

# [***Chinese Minister's Downfall Linked to Lover Who Was Suspected British Spy***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BB1-7JH1-DY68-11WV-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Highlight:** Qin Gang's whereabouts remain unclear, but occasional disclosures hint at the reasons behind his downfall.

**Body**

Qin Gang, [*China*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/china?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships)'s ex-foreign minister, tried to take his own life when he was confronted with evidence that his secret lover was a foreign agent, a former U.S. official told *Washington Post* columnist David Ignatius.

The former official's account, retold in the paper on Monday, said Qin's disappearance and unceremonious dismissal followed a high-level warning issued by the Kremlin. Moscow had discovered a connection between [*Qin's lover*](https://www.newsweek.com/china-foreign-minister-qin-gang-fu-xiaotian-extramarital-affair-scandal-1831378?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships), former state media journalist Fu Xiaotian, and Britain's Secret Intelligence Service, better known as MI6.

President [*Xi Jinping*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/xi-jinping?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships)'s moves to [*securitize all of government and society*](https://www.newsweek.com/china-spy-suspicious-activities-mss-ten-invitation-tea-1866256?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) have made the inner workings of the Chinese political system increasingly difficult to read, even for long-time watchers and top intelligence services in the West. However, few subject-matter experts thought a sex scandal alone was enough to derail Qin's rise.

Many believe Xi has surrounded himself with loyal [*Communist Party*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/chinese-communist-party?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) cadres. He is estimated to have [*purged dozens*](https://www.newsweek.com/china-officials-arrest-anti-corruption-campaign-xi-jinping-1855609?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) of military and political officials at various levels as part of a personal campaign to root out weaknesses including a vulnerability to corruption.

Qin, 57, the former Chinese ambassador to the United States, assumed the post of foreign minister in January 2023, disappeared in June, and was [*formally banished*](https://www.newsweek.com/china-defense-minister-foreign-minister-disappearance-1837653?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) from elite ***politics*** by October. The leading theories recounted by Ignatius may help to peel back certain layers behind the months-long mystery surrounding Qin's fate, but *Newsweek* could not independently verify the information.

In December, China's top disciplinary body dropped [*the biggest hint yet*](https://www.newsweek.com/china-qingang-espionage-spy-ccp-1842146?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) that members of the country's diplomatic service may have been compromised. Officially, however, Beijing has repeatedly declined to comment on Qin's whereabouts. The Chinese Foreign Ministry did not answer calls seeking comment, and the British Foreign Office declined to comment.

Qin's alleged affair with Fu, 40, was first reported last year by the U.K. newspaper *Financial Times*. It said the former Chinese state media reporter had his child by surrogacy in the U.S., before returning to China last April and also disappearing from public view.

The Chinese Foreign Ministry's records listed Qin as married with a son. His previous job as Xi's protocol officer, coupled with his wife Lin Yan's closeness with Peng Liyuan, China's first lady, is thought to have facilitated his rising-star status in Beijing, according to Ignatius.

Qin was "[*arrested and investigated*](https://www.newsweek.com/china-investigation-qin-gang-scandal-li-shangfu-corruption-taiwan-tsai-ming-yen-1832378?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) soon after his June disappearance," a senior Biden administration official told Ignatius. Meanwhile, the former U.S. official informed the columnist that Qin "didn't know of his lover's purported intelligence ties and tried to kill himself," after which he was hospitalized in a medical facility reserved for the country's political elite.

The account was consistent with a December report by Politico, which said Andrey Rudenko, Russia's deputy foreign minister, traveled to Beijing to inform Xi that [*Qin was compromised*](https://www.newsweek.com/russia-putin-warning-china-xi-western-spies-qin-gang-pla-rocket-force-1850277?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) by Western intelligence agencies. The website, which made no mention of Fu's role, also said Qin had died last July—by suicide or torture—"in the military hospital in Beijing that treats China's top leaders."

The [*CIA*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/cia?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) had no clear read on Qin's precise status, Ignatius said. However, the available accounts appeared to speak to the ongoing utility of tools such as sex and money in [*modern-day spycraft*](https://www.newsweek.com/china-spy-surveillance-us-balloon-cyber-hack-tech-1787510?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships).

[*Link to Image*](https://d.newsweek.com/en/full/2348356/qin-gangs-secret-lover-was-british-spyreport.jpg)

**Graphic**

Qin Gang's Secret Lover Was British Spy—Report

Thomas Peter/Pool/Getty Images

China’s then Foreign Minister Qin Gang speaks at a news conference on May 23, 2023, in Beijing, China, a month before he vanished from public view. A former U.S. official told Washington Post columnist David Ignatius that Qin had an affair with a Chinese state media journalist who was suspected of being a British agent, according to a column published on February 12, 2024.

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