

The Falun Gong Factor

A Key to Understanding China's Recent Political Turmoil

WHEN Chongqing's former top cop, Wang Lijun, fled for his life to the U.S. Consulate in Chengdu on February 6, he set in motion a political storm that has yet to subside. Media reports have often described this series of events as infighting among high-level officials in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), seeking to secure a powerful position in advance of the 18th Party Congress later this year.

But the story is not that simple. What is really at stake?

Several key players are not only vying for power, but also for something that profoundly affects their lives—impunity for horrific crimes they have instigated against millions of innocent Chinese.

This is where Falun Gong comes in. Some CCP officials' careers have been tightly entwined with the violent repression of tens of millions of Chinese people who practice Falun Gong. They

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want to ensure that whoever assumes the Party's top spots are people who also have a track record of aggressively participating in these human rights abuses, and in so doing, can assure they will not have to face justice for their crimes.

Since the earliest days of the campaign to persecute the spiritual discipline, certain top Party officials have been particularly enthusiastic in carrying out the orders of former CCP head Jiang Zemin to wipe out Falun Gong. These officials—who include Bo Xilai and Zhou Yongkang, among others—have proactively advanced the persecution, using it as a means to increase their power and influence within the

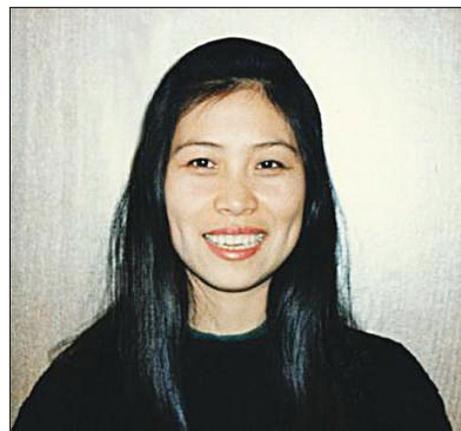
CCP.

Together, they have propelled an unlawful campaign of arrests, violence, and propaganda that has led to hundreds of thousands of prisoners of conscience, over 80,000 documented cases of torture, and a death toll in the thousands, if not tens of thousands. Officials like Bo and Zhou have personally devised new torture methods to use on Falun Gong, visited labor camps and detention centers where hundreds have died or been maimed, ordered the arrest and torture of specific practitioners, and been involved in the forcible removal of organs from Falun Gong prisoners of conscience.¹ They have conceived a wide array of economic and promotional incentives to encourage their subordinates to do the same.

For years, cities Zhou Yongkang has visited have quickly seen an uptick in abductions, torture, and killing of local residents practicing Falun Gong. For prompting such abuses, Zhou and others have been sued around the world by torture victims. In 2009, Bo and Jiang

"You must show your toughness in handling Falun Gong... it will be your political capital."

— China's former communist leader, Jiang Zemin, speaking to Bo Xilai, according to Bo's driver



Ms. Gao Rongrong, 37, was disfigured from torture in 2003 under Bo Xilai's watch in Liaoning province. She died from torture and abuse in 2005.

were among five officials indicted by a Spanish judge for their role in crimes of torture and genocide committed against Falun Gong practitioners.²

These individuals are fighting hard to gain more power in order to avoid accountability for their crimes and continue the campaign.³ With so much at stake, some media reports have indicated that Zhou and Bo may have gone so far as to conspire to up-end the planned transfer of power from Hu Jintao to Xi Jinping. Some U.S. officials who spoke to national security reporter Bill Gertz said this was among the information Wang Lijun provided to U.S. consular officials.⁴

Other Chinese officials, such as current CCP head Hu and Premier Wen Jiabao, have been milder in their attitude towards Falun Gong. In November

“You guys need to beat them [Falun Gong practitioners] up real hard. They deserve it if they’re beaten to death, and the government will shoulder the responsibility.”

— Bo Xilai, then-mayor of Dalian to the city’s police chief, in 1999, according to award-winning journalist Jiang Weiping.

1999, the Washington Post reported that when Jiang decided to eliminate Falun Gong, none of the other six members of the Politburo Standing Committee agreed with him. This included Hu, who to date has not enthusiastically embraced the campaign. Meanwhile, Wen has reportedly expressed in private CCP meetings a desire to end the campaign and rehabilitate Falun Gong.

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Why has the persecution of Falun Gong continued so aggressively under Hu and Wen’s watch?

In part, because of the power Jiang Zemin secured for loyalists before his retirement. Fearing he would be held accountable if the persecution were ended, Jiang arranged for his supporters to dominate the CCP’s top echelons. At the 16th Party Congress in 2002, which marked the end of Jiang’s tenure as general secretary, he went against Party custom and expanded the Politburo Standing Committee from seven to nine to secure more spots for his supporters. He also pushed through a change in the committee’s decision-making rules—from obeying the gener-

al secretary to operating by consensus.

Most importantly, Zhou Yongkang and his predecessor Luo Gan were chosen to head the party’s Political and Legal Affairs Committee (PLAC). The PLAC oversees China’s vast array of internal security forces, courts, and labor camps, as well the 610 Office, an extralegal agency whose primary task is destroying Falun Gong. Since then, the PLAC’s size and budget have expanded dramatically, surpassing even the military. Through persecuting Falun Gong—a group comprising tens of millions of people from every province, age, and profession—the PLAC has accumulated the experience for carrying out large-scale extralegal abuses, and substantial power within the Party apparatus.

Why did Zhou advocate so strongly to prevent Bo’s ouster?

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With Zhou scheduled to retire at the 18th Party Congress later this year, some inside sources have reported that he and other Jiang loyalists had prepared for Bo Xilai, then-Party chief of the megacity of Chongqing, to take his place on the Politburo Standing Committee and as director of the PLAC.⁶

Bo was a safe choice because he too has been deeply implicated in the persecution of Falun Gong. While mayor

of Dalian (1999-2001) and governor of Liaoning Province (2001-2004), security services under Bo’s authority rounded up, tortured, and killed numerous Falun Gong practitioners. Masanjia forced labor camp in Liaoning became one of the most notorious facilities in the country, with tens of thousands of Falun Gong practitioners from other regions brought there for intensive torture sessions.

This is a key reason why Zhou supported Bo up to the last minute before his downfall.

It is also the key reason why, if the pair should be investigated and punished for anything, it is their role in the murder and torture of innocent Falun Gong practitioners.

1 <http://www.theepochtimes.com/n2/china-news/rewarded-for-torture-the-rise-of-bo-xilai-in-china-204452.html>; <http://www.epochtimes.com/b5/9/6/13/n2556721.htm>

2 <http://www.faluninfo.net/article/924/>

3 <http://www.theepochtimes.com/n2/opinion/chinese-coup-may-have-been-plotted-years-ago-218872.html>

4 <http://freebeacon.com/intel-fight-over-china-succession/>

5 <http://www.theepochtimes.com/n2/china-news/wen-jiabao-pushes-for-redressing-falun-gong-source-says-217246.html>

6 <http://www.wantchinatimes.com/news-subclass-cnt.aspx?cid=1101&MainCatID=11&id=20120524000007>