

# Chinese President Xi Jinping targets CCP party factions

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President Xi Jinping's government is continuing its supposed anti-corruption campaign within the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Last weekend, state media denounced the existence of factions within the party, a well-known fact but one rarely discussed.

China's Xinhua news agency named three factions with ties to powerful government figures—dubbed “tigers”—that Xi has targeted for purges. These were the “Security Gang,” the “Petroleum Gang,” and the “Shanxi Gang.” An editorial in the *People's Daily* stated: “Some cliques of officials are, in fact, parasitic relationships for the conveying of benefits.”

Corruption is rampant throughout the Chinese Stalinist bureaucracy. The entire Chinese leadership enriched itself by looting state-owned properties as it oversaw the restoration of capitalism from the 1980s. However, the three factions being targeted have close ties to “tigers” that represent a power threat to President Xi and his drive to open up Chinese state businesses to greater private and foreign investment.

Zhou Yongkang, who was expelled from the party and arrested in December, has close connections with the Security and Petroleum factions. Zhou was a member of the Politburo Standing Committee until retiring in 2012. He also served as the country's security chief.

When Zhou retired in 2012, Chinese oil companies, such as the Sinopec Group and China National Petroleum Corp, were considered more powerful than some government ministries. His retirement saw a decrease in the power of the Petroleum faction. Cheng Li, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institute think tank, stated that year: “In the long term, the end of such a faction-based group will likely benefit economic reforms in general.”

Another recently targeted figure, Ling Jihua, is

believed to be the founder of the Shanxi faction. Ling was the chief aide to former President Hu Jintao, as well as a member of Hu's “Youth League” faction. On December 22, Xinhua announced that Ling was being investigated for “suspected serious discipline violations.”

Ling was a candidate for the Politburo until his sudden loss of influence in September 2012. He was accused of corruption after covering up a car accident caused by his 23-year-old son Ling Gu that left the young man dead and two women with him seriously injured, one of whom later died from her injuries. Ling allegedly paid off the families of the women to keep silent about the crash, while not even acknowledging in public that his son had died.

The Shanxi faction derives its name from the coal-rich Shanxi province. Many of Ling's family members have held positions in the local government, including his older brother, Zhengce. In June, the government placed the elder Ling under investigation, citing violations of discipline. Ling Zhengce served as Shanxi's director of the development and reform commission. This body oversaw the local economy and development projects.

Dozens of Shanxi officials close to Ling Zhengce, including some involved in coal mining development, have been investigated or removed from their positions since 2013. A diplomatic source in Beijing quoted by Japan's *Asahi Shimbun* said the probe into Zhengce “is likely to dismantle the existing structure of coal concessions in the province or accuse the Ling family (of wrongdoing).”

Beijing is further opening up China's state-owned enterprises, such as those controlling coal and oil, to private and foreign investment. The agenda is opposed by sections of the ruling elite, only because they profit

from continued state control. Accelerated pro-market restructuring policies, which are being carried out at the expense of the Chinese working class, were adopted at the central committee's 2013 plenum and new measures were announced at the 2014 plenum.

Zhou and Ling are just the latest in a series of high-profile investigations and purges from the CCP that are related to conflicts arising from Xi's economic agenda. Former Chongqing party boss Bo Xilai, an ally of Zhou, was purged in August 2013. Xu Caihou, formerly the vice-chairman of the Central Military Commission, the military's top decision-making body, is currently awaiting trial after admitting to taking bribes. He was expelled from the party in October. Six other officials, three of whom were close to Zhou, were expelled from the party at last October's plenum.

The removal of Bo, Xu, Zhou and Ling eliminates potential rivals to Xi and paves the way for the Chinese president to stack the Politburo Standing Committee with political allies at the 19th party congress in 2017, when five of the current seven members are expected to step down. Zhang Lifan, formerly of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, stated: "The so-called 'New Gang of Four' represented a very strong political group that covered every aspect of power from the military to the party."

Social unrest is also playing a large role in the CCP purges. Chinese workers are increasingly hostile to the corrupt leadership that enriches itself by offering the working class as a source of cheap labor for international capital. There are concerns in Beijing that the deepening social inequality between the rich and China's 400 million-strong workforce could threaten the CCP's hold on power. Protests overseas, as well as those in Hong Kong last year, are heavily censored out of fear they could trigger unrest on the mainland.

Cheng Li of the US Brookings Institute commented last July: "Corruption is ruining the Chinese Communist Party, causing a serious legitimacy crisis. This is the 25th anniversary of Tiananmen. If there was a similar event would the public and the military support the party? No, because they are too corrupt."

In 1989, protests by students in Beijing's central Tiananmen Square became a trigger for a widespread working class revolt against the mounting inequality and bureaucratic profiteering produced by the CCP's embrace of the capitalist market. Today's so-called anti-

corruption campaign is a desperate effort by the CCP regime to dissipate public anger and try to ensure the allegiance of the military as this agenda is taken to a new level.



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