

Why Xi Jinping is Purging China's Rights Activists

Teng Biao

Since July 9 2015, nearly 30 human rights lawyers have been kidnapped or arrested, most of them are my close friends. At least 300 lawyers or activists have been questioned or released after a short detention.

This ongoing persecution is only a small part of Xi Jinping's comprehensive crackdown on civil society. Since Xi came to power in late 2012, at least 2000 human rights defenders have been detained or sentenced, including Uyghur scholar Ilham Tohti and his students, Journalist Gao Yu, lawyer Xu zhiyong, Pu zhiqiang, Tang jingling, Li heping, Sui Muqing, Zhang Kai, Wang quanzhang, Wang yu, rights defender Guo Feixiong, Liu ping, Zhang Shengyu, Su changlan, dissident Qin yongmin, Zhang lin, Jiang Lijun, Hu Shigen, Yu Shiwen, Paster Zhang Shaojie, etc. Some prisoners of conscience died in detention, obviously out of torture or inhuman treatment, like Cao shunli and Tenzin Delek Rinpoche.

In Zhejiang and other provinces, government destroyed thousands of church buildings, arrested pastors and Christians, demolished the crosses. Falungong practitioners were detained or sent to legal education centers, a kind of extra-legal detentions - many of them have been tortured to death. Other small religious groups are persecuted after the government listed them as evil cults.

Many NGOs have been shut down, like Gongmeng (the Open Constitution Initiative). Even many NGOs focusing on Environment, women's rights, LGBT, labor rights or citizen libraries are not allowed to work.

The CCP made new regulations or policies on high education and ideology. More censorship on internet, textbooks, publishings and traditional media. Document No.9. Seven don't talk. Mass line. Military parade. Fundamentalist Communism - Xi seems to be very keen on bringing back Maoist style discourse and cult of personality.

The Chinese communist authorities, with their excessive violence, have created hostility, division and despair in Xinjiang and Tibet. In Xinjiang, many protests were labelled as terrorist attacks thus many Uyghur people were shot dead without any necessity and legal basis. In Tibet, the number of self-immolation has been 147, and 126 Tibetans have lost their lives. 79 self-immolations happened since November of 2012 when Xi came into office. Some family members of the self-immolators were even detained or sentenced.

Why Xi is purging the rights activist?

Xi is somebody living in 1960s. He never accepts the ideas of liberal democracy or constitutionalism or human rights. What he has been doing and is going to do, is to maintain the

CCP's monopoly of power. He will not tolerate any challenge to the one party rule. CCP never stops its punishment on activists, but Xi has a much lower threshold of prisons.

But the deep reason locates in the whole political and social situation.

China has become the second largest economy in the world. China is flexing its muscles by military parade, AIIB, and new message on South China Sea. By tearing up the promise of Hongkong's autonomy. Also by detaining Nobel laureate Liu Xiaobo, disappearing Panchen Lama, arresting more and more rights activists. But isn't there a profound dread lurking behind this barbarism?

The party's attempts to project confidence do little to disguise its panic: It is beset by economic strife, antagonism between officials and the people, widespread corruption, environmental and ecological disasters, unrest in Xinjiang and Tibet, and its own sense of ideological crisis. The party no longer has the ability to carry out the frantic, Mao-style mobilizations of the past. Its ideology has lost all attraction, and the public's frustration with the party is growing. People are more willing to criticize the regime in public, and the spread of access to the Internet has stunted the effect of the party's inculcation, thought work and propaganda. The stock market's recent crash and the tragic Tianjin blast led even the middle class to fury and disappointment. Wang qishan's recent talk on legitimacy exactly reflects the CCP's anxiety of its lack of legitimacy. The recycling of old slogans, the shutting of NGOs, the arrest of dissidents and enhanced controls on the spread of information — all of it is a sign of the party's deep fear of a color revolution.

Compared with all of this, the rights lawyer and civil society activists are gaining in prestige, influence and communications and organizational capacity. Since 2003, more and more people joined in the Rights Defense Movement. Human rights lawyers defend civil rights, challenge the abuse of power and promote rule of law though taking political cases or sensitive cases. People organize more and more NGOs, working on various rights of the unprivileged people. Bloggers and writers write articles to criticize the government, or disseminate information on sensitive events. Activists initiate *New Citizens Movement* and *South Street Movement* to demand political rights. People gather privately to commemorate the Tiananmen Massacre. The Rights Defense Movement tends to be more organized and politicalized, gaining more support and respects from the general public.

These are the reasons why Xi decided to purge the rights activists and destroy the growing civil society. But this crackdown won't silence the rights lawyers and defenders, and it won't stop the march toward human rights and dignity in China. Rights lawyers will rise from the ashes with an even deeper sense of their historical responsibility.

Xi is coming here soon. Does Xi and the party wish to relive the nightmare of lawlessness during the Culture Revolution? When will he release China's prisoners of conscience? When will this ruthless suppression of freedom end? Will the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics be another human rights disaster, like the 2008 Beijing Olympics were? We ought to ask him.

'The day we see the truth and cease to speak is the day we begin to die' . Martin Luther King Jr. once said. We should not keep silence when so many Chinese people are suffering the atrocities of CCP. History of Nazi will repeat itself when people choose to do nothing when Xi Jinping is going toward Hitler. Those who welcome Xi Jinping without raising human rights issue are helpers of the dictator.