



China Cracks Down Hard on Dissent; Blames “Foreign Hostile Forces”

In a manner eerily reminiscent of the Stalin “show trials” of the late 1930s, China’s ruling Communist Party oligarchy is cracking down hard on dissent.

In the Stalin-run Soviet Union, the world was shocked as many of Joseph Stalin’s old Bolshevik revolutionaries confessed to conspiring with foreigners to restore capitalism. While those accused of crimes in today’s China (perhaps referencing it as “Red China” will soon become common again) are generally not fellow communists, many human rights activists are offering confessions of colluding with foreigners, just like in Stalin’s Russia.



The state-run media in China have blamed “hostile foreign forces” for not only those protesting the lack of political freedom in the country, but also for China’s economic problems. It is a common tactic of a totalitarian regime to blame foreigners for its own nation’s problems — whether it be Castro’s Cuba or Ho Chi Minh’s North Vietnam.

Frances Eve of the Network of Chinese Human Rights Defenders, which advocates for detained activists, explained:

This tactic plays into domestic nationalist sentiment and the Chinese Communist Party’s narrative that the only way for the country to be stable is for the [party] to lead China as a one-party authoritarian dictatorship.

She said she believed it “absurd and insulting” to insinuate that lawyers defending China’s most downtrodden and left-behind citizens are working on behalf of a foreign government.

Four years ago, Xi Jinping became the leader of the Communist Party oligarchy that rules China with an iron fist. During his leadership, hundreds of activists have been arrested. Many of those rounded up appear on state-run television and admit they have committed various crimes. Any reporting that is not favorable to the regime is shut down.

Susan Shirk, who chairs the 21st Century China Center at UC-San Diego, commented on the brutal crackdown on dissidents: “As an old timer who’s been studying China since the Mao era, I have to say it’s the worst I’ve ever seen since then.”

Many in the West believed that with the modernization of the Chinese economy, respect for human rights would follow. Since the infamous crackdown on Chinese dissidents in Tiananmen Square in 1989, the Chinese Communists have attempted to present a more moderate face to the world. And many in the West have bought into this story line. Just last year, British Prime Minister David Cameron proclaimed that relations between his country and China were in a “golden era.” Some Western



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environmentalists even heaped praise upon Xi for his role in bringing about a global climate change pact. It appears that, at least to some, you can be a ruthless dictator as long as you buy into the global-warming myth.

Of course, even during the Stalin show-trials, the Soviet dictator retained a great deal of support among American leftists such as Corliss Lamont and Lillian Hellman, who excoriated those in America who denounced the bloody Stalin purges.

Even with the country's ongoing brutal repression, China will still host President Obama and the rest of the G-20 world leaders in a summit in Hangzhou September 4-5. While some American corporate interests threaten to pull out of Chinese states that do not support transgender bathrooms, that has not deterred entertainment giant Disney, which plans to open a \$5.5-billion theme park in Shanghai.

Jeffrey Wasserstrom, a specialist in Chinese history at UC Irvine, noted,

There hasn't been that much of a cost, so far at least, for Xi Jinping. He literally got the royal treatment when he went to England. He wasn't treated like someone who deserved to be kept at arm's length. After 1988, China and the Communist Party had an interest in shedding the stigma of being seen as a pariah state to international investors and others. I don't think there's that kind of pressure now.

Frances Eve explained how Chinese officials are justifying the present crackdown.

The government has tried to deflect attention away from the clear violations of the defendant's basic due process rights and right to a fair trial by painting them as part of a foreign plot.

This tactic was used by Mao himself, in his effort to portray Christian opposition to his communist ideology as due to Christianity being a "foreign" religion. The present Communist attacks upon Chinese Christians still use this propaganda tool. Xi has warned that "overseas infiltrations via religious means" were a threat to the ruling Communist Party. Accordingly, all religions in China are ordered to become "Chinese," which, of course, means becoming part of the communist system. This reminds one of the efforts of Adolf Hitler to "Germanize" (by which he meant Nazify) the church in National Socialist Germany.

Chinese Communist Party leaders believe that many of the lawyers in the country who raise the issue of "human rights" are Christians, and that they are undermining the authority of the party. Indeed, a significant number of the dissidents in China have explained that Christianity teaches that rights are God-given. Sadly, many American Christians are unaware of this key element of our Christian heritage. When Thomas Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence, his words linked the concept of natural rights to God Himself: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights."

In Zhejiang Province, a center of the Christian faith in China, the destruction of Christian crosses atop church buildings is seen as perhaps just the beginning of a ramped-up persecution of the followers of Jesus Christ. Agents of the government even used blowtorches to cut down a 10-foot high cross atop the Salvation Church in the town of Shuitou. Ten miles away, in Mabu, other agents of the totalitarian regime sawed off a cross on Dachang Church.

Wasserstrom noted that the Chinese Communist Party has used a variety of tactics to question the motives of its opposition. Labeling its enemies as in league with "hostile foreign forces" is certainly a handy charge, but others are called capitalist roaders, or those who are clinging to a backward,



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traditional thinking rather than modern, socialist ideals.

Of course, this sounds much like the rhetoric of progressive Democrats, who constantly accuse conservatives of standing in the way of progress. Who can forget then-candidate Obama labeling some of his opponents in Pennsylvania as those who are “clinging” to their guns and their religion?

Willy Lam, a scholar at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, stated that Xi “likes to thumb his nose at international opinion.” In contrast to the days of previous rulers, before China’s rise to a quasi-superpower, the oligarchy “still cared about public opinion in the West,” Lam explained. “Xi likes to underscore his status as the new Mao Tse-tung by not giving a damn about what major Western leaders, authors or media are saying about China.”

Steve Tsang, a professor of Contemporary Chinese Studies at the University of Nottingham, believes Xi is “determined to push as hard as he can. Anyone or any state that challenges the views of the Chinese party-state is therefore an enemy of China and should be dealt with accordingly.”

Tsang contends that this growing aggressive attitude is creating increasing concern among China’s neighboring countries. “If the current trajectory is not changed, Beijing’s sense that it is right to be assertive is likely to put it on a course that will see confrontation with other countries, and a further deterioration of human rights conditions in China,” Tsang warned.

Susan Shirk also predicted that the present friendly relations between China and the West could soon change, leading to a “global contest of ideologies,” similar to the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union. “What Xi Ping is doing is, he’s really stirring up a Cold War mentality,” she asserted.

Meanwhile, some of the defendants, no doubt threatened and/or tortured, much like the defendants in the old Soviet show trials, have announced that the problem lies outside China, not with the Communist Party. One defendant, Zhai Yanmin, announced (at least as reported by the state-run news agency), “I want to remind everybody to wipe their eyes and clearly see the ugly faces of hostile forces overseas. Never be fooled by their ideas of ‘democracy,’ ‘human rights,’ and ‘benefitting the public.’”



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