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Chinese Communist Party Leaders Target Domestic Security Apparatus

Powerful Party organ blamed for corruption, decline in the rule of law, and instability

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Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao takes part in a press conference on March 14, 2012 in Beijing, China. (Lintao Zhang/Getty Images)

With Premier Wen Jiabao leading the way, criticism within China of the powerful Political and Legislative Affairs Committee (PLAC) has mounted. Such criticism is also a means of attacking the PLAC's director, Zhou Yongkang, who heads a faction opposing Wen and Party head Hu Jintao.

At Wen's press conference at the close of the National People's Congress on March 15, he said, "As the economy grows, such new problems as unfair distribution, lack of credibility, and corruption have emerged. I am fully aware that to resolve these issues we must conduct not only economic structural reform but also political structural reform, especially reform of the leadership system, of the Party, and the state."

Former Beijing University law professor and dissident Yuan Hongbing says Wen's remarks were widely interpreted as a signal that Party Central plans to diminish the wide-ranging powers of the PLAC.

As the head of this Chinese Communist Party (CCP) agency, Zhou has the authority to utilize the resources of the court, Supreme Procuratorate, Ministry of Public Security, Ministry of State Security, Ministry of Justice, the People's Armed Police, and other agencies at various levels. Analysts say that the PLAC's control of the 1.5 million strong armed police in particular has made it a second center of power inside the CCP.

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—Premier Wen Jiabao

According to Yuan, the Chongqing incident has caused some in the CCP leadership to look at the PLAC differently. When Wang Lijun, the former Chongqing police chief, attempted to defect at the U.S. Consulate in Chengdu on Feb. 6, he is said to have revealed a plan by Zhou and the former Chongqing Party chief Bo Xilai to mount a coup against Xi Jinping, after Xi becomes the new Party head in October

The Central Military Commission now wants to take back the command of the armed police force from the PLAC, a move Zhou opposes, Yuan said. Whether the PLAC will continue to have the authority to command the armed police had not yet been decided, according to Yuan.

On March 26, at the State Council's annual conference on opposing corruption, Wen increased the pressure on Zhou and the PLAC. According to the state-run People's Daily, the premier said the greatest danger facing the CCP is corruption. "If this issue is not resolved, the nature of political power could change, and the Party could lose its power to rule the country," Wen said.

A source in Beijing who knows the background of Wen's remarks told The Epoch Times that Wen was aiming at Zhou, because Wen has always thought that the PLAC has paralyzed China's judicial and law enforcement system and is the biggest source of corruption in China.

An article in the Hong Kong-based Trend magazine provides some details for Wen's indictment of the PLAC as a source of corruption. According to Trend, in 2010 there were 37,240 cases of corruption involving personnel from the Public Security system and 32,933 cases in 2011.

Party Elder Speaks

A former head of the PLAC has added his voice in private deliberations to Wen's public criticism. Qiao Shi was head of the PLAC from 1985 to 1992, a member of the small group that runs the CCP—the Politburo Standing Committee (PSC)—from 1987 to 1997, and chair of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress from 1993 to 1998.

Party elders like Qiao often play an important but informal role behind the scenes. Qiao recently advised Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping to strip the PLAC of power over the courts, according to another source in Beijing familiar with the matter.

Qiao's criticism expanded the brief against Zhou's PLAC laid out by Wen. According to The Epoch Times source, Qiao continues to be informed about the PLAC system since he retired. Qiao told Hu and Xi that rule of law declined in China after Zhou took charge of the PLAC five years ago.

Qiao criticized the PLAC for often violently oppressing disgruntled citizens who were victims of forced demolition and for denying renewal of law licenses to lawyers who represent clients who are in conflict with local government officials.

According to Qiao, rather than maintaining stability, the PLAC has created instability in China. The PLAC's powerful apparatus of repression is not the solution to China's problems, the source in Beijing quoted Qiao as saying.

The source also said that the recent political struggle has prompted some top leaders to consider not appointing a member of the PSC as the next chief of the PLAC. Curtailing Zhou's power as head of the PLAC is difficult because he also holds a seat on the PSC.

Intellectuals Condemn

Mao Yushi, a famous economist and winner of the Cato Institute's 2012 Milton Friedman Prize for Advancing Liberty, recently recommended on his Sina microblog in late March that China should "dismantle all levels of PLAC in the Party."

He said in order for China to have judicial independence, the PLAC must be disbanded or at least not interfere with judicial power. "Because most of the people who were charged with corruption were Party members, people are concerned if the Party is in charge of the judiciary," Mao wrote.

Mao's microblog post received much attention from his hundreds of thousands of followers. It was soon censored.

A similar fate met a post by Zhang Zanning, a law professor at China's Southeast University, also published at the end of March. Zhang's post said the PLAC is the "grossest violation of the constitution" and called for it to be dismantled.

Like Mao's post, Zhang's was quickly deleted by censors, but was also widely reposted by Internet users.