

Communist Party officials punished for supporting Dalai Lama

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- Communist Party officials in Tibet Autonomous Region have been punished for taking part in ‘separatist’ activities linked to the Dalai Lama Clique, according to the Chinese state media. In Qinghai, some Party members were similarly penalized for being involved in “Tibet-related instability” following scrutiny by a disciplinary official work team linked to Xi Jinping’s politicized drive against corruption, according to another report in the state media.
- The developments follow stern warnings of “punishment” for Tibetans “who have fantasies about the 14th Dalai Clique”, effectively acknowledging the Chinese authorities’ failure to eradicate loyalty to the religious leader in exile, even among Party members.

The Chinese state media publication The Global Times announced in a report on January 27 (2015) that several officials “who participated in the illegal underground ‘Tibetan Independence’ organization, provided intelligence to the Dalai Lama clique and assisted activities that would harm national security, were put under investigation in 2014”.^[1]

The report said that a total of 15 officials were “punished by the Communist Party of China (CPC) for violating Party and political discipline in 2014”, with no details about their nationality, the nature of the accusation, or what the punishment entails.

Matteo Mecacci, President of the International Campaign for Tibet, said: “This action connects Xi Jinping’s politicized drive against corruption with the ‘fight against separatism’, which is allied with the increasingly systematic political campaign to eliminate loyalty to the Dalai Lama. Punishing Tibetan officials for allegedly supporting the moderate policy of genuine autonomy put forward by the Dalai Lama is a radical and wrong move that could further alienate the Tibetan population.”

The Chinese state media also announced a similar purge in Qinghai following visits of a ‘disciplinary’ work team investigating corruption. The work team were involved in the “rectification” of “a few Party members who were involved in Tibet-related instability events, and Party members who were criticized for having a blurred ideological understanding of the anti-separatist struggle”. A report, posted on January 26 (2015), concluded, “A total of 538 Party members in Qinghai were dealt with over the last year.”^[2]

Tibetans – including officials – in Qinghai (the province incorporating the Tibetan area of Amdo) have been at the forefront of moderate, scholarly efforts to protect Tibetan language and develop education through influencing policy. This action may signal increasing scrutiny of officials in Amdo who are seeking to influence policy in ways that seek to take into account Tibetan concerns, and the protection of Tibetan culture and religion.

The announcements of punishments against officials on political grounds allied to the authorities’ ‘anti-separatist’ struggle follows warnings late last year by the Tibet Autonomous Region Party chief Chen Quanguo that: “Those who have fantasies about the 14th Dalai Clique, those who follow the 14th Dalai Clique, and those Party cadres involved in supporting separatist infiltration and sabotage activities will be strictly disciplined and severely punished in accordance with the law.”^[3]

Campaigns directed against the Dalai Lama’s influence, Tibetan culture and religion, mean that in recent years almost any expression of Tibetan identity not directly sanctioned by the state can be branded as ‘separatist’, and penalized by a prison sentence, or worse. “Endangering national security” is an opaque term that can be used to penalize Tibetans, encompassing a broad category of criminal offences in Chinese law, including separatism and interfering with national sovereignty, among many others. It can carry a prison sentence of around 15 years.

The Global Times report made it clear that in the Tibet Autonomous Region, the Chinese authorities have linked the PRC-wide anti-corruption drive to the political struggle against ‘separatism’. At a press conference, Ye Dongsong, head of an inspection team of the Communist Party Committee Discipline Commission, said: “Some officials failed to take a firm stand on issues related to the Tibet question and some grass-root officials in the region were found to be seriously corrupt.”^[4] According to the same article, Ye said that the focus of the Tibetan regional government should be: “On neutralizing separatists and maintaining social stability, cracking down on corruption and strictly monitoring projects in the region.”^[5]

The announcements in the state media this week are consistent with a much more systematic approach to

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replace loyalty to the Dalai Lama with adherence to the Communist Party authorities from 2008 onwards. The failure of the Chinese Party authorities to undermine the steadfast loyalty of Tibetans – including Party officials – to the Dalai Lama has been acknowledged in the state media.^[6] In November, 2014, Xiong Kunxin, a professor with the Minzu (Ethnic Minorities) University, said: “Some officials in Tibet still sympathize with the Dalai Lama. They continue to support the Dalai Lama out of their religious beliefs.” The professor added that those officials also support the Dalai Lama’s ‘separatism’ activities. (Global Times, November 5, 2014).

In response, ‘patriotic education’ has reached a new stage and has a deeper reach. There has been a dramatic increase in work teams and Party cadres in rural areas of Tibet. Party cadres are often placed in private homes, and are required to report on every aspect of individual’s lives; they are also encouraged to befriend monks and nuns and gather information about them and their family members, while guiding them to be “patriotic and progressive”.

Since the major Tibet Work Forum in January 2010, an important meeting that set policy for the following decade, there has been an emphasis from the Party authorities that such measures apply to all Tibetan areas, not only the Tibet Autonomous Region.

Footnotes

[1] Global Times, January 27, 2015, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/904366.shtml>

[2] Report in Chinese at <http://politics.caijing.com.cn/20150126/3807352.shtml>, translated by ICT into English

[3] Xinhua, November 5, 2014 http://epaper.chinatibetnews.com/xzrb/html/2014-11/05/content_579554.htm

[4] Another state media report dated January 28 (2015) named a Tibetan under investigation by the disciplinary commission for corruption as Lobsang Tsering, former Party Secretary of Lhoka (Shannan), the Tibet Autonomous Region.

[5] Global Times, January 27, 2015, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/904366.shtml>

[6] Before 2008, Chinese officials sought to project the notion that only a "handful" of Tibetans – mostly monks and nuns – caused unrest in Tibet, influenced by the Dalai Lama. But now there is a level of acknowledgement of the Dalai Lama's influence. In November, 2010, TAR governor Padma Thrinley (Baima Chiling) was cited by Xinhua as saying that "to say that the Dalai has no influence at all in Tibet is impossible... The Dalai Lama has some influence, for sure." ("China: Attempts to Seal Off Tibet from Outside Information," July 13, 2012, Human Rights Watch, see: www.hrw.org/news/2012/07/13/china-attempts-seal-tibet-outside-information).