

## No coup ? many plots?

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On March 19, China awoke to widespread rumours of a coup in Beijing. The internet was alive with tales of troop movements, artillery fire in the capital and splits in the ruling Communist Party. Within hours it was clear that there was no coup, but every reason to believe that the splits are real enough.

Clues to disagreements in the party-state apparatus can only be found indirectly from possibly unconnected reports and events. What is not in doubt is that the Party leadership, currently under President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao, is going to be changed at the 18th Party Congress in November. It has been taken for granted for at least a couple of years that they will be replaced by Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang, respectively.

Equally predictable, it was thought, was the rise of Bo Xilai, the head of the Party in Chongqing, to the nine person Standing Committee of the Politburo ? the actual ruling body in China. However, on March 14, Bo was sacked from his post, apparently as a result of an attempt by Chongqing's police chief, Wang Lijun, to seek political asylum in a US consulate. His application was rejected and he was reportedly handed over to the Chinese authorities.

Since then, it has been suggested that he has revealed plans for a coup, led by Bo, to be staged next Spring. A further twist in this curious tale came with a request from Britain for the re-opening of inquiries into the death of Neil Heywood, a British businessman (or should that be ?businessman??) who had links to Gu Kailai, a wealthy lawyer in Chongqing ? and the wife of Bo Xilai.

The plot thickened when rumours began to circulate that Zhou Yongkang, a member of the Standing Committee, head of the country's police system, controller of the state oil industry and a known ally of Bo, has also been removed from office.

Is there a connection between all these events? Is it significant that all of these figures have links to Jiang Zemin, the previous President? His policies were largely set aside by the current leadership who are thought to favour the free-wheeling capitalism of Shanghai rather than the more state-supervised model associated with Jiang and the armed forces. Indeed, are the armed forces themselves flexing their muscles as China's imperialist appetite becomes clearer?

Or is the whole web of stories and rumours simply a product of a conspiracy by China's enemies, orchestrated by the hysterically anti-Marxist, US-backed Falungong cult and its newspaper Epoch Times? It was banned and its members severely repressed in 1997, when Jiang Zemin was President.

Whatever the details, what is clear is that there are serious factional divisions within the Communist Party. Because the Party has opened its doors to capitalists at the same time as transforming previously state-owned industries into capitalist corporations, the contending interests of different capital blocs now clash within the Party itself. The continued slowing of manufacturing industry and the prospect of a collapse in

the real estate markets, which would create serious difficulties in the banking sector, is focussing minds on strategic policy issues. Those issues will have to be settled by the new leadership to be installed in November and that is why the internal disputes are now so sharp that they are beginning to be visible in public.

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