

China's Former Leaders Tell Xi To Halt Anti-Corruption Campaign

Former Presidents Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao are reportedly pushing for an end to Xi Jinping's anti-graft campaign.

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Xi Jinping's much vaulted anti-graft campaign appears to have hit a major roadblock with China's two living former presidents reportedly urging Xi to halt it.

According to a [report in the *Financial Times*](#), both President Jiang Zemin and President Hu Jintao have sent word to Xi in recent weeks telling him to rein in the anti-corruption campaign he has made a cornerstone of his presidency.

Citing three sources with familiar with the matter, *FT* reported that President Jiang recently sent Xi a message warning him that “the footprint of this anti-corruption campaign cannot get too big.” The UK newspaper also cited a Chinese official implementing the anti-graft campaign as saying that former President Hu has expressed a similar sentiment to Xi.

The report comes as speculation is intensifying that former domestic security czar Zhou Yongkang will soon be arrested and [formally charged with corruption](#). Throughout much of Xi's tenure in office, Zhou's loyalists and family members have been arrested, while Zhou himself is reportedly being held under informal house arrest.

[According to *Reuters*](#), which cited two unnamed Chinese officials: “More than 300 of Zhou's relatives, political allies, proteges and staff have also been taken into custody or questioned in the past four months.” The same report said that the Chinese government has also seized about 90 billion yuan (\$14.5 billion) from Zhou's associates and family members.

Zhou was a member of the Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC), China's highest decision-making body, until stepping down at the 18th Party Congress. If formally charged, Zhou would be the highest-ranking official to be formally charged with a crime in the People Republic of China's (PRC) entire history.

The *Financial Times* report this week indicated that Jiang and Hu's warning to Xi would not affect Zhou's case since both had previously approved his purge. It's possible, however, that the two former presidents are hoping that Xi does not proceed with formally putting Zhou on trial, which, as noted above, would be unprecedented in the PRC.

By contrast, keeping Zhou under informal house arrest for the rest of his life would have greater

precedent, as that was the fate former General Secretary Zhao Ziyang faced following the Tiananmen Square protests in 1989. Informal house arrest is less potentially destabilizing than breaking the taboo against formally trying PBSC members, which would likely intensify future leadership transitions.

Jiang and Hu's reported intervention underscores the delicate nature of anti-graft campaigns within the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). On the one hand, anti-corruption campaigns are a time-honored tradition in the PRC and **essential for each new leader to consolidate** his power by purging adversaries and promoting allies. Xi likely sees the anti-corruption campaign as **particularly useful for overcoming intra-Party resistance to China's economic rebalance**, which will inevitably disproportionately harm the interests of Party members.

At the same time, corruption is the lifeblood that attracts Chinese to the CCP in an era when ideology is no longer relevant. If CCP members are not allowed to personally benefit from their Party membership, it's unclear exactly what would hold the Party together. Carrying an anti-corruption campaign too far also carries the risk of causing the Chinese masses to lose faith in the CCP and current system of government.

Jiang and Hu's intervention will also be an important test case as to just how much power Xi has as the current president. The **general consensus is that** Xi has acquired more power during his short time in office than any Chinese leader since Deng Xiaoping (who, it should be noted, had to consider the opinions of the other **seven members of the Eight Elders**).

It seems unlikely that Xi will try to challenge Jiang and Hu, however. Despite his advanced age, Jiang has continued to demonstrate his political acumen, and **most of the current PBSC members are Jiang allies**. On the other hand, **it is still quite likely that Hu's allies will** dominate the 6th Generation leadership, and thus could take retribution against Xi once he is out of office.
