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China and Falun Gong

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Summary

In 1999, the “Falun Gong” movement gave rise to the largest and most protracted public demonstrations in China since the democracy movement of a decade earlier. The People’s Republic of China (PRC) government, fearful of a political challenge and the spread of social unrest, outlawed Falun Gong and carried out an intensive, comprehensive, and unforgiving campaign against the movement. Since 2003, Falun Gong has been largely suppressed or pushed deep underground in China while it has thrived in overseas Chinese communities and Hong Kong. The spiritual exercise group has become highly visible in the United States since 1999, staging demonstrations, distributing flyers, and sponsoring cultural events. In addition, Falun Gong followers are affiliated with several mass media outlets. Despite the group’s tenacity and political activities overseas, it has not formed the basis of a dissident movement encompassing other social and political groups from China.

The State Department, in its annual International Religious Freedom Report (November 2005), designated China as a “country of particular concern” (CPC) for the sixth consecutive year, noting: “The arrest, detention, and imprisonment of Falun Gong practitioners continued; those who refused to recant their beliefs were sometimes subjected to harsh treatment in prisons and reeducation-through-labor camps, and there were credible reports of deaths due to torture and abuse.” In March 2006, U.S. Falun Gong representatives claimed that thousands of practitioners had been sent to 36 concentration camps throughout the PRC. According to their allegations, at one such site in Sujiatun, near the city of Shenyang, a hospital has been used as a detention center for 6,000 Falun Gong prisoners, three-fourths of whom are said to have been killed and had their organs harvested for profit. American officials from the U.S. Embassy in Beijing and the U.S. consulate in Shenyang visited the area as well as inspected the hospital on two occasions and “found no evidence that the site is being used for any function other than as a normal public hospital.”

Since 1999, some Members of the United States Congress have made many public pronouncements and introduced several resolutions in support of Falun Gong and criticizing China’s human rights record. In the 109th Congress, H.Res. 608, introduced on December 14, 2005, would condemn the “escalating levels of religious persecution” in China, including the “brutal campaign to eradicate Falun Gong.” H.Res. 794, introduced on May 3, 2006, would call upon the PRC to end its most egregious human rights abuses, including the persecution of Falun Gong. In January 2006, U.S. citizen Charles Li was released from a PRC prison after serving a three-year term for “intending to sabotage” broadcasting equipment in China on behalf of Falun Gong.

This report will be updated periodically.

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China and Falun Gong

Overview

Since July 1999, when the Chinese government began detaining thousands of Falun Gong (FLG) adherents, the spiritual exercise movement has gained the attention of many U.S. policy makers, primarily as an international human rights concern. Many FLG practitioners reportedly have died or remain in PRC prisons or other forms of detention. In 2005, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom recommended that China remain as a “country of particular concern” (CPC) and stated that crackdowns on the group have been “widespread and violent.”¹ On the basis of this recommendation, the State Department, in its annual International Religious Freedom Report (November 2005), designated China as a CPC for the sixth consecutive year, noting: “The arrest, detention, and imprisonment of Falun Gong practitioners continued; those who refused to recant their beliefs were sometimes subjected to harsh treatment in prisons and reeducation-through-labor camps, and there were credible reports of deaths due to torture and abuse.”²

The PRC government appears to have been largely successful in not only suppressing FLG activity in China but also discrediting Falun Gong in the eyes of PRC citizens and preventing linkages between Falun Gong and other social protest movements. Nonetheless, FLG followers have displayed a remarkable tenacity and dedication both domestically and abroad. They have become a recurring irritant in China’s efforts to project an image of a peaceful world power that abides by international norms, and have raised suspicions among some PRC leaders that the U.S. government is colluding with them. On April 20, 2006, at the official welcoming ceremony of PRC President Hu Jintao’s visit to Washington, D.C., Ms. Wang Wenyi, a reporter for the *Epoch Times*, interrupted Hu’s speech by shouting in support of Falun Gong for more than two minutes before being hustled away by U.S. security agents. Although ostensibly not a political movement, Falun Gong practitioners in the United States have become visible and vocal, particularly in major U.S. cities and in Washington, D.C., in criticizing the PRC government and publicizing human rights abuses against their fellow members in China. The PRC government reportedly also has been aggressive abroad, attempting to refute FLG claims and counteract their activities.

¹ Annual Report of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, May 2, 2005.

² Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, *International Religious Freedom Report 2005 — China* (November 2005).

Basic Descriptions and Major Events

What is Falun Gong?

“Falun Gong,” also known as “Falun Dafa,”³ combines an exercise regimen with meditation, moral values, spiritual beliefs, and faith. The practice and beliefs are derived from *qigong*, a set of movements said to stimulate the flow of *qi* — vital energies or “life forces” — throughout the body, and Buddhist and Daoist concepts. Falun Gong upholds three main virtues — truthfulness, compassion, and forbearance (*zhen-shan-ren*) — which may deliver practitioners from modern society’s “materialism” and “moral degeneration.”⁴ FLG adherents claim that by controlling the “wheel of dharma,” which is said to revolve in the body, one can cure a wide range of medical ailments and diseases. They believe that by practicing Falun Gong, or “cultivation,” they may achieve physical well-being, emotional tranquility, moral virtue, an understanding of the cosmos, and a higher level of existence or salvation.⁵

Some observers maintain that Falun Gong resembles a cult and refer to the unquestioning support given to its founder, Master Li Hongzhi, departure from orthodox Buddhism and Daoism, and emphasis on supernatural powers. Others criticize the spiritual practice for being intolerant or exclusive. The PRC government charges that Falun Dafa has disrupted social order and contributed to the deaths of hundreds of Chinese practitioners and non-practitioners by discouraging medical treatment and causing or exacerbating mental disorders leading to violent acts. FLG followers counter that the practice is voluntary and that levels of faith and involvement vary with the individual practitioner. They also emphasize that Falun Gong is not a religion — there is no worship of a deity, all-inclusive system of beliefs, church or temple, or formal hierarchy.

Formation and Organization

During the mid-1990s, Falun Gong acquired a large and diverse following, with estimates ranging from 3 to 70 million members, including several thousand practitioners in the United States.⁶ Falun Gong attracted many retired persons as well as factory workers, farmers, state enterprise managers, entrepreneurs, intellectuals, and students in China. The practice’s claimed healing powers became especially attractive as economic reforms caused many citizens to lose medical benefits and services. In addition, Falun Gong reportedly was embraced by many retired and active Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and government cadres and military officials

³ The literal meanings of “Falun Gong” and “Falun Dafa,” respectively, are “law wheel exercise” and “great way of the law wheel.”

⁴ According to Falun Dafa, examples of moral degeneration include rock music, drug addiction, and homosexuality.

⁵ See [<http://www.falundafa.org>] and [<http://www.faluninfo.net>] See also Li Hongzhi, *Falun Gong* (rev. ed.) (Gloucester, MA: Fair Winds Press, 2001).

⁶ One estimate put the number of adherents in China at “several million” members. See Craig S. Smith, “Sect Clings to the Web in the Face of Beijing’s Ban,” *New York Times*, July 5, 2001.

and personnel. In 1999, then Vice-President Hu Jintao stated that of 2.1 million known members of the Falun Gong group, one-third belonged to the CCP.⁷

Falun Gong's apparently loose but effective organization has remained somewhat mysterious. During the early phase of the crackdown, adherents of Falun Gong generally characterized their objectives as personal and limited in scope. They described their movement as being loosely organized and without any political agenda beyond protecting the constitutional rights of practitioners in China. According to some analysts, however, the movement was well organized before the crackdown in 1999. After the government banned Falun Gong, a more fluid, underground network, aided by the Internet, pagers, and pay phones, carried on for over two years.⁸

Master Li Hongzhi

Li Hongzhi ("Master Li"), a former Grain Bureau clerk, developed Falun Gong in the late 1980s, when *qigong* began to gain popularity in China. In 1992, Li explained his ideas in a book, *Zhuan Falun*. Falun Gong was incorporated into an official organization, the Chinese Qigong Association, in 1993 but separated from it by 1996.⁹ Around this time, Li reportedly left China.¹⁰ Since 1999, Li, who lives with his family outside New York City, has remained in seclusion, but has made occasional appearances at Falun Gong gatherings. In 2005 and 2006, Li gave lectures to followers in Chicago, New York, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. Some reports suggest that Li Hongzhi has directed his adherents from behind the scenes and that his public statements are interpreted by many Falun Gong practitioners as instructions.

The 1999 FLG Demonstrations and PRC Government Crackdown

On April 25, 1999, an estimated 10,000 to 30,000 Falun Gong practitioners from around China gathered in Beijing to protest the PRC government's growing restrictions on their activities. Some adherents presented an open letter to the Party leadership at its residential compound, *Zhongnanhai*, demanding official recognition and their constitutional rights to free speech, press, and assembly. Party leaders reportedly were split on whether to ban Falun Gong and conveyed contradictory

⁷ The practice reportedly enjoyed a strong following among soldiers and officers in some northeastern cities, while the PRC Navy published copies of *Zhuan Falun*. According to one source, there were 4,000-5,000 Falun Gong "sympathizers" in the PLA air force. See David Murphy, "Losing Battle," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, Feb. 15, 2001. See also John Pomfret, "China Takes Measured Steps Against Sect," *Washington Post*, Aug. 6, 1999.

⁸ Ian Johnson, "Brother Li Love: In China, the Survival of Falun Dafa Rests on Beepers and Faith," *Wall Street Journal*, Aug. 25, 2000.

⁹ Reports differ on which group, Falun Gong or the Qigong Association, initiated the split.

¹⁰ FLG founder Li Hongzhi was reportedly en route from Hong Kong to Australia when the April 1999 demonstrations broke out and denies that he instigated them.

messages.¹¹ Premier Zhu Rongji reportedly met with a delegation of practitioners and told them that they would not be punished. By contrast, President Jiang Zemin was said to be shocked by the affront to Party authority and ordered the crackdown. Jiang was also angered by the apparent ease with which U.S. officials had granted Li Hongzhi a visa and feared U.S. involvement in the movement. The government produced circulars forbidding Party members from practicing Falun Gong. Security forces collected the names of instructors, infiltrated exercise classes, and closed book stalls selling Falun Dafa literature. Tensions escalated as followers engaged in 18 major demonstrations, including occupying a government building in the city of Nanchang and demonstrating in front of China Central Television Station in Beijing.

The official crackdown began on July 21, 1999, when Falun Gong was outlawed and an arrest warrant was issued for Li Hongzhi. On October 30, 1999, China's National People's Congress promulgated an "anti-cult" law (article 300 of the Criminal Law), effective retroactively, to suppress not only the Falun Gong movement but also thousands of religious sects across the country. However, Ye Xiaowen, director of the State Bureau of Religious Affairs, stated that police would not interfere with people who practiced alone in their own homes.¹² In Beijing alone, public security officers closed 67 teaching stations and 1,627 practice sites.¹³ In the immediate aftermath, the state reportedly detained and questioned over 30,000 followers nationwide, releasing the vast majority of them after they promised to quit or identified group organizers.

Under article 300, cult leaders and recruiters may be sentenced to 7 or more years in prison, while cult members who disrupt public order or distribute publications may be sentenced to three to seven years in prison.¹⁴ During the first two years of the crackdown, between 150 and 450 group leaders and other members were tried for various crimes and sentenced to prison terms of up to 18-20 years. Estimates of those who have spent time in detention or "labor reeducation" range

¹¹ Vivien Pik-Kwan Chan, "Sect Ban Rumour Not True — Beijing," *South China Morning Post*, June 15, 1999; John Pomfret, "Jiang Caught in Middle on Standoff," *Washington Post*, Apr. 8, 2001.

¹² The PRC government has not carried out a consistent policy regarding practicing in private. According to the State Department, the mere belief in the discipline (without any public manifestation or practice) has been sufficient grounds for punishment ranging from loss of employment to imprisonment. Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices — 2005 (China)*, March 8, 2006. See also Matt Forney, "Beijing Says Changes in Economy Helped Spur Falun Dafa's Growth," *Wall Street Journal*, Nov. 5, 1999.

¹³ Before the crackdown, there were approximately 39 "teaching centers," 1,900 "instruction centers" and 28,000 practice sites nationwide. See John Pomfret and Michael Laris, "China Expands Sect Crackdown," *Washington Post*, July 25, 1999; and John Wong and William T. Liu, *The Mystery of Falun Gong* (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing Co. and Singapore University Press, 1999).

¹⁴ Statement of Gretchen Birkle, Acting Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bureau for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, U.S. Department of State, Joint Hearing before the Subcommittee on Africa, Global Human Rights and International Operations, *Falun Gong and China's Continuing War on Human Rights*, July 21, 2005.

from 10,000 to 100,000 persons.¹⁵ According to estimates by the State Department and human rights organization, since 1999, from several hundred to a few thousand FLG adherents have died in custody from torture, abuse, and neglect. Many other followers have been suspended or expelled from school or demoted or dismissed from their jobs.

It took the PRC government, employing methods of social control that have deep roots in both Chinese Communist Party practice and Chinese history, over two years to subdue the Falun Gong organization. Incremental improvements in the rule of law in China in the past decade have had little if any effect in protecting the constitutional rights of FLG followers. In 1999, the central government reportedly combined an intensive propaganda campaign with stern internal party directives and reliance upon its system of informal control at the local level. At first, the local enforcement of government decrees, such as those requiring universities, employers, and neighborhood committees to obtain individual repudiations of Falun Gong, was often lax.¹⁶ Some reports suggested that local officials had hoped that they could persuade Falun Gong members to give up the practice or at least refrain from engaging in public protests. However, between July 1999 and October 2000, Falun Gong adherents continued to journey to Beijing and staged several large demonstrations (involving several hundred to over a thousand persons) — many participants were sent home repeatedly or evaded the police. As Falun Gong demonstrations continued, the crackdown took on a greater sense of urgency. The PRC leadership employed a traditional method of threats and incentives toward lower authorities to prevent public displays of Falun Gong, particularly demonstrations in the capital. Central leaders turned a blind eye to local methods of suppression against unrepentant practitioners, including the reported use of torture. The largest memberships and severest human rights abuses have been reported in China's northeastern provinces.¹⁷

Falun Gong Activities Underground and Overseas and Continued Government Repression

There has been little, if any, FLG activity reported in the past year, although the State Department reported that in 2005, there were still hundreds of thousands of

¹⁵ “Labor re-education” is a form of “administrative punishment” for non-criminal acts (such as “disrupting public order”) that lasts between one and three years and does not require a trial. See Craig S. Smith, “Sect Clings to the Web in the Face of Beijing’s Ban,” *New York Times*, July 5, 2001; Mary Beth Sheridan, “Falun Gong Protests on the Mall,” *Washington Post*, July 20, 2001.

¹⁶ See John Pomfret, “China’s Steadfast Sect,” *Washington Post*, Aug. 23, 2000.

¹⁷ Ian Johnson, “Death Trap: How One Chinese City Resorted to Atrocities to Control Falun Dafa,” *Wall Street Journal*, Dec. 26, 2000; Charles Hutzler, “Falun Gong Feels Effect of China’s Tighter Grip,” *Asian Wall Street Journal*, Apr. 26, 2001; John Pomfret and Philip Pan, “Torture Is Breaking Falun Gong,” *Washington Post*, August 5, 2001; “China’s Heilongjiang Records Highest Falun Gong Death Toll,” *BBC*, Dec. 6, 2003.

practitioners in the country.¹⁸ Many FLG followers are believed to be still practicing in their homes or meeting secretly. According to another source, there are 60,000 FLG practitioners left in China: half of them are still in detention while the other half remain under surveillance.¹⁹ According to another estimate, there are between 15,000 and 25,000 political or religious prisoners in China, half of whom are linked to the Falun Gong movement.²⁰ FLG members in the United States claim that adherents in China continue to disseminate written information about the practice.

Interruption of Television Broadcasts

Between 2002 and 2005, in about a dozen reported cases, Falun Gong members interrupted programming in several large Chinese cities and broadcast their own images, possibly with the aid of sources outside China.²¹ In 2002, PRC courts sentenced 27 practitioners to prison terms of 4 to 20 years for carrying out these actions. In July 2005, satellite broadcasts reportedly were interrupted by a 15-minute FLG video.²² On May 19, 2003, U.S. citizen Charles Li was sentenced to three years in prison for “intending to sabotage” Chinese television broadcasts. Li returned to California after he was released in January 2006. U.S. consular officials had maintained regular contact with Li through his detainment. In a letter that he sent while under incarceration, Li reportedly wrote of physical and mental abuse in prison.

Alleged Concentration Camps

In March 2006, U.S. Falun Gong representatives claimed that thousands of practitioners had been sent to 36 concentration camps throughout the PRC, particularly in the northeast, and that many of them were killed for profit through the harvesting and sale of their organs. Many of the claims were based upon the story of one such camp in Sujiatun, a district of Shenyang city in Liaoning province. The *Epoch Times*, a U.S.-based newspaper affiliated with Falun Gong, first reported the story as told by the ex-wife of a doctor at the Liaoning Provincial Thrombosis Hospital of Integrated Chinese and Western Medicine and a Chinese journalist based in Japan. According to the report, the hospital was used as a concentration camp and organ harvesting center. Of an estimated 6,000 Falun Gong detainees there, three-fourths allegedly have had their organs removed and then were cremated or never

¹⁸ Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, *International Religious Freedom Report 2005 — China* (November 2005).

¹⁹ Statement of Yonglin Chen, Joint Hearing before the Subcommittee on Africa, Global Human Rights and International Operations, *Falun Gong and China's Continuing War on Human Rights*, July 21, 2005.

²⁰ Terence Chea, “Former American Businessman Lobbies for China’s Political Prisoners,” *San Diego Union-Tribune*, August 28, 2005.

²¹ The satellite interference may have originated overseas. The Taiwanese government has denied any involvement.

²² “China Condemns Alleged Falun Gong Satellite ‘Attack,’” *Dow Jones International News*, July 6, 2005.

seen again.²³ The PRC government has denied the allegations. American officials from the U.S. Embassy in Beijing and the U.S. consulate in Shenyang visited the area as well as the hospital site on two occasions — the first time unannounced and the second with the cooperation of PRC officials — and after investigating the facility “found no evidence that the site is being used for any function other than as a normal public hospital.”²⁴ In April 2006, 81 U.S. Members of Congress reportedly co-signed a letter written by Representative Dana Rohrabacher to President Bush expressing serious concerns over organ harvesting of Falun Gong prisoners in China.

Falun Gong Activities Overseas

Hong Kong. Practicing Falun Gong is permitted in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) and local members, which number an estimated 500, frequently stage protests against PRC policies toward Falun Gong on the mainland. In November 2004, a Hong Kong appeals court reversed convictions for “obstructing a public place” against sixteen Falun Gong members who had participated in a demonstration in March 2002. The judges ruled that the defendants had been exercising their right to demonstrate. In May 2005, the Court of Final Appeal overturned the convictions of eight other protesters for assaulting and obstructing police, stating that “the freedom to demonstrate peacefully is protected by law.”²⁵ The HKSAR government reportedly has occasionally barred entry to foreign Falun Gong adherents. In February 2006, 83 overseas Falun Gong practitioners, mostly from Taiwan, were refused entry prior to a conference organized by the Hong Kong Association of Falun Dafa, leading some to speculate that PRC authorities keep tabs on overseas and Taiwan FLG members.²⁶

The United States. There are an estimated several thousand Falun Gong practitioners in the United States and similarly large numbers of adherents in other countries with large ethnic Chinese populations. The movement has become highly public in the United States. Members regularly stage demonstrations, distribute flyers, and sponsor cultural events. In addition, FLG followers are affiliated with several mass media outlets, including Internet sites; the Epoch Times, a newspaper distributed for free in eight languages and 30 countries (with a distribution of 1.5 million); New Tang Dynasty Television (NTDTV), a nonprofit Chinese language station based in New York with correspondents in 50 cities worldwide; and Sound of Hope, a northern California radio station founded by FLG members.²⁷ These

²³ “U.S. Presses China for Probe on Falun Gong Organ Harvesting Claim,” *Agence France Presse*, March 31, 2006.

²⁴ “U.S. Finds No Evidence of Alleged Concentration Camp in China — Repression of Falun Gong, Reports of Organ Harvesting Still Worry Officials,” *Washington File*, April 16, 2006; see also Mike Stekete, “The Price is Rights,” *The Australian*, April 1, 2006.

²⁵ Albert Wong, “Falun Gong Victory on the Right to Protest,” *The Standard*, May 6, 2006.

²⁶ “Falun Gong Blacklist Theory Raised,” *South China Morning Post*, February 8, 2006.

²⁷ See [<http://www.falundafa.org>]; [<http://faluninfo.net>]; [<http://www.clearwisdom.net>]; [<http://www.epochtimes.com>]; [<http://www.ntdtv.com>]; KTVO AM 1400. Vanessa Hua, “Culture and Religion: Dissident Media Linked to Falun Gong,” *SFGate.com*, December (continued...)

news outlets report on a variety of topics but emphasize human rights abuses in China, particularly against Falun Gong members, and publish mostly negative or critical reports on PRC domestic and foreign policies.

Two U.S. Internet companies founded by Chinese Falun Gong practitioners, Dynaweb Internet Technology Inc. and UltraReach Internet Corporation, have been at the forefront of overseas Chinese and U.S. efforts to breach the PRC “Internet firewall.” They have each developed software to help Chinese Web users — estimated at 111 million in 2005 — to circumvent government censorship and access websites which the PRC government has attempted to block. The United States Broadcasting Board of Governors has provided funding to these companies in order to help sustain their efforts in enabling Web users in China to freely access the Internet, including Voice of America and Radio Free Asia websites.²⁸

On behalf of plaintiffs in China, Falun Gong adherents in the United States have filed several civil complaints in U.S. federal courts against PRC leaders for violations of the Torture Victim Protection Act, the Alien Tort Claims Act, and other “crimes against humanity.”²⁹ In September 2003, a U.S. District Court judge in Chicago dismissed a lawsuit filed against former PRC President Jiang Zemin, on the basis of lack of jurisdiction and sovereign immunity. In December 2004, a U.S. District Court in San Francisco ruled that Beijing Party Secretary and former Beijing mayor Liu Qi violated U.S., international, and PRC law for his role in violating the human rights of Falun Gong practitioners.³⁰

PRC officials in the United States have engaged in a public relations blitz to counter FLG efforts. In 2001, over one dozen U.S. mayors reported pressure from PRC officials urging them not to give public recognition to Falun Gong.³¹ In 2002, according to Falun Gong practitioners, PRC consulates sent approximately 300 letters to local U.S. officials, including mayors and the governor of Washington state, asking them not to support Falun Gong.³² The *Wall Street Journal* writes: “Chinese diplomats spend a lot of time writing letters and making visits to governments, local

²⁷ (...continued)
18, 2005.

²⁸ For further information, see CRS Report RL33167, *Internet Development and Information Control in the People’s Republic of China*, by Thomas Lum.

²⁹ Under U.S. law, foreigners accused of crimes against humanity or violations of international law can be sued in federal court by U.S. citizens or aliens in the United States. The accused individual must be served a civil complaint in the United States.

³⁰ Liu was served with legal papers in 2002 in San Francisco while en route to the Salt Lake City Winter Olympics. The Court ruled that Liu appeared to have violated Chinese law and was thus not entitled to sovereign immunity. The plaintiffs did not receive damages but hope to bar Liu from visiting the United States again. Vanessa Hua, “Beijing Official Liable in Falun Gong Case,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, Dec. 24, 2004.

³¹ Helen Luk, “China Steps up Efforts Against Sect,” *The Patriot-News*, July 9, 2001.

³² Steve Park, “Officials Ask U.S. Cities to Snub Sect,” *The Washington Times*, April 8, 2002.

newspapers and television outlets, politicians and others...warning them about the movement.”³³

Since 2001, Falun Gong plaintiffs have filed several lawsuits in federal courts claiming that the PRC officials in the United States have been responsible for dozens of isolated incidents of physical and verbal harassment, eavesdropping, and destruction of property of Falun Gong adherents and supporters in the United States. However, plaintiffs often have possessed little evidence of direct involvement by the Chinese government in the alleged incidents. PRC consular officials deny participation in such criminal activity in the United States and claim that they are entitled to diplomatic immunity. In November 2002, the Circuit Court of Cook County charged a PRC immigrant with battery for physically assaulting a Falun Gong hunger striker in front of the Chinese Consulate in Chicago in September 2001.³⁴ In February 2005, Falun Gong members in the United States reported that a coordinated, world-wide campaign (in over 20 countries) of telephone harassment against them had taken place.³⁵ This telephone harassment allegedly consisted of pre-recorded anti-Falun Gong messages in both English and Chinese, some purportedly originating in China.

In May 2005, Mr. Chen Yongli, a political officer at the PRC Consulate General in Sydney, Australia, defected and requested political asylum on the grounds that he would be persecuted if sent back to China.³⁶ On June 4, 2005, Chen made a public appearance at a rally in Sydney to commemorate the 16th anniversary of the 1989 Tiananmen Square military action. In his speech, Chen declared that Beijing had directed the PRC consulate to identify and harass members of the Australian Chinese community who belonged to groups that the PRC deems subversive, such as democracy activists and Falun Gong practitioners. As a consular official, Chen reportedly resisted orders to provide extensive details about FLG adherents in Australia.³⁷ Chen alleged that the PRC government had deployed a network of 1,000 agents and spies in Australia to discredit Falun Gong and to spy on its members, and that the number of such agents in the United States was likely higher. In July 2005, the Australian Immigration Department granted permanent protection visas to Chen, his wife and daughter.

³³ Pui-Wing Tam, Ian Johnson and Li Yuan, “China’s Diplomats in U.S. Act to Foil Falun Gong Protesters,” *Wall Street Journal*, November 24, 2004.

³⁴ Lydia Polgreen, “On New York Streets, Warning of a Crackdown by China,” *New York Times*, November 22, 2004.

³⁵ The information source for this is Jeff Chen, spokesman for the Washington D.C. Falun Dafa Association. See also “Attorney General Asked to Investigate Massive Harassment Calls,” *U.S. Newswire*, March 2, 2005.

³⁶ Although Chen’s request for political asylum was rejected, the Australian government granted Chen and his family permanent protection (immigration) visas in July 2005.

³⁷ Simon Kearney, “Falun Gong Paying Defector’s Expenses,” *The Australian*, July 13, 2005; Janaki Kremmer, “Chinese Defector Details Country’s Espionage Agenda,” *Christian Science Monitor*, June 20, 2005.

Implications for PRC Politics

The Chinese government reportedly referred to Falun Gong as “the most serious threat to stability in 50 years of [Chinese] communist history.” The practice’s popularity in China’s northeast and other economically depressed areas was especially worrisome to the Party because of the fear that “religious fever” combined with economic unrest could spark widespread political protests. Some observers noted that the crackdown on Falun Gong deepened anti-government sentiment among not only adherents but also non-adherents, including many reform-minded intellectuals. However, there has been little indication that Falun Gong has become a rallying cry for other disaffected social groups or China’s small number of political activists. Many Chinese, either because of government propaganda or their indifference toward Falun Gong, have become critical toward the movement or apathetic about the crackdown. Some have charged that Li Hongzhi has exploited vulnerable people and caused their suffering by exaggerating the healing powers of Falun Gong or by encouraging followers in prison to attain full enlightenment by exercising “forbearance” or refusing to recant.³⁸ The January 2001 self-immolations of six purported Falun Gong members on Tiananmen Square was exploited by the official media, further alienating many PRC citizens.

U.S. Government Actions

Since 1999, some Members of the United States Congress have made many public pronouncements and introduced several resolutions in support of Falun Gong. In the 109th Congress, H.Res. 608, introduced on December 14, 2005, would condemn the “escalating levels of religious persecution” in China, including the “brutal campaign to eradicate Falun Gong.” H.Con.Res. 365, introduced on March 28, 2006, would urge the PRC government to allow civil rights attorney Gao Zhisheng to continue practicing law. PRC authorities reportedly revoked Gao’s license after he provided legal assistance for peasant demonstrators, Christian house church worshipers, Falun Gong practitioners, and others. H.Res. 794, introduced on May 3, 2006, would call upon the PRC to end its most egregious human rights abuses, including the persecution of Falun Gong. For six consecutive years (1999-2004), the U.S. Department of State has designated China a “country of particular concern” for “particularly severe violations of religious freedom,” including its persecution of Falun Gong. An ongoing ban on the export of crime control and detection instruments and equipment to China satisfies the requirements of P.L. 105-292, the Freedom from Religious Persecution Act of 1998, which authorizes the President to impose sanctions upon countries that violate religious freedom.

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³⁸ See “Master Li Hongzhi’s Lecture at the Great Lakes Conference in North America, Dec. 9, 2000.” See also John Pomfret, “A Foe Rattles Beijing from Abroad,” *Washington Post*, Mar. 9, 2001; and Ian Johnson, “As Crackdown Grows, Falun Gong’s Faithful Face a New Pressure,” *Wall Street Journal*, Mar. 27, 2001.