

Battling over a corpse in China's Hubei province

Grassroots support frustrates authorities' attempt to cover up apparent murder

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Cover-ups of incidents at this hotel had happened there before. A high school student posted a message on the Internet on June 22 saying that the Yonglong Hotel is a place for sexual transactions and drug dealing.

According to the student's message, "In 1999 a young woman died at the hotel but the case was closed without any explanation. Two years ago a 16-year-old died there, and her death was casually judged by the police as suicide. The case was closed with RMB 35,000 [approximately CA\$5,900] given by the hotel manager, who is the younger brother of the city Mayor Zhang Shancai."

The people of Shishou believe that Tu was dead because he knew the details of secret criminal activity. The owner of the hotel where he was working is said to have been dealing drugs, with the help of the local police chief and the wife of the head judge of the local court.

CLASH IN THE STREETS

A violent clash ensued between the police and the sympathizers with Tu's family. Some of the people were beaten up by the police before they were arrested. But more and more people came to join the fight against the police. At its peak, the crowd is said to have numbered 70,000.

Such spontaneous, mass protests have become increasingly common in China. An isolated event can trigger an explosive incident that involves tens of thousands people. Most people have some grievance against the communist regime.

While some big cities in China give an impression of great prosperity, the benefits are concentrated among a small number of people who are close to political power. Many others have suffered from widespread injustice and corruption, as well as a damaged environment. The people find these grievances usually cannot be addressed through the regime or its legal system.

The accumulation of grievances without possibility of redress has made the people chronically angry. But, the consensus view is that the people of China have been unhappy at their treatment at the hands of the Communist Party for a long time.

DEFENDING RIGHTS

Today, the people of Shishou City are not only angry, they have something new: a sense that they have rights. And this idea of rights that need to be defended helps convert isolated conflicts into mass challenges to the regime.

The people who gathered in Shishou City were not just defending the family's desire to know who or what had killed their son, they were defending the right of the family to know that. This right is something that people throughout China with no connection to Shishou City might support.

This is, in part, why the regime, which a few months ago claimed to have embraced a more open policy towards reporting on events in China, acted so quickly in Shishou City to try to control the news about what was happening there. Within hours after the protests began on June 20,



Armed riot police in Shishou City

the Internet in Shishou City was shut down. The family called media in Beijing, but when reporters reached the city, they were not allowed in. Postings to chat rooms and blogs criticizing the handling of Tu's death were removed, with only the official version allowed to be kept.

This sense of having rights that should be defended has penetrated to the grassroots. Judging by the photos of the protesters in Shishou City, these are not intellectuals or idealistic students; these are working-class people of all kinds—housewives in

their slippers, middle-aged men in t-shirts, and aged grandfathers.

These people believed they were supporting the claims of Tu's family against the designs of the police chief, the head judge, and the town mayor. The people of Shishou City believed that Tu's family could not get fair treatment from what they consider to be a corrupt establishment, and so they took to the streets in support.

TACTICAL ADJUSTMENTS

The regime responded with specially

trained riot police whose numbers are estimated to have been at least 8,000, and eventually the protests were subdued. However, in the confrontation with the riot police, the people appear to have won a victory.

The regime, which had initially sought by force to cremate Tu's body, agreed to conduct an autopsy with the family present. According to a report in the Xiaoxiang Morning Post on June 23, this autopsy has taken place, with results expected in 20 days, and the family has been

asked to cremate the body as soon as possible. The family has refused to do so until the autopsy report has been released.

Meanwhile, according to the same newspaper report, the family has displayed the body in a transparent casket in a mortuary. The reporter, along with all who came to see the body in state, could see wounds on the chest, neck, ankles, and private parts.

What appear to be concessions by the Chinese regime officials, however, often turn out to be mere tactical adjustments. For example, in the recent case of Deng Yujiao, who was tried on June 16 for killing a Communist Party official said to be raping her, the court claimed to have fully restored her freedom. That verdict in the case was thought to be in response to the widespread public support for Deng. Within 48 hours of her release, though, she was reported by her mother to have been taken away for psychiatric "treatment," and has not been heard from since.

In the case of Tu's family, they are now reported to have been invited in for "conversation" with a local official. With 70,000 people no longer in the streets, the pressure on the family will grow intense. A deal that will force them to back down from their confrontation with the regime would not be surprising.

But even if the regime eventually forces the family to back down, this incident in Shishou City has cost it. The knowledge of what had been done to Tu, apparently to protect the interests of the top local officials, reached the Chinese people who read the Internet before it was shut down and cleansed. That knowledge will further fuel the Chinese people's anger and indignation.

Captain America is dead. Long live Captain America.

Perspective

By STEFAN MANTYK

The last eight years have seen a decline in the ideals America stood for. The American people have been more concerned about their own safety than freedom.

Now, before we start debating the success or failure of a certain president, I'm referring to the America where Spider-Man swings from rooftops, the Fantastic Four are bigger celebrities than Brangelina, and the Avengers, led by Captain America and Iron Man, are Earth's mightiest heroes.

And, for those who don't know, this is the America where Captain America is dead. The symbol of American patriotism who first came to life on comic

In some ways, his death in 2007 marked the death of American integrity, honor, and ideals

book pages in 1941 as a World War II hero was assassinated in Captain America 25 back in August 2007.

But don't move to Canada yet, the hero is returning in a five-book miniseries beginning on July 1 entitled "Captain America: Reborn." Though the plot remains tightly guarded by Marvel Comics, the title seems ample.

As written and orchestrated by Brian Michael Bendis and the Marvel Comics editors, the whole thing began when Stamford, Connecticut was devastated by a terrorist attack that destroyed a school and killed 600 children.

Seeing the writing on the wall, futurist Tony Stark, also known as Iron Man, set out to legislate a formal registration so that people with super powers are held accountable for their actions. Those registered would be trained and employed by the government, like a super military. Villains that registered received amnesty for past crimes. Those refusing to register would be arrested and "detained" in a prison in another dimension (outside of U.S.

jurisdiction of course).

Holding true to his ideals, Captain America saw this as an attack on civil liberties and opposed the registration. The result: a super-powered civil war erupted.

The war, like most wars, turned out to do more harm than good. After civilians condemned those fighting on both sides for the destruction they caused, Captain America surrendered. Before he could stand trial for treason, he was assassinated on the courthouse steps. In story time, that was a year ago.

This all changes on July 1, when "Captain America: Reborn" hits comic book shops across the country.

"Why is this a big deal?" you might ask. "Superman died and came back. It's just a comic book."

True, in the world of superheroes, nobody stays dead long. But, this isn't just any super hero. Steve Rogers, a.k.a. Captain America, is the quintessential modern American patriot. He began as a scrawny World War II recruit who loved his country so much that he sacrificed his life to be a lab rat, because he couldn't sacrifice it as a soldier.

In some ways, his death in 2007 marked the death of American integrity, honor, and ideals, leaving the whole American identity in a kind of limbo as it gesticulates and reforms itself. The country hasn't been the same. To this day, even comedian Stephen Colbert, the most patriotic man in any universe, honours Captain America's death by hanging the hero's iconic shield in his studio.

As deeply symbolic as his passing was, Captain America's return will be just as meaningful.

In time to celebrate Independence Day, Captain America's rebirth in comic books harkens a new dawn for our country, with a new president who is challenging the status quo and pushing America to bring it to the next level.

We're even seeing it throughout the rest of the world. The freedom that Captain America defends is infectious and it waves its mighty fist in the face of evil in places like China and now in Iran.

It's simple. The people want a voice, and hope, and a government that works to protect them and give them a fair chance to make a better life. That's what Captain America is. That's what we lost when he died. His return couldn't have come at a better time.

Corruption tops many Iraqis' concerns, not security

BAGHDAD (Reuters)—Many Iraqis, inured to violence after years of slaughter between Shi'ites and Sunnis, seem more worried about the corruption that has crept into every corner of life and is eating away at Iraq's nascent public institutions.

The violence triggered by the 2003 U.S. invasion is fading and as it does, Iraqis focus more and more on the problems plaguing their daily lives, such as intermittent electricity, a lack of clean drinking water and an overwhelmed sewage system.

Topping the concerns of many is a pandemic of corruption, which is undermining efforts to rebuild and provide basic services and could ultimately brew so much discontent that the flagging insurgency may find rich soil in which to renew itself.

"I cannot move one step without bribing people," said Adel Hamza, who as head of public relations at a foreign construction company is responsible for getting contracts signed, stamped and authenticated by Iraqi authorities. "Everyone has got their mouths open as if I am feeding birds."

It is difficult to find someone in the government who can put a figure on the amount being embezzled or paid in bribes for government contracts, passports or other official paperwork.

One senior official, speaking on condition he not be identified, said at least \$4 billion of Iraq's \$58.6 billion 2009 annual budget was expected to go astray.

As oil prices surged to historic highs last year over \$147 per barrel, the Iraqi economy was flooded with cash. Only Somalia and Myanmar were seen as more corrupt than Iraq in 2008, according to cor-



Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki speaks during the inauguration of a newly built Tweiirj Bridge across the Euphrates River in the city of Karbala, 110 kms from Baghdad on May 15, 2009. Maliki said that serious action will be taken against any corruption found within the Iraqi government. For many, corruption has surpassed security as Iraqis' main concern. MOHAMMED SAWAF/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

ruption watchdog Transparency International.

MALIKI VOWS CRACKDOWN

The end of June will mark the start of the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq, when the combat troops that invaded to topple Saddam Hussein pull out of Iraqi cities, leaving security in urban centres in the hands of Iraqi police and soldiers.

Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki and other politicians have warned that Sunni Islamists al Qaeda and other violent groups are likely to try to take advantage of the U.S. pull-back to launch more attacks in a bid to reignite sectarian warfare.

A spate of bombings around Baghdad and in other areas killed 27 people Monday and a massive truck bomb Saturday killed 73 out-

side a mosque near the northern city of Kirkuk.

Haider Abdul-Muhsin says that when he needs to get Interior Ministry officials to sign identification documents, he has to spread money around like confetti.

"From the entry gate where a security guard stands till I get to the officer, I have to pay money to get my paperwork processed. This is not normal," said Muhsin.

He believes corruption lies behind the dilapidated state of his neighbourhood, where sewage pools in cracks in the pavement. A renovation project begun three years ago was never finished. Muhsin said he heard the contractor took the money and ran.

"My district looks like it was hit by a rocket," he said.

In the wake of corruption allega-

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tions against officials in the Trade Ministry, which oversees Iraq's massive food subsidy program and imports billions of dollars worth of wheat, rice and sugar every year, Maliki vowed to crack down on graft.

Former trade minister Abdul Falah al-Sudany was arrested last month after a plane he was flying on to Dubai was ordered to turn around. One of his brothers is also under arrest and another is on the run. The ministry has denied wrongdoing.

"Financial and administrative corruption is more dangerous than terrorism because terrorism kills a person or two or even 100, but corruption kills millions by depriving them of projects, from getting access to good quality medicine ... and it does not encourage international investors," said Ghazi al-Kinani, an economic analyst.

Housewife Najat al-Azzawi said the lack of public services six years after the invasion made her nervous about the future.

"Security was previously the problem, now corruption heads the list," she said.

Robbers in Netherlands snapped on Google Street View

By JASPER FAKKERT
Epoch Times Staff

AMSTERDAM, Netherlands—Police in the town of Groningen recognized and arrested two robbers last week, after their victim found a picture on Google Street View that was taken just moments before the robbery took place.

The 14-year-old victim was dragged from his bike by two men last year September, after which they stole 165 euro (CA\$ 267) and a mobile phone from him. In March this year, Google brought Google Street View online in the Netherlands, which enables users to see streets in a 360° view. In the same month, the victim found an image

showing the two suspects walking beside him on his bike, just before the robbery took place.

Because people's faces on Google Street View are automatically blurred, police contacted Google's head office in the U.S. for the original picture, which they received earlier this month. The fact that the picture was taken just be-

fore the robbery took place "is an enormous stroke of luck," police spokesperson Paul Heidanus was reported as saying in De Volkskrant newspaper.

One of the detectives immediately recognized one of the suspects on the photo. The second robber turned out to be his 24-year-old twin brother.