

Aide to California Politician Arrested, Charged With Conspiring With Chinese Spy to Infiltrate US Politics

The man, and a local city council member, were part of a 'basic team' dedicated to promote Beijing's interests in the U.S., a Chinese agent allegedly said.

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The FBI on Dec. 19 arrested a close associate of a local California politician, accusing him of scheming together with a recently sentenced Chinese spy to amplify China's influence in the U.S. political circle.

Sun Yaoning, also known as Mike Sun, was the campaign manager and close personal confidante to a Southern California city council member that the Chinese authorities supported, according to a newly unsealed complaint.

The 64-year-old has worked closely with Chen Jun, or John Chen, who a New York judge sentenced to 20 months in November for bribing the IRS against Falun Gong, a faith group that the Chinese regime has spent 25 years trying to suppress in China and globally, the document shows.

In conversations with Chinese officials following the politician's election in November 2022, Chen referred to Sun and the California politician as part of a "basic team dedicated for us," according to the filing.

"Mr. Sun has been my helping hand in the Chinese community since 1997," Chen was quoted as telling one Chinese official in January 2023.

The politician, whose name authorities redacted from the complaint, was one of the local U.S. politicians Chen assessed Beijing could influence on issues such as Taiwan, according to the prosecutors.

Sun had previously served in the Chinese military, the FBI agent said in the complaint. Public records show that he is the vice director of the American Chinese Culture Association, one of several U.S.-based pro-Beijing groups where he holds titles. Sun is also the CEO of a U.S.-

based media group called N&N Media Group, and has for years organized large-scale events to promote Beijing’s narratives and celebrate key Party anniversaries, according to Chinese media reports.

A ‘Basic Team Dedicated for Us’

The conversations cited in the court filing show that the pro-Beijing California politician Sun helped to reelect appears to maintain a close relationship with Chen.

On Nov. 9, 2022, the election day in California, the individual contacted Chen, writing: “Old Sun is contacting you. Please call him back. He is with me.”

“Got it, congratulations,” Chen replied from China, adding that they would talk in person in six days.

The two had held two phone calls for around half an hour and one hour each during the weeks following. In January 2023, the politician wrote a thank you letter to Chen, thanking him for attending her Chinese New Year event.

“You are doing a good job, I hope you can continue the good work, make Chinese people proud,” Chen said in reply.



A photo of Chen Jun as appeared on his driver's license. Department of Justice

Chen also tasked Sun to brief Chinese officials regarding the politician’s election outcome in late November 2022, saying “the related department is paying a lot of attention to it,” according to the court filing.

A biography Sun allegedly wrote describing the politician stated she was born in the late 1970s in China’s Chengdu City, capital of the southwestern province of Sichuan.

Three Chinese officials reacted positively to her election victory when separately alerted by Chen, sending a salute emoji, smiley faces, and thumbs up in response.

Days after that, on Dec. 8, 2022, they formed the “U.S.-China Friendship Promotion Association,” with Sun as the vice president and the politician, who they described as a “Chinese elected official,” as a member, the filing shows.

A Chinese official who heads a municipal government office in Tianjin, a northeastern Chinese megacity and Chen’s hometown, congratulated Chen for the work.

“This is the basic team dedicated for us,” Chen wrote, to which the official wrote: “Understood, can’t wait.”

‘Struggles’ Against the Regime’s Targets

In pre-trial detention, Chen, a U.S. citizen, reportedly told his cellmate that he was a Chinese spy working for the 610 Office, the Chinese extralegal agency established expressly to persecute Falun Gong, according to the complaint. The document said Chen described the agency as “a ‘spy agency’ that was 100 times better than the FBI.” Chen seemed astonished that he was caught, the FBI agent said, professing disbelief that the 610 Office “didn’t do a better job watching him.” He also allegedly said the 610 Office paid him \$250,000 to move to the United States decades ago and has since paid him \$52,000 per month.

A major topic among Sun and Chen’s conversations cited in the court file was about how to promote Beijing’s agenda in the United States and then report their work to their handlers in China.

Ahead of a planned trip to China in January 2023, Chen hurried Sun to write a report about the politician’s election win, saying he would present it to the “United Front,” the overseas Chinese influence network.

Chen allegedly instructed Sun to highlight the “current strategy” with Falun Gong, their “past experience with struggles” against the regime’s targets, and of “you and me cultivating and assisting [the politician]’s success.”

In a draft that Sun shared with Chen on Feb. 1, 2023, Sun took credit for leading U.S. dignitaries and cultural workers to China “on many occasions” to further promote U.S.–China ties, prosecutors alleged. Sun, according to the court filing, further cast himself as one who “persist[s] in resisting any hostile forces that undermine the friendship of U.S.-China relations, and Chinese secessionist forces.”

Sun wrote “most proudly of all” of how he orchestrated a team to “win the election for city council member candidate,” the court document stated.

Prosecutors alleged Chen asked Sun to add context about their “past struggle fighting Taiwanese independence forces” and Falun Gong in a California city. They also allegedly discussed how to protest a Congress member’s proposed visit to Taiwan.

The two in February 2023 took issue with the presence of Taiwan flags and Falun Gong practitioners in major U.S. parades, according to the complaint. To counter it, they allegedly proposed to Chinese officials a project: they would mobilize the “Los Angeles organization’s professional core team” to organize a float with a 100-person drum band. The budget was \$80,000, the complaint said.

On April 4, 2023, weeks before Chen’s arrest over the IRS bribery scheme against Falun Gong, Chen asked Sun whether Falun Gong practitioners “have locations” in a California city and activities there, according to the file.

“Can you create some obstacles for them? If you can eliminate one or several locations, or create some obstacles, there will be rewards.”

He allegedly asked Sun about three weeks later to arrange a meeting with the Chinese consul general in Los Angeles, telling him “there is a

major project to report.”

“National level,” Chen added, sharing an article that disparages the belief.

“Actual operation is strictly classified,” he said, according to the court document. “You will get credit for it.”

It’s unclear whether Chen was referring to the IRS bribery plot. According to the complaint, Chen intended to report to Chinese authorities by May 20. That would be six days after his [meeting](#) with a purported IRS official in order to open a probe against Shen Yun Performing Arts, a New York company founded by Falun Gong practitioners that showcases “China before communism,” with segments on the abuses happening to the faith group. Authorities said the complaint he submitted was facially deficient; Chen had promised to pay \$50,000 total for the IRS to open the case.

Sun and the city council member later joined on a China trip and returned together in September 2023 from Shanghai to Los Angeles, the FBI agent said. According to the complaint, Chen took part in the trip planning, which initially involved six Chinese cities and a meeting with a Chinese leader likely part of the Chinese intelligence apparatus.

U.S. Attorney Martin Estrada said Sun’s alleged conduct was “deeply concerning.”

“We cannot permit hostile foreign powers to meddle in the governance of our country,” he said.

Akil Davis, the assistant director for the FBI’s Los Angeles field office, said the case highlights the breadth of the Chinese regime’s “relentless intelligence and malign influence activities targeting the United States.” He said that the FBI will “continue to use all the tools at its disposal” to identify the Chinese intelligence operations, disrupt Chinese information laundering networks, and “bring to justice those who seek to engage in criminal conspiracies to undermine the integrity of our elected officials.”

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