

China Property Seizures

Date: January 29, 2010 11:33 AM

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Categories: [China](#)

Tags: [Chinese Government](#)

Permalink: <http://bit.ly/dbMcve>

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Source: Telegraph.co.uk

A large proportion of China's estimated 100,000 or so public protests each year are driven by rage over compulsory evictions. Over the past decade, hundreds of thousands of Chinese have been forcibly evicted from their homes to make way for one of the greatest property booms of all time.

Rapacious developers, often in cahoots with government officials, rarely pay enough compensation for the property they seize, and instead have been known to employ gangs of thugs to chase out stubborn homeowners. Property development is one of China's most lucrative industries, with house prices rising 68 per cent in Shanghai last year.

Other tactics include shutting off water and electricity to blocks of homes or beginning construction around houses that are still standing, creating "nail houses", which stand precariously in the middle of excavated building sites.

Yesterday the State Council, China's equivalent of a cabinet of ministers, said developers and their demolition companies would be banned from using violence and from shutting off electricity and gas to homes. Under new draft proposals, buildings will not be allowed to be demolished unless 90 per cent of the tenants had signed.