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# CHINA INSIDER

A researcher works in a lab at the Yisheng Biopharma company in Shenyang, Liaoning Province, China, on June 10, 2020. The company is one of a number in China trying to develop a vaccine for COVID-19.



BEIJING'S

# PANDEMIC DIPLOMACY

ACCESS TO THE VACCINE COMES  
WITH STRINGS ATTACHED

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## OPINION

# China's Cynical 'Pandemic Diplomacy'

Beijing targets strategic nations, regions with vaccine access but it comes with strings attached, unanswered questions

NICOLAS ASFOURI/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES



A worker tests an experimental vaccine for the COVID-19 at the Sinovac Biotech facilities in Beijing on April 29, 2020.

JAMES GORRIE



Is China leveraging its pandemic in new ways? It appears that Beijing is taking a page out of its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) debt-trap strategy and applying it to countries victimized by the CCP virus (novel coronavirus). It's viral pandemic diplomacy at its finest.

## Another Debt Trap?

China's BRI strategy has been to loan poorer nations money that they can't pay back. China then collects on the debt by taking ownership of ports and parking its navy there, and perhaps build a sprawling military base on the nations' soil, whether it's wanted or not.

Could Beijing's vaccine diplomacy be just as simple?

Could the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) have hatched the idea to initiate a global pandemic and then sell or even give the vaccine to the poorer countries it wishes to exploit or dominate militarily?

For those nations that can't afford the billion-dollar price tag, you offer to loan them the money for the vaccine that you know they can't repay.

Then, when the poor countries default on the debt, China ends up owning infrastructure, utilities, or farmland in the host countries.

To paraphrase "The Godfather," it sounds a lot like, "an offer they can't refuse."

## Strategic Vaccine Offers

This latest twist in the CCP's power calculus is, in many cases, aimed at countries aligned with the United States or of strategic importance to China, or both.

A big target, for example, is Latin American and Caribbean nations. According to the Mexican foreign affairs ministry, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi conducted a virtual meeting with Latin American and Caribbean national leaders. In that meeting, China offered a \$1 billion loan for access to its vaccine. Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador publicly thanked China after the loan and for other medical supplies that China has sent Mexico.

Undoubtedly, China plans to leverage this assistance for future expansion plans in America's geopolitical

backyard and gain further influence at the expense of the United States. And it's no coincidence that neighboring Mexico would be a target.

What could Mexico offer in return? The opportunity for China to open factories in Mexico?

That would certainly nullify some of effectiveness of the tariffs against China, wouldn't it? We'll have to wait and see.

On the other hand, it should be to no one's surprise that Beijing is also pushing its pandemic diplomacy much closer to home.

Indonesia, for instance, which has challenged China's territorial claims in the South China Sea for years, now is singing a different tune. It wants and needs a vaccine to the CCP virus, and knows that the CCP has a vaccine. Or, at least, the Indonesian government believes Beijing's claim that it has one.

In either case, a personal phone call between Chinese leader Xi Jinping and Indonesian President Joko Widodo has resulted in a promise by China to get the vaccine to Indonesia. What is uncertain is what Indonesia promised in return.

Perhaps one of the most important countries from a strategic point of view is the Philippines. That nation is located in the South China Sea and will be key to China's military dominance in the region. In fact, it's quite plausible that Beijing will eventually come to rule over it one way or another.

As in Latin America and the Caribbean, the target of China's pandemic policy with the Philippines is the U.S.-Philippines strategic relationship. Its proximity to China allows U.S. naval and ground forces a key staging area from which to counter Chinese military moves. From that perspective, China sees a major opportunity to end that threat.

That's because even though the U.S.-Philippine alliance goes back to 1951, the relationship has become much more tenuous over the past two decades. The closure of U.S. military bases in the late 1990s was followed up with a subsequent Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA). The VFA replaced the former military treaties and lightened the Philippines' commitment to their alliance with the United States.

## Duterte Having Second Thoughts?

Then, in February, President Philippine Rodrigo Duterte notified Washington that it was terminating the VFA with the United States within 180

days. It's likely that Duterte's aim was to cut ties with Washington and move closer to Beijing. Undoubtedly, he saw a potential payoff in doing so, even if it's at the expense of his country's national security and sovereignty.

At the same time, it gave him room to negotiate with the United States as well as with China. Apparently, however, Duterte has realized that a closer relationship with Beijing comes with risks. China's militarization of the South China Sea, its treatment of Hong Kong, and growing belligerence toward Taiwan may have given the Philippine president second thoughts.

That may explain why, in June, Duterte suspended—at least temporarily—the termination of the VFA with the United States.

## Giving the Devil His Due?

There are several outcomes that remain to be seen from China's pandemic diplomacy, however.

To begin with, what political or military considerations will China manage to extract from the nations it has vaccinated? In what way will they threaten the United States? What potential U.S. response could there be?

Perhaps just as critical, how will it be determined that China's vaccine is effective or if it is safe?

And, given China's record, why would the leaders in all of these countries trust China for a vaccine that, somehow, they have suddenly developed?

Furthermore, why would any leader trust the Chinese regime after it deceived the world about the existence of the pathogen to begin with, denied the source of it, and its human transmissibility?

Are these leaders living in denial? Or are they facing reality? Is their willingness to believe China's claim to have a vaccine to the virus an acknowledgment of the likelihood that whoever created the virus would best know how to cure it? Give the Devil his due.

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Views expressed in this article are the opinions of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Epoch Times.

## OPINION

# When 'WeChat,' the Chinese Regime Listens

BOB FU

Disney's remake of "Mulan" drew waves of criticism for filming near the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) mass internment camps for Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang, a region in China's far west.

There, under increasing surveillance and repression, the predominantly Muslim, Turkic-speaking ethnic minority struggles to survive.

In the movie's credits, Disney thanked the very entities responsible for persecuting the Uyghurs, including the police bureau in Turpan, an ancient Silk Road city in eastern Xinjiang, home to the persecuted Uyghur population. U.S. Rep. Mike Gallagher (R-Wis.) wrote on Twitter, "While the CCP is committing crimes against humanity in Xinjiang, Disney thanked four Xinjiang propaganda departments."

These CCP entities habitually lie to the world about human rights violations and threats to freedom of speech.

China's assaults on basic human rights aren't contained to the hapless Uyghurs in Xinjiang. CCP security agencies routinely suppress freedom of speech, both on and offline, through many invasive surveillance techniques, including their state-controlled social media tools, WeChat and TikTok.

Several years ago, Gabriel, an American friend with a heart for the Chinese people, personally experienced this threat when he traveled to China to help host a summer football camp for children. On the third day of camp, a group of Chinese agents from China's State Security (MSS), approached Gabriel. Officials confiscated his passport and transported him to a secret location for interrogation. There, they began bombarding my friend with a series of unscrupu-

lous questions.

"What is your relation to Bob Fu?"

"Why would this Bob Fu guy promote your summer camp program on his WeChat site?"

The MSS agents displayed a stack of printed documents. These papers revealed all the WeChat group messages I had posted in Texas, endorsing Gabriel's summer football camps in China.

The CCP's public records show that Tencent Global, the parent company of WeChat, employs more than 11,000 CCP members. Inside as well as outside of China, these workers manage surveillance contents and control every WeChat user's data.

In a sense, "made-in-China" social media apps such as WeChat and TikTok may be considered "quarterbacks"—the CCP's star players to advance their agenda in the expansive, critical, challenging technological standoff between China and the United States. As the CCP implements its integral surveillance in international strategic plays, this positions China as one of the United States' primary national security threats.

In response, President Donald Trump has threatened to completely ban WeChat and TikTok from the United States.

Critics of Trump's proposed ban on WeChat and TikTok claim that this sanction would create an inconvenience for users inside the United States, violate American freedom of speech; and negatively affect U.S. corporations in China such as Apple, Ford, Walmart, and Disney.

These concerns can be easily answered. Instead of sacrificing America's security for convenience's sake, it would be wiser to utilize safer, more secure methods of communication such as WhatsApp.

As to freedom of speech, CCP officials through its "Great Firewall," have banned all U.S. so-

cial media platforms. The CCP is the government repressing free speech, and they do so through state-controlled platforms such as WeChat and TikTok.

American corporations with profits in China often work harder at cultivating their relationship with the CCP than at promoting American principles. For instance, they spend little time pressuring the CCP to lift the ban on popular social media outlets such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Google.

A U.S. ban on CCP-controlled social media would incentivize these corporations to advance freedom of speech globally. Trump's proposed ban on the CCP's surveillance tools on U.S. soil could ultimately help enable a billion Chinese citizens to access Google or Facebook accounts free from communist control.

Two years ago, CCP authorities arrested, prosecuted, and charged Liu Meiting and Han Lifang, a husband and wife from Shaanxi Province, with "inciting subversion of CCP State power." As "evidence" of this couple's "crimes," officials presented a message they each posted on their WeChat accounts. The Ministry of Public Security directly ordered officers to arrest the couple for sending a public letter to a U.S. diplomat via WeChat. The court ultimately sentenced Liu and Han to four and three years in prison, respectively.

Chinese national security-related laws compel WeChat employees to spy on others—even if they are unwilling to do so. Article 7 of China's National Intelligence Law states, "Any organization or citizen shall support, assist, and cooperate with state intelligence work in accordance with the law, and maintain the secrecy of all knowledge of state intelligence work."

Article 28 of China's Cybersecurity Law directs, "Network operators shall provide technical

support and assistance to public security organs and national security organs that are safeguarding national security and investigating criminal activities in accordance with the law."

Article 11 of China's National Security Law states, "All citizens of the People's Republic of China ... shall have the responsibility and obligation to maintain national security."

Do you want all of your private conversations and personal data stored in the Communist Party's security agencies in Beijing? Is it right for the regime to imprison citizens like Liu and Han for simply expressing their opinions about the CCP's corruption on WeChat groups? Do you condone the kind of arbitrary detention and harassment of Americans that my friend Gabriel experienced?

If your answer is no to these questions, then you should applaud the courageous decision of the Trump administration to ban WeChat and other CCP spyware from America.

Instead of permitting the CCP to score another touchdown against Americans, it's time to sack their quarterback. The personal fouls of the CCP's egregious violations of international norms must be called out. They need to be tackled with the strictest enforcement possible, even if that means penalizing them with ejection from the U.S. playing field.

As long as WeChat operates in the United States under the repressive control of the CCP's dictatorship, neither we, our data, nor our country's national security will be safe.

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Views expressed in this article are the opinions of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Epoch Times.

DREW ANGERER/GETTY IMAGES



The WeChat app is displayed in the App Store on an Apple iPhone in Washington on Aug. 7, 2020.







TRUTH *and* TRADITION

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