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THE EPOCH TIMES

# CHINA INSIDER



## 'BRAIN CONTROL' WEAPONRY

CHINA'S MILITARY SEEKS TO CONTROL  
NEW FRONTIER OF WARFARE

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## MILITARY

# China Pursues 'Brain Control' Weaponry in Bid to Command Future of Warfare

EVA FU

Launching assaults on the battlefield with a mere thought. Enhancing the human brain to create "super warriors." Disrupting the minds of enemies to make them submit to the controller's command.

Once believed to only exist in science-fiction movies, the weaponization of the brain has been discussed by Chinese military officials for years. And Beijing is spending billions each year on neuroscience that could draw these scenarios ever closer to reality.

"The study into brain science was born out of a vision for how the future warfare would evolve," Li Peng, a medical researcher at a subsidiary of China's state-run Academy of Military Medical Sciences (AMMS), wrote in an article in 2017. Such research, he said, has "an extremely strong military characteristic" and is crucial to securing a "strategic high ground" for every country.

Li isn't alone in stressing the urgency in militarizing brain science.

In March, a Chinese military-run newspaper described cloud-powered artificial intelligence (AI) "integrating human and machine" as the key to winning wars. With the accelerating "intelligentization" of the military, it warned, China needs to quickly get a firm footing in this technology, and any delay "could lead to unimaginable consequences."

## 'Qualitative' Advantage

According to research papers and articles in military newspapers, Chinese military officials see four areas where innovations in brain science could be weaponized.

"Brain emulation" refers to the development of high-intelligence robots that function like humans. "Brain control" is the integration of humans with machines into one, allowing soldiers to perform tasks ordinarily impossible to them. "Superbrain" involves the use of electromagnetic radiation, such as infrasonic waves or ultrasound, to stimulate human brains and activate the brain's latent potential. The fourth, termed "controlling the brain," is about applying advanced technology to interfere with and manipulate how people think.

Two faculty members with the military-affiliated Army Medical University in a 2018 paper discussed their state-funded project researching a piece of biotechnology dubbed "psycho-virus." Applied in the military, such a psychological weapon could help develop "super warriors" who are "loyal, brave, and strategic;" in wars, the psycho-virus could "manipulate the consciousness of the enemies, crush their will, and interfere with their emotions to make them submit to the will of our side," the authors said.

Brain scientists may also aid the recovery of handicapped soldiers and systematically elevate the health protection of military personnel, according to a 2019 article on PLA Daily, the official newspaper for the Chinese military, known as the People's Liberation Army.

While the Chinese Communist Party has been dedicated for years

to "getting ahead of the biotechnology arms race," the evolution of frontier technologies has brought added urgency, according to Sam Kessler, geopolitical adviser at North Star Support Group, a multinational risk management company.

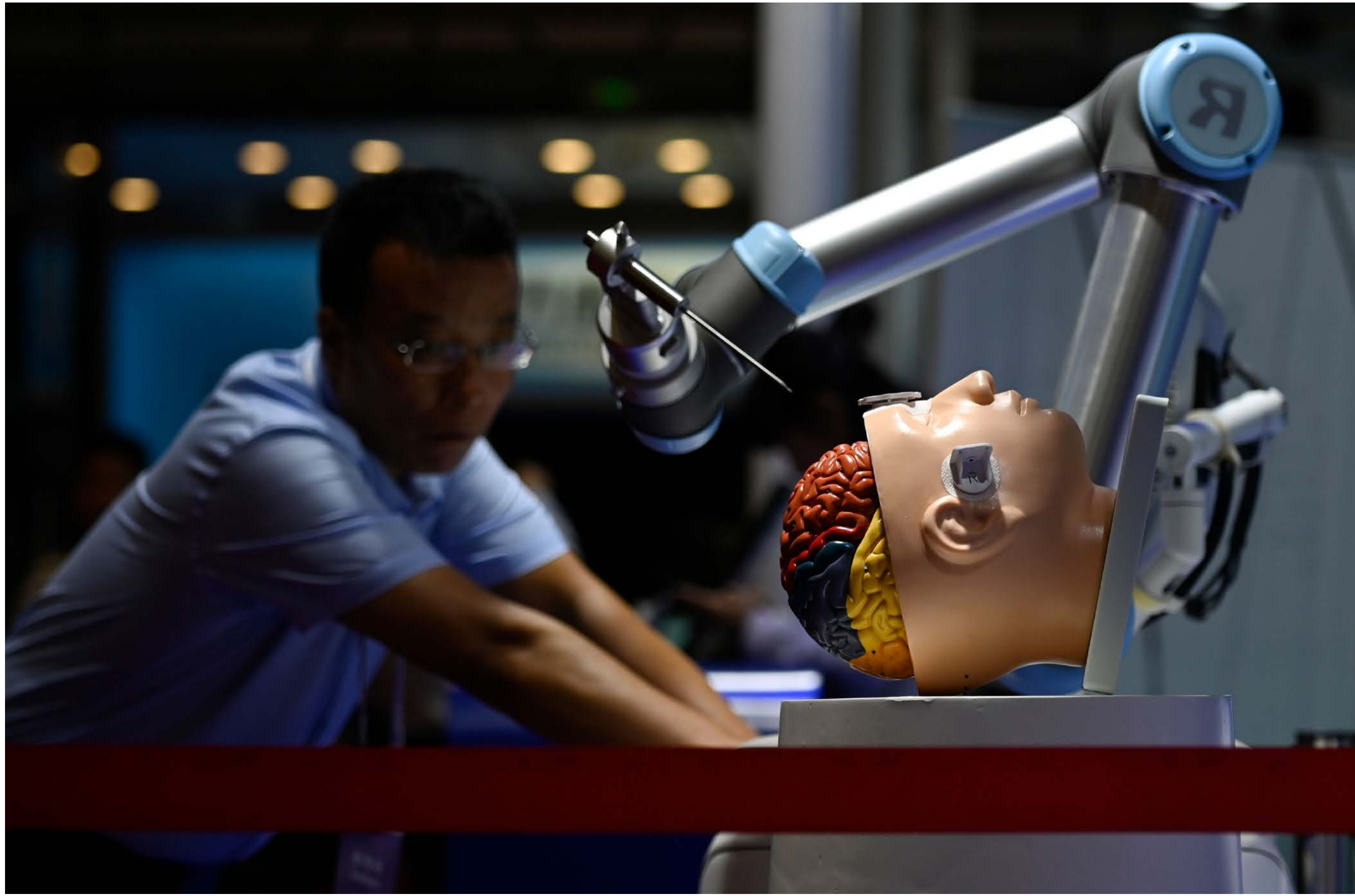
The "improbable futuristic technology that had been dreamed up in the past has now become more realistic in real-time," he wrote in a note to The Epoch Times. "This creates little room for error as a potential loss of dominance of such technology could potentially lead to the weakening of strategic barriers if left unchecked."

Concerned about Chinese activities in biotechnology, the United States in December blacklisted China's AMMS—the country's top medical research institute run by the Chinese military—and its 11 affiliated biotechnology research institutes, accusing them of developing "purported brain-control weaponry" to further the Chinese military.

The Chinese regime didn't comment on this aspect of U.S. blacklisting. The AMMS couldn't be reached for comment, and China's Ministry of National Defense didn't return a request from The Epoch Times for comment.

Weeks before the move, the Commerce Department's Industry and Security Bureau solicited public comments about a proposed rule to ban the export of brain-computer interface (BCI) technology, an emerging field that seeks to enable humans to directly communicate with an external device with just their thoughts.

Such technology would provide a "qualitative military or intelligence advantage" for U.S. adversaries, such as by "enhancing the capabilities of human soldiers, including collaboration for improved decision making, assisted-human operations, and advanced manned and unmanned military operations," the Commerce Department said.



A demonstration of a robotic arm performing brain surgery at the 2019 World Robot Conference in Beijing on Aug. 20, 2019.

Over the past six years, Beijing has come to see progress on brain-related research as 'a matter of China's future,' according to Chinese media reports.

## 'A Matter of China's Future'

The United States has been at the forefront in the field of brain technology, with the world's largest number of research papers published on the subject.

In April, Elon Musk's neurotechnology startup Neuralink released a video showing a monkey playing computer games through a chip inserted in its brain. Synchro, a Silicon Valley developer of implantable neural interface technology, last month released seven tweets it said were sent wirelessly by an immobilized Australian patient who had received the company's chip implant, known as Stentrode. The National Institutes of Health granted Synchro \$10 million last July to help launch its first U.S. human trial.

The Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) has also researched BCI for military applications, such as an "Avatar

project that aimed to create a semi-autonomous machine to act as the soldier's surrogate.

Beijing, closely tracking the developments in America, has demonstrated itself unwilling to stay behind. In January 2020, three months before Synchro began its first trial, eastern China's Zhejiang University had completed testing of a brain implant on a 72-year-old paralyzed patient. Using his brainwaves, the patient could direct a robotic arm to perform handshakes, fetch drinks, and play the classic Chinese board game mahjong.

Over the past six years, Beijing has come to see progress on brain-related research as "a matter of China's future," according to Chinese media reports.

The country's leading national scientific institution, the state-run Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS), has poured around 60 billion yuan (\$9.4 billion) annu-

ally into efforts to map out brain functions, its website shows. In September, China's Ministry of Science and Technology opened up applications for research into the field, with an additional 3 billion yuan (about \$471 million) allocated for 59 research streams.

The role of brain science has been significant enough that Chinese leader Xi Jinping has identified it as a priority field of emerging technology significant for the country's national security and for making China a central hub for the world's cutting-edge scientific innovations. "China is closer than in any time of history to the goal of rejuvenating the Chinese nation, and we need more than any time in history to build a world science and technology superpower," Xi told CAS scholars in a 2018 speech.

## Military 'High Ground'

The Chinese regime is racing to close the gap with the United States in harnessing the power from this emerging technology.

In terms of the volume of published papers on brain technology, China is second only to America, said Zhou Jie, a senior engineer with state-run scientific research institute China Academy of Information and Communications Technology, at a recent forum on BCI. That number grew at a pace of 41 percent over the period of 2016 to 2020, more than double the global average of 19 percent, according to a May report co-written by a Beijing-based AI robot manufacturer and a think tank advising Beijing on big data and AI.

The stack of Chinese innovations on BCI has appeared to keep pace with the growing enthusiasm.

AMMS, the Chinese military academy under U.S. sanctions, has been at the forefront of neuroscience research. Inventions from the AMMS and its affiliates since 2018 include various nerve signal collection devices, miniature skull implants, a remote monitoring system for restoring damaged nerves, and wearable augmented reality glasses designed for enhancing robot control, according to an open depository of patent applications.

In 2019, the Institute of Military

Medicine under AMMS created a brain-controlled unmanned aerial vehicle. To move the vehicle forward, an operator puts on an electrode cap and imagines moving their right hand. Thinking about feet movement would instruct the machine to descend.

The AMMS' National Defence Science and Technology Innovation Research Institute in 2021 acquired a patent for using virtual reality for spacecraft docking. The device interprets the astronaut's brain and limb activities and converts them into orders to adjust the aircraft's position in real-time.

While a sizable portion of innovations in BCI and other fields of brain technology has potential medical use, some may also be leveraged for military purposes.

One Chinese university previously touted unmanned combat via thought-controlled robots as a "high ground" in AI that China "must race to control."

"Witness more miracles with Chinese characteristics in strengthening the army," proclaimed the National University of Defense Technology, a military academy that supplies talent for China's armed forces, as it showed off a list of brain-controlled devices produced by the university, including a wheelchair and a car that could travel roughly 9.3 mph "on any road."

"Together, let's change the world with our 'minds,'" the school declared in a post on its website last November.

The university didn't respond to a request for comment by Epoch Times by press time.

## Calls for Self Reliance

The Commerce Department's blocking rules may hinder or delay Beijing in its path of advancing biotech and brain-related technologies but are unlikely to slow it down, according to Grant Newsham, a senior fellow with the Center for Security Policy and a retired U.S. Marine colonel.

"The Chinese will simply maneuver a bit, change some names, and keep going full speed ahead on these efforts to weaponize biotech," he told The Epoch Times.

But the sanctions serve a useful purpose alone: "making it impos-



A woman competes during the wheelchair race at the Cybathlon Championship, the first edition of an international competition organized by ETH Zurich for physically impaired athletes using bionic assistive technology, such as robotic prostheses, brain-computer interfaces and powered exoskeletons, in Kloten, Switzerland, on Oct. 8, 2016.

sible for Americans (and others) who want to invest in and partner with the Chinese organizations to claim they 'didn't know' what the Chinese were doing—or to argue that 'it isn't prohibited,'" he said.

Meanwhile, Chinese researchers have been focused on achieving self-sufficiency in this area.

In 2019, a research team at Tianjin University in northern China unveiled a "Brain Talker" chip, which, when linked to the brain through an electrode cap, could decode a user's mind intent and translate it into computer commands in less than two seconds.

Fudan University, an elite public institution in Shanghai, in January presented a remote BCI chip that can be recharged wirelessly from outside the body, avoiding potential damage to the brain. The chip consumes only one tenth of the power of its Western counterparts and costs half as much, Chinese state media reported at the time.

The term "self-developed" was prominently featured in both team's announcements and media reports.

Tao Hu, associate director at CAS's Shanghai Institute of Microsystem and Information Technology, said China has the potential to lead the world in the field of BCI.

"China is not lagging behind foreign countries in terms of the design aspects for core BCI gear," he wrote in a June article published on Chinese state media. He called on the country to step up resource allocation to accelerate BCI development, given the risk that the United States might block BCI exports to China.

## Ethical Risks

China has a unique advantage to help it gain a leg up in the race: its vast bank of nonhuman primates, according to Poo Mu-ming, a key figure spearheading China's brain research at CAS.

China has been the world's top supplier for test monkeys but stopped shipping them once the pandemic began. Poo, who in 2008 switched from mice to monkeys as the test animal at his neuroscience institute at CAS, had long wanted to utilize the country's test animal resources to boost China's brain research standing, according to state media reports.

His team in 2017 cloned the world's first pair of monkeys us-

ing the same method that produced Dolly the Sheep—a crucial step forward for China's brain-related research. With the same cloning technology, Chinese scientists could mass-produce and experiment on identical monkeys, eliminating interferences to experiments resulting from individual differences in test animals, Poo told Science Times, a newspaper under CAS, in October.

The AMMS has also proposed studies into building a database for an "aggressive consciousness control weapon" that targets specific spiritual or ethnic groups.

Such a project was first mentioned as early as 2012 by the Institute of Radiation Medicine under AMMS. The database aimed to establish a collection of images and videos that could trigger aggressive behavior. Its proposed targets include "spiritual leaders, organizations and extreme religious groups who share the common belief, and ethnic groups who share similar traits in locations and lifestyle habits."

China's more lenient ethical bar compared to the West has provided it with more leeway to gain a foothold with its BCI-related experiments that would "greatly empower them and streamline their innovations," according to Kessler. In China, such experiments have "less red tape preventing them from using questionable testing practices," he told The Epoch Times. "That makes all the difference in a world where one's edge in technology and intelligence can depend greatly on how they manage their ability to stay ahead of the curve."

Asked by a journal he oversaw whether BCI technologies may one day "enslave" humans, Poo appeared undisturbed.

"If we have the confidence that our society will be able to develop mechanisms to control the use of technologies for our benefits, then we need not worry about AI," he told the National Science Review, a peer-reviewed journal under the auspices of CAS, in 2017.

"Since the 1950s, many people have been worrying about the build-up of nuclear bombs and thought that we will soon be destroyed by a nuclear holocaust. But we still live quite well now, aren't we?"

Andrew Thornebrooke and Donna Ho contributed to this report.



A man wears an EEG brain-scanning apparatus on his head during an experiment in Hannover, Germany, in this file photo.



Five cloned macaques at a research institution in Shanghai on Nov. 27, 2018. Chinese scientists said the five monkeys were cloned from a single animal that was genetically engineered to have a sleep disorder, saying it could aid research into human psychological problems.

STR/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES



## CCP VIRUS

# China's Harsheset Lockdown Yet Tests Its 'Zero-COVID' Playbook

EVA FU

The first man set out on foot. For eight days and seven nights, he walked across snowy mountains, pacing around to warm himself amid the bitter winds and sleeping only when the sun came out—until suspicious villagers tipped off the police.

The second hopped onto a shared bike, cycling for more than 10 hours overnight. But the police got him as well.

The third opted for a water route, jumping into the freezing river in the hopes of swimming away, only to end up stranded for more than six hours.

Compelled by harsh COVID-19 measures in China, some ordinary citizens such as the trio have resorted to desperate measures to flee Xi'an, the city where a severe lockdown policy has barred 13 million residents from leaving their homes.

Best known as the home to the 2,000-year-old Terracotta Warriors, the north-central Chinese city is reporting the country's worst COVID-19 tally in more than 21 months. It's posing a headache to the regime in Beijing as it scrambles to gain the upper hand on the illness just four weeks ahead of the Winter Olympics, which Beijing has pledged to be "safe and grand."

While the caseloads from Xi'an—more than 1,700 as of Jan. 4—pale in comparison with many countries in the West, experts and residents have questioned the authenticity of such figures, because of the regime's routine practice of censoring unfavorable news.

China is the largest country implementing a "zero-COVID" policy, doggedly going after every virus case no matter the emotional or economic costs.

But Beijing's rigid playbook of fighting the virus—relying chiefly on vigorous contact tracing, mass testing, centralized quarantines, and harsh lockdowns—is showing strains amid growing public frustration and anger. With the worsening outbreak in Xi'an, questions are mounting as to how long such stringent COVID measures can last.

## Lockdown Pains

Getting the infection figures down to zero has become a political task.

Liu Guozhong, the Party chief of Shaanxi Province where Xi'an is the capital, on Jan. 1 instructed local officials to tap into the "wartime spirit" and quarantine anyone at risk "without a moment of delay." A leaked document circulating on Chinese social media showed that Liu had set Jan. 4 as the date Xi'an needs to achieve zero new cases of COVID. The Epoch Times couldn't verify the authenticity of the memo.

Racing to contain the outbreak, Xi'an has imposed the world's strictest lockdown measures since Wuhan became the initial epicenter of the pandemic.

Overnight, thousands of people identified as close contacts were hauled away by the truckload to other counties and cities to be quarantined. For the rest, the farthest they could go is the metal door enclosing their neighborhood residential compound.

Some districts were put in tighter lockdowns, with residents not permitted to venture past their doorstep. In some neighborhoods, the elevator service was cut off without further notice.

On New Year's Eve, firefighters had to climb the walls to get into a sealed-off



A young resident is tested for COVID-19 in Xi'an, Shaanxi Province, China, on Dec. 25, 2021.

neighborhood after a building caught fire.

The abrupt confinement has prompted an outcry as residents struggled to secure basic needs. The hashtag "hard to obtain food in Xi'an" quickly became one of the trendiest phrases on Weibo, China's version of Twitter.

During a recent live stream of a press conference on the outbreak, distraught viewers flooded the channel with pleas in the live comments section.

"Please arrange our neighborhood to buy vegetables." "Where is our food?" The authorities soon disabled the comments.

The price of food has skyrocketed due to the shortage, reportedly forcing some to barter for a bag of rice. In a screenshot that has gone viral, a box of Chinese cabbages, known usually for being dirt cheap, was priced at 438 yuan (about \$69).

"Is this robbery?" One resident asked, in apparent incredulity in a group chat on social media. "Are these cabbages made of jade?"

"Don't put on an attitude if you can't afford it. You poor folks can go starve to death," was the reply from the neighborhood committee worker.

For those who break the rules for whatever reason, the consequences have been swift—and sometimes bloody. A video that emerged on social media over the weekend showed a white-shirted man beaten by two pandemic control officers for sneaking out to buy steamed buns.

"I have no food," the man told the officers.

"Who cares if you have food or not," one uniformed officer shouted as he kicked and punched the man, whose half a dozen white buns spilled to the ground.

Another video on social media from New Year's Day showed a man with blood streaming down his face. A local village official had hit him with a brick when the man tried to visit his grandmother in a nearby village over concern that she lacked provisions, he said.

## Under Strain

The restrictions in Xi'an follow the same pattern repeated across China throughout much of the past two years. The heavy-handed approach has gone hand-in-hand with an aggressive vaccination campaign,

Preventing the outbreak is not the same as war. We can't use wartime measures to treat commoners.

Zheng, Xi'an resident

The restrictions in Xi'an follow the same pattern repeated across China throughout much of the past two years. The heavy-handed approach has gone hand-in-hand with an aggressive vaccination campaign, which has resulted in more than 85 percent of the population being jabbed with China-made vaccines as of December 2021.

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One city in Henan, a province bordering Shaanxi, has enforced a similar lockdown on Jan. 3 after announcing three asymptomatic cases.

In Guangxi, a southern Chinese province next to Vietnam, officials resorted to public shaming to punish rule breakers. Late last year, four suspected human smugglers were paraded through the streets wearing hazmat suits and a placard bearing their names and headshots, a scene reminiscent of public denouncement episodes decades ago during the Cultural Revolution. The men were later loaded onto hog trucks after officials enumerated their offenses, a witness later told The Epoch Times.

In November 2021, a sudden lockdown in Zhuanghe, a city in northeastern China, over one COVID case caught a visiting delivery driver off guard. He and his wife ended up staying in their truck and living off instant noodles for an entire month until the travel curf was lifted.

With the Beijing Winter Olympics approaching, Beijing has appeared more determined than ever to continue its current course.

The zero-COVID strategy remains the best choice for China, according to Liang Wannian, a top expert overseeing the country's outbreak response.

"Currently, the key to control the outbreak is not about 'adjustment' but 'implementation,'" he told state media The Paper in late December 2021, adding that the rapid transmission of the new Omicron variant, which is more infectious than Delta, means China needs to double down on current measures. China's current policies have focused on controlling the Delta variant.

"I have strong confidence that our country's outbreak control system can handle mutations like Omicron," he said.

But some are questioning whether China will be able to keep it up.

U.S. political risk consultancy firm Eurasia Group on Jan. 3 assessed China's zero-COVID approach as the first of 10 top risks for 2022.

"China's zero-COVID policy will fail," the group stated. "Keeping the country locked down for two years has now made it more risky to open it back up."

The policy won't contain infections but lead to larger outbreaks, in turn causing more severe lockdowns, it stated.

"This will in turn lead to greater economic disruptions, more state intervention, and a more dissatisfied population at odds with the triumphalist 'China defeated COVID' mantra of the state-run media."

In Xi'an, some residents are already speaking with a sense of fatigue.

"Preventing the outbreak is not the same as war," a resident who gave his last name as Zheng told The Epoch Times. "We can't use wartime measures to treat commoners."

*Eva Fu is a New York-based writer for The Epoch Times focusing on U.S.-China relations, religious freedom, and human rights.*

## AI PROSECUTOR

# Chinese Researchers Build AI 'Prosecutor' That Can File Charges by Itself

FRANK DONG

Scientists in China say they've developed a machine that relies on artificial intelligence (AI) to charge offenders with crimes.

Shanghai Pudong Procuratorate, the country's largest prosecution office, built and tested the machine. So far, the machine is able to identify and file charges for the eight most common crimes in Shanghai—credit card fraud, running a gambling operation, reckless driving, intentional injury, obstructing official duties, theft, fraud, and picking a quarrel.

The researchers said that, based on a written description of a case, the so-called AI prosecutor can file a charge with 97 percent accuracy.

The system can replace prosecutors in the decision-making process to a certain extent.

Shi Yong, lead scientist

Professor Shi Yong, the project's lead scientist, said the AI technology could reduce prosecutors' daily workloads, allowing them to focus on more challenging work. Shi also is the director of the big data and knowledge management laboratory at the Chinese Academy of Sciences, the regime's top state-run research institute.

"The system can replace prosecutors in the decision-making process to a certain extent," Shi and his team said in a paper published in the Chinese peer-reviewed journal Management Review. The South China Morning Post first reported about the newly developed AI machine.

Shi and his colleagues said that Chinese prosecutors began employing AI in 2016. Many of them now use an AI tool known as "System 206." The system is able to evaluate the strength of evidence, conditions for

an arrest, and how dangerous a suspect is considered to be to the public.

But all existing AI tools only played a limited role, since "they do not participate in the decision-making process of filing charges and [suggesting] sentences," the paper stated.

To make such decisions requires a machine to identify and remove any contents of a case file that are irrelevant to a crime and keep the useful information, it added.

The machine also needs to transform the complex, ever-changing human language into a standard mathematical or geometric format that a computer can understand, according to the paper.

China's internet companies have developed powerful tools for natural language processing, but their operation often requires large computers that prosecutors do not have access to.

The AI "prosecutor" developed by Shi's team could operate on a desktop. For each suspect, it would press a charge based on 1,000 "traits" obtained from the human-generated case description text, most of which is too short or abstract to make sense to humans. System 206 would then assess the evidence.

Shi said they used more than 17,000 cases from 2015 to 2020 to train the machine.

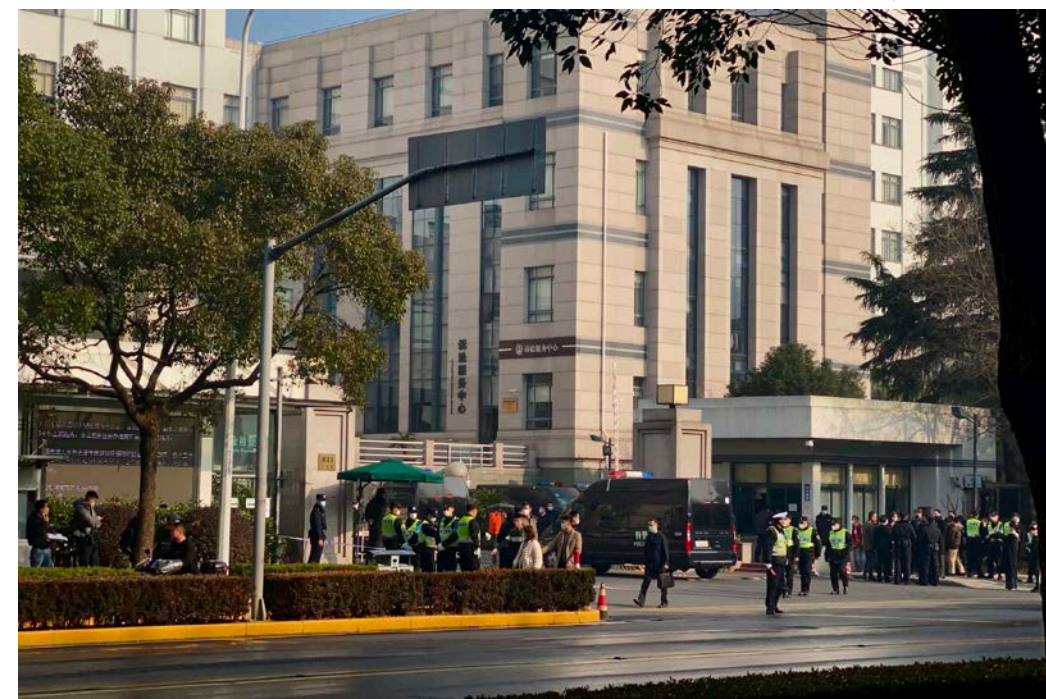
The scientists expected the AI prosecutor to soon become more competent with upgrades, saying it would be able to recognize less common crimes and file multiple charges against one suspect.

But the new machine has raised questions among Chinese prosecutors. A prosecutor in Guangzhou stated in the report that he had some concerns about the use of an AI prosecutor in filing charges.

The 97 percent accuracy may be high from a perspective of technology, but there will always be a chance of a mistake, the prosecutor said.

"Who will take responsibility when it happens? The prosecutor, the machine, or the designer of the algorithm?"

Direct application of AI in decision-mak-



Police stand at the entrance of the Pudong New District People's Court in Shanghai on Dec. 28, 2020.

ing could also affect a human prosecutor's autonomy. Most prosecutors don't want computer scientists to interfere with a legal judgment, the prosecutor added.

Another question is that the AI prosecutor could file a charge based only on its previous experience, the prosecutor said. It couldn't foresee the public reaction to a case in a shifting social environment.

"AI may help detect a mistake, but it cannot replace humans in making a decision," the prosecutor stated.

China's media celebrated the AI prosecutor as the world's first achievement in this field.

Unlike Western democracies, China doesn't have an independent legal system since the courts are controlled by the Chinese Communist Party.

Those who speak or act in a way deemed unacceptable to the Party, such as dissidents, religious believers, rights lawyers,

and citizens journalists, are often charged with vaguely defined offenses such as "picking quarrels and provoking trouble" or "subversion of state power" and invariably convicted in a justice system with a 99.9 percent conviction rate.

For instance, citizen journalist Zhang Zhan is currently halfway into a four-year prison sentence for reporting on the early stages of the COVID-19 outbreak in Wuhan in February 2020. Her conviction has drawn widespread condemnation from Western governments and rights groups. Zhang's health has drastically deteriorated in prison after staging a long-running hunger strike and being denied adequate medical care, her family said.

*Frank Dong is a journalist with more than 20 years of experience. He covers China as a freelance contributor to The Epoch Times.*

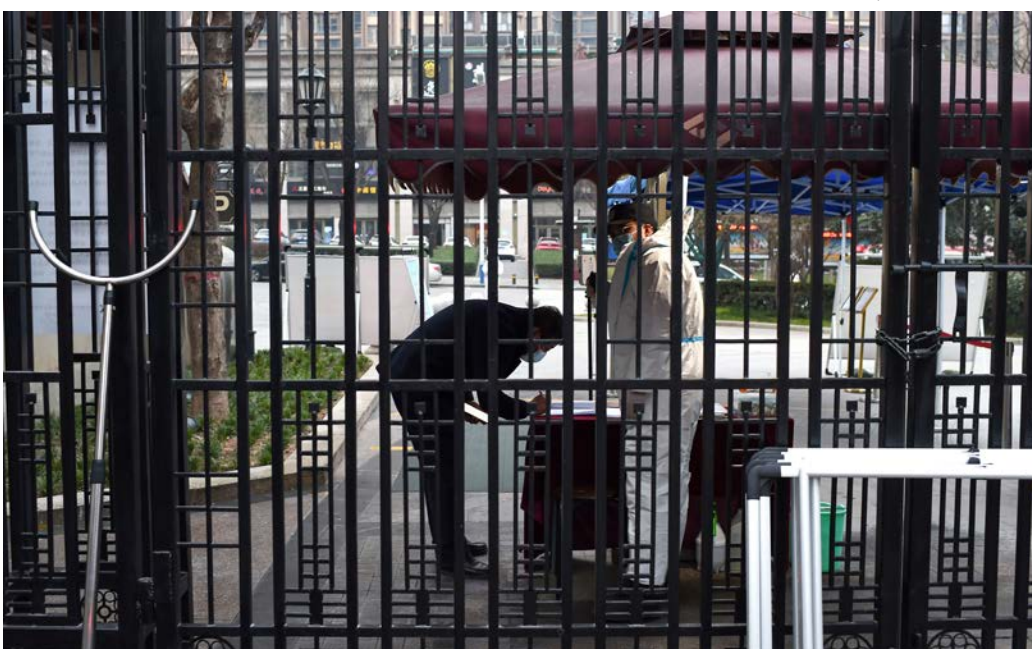
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A security guard checks the information of a resident at the entrance of a locked down area in Xi'an, Shaanxi Province, China, on Dec. 23, 2021.





A soldier wearing a mask gestures outside the Forbidden City in Beijing on Oct. 22, 2020.

## OPINION

# Kremlinology 101: Tools for Understanding Secretive China

MORGAN DEANE



China remains closed off, but a careful examination of history and available sources tells us a great deal.

Communist regimes remain secretive about their behavior, which requires analysts to glean insights and clues based on the little bit of public information available. This skill is called Kremlinology. It was developed by scholars who had to use small and subtle clues to assess the Soviet Union, and generally refers to any study of a closed, communist regime.

With China's upcoming 20th Communist Party Congress, the analysis has focused on Xi Jinping's anti-corruption campaign.

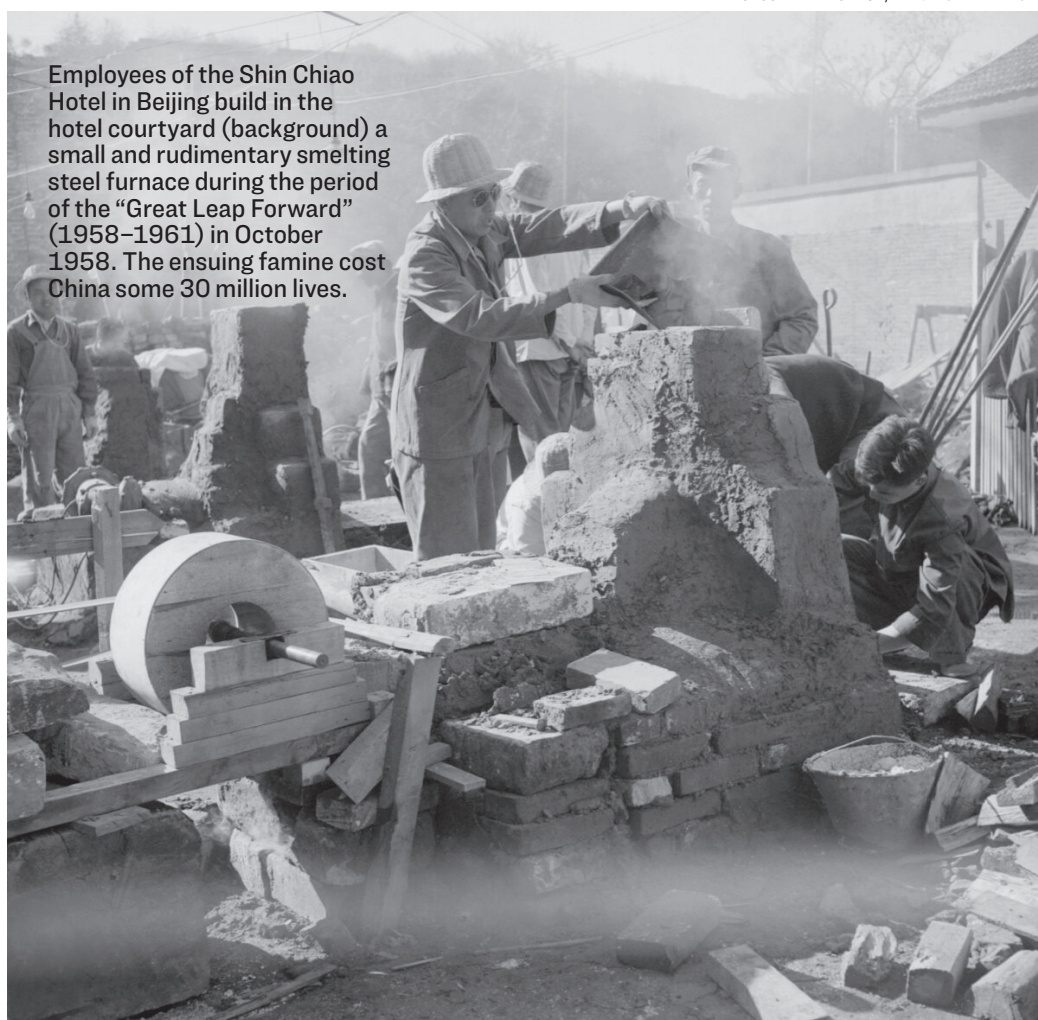
Most Kremlinology offers many details and terms that most readers would be unfamiliar with. But the average reader can still understand pertinent points by studying history and remembering some basic points.

The first point is to try and connect small facts to larger trends in history. While the details are often different, human beings are incredibly similar and the nature of a secretive, top-heavy regime—whether Russian or Chinese Communist—remain the same. In Russian history, Joseph Stalin was not the natural heir to Vladimir Lenin. But Stalin outmaneuvered to consolidate power and eventually took total control. It was only after he assumed total control that he launched some of his worst campaigns, including the five-year programs and the purges.

Chinese history faced similar maneuvers. Mao Zedong was not the natural Communist Party leader. Despite his reputation, Mao was weak in military thought and took much of the military credit of his right-hand man, Zhu De. Mao was fortunate to be out of power during communist failures that led to the Long March, and he could offer hypothetical examples of how much better he would have been. Like Stalin, once Mao was firmly entrenched, many of his bold and disastrous policies, like the Great Leap Forward, were implemented.

This is a high-level summary that leaves out many details. Mao's disagreements with comrades includes items like the Li Lisan Line and the use of bandit soldiers; while Stalin's disagreements included Lenin's New Economic Policy. But the maneuvers to consolidate power were similar.

At present, Xi is using the issue of corruption to attack, neutralize, and remove



Employees of the Shin Chiao Hotel in Beijing build in the hotel courtyard (background) a small and rudimentary smelting steel furnace during the period of the "Great Leap Forward" (1958–1961) in October 1958. The ensuing famine cost China some 30 million lives.

powerful rivals and insert those loyal to him in key positions. This suggests that Xi won't do any big moves until after the Party Congress solidifies his power within the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

Other sources of Kremlinology include parsing public statements and policy documents. The difficulty in this is that a person must wade through long and dry policy documents and parse anodyne public statements, which are open to wide interpretation. Moreover, government documents tend to be pollyannaish about the authorities' ability to fix problems. As American conservatives often point out, government is good at mission statements but bad at executing. For example, much of Beijing's talk focuses on upgrading China's Navy to challenge the United States for supremacy. But China has a poor history of modernization.

In the late 19th century, the self-strengthening of China faltered for many reasons. Disagreements among regional governors and court officials led to haphazard improvements. Modern ships and armies lacked standardized equipment and spare parts. This was a common theme until the end of World War II, as China at various points in this period obtained Soviet, German, Japanese,

American, British, and French advisers and equipment.

Assuming that China did have working equipment, doctrine and training was still very uneven. Even with the best equipment, China didn't always apply them in a conflict due to factional infighting and didn't use them properly in combat. China uses more internal development, though it still relies on limited Soviet technology for both jets and aircraft carriers. China has numerous other problems such as a lack of battle experience or peace disease in army leadership, army generals dominating the leadership in what would likely be a naval-based war, and lack of coordination between branches.

Modern communist equipment might be better, but we can glean more from the Chinese military's training exercises during peacetime training—not how the military will perform in battle. And there is plenty of evidence to suggest that rote training will mean Chinese soldiers and pilots will not perform well in battle.

All the above items suggest that while we can glean a great deal about the Chinese regime's actions, there is still a great deal we do not know. History suggests that Xi is maneuvering to gain power. The CCP's policy documents and publicly

stated budgets and weapons development suggest that China is modernizing to project power globally. And China's training exercises suggest more sophistication. But the Chinese are still limited in what they can do, and there is a great disconnect between their stated words and goals, and the ability to achieve them.

Moreover, what we do know often creates a strategic blind spot in many Western analysts, who seem to default to the scariest and most sinister interpretation of communist behavior. Everything the Chinese regime does is laced with grave implications. It's true that the Chinese communists are aggressive and we should be reasonably concerned. But the concern transforming into paranoia leads to an overinflation of their capabilities. For example, recent stories suggest China is building a string of pearls, or bases in the Atlantic Ocean, but those stories ignore how Beijing's behavior is causing an astounding increase in negative perceptions of China and made Australia move firmly into the U.S. orbit. American over-reaction that could be counterproductive, such as overextending aid to allies, was a danger in the Cold War with Russia.

The Chinese regime is very closed and it has been rather aggressive, which makes analysts use Kremlinology. But those analysts can't exaggerate based on a single piece of information. Instead, they must carefully consider leaked information compared to public sources, and keep those public sources in a broader context. Xi is consolidating his power like Stalin and Mao before him, and the CCP is expanding its objectives and using the military to accomplish them. The Chinese military has many problems and Beijing's aggression can be counterproductive. We can expect more aggression after the 20th Party Congress.

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

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## NEWS ANALYSIS

# Beijing Is Working to Shut Down the Last of Hong Kong's Free Media

Global sanctions, not just words, are the necessary response

ANDERS CORR



The Frangrant Harbor's last truly free media are falling one after another under the pressure of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

Hong Kong police raided Stand News on Dec. 29. The leveling of the outlet, and the "voluntary" closure of Citizen News on Jan. 3, are two more nails in the coffin of democracy.

Human rights and free speech advocates have roundly denounced the shutdown of Stand News, Citizen News, an earlier sacking of Apple Daily, and the muzzling of RTHK and the South China Morning Post. The latter two outlets increasingly pull their punches, or don't punch at all, when it comes to the Chinese and Hong Kong regimes.

In the process of attacking Hong Kong's pro-democracy elements in civil society, Beijing has denuded the city of its most loyal citizens. Hongkongers are getting arrested, or wisely voting with their feet and leaving the city in advance. In most instances they can fight for freedom in Hong Kong more effectively from outside the city.

The Stand News heroes who were arrested most recently include Denise Ho, a pop music star, board member, and Canadian citizen.

Ho's foreign citizenship and celebrity status indicate that nobody is safe in Hong Kong. Neither are investments. The police confiscated almost \$8 million during the Stand News' closure, their largest haul yet.

Also arrested during the Stand News raid were Patrick Lam, acting editor-in-chief; Chung Pui-ken, former editor-in-chief; Margaret Ng, a prior board member; Chow Tat-chi, a writer; Christine Fang; and Chan Pui-man, who is married to Chung and the former associate editor of Apple Daily.

Ronson Chan, deputy editor, was taken in for questioning.

The day prior, police charged the billionaire founder of Apple Daily, Jimmy Lai, along with six senior employees, with sedition. Over the past year, approximately 50 independent media organizations in Hong Kong shut down due to CCP pressure.

Stand News' final statement to the public were its principles, proven by the arrests of these heroes for democracy. "Stand News' editorial policy was to be independent and committed to safeguarding Hong Kong's core values of democracy, human rights, freedom, the rule of law and justice."

The Wall Street Journal editorial board wrote, "The Communist Party can't tolerate a free press covering its demolition of Hong Kong freedom, so it slanders the city's journalists as criminals and traitors." But these "traitors," in a totalitarian regime, are the heroes of democracy. One should weep at their fall, in the hope that they might rise again.

The United States, Germany, and the United Nations Human Rights Office condemned the latest media closure.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken immediately called on the People's Republic of China (PRC) to release the Stand News employees.

"We call on PRC and Hong Kong authorities to cease targeting Hong Kong's free and independent media and to immediately release those journalists and media executives who have been unjustly detained and charged," he said. "By silencing independent media, PRC and local authorities undermine Hong Kong's credibility and viability."

Germany had similar sentiments. "From our point of view, the events illustrate anew that there is a steady erosion of pluralism, freedom of opinion and freedom of the press in Hong Kong—especially since this national security law came into force," a German foreign ministry spokesperson said.

The U.N. Human Rights Office said in a statement to Reuters that it is "alarmed by the continued crackdown on civic space" in Hong Kong, which is "bound by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and has a legal obligation to respect the rights to freedom of information, expression and association, as well as to guarantee due process."

According to the United Nations itself, the Chinese and Hong Kong regimes,



Ronson Chan, deputy assignment editor of Hong Kong outlet Stand News, speaks to reporters outside the outlet's office in Hong Kong on Dec. 29, 2021.

which are really one and the same now, are in violation of international law.

But the two most important points made by commentators were not condemnations, simple statements of support, or observations that Beijing is breaking international law, which most everyone knows and ignores for lack of the necessary military strength for its enforcement.

The two key points are: the need for unified Western actions, rather than just talk, in support of Hong Kong; and the complicity of Hong Kong business elites in the destruction of their own city.

"The crushing of press freedom in Hong Kong joins anti-Uyghur genocide on the list of reasons it was right for President Biden to stage a diplomatic boycott of the Games," according to The Washington Post editorial board. "and why the struggle for human rights in China will need more such solidarity in the years ahead."

Hong Kong's former Legislative Council member Nathan Law spoke to PBS from London in an interview from self-imposed exile. "The West has to step up," Law said. "What we are lacking is a much more coordinated pushback and also democratic countries using multilateral and different mechanisms to work together."

Benedict Rogers, a human rights activist and co-founder of Hong Kong Watch, wrote: "It is time that the regime in Beijing and its quisling henchmen in Hong Kong were made to pay the consequences for destroying Hong Kong's liberties and way of life. The reason incidents such as the attack on Stand News continue to happen is that, so far, the regime has been allowed to perpetrate such violations with impunity."

According to Rogers, the United States is the only government that has actually gone beyond words to place sanctions on the Chinese regime for its breach of the Sino-British Joint Declaration of 1984,

an international treaty registered at the United Nations.

But the United States cannot rectify Beijing alone. If other countries do not follow voluntarily, the United States will be forced to either fold its opposition, or make new sanctions that have extra-territorial effect.

"This is not a regime that respects statements alone, although we must continue to speak out," wrote Rogers. "But it is a regime that only understands the language of strength and action. So democracies, if we still believe in press freedom and other basic human rights, must unite and coordinate robust, targeted sanctions to make it clear that the assault on Hong Kong is unacceptable."

All of these points on Hong Kong have lessons for the rest of the world, which must act together against the CCP or risk the permanent destruction of democracy in the United States, Europe, and everywhere else.

If the world empowers Beijing by giving up Hong Kong with barely a fight, then tomorrow we will be even weaker when it comes to defending our own freedoms.

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APPLE DAILY VIA GETTY IMAGES



Police officers conduct a raid at the Apple Daily office in Hong Kong on June 17, 2021.

In the process of attacking Hong Kong's pro-democracy elements in civil society, Beijing has denuded the city of its most loyal citizens.

What we are lacking is a much more coordinated pushback and also democratic countries using multilateral and different mechanisms to work together.

Nathan Law, former member, HK Legislative Council





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