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THE EPOCH TIMES

CHINA INSIDER

NOT JUST SPY BALLOONS

THE CCP'S EXPANSIVE
CAMPAIGN AGAINST AMERICA

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Falun Gong demonstrators dramatize the illegal act of paying for human organs during a protest on April 19, 2006, in Washington, in conjunction with the visit by Chinese leader Hu Jintao to the United States.

ORGAN HARVESTING

Chinese Police Sold Organs From Executed Prisoners, Witness Says

DOROTHY LI

It's not uncommon to see someone breaking down in tears in hospitals. So when Guo Zhigong, who was being treated for aplastic anemia, tried to help a fellow patient who was crying, he didn't expect to hear a story about China's opaque organ transplant business.

The patient, in his 40s, was worried about a kidney transplant scheduled the next day in eastern China's Qingdao city. The promised organ was from a prisoner due to be executed hours before the life-saving surgery. They had already undergone blood matches.

But what followed was another eye-opener: the family of the executed appeared to have no knowledge that a part of their loved one's body had been sold by the police.

The patient's wife was told to give cash gifts to the police, Gao recalled what the woman told him. The police, according to the woman's recount, told the father of the executed prisoner that he didn't have all the necessary documentation to recover the body. This was an excuse the police gave so that they could keep the body for their grisly business.



Guo Zhigong.
NTS/SCREENSHOT VIA THE EPOCH TIMES

"Once they got the body, the organs were sold to hospitals," Guo, who now lives in the UK, told The Epoch Times. "This is the source of the kidney."

That incident occurred in the early 1990s, when there was no voluntary organ donation system in China. Most kidneys, livers, corneas, and other organs for transplantation were taken from executed prisoners, the regime admitted in 2005. Prior to that, the authorities denied that it stripped organs from executed inmates, a practice that has long been criticized by human rights groups given that prisoners lack the ability to provide free consent.

But abuses in China's transplant industry do not end there. Over the past decade-and-a-half, detailed accounts from informants and extensive research papers have shown that organs have been removed even before prisoners died.

Guo's account adds to mounting evidence of the Chinese regime's systemic transplant abuses that over the past two decades has transformed into a sprawling system in which organs are procured from unwilling prisoners—including those detained simply for their spiritual belief—and using

them to supply the country's multibillion-dollar transplant trade.

Organ Transplant Business

It was in the summer of 1991 when Guo met the organ recipient for the first time. The patient, a man who was suffering from uremia, was crying in a ward as he feared he might die the next day, when he was scheduled to receive a new kidney.

The patient told Guo the kidney was from a death row prisoner that is due to be executed on the same day.

Transplanting organs from executed prisoners was almost an open secret at that time, though the Chinese authorities denied the practice. It was even allowed under a regulation that took effect in 1984. "The dead bodies or organs of the following categories of the executed inmates can be made use of—if family members refuse to collect the body, if the prisoners volunteer their bodies before execution, or if the families consent," read the regulation issued by China's highest court.

But in practice, the regulation was only a cover: There would be "consent" no matter what the actual desire of inmates or



Dr. Enver Tohti, while working as a surgeon in Xinjiang Province, China, personally carried out organ harvesting of Uyghur prisoners. Those techniques were later applied to the Falun Gong prison population, according to testimony.

their families.

"The police authorities had already performed blood tests with the death row prisoner and results show they were [a kidney] match," Guo recounted what the patient's family said.

There was a group of police who were responsible for getting the body slated for organ extraction back, Guo said.

They would require family members of the executed to present multiple documents or proofs of identity and relationships, which Guo noted were not required by regulations. He suggested that was part of efforts to make sure the body of the executed could be classified as an abandoned corpse so police could take it away.

Patients due to receive an organ need to pay an additional amount of money to the police. "That was what the patient's family member told me," Guo said. "I also saw [the patient's wife] wrapping cash in paper. She said that was for the police. The doctor asked her to give money directly to the public security officers."

"I was very, very sad and very angry," Guo described the feelings as he learned hospitals were "colluding with the law enforcement department to illegally obtain and sell organs from death row prisoners." "I felt outraged."

Forced Organ Harvesting

That man had a successful kidney transplant, Guo said, though another patient who had a transplantation at the same time died during the operation.

These kidney transplants were performed at the Affiliated Hospital of Qingdao University, a major hospital in the eastern port city of Qingdao.

According to its website, the institution was among the first large hospitals in China to carry out organ transplants. Staff at the hospital confirmed with The Epoch Times that doctors at the hospital were performing kidney transplants in 1991.

The first organ transplant operation in China occurred in the 1970s. But there was no official organ donation and distribution system until 2015. Chinese people, meanwhile, are reluctant to donate their organs because of traditional beliefs that view the body as a gift from their parents and prescribes it be left untouched after death.

However, in the early 2000s, a sudden and mysterious boom of China's transplant industry started: organ transplant rates shot up. Hundreds of new organ transplant centers opened across the country. A flush of websites advertised waiting times as short as weeks, or even days, for a vital organ transplant, something unheard of in developed countries relying on a voluntary organ donation system.

The industry's tremendous development coincided with the advent of the regime's aggressive campaign to wipe out Falun Gong, a traditional spiritual practice involving meditative exercises and moral teachings based on the principles of truthfulness, compassion, and forbearance.

The practice shot up in popularity in the 1990s, with an estimated up to 100 million Chinese having taken up the practice over six years, exceeding the Party's membership at that time. Perceiving this to be a threat to the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) grip on power, then-CCP leader Jiang Zemin launched a brutal persecution targeting the practice and its adherents in July 1999.

Since then, million of adherents have been thrown in detention facilities, where brainwashing and torture is common. For the communist regime, this surge in detainees also effectively created a large captive population of unconsenting organ donors.

In 2019, an independent people's tri-

bunal concluded that the regime had for years been killing prisoners "on a significant scale" to supply its transplant market, and that the killing continues to this day. The main victims, the tribunal found, were imprisoned Falun Gong practitioners.

Amid growing scrutiny over its transplant practices, the regime set up an official organ donation system in 2015, claiming it would phase out the practice of sourcing organs from executed prisoners. The tribunal, however, found the organ donation figures did not match the staggering number of transplants occurring.

Break the Silence

Guo's account aligned with others who had participated in or witnessed the regime's opaque practice during the same period of time.

Bob (a pseudonym), a former public security officer who guarded execution sites in the mid-1990s, witnessed how death-row prisoners were converted into products for sale in the organ trade. He described it as an "industrialized" supply chain in which the judicial system, police, and doctors all participated.

"The harvesting of death-row prisoners' organs was an open secret," Bob, who now lives in the United States said in a 2021 interview with The Epoch Times. But "as far as I know, no one told the death row prisoners their organs would be extracted."

Enver Tohti, a native Uyghur surgeon from the far western Chinese region of Xinjiang, testified about having helped two doctors carve out the liver and two kidneys from a prisoner in 1995 on the order of his immediate superior.

"What I recall is, with my scalpel, I tried to cut into his skin, [and] there was blood to be seen. That indicates that the heart was still beating. ... At the same time, he was trying to resist my insertion, but he was too weak," he told the independent tribunal in 2019.

The latest piece of evidence was from peer-reviewed research published in the American Journal of Transplantation in April 2022. Researchers identified dozens of papers published in Chinese-language medical journals between 1980 and 2015 in which surgeons procured hearts and lungs without abiding by standard procedures for confirming brain death.

"They have procured organs from people who are not proclaimed dead, meaning they became the executioners," said report co-author Dr. Jacob Lavee, director of the Heart Transplantation Unit at the Sheba Medical Center in Israel.

The growing number of reports touched a deep nerve in Guo's family. "We think we should speak it out," Guo's son told The Epoch Times. "It has haunted [my father] for over three decades."

But it was not an easy decision. Over the past decades, multiple informants who shed light on the grisly practice did so on the condition of anonymity to protect themselves from the regime's retaliation. Gaining courage from his belief, Guo said the decision to use his real name was to encourage more witnesses to break the silence and heightened the exposure of the "horrific atrocities."

"There were so many Falun Gong practitioners who were subjected to the illegal practice of forced organ harvesting in China. That was against humanity."

"I hope more people could be aware of it, especially those who had similar experiences as mine, or had knowledge of the matter. I appeal to you to speak out."

Guo added: "The devil's powers will never surpass those of the good. Let's believe God will grant us wisdom and protect us."

Chang Chun and Eva Fu contributed to this report.

OPINION

China's Xi Is at a Breaking Point—Will He Resist or Surrender?

ZHANG TIANLIANG



Russia's foreign ministry recently announced that Chinese leader Xi Jinping will visit Russia in the spring and possibly in February, but the Chinese side has not confirmed.

On Dec. 30 last year, when Russian President Vladimir Putin and Xi held a video call, Putin extended an invitation to Xi, and Russian media reported on it. But Chinese state-run media deliberately concealed the invitation in their coverage of the meeting.

The Chinese media's response reflects Xi's hesitation. He does not want to be tied to Putin, who could lose the war with Ukraine. If Russia becomes weak economically and militarily, Xi is worried that China would lose a powerful ally and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) will be even more isolated in the international community. This is why Xi did not immediately agree to Putin's invitation. Furthermore, Xi may have wanted to wait and see how the Russia-Ukraine war would progress. If Russia wins, Xi would go to Russia to show his determination to reshape the international order; but if Russia loses, Xi does not want Putin to drag him down, just as he has not provided concrete military aid to Russia after repeated warnings from the United States.

Now, it seems that Xi has already made up his mind to visit Russia. This judgment is based on two reasons.

First, Wang Yi, a member of the Politburo and director of the Office of the Foreign Affairs Working Committee, will visit Russia at the beginning of February. Usually, a foreign minister-level visit precedes an exchange of visits between the two heads of state, setting the tone for what the leaders will talk about and what results they may achieve.

The second reason is related to the latest developments in the Taiwan Strait—U.S. House Speaker Kevin McCarthy will be visiting Taiwan later this year. There's not much the CCP can do about McCarthy's trip. When former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi visited Taiwan in August 2022, the CCP issued war threats through civilian channels and provocative actions through semi-official channels (such as retired Global Times editor-in-chief Hu Xijin), including the possibility of Chinese military aircraft accompanying Pelosi's plane. Instead, the CCP waited until Pelosi left Taiwan and then staged a military drill.

So Xi's visit to Russia would show the United States and the West that Sino-Russia ties are stronger than ever. How far can Sino-Russian cooperation go? A brief history of Xi's childhood might give us a clue. Xi Jinping's father, former Vice Premier Xi Zhongxun, was persecuted by Mao Zedong during the Cultural Revolution, and Xi

Jinping himself was implicated in several detentions and investigations in Beijing. He later left Beijing to save his own life, and followed other young people to the countryside in Yan'an during the "Down to the Countryside Movement" launched by Mao. The campaign urged educated young people to move to the rural areas to learn the lifestyle of the peasants. Unable to endure the poverty and hardship in the countryside, Xi Jinping fled back to Beijing. Gradually he became one of the most hard-working communist youths.

Given the harsh treatment that Xi's family endured, most people would assume that Xi abhors Mao and the CCP. On the contrary, Xi worships Mao, and many of his policies lead China back to the Cultural Revolution. Why?

Xi's childhood experience shows that when he finds his opponents too powerful for him to overcome, he strives to become one of them.

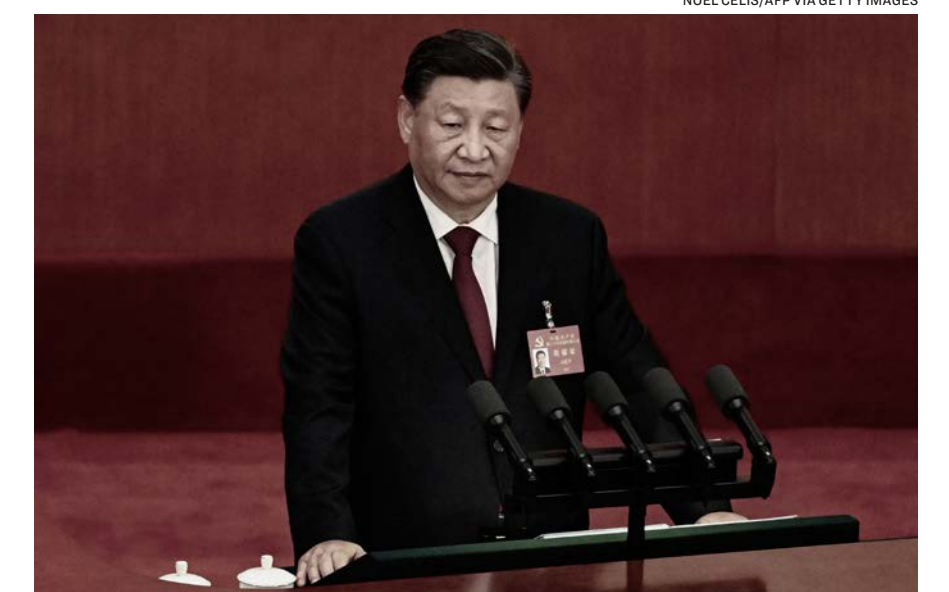
Dr. Enrico Suardi, an assistant clinical professor of psychiatry at Georgetown University, said at The Institute of World Politics: "Xi Jinping and his family were, without questions, the victims of the aggression of the communist authorities. His psychological defense was to identify with the aggressor. ... And so I use the concept of post-traumatic growth here. Spiritual development, finding new possibilities in life, active problem solving, finding meaning and purpose."

Xi's childhood experience shows that when he finds his opponents too powerful for him to overcome, he strives to become one of them. While this may not be the case in competition with democracies, it does show a high likelihood that he may be open to compromise. Xi's abrupt ending of his zero-COVID policy, and the abandonment of his signature economic policies and anti-corruption efforts suggest the possibility of a sudden shift in his stance due to tremendous pressure.

If we believe that this is a trait of Xi's spiritual world, then what we need to do is not to guide him, but to put more pressure on him in key areas, including the military, diplomatic, economic, and political spheres.

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

Dr. Zhang Tianliang is a professor at Fei Tian College and the librettist for Shen Yun Performing Arts operas. He is a prolific writer, historian, film producer, screenwriter, and thinker. He co-authored several books on communism that have been translated into over 20 languages.



Chinese leader Xi Jinping gives a speech during the opening session of a 5-year Chinese Communist Party political conference in Beijing on Oct. 16, 2022.

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ANALYSIS

Chinese Spy Balloon Spotlights CCP's Brazen Plot Against US

Communist China's expansive military, spy campaigns have targeted America since long before the balloon's incursion

ANDREW THORNEBROOKE

For eight long days, a Chinese spy balloon bobbed along in the skies above the United States and Canada.

First, it appeared to be heading north off Alaska's Aleutian Islands, then east toward British Columbia, before suddenly diverting again south and east in a course that would bring it over some of the most critical U.S. military facilities.

The Biden administration has thus far declined to specify which sites the Chinese balloon surveilled, but the dirigible visibly traveled near at least three military bases responsible for overseeing America's nuclear arsenal.

In Montana, the spy balloon lingered over Malmstrom Air Force Base, the site of 150 silos that house many of the nation's nuclear-capable intercontinental ballistic missiles.

In Nebraska, it hovered near Offutt Air Force Base, where U.S. Strategic Command oversees the maintenance and deployment of the military's nuclear weapons.

In Missouri, it careened around Whiteman Air Force Base, which operates the Air Force's nuclear-capable B-2 stealth bomber.

The White House lambasted the presence of the airship as a violation of U.S. sovereignty, with national leaders in a collective uproar over the spherical white menace as it plodded across the span of the continental United States.

President Joe Biden said that he wanted to order the military to shoot the balloon down when he was first briefed on the intrusion on Feb. 1. But the Pentagon wanted to ensure that no debris injured those below and so let the balloon continue its traversal of U.S. airspace until it reached the waters of the Atlantic Ocean on Feb. 4 and was finally met with a definite end in the form of a single Sidewinder missile fired from a U.S. fighter jet.

As the military continues efforts to recover what's left of the downed device, the Pentagon and FBI's analysis of the debris and its intentions is just beginning.

But Communist China's efforts to use espionage and military coercion to undermine and overcome the United States have long been in the works, and congressional leadership remains stunned at the administration's decision to let an adversarial aircraft meander through U.S. airspace at will.

Air Force Gen. Glen VanHerck, who serves as commander of North American Aerospace Defense Command, said on Feb. 6 that the incident provided the United States with "unique opportunities" to conduct counterintelligence against the balloon, but declined to comment on what capabilities were deployed to covertly examine the balloon.

VanHerck said that the intelligence gathered from the balloon and how it operated was "well worth" the wait of shooting it down and added that the United States conducted counterintelligence to prevent the balloon from gathering useful information, without detailing the specific measures.

For Reps. Mike Gallagher (R-Wis.) and Raja Krishnamoorthi (D-Ill.), who are the chair and ranking member, respectively, of the House select committee for competition with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the incident was nothing less than a debacle that they believe demonstrates Washington's continued inability to recognize that communist China is an adversarial nation.

"The Chinese Communist Party should not have on-demand access to American

airspace," Gallagher and Krishnamoorthi said in a Feb. 2 joint statement. "Not only is this a violation of American sovereignty ... it also makes clear that the CCP's recent diplomatic overtures do not represent a substantive change in policy.

"Indeed, this incident demonstrates that the CCP threat is not confined to distant shores—it is here at home and we must act to counter this threat."

The Persistent Threat of Communist China

The presence of a Chinese communist spy balloon hovering over U.S. homes and military bases is alarming enough for most people.

For Paul Crespo, a former Marine officer at the Defense Intelligence Agency and now president of the Center for American Defense Studies, the story only gets darker from here.

In addition to collecting intelligence on U.S. nuclear facilities and military decision-making, Crespo believes that China's balloon incursion could be a dry run for an attack that would likely take place during a U.S.-China war for Taiwan.

Crespo is concerned that the regime could use similar high-altitude balloons to conduct attacks using electromagnetic pulse (EMP) weapons against U.S. bases and infrastructure.

"The biggest threat is sending one or more of these high-altitude balloons over the U.S. with a small nuclear EMP device," Crespo told The Epoch Times in an email.

"Detonated at extremely high altitude, EMPs could knock out power and communications across the U.S., wreaking widespread havoc for a year or more without firing a shot on the ground."

EMPs are bursts of electromagnetic energy that disrupt communications and damage electronic equipment. An EMP can be created by nuclear missiles, radiofrequency weapons, and natural phenomena such as geomagnetic storms.

While any nuclear weapon can create an EMP, specialized EMP weapons such as so-called super-EMP bombs generate particularly strong gamma radiation that multiplies the effect of the pulse, extending the destruction over a greater range.

It has long been believed that the CCP is developing such weapons for a potential conflict with the United States.

In most scenarios, an EMP would need to be detonated at a much higher elevation than the Chinese spy balloon was at in order to cause mass destruction across a vast swath of territory.

If the EMP's purpose were to knock out a smaller target, however, such as a U.S. nuclear command-and-control facility, a balloon like the one shot down over the weekend would be a near-perfect delivery device.



President Joe Biden speaks in Philadelphia on Feb. 3, 2023.



Sailors assigned to Explosive Ordnance Disposal Group 2 recover a high-altitude surveillance balloon off the coast of Myrtle Beach, S.C., on Feb. 5, 2023.

For Crespo, the Biden administration's decision to allow the balloon to continue its malign adventure only increased the potency of such a threat.

By failing to take decisive action against the intrusion immediately, Crespo said, the administration had sent Beijing the signal that it's willing to accept violations of its sovereignty.

"Despite those who claim otherwise, the unprecedented and slow-moving Chinese surveillance balloon across the entire U.S. gave China intelligence it couldn't otherwise get on nuclear, communications, and other critical targets," Crespo said.

"The balloon tested U.S. surveillance and counter-surveillance abilities and reactions. But, most importantly, it tested political will, and Biden's willingness to let it cross the U.S. before finally downing it failed that test."

It's a stark assessment, but one that has traction among many political figures, including former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

Before it was revealed that Biden had ordered the balloon to be shot down, Pompeo said that the president's delay gave the CCP all the indication it needed to conduct further hostilities against the United States, its allies, and partners.

Particularly so, he said, against Taiwan. "If we can't take down this balloon, if President Biden won't respond to this seriously, I doubt that his statement that we will defend Taiwan and help the Taiwanese people is something that [CCP leader] Xi Jinping will ever take seriously," Pompeo said in a Feb. 3 interview with Fox News.

"The fact that they've now penetrated our airspace, put a very visible symbol of their country over our airspace, and we have done nothing, this is a green light for bad guys all around the world, including Xi Jinping."

Preparing an Arsenal

The CCP's efforts to spy on U.S. military development aren't new. But it's vital to understand why the regime is interested

in U.S. nuclear facilities now, and the preparation it has undertaken for a potential conflict with the United States.

Key to that effort is the CCP's own nuclear modernization program, which is expected by the Pentagon to deliver the regime an arsenal of at least 1,000 nuclear weapons by 2030.

Such an arsenal will allow the CCP to coerce the international community more effectively, as the United States has no experience or strategy for simultaneously deterring nuclear escalations from both China and Russia.

"This state of affairs is exacerbated by the CCP's pursuit of technologies specifically designed to overwhelm or penetrate U.S. defenses, such as the hypersonic bombardment system it tested in the summer of 2021.

The weapon, according to senior military leadership, was likely intended to be used as a nuclear first strike against the United States in the event of a conflict. Moreover, such a weapon is likely to be used to target U.S. nuclear facilities to decapitate its strategic capabilities in wartime.

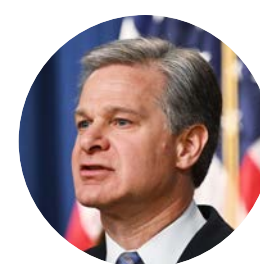
Killing With a Borrowed Sword

The CCP couldn't accomplish this vast and highly sophisticated military modernization program on its own. To fully develop the systems needed to overcome the United States, the regime requires research and technologies developed first in America.

That's one reason why the CCP uses illegal spy balloons to collect data on U.S. military bases, and why Chinese state-sponsored talent programs aim to infiltrate and export U.S. nuclear research.

By recruiting experts and scholars from abroad to study at work in China, such talent programs aim to develop a new generation of researchers in areas crucial for China's technological and military development.

The most telling case of this phenomenon concerns the Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL), the United States' most advanced nuclear research center.



FBI Director Christopher Wray participates in a press conference at the Justice Department in Washington on Jan. 26, 2023.

MANDEL NGAN/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

According to a 2022 report published by strategic intelligence firm Strider Technologies, 162 researchers from the LANL, many of whom came to the United States as part of China's talent programs and including at least one who had a top-secret U.S. security clearance, now work for China, where many assist the regime's development of its most cutting-edge weapons, including hypersonic missiles.

An All-Encompassing Spy Campaign

The effort to steal vital technologies and research from the United States is part of a much larger campaign—one that's decades in the making—to undermine the country, of which the spy balloon incident is just a small component.

FBI Director Christopher Wray has described the communist regime as the single biggest cyber and counterintelligence threat facing the United States.

"They are targeting our innovation, our trade secrets, [and] our intellectual property, on a scale that's unprecedented in history," Wray said in April 2022.

For years, CCP intelligence agents and their proxies have violated U.S. sovereignty and spied on American citizens, engaged in illegal campaigns to forcibly repatriate Chinese dissidents, and engaged in an array of brazen campaigns to covertly steal cutting-edge technologies.

Last year alone, CCP agents were charged by the Department of Justice for their roles in stalking a U.S. Olympic figure skater and her family, conspiring with a New York police officer to gather intelligence on the Asian American community, and even plotting to attack a U.S. Army veteran running for Congress.

The regime has also used cyber attacks to illicitly collect U.S. defense secrets, such as when suspected state-backed agents hacked into a U.S. government department last year and stole sensitive defense information.

Americans' sensitive personal information also is a valued target, as evidenced by multiple massive hacks by Chinese actors over the years, including the

breaches of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, credit-reporting agency Equifax, Marriott hotels, and insurer Anthem. These hacks resulted in hundreds of millions of Americans' personal data being stolen.

In recent years, federal prosecutors have brought dozens of cases against Chinese and Americans over the theft of U.S. technology and trade secrets in a multitude of areas from cancer research to aviation secrets to seed technology.

Wray has said that almost half of the FBI's nearly 5,000 counterintelligence investigations across the country are connected to China, adding that in the past decade, there has been roughly a 1,300 percent increase in economic espionage cases linked to the regime.

Another area attracting growing scrutiny is the hugely popular Chinese-owned app TikTok, which U.S. officials say could be used by the CCP to access Americans' data and manipulate public opinion through the site's addictive algorithm.

The regime also is engaged in an effort to purchase U.S. land, including large tracts of farmland adjacent to U.S. military bases, which experts believe could be used to conduct espionage and disrupt the country's vital infrastructure.

All of these efforts, according to retired Air Force Gen. Robert Spalding, are part of the CCP's larger doctrine of "unrestricted warfare," through which the regime weaponizes academia, economics, diplomacy, media, and technology to achieve military ends without risking overt conflict with the United States.

And, much like shooting down a balloon, Spalding believes there's only one way to stop the threat.

"There's no way to counter unrestricted warfare or win unrestricted warfare when you have a Chinese Communist Party that has access to any part of U.S. society," Spalding previously said.

"If they have any access to American society, then they'll use that access to undermine American society. The only way to be successful ... is to eliminate their access to American society."

They are targeting our innovation, our trade secrets, [and] our intellectual property, on a scale that's unprecedented in history.

FBI Director Christopher Wray



Hospital workers and a relative wheel a body on a gurney out of the busy emergency room at a hospital in Beijing on Jan. 2, 2023.

EXCLUSIVE

Death Toll Rises Nearly 6-Fold in Chinese City Amid COVID Wave, Internal Documents Show

EVA FU

On the road leading to a crematorium in China's southern city of Nanjing where thick black smoke billows into the sky, the line of cars is so long that it isn't clear where it ends.

On the curb squats a woman wearing a white mourning hat with her face buried in her hands, her cries piercing the air. "It's the new year," she says in video footage that first circulated on Chinese social media in early January. "[But] all kinds of cars are coming to collect dead bodies."

Because of the long lines, the corpses often stay in the cars for up to two days, she said.

The reality of the harsh conditions under China's COVID-19 tsunami that the woman alluded to aligns with internal document data from Chinese authorities that The Epoch Times obtained from multiple parts of the country in recent weeks. These details, together with interviews with local residents, paint a somber picture of the virus toll that contrasts starkly with the positive tone authorities have strived to project.

An analysis of dozens of files on daily cremation data from Nanjing, the capital of eastern China's Jiangsu Province and home to about 9.3 million people, shows that the city's death figures shot up in late December 2022, growing to as many as 761 deaths per day in early January—nearly six times the average daily deaths in the city for the first five months of 2022.

The workload at the city's seven operating crematoriums indicated the same trend. From Dec. 29 through Jan. 18, the latest period for which Nanjing Funeral Management Office data is available from the trove, the number of bodies processed ranged from about 300 to 774 per day, up to six times the roughly 130 bodies processed per day in the same period last year.

The data shows that the city saw a total of 8,233 deaths from Dec. 18 to Jan. 2, about four times the average 15-day death toll of 2,100 from before the latest COVID-19 wave.

The official documents placed a heightened emphasis on secrecy. While cremation data is reported daily to city-level authorities, such data appears strictly off-limits from being released to the public.

"Report relevant information, data, and charts through emails, do not discuss them on QQ and WeChat," reads a Jan. 11 document that summarized "key cities' cremation service situation." Both QQ and WeChat are dominant social media channels in China under the Shenzhen-based Tencent brand.

"Step up education on secret-guarding work. Strengthen secret-guarding and safety education of cremation industry workers. Do not casually release cremation-related

The data showed that the city saw a total of 8,233 deaths from Dec. 18 to Jan. 2, about four times the average 15-day death toll of 2,100 from before the latest COVID wave.

There's no question a lot of old people died. This is a fact.

Su, Nanjing resident

data and information," the document states. The same document indicated that a special panel chaired by the Nanjing Civil Affairs Bureau director had been set up to oversee the handling of bodies and that every cremation provider in the city was working 24 hours a day.

In the less than two-week span from Dec. 22, 2022, four funeral homes expanded their capacity by buying morgue refrigerators or requesting more manpower, the document stated. The largest purchase came from Lishui Funeral Home, which bought 120 refrigerators. Nanjing Funeral Home acquired 16 more hearses and hired 38 more drivers.

The total number of additional staff for funeral services was 389 people as of Jan. 11, after 105 people were added eight days earlier.

Causes of Deaths

Despite a significant surge in deaths, few of those cremated were marked as having died from COVID-19. From Nov. 11 to Dec. 17, 2022, the city cremated a total of 4,300 bodies—up by a third from the 3,070 three-year average for the same period from 2019 through 2021, the document stated.

Only 20 of those deaths were marked as COVID-19-related. Data from individual funeral homes from that period further showed that all but one marked the bodies they handled as regular deaths.

Such practice is in line with Beijing's widely criticized policy that deaths can be attributed to COVID-19 only if results directly from respiratory failure or pneumonia due to the SARS-CoV-2 virus. In addition, doctors have said that they've been ordered not to list COVID-19 as a cause of

death on death certificates.

To date, Beijing has only registered less than 80,000 in-hospital COVID-19 deaths. But experts say the figure is a vast underestimate of the true death toll, pointing to the regime's practice of hiding negative information and widespread accounts of overwhelmed crematoriums and hospitals.

A Nanjing resident surnamed Zhang, whose full name has been withheld for her safety, said that more than 20 seniors died in a neighborhood where she used to live.

Her neighbor noted the empty sofa and chairs at the compound's entrance where seniors used to sunbathe.

"Those people are all gone," Zhang said.

A friend of her's from the northern megacity of Tianjin recently lost his brother, who was about 66 years old. The man's body stayed in a mortuary cooler for days until his family bribed a local crematorium's staff with gifts to get the body.

Another local, a woman surnamed Su, has a relative in Beijing who managed to skip the more than two-month-long line at a funeral home by "pulling strings" to get his parent cremated. But they still ended up waiting for days.

"There's no question that a lot of old people died. This is a fact," Su, who declined to provide her full name for fear of reprisals, told The Epoch Times.

"But as to the actual COVID situation, we can't tell—there's no data or public information. Everything is hidden from our knowledge."

Song Tang and Yi Ru contributed to this report.



A man hugs an elderly relative as he and others offer support as she is cared for in the hallway of a busy emergency room at a hospital in Shanghai on Jan. 14, 2023.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Stories of State-Sanctioned Murder, Abuse Highlighted at Religious Freedom Summit

EVA FU

As Beijing staged a dazzling \$100 million spectacle hosting the Winter Olympics last year, Ji Yunzhi lay dying up north in a Chinese hospital. She had a mere breath left after the rounds of torture inflicted on her meant to scare her into renouncing her faith.

Iron ankle fetters and handcuffs chained her to the hospital bed where she spent the last month of her life, with a rubber tube forced up her nose.

The 65-year-old died 48 days after her arrest and detention on the Lunar Chinese New Year, one of a string of mental and physical abuses she had suffered over the more than two decades past.

At her death, blood stains smeared her face and shoulder. Her grieving family who demanded an explanation from the authorities saw nearly 50 policemen guarding Ji's body and monitoring their apartment. The police forced Ji's husband to authorize the cremation of his wife's battered body, and threatened to have his nephew fired from a secure government job if he refused to comply.

They also showed the man photos of his son, Simon Zhang, attending Falun Gong events in the United States and warned him that they know everything.

Zhang, now a New York architect, shared the story about his late mother, also an adherent of the spiritual discipline Falun Gong, at the last day of the International Religious Freedom Summit on Feb. 1.

A previous arrest during the 2008 Beijing Olympics had Ji jailed in a labor camp, at one point electrocuted for two hours until she had an involuntary urination. Her face was also burnt by the torture.

Wish for Religious Freedom

Their Falun Gong faith—which teaches assimilation with the universal principles of truthfulness, compassion, and tolerance, along with slow-moving meditation—has been heavily persecuted under the atheist communist ideology of China's ruling party, which suppresses most religious faiths, for more than 23 years.

Zhang remembers his mother, who he hadn't seen for 19 years before she died at the hands of Chinese police, as warmhearted and considerate. "My brother's wife said my mom gave her things her own mom didn't," he told The Epoch Times.

"My mom had one strong wish: to see for herself how we can practice Falun Gong freely in America," he said at the event. Ji did try to visit him in the United States a few years prior but couldn't get approval for her passport application because of her faith.

"Now, she would never have that chance," he said.

Zhang's family is one of millions torn apart by the communist party's persecution of Falun Gong, he told the audience, noting that there have been more than 4,900 documented cases of adherent deaths by torture or abuses, as well as an untold number of victims to the state-sanctioned crime of forced organ harvesting, all for not renouncing their faith and right to independent thought, speech, and action. "What the Chinese communist regime has done to Falun Gong, including my mom, is a genocide and a crime against humanity."

Beth Van Schaack, the ambassador-at-large for global criminal justice, highlighted Beijing's religious repression in her remarks a day prior.

Aside from the suppression of Uyghurs in China's western Xinjiang region, which the United States and a number of other countries have deemed a genocide, "[a]cross China more broadly, religious persecution is also directed at Tibetan Buddhists, Falun Gong practitioners, Christians, and so many others seeking only to peacefully practice their beliefs," she said.

Religious Freedom, Human Rights a Bipartisan Concern

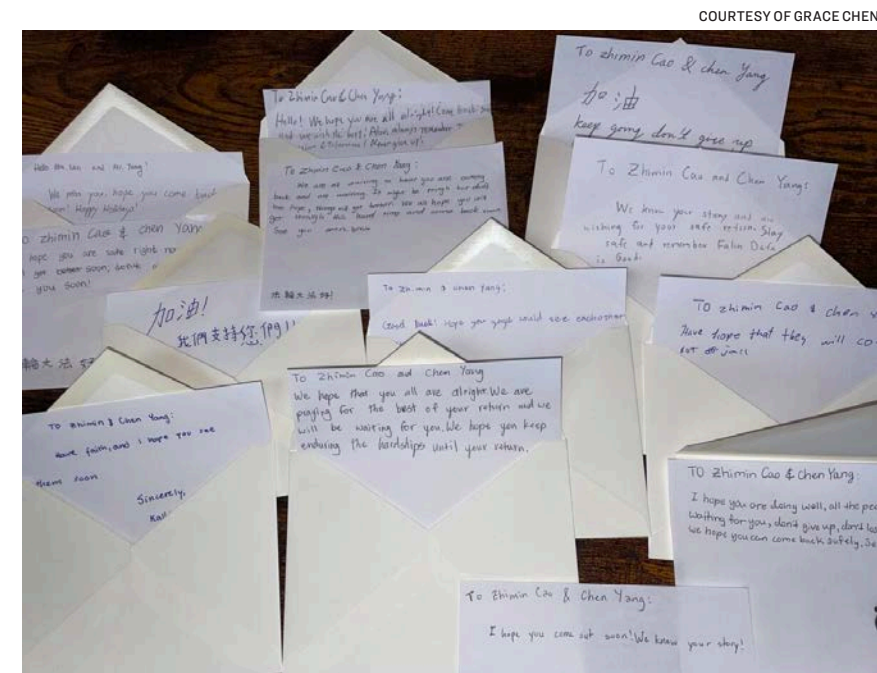
Concern for China's human rights is one issue that unites lawmakers from left and right on Capitol Hill.

At a panel on Tuesday, Foreign Affairs Committee chairman Rep. Michael McCaul (R-Texas), who was an honorary congressional co-chair of the summit, decried the Chinese Communist Party's "all-out assault on religion" while vowing to "keep religious freedom at the forefront of America's foreign policy."

"Protecting religious freedom isn't just about doing what's right, it's also a matter of national security," he said in a speech, adding that he will strive to shed light on



Simon Zhang and his mother Ji Yunzhi during a trip to Hangzhou city in Zhejiang Province, China, in 2012.



Letters sent to Grace Chen's parents, who are detained in China for practicing Falun Gong.

abuses around the world, hold perpetrators accountable, and help the diaspora in America who have family and friends persecuted for their faith overseas.

Asked about concerns of the Chinese regime exporting its repressive influence overseas, McCaul also referenced the practice of forced organ harvesting and the widespread high-tech surveillance apparatus in China, which dozens of countries have adopted.

"They have Biometrics to follow all their people within China. You know, organ transplants—where they force people and they sedate them and take their organs out, and it's just horrific," he said.

Echoing his point, Rep. Jim McGovern (D-Mass.) stressed a need for the United States to "raise the issue of human rights at

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Simon Zhang, Falun Gong practitioner

every level," including "when we're doing trade bills" and "investing in other parts of the world."

In a "country that oppresses their people for whatever reason," he said, "There will be violence and instability in the long run. And so, it is not in our interest to just turn a blind eye to terrible oppression."

'Alone in the World'

One person seeking help at the summit is Grace Chen, a 17-year-old music student in New York.

Chen plays the Chinese stringed instrument the erhu. Both her parents were arrested in communist China on account of their faith in the fall of 2020. She hasn't heard their voices for over two years.

"I bookmarked every single article about my parents' arrest on my laptop. I felt like now, I was [sic] all alone in the world," she said at the summit.

Her teachers and classmates have written lots of letters to the two detainees. Even if the letters may not reach them, at least, she said, she wanted the police in China to know that someone cares. If her words could reach them, though, she would apologize to her parents for not minding their safety enough.

"Did they find your location because I called you so often? I'm sorry for not being more careful. If I called you less, would you still be safe at home now?" she said, imagining talking to her mother.

Before she was born, Chen said that the police had beaten her father until all his teeth fell out because he practices Falun Gong.

"Even after that, you never, ever gave up your faith. You are my hero, baba," she said, using the Chinese term for dad. "But I hope this time you are not hurt."



Protesters stand around the gates of a stage while holding a demonstration urging then-U.S. President George W. Bush to cancel his plans to attend the opening ceremonies of the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing, at Lafayette Park across the street from the White House in Washington on March 31, 2008.

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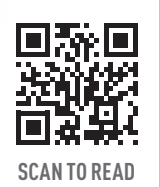
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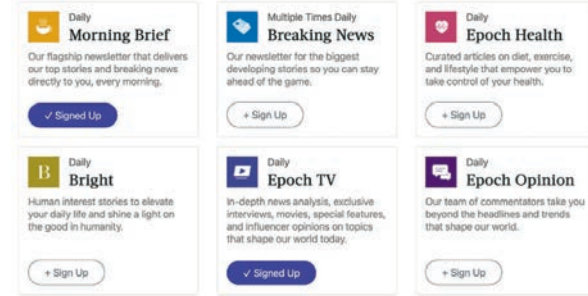
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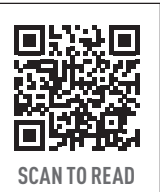


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