

THE EPOCH TIMES

CHINA INSIDER

US DISMANTLING

CCP'S 'MAFIA' APPARATUS

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A man holds a balloon at a press conference and rally in front of the America ChangLe Association highlighting Beijing's transnational repression, in New York on Feb. 25, 2023. A now-closed overseas Chinese police station was located inside the association building.





The P4 laboratory on the campus of the Wuhan Institute of Virology in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China, on May 13, 2020.

ANALYSIS

NIH Leadership Was Deeply Anxious About Wuhan Lab Funding, New Emails Reveal

Top health officials also discussed how to ‘put down this very destructive conspiracy’

HANS MAHNCKE

New National Institutes of Health (NIH) emails released under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) reveal the stark contrast between the public and private views of top NIH officials on the origin of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The new batch of FOIA emails, which was obtained by independent journalist James Tobias, shows a pattern of deception at the highest echelons of the NIH, including both its former director, Francis Collins, and current NIH Director Lawrence Tabak, who was previously Collins's deputy.

The emails also show that when President Donald Trump cut funding to EcoHealth Alliance—the group through which the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases under Director Anthony Fauci funneled federal grant money to the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV)—a litany of organizations and individuals petitioned the NIH to keep the money flowing to EcoHealth. Those efforts ignored revelations on EcoHealth's work with the controversial lab and instead focused on animosity toward Trump.

The emails also reveal that after Trump canceled EcoHealth's Wuhan grant, Collins and Tabak discussed ways to reinstate the grant.

NIH Director Admits EcoHealth Problems

Perhaps the most significant revelation to emerge from the new FOIA emails is that the situation surrounding EcoHealth and its connection to Wuhan was causing NIH leaders a far bigger headache than their public pronouncements indicated.

In August 2020, Collins sent an email to Harold Varmus, one of his predecessors as director of the NIH, admitting that “this EcoHealth grant and its connection to Wuhan has presented one of the most difficult and wrenching situations of my 11 years as NIH Director. Most of that is not ap-

propriate for e-mail.”

In the same email, Collins went on to say that there was “a lot more to this story than we have been able to talk about. Tony [Fauci] and I would like the chance to speak with you about this.”

Collins also wrote, “Meanwhile, and not because I completely buy its premises, I wonder if you have seen this article,” attaching a link to one of the first scientific articles to systematically lay out the case for a lab origin of COVID-19. Collins's interest in scientific evidence for a lab leak stands in stark contrast to his public pronouncements both at the time as well as more recently.

This email had been previously released under FOIA but its contents were almost entirely redacted.

On Feb. 1, 2020, Collins participated in a private teleconference organized by Fauci that had the ostensible purpose of shutting down any discussion of a lab leak. In a Feb. 2, 2020, email to tele-

conference participants, Collins warned that not shutting down the lab leak hypothesis would do great harm to “international harmony.” In a blog post dated Mar 26, 2020, Collins dismissed contentions of a lab origin as “outrageous claims.” On Apr. 16, 2020, after Fox News ran a segment on the potential lab origin of COVID-19, Collins emailed Fauci and Tabak to offer his help to “put down this very destructive conspiracy.”

On May 7, 2020, Collins testified before the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions. Although the topics of EcoHealth and the origin of COVID-19 did not come up at the hearing, the new FOIA emails reveal that Collins had been briefed on possible answers in case they did. His briefing notes contained a reference to possible questions on EcoHealth's failure to comply with federal rules. This is notable because Trump had canceled EcoHealth's grant just

The new emails reveal that NIH leadership quickly came together to brainstorm ways in which EcoHealth's grant could be restored.

twelve days prior to Collins's Senate appearance.

Crucially, but unbeknownst to the public at the time, EcoHealth had failed to provide the NIH with two critical progress reports for its work at the WIV. Those reports covered the 2018 to 2019 timeframe in which COVID-19 might have been created at the lab. EcoHealth only provided these reports in 2020, more than two years after the 2018 report should have been filed, and only after FOIA requests for the reports were filed. In September 2021, the NIH finally released the reports pursuant to FOIA claims. The 2018 report revealed that the WIV had genetically engineered SARS viruses with novel spike proteins, which significantly increased viral load in humanized mice as compared to unaltered viruses. The COVID-19 virus also features a novel spike protein.

EcoHealth later blamed technical difficulties for its failure to submit the 2018 and 2019 reports. EcoHealth's narrative is brought into question by the fact that the belatedly filed 2018 report contains a number of citations from 2019 and 2020, which did not exist at the time that EcoHealth allegedly tried to submit the report.

With respect to EcoHealth's activity reports, Collins's Senate briefing notes stated that “NIH requires grantees to submit a variety of reports which are due at specific times during the life cycle of a grant award. All reports must be accurate, complete, and submitted on time.” What the notes did not mention was that EcoHealth had failed to submit the two most critical reports that overlapped with the likely timeline of COVID-19's creation.

Campaign to Keep Money Flowing to EcoHealth

The new FOIA emails also provide insights into the massive campaign undertaken by outside parties to reinstate EcoHealth's grant.

Immediately after Trump can-



Workers are seen next to a cage with mice (R) inside the P4 laboratory in Wuhan, capital of China's Hubei Province, on Feb. 23, 2017.



Then-NIH Director Dr. Francis Collins listens during a Senate Appropriations Labor, Health and Human Services Subcommittee hearing looking into the budget estimates for National Institute of Health and state of medical research on Capitol Hill in Washington on May 26, 2021.

celed EcoHealth's grant on Apr. 24, 2020, due to the close connections between EcoHealth and the WIV, a large number of parties, including individuals and organizations, started petitioning the NIH to reinstate the grant.

The petitions, which are included in the new FOIA release, originated with a wide variety of groups, including the Infectious Diseases Society of America, the HIV Medicine Association, the American Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene, the Pediatric Infectious Diseases Society, Climate Health Now, ICAP at Columbia University, the AIDS Foundation, and the Latino Commission on AIDS. Hundreds of individuals, many from universities, also petitioned the NIH to reinstate EcoHealth's grant. The thrust of most of the petitions is that Trump capriciously revoked EcoHealth's grant because he believed in the “conspiracy theory” that COVID-19 had come out of a Wuhan lab.

Seventy-seven Nobel laureates also stepped up to complain bitterly about the grant cancellation, claiming in a letter to Collins that “now is precisely the time when we need to support this kind of research if we aim to control the pandemic and prevent subsequent ones.” Their letter went on to explain that “[EcoHealth President] Dr. Daszak and his colleagues have been conducting highly regarded, NIH supported research on coronaviruses and other infectious agents, focusing on the transmission of these viruses from animal hosts to human beings.” Apparently, the 77 Nobel laureates were oblivious to the copious academic literature—which was widely available at the time—describing EcoHealth's extensive involvement in gain-of-function experiments at the WIV.

Seven members of Congress, Reps. Joseph D. Morelle (D-N.Y.), Sheila Jackson Lee (D-Texas), Steve Cohen (D-Tenn.), Jan Schakowsky (D-Ill.), Seth Moulton (D-Mass.), Diana DeGette (D-Colo.) and Nydia M. Velázquez (D-N.Y.) also petitioned Collins to reinstate EcoHealth's grant, which they claimed was canceled because Trump believed in a “conspiracy theory.” They further claimed, “The necessity for this work is clear, now more than ever. EcoHealth Alliance has been receiving federal funding since 2014 to study the risk of bat coronavirus emergence—the specific global health emergency we now face.”

Apparently, these members of Congress were unaware of the possibility that it was EcoHealth's work that caused the global health emergency.

In another letter that called on Collins to reinstate the grant, Reps. Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-Texas), Frank Pallone (D-N.J.), Bill Foster (D-Ill.), and Diana DeGette (D-Colo.) suggested that the cancellation was an “egregious example of the Administration politicizing scientific decision making in order to further a politically convenient narrative.”

Holden Thorp, editor in chief of the Science family of journals, which published numerous pieces promoting the natural origin theory, while rejecting articles on the lab leak theory, also rallied

for EcoHealth, sending Collins an article of his that criticized the withdrawal of the grant. Thorp also expressed his support for Collins “in the difficult situation you are in.” In his article, Thorp falsely claimed, “The genetic sequence of SARS-CoV-2 rules out a lab-engineered virus.”

Irrespective of how the mass petitioning happened, the new emails reveal that NIH leadership quickly came together to brainstorm ways in which EcoHealth's grant could be restored.

In an email dated June 14, 2020, Collins asked Tabak “have you talked to Mike about what would be the perfect set of requirements to lift the suspension on EcoHealth?” Mike is Michael Lauer, the deputy director for extramural research at NIH. According to the NIH's website, Lauer was in charge of “ensuring scientific integrity, public accountability, and effective stewardship of the NIH extramural research portfolio,” which would have included the funds sent to WIV via EcoHealth.

One of the emails included in the new FOIA release is a document from Lauer titled “EcoHealth Alliance narrative.” The contents of the document, which was sent to Tabak, are completely redacted. Another document from Lauer is titled “EcoHealth Alliance narrative” “Option 1c,” suggesting that Lauer was drafting different versions of EcoHealth narratives. The “Option 1c” document is also fully redacted. We can only guess why top NIH officials were engaged in discussing and formulating different narratives.

Ultimately, NIH leadership decided to reinstate EcoHealth's grant that Trump had canceled. Lauer informed EcoHealth of the reinstatement in a letter dated July 8, 2020, without providing an explanation.

Notably, while the grant was nominally reinstated, all research activities related to the grant remained suspended pending a review of WIV records with the aim of “addressing the question of whether WIV staff had SARS-CoV-2 in their possession prior to December 2019.”

This was a condition that NIH knew EcoHealth would not and could not fulfill, even if it wanted to, as it required cooperation from Chinese authorities. Indeed, EcoHealth replied in early August 2020 to say that it would not comply with the request.

Collins, Lauer, and Tabak appear to have drawn up this seemingly paradoxical arrangement in order to wash their hands as far as the canceled grant and EcoHealth's activities at WIV were concerned. Groups that petitioned in favor of EcoHealth could be placated and EcoHealth could claim vindication, while the NIH was at the same time insulated from accusations that it was still funding experiments at the Wuhan lab.

It was a win-win as the NIH already had a new funding plan in place that would bypass Trump's cancellation of the original grant. On Aug. 27, 2020, Fauci announced that he was giving EcoHealth a fresh grant totaling \$7.5 million, more than double the previous grant that Trump had revoked.

OPINION

China Is Becoming a Black Box Under New CCP Rules

PETER DAHLIN



A slew of new policies, coupled with vastly changed behavior, is cutting the world off from vital information about what is happening in China, our ability to understand the reality inside the black box that China is becoming, and our ability to engage with it.

Recent news of raids on the offices of not one or two, but three foreign companies, all involved in performing corporate due diligence, has shaken the business world. Such companies essentially inspect that Chinese firms are doing what they say they are doing, are owned by the people they claim they are owned by, and that their financials aren't made up of fairy tales. It's a vital and, frankly, very basic type of business integral to companies worldwide.

Over the past few years, and rapidly accelerating alongside China's supposed opening up after ending the “zero-COVID” policy, key materials, databases, and even some government websites have become inaccessible to users outside mainland China.

For those working with, for example, criminal justice issues, this shutdown of vital resources started a few years ago. But this reality is now hitting the wider business and even academic communities. Yet, within the world of corporate due diligence, the signs were on the wall years ago.

In fact, some six or seven years ago, I met up with an old friend who works in this particular field at one of the world's premier corporate due diligence companies. He matter-of-factly made clear there was a growing hesitancy to visit the mainland, even for Hong Kong-based groups, but also, more interestingly, that such visits were becoming useless. Earlier, trips to visit and meet with local and provincial government officials and state-owned enterprise leaders were regular and often frank and useful, despite a need to be skeptical of what was being said.

Now, he said, such meetings had become futile, as every official and business leader simply parroted whatever empty statement Xi Jinping had issued on the subject and refused, no matter what, to discuss realities. Fear, he thought, was the reason why almost no one could carry out a basic conversation anymore—fear of becoming a target for any perceived, however small, violation of Xi's ever tighter control over what could and could not be said.

Cutting off information to China for foreign audiences is, in a way, a reversal of the prior policy related to the “great firewall.” This famous system for blocking access to information is, of course, intended to ensure that people inside China can't access information outside the country unless such information conforms to Beijing's policies. Now, on the other hand, numerous steps are being taken to achieve the reverse, to ensure that those outside China can't access information inside of it.

For those working in the human rights field, this is already posing a major problem. In fact, many of the biggest revelations on human rights abuses in China

have come from being able to access and analyze information from the central government and use it as evidence for wide-ranging human rights violations and changes in government behavior.

For example, take China's feared system for enforced disappearances of critics, the RSDL (residential surveillance at a designated location) system. It's only by using the Supreme Court-run database that is (supposed to) host all criminal verdicts that Safeguard Defenders has been able to provide macro-level data as evidence for the system's growth and the massive scale it is now employed on. Similar types of macro-level data on the prosecution of freedom of speech-related crimes, or more recently, on its expanding use of exit bans, have relied on the same database.

Likewise, each year, government organs' work reports presented to China's rubber-stamp legislature, the National People's Congress, are getting sparser and sparser in the information they contain. Likewise, ministries and Party organs are releasing fewer data in their reports and statements.

Not long ago, Safeguard Defenders could reveal the expansion of China's Fox Hunt program to hunt down targets abroad and bring them back to China, often illegally. It's unlikely that it will be possible to track the scale of these operations via official statistics for much longer—a clear threat not just to human rights or business communities but also to foreign governments.

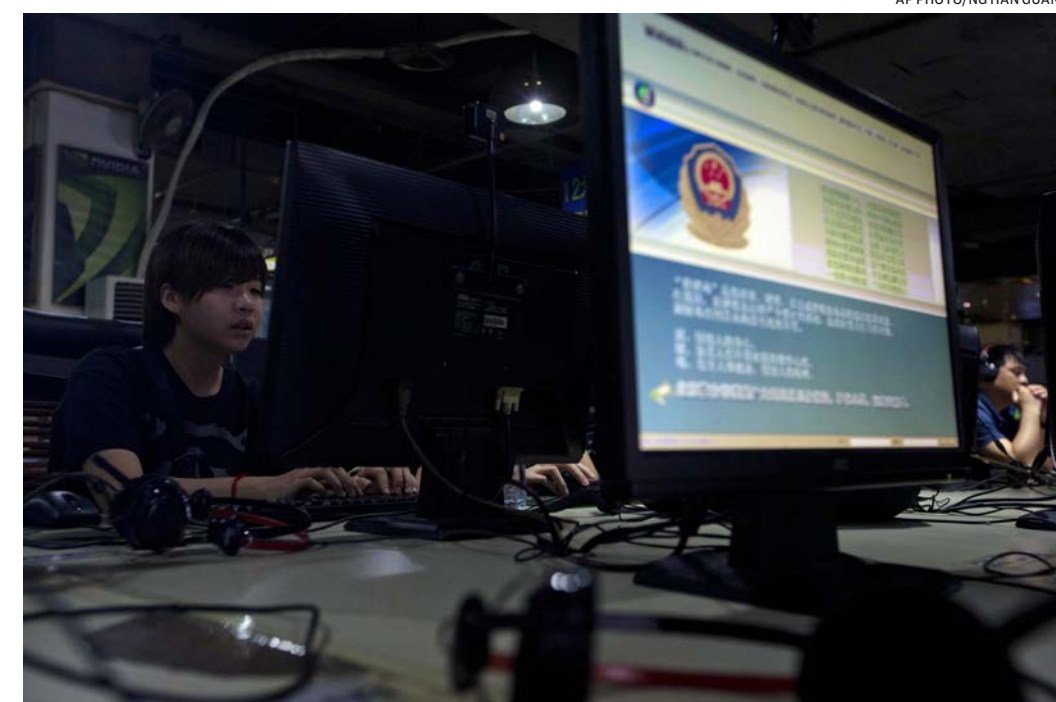
Cutting off information to China for foreign audiences is, in a way, a reversal of the prior policy related to the ‘great firewall.’

Now, China is releasing only partial data. Information that makes it hard to perform the comparative analysis is nothing new and has always been very flawed at best, not to mention that the data often can't withstand closer scrutiny. But with recent developments, it will soon go from very hard to impossible to ascertain even the most basic data.

The problem now is moving far beyond merely the human rights community, but it will severely undermine foreign businesses' ability to engage with the Chinese regime, and force, whether one wants to or not, an ever-faster decoupling from the Chinese economy. It seems the Chinese Communist Party is intent not merely on decoupling China from the world but making it a black box, cutting off economic, political, and even academic exchanges.

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

Peter Dahlin is the founder of the NGO Safeguard Defenders and the co-founder of the Beijing-based Chinese NGO China Action (2007-2016). He is the author of “Trial By Media,” and contributor to “The People's Republic of the Disappeared.” He lived in Beijing from 2007, until detained and placed in a secret jail in 2016, subsequently deported and banned. Prior to living in China, he worked for the Swedish government with gender equality issues, and now lives in Madrid.



A computer displays message from the Chinese Great Firewall on the proper use of the Internet at an Internet cafe in Beijing, in this file photo. New web publishing rules will bar foreign companies from publishing most forms of online content.

IN-DEPTH | MILITARY

China Wants Killer Robots to Fight the Next War

ANDREW THORNEBROOKE

War grips the world and the most powerful nations on earth go to battle once more. This time, however, it is machines that do the killing, operating free from all human oversight and accountability.

It's a grim picture of future conflicts, but one that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is nevertheless working to make a reality.

The CCP is investing in artificial intelligence (AI)-enabled platforms that it hopes will one day conduct lethal missions in wartime, wholly without human input or control.

Gregory Allen, director of the Wadhvani Center for AI and Advanced Technologies at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, says the regime is moving well beyond any attempt to keep a human in the AI decision-making loop.

"China is pursuing development of AI-enabled lethal autonomous weapons," Allen wrote in a prepared testimony for an April 13 hearing of the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission.

"The best available indications... suggest that China's strategy is ambitious, moving beyond any sort of on-the-battlefield human supervision into increasingly autonomous AI-enabled warfare."

Though the CCP is investing heavily in a broad array of new technologies, Allen says, AI is foremost among them. The regime's capacity to build AI-driven machines of war is quickly reaching parity with that of the United States, and may even exceed it soon.

"U.S. leadership in the realm of military AI is not at all guaranteed," Allen says.

"While the United States has important advantages, China may be able to quickly take the lead in government and military adoption of AI capabilities. This is an outcome that the United States should seek to prevent."

Autonomous AI Platforms 'Inevitable'

The CCP's pursuit of AI-driven weapons and other military platforms, though not well understood by many Americans, has been ongoing for years.

Allen notes that he first realized the remarkable ambition of such goals back in 2018. At that time, he attended a conference where he transcribed a speech made by Zeng Yi, a senior executive at China's state-owned military company Norinco.

There, Zeng described Norinco's ambitions—and the CCP's expectations—for future implementation of AI weapons by saying that, "In future battlegrounds, there will be no people fighting."

"Zeng predicted that by 2025, lethal au-



Visitors walk past an AI (artificial intelligence) security robot named APV3 with a facial recognition system at the 14th China International Exhibition on Public Safety and Security at the China International Exhibition Center in Beijing on Oct. 24, 2018.

tonomous weapons would be commonplace," Allen said, adding that Zeng had described the mass adoption of autonomous AI platforms as "inevitable."

Allen also noted that CCP censors removed Zeng's comments and even his participation from the official readout of the conference shortly thereafter.

"It was not in China's interest to have that information in the open," Allen said.

Not long after that, however, the CCP-affiliated military company Ziyang began exporting its Blowfish A2 and A3 drones to the Middle East. The Blowfish, a helicopter-style drone capable of autonomously engaging with targets, using machine guns and missiles, was just the first realization of the regime's ambition to transform war from a human domain into a robotic one.

Military Decision-Making Without Humanity

The regime's ambitions for AI go beyond killer robots. The CCP is also investing to develop AI capabilities related to military decision-making and command and control.

At the heart of the effort is the CCP's goal of "intelligitization," a transformation of warfare through the mass integration of AI, automation, and big data.

Zeng posited that "intelligence supremacy will be the core of future warfare" and that "AI may completely change the current command structure, which is dominated by humans" to one that is dominated by an "AI cluster" that operates "just like the brain of the human body."

Building on that vision are Chinese companies like 4Paradigm, which was contracted by the CCP's military wing to develop AI decision-making models and

human-machine teaming software for use at the company and battalion levels.

Such programs essentially aim toward one end: the restructuring of the Chinese military into an increasingly centralized cadre of officers who direct swarms of AI-enabled autonomous systems to do the actual fighting.

Sam Kessler, an analyst for the North Star Support Group risk advisory firm, believes that the regime's focus on shifting the burden of warfighting from humans to AI-enabled systems is indicative of a broader recognition among CCP leadership about the revolutionary nature of intelligent autonomous systems.

"The [Chinese military] places a great deal of emphasis on disruptive technologies like autonomous systems," Kessler said in an email to The Epoch Times.

"Unmanned combat systems with digitized decision-making programs can potentially speed up the process of performing tasks on the battlefield," Kessler added. "[These include] precision strikes, accurate reconnaissance, resupplying forces, and performing field modifications more precisely and effectively."

Such capabilities, Kessler said, could provide even a meager military with a profound force multiplier, and could shift the balance of power in future conflicts.

"Whoever possesses this kind of technology can help make even the weakest or average conventional military power have an edge in a field of battle, or prolonging it," Kessler said.

Future of War Is Robotic

The CCP is not alone in its ambition to lead a new revolution in military affairs. Many U.S. military leaders believe the dawn of AI-enabled lethal autonomous systems is near.

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Mark Milley shares a similar vision to that of China's Zeng. He believes that the world's most powerful militaries will be primarily robotic in 10-15 years.

"Over the next 10 to 15 years, you'll see large portions of advanced countries' militaries become robotic," Milley said. "If you add robotics with artificial intelligence and precision munitions and the ability to see at range, you've got the mix of a real fundamental change."

"That's coming. Those changes, that technology... we are looking at inside of 10 years."

Lt. Gen. Ross Coffman, head of the Army Futures Command, believes that the United States will enter an age characterized by artificially intelligent killing machines by 2040.

Coffman described the partnership between soldiers and AI as that between a

dog and its master during a March 28 summit of Department of Defense leaders and technology experts.

In a future war, however, it will be soldiers helping AI get into the fight rather than the other way around.

"I think we're going to see a flip in 2040 where humans are doing those functions that allow the machine to get into a position of relative advantage, not the machine getting humans into a position of relative advantage," Coffman said.

That aim is likely to face a bumpy path forward as the United States contends with China's embrace of lethal AI systems, according to Kessler.

"The DoD recently announced they intend to continue developing AI and autonomous lethal systems... that will enable them to keep an edge in the changing global security environment," Kessler said.

"However, keeping a human element involved in the operation of AI autonomous and semi-autonomous lethal systems also remains a priority."

"Since the [Chinese military] is not committed to this DoD strategy and belief system, it will force the U.S. to invest heavily into it. It will also require the U.S. to ensure that the balance between being ethical and conducting oversight does not get in the way of being lethal and operational at the same time."

Chinese Robots, American Research

As the CCP continues its quest for intelligitized warfare, Allen believes that a critical weakness the United States must overcome is its indirect support of China's AI industry.

Because the United States considers AI to be a discrete technology rather than a category of general-purpose technology like electricity or computers, the CCP is able to inadvertently develop its military capabilities through otherwise mundane research and development partnerships with the U.S.

"The linkages between China's AI sector

U.S. leadership in the realm of military AI is not at all guaranteed.

Gregory Allen, AI expert



An AI cancer detection microscope is seen during the World Artificial Intelligence Conference 2018 in Shanghai on Sept. 18, 2018.

and the United States' AI sector are extraordinarily deep," Allen said. "There really isn't a part of the Chinese AI ecosystem that isn't in some way drawing upon the U.S. AI ecosystem."

Allen noted that half of all Chinese academic papers published on the subject of AI feature American co-authors.

Some of those research endeavors even include collaborations between major U.S. corporations and the companies responsible for pioneering China's military AI development.

In one example, Intel conducted research with 4Paradigm, even at the same time the company was contracted to develop AI decision-making models for the Chinese military. Google, meanwhile, has collaborated extensively with military-linked entities in China through its China-based AI centers.

That research and any subsequent technological development based on it in China is then able to be effectively co-opted by the CCP through its strategy of Military-Civil Fusion (MCF), which mandates that all research and technologies serve national security needs in addition to civil needs.

The sheer volume of AI research and development being compiled by the regime through MCF is allowing the CCP to effectively catch up with the United States technologically, according to Elsa Kania,

an adjunct senior fellow at the Center for a New American Security think tank.

"We have to recognize [MCF] as an incredibly consequential component of China's goal to catch up with or supersede the United States," Kania said. "At a certain point, the quantity and the amount of resources put into these efforts do start to produce quality."

Kania added that a key goal of MCF was to realize the regime's desire to become a "pioneer at the forefront of technologies defining a new revolution in military affairs," and to "access and exploit dual use technologies," including artificial intelligence and robotics.

"The writing has been on the wall for a while," Kania said. "Intelligitization is what the PLA regards as the future of warfare."

As such, Kania warned that, without adequate oversight measures, the regime's development of AI-enabled weapons would continue at the expense of American national security.

"There's a risk that any investment in China [without oversight]... has a risk of inadvertently contributing to military modernization," Kania said. "There is a need for increased oversight and screening for outbound investments in those technologies... [to ensure that] U.S. flows of funding are not inadvertently undermining U.S. interests."

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A Chinese soldier salutes during a parade to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the founding of the Chinese communist regime at Tiananmen Square in Beijing on Oct. 1, 2019.



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