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CHINA INSIDER

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MILITARY SHAKE-UP

XI'S PURGE OF TOP PLA LEADERS
REVEALS MAJOR CRISIS

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China's leader Xi Jinping (C) looks at his ballot during the fifth plenary session of the National People's Congress in Beijing on March 12, 2023.

ANALYSIS

Xi's Purge of Top Military Leaders Reveals Major Crisis Within CCP

By Venus Upadhyaya

The recent removal of the top two commanders overseeing China's nuclear arsenal reveals serious fractures in Chinese leader Xi Jinping's regime and will harm its military modernization, according to analysts.

Last week, Gen. Li Yuchao, commander of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Rocket Force, and political commissar Xu Zhongbo, the branch's second in command, were purged from their posts after having disappeared from public view for months. The reason for their dismissal and their current whereabouts are unknown.

Mr. Xi installed former deputy navy chief Wang Houbin as the new commander on July 31, while Xu Xisheng, an air force officer and member of the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP's) elite Central Committee, was promoted to political commissar.

Notably, both men come from outside the branch and have no experience in the Rocket Force, the arm of the PLA responsible for the country's nuclear arsenal and ballistic missiles. Analysts say their installation will likely jeopardize the regime's warfighting ability, as it increasingly seeks to challenge the United States' and Russia's nuclear forces.

Gen. Li and Mr. Xu were among several leaders in the Rocket Force to have gone missing in recent months and were presumed to be under investigation, signaling a wholesale purge of the branch's top brass.

These include Lt. Gen. Liu Guangbin, deputy commander of the Rocket Force, and Lt. Gen. Zhang Zhenzhong, the branch's former deputy commander, according to Germany-based sinologist Frank Lehberger.

Besides the disappearances, the death of Gen. Wu Guohua, 66, former deputy commander of the force, on July 4, which was only confirmed by Chinese state media in late July, has led many to speculate that the purges were because of corruption or the leaking of military secrets.

Three weeks after his death, Chinese state media reported that Gen. Wu had died of an unspecified illness. His death was earlier reported by overseas Chinese-language media, fueling speculation that the general had killed himself.

Disappearances and Deaths

The purges came at a time of much upheaval within the opaque CCP.

"There is more than meets the eye in the recent changes in the PLA Rocket Force, especially at a time when the Chinese foreign minister disappeared," Claude Arpi, a French historian and expert on Tibet based in India, told The Epoch Times.

The previous Chinese foreign minister, Qin Gang, disappeared for a month before being officially removed from his post, without explanation.

Mr. Lehberger also noted the suspicious circumstances surrounding Gen. Wu's death.

"No reason was given why his death was kept a secret for three weeks. In late July, he was given an uncharacteristically low-key funeral, his obituary omitting his status as a high-level member of the CCP. A humiliation, basically. No reason was provided for this either," Mr. Lehberger said.

Gen. Wu wasn't the only high-ranking military official to have died earlier this year, only to have his death belatedly confirmed by the regime.

Gen. Wang Shaojun, 67, former head of the Central Guard Bureau died from an undisclosed illness in Beijing on April 26, Chinese news agency Xinhua reported on July 27. He had previously served as the chief bodyguard to Mr. Xi and other high-ranking CCP members. "No reason was given why his death was kept a secret for three months," Mr. Lehberger said, adding that the case of the two generals was "something unprecedented" in the history of the regime.

Corruption

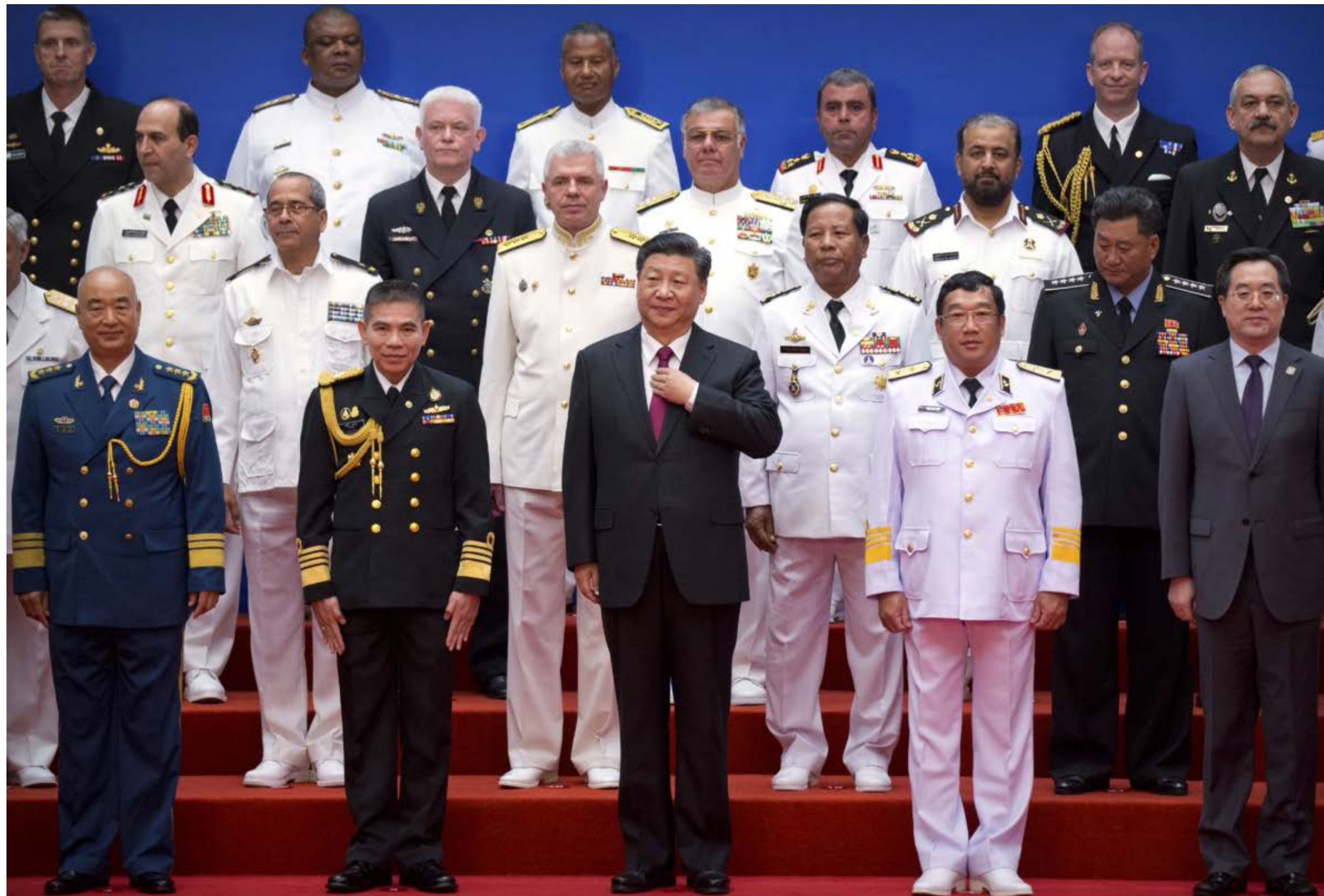
Nishakant Ojha, an India-based geopolitical analyst, said he believes the purge of the Rocket Force's command is linked to a crackdown on corruption.

"The Rocket Force may have failed to meet certain high-level goals," Mr. Ojha

There is more than meets the eye in the recent changes in the PLA Rocket Force.

Claude Arpi, historian and expert on Tibet

Chinese leader Xi Jinping (front-C) and Chinese and foreign naval officials pose for a group photo during an event to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy in Qingdao, Shandong Province, China, on April 23, 2019.



told The Epoch Times, adding that may have prompted an investigation into where the money went.

A July 28 report by South China Morning Post, citing unnamed sources, said several top PLA Rocket Force generals have been investigated for corruption for months, including the force's current commander, Li Yuchao, and deputies

Zhang Zhenzhong and Liu Guangbin.

Intelligence Leak

He Qinglian, a prominent U.S.-based Chinese economist and commentator, thinks the shake-up was the result of a leaking of military secrets that came to light when the U.S. Air Force think tank published a 255-page report on the PLA

Rocket Force on Oct. 24, 2022.

The report described the organizational structure of the Rocket Force, a branch known for its secrecy, with a remarkable level of detail, prompting analysts including Ms. He to conclude it was leaked by senior officials of the force.

Multiple Factors

Some analysts have noted that Mr. Xi's replacement of the Rocket Force command occurred not long after the Russian Wagner mutiny of late June that was directed against President Vladimir Putin. Lehberger called Mr. Putin a

close personal friend of Mr. Xi's and said the Russian mutiny is believed to have deeply shaken the Chinese leader.

While that's unconfirmed, Mr. Lehberger noted that "the peculiar timing and the haste with which the replacement inside the PLA has taken place" lends some credence to the speculation, especially taking into account that Mr. Xi has likely faced coup threats during his tenure.

"Hence, some commentators dub the whole affair as 'China's Wagner moment,'" he said.

The Rocket Force, the PLA's newest branch, created by Mr. Xi during his



▲ Chinese leader Xi Jinping (L) speaks after reviewing the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy fleet in the South China Sea on April 12, 2018.

sweeping military reforms in 2015, oversees precision missiles that are aimed at stationary and moving targets anywhere in Taiwan, Japan, India, U.S. territories in the Pacific such as Guam, Wake Island, and Hawaii, and the continental United States, according to Mr. Lehberger.

"Most (non-nuclear) precision missiles controlled by the [Rocket Forces] could hypothetically also be targeted by hypothetical future Chinese coup plotters at Xi Jinping himself. Thus becoming hypothetically a sure and error-proof way [of] eliminating Xi as China's leader ... very much unlike the botched coup by Wagner mercenaries, only armed with regular firearms, who were targeting Vladimir Putin in Moscow," he said.

Mr. Lehberger said Mr. Xi's speeches since July 24 and the various editorials published in CCP's state media highlight four main problems in the military, "lack of ethics among the PLA, lack of supervision of the PLA, formation of factions inside the PLA, and active divulging of military top-secrets by the PLA."

The first two factors can be linked to corruption and various forms of ethical misconduct, and the latter two are serious political and treasonous offenses directly threaten the survival of the CCP regime and Mr. Xi personally, he said.

"These four points corroborate my assessment that this whole affair is not only due to corruption or behavior or ethical misconduct, but that Xi's status as autocratic leader of China is also threatened."

The massive shake-up of the forces that Xi Jinping personally created indicates that the Chinese leader's reforms of the military are facing serious and unprecedented trouble, according to Frank Lehberger.



▲ Chinese leader Xi Jinping during a parade to celebrate the 70th Anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, in Beijing on Oct. 1, 2019.



▲ Military vehicles carrying hypersonic DF-17 missiles travel past Tiananmen Square during a military parade in Beijing on Oct. 1, 2019.

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CHINA FLOODS

China Flooding Deliberately Diverted to Save Beijing; Public Anger Grows

By Alex Wu

Many towns in China's Hebei Province have sustained severe flooding due to the Chinese communist regime's deliberate use of the locales as a "moat" to protect China's capital city of Beijing and the new political hub of Xiong'an, following the strongest storm in northern China in years.

The storm, super typhoon Doksuri, reached northern China on July 29 and was the strongest to hit Beijing and the surrounding areas in Hebei Province in 140 years, triggering flash floods and landslides.

Provincial officials said on Aug. 3 that the floodwaters might take a month to completely recede. According to state media CCTV, modeling estimated that another 300 million to 400 million cubic meters of water needed to flow to the ocean.

On July 31, flash floods were reported in the municipality of Beijing, a centrally administered region surrounded by Hebei Province, and by Aug. 1, eight reservoirs in the city began discharging water at the same time.

Situated between Beijing and Xiong'an, the city of Zhuozhou and its nearby areas—home to about 1 million people—were subsequently flooded as authorities decided to sacrifice the regions as a "flood storage zone." A large number of people were trapped in fast-rising floodwaters as many people were given only two hours to evacuate on Aug. 1 or didn't receive the evacuation order. Villages, towns, and vast farmlands were quickly submerged by the floodwaters.

Li Guoying, China's water resources minister, on Aug. 1 publicly required "ensuring the absolute safety of capital Beijing, Daxing International Airport, and Xiong'an New Area against the flood." Ni Yuefeng, head of Hebei Province, pledged on state media on Aug. 2 that in order to reduce the pressure on Beijing's flood controls, the province would resolutely be the "moat" for the capital. The official statements sparked public anger.

A staff member from the Zhuozhou Emergency Management Bureau conceded on July 31 that flood discharge from Beijing was one of the reasons for the significant rise in water levels in the regional city, mainland Chinese outlet Southern Weekend reported on Aug. 1.

That triggered mass public outrage and protest.

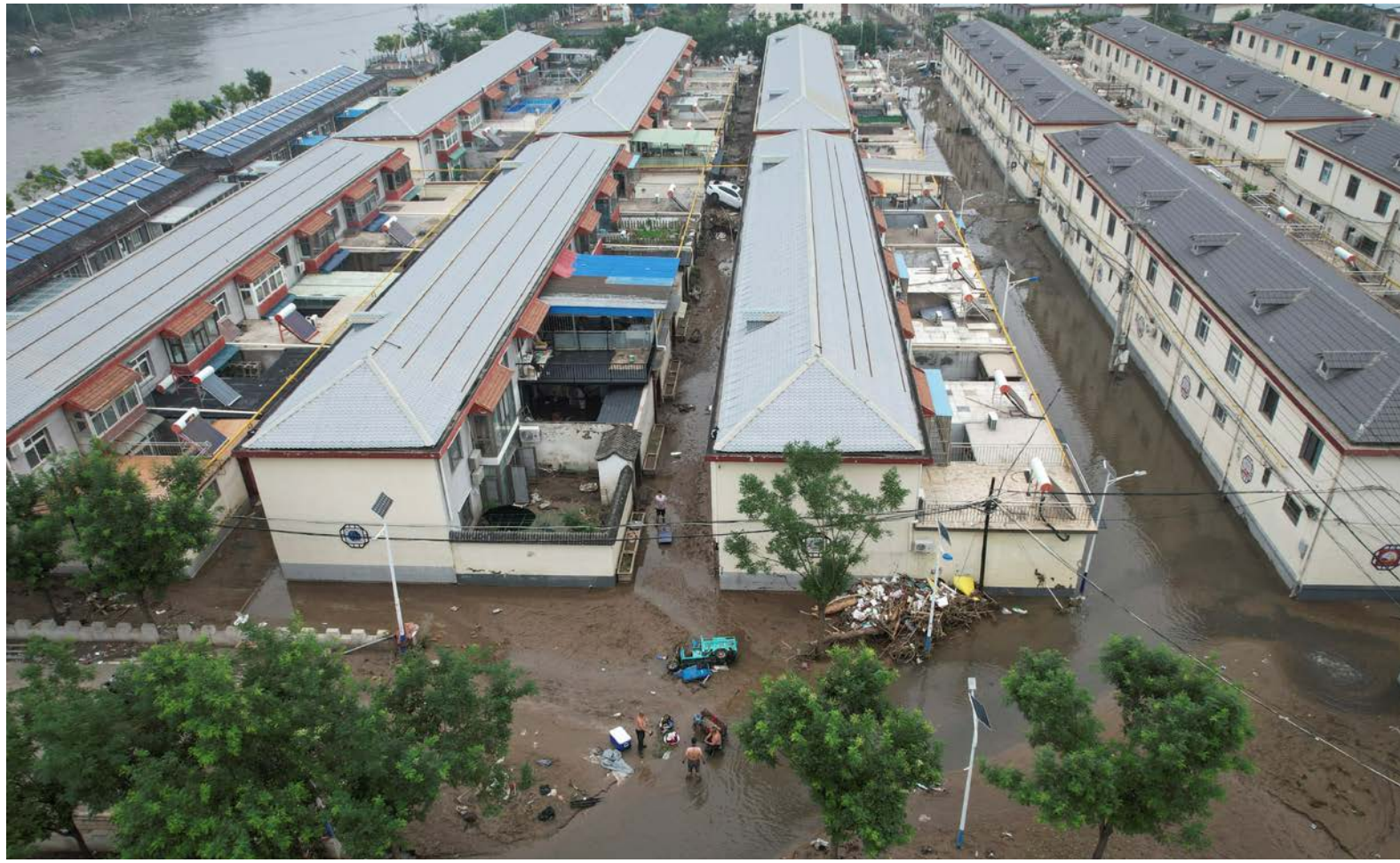
Local residents told the Chinese language Epoch Times that on Aug. 1, all of Zhuozhou was inundated by the floodwater discharge. In addition to communications, water, electricity, and transportation were cut off, they said.

By Aug. 2, floodwaters had reached Bazhou, which is about 130 kilometers (about 80 miles) downstream from Zhuozhou and 40 kilometers (almost 25 miles) upstream of the major city of Tianjin, destroying many homes and properties, and leaving tens of thousands homeless.

Videos on mainland Chinese platform Feidian posted on Aug. 3 showed that independent volunteer rescue teams had arrived in Zhuozhou, and could only move around by boat. Rescuers said that the floodwater on average was 7 to 8 meters (23 to 26 feet) deep, with the deepest areas reaching 12 meters.

Hebei's 'Man-Made' Disaster Wang Weiluo, a hydrology expert now based in Germany, told The Epoch Times on Aug. 3 that if authorities in Beijing hadn't diverted water to Zhuozhou to protect the new Xiong'an district, the rural city and its surrounding regions wouldn't have experienced such disastrous flooding.

Mr. Wang said that, while floodwater discharge from the reservoirs in Beijing's



▲ A flooded village in the aftermath of heavy rains in Beijing on Aug. 3, 2023.

Fangshan and Mentougou districts was needed to prevent the dams from collapsing, after Aug. 1, "eight reservoirs in Beijing began to release flood water" in controlled discharges.

He explained that the water from Beijing usually has two routes to flow to the ocean—neither of which passes through Zhuozhou.

"One ... flows down from Yongding River to Langfang in Hebei, then passes through Tianjin to the Bohai Sea; the other one flows down from the Daqing River, usually passing through Xiong'an to Baiyangdian, and then enters the Bohai Sea," he said.

Mr. Wang added that in order to protect Xiong'an, the new political hub planned by Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leader Xi Jinping, authorities ordered the creation of a new but less efficient flood storage area in Zhuozhou to reduce pressure on Xiong'an.

"That's why the official said that the flood discharge will last for another month, and you should not go home for one month. It doesn't mean that you can go home when the rain stops," he said.

Mr. Wang estimated that some other areas in Hebei Province beyond Zhuozhou like

Baoding (about 60 miles to the southwest), and even Shijiazhuang (about 150 miles to the southwest) and Xingtai (about 125 miles to the south), may have even worse flooding than Zhuozhou. The reason why Zhuozhou has received so much attention is that locals there posted news of the flooding on social media first, he said—before the CCP's internet censors kicked in.

On Aug. 5, more than 600,000 of Baoding's 11.5 million residents were ordered to evacuate.

Ten deaths have since been reported in Baoding, and at least 18 people have also been reported missing. Chinese authorities have officially reported a total of 30 deaths from the floods, with at least 26 missing as of Aug. 5. However, the actual number of casualties is feared to be much higher, given the regime's history of underreporting numbers to save face.

Public Anger Anger has been building among the locals affected, as responsible officials and governmental aid continue to be absent, along with a lack of transparency about the extent of the flooding.



▲ Local residents, some in a makeshift boat, in front of their house in an area inundated with floodwaters near Zhuozhou, Hebei Province, China, on Aug. 3, 2023.



▲ A flooded street after heavy rains in Zhuozhou, in northern China's Hebei Province.

On Aug. 4, posts calling for the attention of state officials went viral on Chinese social media. One post reads: "Urgently looking for the mayor and the CCP's Party secretary of Zhuozhou Ci: We have lost contact with them for many days, and Zhuozhou is suffering unprecedented disasters, and the people need to know the truth!"

Another says: "Missing People Notice: government officials haven't been seen since the disaster happened. Where are the mayor and the Party secretary? Where is the head of the emergency management bureau? People hit by the disaster all depend on independent rescue teams and other ordinary people to provide meals and bedding. What about the people in the government departments? Have they all lost contact?"

Cai Xia, a retired professor from the CCP's Central Party School, posted: "Why is Zhuozhou designated as a flood discharge area? Risking the lives of more than one million people, and choosing to destroy the homes of more than one million people and large tracts of good farmland just to save face and keep the throne of dictatorship."

Bazhou Villagers' Protest On Aug. 4, many Bazhou residents expressed outrage on social media over news reports on CCTV, which they said were falsely reporting about the flood situation.

"We are hit by flood discharge, not rain-fall!" one post read.

The CCTV reports from Bazhou had said that "some villages were affected by rain-fall" and had "logged water," with several people trapped.

On Aug. 5, many local villagers went to the Bazhou city government to protest.

Videos posted on social media show villagers holding up a banner in front of government offices reading "Give me back my home. It's caused by flood discharge, not by the rain!"

A large number of public security personnel dressed in black were sent to the protest scene to control the crowd, and fierce conflicts broke out between villagers and security personnel. A female resident of the village of Dongyangzhuang in Bazhou told The Epoch Times on Aug. 5 that thousands of villagers attended the protest.

On Aug. 5, Zhuozhou resident Mr. Chen told The Epoch Times: "Five-hundred policemen from the Hebei Armed Police Corps entered Zhuozhou today. They have taken over all the rescue work. The civilian volunteer rescue teams were asked to evacuate, and the rescue supplies from the central government had just arrived.

"Previously, the supplies were all from the people, and the ordinary people have tried their best to collect supplies from everywhere. It is completely the people helping each other. "The volunteer rescuers saw dead people everywhere in Mafang village in the Qingliang Temple area of Zhuozhou city. The officials are afraid that civilian rescuers will post pictures and videos of the real situation of the casualties on social media."

Luo Ya, Xiao Lusheng, Ning Haizhong, and Gu Xiaohua contributed to this report.

CCP

CCP Is Like 'A Leech': Businessman Flees China to Get Away From Totalitarian Regime

By Sophia Lam

A Chinese businessman who suffered financial losses in China recently began a new life in the United States. He told The Epoch Times that Beijing's arbitrary policies and totalitarian rule made his life difficult.

"In China, I had always felt that there was a huge leech on my body, sucking blood from me," said Hu Dewang, who immigrated from China to the United States in June. He referred to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) as the "leech" that sucked his business dry.

Mr. Hu has now settled down in Los Angeles, California.

He is from China's eastern Anhui Province, home to successful entrepreneurs before the CCP ruled the country. He left home to work in southern Shenzhen city when he was 19.

At the age of 20, Mr. Hu was employed at Hong Kong- and Taiwan-funded factories and trading enterprises. In 2011, when he was 29, he established a shoemaking factory, and a few years later, he set up an e-commerce business.

But he had to close down the factory and online shoe store due to the CCP's randomly changing policies, Mr. Hu told the Chinese language edition of The Epoch Times in an interview on July 30.

Closure of Shoe Factory

In 2011, with the help of his friends, Mr. Hu set up a shoe manufacturing factory in Wenling city in China's eastern Zhejiang Province.

Wenling is one of the major manufacturing hubs in China. Its shoemaking industry was once one of its pillar industries. Over 1.2 billion pairs of shoes were made in Wenling in 2011, accounting for 10 percent of the total output in China in the year, according to state-run Zhejiang News.

Mr. Hu's company also saw its revenues double yearly in five years. His employees increased from five to over 20.

In 2015, Mr. Hu said the local government forced him to move his factory into a high-tech park, where he would be charged higher fees and more taxes.

"The local government said that the move was due to safety concerns, but the authorities forced business owners [to move to the high-tech park] from other localities," said Mr. Hu, adding that the local government was just trying to make more money from these businesses.

"Factory rental fees skyrocketed from less than \$10,000 to more than \$30,000 per month," said Mr. Hu.

In addition to the high rent, he had to pay extra fees for equipment, facilities, and resources. "With all the extra expenses included, the monthly costs of the factory were over \$100,000 per month, which exceeded my budget."

He said that he didn't want to risk going bankrupt. So he decided to close down the factory and turned to e-commerce.

A document by the Wenling municipal government published in 2021, titled "Wenling City's 13th Five-Year Industrial Layout Planning," states that from 2016 to 2020, the city had "significantly accelerated the pace of industrial layout adjustment," setting up four high-tech parks for various industries. According to the document, three high-tech

With the direct interference by the CCP using its policies, China is bad soil for businesses.

Hu Dewang, Chinese businessman

The U.S. is better than China: I work and get paid.

Hu Dewang, Chinese businessman

parks were designated for manufacturing electric machinery, spare parts of automobiles and motorcycles, shoes, and apparel, among other things. The preparation of these adjustments began in 2015, the document says.

Pandemic and Post-COVID

In 2015, after closing his shoemaking factory, Mr. Hu set up an online shoe store that initially depended on his previous customers.

"I was 33 years old at the time, which was a good age to start a business, as I was more mature and experienced."

Mr. Hu was hopeful for his new e-commerce business and worked hard. In the first year, he earned roughly \$15,000, gradually increasing and entering into a positive business cycle until the COVID-19 pandemic hit in 2020.

Before the pandemic, over 60 percent of his orders were from foreign customers. The lockdowns caused delays in logistics, resulting in a significant decline in overseas orders, Mr. Hu said. He turned to the domestic market for business opportunities. However, Mr. Hu incurred significant financial losses in 2022.

"Shanghai was locked down suddenly in April 2022, and the pandemic restrictions were constant in the city," Mr. Hu said. Other cities also implemented the CCP's draconian zero-COVID policy, and more cities were locked down in the second half of 2022. "When a metropolitan like Shanghai has been locked down, no other city can escape such policies," he said.

Half of his domestic orders could not be shipped out due to the strict lockdowns, making it difficult to clear out inventory. So he began selling his shoes at discounted prices.

"The result was that the more shoes I sold, the more losses I suffered. But there was no other way out if I didn't sell them," Mr. Hu said.

The abrupt lifting of the lockdowns didn't bring him any luck. In 2022 alone, Mr. Hu said he suffered a loss of about \$80,000.



On July 19, 2023, Mr. Hu Dewang, a former Chinese businessman, is interviewed by the Chinese language edition of The Epoch Times in its Los Angeles office.

"Many businesses went bankrupt," Mr. Hu said.

He closed down his e-commerce shoe company earlier this year to avoid more losses and left China.

'China Is Bad Soil for Businesses'

Mr. Hu believes the CCP's rule makes China unsuitable for growing businesses.

"Doing business is like sowing a seed. You need to have rich soil, the sun, and water for the seed to grow," Mr. Hu said.

"With the direct interference by the CCP using its policies, China is bad soil for businesses."

"I was careful in my business dealings, and I had been working hard throughout the years without taking any vacations," Mr. Hu said. "Yet I was unable to survive in China." He accused Beijing of randomly imposing various restrictions on businesses, making them difficult to grow. And even if a company becomes successful, the regime can take away its wealth, he added.

Without the CCP's interference, Mr. Hu believes he could have done better with his businesses.

"The U.S. is better than China: I work and get paid."

"I had little understanding [of the CCP] when I was in China," Mr. Hu said, adding that the three years of zero-COVID restrictions made him see the true nature of the CCP.

Yang Yang and Ma Shang'en contributed to this report.



▲ A worker pulls a pair of shoes from a production line in a factory located in Chengdu, China.

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BIOSAFETY

Black Market Biolab Uncovered in California Linked to China

By Brad Jones & Nathan Su

REEDLEY, Calif.—A secret Chinese-owned biolab with thousands of vials of bacterial and viral agents, including chlamydia, E. Coli, streptococcus pneumonia, HIV, hepatitis, herpes, rubella, and malaria uncovered in California has raised serious concerns about biosecurity.

Investigations involving the city, county, state, U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and FBI have alarmed residents in the small California city of Reedley, located about 25 miles southeast of Fresno.

The lab, at 850 I Street, was operated by Prestige Biotech, Inc., which is believed to produce COVID-19 and pregnancy test kits, and housed nearly 1,000 lab mice.

Jesalyn Harper, a code enforcement officer for the City of Reedley Fire Department, told The Epoch Times she made an initial inspection of the suspicious lab after receiving an anonymous complaint about a possible business operating in the warehouse, which was believed to be vacant at the time.

In her inspection of the building's exterior on Dec. 19, 2022, Ms. Harper said she noticed a garden hose that was being used for plumbing protruding from a warehouse wall—a building code violation.

"When I walked in—in December—there were a couple of women here. The women were putting pregnancy test kits in brown boxes for shipping," she said. "It was a small order going out ... like maybe two or three boxes."

After contacting the FBI to make sure it was safe, the Fresno County Public Health Department obtained search warrants and conducted a full inspection of the building on March 16, according to Ms. Harper.

In addition to medical devices such as COVID-19 and pregnancy tests, "certain rooms of the warehouse were found to contain several vessels of liquid and various apparatus," according to court documents.

"Fresno County Public Health staff also observed blood, tissue and other bodily fluid samples and serums; and thousands of vials of unlabeled fluids and suspected biological material," the documents read.

After testing the substances, the CDC detected at least 20 infectious agents, including coronavirus, HIV, malaria, hepatitis, and herpes.

Joe Prado, assistant director at the Fresno County Department of Public Health, said in a statement on July 7 that all the biological agents in the "unlicensed laboratory" were destroyed.

Out of nearly 1,000 lab mice found in the facility, nearly 200 were dead in their cages when inspectors arrived on the scene. Some of the mice appeared to have attacked each other, which happens when the rodents are forced to live in overcrowded cages and "inhumane conditions," according to Ms. Harper.

"They were under a lot of duress," she said.

A veterinarian who inspected the facility "stated that the mice did not look sick" and authorized nearly 800 of the rodents to be humanely euthanized and incinerated in April, she said.

"They were euthanized prior to the CDC showing up," Ms. Harper said.

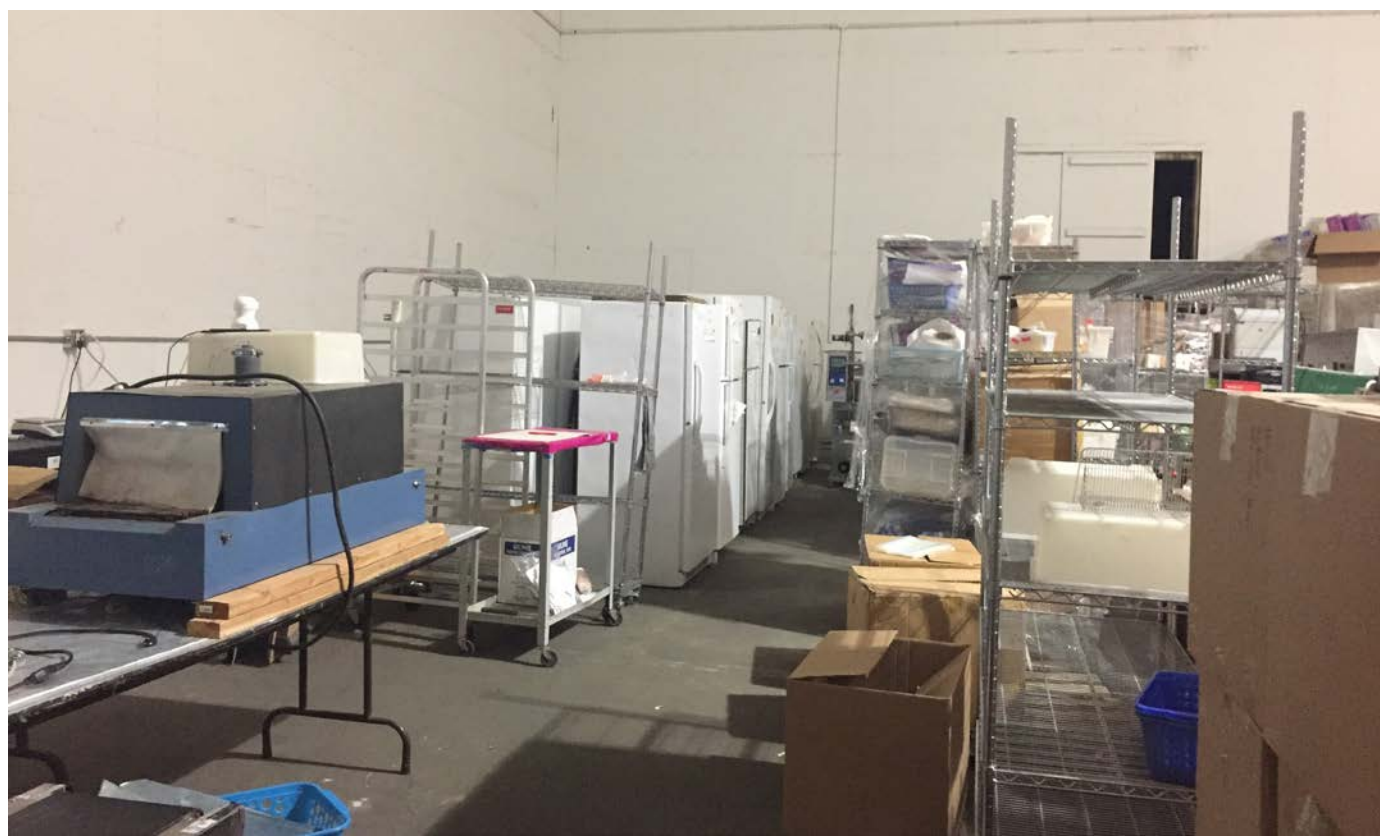
But the bodies of five female and five male mice were preserved in a refrigerated evidence locker at a Fresno Police Department facility where they remain, she said.

None of the mice—including the samples—have ever been tested for COVID-19 antibodies because "there hasn't been any concern that they need to be tested at this point," Ms. Harper said.

Although early reports indicated that the lab mice were "genetically engineered" or "bioengineered" to catch and carry COVID-19, Ms. Harper said the information is misleading.

She said there's no evidence to suggest that COVID-19 experiments occurred at the Reedley facility and suggested that if the mice were carrying COVID-19 antibodies, they were likely injected with the virus in Fresno, if at all.

"There was no sign that they had been doing any form of experimentation on the mice here at the Reedley location," Ms. Harper said.



▲ The interior of a suspected biolab in Reedley, Calif., on July 31, 2023.

'Secret' Lab

Prestige Biotech, which originally operated as Universal Meditech, Inc. in Fresno, was issued a California business license on March 20, 2019, a year before the COVID-19 pandemic gripped the state.

After an electrical fire caused extensive damage at its leased Fresno facility, the beleaguered company, facing financial setbacks and the threat of eviction, relocated to Reedley. One of two businesses leasing the facility in Reedley agreed to sublease a vacant warehouse to Prestige Biotech.

"The company that I'm aware of is Prestige ... that had the lease agreement to rent here. But they were previously Universal Meditech," Ms. Harper said. "They had boxed everything up and came to Reedley, so they were not actually operating here in Reedley. It was prior, and they moved their inventory here."

The material included COVID-19 and pregnancy test kits. Some appeared to be made by the company and some didn't, she said.

"I think what they were doing is they were looking at a successful brand and then kind of modeling their products off of those, so it's hard for me to tell which products were theirs and which ones they may have purchased from another company," Ms. Harper said.

It doesn't appear any of the test kits stored at the Reedley warehouse were made there, she said.

"Some of these test kits ... were in Fresno and then some of them, I believe, were in Tulare at one point," she said. "I was told that this business had been moving around from location to location for a while. I don't know if it was because they were expanding or if they were getting evicted like they did in Fresno. But they finally were stopped here in Reedley by the local branch of government."

Public records show that the company was first registered in Nevada to Zhaojin Wang on April 3, 2019, before Xiuqin Yao—who's based in China, according to Ms. Harper—took over as president on May 28, 2021.

Ms. Harper said she questioned three female employees—who all spoke Mandarin as a first language—at the Reedley facility, as well as a man named David He and a woman who both said they were consultants for Prestige BioTech.

The company hasn't cooperated well with authorities in the ongoing investigation, which has resulted in the abatement warrants, according to Ms. Harper.

It appears that the Reedley facility was primarily an interim facility used primarily for storage while the company looked for another location back in the Fresno area.

Public Fears

Much of the public fear over the biolab discovery is based on information that hasn't been confirmed as true or not, which Ms. Harper said is one of the reasons why authorities delayed issuing a public statement.

She also said daily developments with the investigation with several agencies involved made it difficult to coordinate and release up-to-date information.

Fresno City Councilman Garry Bredefeld criticized public officials for not announcing the investigation for five months before the Mid Valley Times broke a story on the unlicensed lab, which has operated illegally since October 2022.

"From May 2 through May 4, the CDC's Division of Select Agents and Toxins inspected 850 I Street. Court documents confirm the CDC found potentially infectious agents at the location. These included both bacterial and viral agents, including: chlamydia, E. Coli, streptococcus pneumonia, hepatitis B and C, herpes 1 and 5 and rubella. The CDC also found samples of malaria," the local newspaper reported.

Mr. Bredefeld denounced public officials for not disclosing information about the "secret, illegal, and dangerous biological lab" more than five months ago when it was discovered.

"If we can't understand that this is dangerous after going through COVID and millions of people dying, I don't know what it's going to take for our elected officials to ... represent the people," he said. "The public has a right to know exactly what they know, and when they knew it, and what they intend to do about what's going on."

Mr. Bredefeld called the Reedley lab "Wuhan 2.0" in a July 29 statement that was posted on social media and questioned whether other illegal labs are operating in the state or parts of the country.

Lear Zhou contributed to this report.



▲ A sign on the wall of a suspected biolab in Reedley, Calif., on July 31, 2023.

CCP

China's Counterespionage Push Could Undermine Its Own Interests, Analysts Say

By Dorothy Li

The Chinese regime is calling on its citizens to join counterespionage work, a move aimed at stoking nationalism and solidifying the Chinese Communist Party's authoritarian rule. However, the emphasis on national security will harm the regime itself, analysts say.

In a rare move, China's Ministry of State Security, the central agency overlooking intelligence and security operations at home and abroad, established an official account on the Chinese social media platform WeChat that went live on July 31.

A system that makes it "normal" for the masses to participate in counterespionage must be established, the ministry wrote in its first post, titled "Anti-Espionage Fight Requires the Mobilization of the Entire Society!"

"Currently, countering espionage remains a grim and complex task," the ministry wrote. "It not only requires the national security agency to play the role of special anti-espionage organs but also requires the extensive participation of the people."

The dire warning of the threat of foreign spies was met with disbelief among outside observers, who noted that the CCP had deployed a massive network abroad to collect intelligence and that its hackers broke into the email accounts of U.S. government agencies.

The CCP "is using the threat of external spies to stoke nationalism, prompting [the public] to be loyal to the regime," said Su Tzu-yun, a senior analyst at Taiwan's government-funded Institute for National Defense and Security Research.

National security should be understood as the CCP's political security, according to Mr. Su.

'Side Effects'

The call to mobilize the masses to participate in anti-spying work follows an expansion of Beijing's anti-espionage law that took effect in July.

The law allows authorities carrying out an anti-espionage probe to gain access to data, electronic equipment, and information on personal property.

Notably, the legislation broadens the definition of espionage to "all documents, data, materials, or items related to national security and interests." Still, it doesn't specify what falls under national security, sparking fears of a more hostile environment for foreign businesses, researchers, and journalists in China.

Foreign firms have already faced more scrutiny before vaguely worded legislation came into force. In March, Chinese police detained five local employees of Mintz, a New York-based corporate intelligence firm, and shut its office in Beijing. The Foreign Ministry accused the company of engaging in "illegal business operations." Since then, authorities have raided the offices of consultancy Capvision and questioned employees at Bain & Co.

Authorities also have detained an employee of Japanese drugmaker Astellas on "suspicion of engaging in espionage activities which violates criminal law and coun-



▲ Chinese leader Xi Jinping (on screen) delivers a speech during the celebrations of the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of China, at Tiananmen Square in Beijing on July 1, 2021.

ter-espionage law," China's Foreign Ministry stated in late March. Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida has vowed that his government will continue to strongly demand that the Beijing regime release its citizen.

Mr. Su said the expansion of the anti-spying law would likely harm the CCP, whose leadership is seeking to assure foreign companies that China will continue to open up and welcome investment amid a frail recovery from a pandemic slowdown.

He pointed to a Bloomberg report that states that Morgan Stanley is shifting more than 200 technology developers out of China after the country tightened access to a cache of data stored onshore. The report, citing unidentified persons, claims that most employees are moving mainly to Hong Kong and Singapore.

A June report by the European Union Chamber of Commerce in China found "a significant deterioration of business sentiment," with foreign firms shifting their existing investment or part of supply chains out of the country.

"The anti-espionage law will indeed have great side effects on the CCP itself," Mr. Su said.

Ratcheting-Up Security Call

As China's economy declines, the CCP is shifting public attention to the threat of foreign agents, with the leadership ratcheting up the call for counterespionage work in recent months.

On July 14, the nation's spymaster called for officials to support the cause on "covert front lines," referencing the Party's intelligence work.

The message was delivered by Chen Wenqing, secretary of the Party's Central Political and Legal Affairs Commission, a top security post with oversight of police, judges, and spies in China's opaque political system, as he chaired a commendation meeting in Beijing on July 14 to recognize contributions by officials in its national security system.

Party organs at all levels and relevant departments must "pay great attention and support for the works of covert front lines," Mr. Chen said, according to a summary of



▲ Youths walk past a propaganda billboard about the "China Dream," a slogan associated with Chinese leader Xi Jinping, outside a school in Beijing on March 12, 2018.

the meeting published by state-run media outlet Xinhua.

He called on "resolutely implementing" CCP leader Xi Jinping's "overall national security concept."

U.S. CIA Director William Burns acknowledged that Beijing has "made progress" in rebuilding intelligence operations in China.

Mr. Burns made the remarks at the Aspen Security Forum on July 20 when asked whether his agency had recovered from the setback in which a dozen of informants were allegedly arrested or executed by the Chinese regime.

"About a decade ago, China rolled up a lot of CIA operations in China. A dozen or more CIA sources were arrested or, worse, executed. Have you rebuilt?" host Mary Louise Kelly asked.

"We've made progress, and we're working very hard over recent years to ensure that we have strong human intelligence capability to complement what we can acquire through other methods," Mr. Burns responded.

The pronouncements from Washington angered Beijing. China's Foreign Ministry noted Mr. Burns's comment, stressing that it'll take "all measures necessary" to defend its security.

Mr. Xi, China's most powerful leader in decades, has instructed senior officials to speed up the modernization of its national security system and capabilities.

China has already poured massive resources into building a nationwide surveillance system, cracking down on domestic and foreign businesses, and punishing anyone it deems threatening to its national security. The amount that Chinese authorities spent on policing society surpassed its national defense budget in 2020.

At a national security meeting in May, Mr. Xi said the external threats faced by China have become "more complex," and warned that the country must prepare for "extreme scenarios."

To push the public to participate in the anti-spying drive, the Public Security Bureau stated that departments at various levels must carry out anti-espionage training, incorporating such information into education and propaganda agencies.

"News, broadcasting, television, cultural, and internet information services should carry out targeted anti-espionage publicity and education for the entire society," it stated in a recent post.

Li Yuanhua, an Australia-based Chinese scholar, said the latest propaganda campaign is designed to further tighten the Party's grip on the country.

"Under the pretext of [countering] spies, [the CCP] is intended to create an atmosphere that everyone in the society could be an enemy," said Mr. Li, a former history professor at the Capital Normal University College of Education in Beijing.

"The CCP wants to control everything, including its people. That's the nature of an authoritarian regime. To make that happen, the key factor is to make people hostile and monitor each other so that the CCP could feel a sense of safety.

"The purpose is to protect the stumbling authoritarian rule."

Luo Yao and Reuters contributed to this report.

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