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CHINA INSIDER

INSIDE CHINA'S GLOBAL MILITARY EXPANSION

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Cambodian navy boats are berthed at a jetty in Ream naval base in Preah Sihanouk province during a government organized media tour on July 26, 2019.

SPECIAL REPORT

Inside China’s Global Military Expansion

China’s foreign port takeovers a front for global military expansion, say experts, politicians

By Andrew Thornebrooke

For two decades, China’s communist regime has poured tens of billions of dollars into low- and middle-income nations, funding massive port projects in the name of global development.

However, experts and lawmakers are warning that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which rules China as a single-party state, seeks to expand its global military presence by creating new overseas naval bases out of the commercial ports it has funded and built abroad.

According to a new report by AidData, a think tank that analyzes government aid expenditures on international development projects, the regime has spent nearly \$30 billion on overseas port infrastructure since 2001.

For those in Congress who are tasked with countering the threat from a newly expansionist CCP, the regime’s pursuit of new basing opportunities is an alarming development that requires immediate action.

Rep. Mike Gallagher (R-Wis.), who chairs the House Select Committee on the CCP, believes that the only means of countering such an expansion is through increased military and diplomatic investments by the United States. Such investments in partner nations, he hopes, will counter the creeping influence of the CCP.

“The Chinese Communist Party’s expansion of its overseas naval presence is a blaring alarm, and we keep hitting snooze,” Mr. Gallagher told The Epoch Times.

“To counter the CCP’s malign influence and military aggression, the United States needs to both boost its own military-industrial capacity and be more present in the Indo-Pacific, expanding development and diplomacy with key partners to ensure they don’t succumb to debt-trap diplomacy.”

China Seeks Global Military Expansion

AidData’s report, “Harboring Global Ambitions,” analyzes more than 20 years of official investments by China’s state-owned entities into overseas seaport projects that might form the groundwork for a new naval base.

From 2000 to 2023, Beijing spent a staggering \$29.9 billion through loans and grants for 123 different projects at 78 ports in 46 low- and middle-income nations, according to the report.

Each of these projects was funded directly by Beijing or state-owned companies.

This means that the report doesn’t even begin to look at the potential spending of shadow corporations without official ties to the regime, nor does it account for the regime’s policy of military-civil fusion, which demands that all private Chinese entities create a military advantage for the CCP.

Paul Crespo, president of the Center for American Defense Studies think tank, believes that the monumental effort is partly driven by the regime’s desire to hold the United States at threat anywhere in the world.

“China is rapidly creating a large, offensive, blue water navy capable of challenging the [United States] far beyond the western Pacific, especially during a war over Taiwan,” Mr. Crespo said.

“In addition to allowing it to threaten our supply lines, China has long wanted to make the [United States] feel the way it feels with a foreign superpower navy on its doorstep.”

The CCP currently only acknowledges



▲ Members of the Cambodian Navy walk on a jetty in Ream Naval Base, Cambodia, on July 26, 2019.

one overseas military base in Djibouti, in the Horn of Africa. Chinese officials have long acknowledged a more global ambition for their military, however, and suggested that similar bases could be in the works.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said in 2016 that China was amenable to working with partner nations to develop similar facilities to that in Djibouti.

Likewise, the 2020 edition of “Science of Military Strategy”, published by China’s National Defense University, suggested that a new network of long-range naval facilities was necessary to extend China’s reach.

“To improve the naval force’s ocean-going support capabilities, in addition to the development of large-scale accompanying support ships, we must also attach importance to the construction of long-distance maritime comprehensive replenishment points, and multi-channels to ensure naval forces carry out overseas military operations in the ocean,” the document reads.

Mr. Crespo, who previously served as a naval attaché at the Defense Intelligence Agency, said that such a network of bases would be a prerequisite for the long-term sustainment of China’s increasingly global military presence.

“To challenge the U.S. Navy globally, China needs bases for rearming, refueling, [resupplying], and to repair its rapidly expanding fleet,” Mr. Crespo said.

Similarly, the AidData report places the regime’s many overseas investments within the broader context of a tug-of-war for global influence with the United States.

In contrast to Mr. Gallagher’s ironclad commitment to counter might with might anywhere in the world, the report suggests that such an approach may only worsen global tensions.

“The [United States] and allies must be vigilant and allocate resources wisely, fostering alliances and partnerships with countries considering moving toward China,” the report reads. “But Western coalitions should not overreact to news or rumors of China establishing a base here or there.

“A headlong rush by a Western country or alliance to establish new bases overseas as a means of counterbalancing might provide exactly the justification or cover China needs to site a naval base of its own.”

Whatever approach the United States takes, it remains an open question just where exactly the next CCP base will spring up.

By comparing total investments in individual port projects and weighing the strategic value of a geographic location, the strength of the CCP’s relations with the local elites, regional political stability, and the nation’s voting alignment with China on the world stage, the Aid-

Data report suggests a few countries as top contenders for new Chinese military infrastructure.

The choices stretch from the Indo-Pacific to the Atlantic, with each region offering distinct advantages and disadvantages.

Indo-Pacific Base Most Likely

The Indo-Pacific is, perhaps, the most logical place for a new military base.

The CCP seeks to break out past the first island chain, thereby securing its commercial and military vessels’ free rein of the seas. Likewise, it seeks greater control of fishing territories and precious resources throughout the region, from the South China Sea to the Indian Ocean.

If the CCP is to hold the United States and its allies at immediate threat and gain unfettered control of the world’s most valuable trade routes, it needs greater control of the Indo-Pacific.

Sam Kessler, geopolitical analyst at risk management firm North Star Support Group, believes that a base in this region is the logical step for the regime in its ascent to global domination.

“At this current moment, it is realistic to see Beijing focusing on building future naval bases that are closer to their area of influence rather than be sprawled out on various continents,” Mr. Kessler said.

Likewise, the AidData report finds that “the Pacific and the Indian Oceans are China’s highest priority maritime environments.”

In particular, the report finds Hambantota in Sri Lanka the most likely contender for China’s next overseas base due to its strategic location off of India, the popularity enjoyed by the regime among local elites, and its track record of voting in line with CCP interests internationally.

Indeed, the CCP owns a 99-year lease on Hambantota Port. The agreement is a result of what some analysts dub China’s “debt trap” diplomacy: The lease was negotiated in exchange for relief of more than \$1 billion in Chinese debt.

Mr. Kessler agrees. The strategic and economic benefits of a Sri Lankan base are just too valuable to overlook.

“Like the Belt and Road Initiative, the CCP needs a networking web or a shield of protection that surrounds their main realm of control, which is mainland China,” Mr. Kessler said.

“Ports with high-level investments like Gwadar and Hambantota serve strategic value and enable the CCP to expand their power projection capabilities throughout the Indian Ocean, Indo-Pacific, Middle East, and also Eurasia.”

Indeed, Beijing has invested more than \$2 billion into the Hambantota International Port in the past two decades, making it the CCP’s single-largest port investment. The CCP has also invested more than \$430 million into Sri Lanka’s nearby Port of Colombo, which could



◀ Rep. Mike Gallagher (R-Wis.) chairs the House Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party.

offer similar or support facilities. Both would allow China to rule the seas as a direct rival to India.

Sri Lanka, though an obvious choice, isn’t the only possibility. The AidData report and Mr. Kessler note the possibility of Gwadar in Pakistan and Port Luganville in Vanuatu, near Australia.

To that end, the regime has invested some \$577 million into Gwadar and \$97 million into Port Luganville, each offering its own benefits.

A Vanuatu base would allow the regime to break its apparent containment by U.S. and allied forces, according to the report, while one in Pakistan would further cement the regime’s expansion of the Belt and Road Initiative into the Middle East and allow it greater control of the vital Strait of Hormuz.

Notably, Pakistan’s navy is also the world’s largest foreign purchaser of Chinese arms. A naval base there, as such, would improve such a military-to-military relationship and possibly increase interoperability between the two nations’ forces.

The Cambodia Connection

There are other considerations to be made regarding the Indo-Pacific. Namely, how current military development may lessen or intensify future development.

“Cambodia with Ream port may play a role in this scenario as well,” Mr. Kessler said, referring to the CCP’s ongoing extension of the Ream military base in Cambodia, where the regime is building deepwater facilities for Cambodia’s largest naval base and is likely to benefit from access to the facility itself.

“While the official investment to date has been small, Ream, Cambodia, is very likely to be a [Chinese naval] facility in one form or another,” the AidData report states.

The U.S. national security community has issued warnings since 2019 that Cambodia and China drafted a secret pact that would guarantee China unfettered military access to the port on the Gulf of Thailand upon the completion of Ream’s expansion.

The expansion and modernization of the base will increase the size of the vessels serviced there five times over, from those with a displacement of 1,000 tons to those of 5,000 tons. That means that the port will still be too small to house China’s newest Type 055 guided missile cruisers but will be able to host its smaller frigates, including those equipped with anti-ship missiles and electronic warfare packages.

The port is also adjacent to the South China Sea, where China has continuously asserted illegal claims to expand its territory through invented “historical rights” and the creation of artificial islands, which it claims are part of its territory proper.

Growing Interest in West African Facilities

Despite the obvious advantages of an Indo-Pacific base, there’s good reason to believe that the CCP could seek to build

a military base in West Africa.

China has spent \$6.9 billion in West African port projects across nine nations: Angola, Cameroon, Cote d’Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Mauritania, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone.

Flows of cash and other resources from China to West African nations could indicate that such an expansion is well in the works, according to Alexander Wooley, director of partnerships and communications at AidData, whose team compiled the report on China’s investments.

“They’re going to have a base somewhere in that region,” Mr. Wooley said during an Aug. 15 talk at The Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank.

“Which [country] it might be, they’re not telling anyone.”

There are hints, however, and the AidData report suggests that Equatorial Guinea and Cameroon are likely contenders. China has already spent more than \$659 million improving the port in Bata, Equatorial Guinea, and more than \$1.3 billion in Kribi, Cameroon.

Both locations would offer the CCP unparalleled placement on the Gulf of Guinea, cementing China as the go-to nation for foreign investment throughout Africa’s rapidly expanding market while granting the regime a foothold on the Atlantic Ocean.

“A Chinese naval base in West or Central Africa would put the [People’s Liberation Army Navy] within easy striking distance of the US and NATO member nations,” the report states.

To that end, a top U.S. general said last year that Bata appeared to be where the regime had made the most traction in its efforts to expand its African military presence.

Likewise, Kribi now boasts deep enough waters and a large enough pier to accommodate the largest Chinese warships.

“Both Bata and Kribi ports have attractive conditions for Beijing to set up bases and long-term relationships with their leadership, too,” Mr. Kessler said.

“However, the primary goal of the CCP will always be about preserving their realm of influence in addition to expanding it. Regarding naval bases, they’re more likely to build from within and expand outward first.”

US-China Competition Takes Global Character

Wherever the CCP chooses to build next, the decision will not be without resistance of the kind that Mr. Gallagher and the Select Committee on the CCP intend to deliver.

The AidData report notes that wherever the United States catches wind of CCP investments, it will likely seek to sway the local government to its own ends.

Such efforts appear to be underway all over the world, including in the United States’ own backyard. The regime has reportedly secured an agreement with Cuba, for example, to build a spy base just 100 miles off the coast of Florida.

To that end, the CCP needs to be cautious about maintaining a defensible position, especially if it intends to build

a facility prior to an invasion of Taiwan.

“An important caveat for China is that none of the ports described above is currently militarily defensible,” the report states. “In a conflict situation, they would become high-value targets for an enemy.”

Still, the regime faces difficulties. The CCP lacks the many formal allies of the United States. That means that it can’t simply count on its military presence being welcomed anywhere in the world until it can construct its own bases to ensure their protection by force.

“[China does] not belong to a typical defense alliance like NATO or the relatively new AUKUS, so they don’t have relationships with countries where there’s some level playing field in terms of the relationship where they could base their ship, like the U.S. fleet in Naples for example,” Mr. Wooley said.

“If they want to deploy ships further afield, they don’t have those relationships with an ally with a host naval base. They don’t have as many replenishment ships as other modern navies might have, so it makes sense to be looking for a place to have a naval base.”

As for the United States, the leadership is currently stuck in the position of needing to guess where the next Chinese base will be while simultaneously preventing it from being built.

As such, Mr. Kessler said, U.S. leadership would need to adapt—and adapt quickly—to shifts in China’s strategic thinking and the options available to it.

“The U.S. and its allies will not only need to play catch up but to also adapt approaches, mindsets, strategies, and tactics in how to effectively minimize or prevent these patterns from becoming more successful and expansionary by the CCP in the long run,” Mr. Kessler said.

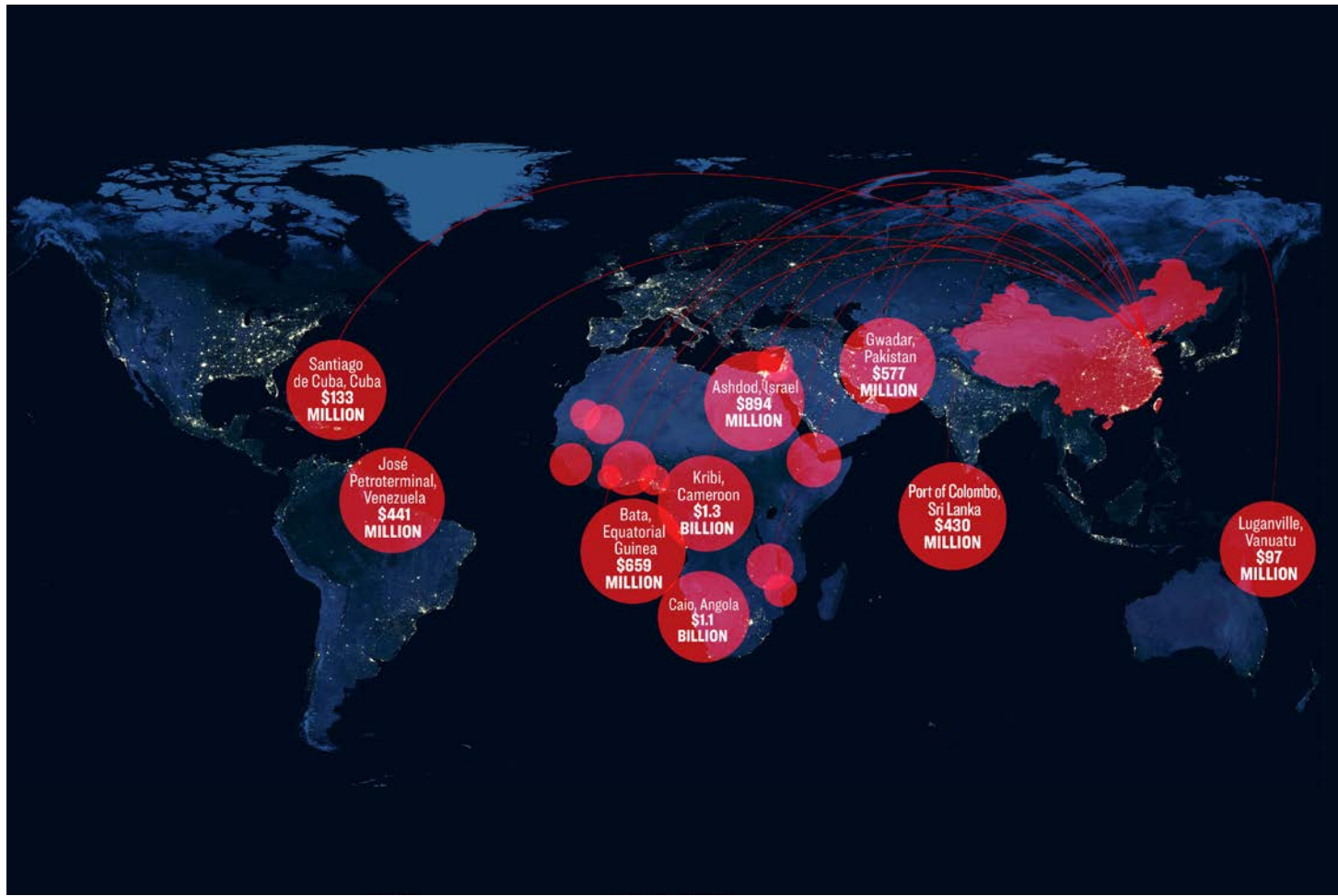
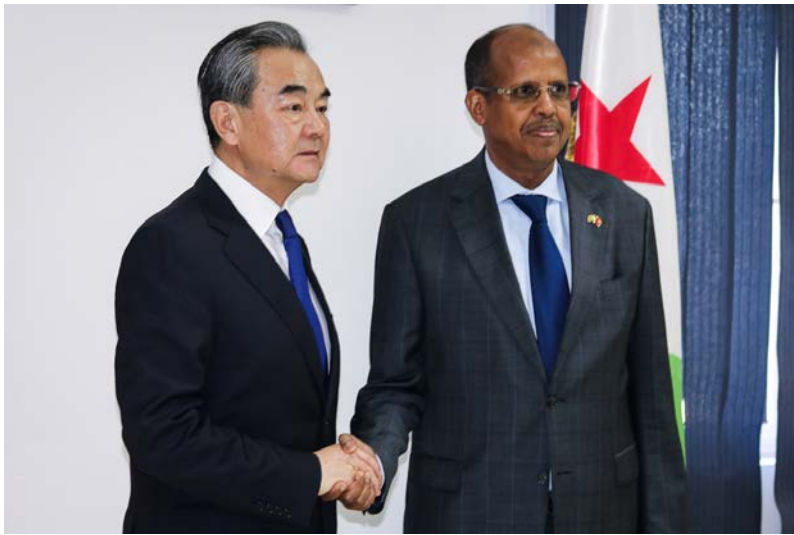


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-AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

SPECIAL REPORT

How the Biden Admin Is Killing China’s High-Tech Ambitions

By Eva Fu

Chinese leader Xi Jinping has long made clear his vision that semiconductors will help the regime overtake the United States as a global technological superpower. Xi’s ambition, however—for China to produce 70 percent of its microchips at home by 2025—is now a distant dream.

Standing in the way of Beijing’s ambitions is a set of sweeping U.S. export controls enacted in October 2022 that aim to hamstring the regime’s power to buy high-end chips or make those of their own.

In January, Yangtze Memory Technologies (YMTC), China’s largest memory chip maker and the parent company of XMC, was said to be cutting as many as 10 percent of its 6,000-strong workforce across all departments.

By market research firm Yole Group’s estimates, YMTC was on track to double its global flash memory chip market share by 2027 to 10 percent before the export controls kicked in and squashed that prospect.

As one of about two dozen Chinese artificial intelligence chip producers blacklisted in December 2022, YMTC isn’t the only Chinese tech firm reeling: In the past four months, at least two phone chip-making initiatives have unraveled, including one under Oppo, a Chinese phone brand that ranks fourth in the world in sales.

Companies once heralded as stars have been downsizing and cutting bonuses to stay afloat. The nation’s chip imports plunged 17 percent by volume in the first seven months of the year. [The domestic tech struggles have led the regime to restart a state fund, which last year became entangled in an anti-corruption probe, to pump about \$1.9 billion into YMTC in late February.]

The race for technological supremacy that has become a hallmark of U.S.–China tension is increasingly allowing the United States to go on the offensive. Together with sanctions and tariffs, the U.S. measures are inflicting pain on Beijing in ways that may have seeded out of reach just years ago.

“It’s grinding China down,” Antonio Graceffo, an economic analyst on China and an Epoch Times contributor, said in an interview. “All of this is just absolutely battering the Chinese economy.”

Economic Decline

The world’s second-largest economy hasn’t been in good shape this year. The property sector, which for decades has been a powerful engine for growth, has come to a halt. Exports in July recorded the sharpest fall since the onset of the pandemic in 2020, while imports also plunged by double digits. The worsening slowdown may dash Beijing’s chance to ever surpass the U.S. economy, according to a Bloomberg Economics projection, flipping previous research predictions that had China ahead as early as 2028.

With at least 1 in 5 youth in China left jobless, Mr. Xi, in May, instructed young Chinese to “eat bitterness” and “seek out hardship” on their own.

At the same time, the Chinese regime has been open about who it considers

President Joe Biden looks at a quantum computer as he tours the IBM facility in Poughkeepsie, N.Y., on Oct. 6, 2022.



MANDEL NGAN/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

All of this is just absolutely battering the Chinese economy.

Antonio Graceffo, economic analyst

to be the culprit for its economic woes.

Xie Feng, the Chinese ambassador to the United States, in late August pointed to a 14.5 percent drop in U.S.–China trade in the first half of 2023, saying it was a “direct consequence” of U.S. tariffs and export restrictions, and claiming that the United States is trying to “shut out” China.

“Is this fair? Does this truly serve U.S. interests?” Mr. Feng asked in a video speech at Forbes’s U.S.–China Business Forum, while citing a 19 percent U.S. tariff.

U.S. Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo rebuffed a Chinese appeal to lift export curbs during her recent trip to China.

“We don’t negotiate on matters of national security,” she said.

“We are trying to choke their military capacity,” she recently told NBC. “So if they feel that, that means our strategy’s working.”

Ms. Raimondo said she also confronted Chinese officials while she was in China about the state-backed hacking of her emails, saying it “erodes trust.”

“I didn’t pull any punches,” she said on CNN’s “State of the Union” on Sept. 3.

‘We’re All on Board’

Rhetorically, Washington has repeatedly disavowed intentions to decouple from China, instead preferring the term “de-risking” to describe the steps it has

taken to reduce reliance on China for critical supplies.

Four senior U.S. officials have made high-profile trips to China in the past several months in attempts to warm trade and defense ties.

Using the term de-risking has two benefits, Mr. Graceffo said, to avoid overt conflicts with China and to get European allies on board. Ultimately, he said, it’s “easier to get the Europeans to swallow a word like de-risking rather than decoupling.”

He noted that during the G-7 summit in Hiroshima in May, the leading industrial nations agreed to a “common set of tools” to counter China’s economic coercion and build supply chain resilience.

“That’s it—we sold it,” said Mr. Graceffo.

“That’s huge. It’s the seven most important countries, and we’re all on board.”

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) cut off military communications with the United States in August 2022 over then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s trip to Taiwan and has since refused to restore the hotline.

In a rare social media post, China’s Ministry of State Security accused the United States of entertaining a “two-faced” strategy that’s “doomed to fail.” The ministry cited, among a list of grievances, the recent U.S. military sales to Taiwan, a first-ever military transfer to the democratic-ruling island under a program usually reserved for sovereign nations. He also said the United States is “stirring trouble” in Tibet and the South China Sea, and “bad mouthing” the Chinese economy.

Any meeting between Mr. Xi and President Joe Biden in San Francisco on the sidelines of the APEC summit in November will hinge upon the United States “showing sufficient sincerity,” the Ministry of State Security asserted, while declaring it “impossible” for the regime to align with the United States.

Deflecting blame is a well-worn tactic in the regime’s playbook, although questions remain about whether its threats will work this time.

The Biden administration emphasizes the need for “intense diplomacy alongside intense competition.” Even as U.S. officials engage with China, President Biden has rolled out restrictions for investments in high-end technologies such as quantum computing, microelectronics, advanced semiconductors, and artificial intelligence, a matter he declared a “national emergency.”

The restrictions are “probably just the

tip of the iceberg” in terms of what the United States is going to do, Clete Willems, senior fellow with the Atlantic Council’s GeoEconomics Center, told The Epoch Times. Mr. Willems, who was a lead trade negotiator with China in the Trump White House, added that the Biden administration is set to review its controls after a year to assess how they might expand.

Under the backdrop of the October 2022 chips ban and the \$280 billion CHIPS and Science Act signed into law last August—of which one-fifth goes to semiconductors—the world’s largest chipmaker, Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co., has pledged to triple its investment in Arizona to a total of \$40 billion and open a second factory.

The White House in August directed federal agencies to use only domestically produced materials for government-funded infrastructure projects, as part of the 2021 “Build America, Buy America” Act.

Multinational firms are heeding the message. Lobby group Reshoring Initiative estimated that U.S. firms made more than 364,000 hires in 2022, up 53 percent from the previous year. The chip-making and electric vehicle battery sectors made up more than half of the jobs.

Foreign direct investment into China meanwhile slumped 87 percent to \$4.9 billion in the April-June period, the most significant year-on-year drop since 1998, according to August data from the State Administration of Foreign Exchange of China.

“U.S. measures are making people think twice about” investing in China, said Mr. Willems, but in part, it’s also of China’s own making.

The regime’s zero-COVID policy that shut down neighborhoods for a handful of positive tests, its saber-rattling on Taiwan, its regulatory crackdown on the tech sector, its raid on two U.S. companies in Shanghai, and its recently broadened anti-spying law that could put regular business activities at risk, have all contributed to a hostile environment that, in Ms. Raimondo’s words, make China “uninvestable.”

In the wider measure of investor confidence, China is facing the world’s biggest millionaire exodus, with an estimated 13,500 rich Chinese seeking to emigrate this year.

All of this is happening while the United States is—according to Ms. Raimondo—on track to “have a large, deep,

best-in-the-world semiconductor ecosystem” by the end of the decade.

“We already lead the world in the design of semiconductors. You can see that with the AI chips. We lead the world in software,” she said in a recent media appearance.

As of now, the United States leads China in chip technology by at least one generation, according to Su Tzu-yun, director of the Institute for National Defense and Security Research of Taiwan. With the new U.S. restrictions, it’s as if “the CCP is marching in place while the United States is charging ahead,” he told The Epoch Times.

Hurdles for Beijing

The Chinese regime has struck back against the U.S.-imposed controls, but its retaliation hasn’t been “very successful so far in really changing the equation there,” observed Mr. Willems.

A number of international semiconductor companies have stated they expect no material impact from China’s new export curb on gallium and germanium, both of which are key to manufacturing electronics and chips.

The China-led BRICS coalition that aims to dethrone U.S. dollar dominance seems unlikely to last due to a lack of



STEFAN ROUSSEAU - POOL/GETTY IMAGES

(L–R) G-7 leaders European Council President Charles Michel, Italian Premier Giorgia Meloni, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, French President Emmanuel Macron, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, U.S. President Joe Biden, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen pose for a group photo at the Itsukushima Shrine during the G-7 Summit in Hiroshima, Japan, on May 19, 2023.

We are trying to choke their military capacity.

Gina Raimondo, U.S. Commerce Secretary

A chip by Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co. is on display at the 2020 World Semiconductor Conference in Nanjing, Jiangsu Province, China, on Aug. 26, 2020.



STR/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

other common interests among the member states.

India, which hasn’t seen eye-to-eye with China since an intermittent violent border clash started three years ago, is one of the significant economies in the BRICS bloc alongside Russia and China, which are both now in an economic crisis.

India’s Prime Minister Narendra Modi paid his first U.S. state visit to a red carpet welcome in June, just ahead of the G20 summit in New Delhi. Mr. Modi criticized the Chinese regime for entrapping poor nations in debt with its massive infrastructure financing program, the Belt and Road Initiative.

A Growing Coalition

Rep. Michael McCaul (R-Texas), chairman of House Foreign Affairs Committee, said in a Sept. 6 briefing at the U.S. Embassy in The Hague that he suspects China’s largest chipmaker, Semiconductor Manufacturing International Corp (SMIC), violated U.S. sanctions in supplying components to Huawei, the beleaguered Chinese telecom giant that the West has shunned.

SMIC’s chip that powers Huawei’s Mate 60 Pro smartphone was seen as a breakthrough in China, but shares in SMIC sank on Sept. 7 following McCaul’s and other U.S. lawmakers’ criticisms.

“This chip likely could not be produced without US technology,” said Rep. Mike Gallagher (R-Wis.), who leads the House China Committee.

“The time has come to end all U.S. technology exports to both Huawei and SMIC to make clear any firm that flouts U.S. law and undermines our national security will be cut off from our technology.”

China is reportedly planning to put another \$40 billion to drive chipmaking. But Frank Tian Xie, a business professor at the University of South Carolina–Aiken, sees these efforts as a sign that the U.S. tech blockade is biting hard.

“The U.S. sanctions are making a real impact,” he told The Epoch Times’ sister network NTD. “That’s why the CCP is now so desperate.”

The CCP’s opportunities to circumvent sanctions are narrowing as the United States builds a coalition of support.

The recent trilateral summit at Camp David in Maryland resulted in the United States, Japan, and South Korea denouncing Chinese aggression as the nations committed to coordinate policies in securing supply chains on critical technologies.

In a joint statement, the three nations said they will also “enhance cooperation on technology protection measures to prevent the cutting-edge technologies we develop from being illegally exported or stolen abroad.”

Mr. Willem called the statement a “big success for the United States.”

Mr. Graceffo, and other China experts, see no turning back in the hardline U.S. stance toward China, which began with the Trump administration and expanded under President Biden.

And de-risking, a “discussion concept only” just five years ago, seems now a reality.

The U.S. policies had for years been to “make China the manufacturing center of the world,” Christopher Gopal, a business professor at the University of California–San Diego with three decades of experience in the global supply chain, told The Epoch Times.

Now, he said, it’s heading the other way, and China is “going to have to live with it.”

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▲ Prime Minister Liz Truss speaking in the House of Commons, London, on Sept. 8, 2022.

CCP INFILTRATION

Designate China as Threat Over ‘Espionage Cell’ in Parliament, UK MPs Say

By Patricia Devlin

Former Prime Minister Liz Truss has described China as the largest threat to freedom and democracy in the world as she urged the government to designate the country as a threat to the UK.

The former prime minister was speaking in the Commons as MPs lined up to grill Deputy Prime Minister Oliver Dowden over claims a Chinese “espionage cell” had infiltrated government.

Many politicians told the House how they were unaware that two men—including a parliamentary researcher—were arrested over the spying claims, until reading about it in the press.

Pressure has since mounted on both Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and Foreign Secretary James Cleverly—who visited China last month—to reveal exactly when they became aware of the allegations.

On Sunday, The Times of London revealed that one of those detained—a man in his 20s—had worked closely with senior security ministers and MPs, including those sanctioned by the Chinese regime.

He was arrested in Edinburgh in March, while another man in his 30s was arrested in Oxfordshire on March 13.

Both were held on suspicion of offences under Section 1 of the Official Secrets Act 1911, which punishes offences that are said to be “prejudicial to the safety or interests of the state.”

They have been bailed until early October.

Details of the arrests and ongoing investigation by the Metropolitan Police’s Counter Terrorism Command only came to light over the weekend.

In a statement to Parliament on Monday afternoon, Mr. Dowden said: “These are serious allegations and it is right that they are being thoroughly investigated by the police and relevant agencies.

“It remains an absolute priority for the government to take all necessary steps to protect the United Kingdom from any foreign state activity, which seeks to undermine our national security, prosperity, and democratic values.

“The government has been clear that China represents a systemic challenge to the United Kingdom and to our values.”

China Ban

The deputy prime minister added that the UK must be able to look the Chinese in the eye and “call out unacceptable behaviour.”

After mentioning Beijing’s “continued disregard for universal human rights and international commitments in Xinjiang” and its “erasure of dissenting voices” in Hong Kong, Mr. Dowden said: “We are clear-eyed about that challenge and we must be able to look the Chinese in the eye and call out unacceptable behaviour directly, just as our prime minister was able to do with Premier Li [Keqiang] at the G-20 in New Delhi this weekend. An approach that has also been taken consistently by our Five Eyes allies.”

However, Mr. Dowden said “actions speak louder than words,” adding: “That’s why I took the decision to instruct departments to cease deployment of all surveillance equipment subject to China’s national intelligence law from sensitive government sites in November last year.

“It’s one of the reasons why I banned TikTok from government devices, it’s why the government has investigated and called out so-called Chinese overseas police service stations.”

Mr. Dowden was grilled by both party colleagues and opposition leaders on exactly when government knew of the espionage claims.

SNP Cabinet Office spokeswoman Kirsty Blackman said: “When did the deputy prime minister himself learn of these allegations and of these arrests? Why did MPs only learn of this from The Times, and will the government institute as soon as possible a review into the decision-making process that led to MPs not being told about this in order that critical updates like this are given to MPs in future and this decision-making process is never allowed to happen again?”

The deputy prime minister responded saying he would not give a “running commentary” on security issues, but added he is “briefed on all relevant matters.”

Espionage Cell

Ms. Truss, who previously called for an “economic NATO” to tackle Beijing’s growing authoritarianism, pushed Mr. Dowden on the UK’s response to the serious spying claims.

“These are extremely worrying reports about the level of infiltration of Chinese-supported forces into our democracy,” she told the Commons.

“Does he agree that what we need to do is to recognise that China is the largest threat, both to the world and to the United Kingdom, for freedom and democracy?”

“And does he not agree that the government should designate it as such?”

Mr. Dowden replied that the UK is “clear-eyed.”

“We will continue to take whatever steps are necessary based on appropriate advice to provide that protection for our nation and our democratic institutions,” he said.

Former Tory leader Sir Iain Duncan Smith also pushed Mr. Dowden on what senior ministers knew about a potential “espionage cell” at the heart of government.

He said: “When did the foreign secretary get told about this investigation? Was it before he went to Beijing, and if he went to Beijing with this knowledge, did he raise it with his counterpart in Beijing, because it’s very important to know whether we have already said it.”

Sir Iain added: “The problem lies in the mess we’ve got into over what we define China as in respect to us. Are they a threat or are they not? If they are a threat, why don’t we call them a threat and take the relative action that is necessary to deal with them on that basis and sanction some people?”

Mr. Dowden said Mr. Cleverly “regularly raises electoral interference and interference with our democratic institutions” with his Chinese counterpart.

He said: “It would not be the case, and it has not been the case generally, that specific cases—particularly those that are subject to an ongoing police investigation—would be raised.”

Spy Denial

Conservative former minister Tim Loughton, who has been sanctioned by China, said he and colleagues are “on the frontline of this threat” before



▲ Cabinet Office minister Oliver Dowden announces the ban of TikTok on government devices in the House of Commons, London, on March 16, 2023.

bemoaning a lack of briefings on the case as he told MPs, “I found out more about this character involved from my son, who just happened to be at university with him, than anything I’ve been told formally.”

On Sunday, The Times of London revealed that the researcher at the centre of the allegations had links with senior Tories including security minister Tom Tugendhat and Foreign Affairs Committee Chairwoman Alicia Kearns.

He was linked with at least one China group involving ministers. Documents seen by The Epoch Times show he resigned from one group as director in June.

He was previously listed as a person with significant control on company documents.

The researcher, who has not been named by police or MPs, yesterday released a statement through his lawyers denying the claims.

He said: “I feel forced to respond to the media accusations that I am a ‘Chinese spy’.

“It is wrong that I should be obliged to make any form of public comment on the misreporting that has taken place.

“However, given what has been reported, it is vital that it is known that I am completely innocent.

“I have spent my career to date trying to educate others about the challenge and threats presented by the Chinese Communist Party.

“To do what has been claimed against me in extravagant news reporting would be against everything I stand for.”

Labour Pressure

Mr. Sunak faced calls from Labour to reveal whether Mr. Cleverly raised reports of Chinese spying in Westminster during his August visit to the country.

Sir Keir Starmer told the Commons: “The news of the arrest of a researcher here in Parliament on suspicion of spying for China is a serious breach of security conducted by the Beijing security services.

“Given the arrest happened in March, can I ask the prime minister if the foreign secretary knew about this incident before he visited China last month, and if he did, did he raise it on that trip?”

Pointing to previous answers by Mr. Dowden which avoided the issue, Sir Keir added: “My question is specific. I would ask the prime minister to address it directly.”

Responding to Labour, Mr. Sunak said: “I am sure he will appreciate that as there is an ongoing investigation, as you have also said Mr. Speaker, I am limited in what I can say specifically.

“But I have been emphatically clear in our engagement with China that we will not accept any interference in our democracy and parliamentary system.”

As he updated the Commons on his time at the G-20 summit in India, Mr. Sunak earlier told MPs: “The sanctity of this place must be protected and the right of members to speak their minds without fear or sanction must be maintained.

“We will defend our democracy and our security.

“So I was emphatic with Premier Li that actions which seek to undermine British democracy are completely unacceptable and will never be tolerated.”

PA Media contributed to this report.

ORGAN HARVESTING

US Website Hit With Cyberattacks After Releasing Testimony on CCP’s Forced Organ Harvesting

By Eva Fu

A New York-based research group became the target of malicious cyberattacks almost immediately after publishing testimony of a whistleblower doctor’s encounter with a Falun Gong practitioner who had her kidney removed against her will in China. The woman was a victim of the communist regime’s forced organ harvesting and perished not long after her conversation with the doctor, according to the whistleblower.

In April 2019, Zhang Xiuqin, 46, briefly survived an operation to remove one of her kidneys and relayed her experience to a doctor at a key military hospital in Harbin, the capital of China’s northernmost province Heilongjiang.

The whistleblower doctor, who is unnamed to protect her safety, provided a video recording of this conversation to the World Organization to Investigate the Persecution of Falun Gong (WOIPFG), a New York-based nonprofit dedicated to tracking the regime’s forced organ harvesting abuse. The organization published a transcript of the recording, as well as

about how fast they reacted.”

“If they didn’t do anything wrong, why so agitated? They could have used the media as an outlet to attack us and put the matter to an end. But they dared not breathe a word in public.”

Dr. Torsten Trey, executive director of the Washington-based medical ethics advocacy group, Doctors Against Forced Organ Harvesting, saw the matter in the same light.

“Hacking usually comes with a purpose. In a commercial setting, it is about financial gains or intellectual property theft. None of the above would apply,” he told The Epoch Times.

“If you follow the question why they were hacked, you come to the conclusion that the news about the forced organ harvesting case in the Chinese hospital must be correct. The hacking attack indicates that the video recording is authentic.”

Dr. Trey further noted that WOIPFG has withheld the video recording over concerns of the provider’s safety. The unreleased video, he suggested, may have been another incentive for the hacking operation “as the hackers might want to

prevent the release or do damage control.”

To “block, cover up, and play down” any information related to forced organ harvesting—this has been the strategy of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) since the first allegations came to light nearly two decades ago, Dr. Wang said.

Although there have been two notable exceptions.

In early 2006, witnesses went public to reveal horrors inside northeast China’s Sujiatun concentration camp, saying authorities were secretly harvesting organs from detained Falun Gong practitioners. In response, Chinese authorities abandoned the facility and, as a publicity stunt, invited U.S. diplomats for a tour around the camp.

Later that year, an undercover WOIPFG investigator recorded Dr. Lu Guoping

from southern China’s Guangxi Minzu Hospital admitted on the phone that the hospital was sourcing kidneys and livers from Falun Gong practitioners for organ transplant surgeries. In response, state-owned Chinese media Phoenix TV released an interview with Dr. Lu in which he denied the conversation.

Dr. Wang noted that the interview on Phoenix TV backfired as it actually helped verify the phone interview that WOIPFG had conducted.

“That man is a stammerer, it’s a very unique trait,” said Dr. Wang. “We interviewed him for nearly half an hour, who could make that voice up? With his image, video, and voice, it becomes another evidence proving our recording’s authenticity.”

That interview, which has since been scrubbed from China’s internet, marked the end of state media’s attempts to refute evidence of forced organ harvesting, according to the investigator.

“We can’t wait for them to respond,” Dr. Wang said. “We can have a public discussion on this and get this into the news cycle.”



If you follow the question why they were hacked, you come to the conclusion that the news about the forced organ harvesting case in the Chinese hospital must be correct.

Dr. Torsten Trey, co-founder and executive director, Doctors Against Forced Organ Harvesting



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Rishi Sunak, British prime minister



These are extremely worrying reports about the level of infiltration of Chinese-supported forces into our democracy.

Liz Truss, former British prime minister



▲ Falun Gong practitioners take part in a parade to commemorate the 24th anniversary of the persecution of the spiritual discipline in China, in New York’s Chinatown on July 15, 2023.



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