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Related Categories: Democracy and Governance; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; International Economics and Trade; China; Taiwan

CHINA'S TOP MAN IN MACAO, RIP

Zheng Xiaosong, the head of China's liaison office to Macau, China's top representative to Macau and a member of the Communist Party's Central Committee, has died after "falling off of his apartment building," according to an official statement. Hundreds of mid-level Chinese officials suspected of graft have died in recent years – reportedly by killing themselves. Macau police have said they found nothing suspicious surrounding Zheng's death, and declared it a suicide. (Reuters, October 21, 2018)

BEIJING, WASHINGTON TRADE VERBAL BARBS

In a direct response to Vice President Mike Pence's October 4th speech on U.S.-China relations, China's official press has published a scathing editorial that describes U.S. strategy toward China since 1978 as "one failed attempt at sabotage after another." The author, Chen Jiangsheng, writes that: "The United States government tried every means at its disposal to prevent China from joining the world trading system...For the sake of a narrow and self-interested few, the United States government continues to suck the lifeblood from the international system it helped to build, like an economic leech...The United States employed unfair practices such as using surrogate countries, and subjected China's products to abnormally high tariff rates, which seriously affected the ability of China's enterprises to export to the United States. In addition to economic means, the United States government has spared no effort in employing military, political, and media methods to hinder China's development and create trouble for China domestically and internationally." (*China Daily*, November 1, 2018)

KEEPING A CLOSER EYE ON CHINA'S VETERANS

Ostensibly to "protect their legal rights" and to "send out honor plates," Beijing has set up 1,100 collection points across the city to acquire the personal information, political status and basic living status of veterans, including photos of their household register and social insurance. Retired military personnel have been instructed to register in person before December 25th, and authorities will review and examine the data before May of 2019. The data collection drive is part of a larger governmental effort. Since September, for example, Tianjin has collected information on more than 70,000 veterans. "Collecting veteran's information is a way of safeguarding social stability," Li Daguang of the National Defense University of the People's Liberation Army has said.

The governmental effort is tied to mounting official concerns regarding discontent among veterans of China's armed forces. This year alone, thousands of PLA veterans have held protests in several cities over mistreatment, poor job prospects and inadequate benefits. (*New York Times*, June 25, 2018; *PLA Daily*, November 2, 2018)

XINJIANG'S SECURITY SPENDING BOOM

Last year, Xinjiang increased spending for "security-related facility construction" by 213%, or nearly 20 billion yuan (\$2.9 billion). Satellite data shows numerous new security facilities were built in 2017, including political re-education camps designed to imprison about a million Muslims. China claims that these facilities are training centers that teach Chinese history, language and culture, but Xinjiang's budget for vocational training, actually fell 7% last year. Former detainees claim that in the camps they faced beatings if they did not accurately sing Communist Party songs and recite laws. The camps were built by the same organization that oversaw China's now-abolished labor reeducation system. (BBC, November 6, 2018)

BEIJING MEDDLING IN TAIWAN'S MIDTERMS

Beijing has been funding fake news and opposition candidates with the goal of unseating the governing Democratic Progressive Party in the island's mid-term elections on November 24th, a top Taiwanese official has charged. Last month, the director-general of Taiwan's Ministry of Justice Investigation Bureau, Leu Wen-jong, accused Beijing of attempting of funding pro-China candidates to sway the election results. Leu told lawmakers that his bureau had 33 "pieces of intelligence" that point to Beijing's interference, and has "solid evidence" of a vote buying scheme funded by the Taiwan Affairs Office of China's State Council. China's military has set up a Strategic Support Force of about 300,000 soldiers that specialize in cyber-attacks. Taiwan's security networks were attacked more than 200 million times in 2017. (*Focus Taiwan*, October 22, 2018; *Taiwan News*, November 5, 2018; *Asia Times*, November 8, 2018)