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U.S., JAPAN WILL COOPERATE IF CHINA ATTACKS TAIWAN

During their recent meeting in Tokyo, U.S. and Japanese defense chiefs agreed to closely cooperate in the event China attacks Taiwan. U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin brought up the issue with Japan's Defense Minister, Nobuo Kishi. Kishi noted the growing number of PRC warplanes crossing the median line in the Taiwan Strait, and a need for new ways for the Japan's Self-Defense Forces to cooperate with U.S. military to defend Taiwan in case China attacks. Although they did not discuss the specifics of their response, one option mentioned was for Tokyo to order its military to protect U.S. warships and planes. (Kyodo, March 21, 2021)

U.S. PUNISHES 24 PRC OFFICIALS FOR HONG KONG POLICIES

The U.S. has sanctioned 24 PRC officials, including Politburo member Wang Chen, for undermining Hong Kong's democratic freedoms. Earlier sanctions imposed by the Trump administration had barred the same officials from traveling to the U.S. and frozen their assets. Meanwhile in Tokyo, Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken and Defense Secretary Lloyd J. Austin III rebuked China for its "destabilizing actions." "China is using coercion and aggression to systematically erode autonomy in Hong Kong, undercut democracy in Taiwan, abuse human rights in Xinjiang and Tibet and assert maritime claims in the South China Sea that violate international law," Blinken told South Korean Foreign Minister Chung Eui-yong in Seoul. (*New York Times*, March 17, 2021)

CHINA PUNISHES MICROSOFT'S LINKEDIN FOR LAX CENSORSHIP

The Cyberspace Administration of China, the country's internet regulator, has rebuked LinkedIn executives for failing to control political content. To remain in China, the Microsoft-owned service for professionals censors the posts of its 50 million Chinese users. It is not clear what material Beijing found objectionable. For years, China's government has blocked major American services like Facebook, Twitter and Google because they refuse to censor their users' posts. LinkedIn remains the only major American social network allowed to operate in China. As a punishment, officials are requiring LinkedIn to conduct a self-evaluation and new user sign-ups have been suspended for 30 days. (*New York Times*, March 18, 2021)

BEIJING DENIES HACKING INDIA'S COVID-19 VACCINE MAKERS

The Chinese hacking group APT10, a.k.a., Stone Panda, has hacked into the IT infrastructure and supply chain software of India's Bharat Biotech and the Serum Institute of India (SII), the world's largest vaccine maker. SII is making the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine for many countries and will soon start manufacturing Novavax shots, while Bharat Biotech plans to export its COVAXIN shot to dozens of countries including Brazil and the Philippines. China's foreign ministry called the accusation "baseless speculation...to malign a specific party." (ChannelNewsAsia, March 2, 2021)

ANTI-CHINA SENTIMENT RISES IN MYANMAR

Last month, Chinese officials asked Myanmar's junta to secure its investments and to provide intelligence on armed groups along its oil and gas pipeline route. After the request was leaked, anti-China protests erupted over the pipelines, which China calls a symbol of "mutually beneficial cooperation." Opened in 2013, the gas pipeline carries gas from Myanmar's offshore fields. The \$1.5 billion, 770km oil pipeline, which brings in crude from the Middle East, began operations in 2017. Anti-Chinese protesters took to the streets in Mandalay city and social media carried threats and allegations. "China shame on you. Stop supporting the theft of a nation," read one placard outside the Chinese embassy before Myanmar security forces closed it off. Billions in Chinese loans had been earmarked for projects in Myanmar, including an economic corridor ending at a \$1.3 billion deep-water port, industrial zones, a new city next to Yangon and a railway to the border. (Reuters, March 11, 2021)