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BURMESE MILITARY LEANS ON CHINESE, WESTERN SURVEILLANCE TECH

In the wake of Burma's February coup, scores of protestors have taken to the streets to demonstrate against the Tatmadaw (as Burma's military is known). Tatmadaw forces, in turn, have cracked down on the protests, and have gone so far as to embrace violent repression tactics. Since the ouster of democratic leader Aung San Suu Kyi, hundreds of civilians have died at the hands of the military and law enforcement. Increasingly, activists fear that the military is turning to facial recognition software and other surveillance technologies to track protestors, predict their behavior, and forestall opposition. Much of the technological infrastructure to do so is of Chinese origin. For instance, Burma's "Safe City" projects in the capital, Naypyitaw, and in Mandalay rely heavily on Huawei services and technologies. But, thanks to technology acquired from Israeli, American, and European companies, the Tatmadaw also wields the capability to hack cell phones and personal computers, and to listen in on conversations.

Some of these capabilities are the result of new contracts struck between Western firms and Naypyitaw in 2015 and 2016, when the U.S. rolled back sanctions on Burma. Others are the result of companies dealing indirectly with the Burmese military, skirting export controls. Thus far, the protestors are responding with makeshift technology of their own, such as mobile apps that warn other activists of the locations of law enforcement, roadblocks, and emergency services. (*Myanmar Now*, December 15, 2020; *New York Times*, March 1, 2021; Reuters, March 18, 2021)

TAIWAN'S ALLIANCE POLITICS COLLIDE WITH "VACCINE DIPLOMACY"

As global production and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines ramps up, transnational imperatives are bumping up against great power competition. China, for instance, has leveraged vaccine diplomacy to force technological inroads into previously unfavorable diplomatic terrain. Brazil, which eschewed cooperation with Huawei before the pandemic, changed its tune in March and allowed the Chinese telecom giant to compete for its national 5G contract.

Taiwan, meanwhile, finds itself caught in the middle of this scramble. According to senior diplomats in Taipei, China approached Paraguay – Taiwan's lone remaining ally in South America – with a vaccine offer contingent upon switching diplomatic recognition away from Taiwan to the People's Republic of China (PRC). Taiwan's Foreign Minister, Joseph Wu, revealed that a diplomatic crisis was only avoided thanks to cooperation with the Indian government, which provided alternative vaccines to Paraguay at Taiwan's request. (New Delhi, however, has disputed Foreign Minister Wu's account, and insisted that India and Paraguay resolved this issue bilaterally.)

Yet the larger trend line remains. Shortly before the episode, New Delhi, along with the three other "Quad" governments in Washington, Tokyo, and Canberra, announced a multilateral push to fund, produce, and distribute a COVID-19 vaccine that would implicitly blunt Beijing's bargaining efforts. (Reuters, March 12, 2021; Reuters, April 7, 2021; *Tribune India*, April 9, 2021)

BANGKOK MOVES AHEAD WITH MILITARY FACILITIES FOR CHINESE-PRODUCED EQUIPMENT

America's delicate balancing act between securing its security interests and advancing its values is especially pronounced in Thailand, due in large part to Chinese opportunism. In March, reports emerged that Bangkok and Beijing were moving forward with plans to establish a maintenance, repair, and overhaul (MRO) facility that would service the nation's China-produced military equipment, specifically tanks and armored vehicles. The MRO facility could also double as a manufacturing hub to service Chinese military vehicles throughout the region.

Sino-Thai military relations date back to the late 1980s, when Beijing angled to offset Soviet interests and blunt Vietnam's influence and advance in Southeast Asia, particularly in Cambodia. To be sure, U.S.-Thai relations go back even further, to 1954, when the two nations inked a mutual defense treaty. In 2003, Washington went as far as to name Bangkok a "Major Non-NATO Ally." But, while Thailand is America's oldest ally in Asia, recurring episodes of military-backed coups have, at times, legally tied Washington's hands in ways that Beijing has readily exploited. For instance, the MRO facility was announced in 2017 amid a downturn in U.S.-Thai military relations in the aftermath of the nation's 2014 coup. In the wake of the military takeover, China sold Thailand over \$300 million in tanks and armored vehicles alone in the span of two years. (Reuters, November 16, 2017; *Jane's*, March 18, 2021)