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Related Categories: Democracy and Governance; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; International Economics and Trade; Warfare; China; Europe; West Africa

EXPLORING CHINA'S "IRREGULAR WAR" TACTICS

U.S. and international policy institutes are increasingly examining the contemporary Chinese way of war, and what to expect in the event of a conflict with Beijing. "National security leaders should look closely at...how the PLA might actually fight a war. Many elements of irregular warfare, such as psychological warfare, legal warfare, and cyberwarfare, are central to the PLA's concept of information warfare and its theory of victory in a conventional conflict," a new report from the Modern War Institute at West Point lays out. "In the run-up to and during a conflict, we would expect Chinese forces to ramp up these efforts, especially against nations hosting U.S. forces. China could promote narratives about U.S. military abuses of a local population, some exaggerated and some imagined, to turn the population against its government's support to the U.S."

A new report from the Australian Strategic Policy Institute elaborates on these points. "There is a lucrative market of influence-for-hire service providers, to which state actors can outsource propaganda distribution and influence campaigns to obfuscate their activities," it states. "These commercial actors are increasingly part of the fabric of political campaigning in many countries. The lack of transparency around these activities risks corrupting the quality of democracy." (news.com.au, May 3, 2021)

CHINA'S AUTHORITIES FACE A CREDIBILITY CRISIS

A series of suspicious student deaths, in which parents were denied answers or allowed to see security footage, is drawing online fury. Last November, a 16-year-old girl died at a high school in Shandong, and in April a 15-year-old girl fell to her death from her dormitory building in Chongqing. In the latter case, the school notified the girl's mother two hours after her death and only after the body had been taken to a funeral home, then refused to show her the security footage of the incident. Suspecting bullying or abuse, the mother demanded an investigation, but the local government quickly ruled out homicide. This week, Lin Weiqi, a high school sophomore in Chengdu, fell to his death from a campus building, and the school did not notify his mother for hours, or allow her to speak with his friends or teachers. In two more cases, one in Hunan and another in Jiangxi, parents also disputed the official accounts of their children's deaths. (CNN, May 14, 2021)

[EDITOR'S NOTE: The academic pressure on Chinese teenagers is extremely high, as millions compete in college entrance exams closely tied to their future success. Experts have long called for more attention to students' mental health, but many schools still lack the awareness or resources to provide adequate mental care.]

CHINA BUILDS ON BHUTAN'S TERRITORY

For years, China has been quietly building in Bhutan's Beyul and Menchuma Valley. In the 232-square-mile area – which China claimed in the 1980s but which is internationally recognized as Lhuntse, Bhutan – Beijing is constructing three new villages, 66 miles of new roads, a hydropower station, two CPC centers, a communications base, a disaster relief warehouse, a satellite receiving station, a military base and numerous security outposts. In 2015, Beijing announced that the new village of Jieliubu (Gyalaphug in Tibetan) had been established. The new construction is part of a major drive, underway since 2017, to fortify the Tibetan borderlands and outmaneuver India along the Himalayan border. China seeks to force Bhutan to cede other territory that will give it a military advantage against New Delhi. (*Foreign Policy*, May 7, 2021)

PENTAGON: PLA EYEING LOCATIONS FOR GULF OF GUINEA BASE

Beijing is looking to establish a large navy base capable of hosting submarines or aircraft carriers on Africa's western coast, and has approached countries from Mauritania to Namibia to discuss the idea. "They're looking for a place where they can re-arm and repair warships. That becomes militarily useful in conflict. They're a long way toward establishing that in Djibouti. Now they're casting their gaze to the Atlantic coast and wanting to get such a base there," said General Stephen Townsend, the head of U.S. Africa Command. "The Chinese are outmaneuvering the U.S. in select countries in Africa. Port projects, economic endeavors, infrastructure and their agreements and contracts will lead to greater access in the future. They are hedging their bets and making big bets on Africa." (*South China Morning Post*, May 6, 2021)

EU SUSPENDS RATIFICATION OF CHINA INVESTMENT DEAL

The European Union has suspended finalization of its investment deal with China, citing deteriorating diplomatic relations. "We have suspended political outreach activities from the European Commission side. It's clear in the current situation with the EU sanctions in place against China and Chinese counter sanctions in place, including against members of European Parliament (that) the environment is not conducive for ratification of the agreement," said EU Executive Vice President Valdis Dombrovskis, who is spearheading the approval process. In December, after seven years of negotiations, the EU and China approved the investment pact. In March, however, the EU sanctioned four Chinese officials for human rights violations in Xinjiang and China responded with sanctions against European politicians, scholars and think tanks. (Agence France Presse, May 4, 2021)