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CHINA "INTENTIONALLY POISONING" AMERICANS WITH FENTANYL

Senator Joni Ernst (R-IA) has accused China of "intentionally poisoning" Americans by not reining in its producers of fentanyl precursors. "The Chinese are selling these precursor chemicals into Mexico. Then the Mexican cartels are working on making the fentanyl and distributing up into the U.S. When we see an adversary like China poisoning our communities, it's very disconcerting. So we have to educate the American people. We have to work with our Mexican counterparts to push back against the cartel and the Chinese. We can't continue to lose our youth to this fentanyl epidemic," Ernst said. Drug Enforcement Administration administrator Anne Milgram has called on Beijing to crack down on the "relationship between these Chinese chemical companies and the criminal cartels in Mexico." (CBS News, February 10, 2023)

CHINA EXPANDING ITS ESPIONAGE IN GERMANY: BERLIN

Thomas Haldenwang, the head of Germany's domestic intelligence agency, the Verfassungsschutz, has said that Beijing is expanding its spy activities against Berlin and focusing more on political espionage. "China is developing wide-ranging spying and influence activities. We must be prepared for these to increase in the coming years," he said. Haldenwang warned that economic dependence on China could be exploited for political influence. "China is pursuing a long-term strategy to achieve its goals. The political leadership is already using its economic power, which also results from intensive relations with the German and European economies, to implement political goals." (The Strait Times, February 11, 2023)

CHINA'S ELDERLY PROTEST AGAINST HEALTH INSURANCE REFORMS

In Wuhan, Hubei and Dalian, Liaoning tens of thousands of Chinese pensioners are protesting against health insurance cuts introduced by cash-strapped city governments seeking to rein in spending in the aftermath of China's costly "zero-Covid" policy. Crowds of retirees gathered and chanted "down with the reactionary government" and sang "The Internationale." They oppose the government's move to divert money from a mandatory health savings plan for workers to a state-controlled outpatient insurance fund - a change that took effect in Wuhan on February 1st. Chinese localities are facing the pinch, with underfunded healthcare systems and a rapidly ageing population. (Financial Times, February 15, 2023)

BBC PRODUCES ADS FOR CHINA'S PROPAGANDA ORGANS

The BBC's commercial unit, StoryWorks, produces glossy ads and sponsored content for at least 18 Chinese clients, including nine state-affiliated bodies such as Huawei and state media outlets like the China Global Television Network (CGTN). Sean O'Hara, the BBC's Executive Vice President of advertising, confirmed the relationship, but insisted that the BBC reports on China "without fear or favor." "The commercial income generated from advertising provides vital investment in BBC News, ensuring that we are able to sustain our global network of journalists," he said. However, Lord David Alton, a British lawmaker, called on the BBC to review StoryWorks' activities, arguing that it is "simply not realistic to believe that commercial relationships with the CPC have no bearing on behavior." The BBC produced an ad campaign for CGTN after the UK's media regulator had withdrawn the network's license to operate in the country. (Deadline, February 13, 2023)

CHINESE SHIP FLASHED PHILIPPINE VESSEL WITH MILITARY-GRADE LASER

On February 6th, China's coast guard used a military-grade laser to disrupt a resupply mission by the Philippines in the South China Sea. China's coast guard and militia vessels created a blockade around the Second Thomas Shoal, which China also claims. The Philippine coast guard vessel was delivering supplies to the BRP Sierra Madre - a World War II-era ship that was purposely run aground on the shoal in 1999 - when a Chinese coast guard vessel flashed it with a green light, temporarily blinding crew and preventing them from reaching the outpost. "The deliberate blocking of the Philippine government ships to deliver food and supplies to our military personnel on board the BRP Sierra Madre is a blatant disregard for, and a clear violation of, Philippine sovereign rights," the Philippine Coast Guard said. (Wall Street Journal, February 13, 2023)

[EDITOR'S NOTE: The incident is the latest in a string of such hostile encounters. In 2018, two U.S. airmen suffered "minor" injuries as a result of Chinese-deployed military grade lasers in Djibouti; in 2020, a Chinese warship used a laser on a U.S. surveillance aircraft flying over the Pacific Ocean; and in 2022, a Chinese warship used one to "illuminate" an Australian Air Force jet in what Canberra called a "serious safety incident."]