



CHINA REFORM MONITOR

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Related Categories: Cybersecurity and Cyberwarfare; Democracy and Governance; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; Public Diplomacy and Information Operations; Terrorism; Corruption; Border Security; China; Pakistan; Russia

CHINA BEHIND THE LARGEST COVERT PROPAGANDA OPERATION EVER

China's Ministry of Public Security orchestrated the largest covert propaganda operation ever identified. A report by Meta outed the four-year campaign known as Spamouflage Dragon, which spread propaganda on Facebook and Instagram about Hong Kong's pro-democracy protests, the origins of COVID-19, attacked dissidents abroad, and criticized the U.S. During the 2022 midterm elections, Spamouflage Dragon targeted American democracy and urged people not to vote. "Once you put everything together from 2019 until now, it is the largest known covert influence operation," said Meta's Ben Nimmo. Spamouflage Dragon is run by "operators across China who appear to have been centrally provisioned with internet access and content directions." (*Rolling Stone*, August 29, 2023)

CHINESE ENGINEERS TARGETED BY BALUCH MILITANTS IN PAKISTAN

On August 13, militants from the Baluch Liberation Army (BLA) attacked a convoy of Chinese engineers in Gwadar, Balochistan Province, Pakistan. No Chinese nationals were hurt in the attack; however, three security officers were injured, while two militants were killed and three injured. The Pakistani military said that the attackers "used small arms and hand grenades." In a statement, the BLA claimed responsibility for the attack, as well as two suicide bombings that purportedly killed four Chinese engineers and nine Pakistani security troops. The latter claim could not be verified. (*Radio Free Europe*, August 13, 2023)

[EDITOR'S NOTE: Chinese working in Pakistan are facing growing security challenges. In April 2022, a suicide bomber in Karachi killed three Chinese teachers. In 2021, a bus carrying Chinese workers was attacked, killing nine of them and four other passengers. In 2020, the BLA attacked the Pakistan Stock Exchange in an effort to thwart "China's exploitative plans" in Balochistan.]

RUSSIA RESPONDS TO CHINA'S CONTROVERSIAL NEW MAP

A new official map from China's Ministry of Natural Resources extends China's claims in multiple territorial disputes, including Bolshoi Ussuriysky Island (Heixiazi in Chinese). "The correct national map is a symbol of national sovereignty and territorial integrity," said a senior official from China's resources ministry. However, the Russian Foreign Ministry rejected China's claim over the 135-square-mile island, which sits at the confluence of the Ussuri and Amur rivers that separate China from Russia. Although a source of tension between the two countries for decades, the island was split between the two countries in bilateral agreements more than 15 years ago. (*Newsweek*, September 1, 2023)

PROFESSOR JAILED FOR MEASURING PARTY PERSONNEL COSTS

The Guiyang Intermediate People's Court has sentenced former Guizhou University economics professor Yang Shaozheng, 53, to four-and-a-half-years in prison for estimating that party and government personnel cost Chinese taxpayers an estimated \$2.75 trillion per year. In a closed-door trial on July 29, Yang was found guilty of "incitement to subvert state power." He was fired during a purge of outspoken academics in 2017. In 2019, he was detained and interrogated for six months for criticizing the teaching of Xi Jinping Thought in China's universities, and in 2021 he was arrested again. (*Radio Free Asia*, August 31, 2023)

CHINA "ADOPTS A RESTRICTIVE THEORY OF FOREIGN STATE IMMUNITY"

China's National People's Congress Standing Committee has "adopted a restrictive theory of foreign state immunity." The new law, which will take effect on January 1, 2024, stipulates that if "a foreign state abolishes, restricts or downgrades the immunity it has granted to China, China will have the right to take necessary countermeasures in accordance with the principle of reciprocity." After Beijing enacts the law, similar regulations will be promulgated in Hong Kong and Macao. (*Xinhua*, September 1, 2023)