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CHINA'S DEFENSE MINISTER DISAPPEARS

In the latest sign of turmoil among China's leadership, Defense Minister Li Shangfu has not been seen in public for more than two weeks. U.S. officials believe Li is under investigation for corruption relating to his previous position as head of military procurement, and has been stripped of his official responsibilities. Li's disappearance comes two months after Xi Jinping removed the two top generals in the PLA Rocket Force, which oversees China's arsenal of long-range missiles and nuclear weapons. In July, Foreign Minister Qin Gang also disappeared from public view before being removed from his position. (*Financial Times*, September 14, 2023)

CHINA USES AI TO SOW DISINFORMATION ABOUT HAWAII FIRES

Last month, as wildfires swept across Maui, China created and spread false claims that they were caused by a secret "weather weapon" being tested by the U.S. military. The posts carried photographs generated by AI programs, making Beijing among the first to use these new tools to enhance the authenticity of a disinformation campaign. For China, the effort to cast the wildfires as a deliberate act by the U.S. government represents a change of tactics. Until now, China's influence campaigns had been focused on amplifying propaganda defending its policies on Taiwan and other sensitive subjects. These recent efforts suggest Beijing is now working to sow discord among Americans. (*New York Times*, September 11, 2023)

UK PARLIAMENT RESEARCHER ARRESTED AMID CHINA SPY CLAIMS

A researcher in the British Parliament has been arrested under the Official Secrets Act amid claims he was spying for China. Police confirmed that two men were arrested under the act in March, and that one was a parliamentary researcher involved in China policy issues, with access to several Conservative MPs. On the sidelines of the G20 summit in India, Rishi Sunak "conveyed his significant concerns about Chinese interference in UK's parliamentary democracy" to Premier Li Qiang. (*BBC*, September 10, 2023)

CANADA LAUNCHES INQUIRY INTO FOREIGN INTERFERENCE

After months of negotiations between Canada's political parties, Ottawa has launched a public inquiry into foreign interference. The investigation follows the targeting of a Canadian member of Parliament, which led to a PRC diplomat getting kicked out of Canada in May. Public Safety Minister Dominic LeBlanc said the official inquiry will begin this month and will be led by a Quebec appeals court judge, Marie-Josée Hogue. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau described Canada's relationship with China as "stable," and attributed tensions to "real concerns around foreign interference" in Canada. "This challenge is not unique to Canada. This is a global challenge for democracies," LeBlanc said. (*Politico*, September 7, 2023)

CHINA, RUSSIA TO BUILD BORDER GRAIN TERMINAL

At the Eastern Economic Forum in Vladivostok, Russia, which was attended by Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese Vice Premier Zhang Guoqing, China and Russia agreed to create a grain hub on their common border. The new \$159 million "Grain Terminal Nizhneleninskoye-Tongjiang" distribution center will be located between Vladivostok and Heilongjiang province. A group of Russian companies managing grain production will work with China's Chengtong International Investment to create the new agricultural logistics hub. In the first eight months of 2023, bilateral trade between Moscow and Beijing increased 32 percent from 2022 to \$155 billion, bolstered by large increases in Russian agricultural exports. Last week, during his visit to Heilongjiang, Xi Jinping highlighted grain security and called the region a gateway in "northward opening-up." (*South China Morning Post*, September 12, 2023), September 1, 2023)