



China Policy Monitor No. 1581

January 4, 2024 **Joshua Eisenman**

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TIKTOK CONTENT ALIGNS WITH BEIJING'S INTERESTS

Social media app TikTok promotes content based on China's preferences, a new study has confirmed. After comparing posts with the same hashtags on TikTok and Instagram, researchers at Rutgers University found that TikTok manipulates public debate on both China-related topics, such as the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests, and geostrategic issues, such as Ukraine and Israel. "Content on TikTok is either amplified or suppressed based on its alignment with the interests of the Chinese Government," the report states. The hashtag #HongKongProtests, for instance, had 206 posts on Instagram for each one on TikTok. For every 8.5 posts on Instagram with a hashtag supporting Ukraine, there was only one such post on TikTok. This was reversed for China-friendly hashtags: #StandWithKashmir was overrepresented on TikTok by a 661-to-1 ratio as compared to Instagram. "It is challenging to imagine that activity of such magnitude could occur on a platform organically, and without the knowledge and consent of the platform itself," the study concluded. (*NBC*, December 21, 2023)

CHINA USES AI TO TURBOCHARGE SPYING ON THE U.S....

China is using artificial intelligence to analyze Americans' personal data on an unprecedented scale. China has stolen billions of pieces of private data from Marriott Hotels, the Equifax credit agency, health insurer Anthem, and the personnel files of more than 20 million U.S. government workers from the Office of Personnel Management. Until now, that trove was too vast to discern patterns. "Now they are working to use AI to improve their already-massive hacking operations," says FBI Director Christopher Wray. "China can harness AI to build a dossier on virtually every American, with details ranging from their health records to credit cards and from passport numbers to the names and addresses of their parents and children," notes Glenn Gerstell, former general counsel at the National Security Agency. (*Wall Street Journal*, December 25, 2023)

...AS U.S. RAMPS UP SPYING ON CHINA

Since 2020, the United States has been investing in its human espionage capabilities in China. After two decades of hunting Islamists, the \$100 billion-a-year intelligence community is shifting resources from counterterrorism and the Middle East to retraining personnel and retooling expensive spy machinery to focus on China. "The numbers have gotten significantly better in terms of personnel, spending [and] focus on China," according to Senator Mark Warner, chair of the Senate Intelligence Committee. Soon after becoming director in 2021, Nicholas Burns established a mission center for China that brings together CIA operators, intelligence analysts, and technology experts. (*Wall Street Journal*, December 26, 2023)

[EDITOR'S NOTE: Between 2010 and 2012, China executed or imprisoned a network consisting of as many as two dozen CIA assets, among them high-ranking Chinese officials.]

XI REMOVES DOZENS OF SENIOR MILITARY OFFICIALS

At least 70 senior military officials have recently been removed from their posts or gone missing as Xi Jinping continues to crack down on the country's armed forces. The Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference has expelled Liu Shiquan, chair of weapons manufacturer China North Industries Group, as well as China Aerospace Science and Technology Corp chair Wu Yansheng and China Aerospace Science & Industry Corp. boss Wang Changqing. The unexplained removal of the three senior officials comes six months after the disappearance of top officers of the PLA Rocket Force. In October, two months after he disappeared, Beijing officially removed defense minister Li Shangfu from his post; Li was replaced this month with Dong Jun. "We are not only talking about embezzling funds or getting kickbacks from military linked SOEs but also lowered quality-control standards, resulting in subpar quality weapons and military equipment being purchased," explains Alex Payette at the Cerci Group. (*Financial Times*, December 27, 2023)

ONE BILLION CHINESE LIVE ON LESS THAN \$280 PER MONTH

Nearly 964 million Chinese people live on less than \$280 (2000 Chinese yuan) per month, according to data cited by Li Xunlei, chief economist at Zhongtai Securities. The data sparked online discussions pushing the hashtag for China's economic woes to number one on Weibo's trending page before censors removed it. In his article, which was also deleted, Li cites Wang Haiyuan and Meng Fanqiang's June 2020 publication in Caixin, which quoted late Premier Li Keqiang's estimate that 600 million Chinese people live on less than \$140 (1000 yuan) per month. Their article was also deleted. The censorship underscores China's sensitivity about its faltering economic performance. (*Newsweek*, December 28, 2023)