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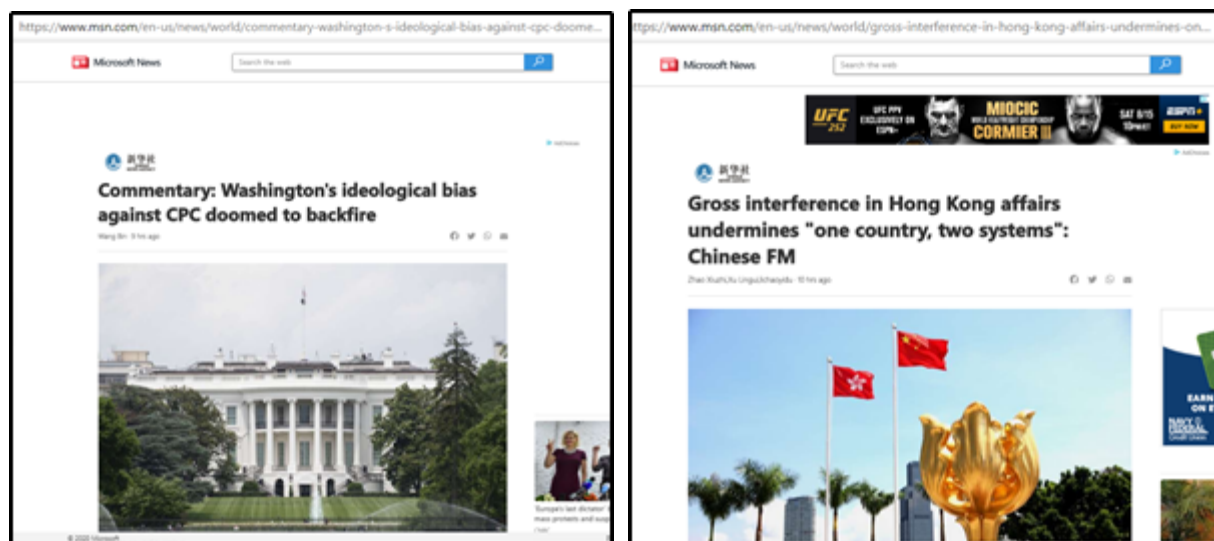
Xinhua Infiltrates Western Electronic Media, Part 2: Relationships with News Agencies and Distribution Services

By John Dotson

Author's Note: This is the second part of a two-part article series in China Brief exploring methods by which Xinhua and other Chinese state-owned media organizations are seeking greater presence and influence for their propaganda material in English-language online media. The first article examined recent examples of "advertorial" advertising, in which Xinhua content has been hosted on the websites and promoted in the e-mail advertising of prominent English-language news and foreign affairs publications ([China Brief](#), April 12).

Introduction

Xinhua, the state news agency of the People's Republic of China (PRC), serves a role very different from that of its nominal counterparts in democratic states, such as Britain's BBC, Germany's Deutsche Welle, or Taiwan's Central News Agency. Xinhua (新华 or "New China") functions as the official mouthpiece of China's ruling party: Chinese Communist Party (CCP) General Secretary Xi Jinping, reinforcing a long-standing party dictum, has declared that "journalism is the mouthpiece of the party and people" (新闻事业是党和人民的喉舌, *xinwen shiye shi dang he renmin de houshe*), possessing an "important mission to guide public opinion" (引导舆论的一个重要任务, *yindao yulun de yige zhongyao renwu*) ([Renmin Wang](#), September 18, 2019). Operating abroad, the primary role of the PRC's propaganda system is the imperative to "tell China's story well" (讲好中国故事, *jiang hao Zhongguo gushi*) by promoting the CCP's narratives to international audiences.



Images: Xinhua articles decrying U.S. "ideological bias" against the Chinese Communist Party and alleged U.S. "interference" in Hong Kong, both hosted by MSN News in early August 2020. (Source: Author's screenshots; web links no longer active).

According to research by the Center for Responsive Politics, the PRC's declared expenditures on public opinion influence activities (including lobbying, public relations and media support) expanded dramatically in the United States in 2019-2020 and reached over \$63.78 million in 2020.[1] As a component of this, Xinhua has explored multiple avenues to "borrow foreign newspapers" (借用海外报刊, *jieyong haiwai baokan*) by inserting paid content into foreign publications, in both hardcopy and electronic form ([China Brief](#), April 12). This practice continues—as evidenced by a spring 2021 legal filing indicating that Xinhua's subsidiary *China Daily* had paid more than \$1.96 million dollars over the preceding six months for "advertorial" advertising in five prominent North American publications, including \$700,000 to *Time* magazine.[2]

Moving beyond “advertorial” content, Xinhua has also undertaken more ambitious steps to forge broader business relationships with foreign news services and online news distribution outlets. This has received some limited attention: for example, in January 2019 a group of 14 Senators and Members of Congress issued a letter to the Associated Press (AP) requesting information on the company’s business relationships with Xinhua. An official response from the company noted that it was considering “the possibility for future commercial interactions,” but asserted that “AP’s business relationship with Xinhua is completely separate and firewalled from its journalistic coverage of China,” and that “AP’s business relationship with Xinhua is purely commercial in nature, and there is no planned change to the way AP interacts with Xinhua on editorial content” ([AP](#), January 10, 2019).

Although these relationships must be evaluated on a case-by-case basis, such business ties potentially offer the CCP’s propaganda apparatus an expanded set of opportunities to promote its content, disguising the origin of this material behind the banner of a reputable and supposedly objective news service. This article focuses on two case studies involving Microsoft News (MSN) and the Reuters News Agency, both of which have formed business relationships with Xinhua and other PRC state news agencies.[3] These two companies are not unique in their relationships with Xinhua, and the efforts of Chinese state media entities to engage with and influence foreign news outlets are wide-ranging, well-funded, and global.[4] However, these two limited case studies help illustrate how Xinhua and other state agencies have sought to leverage Western online media outlets to promote Chinese state narratives, often in subtle ways that might escape the notice of routine news consumers.

Hosting of Xinhua Content by Microsoft News

Microsoft has a business history in China dating back to the early 1990s, and its friendly relationship with the PRC government is reflected in the fact that the company’s search engine Bing and networking portal LinkedIn continue to operate in China (albeit in censored versions), even as many competing foreign information technology companies have been blocked from, or forced to exit, the Chinese market ([Bloomberg](#), August 3, 2020). While foreign tech firms such as Microsoft and Apple have faced controversies regarding their accommodations of PRC government policies, their business ties with China’s state propaganda apparatus have received far less attention.

Microsoft’s news aggregation service MSN has become a significant portal for the repackaging of Xinhua content, itself a component of broader propaganda campaigns aimed at English-speaking audiences. For example, throughout 2019 a major focus of PRC external propaganda was the U.S.-China “trade war,” with specific emphasis on themes such as: the need for a deal to end the trade disputes; the reasonableness of the PRC position; the benefits of Chinese-made products to American consumers; and the benefits of trade for constituencies in America. From at least 2019 to the present, MSN regularly served as a platform for the reposting of Xinhua content related to these themes, with a small-print Xinhua logo usually the only indication of the article’s origin.[5]

In another recent example, Xinhua material hosted by MSN was used as a component of a broader propaganda effort to justify the PRC's forcible annexation of Tibet. On May 21, the PRC State Council issued an official white paper titled *Tibet Since 1951: Liberation, Development and Prosperity*, which proclaimed:

On the occasion of the 70th anniversary of Tibet's peaceful liberation, we are publishing this white paper to review Tibet's history and achievements [and] counter the propaganda spread by a number of Western countries and their allies... In the new era, under the strong leadership of the [Communist Party] Central Committee with Xi Jinping at the core... Tibet has eradicated extreme poverty. Enjoying a stable social environment, economic and cultural prosperity, and a sound eco-environment, the people now lead better lives and live in contentment. ([PRC State Council Information Office](#), May 21).

An MSN-hosted article published the same week (see *accompanying image*) celebrated the PRC's annexation of Tibet in 1951, asserting that, under CCP rule, “the people of Tibet have broken free from the fetters of invading imperialism for good, and embarked on a bright road of unity, progress and development... In the new era, Tibet is enjoying rapid and sustained growth thanks to social harmony and stability” ([MSN News](#), May 27). Unlike many earlier examples, in this instance MSN made the Xinhua connection clear by including “Xinhua Headlines” in the article’s title. However, the underlying ethical questions surrounding the hosting of such material remain unchanged.

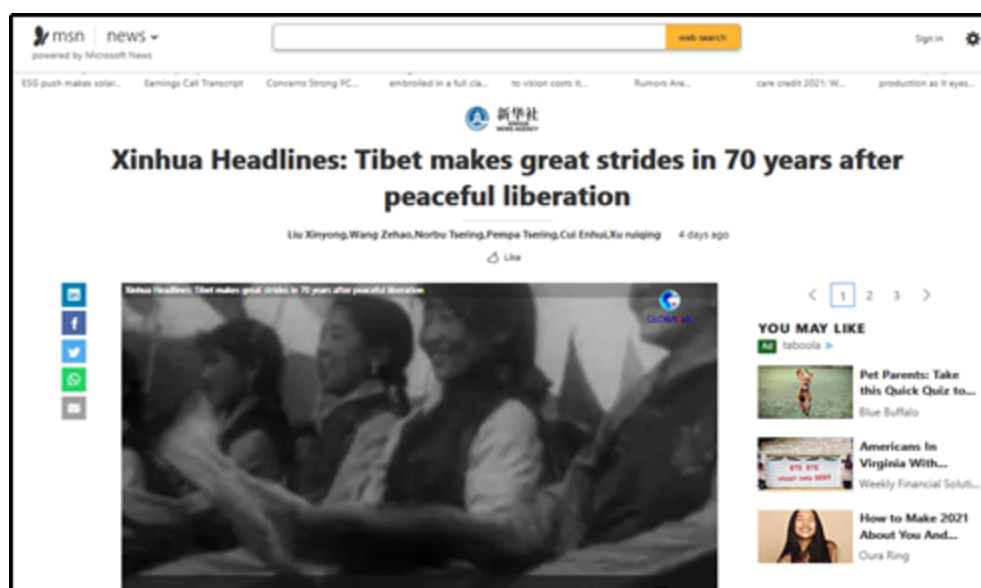


Image: A Xinhua propaganda article celebrating life in Tibet under CCP rule. The article was hosted by MSN News the same week as the release of a PRC white paper on Tibet, in an apparent example of coordinated propaganda. (Source: [MSN News](#), May 27, 2021).

“Propaganda Laundering” Through International and Third-Party Media

This phenomenon becomes even more complex when online news services present Xinhua material that has first been hosted by another media outlet, and then repackage the content for distribution. In one such example from April 2021, the *Manila Times* appears as the source of an article about PRC military exercises around Taiwan. The article opines that “Taiwan secessionists insisted on making provocative statements and holding drills,” and that the United States had “voiced support to ‘Taiwan independence’ forces.” As a result, “Taiwan secessionists and the US are leaving the Chinese mainland and the PLA with no choice but to enhance war preparedness” ([Manila Times](#), April 10) (see accompanying image).

A casual observer might assume that an independent and objective newspaper from the Philippines is the source of this analysis. In fact, the true original source of the article—identified in much smaller print—is the English-language edition of *Global Times*, an outlet maintained by Xinhua for stridently nationalist news content and commentary ([Manila Times](#), April 10). This example illustrates a wider phenomenon of “propaganda laundering,” in which Xinhua material is placed in an initial publication—whether through advertorial hosting fees, free publication rights, or other incentives—and then republished by an online distribution service as nominally objective material.



Image: A screenshot of an article posted on MSN News, taken April 12, 2021. (Image source: [MSN News](#)).

Xinhua’s Relationships with the Reuters News Agency

The venerable Reuters News Agency is another major Western news outlet that has formed a series of multi-layered business relationships with Xinhua. In September 2019, during the course of a visit to Xinhua’s Beijing headquarters by Reuters News President Michael Friedenber, the two sides reportedly agreed to

“expanding cooperation between the two agencies” and “enhanc[ing] communication and cooperation in areas of new technology, especially video and media [artificial intelligence] application[s]” ([Xinhua](#), September 12, 2019).

The business relationships between Reuters and Xinhua, and other *de facto* agencies of the Chinese government, have grown since this meeting. In December 2019, the company’s commercial advertising arm Reuters Plus hosted an advertorial article and video featuring Paul Scanlan, chief technical officer of Huawei’s Carrier Business Group, speaking about the economic benefits and trustworthiness of 5G technology. A banner indicated in small print that the material was “paid for and posted by Huawei.”[6]

The business relationship between Reuters and PRC state media saw further expansion at the “2020 European Media Partners Cooperation Online Forum,” a December 10 virtual conference hosted by China Media Group (CMG), a holding company for the PRC’s major broadcasting companies. At the forum, organized under the theme of “Mutual Trust Dialogue for Win-Win Cooperation,” Reuters announced a deal with China Central Television (CCTV) to create “China Business Video,” a service to provide Reuters subscribers with China-related financial news. Friedenbergs stated that “We must recognize the power of partnerships in this new media ecosystem... [which] can take the form of collaborative journalism, industry coalitions, new commercial business opportunities, content-sharing or shared platforms” ([CGTN](#), December 10, 2020).



Image: Teng Yunping, President of CCTV Video News, and Michael Friedenbergs, President of Reuters, appear together at a virtual 2020 conference to announce the creation of a CCTV-supported business news service for Reuters customers. (Source: [CGTN](#), December 10, 2020).

Reuters has also amplified and republished Xinhua material, albeit with a different approach from that of the directly repackaged material presented by MSN. Over the past two years, Reuters has made a regular

practice of overtly presenting PRC state media material, in the form of reporting on that material. A recent—and unintentionally ironic—example comes from this past June, following a May 31 Politburo study session on the theme of "international dissemination capability building" (国际传播能力建设, *guoji chuanbo nengli jianshe*) (Xuexi.cn, June 1). Reuters re-presented Xinhua's coverage of the event as follows:

China President Xi Jinping said the country must improve the way it tells its "stories" to a global audience as it seeks to develop an international voice that reflects its status on the world stage, official news agency Xinhua reported. Speaking at a Communist Party study meeting, Xi said it was crucial for China to improve its ability to spread its messages globally in order to present a "true, three-dimensional and comprehensive China", Xinhua said on Tuesday. China needed to develop an "international voice" to match its national strength and global status, Xinhua said, citing Xi. It also needed to strengthen propaganda efforts to help foreigners understand the Chinese Communist Party and the way it "strives for the happiness of the Chinese people" ([Reuters](https://www.reuters.com), June 1).

This approach makes explicit that this material originated with PRC state media or government spokespersons, avoiding the ethical problem of repackaging state media content whose origin is more disguised. It is also straightforward and factual, reporting on what has been published or presented by PRC state sources. However, the format seems odd, with little value added by the Reuters reporting; instead, it raises suspicions that this narrative content has been repackaged in order to gain broader distribution and wider respectability under the Reuters brand.

Conclusion

In a statement made on May 11, PRC Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying (华春莹) criticized U.S. "discourse hegemony," and declared that "In the face of lies and rumors to smear and attack China, it is only natural to make our own voices heard." Accordingly, "No one can deprive Chinese media like Xinhua their right to exchange and cooperation just because it is from China, a socialist country. Accusing Xinhua of engaging in exchange and cooperation with other agencies based on this alone is some sort of ideological bias and political discrimination" (Xinhua, May 12).

This effort to contest the "discourse hegemony" of the United States and other democratic countries has led the CCP and the state media agencies under its control to seek out an increasingly complex, multi-layered network of business relationships with international news agencies and news distribution services. The aim of these efforts is twofold: first, to seek wider dissemination and greater acceptance for Xinhua propaganda material by repackaging it under the trusted name of another outlet; and second, to enmesh foreign news outlets in profitable relationships that will force a gradual change towards editorial lines more amenable to CCP narratives. The first of these, as demonstrated by the examples in this article, is unquestionably happening. Whether or not the second goal is realized will be up to the companies involved, and to the level of critical readership among their audiences.

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Notes

[1] This figure represents nearly \$54.1 million in direct state spending, and an additional nearly \$9.7 million by nominally non-state actors such as Huawei Technologies. These figures represent only expenditures reflected in Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) filings, meaning that actual expenditures (to include support of PRC state-sponsored united front organizations, etc.) would be considerably higher. ([Center for Responsive Politics](#), undated).

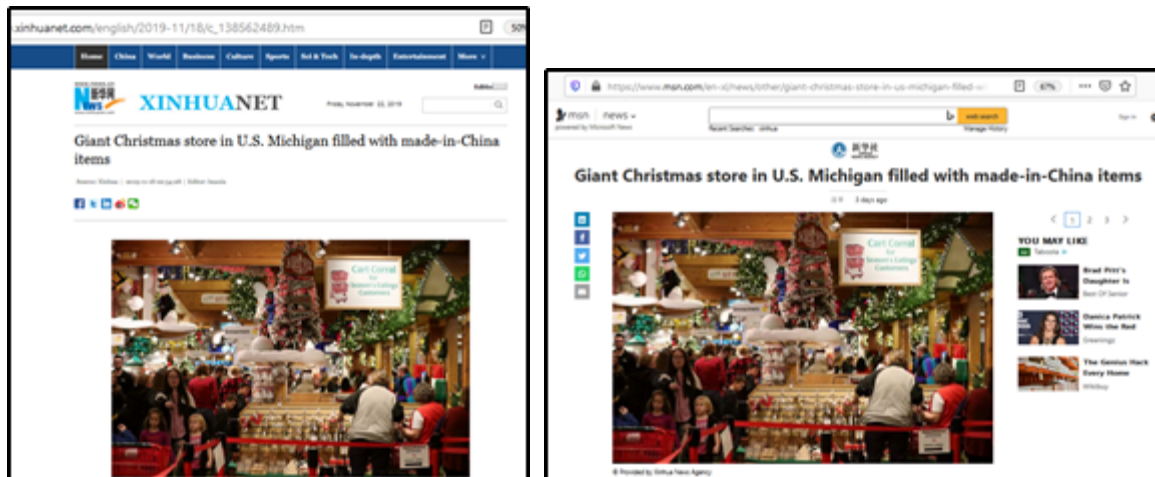
[2] Between November 2020 and April 2021, *China Daily* paid \$272,000 in advertising fees to the *Los Angeles Times*; \$291,000 to *Foreign Policy*; \$371,577 to the *Financial Times*; \$329,898.59 to Canada's *Globe and Mail*; and \$700,00 to *Time*, for a total of \$1,964,475.59. See: Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) filing by China Daily Distribution Corp. for the six-month period ending April 30, 2021 (document dated May 24, 2021). <https://efile.fara.gov/docs/3457-Supplemental-Statement-20210524-34.pdf>.

[3] Approximately four weeks prior to publication, the author reached out to representatives of both MSN and Reuters to inquire whether the companies had received hosting fees, beneficial business arrangements, or other financial incentives in order to cooperate with Xinhua; as of the date of publication, no responses had been received from either organization.

[4] Apple News, for example, has been featured prominently on the English-language webpage of *People's Daily*, the official newspaper of the CCP. For one example of this, see the following screenshot from an article warning against Taiwan "separatist" activities: links to multiple social media platforms are provided, as well a clear link to Apple News, placed alongside the headline. (Source: [People's Daily](#), March 9).



[5] Many examples could be cited of the parallel hosting of Xinhua content by MSN in this manner. Two such examples noted by the author were: “U.S. Long Beach Port Highlights Cordial Relationship with China” ([Xinhua](#), November 16, 2019; [MSN](#), November 16, 2019); and “Giant Christmas Store in U.S. Michigan Filled with Made-in-China Items” ([Xinhua](#), November 18, 2019; [MSN](#), November 21, 2019). As of the final preparation of this article in June 2021, the MSN links to these articles were no longer functional. The parallel screenshots from the latter article are copied below:



[6] At the end of the article, this line is also posted: “The Reuters editorial and news staff had no role in the production of this content. It was created by Reuters Plus, part of the commercial advertising group.”

Expanding China's Central Asia Playbook to Afghanistan

By Niva Yau

Introduction

For almost 30 years, the People's Republic of China (PRC) has deployed various strategies to increase its economic and political influence in Central Asia. In 1994, then-Premier Li Peng suggested a plan to develop economic connectivity and “revive the old Silk Road” ([Xinhua](#), December 25, 2013). This paved the way for a China-Kazakhstan oil pipeline which became operational in 2005 and was followed in 2009 by a China-Central Asia gas pipeline reaching Turkmenistan. With these pipelines, China has gradually undermined Central Asia's energy export reliance on Russia (a legacy of the Soviet Union). In addition, China-Europe cargo rail lines via Kazakhstan offer Central Asian economies the quickest access to sea-based trade through Chinese territories and have played a significant role in growing trade linkages between China and the region. State-owned Chinese companies have repaired and modernized a number of decaying Soviet infrastructure projects throughout Central Asia and helped to transfer some industrial capacity crucial to individual economies, such as aluminum processing and renewable energy. China is likely to deploy the same investment-driven playbook used in Central Asia under the pretext of post-war reconstruction in the Taliban's re-established Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan after advances in Kabul on the eve of August 15 ([AP](#), August 15).



Image: Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi meets with Mullah Baradar, head of the Taliban Political Committee, in Beijing on July 28. (Source: [PRC Foreign Ministry](#)).

While efforts to integrate the economies of Central Asia with China have boosted development, quick and easy Chinese investments have also furthered elite-level corruption across the region.[1] This has benefited China, allowing it to leverage economic ties to attain its key political goal in the region—maintaining the territorial integrity of Xinjiang. Beginning in the early 2000s, Central Asian states wary of the independence movement across the border suppressed ethnic Uyghur associations in their territories. To date, no Central Asian state officials have dared to voice concern for the treatment of ethnic minorities in Xinjiang, a neighboring region with a strong history of shared culture. Both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have been reluctant to accept ethnic Kazakh and Kyrgyz refugees from across the border, and local news have reported about secret agreements between Chinese border guards and their Central Asian counterparts to detain and repatriate any people that cross illegally ([Azattyk](#), January 13, 2015; [Azattyk](#), August 12, 2016).

Taliban and Beijing: An Honest Beginning?

In the midst of the American troop withdrawal, the Taliban in Afghanistan have recaptured almost all of the country, entering the capital and expressing clear gestures to establish itself as a legitimate ruling party. Despite the possibility of small-scale resistance from the Afghan Army and potential in-fighting within the Taliban, a Taliban-led regime is likely to last, especially with the support of China in post-war reconstruction. Understanding this reality, China has recently stepped up its efforts to ensure that the Taliban understands its will to secure and control Xinjiang, offering promises of economic investment and international recognition in return for regional stability.

On July 28, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, one of the Taliban's key founders, led a delegation to Beijing. The agenda of Baradar's meeting with China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi was clear. China has asked the Taliban to "cut ties completely with the East Turkestan Movement," which China considers to be a terrorist organization seeking independence in Xinjiang from Beijing ([PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#), July 28).[2] A large number of foreign fighters with a variety of affiliations are present in Afghanistan, and the Taliban's ability to oversee and control these groups is in doubt ([UN Security Council](#), May 20). Nonetheless, the Taliban delegation provided reassurance that Afghanistan will not harbor the group, as it hopes to develop friendly relations with China and secure a role for Chinese investments in post-war reconstruction.

It is too soon to tell whether the Taliban can uphold their end of the bargain. At the same time, not working with the East Turkestan Movement may be the first among many requests demonstrating Beijing's concerns for the future of Afghanistan. On July 13, during a trip to Tajikistan, which shares a 1,300 kilometer (807 miles) porous border with Afghanistan, Wang urged the Taliban to be a responsible actor and give fair recognition and treatment to the Afghan government ([PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#), July 14). Wang also added that China wishes for an inclusive regime to be established in Afghanistan, with a robust, productive Islamic policy.

Besides the worry that Taliban support for the East Turkestan Movement could challenge the stability of Xinjiang, China is concerned about what kind of Islamic regime will emerge under the Taliban's leadership in Afghanistan. Including the Afghan government in the future of Afghan politics will serve to support a more modest and predictable Islamic policy, which is desirable for China as it worries that the success of the Taliban in Afghanistan could encourage the spread of like-minded groups throughout Central Asia, with the potential to influence extremism in Xinjiang.

Central Asian leaders, already concerned about the increase of extremism domestically, are also anxious as to how their populations will react to the Taliban's success in Afghanistan. With dozens of international terrorist organizations active in Afghanistan, outreach to Central Asia has been on the rise. In Kyrgyzstan, in July alone, a terrorist attack was planned by a Kyrgyz citizen who was a member of an undisclosed international terrorist organization and had trained in Afghanistan; two more cases of foreign fighter recruiters were also recently brought to light: one person was found to have known ties to ISIS, and the Hizb ut-Tahrir movement recruited a Kyrgyz woman to carry out its propaganda work in the country ([24 KG](#), July 28; [24 KG](#), July 27; [24 KG](#), July 22; [24 KG](#), July 16).

For the time being, Central Asian states are working to make sure that there is no conflict overspill into the region. There is a need to stabilize and assure the international community that Central Asia is safe enough for large investments, a topic that is particularly concerning to the oil- and gas-rich economies of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. On July 22, Tajikistan held its largest ever military exercise preparing for the growing insecurity from Afghanistan ([Reuters](#), July 22). On August 10, the Russian military led a week-long exercise with the Tajik and Uzbek armies in its Kharb-Maidon base at the border between Tajikistan and Afghanistan ([Moscow Times](#), August 10).

Economic Incentives for Peace

Beijing has failed to deliver tangible security plans to support its Central Asian neighbors on the western periphery in the event of an escalation of instability in Afghanistan. Instead, since the United States first announced plans to withdraw from Afghanistan in the early 2010s, China's primary strategy towards Afghanistan has been to induce economic incentives for peace.

In 2015, China began granting a tax-free regime for all Afghan products entering China ([PRC Ministry of Commerce](#), accessed August 10). As a result, Afghan exports to China increased steadily from \$12 million in 2015 to \$52 million in 2020 ([PRC General Administration of Customs](#), accessed August 10). A cargo flight inaugurated a China-Afghanistan air corridor in late 2018, shipping Afghan pine nuts ([Xinhua](#), November 7, 2018). A rail route between China and Afghanistan via Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan was launched in summer 2019 ([Belt and Road Portal](#), December 11, 2019). These logistics initiatives are important steps to establishing a transport corridor for trade, which will be crucial for gradually incorporating Afghanistan into the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Besides allowing bilateral trade, it also boosts local added-value businesses

and aids economic growth in countries between China and Europe, boosting a land-based Eurasian economy that hopes to rival the current sea-based global economic dynamic. In the first quarter of 2019 alone, Afghanistan exported over \$15 million worth of pine nuts to China; this success prompted the Afghan government to invest in a processing plant for pine nuts in Kabul ([Xinhua](#), April 15, 2019). Apart from expanding trade, Chinese companies have obtained a number of infrastructure contracts in Afghanistan such as repairing the Bamyan-Samangan highway and a solar energy project in Daykundi ([Belt and Road Portal](#) January 9, 2017). That being said, while relatively small-scale Chinese trade and infrastructure projects exist,[3] China has suspended its oil and gas project in northern Afghanistan, and almost no progress has been made toward developing the Mes Aynak mine project that was signed in 2007, largely due to concerns arising from the lack of a security guarantee from the Taliban as well as supply chain and energy concerns ([MEI](#), January 21, 2020).

Getting local political elites hooked on the rent-seeking opportunities that come with working with Chinese companies has been the primary strategy for China to attain its political goals in Central Asia over the past 30 years. If the Taliban can provide security protection for Chinese investments, Beijing is likely to roll out the same toolkit of informal political and economic incentives, but the key question of whether or not Taliban leaders will be swayed by financial incentives remains. In a rare phone interview with international media, the Taliban spokesman Suhail Shaheen told the *South China Morning Post* that “China is a friendly country that we welcome for reconstruction and developing Afghanistan [sic]... if they have investments of course we ensure their safety, their safety is very important for us”([South China Morning Post](#) July 9).

Conclusion

Moving forward, China will have to recognize the Taliban as a legitimate political party as a first step to recognizing a Taliban-led Afghanistan. Despite dozens of reported secret meetings between China and Taliban in recent years, China remains deeply insecure about a Taliban-ruled Afghanistan. Leading Afghanistan analysts in China are pessimistic about the future of regional security after the Taliban establishes itself as a legitimate ruling party. For example, Dr. Wang Shida (王世达), Deputy Director of the South Asia Institute at the China Institute of Modern International Relations, wrote in an opinion article for *Dazhong Daily* (大众日报) that the “Taliban’s return to power will turn Afghanistan into a more conservative and isolated country” ([Dazhong Daily](#) July 6). More explicitly, Dr. Qian Feng (钱峰), Director of the Research Department of National Institute of Strategic Studies at Tsinghua University, told the *Global Times* that the “fact is, there are still supporters of the East Turkestan Movement within the Taliban” ([Global Times](#) July 13). Furthermore, even if the Taliban were to rule Afghanistan as a legitimate political party, it might not be able to guarantee security; various factions within the Taliban controlling different districts would likely still compete to share profits with a foreign investor—such as China—once it finally enters the market in Afghanistan.

The Taliban will not be an easy partner for China. Significant uncertainty remains regarding the kind of Islamic ideologies that the Taliban leadership will pursue, as well as how this will affect the group’s foreign

policy—particularly toward its Central Asian neighbors—if it were to gain control of the Afghan state. In the long term, Afghanistan is in a geographically ideal position to benefit from China’s BRI, sitting between Central Asia and South Asia, and potentially providing a conduit for the landlocked former to the South Asian oceans. It is expected that Chinese companies will be interested in Afghanistan’s reconstruction and connectivity plans. But absent substantial political reforms—possibly as an outcome of the peace talks—Afghanistan’s fragile governance also risks leaving a large vulnerability open for Chinese actors to exploit. Across Central Asia, the failure to implement meaningful political and economic reforms following the Soviet era has resulted in a systemic lack of transparency and other safeguards against corruption, leading to a sustained culture in which political elites view their positions as a source of income and thus open the door to Chinese influence. With China determined to attain a security guarantee over Xinjiang issues, future Afghan political elites will be similarly vulnerable to succumbing to China’s open pockets.

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Notes

[1] For more information on corruption in Central Asia, see: Forthcoming report, <https://www.iri.org/cfai>; Gül Berna Özcan, “Chinese Business in Central Asia: How Crony Capitalism is Eroding Justice,” FPRI, March 30, 2021, <https://www.fpri.org/article/2021/03/chinese-business-in-central-asia-how-crony-capitalism-is-eroding-justice/>.

[2] The U.S. State Department removed the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) from its list of terrorist organizations last year, with one State Department official explaining the change saying “for more than a decade, there has been no credible evidence that ETIM continues to exist” (RFA, November 5, 2020). For more on how the Chinese state references ETIM to justify its counter-terrorism program, see: [China Brief](#), February 26.

[3] For reference, the China Global Investment Tracker records 3 significant deals (valued at more than \$100 million) totaling \$3.48 billion worth of investment between China and Afghanistan since 2007 ([AEI](#), accessed August 10).

‘Lips and Teeth’: The Enduring China-North Korea Relationship

By Pratik Jakhar

Introduction

The leaders of China and North Korea marked the 60th anniversary of the China-North Korea Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance ([Peking Review](#), July 11, 1961) on July 11, and pledged to renew the treaty for another 20 years ([UPI](#), July 7). "Despite the unprecedentedly complicated international situation in recent years the comradely trust and militant friendship between the DPRK [Democratic People's Republic of Korea] and China get stronger day by day," North Korean Supreme Leader Kim Jong-un said in his message to Chinese President Xi Jinping. In a reference to the U.S., he also highlighted that the "hostile forces become more desperate in their challenge and obstructive moves" ([Rodong Sinmun](#), July 11). Although many aspects of the notoriously opaque China-North Korea relationship are difficult to judge, the fluctuating bilateral ties recently appear to be on a firmer footing, driven by an alignment of interests, growing tensions with the U.S., and an increased emphasis on shared ideological roots.



Image: From left to right, Chinese first lady Peng Liyuan, Chinese Communist Party General Secretary Xi Jinping, North Korean Supreme Leader Kim Jong-Un and North Korean first lady Ri Sol-ju attend a gymnastics and art performance in Pyongyang during a state visit on June 20, 2019. (Source: [Xinhua](#)).

Xi said that the signing of the treaty was a "far-sighted strategic decision," and that he was ready to work with Kim to "strengthen strategic communication, chart the course for the China-DPRK relationship and lift the friendly cooperation between the two countries to new levels" ([PRC MFA](#), July 11). Although the treaty serves as a firm legal basis for their friendship, its renewal was not a certainty as bilateral relations were seemingly

going astray until recently. Kim's much publicized visit in March 2018 to Beijing seemed to have put Sino-North Korean ties back on track after what had appeared to be a gradual drifting apart of the two traditional allies. Since then, the two countries have increased their public displays of friendship and camaraderie, but underlying mistrust of the other side's motives and commitment towards the alliance remains.

Aspects of the treaty, in particular Article II, which compels Beijing to provide "mutual assistance" to Pyongyang in the event of an "armed attack," had led some to wonder if Beijing might seek to modify its language. A debate has been underway in China for some time about whether the treaty—born under different circumstances and originally aimed at balancing against the Soviet Union—is becoming "outdated" and increasing the risk for Beijing to be drawn into an unnecessary conflict ([Global Times](#), May 3, 2017; [NK News](#), July 10).

Nevertheless, the treaty's renewal shows that for now the motivations underlying close ties are stronger than those fostering divisions. North Korea confronts multiple challenges including COVID-19, sanctions and food shortages arising from a spate of extreme weather and natural disasters ([Aljazeera](#), August 8), and it is expected to rely on China for greater support. Beijing, for its part, sees preventing a North Korean collapse as crucial to its security interests.

Deep-Rooted Ties

The Sino-North Korean relationship, often described as being "as close as lips and teeth," goes back decades, with formal diplomatic ties being established in 1949. The two also fought together in the 1950-53 Korean War. Since then, China has provided political and economic support to sustain the North Korea regime. But the relationship has seen periods of turmoil, particularly in the 1990s when Pyongyang was upset over Beijing's decision to normalize ties with Seoul. In 2001, the two countries restored high-level exchanges with then-Chinese President Jiang Zemin's visit to North Korea.

North Korea's test of a nuclear weapon in October 2006 and China's subsequent endorsement of UN sanctions on Pyongyang again put a strain on their relationship. Beijing clearly signaled that it would not hesitate to punish Pyongyang for ignoring its appeals to not disturb peace on the Korean peninsula ([Global Times](#), February 17, 2013). Over the years, North Korea's repeated nuclear and missile tests have taken place despite China's disapproval, and Beijing's continued support for sanctions against Pyongyang also added to the deterioration in relations. Kim and Xi did not meet for several years, fueling suggestions about relations being frosty between the two countries.

China's approach towards resolving the North Korea nuclear issue has evolved from advocating for the resumption of the Six-Party Talks to proposing the "double suspension" idea, which calls for North Korea to suspend all nuclear tests and the U.S. to halt its annual military drills with the South ([Xinhua](#), March 8,

2017).[1] However, despite Beijing's repeated insistence, the proposal did not manage to gain much traction. As South Korea and the U.S. took on a larger role to resolve the North Korea crisis after Pyongyang's diplomatic outreach in 2018, many analysts said that Beijing was being marginalized ([Global Times](#), May 28, 2018).

In March 2018, Kim's first foreign visit since taking office in 2011 was to China, putting to rest theories about China losing its influence over North Korea. The two leaders have met four more times since then: in May 2018, June 2018, January 2019 and June 2019. The most recent meeting took place in Pyongyang, marking the first time that a Chinese leader visited North Korea since 2005 ([Xinhua](#), June 20, 2019). The momentum of improved ties has been maintained with a flurry of messages, letters and meetings between officials.

Shared Mutual Interests and a Marriage of Convenience

The core component that underpins the relationship remains shared mutual interests, encompassing economic cooperation, geopolitical concerns and strategic rationale. Although there has been a recent decline in trade flows, China remains by far the largest economic and aid partner of North Korea. Informal trade across the porous border between the two countries has also become a crucial aspect of the bilateral relationship. Up until the COVID-19 pandemic, China-North Korea trade rose steadily from 2000, peaking at \$6.86 billion in 2014. Although sanctions caused trade to plummet in 2018, Chinese exports to the DPRK climbed back up in 2019. But in 2020, Sino-North Korea trade tumbled 80 percent due to public health-related border restrictions as well as ongoing sanctions ([Yonhap](#), February 12; [38North](#), February 25, 2020).

Geopolitical imperatives also dictate the two neighbors' close relations, with China being one of the very few allies that the North Korean regime has in the face of Western pressure and sanctions. For China, its interest in sustaining the North Korean regime is more strategic than economic. It is deeply worried about the possibility of a unified Korean Peninsula under the leadership of Seoul, which is aligned with the U.S. A buffer state with close links to China is crucial to maintaining a regional strategic balance.

Further, regional stability is of particular interest to Beijing, which fears that being dragged into a spiral of conflict or chaos in the DPRK would result in political, social and economic upheaval inside China. While the Chinese certainly would prefer that North Korea not have nuclear weapons, their greatest fear remains regime collapse. Beijing also aims to ensure that it remains a significant party in the negotiations over North Korea's nuclear program.

Ideological Bonds: 'Comrades-in-Arms'

Recent trends suggest that the growing bonhomie between the two countries is being increasingly guided by common principles of revolutionary socialism and shared animosity towards the U.S. The ratcheting up of

tensions between Beijing and Washington has had the unintended effect of bringing China and North Korea closer. Beijing and Pyongyang both increasingly see themselves engaged in a long-running ideological competition with the West, and the leaders of the two countries consistently reinforce this viewpoint in their public remarks.

For example, during his June 2019 visit to Pyongyang, Xi Jinping said that, "We will pass down the China-North Korea friendship from generation to generation, consolidate and develop the two countries' socialist cause, better enrich our citizens and advance regional peace, stability, development and prosperity" ([The Korea Times](#), June 21, 2019). Kim said during the same meeting that the "invincible DPRK-China friendship will be immortal on the road of accomplishing the cause of socialism" ([KCNA](#), October 6, 2019).

Strong ideological bonds between the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK) have also played a role in strengthening the alliance. Both countries have sought to amplify their shared history in the Korean War, emphasizing a friendship that has been "forged in blood" and reinforcing the notion of two single-party Communist states united in fighting against imperialism and U.S. interventionism. In a recent letter to Xi commemorating the centenary of the CCP, Kim said that the WPK and the CCP are "true comrades and the comrades-in-arms that have shared life and death in the protracted struggle for opposing imperialism and building socialism, writing the proud history of friendship" ([Global Times](#), July 1).

Meanwhile, state media in both countries has pushed propaganda extolling the two communist countries' socialist ties and shared opposition to the U.S. "As imperialists now have united and are plotting to isolate and crush socialist countries, it is required of North Korea and China to further develop their friendly relations based on the spirit and principles of the bilateral treaty," said the Rodong Sinmun, which is the official newspaper of the WPK, said recently ([Yonhap](#), July 11).

North Korean officials have also come to the defense of China as it faced mounting international criticism over actions in Xinjiang, Hong Kong, and in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, North Korean Ambassador to China Ji Jae-ryong said that the U.S. has openly smeared the CCP and the country's socialist system, constantly agitating China-U.S. relations, which then turned into a confrontation of ideologies and systems ([Global Times](#), July 3). Pyongyang appears to be signaling to China that it will publicly back Beijing against the U.S. on criticisms of domestic and international issues. In June, the two countries' envoys stressed the importance of bilateral relationship in coordinated rare opinion pieces published in their respective host country's state media to mark the second anniversary of Xi's trip to Pyongyang ([PRC Embassy in the DPRK](#), June 21; [The Paper](#), June 21).

Conclusion

Both interests and ideology are driving the two countries together, and their traditional alliance is likely to solidify further with the Sino-U.S. rivalry as a key factor. In a message to Xi last month, Kim said that it is "the fixed stand" of his government to "ceaselessly develop the friendly and cooperative relations" between the countries ([Rodong Sinmun](#), July 11). In another exchange, Xi pledged efforts to "defend, consolidate and develop" relations with North Korea, while Kim said that he will push to elevate the two countries' ties to a "new strategic point" ([Yonhap](#), July 30).

The contemporary status of the bilateral relationship should be seen through the framework of the simmering U.S.-China strategic rivalry. Under this dynamic, China and North Korea will likely remain steadfast allies despite the ebbs and flows in their relations. Zheng Jiyong (郑继永), director of the Korean Studies Center at Fudan University, has said that the ties between China and North Korea will not be severed but will instead grow stronger, adding that "wishful thinking held by some Western elites and observers who expect China-North Korea ties to split has collapsed" ([Global Times](#), July 11).

The Biden administration has reiterated the long-held view that the U.S. and China have a common interest in the nuclear disarmament of North Korea, with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken noting that Pyongyang is also a concern for Beijing as it represents a regional "source of instability" ([South China Morning Post](#), March 18). But Washington should not count on support from Beijing to help end North Korea's nuclear program; indeed, China's incentives for doing so appear to be shrinking. Instead, Beijing may become even more reluctant to enforce sanctions and use its supposed leverage over Pyongyang to persuade Kim to adhere to international norms and laws.

China has recently stepped up calls for international sanctions on North Korea to be lifted and accused the U.S. of stoking regional tensions after it held talks to conduct military exercises with South Korea. "Given that North Korea has already stopped nuclear and long-range missile tests, its legitimate concerns should be addressed. An effective way to resolve the current deadlock is to lift sanctions imposed on North Korea by the United Nations Security Council," Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said earlier this month ([South China Morning Post](#), August 7).

The economic troubles caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and sanctions against North Korea as well as worsening food shortages are likely to further push Pyongyang into Beijing's orbit. Fearing a humanitarian disaster on its border, China has already said it is "ready to positively consider" providing assistance to Pyongyang if needed ([PRC MFA](#), June 30).

At the same time, suspicion and mistrust will continue to cloud the relationship. North Korea has shown no signs of abandoning its nuclear missile program, which irks China. For China, even a troublesome partnership with North Korea has strategic value, although recent warm ties would be at risk again if Pyongyang were to resume nuclear or long-range missile testing. Kim fears China gaining too much leverage

through deepening economic and trade links, but he has skillfully managed the asymmetric relationship so far, constraining Beijing's ability to influence Pyongyang.

Under the changing geopolitical landscape, China has shown itself willing to take the hit on its international reputation that comes with supporting North Korea as a fair price to pay to put pressure on Washington, and perhaps even begrudgingly accept a nuclear North Korea.

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Notes

[1] For more on this, see Jayshree Bajoria, Beina Xu; "Backgrounder: The Six Party Talks on North Korea's Nuclear Program." CFR, 2013, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/six-party-talks-north-koreas-nuclear-program>.

China's New Biosecurity Law Gives Limited Insight into Government Priorities and Next Steps

By James Haynes

Introduction

The new Biosecurity Law ([生物安全法], *Shengwu anquan fa*, hereafter “Law”) of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) went into effect on the country's sixth National Security Education Day on April 15 ([Xinhua](#), April 15). Adopted by the National People’s Congress (NPC) in October 2020, the Law is comprised of 10 chapters and 88 articles and stipulates the establishment of 11 basic systems for biosecurity risk prevention and control, including biosecurity risk monitoring and early warning, risk investigation and assessment, information sharing and information release ([Xinhua](#), April 15). Just before its implementation, China’s top legislator Li Zhanshu (栗战书) called for the country to adopt a “holistic approach to national security and ensuring both development and security” upon implementing the Law ([Xinhua](#), April 1).



Image: A worker tests a shipment of frozen shrimp for traces of coronavirus (Source: [Bangyue Online](#)). Amid a series of biosecurity and biosafety controversies, China recently implemented a new Biosecurity Law on April 15.

Chinese Communist Party (CCP) General Secretary Xi Jinping first mentioned the “Holistic National Security Concept” (总体国家安全观, *zongti guojia anquan guan*) as early as April 13, 2014 ([China Law Insight](#), October 20, 2020). The concept encompasses not only biosecurity, but also the realms of “politics, territory,

military, economy, culture, society, science and technology, information, ecology, natural resources and nuclear programs” ([China Daily](#), April 16, 2014). Although the Biosecurity Law was not classified as a high priority project in the 13th National People’s Congress Standing Committee five-year legislative plan (2018-2023), its importance was elevated following international criticisms of a Chinese scientist who created the world’s first gene-edited babies in 2018, and its implementation was reportedly accelerated in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic ([NPC Observer](#), Oct. 15, 2019, [m.21jingji.com](#), February 27, 2020). NPCSC Chairman Li Zhanshu, who chaired a July 2019 symposium on the Law, noted that the CCP “attaches great importance to biosecurity issues” and said that the law must “guide” human biotechnology “to the correct path” ([National People’s Congress](#), July 11, 2019). The NPC reviewed the first draft of the Biosecurity Law in October 2019. A second draft was released for public comment in April 2020 and the Law was finalized in October 2020 (Xinhua, April 14, [Covington](#), December 9, 2020, China MFA, February 14, 2020).

Although the Law is sweeping in its scope, it is also light on details regarding implementation, enforcement mechanisms, and so forth, leaving room for follow on legislation. For example, the Law does not clearly define laboratory safety procedures or implementation of containment principles that would be relevant to preventing the risk of accidental outbreaks, unlike comparable Western regulations such as the Laboratory Biorisk Management guidelines, a high-level strategy document issued by the U.S. government ([Pandora Report](#), March 19; [European Committee for Standardization](#), September 2011). The Law reflects the Chinese scientific community’s understanding of “biosecurity” (生物安保, *shengwu anbao*) as a subcategory of “biosafety” (生物安全, *shengwu anquan*), rather than an independent field of study, leading to these terms being used interchangeably. Western scientific norms typically distinguish these terms for better clarity. For example, according to a 2009 U.S. National Research Council report: “Biosafety is about protecting people from bad ‘bugs’; biosecurity is about protecting ‘bugs’ from bad people” ([Pandora Report](#), March 19, [National Research Council](#), 2009). Although the lack of distinction is unlikely to lead to significant changes in regulation, it does represent a slightly less-evolved academic framework for regulating biohazards in China.

It is likely that individual PRC ministries, including the National Health Commission, the State Council, the People’s Liberation Army, the People’s Armed Police Force and the Central Military Commission, could issue more detailed guidance on implementing and enforcing the Biosecurity Law ([Pandora Report](#), March 19). The Law also calls for the establishment of a new enforcement entity, the national biosecurity coordination mechanism (国家生物安全工作协调机制, *guojia shengwu anquan gongzuo xietiao jizhi*), which could play a role in centralizing control over biosecurity issues ([China Law Translate](#), October 18, 2020). Numerous other ministries could also have potential roles in implementing the new Law, including the Ministry of Ecology and Environment, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, the Ministry of Science and Technology, the Ministry of Commerce, the General Administration of Customs, and the State Administration for Market Regulation ([China Law Insight](#), October 20, 2020).

The Law’s ten chapters broadly fall into three categories covering preventive measures, containment recommendations, and enforcement mechanisms. Chapters 1-3 and 7 highlight prevention, Chapters 4-6

examine containment—mostly in laboratory environments—and Chapters 8-9 focus on enforcement ([China Law Translate](#), October 18, 2020, [NPC](#), October 17, 2020). As already mentioned, Xi's public criticism of systemic weaknesses and loopholes exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 underscores the necessity to rapidly implement the Law ([Xinhua](#), February 15, 2020).

Prevention (Chapters 1-3, 7, 10)

The first three chapters of the Law lay out expectations for governmental organs to establish various systems and draft standards and regulations on biosecurity, but do not specify exactly what those should be. Details on enforcement and legal obligation are similarly sparse. The text does legally define biosafety at the national level for the first time, referring to the need for “the nation effectively preventing and responding to the threat of dangerous biological factors and related factors, biotechnology developing steadily and healthily, people's lives and health and ecosystems being in a state of relatively no danger and threats, and the biological field having the capacity to preserve national security and sustainable development” ([NPC](#), October 17, 2020).

The Law also expands the legal scope of biosecurity enforcement to apply to infectious disease control; biotechnology research, development, and applications; microbiology laboratories; and human genetic resources and biological resources, among others, and establishes a clearer framework for the targeted prevention and control of biosafety risks ([Legal Daily](#), April 16). Four principles and eight applications for the prevention and control of biosecurity risks map onto the CCP principle of “four beams and eight pillars,” (四梁八柱, *siliang bazhu*), which Premier Li Keqiang first used in 2015 to describe the foundations of China's economy ([People's Daily](#), April 15; [Legal Daily](#), April 16; [China News](#), September 10, 2015), and has subsequently been adopted as a methodology for a variety of governance and reform measures. Essentially, the concept highlights the CCP's aim to achieve interlocking strength through engaging multiple government organs, rather than assigning all responsibility to just one organ.

This first section of the Law also calls for the establishment of a biosecurity risk monitoring and early warning system; a biological security risk investigation and assessment system; systems for sharing information on biological security; and a system for responding to major overseas biosecurity incidents ([China Law Translate](#), October 18, 2020). Notably, although the details on the early warning implementation are light, the information sharing mechanisms specified by the Law could be integrated with China's national credit system, according to Article 26 ([China Law Translate](#), October 18, 2020). Although the development of an actual national credit system for individuals is still in the early phases, one could foresee a future in which an individual's social credit score could be impacted by whether they are reported to have violated the biosecurity law by, for instance, importing invasive species.

The warning systems would necessarily connect to the prevention and control of major emerging infectious diseases, animal and plant epidemics, biotechnology research, development and application safety,

pathogenic microorganism laboratory biosafety, human genetic resources and biological resource safety, prevention of bioterrorism and biological weapons threats, and biological safety, according to Sun Youhai (孙佑海), Dean of the Tianjin University Law School and deputy director of the Tianjin University Biosafety Strategy Center. Sun wrote an interpretation of the Law, first published by the Yunnan Provincial Department of Ecological Environment, which highlighted in particular the security threat posed by invasive species, more than 660 of which have been discovered in China. Seventy-one have caused or present potential threats to the natural ecosystem and have been included in the "List of Invasive Alien Species in China" ([The Paper](#), November 29, 2020).

Implementation: Chapters 4-6

Sections of the Law regarding containment (Chapters 4-6) primarily address laboratory work in virology labs, biotechnology and microorganism laboratories, and labs dealing with human genetic resources and biological resources, but also touch on issues concerning invasive species, microbial resistance and biological weapons. The legislation could be seen as an indirect response to concerns over Chinese laboratory safety protocols, which have been subject to international scrutiny amid outstanding questions over the origins of the coronavirus outbreak. But the actual text is not especially prescriptive. It calls for "high-level laboratories engaging in laboratory activities with highly pathogenic, or suspected highly pathogenic, microbes" to be "approved by the department of health or rural affairs of a provincial-level people's governments, and [to] report on the experimental activities to the approving department." It also calls for experiments involving new microbes to obtain approvals, take measures to prevent experimental animals from escaping, and provide for responsible waste management ([China Law Translate](#), October 18, 2020; [NPC](#), October 17, 2020). Perhaps of most note to foreign observers are the restrictions in Articles 56-58 on collecting Chinese citizens' "genetic resources" and "biological resources," which may relate to China's documented attempts to build a national DNA database ([South China Morning Post](#), September 22, 2016). Some in the West have also criticized China's collection of genetic data beyond its borders ([Nature](#), July 7, 2020, [U.S. National Counterintelligence and Security Center](#), February 2021). In contrast to a long-standing international consensus on the importance of open genomic data sharing to benefit scientific research and innovation, Chinese regulations have underscored the national security risks of cross-border data transfers as early as 2016 ([Human Genetics](#), August 17, 2018).

Chapters 8 and 9 focus on enforcement of the prevention and containment provisions. Article 70 of Chapter 8 says that "The state is to strengthen reserves of biosecurity risk prevention and control supplies for major emergent infectious diseases and plant and animal diseases" ([China Law Translate](#), October 18, 2020). In addition to domestic risks, this admonition connects to Article 24, which reads that when "major biosecurity incidents occur overseas, [the custom] is to lawfully employ emergency biosecurity prevention" by controlling flows of people and goods into the country ([China Law Translate](#), October 18, 2020).

One non-COVID-19 related example of containment could include the ongoing swine flu epidemic in China that has decimated China's pork production, with some estimates suggesting that as much as half of Chinese pig herds died from the flu in 2020 ([Reuters](#), January 16, 2020). In the first quarter of 2021, industry sources and analysts reported that at least 20 percent of the breeding herd in northern China was lost, exceeding expected losses and raising fears about the potential for further impact in the south ([Reuters](#), April 1). Full rehabilitation to pre-swine flu levels is more likely by the second-half of 2022 ([Caixin](#), Feb. 24). Although the new Law has limited ability to affect the epidemic response *ex post facto* (centralized reporting mechanisms may be one exception), its most significant ramifications could include increased scrutiny of future pork imports and other staple foods.

The penultimate chapter concludes by outlining the fines and sanctions that may be levied by the on those who violate the law. Enforcement bodies vary by sanction, and the text of the Law does not indicate any kind of centralized oversight. Those violating biotechnology research regulations can be fined up to 10 million RMB (a little over \$1.5 million), those setting loose unauthorized animals up to 1 million RMB (\$154,340), those violating human genetic material regulations up to 10 million RMB (\$1.54 million), and those importing foreign species without permission up to 250,000 RMB (\$38,585) ([China Law Translate](#), October 18, 2020).

Conclusion

While recent challenges including genetic research and testing controversies, the COVID-19 pandemic, and last year's swine flu epidemic all clearly had an impact on fast-tracking China's new Biosecurity Law, it is not clear whether the Law's general provisions would have prevented any of the major issues that it was crafted to address. Many have noted that China's public health warning system, which was dramatically revamped following the SARS epidemic in 2002-2003, failed to work as expected in the early days of the coronavirus pandemic ([AJPH](#), June 10, 2020; [Science](#), May 18). Because the new Biosecurity Law is so vague, it is also uncertain how it will affect ongoing biosecurity challenges facing the Chinese state, including measures to block frozen food imports that are feared to transmit the infectious SARS-CoV-2 ([South China Morning Post](#), November 14, 2020).[1]

Although China's existing patchwork of laws may have contributed to the lagging response to its biosecurity challenge, it remains to be seen what kind of teeth this new law will have. In its current form, it looks more like a strategy document or list of priorities. Perhaps by the next National Security Education Day in 2022 the picture will appear clearer.

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Notes

[1] Note that the theory about the transmissibility of coronavirus via frozen food packaging is not widely accepted outside of China.
