



United States Department of State

Washington, D.C. 20520

October 31, 2023

Case No. FL-2023-00013

Reed Rubinstein
America First Legal Foundation
611 Pennsylvania Avenue, SE, #231
Washington, DC 20003

Dear Mr. Rubinstein:

As we noted in our letter dated September 29, 2023, we are processing your request for material under the Freedom of Information Act ("FOIA"), 5 U.S.C. § 552. The Department of State ("Department") has identified an additional three responsive records subject to the FOIA. Upon review, we have determined that the three records may be released in part.

An enclosure explains the FOIA exemptions and other grounds for withholding material. Where we have made redactions, the applicable FOIA exemptions are marked on each record. Where applicable, the Department has considered the foreseeable harm standard when reviewing these records and applying FOIA exemptions. All non-exempt material that is reasonably segregable from the exempt material has been released and is enclosed.

We will keep you informed as your case progresses. If you have any questions, your attorney may contact Pardis Gheibi, U.S. Department of Justice Trial Attorney, at pardis.gheibi@usdoj.gov and (202) 305-3246. Please refer to the case number, FL-2023-00013, and the civil action number, 22-cv-03386, in all correspondence about this case.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Diamonece Hickson", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Diamonece Hickson
Chief, Litigation and Appeals Branch
Office of Information Programs and Services

Enclosures: As stated.

The Freedom of Information Act (5 USC 552)

FOIA Exemptions

- (b)(1) Information specifically authorized by an executive order to be kept secret in the interest of national defense or foreign policy. Executive Order 13526 includes the following classification categories:
- 1.4(a) Military plans, systems, or operations
 - 1.4(b) Foreign government information
 - 1.4(c) Intelligence activities, sources or methods, or cryptology
 - 1.4(d) Foreign relations or foreign activities of the US, including confidential sources
 - 1.4(e) Scientific, technological, or economic matters relating to national security, including defense against transnational terrorism
 - 1.4(f) U.S. Government programs for safeguarding nuclear materials or facilities
 - 1.4(g) Vulnerabilities or capabilities of systems, installations, infrastructures, projects, plans, or protection services relating to US national security, including defense against transnational terrorism
 - 1.4(h) Weapons of mass destruction
- (b)(2) Related solely to the internal personnel rules and practices of an agency
- (b)(3) Specifically exempted from disclosure by statute (other than 5 USC 552), for example:
- | | |
|----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| ARMSEXP | Arms Export Control Act, 50a USC 2411(c) |
| CIA PERS/ORG | Central Intelligence Agency Act of 1949, 50 USC 403(g) |
| EXPORT CONTROL | Export Administration Act of 1979, 50 USC App. Sec. 2411(c) |
| FS ACT | Foreign Service Act of 1980, 22 USC 4004 |
| INA | Immigration and Nationality Act, 8 USC 1202(f), Sec. 222(f) |
| IRAN | Iran Claims Settlement Act, Public Law 99-99, Sec. 505 |
- (b)(4) Trade secrets and confidential commercial or financial information
- (b)(5) Interagency or intra-agency communications forming part of the deliberative process, attorney-client privilege, or attorney work product
- (b)(6) Personal privacy information
- (b)(7) Law enforcement information whose disclosure would:
- (A) interfere with enforcement proceedings
 - (B) deprive a person of a fair trial
 - (C) constitute an unwarranted invasion of personal privacy
 - (D) disclose confidential sources
 - (E) disclose investigation techniques
 - (F) endanger life or physical safety of an individual
- (b)(8) Prepared by or for a government agency regulating or supervising financial institutions
- (b)(9) Geological and geophysical information and data, including maps, concerning wells

Other Grounds for Withholding

- NR Material not responsive to a FOIA request excised with the agreement of the requester

From: (b)(6)@state.gov>
Gabrielle(Potts), Lea (b)(6)@state.gov>;
(b)(6)@state.gov>;
Stilwell, David R (b)(6)@state.gov>;
To: Krach, Keith J (b)(6)@state.gov>;
(b)(6)@state.gov>;
(b)(6)@state.gov>;
Kissel, Mary E (S) (b)(6)@state.gov>
CC: (b)(6)@state.gov>
Subject: Grave and growing concern
Date: Thu, 10 Dec 2020 03:49:11 +0000

Dear Colleagues,

I just received the attached summary of information censorship in support of CCP propaganda in our own country by US tech companies.

May I suggest a meeting on this topic early next week? (b)(6) would you please help reaching out to schedule). If the schedules do not permit a meeting before my scheduled departure, I hope one of our offices can continue this important thread.

Thank you.

(b)(6)

(b)(6)

U.S. Department of State

Sender: (b)(6)@state.gov>
Gabrielle(Potts), Lea (b)(6)@state.gov>;
(b)(6)@state.gov>;
Stilwell, David R (b)(6)@state.gov>;
Recipient: Krach, Keith J (b)(6)@state.gov>;
(b)(6)@state.gov>;
(b)(6)@state.gov>;
Kissel, Mary E (S) (b)(6)@state.gov>;
(b)(6)@state.gov>

A summary of Chinese self-media users

Twitter, Facebook, YouTube have been censoring users' comments and info on the Hong Kong protest last year, the Wuhan epidemic this year, and now the Biden scandal and the presidential election. New media has been censoring speech for a long time. Several Chinese "self-media" professionals and netizens shared their user experiences with various social platforms, which show that media companies are suppressing users' freedom of speech and even block certain people.

The main issues include: Twitter uses algorithms to automatically unsubscribe followers and limit the influence of internet celebrities.

Twitter labels tweets, censors comments, suspends and freezes accounts, and even bans users who post certain information such as that of the coronavirus outbreak. A number of people in China have been arrested by the State Security Bureau for using Twitter, but there is no clear evidence yet on whether Twitter directly notified Chinese police to arrest people as Weibo does.

Likewise, Facebook not only cancels accounts, but also uses specific accounts to take over users' accounts, making it impossible for the original owner to post anything.

Since February this year, YouTube has been involved in the "yellow dollar sign" incident. A large number of films related to the CCP virus (COVID-19) and the pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong have been marked with yellow dollar signs (which means no ads and income for the film) on the grounds of "controversial" and "sensitive".

YouTube also imposes some restrictions on channels, resulting in a significant reduction in the number of viewers. Users cannot receive subscription alerts. Many users have also been automatically unsubscribed.

Facebook, YouTube and Google all block traffic and user ads.

(b)(6)

a renowned Chinese rights lawyer, said:

In the past three months, my Twitter followers have dropped three times a day at fixed time. Usually it's at 12:00 the noon, and 3:00 or 5:00 in the afternoon, then another time at 8:00 in the evening, and again at 12:00 at night. It's been happening since September. Now the time is not so fixed. There are intervals in between, and sometimes more than 200 followers drop at just one time.

(b)(6)

This situation existed before. It happens all the time. On July 23, 2017 or 2018, my followers dropped more than 2,000. I wrote a report to Twitter asking them to check, but there was no result.

Also, the number of people I follow drop by 10 or 8 every once in a while. The most typical one is that other Tweeter users ask me, "You used to follow President Trump, why do you unfollow him now?" Only then did I realize that I actually unsubscribed him, but it's hard to know when I was unsubscribed from other followers.

This experience actually comes from mainland China, where the Communist Party used to control Weibo in this way. In 2007, Weibo was very popular in China. In order to prevent the influence of many Weibo users from growing rapidly and becoming internet celebrities, this method was used to control the growth of their fans and limit their influence.

This is a tactic that the CCP has been using for a long time, and it's being adopted about a few years later by Western social media in 2014 or 2015. This is a problem with both Facebook and Twitter.

In addition, Twitter's restrictions on speech, some of which are unfair, are also unusual. Trump's tweets, for example, are immediately tagged. The accounts of some Chinese netizens who made anti-communist comments were cancelled, frozen or asked to be re-verified. When you re-verify, you can't log in if you can't receive the verification code. Things like that happen all the time.

(b)(6)

a Twitter user in Wuhan was completely banned due to posting epidemic information (Please keep his information confidential, as he is inside China)

Twitter frequently freezes user accounts in large numbers in the name of violating rules without indicating which rules were violated. Hence, a huge number of Twitter users resurrect with new accounts named XXX ii, III... Vi.

"Nicole", a Twitter user in Hong Kong said, "I've been tweeting pictures from the protests

in Hong Kong. I got five Twitter accounts blocked and now I'm using the sixth one. I don't know why I suddenly can't log in."

This May, multiple Twitter users, including the renowned financial blogger (b)(6) were banned due to exposing Li Feifei, Twitter's new independent director online. After continuous protests and complaints, he was first allowed to unblock one account, but then all four accounts of his were unblocked.

Twitter can even target specific users, banning them from spreading information or speaking out on the platform. Wuhan netizen (b)(6) used a bear image as his Twitter head portrait. During the Wuhan lockdown, he posted a large number of COVID-19 related inside stories and videos. He revealed that he was suspended and was noticed "if you try to escape the permanent freeze by creating a new account, we will freeze your new account."

注意，如果你试图通过创建新账号逃脱永久冻结，我们将冻结你的新账号。如果你想对冻结提出申诉，请联系我们的支持团队。

As expected, the new account of him, which is similar to the original account, was also banned. He joked that he was being hunted down by Twitter. "Open a new account, say something publicly, frozen immediately." Netizens believe that this is Twitter cooperating with the CCP to cover up the epidemic and undermine the timeline evidence.



The company does not allow users to export any data. Users' previous posts are not accessible, and all private messages with other users have disappeared. "Similar usernames were frozen immediately and complaints were all ignored."



(b)(6), a Chinese peasant in Hebei Province who lost his farmland and has been defending his rights, said: "My Facebook and Twitter have both been blocked, and the accounts I am using now are new accounts I set up using new IDs. Social media in free countries should not be allowed to suspend users' accounts casually. I hope that the U.S. government will discipline social media so that people have a place to speak out."

Inside China, (b)(6) was repeatedly visited by the National Security staff who forced him to delete sensitive posts. He is also aware that he is under tight surveillance by the same group of people.



Various media reports also revealed that many Chinese had been arrested by National Security for using Twitter. So far, there is no direct evidence as for whether Twitter would inform China's National Security to help them with these arrests.

Testimony from

(b)(6) (b)(6)

In February and March, when the CCP virus pandemic was severe (in China), my video posts were tagged with yellow icon every day for a period of about two months. I estimate that at least 45 videos were yellow tagged, which means, no ad income was obtained from these videos. As a matter of fact, they were yellow tagged as soon as they were posted, regardless of topics and headlines.

Many of our viewers can testify for us. Numerous subscribers told me that they cannot receive updates. Instead, the channels that they did not subscribe, such as the CCP's overseas propaganda and channels run by Chinese internet trolls, were intensely recommended to them. Isn't it a suppression of freedom of speech? My most popular channel used to have roughly 2.3 million views every day. Now the number of viewers has dropped to a little more than 100,000. Is it normal? It is indeed a grave suppression.

In addition, when Epoch Times and NTD TV truthfully reported the U.S. presidential election, our media's twitter accounts were restricted by Twitter. My program, Epoch Times' News Highlights, was suspended by Twitter. Even the ID image was gone.

(b)(6)

(b)(6)

In addition to yellow icon and ad restriction, Youtube has apparently restrict the exposure and recommendation of my channels through it algorithm. When Youtube audience search certain topics, the ranking of my channels are artificially lowered. As a result, number of views dropped a lot, so did the ad income.

It is very possible that Youtube imposed an upper limit for our subscription and views, because my viewers discovered several times that subscription remained unchanged and even dropped at a rate of several hundred a day. Some viewers also reported that they were unsubscribed by Youtube's system without their knowledge.

There are also viewers who told me that they could not leave comments, or their comments would not show up. We don't know what was specifically going on, we only noticed that viewer comments had become much fewer than before. It is very similar to CCP's internet censorship technology and tactics.

Although we do not have direct evidence, we feel that the methods they use are similar to voting machine fraud in the presidential election, whereby the shady operations were happening on the backend, keeping the frontend users and channel owners in the dark.

Writer

(b)(6)

I have also been harshly suppressed by internet censorship. The details are provided below.

1. I had worked hard on my Facebook page

(b)(6)

for three years and accumulated 284,562 followers. In early August, my account was taken over by an ID name Fb portal for no reason. I was deprived my admin rights for this page, which means, I cannot post anything thereafter. I filed complaints to Facebook many times, but all these complaints fell on deaf ears.

Action	Page Manager	Date
Changed (b)(6) from an editor to an analyst	Fb portal	Aug 7, 2020, 6:58 AM
Changed (b)(6) from an editor to an analyst	Fb portal	Aug 7, 2020, 6:58 AM
Changed (b)(6) from an editor to an analyst	Fb portal	Aug 7, 2020, 6:58 AM
Changed (b)(6) from an editor to an analyst	Fb portal	Aug 7, 2020, 6:58 AM
Changed (b)(6) from an editor to an analyst	Fb portal	Aug 7, 2020, 6:58 AM
Claimed ownership of the Page	Fb portal	Aug 2, 2020, 12:05 PM

2. I had about 156,000 followers on my Twitter account

(b)(6)

just two months ago. This number then started dropping around the same time. I kept losing followers by at least 100 a day; in the worst scenario, 1,000 every day. Now my followers been reduced to 150,900. Many of my followers told me that they themselves didn't unfollow me, but lost connection with my account. Some told me that although they are still my followers, they could not see my new posts.

3. Youtube placed yellow tag on almost all my videos

(b)(6)

when the coronavirus pandemic was very serious in China and it was my major topic. Although there are fewer yellow tags now, my subscribers say they were unknowingly unsubscribed, and some say they cannot receive updates.

When I started to discuss election fraud, number of views dropped a lot. During this time, some viewers told me they could not "like" my video, others said they could not share my videos on Facebook, as the videos seemed to be banned on Facebook.

4. I have to resort to self-censorship to get around. In a recent episode in which I discussed election integrity

(b)(6)

I used the phrase "problems in the voting system" instead of "voter fraud," as I was afraid that Youtube's AI system can recognize and censor the term "voter fraud."

The United States used to be the hope for the entire world to safeguard freedom of speech. Isn't it a big tragedy that we are facing such a situation today?

In addition, in July last year, Facebook banned Epoch Media Group from placing ads on

Facebook. Some employees of Epoch Times even had their personal accounts suspended by Facebook.

Since November 4th, YouTube campaign (bidding ads) has suspended many Epoch Times ads. These advertisements have nothing to do with the election, but are marked as sensitive election advertisements, which affects the promotion of English-language Epoch Times.

As a global search engine, Google is constantly changing its algorithms. In recent years, algorithms with censorship function have emerged. For example, articles on the Epoch Times website are given low rankings on Google's search result, while the CCP's external propaganda websites are placed on the top.

Youtube's CEO Susan Wojcicki revealed in an interview with CNN in April that any content that does not comply with the recommendations of the World Health Organization may be removed from the platform.

Analysts believe that Google's new ranking algorithm is also supporting the Chinese Communist Party's propaganda, and deliberately suppressing upright media groups such as The Epoch Times. These social media are also suspected of creating fake data.

(b)(6)

believes that these social media companies should not have the power to determine whether information posted is true or false. They cannot be a player and a judge at the same time. Social media must comply with the laws of the United States when formulating their own rules. The U.S. government should introduce laws to regulate them. They should not be casually allowed to have such a power of censorship and judgment.

We call on the U.S. congress to enact new laws and formulate new policies to supervise the new media. The U.S. government has the duty to protect the citizens' right of free speech as much as possible.

From:	"Gabrielle(Potts), Lea" <(b)(6)@state.gov>
SentVia:	(b)(6)@state.gov>
To:	Gabrielle(Potts), Lea <(b)(6)@state.gov>
Subject:	GEC Weekly Operational Update Report 11.13.2020
Date:	Fri, 13 Nov 2020 14:59:36 +0000

Colleagues,

Please find our GEC Weekly Operational Report below. I have also attached our abbreviated GEC Operations Update slides prepared for the Secretary, and the GEC reports referenced in the Operational Report.

Have a wonderful weekend.

Best,

Lea

Lea Gabrielle

Special Envoy

Global Engagement Center

U.S. Department of State

(b)(6)@state.gov



From: Bray, Leah <(b)(6)@state.gov>

Sent: Friday, November 13, 2020 9:44 AM

To: (b)(6)@state.gov>
Cc:



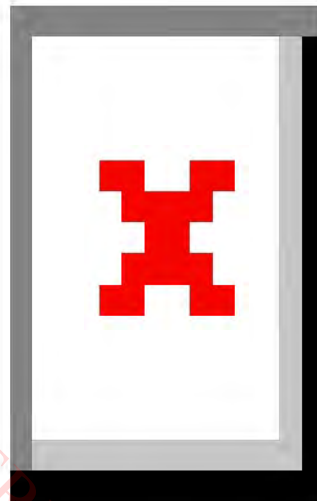
11/13/2020

Colleagues,

(U) Ongoing GEC Activities to Expose Propaganda and Disinformation.

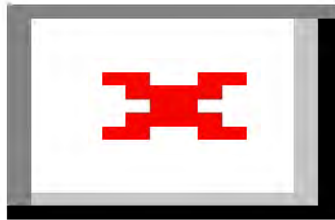
(U) Countering Russian Disinformation.

- **(U) *Russian Pillars Report* Featured in Leading UK Newspaper.** The UK-based newspaper *The Times* ran a frontpage article on the British government's cyberwar against anti-vaccine Russian propaganda, citing the GEC's *Pillars of Russia's Disinformation and Propaganda Ecosystem* report and highlighting three proxy sites mentioned in the *Pillars* report: SouthFront, News Front, and Geopolitica.ru.
 - **(U) The author of the article, Lucy Fisher, promoted the article and the *Pillars Report* in [tweets](#), which included in a link to the report.**



(U) Countering Iranian Disinformation.

- ~~(SBU)~~ **A GEC Partner Exposes Tehran's Laissez-faire Approach to COVID-19.** The two-minute video, produced by a GEC partner and viewable on YouTube, reveals the scale of the epidemic within Iran's borders and highlights the Iranian regime's focus on detaining those accused of spreading "rumors" about the disease rather than working on pandemic mitigation efforts. **The video also showed how militia fighters deployed to Syria, many of whom disregarded health precautions, were spreading the illness. 1,600 of 6,200 YouTube views in the first two days came from people who searched for "Hizballah" in Arabic; 73 percent of those who did that search watched the video.** The video was also published on three other platforms. View COVID-19 video in English [here](#).



(U) Image from the video depicting COVID-19 infected Shia Pilgrims and militia fighters traveling to Qom, Iran.

(U) Undermining and Exposing Terrorists.

- **(SBU) Pro-ISIS Rocket.Chat Channel Urges Renewed Allegiance for ISIS Emir.** The Counter Extremism Project (CEP), an international non-partisan think tank, identified the post (made initially on October 23), which called on ISIS supporters to renew their pledge of allegiance to Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Quraishi. The *Rocket.Chat* channel stated that video and audio pledges to ISIS would be published on Telegram and other platforms to showcase the group's strength.
 - **(SBU) Since the September 17 launch of the GEC lead al-Mawla CONOP, ISIS has increased its requests for online pledges. It is the GEC's assessment that this is an attempt to rebuild lost credibility resulting from the CONOP's release of damaging interrogation reports.**

(U) Countering CCP Disinformation.

- **(U) The GEC Facilitates Coordination between Australia, New Zealand, and the United States on Building Journalism Capacity in the Pacific Islands.** As part of the GEC's efforts to work with America's allies and partners to confront disinformation and propaganda, the GEC facilitated the first meeting between the State Department, Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and New Zealand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade to share information on journalism capacity-building programs across the Pacific Islands.
 - (U) The representatives agreed to develop a framework for de-conflicting activities moving forward. To facilitate that effort, the GEC has generated a catalog of ongoing media support activities conducted by the three countries. This deconfliction effort seeks to maximize the impact and reach of programming by the U.S. and its allies to bolster Pacific Islands media against foreign influence and to avoid over-burdening small media outlets.
 - (U) The group agreed to meet on a quarterly basis moving forward to advance coordination and collaboration to counter disinformation in the Pacific Islands. This effort is an off-shoot of the U.S.-Australia Disinformation Working Group

first announced this Summer at the Australia-United States Ministerial Consultation.

(U) Additional Significant GEC Activities.

- **(U) On November 6, the GEC and DHS's Online Counter Disinformation Game, Harmony Square, was Reviewed Positively in the Harvard Misinformation Review.**
 - **(U) Within four days of the announcement of research by the [Harvard Misinformation Review](#), the game gained over 23,000 players.** The game has received extensive media coverage with over 60 articles resulting from Harvard's review and an earlier press release from Cambridge University.
 - **(U) The peer reviewed research found that the [game](#) increased psychological resistance against manipulation techniques commonly used in political misinformation.** Drawing on "inoculation theory," the game functions as a psychological "vaccine" by exposing people to weakened doses of the common techniques used in political misinformation especially during elections.
 - **(U) GEC introduced DHS to the game concept during a GEC Tech Demo in 2019.** As a result, GEC and DHS partnered with the game developer DROG to develop what eventually became Harmony Square.
 - **(U) The GEC will conduct an international rollout of the game in coming weeks,** while DHS is finalizing its preparations for a domestic rollout.
- **(U) The GEC Announces Election-related Assistance to Ecuador.** At the November 10 U.S.-Ecuador Bilateral Expanded Political Dialogue, Special Envoy Lea Gabrielle announced that the GEC would provide training to the Ecuadorians in preparation for their upcoming elections.
 - **(U) The GEC will conduct training on its collaborative analytics platform, GEC-IQ, as well as disinformation and propaganda-related training for Ecuadorian government communicators and analysts.** These training events are scheduled to take place before the end of the year.
 - **(U) Ecuador has been the victim of previous coordinated disinformation campaigns,** most recently surrounding its response to COVID-19. The GEC's assistance will help enable the conduct of free and fair elections while blunting the impact that disinformation and adversarial propaganda may have on the electoral outcome.
- **(U) The GEC's Principal Deputy Coordinator (PDC) Daniel Kimmage Spoke to Thousands of Tech Sector Participants at the November 9 Africa Tech Festival Panel.** His participation was in support of the GEC's upcoming U.S.-Africa Tech Challenge.
 - **(U) PDC Kimmage spoke about the GEC and highlighted the U.S.-Africa Tech Challenge while providing the GEC's perspective on how technology has an impact on disinformation and counter-disinformation efforts.** He emphasized that private industry should work with the GEC to develop tools to alert users on disinformation campaigns.

- (U) After the Tech Festival, panel member Emmanuel Lubanzadio, Twitter's Head of Public Policy for Sub-Saharan Africa expressed interest in participating in the GEC's upcoming Africa Tech Challenge.
- (U) On November 5, the GEC Briefed its Technology Programs at the DOD's Information Conflict Technical Exchange Meeting. The meeting was hosted by the Joint Information Operations Warfare Center.
 - (U) The purpose of this government-only meeting was to bring together Military Services, Service Labs, Government Agencies, federally funded research and development centers, and University Affiliated Research Centers which are currently working on programs or research relevant to Information Operations.
 - (U) The GEC used the event to promote its technology programs, with the goal of eliciting additional DOD participation from the 100+ personnel at the meeting.
 - (U) Numerous DOD partners contacted the GEC after the event to request participation.
- (U) The GEC's Disinfocloud.com (1163 users) Platform Informs the Interagency and Foreign Government Partners about Technology Capabilities and Assessments of Tools to Counter Propaganda and Disinformation (CPD). Visit the following links for the latest Disinfo Cloud social media postings on [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#), the Disinfo Cloud [blog](#), and the Disinfo Cloud [Newsfeed](#). Posts by Disinfo Cloud this week include:
 - (U) As a follow-up to the March 2019 Weapons of Mass Destruction report; Disinfo Cloud is publishing a series of blog posts that [highlight recent foreign state-sponsored disinformation and propaganda efforts](#); [explore how governments and intergovernmental bodies are responding to the challenge](#); highlight [what social media platforms](#) are doing as well as activities by civil society and independent organizations; and spotlight tools and technologies that can be leveraged to address the threat.
 - (U) The fourth post on actions by social media platforms to combat disinformation will be published later this week.
 - (U) Disinfo Cloud's [weekly disinfo news round-up](#) summarizes publicly available content featured on the Disinfo Cloud newsfeed. This week Disinfo Cloud included the following news highlights:
 - (U) After playing the game Harmony Square, gamers/users had a positive change of behavior. They found misinformation significantly less reliable, are significantly more confident in their assessment of misinformation, and are significantly less likely to share misinformation. Harmony Square is a free online game aimed at inoculating people against online manipulation.
 - (U) The number of Russians who trust television as a source of information has dropped to 23 percent. Russians have become more aware that Russian-state affiliated media has a role in spreading disinformation. PRC influence operations on Twitter have limited impact largely due to poor messaging and network coordination, although new technologies and platforms such as YouTube might offer greater results.

(U) Current Observations and Analysis.

- **(SBU) The GEC Monitors for Foreign Disinformation During the U.S. 2020 Election.** The GEC conducted select monitoring of the overseas information environment for Russian, Iranian, and PRC disinformation. Russian state and proxy media outlets engaged in clear amplification of inflammatory, anti-U.S. themes.
 - **(SBU)** For example, throughout U.S. elections week, RT and Sputnik continuously promoted through videos and online articles claims of election fraud, protests, and the potential for post-election violence or a “coup” in the United States.
 - **(SBU)** As the election results started to shift toward former Vice President Joe Biden, RT, Sputnik, and Iranian media began publishing more articles claiming that “the U.S. is broken either way.” Russians used third-party influencers and proxy websites such as SouthFront and Global Research to cover election fraud and anti-U.S. “coup” narratives.
- **(U) ISIS Supporters React to U.S. Elections.** Several pro-ISIS channels on Telegram commented on the results of the U.S. elections. A post by *2020 Course of Event* said that regardless of who wins the election, jihadis should be ready “to fight Biden's army or Trump's army.” Another post on the same channel asked followers to provide speeches of jihadi leaders who discussed the significance of jihad against America, including clips that document operations in the U.S., specifically killing. Another ISIS supporter posted on Telegram he hoped Trump’s rejection of Biden’s victory would lead to a U.S. civil war while another pro-ISIS Telegram channel predicted Biden will win the U.S. elections.
 - **(U)** Pro-ISIS supporters continue to respond to direction given in a recent speech by ISIS spokesman, Abu Hamzah Al-Qurashi, calling supporters worldwide to carry out attacks and to also add their own messages encouraging others to do the same. In the same speech, al-Qurashi told fighters in various ISIS provinces to increase their efforts and attacks, and when referring to Iraq, he predicted U.S. forces will soon leave the country, enabling ISIS to advance against the Iraqi army.
- **(U) The GEC Finds That Global Twitter Conversations and Global Media Outside of China Largely Favored Pro-Democracy Protestors in Hong Kong.** On November 5, the GEC published two reports that found that both global Twitter conversations and global media outside of China largely favored the pro-democracy protestors and criticized Beijing’s erosion of Hong Kong’s autonomy in the months following Beijing’s enactment of China’s National Security Law for Hong Kong on June 30.
 - **(U)** The reports also evaluated receptivity to CCP propaganda on Hong Kong within Hong Kong. Analysis showed that Twitter users self-locating in Hong Kong amplified the announcement of U.S. sanctions against Chief Executive Carrie Lam and other Hong Kong and PRC officials. Hong Kong users also expressed concern that the National Security Law would erode fundamental rights and liberties. Articles in Hong Kong that endorsed sanctions on Chief

Executive Lam for using excessive police force were shared at higher volumes than articles from CCP-linked outlets like *East Week*, which claimed the United States had meddled in Beijing's affairs by supporting protesters in Hong Kong and monitoring Hong Kong's online network systems.

- (U) **The GEC Makes its Vaccine Coverage Estimation Model Available to the Department of State.** All DOS employees can now view the [Vaccine Coverage Estimation Model \(V-CEM\)](#) dashboard without logging into GEC-IQ. A future iteration of the dashboard will be available for non-DOS government users on a needed basis.
 - (U) The V-CEM dashboard, which was built by the GEC, is a near real time, global monitoring capability for estimating the tone and volume of media coverage regarding top vaccine development efforts and long-term trends of structural relations with the U.S., China, and Russia. V-CEM gathers global news coverage in over 50+ languages from approximately 172 countries. These stories are then analyzed based on their volume and tone on the leading global vaccine development efforts.
 - (U) DOS employees can access the dashboard if already logged into OpenNet by going to the website <https://tableauenterprise.geciq.com/> or by logging in through [Okta \(the State Department's secure platform for accessing cloud applications\)](#) with their OpenNet credentials or PIV/CAC card reader. Once on the Okta homepage, click on the **GEC-IQ Tableau** button to launch Tableau Enterprise, search for "vaccine" and view the dashboard.

(U) In closing, thank you for your close collaboration with the GEC team. Our success is made possible only by the great colleagues we have in State, the interagency, and our international partnerships. We will continue to release these reports on a bi-weekly basis. Please contact the GEC's Acting PPO Director [\(b\)\(6\)@state.gov](#) if we can be of any assistance.

Best regards,
Leah Bray
Deputy Coordinator for Policy, Plans, and Operations

~~SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED~~

~~SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED~~

~~SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED~~

FL-2023-00013

A-00000659560

"UNCLASSIFIED"

10/31/2023

~~SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED~~

Sender:	"Gabrielle(Potts), Lea" (b)(6)@state.gov; (b)(6)@state.gov>
Recipient:	Gabrielle(Potts), Lea (b)(6)@state.gov>

OBTAINED BY AMERICA FIRST LEGAL FOUNDATION



(U) GEC Weekly Operational Report

FL-2023-00013

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(U) GEC Weekly Operational Report

11/13/2020

Colleagues,

(U) Ongoing GEC Activities to Expose Propaganda and Disinformation.

(U) Countering Russian Disinformation.

- (U) *Russian Pillars Report* Featured in Leading UK Newspaper.** The UK-based newspaper *The Times* ran a frontpage article on the British government's cyberwar against anti-vaccine Russian propaganda, citing the GEC's *Pillars of Russia's Disinformation and Propaganda Ecosystem* report and highlighting three proxy sites mentioned in the *Pillars* report: SouthFront, News Front, and Geopolitica.ru.
 - (U) The author of the article, Lucy Fisher, promoted the article and the *Pillars Report* in [tweets](#), which included in a link to the report.**



(U) Countering Iranian Disinformation.

- **(SBU) A GEC Partner Exposes Tehran's Laissez-faire Approach to COVID-19.** The two-minute video, produced by a GEC partner and viewable on YouTube, reveals the scale of the epidemic within Iran's borders and highlights the Iranian regime's focus on detaining those accused of spreading "rumors" about the disease rather than working on pandemic mitigation efforts. **The video also showed how militia fighters deployed to Syria, many of whom disregarded health precautions, were spreading the illness. 1,600 of 6,200 YouTube views in the first two days came from people who searched for "Hizballah" in Arabic; 73 percent of those who did that search watched the video.** The video was also published on three other platforms. View COVID-19 video in English [here](#).



(U) Image from the video depicting COVID-19 infected Shia Pilgrims and militia fighters traveling to Qom, Iran.

(U) Undermining and Exposing Terrorists.

- **(SBU) Pro-ISIS Rocket.Chat Channel Urges Renewed Allegiance for ISIS Emir.** The Counter Extremism Project (CEP), an international non-partisan think tank, identified the post (made initially on October 23), which called on ISIS supporters to renew their pledge of allegiance to Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Quraishi. The *Rocket.Chat* channel stated that video and audio pledges to ISIS would be published on Telegram and other platforms to showcase the group's strength.
 - **(SBU) Since the September 17 launch of the GEC lead al-Mawla CONOP, ISIS has increased its requests for online pledges. It is the GEC's assessment that this is an attempt to rebuild lost credibility resulting from the CONOP's release of damaging interrogation reports.**

(U) Countering CCP Disinformation.

- **(U) The GEC Facilitates Coordination between Australia, New Zealand, and the United States on Building Journalism Capacity in the Pacific Islands.** As part of the GEC's efforts to work with America's allies and partners to confront disinformation and propaganda, the GEC facilitated the first meeting between the State Department, Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and New Zealand's Ministry of

Foreign Affairs and Trade to share information on journalism capacity-building programs across the Pacific Islands.

- (U) The representatives agreed to develop a framework for de-conflicting activities moving forward. To facilitate that effort, the GEC has generated a catalog of ongoing media support activities conducted by the three countries. This deconfliction effort seeks to maximize the impact and reach of programming by the U.S. and its allies to bolster Pacific Islands media against foreign influence and to avoid over-burdening small media outlets.
- (U) The group agreed to meet on a quarterly basis moving forward to advance coordination and collaboration to counter disinformation in the Pacific Islands. This effort is an off-shoot of the U.S.-Australia Disinformation Working Group first announced this Summer at the Australia-United States Ministerial Consultation.

(U) Additional Significant GEC Activities.

- **(U) On November 6, the GEC and DHS's Online Counter Disinformation Game, Harmony Square, was Reviewed Positively in the Harvard Misinformation Review.**
 - (U) Within four days of the announcement of research by the [Harvard Misinformation Review](#), the game gained over 23,000 players. The game has received extensive media coverage with over 60 articles resulting from Harvard's review and an earlier press release from Cambridge University.
 - (U) The peer reviewed research found that the [game](#) increased psychological resistance against manipulation techniques commonly used in political misinformation. Drawing on "inoculation theory," the game functions as a psychological "vaccine" by exposing people to weakened doses of the common techniques used in political misinformation especially during elections.
 - (U) GEC introduced DHS to the game concept during a GEC Tech Demo in 2019. As a result, GEC and DHS partnered with the game developer DROG to develop what eventually became Harmony Square.
 - (U) The GEC will conduct an international rollout of the game in coming weeks, while DHS is finalizing its preparations for a domestic rollout.
- **(U) The GEC Announces Election-related Assistance to Ecuador.** At the November 10 U.S.-Ecuador Bilateral Expanded Political Dialogue, Special Envoy Lea Gabrielle announced that the GEC would provide training to the Ecuadorians in preparation for their upcoming elections.
 - **(U) The GEC will conduct training on its collaborative analytics platform, GEC-IQ, as well as disinformation and propaganda-related training for Ecuadorian government communicators and analysts.** These training events are scheduled to take place before the end of the year.
 - (U) Ecuador has been the victim of previous coordinated disinformation campaigns, most recently surrounding its response to COVID-19. The GEC's assistance will help enable the conduct of free and fair elections while blunting the impact that disinformation and adversarial propaganda may have on the electoral outcome.

- **(U) The GEC's Principal Deputy Coordinator (PDC) Daniel Kimmage Spoke to Thousands of Tech Sector Participants at the November 9 Africa Tech Festival Panel.** His participation was in support of the GEC's upcoming U.S.-Africa Tech Challenge.
 - (U) PDC Kimmage spoke about the GEC and highlighted the U.S.-Africa Tech Challenge while providing the GEC's perspective on how technology has an impact on disinformation and counter-disinformation efforts. He emphasized that private industry should work with the GEC to develop tools to alert users on disinformation campaigns.
 - **(U) After the Tech Festival, panel member Emmanuel Lubanzadio, Twitter's Head of Public Policy for Sub-Saharan Africa expressed interest in participating in the GEC's upcoming Africa Tech Challenge.**
- **(U) On November 5, the GEC Briefed its Technology Programs at the DOD's Information Conflict Technical Exchange Meeting.** The meeting was hosted by the Joint Information Operations Warfare Center.
 - (U) The purpose of this government-only meeting was to bring together Military Services, Service Labs, Government Agencies, federally funded research and development centers, and University Affiliated Research Centers which are currently working on programs or research relevant to Information Operations.
 - (U) The GEC used the event to promote its technology programs, with the goal of eliciting additional DOD participation from the 100+ personnel at the meeting.
 - (U) Numerous DOD partners contacted the GEC after the event to request participation.
- **(U) The GEC's Disinfocloud.com (1163 users) Platform Informs the Interagency and Foreign Government Partners about Technology Capabilities and Assessments of Tools to Counter Propaganda and Disinformation (CPD).** Visit the following links for the latest Disinfo Cloud social media postings on [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#), the Disinfo Cloud [blog](#), and the Disinfo Cloud [Newsfeed](#). Posts by Disinfo Cloud this week include:
 - (U) As a follow-up to the March 2019 Weapons of Mass Destruction report; Disinfo Cloud is publishing a series of blog posts that [highlight recent foreign state-sponsored disinformation and propaganda efforts](#); [explore how governments and intergovernmental bodies are responding to the challenge](#); highlight [what social media platforms](#) are doing as well as activities by civil society and independent organizations; and spotlight tools and technologies that can be leveraged to address the threat.
 - (U) The fourth post on actions by social media platforms to combat disinformation will be published later this week.
 - (U) Disinfo Cloud's [weekly disinfo news round-up](#) summarizes publicly available content featured on the Disinfo Cloud newsfeed. This week Disinfo Cloud included the following news highlights:
 - (U) After playing the game Harmony Square, gamers/users had a positive change of behavior. They found misinformation significantly less reliable,

are significantly more confident in their assessment of misinformation, and are significantly less likely to share misinformation. Harmony Square is a free online game aimed at inoculating people against online manipulation.

- (U) The number of Russians who trust television as a source of information has dropped to 23 percent. Russians have become more aware that Russian-state affiliated media has a role in spreading disinformation. PRC influence operations on Twitter have limited impact largely due to poor messaging and network coordination, although new technologies and platforms such as YouTube might offer greater results.

(U) Current Observations and Analysis.

- **~~(SBU)~~ The GEC Monitors for Foreign Disinformation During the U.S. 2020 Election.** The GEC conducted select monitoring of the overseas information environment for Russian, Iranian, and PRC disinformation. Russian state and proxy media outlets engaged in clear amplification of inflammatory, anti-U.S. themes.
 - ~~(SBU)~~ For example, throughout U.S. elections week, RT and Sputnik continuously promoted through videos and online articles claims of election fraud, protests, and the potential for post-election violence or a “coup” in the United States.
 - ~~(SBU)~~ As the election results started to shift toward former Vice President Joe Biden, RT, Sputnik, and Iranian media began publishing more articles claiming that “the U.S. is broken either way.” Russians used third-party influencers and proxy websites such as SouthFront and Global Research to cover election fraud and anti-U.S. “coup” narratives.
- **(U) ISIS Supporters React to U.S. Elections.** Several pro-ISIS channels on Telegram commented on the results of the U.S. elections. A post by *2020 Course of Event* said that regardless of who wins the election, jihadis should be ready “to fight Biden’s army or Trump’s army.” Another post on the same channel asked followers to provide speeches of jihadi leaders who discussed the significance of jihad against America, including clips that document operations in the U.S., specifically killing. Another ISIS supporter posted on Telegram he hoped Trump’s rejection of Biden’s victory would lead to a U.S. civil war while another pro-ISIS Telegram channel predicted Biden will win the U.S. elections.
 - (U) Pro-ISIS supporters continue to respond to direction given in a recent speech by ISIS spokesman, Abu Hamzah Al-Qurashi, calling supporters worldwide to carry out attacks and to also add their own messages encouraging others to do the same. In the same speech, al-Qurashi told fighters in various ISIS provinces to increase their efforts and attacks, and when referring to Iraq, he predicted U.S. forces will soon leave the country, enabling ISIS to advance against the Iraqi army.
- **(U) The GEC Finds That Global Twitter Conversations and Global Media Outside of China Largely Favored Pro-Democracy Protestors in Hong Kong.** On November

5, the GEC published two reports that found that both global Twitter conversations and global media outside of China largely favored the pro-democracy protestors and criticized Beijing's erosion of Hong Kong's autonomy in the months following Beijing's enactment of China's National Security Law for Hong Kong on June 30.

- (U) The reports also evaluated receptivity to CCP propaganda on Hong Kong within Hong Kong. Analysis showed that Twitter users self-locating in Hong Kong amplified the announcement of U.S. sanctions against Chief Executive Carrie Lam and other Hong Kong and PRC officials. Hong Kong users also expressed concern that the National Security Law would erode fundamental rights and liberties. Articles in Hong Kong that endorsed sanctions on Chief Executive Lam for using excessive police force were shared at higher volumes than articles from CCP-linked outlets like *East Week*, which claimed the United States had meddled in Beijing's affairs by supporting protestors in Hong Kong and monitoring Hong Kong's online network systems.
- (U) **The GEC Makes its Vaccine Coverage Estimation Model Available to the Department of State.** All DOS employees can now view the [Vaccine Coverage Estimation Model \(V-CEM\)](#) dashboard without logging into GEC-IQ. A future iteration of the dashboard will be available for non-DOS government users on a needed basis.
 - (U) The V-CEM dashboard, which was built by the GEC, is a near real time, global monitoring capability for estimating the tone and volume of media coverage regarding top vaccine development efforts and long-term trends of structural relations with the U.S., China, and Russia. V-CEM gathers global news coverage in over 50+ languages from approximately 172 countries. These stories are then analyzed based on their volume and tone on the leading global vaccine development efforts.
 - (U) DOS employees can access the dashboard if already logged into OpenNet by going to the website <https://tableaumenterprise.geciq.com/> or by logging in through [Okta \(the State Department's secure platform for accessing cloud applications\)](#) with their OpenNet credentials or PIV/CAC card reader. Once on the Okta homepage, click on the **GEC-IQ Tableau** button to launch Tableau Enterprise, search for "vaccine" and view the dashboard.

(U) In closing, thank you for your close collaboration with the GEC team. Our success is made possible only by the great colleagues we have in State, the interagency, and our international partnerships. We will continue to release these reports on a bi-weekly basis. Please contact the GEC's Acting PPO Director (b)(6)@state.gov if we can be of any assistance.

Best regards,
Leah Bray
Deputy Coordinator for Policy, Plans, and Operations



(U) Global Engagement Center Operations Update

November 13, 2020



(U) GEC Russia Report Continues to Have an Impact

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(U) GEC's Russian Pillars of Disinformation Report Featured in Leading UK Newspaper

- (U) UK-based newspaper The Times ran a front-page article on the British government's cyberwar against anti-vaccine Russian propaganda, citing the GEC's "Pillars of Russia's Disinformation and Propaganda Ecosystem" report and highlighted three Russian proxy sites mentioned in the Pillars report: SouthFront, News Front, and Geopolitica.ru. (U) The author of the article, Lucy Fisher, promoted the article and the Pillars Report in tweets, which included a link to the report.



*** (U) The GEC Announces Election-Related Assistance to Ecuador

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(U) At the November 10 U.S. - Ecuador Bilateral Expanded Political Dialogue, Special Envoy Lea Gabrielle announced the GEC would provide training to the Ecuadorians in preparation for their upcoming elections.

- (U) The GEC will conduct training on its collaborative analytics platform GEC-IQ, as well as on disinformation and propaganda for Ecuadorian government communicators and analysts. These training events are scheduled to take place before the end of the year.
- (U) Ecuador has previously been the victim of coordinated disinformation campaigns, most recently surrounding its response to COVID-19. The GEC's assistance will help enable free and fair elections while blunting the impact that disinformation and adversarial propaganda may have on the electoral outcome.



★★★ (U) GEC Launches Game to Reduce Disinformation's Effectiveness

(U) The GEC and DHS's online counter disinformation game, Harmony Square, was reviewed positively in the *Harvard Misinformation Review*.

- (U) Within four days of the November 6 research announcement by the *Harvard Misinformation Review*, the game gained over 23,000 players. The game has received extensive media coverage with over 60 articles resulting from Harvard's review and an earlier press release from Cambridge University.
- (U) The peer-reviewed research found that the game increased psychological resistance against manipulation techniques commonly used in political misinformation. The game functions as a psychological "vaccine" by exposing people to weakened doses of the common techniques used in political misinformation.
- (U) The GEC will conduct an international rollout in the coming weeks and DHS is finalizing its preparations for a domestic rollout. (U) GEC introduced DHS to the game concept during a GEC Tech Demo in 2019. As a result, GEC and DHS partnered with the game developer DROG to develop what eventually became Harmony Square.





COVID-19 Vaccine Development Narratives

1 November – 4 November 2020

Analytics & Research Directorate

Global Engagement Center

Department of State

09 November 2020



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CHINA OVERVIEW



- From 1 November to 4 November, 58 countries published 616 articles about Chinese vaccine efforts.
- The average tone of these articles was similar to the tone of articles published about the US' vaccine efforts, although. The tone of Chinese articles peaked significantly above US articles on 3 November.
- The majority of the positive articles related to Chinese vaccine efforts, were posted by Chinese news sources. On 3 November, the French publication, *France 24*, wrote about Sinopharm's Phase 3 clinical trial occurring in the UAE. The article mentioned that Emirati officials said the "results have been positive." (<https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20201103-dubai-ruler-joins-coronavirus-vaccine-trial>)
- Publications regarding Chinese vaccine efforts saw the most negative tone on 2 November. One of the most negative articles came out of Australia. This article focused on protests in Brazil against mandatory COVID-19 immunizations and the ongoing testing of a potential vaccine developed by China's Sinovac. The article also mentioned Bolsonaro's criticism of China because of its "growing investments and influence in Brazil." (<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-11-02/brazilians-protest-mandatory-coronavirus-immunisation-vaccine/12840252>)



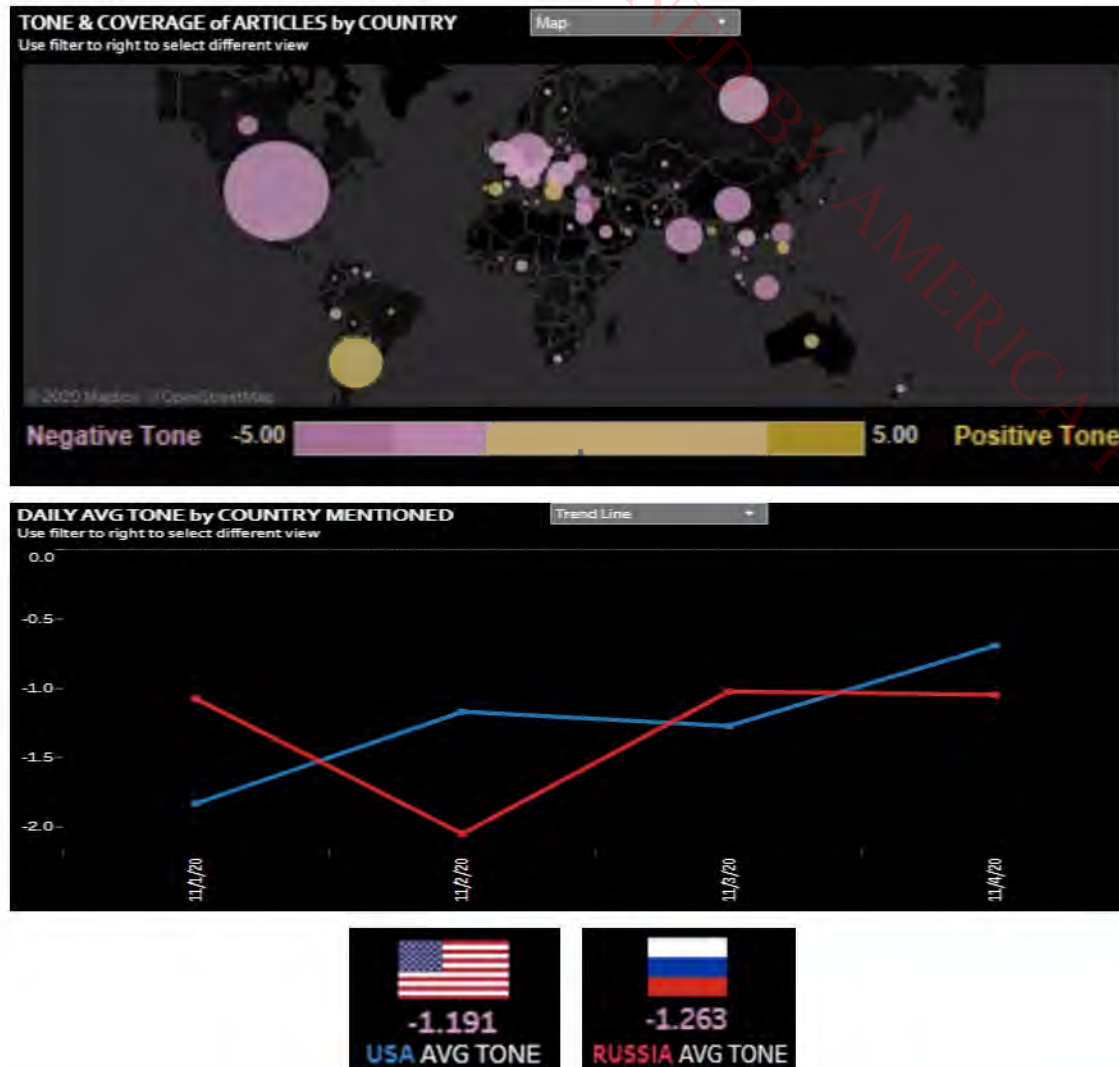
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RUSSIA OVERVIEW



- From 1 to 4 November, 60 countries published 573 articles about Russian vaccine development efforts.
- The tone of these articles was the most positive on 3 November, and the most articles were posted that day (240).
- The most positive articles were posted on 4 November, largely by Argentinian news sources. These articles discussed President Alberto Fernandez's approval of an agreement with the Russian government for the purchase of 25 million vaccines against COVID-19. (<https://www.wbal.com/article/486160/110/coronavirus-live-updates-us-reports-more-than-81000-new-cases>)
- The Russian COVID-19 vaccine efforts were reported on most negatively on 2 November. One of the most negative articles came from a US publication. The article detailed the steep increase in COVID-19 cases in Russia and referred to Moscow as the "epicenter of the country's outbreak" due to the recent surge in infections and fatalities there. (<https://www.wbal.com/article/486160/110/coronavirus-live-updates-us-reports-more-than-81000-new-cases>)



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NOTABLE RECENT VACCINE DEVELOPMENTS

VACCINE by PHASE, COUNT of ARTICLES, and AVG TONE

Current Phase	Vaccine Effort	Articles
3	Astrazeneca/ Oxford University	783
	BioNTech/Pfizer	524
	Johnson & Johnson	178
	Gamaleya Research Institute/Sput...	130
	Novavax	107
	Moderna	59
	Sinovac	28
	Sinopharm/ Beijing Institute/ Wuh...	25
	CanSino Biologics	12
2	Imperial College London	109
	CureVac	69
	Bharat BioTech	39
	Zydus Cadila	8
	Anhui Zhifei Longcom/Chongqing Z...	1
1	University of Queensland/CSL	56
	Serum Institute of India	40
	Institute Pasteur/Themis/Merck	17
	Inovio Pharmaceuticals	4
	Vaxine	2
	Clover Biopharmaceuticals	2
	Beijing Wantai Biological Pharmac...	2

Negative Tone -5.00 5.00 Positive Tone

- On 4 November, Pfizer opted to not use the US government's chosen distribution partner, McKesson, and instead use its own system to deliver the COVID vaccine directly to healthcare providers. This message was announced by Tanya Alcorn, Pfizer's vice president for biopharma global supply chair, during a webinar with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.
(<https://www.fiercepharma.com/pharma/pfizer-sidelines-us-government-covid-19-vaccine-distribution-plan-favor-its-own-reports>)
- On 2 November, Argentinian President Alberto Fernandez, announced that Argentina is expecting 10 million doses of Russia's main experimental COVID-19 vaccine between December and January. President Fernandez was quoted saying: "We had a proposal from the Russian foreign ministry and the Russian (Direct Investment) Fund to see if Argentina was interested in having doses of the vaccine in the month of December and of course we said yes."
(<https://www.metro.us/argentina-expects-10-million/>)

SOCIAL MEDIA ANALYSIS

Narratives Promoting Democracy and Hong Kong Autonomy Dominate CCP's Global Twitter Messaging on National Security Law

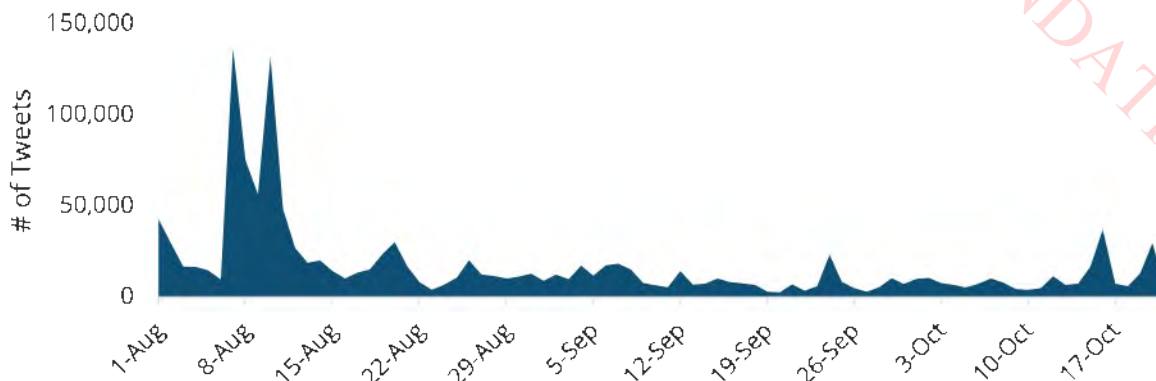
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: In the wake of Beijing's enactment of China's National Security Law for Hong Kong on 30 June 2020, global Twitter conversations have largely favored the pro-democracy protesters and have criticized Beijing's crackdown on Hong Kong's autonomy. Twitter users self-locating in Hong Kong amplified the announcement of U.S. sanctions against Chief Executive Carrie Lam and other Hong Kong and Chinese officials, expressing concern that the National Security Law would erode fundamental rights and liberties. While CCP-linked outlets posted messages condemning the U.S. Hong Kong Autonomy Act and accusing the United States of backing violent protesters, these tweets gained little traction, either in Hong Kong or globally. Globally, users often compared Hong Kong to local movements, with some encouraging protesters to take inspiration from the Hong Kong protests (the EndSARS movement in Nigeria, for example). Others accused national governments that supported the Hong Kong protesters of being hypocritical toward domestic protest movements.

REPORT

Global Overview of Twitter Reactions

In 2019, the Hong Kong government tried to fast-track a bill through the city's partially elected legislature that would have permitted extraditions to CCP-controlled courts. In a bid to quell the massive protests that took place in Hong Kong in response to the extradition proposal, the CCP approved a National Security Law for Hong Kong that went into effect on 30 June 2020. Since the National Security Law was initially proposed, the United States government has taken a number of actions aimed at supporting Hong Kong's continued autonomy. These actions include passing the Hong Kong Autonomy Act (HKAA), which sanctions individuals and banks deemed to have aided in the erosion of Hong Kong's autonomy, and issuing an Executive Order that strips Hong Kong of its preferential trading status.

Volume of Tweets Over Time



Between 1 August and 21 October 2020, more than 1.4 million tweets were posted globally pertaining to China's Hong Kong National Security Law (tweets from U.S.-based accounts were excluded from analysis). Online conversation was highest on 7 August (139,393 tweets), the day the U.S. government-imposed sanctions against Lam and 10 other senior officials in both Hong Kong and Mainland China for their roles in cracking down on political dissent.

We found no evidence of a significant, concerted campaign by China to push its version of the Hong Kong narrative on Twitter. Instead, Twitter sentiment was overwhelmingly in favor of the Hong Kong protesters and against the Chinese government. While some tweets were supportive of China's position, they were rare. Instead, public opinion on Twitter primarily aligned with the U.S. and UK positions. The U.S. Secretary of State and UK Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab (@DominicRaab) were the top two mentioned accounts (30,000+ and 28,000+ mentions, respectively).

Volume of Twitter Activity by Region

Region	Tweets	Share
No Geolocation	1,088,388	71%
East Asian and Pacific Affairs (EAP)	304,260	21%
European and Eurasian Affairs (EUR)	42,318	3%
African Affairs (AF)	38,564	3%
Western Hemisphere Affairs (WHA)	23,162	2%
South and Central Asian Affairs (SCA)	7,906	1%
Near Eastern Affairs (NEA)	1,821	0%

Regional Conversations

East Asian and Pacific Affairs (EAP)

Users self-located in Hong Kong were responsible for more than 80% of the tweets in the EAP region and largely promoted democracy and Hong Kong autonomy narratives. Regionally, the two most retweeted posts came from the Secretary; [the first](#) announcing U.S. sanctions against Lam and other Hong Kong and Chinese officials (3,200+ retweets),¹ [and the second](#) expressing concern that China's National Security Law would erode fundamental rights and liberties (1,700+ retweets).² Other widely shared tweets from Raab and pro-democracy Hong Kong activists, including Nathan Law, contained similar sentiments. Cantonese conversations [urged](#) Western powers—namely the United States and [UK](#)—to impose sanctions against CCP and Hong Kong officials for their actions against protesters in Hong Kong.³ Another popular Cantonese [tweet](#) (640+ retweets) called attention to a billboard urging Hong Kong expatriates in the United States to report "Hongkonger" rather than "Chinese" on the 2020 U.S. census and included a reference to the CCP crackdown on protesters in Tiananmen Square on 4 June 1989.⁴



Tweet praising the creativity of a billboard encouraging Hong Kong expatriates not to report "Chinese" on the U.S. Census.

A few tweets from the EAP region supported the CCP narrative, but they gained very little traction. One post from [@MFA_China](#) strongly [condemned the Hong Kong Autonomy Act](#).⁵ A few [tweets](#) suggested that the protests were organized by the United States.⁶ Other [tweets](#) maintained that it was the protesters, not the Hong Kong police, that were engaging in abusive behavior.⁷ Users also [alleged](#) that the Hong Kong police were much more restrained in similar situations, compared to the U.S. police.⁸ Low amplification of these narratives outside of CCP state media suggests minimal resonance both regionally and globally.

European and Eurasian Affairs (EUR)

Regionally, anti-CCP narratives were more prevalent, with popular tweets condemning the CCP for violating Hong Kong's autonomy and for arresting activists in the region. Pro-CCP tweets were minimal, and mostly focused on reports of statements from Chinese officials. One notable exception was a tweet from Australian journalist John Pilger that linked to an article alleging that a prominent Hong Kong online activist was actually a U.S teacher with ties to Amnesty International. [The tweet](#) (290+ regional retweets) characterized the article as "a rare counter to propaganda that elevates a crude, violent, Washington-manipulated bid for secession in Hongkong to a struggle for democracy, which it isn't."⁹ Other pro-CCP tweets from the EUR region included the following:

- [@AsaWinstanley](#) [tweeted](#) a link to an article reporting that "Pakistan led 55 countries in a statement opposing interference in China's internal affairs over Hong Kong and reminding Western powers that the territory is Chinese."¹⁰
- [@perixle](#) [linked](#) to an article he wrote alleging that Hong Kong protesters are funded by the United States and the UK.¹¹
- [Several posts](#) from [@MFA_China](#) strongly condemned the Hong Kong Autonomy Act and related sanctions, but received less than 10 retweets from accounts in the region.¹²

African Affairs (AF) and Near Eastern Affairs (NEA)

In the AF and NEA regions, particularly in Nigeria and South Africa, users generally expressed support and sympathy for Hong Kong protesters. No prolific pro-CCP users were identified in these regions, as coverage pertaining to the EndSARS movement in Nigeria dominated the conversation. In both regions, the most retweeted posts compared the EndSARS movement to the Hong Kong protest movement. Posts pertaining to the CCP and Hong Kong from the Secretary were slightly more prominent in the NEA region than in the AF.

Use of Popular Hashtags by Region		
Hashtag	AF	NEA
#ENDSARS	9,932	41
#SARSMUSTEND	3,625	29
#SARSMUSTGO	3,598	29
#HONGKONGPROTESTS	3,616	34
#HONGKONG	152	84

Accounts mentioning both Hong Kong protesters and the EndSARS movement included predominantly Africa-based—Nigeria in particular—users such as [@TaymiB](#), [@aproko_doctor](#), [@renoomokri](#), and [@YeleBademosi](#).¹³ These accounts encouraged Nigerians to take inspiration from

the Hong Kong protests after a [video](#) emerged on 3 October showing a SARS police officer shooting a Nigerian citizen in Ughelli.¹⁴ A popular tweet (520+ retweets) from [@cchukudebelu](#) was critical of U.S. support to protesters in both Hong Kong and Nigeria, expressing [doubt](#) over its interest in protecting Nigerian citizens.¹⁵ Users responding to this tweet agreed that the [United States](#) was only interested in profiting from corruption in developing countries, and [questioned](#) the [authenticity](#) of U.S. support for Hong Kong protesters.¹⁶

Although overall volume and engagement was low in the NEA region, the Secretary's tweets made up three of the top 10 retweets. The Secretary's most popular tweets mentioned [sanctions](#) against Chinese and Hong Kong entities for doing business with Iranian Shipping Lines, criticism of the CCP for the erosion of Hong Kong's [autonomy](#), and emphasis on the need for Legislative Council [elections](#) in Hong Kong.¹⁷

Western Hemisphere Affairs (WHA)

The WHA region published 2% (23,162 tweets) of the conversation. Users expressed anti-CCP sentiment and were generally neutral or favorable toward U.S. support for Hong Kong. The most prominent topics were activist Jimmy Lai's [arrest](#), mistreatment of [Canadians](#) by the CCP in Hong Kong, the CCP's [violation](#) of a UN registered treaty, and general [support](#) for protesters in Hong Kong.¹⁸

One regional [tweet](#) from 8 August that included a video of what appears to be a Hong Kong protester being beaten by CCP police officers was widely circulated (400+ retweets).¹⁹ This user called Chinese government officials hypocrites for condemning the United States for its handling of the George Floyd killing and subsequent Black Lives Matter protests, given the CCP's continual human rights violations tied to the Hong Kong protests.

Users in Brazil, Venezuela, and Argentina were also sympathetic toward protesters. Many engaged with a post by [@USAemPortugues](#), quoting the Secretary on the CCP's violation of a UN registered treaty.²⁰ Responses to this tweet were [unfavorable](#) toward the CCP, with one user suggesting a [boycott](#) of any products made in China.²¹

South and Central Asian Affairs (SCA)

In the SCA region, tweets from India made up 84% of conversation. Regionally, users condemned CCP actions related to Hong Kong. The top retweets included posts from India-based multi-news agency *Asian News International* [@ANI](#), the Secretary, [@airnewsalerts](#), and Taiwan-journalist [@WilliamYang120](#).²² Early in the reporting period, three posts by [@ANI](#), and one by [@airnewsalerts](#), amplified [the Secretary's statements condemning](#) CCP officials.²³ [@WilliamYang120](#) shared a 9 August [gov.uk](#) article highlighting a press release from the "Five Eyes" countries.^{24,25} Users engaging with this tweet eluded to the perceived [hypocrisy](#) of the Five Eyes countries, for their concern for Hong Kong protesters.²⁶

Coordinated Community Detection

The GEC also analyzed a sample of more than 600,000 tweets mentioning Hong Kong to identify signs of coordination or inauthentic activity. We identified thousands of accounts—primarily located in Hong Kong—that consistently tweeted about Hong Kong and the ongoing regional protests. These accounts demonstrated limited evidence of coordinated amplification of pro-democracy, pro-protest, anti-CCP, and anti-Hong Kong police narratives. While there was extremely limited evidence of co-tweeting (i.e. tweeting the exact same content), these accounts consistently retweeted similar accounts—namely:

- Western news outlets reporting on CCP or Hong Kong police actions against the people of Hong Kong,
- Western politicians when they tweeted messages condemning the CCP and the Hong Kong national security law, and
- pro-democracy Hong Kong activists.

Many of these accounts have relatively anonymous profile images, including pictures of animals, cartoons, and pro-Hong Kong protest imagery. Profile bios also frequently include Hong Kong-related hashtags, including #StandwithHongKong and #FollowBackHongKong—the latter possibly in an attempt to grow followers in the pro-Hong Kong protest community. Many accounts also include links to Hong Kong related websites documenting protest activity in the region. These include, but are not limited to hongkongwatch.org, hkrev.info, and hkpop.wtf.

ANALYST COMMENT: As the GEC has observed in previous analyses related to CCP messaging in Africa, rejection of CCP-linked messaging does not always translate to acceptance of the narrative touted by the U.S. government. For example, while GEC analysis observed social media users in countries like Kenya and Zimbabwe expressing concern over the debt traps built into Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects, they also criticized what they saw as a U.S. development model built on imperialism and greed. Similarly, in the case of messaging related to Hong Kong and China's National Security Law, while GEC observed Twitter users in Africa urging protesters in countries like Nigeria to take inspiration from Hong Kong protesters, we also observed Twitter users in Africa doubting the authenticity of U.S. support for Hong Kong protesters and suggesting that the United States only cared about profit.

[We would appreciate your feedback by completing a short survey here.](#)

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<https://twitter.com/USAemPortugues/status/1290293803132362754>; <https://twitter.com/rexcheung/status/1298608039369437186>
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<https://twitter.com/ANI/status/1290367923576422400>; <https://twitter.com/ANI/status/1296157877409738753>
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DIGITAL MEDIA ANALYSIS

CCP State-Media Narratives on Hong Kong Resonate Minimally Outside of East Asian and Pacific Region

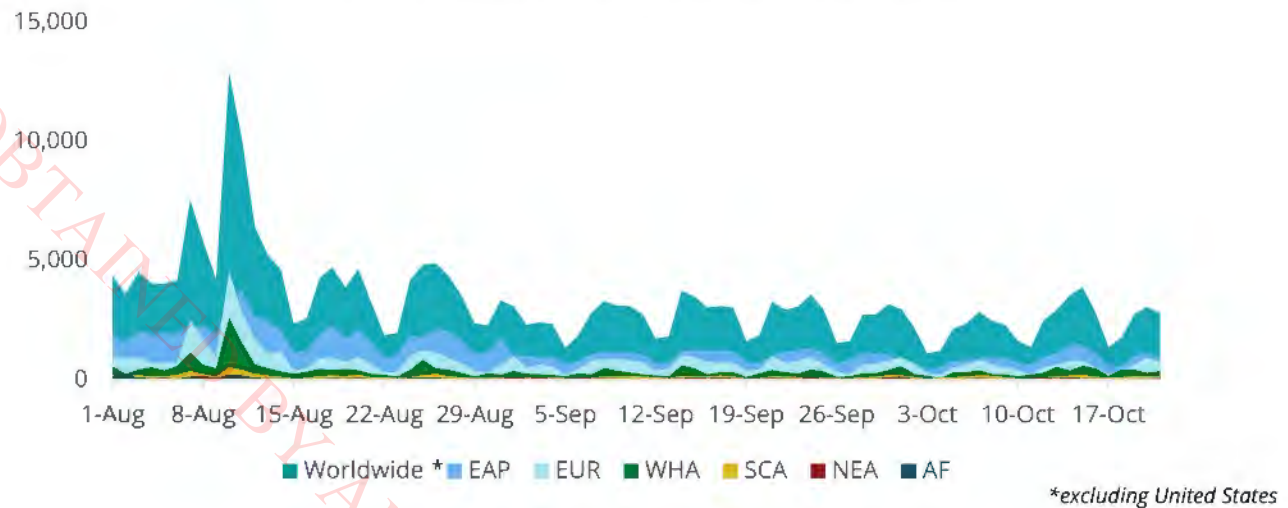
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: With the exception of the East Asian and Pacific Region, where CCP state-media outlets criticized “rioters” and U.S. meddling in Beijing’s internal affairs, global media in the wake of Beijing’s enactment of the National Security Law in Hong Kong largely sympathized with pro-democracy protesters. While CCP-linked articles highlighting the need for the law were shared at high volumes on Facebook, the underlying narratives were not shared or amplified by any independent media sources globally. Highly shared articles from independent media outlets highlighted the role of the international community, including articles from Canada criticizing the Chinese government for attempting to “bully” states into a more pro-China stance, and articles from India stating that Hong Kongers were counting on India to help them “liberate” their city. In Hong Kong itself, articles endorsing sanctions on Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam for using excessive police force were shared at higher volumes than articles from CCP-linked outlets like *East Week*, which claimed the United States had meddled in Beijing’s affairs by supporting protesters in Hong Kong and monitoring Hong Kong’s online network systems.

REPORT

Trend Analysis

In an effort to examine the resonance, response, and pushback globally to China’s Hong Kong National Security Law, the GEC assessed 270,153 digital news articles published between 1 August and 21 October 2020 that contained keywords related to the pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong after its passage. Articles from the United States were excluded from the analysis. Except for the East Asian and Pacific Region, where CCP-sponsored media dominated, global sentiment surrounding the Hong Kong protests was sympathetic toward the pro-democracy protesters and critical of China’s response. Global coverage experienced a small spike on 7 August—which corresponded with the imposition of U.S. sanctions against CCP officials for their roles in the crackdown on Hong Kong’s autonomy—followed by a larger spike between 10 and 11 August—which corresponded with the arrests of pro-democracy Hong Kong activists Jimmy Lai and Li Zhiying for violating China’s Hong Kong National Security Law.

Volume of Coverage by Region over Time



Volume of Digital Media Coverage by Region and Country

By percentage and total volume of articles published during the reporting period.

EAP	EUR	WHA	SCA	NEA	AF
40.2% 108,554	24.4% 65,818	11.9% 32,229	4.3% 11,660	2% 5,528	1.2% 3,317
China (26%)	UK (36%)	Canada (63%)	India (85%)	Qatar (26%)	South Africa (38%)
Hong Kong (19%)	Germany (20%)	Brazil (14%)	Pakistan (4%)	UAE (18%)	Nigeria (27%)
Taiwan (15%)	France (10%)	Mexico (6%)	Bangladesh (4%)	Jordan (10%)	Ghana (6%)

For each region, the three countries (excluding the United States) that produced the most articles about the Hong Kong protests during the reporting period are displayed. In parentheses is the percentage of each country's publication share within its region.

Narrative Analysis

The Hong Kong protests, COVID-19, and U.S.-China economic relations emerged as prominent topics across all regions. Globally—except for in the East Asian and Pacific Region—digital news sources were sympathetic to the democratic protesters in Hong Kong.

East Asian and Pacific Region - CCP-Sponsored Media Commands the Information Space

Globally, the most-shared relevant article was from Chinese state-owned media outlet *CGTN* on 2 October. It discussed “blatant, flagrant and abominable acts” of violence on behalf of [rioters](#) outside the Chinese embassy in the UK, and was overwhelmingly sympathetic toward the CCP and critical of the protesters.¹ The article also condemned the violence and the protesters’ disrespect, specifically their disrespect of the Chinese flag, and was shared 50,149 times on Facebook, though only eight times on Twitter. A 5 October article, also from *CGTN*, was shared 13,848 times (13,841 times on Facebook and seven times on Twitter), and it too [condemned](#) the United States for siding with the Hong Kong protesters.² This article reported how Hong Kong’s Office of the Commissioner of the

Chinese Foreign Ministry demanded that the United States stop interfering in Hong Kong's affairs under the guise of protecting human rights.

Other regional coverage was equally unsympathetic toward the democratic protesters in Hong Kong and was dominated by Chinese state-sponsored media outlets; four of the top 10 most widely disseminated articles regionally were published by *CGTN*.³ Of these shares, more than 99% occurred on Facebook, which is banned in mainland China but is a popular platform in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and among Chinese diaspora communities.⁴ Despite being widely disseminated, the ideas presented in these articles were not shared or amplified by any independent media sources, neither globally nor regionally; thus, the GEC assesses that the pro-China/anti-Hong Kong narrative did not resonate with actors in the region.

In the Philippines, *Voice of America* published an article on 10 August detailing Chinese [sanctions](#) against 11 U.S. citizens, including several U.S. senators.⁵ Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian said these particular U.S. citizens were sanctioned due to their positions on Hong Kong-related issues. The article discussed the deterioration of U.S.-China relations because of trade, the pandemic, and China's Hong Kong National Security Law, along with other reasons. The article was shared 1,146 times on social media—478 times on Facebook, 649 times on Twitter, and 19 times on Reddit.

Hong Kong News Outlets Mixed Toward Pro-Democracy Protesters

Articles published by Hong Kong media outlets that were critical of Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam and the use of excessive police force were shared at a high volume. On 4 August, *Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK)* published an article claiming that British lawmakers had asked the UK to [impose sanctions](#) on Lam.⁶ The lawmakers claimed that Lam, who also serves as Hong Kong's police commissioner, was "responsible for using excessive police force against medical workers during the anti-government protests." The article was shared 3,100 times.

An 8 August [article](#) from Hong Kong's CCP-linked *East Week* claiming that the United States had interfered in Hong Kong's National Security Law was shared 928 times.⁷ It alleged that the Open Technology Fund (OTF), which is funded by the U.S. Congress to support overseas democratic movements, had meddled in Hong Kong's anti-revision activities last year, and had "even supported 100,000 'men in black' and 'yellow vests' to participate in the struggle during the anti-amendment bill." The article went on to claim that the OTF had spent significant resources monitoring China's and Hong Kong's online network systems. On 27 August, *HKC News* expressed [solidarity](#) with Taiwan, writing that it supported the people in Hong Kong in their quest for freedom and democracy.⁸

European Media Sympathetic to Hong Kong Protesters, Western Sanctions; Anti-China on COVID-19

Reporting from the European and Eurasian Region on the situation in Hong Kong was overwhelmingly sympathetic toward the Hong Kong activists. A widely shared article (9,380 shares on Facebook; 14,531 shares on Twitter; one share on Pinterest; and two shares on Reddit) from *BBC News* [criticized](#) the Hong Kong government's response to a violent clash between protesters and security forces in Yuen Long in 2019, while *Financial Times* delivered a compassionate expose of Hong Kong protest [detainees](#) who were not allowed family visits.⁹

In the UK, a high-impact article from *BBC News* (shared 11,878 times) on 8 August described the U.S.-imposed sanctions on Lam as, "limited impact, but highly symbolic," and lauded the United States for the gesture.¹⁰ However, on 28 September *BBC News* published another [article](#) that included an interview with Chinese artist and activist Ai Weiwei who asserted that China was trying to bully international actors with its policies, even though it says otherwise. The article specified that, while Western sanctions were warranted, they were not a long-term solution. The article was shared 2,081 times on Reddit, 168 times on Twitter, and 100 times on Facebook. A 27 September article from Italian media outlet *Corriere* (shared 32,770 times) held China [responsible](#) for the COVID-19 outbreak.¹¹ It wrote that China should atone for the pandemic's devastating impact by offering international political reforms that would benefit human rights, and specifically recommended that China rethink its approach to the Hong Kong crisis and recognize the passports of Hong Kong citizens.

Western Hemisphere - Media Coverage Sympathetic to Hong Kong Protesters, Critical of Legal Crackdowns

Media outlets in the Western Hemisphere Region were also critical of China. An article from Canadian outlet *National Post* issued a [scathing critique](#) of China's Hong Kong policies, and wrote that Chinese government officials were attempting to "bully" states into a more pro-China stance.¹² A 10 September article from Brazil, shared 13,929 times, [reported](#) that 39 UN countries condemned Chinese human rights violations in Hong Kong.¹³ Canadian media outlet *Global News* released an article on 13 August that decried the criminalization of dissenters in China, to include professors or activists, calling for U.S. [sanctions](#) against China (shared 4,715 times).¹⁴

South and Central Asian - Media Critical of China's Poor Human Rights Policies

Coverage from the South and Central Asian Region also projected anti-China sentiment. A 3 October article from India (shared 6,892 times) [reported](#) that "Hong Kongers are counting on India to help them liberate their city from the clutches of Chinese tyranny."¹⁵ Other Indian media outlets echoed this tone, with one article [highlighting](#) China's "dismal human rights record," and another reporting on [oppressive policies](#) that restrict Hong Kong diplomats from engaging with U.S. government officials.¹⁶

***Near Eastern and African Regions Provide Little Coverage of Hong Kong Protests***

The Near Eastern and African Regions published little coverage of the Hong Kong protests, and that which was released had very limited impact. Overall, African media outlets were sympathetic toward activist Jimmy Lai and expressed negative sentiment toward China's Hong Kong's National Security Law. [Reuters Africa](#) and [Channels TV Nigeria](#) both shared articles that lamented Lai's arrest, the latter claiming that the new security law was unfair as it "criminalised certain political speech overnight."¹⁷

ANALYST COMMENT: None.

From: "Stilwell, David R" (b)(6)@state.gov>
Hale, David (b)(6)@state.gov>;
To: Bulatao, Brian J (b)(6)@state.gov>;
Krach, Keith J (b)(6)@state.gov>
CC: Biegun, Stephen E (b)(6)@state.gov>;
Gabrielle(Potts), Lea (b)(6)@state.gov>;
Ringel, Aaron E (b)(6)@state.gov>
Subject: FW: December 15, 2020 - CCP Twitter and Social Media Coverage of the United States
Date: Tue, 15 Dec 2020 16:13:39 +0000

Gents

Following up on this morning's EGB brief; here's how USG efforts to highlight PRC malfeasance have empowered others to speak up. (b)(5)

(b)(5)

V/R

Dave

- MFA Spokesperson Wang Wenbin responded to a report that more than 500,000 people in Xinjiang are forced to pick cotton every year, saying "helping people of all ethnic groups achieve stable employment is completely different from 'forced labor.'" Wang also called Adrian Zenz "a member of a far-right organization established by the U.S. government and a backbone of an anti-China research organization set up under the control of the U.S. intelligence agencies."
- On the Australian prime minister's comment that China's ban on coal imports only from Australia was a breach of WTO rules and bilateral free trade agreements, saying "the Australian side claim to be the so-called victims, constantly accusing and attacking China by innuendo" and criticizing "politicizing normal economic and trade activities and setting restrictions for no reason, interfering in the internal affairs of other countries."
- On the British ambassador to China's criticism of China's NSL for violating the Sino-British joint declaration, "it is the usual tactic of the colonialists to play double standards to the stir up trouble in other countries." Wang called on the UK to "respect the basic norm governing international relations of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries."

- On the **Palau government** arresting crew members of an illegally fishing Chinese vessel, "the Chinese government has always required overseas Chinese citizens and companies to abide by local laws and regulations."
- On **Brazil's health regulator** Anvisa's comment that China's health authorities are not transparent in their authorization of COVID-19 vaccines for emergency use, Wang emphasized "Chinese vaccine's partner in Brazil expressed their complete trust and belief in Chinese vaccines."
- On China's plans for phone calls between President-elect Biden and President Xi, "China and US should follow the spirit of non-conflict and non-confrontation, mutual respect and win-win cooperation."
- Global Times Editorial Chief Hu Xijin responded to an article on **India's military** response to PLA development work in Tibet, saying "Indian nationalism needs some fuel again", criticizing the Indian military saying "such a military cannot stand a real fight."

From: (b)(6)@state.gov>

Sent: Tuesday, December 15, 2020 10:00 AM

Subject: December 15, 2020 - CCP Twitter and Social Media Coverage of the United States

BLUF: MFA spokesperson Wang Wenbin tweeted "4 tricks used by Adrian Zeng to make up lies" and "3 facts about Australia's discriminatory measures targeting Chinese competition." He also accused the British government of double standards on the topic of democracy in Hong Kong, tweeting "during the 150 years of British colonial rule, Hong Kong had no democracy & it's people no freedom." Global Times Editorial Chief Hu Xijin responded to an article on India's military response to PLA development work in Tibet, saying "Indian nationalism needs some fuel again", criticizing the Indian military saying "such a military cannot stand a real fight." The Chinese Embassy tweeted about global climate initiatives, China's opening-up, and poverty alleviation, claiming "#China is making the world greener."

*Please consult the attached PDF for the tweets referenced in this email.

MFA Press Briefing:

- MFA Spokesperson Wang Wenbin responded to a report that more than 500,000 people in Xinjiang are forced to pick cotton every year, saying "helping people of all ethnic groups achieve stable employment is completely different from 'forced labor.'" Wang also called Adrian Zeng "a member of a far-right organization established by the U.S. government and a

backbone of an anti-China research organization set up under the control of the U.S. intelligence agencies.”

- On the Australian prime minister’s comment that China’s ban on coal imports only from Australia was a breach of WTO rules and bilateral free trade agreements, saying “the Australian side claim to be the so-called victims, constantly accusing and attacking China by innuendo” and criticizing “politicizing normal economic and trade activities and setting restrictions for no reason, interfering in the internal affairs of other countries.”
- On the British ambassador to China’s criticism of China’s NSL for violating the Sino-British joint declaration, “it is the usual tactic of the colonialists to play double standards to the stir up trouble in other countries.” Wang called on the UK to “respect the basic norm governing international relations of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries.”
- On the Palau government arresting crew members of an illegally fishing Chinese vessel, “the Chinese government has always required overseas Chinese citizens and companies to abide by local laws and regulations.”
- On Brazil’s health regulator Anvisa’s comment that China’s health authorities are not transparent in their authorization of COVID-19 vaccines for emergency use, Wang emphasized “Chinese vaccine’s partner in Brazil expressed their complete trust and belief in Chinese vaccines.”
- On China’s plans for phone calls between President-elect Biden and President Xi, “China and US should follow the spirit of non-conflict and non-confrontation, mutual respect and win-win cooperation.”

U.S. Embassy Beijing Media Reaction – A Summary of Select PRC Media Commentary

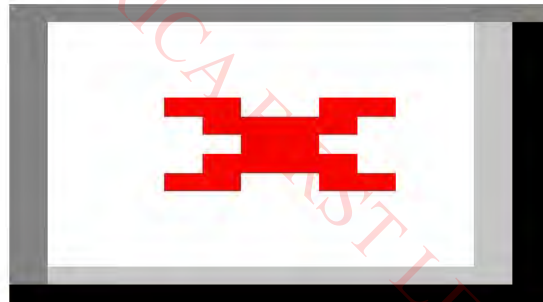
Produced by the U.S. Embassy Beijing Press Office

Unofficial news excerpts for reference only. Not for distribution outside the USG.

Tuesday, December 15, 2020

BLUF – China’s Public Messaging Summary: The Western press once again shows its true colors and true bias. The self-designated arbiters of journalistic standards, integrity, and objectivity demean themselves by pointing the finger at the many talented, dedicated, everyday Chinese nationals who work on behalf of those same Western countries’ interests. Globally, in a public health crisis of this magnitude, no one is safe until everyone is safe. China’s vaccines will be a global public good that is accessible, affordable, and effective in protecting frontline medical workers, high-risk individuals, and everyone else in need.

News:



People’s Daily: Xi congratulates International Forum on Sharing Poverty Reduction Experience

Global Times-Chinese: “Five Eyes” media fabricates “CPC infiltration”

Subtitle: crank up hype over information leaking, egregiously smears CPC identification

Sidebar: U.S. kicks off inoculation amid controversy

21st Century Business Herald: Mengniu Dairy gobbles up 3 billion yuan of Milkground Food Tech’s shares

Editorial Commentary (Chinese-language):

1. U.S-China

CCP Infiltration

Global Times-Chinese (December 15, p. 1, p. 14) ran both a front-page article and an editorial about the reports by Five Eyes' media outlets on a list of 1.95 million Chinese Communist Party (CCP) members' personal information which they interpreted as the CCP's large-scale infiltration in the U.S., UK and Australian consulates in Shanghai and foreign businesses in China. The [front-page article](#) quoted Professor (b)(6) from Beijing Foreign Studies University saying that the act of some Western forces labeling the CCP members is equal to that of the Nazis labeling the Jews during the WWII, which is unbearable by historical trends. Those party members work in foreign institutions mostly to promote a better development of the institutions in China. The Western forces who imposed the tag of "infiltration" on them for no reason held a predetermined and irresponsible bias and made a dreadful mistake. They are sinister by seeking to separate the party from the country and slander the CCP's legitimacy in its normal functioning in China and the world. They are acting in collusion with the U.S. conservatives like Pompeo. The [editorial](#) says CCP members accounts for a high percentage in Chinese population and excellent Chinese talents as well. It is highly likely to employ party members as long as foreign institutions do not exclude their employments. The U.S.-led defamation campaign against the CCP has undermined the relations between China and Five Eyes countries. Viewing the party members as infiltrators or intelligence workers is a result of such campaign going extreme, revealing their gross ignorance of China's situation.

[Similar *Global Times-English* [editorial](#): Five Eyes turn blind by fantasizing CPC infiltration]

Global Times-Chinese, wholly owned by People's Daily, is a commercial daily publication; strongly nationalistic and hawkish, and not considered to authoritatively reflect CCP messaging.

2. India

India's mindset on multilateral mechanism has clearly changed

Global Times-Chinese (December 15, p. 15)

Hu Shisheng from the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations opined that, in recent years, India's mindset on multilateralism has clearly changed, shown in the following two aspects: first, it clearly expresses hope to be a leading force in the reshaping of the international order, unwilling to be dwarfed by China on issues like global governance. Second, it tends to become more Westernized and anti-China. These changes are related to its self-repositioning and expectation. First, India shifts from a balance role in foreign strategy among powers to seeking to be an international, especially regional, leading force. It constantly disrupts the China agenda in multilateral mechanisms while unwilling to see the mechanisms to become a propeller for China's rise. Second, as many developed countries made an uproar to no longer recognize China as a developing country, India hopes to be a real representative or leader of developing countries. China and India's difference in identity due to the increasing development gap has led to the two countries' increasingly different pursuits of interests. Third, India wants to be the "net security provider" in the Indian Ocean. In the face of China's Belt and Road and feeling that its leading position cannot be maintained, India continuously builds multilateral mechanisms led by itself in South Asia and the Indian Ocean. Fourth, India hopes to be a member of "value alliance". Self-boasting itself as the world's largest democracy who has had a lot in common with Western value system, Indian political elites join the U.S.-led West in launching ideological attack on China. They think the multilateral mechanisms they build with Western countries will remain steady and long while viewing China as its top geostrategic competitor.

Global Times-Chinese, wholly owned by People's Daily, is a commercial daily publication; strongly nationalistic and hawkish, and not considered to authoritatively reflect CCP messaging.

3. Vaccine

Distribution of first batch of U.S. vaccines becomes a big problem

Xiakedao (December 14)

Various groups in the United States try to grab the first batch of vaccines. Can it really save a nation's people by sparing no effort to store vaccines and practice "vaccine nationalism"? "No one is safe, until everyone is." That rich countries buy up available vaccines violates their obligation in human rights and weakens the effectiveness of building a "health shield" for all mankind through vaccines. Experts believe the priority of vaccination should be given to frontline medical workers first, people at higher risks of infections second, those at hard-stricken areas third, and the rest last. This prioritization should have been beyond doubt. Putting one's own country first at the cost of other countries may greatly reduce effectiveness in practice, regardless of "moral obligations." China's vaccines will be a global public good that is accessible and affordable for developing countries. If distribution of vaccine becomes a "life or death situation" among privileged groups vying for them, it would be a lose-lose scenario.

Xiakedao is the WeChat-media platform for People's Daily Overseas, providing analysis of major domestic and international issues; targets a younger and wider audience.

4. Climate

Boosting global ambitions with China's greater contributions

Guangming Daily [commentary](#) (December 15, p. 12)

President Xi Jinping's important speech delivered via video link at the Climate Ambition Summit has injected strong confidence into the global cooperation on breaking new ground in climate governance, contributed China's plan to the improvement of the international climate governance system, and provided China's momentum for the world's green recovery from the pandemic. In the past five years since the signing of the Paris

Agreement, many signatories have failed to take sufficient actions, and some major emitters have even withdrawn from the Agreement. Comprehensive implementation of the Agreement is the only correct international policy path to address climate change. As an active practitioner of the Agreement, China announced at the Summit that it will scale up its nationally determined contributions, which demonstrates China is a major power that takes a down-to-earth approach to implement the Paris Agreement, keeps its promises, and shoulders its responsibilities in joining hands with other countries to build a clean, beautiful world.

Guangming Daily is one of the leading state-run dailies with principal readership among government officials and scholars.

5. North Africa and Middle East

Why U.S. pushes for normalization of relations between Morocco and Israel

Xinhua Chinese [report](#) (December 14)

Some analysts believe that the United States used the recognition of Morocco's "sovereignty over Western Sahara" to push for normalized relations between Morocco and Israel. The normalization of Morocco-Israel ties is part of the Trump administration's plan to promote détente between Arab countries and Israel and serves Washington's strategic goals of supporting Israel and containing Iran. But it will worsen the hostile relationship between some Arab countries and Iran and may also bring more uncertainty to the security of the Middle East. Zhang Yuyou, a lecturer at the Middle East Institute of China's Northwest University, likened the move to the Trump administration's previous approach to Jerusalem and Golan Heights, which he described as use of "recognition diplomacy" that meets the interests of one party while harming those of others. The move may further intensify the geopolitical wrestling in North Africa.

Xinhua is the premier state-run news agency that provides content to China's state-run media as well as its own platforms which include more than 20 newspapers and a dozen magazines.

6. NATO

Expectedly, division within NATO happened

Bull Piano (December 15)

The United States sanctioned Turkey for purchase of Russian S-400 Air Defense System. One thing is certain: the fissure between the two NATO members is widening. The United States' ultimatum asking Turkey to choose between NATO and Russia becomes an ultimate joke; the U.S. red line is trampled into a dotted line. What will happen next? If Turkey completely turns toward Russia, it means a major reshuffle in the landscape of the Middle East and Eurasia. That would be a strategic mistake for the United States and NATO. Neither side will give in easily. Erdogan understands Americans would be a "paper tiger" if he can withhold U.S. pressure, or he risks losing everything, even his presidency. Trump faces a dilemma as the leader of the West and will be happy to create a problem for Biden.

Bull Piano is the non-official WeChat account of a senior Xinhua News Agency journalist that attracts elites affiliated with international affairs. Content largely aligns with official rhetoric, but offers more candid, informed commentary even on sensitive issues.

CCP-Promoted Storylines:

[Xi sends letter of congratulations to International Forum on Sharing Poverty Reduction Experience](#)

Chinese President Xi Jinping has sent a letter of congratulations to the International Forum on Sharing Poverty Reduction Experience, which opened on Monday in Beijing. Calling poverty eradication "a common ideal of humanity," Xi said that the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the Chinese government made unremitting and arduous efforts to ensure a better life for the people. With nearly 100 million poor people in rural areas lifted out of poverty, China has made

significant contributions to the global poverty reduction cause, Xi said. China is willing to work with all countries to promote international poverty reduction and build a community with a shared future for humanity, he said.

MFA: China opposes wanton suppression of Chinese companies by U.S.

Spokesperson Wang Wenbin made the remarks at a press briefing after Nasdaq said last week it would remove shares of four Chinese companies from indexes it maintains in response to a U.S. government order restricting purchases of these shares. He said that the United States should stop the erroneous practice of politicizing economic and trade issues and stretching national security concepts to suppress foreign businesses. Wang stressed that China opposes the wanton suppression of Chinese companies by the United States. What the United States has done gravely violates market competition principles and international trade rules it always claims to champion, and will eventually damage investors' interests, as well as the U.S. national interest and image. "The Chinese government will continue to firmly safeguard Chinese companies' legitimate rights and interests," he added.

CCTV Summary (12/14):

Xi and his Somali counterpart exchanged congratulatory messages over 60th anniversary of bilateral ties; 13th Five-Year Plan achievement: transportation infrastructure development in remote, poverty-stricken areas enable people to dream big; Li Keqiang addresses commemoration of 60th anniversary of Convention on OECD; 13th Five-Year Plan achievement: direct mail services reach prefectures nationwide, China tops world in express delivery; promote CPC plenum spirit at grassroots level; Hainan reclaims and turns abandoned mined land into green tourist attractions; China kicks off second season of National Recruitment Action; National Health Commission on latest COVID-19 development; Xi's remarks boosts global climate ambition; global COVID-19 cases top 70.46 million; EU, Britain to continue negotiations over future relations.

Popular Online Commentary from Weitianxia

1. Joe Biden officially wins U.S. presidential election after the Electoral College confirmed his victory.
2. Trump: You can temporarily live in the White House till 2024 when I am back.
3. No more miracles. The unhinged Trump-era is officially over. The United States is luckily saved.
4. Trump has become one of the most humiliating presidents in American history.
5. The Republicans don't scruple to shake up the American system for the next general election four years from now.

Chinese Media Outlets Cited

Bull Piano (牛弹琴, *Niu Tan Qin*) is the non-official WeChat account of a senior journalist from the Xinhua News Agency. While the writer's comments are largely aligned with government rhetoric, they nevertheless have a tendency to push the envelope in speaking with candor on relatively sensitive issues like North Korea or domestic developments. *Bull Piano* typically posts one article daily, with readership typically spanning from 50,000 to 100,000, and targeting elites affiliated with international relations.

Guangming Daily (光明日报, *Guangming Ribao*, circ. 1 million): One of the leading state-run dailies with principal readership among government officials and scholars.

Global Times-Chinese (环球时报, *Huanqiu Shibao*, circ. 1.5 million): Daily commercial publication that focuses on international affairs and features a nationalist, hawkish, editorial line. Though wholly owned by People's Daily, it is not authoritative and has more latitude in expressing opinions, including editorials that are not in sync with party leadership.

Xiakedao (侠客岛) is the WeChat-media platform for *People's Daily Overseas*, providing analysis of major domestic and international issues. In contrast to the newspaper, *Xiakedao* targets a younger and wider audience, with lead stories typically reaching more than 100,000. It is widely considered one of the most successful we-media experiments of state-run media outlets.

Xinhua (新华社): Premier state-run news agency that provides content to China's state-run media as well as its own platforms which include more than 20 newspapers and a dozen magazines. Xinhua's official website, www.xinhuanet.com, reports receiving 75 daily viewers, with over 200 million page views. *Xinhua* also runs an English-language [website](#).

"CCP-Promoted Storylines" is a curated list of news articles selected from China's principal media outlets. The stories selected reflect top trending issues as promoted by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), with a focus on topics of interest to U.S. Government readers.

CCTV (中国中央电视台, Zhongguo Zhongyang Dianshitai, viewership in the hundreds of millions): China's primary state broadcaster, generally considered a mouthpiece for the Communist Party. Regional television outlets view the scope of CCTV's reporting as indicative of permissible reporting options. Headlines reported herein are from the preceding evening's CCTV Channel 1 news programs.

Weitianxia (微天下, 26 million followers) is a prominent international news Weibo account operated by sina.com. Users post articles and comments related to international issues. This media reaction summarizes and translates the most popular posts related to politics, international relations, and social issues.

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