XII. Human Rights Violations in the U.S. and Globally

Human Rights Violations in the U.S. and Globally

Findings

- The People's Republic of China (PRC) continued a multifaceted campaign of transnational repression against Hong Kongers, Tibetans, Uyghurs, journalists, Chinese university students, and others to stifle dissent and intimidate individuals in emigrant and diaspora communities. Examples include the issuance of HK$1,000,000 (US$127,600) bounties on 13 overseas activists, intelligence-gathering efforts in diaspora communities, and the harassment of China-based relatives of overseas targets.
- The PRC's transnational repression efforts were observed leading up to, during, and after the November 2023 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Summit in San Francisco, California.
- This reporting year, the Commission observed reports of PRC authorities forcibly repatriating overseas Chinese citizens **Lu Siwei** and **Yang Zewei,** also known as Qiao Xinxin, through extrajudicial means.
- The PRC targeted foreign politicians and governments by attempting to influence democratic elections and shape public opinion abroad about the Chinese Communist Party and government, including in Canada, the Solomon Islands, and Taiwan.
- PRC authorities continued to make efforts to influence processes and procedures within the U.N. system to limit public awareness of China's human rights abuses in the international community. This past year, reports detailed the PRC's efforts to influence and impede the U.N. Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and several U.N. Special Procedures.

Transnational Repression

During the Commission's 2024 reporting year, the People's Republic of China (PRC) continued a multifaceted campaign of transnational repression to intimidate and enhance control over critics, Uyghurs, Hong Kongers, and others.[1] "Transnational repression" refers to transnational efforts to stifle dissent or independent organizing within emigrant or diaspora communities.[2] Freedom House characterized China's transnational repression campaign as the "most sophisticated, global, and comprehensive" in the world.[3] In several reported cases, authorities harassed or intimidated the China-based relatives of overseas targets as an indirect way to compel the compliance of the targets themselves, coercing them into silence or to return to China.[4] Targets of the PRC's transnational repression from this past year include:

- **Hong Kongers.** In July 2023, Hong Kong authorities issued HK$1,000,000 (US$128,000) bounties on eight overseas activists: Ted Hui Chi-fung, Anna Kwok Fung-yee, Dennis Kwok Wing-hang, Finn Lau Cho-dik, Nathan Law Kwun-chung, Christopher Mung Siu-tat, Kevin Yam, and Elmer Yuen Gong-yi.[5] In December 2023, authorities expanded the list to include five additional overseas pro-democracy activists: Simon Cheng Man-kit, Tony Choi Ming-da, Johnny Fok Ka-chi, Frances Hui Wing-ting, and Joey Siu.[6] These individuals all live either in the United States, the United Kingdom, or Australia.[7] These bounties marked the first major instance of Hong Kong officials extraterritorially using the *PRC Law on Safeguarding National Security* to accuse overseas activists of crimes, such as "collusion" with foreign forces and incitement to "secession" and "subversion."[8] Hong Kong police mounted additional pressure on the wanted activists by investigating and interrogating several of their family members in Hong Kong.[9] On June 12, 2024, Hong Kong authorities initiated specific measures, such as the cancellation of Hong Kong passports and the prohibition on the provision of funds, under the *Safeguarding National Security Ordinance* (also known as "Article 23" legislation), against Simon Cheng, Tony Choi, Johnny Fok, Christopher Mung, Finn Lau, and Nathan Law—all six individuals are based in the United Kingdom.[10] Finn Lau called the Hong Kong government's actions "an explicit act of transnational repression," while an expert theorized that the main motive for these measures was to deter Hong Kongers from "donating . . . or sharing . . . [these overseas activists'] social posts."[11] [For more information about Hong Kong, see Chapter 19—Hong Kong and Macau.]
- **Tibetans.** A report published this past year by the Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy revealed efforts to silence members of the Tibetan diaspora.[12] According to a September 2023 interview with an official in the Central Tibetan Administration, an estimated 80 to 90 percent of Tibetan refugees with family and relatives still living in Tibet have suffered repressive PRC tactics.[13] PRC authorities attempted to sever connections between diaspora members and their relatives in

the Tibet Autonomous Region and coerced Tibetan activists abroad to cease speaking out against the Chinese Communist Party.[14] Many Tibetans also reported attempts by the Party to recruit them to spy on their fellow diaspora members, exacerbating distrust and fear in their communities.[15] [For more information about the PRC's persecution of Tibetans, see Chapter 17—Tibet.]

• **Uyghurs.** Reports this past year revealed that Uyghur diaspora members faced transnational repression around the globe. One report by the Human Rights Foundation noted that "the Uyghur diaspora experiences intimidation, harassment, threats, and censorship on a daily basis."[16] Despite long serving as a safe destination for Uyghur refugees, Türkiye has become less safe in recent years due to the Chinese Communist Party's well-established intelligence-gathering efforts and threats from Turkish police against Uyghur exiles in the country.[17] Uyghurs interviewed for another report shared personal anecdotes of financial exploitation and coercion and threats against friends and family still in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) by Chinese police.[18] Uyghur journalists in the U.S. also raised concerns this reporting year of spies within their communities, as well as the threat of detention of their friends and family in the XUAR, both aimed at discouraging them from publishing stories about sensitive topics.[19] [For more information about the PRC's persecution of Uyghurs, see Chapter 18—Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region.]

• **Journalists.** Australian journalist and researcher Vicky Xu detailed in an April 2024 essay about the PRC surveillance and threats she faced in recent years for her work exposing human rights abuses committed by the Chinese Communist Party and government.[20] She recounted being intimidated by men in front of her apartment complex, learning about her China-based family and friends "disappearing," and receiving warnings from the Australian Federal Police that she was being targeted by foreign agents.[21] In June 2024, the Commission observed reports of PRC authorities appearing to physically block Australian journalist Cheng Lei at an event featuring Chinese Premier Li Qiang and Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese in Canberra.[22] Cheng speculated that the attempts were likely to prevent her "from saying something or doing something that they think would be a bad look."[23] [For more information on the PRC's repression of journalists, see Chapter 1—Freedom of Expression.]

• **Chinese university students.** Reports and congressional testimony detailed transnational repression efforts against Chinese students abroad.[24] Amnesty International reported in May 2024 about Chinese and Hong Kong students "living in fear of intimidation, harassment, and surveillance as Chinese authorities seek to prevent them [from] engaging with 'sensitive' or political issues while overseas."[25] The authors of the report conducted interviews with 32 current students and recent graduates from the mainland, Hong Kong, and Macau who studied at universities in eight countries; almost

half of the interviewees claimed they had been photographed or recorded at events by individuals that they believe did so on behalf of the PRC.[26] Moreover, nearly a third of the interviewees reported that PRC officials had harassed their families back home, and more than half admitted to self-censoring their conversations and posts online out of fear of being monitored, including on non-Chinese social media.[27] Georgetown University law student Zhang Jinrui detailed how Chinese police interrogated his family in China following his participation in campus events critical of the Chinese government's actions.[28] Zhang himself was also approached, threatened, and recorded by other Chinese students on campus for speaking out against China's zero-COVID policy.[29] In June 2024, the Commission held a hearing where a Chinese student at Columbia University testified that "the intensity of transnational repression against outspoken Chinese overseas students has only escalated," saying that it occurred, "[in] most cases, through personal harassment, transnational surveillance, and the coercion of proxies—in this case meaning the interrogation and intimidation of family members in China."[30] The student, dressed in a disguise and choosing to testify with an alias, took precautions "even though it will only delay the inevitable police visit to [her] parents."[31]

According to a December 2023 report by *Axios*, there are two types of PRC overseas centers: 1) service centers, and 2) police-community cooperation centers, the latter of which may either have official relationships with host governments or operate "under the radar."[32] The report provided an overview of a PRC overseas service center based in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, with "extensive" ties to the Chinese government and the China Council for the Promotion of Peaceful National Reunification, an organization managed by the United Front Work Department tasked to "monitor overseas Chinese citizens."[33] Although the service center provides necessary assistance and resources, experts expressed concerns about the Chinese government's use of transnational repression to prevent dissent and control members of Tanzania's Chinese communities.[34]

During the Commission's 2024 reporting year, *Radio Free Asia* (RFA) published an investigative report about a PRC overseas police station in New York City (NYC). *RFA* journalist Jane Tang interviewed individuals in NYC's Chinese diaspora, revealing specific instances of PRC harassment and intimidation perpetrated by members of America ChangLe Association ("ChangLe"), a community hub based in Manhattan's Chinatown that supports residents of Fujianese descent.[35] *RFA*'s report revealed that "Harry" Lu Jianwang and Chen Jinping, two men whom the U.S. Department of Justice charged in April 2023 with "conspiring to act as agents of the PRC government as well as obstructing justice by destroying evidence of their communications with [a PRC Ministry of Public Security] official," were both involved with ChangLe's operations, with Lu serving as the chairman of the association.[36] Although Lu stepped down from the chairmanship position, he later became president of another overseas Chinese association located across the street from ChangLe in Chinatown.[37]

Harassment of APEC Summit Peaceful Protesters

The Commission observed the PRC's transnational repression efforts leading up to, during, and after the November 2023 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Summit in San Francisco due to clashes between advocacy groups and pro-Chinese Communist Party demonstrators. Advocacy groups and pro-democracy activists peacefully assembled outside the summit during Xi Jinping's visit, to protest human rights abuses perpetrated by the Chinese Communist Party and government.[38] The Chinese consulate reportedly mobilized overseas pro-Party communities to counter-protest by incentivizing them with money, transportation, and lodging.[39]

Video evidence and eyewitness accounts detailed instances of seemingly coordinated pro-Party demonstrators harassing and physically attacking peaceful protestors, including by 1) taking a banner from the advocacy group Students for a Free Tibet; 2) beating peaceful protestors with metal rods, umbrellas, and flag poles; and 3) seizing advocates' phones and tossing them into nearby water, presumably because they contained evidence of such attacks.[40] The Commission wrote a letter to U.S. Attorney General Merrick Garland in December 2023 requesting an investigation into the violence committed by counter-protestors outside of the APEC Summit, as well as to determine "whether the violence was planned or instigated by elements of the Chinese Communist Party or Chinese diplomats in the United States."[41] The Commission has not received a response, as of June 2024.

Extraditions to China

"Operation Fox Hunt," which officially launched ten years ago by the PRC government, began as a joint effort between multiple high-ranking agencies to track down fugitives and return them to China, either through international cooperation mechanisms or "voluntary" returns.[42] According to one estimate, the operation forcibly returned at least 283 individuals from at least 56 countries and two territories through extrajudicial means in the past decade.[43]

This reporting year, the Commission observed reports of PRC authorities forcibly repatriating overseas Chinese citizens through extrajudicial means. Examples from this reporting year include the following:

- **Lu Siwei,**[44] a disbarred human rights lawyer from China known for representing rights lawyers and pro-democracy activists, disappeared for 28 days after Lao police detained him in July 2023 for "illegal entry."[45] Lu had fled to Laos with the aim of then traveling to the United States to reunite with his wife and daughter.[46] Despite calls by UN human rights experts and 85 non-governmental organizations to release Lu and prevent his refoulement to China,[47] in September, Lao officials repatriated Lu to China where he was immediately detained by PRC authorities under suspicion of "illegally crossing a border."[48] Mary Lawlor, U.N. special rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, denounced the Lao authorities' decision to deport Lu and called on PRC authorities to release him.[49] Authorities released Lu on bail pending trial in October 2023.[50]

• **Yang Zewei,**[51] also known as Qiao Xinxin, was abducted from his home in Laos in May 2023.[52] Yang worked as a journalist in China before moving to Laos, where he launched an online campaign named "Ban the Great Firewall" to advocate for the end of internet censorship in China.[53] Yang's brother messaged him the month before his abduction to warn him that PRC authorities were harassing his family in China, prompting Yang to publish a "declaration to not commit suicide" on social media in case he suddenly disappeared.[54] Reports confirmed that six Chinese and two Lao police officers took Yang away from his home in handcuffs, and Yang later resurfaced in a Chinese detention facility in Hunan province, formally arrested for "inciting subversion of state power."[55]

Malign Influence

The Commission continued to observe reports of the PRC's attempts to target foreign politicians and governments, influence democratic elections abroad, and shape public opinions about the Chinese Communist Party and government. These efforts illustrate the PRC's malign influence campaign,[56] violating various articles of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which China has signed but not ratified.[57] Examples include:

• **Canada:** PRC authorities continued to target Canadian Member of Parliament (MP) Michael Chong this year,[58] likely spearheading a 10-day disinformation campaign about him on WeChat focused on his family, background, and political views.[59] Media reports focused on an ongoing federal inquiry showed that Canadian intelligence officials recently revealed that the PRC government "clandestinely and deceptively" interfered in Canada's 2019 and 2021 federal elections to support China-friendly candidates and suppress those critical of the Chinese Communist Party and government.[60]

• **Solomon Islands:** The PRC attempted to influence Solomon Islands' April 2024 general elections—elections the *Associated Press* said would "shape relations with China."[61] Experts noted an increase of PRC "aid" delivery and detailed evidence of coordinated efforts between the PRC and Russia to amplify misleading narratives about the United States' engagement in the Solomon Islands.[62] The Solomon Islands had previously signed security agreements with the PRC, which contributed to an increase of Chinese influence and the "deterioration of due process and good governance," according to an analysis by the Center for Strategic & International Studies.[63]

• **Taiwan:** The PRC attempted to influence Taiwan's January 2024 general elections and "coax and coerce the Taiwanese population into accepting closer ties" with China, as described by the German Marshall Fund.[64] According to commentary published by the Macdonald-Laurier Institute, "while Beijing often tries to shape other countries' political environments in its favour ahead of general elections . . . its interference in Taiwan is much more direct," with the use of cognitive warfare, military threats, propaganda, economic retaliation, and measures to further isolate Taiwan in the international community.[65] The

PRC, in addition, "tried to co-opt businesspeople and opposition politicians," reportedly offering local politicians discounted or all-expenses-paid trips to mainland China.[66] Leading up Taiwan's May 2024 presidential inauguration, PRC authorities sanctioned five Taiwanese political commentators for "spreading rumors to smear the mainland."[67] *Bloomberg* referred to the sanctions as an attempt to "[pile] pressure on incoming president Lai Ching-te just days before he takes office,"[68] with the Taiwan Foreign Correspondents' Club describing them as "an affront to free speech and the rights of journalists to operate without intimidation or reprisal."[69]

Efforts to Impede U.N. Human Rights Bodies

PRC authorities continued to make efforts to influence processes and procedures within and around the U.N. system to limit public awareness of China's human rights abuses in the international community.[70] For example, in January 2024, Chinese government-organized groups occupied the few seats available for nongovernmental organizations to sit in the room at the interactive dialogue of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), a review of China's human rights record that takes place once every five years.[71] Prior to the UPR, China's diplomatic mission reportedly lobbied countries for "valuable support to China."[72] The Chinese delegation to the U.N. promoted boycotting events on "sensitive" topics relating to late human rights activist Cao Shunli,[73] media freedom in Hong Kong, and human rights abuses in the XUAR.[74] [For more information on China's UPR at the U.N. this reporting year, see Chapter 2—Civil Society.]

Scholar Rana Siu Inboden in a May 2024 article described the PRC's attempts to interfere with the United Nations Special Procedures, which are independent human rights experts who monitor and report on thematic and country-specific human rights situations.[75] Methods deployed by the PRC include 1) targeting Special Procedure mandate holders who highlight PRC human rights abuses through public criticism; 2) selectively funding mandates that may "elevate the work, visibility, and impact" of initiatives that supported the PRC's vision of human rights; and 3) using institutional power to change regulations, practices, and mechanisms in an attempt to stifle certain initiatives.[76] Despite the Chinese government's efforts, however, Inboden notes that the Special Procedures remains the U.N.'s "most active and responsive" tools for raising public awareness of human rights abuses in China.[77]

Notes to Chapter 20—Human Rights Violations in the U.S. and Globally

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