

INSIGHT

Strings attached



Paul Letters says China is expanding its influence in the developing world through a network of state-sponsored media that is giving global reach to Communist Party censorship

A recent report entitled "The Long Shadow of Chinese Censorship" criticised the growing global reach of China's censorship and its unrestrained investment aimed at spreading state-sponsored media abroad.

The report, by the US government-funded National Endowment for Democracy, asserts that China's "efforts to influence reporting by foreign and overseas Chinese news outlets have intensified and expanded over the past five years", and points to a set of targets internally labelled "the five poisonous groups": Tibetans, Uyghurs, the Falun Gong, Chinese democracy activists, and Taiwanese separatists.

Foreign correspondents' attempts to scrutinise issues such as party leaders' finances, Aids compensation, land disputes and environmental pollution have also encountered well-documented interference, from visa denials to cyberattacks against Western news organisations. China's array of economic carrots and political sticks, utilised across the globe, have now been exposed under one light.

In recent years, the state-owned *China Daily* has paid for news pages – faintly labelled "advertisement" – within publications such as *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*. It has launched a US edition (2009), a European weekly (2010) and an African edition (2012). But in Europe and North America, *China Daily* – and the new CCTV bureau in Washington – will not

sway the mainstream news conversation. In the developed world, China has never looked like superseding American soft power. However, in vast tracts of the developing world China is making its mark. Media organisations there rely on foreign sources, so why not China, the world's leading developing nation?

Chinese authorities offer free editorial content to any cash-strapped news organisations seeking to avoid the cost of stationing correspondents in China and even fly their journalists to Beijing for all-expenses-paid training. In parts of Asia, Latin America and Africa, China has invested heavily in various economic sectors and is now buying shares in the media.

In South Africa, Beijing has bought major stakes in satellite television provider TopTV, and in Independent News and Media, a powerful newspaper group.

A show of goodwill often helps. In Zimbabwe earlier this year, CCTV provided President Robert Mugabe's state-monopoly television ZBC with new equipment – including giant city-centre screens – to broadcast his election campaign rallies. In return, ZBC has agreed to air CCTV news bulletins. In Cuba – China's biggest trading partner in the Caribbean and a leader in presenting an alternative world view to that of the US – Chinese companies have modernised Soviet-era infrastructure, and CCTV is replacing Russia's long-standing dominance in television programming. Western media companies blanket the

globe with a Western news agenda and often project an anti-China bias. The 2012 opening of CCTV's Africa centre in Nairobi is both an arm of China's broader expansion of influence in Africa and a step towards confronting Western outlets on the world stage. CCTV news scripts are skewed to adulate China's aid and trade in Africa and to avoid critical reporting of Chinese affairs. Reports of Zambian mine workers rallying against unfair treatment from their Chinese bosses is a story you won't see on CCTV. Another is the illegal slaughter of African elephants, driven by Chinese demand for ivory.

To accuse CNN or the BBC of a broad cultural bias towards Western concerns



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and viewpoints is to call a cat a cat. But they exist in the climate of freedom that pluralist democracies encourage. CCTV adheres to a one state, one party and one blinkered narrative of the China story.

The "Long Shadow" report highlights Chinese officials, particularly within Asia, who curtail reporting considered damaging to China's reputation. In Cambodia, one researcher suggested that because his country receives considerable aid from China, and most Cambodian media are state-owned, they rarely criticise Beijing.

Similarly in Nepal, self-censorship by journalists is common because of a fear of punishment by their own government for unfavourable coverage of China.

In 2011, a court in Hanoi sentenced two Vietnamese citizens to prison for transmitting radio broadcasts to listeners in China. Chinese-language transmissions included content that originated from a US Falun Gong radio station and which criticised human rights abuses in China.

A leaked letter in 2007, from the Chinese Embassy in Jakarta to the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, revealed that ensuing legal proceedings against a local radio station associated with the Falun Gong was due to Chinese pressure.

In 2009, similar pressures apparently convinced Maori TV in New Zealand to broadcast a Chinese-government film maligning Uygur leader Rebiya Kadeer, following a documentary about her activism.

But occasionally such tactics blow up in Beijing's face. Media pressure against pro-independence groups in Taiwan has produced negative publicity, counterproductive for Beijing's long-term goal of unification. The Taiwanese have observed the deterioration in media freedom in Hong Kong, particularly over the last five years. It was in 2008 that US-based Freedom House – whose analyst Sarah Cook authored the "Long Shadow" report – downgraded its assessment of Hong Kong's press from "free" to "partly free". Hence, in Taiwan, readership numbers for papers critical of Beijing are high.

Elsewhere, power and money can't always buy love – but they often help.

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Flak attack

Michael Chugani says Leung Chun-ying has done a lot in his first year, but as an unlikeable leader he is criticised for everything he does



I never thought I would say this, but I feel sorry for Leung Chun-ying. No, I am not a "Leung fan" – a new Cantonese expression, often used scornfully, that means a Leung fan. We've met several times but only on a professional level. Like others who've had contact with him, I found him difficult to size up.

I feel sorry for him simply because he gets flak for whatever he does. He's the opposite of the late Ronald Reagan, who was known as the "Teflon president" because no flak ever stuck. With Leung, everything sticks, often undeservedly. Forget praise, he doesn't even get grudging acknowledgement for the things he does right.

Let's look at some of the things he's got flak for – national education, the Manila hostage tragedy, the housing shortage, and the issuing of two instead of three free-to-air TV licences. National education wasn't even his idea, the housing shortage worsened before he took office, the Manila hostage tragedy was left unresolved by the previous administration, and the three applications for TV licences were made well before his time in office but, for whatever reason, were not issued. Leung inherited all of these politically charged issues.

Now let's look at the things he's done, and tried to do, in the 16 months he's been in office. He stopped mainland mothers from having babies in the city, ended the baby-milk-powder shortage, scrapped national education due to huge public opposition, secured a meeting with Philippine President Benigno Aquino to discuss the Manila tragedy, cooled the property market, set a poverty line, mapped out a long-term plan to ease the housing shortage, issued a blueprint to clean up our air, and doubled the number of free-to-air TV licences. Yet James Tien Peichun of the Liberal Party described him as the worst of our post-handover chief executives.

If impartially judged, Leung has actually achieved more than his predecessors and he's only a quarter of the way through his term. But that's the trouble; few judge him impartially, least of all the pan-democrats.

There's an old joke about Reagan: during a storm at sea he walked on water to save others. But the next day the liberal media reported: "Reagan can't swim". As the "Teflon president" he got away with a lot. Leung is our "fly paper chief executive". Everything sticks.

Has our politicised society become so demanding that it has lost its sense of reasoning? Or is it simply that Leung is an unlikeable leader? It's a mixture of both, but more so the latter. The way media and opposition politicians have been hounding Leung betrays an intense personal dislike for the man. He has a tough time winning loyalty even from many in the pro-establishment camp.

Since the TV licence controversy erupted I've asked myself numerous times: what if only Ricky Wong Wai-kay won a licence? We would have three instead of four free-to-air stations. Would that have sparked the uproar we're now seeing? Definitely not. It's Leung the man, not his policies, that's tearing our society apart. Many want him toppled. But we lack the good sense to understand we're only hurting ourselves by making our society unworkable.

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American soft power is undermined by allegations of widespread spying

Kevin Rafferty says the actions of US spy chiefs bring their own 'intelligence' into question

Many years ago when I was the founder editor of a daily newspaper in Malaysia, I was tipped off that the country's spy agency was tapping my office telephone. I was flattered.

These were the days before mobiles, so it was a complicated exercise to pick out a switchboard extension and quite an honour to be singled out by an agency that had limited capacity. My source said they could tap fewer than 100 telephones.

Why my blatherings about the daily task of producing a new newspaper should be of any interest or yield anything of value to anyone, I never understood. When I was told that the spy agency continued to tap my telephone at least 10 months after I had left Malaysia, I lost respect for both the intelligence (meaning brain power) and intelligence (spying results) of intelligence agencies.

The performances of the US spy chiefs before Congress this week yielded few surprises, but left many real questions about their intelligence.

General Keith Alexander, the head of the National Security Agency, claimed that his agency's snoop on the telephone calls and e-mails of millions of people was keeping America safe from terrorism. James Clapper, the director of national intelligence, defended tapping foreign leaders' telephone calls on the grounds that it helped to know the intentions of foreign leaders. Spying has always gone on. Moses sent spies into Canaan to

"see what the land is like and whether the people living there are strong or weak... do their cities have walls round them or not?" Successful spies have often meant the difference between victory and defeat in war.

The coming of the internet and the speed of technological change have made conventional spies like James Bond redundant. Technologically strong governments don't need an intrepid hero to plant a bug or seduce a petty secretary to



Behind this question lies the issue posed by the Romans – who will guard the guards?

know what is going on in a distant foreign capital. They can eavesdrop electronically and mop up zillions of transmissions of e-mails and telephones.

We should not be surprised about spying on such a scale. Bernard Squarcini, former head of French intelligence, said: "The Americans spy on French commercial and industrial interests, and we do the same to them because it's in the national interest to protect our companies." That's a particularly French, and Chinese, corporate view. We should not be surprised that macho boys given hi-tech

toys and the task of keeping the country safe from terrorists do not hesitate to use them. Nevertheless, there are important questions that should be asked.

The sheer scale and intrusiveness of the spying does boggle the mind. The latest claims that the NSA has secretly broken into the main communication links that connect Google and Yahoo centres around the world suggest that no one is safe from Big Brother, American or not.

There is still the question of how smart the intelligence agencies are and how they deal with the mass of data they collect. Their super-computers use sophisticated algorithms to sort out the few grains of wheat from the trillions of pieces of chaff flying at them.

But interpretation is still a tricky business. Presumably potential terrorists have learned to use code, so it is only innocents who would say that the play was a real bomb.

There are overarching questions as to whether all people in the world, whether non-Americans or Americans, should be legitimate targets. There are questions, fudged in the congressional hearings, as to whether the spy agencies are looking for terrorists or are trying to protect or discover commercial secrets, or are just playing with their powerful toys. Angela Merkel could hardly be accused of being a terrorist or of being a corporate wheeler-dealer. Behind this question lies the age-old issue posed by the

Romans – who will guard the guards?

The US needs to ask some tough questions of President Barack Obama: was he being economical with the truth in claiming not to know about the tapping of Merkel's telephone? Or was he asleep on the job? Or did his spy agencies cut him out?

In the US, the official watchdogs supposed to check the spy agencies seem to have become tame pussycats.

The more the spy chiefs try to pretend that they are merely doing their job to protect the country, the more they will seem to lack the basic intelligence, needed to be doing the job.

Obama and the US have to face several dangerous consequences of being caught with their spying pants down. As Henry Farrell and Martha Finnemore write in the latest issue of *Foreign Affairs*, revelations of massive spying "undermine Washington's ability to act hypocritically and get away with it".

Hypocrisy, they contend, is crucial to America's soft power, but by their stubborn attitudes Obama and his spy chiefs risk throwing away the remaining trust in US leadership.

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Defeating malaria requires more than medical solutions

Woochong Um says only a concerted regional effort can fight the disease

When the powerful antimicrobial medicine quinine came to Europe in the 1600s, it changed history. Religious leaders, royalty and the fortunate few who could obtain it often recovered from the mysterious bone-shaking chills and fever of the little-understood affliction called malaria.

The bitter powder was later mixed with sweet water to form tonic and topped off with gin. The quinine-laced gin and tonic cocktail was seen by some as a miracle cure for malaria.

Though quinine has been used successfully for centuries, it has not been a miracle cure. More than 200 million people in nearly 100 countries contract malaria each year. An estimated 655,000 people are killed annually. A heartbreaking 86 per cent of these deaths are children whose fragile immune systems cannot withstand the powerful parasite.

Though Africa is hit hardest by malaria, communities and families throughout Asia are also suffering. An estimated 36 million people in the region are infected each year, causing about 49,000 deaths. India, Indonesia, Pakistan, Myanmar and Papua New Guinea see the most infections.

Prosperous countries have defeated malaria. Aggressive monitoring, prevention and treatment have essentially run the once common disease out of North America and Europe – clearly illustrating that malaria can be conquered. Developing countries in Asia

have made significant progress in combating malaria as well, but the poorest, most remote communities remain vulnerable.

Increasingly, it is becoming clear that the same powerful forces that have brought unprecedented prosperity to Asia – regional co-operation, trade and information-sharing – need to be harnessed to address diseases such as malaria.

But the changes that have brought prosperity have also



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allowed communicable diseases such as malaria to move easily across borders and have hindered efforts by countries to isolate and eliminate the problem.

Amidst the factories that have given impoverished farmers good-paying jobs, there are also those which produce fake or adulterated malaria medicines that can move quickly through regional trade networks.

Among the most popular medicines to fake, or produce on the cheap at substandard quality, is artemisinin. This powerful and effective anti-malarial drug has played an

important role in decreasing infections around the world.

But fake or substandard artemisinin, as well as incorrect usage of legitimate forms of the drug, has resulted in the emergence of drug-resistant strains of malaria in Cambodia, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam.

Political leaders in Asia have recognised that in order to eventually eliminate malaria, they must take the same concerted regional approach that has proven so successful in building prosperity in the region.

During the recent East Asia Summit in Brunei, 18 leaders endorsed the creation of an Asia-Pacific Leaders Malaria Alliance, which will partner with the Asian Development Bank and the World Health Organisation to bring political commitment, long-term financing, and a new approach to the fight.

The alliance, which aims to reduce malaria cases and deaths by 75 per cent by 2015, will seek to contain the spread of drug-resistant forms of the parasite by going beyond medical solutions and taking the fight into the areas of regional trade, transport, migration and industry.

The days of dreaming of a stiff gin and tonic as the cure for malaria are long gone, but leaders in the region are ready to join forces and do the hard work necessary to beat this disease.

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