

Chinese Interpol chief goes missing

Editorial

Meng Hongwei, president of Interpol, the international police coordinating agency, has been arrested by the Chinese government. It is a stunning development: A man once heralded by Beijing for reaching the pinnacle of international law enforcement first disappeared and was then revealed to have been arrested on charges of corruption. The irony — a top law enforcement official arrested for breaking the law — is only exceeded by the chilling message sent by his detention: Nothing takes precedence over the Chinese Communist Party's self-perceived need to protect itself. Governments around the world, including Tokyo, must take note.

Meng had a distinguished career in China's security apparatus. He became vice minister of public security in 2004, promoted by Zhou Yongkang, then the minister of public security and one of the most powerful men in China. Zhou was one of the first casualties of President Xi Jinping's anticorruption campaign, whose arrest proved that no one was too senior in the party bureaucracy to be protected. (That Zhou supported Bo Xilai, whom Xi and his allies considered a rival for power, was another damning factor in his indictment.) Zhou was imprisoned for life on corruption charges in 2015.

Meng was one of the most visible figures in China's efforts to promote an image of international responsibility. He oversaw Chinese contributions to some United Nations peacekeeping operations, led a campaign to eradicate lawlessness in the Mekong River area in Southeast Asia, and guided Chinese efforts to track down Chinese officials and business people who had fled abroad amid suspicions of corruption.

In 2016, Meng was elected president of the International Criminal Police Organization — a largely ceremonial position; the organization is run by its secretary-general — one of the most high-profile positions occupied by a Chinese citizen in the international bureaucracy. China exulted in the boost to its efforts to secure international legitimacy, and last year Beijing hosted the organization's annual general assembly, with Xi addressing the gathering.

Last month, however, the smiles vanished. While traveling home from Interpol headquarters in Lyon, France, Meng disappeared. His wife contacted the French police, and on Oct. 7 Chinese authorities announced that they had detained him so that he could be investigated for corruption, although there was no additional information about the crimes of which he was accused. On the same day, Interpol tweeted that it "received the resignation of Mr. Meng Hongwei as president of Interpol with immediate effect." That bland statement ignored all the circumstances of the case — as if a resignation by an individual held in secret detention was business as usual. Interpol's acting president said the organization had no advance notice of the investigation or the planned arrest.

Equally disturbing was the statement released by China's Ministry of Public Security — ostensibly his employer as Meng was still a vice minister — that said a hurried meeting of its Communist Party committee had condemned Meng for corruption and underscored the need for "absolute loyalty" as well as "resolute support" for Xi. In other words, Meng was apparently being accused of political crimes and less than complete support for Xi.

There are many reasons to be troubled by these developments. First, there is the blatant disregard for justice. Meng has been secretly detained and his wife threatened after she held a news conference about his disappearance. Meng may be a Chinese citizen, but that does not give the Beijing government an excuse to arrest and detain him without any process. As one human rights advocate explained, "It's very concerning (that) China thinks it can abduct and arbitrarily detain the sitting head of an international organization without serious consequences."

Second, there is the political nature of the allegations. The assertion that all officials, at home or abroad, must be loyal first to the Chinese Communist Party violates the long-standing practice that international bureaucrats give their first loyalty to their institution, that they try to be neutral and above nationality in their work. When Meng first went to Interpol, there were fears that he would try to corrupt the process by which a Red Notice, the Interpol arrest warrant, is issued and be used against political dissidents. The organization's constitution prohibits interventions that are political and Meng respected that limit, saying that the organization's neutrality was "its lifeline."

The silence that has greeted Meng's abduction and detention is deafening. That is shameful. All governments should complain about the treatment afforded an international official, and demand that all such officials put their organization's interests ahead of that of their country. It is an ideal standard, but it is one to which they and their organizations must aspire, and to which their dispatching countries must honor.

The U.S. midterm elections and Japan

Glen S. Fukushima



WASHINGTON

The U.S. midterm elections of Nov. 6 are attracting worldwide attention because they will constitute the first "national referendum" on the presidency of Donald Trump.

Four results are possible: (1) both the House of Representatives and the Senate remain with the Republican Party in the majority; (2) the House turns majority Democratic but the Senate remains majority Republican; (3) the Senate turns majority Democratic but the House remains majority Republican, and (4) both the House and the Senate turn majority Democratic. With less than a month to go, it appears that (2) has the highest probability and that (3) has the lowest probability.

In the House — where all 435 seats are up for election — Democrats need to flip 23 seats to gain the majority. This appears possible, although gerrymandering, voter suppression and unlimited campaign financing made possible by the Supreme Court's 2010 Citizens United decision all favor Republican candidates.

In the Senate — where Republicans have a 51-49 majority — 35 seats are up for election, of which 26 have Democratic incumbents and nine have Republican incumbents. To gain a majority in the Senate, Democrats need to add a net two seats to their current 49. This is difficult, but not impossible. Some of the states where Democrats have a chance to flip seats include Arizona, Nevada, Tennessee and Texas. On the other hand, states where incumbent Democrats are vulnerable and Republicans may be able to flip seats include Florida, Indiana, Missouri, North Dakota and West Virginia.

Election results

If both the House and the Senate remain majority Republican, Trump will no doubt claim that the American voters have given him a "mandate" to continue the policies he pursued during his first two years in office. His ability to do this will be enhanced with the confirmation of Brett Kavanaugh as the new Supreme Court justice to replace Anthony Kennedy, who retired this year. Throughout his career as an attorney and especially in the confirmation hearings to become a justice of the Supreme Court, Kavanaugh has shown himself to be a staunch conservative who will support Trump on such issues as executive privilege, Obamacare, immigration, taxes, deregulation, abortion, women's rights, LGBTQ rights, racial



U.S. President Donald Trump greets supporters at a campaign rally in Erie, Pennsylvania, on Wednesday. AP

equality, criminal justice, unions, campaign financing and the environment, etc.

If the House turns majority Democratic, this will lead to the use of subpoena power to launch investigations into the president's finances, ties to Russia, potential conflicts of interest, potential obstruction of justice and other issues that Democrats have alleged since the 2016 election but have been ignored by congressional Republicans. Many of these issues are related to those being investigated by special counsel Robert Mueller, whose final report is expected to be issued after the midterm elections.

Some have advocated that a Democratic-led House should initiate impeachment proceedings against the president if sufficient evidence is uncovered by the Mueller investigation. However, given the high hurdle that at least two-thirds of the Senate needs to convict the president to remove him from office, Democrats will be cautious in weighing the impeachment option.

If the Senate turns majority Democratic, this will allow Democrats to scrutinize and vet more strictly the president's nomination of candidates for senior administration positions (assistant secretary and above, including ambassadors) and for the federal judiciary (94 district courts, 13 courts of appeal and the Supreme Court). This would create a significant check on the president's ability to hire the people he wants.

In sum, if the House or the Senate, or both,

turn majority Democratic, it will for the first time since the advent of the Trump administration allow for the checks and balances that we have come to expect among the three branches of the U.S. federal government. This will have significant implications not only for domestic policy but also for America's relations with other countries, including Japan.

Implications for Japan

Thanks in part to the initiatives taken by the government of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe immediately after the U.S. election of November 2016, relations between the United States and Japan during the first year of the Trump administration were far better than had been feared by many.

In particular, the "U.S.-Japan Economic Dialogue" between Vice President Mike Pence and Deputy Prime Minister Taro Aso was a brilliant move by Japan to forestall trade negotiations between the two countries. But by the spring of this year, the U.S. patience had worn thin, and in their April 17-18 meeting, Trump and Abe agreed to a new framework for "free, fair and reciprocal" trade talks under U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer and economic revitalization minister Toshimitsu Motegi.

Following the Abe-Trump summit meeting in New York on Sept. 26, Japan and the U.S. issued a joint statement that was revealing, especially when compared to the subse-

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quent comments about the meeting made by officials of the two governments. First, Abe emphasized that the new talks would not lead to a free trade agreement, since the Japanese government's position is that it wants the U.S. to rejoin the Trans-Pacific Partnership, a multilateral, not bilateral, arrangement. Second, Abe emphasized that this would be a trade agreement on goods, limited only to goods. Third, Abe explained that in these negotiations the U.S. would not ask for more than what was agreed to under "previous economic partnership agreements." Finally, he emphasized that while the negotiations were in progress, the U.S. would not impose tariffs on Japanese automobile imports under Section 232 of the Trade Expansion Act of 1962.

In contrast to the above, Pence said in a speech in Washington on Oct. 4, "We're forging new trade deals, on a bilateral basis ... we will soon begin negotiating a historic bilateral free trade agreement with Japan." Second, the joint statement states: "The United States and Japan will enter into negotiations ... for a United States-Japan Trade Agreement on goods, as well as on other key areas including services."

Third, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue said on Oct. 4, "We think frankly that we are a better ally of Japan than the European Union is and we would expect to have an equal or better deal than Japan gave the European Union regarding agriculture." And Lighthizer has repeatedly called on Japan to unilaterally slash its tariffs on agricultural imports. Finally, the joint statement stipulates that "(the U.S. and Japan) refrain from taking measures against the spirit of this joint statement during the process of these consultations," but the words "measures" and "spirit" are not defined.

If Republicans maintain their majority in the House and the Senate on Nov. 6, the Trump administration will be free to pursue policies it initiated before the elections, including the new trade negotiations with Japan. If they lose their majority in the House or the Senate or both, chances are high that the administration will be so busy dealing with a contentious Congress that it will be severely constrained in pursuing policies it initiated during its first two years in office.

For this and other reasons, the results of the U.S. midterm elections of Nov. 6 will be felt far beyond the borders of the U.S. and will also carry important implications for the U.S. presidential election of 2020.

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When China rules the world

The nation's journalists and diplomats increasingly act as enforcers of rampant displays of Chinese nationalism abroad

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In August 1967, China was in the throes of the Cultural Revolution. Eager to show their revolutionary fervor, Chinese diplomatic staff in London emerged from their embassy wielding iron bars and confronting the police and some journalists who were outside.

No one was significantly hurt in the scuffles that followed, but it was duly reported by Beijing as an attack by "imperialist" police on innocent Chinese.

There were echoes of that well-recorded incident in an event last week in Birmingham, England, at a side event of the annual Conservative Party conference. It was addressed by Benedict Rogers, deputy chairman of the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission and activist on Hong Kong issues who established Hong Kong Watch, a group concerned with civil rights in that territory.

A London-based reporter for China Central Television named Kong Linlin stepped outside of her reportorial role and began to shout at the speaker, using words including "You are a puppet. ... You are a liar. You want to separate China and you are not even Chinese. ... The rest are all traitors. ..."

The female reporter was then seen to slap more than once an ethnic Chinese attending the event — Enoch Lieu, who is Hong Kong

born but a U.K. resident. The police intervened and Kong was arrested for assault, though later released without charge.

This might have been written off as a minor incident, a nationalistic reporter losing her cool. But CCTV defended her and, despite the visual evidence available, insisted that she was the one who had been blocked from expressing her opinion and then assaulted. Naturally, this claim went down well with the social media masses back home in China. They are ever eager on the lookout for "insults to the Chinese people."

It was not clear whether Kong acted spontaneously or the incident was a special kind of "assignment," planned like that one in 1967.

However, a pattern is emerging. It was the third time in as many weeks that China's state organs — of which CCTV is a key part — have made victims out of Chinese who were "misbehaving."

In a pattern that is well familiar from Vladimir Putin's Russia, twisting facts in order to spur nationalist sentiments among the masses has become the new normal in China.

Thusly, a Chinese tourist who refused to leave a Swedish hotel where he did not have the appropriate booking was made into a hero of anti-Chinese victimization when the hotel called the police and had the man arrested. The Chinese Foreign Ministry decided to take up the case and Sweden was widely vilified.

A similar burst of Chinese outrage followed an incident between a Chinese tourist and an immigration official in Thailand. In this case, the official appears to have been at fault in an incident by slapping the tourist who repeatedly refused to obey his instructions.

The ensuing outrage in Chinese media was sufficient for Thai Prime Minister, Gen. Pra-



Thai Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha pledges to make all-out efforts in search and rescue operations after two boats carrying 127 Chinese tourists capsized in Phuket on July 9. AP

yuth Chan-ocha, to issue a groveling apology. This was doubtless out of fear of slowing the flow of Chinese tourists who now account for about 27 percent of 35 million annual visitors to the country.

China had earlier been outraged by the Thai deputy prime minister's suggestion that a Chinese tour operator's ignoring of a weather warning had been at least partly responsible for the deaths of 44 Chinese when a boat sank off the holiday island of Phuket. Bookings for Phuket plunged. The minister apologized.

Most countries are keen to attract Chinese tourists. Nonetheless, official as well as social media responses to recent incidents also raise questions in foreign minds about China's self-regard. Other countries have plenty of misbehaving tourists, but — unlike in China's case — their diplomats are normally the ones apologizing for their countrymen's

behavior, not the ones demanding apologies.

There are two obvious reasons for China's approach. One is simply to use its commercial power for political ends — amply demonstrated by actions in 2017 to boycott some goods and reduce tourism to South Korea over its missile defense deal with the United States.

Another is for the government to appeal to populist sentiment in being seen to support Chinese people everywhere and anywhere, on the principle "My Country Right or Wrong." This, in particular, is a tell-tale indication of the nervousness of the Chinese Communist Party's leadership over the country's brittle economic course.

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