

US places alleged “Chinese spy” on public trial

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In a dramatic escalation of its declaration of economic and strategic war against China, the US government yesterday revealed that a Chinese citizen accused of being an intelligence official had been arrested and extradited from Belgium to be charged with conspiring to commit “economic espionage” and steal trade secrets.

While many of the circumstances surrounding the case remain extremely murky, the extradition of Yanjun Xu as a supposed Chinese “spy” is unprecedented. Xu was reportedly snatched by Belgian authorities on April 1 as the result of a US entrapment operation, in which he was lured to Belgium from China by an offer of information about a fan blade design developed by GE Aviation, an American aerospace giant.

Despite a growing tide of vague and unsubstantiated US government and media allegations of Chinese “theft” of commercial and military technology, this is the first time an alleged Chinese agent has been seized and transported to the US to stand trial.

Moreover, the operation’s timing points to a new stage in Washington’s increasingly open drive to prevent China from becoming an economic or military threat to US global hegemony. This drive is combining punitive tariffs, trade war and sanctions with sweeping allegations of Chinese “espionage” and “interference” in the United States.

Xu’s extradition was announced days after US President Donald Trump, Vice President Mike Pence and FBI Director Christopher Wray all declared China to be the greatest threat to America’s economic and military security.

It also came less than a week after the Pentagon released a 146-page document, titled “Assessing and Strengthening the Manufacturing and Defense Industrial Base and Supply Chain Resiliency of the

United States,” which made clear Washington is preparing for a massive, long-term total war effort against both China and Russia.

China’s foreign ministry spokesman Lu Kang immediately rejected the US charges, telling a press conference yesterday they were “purely fabricated.” He said: “We hope the US can deal with the issue fairly and legally and ensure the legitimate interests of a Chinese citizen.”

Nevertheless, the unveiling of the entrapment operation conducted against Xu was accompanied by provocative accusations against China, both intensifying the confrontation with Beijing and prejudicing any chance of Xu receiving a fair trial on charges that could see him jailed for 15 years.

As Xu made an initial appearance in federal court in Ohio yesterday, Assistant Attorney General for National Security John Demers declared: “This case is not an isolated incident. It is part of an overall economic policy of developing China at American expense... we cannot tolerate a nation stealing our firepower and the fruits of our brainpower.”

Likewise, FBI assistant director Bill Priestap told the media: “This unprecedented extradition of a Chinese intelligence officer exposes the Chinese government’s direct oversight of economic espionage against the United States.”

This language echoed that of FBI director Christopher Wray, who branded China “the broadest, most complicated, most long-term” threat to US interests during October 10 testimony to a Senate Homeland Security Committee hearing.

The accusations also matched last week’s bellicose speech by Pence, in which he accused Beijing of directing “its bureaucrats and businesses to obtain American intellectual property—the foundation of our

economic leadership—by any means necessary.” And Trump himself earlier accused China of interfering in the US mid-term elections in a bid to remove him from office.

The indictment against Xu alleges that he is a deputy division director in a department of China’s Ministry of State Security, the country’s intelligence agency. But the allegations against him relate to what appear to be routine activities involving exchanges of information between researchers and academics, in which Xu was employed by the Jiangsu Science & Technology Promotion Association.

Prosecutors alleged that Xu worked from 2013 through this year with others associated with the ministry and several Chinese universities to obtain “sensitive and proprietary information” from aviation and aerospace companies. They said he invited experts to travel to China, often for the initial purpose of delivering a university presentation, and paid their costs.

Such invitations and arrangements are commonplace among academics, scientists and technology experts, so the charges against Xu are also a wider threat to the civil liberties and basic democratic rights, including those of thousands of Chinese or Chinese-descended researchers and students in the US.

In last week’s speech, Pence targeted the more than 300,000 Chinese students studying in the US, as well as Chinese student organisations, as potential “fronts” to be countered as Washington puts the US on a war footing against China.

Xu was entrapped into travelling to Belgium after months of undercover operations by FBI agents, working in collaboration with GE Aviation. Yesterday, the Justice Department praised GE Aviation for its cooperation in the investigation.

This joint operation underscores the growing merging of the American corporate technology sector giants, which benefit from huge Pentagon contracts, with the repressive intelligence and police apparatus that aggressively protects the global and domestic interests of US imperialism.

The corporate media produced sensationalised headlines about a “Chinese spy” charged with stealing secrets. But any Chinese diplomatic and intelligence activities focussed on the US undoubtedly pale into insignificance compared to the massive operations

conducted by Washington’s surveillance and military agencies against China, and every other country. These have been documented thoroughly by National Security Agency whistleblower Edward Snowden and WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange.

Significantly, Stratfor, which has close links to the US security apparatus, described as “unusual” the decision to haul Xu to the US for a public trial, instead of possibly swapping him for a US spy or informant arrested by China. The state-owned *Global Times* said the unprecedented operation may be related to the reported 2010–2012 “dismantling” by the Chinese authorities of a CIA network of agents across the country.

On August 15, *Foreign Policy* reported that the CIA had “botched the communications system it used to interact with its sources in China, according to five current and former intelligence officials.” Dozens of suspected US spies were reportedly executed. China has neither confirmed nor denied the *Foreign Policy* report, and the US agencies have refused to comment on it.

What is clear is that by seizing Xu, and six months later placing him on what amounts to a public show trial, the US government has taken another step toward military confrontation with China.



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