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13 Chinese agents charged in forced repatriation bid, plot to block Huawei probe

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WASHINGTON – The Justice Department on Monday unveiled charges against 13 people accused of working for China in three “significant national security cases,” Attorney General Merrick Garland said.

One of the cases concerns an attempt to pressure a New York-based critic of the Communist Chinese government to return to the country; the second involves efforts to obtain secret information about the US prosecution of Chinese tech giant Huawei; and a third deals with the recruitment of spies in the US.

Ten of the 13 individuals charged are Chinese spies and government officials, FBI Director Christopher Wray said Monday.

‘They’re charged in three different cases that might seem at first glance to be about unrelated issues,’ Wray said. ‘However, ... each of these ways bear the Chinese government’s flagrant violation of international laws as they work to project their authoritarian view around the world, including within our own borders.’

The first case charges seven Chinese citizens – Tian Peng, 38, Chenghua Chen, Chunde Ming, Xuexin Hou, 52, and Weidong Yuan, 55, Quanzhong An, 55 and Guangyang An, 34, – with participating in an effort to “harass and coerce” a US resident to return to China “as part of an international extralegal repatriation effort known as ‘Operation Fox Hunt,’” according to the department.

“[China] has a history of targeting political dissidents and critics of the government who have sought relief and refuge in other countries,” Garland told reporters while announcing the cases.

The unnamed victim was reportedly targeted for participating in “protected First Amendment activities – protests here in the United States – which would have been embarrassing to the Chinese government,” he said.



Attorney General Merrick Garland announces the charges at a press conference on Monday, Oct. 24, 2022. Getty Images

"The defendants threatened the victim saying that, 'Coming back and turning yourself in is the only way out,'" Garland said. "They showed up at the home of the victim's son in New York. They filed frivolous lawsuits against the victim and his son and said it would be 'endless misery for the defendant and son to defend themselves.' And they made clear that their harassment would not stop until the victim returned to China."

Quanzhong and Guangyang, of Roslyn, were arrested and arraigned Thursday. The others remain at-large, the department said.

Those convicted of acting as Chinese agents face a maximum sentence of 10 years in prison, according to the Justice Department.

In the Huawei case, two Chinese intelligence agents named as Dong He and Zheng Wang tried to bribe a US law enforcement official with \$41,000 in bitcoin for information pertaining to the matter, Garland said.

“This was an egregious attempt by PRC intelligence officers to shield a PRC based company from accountability, and to undermine the integrity of our judicial system,” added the AG, using the acronym for the People’s Republican of China.



FBI Director Christopher Wray accused the Chinese government of violating international law. AP

Dong and Zheng reportedly believed they had recruited the law enforcement officer to work for Beijing, but “in actuality, [the officer] was working as a double agent on behalf of the FBI,” according to the Justice Department.

Dong is accused of paying the agent the bribe to receive a secret document that purported to be an internal strategy memorandum from the Brooklyn US Attorney's office regarding Huawei's prosecution.

If convicted, Dong and Wang face up to 40 and 20 years in prison, respectively, according to court documents.

The third case charges four Chinese citizens – including three Chinese Ministry of State Security intelligence officers – with attempting to recruit spies for China in the United States, according to the federal indictment.



Seen in surveillance footage, Guangyang An (right) is one of the 13 people charged by the federal government. DOJ

Wang Lin, 59; Dong Ting, 40; Wang Qiang, 55, and Bi Hongwei, are accused of targeting individual including university professors, former federal law enforcement officers and state homeland security officials to act as agents on behalf of the Chinese government between 2008 and 2018, according to the Justice Department.

“As part of the conspiracy, [they] used a purported academic institute at Ocean University of China – referred to as the Institute for International Studies (IIS) – as cover for their clandestine intelligence activities,” the department said. “Acting undercover as the purported director of the IIS, Wang Lin … targeted professors at American universities and others in the United States with access to sensitive information and equipment.”

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The charges carry a maximum prison term of five years and maximum fine of \$250,000, according to the department.

“As these cases demonstrate, the government of China sought to interfere with the rights and freedoms of individuals in the United States and to undermine our judicial system that protects those rights,” Garland said. “The Justice Department will not tolerate attempts by any foreign power to undermine the rule of law upon which our democracy is based. We will continue to fiercely protect the rights guaranteed to everyone in our country, and we will defend the integrity of our institutions.”