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Prices in Canada may be higher

\$4.00



JUAN MANUEL BLANCO/EPA, VIA SHUTTERSTOCK

Thousands of migrants, including people from Honduras, Haiti and Cuba, were 1,000 miles south of the U.S. border on Tuesday.

Beijing-Washington Spy Competition Escalates

This article is by Edward Wong, Julian E. Barnes, Muye Xiao and Chris Buckley.

WASHINGTON — The Chinese spies wanted more. In meetings during the pandemic with Chinese technology contractors, they complained that surveillance cameras tracking foreign diplomats, military officers and intelligence operatives in Beijing’s embassy district fell short of their needs.

The spies asked for an artificial intelligence program that would create instant dossiers on every person of interest in the area and analyze their behavior patterns. They proposed feeding the A.I. program information from databases and scores of cameras that would include car license plates, cellphone data, contacts and more.

Using High-Tech Tools, Not Just Gossip From Embassy Parties

The A.I.-generated profiles would allow the Chinese spies to select targets and pinpoint their networks and vulnerabilities, according to internal meeting memos obtained by The New York Times.

The spies’ interest in the technology, disclosed here for the first time, reveals some of the vast ambitions of the Ministry of State Security, China’s main intelligence agency. In recent years, it has built itself up through wider recruitment, including of American citizens. The agency has also

sharpened itself through better training, a bigger budget and the use of advanced technologies to try to fulfill the goal of Xi Jinping, China’s leader, for the nation to rival the United States as the world’s pre-eminent economic and military power.

The Chinese agency, known as the M.S.S., once rife with agents whose main source of information was gossip at embassy dinner parties, is now going toe-to-toe with the Central Intelligence Agency in collection and subterfuge around the world.

Today the Chinese agents in Beijing have what they asked for: an A.I. system that tracks American spies and others, said U.S. officials and a person with knowledge of the transaction, who shared the information on the condition that

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Blinken Seeks Mexico’s Help To Slow Surge

By HAMED ALEAZIZ and EMILIANO RODRÍGUEZ MEGA

MEXICO CITY — Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken and other top American officials met with Mexico’s president on Wednesday in hopes of figuring out a strategy to slow the surge in illegal migration at the southern U.S. border.

President Biden dispatched the officials to Mexico City at a pivotal moment, as border crossings have hit record numbers and there is growing pressure on Mr. Biden to solve — or at least contain — a crisis that has proved to be a consistent political vulnerability.

The situation at the border is at the center of some of Mr. Biden’s biggest priorities going into 2024, particularly as Republicans in Congress demand a new crack-down on immigration in exchange for wartime aid for Ukraine and Israel.

Mexico has been a key player in U.S. efforts to stem the tide of migration as people from across the globe have passed through the country. On several occasions in recent weeks, the U.S. Border Patrol encountered more than 10,000 people a day trying to cross the border.

Shortly before Wednesday’s meeting, President Andrés Manuel López Obrador of Mexico said the U.S. Congress should offer more support to Latin America instead of putting up “barriers, barbed wire fences on the river or thinking about building walls.”

He added, “It is more efficient and more humane to invest in the development of the people.”

Mr. López Obrador also said next year’s presidential election in the United States would bring migration to the top of the agenda.

“The migration issue is going to intensify,” he said.

Wednesday’s two-hour meeting also included Alejandro N. Mayorkas, the homeland security secretary, and Liz Sherwood-Randall, the White House homeland security adviser.

Mexico has taken steps to keep migrants from massing along the border in the past. But earlier this month, the Mexican government suspended migrant deportations because of a lack of funding, according to an official from the gov-

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Assisted Death For Mentally Ill Divides Canada

By VJOSA ISAI

TORONTO — Canada already has one of the most liberal assisted death laws in the world, offering the practice to terminally and chronically ill Canadians.

But under a law scheduled to take effect in March, assisted dying would also become accessible to people whose only medical condition is mental illness, making Canada one of about half a dozen countries to permit the procedure for that category of people.

That move has divided Canadians, some of whom view it as a sign that the country’s public health care system is not offering adequate psychiatric care, which is notoriously underfunded and in high demand.

The government of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, which has been criticized for its rollout of the policy, has defended its actions by pointing to a 2019 court decision in Quebec that officials say mandates the expansion.

Members of the Conservative Party have accused the government of promoting a “culture of death.” There has also been opposition from politicians on the left who want the government to focus its health policy on expanding mental health care.

Jason French is among those building a case for why a doctor should help him die.

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Half of Folk Duo That Pushed Limits of Satire on TV in ’60s

TOM SMOTHERS, 1937-2023

By WILLIAM GRIMES

Tom Smothers, the older half of the comic folk duo the Smothers Brothers, whose skits and songs on “The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour” in the late 1960s brought political satire and a spirit of youthful irreverence to network television, paving the way for shows like “Saturday Night Live” and “The Daily Show,” died on Tuesday at his home in Santa Rosa, Calif., a city in Sonoma County. He was 86.

He died “following a recent battle with cancer,” a spokesman for the National Comedy Center announced on behalf of the family.

The Smothers Brothers made their way to network television as a folk act with a difference. With Tom playing guitar and Dick playing stand-up bass, they spent as much time bickering as singing.

With an innocent expression and a stammering delivery, Tom would try to introduce their songs with a story, only to be picked at by his skeptical brother. As frustration mounted, he would turn, seething, and often deliver a trademark non sequitur: “Mom always liked you best.”

Hoping to reach a younger audience, CBS gave the brothers creative control over “The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour,” a one-hour variety show that made its debut in February 1967. For the



CBS PHOTO ARCHIVE

Tom Smothers, left, and his younger brother, Dick, in 1969.

next three seasons it courted controversy as it addressed American policy in Vietnam, religious fundamentalism, racial strife and recreational drug use.

Running features like Leigh French’s “Share a Little Tea With Goldie,” replete with drug references, either delighted or scandalized, depending on the age and the politics of the viewer.

“During the first year, we kept saying the show has to have something to say more than just empty sketches and vacuous comedy,” Mr. Smothers said in a 2006 interview. “So we always tried to put something of value in there, something that made a point and reflected what was happening out in

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Trump to Stay On the Ballot, Michigan Says

Top State Court Leaves Room for New Suit

This article is by Julie Bosman, Ernesto Londoño and Nicholas Boggel-Burroughs.

The Michigan Supreme Court on Wednesday gave Donald J. Trump an important victory in the legal battle over his eligibility to return to the White House by allowing the former president to appear on the state’s primary ballot in February.

But in a narrow ruling, the court left the door open for a new challenge to bar Mr. Trump from the general election ballot in the key battleground state over his attempts to overturn the 2020 election.

The decision was the latest in the high-stakes efforts to block Mr. Trump from returning to power. It follows the bombshell ruling by the Colorado Supreme Court, which on Dec. 19 determined in a 4-to-3 opinion that Mr. Trump should be removed from the state’s 2024 Republican primary ballot for his role in the Jan. 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol.

Lawyers across the country are venturing into largely unexplored legal terrain that could have far-reaching implications for future elections as they argue over a constitutional amendment passed after the Civil War.

The provision, Section 3 of the 14th Amendment, disqualifies people who served as federal officers and “engaged in insurrection or rebellion” from holding office. The original intent was to bar Confederate officials from serving in the U.S. government. But the courts and Congress have not clearly established how the provision should be interpreted today, or how much latitude states have to remove candidates from the ballot.

Jocelyn Benson, Michigan’s secretary of state, said in a statement on Wednesday that the state’s top court had rightly concluded that she lacked the authority to prevent Mr. Trump from appearing on the primary ballot. But

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THE WEATHER
Today, cloudy, drizzle at times, mild, high 55. Tonight, cloudy, occasional drizzle, low 46. Friday, cloudy, some lingering drizzle or a shower, mild, high 50. Weather map, Page B4.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Israel’s Goal Of No Hamas Sows Doubts

Effort to Crush Group Is Seen as Unrealistic

By NEIL MacFARQUHAR

Standing before a gray backdrop decorated with Hamas logos and emblems of a gunman that commemorate the bloody Oct. 7 attack on Israel, Osama Hamdan, the organization’s representative in Lebanon, professed no concern about his Palestinian faction being dislodged from Gaza.

“We are not worried about the future of the Gaza Strip,” he recently told a crowded news conference in his offices in Beirut’s southern suburbs. “The decision maker is the Palestinian people alone.”

Mr. Hamdan thus dismissed one of Israel’s key objectives since the beginning of its assault on Gaza: to dismantle the Islamist political and military organization that was behind the massacre of about 1,200 people, according to Israeli officials, and which still holds more than 100 hostages.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel has repeatedly emphasized that objective even while facing mounting international pressure to scale back military operations. The Biden administration has dispatched senior envoys to Israel to push for a new phase of the war focused on more targeted operations rather than sweeping destruction.

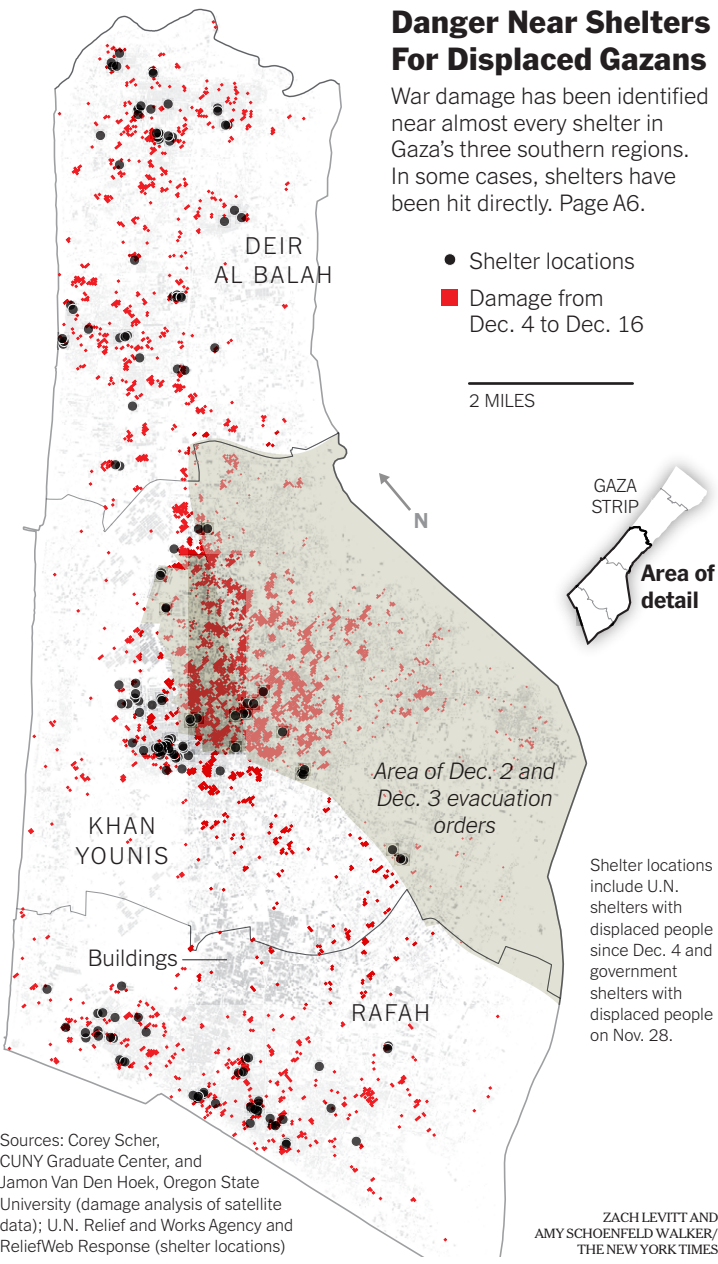
And critics both within Israel and outside have questioned whether resolving to destroy such a deeply entrenched organization was ever realistic. One former Israeli national security adviser called the plan “vague.”

“I think that we have reached a moment when the Israeli authorities will have to define more clearly what their final objective is,” President Emmanuel Macron of France said this month. “The total destruction of Hamas? Does

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Danger Near Shelters For Displaced Gazans

War damage has been identified near almost every shelter in Gaza’s three southern regions. In some cases, shelters have been hit directly. Page A6.



SPORTS B8-11 Anatomy of a Road Trip N.F.L. teams’ travel plans are designed to eliminate stress. No wonder so many Giants enjoy the experience. PAGE B8 Pistons Win (a Spot in History) Detroit’s 27th straight loss set a single-season N.B.A. record. A look at other memorable skids in sports. PAGE B9	INTERNATIONAL A4-10 Putin Woos Neutral India The Russian president thanked India’s foreign minister, who is on a five-day diplomatic trip to Moscow, for New Delhi’s “direct support.” PAGE A4 BUSINESS B1-5 Past Year’s Good Tech Awards Toasting a year of transformation and breakthroughs (and a few breakdowns) in Silicon Valley and beyond. PAGE B1 The Times Sues Over A.I. Bots The complaint against OpenAI and Microsoft said millions of articles were used without authorization. PAGE B1	NATIONAL A11-14 A Question of Responsibility Birmingham-Southern College, a private liberal arts school in Alabama, has been plagued by financial instability. Should the state help rescue it? PAGE A11 Haley’s Strategy: Play It Safe Nikki Haley is betting on the discipline that’s left her as the only non-Trump candidate with momentum. PAGE A13 OBITUARIES A16-17 Longtime German Statesman Wolfgang Schäuble, a politician who had a key role in the reunification of East and West Germany, was 81. PAGE A16	THURSDAY STYLES D1-8 What Was Most Clickable? Revisiting some of the people, trends, feuds and frenzies that really took off on social media. PAGE D4 A Look All Her Own “I looked different, I dressed different,” Barbra Streisand said in an interview about her sense of fashion. PAGE D1	ARTS C1-6 Capturing 2023 on Film Photographers sifted through thousands of images to find the shots that best defined the year in culture. PAGE C1 Choosing Their Own Roles Some transgender people have turned to video games as places where they can safely express themselves. PAGE C3 OPINION A18-19 Jamelle Bouie PAGE A19
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