

Watch this: China surveillance tech seeks to go global

24 November 2019, by Mathieu Rabechault



China is the best represented of the 53 nations at the security fair save for host nation France

Chinese firms are omnipresent at a Paris homeland security trade show, capitalising on their vast experience in developing surveillance systems for Beijing to conquer the global market despite concerns the technology has been used to violate human rights.

With 89 out of 1,100 companies demonstrating their wares at the Milipol security trade fair, China is the best represented of the 53 nations present save for host nation France.

But contrary to weapons and ammunition on display at other stands, Chinese firms offer non-lethal equipment: helmets, bullet-proof vests and tactical clothing for special forces or riot troops. Jamming equipment. And cameras, lots of cameras.

China is known for its heavy police surveillance, with market research firm IHS Markit estimating it has already deployed 176 million cameras to monitor public spaces across the country.

That number is expected to expand to 2.76 billion, or nearly two for each citizen, by 2022.

Coupled with facial recognition technology, in which China is also a world leader, the surveillance network is an important element of Chinese efforts to control its population.

Concerns about the system appear to be well placed.

According to a trove of government documents released by the New York Times recently the surveillance system was used against China's Uighur minority as part of a crackdown in Xinjiang.



By 2022, the number of cameras in China is expected to boom to 2.76 billion, or nearly two for each citizen

Human rights groups and outside experts say more than one million Uighurs and other mostly Muslim minorities have been rounded up in a network of internment camps across the fractious region.

Beijing, after initially denying the camps existed, now describes them as vocational schools aimed at dampening the allure of Islamist extremism and

violence through education and job training.

China's involvement in the tech fair has stirred controversy in the past.

Organisers closed the stand of one Chinese firm at the previous fair in 2017 after [human rights](#) campaigners from Amnesty International called them out for allowing it to display handcuffs that deliver electric shocks and other equipment that could be considered torture instruments that are banned in the EU.

The stand of Hytera Communications Corporation sports communications gear that integrate images from body cameras to smartphones equipped with big antennas.

"Each police officer can have the tactical situation displayed on their smartphone," said Sylvain Shuang, who represents the firm in francophone Africa.

Coupled with images from the network of surveillance cameras, police in command centres have more information upon which to base decisions, especially since "we can integrate facial recognition systems," he added.



The stand of a Chinese firm was closed in 2017 after it displayed handcuffs that deliver electric shocks

Barred from US public contracts

The company already makes 40 percent of its sales outside of China, owing in part to having acquired firms in Britain, Canada and Spain.

But Hytera Communications Corporation has found itself barred from seeking public contracts in the United States, as has fellow Chinese company Hikvision which is the world's top video surveillance firm.

Hikvision, which has supplied cameras for the video surveillance system in the French city of Nice, is not present at Milipol this year.

A number of the companies present come from the Shenzhen region near Hong Kong—home to telecommunications equipment maker Huawei.

"It's the Silicon Valley of China," said Yolen Ye, sales manager at GDU, which makes mini drones equipped with cameras.

The firm has already sold a model to Thailand for use in monitoring forest fires, but the GDU says the drones are capable of tracking up to 30 targets while the cameras can feed systems that identify licence plates or faces.



Coupled with facial recognition technology, China's surveillance network is key to its efforts to control its population

Chinese armaments firm Norinco is also present at

Milipol, but with facial recognition technology rather than assault rifles or battle tanks.

"In China, facial recognition is not a new technology and we realise this is a safe country because in most public spaces, we have this system to secure the situation," said a representative of the state-owned firm who asked that his name not be used.

It is more difficult to sell the technology in Europe as "they have fears that it impacts privacy," he added.

But he said it offers advantages in situations like preventing football violence as police can be alerted when persons known to commit violence arrive near stadiums.

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