Buying Counterfeit Chips from China

by Phyllis Schlafly October 5, 2011

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It's a problem for U.S. retailers when Communist China makes fake designer handbags and illegal copies of our music CDs, but it's a much bigger problem when the fakes are chips installed in our military weapons. The American people are starting to discover that counterfeit computer components bought from the Chinese are used in our war planes, ships, and communication networks.

These tiny electronic circuits used in computers can cause breakdowns or malfunctions. Bloomberg Businessweek reported that a confidential Pentagon program issued an alert as long ago as 2005 that fake microchips were causing military equipment malfunctions.

Other shipments were discovered to be counterfeit in time to be cancelled. Four counterfeit chips were discovered in the flight computer of one of our F-15 fighter jets at Robins Air Force Base in Georgia.

While it is difficult to determine if fake chips caused particular plane or helicopter crashes, we know that we are having field failures in almost every weapon system. Informed military observers believe that at least 15 percent of the spare and replacement chips the Pentagon buys are counterfeits.

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Another danger from fake Chinese chips is that they facilitate foreign espionage. The head of cyber security in the Office of the Director of National Intelligence

and the FBI have both admitted that these routers can allow the Chinese to gain access to U.S. secure systems.

These dangers come from the routing trail of the router chips. After the U.S. ships our scrap computers to China, scavengers working in littered streets sand off the dates and other identification from cast-off circuit boards, put a new coating on the chips, often re-label them as military, sell them in bazaars to never-inspected kitchen-table brokers in the U.S., and the Pentagon buys them because they are cheap or because federal affirmative-action policies require them to favor suppliers claiming to be "disadvantaged."

The U.S. has seized more than 400 fake routers. Nobody knows how many more Chinese counterfeits have been installed in U.S. equipment.

The threat from Chinese counterfeits is really not news to those in the know. It has been known for so many years that it has acquired a nickname: "hardware Trojans," taken from the ancient Greek myth about how the Greeks defeated Troy with a Trojan horse, a wooden horse that secretly contained Greek troops.

Likewise, the Chinese are most probably now selling us counterfeit computer routers for our military equipment and covertly routing our most secret information directly to the Chinese. There are so many ways computers can be jimmied by the Chinese: programmed to fail prematurely, tracking or surveillance for spying, or providing hackers with hidden "back doors."

Last year, the U.S. bought 59,000 counterfeit microchips from China for use in our warships, planes, missile and antimissile systems, but fortunately discovered they were fake in time. How many didn't we catch?

The Government Accountability Office reported that "counterfeit parts have the potential to cause a serious disruption to DoD supply chains, delay ongoing

missions, and even affect the integrity of weapons systems." Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Carl Levin (D-MI) added that counterfeit parts have "infiltrated" the defense supply chain including microprocessors for F-15 operational flight-control computers and the hardware of our Missile Defense System.

Can't we assure U.S. safety by sending our inspectors to China for on-site inspections? The Chinese have already rejected that request.

When are Republican presidential and senatorial candidates going to address any of the many problems caused by China? Their silence is deafening, and the media are complicit in the silence by failing to ask serious questions about China in five presidential debates.

Will you instruct the Defense Department to buy only computer chips and routers manufactured in the U.S. under strict security guidelines?

Since everyone agrees on the need to reduce America's dependence on foreign oil, isn't it just as important to reduce our dependence on foreign computer parts for our military planes and weapons?

Will you bar from Defense Department business any companies that give away their patents, manufacturing processes, and intellectual property as part of the deal to open a plant in a foreign country?

Will you announce that the next time an American dies because of contamination of a prescription drug imported from China, prescription drugs will no longer be allowed to be imported from China?

Do you realize that China is not our "trading partner" but is our no-holds-barred economic competitor, highly protectionist, anti-free-trade, and spending the money it gets from U.S. trade to build up its military to become the world's number-one superpower?