



PRIMER: China in the Homeland

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While U.S. policymakers primarily have focused on countering China's military threat, there is another arm of the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) strategy to defeat the United States that needs attention. The CCP is conducting a malign influence campaign, driven by its United Front political warfare operations, that seeks to destroy American institutions and undermine our will to fight for freedom. For years, the CCP has steadily infiltrated elements of American society, rooting its tentacles in everything from higher education to critical infrastructure to our pension funds.

In our limited podcast series "[China in the Homeland](#)," The Vandenberg Coalition spoke with policy experts and state government officials about the threat posed by the CCP to the American heartland and the policy solutions needed to address it. Our guests explained how the CCP has exploited our free and open society and countering this threat requires action from both federal and state policymakers. Here are the key takeaways for what we should be doing to kick China out of the American homeland.

HIGHER EDUCATION

Risks:

America's colleges and universities drive innovation and shape the minds of our future leaders. With hundreds of thousands of Chinese nationals attending them for undergraduate studies and graduate research, the CCP has identified U.S. institutions of higher education as primary targets for its malign influence campaign.

Through predatory research agreements, recruitment of American-trained scientists, and direct intellectual property theft from American labs, China takes our research and innovations and uses them to strengthen the Chinese military. China's "Civil-Military Fusion" approach makes no distinction between military and civilian technology, building up the Chinese military on America's dime. On campuses, the CCP also promotes propaganda and communist ideology while aggressively silencing dissenting voices through organized protests and disruption. Chinese students studying in America face coercion, surveillance, and enticement by CCP agents. The CCP coordinates these malign activities through government-backed "student groups," such as Chinese Students and Scholars Associations (CSSAs).

Recommendations:

- **Remove CCP Campus Strongholds:** China utilizes outwardly benign CSSAs (as it did previously with Confucius Institutes) as bases from which to coordinate malign activities on U.S. campuses. These organizations, and any future CCP-backed groups, should be exposed for what they are and removed from university campuses.
- **Scrutinize Visa Applicants:** The CCP frequently exploits college admissions and exchange programs to place communist operatives into the United States. Adopting stricter vetting procedures will increase the standards for who is allowed onto American campuses and reduce China's ability to conduct campus United Front work.
- **Protect Good-Faith Students:** Chinese students are not a pro-CCP monolith, and their talents have greatly contributed to American society. Efforts must be made to protect good-faith Chinese students from CCP repression, including strengthening student rights offices and increased enforcement of Title 18 federal rights protections.

- ***Secure American Research:*** American research, especially when taxpayer funded, must not contribute to China’s technological or military advancement. Funding restrictions, sanctions on institutions associated with the Chinese military, enhanced punishment for intellectual property theft, and other measures must be taken to ensure that American ingenuity does not benefit our adversaries.
- ***Restrict and Disclose Foreign Gifts:*** Adversaries like China should not be allowed to donate money to our universities to gain influence. We should take steps to ban gifts from countries of concern.
- ***Promote Pro-American Civics Education:*** Authoritarian propaganda fails when Americans understand the virtue of our constitutional freedoms and how to identify disinformation. It is critical that we provide students a pro-American civics education before and during college.

CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE & SUPPLY CHAINS

Risks:

Since America errantly facilitated China’s reentry into the world economy, the CCP has pursued an aggressive economic strategy aimed at entrenching Chinese products into global supply chains and infrastructure. This strategy has been enormously successful—and caused an unacceptable risk to American national security.

Today, the United States heavily depends on Chinese imports, and Chinese businesses have integrated themselves into American critical infrastructure. In the event of a conflict or crisis, China can throttle our supplies of rare earth metals, foundational semiconductors, pharmaceuticals, and other critical products. Additionally, Chinese-made components and Chinese-owned crypto-mining data centers expose the U.S. energy grid to potential sabotage. Even during peacetime, those same Chinese components—as well as Chinese-owned land near government installations—have facilitated PRC surveillance and espionage on American soil.

Recommendations:

- ***Identify Vulnerabilities:*** Strengthening U.S. resilience is popular, but reform first requires awareness of the problem and specific vulnerabilities. State legislative committees, Pacific Conflict Stress Tests, and consultation with relevant experts have proven successful models for educating lawmakers and producing targeted reforms at the state and local levels.
- ***Decouple Supply Chains:*** In 2020, the shortage of ventilators and Personal Protective Equipment during the coronavirus pandemic demonstrated that America’s reliance on Chinese imports is a major liability during a crisis. Policymakers should work to decouple critical supply chains from China by identifying alternative suppliers, cultivating partnerships with fellow industrialized countries, and using investment and tax incentives to encourage companies in strategically important sectors to decouple their supply chains from China.
- ***Prohibit Compromised Equipment:*** Chinese-made components are a serious risk to our power grid and other critical infrastructure, as the remote kill switches found in Chinese solar power inverters have shown. The use of Chinese components in critical infrastructure must be prohibited.
- ***Restrict Chinese Foreign Investment:*** Chinese investment in American infrastructure poses significant risks. For instance, data centers capable of rapidly powering up and down can overload power grids, and land near military bases can act as surveillance stations. States should prohibit critical infrastructure investments and the purchase of land near government facilities by foreign adversaries.
- ***Curtail Foreign Influence at the State Level:*** States should adopt stricter regulations preventing lobbying by individuals or entities tied to foreign adversaries.



PENSION FUNDS

Risks:

Millions of Americans rely on state pension funds for their retirement. However, many of these funds are invested in Chinese companies. This exposes pensioners to tremendous risk and jeopardizes their ability to retire by, effectively, entrusting their money to the CCP. Chinese companies are beholden to the commands of the CCP and often maintain poor transparency or malicious business practices. Furthermore, they are often subject to involvement in China's Civil-Military Fusion, meaning American money is contributing directly to the improvement of the Chinese military.

Recommendations:

- ***Divest from China:*** For the sake of the stability of Americans' retirement plans and finances, state (and private) pension funds should divest from Chinese businesses as soon as possible. State financial officers are well-positioned to lead the charge for divestment, but where conflicts in fund governance priorities present a roadblock, state legislatures can and should force the issue through the lawmaking process.
- ***Demand Openness and Honesty:*** Access to American markets and exchanges is not a right. Foreign companies should be held to the same standards of transparency and honesty as American corporations are if they want to be traded on American markets. Under no circumstances should the Security and Exchange Commission issue foreign private issuer status to Chinese companies.

