

CHAIRMAN ADAM B. SCHIFF
HOUSE PERMANENT SELECT COMMITTEE ON
INTELLIGENCE HEARING
China's Digital Authoritarianism: Surveillance, Influence, and
Political Control
May 16, 2019

[GAVEL]

The Committee will come to order.

I want to remind all of our Members that we are in OPEN session, and as such we will discuss UNCLASSIFIED matters only.

Without objection, the chair may declare a recess at any time.

CHAIR AND RANKING OPENING STATEMENTS

Thank you all for joining us today for a timely and important discussion on China's emerging brand of Digital Authoritarianism. In particular, I'd like to thank our distinguished panel of witnesses, some of whom have traveled considerable distances to share their expertise with us.

As the Chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, I have directed our Committee to look into the rise of authoritarianism, a trend that underpins many of the most pernicious developments throughout our world. This hearing is part of our Committee's broader effort to understand this trend's impact on the intelligence community and broader national security of the United States.

This is also our formal launch for the Committee's "Deep Dive" on China, where we will continue to look at these issues in open and closed sessions for the duration of the 116th Congress.

Today, our nation faces no greater long-term strategic challenge than China's emergence as a major actor on the global stage.

Citizens of China today live their lives bounded by the guardrails of ubiquitous surveillance and pervasive influence operations—all in the name of the Chinese Communist Party's desire to retain political control. Leveraging advances in artificial intelligence, machine learning, and facial recognition software, Beijing seeks to optimize and cement the social control of its population.

Alongside this effort, we've seen a resurgence in assertive, nationalist sentiments in China, particularly among its youngest citizens. This divisive rhetoric is frequently fueled by the Party's "50 Cent Army," a group of hundreds of thousands of internet commentators that are paid to praise the government and distract from society's woes. The result? More public support for confrontational Chinese behavior in the Taiwan Strait and East and South China Seas.

The motives for this course of action are clear. Faced with prospects of a slowing economy and a rapidly graying population, the Communist Party sees engineering popular support as the best way to retain power.

Nowhere are the consequences of digital authoritarianism clearer than in Xinjiang (*Sheen-Jang*) province, where an omnipresent surveillance state has been created, and where an estimated 1 million Uyghurs and other ethnic Muslim minorities are held in political "re-education" internment camps.

A recent report from Human Rights Watch documented the extent of surveillance in Xinjiang (*Sheen-Jang*), noting that Chinese authorities are collecting everything from the color of an individual's car, what they download on their phone, and donations to religious organizations. This aggregated information powers a police app that identifies suspicious behavior. Detainees are prohibited from contacting family and friends abroad, stymying the flow of information.

This coupling of innovation and authoritarianism is deeply troubling and has spread beyond China itself. According to a report authored by Dr. Hoffman—one of our witnesses today—Huawei's so-called "safe cities" have been installed in at least 46 countries. These systems link 24/7 surveillance with command and control centers, facial and license plate recognition technologies, data labs, and intelligence fusion capabilities.

The export of this technology gives countries the technological tools they need to emulate Beijing's model of social and political control. These technologies have not only enabled China's quest to gain market share, they're also shaping the world in a way that also encourages support for their brand of governance and restrictions on personal liberty.

Huawei's own officials have confirmed that they have no interest in guaranteeing the civil liberties and privacy protection for the citizens in countries who purchase their equipment. This is unacceptable. We cannot—and should not—stand by as civil liberties and privacy protection are degraded *en masse*.

China's 21st Century drive for political influence has deep roots back to the founding days of the People's Republic. Today, we will hear testimony about an organization called the United Front Work Department, a key player in China's influence apparatus. The United Front Work Department engages in a unique blend of propaganda operations, covert action, and overt influence operations, all designed to shape our conceptions of how we see and discuss the Communist Party.

To that end, the Communist Party has spent an enormous amount of energy shaping the way we view and discuss their activities. Following Canada's decision to detain Huawei executive Meng Wanzhou (*wan-joe*) in response to a lawful U.S. extradition request, China's intelligence service detained two Canadian individuals, Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor, both of whom are still in custody and were formally charged overnight.

With this unjust detention, Chinese officials have sought to reframe the discussion and coerce Canadian officials into releasing Meng. By changing the terms of the discussion to, "should two Canadian citizens be detained in China in exchange for assisting our American ally," the Communist Party's influence apparatus distorts the public conversation in a way that preferences their interests.

I would like to end on a serious note about the importance of ensuring that we confront the issue ahead in the most objective way, and consistent with our Nation's principles and values. While competition with China is inevitable, conflict is not and we must strive to avoid making it so. We must also guard against betraying our values at home even as we champion them abroad. There must be no place for racial profiling or ethnic targeting in meeting to rise of China. In America, one of our enduring strengths is welcoming and celebrating diversity. Chinese Americans have made countless contributions to our society. Chinese Americans are Grammy-winning producers, Olympic medalists, cutting-edge scientists, successful entrepreneurs, academics, acclaimed artists, and some of our most successful intelligence officers and national security professionals.

We would all be wise to view Chinese Americans as one source of our great strength and not with pernicious suspicion.

It is in China, in fact, that we see the consequences of defining US-China relations in ethnic terms. In many cases, Chinese Americans are, themselves, victims of China's authoritarian policies. As we sit here today, multiple ethnically Chinese American citizens are currently being held under exit ban in China and are unable to return to the United States. The Communist Party has made the determination that their ethnicity means that they are Chinese citizens—regardless of what passport that they hold. Targeting Chinese Americans and defining this issue in terms of race only empowers the Communist Party to continue doing the same. Members of Congress must shun such an approach, not embrace it.

With that, I recognize the Ranking Member for any opening statement he wishes to make.

[RANKING MEMBER REMARKS]

Thank you Ranking Member Nunes. Without objection these opening statements will be made a part of the record.

WITNESSES INTRODUCTIONS AND OPENING STATEMENTS

I am honored to welcome the distinguished panel of witnesses here with us today.

- **First, Dr. Samantha Hoffman, Non-Resident Fellow at the Australian Strategic Policy Institute.** Dr. Hoffman is a leading expert in China's social credit system and the co-author of a recent ASPI report, "Mapping China's Tech Giants."
- **Next, Dr. Jessica Chen Weiss, Associate Professor of Government at Cornell University.** Dr. Weiss' academic work examines the rise of nationalism in China. She is the author of "Powerful Patriots: Nationalist Protest in China's Foreign Relations" and also is an editor of the Washington Post's Monkey Cage Blog.
- **Next, Mr. Peter Mattis, Research Fellow in China Studies at the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation.** Mr. Mattis a co-author of "Chinese Communist

Espionage: An Intelligence Primer” and contributing editor at *War on the Rocks*.
Previously, he served as an analyst at the Central Intelligence Agency.

- **And finally, Christopher Walker, Vice President at the National Endowment for Democracy, invited at the recommendation of our colleagues in the Minority.**

Previously, Walker was Vice President for Strategy and Analysis at Freedom House and a senior associate at the EastWest Institute. He is the co-editor of the report *Sharp Power: Rising Authoritarian Influence*.

- Each of your statements will be made a part of the record, in its entirety. I would ask that you summarize your testimony in five minutes or less.

Dr. Hoffman – you may begin.

[WITNESS 1 OPENING STATEMENT]

Thank you. Dr. Weiss?

[WITNESS 2 OPENING STATEMENT]

Thank you. Mr. Mattis, please begin.

[WITNESS 3 OPENING STATEMENT]

Thank you. And finally, Mr. Walker.

[WITNESS 4 OPENING STATEMENT]