



November 01, 2022

OP-ED | China Policy Initiative

XI'S BRAZEN POWER CONSOLIDATION SHOWS US WHY STRENGTHENING AMERICA MUST BE OUR FIRST PRIORITY IN CONTAINING CHINESE AUTHORITARIANISM

Stephen Yates and Adam Savit

- ★ General Secretary Xi Jinping has consolidated power in China and stacked the Central Committee with new appointees faithful to him, destroying all possible checks and balances on his power.
- ★ It is the vibrancy of United States institutions that will determine the future of our rivalry with China and ensure our success.
- ★ We won the Cold War through a revival of American greatness. China is more powerful and more embedded in our culture than the Soviet Union was, and the institutions that protected us are at risk.

The world watched and stomachs collectively churned last Saturday as disturbing footage emerged from the 20th Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Congress, with General Secretary Xi Jinping sitting stone-faced while his predecessor, 79-year-old Hu Jintao, was forcibly removed from a meeting by an aide. The imagery supported the narrative of an old-fashioned public purge carried out by Xi while the state-controlled Xinhua News Agency reported that Hu simply felt ill and needed to rest.

Whatever the true machinations behind this dramatic scene, the upshot is that Xi has consolidated power and stacked the Central Committee with new appointees faithful to him, such as new premier Li Qiang—a loyalist with no background in the national government—destroying all possible checks and balances on his power. Xi has abolished a customary ten-year term limit, and many expect him to be leader for life. This all but



ensures more repression at home, more state interference in the economy including COVID-zero lockdown policies that have retarded domestic economic growth with global implications, and more aggression abroad.

As abhorrent as China's internal power dynamics and system of governance are to democratic sensibilities, it is the vibrancy of United States institutions that will determine the future of this rivalry and ultimately ensure our success. Xi's brand of aggressive expansionist authoritarianism is here to stay and does not seek peaceful coexistence with the free world. In fact, the threat to the American way of life is acute and accelerating, touching citizens and households on sensitive issues ranging from jobs and inflation to the soundness of their personal health and personal information. Whatever the promises of past engagement were, we now know that China under Xi Jinping has chosen confrontation.

Of course, human rights abuses like the genocide and concentration camps in Xinjiang must be cataloged and exposed. China's rapid and threatening military buildup should be monitored and countered. But our chief concern must be our own land and resources, our own cultural and intellectual security, and our own economic prosperity.

Our defense starts literally at the grassroots: we must ban CCP ownership of American agricultural land. Securing and dominating world food supply chains is an integral part of China's Belt and Road Initiative. The CCP owns enough U.S. farm acreage to house nearly 800 average-sized American family-run farms. Americans have a right to determine which foreign countries may purchase U.S. farmland, and countries spreading malign influence at all levels of our society to undermine us should not be allowed to acquire it. Both red and blue states are moving on this problem, with Florida Governor Ron DeSantis proposing new legislation and the California legislature passing a related measure last summer, both of which would effectively ban CCP purchase of agricultural land. In the new Congress, we must pass such safeguards at the federal level as well.

Our states must institute laws that protect their university campuses from CCP malign influence on students, professors, and curricula. Starting in 2004, the CCP began sponsoring Confucius Institutes (CIs) to export Chinese soft power to the U.S., leveraging academic partnerships to influence American university campus culture and counteract activities, events, or programs that would oppose the CCP. Though CIs have declined in recent years under increased scrutiny, their goals are now pursued by Chinese Student and Scholar Associations (CSSAs) with their memberships swollen by the increased numbers of CCP-born students in the U.S. A bill tabled this year in the Wisconsin legislature would ban the University of Wisconsin system's involvement with Chinese government sponsored "recruitment or propaganda programs." This language effectively covers the CIs, CSSAs, and any creatively framed legacy group that may arise in their wake.



The United States has been defined and strengthened by its unwavering commitment to the values of democracy and republicanism embodied in the Constitution, even when our enemies and adversaries laughed that it made us soft and weak. The modern world has always been full of cold-blooded dictators and their methodically murderous regimes. While the CCP is particularly cynical, unscrupulous, and effective at bludgeoning its own population into submission, they are not able to touch our freedoms if we don't let them.

Ultimately, victory in the Cold War was not determined on the battlefield but by the revival of American greatness. The greatness of our people, our economy, our system of government, and the zeitgeist of "Morning in America" was the bright sun that blotted out Soviet tyranny. It was system versus system. The Chinese system is more powerful, has a global reach, and is embedded into the Western world in ways the Soviet Union could have never dreamed of. The institutions and pillars that preserved our freedom in that contest are at risk from within today. It is precisely there that the conflict with the CCP system and its malign influences will be won or lost.

Stephen Yates serves as Chair of the China Policy Initiative at America First Policy Institute. He was the president of Radio Free Asia and a White House deputy national security advisor (2001-2005).

Adam Savit serves as Director of the China Policy Initiative at America First Policy Institute.

