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AFJAGS Podcast: Episode 57

What's Up with China? – with Lt Col Charles Gartland

Hosts: Major Erin Davis and Captain Charlton Hedden

Guest: Lieutenant Colonel Charles Gartland

Great Power Competition: Today, a primer on China, with Lt Col Charles Gartland. Currently the Law Chair Director for Air University here at Maxwell Air Force Base, Lt Col Gartland has been studying and writing about China for several years and he agreed to bring his considerable understanding of that competitor.

Great Power Competition

Captain Charlton Hedden:

Hello and welcome to The Air Force Judge Advocate General's School Podcast. Today we're talking about great power competition a term generally used for the United States current posture as it relates to China and Russia. The specter is one of three predominant players competing to protect and or expand their respective spheres of influence over the globe.

Today, we launch our first podcast in a series of episodes that will introduce, define, and explore this phenomenon. We'll talk about how it started, where it is, and where it looks like it's headed. And we'll talk about why it matters. We've assembled experts from various

fields to help us understand our competitors better, to help us understand our history better, and in turn, to help us understand our role that much better.

Today, a primer on China with Lieutenant Colonel Charles Gartland, currently the Law Chair Director for Air University here at Maxwell Air Force Base. Lieutenant Colonel Gartland has been studying and writing about China for several years, and he agreed to bring his considerable understanding of that competitor to bear to kick off this series.

Here's episode 57. We hope you enjoy.

[Music: Band playing a section of the Air Force Song]

China

Major Erin Davis:

Hello, everyone, and welcome back to another episode of the Air Force JAG School Podcast. Today we are talking again with Lieutenant Colonel Charles Gartland. But today, we are actually not reviewing a book. We're going to be talking about China. This is definitely a topic that we in the DoD are talking about a lot more recently. I think recently, General Brown basically said, hey, if it's not about China, we're not talking about it. So, with that in mind, we thought that maybe everyone could use a little bit of a primer and a little bit of background on exactly what is going on with China and about the current state of affairs. And Colonel Gartland has agreed to sit down and talk with us about that. So, sir, how did you get involved in this area of research?

Lieutenant Colonel Charles Gartland:

All right. Well, hey, Erin, thanks for having me again. And it is a bit different here to not be talking about mutinies ...

Maj Davis:

[laughter] Yes.

Lt Col Gartland:

... in fictional literature or *Lincoln on Leadership*—our other two podcasts out there. Don't forget to take a look at those audience.

How did I get interested in China? So when I arrived here, coming off of deployment in September, 2017 as the Air University Law Chair, I started to take a look at the curriculum around the circle, as we say for those you've been out here at Maxwell. We're arranged in a one mile circumference circle here at Maxwell, Air Force Base. So, I started to take some trips throughout the circle to see what they were studying, and not surprisingly, because I got a bit of a taste from doing Air War College by correspondence, great power competition, nation state rivalry, studies such as the threat from China, threat from Russia, Iran, from North Korea, that was really the focus of attention over there. So when I arrived in the

position here as the Law Chair, since my job was to essentially liaise with all the schools around the circle, I figured it would be a good occasion to get spun up on all of the curriculum, which is the focus of studies over there.

Why China?

Maj Davis:

Okay. Thank you. So, it's the focus at Air War College and around the circle at AU. Why? So why are we talking so much now about China?

Lt Col Gartland:

Yeah, that's a that's a great question, Erin. And it's something that a bunch of people have, it's a question quite a few people have posed to me, because you really have to—if you look over the last 25 years or so, of U.S. military operations, all of the focus, of course, has been on COIN, on counterinsurgency, primarily operations out in CENTCOM. So, we're talking about Islamic militancy, ISIS, al Qaeda, other violent extremist organizations. And that's where our focus has been. That was the in fact, I lived it. That was essentially the subject of my deployment when I was with Operation INHERENT RESOLVE. So, the focus has been so much on counter terror, counterinsurgency operations that this came as a bit of a jolt to a lot of people when it seemed all of a sudden there was this focus on China.

So, to answer your question, why is that? I think I can point to two different rationale and two different sources. So the first, particularly for a military audience, I point to the documents out there. And the number two, I'm going to take a look at maybe the underlying reason for why this is showing up in the documents.

So, if you go back to the Obama administration, 2015, President Obama was making a speech. I don't recall the forum. I think he may have been in Australia at the time, what the subject was for that particular talk. But he used a phrase and the phrase was "pivot to Asia." And that's a phrase that might resonate with some in our audience. And essentially what President Obama was

getting at the time is that we need to start refocusing our efforts on our strategic efforts, not just from a military standpoint, that being one of the without being one of the considerations, but to invoke an Air War College term “all of the DIME”. And I think you probably come across that in ACSC as well—diplomatic, informational, military, political, economic.

So, all of the other instruments of power we need to pivot over to Asia and put more of an emphasis over there. And that showed up on, that was reflected in one of President Obama’s National Security Strategy documents. And then when the Trump administration came in with his National Security Strategy in 2017 that was really the, he picked up and accelerated on that decision from the Obama administration, and then really honed in on great power competition.

And that was really a seminal moment in American foreign policy because up until that point, as I said, after the last two decades or so, the focus had been on counterinsurgency, but number two, it completely re-engineered the approach to China. Because up until that point in time, in American diplomacy, particularly beginning with the accession of China and the World Trade Organization in the early 2000s, I think it was 2001, the idea was that China would be coaxed into the community of nations through diplomatic engagement and primarily through economic engagement.

So, through trade, through international free markets, the more we trade with China, the more that China will be able to bankroll infrastructural development, create a middle class. And as the middle class begins to verge in a country obviously as populous as China, over a billion people, then that in turn will create internal pressures for democracy and the net result over time will be that China will join the international order of democratic, free market economies and participate in the International Free Trade Order. The 2017 National Security Strategy basically pronounces death to that particular approach with China and declares that it

hasn’t worked. We thought we would bring China into the fold of peaceful nations, and this hasn’t worked at all. Instead, what it’s done is enriched an authoritarian regime that is now going to challenge us on a global scale. So, the Trump NSS completely reverses course on our approach to China.

And then following from that and I’ll move into the second basis here, following along from that, you have aside from the 2017 NSS, you then have the National Defense Strategy that came on the heels of that. There was then Indo-Pacific strategy. And for the first time, as far as I know, a strategy directed specifically at China, which really hadn’t come up from kind of from a from a military strategic standpoint with previous administrations. So just those pronouncements from the executive level, as reflected in those documents, in and of itself, that definitely prompted both in professional military education, and in the intellectual communities that engage in this sort of talk. Those documentary changes just started to prompt a change in the narrative. A change in the topic of discussion.

I think it’s important to note, though, moving on to point two, is that what those documents are reflecting is also real changes in the geopolitical order that had been taking place over the previous two decades. And note that it’s taking, those changes are taking place over two decades where the United States has its focus, as I mentioned before, in a completely different part of the world—over in the Middle East. So, while our attention is over there, in the meantime, the Chinese Communist Party is, through its centralized power within the country, is meticulously directing efforts in order to try and expand their influence, and expand their power ultimately culminating with their first military installation abroad. And as far as I know, at least open source, the only installation so far, the People’s Republic of China has actually constructed outside of China or outside of their immediate zone of influences, out in the Horn of Africa, in Djibouti. So very close, of course, to American operations in that particular theater of the world.

So, China's economic power is growing. They start to undertake the One Belt One Road Initiative, also called the Belt, just referred to as the Belt and Road Initiative. And BRI, I think, is kind of the most common phrase that you hear from it now. And they're starting to gain stature. They're starting to cut bilateral agreements under the Belt and Road Initiative with many countries. It really began as, this is one of Chairman Xi, and we'll be talking about Chairman Xi or President Xi, the current premier of China. We'll talk about him later on. But really his signature initiative has been the Belt and Road Initiative, which he kicked off when he came in, or shortly after he came into power in 2012.

And the idea was to essentially start with third world countries. Cut economic development deals with them. So, it could be anything from roads, infrastructure projects, port developments, all sorts of different construction projects. Cut deals with them that would, number one, provide a diplomatic basis for further exchange with China in the future and also give them an economic anchor in different parts of the world and in concomitant with that, an actual foothold in some cases. So an actual physical footprint present and that's presence, excuse me. And that's actually how that naval base in Djibouti began. It began as a port infrastructure development project and ultimately morphed into a Naval base for China.

So during that 20 years where the United States and much of the Western world was focusing on counterinsurgency, the Chinese were expanding economically and using the trade imbalance to bankroll vast military technological improvements in infrastructure development. And that started to hit critical mass as we entered into 2010 and beyond. And people couldn't help but take notice, that hey, all of the sudden it looks like the Chinese have a presence in Africa, in South America, in other regions in the Indo-Pacific for instance. And this gave clear signals to the global community that clearly China was moving from just being a trading partner with everyone, to having other ambitions and desires that perhaps went beyond just internal economic improvement.

Communist China

Maj Davis:

So, you know, we talked about ambitions as the word you used ambitions, and I know that my limited understanding, is that China is a communist country. And I guess my understanding of communism is sort of based on Marxism and the Cold War.

Lt Col Gartland:

Soviet Union.

Maj Davis:

Soviet Union, right. That's the American history classes I took as a kid. That's what we talked about. But so for communist China, for them to have the ambition, what does that look like? What does their brand of communism look like?

Lt Col Gartland:

Okay. So yeah, that's also a really good question that you get out there. And just as that pivot to Asia in the refocus on China has taken a lot of people by surprise, the notion of China as a communist state really takes a lot of people by surprise. And I think that the reason for that is pretty obvious when you can when you consider how most Americans recognize the brand of China, it's from the standpoint of trade.

You you think of microprocessors and all sorts of, I mean, really just about anything that you can think of. If you go to your major big, big box store, you're going to find quite a bit of merchandise there that's been manufactured in China. Same thing. If you go to any department store for, you know, for clothing, you're going to see the "Made in China" tag and quite a few different articles of clothing.

So, when Americans see that and when Westerners see that and they see the "Made in China" label, they immediately think trade. And when people think trade, they think commerce, free markets, and capitalism—not communism. So, at first blush, it's kind of hard to reconcile China's outsized economic presence and their trade with the rest of the world, with on the other

hand, what you were saying, Erin, the Soviet Union and bread lines?

And I mean, I remember this growing up at the height, back in the previous era of great power competition with the Soviet Union. I grew up in Anchorage, Alaska, and I remember the F-15s, back then it was F-15s not F-22s, the F-15s being scrambled from Elmendorf, Air Force Base to go up and basically intercept the Russian bombers that were crossing over into U.S. and Alaskan airspace. They were basically timing how long it would take us to get up there, testing our air defenses and our, you know, radar capabilities. That's kind of your lawyer's layman's understanding what was going on there. But that was the previous era of great power competition. That was this that was the Soviet Union, an adversary who in remarkable contrast to China, did not have obviously the economic wherewithal that the Chinese do now.

So back to this question. If we think of the Soviet Union and Marxism, and that's our idea of kind of broken-down economies that don't have any innovation, no technological development. How do we reconcile Marxism, communism, the Soviet Union with what we see happening in China? When now basically neck and neck with the United States, depending on how you measure the economics on it, as one of the most powerful economic countries in the world.

And I think there it's important to understand for a number of reasons, the nature of the CCP, the Chinese Communist Party and its role within China. So, to try and give a succinct explanation of that, if you take a look, if you take a look at the political organization of China, you basically can break it down to two entities. You have the PRC, the People's Republic of China, which was proclaimed by Mao Zedong in 1947, 1949, somewhere around there. So, the country of China and then you have the CCP, the Chinese Communist Party.

Well, the People's Republic of China is essentially a one party state, and the CCP controls the government. Now it's an important point to make here because China has over a billion people, but the Chinese Communist Party, depending on the estimates that you read out there, probably not even one 10th of the population is an actual member of the CCP. Okay, so I've seen estimates for about 70 million to 100 million. I guess depending on how it is that you want to define it. Go ahead Erin, you were about to say something.

Maj Davis:

I was going to say, how do you define who is like an active party member? I know for us would be you're like, I'm a registered Republican or I'm a registered Democrat, or I vote. How do they measure that?

Lt Col Gartland:

So, they actually do have a list of those people who are subscribed as being part of the Chinese Communist Party. And I think for our purposes, the point to really underscore is that if you're someone who really is ultimately going to matter in China, then you have to be a member of the CCP. And the CCP is ultimately behind all of the efforts. And the best illustration that I can actually give of that, and really apropos considering who we are and our audience is the military, by the Constitution of the CCP, the People's Liberation Army, or the PLA, so that the Chinese military is not technically the military of the People's Republic of China. It is instead the armed wing of the Chinese Communist Party. That's what the CCP says. So, the military is ultimately the party's army, not the country's army.

Now, this in turn takes us to a topic that we're hearing about quite a bit in the news these days, Taiwan. So, if we take just a quick, really brief sketch here of Chinese history, communist revolution in China, 1940s, Mao Zedong ultimately comes to power, winds up ejecting the nationalists under leader by the name of Chiang Kai-shek.

Chiang Kai-shek flees to what had formerly been a Portuguese colony that the Portuguese called the island of Formosa, which today we call Taiwan. So, Chiang Kai-shek flees Mao Zedong and the communist revolution because he's lost essentially, and establishes what he calls the Republic of China. Now, I don't know if you when I was growing up, I recall seeing labels on products that had been imported to the United States and would say "Made in Taiwan, ROC" as in Republic of China.

And that's because Chiang Kai-shek held out to the world that the real China was located in Taiwan, because they were the real Chinese people, whereas Mao Zedong, as the Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party, was an insurgent who had overthrown the lawful government of China. So that's what's going on there with Taiwan and why we can talk about that more perhaps during our discussion today. But one reason why the question of Taiwan is so controversial. But to get back to because I see your point here for another point, Erin, to just to, I guess, get to the bottom line there on the Chinese Communist Party and to what degree is it communist, I'd say that you could you could probably pin down at least these two points on it.

Number one, current leader of China, Xi Jinping or Chairman Xi, as he's affectionately referred to in much of the popular media, he has repeatedly in his public declarations, made a point of emphasizing Marxist-Leninist ideology. One of the phrases that you hear over and over again is, "socialism with Chinese characteristics." But he has made clear that the CCP is the ultimate authority in China, and he invokes that ideology repeatedly, more so than any other leader in China since the death of Mao. You would really have to go back to Mao, in fact, to find someone who's emphasized communist ideology as much as Xi.

And that has manifested itself in an expanding centralization of the state when China first entered the WTO in the early 2000s, it really seems as though there was much more room for personal initiative in China when it

came to the development of many of those corporations there that became the components of China's incredible export machine, export juggernaut. But as time has gone on, and especially beginning with Xi in 2012, when he became the Chairman of the CCP, he has worked to steadily centralize that influence and make sure that the CCP has a hand in just about anything that matters that's taking place in China. And that ranges any from anywhere from ensuring that the major export corporations of China have CCP membership on their boards, ensuring that there are CCP committees that are active in those organizations. And also just in his public proclamations, always in or relentlessly invoking Marxism-Leninism and the importance of having an all-powerful centralized state.

So, you do have this kind of uneasy tension that's clearly moving in a much more authoritarian direction and has over the last 20 years, whereby on the one hand it's these free-market exports that are bankrolling the machine. But on the other hand, unlike in Western countries, it's being directed by the most powerful organs within the party.

Unstable Compromise

Maj Davis:

I guess my understanding of China, the way it's set up now is that Chairman Xi, that the rule of law is pretty authoritarian, that there's been a lot of personal gain by him and by the people loyal to him, and that this is not necessarily the communism dream, right, of that I think, you know, maybe Marx envisioned. That there really is still a lot of power and economic inequality.

How does he, how is he getting around that? Like what is he doing to convince people to still be part of this plan?

Lt Col Gartland:

Sure. So and this, in fact, is really, in my mind, when, one of the things I want to make sure we talk about here is some of the vulnerabilities of communist China, because one, I think unfortunate aspect of all of the emphasis, you could even say may be obsession sometimes, with

great power competition is that we tend to get in this mindset of the inevitability of CCP triumph or Chinese triumph, and that the Chinese are going to overtake us. There's nothing that we can do to stop it. It has inexorable momentum behind it, and we're too far behind. There's nothing that we can do.

Well, there's a great study that was put out at, I believe it's the Baker Institute at Rice University. This is just a few months back, and it's entitled *Hold the Line*, and it presents the, it's *Hold the Line Through 20*, I'm probably off on the dates, I want to say it's like, *Hold the Line Through 2035*. Okay. Yeah, it's *Hold the Line Through 2035*. And in there, two experts on foreign policy with China point out that in fact, Chairman Xi has something of the of an unstable compromise that's in play with the Chinese people.

And that essentially is that the Chinese Communist Party, insular as it is, relative to the entire population, since it's quite likely, you know, that it is less than 10% of the actual Chinese population, that they can continue the CCP politburo, the primary figureheads' leadership within the CCP, they can continue to enrich themselves, and they can continue to exercise all of the influence over state control. However, they can only retain those positions of power as long as the Chinese's middle class continues to grow and prosper.

So, the bottom line is that as soon as the economic growth begins to falter, then the tacit deal that the Chinese public has with the CCP starts to break down. And that's why economic growth has been, and ensuring the success of Chinese export engine, has been of paramount importance to the leadership of the CCP regime. Because once that economic growth starts to slow down, people begin to question whether their stated reason for why they should be in power, which is that they've been able to successfully direct one of the, I mean one of the greatest economic comebacks in world history when you consider the extent of economic development in China over the last two decades.

Once that growth begins to falter, people start to question whether the people who are running the regime have the credibility that they claim that they should have. So, it's absolutely vital to the CCP that economic growth continue. And if it were to falter, in any way, then their stature could be substantially diminished and arguably lead to the downfall of the entire regime. And that's something that's pointed out in that strategy document that I just mentioned from Rice University.

Military Threat

Maj Davis:

What is the military threat here? You know, it seems like if it were just a matter of China improving its economy, improving the lives of its people, we probably wouldn't be concerned about that. And you know, obviously, the fact that there are communist plays a big role there, right? They're not a free country. They're not a democratic country. But what is the military concern for us?

Lt Col Gartland:

For sure, yeah. And this is another area where you need to have some clear-eyed realism and recognize the threat for what it is. But on the other hand, you don't want to succumb to alarmism. So, for instance, there's been a lot of talk recently about how China has eclipsed the United States in terms of the number of vessels that they have in their Navy. So, they now literally have a larger navy in terms of actual in terms of actual ships within their arsenal, as compared to the United States.

Another issue altogether, of course, is the "quality" of what they have. I think that they're up to, don't quote, don't, well, you won't be quoting me on this, right? [laughter] Two, I think there are up to two carriers, aircraft carriers, now, but still overall lacking, you know, what they call a blue-water navy, right? So a global reach navy. As far as I know, on the submarine front, still really in the stages of rudimentary development, nothing akin to what the United States has with nuclear powered, nuclear weaponized submarines, which are, of course,

indispensable component of our nuclear triad. So, on the one hand, their technological capabilities have improved dramatically and they certainly have in terms of the size of what they count within their arsenal has expanded tremendously over the last 20 years.

Also, in the cyber realm, you'll see the commentators kind of jostling back and forth on this one as to whether or not China has the upper hand with us, on us when it comes to cyber capabilities. And I'm not a cyber expert, but what of what I've read, I mean, you certainly get a sense that if we haven't been overtaken by China in that realm, then they're certainly extremely competitive in that realm.

Another issue that's received a lot of attention recently has been in the area of hypersonic weapons. So, for instance, if you were to take a look at America's military deterrent, I just mentioned the nuclear triad. So, we have the nuclear submarines. We have the ability to launch weapons with our ICBM capability, and then we also have the ability to bomb with our B-1s or B-52s. So, it's that three-full triad, the subs, the ICBMs, and the bombers. So, the Chinese answer to being able to circumvent that is hypersonic weapons. So, the idea with the hypersonic is that you use a rocket to launch some type of vehicle, a hypersonic vehicle, so many times the speed of sound into a low Earth orbit. And then from there, from that vehicle have it maneuvered down to Earth and either have that vehicle launch a weapon or the vehicle itself is the nuclear weapon.

Now, why this is potentially a game changer is that if you look at the traditional ICBM threat, so, for instance, from the Soviet Union in the nuclear arms race that developed during the Cold War, ICBMs have a parabolic trajectory. So, they go up. They're launched from a specific location. They can be tracked from space, and you can predict where they're going to go based on their trajectory. And, you know, roughly at the speed they're traveling. And you can you can predict roughly when it is that they're going to impact. With hypersonic vehicles, once it goes into low Earth orbit, you don't have something

that's predictable. So, you're not exactly sure because it's maneuverable. You're not sure where it's going to go. And it's traveling at a speed and in such a way that it's elusive of radar. So, it basically introduces an element of surprise into the nuclear arms race. In other words, it's a way of bypassing the predictability of ICBMs. Well, that's a major concern when it comes to nuclear deterrence, because the whole notion of nuclear deterrence is that if you're enemies launching ICBMs at you, they have a limited number. They're going to land in certain places. And while you're watching the approach of these ICBMs, you're going to be able to launch a retaliatory attack before they've destroyed your capability to retaliate. With hypersonics, you're not necessarily aware that that attack is happening.

So, this is something that garnered a lot of concern in the popular press. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff talked about it as well with the Service Secretaries. I think it's important to look, on the other hand, that, nonetheless, the United States still does retain an element of surprise with nuclear submarines for instance, because the nuclear submarines in our Navy, very difficult to track them. And so, of course, they still have a first strike capability that's very difficult to detect.

So, the bottom line is that there's great reason to be concerned with the nature of the People's Liberation Army and the threat that it poses. They've dramatically improved their technology over the last two decades. They've expanded the number of assets that they can utilize. And on the cyber front, they're extremely capable. We use the phrase "near peer." They may be beyond that at this stage. So, the threats are real. But on the other hand, there's still a lot of catch-up that they have to do when it comes to blue-water navy and when it comes to matching us in a number of other fronts.

Non-Military Concerns

Maj Davis:

So aside from military concerns, what are the other ways that we are concerned with China? Because I know that military is just one of several things.

Lt Col Gartland:

Sure. A couple of points on that. So, one would be industrial espionage. So, there's been quite a bit of attention that's focused lately on what's referred to as a "force technology transfer". In fact, the Department of Justice set up a program that's received a bit of criticism lately maybe more on that later. But DOJ set up something called the China Initiative. And really, one of the primary purposes of it is to try and prosecute people working in the United States for stealing trade secrets—industrial secrets, for instance. But here's how it usually, usually plays out. The Chinese market is vast. It's lucrative. We've talked about it here—over a billion people. So naturally, if you can get something over there that the regime will allow into the market, then you stand to have almost an inexhaustible demand for whatever it is that you're selling.

So, what's happened is that a lot of Western companies and a lot of American companies in the rush to try and get a foothold in the Chinese economy have essentially been, they've essentially been coerced into having to hand over their trade secrets in exchange for being given access to the Chinese market. So as a condition for being allowed to sell whatever or market whatever in China. And this can take a number of forms. Perhaps it is that the company has to, they have to do business with certain designated entities in China. And those entities happen to be controlled by the CCP. And everything that you pass on to them is going to go back to the CCP.

In other instances, it's just been outright theft. You happen to have satellite offices over in China, and it turns out that your entire information stream over the Internet is being hacked. And all of the trade secrets and copyrights that you have are being pilfered unbeknownst to you. So, force technology and this is not just been an issue for the United States. This has been an issue that has been problematic for many companies in Western Europe and Australia as well. That's been one of great cause of concern. There have been a number of reports that have come out recently detailing far more

particulars than what I just gave right now. How it is that that forced technology transfer and industrial espionage is taking place. And DOJ through the China Initiative has prosecuted dozens and dozens of people over the last few years operating within the United States who have been involved in various forms of industrial espionage. So that's that would be one example.

Another would be just influence operations. Chairman Xi, when he came in in 2012 really honed in on what we all call now soft power. He even has a phrase for this he calls it "winning without fighting". So the idea here is to influence global audiences in a way that positively reflects on the Chinese regime without having to get overtly belligerent about it.

A couple of brief examples that I could bring up in, I guess before I go into as I should point out, Xi Jinping, Chairman Xi. Worked with an organization, this is earlier on in his career called the United Front Work Department. This is this is what Xi refers to as "his magic weapon", harkening back to a phrase that Mao used decades earlier. Mao himself had lifted the United Front Work Department from the Soviet version. He copied it directly over from the Soviets. United Front Work Department is basically an influence operation organization and originally just had a domestic purpose to influence domestic audiences and exercise narrative control, if you will, over the domestic populace. But it now operates on a global level. Some of the most notorious examples come out of Australia. The Australians produced a report I want to say was about it's probably two years or so ago now detailing infiltration of the United Front Work Department into multiple sectors within Australia, from the political realm, to industry, into academia. And that's probably a good segue to provide an example of some of these influence ops.

So, for those of you who have gone to college in the United States, when strolling across your campus, you may have come across a building that's called the Confucius Institute. Confucius Institutes are placed

throughout academia in the United States. In fact, I happened to notice the other day. I was just driving, driving through the Auburn University at Montgomery campus, and there's a Confucius Institute located there.

Confucius Institutes, and I don't know the status of that particular one because just full disclosure on this, quite a few of them have shut down over the last year or two. So, I don't know the status as to that one. But at any rate, the sign in the building was still there when I drove through. So, Confucius institutes were marketed. This was this something that had heavy influence from the United Front Work Department. They were basically marketed along the lines of the foreign institutes of other countries. So, when they were launched, they were basically advertised as being like a German Goethe-Institute. Most of Spain has Cervantes Institute. I would presume that quite a few countries in Europe, they have their own. They're basically just institutes that are placed in foreign countries as a way of showcasing, you know, the culture of their country, their language. You can pick up a language, you know, language lessons at them, for instance. They'll have classes maybe on the cuisine from that country. It's basically a way for for countries to be able to exhibit their cultural background, their history, their gastronomy, etc., etc.

So, Confucius Institutes were advertised on that particular model, but it turned out—and there have been a number of studies that have been devoted to this—recently, that there were some more sinister goings on at Confucius Institutes. In particular, at some of the locations in the United States. So, what was discovered was that in many cases, students who were attending these institutes, first off, they were being fed propaganda that was design by instructors who were hand-picked by the CCP to be delivering the message that they were delivering. Typically, in the arrangements, that the Confucius Institutes will set up with the host university, the host university doesn't have any say over who's teaching at the Confucius Institute. And these arrangements, by the way, you

know, they vary tremendously. At some universities, you can get university credit when you're attending your university for taking classes at the Confucius Institutes. Sometimes you don't get credit. It's just kind of like more of an opportunity to survey the classes by attending the university. It really varies tremendously from, from school to school.

But in any event, they saw number one that the Confucius Institutes were being used as a means of spreading propaganda from the CCP. But then even beyond that, that frequently what was happening is that Chinese students who were present, at Confucius Institutes were being instructed behind the scenes that they were to bring up certain topics during class discussions and additionally that they were being coerced into monitoring the discussion in the classroom and then reporting back to operatives the discussion that was taking place or perhaps even reporting on other Chinese students who were present who perhaps were making comments that didn't show the CCP in a favorable light, right?

So maybe you had a Chinese student who was here on a student visa and he was talking about the situation in Hong Kong, or he was talking about the Uyghurs, for instance, and yeah, I don't even know that we'll have a chance to get to it, right, with everything that we're discussing today. But the concentration camps essentially that are present all throughout northeastern China and the Xinjiang province, where Uyghurs are being systematically persecuted. So, if perhaps someone wasn't towing the party line on that on, then they'd be informed upon. And then what do you know? All of the sudden they're being quickly recalled back to China, or they're not being given an opportunity to come back to United States.

So, this would be the Confucius Institutes would just be **one** example of United Front Work Department influence operation and winning without fighting in using soft power. So the idea here and this is not I

should underscore this, these are not really intelligence operations per se. While there are links between some people within the UFWD and the Chinese intelligence apparatus, for the most part, it's not really so. It's merely more a question, a question of just PSYOPS, psychological operations, influence operations. And some of this might get back to the intelligence service. Maybe it doesn't. Those links, some of those links have been documented, but it's really just more in influence op. I've spent a bit of time on the Confucius Institutes because that's I just mention it because that's probably one of the more prominent examples that people might be familiar with from just being on a U.S. campus or on some other Western campus. But there are other examples that have been detailed pretty exhaustively. That report that I mentioned from Australia from I think roughly two years ago, catalogs infiltration of UFWD operatives who start to make contacts with businessmen in Australia, make contacts with political figures, and before you know it, and a lot of times it's really, just very basic appeals to vanity.

Someone from the United Front Work Department he might be an operative out of an out of a consulate, out of a Chinese consulate, for instance, in Australia. He may approach a political figure there and he may say:

Hey, you really seem to have a keen understanding of China and our perspective and where you're coming from. We'd like to invite you over to China so that you can see a tour of our developments and what we're doing. And this will really facilitate cross-cultural exchange. And then you can come back on and you can tell your fellow countrymen what's really going on in China.

And before you know it, a lot of these individuals who don't have malign intentions at all wind up parroting the CCP line and spinning a favorable narrative for the Chinese Communist Party without even realizing that they've been targeted for the specific purpose of being able to weave a favorable narrative for the CCP.

One of the textbooks that I, not textbook, excuse me. A book that was published just last year. It's called *Hidden Hand*. Written, I think one of the individuals is Australian, and it extensively catalogs a lot of these United Front Work Department influence operations and furnishes all sorts of illustrations of circumstances to include with some with some very high powered, high profile personalities who were basically co-opted by the Chinese regime and didn't even realize that they were just being used as an instrument of spreading CCP propaganda.

But I guess we could, we could finish this off by saying that it's really a, it's an elaborately—the influence operations coming out of the CCP are elaborately devised, and they are meant to look innocuous, but serve ultimately a really powerful purpose. And going back to the one of the questions that you asked the beginning, Erin, why is it that all of a sudden we're paying attention to this, paying attention to the to the CCP threat? One of the reasons is that a lot—it's just at this point now here within the last few years that various Western intelligence services and state departments have started to unravel what's been going on. And it's starting to come to light now.

Closing

Maj Davis:

All right, sir, thank you so much. Is so interesting because I really do feel like, you know, we were talking about it before. I check the news every morning. You know, tons of domestic stuff, a little bit of BBC, British, European stuff. And every once in a while, you know, a little point here and there about China, but, you know, it's just fascinating to know that all this stuff has been going on for decades, and I think it maybe goes to show how, you know, careful and insidious it really was that it's not even something that we were really aware was even happening until recently. And certainly, I would say probably most of the regular American population is still not really tracking or aware of. So super fascinating. Thank you for coming here and talking with us.

Lt Col Gartland:

Thank you.

Maj Davis:

About this today. Yes, super fascinating. We'll have to have you come back and get into more detail about some of this stuff, especially I'm super interested in this psychological operations type stuff. We didn't even have a chance to even talk about what I think is one of the big kind of almost embarrassing pieces of this, right? Which is the desire to be competitive in the marketplace and the lure of the dollar that we see in, you know, the Chinese population. And that gets into, you know, movies being produced and marketed there, the whole John Cena thing.

Lt Col Gartland:

Yes. Absolutely.

Maj Davis:

You know, it feels it's an exploitation of something I think that we are very vulnerable to.

Lt Col Gartland:

Absolutely. We didn't even get into co-opting Hollywood and some of the efforts that have paid enormous, enormous fruit within, you know, within Western movie production studios who have almost reached a point now where implicitly they know what messages will and will not get through will—will and will not get through censors over in China and begin to self-censor, if you will.

There's a report also out there from PEN America that came out recently that talks about self-censorship that it's almost this, it's really kind of a self-fulfilling feedback loop whereby American movie studios know that there are certain topics that they have to avoid and certain topics that have to be presented in a certain way in order for them to gain access to the Chinese market.

Last I saw and I know, Erin, because I could go on this forever, I believe that as it stands right now there, when it comes to the most lucrative, they have different tiers of profit, profit sharing that are associated with films that are foreign, that is, you know, Western films that are allowed to be shown in China, and in order to qualify for one of the 34 films that are allowed to be shown in China by the regime. Those, of course, are going to be going to receive the most scrutiny of all. And there are instances of essentially Western movie studios directly interfacing with the Chinese censors to try and hash out what is and what is not acceptable in order to qualify for presentation in China and meet the quota of one of those 34 films. So, it's really a fascinating topic. And absolutely getting—finally getting a bit of the attention that it deserves as we start to pay attention.

Maj Davis:

All right. Great. Thank you, sir. And again, thank you so much for sitting down talking about this with us today.

Capt Hedden:

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[Music: Band playing ending of the Air Force Song]

Glossary

- **ACSC:** Air Command and Staff College
- **AFJAGS:** Air Force Judge Advocate General's School
- **AU:** Air University
- **BBC:** British Broadcasting Corporation
- **BRI:** Belt and Road Initiative
- **CCP:** Chinese Communist Party
- **CENTCOM:** U.S. Central Command
- **COIN:** counterinsurgency
- **DIME:** diplomatic, informational, military, and economic
- **DOJ:** Department of Justice
- **ICBM:** intercontinental ballistic missile
- **ISIS:** Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
- **JAG:** judge advocate general
- **NSS:** National Security Strategy
- **PLA:** People's Liberation Army
- **PRC:** People's Republic of China
- **PSYOP:** psychological operation
- **ROC:** Republic of China
- **UFWD:** United Front Work Department
- **WTO:** World Trade Organization

Layout by Thomasa Huffstutler