

US report on Chinese “United Front Work” seeks to whip-up hostility towards China

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On August 24, the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission published a new report entitled, “China’s Overseas United Front Work: Background and Implications for the United States.” Written by Alexander Bowe, it argues that China is working to “co-opt and neutralize sources of potential opposition” to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in the US by funding and directing Chinese cultural student groups.

The report is, in reality, more of a pseudo-factual tirade aimed at whipping up an atmosphere of hysteria towards Chinese “spying” and “overreach” on American soil. It is the latest of many such hypocritical reports and articles that ideologically lay the groundwork for much more aggressive US measures against China, with the ultimate aim being the justification of war.

The main body of the report reproduces a host of alleged incidents of CCP funding and direction of Chinese student organizations in the US, which it claims are part of China’s “United Front” policy of “neutralizing” dissent abroad. The report, however, can only cite examples from two organizations, the Chinese Students and Scholars Associations (CSSA) and the Confucius Institutes.

The CSSA, which is present on many major campuses in the US, is, according to its Wikipedia entry, the “official organization for overseas Chinese students and scholars registered in most colleges, Universities, and Institutions outside of China.” It puts on social events and cultural events, like important Chinese holidays, and helps Chinese students navigate being in a foreign country.

The report notes several controversies surrounding the CSSA, including a CSSA allegedly paying its members \$20 each for showing up to see former President Hu Jintao speak in 2011, emails presented by

Foreign Policy showing, in 2018, that Georgetown University CSSA accepted funding from the Chinese Embassy in Washington, D.C., and the UC San Diego CSSA protesting the Dalai Lama speaking, a known asset of US intelligence. The report worries that China is exercising its “soft power” by financing and directing these cultural agencies.

Were all the factual allegations of this report true, they would amount to a small pile of salt next to the towering crimes and interventions of US imperialism in other countries. The US government alleges that the Chinese government is “neutralizing dissent” by funding these organizations on US soil. But, if paying students \$20 to attend a speech is part of a larger plan to “neutralize dissent” in China against the CCP, then it would be difficult to find words to adequately describe the blood-soaked century of regime changes and war crimes perpetrated by the US, including numerous coups and CIA-backed civil wars.

An underlying fear in the report, is that positive Chinese-American relations could give Americans a positive association with China. For example, it complains that the Chinese government, through the Confucius Institutes, pays for 6,000 US high school students to visit China. The author writes, “An important goal of these exchanges is to try to build a friendly environment for China’s interests by giving participants favorable views of China, which they then disseminate, helping to legitimize the CCP.”

The report cites favorably a remark from Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian, an editor for *Foreign Policy* and writer for the *Daily Beast*, who actually advised the writing of the report, that the students would not have been able to afford to visit China had the government not funded it. The implication is that the US state-complex would prefer that US students have less

contact with China, not visit the country so much, and not form “favorable views” that could help “to legitimize the CCP.”

Allen-Ebrahimian’s work, which is cited frequently in the report, is also aimed at whipping up anti-China sentiment. Her most recent article, published in the *Daily Beast* is titled, “NO ESCAPE: Chinese Cops Now Spying on American Soil.”

The Commission report makes the point that the greatest difficulty of China’s so-called “United Front” tactic, is that it “seek[s] influence through connections that are difficult to publicly prove and to gain influence that is interwoven with sensitive issues such as ethnic, political, and national identity, making those who seek to identify the negative effects of such influence vulnerable to accusations of prejudice.” In other words, the United States has a hard time justifying to the public cracking down on, or discouraging institutions, whose primary activity is cultural and social because it would look bad.

In another section, the report says China’s “United Front” tactic poses “a number of difficulties to US law enforcement and counterintelligence agencies.” It continues, “For instance, in light of the fact that the United Front work and China’s intelligence services specifically target ethnic Chinese, US law enforcement agencies attempt to design their counterintelligence protocols to avoid the perception of discrimination, with investigators focusing on tracking the activity of intelligence collectors to find out whom they have targeted, not the other way around.”

The passage then goes on to cite former FBI agent David Major, who testified to the China Economic Security and Review Commission in 2016 that, “It’s not how [the US government looks] at ethnicity; it’s how the [Chinese intelligence] collector looks at ethnicity. The Chinese intelligence services specifically target people who are [Han]. [Chinese-Americans] ... have a higher probability of being targeted because of what [China’s] world view is.”

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This is a remarkable passage. It is a back-handed justification of a mass dragnet against Chinese nationals living in the US on the basis that they are supposedly susceptible to the actions of Chinese intelligence—all of which is unsubstantiated.

The report must be placed in the context of the intensifying drive to war against China.

In November 2011, President Barack Obama declared the “pivot to Asia,” a comprehensive military, economy, and political strategy to encircle China and undermine its regional influence. The pivot included, among other things, the redeployment of 60 percent of the US naval and air forces to the Asia-Pacific region. The Trump administration has escalated the confrontation with China with a series of trade war measures which only heighten the danger of conflict.

It also takes place amid bitter infighting in US ruling circles over unsubstantiated allegations of “Russian interference” in the 2016 presidential elections and Trump’s collusion with Moscow. The feuding reflects tactical differences within the American security, military and political establishment over whether Russia or China should be confronted first. The report has the character of riposte by those who consider China to be the greatest danger to US global dominance.

Significantly, the report relies heavily on alleged Chinese interference and influence in Australia and New Zealand as proof of China’s global machinations. In reality, the allegations of Chinese activities in these two countries—both closely aligned with the US against China—are just as threadbare as those in the US report. In a warning of what is being prepared in the US, the Australian parliament has just rammed through draconian new “anti-foreign interference” legislation that creates a battery of new crimes that will be used against individuals and organizations opposed to the US war drive against China.



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