Mike Pompeo Never Gives an Inch, Nationalist Rhetoric from Beijing, and the Case of a Missing Boy in China

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TRANSCRIPT

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Wilson Shirley:

Hello and welcome back to the China Insider, a podcast from the China Center at Hudson Institute.

It's Tuesday, January 31st and we have three top stories for this week. The first is Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo's book Never Give an Inch, which details some of the decision making around US China policy over the last administration, as well as a few great stories about how it all happened. The second is about the CCP's, increasingly nationalistic and occasionally xenophobic rhetoric around Chinese New Year and what the objectives of it are. And the third is a story that you may have missed. We'll talk about a child who went missing in China in October and whose body was reportedly recently discovered. We'll talk about what that specific story is all about and how it fits into the broader picture of human trafficking and the CCP surveillance state within China. Miles, the first thing we're going to talk about today is something that we've both been waiting for a while, which is former Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo has his new memoir out. It's called Never Given Inch, and it's not a full biography. It focuses mostly on his time as director of the CIA and as Secretary of State. So, there are a lot of great stories from this book that we could go through. A lot of them relate to China. I wanted to ask you what you think the most important or most interesting nuggets from the book are?

Dr. Miles Yu:

Well, great indeed. This is actually a very big event because Mike Pompeo is not an ordinary US Secretary of State. During his tenure at the State Department, he was the man most responsible for changing the US-China policy in a very revolutionary way. He was able to do so because he is the only Secretary of State in the entire history of the United States. That served both as the director of the nation's top intelligence officer, as well as the Secretary of State America's top diplomat. So, before he made his diplomatic move, he actually already had a very solid and most importantly realistic understanding of the world. When it comes to China it is very important for someone who has a realistic understanding of China's strategic intent, its capabilities and enormous opportunities that China has and nobody else has. So, he came into the State Department with a very determined approach to change our China policy, which has been in bad shape for all nearly half a decade. So it is, with this background he wrote we have to understand this memoir. The memoir has a lot of very, very interesting takes that that I call golden nuggets that you normally would not see in any other memoirs by high officials of the US government.

Wilson Shirley:

So, what are some of those?

Dr. Miles Yu:

For example, the Chinese government basically is particularly allergic and angry about one particular point we make no matter where how directly, indirectly we made that is the Chinese Communist Party does not represent the Chinese people. The Chinese government would normally go berserk. This is our top concern. It's amazing how the government lacks so much self-confidence on this. In July, 2020, for example, secretary Pompeo, someone in the Chinese ambassador to the United States to his office, the ambassador a gentleman by the name of
(inaudible) and make this a stunning announcement that the US government is going to close
the Chinese consulate in Houston and Chinese government has 72 hours to evacuate. And this
is such a stunning news. But the first you would've expected that the Chinese ambassador
would've reacted directly to that news. No, the first words out of his mouth, according to Mr.
Pompeo's memoir, were Mr. Secretary, you should not separate the Chinese Communist Party
from the Chinese people.

Wilson Shirley:

And that theme of the Chinese Communist Party and the Chinese people really played into a
speech that you and I helped to work on that Secretary Pompeo delivered at the Richard Nixon
library. Just a little bit after the meeting that you're talking about, I think that libraries in Yorba
Linda California, and I want to elaborate on why this theme is so important because after that
speech the official Chinese news agency published a very, very long rebuttal to the speech. And
you're right, the first thing that they focused on was that theme of the party and the people. So
why particularly in a Marxist-Leninist system is it so important for the party to purport, to speak
for the interests of the Chinese people themselves?

Dr. Miles Yu:

The number one most unavoidable reality in China is that the Chinese Communist Party
represent interests opposite of the Chinese people. You can see this everywhere and the
Chinese Communist Party views the Chinese people as this ultimate adversary. So that's why it
builds a surveillance state. It has all the control mechanisms suppressing the freedom and
interest of Chinese people. So that sheer reality according to the Chinese Communist Party is
basically a philosophy that cannot be said by anybody outside the government because that
fundamentally challenges the legitimacy of the regime. If the Chinese government does not
have the legitimacy to represent China, Chinese people, then we're dealing with an illegitimate
regime. And that's basically why the government of China is so nervous about this. Now you
mentioned about the Nixon library speech, that was not it and that was just the height of the
Chinese reaction to that.

The first mention it was the speech I worked on back in October, 2019. At that time Mr. Pompeo
was giving a speech to the Hudson Institute, of course, where he received an award in that
speech, not even the main thing, just one in the middle of the speech toward the end of the, Mr.
Pompeo casually mentioned this that today's Chinese party does not speak for the Chinese
people. That was the most violent the target of the most violent reaction from China. And we
knew at that moment we hit the nerve. And so, the Chinese government has never moved away
from the focus of that. This is why their regime in China is so funny. This is one of the nuggets in
Mr. Pompeo's memoir. There are several others. For example, Mr. Pompeo's visit to Pyongyang
when he first met the chairman Kim Young Ken Jon on, and he said, oh, you know what? I
understand that the Chinese counterpart told me that if the US withdraw from South Korea
chairman King will be very happy. And that to which Kim Jon will react hilariously, he punched
the table and said, the Chinese are all liars and they want you to withdraw from South Korea so
they can basically roll us. There were other puppet regimes in the region.

Wilson Shirley:

Yeah, he compared it to Xin John and Tibet I think in that section, which was pretty remarkable.
Dr. Miles Yu:

That's exactly right. So this is actually a remarkable window to the highest level of international diplomacy and intrigues, particularly when it comes to China.

Wilson Shirley:

And there are a few really important decisions that are cataloged throughout the book. Some of the real policy decisions came through with the decertification of Hong Kong autonomy that also happened in the summer of 2020, the Taiwan meeting conditions that Secretary Pompeo jettisoned, the Declaration of Genocide and Xinjiang. So, pick one of the policy decisions that you think was most consequential and talk about what it's like to move policy through the State Department because it's hard to decide what to do, but it's also hard to get that building to do anything that goes against the status quo.

Dr. Miles Yu:

Of course, as Mr. Pompeo's senior China policy advisor, I was involved in virtually all of them. And you asked me to give a few examples. I'll just mention one example you mentioned about Hong Kong, the gradual loss of freedom and autonomy in Hong Kong has been going on for years. Yet it's very, very important for the US government to accurately document that kind of backsliding of freedom and autonomy year after year, how to use the language. And so, you have basically how to measure what words could be used and that's where reality comes in, bureaucratic inertia, and I think Mr. Pompeo, as he mentioned in the book sent me down to the bureaus to actually sort through all this mess because the words were not reflecting reality. We see reports about the incredible backsliding of freedom and democracy in Hong Kong. Yet the words out of our annual report to Congress was particularly feeble and calculated, shall we say, doesn't mean much.

Wilson Shirley:

And those reports are mandated by law.

Dr. Miles Yu:

That's right. In 2019, I saw this problem. So I report to secretary, he sent me down to our bureau people in charge of the drafting and I found out that people who are in charge of drafting or Obama holdovers, they were very, very soft. They do not carry out the commander's intent from the secretary's office. I worked with that office for literally three, four days arguing about the wording. And finally, I think I <laugh> succeeded in searching for the phrase “Hong Kong's basic freedom still remains although greatly degraded”. Something like that deteriorated. So, for that you have to really fight the bureaucrats for a couple days.

Wilson Shirley:

All right. So I think one of the most encouraging things over the last couple of years has been the bipartisan consensus that has really coalesced around China and the China challenge. So we talked a lot about Secretary Pompeo and the accomplishments of his tenure at the State Department Secretary Antony Blinken is about to go to China. He's going to be there on February 5th and sixth. So just a quick end to this section. If you were going to give Secretary of
Dr. Miles Yu:

As much as the United States need China's cooperation on agendas, that we prefer. China needs a lot more on good willing and cooperation with the United States. China's dependency on the United States is much, much deeper and much more existential than the other way around. So with that, we should have full confidence to negotiate with the Chinese. Do not beg them if they do not comply with international norm and the reciprocity. And then we should be perfectly willing to walk away from the negotiation table. That's the primary operational methods of the Trump administration. We lay out our cards and lay our conditions. If the opposite does not really comply, we'll be willing to walk away.

Wilson Shirley:

Well, let's hope he goes in with that mindset. And then turning to our next couple of topics, these are stories out of China that likely haven't been picked up in the US press very much, but around the Chinese New Year there's been an uptick in CCP propaganda and a lot of this has been directed towards the us. It's taken on a lot of nationalistic, even sort of xenophobic undertones. So, can you talk about the propaganda that's been coming out of Beijing over the last week or so that's been directed towards the Chinese people over the new year?

Dr. Miles Yu:

Samuel Johnson used to say nationalism is the last refuge of scandals. This is totally true. Chinese communist party is in deep crisis in the aftermath of the covid disaster in the aftermath of international, unprecedented international isolation. You look at it around the Chinese New Year, I mean the Chinese population was basically seething with the resentment against the Xi Jinping and his stupid policies.

Wilson Shirley:

Right over zero covid,

Dr. Miles Yu:

Over zero covid and also over the absolute callousness on public affairs, public health you have a lot of people dying of covid and public health system is corrupt. The government of China is very good at controlling but not very good at governing and that's the problem. And then in light of all this international and domestic problems, the Chinese Communist party resorts to fanning Ultra nationalism to create this sensational sentiment in China against foreigners, this is very much like the 1900's boxer rebellion. End of January is the Chinese New Year. The phrase itself is not really a big issue because it doesn't even have the word Chinese in there. It's basically the west. In the West people are used to calling it Chinese New Year. It turned out this lunar new year people in Korea, in Vietnam and in a sort of confusion domain, they all celebrate this.

It's not necessarily Chinese. Some folks in Korea, some people in Vietnam and in other places in Southeast Asia, Chinese diaspora, they don't want to call it the Chinese New Year. They want to call it Lunar New Year, which is fine. But then this causes a lot of sort of backlash by the
Chinese government in the domestic media, people take this as if this is the last bastion of anti-China, we have to beat. So that's the reason why there's a lot of interesting and the kind of a fire of theory actually hits the Chinese newly minted Chinese foreign minister Qin Gang, when he briefed the foreign journalist and diplomats on the eve of Chinese New Year, he actually used the phrase Lunar New Year, he didn't use Chinese New Year. This made the Chinese ultranationalists very upset about him. So, they attack him for being a traitor.

It's just insane. And then of course on top of that the Chinese government, chooses the timing. I released the movie made by the China as the most famous director, and it's called [inaudible] something translated into All Rivers Red. This is a historical drama. It's about the Southern Song dynasty of the 12th, 13th century fighting against the northern invaders from the Gin dynasty, which is the minority dynasty in the north. And this basically is an enormously xenophobic film. And so right now you see the nationwide theaters, all the young people, the youth they were so all sort of riled up against this. So this is just one of the very, very interesting phenomenon. Unfortunate.

Wilson Shirley:
So, talk a little bit about how the messages are received within China. You talked about how the youth are kind of riled up over this nationalistic xenophobic messaging. Is there a generational divide? Does it resonate more in the cities or countryside? How is it received?

Dr. Miles Yu:
First of all, China's information environment is totally controlled and manipulated. So, controlling and manipulating the environment, is much easier to command the hearts or minds of large portions of people. But more and more recently people were moving away from that Chinese sort of government propaganda. So even that right now all you could see China, all that was allowed to see are those what we call the angry youth. Right. So, this is why people give the impression that the whole nation was really mad at the foreigners while in fact they're probably not, so most people in China want to get out of China.

Wilson Shirley:
Yeah. So let's talk about a story about one particular youth in China. And this is something that you flagged for me. In October, a 15-year-old boy disappeared in China and his body was recently discovered the boy was at school he disappeared for a few months. What was that story about and why does it matter?

Dr. Miles Yu:
Okay, Wilson, imagine this if you are a parent in China, what do you think is the primary concern? It's the safety of your only child.

Wilson Shirley:
Yeah.

Dr. Miles Yu:
The problem is in China every year, hundreds of thousands of young children, teenagers, mysterious, disappeared. Nobody knows where they go, they would go, the cops were not really interested in finding out. And so there is kind of a gradually sort of a growing resentment against this phenomenon. Government doesn't care, government care about political dissent. So, if there's a case of somebody with a banner, somewhere in Tiananmen Square, that person will be found, I mean with the mostly efficient police search. But on these hundreds of thousand cases each year people disappear now. So now coupled with that, there is a very, very pernicious phenomenon in China, organ harvesting. So, a lot of high officials, the doctors that colluded with the market forces and basically hundreds of thousands of people have had their organs harvested against their will. So this basically, initially it started with the political prisoners, but now you see that the demands are so huge for organ transplants.

So, you see a lot of people disappear. So, people basically combine these massive amount disappearances on top of this human trafficking industry in China. And then they connect with this organ harvesting. So, there is a boy 15 years old, his name's Hu he's from the <inaudible> High School, he's a high school freshman last October, he mysteriously disappeared in the broad daylight. The police refused to file a case, the local government lied about it. And this cause gradually got national attention. So, the nation basically was on the tip of its toe to figure out what the heck is going on. And then there was a growing, growing resentment. This becomes a national crisis. 160 days later last week, the Chinese government suddenly announced. Ah, we found his body. As a matter of fact, he killed himself by hanging, on the tree, On the tree like a few hundred feet away from the school. The problem is the police had already announced they have searched the entire area, I mean the whole city, right? They searched multiple times, couldn't find anything. All of a sudden, they found this body, the body is not decomposed right now, fully clothed.

Wilson Shirley:

Oh no,

Dr. Miles Yu:

The police say this is the person we have DNA. And then rush to the conclusion, the nation exploded. And this is such incredible level of mendacity. What I'm saying is through this case, you can see China's enormous organ harvesting industry is a crime of unspeakable level.

Wilson Shirley:

So, when this young boy disappeared again, 15 years old is the first thing that came to Chinese domestic audience's mind this history of human trafficking and Oregon harvesting without the country, is that what people were really worried about? Because that's an unbelievably gruesome background to what's already a really horrible story as someone disappears for three months and then as you said, his body is rediscovered hanging near his school. That's a terrible story.

Dr. Miles Yu:

Cases like this, the resentment, the anger toward cases like this are growing incrementally. It started with last year one of the top news items in China was the so-called Iron Chan lady. A girl
who was college student was kidnapped many years ago and nobody, she basically, she just basically disappeared and she was sold into a remote village and then she was forced into the marriage and gave birth to eight children. And then when she was finally discovered she was chained in the basement, completely mentally destroyed individual. This was such a big news item in China. And not only feminist but also the whole nation was mad, but the Chinese government decided to do nothing and say nothing, and they tried to cover it up. So, all the cases remain unresolved. So, the disappearance of this boy and the so-called discovery of the body by suicide last week further should add fuel to the fire. And that's why you can see the Chinese government is absolutely clueless when it comes to governance and they're very good at controlling and repression.

Wilson Shirley:

And it's a little bit, I mean it's terrible, but it's also ironic that in a country that has probably more security cameras than any other country in the world, an unbelievable surveillance state, this just happened, and it went for months being unresolved. And as you said a second ago, if there's any dissent, the Chinese government can crack down on it very, very quickly and went after people who were protesting last year very, very quickly. So again, gets to your point about how the government directs its resources either to repress or not so much to serve the people of China

Dr. Miles Yu:

Its all boiled down to one thing that the government not elected by the people will work against the interests of the people. Pure and simple. If the government is not accountable for its own actions, you got a dictatorship, that's exactly where China is. I urge the listeners to read the US State Department's, the yearly annual report on human trafficking, China always ranks at the very top. And so, this is the issue that the Chinese people care about it. This is what the people care about. The only group of people that don't care are those in the Chinese Communist Party.

Wilson Shirley:

And I'll read the first little sentence of the report that you just talked about from 2022. Again, this is the US State Department's Human Trafficking report about China. It says the government of the People's Republic of China does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking and is not making significant efforts to do so even considering the impact of Covid 19 and on its anti-trafficking capacity. Therefore, the PRC remained on tier three, which is again the worst category to be a part of. I think that's all that we have time for this week. Miles, thank you so much for bringing those latter two stories to my attention. It was fun to read. Never give an inch and see some of the stories from Secretary Pompeo's time at the State Department and also to see how much work there is to do on this issue going forward. Thanks again. Thanks for tuning in to this episode of the China Insider, a podcast from the China Center at Hudson Institute. We appreciate Hudson for making this podcast possible follow miles and all of the additional great work we do at hudson.org. Please remember to rate and review this podcast and we'll see you next time on the China Insider.