Virtual Event | The Future of US-China Relations: A Conversation with Representative Michael McCaul

TRANSCRIPT

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- Representative Michael McCaul, U.S. Representative, Texas’s 10th District, and Ranking Member, House Foreign Affairs Committee
- Nury Turkel, Adjunct Fellow, Hudson Institute
- Eric Brown, Senior Fellow, Hudson Institute

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A video of the event is available: https://www.hudson.org/events/1931-virtual-event-the-future-of-us-china-relations-a-conversation-with-representative-michael-mccaul-32021

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Eric Brown:

Many thanks to our viewers for joining us for this Hudson Institute discussion with Representative Michael McCaul on America's relations with the People's Republic of China. First elected in 2005, Congressman McCaul represents Texas's 10th District, which stretches from Austin to Houston. And he has distinguished himself as a leader on Capitol Hill on homeland security technology and foreign policy issues.

As the ranking member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Representative McCall has also been an important leader on policy toward the People's Republic of China, including on human rights and the US's intensifying, many faceted strategic rivalry with China's ruling Communist party.

I'm also joined today by Nury Turkel, my colleague and an adjunct fellow here at Hudson. Nury is additionally a commissioner at the US Commission on International Religious Freedom appointed by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, as well as Chair of the Uyghur Human Rights Project.

Congressman McCaul, we're very honored to have you back and welcome back to Hudson Institute. First off, let's discuss the Chinese Communist Party's campaign of systematic repression against the Uyghurs and others in their homeland of Xinjiang.

In September of 2020, the China task force that you had chaired called on the Department of State to consider issuing a determination that the Communist Party's crimes against Uyghurs amount to genocide. Last January, you welcomed and supported the State Department's announcement that it would officially designate the Chinese Communist Party's treatment of Uyghur Muslims and others as crimes against humanity and as a genocide.

Many key US allies are themselves now debating this important issue of genocide determination. Last month, however, we had an editorial in The Economist magazine arguing that genocide was the wrong word to describe the CCP's horrifying abuses against the Uyghurs. You have disputed The Economist's view. Tell us why is The Economist's editorial challenging the term genocide wrong? And what are the potential implications should other prominent media outlets and other governments, including our own, if they adopt The Economist's view? Thank you.

Michael McCaul:

Well, thank you. And I want to thank the Hudson Institute for asking me to join today's important discussion. The appalling human rights abuses by the Chinese Communist Party, especially those committed against the Uyghur Muslims and other ethnic and religious minorities have really horrified the entire world. CCP is currently interning at least 1 million people in a vast network of concentration camps. And that is according to the Department of Defense.

According to former detainees, people in these camps are deprived of food, beaten, brainwashed, subject to forced labor and sexual abuse. There are reports of forced sterilizations, forced abortions, murder of infants, and the disappearance of people never to be heard from again. Uyghur children are forcibly removed from their parents' homes and sent to orphanages. And they live under a constant Orwellian surveillance by the CCP. Yet last month, as you stated, the editors at The Economist argue the CCP's atrocities does not amount to a genocide.

They claim because the CCP quote, "Is not slaughtering them," there can be no genocide. On every single point they make, though, they're absolutely wrong. If they had taken a moment to read the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, which China itself ratified, it would be clear the actions and intentions of the CCP equates to a genocide.

There are reports that the CCP has been, one, killing Uyghurs. Two, causing serious bodily or mental harm to Uyghurs. Three, trying to bring about the physical destruction of the Uyghurs. Five, preventing
births of Uyghurs. Six, and lastly, forcibly transferring children out of their Uyghur homes. In other words, trying to destroy an entire generation, an entire culture, an entire people.

So in other words, their actions meet each aspect of genocide as defined by the world. I hope The Economist's intentions were not served as genocide apologist. But the CCP will use this headline and others like it to excuse and whitewash their genocide. They will use it in their propaganda. And the United States has a moral obligation to do everything we can to stop these atrocities from happening.

The House has passed legislation like the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act, which would ensure American companies are not importing cotton, garments and technology made from Uyghur slave labor. But we also need strong actions from the Biden administration. Unfortunately, we've only seen strong rhetoric to date. They have promised costs will be imposed on the CCP for this genocide, but they have not outlined any specifics.

And while Secretary Blinken, and I just talked to him today, has repeatedly said he believes the CCP is committing genocide, we have still not heard from the President on this issue. I'm hopeful though, that the administration will soon detail how we plan to confront the CCP for their genocide. I'm also hopeful it includes more than just harsh words.

Unfortunately, the genocide against the Uyghurs and other ethnic and religious minorities is not the only instance of human rights abuses by the CCP. Whether it's destruction of freedom in Hong Kong, oppression in Tibet, or persecution of journalists and doctors who told the truth about the beginnings, the origins of COVID-19, the CCP shows time and again that it has no regard for human life or liberty. And the longer the United States refuses to hold them accountable, the more it will embolden them to continue. So I want to thank the Huston Institute, again, for having me today and I look forward to talking about these issues much more. And I'm actually delighted to be here also with Nury. I know he has a really incredible story.

**Nury Turkel:**

Thank you very much, Congressman. As you been part of this effort in the US Congress, last year in particular, the United States government made a announcement and Global Magnitsky sanction, a designation of entities being added to the entity list. Has the US or allies adequately responded to the brutal repression of the Uyghurs and others in the Uyghur region? If not, what else should we be doing?

**Michael McCaul:**

Well? I think we need to do more. Secretary Pompeo was very forceful in getting this definition of genocide and applying it to what's happening to the Uyghur Muslims. We have applied sanctions to anyone associated with the manufacturers buying the garments. But we need to do more. I think we need to really put this on the global stage. When genocide was occurring in the Holocaust, the world didn't know about it at the time. But when, after the fact, it came to the horror and shock of the American people.

I think a similar thing is happening, right now. And most people just have no idea that it's actually happening over there. And I think they're trying to destroy an entire people and culture by basically exterminating the next generation. But I also, I'd like for the administration to expand the entity list and apply the same licensing rules as they have, or as we have previously, in the case of Huawei.
Nury Turkel:
Thank you. What is the sense of a new Congress is thinking about these issues on the genocide determination, maybe additional legislative responses? And how do you hope the Biden administration will deal with these issues specifically, on the policy of ground?

Michael McCaul:
When it comes to human rights, we do have a great... It is not a partisan issue and it's very much a bipartisan issue. And I have to say I've been on the floor many times with these votes against what the CCP was doing in Hong Kong to defending Taiwan from the CCP, and it really does bring both sides together. And I think that's important for Congress, as the voice of the American people, to send this message to the Chinese Communist Party that we will not tolerate this.

I'm always amazed at things that we even say at the committee level, how it gets out there through the Voice of America and other entities so that they know that the American people care, and that we want to do something about it, and that we defend their human rights and that we condemn these human rights violations. So I see more of this in the future with this Congress, because it is one of those issues that unites rather than divides us.

Eric Brown:
Thank you very much, sir. Moving on to a slightly different subject, but a related one. Nury And I recently hosted the German journalists Kai Strittmatter at Hudson to discuss his new book, We Have Been Harmonized: Life in China’s Surveillance State. The book, I believe, is obligatory reading about how the Chinese Communist Party has harnessed artificial intelligence and information technology to build a new kind of techno-totalitarianism and the most advanced police state that the world has ever seen.

The CCP is clearly intent on exporting this population control technology to other countries around the world and it has been doing that with great sense of purpose and alacrity. You've been a leader in Congress on the dangers of allowing Beijing to control the commanding heights of information technology and next generation technologies. How should we be dealing with this threat, not just to democratic norms, but to international norms around the world?

Michael McCaul:
Right, and it is a surveillance state. They're doing this in Hong Kong, artificial intelligence, cameras, biometrics. A total surveillance state. I know we'll talk about the origins of COVID-19 in a little bit. But, for instance, the doctors that first saw a new SARS-like virus were reporting it on social media know on WeChat. And the communist party picked it up immediately and arrested, detained the doctors and silenced them from talking about it. That is what they do in China. And that's the lengths they went to try to cover up what was happening that then became a global pandemic.

But it takes away all freedoms and liberties in mainland China. We've done some really interesting things with Voice of America to get our message translated into Mandarin and Cantonese into mainland China, to tell them the truth about things like the origins of COVID-19.

I think what President Xi and his party fear the most are his own people, because at some point they're not going to be subjected to this oppression and constant surveillance. And we see this also in Russia and Iran and North Korea. But the Chinese are very sophisticated in their technology. They are moving at a fast clip. They've invested a trillion dollars in their digital economy.

We've got to be more competitive. I introduced the CHIPS act, which passed on the National Defense Authorization bill to allow and incentivize manufacturing of these advanced semiconductor chips, which
we have in everything from your iPhone to an F-35, to incentivize them to manufacture in the United States rather than in China or nations that can be compromised by China. Because they are moving fast on that issue as well. And quantum computing. And then as we talked about Huawei, 5G, we're in a global competition for this.

When I talk to foreign nations and ambassadors who are thinking about Huawei, I remind them that Huawei is truly a telecom surveillance technology. That what they are going to do is come in at a cheaper rate, but know, that they are going to pick up all your data like a vacuum cleaner and surveil everything you're doing. And so I try to stress, and Secretary Pompeo did a great job, that this is in their national security's best interest not to engage with Huawei. We persuaded the Brits to get out of it, the European Union, our NATO allies, and our Five Eyes. We have to do a better job in Africa and the African continent and Latin America to keep the Chinese surveillance program out of the rest of the world.

Eric Brown:
Thank you. You had mentioned Hong Kong earlier. The crack down there, of course, is nothing new. A friend in Hong Kong told me just the other day that the local authorities have commenced a new and far more intrusive crack down there, seeking to eradicate the pro-democracy Hong Kongese movement at its very roots. Xi's Chinese Communist Party clearly sees the Hong Kongese Citizens movement as a mortal threat to its own power. How should the US and allies be responding to the dismantling of Hong Kong's basic law and political autonomy? And how should it be responding to the CCP's ongoing crushing of dissent and the implementation of national emergency law?

Michael McCaul:
I think what is happening in Hong Kong is, first of all it violated the Sino-UK treaty. But they, essentially using this national security law, invaded and took over Hong Kong without a shot fired. And the human rights violations are just horrific. Anybody that speaks out against their government is immediately arrested. Any political dissident is immediately arrested. In fact, just recently, any candidate running for office could be arrested for saying the wrong thing.

There is no democracy in Hong Kong any more. And it's become, completely, a part of the Chinese Communist Party now. And we warn Americans about traveling to Hong Kong because they too, very well could be arrested onsite once they touch ground in Hong Kong. I think we've done several things to respond to this. Sanctions are always on the table, but it's hard to... Other than highlighting the abuses and just calling attention to the world that this is in fact happening.

I know the Brits took a lot of refugees in, I wish they had been a little more vocal about how this violated their longstanding treaty. Unfortunately, the treaty didn't really have any enforcement mechanisms if there was a violation of it. And then I would take you not too far from there. If they can do this in Hong Kong, they can certainly do it in Taiwan as well. And what we're seeing now is a militarization of the Taiwan Straits in the South China Sea, building artificial islands.

I think President Xi's worldview is that democracies are weak. That dictatorships are strong, that he is more effective. And he wants to take China back to sort of like Imperial China. And that would include the territory of that. So he rightfully sees the areas in the South China Sea, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, all of that is rightfully theirs. And it's a matter of time before we could see more aggressive, and we're already seeing provocative moves in the Taiwan Straits. Also, the aggressive nature by which they patrol the South China Sea and create these artificial islands. Our Pacific fleet is very engaged in that area and it's important when members of Congress say, "We are watching you." I passed the Taiwan Assurance Act to make sure that the CCP knows that invading Taiwan will not be acceptable to the American people.
Nury Turkel:
Congressman, you have been a leader on the effort to move the Olympics, Next Year's Winter Olympics from Beijing to somewhere else. You have been also advocating in the effort to educate the athletes, that it will be difficult if not immoral for them to compete amid the backdrop of the concentration camps and ongoing genocidal campaign. Can you share with us your view, why this Olympic is particularly important in the efforts to address the human rights abuses in China?

Michael McCaul:
Well, I think that we see human rights violations all around the globe, but I think the worst are occurring in China. Our athletes train hard to be in the Olympics and I want to give them that opportunity, but I also don't want to be complicit with the country that is so abusive of their own people, including the Tibetan monks and the Tibetan people who have been pushed out and there's a current tension and friction in the Himalayas.

I mean it's a very peaceful Tibetan people just persecuted. And I'm worried that we'll be seen as complicit. So I would advise, every time I go on television I try to speak out against the Olympics taking place in Beijing. That we need to think about moving it elsewhere. We're also talking about a country that is really responsible for a virus and very irresponsible in its containment that has killed over a million people and millions of jobs as well. And I think that should be important when we talk about the sponsors of the Olympics.

But at a minimum, Nury, I think if they do go there to Beijing we have to educate them so they know what they're getting into. To the previous question about technology and surveillance, we as members of Congress, when we go over to foreign nations say like China, we get fully briefed on their security surveillance, the use of phones, the fact that they're going to be tracked, all of this with respect to their personal safety. And so we want to make sure that if that does occur, I would prefer the Olympics to be elsewhere, but if our athletes do go at a minimum that we teach and train them with respect to security measures. Because they will be under surveillance and under a watchful eye.

Nury Turkel:
Thank you very much.

Eric Brown:
Yeah. Thank you, sir. Last question. You've referred to Beijing's totalitarian regime as a generational threat to the US and to our foreign interests. Is the US government and more importantly US citizens, are they ready for this generational challenge in your view? And as you look over the horizon, what do we need to be doing more of or better to be able to compete successfully?

Michael McCaul:
Yeah and I try not to be, like scare tactics, but I think you got to go into this eyes wide open. COVID really opened the eyes of the American people. And I think with that, they realize that this is a nation that would horde and not supply personal protective equipment. People didn't realize how reliant we were for medical supplies, for rare earth minerals and for advanced semiconductor chips.

I think from a foreign policy standpoint, I get asked about this a lot. You have to go back to Nixon going to China. He went there to try to open up China, and that was also done geopolitically as a threat to the Soviet Union. Then you had Bush 41, who I had a lot of admiration for, Secretary Howard Baker trying to engage China. I think it was well intended to bring him into the family of nations.
In fact, Secretary Baker I talked to him recently, he’s still going, his mind is still sharp. And he said, "We tried to bring him into the family of nations and it just didn't work." And then yet the Bill Clinton administration. I prosecuted the Johnny Chung case that led us to the Director of Chinese Intelligence and China Aerospace putting money in his Hong Kong bank account to fund the Clinton Campaign. To interfere in our federal elections, presidential elections, because they liked and wanted to influence this technology transfer. Particularly satellite technology, at that time.

I was a young prosecutor, it was in 1997 and that opened my eyes back then. But to your point, the American people now, I think, are really waking up. You had the Houston Consulate shut down in my home state because they were stealing so much intellectual property and biomedical research, including the vaccine. They stole information from NASA. And out of that Consulate we retrieved so much documentation that you're going to see further prosecutions. And really, it was good to see the administration trying to take China head on and prosecute legitimate espionage cases, which they've been doing for years.

They stole 23 million security clearances from the federal government, including my own, with no consequences. And I think there cyber security, we have to be very competitive with them. But the amount of intellectual property theft stolen, I believe it was Keith Alexander said, "It was the largest transfer of wealth in human history." They don't really innovate, they steal innovation. They don't create. And culturally I think they think if it's out there that it's in the public domain, that it's okay.

I got appointed to chair the China task force and we looked at all these issues. We had over 400 recommendations. We had over 200 legislative recommendations, most of them bi-partisan. And I'm proud to say that about 40 of those get passed on the National Defense Authorization bill. But I think the American people are waking up. There's a recent poll done, that 80% of Americans now have a negative perception of China and the Chinese Communist Party. And a lot of that probably stemmed out of COVID.

But COVID just opened our eyes to everything else that's going on, whether it be the persecution of the Uyghur Muslims, as we've talked about, human rights, theft of intellectual property, the Belt and Road Initiative, and in competition, quite frankly. And that's what it is. A global challenge as to who's going to be the world's dominant economic and military power. That is the greatest long-term national security threat to the next generation.

My father, it was the Nazis. I had the Cold War growing up, and then we had 9/11 radical Islamic terror. I think now, putting it into perspective, it's the Chinese Communist Party. And I tell that to this generation. Because they need to understand this. And I do think we've made a lot of progress, but we have to keep exposing them for what they're doing.

I would like to close with just our investigation into the origins of COVID-19. It was absolutely fascinating as a former prosecutor and investigator type to basically figure out, what happened? What happened with the World Health Organization? Why didn't we know about this? And this we study, we found that this SARS-like virus was starting to hit in Wuhan around late November, early December. It had about a two week dormancy period to it.

In mid December as I mentioned before, the doctors who were on social media, they got intercepted by, on WeChat, by the Chinese Communist Party. And local officials went in and arrested them, detained them, and silenced them from speaking the truth. And Dr. Li, of course, died from COVID. Trying to tell the world that there was a problem.

The International Health Regulations required, after the SARS outbreak, required a 24-hour notification of a SARS-like virus. The Chinese Communist Party never, ever notified the World Health Organization. And to make things worse, the head of the WHO Director General Tedros, who was handpicked by President Xi to lead it... Which is another problem with the United Nations, as well. Went along with Xi
with the coverup. There were several times when his own experts in Wuhan were telling him, "It's transmittable." Taiwan warned them, "This is transmittable."

And yet when they met to determine if they should issue an International Health Emergency alert, Director General Tedros cast the deciding vote against warning the world as to what was going to be a global pandemic. Fast forward into January, the spring festival, it takes place. It’s there kind of like Christmas and Thanksgiving combined. Five million people leave Wuhan and travel both across mainland China and internationally. That is a point when this went from a local epidemic to a global pandemic.

And the lengths to which they went to cover up this element is really disgraceful. I think there should be consequences. I think the supply chain will be one of those consequences that plays out. And so when we got this a report... And we also talk about the Wuhan lab. There are two sources and I think they're actually both a source for it. The wet markets that have the exotic animals and the Wuhan lab of virology.

In 2016, The State Department issued two cables warning about safety protocols not being followed at the Wuhan lab. This same phenomenon happened with SARS when researchers walked out contaminated. We think there is a high probability that what happened was, it wasn't manufactured or weaponized, but rather they were looking at Corona-like viruses in bats. Studying how they extrapolate to humans and then trying to create a vaccine.

I think there's a very high likelihood that one of those researchers walked out of the lab, went to the wet market perhaps to buy dinner on the way home, and that's how the whole thing started.

So when we wrote this report, it's obviously very damaging to the Chinese Communist Party, we translated it into Mandarin and through the Voice of America we broke through their internet firewall, got this into mainland China, and it went viral. This report went viral on the internet, so much so that President Xi's own spokesman condemn the report, condemned the China task force and condemn me personally.

Then they developed an hour long program devoted to debunking the McCaul report. That's how paranoid they were about it, because they didn't want their own people to know the truth about what they did. Because that's what they fear the most. They don't want their own people educated. They want them oppressed, is the bottom line. And so we had about 20 different articles coming out of Beijing, hitting as hard. But I would argue some that came to the level of a disinformation campaign in our elections moving forward.

So I don't take this subject matter lightly. And I think if they're going to attack me, that's a badge of honor. Because we're on the side of angels in this. And I think longterm, I'm optimistic about the future of the United States prevailing in this great challenge, this great global challenge, that we face.

Eric Brown:

Congressman McCaul, thank you very much for being with us today. And most important, thank you very much for the leadership that you offer our Republic and we hope to have you back at some point very soon. Thank you.

Nury Turkel:

Thank you very much.

Michael McCaul:

Thank you so much for having me and to all my friends at the Hudson-