Virtual Event | China, Technology, and Mass Surveillance: A Conversation with Congressman Mark Green

TRANSCRIPT

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• Congressman Mark Green, U.S. Representative, Tennessee’s 7th district
• Eric B. Brown, Senior Fellow, Hudson Institute
• Kenneth Weinstein, Walter P. Stern Distinguished Fellow, Hudson Institute

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A video of the event is available: https://www.hudson.org/events/2094-virtual-event-china-technology-and-mass-surveillance-a-conversation-with-congressman-mark-green42022

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Eric Brown:

Good morning. And thank you all for joining us for a conversation with Representative Mark Green on the U.S.-PRC competition on technology and on mass surveillance. Representative Green hails from the great state of Tennessee, and represents the Seventh Congressional District, which is located between Memphis and Nashville. He serves on the House Armed Services committee, as well as the Foreign Affairs committee. In addition to the Select Committee on the Coronavirus Crisis. Before his election to the U.S. Congress in 2018, Representative Green served in Tennessee’s State Senate, and before that, he served as an Army Green Beret in both the Afghanistan and Iraq wars. He participated in the mission to capture Saddam Hussein, and interrogated him for six hours that very evening. Representative Green is also a medical doctor, among many other things.

And I'm also joined today by Hudson Institute's Kenneth Weinstein, the Walter P. Stern distinguished fellow, and former chair of Radio Free Asia. We were going to begin this morning with a couple of broad comments from Representative Green. Again, thank you Congressman, for joining us.

Rep. Mike Green:

Well, thanks for having me. And before I start, let me just tell you how important the Hudson Institute is to those of us who are interested in freedom, and economic security, and prosperity. We lean very heavily on the white papers, and podcasts, and things that come from you guys. You're doing amazing work, and I deeply appreciate it. You know, our number one strategic threat to both our sovereignty, and security, and prosperity is China, hands down.

And their methods are many, but the one, I guess, we're talking about this morning especially, is intellectual property theft and how that's both an economic challenge to the United States, as well as a national security challenge. And China's ... it's very well understood, they want to replace the United States as the world leader, and then bring in their own version of a rules-based or their rules, rule-based order, do away with the liberal rules-based world order.

And that is a threat to freedom and democracy. It is a threat to free speech. It's a threat to privacy. It's a threat to people's lives if the race that you particularly belong to is one that they want to target. For example, the Uyghurs. They inherit an Imperial history that uses deception as a form of principle of war. And it started as early as the Warring States period with Sun Tzu. It continues today in an overt campaign of stealing both economic and national security intellectual property to advance that goal that I mentioned before. And they use overt, committed methods that range from espionage, as in the case of the Canadian company, to the co-opting of our students in our universities to gain access to research.

So this is a committed enemy, our committed competitor at a minimum, and we have to be very thorough and detailed. And I don't want to necessarily say, do away with free enterprise, that's the way we beat them. But we have to be very calculating in how we protect American businesses from cyber and other forms of espionage. And that's what the bills we're doing now are designed to do. So with those few opening comments, Eric, I'm all yours.

Eric Brown:

Perfect. Thank you. I did want to ask a little bit about the two bills that I understand that you've been sponsoring, and that includes the China Technology Transfer Control Act, and the Countering
Communist China Act. Could you elaborate a bit more about how those works of legislation can help protect American economic security and competitiveness?

Rep. Mike Green:

Well, most people are aware of Made in China 2025, and that's China's specific effort to beat the United States in core technologies from artificial intelligence, quantum computing, bioengineering, things like that. And so, one of those bills places all of China's Made in 2025 goals in the Protected Export list with the Department of Commerce. So it requires an additional step, you have to acquire a license to actually send that technology and that extra step gives commerce an opportunity to look exactly at what they're doing.

In terms of countering China, it broadens that more into the national security space and puts restrictions on what can be transferred. Interestingly enough, it'll be the first piece of legislation that specifically states that China is an IP theft violator and it just calls them out, specifically calls them out. And it'll be the first time Congress has actually done that in legislation.

Eric Brown:

Ken?

Ken Weinstein:

Congressman, a pleasure to be with you and like Eric, I salute you for your leadership on this and other critical issues. One of the pieces of legislation that obviously has gotten a lion's share of attention in the China states, is the America Competes Act, which you've been critical of. I was wondering if you could say a few things about why that bill falls short, and what you think ought to be done instead?

Rep. Mike Green:

Well, the China Competes Act funnels millions of dollars through the UN to China. It claims to be for green energy, but it actually sends them cash, which, in a competition with China, the second largest, some would argue with purchasing power parity, the largest economy in the world, that makes no sense. And it's all under the guise of green energy, that our technology is transferred, and honestly, our wealth.

That's probably the biggest issue that I have with it, but it fails to directly call out China and its violations of intellectual property theft and provides vehicles for them to do just that. So the bill was poorly constructed and at the tactical level fails to accomplish even what the bill's grand goals say it's all about. And that happens a lot in Congress. We see where the bill will say, "We're for the children, or for the people," act. If you look at House resolution one, and it's really for the politicians. So the name never seems to match what the bill really does. And in this case, it's exactly like that.

Ken Weinstein:

If I can follow up on your earlier statement, thank you, Congressman, you talked a bit about the Commerce Department under the Biden administration. I want to get your sense of how you feel they are enforcing actions against China, particularly compared to the Trump administration.
Rep. Mike Green:

If you look at the Indo-Pacific strategy that they just recently published, on a broader sense, there’s some commonality. Putting an emphasis on the quad, putting an emphasis on improving relations with India, particularly and especially, it’s very important as we counterbalance against China. But when you get into the details of it and the actual, I guess, more tactical level than strategic level, they’re doing just the opposite. Commerce Department has always been our problem, interestingly enough, both in the Trump administration, and in the Biden administration. Treasury, as well. They seem to contend against the national security factions within our government. The for-profit motive and the for-protection motive, and those seem to clash in the U.S. government, in both administrations. And there’s this great book written about [inaudible 00:09:06] and the Mnuchin battle. And so I think there are similarities at the strategic level, at the tactical level we’re failing.

Ken Weinstein:

Thank you.

Eric Brown:

Sir, in your opening remarks, you discussed how PRC has been using a lot of technology, including technology it’s acquired from the United States, to target Uyghurs and to persecute other peoples in China. The PRC, as we’re all aware, has been pursuing a concerted effort to export this technology to other countries around the world. It’s been estimated that dozens in fact have been in receipt of what can be referred to as a sort of a tyrant’s toolkit by which the PRC is enabling technologically enabled tyrannies, authoritarian governments in different parts of the world. I was wondering what Congress has done so far to attempt to stem and to compete with this effort by PRC to change international governing norms and what more can the U.S. government and the U.S. Congress be doing to prevent this, to compete with it?

Rep. Mike Green:

Well, you bring up a huge issue for my subcommittee. I’m the ranking Republican on the Western hemisphere, and hopefully very soon the chairman of that committee. That includes Latin America and the Caribbean. And what we’re seeing, China is empowering these nations through technology to their own surveillance state. Started with Cuba, now it’s in Venezuela, it’s exporting the Nicaragua now. China just cut a deal with El Salvador. So they’re basically, this surveillance state that they have, violating people’s privacy and of course restricting free speech, creating social credit scores. All of those things that they’re doing in their own country, they’re exporting. And in our hemisphere, that’s metastasizing. I call it Cubazuela, and it’s metastasizing.

We're losing the battle for democracy and freedom in Latin America and China is pushing that and empowering those authoritarians. Now Peru, potentially Chile. So your question was what Congress is doing. Not a lot. What Congress wants to do is, and I have one initiative. We’re calling it the Nearshoring Act. We’re launching that this week or next. But basically it’s using private investment dollars, not taxpayer dollars, through the development finance corporation, to provide very low interest loans to businesses who are manufacturing to Latin America. So we’re going to approach this from an economic...
standpoint, empowering those countries, offering an alternative belt and road, and hopefully blocking out those security issues, particularly as it relates to 5G and things like that.

That's the camel's nose in the tent for China is 5G. So what we have to do is provide economic opportunities for those countries. And in this nearshoring bill, it'll accomplish a lot more than just decoupling from China. And of course, I don't mean that in a comprehensive sense. That's way too big. But creating opportunity in Latin America not only creates a security benefit, but it also creates an immigration benefit. And interestingly enough, Democrats really like this approach. They would rather focus on the push factors for immigration, as opposed to the putting a wall up and blocking the pull factors. I had Congressman Espaillat come to me and say, "Can I take over this bill?"

So we have to think innovatively like this, particularly in the minority, with ideas that the majority want to join that then accomplish the goal, and in the case of Latin America, it's to block China.

Ken Weinstein:

Congressman, can I ask you, on that bill, do you make a distinction between the... You mentioned obviously... Well, Cuba's the obvious example. You mentioned Cubazuela. But the other countries that are increasingly aligned with Cuba and Venezuela, you mentioned Peru, Chile possibly. Does the bill make a distinction between those countries and the free countries in terms of encouraging offshoring from China to Latin America?

Rep. Mike Green:

Yeah, what we did was we sent this to the State Department and we had three wins when we built the bill. The state department came back and said, "If you'll add some additional country criteria that would qualify for a business to move into that, then it gives us an arrow in our quiver." And this is Zúñiga over at state who is an under secretary for Latin America. I thought that was fantastic advice. So we amended the bill to include that. Now State Department, with the passage of this bill, will have the ability to say, "You don't qualify as a country to participate in this program, as long as you're doing X, Y, and Z." And corruption is one of those things, fighting narco terrorism, et cetera. But authoritarianism, fair elections, those kinds of things are also in that list. And I think it's an additional win of the bill. And it came from the Democratic administration, the folks over at the state.

Ken Weinstein:

Excellent to see you working across party lines and with the Biden Administration on this critical issue. Yeah. One of the funny things we've seen is obviously in China, there's a huge amount of IP theft. You've talked about it. We know it's, what is it? About $500 billion annually is stolen by the Chinese. Most of it I think it's probably stolen in China. A lot of it is stolen here. We know the FBI has opened up, what, 1000 cases or so regarding IP theft from China. One of the PO one of the few positive things we're seeing out of the invasion of Ukraine now by Russia is the fact that not only are companies obviously having to pull out of Russia, but they're really starting now, when you look at the opinion surveys of American business leaders, of German business leaders, they realize it is time to think seriously about pulling out of China.

I'm just wondering how has this IP theft occurred? Why haven't people pulled out so far? And what is it going to take really to get people to really start to pull out or at least to reduce the IP theft?
Rep. Mike Green:

Well, how it happened is very multifactorial. You marry the profit motive with a desire to see China open up, and we thought democratic connect with them and cooperation would lend to bringing about a freer society in China. That was well intentioned, but proved false, particularly with the rise of Xi Jinping. I think perhaps, and there's an excellent book out, From Mao to Now, that dissects each of the leaders of China since Mao. The difference between Deng Xiaoping and Xi Jinping is night and day. Who knows? Maybe we all believe, as Michael Pillsbury does, that it was this way from the very beginning and all part of a master plan. But if you read that book, it’s almost like you have the personality of the leader of the CCP determining the direction of the country and now we have a pure authoritarian there. The how is that marrying a profit motive.

The challenge before us right now is to just continue to educate Americans on what's going on. You can look at what happened with the NBA, with movies in Hollywood, the Confucian Institutes. People are becoming aware. I saw a recent poll that said something like 80% of Americans view China as an enemy. That's a huge strategic shift. I was talking to our former governor, Bill Haslam, an incredible businessman, CEO of Pilot Oil at one time and governor of Tennessee, helped take Tennessee to the next level. And he said the greatest contribution of Donald Trump was to awaken America to China. And I think that may very well be. I submitted it might be the Abraham Accords, but we had a discussion about that. He's a very bright guy and I think it's very possible that he's right. So I don't know if I hit all the elements of your question, but I'm done rambling.

Eric Brown:

It's great. If I could circle back to India, you mentioned the focus on the quad and on obviously operationalizing the U.S.-India partnership, which has been a big focus of my work and the work of many other of my dear colleagues at Hudson Institute.

I am curious your thoughts on the future of the U.S.-India partnership, where you think leadership is required in order to make this the comprehensive partnership that many in the United States and many in India seem to want.

Although we're clearly also facing a lot of important and significant headwinds. I'm curious, again, just in general, your thoughts on the U.S.-India partnership and its opportunities and the potential problems that we may face in years ahead.

Rep. Mike Green:

India is a challenge in that they seem to want to put a foot in both buckets. And that's probably the best way I can just... Particularly with Russia. They were very slow to get on board with sanctions against Russia. They bought a lot of equipment from Russia.

And some of that was our fault from decades ago, pushing back on the communist state when they were having relations with the Soviet Union. I get it. But we're in a situation now where our relations with India have to move forward.
And what the state department on the tactical level has done, it has really impeded the flow of weapon systems that would replace those Russian systems, for example, the S-400. But we could have easily beaten the Russians in a deal to get them air defense systems, drones, things of that nature.

It looks like the Israelis are now going to beat us on the drone deal. Those sort of missteps communicate to India that we may not be a great partner. And I go on India news all the time. I was on something similar to their today's show and they ask very hard questions about, what kind of an ally is the United States?

You just abandoned Afghanistan. What kind of ally is the United States? You made a promise to Ukraine when they gave up their nuclear weapons that you would protect their sovereignty and now all you're doing is sending some lethal aid.

So they have reasons with the current administration to ask questions, but the importance is there. We have to be a little bit careful how we go forward with India because we want them to feel and know that we see them as a central partner in protecting democracy. They're the world's largest democracy.

But what we can't do either is, and this kind of goes into the art of the deal, if you'll allow me to use that term, we can't allow them to have too much leverage with that because then we can be taken advantage of.

Not to say that they would do that, but that's just good negotiating tactics, right? So this is a challenge. This is foreign policy 601, 701 in the college-level vernacular. And we have to proceed with caution and wisdom.

Ken Weinstein:

Yeah. On that note, let me ask, obviously, you're a member of the Asia subcommittee of the house, foreign affairs committee. You watch the quad closely. Your sense of what impact, if any, India's ambivalent policy with regard to criticizing Russia and Ukraine, what impact that's going to have upon the quad, upon the future of our Indo-Pacific strategy? Is it something we need to worry about or are these completely separate baskets?

Rep. Mike Green:

I mean, we have to be concerned about it, but we also have to understand that India's going to chart its own path. Admiral Stavridis, I don't know if you've read his book, 2034. It's a fascinating book that sort of envisions the next world war and how India will play a decisive role in that.

They want to remain sort of that third person out there. And I think in a sense, that's a good thing. I want a multipolar world. One of the areas where I agree with Richard Haass, and I guess Kissinger too, following the Napoleonic wars, the Concert of Europe really kept peace for a long time.

So if we can create that multi-polar situation, that'd be good, particularly as we balance against China. Now, will we be able to align ourselves through the quad more closely with India? That's really going to I think be India's call and not ours to make.
Eric Brown:

Yeah, I was intrigued. It was just recently brought to my attention your piece in the National Interest from 2021 about what you just described as actualizing a multipolar world. I was very intrigued by the argument.

I’m sympathetic to it. I think that it’s one way of thinking about how to enhance U.S. national security and our ability to pursue a diversity of interest internationally. I was curious if you could elaborate a bit more on your vision and what kind of leadership we should hope to see at the presidential level here in the United States to be able to realize such a concert in the 21st century.

Rep. Mike Green:

Yes. As I study history, particularly since the piece of West failure really established our concept of sovereignty of states. That following a major war, in that case, it was the 30 years war, but you can go the seven years, you can go Napoleonic wars, the war of Spanish Succession.

There is this cycle in international politics. And following a major conflict where the parties are exhausted, states tend to treat each other much more equally. So I call this the polarity cycle. And so right after that exhaustion phase, there are treaties and agreements where it’s a vastly multi-polar situation.

Over time, the balance of power kicks in. And because some economies can't keep up, nations begin to align with one another for their own protection. And as those alliances narrow the polls in the field, you rapidly approach, or not rapidly, but over time approach a bipolar situation.

And when there’s been bipolarity, very soon after that the major war starts again. And then you wind up in the exhaustion phase and the cycle repeats itself. I call that the polarity cycle. What we want to try to do is blunt the formation of a bipolar world.

Russia, Iran, and China want to form an axis and that would be very detrimental to the world because then the West aligns and we’re in a bipolar situation. And if history is correct, that means a major war. So I want to stick us in that multipolar phase as long as we can.

That means India, Japan, and China would be a piece of that. Russia would be a piece of that. And what I proposed in the article was something akin to the Shanghai Communiqué, where we don't necessarily say...

The great thing about the Shanghai Communiqué is it said, "This is what we can agree on. This is what we're not going to agree on." At least in the negotiations. Maybe the actual Communiqué didn't say that.

But they drew the lines out, "This is where we agree. This is where we disagree. And we'll postpone what we disagree and we'll cooperate where we agree. And I think that's what we have to do with China. And we can do that better through a multipolar, to use Montero's international structure verbiage.
Ken Weinstein:
I’d like to ask you, on that score. There’s a sense that particularly public opinion which tends to drive American foreign policy tends to be perhaps moralistic or at least really focused on the question of human rights, really focused on questions of national sovereignty that our public opinion isn’t engaged on foreign policy until you hit a crisis. And we obviously hit one with China with regard to the China 2025 plan with regard to Xi Jinping’s hegemonic vision cracking down on the Uyghurs, cracking on Tibet, cracking down obviously on Hong Kong. And then you see large numbers as you cited before, the 80% who view China as an enemy now. Similarly, with regard to Russia where public opinion lays low, but then Vladimir Putin goes into Ukraine. We’re seeing quasi unanimity on the need for action, the need to arm the Ukrainians, if not further.

And I'm just wondering, it's a challenge to balance American foreign policy in a multipolar world where you have to take [inaudible 00:28:15] decisions, particularly given the fundamental principles, the Declaration of Independence, and our basic sort of views on human rights, how do you balance those and how do you get the American public to think, I guess, more subtly as it were about such issues, if you can?

Rep. Mike Green:
Well, you hit on the crisis of democracy, right? I mean, we want our public opinion empowering our decisions. That's the basic tenants of a democracy. And in a world where information can sometimes be shaped by your enemy, that becomes an incredibly difficult thing to do. So we have to just message. We have to point out where Russia and China are specifically using disinformation campaigns and just do our best to educate our populous. In town hall meetings, I get this question a lot and so my job is to just sometimes take the risk as a politician and to go against the disinformation that's out there and sometimes accepted by constituents and say, look, no, this is what's really going on. And that takes a risk from the politician. But what you're hitting at is the challenge and its only worsened the disinformation by our enemies.

Eric Brown:
As an elected politician, how do you gauge the general sense of your constituents when it comes to American leadership, when it comes to the China challenge, the many faceted China challenge, and how do you gauge how your constituents are looking at the general world around us and making decision about what matters most to U.S. national security?

Rep. Mike Green:
Well, it's just like we gauge on the economy and on everything else. We have multiple ways of doing that from the emails and calls we get, to surveys we do, to the town hall meetings we have where we take lots of notes about comments and the squeaky wheel seems to get the most grease in politics, as well as in business and auto mechanics. But we listen to what people are saying. We assess through surveys. That's how we gain the inside of what the constituents want. I happen to be in a conservative district. Right now, I'm in a very conservative district. I won 70/30. So it's easier in a district like that on this issue. If I were in, say Massachusetts or California and places where other things are the priority, then it's much more difficult. I have the U.S. military's third largest installation in my district. My district
is filled with retirees from the military and their awareness of national security demands is much higher than, say Downtown Nashville, which interestingly enough, I will pick up in my next redistricting.

So the challenge will be a little greater for me when I get into my new district, but I mean, we just use the same tools we use for everything else to get info.

Ken Weinstein:

Let me ask you, from your former career as a physician, the role of the leader who's focused on international affairs, I mean, I would assume there are some parallels between sort of diagnosing a situation or diagnosing a patient and then figuring out how to communicate what can often be not pleasant news to get them on board. I mean, do you think about parallels between your past career at all or are there things you learned from medicine that make you a better member of Congress? I don't mean in the scientific realm at all, but I mean in these other realms.

Rep. Mike Green:

I think the thought process is that physicians have to determine the problem and then the treatment algorithm to address the problem are very helpful in this business. You want to gather all the information that you can to make a decision as quickly as you can. I'm an emergency medicine physician. So we are a little less detailed because we don't have enough time to make those decisions. I'm probably more prone personality-wise to go with 80% of the information, whereas the internal medicine physician needs 125%. But that algorithm is still there and yes, I apply that in all of life, whether it's parenting or being a good husband or purchasing a car, and I do that with the decisions I make in Congress.

Ken Weinstein:

As an emergency room physician, obviously you've got to take decisions right then and there, which is obviously not the way that the U.S. government operates in any way, shape or form. So it's got to be somewhat frustrating.

Rep. Mike Green:

It's very frustrating for me at times because remember, I was a commander in the army, both as an infantry officer beforehand and then in the army as a physician and in combat, making pretty quick decisions with patients and with the delivery of care across the spectrum of the battle for. Then I started a healthcare company, was a CEO of that. So I've lived more as an executive in my life than I have as a legislator. And the difference is stark, particularly as it relates to making decisions on a vision you've cast. So I've had to learn a little more about creating consensus as opposed to, hey, we need to do this and let's move the ship forward. But it's been good for me. It's developed to me as a leader and I feel like I've done a fairly good job. When I was in the state senate, made some really big changes. Tennessee passed. It took me four years to get it done, but we repealed an income tax and only twice in the nation's history has a state done that.

I led that fight in this Congress. I want to walk away saying the Nearshoring Act was a contribution I've made and that's required different skill set than when you're an XO or a CO.
Eric Brown:
Yeah. Well, Representative Green, thank you very much for being with us this morning. This has been a rich conversation and we're very grateful to be speaking with you and hope to have you back at some point soon.

Rep. Mike Green:
Say when, I'll be back.

Eric Brown:
Appreciate it.

Rep. Mike Green:
Thanks. Thanks for having me.

Eric Brown:
Thank you.