



# WTH should Congress do about China? Rep. McCaul on the China task force and US policy toward Beijing

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Danielle Pletka: Hi, I'm Danielle Pletka.

Marc Thiessen: I'm Marc Thiessen.

Danielle Pletka: Welcome to our podcast, What the Hell Is Going On? Marc, you know what's coming, what the hell is going on?

Marc Thiessen: Well, we're trying to find out what the hell is Congress going to do about China? The reality is there's more and more evidence emerging every day of China's complicity in the spread of the coronavirus through lies and deception and all the rest that we've enumerated on this podcast and episodes before. We've got the issues of the fact that so many of our supply chains have moved to China for things that we now all of a sudden, once the pandemic hit we suddenly realized we needed and can no longer produce. We've got Chinese theft of intellectual property. We've got Chinese infiltration of, and control of the World Health Organization, which also had an impact on the spread of this pandemic because the WHO was subservient to China and didn't do its job in warning the world about the coming crisis.

Marc Thiessen: We have China, which is oppressing a million Uighurs, that is cracking down on the democracy movement in Hong Kong, that is threatening Taiwan. This is a whole panoply of issues related to China and then you have the added factor that the American people have woken up to the Chinese threat because of the coronavirus. So all of these things together are a real opportunity for Washington to really rethink and do something different in confronting this danger that's coming from the Chinese Communist Party.

Danielle Pletka: Yeah. I mean, I completely agree with you. And I think we have talked about this a lot and established that this is a unique alignment of the stars. The problem is that in the last week we have seen the issue become hugely politicized already. I told you I got some email from the GOP, with the subject line "Beijing Biden." I didn't even open it, but I know that Biden is sending out emails saying, "Donald Trump, stooge of Beijing." This is so antithetical to the interests of the American people. This is actually a bipartisan issue. It really is. This is not Kavanaugh and Tara Reade. This is the health and welfare of the world, this is our supply chains as you rightly say, this is our economic security, this is our national security. There is nothing GOP or Democratic about this challenge. And to see the political leading lights, if I may call them that, of the day already politicizing this does not bode well for doing anything effective.

- Marc Thiessen: So here's the silver lining in that dark cloud you just described.
- Danielle Pletka: You always see a silver lining. Yes.
- Marc Thiessen: I do, which is that both of them are fighting over who's tougher on China, which is not the situation we had even a few months ago. That Biden a while ago was talking about, "Oh, China, they can't compete with us. They're no big deal," before the pandemic hit. And now all of a sudden Biden is trying to out-tough Trump on China. We're not going to get into the whole debate over who's right or wrong on China right now, but I think it's actually a positive thing that that has become politically the place you want to be when it comes to China.
- Danielle Pletka: Yeah, I mean, look, you're right. That is a silver lining. On the other hand, when stuff needs to get done, what you don't want to see is what we're about to talk about, which is that there's bipartisan discussion of a China taskforce, it's pretty prescient, it predates the coronavirus. House Democrats and House Republicans are talking about going ahead and creating a group to talk about how they together can face up to China. Coronavirus comes along and all of a sudden, the Democrats send the GOP leadership a note, "Hey, thanks for the invite guys. No thanks. I'm rearranging my sock drawer that night." That is unnecessary. And I'm sure that we're going to see plenty of immature behavior on the GOP side as well, but in this instance, that was a big mistake I think.
- Marc Thiessen: I agree with you it's a big mistake, but there'll be a lot of sock rearranging between now and November. And at some point there's going to be an election. I'm shocked that there's politics going on in an election year. Yes, absolutely I agree with you. A lot of good things don't get done in election years because everybody's seeking political advantage. Then the American people will vote. They may vote by mail. They may vote in person. They may vote somewhere in between, but they're going to vote, they're going to elect a president. It's either going to be Trump or Biden, and then we're going to have to deal with the problem. So the consensus of the American people that China is a threat and needs to be dealt with is not going to disappear between now and November I hope, and I expect. And so once the election is over, I think it bodes well for us doing something big when it comes to China.
- Danielle Pletka: Well, we have the right person to talk about this with today. We're lucky enough to be joined by Congressman Michael McCaul. He's the ranking member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, and he is the chairman of this new China task force. There are a lot of people, even friends of this podcast, we could say, who are members of the task force. And it's a great group of people. It's very timely. Congressman McCaul represents the district that stretches all the way from Austin to Houston. He is the former Chairman of the House Committee on Homeland Security. He's a former federal prosecutor. He's really a good choice for the Republicans in the House for the China task force. And we're going to chat with him now.
- Marc Thiessen: Congressman McCaul, welcome to the podcast.
- Rep. McCaul: Hey, thanks for having me, Marc.

- Marc Thiessen: You've been investigating this coronavirus and the origins of it with both the Chinese Communist Party and the World Health Organization. You've also got a history of investigating communist infiltration, going back to the 1990s. Tell us about that.
- Rep. McCaul: Yeah. In the late 1990s I was a little bit younger, but I was a federal prosecutor at Justice in the Public Integrity Section. I was assigned to a campaign finance task force back in the day to determine if the Chinese Communist Party had somehow influenced the presidential election by putting money into the Clinton campaign. My case was the Johnny Chung case, and we were able to establish through his cooperation that he met at the highest levels with the director of Chinese intelligence and Liu Chaoying from China Aerospace, very interested in the aerospace satellite technology transfer that the Clinton administration had come around to. They had diverted funds into a Chinese Hong Kong bank account, and then that was eventually put into the presidential election. So not the first time a presidential election has tried to be influenced by a foreign power. And also, that was my first introduction to Chinese Communist Party espionage.
- Danielle Pletka: Well little did you know that a mere quarter of a century later you would be chairing the China task force in the House of Representatives, looking at something different, but at its heart all too similar, the malign behavior of the Chinese government. Tell us a little bit about the China task force.
- Rep. McCaul: Well, it's comprised of 11 different committee jurisdictions. We have great members from these 11 committees with great expertise, whether it be... We'll be looking at the origins of COVID-19 out of Wuhan, to the cover-up by the Chinese Communist Party, to the role of the World Health Organization and its failure to alert the world of the global pandemic in a timely basis. But we'll also be looking at supply chain that's coming out of China. I think a lot of people woke up, American people woke up to this situation because of COVID-19 and they want to see our foreign policy change with respect to the Chinese Communist Party. I think they now realize that they're more of a threat, that I've known for quite some time, but they realize that they're more of a threat than they thought.
- Marc Thiessen: This is an opportunity for bipartisanship. First, the Democrats were supposed to be a part of this and then they pulled out, what happened there?
- Rep. McCaul: Yeah. I've been in discussions with leader McCarthy. He had talked with Steny Hoyer, the majority leader, I thought things were on the right track. I think it would have looked very prescient if we announced this bipartisan, and said that we'd been looking at doing this for a year. We had really extended an invitation to work in a bipartisan way. To your point, the American people don't see this as Republican-Democrats, it's an American issue and national security, and I think that's what they want. And so both Kevin McCarthy and myself were a little surprised when they gave the response that they were no longer interested in working together on a China task force. And that's very disappointing. I think the American people deserve better than that.
- Danielle Pletka: I agree. I think it is disappointing, especially because Marc and I have both noted there's just so much common ground. The concerns about supply chain, the concerns about Chinese infiltration of the World Health Organization, the concerns about the cover-ups, all of those things are not Republican or Democratic concerns. Those are American concerns. And so it's a shame. I hope behind the scenes that the Democrats will be working with you, because it's important that you find out as

much as possible about what's behind this. Talk to us a little bit about what you... You've talked about what you hope to look into. Talk to us a little bit about whether that's going to form the underpinning of legislation going forward. There have already been just, I don't want to say dozens, but a lot of bills introduced to change the nature of our relationship with the People's Republic of China.

- Rep. McCaul: Yeah. So we are looking at both a report that we hope will be a very comprehensive, broad picture sweeping view of the threat posed by the Chinese Communist Party globally, but also at legislative proposals and recommendations, which I think is very important. And I will say Danielle, that a lot of this work has been done by the respective committees of jurisdiction. It's just pulling this together, putting a report that we think is going to be very authoritative. Hopefully one of those reports that comes out of Congress that will not be put on a shelf, but really given a lot of attention, because I do think that this is a defining issue for this generation. My father in his time that he fought in World War II, it was Nazi Germany. We had the Cold War, we had the events of 9/11 radical Islam, and now we have the Chinese Communist Party. I think this is the issue of this generation.
- Marc Thiessen: So one of your tasks and one of the things you've been doing is looking into the Chinese Communist Party's culpability in the spread of this virus. What have you found so far? Lay out the case for China's responsibility for the global pandemic?
- Rep. McCaul: Well, I call it the worst cover-up in human history because their cover-up resulted in absolute devastation, both loss of life and economic devastation all over the world. And the sad thing is I think it could have been stopped had they been more transparent and not silenced people who were telling the truth, really beginning with the doctors who were reporting, "Hey, this is a SARS-like virus. It's different, it's human to human." And the response by the PRC was not to listen to them, but rather to crack down on them, get them to retract their statements, and then going into the laboratories who were starting to report this, going into those laboratories and telling them not to report this and essentially to destroy their lab samples.
- Rep. McCaul: That was when they began to control the investigation itself. It all had to go through one lab that they had control over. Then you had the human-to-human transmission lie that the CCP was reporting to the WHO, "This is not human to human." That was a huge factor because you have Taiwan warning the WHO. You have the WHO's own experts in Wuhan warning them that this was in fact human-to-human. And then unfortunately, Tedros, basically his leadership decides not to declare a public health emergency of international concern. That's on January 23rd. All this happened in December up to January 23rd, was all pointing towards a different SARS-like virus, which under the guidelines passed by WHO after SARS, requires a 24 hour notification to the WHO. So they were already in violation throughout this time.
- Rep. McCaul: But it was on that day when Tedros went along with President Xi, not declaring it a global pandemic, it was a critical point where... Marc, it was an epidemic, but that was the point it could have been stopped at that point. And then this Lunar Festival takes place, millions people, 5 million traveling out of Wuhan, millions internationally. That is a point when it went from an epidemic locally to a global pandemic.
- Danielle Pletka: Talking about Tedros, what do you think that the right step for the United States to take vis-a-vis the World Health Organization is? We've had all of these spats and he's now decided that he wants to take on President Trump and argue his case, but we

are the largest funder of the World Health Organization. What do you think the right way for us to deal with them is?

- Rep. McCaul: I think the WHO has never been more relevant than today. I would like to see a stronger World Health Organization. But Tedros failed at the number one mission of the WHO and that's to alert the world of a pandemic. He absolutely failed in that mission, and I would argue took the side of President Xi every step of the way as he was covering up this virus of COVID-19. So in my view, it needs to be reformed. And I don't see how the WHO can do its mission adequately, it obviously failed in it, with someone who's an instrument or an arm in the Chinese Communist Party at the helm. This brings up a broader picture, is that the Chinese Communist Party has been very deceptively successful in taking over top leadership positions within the United Nations.
- Rep. McCaul: And then they got their top guy into the WHO, and we saw a pro-PRC policy coming out of that, and I think one that has really caused so much devastation. We are the largest funder of the WHO, and I think asking for reforms, if you're investing in something, you want reforms when they fail to do a job. If Tedros was in a private corporation or private company as a CEO and utterly failed at his number one mission, nobody in the private sector would keep them on as a CEO.
- Danielle Pletka: That's the beauty of the international bureaucratic system, is that effectiveness is not necessarily your number one qualification. I want to just ask you a quick follow up on that though, it's one of my hobby horses. Do you think eventually we will see Congress supporting legislation that actually does something about the Tedroses of this world? You know, the Chinese are in charge of Interpol, the Chinese are through their proxy in charge of the World Health Organization. They tried to take over the World Intellectual Property Organization. The United States in each of these cases is the largest funder. Shouldn't Congress be requiring that whenever an organization is led by somebody who is inimical to the actual fundamental mission of that organization, that we just shouldn't pay up?
- Rep. McCaul: Well, that's what we... I sent a letter to the President and Secretary Pompeo and all the members of my committee who are Republican conditioning support on the resignation of Tedros. I really think you cannot reform it with him at the top. And I think you're right, we are developing legislation right now to deal with reforms at the United Nations and the WHO, considering the fact we're the number one funder. And I think... I've talk to ambassadors, our EU and NATO allied partners that I think they're waking up to this phenomenon as well. And I think we have put pressure on the international community to stop this sort of deceptive takeover of our United Nations and bodies of that significance. And so they think very long term and we don't, and they have systematically been setting this up since the time I prosecuted Johnny Chung, and look where they are today, they are the number one... When I talked to Secretary Pompeo they are long term the biggest threat to the national security of the United States.
- Marc Thiessen: We're now in a situation where hundreds of millions of Americans are on lockdown. More than 30 million people have filed for unemployment claims. Our economy is in levels of misery unseen since the Great Depression, and it all started, as you point out, with China's failure to contain that epidemic and allowing it to become a pandemic. How do we hold China accountable for that?

- Rep. McCaul: And that's something we'll be looking at now with our investigation, but then legislative responses. I know the President's talked about tariffs, which he's fairly good at doing. He's really the first president in my lifetime to really stand up to the Chinese Communist Party. We are looking at options like sanctions that we'll be working on out of the Foreign Affairs Committee coming out of the task force, particularly sanctions against the officials that were involved in the cover-up itself. But we have to look at really the big picture here, Marc, that they're in our university systems, they are stealing intellectual property daily from our high-tech companies. We've got to get off this supply chain of reliance on China and become more self-reliant and not so vulnerable. Most Americans woke up after COVID-19 hit thinking, "I had no idea that we were so reliant on China for personal protective equipment or pharmaceuticals."
- Rep. McCaul: Now with the technology, with the semiconductor industry, we're going to have to bring manufacturing jobs out of China, into more favorable democracies in Asia, and also here in the United States, bring more of that manufacturer... I've got Apple and Samsung in my district, and it's companies like that that could ramp up their manufacturing here in the United States. I had... MD Anderson at UT, we had a scientist indicted for espionage for stealing medical intellectual property. They are in our university systems and they're pretty much everywhere. And I think we have to take another look and determine how can we for the long-term benefit of the American people, poise ourselves with a better foreign policy to deal with it. I think for years, we thought they could play in the sandbox, we thought they could be friends, we could get them to towards being a democracy. And I think President Xi, he has taught us that that is not the course they have chosen.
- Marc Thiessen: Some of your colleagues have introduced legislation to strip China of sovereign immunity and allow Americans to sue them for damages. Where do you stand on that, and do you think that's going to happen?
- Rep. McCaul: Well, I think that's going to be part of our recommendations. I know we did that after 9/11, waive sovereign immunity, and so the victims could sue the Kingdom. And I think that's going to be one of those options we're looking at because people, to your point in high percentages, they realize what happened, but how can they possibly pay for all the damage that they've done? Not until the international community is stepping up to them can that really happen.
- Danielle Pletka: You teed me up perfectly. You are the ranking member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. It's your job to think about US relations with other countries. Obviously, we all have something important in common right now, which is that we have all been locked down, except for our friends in Sweden, we've all been locked down because of decisions that were made in Beijing. And when we start to reconstruct our supply chains, when we start to look at changing how international organizations do business, one of the ways we're going to do that best is if we can do it with our friends, with the Australians, with the Brits and with others. How do you see the prospects of cooperation on these issues with other countries? And especially as you think about how we really hit a brick wall when we tried to get cooperation on issues like Huawei in the past.
- Rep. McCaul: Well, and I don't think they realized Huawei 5G, that's one of the biggest competitions on the face of the planet and we're losing in my judgment, and we need to be more competitive. I think when I talked to the Australian ambassador, he gets that. We were questioning why the UK decided to go on with Huawei to a

limited extent. Hopefully they'll revisit that issue. But I've been in conversations with the Japanese ambassador or the Australian or European countries, there is an appetite for a couple of things. One, to have an international team of scientists allowed access into how this happened in the first place.

Rep. McCaul: I mean, here is a WHO member, that being the CCP, not allowing the international community in to figure out how this happened, how we can stop it from ever happening again. That's utter defiance against the global community. So I think the answer to your point is to bring in our allies, both NATO and the Five Eyes to put that pressure on China. Meanwhile, in Japan, they're already funding billions to pull their supply chain out of China and put it elsewhere. And I think you're going to see a big movement by the international community towards that goal. But then you're going to see a lot of threats coming out of Beijing as well.

Marc Thiessen: Exit question for me, we just had Joshua Wong on the podcast who's one of the leader's of the pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong. And he was describing for us how China is using the coronavirus to crack down on the democracy movement because they arrested all these pro-democracy leaders, including Martin Lee and no one could come out and protest in the streets because they're all forced to be locked down. He thinks that the protests are going to start up in June again soon. What is Congress doing to back the pro-democracy movement in China, and how does that play into our larger China's strategy?

Rep. McCaul: Right. They have a horrible record on human rights, and that's something we want to come out in the report as well. And they're also the number one offender of the environment, by the way, and so I don't understand some coming to the CCP's defense. But they persecuted the Uighurs and put them in what's called concentration camps by our Defense Department. Then they pulled them out to work in the factories when COVID-19 was hitting. They persecuted the Tibetans and the Dalai Lama and Christians. We stood up very strongly in a bipartisan way, I should say, for both Hong Kong and Taiwan to recognize their right to determine their own fate and to live in liberty and freedom from the oppressive communist government in China. And that's been a very bipartisan issue.

Rep. McCaul: And I think we need to continue that struggle when it comes to human rights, because at the end of the day, Marc, you've framed it perfectly, when you look at all of our foreign adversary nations, none of them are democratic. They are dictatorships. They do not guarantee freedoms and individual liberties. They oppress them. And that would be Russia, China, Iran, North Korea, Assad, go to Maduro down in Venezuela. You have a socialist dictator. Everywhere you see that is where human rights are violated. So this is a bigger stage here of freedom and democracy versus dictatorship and totalitarianism. So I think that's how we need to frame the issue because that is the dynamic and that is the geopolitical competition of our day. I do think at the end of the day, our values win.

Danielle Pletka: Well, that's music to our ears, because that's exactly how we feel about the confrontation between the forces of freedom and the forces of oppression, something worth fighting for for everybody. Sir, thank you so much for taking the time to chat with us. This has really been a pleasure.

Rep. McCaul: Thanks Danielle. Thanks Marc.

- Marc Thiessen: So Dany, I think he hit the nail on the head at the end, that this is about democracy versus dictatorship, it's about freedom versus tyranny. That all the countries around the world that pose a threat to us have one thing in common, that they oppress their people, they lie to their people, they pose a threat to their own people's public health, their physical health, their liberty. And we are seeing now with the spread of this coronavirus, a little bit of an awakening to the fact that what happens in Wuhan-
- Marc Thiessen: Doesn't stay in Wuhan. Wuhan is not Las Vegas. What happens in Wuhan doesn't stay in Wuhan. Exactly.
- Danielle Pletka: No, that's absolutely true. Look, I'm always really happy to hear any influential American politician talk about the battle between freedom and authoritarianism, because that's our fight here at AEI. It really is. There are many, many things wrong with democratic capitalism, but there are many, many, many worse things with socialism, communism, dictatorship. And I think that's really-
- Marc Thiessen: Churchill said democracy is the worst system, except for all the rest.
- Danielle Pletka: That's exactly right. Churchill had all of these wonderful aphorisms, which say it better than you or I can, but that at the end of the day is the confrontation that we're having because we are going to find as we stand with the Australians, the Japanese, the Brits and the Germans and others, just as Congressman McCaul laid out, we are going to find that it is the Russians, the Iranians, the North Koreans, the Venezuelans, the bad guys of this world who are standing with China. And we need those guys. We need our allies. Whenever I hear criticism of our allies, I think it undercuts the fact that yeah, sometimes they're the worst. But we need them to stand with us because we need to refashion a world that excludes those bad guys, that excludes them from our supply chains, that excludes them from our reindeer games. And that's the right way for Congress to think about it because Congress can really play a determining role in how that new world looks.
- Marc Thiessen: Leave it to Dany to bring Santa into NATO. Look, I mean you're absolutely right. We need our allies, but what we really need is an appreciation of the threat that China poses, which is an outsized threat to all those other countries. Iran is important, they are a malign force in the Middle East, they can't be allowed to get a nuclear weapon, but guess what? Beijing has nuclear weapons. Beijing is building islands in the South China Sea as military bases. Beijing is threatening Taiwan. Beijing is doing all sorts of nefarious activities. They want to push us out of the Pacific, and they want to dominate that region and oppress their people.
- Marc Thiessen: And their behavior... we've always had the isolationist temptation in America. We've had it from the earliest days of the Republic, Americans are reluctant internationalists, as well we should be. We don't want to go around the world slaying monsters, but we do need to recognize there are monsters in the world and they don't always stay in their cages. And we have discovered a renewed understanding that China's treatment of its own people affects us here at home. Because what they were doing when they lied about that virus is they were abusing their people. They were not responding to a public health threat in Wuhan that was killing thousands and thousands of Chinese and lying to them and their treatment of those people, their propensity for lying has now impacted every single American and put our country into the worst economic straits since the Great Depression.



- Danielle Pletka: I don't know why you're so hostile to slaying monsters, Marc. I personally am a big defender of America slaying monsters, and it sounded to me like Representative McCaul was with us. You're not going to have any trouble persuading me that the Chinese are bad guys. But I do think that... And I understand that we need to be reluctant about this. On the other hand, we do need to have a vision of what it is that we need to accomplish. Because if we let this die by a thousand cuts and mind you, the Chinese will work hard to intimidate our allies from standing with us. They will work hard to ensure that we don't get the right people in at the United Nations, and they are going to work hard to interfere in our election this year to ensure that a candidate more congenial to them, not just in the White House, but in Congressional races-
- Marc Thiessen: You mean Beijing Biden?
- Danielle Pletka: Right. That guy. They are going to work hard and we need to be on our top game. I worry that we are not always on our game, and part of that is the fight about whether we need to be out there slaying monsters or not. My argument is, yeah, we-
- Marc Thiessen: So you want to go slay every monster?
- Danielle Pletka: Not every monster. I want to be selective about it, but I want us to know who all the monsters are for sure.
- Marc Thiessen: I agree with you on that. Look, the Americans are, as I said, reluctant internationalists, but they're internationalists. We don't want to spill American blood in places where our national security interests don't lie. But we have a vital national security interest in confronting the threat of the Communist China poses.
- Danielle Pletka: Amen to that. Okay. I'm going to go home with Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer, and have an evening of it. Thanks for being here folks with us. Don't forget to send your suggestions, compliments only, insults to Marc. That's [marcthiessen@aei.org](mailto:marcthiessen@aei.org).
- Marc Thiessen: That's not the right email address, so good.
- Danielle Pletka: And we'll see you soon.
- Marc Thiessen: Bye.