SENTRY

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Visiting PRC Delegations Seek to Influence US State and Local Governments

Overview

Strider's product Sentry provides actionable intelligence to state and local government officials that helps inform their decisions as they consider requests to host visiting PRC delegations or to visit China themselves. Utilizing Strider's extensive and growing data collection, Sentry offers rapid fidelity on PRC interlocutors' government affiliations, funding, and motivations.

The PRC Looks To Spread Its Influence

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is seeking to use visiting delegations to influence US state and local governments and advance the party's interests. While the stated motives for these meetings are benign, visitors from the PRC can have hidden agendas, including promoting CCP propaganda and collecting information.

Examples:

- The Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC) organizes the China-US Governors Forum, the China-US Sub-National Legislators Cooperation Forum, and sister-city relationships. CPAFFC claims to be an NGO, but it is overseen by the PRC government and is staffed by CCP officials, according to the Foundation for Defense of Democracies.[i] According to the US State Department, CPAFFC has "sought to directly and malignly influence" state and local leaders to promote PRC goals.[ii]

- The China Association for International Friendly Contact (CAIFC) claims to be "devoted to fostering international and regional people-to-people friendly exchanges."[iii] However, CAIFC collects intelligence and promotes propaganda on behalf of the PLA, according to the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission.[ivv]

US Government Officials Face Reputational Risk

State and local officials who host visiting PRC delegations or who accept invitations to travel to China face increased reputational risks as well as the risk of being targeted by PRC intelligence services. In January 2022, the FBI warned that the PRC government seeks to cultivate relationships with state and local officials to advocate on behalf of Beijing's agenda."[vi]

Examples:

- In 2023, the CPAFFC visited with state and local leaders throughout the US to promote cultural exchanges and development of sister-city relationships.[vii] In 2006, a sister-city relationship established between Shanghai and a California city strained relations with Taiwanese-Americans because the agreement included a pledge to recognize the PRC as the legitimate government of Taiwan.[viii]

- From 2011 to 2015, an individual acting at the direction of a PRC intelligence service established professional and romantic connections with local politicians in California and in the Midwest to identify and influence individuals with national political aspirations early on in their careers.[ix]

Not all channels of cooperation and dialogue with the PRC are fronts for CCP-sponsored influence campaigns. But in this new era of global strategic competition, state and local leaders must be clear-eyed about risks while at the same time open to engagements that further their constituents' interests.

Strider Can Facilitate Confident Decision-Making

Government officials equipped with the right information and context can safely navigate potential risks and reputational damage. Strider's product Sentry enables government agencies to screen visitors, researchers, and other collaborators for verifiable connections to restricted or high-risk entities. Utilizing Strider's exclusive and growing data collection, Sentry employs advanced AI processing tools to uncover accurate and actionable insights.