

**Chairman Gallagher Opening Remarks**  
*Remarks on Pro-Freedom Chinese Dissidents in Protest of Xi Jinping's Visit*  
*12.11.23*  
*as prepared for delivery*

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I'm honored to join three storied voices of the Chinese democracy movement.

To be honest, I feel out of place. It's easy to say critical things about the Chinese Communist Party when you're a politician in America. It's easy to tell yourself that you're standing up for truth.

But, as the famous Soviet writer and dissident Alexander Solzhenitsyn said, "To stand up for truth is nothing. For truth, you must sit in jail."

Wei Jingsheng, Wang Dan, and Wang Juntao share one thing in common. They've all gone to jail for a simple truth - that the Chinese people want and deserve freedom.

Today, the CCP's People's Liberation Army (PLA) is amassing the largest conventional stockpile of rockets and missiles the world has ever seen. Their navy is now the largest in the world, purpose-built for a cross-strait operation to invade or blockade Taiwan. Many China-watchers around Washington D.C. believe that the Taiwan Strait could be the most important battlefield of the 21st century.

But that's not what the CCP thinks. In Xi Jinping's view, the war has already started on the most important battlefield: your mind.

The CCP calls it cognitive domain operations or psychological warfare.

As Xi Jinping himself has said in a speech on military political work, "The crumbling of a regime always starts in the realm of ideas. . . changing the way people think is a long-term process. Once the front lines of human thought have been broken through, other defensive lines also become hard to defend."

Cognitive warfare is not something we tend to think about here in the West. Sure, we have ideas like soft power, but they're not a national strategy.

We don't really do propaganda here. After all, there's nowhere in the world where you can find a more scathing critique of the United States and its government than in the New York Times or on Fox News on any given Wednesday.

We don't have an equivalent to the United Front Work Department, China's global, industrial-scale influence operation. We don't have colossal state media apparatuses. On the battlefield of people's minds we don't have a standing military at all.

How do we fight back on the battlefield of people's minds while staying true to our values? I believe Chinese netizens and dissidents like Wei Jingsheng have part of the answer: we're going to have to fight like insurgents.

Reading Wei's book *The Courage to Stand Alone* and his ordeals in Chinese prisons is, unsurprisingly, heart wrenching. But what stood out to me was his attempt to provoke laughter as much as sympathy. For years, Wei taunted Deng Xiaoping through the mail, like a fly buzzing around his room that wouldn't let him sleep. He mocked Deng's reformist pretensions, exposing Deng as just a goon with tanks long before Tiananmen Square proved him right.

In his first letter after the massacre, Wei writes "Dear Deng Xiaoping, so now that you've successfully carried out a military coup to deal with a group of unarmed and politically inexperienced students, how do you feel?"

In its way, it's a brilliant response. It's not moralizing. It's not lecturing. The mock concern for Deng's feelings is funny – implicit is that even after giving orders to butcher thousands of protestors, CCP leaders still ate dinner, bathed, clipped their toenails, felt some particular way — and the gallows humor hammers home the inhuman absurdity of the CCP's repression better than an essay could.

Wei's style of dissent illuminates how we fight back against a self-referential, totalitarian ideology. You can't reason. You can't betray your values to create a self-referential ideology of your own. You need to use the cognitive warfare insurgent's most powerful weapon of all: humor.

I want to try to use Wei's inspiration to look at this upcoming week's APEC conference. Reportedly for the low, low price of just \$40,000, American business leaders will have the chance to dine with Xi Jinping, courtesy of the U.S.-China Business Council and National Committee on US-China Relations.

How does that dinner conversation go? "Wow this filet mignon is a little dry...how's your extrajudicial internment of over a million Uyghur Muslims going? This sauvignon blanc is really nice...congrats on completely crushing civil society in Hong Kong."

The point is these corporate executives are not even worthy of our scorn, only our mockery.

That's part of why we're here in San Francisco. To put another frame on this whole sad event and show the world that accommodating a dictator like Xi is not just morally wrong, strategically stupid, it's also laughable.

If you want to know what the CCP is afraid of, look at what they censor. Often it is humor.

Chinese netizens are hilarious and ingenious, always creating new ways to evade the internet police and refer to banned events. For instance ,they've used "8 squared" to refer to the Tiananmen square massacre -  $8 \text{ squared} = 64$ ,  $6.4 = \text{June 4th}$ , the date of the massacre. They've used the number 11 to refer to Xi, referencing the fact that the romanized spelling of his name equates to the roman numeral XI...11.

This spring, Chinese authorities fined and essentially canceled a comedian in Beijing for simply using the phrase "fine style of work, capable of winning battles," which is Xi Jinping's description of qualities the PLA should strive for, as a punchline to one of his jokes about a dog.

While the CCP is often ham-fisted in their self-aggrandizing propaganda, they are ruthlessly efficient at explicit censorship and chilling the discourse to promote self-censorship.

If Mao didn't invent cancel culture, he certainly brought it to its apotheosis during the Cultural Revolution and the CCP has been its greatest practitioner since.

By holding out the prospect of access to the Chinese market, the CCP forces multinational corporations like those gathered here in San Francisco to self-censor.

Few corporate executives risk mentioning Tibet or the ongoing genocide in Xinjiang. With rare exception, Hollywood refrains from any critique and famously, the NBA even apologized for a tweet from one executive that expressed support for the people of Hong Kong. I have personally had some of the top CEOs in America beg me not to ask them about the Uyghur genocide in public, and many others were only willing to meet on the condition of total secrecy out of fear of Beijing's reprisal.

Think about that. American businessmen are unwilling to even be known to have meet with representatives of their OWN government out of fear of a dictator in Beijing.

Xi Jinping has convinced capitalist executives to appease the CCP not because it treats them well, but because they fear Beijing's power.

This appeasement — the ignoring of the mistreatment of colleagues, the abuses in Tibet and Xinjiang, and the CCP's military expansion — only convinces Xi that their global propaganda campaign is working and they have convinced the world they are unstoppable.

That is why the heroism of Peng Lifa terrified the CCP. It punctured the bubble of false consensus the CCP had cultivated and plunged a dagger into the heart of party rule.

People like Peng were not supposed to exist. Instead, Peng revealed Xi's rule as a lie. The Emperor not only had no clothes but hundreds of millions of Chinese knew he was naked.

One axiom I hear repeated all the time about China is embodied in the following quote from an Asian studies professor: “the CCP’s legitimacy since 1978” rests on “an implicit bargain that offers citizens constant improvement in their material standard of living in exchange for political acquiescence.”

Under this formulation, the Chinese people are portrayed as mercenary—willing to swallow ideology if the check clears in their bank account.

But I don’t believe that’s true and I certainly don’t believe that’s how the CCP sees it. From the very beginning of the CCP and the PLA, during the upheaval of feuds and civil war, the Party perceived that its advantage was that its soldiers fought for ideology, not pay. The United Front and propaganda efforts were created to demoralize the Party’s enemies like the KMT who were seen as ideologically weak.

In Xi Jinping’s eyes, it is the WEST that is mercenary. Just look at this APEC gala dinner being thrown in his honor. Look at how effectively the CCP has executed its strategy of elite capture in our country from corporate executives, to bankers, to university presidents, to politicians and their families. Xi Jinping must look at America and see nothing but mercenaries.

But gatherings like this one today show that there are people in this country willing to speak the truth no matter how costly. There are people willing to say that a Chinese autocrat who constantly rails against meddling from “external forces”, “color revolutions”, and “western influence” yet parades around under huge portraits of Marx, Lenin, and Stalin is ridiculous, laughable.

The CCP may be preparing for a military conflict, but it is already engaged in an informational one, and it perceives Peng, Wei, and the Wangs as its opponents. It’s time to join the fight.

