

JD Vance and the PRC

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On July 15 2024, Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump named junior Ohio Senator JD Vance as his running mate at the Republican National Convention (RNC) in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. A former 'Never Trumper' turned Trump supporter¹ and dubbed by some the epitome of the 'New Right',² the 39-year-old has been serving as senator since January 2023. Despite the brevity of his political career, Senator Vance has made a number of statements reflecting a 'tough on China' position that dovetails with that of former president Trump. Some of these reflect a shift away from a view expressed in his 2016 memoir *Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis*:

We talk about the value of hard work but tell ourselves that the reason we're not working is some perceived unfairness: Obama shut down the coal mines, or all the jobs went to the Chinese. These are the lies we tell ourselves to solve the cognitive dissonance – the broken connection between the world we see and the values we preach.

This UTS:ACRI Brief outlines the Republican vice presidential nominee's contributions to discourse on the People's Republic of China (PRC) in descending chronological order, comparing them with Mr Trump's views on the same topics.

July 2024: The PRC labelled the 'biggest threat' facing the US

Following the announcement of his place on Trump's presidential ticket, Senator Vance in a *Fox News* interview said that the PRC was 'the biggest threat to our country and we are completely distracted from it'. He said that the war in Ukraine needed to be brought to a 'rapid close' so the US could focus on 'the real issue, which is China'.³

He also made several direct references to the PRC during his RNC speech accepting the vice-presidential nomination, accusing President Joe Biden and 'other out-of-touch politicians in Washington' of implementing policies that had flooded the US with 'cheap Chinese goods, with cheap foreign labour' as well as 'deadly Chinese fentanyl'. He stated:⁴

Together we will protect the wages of American workers and stop the Chinese Communist Party from building their middle class on the backs of American citizens.

¹ See Kathryn Diss and Lucy Sweeney, 'How JD Vance transformed himself from a Never Trumper to the Republican pick for vice-president', *ABC News*, July 17 2024 <<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-07-17/how-jd-vance-transformed-himself-from-never-trumper-to-vp-pick/104106988>>.

² James Pogue, 'Inside the New Right, where Peter Thiel is placing his biggest bets', *Vanity Fair*, April 20 2022 <<https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2022/04/inside-the-new-right-where-peter-thiel-is-placing-his-biggest-bets>>.

³ Lin Yang, 'Vice presidential nominee Vance calls China "biggest threat to our country"', *VOA*, July 16 2024 <<https://www.voanews.com/a/vice-presidential-nominee-vance-calls-china-biggest-threat-to-our-country-/7701298.html>>.

⁴ 'JD Vance speaks at RNC Night 3', *Rev*, July 18 2024 <<https://www.rev.com/blog/transcripts/jd-vance-speaks-at-rnc-night-3>>.

On June 28 2024, during a *CNN* debate with then-presumptive Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden, Mr Trump described his opponent as a ‘Manchurian candidate’, saying that the PRC was ‘killing us as a country’.⁵

In a *Bloomberg Businessweek* interview, conducted on June 25 2024 and published in full on July 16, Mr Trump said that while he ‘respect[ed] China greatly’ and while President Xi Jinping was a ‘strong guy’ that he ‘liked... a lot’, the PRC ‘has been ripping off this country for 30 years... under every president’.⁶

Asked about Senator Vance’s characterisation of the PRC, a PRC Foreign Ministry spokesperson replied, ‘We are always opposed to making China an issue in US elections’,⁷ broadly in keeping with Beijing’s tendency towards reservation during US presidential campaigns.

May 2024: Support for the application of more tariffs on PRC goods and re-shoring manufacturing to the US

In an interview with *CBS* on May 19 2024, Senator Vance said, ‘I don’t like China. I don’t like that China has stolen a lot of American jobs.’

He stated that he was in favour of the application of ‘some broad-based tariffs, especially on goods coming in from China, and not just solar panels and EV stuff. We need to protect American industries from all of the competition.’⁸ Making reference to forced labour in Xinjiang, Senator Vance said:

[T]he reason China beats us, it’s not because they have better workers, it’s because they’re willing to use slaves to make things there.

He said further:

We are pushing other nations into the arms of Chinese... because we don’t make enough stuff, because we pursue a ridiculous foreign policy very often. We have to be more self-reliant.

During his *Bloomberg Businessweek* interview, Mr Trump that he would consider tariffs of around 50 percent on all PRC imports.⁹ He had previously suggested that he could impose a ‘more than’ 60 percent tariff on all imports from the PRC if returned to the White House.¹⁰

March 2024: Introduction of legislation to restrict PRC access to US capital markets and exchanges

Senator Vance introduced legislation on March 14 2024 to restrict the PRC from accessing US capital markets and exchanges if Beijing ‘fails to comply with international laws relating to finance, trade and commerce.’ He said:¹¹

If the Chinese Communist Party [CCP] doesn’t want to play by American rules, they shouldn’t be allowed access to our financial markets.

Ohio workers and our manufacturing industry have suffered the consequences of the CCP’s illegal currency manipulation for far too long. It’s about time we hold them accountable and force them to follow the law.

As president, Mr Trump designated the PRC a currency manipulator in August 2019.¹²

⁵ CNN Staff, ‘Biden-Trump debate transcript’, *CNN*, June 28 2024 <<https://edition.cnn.com/2024/06/27/politics/read-biden-trump-debate-rush-transcript/index.html>>.

⁶ Nancy Cook, Joshua Green, Mario Parker, Brad Stone and Gregory Korte, ‘The Donald Trump interview transcript’, *Bloomberg Businessweek*, July 16 2024 <<https://www.bloomberg.com/features/2024-trump-interview-transcript/>>.

⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, ‘Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lin Jian’s regular press conference’, July 16 2024 <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/202407/t20240716_11454788.html>.

⁸ ‘Transcript: Sen. JD Vance on “Face the Nation”’, *CBS News*, May 19 2024 <<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/jd-vance-ohio-senator-face-the-nation-transcript-05-19-2024/>>.

⁹ Nancy Cook, Joshua Green, Mario Parker, Brad Stone and Gregory Korte, ‘The Donald Trump interview transcript’, *Bloomberg Businessweek*, July 16 2024 <<https://www.bloomberg.com/features/2024-trump-interview-transcript/>>.

¹⁰ Rebecca Picciotto, ‘Trump floats “more than” 60% tariffs on Chinese imports’, *CNBC*, February 4 2024 <<https://www.cnbc.com/2024/02/04/trump-floats-more-than-60percent-tariffs-on-chinese-imports.html>>.

¹¹ JD Vance, ‘Vance legislation seeks to end Chinese currency manipulation. Force compliance with financial law’, press release, March 14 2024 <<https://www.vance.senate.gov/press-releases/vance-legislation-seeks-to-end-chinese-currency-manipulation-force-compliance-with-financial-law/>>.

¹² United States Department of the Treasury, ‘Treasury designates China as a currency manipulator’, press release, August 5 2019 <<https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm751>>.

March 2024: Expression of scepticism of the rules-based international order, citing its failure to transform the PRC into a liberal democracy

A *Politico* interview published on March 15 2024 outlined Senator Vance's 'deep scepticism' of the 'rules-based international order', touting in particular its failure to deliver on the promise of transforming the PRC into a liberal democracy:¹³

During the post-war era and into the Cold War, Vance told me, 'a lot of the mythology around free trade and globalisation... was astroturfed to justify the political project' of bringing communist China into the West's orbit, even as proponents of the new system understood it would come at a cost for the West.

'In the '60s and '70s, what Kissinger and these guys would say was, "Yeah, of course, [with] globalisation, a lot of our people lose jobs, it's going to weaken our social solidarity in all these important ways, but if we make China more like us, it will be worth it in the long run,"' Vance said.

In the intervening half-century, Vance believes, the rules-based order has delivered on half of that promise — shipping jobs overseas and undermining social stability in the US — without delivering on its ultimate promise of transforming China into a liberal democracy. Along the way, it has enriched economic elites who benefit from the globalisation and financialisation of the international economy, while harming working-class people who were rooted in the older industrial economies that globalisation destroyed.

Senator Vance told *Politico* that 'If that fundamental goal has not materialised, then I think you have to rethink the entire project.'

The Trump administration's May 2020 *United States Strategic Approach to the People's Republic of China* said that since the establishment of US-PRC diplomatic relations in 1979, US PRC policy 'was largely premised on a hope that deepening engagement would spur fundamental economic and political opening in the PRC and lead to its emergence as a constructive and responsible global stakeholder... More than 40 years later, it has become evident that this approach underestimated the will of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to constrain the scope of economic and political reform in China.'

The document went on to state that 'The CCP has chosen... to exploit the free and open rules-based order and attempt to reshape the international system in its favour', and, as such, 'the Administration has adopted a competitive approach to the PRC, based on a clear-eyed assessment of the CCP's intentions and actions, a reappraisal of the United States' many strategic advantages and shortfalls, and a tolerance of greater bilateral friction.'¹⁴

January 2024/December 2023: Opposition to Nippon Steel's acquisition of US Steel, PRC influence as a factor

Senator Vance joined Republican Senators Josh Hawley and Marco Rubio, to urge Treasury Secretary and Chair of the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States Janet Yellen to block the sale of US Steel, the US' second largest steelmaker, to Japan-based Nippon Steel, citing national security concerns.^{15 16}

While Senator Vance's fundamental concern was the foreign acquisition of the company, during a hearing of the Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs on January 19 2024 he said that while 'the

¹³ Ian Ward, 'Is there something more radical than MAGA? J.D. Vance is dreaming it.', *Politico*, March 15 2024 <<https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2024/03/15/mr-maga-goes-to-washington-00147054>>.

¹⁴ The White House, *United States Strategic Approach to the People's Republic of China*, May 2020 <<https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/U.S.-Strategic-Approach-to-The-Peoples-Republic-of-China-Report-5.24v1.pdf>>.

¹⁵ Marco Rubio, 'Rubio, Vance, Hawley: Protect American steel from foreign control', press release, December 19 2023 <<https://www.rubio.senate.gov/rubio-vance-hawley-protect-american-steel-from-foreign-control/>>.

¹⁶ Senator Vance had also written an opinion piece in *The Washington Post* in September 2023 raising concerns about the potential sale of US steel, and a letter to the CEO and Chairman of US Steel in August 2023 urging the company to reject any acquisition bid from a foreign entity. See JD Vance, 'America cannot afford to auction off its industrial base', *Washington Post*, September 5 2023 <<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2023/09/05/jd-vance-america-auction-industrial-base/>>; and JD Vance, 'Senator Vance urges US Steel to reject foreign acquisition, protect domestic manufacturing', press release, August 17 2023 <<https://www.vance.senate.gov/press-releases/senator-vance-urges-u-s-steel-to-reject-foreign-acquisition-protect-domestic-manufacturing/>>.

Japanese... are an important ally', they were also 'fundamentally in the sphere of influence of China.'¹⁷ A similar view was expressed by Democratic Senators Bob Casey and John Fetterman and Rep Chris Deluzio who in a December 2023 letter to Secretary Yellen noted that 'Nippon Steel has facilities in the People's Republic of China, a foreign adversary of the US'.¹⁸

Former president Trump said on January 31 2024 that he would block the deal 'instantaneously' if he was re-elected. He described the proposed sale as 'a horrible thing'.¹⁹

December 2023: Call for PRC travel ban after respiratory illness cases

Following an increase in respiratory illness cases in the PRC, Senator Vance joined four Republican senators to urge President Joe Biden in a December 1 2023 letter to 'immediately restrict travel' between the US and the PRC, saying the PRC had a 'long history of lying about public health crises'. While the World Health Organization (WHO) had advised against travel restrictions, the senators wrote:²⁰

[W]e should not wait for the WHO to take action given its track record of slavish deference to the CCP.

The senators cited then-President Trump's January 31 2020 travel ban in response to the COVID-19 pandemic as a rationale for recommendation, stating:

Many officials and commentators – including you – criticised his decision as being influenced by 'xenophobia.' But history and common sense show his decision was the right one.

November 2023: Linking opposition to increased Ukraine aid with need to supply Taiwan with weaponry

Speaking in the Senate on November 14 2023, Senator Vance took aim at what he went on to dub a Senate Democrat 'obsession'²¹ with funding Ukraine in the war with Russia, stating that 'limited' US weaponry ought to be supplied instead to Taiwan. He said:²²

You'll also hear that China will be emboldened... if we don't stop the Russians in Ukraine. Well call me crazy, but I think the Chinese will be emboldened if we use limited American weapons and give it all to the Ukrainians instead of giving it to the Taiwanese.

In his interview with *Bloomberg Businessweek* published on July 16 2024, Mr Trump said he believed Taiwan 'should pay us for defence', particularly given 'they [took] about 100 percent of our chip business' and 'they're immensely wealthy'.²³ Senator Vance during his July 18 2024 RNC speech appeared to concur, telling the audience, '[W]e will make sure our allies share in the burden of securing world peace. No more free rides for nations that betray the generosity of the American taxpayer.'

Mr Trump also seemed to suggest that the US would face difficulties defending Taiwan in the event of conflict with the PRC, telling *Bloomberg Businessweek*, 'Taiwan is 9,500 miles away. It's 68 miles away from China. A slight advantage, and China's a massive piece of land, they could just bombard it.'²⁴

October 2023: Call for Washington to confront the 'infiltration' of PRC payment networks into the US

On October 30 2023, Senator Vance, along with all the Republicans on the Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs, led by Ranking Member Tim Scott, wrote to the Treasury Secretary Yellen and US Trade Representative Katherine Tai to urge the Biden administration to confront Beijing's 'ongoing efforts

17 JD Vance, 'Senator Vance questions former CFIUS coordinator on the sale of US Steel to Japan's Nippon Steel', press release, January 19 2024 <<https://www.vance.senate.gov/press-releases/senator-vance-questions-former-cfius-coordinator-on-the-sale-of-u-s-steel-to-japans-nippon-steel/>>.

18 Bob Casey, 'Casey, Fetterman, Deluzio urge Secretary Yellen to block US Steel acquisition', press release, December 19 2023 <<https://www.casey.senate.gov/news/releases/casey-fetterman-deluzio-urge-secretary-yellen-to-block-us-steel-acquisition>>.

19 Ken Moriyasu, 'Trump throws wrench into US-Nippon Steel with vow to block', *Nikkei Asia*, February 1 2024 <<https://asia.nikkei.com/Business/Business-deals/Trump-throws-wrench-into-U.S.-Nippon-Steel-with-vow-to-block>>.

20 Marco Rubio, JD Vance, Rick Scott, Tommy Tuberville and Mike Braun, letter to President Joe Biden, December 1 2023 <<https://www.rubio.senate.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/12.01.23-Rubio-et-al-Letter-to-POTUS-re-China-travel-pause.pdf>>.

21 JD Vance, 'All 51 Senate Democrats vote to block aid to Israel', press release, November 15 2023 <<https://www.vance.senate.gov/press-releases/all-51-senate-democrats-vote-to-block-aid-to-israel/>>.

22 JD Vance, 'Senate Democrats block urgent Israel aid', press release, November 13 2023 <<https://www.vance.senate.gov/press-releases/senate-democrats-block-urgent-israel-aid/>>.

23 Nancy Cook, Joshua Green, Mario Parker, Brad Stone and Gregory Korte, 'The Donald Trump interview transcript', *Bloomberg Businessweek*, July 16 2024 <<https://www.bloomberg.com/features/2024-trump-interview-transcript/>>.

24 *Ibid*.

to expand its footprint in the United States' financial system and the global payments market', saying that such efforts 'undermine[d] US foreign policy, threaten[ed] Americans' sensitive financial and consumer data privacy, and violate[ed] international trade practices'. They wrote:²⁵

It is no secret that the CCP seeks to secure a global leadership role in the setting of financial standards and to reduce the world's reliance on the US dollar.

...

Therefore, efforts by the CCP to infiltrate the US financial system must be met with extreme scrutiny.

October 2023: Linking opposition to diversity, equity and inclusion requirements to US-PRC competition

During a Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation hearing on the implementation and oversight of the CHIPS and Science Act, Senator Vance expressed criticism of the provisions within the Act aimed at the promoting of diversity, equity and inclusion, characterising their implementation as beneficial for the PRC to the cost of the US. He said:²⁶

Think about this from the perspective of a company that is thinking about locating a chip fabrication facility in this country or in China.

From China, they get cheap labour, massive subsidies, and a government that seems to want to work with them. From the United States, they get a little bit of money and a human resources statement that looks like it was written by a 22-year-old gender studies graduate of Harvard or Yale...

September 2023: Linking opposition to electric vehicle transition to assertion it is offshoring auto worker jobs to the PRC

Against the backdrop of contract negotiations between the United Auto Workers (UAW) and General Motors, Ford and Stellantis, Senator Vance in a press statement on September 13 2023 expressed his support for the UAW's demand for higher wages, but stated 'there is a 6,000-pound elephant in the room: the premature transition to electric vehicles. While EV supply chains are still heavily concentrated in China, the Biden administration sends billions to that industry every year.' He said:²⁷

Every time Biden subsidises an EV component made in China... there is an American auto worker who loses bargaining power and an American family who loses their access to a middle-class life.

In an opinion piece for the *Toledo Blade* on September 19, Senator Vance encouraged the UAW not to 'relent to the Biden administration's unjust transition to EVs' but rather 'use their leverage and force the President to stop subsidising an industry that benefits Communist China more than it does American workers.'²⁸

He told *Business Insider* in an article published on September 27 that the transition to electric vehicles was resulting in the offshoring of American auto worker jobs to the PRC, saying:

I don't want them [auto workers] to just have higher wages next year, I want them to have a job five years from now. They're gonna go make demands on GM and Ford, and Ford is gonna say, "go **** yourself," because all your jobs are in China, we don't need you guys.

Senator Vance's remarks were in line with views expressed by former president Trump in posts made on his Truth Social account on September 17:²⁹

The all Electric Car is a disaster for both the United Auto Workers and the American Consumer.

²⁵ United States Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs, 'Scott, colleagues sound alarm on China's dominance in global payments market', press release, October 25 2023 <<https://www.banking.senate.gov/newsroom/minority/scott-colleagues-sound-alarm-on-chinas-dominance-in-global-payments-market>>.

²⁶ JD Vance, 'Senator Vance slams Biden Commerce Secretary over woke diversity mandates', press release, October 4 2023 <<https://www.vance.senate.gov/press-releases/senator-vance-slams-biden-commerce-secretary-over-woke-diversity-mandates/>>.

²⁷ JD Vance, 'Senator Vance: Biden's forced transition to electric vehicles is crushing UAW workers', press release, September 13 2023 <<https://www.vance.senate.gov/press-releases/senator-vance-bidens-forced-transition-to-electric-vehicles-is-crushing-uaw-workers/>>.

²⁸ JD Vance, 'Senator Vance: Biden EV agenda threatens US auto industry', *Toledo Blade*, September 19 2023 <<https://www.vance.senate.gov/press-releases/senator-vance-biden-ev-agenda-threatens-u-s-auto-industry/>>.

²⁹ Reuters Staff, 'What are Republican US presidential candidates saying about the UAW strike?', *Reuters*, September 19 2023 <<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/some-republican-2024-presidential-candidates-reaction-uaw-strike-2023-09-18/>>.

They will all be built in China and, they are too expensive, don't go far enough, take too long to charge, and pose various dangers under certain atmospheric conditions.

September 2023: Introduction of legislation to increase regulation around PRC donations to and cooperation with higher education institutions

On September 20 2023, Senator Vance joined four other Republicans³⁰ in introducing the Safeguarding American Education from Foreign Control Act, which sought to tighten regulations around foreign donations to higher education institutions as well as their contracts with foreign entities.

Senator Vance said the legislation 'levels a direct response to efforts by the Chinese Communist Party to exert financial influence over American educational institutions and students.' He said further:³¹

The institutions tasked with educating America's future leaders have been repeatedly exposed for seeking money from our adversaries, especially the Chinese Communist Party. We cannot allow the CCP, or any hostile nation for that matter, to continue to infiltrate and exploit our higher education system.

Just before Joe Biden assumed the presidency in 2021, *Axios* reported that the Trump administration attempted to push through a last-minute policy 'to heighten scrutiny of Chinese government funding in American education'.³² As president, Mr Trump had implemented a number of policies to constrain PRC nationals' participation in the US' STEM sector,³³ including the denial of visas to PRC graduate students based on which university in the PRC they attended.³⁴

July 2023: Claim that Big Tech operating under PRC influence, coordinating with government to censor American public

On July 4 2023, a judgement was handed down by a federal district judge in Louisiana restricting some agencies and officials of the Biden administration from meeting with social media companies and asking them to moderate content appearing on their platforms.³⁵

Following the ruling, Senator Vance described the moderation of content as 'technology companies with financial interests in communist China working with our own FBI to censor the American people'.³⁶

The US Supreme Court rejected the Louisiana ruling in June 2024.³⁷

June 2023: Call for the Food and Drug Administration to re-shore pharmaceutical production to the US instead of importing medication from the PRC

In order to address a shortage of chemotherapy medications in the US, the Food and Drug Administration in June 2023 allowed PRC company Qilu Pharmaceutical to distribute cisplatin product manufactured and marketed in the PRC. While cisplatin was a commonly used drug in the US, the Qilu product was not FDA-approved.³⁸

³⁰ Senator Mike Braun (R-IN), Senator Josh Hawley (R-MO), Senator Ted Budd (R-NC) and Senator Tommy Tuberville (R-AL) were co-sponsors. Congressman Jim Banks (R-IN) introduced companion legislation in the US House of Representatives.

³¹ JD Vance, 'Senator Vance introduces legislation to protect higher education from Chinese influence', press release, September 20 2023 <<https://www.vance.senate.gov/press-releases/senator-vance-introduces-legislation-to-protect-higher-education-from-chinese-influence/>>.

³² Stef W. Knight, 'Trump seeks scrutiny of Chinese funding at U.S. schools', *Axios*, January 10 2021 <<https://www.axios.com/2021/01/11/trump-chinese-funding-education>>.

³³ Evan Burke, 'Trump-era policies toward Chinese STEM talent: A need for balance', Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, March 25 2021 <<https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2021/03/trump-era-policies-toward-chinese-stem-talent-a-need-for-better-balance?>>.

³⁴ Executive Office of the President, 'Suspension of entry as nonimmigrants of certain students and researchers from the People's Republic of China', Proclamation 10043 of May 29 2020, National Archives Federal Register – The Daily Journal of the United States Government <<https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2020/06/04/2020-12217/suspension-of-entry-as-nonimmigrants-of-certain-students-and-researchers-from-the-peoples-republic>>.

³⁵ Kanishka Singh, 'US judge restricts Biden officials from contact with social media firms', *Reuters*, July 6 2023 <<https://www.reuters.com/legal/judge-blocks-us-officials-communicating-with-social-media-companies-newspaper-2023-07-04/>>.

³⁶ JD Vance, 'Senator Vance slams coordinated censorship from Big Tech and big government', press release, July 12 2023 <<https://www.vance.senate.gov/press-releases/senator-vance-slams-coordinated-censorship-from-big-tech-and-big-government/>>.

³⁷ Anna Faguy, 'Supreme Court rejects claim White House limited free speech on social media', *BBC*, June 27 2024 <<https://www.vance.senate.gov/press-releases/senator-vance-slams-coordinated-censorship-from-big-tech-and-big-government/>>.

³⁸ Joseph Choi, 'FDA to import more Chinese cancer drugs amid shortage', *The Hill*, July 7 2023 <<https://thehill.com/homenews/4089447-fda-to-import-more-chinese-cancer-drugs-amid-shortage/>>.

On June 22 2023, Senator Vance joined Senators Rick Scott and Mike Braun in sending a letter to the Food and Drug Administration expressing ‘shock’ at the decision to temporarily import the PRC product and to request more information. They wrote:³⁹

This use of a Chinese-approved product without adequate vetting, labelling or communication... is especially inappropriate while we are still discovering the truth about China’s role in the COVID-19 pandemic.

...

We cannot imagine a greater threat to our nation’s drug supply during emergencies than increasing dependence on China. Instead of responding to drug shortages by accelerating imports of cancer medicines from China, the FDA should focus on re-shoring production to the United States.

As president, Trump expressed support for re-shoring manufacturing pharmaceuticals to the US, nominating in May 2020 a two-year timeframe to establish near-total self-sufficiency in the sector.⁴⁰

June 2023: Co-sponsorship of legislation to eliminate the de minimis rule

On June 14 2023, Senator Vance co-sponsored the De Minimis Reciprocity Act to eliminate the de minimis rule, a tariff exemption widely used by e-commerce sellers to send orders from the PRC to shoppers in the US.

The legislation, intended ‘to stop Communist China and other countries from abusing US trade laws’, barred PRC exports from entry via the de minimis channel and reducing the threshold for duty-free imports into the US to an amount that matches the threshold used by US trade partners.⁴¹

June 2023: Introduction of legislation to prohibit companies from manufacturing new tech in the PRC

On June 13 2023, Senator Vance and Democratic Senator Tammy Baldwin introduced the Invent Here, Make Here Act which would expand restrictions on the foreign manufacture of new technologies discovered through publicly funded research.⁴² The legislation would prohibit the issuing of licenses to companies that intend to manufacture in a ‘country of concern’, including the PRC, Russia, North Korea and Iran.

Senator Vance said, ‘Taxpayer-funded innovations should benefit American workers and industry, not our foreign adversaries. For far too long, we’ve allowed American breakthroughs to be offshored to nations like China and Russia – this legislation will bring those abuses to an end.’⁴³

Restricting the flow of technology to the PRC was a policy of the former Trump administration.⁴⁴

April 2023: Prevention of a PRC invasion of Taiwan a priority

In a speech to the Heritage Foundation’s 50th Anniversary Leadership Summit on April 20 2023, Senator Vance said that the prevention of an invasion of Taiwan by the PRC needed to be prioritised over aid to Ukraine, particularly given the economic ramifications of such an invasion for the US:⁴⁵

Joe Biden is not sending weapons to Taiwan, weapons that we promised the Taiwanese, because we’re sending those weapons to Ukraine or elsewhere.

...

39 Rick Scott, ‘Sens. Rick Scott, Mike Braun & JD Vance press FDA on allowing imports on unapproved cancer drugs from China’, press release, June 27 2023 <<https://www.rickscott.senate.gov/2023/6/sens-rick-scott-mike-braun-jd-vance-press-fda-on-allowing-imports-of-unapproved-cancer-drugs-from-china>>.

40 ‘Trump on when US will no longer be dependent on China’s drug manufacturing’, *Fox News*, May 4 2020 <<https://www.yahoo.com/news/trump-us-no-longer-dependent-003214005.html>>.

41 Bill Cassidy, ‘Cassidy, Baldwin introduce bill to stop China from taking advantage of lax US trade laws’, press release, June 14 2023 <<https://www.cassidy.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/cassidy-baldwin-introduce-bill-to-stop-china-from-taking-advantage-of-lax-us-trade-laws/>>.

42 JD Vance, ‘Senators Vance, Baldwin to introduce bipartisan legislation to ensure taxpayer-funded inventions are made in America’, press release, June 13 2023 <<https://www.vance.senate.gov/press-releases/senators-vance-baldwin-introduce-bipartisan-legislation-to-ensure-taxpayer-funded-inventions-are-made-in-america/>>.

43 *Ibid.*

44 See, e.g., Ana Swanson and David McCabe, ‘Trump effort to keep US tech out of China alarms American firms’, *The New York Times*, February 16 2020 <<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/16/business/economy/us-china-technology.html>>.

45 Elizabeth Troutman, ‘Chinese invasion of Taiwan would pose greatest threat to America, says JD Vance’, *The Daily Signal*, April 20 2023 <<https://www.dailysignal.com/2023/04/20/get-progressive-politics-out-foreign-policy-says-j-d-vance/>>.

The thing that we need to prevent more than anything is a Chinese invasion of Taiwan. It would be catastrophic for this country. It would decimate our entire economy. It would throw this country into a Great Depression.

March 2023: Introduction of legislation to prohibit US funding for Montreal Protocol and United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change until PRC no longer designated a ‘developing country’

In March 2023 Senator Vance co-sponsored the Ending China’s Unfair Advantage Act, which would prohibit American government funding for the Montreal Protocol and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change until the PRC was no longer defined as a ‘developing country’.⁴⁶

In July 2019, then-President Trump in a memo directed then-Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer to pressure the World Trade Organization (WTO) to limit the number of countries considering developing nations, writing, ‘When the wealthiest economies claim developing-country status, they harm not only other developed economies but also economies that truly require special and differential treatment.’ The memo singled out the PRC ‘most dramatically illustrat[ing] the point.’ It read:⁴⁷

Since joining the WTO in 2001, China has continued to insist that it is a developing country and thus has the right to avail itself of flexibilities under any new WTO rules. The United States has never accepted China’s claim to developing-country status, and virtually every current economic indicator belies China’s claim.

March 2023: Linking opposition to climate pledges and sustainable practices around aviation technologies to US-PRC competition

During a Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation hearing on the advancement of aviation technologies on March 29 2023, Senator Vance expressed scepticism about climate pledges and sustainable practices applying to the advancement of commercial aircraft, linking his opposition to competition with the PRC. He said:⁴⁸

My fear here with all things China and the United States when it comes to these international programs, is that we often make these commitments and we follow through on these commitments – I don’t know if we’re trying to be good global citizens or we’re just trying to honour our word – but very often these voluntary commitments are not followed by the communist Chinese.

And in particular, a very real worry I have is, we all believe in technology, we all believe in the importance of moving an American industry into the technological future, but if we allow the Chinese to operate their industrial economy more cheaply than in the United States, we’re offshoring the very basis of technological innovation.

Under the Trump administration, the US in 2017 withdrew from the Paris Climate Accord, a key part of Mr Trump’s 2016 election platform, on the basis that it ‘punishes the United States... while imposing no meaningful obligations on the world’s leading polluters’, particular the PRC and India.⁴⁹

March 2023: Call to re-evaluate use of DJI drones

On March 16 2023, Senator Vance signed a bipartisan letter to the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency urging it to re-evaluate the security risks posed by the use of drones manufactured by Shenzhen DJI Technology to operators of critical infrastructure and state and local law enforcement in the US.

⁴⁶ The bill was reintroduced by Senator John Barasso (R-Wyo.). Other co-sponsors included Republican Senators Dan Sullivan (R-Alaska), Mike Lee (R-Utah), Cynthia Lummis (R-Wyo.), John Cornyn (R-Texas), Mike Braun (R-Ind.), Ted Budd (R-N.C.), John Hoeven (R-N.D.), Marco Rubio (R-Fla.), Rick Scott (R-Fla.), Thom Tillis (R-N.C.), and Shelley Moore Capito (R-W.Va.). See United States Congress, S.1035 – Ending China’s Unfair Advantage Act of 2023, 118th Congress (2023-2024) <<https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/senate-bill/1035/actions>>.

⁴⁷ The White House, ‘Memorandum on reforming developing-country statuses in the World Trade Organization’, July 26 2019 <<https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/presidential-actions/memorandum-reforming-developing-country-status-world-trade-organization/>>.

⁴⁸ JD Vance, ‘Senator Vance remarks on leftwing climate pledges and economic competition against communist China’, press release, March 29 2023 <<https://www.vance.senate.gov/press-releases/senator-vance-remarks-on-leftwing-climate-pledges-and-economic-competition-against-communist-china/>>.

⁴⁹ The White House, ‘Statement by President Trump on the Paris Climate Accord’, June 1 2017 <<https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/statement-president-trump-paris-climate-accord/>>.

The letter stated, '[W]e believe that given the company's identified connections to the Chinese Communist Party, the use of its drones in such sensitive contexts may present an unacceptable security vulnerability.'⁵⁰

In January 2021, then-President Trump signed an executive order directing US agencies to conduct a security risk assessment of PRC-made drones used by the US government and to prioritise their removal.⁵¹

March 2023: Co-sponsorship of legislation to mandate disclosure requirements for PRC-based companies by the Securities and Exchange Commission

On March 16 2024, Senator Vance co-sponsored the Secure America's Financial Exchanges (SAFE) Act which would direct the Securities and Exchange Commission to 'implement specific disclosure requirements for Chinese-based companies seeking access into US-based exchanges through Initial Public Offering (IPOs).'⁵²

February 2023: PRC spy balloon

On February 3 2023, Senator Vance posted a photo of himself on social media pointing a firearm at the sky as a response to the PRC flying a spy balloon over the US,⁵³ joining Republican Congressman for Arizona Paul Gosar and 2022 gubernatorial candidate for Arizona Kari Lake in doing so.

Author

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⁵⁰ Mark R. Warner, 'Warner, Blackburn, colleagues request cybersecurity analysis of Chinese-made drones', press release, March 16 2023 <<https://www.warner.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/2023/3/warner-blackburn-colleagues-request-cybersecurity-analysis-of-chinese-made-drones>>

⁵¹ David Shepardson, 'Trump orders assessment of security risks of Chinese drones', *Reuters*, January 19 2021 <<https://www.reuters.com/article/world/trump-orders-assessment-of-security-risks-of-chinese-drones-idUSKBN29O046/>>.

⁵² Rick Scott, 'Sen. Rick Scott introduces bill package to combat Communist Chinese influence in financial sector', press release, March 16 2023 <<https://www.rickscott.senate.gov/2023/3/sen-rick-scott-introduces-bill-package-to-combat-communist-chinese-influence-in-financial-sector>>.

⁵³ Morning Joe, 'Republicans point guns in the sky on social media in response to balloon', *MSNBC*, February 7 2023 <<https://www.msnbc.com/morning-joe/watch/republicans-point-guns-in-the-sky-on-social-media-in-response-to-balloon-162694725776>>.