

China's Surveillance State at Home & Abroad: Challenges for U.S. Policy

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Key Findings:

- 1) Under Xi Jinping, China has pursued a surveillance state of immense scale and ambition, focused on “prevention and control” of risks to social stability and CCP rule. In these efforts, technology is a key tool by which the regime’s preventive aims are to be achieved.
- 2) The rise of this surveillance state has had significant global consequences: over the course of the past decade, Chinese surveillance and policing technologies have been adopted in more than 80 countries worldwide, both democratic and autocratic, on every continent except Australia and Antarctica.
- 3) Both supply from China and global demand for these technologies have driven their adoption. Thinking about both sides of this equation is necessary not just for understanding the diffusion of Chinese surveillance technology, but for crafting effective policy to address it.

Recommendations

- 1) The United States should develop a coordinated interagency strategy that addresses the development and spread of Chinese surveillance technology worldwide, to provide an overarching vision, shared lexicon, and reference point for assessing policy tradeoffs. It should also develop a process by which to regularly track and assess the spread and effects of Chinese surveillance technology.
- 2) That strategy should a) understand its audiences and differentiate messages by region/country; b) address the incentives and knowledge of subnational officials making adoption decisions; c) articulate and address the governance challenges that Chinese surveillance technology is often being brought in to address; d) include an explicit plan for standard-setting in formal and informal multilateral settings.
- 3) U.S. strategy should also have a second layer of policies for cases in which de-adoption of technology is not politically or technically feasible, aimed at technical and legal safeguards to protect data security and privacy and prevent the use of these technologies from corroding democracy.
- 4) At home, the United States must think hard about how to develop and maintain its own edge in innovation and technology. It must also think carefully about the role of the Chinese diaspora, accounting for the need to retain and recruit global tech talent as well as to pursue effective counter-intelligence without alienating an important and valuable community through indiscriminate and unfair targeting.