

Filling the China-Shaped Hole Enhanced FIRS for China

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I was astonished when the long awaited ‘[China Audit](#)¹’ was not published in any form other than a ministerial statement. Sure, there are legitimate reasons not to publish the audit in full. Though, it is worth noting that in 2023, a detailed publicly available report on China was published by the Intelligence & Security Committee (‘ISC’) of Parliament. When there is no reliable document for selected parliamentarians to scrutinise, elected representatives lacked a comprehensive document demonstrating the complexity of the UK-China relationship, Britain’s interests and UK’s strategy and position. The government cannot be held accountable. Why do PM Starmer’s ministers try to wave through Beijing’s application for a mega Embassy as a mere “planning application”? Why is his Chancellor attempting trade deals when former PM Cameron’s warm relations with China clearly demonstrated a history of broken promises on trade? Hence, when it was announced that China is left off the Enhanced Tier of the Foreign Influence Registration Scheme in the hope of illusional economic benefits², the public is less informed of the risk of Chinese government’s influence. Subsequently, our agencies are less able to monitor and shield our institutions from China’s meddling in our democracy. China is notably omitted from the Enhanced Tier which included Russia, North Korea and Iran. President Xi asserts his strategic leadership in this triumvirate bloc. I would reason that by adding China to the FIRS Enhanced-tier³, which had been the intention when the scheme was designed, is even more critical now given that no publicly available version of the China Audit has been released.

The threats from China are real.

First, in the era of misinformation, it is easy to discount the ambition, depth and scale of malign influence in the UK, especially given the breadth and depth of the work of the CCP’s United Front Work Department. This is something UK, along with many liberal democracies, have only recently begun to grasp. For example, for years the Chinese influence agent Christine Lee was called out. But these concerns were casually

¹China audit: Foreign Secretary's statement, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/china-audit-foreign-secretarys-statement>

² “China has been left off the top tier of the British government’s new register to track “covert foreign influence” as UK ministers seek to rebuild relations with Beijing in their pursuit of growth. “, Financial Times, 30 June 2025, <https://www.ft.com/content/1fc73966-6353-4678-80fd-f6ba6bcba0c1> and “Government is weighing up security concerns against economic benefits of closer ties with Beijing”, The Guardian, 13 April 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/apr/13/uk-could-target-parts-of-chinese-state-under-new-foreign-influence-rules>

³ FIRS is an acronym for the Foreign Influence Registration Scheme which came into force in 2025. Further explanation: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/foreign-influence-registration-scheme>

discounted by many. Entrenched within UK's political parties, other agents orchestrated community-aid groups to frame a "democratic voice" against these warnings. Another example is Beijing's "elite-capture" – getting UK politicians to become a poster child for its *global institutions*. Politicians have attempted to discount the risk of AIIB⁴ and IOMed⁵ to the Rules-Based International Order by framing these institutions in the language of multipolarity and multilateralism. However, these institutions are not truly multilateral, as by design they imply and facilitate Chinese, meaning the CCP, leadership. Enhanced-tier FIRS will improve awareness among UK politicians, ensuring China is correctly framed, like its strategic partners – Russia, North Korea and Iran, as a threat.

More worrying is the threat of CCP's repression, which is increasingly felt across the world. We all know that the proposed new Chinese embassy is an enormous hub for Chinese intelligence gathering. What else justifies its size and secrecy? Globally, larger embassies mean more interference. And with challenging regimes like China, it is transnational repression, more interference, and facilitating China's assertive demands. This may manifest as more psychological pressure on the Chinese and dissident diaspora, extortion of pro-democracy campaigners and providing residences for influence agents conducting political interference in institutions, including Parliament. It is inappropriate to warm up to China given the levels of irregular activities Beijing conducts in London, which is only increasing.

My last point, placing China on the enhanced FIRS is a determination of political will.

To start, the wide net of suspicion is too harmful among the diaspora. It defeats unity in activism, and it hinders citizen politics. Enhanced FIRS provides a useful tool for UK authorities to review practices often hidden as community groups among the Chinese diaspora. I firmly believe that breadth and depth of the United Front and the multi-faceted roles of Chinese Influence agents have nefarious impacts. There is no excuse to facilitate or partake in their activities. However, liberalism and the trust in the rule-of-law also says freedom of association so long as an organisation is not proscribed. Yet, the CCP's industrial-scale malign influence should not be given a free reign in our communities without being labelled as Chinese government-controlled.

The burden of protection should not be on ordinary citizens, but on the UK state. It is the role of the state to provide security for we know, legally in the failure of the state to provide security for the person, is a primary basis for the grant of asylum. The implementation of enhanced FIRS means UK authorities are provided with the information to monitor and therefore know and better understand ways the CCP and its proxies influence our institutions and community. It also demonstrates to the

⁴ acronym for Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank

⁵ acronym for The Convention on the Establishment of the International Organisation for Mediation

Government the need to fund investigations. It is unacceptable for UK residents to fear the Chinese state in their homes, and feel silenced and oppressed by a foreign regime. In such circumstances, the Government must explain why both the China Audit is unpublished and that China is not placed on enhanced FIRS like Russia.

In conclusion, challenging China in a dangerous world is not a task the UK government do by acting alone. China adopts a whole-of-society approach to undermine our freedoms and way of life. It will require a whole-of-society approach to defend them. Within our communities, we need to have the confidence to build networks in support of each other without the fear of harassment and coercion. China does “oversteps the boundary and crosses the line⁶”, in a way only states on the FIRS enhanced-tier do. It is only a lack of political determination that China has, and continues to, get away with actions considered unacceptable in other states. It is this lack of determination that fuels China’s assertiveness.

That is why voting YES to policy motion F34 is important. It impresses on the UK Government to fill the China-shaped hole in the UK’s resilience strategy. The motion is also a warranted response to the aforementioned transnational repression China conducts in the UK. Lastly, it is our duty to help pro-democracy campaigners strengthen their network without hindrance or fear. Let us lead in doing the right thing on demanding the enhanced FIRS tier for CCP influences.

⁶ Paragraph K of the 2023 Intelligence & Security Committee Report On China.