State of Insecurity: The Cost of Militarization Since 9/11

During the September 13, 2021 APA Justice monthly meeting, Gisela Kusakawa of Advancing Justice | AAJC cited a report released by The Institute for Policy Studies titled STATE OF INSECURITY: The Cost of Militarization Since 9/11 on September 1, 2021.

According to the report, twenty years after 9/11, the War on Terror has remade the U.S. into a more militarized actor both around the world and at home. The costs of this evolution are many, in terms of surveillance and the costs to individual privacy, growing xenophobia and racism and their costs to immigrants and people of color, mass incarceration, and the cost of hundreds of thousands of lives lost in war and violence, all in the name of security.

The financial cost of this militarization is calculated to be more than $21 trillion over the past 20 years. They point to another set of costs — the opportunity costs of investing so heavily in militarization at the expense of social and economic investments.

As the country went to war and refocused domestic security spending on terrorism, few had any inkling of the far-reaching ramifications for the military, veterans, immigration, or domestic law enforcement. Today, the War on Terror has fed a sprawling security apparatus that was designed for counterterrorism but has also taken on immigration, crime, and drugs. One result is a turbo-charged militarism and xenophobia in both international and domestic policy that has driven some of the deepest divisions in U.S. politics, including the growing threats of white supremacy and authoritarianism. Another is a long-standing neglect of growing threats like those from pandemics, climate change, and economic inequality.

About $732 billion of the militarized spending was on federal law enforcement. Domestic policy has also been increasingly militarized. According to the report, the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) has conducted broad-based surveillance, infiltrated political groups, and monitored entire communities based on their race, ethnicity, or religion based on a 2017 Intercept report titled Secret Docs Reveal: President Trump Has Inherited An FBI With Vast Hidden Powers.

For example, according to the Intercept report, FBI agents can decide that a campus organization is not “legitimate” and therefore not entitled to robust protections for free speech; dig for derogatory information on potential informants without any basis for believing they are implicated in unlawful activity; use a person’s immigration status to pressure them to collaborate and then help deport them when they are no longer useful;
conduct invasive “assessments” without any reason for suspecting the targets of wrongdoing; demand that companies provide the bureau with personal data about their users in broadly worded national security letters without actual legal authority to do so; fan out across the internet along with a vast army of informants, infiltrating countless online chat rooms; peer through the walls of private homes; and more. The FBI offered various justifications of these tactics to [Intercept] reporters. But the documents and [Intercept] reporting on them ultimately reveal a bureaucracy in dire need of greater transparency and accountability.


On September 1, 2021, the New York Times Magazine published “I Helped Destroy People.” It tells the story of Terry J. Albury, an African American who joined the F.B.I. just before the 9/11 attacks, drawn in by the bureau’s work fighting child exploitation. His role quickly changed after 9/11 however, and he subsequently spent over a decade working in counterterrorism. Around 2015, he began to deeply question his work. “This is not what I joined the F.B.I. to do,” he recalled thinking. His doubts about the bureau’s workings led him to leak classified information to journalists. On September 9, 2021, the New York Times produced a podcast titled "I’m Part of Something That’s Really Evil" (40:39). In October 2018, former Minneapolis FBI agent Terry J. Albury was sentenced to four years in prison for leaking classified documents.

2021/09/13 APA Justice Monthly Meeting Summary and Video Posted


We thank Congressman Andy Kim, Professor Anming Hu and his wife Ivy Yang, Attorney Phil Lomonaco, Nisha Ramachandran of CAPAC, Professor Mary McAlpin of University of Tennessee Knoxville, Professor Andrea Liu of UPenn and American Physical Society, and Gisela Kusakawa of Advancing Justice | AAJC for their remarks, updates, and active participation in the meeting.

Time marks of the YouTube video (48:00):

- 4:43 Phil Lomonaco describes legal reasoning behind Judge Varlan’s acquittal.
- 10:07 Ivy Yang expresses her family’s gratitude for the broad support they received.
- 13:22 Professor Anming Hu gives thanks and brief remarks.
- 15:07 Congressman Andy Kim shares his personal experience and addresses the questions of how we confront the ideas of loyalty and trust as a country, who belongs in this country, who is an American, and who has opportunities to be able to seek the fullness of what it means to be here in this nation that goes beyond just any individual case.
• **20:45 Nisha Ramachandran** provides updates from CAPAC, covering (a) CAPAC guidance on Anti-China messaging and anti-Asian violence, (b) CAPAC statement on the acquittal of Professor Hu, (c) Letter from 177 Stanford faculty members to Attorney General Garland, and (d) Department of Commerce decision to eliminate rogue unit and continuing concerns of racial profiling.

• **25:35 Professor Mary McAlpin** reports on the views and actions of the UTK Chapter of AAUP on Professor Hu’s situation, including three primary areas of concern on (a) the FBI, (b) the University of Tennessee Knoxville, and (c) the government’s targeting of international faculty.

• **34:26 Professor Andrea Liu** shares her thoughts on the importance of professional societies and the recent actions and results of the American Physical Society on the advocacy of immigration, visa, science/scientist issues, and the “China Initiative,” including a webinar on “Effects of Federal Immigration Policy on US Science and All Scientists.”

• **40:43 Gisela Kusakawa** reports on Advancing Justice | AAJC activities and (a) the need to focus on the correctness of Judge Varlan’s ruling and the Department of Justice’s over-reach, (b) Professor Hu is not alone under the “China Initiative,” (c) Webinar on the criminalization of AMEMSA and Chinese American and immigrant communities, and (d) addressing the cyclical pattern of targeting based on the perception of Asian Americans being “perpetual foreigners” in the aftermath of 9/11.

**Reports and Updates on The Unraveling "China Initiative"**

On September 17, 2021, The Editor-in-Chief of The Diplomat published [Has the ‘China Initiative’ Run Its Course?](https://thediplomat.com/2021/09/has-the-china-initiative-run-its-course/) The comprehensive article raised the question: After a resounding legal defeat, will the Justice Department change stance on the controversial program? The initiative potentially covers a lot of ground, making it hard at times to know what officially counts as part of the "China Initiative." “No one has been able to explain to me how a case gets labeled a China Initiative case,” [Seton Hall University Law Professor Margaret Lewis](https://www.setonhall.edu/law) said. “…By nature, it’s a bit of an amorphous creature.”

On September 16, 2021, LA Times published [Why Trump’s anti-spy ‘China Initiative’ is unraveling.](https://www.latimes.com/politics/story/2021-09-17/why-trumps-china-initiative-is-unraveling) The article covered recently dropped “China Initiative” cases including visiting UCLA researcher [Lei Guan](https://www.ucla.edu/) and Professor Anming Hu. According to the report, [Michael German](https://www.brennancenter.org/), a former FBI agent who serves as a fellow for the Brennan Center for Justice’s Liberty & National Security Program, said the recent dismissals revealed how weak many of the cases were. “Obviously, the FBI and Justice Department are under pressure to produce indictments against people with a so-called ‘nexus to China’ to match the political rhetoric sensationalizing the espionage threat from the Chinese government,” he said. “Even FBI analysts appear to have felt the investigators’ effort to connect these defendants to the Chinese military was overwrought.”

On September 16, 2021, the Washington Post published [As cases fail, security initiative’s aim is questioned.](https://www.washingtonpost.com/2021/09/17/us-security-initiative-aim/) According to the report, to federal investigators, [Qing Wang](https://www.washingtonpost.com/) was
an example of China’s growing effort to co-opt scientists in the United States — part of a vast campaign to steal American secrets and technology. But a string of dismissed cases including Wang’s has amplified concerns among some lawmakers and activists about whether prosecutors have been overzealous in pursuing researchers of Chinese descent. The issue goes beyond whether the government is bringing prosecutions it can win. Critics say the cases raise the question of whether a program designed to address a national security threat posed by the Chinese government has strayed, targeting researchers on lesser allegations of fraud without compelling evidence that they pose a danger to the United States.
On September 13, 2021, The Hill reported Stanford professors ask DOJ to stop looking for Chinese spies at universities in US. According to the report, the Stanford educators wrote in their letter to Attorney General Merrick Garland that the "China Initiative" program has since its launch in 2018 "deviated significantly from its claimed mission." The professors stated that the China Initiative is "harming the United States' research and technology competitiveness and it is fueling biases that, in turn, raise concerns about racial profiling." The report cited the case of Professor Anming Hu in which FBI agent Kujtim Sadiku admitted to falsely accusing Professor Hu of being a spy and of using baseless information to have Hu and his son placed on the federal no-fly list. The agent claimed that his investigation into Hu had nothing to do with the DOJ's "China Initiative" although Professor Hu is the first academic to go to trial under the "China Initiative."

On October 25, 2021, the trial of University of Kansas Professor Franklin Tao will begin in the U.S. Court for the District of Kansas. Professor Tao is the first academic indicted under the "China Initiative" and faces wire fraud and false statement charges, again nothing to do with economic espionage or trade secret thefts. Read more: https://bit.ly/3fZWJvK

Earlier this month, Texas A&M University Professor Zhendong Cheng was released on a $100,000 bond. Professor Cheng was arrested in August 2020 and charged for wire fraud, conspiracy, and false statements under the "China Initiative." They again do not involve economic espionage or trade secret theft. However, Professor Cheng has been denied bail for more than a year. He tested positive for COVID-19 while incarcerated. The Human Rights Committee of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicines, the Committee of Concerned Scientists, and others had sent letters to the court in support of the motion to to revoke the detention order. Read more: https://bit.ly/APAJ_Zhendong_Cheng

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