

# Opinion The brazen, alarming scale of China's efforts to silence dissidents abroad

By Mark L. Clifford

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Then there was a scheme that allegedly looked for evidence of tax evasion by prominent dissident artist [Chen Weiming](#), who lives in Southern California. The complaint said that Chen's car was tagged with a GPS device and placed under surveillance by an investigator who posed as a broker looking to buy Chen's sculptures. When that failed, an arson attack destroyed a sculpture Chen had made, on display in Yermo, Calif., depicting Chinese President Xi Jinping as a covid-19 virus molecule.

As a former director of Next Digital — publisher of the pro-democracy [Apple Daily](#) newspaper in Hong Kong that was forcibly shuttered by the government last year — I have seen how former colleagues, even those now in the United States, are living in fear. People are afraid to attend an upcoming award ceremony honoring the paper's journalists. Prospective employees of the [Committee for Freedom in Hong Kong](#) worry that association with our group will expose them or their relatives to punishment by the Chinese Communist Party.

I have seen a similar pattern of fear in my trips to Britain. Hong Kongers in Scotland told me during a recent visit of harassment and bullying on university campuses, including attempts to force them to disavow their support for Hong Kong's democracy movement. Pro-democracy protesters in London, ironically at a "stop Asian hate" rally, were beaten by thugs they believe were sent by the Communist Party.

In the United States, pro-Communist Chinese forces are squelching debate. Universities are put under pressure not to invite the Dalai Lama or discuss genocide against the Uyghurs or the fight for freedom in Hong Kong. At [George Washington University](#), the president initially agreed to take down dissident posters after a pro-mainland group claimed that they were racist, simply because they depicted the Chinese government's actions negatively. Though the decision was later reversed, it shows the naivete of Americans in facing this threat to freedom. More recently, Chinese students at Cornell University intimidated a Uyghur student at the university, prompting a bland statement from the university [warning](#) about how "harmful it is when conversation devolves into derogatory anti-Asian expression."

The day after the Justice Department announced the complaints, a journalist friend of mine who narrowly escaped Hong Kong and now lives in a seaside community in Florida woke up to find a small, vaguely Chinese flowerpot on his front doorstep. My friend won't appear at anything publicly associated with Hong Kong's pro-democracy movement. He's too afraid of what might happen to relatives back home. The pot spooked him, though "there's no note, no warning," he wrote me. "I'm afraid to touch it."