

COVER STORY

Burning Man

Steve Bannon was having a good summer aboard Guo Wengui's yacht, torching the CCP. Now both men are feeling the heat.

BY ANDREW GOLDMAN — AUGUST 30, 2020



Illustration by Luis Grañena

On a Saturday morning, a month before he was arrested for fraud, Stephen K. Bannon was on the phone from somewhere on the Long Island sound, sounding triumphant and caffeinated as he celebrated America's escalating rhetoric with China.

"This is a war plan, and it's being executed upon," he crowed, referring to the tough-on-China [speech](#) delivered a few days before by Secretary of State Mike Pompeo at the Nixon Library. To Bannon, it was a clear signal that China hawks like Pompeo and Peter Navarro, President Trump's trade advisor, were winning the internal dispute in the Trump administration with "Panda huggers." Bannon heard in Pompeo's words echoes of his own anti-China messaging, which he has broadcast for months through frequent Fox News appearances and his daily podcast, "[War Room: Pandemic](#)." Even though Bannon left his post as an adviser in the Trump administration in August 2017, he believed himself to be the true genius behind the new policy.

"I don't think there's one line that has not been talked about on '[War Room: Pandemic](#)' since January in great detail," he said of Pompeo's speech.

Bannon's regular lair is located in a rented D.C. rowhouse that's known as [The Breitbart Embassy](#), in honor of the right-wing news website he used to run, but he was calling from the site of his future arrest: the deck of the Lady May, a [\\$28 million](#), 152-foot superyacht, complete with chrome trim, glass tables, and a circular white couch. Bannon had been a guest on the yacht for the summer, and his only shipmate — not counting the crewmembers aboard — was his patron and comrade in arms against the Chinese Communist Party, [Guo Wengui](#), a Chinese real estate billionaire, fugitive, and self-described CCP "whistleblower" who is also known as Miles Kwok.

The two had been mostly moored off the coast of Connecticut since Memorial Day except for a brief excursion on June 4th — the 31st anniversary of the Tiananmen Square Massacre — when Bannon and Guo sailed the Lady May into New York harbor to announce the New Federal State of China, a nonprofit organization whose sole aim, it seems, is to overthrow the Chinese government. While airplanes circled above — pulling congratulatory banners to the bewilderment of Covid-weary Manhattanites below — Bannon stood with the Statue of Liberty as his backdrop and Guo nodding at his side as he read from the state’s proposed Constitution. It included adoption of a rule of law, human and land rights, freedom of speech and religion, and confiscating funds “that have been plundered by the kleptocrats within the Chinese communist party” so they can be returned to “the Chinese people” — to include, presumably, Guo, who claims that China has unlawfully seized at least a billion dollars from him.



The yacht, called Lady May, where Bannon was arrested and where he and Guo spent the summer.

Credit: [Moran Yachts](#)

Nevertheless, the Chinese people’s “quest for freedom and the rise of the new China,” Bannon told me, are going to be “the defining event of the first half of the 21st century” — which is why he — a man who rose to prominence thanks to his unrelenting condemnation of Islamic fundamentalism as well as his devotion to anti-immigration policies — has turned almost all of his attention in the past year to attacking the Chinese Communist Party.

“I don’t know if I would define it as a government in exile, a government in waiting,” Bannon said of the New Federal State of China. “It’s an NGO that is set up to basically give people an alternative” to the CCP.

Bannon’s foray into NGOs is what led federal authorities to board the Lady May on [August 20 and arrest him](#) while drinking his morning coffee. New York federal prosecutors have charged him and three other men with using hundreds of thousands of dollars donated to their nonprofit to build a wall along the Mexican border for personal expenses. Bannon pleaded not guilty and is currently out on bail. (In an interview with *The Wire*, on Saturday, he called the fraud case a political hit job, and said “it’s just an effort to shut me up.”) But for now, he is expressly forbidden from boarding any private planes or boats, including the Lady May, where he had been planning on staying until Labor Day weekend. Back in July, when I asked him about his summer aboard the yacht, he said it had been a productive one: “Just myself and Miles. He’s doing his thing. I’m doing my thing. I’ve probably done more media since Memorial Day than I did beforehand. We’ve got a camera. We’ve got a studio. All the technology on the iPhone, so it’s just been terrific.”



Guo Wengui, who is seeking asylum in the U.S. after accusing officials in his native China of corruption, poses at his New York City apartment, Nov. 28, 2017.

Credit: Timothy A. Clary/AFP via Getty Images

On the surface, Guo and Bannon make for a fairly odd couple. Bannon, 66, is often rumpled and unkempt, and over the summer, as he continued to record episodes for “War Room” from the Lady May, he began to resemble a boomer marooned at Burning Man without hair product or sunscreen. Guo, by contrast, is trim, compact and looks younger than his 51 years; he is often immaculately dressed in fitted suits and aviator shades.

By early 2015, after making billions in real estate and securities, Guo fled China. Two years later, Chinese authorities asked Interpol to [issue a red notice](#) seeking Guo for his role in at least 19 criminal cases, charges that ranged from bribing a top Chinese intelligence official to kidnapping, money laundering and fraud. Guo, who denies all of the charges, says Beijing is trying to smear his reputation and desperately wants him back to prevent him from airing allegations of corruption at the highest levels of the Communist Party. He is now seeking asylum from the United States.

Early in his exile, Guo joined Mar-a-Lago, President Trump’s private club in Florida, and mostly devoted his time to creating videos taunting Chinese officials with promises of exposing their crimes, even posting online what he claimed were incriminating documents.¹

But by early 2018, he had founded Guo Media (tagline: “[Everything is just beginning!](#)”), a news, social media and e-commerce platform that caters to Chinese speakers critical of China’s ruling communist party. GNews, the English language website, runs short stories such as “[CCP’s forced organ harvesting is a most barbaric crime,](#)” and [G-TV](#) serves mostly as a venue to disseminate videos, including Guo’s angry tirades against his foes.



Bannon leaves federal court Aug. 20 after pleading not guilty to charges that he ripped off donors to an online fundraising scheme to build a southern border wall.

Credit: AP Photo/Craig Ruttle

In late 2018, Guo, at Bannon's prompting, also started planning the [Rule of Law Fund](#), a proposed \$100 million nonprofit fund to investigate Chinese corruption.² The idea was to investigate wrongdoing involving the Chinese Communist Party, and to share the information with the authorities, and also expose it in the media.

Even though Guo regularly refers to Bannon as chairman of G-TV, the extent of their financial relationship is murky. As the *Wall Street Journal* [first reported](#) in early July, the FBI is probing Guo's finances, including the source of a \$1 million consulting contract paid to Bannon in 2018 in exchange for introducing Guo to "media personalities" and advising on "industry standards." Moreover, the day before Bannon was arrested, the *Journal* reported that the FBI, the Securities and Exchange Commission and New York state authorities are [investigating](#) the methods used to raise \$300 million for Guo's media venture, specifically whether Guo or his associates violated securities laws through a private share placement. (Guo declined to comment on the investigation, but in a statement released Sunday said he is confident in the U.S. legal system. A source close to Bannon, who recently stepped down as chairman, says he joined the board after G-TV had completed a \$300 million dollar fundraising effort in May.)

At the moment, Guo and Bannon seem united in their plot to overthrow the People's Republic of China; both appeared on "[War Room](#)" the morning after Bannon's Manhattan arraignment. But with their respective legal problems growing, and possibly overlapping, their summer antics aboard the *Lady May* — smoking cigars and breaking into impromptu chants of "Take down CCP!" — are probably a thing of the past.

"Guo desperately needs Bannon," journalist and former Chinese political prisoner [Sasha Gong](#), a one-time ally of Bannon and Guo's cause, told me in June. "He's the only thing he can hang onto for credibility."



Video unavailable

This video is no longer available because the YouTube account associated with this video has been terminated.



Bannon and Guo aboard Guo's yacht, chanting "Take down CCP!"

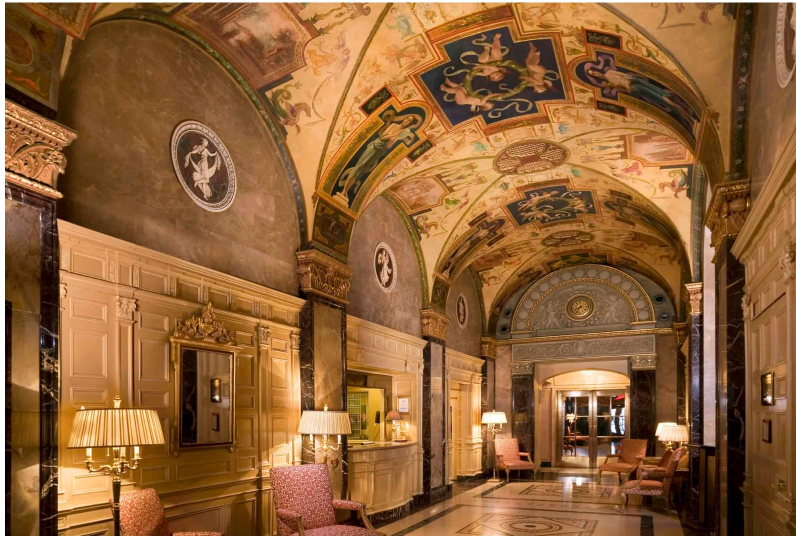
A month before the arrest, Guo declared in a video he posted from the deck of the Lady May that Bannon, Mike Pompeo or [Tom Cotton](#), Republican Senator from Arkansas, would be elected President in 2024. "One will be the President, another will be the Vice President. The one left will be the Secretary of Defense!" In fact, recently, Bannon had been making significant inroads into Trump's orbit — to the point that it was broadly speculated that he would serve some role in the reelection campaign. After all, a year ago, after Bannon made an appearance on [CNBC](#), the President sent out a [tweet](#) that seemed to indicate they were still on the same team. "Nice to see that one of my best pupils is still a giant Trump fan. Steve joined me after I won the primaries, but I loved working with him!"

Bannon's arrest, however, may render him radioactive — which could test his bromance with Guo. Should the odd couple dissolve, the world may finally learn if Bannon's reincarnation as a China hawk is grounded in a true ideology, as he claims, or was just a cynical cash grab, as his many critics speculate.

BROMANCE IN THE TIME OF COVID

"That's the kind of lawyer I want," Bannon tells me. It's an unseasonably warm and mask-free Saturday afternoon in early February on Manhattan's Upper East Side, and we're chatting about the news coming out of tony New Canaan, Connecticut, where Bannon maintains a house. The day before, a lawyer for a New Canaan luxury home builder [had been arrested](#), suspected of plotting to bury the dismembered remains of his client's wife at a local rod and gun club. Bannon, who's been divorced three times, chuckled at his gallows humor. Even though he hasn't had a drink in more than 20 years, he looked, as usual, like he'd just slipped in from a 48-hour bender with Mötley Crüe.

We were in his 14th floor room in Park Avenue's [Loews Regency Hotel](#), which became something of a landmark for Trumpworld apostates when Michael Cohen, Trump's lawyer and fixer, was photographed on the sidewalk outside the hotel hosting a cigar party in a \$4,000 Italian blazer just a few days after the FBI raided his office, home and hotel room in 2018. But for Bannon, the hotel is appealing because it's located just a three minute walk from [The Sherry Netherland](#), where Guo resides in the penthouse he bought in 2015 for \$67.5 million.



Lobby of the Sherry Netherland, where Guo lives in the penthouse.

Credit: Ber Murphy, [Creative Commons](#)

Bannon says the two were introduced a couple months after he left the White House by his friend [Bill Gertz](#), an American journalist and longtime China hawk who had written about Guo's anti-CCP campaign extensively for the right-wing *Washington Free Beacon*. Gertz brought the two together following an October 2017 [press conference](#) at Washington's National Press Club, where Guo decried the "kleptocrat" CCP and announced his sources had informed him that a new wave of Chinese spies had just been dispatched to the United States.

In happier days, Guo had been a close associate of Ma Jian, once the number two official in China's Ministry of State Security who is now serving [a life sentence](#) for accepting about \$16 million in bribes between 1999 and 2014, some of them, allegedly from Guo, whose legal troubles arose from the same Chinese anti-corruption campaign. Whatever he had or hadn't done back in China, Guo's proximity to Ma meant he knew a lot.

"Some people believe Guo is one of the highest profile defectors we've ever had and that he had intel about how the Chinese Communist Party works," says [Brian Kennedy](#), chairman of the [Committee on the Present Danger: China](#), whose board also includes Bannon and former C.I.A. director R. James Woolsey.

Just a few weeks after Bannon met Guo, he appeared on Breitbart Radio and called China "[an enemy of incalculable power](#)," citing China's advances in financial technology and 5G. From then on, Bannon visited the Sherry Netherland with some regularity.

"It was very clear that Miles occupied a very special place in the universe of Bannon's contacts because of the way that Bannon treated him," says [Alison Klayman](#), the award-winning documentary filmmaker who followed Bannon for her 2019 film, "[The Brink](#)." Klayman saw that Bannon could be elusive and curt with contacts, but Guo seemed different. "Every time he would come in and out of New York, Miles would be the first stop. It became pretty obvious that Bannon wanted something from this guy."

Soon, Bannon began appearing for long stretches on Guo's annual G-TV Lunar New Year special, a day long Chinese language broadcast that saw Bannon sitting in the same wrinkled outfit while Guo made frequent costume changes, from one candy-colored suit to another. ("He's a Liberace," Bannon says. "He's always got different looks.")



Bannon on Guo's Lunar New Year broadcast.

Credit: [Guo Media on YouTube](#)

In late 2019, details of a financial relationship emerged. Axios [reported](#) that Bannon had signed a one year, \$1 million contract with Guo for his consulting services beginning in August 2018. [The New York Times](#) then reported Bannon had also received a \$150,000 loan from Guo. In an interview, Bannon said that he had borrowed the money for a still unfinished film about Xi Jinping called, “The Last Emperor of China,” and had already repaid the debt.³

Gong, the journalist, says she became incensed upon hearing the news of Bannon’s \$1 million contract with Guo and began imploring Bannon to break with him. “I was very mad about that money,” she says, noting she had doubts about whether the funds were clean. “I had been telling him... please don’t take it. Then I learned he still took the money.” Gong says she has since been interviewed on two occasions by an FBI agent, who was interested in any information she could provide related to both Guo and Bannon. (Gong declined to provide specifics.)

Guo told me it was Bannon who convinced him to launch the [Rule of Law Fund](#) late in 2018. The fund was designed to investigate abuses by the Communist Party, such as the deaths and disappearances of businesspeople and politicians. Guo personally pledged \$100 million, and Bannon [promised](#) to serve as the fund’s chairman. Guo says it’s been “very successful.” But when Bannon thanked the Fund on an episode of “[War Room: Pandemic](#),” some observers wondered if the NGO’s money was being used to pay Bannon.

Guo told me he is not certain whether Rule of Law funds are paying for the production or salaries of Bannon’s podcast. “I personally don’t manage the Rule of Law Foundation account, but I do think the Rule of Law Foundation will support Mr. Bannon’s program and his podcast,” he said.

The Covid-19 pandemic seems to have fast tracked the men’s relationship and given them even more of a common purpose. Indeed, whatever one believes about Bannon’s political takes, his assessment of the severity of the novel coronavirus was decidedly ahead of the mainstream — which he attributes to Guo. Almost as soon as the virus was detected, in late December, Guo posted videos saying that undisclosed sources within the Chinese scientific community had told him that the virus’s spread was anything but accidental; it was, he said, a biological weapon purposely released by the CCP to carry untold death and destruction to the West. From Washington, Bannon began talking daily to Guo.

While there is no proof of the biological weapon theory, Gertz (who himself has [received](#) a \$100,000 loan arranged by Guo) published an article in the *Washington Times* about it — “[Coronavirus may have originated in lab linked to China’s biowarfare program](#)” — on January 26. The day before, Bannon had changed the name of his “War Room: Impeachment” podcast to “[War Room: Pandemic](#),” announcing that “the biggest story in the world” was no longer the impeachment, but a potential pandemic that could kill untold millions and shake the world economy. By the end of February, after Sen. Cotton began discussing the lab connection publicly and scientists felt compelled to dismiss the biological weapon speculation as a conspiracy theory, Bannon had Guo and Gertz on his show for a victory lap on their messaging win.



Bannon hosts “War Room: Pandemic,” a podcast about Covid-19.

Guo’s whistleblowing has, at times, felt prescient. In 2017, for instance, he started making scattershot [accusations relating to Chinese conglomerate HNA](#), which, it has since been revealed, was so over leveraged that the Chinese government was forced to bail it out. A 2017 [article](#) on Guo in *The New York Times* also indicated that he had access to insider information on the families of high ranking Communist Party officials. But other claims — like Guo’s insistence that the Chinese government was behind the 2014 disappearance of Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 as part of a plot to cover up an alleged organ harvesting program from imprisoned Falun Gong followers and other prisoners in China — seem kooky at best.

For his part, Bannon is unwilling to concede the point that Guo is anything but reliable. “A lot of the stuff he says sounds crazy,” he says. “I witnessed people mock him, say he’s crazy, but things he said about HNA, [Beijing’s restrictions on] Hong Kong and the pandemic were great calls. There’s no doubt about it, he’s like a character out of a James Bond movie.”

“American people don’t like to listen to truth,” Guo told me over Zoom in July, on a rare moment off the yacht and on terra firma in his Greenwich, Connecticut, home, which he calls his “ranch.” “Three years ago, I do a press conference and say, ‘Please, America, friend, you need to prepare. CCP have officially planned to kill America.’ Now how many people died? 100,000 people. All of America — media, Wall Street — [could be] under CCP control. I’m not a gossip guy. All this information is insider information, intelligence. Nobody believed me. You trust the CCP!”



Bannon and Guo in a video posted on GNews.

Credit: [GNews](#)

President Trump, for his part, seemed willing to trust Chinese President Xi Jinping's ability to defeat the virus in early February. "Great discipline is taking place in China, as President Xi strongly leads what will be a very successful operation," he [tweeted](#). Later in the month he compared the virus to his impeachment, as just another Democratic "hoax."

But inside his administration, some of Bannon and Guo's alarm was beginning to be heard. In late January, Trump's trade adviser, Peter Navarro, wrote a memo warning about a "full-blown pandemic." He wrote a second one in late February about appropriating funds, saying "This is NOT a time for penny-pinching."

According to Bannon, the memo from Navarro, who co-authored the 2011 book [Death By China](#), was not just an instance of great minds thinking alike.⁴

"I'll leave it at this," Bannon says. "If you read Navarro's memo, I think if you go back and look at the dates of our shows, you heard many of those things were on the show."

THE CHINA PIVOT

Bannon says his fascination with Asia goes back to his childhood in Norfolk, Virginia, and exposure to naval history there. But for those who knew Bannon when he was a producer in Hollywood, his shift to far-right causes, including focusing on Islamic fundamentalism, anti-immigration policies at the Mexican border, and most recently the Chinese Communist Party, has been surprising.

Screenwriter Julia Jones, who collaborated on scripts with Bannon for 17 years, from 1991 up until "he went to the dark side" in 2008, has been bewildered by his transformation. "I'm trying to figure out how he has these policy positions, because they're not consistent with the Steve Bannon I knew and that many of us knew," Jones says. "I knew he was a Republican, but he was what I call a plain, cloth coat Reagan Republican. I never heard him bash the Clintons. Everybody he associated with was far left."

Jones marks what she sees as a conversion to far-right ideology to his work with [David Bossie](#), which began around 2009 with Bannon's documentary "Generation Zero." Bossie, president of the right-wing political action committee Citizens United, introduced Bannon to conservative billionaire mega-donors, Robert and Rebekah Mercer, who would go on to invest \$10 million in Breitbart at Bannon's behest. One of the Mercers' pet causes is combating Islamic fundamentalism, and under Bannon's leadership, Breitbart [labeled](#) Muslims "rapefugees" and claimed terrorism to be "an expression of mainstream Muslim values."

The Mercers, the largest donors to Trump's 2016 presidential campaign, [helped install](#) Bannon as chief executive of the campaign when it seemed to be flailing. Once in the administration, Bannon quarterbacked Trump's travel ban from seven majority Muslim countries and pushed Trump to scrap NAFTA.

One of Bannon's first acts in the Trump administration was one that hardly boosts his anti-CCP bonafides: he enlisted the help and advice of [John L. Thornton](#), the former co-President of Goldman Sachs, who had become perhaps the Chinese government's greatest ally in the American financial sector. By the time Thornton left Goldman, in 2003, his initiatives had turned it into the leading underwriter for huge state-owned Chinese companies — helping turn China into the economic superpower it is today.

"We won at 2:30 in the morning on November 9th, and John Thornton was in my office on the 14th floor of Trump Tower at 5 o'clock the next afternoon, as soon as he could get there,"



David Bossie, president of Citizens United.
Credit: Gage Skidmore, [Creative Commons](#)

Bannon says. Soon after, Thornton was advising the President to forge a close, personal relationship with Xi Jinping — a move now at odds with Bannon's stated ambitions.



Robert and Rebekah Mercer (father and daughter) attend the 2017 TIME 100 Gala in New York City. The Mercers invested millions in Breitbart, the right-wing news site Bannon used to run.

Credit: Sean Zanni/Patrick McMullan via Getty Images

But in less than a year, by August of 2017, Bannon was pushed out of the administration after he gave a candid interview to the *American Prospect* and made [comments](#) contradicting Trump's North Korea policy. Bannon resumed chairmanship of Breitbart and was reportedly still in regular contact with Trump in October, when he met Guo. But by the January 2018 publication of Michael Wolff's *Fire and Fury*, with pages and pages of [incendiary quotes](#) from Bannon about Trump and his family, the Mercers publicly cut ties with him — and forced him out of Breitbart.

Within four days of the Mercers' statement, Matt Drudge [tweeted](#), "LIFE AFTER MERCER! BANNON FINDS NEW BILLIONAIRE, MILES KWOK..." Soon, it was Guo's [private jet](#) at his disposal, replacing the Mercers'.

Some who know Bannon question his commitment to China, or any issue. "This is Steve's modus operandi," says Kurt Bardella, a longtime congressional aide to former Republican Congressman Darrell Issa. Before experiencing a political conversion and quitting in protest,

Bardella worked for Bannon as Breitbart's spokesperson from 2014 to 2016. "For someone like him to exist and have any relevance, he constantly needs a bogeyman to congregate the xenophobic prejudiced people who are the readers of places like Breitbart, who watch Fox News and support Donald Trump," he says.

[Kennedy](#), at the [Committee on the Present Danger](#), disagrees. He argues that Bannon has been at the "forefront" of articulating the dangers of China's rise, and that the country, and the federal government, are already beginning to think differently about China.

"He saw China as *the* existential threat of the modern age, as the Soviet Union was," says [Kennedy](#). "And when he talks about China, he really believes it. If Guo never existed, Steve would still be talking about China. He's all policy, all the time."

Bannon, for his part, insists he's no Johnny-come-lately China hawk. As a young naval officer, he served on a destroyer in the South China Sea and later at the Pentagon. Before joining the Trump campaign, in March 2016, he [declared](#) on his Breitbart radio show, "We're going to war in the South China Sea in five to ten years. There's no doubt about that." And in the final months of the 2016 campaign, Bannon says, he reinforced Trump's inclination to bash "China, China, China," because it played well in the heartland, where so many had lost manufacturing jobs. He also insists that while in the White House, he took a special



Bannon served as a naval officer in the 1970s and 1980s.

Credit: Courtesy of the Bannon family

interest in China, collecting agency reports and advocating for a tougher policy towards Beijing.

Bannon ascribes to the apocalyptic, cyclical view of history laid out in Neil Howe and William Strauss's 1997 pop sociology book *The Fourth Turning: An American Prophecy*, in which the authors posit that every 80 years or so, America inevitably encounters a crisis, like the Civil War and World War II, that brings great loss of life and upheaval. The last fourth turning was World War II and the Great Depression; the next one, Bannon has taken to predicting, will involve a confrontation with China. "We're in 1938 right now," he told me in February. "There's no difference in these guys than the Nazis, the Fascists in Italy, and the Imperial Japanese Military. In 1936, '37, '38, the allies had every tool at their disposal to stop Hitler and stop the Nazis. The West blinked and didn't stop the gangsters."

Bannon told me that his feelings about the existential threat posed by China crystallized while working in Asia in the late aughts. In between a stint running a Hollywood management company and his period of writing and directing venerating documentaries on proto Trump figures Sarah Palin and Michelle Bachmann, Bannon ran a Hong Kong-based company that harnessed the cheap labor of young gamers to mine virtual gold from the game "World of Warcraft" and turn it into a real world, tradeable currency.

While he was in Beijing for the 2008 summer Olympics, Bannon had an epiphany. "It was very obvious that these guys want to be a hegemonic power," he says. "They need total control ... I just saw it as an American, as a 'foreign devil,' but you could see something was building."

He also got his first look at a property owned by his future partner and benefactor. "Miles was the man," he says. "He had the [Pangu Hotel](#) right across from the major Olympic stadium, and he was put forth as the successful Chinese entrepreneur. He was the Donald Trump of China at the time."

TO DEPORT OR NOT TO DEPORT, THAT IS THE QUESTION

With news of the FBI's ongoing investigation into his financial affairs, Guo's immigration status is once again a subject of scrutiny. The *Wall Street Journal* recently [reported](#) that in 2017, Sun Lijun, then China's vice minister of public security, convinced the Republican National Committee vice chair Elliot Broidy to lobby on behalf of Guo's extradition. Back when Bannon was still in the White House, Broidy was far from a lone voice advocating for Guo's return. Then finance chairman of the RNC, Steve Wynn as well as Sheldon Adelson, both major Trump donors and casino magnates with investments in Chinese gaming mecca Macau, each lobbied the Trump administration to deport Guo to face justice in China. [Bruno Wu](#), a Chinese billionaire with deep Chinese government ties, hired Roger Stone, the Republican lobbyist and consultant, to engage in an anti-Guo propaganda campaign.

Although he hadn't yet met him, Bannon says that he personally advocated for Guo's amnesty from the West Wing because he imagined that a man in his position would possess considerable useful intelligence. "I was the protector," he told me. "When I was inside the White House, I took the files and put them in my office, and said, 'Whoever wants this guy, this guy is a pretty valuable hombre.'"

Then-Attorney General Jeff Sessions, a [close friend](#) of Bannon's, was another notable holdout. In October 2017, Bill Gertz — Guo and Bannon's friend — wrote a [piece](#) in *The Washington Times* reporting that, the previous spring, Sessions actually threatened to resign should Guo be deported. (Sessions didn't respond to my request for comment.)

When Bannon and I last spoke in July, there had been a great deal of speculation about Bannon's role in Trump 2020. The conditions, after all, looked ripe. [Jason Miller](#), who served as Trump's 2016 campaign spokesman and was a longtime co-host of Bannon's "War Room"

shows, joined the Trump campaign in June as an advisor. Then, when Brad Parscale, a longtime Bannon enemy, was fired as Trump's campaign manager in July, Bannon's name [appeared in print](#) as a possible replacement. Parscale was instead replaced with [Bill Stepien](#), whom Bannon had helped bring into the 2016 campaign. With the campaign seemingly foundering again — Trump has been consistently behind Biden in the polls — it wouldn't be out of the question for Trump to reassemble the team that led to his 2016 victory.

Pre-arrest Bannon, however, was unequivocal. "There's absolutely no chance," he told me, bobbing in luxury somewhere in the Long Island Sound. "I have no interest and no chance, and they don't need me. I am fully engaged in helping the citizens of China."

Facing political Siberia as well as up to 40 years in prison, running a government in exile for China may be all he's got left.



Andrew Goldman, the host of *Los Angeles* magazine's podcast, "[The Originals](#)," is a veteran interviewer, journalist and contributing editor at *Town & Country* and *WSJ* magazines. He lives in Connecticut with his wife, interior designer Robin Henry, and their two sons, Henry and Charlie.

COVER STORY



Pole Position

BY EYCK FREYMAN

In public, Chinese diplomats and climate negotiators deny that they see any link between climate change and geopolitics. But there is a deeply cynical consensus within China's academic and policy communities that climate change creates geopolitical opportunities that China can exploit — and must exploit before its rivals do. Greenland was the proof of concept for this strategy. And it caught the U.S. flat-footed.

THE BIG PICTURE



Transsion's Triumph

BY GARRETT O'BRIEN

A look at Transsion's monumental growth, unique marketing strategies and future growth potential.

Q & A



Jörg Wuttke on China's Self-Destruction

BY ANDREW PEOPLE

The EU Chamber of Commerce in China president talks about China's self-inflicted problems; how he gets away with being so outspoken; and why he believes in China's comeback gene.



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