



[Department of the Interior Grounds Drones Made in China](#)

Last week, the U.S. Department of the Interior announced that it would be grounding all drones in its fleet that were manufactured in China or contain Chinese-made parts while it conducts a review of the drone program. Exceptions will be made for any drones that are currently being used for emergency purposes such as fighting wildfires, dealing with natural disasters, and search and rescue. The decision to ground the non-emergency use drones stems from a concern regarding Chinese technology and the potential risks of using it for sensitive government projects. Fears that these drones could be secretly passing along data to Chinese intelligence agencies have existed for years.

The United States has a fleet of approximately 810 drones, and most are either made in China, or have parts that were manufactured in China. Last month, the American Security Drone Act was introduced in the Senate, which would mandate the federal government to cease using drones made in China. The Department of the Interior currently uses its drones to monitor fires and floods, inspect dams, and track endangered species. However, there are fears that the drones could be sending data and photographs to China. Additionally, footage from the drones could reveal sensitive information about American infrastructure and increase vulnerability to a potential cyber-attack. The Department of the Interior previously attempted to assuage concerns over Chinese interference by developing strategies and technology to ensure that drone data didn't leak. Interior Secretary David Bernhardt failed to give a clear answer on whether the drones would be able to be used again at the conclusion of the investigation, saying only that he would make a decision when the investigation ended.

The grounding of the drone fleet is just the latest in a series of measures the United States Government has taken to curb the influence of Chinese technology in the United States. Most notably, Chinese telecommunications giant Huawei has been blocked from going about its business in the United States over similar fears of Chinese spying. Chinese company DJI holds a 70% stake in the U.S. drone market, and vowed to work with the United States Government to assuage their concerns and reinstate the drones. The company has worked with the Department of the Interior for over two years, and has previously consulted with officials from the Department, NASA, and independent cybersecurity professionals to ensure their drones were secure. For their part, the Chinese Foreign Ministry slammed the move, and encouraged the United States to "stop abusing the concept of national security," and provide a more hospitable environment for Chinese companies.

Moving forward, the only drones that will continue to be used are those that are currently deployed for emergency purposes. The decision to ground the drone fleet will not help relations between the United States and China, who are locked in disagreement over multiple trade-related issues. China has been upset by the American effort to curb the influence of their companies in the West, and the United States is wary of the Chinese government using their companies to spy and steal information.