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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
SELECT COMMITTEE ON CHINA

March 19, 2026

The Honorable Pete Hegseth
Secretary of War
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301

Dear Secretary Hegseth:

As detailed in my December 19, 2025, letter, the French government is effectively blocking the ability of the Select Committee on China (Select Committee) to obtain basic information about French aerospace companies' activities in China. In addition to the issues we identified regarding Airbus, the Committee has identified publicly available information showing that Safran, another French aerospace company operating in the American defense ecosystem, is potentially engaging in activities in China. As the French government blocked us from learning more about Airbus' activities, we expect the same treatment for Safran. Therefore, the Select Committee wanted to inform you of Safran's Chinese operations.

Safran plays an important role in the U.S. defense industrial base, including developing quantum sensing technology,¹ maintaining engines for the U.S. Army's UH-72A Lakota helicopter,² as well as landing systems for various U.S. military aircraft.³

The U.S. government should have policies in place to ensure that its contractors are not directly or indirectly advancing China's military-civilian fusion capabilities in the aerospace industry. As part of its oversight responsibilities, the Select Committee has undertaken a targeted, non-public review of American and Western aerospace companies' activities in China.

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For several decades, the U.S. Government operated under a naïve assumption: robust economic engagement would lead the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to political liberalization in China.⁴ In furtherance of this misguided objective, the U.S. government encouraged businesses, including aerospace companies such as Safran, to make significant investments in the People's Republic of China (PRC). The promise of potentially the largest market in the world presented a tremendous opportunity. But the situation has changed.

America's misguided optimism about China turned to clear-eyed confrontation once the U.S. finally recognized the threat posed by the CCP. As the U.S. Government shift their approach towards confronting this existential threat, we expect Western companies who do business with the U.S. Government to work with us in good faith to unwind relationships that undermine U.S. national security.⁵ U.S. export controls help to protect U.S. national security and bolster America's technological superiority, ensuring that U.S.-developed or -derived technology does not get used against Americans or erode our edge.

In the aerospace domain, there is substantial overlap between commercial and military aerospace technologies, as you know. Advanced commercial technologies—such as integrated flight management systems, engines, modular avionics architectures, cockpit displays,⁶ and weather radar⁷— can be easily repurposed for military use.⁸ The United States pioneered this approach of adapting commercial technology for military systems—repurposing commercial aircraft such as the Boeing 737, 767, and 707 into highly capable military platforms including the P-8 Poseidon, KC-46 Pegasus, and airborne early warning and signals intelligence aircraft.⁹ However, that was American defense companies supporting the U.S. military. Here, we are concerned about Western aerospace companies supporting PRC military capabilities.

The PRC aggressively adopted this same approach of developing commercial technology then repurposing it for military purposes. It primarily accomplished this goal by leveraging joint ventures and partnerships with Western aerospace companies.¹⁰ Many of these joint ventures predate the U.S. Government's recognition of the seriousness of the CCP threat, but now they should be reevaluated given the national security implications. Relationships between Western aerospace companies and the Chinese industrial base have not only transferred technology but also taught PRC firms the critical design, manufacturing, and certification know-how needed to develop China's indigenous aircraft.¹¹ By bypassing early phases of aerospace development, these partnerships helped China rapidly modernize the People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF),¹² largely through one key firm: the Aviation Industry Corporation of China (AVIC).

AVIC is not a benign commercial partner. It produces essentially all of China's domestic fixed-wing military aircraft, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), and helicopters, as well as a wide range of civilian aircraft and other aviation and nonaviation products and services.¹³ Unlike its Western counterparts, AVIC's primary duty is not to shareholders, but to the PRC Party-state and its defense goals, particularly through Beijing's strategy of military-civil fusion [军民融合].¹⁴ In recognition of this role, the U.S. Treasury Department designated AVIC a Non-SDN Chinese Military-Industrial Complex Company in 2021.¹⁵ The Committee has concerns that Safran's work with AVIC enables PLAAF aircraft development.

Safran's website proudly boasts its influence and deep roots in all segments of China's major aviation programs over 50 plus years.¹⁶ With its joint ventures (including with AVIC subsidiaries), production factories, training centers, and research and development efforts in China, Safran played a role in fostering the development of China's domestic commercial aerospace capabilities which can then be repurposed to serve China's military aims. This letter seeks to highlight a few examples of the Select Committee's concerns.

For example, Safran reportedly established a joint venture with the Shanghai Aircraft Manufacturing Corporation (SAM) in 2012 to manufacture EWIS, an electrical wiring connection system, for Chinese C919 commercial aircraft.¹⁷ As you know, the United States Department of Commerce Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) listed SAM as a military end-user in December 2020.¹⁸ These EWIS systems can then be applied to different aircraft sections and processes.¹⁹ While the C919 is a commercial aircraft, Safran's partner in this joint venture, SAM, is fully owned by the Commercial Aircraft Corporation of China (COMAC), which is a state-owned enterprise and substantially influenced by AVIC.²⁰ SAM has been involved in the manufacturing and repair of more than 3,400 aircraft for the PLAAF and the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN).²¹ In January 2025, the U.S. Department of War identified SAM as a "Chinese military company" to highlight its role in supporting the modernization goals of the PLA.²²

Additionally, Safran established a joint venture with Xi'an Aircraft Industry Group (XAC), a subsidiary of AVIC, in 2011 to produce and build jet engine nacelle components.²³ In 2016, they announced the milestone of having assembled 8,000 thrust reverser doors for CFM56 jet engines.²⁴ Thrust reverser technology has been noted to have direct military applications, such as for in-flight deceleration, for short takeoff and landing aircraft, and military fighter applications.²⁵ XAC has developed multiple PLAAF platforms including the Y-20 cargo aircraft, H-6 bomber, and JH-7 fighter-bomber.²⁶ XAC is also known as the Xi'an Aircraft Group has been identified as a "Chinese military company" by the U.S. Department of War.²⁷

As stated in a press release, Safran also co-developed a WZ-16 turboshaft helicopter engine with Aero Engine Corporation of China (AECC).²⁸ AECC operates as another PLA defense contractor whose engines have been widely used in Chinese military and civilian aircraft. The WZ-16 was the first jointly developed aero engine to be entirely certified in China where it was then installed in the AVIC AC 352 helicopter.²⁹ The development of the AVIC AC 352 was considered groundbreaking for the Chinese helicopter industry and it provides a platform for the development of a military version in the future. AECC is a driving force of China's "Two Engine Plan" to develop and build high quality aero-engines and gas turbines for military and commercial use.³⁰ The Select Committee is concerned that Safran's partnership with AECC has accelerated China's pursuit of this goal.

As you know, the PLAN and PLA adopted a series of French technology for its military helicopters. We noticed a pattern where French companies work with China to develop a civilian helicopter then the PLA absorbs that civilian helicopter technology into its military platforms. This appears to date back multiple decades. According to the U.S. Army, Safran's engines appear on the Chinese Multi-role helicopter the Z-8, and the Chinese Naval Search and Rescue Helicopter variant the Z-8S.³¹ The PLA derived the Z-8 based on the design of the SA 321 Super Frelon, a French helicopter³² that dates back more than 50 years.³³ The Z-8 plays a critical role in PLA airborne operations.³⁴

We understand this technology dates back decades. However, it continues to drive China's military development. The PLAN has developed its new generation of civilian and military transport helicopters by adopting this French technology. According to the U.S. Army, China developed the

AC313 commercial helicopter based on the Z-8.³⁵ The AC313 first flew in 2010.³⁶ Afterward, the PLAN used technology from the AC313 on the Z-18, its medium transport helicopter.³⁷ Safran publicly states that it sells components for the AC313 platform.³⁸ Now, we see Safran's participation in furthering the goals of the Two Engine Plan, and are concerned that history will repeat itself.

Safran's relationships with Chinese state-owned-enterprises may be indirectly benefiting Russian military companies. Rostec is a major Russian defense contractor manufacturing vehicles critical to the conflict in Ukraine such as the Su-57 multirole fighter aircraft, T-90M tanks, and BMP-3 fighting vehicles.³⁹ In 2008, Avicopter, an AVIC subsidiary, signed a joint development Memorandum of Understanding with Oboronprom, part of Rostec,⁴⁰ for an advanced heavy lift helicopter.⁴¹ In June 2016, Russian Helicopters, a Oboronprom subsidiary, signed a framework deal with Avicopter for this joint development of the helicopter referred to as AHL,⁴² during a state visit in China by Vladimir Putin,⁴³ highlighting the importance of the agreement. In 2024, Russia's First Deputy Prime Minister Denis Manturov told reporters the AHL project remained on track.⁴⁴ This development is troubling because Safran supplies power generation systems for the AC313,⁴⁵ which is Avicopter's biggest civilian helicopter,⁴⁶ while Avicopter simultaneously develops a heavy lift helicopter with the Russian defense industrial base.

Finally, Safran's website states its ongoing commitment to the development of the Chinese aviation industry through its training programs for engineers and mechanics. Among other examples, Safran notes that it was the first industrial partner to create the Ecole Centrale of Beijing, a Sino-French school focused on developing Chinese engineers, at Beihang University in 2005.⁴⁷ Beihang University is one of the "Seven Sons of National Defense," ("Seven Sons") which are a group of leading Chinese universities at the forefront of defense research in China.⁴⁸ The U.S. Government added Beihang University to the entity list in 2001,⁴⁹ four years before Safran announced this partnership. Safran should have taken this key security risk into consideration before engaging with an entity that holds close ties to the Chinese military. Unlike other traditional civilian universities that report to the Chinese Ministry of Education, the Seven Sons report to the Chinese Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT).⁵⁰ The MIIT holds ties to both the civilian and defense sectors of the Chinese economy, and the MIIT division called the State Administration of Science, Technology, and Industry for National Defense (SASTIND) has substantial involvement with the Seven Sons.⁵¹ In 2016, a SASTIND publication referred to them as "military engineering universities."⁵² Beihang University itself reported that it spent roughly 60% of its research budget on defense research, as of 2017.⁵³ In short, these are universities dedicated toward strengthening China's military might, Beihang being one of them.

Secretary Hegseth

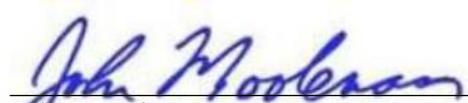
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While Safran's ventures in China are commercial in nature, its work with these AVIC subsidiaries may directly support entities that help advance the CCP's military capabilities. Technology transferred through ostensibly civilian programs can be repurposed by military subsidiaries. Even absent direct technology transfer, Safran's partnership strengthens AVIC financially, institutionally, and reputationally, indirectly fueling China's military modernization.

I stand ready to work with the Pentagon to ensure that American defense contractors do not support the Chinese military. I hope this information helps inform your decisions going forward when engaging with Safran.

Sincerely,



John Moolenaar
Chairman

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¹⁶ *China: Fully committed to the world's most dynamic aviation market*, SAFRAN, <https://www.safran-group.com/countries/china> (last visited November 5, 2025).

¹⁷ *Joint Venture: Safran Group & Shanghai Aircraft Manufacturing Company*, Datenna, <https://www.datenna.com/resources/joint-venture-safran-group/> (last visited February 9, 2026).

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