

# "Anything We Touch Is A Weapon": New US PsyOps Recruitment Video Casts Spotlight On China Threat



BY TYLER DURDEN

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*Authored by Andrew Thornebrooke via [The Epoch Times](#).*

The phrase "A threat rises in the east" is superimposed over rolling footage of Chinese and Russian [military](#) parades. Ethereal, eerie music plays as cinematic impressions of the Eurasian alliance between [China](#) and Russia are interspersed with images of the last century's most emblematic struggles for democratic values.



*The video "Ghosts in the Machine" by the U.S. Army's 4th Psyop Group displays an ominous warning about the threat from China and Russia. (Screenshot)*

There is footage of the fall of the Berlin Wall, a free speech protest in Hong Kong, the toppling of a Saddam Hussein statue in Baghdad, and the resolute stand of Tiananmen Square's "Tank Man."

This is not some documentary about the myriad threats democracy has faced time and time again, but a new video created by the Army's 4th Psychological Operations Group and shared on social media by U.S. [Special Forces](#) Command.

Equal parts recruiting video and actual psychological warfare, the project might best be described as a proof-of-concept for the military's capability to build confidence at home and to instill fear abroad.

## GHOSTS IN THE MACHINE



The video, aptly titled “Ghosts in the Machine,” opens with a quote from “The Art of War,” written by Chinese military philosopher Sun Tzu some 2,500 years ago:

“If your opponent is of a choleric temper, seek to irritate him. Pretend to be weak, that he may grow arrogant.”

At first glance, one might think that the quote suggests that the Chinese Communist Party has been pretending to be weak for years in order to lull the United States into a false sense of superiority. By the end of the three and a half minutes of growing unease, however, one wonders whether it has not been the other way around all along.

Indeed, that may be just the purpose of Ghost in the Machine. After all, the video itself is psychological warfare.

### The Sugar-Coated Pill

To realize the importance of psychological operations such as Ghosts in the Machine, one needs to look beyond its visage of cinematic splendor and intentional creepiness, and penetrate to the threat that the video is working against.

According to innumerable reports from the nation’s think tanks and institutions of higher learning, the United States is in a war, though its leadership seems largely unaware of it. It is a war without conventional weapons, but that is nevertheless being fought in hearts and minds everywhere. Indeed, it is a war *on* the minds of Americans everywhere.

It is the psychological campaign of unrestricted hybrid warfare perpetrated by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) with the purpose of eradicating the United States’ will to defend itself and preserve democratic values.

According to one report ([pdf](#)) published by the Washington-based think tank Hudson Institute earlier this month, this psychological warfare is one part of a suite of so-called cognitive operations used by China’s communist regime to undermine U.S. security.

“Cognitive operations involve using psychological warfare to shape or even control the enemy’s cognitive thinking and decision-making,” the report stated.

Indeed, the report quotes directly from the primary propaganda organ of the Chinese military, the PLA Daily, that the ultimate aim of cognitive operations is to “manipulate a country’s values, national spirit/ethos, ideologies, cultural traditions, historical beliefs, etc., to prompt them to abandon their theoretical understanding, social system and development path, and achieve strategic goals without victory.”

In not so many words, it is a military campaign against the United States to convince Americans to give up their society without fighting.

It is, according to a report by the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies ([pdf](#)), a “long-standing Chinese government strategy to exploit foreign media to deliver Chinese propaganda.” The goal of which is to destabilize and otherwise interfere in the political processes of the United States by offering a “sugar-coated pill,” something easy to swallow but lethal to consume, often in the form of anti-American propaganda disguised as domestic information and reproduced online.

“According to the PLA, China is already in constant battle over the narrative of China’s rise and the PLA’s intentions with other nations, both inside and outside of China, and, most prominently, against the United States,” the report said, referring to the acronym for the People’s Liberation Army, the official name of the regime’s military.

The roots of the CCP’s psychological warfare go deep, and their tendrils can be seen crawling rampant across Western media in the form of Twitter bots, sponsored newspaper articles, and state-sponsored misinformation. And the onslaught has been going on for decades.

## Unrestricted Warfare

The CCP’s current efforts can be traced back to the 1999 book “Unrestricted Warfare.” Written by two retired PLA colonels, the book described the strategy and operations through which China could overcome the United States—without being embroiled in kinetic warfare.

Unrestricted Warfare argued that the United States’ weakness was the widespread belief among American military and political leadership that military dominance was solely dependent on technological means, rather than legal, economic, or social factors.

The book, therefore, advocated the use of lawfare, economic warfare, terrorism, and data and supply chain network disruption as various means of undermining the U.S. military.

Much of the book’s proposed strategy was later codified as the “Three Warfares Strategy” in a 2003 document [published](#) by the PLA and titled “Political Work Guidelines of the People’s Liberation Army.”

Since then, the CCP has worked tirelessly to adapt the Three Warfares Strategy to the social media era, using social networking platforms as tools of war to combat the minds of the party’s enemies. Moreover, the introduction of Three Warfares has helped to underscore the promulgation of [military-civil fusion](#), a CCP strategy that seeks to erode any boundary between civilian and military spheres, thus accelerating the erosion of distinctions between war and peace.

To that end, it is vital to understand that the PLA is not a military of the Chinese state, but a wing of the Chinese Communist Party. Thus, the entire military apparatus of China is designed to defend and promote communism first and foremost.

## Party Above All

How the Chinese military serves the whims of the CCP rather than the interests of the Chinese people was elucidated by retired Air Force Brig. Gen. Robert Spalding during an interview with EpochTV’s “China

Insider" on May 12.

"The People's Liberation Army is the armed wing of the Chinese Communist Party," Spalding [said](#). "In the West, we consider the military to be a protector of the state, which in a democracy includes the people. In China's case, the People's Liberation Army is actually a party army, so it protects the party's prerogatives."

"Unlike a national army dedicated to the defense of a state and its people, the Chinese military's purpose is to create political power for the party."

According to a report ([pdf](#)) by the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, U.S. leadership believed for years that the CCP's psychological warfare efforts were a thing of the past.

Such beliefs were proven wrong, however, with the rise of CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping in 2012, whose rule has overseen a resurgence of party initiatives pushing psychological operations as a core part of Chinese national strategy.

Xi has [referred](#) to the work of organizations that engage in psychological operations for the CCP as China's "magic weapons." Those organizations include, most predominantly, the General Political Department within the PLA and the [United Front Work Department](#), the latter of which is charged with overseeing the regime's overseas influence operations and answers directly to the CCP's Central Committee.

Indeed, since the ascension of Xi, Chinese state-run news agency Xinhua has gone so far as to explicitly [characterize](#) the PLA's psychological warfare and political work as "thoroughly implement[ing] Xi Jinping's thoughts on socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era."

Importantly, according to the Johns Hopkins report, the CCP's psychological warfare units under Xi have sought to leverage social media as a key component of "cognitive domain operations" in order to scale Chinese propaganda to a global audience, and to sway, anger, and misinform the citizens of foreign nations to the benefit of the party.

"China uses the tools of information and finance to advance political warfare on a global scale," Spalding said.

"It's a type of warfare that is completely alien to the way that we think of warfare."

Thus, while U.S. military leaders and members of Congress have harped on budget proposals and the number of ships being built for the Navy, the CCP has already committed itself to winning a war without firing a shot.

## Brave New World

At the heart of the CCP's efforts to assault the minds of the American public, then, is the critical ability of social media and related technologies to create content that can have a real-world effect.

"[T]he PLA is developing technologies for subliminal messaging, deep fakes, overt propaganda, and public sentiment analysis on Facebook, Twitter, LINE, and other platforms," according to a report by the RAND Corporation ([pdf](#)).

"Other articles also suggest that the PLA could blackmail or tarnish the reputation of politicians as well as co-opt individual influential civilian social media users to extend the reach of Chinese propaganda while obfuscating its Party origins."

It is through this "hostile social manipulation on foreign platforms" that the CCP can essentially launder state-backed propaganda through proxy channels in the way a mobster might launder ill-gotten gains through a front organization. By obfuscating the origin of social media posts and using technologies such as deep fakes, the party can more effectively diminish American confidence in the United States' ability and worthiness.

"What they've been able to do is use proxies in the West to have the same control over the narrative in the West that they have within China," Spalding said.

"We have no institution in the West that is tasked with understanding this form of warfare."

Spalding's comments were in line with recent [remarks](#) made by U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who said that the CCP was exploiting the United States' free and open information channels and social media networks to promote authoritarianism abroad and strike at the heart of American democracy.

## Ghosts in the Machine

The sudden appearance of a recruitment video for psychological warfare units in the U.S. military is perhaps not such a mystery, given the battles being waged against the American mind.

The primary objective of the CCP's efforts is to [create](#) doubt, fear, and exhaustion to such an extent that American leadership will make mistakes in planning and executing strategy. Likewise, the U.S. Army's "Ghosts in the Machine" video lifts the mirror at the effort.

"Anything we touch is a weapon," the video says, before flashing the motto of the 4th Psychological Operations Group, "Verbum Vincet"—"the word will conquer."

The message is clear enough, China's transnational campaign of repression and psychological terror is not without recourse. The psychological warfare apparatus of the American military and intelligence communities have changed history before and can do it again.

It is surely not by accident that images of the famous Tiananmen Square protests were interlaced with videos of pro-democracy revolutions, or that footage of the PLA marching was juxtaposed with the fall of the Soviet Union.

The United States has toppled great powers from within and from without, the video implies, and can do so again.

As the video so abruptly states, "We are everywhere."

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# ‘Win Without Fighting’: The Chinese Communist Party’s Political and Institutional Warfare Against the West

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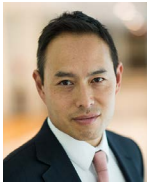
Cover: Chinese leader Xi Jinping is applauded by members of the government as he arrives for the closing session of the National People's Congress at the Great Hall of the People on March 11, 2022 in Beijing, China. (Kevin Frayer/Getty Images)

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

When compared to Western forms of diplomatic conversation and strategic discussion, phrases emanating from Beijing and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) can appear peculiar, platitudinous, and so ambiguous as to be devoid of practical content. China's paramount leader Xi Jinping speaks frequently about a 'community of shared future,' a 'common destiny for mankind' as part of his 'China dream,' or of his country's 'rejuvenation.' He promises to pursue and achieve a 'new type of great-power relations' with the United States that will 'expand the converging interests of all and build a big global family of harmony and cooperation.'

Yielding to the temptation to dismiss these phrases as glib and meaningless or as empty promises to the world would be a serious mistake. Emerging as the victorious side after the world was reshaped in the aftermath of the Second World War, and, more recently, the formal end of the Cold War, the United States

and its allies have generally enjoyed dominance in all forms of power. The challenge and threat of China is largely understood in the context of its increase in material power, which is relatively easy to understand and quantify. In contrast, far less attention is being paid to non-material power, which is, admittedly, more nebulous and difficult to assess.

However, China's focus has been on relentlessly building its 'comprehensive national power' (CNP), that is, the sum-total of its powers and strengths—economic, military affair, science and technology, education, and resource—and *influence*.<sup>1</sup> Thus, CNP encompasses both material and non-material power, and China's buildup of both of these forms of power best explains

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Caption: A visitor views a painting of Chinese leader Xi Jinping with children at the Museum of the Communist Party of China on December 16, 2021 in Beijing, China. (Andrea Verdelli/Getty Images)

its strategic and diplomatic successes. Chinese ‘rejuvenation’ is also not just about building GDP or having the world’s largest naval fleet. Rather, the CCP’s vision of a ‘community of shared future for mankind’ is very much about displacing the dominance enjoyed by the US and other advanced democracies in shaping global discourse and conversations, norms and standards, and influence within and through institutions.

The advanced democracies have taken these less obvious forms of power for granted, a complacency that Beijing has exploited. As the CCP recognizes, “In the final analysis, the rise of a great power is a cultural phenomenon. It (that power) must be accepted by the international community. Be accommodated by the international system, rely on the international system, and be recognised by international norms.”<sup>2</sup>

To be sure, there is a rich and growing literature on the CCP’s various information, influence, and institutional resources and activities, and this report does not seek to reproduce the excellent work already in the public domain. Rather, it begins from the uncomfortable but growing realization that the CCP believes it has long been at war with the US and its allies, even though kinetic force has been used in only a few instances. It looks at why this war is being waged, what the hallmarks of success for Beijing look like, and how the use of non-material strategies in the form of political and institutional warfare complements and augments China’s better known material approaches in the CCP’s determined attempts to win this on-going war or struggle.

The report seeks to emphasize that, in understanding the challenge and threat of China, political and institutional warfare should not be treated as optional or interesting adjuncts to

traditional notions of warfare or that their effects are peripheral to core strategic and even military objectives. On the contrary, non-material approaches are essential to the Chinese strategy and have real-world outcomes that are often the same ones that the use of force or economic coercion is intended to achieve. Just as the CCP views comprehensive power as encompassing material and non-material elements, its notion of waging and winning a war may or may not include a military element. We need to do the same when countering, deterring, and, if necessary, defeating Chinese strategies and actions.

Moreover, the CCP’s approach is not just about putting its views forward in overt or veiled ways in the hope that it will change our minds about various issues. Instead, Beijing’s strategy is much more proactive and profound than that. The CCP’s political and institutional approaches are about fundamentally changing and shaping even the way we begin to think about or analyze an issue or what we perceive to be its ‘first principles.’ It is designed to shape the way we talk (or do not talk) about an issue, the presumptive and analytical frameworks we employ to do so, and the discourse regarding it that is accepted and deemed acceptable. At first glance, such a deeply cognitive approach might seem fanciful and impossible to implement. However, this report offers two recent case studies of instances where the CCP enjoyed considerable success in melding the material and the cognitive—with tangible and real-world results.

This report then offers a summary of the real-world strategic effects and their impacts on the tactical decision-making of countries and their elites that should concern those in charge of our political, economic, military, and diplomatic policies and activities. In conclusion, it suggests some general responses to the CCP’s strategy, approach, and actions in these contexts.



## 2. THE CHINESE COMMUNIST PARTY'S WAY OF WAR

One of the best-known lines from Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* is "To win one hundred victories in one hundred battles is not the acme of skill. To subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill." A later passage provides further context and content: "The highest realization of warfare is to attack the enemy's plans; next is to attack their alliances; next to attack their army; and the lowest is to attack their fortified cities." In short, success is most likely when one avoids direct assault in favor of subversion and circumvention of an enemy's entrenched strengths and strongholds.

The Chinese Communist Party believes it is already at war with the United States and its allies, including Australia. As with Sun Tzu, the CCP's preferred strategy is to win without fighting, or, if there is recourse to kinetic action, to prepare the ground for victory before military hostilities begin. In this context, it is not

being suggested that the importance of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and the threat its presence and capabilities poses should be downplayed. On the contrary, the aim is to seek a more comprehensive and accurate understanding and appreciation of how China seeks to compete, fight, and win—and, in doing so, accept that we are already in a war and therefore need to rethink how best we are compete, fight, and prevail.

The proposition that we are already at war is a troubling one. Even though, in Western thinking war has long been under-

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Caption: The Guard of Honor of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) attend a flag-raising ceremony at Tiananmen Square to mark the 72nd anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China on October 1, 2021 in Beijing, China. (VCG/VCG via Getty Images)

stood to be the continuation of politics albeit using extreme and violent means, clear differences distinguish peacetime from wartime. In this way of thinking, one enters into a state of war only when the state formally decides to use force to achieve political and strategic objectives.

For the CCP, however, war and warfare are broader and more flexible concepts. As in the West, the aim of the use of force is to achieve political and strategic objectives. However, force is merely one form or domain of warfare, with others being political (e.g., information and influence operations) and institutional warfare. These can be used to either enhance the effectiveness of a possible use of force or to achieve the same political and strategic outcomes as the actual use of kinetic force would have. It is about mobilizing national resources to subjugate and defeat the enemy regardless of whether there is physical destruction and loss of life, even if the enemy is unaware of what is being done against them. The CCP considers political and institutional warfare as important domains within the waging of war—not just peacetime domains where one competes as a possible prelude to the use of force. It is with respect to these two domains that the CCP believes it is already at war with the US and its allies. The use of force by the PLA would merely be an extension of fighting in other domains of a war that is already ongoing.

## Understanding the CCP's Political and Strategic Objectives

If the CCP is already at war with us, what are its political and strategic objectives? To answer this question, understanding how the CCP views the regional and global order within which China is still rising is necessary. This global order has been based upon US military and economic dominance. The US has consolidated its strategic presence within the Indo-Pacific region through a system of alliances and security partnerships. In Beijing's viewpoint, the US has provided security and public goods that have made economic development possible but with the expectation that it was also exporting its values of po-

litical and economic reform to nations within the region. From Richard Nixon's rapprochement to George W. Bush's encouraging China to rise to be a 'responsible stakeholder,' China was to rise under US leadership and within the US-led system and eventually face irresistible pressures to change its political and economic institutions. This American aspiration is, however, the Chinese vision of failure.

'Hide your brightness, bide your time' was the patient tactic China employed to make the most of its 'window of opportunity' during a time of relative Chinese weakness whilst dissuading the US and others from demanding reforms inside China or limiting the growth of Chinese power and influence. From Mao Zedong to Deng Xiaoping to Xi Jinping, the 'struggle' against external forces has never ended, even as the tactics and diplomacy have changed radically over the decades. The Chinese have spent many decades and resources studying and understanding the nature and sources of US power and have concluded that a dominant nation's position in the regional and global order derives from the following broad sources or 'forms of control':<sup>3</sup>

- Coercive capability (based largely on material means and resolve)
- Consensual inducements (based on incentives provided to nations bilaterally or through preferred institutional arrangements)
- Legitimacy (which can be based on widely accepted or on institutional norms or conventions)

China's vision of success consists of enhancing its 'forms of control' and weakening America's. As Rush Doshi and others have noted, a weaker China focused primarily on engaging in non-kinetic warfare intended to 'blunt' American and allied power whereas a more powerful (or confident) China is transitioning into building and entrenching 'forms of control' that surpass America's. In this sense, Xi's 'China dream' of 'rejuvenation' envisages the country and Party enjoying and exercising dominant

forms of control over Asia and beyond. As Xi explained in his 30,000-word speech at the CCP's 19th Party Congress, victory is a 'new era' of greater Chinese activism in global governance, the development of a Chinese military that is 'world-class' and possesses global projection and reach, and the emergence of a China that will "become a leading country in comprehensive national strength and international influence." Achieving these goals will herald China's arrival on the 'world's center stage.'<sup>4</sup>

Although there is no doubt about the scale of Beijing's global ambitions, the focus of most of its efforts (those that will negatively affect US interests) is securing hegemony over the maritime nations of Asia. The significance of geography and other material factors can never be negated or wished away by ideational or non-material considerations. There are obvious reasons for the focus on the Indo-Pacific. The region is home to more than half of the world's population, and its combined gross domestic product constitutes around 60 percent of the global GDP. More than one-third of trade and energy flows passes through the region.

In addition to the US, the region has five nuclear armed militaries: Russia, China, India, Pakistan, and North Korea—along with latent or potential nuclear powers such as Japan and South Korea. The four largest military spenders globally are Indo-Pacific nations (US, China, India, and Russia) with Japan and South Korea occupying the ninth and tenth positions. It is also the region having the highest rates of increase in military expenditure and military modernization.

In terms of security, the region is fluid. While multiple maritime and land disputes there are live and increasingly militarized, the region's security organizations are weak, and security arrangements between countries are unclear. For example, US security guarantees are not as institutionalized as the collective security agreement in Europe, and formal treaty commitments to Indo-Pacific powers are ambiguously stated and constantly evolving based on changing circumstances.

China is a dominant geographical presence in the heart of the Indo-Pacific, sharing borders with fourteen other countries and claiming maritime territories that directly impact the interests of almost every country in the Indo-Pacific region having a maritime border. It is also a rare beast, having rapidly made the difficult transition from continental power to sea power (even though the extent to which its strategic doctrine and operational competencies have kept pace with the increases in its sea-power capabilities is uncertain). As many analysts have noted, the most strategically important geography throughout the Indo-Pacific is not its continental but rather its maritime areas,<sup>5</sup> because maritime areas and activities overwhelmingly shape the security and prosperity of not just the maritime nations but also of the major continental nations and the US.

With regard to geostrategy, these areas are commonly referred to as the 'First Island Chain,' which begins at the Kuril Islands and then extends down to the Japanese Archipelago, the Ryukyu Islands, Taiwan, the Philippines, and Borneo, finally ending at the southern part of Vietnam in Indo-China. The first step in dominating the Indo-Pacific is dominating the First Island Chain, thus opening the way to a presence and eventual pre-eminence in the Second Island Chain, the line running from the Bonin and Volcano Islands of Japan to Guam and then towards the eastern islands belonging to Indonesia. The pre-eminent power could then establish a dominant foothold in the middle of the Pacific, allowing a traditionally continental power like China to negate potential vulnerabilities in the form of bottlenecks and blockades in important straits and channels.

As Kamphausen explains, "These straits are of two kinds. The first run perpendicular to the Asian landmass and essentially create paths between islands from the continent to the open sea." Examples of this type are "the Tsugaru Strait between Honshu and Hokkaido" and the "Ishigaki Strait, between Ishigaki and Miyako Islands in the Ryukyus." The second type "runs parallel to the continent and offers access from one marginal sea to another"; examples are "the Malacca and Taiwan Straits."

Kamphausen concludes, “The straits that pass through and between islands are decisive because they afford military and commercial advantages.”<sup>6</sup>

In short, Beijing knows the fate and positioning of the US and China will depend on what occurs in the maritime space and with the maritime nations rather than in Central Asia and land-locked South Asia. Chinese plans towards China’s west, including through relevant parts of the One Belt One Road Initiative, are important in developing its poorer inner provinces and offering possible alternative trade routes that do not pass through maritime East Asia. These will not be decisive in a global geopolitical sense, however, and so Beijing has no choice but to become a great and, eventually, the dominant maritime power in East Asia.

For this reason, the primary focus of this report are China’s political and institutional warfare and its approach to the maritime nations in its neighborhood, including Australia and the rest of Oceania.

Although Japan and a unified Korea have the potential to re-emerge as regional great powers, China recognizes that it is still largely dealing with an assorted collection of ‘small states.’ While some of these ‘small states,’ including Vietnam and Indonesia, may yet become formidable strategic actors within their immediate localities, their primary strategic value is to render assistance to great powers as enablers or blockers.

Due to these regional disparities, China has long been obsessed with identifying strategic, military, and other non-material weaknesses pertaining to the US.<sup>7</sup> Notwithstanding debates within China about whether American dominance has entered its twilight years in structural terms or whether renewal is possible, Beijing focuses on the US because it recognizes the impossibility of an enduring or effective balance without the US presence. Since the end of the Second World War, only the US has possessed the capabilities and relationships needed to dominate and/or intervene decisively in the maritime areas of East Asia.

It has occurred to Beijing that the US’s much greater distance from maritime East Asia can be both a structural advantage and disadvantage. It is the former for the US because the prospect of an Asian hegemon creates more apprehension for resident smaller states than a distant one. This is because the distant US power requires greater acquiescence from regional states to retain its presence and relevance in the region. In that sense, the US is more structurally bound to provide public security goods than would be the case for an Asian hegemon. That partly explains why the US is still largely welcomed as a superpower by most states.

From the 1990s onward, China’s initial approach was to acquire the capabilities needed to dissuade the US from intervening decisively. These capabilities consisted of the ability to inflict (or threaten to inflict) prohibitive costs on US forces. As the PLA’s capacities have grown in absolute and relative terms, the conventional superiority of the US military becomes decisive only in a protracted conflict or with the luxury of significant ‘warning time’ prior to a conflict. As US military superiority in theaters at China’s periphery such as the Taiwan Straits erodes or is surpassed, the US becomes immensely vulnerable to attacks against its bases and ports and those belonging to its allies, meaning that the US becomes ever more reliant on the goodwill, acquiescence, and resolve of regional allies and partners.

In this context, the structural disadvantage for the US is that strategic neutrality or passivity on the part of these small states could be crippling whilst being only inconvenient for an Asian hegemon such as China. Thus, Beijing does not have the same strategic or military need of cooperation from local allies and partners that the US does. Thus, Beijing would have the easier task of neutralizing US allies and partners rather than the more difficult one of acquiring these for itself. Should China change the cost/benefit calculations of these allies and partners in China’s favor, then the US, as a geographically distant power, would be immensely exposed.

In other words, simply minimizing the strategic and military relevance and agency of regional states works in China's favor given that the People's Liberation Army is strengthening its presence in the region and not the US or its northern and southern allies. Achieving that has always been a central pillar in China's strategy of 'easing the US out of Asia' and therefore 'winning without fighting,' and that is still China's primary strategic approach.

In China's view, the struggle began long ago, and war is already upon us. It is not (yet) being fought in kinetic terms, but China's vision of success in Asia is not overly reliant on surpassing raw US power and influence as would be necessary in a simple contest on a level playing field. Rather, the key to success is gradually locking the US out of the region.

## Cultivating Strategic Support States

Eventually locking out the US in military, economic, political, and normative terms on the one hand, and enhancing forms of control over regional states on the other are complementary objectives and explain the growing discourse amongst Chinese strategists about cultivating 'strategic support states.'

In a 2015 consensus of fifty Chinese scholars on 'China's periphery diplomacy in the Xi Jinping era,' it was concluded that acquiring 'strategic support states' can be achieved through regional cooperation and provision of economic and public goods as China expands. Cultivating such support states is closely linked to the oft-repeated Chinese aspiration to create a 'community of shared future for mankind,' which is central to achieving 'national rejuvenation.' According to one extensive analysis, one of the principles of cultivating a 'strategic support state' is ensuring that "China has the ability and resources to guide the actions of the country so that they fit into [China's] strategic needs."<sup>8</sup> To reiterate, this need not mean that they become virtual allies of even client states (e.g., Cambodia). Rather, it only requires that they do increasingly less to assist the US in opposing or reversing creeping Chinese domination.

The cultivation of strategic support states has taken several primary forms and encompasses strategic, military, political, economic, non-material, and psychological forms. The military and related strategic aspects of China's approach are well researched and not the subject of this report. Some important non-military aspects include the following:

### Moving from defense to promotion of authoritarianism

In the recent past, China sought merely to deflect criticism of its authoritarian system. Although it still does so, it now also promotes its approach as a superior one for developing economies around the region and world.

According to Xi, as China becomes a leading global power from 2035 onward, the Chinese people will enjoy the "common property" of the international system. Xi has also stated that "the Chinese nation will stand with a more high-spirited image in the family of nations," and "socialism with Chinese characteristics" represents a "new choice" for other developing nations that seek economic growth while still maintaining their independence.<sup>9</sup>

Beijing's promotion of its political values and standards goes far deeper than official pronouncements and mere declaratory policy. The CCP leadership has augmented support for authoritarian regimes—for example, that of Cambodia's Hun Sen,<sup>10</sup> and autocratic regimes are significantly overrepresented as recipients of Chinese financing.<sup>11</sup>

China is not just promoting authoritarian values but teaching tactics for repression and exporting apparatuses used for domestic coercion to willing authoritarian clients.<sup>12</sup> It has gone beyond forcing foreign firms to agree to its restrictive internet and social media standards to championing its standard of "internet sovereignty," which gives every government the right to regulate online information and rejects a universal freedom-of-information standard.<sup>13</sup>

In the United Nations, China promotes the innocuous-sounding "community of shared future for human beings" as an alterna-

tive to the notion of universal human rights. The former concept is based on the right of each country to interpret what ‘human rights’ actually means, and it insists that other countries respect and accept that the term ‘human rights’ has different meanings for each country.<sup>14</sup> With respect to ASEAN, China is promoting an ASEAN-China Community of Common Destiny to engineer a smooth transition to a China-centric and hierarchical region.<sup>15</sup> Perhaps most concerning is China’s increased willingness to interfere in, and covertly influence, the domestic decision-making institutions and debates in democratic nations, including promotion of Chinese authoritarian values.<sup>16</sup>

Moreover, the ground for such messages to take hold is immensely fertile. In a Southeast Asian region where Singapore is the only high-income per capita economy, the promise of rapid development under authoritarian rule is attractive. In Asia, only Japan and the Philippines had experienced democratic governance over a sustained period of time prior to 1990. In Asia, there are few, genuine, committed democrats (i.e., those who reject all other forms of government but a democratic one, no matter what occurs), and democracy is viewed in somewhat more instrumental terms.<sup>17</sup>

### Setting ‘discourse, prices, and policy’ in the region

China’s previous focus was benefitting from the regional and global economic system and order while reducing its vulnerabilities to external actions and exogenous shocks.

While such participation is still essential, China now tirelessly and creatively attempts to set ‘discourse, prices, and policy’ in ways that lock in privileges, advantages, and agency for itself with respect to institutions and work through these (e.g., membership of groupings that determine norms, policies and/or actions) to normalize certain forms of economic activity and influence technological, technical, and legal standards in Asia. In this context, initiatives primarily conceived to reduce domestic vulnerabilities, create new avenues for economic growth, and export opportunities without further reforms to the Chinese

political economy (such as the Belt and Road Initiative [BRI] and Made in China 2025) have been transformed into a grand strategy designed to rewrite rules for how regional nations compete and interact.

Achieving the objective of setting ‘discourse, prices, and policy’ offers Beijing far more leverage over regional states than would otherwise be the case, as it places China in a unique position to predetermine or decide the current and future winners and losers of various interactions. From this point of view, the objective is to institutionalize and entrench the Communist Party’s Leninist approach to political economy (i.e., a system where all economic activity serves the interests of the Communist Party and the Chinese state) beyond China’s borders and throughout Southeast Asia.

In this sense, China does not just benefit disproportionately from economic activity with other entities. Instead, Beijing is now able to offer or withdraw opportunity according to political and strategic considerations as it cobbles together a contemporary system for Asian states to offer fealty and tribute in return for access and opportunity.

### Controlling and manipulating grand narratives

Unlike his predecessors, who all stressed the scale and depth of Chinese vulnerabilities and challenges, Xi argues for the inevitability of Chinese success and dominance to an external audience.

An important corollary of this narrative is that the region is an ‘optional’ strategic interest for the US, and, in any event, the US will periodically be distracted by other global priorities (such as in the Middle East) or else be taken in inconsistent directions by the vagaries and irrationalities of different administrations and domestic politics. In contrast, the Communist Party-led China is permanently in the region and is unchanging in its objectives, fundamentally undeterrable, prepared to pay any cost to achieve its objectives, and focused first and foremost on Asia.

Buy-in into these narratives is the essential underpinning for China's vision of success. For weaker states, the will to resist even a coercive great power is greatly diminished if there is consensus that great power will dominate regardless of whether other states disapprove of China's behavior. Striking an uneven accommodation or removing oneself from the fray is preferable to balancing against the future dominant power; that is, one must not fight the future but learn to make the best of it.

### Building Chinese authority, legitimacy, and leadership

China is thinking deeply and creatively about enduring and effective foundations for the accumulation and exercise of power and influence over Southeast Asian states. Beijing is cognizant of the likelihood that the significant powers in the region will not become Chinese allies in the manner that Japan and Australia are allies of the US.

For this reason, 'dominance' based on overwhelming material superiority is perhaps impossible, or at least will not endure even if achieved, and constant 'coercion' of other states might eventually convince these states to properly balance against Beijing. Thus, these tactics alone cannot provide a sound basis for future Chinese power and influence.

For these reasons, because it is also aware that its relative power will most likely not continue to increase indefinitely, Beijing is also attempting to enhance its 'authority' and 'legitimacy' as its power grows in relative terms. Whereas coercion relies on threats or actual punishments to shape or change the behavior of others, the notion of *authority* is based on the *legitimate* exercise of power. Such authority is a more efficient and enduring means to exercise power, because it induces compliance from smaller powers through their recognition or acceptance of China's right to impose obligations on them.

The recognition of that 'right' might be moral or normative or might be based on a long-term material calculation. Whichever it is, smaller countries come to accept that the rules applicable

to the great Chinese power differ from those for smaller powers, and so, unlike the US's rule-based framework, the Chinese proposition is inherently hierarchical. If accepted, that hierarchy reduces the need for China to rely on mere threats or punishments.<sup>18</sup>

Consider the primary forms of diplomatic messaging China employs for East Asia compared to those it reserves for Western liberal democracies such as Australia, the US, and the European Union states. With respect to the latter groups, China promotes the notion of 'mutual benefit' and 'win-win.' In contrast, the authors' conversations with Southeast Asian interlocutors emphasize the permanence and greatness of Chinese civilization, which thus provide an enduring basis for hierarchical but stable and benevolent relationships with smaller states in Asia. Importantly, according to Beijing, the permanence and greatness of Chinese civilization both guarantees the success of China's re-emergence (as that re-emergence is natural and so to be expected) and Beijing's claims that the Chinese overlord will be just and fair (as it has been for millennia, according to the Communist Party's view of history).

China has attached these narratives to actual policies directed toward Asian states. For example, the BRI is designed to spur 'common development' through the strengthening of infrastructure, networks, connectivity, and enhanced people-to-people interactions and exchanges. To Asians, Beijing is not apologetic that the BRI is China-centric or even that Chinese entities are the primary beneficiaries. In addition, countries are often flattered by being told that they form essential nodes in a vast China-centric network. But the overriding message is that benefits can flow to the entire region only if the great Chinese civilizational state comprises the center of the region's economic, political, and diplomatic life.

Whereas impersonal and ruthless market-based principles creates short-term winners and losers based on the merit-based measurement of profitability, embracing the Chinese system will provide participants guaranteed and enduring benefits even

though these may be unevenly distributed. A smooth, peaceful, and prosperous transition to an inevitable Sino-centric region is only possible, according to Beijing, when there is little or no resistance from Asian states. And that can only occur when the latter states accept the ‘natural propensity of things’—the notion of ‘shi’ and ‘harmony’<sup>19</sup>—and seek to work with rather than against it. As Xi Jinping puts it, “When the big river is full

of water, the smaller ones never run dry.”<sup>20</sup> In short, this is all about China making a moral, normative, and material case for its unique hierarchical authority.

Note that these strategies all reinforce the Chinese grand narratives mentioned previously about the inevitability of Chinese dominance and the futility of resistance.



### 3. POLITICAL WARFARE: INFLUENCE AND INFORMATION

As the discussion above indicates, Beijing views the informational and institutional as genuine domains of warfare, not simply peacetime avenues for Chinese mischief, and success in these domains can lead to two possible scenarios. In the event of a future war and during what its opponent views as peacetime, it can lay the groundwork for the CCP's success militarily by "disintegrating the opponent's war foundation" through the "application of political, economic, diplomatic, legal, and public opinion means."<sup>21</sup> However, the CCP can also employ the informational and institutional so as to cause its opponent to behave in ways and to make decisions that will ultimately achieve the same effect as its having been defeated through military means. In both contexts and in contrast to the Western preoccupation with working toward success based on strengthening oneself, much of the CCP's approach to warfare consists of creating the conditions that will lead the enemy to fail.<sup>22</sup> These might be political or strategic decisions made by the opponent, the

PLA's acquisition of bases on foreign territory, a reduction in the capacity of that country to resist CCP demands, or support by that country of Beijing's policies and actions elsewhere. In this sense, the CCP views the informational and institutional domains of war as having at least as significant a strategic and even military impact as would the use of kinetic force.

The term 'political warfare' is sometimes used to describe PLA-led actions to influence emotions, motivations, objective reasoning, and the behavior of governments, organizations, groups, and individuals of a target country in a way that is fa-

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Caption: Chinese Vice Premier Han Zheng, also a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, chairs a conference of the group responsible for implementing the CCP's Belt and Road Initiative in Beijing, China, Feb. 24, 2022. (Yao Dawei/Xinhua via Getty Images)

vorable to China's own political and military goals.<sup>23</sup> Given that broad mission, it is obvious that the PLA is not the only Chinese entity engaged in political warfare.

In his famed 1948 Long Telegram on the Soviet Union, George Kennan described “the employment of all the means at a nation's command, short of war, to achieve its national objectives.”<sup>24</sup> The rich and growing literature analyzing this topic in reference to contemporary China reflects increased knowledge about and awareness of the CCP's deep thinking and reliance on non-military means to achieve strategic and political ends.

The activities of the United Front Work Department (United Front) to organize and mobilize forces outside the CCP to support the Party and strike against its enemies are well known and infamous. Openly referring to the United Front as one of the Party's ‘magic weapons,’<sup>25</sup> Xi has further fueled its infamy. Increasingly serious attention is being paid to the PLA's ‘Three Warfares’ doctrine, which was formulated in 2003 and covers psychological warfare, public opinion warfare, and legal warfare. Its objective is to influence an adversary's decision-making, shape public opinion, and produce a normative and discursive environment favorable to the CCP.

The General Political Department (GPD) is responsible for the PLA's political warfare doctrines and operations and is one of four ‘General Departments’ under the all-powerful Central Military Commission.<sup>26</sup> That the PLA is charged with conducting the ‘three warfares’ does not mean that the doctrine is a military one concerned only with supporting traditional warfighting, however. As Peter Mattis explains, the PLA is the Party's army and explicitly swears loyalty to the CCP rather than to the Chinese state. The PLA's highest purpose is to ensure that the CCP remains in power, and it serves the Party's political goals.<sup>27</sup>

The CCP clearly takes ideas and ideology seriously. In domestic and external contexts, the CCP sees itself as threatened by both material and non-material (i.e., ideational and normative)

elements—a common perspective amongst political entities with Marxist and Leninist foundations. In this sense and in the context of the PLA, it is there to carry out the political work of the Party, and the importance of this mission is permanently elevated above serving as a professional military.

Chinese leaders, officials, and academics have carried out extensive discussions on the importance of non-material warfare. For example, the PLA and other CCP entities are developing concepts of ‘cognitive domain operations,’ and some Chinese military strategists refer to the cognitive domain as the sixth domain of warfare (in addition to land, air, sea, cyber, and space).<sup>28</sup> Cognitive operations involve ‘using psychological warfare to shape or even control the enemy's cognitive thinking and decision-making.’<sup>29</sup> Their ultimate objective is to “manipulate a country's values, national spirit/ethos, ideologies, cultural traditions, historical beliefs, etc., to prompt them to abandon their theoretical understanding, social system and development path, and achieve strategic goals without victory.”<sup>30</sup> Cognitive domain operations employ a systematic approach to understanding the way a target's mind is constructed nationally, socially, culturally, and historically in order to exploit that knowledge and manipulate it. The concept and related operations began to appear prominently in the PLA in the second half of the previous decade and was even noted as the primary approach driving the CCP's political influence and interference operations in the 2018 Taiwanese elections.<sup>31</sup> The table below shows a summary of the actions and purposes of the Three Warfares.

The Three Warfares is only one overarching framework or schema developed by the CCP to wage political warfare. Other concepts include ‘cognitive domain operations,’<sup>32</sup> which is closely related to psychological warfare and involves using information to influence an enemy's way of thinking in contexts ranging from peacetime decision-making to actual physical warfighting. Under this approach, the four tactics used to gain ‘mental’ or ‘mind’ superiority consist of the following:

Table 1. The Actions and Purposes of the Three Warfares

WARFARE	ACTIONS	PURPOSES
Psychological	<p>Use or dissemination of specific information or arguments to affect the psychology and subsequent behavior of the enemy.</p> <p>Focus on the psychology of ‘coercion’ (compelling a subject to behave in certain ways); ‘mystification’; or ‘obfuscation’ (spreading confusion and uncertainty of facts or issues); ‘division’ (encouraging and exploiting disagreement amongst enemies); and ‘defense’ or ‘resilience’ (ensuring the same cannot be done to Chinese entities).<sup>107</sup></p>	<p>Encourage a potential adversary to be cautious about joining an action (including war) against China.</p> <p>Encourage the enemy to base its policies and actions on false or irrelevant information to dilute the effectiveness of their decision-making.</p> <p>Enhance the CCP’s capacity to control the nature and pace of escalation through manipulation of how the enemy calculates costs/benefits and understands risk.</p> <p>Undermine the enemy’s will to resist or endure costs/losses.</p>
Public Opinion	<p>Dissemination of disinformation through media (newspapers, radio, television, the internet, films, books, and social media) to affect discussion and shape desired narratives in an enemy’s environment.</p>	<p>Degrade the resolve of the public to oppose CCP policies and actions.</p> <p>Shape not only public opinion but how the public thinks and talks about an issue (such as Taiwan, human rights, or Chinese history).</p> <p>Create social licence to support and propagate the CCP’s view of history and deny others the social licence to oppose the CCP’s view of history.</p>
Legal	<p>Use of legal and pseudo-legal arguments to redefine notions of legality and legitimacy.</p> <p>Development of favorable norms and processes in international organizations.</p>	<p>Redefine legality and legitimacy to justify Chinese actions.</p> <p>Increase the sphere of ‘legitimate’ coercive and subversive Chinese actions.</p> <p>Use threat of legal action to intimidate or silence, or to impose financial or reputational costs on entities and individuals promoting views antithetical to Beijing’s interests.</p>

Source: Authors.

- Manipulating perception through propaganda narratives.
- Restricting an enemy’s ‘historical memory’ so that its citizens will be open to new (CCP) values.
- Modifying the paradigms and ideologies of elites in enemy countries.
- Deconstructing symbols to challenge national identity.<sup>33</sup>

The purpose of these approaches is to shape and manipulate not just opinions and perceptions or frame the debate about important issues but rather to exercise dominant discursive

power.<sup>34</sup> In this context, the CCP is a keener student of Western philosophy, sociology, hermeneutics, and linguistics than the US and its allies, who have long assumed and enjoyed dominant discursive power. Of high relevance are such postmodernist thinkers as Michel Foucault, who understood that power is exercised through accepted forms of knowledge, a hierarchy of subjective truths and facts, and accepted rules and processes to distinguish fact from falsehood and that dominant views are usually based on accepted authority and wisdom rather than objective rationality.<sup>35</sup>

In short, the CCP believes that China cannot displace the US as the dominant power until it first displaces the hegemony of American and Western discourse, i.e., how we think and talk about the world and its problems—first in Asia and then beyond. This belief concerning the power of discourse applies to singular issues such as the ‘reintegration’ of Taiwan into mainland China rather than its ‘integration,’ the accurate description given that Taiwan has never been ruled by a CCP-led China. It applies to notions such as ‘Chineseness,’ with which the CCP seeks to conflate the Chinese race and culture with the Party’s values, and, more broadly, making the case that the CCP’s values represents Asian values. Discursive power applies to concepts, such as challenging the liberal and individualistic notion of ‘human-rights’ or the Westphalian approach to order and sovereignty in which the rights and privileges of one nation, regardless of its size or power, are equivalent to the rights and privileges of a larger entity. The CCP seeks to displace the principle of order based on the sovereignty of nations with a hierarchical system overseen by China and based on the superior achievements and strengths of its supposedly unsurpassed civilization. Concepts of ‘freedom,’ ‘justice,’ ‘democracy,’ and ‘accountability’ are thus to be redefined.

The CCP’s preferred discourse must be imposed and reinforced domestically and then externally so as to produce uniformity and conformity of thought, conversation, debate, and action serving Party objectives. Without first upending the discursive power of America and the West, China will continue to exist in an international environment that is fundamentally and enduringly hostile to the CCP.

In all these senses, the CCP’s approach to political warfare is totalitarian, especially as it relates to information and influence, and the importance of the entities overseeing this warfare reflect its importance to the CCP. The CCP’s Central Committee (a political body comprised of over 200 members who are considered the most senior leaders of the Party), the State

Council (the chief administrative entity comprising the premier and the heads of cabinet-level departments and ministries), and the Central Military Commission (the peak military decision-making body) are jointly responsible for domestic and international propaganda and messaging for the express purpose of enhancing the CCP’s ‘discourse’ power within China and throughout the world.<sup>36</sup>

These three high-level organizations oversee entities such as the Publicity Department, the Taiwan Affairs Office, the State Council Press Office, and the United Front Work Department. The United Front Work Department has gained profile and international infamy due to its increasingly international (and not just domestic) focus on mobilizing Chinese diasporas, which the forensic work of courageous experts such as Anne Marie-Brady<sup>37</sup> and John Garnaut has made known.<sup>38</sup>

While the United Front Work Department has functional and policy responsibility for information and influence activities, all Chinese government entities are part of the ‘United Front System’ and are expected to engage in ‘united front work.’<sup>39</sup> These entities include all government ministries and agencies, media outlets and universities, business associations, and even organizations such as the Chinese People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries, which is responsible for managing China’s sister-city relationships.<sup>40</sup> As was reported regarding CCP politburo meetings held in 2020-21, the top leadership instructed “party committees (and organizations) at all levels [to] fully recognize the importance of New Era united front work” and work collectively to “study the Party’s history, understand its theories, do practical work and make new advances.”<sup>41</sup>

Unlike almost all other countries where power and influence are dispersed and diffused amongst multiple organizations and interest groups, the CCP’s position to define the objectives and lead political warfare against its own people and other nations is unchallenged. While all nations seek to shape public opinion

and disseminate propaganda in service of their national interests, one should not entertain the false argument that Beijing is simply doing what all other governments do with respect to information and influence operations.

Normal public diplomacy activities are conducted transparently and through open media networks and public engagements with the objective of influencing the views of audiences. In contrast, the intent of political warfare is to manipulate leaders, elites, and other entities and persons of influence through covert or underhanded approaches to achieve specific political and strategic goals. Thus, political warfare is conducted as if one were already in enemy territory and at

war, which the CCP believes is already occurring at a national or ideological level.

Moreover, in terms of the top-down organization for the conduct of political warfare, the ability of Beijing to compel or incentivize any Chinese entity or individual to do its bidding, the manpower and economic resources allocated to the task, the willingness to interfere in or corrupt the institutions of other nations, and the ambition of the information and influence operations and objectives, the CCP is without peer.<sup>42</sup> For example, the PLA's Strategic Support Force alone has a cyber unit of over 300,000 soldiers and pays fees to approximately 2 million 'net citizens' to make comments on social media sites in support of CCP policies and messages.<sup>43</sup>



## 4. NORMATIVE POWER THROUGH INSTITUTIONS

All great and rising powers seek greater influence in the world commensurate with their size. In this sense, Beijing's efforts to fill global and regional institutions with its diplomats and officials is unsurprising.

For example, Beijing has made concerted efforts to occupy senior positions in the 15 specialized agencies of the United Nations. That prominent entities such as the International Monetary Fund and World Bank tend to be dominated by Europeans and Americans was a large reason why China led the creation of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank as an alternative to the IMF and World Bank. However, China has made enormous progress in filling and even infiltrating the other agencies. At the time of writing, four agencies overseeing food and agriculture, industrial development, civil aviation, and telecommunications

have Chinese directors. Nine other agencies overseeing areas such as agricultural development financing, international tourism, global meteorology, and UNESCO have Chinese deputies. Recently, Beijing lost out to a candidate from Singapore for the leadership of the UN World Intellectual Property Organization.

In addition to the well-known ASEAN institutions, China has set up arrangements with different regions such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, China-Arab States Cooperation Forum, Cooperation between

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Caption: China's permanent representative to the United Nations Zhang Jun speaks during an emergency special session of the UN General Assembly on Ukraine, at the UN Headquarters in New York, on Feb. 28, 2022. (Wang Ying/Xinhua via Getty Images)

China and Central and Eastern European Countries (which seeks to bypass European Union institutions), and China and the Community of Latin American States.

The idea is to reframe and set regional and global “long-term institutional arrangements” as well as the “status and roles in the system.”<sup>44</sup> As Doshi summarises:

**China’s great interest in shaping global political order and building ‘a community of common destiny for mankind’ has manifested itself across a broad range of efforts. These broadly help China build the foundations of hegemonic order—coercion, consent, and legitimacy—and take place across a variety of arenas: (1) the UN system; (2) global regional organisations; (3) new coalitions; and (4) exports of certain governance practices.<sup>45</sup>**

If all great powers advance their interests and values through institutions, why then the alarm about China’s increasingly well-known focus on institutions? The problem is that the CCP’s interests and values are becoming ever more divergent from and hostile to those of Australia and other countries explicitly supportive of the existing, rules-based order. Given China’s flagrant and systematic violation of IP rules, the prospect that the leadership of the World Intellectual Property Organization could have been a CCP-appointed official is an obvious case in point.<sup>46</sup>

The blatant misuse of these institutions was also apparent when Beijing attempted to pressure the World Health Organization to unquestioningly promote its dishonest account of COVID-19’s origins in the critical early days of the pandemic with catastrophic consequences. Illegitimate political motivations were also seemingly apparent when China exercised its considerable influence within the supposedly apolitical UNESCO World Heritage Committee to suddenly recommend an ‘in-danger’ listing for Australia’s Great Barrier Reef that would have gravely im-

pacted the local tourism industry.<sup>47</sup> This occurred at a time of escalating diplomatic tensions between the two countries with Australia suffering from a series of cascading economic measures imposed against it by China as a result of political and strategic disagreements.

The CCP’s pursuance of its interests by influencing the decisions made by important institutions is an obvious way for Beijing to increase its global power. More than this, as part of its broader plan to acquire dominant discursive power in a new regional and global order, the CCP seeks to relentlessly purge liberal and democratic values, norms, and processes from existing institutions and exclude them from new ones.

An extensive examination of Chinese texts and documents over the past few decades reveals that Beijing has viewed institutions as entities through which to increase its own material and non-material power at America’s expense and to protect Chinese material power and values before eventually promoting the latter to the region and world.<sup>48</sup>

In this context, the goals are not just to participate in and dominate institutions but also include entrenching CCP interests, values, processes, and solutions to challenges. As with political warfare, one of the primary objectives is to advance Chinese discursive dominance. At a global level, this is most obvious in the CCP’s attempts to redefine concepts such as ‘human rights’ and ‘democracy.’ For China, human rights ought to be based on nebulous concepts such as ‘happiness’ and ‘economic prosperity’ rather than Western notions of freedom, equality, and dignity.<sup>49</sup> China dismisses American and Western democracy as “the rule of a few over the many”<sup>50</sup> and sees little value or virtue in universal suffrage or political pluralism. It advocates ‘Chinese democracy’ as the superior democratic model because the latter’s focus is achievement of superior material outcomes for all citizens.<sup>51</sup>

In the regional context, it has simply insisted that its ‘historic rights’ are the equal of recognized international law and con-

vention. Diplomatically, it elevates a Chinese version of ‘pragmatism’ that prioritizes bilateral ‘negotiated settlements’ and ‘agreed outcomes’ in which China is invariably the larger and more coercive country. This is the proper intention and interpretation of then-Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi’s comment to counterparts at the Asian Regional Forum in Hanoi in 2010 that “China is a big country and you are small countries, and that is a fact.” In contrast, ‘principle,’ ‘rules,’ and ‘laws’ are dismissed as Western notions belonging to a different time and applicable to a fading region characterized by American liberal hegemony. This is the context of Xi Jinping’s speech at a conference on confidence-building measures for the region in 2014 when he proclaimed, “In the final analysis, it is for the people of Asia to run the affairs of Asia, solve the problems of Asia, and uphold the security of Asia.”<sup>52</sup>

This offers a glimpse into the closed Sino-centric security and epistemic community which the CCP wants to create in maritime Asia, where China seeks not only to be the uncontested and preeminent strategic and material power but also to seize discursive and normative dominance. By doing so, it can control the agenda and manipulate the behavior of regional states. That grand ambition was intrinsic to its so-called ‘neighborhood’ policy in the 1990s and what this report has termed the cultivation of ‘strategic support states’ in more recent times. If the CCP can define and institutionalize its preferred discourse, norms, and terms of reference of discussion for important issues, it will have advanced several steps to winning without fighting. This constitutes what strategists in previous Chinese dynasties referred to as ‘attacking the heart’ of the enemy.<sup>53</sup>



## 5. NON-MILITARY MEANS TO ACHIEVE CHINESE REJUVENATION

Since 2018, CCP leadership and Chinese scholars have faithfully followed Xi's cues and consistently referred to 'great changes unseen in a century' that will create unparalleled opportunities for 'the great rejuvenation of the Chinese.'<sup>54</sup> The 'great changes' refers to Xi's apparent confidence that the balance of comprehensive power vis-à-vis the US is rapidly changing in China's favor and that the next decade will be a decisive time in the contest between the two greatest powers. While China's ambitions for dominance are increasingly global, the first step is to dominate maritime Asia and then the Indo-Pacific. As one influential Chinese scholar put it, an increasingly bifurcated world will see China construct a 'community of common destiny revolving around China'<sup>55</sup> as the foundation from which it then begins to build its global presence.

As argued earlier, China seeks to build dominant and uncontested 'forms of control' that are buttressed by and further enable discourse dominance through a combination of material and non-material means that include political warfare and institutional approaches.

The sheer scale of the enterprise, as well as the sprawling and labyrinthine nature of the entities charged with conceiving, operationalizing, and implementing the CCP's political and institutional warfare policies mean that efforts are invariably ad hoc,

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Caption: The Thailand booth during the 2021 China International Fair for Trade in Services at the China National Convention Center on September 4, 2021 in Beijing, China. (VCG/VCG via Getty Images)

Table 2. Peak Bodies Overseeing Political Warfare Doctrine and Operations

ORGANIZATION	KEY INTERNATIONAL OBJECTIVES AND MISSIONS
United Front Work Department	<p>Influence foreign perceptions of the successes and desirability of CCP's policies and actions.</p> <p>Promote key CCP domestic and international narratives.</p> <p>Identify and forge connections with institutions, collaborators, and individuals in target countries.</p> <p>Work with and provide support/guidance with other CCP entities (including embassies and consulates) to carry out political warfare missions and objectives.</p>
Political Work Department (Central Military Commission)	<p>Oversee the political and ideological development of the PLA including preparing military personnel for 'ideological' work.</p> <p>Oversee and produce content and messages for and about the PLA for dissemination domestically and internationally.</p> <p>Work with other entities such as the Internet Public Opinion Bureau and Cyberspace Administration of China to shape views of the PLA domestically and abroad.</p> <p>Work with the recently established Strategic Support Force (which coordinates space, cyber, electronic, and psychological warfare capabilities) to develop and conduct psychological warfare and public opinion strategies against targets.<sup>108</sup></p>

Source: Authors

piecemeal, often disorganized, and sometimes counterproductive. Consider the United Front Work Department, one major entity in charge of winning the hearts and minds of populations (especially Chinese diasporas) in dozens of countries and territories, including all the Five Eyes nations, Europe, Southeast Asian nations, and Taiwan. The means it employs include inviting politicians, journalists, businesspeople and civil society leaders to academic conferences, political and social gala events, and other organized gatherings. Enabling this is the United Front Work Department's connections with countless firms, organizations, and individuals in all target countries<sup>56</sup>—some of whom remain wilfully or naively unaware of the political and strategic context of their activities.

Perversely, the impossibility for the United Front Work Department and other organizations to seamlessly coordinate their extensive efforts across China's vast political, economic, civil, bureaucratic, and military networks facilitates the CCP's denial

of a comprehensive plan to use all the tools that the country has at its disposal to 'win without fighting'—that the objective to control and dominate discourse is a spurious and paranoid accusation by the US and its allies. Fortunately, the CCP under Xi's leadership has been far more explicit about these plans and objectives than were his predecessors, and, for this reason, complacency or denial that the CCP is deeply engaged in these forms of warfare is no longer plausible.<sup>57</sup>

In many respects, achieving global discourse dominance is a far-off aspiration even though Beijing has expended enormous effort to do so and has made significant progress. While there is deep respect and admiration for the country's material progress over the last four decades, Beijing is better known for the rise of its 'sharp power'<sup>58</sup> than its 'soft power.' From the genocide occurring in Xinjiang and the repression of Hong Kongers to the deceit and obfuscation that led to the COVID-19 pandemic, the CCP remains on the defensive and is still viewed with wide-

spread wariness and distrust around the world. Its ‘no limits’ friendship with Russia shortly before the latter invaded Ukraine in February 2022 does not bode well for China’s standing since 141 countries in the United Nations General Assembly—a body that is no reliable friend of America and the West—supported the non-binding resolution that Russia unconditionally withdraw its forces from Ukraine, with only five voting against. China meekly abstained.<sup>59</sup>

China’s use of its material power has been more effective in achieving the CCP’s political and strategic gains. Whereas its ‘sharp power’ side has included military intimidation and economic coercion, its inducements side has involved the use of economic resources and promises of economic opportunity to win over regimes, governments, organizations, and individuals.<sup>60</sup>

Even so, the combination of China’s material, or ‘sharp,’ use of that power and a more targeted and thoughtful implementation of non-material approaches has been very effective when employed against key ‘strategic support states’ in the region, especially in Southeast Asia. Indeed, not too much comfort should be taken from surveys consistently showing that ‘trust perceptions’ of China are persistently low.<sup>61</sup> One does not always need to be ‘liked’ or even ‘trusted’ to exercise influence. Indeed, Beijing has had considerable success in building the conditions for ‘winning without fighting’ with respect to some crucial strategic support states in the region.

### Case Study: BRI and Strategic Support States

China’s official *Blue Book of Non-Traditional Security* (2014–2015) states that two purposes of the BRI are to mitigate American-led geopolitical machinations and ideas and to promote a new international system of discourse and order that enhances China’s national power and soft power. While the BRI’s origin is largely attributable to the existence of domestic vulnerabilities and it is implemented opportunistically by many domestic entities (with disparate objectives) and in a fragmented manner,

Xi has clearly seized upon it as a framework for an outward-focused ‘grand strategy.’ Moreover, it has several manifestations and approaches and must be taken seriously.

The BRI is both a weapon with which the CCP conducts political and institutional warfare and an end which the CCP is using political and institutional warfare to achieve.

Investment in BRI projects should be considered in the context of the concept of ‘strategic support states’ previously mentioned. One principle of cultivating a ‘strategic support state’ is ensuring that “China has the ability and resources to guide the actions of the country so that these fit into [China’s] strategic needs.”<sup>62</sup> One former senior National Security Council official describes the BRI as ‘infrastructure warfare.’<sup>63</sup> It is also a case where the CCP’s material approaches intersect political warfare, as this report has characterized it above.

On the material elements of inducement and coercion, a study published in March 2018 found that one-third of 68 economies receiving BRI loans are “significantly or highly vulnerable to debt distress.”<sup>64</sup> Although enormous Chinese investments in Pakistan such as the Port of Gwardar have given the Pakistani economy an instant economic boost, it has also burdened that country with debt that it cannot repay and turned Pakistan into a long-term client state of China’s. A similar situation is occurring in Sri Lanka. Unprofitable and debt-heavy projects such as the Hambantota Port forced Sri Lanka into a \$1.1 billion debt-for-equity swap with China, giving the latter long-term control of a military-capable port and considerable leverage over Colombo’s foreign policy. Over the past five years, China has invested over \$5 billion in Cambodia, a sum equivalent to about one quarter of that country’s GDP, in return for Phnom Penh’s pushing China’s interests in organizations such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. Included is 100 percent ownership of the Koh Kong New Port, and a secret agreement allowing China to construct a military port there has reportedly been signed.<sup>65</sup> Like Pakistan and Sri Lanka, Cambodia cannot change course while

caught in a Chinese-created ‘debt trap.’<sup>66</sup> A similar dynamic is playing out in the South Pacific.<sup>67</sup>

With respect to the CCP’s authoritarian strategic objectives and policy implementation, the BRI fuses economic partnership and opportunity with developmental assistance and political support. Bear in mind that forms of Chinese economic assistance usually do not include the attachment of demands for good governance, respect for human rights, and relevant economic reforms that characterize assistance by organizations such as the IMF and World Bank. Beijing justifies this as being consistent with its stated principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other states. Instead, it offers support and cover for regimes so that they can insulate themselves from reform pressures, and examples of this have been documented in Chinese investment and assistance to countries in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East.<sup>68</sup>

In a broader context, a Chinese-led authoritarian revival and promotion is currently occurring. When announcing that he had abolished presidential term limits during the 19th Congress of the CCP in October 2017, Xi declared that China is moving to the “center stage” and that its authoritarian model “offers an option for other countries and nations who want to speed up their development while preserving their independence; and it offers Chinese wisdom and a Chinese approach to solving problems facing mankind.”<sup>69</sup> The State Council Information Office, International Liaison Department, and United Front Work Department are the three departments primarily charged with the international dissemination of the BRI’s munificent narrative and are given considerable resources to shape and promote these messages to elites in foreign states.<sup>70</sup>

Moreover, China is not just promoting authoritarian values but is also teaching tactics for repression and exporting apparatuses used for domestic coercion to willing authoritarian clients.<sup>71</sup> This has gone beyond forcing foreign firms to agree to its restrictive internet and social media standards and now

includes championing its standard of “internet sovereignty,” which gives every government the right to regulate online information and rejects a universal freedom of information standard.<sup>72</sup> In the United Nations, China promotes the innocuous-sounding “community of shared future for human beings” or “community of common destiny” as an alternative to the notion of universal human rights. The former concept is based on the right of each country to interpret what “human rights” means and insists that other countries should respect and accept that the term ‘human rights’ has different meanings to different countries.<sup>73</sup> Perhaps most concerning is China’s increased willingness to interfere in, and covertly influence, the domestic decision-making institutions and debates in democratic nations, including the promotion of Chinese authoritarian values.<sup>74</sup>

The proponents of this model in China and elsewhere adopt the position that any political system ought to be assessed according to practical outcomes and that liberal-democratic systems that emphasize individual rights and freedoms without regard to such outcomes have no intrinsic value. China argues that it has resolved the alleged contradiction between the subordination of individual rights and freedoms to one-party rule, on the one hand, and positive social and economic outcomes, on the other—a contradiction the Communist regimes in the Cold War era failed to address. As Xi argues, the CCP is meeting the basic needs of over one billion people, and thus its authoritarian system has made it possible for people to live fulfilling and materially better lives.<sup>75</sup>

This is a compelling message in an Indo-Pacific region in which an overwhelming number of countries are developing economies that have yet to fully industrialize. Only Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Taiwan, Australia, and New Zealand can be considered fully industrialized economies. The rest are straining to become middle-income economies, while only a small number of the others, such as Malaysia and Thailand, are seeking to break out of the so-called middle-income trap.

Also, authoritarian systems such as China's have demonstrated an impressive capacity to generate rapid economic growth through the forced mobilization of capital, land, and even labor—if only at the earlier stages of development, thus contributing to the narrative that autocratic competence is outstripping democratic dysfunction. An editorial in China's state-owned *Xinhua* argued that “endless political backbiting, bickering and policy reversals, which are the hallmarks of liberal democracy, have retarded economic and social progress and ignored the interests of most citizens” and thus constitute a “crisis and chaos swamp[ing] Western liberal democracy.”<sup>76</sup> In contrast, China actively promotes its authoritarian model as one that is politically stable, technically superior, and better able to pursue sensible policies in a consistent manner.<sup>77</sup>

These messages are effective because achieving “order” and ‘development’ rather than guaranteeing “justice” for the individual remains highly valued in the region. In this context, the BRI is promoted as China's grand plan for the region—not just to advance economic development but to reframe and reset objectives, policies, and standards in a manner which places China as the primary creator and guardian of progress in a non-US-centric Indo-Pacific region.

In this context, the case study of Thailand offers a striking example of the application of political warfare in the form of influence and information operations. In several field trips the authors have undertaken to that country over the past few years, the overwhelming finding was that Chinese narratives have taken broader and deeper hold in Thailand than in the other countries of the region. The vast majority of the roughly 30 Thai politicians, bureaucrats, serving military officers, business elites, journalists, academics, and policy experts the authors spoke with already view China as the dominant and most important economic power for Thailand and in the region. In this sense, the contest for economic leadership and dominance is already over, with China the decisive and permanent winner.

Remarkably, China was widely admired for its wisdom, civilization, culture, and recent economic achievements. More than that, contemporary China is seen as benevolent, fair, and generous. One only needs to accept and accede to the authority and legitimacy of Beijing as the ‘big brother’ to share in the successes of partnership with China.

For example, many brought up the signing of the 2003 early-harvest free trade agreement with China on agricultural items—seven years before the China-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement—as one example of the fruits of Thailand's special relationship with China. Others raised the prospect that Thailand, the ‘glue’ or central hub for the Pan Asian railway, was too important to China for Beijing to damage the bilateral relationship through overreach.

Thai interlocutors were open about the fact that their Chinese interlocutors were explicitly and relentlessly propagating these messages at all levels, and most Thai interlocutors were prepared to welcome and accept the Chinese message. Indeed, many expressed the firm belief that Thailand enjoyed a special relationship akin to ‘kinship’ with China, with the expectation that Beijing offered Bangkok privileged access and took great care to ensure Thai concerns were addressed.

Little of this has occurred by accident. Various investigations have shown that Beijing has relentlessly targeted and co-opted national and local-level elected officials, royal family members, senior military and bureaucratic officials, judges, and economic and social elites across all sectors. Those who are of Sino-Thai ethnicity are considered high-value and the most susceptible targets.<sup>78</sup>

One result is that the Thai government regularly and willingly ensures Thai media, academics, and commentators are ‘compliant’ with the CCP's desired messaging. In recent times, this has included supporting Beijing's official narrative about COVID-19 and even jailing some individuals who have

refused to comply.<sup>79</sup> More broadly, Thailand has reproduced some of Beijing's censorship and restrictions on freedom of speech, replicated some aspects of China's internet infrastructure such as the Thai 'Single Portal' platform, which is based on China's surveillance and censoring 'Golden Shield Project,' and reduced the editorial freedom of established newspapers such as *The Bangkok Post* and *The Nation*.<sup>80</sup> There have even been instances of CCP influence agents actively intimidating Thai citizens to tow the CCP's line on such issues as the BRI.

Indeed, Chinese information warfare entities are increasingly targeting the ownership of Thai media assets and have facilitated the so-called 'Sinicization of their news,' in which much of the content is sourced from China or sources approved by Beijing.<sup>81</sup> With cooperation from the Thai government, Beijing supports and promotes such initiatives as the 2019 ASEAN-China Year of Media Exchanges. Consequently, a steady and increasing flow of direct content from Chinese state media outlets such as *Xinhua* is translated directly into Thai language media without the content's original source being revealed so as to give the impression it is Thai-generated news. A survey of these stories reveals that the benefits of doing business with China, including through the BRI platform, feature heavily in these articles. There is also evidence that CCP-affiliated businesses use the carrot of advertising to entice Thai media entities to run favorable stories whilst threatening to withdraw advertising if they do not do so. The same carrot-and-stick approach is applied to Thai news outlets to run negative stories about US policies and actions.<sup>82</sup>

### Case Study: South China Sea

The South China Sea presents a noteworthy case study of the extent to which non-material strategies can work alongside material approaches to achieve extraordinary gains that would normally be very difficult without employing an overt military approach. The growing Chinese presence in the South China Sea is well documented and need not be reproduced here.<sup>83</sup>

At a broad level, the geographical distance of the US and the enduring Southeast Asian fear of abandonment exacerbated by the relative decline of American power has placed China in a structurally stronger position to engage with ASEAN states on a consistent basis.

However, these structural and geographical US disadvantages do not fully explain China's success in advancing Chinese security interests, including through ASEAN. Indeed, whereas ASEAN was recently viewed as a diplomatic buffer against Chinese attempts at dominance, one could argue that it has now inadvertently become complicit in helping China achieve its security objectives in Southeast Asia.

The cleverness of Beijing's institutional approach is evident in its successful exclusion of US and non-claimant allies from ASEAN-led discussions about the application of international law (and the 2016 Arbitration Award ruling in favor of the Philippines) in South China Sea debates. As one of the case studies below will show, Beijing has managed to define how disagreements over the South China Sea are spoken about and which concepts and principles apply. For example, 'peace and stability' is elevated over the application of rule-based principles. In this context, the enemy of peace and stability' is 'provocative action,' and the latter is often defined as American Freedom of Navigation Operations rather than Chinese militarization of artificial islands. Even though only five of the ten ASEAN states are claimants, the non-claimant ASEAN states are deemed to be more central and relevant to the South China Sea discussion than the US, Japan, or Australia.

In other words, many regional voices treat South China Sea disputes as if they constituted a historical disagreement between China and its neighboring states that can only be settled using institutions and regimes outside the purview of the US and its allies. Southeast Asian states have found themselves in this absurd predicament because they allowed Beijing too much leeway and authority to dominate and shape the institutions and processes (e.g., an exclusionary conversation between China

and ASEAN on a Code of Conduct for the South China Sea) used to define the problem and the terms by which such disputes are to be managed and negotiated.

Although elevated by China as the primary framework by which an institutional solution was to be found, the deliberately drawn-out Code of Conduct negotiations allowed China to admonish other powers, especially the US and its allies, for interfering in the process. Beijing managed to exclude the 2016 Arbitration decision from the CoC negotiations which affirmed the illegality and illegitimacy of much of Beijing's claims to the South China Sea. While dealing bilaterally with ASEAN and member states over the disagreements, Beijing continues to expand and consolidate control over contested areas. Even then, to preserve regional good will and stability, most Southeast Asian states remain reluctant to openly support any action by the US or allies that would enrage China. Indeed, one could argue that Chinese successes in the South China Sea exemplify the paradigm *par excellence* of how to 'win without fighting.'

None of this is to suggest that material factors are irrelevant or important. On the contrary, the use of physical coercion (through Chinese para-military entities), as well as economic coercion and inducements, have been essential in the prevention of any ASEAN consensus against Chinese interests and manipulation of the actions of individual states.<sup>84</sup> However, China has buttressed and complemented these material approaches with extremely effective and relentless political warfare and institutional strategies, without which Beijing could have achieved far less without the overt use of force.

China's 'divide and rule' approach to ASEAN is a simple matter of ensuring that there is no unanimous agreement on issues or actions which are against Beijing's interests. It has achieved this through the tried and tested Chinese approach of using material means and coercion to achieve regime and/or elite capture in several countries to ensure ASEAN is not able to act unanimously in ways that Beijing does not want.<sup>85</sup>

However, Beijing has achieved much more than 'divide and rule.' It has obtained ASEAN's formal endorsement of the BRI even though Southeast Asian states know that China will be the primary beneficiary. It has positioned the BRI as a perfect and natural complement to sub-regional regimes such as the Greater Mekong Subregion, which came into being in 1992 as a development program overseen by the Japanese-dominated Asian Development Bank. More than this, Beijing created the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation in 2015 to enhance its own leadership and leverage involving the GMS countries and further linked the GMS mechanism with promotion of the BRI.<sup>86</sup>

Yet, most broadly, most striking is its success in seemingly hoodwinking or else manipulating the thinking about ASEAN and vis-à-vis ASEAN states. Specifically, Beijing has managed to lure many Southeast Asians into thinking the following:

- Their and ASEAN's diplomatic strategies towards China will allow ASEAN to maintain 'diplomatic centrality' (when China is setting the terms of reference and pace of negotiations on issues like the South China Sea disputes).
- Current decisions (or non-decisions) taken by ASEAN are consistent with both a counter-dominance and hedging approach preferred by member states.
- ASEAN is getting the benefits of cooperation with China without unacceptable risks or costs.
- The US and its allies are intent on forcing ASEAN (and its member states) to 'choose' sides whilst China is content for ASEAN to accept some of its initiatives and reject others.

How has China done this? Beijing has been able to do so by:

- Manipulating the hedging strategies and mindsets of ASEAN member states in ways that preserve the illusion they are hedging when in fact they are committing to strategic decisions with long-term consequences in China's favor.
- Persuading ASEAN and member states to focus on short-term gains and/or avoidance of short-term losses rather

than on long-term gains and/or avoidance of long-term losses.

- Positioning Chinese objectives and policies as the ‘natural evolution’ of developments whilst characterizing US and allied actions as futile but disruptive counter actions that carry risk and costs to ASEAN and the region.

China is not yet the uncontested military<sup>87</sup> or economic power in the region.<sup>88</sup> That cannot be achieved using only material means. This objective is being pursued through a relentless combination of material coercion/inducements, institutional strategies, and political warfare – the latter including extensive use of the ‘Three Warfares’.

Consider the way Beijing has deliberately obfuscated and reinvented its explanations, positions, and justifications regarding claims in the South China Sea.

For example, earlier in this century, China fooled many seasoned China watchers into thinking that there was no internal CCP agreement or consensus on what Beijing wanted in the South China Sea, that strategic policy was a messy and pluralistic process involving many actors and stakeholders, and that assertive actions were often performed by rogue PLA or para-military entities without the knowledge of the senior political and military leadership.<sup>89</sup>

Similarly, CCP and PLA claims were deliberately ambiguous when referring to the nine-dash line, that is, whether China claimed all maritime territory within the nine-dash line or just the exclusive economic zones around islands in the area or viewed the nine-dash line as its sphere of influence without necessarily claiming exclusive ownership.<sup>90</sup> Beijing consistently offered differing and often contradictory legal and pseudo-legal justifications for its claims, introducing amorphous terms such as ‘historic rights,’ ‘adjacent waters,’ and ‘relevant waters.’ These are linked to the prerogatives and unique perspectives of one of the world’s oldest and greatest ‘civilizations’ and a ‘tradition-

al Asian order’ that preceded the current Westphalian system and the contemporary regime of international law (including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea).<sup>91</sup> Even the nomination of claims in the South China Sea as a ‘core interest’ was kept intentionally ambiguous.<sup>92</sup> ‘Core interest’ is a critical term because Beijing has consistently applied it to Xinjiang, Tibet, and Taiwan, and its use signifies the preparedness of the PLA to use military means to defend its stated positions.

Foreign governments, officials, experts, media, and the public were all targets and fell victim to the CCP’s psychological, public opinion, and legal warfare with enormous strategic and security ramifications. Even as China steadily and relentlessly changed facts ‘on the ground’ or more precisely ‘in the water,’ the region and the US were paralysed and divided by the obfuscation and lies regarding such issues as the exact nature of China’s claims, the degree of top-down authorization of actions, the hierarchy of priorities and where the South China Sea existed within them, and the pseudo-legal nature of Chinese claims.

For example, foreign governments and voices advanced Beijing’s strategic aims by arguing that a tougher approach would simply inflame the hard-core nationalists within China while a softer line could help the more moderate voices within China gain ascendancy. Others argued that supposed Chinese assertiveness was a tactical ploy to placate chauvinistic elements in Chinese society, and so this domestically driven motivation was not evidence that Beijing had expansive ambitions in the South China Sea.<sup>93</sup> Such views were encouraged by earlier arguments put forward by Chinese scholars, no doubt with the CCP’s blessing, stating that, while the South China Sea was likely not a genuine ‘core interest,’ forcing Beijing to clarify its position would ‘inflame the Chinese people,’ and ‘moderate’ leaders such as Hu Jintao required space and freedom to continue their peaceful approach.<sup>94</sup>

Notably, some of the region’s most respected experts on this issue became unwitting enablers of the CCP’s approach.<sup>95</sup> It

was common to argue that China's assertiveness in the South China Sea was an unfortunate response due to developments and issues such as the following:

- The securitization of the issue by the US and others (notwithstanding that it was China that was unilaterally and forcefully changing the status quo at an incomparable pace and scale).
- US and others' militarization of the disputes by having naval vessels perform freedom of navigation operations (FONOPs) that increased Beijing's insecurity and caused it to accelerate its activities in the disputed regions.
- The actions of other claimants to secure their claims, which, while miniscule compared to Chinese actions, was the primary trigger for Beijing's supposed assertiveness on this issue.
- The greater interest taken by non-claimant states such as the US, Japan, and Australia, which exacerbated what ought to be a manageable issue between claimant states.
- The inadequacies of international law, which applies an altogether too ahistorical context to disputes.

Others argued that the South China Sea was a dangerous distraction for Beijing, which was focused on preventing Taiwanese independence, and Beijing's ambition and level of threat with respect to the South China Sea should therefore not be exaggerated. Another argument was that the US and allies ought to maintain a neutral stance on South China Sea issues or run the risk of being dismissed as failing to be impartial, causing Beijing to become even more insecure about US intentions regarding contested issues such as Taiwan and the East China Sea dispute with Japan—with potentially destabilizing outcomes.<sup>96</sup>

A careful examination of the decision-making structure would have led one to question many of these complacent arguments and assumptions. For example, since around 2012, the Central Maritime Rights Protection Leading Group headed by Xi Jinping has led Beijing's South China Sea policy. Xi was active in Small

Leading Groups on these issues in the Hu Jintao era. This particular Small Group was established to formulate strategies to advance China's maritime rights and interests, coordinate policy amongst the many state entities in charge of maritime affairs, and manage disagreements and conflict with other countries over disputed territories. Membership of this Small Group included senior representatives from at least seventeen organizations including the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Public Security, State Security and Agriculture, and the PLA Navy.<sup>97</sup>

Even if one were unaware of this, that China's behavior had changed since the first decade of this century was obvious. Beijing started imposing more expansive fishing bans in 2009 in disputed areas and gave its entities authority to seize and detain foreign fishing boats. By 2009, Beijing had started to militarize fisheries administrative vessels (many of which were former navy ships) even if they were not formally flagged as PLA Navy, and these vessels unmistakably and regularly patrolled disputed waters. Notably, from as early as 2008, naval vessels began to perform large-scale exercises that involved some of the latest PLA Navy ships.<sup>98</sup>

Even without the benefit of hindsight, the weight of empirical evidence then available communicated the nature and scale of Beijing's ambitions in the South China Sea. Regardless, foreigners tied themselves in knots trying to decipher Beijing's deliberately ambiguous claims, legal justifications, and degree of political resolve to defend its claims while finding comfort in assurances that China was only seeking 'peaceful development'<sup>99</sup> and that any overly confrontational response to its activities could derail that happy trajectory and so was not worth the risk. To reiterate, all this was occurring even as Beijing was relentlessly changing the status quo in terms of advancing a permanent presence in disputed areas.

In contemporary times when Beijing's good intentions are increasingly being questioned, new arguments are being advanced to help Beijing support its objectives. While the CCP's

strategic objectives as described earlier are increasingly difficult to deny, it has worked tirelessly to introduce a different conversation and discourse to be applied to the South China Sea and other issues, much of which is based on the grand narratives mentioned earlier and can be applied to many other issues:

- Chinese dominance is the historical norm and is inevitable.
- The objectives of the CCP are permanent and unchanging.
- A CCP-led China is fundamentally undeterrable.
- The party is prepared to pay any price to achieve its core objectives.
- The US is an increasingly weak and unreliable ally.

These assumptions underlie the arguments of many who advocate a more accommodationist approach to China in current times.<sup>100</sup> Their acceptance greatly diminishes the motivation of regional states to resist or counter even the most coercive policies even though they profoundly disagree with China's behavior.

Even with respect to reactive policy, these narratives and other political warfare strategies have enormous real-world impacts.

Consider how the US and its allies have tied themselves in knots shifting the definition of 'gray zone' ever more expansively to describe Chinese activities. Gray zone activities are those that fall beneath the threshold of what would be considered an act of war and so is a subjective term. For instance, many have somehow convinced themselves that Chinese military and para-military incursions into the South China Sea (or Taiwanese and Japanese air and maritime space) are 'gray zone' activities that ought not to be treated as inherently hostile and so require a firm response.

This is not to argue that a kinetic response is the only or wise option in most cases. However, since the decision as to how to label 'gray zone' activities leads to compromise and de-escalation that almost always favors the CCP, China is never subject to either military or non-military punishment and so never suffers direct costs or is compelled to surrender any gains. The CCP's intention, which it often achieves, is that the cost and consequences of escalation for the other side are too uncertain and therefore carry too much risk. Thus, if the CCP is allowed to manipulate perception and calculation of risk, then it is well on the way to winning without fighting.



## 6. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

### Policy Recommendations

As democratic governments and those leading their institutions need to accept, the CCP's intent in conducting warfare in non-material domains is *to advance the same objectives that the PLA could one day deploy force to secure*. Thus, in both allied and neutral countries, it seeks not just to disrupt the enemy and deny it dominance within these domains, but instead to manipulate, degrade, corrupt, dominate, or control the domains. The CCP, whose *objectives* are clearly hostile, is rapidly building and deploying its *capabilities* to translate this intent into reality.

Having accepted the reality of the above, our institutions, their personnel, and the public must prepare for this type of warfare. Countries such as Australia are further along in this respect than others, given the relatively advanced nature of that country's

political and public conversation about the CCP's influence and interference activities.<sup>101</sup> Such preparation constitutes the first, important step.

The next steps are *to inform and educate* those leading our institutions and the public as to the scale of the CCP's efforts, to

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Caption: Government representatives participate in a Five Eyes panel on global security concerns during the CYBERUK event held at the Scottish Event Campus in Glasgow. Participants pictured include, from left: Scott McLeod (Australian Cyber Security Centre), Scott Jones (Canadian Cyber Security Centre), Jan Thornborough (New Zealand National Cyber Security Centre), Ciaran Martin (UK National Cyber Security Centre) and Rob Joyce (US Homeland Security advisor). (Andrew Milligan/PA Images via Getty Images)

*prepare our institutions* for the challenges ahead, and, together with a coalition of allies, *to proactively engage in non-material warfare* so as to neutralize the CCP's tactics within this area. The ten policy recommendations below are organized into these three categories and constitute the actions necessary to address the Chinese non-material strategies discussed in this report.

### Category A. Inform and Educate

#### 1). Identify the Tactics Commonly Used by the CCP Against the Five Eyes Alliance

In assessing the terrain, one early task should be to clearly define Beijing's key strategic priorities and then identify patterns in the CCP's activities related to various targets. For example, what tactics of non-material warfare does Beijing commonly deploy against members of the Five Eyes and other Western democracies? How do these differ from approaches used against non-Western allies such as Taiwan, Japan, and South Korea or developing economies within the region? Regarding the latter, identifying patterns in the CCP's techniques/tactics/methods for elite-capture approaches would be of particular importance.

While extensive investigations and assessments on these issues have been performed,<sup>102</sup> these have been scattered, and so a necessary prelude to informing national and coalition strategies is compiling and disseminating their most salient elements. For example, the US and allies could produce an annual report on the nature and evolution of the techniques/tactics/methods the CCP employs against liberal democracies. Such a report should be declassified and made widely available, as this knowledge would enable governmental and non-governmental entities and individuals to recognize and effectively respond to CCP tactics.

#### 2). Prioritize Adequate Funding for Tracking Entities

As with any campaign, accurate assessments are needed to determine the correct strategy and tactics. Well-resourced and

institutionalized entities dedicated to monitoring, tracking, mapping, and anticipating the activities and targets of relevant Chinese entities should be created, or existing ones re-tasked to accomplish the same purposes.

#### 3). Increase Public and Media Awareness by Making Research Publicly Available

As Australia's experience countering the CCP's interference and covert influence demonstrates,<sup>103</sup> public and media awareness (in addition to legislation prohibiting certain activities) is crucial to bringing non-governmental entities onboard and raising the standards of what is considered socially acceptable or otherwise. Governments need to work with academic institutions, business/industry groups, think tanks, and the media to explain what is at stake and so gain their help in exposing individuals and organizations carrying out, enabling, lobbying for, or funding the CCP's non-material warfare activities. An admirable example of government activity in this area are the ongoing investigations and public reports on CCP activities in Australian universities and research organizations that the Australian Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security issues.<sup>104</sup>

#### 4). Publish an Annual Assessment of CCP Non-Material Activities

US and allied governments could also issue an annual public report on the CCP's non-material warfare objectives and activities as well as ad hoc updates on such activities in key allied nations. To the authors' knowledge, no such authoritative report is currently being issued by the US or allied governments.

#### 5). Release an Annual Review of the CCP's Social Media Disinformation Efforts

A separate report could be issued on the CCP's assets and the evolving tactics they employ on social media, including use of fake accounts, internet and social media trolling for strategic effects, and online disinformation efforts. To date, think tanks primarily have performed this important task.<sup>105</sup>

## **6). Establish a Legal Framework to Prosecute Foreign Interference**

Within individual jurisdictions, a review of the existing laws, legislation, and policies required to investigate and prosecute illegal organizations and/or activities or regulate or restrict such organizations/activities should be performed. Such a review must include application of existing foreign-interference and covert-influence laws and regulations to social media.

### **Category B: Prepare Our Institutions**

## **7). Elevate Non-Material Warfare to a Whole-of-Government Priority**

Those entities charged with defending, promoting, and advancing a country's national interests cannot view the non-material aspects of warfare as a side project or peripheral activity of the 'real' business of traditional warfare. Rather, they must be institutionally prepared to wage war in these domains *now* and not just in the event of a traditional military conflict.

Regarding China's dominance of both existing and new institutions, US and allied efforts are already underway to slow Beijing's advance and reverse its gains. With respect to political warfare (i.e., that involving influence and information), the rapid acceptance of the cyber domain as both a threat to national economic and civilian life and a genuine domain of warfare offers useful lessons from which we ought to learn.

For example, agencies covering the defense, foreign affairs, domestic affairs, and economic and intelligence functions currently allocate significant resources to cyber issues. Cyber expertise and career paths are being established within these agencies, which, in an independent and whole-of-government context, are continuing to expand and refine cyber strategies to be deployed against hostile actors. These agencies thus seek not only to internally entrench cyber expertise and capabilities but also link these to other areas of national capability and enlist the private sector and the public in many of

these efforts. In short, cyber has been established as a major and mainstream issue between allies in both war and non-war contexts, and the same needs to be done with respect to political warfare.

Given that non-material warfare cuts across the military, diplomatic, economic, and civilian domains, strategy and tactics must be a whole-of-government enterprise. Furthermore, even if we adopt the language and mindset of non-material warfare, both defense- and non-defense-related approaches to this warfare will exist.

In addition, either one primary entity could be established to coordinate all non-material warfare strategies and efforts, or else different, already-existing entities (e.g., defense, foreign affairs, intelligence, domestic affairs) could employ specific strategies and initiatives directly pertaining to their functional responsibilities.

However traditional defense and military institutions need to play a central and prominent role in any national strategy and its execution. The intent of much of the CCP's non-material warfare efforts is to achieve or advance strategic and military objectives. Countering these efforts is within the traditional purview of a nation's defense organizations. Within the Chinese system, the PLA's central role is developing doctrine, strategy, and tactics in the material and non-material contexts. As with any martial capability relevant to competition or conflict, one needs to build, position, and deploy one's own non-material assets on the one hand, and seek to track, counter, degrade, and destroy the enemy's non-material capabilities and use of them on the other. Thus, defense entities already possess not only the capabilities required to coordinate and lead such efforts but also the institutional mindset needed to do so.

### **Category C. Engage in Non-Material Warfare**

## **8). Deploy a Denial and/or Negation Strategy**

Next is the all-important tactical execution of engagement in non-material warfare (or counter warfare) through a denial and/

or negation strategy aimed at reducing the CCP's ability and effectiveness to conduct non-material warfare.

As noted earlier, this involves construction, positioning, and deployment of non-material assets on the one hand, and tracking, countering, degrading, and even destroying the enemy's non-material capabilities and their use on the other hand. Successfully accomplishing these aims will require dedicated and permanent teams, most likely based within the Department of Defense.

### **9). Build a Coalition to Proactively Engage in Non-Material Warfare**

Application of good denial/negate strategies and tactics are essential but not sufficient. The CCP is seeking to change the cognitive, informational, and institutional environment in the entire region, and implementing a denial approach outside one's own jurisdiction always has limitations. Many of the 'strategic support states' China is targeting are not able or willing to adopt measures that might be possible in advanced liberal democracies.

The South China Sea exemplifies the results the CCP is capable of achieving—gaining regional dominance through the way an issue is framed and dealt with institutionally and (pseudo) legally. In this case, the US and allies also helped the CCP's cause by inadvertently vacating the space. Because of their earlier insistence that they were 'neutral' and 'did not take sides' in such disputes, the allies were unable to insert themselves more resolutely into the discussion and thus allowed China to position the issue as an exclusively China-ASEAN one to be resolved using bilaterally negotiated principles rather than international law. The allied position of ostensible impartiality also allowed China to play on enduring Southeast Asian fears that the allies lacked resolve and would abandon their allies and friends in the region, thereby also contributing to the conditioning of Southeast Asian countries to accept unequal or unfair bargains offered by Beijing.

For these reasons, the US and allies need to adopt a proactive or offensive mindset and develop the assets and capabilities to carry it out. This would require a core coalition of allies prepared to proactively engage in all areas of non-material warfare, including that conducted through institutions, lawfare, and the full spectrum of political warfare.

These allies would need to implement, institutionalize, and fund agreements to sustain constant and ongoing 'joint operations' in this type of warfare. As suggested previously, this could include the following: guidelines and frameworks for identifying key targets and priorities; political and operational consultation and coordination; and agreement on protocols for intelligence exchanges, staff training, and resource sharing.<sup>106</sup>

To reiterate, the purpose of being proactive and going on the offensive is to shape the institutional environment, discourse, assumptions used, and principles adopted by target countries and their populations. Doing so will be beneficial, whether such warfare is waged well prior to the potential use of force or in lieu of the use of force. Moreover, in either situation, the costs and risks for China increase while the resolve of other countries to resist or rebuff the Chinese advance also increases.

### **10). Engage with the Private Sector and Promote Transparency**

Although many of the capabilities required for the proactive conduct of such warfare can exist inside government, democracies will also require the expertise, know-how, and assistance of organizations and individuals from outside government. However, unlike China's government, those in liberal democracies cannot compel such entities to do their bidding, and most private sector entities and individuals will be reluctant to engage in covert activity.

A virtue can be made out of these democratic circumstances, however. These countries should be transparent about their preparations to engage in this kind of warfare, thus beginning an overdue and necessary public conversation about what the

CCP is seeking to achieve, its ways and means of doing so, the outcomes at stake, and the importance of fighting and ‘winning’ this type of war.

Moreover, the messages, principles, conversations, and institutional objectives are consistent with the interests, values, and obligations of liberal democracies seeking to advance a

‘Free and Open Indo-Pacific.’ Democratic governments should openly appeal to private entities to advance these same principles and transparently offer funding for them to do so. Such non-governmental contributions will most likely carry more weight with the populations of target countries than would governmental ones, particularly if constructed and delivered in innovatively tactical ways.



## 7. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

### Summary

In terms borrowed from popular culture, the CCP's non-material approaches to warfare are NOT a 'Jedi mind trick,' and so one should neither be terrified of the CCP's approaches nor dismissive of them. They arose from the CCP's revolutionary history and totalitarian instincts and were adapted to dealings with other countries—first from a position of relative weakness but now increasingly from one of greater strength and confidence.

The CCP's approach begins with the conviction that it is already engaged in conflict with the US and others and that the key to success is to prevail in all physical and non-physical domains where war can be fought and won. However, the CCP also believes, the lower the reliance on military action, the more glorious and excellent the victory and the greater the success for China.

As with all matters in international politics, individuals and entities exist in an environment where, although material factors can be exploited or diminished in importance, they cannot be ignored. As argued, the CCP's non-material approaches would be ineffective were it not a material behemoth able to use material means to compel and seduce. To nations building 'strategic support states,' there is necessarily a material element that plays out well for the CCP, especially in Southeast Asia. Controlling narratives which can change or guide another's behavior, the use of the Three Warfares, developing cognitive domain operations, and marching through existing and new institutions to produce real-world effects are the pre-

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Caption: The opening meeting of the fifth session of the 13th National People's Congress is displayed on television screens at a shopping mall on March 5, 2022 in Yantai, Shandong Province of China. (Sun Wentan/VCG via Getty Images)

rogatives of great material powers. In this sense, Beijing's material prowess complements and augments its non-material capabilities, and vice versa.

What then are these real-world behavioral effects? As argued earlier, at its essence, China's approach is to advance two fundamental objectives:

- Maintain the viability and robustness of the current CCP-led political economy, enhance the legitimacy of a Sino-led political economic order, and promote and extend that order beyond its borders.
- Continually reduce or degrade the strategic, military, economic, political, and normative ground in the region on which the US and its allies can sustain, build, and demonstrate power and influence.

In easing or else forcing the US out of Asia, the Chinese focus is on changing, manipulating, or denying the capacity and/or resolve of regional states to assist the US in maintaining or extending its role and presence in Asia. It employs its material and non-material approaches in combination to achieve the following general effects:

- *Simplifying and reducing the complexity of the strategic map.*

For China, the fewer active strategic players, the better. Thus, in casting the strategic competition/rivalry as only between the US (and a small band of stubborn allies) and itself, the Chinese ideal is that other regional states remain on the sidelines.

- Manipulate, persuade, or compel smaller regional states to focus on *absolute rather than relative gains*—*win-win Chinese style*.

As China is invariably the larger or more powerful party, Chinese entities tend to be in a better position to negotiate a better relative outcome for China in any arrangement or agreement. However, Beijing will often present *guaranteed*

*(absolute) gains* to the smaller side to entice them to agree to the arrangement.

In the medium- to long-term, China's intended consequence is that these countries find themselves both more reliant on Chinese acquiescence/largesse and also in a weaker relative position to it.

- Manipulate, persuade, or compel smaller regional states to *separate geo-strategic or geo-political issues from geo-economic issues*.

This benefits China by allowing it to be the only state genuinely enhancing its comprehensive national power and thus better positioning it to deploy all the tools of national power to achieve the CCP's objectives. Supporting this is Beijing's increased capacity and willingness to consider and use all Chinese public and private sector entities as tools of the Party and state.

Moreover, by getting other states to focus on economic growth rather than other forms of power, China increases its relative dominance in the other forms of power, thus increasing Beijing's overall leverage in the longer term.

- In every context (military, economic, diplomatic, institutional, normative, etc.), China seeks to ensure that its *willingness and capacity to escalate is more credible* than those of either the US or another regional state—thereby reducing the resolve of all other states to intervene.

Further, this strategy conditions other states to consider the *cost of action, but not that of inaction*.

At the same time, to suggest that achieving one goal (e.g., Taiwan) is not a precursor to achieving another (e.g., the South China Sea), Beijing implies the existence of imitations to specific issues on which it chooses to escalate, thereby increasing the incentives for the US and others to concede each time Chinese escalation occurs in one theater.

- *Normalize forms of such Chinese behavior as coercion*. The resulting effects are not only a broader toolkit for Beijing to employ in statecraft but other states' eventual acceptance and internalization of such Chinese behavior. These other

states will then more willingly conclude that Chinese coercion against them is caused by their misbehavior or mistakes and could have been avoided had they behaved more prudently or wisely.

For China, this has the beneficial effect that attempts by the US or others to resist or counter such Chinese behaviors are perceived to be provocative, escalatory, or futile.

## Conclusion

To understand contemporary China is to understand the CCP, and to understand the CCP is to properly assess the ideological lens through which its leaders view the world and the material and non-material strategies and means through which it seeks to wage war. In the latter context, Beijing has done as well as it has not only because it is persistent and determined, but also because we have been complacent and too reluctant to acknowledge that we are already at war and engage in this type of warfare ourselves.

This report is not suggesting that any country declare a formal 'state of war' with China. However, the strict distinction between wartime and peacetime no longer reflects the true state of affairs vis-à-vis China. Beijing is building its military capabilities and relentlessly positioning them to engage in a possible (if not probable) kinetic war against the US and allies in various regional theaters. Additionally, Beijing views the cognitive and institutional domains as genuine domains of war and has al-

ready begun to wage non-kinetic warfare in them. Our refusal to recognize this does not change what the CCP is doing in the real world and in real time.

Although there is increased acceptance regarding the threat China poses, there is still reluctance to focus on its authoritarian nature or the unique challenges posed by the ideology and related practices of the Chinese Communist Party. Therefore, we routinely refer to the great ambition of China and the 'comprehensive' nature of this ambition as a challenge or threat whilst denying ourselves the analytical tools and policy responses required to respond to such a comprehensive challenge or threat.

The CCP's preferred operational environment for this kind of warfare is covert and based on deception, obfuscation, corruption, and the lulling of targets into a sense of complacency and false security. It does not want the world to know it is engaging in this type of warfare, even though it has meticulously set up its institutions to do so. The CCP also wants other countries to quietly allow it 'safe and unaccountable spaces' for its operatives and sympathizers to do their work in the shadows, with the members of the targeted society remaining unaware that they are in a warzone. Therefore, the greater the extent to which members of the targeted society understand Chinese tactics and are involved in a counter-offensive against them, the better they can protect their free society and its strengths and values.

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# U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission

Staff Research Report



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## **China's Overseas United Front Work Background and Implications for the United States**

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## Executive Summary

China uses what it calls “United Front” work to co-opt and neutralize sources of potential opposition to the policies and authority of its ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The CCP’s United Front Work Department (UFWD)—the agency responsible for coordinating these kinds of influence operations—mostly focuses on the management of potential opposition groups inside China, but it also has an important foreign influence mission. To carry out its influence activities abroad, the UFWD directs “overseas Chinese work,” which seeks to co-opt ethnic Chinese individuals and communities living outside China, while a number of other key affiliated organizations guided by China’s broader United Front strategy conduct influence operations targeting foreign actors and states. Some of these entities have clear connections to the CCP’s United Front strategy, while others’ linkage is less explicit. Organizations such as Chinese Students and Scholars Associations are less directly tied to the main United Front-related organizational structure, but many of their activities and acceptance of oversight from the CCP shows some level of guidance from the United Front strategy.

Today, United Front-related organizations are playing an increasingly important role in China’s broader foreign policy under Chinese President and General Secretary of the CCP Xi Jinping. It is precisely the nature of United Front work to seek influence through connections that are difficult to publically prove and to gain influence that is interwoven with sensitive issues such as ethnic, political, and national identity, making those who seek to identify the negative effects of such influence vulnerable to accusations of prejudice. Because of the complexities of this issue, it is crucial for the U.S. government to better understand Beijing’s United Front strategy, its goals, and the actors responsible for achieving them if it is to formulate an effective and comprehensive response. This staff report provides an overview of the United Front, its history and ideology, the structure and operations of the UFWD and other organizations carrying out United Front work, and the implications of this activity for the United States.

## Introduction

The CCP advocates for its political interests through the use of what it calls “United Front” work, a strategy borrowed from the former Soviet Union.<sup>1</sup> President Xi has placed a greater emphasis on United Front work since assuming office in 2012, describing it as important for the “whole [Chinese Communist] Party” and elevating its role within China’s broader foreign policy.<sup>2</sup> At the national level, China’s United Front strategy is “given concrete institutional form”—according to June Teufel Dreyer, senior fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute—by the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), a critical coordinating body that brings together representatives of China’s other interest groups and is led by a member of China’s highest-level decision-making authority, the CCP’s Politburo Standing Committee.<sup>3</sup> At the operational level, United Front activities are coordinated by the CCP’s United Front Work Department (UFWD), although a number of other organizations also play important roles carrying out United Front work abroad.<sup>4</sup>

The United Front strategy uses a range of methods to influence overseas Chinese communities, foreign governments, and other actors to take actions or adopt positions supportive of Beijing’s preferred policies.<sup>5</sup> A number of official and quasi-official entities conduct overseas activities guided or funded by the United Front including Chinese government and military organizations, cultural and “friendship” associations, and overseas academic groups such as Chinese Students and Scholars Associations (CSSAs) and Confucius Institutes.<sup>6</sup> The UFWD also oversees influence operations targeting Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau that aim to suppress independence movements, undermine local identity, and promote support for Beijing’s political system.<sup>7</sup> In all of these cases, United Front work serves to promote Beijing’s preferred global narrative, pressure individuals living in free and open societies to self-censor and avoid discussing issues unfavorable to the CCP, and harass or undermine groups critical of Beijing’s policies.<sup>8</sup>

The CCP continues to lay the groundwork in the United States for United Front operations that could be similar to those that have achieved success in some U.S.-allied countries (e.g., Australia and New Zealand, where the CCP has effectively monopolized Chinese-language media outlets and taken over Chinese community organizations).<sup>9</sup> The CCP has sought to influence academic discourse on China and in certain instances has infringed upon—and potentially criminally violated—rights to freedoms of speech and association that are guaranteed to Americans and

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those protected by U.S. laws.<sup>10</sup> Despite the CCP's candid discussion of its United Front strategy, the breadth and depth of this issue remain relatively unknown to U.S. policymakers.<sup>11</sup>

## Background and Role of United Front Work

United Front work—which is inspired by the Leninist theory of uniting with lesser enemies to defeat greater ones—has been a key element of the CCP's strategy to consolidate its hold on power, both domestically and internationally, since the Party's founding.<sup>12</sup> The first incarnation of United Front work was an attempt to join and subvert the then ruling Nationalist government, the Kuomintang, in the early 1920s.<sup>13</sup> The CCP then formed an alliance of convenience with the Kuomintang to discourage it from trying to wipe out the fledgling CCP while uniting their efforts against Japan.<sup>14</sup> According to Gerry Groot, senior lecturer at the University of Adelaide and renowned expert on the United Front, this campaign evolved into a systematic effort to recruit “fellow travelers,” mostly “famous intellectuals, writers, teachers, students, publishers, and business people who were not necessarily themselves Communists.”<sup>15</sup> Through co-opting or subverting potential opponents, the CCP has proven highly successful in neutralizing large-scale or open political opposition, including from religious groups and ethnic minorities, while incentivizing public displays of loyalty to the CCP.<sup>16</sup> It is also trying to use this strategy against the rising Chinese middle class and other new groups of potential opposition.<sup>17</sup> Since its early successes inside China, the CCP has extended its United Front work overseas to influence foreign individuals and the policies of foreign states to serve Beijing's interests.<sup>18</sup> According to a UFWD training manual from 2014 reviewed by the *Financial Times*, an important goal of United Front work is to “unite all forces that can be united” to thwart “enemy forces abroad.”<sup>19</sup> Within China, United Front work is carried out by the CCP's United Front Work Department.

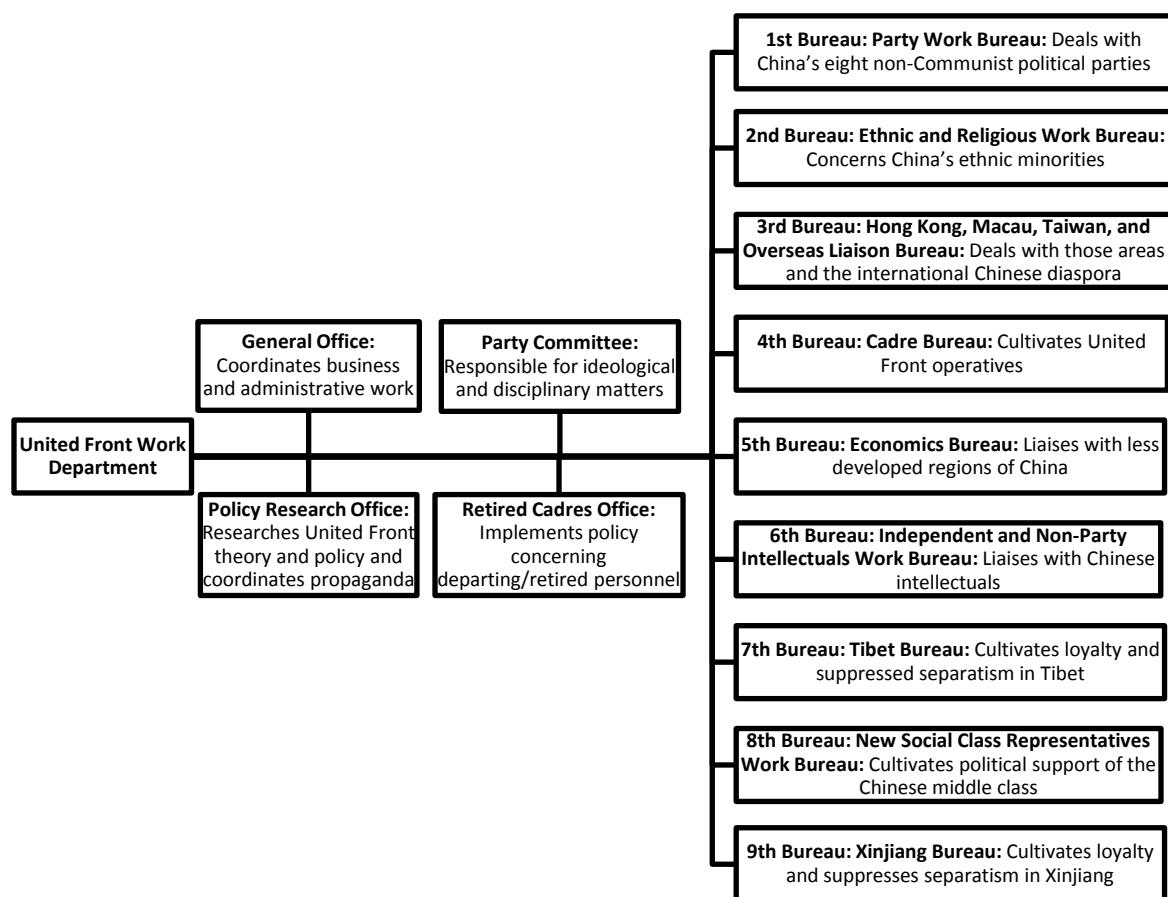
### The United Front Work Department

The UFWD, which is the primary organization responsible for United Front work within China and United Front operations targeting Chinese communities abroad,\* is a high-level Party body that reports directly to the CCP's Central Committee.<sup>20</sup> The UFWD follows the direction of China's broader United Front strategy set forth by the CPPCC, a coordinating body led by a member of the Party's Politburo Standing Committee that brings together representatives of China's other interest groups under the CCP's overall leadership.<sup>21</sup> The UFWD comprises four subordinate offices and nine specialized bureaus, each dealing with a particular targeted group such as China's eight officially-approved non-communist political parties, ethnic minorities, and Chinese communities overseas.<sup>22</sup> President Xi recently expanded the UFWD by establishing two new bureaus. One, which targets representatives of the “New Social Classes,” is responsible for garnering support from China's new middle class, and the other cultivates loyalty and suppresses separatism in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of western China, home to the Uyghur ethnic group and other Muslim minorities.<sup>23</sup>

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\* For more on United Front work targeting Chinese diasporas, see “Focus on Influencing Overseas Chinese Communities” below.

**Figure 1: United Front Work Department Organization**



*Note:* According to its website, the UFWD oversees the UFWD Organization Service Center, the Taiwan Guild Halls, the Huaxing Economic Advisory Service Center, Cadre Training Centers, the *China United Front* magazine, the *China Tibet* magazine, the Guangcai Program Guidance Center, the UFWD Information Center, the Taiwanese Classmates Academic Exchange Center, the Office of the China Council for the Promotion of Peaceful Reunification, and the High-Level Tibetan Buddhism College of China.  
*Source:* The United Front Work Department of the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee, *Organization Structure*, May 3, 2017. Translation. <http://www.zytzb.gov.cn/tzb2010/jgsz/201012/690112.shtml>.

## Resurgence of the United Front under President Xi

President Xi views United Front work as an important tool to strengthen support for the CCP both inside and outside China by exploiting individuals' emotional and ideological sympathies for China and providing financial support to key groups and individuals.<sup>24</sup> Although the importance of United Front work declined after the founding of the People's Republic of China,<sup>\*</sup> a number of Western analysts agree it has regained its prominence since then, and especially since the rise of Xi Jinping, as Beijing has embraced a much more assertive approach to foreign policy.<sup>25</sup> In his address to the 19th National Congress of the CCP<sup>†</sup> in October 2017, President Xi called United Front work "an important way to ensure the success of the [Chinese Communist] Party's cause" and urged the CCP to form the "broadest possible patriotic United Front."<sup>26</sup> President Xi has also called United Front work a "magic weapon" that is important for bringing about "the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation."<sup>27</sup> This elevation of the importance of United Front work has resulted in an increased number of UFWD officials assigned to top CCP and government

<sup>\*</sup> Professor Groot argues Mao Zedong "lost interest" in United Front work after the mid-1950s because he preferred "class struggle" over conciliation, the latter of which is a necessary element of United Front co-option. However, according to Professor Groot, the CCP continued to rely on the United Front strategy to regain political stability each time it "had to recover from a Mao-induced crisis." Gerry Groot, "The United Front in an Age of Shared Destiny," *China Story*, 2014. <https://www.thechinastory.org/yearbooks/yearbook-2014/forum-begging-to-differ/the-united-front-in-an-age-of-shared-destiny/>.

<sup>†</sup> At the National Party Congress, which occurs every five years, delegates set the CCP's national policy goals and choose new top leaders. *Brookings Institution*, "China's 19th Party Congress." <https://www.brookings.edu/product/chinas-19th-party-congress/>.

posts, adding roughly 40,000 new UFWD cadres overall in the first few years after Xi became president.<sup>28</sup> According to Professor Groot, most of the new UFWD cadres are tasked with United Front work within China, although Beijing has also strengthened its overseas United Front work, with almost all Chinese embassies now including personnel working with the UFWD.<sup>29</sup>

The CCP has also recently taken steps to increase the bureaucratic authority of the United Front and ensure that it follows President Xi's personal directives. In 2015, the CCP held its first Central Committee Conference on United Front Work\* and President Xi established a leading small group† on United Front Work with himself at its head, signifying “a direct line of command from the [CCP] Politburo to [the] United Front,” according to the *Financial Times*.<sup>30</sup> At a 2017 national conference on United Front work, Yu Zhengsheng—former member of the Politburo Standing Committee, former head of the UFWD, and then Chairman of the CPPCC National Committee‡—called on UFWD officials to “resolutely safeguard the authority of the [CCP] Central Committee with comrade Xi Jinping as the core.”<sup>31</sup>

## Seeking to Control the Narrative

Merriden Varrall, director of the Australian think tank Lowy Institute's East Asia program, argues that since Xi Jinping assumed office the Party has had “a sense that China must dictate how it's perceived and that the world is biased against China.”<sup>32</sup> To advance its narrative, the CCP has stepped up its United Front work to further stifle criticism of the CCP, spread positive views of China, and incentivize voters in foreign democracies to influence their domestic policies in ways favorable to China.<sup>33</sup> According to Professor Groot, United Front work tells what President Xi has called Beijing's preferred “China story”—or an interpretation of history that is flattering to the CCP—and encourages co-optees to promote CCP views.<sup>34</sup> Since President Xi came to power the CCP has also cracked down on what it terms “historical nihilism,” or attempts to undermine Beijing's official history, which an internal CCP memo in 2012 identified as one of seven existential threats to the Party.<sup>35</sup>

According to Peter Mattis, a research fellow in China studies at the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation, CCP intimidation and efforts to promote Beijing's narrative “sometimes crosses the line into criminal actions, such as conspiracy against rights.”<sup>36</sup> Mattis argues the CCP has infringed upon the freedoms of association and speech

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\* The UFWD held 20 “national” conferences between 1995 and 2006, but the 2015 conference was the first “central” meeting. According to analyst Marcel Angliviel de la Beaumelle, “The ‘Central’ qualifier represented a rise in status for a previously ‘national’ ... conference. The elevation in status corresponded with [President] Xi's new vision for the department.” Marcel Angliviel de la Beaumelle, “The United Front Work Department: ‘Magic Weapon’ at Home and Abroad,” *China Brief*, July 6, 2017. <https://jamestown.org/program/united-front-work-department-magic-weapon-home-abroad/>.

† Leading small groups are powerful advisory bodies that formulate and help implement policies concerning particular topics, including coordination across Party and state bureaucracies. According to the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), CCP leading small groups predominantly address domestic political and security issues, and state leading small groups predominantly address domestic social and economic issues. Christopher K. Johnson, Scott Kennedy, and Mingda Qiu, “Xi's Signature Governance Innovation: The Rise of Leading Small Groups,” *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, October 17, 2017. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/xis-signature-governance-innovation-rise-leading-small-groups>; Mark Stokes and Russell Hsiao, “The People's Liberation Army General Political Department: Political Warfare with Chinese Characteristics,” *Project 2049 Institute*, October 14, 2013, 16–17. [https://www.project2049.net/documents/PLA\\_General\\_Political\\_Department\\_Liaison\\_Stokes\\_Hsiao.pdf](https://www.project2049.net/documents/PLA_General_Political_Department_Liaison_Stokes_Hsiao.pdf); Alice Miller, “The CCP Central Committee's Leading Small Groups,” *China Leadership Monitor* No. 26 (2008): 1. <http://media.hoover.org/sites/default/files/documents/CLM26AM.pdf>.

‡ Wang Yang became CPPCC chairman in March 2018. Sidney Leng and Tony Cheung, “Wang Yang Takes the Helm of China's Top Political Advisory Body,” *South China Morning Post*, March 15, 2018. <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/policies-politics/article/2137223/wang-yang-takes-helm-chinas-top-political-advisory-body>.

§ This also includes exerting pressure on the language used by others to discuss “core” issues; for example, by conditioning Western media to use the word “reunification” instead of “unification” when discussing Taiwan, implying that being subject to Mainland rule is Taiwan's proper state even though the People's Republic of China has never ruled the island. Mercy A. Kuo, “China's United Front Work: Propaganda as Policy,” *Diplomat*, February 14, 2018. <https://thediplomat.com/2018/02/chinas-united-front-work-propaganda-as-policy/>; Bruce Jacobs, “Taiwan Was Never Part of China,” *Taipei Times*, January 6, 2016. <http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/editorials/archives/2016/01/06/2003636520>.

\*\* U.S. law defines “conspiracy against rights” as conspiring to “injure, oppress, threaten, or intimidate any person ... in the free exercise or enjoyment of any right or privilege secured to him by the Constitution or laws of the United States, or because of his having so exercised the same” or going “in disguise ... or on the premises of another, with intent to prevent or hinder his free exercise or enjoyment of any right or privilege so secured.” Conspiracy against Rights, 18 U.S. Code § 241. <https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/18/241>.

afforded to U.S. citizens and others protected by U.S. laws—by, for example, suppressing protests on U.S. soil—making CCP efforts to promote its narrative as much a problem of civil rights as of national security.<sup>37</sup> During anti-CCP protests in San Francisco surrounding the 2008 Olympic torch relay, former U.S. intelligence officials said Chinese security officials monitored and directed counterprotesting blocs of thousands of Chinese students to drown out Beijing’s critics, which *Politico* called an “operation ... by a hostile foreign intelligence service to forcibly suppress First Amendment activities in a major American city.”<sup>38</sup>

## Focus on Influencing Overseas Chinese

Recent official statements by Chinese leaders and in CCP documents echo the increased focus on “overseas Chinese work” to influence the behavior and views of Chinese living abroad. In his address to the 19th National Congress of the CCP, President Xi declared the Party would “maintain extensive contacts with overseas Chinese nationals, returned Chinese, and their relatives and [will] unite them so that they can join [the Party’s] endeavors to rejuvenate the Chinese nation.”<sup>39</sup> Information in the UFWD teaching manual reviewed by the *Financial Times* further suggests an increased focus on United Front work targeting overseas Chinese, saying “the unity of Chinese at home requires the unity of the sons and daughters of Chinese abroad.”<sup>40</sup> A 2015 CCP Central Committee trial regulation<sup>\*</sup> said the primary mission of United Front work includes “guiding” overseas Chinese.<sup>†</sup> <sup>41</sup>

The goal of “overseas Chinese work” is to use ethnic, cultural, economic, or political ties to mobilize sympathetic overseas Chinese communities—ideally of their own accord—to advocate for the interests of the CCP and marginalize its opponents.<sup>42</sup> The UFWD teaching manual directs operatives to win overseas Chinese over to the CCP’s side by emphasizing “flesh and blood” ties to China with the goal of securing political, moral, and financial support for the CCP.<sup>43</sup> To achieve these ends, UFWD officials often meet with local chapters of “Hometown Associations” (groups that connect Chinese emigrants from the same locale), sometimes along with senior staff from Chinese consulates.<sup>44</sup> In March 2018, the UFWD absorbed a number of State Council offices, including its Overseas Chinese Affairs Office, further consolidating its responsibility for activities that seek to sway the overseas Chinese communities.<sup>45</sup> This consolidation emphasizes the CCP’s subjugation of issues concerning nationality to United Front work.<sup>46</sup> According to John Fitzgerald, director of the CSI Swinburne Program for Asia-Pacific Social Investment and Philanthropy and an expert on the United Front, the Chinese state agencies working with overseas Chinese had been “admirably transparent about their activities to date,” but “there is a risk that the [CCP’s] United Front work among overseas Chinese will be more difficult to track publicly” once the UFWD fully absorbs them.<sup>47</sup>

Chinese intelligence services have been known to coerce overseas Chinese to function as operatives targeting other overseas Chinese in both the United States and other countries, indicating that these agencies actively participate in overseas Chinese work that seeks to hide official connections. In January 2018, Chen Yonglin, a former Chinese diplomat who defected to Australia in 2005, told Radio Free Asia (RFA) that the Chinese government uses both threats and rewards to incentivize Chinese students abroad to act as CCP informants.<sup>48</sup> Sulaiman Gu (a student at

<sup>\*</sup> Although it is a “trial” regulation, it nonetheless appears to be used as official guidance in provincial, city, and district-level UFWDs. Universities have also held study sessions on the regulation despite its trial status. In a “Top 10” list of major United Front events in 2015 posted by the official UFWD Wechat account, the promulgation of this trial regulation was second only to the CCP Central Committee’s Conference on United Front Work. Baoshan City United Front Work Department, “Concentrating the Will of the People, Assembling Power, Innovation and Reform—2017 Baoshan United Front Work Summary,” August 2, 2018. Translation. <http://www.zytzb.gov.cn/tzdk/293143.jhtml>; CCP Central Committee United Front Work Department, “Guangzhou City Tianhe District Makes Solid Progress on Multiparty Cooperation: Highlights Brilliant, Results Clear,” July 9, 2018. Translation. <http://www.zytzb.gov.cn/tzcx/291102.jhtml>; Tongji University United Front Work Department, “‘Chinese Communist Party’s United Front Work Regulation (Trial)’ Study,” June 17, 2016. Translation. <https://tzb.tongji.edu.cn/82/7e/c3405a33406/page.htm>; *United Front Newspeak*, “United Front Major Events – TOP 10,” January 5, 2016. Translation. <http://www.zytzb.gov.cn/tzb2010/wxwb/201601/51aa90eae1bd4c6bb4d2990bf06d25de.shtml>; Tianjin University, “Tianjin University Holds Lecture to Study ‘Chinese Communist Party’s United Front Work Regulation (Trial),’” November 16, 2015. Translation. <http://news.tju.edu.cn/info/1003/23835.htm>. Central United Front Work Department, “Guangdong Province Party Committee Standing Committee Studies the Spirit of the Central United Front Work Meeting,” May 25, 2015. Translation. <http://www.zytzb.gov.cn/tzb2010/xxgc/201505/02ff117f4d1a470d93be3328088f730d.shtml>.

<sup>†</sup> The CCP established its first organ responsible specifically for liaising with overseas Chinese communities in 1940; currently, the third bureau of the UFWD oversees United Front work targeting Hong Kong, Taiwan, Macau, and overseas Chinese. James Kynge, Lucy Hornby, and Jamil Anderlini, “Inside China’s Secret ‘Magic Weapon’ for Worldwide Influence,” *Financial Times*, October 26, 2017. <https://www.ft.com/content/fb2b3934-b004-11e7-beba-5521c713abf4>; James Jiann Hua To, *Qiaowu: Extra-Territorial Policies for the Overseas Chinese*, Brill Academic Publishers, 2014, 57.

the University of Georgia) and Wu Lebao (a student at Australian National University) both told RFA that Chinese security personnel attempted to recruit them as informants on overseas Chinese dissident groups.<sup>49</sup> Mr. Gu provided RFA with recordings of his conversations with Chinese Ministry of State Security (MSS) agents, in which the agents requested information on pro-democracy groups in the United States and on Guo Wengui, a U.S.-based Chinese billionaire who has repeatedly made allegations of high-level CCP corruption and whom the CCP has persecuted and sought to discredit.<sup>50</sup>

Chinese intelligence services have also specifically targeted ethnic minorities such as Uyghurs living overseas, threatening to send their families still in Xinjiang to internment camps, or keep them there, if the former do not agree to spy for China.<sup>51</sup> According to Uyghurs who have been threatened in this way, this coercion is intended “not only to gather details about Uyghurs’ activities abroad, but also to sow discord within exile communities in the West and intimidate people in hopes of preventing them from speaking out against the Chinese state.”<sup>52</sup> Megha Rajagopalan, *BuzzFeed*’s former China bureau chief who has reported extensively on these issues, told the Commission that Beijing’s harassment of overseas Uyghurs matches characteristics of the United Front strategy to neutralize potential political opposition, though she was not aware of direct UFWD involvement in this particular campaign.<sup>53</sup> Consistent with Beijing’s effort to silence overseas critics, RFA has reported that Chinese security forces have recently detained dozens of Xinjiang-based family members of RFA Uyghur service journalists in retaliation for their reporting on these events.<sup>54</sup> In August 2018, when the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination received testimony regarding the ongoing mass detentions of Uyghurs and other Muslim ethnic minorities in Xinjiang, it was the deputy director-general of the UFWD Ninth (Xinjiang) Bureau, Hu Lianhe, who spoke out to flatly deny the detentions were occurring and insist that “Xinjiang citizens, including the Uyghurs, enjoy equal freedoms and rights,” clearly revealing the UFWD’s involvement in Beijing’s campaign to silence Muslim minorities.<sup>55</sup>

The CCP’s United Front strategy targeting overseas Chinese presents a number of difficulties to U.S. law enforcement and counterintelligence agencies. For instance, in light of the fact that United Front work and China’s intelligence services specifically target ethnic Chinese, U.S. law enforcement agencies attempt to design their counterintelligence protocols to avoid the perception of discrimination, with investigators focusing on tracking the activities of intelligence collectors to find out whom they have targeted, not the other way around. Michelle Van Cleave, former U.S. national counterintelligence executive, testified to the Commission in June 2016 that counterintelligence in the United States is not “about finding the traitors ... as much as it is understanding how an adversary uses intelligence against [the United States].”<sup>56</sup> David Major, former Federal Bureau of Investigation supervisory agent and president of the Alexandria, Virginia-based CI Centre, testified to the Commission in 2016 that “It’s not how [the U.S. government looks] at ethnicity; it’s how the [intelligence] collector looks at ethnicity. The Chinese intelligence services specifically target people who are [Han]. [Chinese-Americans] ... have a higher probability of being targeted because of what [China’s] world view is.”<sup>57</sup>

## Other Organizations Involved in United Front Work

In addition to the UFWD, a range of CCP military and civilian organizations are active in carrying out United Front work, either working directly for the UFWD or under the broader leadership of the CPPCC.<sup>58</sup> The broad swath of actors involved in this work underlines that while certain organizations like the UFWD and CPPCC are explicitly involved in implementing United Front work, the strategy is a priority for the “whole Party.” For instance, the China Council for the Promotion of Peaceful Reunification (CPPRC)—a prominent organization promoting China’s unification with Taiwan—is directly subordinate to the UFWD and has at least 200 chapters in 90 countries, including 33 chapters in the United States registered as the National Association for China’s Peaceful Unification.<sup>59</sup> The CPPRC has become one of the most prominent groups claiming to represent Chinese diaspora

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\* Its chairman is Yu Zhengsheng, the CCP official responsible for United Front policy, and its executive vice-chair is Sun Chunlan, the head of the UFWD until late 2017. John Dotson, “The United Front Work Department in Action Abroad: A Profile of the Council for the Promotion of the Peaceful Reunification of China,” *China Brief*, February 13, 2018. <https://jamestown.org/program/united-front-work-department-action-abroad-profile-council-promotion-peaceful-reunification-china/>; James Kynge, Lucy Hornby, and Jamil Anderlini, “Inside China’s Secret ‘Magic Weapon’ for Worldwide Influence,” *Financial Times*, October 26, 2017.

communities and is a leading organization mobilizing international Chinese communities in support of Beijing's policies.<sup>60</sup> A separate entity, the Liaison Department\* of the former People's Liberation Army (PLA) General Political Department (GPD),<sup>†</sup> facilitated the activities of a number of front organizations—including “friendship” and “cultural” associations—as part of its broader mission to conduct propaganda operations, perform perception management,<sup>‡</sup> and gather intelligence.<sup>61</sup> For example, the China Association for International Friendly Contact (CAIFC), a front organization for the former General Political Department, performs dual roles of intelligence collection and conducting propaganda and perception management campaigns, such as its work through the Sanya Initiative, a series of track two dialogues between retired senior flag officers of the U.S. and Chinese armed forces.<sup>62</sup>

The National Endowment for Democracy argued in its December 2017 report, *Sharp Power: Rising Authoritarian Influence*, that targets of CCP influence operations are often under the mistaken impression that media, academic, and friendship organizations operate independently from the CCP, but “[m]ost, if not all, of the Chinese entities that engage with their peers abroad unequivocally serve national party goals—either by following official or unofficial guidelines, or by avoiding taking positions that might violate [CCP] guidelines or jeopardize the regime's goals.”<sup>63</sup> According to another expert, the UFDW's approach to foreign intelligence using an “overt and benign appearance” and innocuous-sounding language while purporting to promote Chinese culture to both Chinese and non-Chinese is “distinct from other [CCP-affiliated] organizations.”<sup>64</sup>

## The Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference

The CPPCC, an advisory committee “under the leadership of the [CCP],” is the highest-ranking entity overseeing the United Front system.<sup>65</sup> It has been part of the “patriotic United Front” since 1954, according to official Chinese government websites.<sup>66</sup> Senior members of China's non-communist political parties are elected as CPPCC members and are permitted to directly submit proposals to local and national CPPCC committees.<sup>67</sup> A declassified Central Intelligence Agency study on the United Front produced in 1957 noted, “Without exception, the non-Communist parties have acknowledged and frequently reaffirmed their subordination to the [CCP] Central Committee and the Chinese Communist program. The presence of CCP members who are responsible to the Central Committee ... assures Central Committee control of those organizations.”<sup>68</sup> Military and civilian officials coordinate foreign influence operations through the CPPCC's External Friendship Subcommittee.<sup>69</sup>

## China Association for International Friendly Contact

CAIFC is a front for the former PLA GPD which may now report directly to the PLA Central Military Commission's Political Work Department.<sup>70</sup> CAIFC's website claims it is “a national social organization devoted to fostering international and regional people-to-people friendly exchanges” and “promoting international people-to-people

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<https://www.ft.com/content/fb2b3934-b004-11e7-beba-5521c713abf4>; China Council for the Promotion of Peaceful National Reunification, “Council Introduction.” Translation. <http://www.zhongguotongcuihui.org.cn/bhjs/>.

\* The Liaison Department of the PLA GPD has traditionally been responsible for conducting propaganda and psychological operations directed at other militaries. Mark Stokes and Russell Hsiao, “The People's Liberation Army General Political Department: Political Warfare with Chinese Characteristics,” *Project 2049 Institute*, October 14, 2013, 3. [https://www.project2049.net/documents/PLA\\_General\\_Political\\_Department\\_Liaison\\_Stokes\\_Hsiao.pdf](https://www.project2049.net/documents/PLA_General_Political_Department_Liaison_Stokes_Hsiao.pdf); Interagency Operational Security Support Staff, *Intelligence Threat Handbook*, 2004, 23. <http://www.fas.org/irp/threat/handbook/foreign.pdf>; Howard DeVore, *China's Intelligence and Internal Security Forces*, Jane's Information Group, 1999, 50–51.

† As part of the PLA's ongoing reform, the four former departments of the Central Military Commission (CMC)—the General Staff Headquarters, the GPD, the General Logistics Department, and the General Armaments Department—were disbanded in 2016 and replaced by 15 functional sections comprising seven departments, three commissions, and five directly affiliated bodies. Of these, the CMC Political Work Department likely took over the foreign perception management mission from the former GPD. U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *2016 Annual Report to Congress*, November 2016, 291. *China Military Online*, “MND Holds Press Conference on CMC Organ Reshuffle,” January 12, 2016. [http://english.chinamil.com.cn/view/2016-01/12/content\\_7160588.htm](http://english.chinamil.com.cn/view/2016-01/12/content_7160588.htm).

‡ According to the Department of Defense, perception management comprises “actions to convey and/or deny selected information and indicators to foreign audiences to influence their emotions, motives, and objective reasoning as well as to intelligence systems and leaders at all levels to influence official estimates, ultimately resulting in foreign behaviors and official actions favorable to the originator's objectives.... Perception management combines truth projection, operations security, cover and deception, and psychological operations.” U.S. Department of Defense, *Joint Publication 1-02: Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, April 12, 2001 (as amended through October 31, 2009), 411. [http://jtrc.fhu.disa.mil/jtrc\\_dri/pdfs/jp1\\_02.pdf](http://jtrc.fhu.disa.mil/jtrc_dri/pdfs/jp1_02.pdf).

exchanges and cooperation, and enhancing world peace and development.”<sup>71</sup> The organization’s website says it establishes “close ties with [foreign] government agencies, political parties, and prominent political and military figures” to promote China’s policies, achievements, and goals, which John Garnaut—a former journalist and adviser to Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull—argues is intended to outsource the CCP’s messaging to “self-interested or naïve intermediaries.”<sup>72</sup> CAIFC has additional ties to the Ministries of State Security, Civil Affairs, and Foreign Affairs, and it is a platform for deploying undercover intelligence gatherers.<sup>73</sup> In addition to sending intelligence collectors abroad, CAIFC sponsors trips to China by foreign military and veteran groups, businesspeople, and former politicians which typically include contact with hand-picked PLA personnel.<sup>74</sup>

## Chinese Students and Scholars Associations

After the Tiananmen Massacre, the Chinese government increased ideological work targeting domestic Chinese university students and subjected overseas Chinese students to “aggressive methods ... of group management [and] extraterritorial influence,” according to researcher James Jiann Hua To.<sup>75</sup> These efforts resulted in the creation of CSSAs, which Mr. To argues have received critical support from Chinese embassies since their inception.<sup>76</sup> CSSAs have proliferated in the United States since this time and now include at least 142 U.S. chapters;<sup>\*</sup> they act as social hubs that “help Chinese students adjust to life in a foreign country, bring Chinese students together on campus, and showcase Chinese culture,” according to *Foreign Policy*.<sup>77</sup> Independent analyst Tanner Greer argues CSSAs provide important social goods to Chinese students, such as assistance in finding roommates and housing, which Western universities hosting Chinese students often provide “little instruction or knowledge” on how to obtain.<sup>78</sup>

Despite the useful social services CSSAs provide for their members, they receive guidance from the CCP through Chinese embassies and consulates—governmental ties CSSAs frequently attempt to conceal—and are active in carrying out overseas Chinese work consistent with Beijing’s United Front strategy.<sup>79</sup> Journalists and activists have also shown CSSAs to routinely coordinate with the Chinese government and to have been involved in the suppression of free speech and the harassment, intimidation, and surveillance of Chinese student activists.<sup>80</sup> In at least one case, a CSSA has been implicated in industrial espionage: in 2005, the French newspaper *Le Monde* reported that a CSSA in Leuven, Belgium was a front for a “Belgian-based economic espionage network” comprising “hundreds of Chinese spies working at various levels of European industry.”<sup>81</sup> According to a former U.S. intelligence official, Chinese intelligence officers posted in diplomatic facilities are the primary point of contact for CSSA members; in multiple cases, CSSA members have reportedly cooperated directly with Chinese security personnel outside of China.<sup>82</sup> In the mid-2000s, a CSSA member in the United States informed on another CSSA member to China’s MSS for having contact with the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and in the mid-2010s, U.S. counterintelligence officials believed a University of California, Berkeley CSSA member was reporting the activities of other Chinese students to the MSS.<sup>83</sup> In other cases, CSSA members have performed similar functions outside the United States. For instance, in 2017, after Chinese security agents working with Egyptian plainclothes police officers rounded up more than 200 Uyghur students in Cairo at Beijing’s request and jailed or deported many of them, two Uyghur students who had been held in a police station told RFA that Bai Kecheng (the president of the CSSA in Egypt) and three other Chinese men had interrogated them about their Islamic religious practices.<sup>84</sup>

Alex Joske, a Chinese-Australian student journalist who says he has been harassed by CSSA members because of his reporting, argues CSSAs are “active adherents to a mentality that exacerbates the divide” between Chinese students and their university communities.<sup>85</sup> Mr. Greer asserts that the “entire purpose” of United Front work is “to [co-opt] the movements, organizations, and people that provide social ... goods and mobilize or manipulate them into aiding the Party in its endeavors.”<sup>86</sup> This co-opting, based on publicly available information provided by CSSAs, includes receiving funding from the Chinese government, advocating for Beijing’s foreign policy priorities, and responding to direction from—or even being directly subordinate to—Chinese embassies and consulates. In 2018, *Foreign Policy* reported that budget documents from the Georgetown University CSSA showed the CSSA received roughly half of its annual budget from the Chinese government and “confirm a link between the Chinese government and Chinese student organizations ... that is often suspected but difficult to verify.”<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>\*</sup> ChineseInUS, a website providing immigration resources for Chinese students in the United States, lists 142 individual U.S. CSSA chapters. This list is not exhaustive. *ChineseInUS*, “CSSA List.” [http://www.chineseinus.com/cssa\\_list.htm](http://www.chineseinus.com/cssa_list.htm).

Receiving funding from the Chinese government is not necessarily tantamount to being under direct oversight, and the funding provided to individual CSSAs appears to vary. Sarah Cook, senior research analyst for East Asia at Freedom House, points out that other governments “generally do not provide [comparable levels of funding] to student groups.”<sup>88</sup> For example, the Chinese Embassy in Washington, DC paid hundreds of students with cash distributed through the George Washington University CSSA to attend events welcoming President Xi to Washington in 2012 and 2015, according to messages sent by the CSSA to its members and a George Washington University student who participated.<sup>89</sup> When then-President Hu Jintao visited Chicago in 2011, the University of Wisconsin-Madison CSSA bused in members to greet him and also gave them cash gifts which the CSSA president told them to keep secret, according to an attendee.<sup>90</sup> Because this kind of petty cash for CSSA activities is often deposited into CSSA officers’ personal bank accounts or unofficial CSSA bank accounts, *Foreign Policy* reports university administrators may not be aware these organizations are receiving funding from Beijing; when violations of host universities’ financial and student organizational policies have occurred, at least one CSSA has been temporarily closed.<sup>91</sup> According to Professor Dreyer, Confucius Institutes—Beijing’s official overseas language and culture educational organizations—have also subsidized CSSA political activities.<sup>92</sup>

In addition to funding, ties indicating supervision of CSSAs by the Chinese Embassy or consulates have also been documented, raising serious concerns about the organizations’ operational independence.<sup>93</sup> The nature of the ties appears to involve direct subordination and political direction rather than mere affiliation or cooperation. For example, in a promotional video from 2017, the president of the George Washington University CSSA explicitly says the CSSA is “directed by the Chinese Embassy” and “works with” the embassy; Cao Yaxue, founder and editor of ChinaChange.org (a civil society activist website), asserted that all CSSAs are funded by the Chinese government.<sup>94</sup> Chen Yonglin claims most CSSAs are “installed by the Chinese government” and noted that the constitution of the Southwestern CSSA—a coalition comprising 26 CSSAs in California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Hawaii, according to its website<sup>95</sup>—says the Chinese Consulate in Los Angeles must approve all Southwestern CSSA presidential candidates.<sup>96</sup>

China is not the only country that provides support for overseas student organizations, but its use of CSSAs to politically mobilize students in support of Beijing’s foreign policy objectives and enforce support for the CCP goes well beyond just funding for cultural and educational activities.<sup>97</sup> For example, in February 2017, after the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) invited the Dalai Lama to give that year’s commencement address, the UCSD CSSA threatened “tough measures to resolutely resist the school’s unreasonable behavior” and claimed it had coordinated with the Chinese Consulate and was “waiting for the advice of the Consulate General” regarding the matter.<sup>98</sup> The University of Tennessee CSSA describes itself as apolitical in its charter but requires its members to “fervently love the motherland” and “protect the motherland’s honor and image.” In order for students from Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan to be eligible for CSSA membership at the University of Tennessee, they must “support [China’s] national reunification” and “recognize the ‘One China’ principle,” a stipulation indicating the CSSA’s goals include not just celebrating Chinese heritage and cultural interests but explicitly advocating for Beijing’s foreign policy priorities which, in this case, do not align with the United States’ official interpretation of diplomatic arrangements.<sup>99</sup> Not all CSSA members are comfortable with Beijing’s attempts to assume direct control over their activities; some CSSA principals told *Foreign Policy* they are pressured by Chinese consular officials to submit proof they have complied with the Chinese government’s requests.<sup>100</sup>

**Table 1: Selected CSSA Content Indicating CCP Oversight**

CSSA chapter	Website content/principal comments
George Washington University	CSSA president says the CSSA is “directed by” and “works with” the embassy.

\* Beijing’s “One China” principle is based on the “1992 Consensus,” a tacit understanding reached at a meeting between representatives of Taiwan and China in that year that there is only “one China” but that each side may maintain its own interpretation of the meaning of “one China.” The United States’ “One China” policy is the acknowledgement of China’s position that “there is but one China and Taiwan is part of China.” It is not an endorsement of China’s position. U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *2017 Annual Report to Congress*, November 2017, 182, 373–374; Richard C. Bush, “A One-China Policy Primer,” *Brookings Institution*, March 2017, iii–iv. <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/one-china-policy-primer-web-final.pdf>; U.S. Department of State, *U.S. Relations with Taiwan*, September 13, 2016. <https://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35855.htm>.

CSSA chapter	Website content/principal comments
Southwestern CSSA	Says the Chinese Consulate in Los Angeles must approve presidential candidates.
University of Tennessee	Requires members to “fervently love the motherland” and “protect the motherland’s honor and image.” Members from Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan must “support [China’s] national reunification” and “recognize the ‘One China’ principle.”
University of Alberta	Chinese-language frequently asked questions page on the group’s website says the group was established by the Chinese Embassy in Canada; the English version does not mention the embassy.
University of California, San Diego	An older version of the group’s website says the group is “a subordinate organization of the Chinese [Consulate] in Los Angeles”; the website has since been changed.
Harvard Medical School	The Chinese version of the group’s “About Us” page mentions receiving sponsorship from the Chinese Consulate, but the English version does not mention the consulate’s support and says the group is nonpolitical.

Source: Various.<sup>101</sup>

Further complicating concerns about their independence, CSSAs often attempt to conceal or obscure their ties to the Chinese government, frequently omitting incriminating language from the English-language versions of their websites—the ones typically reviewed by university administrators.<sup>102</sup> After the Dalai Lama’s commencement address at UCSD was announced, *Quartz* reported that a UCSD CSSA principal claimed it had been a “mistake” to admit that the CSSA had been in touch with the Chinese consulate and insisted the group was “100 percent student-run.”<sup>103</sup> The current website of the UCSD CSSA says the organization was “spontaneously established by overseas international students,” but an archived version of the website from 2015 shows it previously said the UCSD CSSA is “a subordinate organization of the Chinese [Consulate]\* in Los Angeles.”<sup>104</sup> According to Sandra Fu, senior editor at *China Digital Times*, an activist website that tracks Chinese censorship, the page was altered after the CSSA’s Dalai Lama protest “because people started digging” into its ties to the Chinese government.<sup>105</sup> CSSAs have also attempted to conceal financial ties to the Chinese government; the president of the University of Pittsburgh’s CSSA posted on China’s microblogging platform Sina Weibo in June 2017 that the Chinese Consulate provides the group an annual budget of \$6,000, but later deleted the post, potentially indicating a desire to conceal that support.<sup>106</sup>

## Confucius Institutes

Confucius Institutes are CCP-sponsored education organizations that teach Chinese language, culture, and history at the primary, secondary, and university level around the world.<sup>107</sup> However, they also advance Beijing’s preferred narrative and subvert important academic principles such as institutional autonomy and academic freedom. Significantly, Confucius Institutes are funded by the CCP Propaganda Department—formally affiliated with the UFWD—and are also overseen by personnel based in Chinese embassies and consulates, according to Richard Fadden, former director of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service.<sup>108</sup> The Confucius Institute program has longstanding and formal ties to the UFWD, as Liu Yandong—a former Chinese vice-premier and Politburo member—was the head of the UFWD when she launched the program in 2004.<sup>109</sup> Ms. Liu now serves as chair of the Office of Chinese Language Council International, which is the Confucius Institutes’ parent organization, also known as the “Hanban,” short for “National Chinese Language Office.” As of 2014, according to the Hanban, there were at least 110 Confucius Institutes in the United States alone and, according to *Xinhua*, there were more than 500 institutes in 142 countries as of late 2017.<sup>110</sup> Ethan Epstein, associate editor of the *Weekly Standard*, argued that a key factor in the spread of Confucius Institutes in U.S. universities is “an alarming willingness to accept

\* The older page states the CSSA is subordinate to “the Chinese embassy in Los Angeles.” China has a consulate in Los Angeles; the embassy is in Washington, DC. “About UCSD CSSA,” March 13, 2015, accessed via Internet Archive Wayback Machine. Translation. <https://web.archive.org/web/20150313160810/http://www.ucsdcssa.org:80/about/about-ucsd-cssa/>.

money at the expense of principles that universities are ostensibly devoted to upholding.”<sup>\*\* 111</sup> According to United Front expert John Fitzgerald, “Universities that accept [Confucius Institutes] on Beijing’s terms, with all the compromises they entail, signal they are willing to set aside academic principles<sup>†</sup> to build good relations with China [and] indicate normal due diligence does not apply to relations with Chinese universities and firms.”<sup>112</sup>

In addition to providing Chinese language instruction to students in the United States—including sending hundreds of teachers to help meet U.S. government goals for Mandarin instruction—the Chinese government also sponsors trips for U.S. students to study abroad in China.<sup>‡ 113</sup> The Hanban has paid for more than 6,000 U.S. high school students to visit China since 2007 through its Chinese Bridge Program for Secondary School Students, an opportunity *Foreign Policy*’s Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian argues many students would not be able to have without the Hanban’s sponsorship.<sup>114</sup> An important goal of these exchanges is to try to build a friendly environment for China’s interests by giving participants favorable views of China, which they then disseminate, helping to legitimize the CCP.<sup>§ 115</sup>

However, Confucius Institutes’ Chinese-language instruction also serves as an important platform for a larger program to increase China’s soft power and advance Beijing’s version of history, according to Li Changchun, a former CCP Politburo Standing Committee member responsible for propaganda.<sup>116</sup> Liu Yunshan—another former Politburo Standing Committee member and head of the CCP Central Propaganda Department—wrote in 2010 that China should “actively carry out international propaganda battles” on core issues and “do well in establishing cultural centers and Confucius Institutes,” suggesting China’s vision of soft power aims more to combat Western and other foreign narratives about China than to cultivate China’s attractiveness.<sup>\*\* 117</sup> In addition to hosting cultural

\* There are more than 500 Confucius Institutes in universities—with plans for 1,000 by 2020—and more than 1,000 Confucius Classrooms in primary and secondary schools worldwide, including at least one Institute in a government department, the New South Wales Department of Education. Ethan Epstein, “How China Infiltrated U.S. Classrooms,” *Politico*, January 16, 2018. <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2018/01/16/how-china-infiltrated-us-classrooms-216327>; Louisa Lim and Anders Furze, “Confucius Institute in NSW Education Department ‘Unacceptable’ – Analyst,” *Guardian*, December 7, 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/dec/08/confucious-institute-in-nsw-education-department-unacceptable-analyst>; Mareike Ohlberg and Bertram Lang, “How to Counter China’s Global Propaganda Offensive,” *New York Times*, September 21, 2016. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/22/opinion/how-to-counter-chinas-global-propaganda-offensive.html>; Rachele Peterson, “American Universities Are Welcoming China’s Trojan Horse,” *Foreign Policy*, May 9, 2017. <http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/05/09/american-universities-are-welcoming-chinas-trojan-horse-confucius-institutes/>.

† For example, according to the Association of American Universities, core academic principles include institutional autonomy, academic freedom, and shared governance. Association of American Universities, “Academic Principles: A Brief Introduction,” April 2013. <https://www.aau.edu/sites/default/files/AAU%20Files/AAU%20Documents/Academic-Principles.pdf>.

‡ For example, in 2014, following a 2013 meeting with then Vice-Premiere Liu Yandong brokered by the China-U.S.-Exchange Foundation (CUSEF), a delegation from eight U.S. historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) signed a memorandum of understanding in Beijing for the Chinese Ministry of Education to provide 1,000 scholarships for HBCU students to visit China. CUSEF is run by Tung Chee-hwa, a vice-chair of the CPPCC. For more on Dr. Tung and CUSEF, see “Funding of U.S. Academic and Policy Discourse” below. U.S. Department of Education, “PRESS RELEASE: Chinese Government Signs MOU with Historically Black Colleges & Universities in Beijing Today,” July 9, 2014. <https://sites.ed.gov/whhbcu/2014/07/09/press-release-chinese-government-signs-mou-with-historically-black-colleges-universities-in-beijing-today/>.

§ The CCP uses “friendship envoys” to outsource propaganda, in part because Beijing believes foreigners are more accepting of propaganda if it appears to come from other foreigners instead of Chinese sources. In many cases, friendship envoys go on to assume important positions in their respective governments. Language study through the Hanban constitutes “friendship” activities, according to Liu Yandong. For example, in June 2017, then Vice Premier Liu visited the Hungarian-Chinese Bilingual Primary School in Budapest and praised the “sincere friendship” reflected by the students’ Chinese language ability. In March 2018, Chinese Ambassador to the United Kingdom Liu Xiaoming encouraged participants in a Confucius Institute-sponsored Chinese language proficiency contest to become friendship envoys. People’s Republic of China in Kolkata, “Liu Yandong: Hope Hungarian-Chinese Bilingual Primary School Will Cultivate More Envoys of China-Hungary Friendship,” June 20, 2017. <http://kolkata.china-consulate.org/eng/zgbd/t1472741.htm>; Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, “Ambassador Liu Xiaoming Attends the 17th ‘Chinese Bridge’ Chinese Proficiency Competition for Foreign College Students UK Regional Final,” March 26, 2018. <http://www.chinese-embassy.org.uk/eng/tpxw/t1545912.htm>; Juan Pablo Cardenal, “‘Sharp Power’: Rising Authoritarian Influence,” Washington, DC, December 6, 2017; Li Baoping, “On the Issues Concerned with China-Africa Education Cooperation,” China-Africa Links Workshop, Hong Kong, November 11–12, 2006, 5. <http://www.cctr.ust.hk/materials/conference/china-africa/papers/Li,Baoping-Eng.pdf>; Anne-Marie Brady, *Making the Foreign Serve China: Managing Foreigners in the People’s Republic*, Rowman & Littlefield, 2003, 19–20.

\*\* For more comments made by senior CCP officials on the politics of culture and the Confucius Institutes, see Marshall Sahlins, “Confucius Institutes: Academic Malware,” *Asia-Pacific Journal* 12:46 (November 2014): 3–5.

and linguistic courses, Confucius Institutes have been documented to organize protests against topics deemed threats to the stability of CCP rule\* and to distort history (e.g., by inviting speakers who repeat CCP propaganda points about Tibet and by claiming the United States drew China into the Korean War by bombing Chinese villages, as a video posted to the Hanban's website did).<sup>118</sup>

A 2017 report on Confucius Institutes by the National Association of Scholars—a U.S. organization advocating for intellectual freedom—made a number of concerning findings, including that Institute faculty “face pressure to self-censor”; contracts between Confucius Institutes and host universities are “rarely publicly available”; universities with financial incentives not to upset China† “find it more difficult to criticize Chinese policies”; and that Confucius Institutes present students with “selective knowledge” of Chinese history, including “avoid[ing] Chinese political history and human rights abuses.”<sup>119</sup> The Confucius Institute constitution requires the hosting institutions to avoid “tarnish[ing] the reputation of the Confucius Institutes,” and the eight contracts with U.S. universities that the National Association of Scholars report reviewed duplicated this language nearly verbatim.<sup>120</sup> Finally, Confucius Institute officials have also personally intervened to censor material regarding Taiwan, including at U.S. academic conferences.<sup>121</sup>

In recent years, U.S. policymakers have increased their scrutiny of the activities of Confucius Institutes and their relationship to the Chinese government based on concerns over propaganda, censorship, and interference in U.S. universities' decision-making processes, which has led some universities to withdraw from the program.<sup>122</sup> As part of this increased scrutiny, Members of Congress have sought explanations from universities partnering with Confucius Institutes and introduced legislation to increase the transparency of the organizations. In February 2018, Senator Marco Rubio (R-FL), chairman of the Congressional-Executive Commission on China, wrote to five universities in Florida asking them to end their affiliations with the Confucius Institutes, citing the risk posed by Beijing's “increasingly aggressive attempts to use ‘Confucius Institutes’ ... to influence foreign academic institutions and critical analysis of China's past history and present policies.”<sup>123</sup> One of the schools that received Senator Rubio's letter, the University of West Florida, cut ties with its Confucius Institute a day later, citing “a lack of student interest.”<sup>124</sup> In March 2018, Representative Seth Moulton (D-MA) urged Tufts University and the University of Massachusetts Boston to close their Confucius Institutes, and in April 2018, two Texas representatives, Michael McCaul (R) and Henry Cuellar (D), urged several Texas universities to cut ties with the Confucius Institute.<sup>125</sup> Because of this scrutiny, the Texas A&M University system announced shortly thereafter that Texas A&M and Prairie View A&M would terminate their contracts with the Hanban.<sup>126</sup>

Several pieces of U.S. legislation in 2018 have included important provisions for countering CCP and other malign foreign influence.‡ Representative Joe Wilson (R-SC) and Senators Rubio and Tom Cotton (R-AK) introduced legislation in March 2018, titled the Foreign Influence Transparency Act, which would require organizations that promote the political agendas of foreign governments to register as foreign agents§ and would require universities to disclose certain donations and gifts from foreign sources.<sup>127</sup> Senator Ted Cruz (R-TX) introduced the Stop Higher

\* The “five poisons” that the CCP believes threaten its rule are Uyghurs, Tibetans, Taiwan independence proponents, democracy activists, and the Falun Gong spiritual group. Sarah Cook, “The Long Shadow of Chinese Censorship: How the Communist Party's Media Restrictions Affect News Outlets around the World,” *Center for International Media Assistance*, October 22, 2013, 11. [http://www.cima.ned.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/CIMA-China\\_Sarah%20Cook.pdf](http://www.cima.ned.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/CIMA-China_Sarah%20Cook.pdf).

† Every Hanban contract the report's author reviewed stipulated that “action that ‘severely harms the image and reputation of the Confucius Institute’” can result in a loss of funding. For example, in 2008, the dean at the University of Tel Aviv closed a student art exhibit depicting oppression of Falun Gong members out of fear the exhibit would “jeopardize Chinese support for the University's Confucius Institute and other campus activities,” according to Marshall Sahlins, emeritus professor of anthropology at the University of Chicago. An Israeli district court later ruled the university had violated the students' freedom of expression. Marshall Sahlins, “Confucius Institutes: Academic Malware,” *Asia-Pacific Journal* 12:46 (November 2014): 10. Rachele Peterson, “Outsourced to China: Confucius Institutes and Soft Power in American Higher Education,” *National Association of Scholars*, April 27, 2017, 46. [https://nas.org/images/documents/confucius\\_institutes/NAS\\_confuciusInstitutes.pdf](https://nas.org/images/documents/confucius_institutes/NAS_confuciusInstitutes.pdf).

‡ The National Defense Authorization Act for 2019 defines “malign foreign influence operations and campaigns” as “coordinated, direct, or indirect application of national diplomatic, informational, military, economic, business, corruption, educational, and other capabilities by hostile foreign powers to affect attitudes, behaviors, decisions, or outcomes within the United States.” John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act for 2019 § 1043, Pub. L. 115-232, 2018. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/5515/text>.

§ The Foreign Agents Registration Act of 1938 “requires persons acting as agents of foreign principals in a political or quasi-political capacity to make periodic public disclosure of their relationship with the foreign principal, as well as activities, receipts, and disbursements in support of those activities.” U.S. Department of Justice, *FARA: Foreign Agents Registration Act*. <https://www.fara.gov/>.

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Education Espionage and Theft Act in May 2018, which is intended to strengthen the U.S. government’s ability to counter foreign intelligence organizations working inside the U.S. educational system.<sup>128</sup> Senator Rubio and his Congressional-Executive Commission on China co-chair Representative Chris Smith (R-NJ), along with co-sponsors, introduced companion bills in the Senate and House in June 2018 calling for the establishment of an interagency task force to compile an unclassified report on CCP influence operations targeting the United States and certain U.S. allies.<sup>129</sup> Most significantly, the National Defense Authorization Act for 2019 contains important provisions to coordinate the U.S. government response to malign foreign influence operations and campaigns—including specifically by China.\*

## United Front Activities in the United States and Other Target Countries

As concerns over China’s overseas United Front activities have grown, reporting and analysis have brought to light a few examples of Chinese influence campaigns notable for their characteristic United Front tactics and clear intent to influence policy toward China in the United States and other countries. These cases include United Front influence on academic and policy discourse in the United States, political interference in Australia and New Zealand, and political warfare in Taiwan, which are discussed further in this section.

### Funding of U.S. Academic and Policy Discourse

In November 2017, *Foreign Policy* reported that the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS)—a major nexus of foreign policy education and analysis in Washington, DC—had received part of the funding for a new endowed professorship and research project from Dr. Tung Chee-hwa, a vice-chairman of the CPPCC National Committee.<sup>130</sup> Dr. Tung’s Hong Kong-based nonprofit that provided the direct funding for the endowment, the China-United States Exchange Foundation (CUSEF), is registered under the U.S. Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA).<sup>131</sup> According to *Foreign Policy*, CUSEF’s partnership with Johns Hopkins SAIS is not its first with U.S. academic institutions and think tanks, as it has also cooperated with the Brookings Institution, CSIS, Atlantic Council, Center for American Progress, East-West Institute, Carter Center, and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, all of which are influential in the U.S. foreign policy community.<sup>132</sup> Demonstrating the extent of CUSEF’s ties to the Chinese government and its involvement in influence operations, the organization has also cooperated on projects with CAIFC, uses the same public relations firm as the Chinese Embassy, and has spent hundreds of thousands of dollars lobbying for “China-U.S. relations” as a registered foreign agent.<sup>133</sup>

In response to concerns the CUSEF endowment could negatively influence SAIS publications and research on China, David Lampton, director of SAIS’s China studies program, explained CUSEF granted the funding without “conditions or limitations imposed upon the [research project] or [SAIS] faculty members.”<sup>134</sup> However, the goal in these kinds of investments, according to Mr. Mattis of the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation, is for China to “cultivate enough people in the right places [so that the CCP starts] to change the debate without having

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\* It requires the president to designate a National Security Council staffer responsible for interagency coordination in combating malign foreign influence and requires a report outlining a strategy for doing so; it directs the president to submit to Congress a report detailing a whole-of-government strategy regarding China including strategic assessments of and responses to, among other factors, China’s “use of political influence, information operations, censorship, and propaganda to undermine democratic institutions and processes, and the freedoms of speech, expression, press, and academic thought;” and it directs the Department of Defense to add a section in its *Annual Report on Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China* addressing China’s “efforts ... to influence the media, cultural institutions, business, and academic and policy communities of the United States to be more favorable to its security and military strategy and objectives” as well as China’s use of “nonmilitary tools in other countries, including ... information operations.” It also prohibits Department of Defense funds from being used for Chinese language instruction by Confucius Institutes. John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act for 2019 § 1043, 1091, 1260, 1261, Pub. L. 115-232, 2018. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/5515/text>.

to directly inject [its] own voice.”\*<sup>135</sup> According to Senator Cruz, the primary concern over collaboration with United Front-affiliated entities is that the CCP attempts to use “Americans who unwittingly promote CCP ideology” as a “countering voice” in the China debate.<sup>136</sup> Josh Rogin, columnist at the *Washington Post*, argues that “by influencing the influencers, China gets Americans to carry its message to other Americans.”<sup>137</sup> Beijing seeks to outsource its messaging in part because it believes foreigners are more likely to accept propaganda if it appears to come from non-Chinese sources.<sup>138</sup>

In January 2018, Senator Cruz, citing the Commission’s *2017 Annual Report to Congress*, wrote to the president, chancellor, and chairman of the University of Texas (UT)-Austin regarding the university’s consideration of a partnership with CUSEF, which he called a “pseudo-philanthropic foundation,” noting Dr. Tung’s ties to the United Front and CPPCC as reasons for concern.<sup>139</sup> After several professors and university officials raised their own concerns, and following the receipt of Senator Cruz’s letter, UT-Austin President Greg Fenves announced the university’s China Public Policy Center would not accept any funding from CUSEF.<sup>140</sup>

## Political Interference in Australia and New Zealand

Australia and New Zealand have received a great deal of political donations and media investment from United Front affiliates since the mid-2000s and have even seen United Front and PLA affiliates hold political office, raising deep concerns over the CCP’s exercise of undue influence on Australia and New Zealand’s policies toward China.<sup>141</sup> China’s United Front work has targeted a range of Australian and New Zealand organizations and actors and achieved significant success exerting political influence, controlling important media outlets, and subverting narratives China believes to be unfavorable to its interests.

**Political Influence:** According to Clive Hamilton—a professor of public ethics at Charles Sturt University in New South Wales, Australia whose book on CCP influence in Australia was initially canceled by three separate publishers due to fears of potential lawsuits from Beijing—United Front organizations groom members to participate in politics in target countries, both as candidates for election and as staff in important positions.<sup>142</sup> The Australian Security Intelligence Organization has reportedly estimated at least ten recent Australian state and local government political candidates are connected to Chinese intelligence agencies.<sup>143</sup> United Front activities in Australia have involved political donations, influence operations targeting high-ranking politicians, and harassment of members of the Chinese-Australian community. Huang Xiangmo, a China-born permanent Australian resident and real estate magnate who was president of the Australian chapter of the UFDW subordinate organization CPPRC from 2014 to 2017, has been a key figure in these events due to his significant donations to Australian political parties.<sup>144</sup> An Australian senator, Sam Dastyari, who had argued in favor of China’s position on territorial disputes in the South China Sea while standing by Mr. Huang’s side, announced in late 2017 he would resign from Parliament after it was revealed he had warned Mr. Huang that the latter was likely being surveilled by Australian intelligence agencies.<sup>145</sup> Senator Dastyari had previously faced criticism for allowing a bill incurred by his office to be paid by Mr. Huang’s company.<sup>146</sup> These influence operations have been arguably much more successful in New Zealand, as the case of Yang Jian shows.

Independent analyst and United Front expert Jichang Lulu argues New Zealand is an example of successful United Front “domination” of a Chinese diaspora.<sup>147</sup> Yang Jian, a China-born New Zealand Member of Parliament, spent 15 years working in China’s military intelligence sector before naturalizing in New Zealand, and he was later found to have concealed his previous PLA affiliation on his permanent residency and employment applications.<sup>148</sup> Mr.

\* The CCP has also attempted to directly inject its own voice into policy discussions: in 2015, the Chinese state-run think tank National Institute for South China Sea Studies established the Institute for China-America Studies in Washington, DC, as part of a campaign to introduce Beijing’s views on its territorial claims in the South China Sea to Washington. Chinese think tanks such as the China Energy Fund Committee (CEFC), which is funded by the private conglomerate CEFC China Energy, are also involved in influence operations and propaganda. Prominent representatives of CEFC are known to have held senior positions in CAIFC, according to the think tank Project 2049 Institute. Reuters, “U.S. Charges Two with Bribing African Officials for China Energy Firm,” November 20, 2017. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-china-corruption/u-s-charges-two-with-bribing-african-officials-for-china-energy-firm-idUSKBN1DK2Q6>; Isaac Stone Fish, “Beijing Establishes a D.C. Think Tank, and No One Notices,” *Foreign Policy*, July 7, 2016. <http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/07/07/beijing-establishes-washington-dc-think-tank-south-china-sea/>; Mark Stokes and Russell Hsiao, “The People’s Liberation Army General Political Department: Political Warfare with Chinese Characteristics,” *Project 2049 Institute*, October 14, 2013, 26–27. [https://www.project2049.net/documents/PLA\\_General\\_Political\\_Department\\_Liaison\\_Stokes\\_Hsiao.pdf](https://www.project2049.net/documents/PLA_General_Political_Department_Liaison_Stokes_Hsiao.pdf).

Mattis assesses Mr. Yang was almost certainly an officer involved with the intelligence system during his time in the PLA based on where he is known to have taught.<sup>149</sup> Afterward, while attending Australia National University in the 1990s, Mr. Yang was the president of the CSSA there, long before he moved to New Zealand, naturalized, and entered politics.<sup>150</sup> Mr. Yang's position has likely given him access to sensitive intelligence on China, and according to the *Financial Times*, he has "consistently pushed for closer ties with Beijing and for international policies and positions echoing" those Beijing favors.<sup>151</sup> Christopher Johnson, Freeman Chair in China Studies at CSIS, argues China likely sees New Zealand as a softer target than the United States for "cultivating people at the grassroots political levels of western democracies and helping them to reach positions of influence" and may be "using it as a testing ground for future operations in other countries."<sup>152</sup>

**Controlling the Media:** Dr. Chau Chak Wing, a China-born Australian citizen, business magnate, and member of the CPPCC,<sup>\*</sup> has also been prominent in United Front operations in Australia, both via donations and by seeking to exert control over Australia's formerly vibrant Chinese-language media landscape.<sup>153</sup> According to an editor at a pro-Beijing publication in Australia cited by the *Sydney Morning Herald*, "Nearly 95 percent of the Australian Chinese newspapers have been brought in by the Chinese government to some degree."<sup>154</sup> Australian National University professor Bates Gill and independent researcher Linda Jakobson cited the *Australian New Express Daily* as a particularly striking example of Chinese government influence, which Mr. Chau praised for "never hav[ing] any negative reporting [about China]."<sup>†</sup><sup>155</sup> According to John Garnaut, Dr. Chau "made himself known as the point man for organizing the Chinese diaspora in Australia" using his "Beijing-friendly Chinese media empire."<sup>156</sup>

**Subverting Unfavorable Narratives:** United Front work in Australia aimed at both Chinese and non-Chinese communities has attempted to "influence the choices, direction, and loyalties of its targets by overcoming negative perceptions of CCP rule in China and promoting favorable perceptions," according to Professor Hamilton and Mr. Joske.<sup>157</sup> They argue that in the 2000s, "trusted individuals sympathetic to the CCP, encouraged by the [Chinese Embassy in] Canberra ... and [Chinese] consulates, took over most of the established Chinese community and professional associations in Australia."<sup>158</sup> They argued further that CCP officials "typically aim to guide ... rather than directly control" these organizations.<sup>159</sup> CSSAs have been very active in Australia, as well,<sup>‡</sup> according to Mr. Joske, CSSA executives in Australia are "prolific in their output" of pro-CCP statements, and each year they travel to Canberra at the Chinese Embassy's cost "to discuss the latest party doctrines and collaboration with the embassy."<sup>160</sup> In 2013, then Chinese Ambassador to Australia Ma Zhaoxu, in an act emphasizing the close connection, personally presented awards to CSSA members in recognition for being "outstanding cadres," with the implication being that the recipients were essentially CCP officials.<sup>161</sup>

Observers have been careful to note that the CCP and its proxies—not the wider Chinese-Australian community—are responsible for these United Front activities, and that it is important not to play into the CCP's hands by

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<sup>\*</sup> Dr. Chau has denied being a member of the CCP, but he is a member of the Guangdong Province chapter of the CPPCC. According to researcher James To, Guangdong Province is one of the most important provincial-level units for overseas Chinese work due to the large number of emigrants from Guangdong. Rebecca Trigger, *Australian Broadcasting Network*, "Chinese Businessman Subject of ASIO Warning Donated \$200,000 to WA Liberals," June 10, 2017. <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-06-10/chinese-businessman-asio-warning-chau-chak-wing-wa-liberals/8607372>; *China Federation of Overseas Returned Chinese Entrepreneurs*, "Chau Chak Wing," May 9, 2016. Translation. <http://www.qiaoshang.org/staticpages/ryhz/20160509/2993.html>; James Jiann Hua To, *Qiaowu: Extra-Territorial Policies for the Overseas Chinese*, Brill Academic Publishers, 2014, 85.

<sup>†</sup> For more information on CCP influence in Chinese-language Australian media, see U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *2017 Annual Report to Congress*, November 2017, 468–470.

<sup>‡</sup> In 2014, *People's Daily* reported China had become the top country of origin for international students in Australia and praised these students for being "determined to work hard to realize the great China Dream." As of July 2017, students from China comprised approximately 29 percent of Australia's 564,869 international students. Australian Department of Education and Training, *International Student Data Monthly Summary*, July 2017. <https://internationaleducation.gov.au/research/International-Student-Data/Documents/MONTHLY%20SUMMARIES/2017/Jul%202017%20MonthlyInfographic.pdf>; Li Jingwei, "Chinese International Students in Australia Are Determined to Work Hard to Realize the Great China Dream," *People's Daily*, March 4, 2014. Translation. <http://world.people.com.cn/n/2014/0304/c1002-24527089.html>.

presenting an opening for claims of racism, even while the CCP attempts to exploit ethnic Chinese communities.\*<sup>162</sup> According to Mr. Joske, CSSAs do not fairly represent either Chinese students in Australia or the interests of the Chinese diaspora in the country; in addition, Chinese-Australians have been instrumental in exposing the CCP's covert influence operations.<sup>163</sup> Importantly, the investigative journalism at the center of the ongoing debate in Australia over CCP influence has made specific claims about a few individuals that have engaged in questionable behavior rather than broad assertions about Chinese-Australians in general.<sup>†</sup><sup>164</sup> However, CSSAs and other CCP-backed groups have demonstrably carried out United Front activities in Australia.<sup>165</sup> Mr. Joske argues the CCP exploits Chinese students to expand its influence and has fostered the idea among Chinese-Australians that the liberal West and supporters of freedom are China's enemies.<sup>166</sup>

## Political Warfare in Taiwan

The CCP is active in waging information warfare against Taiwan to suppress independence movements, undermine Taiwan's government, and recruit politicians in Taiwan and third countries to advocate for China's preferred cross-strait outcome: unification of Taiwan with the Mainland.<sup>167</sup> As with other United Front campaigns, these activities include sponsoring trips to mainland China and offering other opportunities such as jobs and trade deals.<sup>168</sup> J. Michael Cole, a Taiwan expert and former Canadian intelligence official, argues the goal of United Front operations in Taiwan is not to brainwash the general population into supporting unification, but rather to create unrest that the CCP can then claim as justification for military intervention to protect the people there.<sup>‡</sup><sup>169</sup> United Front operations against Taiwan include lobbying efforts in third countries to change the international narrative about the status of Taiwan. For example, CCPRC President Huang Xiangmo sponsored an event in the Tasmanian Parliament in October 2017 advocating for Taiwan's unification with the Mainland.<sup>170</sup>

Mr. Cole argues authoritarian regimes such as the CCP often try to create and capitalize on instability to further their political agendas.<sup>171</sup> This approach has been evident in United Front activities in Taiwan, where United Front operations have involved sponsorship of organized crime to destabilize society and meddle in politics, which intend "to turn Taiwan's democracy against itself," according to Mr. Cole.<sup>172</sup> For example, Chang An-lo, the Triad-linked head of Taiwan's Chinese Unity Promotion Party—which advocates for unification with the Mainland—mobilized about 200 pro-Beijing activists and Triad associates to protest the arrival in Taiwan of Hong Kong activist Joshua Wong and pro-self-determination Hong Kong legislators.<sup>173</sup> Chang has admitted he has regular contact with China's Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO) and has friends in the United Front, but he also denies receiving funding from Beijing or following its orders.<sup>174</sup> In January 2017, pro-Beijing activists and Triad associates of Chang An-lo mobilized about 200 people to protest the arrival in Taiwan of Hong Kong activist Joshua Wong and pro-self-determination Hong Kong legislators.<sup>175</sup> In December 2017, the Taiwan pro-unification New Party announced its intent to open a liaison office in China, and its chairman Yok Mu-ming met with then-CPPCC chairman Yu Zhengsheng and TAO head Zhang Zhijun in Beijing.<sup>176</sup> Later that month, Taiwanese authorities detained and questioned four members of the party about their Mainland ties; authorities also raided New Party spokesman Wang Ping-chung's home on

\* In March 2018, scholars of China and of the Chinese diaspora published an open letter expressing concern that the debate in Australia surrounding "Chinese influence" risked threatening intellectual freedom and civil liberties. Days later, a second group of scholars signed an open letter arguing that an open debate on CCP influence operations in Australia is "essential to intellectual freedom, democratic rights, and national security"; both letters agreed authorities should take action to counter unacceptable forms of influence when evidence of it exists. Open Letter Respondents, "China's Influence in Australia: Maintaining the Debate," *Policy Forum*, March 27, 2018. <https://www.policyforum.net/chinas-influence-australia-maintaining-debate/>; Concerned Scholars of China, "An Open Letter from Concerned Scholars of China and the Chinese Diaspora," *Policy Forum*, March 26, 2018. <https://www.policyforum.net/an-open-letter-from-concerned-scholars-of-china-and-the-chinese-diaspora/>.

† Professor Fitzgerald at the CSI Swinburne Program for Asia-Pacific Social Investment and Philanthropy also argues the proportion of articles in Australian Chinese-language media irresponsibly declaring Chinese-Australians should primarily be loyal to Beijing has been "comparably" small. John Fitzgerald, "No, China Is Not Being Demonized," *Lowy Institute*, October 6, 2017. <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/no-china-not-demonised>.

‡ According to a declassified National Intelligence Estimate produced by the U.S. National Foreign Intelligence Board in 1999, widespread instability or unrest in Taiwan is one of four "red lines" concerning Taiwan that could result in the use of force to compel unification. These "red lines" have likely not changed in recent years. U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *2017 Annual Report to Congress*, November 2017, 237; U.S. National Foreign Intelligence Board, *National Intelligence Estimate China-Taiwan: Prospects for Cross-Strait Relations*, September 13, 1999.

suspicion of his being involved in a Chinese spy ring.<sup>177</sup> In June 2018, authorities indicted Mr. Wang and two other New Party members for violating Taiwan’s law and seeking to recruit Taiwan military officers on behalf of China.<sup>178</sup>

## Implications for the United States

The challenges posed by the CCP’s United Front operations to the United States are significant, and addressing them is complicated by the CCP’s insistence that the CCP is inseparable from China.<sup>179</sup> Western experts have cautioned against equating the CCP with China or the Chinese people, and *New York Times* reporter Michael Forsythe has written that reporters must approach this issue “thoughtfully and with sensitivity” so as not to “slip into a tone that could be construed as racism,” using phrases like “the Chinese” and “Chinese influence” when discussing CCP influence operations risks falsely equating the CCP and anyone who is ethnically Chinese.<sup>180</sup> Instead, Mr. Forsythe recommends focusing on how CCP-connected funds affect the “missions or focus” of universities, think tanks, and other institutions.<sup>181</sup>

Simplistically framing the debate over China’s overseas United Front work as “Chinese” influence conflates the positive influence that Chinese culture and people have with the targeted subversive influence of a foreign power designed to shape U.S. policy in ways that may be against the United States’ own interests. This framing also risks stoking Chinese nationalism and could provide the CCP with an additional pretext to accuse the United States of racism toward Chinese-Americans.<sup>182</sup> In framing this issue, it is also important to differentiate illegitimate influence and coercion from legitimate forms of influence. For example, when introducing Australia’s new anti-foreign influence legislation in December 2017, Prime Minister Turnbull explicitly singled out “covert, coercive, or corrupt” foreign influence activities as unacceptable but welcomed transparent engagement based on legitimate soft power.<sup>183</sup> Prime Minister Turnbull argued further that refusing to seriously address the question of political interference by the CCP is also not helpful, and he warned the CCP that Australia is open and optimistic, but not naïve.<sup>184</sup> Bill Bishop, curator of the widely read *Sinocism* newsletter, told the Commission in March 2018 that it is “vital” to examine China’s influence operations, albeit with precision, because while CCP influence activities in the United States may not yet have achieved the same success as elsewhere, the United States should not ignore the “nodes and networks” Beijing is setting up for potential future use.<sup>185</sup> Australia and New Zealand are useful case studies in how these kinds of networks function in advanced stages, and they serve as warnings to other democracies that may be targeted in the future.<sup>186</sup> United Front organizations such as the National Association for China’s Peaceful Unification actively cultivate ties to campaign donors and politicians in the United States in order to lobby for Beijing’s policy priorities, encourage overseas Chinese to get involved in politics to advocate for Beijing’s interests and, according to Peter Mattis, aim to “turn Americans against their own government’s interests and their society’s interests.”<sup>187</sup>

Despite the CCP’s general candor in Chinese-language publications and recent English-language research and reporting on the United Front, the extent of its organization and influence is still relatively unknown among policymakers.<sup>188</sup> Jichang Lulu argues that “it speaks volumes about the level of knowledge of the politics” of China that Western media coverage often uses “scare quotes” when referring to the UFWD or the United Front strategy, indicating a lack of comprehension of the UFWD’s formal role.<sup>189</sup> Individuals clearly associated with the United Front—such as Dr. Chau Chak Wing and Dr. Tung Chee-hwa—simply deny their association or knowledge of it, and front organizations such as CSSAs and the CPPCC insist they are run by private citizens, even as they take money or guidance from the CCP.<sup>190</sup> For example, Dr. Tung published an editorial in *The Diplomat* in February 2018 scolding “some Americans” for viewing China as an “adversary,” and claimed China has “no interest in

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\* The National Security Legislation Amendment (Espionage and Foreign Interference) Act 2018 and the Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme Act 2018, became law in June 2018. A third bill designed to crack down on foreign political donations is currently in Parliament. Electoral Legislation Amendment (Electoral Funding and Disclosure Reform) Bill 2017 (Australia), [http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/legislation/bills/s1117\\_first-senate/toc\\_pdf/1728620.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf](http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/legislation/bills/s1117_first-senate/toc_pdf/1728620.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf); National Security Legislation Amendment (Espionage and Foreign Interference) Act 2018 (Australia), 2018. <https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2018A00067>; Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme Act 2018 (Australia), 2018. <https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2018A00063>.

expanding [its] territory or exporting [its] ideology;" the editorial made no mention of the author's CUSEF affiliation or the organization's involvement in CCP influence operations.<sup>191</sup>

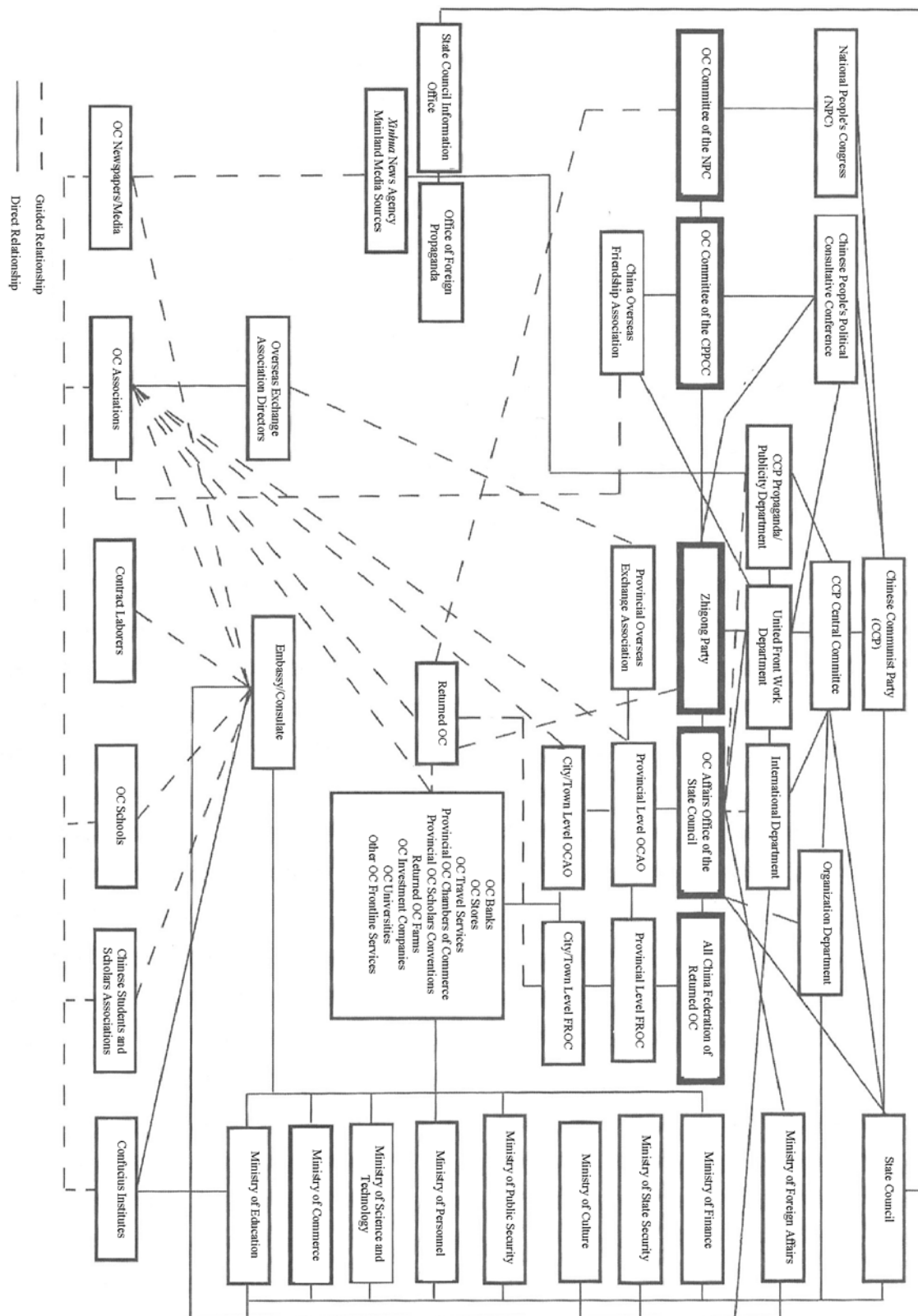
To effectively counter CCP influence operations, continued research and investigation is needed to further bring to light the activities of the United Front, its role in the CCP, how it operates, and its links to other important CCP organs.\* Both Taiwan and Australia, which have long been testing grounds for United Front tactics and are intimately familiar with these operations, can play an important role in coordinating international best practices for responding to the CCP's subversion of democracy abroad.<sup>192</sup> To address concerns over CCP influence and censorship, some experts have recommended the United States invest in and expand its own academic programs in Chinese culture and language so universities will be less reliant on funding from China.<sup>†</sup><sup>193</sup> Experts have also called for increased transparency in contracts between universities and Confucius Institutes and for contracts to be renegotiated to give the host universities control over the content taught in these programs—or, failing that, for the Confucius Institutes to be closed.<sup>194</sup> Increased support for Chinese students could also reduce the influence that CCP-sponsored entities like CSSAs wield based on their ability to provide social goods. More steadfast and visible support from universities for freedom of expression could deter United Front affiliates from harassing those who criticize China or its policies on college campuses.<sup>195</sup> Overall, improved transparency and oversight—combined with an increased understanding of the United Front—hold great promise for countering the most subversive and anti-democratic of the CCP's influence operations.<sup>196</sup>

\* In May 2018, the Kissinger Institute on China and the United States at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars hosted a panel discussion called "Chinese Influence Operations in the U.S.: Shedding Some Light on All the Heat." The panel, which listed United Front Work among the types of influence it planned to address, originally included Wang Huiyao—whom the event's website merely described as the founder and president of Chinese think tank Center for China and Globalization (CCG)—to take the Chinese government's views on the matter into account, according to Robert Daly, director of the Kissinger Institute. Dr. Wang is also the standing director of the UFWDC China Overseas Friendship Association and a member of its advisory council, and he is a Central Committee member and Economic Committee Deputy Director of the Jiusan Society, a non-communist political party subordinate to the CCP via the CPPCC. He is also the vice-chair of the United Front organization Western Returned Scholars Association—members of which founded the CCG—and director of its Expert Committee as well as an adviser to the CPPCC's Beijing Committee. The Wilson Center's website did not initially specify Dr. Wang's United Front ties, but after *Foreign Policy* reported that Senator Rubio had asked whether the Center was aware of Dr. Wang's United Front affiliation and requested that it be disclosed, Dr. Wang withdrew from the event. The CCG issued a press release saying Dr. Wang had never officially accepted the invitation and claiming that portraying Dr. Wang's United Front ties as evidence of CCP overseas influence misrepresented his work. The CCG press release said Dr. Wang "has not been on the payroll of any state apparatus," seeming intentionally to obfuscate the point that the United Front is an organization of the CCP rather than of the Chinese state. Robert Daly, "Chinese Influence Operations in the U.S.: Shedding Some Light on All the Heat," Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington, DC, May 9, 2018; Center for China and Globalization, "CCG Release," May 9, 2018. <http://en.ccg.org.cn/ccg-release/>; Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian, "Rubio Questions D.C. Panel on China Influence," *Foreign Policy*, May 7, 2018. <http://foreignpolicy.com/2018/05/07/rubio-questions-d-c-panel-on-china-influence-united-front-beijing-communist-party/>; Gerry Groot, "United Front Work after the 19th Party Congress," *China Brief*, December 22, 2017. <https://jamestown.org/program/united-front-work-19th-party-congress/>; Wang Huiyao, "Personal Introduction," October 11, 2017. Translation. <http://scgti.org/wanghuiyao/a/jieshao/2011/1004/11.html>; "Chinese Influence Operations in the U.S.: Shedding Some Light on all the Heat," May 2, 2018, accessed via Internet Archive Wayback Machine. [https://web.archive.org/web/20180502013618/http://pages.wilsoncenter.org/index.php/email/emailWebview?mkt\\_tok=eyJpIjoiTVRBMU1qa3pNbVVV4TURKaSIsInQiOiJhb2dCS1NZRE52NVAwUU4WlBcL3hYenByY2tXaXBhU016alhWMmk0dEpqREN5R2JHbVwvamFhZXd0MUhIWlVhUWw3dlptUVd6NzVJRmRoTXE1QXJmY1VEcUpHWlFjdnczaU5Ha0c3MFhJbXB4RDRCcWNMazV0NEh1djUzaGlT0JHIn0%3D](https://web.archive.org/web/20180502013618/http://pages.wilsoncenter.org/index.php/email/emailWebview?mkt_tok=eyJpIjoiTVRBMU1qa3pNbVVV4TURKaSIsInQiOiJhb2dCS1NZRE52NVAwUU4WlBcL3hYenByY2tXaXBhU016alhWMmk0dEpqREN5R2JHbVwvamFhZXd0MUhIWlVhUWw3dlptUVd6NzVJRmRoTXE1QXJmY1VEcUpHWlFjdnczaU5Ha0c3MFhJbXB4RDRCcWNMazV0NEh1djUzaGlT0JHIn0%3D); Center for China and Globalization, "Leadership." <http://en.ccg.org.cn/staff-member/wang-huiyao/>; Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China, "The Jiu San Society (JSS)," 2012. [http://english1.english.gov.cn/2005-08/16/content\\_23652.htm](http://english1.english.gov.cn/2005-08/16/content_23652.htm).

† Public spending on community colleges and universities in 2017 fell about \$9 billion from 2008 levels. Michael Mitchell, Michael Leachman, and Kathleen Masterson, "A Lost Decade in Higher Education Funding," *Center on Budget and Policy Priorities*, August 23, 2017, 1. [https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/2017\\_higher\\_ed\\_8-22-17\\_final.pdf](https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/2017_higher_ed_8-22-17_final.pdf); Jonathan R. Cole, "The Pillaging of America's State Universities," *Atlantic*, April 10, 2016. <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/04/the-pillaging-of-americas-state-universities/477594/>.

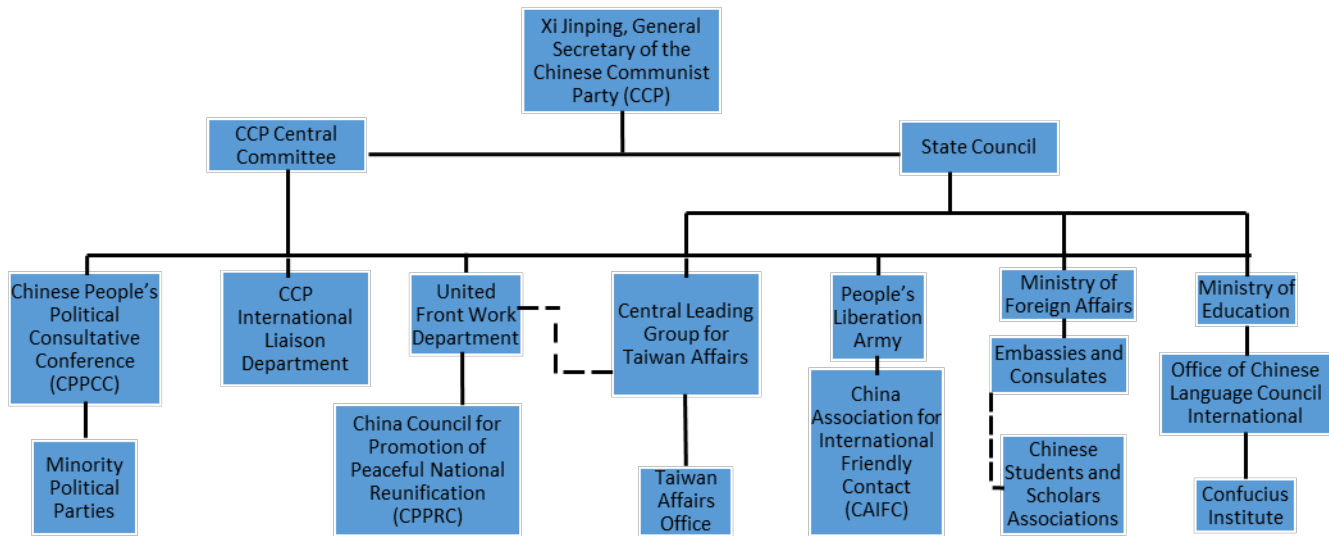
## Appendix

Figure 2: Relationships between the Overseas Chinese Work Apparatus and Extended State Bureaucracy



Source: Adapted from James Jiann Hua To, *Qiaowu: Extra-Territorial Policies for the Overseas Chinese*, Brill Academic Publishers, 2014, 74.

**Figure 3: Selected United Front-Affiliated Organizations and Officials**



Name	UF-Affiliated Roles	Name	UF-Affiliated Roles
Bagatur	CPPCC Vice-Chair; CCPCC Member; State Ethnic Affairs Commission Director and Party Group Secretary; UFDW Deputy Director	Ran Wanxiang	UFDW Deputy Director; UFDW General Secretary, Party Committee Secretary, and Discipline Committee Secretary; CPPCC Deputy General Secretary
Cai Dafeng	China Association for Promoting Democracy Chair (Political party)	Shao Hong	CPPCC Vice-Chair; Jiusan Society Central Executive Vice-Chair
Chen Changzhi	CPPRC Vice-Chair	Shen Beili	Assistant to ILD Minister and Office Director
Chen Xiaoguang	CPPCC Vice-Chair; China Democratic League Vice-Chair	Song Tao	ILD Minister; CCPCC Member
Chen Yuan	China Association for International Friendly Contact President	Su Bo	UFDW Discipline Inspection Unit Head; CPPCC Economic Committee Deputy Director
Chen Zhu	CPPRC Vice-Chair; Chinese Peasants' and Workers' Democratic Party Chair (Political party)	Su Hui	CPPCC Vice-Chair; Taiwan Democratic Self-Governing League Chair (Political party)
Cheng Guoping	CAIFC Vice-Chair; State Commissioner for Counterterrorism	Sun Chunlan	Politburo Member; Central Leading Group for United Front Work Deputy Head; CPPRC Vice-Chair; Chinese Vice-Premier; former UFDW Minister
Dai Junliang	UFDW Deputy Director; CCDI Member; CPPCC Member	Tung Chee-hwa	CPPCC Vice-Chair
Deng Rong	CAIFC Vice-Chair	Wan Xiang	CPPRC Vice-Chair; Revolutionary Committee of the Chinese Kuomintang Chair (Political party)
Ding Zhongli	China Democratic League Chair (Political party)	Wan Gang	CPPRC Vice-Chair; CPPCC Vice-Chair; Zhigong Party Chair (Political party); former Minister of Science and Technology; China Association for Science and Technology Chair
Gao Yunlong	CPPCC Vice-Chair; All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce Chair; Chinese People's Chamber of Commerce Minister; China Democratic National Construction Association Beijing Chair; China Everbright Group Corporation Vice-Chair and President	Wang Qinmin	CPPRC Vice-Chair
Gu Shengzu	CPPCC Vice-Chair; China Democratic National Construction Association Central Vice-Chair	Wang Yajun	ILD Vice-Minister
Guo Yezhou	ILD Vice-Minister	Wang Yang	CPPCC Chair; Politburo Standing Committee Member; State Council Vice-Premier

Hao Mingjin	China Democratic National Construction Association Chair (Political party)	Wang Yongqing	CPPCC Vice-Chair; CCPCC Member; Central Political and Legal Affairs Commission General Secretary; State Council Deputy General Secretary and Party Committee Member
He Houhua	CPPCC Vice-Chair	Wang Zhengwei	CPPCC Vice-Chair; CCPCC Member
He Lifeng	CPPCC Vice-Chair; CCPCC Member; National Development and Reform Commission Director and Party Group Secretary	Wang Zuonan	UFWD Deputy Director; State Administration for Religious Affairs Head
He Wei	CPPCC Vice-Chair; Chinese Peasants' and Workers' Democratic Party Executive Vice-Chair	Wu Weihua	Jiusan Society Chair (Political party)
Jing Wei	Hanban Deputy Director-General; Deputy Chief Executive of Confucius Institute Headquarters	Xia Baolong	CPPCC General Secretary and Vice-Chair
Leung Chun-ying	CPPCC Vice-Chair; former Chief Executive of HKSAR	Xin Qi	CAIFC Vice-President and Party Group Secretary; China Association for Promotion of Chinese Culture General Secretary; Center for Peace and Development Studies Researcher
Li Bin	CPPCC Vice-Chair; CCPCC Member; National Health and Family Planning Commission Director and Party Group General Secretary	Xu Lejiang	UFWD Deputy Director; All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce Party Secretary and Executive Vice Chair; CCPCC Member; CPPCC Standing Committee Member
Li Jun	ILD Vice-Minister	Xu Lüping	ILD Vice-Minister
Lin Wenqi	CPPRC Vice-Chair	Xu Yousheng	UFWD Deputy Director; Overseas Chinese Affairs Office Director; CCPCC Member
Liue Jieyi	Taiwan Affairs Office Director	Yan Juanqi	CPPRC Vice-Chair
Liu Qibao	CPPCC Vice-Chair; CCPCC Member	Yang Chuantang	CPPCC Vice-Chair; Ministry of Transport Party Group Secretary
Liu Xincheng	CPPCC Vice-Chair; China Association for Promoting Democracy Central Vice-Chair	Yi Xian	CAIFC Vice-Chair
Liu Yandong	Council of Confucius Institute Headquarters Chair; former State Council Vice-Premiere; former Politburo Standing Committee Member; former UFWD Minister	You Quan	UFWD Director; CCP Central Committee (CCPCC) Secretariat Member
Long Mingbiao	Taiwan Affairs Office Deputy Director, Party Committee Secretary, and Discipline Committee Secretary; Executive Vice-President of Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Strait	Yu Tianqi	Hanban Deputy Party Committee Secretary; Confucius Institute Committee for Discipline Inspection Secretary
Lu Zhangong	CPPCC Vice-Chair; CCPCC Member	Yu Yunfeng	Deputy Chief Executive of Confucius Institute Headquarters; Hanban Deputy Director-General
Ma Biao	CPPCC Vice-Chair; CCPCC Member	Yu Zhengsheng	CPPRC Chair; former CPPCC Chair; former Politburo Standing Committee Member
Ma Jianfei	Hanban Party Committee Secretary and Deputy Director-General; Deputy Chief Executive of Confucius Institute Headquarters	Zhang Baowen	CPPRC Vice-Chair
Tan Tianxing	UFWD Deputy Director	Zhang Qingli	CPPCC Vice-Chair; CCPCC Member
Pagbalha Geleg Namgyai	CPPRC Vice-Chair; CPPCC Vice-Chair; Buddhist Association of China Honorary Chair	Zhang Yijiong	UFWD Executive Deputy Director; CCPCC Member, CPPCC Standing Committee Member
Qi Xuchun	CPPRC Vice-Chair	Zhao Guocheng	Hanban Deputy Director-General; Deputy Chief Executive of Confucius Institute Headquarters
Qian Hongshan	ILD Vice-Minister	Zheng Jianbang	CPPCC Vice-Chair; Revolutionary Committee of the Chinese Kuomintang Vice-Chair; China Soong Ching Ling Foundation Vice-Chair

Source: Commission research.<sup>197</sup>

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# ***Open letter to Xi Jinping, President of the People's Republic of China***

***China is not America's enemy.***

***Excerpts from: Open letters to General Jim Mattis, 25 Jan, 2018***

***(Re-posted)***

***07 Jan 2021***



[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xi\\_Jinping](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xi_Jinping)

10/26/18

President of the People's Republic of China,  
Xi Jinping,

Dear Mr. President,

First I must make the statement that this letter constitutes my opinions alone and that I do not work for, or represent the United States Government, or any political or government entity therein, and that I hold no political or appointed government office of any kind.

I feel that I need to write to you directly because my government does not adequately represent me or the vast majority of the American people, and does not form foreign (or domestic policy) that is in the best interests of my countrymen or of the world community.

I am not sure if your administration is yet aware of the statements of a retired Lieutenant General of the United States Army; Frederick Benjamin 'Ben' Hodges III. Where he explains: '[A US war with China is likely within 15 years](#)'.

This imbecilic, war mongering retired General does not represent the will or demeanor of the average, educated American citizen, and the a vast majority of average, educated American citizens do not perceive the People's Republic of China, or the Chinese people to be the United States' military enemy.

Most of my countrymen will however; agree that many of our well paying, domestic manufacturing jobs have been exported to the People's Republic of China, and many other developing countries that have a lower cost of manufacturing than the United States. Most of us Americans do not see this as the fault of PRC or any other country, and we squarely place the blame for America's failed industrial policy where it belongs: On America's corrupt leaders and elected officials of both political parties (the DNC and the GOP) who have consistently allowed large American companies to destroy our domestic manufacturing industries and do massive damage to the livelihood of the American worker.

This is not an issue that requires a war with China to remedy, this is an issue that requires the American people to demand accountability of their leaders who have consistently sold out the American people for decades, so that the richest 1% of our citizens and corporate interests can reap obscene profits, while the middle class workers of America are driven towards financial ruin and spiritual destruction.

This is an issue that requires commonsense domestic laws like '[The Right to Manufacture in America Act](#)' that will NOT make it illegal to export American manufacturing jobs to China and other countries , but it will reward those American manufacturers who are able to maintain manufacturing facilities in the United States.

I hope that you will find the wise path and negotiate with the leaders of my country for a future of peace and compromise that will allow for the health of the middle class, and a decent standard of living for both the Chinese people and the American people.

Thank You for your consideration,

---

## Accept Lyrics

### "Balls To The Wall"

Too many slaves in this world  
Die by torture and pain  
Too many people do not see  
They're killing themselves - going insane

Too many people do not know  
Bondage is over the human race  
They believe slaves always lose  
And this fear keeps them down

Watch the damned (God bless ya)  
They're gonna break their chains  
You can't stop them (God bless ya)  
They're coming to get you and then  
You'll get your

Balls to the wall, man  
Balls to the wall  
You'll get your balls to the wall, man  
Balls to the wall - balls to the wall

You may screw their brains  
You may sacrifice them, too  
You may mortify their flesh  
You may rape them all

One day the tortured stand up  
And revolt against the evil  
They make you drink your blood  
And tear yourself to pieces

You better watch the damned (God bless ya)  
They're gonna break their chains  
You can't stop them (God bless ya)  
They're coming to get you and then  
You'll get your

Balls to the wall, man  
Balls to the wall  
You'll get your balls to the wall, man  
Balls to the wall - balls to the wall

Come on man, let's stand up all over the world  
Let's plug a bomb in everyone's arse  
If they don't keep us alive - we're gonna fight for the right

Build a wall with the bodies of the dead - and you're saved  
Make the world scared - come on, show me the sign of victory  
Sign of victory - sign of victory

You better watch the damned (God bless ya)  
They're gonna break their chains (hey)  
No, you can't stop them (God bless ya)  
They're coming to get you  
And then you'll get your

Balls to the wall, man  
Balls to the wall  
You'll get your balls to the wall, man  
Balls to the wall  
You'll get your balls to the wall, man  
Balls to the wall  
You'll get your balls to the wall, man  
Balls to the wall  
You'll get your balls to the wall, man