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“THE MALIGN INFLUENCE OF THE PEOPLE’S REPUBLIC OF CHINA AT HOME AND ABROAD: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY MAKERS”

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I. OVERVIEW

Chairman Risch, Ranking Member Shaheen, distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to appear before you.

Countering the Chinese Communist Party’s efforts to build political influence, recruit and mobilize civil society outside the borders of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), and shape the world in coercive, corrupting, and covert ways is fundamental to U.S. success in this rivalry. Any sustainable, long-term strategy for addressing China’s challenge requires the integrity of U.S. political and policymaking processes—and those of our allies and partners. This requires grappling with the challenges posed by the party’s efforts to shape the United States and others by interfering in our politics and domestic affairs.



The United States, its political and business elite, its thinkers, and its Chinese communities have long been targets for the Chinese Communist Party. The party employs tools that go well beyond traditional public diplomacy efforts. Often these tools lead to activities that are, in the words of former Australian prime minister Malcolm Turnbull, corrupt, covert, and/or coercive. Nevertheless, many activities are not covered by Turnbull's three "Cs" but are still concerning and undermine the ability of the United States, its allies, and its partners to comprehend and address Beijing's challenge.

Most of my statement will focus on the policies and actions of the Chinese Communist Party. Many Americans are still not prepared to accept the Party has sought to shape and influence U.S. political and business elite for decades. We are still in a process of building awareness and consensus about the nature of the problem. We can know the objectives of the Chinese Communist Party. We can understand its organizations and its policies. And we can observe the Party's actions. It is far harder to determine the motivations of our fellow citizens and those in allied and partner countries, because they may have sincere intentions coupled with naivete or they have only their private benefit at heart. Although much more information is now available about the Party's ambitions and activities, many still are not sufficiently aware or do not know how to operationalize their knowledge. Hearings like this one are a good step for raising awareness. Finally, The Jamestown Foundation is dedicated to helping Americans (and our allies) understand U.S. rivals in their own words and in their own terms. Although I have personal policy views, the institution I lead focuses on providing information, analysis, and context primarily about U.S. rivals.

The central element to understanding on why and what the Chinese Communist Party is doing to shape the world outside the party is united front work. Mao Zedong described the purpose of this work as mobilizing the party's friends to strike at the party's enemies. In a more specific definition from a paper in the 1950s, the Central Intelligence Agency defined united front work as "a technique for controlling, mobilizing, and utilizing non-communist masses." Put another way, united front policy addresses the party's relationship with and guidance of any social group outside the party. The most important point here is that what needs to be shaped is not just the Chinese people or world outside the People's Republic of China, but rather those outside the party.

United front work also is a tool of political struggle. It is not just a question of activities that we would call propaganda or public diplomacy. Nor is it limited to what we would call covert action. As Mao wrote in 1939: "Our eighteen years of experience show that the united front and armed struggle are the two basic weapons for defeating the enemy. The united front is a united front for carrying on armed struggle. And the Party is the heroic warrior wielding the two weapons, the united front and the armed struggle, to storm and shatter the enemy's positions. That is how the three are related to each other." Mao's basic framing of united front work within the party's toolbox remains the core understanding within the party today. Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao, and Xi Jinping all have characterized united front work as a "magic weapon" to facilitate China's rise in the midst of an international ideological battleground.



CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping has put particular emphasis on this element of statecraft and party activity. During his first three years in office (2012–2015), Xi launched three major initiatives that correspond to Mao’s three tools. The anti-corruption campaign was intended to strengthen the party—a point that was made clear for those in doubt in Xi’s address to the 20th Party Congress in 2022. The PLA began a major reform in late 2015 to bring the way the PLA intended to fight into sync with its organizational structure. And finally, Xi launched reforms of the united front policy system. In his speech for the Party’s centenary, Xi focused his remarks on these three areas: party-building, the PLA, and united front. Although it is comforting to think that Mao’s words “to storm and shatter the enemy’s position” belong to a bygone era, Xi has proved otherwise. He was explicit in a speech to the Party faithful early in his tenure about the importance of seeing the basic continuity across Mao’s rule and the Reform Era.

United front activities help the party resolve several dilemmas of the post-Mao era and that became ever more apparent after the Tiananmen Massacre and the passing of Deng Xiaoping. These are fundamental questions for the Chinese Communist Party, and they speak to why the party must spend so much effort trying to shape the world beyond the membership of the party.

1. How to motivate and mobilize the Chinese population without the ideological fervor of the Mao Zedong era?
2. How to benefit from the outside world while screening out influences and ideas that might damage the party’s positions?
3. How to enlist the outside world in supporting China’s rise and keeping those doors open even as the party continues to be repressive and becomes more aggressive internationally?
4. How to shape the world, its institutions and its leaders, so that the CCP can achieve its objectives and they respect Beijing’s system of governance?

The Chinese Communist Party has put particular focus on targeting people and institutions with united front work, because these are the fundamental units of society. Controlling the platforms and social groups where people congregate is how a totalitarian regime maintains control even when there might be immense dissatisfaction. The Party’s methods at home and abroad have significant parallels. The Party’s targets also are the key to pushing back. Civil society organizations and individuals—in some cases supported by the United States through Department of State programs—have helped fight back. In some cases, this means raising awareness and supporting journalistic investigations.

In other cases, civil society organizations provide the first warning of significant developments. For example, the human rights non-governmental organization Safeguard Defenders exposed the existence of “Chinese overseas police service centers” set up by subnational public security bureaus in blatant violation of the territorial sovereignty and national security of other nations, including the United States and many of its allies. These “police stations” were set up in direct cooperation



with united front-affiliates in target countries. As a consequence of the exposé, not only has a successful prosecution taken place in New York and investigations remain ongoing around the world. It has also spurred a previously non-existent debate on the nature and activities of the united front in countries around the world. An organization like Safeguard Defenders was only able to do this because they engage in daily grassroots activities with members of the targeted communities that allow them to pick up on developments early on and develop them for further research.

As a general rule, successful pushback against specific instances of CCP malign influence requires a combination of insider concern, expertise, and political power. Someone inside an organization—whether a civil society organization, a government body, a company, a university, or any other institution—will be the first to become aware of an emerging agreement with the CCP or one of its proxies. This person and their knowledge are required to trigger any internal process to bring in expertise, whether that expertise resides inside or outside the organization. Someone or some group with expertise helps to properly contextualize what is taking place and why the surface-level view of the partnership with the united front system (broadly defined) misses the real purpose and effects of that partnership or activity. Sometimes, political power is required to make the risk of proceeding untenable. That could be the threat of Executive Branch action or some sort of investigation. It also could take the form of Congressional or media scrutiny. In the case of the University of Texas-Austin rejecting an agreement with the China-U.S. Exchange Foundation in 2018, the combination of Congressional and media scrutiny provided the necessary pressure on university leadership to reject funding that came with conditions that many faculty realized were incompatible with the university's values and stated mission.

The infrastructure and organizations to maintain this expertise are, in a way, the industrial base of strategic rivalry. While we need the defense industrial base to deter and, if necessary, fight a war with the PRC, we also need the people necessary to maintain the strength and integrity of the United States, our allies, and our partners.

II. MAGIC WEAPON FOR NATIONAL REJUVENATION

Achieving the “Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation” (中华民族伟大复兴) has two significant components. The first is making China a great power with global reach. The second is doing so with the Chinese Communist Party at the helm.

The party defines the “Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation” as having three components. The first is building “a great, modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced, harmonious, and beautiful.” Although many of these words are self-explanatory, others like democratic, culturally advanced, and harmonious mean something very different in the party's context than in the American context. “Democratic” is consultative democracy in which the party leads, and other political inputs are provided through controlled mechanisms like the united front



policy system. “Culturally advanced” and “harmonious” define the party’s relationship with society and the ways in which Chinese people conduct themselves. The second is national reunification of all areas claimed by Beijing, regardless whether they were traditionally part of China. The third is China’s emergence as a global leader in terms of comprehensive national power and international influence.

The following quote from Xi Jinping in 2016 explains what united front work is intended to accomplish in bringing together a unity of effort. When U.S. intelligence officials describe Beijing as presenting a “whole-of-society” challenge, they are describing an important element of what the united front policy system is doing:

“Attaining the ‘Two Centenary Goals’ requires that our entire society works together in one heart and one mind. It requires that people of all ethnic groups focus their thoughts and their efforts towards the same goal. A society that lacks common ideals, goals, and values, and that finds itself in permanent disorder will never achieve anything. China has a population of more than 1.3 billion people, and neither the people nor the country would benefit if we ended up like that. To attain our goals... [we must rally] all Chinese people under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, and motivating all parties to engage in a concerted effort to bring about the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.”

The United Front Work Department, the executive agency for conducting and coordinating these operations, provided a similar description of its purpose and activities:

“The history of China and foreign countries shows that whether a political power or a political party is good or not, its success or failure ultimately depends on the back of the people. Paying attention to the people's sentiments, obeying the public's will, striving for the people's hearts, maintaining proper flesh-and-blood ties with the masses, and winning the sincere support of the masses is a solid foundation for our country's long-term stability and a fundamental guarantee for the sure victory of our cause.”

The second important component of the “Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation” is maintaining the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party. The most important threats to party that must be addressed are the diaspora communities and potentially threatening great powers. The former have the cultural knowledge to introduce subversive ideas that resonate. The latter have the material power to undermine or topple the party-state.

The desire to control the political landscape and protect the party’s position found clear definition in China’s National Security Law (2015). The law describes security in broad terms that go well beyond physical threats to the territory of the PRC. Security comes from the inside out. Articles Two and Three of the law state: “National security refers to the relative absence of international or domestic



threats to the state’s power to govern, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity, the welfare of the people, sustainable economic and social development, and other major national interests, and the ability to ensure a continued state of security. National security efforts shall adhere to a comprehensive understanding of national security, make the security of the People their goal, political security their basis and economic security their foundation; make military, cultural and social security their safeguard...”

This definition has two notable features. First, security is defined by the absence of threats, not by the ability to manage them. This unlimited view pushes the Chinese Communist Party toward preempting threats and preventing their emergence. Second, security issues extend to the domain of ideas—what people think is potentially dangerous. The combination of these themes — preemption in the world of ideas — creates an imperative for the party to alter the world in which it operates—to shape how China and its current party-state are understood in the minds of foreign elites.

One way of making this more concrete is to look at party documents about security threats. In April 2013, “Document No. 9” — “Communiqué on the Current State of the Ideological Sphere” — identified ideas that undermine the party-state’s security. Among them were the promotion of constitutional democracy, civil society, and Western concepts of journalism. In the circular’s final paragraph, it stated the party should “allow absolutely no opportunity or outlets for incorrect thinking or viewpoints to spread.” Although it would be easy to dismiss this document as a one-off or unenforced, in 2015 Beijing abducted and held five Hong Kong booksellers, including foreign passport holders, who sold books ostensibly banned in China. Moreover, Beijing issued new regulations on counter-espionage last December that clarified the Counter-espionage Law (2014) and defined activities threatening national security apart from espionage. Among these was “fabricating or distorting facts, publishing or disseminating words or information that endanger state security.” Influencing the outside world, therefore, is not just a historical activity of the party, but an ongoing requirement for national security as defined by the party-state. Over the last decade, the international element of Beijing’s repression has grown immensely, involving convictions on U.S. soil, reports of CCP-instigated violence, arrest warrants and bounties for Hong Kong exiles whose activities were entirely legal at the time of the action, and much more. During his confirmation hearing, Secretary of State Marco Rubio also highlighted the plight of Uyghurs in Thailand who faced forced repatriation, but this is a phenomenon that has been well reported around the world.



III. INTRINSIC TO THE PARTY'S DAY-TO-DAY OPERATIONS¹

The Chinese Communist Party's management of political influence operations — evaluated on the basis of the united front policy system — runs to the very top of the party, involving senior leaders directly. The policy system extends through the party's hierarchy and spills over into the government ministries of the People's Republic of China as well as other state-owned and -administered organizations and enterprises. Put simply, united front work is conducted wherever the party is present. Moreover, united front work is not an “influence operation” or a campaign. It is the day-to-day work of the party. There are not special orders explaining what to do to achieve what objectives or the equivalents of a presidential finding.

At the leadership level, four elements point to the importance of united front work and shaping the world outside the Chinese Communist Party.

1. A Politburo Standing Committee Member Oversees United Front Work: The senior-most united front official is the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) chairman, who is the fourth-ranking PBSC member. A look at the leaders who have held the CPPCC chairmanship suggests that Western observers have been far too quick to condemn the CPPCC as a mostly-useless advisory body. The list is a who's who of the party, including Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, Deng Xiaoping, and Li Xiannian. The current CPPCC chairman, Wang Huning, continues a tradition of competent leadership at the top of the united front system. He exemplifies the need of united front personnel to be highly-disciplined party cadre, who are nonetheless capable of handling themselves among diverse people and feigning ideological flexibility.
2. A State Council Vice Premier Has a United Front Portfolio: The vice premier position serves as the bridge between the party center and the State Council ministries. The vice premier provides prestige to the united front system as well as a necessary position of authority to direct and coordinate the ministries' united front activities. The position often looks as though the portfolio covers education and culture, because of the overlap with united front work. At meetings of the united front policy system, this vice premier appears in protocol order between the CPPCC chairman and United Front Work Department director. Currently, the position is held by Ding Xuexiang.

¹ Much of the following sections draws from my previous testimony to the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, Alex Joske's report entitled “The Party Speaks for You: Foreign Interference and the Chinese Communist Party's United Front System” published by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (June 2020), Matt Schrader's report entitled “Friends and Enemies: A Framework for Understanding Chinese Political Interference in Democratic Countries” published by the German Marshall Fund (April 2020), and a forthcoming report from The Jamestown Foundation on united front activities in democratic countries by Cheryl Yu.



3. Two Members of the Central Secretariat Have United Front Policy Roles: The directors of the party's United Front Work Department (UFWD) and Propaganda Department serve on both the Politburo and the Secretariat of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China. Because the Politburo does not meet regularly—its far-flung membership includes both central party bureaucrats and provincial party secretaries—the secretariat is empowered to make day-to-day decisions related to policy that has already been settled. This group is also responsible for moving paperwork among the central leaders and coordinating the party's actions. Secretariat membership is not related to relationships that the current UFWD and propaganda chiefs—respectively, Shi Taifeng and Li Shulei—have but rather reflects the structure of post-Deng Xiaoping politics. Their presence on the Secretariat is more institutional than political.
4. In 2015, Xi Jinping Established a United Front Leading Small Group: As part of the effort to revitalize and better coordinate united front activities under Xi Jinping, the party established a leading small group. It functions as a platform to coordinate and raise the status of united front work across the bureaucracy, bringing together senior officials from numerous state and party agencies for united front study tours across China. Interestingly, the last time the party created a united front leading small group — in 1986 under the leadership of Xi Jinping's father Xi Zhongxun — it coincided with a similar description of problems to be resolved: expanding scope and responsibilities coinciding with a lack of central direction.

The Chinese Communist Party bureaucracy at the central level has four key bodies for building and exercising political influence outside the party — and especially outside China. The United Front Work and the Propaganda departments also have subordinate elements at the provincial and local levels.

1. United Front Work Department: The UFWD is the executive and coordinating agency for united front work. It has a variety of responsibilities at home and abroad, including in the following areas: Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan affairs; ethnic and religious affairs; domestic and external propaganda; entrepreneurs and non-party personages; intellectuals; and people-to-people exchanges. The department also takes the lead in establishing party committees in Chinese and now foreign businesses. The UFWD operates at all levels of the party system from the center to the grassroots, and the CCP has had a united front department dating to the 1930s.
2. Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC): The CPPCC, according to the organization's website, is “an organization in the patriotic united front of the Chinese people, an important organ for multiparty cooperation and political consultation.” The advisory body mediates between important social groups and the party apparatus. The CPPCC is the



place where all the relevant united front actors inside and outside the party come together: party elders, intelligence officers, diplomats, propagandists, military officers and political commissars, united front workers, academics, and businesspeople. They are gathered to receive instruction in the proper propaganda lines and ways to characterize Beijing's policies to both domestic and foreign audiences. Many of these individuals, particularly if they hold government positions, are known for their people-handling skills and have reputations for being smooth operators. CPPCC membership offers access to political circles, political protection for business, and minor perquisites like expedited immigration. The CPPCC standing committee includes twenty or so vice chairpeople who have a protocol rank roughly equivalent to a provincial party secretary. At the central level, the CPPCC includes more than 2,160 members, but the provincial and local levels include another 680,000.

3. International (Liaison) Department: The International Department, founded in 1951, is the party's diplomatic arm, handling relationships with more than 600 political parties and organizations as well as individual, primarily political, elites. The department previously handled the CCP's relationships between fraternal Communist parties and cultivated splinter factions of Moscow-dominated Communist parties after the Sino-Soviet split. The activist bent of the International Department disappeared as the department began re-establishing itself in 1970–71 following the tumultuous early years of the Cultural Revolution. Interestingly, the department originated as a UFWD bureau before being carved out into an independent entity.
4. Propaganda Department: The Propaganda Department has been a core part of the CCP since 1924. The official description of its duties includes conducting the party's theoretical research; guiding public opinion; guiding and coordinating the work of the central news agencies, including Xinhua and the People's Daily; guiding the propaganda and cultural systems; and administering the Cyberspace Administration of China and the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film, and Television. The Propaganda Department cannot be regarded as an entirely internal organization that broadcasts outward to the extent that it is involved in influence-building abroad. For example, China Radio International developed in the 2000s a covert international network of radio stations to hide the CCP's direct role in broadcasting Chinese-language propaganda inside target countries. The Propaganda Department presumably also plays a role in the co-optation, intimidation, and purchase of Chinese-language print media outside China.

The State Council ministries and many other organizations with a party committee also conduct united front work. These organizations all offer unique platforms and capabilities that the united front policy system can draw upon for operational purposes. Below are a few of the examples of the organizations outside the party that perform united front work or have united front work departments attached to their party committee:



1. Ministry of State Security
2. Ministry of Foreign Affairs
3. Ministry of Civil Affairs
4. Ministry of Education
5. Ministry of Culture and Tourism
6. Chinese Academy of Sciences
7. China Baowu Steel Group
8. China National Overseas Oil Corporation (CNOOC)
9. State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission (SASAC)

The People's Liberation Army (PLA) deserves special mention, because it operates both inside and in concert with these other influence-building actors as well as outside this system. During the Chinese Revolution, the PLA served almost as the party's expeditionary arm. It duplicated all of the party's functions within a military organization. The PLA was and remains the armed wing of the Chinese Communist Party and not China's national army. As the party's armed wing and as the ultimate guarantor of the party's power, the PLA still mirrors the party structure from leadership to leading agencies to tactical execution.

1. Central Military Commission: Headed by Xi Jinping, the Central Military Commission serves as the nexus between the party and military leadership. Historically, the two military vice chairmen included an officer who had risen through the PLA's political work system; however, since 2012, two experienced operations officers have held the vice chairmanships. The CMC also includes the minister of national defense and the director of the Political Work Department. The former, like the vice premier for united front work, serves as the link between the PLA and the State Council. The latter oversees the bureaucracy responsible for military propaganda and political influence operations. Currently, however, Dong Jun, who is the minister of national defense, is not listed as part of the CMC. Miao Hua, who was the director of the Political Work Department, was suspended and put under investigation in November 2024 for corruption. As of January 21, 2025, Miao is still listed as a member of the CMC.
2. Political Work Department: This department is the successor to the General Political Department, which was dissolved in the reorganization of the PLA launched in November 2015. The department's Liaison Bureau is the military agency that contributes most to the party's united front work. It operates much like an intelligence service with officers using official and non-official cover, but focused on strategic targets relevant to military operations. Two of the Liaison Bureau's most notable targets have been Taiwan and Okinawa.



3. Information Support Force and Cyberspace Force: The creation of the Strategic Support Force as part of the 2015 reforms integrated the PLA's signals and electronic intelligence capabilities with its tactical information warfare elements. In April 2024, the PLA eliminated the Strategic Support Force and created the Information Support Force, the Military Aerospace Force, and the Cyberspace Force. This restructuring reflects the PLA's continued emphasis on information warfare and battlespace information control in multi-domain integrated joint operations.

IV. VECTORS AND MECHANISMS

The Chinese Communist Party's political influence operations target: community organizations, wealthy proxies, universities, local governments, exchanges, and consulting agreements. Initially, these entities are themselves targets of cooptation and/or coercive efforts. Once properly developed, they become additional vectors in the Party's arsenal to further develop other relationships. The party openly exploits (and sometimes subverts) the constitutional freedoms offered by democracies like the United States: many of these avenues for influence are not illegal by themselves. Often only a few individuals camouflaged by the myriad China engagements are working directly on behalf of the united front system, but they might be difficult to point out without implicating individuals who are guilty, if anything, of nothing more than naivete or being the victim of the Party's coercion.

1. Overseas Chinese Community and Other Civil Society Organizations: The Chinese communities outside the PRC contain an alphabet soup of ethnic community organizations, including chambers of commerce, hometown associations, friendship societies, and cultural promotion centers. These organizations exist for all the same reasons that ethnic community organizations come together. They provide useful community resources and services, even as ones tainted by the united front system bring the party's influence along with them. In most of the problematic organizations, the majority of membership probably is unaware of the connections. The leadership sitting atop co-opted organizations become the community leaders through which politicians engage their local Chinese communities. They also can be quoted in media as being community leaders, even in cases where the organization exists in little more than name.

There are several indicators for whether a community organization—or rather its leadership or other important member—is working on the party's behalf. None of these indicators by themselves is sufficient, but, taken together, they are strongly suggestive. The first is whether the organization's officers participate in united front delegations and conferences back to the PRC. Sometimes these officers have special advisory roles with united front work units. The second is contact with the local PRC embassy or consulate, and whether these officials



participate in the organization's events. The third is the organizations' goal and leader remarks alignment with the Party's narratives. The fourth is the activities the organization hosts often have a tendency to amplify Party narratives. The fifth is that the organization becomes a key voice and proxy for the Party at times when the Party deems to be critical. The sixth is whether the organization hosts delegations of party and/or state officials, often at subnational levels of the party-state. Provincial and local level united front elements have become more and more active internationally, and greater attention should be paid to their activities. Changes, such as a shift from using traditional characters to simplified characters or visible changes to the amount of money used to put on events, is another indicator.

2. Wealthy Proxies: Wealthy businesspeople working on the party's behalf are one of the most important vectors for the party's influence abroad. Although many of these individuals are PRC citizens or emigres, some businesspeople from other states are influenced, coopted, or fully recruited to the party's cause. Their primary value is the ability to move money quickly outside of China and, in democratic societies, the ability to spend that money legitimately without generating the alarm that comes with more direct state activity. Where the united front system is active, two or more businesspeople will provide a significant chunk of the financial support for large united front-linked community organizations as well as other relevant political or social causes. For example, in Australia, Chau Chak Wing and Huang Xiangmo appear to have been the most active financial supporters of Beijing's efforts to interfere in Australian politics. Their money bought access to the major political parties, platforms for pro-China voices, and supported community groups like the Australian Council for the Promotion of Peaceful Reunification.

The easiest group of these proxies to identify come from Hong Kong. Their wealth has been built with the party's assistance. Although their families may have built successful businesses in one or two industries, a hallmark of these businesses is sprawled across numerous, unrelated industries. These businesspeople often can be identified because they are members of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference and the National People's Congress system. Their Hong Kong residency gives them legitimacy and credibility that their counterparts in China do not have. For example, former Hong Kong chief executive Tung Chee-hwa has been able to reinvent himself as a philanthropist to donate money to U.S. think tanks, academic programs, and sponsor trips for journalists, students, and politicians to China. Tung, however, became Beijing's man in Hong Kong after the party bailed his company out of bankruptcy in the mid 1980s, and he began representing the party's interests to the British. Tung now serves as a vice chairman of the CPPCC, which gives him standing within the party at roughly the level of a provincial party secretary.

The CCP also cultivates relationships with prominent Western business leaders through high-level meetings and economic incentives to advance its interests internationally. For



example, in March 2024, Xi Jinping met with US representatives including those from the business community. He encouraged the companies to participate in Belt and Road cooperation, attend large-scale business events such as the China International Import Expo, and continue to invest in China. Attendees included people like the Chair of the Board of Directors of the National Committee on U.S.-China Relations Evan G. Greenberg and President of the U.S.-China Business Council Craig Allen.

3. People-to-People Exchanges/Diplomacy: The united front policy system sponsors and arranges hundreds of trips to China each year. These trips are used in a myriad different ways to earn good will and to influence analysts and politicians. They offer opportunities for the party to persuade them of China's rectitude or to refute critical arguments. Even if the latter does not persuade the critic, their fellow participants may be persuaded or inclined to see the critic as needlessly provocative. The trips also give party officials evaluate potential targets personally. Not only is there personal interaction, but there often is substantive discussion of ideas and policy positions.
4. Consulting Agreements: Hiring senior officials after they retire has become common practice. Beijing may have pioneered the process decades ago, pressing companies that wanted to do business in China to hire their favored former officials to close business agreements. Perhaps the most noteworthy recent example is former Australian trade minister Andrew Robb's \$880,000 (AUS) salary for minimal work on behalf of the Chinese firm Landbridge. Robb resigned from this position ahead of the deadline to register under Australia's new transparency scheme for former officials. In some cases, former officials work for Chinese or Hong Kong businesspeople through their personal consulting companies, obfuscating the sources of their income.
5. Universities: The united front system targets foreign universities, leveraging their access to cutting-edge technologies, talents, and opportunities to cultivate relationships that align with China's interests. By engaging with academic institutions, Beijing seeks to gain access to sensitive intellectual property and recruit scholars and students for its broader objectives. The CCP also tries to co-opt academics to build discourse power, reinforcing preferred narratives and whitewashing its track record.
 - On cultivating relationships, in September 2024, the "1+10" Sino-U.S. University Presidents' Dialogue was hosted at the University of Chicago. Wang Dinghua, CPPCC member and secretary of the Party Committee of Beijing Foreign Studies University, gave a keynote on promoting academic cooperation between Chinese and American universities, including people-to-people exchange and the development of joint research initiatives. The event was attended by U.S. universities such as Harvard University, Yale University, University of California, Los Angeles, Carnegie Mellon



University, and Georgetown University at least one of which has programs funded by united front-affiliated actors.

- The Confucius Institute program — ostensibly under the Ministry of Education and Hanban — creates a beachhead in university administration through which the party’s influence can expand. Although a Confucius Institute appears focused on language training and cultural programming, they sometimes provide opportunities for staff to move into influential positions. Confucius Institute directors can be found on faculty committees and advising engagement offices on how to handle China. In some cases, the institutes have given Beijing a voice in a university’s hiring decisions for China-related faculty and affected the kind of speakers invited to the university. Australia’s John Fitzgerald, an astute observer of the party’s influence operations, wrote that accepting a Confucius Institute signaled a university was “prepared to make an exception for China on questions of academic freedom, teaching curriculums, and research integrity.” Not every Confucius Institute has proven to be problematic, but it has depended on whether the university avoids exceptions and ensures the institute operates within the agreement. The 2021 National Defense Authorization Act prohibited the Department of Defense from providing funding to U.S. institutions hosting a Confucius Institute. It encouraged most universities to shut the institute down, but the network it has built remains active. The universities maintained close relationships with their Confucius Institute partners.
6. Companies: The Party targets foreign companies for their financial resources, and global networks through investments, partnerships, and financial incentives to deepen economic ties. In some cases, corporate revenues inside the PRC are used as a threat to pressure the companies into lobbying their home governments for policy changes, as Ericsson was reportedly pushed to do on Huawei’s behalf in 2020.
 7. Politicians and local governments: The united front system targets politicians and local governments to push its narratives and agenda abroad. Other mechanisms for building relationships with politicians and local governments include establishing sister states and cities partnerships and hosting economic forums and delegations to the PRC. These partnerships create opportunities for the united front system to influence local policies, shape public opinion, and marginalize competing narratives.
 - In March 2023, Associated Press reported that China has successfully influenced lawmakers and has been able to promote China-friendly policies and narratives in Utah. Through Le Taowen, professor of information systems and technologies at Weber State University and a CPPCC overseas delegate, the PRC was able to establish friendly local government relationships, organize friendly visits, and pass



resolutions such as promoting the Chinese language education system in Utah and bills that support friendly relationships with China.

- A recent case is Linda Sun, a former employee of the New York State government. Sun acted as an agent under the direction of the PRC representatives to push for the PRC agenda, including blocking Taiwanese government from accessing New York state officers and providing unauthorized invitation letters to PRC officials from the office of New York State officers to facilitate their travel. Sun often attends united front organization events that carry narratives that are pro-Beijing.
8. Congress: Congressional members are another key target with which the united front system aims to build relationships. By leveraging lobbying efforts, donations through intermediaries, and coordinated outreach by united front-linked organizations, Beijing seeks to shape legislative decisions and promote narratives favorable to the PRC. The PRC also uses the so-called “civic organizations” in China to engage with congressional members and staffers. The Chinese People’s Institute of Foreign Affairs, affiliated with multiple united front officials and aims to “dedicated to enhancing people-to-people friendships” and “establishes and strengthens connections and exchanges with prominent political and social figures, parliaments, think tanks, media organizations,” is one of the first to engage in friendly exchanges with the U.S. Congress. This organization alone has hosted at least approximately 500 U.S. Congressional delegations to the PRC.

V. WHAT IS THE HARM?

The harm caused by Beijing’s political influence and united front operations takes several forms, even if many of these problematic activities do not meet a current threshold of illegality. Moreover, Beijing would not allow many of these activities to occur inside its borders with any foreign involvement without first being co-opted by the party-state. The lack of reciprocity helps reinforce the imbalance in most countries’ relationship with the PRC. We should not accept many of these activities as being legitimate actions of a foreign state inside the United States or other countries, because the nature of the Party’s objectives and united front system’s explicit role in political struggle mean that they are not acceptable for democratic societies even when they are not illegal.

1. Western Politicians Become Symbols for the Chinese Communist Party’s Rule: By using party-controlled community organizations for their outreach to ethnically-Chinese constituents, Western politicians become propaganda fodder for the Chinese Communist Party. Politically-aware Chinese in the People’s Republic of China (and sometimes abroad) can recognize these groups for what they are: pawns of the party. The reason for the publicity surrounding these meetings and fundraisers is to broadcast back into China the



message that Western politicians care about liberalism at home, but not for Chinese people, and that they stand on the side of the party. They reinforce the image of the party's strength.

Vaclav Havel captured this dynamic in his essay *The Power of the Powerless* by describing a greengrocer placing a slogan of regime loyalty in his shop window. He does not believe in the regime or its ideology, but he does so to make his life a little bit easier. Nor do people necessarily notice or read the slogan, because similar slogans can be “found in other shop windows, on lampposts, bulletin boards, in apartment windows, and on buildings.” The presence of these slogans becomes part of the “panorama of everyday life.” This panorama “reminds people where they are living and what is expected of them. It tells them what everyone else is doing, and indicates to them what they must do as well, if they don't want to be excluded, to fall into isolation, alienate themselves from society, break the rules of the game, and risk the loss of their peace and tranquility and security.” By participating even inadvertently in united front-sponsored events, U.S. politicians and their foreign counterparts help the Chinese Communist Party build Havel's “panorama of everyday life” for the Chinese people and their own ethnic Chinese citizens.

2. The Chinese Communist Party Mediates Between Chinese Citizens and Their Elected Representatives: The network of united front “community organizations” creates a fake civil society. The community which is supposedly represented is supplanted by the Chinese Communist Party, unless politicians reach directly to membership or deal with uncompromised organizations. The party's interests become the constituency interests that are presented to officials.
3. The Marketplace for Ideas is Distorted: Having a pluralistic, democratic society means engaging with differences of opinion. There is a natural ebb and flow. As noted above, the defining feature of the party's united front operations is the effort to control platforms rather than just the narrative. As platforms are compromised, the voices and messages they carry change. They may not specifically represent the Chinese Communist Party, but they will avoid criticisms or subjects that are intrinsically damaging to the party's image, standing, and legitimacy.
4. The Party Suppresses Discussion of China's Future: The Chinese Communist Party's control inside China means that any version of China's future without the party must be discussed and decided beyond China's borders. The extent to which the party monopolizes the social space of Chinese people — especially those who would like to return to their home country — is the extent to which the party can preempt the transmission of liberal political values into China and discussion of China without reference to the party.



5. Undermining the Integrity of Policymaking: At its worst, the party's political influence and united front operations distort policymaking and the process of gathering information to feed into the policy process. The primary targets of united front work are socially influential individuals, such as politicians, prominent businesspeople, intellectuals, and sometimes even celebrities.

There is some reason to suspect that the united front system plays a role in feeding foreign intelligence services information. In conversations with former U.S. intelligence officials and serving foreign ones, they described questionable sources over the years whose information seemed too good to be true. The sourcing for their political reporting appeared sufficiently plausible and good to encourage officers to avoid placing too much scrutiny on the policy implications of the reporting or the light in which that reporting seems to paint around the Party's politics and positions. Such reporting can shape the perceptions of U.S. policymakers, reinforcing Beijing's preferred view about the Party's intent or presenting opportunities where none exist to lead policymakers to waste time and energy.

6. Facilitating Intelligence Operations and Technology Transfer: The united front network of organizations and relationships in overseas Chinese communities has been used to facilitate the theft and transfer of technology from the U.S. companies and research institutions. There are numerous cases of technology theft in which the risks posed by the individual were foreseeable because of their direct connections to united front organization or because they had established their own united front organization to identify and mobilize others to support their illegal activities. Among the many examples are the following:
 - Tan Hongjin, who pleaded guilty of trade secret theft, transmission, and possession in 2019 that was worth more than \$1 billion, was the president of CalTech Chinese Association and received the Chinese Government Award for Outstanding Self-Financed Students Abroad.
 - Huang Leping, General Manager of General Technology Systems Integration Corporation (GTSI) who was charged in October 2010 for illegally exporting high-speed analog-to-digital converters to the PRC through the PLA-linked China Electronics Technology Corporation's 24th Research Institute, was the president of the U.S. Wenzhou Association and the U.S. Zhejiang Commerce & Culture Association.
 - Li Tao, who pleaded guilty for conspiracy to steal trade secrets from GlaxoSmithKline to benefit his own China-based pharmaceutical company Renopharma in September 2018, was a Science and Technology Committee member of united front-linked Jiangsu Overseas Chinese Entrepreneurs Association and was part of several other talent programs.



Current and former intelligence officials inside and outside the United States believe the Chinese intelligence services make use of the spotting and assessing opportunities created by united front system-sponsored visits to China for education, culture, and business. Alex Joske showed how the UFWD system provides cover to Ministry of State Security intelligence officers operating from within the PRC and abroad.

VII. THE ROLE OF THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

The U.S. Department of State plays several important roles in countering united front work and the CCP's other political warfare operations, particularly outside the United States. First, U.S. diplomats are America's eyes and ears on the ground for identifying and observing CCP influence and other related activities around the world. They might well be the first to spot new trends, developments, or the evolution of CCP tactics. Many developments in united front work or other CCP influence operations are first used outside the United States. Diplomats and their local contacts may well provide the earliest warning of new tactics and techniques being used by the Party. Second, the State Department identifies, supports, and maintains connections to local civil society organizations, individuals, and other partners who are working to counter CCP interference. This is about helping those who are trying to help their own country resist the Party's interference and manipulation. It is consistent with long-standing U.S. practices going back to the beginning of the Cold War with the Soviet Union. Third, the department should be coordinating the U.S. Government's international activities toward a common purpose. It is easy to fall into the trap of acting as a traffic cop, simply providing "stop" and "go" commands. The State Department in conjunction with the White House should be providing clear guidance about what kind of activities support U.S. objectives, counter the CCP's activities, and support the local partners standing up for their own country's sovereignty and interests.

From a historical perspective, we should remember the American way of modern political warfare emerged from the State Department. Many of the initiatives, like the Marshall Plan and support to democratic parties in Europe and elsewhere, were, at least internally, understood as coordinating the non-military elements of national power to counter the Soviet Union. The State Department needs to reclaim this generalship today, which is more a question of priorities, interest, and guidance than it is of authorities. When the Secretary of State emphasizes these activities, especially in the information space, and takes a personal and supportive interest in them, then the United States performs well. The American approach to political warfare has been underpinned by the idea of providing a true experience of Americans to the world and that supporting people's hunger for truth and meaning in their lives will create better conditions for U.S. national interests to be achieved.



VIII. GUIDING PRINCIPLES IN RESPONDING

It is impossible to provide a comprehensive list of policy recommendations, and many of those recommendations could be hypotheses about what works to counter the CCP's efforts to shape foreign perceptions and mobilize people on its behalf. Nor could one individual provide an exhaustive list. Below I outline several principles that are consistent with democratic values and my own understanding of what has been successful in specific cases of countering CCP united front operations. These principles provide a framework for generating and evaluating policy recommendations.

1. **Transparency**: Sunlight is the best disinfectant. Out in the open, people have to make choices about whether to continue on in their conflicts of interests or compromised relationships. This applies equally to government and law enforcement responses to political interference. Administrative responses done quietly are not as effective as public prosecutions and explanations, which help create risk and inject new information into the public sphere for discussion.
2. **Conversation and Debate**: The legislature draws the line between legal and illegal. Federal government resources always will focus predominantly on the illegal side. In a democracy, we would not want it any other way. What is unacceptable or improper, however, is not necessarily what is illegal. Civil society must be able to discuss in reasonable terms what is taking place
3. **Protect Space for Critical Discussion of China**: Whether it is Chinese-language media outside of China, university spaces, or any other platform where discussion of contemporary China takes place, they all are vulnerable to the party's pressure. And they all are targets of the Chinese Communist Party. They need support, protection, and sometimes even cultivation.
4. **Consequences Create Risk**: Until the Chinese Communist Party faces consequences for its actions, they are not in danger of overstepping the mark or overestimating their ability to influence or intimidate. Without successfully taking cases to and winning at trial, without administrative penalties, Americans who actively assist the Chinese Communist Party at the expense of U.S. interests will have no reason to scrutinize their actions or to desist. Risk is required to deter behavior that undermines democracy.
5. **Civil Liberties as much as National Security**: Because the Chinese Communist Party puts so much emphasis on overseas Chinese communities and individuals, countering Beijing's efforts means ensuring ethnically-Chinese citizens and residents can enjoy equal protection under the law. National security and the resources brought to bear in its name are negative,



defensive powers rather than positive or creative. Civil liberties protections and the resources deployed for this purpose, however, are the latter. They serve to guarantee constitutional freedoms, creating and preserving the free space for speech and association. Enabling democratic practices is at least as important as preventing the exploitation of democracy.

6. **Maintain the Integrity of Rules and Processes:** When relationships with Chinese Communist Party organizations go awry or become exploitative, most cases — excepting those involving recruited or compromised agents — involve foreign partners who do not monitor and enforce their own guidelines and procedures. To protect against conflicts of interests and outright compromise, organizations that seek to do business, promote exchanges, collaborate on research, or otherwise have institutional relationships need to establish and stick to rules and procedures. Exceptions and exemptions need to be done in the open with clear explanation; otherwise, it is too easy to slip toward compromise and exploitation.

IX. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONGRESS

1. **Revise the Foreign Agent Registration Act (FARA) to include more robust reporting requirements, more robust penalties for non-compliance, and a publicly-accessible database of FARA registrants updated frequently.**

Others have more fully outlined the fixes that need to be made related to the Foreign Agent Registration Act, but I would like to emphasize a few points. First, the reporting requirements for describing the activities are quite minimal. Companies and individuals that wish to be safe provide more; however, that is not the general rule. Expanding the reporting requirements to include more substance and specificity about the messages delivered or services provided would make the reporting mechanism more transparent. Separately, additional reporting could be made a part of Congressional ethics standards. Second, non-compliance with FARA seems to have few if any consequences. The current approach to enforcement is largely about voluntarily self-policing. Third, the United States should revise its approach to presenting FARA data, modeling its public-facing database on the Australian Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme (FITS). The FITS database is updated on a regular, rolling basis rather than the quarterly approach to FARA. The database and accompanying documentation is comparatively clear and accessible.

2. **Request a review of the Department of State's Countering People's Republic of China Influence Fund (CPIF) and new strategic guidance on how the funds are applied.**



The CPIF fund is the product of bipartisan recognition that funds need to be devoted to the purpose of countering CCP malign influence. Anecdotal evidence from the State Department suggests that much of the funds goes to existing programming that may or may not be directed at the Party's influence and interference. A Confucius Institute in a foreign city or university does not make an English-language program in that city or university an initiative to counter Beijing.

New strategic guidance will necessarily be broad, but should include at least some of the principles outlined above. Moreover, priority should be given to programs that interrupt the political process through which the CCP builds power. When the United States or its allies wait too long and allow the CCP to become too established, they end up deflecting tactical efforts. While this sometimes is effective in the short term, it requires forewarning to take action and over time a relentless CCP will succeed in achieving its objectives, whether a military base, a policing agreement, or a telecommunications deal. This has been seen over and over in places like the Solomon Islands and the fights over whether a country recognizes the People's Republic of China or Taiwan.

Such guidance also could carry over to the U.S. Agency for Global Media and its media outlets, such as Voice of America and Radio Free Asia. The law is clear about the separation between USAGM content and U.S. government direction, preserving journalistic integrity and the desire to ensure that these are not simply U.S. propaganda outlets, equivalent to Xinhua, the Chinese Global Television Network, China Radio International, and the like. However, the law is also clear that these organizations should report on news relevant to U.S. policy, that the U.S. government thinks is important, even if the content is independently produced and reported. Exposing the CCP for what it is and the perniciousness of its activities is in the U.S. interest.

3. Invest in expertise building inside and outside the U.S. government.

Countering the CCP's interference and malign influence requires country-specific expertise, even if the laws and regulations are country agnostic. U.S. access to the PRC, however, is becoming more constrained for both the public and private sectors as Xi Jinping has tightened security measures and the U.S.-PRC relationship has become more fraught. Fewer Americans are studying China and Chinese language(s). And the United States does not have the expertise it needs to enforce the policies it already has.

In the 116th Congress, none of the various U.S.-PRC competition bills included investments in developing expertise and language skills. This stands in stark contrast to the early Cold War, when the White House and Congress realized the need to invest in expertise. The National Defense Education Act of 1958 created substantial investments in area studies,



particularly related to the Soviet Union, and the United States continued such programs through Title VI of the Higher Education Act. 45 Congress should create and fund educational programs to support mid-career expertise building and language skill maintenance. Existing programs focus almost exclusively on undergraduate and graduate students at the beginning of their careers. Creating space and time for experienced professionals to brush up on language skills or pursue useful personal projects would help ensure continued learning. Government employees have some access to similar programs, but there needs to be greater recognition of the value of education and being away from the desk. Private sector employees need new programs and sources of support to be able to take the time to study and return to work.

- 4. Reverse reporting requirements on sanctions and other Congressional authorities relevant to Executive Branch actions, so that agencies like the Department of State have to report when authorities go unused.**

Congressional reporting requirements often create a perverse incentive for the Department of State and other executive departments to not take action using the authorities provided by Congress. As a general, U.S. government officials do not like providing Congressional reports on their activities. As a result, significant authorities have gone unused because they do not want to go through the process of providing the report to Congress. Alternative authorities are applied or nothing is done at all. By requiring U.S. officials to report to Congressional oversight every 90 days or some other appropriate length of time that the authority goes unused, Congress will strengthen its oversight of U.S. policy and create a better incentive for U.S. officials to follow Congressional intent.

- 5. Congressional reporting on CCP malign influence should focus on enabling action rather than situational awareness.**

Most Congressional reports required of the Executive Branch are requests for situational awareness. This has overburdened the departments and, in many cases, Congress would be better served turning to the Congressional Research Service, the Government Accountability Office, or universities, think tanks, or other external research organizations. The problem of CCP malign influence is well known, and many aspects of it have been catalogued in detail by The Jamestown Foundation, the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, Sinopsis (Czechia), Safeguard Defenders, and many individual analysts. Where once there was a paucity of information, analysis, and expertise, there is a growing global network of analysts, journalists, and officials who can provide the general information usually required in Congressionally mandated reports.



Instead, Congressionally mandated reports should request information that enables action, like targeting packages for sanctions, entity lists (such as those at the Departments of Defense, Commerce, and Homeland Security). Congress cannot require the Executive Branch to take certain actions. There is a bipartisan presidential consensus, for example, that Congress cannot require the Executive Branch to place sanctions on companies or individuals. Presidents claim that is not a Congressional power. And practice has made this a reality. However, by demanding the compilation of materials required for specific executive actions, Congress will create reports that entrepreneurial U.S. officials can leverage to drive action either in the moment or at some time in the future.

6. Use Congress's institutional powers to press the executive branch for transparency on actions taken against China, especially where the actions are administrative.

American opinions are shifting about China, but much of the public discussion remains caught in limbo between the old policy paradigm and the uncertainty of today's new era of competition. Consequently, the administration needs to be more transparent than the executive branch typically is inclined.

The visa denials for Chinese scholars is a perfect example from recent news. Many U.S. and international scholars have been dismayed by the news, and the merits of excluding those individuals or revoking their visas is not obvious to the public. The particular case of Zhu Feng, a Nanjing-based professor, having his visa revoked shows why the executive branch needs to be more transparent publicly. Although he is a well-known scholar known for his amiable humor, Zhu also has been supported by and done work for the political warfare element of the People's Liberation Army. This is available from open sources. Putting a few simple criteria out in public for visa denials and alerting inviting institutions what criteria was triggered would be a useful positive step for handling the visa issues going forward. Without such information, many otherwise knowledgeable people about China assumed the worst about the administration's intentions and actions.

The administration also should be encouraged to use the legal system and press charges where appropriate. The legal process forces the U.S. Government to commit to a course of action and make some information public. That information, especially after a conviction, becomes as close to ground truth as possible on sensitive subjects for which there is not much clear, public information.