

Written Statement

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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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Chairman Risch, Ranking Member Shaheen, and distinguished members of the committee: thank you for the invitation to testify before you today. My name is Jennifer Lind: I’m a professor at Dartmouth College in New Hampshire where I teach courses on great power politics, East Asian international security, and U.S. foreign policy toward the region. My recent research and forthcoming book focus on China’s rise to become a great power and technological leader.

In my testimony today I will briefly cover four topics. First I will discuss what are influence operations and when are they malign. Second, I will comment on how threatening we should view Chinese operations. Third, I will offer a framework for thinking about U.S. responses: one that relies not only on defense but on more assertive measures as well. Finally, I conclude with thoughts about responding to Chinese influence operations in ways consistent with U.S. values.

(MALIGN) INFLUENCE OPERATIONS

Every country to some extent engages in activities to communicate its views, frame its actions in the best light, and shape policy outcomes to reflect its interests. China is no exception in pursuing what we call public diplomacy or soft power. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP), like other governments, engages in numerous mundane influence activities: it extends aid and loans to other countries; it promotes a positive narrative of China overseas; China’s government sponsors educational and cultural activities abroad; Chinese diplomats write op-eds in foreign newspapers and promote the national interest within international organizations. In the United States, Chinese firms hire lobbyists to influence U.S. policy; China’s government hires PR firms and offers all-expense-paid trips to China to influential Americans. All of these activities are routine in international relations. To be clear, we don’t like these Chinese activities because of the agenda they advance. But they are standard public diplomacy: business as usual in international politics.

However, malign influence operations are a different matter. The CCP conducts extensive influence operations against the United States and the broader international order that are malign in terms of goals and methods. Such operations seek to bolster authoritarianism, discredit democratic governance, and reshape global norms in China’s interests. China exploits its economic leverage, such as market access and investment, to coerce businesses and governments to behave in accordance with Beijing’s wishes. The CCP employs propaganda and disinformation campaigns, relying on social media manipulation to sow division and weaken democratic resilience. Cyber-enabled espionage and intellectual property theft bolster China’s

military and technological power. CCP co-optation – of NGOs, academics, political and other leaders – seeks to silence criticism of China. In many of its influence operations, the Chinese government coerces Chinese citizens living abroad as well as Chinese Americans.

THE THREAT OF CHINESE MALIGN INFLUENCE OPERATIONS TO THE UNITED STATES

The CCP clearly conducts a mixture of mundane and malign influence operations. Is China’s level of activity in this domain unusual or unexpected? Are its operations particularly malign? Such context is important because if China’s actions seem unusually aggressive, that’s an important threat indicator.

A look at Chinese influence operations suggests their **extent** is vast. The CCP conducts such operations through a massive government bureaucracy that includes agencies such as the United Work Front Department, the Propaganda Department, the Ministry of State Security, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Chinese People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries. The CCP also directs influence operations that recruit Chinese businesspeople from both the state and private sectors.

The annual budget for such activities is understandably hard to assess but estimates range from about \$3 to 8 billion. The Jamestown Foundation’s Ryan Fedasiuk reports that this exceeds China’s budget for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.¹ From the extent of China’s influence operations we can infer the CCP’s high level of ambition and commitment to advance China’s interests and undermine the United States.

What can we learn from the **types** of influence operations that China pursues? As noted, the CCP engages in operations that depart from mundane public diplomacy activities, or even from the espionage common to great power rivalries. First, many Chinese operations are malign because they are covert rather than transparent. Proxy organizations that obscure their connections to the CCP fund political contributions, think tanks, and academic research. The Hoover Institution reports that the CCP gained control of the Chinese-language media in the United States as well as in other countries; “Over the course of the last decade, most of the independent Chinese language media outlets in the United States have been taken over by businessmen sympathetic to the PRC.”² China’s government also seeks to shape public opinion through social media operations that rely on fake accounts and “hashtag storms” to flood sites with pro-CCP content while burying dissenting opinions and encouraging abuse of people who offer them. Other examples of covert activities abound.

Second, many Chinese influence operations are malign because they violate U.S. law and the rights of American citizens. Chinese cyber units engage in operations to steal U.S. technology, gather intelligence, and disrupt activities critical of the CCP. Such operations rely on

¹ Ryan Fedasiuk, “Putting Money in the Party’s Mouth: How China Mobilizes Funding for United Front Work,” *China Brief* 20, no. 16 (2020), <https://jamestown.org/program/putting-money-in-the-partys-mouth-how-china-mobilizes-funding-for-united-front-work/>

² Larry Diamond and Orville Schell, eds., *China’s Influence & American Interests: Promoting Constructive Vigilance* (Stanford, Calif: Hoover Institution Press, 2020), p. 214.

cyberespionage, identity theft, and hacking operations that use malware and spear phishing techniques. Targets include the U.S. government, think tanks, NGOs, researchers, activists, dissidents, and journalists.

Chinese agents also operate in the United States in violation of the Foreign Agents Registration Act. They engage in surveillance and intimidation campaigns against Chinese citizens (e.g., tourists, students, businesspeople, and researchers) as well as U.S. citizens of Chinese descent. The CCP harasses and pressures people to promote Beijing's interests by threatening their families in China. In 2020, the U.S. Department of Justice charged eight individuals who stalked and pressured a Chinese dissident and his family in New Jersey, as part of China's "Operation Fox Hunt": a program ostensibly aimed at apprehending Chinese fugitives abroad, which has been turned against dissidents and other ethnic Chinese.

In sum, this is not geopolitics as usual. China's influence operations do seem unusually expansive, unusually well-funded, and frequently conducted using covert and illegal methods that undermine not only U.S. interests but the rights of American citizens and the rule of law in our country. Although the United States previously engaged in this kind of shadow conflict with the Soviet Union, this is not your father's Cold War. As a rich, economically central, and technologically advanced country, China has a powerful toolkit to exploit as it engages in influence operations in the United States and around the world.

RESPONSES TO CHINESE MALIGN INFLUENCE OPERATIONS

How should the United States respond to Chinese malign influence operations? Scholars and think tanks have produced many articles and reports that detail the numerous U.S. government agencies and programs that monitor and counter Chinese activities. Such studies generally emphasize defensive U.S. responses to blunt Chinese operations.

I would like to build on the valuable tools recommended in those studies to introduce a broader framework for thinking about U.S. policy. The goal of this framework is not only to consider how the U.S. should defend itself from hostile Chinese operations, but how to convince Beijing to rein in its activities. The United States is in a great power competition with a very capable adversary; this is going to be a long haul with a serious risk of crises and war. In the shadow conflict of influence operations, the two countries – as the two superpowers did in the Cold War – should create some rules of the road in order to stabilize their relationship.

The first step toward creating those rules is for U.S. leaders to identify which of China's activities are regrettable but normal great power competition. After all, China is a great power with its own interests; China is allowed to do things even if we don't like those things. So we should ask ourselves, which Chinese behaviors and activities fall into that "regrettable but acceptable" category – versus which activities do we view as intolerable? That's our first challenge: to distinguish between the two.

Examples of "regrettable but acceptable" activities might include pro-CCP fake accounts on social media, Chinese efforts to set agendas in key international institutions, and Chinese aid for brutal authoritarian leaders. To be clear, we disapprove of such activities; we would keep playing

defense and try to thwart them. But we would understand that such operations are commonplace and, from our standpoint, bearable.

The second category of activities are different: they are the Chinese policies or behaviors that U.S. leaders view as intolerable. Such activities might include election interference, abductions, and operations that harass, coerce, or blackmail American citizens (of Chinese descent or otherwise). These operations undermine the rule of law in the United States and our responsibilities to protect our citizens from direct harm by foreign adversaries.

Step two is to develop a toolkit that we are willing to use to shape Chinese behavior: activities and policies that *the CCP* would view as intolerable. The U.S. government would convey privately to Beijing that if their influence operations violated the bounds of acceptable behavior, we would respond in kind: in other words, we might cross some of Beijing's red lines. This is not an escalation – it's a negotiation. This is how great powers establish the rules of the game—about what's going to be normal conduct versus what's going to be out of bounds.

What are the CCP's red lines? Beijing would prefer that we wage the shadow conflict far afield – in the United States, in third countries, and no closer than Taiwan, Tibet, and so on. But Beijing's bright red lines – the absolutely intolerables – relate to China's domestic stability. The CCP worries about its people mobilizing, getting ideas about democracy, and about economic and financial crises delegitimizing the regime. If the United States were to push ideas about democracy, or to take steps that undermine the stability of the Chinese economy – for example, its real estate or banking sectors – that would be intolerable to the CCP.

Identifying specific policy tools would have to be done by experts doing very sensitive work at the classified level. At an unclassified level we can't even talk about what are current U.S. operations, let alone how one might want to shift them or scale them up. So today I can't give you specific recommendations but rather offer this general framework for thinking about U.S. responses.

Once again, that frame is: first, figure out what we view as garden-variety great-power competition versus unacceptable Chinese behavior. And second, figure out how we might respond using both defense and offense – defense to protect ourselves from China's run-of-the-mill activities, and more assertive steps designed to make the CCP feel the costs of its aggression and to encourage it to moderate its behavior. And over time the two countries would forge an equilibrium in which hopefully both sides stay within the bounds of that agreement in order to maintain stable relations.

LIVING UP TO OUR OWN VALUES

Let me conclude by noting that as we formulate our responses to Chinese malign influence operations, U.S. leaders should be thinking not only about this negotiation with Beijing, but also about whether our responses uphold our own values. Among our people number millions of Chinese American citizens. We find ourselves in a complex situation in that our adversary is

already – at this early stage and in peacetime – harassing and coercing good Americans to work against their country on its behalf.

As U.S. leaders evaluate policy responses to Chinese operations, it's helpful to think about similar situations in the history of U.S. national security policy, and to ask ourselves what we got right and wrong. U.S. leaders should have this conversation (as indeed the Committee is doing today) with members of America's free and vibrant civil society: which sets us apart from authoritarian rivals and indeed is one of our country's strengths.

In World War II, the U.S. government imprisoned Japanese American citizens in camps in violation of the U.S. Constitution. In the Cold War, the Red Scare of McCarthyism violated the rights and ruined the lives of many people. The aftermath of September 11, 2001 in some ways offers a more optimistic example. President George W. Bush made it crystal clear to Americans that we were not fighting a war against Islam, but against a terrorist group that had twisted Islam's teachings. This kind of strong leadership was essential then and is essential today.

It is important for Americans to recognize that in the security competition with China lurk not only geopolitical dangers, but dangers to our people and values. As that competition becomes more intense, and as we get frustrated that an authoritarian society is exploiting our free one, while we protect ourselves against Chinese influence operations in the ways recommended here, we must also honor our own values.

Thank you.