

SECTION 2: BATTLING FOR OVERSEAS HEARTS AND MINDS: CHINA'S UNITED FRONT AND PROPAGANDA WORK

Abstract

Over the past ten years, General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Xi Jinping has directed a wide-ranging effort to enhance the potency and reach of China's overseas influence activities. Aiming to discredit the CCP's critics while inducing others to advance its strategic goals, these activities involve a variety of agencies within the Party-state as well as proxies who further its initiatives in foreign countries, often—but not always—unwittingly. Foreign countries' media, politicians, businesses, academic institutions, and ethnically Chinese citizens and residents are all major targets of Beijing's harmful, aggressive, and at times illegal overseas influence efforts. Operating with flagrant disregard for sovereignty and the laws of foreign nations, these activities go well beyond “soft power” and persuasion to include bribery and threats of violence against officeholders and candidates for public office; harassment of the press, including allegedly framing individual reporters for criminal activity; and intimidation of the Chinese diaspora on foreign soil through the use of informants and threats against family in China.

Key Findings

- For CCP leaders, influencing how the outside world views and engages with China is a matter of regime survival and a means of advancing national interests. The Party-state recognizes that the success of certain objectives—such as the CCP's unquestioned rule over China, the absence of criticism regarding CCP policies, the Party's unequivocal claim to speak for the Chinese diaspora in a way the outside world acknowledges, and the unification of Taiwan with the Mainland—depends partly on the behavior of foreign leaders and publics. In the same vein, CCP leaders understand that foreign parties' reactions to their efforts may impact the effectiveness of China's signature foreign policy initiatives, foreign investment, and technology transfer as well as the attractiveness of its global image.
- Under Xi's rule, China's overseas influence activities are now more prevalent, institutionalized, technologically sophisticated, and aggressive than under his predecessors. China's overseas influence activities involve many actors within the Party-state and can be found in countries around the world, regardless of their form of government or level of development.
- The Chinese Party-state exhibits a growing and increasingly brazen tendency to employ coercion in tandem with persuasion

to conduct overseas influence activities, often in ways that challenge other countries' sovereignty or threaten the rights of persons living within their borders. Beijing seeks to sow discord in other countries, including the United States, where the uptick in China's influence activities has inflamed rhetoric and contributed to a troubling rise in violence against Asian Americans.

- Certain factors make countries more or less resilient to China's overseas influence activities. These include the presence of liberal democratic institutions, such as a free press and an independent judiciary, the extent of economic dependence on China, the prevalence of domestic corruption, and a foreign society's familiarity with China.
- In the media sphere, China's Party-state aims to bolster its global image by encouraging positive coverage, manipulating local media environments, and silencing critical voices. Content sharing agreements between Chinese state media and foreign media outlets, CCP-sponsored media training programs, investments in local media, disinformation propagated through social media, and intimidation of media figures are all avenues through which the Party-state seeks to control foreign coverage of China.
- In the political sphere, Beijing seeks to empower foreign political figures who will pursue policies it regards as favorable while deterring, threatening, or punishing those who pursue policies it regards as disadvantageous. Covert efforts to influence electoral processes, to violate the civil liberties of people within another country's borders, to curry favor with sitting officials, and to harass unfriendly political figures are all hallmarks of China's overseas political influence activities.
- In the economic sphere, Beijing attempts to align the commercial interests of other countries with its own strategic goals and to distort domestic policymaking. In countries with weak institutions, China often employs outright corruption, enriching ruling elites who advance its objectives. In democracies, industry associations and business councils may serve as proxies for CCP interests. The CCP may also leverage business partnerships in strategic sectors to advocate for policies favorable to China.
- In the academic sphere, the Chinese government endeavors to control access to knowledge about China and, by extension, to influence public opinion regarding the policy choices based on that knowledge. China's influence activities can result in censorship, intimidation, and harassment that shape critical discourse about China in universities around the world.

Recommendations

The Commission recommends:

- Congress address China's state-sponsored influence and interference in the United States by amending the Higher Education Act of 1965 as follows:

- To require the U.S. Department of Education to share data on U.S. universities and colleges' foreign gifts and contract disclosures, required under section 117 of the act, with U.S. federal law enforcement, intelligence agencies, and other relevant agencies, including but not limited to the Federal Bureau of Investigations and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI). Such information sharing should encompass gifts and contracts extending back at least ten years, or a period of time determined by Congress, as well as all future gifts and contracts as they are disclosed to the department.
- To direct an interagency review, led by ODNI, to assess the section 117 data to identify risks posed by China- and Hong Kong- origin money received by U.S. universities and colleges. The interagency findings should be reported to Congress and inform steps, including potential suspension of federal funds, to mitigate risks associated with continued receipt of China-origin money by U.S. universities and colleges.
- To require universities and colleges to include in their section 117 reporting when a foreign gift or contract disclosure has been added retroactively or when a past entry has been revised, and to establish penalties for late reporting. Penalties may include loss of federal financial assistance within three consecutive or non-consecutive years of failing to disclose gifts or contracts above the current threshold of \$250,000.
- To direct the Department of Education to evaluate the adequacy of the current reporting threshold of \$250,000 by conducting a study on the average amount of foreign gifts and contracts received or signed by U.S. universities and colleges in a variety of academic disciplines and to determine whether the threshold needs to be adjusted for programs in disciplines that Congress deems critical to U.S. national security. The study should also include an analysis of the amount, focus, and potential impact of China- and Hong Kong-origin gifts and contracts received by U.S. universities and colleges over the last ten years.
- Congress pass legislation to amend the Foreign Investment Risk Review Modernization Act (FIRRMA) to expand the definition of "covered transaction" to include "research contracts." Under the expanded definition, the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States (CFIUS) should have the authority to review investments made by Chinese entities in the U.S. education system in the form of contracts. All parties to the transaction, including the foreign contracting organizations and U.S. institutions, should file a joint declaration to CFIUS ahead of their contract start date. Upon passage of this legislation, reporting requirements under section 117 of the Higher Education Act should be adjusted through regulation to include foreign gifts to U.S. universities and colleges, effectively transferring the administrative authority to receive and oversee the collection of foreign research contract reporting to CFIUS.

- Congress amend the Lobbying Disclosure Act (LDA) to require domestic associations, such as industry or trade associations, who employ an individual registered as a lobbyist to publicly disclose any donations or member contributions from entities based in China and other countries of concern, as well as their U.S. affiliates.
- Congress support the establishment of a new entity under the U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM) to coordinate and disseminate news content internationally in Chinese, English, and other languages to promote fact-based information on China and counter CCP global information manipulation. The entity could facilitate partnerships with international journalists and media, and provide independent content, particularly where Chinese state and state-sponsored entities seek to discredit the United States and the values of liberal democracy and promote false narratives about China. This digital service will:
 - Curate and repackage the best of USAGM entities' daily content to provide uncensored China-related news in Mandarin and English for countries around the world where China is making inroads promoting its values and attempting to discredit the United States; and
 - Engage audiences and partners through multiple platforms and multilateral means to promote responsible and fact-based journalism.
- Congress establish an interagency group, led by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, to create a public database to assist U.S. companies, universities, and individuals in conducting due diligence on potential business or academic partners in China. The database should enable users to identify how China's military, United Front Work Department, intelligence agencies, and security agencies may be linked to Chinese companies, investment firms and other financial institutions, research institutes, and universities.
- Congress direct the U.S. Department of State, in coordination with the U.S. Department of Commerce and U.S. Trade and Development Agency, to prepare a public biennial assessment of the impact of China's lending and other financial practices on Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) participant countries and recommend best practices for addressing the impacts of China's activities through U.S. diplomatic and programmatic engagements.
 - The assessment should consider the impact of these practices on corruption and social stability within recipient countries, among other issues.
 - Based on the findings of the report, Congress request the Department of State, in coordination with the Development Finance Corporation, United States Trade and Development Agency, and other relevant agencies, to work with the EU to develop a unified approach to addressing the impact of China's activities under BRI in third countries.

- Congress should consider legislative restrictions to address the national security and systemic risks raised by Chinese social media applications.
- Congress should require the U.S. Department of State to establish as grounds for student visa revocation any instance where a foreign student surveils on behalf of or reports to any foreign-state intelligence, security, law enforcement, or political party authority the civil or political speech of any other student, or threatens to do so. The Department of State shall develop appropriate evidentiary sources and standards for revocation.

Introduction

This year, China's government continued to aggressively seek to influence foreign policymakers and interfere with civic life overseas. To advance its goals, Beijing relies on a variety of covert and overt influence tactics, some of which clearly violate U.S. law and undermine the protections afforded to U.S. persons. One such case was publicly revealed in April 2023, when the Federal Bureau of Investigation announced that it had arrested and charged two defendants in connection with opening and operating an illegal overseas "police station" in lower Manhattan, New York, for a provincial branch of China's Ministry of Public Security (MPS).¹ The defendants allegedly helped the Chinese government find Chinese nationals living in the United States, harass them, and in some cases threaten them with consequences if they did not return to China.² Notably, one of the defendants was introduced to the MPS by an official of China's United Front Work Department, the agency responsible for China's overseas influence operations.³ "The PRC [People's Republic of China], through its repressive security apparatus, established a secret physical presence in New York City to monitor and intimidate dissidents and those critical of its government," Assistant Attorney General Matthew G. Olsen of the U.S. Department of Justice's (DOJ) National Security Division said.⁴ "The PRC's actions go far beyond the bounds of acceptable nation-state conduct. We will resolutely defend the freedoms of all those living in our country from the threat of authoritarian repression," he added.⁵

The actions described in the April 2023 complaint offer a window into the Chinese Party-state's overseas influence activities, which have long sought to advance China's priorities at the expense of and with blatant disregard for foreign countries' interests, laws, institutions, and residents.⁶ This section explores how China's overseas influence activities have evolved from the early days of the communist revolution to suit the opportunities and demands of the modern era. This section first assesses the Party-state's efforts to influence foreign societies in covert, harmful, and sometimes illegal ways through two characteristic forms of Leninist political activities known as united front work and external propaganda work. Then, the section surveys the Party-state's influence tactics and their application in a variety of media, political, economic, and academic contexts around the world. The section concludes by considering the implications of China's overseas influence activities for the United States. The section draws on the Commission's March 2023 hearing,

“China’s Global Influence and Interference Activities,” consultations with experts, and open source research and analysis.

Defining China’s Overseas Influence Activities and a Theory of Harm

This section defines “overseas influence activities” as the wide range of actions the CCP leadership undertakes to shape other countries’ perceptions and their policy choices in ways that advance Chinese national interests. Furthermore, this section restricts its focus to only those influence activities that plausibly cause *harm* to the targeted country.* Harm to a country can be construed in a variety of overlapping ways:

- *Compromising political processes and institutions:* This includes corrupting the integrity of political deliberation and its associated processes as well as manipulating political or social activity to disguise actions that advance China’s interests as the efforts of domestic constituencies.⁷
- *Manipulating the information environment:* This includes undermining the ability of media or other civil society actors to hold domestic and foreign actors accountable for choices contrary to the public interest; it also includes restricting the availability of knowledge that domestic policymakers require as the basis for sound decision-making.⁸
- *Encroaching on civil liberties:* This includes preventing citizens in democratic countries from exercising the freedoms to which they are entitled (such as freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of religion, and freedom of the press) and may take the form of state-sponsored transnational repression schemes carried out by China’s security services.⁹
- *Undermining the commercial environment:* This may involve elite capture and other forms of corruption to create commercial conditions that advance Chinese objectives, including awarding contracts to Chinese firms, deepening dependence on China, and achieving preferential access to resources or export markets. Dependence on China as an export market or as a supplier of critical goods and technology can then be leveraged for coercive purposes.¹⁰

Some of China’s harmful overseas influence activities may be illegal in the targeted country, but others may be entirely legal or occupy a legal gray zone that makes them difficult to mitigate effectively. Some of these activities may exploit differences between federal, state, and local regulations.¹¹ In some cases, a discrete instance of the influence activity may not be problematic, but the cumulative impact of China’s activities may cause harm to the targeted society.

*In contrast to activities that could be understood as beneficial and purely intended to build “soft power,” which refers to the ability of a country to persuade others to do what it wants without force or coercion. Joseph S. Nye, Jr., “Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics,” *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2004.

Influencing Hearts and Minds Abroad: China's United Front and External Propaganda Activities

CCP leaders believe they must influence the outside world in order to protect themselves from threats to their regime and to advance China's national interests, including its "national rejuvenation."^{*12} Since the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989, the Party-state has assessed that it faces a hostile Western bloc bent on undermining China's political stability by spreading "subversive" ideas within China as well as among the Chinese diaspora.¹³ At the same time, it maintains that Western countries unfairly smear China's international image and aim to constrain its emergence as a global power.¹⁴ As a result, the Party-state seeks to influence the world in which it operates and shape how China is perceived by foreign audiences in ways observers often label "influence operations" or "foreign interference."¹⁵ Drawing from the ideology developed by Russian political theorist and Marxist revolutionary Vladimir Lenin, the Party-state structures its efforts to influence foreign perceptions around two longstanding Leninist† approaches to foreign policy: "united front work" and "external propaganda work."¹⁶ United front work involves rallying support for the CCP and neutralizing opposition to its policies and authority, while external propaganda work aims to control international perceptions of China and increase the CCP's sway over global narratives.¹⁷

The Party-state conducts united front and external propaganda work against a variety of overseas populations‡ to rally them in support of its agenda or counter threats to the success of that agenda.¹⁸ The CCP's targets include foreign government officials, businesspersons, human rights advocates, and other influential figures the Party-state believes have the clout needed to advance or impede policies aligned with its goals.¹⁹ Another major target is the Chinese diaspora, whom the Party-state views as resources for advancing its

*The CCP's narrative of "national rejuvenation" promises to increase China's material power and redress grievances from what Chinese leaders call the "century of humiliation," which Beijing believes robbed it of its rightful place as a global leader. Xi has repeatedly stated that unification with Taiwan is an important part of national rejuvenation. For more on the national rejuvenation concept, see U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Chapter 1, Section 2, "The China Model: Return of the Middle Kingdom," in *2020 Annual Report to Congress*, December 2020, 89.

†Developed by Lenin in the early 1900s and deployed by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Leninism is typically understood as an action-oriented ideology that builds upon the intellectual groundwork laid by Marxism. Leninism builds on Marxism in holding that there exists a singular, collective, utopian goal that polity and society should be organized and mobilized toward reaching. Leninism supplements Marxism, however, in holding that a vanguard Party, operating under the pretense of representing the working class or the "proletariat," is both uniquely qualified and necessary for achieving Marxism's prophesied communist future. The core legacy of Leninism is a blueprint for creating an "organizational weapon," namely a set of organizational tactics for achieving, maintaining, and enacting societal control and influence. The organizational weapon in Lenin's framework is the Communist Party, which, operating under regimented hierarchical control of "democratic centralism," is meant to thoroughly penetrate every sphere of society and implement plans from the top down. Philip Selznick, "The Organizational Weapon," *McGraw Hill (RAND series)*, 1952, 3–8; U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *The China Rising Leaders Project, Part 1: The Chinese Communist Party and Its Emerging Next-Generation Leaders*, March 23, 2012, 55; Vladimir Lenin, "What Is to Be Done?: Burning Questions for Our Movement," in *Lenin's Collected Works*, 1902; Daniel Tobin, written testimony for U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *Hearing on a 'China Model'? Beijing's Promotion of Alternative Global Norms and Standards*, March 13, 2020.

‡While this chapter focuses on the Party-state's overseas united front work and propaganda work, it is important to note that China also conducts these activities within its borders toward its own population. Ryan Fedasiuk, "How China's United Front System Works Overseas," *Australian Strategic Policy Institute*, April 13, 2022.

overseas interests and consolidating its global influence.²⁰ Beijing lays claim to all “sons and daughters of the Chinese nation in China and abroad,” including PRC nationals overseas as well as ethnically Chinese citizens and residents of foreign countries in its expansive definition of what it means to be “Chinese.”²¹ A third target is persecuted ethnic and religious minorities whom the CCP perceives as threats to territorial integrity and social cohesion, such as but not limited to Tibetans, Uyghurs, Mongolians, and members of the outlawed Falun Gong movement.²² A fourth target is citizens of Hong Kong who have resisted Beijing’s imposition of the National Security Law and other encroachments on the formerly free territory.²³ A fifth category is citizens of Taiwan, where the Party-state’s goals include cultivating support for unification with the Mainland and opposing *de jure* independence.²⁴

Making Friends and Isolating Enemies: China’s United Front Work

United front work is a way of managing relationships with important groups and individuals outside of the CCP that is based on Russian revolutionary Vladimir Lenin’s concept of forming a “united front,” or a temporary alliance with one’s friends and lesser enemies,* to defeat greater enemies.²⁵ Contemporary united front work encapsulates the various activities of CCP organs, Chinese government agencies, and their affiliates to coopt or coerce groups outside of the CCP—including but certainly not limited to foreigners—into comporting with the Party’s demands and advancing Chinese national interests as the CCP defines them.²⁶ Chinese leaders from Mao Zedong onward have affirmed the importance of united front work, describing it as a “magic weapon” for defeating the CCP’s enemies.²⁷

Shortly after ascending to power, General Secretary Xi reemphasized the role of united front work as an increasingly important tool and a “magic weapon”† for achieving China’s national interests in a dangerous and dynamic world.²⁸ In a speech at the Central United Front Work Conference‡ in July 2022, Xi observed that the international environment was in flux and argued that united front work was now more important than before to safeguard China’s national sovereignty, security, and development interests.²⁹ United front work will be crucial to the Party-state’s efforts to become a “modern socialist country” and realize “the great rejuvenation of the Chinese

*The CCP has long divided the world into “friends” and “enemies.” Friends are those inside of China who uphold the Party’s rule and policy agenda and those outside of China who use their power and influence to advance China’s interests. The CCP’s enemies are defined as those who question its legitimacy or exercise of power. Mareike Ohlberg, written testimony for U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *Hearing on China’s Global Influence and Interference Activities*, March 23, 2023, 6; Matt Schrader, “Friends and Enemies: A Framework for Understanding Chinese Political Interference in Democratic Countries,” *German Marshall Fund*, April 22, 2022, 1–2.

†The term “magic weapon” was first coined by Mao Zedong but has been used by every Chinese leader since to describe three “weapons” or efforts necessary for the Party’s success: united front work, Party building, and the armed struggle (or military activities). Peter Mattis and Alex Joske, “The Third Magic Weapon: Reforming China’s United Front,” *War on the Rocks*, June 24, 2019.

‡The Central United Front Work Conference gathers together the country’s top leadership to discuss the state of united front work and set future priorities. *Xinhua*, “At the Central United Front Work Conference, Xi Jinping Emphasized Promoting the Unity and Struggle of Chinese Sons and Daughters at Home and Abroad to Gather Great Power for the Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation” (习近平在中央统战工作会议上强调 促进海内外中华儿女团结奋斗 为中华民族伟大复兴汇聚伟力), July 30, 2022. Translation.

nation,” Xi argued, calling on officials below him to carry out united front work with “a high sense of mission and responsibility.”³⁰

The CCP has signaled that united front work is a major priority and has reformed the bureaucratic structures that implement it over the past ten years. Xi has called for strengthening united front work under the banner of his “Great United Front” concept.³¹ He has also emphasized that all CCP officials must participate in united front work and touted united front work’s importance in speeches at the last two Party congresses and national work conferences on the subject.³² Current united front regulations state that the CCP must lead united front work and that Party committees at all levels of government must play a role in united front work.³³ Major bureaucratic changes since Xi came to power include reviving a leading small group to coordinate Party activities on united front work, elevating the status of the Central United Front Work Conference, issuing two sets of regulations for united front work, and reorganizing the United Front Work Department (UFWD).³⁴

China’s System for United Front Work: A Party-State-Wide Endeavor

The “united front system” encompasses dozens of Party bodies, ministries, military organizations, and civic entities that bring different platforms, capabilities, and personnel to bear in China’s foreign influence activities.³⁵ United front work is inherent in many of the Party-state’s global activities, from its funding of Chinese-language study centers, to its diplomats’ engagement with foreign elites, to its espionage services’ collection of intelligence, to its national police force’s perpetration of transnational repression.³⁶ United front work is also carried out by a wide range of quasi-official and civil society groups that are based abroad but may nonetheless respond to CCP and ministry guidance, underscoring the fact that China’s overseas influence activities frequently involve proxies and benefit from plausible deniability.³⁷ The involvement of so many actors inside and outside of the Party-state makes the united front system a flexible and effective vehicle of influence.³⁸ Important actors within the united front system include but are not limited to the following:

- **The United Front Work Department (UFWD), the CCP Central Committee department that coordinates united front work toward the Chinese diaspora, Taiwan, Hong Kong, ethnic minorities, and religious groups.**³⁹ According to Alex Joske, a senior risk advisor at McGrathNicol who testified before the Commission, the UFWD contributes significantly to covert overseas operations involving political influence, intelligence collection, and technology transfer.⁴⁰ The UFWD does not exist at just the central level of China’s political system; rather, there are smaller, identical versions of the UFWD embedded within Party committees down to the local level that carry out united front work inside and outside of China.⁴¹ Provincial or even municipal UFWDs often supervise the quasi-governmental and civil society groups that lobby for Party-state interests overseas.⁴² Most Chinese embassies and consulates include UFWD personnel among their staff.⁴³

- **The Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), which is an “advisory” body the Party-state uses to coordinate between itself and important social groups—such as leaders in business, academia, and religious organizations outside of the Party—to carry out united front work.***⁴⁴ CPPCC delegates attend a high-profile annual meeting to receive direction from the CCP regarding the ways its policies should be characterized to both domestic and foreign audiences.⁴⁵ Delegates to the CPPCC serve as proxies for CCP interests by virtue of their participation in this forum, and they frequently act as interlocutors with foreign government officials, businesses, and academic institutions.⁴⁶
- **The International Liaison Department, another CCP Central Committee department that engages with more than 600 foreign political parties in 160 countries or regions to facilitate united front work.**†⁴⁷ This “party-to-party diplomacy” frequently involves conducting political training, promoting China’s governance model, reinforcing China’s global narratives, and increasing the number of China-friendly figures across the political spectrum in foreign countries.⁴⁸
- **Quasi-official organizations subordinate to the UFWD and related organs, which advocate for Party-state interests while appearing to be nongovernmental entities.**⁴⁹ Some of these quasi-official organizations, such as the China Council for the Promotion of Peaceful National Reunification (CCPPNR), advocate for the “peaceful reunification” of Taiwan and mainland China.⁵⁰ Others, such as the Chinese People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC), advocate for closer bilateral ties with China and oversee major elements of China’s subnational diplomacy, such as sister-city partnerships.⁵¹ Still others, such as the Western Returned Scholars Association (WRSA), encourage Chinese students and scholars who have been educated abroad to contribute scientific knowledge and technology to the cause of China’s modernization.⁵²
- **Overseas Chinese community organizations whose leaders may at times be engaged by the UFWD or related organs and who may express the positions of the Party-state as the views of the communities they serve.**⁵³ Peter Mattis, then director for intelligence at the Special Competitive Studies Project, wrote in testimony before the Commission that the united front system may co-opt the leaders of some ethnic community organizations, such as chambers of commerce, hometown associations, and cultural promotion centers.⁵⁴ Notably, ordinary members of these community organizations may be unaware of the leadership’s engagement with the

*Both the elevation of fourth-ranking Politburo Standing Committee member Wang Huning to chairman of the CPPCC and reports that Xi has tasked him to develop a “theoretical unification strategy fit for the Xi era” indicate that united front work will likely play a greater role in China’s future approach to Taiwan. Katsuji Nakazawa, “Analysis: Xi Puts Top Brain in Charge of Taiwan Unification Strategy,” *Nikkei Asia*, January 26, 2023.

†The CCP engages with ruling, opposition, and fringe parties across the ideological spectrum in its party-to-party diplomacy. Lina Benabdallah, “Ties That Bind: China’s Party-to-Party Diplomacy in Africa,” *Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung*, October 2021, 8.

united front system, and the organizations themselves may not be directly under the command of any united front-related organ.⁵⁵ Community organizations with links to the united front might receive support in the form of funding, logistical support, and advice, and they likely have varying degrees of autonomy.⁵⁶

China Leverages United Front Work for Intelligence Collection, Repression

United front work builds relationships that facilitate intelligence collection and/or repressive activities by China's Ministry of State Security (MSS) and MPS.*⁵⁷ Mr. Joske testified before the Commission that China's intelligence services have recruited united front figures in foreign countries as clandestine assets or even posed as UFWD officials themselves to facilitate intelligence operations.⁵⁸

One recent case illustrates this entanglement between united front work and China's security services. In May 2023, DOJ indicted a Massachusetts man for allegedly acting as an unregistered foreign agent of the Chinese government and accused him of providing information about Chinese dissidents and others to China's MPS and the UFWD.⁵⁹ According to DOJ, Liang Litang allegedly "provided PRC government officials with information regarding members and leaders of Boston-area, Chinese family associations and community organizations with pro-Taiwan leanings."⁶⁰ DOJ also alleged that the information Mr. Liang provided to the UFWD and MPS included the identification of an individual he believed had "sabotaged" PRC flags in Boston's Chinatown in October 2018, a video of a dissident attending the "Boston Stands with Hong Kong" march in August 2019, and photographs of anti-PRC dissidents in front of the Boston Public Library in September 2019.⁶¹ The fact pattern described by DOJ demonstrates that the UFWD and China's security services may indeed rely on the same human source to accomplish their varied objectives.

"Telling China's Story Well": CCP External Propaganda Work

External propaganda work refers to the Party-state's efforts to shape the attitudes of foreign audiences through propaganda.†⁶² Like united front work, external propaganda work is also based on Leninist principles of information control and has been practiced by the CCP since the 1920s.⁶³ The CCP leaders of the past and present have viewed external propaganda work as a means of cultivating

*The MSS maintains two front organizations, the China International Cultural Exchange Center (CICEC) and the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR), that engage with foreign scholars of China and think tank experts to influence foreign policy debates in a manner consistent with united front work. Alex Joske, *Spies and Lies: How China's Greatest Covert Operations Fooled the World*, Hardie Grant Books, 2022, 26; Alex Joske, "The Party Speaks for You: Foreign Interference and the Chinese Communist Party's United Front System," *Australian Strategic Policy Institute*, 2020, 15; Peter Mattis and Matthew Brazil, *Chinese Communist Espionage: An Intelligence Primer*, Naval Institute Press, 2019, 56; Larry Diamond and Orville Schell, eds., "China's Influence and American Interests: Promoting Constructive Vigilance," *Hoover Institution*, 2019, 79–80.

†Propaganda is information, especially of a biased or misleading nature, used to promote or publicize a particular political cause or point of view. European Parliament, *Understanding Propaganda and Disinformation*, November 15, 2015.

positive global attitudes toward China, countering what they view as hostile foreign propaganda about China, publicizing the CCP's stance on important issues, promoting Chinese culture abroad, and enhancing China's ability to set the global agenda.⁶⁴ External propaganda work reinforces united front work by influencing the attitudes of key overseas constituencies and is sometimes implemented by the same organizations within the Party-state bureaucracy.⁶⁵

Since coming to power in 2013, Xi has repeatedly spoken about the importance of improving China's image by breaking what he alleges is a Western, biased monopoly on international information about China.⁶⁶ Frequently, he describes the work of improving China's image through external propaganda in terms of "strengthen[ing] China's international communication capabilities" or "telling China's story well."⁶⁷ In a 2015 speech, Xi underscored the global reach of propaganda work by stating, "Wherever the readers are, wherever the viewers are, that is where propaganda reports must extend their feelers, and where the focus and foothold of propaganda and ideological work must be placed."⁶⁸ In 2022 at the 20th Party Congress, Xi made clear that the priority remains to "better tell China's stories, make China's voice heard, and present a China that is credible, appealing, and respectable."⁶⁹ He vowed to make China's external propaganda work more effective and "to strengthen China's voice in international affairs so it is commensurate with our composite national strength and international status."⁷⁰

Xi has also intensified the external propaganda drive that began under his predecessor Hu Jintao by directing changes to the way China's propaganda apparatus produces and disseminates content to foreigners.⁷¹ Since highlighting external propaganda work during a 2016 visit to the headquarters of *People's Daily*, Xinhua News Agency, and China Central Television (CCTV), Xi has spoken repeatedly about the need for China to improve the precision, salience, and efficacy of its global propaganda efforts.⁷² He also oversaw the 2018 consolidation of three state television and radio broadcasters aimed at overseas audiences—China Global Television Network (CGTN), China Radio International, and China National Radio—into a mega-broadcaster supervised by the CCP Central Propaganda Department and referred to as the "Voice of China" in media intended for foreigners.⁷³ In line with Xi's exhortations to improve external propaganda work, state media-affiliated newspapers and broadcasting platforms have increased their production of content for foreign audiences, launched new overseas bureaus,* hired large numbers of foreign journalists, and increased their social media presence.⁷⁴

*As of 2021, Xinhua has 181 overseas bureaus, while CGTN has offices in more than 70 countries. China Radio International also has a presence in at least 14 countries. By contrast, the *Associated Press* has around 250 bureaus worldwide. Both Xinhua and *China Daily* also pay for online and print inserts in U.S. news outlets. Between 2019 and 2021, *China Daily* spent more than \$7 million buying ad space in both print and online publications. Additionally, it claims to have 300 thousand copies in circulation daily in the United States and 600 thousand overseas. As a state-owned company, *China Daily* provides Beijing with a direct platform to spread propaganda in the United States, primarily reaching an older generation of readers. Alternatively, an increasing number of Americans rely on new media, like TikTok, for their news. TikTok, which is privately owned by a Chinese company but ultimately must be responsive to the demands of the Party-state, provides Beijing with a potential avenue to reach its more than 150 million users in the United States. Catherine Thorbecke, "TikTok Says It Has 150 Million US Users amid Renewed Calls for a Ban," *CNN Business*, March 21, 2023; Christopher Paul, "How China Plays by Different Rules—at Everyone Else's Expense," *RAND Corporation*, February 7, 2022; Joshua Kurlantzick, "China Wants Your Attention, Please," *Council of Foreign Relations*, December 28,

China's System for External Propaganda Work

China's external propaganda system encompasses many agencies that work to influence the international media environment on the CCP's behalf or in ways that advance its interests.⁷⁵ The government and nongovernment actors within China's propaganda system listed below engage in a mixture of propaganda, censorship, and disinformation* to shape foreign media discourse.⁷⁶ The CCP's Propaganda Department issues guidance regarding specific messages to be conveyed to foreign audiences that are then implemented by state media outlets, ministries, and Party bodies.⁷⁷ As with united front work, the top CCP leadership expects organizations at all levels within China's Party-state—and increasingly within Hong Kong—to contribute to external propaganda work.⁷⁸ Entities contributing to China's external propaganda work, officially directed or not, include:

- **Chinese state-owned media outlets, such as Xinhua News Agency, *China Daily*, China Global Television Network (CGTN), and China Radio International, which disseminate news and other programming around the world in dozens of local languages.**⁷⁹ Joshua Kurlantzick, a senior fellow for Southeast Asia at the Council on Foreign Relations, observes that CGTN, China Radio International, and most other Chinese state media outlets have struggled to grow their audience share in many regions of the world despite their efforts to replicate the sleek and professional appearance of international media counterparts.⁸⁰ An important exception is *Xinhua*, which maintains cooperation and content-sharing agreements with numerous foreign news outlets and wire services that distribute its stories or advertisements directly to local audiences.[†]⁸¹ Mr. Kurlantzick notes that in places where it has relatively more reporters, such as Africa and Southeast Asia, *Xinhua* is beating competitor wire services to stories and is not under the same pressure as its competitors to turn a profit.⁸²
- **The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which oversees the activities of China's diplomatic corps, training programs for journalists from other countries, and the accreditation of foreign journalists working in China.**⁸³ Sarah Cook, the senior advisor for China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan at Freedom House, observed in testimony before the Commission that Chinese diplomats frequently promote falsehoods, such as conspiracies regarding the origins of COVID-19, the source of

2022; Hadas Gold, "State Department Asks Americans Working for Chinese Media to Share Personal Details," *CNN Business*, May 22, 2020.

*Censorship is the suppression of ideas and information that some individuals, groups, or government officials find objectionable or dangerous. Disinformation refers to politically motivated messaging designed to engender public cynicism, uncertainty, apathy, distrust, and paranoia for the purpose of depressing citizen engagement. *American Library Association*, "First Amendment and Censorship," October 2021; *National Endowment for Democracy*, "Issue Brief: Distinguishing Disinformation from Propaganda, Misinformation, and 'Fake News,'" October 17, 2017.

†While some major U.S. news outlets, like the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *Wall Street Journal* discontinued their content-sharing agreements with Xinhua, as of at least 2021, others such as *USA Today*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *Financial Times* continue to permit inserts from Xinhua News Agency or *China Daily*. The paid inserts are sometimes labeled as being from *China Daily*, but they often fail to note their ties to the Chinese government. In 2022, CNN also published an advertisement for Xinhua advertising the Beijing Winter Olympics. *Freedom House*, "Beijing's Global Media Influence 2022," 2022.

prodemocracy protests in Hong Kong, and the atrocities committed against Uyghurs in Xinjiang.⁸⁴ Chinese diplomats have also pressured foreign media executives and journalists in private and public settings to censor critical coverage about China.⁸⁵ For example, in 2021, the Chinese embassy in Sweden sent a threatening email to Swedish journalist Jojje Olsson demanding that he stop his critical coverage of Beijing.⁸⁶

- **The Ministry of Education, which oversees the promotion of officially approved versions of Chinese history and state-sponsored educational initiatives.**⁸⁷ The Ministry of Education oversees the parent body funding Confucius Institutes, which have come under fire in the United States over concerns they facilitate censorship and promote China's worldview as well as sovereignty claims over Taiwan.⁸⁸ In fact, Politburo member Li Changchun openly described Confucius Institutes as “an important part of our country's external propaganda layout” as early as 2007, leaving no doubt as to Confucius Institutes' supportive role in China's global propaganda activities.⁸⁹ Since June 2022, 104 of 118 U.S.-based Confucius Institutes have closed, but some new programs and initiatives have already emerged to replace the closed institutes.⁹⁰ According to Ian Oxnevad, a senior fellow at the National Association of Scholars, some U.S. universities have transferred language instruction previously held at Confucius Institutes to extant partnerships with Chinese universities, while others are establishing new partnerships with the Chinese government agency responsible for administering the Confucius Institutes (previously known as the *Hanban*, but now called the Ministry of Education Center for Language Exchange and Cooperation).^{*91}
- **The Ministry of Culture and Tourism, which oversees the promotion of officially approved versions of Chinese art and culture abroad.**⁹² The Ministry of Culture and Tourism oversees multi-channel networks (MCNs), which are agencies that manage online influencers and help them produce content approved and, in some cases, directly commissioned by the Party-state.⁹³ Some of these influencers produce propaganda specifically designed for overseas audiences and post their videos on foreign platforms, such as YouTube.⁹⁴ A report by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute highlighted one set of MCN-backed YouTube accounts that publish content depicting the supposedly joyous lifestyles of residents in Xinjiang, Tibet, and Inner Mongolia, a clear effort to counter media reporting of Chinese atrocities in these regions.⁹⁵
- **The People's Liberation Army (PLA), the MSS, and other state-linked actors that conduct disinformation campaigns targeting foreign audiences.**⁹⁶ While the PLA is most likely behind many disinformation campaigns targeting Taiwan,

*The Center for Language Exchange and Cooperation in turn oversees an organization called the Chinese International Education Foundation, which funds Confucius Institutes and their replacement programs. Rachele Peterson, Flora Yan, and Ian Oxnevad, “After Confucius Institutes: China's Enduring Influence on American Higher Education,” *National Association of Scholars*, June 2022, 8; Zhuang Pinghui, “China's Confucius Institutes rebrand after overseas propaganda rows,” *South China Morning Post*, July 4, 2020.

others, such as the coordinated DRAGONBRIDGE* campaign that propagated divisive content ahead of the U.S. midterms in November 2022, are likely state-linked but difficult to attribute to a particular Chinese government agency or military unit.⁹⁷

- **Chinese law enforcement agencies, which have been linked to a massive online influence campaign targeting more than 50 platforms, including Meta, X (formerly Twitter), TikTok, YouTube, and others.**⁹⁸ In August 2023, Meta announced that it had removed 7,704 accounts, 954 pages, and 15 groups linked to a larger influence effort by Chinese law enforcement that sought to promote pro-China talking points and attack CCP critics.⁹⁹ Content included criticisms of the United States and positive commentary on China’s governance of Xinjiang, among other issues related to Beijing’s global interests.¹⁰⁰
- **The Hong Kong government, which has jailed local journalists, barred foreign journalists from permission to cover certain events, and forced the closure of free media in the territory.**¹⁰¹ Once a bastion of press freedom in Asia, Hong Kong plummeted from 18th place to 148th place in Reporters Without Borders’ annual index on press freedom between 2002 and 2022.¹⁰²
- **Local media owners and political elites in foreign countries, who may favor closer ties with Beijing.**¹⁰³ Ms. Cook argues these local media owners and political elites have often “taken action—either at the direct behest of Chinese officials or for their own pre-emptive business interests—to suppress critical reporting or amplify pro-Beijing propaganda and falsehoods.”¹⁰⁴

CCP Propaganda Pushes Tailored Messages to Global Audiences

China’s external propaganda features both positive stories about China and negative stories about the United States.¹⁰⁵ Rebecca Fair, vice president of information advantage at the technology services firm Two Six Technologies, testified before the Commission that “almost 30 percent of PRC tweets in the last 12 months use cultural content to promote a positive image of China” and speculated that this positive messaging over the past year by official Chinese government accounts was intended to counter perceived bad publicity in international media.¹⁰⁶ During the same period, Ms. Fair noted, official and pro-Beijing social media accounts also spread negative narratives portraying the United States as a “global destabilizer” with severe internal problems.¹⁰⁷ Prominent topics included the United States’ alleged escalation of the war in Ukraine, U.S. support for Japan’s defense,

*DRAGONBRIDGE is a cyber threat group linked to China that uses an expansive network of inauthentic social media accounts to influence Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the United States. *Man-diant Intelligence*, “Pro-PRC DRAGONBRIDGE Influence Campaign Leverages New TTPs to Aggressively Target U.S. Interests, Including Midterm Elections,” October 26, 2022; Andy Greenberg, “A Pro-China Disinfo Campaign Is Targeting US Elections—Badly,” *WIRED*, October 26, 2022.

CCP Propaganda Pushes Tailored Messages to Global Audiences—*Continued*

and parallels between the January 8, 2023, insurrection in Brazil and the January 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol.¹⁰⁸

Chinese propaganda on social media is often tailored to audiences in different geographic regions in a variety of languages.¹⁰⁹ According to Ms. Fair, between 2022 and 2023, official Chinese government-affiliated tweets as well as inauthentic tweets likely linked to the Chinese government targeting audiences in East Asia, Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa tended to emphasize negative depictions of the United States.¹¹⁰ By contrast, Chinese government-sponsored tweets targeting audiences in Australia and Oceania, Latin America and the Caribbean, Sub-Saharan Africa, and South and Central Asia focused on Chinese infrastructure and investment.¹¹¹

More broadly, Chinese media outlets frequently amplify the Russian media's messages, a phenomenon that Caitlin Dearing Scott, a technical and team lead at the International Republican Institute's Center for Global Impact, described in her testimony before the Commission as "narrative collusion."¹¹² Chinese coverage of Russia's war in Ukraine is a clear recent example of this collusion.¹¹³ Chinese officials and state media have adopted the Kremlin's sanitized language about the war, propagated claims that the United States and NATO are to blame for tensions, and provided vastly more air time to Russian perspectives than Ukrainian ones.¹¹⁴ Chinese state media outlets have also consistently reposted social media content promoting the Kremlin's claim that the United States is running more than 30 bioweapons labs in Ukraine.¹¹⁵

China's Overseas Influence by Domain

China attempts to shape foreign media, political, economic, and academic systems abroad through a mixture of persuasive and coercive tactics inherent in united front and propaganda work. According to Ms. Cook and Mareike Ohlberg, a senior fellow in the Indo-Pacific Program at the German Marshall Fund, China's coercive tactics have become more obvious—and more prevalent—in its global activities over the past ten years, reflecting Chinese leaders' belief that a strong country cannot be seen to tolerate criticism of any kind.¹¹⁶

While it is clear that China's overseas influence activities aggressively target countries around the world, they appear to have varying degrees of success.¹¹⁷ Moreover, determining whether these efforts decisively impacted the outcome, even in particular cases, remains challenging. Nevertheless, several witnesses testified before the Commission that specific characteristics of the target country may make it more or less resistant to China's overseas influence activities. These include:

- **The presence of liberal democratic institutions.** Countries with a free press, political opposition, elections, an active civil

society, and an independent legal system are better positioned than countries without those institutions to identify and root out undue foreign influence and interference.¹¹⁸

- **The extent of economic dependence on China as well as domestic corruption.** Economic ties such as trade, infrastructure investment, and lending are often “the entry point for broader PRC political influence and interference,” Ms. Dearing Scott observed.¹¹⁹ She noted that Beijing routinely exploits corruption among local elites to “capture” their support, arguing that countries with medium to high levels of corruption are most susceptible to Chinese influence based on BRI deals or other economic inducements.¹²⁰
- **Knowledge of China within the foreign government and population.** Countries with low levels of local China expertise may struggle to identify the potential pitfalls of engagement with China, determine what types of cooperation facilitate CCP influence efforts, or implement appropriate responses to mitigate and counter the most nefarious aspects of that influence.¹²¹ According to Ms. Cook, low levels of “China literacy” were common among all of the countries Freedom House described as “vulnerable” to Chinese media influence in a recent study.¹²²

China’s Harmful Media Influence Activities

The CCP is intensifying its global campaign to shape the media environments of foreign countries, relying on more sophisticated and coercive tactics than in the past.¹²³ These efforts occur in all regions of the world but appear especially vigorous in developing countries.¹²⁴ Content sharing, media training programs, investments in local media, disinformation propagated through social media, and intimidation of media figures are five tactics that exemplify China’s efforts to influence foreign media systems.¹²⁵ Beijing’s efforts to influence global media discourse have been challenged by the resistance of local media establishments—especially in democratic countries—and the rigidity of its official messaging system, but they may become more effective if the Party-state continues to deploy narratives that resonate with local audiences and adapt to emerging social media platforms.¹²⁶

Content-Sharing Agreements Inject CCP Narratives into Mainstream Media

Content-sharing agreements and other partnerships with mainstream media are the most important way official Chinese messaging reaches large local audiences.¹²⁷ Under such agreements, Chinese state media organizations such as Xinhua and China News Service typically provide paid-for or free news stories, photos, or videos to foreign media outlets, disguising CCP propaganda as legitimate coverage for local audiences.¹²⁸ According to a 2022 Freedom House report, at least 130 news outlets in the 30 countries surveyed published Chinese state-produced content in print, on television, or on the radio between 2019 and 2021.¹²⁹ Chinese state media or other state-backed entities may also cooperate with foreign media to coproduce film and television content, sometimes presenting themselves as private media groups even as they expose foreign audienc-

es to official programming.¹³⁰ Examples of Chinese content-sharing agreements include:

- *China Daily's* previous deals with at least 30 foreign newspapers—including the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Washington Post*, the *UK Telegraph*, and the *Sydney Morning Herald*—to carry four- or eight-page propaganda inserts called *China Watch*.¹³¹ A number of media outlets later dropped *China Watch* amid the pandemic and public scrutiny.¹³² Several U.S. newspapers, such as the *Los Angeles Times*, continue to publish *China Watch*.¹³³
- Content-sharing agreements between *Xinhua* and three influential state-run media outlets in Ghana: Ghana News Agency, the *Ghanaian Times*, and *Daily Graphic*.¹³⁴
- CGTN's regular slot on public broadcaster Kenya Broadcasting Corporation's Channel 1 from 11:00 p.m. to midnight, Monday to Friday, as well as China Radio International's use of a frequency provided by the same public broadcaster to broadcast programming for 19 hours a day in English, Chinese, and Swahili.¹³⁵
- Agreements between the China International Communication Center* and media groups in the United States and Southeast Asia over the past seven years to co-produce or distribute documentaries favorably portraying China. For instance, Discovery Channel aired a documentary series called "China: Time of Xi," which presented a one-sided, positive overview of Xi Jinping's tenure.¹³⁶ In Southeast Asia, the National Television of Cambodia co-produced a documentary that discussed China-Cambodia relations and praised the CCP's response to the COVID-19 virus.¹³⁷ The Chinese Embassy in Cambodia promoted the documentary, noting that the production deal had been led by the Central Propaganda Department's Overseas Promotion office.¹³⁸

CCP Media Training Programs Encourage Foreign Journalists to "Tell China's Story Well"

The Party-state also brings foreign journalists to China for all-expenses-paid "trainings" and "exchanges" that expose them to official talking points, cultivate goodwill toward China, and promote the CCP's state-controlled model of journalism.[†]¹³⁹ Media training and exchange programs are managed jointly by China's Foreign Ministry and the China Public Diplomacy Association and coordinated by press centers for journalists from the Asia Pacific, Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean, aligning with Beijing's efforts to expand its presence in developing countries.[‡]¹⁴⁰ Generally speaking, the programs prioritize journalists from developing or middle-in-

*The China International Communication Center is a company operated by the State Council Information Office (SCIO) that shares an address with the Central Propaganda Department's Office of Foreign Propaganda. David Bandurksi, "Co-Producing with the CCP," *China Media Project*, February 17, 2023.

†China's model of state-controlled journalism views information as a resource to be controlled by the state rather than a public good grounded in journalistic standards. Journalists are trained to cover events without criticizing domestic or Chinese officials and to portray a positive image of China. *Africa Center for Strategic Studies*, "China's Influence on African Media," May 12, 2023.

‡Similar programs exist for journalists from Europe and Central Asia. *Reporters Without Borders*, "China's Pursuit of a New World Media Order," 2019, 33.

come countries and range from four days to ten months long.¹⁴¹ Foreign journalists receive housing and a stipend for living expenses; visit or intern with Chinese media organizations; interview Chinese officials; take classes in China's politics, approach to development, and media practices; and participate in trips to popular tourist attractions.¹⁴² Anecdotal evidence suggests the programs do not give foreign journalists opportunities to ask critical questions of Chinese interlocutors, tend to restrict participants' freedom of movement within China, and sometimes provide participants with instructions on how they should report on China when they return home.¹⁴³ Interviews with former participants suggest the trips successfully influence some journalists' perceptions of China but fail with others.¹⁴⁴ More broadly, the participation of foreign journalists in these programs confers legitimacy on the Chinese media and creates the impression of widespread approval for CCP policies.¹⁴⁵

While the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted in-person international media trainings and exchanges for several years, recent evidence suggests China restarted these programs in late 2022 and that they remain global in scope.¹⁴⁶

- Prior to the pandemic, a 2019 Reporters Without Borders report estimated that about 3,400 journalists from at least 146 countries had come to China for some sort of training or exchange program, though this figure was likely an underestimate.¹⁴⁷
- In June 2022, 73 journalists from 54 countries arrived in Beijing for a six-month fellowship program during which they were told there would be ample opportunity to study and cover the upcoming 20th Party Congress.¹⁴⁸
- In early 2023, journalists from 51 countries in Africa, Southeast Asia, and Central Europe began a four-month exchange program that promised opportunities to extensively cover the meetings of China's National People's Congress and the CPPCC in March.¹⁴⁹

Ownership of Media Outlets, Digital Platforms Threatens Editorial Independence

China's Party-state also influences media coverage abroad through Chinese companies' shares in or complete ownership of media outlets.*¹⁵⁰ Even when privately owned, Chinese media and technology companies maintain close ties with the CCP and may act as "gatekeepers" that veto or otherwise influence editorial coverage of China at the outlets in which they invest.¹⁵¹ Chinese companies are also at the forefront of digital television broadcasting on the African continent and are expanding the reach of Chinese social media platforms around the world, creating new avenues through which the CCP can influence news distribution outside of China.¹⁵² There is already evidence that Chinese companies have used their control over foreign media outlets and digital platforms to suppress reporting critical of China, ensure coverage reflects CCP preferences, or crowd out

*Section 310 (a) (b) of the 1934 Communications Act prohibits the Federal Communications Commission from granting broadcast, aeronautical radio, or common carrier licenses to any U.S. entity that has more than a 25 percent investment by a foreign corporation, government, or individual. Federal Communications Commission, *Foreign Ownership Rules and Policies for Common Carrier, Aeronautical En Route and Aeronautical Fixed Radio Station Licensees*.

coverage by other international broadcasters with content produced by Chinese state media.¹⁵³ Examples of Party-state-affiliated entities seeking to influence the coverage or distribution of content in foreign media include the following:

- Journalist Azad Essa was fired by South African news outlet *Independent Online* in 2018, hours after one of his columns criticized China's persecution of Uyghurs.¹⁵⁴ Chinese investors had a 20 percent stake in *Independent Online* at the time.¹⁵⁵
- Journalists working at the Taiwan-based *China Times* and CtiTV, both owned by the pro-Beijing Want Want media group,* told the *Financial Times* in 2019 that their editors take instructions regarding coverage on cross-Strait relations directly from the Taiwan Affairs Office, the body in the Chinese government that handles Taiwan affairs.¹⁵⁶
- StarTimes, a Chinese satellite company with close ties to the CCP, provides digital television infrastructure services to Ghana, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, and South Africa.¹⁵⁷ According to Freedom House, StarTimes offers access to inexpensive subscription television packages that favor Chinese state media channels over those of other international broadcasters.¹⁵⁸
- WeChat suspended several prominent U.S. accounts run by Chinese immigrants or Chinese-Americans between 2021 and 2023 for posting content that praised life in the United States or did not take an overtly pro-Beijing position on issues like the U.S.-China trade war.¹⁵⁹ WeChat is owned by the Chinese technology giant Tencent.¹⁶⁰
- TikTok, the Chinese-owned social media platform, suspended accounts and blocked content that showed or mentioned religious activities banned in China, the Tiananmen Square massacre, Tibetan independence, and other topics that Beijing regards as sensitive.¹⁶¹ (For more on TikTok's most recent efforts to block content on prodemocracy activities in Hong Kong, see Chapter 5, Section 3, "Hong Kong.")

Social Media Posts Spread CCP Propaganda and Disinformation

China's Party-state increasingly relies on social media platforms to spread propaganda and disinformation in foreign media environments.¹⁶² Chinese embassies, consulates, diplomats, and state media outlets have created hundreds of new accounts on Facebook and Twitter† since 2019, disseminating China's official views on international events in a variety of languages to millions of followers worldwide.¹⁶³ Networks of fake accounts linked to the CCP‡ frequently

*Want Want Holdings Limited is a Taiwan food and beverage manufacturer headquartered in Shanghai, China. The company makes about 90 percent of its revenue by selling its products in China, giving rise to longstanding rumors that it is closely aligned with mainland Chinese authorities. Lisa Wang, "China Times Group Is Sold to Want Want," *Taipei Times*, November 5, 2008; Nick Aspinwall, "Taiwan Shaken by Concerns over Chinese Influence in Media, Press Freedom," *Diplomat*, July 27, 2019.

†In July 2023, Twitter was rebranded as X. Wes Davis, "Twitter is being rebranded as X," *The Verge*, July 23, 2023.

‡Such as those run by OneSight Technology, which held a contract with state-owned China News Service. Jeff Kao and Mia Shuang, "How China Built a Twitter Propaganda Machine Then Let It Loose on Coronavirus," *ProPublica*, March 26, 2020.

and rapidly share posts from official Chinese accounts as well as articles containing disinformation on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, artificially inflating the statistics measuring engagement with these official accounts and accelerating the spread of falsehoods across the internet.¹⁶⁴ The kinds of content shared by Chinese state-affiliated media has grown more creative over time, with outlets such as the *Global Times* and *People's Daily* posting videos set to music on YouTube or posting memes that convey anti-U.S. messages with references to popular culture in a comical fashion.¹⁶⁵ State media organizations also pay Chinese and foreign social media personalities to serve as “influencers” on YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, and TikTok, promoting views sympathetic to the CCP without disclosing their state affiliation.¹⁶⁶ In 2022, the Digital Threat Analysis Center (formerly the research firm Miburo) catalogued at least 200 influencers with connections to the Chinese government or state media operating in 38 different languages.¹⁶⁷ Examples of China’s manipulation of social media include:

- Researchers’ discovery in August 2023 of networks of Chinese state-linked social media accounts spreading disinformation about the Maui wildfires, including content claiming the fires were the result of a “weather weapon” allegedly created by the U.S. government.¹⁶⁸ Reports on these disinformation activities, including from the cybersecurity firm Recorded Future and Microsoft, note that the social media networks posted in more than 25 languages and used AI-generated images to sow discord in the United States and elsewhere.¹⁶⁹
- Xinhua’s posting on Twitter of a “Tetris”-themed meme criticizing the United States’ handling of the COVID-19 virus in 2021.¹⁷⁰
- Chinese state media collaboration with an Israeli social media influencer who contradicted international reporting on China’s atrocities in Xinjiang through trips to the province in which he interviewed local cotton farmers and claimed, “It’s totally normal here.”¹⁷¹ In an interview conducted with CGTN during the visit, the influencer asserted that there was “true harmony” between the Uyghurs and Han Chinese in Xinjiang.¹⁷²
- U.S. cybersecurity firms’ discovery in 2022 of a Chinese state-linked online influence campaign called DRAGONBRIDGE, which has used massive networks of inauthentic accounts to spread false or divisive content about alleged environmental degradation by U.S. and Canadian rare earth companies, China’s COVID-19 response, the war in Ukraine, and the explosion of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline.¹⁷³

China’s Diplomats Pressure Foreign Journalists to Avoid Critical Coverage

Chinese diplomats routinely pressure media executives and journalists outside of China to alter coverage they view as unfavorable—behavior that Freedom House observes has become more aggressive in recent years.¹⁷⁴ This pressure typically involves demands to edit or delete unfavorable content as well as threats to pursue defamation lawsuits or withdraw advertising if the offending media outlet

or journalist does not comply.¹⁷⁵ Chinese diplomats may castigate the media outlet or journalist publicly, but Freedom House observes that more often, pressure is exerted privately in phone calls urging a retraction or apology.¹⁷⁶ Online harassment or cyberattacks by actors linked to Beijing may occur in tandem with Chinese diplomats' complaints about critical coverage.¹⁷⁷ Chinese authorities may also harass or detain the China-based relatives of foreign journalists to punish them for critical coverage.*¹⁷⁸ Examples of Chinese diplomatic pressure on foreign media include:

- Kuwaiti newspaper *Arab Times*' decision to delete an interview with Taiwan's foreign minister from its website following public condemnation by the Chinese Embassy in Kuwait in August 2021.¹⁷⁹ *Arab Times* replaced the online interview with a statement from the embassy titled "There is only one China in the world and Taiwan is an inalienable part of China's territory."¹⁸⁰
- The Chinese Embassy in Sweden's aggressive treatment of Swedish journalists during the tenure of Ambassador Gui Congyou (2017–2021), who gained notoriety as one of China's best-known "wolf warrior" diplomats.†¹⁸¹ This included threats the embassy sent to Swedish freelance journalist Jojje Olsson in 2018 and in 2021 following stories critical of the Chinese government.¹⁸²
- The intense online harassment and apparent framing of *De Volkskrant* reporter Marije Vlaskamp for fake bomb threats against the Chinese embassies in Oslo and The Hague following her coverage of sensitive topics, including the activities of Chinese dissidents in the Netherlands.¹⁸³ The Netherlands' Ministry of Foreign Affairs subsequently demanded clarification from the Chinese Embassy about the origins of the intimidation campaign against Ms. Vlaskamp.¹⁸⁴

According to Ms. Cook, a recent Freedom House study of Chinese influence on foreign media between 2019 and 2022 found at least one incident of censorship or intimidation aimed at suppressing reporting or viewpoints critical of the Chinese government and companies in 24 of the 30 countries assessed.¹⁸⁵ About half of these incidents involved Chinese diplomats or state-owned enterprises, Ms. Cook noted, but the other half involved "local officials or media executives from outside China who attempted to suppress the critical reporting because of their own interest[s] related to the Chinese government."¹⁸⁶

China's Harmful Political Influence Activities

The CCP attempts to shape the political ecosystems and choices of foreign countries, exploiting the porous nature of democratic systems and making use of cyber operations as well as coercion to achieve its goals.¹⁸⁷ Ms. Dearing Scott testified before the Commis-

*For instance, in 2018 Chinese authorities detained relatives of at least five U.S.-based reporters who covered the CCP's crackdown in Xinjiang for Radio Free Asia's Uyghur service. Austin Ramzy, "After U.S.-Based Reporters Exposed Abuses, China Seized Their Relatives," *New York Times*, March 1, 2018.

†Between 2017 and 2020, Ambassador Gui was reportedly summoned by Sweden's foreign ministry more than 40 times to protest his remarks. Lai Fu, "Growling Back at the West," *China Media Project*, August 8, 2021.

sion that her organization, the International Republican Institute, had “noted robust attempts by the PRC at pure political influence and interference.”¹⁸⁸ She argued that the type of political influence activity employed depends on the country China is targeting.¹⁸⁹ Ms. Dearing Scott observed that while China often prefers to “identify, empower, and occasionally fund proxies, candidates, and parties that favor cooperation with the PRC and who will not push the envelope on any of the PRC’s red lines,” it has also attempted to directly steer elections in Taiwan, Australia, and Canada.¹⁹⁰ The allegations and evidence of CCP-linked political influence efforts that do exist publicly are limited, complicating any effort to quantify the scale of these activities or to assess their efficacy on average, even if they appear to show that Beijing has generally failed to achieve its aims.¹⁹¹

Influencing Foreign Electoral Processes

There is a small but growing amount of evidence that actors associated with China’s Party-state have sought to influence electoral processes in the United States as well as in allied and partner countries, though the operations that have been exposed do not appear to have impacted the outcomes.¹⁹² Efforts to fund candidates perceived as friendly to Beijing during elections or to bombard the public with disinformation that undermines confidence in certain candidates, the government, or the integrity of the election at large are all consistent with the U.S. National Intelligence Council’s definition of election influence.*¹⁹³ Recent examples in which actors linked to China’s Party-state have attempted to influence other countries’ elections include the following:

- Prior to the November 2022 U.S. midterm elections, cybersecurity researchers discovered multiple coordinated social media campaigns in which fake online accounts potentially linked to China’s Party-state propagated content containing anti-U.S. messages, criticisms of U.S. politicians, and highly divisive political topics across a variety of social media platforms.¹⁹⁴ One social media influence campaign dubbed DRAGONBRIDGE by U.S. cybersecurity firm Mandiant aggressively sought to discredit the U.S. democratic process by posting English-language videos discouraging Americans from voting, impugning the productivity of U.S. lawmakers, and highlighting instances of politically motivated violence as evidence that U.S. democracy had purportedly failed.¹⁹⁵ Another series of campaigns discovered by Twitter spanned more than 2,000 inauthentic accounts and propagated claims that the 2020 election had been rigged, narratives favored by the U.S. political right and U.S. political left, and messages echoing the Chinese government’s rhetoric on issues like then Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi’s 2022 trip to Taiwan.¹⁹⁶ Yet another campaign discovered by Meta involved a series of fake accounts on Facebook and Instagram that posed as conservative and liberal

*The National Intelligence Council considers “election interference” to be a subset of election influence activities that specifically target the technical elements of an election, such as voter registration, casting and counting ballots, or reporting results. National Intelligence Council, *Foreign Threats to the 2020 US Federal Elections*, March 21, 2021.

Americans sharing content related to gun ownership and abortion access in sometimes mangled English.*¹⁹⁷ There is no evidence that these social media campaigns had any impact on the 2022 midterms' outcome, but experts assess these efforts reflect China's maturing cyber operations tradecraft and the adoption of tactics generally associated with Russian and Iranian influence campaigns.¹⁹⁸

- In March 2022, DOJ arrested a Chinese national for allegedly working on behalf of the MSS on charges related to a conspiracy to surveil and harass a candidate for U.S. Congress in New York.¹⁹⁹ The Chinese national, Lin Qiming, allegedly hired a private investigator to discover and manufacture compromising information about the candidate, whom media reporting revealed to be Yan Xiong, a military veteran and former leader of the 1989 prodemocracy protests.²⁰⁰ According to the DOJ complaint, Mr. Lin also suggested the private investigator physically attack Mr. Yan and “beat him until he cannot run for election” or arrange a car crash ahead of the election.²⁰¹ While there is no evidence the scheme had any impact on the election's outcome, Mr. Yan claims the scheme “successfully” sank his race.²⁰²
- Between November 2022 and May 2023, Canadian media published a series of reports based on leaked intelligence from the Canadian Security Intelligence Service that detailed allegations of Chinese state-sponsored influence operations during the country's 2019 and 2021 federal elections.²⁰³ The reports included claims that China funneled money through its Toronto consulate to 11 candidates who ran in the 2019 federal election and that Chinese diplomats and their united front proxies made undeclared donations to political campaigns and hired international Chinese students to volunteer for certain candidates ahead of the 2021 federal election.²⁰⁴ The leaked Canadian Security Intelligence Service documents reportedly detail efforts by several Chinese consular officials to encourage members of Chinese-Canadian organizations to rally votes for the Liberal Party and defeat Conservative Party candidates because they viewed the latter as hostile to China.²⁰⁵ There is no evidence China's state-sponsored influence operations changed either election's outcome.²⁰⁶
- In February 2022, Australian media reported that the Australian Security Intelligence Organization (ASIO), Australia's domestic counterintelligence agency, had disrupted a plot in which China-linked figures allegedly sought to fund parliamentary candidates in the New South Wales branch of the Labor Party in an upcoming federal election.²⁰⁷ ASIO chief Mike Burgess said in a speech that the plot was arranged by a wealthy individual with connections to a foreign government—a country Australian media subsequently determined was China based on interviews with multiple sources in the intelligence establishment unau-

*According to Meta's 2022 report, in at least one instance, an inauthentic account shifted from posting pro-choice content to anti-Biden content while maintaining the same user information. Ben Nimmo and Mike Torrey, “Taking Down Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior from Russia and China,” *Meta*, September 2022, 9.

thorized to speak publicly.²⁰⁸ The wealthy individual allegedly hired a subordinate to identify “candidates likely to run in the election who either supported the interests of the foreign government or who were assessed as vulnerable to inducements and cultivation” and provided to that subordinate an offshore bank account with hundreds of thousands of dollars for operating expenses.²⁰⁹ Mr. Burgess said ASIO successfully prevented the wealthy individual and the subordinate from getting specific candidates preselected to stand for Labor seats, and there is no evidence the plot affected the outcome of the election.²¹⁰

Attempted Infiltration of U.S. Institutions to Violate Rights of Diaspora Communities

China’s Party-state has deployed a number of schemes to violate the rights of ethnically Chinese people and other minorities living in the United States, at times attempting to infiltrate U.S. government and civic institutions to provide cover for its egregious and illegal activities.²¹¹ Andrew Chubb, a senior lecturer at Lancaster University, argued in testimony before the Commission that “the most demonstrable overseas impact of Beijing’s interference has been on civil liberties and human rights, particularly inside diaspora communities.”²¹² He observed that Beijing’s influence activity “against dissidents and persecuted ethnic groups has severely impacted on freedoms of speech, political association and social trust in émigré communities,” an observation borne out by recent nongovernmental organization (NGO) reporting and law enforcement charges related to China’s transnational repression practices.²¹³ Recent examples in which actors linked to China’s Party-state have allegedly deployed harmful tactics and attempted to undermine civil liberties such as religious freedom, freedom of speech, and freedom of assembly by infiltrating U.S. government or civic society institutions include the following:

- In May 2023, DOJ unsealed a complaint charging a Chinese citizen and a U.S. resident with participating in a scheme to revoke a New York-based Falun Gong organization’s tax-exempt status and paying bribes to an undercover U.S. law enforcement officer posing as an Internal Revenue Service (IRS) agent.²¹⁴ DOJ’s complaint alleged that the two men filed a false complaint against a Falun Gong entity using the IRS’s Whistleblower Program at the direction of Chinese officials and then paid \$5,000 in cash bribes to the undercover law enforcement officer in order to initiate an audit of the Falun Gong entity.²¹⁵ “John Chen and Lin Feng allegedly waged a campaign at the behest of the Government of the People’s Republic of China to influence a U.S. Government official in order to further the PRC Government’s repression of practitioners of Falun Gong,” U.S. Attorney Damian Williams for the Southern District of New York said of the foiled plot.²¹⁶ He noted that Beijing’s use of illegal methods to achieve its autocratic aims are “as shocking as they are insidious.”²¹⁷
- In March 2022, DOJ charged three individuals with conspiring to act as agents of the Chinese government, commit interstate harassment, and bribe a federal official for the purpose

of discrediting Chinese prodemocracy activists residing in the United States.²¹⁸ According to DOJ, two of the defendants—Fan “Frank” Liu, the president of a purported media company, and Matthew Ziburis, a former correctional officer for the state of Florida—acted at the direction of Qiang “Jason” Sun, a PRC-based employee of an international tech company, to spy on and spread negative information about multiple Chinese dissidents living in California, Indiana, and New York City.²¹⁹ In one case, the defendants allegedly paid a private investigator to bribe an IRS employee to access the federal tax returns of a Chinese dissident, hoping to discredit him by publicly disclosing his tax liabilities.²²⁰ The private investigator cooperated with law enforcement, and no IRS employee received a bribe payment.²²¹

- In March 2022, DOJ charged a New York man with acting as an agent of China’s government and accused him of using his status within the Chinese dissident community to collect information about activists on behalf of the MSS.²²² According to DOJ, Wang Shujun—a former leader within the Chinese dissident community and founder of a prodemocracy organization serving Chinese dissidents in Queens, New York—collected information about prominent activists, dissidents, and human rights leaders made available to him in confidence as the leader of the civil society organization at the direction of MSS handlers from at least 2016 onward.²²³ Mr. Wang’s alleged victims included Hong Kong prodemocracy activists, advocates for Taiwan independence, Uyghur activists, Mongolian activists, and Tibetan activists in New York City as well as abroad.²²⁴ DOJ’s complaint stated that one Hong Kong democracy activist whom Mr. Wang reported was arrested in Hong Kong and jailed on political charges as a result.²²⁵

Intimidation of Political Figures Who Pursue Policies Unfavorable to China

China’s Party-state pressures sitting officials and other political figures in foreign countries to avoid policies it regards as unfavorable to its interests. This pressure may take the form of attacking foreign political figures’ reputations, threatening their family members, or retaliating for moves it disapproves of by cutting off exchanges with China. Examples in which China’s Party-state has pressured foreign political figures to change policies or positions it dislikes include the following:

- In May 2023, Canadian press reported that the Canadian Security Intelligence Service had produced an assessment two years prior finding that the MSS had targeted the family of Michael Chong, a Conservative Member of Parliament [MP] who sponsored a parliamentary measure to recognize China’s atrocities in Xinjiang as genocide.²²⁶ Suspected MSS officer Zhao Wei reportedly sought information on Mr. Chong’s relatives in Hong Kong while posted as a diplomat at the Toronto consulate.²²⁷ Canadian intelligence assessed this was “almost certainly meant to make an example of this MP and deter others from taking anti-PRC positions.”²²⁸

- In March 2023, outgoing President of the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) David Panuelo described an instance of intimidation by Chinese officials in a public letter to fellow Pacific Islands leaders warning of Beijing’s covert and coercive efforts to align the region with China instead of the United States.*²²⁹ “You can imagine my surprise when I was followed this past July in Fiji during the Pacific Islands Forum by two Chinese men; my further surprise when it was determined that they worked for the Chinese Embassy in Suva,” then President Panuelo wrote, recalling the incident.²³⁰ “To be clear: I have had direct threats against my personal safety from PRC officials acting in an official capacity.”²³¹

Incentivizing Sitting Officials to Support Policies Favorable to China

The Party-state also aggressively seeks to access and incentivize sitting officials in foreign countries to support policies that favor China, frequently relying on financial contributions distributed by its proxies to further these goals.²³² According to Mr. Mattis, wealthy individuals are a common type of proxy that work on the Party-state’s behalf to “move money quickly outside of China and ... spend that money legitimately without generating the alarm that comes with more direct state activity.”²³³ He notes that these funds can buy “access to the major political parties” and fund “platforms for pro-China voices.”²³⁴ Examples in which individuals linked to the Party-state have attempted to cultivate sitting politicians’ support for China-friendly policies through financial contributions include the following:

- In 2023, Canadian media reported that the Canadian Security Intelligence Service had uncovered evidence a decade prior of a Chinese state-backed plot to improperly influence then Liberal Party leader Justin Trudeau by directing a wealthy individual to donate to organizations affiliated with his father, former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau.²³⁵ According to the *Globe and Mail*, the intelligence service intercepted a 2014 conversation between a Chinese consular official and Canada-based billionaire Zhang Bin in which the official instructed Mr. Zhang to donate \$1 million to the Trudeau Foundation and told him the Chinese government would reimburse him for the entire amount.²³⁶ Mr. Zhang, who is a member of several major united front organizations, subsequently joined with another wealthy Chinese businessman to donate \$1 million to the Trudeau Foundation and the University of Montreal in 2015, where the elder Trudeau had studied and later taught.²³⁷ The office of current Prime Minister Justin Trudeau stated that he was unaware of Mr. Zhang’s donation and had ceased involvement with the Trudeau Foundation upon becoming leader of the Liberal Party in 2013, two years prior to the donation.²³⁸
- In 2022, UK intelligence service MI5 issued a rare “interference alert” alleging that British-Chinese lawyer Christine Ching Kui

*During his presidency, Panuelo authored several letters critical of Beijing. Cleo Paskal, “Micronesia’s President Writes Bombshell Letter on China’s ‘Political Warfare,’” *Diplomat*, March 10, 2023.

Lee was “knowingly engaged in political interference activities on behalf of the United Front Work Department (UFWD) of the Chinese Communist party.”²³⁹ The alert stated that Ms. Lee was “engaged in the facilitation of financial donations to political parties, Parliamentarians, aspiring Parliamentarians and individuals seeking political office in the UK” on behalf of individuals based in China and Hong Kong in “covert coordination with the UFWD.”²⁴⁰ It warned anyone in contact with Ms. Lee to be “mindful of her affiliation with the Chinese state and remit to advance the CCP’s agenda in UK politics.”²⁴¹ A *Guardian* report found that Ms. Lee’s law firm had made donations to UK political figures totaling \$926,349 (£675,586), \$801,011 (£584,177) of which were “donations in kind” to the office of Labor member of Parliament and former shadow cabinet member Barry Gardiner.²⁴² Ms. Lee is known to be a member of the China Overseas Friendship Association* and the CPPCC, both of which are involved in united front work.²⁴³

China’s Harmful Economic Influence Activities

There are two key features of the Party-state’s united front strategy discussed below: the use of influence operations to advance China’s economic interests in other countries and the use of economic actors to exert influence over foreign countries in order to shape policies that suit Beijing.²⁴⁴ Chinese firms’ pervasive and systematic efforts to “capture” elites† for the purpose of achieving China’s foreign investment objectives degrade the international business environment, making it harder for firms not aligned with Beijing’s agenda to compete. These economic influence activities also deepen other countries’ dependence on China, create debt sustainability concerns, and cause harm to local populations and environments. More broadly, Beijing attempts to co-opt local organizations or establish organizations it presents as being local or joint but that actually represent its views. While such activities may not be as harmful to the international business environment and local economies as China’s elite capture, they nonetheless present a challenge for officials to identify the presence and extent of China’s foreign influence on economic policymaking.

Elite Capture Fuels Corruption and Builds Market Share for Chinese Companies

A major aspect of China’s overseas economic influence activities involves capturing foreign elites through bribery or other forms of

*The China Overseas Friendship Association is an important platform through which the UFWD co-opts and interacts with overseas united front figures. According to Mr. Joske, the association operates “like bureau-level organs of the UFWD” and has chapters around the world. Alex Joske, “The Party Speaks for You: Foreign Interference and the Chinese Communist Party’s United Front System,” *Australian Strategic Policy Institute*, 2020, 7, 12, 44; *Xinhua*, “CCP Central Committee Issues Regulations on CCP United Front Work” (中共中央印发中国共产党统一战线工作条例), September 22, 2015. Translation.

†Elite capture is a form of corruption in which public officials and national elites manage or direct government projects in a manner that enables them to misdirect resources for their own personal financial gain to the detriment of the public. Chinese influence creates a system of incentives whereby those in positions of power choose and implement policy outcomes advantageous to China but likely detrimental to public welfare because the elites will also be enriched through the outcome. *International Republican Institute*, “A World Safe for the Party China’s Authoritarian Influence and the Democratic Response: Country Case Studies from Nepal, Kenya, Montenegro, Panama, Georgia and Greece,” 2021, iii.

personal enrichment. These actions often aim to secure contracts for national projects for Chinese companies, even when the excessive cost of those contracts, the companies' poor credentials, stated rationale for those projects, or overall impact of those projects on a country's finances clearly contravene the public interest.²⁴⁵ As Ms. Dearing Scott noted in her testimony, BRI-related infrastructure financing and domestic plans for large public infrastructure projects frequently create opportunities for corruption as well as lucrative deals and greater market access for Chinese companies.²⁴⁶ Beijing's BRI projects take particular advantage of countries in which corruption is rampant and democratic institutions are weak, effectively fueling greater corruption and crony capitalism.²⁴⁷ (for more information on the status of BRI implementation, see U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Chapter 1, Section 1, "U.S.-China Bilateral and China's External Economic and Trade Relations.") Cases of elite capture are individually egregious but also are part of a larger pattern of China's economic influence.²⁴⁸ While examples of China's efforts to foster corruption in foreign countries to benefit the Party-state's interests are extensive, select examples demonstrating the Party's tactics include the following:

- Sinohydro, a Chinese state-owned hydropower engineering and construction company, allegedly paid \$76 million in bribes to Ecuadorian government officials during the bidding process and construction of the Coca Codo Sinclair hydroelectric plant, the largest hydroelectric dam project in Ecuadorian history.²⁴⁹ This infusion of bribes undermined Ecuador's government institutions and resulted in a deal that made China money but has not proven environmentally or economically fruitful for Ecuador.²⁵⁰ The dam cost more than \$2.2 billion, was built near an active volcano despite warnings by geologists that it could collapse, and now only operates at half capacity due to the strain it puts on the country's electrical grid.²⁵¹ In March 2023, Ecuadorian prosecutors charged 37 people—including a former president and a former Chinese ambassador to Ecuador—with accepting bribes between 2009 and 2018.²⁵² Ecuador's former electricity minister and the former anticorruption official monitoring the project were also sentenced on bribery charges.²⁵³
- Patrick Ho, the former head of an NGO backed by Chinese energy conglomerate CEFC China, attempted to bribe top officials in Chad and Uganda in exchange for business advantages, including valuable oil rights.*²⁵⁴ The NGO Mr. Ho oversaw was partly based in Arlington, Virginia, was registered as a charitable entity in the United States, and held "Special Consultative Status" with the UN Economic and Social Council.²⁵⁵ Mr. Ho was convicted in 2018 of violations under the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (FCPA), sentenced to 36 months in prison, fined \$400,000, and deported to Hong Kong upon his release.²⁵⁶

*According to the U.S. Department of Justice, "CEFC China is a Shanghai-based multibillion-dollar conglomerate that operates internationally in multiple sectors, including oil, gas, and banking." U.S. Department of Justice, *Former Head of Organization Backed by Chinese Energy Conglomerate Sentenced to Three Years in Prison for International Bribery and Money Laundering Offenses*, March 25, 2019.

- In 2018, the son of a Nepali political adviser reportedly pushed for a contract to be awarded to Huawei subsidiary China Communications Services (CCS) to build a videoconferencing facility within the prime minister's office in return for financial compensation.²⁵⁷ The project was ultimately canceled after it attracted the scrutiny of Nepal's anticorruption commission, which found that the son of the president's chief political advisor had received payment and visited Huawei's headquarters while in China.²⁵⁸ While the project was eventually canceled, initial concerns from security experts regarding the cybersecurity risks of embedding Huawei technology into government communications systems were ignored, as were concerns about the government favoring a Chinese company over Nepal Telecom, which could have also built the facility.²⁵⁹ Despite the failure of the project, Beijing continues to seek advantageous relations with the Nepali government and empower pro-China political parties in the country.²⁶⁰

China Cultivates Foreign Constituencies to Support Favorable Economic Policies

A distinctive aspect of China's approach to overseas influence activities is the fact that the CCP and its united front proxies cultivate constituencies in foreign countries who lobby for Beijing's preferred economic policies even as they represent their private interests. The reliance of particular groups or industries on trade or exchanges with China, and their ability to advocate for their interests to national-level policymakers, represents a point of leverage that Chinese leaders recognize as a means of influencing economic policies.²⁶¹ United front-linked industry associations and fora facilitating outreach to government officials work to establish coalitions of local businesses that can advocate for China's policy preferences.²⁶² The Chinese organizations' role in the process may distort policymaking, as they often try to disguise their activities as organic, grassroots initiatives.²⁶³ In fact, these united front activities are sanctioned by the Chinese government and conducted via organizations with ties to key economic agencies that may seek to steer both Chinese business engagement in the country and local business toward fulfilling Chinese policy objectives.²⁶⁴ These objectives may include decisions to remove tariffs or to boost imports China depends on for food security, such as soybeans and beef.²⁶⁵ Examples of Chinese entities' efforts to cultivate domestic constituencies that further Beijing's economic agenda include:

- Chinese companies' efforts to increase trade in agricultural and mineral commodities with Brazil through engagement in the China-Brazil Business Council (CEBC), an organization with ties to China's united front that describes itself as committed to "improving the trade and investment environment between the countries."²⁶⁶ The CEBC has branches in Brazil and in China—with the latter supervised by China's Ministry of Commerce, ensuring the organization is representing the official views and policies of the government—and is part of the united front-linked China Council for the Promotion of International Investment (CCIIP).²⁶⁷ CCIIP is one of the oldest of the gov-

ernment-approved “civil society organizations,” often referred to as “people’s organizations,” administered by China’s Ministry of Civil Affairs.²⁶⁸ These organizations are specifically tasked with carrying out elements of government policy. Ms. Dearing Scott testified before the Commission that the CEBC “has become an important tool for defending Chinese interests in Brazil” and noted that the organization advocates for views held by the CCP and policies favorable to China.²⁶⁹ For example, in a 2020 report, the CEBC suggested that China has implemented most of the commitments it made at the time it acceded to the WTO, a claim the Commission determined to be false in its 2022 Annual Report to Congress.²⁷⁰ The CEBC report also warns against limiting Huawei’s participation in 5G and suggests this would hamper critical partnerships with other high-technology Chinese companies.²⁷¹ Instead, the CEBC report recommends Brazil pursue a long-term strategy toward China that deepens engagement between the two countries and avoids the supposed missteps of U.S. economic policy toward China.*²⁷² The CEBC also hosts fora that bring Chinese and Brazilian government officials together to discuss expanded trade and investment, such as a November 2021 virtual forum on China-Brazil cooperation in agricultural biotechnology geared toward increasing Brazilian agricultural exports to China, which included Ambassador Yang Wanming and president of the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences Wu Kongming.²⁷³

- CCP-linked entities’ engagement with the United States Heartland China Association (USHCA), a U.S. nonprofit organization focused on agriculture that describes itself as “committed to building bridges and promoting opportunities between the peoples of the Heartland region [of the United States]... and the People’s Republic of China.”²⁷⁴ USHCA has partnered with the Chinese Embassy, the united front-linked Chinese People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC), and the united front-linked China-United States Exchange Foundation (CUSEF) to hold various gatherings and events, often providing a platform for the promotion of official Chinese views on agricultural trade and exchange.†²⁷⁵ USHCA also engages with subnational leaders who can influence agricultural trade policy in key U.S. states.²⁷⁶
- CCP-linked entities’ engagement with U.S. governors to facilitate trade and investment through the U.S.-China Governors Forum, which was established in 2011 but became defunct after the U.S. Department of State withdrew in 2021, citing foreign influence concerns.²⁷⁷ CPAFFC, a key organization in China’s

*The author of the CEBC’s 2020 report became Brazil’s secretary for international affairs at the Ministry of Finance in 2023, demonstrating the organization’s ties to influential members of Brazil’s government. *Wilson Center*, “U.S.-Brazil Economic Relations: New Opportunities for Trade and Investment,” March 22, 2023.

† In 2023, Luan Richeng, the CEO of state-owned grain company COFCO, delivered remarks at USCHA’s third annual Agriculture Roundtable in which he thanked Chinese government entities, including CPAFFC, for their help in facilitating the event and U.S.-China agricultural cooperation more broadly. In his remarks, Mr. Luan insinuated that U.S. policies, which he described as “anti-globalization policies,” have created greater vulnerabilities in global food supply chains. United States Heartland China Association, “Luan Richeng Remarks @USHCA 3rd Annual Agriculture Roundtable 2023,” *YouTube*, May 9, 2023.

united front network, co-organized the forum with the U.S. National Governors Association and together hosted Xi at the 2015 gathering as well as other high-ranking Chinese government officials in the following years.²⁷⁸ Addressing an audience gathered in Kentucky at the 2019 U.S.-China Governors Forum, then Chinese Ambassador to the United States Cui Tiankai noted the impact of the Trump Administration's tariffs on U.S. states and urged attendees "to pay serious attention to this, and not let some ill-informed, ill-intentioned people incite a 'new Cold War' at the expense of the people's interests."²⁷⁹ The warning was clearly intended to rally U.S. officials against the tariffs and echoed a 2018 remark by the spokesperson of the Chinese Ministry of Commerce, who called on U.S. companies importing Chinese goods to "do more to lobby the U.S. government and work hard to safeguard their own interests."²⁸⁰ Ambassador Cui also praised Kentucky, saying he always finds "true friendship, not groundless suspicions" there, and thanked the state's governor and CPAFFC for hosting the event.²⁸¹

China's Harmful Academic Influence Activities

The CCP seeks to aggressively influence research at foreign universities and think tanks.²⁸² Glenn Tiffert, a research fellow at the Hoover Institution, testified before the Commission that the CCP and affiliated actors "employ a range of overt and covert methods to manipulate the ecosystem of knowledge, the flows of information, and the source bases that inform decisionmakers and public opinion around the globe," heavily targeting academia in these efforts.²⁸³ The surveillance and intimidation of campus community members, the censorship of China-related publications and databases, and the encouragement of financial- and human capital-related dependencies on China within foreign universities and think tanks are three tactics that exemplify Beijing's efforts to take advantage of and control foreign academic discourse.

CCP Surveillance and Intimidation Undermine Academic Freedom, Student Safety

The CCP uses a variety of coercive measures to influence how members of the campus community discuss China-related issues and to deter potential critics from freely expressing themselves.²⁸⁴ One of these measures is the surveillance of Chinese students and others by Chinese diplomats and networks of informants on campus, which induces self-censorship.²⁸⁵ Campus informants are sometimes, but not always, linked to student groups that receive funding from the Chinese government, such as the Chinese Students and Scholars Association (CSSA).²⁸⁶ Another type of coercive activity involves Chinese diplomats and individual Chinese students who employ intimidating modes of conversation, make explicit threats, or otherwise harass faculty, other students, or university administrators for a view they hold or activity they undertake that contradicts Party orthodoxy.²⁸⁷ According to Dr. Tiffert, state-sponsored surveillance and intimidation "creates an atmosphere of fear, impairs the ability of PRC students to enjoy equal access to the privileges and benefits of the US education for which they are generally paying

full freight, and starves our campuses of the full range of ideas and perspectives that Chinese students can contribute to our classrooms, affecting the education that everyone receives.”²⁸⁸ A third type of coercive measure involves efforts to heckle, disrupt, or cancel speakers or events on campus that criticize or diverge from the Party’s orthodoxy—activities that clearly undermine academic freedom.²⁸⁹ Examples of campus intimidation or disruptions intended to deter or punish criticism of the CCP include the following:

- In 2022, the CSSA at George Washington University complained to university leadership about the appearance of posters on campus designed by Chinese-Australian artist Badiucuo criticizing China’s human rights abuses ahead of the 2022 Olympics in Beijing.²⁹⁰ The CSSA’s complaint alleged that the posters reflected racism toward Chinese students, constituted a “naked attack on the Chinese nation,” and called for those who had put up the posters to be “severely” punished, prompting the university to announce that it would remove the posters.²⁹¹ The university president ultimately reversed the decision after learning that the posters in question were a critique of Chinese government policies, citing the need to protect freedom of speech on campus and promising that the students who originally put up the posters would not be punished.²⁹²
- A 2021 investigation by Human Rights Watch found that pro-democracy students from mainland China and Hong Kong at Australian universities were threatened by some of their classmates with physical violence, claims they would be reported to Chinese authorities, or doxxing* online.²⁹³
- In 2020, an online panel at Brandeis University discussing China’s treatment of Muslim Uyghurs was “Zoombombed” by online participants who scrawled profanities on one of the presenter’s slides and played China’s national anthem to drown out her voice.²⁹⁴ Prior to the event, the Brandeis CSSA organized a campaign on WeChat calling for the cancelation of the panel, an entreaty that university administrators ignored.²⁹⁵

Manipulating the “Source Base” of Foreign Knowledge about China

The CCP regularly censors authoritative sources of China-related knowledge in order to distort the types of conclusions foreigners can draw about the country from publicly available information.²⁹⁶ This practice is evident in the systematic deletion from Chinese academic databases of articles touching on topics the CCP regards as sensitive or as challenging Party orthodoxy; it is also evident in the reduction of foreigners’ access to such databases.²⁹⁷ Similarly, articles published jointly by Western and Chinese academic presses are often unilaterally edited by the PRC side to comport with the CCP’s political preferences, and they may revise map and place names to confer legitimacy on Chinese territorial claims.²⁹⁸ The CCP has also

*“Doxxing” is the intentional revelation of a person’s private information online without their consent, often with malicious intent. This includes sharing phone numbers, home addresses, identification numbers, and any sensitive and previously private information such as personal photos that could make the victim identifiable and potentially exposed to further harassment. Sen Nguyen, “What Is Doxxing and What Can You Do If You Are Doxxed?” *CNN*, February 7, 2023.

considerably restricted the participation of Chinese academics and scientists in international conferences, depriving foreign audiences of access to a diversity of perspectives and providing grounds for the Party to dismiss academic assessments that challenge its official positions as “ill-informed” attacks on China.²⁹⁹ “By tampering with the source base we use in ways that are invisible to the end user or difficult to detect,” Dr. Tiffert observes, “these measures corrupt our scholarship and hijack our tongues with the aim of enlisting them to inadvertently propagate official narratives.”³⁰⁰ Examples of China’s censorship of the “source base” include the following:

- In July 2023, regulations on China’s genetic databases went into effect, providing the government with additional oversight of the country’s vast biobanks* while restricting foreign countries’ access.³⁰¹ While the United States and other countries maintain an open environment for sharing scientific discoveries and data, China continues to resist reciprocity in this area.³⁰² As Anna Puglisi, director of biotechnology programs at Georgetown’s Center for Security and Emerging Technology, noted in testimony before the Commission, the Chinese government is “not adhering to the global norms of collaboration” by restricting the export of its own genomic data.³⁰³
- In March 2023, the Chinese government announced new restrictions on international access to the China National Knowledge Infrastructure Database (CNKI),† the academic database most heavily used by foreign scholars of China.³⁰⁴ According to notices sent to foreign universities and libraries that subscribe to CNKI, access to four databases containing PhD dissertations and masters theses, conference proceedings, the National Population Census of China, and statistical yearbooks was temporarily suspended as of April 1 pending “regulatory review” of CNKI’s cross-border services.³⁰⁵ The move followed a June 2022 announcement by the Cyberspace Administration of China that CNKI would undergo a “cybersecurity review” for the stated purpose of “preventing national data security risks, maintaining national security and protecting the public interest,” a measure foreign observers assessed would lead to the removal of many valuable sources from CNKI.³⁰⁶
- In March 2022, Chinese security services prevented at least five Chinese scholars based in the PRC from virtually attending the annual gathering of the Association for Asian Studies, one of the most important international conferences for scholars in the Asian studies field.³⁰⁷

* Biobanks are collections of human biological samples linked to personal genetic and health information. Laura Annaratone et al., “Basic Principles of Biobanking: From Biological Samples to Precision Medicine for Patients,” *Virchows Archiv: An International Journal of Pathology* 479:2 (2021): 233–246.

† CNKI is a multidisciplinary database of over 8,500 periodic titles published in China that hosts about 95 percent of all academic literature written in Chinese as well as government reports and yearbooks with key statistical datasets such as yearly census numbers by city and province, economic data, and health data. As Ruby MacDougall, an analyst at Ithaka S+R, observes, “Scholars from across disciplines who work on China regularly turn to CNKI journals and datasets for research, and unrestricted access to information contained in CNKI is widely viewed as a crucial tool for sustaining a deep understanding of China.” Ruby MacDougall, “Reflecting on Restricted Access to a Chinese Research Lifeline,” *Ithaka S+R*, April 25, 2023.

- In late 2020 or early 2021, verdicts and other judicial decisions began disappearing from China Judgments Online, a web portal-based database run by China's Supreme People's Court that had provided foreign legal scholars with some insight into the country's judicial system since 2013.³⁰⁸
- In 2019, two professors at the University of Otago in New Zealand discovered that their Chinese press partner had censored one of the essays in the special issue submitted to the journal *Frontiers of Literary Studies in China*, which is jointly published by the Netherlands-based company Brill and Higher Education Press, an organization subordinate to China's Ministry of Education.³⁰⁹

Chinese Funding of Foreign Universities and Think Tanks May Influence Research Activities

Foreign universities and think tanks' dependence on Chinese sources for funds may undermine the academic freedom, integrity, and activities of these institutions.³¹⁰ For example, funding provided by China-based partners in the form of donations, grants, research partnerships, and agreements to establish Confucius Institutes with universities and think tanks has raised concerns in the United States* and elsewhere that the arrangements could disincentivize rigorous or critical research about China, especially when the Chinese partners are companies or universities with close ties to the CCP.³¹¹ U.S. institutions of higher education frequently accept gifts, donations, and contracts from China, and despite federal requirements to disclose† to the U.S. Department of Education any foreign gifts or contracts that exceed \$250,000, noncompliance is widespread.³¹² A 2020 report by the Department of Education found that in 2020 alone, colleges and universities retroactively reported more than \$6.5 billion in foreign funding, including from China.³¹³ The fact that universities often retroactively disclose foreign funding complicates efforts to ascertain the full amount of funding received from China in a given year, meaning the total number of China-origin gifts and contracts U.S. universities receive likely exceeds that reflected in publicly available data. For example, between January and halfway through October 2022, U.S. universities and colleges reported \$31.8 million from China, but this number may increase as additional gifts and contracts are retroactively reported in the coming months and years.³¹⁴ Examples in which foreign academic institutions' acceptance of Chinese funding either plausibly

* Policymakers and analysts in the United States have expressed concerns about the lack of transparency surrounding these donations, the dependencies on China they create, and the fact that some of the Chinese entities that have provided funding are on the U.S. Department of Defense's Communist Chinese Military Companies (CCMC) List or the U.S. Department of Commerce's Military End-User List. A *Bloomberg* analysis of data collected by the U.S. Department of Education between 2013 and 2020 concluded that 115 U.S. colleges received almost a billion dollars in gifts and contracts from Chinese sources during this period. Daniel Currell, "Foreign Money in U.S. Universities, Part VI — A Guided Tour of Chinese Money in U.S. Universities," *National Security Institute*, October 6, 2021; Janet Lorin and Brandon Kochkodin, "Harvard Leads U.S. Colleges That Received \$1 Billion from China," *Bloomberg*, February 6, 2020.

† Section 117 of the Higher Education Act of 1965 requires universities and colleges that receive federal financial assistance to disclose to the U.S. Department of Education contracts with or gifts from a foreign entity. The threshold for reporting is currently \$250,000 or more in one calendar year. U.S. Department of Education Office of Federal Student Aid, *Section 117 Foreign Gift and Contract Reporting*, 2023.

influenced their operations or created the risk of improper influence in the future include the following:

- In 2023, University of California Berkeley failed to report a \$220 million investment from the Chinese city of Shenzhen's municipal government.³¹⁵ The money was intended to finance a research campus in China.³¹⁶ Berkeley's partnership with the Shenzhen municipal government was announced in 2018 but was not reported despite the Department of Education's requirement to disclose foreign gifts or contracts within six months of signing a deal and the university's own policy of protecting academic freedom and U.S. national security.³¹⁷ According to media reporting, after the contract was signed, "Berkeley researchers granted Chinese officials private tours of their cutting-edge U.S. semiconductor facilities and gave 'priority commercialization rights' for intellectual properties they produced to Chinese government-backed funds."³¹⁸
- In 2021, a professor at the University of Cambridge who directs one of its colleges' China-focused research centers reportedly advised colleagues to avoid discussing contentious issues on China's human rights record so as not to be seen as "campaigning... for freedom for Hong Kong, [or] freedom for the Uyghurs."³¹⁹ According to the British newspaper *Sunday Times*, this professor's position was funded by a £3.7 million (\$4.6 million) donation to the university from the Chong Hua foundation, a trust allegedly controlled by the daughter of former Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao.³²⁰ The professor also reportedly sat on the board of China International Capital Corporation, a Chinese investment bank that is partially state owned.³²¹
- In 2020, media reports revealed that Vrije Universiteit, the Netherlands' fourth-largest university, had accepted hundreds of millions of euros' worth of funding from a Chinese university to support its Cross Cultural Human Rights Center, which espoused views on China's treatment of Uyghurs and human rights record effectively echoing those of the Chinese government.³²² One post on the center's website, for example, stated that several of its Dutch academics had visited Xinjiang and concluded that there was "definitely no discrimination of Uyghurs or other minorities in the region."³²³ Following a public outcry and a statement from the Netherlands' education minister expressing concerns about academic freedom, Vrije Universiteit announced that it would refuse further funding from the Chinese university and repay any money it had received.³²⁴

Some universities have decided to forgo Chinese funding to protect academic freedom, however. In 2023, Friedrich Alexander University of Erlangen Nuremberg (FAU), one of Germany's largest universities, suspended its collaboration with students funded by the China Scholarship Council (CSC), a Chinese-government backed organization that administers study abroad programs for Chinese nationals, including students sponsored by institutions tied to China's military, defense industry conglomerates, and other government agencies to

study scientific disciplines relevant to defense modernization.*³²⁵ The FAU executive committee expressed concerns with the contract CSC students are required by the Chinese government to sign prior to their studies in Germany, which includes a pledge to remain in communication with the Chinese embassy, maintain allegiance to the Party, and return to China after completing their scholarship.³²⁶ The executive committee explained that “under these contracts CSC scholarship holders will be unable to fully exercise their academic freedom and freedom of expression as stipulated under the Germany Basic Law.”³²⁷

Implications for the United States

China’s brazen, egregious, and increasingly aggressive overseas influence activities present a diverse set of risks to the United States and fellow liberal democracies.³²⁸ At the same time, they create opportunities for Congress to strengthen U.S. institutions, work closely with other countries that face similar challenges, and develop mitigation efforts that other democracies around the world can emulate.³²⁹ Many of the Party-state’s attempts to influence political and social life in the United States as well as allied and partner countries have been exposed by media reporting or disrupted by law enforcement, suggesting that democratic countries have the capacity to cope with many of these challenges, even if further public scrutiny, new laws, and more robust safeguards against coercion are required.³³⁰

First, China’s overseas influence activities challenge U.S. national security as well as international conventions and norms. The Party-state’s efforts to unduly influence elections by flooding social media with divisive and false content threaten the integrity of the U.S. political system and its decision-making processes.³³¹ There is no public evidence that Beijing has funded networks of candidates to win races in the United States, but recent allegations of such activity in Canada suggest that heightened vigilance around future U.S. elections is warranted.³³² Similarly, the Party-state’s attempts to influence every level of government raise legitimate questions about

*The China Scholarship Council (CSC) describes itself as a nonprofit organization affiliated with China’s Ministry of Education that administers a variety of study abroad funds and programs for Chinese nationals, including some designed to cultivate human talent for China’s industrial and defense aims. The CSC’s website indicates that its advisory board includes ten ministries and academies, at least eight of which are known to be involved in talent recruitment or technology transfer activities. One of its programs, the National Study Abroad Fund, requires recipients to study scientific fields prioritized by the state, support the CCP’s leadership, and return to China for a two-year work commitment. Another CSC scholarship, the National Government-Sponsored Graduate Student Program for the Building of Top Universities, targets doctoral students who are already affiliated with universities belonging to China’s military-industrial complex. Like the National Study Abroad Fund, this scholarship requires political loyalty and a two-year service commitment upon returning to China but also emphasizes that applicants must secure admission to well-known universities in technologically advanced countries. The list of “accepting units” approved to solicit and sponsor applications on the scholarship’s behalf includes a host of institutions tied to China’s military, defense industry conglomerates, state-owned enterprises, and other government agencies. A final CSC scholarship, the National Government-Sponsored Program for Senior Research Scholars, Visiting Scholars, and Postdoctoral Students, targets S&T researchers who are advanced in their careers and already work for an employer linked to the Chinese government, like state-owned enterprises. This scholarship’s 2020 selection guidelines indicate that recipients must follow the study plan agreed upon with their employer, regularly submit “training reports” on their progress to the Chinese consulate while abroad, and communicate the results of their study upon returning home. For more, see Anastasya Lloyd-Damjanovic and Alexander Bowe, “Overseas Chinese Students and Scholars in China’s Drive for Innovation,” *U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission*, October 7, 2020, 12–13.

whether state and local leaders have the knowledge, support, and resources they need to properly evaluate outreach from China. China's deliberate integration of united front work with the activities of its security services also means united front activities may conceal dangerous espionage and harassment.³³³

Second, China's overseas influence activities often violate U.S. law and threaten the civil liberties of U.S. persons* and others wishing to exercise their rights freely within the United States. The Party-state's surveillance and intimidation of U.S. persons and others has impacted freedom of speech, freedom of political association, and social trust.³³⁴ At the same time, the Party-state frames U.S. government and law enforcement responses to its overseas influence activities as racist. Given the Party-state's weaponization of race, an effective policy approach should avoid alarmist rhetoric, clearly establish the involvement of the Party-state in harmful activities, and take steps to protect people of Asian descent from unwarranted political suspicion and violence.³³⁵

Third, China's economic influence undermines the integrity of global markets and U.S. policymaking. Elite capture and other influence activities in foreign markets could create a tilted playing field, encouraging foreign governments and businesses to favor Chinese companies in awarding contracts, for instance. In cultivating deep ties to state and municipal governments, Chinese united front organizations may also effectively build constituencies that advocate for policy choices favored by the CCP, without a clear connection to China. Additionally, Chinese companies may seek to establish deals with key U.S. firms that align the commercial objectives of U.S. industry with the strategic objectives of the CCP. This places U.S. policymakers in the difficult position of evaluating whether U.S. firms are making investment decisions and supporting policies that privilege their short-term business interests at the expense of U.S. competitiveness, supply chain security, and national security more broadly.

Finally, China's overseas influence activities endanger the independence of media and academic institutions that U.S. policymakers rely on to make sound foreign policy decisions. The Party-state's efforts to covertly manipulate research and publications by universities, think tanks, and media organizations is prompting self-censorship by institutions meant to provide transparency and fora for public debate.³³⁶ In addition to grappling with Beijing's assault on the "knowledge base," U.S. policymakers face substantial limitations in the data available to establish the extent of some institutions' dependencies on entities connected with the Party-state. For example, it remains difficult to grasp the full extent of China-origin donations to U.S. universities even though such disclosures are required under section 117 of the Higher Education Act, partly because universities' compliance with the law is uneven, partly because entities' ties to the Party-state are not always obvious, and partly because the Federal Government does not make this information public in an accessible format.³³⁷

*U.S. Code defines a "United States person" as "any U.S. citizen or alien admitted for permanent residence in the United States, and any corporation, partnership, or other organization organized under the laws of the United States," Cornell Law School, "22 U.S. Code §6010—'United States person' defined."

Without greater transparency, U.S. policymakers will struggle to formulate policies that appropriately gauge and mitigate the risks stemming from China's overseas influence activities in the academic and media spheres.

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