

SECTION 2: YEAR IN REVIEW: SECURITY, POLITICS, AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Key Findings

- In 2019, Beijing declared in unambiguous terms its intent to revise and reorder the international system in ways more befitting its national interests and repressive vision of governance. In a series of national addresses, Chinese leaders suggested the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) viewed its “historic mission” as being not only to govern China, but also to profoundly influence global governance. The CCP took new steps to promote itself abroad as a model worthy of emulation, casting its political system and approach to economic development as superior alternatives to that of the United States and other democratic countries.
- Chinese leaders took a more strident tone in their discussion of military affairs, reinforcing a sense of urgency in the People’s Liberation Army’s (PLA) preparations for a potential military conflict while indicating Beijing’s intent to position the PLA as a globally-oriented military force. General Secretary of the CCP Xi Jinping urged the PLA to make preparations for a possible conflict with the “powerful enemy adversary”—a phrase the CCP uses to refer to the United States—central to its modernization and training efforts.
- Despite signs of outward confidence, CCP leadership also revealed a growing unease over the mounting external resistance to its ambitions, which it viewed as threatening its objectives abroad and rule at home. In response to these challenges, the CCP deepened its control over the Chinese government and Chinese society and stepped up an ideological and nationalistic messaging campaign instructing key groups to “win the ideological war” against Western and other democratic countries.
- China continued its efforts to coerce or interfere in the domestic affairs of countries acting in ways contrary to its interests, detaining foreign citizens and carrying out an extensive influence campaign targeting foreign universities, media, and the Chinese diaspora. Beijing also expanded its global promotion of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), increasing military cooperation and exporting its censorship and surveillance technologies to countries under BRI auspices.
- In the Indo-Pacific region, China made new use of “gray zone” activities and military intimidation of its neighbors to secure its expansive sovereignty claims. Military tensions between China and Japan persisted in the East China Sea despite attempts by both countries to reset bilateral relations, while an annual poll

of respondents in Southeast Asian countries found that fewer than one in ten saw China's regional influence as benign.

- The U.S.-China relationship grew markedly more confrontational as tensions increased over political, economic, and security issues and polls reflected a significant drop in the U.S. public's favorability toward China. Chinese leaders showed few signs of willingness to compromise on issues raised by Washington.

Introduction

In 2019, Beijing took new steps to advance the aggressive approach to foreign and security policy it has taken in recent years in the Indo-Pacific region and around the globe. Over the past year, the CCP promoted itself abroad as a model worthy of emulation, casting its political system and approach to economic development as superior alternatives to that of the United States and other democratic countries.¹ Meanwhile, Beijing used its growing economic and political clout in a campaign that increasingly extended beyond the Indo-Pacific region to silence criticism of the CCP and coerce other countries into conforming to Beijing's wishes.

Against the backdrop of deepening tensions over trade and technology with the United States and other countries, China made efforts to assuage foreign concerns over its diplomatic, economic, and military ambitions, although it gave little indication it was willing to alter the essential features of its policy. In the Indo-Pacific region, Beijing used displays of military force to intimidate its neighbors while continuing its military build-up and issuing new calls to improve military readiness, including for a possible conflict involving the United States.² In response to new challenges in China's political and security environment, the CCP reinforced ideological and nationalistic messaging as it prepared the population for a protracted, multidecade confrontation with Washington and its allies over divergent views of security issues and political and economic systems.

This section begins by examining Beijing's actions in 2019 to promote itself as a global political and economic leader, improve its military readiness, and coerce or interfere in the domestic affairs of countries acting in ways contrary to its interests. It then assesses China's attempts to strengthen its foreign relations around the globe and advance its sovereignty claims in the East China Sea, South China Sea, and along the Indian border. The section concludes with an examination of new areas of competition and attempts at cooperation in the U.S.-China relationship. This section is based on Commission hearings and briefings, the Commission's May 2019 fact-finding trip to the Indo-Pacific, discussions with outside experts, and open source research and analysis.

A Year of Both Success and Setback

In 2019, Beijing declared in unambiguous terms its intent to revise and reorder the international system in ways it believes are more befitting its national interests. Repeating language introduced at the CCP's 19th National Congress in 2017, General Secretary Xi and other top Chinese leaders reaffirmed China's view of itself as "moving closer to the world's center stage" and offering a new

“Chinese plan” to solve global challenges.³ At the National People’s Congress held in March 2019, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang spoke in stronger language than he had previously at the annual assembly, declaring China would “actively participate in the reform and improvement of the global governance system ... and push forward the building of a ‘community of common human destiny’”—the latter a formulation the CCP has used with increasing frequency to refer to what appears to be its vision for a global order revised to Beijing’s advantage.*⁴ Premier Li used more passive language in his address to the assembly in March 2018, for instance, stating only that China had “called for ... and stands ready to work with other countries to build a community of common human destiny.”⁵

Other Chinese leaders used even clearer terms to describe China’s aspirations to play a global leadership role. In an article published in the influential Party journal *Qiushi* (*Seeking Truth*) in September 2019, Chinese Politburo member and top diplomat Yang Jiechi described a central aim of China’s foreign policy since 2012 as having been to “lead and shape” changes to the global governance system.⁶ This language matched General Secretary Xi’s claim in 2018 that China would “lead” changes to global governance rather than merely participate in these changes.⁷ Over the past year, China applied its formulation for a revised international order to its relations with regions around the world, calling for the construction of “communities of common destiny” encompassing Asia,⁸ Latin America and the Caribbean,⁹ Africa,¹⁰ space,¹¹ and cyberspace.¹² Central to Beijing’s ambition is the CCP’s view that the world is currently undergoing epochal changes “not seen in a century,” driven in large part by China’s own actions, which require Chinese leaders to play an active role in leading and shaping these changes.¹³

As part of its vision for a revised world order, Beijing reaffirmed its desire to gain wider international acceptance of China’s authoritarian political system and development model, especially as embodied in its BRI. Beijing has identified BRI as its model for the construction of a new international order, with General Secretary Xi describing it as both a platform for economic cooperation and an “avenue ... for perfecting the global development model and global governance.”¹⁴ In April 2019, China held its second international forum on BRI, where General Secretary Xi repeated these themes and noted China had added 50 BRI signatories—including Italy, which in March became the first G7 country to sign onto the project—since holding its first BRI forum in 2017.¹⁵

But the CCP gave signs its ambition to reshape the international order transcended the expanded scope of BRI to include gaining acceptance of—and even promoting abroad—its repressive vision of governance. In a December 2018 speech commemorating 40 years

*The phrase “community of common human destiny”—alternately translated “community with a shared future for mankind”—was first used by former CCP general secretary Hu Jintao, but has been invoked with much greater frequency by current general secretary Xi Jinping. A recent state-backed study of CCP strategy published by Fudan University describes the phrase as “the contemporary Chinese Marxist cultural form of China moving toward and leading the world” and as China’s post-19th National Party Congress “global cultural strategy.” See Chen Mingming and Xiao Cunliang, eds., *The Frontiers of United Front Theory and Practice* (统一战线理论与实践前沿), Fudan University Press, December 2018, 268. Translation; Liza Tobin, “Xi’s Vision for Transforming Global Governance: A Strategic Challenge for Washington and Its Allies,” *Texas National Security Review* 2:1 (November 2018): 155.

of China's reform and opening era, General Secretary Xi suggested the CCP still views its "historic mission" as being not only to govern China, but also to profoundly influence global governance.* Reserving some of his highest praise for Karl Marx and Mao Zedong, General Secretary Xi invoked Mao's characterization of the revolutionary nature of the CCP's victory in the Chinese Civil War, repeating the judgment of the People's Republic's first supreme leader that the CCP had proven it was "good not only at destroying an old world, but now must become good at creating a new one."¹⁶ In his September 2019 *Qiushi* article, State Councilor Yang argued the CCP had provided the international community with a "profound" and uniquely Chinese vision for how to create and shape the world's future development.¹⁷ He concluded that China's vision would "radically reform" existing global concepts and come to "occupy the commanding heights of international morality and justice."¹⁸

Building a Combat-Ready and Increasingly Global Military

In 2019, Chinese civilian and military leaders took a more strident tone in their discussion of military affairs, reinforcing a sense of urgency in the PLA's preparations for a potential military conflict. On January 4, General Secretary Xi issued an order of instructions to the PLA for the second straight year, using more openly confrontational language than he did the year before.¹⁹ In his order, he instructed the PLA to prepare for a host of "risks and challenges" in the year ahead and to make improving combat readiness the primary focus of its efforts. In a notable addition, General Secretary Xi urged the force not to fear "the powerful enemy adversary"—a phrase used by the CCP to refer to the United States he had not used in his 2018 public instruction.²⁰ In a fiery speech at the Singapore-hosted Shangri-La Dialogue in June 2019, Chinese Defense Minister Wei Fenghe sounded similar warnings over China's readiness to go to war to defend its interests. Vowing the PLA would not "yield a single inch of [China's] sacred land," Defense Minister Wei decried the U.S. relationship with Taiwan and presence in the South China Sea, while quoting China's national anthem as evidence of China's resolve to "defeat all enemies": "Arise, all those who do not want to be enslaved. Let's build the new Great Wall with our flesh and blood."²¹

Meanwhile, Chinese leaders reiterated their call to build the PLA into a "world-class" military positioned to conduct combat operations both within and beyond the Indo-Pacific region. In July 2019, Beijing released a new defense white paper—the first it had issued since 2015—that included language unmistakably denoting China's intent to position the PLA as a globally-oriented military force.²² Although previous white papers had also tasked the PLA with requirements to undertake missions overseas, the new document was much more explicit in its call for the PLA to increase its overseas

* For more information on Chinese leaders' connection of the CCP's mission with global governance and development, see Wang Yi, "Take 'Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era' to Lead the Opening of New Frontiers for Chinese Diplomacy (以习近平新时代中国特色社会主义思想引领中国外交开辟新境界)," *People's Daily*, December 19, 2017. Translation; *Xinhua*, "Xi Jinping: Promote the Successful Implementation of One Belt, One Road to Benefit the People (习近平: 推动共建“一带一路”走深走实造福人民)," August 27, 2018. Translation.

military presence and shoulder global security responsibilities.* Drawing justification from its claim that China's overseas interests were endangered by a number of threats, the paper stated Beijing's intent to expand its overseas military presence and actively work to revise norms for global security governance.²³ Noting the "global significance" of China's new defense policy, the document further argued that in the face of increasing global security challenges from cybersecurity to Iran and Syria, "no country can stand aloof."²⁴ Later that month, prior to the PLA's anniversary celebration on August 1, General Secretary Xi admonished a gathering of senior civilian and military leaders to "resolutely eliminate all outdated ideological and behavioral obstacles" that could hamper the force's ability to build a world-class military and enhance its combat preparedness.²⁵ (For more information on China's military modernization and strategy for employing the PLA abroad, see Chapter 4, Section 1, "Beijing's 'World-Class' Military Goal.")

Concerns over Mounting External Challenges

Despite signs of outward confidence, the CCP also revealed a growing unease over the mounting external resistance to its ambitions, which it viewed as threatening its objectives abroad and even its stability at home. As trade tensions between China and the United States deepened, General Secretary Xi warned in his speech commemorating China's reform and opening era that the country could soon face "unimaginably stormy seas" as it made efforts to overcome a host of significant internal and external challenges.²⁶ In his address to the National People's Congress in March 2019, Premier Li described China as facing a "profound change" in its external environment that had contributed to "complex and severe situations ... rarely seen for many years."²⁷

In May, following a breakdown in trade negotiations with the United States and the addition of Chinese telecommunications company Huawei to the U.S. Entity List, General Secretary Xi made a highly-publicized inspection tour of central China. In a pair of symbolic gestures, he visited one of China's major mining and processing facilities for rare earths and a monument marking the beginning of the CCP's Long March to escape encirclement by Chinese Nationalist forces during the Chinese Civil War.[†]²⁸ During the visit, he declared that the CCP was now engaged in a "New Long March" amid intensifying, long-term challenges coming both from within

* For instance, China's 2015 defense white paper had included for the first time a mission for the PLA to protect China's "overseas interests." As early as 2006, China's defense white paper noted the PLA's responsibility to "maintain world peace," reflecting the increasingly global role then-CCP General Secretary Hu Jintao envisioned for the PLA in the "new historic missions" he assigned to the force. Still, Chinese officials regularly denied any intention to permanently station troops abroad, stating as recently as late 2012 that China had never and would not establish an overseas military base. See *Hindu*, "China Has No Plan for Indian Ocean Military Bases," September 4, 2012; China's State Council Information Office, "China's Military Strategy," May 27, 2015; China's State Council Information Office, "China's National Defense in 2006," December 29, 2006.

† During the Long March, the CCP's Red Army—the predecessor of today's PLA—undertook a series of military retreats from 1934 to 1935 to evade the Chinese Nationalist Army. The best known of these retreats began in Jiangxi Province in central China and involved a punishing journey over mountainous and remote terrain to Yan'an, a small town in northern China that became the CCP's wartime stronghold. It is estimated that only one tenth of the force that left Jiangxi arrived alive in Yan'an. The Long March, which also began the ascent of Mao Zedong to the CCP's top leadership position, remains an important CCP symbol of revolutionary determination in the face of hardship.

China and abroad. To prevail in this new struggle, he exhorted cadres to match the earlier generation's "revolutionary determination" and belief in the CCP's socialist system.²⁹ When Commissioners visited Beijing in May 2019, large electronic propaganda billboards were brightly lit around the city telling citizens to prepare for this "New Long March." Some billboards depicted PLA soldiers ready to fight, while others depicted scenes from the 1934–1935 Long March.

Beijing's perception of its security environment appeared to grow increasingly pessimistic as 2019 progressed. In June, as protests escalated over a proposed extradition bill in Hong Kong, China's vice minister of public security issued a notice to security bureaus across the country, warning "U.S. suppression' had become the greatest external factor affecting China's 'political security.'"³⁰ In September, General Secretary Xi delivered an address at the CCP's Central Party School, where he noted China's challenges were likely to become even more frequent and severe.³¹ Repeating the word "struggle" a total of 58 times, he used martial language normally reserved for his instructions to the PLA, calling on cadres to become "soldiers" able to "come at the first call, ready to fight and win."³² He further warned that the country must prepare for a wide-ranging struggle spanning the economic, political, cultural, foreign policy, and military domains which would last until at least the middle of the 21st century.³³ (For more information on China's concerns over its internal and external security environment, see Chapter 2, "China's Internal and External Challenges.")

Continued "Party-ification" and an Increasingly Rigid Ideology

To support its ambitions abroad while consolidating its rule at home, the CCP stepped up an ideological and nationalistic messaging campaign to unite its domestic population in support of CCP policy and against its perceived opponents abroad. In March 2019, following a common practice used by CCP leadership to emphasize key areas of national policy, *Qiushi* reprinted a 2013 speech by General Secretary Xi recalling the history behind the CCP's path to power and establishing ideological principles for its future endeavors.³⁴ In the speech, General Secretary Xi warned of the dangers of Westernization and argued it was "history's verdict ... [that] only socialism can save China."³⁵ Citing China's rapid economic growth, he continued that a "new type of Marxism" was now challenging the assumptions of the democratic model as the "superiority of China's socialist system inevitably becomes more apparent ... and the global influence of China's development model inevitably increases."³⁶ He concluded by declaring the fall of capitalism and triumph of socialism to be an "irreversible trend of history," while urging cadres to maintain their strategic resolve in realizing the ultimate goal of Communism.³⁷ In his May 2019 speech on China's New Long March, General Secretary Xi reiterated the importance of China maintaining confidence in its socialist system, declaring the CCP's "ideological conviction" and "revolutionary determination" would be crucial for overcoming China's internal and external challenges.³⁸

In reestablishing the primacy of ideological discipline, political rectitude, and social control, the CCP continued to deepen the "Par-

ty-ification” of the Chinese government and Chinese society.*³⁹ In practical terms, this effort included new steps to increase the CCP’s ideological influence over government bodies, media, educational institutions, private businesses, and state-owned enterprises.⁴⁰ In September 2019, the CCP Central Committee announced that discipline inspections would be carried out in 37 Party and state institutions, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the CCP’s International Liaison Department and Central Party School.⁴¹ Considering that many of the targeted government bodies play a role in foreign affairs work and national policy formulation, the move likely aimed less to address traditional corruption issues than to ensure the compliance of key institutions with CCP leadership guidelines.⁴²

The inspections also included Chinese national academies, Party schools, and media associations, constituting the latest move by the CCP to reinforce ideological discipline in key organizations impacting education and public opinion.⁴³ Also in September, the CCP Propaganda Department gave notice that approximately 10,000 reporters and editors from 14 state-run online media outlets in Beijing would be required to pass a political loyalty exam in order to receive updated press cards required to work in the industry.⁴⁴ At a March 2019 seminar in Beijing attended by teachers from across China, General Secretary Xi called on educational institutions from primary schools to universities to curb discussion of Western ideas in their classrooms and ensure that teachers spread CCP-approved content to “nurture support” for CCP rule.⁴⁵

The CCP’s moves to enhance its influence over media and public opinion included expanding its censorship of the content of films and television. In June 2019, a much-anticipated historical drama film was canceled just before its release, allegedly due to its favorable depiction of the CCP’s historical rival, the Chinese Nationalist Party, during China’s war against Japan in the 1930s.⁴⁶ Following the incident, the film company, Huayi Brothers, publicly pledged to deepen its ties to the CCP and “integrate party-building work into every aspect ... of film and TV content creation.”⁴⁷ By mid-July 2019, a total of three major Chinese films had been abruptly canceled or suspended for unclear reasons, which some observers took to be a result of heightened caution over unfavorable portrayals of the CCP in the leadup to the People’s Republic of China’s (PRC) 70th anniversary celebrations in October.⁴⁸ State censors also delayed or canceled several popular television series, which experts cited by state tabloid *Global Times* believed might be driven by the CCP’s desire to promote a “correct historic view” among potential viewers.⁴⁹ These actions followed the CCP Propaganda Department’s assumption of direct oversight of film production in 2018, a significant step in strengthening adherence to ideological and political guidelines in Chinese media. The resulting increase in censorship was reportedly a leading factor in China’s first year-on-year decline in film revenues in a decade.⁵⁰

CCP efforts to control discourse within China’s borders also resulted in its deployment of increasingly advanced social management

* For more information on Party-ification, see U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Chapter 2, Section 1, “Year in Review: Security and Foreign Affairs,” in *2018 Annual Report to Congress*, November 2018, 159–161.

technology.*⁵¹ In 2019, the CCP introduced a mobile application called “Study Xi, Strong Country” through which Party members and state employees are required to engage in daily study of General Secretary Xi’s speeches and other CCP ideological content.⁵² Some observers have nicknamed the application the “Little Red Phone” in reference to the Cultural Revolution-era “Little Red Book” containing quotations from Mao Zedong.⁵³ Users earn “Xi Study Points” by scoring well on quizzes and using other features of the application. The application also enables digital surveillance because it is linked to users’ personal information, and metrics regarding users’ performance can be accessed by government offices, schools, and private companies to sanction employees and students who earn too few points.⁵⁴ The program builds on the CCP’s increased efforts to ensure citizens’ compliance with its social and political directives, such as through the “social credit system,” which leverages China’s vast data collection capabilities to incentivize government-approved thought and behavior.⁵⁵

Suppressing Resistance through United Front Work

CCP leaders have also pushed to ensure all relevant parts of the state contribute to the goal of “United Front” work, a strategy to secure the political support of or otherwise co-opt non-Party elements both in China and in foreign countries.⁵⁶ The United Front Work Department (UFWD), the CCP Central Committee body responsible for coordinating this mission, underwent an extensive reorganization in 2018 intended to increase the CCP’s ability to “directly influence religious groups and overseas Chinese.”†⁵⁷ The reorganization has resulted in the UFWD “effectively [subordinating] the Ministry of Foreign Affairs” in all matters related to influencing the behavior

*Social management, a product of the CCP’s core need to shape and control society to ensure its own survival, involves guiding and responding to both Party and non-Party actors as a pre-emptive form of state security to incentivize people into managing their own activities for the CCP’s benefit. A 1984 *People’s Daily* report contended effective social management would only become possible by fully grasping “information, data, systems analysis, and decision modeling,” something the influence of a “new technological revolution” on management work could make possible. Increasingly innovative social management is part of a blueprint for the CCP’s continuing ability to maintain power, according to political scientist Samantha Hoffman. The earliest forms of this social management in China were “grid management” schemes in which communities policed themselves. House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, *Hearing on “China’s Digital Authoritarianism: Surveillance, Influence, and Political Control,”* written testimony of Samantha Hoffman, May 16, 2019, 3. <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/IG/IG00/20190516/109462/HHRG-116-IG00-Wstate-HoffmanS-20190516.pdf>; Samantha Hoffman, “Programming China: The Communist Party’s Autonomic Approach to Managing State Security,” University of Nottingham, 2017, iii, 12, 55–56; *Xinhua*, “Outline of the 12th Five-Year Plan (Full Text)” (十二五规划纲要 (全文)), 2011, 7–8. Translation. <http://www.lse.ac.uk/GranthamInstitute/wp-content/uploads/laws/1314.pdf>; Song Jian, “Reform of Systems Engineering and Management Systems” (系统工程与管理体制的改革), *People’s Daily*, September 13, 1984. Translation.

†The UFWD promotes broader Chinese foreign policy goals by directing activities to recruit members of the Chinese diaspora as well as by affiliated organizations targeting foreign states and actors. In tandem with other Chinese government agencies, the UFWD works to induce foreign governments to adopt policy positions favorable to Beijing, often through covert, coercive or corrupt means. It restructured its existing bureaus and created four new ones—reaching a total of six new bureaus created since 2017, including new bureaus focusing on Xinjiang and China’s middle class—to more clearly delineate responsibility for influence operations targeting overseas Chinese and religious communities within China. Previously, a single bureau was responsible for activities targeting both ethnic minorities and religious communities, which has now been reorganized so that ethnic work is the responsibility of a stand-alone bureau while two new bureaus carry out different aspects of religious work. For an overview of the CCP’s United Front organization, strategy and activities, see Alexander Bowe, “China’s Overseas United Front Work: Background and Implications for the United States,” *U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission*, August 24, 2018. See also Alex Joske, “Reorganizing the United Front Work Department: New Structures for a New Era of Diaspora and Religious Affairs Work,” *China Brief*, May 9, 2019.

and views of ethnic Chinese individuals and communities living outside of China.⁵⁸ This change is noteworthy because such outreach beyond a country's national borders is generally associated with a government's formal diplomatic arm.

The UFWD's consolidation of control over religious groups—what CCP officials have called the “sinicization of religion”—is an attempt to “radically transform religion into the [CCP's] servant,” according to Representative Chris Smith (R-NJ), then co-chair of the Congressional-Executive Commission on China.^{*59} These efforts have involved the mass concentrations of Muslim Uyghurs in prison camps in China's western Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region,[†] as well as the repression of Tibetan Buddhists, Christians, Chinese Hui Muslims, and other religious minorities.⁶⁰ Reports emerged in 2019 that Christian Uyghurs and members of China's majority Han ethnic group who sought to petition the state for official redress or were considered by the CCP to be politically unreliable have also been interned in Xinjiang's prison camps.⁶¹

These developments suggest the state-sanctioned campaign of indoctrination and religious repression has broadened its reach. Moreover, the CCP has expanded its suppression of the Muslim faith to the ethnic Chinese Hui Muslim population in the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region. The campaign in Ningxia has accelerated since the UFWD assumed responsibility for religious affairs in 2018. The CCP has shut down mosques and Hui-run nursery schools, child care centers, and religious schools; demolished mosque domes and minarets; and imprisoned community leaders, including in Xinjiang's prison camps.⁶² In 2019, local authorities across China also reportedly replaced the Ten Commandments in Christian churches with quotations from General Secretary Xi and portraits of Xi and Mao Zedong.⁶³

Another major consequence of China's campaign has been its success in persuading other countries to at minimum not oppose—and in many cases, openly support—its policy toward its ethnic Muslim population. In July 2019, responding to a letter from 21 Western countries and Japan criticizing the CCP's treatment of Muslims,[‡] 37 African, Eurasian, Middle Eastern, and other countries—including a large number of Muslim-majority countries—sent a letter to the UN

*The CCP itself is officially atheist and claims Party membership and religious beliefs are incompatible. It prohibits its members from holding religious beliefs and has demanded the expulsion of members who belong to religious organizations. Eleanor Alberts, “Religion in China,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, October 11, 2018.

†Since 2017, the CCP has detained between one million and three million ethnic Uyghurs, Kazakhs, and other Muslims—some of whom are residents or citizens of the United States and other countries—in facilities Beijing claims are for “transformation through education” or vocational training. In fact, detainees are kept in extraordinarily cramped conditions, forced to denounce their religious beliefs, family, and culture, and subjected to brainwashing, torture, and forced labor, in some cases leading detainees to commit suicide. In May 2019, in the strongest condemnation to date from an Administration official, Assistant Secretary of Defense for East Asia and the Pacific Randall Schriver contended the facilities merit the description “concentration camp” due to the sheer number of Muslims detained in the camps, the inhumane treatment to which they are subjected, and the CCP's goals in subjecting detainees to this treatment. Phil Stewart, “China Putting Minority Muslims in ‘Concentration Camps,’ U.S. Says,” *Reuters*, May 3, 2019; *China Digital Times*, “Foreign Citizens, Residents Caught in Xinjiang Camps,” April 2, 2019; Tara Francis Chan, “U.S. Resident May Be One of a Million People Imprisoned in China's Secretive Detention Camps,” *Newsweek*, March 29, 2019; U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *2018 Annual Report to Congress*, November 2018, 271–272; Nick Cumming-Bruce, “U.N. Panel Confronts China over Reports That It Holds a Million Uighurs in Camps,” *New York Times*, August 10, 2018.

‡Signatories of this letter included Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom.

parroting Beijing’s justification of its policies.*⁶⁴ Nearly every signatory of the second letter participates in BRI, vividly demonstrating China’s ability to leverage economic ties to achieve its preferred geopolitical outcomes.⁶⁵

Chinese Diplomacy: Toward a China-Led World Order

In 2019, China’s top leaders continued to implement the more assertive vision for China’s foreign relations called for by General Secretary Xi in 2018.† Chinese leaders often framed their foreign policy in civilizational terms—despite publicly rebuking the United States for purportedly adopting a “clash of civilizations” mindset—while attempting to rebrand Beijing’s approach to global order as superior and in opposition to that of the United States and other democratic countries.⁶⁶ In an official compilation on BRI published in December 2018, General Secretary Xi was quoted as describing BRI as offering the world a new development model “brimming with Eastern wisdom.”⁶⁷

Building on this theme, in May 2019 China convened a “Conference on Dialogue of Asian Civilizations,” inviting attendees from 47 countries both in and outside of Asia, including leaders from countries often viewed as geographically outside of Asia, such as Armenia and Greece.⁶⁸ In his keynote address General Secretary Xi criticized the legitimacy of universal values, implying they did not apply to Asian countries—ignoring the longstanding embrace of these values by many Asian nations.⁶⁹ Instead, he called on attendees to strengthen their “civilizational self-confidence” and pursue what he described as a common dream to build an “Asian community of common destiny.”⁷⁰

Also in May, a delegation of U.S. scholars returning from Beijing reported that an unnamed member of the CCP’s Politburo had used “extreme” language to lecture the group at length on civilizational differences between the United States and China, asserting the two countries were in fact engaged in a clash of civilizations.⁷¹ During the exchange, the Politburo member accused the United States of being a Mediterranean culture based on “belligerence and internal division,” which explained its “oppressive” foreign policy.⁷² In a similar reflection of the sense of civilizational and racial difference informing the CCP’s worldview, China’s ambassador to Canada criticized Ottawa’s calls to release a Canadian citizen detained by Beijing as being an assertion of “Western egotism and white supremacy.”⁷³

Against this backdrop, Chinese officials grew more strident in their approach to diplomacy with the United States and countries both within and outside the Indo-Pacific region. In June 2019, Beijing released a white paper placing the blame for trade tensions on the United States, while a vice foreign minister accused the United States of targeting

*Signatories of the letter defending Beijing’s policies included Algeria, Angola, Bahrain, Belarus, Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Cameroon, Comoros, Congo, Cuba, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, Eritrea, Gabon, Kuwait, Laos, Myanmar, Nigeria, North Korea, Oman, Pakistan, Philippines, Qatar, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, Tajikistan, Togo, Turkmenistan, United Arab Emirates, Venezuela, and Zimbabwe.

†For more information on the new foreign policy guidelines introduced in 2018—known as “Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era”—see Chapter 2, Section 1, of the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *2018 Annual Report to Congress*, November 2018, 161–162.

China with a campaign of “naked economic terrorism [and] economic homicide.”⁷⁴ As tensions increased over mass protests in Hong Kong pushing back against a new extradition bill backed by Beijing, a senior Chinese diplomat lashed out over social media at European critics, castigating the British as “descendants of war criminals” unfit to “[give] lessons to China on freedom.”⁷⁵ Earlier, in December 2018, Beijing released a policy paper on its relations with the EU in which it adopted a much harsher—and even didactic—tone than in its previous EU policy papers.⁷⁶ In the paper, Beijing issued instructions to EU member countries on how to approach issues such as their relations with Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the Dalai Lama; the timing for lifting the EU arms embargo on China; and cooperation with China on advanced technology and other trade issues.⁷⁷

In the Indo-Pacific region, Beijing displayed an even more uncompromising diplomatic approach. At an Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in November 2018, due to China’s objections over the inclusion of a phrase agreeing to fight “unfair trade practices,” the assembly failed to produce a joint statement for the first time in its 20-year history.⁷⁸ In what one U.S. official involved in the negotiations termed “tantrum diplomacy,” Chinese officials decried other countries’ “scheming” against China during official negotiation sessions, while several forced their way uninvited into the office of the hosting Papua New Guinea foreign minister to demand a meeting.⁷⁹ Security was ultimately called to remove the Chinese diplomats from the room. In his speech at Singapore’s Shangri-La Dialogue in June 2019, Chinese Defense Minister Wei staunchly defended China’s island-building campaign and policies in the South China Sea while warning, “Should anyone cross [China’s] bottom line, the PLA will resolutely take action and defeat all enemies.”⁸⁰ (For more information on pressure China has applied to countries in the Indo-Pacific, see Chapter 4, Section 4, “Changing Regional Dynamics: Oceania and Singapore.”)

The Myth of Chinese “Noninterference”

Despite its professed adherence to the principle of noninterference in other countries’ internal affairs, China continued its efforts in 2019 to influence other countries’ political processes as well as global perceptions of its rise. These efforts took the form of United Front work, influence activities targeting foreign universities and media, arbitrary detentions of foreign citizens, and China’s export of censorship and surveillance technologies.

United Front Work Remains a Prominent Feature of Chinese Foreign Policy

Over the past year, China continued its efforts to carry out United Front work to advance its interests while co-opting or subverting sources of potential opposition to the CCP at home and abroad. In December 2018, Fudan University published a state-supported study of the CCP’s United Front work, noting these efforts had undergone an epochal transformation. According to the study, whereas United Front work in China’s earlier reform era sought only to make the country “rich,” it now aimed to make China “powerful.”⁸¹ In May 2019, General Secretary Xi met with overseas Chinese rep-

representatives from over 90 countries involved in two “friendship” societies sponsored by entities subordinate to the UFDW.⁸² While meeting with one of the groups, UFDW head You Quan urged participants to subordinate themselves to General Secretary Xi’s ideological guidance, praised their accomplishments, and emphasized the importance of their roles in working to bring Taiwan under Beijing’s control and realizing China’s rejuvenation.⁸³ In a July 2019 speech, senior CCP official Pan Yue said General Secretary Xi had ordered the UFDW to step up its efforts in the face of “increasingly severe challenges by the West to contain China” and the urgent need to “win the ideological war.”⁸⁴ Outside of Beijing, UFDW-subordinate organizations like the Council for the Promotion of the Peaceful Reunification of China mobilized international chapters to praise General Secretary Xi’s January 2019 speech urging unification with Taiwan.*

China’s 2019 United Front activities in the United States highlighted the system’s reach and ambition. In May 2019, Li “Cindy” Yang, who previously served as vice president of the Florida chapter of the Council for the Promotion of the Peaceful Reunification of China, came under scrutiny after it emerged that she had peddled access to top U.S. government officials and potentially funneled foreign campaign contributions to the upcoming 2020 presidential election campaign.⁸⁵ According to the *Miami Herald*, in 2017 and 2018, Ms. Yang brought the president of the organization to U.S. political fundraising events.⁸⁶

Evidence also emerged of United Front activity targeting influential U.S. political figures at the subnational level. For example, in May 2019 a “U.S.-China Governors Collaboration Summit” brought together U.S. and Chinese business representatives with officials from U.S. states and Chinese municipal- and provincial-level governments to discuss trade opportunities, especially in the areas of manufacturing, infrastructure, and innovation.⁸⁷ On the Chinese side, the event was organized by entities linked to the United Front organization, and China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs later praised the summit for its efforts to “promote the sound and steady development of China-U.S. relations through subnational exchange and cooperation.”⁸⁸

Influencing Foreign Media and Universities

In 2019, China’s media practices abroad continued to promote positive narratives and neutralize criticism of the CCP, in some cases constituting a direct assault on press freedoms and democratic values. China sought to generate favorable foreign coverage by acquiring stakes in local media, placing positive advertisements in newspapers, and offering all-expenses-paid “training” trips to China for foreign journalists, sometimes explicitly incorporating such strategies into BRI.⁸⁹ The inaugural meeting of the Belt and Road

*The China Council for the Promotion of Peaceful Reunification (CPPRC) is a prominent organization promoting China’s unification with Taiwan. The CPPRC is directly subordinate to the UFDW and has at least 200 chapters in 90 countries, including 36 chapters in the United States. For an overview of the CPPRC, see John Dotson, “The United Front Work Department Goes Global: The Worldwide Expansion of the Council for the Promotion of the Peaceful Reunification of China,” *Jamestown Foundation*, May 9, 2019 and Alexander Bowe, “China’s Overseas United Front Work: Background and Implications for the United States,” *U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission*, August 24, 2018, 8.

News Network, an association consisting of 182 media outlets from 86 countries, was held in Beijing in April 2019 with the aim of promoting positive coverage of the project in BRI countries.⁹⁰ A March 2019 report by Reporters Without Borders concluded that China aims to build a “new world media order” in which “journalists are nothing more than state propaganda auxiliaries.”⁹¹ China’s government has reportedly invested approximately \$1.4 billion (10 billion renminbi) annually over the last decade to improve its international media presence, according to Reporters Without Borders.*

Chinese officials also proved willing to resort to intimidation when incentives did not suffice. In some cases, this included state-sanctioned bullying of foreign media in their own countries, exhibiting a blatant disregard for local laws protecting freedom of expression. For example, the Chinese Embassy in Sweden castigated a major Swedish news outlet in March 2019 for allowing Taiwan’s government representative to publish an article calling on Sweden to support Taiwan’s democracy in the face of Chinese pressure.⁹² “The article amounts to serious political provocation and fraud,” the embassy said, accusing the outlet of providing a “platform for ‘Taiwan independence’ separatist activities.”⁹³ In May 2019, the Chinese Embassy condemned a Swedish newspaper for publishing an article advocating Taiwan’s attendance at the World Health Assembly, charging it with a “serious violation of the basic principles of Swedish diplomacy” and demanding the newspaper “immediately correct the mistake.”⁹⁴

Universities in countries around the world also faced challenges to their institutional autonomy and academic freedom stemming from China’s influence activities.† In February 2019, pro-Tibetan independence Tibetan Canadian student Chemi Lhamo received thousands of insults and death threats from Chinese students after being elected student union president at the University of Toronto.⁹⁵ According to Charles Burton, a consultant with the Canadian Security and Intelligence Service and former Canadian diplomat, Lhamo’s harassment was consistent with the Chinese government’s strategy to undermine dissidents and was likely coordinated by the UFDW’s Canada desk.⁹⁶ That same month, a group of Chinese stu-

*The Chinese state-owned broadcaster China Global Television Network, for example, now has five 24-hour TV news channels (in English, Chinese, Russian, Arabic and French) as well as an English-language documentary channel. With TV programs in 140 countries, China Global Television Network maintains 70 bureaus and employs 10,000 people around the world. China Radio International broadcasts in 65 languages from its own stations and is the largest shareholder in at least 33 other radio stations in 14 countries, including the United States, a November 2015 *Reuters* investigation found. For more information, see Koh Gui Qing and John Shiffman, “Exposed—Beijing’s Covert Global Radio Network,” *Reuters*, November 2, 2015; Reporters Without Borders, “China’s Pursuit of a New World Media Order,” March 22, 2019, 30.

†The Chinese government employs a host of tools to influence academic discourse, including the Confucius Institutes, Chinese Students and Scholars Associations, joint research initiatives between Chinese companies and U.S. universities, funding of professorships and research institutes, and the intimidation of faculty and staff. For an overview of China’s influence activities in education, see Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian, “China’s Long Arm Reaches into American Campuses,” *Foreign Policy*, March 7, 2018; Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian, “This Beijing-Linked Billionaire Is Funding Policy Research at Washington’s Most Influential Institutions,” *Foreign Policy*, November 28, 2017; Larry Diamond and Orville Schell, “Chinese Influence & American Interests: Promoting Constructive Vigilance,” Hoover Institution, November 2018; Sheena Chestnut Greitens and Rory Truex, “Repressive Experiences among China Scholars: New Evidence from Survey Data,” August 1, 2018; Anastasya Lloyd-Damjanovic, “A Preliminary Study of PRC Political Influence and Interference Activities in American Higher Education,” *Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars*, September 2018; Yojana Sharma, “Huawei Research Ties with World’s Top Universities at Risk from U.S. Advice,” *University World News*, January 25, 2019.

dents at McMaster University in Ontario heckled Uyghur activist Rukiye Turdush during a lecture on campus about China's mass internment of Muslims in Xinjiang, contacting the Chinese Embassy about the event and submitting photos of the event to embassy officials afterward.⁹⁷ In June 2019, New Zealand's Auckland University of Technology allegedly canceled an event commemorating the 30th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre in response to pressure from China's vice consul-general in the country.⁹⁸ A July 2019 report in *The Atlantic* also found that Chinese student organizations based at German universities had distributed materials with pro-Beijing and CCP political messages, likely with state backing.⁹⁹

Over the past year, revelations of China's political influence in U.S. higher education prompted U.S. nonprofits, universities, and lawmakers to act. For example, Human Rights Watch, the Association of American Universities, and the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities all released "best practices" for U.S. universities to curb undue foreign influence and interference activities on campus.¹⁰⁰ In May 2019, the University of Maryland publicly acknowledged the need "to prevent foreign infringement on values of free speech and scientific integrity" and formed a campus committee to explore responses to these problems.¹⁰¹

Following congressional outreach and the passage of the 2019 National Defense Authorization Act, which prohibited the use of appropriated funds for Chinese language programs at colleges or universities hosting a Confucius Institute, 22 U.S. universities closed their Confucius Institutes.*¹⁰² As of October 2019, a total of 26 Confucius Institutes have been shuttered by their host institutions since their establishment in the 2000s, while 86 remained operational at universities throughout the United States.¹⁰³ The U.S. Department of Justice's (DOJ) China Initiative also worked throughout 2019 to "educate colleges and universities about potential threats to academic freedom and open discourse from influence efforts on campus" and crack down on unregistered foreign agents seeking to advance China's political agenda.†¹⁰⁴

Arbitrary Detentions and Harassment of Foreign Citizens

China showed increased willingness to arbitrarily detain and levy severe punishment against foreign citizens in 2019, under-

*The 22 U.S. universities that made or announced their decision to close their Confucius Institutes since 2018 were: the University of Illinois-Urbana Champaign, the University of West Florida, Texas A&M University, Prairie View A&M University, the University of Iowa, the University of North Florida, North Carolina State University, the University of Michigan, the University of South Florida, the University of Rhode Island, the University of Massachusetts Boston, the University of Tennessee Knoxville, the University of Minnesota, the University of Montana, Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis, Western Kentucky University, the University of Oregon, Northern State University, San Francisco State University, the University of Hawaii Manoa, Arizona State University, and San Diego State University. See Kyra Hass, "ASU Closes China-Funded Institute after Defense Department Gives Ultimatum," *AZ Central*, August 24, 2019; Rachelle Peterson, "Confucius Institutes in the U.S. That Are Closing," *National Association of Scholars*, June 2019; San Diego State University News Center, "New Chinese, Global Education Center Launched at SDSU," August 7, 2019.

†The DOJ China Initiative was established in November 2018 to counter threats to U.S. national security stemming from China and is led by Assistant Attorney General John Demers. The China Initiative's goals include identifying and prosecuting those engaged in trade secret theft, hacking, and economic espionage; protecting U.S. critical infrastructure against external threats including foreign direct investment and supply chain threats; and prosecuting foreign agents seeking to influence the U.S. public and policymakers without proper registration. See U.S. Department of Justice, *Attorney General Jeff Session's China Initiative Fact Sheet*, November 1, 2018. <https://www.justice.gov/opa/speech/file/1107256/download>.

scoring the country's disregard for the rule of law and willingness to use foreign nationals as bargaining chips in inter-state political disputes. The most high-profile development of the year involved Chinese authorities' decision to charge Canadian businessman Michael Spavor and former Canadian diplomat Michael Kovrig with espionage in May 2019.¹⁰⁵ Messrs. Spavor and Kovrig, who were held under harsh conditions without access to legal representation or their families, were detained in December 2018 in apparent retaliation for Canada's arrest earlier that month of Huawei's Chief Financial Officer Meng Wanzhou in connection with Huawei's alleged violation of U.S. sanctions on Iran.¹⁰⁶ Ms. Meng is also the daughter of Huawei founder and CEO Ren Zhengfei. In an example of what Donald Clarke, expert on Chinese law at George Washington University, called "death-threat diplomacy," the Chinese government also sentenced Canadian citizen Robert Lloyd Schellenberg to death on drug charges shortly after the detention of Ms. Meng, which could indicate a linkage between the cases.¹⁰⁷ Notably, Beijing took the highly unusual step of ordering a retrial to secure the much harsher sentence for Mr. Schellenberg only weeks after Canadian authorities detained Ms. Meng, further suggesting political motivations behind the decision.¹⁰⁸ Mr. Schellenberg is in the process of appealing the sentence.¹⁰⁹

Several cases over the last two years demonstrated Beijing's willingness to apply "exit bans" to U.S. citizens, particularly those of Chinese heritage, to prevent them from leaving China. These bans may violate customary international law regarding an individual's right to leave any country such as that contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.¹¹⁰ Moreover, China's frequent targeting of foreign citizens of Chinese descent suggests a racial motivation and Beijing's apparent belief in its right to apply elements of Chinese law and sovereignty over these individuals.

In June 2019, a Chinese American executive at Koch Industries visiting southern China for business was told he would not be able to leave the country and was interrogated for several days about U.S.-China trade tensions before intervention by the U.S. Department of State led to his release.¹¹¹ U.S. citizen Wan "Fiona" Huang, who is related by marriage to jailed former Chinese security chief Zhou Yongkang, said in a series of posts on Twitter in July 2019 that Chinese authorities would not let her or her 11-year old daughter, who is also a U.S. citizen, leave the country.¹¹² Victor and Cynthia Liu, two U.S. citizens who entered China in June 2018 to visit family, remain barred from leaving the country despite local authorities' insistence they are not being investigated or charged with a crime relating to their father Liu Changming, a Chinese citizen who is wanted for fraud.¹¹³ "Our lives have been interrupted and we feel trapped," Cynthia Liu said in a video obtained by *CNN* in May 2019.¹¹⁴ "We live with the grave fear that even as Americans our safety is not guaranteed, our voices cannot be properly heard and that our destiny is not in our control." As many as two dozen U.S. citizens have been prevented from leaving China over the past two years.*¹¹⁵ The State Department's January 2019 travel

*The U.S. government has publicly criticized China's coercive use of exit bans. U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has reportedly raised concerns about the use of exit bans in meetings

advisory warned that Chinese authorities may arbitrarily enforce local laws and noted “U.S. citizens under exit bans have been harassed and threatened.”¹¹⁶

There were also several reports in 2019 of cases in which U.S. citizens were harassed by Chinese authorities during visits to the country. For example, a former U.S. diplomat was confronted at his hotel by several plainclothes officers while in Beijing for an artificial intelligence forum in June 2019.¹¹⁷ The officers pressured the former U.S. diplomat to accompany them off the premises for questioning and only dispersed after several U.S. Embassy officials arrived.¹¹⁸ Due to such cases, some U.S. companies are drawing up contingency plans should their executives face harassment during their travel to China.¹¹⁹ Chinese authorities warned major foreign technology companies in June 2019 that they would suffer dire consequences if they cooperated with the Trump Administration’s ban on sales of key U.S. technology to Chinese companies, only reinforcing concerns that trade war tensions could turn businesspeople into targets.¹²⁰

Beyond the business community, arrests and deportations of foreign teachers in China increased significantly in 2019 amid the CCP’s crackdown on foreign influences in China’s education system. According to an August 2019 *Reuters* report, requests from foreign teachers for legal representation to contest enhanced—and often arbitrary—enforcement of Chinese laws had surged by between four and tenfold since February 2019.¹²¹

Exporting Censorship and Surveillance Technologies

In 2019, China continued to export methods, technologies, and principles of internet governance that improve foreign governments’ ability to censor and surveil their own populations. In contrast to the open and free conception of internet governance championed by the United States, China promotes so-called “internet sovereignty,” or the idea that governments should be able to control their countries’ internets to prevent instability from public access to sensitive information from foreign or domestic sources.*¹²² The primary vehicle through which China advocates for internet sovereignty is its annual World Internet Conference, though it also coordinates with like-minded states to propagate this norm.¹²³ At the most recent iteration of the conference in November 2018, which discussed arti-

with Chinese interlocutors. U.S. lawmakers also identified China’s exit bans as a key problem in a November 2018 letter to Secretary Pompeo. For an overview of U.S. government responses to China’s use of exit bans, see U.S. Senate, “Senate Letter to Secretary Pompeo Re: Chinese Exit Bans,” November 29, 2018; Edward Wong and Michael Forsythe, “China’s Tactic to Catch a Fugitive Official: Hold His Two American Children,” *New York Times*, November 25, 2018.

*According to New America Foundation analysts Robert Morgus and Justin Sherman, the governments of the United States and other democratic societies have championed a global internet that has five characteristics: it is (1) free (“any user can access and exchange information on and through the internet without unreasonable restriction”); (2) open (“systems and infrastructure are merely conduits for data transmission; they are net neutral and oblivious to what goes through them”); (3) interoperable (“parts of the global system [network] work with other parts of the global system [network]; ‘A’ can easily move or convert to ‘B’”); (4) secure (“the system upholds the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of its users, its data, and itself”); and (5) resilient (“no single points of failure exist in the network; systems do their intended job despite impediments”). U.S. government policy documents have invoked these principles as far back as the early 2000s. In contrast, countries like China, Russia, and Iran have promoted regulatory and legislative structures that legitimate state control over the flow of information on the internet. These countries wish “to leverage the internet’s potential to grow wealth, while also managing its capacity to sow instability and create new harms at home and abroad.” See Robert Morgus and Justin Sherman, “The Idealized Internet vs. Internet Realities (Version 1.0),” *New America Foundation*, July 2018, 7, 10.

ficial intelligence and 5G, among other issues, General Secretary Xi sent a congratulatory letter calling on attendees to improve global internet governance and create a “community of common destiny in cyberspace.”¹²⁴ In advocating for internet sovereignty, China provides a political blueprint for other authoritarian countries seeking to manage the information space.

China also sold other countries technologies over the past year that make censorship, surveillance, and political repression possible.* An August 2019 *Wall Street Journal* investigation, for example, found that Huawei employees had assisted at least two African governments in spying on their political opponents, including intercepting their encrypted communications and tracking them through their cell data.¹²⁵ Experts offer varying assessments of the extent to which China has spread its surveillance technology and methods around the globe. Boise State University professor Steven Feldstein wrote in an April 2019 *Newsweek* article that Chinese companies have exported surveillance technology to at least 54 countries, often through deals associated with BRI.¹²⁶ Chinese companies Hikvision, Yitu, and SenseTime have supplied facial recognition cameras for use in countries like Singapore, Mr. Feldstein notes, while Huawei and ZTE are using built-in surveillance technology in their construction of “smart cities” in Pakistan, the Philippines, and Kenya.¹²⁷ The independent watchdog Freedom House offered a more conservative estimate in its October 2018 report, finding that 18 countries have to date used Chinese-made monitoring systems and 36 have received training from China in censorship-related topics like “public opinion guidance.”¹²⁸

An Expanding Network of Global Partnerships

In 2019, Beijing extended the reach of its assertive diplomacy as it sought to shore up ties with partners and promote itself as a leader in key regions around the world. China’s relations with North Korea and Iran were particularly consequential, while its growing influence in the Western Hemisphere, Africa, and the Middle East also had direct implications for U.S. interests. (For more information on China’s ties with Russia, see Chapter 4, Section 2, “An Uneasy Entente: China-Russia Relations in a New Era of Strategic Competition with the United States.”)

Improving Relations with North Korea

In June 2019, General Secretary Xi met with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un in Pyongyang in a bid to improve bilateral ties and re-establish China’s influence as a power broker between North Korea and the United States. During the two-day summit—the first time the CCP’s top leader had visited North Korea since 2005—General Secretary Xi pledged to achieve a political resolution to North Korea’s nuclear issue and cooperate with North Korea in return for concessions by Pyongyang in its negotiations with the United States

*Chinese firms have developed information filtration software, facial recognition sensors, machine learning algorithms, and surveillance cameras for use by law enforcement both at home and abroad. For an overview of Chinese sales of censorship and surveillance technologies, see Daniel Beniam and Hollie Russon Gilman, “China’s Aggressive Surveillance Technology Will Spread beyond Its Borders,” *Slate*, August 9, 2018; Paul Mozur, Jonah M. Kessel, and Melissa Chan, “Made in China, Exported to the World: The Surveillance State,” *New York Times*, April 24, 2019.

over the dismantling of its nuclear weapons program.¹²⁹ Analysts asserted that by making the rare visit, Beijing sought to bolster its position in its relationship with the United States while also exposing fears that Pyongyang might strengthen relations with Washington at the expense of Beijing.¹³⁰ The meeting was timed to occur ahead of General Secretary Xi's meeting with President Donald Trump on the sidelines of the June 28–29 G20 Summit in Osaka, Japan, and President Trump's subsequent meeting with Chairman Kim on June 30.¹³¹ Beijing's attempts to portray itself as a middle man in resolving the North Korean nuclear issue could also have been a response to previous indications from the United States that China's cooperation on North Korea could result in better terms in Beijing's trade talks with Washington.¹³²

Undermining Sanctions against Iran

As tensions mounted in 2019 between the United States and Iran over the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, Beijing lent rhetorical support to Tehran while undermining U.S. sanctions on Iran by clandestinely purchasing Iranian energy exports. In May 2019, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi voiced China's opposition to additional U.S. sanctions placed on Iran for its violations of the nuclear agreement and vowed to support Iran's efforts to safeguard its national interests.¹³³ Geng Shuang, spokesman for China's Foreign Ministry, held the United States responsible for Iran's violations of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, stating in July 2019, "The maximum pressure exerted by the United States on Iran is the root cause of the Iranian nuclear crisis."¹³⁴

Following the expiration on May 2 of sanctions waivers granted by the United States to China allowing for the temporary continued import of Iranian oil and gas, China continued importing Iranian energy in violation of U.S. sanctions, although at reduced levels compared to its previous import volume.*¹³⁵ Paris-based data intelligence firm Kpler SAS estimated that five supertankers shipped roughly \$100 million worth of Iranian liquefied petroleum gas, used for products like cooking fuel and plastic, to China in May and June 2019.¹³⁶ China acted to camouflage its import of Iranian liquefied petroleum gas, using techniques such as switching off the transponders of ships and intentionally reporting false import destinations.¹³⁷ China continued its purchase of Iranian energy in July, importing between 4.4 million and 11 million barrels of crude oil that month.¹³⁸

In addition, China and Iran have voiced their opposition to U.S. offensive cyber operations after the United States reportedly carried out cyberattacks on Iran in June.¹³⁹ Iran's Minister of Information and Communications Technology Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi stated, "The Islamic Republic of Iran and China are standing in a united front ... to confront U.S. unilateralism and hegemony in the field of IT [information technology]."¹⁴⁰

*A July 2019 report by the Congressional Research Service found that China and Turkey were the only states to continue importing Iranian oil after the expiration of the sanctions waivers, estimating that in June 2019 China imported 133,000 barrels of Iranian oil per day, while Turkey imported 67,000 barrels per day. Kenneth Katzman, "Iran Sanctions," *Congressional Research Service*, July 12, 2019, 24.

A Growing Presence in Latin America and the Caribbean

China's growing influence in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) threatens U.S. interests in the region while eroding democratic norms and enabling LAC states to pursue irresponsible economic policies and governance practices.¹⁴¹ Admiral Craig S. Faller, Commander of U.S. Southern Command, testified to the Senate Armed Services Committee in July 2019 that China has reached “unprecedented levels of influence and leverage” in LAC and seeks to “displace the United States as the partner of choice and weaken the commitment of our partners to the rule of law and democracy.”¹⁴² In 2019, China continued to pursue foreign policy objectives that run counter to democratic norms as well as other U.S. interests.¹⁴³ In Venezuela, Beijing's economic and diplomatic support for authoritarian leader Nicolás Maduro has enabled the regime to maintain power despite significant domestic and international pressure for Maduro to step down amid an ongoing humanitarian crisis. U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo remarked in April, “China's bankrolling of the Maduro regime helped precipitate and prolong the crisis.”¹⁴⁴

China continued to export surveillance technologies to LAC countries that could weaken or undermine the development of democratic societies. In February 2019, Uruguay began the installation of 2,100 surveillance cameras donated by the Chinese government, while Argentina planned to begin installing a \$24 million Chinese surveillance system in October 2019.¹⁴⁵ Argentina and Uruguay join Ecuador, Mexico, and Bolivia as regional operators of Chinese surveillance technology.¹⁴⁶ “These technologies can certainly be used to limit basic freedoms and suppress political opposition in countries, such as Venezuela, with authoritarian tendencies,” Margaret Meyers, director of the Inter-American Dialogue's Asia and Latin American Program, told the *South China Morning Post*.¹⁴⁷ “The result is a further weakening of democratic governance.”

China also expanded its promotion of BRI among LAC countries, including referring for the first time to a military cooperation component of the development initiative. Peru joined BRI in April 2019, bringing the total number of LAC states participating in the initiative to 17.¹⁴⁸ In July, Defense Minister Wei told a gathering of Caribbean military chiefs at a summit in Beijing that China sought to “deepen military exchanges and cooperation with the Caribbean countries ... under the framework of the BRI.”¹⁴⁹ At least some participants were reported to have responded favorably to Beijing's offer, with Chinese state media quoting the chief of staff of Guyana's military as claiming that Guyana wished to work with the Chinese military to “jointly safeguard regional and world peace and stability.”¹⁵⁰

Providing Political Training, Infrastructure, and Arms to Africa and the Middle East

China steadily increased its influence in Africa and the Middle East over the past year, including by promoting itself as a political and economic model for countries in these regions. China attempted to highlight its status as an international leader at the September 2018 summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation held in Beijing. At the summit, China espoused its vision for a “China-Africa

community of common destiny,” pledging to increase China-Africa cooperation in industry, infrastructure connectivity, people-to-people exchanges, and security.¹⁵¹ Beijing sought to dispel accusations that it engages in “debt trap diplomacy” and “neocolonialism” in Africa, pledging \$60 billion in new Chinese financing for African countries and promising a larger amount of grants, interest-free loans, and concessional loans than offered in its previous financial pledges to the continent.¹⁵² Still, the majority of financing remained non-concessional, state-directed loans, and Beijing did not specify a timeline for disbursing the funding.¹⁵³

Beijing used party-to-party training for African leaders as another tool to increase its influence on the continent and promote its one-party governance system as an alternative development model for African countries. As part of these efforts, since 2014 Beijing has hosted annual summits of leaders from the developing world, including those of African political parties from both democratic and authoritarian countries, to explain what it calls its “new type of political party system”—referring to the CCP’s political model that promotes economic growth with authoritarianism.¹⁵⁴ The Central Party School’s major training partners include Angola, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Sudan, South Sudan, Uganda, and Zimbabwe.¹⁵⁵ China has also dispatched political advisors to provide training to African political party officials in their home countries. These trainings have grown both in frequency and profile over the past decade.¹⁵⁶ By mid-2018, China had helped fund or establish political training schools for African governing parties in South Africa, Ethiopia, Namibia, and Angola.*¹⁵⁷ Forum on China-Africa Cooperation participants underscored this longstanding practice in the forum’s 2019–2021 action plan, calling for continued exchanges between Chinese and African legislatures, consultative bodies, political parties, and local governments.¹⁵⁸

Moreover, China expanded its cooperation with African states on security issues in 2019 by sending PLA instructors to train Rwandan troops and convening the first China-Africa Peace and Security Forum in July 2019.¹⁵⁹ At the forum, which was hosted by China’s Ministry of National Defense in Beijing and attended by nearly 100 representatives from 50 African countries and the African Union, attendees discussed cooperation on regional maritime security and improving the “global security governance system.”¹⁶⁰

The growing presence of Chinese telecommunications providers across Africa and the Middle East was another significant component of Beijing’s increasing influence in both regions. Multiple U.S. partners in the Middle East and Africa voiced their willingness to conduct business with Huawei despite pressure from the United States to ban the telecommunications company from building 5G networks in allied and partner nations. In February 2019, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) announced that it would roll out a Huawei-developed 5G network later in the year.¹⁶¹ The same month, Huawei Vice President for Public Affairs Mark Xue (Xue Man) told

*South Africa, Ethiopia, Namibia, and Angola are all participants in BRI. Angola is the top recipient of Chinese loans, with \$42.8 billion disbursed between 2000 and 2017. Over the same period, Ethiopia received \$13.7 billion, South Africa received \$3.7 billion, and Namibia received \$729 million. See Johns Hopkins SAIS China-Africa Research Initiative (SAIS-CARI), “Chinese Loans to Africa.” http://www.sais-cari.org/s/Upload_LoanData_v11_October2018.xlsx.

attendees at the China-Saudi Investment Cooperation Forum that Saudi Arabia would also deploy Huawei's 5G technology over the next year.¹⁶² Vodafone Qatar and Huawei signed an agreement in April 2019 to expand Vodafone Qatar's wireless network infrastructure, in part through a large-scale 5G technology rollout.¹⁶³ In May 2019, the South African government stated it will not discriminate against Huawei, which has already partnered with major South African network operators to build the country's 5G network.¹⁶⁴ To date, Huawei has reportedly constructed approximately 70 percent of Africa's 4G networks, with construction often accompanied by loans from Chinese state banks.¹⁶⁵ It is expected that Huawei will be extensively involved in the rollout of the African continent's 5G networks.¹⁶⁶

In recent years, China has expanded its exports of armed unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) to countries in the Middle East and Africa, including key U.S. partners Jordan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE.¹⁶⁷ Across both regions, expanding sales of Chinese UAVs have increased the risk of human rights abuses by lowering the threshold for leaders of Middle Eastern and African countries to use military force.¹⁶⁸ In May 2019, UN experts found that Chinese-made missiles and UAVs were used to conduct airstrikes in the ongoing conflict in Libya and suggested that the UAE—which is prohibited by law from purchasing U.S. armed drones—was likely behind the attacks.*¹⁶⁹ Timothy Heath, senior researcher at the RAND Corporation, argued it is likely that Chinese UAVs will “appear in more and more political conflicts and civil wars around the world,” warning, “If the weapons continue to proliferate, there is a risk that the world could see an increase in violence associated with such technologies.”¹⁷⁰

Pressure on the Regional Balance

A Tenuous Sino-Japanese Reset

Over the past year, China and Japan conducted a series of diplomatic exchanges in an attempt to reset their fraught bilateral relationship. These exchanges included a meeting between Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and General Secretary Xi in Beijing in October 2018—the first official visit to China by a Japanese leader since 2011.¹⁷¹ As part of this effort, the two countries agreed to cooperate in a number of areas, such as private sector-led infrastructure development in third countries.¹⁷² Still, Prime Minister Abe urged China to curb the assertive activities of its coast guard near the Senkaku Islands, raised concerns over China's militarization of the South China Sea, and called for greater protection for intellectual property and the end of forced technology transfers.¹⁷³ According to a Japanese government spokesman, a message underlying Prime Minister Abe's visit was, “Without stability in the East China Sea, there can be no true improvement in the relationship.”¹⁷⁴

*Chinese UAVs provide a cheaper alternative to U.S. UAVs for states in the Middle East and Africa, many of whom are prohibited from purchasing U.S. UAVs under the 1987 Missile Technology Control Regime. China is not a signatory to the Missile Technology Control Regime. Arthur Herman, “The Treaty behind China's Drone Edge,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 8, 2019; Liu Zhen, “China Fills Gap Left by U.S. in Middle East Military Drone Market,” *British Think Tank Says*, *South China Morning Post*, December 18, 2018.

Prior to the 2018 Beijing summit, Tokyo ended its Official Development Assistance program to China, stating the program had helped China develop into the world's second-biggest economy and therefore completed its "historic mission."¹⁷⁵ The program, which started in 1979, provided China with \$32.4 billion in assistance over its lifetime for the purpose of improving Chinese infrastructure.¹⁷⁶ In its place, Japan and China plan to promote bilateral innovation projects and cooperate on a "development cooperation dialogue" focused on assisting developing countries.¹⁷⁷ The Japanese government, however, has taken a cautious view of BRI, refusing to sign on to the initiative while signaling its willingness to cooperate on BRI projects that are open, transparent, efficient, and economically sound.¹⁷⁸

Despite the attempt to improve relations, challenges endured over sovereignty disputes in the East China Sea and both countries' military modernization efforts. China continued to carry out coast guard and maritime militia operations challenging Japan's administrative control of the Senkaku Islands.* According to Tokyo, an average of 12 Chinese government ships, most if not all operated by the China Coast Guard, entered the territorial sea around the Senkakus each month during the first half of 2019—nearly double the seven ships per month reported during the same period in 2018.¹⁷⁹ Furthermore, in the lead-up to the Japan-hosted G20 summit, the China Coast Guard conducted its longest patrol through the contiguous zone† around the Senkakus to date, sailing for 62 days of continuous operations.¹⁸⁰ Beijing also continued to conduct military training and intelligence collection flights near Japan, with the number of Japanese scrambles to PLA aircraft between April and June increasing compared to the same timeframe in 2018.¹⁸¹ For its part, China responded negatively to Japan's plans to retrofit its largest ships to be capable of carrying F-35B fighters, claiming such moves could lead to Japan repeating its "militaristic history" and threaten the thaw in bilateral ties.¹⁸²

Increasing Coercion in the South China Sea

In 2019, China undertook a number of aggressive actions in the South China Sea, reflecting its increased assertiveness in the region. In April, the Philippines and the United States undertook a major amphibious assault drill after a fleet of approximately 275 boats thought to belong to China's maritime militia blocked the Philippines' access to Thitu Island for months, apparently in an attempt

*The Obama and Trump administrations have publicly stated that the Senkaku Islands are administered by Japan and thus covered by Article 5 of the U.S.-Japan Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security, which requires the parties to "act to meet the common danger" of an "armed attack against either Party in the territories under the administration of Japan." See Lindsay Maizland and Beina Xu, "The U.S.-Japan Security Alliance," *Council on Foreign Relations*, August 22, 2019; Ankit Panda, "Mattis: Senkakus Covered under US-Japan Security Treaty," *Diplomat*, February 6, 2017.

†The contiguous zone is a 12-nautical mile area adjacent to the territorial sea, which is a 12-nautical mile area extending out from a country's coastline, islands, or rocks. In its territorial sea, a state has full sovereignty, subject to the right of innocent passage. In its contiguous zone, a state can enforce customs-related laws. Under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, foreign civilian and military ships may transit through a country's territorial sea according to the principle of innocent passage, which prohibits activities that are "prejudicial to the peace, good order or security of the coastal State," such as military exercises or intelligence gathering. "UN Convention on the Law of the Sea Part 2: Territorial Sea and Contiguous Zone." http://www.un.org/depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/part2.htm.

to prevent Manila from constructing military facilities on its own territory.*¹⁸³ In June, a Chinese fishing vessel rammed and sank a Philippine fishing boat operating near Reed Bank—a disputed area only 85 nautical miles from the Philippines’ coast, well within its exclusive economic zone—and abandoned the boat’s crew, who nearly drowned.¹⁸⁴ A spokesman for Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte called the Chinese vessel’s desertion of the fishermen “as inhumane as it is barbaric.”¹⁸⁵

In July, China and Vietnam became embroiled in a standoff near an offshore oil block in Vietnam’s exclusive economic zone after China deployed a survey ship, heavily-armed coast guard vessels, and paramilitary fishing boats to the area.¹⁸⁶ That same month, Chinese forces launched six antiship ballistic missiles into the South China Sea—the first known time China had tested this type of missile at sea.¹⁸⁷ Two months earlier, Chinese fishing vessels likely operated by China’s maritime militia targeted Australian Navy helicopter pilots flying over the South China Sea with lasers, forcing them to conduct an emergency landing.¹⁸⁸

Southeast Asian countries continued to try to balance protecting their interests with placating Beijing, although some responded more assertively to Chinese pressure. According to a January 2019 survey of government, business, media, and academic elites in Southeast Asian countries organized by a Singaporean government-affiliated think tank, nearly half of respondents believed Beijing intended to “turn Southeast Asia into its sphere of influence.” 70 percent said Southeast Asian countries should be cautious to avoid being trapped in unsustainable BRI debt, and fewer than one in ten saw China’s influence in the region as benign. Still, nearly three quarters of respondents thought China’s influence over the region was greater than that of the United States.¹⁸⁹

Over the past year, President Duterte sought to balance relations between the United States and China. In late November 2018, he and General Secretary Xi signed a joint gas and oil exploration deal, prompting protests in the Philippines over his failure to protect the country’s rights under international law.¹⁹⁰ In the summer of 2019 the Philippines began installing Huawei 5G equipment into a new telecommunication network largely designed by China and that will be overseen by Chinese engineers for at least three years following its installation.¹⁹¹ Still, President Duterte invoked the 2016 Permanent Court of Arbitration ruling that found China’s South China Sea claims had no basis in international law during a visit to China in August—a subject he had largely avoided in favor of seeking closer ties with Beijing.¹⁹² In April, he also threatened China with a “suicide mission” if Beijing took action to seize Thitu Island.¹⁹³ Prior to President Duterte’s more assertive statements, Secretary Pompeo

*In addition to its navy and coast guard, China also employs its maritime militia to promote its sovereignty claims in the South China Sea. The maritime militia is a paramilitary force composed of civilian vessels—including but not limited to fishing boats—that engages in what researcher Gregory Poling characterizes as “patrol, surveillance, resupply, and other missions to bolster China’s presence in contested waters in the South and East China seas.” The PLA trains, directs, and equips the maritime militia. For more, see Gregory B. Poling, “Illuminating the South China Sea’s Dark Fishing Fleets,” *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, January 9, 2019; U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Chapter 2, Section 2, “China’s Military Reorganization and Modernization: Implications for the United States,” in *2018 Annual Report to Congress*, November 2018, 224.

said while visiting Manila in February that U.S. obligations under the U.S.-Philippines mutual defense treaty would be triggered by “any armed attack on Philippine forces, aircraft, or public vessels in the South China Sea.”¹⁹⁴

In 2019, the U.S. Navy formally addressed the role of China’s militia fleets in supporting Beijing’s military ambitions, recognizing the need for new tactics to address China’s destabilizing gray zone activities. In April, the United States revealed it had informed China that the U.S. Navy would in the future treat provocative actions by the China Coast Guard and Chinese maritime militia the same way it reacts to provocations by the PLA Navy.¹⁹⁵ The U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) assessed in May 2019 that China’s paramilitary and military forces had demonstrated increasing interoperability between the PLA Navy, China Coast Guard, and maritime militia, improving the latter’s ability in particular to support PLA operations.¹⁹⁶

China’s Challenges to Indian Security

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s landslide reelection in May 2019 returned him to office facing significant policy challenges posed by New Delhi’s uneasy relations with Beijing.¹⁹⁷ In 2019, while India engaged China during the G20 and Shanghai Cooperation Organization summits, significant tensions remained over India’s 5G buildout, New Delhi’s concerns over Beijing’s increasing influence in South Asia, and China’s military modernization and arms sales to Pakistan.¹⁹⁸

Although India invited Huawei to participate in field trials to develop India’s 5G infrastructure in late 2018, leaders of a high-level government committee on 5G raised national security concerns about the threat Huawei’s equipment could pose to the country’s telecommunications network.¹⁹⁹ By July 2019, reports emerged that the committee was considering banning Chinese companies from participating in India’s 5G network rollout.²⁰⁰ In response, China warned it could impose “reverse sanctions” on Indian firms engaged in business in China if New Delhi decided to block Huawei from India’s 5G network.²⁰¹

China’s pursuit of closer ties with several other South Asian countries also fueled Indian concerns over Chinese encirclement. In 2019, Beijing continued efforts to exploit diplomatic and economic rifts between India and Bhutan, promoting bilateral trade and tourism in Bhutan at a time of ongoing concerns within the Bhutanese government over its economic dependency on India.²⁰² China also saw investment in Bangladesh as an opportunity to extend its influence in the region.²⁰³ Bangladesh and China have signed deals worth \$21.5 billion for power and infrastructure projects, with the most recent agreement signed in June 2019 providing Bangladesh’s power sector with loans worth \$1.7 billion.²⁰⁴

India has taken steps to improve its military capabilities, driven in large part by China’s military modernization efforts and arms sales to Pakistan, India’s historical rival. Nevertheless, its 2019 defense budget lags far behind China’s and its own modernization requirements.²⁰⁵ India’s level of declared defense spending in 2019—\$61.96 billion compared with China’s official figure

of \$177.61 billion—was deemed by some expert observers, such as retired Indian Vice Chief of Army Staff Lieutenant General Sarath Chand, as insufficient to conduct a two-front war should India have to fight both Pakistan and China.²⁰⁶ Indian unpreparedness is exacerbated by China’s continued arms sales to Pakistan, the most recent of which include the construction of four frigates to be delivered to the Pakistan Navy by 2021 and an avionics upgrade to a jointly-produced China-Pakistan fighter to enhance the aircraft’s lethality.²⁰⁷

Tensions in U.S.-China Ties

Over the past year, the U.S.-China relationship grew markedly more confrontational as tensions increased over political, economic, and security issues. In October 2018, U.S. Vice President Mike Pence delivered a notable address on the Trump Administration’s China policy, advocating for improved ties but denouncing China’s unfair economic policies, military buildup, malign interference activities, and human rights abuses.²⁰⁸ In November 2018, DOD issued the United States’ first public call for China to remove the missile systems it had deployed to the artificial islands it had constructed in the South China Sea.²⁰⁹ In testimony to Congress in February 2019, U.S. Indo-Pacific Command head Admiral Phillip S. Davidson described Beijing as the “greatest long-term strategic threat ... to the United States,” with Washington facing in Beijing a “fundamental divergence in values that leads to two incompatible visions of the future.”²¹⁰ Admiral Davidson’s sharp language on ideological difference between the two sides, which had not been used previously by U.S. military officials, appeared to reflect a growing view within DOD that China’s challenge to U.S. interests was not confined solely to the military domain.

U.S. officials also cited China’s massive arsenal of precision-strike missiles as an important reason for the U.S. suspension of compliance with the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty in February 2019.²¹¹ Following the formal U.S. withdrawal from the treaty in August, the U.S. military conducted its first flight test of a conventional ground-launched cruise missile that would have been banned by the treaty’s provisions.²¹² That same month, U.S. Secretary of Defense Mark Esper pledged to quickly deploy ground-based intermediate-range missiles to the Indo-Pacific region.²¹³ Reflecting DOD’s increased focus on Beijing’s military build-up, Secretary Esper emphasized in his first public interview as head of the department that China is the Pentagon’s “number one priority.”²¹⁴

The hardening U.S. attitude toward China was not limited to Washington, as the U.S. public’s favorability toward China dropped markedly. In a national survey released in June 2019, the Chicago Council on Global Affairs found that after more than a decade during which on average approximately 50 percent of U.S. citizens viewed China as a “rival,” that number jumped to 63 percent in February 2019, beginning its rise after the Trump Administration levied steel and aluminum tariffs on China in March 2018.* According to a Gal-

*In February 2019, 65 percent of Republicans, 64 percent of Democrats, and 61 percent of Independents viewed China as a rival. In March 2018, those numbers were 50 percent, 51 percent, and 49 percent, respectively. See Craig Kafura, “Public and Opinion Leaders’ Views on U.S.-China Trade War,” *Chicago Council on Global Affairs*, June 27, 2019.

lup poll conducted in February 2019, only 41 percent of U.S. citizens held a favorable view of China, down 12 percentage points from the year before.²¹⁵ Beijing's human rights abuses in Xinjiang also likely played a role in the drop in public opinion toward China.²¹⁶ In a statement in March 2019, the State Department sharply criticized Beijing for these actions, with Secretary Pompeo saying China was in a "league of its own" as a human rights violator.²¹⁷ The head of the department's human rights bureau described Beijing's arbitrary detention and confinement of its minority ethnic Muslim population in even more forceful terms, saying it was unlike anything seen in the world "since the 1930s," a reference many observers took to be a comparison to the creation of concentration camps by Nazi Germany.²¹⁸

Meanwhile, Beijing's views of the United States hardened as Chinese leaders showed few signs of willingness to compromise on issues raised by Washington. Amid growing trade tensions in May 2019, anti-U.S. propaganda intensified in Chinese state media, while China's main state television broadcaster interrupted normal programming to air a series of movies depicting Chinese battles with U.S. forces during the Korean War.²¹⁹ In response to U.S. criticism at the annual U.S.-China Diplomatic and Security Dialogue of China's missile deployments to the South China Sea, State Councilor Yang responded it was Washington who was at fault for "militarization" of the South China Sea.²²⁰ Luo Yuan, a retired major general affiliated with the PLA's Academy of Military Science, declared in December 2018 that sinking two U.S. aircraft carriers would kill the 10,000 sailors aboard and thus deter further U.S. "provocation" of China.²²¹ "What the United States fears the most is taking casualties," Luo said. "We'll see how frightened America is." Beijing adopted a similarly confrontational tone in response to U.S. criticism of China's detention of Uyghurs and other ethnic Muslims in prison camps, claiming the camps were more similar to "boarding schools" and labeling U.S. statements as "completely fabricated lies."²²²

Crackdown on Academic and Espionage Cases

The U.S. government intensified its efforts in 2019 to curb China's extensive influence and espionage activities in academic and commercial settings. These efforts took the form of visa restrictions for Chinese nationals, greater scrutiny of federal funding awarded to universities, legal action against those suspected of theft or espionage, and new legislation.

Increased visa restrictions for PRC students and researchers arguably offered the most conspicuous sign of the intensified U.S. government response. In June 2018, the State Department began to implement a new policy imposing a one-year limitation on PRC graduate students studying in technical fields identified as priorities in China's "Made in China 2025" manufacturing plan.²²³ Hundreds of PRC students in science, technology, engineering, and math fields have since faced delays in renewing their visas due to additional screening required by the policy.²²⁴ Some PRC researchers and experts in the social sciences also had their visas canceled or reviewed due to espionage and counterintelligence concerns in the last year, though estimates of the numbers affected range from 30 to 280.²²⁵

One of the most prominent cases involved Zhu Feng, a professor at Nanjing University known for his frequent exchanges with the CCP, China's Foreign Ministry, and the Chinese military and intelligence services.²²⁶ Mr. Zhu said he was questioned by two agents from the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) about his links to Chinese intelligence while in transit at a Los Angeles airport in January 2018 and alleged that his ten-year U.S. visa was canceled because he refused to cooperate with the agents.²²⁷

Federal agencies also took steps in 2019 to increase U.S. research institutions' compliance with extant rules and security procedures to mitigate foreign influence on federally-funded scientific research. According to a December 2018 report by a panel of experts commissioned by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to study this problem, "Small numbers of scientists have committed serious violations of NIH's policies and systems by not disclosing foreign support (i.e., grants), laboratories, or funded faculty positions in other countries."²²⁸ As of May 2019, the NIH had contacted more than 55 awardee institutions regarding violations of NIH policies relating to foreign ties, prompting some institutions to take actions such as terminations or suspensions of scientists who egregiously violated NIH policies, relinquishment of NIH funds, termination of active NIH grants, and outreach to the FBI for assistance.*²²⁹ For example, both Emory University and the MD Anderson Cancer Center at the University of Texas terminated scientists in 2019 after the NIH raised concerns regarding China-related conflicts of interest or unreported foreign income.²³⁰

Under the auspices of DOJ's China Initiative, the FBI also continued its work to develop an enforcement strategy targeting non-traditional intelligence collectors and to educate U.S. colleges and universities about the threats foreign influence poses to academic freedom.²³¹ The U.S. Department of Education also sent letters to Georgetown and Texas A&M universities in June 2019 stating its concern that they did not fully report funds received from foreign sources, including China.²³² The same month, the U.S. Department of Energy issued an order prohibiting its employees and contractors from participating in foreign governments' talent recruitment programs.²³³

The U.S. government paired official warnings about the scope of China's efforts to influence and steal scientific research with enforcement of existing laws.† According to DOJ, between 2011 and

* Prior to the release of the NIH study in December 2018, NIH Director Francis Collins sent a letter in August to approximately 10,000 institutions that receive or are applying for NIH funding warning of foreign threats to the integrity of U.S. biomedical research and that some researchers working at institutions had failed to disclose "substantial resources from other organizations, including foreign governments." Collins wrote at the time, "In the weeks and months ahead you may be hearing from [NIH] regarding ... requests about specific ... personnel from your institution." See Francis C. Collins, "NIH Foreign Influence Letter to Grantees," National Institutes of Health, August 20, 2018.

† The DOJ's July 2019 China Initiative fact sheet suggests that law enforcement has invoked legal tools like the International Emergency Economic Powers Act, Espionage Act and 18 U.S. Code § 1831 provisions related to economic espionage in its China-related criminal cases this year. In addition, the newly-proposed Securing American Science and Technology Act of 2019 would direct the Office of Science and Technology Policy to establish an interagency working group to coordinate protection of federally-funded research as well as an information exchange mechanism between academia and federal security and science agencies. Numerous universities and professional organizations have already expressed their support for the bill, which has been incorporated into the House version of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020. For more information, see: Association of American Universities, "AAU, Associations, and

2018 more than 90 percent of its state-backed economic espionage cases and two-thirds of its theft of trade secrets cases involved China.²³⁴ “China has pioneered a societal approach to stealing innovation in any way it can from a wide array of businesses, universities, and organizations,” FBI Director Christopher Wray told the Council on Foreign Relations in April 2019.²³⁵ “They’re doing it through Chinese intelligence services, through state-owned enterprises, through ostensibly private companies, through graduate students and researchers, through a variety of actors all working on behalf of China,” he said.

In September 2019, a stark illustration of such state-sponsored efforts to illegally obtain U.S. technology emerged when the FBI charged Chinese government official Liu Zhongshan with conspiracy to fraudulently procure U.S. research scholar visas for Chinese officials whose actual purpose was to recruit U.S. scientists for high technology development programs within China.²³⁶ A few months earlier, University of California, Los Angeles professor and electrical engineer Yi-Chi Shih was convicted of conspiring to illegally export semiconductor chips with missile guidance applications to China.²³⁷ In April 2019, former General Electric engineer Zheng Xiaoqing and Chinese businessman Zhang Zhaoxi were charged with economic espionage and conspiring to steal General Electric’s trade secrets surrounding turbine technologies.²³⁸

The year 2019 also saw the conclusion of several traditional espionage cases, some of which involved former U.S. intelligence officers. In the spring of 2019, Jerry Lee and Kevin Mallory, both former Central Intelligence Agency officers, and Ron Hansen, a former officer at the Defense Intelligence Agency, were convicted in separate cases of conspiring to communicate, deliver, and transmit national defense information to China.²³⁹ On the occasion of Mr. Mallory’s sentencing, Assistant Attorney General for National Security John C. Demers, the official leading DOJ’s China Initiative, cited the case as “one in an alarming trend of former U.S. intelligence officers being targeted by China and betraying their country and colleagues.”²⁴⁰ He concluded that former U.S. intelligence officers “have no business partnering with [China] or any other adversarial foreign intelligence service.” In addition, DOJ charged naturalized U.S. citizen Peng Xuehua with acting as an illegal foreign agent to deliver classified U.S. national security information to China’s Ministry of State Security in September 2019.²⁴¹

While U.S. government officials defended the necessity of these policies, the Chinese government condemned the new visa restrictions on its students and researchers, framing the policy response as motivated by racism. “There are some reports saying that some Chinese-American scientists in the U.S., just because they are Chinese scientists, they have been treated unfairly,” Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Le Yucheng told the Tsinghua University-hosted World Peace Forum in July 2019. He warned that such moves demonstrated the United States views China as an “enemy” and could lead to “disastrous consequences.”²⁴²

Universities Support the Securing American Science and Technology Act,” May 30, 2019; National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020, H.R. 2500, introduced May 2, 2019. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/2500>.

ENDNOTES FOR SECTION 2

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