

“Testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission”

**Hearing on “China’s Global Influence and Interference Activities”**

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Testimony prepared by

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Panel III: The Chinese Communist Party’s Approach to Influence and Interference

Co-Chairs Borochoff and Wessel, distinguished Members of the Commission: thank you for giving me the opportunity to participate in his hearing. My testimony will focus on the objectives of the global influence and interference operations of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), how the Party itself describes and understands the different categories of work that form parts of these operations (with a focus on what does and does not constitute united front work), the basic toolkit the CCP uses, as well as a set of policy recommendations to mitigate and counter influence and interference.

Foreign influence and interference are defined here as activities by a foreign government or foreign actor(s), in this case the CCP, intended to influence or manipulate political processes, public opinion or national debates in ways that are favorable to the foreign government or actor and may harm the interests of the United States and its allies.

**1. Why does the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) seek to influence and interfere in foreign countries’ political systems, economies, and societies? Please address how CCP leaders explain the national objectives served by their global influence and interference activities as well as how these objectives have changed over time.**

The CCP frames the various categories of work that form its global influence and interference operations as a type of work that is in service of its larger development and policy goals. These goals can range from securing individual development interests to broadly defined but usually regime security related goals such as ensuring “national security” and “social stability” and – increasingly – making “contributions” to the world (i.e. reshaping the global order to bring it more in line with the CCP’s long term interests).

Through its global influence and interference activities, the CCP aims to create an external environment that is conducive to realizing its foreign policy goals and securing its short, mid and long term interests by maximizing support for and neutralizing opposition to the CCP, its policies and its interests both at home and globally. The “service” or “support” function of the different subsets of activities that we understand as influence and interference operations is expressed in the speeches of party leaders and in party documents. For example, united front work (统战工作), among other things serves to safeguard the PRC’s “national

sovereignty, national security and its development interests” and to mobilize all “sons and daughters of China” (全体中华儿女) behind the goal of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.<sup>i</sup>

Development interests used to be more domestically focused but can include a growing number of concrete policies and interests not just inside China but in various countries, such as smooth implementation of Belt and Road projects, supporting both state-owned and private PRC companies and protecting as well as expanding Chinese assets overseas, in essence, anything that is needed to make China thrive and “realize the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.”

The objectives of externally focused propaganda work (对外宣传工作) are similarly framed as in service of larger policy goals. As early as December 2003, Hu Jintao declared that “creating a favorable international public opinion environment” and “establishing a good image of China” abroad were “of importance for China’s national security and social stability.”<sup>ii</sup> At the 30<sup>th</sup> collective study session of the Politburo, held on May 31, 2021 and dedicated to raising China’s “international communication capabilities,” Xi Jinping similarly stated that, “China needs to form an international discourse power that matches its comprehensive national strength and international status and that creates a favorable external public opinion environment for China’s reform, development and stability, and to make positive contributions to promoting the building of a community with a shared future for mankind.”<sup>iii</sup>

Notably, CCP leaders, including Xi Jinping, have gone so far as to define the lack of an international “voice” (or discourse power 话语权) as a historical or generational challenge that is on par with freeing China from foreign colonization and eradicating poverty. At the National Party School Work Conference in December 2015, Xi Jinping stated that “if you are backward, you will suffer beating, if you are poor, you will suffer hunger, and if you have no voice, you will suffer being scolded.”<sup>iv</sup> With these references, Xi took up a debate that was started in Chinese think tank circles over a decade ago<sup>v</sup> and injected it into the official public party discourse at the highest level. At the conference, Xi declared that the first two problems – suffering beating and hunger – had been basically resolved by the Party, but the last problem – suffering being scolded – remained fundamentally unresolved<sup>vi</sup> and remains as a key challenge that a “strong China” will have to tackle.<sup>vii</sup> This is especially relevant because it may help explain why a large part of the CCP’s political interference in other countries as well as in international organizations is now undertaken with the increasingly aggressive goal of silencing opposition to the CCP and trying to ensure that criticism of the Party and its policies has no platform in the world.

While all the objectives of subsets of work that make up influence and interference operations are usually phrased in terms of **national interests and national objectives**, the key actor is the CCP. The Party’s interests and priorities are what define how and why this work is undertaken. At the most fundamental level, influence and interference activities aim not just to facilitate and create favorable conditions for individual policies and goals but to guarantee the long term regime security of the CCP by creating a safer international environment in which the CCP enjoys widespread global legitimacy and recognition, opposing forces are marginalized or have been eliminated, and others “naturally” align themselves with the Party’s objectives.

**2. What terms do Chinese leaders use to describe their influence and interference activities? Please address the “united front” concept and how it is different from externally-focused propaganda work or China’s broader foreign policy. Briefly address how “united front work” drives specific elements within the party-state bureaucracy.**

No single work area inside the PRC party-state bureaucracy sums up all the activities that make up political influence and interference activities, and no party or state agency is single-handedly in charge of all of these activities. Instead, CCP leaders use a variety of terms to describe different sub-areas, which are, in turn, led by different agencies inside the party-state bureaucracy. One type of work that is relevant for the CCP’s global influence and interference operations and that has received a lot of attention in recent years is united front (UF) work. UF work refers to the penetration and of any relevant societal force outside of the CCP with the goal of building the broadest possible alliance and resulting in the isolation of the Party’s main enemies. UF work is led by the United Front Work Department, a Party department which oversees a number of state bureaucracies, such as the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office.<sup>viii</sup>

A desired effect of united front work, both inside and outside of the PRC, is that it can mimic the appearance of civil society while ensuring that any group or societal force that is considered to be of significance remains institutionally tied to the CCP and is under Party control, or at least its guidance. The elevation of united front work under Xi (addressed below) should be first and foremost seen as a reassertion of control on the part of the CCP over various groups in Chinese society.

Although the term “united front work” is sometimes used interchangeably with the CCP’s global interference operations in our current debates, the principal target of united front work as a specific work area inside the party-state bureaucracy is PRC citizens, and a large part of united front work takes place inside the PRC’s borders. The slight domestic bias becomes evident when looking at the officially defined targets of united front work (groups and representative individuals from within these groups):

1. Members of the Democratic Parties (i.e. members of the eight “democratic” political parties that are allowed to exist and offer political consultation to the CCP but are not allowed to stand for election and govern the PRC)
2. Persons without Party affiliation
3. Non-Party intellectuals (i.e. intellectuals that are not CCP members)
4. Persons from ethnic minorities
5. Persons from religious groups
6. Persons from the non-public sector of the economy (i.e. private entrepreneurs)
7. Persons from the new social strata (a corresponding bureau, the 8th bureau, was added in 2016)
8. Students studying abroad or returned students (i.e. people who studied abroad but have now returned to the PRC)
9. Compatriots from Hong Kong and Macao
10. Taiwan compatriots (i.e. Taiwanese citizens) and their relatives in the Mainland
11. Overseas Chinese, returned Overseas Chinese, and the relatives of Overseas Chinese in the Mainland (note that the term used in the regulations is *huaqiao* 华侨, which refers to PRC citizens residing abroad)
12. Other persons that the CCP needs to liaise and unite with<sup>ix</sup>

Liaising with persons from groups 1-7 is of principal relevance inside the PRC's borders to maintain control over different groups inside the country, although these groups also remain of interest to the CCP when their members leave China's borders. Groups 8-11 are of principal relevance outside of Mainland China, though the focus on relatives in the Mainland and returned individuals shows that work pertaining to these groups takes place both inside and outside of the Mainland. Group 12 can refer to any group inside and outside the Mainland.

Although people of Chinese descent who are nationals of other countries (*haiwai huaren* 海外华人, *huayi* 华裔) are not specifically listed among the key targets of united front work as defined in the work regulations (except for "Taiwan compatriots"), the CCP indirectly lays claim to them and in practice often includes them among the "sons and daughters of the Chinese nation in China and abroad" (海内外中华儿女)<sup>x</sup> that need to be rallied and united behind the goal of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation and all the other related tasks that united front work is meant to support.

The dual role of people of Chinese descent and how to handle them in political liaison or united front work is summed up in an undated but clearly older article on Overseas United Front Work published on the CCP's website. The article quotes Zhou Enlai comparing Chinese people who have obtained foreign citizenship to a woman marrying into another family; she may belong to a different family now, but she remains a relative.<sup>xi</sup> The article then goes on to explain, that:

“As foreigners, the relationship between Overseas Chinese (of foreign nationality) and us belongs to the category of friendship with the peoples of other countries (人民友好的范畴) and is a friend relationship (朋友关系); but as the descendants of the Chinese nation, the Overseas Chinese and us are relatives and belong to the category of overseas united front work (海外统一战线工作的范畴).”<sup>xii</sup>

Especially in countries with large ethnic Chinese diasporas, such as Australia, New Zealand, and Canada, united front work can get mixed up with influence and interference activities targeting people who are not PRC citizens and not of Chinese descent. However, as the reference to different “categories” of work in the quote above already indicates, there are other work categories headed by different organizations inside the party-state bureaucracy that are primarily concerned with international liaison work and (political) friendship with the peoples of other countries.<sup>xiii</sup>

A number of terms are used to refer to this, including “friendly exchanges” (友好交往), the aforementioned friendship between peoples (人民友好), people-to-people diplomacy (民间外交) or “international liaison work” (国际联络工作). Despite referencing terms such as “people-to-people”, these exchanges are overseen by high level party-controlled organizations on the PRC side. One of the most important organizations is the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries, which is responsible for liaising with foreigners through Friendship Associations as well as through local relations (sister cities and sister states) and via foreign NGOs.<sup>xiv</sup> In addition, the International Liaison Department of the CCP is responsible for political liaison work that takes place in the form of party-to-party diplomacy. There are a number of additional organizations affiliated with

various parts of the party-state bureaucracy that also primarily engage in liaison work with foreign citizens.

In addition to political liaison work, be it in the form of united front work or “friendly exchanges”, there is external propaganda work (对外宣传), a set of tasks that is principally about raising China’s “voice” (话语权) and “raising China’s international communication capabilities” (国际传播能力) by amplifying Chinese talking points, shaping global debates and narratives and changing how people think about the PRC, the world and any topic that is of interest to the Party. This includes shaping day-to-day coverage of political events but, more ambitiously, is also about shifting the “balance of power” in the arena of international public opinion in the long run and changing the categories and concepts according to which the PRC and everybody else is evaluated. This work is primarily done through the CCP’s propaganda system, with the Central Propaganda Department at the top, which oversees media as well as various subordinate bureaucracies dedicated to culture, education, publishing, translation, etc. There used to be a separate party bureaucracy for externally focused propaganda work, with its own leading small group and party office, but it was absorbed into the Central Propaganda Department.<sup>xv</sup>

In theory as well as in the way the work is carried out in practice, there is significant overlap between united front work, friendship work and propaganda work targeting audiences outside the PRC. United front agencies also engage in activities that are meant to shape perceptions and thinking, and agencies and media in the propaganda system are also engaged in united front work and liaison work to win over foreigners to amplify the PRC’s narratives and messages.

Borders between different types of activities related to political influence and interference are also fuzzy because a number of activities have been defined as all-of-Party efforts, and all departments and subordinate organizations of the CCP are required to participate in them. Both united front work and “raising China’s international communication capabilities” have been defined by Xi Jinping personally as either all-of-Party efforts or the responsibility of all leading cadres, making them the responsibility not only of the departments that have traditionally led this work, but of other departments and leading cadres as well.<sup>xvi</sup>

Beyond united front work as carried out by the United Front Work Department and its subordinate bureaucracies, **all** of the CCP’s work, both the strategic outlook and the day-to-day work at home and abroad, including external propaganda work and any kind of liaison work regardless of the ethnicity of the target, is guided by a set of key principles that can be referred to as united front principles because they were informed by the basic experience of the Party during its formative early decades and are the same principles that also guide the party’s UF work in the narrow sense. In the simplest terms, this is about building the broadest possible alliance against enemies of the Party that need to be isolated, fought and discredited by all means. This principal enemy is context specific and is often referred to abstractly as “hostile forces at home and abroad” (境内外敌对势力).

A different set of rules applies depending on whether the Party believes it is dealing with a societal force that can be compromised and turned into part of a greater alliance or whether it believes it is dealing with a hostile force that cannot be integrated into an alliance and therefore needs to be fought. The enemy category includes any forces advocating or perceived by the CCP as advocating for independence for Xinjiang, Tibet, Taiwan or any other territory claimed by the PRC. At the global level, the principal enemy who needs to be

isolated (from its allies and partners) and discredited as a country that acts against the interests of the overwhelming majority of other countries is the United States. (As such, CCP influence and interference operations in other countries can be relevant to U.S. interests when these activities are geared towards isolating the U.S. or driving divisions between itself and its allies.)

The distinction between friends and temporary allies on the one hand and enemies on the other is what informs **all** of the CCP's work, including its international dealings and the broad set of activities that we call influence and interference. In fact, I will argue below that it makes sense to divide the influence and interference toolkit used by the CCP globally into two sets of activities: those that are geared towards making "friends", towards building the broadest possible alliances and towards promoting positive narratives on the one hand and those activities that primarily seek to isolate or silence the declared enemies of the party on the other hand, including preventing the participation of certain individuals in the public discourse and suppressing the discussion of topics the CCP does not wish to see discussed or in which it wants to tightly limit the voices that can be heard to its own and other "friendly" voices.

**3. Describe the Xi family's historical involvement in united front work and explain how General Secretary Xi Jinping has elevated the importance of united front work over his tenure. What changes has he made to the relevant policies, bureaucracies, budgets available for these efforts?**

Various articles in PRC media cover the contributions that Xi Jinping's father, Xi Zhongxun, made to the Party's United Front work (both the theory and in practice) during various stages of his career, such as when he was stationed in the CCP's Northwest Bureau (an administrative jurisdiction at the time, covering multiple provinces) in the earliest years of the PRC as well as during the Reform and Opening period. For example, one such article recounts how Xi's father helped delay a military confrontation by insisting on trying united front work before resorting to military suppression of the conflict.<sup>xvii</sup> Another article recounts how Xi's father corrected the mistakes of other cadres that did not implement the Party's policies with regard to ethnic unity correctly, as well as how his instructions on united front work regarding non-Party intellectuals resolved "misunderstandings" and "ideological confusion" surrounding united front work.<sup>xviii</sup>

These articles often hold Xi's father up as a person exemplifying the virtues of the Party's "patience" when dealing with China's ethnic minorities or other important or potentially restive forces in Chinese society. It is unclear whether and to what extent the biography of his father informed Xi Jinping's upgrading of united front work and to what extent the articles on his father's involvement in united front work were written to create this impression and explain the attention that Xi Jinping has paid attention to this work as well as to further the standing of united front work as a whole by tying it to the family of the CCP's preeminent leader.

What is certain is that Xi Jinping has elevated if not revived united front work during his tenure as General Secretary of the CCP. The first clear public sign was in 2014, when Xi Jinping gave a speech on united front work.<sup>xix</sup> This was followed in 2015 by the creation of a Leading Small Group for United Front Work, trial regulations for united front work (revised in 2020) as well as the first National United Front Work Conference in nine years (prior to

the last conference in 2006, national conferences on united front work were also held irregularly).<sup>xx</sup> At the time, united front personnel had already been increased by 40,000 cadres.<sup>xxi</sup> This signified a very substantial revival of united front work. The elevation was principally relevant as a signal that the Party wanted to tighten control over Chinese society. Since this includes Chinese citizens living abroad and any other group that the CCP claims as the “sons and daughters of the Chinese nation,” the elevation of united front work is of course also relevant for any country with significant Chinese diasporas. However, it needs to be kept in mind that united front work in the narrow sense (the work overseen by the UFD and its subordinate agencies) captures only a part of global influence and interference operations undertaken by the CCP and PRC agencies.

The united front work budget is difficult to reconstruct because the United Front Work Department, like other CCP departments, does not publish its budget. Ryan Fedasiuk has attempted to reconstruct a rough budget based on the published central and local level budgets of four types of organizations that directly or indirectly fall under the authority of the UFD (namely Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conferences, Ethnic and Religious Affairs Commissions, Foreign and Overseas Chinese Affairs Offices, and Federations of Industry and Commerce). Based on that data, he found that at least \$2.6 billion were spent on united front work in 2019, a budget that exceeded that of the PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs. These estimates are by definition conservative, as a large portion of the budget is missing, but only a part of it, as per Fedasiuk’s own estimate is dedicated to united front work outside of China, namely 23%, or US\$600 million.<sup>xxii</sup>

Similar constraints apply to the budgets attached to externally focused propaganda work (or propaganda work as a whole), as well as the budgets attached to liaison work via the International Department of the CCP or the CPAFFC. David Shambaugh had previously estimated the PRC’s external propaganda budget to be US\$ 10 billion annually; however, it is unclear what was counted into this figure, and I have not personally attempted to reconstruct a budget for external propaganda, united front work, or the CCP’s friendship bureaucracy.<sup>xxiii</sup> Even without exact numbers, it is safe to say that the budgets and attention devoted to different sub-areas of influence and interference work are substantial.

#### **4. Characterize Beijing’s general “toolkit” for carrying out global influence and interference activities. Does this toolkit differ depending on the target country or sector?**

Generally speaking, people (including myself) who have studied the influence and interference work of the CCP in one country will often recognize elements of it in another country. The CCP draws on a set of activities and types or organizations that it uses across different countries and sectors, but there is also variation depending on the concrete local circumstances or the individual agency of people on the ground. Below is an attempt to give an overview of the different types of activities that make up the toolkit. Examples given below are **not exhaustive**, but are only meant to give an impression of the range and types of activities that are part of the toolkit.

Based on the CCP’s own united front thinking (forming alliances versus isolating enemies), I have grouped various influence and interference activities into a “positive agenda” (building alliances, promoting PRC narratives and talking points) and a “negative agenda” or coercive toolkit (isolating and fighting hostile forces and suppressing discussion of certain topics or narratives).

The first set of activities, the “positive agenda”, is focused on liaison work (building the broadest possible alliances with as many groups as possible) and promoting narratives the CCP wants to promote. It can include activities such as:

- **Friendship and liaison work, networking and building positive relationships** with as many potentially relevant groups and through as many channels as possible. This can include channels such as party-to-party diplomacy, local diplomacy (sister cities and sister states, through the National Governor’s Association, etc.), friendship associations, business networks, think tank networks, university networks, theater associations, museum associations, and various (often BRI-themed) networks in other fields. PRC counterparts in any of these exchanges may try to create the impression of being civil society organizations, but any kind of work involving liaising with foreigners is automatically political and therefore necessitates Party oversight. The CCP or the PRC government may try to use this broader liaison work for various purposes, including make political friends who are willing to represent the interests of the PRC publicly or lobby behind the scenes. If it encounters opposition with a national or federal government, it may also try to exert pressure on it by trying to win over local governments, businesses or other interest groups. This kind of work can also involve the work of intelligence organizations operating behind front organizations.
- **United front work in the narrow sense**, i.e. ensuring that PRC citizens or overseas Chinese groups liaise with PRC embassies and united front bodies in the PRC and that the interests of the party-state are represented in these groups. Relevant organizations in other countries include, for example, local chapters of the Council for the Promotion of the Peaceful Reunification of China, various Chinese Associations, Chinese Students and Scholars Associations, as well as many (but not all) Chinese language media. PRC authorities may try to mobilize Overseas Chinese groups and networks for specific political purposes such as welcoming a PRC leader, participating in an embassy-facilitated protests, making statements in support of PRC policies, for mutual surveillance, or for attending and/or disrupting events.
- **Spreading CCP narratives via as many channels as possible**, including the PRC’s own party-state media, via media in host countries e.g through inserts, op-eds or other kinds of media cooperation (“borrowed boats”), by having non-PRC voices promote CCP narratives, e.g. via op-eds, by working with foreign influencers, etc. (“borrowed mouths”), through various types of convenings or via PRC-run networks (often BRI-themed), through bot and troll networks on social media, by subsidizing the translation and distribution of Chinese works into foreign languages, including via large academic and scientific publishing houses, etc. The CCP will often ask foreign interlocutors (individuals, groups, or sometimes national governments) for public statements of support for its various positions. This can range from casual statements affirming the PRC’s poverty reduction policies during a meeting to signatures on UN letters praising the PRC’s human rights record, its approach to Hong Kong or its policies in Xinjiang.<sup>xxiv</sup> The goal of insisting on these public statements is to create the impression of the broadest possible support for the PRC and its policies.
- **Providing funding or financial support**. This includes activities ranging from providing investment or loans for infrastructure and other projects in some countries that the PRC may hopes it can leverage for political support to subsidizing translations of Chinese works and providing funding for Confucius Institutes or classrooms. The point here is not so much to group these types of spending together



but to have this serve as a reminder that for a long time, the PRC has mixed economic and financial incentives with its influence and interference work, and the two cannot always be neatly separated.

The exact “positive” toolkit used in a country or sector may vary depending on what groups are available to liaise with, which groups are considered politically influential, who is willing to engage in this kind of work, how well the PRC understands the local political and social landscape, or how much support the PRC already enjoys at the national or federal level, etc. For example, in a country with a large Chinese diaspora, the diaspora will usually become a focal point of the party’s work, but the way in which the work is carried out may vary depending on the overall political circumstances, composition of the diaspora community, their social standing, etc. To give another example of variation, in a country in which the CCP has the general support of the federal or national government, it may be less necessary to work with local governments, opposition parties and other societal forces in order to put pressure on the national or federal government. This does not mean that this is not done at all, but it is less relevant in the moment and more done to prepare for a situation when political support for the PRC at the Center may change (a change of government, a change in the government’s position towards the PRC, etc.).

The second set of activities, the “negative agenda” or coercive toolkit, is comprised of activities that use various levers to exert pressure on individuals, groups or even whole countries so that they align themselves with Beijing’s preferences, to isolate and suppress groups considered hostile, or to prevent certain topics from being discussed. It can include activities and actions such as:

- Threats against and targeted harassment of individuals or groups perceived as critical<sup>xxv</sup>
- Physical violence, enforced disappearance or threats of violence, kidnappings,<sup>xxvi</sup> etc.
- Embassy-organized or -facilitated counter-protests
- Disruption of events on certain topics considered political or sensitive that the CCP wants to control tightly (on Xinjiang, Hong Kong, human rights, Xi Jinping, etc.), or events with speakers that the CCP opposes<sup>xxvii</sup>
- Behind the scenes editorial pressure, for example at overseas Chinese media
- Pressuring advertizers not to advertize with media (usually Chinese language media) that the CCP considers hostile<sup>xxviii</sup>
- Denial of visas to persons (journalists, academics, members of delegations) that the CCP considers too critical or in an attempt to induce self-censorship more broadly among researchers
- Economic coercion against countries (famous examples include Australia, Lithuania, South Korea, and Canada) to retaliate against actions or policies the CCP opposes or in attempt to force a country to change policy.

Again, the exact tools and their application can vary by country or sector. For example, in some countries, the CCP may not need to issue threats or issues fewer threats against individual journalists, media, academics, or others because few such voices exist to begin with (for example because people understand that criticism might endanger them). Some countries may be more vulnerable to economic coercion. In some countries PRC party and state authorities may operate with complete impunity while in other countries, they have started to encounter pushback. Generally speaking, PRC citizens or individuals with family ties to the PRC are often the most affected targets of the coercive toolkit and various forms of

threats and intimidation as they are of special interest to the CCP, PRC and CCP authorities feel that they have greater leverage and because members of the Chinese diaspora, such as PRC pro-democracy activists, PRC dissidents, activists from Hong Kong, members of the Uyghur or Tibetan diaspora and others are perceived as some of the biggest threats by the CCP.

##### **5. How should policymakers distinguish between those of China’s global influence and interference activities that are “legitimate” and those that are “illegitimate”?**

One standard to define illegitimate interference activities that was first raised by Malcolm Turnbull and is often cited is that of efforts that are “covert, coercive, and corrupt” (later, in follow-up definitions building on this one, “corrupt” was modified to “corrupting,” as in activities that corrupt political processes in the host country).<sup>xxxix</sup> This is a good starting point. Some governments distinguish between influence and interference, where the latter is usually defined as harmful and illegitimate while the former can include activities that are not necessarily malign or undermining the interests of the state in which they are carried out. According to the Australian Government Department of Home Affairs, “foreign interference occurs when activity carried out by, or on behalf of, a foreign power, is coercive, corrupting, deceptive or clandestine, and contrary to Australia’s sovereignty, values and national interests.”<sup>xxx</sup> The U.S. Department of Homeland Security defines foreign interference as “malign actions taken by foreign governments or foreign actors designed to sow discord, manipulate public discourse, discredit the electoral system, bias the development of policy, or disrupt markets for the purpose of undermining the interests of the United States and its allies.”<sup>xxxi</sup>

Some activities, including some that are already illegal, unequivocally fall under illegitimate forms of interference that should be countered and/or prosecuted where possible and applicable. These include:

- Election interference, including instructing people to vote for a certain candidate,<sup>xxxii</sup> or trying to prevent a candidate from running<sup>xxxiii</sup>
- Inauthentic coordinated behavior on social media, such as bot networks
- Instances of transnational repression where PRC authorities threaten or intimidate or try to repatriate individuals (often PRC citizens) on foreign soil
- Targeted harassment of individuals perceived as critical of the PRC or the CCP and/or its policies (phone calls, anonymous messages, sending spoofed emails on their behalf, etc.)
- Any action that tries to violate freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, etc. of U.S.-based individuals
- Blackmail
- Transmission of sensitive private personal information to PRC authorities
- Other parts of the PRC’s coercive toolkit

In addition to obvious examples of illegitimate interference, some activities that are generally legitimate can be used in part for illegitimate purposes. For example, a lot of the general networking activities on the “positive agenda” above are activities that host countries should be aware of but that can often be legitimate and do not necessarily require a response from local governments. For example, networking activities such as party-to-party diplomacy, local diplomacy, and other forms of meetings and networking and exchange activities are

legitimate activities on their own and can be pursued for mutual benefit as long as participants are aware of party ties of their PRC counterparts. However, actions may result from these broader exchange activities that do not fall within the spectrum of legitimate public diplomacy and that may require responses or more coordinated pushback. For example:

- PRC leaders meeting with U.S. business leaders to discuss their concerns or topics of mutual interests is a legitimate activity, but using those meetings to pressure business leaders to lobby for or against certain U.S. policies or legislation, as happened in 2021,<sup>xxxiv</sup> potentially crosses into illegitimate interference. It has also caused concern among businesses that they may be in violation of FARA if they do advocate for or against certain policies.
- U.S. cities and states engaging in relations with PRC counterparts is a legitimate activity that can be pursued for mutual benefit, but if CCP or PRC authorities try to systematically use states to try to pressure the federal government or change federal policy, this can cross into illegitimate interference.
- A U.S. city signing a partnership agreement with a PRC city is completely legitimate, but if such an agreement tries to prohibit U.S. city officials from interactions with Taiwan or if the PRC side tries to prevent interactions between the sister city and Taiwanese counterparts, this crosses into illegitimate interference.<sup>xxxv</sup>

**6. The Commission is mandated to make policy recommendations to Congress based on its hearings and other research. What are your recommendations for Congressional action related to the topic of your testimony?**

The majority of responses should focus on practices that can be clearly identified as belonging to the 3C (covert, coercive, corrupting) and thus constitute illegitimate interference, including practices that are illegal under U.S. law. Compared to some other countries, the United States has already acted more decisively in cases of suspected illegitimate interference, such as bringing a case against an individual who allegedly attempted to prevent an ethnic Chinese candidate from running for office.<sup>xxxvi</sup> Actions taken should aim to maximize costs for transnational repression and any activity that conspires to deny rights to U.S.-based individuals.

- Track rights infringements or attempts to deny rights on U.S. soil more systematically and raise the costs for such behavior, including through prosecution where possible and appropriate and by expelling PRC cadres engaging in such behavior or declaring PRC diplomats persona non grata in extreme cases.
- Continue to monitor for and raise costs for potential election interference through prosecution where possible and appropriate, by expelling PRC cadres engaging in acts of transnational repression on U.S. soil or by declaring PRC diplomats persona non grata where appropriate.
- Encourage affected parties to make rights violations and/or threats and intimidation attempts public where this can be done without risk to the individual or their family. Establish and/or improve mechanisms for individuals to report harassment, intimidation attempts or requests to cooperate with PRC authorities confidentially.
- Continue to hold hearings on CCP influence and interference, with a specific focus on the coercive toolkit and potential rights infringements on U.S. soil.

- Consider imposing Magnitzky type sanctions for particularly egregious instances of transnational repression and coercion against individuals based in the U.S. by individuals or groups acting from outside the U.S.

Additional action should focus on providing funding to improve China literacy in the U.S., both in general and on specific topics.

- Provide funding to improve China literacy, including Mandarin language but also political literacy of PRC and CCP institutions, work modus, and political processes.
- Consider providing funding specifically to mainstream existing knowledge across groups that interact with the PRC.
- Provide funding for topics that are more difficult to research or that may become less popular due to PRC pressure against those researching these topics.
- As access to the PRC and to data from the PRC is becoming more difficult in many cases, consider providing funding for open source research and to reward innovative ways to use open source data to research issues of interest regarding the PRC as well as to regain access to sources and data that has disappeared behind the Great Firewall.

Last, the U.S. should continue to coordinate with allies and partners on issues of PRC interference to find better responses and to prevent the attempted isolation of individual countries by the PRC.

- Continue to learn from the experience of other countries to the extent possible and while keeping in mind that circumstances across countries are not always identical.
- Coordinate with other countries to address issues of common concern, find best practices and demonstrate a joint response.
- Address economic coercion preemptively by diversifying and eliminating one-sided dependencies. Address coercion of allies and partners through coordination with them as well as by offering short term relief in case an ally or partner is hit (as happened to a limited degree in the case of Lithuania).

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<sup>i</sup> The first quote is from the Regulations on United Front Work, first released as a trial version in 2015 and in the final version in 2020. Zhonggong Zhongyang yinfa “Zhongguo Gongchandang tongyi zhanxian gongzuo tiaoli” 中共中央印发《中国共产党统一战线工作条例》(The Central Committee of the Communist Party of China issued the “Regulations on United Front Work of the Communist Party of China”), Gov.cn, January 5, 2021, [http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2021-01/05/content\\_5577289.htm](http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2021-01/05/content_5577289.htm). The second quote is from Xi Jinping’s 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress Report. Wang Ruijun> Tuidong xin shidai xin yhengcheng tongzhan gongzuo de gao zhiliang fazhan 王瑞军：推动新时代新征程统战工作高质量发展 (Wang Ruijun: Promote the high-quality development of united front work in the new era and on the new journey), website of the Guangzhou United Front Work Department, February 20, 2023, [http://www.tongxin.org/llyj/tzll/content/post\\_179876.html](http://www.tongxin.org/llyj/tzll/content/post_179876.html).

<sup>ii</sup> Zhonggong zhongyang xuanchuanbu ganbuju 中共中央宣传部干部局 (Cadre Bureau of the Central Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China), ed., *Xin shiqi xuanchuan*

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*sixiang gongzuo* 新时期宣传思想工作 (Propaganda and thought work in the new period). Beijing: Xuexi, 2006, p. 188.

<sup>iii</sup> Xi Jinping zai Zhonggong Zhongyang zhengzhiju di sanshi jiti xuexi shi qiangdiao jiaqiang he gaijin guoji chuanbo gongzuo zhanshi zhenshi liti quanmian de Zhongguo 习近平在中共中央政治局第三十次集体学习时强调 加强和改进国际传播工作 展示真实立体全面的中国 (During the 30th collective study of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, Xi Jinping emphasized strengthening and improving international communication work to show a true, three-dimensional and comprehensive China), Xinhua, June 1, 2021, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2021-06/01/c\\_1127517461.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2021-06/01/c_1127517461.htm).

<sup>iv</sup> Xi Jinping: zai quanguo dangxiao gongzuo huiyi shang jiang hua 习近平：在全国党校工作会议上的讲话 (Xi Jinping: Speech at the National Party School Work Conference), speech given December 11, 2015, published May 1, 2016 <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n1/2016/0501/c64094-28317481.html>; Women kao shenme jie jue ‘ai ma’ wenti 我们靠什么解决“挨骂”问题 (What do we rely on to solve the problem of being scolded), Xinhua, September 26, 2016, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2016-09/26/c\\_129299344.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2016-09/26/c_129299344.htm).

<sup>v</sup> This debate was picked up and covered by David Bandurski at the time. See David Bandurski, “CCP media policy, soft power, and China’s ‘third affliction’” China Media Project, January 5, 2010, <https://chinamediaproject.org/2010/01/05/ccp-media-policy-and-chinas-third-affliction/>.

<sup>vi</sup> Xi Jinping: zai quanguo dangxiao gongzuo huiyi shang jiang hua 习近平：在全国党校工作会议上的讲话 (Xi Jinping: Speech at the National Party School Work Conference), speech given December 11, 2015, published May 1, 2016 <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n1/2016/0501/c64094-28317481.html>; Women kao shenme jie jue ‘ai ma’ wenti 我们靠什么解决“挨骂”问题 (What do we rely on to solve the problem of suffering being scolded), Xinhua, September 26, 2016, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2016-09/26/c\\_129299344.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2016-09/26/c_129299344.htm).

<sup>vii</sup> “站起来”解决了“挨打”的问题，“富起来”解决了“挨饿”的问题，“强起来”就是要解决“挨骂”的问题。See Wang Shanshan 王珊珊, “Zhongguo gongchandang jie jue de san da lishi wenti” 中国共产党解决的三大历史问题 (Three historical issues solved by the Communist Party of China,” Zhonggongwang, August 14, 2019, <https://www.workercn.cn/251/201908/14/190814090507243.shtml>.

<sup>viii</sup> Zhonggong zhongyang yinfa ‘Shenhua dang he guojia jigou gaige fang’an 中共中央印发《深化党和国家机构改革方案》 (The Central Committee of the Communist Party of China issued the “Deepening Party and State Institutional Reform Plan”), March 21, 2018, [http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2018-03/21/content\\_5276191.htm#1](http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2018-03/21/content_5276191.htm#1).

<sup>ix</sup> Zhonggong Zhongyang yinfa “Zhongguo Gongchandang tongyi zhanxian gongzuo tiaoli” 中共中央印发《中国共产党统一战线工作条例》 (The Central Committee of the Communist Party of China issued the “Regulations on United Front Work of the Communist Party of China”), Gov.cn, January 5, 2021, [http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2021-01/05/content\\_5577289.htm](http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2021-01/05/content_5577289.htm).

<sup>x</sup> Xi Jinping chuxi Zhongyang tongzhan gongzuo huiyi bing fabiao zhongyao jianghua 习近平出席中央统战工作会议并发表重要讲话 (Xi Jinping Attends the Central United Front Work Conference and Delivers an Important Speech), Xinhua, July 30, 2022, [http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2022-07/30/content\\_5703635.htm](http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2022-07/30/content_5703635.htm).

<sup>xi</sup> Haiwai tongyi zhanxian gongzuo 海外统一战线工作 (Overseas United Front Work), website of the CCP provided on people.com.cn, undated, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64107/65708/65722/4444411.html>.

<sup>xii</sup> Haiwai tongyi zhanxian gongzuo 海外统一战线工作 (Overseas United Front Work), website of the CCP provided on people.com.cn, undated, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64107/65708/65722/4444411.html>.

<sup>xiii</sup> For the PRC concept of friendship (友谊), its Soviet origins, and the vast field of managing foreigners, see Anne-Marie Brady, *Making the Foreign Serve China*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2003, (p. 7).

<sup>xiv</sup> Activities in these three areas are documented on the CPAFFC’s website. Their website is currently not accessible from outside China, but archived screenshots remains, and the website is also still accessible from inside the PRC. <https://web.archive.org/web/20210220011933/https://cpaffc.org.cn/>.

<sup>xv</sup> Jichang Lulu, Filip Jirouš and Rachel Lee, Xi’s centralisation of external propaganda: SCIO and the Central Propaganda Department, Sinopsis, January 25, 2021, <https://sinopsis.cz/en/scio/>.

<sup>xvi</sup> For international communication capabilities: “习近平强调，各级党委（党组）要把加强国际传播能力建设纳入党委（党组）意识形态工作责任制，加强组织领导，加大财政投入，帮助推动实际工作、解决具体困难。”From: Xi Jinping zai Zhonggong Zhongyang zhengzhiju di sanshi jiti xuexi shi

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qiangdiao jiaqiang he gaijin guoji chuanbo gongzuo zhanshi zhenshi liti quanmian de Zhongguo 习近平在中共中央政治局第三十次集体学习时强调 加强和改进国际传播工作 展示真实立体全面的中国 (During the 30th collective study of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, Xi Jinping emphasized strengthening and improving international communication work to show a true, three-dimensional and comprehensive China), Xinhua, June 1, 2021, [习近平在中共中央政治局第三十次集体学习时强调 加强和改进国际传播工作 展示真实立体全面的中国-新华网 \(xinhuanet.com\)](https://www.xinhuanet.com). For united front work: “统战工作是全党的工作，必须全党重视，大家共同来做，构建党委统一领导、统战部门牵头协调、有关方面各负其责的大统战工作格局。” From: Xi Jinping chuxi Zhongyang tongzhan gongzuo huiyi bing fabiao zhongyao jianghua 习近平出席中央统战工作会议并发表重要讲话 (Xi Jinping Attends the Central United Front Work Conference and Delivers an Important Speech), Xinhua, July 30, 2022, [http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2022-07/30/content\\_5703635.htm](http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2022-07/30/content_5703635.htm).

<sup>xvii</sup> Xi Zhongxun: shi qin shi fang zhengqu renxin 习仲勋：十擒十放，争取人心, September 5, 2021, Tongyi zhanxian xinwen, <https://www.tyxxnews.com/static/content/RWTX/2021-09-04/883985713375485952.html>.

<sup>xviii</sup> Xi Zhongxun yu tongyi zhanxian 习仲勋与统一战线 (Xi Zhongxun and the United Front), website of the Hunan United Front Work Department, January 9, 2018, <https://www.hnswtzb.org/content/2018/01/09/6286985.html>.

<sup>xix</sup> Anne-Marie Brady, Magic Weapons: China’s Political Influence Activities under Xi Jinping, [https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/article/magic\\_weapons.pdf](https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/article/magic_weapons.pdf).

<sup>xx</sup> Gerry Groot, “The Expansion of the United Front under Xi Jinping,” The China Story Yearbook 2015, <https://www.thechinastory.org/yearbooks/yearbook-2015/forum-ascent/the-expansion-of-the-united-front-under-xi-jinping/>.

<sup>xxi</sup> Gerry Groot, “The Expansion of the United Front under Xi Jinping,” The China Story Yearbook 2015, <https://www.thechinastory.org/yearbooks/yearbook-2015/forum-ascent/the-expansion-of-the-united-front-under-xi-jinping/>.

<sup>xxii</sup> Ryan Fedasiuk, Putting Money in the Party’s Mouth: How China Mobilizes Funding for United Front Work, Jamestown China Brief, Volume 20, Issue 16, September 16, 2020, <https://jamestown.org/program/putting-money-in-the-partys-mouth-how-china-mobilizes-funding-for-united-front-work/>.

<sup>xxiii</sup> David Shambaugh, “China’s Soft-Power Push The Search for Respect”, Foreign Affairs, June 16, 2015, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2015-06-16/chinas-soft-power-push>.

<sup>xxiv</sup> E.g. “50 Countries Co-signed Letter to President of UN Human Rights Council and UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in Support of China’s Position on Xinjiang-related Issues,” website of the Chinese Mission to the UN, July 26, 2019, [http://geneva.china-mission.gov.cn/eng/dbdt/201907/t20190727\\_8192445.htm](http://geneva.china-mission.gov.cn/eng/dbdt/201907/t20190727_8192445.htm).

<sup>xxv</sup> See for example Masood Farivar, “China Steps Up Intimidation, Harassment of Chinese Dissidents in US,” VOA, July 14, 2022, <https://www.voanews.com/a/us-officials-warn-of-china-s-transnational-repression-operations/6658166.html>.

<sup>xxvi</sup> Cases such as Swedish citizen Gui Minhai and other booksellers from Hong Kong.

<sup>xxvii</sup> E.g. Levon Sevunts, “Chinese officials pressured Concordia University to cancel event with Uighur activist,” CBC, March 27, 2019, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/chinese-officials-concordia-university-cancel-event-with-ughur-activist-1.5074423>.

<sup>xxviii</sup> Joshua Kurlantzick, “How Beijing targets media in global influence operations,” Nikkei, February 5, 2023, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Life-Arts/Arts/Books-How-Beijing-targets-media-in-global-influence-operations>.

<sup>xxix</sup> Malcolm Turnbull, “Speech introducing the National Security Legislation Amendment (Espionage and Foreign Interference) Bill 2017,” <https://www.malcolmtturnbull.com.au/>, December 7, 2017, <https://www.malcolmtturnbull.com.au/media/speech-introducing-the-national-security-legislation-amendment-espionage-an>.

<sup>xxx</sup> “Defining Foreign Interference.” Australian Government, Department of Home Affairs, undated, <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/about-us/our-portfolios/national-security/countering-foreign-interference/defining-foreign-interference>.

<sup>xxxi</sup> “Foreign Interference Taxonomy.” Cisa.gov, Department of Homeland Security, July 2018, [https://www.cisa.gov/sites/default/files/publications/19\\_0717\\_cisa\\_foreign-influence-taxonomy.pdf](https://www.cisa.gov/sites/default/files/publications/19_0717_cisa_foreign-influence-taxonomy.pdf).

<sup>xxxii</sup> E.g. the alleged election interference in Canada currently dominating headlines.

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<sup>xxxiii</sup> The National Counterintelligence and Security Center, "Protecting Government and Business Leaders at the U.S. State and Local Level from People's Republic of China (PRC) Influence Operations", June 2022, [https://www.dni.gov/files/NCSC/documents/SafeguardingOurFuture/PRC\\_Subnational\\_Influence-06-July-2022.pdf](https://www.dni.gov/files/NCSC/documents/SafeguardingOurFuture/PRC_Subnational_Influence-06-July-2022.pdf).

<sup>xxxiv</sup> Helen Davidson, "Beijing warns China-linked US businesses: you cannot 'make a fortune in silence,'" The Guardian, December 2, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/dec/02/beijing-warns-china-linked-us-businesses-you-cannot-make-a-fortune-in-silence>

<sup>xxxv</sup> The National Counterintelligence and Security Center, "Protecting Government and Business Leaders at the U.S. State and Local Level from People's Republic of China (PRC) Influence Operations", June 2022, [https://www.dni.gov/files/NCSC/documents/SafeguardingOurFuture/PRC\\_Subnational\\_Influence-06-July-2022.pdf](https://www.dni.gov/files/NCSC/documents/SafeguardingOurFuture/PRC_Subnational_Influence-06-July-2022.pdf).

<sup>xxxvi</sup> The National Counterintelligence and Security Center, "Protecting Government and Business Leaders at the U.S. State and Local Level from People's Republic of China (PRC) Influence Operations", June 2022, [https://www.dni.gov/files/NCSC/documents/SafeguardingOurFuture/PRC\\_Subnational\\_Influence-06-July-2022.pdf](https://www.dni.gov/files/NCSC/documents/SafeguardingOurFuture/PRC_Subnational_Influence-06-July-2022.pdf).