



# People's Republic of China: Tools of Influence



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## Introduction

### *A Stark Example*

In February 2017, the chancellor of a major university in the western United States announced to students and faculty that the political and spiritual leader of Tibet, the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama, would be touring the United States that summer. The university invited the Dalai Lama to give the commencement speech for the university's all-student graduation. The chancellor's announcement set off a firestorm of controversy within the university. Almost immediately, the Chinese Students and Scholars Association (CSSA) released a public statement denouncing the Chancellor's decision on social media and the Chinese WeChat messaging app and notified the Chinese Consulate General in the state of the Dalai Lama's impending visit. Other Chinese student organizations also made public statements denouncing the Dalai Lama's visit, and students across campus expressed mixed emotions about the visit during interviews and comments on social media. Regardless of the controversy, the Dalai Lama's visit still occurred that summer, prompting the PRC to retaliate against the university by prohibiting researchers who received People's Republic of China (PRC) government funding from attending the school in the future.<sup>1,2,3,4</sup>

The PRC government has long had a hostile stance on activities regarding the Dalai Lama. The Dalai Lama fled Tibet in 1959, and he has served as a symbol of defiance to the PRC's claimed rule over the mountainous region in the years since his self-imposed exile.<sup>5</sup> However, the PRC's retaliatory action at this U.S. academic institution—against entities on U.S. soil—showed a remarkable brazenness. What changed geopolitically to enable such activity from the PRC? Who were the PRC-linked entities involved? What other influencing activities does the PRC engage in with U.S. audiences? And what actions can U.S. homeland stakeholders take to mitigate the risks associated with such activities?

### *Subnational Engagement & Foreign Malign Influence*

The PRC, as is typical of most countries, engages in influence-seeking behavior with foreign nations. Such influence-seeking behavior takes place in the traditional world of diplomacy; for example, in the form of official visits to U.S. national-level leadership from foreign diplomats and government officials. PRC engagements such as these, occurring at the national level, tend to be high-profile and receive ample attention from media, the public, and intelligence analysts.<sup>6,7</sup> Less visible, however, are the PRC's influence seeking activities that occur at the "subnational" level, with U.S. state, city, or local government officials and corporate executives. Examples of PRC subnational engagement may include the establishment of "sister" partnerships between cities in the PRC and those in the U.S., offers of paid trips to the PRC for state and local officials, or visits by China-based business leaders to U.S. companies to facilitate joint corporate ventures.<sup>8,9,10</sup>

Some PRC engagement with U.S. subnational entities, such as cultural exchanges, are on their face, relatively harmless and fall well within the norms of free and open societies.

However, other PRC subnational engagement activities are more malign in nature and further agendas designed that subvert and harm U.S. interests. The United States’ Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) terms such activities as “Foreign Malign Influence” (FMI). According to ODNI, FMI is defined as: “subversive, undeclared, coercive, or criminal activities by foreign governments, non-state actors, or their proxies to affect another nation’s popular or political attitudes, perceptions, or behaviors to advance their interests by driving integration and providing timely, rigorous, apolitical and insightful intelligence and support to inform national security decisions and protect our nation.”<sup>11</sup> As highlighted by the 2017 university incident, the PRC engages in FMI against the U.S. research community, exploits U.S.-PRC “sister city” relationships, and leverages person-to-person interactions with state and local leaders to advance policies that benefit the PRC.<sup>12,13</sup>

### *A National Security Risk*

The U.S. Government considers FMI at the subnational level to be a national security risk because they can push state and local leaders to pursue actions that are in their favor but subvert the interests of the United States broadly in furtherance of the PRC’s geopolitical agenda.<sup>14</sup> The PRC’s engagement at the subnational level, such as offers to build factories or purchase real estate in distressed areas, can bring jobs and economic prosperity to U.S. localities. However, these decisions can also foster an environment of unfair competition for U.S. companies, who have little hope of competing with Chinese companies’ cheap prices, due to the PRC’s seemingly endless supply of cheap labor.<sup>15</sup>

**Defining FMI**

According to ODNI, FMI is a type of foreign influence that includes one, or a combination of, the following characteristics:

- **Subversive:** intends to undermine the United States, its institutions, political systems, or the will of the American people
- **Undeclared:** intends to hide a foreign country’s hand
- **Coercive:** pressures individuals or groups in the United States to make decisions or support policies that favor a foreign country
- **Criminal:** violates U.S. law

Source: ODNI Foreign Malign Influence Center, FMI Primer, p. 2

**Figure 1:** Key Factors Associated with FMI.<sup>16</sup>

U.S. entities who decide to engage in joint ventures with PRC-linked entities, face additional risks such as the prospect of intellectual property theft, which the U.S. Intelligence Community highlighted as a top challenge to U.S. competitiveness.<sup>17</sup> Finally, the PRC’s FMI efforts could threaten core American values, for example by challenging the integrity of the U.S. policy-making process, exploiting free speech and academic freedom, and the free market.<sup>18,19</sup>

## The AEP Program

### *AEP Background*

The ODNI-sponsored Public-Private Sector Analytic Exchange Program (AEP) is a potential solution to the problem of ensuring the subnational decision-makers are well-informed on the nature of the PRC influence threat. The AEP, which is executed by the U.S. Department

of Homeland Security's Office of Intelligence & Analysis (DHS I&A) brings together teams of government and corporate intelligence analysts to analyze problems of mutual interest to public and private sector decision-makers.<sup>20</sup>

Each AEP research team includes a variety of analysts with unique skills, expertise, and insights which they can bring to bear on research problems, such as trying to better understand the nature and impacts of PRC subnational engagement in the U.S. homeland. Members of AEP research teams, acting on behalf of an U.S. Intelligence Community (IC)-sponsored program, are often subject matter experts on specific national, homeland, and economic security matters in their own right. However, the IC backing of their project additionally affords them unique access to researchers and other experts across the U.S. government and industry, including those with expertise on U.S. and overseas activities of PRC-linked entities.

AEP research teams' published products, which are fully unclassified and publicly accessible, also have the advantage of being able to leverage the broad corporate and government networks associated with the program, including professional associations. So, AEP teams' analysis is shared with the homeland stakeholders, including those at the subnational level, who can best use it. For further details on the AEP program, see the following link: <https://www.dhs.gov/publication/aep-overview-and-documents>

### *2024 Research Topic & Team*

Due to the recognition that U.S. decisionmakers at subnational level should be better informed on the nature and implications of PRC influence activities, the 2024 AEP Program brought together a team of thirteen government and corporate employees to draft a white paper that examines the "tools" the PRC utilizes during its outreach activities in the United States, as well as the implications of their use against subnational entities, broadly. Six members of the team are government analysts, hailing from the U.S. military, state and local law enforcement, a regional drug task force, and DHS. These government employees are joined by 7 corporate intelligence analysts who represent a consulting company, the financial services and banking industry, the entertainment sector, an airline, and the healthcare industry.

This AEP team, due to its' members broad and varied backgrounds, brings a unique insight to research on PRC subnational engagement, a topic most often examined by think tank/academic researchers and journalists. For example, the AEP team's military and federal government members have backgrounds in intelligence analysis and investigations, much of which is focused on the PRC. The team's experts from the banking and healthcare sectors have spent time living and studying in the PRC. And other members of the group have previously worked in think tanks or currently work on analyzing PRC security-related issues as a regular part of the daily employment duties. Additionally, many of these individuals are members of strong networks of corporate and government intelligence analysts from across the U.S. intelligence enterprise.

Member	Organization Type
Chuck E.	Consulting
James A.	Finance
Michelle H.	DoD
Brian H.	DoD
Clarence C.	Law Enforcement
Katie F.	Law Enforcement
Robert G.	Law Enforcement
Mario C.	Finance
Shira L.	Public Events
Charlotte M.	Transportation
Jesse H.	Banking
Ethan M.	Health-ISAC
Conley H. (Champion)	DHS (Champion Agency)

Figure 2: AEP Research Team Members.

## The PRC & the U.S. Today

### *Defining the Global System*

Historically and currently, competitive activities between nations occur within the context of achieving national goals and ambitions. Global powers typically compete over the ability to exert influence in the following areas: relative economic and military power, domestic security, status and prestige, material and economic prosperity, resources, territory and sovereign claims, values and ideology, and the power to shape the rules, norms, and institutions of the broader system.<sup>21,22</sup> With regards to the current U.S.-PRC competition, specifically, the two nations are primarily competing over *who gets to define the character of the international system*. This competition manifests itself in the forms of jockeying for leadership in international institutions, courting of alignments with important nations and companies, and dominating in the production of emerging technologies.<sup>23</sup>

### *The PRC, the U.S., & the Global Moment*

From an American perspective, the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 ended the Cold War and left the United States as world's dominant power. To many Americans, the Soviet Union's demise was a decisive confirmation that soviet concepts such as universal communism and the command-directed economy were vastly inferior to the West's open society and free markets. The U.S.'s outlook for the PRC was also brightening, as since 1978 the country had been gradually opening their economy to the world. Though there were a few notable exceptions, such as the Tiananmen Square Crisis, by the end of the Cold War, Chinese citizens lives had greater political and personal freedoms than they had throughout most of the previous decades. As a result, American decision-makers were cautiously optimistic that, like the Soviets, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) would also soon collapse.<sup>24</sup>

By 2015, however, U.S. optimism about the PRC's trajectory had soured after a series of U.S.-PRC disputes on issues including maritime sovereignty in the Pacific and cyber-espionage and intellectual property theft. This souring cemented itself into official U.S. policy when the U.S. acknowledged the PRC's status as a strategic competitor that sought to challenge American interests in the 2017 National Security Strategy and 2018 National Defense Strategy.<sup>25,26,27,28</sup>

The PRC's growing economic and military power is not the sole strategic threat to United States security and prosperity. The aforementioned 2017 and 2018 U.S. national security documents also highlight Russia as a strategic competitor to the United States, in particular their ability to use their veto authority in international institutions to stymie neighboring nations' economic, diplomatic, and security decisions.<sup>29,30</sup> The 2022 National Security Strategy highlighted Russia as posing an immediate threat to overturn key elements of the U.S.-led post-Cold War international order, as evidenced by their aggressive invasion of Ukraine in February of that year, and their efforts to subvert democratic processes and sow discord throughout the world, including within the United States homeland.<sup>31</sup> And it is worth remembering that Russia still remains the U.S. rival with the largest and most capable nuclear force, and though their war of aggression in Ukraine has laid bare some of the vulnerabilities associated with their conventional military, they are still a profoundly dangerous adversary.<sup>32,33</sup>

But, as the 2022 National Security strategy document notes, "the PRC...is the only competitor with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to advance that objective."<sup>34</sup> Russia is a poor rival to the United States in many respects, having little ability to rival the United States outside of the military domain: they have little comparative productive capacity, they are not a global technology leader, and they have few strong allies.<sup>35,36,37</sup>

### *The PRC's Strategic Goals*

PRC internal policy debates about their past, current, and future place in the world are at present operating under a narrative of national rejuvenation. There is a desire to correct past injustices that occurred at the hands of foreign powers in China's "Century of Humiliation" from 1839 and 1949. This period included China's compelled opening of the Yangtze River ports to Great Britain after being defeated in the First Opium War, the loss of territories including Manchuria and Taiwan during military incursions by a modernized Japanese military, multiple uprisings throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> Century that resulted in the millions of deaths, independence movements in regions such as Tibet and Mongolia, conflict with Japan during World War II, and a multi-decade Civil War between the CCP and Nationalist (KMT) Parties.<sup>38</sup>

As a result of these troubles, Chinese policymakers have gleaned several lessons about the nature of the international system, and how the PRC should improve its standing in it. According to this narrative, China suffered a loss of territory, control over its internal and external environment, and its international standing during its Century of Humiliation. Further, the Century of Humiliation narrative nurtures the idea among Chinese elites that Western powers are at heart greedy, aggressive, and still harbor ambitions to force the PRC

into subjugation. PRC elites perceive their nation's rapid growth in recent years, and the U.S.'s relative decline, as a period of opportunity where they could "restore" their nation to the position of power and prestige they had in eras prior to the Century of Humiliation.<sup>39,40</sup> Public statements by the PRC's current President, Xi Jinping, echo this narrative of national rejuvenation as he seeks to build a "fully developed, rich, and powerful" nation by 2049.<sup>41</sup>

Since 1953, the PRC's strategic goals have been conceptualized in series of "Five-Year Plans 五年计划 Wu Nian Ji Hua" which are focused particularly on the nation's social and economic development. The Five-Year Plans are the nation's roadmap to achieving global dominance. In meeting Five-Year Plan goals, PRC officials strive for the PRC to be the global leader in factors associated with "Comprehensive National Power (CNP), such as: economics, military capabilities, political clout, diplomatic savvy, technological advantage, natural resources, geography, moral stature and socio-cultural traits. Of these, the PRC is particularly focused on factors associated with economic growth, as officials deem this to be the primary benchmark associated with world leadership.<sup>42</sup>

The latest 14<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan, covering the period from 2021 to 2025, has the stated goals of: 1) making new strides in economic development, 2) improving the environment with aggressive goals on sustainable energy, 3) developing increased energy generation, 4) modernizing infrastructure development, 5) increasing China's scientific and technical capabilities, 6) and promoting the development of urban clusters and metropolitan areas through a people-centered urbanization process.<sup>43</sup> In turn, whole of government CCP engagement efforts are reflective of these goals. For example, in 2021 in furtherance of the CCP's 14<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan priority of creating technology independence and indigenous innovation, the Chinese city of Shenzhen prioritized foreign partnerships and the establishment of overseas research centers, utilizing relaxed visa and work permit allowances to attract foreign experts.<sup>44</sup>

### *PRC Seeking a Return to Historical Greatness*

As noted in the previous section, PRC elites' actions are often driven by the mindset that they are operating in a moment of historical destiny. For example, the PRC has doggedly pursued its' global Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in an effort to secure its maritime trade routes, which is a modern rendition of the "Silk Road". Xi Jinping's public statements highlight this comparison and indicate the PRC's desire to resurrect China's past glories. During a 2013 speech in Kazakhstan, Xi stated "as I stand here and look back at that episode of history, I could almost hear the camel bells echoing in the mountains and see the wisp of smoke rising from the desert."<sup>45,46</sup>

In examining China's past and its potential impact on PRC elites' current goals, it is worth noting China's historical attitude toward its neighbors. During much of its long history, China categorized its neighbors into various categories of "vassals". China was perceived to be the center of power, as the Middle Kingdom, and its vassals were defined by their *proximity to China's power*.<sup>47</sup> This historical Chinese foreign relations dynamic, which was buoyed by China's wealth and size, is characterized as a *Superordination-Subordination Order* in which the system consisted of a single state that vastly outpaced its neighbors in strength and influence rather than a system of equal.<sup>48</sup> This dynamic is seen in current diplomatic

conduct and statements, such as during PRC Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi's 2010 meeting with Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) leaders in which he stated, "China is a big country, and other countries are small countries—and that's just a fact."<sup>49,50</sup>

PRC leadership has not been reserved about stating its goals to supplant the Western-led "rules-based" international order.<sup>51</sup> One particularly illuminating statement was made in 2016 by the chair of the national People's Congress Foreign Affairs Committee, "the U.S. world order is a suit that no longer fits."<sup>52</sup> As an alternative to the Western-led order, the PRC offers its "Community for the Common Destiny of Mankind," a vision of national power which echoes China's eras of past dominance. According to the Communist Party journal, "Seeking Truth 求实 *Qishi*":

"The overall national security concept emphasizes the promotion of international security, the realization of self-security and common security, jointly building the Community of Common Destiny for Mankind. This concept of security discards old ideas of a zero-sum game, absolute security, alliance theory, etc., establishing on an international level an inclusive security concept which embodies the Chinese manner, reveals the Chinese mind and spirit, and manifests Chinese wisdom."<sup>53,54</sup>

Notably, the above text is offering a *security* concept, not just an economic concept. The PRC's new world order discards old norms such as competition and alliances in favor of PRC-defined values. "It is a concept of order built on, in Xi Jinping's words, 'peace and development.' Peace and development with China at the center."<sup>55,56</sup> Such a framework not only rejects key "Western" values, but rejects them as existential—note the following quote from Zhou Qian, Chief Justice and president of the Supreme People's Court of China:

"[China's courts] must firmly resist the Western idea of "constitutional democracy," "separation of powers" and "judicial independence." These are erroneous Western notions that threaten the leadership of the ruling Communist Party and defame the Chinese Socialist path on the rule of law."<sup>57,58</sup>

An internal 2013 Party communique supports this notion, listing key concepts to be resisted including constitutionalist democracy, "universal" values, civil society, and attempts to deny the history of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and what they term the New China.<sup>59,60</sup>

### *High-Level Challenges in U.S.-PRC Relations*

The current relationship between the United States and the PRC is marked by numerous bilateral tensions, each contributing to an environment of overall strain between the two nations. As of July 2024, one of the most visible aspects of this rivalry is an ongoing trade war between the U.S. and the PRC. Initiated by the imposition of tariffs and economic sanctions, this trade conflict has disrupted global supply chains and introduced significant economic uncertainty worldwide.<sup>61</sup> The tariffs have affected a wide range of goods, leading to increased costs for consumers and businesses alike. Both countries have accused each other of unfair trade practices, further complicating efforts to reach a resolution.<sup>62</sup> The U.S. push to lessen Chinese economic influence has brought together political opponents, as both major parties have advocated for greater trade restrictions, tariffs on Chinese electric vehicles (EVs), or banning TikTok.<sup>63,64,65</sup>



The technological rivalry between the U.S. and the PRC is another critical dimension of the two countries' competition. Increasingly, the U.S. and the PRC are caught up in evolving disputes over leadership in high-tech industries such as 5G networks, artificial intelligence, and quantum computing. Accusations of intellectual property theft and cyber espionage are rampant, with both nations alleging that the other engages in practices that threaten national security and economic stability. The U.S. has taken steps to ban or restrict Chinese technology companies like Huawei and TikTok, citing security concerns, while the PRC has responded with its own set of regulations and restrictions. According to an expert with the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), "China's rapid advancements in cloud computing and AI directly challenge U.S. dominance. The U.S. must adopt proactive policies to counteract these advancements. Failure to act now could cede critical technological ground to a strategic rival, with profound implications for economic and national security."<sup>66</sup>

Militarily, the South China Sea serves as a significant flashpoint in U.S.-PRC relations. A summary of the 2022 National Defense Strategy highlighted the PRC's aggressive actions to reshape the Indo-Pacific region, as well as the international system, to suit its interests as the top challenge to U.S. national security.<sup>67</sup> China's assertive territorial claims and construction of military installations on disputed islands have heightened tensions in the region. The United States, advocating for freedom of navigation, regularly conducts naval patrols through these waters, leading to close encounters and the risk of military confrontation. This militarization underscores the strategic importance of the region and the competing interests of both nations. Chinese President Xi Jinping reportedly warned U.S. President Joe Biden in late 2023 that Taiwan was the "most dangerous issue" in U.S.-PRC relations.<sup>68</sup>

In May 2024, the People's Liberation Army (PLA), following the inauguration of new Taiwanese President William Lai, performed large-scale military exercises surrounding the main island of Taiwan. The exercises were the PRC's third large-scale escalatory exercises occurring around Taiwan in as many years.<sup>69</sup> PRC President Xi Jinping has publicly stated that Taiwan's reunification with the Chinese mainland is a "historical inevitability".<sup>70</sup>

In the event the PRC elects to use military force to bring Taiwan into its fold, they have a variety of military options it might use during any future conflict over Taiwan, ranging in severity from attacks against Taiwan's offshore islands to all-out invasion of the Taiwanese mainland.<sup>71</sup> Most of the PRC's military options include some form of economic blockade or quarantine scenario in which the PLA controls all air and maritime access to and from the island of Taiwan.<sup>72</sup> A PRC quarantine of Taiwan could possibly be a fast-escalating crisis that could force the U.S. military to intervene to break the quarantine.<sup>73</sup> In some U.S.-PRC conflict scenarios over Taiwan, the economic damage to both the U.S. and the PRC would be staggering: a reduction of PRC Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 25-35 percent, and a reduction of U.S. GDP by 5-10 percent.<sup>74</sup> Such dire scenarios suggest brutal possible economic impacts at the U.S. subnational level, such as disruptions of the global semiconductor and electronics supply chains, cutting off of direct U.S. trade with the PRC, and a sanctioning of major Chinese banks—not to mention the possibility of crippling cyberattacks on U.S. infrastructure.<sup>75,76</sup>

Human rights disputes remain a thorny issue in U.S.-PRC relations, particularly concerning China's actions in Hong Kong, Xinjiang, and Tibet. The U.S. has consistently criticized China's human rights record, condemning actions such as the suppression of pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong, the mass detention of Uyghurs in Xinjiang, and the repression of Tibetan cultural and religious practices. These criticisms have led to the imposition of sanctions and increased diplomatic tensions. In July 2021, the State Department declared the PRC “is committing genocide and crimes against humanity through its wide-scale repression of Uighurs and other predominantly Muslim ethnic minorities in its northwestern region of Xinjiang, including in its use of internment camps and forced sterilization.”<sup>77</sup>

Beyond bilateral tensions, the United States and the PRC are also grappling with broader domestic pressures and national-level concerns reflecting their economic pressures and political systems. Economically, the U.S. and the PRC have both struggled with higher interest rates and persistent inflation, as the global economy was set to slow for a third straight year in 2024. The United States, for one, has increasingly embraced protectionist policies to offset its reliance on Chinese goods and protect its supply chains. In contrast, the PRC has struggled post-Covid with pronounced inflationary pressures and economic hardship, after relying for decades on government spending and commercial investment to fuel its economic development.

Politically, the U.S. and the PRC are two fundamentally different governance models with sharp contrasts in leadership. The United States upholds democratic values and supports institutions emphasizing individual freedoms, rule of law, and electoral accountability. China, on the other hand, advocates for its model of authoritarianism and centralized control, which it argues provides stability and rapid economic development. President Xi Jinping, who was elected president in 2013, has emerged as the most powerful leader in the PRC since Mao Zedong.<sup>78</sup>

While the Democrat and Republican parties in the U.S. remain aligned regarding China, the 2024 U.S. presidential election will set the course for relations with the PRC for the next four years. The presidential election will likely raise new issues over how competing administrations will look to safeguard U.S. economic stability and advance U.S. leadership in new and emerging technologies.

### *Subnational Engagement Furthers PRC Strategic Goals*

Since its infancy, the PRC has sought to render the outside world more amenable to its geopolitical interests. Relatedly, the PRC's influence operations have been integral to ensuring that the PRC government retains its dominion over China's complex society, which today exists largely outside of the country.<sup>79</sup> Despite continuous friction between the U.S. and PRC, the PRC government has pursued subnational engagement efforts in the U.S. homeland to promote its global objectives and policy stances to American public officials and society at large.<sup>80</sup>

The Chinese government, under President Xi Jinping, has taken a hardened approach to limit U.S. influence in the PRC, including activities ranging from cutting English language education to enacting pressure on Western businesses. PRC elites realize that U.S.

subnational leaders have a degree of relative separation from the federal system in Washington D.C. and they may seek to use these leaders as proxies to advocate for U.S. national-level policies that Beijing desires. Some of the influence activities can be relatively harmless, such as seeking to improve U.S. economic cooperation with the PRC. But PRC influence activities can also be more challenging to U.S. norms and ideals, such as by seeking to repress U.S. criticism of PRC policies on sensitive issues like Taiwan, Tibetans, Uyghurs, pro-democracy activists and others.<sup>81</sup>

At the subnational level, the PRC has intensified efforts to limit Western influence within its own borders through a variety of measures. One of the areas where this is most evident is in education. The PRC has implemented restrictions on foreign educational materials and institutions, aiming to curtail the spread of Western ideas and values. This includes reducing the presence of English language programs and foreign textbooks in schools, and promoting a curriculum that emphasizes Chinese culture and patriotism, including “Xi Jinping Thought.”<sup>8283</sup>

The PRC has, simultaneously, hampered Western businesses operating in the PRC by increasing regulatory challenges and made the market less accessible to them. The PRC has imposed even stricter regulations requiring foreign companies to form joint ventures with local firms, share technology, and comply with laws that conflict with international standards. Such measures are intended to protect the PRC’s domestic industries and reduce foreign influence in key sectors of the economy. According to the American Chamber of Commerce, foreign business confidence has lessened due to the declining environment for overseas businesses and Chinese government’s push to establish “domestic champions” or state-controlled companies in various industries.<sup>84</sup>

The PRC also exerts control over cultural and media content, restricting foreign media and promoting domestic alternatives. This includes censorship of foreign films, television shows, and online content, as well as efforts to promote Chinese media companies and cultural products.<sup>85</sup> By controlling the narratives which reach its populace, the PRC aims to strengthen its cultural identity and reduce the impact of Western media.

In response to the PRC’s actions, the United States and its allies have implemented various measures to counter PRC influence and protect their interests. The U.S. Government has heightened scrutiny on Chinese investments, particularly in sensitive sectors such as technology, infrastructure, and real estate. Additionally, the U.S. Government has enacted stricter regulations to review and potentially block Chinese investments that pose a risk to national security. In July 2024, for instance, the U.S. Treasury announced a major expansion of its security review authority for foreign purchases of real estate near American military bases, reportedly in response to PRC-linked purchases of property near sensitive sites.<sup>86</sup> Other countries have adopted similar measures, reflecting a broader concern about the strategic implications of PRC economic activities.

PRC efforts to target political dissidents and critics abroad have prompted international backlash. In 2023, the U.S. Department of Justice charged 40 Chinese public security officials with harassing Chinese nationals living in New York and elsewhere.<sup>87</sup> These officials used surveillance, coercion, and even extraterritorial abductions of individuals who were

perceived to be threats to the PRC Government. Such actions have raised concerns about China's disregard for international norms and the safety of those who challenge its policies.

### *Vectors of PRC Influence*

The PRC's primary bureaucratic organ for engaging in influence-seeking behavior within the U.S. are the CCP's United Front Work Department (UFWD), which focuses largely on reaching people or entities in the U.S. Chinese diaspora who hold prominent political, commercial or academic positions. UFWD, through these ties, aims to curry influence in various areas of U.S. domestic society in furtherance of the current strategic goals of the PRC.

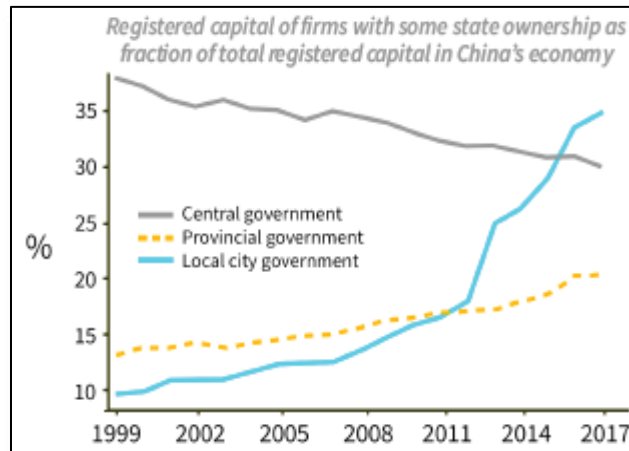
One instrument in the PRC's influence toolkit is the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC), which hosts elaborate conferences, paid trips, and meetings to facilitate seemingly lucrative joint business ventures between U.S. and Chinese entities. Other organizations such as China-U.S. Governors Forums, partnership with the Council of state government (CSG), and The National Association for China's Peaceful Unification (NACPU) engage in similar influence-facilitating activities.<sup>88,89</sup> These lucrative commercial deals can present U.S. corporate decisionmakers with immediate financial gains; however, in the long run, they can also foster U.S. dependencies on PRC resources. Such dependencies leave the U.S. open to exploitation in the event the U.S.-PRC relations sour in the future, as the PRC can take actions like inflating or restricting exports of these supplies to the U.S.<sup>90</sup>

The PRC's toolkit in exerting influence at the subnational level, with state, local, or tribal officials, can be either overt or covert in nature. PRC overt activities include acts of public diplomacy where the PRC's role is obvious and unobscured. During covert activities, on the other hand, the PRC's role is hidden, and their activities can be coercive or even criminal in nature. PRC approaches to subnational engagement frequently entail collecting information such as personal identifiable information (PII), targeting officials early in their career for potential later exploitation, leveraging partnerships such as city-to-city or "sister" relationships that can encompass business, technical, cultural, and educational exchanges between U.S. and Chinese communities, and exploiting state/local economic challenges to foster dependencies which afford the PRC significant influence.<sup>91</sup>

One notable factor that enables the PRC's ability to offer lucrative, and potentially exploitative, business deals with U.S. subnational entities is their use of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) 国有企业 Guo You Qi Ye. SOEs have inherent advantages over U.S. competitors due to their subsidization and assistance by the PRC government. The overall scope of SOEs used by the PRC to further its strategic goals is difficult to determine as researchers have not agreed upon how to properly define SOEs.<sup>92</sup>

The 2022 Stanford University study, "Reassessing the Role of State Ownership in China's Economy", finds that while 100% state ownership is the traditional definition of SOE, there are a large number of Chinese firms that operate under various percentages of state ownership.<sup>93</sup> This is further complicated by the trend in recent years that there has been a movement to diversify 100% state-owned entities towards a mix of private and state ownership in an effort to maximize growth productivity, and profitability.<sup>94</sup> Additionally, the

PRC is also revamping its state sector through a series of mergers that will consolidate state controls in an effort to improve performance and competitiveness in the international market.<sup>95</sup> In the press release by PRC state council, the integration of CCP corporate governance in PRC SOE will focus on strategic security, the national economy, people’s livelihoods, and public services.<sup>96</sup>



**Figure 3:** SOEs an Increasing Part of PRC Economy.<sup>97</sup>

State ownership threshold	No. of firms	SOEs by conventional (AIS) measure
100%	362,693	391,490
50%	539,238	
30%	628,554	
10%	743,821	
> 0%	866,757	

**Figure 4:** SOEs in PRC by Percentage of State Ownership.<sup>98</sup>

### *Subnational Decision-Makers Underserved by Existing Research*

The topic of U.S.-PRC competition, as well as PRC subnational engagement specifically, has been a common topic for research in recent years from academics, think tanks, and U.S. government analysts. Given the high stakes associated with the U.S.-PRC competition, no doubt such attention is warranted. Most of these studies were published with the goal of informing U.S. government decision-makers or the research community broadly, and these efforts have been effective.

However, this existing body of research almost assuredly underserve many of the U.S. entities who are dealing with PRC subnational engagement on a regular basis: decision-makers at the state, local, and private sector levels. For example, most mayors, county

commissioners, university administrators, and CEOs—who are all busy running their respective organizations—likely take little time to keep abreast of policy analysis or academic journals related to U.S.-PRC relations. As a result, many such decision-makers may be unaware, or are naïve, about the broader context of U.S.-PRC competition, how PRC subnational engagement can manifest itself to the determinant of their operations (i.e., the “tools” the PRC typically uses in exerting its influence), and what actions they can take to mitigate any potential threats associated with PRC influence activities.

## Scope

### *Audience & Intended Use of Paper*

As noted in the previous section, the intended primary audience for this AEP white paper are decision-makers within the SLTTPS community, including but not limited to state agency officials, county commissioners and commerce officials, mayors, corporate executives, and university administrators. Such individuals are some of the more likely recipients of PRC subnational engagement activities in the U.S. homeland. As a result, this paper is intended to assist these key stakeholders in understanding the PRC’s goals and aspirations, recognizing the types of PRC influence activities they could encounter in the course of their normal duties, and realizing what actions they might take to mitigate the threat of coercion or other nefarious acts from the PRC.

Our AEP team recognizes that some U.S. subnational entities may have a vested financial or social interest in engaging with PRC-linked entities. The AEP program does not advise homeland stakeholders on what actions they should or should not take. Rather, AEP’s goal is simply to aid these stakeholders in making more informed decisions, fully aware of the potential consequences (to both their organization and the U.S. government) associated with PRC engagement.

## Methodology & Literature Review

### *Overview of Research*

The 2024 AEP PRC Tools of Influence research team was tasked with analyzing the PRC’s subnational engagement efforts, with the goal of informing the homeland decision-makers who are most likely to be recipients of such activities. In seeking knowledge on this topic, the team examined existing literature that provided critical insights on Chinese history, decision-making within the PRC, and the activities associated with PRC subnational engagement within the U.S. and abroad.

The literature highlighted in this review is unclassified, publicly available, and is comprised of think tanks, magazines, and academic articles, books written on U.S.-PRC relations, congressional testimony, and news media. Additionally, the team gleaned insights from informal interviews conducted with researchers, NGOs, consultants, corporate executives, and government employees who each had a variety of expertise and experiences involving the PRC and associated entities. The literature and interviews highlighted in this review is not comprehensive of the totality of available knowledge on this topic. However, this review

is representative of most of the context and major themes associated with PRC subnational engagement.

### *Think Tank, Academic, Magazine, and News Articles*

In a 2022 RAND study titled, “Understanding a New Era of Strategic Competition”, RAND researchers highlighted the areas in which great powers, including the U.S. and the PRC, compete with one another over influence. According to RAND, one key element that is critical to understanding the context surrounding great power competition is to examine the goals, objectives, and interests of the competing nations.<sup>99</sup>

Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian’s 2018 article for Foreign Policy magazine titled, “China’s Long Arm Reaches into American Campuses”, uncovered the role and degree to which Chinese student organizations are exerting PRC influence on American universities. Allen-Ebrahimian’s article highlights the dual-nature of Chinese student organizations: aiding students in adjusting to social life in the U.S. but also in some cases serving as a coercive entity that ensures students adhere to the PRC’s ideological goals and vision while in the U.S.<sup>100</sup> Additionally, the Italy-based online magazine, *Bitter Winter: A Magazine on Religious Liberty and Human Rights*, offers unique journalistic accounts, often written by contributors from Chinese provinces, of the PRC’s use of harassment and threats to repress overseas dissidents.<sup>101</sup>

Alison Kaufmann’s testimony on behalf of the Center for Naval Analysis to the U.S.-PRC Economic and Security Review Commission provides numerous insights into PRC elites’ historical lessons-learned from China’s “Century of Humiliation” and its impacts on their current beliefs about the nature of the international system and the PRC’s role in it.<sup>102</sup>

Peking University’s Institute for Global Cooperation and Understanding conducted a study titled, “The Development of U.S.-China Sister Cities”, which shows the history of the inception of the sister cities concept as well as their importance and challenges in the current day.<sup>103</sup> The Stanford University Center on China’s Economy and Institutions published a briefing titled, “Reassessing the Role of State Ownership in China’s Economy” that analyzed a PRC database to identify the scope of state versus privately owned firms within China.<sup>104</sup> And finally, the Brookings Institute has detailed the history and current status of U.S.-PRC cooperation on countering flows of fentanyl and synthetic opioids.<sup>105</sup>

### *U.S. and PRC Government Policies, Reports, and Statements*

U.S. policy documents such as the 2017 and 2022 National Security Strategies, and the 2018 and 2022 National Defense Strategies provide researchers of U.S.-PRC relations an excellent overview of the U.S. government’s perception, under both Democratic and Republican parties, of the threat posed by the PRC’s rising power and influence globally. Relatedly, these documents also show the degree to which U.S. government policymakers perceive the PRC as posing a *uniquely dangerous* threat, with both the intent and capability to challenge the U.S.-led international order.<sup>106,107,108,109</sup>

Unclassified publicly available U.S. Intelligence Community products, such as the Foreign Malign Influence Center’s 2024 “FMI Primer” and the National Counterintelligence and Security Center (NCSC)’s 2022 “Safeguarding Our Future: Protecting Government and Business Leaders at the U.S. State and Local Level from PRC Influence Operations” provide a concise, easy-to-read overview of the types of PRC activities faced by U.S. SLTTPS entities.<sup>110,111</sup> DHS’s “2024 Homeland Threat Assessment” highlights forward looking trends regarding the PRC’s use of economic coercion and manipulation in the economic realm.<sup>112</sup>

The PRC’s “5-Year Plan” documents provide researchers with the CCP’s stated policy goals and the roadmap for meeting them. The PRC’s governance efforts have been guided by 5-Year Plans since 1953, and as of 2024 the country is on their 14<sup>th</sup> such plan.<sup>113,114</sup> In 2023, the PRC enacted new laws on foreign relations that reflect their strategic goals regarding domestic and global governance.<sup>115</sup>

## Books

Larry Diamond and Orville Schell’s Hoover Institution book titled, “China’s Influence and American Interests: Promoting Constructive Vigilance” is an excellent examination of the PRC’s influence efforts targeting a variety of U.S. entities, such as state and local governments, academia and think tanks, corporations, and the media.<sup>116</sup> The Hoover book also includes a useful study of the PRC’s influence operations bureaucracy, including key organizations as well as associated policy-making and coordination processes.<sup>117</sup> Thomas F. Lynch III’s National Defense University book titled, “Strategic Assessment 2020: Into a New Era of Great Power Competition,” is a comprehensive study of the topic of great power competition broadly, gleaning insights from past eras and also examining current day dynamics, such as the competition strategies pursued by the U.S., the PRC, and Russia.<sup>118</sup> Lynch III’s book also highlights the elements that great powers compete for dominance over, as well as the tools they utilize to exert their influence vis-à-vis their competitors.<sup>119</sup>

Dr. Jonathan D.T. Ward’s “China’s Vision of Victory” outlines PRC goals and ambitions and national narrative of rejuvenation. Extensively researched, Ward’s book draws on various primary sources and a reading of China’s history to walk the reader through PRC elites’ strategic vision and the consequential implications for the American-led global order.<sup>120</sup> Equally compelling is Dr. Ward’s subsequent work, “The Decisive Decade: America’s Grand Strategy for Triumph over China,” which provides policymakers with a framework for how the United States can prevail over the PRC in areas ranging from the economic to ideological realm of ideas.<sup>121</sup> Dr. Ward leverages the history of U.S.-PRC relations, as well as insights from other conflicts to inform his analysis.<sup>122</sup>

“Hidden Hand: Exposing How the Chinese Communist Party is Reshaping the World,” authored by Clive Hamilton and Mareike Ohlberg, elucidates the PRC’s methods of influence and goals, detailing the Party’s ideological principles, slogans, and UFWD strategies.<sup>123</sup> This work is detailed, providing researchers with examples of PRC influence operations in various countries worldwide. The book also addresses the threats such PRC influence activities pose at various levels of society, including in subnational, academic and private-sector environments. Importantly, this work addresses the tactics employed by the PRC during



influence operations, and the ideological drivers that shape and guide such actions. Moreover, the book also provides insights into the ways in which U.S. entities, unwittingly or wittingly, further the PRC's stated goals by engaging with PRC-linked actors.

## *Interviews*

The AEP PRC Tools of Influence research team conducted interviews of thirteen subject matter experts in the field of U.S.-PRC relations. These individuals, whose identities have been kept anonymous in this paper, hailed from a variety of backgrounds, working as: think tank and academic researchers, corporate risk consultants, U.S. intelligence analysts, state and local government policy analysts, U.S. diplomats, cybersecurity analysts, human rights researchers, and business executives.<sup>124,125,126,127,128,129,130,131,132,133,134,135,136</sup> These interviewees provided the AEP team with unparalleled insights into PRC decision-making dynamics, the tactics and levers that enable PRC coercion on U.S. soil and abroad, the influence of PRC laws and regulations on U.S.-PRC engagement, as well as potential areas of future cooperative engagement between the U.S. and the PRC.<sup>137,138,139,140,141,142,143,144,145</sup>

## *Literature Review Conclusion*

Overall, a wealth of literature and media reporting exists that highlights the broader context of Great Power Competition, U.S.-PRC relations, and the tools of power and coercion the PRC uses to exert its influence among specific U.S. subnational entities, such as businesses and government entities. This literature makes clear that the PRC is actively engaged in a multi-pronged and complex effort to exert influence U.S. entities to take actions in furtherance of their own ideological and political goals. However, little research has been performed that *comprehensively* highlights the breadth of activities (whether malign or benign) that the PRC engages in to curry influence in the U.S. homeland. Little guidance has also been produced, whether from the U.S. government or by private sector entities, that arms subnational decision-makers with *constructive options* for mitigating threats during their interactions with PRC entities.

## Key Intelligence Questions

### *3 KIQs and Their Criticality*

The AEP research team focused its research by establishing what we term, “Key Intelligence Questions (KIQs)”. KIQs are, simply, the primary overarching research questions that are addressed in the paper’s analysis. This white paper addresses the following three KIQs regarding PRC subnational engagement:

1. *Range of PRC Activities*. What are the range of activities that U.S. subnational entities face during engagements with PRC-linked entities? What vulnerabilities facilitate these activities?

2. [Determining Risk](#). What factors should U.S. subnational decision-makers consider when determining their risk tolerance for PRC engagement? What are some risks associated with malign activity?
3. [Constructive Mitigation](#). What are some ways subnational entities can constructively mitigate the threats posed inherent in PRC engagement? What are some avenues of cooperation that can lessen U.S.-PRC tensions?

Each of these KIQs was chosen due to their criticality in ensuring that U.S. subnational decision-makers are properly informed on the nature of the PRC threat. For example, to effectively protect their organization from exploitation during engagement with PRC-linked entities, subnational decision-makers should have a solid understanding of the broad array of activities they might possibly face, and the driving factors behind them, during future interactions with such actors. Further, these KIQs were chosen with the goal of ensuring that U.S. subnational decision-makers can walk into such PRC-linked engagements with a better understanding of which risks they can tolerate and which they cannot.

It is worth noting that this internal risk assessment should be informed by an understanding of the current geopolitical environment as well as the potential future trajectory of U.S.-PRC relations. Finally, as many U.S. subnational entities may have little alternative but to engage with PRC-linked entities, decision-makers should also be armed with a list of ways in which they can mitigate some of the threats inherent to engagement with PRC-linked entities, such as intellectual property theft or a gradual degrading of industry competitiveness.

## [Findings](#)

### **KIQ#1: Range of PRC Activities**

#### *Introduction*

The PRC's strategic goal of national rejuvenation, and ultimately global dominance, necessitates the undertaking of a wide variety of activities across the diplomatic, informational/technological, and economic spheres. For example, the PRC regularly fosters economic and trade-based partnerships with U.S. entities through trade missions that bring together government and corporate decision-makers who collaborate to produce mutually beneficial deals.<sup>146</sup> Though these often occur at the national level, many engagements also occur at the subnational level between U.S. entities and a sprawling array of CCP and front groups.<sup>147</sup>

The U.S. federal government, to its detriment, often does not have good visibility into these PRC interactions at the subnational level.<sup>148</sup> Such engagements often have no obvious indications of malicious intent or criminality, and as a result, there is little reason or incentive for subnational entities to notify federal entities of their engagements with PRC-linked entities. Indeed, one might argue that many U.S.-PRC engagements, such as those involving the trade of food and agriculture, are mutually beneficial to both nations.<sup>149</sup> However, it is worth noting that while the U.S. participants in these engagements may be acting without political intent, that is not necessarily the case for their Chinese counterparts.

For example, U.S. delegations to the PRC are typically hosted by the Chinese People’s Institute of Foreign Affairs (CPIFA), which was created to promote people-to-people exchanges with distinguished individuals, but also carries out PRC government priorities without being perceived to be a formal government entity.<sup>150</sup>

There are also some PRC engagements at the subnational level which may begin as benign and then become predatory in nature at a future date, ultimately proving extremely harmful to U.S. economic and national security. Evidence in support of this is provided in the 2020 public statement of FBI Director Christopher Wray, which indicated that the FBI had more than one thousand investigations into Chinese intellectual property thefts.<sup>151</sup> Such thefts of proprietary information and trade secrets cost U.S. companies hundreds of billions of dollars annually, leave them at a competitive disadvantage, and threaten global innovation.<sup>152</sup> One must wonder how many of these thefts began as seemingly benign and mutually beneficial exchanges between U.S. companies and PRC entities.

### #1: Courting “Friends”

In a speech at the National Work Conference for Propaganda and Ideology, Xi Jinping grouped actors for outreach into three categories: those in “red” (i.e. those already in the PRC’s grasp), those in “gray” (those who are in the middle ground), and those in “black” (those who have a negative opinion of working the PRC-linked entities).<sup>153</sup> Xi instructed the Party to reach out entities deemed in the gray zone and incorporate those who already in the red, as the “political middle” is the primary target of influence work.<sup>154</sup> Such framing places the majority of the PRC’s potential partners in the first two camps, suggesting their belief that most parties can, and ultimately will, be won over to the PRC’s point of view.

Decades earlier, Mao Zedong infamously said that that “95 percent of people are good”. Mao was speaking in a political sense, that most people were on side of the CCP, which he considered to be the “vanguard of the people”.<sup>155</sup> Mao’s beliefs appear in modern PRC discourse as well as the modern-day PRC argues that the CCP’s positions are good and in line with what most of the world thinks.<sup>156</sup> As an example, see the following statement by a PRC foreign ministry spokesperson in the *China Daily*:

“If every Chinese citizen sent an open letter to Canadian leaders, their voice would be more resounding, and would certainly join with the mainstream voice of the international community, which is on the side of justice. . . the handful of people behind the open letter are intentionally creating an air of panic.”<sup>157</sup>

This presumptuous narrative also applies in the context of subnational outreach, for the PRC’s position is that while the U.S. may be a geopolitical enemy, within American society itself only a small number of enemies exist, and the majority of the country is comprised of ‘the people’ who can be convinced of the ‘irresistible historical trend towards multipolarity.’<sup>158,159</sup> Notably for the PRC, those small numbers of enemies must include key decision-makers in Washington D.C.

One PRC slogan, in particularly, induces the benefits of rallying these red and grey actors against the PRC’s enemies: use the countryside to surround the cities 农村包围城市 *Nong*

*Chun Bao Wei Cheng Shi*.<sup>160</sup> The PRC uses this concept to induce sympathetic actors to organize and attack the PRC's enemies by surrounding the enemy's strongholds in the cities to pressure the center.<sup>161</sup> The PRC applies this principle to its U.S. subnational engagement efforts as well, for by courting influence at varying levels of governance throughout the country, the PRC believes it can sway national-level policy and decisionmakers in Washington D.C.

PRC planners are well aware of the fact that the U.S. subnational leaders of today often become the national leaders of tomorrow. U.S. political pipelines drive this dynamic, leading many political aspirants from across the nation to spend at least a portion of their career in the Beltway. The PRC calculates that if they if they can become "friends" with such individuals prior to their arrival in Washington D.C., the influence deck will be stacked in the favor of the PRC's needs.<sup>162</sup>

Relatedly, when considering the PRC's cultivation of human assets, it is critical to understand how the PRC uses the term "friend". For the PRC, the term "friend" has a transnational connotation in which political friendship is "an application of united front principles to divide the enemy by focusing on contradictions and uniting all forces that can be united around a common goal", and foreign "friends" are those who are willing and able to promote PRC interests.<sup>163</sup> Xi Jinping expounded on this concept in 2017, saying that friends outside the Party are not 'personal resources,' but should be 'friends for the Party' or 'for the public good.' He added further, "of course, friendships made outside the Party will devolve into personal friendships. But personal friendships must comply with the work for the public good. Principles, discipline, and rules must be maintained."<sup>164</sup>

The PRC has a variety of tools at its disposal for use in courting foreign "friends". Some U.S. leaders can be met with appeals to their vanity or sense of gratitude, such as by receiving "special" access to their PRC counterparts and by promoting a belief that "only they" understand the PRC with their elevated perspective. Former U.S. President George H.W. Bush noted in a memoir the concept of friendship: "When Deng called me (an old friend of China) 老朋友 *Lao Peng You*, I felt the phrase was not just the usual flattery, but a recognition that I understood the importance of the U.S.-PRC relationship and the need to keep it on track."<sup>165</sup> This feeling of connection can drive leaders to unwittingly pursue Beijing's interests, urging them to seek understanding and follow the PRC's perspective. A previous Canadian ambassador to the PRC, David Mulroney, put it as follows: "You and you alone are sufficiently gifted and experienced to understand the situation and explain it to your government. The fate of the bilateral relationship is in your hands."<sup>166</sup>

Other prospective PRC partners are enticed with "exchange trips," where they meet with enthusiastic counterparts. Such exchanges can occur through invitations to attend conferences, or cultural events and are often hosted by seemingly neutral organizations like academic organizations or charities. Courting can also include gifts or free trips to the PRC, where prospective partners receive a scripted program of tours and meetings.<sup>167</sup> Others are wooed by the prospect of lucrative investment opportunities that will help fulfill campaign promises or generate favorable voting metrics. When a southeastern U.S. state hosted the U.S.-China National Governors Collaboration Summit in 2019, the event elicited federal concerns due to the event being jointly coordinated with CPAFFC. One state's governor, at

the time, opined that suspicion and misunderstanding would vanish “when people talk”, a message pushed through the PRC’s media apparatus. Notably, two months later, a Chinese company announced its plan to invest \$200 million in a rural part of the state, creating 500 jobs.<sup>168</sup>

One might object to this paper’s argument that the PRC often cultivates “friends” for later exploitation, arguing that cultural exchange and investment are natural forms of engagement. However, with regards to the PRC, their malign behavior is often characterized by a lack of reciprocity and transparency that is the norm in Western exchanges. One example of such malign behavior is technology theft. According to U.S. officials, the PRC’s industrial espionage efforts are “theft on a scale so massive that it represents one of the largest transfers of wealth in human history.”<sup>169</sup>

Importantly, the PRC’s theft of U.S. intellectual property drives the country’s domestic economic development. This is particularly dangerous for the United States: “Just as harmful as the PRC’s systematic technology transfer programs is the series of industrial strategies that this system of industrial espionage feeds into, allowing the PRC to dominate foundational industries and position itself to dominate many of the emerging technologies that will define the future.”<sup>170</sup> This in turn bolsters the PRC’s “Dual Circulation” strategy, with the aim of increasing the world’s dependence on the PRC while decreasing its dependence on the world: “[w]e must tighten international production chains’ dependence on China, forming a powerful countermeasure and deterrent capability against foreigners who would artificially cut off supply [to China].”<sup>171</sup>

## #2: *Leveraging Corporate Influence*

The PRC has increasingly deployed a tactic that leverages the state’s significant corporate influence to apply pressure to foreign entities. This tactic, often referred to as 以商避政 “*yi shang bi zheng*” translates to “using business to pressure government.” By cultivating deep economic ties through trade, investment, and market access, the PRC positions its corporations as instruments of state policy. When conflicts arise or political concessions are desired, the PRC can exert pressure by threatening economic repercussions. For example, multinational companies who are reliant on the Chinese market may face boycotts or regulatory hurdles if their home governments adopt policies unfavorable to Beijing. This strategy effectively turns global businesses into conduits for Chinese political leverage, compelling governments to reconsider their stances on key issues such as human rights, territorial disputes, and trade regulations.

The PRC’s corporate influence in the U.S. extended to Wall Street with a major U.S. investment banking company establishing in the early 2000s an initiative to recruit the children and relatives of influential Chinese officials and business leaders with the intent to reinforce the U.S. company’s relationship with key decision makers in China, and curry favor to secure lucrative business deals within the highly competitive Chinese market.

This program came under intense scrutiny in 2013 when U.S. authorities began investigating whether these hiring practices violated anti-bribery laws, specifically the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (FCPA). The FCPA prohibits U.S. companies from giving

anything of value to foreign officials to gain a business advantage. In 2016, the U.S. company agreed to pay more than \$264 million to settle charges suggesting that the program was used to win business from Chinese state-owned companies, thus violating the FCPA. The program provided more than just elite employment opportunities for the Chinese wealthy and well-to-do, it placed key informants at the center of the U.S. financial markets, with access to gather intelligence and exert influence.<sup>172</sup>

The PRC also targeted another major U.S. investment banking company with its 以商避政 "*yi shang bi zheng*" tactic. By the early 2000s the U.S. company was considered to be "the lead underwriter for major Chinese state-owned companies" and was considered essential to the PRC in terms of accessing and influencing the U.S. financial elite.<sup>173</sup> A former high-ranking U.S. government official left his role as CEO of the U.S. company in 2006 for a high profile job in Washington D.C. overseeing U.S. economic policy towards the PRC. The U.S. official was later accused of failing to respond forcefully enough to the PRC's predatory investment tactics, which ultimately lead to the trade war between the U.S. and the PRC. The lukewarm response to PRC tactics curtailed U.S. economic power and elevated Chinese influence.<sup>174</sup> Also occurring in the subnational realm, the PRC often presents business deals, collaborations, and partnerships to entities at the corporate level between PRC-linked companies and U.S. companies. Some such deals and relationships may be brokered by "sister-cities" agreements, as joint university research projects, or simply under the auspices of perceived mutual interest.<sup>175</sup> However, while there is a separation in business entities and government in the U.S., the connection between China-based companies and the PRC government may not be as clear.<sup>176</sup> Referring to the section on SOE, it is often difficult to define the status of a PRC company because of the push towards mixed-ownership structures. To compound the issue of PRC government influence on corporations, the 2017 National Intelligence Law compels firms to provide information or support to the Chinese State if required.<sup>177</sup>

The PRC recognizes that through solidifying its economic ties and interconnectedness with the U.S., they are creating a space where political influence and interference can occur.<sup>178</sup> By creating economic dependencies, financial rewards and punishments may be used to influence business and government leaders at the subnational level.<sup>179</sup> Rewards could be access to certain Chinese markets or resources, investments in business deals, PRC delegation visits to further business agendas. To receive such rewards, corporate entities may be influenced to perform actions to further the PRC's strategic goals. In 2021, the PRC urged U.S. businesses to push the U.S. government to "lift tariffs imposed on China, stop the suppression and sanctions against Chinese enterprises and provide a level playing field for enterprises of both countries." These sanctions were put in place due to human rights abuses and regional aggression by the PRC.<sup>180</sup>

Of course, not all China-based companies are the string puppets for PRC government agendas; some China-based companies may simply be operating on the best interest of their companies and industries. In the interview with U.S. academic Kyle Jaros on the role of subnational relationships in U.S.-PRC relations, Jaros pointed out that both U.S. and PRC subnational governments have a "major interest in promoting trade and investment links that do not directly impinge on national security."<sup>181</sup> From a U.S. corporate standpoint,

having a solid understanding of PRC financing and corporate practices may go a long way to increase awareness of weighing the costs and benefits of collaboration.

### #3: *Exploiting Sister City Agreements*

Political coercion can extend beyond specific individuals, with coercion's foundations laid in specific (sometimes symbolic) agreements. Sister-city agreements are a key example of this, as such partnerships, borne of a desire to build constructive relations, can be exploited by the PRC for political gain. Most municipal governments lack understanding of the goals of their PRC counterparts regarding these agreements.<sup>182</sup>

Sister Cities are defined by agreements between cities designed to promote cultural and commercial ties.<sup>183</sup> Sister cities relationships are a key, often overlooked aspect of PRC influence. One reason such relationships are overlooked is that observers may have the erroneous belief that most PRC political activity occurs in national-level engagements, but at the subnational level it is absent. A good example is highlighted in the following quote by the president of a sister city committee in a western U.S. state: "There are things we can do as people that sometimes the government cannot."<sup>184</sup> As noted earlier in this paper, these relations are managed by the CPAFFC, part of the PRC's UFWD, and thus all actions and agreements are under the support of the PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs and are intended to align with the CCP's strategic goals.<sup>185</sup> These agreements, by virtue of the dominance of the CCP within the PRC, represent "party-to-people" relationships, and are intended to further the Belt and Road Initiative.<sup>186</sup> In contrast, U.S. state and local leaders do not need the explicit approval from the federal government for agreements and activities. The difference in governance may allow the PRC space to seek subnational entities as proxies to advocate for national U.S. policies the PRC desires<sup>187</sup>. In the game of weiqi 围棋, this is the PRC's move to use sister cities as a strategy to surround the center (federal government).<sup>188</sup>

The basis of sister city agreements is to forge ties between U.S. and PRC entities, gaining business opportunities through access to new markets, help navigating regulations, or partner introductions.<sup>189</sup> This extends to cultural exchanges—for example Nashville and Chengdu held a "Music Capital City Conference" in 2020.<sup>190</sup> However, the risk remains that the PRC may be aligning their actions with their strategic agendas, and may undermine U.S. policies. For example, according to media reporting, the sister-city agreement between Xuhui District, PRC and Irvine, California, requires the U.S. city to disavow the existence of Taiwan, thus forcing Irvine to accept the PRC's interpretation that "that there is only one China."<sup>191</sup>

In the previously noted report released by NCSC, the PRC 's toolkit of techniques used to influence leaders at the subnational level – 1) *Collecting information, including PII*, 2) *Targeting officials to exploit later* 3) *Exploiting partnerships* 4) *Creating dependencies* 5) *Shaping policy via the business community*.<sup>192</sup> As such, U.S. subnational leaders should have defined goals, and be aware of possible PRC influence or activities through sister city partnership, when considering enjoining into such agreements.<sup>193</sup>

#### #4: Coercion by Media & Publicity

Another lever used by the PRC is publicity and the media. The PRC's English language publication *China Daily* claims to have 150,000 subscribers in the United States. Between 2019 and 2021, *China Daily* spent \$7 million purchasing advertising space in U.S. print and online news publications such as *Foreign Policy*, *Time*, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post*, and *USA Today*, as well as local newspapers like *Houston Chronicle*, *The Los Angeles Times*, and *Seattle Times*.<sup>194</sup> The U.S. branch of *China Central Television* (CCTV), *CGNTV America*, reaches viewers through cable news and online. The state-backed news organization has commercial arrangements with *Associated Press* (AP), *CNN*, *NBC News*, and *Reuters*.<sup>195</sup>

PRC-backed outlets such as *China Daily* and *CGNTV America* amplify and spread narratives that further PRC goals, as engaging with U.S.-based entities offers a wealth of potential examples to the PRC to use in their propaganda efforts. Comments made at an event alleging detrimental impacts of U.S.-PRC tensions, for instance, may be leveraged to apply political pressure on Washington to make concessions to Beijing.<sup>196</sup> Generally, however, the PRC seeks to avoid antagonizing too many people at one time, in order to avoid alienating potential allies.<sup>197</sup> Rather, it will single out a few individual actors for criticism or stay silent.<sup>198</sup> One PRC slogan reads as follows: 小骂大帮忙 *xiao ma da bangmang* ("Big help with a little badmouthing").<sup>199</sup> This slogan references controlled opposition – a news outlet may be permitted to say slightly critical things about the PRC in order to project an air of neutrality (although in the most important elements, they will remain firmly supportive of PRC views). Similarly, the slogan "round outside, square within" (or, firmness of principles, flexibility of strategy) refers to allowing concessions for greater strategic purposes.<sup>200</sup>

One way to spread useful narratives is by attempting to coopt journalists. The PRC will subsidize U.S. journalists' trips to the Chinese mainland, often times aided by paid public relations firms in the United States.<sup>201</sup> The goal of the trip is to get local news organizations to report stories from the PRC's point of view.<sup>202</sup> Such trips may create a sense of obligation among the participants and diminish a journalists' independence.<sup>203</sup> When a journalist's reporting is critical of the PRC government or its policies, they may face retaliation in the form of travel restrictions within the PRC, the revocation of visas or expulsion, and even retaliation against the families of U.S.-based journalists in the PRC. The actions not only inhibit the ability to report about the PRC but is an effort to force journalists to self-censor.<sup>204</sup>

As U.S. consumers shifted from traditional news outlets to social media, the PRC adopted a playbook similar to Russia with increased use of online personas, such as fake social media profiles and paid influencers, to promote pro-PRC narratives and shift the discourse about events within the PRC, such as pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong, or the human rights abuses occurring in Xinjiang.<sup>205</sup> The accounts also aim to sow doubts about U.S. leadership and democracy, and to counter U.S. policies that threaten the PRC's interests.<sup>206</sup>

According to a U.S. cybersecurity company, in September 2022, actors associated with the PRC's DRAGONBRIDGE malign influence campaign posted videos across multiple social media platforms that attempted to discourage Americans from voting in the upcoming U.S.



midterm elections by calling into question the efficacy of the U.S. system.<sup>207</sup> In June 2022, PRC-linked actors also used the DRAGONBRIDGE campaign to denigrate the reputation of Australian and U.S. rare earth mining companies who had recently announced plans for rare earth mining and processing facilities in the United States. The campaign spread negative narratives on social media claiming these companies' planned projects were associated with environmental damage and health risks and attempted to incite U.S. citizens to protest against them.<sup>208</sup> The manufacturing process for military equipment, wind turbines, and magnets used in EVs all require rare earth metals. The PRC is the world's top miner and processor of rare earth metals, and during trade disputes with the U.S. in recent years, they have restricted exports on equipment used to make rare earth magnets and to extract and separate the minerals.<sup>209</sup>

It is also worth noting that the PRC presumes that members of the worldwide Chinese diaspora, including persons living in the U.S., have some form of allegiance to "the Motherland."<sup>210</sup> To reach the diaspora with the PRC's message, the PRC expanded the operations of their state-run media outlets and Chinese language newspapers, such as the newspaper 侨报 *Qiaobao*, into the U.S. market.<sup>211</sup> Furthermore, PRC-linked entities increased their control over previously existing independent Chinese language newspapers in the U.S.—allowing the PRC to control the narratives on topics such as U.S.-PRC relations, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and other controversial topics.<sup>212,213</sup>

In addition to controlling narratives, PRC state-run media in the Chinese mainland, particularly the *People's Daily*, frequently highlights interactions between prominent Chinese Americans and United Front-linked individuals.<sup>214</sup> Like the PRC's efforts targeted at English-language speakers, PRC-linked accounts use social media, primarily WeChat, to influence the diaspora community. WeChat is a source of news and the primary means by which the Chinese diaspora communicates with family in the PRC.<sup>215</sup> Researchers found PRC-linked accounts on WeChat target the diaspora's sense of identity and belonging in the United States by disproportionately highlighting anti-Asian discrimination and hate crimes, and exploiting the communities' fear of violence and racism, to drive a wedge between the diaspora and its host community. In contrast, researchers found non-PRC linked accounts focus on a broader range of topics.<sup>216</sup>

### #5: Controlling Taboo Narratives

One tactic of PRC engagement with U.S. subnational entities that is particularly egregious, and a challenge to values endemic to a free and open society, is their use of influence and coercion to mold discourse surrounding taboo topics for the PRC Government.<sup>217</sup> The PRC attempts to control narratives surrounding issues such as Taiwan independence, human rights abuses in Xinjiang, Tibetan freedom, the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre, protests in Hong Kong, and various other topics.<sup>218</sup> Key enablers of the CCP's repression activities in the U.S. are electronic surveillance, as well as a network of spies and informants, who report dissident activities to PRC authorities.<sup>219</sup>

According to a declassified 2022 U.S. National Intelligence Council (NIC) assessment, between at least 2019 and 2020, PRC intelligence officers conspired with a PRC-based U.S. technology company employee to disrupt anti-PRC speech, including in the U.S. The

intelligence officers worked to sabotage online meetings that commemorated the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989; provided the names and email and internet protocol (IP) addresses of overseas users to the PRC, where PRC officers made threats through the U.S. persons' family members; and helped surveil online meetings of dissidents.<sup>220</sup> PRC authorities use a variety of means to coerce individuals living abroad to discontinue their subversive behavior, including: delivering threats via messaging apps popular in Chinese culture such as WeChat or WhatsApp, sending text messages and phone calls, or delivering threats in person.<sup>221</sup>

In some cases, officials demand the offender return to the PRC to stand trial for their purported crimes against the State. PRC officials use a variety of means to bring such individuals back to the Chinese mainland for trial, including more traditional means such as obtaining deportation or extradition agreements from host countries. However, for those cases in which traditional means are not possible, the PRC typically uses a combination of persuasion, intimidation, and harassment to coerce their return. For example, PRC officials will threaten to harm their family members residing in the PRC if they do not return. In other instances, PRC agents make in-person contact with the individual in the host country, intimidating and harassing them into returning to the PRC.

And finally, in some cases, PRC agents orchestrate kidnappings of their target abroad or in the host country.<sup>222</sup> According to the PRC's official claims, from 2014 to 2022 in an operation called "Fox Hunt", the PRC successfully returned approximately 10,000 persons to the Chinese mainland as part of a worldwide anti-corruption dragnet.<sup>223</sup>

The PRC also utilizes economic statecraft to control international discussions and perceptions on topics sensitive to the Party. U.S. businesses that express support for Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Tibetan autonomy or contradict the PRC's stance often find themselves swiftly retaliated against, experiencing sudden loss of market access, cancellation of contracts, or even social media-driven consumer boycotts within the PRC. By leveraging the immense economic power of its domestic market and acknowledging the desire of foreign businesses to maintain access to its highly lucrative market, the PRC creates a compelling incentive for businesses to remain on the sidelines or align their positions with Beijing's policies. This tactic of aligning and neutralizing has been effective in curbing criticism and shaping international dialogue. Notable examples are:

- *U.S. Sports League:* In 2019, a tweet by the manager of a U.S. sports team expressing support for the Hong Kong protests led to swift backlash from the PRC. The Chinese component of the broader global sports league suspended cooperation with the U.S. team, Chinese sponsors pulled out of their support for U.S. sports league, and Chinese broadcasters stopped airing the U.S. team's games in the PRC. This incident demonstrated the PRC's willingness to leverage its vast market to punish organizations for perceived political transgressions.<sup>224</sup>
- *U.S. Movie Studio:* In 2021, when a large U.S. movie studio slated two films for release, comments made by the directors and lead actors in the past, including support for Hong Kong protests and criticism of the PRC's human rights record, led to complications. Although not explicitly banned, the films faced significant obstacles in

obtaining release dates and promotion within the PRC, showing indirect retaliation against the companies involved. In 2020, a separate U.S. movie studio thanked the “Publicity Department of the CCP Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Committee” for allowing the iconic American company to film one of its more successful cartoon movies in the region, despite worldwide condemnation of what many have referred to as genocide against the Uyghur population, and U.S. laws restricting the import of goods from the region, a practice which began in 2019.<sup>225</sup>

- *U.S. Technology Company:* A major U.S. technology company, which manufactures cell phones, has repeatedly faced pressures from the PRC government concerning its stance on Taiwan and Hong Kong. In 2019, the U.S. company removed the HKmap.live app from its applications store, which Hong Kong protestors used to track police movements. This decision came after strong criticism from Chinese state media, indicating a direct response to the PRC's political pressures.<sup>226</sup>
- *U.S. Hotel Chain:* In 2018, a large U.S. hotel chain faced severe repercussions when a customer survey listed Tibet, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau as separate countries. The PRC government shut down the U.S. hotel's website and app in the PRC for a week, forcing the company to issue a public apology and revise its practices. Additionally, according to media reports, the hotel fired an employee for liking a Twitter post supportive of Tibet and changed the name of Taiwan to Taiwan, China, illustrating the strict control the PRC can exert over how foreign companies address sensitive political issues.<sup>227</sup>

These examples illustrate how the PRC utilizes economic leverage to enforce its political narratives and deter foreign companies from supporting movements or regions it considers contentious.

## #6: Research & University Activities

American universities have a long-standing role in relations between the United States and PRC, dating back to the Carter administration's exploration of the idea in the late 1970's. For the first two decades after the normalization of U.S.-PRC relations, the PRC government prioritized sending students in STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering, mathematics), but over time widened the scope to include the humanities, social sciences and the arts, resulting in several million Chinese students successfully matriculated through the U.S. higher education system. For context, during the 2017-2018 academic year, a record 350,755 Chinese students enrolled in American universities (with an additional 80,000 in high schools) out of a total of 1.5 million Chinese students studying worldwide.<sup>228</sup>

U.S. universities and American society benefited significantly from this exchange, as Chinese students aided in diversifying the makeup of U.S. student bodies, contributed positively to the classroom, and made significant contributions in joint research projects with university faculties. Many Chinese students remained in the U.S. to pursue professional careers, build their lives, and become American citizens. For their part, American universities and scholars have also engaged in the PRC, albeit far fewer in numbers. 11,688 American students and scholars studied in the PRC during the 2015-2016 academic year, and possibly fewer than

1,000 studied in the country in 2024—an impact of the global pandemic. It is also worth noting that some U.S. universities have gone so far as to establish campuses in the PRC.<sup>229,230</sup>



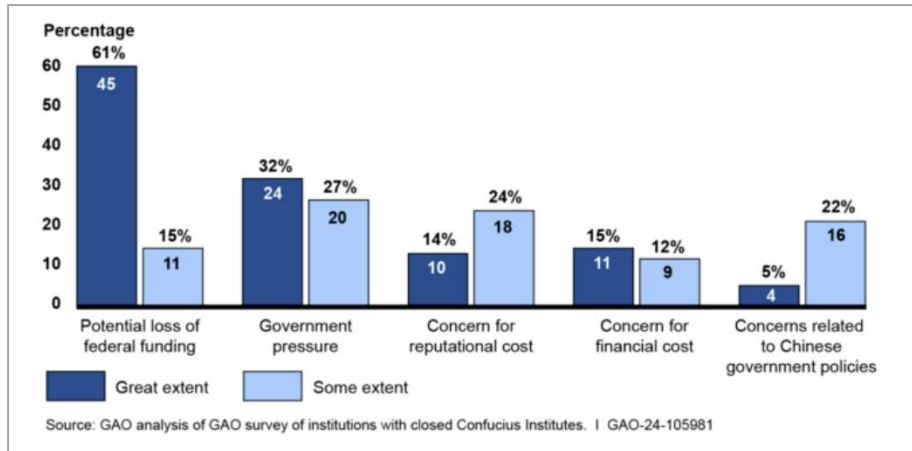
**Figure 5:** U.S. University in Shanghai.<sup>231</sup>

But while U.S.-PRC academic exchanges have been primarily a success story, friction points have grown in recent years amid rising tensions between the two countries and growing concerns about unfair PRC “influence-seeking activities” in the U.S.<sup>232</sup>

Confucius Institutes (CIs) are one such friction point, which are sponsored by the Hanban, an organization directly under the purview of the Ministry of Education in Beijing, but also with ties to the External Propaganda Leading Group of the CCP Central Committee. The primary mission of CIs is to teach Chinese language and culture abroad. First appearing on U.S. university campuses in 2005, CIs are joint operations located inside and co-funded by a host university or secondary school for which the Hanban arranges a PRC-based university to supply teachers, textbooks and other materials. The PRC-based university pays teachers and typically the Hanban will provide a \$150K start-up grant, with \$100K-\$200K per year follow-on funding (dependent on the institution) direct to the American university. Most troublesome are two specific provisions in the Hanban contracts with U.S. host institutions: one forbids the CIs from conducting any activities that contravene Chinese law while the other requires that the enabling contract remain confidential, which makes oversight by the academic community arduous.<sup>233,234</sup>

CIs are the subject of controversy for their perceived effects on academic freedom and for their lack of transparency. Accusations leveled at CIs revolve around the exclusive use of PRC materials that promote state viewpoints, terminology and simplified characters, the avoidance of discussion in American classrooms on controversial topics such as Tibet and

human rights, and potential infringement on independent studies on American campuses. The number of CIs in the U.S. peaked in 2017 at around 118 but that number quickly trended downward with U.S. government pressure to include Congress restricting federal funding to schools with CIs in 2018. As of July 2023, fewer than five CIs remained operational in the U.S.<sup>235,236,237</sup>



**Figure 6:** Contributing Factors Schools Reported for Decision to Close Confucius Institutes.<sup>238</sup>

When the PRC government first allowed its citizens to attend western universities in the late 1970's, the PRC created the Chinese Students and Scholars Association (CSSA) to essentially monitor Chinese students (aided by PRCs diplomatic missions) and mobilize them against viewpoints that deviated from the PRC Government's stance, according to the U.S. Department of State.<sup>239</sup> The PRC sometimes coerces students who speak out in "unacceptable ways" by using its security services to apply pressure to students' family members back in the PRC. Additionally, some Chinese students and scholars exploit the collaborative research environment on U.S. campuses to obtain sensitive American technologies. In 2019, the FBI reported that some such scholars could engage in, willingly or unwillingly, the theft of economic, scientific and technological information that ultimately benefits Chinese academic institutions, businesses, and military.<sup>240,241,242</sup>

CSSAs on occasion alert PRC diplomatic missions about events on campus that offend official PRC political sensitivities, such as speeches concerning Tibet, Taiwan and human rights in general. Once notified, the local PRC mission may contact university faculty or staff members to prevent such events from proceeding. CSSAs in the Washington D.C. area, for example, make no secret of their ties to the Chinese embassy and even receive small amounts of operating funds directly from them. Elsewhere, CSSAs with similar ties to nearby consulates provide them with funding, and other kinds of support such as surveillance.<sup>243</sup>

To highlight the level of influence CSSAs can have on a university campus, during the 2022 Winter Olympic Games held in Beijing, students at a university in Washington D.C. hung art posters that were critical of the PRC's human rights abuses. Shortly afterwards, the local

CSSA chapter at the school circulated a letter calling the posters “racist”, alleging they had “insulted China” and that the posted constituted an attack on all Chinese and Asian students. The CSSA called on university leadership to also find those responsible for posting the posters and to “punish them severely.”<sup>244</sup>

Later, the school’s Chinese Cultural Association followed suit and publicly complained that the posters were “inciting racial hatred and ethnic conflicts.” According to media reporting, initially and privately, the university’s president sided with the student groups, saying he was “personally offended” and instructed university personnel to remove the posters from campus. Once these communications leaked to the public, a wave of criticisms poured in from lawmakers, free speech groups and other student organizations calling on him to recognize he was defending censorship, not punishing racism. The university president later backtracked and called his actions “mistakes”, but this incident ultimately showcases the extent of the PRC’s malign influence reach on U.S. campuses.<sup>245</sup>



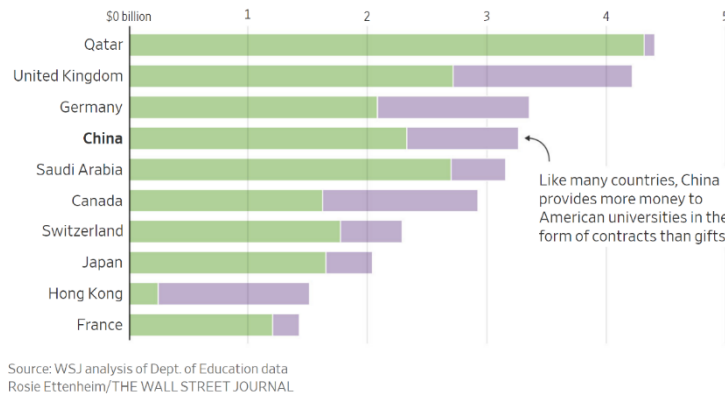
**Figure 7:** Posters at Washington D.C. University Protesting The 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing.<sup>246</sup>

Lastly, CCSAs also serve as a mechanism of political “peer monitoring” of Chinese students, constraining the academic freedom of Chinese students on campuses and undermining the core principles of free speech and academic freedom. Amnesty International, a non-governmental organization (NGO) that focuses on human rights published a report in 2024 that highlighted the extent of this issue in general, with in-depth interviews of 32 Chinese students studying at universities worldwide, to include the U.S. In one particular instance, a student described how within a matter of hours of attending a commemoration of the 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown, she heard from her father in the PRC who security officials contacted. The security officials told him to “educate his daughter who is studying overseas not to attend any events that may harm China’s reputation in the world.” The speed in which Chinese officials identified the student as a participant, located her father, and used him to warn her against further dissent shocked her.<sup>247,248</sup>

Chinese corporate and private donors are also starting to pour millions of dollars into the U.S. educational system, think tanks, and non-profit organizations. Given that privately owned companies in the PRC exist and prosper at the sufferance of political authorities there, even seemingly independent actors are often likely to act at government direction or in ways that they believe will please the government. Major mainland Chinese and Hong Kong companies and individuals with active business ventures in the PRC have now pledged or donated substantial funds to U.S. universities.<sup>249</sup>

In terms of numbers, nearly 200 U.S. colleges and universities held contracts with Chinese businesses valued at \$2.32 billion, between 2012 and 2024, totaling roughly 2,900 contracts. The U.S. Department of Education requires universities to report foreign gifts or contracts worth \$250K or more, though the rule historically was not vigorously enforced, and the agency has alleged billions have gone unreported. Schools say the practice of matching Chinese funding with American expertise often serves the public good, like developing new cancer treatments. Yet to critics, the PRC's control over the business sector can taint even those pursuits, such as with the PRC's national strategy of Military-Civil Fusion (MCF), which directs collaboration with foreign universities to acquire cutting edge research and technology to advance its efforts to achieve a world-class military by 2049.<sup>250,251</sup>

This conundrum affects many U.S. universities that have entered into such contracts. For example, Shanghai-based firm WuXi AppTec (known in the PRC as the Huawei Technologies of pharma), is a biotech conglomerate globally recognized for medical breakthroughs and manufacturing therapies approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). But like Huawei (the PRC's now-blacklisted maker of advanced telecommunications gear), it is now dogged by concerns that its innovations could be abused by Beijing. A U.S. university valued three AppTec contracts it reported for 2022 collectively around \$1.5 million. Among them is an agreement in which a services arm of AppTec, on behalf of another Chinese drugmaker, agreed to pay the university's hospital \$36,977 for each subject enrolled in trials of a drug designed to treat tumors. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved the medicine for treatment during the trial of certain rare cancers. Out of concern Beijing could harness commercial biological discoveries for military purposes, members of Congress want the government to classify AppTec as an "adversary biotech company of concern", as it is rapidly becoming a global pharmaceutical and research-services giant that threatens U.S. intellectual property and national security. The underlying concern being that contracts represent just one of the many avenues of access into our research and development (R&D) by the PRC that could be used for more questionable purposes.<sup>252</sup>



**Figure 8:** Leading Sources of Foreign Funding Through Contracts And Gifts To U.S. Universities, 2012-2024.<sup>253</sup>

### #7: *Turning a Blind Eye to Criminality*

Decidedly less hands on, though no less impactful, the PRC has a well-established practice of turning a blind eye to criminal activity that serves its global strategic interests, especially if such activities undermine the PRC’s adversaries. Some criminal activities that the PRC frequently overlooks are: the production and sale of pre-cursor chemicals of fentanyl and other illicit drugs, the establishment and sponsoring of an exploding number of marijuana grows within the U.S., and PRC-linked entities serving as primary money launderers for major Mexico based transnational criminal organizations responsible for smuggling both humans and illicit drugs into the U.S.

#### Precursor Chemical Production

The fentanyl crisis has plagued the U.S for years, and the flow of drugs has only increased over time. The fentanyl supply chain typically begins inside the PRC, where state actors, including large Chinese chemical conglomerates, ship pre-cursor chemicals for use in the production of illicit synthetic drugs to criminal drug cartels in Mexico and South America. While the PRC government officially outlaws illicit drug manufacturing and trafficking of any kind, they seemingly turn a blind eye to pre-cursor production and money laundering. Some of the chemicals produced and exported from the PRC have no legal uses worldwide, so there is no justifiable reason to allow their continued production.<sup>254</sup> This inexplicable lack of action could possibly be the result of a lacking PRC domestic drug enforcement policy; however, it could also be evidence a broader psychological and institutional warfare against the United States, who is the largest consumer of drugs synthesized and sold by this system.

The PRC uses controlled substance lists as a part of its domestic anti-drug manufacturing policy, but chemical companies circumvent these laws by creating “analogues” of controlled substances, where they create the same chemical with a different chemical structure—therefore allowing them to skirt enforcement efforts. Additionally, PRC-based companies involved with the manufacture of chemicals used in fentanyl will hide amongst legitimate medical compound manufacturers and companies in related fields such as biotechnology. Such illegal activity is further obfuscated by these companies’ use of layers of brokers and



freight forwarders which ship drugs, precursor chemicals, and other contraband through intentionally mislabeled shipping containers and mail order-packages.<sup>255,256</sup>

While there are stiff penalties for drug offenders within the PRC, the mislabeling of shipments of precursor chemicals typically results in civil penalties and small fines.<sup>257</sup> Analysis of the nation’s online drug market on PRC-hosted web platforms provides added insights into the PRC’s turning of a blind eye toward illicit precursor production. In 2020, research of more than 350 English language websites advertising fentanyl on PRC-hosted web platforms identified 40 percent of the websites are connected to officially registered Chinese companies. It is worth noting that the PRC frequently censors online content it disapproves of, and yet the Party allowed hundreds of websites selling fentanyl and precursor chemicals to continue operations with relative impunity.<sup>258</sup> Even more damning, U.S. government organizations recently reported that the PRC directly subsidized the manufacturing and export of fentanyl precursor chemicals through tax rebates, has ownership in several Chinese companies tied to illicit drug trafficking, and awarded monetary grants to companies openly trafficking in fentanyl materials.<sup>259</sup>

As will be noted later in this paper, the U.S. engages with the PRC on stemming the flow of precursor chemicals to criminal organizations on the U.S. southern border, though progress has been limited and the PRC continues to minimize its role in the crisis. Overall, the above indicators suggest highlight the PRC government recognizing that precursor chemical production is problematic, but they willfully choose not to prioritize enforcement against offending chemical and drug companies. And while the PRC government does not outright support these illegal activities, the government clearly turns a blind eye to them—possibly because fentanyl weakens the population of their largest adversary, the United States.

### [Black Market Marijuana](#)

As many U.S. states legalize marijuana, black market marijuana grows tied to Chinese organized crime proliferated across the U.S. in the past several years. PRC-linked criminal organizations assumed an outsized role in the lucrative illicit marijuana industry and are said to be operating thousands of illicit marijuana grows throughout the country, which have had destabilizing and deleterious effects on U.S. communities.<sup>260</sup>

For example, Oklahoma is an epicenter for illicit marijuana grows with ties to the PRC, commonly being referred to as the “Wild West” in terms of the crimes associated with the rapidly expanding illicit marijuana market. In 2024, Oklahoma reported 7,000 licensed marijuana grows, 3,000 of which the state flagged for suspicious activity. Of the 3,000 found to have fraudulently obtained licenses or sold marijuana illegally, an astounding 2,000 are believed to have either a PRC connection to funding or labor supply, and frequently both. Over the previous two years, the Oklahoma Bureau of Narcotics closed approximately 800 marijuana grows, with 75% believed to be linked to Chinese investors or organized crime.<sup>261</sup>

Oklahoma is not the only state to experience a heavy PRC-linked presence in their illicit marijuana market, with similar scenarios unfolding in Colorado, Maine, Oregon, and Washington. While direct ties to the PRC remain unknown, reports suggest “the number of

farms funded by sources traceable back to Chinese investors or owners has skyrocketed” as have “the presence of Chinese owners and workers...at illegal grows.”<sup>262</sup>

Illicit marijuana grows are frequently enmeshed with human trafficking, in the form of both labor and sex trafficking, the trafficking of other illicit drugs, and money laundering. In fact, the explosive infusion of cash from illicit marijuana grows propelled Chinese criminal organizations to become the dominant money launderers for major Mexican cartels trafficking in fentanyl and fueled “the most extensive network of underground banking in the world.”<sup>263</sup>

According to a RAND study, from 2006 to 2016 Americans spent nearly \$150 billion annually on marijuana products, cocaine, heroin, and methamphetamine. The study did not factor money spent on synthetic opioids, to include fentanyl, the primary driver of the illicit drug trade since roughly 2017, thus the annual national expenditure is likely much higher. Mexico-based drug cartels are the overwhelming source of the illicit drug supply in the U.S. and maintain up to 80% profit margins. Flush with such large amounts of illicit proceeds, the cartels have found in Chinese money laundering enterprises an ideal partner.<sup>264,265</sup>

### Money Laundering

Moving illegal bulk cash proceeds from drug trafficking is risky, as nationwide highway interdiction efforts increase in frequency and sophistication. As a result, drug traffickers know that the safest way to move illicit proceeds is to launder it. Chinese criminal organizations have established themselves as the most reliable and affordable laundering syndicates for Mexico-based drug cartels, charging only 1-2 % in transaction fees compared to 10% by traditional laundering organizations.<sup>266</sup> The Mexican cartels find an eager partner in Chinese criminal organizations, who already engage in laundering operations to skirt the PRC’s strict currency controls that prevent its citizens from moving more than \$50,000 per year out of the country. By laundering cartels’ money, these Chinese criminal organizations can gain access to a nearly limitless supply of cash that effectively neuters Beijing-based currency controls for ultra-wealthy individuals living in the U.S.<sup>267</sup>

Eschewing formal banking systems, Chinese criminal organizations utilize trade-based laundering, value transfer in timber and exotic wildlife, (with an increase in the purchase of precursors through the exchange of sea cucumbers, jellyfish, reptiles, shark, and Totoaba fish), real estate, crypto currency, and bulk cash.<sup>268,269</sup> In June 2024, a Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) operation uncovered growing links between the Sinaloa cartel and Chinese organized crime within the United States, leading to the arrest of two dozen individuals with ties to both the cartel and Chinese criminal organizations. The mutually beneficial arrangement struck between Chinese organized crime and Mexico-based drug cartels allows the cartels to thrive in their efforts to bring highly lethal and addictive drugs into the U.S. While there are no known connections between Chinese criminal organizations and the PRC government, given the PRC’s long reach into its diaspora communities and its well-established practice of influencing those communities to promote Chinese strategic interests abroad, it is not unreasonable to assume that there is, at a minimum, some tacit approval of this activity.<sup>270</sup>

Additionally, it is worth noting that while the PRC government avoids obvious complicity in Chinese organized crime activities, there is some evidence that individual Party members are actively profiting from them. Reporting by *The Sydney Morning Herald* indicates the FBI tracked money flows from Chinese organized crime groups in the Pacific to known CCP members.<sup>271</sup> Further, criminal investigations in the U.S. and Europe uncovered links between Chinese organized crime groups and top officials in the UFWD. Reportedly, in exchange for monitoring the diaspora community, intimidating dissenters, and other malign influence operations, the PRC allows the criminals to continue their illicit activities to earn money and protects them against Western law enforcement agencies.<sup>272,273</sup>

## #8: Cyber & Technology Control

According to the 2024 Annual Threat Assessment of the Intelligence Community, the PRC remains the most active and persistent cyber threat to the U.S. government, private-sector and critical infrastructure networks.<sup>274</sup> The PRC utilizes its cyberspace capabilities, not only to support intelligence collection against U.S. academic, economic, military, and political targets, but also to exfiltrate sensitive information from the critical defense infrastructure and research institutes to gain economic and military advantage and possibly for cyberattack preparations. The targeted acquisition of such information can benefit the PRC's defense high-tech industries, support the state's military modernization, provide their leadership with insights into U.S. plans and intentions and even enable diplomatic negotiations.<sup>275</sup>

Several different elements of the PRC's security apparatus, to include the military, state security and internet censorship organizations, possess distinct cyberattack capabilities. These capabilities are deployed by operators along a spectrum of acknowledged state affiliation and control, from formal units and militias to contractors, recruited criminals, and volunteer civilian actors.<sup>276</sup>

KEY PRC ORGANIZATIONS WITH CYBER MISSIONS		
This table characterizes several key PRC organizations with cyber missions. Significant overlaps in missions and authorities, joint operations, shared operational resources, and the use of common contractors contribute to the challenge of attributing PRC-aligned threat activity to specific organizations with high confidence.		
ORGANIZATION(S)	MAJOR MISSION AREAS	ACTIONS IN CYBERSPACE
PEOPLE'S LIBERATION ARMY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ National security</li> <li>★ Military intelligence</li> <li>★ Disaster relief</li> <li>★ Peacekeeping</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Warfare</li> <li>★ Military espionage</li> <li>★ Economic espionage</li> </ul>
MINISTRY OF STATE SECURITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Political security</li> <li>★ Civilian intelligence</li> <li>★ Counterintelligence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Political espionage</li> <li>★ Economic espionage</li> <li>★ Dissident surveillance and harassment</li> </ul>
MINISTRY OF PUBLIC SECURITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Domestic security</li> <li>★ Public security</li> <li>★ Law enforcement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Content monitoring enforcement</li> <li>★ Shaping IT regulations to support CCP political needs</li> </ul>
CYBERSPACE ADMINISTRATION OF CHINA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Internet governance</li> <li>★ Internet regulation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Regulation of cross-border data transfer, to include censorship via the national internet boundary system</li> </ul>
CENTRAL PROPAGANDA DEPARTMENT (CPD) AND THE UNITED FRONT WORK DEPARTMENT (UFWD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ National messaging</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Social media influence operations</li> </ul>
GOVERNMENT CONTRACTORS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ N/A</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Support for or execution of agencies' offensive activities</li> <li>★ Self-enriching data theft and ransomware operations</li> </ul>

**Figure 9:** Chart Highlighting the PRC’s Key Organizations with Cyber Missions.<sup>277</sup>

PRC threat actors have conducted attacks such as denial-of-service, data destruction, and defacement, as well as hold-at-risk operations targeting industrial control systems (ICS). These cyberattacks are intended to secure the PRC’s “core interests,” related to its political system, territory, and economy. Ultimately, advancing these interests serves as a mechanism to sustain both the legitimacy and continuity of the CCP.<sup>278</sup>

To highlight a few case studies of the PRC’s evolving cyberspace capabilities, one significant historical breach occurred in 2015 with the Office of Personnel Management (OPM). The OPM attack was a particularly damaging data breach for the U.S. government as it exposed the personal information of more than 21 million people via the security clearance forms of government workers and job applicants, to include their Social Security numbers. The FBI blamed the breach on PRC government-linked hackers and considered the damage to have potentially far-reaching impacts to U.S. national security.<sup>279</sup>

In a recent case that was disclosed to the public in early 2024, the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), National Security Agency (NSA) and FBI assessed that PRC cyber actors were seeking to pre-position themselves on IT networks for disruptive or destructive cyberattacks against U.S. critical infrastructure in the event of a future major crisis or conflict with the U.S. The U.S. government authoring agencies confirmed the PRC cyber actor “Volt Typhoon” was behind the attack and had compromised the IT environments of multiple critical infrastructure organizations, primarily in the communications, energy, transportation systems, and water and wastewater system sectors in the continental and non-continental United States and its territories, including Guam. A

technique known as “living off the land” (LOTL) is a hallmark trademark of “Volt Typhoon”, whereby the cyber threat actor uses native, legitimate tools within the victim’s system to sustain and advance an attack. In some instances, “Volt Typhoon” actors maintained access and footholds within some victim IT environments for at least five years.<sup>280,281</sup>

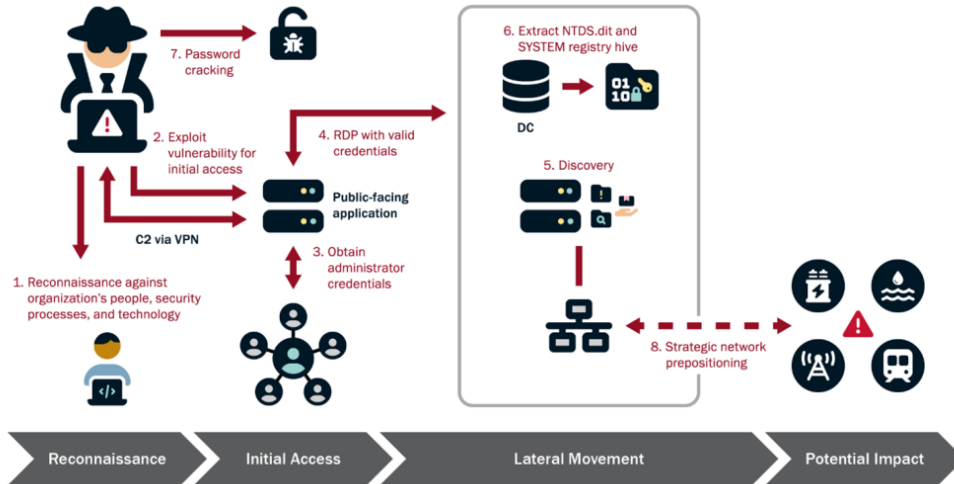


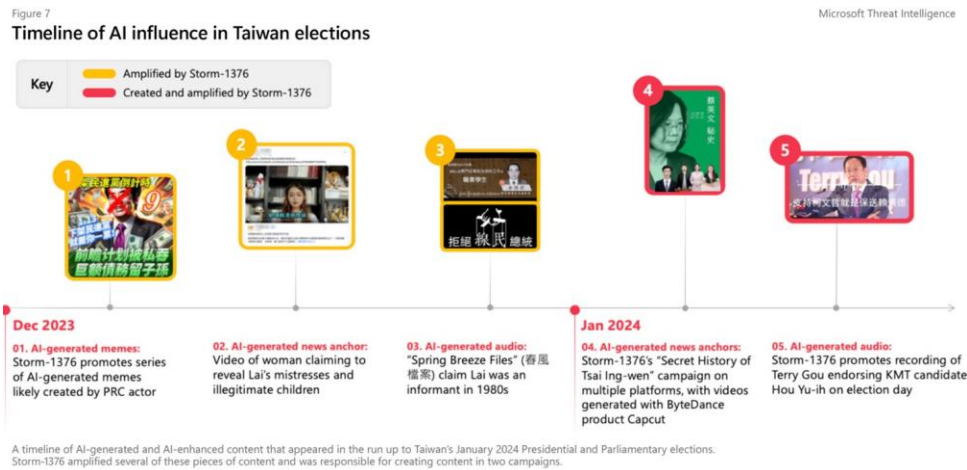
Figure 10: Typical Volt Typhoon Activity.<sup>282</sup>

Lastly, the PRC is using fake social media accounts to poll voters on what divides them to sow division and possibly influence the outcome of the presidential elections in its favor, as well as increasing the usage of artificial intelligence (AI) generated content. With the former element, deceptive social media accounts by PRC-affiliated actors have started to pose contentious questions on controversial U.S. domestic issues to better understand the key issues that divide voters. This could be to gather intelligence and precision on key voting demographics ahead of the U.S. presidential election.<sup>283,284</sup>



Figure 11: PRC Sock Puppets Solicit Opinions on Political Topics From Other Users On “X” Social Media Platform.<sup>285</sup>

There has also been an increase in the usage of AI-generated content in recent months, attempting to influence and sow division. The Taiwanese presidential election in January 2024 saw a surge of AI-generated content to augment influence operations (IO) by PRC-affiliated actors. A PRC-linked group known as “Storm-1376” was the most prolific threat actor on this front, such as promoting a series of AI-generated memes of Taiwan’s then-Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) presidential candidate William Lai, and other Taiwanese officials as well as Chinese dissidents around the world. These have included an increasing utilization of AI-generated TV news anchors that “Storm-1376” has deployed since at least February 2023. Overall, the PRC’s increasing experimentation in augmenting memes, videos and audio with AI-generated content will likely continue and may prove more effective down the line.<sup>286</sup>



**Figure 12:** A Timeline Of AI-Generated and AI-Enhanced Content That Appeared In the Lead Up to Taiwan’s January 2024 Presidential and Parliamentary Elections.<sup>287</sup>

## KIQ#2: (Determining Risk Tolerance):

### Introduction

As noted in the previous section, U.S. subnational organizations who engage with PRC-linked entities can face a variety of resultant risks to their organization, such as legal, financial, and reputational risks, among others. U.S. subnational entities face inherent complexities in running their day-to-day operations which are not always understood, or acknowledged, by U.S. federal agencies tasked with countering PRC malign influence. As a result, it is subnational entities themselves who are likely best suited to determine which risks they can tolerate when engaging with PRC-linked entities. Some of the risks associated with PRC subnational engagement are widely publicized, such as the PRC-linked entities purchasing of real estate near sensitive U.S. military sites or theft of U.S. intellectual property creating an unfair business environment for American companies.<sup>288,289</sup> However, subnational entities should carefully consider the wide breadth of risks associated with PRC engagement, as many risks are not obvious.

In recent years the U.S. and PRC bilateral relationship has been marked by tensions that have impacts at the subnational level. Perhaps the most troubling development has been the ongoing tit-for-tat trade war between the two countries, which has resulted in tariffs and export restrictions that can disrupt supply chains and increase business costs.<sup>290,291</sup> Additionally, U.S.-PRC tensions have recently flared up over issues such as Taiwan sovereignty and freedom of navigation in the South China Sea.<sup>292,293,294</sup> In the event that tensions escalate to the level of armed conflict, companies that are partnered with PRC-linked entities could be in the unenviable legal and reputational position of doing business with a declared enemy of the state.<sup>295</sup>

Relatedly, U.S. subnational entities should be aware that the PRC has a military doctrine that is expansive and quite different from the U.S. way of war. Known as the “Three Warfares”, the concept encompasses use of media warfare, psychological warfare, and legal warfare to harm their opponent while seeking to avoid conventional conflict.<sup>296</sup> As the PRC increasingly perceives such non-kinetic activities to be legitimate means of securing their interests, in the event of future escalation between the U.S. and the PRC, U.S. subnational entities must consider the fact that they might be tempting targets for the PRC in such non-kinetic attacks.

### *A Variety of Risks*

Conducting business with China, whether by a U.S. company or stemming from state and local interactions, carries inherent risks and opens the door to further influence operations by the PRC Government. This does not preclude beneficial or benign interactions with Chinese firms, but U.S. officials and companies must weigh the benefits against risks or the costs of mitigating those risks. Additionally, some interactions carry minimal immediate risks beyond the possibility of future market domination, but even cornering a market is seen as an indirect tool to be used by the PRC.

Although slowing in recent years, foreign direct investment (FDI) by the PRC has been beneficial in some ways, creating jobs for Americans and bringing greater wealth to towns and states. PRC investment in the U.S. is broad in scope, and has occurred in the legal, manufacturing, and research industries, among others.<sup>297</sup> For example, an automotive glass manufacturer based out a U.S. Midwest state supplies all major vehicle production companies in the U.S.; however, the company is a subsidiary of a larger company based out of the PRC. The U.S. subsidiary employs American workers almost exclusively and is set to add another 2,500 jobs over the next 5-10 years.<sup>298</sup> With these surface benefits, it’s easy to overlook deeper and longer-term risks to the U.S. and to the states and companies doing business with these PRC-based firms.<sup>299</sup>

One of the greatest concerns is the PRC’s dual dispute system and ignoring global establishments like the World Trade Organization, of which it is a member. The PRC regularly refuses to abide by restrictions or rulings that being a part of these organizations entails, and will create their own systems alongside them, in an effort to reshape international norms in their favor. For example, in 2018 the PRC created the China International Commercial Court, which is directly controlled by the CCP and is likely little more than a figurehead for CCP member goals.<sup>300</sup> The PRC claimed the Court would be a demonstration of openness intended to draw more foreign investment to the country;

however, the court instead has been plagued with barriers to foreign lawyers and companies and is accused of heavy bias in favor of Chinese firms.

PRC-linked firms may use a lack of reciprocity in business dealings, where demands placed on U.S. firms are not matched by the PRC firms. This allows the Chinese firm to shape the business environment to their benefit and gain greater or sole advantage in the interaction.<sup>301</sup> This lack of reciprocity can also manifest in a lack of equal access when it comes to research and data, with the PRC restricting access to information it deems of importance to national security, which is applied vaguely and as needed to maintain an upper hand. Combined with Chinese firms essentially “playing by two sets of rules”<sup>302</sup>, the PRC can use state-backed courts to drive economic policy and affect foreign entities by using subsidiary companies or direct ownership.

A PRC government-backed company will be able to dominate a market more readily than a private U.S. company, especially when assisted by laws or trade restrictions, tying back to state-controlled courts. Additionally, the ability of a Chinese firm to dominate a market domestically then runs the risk of spreading its control internationally. For example, the CCP has backed EV manufacturing and created a severe oversupply domestically, and Chinese firms are attempting to sell significant stock overseas, considered “dumping” by many governments.<sup>303</sup> These EV’s are cheaper than domestic products in Europe and the U.S. and can rapidly overtake the markets and severely harm domestic firms.<sup>304</sup>

Though viewed from an economic perspective, cornering certain markets, especially in terms of raw materials and technologically advanced goods, with microchips being a recent and relevant example, presents a significant national security risk to the U.S. A recent example is the PRC’s control of lithium mining in Argentina, Bolivia, and Chile that accounts for about half of the known lithium supply globally.<sup>305</sup> Given the reliance on lithium for green energy transitions and the vast quantities needed, especially in developed countries like the U.S., the PRC can exert significant influence on both prices and access, and tie these back to diplomatic or political issues, such as recognition of Taiwan.

The PRC has engaged with countries throughout the developing world for decades, allowing it access to critical resources and new markets for its rapidly growing economy. However, more recently Beijing has taken a more aggressive approach to expanding influence globally. The PRC has rapidly increased its use of influence tactics in the developing world and in vulnerable democracies through economic influence and mis/dis-information. This represents a clear and significant threat to the United States’ strategic and economic interests and the international democratic order. While developed countries can withstand the PRC’s ambitious global reach, developing countries are especially vulnerable and may not be able to make decisions about their risk tolerance.

As an example, following the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, the PRC immediately sought investments into oil and mining across the country, and convinced Taliban leaders to join the Belt and Road Initiative.<sup>306</sup> The PRC immediately set up diplomats in Kabul, being the first country to do so following the Taliban’s return to power, allowing them immediate and unrestricted access to the government’s top officials. This was enabled by the U.S. withdrawal and limited economic assistance from the West, creating a void the PRC could



readily step into. The PRC then demanded the Taliban prevent the Turkistan Islamic Party, a Uyghur militant group blamed for unrest in the PRC's western region of Xinjiang, from attacking PRC interests inside Afghanistan.<sup>307</sup>

As the world's largest commodity importer with a \$14 trillion economy, the PRC's economic engagement is vital to many economies globally. While some developing countries don't have the ability to disengage economically from the PRC (i.e. Belt and Road Initiative [BRI], infrastructure investments, etc.), more powerful economies like the United States must determine their risk tolerance. This does not preclude influence operations against governments or businesses in developed countries. In 2022, the PRC imposed import restrictions against Lithuania, after the government allowed a Taiwanese office in Vilnius to bear the name Taiwan, instead of Chinese Taipei, which most other countries use to avoid offending Beijing.<sup>308</sup> Lithuania has a comparatively small amount of import business to the PRC, about \$200 million a year, which allows it to weather the impacts more readily than a country more economically dependent, like Afghanistan.

Following underinvestment by the U.S. in Latin America, the PRC has become the largest trade partner with South America and is second for Latin America, including Mexico, behind the U.S.<sup>309</sup> Much of the investment focuses on strategic resources like oil, lithium, and copper. The region exports raw materials and foodstuffs, and mostly imports manufactured products from the PRC, a trade some experts say has undercut local industries with cheaper Chinese goods. As of 2023, Beijing has free trade agreements in place with Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, and Peru, and twenty-one Latin American countries have so far signed on to China's BRI.<sup>310</sup> Concern exists around this reliance on the PRC to bolster economies in the region. For example, Latin countries like Venezuela and Ecuador now find themselves in debt traps, forced to make concessions like prioritizing oil and mineral sales to the PRC, to avoid defaulting on PRC loans.<sup>311</sup> These countries may become beholden to the PRC for trade as well; roughly 38% of Chile's exports in 2021 were to the PRC.<sup>312</sup> This opens the door for the PRC to influence Chile's global diplomacy, like its interactions with Taiwan or the US, under threat of cutting off roughly a third of its total trade.

The PRC also goes to great lengths to ensure greater control over developing countries' internal narratives about their relationships with the PRC. Much of this revolves around acceptance of PRC policies or views, especially in relation to Taiwan. The PRC continues to refuse investment in developing countries that recognize Taiwan or have relations with them. The most recent example is the flipping of Honduras. The PRC refused aid to Honduras until they broke diplomatic ties with Taiwan, then saw billions in aid and investment from the PRC, including the construction of a hydroelectric dam funded by the PRC government.<sup>313</sup> Honduran officials now paint the PRC as their ally and strategic partner, and willingly support narratives put out by PRC leadership.

It is vital that the United States and its partners combat this threat by engaging with and increasing the resilience of the countries that the PRC targets; raise awareness of PRC influence tactics with private enterprise, academia, and government; and invest in programs to increase awareness and capacity of governments, the private sector, and the media to recognize and counter such actions. Most actions are taken at the Federal level, such as U.S. President Joe Biden's "Build Back Better World" aimed at countering the PRC's BRI by

providing infrastructure funding for developing countries, with a focus on Latin America. Additionally, the U.S. continues to raise concerns around the use of Huawei for a country’s telecom needs, linking the company back to malign PRC cyber activities and spying. Of equal importance, the government has started to focus on “nearshoring” strategic resources, with a focus on expanding trade and diplomacy across Latin America.

*Graphic Depicting of Risks by U.S. Target*

While the PRC has spent years developing strategies to influence economies and politics throughout the Pacific and in developing countries, the PRC has recently heightened the influence efforts in the United States. Not all influence efforts are blatant and malign. The PRC targets sectors in various ways through both malign and benign influence campaigns.  
314,315,316,317,318

The below graphic highlights the breadth of activities the PRC uses against homeland entities. It also merits keeping in mind several principles. First, some malign behavior requires the U.S.’s participation and engagement in turn. This participation may result from pursuing short-term financial interests, naïve/unwitting engagement, or willful ignorance. “Local politicians typically know little about [the PRC] and have no responsibility for national security, and because their [PRC] interlocuters present themselves as offering people-to-people exchanges and ‘opportunities for local business’, these politicians have a strong incentive to remain uninformed...”<sup>319</sup> Second, whatever the cause, it is important to learn and remember, as outlined in this document, that enabling malign activities is not in the U.S.’s national interest, and will likely prove economically harmful in the long-term, as the PRC seeks to heighten the U.S.’s dependence on PRC output while reducing their own dependence on U.S. entities.<sup>320,321</sup> Third, any table or chart cannot be exhaustive. When trying to determine whether a particular activity is benign or malign look for transparency, reciprocity, honesty and accountability.<sup>322</sup> If any of these elements is missing in a given interaction, it may fall into the category of “malign” activity.

	Malign Activities	Benign Activities	Risks
<b>Federal government</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Electoral interference (i.e. cyber campaigns, etc.).</li> <li>• Targeting and infiltrating federal agencies.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Influence of sympathetic politicians.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to influence U.S. policy in line with PRC interests through agenda setting and discourse framing.</li> <li>• Prominent decisionmakers serving PRC interests at the expense of the U.S.</li> <li>• U.S. losing key competitive advantages afforded by robust, healthy national-level governance.</li> </ul>

	Malign Activities	Benign Activities	Risks
<b>State/local government</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Electoral interference (i.e. cyber campaigns, etc.).</li> <li>• Targeting and infiltrating state-level agencies.</li> <li>• Steering local decisionmakers to pursue PRC-friendly policies at the expense of U.S. interests, via various means.</li> <li>• Nefarious investment strategies.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Investment in state/local economies.</li> <li>• Infrastructure investments and developments by PRC-linked - companies.</li> <li>• Influence of sympathetic politicians as proxies to advocate for national policies that the PRC desires.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to influence state/local level policy in line with PRC interests through agenda setting and discourse framing.</li> <li>• PRC investments can be used to influence, intimidate, and/or extort local leaders/business.</li> <li>• Economic investments can create dependencies on the PRC, thereby gaining influence.</li> <li>• PRC courting future national decision-makers.</li> <li>• PRC pressuring Washington with subnational dynamics.</li> <li>• PRC exploiting lack of coordination at subnational level to advance its position.</li> </ul>
<b>Private corporations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Corporate espionage.</li> <li>• Targeting and infiltrating key industries.</li> <li>• Cyberattacks (compromise of data and/or PII).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emerging technology competition.</li> <li>• Recruitment of senior executives and subject matter experts to PRC-based companies.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State-sponsored theft or transfer of technology and intellectual property to PRC-linked companies.</li> <li>• Reputational harm from cyberattacks.</li> <li>• Ceding competitive advantage through technology transfer.</li> <li>• Uneven playing field.</li> <li>• Eroding national security to advance short-term financial goals.</li> </ul>
<b>Academia</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gaining access to classified research/programs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sponsoring research and exchange programs.</li> <li>• Cultural exchanges.</li> <li>• Language programs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to academia and research allows the PRC to decrease their own research and development costs and timelines. In turn, they may gain competitive</li> </ul>

	Malign Activities	Benign Activities	Risks
			<p>advantage in key sectors.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• US discourse around the US-PRC relationship being stifled/manipulate.</li> <li>• U.S. losing competitive advantage in technological development.</li> </ul>
<b>Media</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intimidation of foreign journalists.</li> <li>• In 2020, the U.S. Department of State determined that certain PRC-affiliated media entities operating in the United States were effectively controlled by a foreign government, thus meeting the definition of a “foreign mission” under the Foreign Missions Act.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of Western social media platforms to spread lies and false narratives.</li> <li>• Use of fake accounts to impersonate and push narratives.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mis/disinformation campaigns through media can amplify partisan tensions and build audiences for PRC-preferred narratives, policies, and/or candidates.</li> <li>• U.S. divisive issues being inflamed to sow discord.</li> <li>• Discourse around the U.S.-PRC relationship being stifled/manipulated.</li> <li>• Subnational discourse being amplified and manipulated to serve PRC interests.</li> </ul>
<b>Misc.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Illegal Chinese “police stations” to target and threaten diaspora communities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Influence of diaspora communities through a “guiding hand” approach with positive incentives.</li> <li>• Organizing community events and facilitating business opportunities for diaspora populations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diaspora communities can be used as a tool to promote China’s political and security interests within the United States.</li> <li>• Plausible deniability makes actions harder to detect and respond to.</li> <li>• Repression of free U.S. discourse.</li> </ul>

**Figure 13:** PRC Activities and Associated Risks.

## KIQ#3: (Constructive Mitigation):

### *Introduction*

Subnational leaders have demanding jobs that often require them to make critical and difficult decisions that impact the safety and wellbeing of their constituents. The previous sections highlighted the breadth of activity PRC-linked entities engage in at the subnational level, and examined the types of risks these activities can create for U.S. entities who engage with PRC-linked actors. Given the large scope of the PRC's subnational engagement efforts, and possible risks posed to U.S. companies, industries, and national security associated with such engagement, it may be tempting to suggest that U.S. subnational entities avoid engaging with PRC-linked entities at all. However, such advice is not realistic, or constructive. But for all the risks, the explosion of trade between the U.S. and the PRC since the mid-1980s resulted in major, and often complicated, upsides for the United States. The increased trade fed the U.S.'s insatiable appetite for cheap imports, supported U.S. manufacturing supply chains, made millions of dollars for U.S. investors, and provided the U.S. population with hundreds of thousands of jobs.<sup>323</sup>

Relatedly, there is debate in U.S. research and policymaking circles on the wisdom of “decoupling” the two economies, or what form it should ultimately take.<sup>324,325, 326,327</sup> The undeniable reality is that for many entities operating at the subnational level, engagement with PRC-linked entities will continue for the foreseeable future. To mitigate risks in a constructive manner, subnational leaders should: 1) ensure key stakeholders are educated on the nature of the threat, 2) perform due diligence regarding the true risks to your organization associated with PRC engagement, 3) ensure all PRC engagement participants act with transparency, 4) expose PRC transnational repression activities occurring at the subnational level, 5) pursue national and state legislation to protect subnational entities from malign PRC actions, and 6) seek out areas for healthy U.S.-PRC collaboration.

### *#1: Educate Subnational Stakeholders*

Education is the first line of defense for U.S. subnational entities to combat the risk of engagement with a PRC-linked entity with malign intent. In 2013, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China's General Office published a document titled “Communiqué on the Current State of the Ideological Sphere,” also known as “Document No. 9.”<sup>328</sup> “Document No. 9” revealed the CCP's belief the Party is in an ideological struggle against the West and refers to the fundamental principles of democracy, human rights, media independence, and civic engagement as perilous to the CCP. “Document No. 9” instructs CCP members to pushback against these ideals by expanding and strengthening propaganda, ideological fronts, and promoting the unification of thought.<sup>329</sup>

The PRC concentrates its efforts on Chinese citizens within the PRC and increasingly on a foreign audience. The PRC's goal is to gain support for and limit opposition against the CCP's policies, and push the narrative that democracy is in turmoil and in decline.<sup>330,331</sup> The UFDW is at the forefront of the PRC's malign influence campaign. The UFDW is responsible for external propaganda against foreign populations, including the Chinese diaspora, students, politicians, and the business community. In addition to official government

ministries, united front work is executed by civil society groups based abroad that adhere to PRC guidance such as cultural or friendship associations and overseas academic groups.<sup>332</sup>

There are thousands of groups involved with united front work.<sup>333</sup> UFWD-associated organizations will also sponsor trips to the PRC under the auspices of initiating trade, investment agreements, or increasing people-to-people exchanges to bolster ties between the PRC and the U.S. to give participants a balanced view of U.S.-PRC relations. While in the PRC, travelers may be treated to lavish meals, expensive liquor, and tours to showcase the success of the PRC and to create a favorable view towards the PRC.<sup>334,335</sup> Unfortunately, U.S. participants may not realize they are actually meeting with intelligence officers from the PRC's Ministry of State Security (MSS). The meetings are meant to build relationships and cultivate the subnational leaders as part of an influence operation with hopes the leaders will move to higher levels of the U.S. government in the future and have the ability to influence U.S. policy towards China.<sup>336</sup> A UFWD-linked organization helped create and oversee the U.S.-China Governors Forum to Promote Sub-National Cooperation in 2011. In 2020, the U.S. Department of State ended the Memorandum of Understanding between the U.S. and the PRC which created the organization citing attempts to malignly influence U.S. subnational leaders to promote the PRC's global agenda.<sup>337</sup>

U.S. subnational leaders may also be unaware of the amount of data collected on them through cyber espionage and from commercial sources, which is used to create intelligence dossiers.<sup>338</sup> According to congressional testimony, the dossiers may be used to pressure local leaders into accepting the PRC's terms in an agreement or to target the leader's network to have friends or family persuade the leader to accept an agreement.<sup>339</sup>

## *#2: Perform Due Diligence*

Whether or not a PRC-based organization in the U.S. is formally part of the UFWD, no Chinese organization can operate freely without fear of retaliation from the PRC Government.<sup>340</sup> National security laws passed in the PRC require citizens and organizations to assist with intelligence gathering and require access to data and encryption keys.<sup>341</sup> Recent legislation passed in Hong Kong broadly criminalizes acts of free speech and activism with threats of punishment for espionage or seditious intention.<sup>342</sup> The laws are purposefully vague and up to interpretation by PRC authorities. The laws are also extraterritorial and meant to silence criticism of the PRC government or its policies at home and abroad.<sup>343</sup>

As a result, it is critical subnational leaders and universities request delegation lists before meeting with or accepting donations from PRC-backed entities and perform due diligence on them and the organizations funding them.<sup>344</sup> Subnational leaders should start with open-source tools such as the Department of Commerce's Consolidated Screening List (CSL), which allows users to screen entities, and their addresses, against multiple U.S. sanctions lists. The U.S. Department of Justice's Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) database, a repository of organizations and persons representing and lobbying on behalf of foreign interests, is also publicly available. Finally, delegations and their funders should be checked against lists of known UFWD-affiliated organizations.<sup>345</sup> If in doubt, or in need of assistance,

U.S. subnational leaders should communicate with their region's fusion center or federal law enforcement.

### *#3: Act with Transparency*

Transparency is an important tool U.S. subnational leaders should use to combat the PRC's malign influence.<sup>346</sup> Not all engagement with the PRC carry the same risk, but subnational leaders should approach interactions and agreements with PRC-sponsored organizations with increased vigilance and the understanding the PRC may be attempting to build networks of leaders outside of Washington, D.C., who may become national leaders in the future.<sup>347</sup> U.S. subnational leaders should also expect the PRC to include language in agreements that prevents future engagement with or support of topics considered taboo by the PRC Government: the Dalai Lama and Tibet, Taiwan, Tiananmen Square, and Xinjiang.<sup>348</sup> The PRC-backed entity may require communist party cells within American businesses, organizations, or on college campuses.<sup>349,350</sup>

To prevent malign influence, U.S. subnational decision-makers should ensure all agreements signed with the PRC are published online and discussed in public hearings.<sup>351</sup> As the exact number of agreements signed between subnational governments and all foreign entities, not just the PRC, is currently unknown, subnational entities should also consider creating a public database of all their foreign agreements.<sup>352</sup> U.S. subnational decision-makers should ensure their organizations' agreements are not in contradiction with U.S. national security or foreign policy objectives, as well as federal law.<sup>353</sup> Subnational governments should not forfeit their free speech or the right to future engagements with other entities to satisfy the PRC.<sup>354</sup> Subnational leaders should share best practices, lessons learned, and delegation lists with other local leaders on a regular basis to increase knowledge and the ability to engage with the PRC without undermining national interests.<sup>355</sup>

### *#4: Expose Transnational Repression at Subnational Level*

To protect its reputation and hide the truth of its policies, the PRC shows little respect for national borders. Decisionmakers at the subnational level, in both the public and private sector, are often unaware of the extent to which transnational repression occurs within their area of operations. Those who are aware likely think of them as isolated incidents, occurring in major population centers such as New York City.<sup>356</sup>

The PRC's transnational repression and the suppression of free speech extends beyond agreements and interactions with subnational leaders into U.S. universities where it is now common for Chinese exchange students and professors to self-censor in fear of retaliation from the PRC Government.<sup>357</sup> Researchers and Chinese exchange students are present in locations all across the U.S. For Chinese exchange students and the diaspora community, there is a fear of not knowing who may report speech critical of the PRC government or its policies back to a local consulate or Chinese law enforcement, which may result in threats to the student or the student's family in the PRC.<sup>358</sup> For professors, there is a fear of losing research funding, connections to colleagues abroad, or the ability to obtain a visa and travel to the PRC to conduct research.<sup>359,360</sup>

There is no place in a free, Western society for repression from a foreign power. Subnational leaders and public safety officials must work to protect researchers, exchange students, and the Chinese diaspora to limit such activities from occurring in the future.

### *#5: A Role for Legislation*

Federal and state legislation can play a role in protecting U.S. subnational leaders from the PRC's malign influence activities. Subnational leaders must ensure legislation is not discriminatory and must be prepared for UFWD-linked organizations and social media accounts to exploit sensitive issues such as racism to attempt to drive a wedge between the Chinese diaspora and their host community.<sup>361</sup>

At the federal level, legislation could require the U.S. Department of State create and maintain a database of all subnational engagements. Legislation could also require subnational entities to seek approval from Congress before signing agreements with a foreign power.<sup>362</sup> According to research conducted in 2023, on average states only reported 13 agreements each to Congress.<sup>363</sup> Additional requirements could include standard practices for drafting agreements such as stipulating all agreements will be interpreted in accordance with federal law and foreign policy objectives as well as mandating consistent information collection and sharing of PRC subnational influence methods.<sup>364, 365</sup> Without accurate and timely information, subnational leaders cannot make informed decisions to engage with a PRC-linked entity. To assist subnational entities in this effort, Members of Congress previously recommended the creation of an Office of Subnational Diplomacy within the U.S. Department of State. The U.S. Department of State could also consider embedding staff within subnational agency offices to help inform them of key national security priorities.<sup>366</sup>

At the state level, officials could consider adopting and operating their own FARA database, which requires individuals and organizations engaging in political activities on behalf of a foreign power to register with the U.S. Department of Justice. Such legislation would provide greater insight into how money and lobbying efforts at the state level are impacting policies and debate.<sup>367</sup>

### *#6: Seek Out Avenues for U.S.-PRC Cooperation*

Outside of the security ramifications of trade deals, the fact remains the PRC is the world's second-largest economy; approximately the size of the third, fourth, fifth, and sixth combined. With a massive market size and manufacturing capability, the PRC pursues many of the same goals as the U.S. and its allies. Common goals include creating a sustainable society for its inhabitants using green energy, countering security threats such as terrorism and violent extremism, prestigious post-secondary education, and bolstering economies through areas where it has a comparative advantage, such as large-scale manufacturing. As a result of these shared goals, a massive network of trade deals between the U.S. and the PRC creates a complex interdependence that overshadows all geopolitical-driven sanctions, preventing significant decoupling. The interdependence the two nations share highlights a need to pursue trade and cooperation where possible. Possible avenues for continued cooperation with the PRC that hold relatively little security risk and are



mutually beneficial for both parties include counternarcotics, agricultural trade, green energy, education, and sports.

### [U.S.–PRC Counternarcotics Working Group](#)

As noted earlier in this paper, Chinese companies and related criminal syndicates have been involved in the illegal U.S. drug trade for the last decade and play major roles in both supplying precursor chemicals and related machinery, exploiting the U.S. black market marijuana industry, and laundering money for major Mexican drug cartels. In January 2024, an interagency delegation launched the US-PRC Counternarcotics Working Group. The group is designed for bilateral communications between the two countries and will support policy making, law enforcement coordination, as well as the sharing of best practices and technical information.<sup>368</sup> In a White House press call with the attending members of the Working Group, a senior administrative official stated one of their main objectives was to “create an enduring architecture that will help us continue the coordination and the communication ... (between countries).”<sup>369</sup> Regardless of PRC companies’ and organizations’ past involvement with the illegal drug trade, greater efforts are being made by both countries to stop the growing problem of international drug manufacturing now and into the future. This avenue of cooperation will be a crucial link to good relations between both countries.

### [Agricultural Trade](#)

The PRC’s economy is largely propped up by the production of commercial technologies and raw materials, and the natural resources the country possesses are not enough to sustain its vast population of over 1.4 billion people. The unmet need opens the door for U.S. companies to sustain a business need that is unlikely to disappear. U.S. agricultural export data indicates a net positive trend in nearly all subsectors over the last five years.<sup>370</sup> As the U.S. agriculture exports to the PRC continue to grow, the revenue it generates is helping create American jobs in farm-heavy areas like California and Texas. According to a recent report by the U.S.-China Business Council, this trade has supported over 930,000 American jobs.<sup>371</sup> Though not without its complications, trade with the PRC in this field is arguably beneficial for both parties involved, creating a revenue stream for the U.S. and satiating the massive food demand in the PRC.

### [The Green Transition](#)

The implementation of clean energy sources and low-carbon emissions into everyday aspects of society are priorities for the U.S. and its allies. The development and manufacture of sustainable technologies is also key to the PRC’s economy, which is seeking to be a leader in the upcoming green transition. As a major producer of lithium, the material required for large storage power sources such as EV batteries, the PRC is in a unique position to become an innovator as investment into environmentally friendly energy alternatives increases and an attractive upstream supply chain entity for prospective green energy companies. To emerge at the forefront of this new technology wave, the PRC created a massive surplus of green energy products and materials, making cooperation in areas of green technology beneficial for Western companies and PRC manufacturers.<sup>372</sup>

Due to the many cases of intellectual property theft from Western companies that send sensitive, high-tech components to get manufactured in the PRC, companies should prioritize the manufacturing of basic components such as battery cases, raw lithium, and other green energy technologies that do not represent advanced technology, such as next-generation lithium-ion batteries.<sup>373</sup>

## Education

Education is a value both the U.S. and the PRC share and promote within their societies. The U.S. and the PRC began student exchanges in 1978, which helped spur the PRC's modernization.<sup>374</sup> From 1979 to 2016, the Fulbright Program, sponsored by the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, sent 3,556 Americans to the PRC while receiving 1,545 Chinese scholars in the U.S."<sup>375</sup>

Deeper relationships made at the educational level assist in minimizing dehumanization on both sides, often exasperated by the media, and promotes civil interactions between the two cultures.<sup>376</sup> Connections made between researchers of different cultures impacted political relationships in the past. For example, during the Cold War, the relationships between American and Soviet researchers aided in the development of arms control agreements between the nations.<sup>377</sup> It is important to note, however, that while these political benefits are present, education exchanges also present opportunities for malign activities between the PRC and the U.S., including theft of university research and transnational repression.

## Sports

Sports is another avenue for cooperation utilized by the U.S. and the PRC in the past and can move both countries towards better diplomatic relations in the future. Sports opens avenues for dialogue between leadership and allows for people of different cultures to have a shared interest. In 1971, a team of US ping-pong players became the first Americans to officially visit the PRC after the CCP obtained power in 1949.<sup>378</sup> Again in 2024 and in line with the U.S.-PRC education collaboration, a group of US undergraduate students from the University of Virginia traveled to the PRC to play a series of ping-pong matches with Chinese university students.<sup>379</sup> This trip attempted to reignite exchanges and collaboration between the two countries, U.S. which was negatively impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic.<sup>380</sup>

Hosting the 2008 Olympics legitimized the PRC on the world stage, opened opportunities for diplomacy and communication with Western countries.<sup>381</sup> Former U.S. President George W. Bush visited the PRC to support the U.S. athletes and despite the former President's criticisms of the PRC's human rights abuses throughout the trip, his appearance at the Olympics and influence motivated other nations to show similar leadership and helped make the event successful for the PRC.<sup>382</sup> Former U.S. President Bush's attendance helped further the diplomatic relationship between the United States and PRC, at the time.<sup>383</sup> Following the event, an article in a Hong Kong newspaper described the future of U.S.-PRC relations to "only be better" after "Bush's era," showing the importance of sports diplomacy on public perception.<sup>384</sup>

## Outlook & Recommendations

### *The Time to Act is Now*

A quote erroneously attributed to Vladimir Lenin states, “[T]he capitalists will sell us the rope that we will use to hang them.”<sup>385</sup> In prior decades, the United States developed a manufacturing dependency on the PRC.<sup>386</sup> Economics is key in the U.S.-PRC competition and the current decade, the 2020s, will likely be decisive in determining the winner of this struggle.<sup>387</sup> By 2030, the PRC could surpass the United States as the world’s largest economy.<sup>388,389</sup> Indeed, per J.P. Morgan Asset Management, the U.S.’s global economic dominance may be supplanted by the PRC at an even sooner date: “we estimate that by 2027 it will overtake the United States to become the largest economy in the world. This is two years earlier than we had estimated pre-pandemic.”<sup>390,391</sup> With that advantage seized, the PRC will continue to enhance their ability to impose their values and norms abroad. “[T]he defining characteristic of the emerging international landscape is the array of constraints that it presents to the exercise of American power.

The rise of the PRC confronts the United States with arguably the most capable adversary it has faced in its history as a global power.”<sup>392,393</sup> Lijian Zhao, PRC Foreign Ministry spokesperson tweeted in 2019: “China will overtake the U.S. in ten years. China’s win is unstoppable.”<sup>394</sup> Increased economic power, coupled with heightened dependence on PRC outputs, may lead to extensive, easily exploitable vulnerabilities. Consider the following quote from the *Financial Times*:

“It’s one thing to trade Portuguese wine for English wool. It’s another thing to give you your entire industrial base to Asia, and then not be able to put masks on your citizens because the country that supplies 70 percent of your masks, which has an entirely different economic and political model, decide to nationalize its personal protective equipment industry.”<sup>395</sup>

The PRC’s economic ascendance will lead, ultimately, to enhanced military power.<sup>396</sup> The PRC has taken recent actions that indicate their desire to enhance their military strength:

“Since 2014, China has launched more warships, submarines, support ships and major amphibious vessels than the entire number of ships now serving in the United Kingdom’s fleet. . . between 2015 and 2017, China launched almost 400,000 tonnes of naval vessels, about twice the output of US shipyards in that period [according to the International Institute of Strategic Studies].”<sup>397</sup>

Moreover, China’s technology and transportation companies, among others, are integrating with the PRC military.<sup>398</sup> Increased military power and economic coercive ability lead to multiple “nightmare scenarios,” detailed in the next section.

The U.S. must pursue a policy of economic containment against the PRC, coupled with domestic investment in production and technology (paired with partnership with the free world) if it hopes to maintain its status as the dominant global economy.<sup>399</sup> The strategy of containment was one that saw the U.S. prevail over, and outlast, the Soviet Union:

“Containment was a doctrine that saw America through more than four decades of construction, struggle and ultimately, triumph.”<sup>400</sup> In the current era, economic integration rather than competing blocs defines our world and the dynamics and relationships associated with such integration bear responsibility for the challenge posed by the PRC today.<sup>401</sup>

The U.S. still has levers it can bring to bear on the economic front, for while the PRC is working assiduously to strengthen its global supply chain resiliency, the country is still very much reliant on access to Western markets for its economic health. By denying the PRC access to that market, the U.S. could potentially stunt their continued rise.<sup>402</sup> Should the PRC retain access to Western markets, the country can leverage investment and stolen technology to buoy itself and stay ahead of the massive amounts of debt it has accrued.<sup>403</sup> Without access to Western markets, the PRC’s debt could become increasingly unsustainable as domestic issues, such as the impact of an aging population on their economy, compound.<sup>404</sup>

Given these factors and the PRC’s economic goals, a U.S. long-term strategy must include maintaining and increasing the U.S. share of global wealth and gross domestic product (GDP) while slowing the PRC’s economic growth.<sup>405</sup> Pursuit of this goal involves limiting PRC access to U.S. capital markets; similarly, reducing or shutting down the transfer of technology in emerging industries will have a desirable impact.<sup>406,407</sup> Part of such a U.S. strategy should also include the application of comprehensive sanctions against PRC-linked entities that have benefited from stolen or illegally transferred intellectual property.<sup>408</sup> Partnering with allies to form an alliance-based trading system (some researchers have described it as a “NATO for trade”) may act to counterbalance the PRC’s use of import restrictions as political punishment or economic coercion.<sup>409</sup>

These U.S. strategies, to be valuable, must be paired with investment at home—enhancing America’s industrial base and leveraging emerging technologies like A.I. to lessen the U.S.’s dependence on foreign resources. “A society that excels at only technology, finance and services will always rely on other places to have a whole economy. This is untenable in a major power competition.”<sup>410</sup> Furthermore, for the U.S. to pursue a strategy of economic containment will require discipline, coordination, and knowledge of the threat among subnational stakeholders. Of import is the maxim “Penny wise and pound foolish”, as trading away strategic advantages for short term gains is against the U.S.’s national interest, and a trap we must learn to avoid. This dynamic reflects a tension between private and national security goals: “[W]hat remains is a fundamental convergence between the desire for PRC economic growth held by Western businesses and investment institutions and the strategic objectives of the PRC Government, which believes that economic ascendancy is the key to global power and to strategic victory over the United States.”<sup>411</sup>

Notably, on the PRC side, the government demands private actor alignment with ideological and strategic goals. This is highlighted in the following CCP guidance:

“Educate and guide private economy actors to arm their minds and guide their practice with Xi Jinping’s Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics in a New Era. . . further strengthen the Party building work of private enterprises and sincerely give full play to the

role of Party organizations as battle fortresses and to the vanguard and exemplary role of Party members.”<sup>412,413</sup>

The contrast in strategic alignment and preparation is evident.<sup>414</sup> The PRC is already thinking strategically, while the U.S. merely seeks to catch up. Indeed, the U.S. may fail at its task of keep pace with the PRC’s economic and military growth—an eventuality that may transpire if the U.S. only looks to future opportunities while ignoring its foundations.<sup>415</sup> “There is no purpose in driving our own car faster when our adversary is sitting beside us in the passenger seat, with total access to anything and everything that we invent and do.”<sup>416</sup>

### *Future “Nightmare” Scenarios*

The United States must commit substantial resources and foster a robust information-sharing framework to counter the malicious activities of the PRC. The PRC possesses vast resources and advanced technical and influence capabilities, posing a significant threat to U.S. national security, economic stability, and democratic processes. Addressing these challenges will not be easy; rather, it requires an all-encompassing, coordinated approach involving federal, state, and local governments, as well as private sector entities. By aligning efforts and leveraging all stakeholders, the U.S. can develop and implement effective strategies to thwart malign PRC operations and safeguard its economic and national security interests.

If the United States fails to control PRC influence, however, the repercussions could be severe. National security secrets could be compromised, endangering military operations and intelligence activities. The safety and security of U.S. citizens could be at risk as critical infrastructure and personal data become vulnerable to exploitation. Additionally, the theft of commercial secrets and intellectual property could undermine economic viability, crippling innovation and competitive advantage in an information-driven society. Such failures would not only diminish U.S. global standing but also erode public trust in the government’s ability to protect its interests and citizens. Therefore, a comprehensive approach is needed to mitigate these risks and preserve national security and economic stability.

This year, the AEP has facilitated a deeper understanding among U.S. government analysts and private sector partners regarding the U.S.-PRC competition, particularly focusing on tools of power and impacts. Through engagements with diverse experts, extensive research, and analysis of government statements and reports, the Public-Private Analytic Exchange Program (AEP) laid a strong foundation for addressing these challenges. However, a more comprehensive review is necessary to stay ahead of the PRC’s evolving methods of exerting power and influence within the United States.

Below are several concerns that were highlighted in our research review:

#### 1. Acquisition and Exploitation of U.S. Privacy Data

PRC investments in U.S. technology companies, particularly those handling vast amounts of personal data, present significant national security risks. By acquiring companies with

access to sensitive data, the PRC could potentially collect and exploit this information for espionage and influence operations. This scenario could include following impacts:

- **Data Surveillance:** PRC-based firms, under the influence of PRC government regulations, might be compelled to share data with the PRC government, facilitating large-scale surveillance operations.
- **Influence Campaigns:** Detailed personal data could be used to craft targeted disinformation and influence campaigns aimed at swaying public opinion and election outcomes.

Through the AEP research team's interviews, many experts expressed concern about Chinese companies and investments expanding into commercial areas that would allow the PRC authorities to acquire data in the United States. According to a report by the Hoover Institution, titled "China's Grand Strategy for Global Data Dominance," access to data will be a key point in the U.S.-PRC competition: "this capacity to store and analyze vast amounts of data enables Beijing to acquire intelligence about its foreign competitors, such as their information environments and patterns of activity. With this data edge, business enterprises operating under the CCP's authority can breach networks in which signals are sent to autonomous vehicles, industrial equipment, and other deep infrastructure underpinning the economy. It can also breach data stored in digital form, including documents and other records that are national security-sensitive."<sup>417</sup>

## 2. PRC Investments and Influence at the State and Local Levels

PRC investments at the state and local levels can create dependencies and influence local politicians and policies. PRC influence can start locally but extend to national politics, particularly if state-level officials with pro-PRC leanings move into federal positions. Key concerns include the following:

- **Political Donations and Lobbying:** PRC-linked entities might engage in political donations and lobbying efforts to sway legislative decisions in their favor.
- **Grassroots Influence:** Leveraging local economic dependencies, the PRC could influence voter bases and grassroots movements, indirectly impacting national elections.

While many of the experts the AEP team met understood growing pressure on local governments to secure overseas investment, they also expressed concerns over the capabilities of state, local, and tribal governments to properly vet investments coming from the PRC and PRC-affiliated companies. A report by the *International Republican Institute* highlights how Chinese investments can lead to political influence, citing the PRC's strategic use of economic leverage to gain political concessions. Additionally, an article from the *Wall Street Journal* discusses how the PRC escalates efforts to influence U.S. state and local leaders through economic deals.<sup>418</sup>

### 3. Theft of Intellectual Property and Trade Secrets

The PRC's efforts to acquire U.S. intellectual property (IP) and trade secrets poses a direct threat to U.S. economic and technological superiority. This scenario involves include the following:

- **Corporate Espionage:** Chinese firms and state-sponsored actors engaging in espionage to steal critical technologies and trade secrets.
- **Research Partnerships:** Using academic and research collaborations as a front for transferring sensitive technologies and know-how back to the PRC.

According to a 2023 *Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)* report, Chinese intellectual property theft is estimated to cost the U.S. economy \$600 billion per year. This includes the use of various methods such as cyber espionage and exploitation of legal loopholes.<sup>419</sup>

### 4. PRC Investments in Land and Other Resources

PRC investments in land and other strategic resources, such as agricultural land and natural resources, could compromise U.S. national security. Concerns include the following:

- **Control of Critical Resources:** Ownership or significant stakes in agricultural land, natural resources, or real estate could allow the PRC to exert influence over essential supplies and economic activities.
- **Economic Coercion:** Economic dependencies at the local level might be leveraged to extract political or strategic concessions from the U.S. at the national level.

In recent years, there has been greater concern over large-scale real estate purchases by PRC-based investors. In March 2024, the Chicago Council of Global Affairs found that, as of 2021, the PRC owned held the most foreign-held land in the U.S. and Canada with 12.8 million acres — more than the entire area of Vermont and New Hampshire combined.<sup>420</sup>

Political pressure, however, has grown to restrict PRC ownership of U.S. land. According to an April 3, 2024 report by *Politico*, several states, including Hawaii, Illinois, and Iowa, have introduced bills specifically barring land purchases by PRC-linked entities. This move aims to prevent PRC-affiliated purchases of agricultural land and efforts to influence state and local politics.<sup>421</sup> This comes after the U.S. intelligence agencies consistently warned about the threats that our foreign adversaries—particularly the PRC—pose by acquiring U.S. real estate and critical technology.<sup>422</sup>

The PRC's strategic influence in the U.S. underscores the multifaceted nature of this competition. Through targeted investments and strategic acquisitions, the PRC could potentially exploit vulnerabilities at the subnational level to advance its national security objectives. Addressing these concerns requires more work and research at the federal level,

as well as partnerships to engage those at the subnational level. Robust regulatory frameworks, increased awareness, and strategic countermeasures are essential to safeguard U.S. interests.

A more detailed and prolonged effort is necessary to effectively counteract the PRC's influence. This includes enhancing federal oversight and increasing collaboration between government entities and private sector partners. Such an approach will help identify and mitigate risks posed by Chinese investments and activities at local and state levels. Engaging local communities and state governments in understanding and responding to these threats is crucial for building a comprehensive defense strategy.

It is, therefore, recommended that the Public-Private Analytic Exchange Program (AEP) project on the PRC's impact at the subnational level continue for an additional year. This extended study could, for instance, specifically focus on the influence of Chinese investments in colleges and universities, and academic centers that are the destination for Chinese students and the target for PRC investment and research support. For example, examining how PRC-funded research projects and academic programs could potentially serve as channels for technology transfer and influence operations would provide critical insights. By concentrating on these critical areas, the research will provide deeper insights into how these investments can affect national security. This targeted approach will help in developing more effective strategies to counter potential threats and ensure that the United States remains vigilant and prepared to safeguard its national interests.

### *Areas for Further Research*

PRC tools of influence continue to proliferate and advance in sophistication and in response there are multiple areas for continued research on this topic. While this product focused on various tools that the PRC uses against multiple targets in the United States, future research could benefit from taking a more concentrated approach. For example, further research could be focused on one of the many targets of PRC influence efforts such as academia or private corporations in the United States. By taking a more focused approach, this research could explore more details and nuances of PRC influence and its impacts and in turn provide more tailored recommendations to the chosen sector.

Of particular interest, is additional research on PRC influence in U.S. academia. The PRC is the greatest source of foreign students in the United States, and with the PRC government directing students to study in the United States in order to engage in competition on a global scale, this necessitates a closer look at the impact of PRC activities on college campuses in the United States. Understanding whether American educators and policymakers are equipped to manage this challenge is vital to protecting critical research, classified materials, and national security.

Additionally, another area of interest is PRC influence in the private sector within the United States. While there has been recent attention on PRC activities against foreign companies within the PRC, further focus on malign PRC activities within companies in the United States is warranted. Actions within the PRC, such as asset seizures and searches of company



offices, often make headlines, however, activities directed towards the private sector domestically is less understood. Further research into how the private sector is vulnerable, which sectors are most likely to be targeted, and how companies can respond is increasingly important to protect data, research and development, intellectual property, and American talent in an increasingly competitive world.

## APPENDIX I: List of Key Terms

Throughout this paper, the AEP team utilized a variety of acronyms and terms that are not commonly known outside of the U.S. government and PRC research spheres. Below is a brief highlighting of some such terms:

- *AEP*: The ODNI-sponsored, DHS-led, Public-Private Sector Analyst Exchange Program, which brings together government and corporate analysts for a six-month joint research project on a topic of mutual interest to the public and private sector
- *Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party*: Carries out Chinese Communist Party work when the National Congress is not in session
- *Chinese People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC)*: Affiliated with the United Front Work Department. The organization oversees the PRC’s sister-city relationships
- *Confucius Institutes (CI)*: A PRC-led education program designed to expose U.S. students to Chinese culture and language
- *CCP*: Chinese Communist Party
- *CSSA*: Chinese Student & Scholars Association
- *DRAGONBRIDGE*: A malign influence network linked to the PRC with a presence on multiple social media platforms.
- *External Propaganda Leading Group of the CCP Central Committee*: Members included senior CCP officials and leaders of foreign audience-focused media outlets; the group develops the PRC’s foreign propaganda priorities
- *Five-Year Plans*: PRC planning documents that set their strategic goals, focusing government work and guiding the activities of market and non-market entities
- *Fox Hunt*: Extralegal repatriation effort of Chinese nationals the CCP views as a threat to the regime
- *Global Comprehensive Power (GCP)*: The PRC’s measurement for how it determines its status relative to geopolitical competitors such as the U.S.
- *Hanban*: Organization that provides resources for the teaching of Mandarin language and Chinese culture; also known as the Center for Language Education
- *Lawfare*: Countries’ use legal means, such as court decisions, to exert their power and influence over their international competitors

- *Military-Civil Fusion (MCF)*: A CCP strategy to develop the most technologically sophisticated military in the world by combining its commercial and defense sectors
- *MSS*: Ministry of State Security
- *NCSC*: U.S. National Counterintelligence and Security Center
- *NGO*: Non-governmental organizations
- *NIC*: U.S. National Intelligence Council
- *ODNI*: Office of the Director of National Intelligence
- *Party*: Chinese Communist Party
- *PRC*: People's Republic of China
- *PLA*: People's Liberation Army
- *SOE*: State-owned Enterprise
- *Subnational Engagement*: Nation-state outreach efforts designed to curry influence among their foreign interlocutors at levels below that of the national decision-making process
- *Strategic Competition*: The breadth of activities countries engage in to obtain advantage during military, economic, and diplomatic exchanges with foreign entities
- *Think Tanks*: Non-governmental and non-academic research organizations designed to influence policy decisions
- *Transnational Repression*: Engaging in authoritarian activities to suppress domestic adversaries in locations outside of a country's mainland
- *UFWD*: United Front Work Department

## APPENDIX II: Useful Resources

A variety of resources are available that can aid subnational decision-makers in better understanding the threats and risks associated with PRC engagement. Many of the articles and books cited in this product were written by think tank, academic, and consultant researchers and are accessible on the internet. The U.S. Government has produced a variety of assessments and resource pages concerning PRC activities that are not restricted in distribution and are posted on the public-facing websites of the ODNI's Foreign Malign Influence Center (FMIC) and the National Counterintelligence and Security Center (NCSC).<sup>423,424</sup> Subnational entities are encouraged to establish an information-sharing relationship with their local Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) field office, the DHS Office of Intelligence & Analysis (I&A) state intelligence representative, and their state's fusion center.<sup>425,426,427</sup> Related to these, subnational entities are also encouraged to seek access to the Homeland Security Information Network (HSIN), which is an invaluable repository of intelligence assessments concerning PRC activities in the homeland.<sup>428</sup>

Business entities are encouraged to seek out and share PRC threat information through various corporate intelligence sharing networks, such as the Domestic Security Advisory Council (DSAC), the Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC), Infragard, ASIS International, the Association of International Risk Intelligence Professionals (AIRIP), and Business Executives for National Security (BENS), among others.<sup>429,430,431,432,433,434</sup> Additionally, human rights organizations such as Human Rights Watch, Freedom House, and Amnesty International have written invaluable assessments that can assist subnational decision-makers in better understanding the threats posed by PRC engagement.<sup>435,436,437</sup> Finally, members of the 2024 AEP research team are glad to answer any questions on the topic of PRC subnational engagement, and can be reached via the AEP's public website.<sup>438</sup>

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- <sup>299</sup> (U) | Rhodium Group | 01 DEC 2016 | Chinese Investment in the United States: Recent Trends and the Policy Agenda | pgs. 99-101 | Research report prepared for the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission
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- <sup>368</sup> (U) | Staff | U.S. Department of State | 1 FEB 2024 | Launch of the United States-People’s Republic of China Counternarcotics Working Group | <https://www.state.gov/launch-of-united-states-peoples-republic-of-china-counternarcotics-working-group/> | U.S. State Department press release regarding a recent trip to Beijing to work with the PRC on coordinating counter-fentanyl supply chain efforts.
- <sup>369</sup> (U) | Staff | Office of the President of the United States | “Background Press Call by Senior Administration Officials on the Counternarcotics Working Group Trip to Beijing” | 28 JAN 2024 | Report | <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/background-press-call-senior-administration-officials-the-counternarcotics-working-group> | U.S. President’s office working group call to discuss U.S.-PRC exchange to counter the fentanyl supply chain.
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- <sup>371</sup> (U) | Staff | U.S.-China Business Council | “U.S. Exports to China: Goods and Services Exports to China and the Jobs They Support, by State and Congressional District” | 2024 | Report | p. 1 | U.S.-PRC trade association.
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- <sup>400</sup> Henry A. Kissinger, “Reflections on Containment,” *Foreign Affairs*, May/June, 1994, and Decisive Decade, p. 29.
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- <sup>403</sup> (U) | Ward, J. | Diversion Books | “The Decisive Decade: American Grand Strategy for Triumph Over China” | 25 APR 2023 | Academic book | p. 114 | Academic book highlighting proposed U.S. strategy competing with the PRC.
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- <sup>413</sup> (U) | Ward, J. | Diversion Books | “The Decisive Decade: American Grand Strategy for Triumph Over China” | 25 APR 2023 | Academic book | p. 75 | Academic book highlighting proposed U.S. strategy competing with the PRC.
- <sup>414</sup> (U) | Ward, J. | Diversion Books | “The Decisive Decade: American Grand Strategy for Triumph Over China” | 25 APR 2023 | Academic book | pp. 75-76 | Academic book highlighting proposed U.S. strategy competing with the PRC.
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- <sup>418</sup> (U) | Shullman, D., Staff | International Republican Institute | “Chinese Malign Influence and the Corrosion of Democracy” | 2019 | Research Paper | [https://www.iri.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/chinese\\_malign\\_influence\\_report.pdf](https://www.iri.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/chinese_malign_influence_report.pdf) | Think tank report on PRC FMI campaigns.
- <sup>419</sup> (U) | Staff | Select Committee on the CCP | “Gallagher, Williams Seek Answers from DOJ on Chinese IP Theft” | 15 JUN 2023 | Website of U.S. government agency | <http://selectcommitteeonthecpp.house.gov/media/press-releases/gallagher-williams-seek-answers-doj-chinese-ip-theft> | U.S. Congress press release regarding letter sent to DOJ on countering PRC IP theft.
- <sup>420</sup> (U) | O’Dell, H., Caughey, A. | Chicago Council on Global Affairs | “State Lawmakers are Concerned About Chinese Ownership of U.S. Land, but Other Countries Own Much More American Acreage” | 29 MAR 2024 | Global Cooperation Focused Research Blog |

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<https://globalaffairs.org/bluemarble/china-foreign-land-ownership-explainer> | Research Article highlighting PRC purchases of U.S. farmland.

<sup>421</sup> (U) | Kine, P. | Politico | “U.S. States are Cutting Off Chinese Citizens and Companies from Land Ownership” | 3 APR 2024 | Politically Focused News Magazine | <https://www.politico.com/news/2024/04/03/state-laws-china-land-buying-00150030> | Article highlighting U.S. politicians’ responses to PRC purchases of U.S. property.

<sup>422</sup> (U) | Staff | FBI | “Director Wray’s Opening Statement to the House Select Committee on the Strategic Competition Between the United States and the Chinese Communist Party” | 31 JAN 2024 | Website of U.S. government agency | <https://www.fbi.gov/news/speeches/director-wrays-opening-statement-to-the-house-select-committee-on-the-chinese-communist-party> | FBI press release highlighting Director’s statements on U.S.-PRC strategic competition.

<sup>423</sup> (U) | Staff | ODNI | “Foreign Malign Influence Center” | 24 JUL 2024 | Website of U.S. government agency | <https://www.odni.gov/index.php/fmic-home> | ODNI website providing background info on FMI and the ODNI response.

<sup>424</sup> (U) | Staff | ODNI | “National Counterintelligence and Security Center” | 24 JUL 2024 | Website of U.S. government agency | <https://www.dni.gov/index.php/ncsc-home> | ODNI website providing U.S. national-level counterintelligence efforts.

<sup>425</sup> (U) | Staff | FBI | “Field Offices” | 24 JUL 2024 | Website of U.S. government agency | <https://www.fbi.gov/contact-us/field-offices/@castle.cms.querylisting/6bd7cedb14f545e3a984775195ea3d30> | FBI website listing of Field Office contact information nationwide.

<sup>426</sup> (U) | Staff | DHS | “Office of Intelligence & Analysis” | 24 JUL 2024 | Website of U.S. government agency | <https://www.dhs.gov/office-intelligence-and-analysis> | DHS website providing background info on activities of DHS’s Office of Intelligence & Analysis.

<sup>427</sup> (U) | Staff | National Fusion Center Association (NFCA) | “The National Network of Fusion Centers” | 24 JUL 2024 | Website of U.S. Association that Represents Fusion Centers Nationwide | <https://nfcausa.org/fusion-centers/> | Association website that includes background and contact information from NFCA.

<sup>428</sup> (U) | Staff | DHS | “Homeland Security Information Network” | 24 JUL 2024 | Website of DHS-run Information Sharing Portal | <https://www.dhs.gov/homeland-security-information-network-hsin> | DHS’s official system for sharing sensitive unclassified information.

<sup>429</sup> (U) | Staff | DSAC | “About DSAC” | 24 JUL 2024 | Website of Joint FBI-DHS Public-Private Partnership Program | <https://www.dsac.gov/about> | DSAC website that provides background information on the organization.

<sup>430</sup> (U) | Staff | OSAC | “Home Page” | 24 JUL 2024 | Website of U.S. State Department Run Private Sector Security Community | <https://www.osac.gov/> | OSAC homepage with upcoming events, threat reports, and travel guidance.

<sup>431</sup> (U) | Staff | Infragard | “Welcome to Infragard” | 24 JUL 2024 | Website of FBI Corporate Partnership Program | <https://www.infragard.org/> | Infragard homepage that provides background information on the program, and points of contact for outreach.

<sup>432</sup> (U) | Staff | ASIS International | “Homepage” | 24 JUL 2024 | Website of Security Management Association | <https://www.asisonline.org/> | ASIS homepage offering members publications, access to professional development opportunities, and certifications.

<sup>433</sup> (U) | Staff | Association of International Risk Professionals (AIRIP) | “Homepage” | 24 JUL 2024 | Homepage of nonprofit risk-focused professional association | <https://www.airip.org/> | AIRIP homepage highlights job opportunities, a security-focused blog, and links to social media sites.

<sup>434</sup> (U) | Staff | Business Executives for National Security (BENS) | “Homepage” | 24 JUL 2024 | Homepage of organization that brings together corporate and government national security leaders | <https://bens.org/> | BENS website provides background on the organization, news, and upcoming events.

<sup>435</sup> (U) | Staff | Human Rights Watch | “China: Events of 2023” | 24 JUL 2024 | Country Report | <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/china> | Report highlights PRC’s worldwide pattern of human rights violations in 2023.

<sup>436</sup> (U) | Staff | Freedom House | “Special Report 2021—China: Transnational Repression Origin Country Case Study” | 24 JUL 2024 | Study of PRC Repression | <https://freedomhouse.org/report/transnational-repression/china> | Report examines breadth of PRC’s efforts to repress dissidents worldwide.

<sup>437</sup> (U) | Staff | Amnesty International | “China: Overseas Students Face Harassment and Surveillance in Campaign of Transnational Repression” | 13 MAY 2024 | Article on PRC Transnational Repression | <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/05/china-overseas-students-face-harassment-and-surveillance-in-campaign-of-transnational-repression/> | Report looks at PRC campaign targeting Chinese students worldwide, including in the U.S.

<sup>438</sup> (U) | Staff | DHS | “Public-Private Analytic Exchange Program (AEP) Overview and Documents” | 24 JUL 2024 | Website of U.S. government agency | <https://www.dhs.gov/publication/aep-overview-and-documents> | U.S. government website for public-private exchange program.