

Written Testimony of Peter Mattis, President, The Jamestown Foundation

House Foreign Affairs Committee

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Hearing on “Lives, not Leverage: the Long Arm of China and North Korea’s Repression”

Chairwoman Kim, Ranking Member Bera, thank you for holding today’s hearing on the human rights abuses of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and its ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Concern for human rights in the PRC has long been the bedrock of bipartisan conversations on U.S. policy toward the PRC. Even in difficult times, we have found ways to work across the aisle in Congress to ensure that both Beijing and Washington take seriously the inalienable rights of the Chinese people. Since our founding, the United States and the American people have held that all individuals have the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. These are not rights granted by a government, but rather innate to their humanity. It is bad enough that the CCP violates those principles in its treatment of PRC citizens, but Beijing has extended that treatment to U.S. citizens (and all others) while claiming a global right to detain, arrest, and imprison anyone—regardless of citizenship—who challenges the Party’s view of what it means to be Chinese. In practice, such offenses include activities legal in the country where they are conducted and individual representations delivered to the local government, such as Hong Kongers testifying before the U.S. Congress.

We also should note that concern with human rights in the PRC is the underpinning of the need to distinguish Chinese civilization and the Chinese people from the current ruling regime. We hold that individuals have a choice; they do not belong to a government or a political party irrespective of their free will. It is a very human concern to be worried about the fate or lives of more than 1.3 billion people. It is a matter of U.S. sovereignty to protect Americans—people who by themselves or by an ancestor chose to become Americans—from a foreign political party or government that claims them, that claims to have control over their lives, liberties, and pursuits. What we call transnational repression is a fancy way of saying a foreign government committing criminal acts against our people, oftentimes on our own soil.

The Global Consequences of CCP Views

Hong Kong’s *National Security Law* and the PRC *Ethnic Unity and Progress Promotion Law* (民族团结进步促进法) are the natural exposition of the CCP’s ambitions and security concepts. Beijing has made explicit what was already implicit from the Party’s activities over the last century. They emerge from ambitions for a harmonious society led by the CCP with a unified economic, social, and cultural foundation. The Party also has defined security in such a way that anything that threatens those objectives or the CCP’s ability to manage or control related factors is a danger. That includes ideas, such as freedoms of speech and association, that might complicate the Party’s ability to govern.

The CCP has described its global ambitions for decades in some form of, in current parlance, achieving the “Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation” (中华民族伟大复兴). National rejuvenation has two significant components. The first is making the PRC a great power with global reach. The second is doing so with the Chinese Communist Party at the helm.

By the party’s definition the “Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation” has three distinct prerequisites. The first is building “a great, modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced, harmonious, and beautiful.” Although many of these words are self-explanatory, others like “democratic,” “culturally advanced,” and “harmonious” mean something very different in the party’s context than in the American context. “Democratic” refers to consultative democracy in which the party leads, and other political inputs are provided through controlled mechanisms like the united front policy system. “Culturally advanced” and “harmonious” define the party’s relationship with society and the ways in which Chinese people conduct themselves.

The second prerequisite is national reunification of all areas claimed by Beijing, regardless of whether they were traditionally part of China. The goal includes the economic, social, and cultural unity of those areas, as can be seen in the Ethnic Unity Law, the integration of Hong Kong into a “Greater Bay Area,” and language policies to drive out public usage of ethnic minority languages and even Chinese dialects.

The third is China’s emergence as a global leader in terms of what it calls comprehensive national power. First conceived of as an idea in the 1980s, comprehensive national power evolved over two decades to become a central framing device in speeches, policy documents, and national strategies for how the Party understands PRC strengths and competitive position vis-a-vis other countries.¹ In 1991, then-CCP General Secretary Jiang Zemin described international rivalry as “a competition for comprehensive national power,” and such framing has continued to the present day. As the PRC’s own conception of its power grows, it has become more aggressive internationally. When party theorists determined that China was now the world’s second strongest country in the 2010s, it led to more aggressive maritime behavior near Japan and informed Chinese export controls of rare earths.² The CCP’s perception that the United States’ national power is in relative decline and the world is experiencing a “governance deficit” has led it to pursue efforts to reshape the world according to Chinese rules and norms.³ The notion of U.S. relative decline has also contributed to China’s willingness to resort to transnational repression within the United States. These three overarching objectives are frequently cited in leadership speeches, guidance documents, policies, and more. Such documents are the products of bureaucratic processes that define the work across the party-state for weeks and even months at a time.

The PRC *National Security Law* (2015) describes security in broad terms that go well beyond physical threats to the territory of the PRC. Security comes from the inside out. Articles 2 and 3 of the law state: “National security refers to the relative absence of international or domestic threats to the state’s power to

¹ Erik R. Quam, “PRC Conceptions of Comprehensive National Power: Part I,” *China Brief* (Jamestown Foundation), September 5, 2025, <https://jamestown.org/prc-conceptions-of-comprehensive-national-power-part-1/>.

² Erik R. Quam, “CNP Part III: Growing CNP Drove Foreign Policy Shift,” *China Brief* (Jamestown Foundation), January 6, 2026, <https://jamestown.org/cnp-part-iii-growing-cnp-drove-foreign-policy-shift/>.

³ W.Y. Kwok, “Beijing’s Latest Global Leadership Bid,” *China Brief Notes* (Jamestown Foundation), October 31, 2025, <https://jamestown.org/beijings-latest-global-leadership-bid/>.

govern, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity, the welfare of the people, sustainable economic and social development, and other major national interests, and the ability to ensure a continued state of security. National security efforts shall adhere to a comprehensive understanding of national security, make the security of the People their goal, political security their basis and economic security their foundation; make military, cultural and social security their safeguard...”

This definition has two notable features. First, security is defined by the absence of threats, not by the ability to manage them. This unlimited view pushes the Chinese Communist Party toward preempting threats and preventing their emergence. Second, security issues extend to the domain of ideas—what people think is potentially dangerous. The combination of these themes, i.e. preemption in the world of ideas, creates an imperative for the party to alter the world in which it operates, to shape how China and its current party-state are understood in the minds of anyone outside the Party.

One way of making this more concrete is to look at party documents about security threats. In April 2013, “Document No. 9”—the “Communiqué on the Current State of the Ideological Sphere”—identified ideas that undermine the party-state’s security.⁴ Among them were the promotion of constitutional democracy, civil society, and Western concepts of journalism. In the circular’s final paragraph, it stated the party should “allow absolutely no opportunity or outlets for incorrect thinking or viewpoints to spread.” Although it would be easy to dismiss this document as a one-off or unenforced, in 2015 Beijing abducted and held five Hong Kong booksellers, including foreign passport holders, who sold books ostensibly banned in China. Moreover, Beijing issued new regulations on counter-espionage last December that clarified the *Counter-Espionage Law* (2014) and defined activities threatening national security apart from espionage. Among them was “fabricating or distorting facts, publishing or disseminating words or information that endanger state security.” Influencing the outside world, therefore, is not just a historical activity of the party, but an ongoing requirement for national security as defined by the party-state. Over the last decade, the international element of Beijing’s repression has grown immensely, involving convictions on U.S. soil, reports of CCP-instigated violence, arrest warrants and bounties for Hong Kong exiles whose activities were entirely legal at the time of the action, and much more. During his confirmation hearing, Secretary of State Marco Rubio also highlighted the plight of Uyghurs in Thailand who faced forced repatriation, but this is a phenomenon that has been well-reported around the world.

PRC *Ethnic Unity and Progress Promotion Law* Justifies Global Reach

The new Ethnic Unity Law explicitly describes the CCP’s assimilationist agenda. The law emphasizes forging a sense of community and promoting material, political, spiritual, social, and ecological aspects of Chinese civilization. In this case, the spiritual element refers to adherence to socialist core values rather than any religious beliefs and acceptance of Chinese cultural symbols, as denoted in Articles 11 through 14.⁵

⁴ Document 9: A ChinaFile Translation,” ChinaFile, November 8, 2013, <https://www.chinafile.com/document-9-chinafile-translation>.

⁵ Jonah Reisboard, “Ethnic Unity Law Codifies ‘Chinese’ Identity,” *China Brief Notes* (Jamestown Foundation), March 27, 2026, <https://jamestown.org/ethnic-unity-law-codifies-chinese-identity/>.

Similar to previous national security-related laws, the *Ethnic Unity and Progress Promotion Law* creates an obligation and expectation of PRC nationals to support the law. Article 10 states that citizens are obligated “to safeguard national unity and the unity of all ethnic groups in the country, and shall safeguard national sovereignty, security and development interests.” Article 60 also places the obligation on any PRC company and organization to halt any activities that might undermine ethnic unity.⁶

Two features of the law have direct impact beyond the PRC’s borders. The first is its promotion of international academic exchanges and propaganda to shape how the rest of the world understands the PRC’s ethnic minorities and Chinese nationhood, as in Articles 17 through 19. Moreover, the law endorses approaches to exploit modern technology, including artificial intelligence, to promote the Party’s goals (without reference to geographic scope). The second is the law’s explicit extraterritorial application. Article 63 states “Organizations and individuals outside the territory of the People’s Republic of China that commit acts against the People’s Republic of China to undermine ethnic unity and progress or to incite ethnic separatism shall be held legally liable in accordance with the law.” Legally liable in accordance with the law means that such overseas actions are criminal and will be treated as such.

In sum, the *Ethnic Unity and Progress Promotion Law* expands on the Party’s existing ambitions for national rejuvenation and national security. The law is a natural extension of these two ideas, including the international elements.

Lessons from Recent Incidents

This section focuses on recent examples of the PRC human rights abuses and criminality against people beyond the PRC borders. However, this is not to overlook the abuses the CCP has perpetrated inside the PRC and against the Chinese people. These external examples provide more visible manifestations of the kinds of treatment that Chinese people receive at the hands of their government.

- *Min Zin’s Imprisonment Highlights Risks of Arbitrary Detention and PRC Law Superseding Local Laws.* The Ministry of State Security (MSS) lured U.S. researcher Min Zin to a conference in Yunnan Province and detained him as he entered the country. Min Zin had been conducting research on PRC activities in Southeast Asia, especially in Burma.⁷
- *Hong Kong Arrest Warrants and Bounties in 2023–2025 Highlight Retrospective Application of the National Security Law, Including Against Foreign Citizens.* In 2023, the Hong Kong national security authorities issued arrest warrants for Hong Kong activists and added bounties in subsequent years for additional activists. At least some of the activists had U.S., Canadian, U.K.,

⁶ Christopher Nye, “Ethnic Unity Law Enforces Mandatory Assimilation,” *China Brief Notes* (Jamestown Foundation), April 2, 2026, <https://jamestown.org/ethnic-unity-law-enforces-mandatory-assimilation/>.

⁷ Robbie Gramer and Yoko Kubota, “A U.S. Scholar Was Invited to China. Then He Vanished.” *Wall Street Journal*, September 12, 2026, <https://www.wsj.com/world/china/a-u-s-scholar-was-invited-to-china-then-he-vanished-88c720af>.

or other citizenship and became targets because they lobbied their own governments for sanctions on Hong Kong actors.⁸

- *Intimidation of Li Ying (aka Teacher Li) in Italy for Circumventing Censorship.* In March 2026, Italy expelled eight PRC nationals for their surveillance, harassment, and intimidation of Li Ying. Li and his network have helped to keep an inside-outside-inside flow of information in Chinese-language circles within and beyond the PRC. Beijing has put pressure on Mr. Li, because he played a role in spreading word about the COVID-related protests in the PRC and continues to expose the darker sides of CCP rule. Li and his network have also proven able to reveal developments that have disappeared from official accounts and statistics.⁹
- *CCP-Aligned Groups Instigate Violence in Confrontations with Activists Around the APEC Meeting in San Francisco 2023.* The CCP mobilized united front-linked organizations in the United States for a counterprotest in San Francisco to intimidate U.S.-based citizens and activists protesting CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping's attendance at the annual APEC summit in November 2023.¹⁰ The Chinese Consulate in Los Angeles paid for supporters' hotels and meals as an incentive to participate in the protests, with at least 35 distinct Beijing-aligned diaspora organizations participating. Two high-profile united front-linked organization leaders, Lu Qiang and John Chan, traveled from Los Angeles and New York, respectively, to show support for the CCP.
- *Threats and Pressure Against Shen Yun and Falun Gong.* In February 2025, an email was sent to the Kennedy center threatening violence if the Chinese cultural troupe Shen Yun performed.¹¹ This tactic has been used to disrupt performances by the group across the country and globally. The CCP's insecurity around Falun Gong stems from its inability to control the spread and beliefs of its followers. The Falun Gong became a CCP target when it was entangled in factional political fights in the 1990s and staged a rally of thousands near the CCP leadership compound in 1999.

⁸ Amy Hawkins and Daniel Hurst, "Hong Kong Issues Arrest Warrants for Eight Overseas Democracy Activists," The Guardian, July 3, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jul/03/hong-kong-issues-arrest-warrants-for-eight-overseas-democracy-activists>; "Hong Kong puts arrest bounties on five overseas activists including US citizen," Reuters, December 14, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/dec/14/hong-kong-puts-arrest-bounties-on-five-overseas-activists-including-us-citizen>.

⁹ "Italy moves against 8 Chinese nationals tied to targeting activist Teacher Li," Decode39, March 9, 2026, <https://decode39.com/13820/italy-moves-against-8-chinese-nationals-tied-to-targeting-activist-teacher-li/>; Li Yuan, "He Became China's Largest Critic in Exile. Then the Threats Followed Him," *New York Times*, June 1, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/06/01/business/teacher-li-transnational-repression.html>.

¹⁰ Shibani Mahtani et al., "How China Extended Its Repression into an American City," Washington Post, September 3, 2024, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/interactive/2024/chinese-communist-party-us-repression-xi-jinping-apec/>.

¹¹ Shen Yun Performing Arts, "Kennedy Center Receives Bomb Threat Targeting Shen Yun," Press Release, February 20, 2025, <https://www.shenyun.org/news/view/article/e/eSCGweNXvjO/bomb-threat-kennedy-center-shen-yun>; Leeshai Lemish, "Incidents & Evidence," Who's Afraid of Shen Yun?, accessed September 14, 2026, <https://leeshailemish.com/on-shen-yun/whos-afraid-of-shen-yun/>.

- *Holding Uyghur Family Members Located in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) as Hostages to Coerce Foreign Nationals.* The CCP has targeted Uyghurs living in the XUAR in retaliation for advocacy by overseas family members. Gulshan Abbas is a retired doctor who disappeared in 2018, just days after her sister, Rushan Abbas, spoke at a think tank event in the United States. Gulshan's disappearance and 20-year prison sentence was most likely meant to intimidate and discourage her sister's continued advocacy.¹² Detaining and convicting Uyghurs in the XUAR who have family members abroad is a common intimidation tactic, and the fact that it is so prevalent shows the extent that the CCP prioritizes its political goals over the natural rights of the Chinese people.
- *PRC Repression Escalating to Plans for Political Violence.* In 2022, Department of Justice documents showed that Yan Xiong, a New York congressional candidate and Chinese democracy activist, was the victim of PRC threats and attempts to discredit his campaign.¹³ The documents cite a voicemail message left by someone affiliated with the PRC's security apparatus who suggested physically assaulting the candidate. This is not an isolated case. Czech authorities released details of a Chinese plan to manufacture a car collision involving Taiwanese Vice President Hsiao Bi-khim during a 2024 visit.¹⁴ The absence of a successful attack is not a sign of innocence or an unwillingness to execute. The U.S. Government and like-minded governments need to recognize the escalating nature of transnational repression before the CCP successfully carries out a violent attack against a political figure.

Implications for the United States and Conducting U.S.–PRC Relations

The United States does not have a proportional or symmetric way to respond to the CCP's hostage-taking, exit bans, and the violence, intimidation, and other criminal acts that contribute to transnational repression. The U.S. Government will not and legally cannot just take hostages and hold them until Beijing provides some concession. Nor would such hostage-taking affect CCP leadership thinking, unless the individuals targeted had direct connections to the elite or government institutions. Direct exchanges would merely encourage hostage-taking. De-linking these incidents from the broader agenda of U.S.–PRC relations would effectively neutralize any U.S. response, because the U.S. response would either have to be proportional (which will not be done) or relegated to simply raising the issue during summits and other high-level engagements. These options seem unsuitable for a democratic government and would signal a lack of willingness to protect U.S. citizens.

¹² Jessica White, Grady Vaughan, and Yana Gorokhovskaia, *A Light That Cannot Be Extinguished*, Freedom House, December 2023,

https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2023-12/TNR_Journalism_Report_12.2023_Digital.pdf; U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, "Gulshan Abbas," Freedom of Religion or Belief Victims Database, accessed September 14, 2026,

<https://www.uscirtf.gov/religious-prisoners-conscience/forb-victims-database/gulshan-abbas>.

¹³ Rebecca Davis O'Brien, "Chinese Officer Charged With Harassing N.Y. Congressional Candidate," *New York Times*, March 16, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/16/nyregion/china-target-congress-campaign.html>.

¹⁴ Helen Davidson, "China 'planned car collision' during Taiwan vice-president's visit to Prague," *The Guardian*, June 28, 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jun/28/taiwan-vice-president-undeterred-after-czech-reports-of-alleged-chinese-car-collision-plot>.

To shape Beijing's thinking and deter such actions, the U.S. Government would need to approach these incidents asymmetrically or disproportionately to target or hold at risk things that CCP leaders would care about.

Beijing's need for stability in U.S.-PRC relations creates a window of opportunity in the coming months or even years to apply such pressure. Although Beijing has demonstrated leverage through its dominance in rare earth element processing, magnet production, and other critical minerals, the CCP remains reluctant to overturn the U.S.-PRC relationship entirely. The United States still provides knowledge and technology that is vital to the CCP's objectives, as shown in the Anthropic report on misuses of Claude, PRC-based companies' persistent distillation attempts on U.S. large-language models, and the continuing attempts to circumvent U.S. export controls.¹⁵ The PRC's economic stability has declined over the past year with consumer spending decreasing and greater reliance on exports to sustain the economy. Beijing does not appear to be seeking a breakthrough to improve U.S.-PRC relations; however, recent economic performance casts doubt on the PRC's ability to make significant deals, such as large orders for Boeing planes or even agricultural products. If Beijing cannot offer a meaningful carrot to encourage Washington to maintain a stable relationship, then the Party must consider ways to stabilize the relationship by deescalating. U.S. actions should show Xi Jinping and other CCP leaders that the arbitrary detention of U.S. citizens or efforts to restrict U.S. citizens from exercising their legal rights is inherently escalatory and destabilizing, as well as jeopardizing other Party interests.

Recommendations

For Congress, the difficulty of compelling executive branch action should be reframed as creating incentives for the executive branch to act. Many human rights-related laws require the U.S. Departments of State and Treasury to report to Congress when their authorities are applied, which disincentivizes using those authorities. When incidents occur for which Congress believes that a U.S. response is necessary, Congress should reverse reporting requirements on sanctions and other Congressional authorities relevant to Executive Branch actions by forcing agencies to report when authorities go unused. This will require amendments to existing legislation providing sanctions authorities and could be attached to other economic statecraft authorities that might be applied in disproportionate or asymmetric ways.

The CCP's notion of comprehensive national power serves as a driver of PRC aggression around the world and it is a pillar of the party's top goal of national rejuvenation. This calls for competitive clarity that foregrounds CCP conceptions of power in U.S. responses. The technology race and transnational repression may seem like two issues with limited overlap. But, by the CCP's own logic and according to its behavior, transnational repression is the outcome of a power calculation in which technology features

¹⁵ Anthropic, *Detecting and Countering Misuse of AI: September 2026*, September 2026, <https://www.anthropic.com/threat-intelligence-report-september-2026>; Sunny Cheung, "Chinese Research Details Distillation for Military Use," *China Brief* (Jamestown Foundation), August 7, 2026, <https://jamestown.org/chinese-research-details-distillation-for-military-use/>; U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Public Affairs, "U.S. Authorities Shut Down Major China-Linked AI Tech Smuggling Network," Press Release, December 9, 2025, <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/us-authorities-shut-down-major-china-linked-ai-tech-smuggling-network>.

prominently. Restricting access to U.S. knowledge and technology that Beijing cannot yet domestically replicate gives the United States the ability to make Chinese escalation more costly at a time when the PRC needs stability. This opening could create leverage to press for the release of arbitrarily detained citizens and other prisoners. Greater U.S.–PRC cooperation, or the absence of competitive pressure, will not produce restraint by the CCP. Its actions are calibrated by its own reading of the global balance of power.

A number of specific measures could be taken to express U.S. displeasure—consistent with how the United States has responded previously—at the encouragement of the U.S. Congress:

- Designate the PRC a state sponsor of wrongful detention under Executive Order 14348, which enables sanctions, travel restrictions, and other punitive measures;
- Raise the level of the travel advisory to the PRC and add the wrongful detention signifier;
- Issue a specific warning regarding academic exchanges in the PRC, including Hong Kong and Macao, identifying specific areas of sensitivity; and/or
- Issue targeted sanctions on the official entities involved in wrongful detentions and other incidents of transnational repression. Rather than or in addition to sanctioning the provincial or municipal units involved in human rights abuses, disproportionate sanctions could be applied to enterprises owned by that unit so that there are localized economic consequences.

Lastly, the United States could find an action to apply to each instance the PRC violates the human rights of U.S. citizens or after each period of time that passes for wrongful detention. For example, for every act of PRC transnational repression committed inside the United States, the Administration could use some version of the following ideas to put pressure on Beijing's interests:

- Publish the details of one Central Committee member's family wealth, foreign passports, and any sign of a lack of faith in the Party or corruption, with attention being paid to ensure its dissemination inside the PRC;
- Use Presidential Drawdown Authority provided under the Taiwan Enhanced Resilience Act to provide arms to Taiwan in \$25 million increments (or ratchet up the commitments for each act in \$5 million increments) for each act or for each week that an American is wrongfully detained;
- Apply export controls to a new PRC company for each act or unit of time that passes and could be removed once Beijing rectifies the situation; or,
- Remove one agenda item that Beijing requested from the next U.S.-PRC meeting held at any level.