

## **Chinese Communist Party Influence in United States Institutions and Political Networks**

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Chairman Mast, Ranking Member Meeks, distinguished members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

Beijing's influence posture has shifted from discrete propaganda and relationship-building toward a broader system for shaping the external conditions of strategic competition. Since the 2017 Nineteenth Party Congress, Xi Jinping has strengthened Party direction over foreign affairs, national security, united front work, international communication, and science and technology. The result is a growing capacity to accumulate access inside U.S. nongovernmental institutions and convert it – when useful – into political influence, technology and knowledge transfer, elite advocacy, mobilization, or covert intervention. Frontier AI raises the stakes by making the U.S.-China global competition increasingly dependent not only on technology itself, but on compute, energy, talent, standards, infrastructure, institutional rules, and political will.

U.S. analysts have been right to place united front work near the center of this problem. United front work explains how the Party identifies, cultivates, and makes use of people and institutions beyond its formal membership, including outside China. It also explains why a relationship may be useful before it produces more visible political interference. The Party can accumulate contacts, platforms, and organizational positions, then draw on them when a strategic need or political opportunity arises.

The larger influence system, however, extends beyond the united front bureaucracy. Because Xi has placed all of the Party's systems under stronger central direction, the central analytical problem is therefore how different parts of the Party-state are organized around common influence missions. Influence is the broader effort to acquire, preserve, and convert access into power over a foreign decision environment. It can work through information, but also through professional authority, personal dependence, institutional rules, funding, convening power, data, technology relationships, community organizations, and the ability to impose costs. Espionage and influence can also form successive stages of one relationship management process. A contact may initially provide information about

an institution or policymaker, later supply access to a network, and eventually help advance an argument, block a decision, recruit another participant, or transfer knowledge. The important questions are what capacity has been built, how readily it can be operationalized, and what changes when it is activated.

This distinction matters because influence is often confused with propaganda. Propaganda tries to shape what an audience believes. The Party's present effort, however, addresses five enduring problems that became more urgent as Xi concluded that China was moving toward the center of the international system.

1. How can the Party benefit from open foreign systems while limiting the political and informational exposure that openness creates inside China?
2. How can China obtain foreign technology, expertise, capital, and data while reducing foreign leverage over China's own development?
3. How can the Party shape foreign institutions and policy coalitions without making every intervention visibly Party-directed?
4. How can Beijing prevent the United States from converting superior resources into sustained technological and political power?
5. How can separate Party, state, military, academic, commercial, and social organizations be mobilized around the same strategic tasks to offset U.S. advantages in key domains of competition?

These problems ultimately concern the survival of Party rule and the balance of power between political systems. Xi inherited a Party that had long treated "peaceful evolution", ideological penetration, technology dependence, and foreign intelligence activity as related dangers. His contribution has been to intensify that worldview, centralize its institutions, and turn external environmental shaping into a more explicit requirement of national security and national rejuvenation.

## **1. FROM CENTER STAGE TO COORDINATED EXTERNAL WORK**

The fundamental strategic shift described in this testimony is best understood as a sequence: Beijing has moved from targeting discrete audiences to seeking influence across the full range of social, institutional, technological, and political vectors that shape the external environment. A 2015 Central Committee and State Council opinion began constructing a Party-led system of "new-type think tanks with Chinese characteristics". It directed Party and government offices, academies, Party schools, universities, military institutions, research institutes, enterprises, and social organizations to form a coordinated system for policy advice, theoretical innovation, public opinion guidance,

social service, and public diplomacy. It also required information collection and analysis, international exchange platforms, foreign language capacity, and channels for converting research into policy and public communication. This policy created an institutional layer capable of studying foreign environments, advising decisionmakers, cultivating outside partners, and shaping public interpretation.

Xi's report to the 19th Party Congress in October 2017 supplied the underlying strategic rationale for this underappreciated development. China, he declared, was "moving closer to center stage" in world affairs. The phrase expressed more than growing prestige. It marked a leadership judgment that China now possessed greater capacity to shape international outcomes and that national rejuvenation required it to do so. Two years later, the Fourth Plenum of the 19th Central Committee translated that ambition into institutional language. Its decision called for unified Party leadership over foreign affairs and a system of "great coordination in external work" bringing together the external activities of the Party, legislature, government, consultative system, military, localities, and people's organizations.

Xi's May 2021 Politburo study session then set out the external influence component. He called for a strategic communication system with stronger top-level coordination and research support. He instructed the Party to convert its organizational and personnel advantages into communication power, use high-level experts and foreign mainstream media, tailor messages to countries and social groups, expand circles of foreign friends, and place international communication within the ideological responsibility of Party committees at every level. He described an emerging "multi-actor and three-dimensional external-propaganda structure". This formulation is important because the "multi-actor" system extends well beyond state media. It makes expertise, academic standing, international forums, personal relationships, and ostensibly independent foreign platforms part of the Party's communication capacity.

### 1.1. THE GLOBAL THREAT IMAGE BEHIND XI'S SECURITY DOCTRINE

The establishment of the Central National Security Commission in 2014 placed Xi above a system designed to integrate domestic security, external security, foreign affairs, technology, ideology, and social governance. The 2015 National Security Law defines political security as the basis of national security and treated culture, information, economic development, technology, and overseas interests as parts of the same security field. In 2017, Xi instructed national security officials to adopt a global vision, coordinate security with development, and keep the strategic initiative in China's hands.

My earlier work described the resulting logic as “safeguarding socialism”. China cannot insulate Party rule simply by controlling speech, institutions, and networks at home. Foreign ideas, technologies, social movements, information systems, and political decisions continually cross the boundary. Security therefore requires action abroad: reducing the sources of political pressure, controlling channels of exposure, building alternative institutions, gaining leverage over foreign actors, and making the international environment more compatible with China’s domestic system. This is why the Party treats discourse power, technology sovereignty, overseas Chinese work, data control, united front activity, and counterespionage as connected rather than discrete concerns.

Xi’s legal and organizational reforms also connect this doctrine to intelligence work. The 2017 National Intelligence Law requires organizations and citizens to support, assist, and cooperate with national intelligence activity. Counterespionage, data security, secrecy, and cybersecurity rules have widened the information and organizational resources available to state security agencies. At the same time, the Ministry of State Security has become more politically prominent and publicly active. It now interprets national security priorities for a mass audience, mobilizes society against espionage and subversion, and frames technology, data, ideology, and foreign contact through a common “political security” lens that fuses global security with domestic security.

Speeches and writings of current MSS head Chen Yixin help reveal how the mission has become more active. In January 2021, while serving as secretary-general of the Central Political-Legal Commission, Chen transmitted Xi’s assessment of the international situation to provincial and ministerial cadres. China’s rise was a “major variable,” the “rise of the East and decline of the West” was a trend, and U.S. containment and suppression constituted both an immediate “war of encounter” and a “protracted war”. As minister of state security, Chen later translated that worldview into a narrative of global conflict. His writings depict foreign attempts to “Westernize and divide China” as continuous attacks on Party leadership and socialism.

The result is a subtle offensive turn. Beijing still describes its actions as defensive responses to containment, subversion, and hegemony. Yet a strategy designed to seize initiative, shape security, restructure dependence, and outlast the United must by definition extend beyond China. It must affect the choices of other states. It must preserve access to foreign resources, weaken coalitions that can deny that access, increase foreign dependence on China, and raise the domestic political cost of sustained competition. Influence, espionage, economic leverage, and technology policy become different means of improving China’s position in a prolonged systemic contest.

## 1.2. THE 2014 NATIONAL SECURITY AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS RESET

Two Xi-led meetings in 2014 supplied the basic grammar the Party's external influence system. At the first meeting of the Central National Security Commission on April 15, Xi introduced the Overall National Security Outlook. He described national security as broader in content, geographic reach, and causal complexity than at any previous point. Political security was the root, economic security the foundation, and military, cultural, and social security supporting guarantees. The framework expressly required coordination between internal and external security, development and security, traditional and nontraditional security, and China's own security and common security. It also placed science and technology and information inside the national security system. This doctrine made it difficult to maintain firm boundaries between domestic regime protection, external affairs, technological development, and the management of foreign information and relationships.

The Central Foreign Affairs Work Conference later that year set the external agenda. Xi called for stronger Party leadership, coordination of domestic and international conditions, more active planning, wider global partnerships, and protection of sovereignty, security, and development interests. The meeting's emphasis on influence, appeal, and the ability to shape international affairs anticipated the later vocabulary of discourse power and external environmental shaping.

Read together, the two meetings established an enduring two-way logic. The outside world was a source of markets, technology, data, expertise, and diplomatic opportunity. It was also a source of ideological pressure, strategic constraint, political organization, and technological dependence. National security could not be achieved solely by hardening China internally. Foreign affairs had to reduce external pressure and cultivate conditions favorable to Party rule and national development.

### 1.3. ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE CHANGES THE CONTEST

Xi initially approached digital power through the politics of information and big data. China's early strategy emphasized data accumulation, network infrastructure, platform control, surveillance, and the ability to draw global information resources toward a Party-controlled domestic system. In 2018, Xi called artificial intelligence a key strategic lever for seizing the initiative in global science and technology competition, but the wider digital architecture still assumed that control over data, infrastructure, and deployment would provide the decisive advantage. My previous work on China's data strategy traced this model: maximize data absorption from abroad, restrict outward flows, integrate companies with national data systems, and use the "new national system" to combine state, military, academic, and commercial resources.

Frontier generative AI disrupted that model. It made gains in algorithms, training methods, chips, compute, energy, models, talent, and deployment mutually dependent. It also demonstrated that breakthroughs could emerge from firms and research networks faster than conventional planning cycles anticipated. The release of ChatGPT sharpened China's awareness of the U.S. lead. DeepSeek's 2025 breakthrough showed Beijing that the gap could narrow, but also exposed the strategic importance of frontier hardware, data-center capacity, energy, open research, and continued access to foreign knowledge. AI did not replace the earlier big data strategy. It forced the Party to reorganize that strategy around a faster and less predictable technological frontier.

Xi had already prepared a mechanism for such a response. The March 2023 Party and state institutional reform created a Central Science and Technology Commission to strengthen the Party Center's "centralized and unified leadership" over science and technology. The commission was assigned responsibility for national innovation strategy, major plans and projects, national laboratories and other strategic scientific forces, and military-civil science and technology integration. Ding Xuexiang, a Politburo Standing Committee member and long-serving Xi aide, emerged as its director. The reform moved the "commanding heights" of technology policy more clearly into the Party system and gave Xi a body capable of coordinating ministries, laboratories, universities, local governments, state firms, private firms, and finance around national missions.

Xi then intervened personally in April 2025, shortly after DeepSeek demonstrated a credible Chinese frontier model. He told the Politburo that China must "seize the decisive opportunity and win the advantage" in AI. He called for breakthroughs in basic theory, methods, and tools; an autonomous and controllable software and hardware system; stronger talent and infrastructure; broad industrial application; and governance capacity. He explicitly invoked the advantages of the "new whole-nation system". Ministries and local governments subsequently translated this guidance into coordinated work on general and industry models, compute, datasets, open-source ecosystems, standards, industrial upgrading, and risk controls. Beijing's AI strategy now joins frontier breakthroughs and diffusion across the economy as mutually reinforcing national tasks.

#### 1.4. CHINA'S TECHNOLOGY, SECURITY, AND INFLUENCE STRATEGIES ARE INTERTWINED

The July 29 and 30, 2022 Central United Front Work Conference updated the united front mission for a period of sharper external competition. Xi's twelve requirements included using united front work as a strategic instrument, solving the problem of people and political force, improving relations with non-Party intellectuals and new social strata, strengthening work among overseas Chinese, and building a Party-wide system of

responsibility. Official accounts tied the work directly to national rejuvenation and to the defense of sovereignty, security, and development interests.

On May 30, 2023, Xi chaired the first meeting of the twentieth Central National Security Commission. He instructed the system to maintain and shape national security, seize the strategic initiative, improve real-time monitoring and early warning, and raise governance capacity for cyber, data, and AI security. The December 27 and 28 Central Foreign Affairs Work Conference then argued that China had gained greater strategic autonomy and initiative and should become more effective at shaping the external environment. It emphasized Party leadership, the transformation of the international system, and the need to support PRC initiatives with broader international alignment.

The technology side accelerated after the arrival of frontier generative AI. In April 2025 Xi told the Politburo that China had to seize the initiative and win advantage in AI, strengthen basic research, master high-end chips and foundational software, build an autonomous and controllable hardware and software system, and use the new whole-nation system to mobilize resources. In January 2026 a Politburo study session on future industries again called for the new whole-nation system, breakthroughs in core technologies, rapid conversion of research into applications, and strategic preparation for emerging industries.

By July 2026 Xi was externalizing the program. At the World Artificial Intelligence Conference he presented Chinese open-source AI, training, cooperation centers, and an international AI organization as public goods for the Global South while criticizing restrictions justified by national security. Domestic mobilization and external coalition-building thus became two sides of the same technology strategy: reduce China's dependence, preserve foreign access where useful, and shape the rules and political alignments surrounding AI.

## **2. HOW THE PARTY'S MULTIPLE INFLUENCE SYSTEMS CONVERGE**

Foreign affairs, united front work, national security, international communication, academic institutions, and science and technology increasingly receive overlapping guidance to safeguard political security, advance national rejuvenation, improve China's position in systemic competition, and shape a more favorable external environment. The 2019 Fourth Plenum's call for "great coordination" in external work, current United Front Work Regulations, Politburo study sessions on national security and international communication, and subsequent technology-security institutions together show how separate systems are being brought into a common strategic framework.

This convergence appears in a shared operational repertoire rather than identical organizational structures. Different institutions repeatedly employ the same basic

methods: research and audience analysis, relationship cultivation, institutional access, elite exchange, narrative formation, technology and knowledge acquisition, mobilization, and feedback. A university program, for example, can simultaneously provide research access to a think tank, contact opportunities to Party diplomats, constituencies of interest to united front officials, and information potentially useful to security organs. The important analytical question is therefore not which single bureaucracy “owns” an activity, but which capabilities are being supplied, by whom, for what strategic purpose, and with what result.

The Fourth Plenum of the Nineteenth Central Committee in October 2019 provides the most direct general statement of external convergence. Its decision called for unified Party leadership over foreign affairs and a system of great coordination in external work. It enumerated the foreign activities of the Party, people's congresses, government, political consultative system, military, localities, and people's organizations.

This helps explain the “fractal” quality of PRC influence activity. Similar missions and techniques can recur across different bureaucratic scales and institutional settings without requiring every actor to share personnel, instructions, or a single command chain. Party-defined strategic direction can be translated separately by diplomatic, intelligence, propaganda, academic, commercial, or united front institutions, producing activities that are organizationally distinct but functionally reinforcing. This is one reason the system can be difficult to recognize using analytical frameworks that assume hard boundaries between propaganda, intelligence, diplomacy, academic exchange, or political mobilization.

**The united front system.** United front work specializes in people and organizations outside the Party's direct structure. Its comparative advantage is the ability to identify representative figures, cultivate durable relationships, build organizations, manage political identity, and mobilize constituencies while preserving the appearance of social or professional autonomy. The 2020 regulations define the United Front Work Department as a coordination, implementation, and inspection organ. Its listed duties include understanding conditions, mastering policy, coordinating relationships, arranging personnel, building consensus, and strengthening unity. Overseas work, overseas Chinese affairs, intellectuals, private business, returnees, universities, and research institutes all fall within its scope.

Cheryl Yu has identified more than 2,000 organizations connected to the united front system in the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, and Germany, including 967 in the United States. The organizations span identity groups, education, business, professions, media, and political or policy work. Yu documents a recurrent process: target identification, contact, visits, support, gradual appearance of Party narratives, and

requests that can escalate with acquiescence. The network's strategic value is not exhausted by the actions already observed. Reach, durability, and convertibility create an option that the Party can activate during a crisis or campaign.

**The International Liaison Department.** The International Department ostensibly conducts party-to-party diplomacy, but its own description shows a broader mission. It calls the Party's external work an important front and an integral component of overall diplomacy. It claims relationships with more than 600 parties and political organizations in more than 160 countries. Its Xi-era operating formula is especially revealing: engage political parties, conduct research, build personal networks, and shape China's image. Through high-level visits, forums, training, and dialogue, it reaches governing and opposition parties, former officials, political foundations, think tanks, businesses, and civil society figures whom formal state diplomacy may not reach as easily.

Party diplomacy can then complement formal diplomacy while retaining a more flexible, less official character. The ILD's Track 1.5 relationship with the Asia Society illustrates this hybrid aspect of its tasking.

**Ministry of State Security and its research institutions.** The Ministry of State Security brings clandestine collection, counterintelligence, political-security analysis, recruitment, cyber capability, and covert influence to the Party-state system. Its comparative advantage is secret access and the ability to convert relationships into tasking, collection, placement, and intervention.

The MSS also has an affiliated research and analysis wing which carries out influence work using scholarly cover. The China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations provides analysis of foreign politics, technology, and strategic competition. Other organizations have also been publicly identified by specialist research as MSS platforms or covers. Alex Joske's work documents how state security officers have used scholars, friendship bodies, and apparently independent institutes to approach foreign elites.

**Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the diplomatic knowledge system.**

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs supplies formal state diplomacy, embassy and consular presence, official negotiation, public diplomacy, media engagement, reporting, and protection of China's overseas interests. Under the Central Foreign Affairs Commission, the ministry operates as an implementing arm of the Party's foreign affairs system.

The ministry's schools and institutes blur the boundary between diplomacy, training, research, and communication. China Foreign Affairs University is the ministry's only directly affiliated university and describes its purpose as training diplomatic and foreign affairs personnel. It also conducts international relations research, hosts foreign speakers

and students, and operates China Foreign Affairs Training Institute under the same institutional roof. These functions make it a personnel pipeline, research venue, and relationship cultivation platform.

The China Institute of International Studies is directly administered by the ministry and produces policy research, dialogue, and public analysis. In 2019 the ministry, with central approval, created the Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy Studies Center through CIIS; the center was publicly inaugurated in July 2020. Its mandate is to coordinate research resources nationwide and conduct theoretical, practical, communicative, policy, and topical research that guides diplomatic practice and supports institutional and capability development.

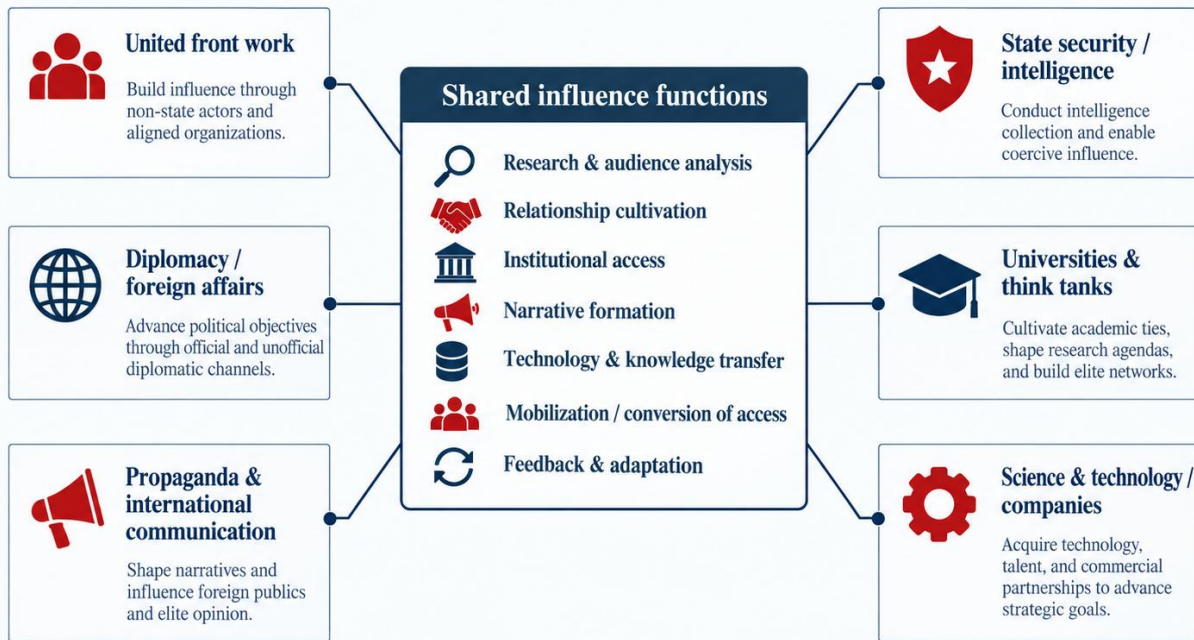
**Universities and think tanks.** Universities and think tanks provide expertise, disciplinary authority, foreign partnerships, students, conferences, publications, technology networks, and credible messengers. The January 2015 policy on new-type think tanks assigned them functions including policy advice, theoretical innovation, guidance of public opinion, social service, and public diplomacy. It directed Party and government research offices, academies, Party schools, universities, military institutions, research institutes, enterprises, and social organizations to form a coordinated system. It also called for international platforms, foreign language capability, information collection, and faster movement of research into policy.

Xi's 2021 international communication instructions increased the external value of this system. A university center can study an audience, advise officials, host a visiting delegation, provide an expert voice, publish a foreign-facing argument, and maintain a technology partnership. These functions can be legitimate scholarship or diplomacy. They become influence concerns when sponsorship, governance, dependence, hidden obligations, participant selection, or intervention compromises independent judgment or converts institutional access into action for a Party-defined purpose.

Recent internal discussion shows that functional convergence may be accelerating. A 2026 article in *United Front Studies* proposed a multi-institutional united front risk system integrating united front, foreign affairs, state security, public security, cyberspace, and ethnic and religious bodies. It described a closed loop of information sharing, integrated assessment, strategic decision, coordinated execution, and evaluation, supported by data platforms and AI. The article is an academic policy recommendation, not proof that such a national system has been formally created. It is still evidence that specialists inside the Party's united front research system regard this degree of functional integration as desirable.

# CCP Systems and Overlapping Influence Functions

Chinese Communist Party Influence Across U.S. Institutions and Political Networks



*Distinct systems, overlapping functions, shared strategic effect.*

## 3. CASE EVIDENCE OF INFLUENCE OPERATIONS TARGETING U.S. CITIZENS AND INSTITUTIONS

The Party's influence system has been built to shape the external conditions of China's security and development. The three cases below ask whether that capacity is visible in the United States.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Corporate influence and espionage are not treated as a separate case study in this testimony. This is not because corporations are peripheral to the Party's external strategy. Chinese intelligence services, technology acquisition programs, commercial partnerships, investment relationships, and state-linked firms demonstrably target U.S. companies or use corporate channels to advance national objectives. Rather, conventional economic espionage, intellectual property theft, and corporate coercion constitute a large and comparatively well-established field with distinct mechanisms, evidentiary standards, and policy tools. The narrower purpose here is to examine a less clearly bounded problem: how access accumulated through the more diffuse network of social relationships, quasi-public institutions, expert networks, and political activity – and how this can be converted into influence over U.S. decision environments.

**AI and data center infrastructure illustrate how influence activity can target both U.S. physical capacity and its political ability to convert that capacity into technological power.** The case evidence reveals a loosely coordinated “high-low” structure rather than a fully integrated campaign. At the national level, PRC university and policy platforms seek access to U.S. debates over AI safety, governance, and cooperation. At the local level, PRC information operations have amplified genuine grievances surrounding data-center costs, while activist networks with institutional links to Neville Roy Singham’s Shanghai-based funding and media ecosystem have supplied organizing capacity in local disputes. The strategic concern is that China-amplified advocacy, political organization, and media can impose pressure on the infrastructure and software that underpin U.S. leadership in artificial intelligence.

**Universities and research institutions constitute the deepest reservoir of pre-positioned influence capacity identified in the testimony.** Research collaborations can facilitate technology and knowledge transfer; exchanges and sponsored travel cultivate durable relationships and curated access; centers and fellowships can affect research agendas, personnel, and institutional legitimacy; and student programs can create networks extending into future government, business, media, and academia. While sustained contact with China or advocacy for engagement does not equate with “capture”, the risk increases when relationships create persistent dependence or gatekeeping power – for example through undisclosed funding, foreign influence over personnel selection, administrative control, suppression of disfavored research, or partnerships that alter institutional decisions. These risks are likely to become more consequential in AI, biotechnology, quantum information, advanced materials, energy, space, and other fields where research, regulation, and national security competition increasingly overlap.

### 3.1. ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND DATA CENTERS

**The target is the conversion of technology into U.S. national power.** Data centers have become politically vulnerable at the moment they have become strategically indispensable. Frontier AI requires chips, electricity, water, land, transmission, cooling, construction capacity, and permission to build. The United States possesses large advantages in capital, cloud infrastructure, advanced models, and private sector innovation. Those resources do not automatically produce national power. They must pass through local zoning, utility regulation, environmental review, public acceptance, and a fragmented political system.

Beijing’s domestic approach is more integrated. Xi has ordered a new whole-of-nation mobilization around AI, while central and local authorities coordinate compute, energy, laboratories, industrial application, models, standards, and talent. PRC policy

simultaneously presents AI governance as a field for international cooperation and argues against technology restrictions imposed in the name of national security. The resulting strategic asymmetry is plain. China seeks to accelerate and coordinate its own buildout while preserving access to foreign knowledge and encouraging rules, narratives, or political choices that may constrain competitors.

This does not mean that every American objection to a data center serves China. The national backlash has strong domestic causes: electricity bills, grid costs, water consumption, noise, diesel generators, secrecy, nondisclosure agreements, weak benefit sharing, tax concessions, land use, and distrust of AI companies. The breadth of the opposition is itself strategically important. It provides a large supply of real grievances that a foreign actor can study, amplify, or enter without having to invent a movement.

**A documented covert attempt.** OpenAI's June 2026 disclosures provide the clearest instance of activation. The company banned a cluster of accounts that likely originated in China and used ChatGPT to generate English and Chinese social-media material criticizing U.S. data centers and AI infrastructure. The operators asked the model to produce comments and images attributing higher electricity prices to AI demand, then distributed the material through accounts posing as Americans. They also developed procedures for creating credible personas, preserving accounts, coordinating cross-account engagement, testing topics and audiences, and evading platform detection. OpenAI assessed that the operators were likely part of a private Chinese technology company conducting public opinion work for provincial government clients.

This episode establishes four points. A China-origin actor selected AI infrastructure as a U.S. political target. It concealed its identity. It used authentic reporting and material grievances rather than fabricating the issue wholesale. It also treated influence as an iterative operational problem involving audience selection, persona maintenance, automation, testing, and adaptation.

The operation's measured effect was negligible. OpenAI found no evidence of meaningful breakout beyond the network's own activity. Subsequent examination of related accounts disclosed by X likewise found that many had no engagement. The case therefore demonstrates attempted activation and a developing method, not successful manipulation of the national debate. Its importance lies in target selection and workflow. Operators tested whether they could convert a local economic grievance into pressure on the physical base of U.S. AI development while appearing to be ordinary Americans.

**Overt analysis and narrative warfare preparation.** The covert attempt sits beside a larger body of overt PRC analysis. During 2026, PRC state media and university-affiliated

specialists increasingly treated American data center opposition as evidence of U.S. political weakness. Their accounts emphasized ratepayer costs, water and energy consumption, land conflicts, job displacement, corporate power, polarized politics, and the difficulty of building national technology policy through local democratic institutions. A September 2026 Global Times article by Fudan University scholar Zhao Minghao called the backlash an American AI-era “Luddite movement” and described left- and right-wing participation, public opposition, and resulting stalled projects.

Such writing serves several audiences. It reassures PRC readers that the U.S. model has internal constraints. It supplies policy specialists with a map of American arguments and decision points. It also develops language that can travel into international debates about environmental justice, monopoly power, democratic accountability, militarization, and AI safety. The convergence is significant because overt analysis identifies the same grievance structure that the covert operation tried to exploit.

Fudan’s institutional activity shows how that analysis can be translated into global governance. Its Center for Global AI Innovative Governance was launched at the 2025 World Artificial Intelligence Conference with national and Shanghai support. Fudan forums and research products connect AI to infrastructure, energy, environmental costs, technological autonomy, Global South representation, and international rulemaking. In July 2026, Fudan’s China Institute convened a symposium on an AI and environment white paper prepared with Russian and Indian partners and presented through United Nations-related channels. The paper followed the AI life cycle from critical minerals and chips to compute centers, electricity, water, and waste. This policy work gives a Party-led university the institutional means to define the categories through which foreign publics understand U.S. AI.

**Establishing a high-level governance and safety channel.** Tsinghua University and the Beijing Institute for AI Safety and Governance occupy a more direct high-level policy channel. Tsinghua describes its Institute for AI International Governance as providing intellectual support for China’s participation in global AI governance. Its leading figures, including Xue Lan, move between China’s national AI governance bodies and international academic and policy forums. Zeng Yi of the Beijing institute has similarly held roles in China’s expert governance system and international AI safety networks.

In 2026, Xue and Zeng appeared with Senator Bernie Sanders at a Capitol Hill discussion centered on existential risk, AI red lines, international cooperation, and the danger of an unconstrained U.S.-China race. Tsinghua’s used the event to present China’s approach as a superior system joining government and industry. The event followed Sanders and Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez’s proposal for a federal moratorium on new or

expanded AI data centers until Congress enacted a much wider regime covering safety, employment, civil rights, environmental effects, and distribution.

**A radicalized intermediary layer.** A separate network translates related themes into movement language. Neville Roy Singham has funded nonprofit, media, and activist organizations whose content frequently aligns with Beijing's positions. His Shanghai-based business and communications network is linked by personnel, co-location, and underlying Party ties to PRC external-communication institutions. Singham-owned StarStream and its affiliated entity Maku Cultural Communication are connected via partnerships and personnel with East China Normal University's Global South international communication work and the Tricontinental Institute for Social Research. Chinese-language records indicate Party organizational activity inside StarStream and an operating environment receptive to Party priorities.

This layer reaches different audiences from Tsinghua or Fudan. Its characteristic language concerns anti-imperialism, the Global South, corporate extraction, environmental harm, militarization, inequality, and U.S. hegemony. Organizations within the broader Singham-funded ecosystem include The People's Forum, BreakThrough News, Tricontinental, and entities associated with CODEPINK and the ANSWER Coalition. Personnel from several of these organizations also occupy roles in the Party for Socialism and Liberation (PSL).

The Bitcoin Policy Institute has documented PSL participation in 21 data-center campaigns across 14 states. The evidence is strongest in Prince George's County, Maryland, where PSL trained residents, canvassed, produced widely circulated videos, helped gather petition signatures, and organized meetings and rallies before a permitting pause and two-year moratorium. In Charlotte, PSL conducted door-to-door and petition activity, worked with local organizations, and helped mobilize attendance before the city council adopted a temporary moratorium. In several other states, PSL appeared as a supporter or coalition participant.

### 3.2. POLITICAL POLARIZATION

The Party has long studied the political weaknesses of foreign societies. Xi's external work and national security directives have made that work more useful by connecting research, communication, intelligence, technology, and relationship cultivation to common strategic missions. The emerging change is the potential compression of the cycle between observation and intervention. Data collection and AI can help an actor identify a division, map influential people, generate tailored language, deploy it through authentic-seeming accounts or intermediaries, measure response, and revise the approach.

**Fudan University institutionalizes the measurement of U.S. political division.** Fudan University's Center for American Studies provides a concrete example of organized diagnostic capacity. In May 2026 the center released a suite of "American Studies Indices", including the United States Political Polarization Index, an economic risk index, and an innovation index. The polarization index evaluates the period from the Clinton through Biden administrations and measures two institutional dimensions: conflict between the executive and Congress, and divergence between the federal government and the states.

The index is an openly published analytical product. Its significance appears when placed beside Fudan's wider role. The university combines American studies, international strategy, global communication, AI governance, and policy access. Its scholars analyze affective polarization, populist anger, distrust of institutions, technology nationalism, federal-state conflict, and the U.S. government's dependence on private technology companies. Those are also the variables that determine whether a national technology strategy can survive elections, litigation, local opposition, and partisan turnover.

This produces a more useful intelligence picture than a simple left-right map. It identifies where authority is fragmented, which institutions can block one another, which grievances cross party lines, and which actors can convert a technical question into a conflict over identity or legitimacy. The predictive implication is that future intervention will often target jurisdictional fissures rather than national opinion as a whole.

**GoLaxy links profiling to scalable persuasion.** Documents examined by Vanderbilt University researchers provide a more operational example. Their August 2025 announcement described the online leak of nearly 400 pages of internal documents concerning GoLaxy, a PRC company with Chinese Academy of Sciences ties. The researchers reported apparent deployments of AI-driven propaganda in Hong Kong and Taiwan and the construction of data profiles on thousands of American political figures, including congressional leaders. They described a system capable of generating communications tailored to individuals at scale.

**Selective amplification instrumentalizes preexisting debates.** The "Tech and Tariffs" social media account cluster disclosed by OpenAI was used to amplify and shape an existing debate using similar methods. It criticized U.S. tariffs as instruments of technological domination, instructed its accounts to omit Xi Jinping, and concentrated attention on President Trump. The goal was to enter an U.S. argument while suppressing attention on China's role in the trade dispute.

This approach is politically flexible. One audience can be told that corporations are destroying the environment. Another can be told that elites are raising family utility bills. A

third can be told that national security officials are provoking a dangerous technology race. The messages need not be ideologically consistent. They need only intensify a division that raises the cost of a policy Beijing opposes

### 3.3. UNIVERSITY RESEARCH AND STUDENT CULTIVATION

**Research security is still a critical part of the problem.** Jeffrey Stoff's 2025 Senate testimony provides the strongest baseline for the research security problem. He argued that the United States has focused too narrowly on espionage and prosecutable theft even though China's technology acquisition system often works through legal or lightly regulated research. His review identified 9,398 articles published from 2019 through January 2025 that joined U.S.-based coauthors with a selected set of PLA, military, nuclear-weapons, and defense-industrial institutions. Stoff also described talent programs, undisclosed contracts, patent diversion, co-opted hiring, grant-review manipulation, "serve in place" arrangements, and networks that can redirect federally funded research toward Chinese objectives.

The U.S. government has begun to respond. The FY 2025 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) restricted Department of War fundamental research funding for institutions that maintain specified collaborations with listed Chinese entities. In August 2026, the Pentagon ordered 30 universities, reportedly including Harvard, MIT, and Johns Hopkins, to audit partnerships with mostly Chinese foreign institutions and terminate arrangements judged problematic or risk funding consequences.

#### **The broader influence asset is embedding Party-steered exchange in U.S. institutions.**

Universities allocate authority over people, money, knowledge, and reputation. Leaders approve partnerships and gifts. Faculty select students and collaborators. Centers choose speakers, fellows, research questions, and language. Prestigious affiliations confer legitimacy on foreign counterparts. Students become future officials, journalists, executives, scholars, and donors. A relationship that affects any of these functions can acquire political value even when no classified information changes hands.

The common precursor is cultivation. Trips, conferences, fellowships, joint programs, interviews, and private dialogues create familiarity and reciprocity. They allow Chinese hosts to select whom foreign participants meet, which sites they see, what information they receive, and which relationships continue after the visit. The resulting account may be sincere and factually informed. It is still produced inside a curated access environment.

This mechanism can be seen operating policy and social science. CUSEF has sponsored travel, dialogue, research, journalism, and student programming through U.S. universities and think tanks. Its founder, Tung Chee-hwa, served as a vice chairman of the Chinese

People's Political Consultative Conference. CUSEF has registered activity through U.S. firms under the Foreign Agents Registration Act while cultivating relationships with officials, former officials, journalists, scholars, and students. Cheryl Yu describes these “people-to-people” programs as structurally one-way: the Party-state can organize and select foreign access while maintaining tight restrictions on reciprocal foreign political activity inside China.

Recent activity shows that the channel remains active. CUSEF organized a January 2026 student trip that included a meeting with Lu Kang of the CCP International Department. Chinese university and think-tank platforms have continued to host American delegations spanning research institutions, philanthropic organizations, and policy centers. The Carter Center delegation to Tsinghua discussed AI and other strategic issues with a group drawn from several important U.S. institutions. Fudan's American Studies Center received a Carter Center delegation in September 2026.

**Student cultivation and the formation of a cross-generational “engagement” constituency.** Student programs deserve separate treatment because their effects are delayed. A short trip rarely changes a participant's politics by itself. Its value lies in selection, identity formation, and continued opportunity. Programs identify ambitious students before their professional views harden, give them high-level access, connect them to peers and mentors, and provide a credential that can lead to later fellowships, travel, employment, or public commentary.

CUSEF-supported programs with Georgetown, the University of Montana, and other institutions illustrate this investment. The public-facing language emphasizes mutual understanding and the danger of losing a generation of bilateral knowledge. Those are legitimate aims. The influence question is whether students also receive a systematically curated account of China, whether sponsor and host relationships are transparent, and whether alumni become recruiters or gatekeepers for later cohorts.

**Research and exchange are reinforcing dimensions of influence.** Research access and political influence should not be treated as separate domains. A joint project creates interpersonal trust, travel, data access, hiring pathways, and institutional commitments. A conference can identify recruits. A talent contract can redirect work and still leave the researcher in place at a U.S. laboratory. A university partnership can generate both technical output and public claims about the indispensability of cooperation. An exchange program can produce a future policymaker who already possesses relationships with PRC hosts.

The broader influence system, in other words, has a political consequence: the same relationships can create a constituency inside U.S. institutions that resists scrutiny, treats continued access as a professional necessity, and speaks with more domestic credibility than a Party-state official could.

The inverse risk also requires attention. Overbroad accusations can drive away Chinese and Chinese American researchers, damage open science, and deprive the United States of talent. Nationality is a poor risk variable. The proper unit is the relationship: institutional affiliation, sponsor, contract, disclosure, access, research field, decision-making authority, and evidence of tasking or pressure.

#### 4. OUTLOOK AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The cases highlight Beijing's methods for accumulating and converting influence capacity in open institutions.

**First, Beijing studies the point at which a U.S. resource can be prevented from becoming political, economic, or military power.** In AI, that point may be a local permit, a grid connection, or a governance rule. In politics, it may be a jurisdictional conflict or an audience whose distrust can be intensified. In universities, it may be the professor, center, conference, or exchange program that controls access to knowledge and future elites.

**Second, the most useful foreign actor often appears to be independent.** A U.S. scholar, activist, former official, or student does not need to support the CCP. The actor needs only to possess credibility, access, or organizing capacity and to favor a decision useful to Beijing on a particular issue.

**Third, influence is cumulative and convertible.** A trip can become a relationship. A relationship can become privileged information or a platform. A research partnership can become dependence. An index can become a targeting model. A local grievance can become a national narrative. A dormant account network can be redirected when a strategic issue rises.

**Finally, the evidence points toward faster adaptation.** AI lowers the cost of language production, profiling, testing, and account management. Chinese policy institutions have already built the research and external networks needed to identify opportunities. The likely future pattern is not a constant barrage of pro-China propaganda. It is repeated entry into American disputes at the moment they become relevant to Beijing's technology, security, and competitive position.

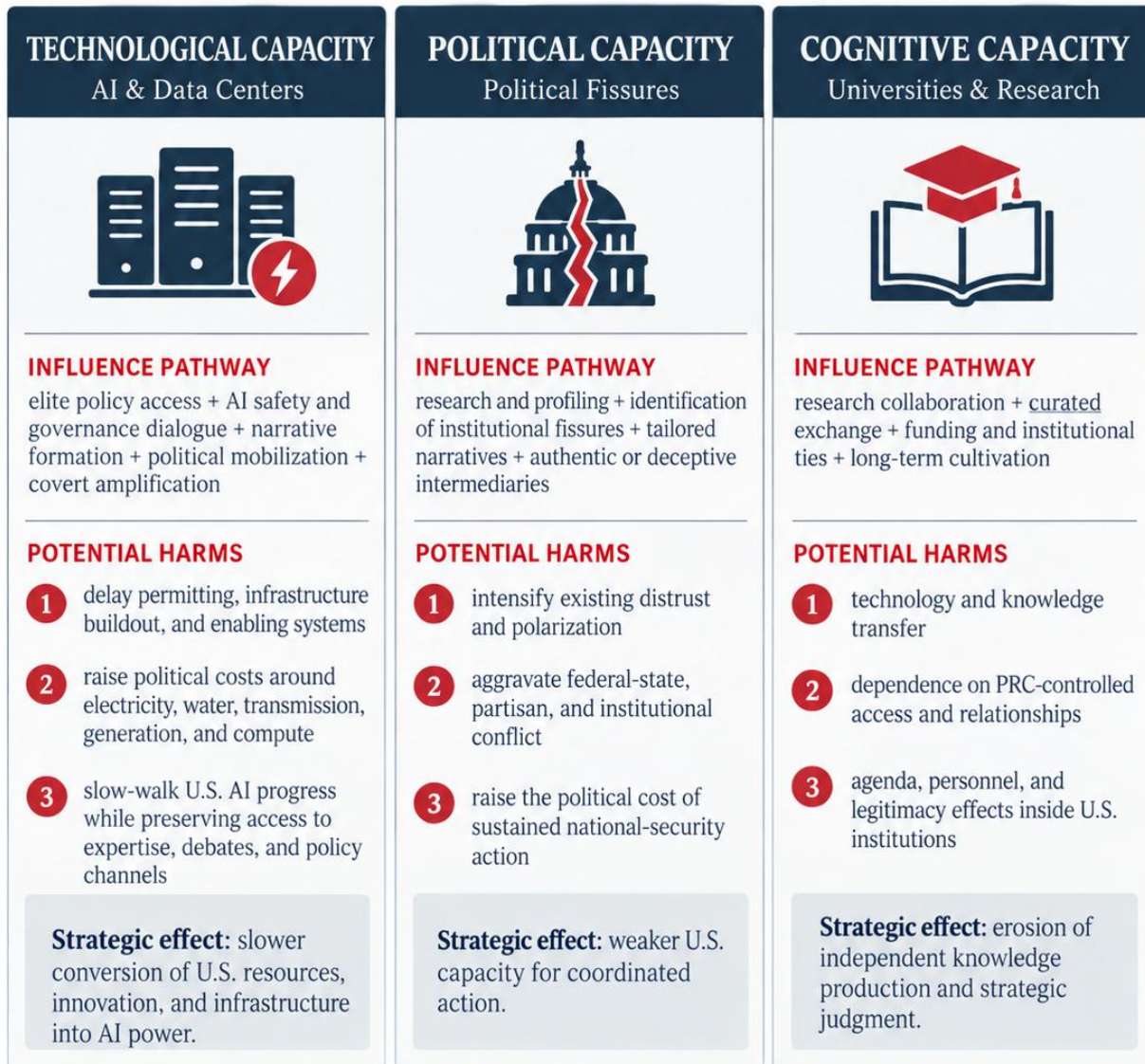
**Congress should move beyond transparency toward institutional resilience and reducing Party-exploited cognitive leverage.** Greater visibility into foreign sponsorship,

intermediaries, research relationships, technology transfer, and institutional dependencies remains necessary, but transparency alone will not address the deeper asymmetry in U.S.-China engagement. Beijing can create a simulacrum of reciprocity through carefully managed student and professional exchanges, investor and expert delegations, conferences, and research access – all while sharply constraining comparable foreign access to China’s own political system. The resulting risk is not simply undisclosed influence, but long-term dependence on PRC-controlled interpretive frameworks, access, and relationships. Congress should therefore pair stronger enforcement and modernization of existing tools such as FARA, CFIUS, research security authorities, and counterintelligence capabilities with renewed investment in independent U.S. national security institutions capable of developing deep China expertise. This should include sustained support for language training, area studies, technical expertise, fellowships, and analytic programs that prepare future officials, researchers, and private sector leaders to assess China through the lens of U.S. national security interests rather than through lenses provided by Beijing.

# Three Pathways from Influence to Strategic Harm

Chinese Communist Party Influence Across U.S. Institutions and Political Networks

*Distinct pathways, different targets, shared strategic effect.*



## COMMON STRATEGIC EFFECT

Reduce the ability of the United States to convert physical resources, political cohesion, and knowledge into national power.