

## Testimony before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Oversight

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### ***Overview***

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) seeks to bring about what it calls the “Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation” (中华民族伟大复兴)—also referred to as “national rejuvenation”—and to remake the international system in its favor as a “Community of Common Destiny for Humanity” (人类命运共同体). These two ideas broadly represent the party’s program. Staying in power is prerequisite to being able to execute that program, but, as long as we mistakenly emphasize the staying in power as the CCP’s foremost priority day to day, we will underestimate the party’s determination to achieve national rejuvenation domestically and create the Community of Common Destiny internationally.

- National rejuvenation, in broad strokes, can be described as comprehensive modernity, unification of China (including economically, culturally, and socially), and becoming the world’s leader in comprehensive national power sufficient to reshape the international system.
- The Community of Common Destiny is intended to be a new model of international relations in which the international order is reshaped to overcome the resistance that the People’s Republic of China (PRC) finds to its rise. It also can most simply be described as recreating the CCP’s domestic arrangement of the party’s domination and control on the international stage.

To achieve these goals, Beijing harnesses all the tools of statecraft in a competitive endeavor—what we used to call political warfare. A key component of the CCP’s toolkit is united front work, which is a way of conducting policy, a theory of politics, and the policy bureaucracy to monitor, influence, and mobilize individuals outside the Party for its purposes. As Xi Jinping noted in 2021 and was summarized in official press, “the united front is an important magic weapon for the Party to overcome the enemy and govern the country, as well as to unite all Chinese people at home and abroad to achieve the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, and must be persistently upheld over the long term.”

Since Mao Zedong, the CCP leadership has repeatedly emphasized these objectives and the role of united front work (and the policy system) to achieve those objectives. Although it is tempting to dismiss the Maoist origin of these tools and pretend the CCP operates in a fundamentally different way than before, Xi’s priorities and actions suggest that he believes traditional CCP approaches are necessary and relevant for contemporary policy issues. Mao had identified armed struggle, united

front work, and party building (improving the quality of the Party) as the CCP's "three magic weapons" for winning the Chinese Revolution. Xi's policy priorities after becoming the CCP general secretary in 2012 included a reform of the People's Liberation Army, an anti-corruption campaign to strengthen the CCP, and a reorganization of the united front work policy system. When Xi delivered a speech on the Party's centenary, he focused his remarks on the same three areas. Below is a sampling of quotes that reflect the commitment of the CCP leadership to these goals and to using united front work to achieve them. These quotes also demonstrate the Party's targeting of overseas Chinese—many of whom are not PRC citizens—for leverage in achieving national rejuvenation.

- "The rejuvenation of China and the creation of a happy life for over a billion Chinese people is a grand initiative and this must rely on the unity, cooperation, and joint efforts of the entire Chinese nation. As long as there is agreement on the major goals of loving the motherland and rejuvenating China, it does not matter which party or group one belongs to, which ethnicity one is from, what beliefs one holds, or where one lives; all Chinese should join hands to complete the great historic mission of national rejuvenation." — Jiang Zemin (2001)
- "In the journey toward the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, we must vigorously promote the spirit of patriotism, consolidate and strengthen the grand unity of people of all ethnic groups across the nation, consolidate and strengthen the grand unity of Chinese at home and abroad, consolidate and expand the broadest patriotic united front, promote harmony in party relations, ethnic relations, religious relations, class relations, and relations between compatriots at home and abroad, and broadly gather all the wisdom and strength of the Chinese nation. We must unite all the forces that can be united, with one heart and one mind, to strive for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation." — Hu Jintao (2011)
- "The basic tasks of the patriotic united front in the new era are: to insist on being guided by the thought of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era, to insist on the leadership of the CCP, to insist on the road of socialism with Chinese characteristics, to hold high the great banners of patriotism and socialism, to insist on the unity of consistency and diversity, to insist on focusing on the center and serving the overall situation, to insist on keeping abreast of the times, to keep up with the correctness of the situation, to strengthen ideological and political leadership, to play the political role of uniting people's hearts and minds, and to promote party relations. We will strengthen ideological and political leadership, play the political role of rallying people's hearts and gathering strength, promote harmony in political party relations, ethnic relations, religious relations, class relations and relations between compatriots at home and abroad, and promote the unity and struggle of Chinese sons and daughters at home and abroad, so as to build a modern socialist power in an all-round way and realize the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation." — Xi Jinping (2021)

- “The main tasks of overseas united front work are: to strengthen ideological and political leadership, enhance the love of overseas Chinese and overseas students for the motherland and their understanding of and identification with the CCP and socialism with Chinese characteristics; to pass on and carry forward the excellent Chinese culture, and promote cultural exchanges between China and foreign countries; to encourage overseas Chinese to participate in China's reform and opening up and socialist modernization, and to be integrated into the cause of national rejuvenation; to curb separatist forces such as "Taiwan independence" and safeguard the core interests of the country; to play the role of a bridge and link in promoting friendship between China and foreign countries, and to create a good international environment. It also encourages overseas Chinese to participate in China's reform and opening up and socialist modernization, and to integrate into the national rejuvenation; it curbs the separatist forces such as "Taiwan independence" and safeguards the core interests of the country; and it plays the role of a bridge to promote friendship between China and foreign countries and creates a good international environment.” — Article 37, *CCP Central Committee issues Regulations on the Work of the Unified Front of the Communist Party of China* (Updated 2021)
- “The main tasks of the work of overseas Chinese affairs are: focusing on the theme of concentrating and uniting efforts to share the Chinese dream, strengthening the work of representatives of overseas Chinese, returned overseas Chinese, and relatives of overseas Chinese who remain at home, rallying the hearts of overseas Chinese, gathering the wisdom of overseas Chinese, bringing into play the power of overseas Chinese, safeguarding the interests of overseas Chinese and serving overseas Chinese; coordinating the work of overseas Chinese affairs and overseas Chinese affairs at home and abroad, striving to cultivate resources for overseas Chinese affairs and guiding the overseas Chinese, returned overseas Chinese and relatives of overseas Chinese to devote themselves to modernizing and constructing the motherland, safeguarding and promoting the reunification of China, realizing the greatness of the Chinese nation, to promote friendship, cooperation and exchanges between the Chinese people and the people of the world, and to promote the building of a community of human destiny.” — Article 38, *CCP Central Committee issues Regulations on the Work of the Unified Front of the Communist Party of China* (Updated 2021)

### ***The Harm Caused***

The harm caused by Beijing’s political influence and united front operations takes several forms, even if we accept many of these activities as being legitimate actions of a foreign state inside the United States or other countries. However, as an American, I am most disturbed by the instances in which our government has tolerated CCP and PRC officials carrying out forced repatriations, inciting violence, and other criminal actions against Americans. To the extent that the victims of these CCP actions are predominantly ethnically Chinese, I am frustrated by the tolerance of not

extending the full protection of the law to some citizens of our country. Here are some additional problems with this set of CCP activities:

1. Western Politicians Become Symbols for the Chinese Communist Party's Rule: By using party-controlled community organizations for their outreach to ethnically-Chinese constituents, Western politicians become propaganda fodder for the Chinese Communist Party. Politically-aware Chinese in the People's Republic of China (and sometimes abroad) can recognize these groups for what they are: pawns of the party. The reason for the publicity surrounding these meetings and fundraisers is to broadcast back into China the message that Western politicians care about liberalism at home, but not for Chinese people, and that they stand on the side of the party. They reinforce the image of the party's strength.

Vaclav Havel captured this dynamic in his essay *The Power of the Powerless* by describing a greengrocer placing a slogan of regime loyalty in his shop window. He does not believe in the regime or its ideology, but he does so to make his life a little bit easier. Nor do people necessarily notice or read the slogan, because similar slogans can be "found in other shop windows, on lampposts, bulletin boards, in apartment windows, and on buildings." The presence of these slogans becomes part of the "panorama of everyday life." This panorama "reminds people where they are living and what is expected of them. It tells them what everyone else is doing, and indicates to them what they must do as well, if they don't want to be excluded, to fall into isolation, alienate themselves from society, break the rules of the game, and risk the loss of their peace and tranquility and security." By participating even inadvertently in united front-sponsored events, U.S. politicians and their foreign counterparts help the Chinese Communist Party build Havel's "panorama of everyday life" for the Chinese people and their own ethnic Chinese citizens.

2. The Chinese Communist Party Mediates Between Chinese Citizens and Their Elected Representatives: The network of united front "community organizations" creates a fake civil society. The community which is supposedly represented is supplanted by the Chinese Communist Party, unless politicians reach directly to membership or deal with uncompromised organizations. The party's interests become the constituency interests that are presented to officials.
3. The Marketplace for Ideas is Distorted: Having a pluralistic, democratic society means engaging with differences of opinion. There is a natural ebb and flow. As noted above, the defining feature of the party's united front operations is the effort to control platforms rather than just the narrative. As platforms are compromised, the voices and messages they carry change. They may not specifically represent the Chinese Communist Party, but they will avoid criticisms or subjects that are intrinsically damaging to the party's image, standing, and legitimacy.

4. The Party Suppresses Discussion of China's Future: The CCP's control inside the PRC means that any version of China's future without the party must be discussed and decided beyond the PRC's borders. The extent to which the party monopolizes the social space of Chinese people — especially those who would like to return to their home country—is the extent to which the party can preempt the transmission of liberal political values into China and discussion of China without reference to the party.
5. Undermining the Integrity of Policymaking: At its worst, the party's political influence and united front operations distort policymaking and the process of gathering information to feed into the policy process. The primary targets of united front work are socially influential individuals, such as politicians, prominent businesspeople, intellectuals, and sometimes even celebrities.

There is some reason to suspect that the united front system plays a role in feeding foreign intelligence services information. In conversations with former U.S. intelligence officials and serving foreign ones, they described questionable sources over the years whose information seemed to good to be true. The sourcing for their political reporting appeared sufficiently plausible and good to encourage officers to avoid placing too much scrutiny on the policy implications of the reporting or how it seemed to slant the party's politics and positions.

6. Facilitating Intelligence Operations and Technology Transfer: The united front network of organizations and relationships in overseas Chinese communities has been used to facilitate the theft and transfer of technology from U.S. companies and research institutions. For example, as Alex Joske of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute explained at recent conferences in Canberra and Melbourne last month, Tesla's problem with Chinese theft of its intellectual property was entirely predictable. Those involved were nested within and had even established UFWD-linked organizations related to talent recruitment and technology transfer. Current and former intelligence officials inside and outside the United States believe the Chinese intelligence services make use of the spotting and assessing opportunities created by united front system-sponsored visits to China for education, culture, and business.

### *Guiding Ideas for the U.S. Response*

In previous testimony before the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence in May 2019, I outlined seven ways to think about responding to the CCP's political warfare and united front work. Those principles were transparency; conversation and debate; protecting space for critical discussion of China, the PRC, and the CCP; consequences create risk; protecting civil liberties as much as national security; and maintaining the integrity of rules and processes. The CCP may believe that it can exploit the openness of democratic society; however, the Party fails to appreciate how operating

in an open society allows that society to identify and respond from both government and civil society.

To these general ways of thinking about the U.S. response, I would add three additional considerations:

1. Always start with the CCP: Without an appropriate judicial process, it is difficult, if not impossible, to adequately judge those with CCP-related entanglements. Having a conflict of interest or a point of personal vulnerability does not mean a person is guilty of collaboration or has necessarily been coerced. The one thing that can be assessed clearly is the CCP's ambitions, intent, and capabilities. The Party views united front as a tool of political struggle, and therefore these organizations cannot be considered appropriate partners for those seeking to engage the Chinese people. They serve as a barrier to genuine engagement.
2. Running faster will only work with the appropriate countermeasures: Many would like to believe that if the United States just "puts its own house in order" or "takes care of itself" then the consequences of these activities will be minimal. However, this is like pretending that a runner who spends more time training, eating well, working on their form, and building their muscle strength and endurance will win against a competitor who will break his/her knee. Security is not a sufficient condition, but it is absolutely necessary to ensure that a United States ready for this rivalry can actually compete.
3. Rules may be country-agnostic, but enforcement requires choices about focus and expertise: In a common law society, it makes sense on principle to have laws and regulations that are not directed at any given country. However, the scale and delicacy of the CCP's efforts require expertise to sort through and where to focus government efforts. The most aggressive U.S. adversaries in information and political warfare all have distinct features that must be accounted for in the U.S. effort to counter them. Investigation and enforcement—whether through civil society's self-regulation or the U.S. Government's counterintelligence and law enforcement—are not interchangeable. Therefore, it is also advisable not to have blanket laws and regulations that would treat Canadian and Mexican organizations the same way as the CCP's organizations.
4. Recognize that universal values must be protected: Some continue to argue that the United States and other democracies need to find an accommodation with CCP values in international institutions and civil society exchanges. It is worth remembering that the PRC is a party to the UN Charter that embodies some liberal values, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights describes universal values—not American, Western, or democratic values. Beijing had a choice to accept or not, and the Party should be held to the standards to which it acceded. Accepting compromise on these values often leads to the corruption of democratically biased institutions away from their intended purpose.

## ***Recommendations***

For nearly fifty years, Americans have lamented the state of China expertise and literacy among U.S. Government officials and senior political leadership. Whether such complaints were warranted continues to be debated. However, it is clear that with only a few hundred students studying the PRC today, the United States does not have an adequate pipeline of talent to support all of the China-related needs across the country, inside and outside government. Investments in expertise and open source collection are necessary supplements to transparency measures that force openness when dealing with the CCP. Below are a selection of recommendations that address some of these issues, some of which are repeated from my previous testimony to Congress:

- 1. Revise the Foreign Agent Registration Act (FARA) to include more robust reporting requirements, more robust penalties for non-compliance, and a publicly-accessible database of FARA registrants updated frequently.**

Others have more fully outlined the fixes that need to be made related to the Foreign Agent Registration Act, but I would like to emphasize a few points. First, the reporting requirements for describing the activities are quite minimal. Companies and individuals that wish to be safe provide more; however, that is not the general rule. Expanding the reporting requirements to include more substance and specificity about the messages delivered or services provided would make the reporting mechanism more transparent. Separately, additional reporting could be made a part of Congressional ethics standards. Second, non-compliance with FARA seems to have few if any consequences. The current approach to enforcement is largely about voluntarily self-policing. Third, the United States should revise its approach to presenting FARA data, modeling its public-facing database on the Australian Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme (FITTS). The FITTS database is updated on a regular, rolling basis rather than the quarterly approach to FARA. The database and accompanying documentation is comparatively clear and accessible.

- 2. Create a new open source information and intelligence organization to leverage publicly and commercially available information more effectively and enable more public conversation.**

The nature of the PRC and CCP systems require the sprawling and overlapping central, provincial, and local structures to communicate many objectives and guidance out in the open. This includes the united front system and sometimes broader parts of the national security apparatus. Open source research has been the foundation for much of the global conversation about how to respond to the CCP's political interference. Yet, the myriad books, articles, and pieces of investigative journalism that have been published are essentially the products of loosely coordinated researchers acting alone or in small groups. Although

the value of an open source agency would go well beyond countering CCP united front operations, such an organization would provide a steady capability within the U.S. Government functioning on a day-to-day basis rather than project-by-project as often is the case with contracted open source work. As the Special Competitive Studies Project (SCSP) recommended in 2022, the lack of an open source agency is a critical organizational shortfall in the IC that needs to be remedied in part because of the need to bridge the Intelligence Community, the rest of the U.S. Government, and outside partners in business, academia, and civil society.

**3. Invest in expertise building inside and outside the U.S. Government with special attention paid to developing and funding educational programs to support mid-career expertise building and language skill maintenance.**

Existing programs focus almost exclusively on undergraduate and graduate students, most often at the beginning of their careers. Creating space and time for experienced professionals to brush up on language skills or pursue useful personal projects would help ensure continued learning. Government employees have some access to similar programs, but there needs to be greater recognition of the value of education and being away from the desk. Private sector employees need new programs and sources of support to be able to take the time to study and return to work.

U.S. access to the PRC also is becoming more constrained for both the public and private sectors as Xi Jinping has tightened security measures and as the U.S.-PRC relationship has become more fraught. Fewer Americans are studying China and Chinese language—the latter of which began declining in 2016. In the 116th Congress, none of the various U.S.-PRC competition bills included investments in developing expertise and language skills. This stands in stark contrast to the early Cold War, when the White House and Congress realized the need to invest in expertise. The National Defense Education Act of 1958 created substantial investments in area studies, particularly related to the Soviet Union, and the United States continued such programs through Title VI of the Higher Education Act.

**4. Use Congressional oversight to press the executive branch for transparency about actions taken against the PRC and the CCP, especially where the actions are administrative and do not automatically require publicity or Congressional reporting.**

American opinions about the appropriate China policy are shifting, but much of the publicly discussion remains caught in limbo between the old policy paradigm of engagement and the uncertainty of today's more explicit rivalry. More needs to be done to ensure that U.S. Government actions are understood on their own terms rather than through Beijing's manipulations and misrepresentations.



The growing transparency in terms of Department of Justice indictments of PRC personnel engaging in transnational repression or computer network exploitation are good examples of how this can be done. Indictments demonstrate what the U.S. Government is willing to prove in an open court and provide a measure of certainty for journalists, researchers, and others in civil society to understand what is taking place. Visa denials on the other hand are not publicly disclosed and leave the inviting institutions in the dark about why such a visa was denied. Putting a few simple criteria out in public for visa denials and alerting inviting institutions which criteria were triggered would be a useful positive step for handling visa issues going forward. Without such information, many otherwise knowledgeable and thoughtful people about China assume the worst about the administration's intentions and actions.