

# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

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March 13, 2024

The Honorable Amanda Bennett  
Chief Executive Officer  
U.S. Agency on Global Media

Dear Ms. Bennett:

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP or the Party) has made a concerted effort to infiltrate and control media coverage and mass communications beyond the People's Republic of China's (PRC) borders, including in the United States.<sup>1</sup> The CCP has manipulated discourse and media through "narrative dominance," coercively controlling the global dialogue around China and the CCP.<sup>2</sup> As the sole Congressionally-funded news agency, the U.S. Agency on Global Media (USAGM or the Agency), and its various entities including Voice of America (VOA) and Radio Free Asia (RFA) have important responsibilities in countering the CCP's destructive narrative and to advance the Agency's mission to disseminate news and information "in support of freedom and democracy."<sup>3</sup>

As part of a broader investigation into the work federal agencies are doing to protect Americans from CCP "political warfare," the Committee is investigating what USAGM is doing to safeguard Americans from the pervasive threats these many forms of warfare pose against Americans and their communities.

### Broader Committee Investigation

The Committee is conducting oversight of the federal government's work to protect the American people from CCP political warfare<sup>4</sup> and nefarious influence operations. For decades,

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<sup>1</sup> Alliance for Securing Democracy, *Friends and Enemies: A Framework for Understanding Chinese Political Interference in Democratic Countries*, at 7, 9 (Apr. 2020).

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* at 7.

<sup>3</sup> See U.S. Agc'y on Glob. Media, *Mission*, <https://www.usagm.gov/who-we-are/mission/> (last accessed Feb. 5, 2024).

<sup>4</sup> Political warfare "seeks to influence emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and behavior of foreign governments, organizations, groups, and individuals in a manner favorable to one's own political-military objectives." Mark Stokes, Project 2049, *The People's Liberation Army General Political Department: Political Warfare with Chinese Characteristics* (Oct. 14, 2013).

the CCP has sought to infiltrate and influence every aspect of American society.<sup>5</sup> The CCP's goal is plain: defeat the "main enemy," which counterintelligence officials have identified as America.<sup>6</sup> The fronts are multiple; according to the CCP itself: "[t]he battlefield will be everywhere."<sup>7</sup> And the tools are myriad, with the "united front"<sup>8</sup> leading as one of the PRC's<sup>9</sup> "magic weapons,"<sup>10</sup> as described by General Secretary Xi Jinping,<sup>11</sup> to advance the Party's aim of global domination.<sup>12</sup> United front work (UFW), which may be executed by the United Front Work Department (UFW) or elsewhere in the Party, is a "unique blend of engagement, influence activities, and intelligence operations" that the CCP uses to "influence other countries' policy toward the PRC and to gain access to advanced foreign technology."<sup>13</sup> UFW "generally involves covert activity and is a form of interference that aids the CCP's rise."<sup>14</sup> United front "networks" are used "to carry out relationship-focused influence campaigns through a multitude of proxies."<sup>15</sup>

Despite years of false promises to the West, the CCP openly seeks to achieve its destructive ambition. In 1999, two People's Liberation Army Air Force colonels authored *Unrestricted Warfare*, which has been described as a strategic military vision for the PRC to defeat America through political warfare.<sup>16</sup> Retired Brig. Gen. Robert Spalding, who has served in senior positions in strategy and diplomacy with the U.S. Departments of Defense and State for

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<sup>5</sup> See generally Constantine C. Menges, *China The Gathering Threat* (2005); Report of the Select Committee on U.S. National Security and Military/Commercial Concerns With The People's Republic of China ("Cox Report") (Jan. 3, 1999); Robert Spalding, *War Without Rules* (2022); Col. Grant Newsham, *When China Attacks: A Warning to America* (2023); Kerry K. Gershaneck, *Political Warfare: Strategies for Combating China's Plan to "Win without Fighting"* (2020); see also Larry Diamond and Orville Schell, *China's Influence & America's Interests: Promoting Constructive Vigilance*, Hoover Institution (2019).

<sup>6</sup> Menges, *supra* note 5; Gershaneck, *supra* note 5 ("The PRC is engaged in war against the United States. It is not mere competition or malign influence, but war by PRC definition."); Newsham, *supra* note 5 at 60 (The CCP "seeks global domination" and "will fight its main enemy, the United States, to achieve it.").

<sup>7</sup> Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsu, *Unrestricted Warfare: China's Master Plan to Destroy America* (Beijing: PLA Literature and Arts Publishing House, Feb. 1999) (military colonels describing twenty-four varieties of warfare).

<sup>8</sup> "While the CCP's United Front Work Department has functional responsibility for these [warfare] operations and activities, PRC united front work is a task of all CCP agencies and members." Gershaneck, *supra* note 5 at 22.

<sup>9</sup> It is essential to understand that Xi Jinping has removed any "veneer of separation between the [CCP] and the Chinese state." Gershaneck, *supra* note 5 (quoting Ann-Marie Brady, *Exploit Every Rift: United Front Work Goes Global*, in David Gitter et al., *Party Watch Annual Report*, Center for Advanced China Research (2018)).

<sup>10</sup> Ann-Marie Brady, *Magic Weapons: China's political influence activities under Xi Jinping*, Wilson Center (Sept. 18, 2017); see also The Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party, *Memorandum: United Front 101*, <https://selectcommitteeontheccp.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/selectcommitteeontheccp.house.gov/files/evo-media-document/uf-101-memo-final-pdf-version.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> Alex Joske, *The party speaks for you: Foreign interference and the Chinese Communist Party's united front system*, Australian Strategic Policy Institute (2020) (quoting Xi Jinping at 2015 Central United Front Work Meeting).

<sup>12</sup> See, e.g., Newsham, *supra* note 5 at 43 ("The People's Republic of China may settle for dominance rather than occupation, but it does indeed aim to rule us all.").

<sup>13</sup> United Front 101 Memo, *supra* note 10 at 1.

<sup>14</sup> Joske, *The party speaks for you*, *supra* note 11.

<sup>15</sup> Alex Joske, *Spies and Lies: How China's Greatest Covert Operations Fooled the World* (2022) at 63.

<sup>16</sup> Gershaneck, *supra* note 5.

decades, characterizes the book as “the main blueprint for China’s efforts to unseat America as the world’s economy, political, and ideological leader,” which “shows exactly how a totalitarian nation set out to dominate the West through a comprehensive, long-term strategy that includes everything from corporate sabotage to cyberwarfare to dishonest diplomacy; from violations of international trade law and intellectual property law to calculated abuses of the global financial system.”<sup>17</sup> Kerry Gershaneck, former counterintelligence officer who wrote a seminal book on combatting PRC Political Warfare, has explained that *Unrestricted Warfare* details CCP use of “any methods” where “the boundaries between war and non-war and between military and non-military affairs [have] systemically broken down.”<sup>18</sup> To successfully combat these highly organized and pervasive warfares spawned by China, federal agencies must first recognize and understand them.

The CCP “know[s] the strength of the American people, of the American idea, and that’s why China has launched so many warfares to try to weaken us, divide us, and get us to hate ourselves and each other.”<sup>19</sup> Retired Col. Grant Newsham, former U.S. Marine Liaison Officer to the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force and U.S. Foreign Service Officer, has advised that “the way out of this is to rediscover why we are an exceptional country, get to know each other better, and fight side by side.”<sup>20</sup>

As all Americans are targets of the PRC’s warfare,<sup>21</sup> federal agencies have responsibilities to (1) conduct outreach to citizens about the dangers they may encounter, and (2) provide appropriate incentives for Americans to proactively protect themselves—their communities, schools, houses of worship, businesses, finances, food, and more—from the threat. Federal agencies must prepare Americans to “take action.”<sup>22</sup> To stop the CCP’s “destructive actions,” retired Brig. Gen. Spalding advises that it will “take macrolevel strategic changes by our

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<sup>17</sup> Spalding, *War Without Rules*, *supra* note 5 at xii; *see also* Robert Spalding, *Stealth War* at 12-13 (2019) (*Unrestricted Warfare* “should be required reading for all branches of the US government and for business leaders, because it outlines, in no uncertain terms, the strategy behind China’s policies,” including stating that the “new principles of war” are “no longer ‘using armed force to compel the enemy to submit to one’s will,’ but rather are ‘using all means, including armed force or non-armed force, military and non-military, and lethal and non-lethal means to compel the enemy to accept one’s interests.’”).

<sup>18</sup> Gershaneck, *supra* note 5 (quoting Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsu, *supra* note 7).

<sup>19</sup> Newsham, *supra* note 5 at 341.

<sup>20</sup> *Id.*

<sup>21</sup> “The Three Warfares, the traditional foundation of PRC political warfare, include public opinion/media warfare, psychological warfare, and legal warfare.” Gershaneck, *supra*, note 5. It “requires efforts to unify military and civilian thinking, divide the enemy into factions, weaken the enemy’s combat power, and organize legal offensives.” Elsa Kania, *China Brief: The PLA’s Latest Strategic Thinking on the Three Warfares*, Jamestown Foundation (Aug. 22, 2016).

<sup>22</sup> Spalding, *War Without Rules*, *supra* note 5 at 214.

government, but also microlevel actions by individuals, businesses and other civic institutions.”<sup>23</sup> The Committee is surveying each agency’s role to secure Americans and their communities.

Congress has recognized the threat posed by the PRC for some time. Notably, in 1999, the U.S. House Select Committee on U.S. National Security and Military/Commercial Concerns with the People’s Republic of China concluded that in the preceding decade, the PRC used a “variety of techniques including espionage, controlled commercial entities, and a network of individuals that engage in contact with scientists, business people and academics” as part of its warfare operations.<sup>24</sup>

With varying degrees of effort and success, federal agencies have sought to address the CCP’s attack on what Col. Newsham has aptly described as “[t]he core of America.”<sup>25</sup> However, the threat is grave and work must be done across agencies to protect America.<sup>26</sup> Peter Mattis, former staff director of the Congressional-Executive Commission of China and counterintelligence analyst at the CIA counsels that

Only by being clear in public about the actions and intentions of the Chinese party-state, and being publicly accountable for the actions the U.S. government takes in response, will the United States be able to address Beijing’s challenges while upholding our democratic commitment to fair, transparent justice for all Americans.<sup>27</sup>

To this end, the Committee is conducting this investigation and implores each federal agency to uphold its duty to the American communities for whom they are responsible.

### CCP Political Warfare via Narrative Dominance

At the forefront of the CCP’s political warfare is its warfare on media and public opinion around the world, particularly within America.<sup>28</sup> According to Kerry Gershaneck:

Through the use of political warfare and deception, the PRC has achieved notable strategic victories without fighting. . . . Chinese strategic literature particularly emphasizes the role of the Three Warfares—public opinion/media warfare,

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<sup>23</sup> *Id.*; see also Peter Mattis and Matt Schrader, War On the Rocks, *America Can’t Beat Beijing’s Tech Theft With Racial Profiling* (July 23, 2019) (“The U.S. government’s difficulties in telling a convincing story about the Chinese Communist Party point to a[n] important step: addressing a serious lack of ‘China literacy,’ both within the enforcement portions of the federal bureaucracy, and in U.S. society as a whole.”).

<sup>24</sup> Menges, *supra* note 5; see generally Cox Report, *supra* note 5.

<sup>25</sup> Newsham, *supra* note 5 at 33.

<sup>26</sup> See Newsham, *supra* note 5 at 309 (“We need to know, value, protect and build the strengths of the United States of America, and shed the light of truth on the corruption, in every sense of the word,” of the CCP. “That could mean in discussions with family, community, at school or wherever that understanding needs bolstering.” Education courses on PRC political warfare would benefit “[a]ny decision-makers who work with China.”); see Gershaneck, *supra* note 5 (outlining such courses to “build[] internal defenses”).

<sup>27</sup> Mattis and Schrader, *supra* note 23.

<sup>28</sup> Gershaneck, *supra* note 5 at 17-19.

psychological warfare, and legal warfare—to subdue an enemy before conflict can break out or ensure victory if conflict does occur.<sup>29</sup>

Dr. Michael Pillsbury, a foremost expert on Chinese strategy under many administrations, explained that historical Chinese military theory undergirds the Party’s strategies, following the idea that the PRC “must manipulate the perceptions of the dominant world power [the United States].”<sup>30</sup> These tactics are plainly intended to conquer the minds of Americans. With an estimated seven hundred or more likely propagandists working within American media in the United States, the CCP bolsters pro-CCP sentiments while monitoring those who are spreading anti-CCP views.<sup>31</sup>

Through narrative dominance, the CCP is able to utilize both overt and covert measures to influence the public perception surrounding the PRC and CCP.<sup>32</sup> The Party has infiltrated global and local media outlets,<sup>33</sup> as well as the entertainment industry, and it actively seeks to manipulate the public through social media and cyber operations.<sup>34</sup> “[M]anipulating opinion[s], rewarding those who advance helpful messages, and punishing those voices who are discordant” are all tactics taken from these historical teachings, and underlie the CCP’s methods to control the global public narrative surrounding the PRC.<sup>35</sup>

Sarah Cook, Senior Advisor for China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan at Freedom House and expert on Chinese media operations explains that to achieve its narrative dominance, the PRC has spent billions of dollars on media investments, including the U.S. market.<sup>36</sup> The CCP “aims to bolster its global image by encouraging positive coverage, manipulating local media environments, and silencing critical voices.”<sup>37</sup> Through methods of degradation and destabilization, the CCP is able to weaken other countries without ever having to fire a bullet.<sup>38</sup>

China has gone so far as to centralize their global media outreach into a single department called “Zhongguo Zhisheng,” or the China Media Group, which translates to “Voice

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<sup>29</sup> *Id.* at 55-56.

<sup>30</sup> Michael Pillsbury, *The Hundred-Year Marathon: China’s Secret to Replace America as the Global Superpower*, 38 (2015).

<sup>31</sup> *Id.* at 129.

<sup>32</sup> Gershaneck, *supra* note 5 at 17-19.

<sup>33</sup> Sarah Cook, *The Long Shadow of Chinese Censorship: How the Communist Party’s Media Restrictions Affect News Outlets Around the World*, Cent. for Int’l Media Assist. 9 (Oct. 22, 2013) (stating “[o]utside China, diplomats have been known to apply pressure on senior editors and executives to alter coverage, while recent cyberattacks have infiltrated the global servers of leading outlets such as the New York Times and the Wall Street Journal.”).

<sup>34</sup> Gershaneck, *supra* note 5 at 17-19.

<sup>35</sup> See Pillsbury, *supra* note 30 at 132.

<sup>36</sup> Sarah Cook et al., *Beijing’s Global Media Influence 2022*, Freedom House, at 17 (2022).

<sup>37</sup> USCC Ann. Rep. 224 (2023).

<sup>38</sup> Newsham, *supra* note 5 at 49-50.

of China” in English.<sup>39</sup> Voice of China is operated through China’s state-run propaganda department, the Publicity Department of the CCP.<sup>40</sup> Individual organizations under the China Media Group umbrella, including CCTV, are registered under the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) for seeking to influence American officials and the public at the behest of a foreign principal, the CCP.<sup>41</sup> It is unclear if “the parallel with the Voice of America was intentional,”<sup>42</sup> but the name “Voice of China” can easily be misconstrued as an arm of Voice of America (and inevitably USAGM), an agency funded by the U.S. government.<sup>43</sup>

Many Chinese and English-language news channels accessible in the U.S., both those under direct ownership and control of the CCP as well as independent Chinese channels, have been coerced into tailored messaging to suit the CCP’s desired global image through various means.<sup>44</sup> The PRC also uses a sophisticated system to influence or manipulate American reporting within China’s borders to combat negative messaging.<sup>45</sup> Some of these tactics include withholding and delaying media visas for reporters in China or deporting foreign journalists when the Chinese government feels their reporting is unfavorable to China’s preferred global image.<sup>46</sup>

CCP political warfare and infiltration pose serious risks to American discourse, national security, and public policy. As such, it is vital that USAGM, VOA, and RFA accurately portray and expose the CCP to global audiences. American journalistic integrity is a powerful countervailing measure to combat CCP influence.<sup>47</sup> USAGM has responsibility in exposing CCP influence operations at home and abroad, as well as in advancing American interests in its coverage of the CCP. The Agency can demonstrate high standards of journalistic integrity by bolstering honest reporting surrounding the PRC and CCP.

To assist the Committee in investigating this matter and to help our Committee understand how USAGM and its entities are working to combat CCP influence in American and

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<sup>39</sup> *China to merge state media broadcasting giants*, CGTNAmerica (Mar. 21, 2018) (stating “China Central Television (CCTV), China Radio International (CRI), and China National Radio (CNR) will form the new Zhongguo Zhisheng (中国之声), which translates to “Voice of China” – although the English name has yet to be announced.”).

<sup>40</sup> Steven Jiang, *Beijing has a new propaganda weapon: Voice of China*, CNNBusiness (Mar. 21, 2018).

<sup>41</sup> See e.g., Dep’t of Justice, FARA Registration No. 6633, CCTV, <https://efile.fara.gov/docs/6633-Exhibit-AB-20191209-4.pdf> (Dec. 12, 2019) (the FARA registration of MediaLinks TV, LLC, the Washington, D.C.-based operations of China Central Television.) (last accessed Feb. 5, 2024); 22 U.S.C. §§ 611(c), 611(o).

<sup>42</sup> Diamond & Schell, *supra* note 5 at 105.

<sup>43</sup> Jiang, *supra* note 40.

<sup>44</sup> Alliance for Securing Democracy, *supra* note 1 at 8-10 (stating “[t]he party [] attempts to instrumentalize members of the Chinese diaspora to shape the information environment abroad. Many Chinese-language newspapers overseas have increasingly adopted pro-Beijing stances. The party has encouraged this shift through preferential treatment of friendly publications, and targeted harassment of neutral or skeptical outlets. Numerous independent Chinese-language media outlets overseas have reported threats to their advertisers by Chinese diplomats, as well as to would-be local partners such as politicians and community organizations.”).

<sup>45</sup> Pillsbury, *supra* note 30 at 129-30.

<sup>46</sup> *Id.* at 129-31.

<sup>47</sup> Cook, *supra* note 33 at 12-13.

global discourse and media, we request a briefing from USAGM with Committee staff as soon as possible, but no later than March 20, 2024. These briefings should address:

1. How USAGM strives to inspire and equip Americans to strengthen their communities, innovate, and create the technologies and phenomena that will secure a strong and prosperous future for our nation;
2. How USAGM leadership ensures from the top down that all Agency employees are aware of CCP warfare and influence operations against America, and are equipped to address them wherever they arise;
3. Agency efforts to educate its employees and journalists about the CCP's narrative dominance tactics, influence over and manipulation of public discourse, mass communications, and media in the U.S. and abroad; and
4. Agency work that encourages transparency about the CCP within USAGM and its entities, as well as within its media and communications more broadly.

To schedule the briefing, or if you have questions regarding this request, please contact the Committee on Oversight and Accountability staff at (202) 225-5074. The Committee on Oversight and Accountability is the principal oversight committee in the U.S. House of Representatives and has broad authority to investigate "any matter" at "any time" under House Rule X. Thank you in advance for your cooperation with this inquiry.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James Comer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "James" and last name "Comer" clearly distinguishable.

James Comer  
Chairman  
Committee on Oversight and Accountability

cc: The Honorable Jamie B. Raskin, Ranking Member  
Committee on Oversight and Accountability