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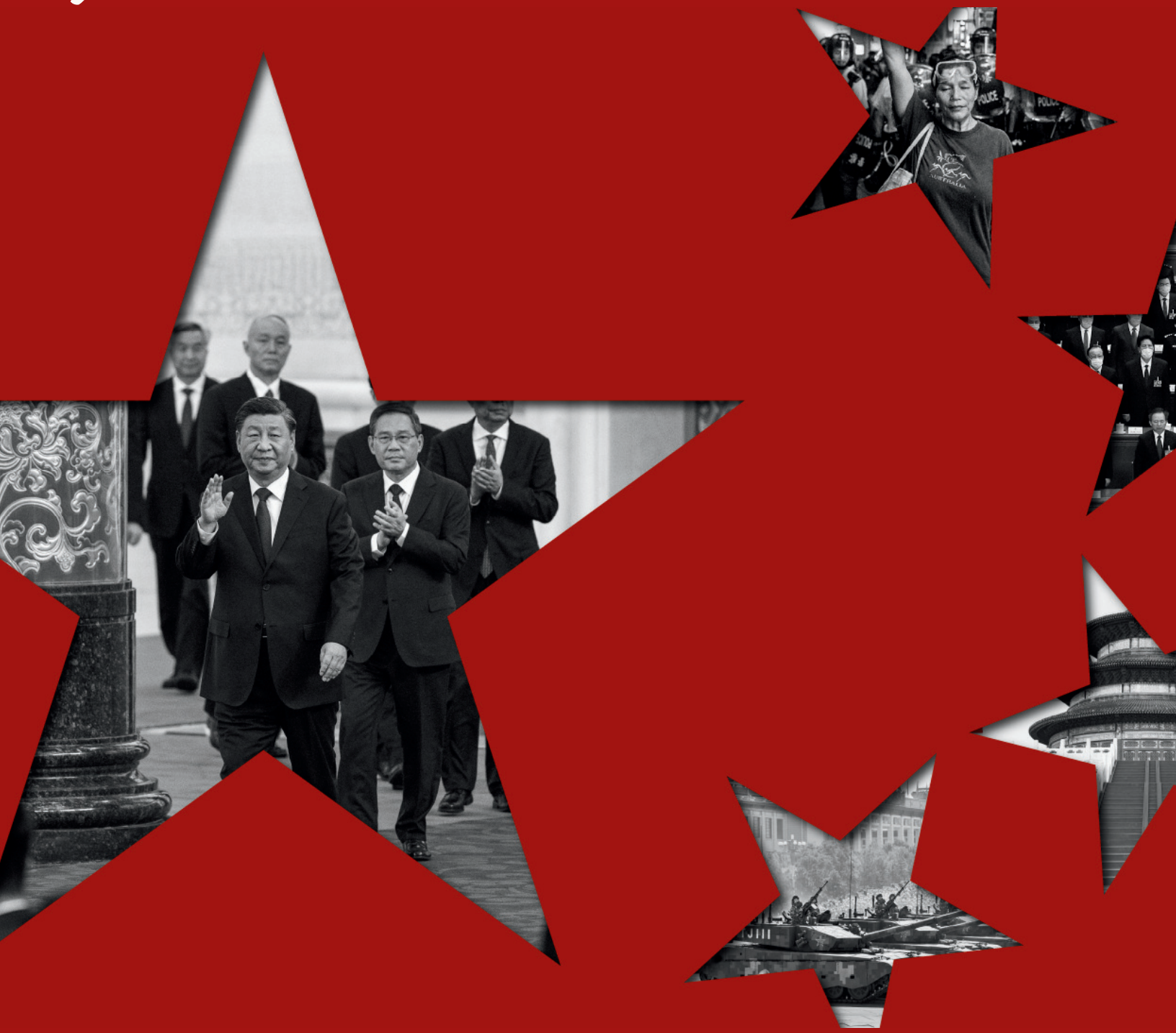

China Brief

Volume 26, Issue 15

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Chinese President Xi Jinping tours U.S. President Donald Trump around Zhongnanhai Garden on May 15, 2026 in Beijing. (Source: Evan Vucci-Pool/Getty Images)

Extensive Diplomatic Work is Bringing the World to Beijing

Arran Hope
July 24, 2026

Executive Summary

- Since December 2025, Chinese president Xi Jinping and foreign minister Wang Yi have hosted the political leaders of all the permanent members of the United Nations (UN) Security Council and met with all of the candidates for the UN's next secretary-general, among what Xinhua describes as an "endless stream" of foreign leaders "looking eastward."
- Across roughly 500 diplomatic engagements in the first half of 26 conducted by more than 20 senior officials, Beijing has seized the opportunity to make its pitch to the world. Recent survey results suggest that this work is paying off.
- Overlooked in coverage of Beijing's efforts to court Global South countries is its unwavering prioritization of handling relations with the most powerful countries in the world: in the first half of 2026, top-level diplomatic engagement was highest with the United States and Russia at the country level, and with Europe at the regional level.
- Although Xi travels far less today than during his first decade in charge, he has turned this to his advantage. Beijing's growing convening power has allowed it to stage-manage diplomatic engagements on its own terms, often tailoring its approach to maximize its desired effect on specific individuals.

Chapter 35 of the Warring States-era text the Dao De Jing (道德經) begins: "The whole world travels to the one who holds the Great Image [of the Dao]" (執大象，天下往) (**Chinese Text Project**, accessed July 24). **[1]** In early July 2026, Chinese state media selected this phrase for the headline of an article summarizing the country's diplomatic activity during the first half of the year (Xinhua, July 11). The symbolism is revealing. Transposed onto the contemporary moment, the allusion is intended to illustrate Beijing's emerging prominence as an "important hub for global diplomacy" (全球外交的重要枢纽): the "great image" in this reading is the portrait that Beijing paints of itself and displays to the world. It is a shining edifice of modernity, a beacon of moral rectitude, and a center of civilizational grandeur. The People's Republic of China (PRC), according to Xinhua, is expanding its influence, leadership, and "moral appeal" (道义感召力) on the global stage.

Two facets of Beijing's strategy emerge from an analysis of its diplomatic activity in the first half of 2026. First is the intensity and impressive breadth of its engagements. Second is the skill involved in managing—and manipulating—actors from countries of varying wealth, power, and geographic and geopolitical proximity. The ultimate goal of Beijing's strategy is perhaps also hinted at in the Dao De Jing. As Chapter 32 of the ancient text states, "If … the king could guard and hold [the Dao], all would submit themselves to him" (王若能守之，萬物將自賓) (Chinese Text Project, accessed July 24).

Xi Uses Visiting World Leaders to Advertise Openness, Centrality

Measured by what the PRC refers to as "head-of-state diplomacy" (元首外交), Beijing in the first half of 2026 appears as the center of global engagement. The city hosted U.S. president Donald Trump in May, followed soon after by Russian president Vladimir Putin. Since December 2025, General Secretary Xi Jinping has received the heads of all the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council. Analysts often focus on Beijing's mobilization of support for Global South countries in its diplomatic outreach. There is good reason for this. The Party signaled courting developing countries as an important part its foreign policy approach at the Central Foreign Affairs Work Conference in December 2023 (China Brief, April 12, 2024). At the same time, its prominence is in many ways embellished in the Party's rhetoric. **[2]** As official white papers, plans, speeches, and articles consistently indicate, Beijing's primary focus is and has always been the most powerful countries of the world. The Xinhua piece reflects this concentration too (Xinhua, July 11).

Relations with the United States remain the PRC's highest priority. On this front, the propaganda machine has been effective at packaging its engagement as evidence of superiority. Trump is quoted for praise he bestowed on Xi ("Xi is a great leader, China is a great country" (习近平主席是伟大的领导人，中国是伟大的国家)), and visiting executives from Apple, Nvidia, Tesla, and Boeing are paraded as advertisements for "the attraction of 'open China'" (开放中国的魅力). The Xinhua article notes that the CEOs "each expressed their high regard for the Chinese market, their desire to deepen their business in China, and their commitment to strengthening cooperation with China" (纷纷表示，高度重视中国市场，希望深耕中国业务，加强对华合作) (Xinhua, July 11).

The Xinhua article makes a point of highlighting Europe's importance to Beijing's strategy. It observes that the first foreign guests Xi met with after both New Year's Day and Spring Festival were from Europe, and reiterates the continent's role as an important pole in a multipolar world—in other words, a region that can be maneuvered away from the United States (China

Brief, February 28, 2025). A further significant area of focus is the PRC's own neighborhood, which Xinhua describes as a "priority direction" (优先方向) for the country's diplomacy (Xinhua, July 11). Xi has been a keen promoter of "Asian values" in the region in recent times, which for the Party is a byword for anti-Western, pro-authoritarian, and CCP-aligned governance, and is linked to gaining advantage in strategic competition with the United States (Xinhua, March 5; China Brief, March 6).

Data on Foreign Engagements Backs up Rhetoric

Data on engagements over the first six months of 2026, taken from the websites of both the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Party's International Liaison Department (ILD) generally supports the claims made in the Xinhua article. Overall, we counted roughly 500 engagements over the course of the first six months of the year. The large volume of engagements is in part a result of delegation: a whole set of individuals at the top of the Party—at least 23 by our count—have been involved in the work of diplomacy so far this year.

Foreign Minister Wang Yi (王毅) has been involved in roughly one third of all high-level engagements. Xi Jinping and ILD head Liu Haixing (刘海星) account for another third. Han Zheng (韩正), a former politburo standing committee member and vice president, who now holds a ceremonial role focused on foreign affairs, has also been active, with trips across Africa and to Russia and Belarus. He has been the most active among the 20 or so who make up the final third, which includes the remaining politburo standing committee members, several politburo members, a number of special envoys, and Xi's wife, Peng Liyuan (彭丽媛).

In terms of the division of labor, Wang handles the majority of bilateral meetings, calls, and cri--sis diplomacy. Notably, he has met with each candidate for the role of United Nations Secretary-General (the successor to António Guterres will begin their term in 2027). Wang has been heavily engaged in the Middle East during the U.S.–Iran conflict, though from a distance: he has managed this particular diplomatic track over the phone. Xi's high volume of engagements has similarly been made possible by how much he is able to do from Beijing. He has traveled less and less over the last decade, but remains deeply involved in diplomatic work through sending messages or letters, and occasionally making calls: almost half of his engagements in 2026 have taken place via these routes (IISS, April 17, 2025; Asia Society, May 6). Liu Haixing, by contrast, has conducted almost all his diplomatic activity in person, indicating a growing parallel track of Party-led diplomacy (China Brief, February 17). **[3]**

The countries with which senior Chinese officials had the most engagements in the first six months of the year—including in-person meetings, calls, and correspondence—were the United States, Russia, Vietnam, Pakistan, and North Korea. This makes sense. These countries are the ones Beijing views as the most important to manage and maintain relations with, and are also among the countries whose leaders have met in person this year (all in Beijing, with the exception of North Korea: Xi Jinping's first—and only—overseas travel was to Pyongyang to meet with Kim Jong Un in June).

At the regional level, Europe's importance is reflected in its high volume of diplomatic engagements: no other region received as much attention between January and June, with the United Kingdom and Belarus receiving the most. ASEAN countries saw the next highest degree of engagement, which is in line with trends laid out above (China Brief, March 6).

At the other end of the spectrum, countries with

which the PRC has barely engaged at all in 2026 include those the United States has effectively sought to bring within a sphere of influence (U.S. Department of Defense, January 23).

These include Panama, where Wang Yi had a single meeting with his counterpart, and Venezuela, where Xi Jinping sent condolences following an earthquake. Mexico, meanwhile, received no diplomatic attention at all. This could be in part a form of overt signaling under the mutually established agreement to abide by a "constructive China–U.S. relationship of strategic stability" (中美建设性战略稳定关系) (Xinhua; The White House, May 14).

Conclusion

The PRC has made the most of what Xinhua describes as an "endless stream" (络绎不绝) of foreign leaders "looking eastward" (向东看). Its growing convening power has enabled the leadership to stage-manage engagements on its own terms and to showcase the country's strengths in carefully tailored ways to each visiting dignitary. As a result, Serbia's president Aleksandar Vučić has been brought to the verge of tears after receiving a friendship medal from Xi Jinping; Beijing's imperial architecture has provoked Spanish prime minister Pedro Sánchez to muse that the PRC is "destined to play a key role in the world's future" (注定要在世界的未来扮演关键角色); and Xi has taken Trump to look across Tiananmen Square and show him that "the Great Way is clear" (大道昭然)—another Daoist allusion wielded to paint Xi [in sagely trappings] as one who understands the inevitable laws of the universe (Xinhua, July 11).

A lot of this work, as Xinhua plainly puts it, is effective political theater—a hollow imitation of the Dao De Jing's imagined "grand image" (大象). Hosting visitors, and in particular taking them to high-tech sites, is done so that "the international community understands an image an innovative China that shares the results of its innovation" (国际社会读懂创新中国、共享创新成果的时代图景) (Xinhua, July 11).

If the recent results of a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center are to be believed, this work may be paying off. Respondents in most of the 36 countries surveyed now see both the PRC and Xi more positively than the United States and Trump (Pew, July 15). On the basis of this evidence, Xi could be forgiven for believing that he is driving a series of changes in the international system. Absent more concerted efforts from the West, these trends may well continue through the end of this year and beyond.

Arran Hope is the editor of China Brief.

Notes

[1] The *Dao De Jing* is frequently cited in Party literature. In recent years, Qiushi articles have often quoted passages alongside quotes from Xi Jinping (Qiushi, May 26, 2021, May 26).

[2] When the Global South is mentioned in the Xinhua piece, it is to remark that those countries' "unity and self-reliance are unstoppable" (联合自强不可阻挡). It is not entirely clear what this means, but this framing could suggest that Beijing views "self-reliance" in this context as synonymous with "independent of the West": if anything, many global south countries are more reliant on the PRC today than ever before.

[3] Beyond the parties one would expect the ILD head to engage with, Liu has also met with Graham Allison, the chairs of the Eurasia Group and Asia Society, the head of Singapore's sovereign wealth fund, and cadres from Fatah.

To read this article on the Jamestown website, click here.

Ma Xingrui (center) seen at the opening of the first session of the 14th National People's Congress at The Great Hall of People on March 5, 2023 in Beijing (Source: Lintao Zhang/Getty Images)

No Political Charges as Ma Xingrui Expelled From Politburo

Christopher Nye
July 11, 2026

Executive Summary

- On July 14, the Party announced the expulsion of Politburo member Ma Xingrui and referred him for prosecution on bribery charges.
- Ma's notice contains no specific political accusations. This is a departure from historical practice. Every other Politburo-level official felled under Xi Jinping has been charged with political crimes, such as disloyalty, factionalism, ambition, or undermining the Central Military Commission chairman responsibility system.
- The omission suggests removing a top official no longer requires a political narrative. Framing the case as ordinary corruption shields Xi from the embarrassment of purging his own appointees.
- Given that nearly all senior officials are vulnerable to accusations of economic corruption, the lower threshold that Ma's case suggests turns ordinary graft into a weapon and raises the risk of intensified elite infighting before the 21st Party Congress.

The Politburo of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) expelled Ma Xingrui (马兴瑞), a sitting Politburo member and former Xinjiang Party secretary, on June 30. The official notice referred him for prosecution on bribery charges (Xinhua, July 14). The announcement is notable for what it lacks. Unlike the disciplinary notices of other Politburo-level officials felled during General Secretary Xi Jinping's tenure, Ma's charge sheet contains no specific political accusations. The text omits established disciplinary formulas regarding factionalism, disloyalty, or inflated political ambition. Instead, the CCP removed a top civilian leader just for ordinary corruption and supervision failures.

This divergence marks a significant shift in elite politics. It indicates that the leadership may no longer feel compelled to construct a grand political narrative to justify felling a Politburo member. Xi Jinping now exercises complete discretion over the public framing of top-level purges.

Charge Sheet Against Ma Focuses on Venal Corruption

Ma Xingrui entered the Politburo at the 20th Party Congress in October 2022. He was known as a renowned aerospace engineer who once served as general manager of the China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation (CASC; 中国航天). Within the Party, he had ascended the hierarchy by serving as Shenzhen Party secretary, Guangdong governor, and Xinjiang Party secretary. The Party abruptly relieved him of his Xinjiang post in July 2025 for an unspecified other appointment (Xinhua, July 1, 2025). Then, in April 2026, the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection announced an investigation into Ma (Xinhua, April 3). Three months later, the leadership published the final disciplinary results.

The notice outlines a massive corruption scandal without mentioning political disloyalty. The document groups his offenses into four distinct disciplinary failures. First, Ma failed to fulfill his supervisory responsibility for party governance by indulging aides involved in suspected crimes. Second, he violated organizational discipline by answering official inquiries dishonestly and trading favors in personnel arrangements. Third, the commission cites severe integrity breaches. These include the acceptance of illicit gifts, instances in which Ma "traded power and money for sex" (权色、钱色交易), and a broader pattern of "large-scale family corruption" (大搞家族腐败). Fourth, the text accuses the former secretary of weaponizing public power for private profit. He is charged with leveraging his office to secure business contracts and job promotions for others in exchange for enormous financial bribes paid to himself and his "specific related persons" (特定关系人), a legal term covering close relatives and associates. **[1]**

This severe document stands out specifically for what it omits. All other Politburo-rank officials disciplined under Xi Jinping ultimately received at least one political charge. Civilian peers like Zhou Yongkang (周永康) and Sun Zhengcai (孙政才) faced accusations of leaking secrets or harboring inflated political ambition (Supreme People's Procuratorate, December 6, 2014; Xinhua, September 29, 2017, October 29, 2017). Recent military purges involving Central Military Commission (CMC) vice chairmen He Weidong (何卫东) and Zhang Youxia (张又侠) escalated to charges of undermining and trampling the "CMC chairman responsibility system" (军委主席负责制), respectively (Xinhua, October 18, 2025; PLA Daily, January 25). As in Ma's case, nearly all of these other high-level disciplinary actions include accusations of financial crimes and nepotism. The difference with Ma's notice, however, is that it relies entirely on these economic offenses.

Previous Elite Purges Required Political Charges

In the post-Tiananmen era before Xi Jinping took power, the CCP rarely removed Politburo members. The Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao decades saw only three such dismissals in 23 years. Chen Xitong (陈希同), Chen Liangyu (陈良宇), and Bo Xilai (薄熙来) all lost their positions during this period. In each of these historical cases, the underlying conflict involved a challenge to the sitting leadership. Chen Xitong's Beijing municipal machine contested Jiang Zemin's authority (Radio Free Asia, June 23, 2017). Chen Liangyu resisted the macroeconomic policies of the Hu Jintao leadership (VOA, April 11, 2008). Bo Xilai faced expulsion after his abuse of power in the Wang Lijun incident (王立军事件) (China Brief, March 2, 2012, March 30, 2012; Xinhua, September 28, 2012). All three men were ousted for economic crimes. Their underlying offense, however, was challenging central authority. The Party did not purge its highest ranks simply for financial crimes.

Xi Jinping lowered this historical threshold in his first term. Defying the core leadership was no longer the required trigger for a purge. Instead, merely possessing a severe political problem became sufficient to bring down a Politburo member. The notice announcing Zhou Yongkang's expulsion from the Party carried heavy political accusations, including charges of leaking Party and state secrets, alongside massive abuses of power (Supreme People's Procuratorate, December 6, 2014). Sun Zhengcai faced a slightly different formulation in 2017. His expulsion notice heavily emphasized bribery, though it still included a distinct political charge by citing the leaking of organizational secrets (Xinhua, September 29, 2017). The CCP subsequently formalized the political framing of these elite purges. The work report of the 18th Central Commission for Discipline Inspection explicitly grouped Zhou and Sun with former director of the General Office of the CCP Central Committee Ling Jihua (令计划) as "careerists and conspirators" (野心家、阴谋家) (Xinhua, October 29, 2017). A discipline official summarized this norm at a press conference after the Party Congress that year, saying that for the great majority of felled senior officials "political problems and economic corruption were intertwined" (政治问题和经济腐败相互交织) (Xinhua, October 26, 2017). Ordinary graft alone was insufficient to underpin the removal of a top leader.

The purge of top military commanders following the 20th Party Congress in 2022 demonstrates how this requirement for high-level officials to be accused of political crimes in order to be removed from their positions operates. The disciplinary apparatus now delivers severe political indictments almost simultaneously with criminal charges. When the Party expelled He Weidong in October 2025, the initial announcement focused purely on "job-related crimes" (职务犯罪) and massive bribes. The political verdict arrived the very next day, in a PLA Daily editorial that accused him of losing his faith and seriously undermining the CMC chairman responsibility system (Ministry of National Defense; China Brief, October 17, 2025; PLA Daily, October 18, 2025). The rhetoric escalated further when Zhang Youxia fell several months later. Given Zhang's established prestige within the military and his family's generational ties with that of Xi Jinping, his purge demanded the most severe political indictment. The ensuing editorial accused him of "seriously trampling on and damaging" (严重践踏破坏) the chairman responsibility system and "endangering the governing foundation of the CCP" (危害党的执政根基) (PLA Daily, January 25; China Brief, January 26). As in He Weidong's case, a brief announcement of a criminal investigation was instantly followed by a coordinated, media-driven political condemnation to legitimize the decision to purge Zhang.

Table 1: Comparison of Disciplinary Charges Against Politburo-Level Officials Under Xi Jinping [2]

Charge / Allegation	Zhou 2014	Xu 2014	Guo 2015	Sun 2017	He 2025	Zhang 2026	Ma 2026
Political Charges							
Undermining Chairman Responsibility System	*none*	yes (PLA Daily commentary, 2016)	yes (PLA Daily commentary, 2016)	*none*	yes	yes ("trampling")	*none*
Issues of Loyalty or Faith	*none*	yes ("two-faced," "sham loyalty"; commentary)	yes (same commentary)	*none*	yes ("loyalty forsaken")	pending	*none*
Damage to Political Ecology	*none*	*none*	*none*	*none*	yes	yes	*none*
Secrets Leaked or Obtained	yes	*none*	*none*	yes (organizational)	not enumerated	not enumerated	*none*
Abuse of Power	yes (with major state-asset losses)	*none*	*none*	*none*	not enumerated	not enumerated	*none*
Venal Charges							
Personnel-related Corruption	*none*	promotions for bribes	promotions for bribes	cronyism in selection	not enumerated	not enumerated	favors and job placements
Family Enrichment	yes	yes (via family)	yes (via family)	yes	not enumerated	not enumerated	yes ("family-style corruption")
Sexual-related Corruption	power-for-sex, money-for-sex	*none*	*none*	power-for-sex	not enumerated	not enumerated	power-for-sex, money-for-sex
Additional Information							
Political Characterization Added Later	in notice itself	conspirator (Oct. 2017, plus circular Feb. 2018)	conspirator (Oct. 2017, plus circular Feb. 2018)	conspirator (Oct. 2017, plus circular Feb. 2018)	near-concurrent (editorial next day)	near-concurrent (editorial next day)	none to date

(Source: Compiled by the author)

Omitting Political Charges Signals a Change in Elite Management

The handling of Ma Xingrui signals another shift in the treatment of senior leaders. Political charges are apparently no longer necessary to remove a member of the Politburo. Xi Jinping has further dismantled the unwritten rule that historically shielded the highest echelons from severe punishment. This case serves as a stark warning to the inner circle. Core officials must now maintain strict personal integrity rather than relying on political loyalty alone. At a minimum, they must keep their own relatives and personal aides in check. Unlike ordinary anti-corruption cases, this purge carries deep structural significance. It directly targets the Politburo level and raises the baseline disciplinary standard for the entire elite class.

This new dynamic reflects Xi Jinping's fully consolidated power. He is no longer bound by past unwritten rules. He does not need to provide the broader Party with a political explanation to maintain his governing legitimacy. More importantly, issuing excessive political charges now actively harms his own authority. The current central leadership consists almost entirely of officials Xi personally promoted. Accusing these handpicked loyalists of forming cliques, harboring political ambition, or acting with disloyalty creates a glaring contradiction, by implying that the paramount leader routinely elevates treacherous officials. **[3]** The post-20th

Party Congress purges of newly appointed ministers like former foreign minister Qin Gang (秦刚) and former defense minister Li Shangfu (李尚福) already invited questions about Xi's personnel management (China Brief, September 20, 2023, April 23, 2025). Sweeping military purges amplified the skepticism. Framing Ma's downfall purely around common corruption could insulate the core leadership from this political risk.

The preceding analysis carries a caveat regarding timing. This assessment relies strictly on the official notices published to date. The Central Committee could still append political charges to Ma's file in the future. The historical cases of Xu Caihou (徐才厚), Guo Boxiong (郭伯雄), and Sun Zhengcai provide precedents for this delayed tactic. Sun offers the most direct comparison. Aside from a charge of leaking secrets, his expulsion notice closely mirrored Ma's current charge sheet. The Party subsequently escalated Sun's case through internal circulars (The Paper, February 14, 2018). It even utilized state-guided peripheral media to leak that a close associate (a "specific related person" under the legal definition referenced above) had gifted Sun a dragon robe—a garment traditionally reserved for emperors—after a fortune teller predicted his ascent to higher office (Caixin Weekly, February 2, 2018). This bizarre detail served to publicly validate accusations of his extreme political ambition and personal greed. A similar retroactive escalation for Ma cannot be ruled out in the future.

Conclusion

The unprecedented decision to expel Politburo member Ma Xingrui solely on corruption charges without the customary political indictments marks a shift in elite management under Xi Jinping. It suggests that the core leadership can now remove top officials without constructing the severe political narratives required in previous years. This strategic omission may protect the paramount leader from the political embarrassment of repeatedly purging his own handpicked loyalists. The ultimate decision rests entirely with Xi Jinping. Because nearly all senior officials harbor similar corruption vulnerabilities, however, this lowered threshold for removal turns ordinary graft into a readily available weapon. Competitors jockeying for position ahead of the 21st Party Congress now possess a streamlined blueprint to strike rivals. As a result, this new dynamic threatens to intensify elite infighting.

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Notes

[1] Under the technical legal definition, "特定关系人" refers to individuals who are close relatives or mistresses (or lovers) of state functionaries, serve as "white gloves," or who share other common interests with them.

[2] In the table, "None" denotes a comprehensive expulsion notice that deliberately omits political accusations. "Not enumerated" designates a brief initial investigation announcement in which specific offenses are not yet listed, meaning the absence of political charges in those specific documents carries no analytical signal.

[3] In fact, purging handpicked loyalists creates an "insoluble paradox" for Xi himself: it signals either profoundly flawed judgment in personnel selection or a system so ruthless that no status guarantees safety, both of which inflict a crushing blow to his political prestige. See Christopher Nye, "Why Xi Jinping Is Purging

China's Top Leaders," Journal of Democracy, March 2026, https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/online-exclusive/why-xi-jinping-is-purging-chinas-top-leaders/.

To read this article on the Jamestown website, click here.

Beijing is learning from Russia's cyber operations against Ukraine. (Source: Dragon Claws, Getty Images)

Cyber Lessons From Russia's War in Ukraine

Sunny Cheung
July 15, 2026

Executive Summary

- Chinese analysts have closely followed Russia's cyber offensive against Ukraine, drawing a series of lessons about how the People's Republic of China (PRC) can better prepare for cyber warfare.
- Analysts blame Russia's underwhelming cyber campaign at the outset of its invasion on institutional flaws. This contrasts with analysts in the West who suggest that cyber capabilities are not a decisive factor in contemporary warfare. In response, Chinese analysts advocate for a more unified command structure and enhanced civil-military fusion.
- Research on cyberattacks against critical infrastructure in Ukraine and, more recently, by the United States in Venezuela underscore the need to improve domestic resilience and defenses for critical infrastructure.
- Developing "independent and controllable" technologies and reducing dependence on those controlled by adversaries is a key theme of this literature. Some scholars also advocate using international governance institutions to shape global cyberspace regulation in favorable ways.

For the last ten years, Chinese experts and policymakers have referred to cyberspace as the "fifth domain" (第五疆域), after land, sea, air, and space (Central Cyberspace Affairs Commission, September 8, 2024). For the last four, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has given strategists in the People's Republic of China (PRC) a first sustained look at large-scale cyber and electronic warfare operations between two digitized states. Analysis of the conflict has resulted in a substantial literature, spanning institutional journals of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), military conference proceedings, state-backed magazines, academic quarterlies, and the PLA Daily. These writings are often strikingly critical about Russia's failings. A survey of some two dozen analyses that engage the cyber war in Ukraine maps how the PLA is using the conflict to inform a new cyber doctrine. In the course of reviewing these analyses, minor discrepancies were found between different published versions of particular articles. In such cases, the analysis below prioritizes versions that appear more complete and/or authoritative.

The Chinese military's ability to learn the correct lessons from Russia's war in Ukraine and successfully implement them will be crucial to its military modernization efforts. One recent data point could call that into question. In late June, the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC) decided to remove the commander of the two-year-old PLA Cyberspace Force (网络空间部队) from his position as a delegate to the NPC. Lieutenant General Zhang Minghua (张明华), who has led the Cyberspace Force since its inception, was one of several senior officers removed from the national legislative body without public explanation (NPC, June 26). Chinese analyses of Russia's cyber operations frequently fault Russia for running a personalized, opaque, and disunified cyber command, but Zhang's removal from the NPC could indicate that the Chinese system is plagued by the same pathologies as Russia's.

Russia's Cyber Failures Are Institutional

Many Western commentators spent 2022 puzzling over why Russia's vaunted cyber forces never delivered a knockout blow to Ukraine. Chinese analysts noted the same puzzle, but described Russia's cyber prowess as something of a "myth" (迷思). As Tsinghua University's Wu Dahui (吴大辉), a prominent Russia hand, pointed out, Russia lacked a unified cyber command, its security services carried "traditional organizational structures and strategic cultures ill-suited to cyber operations" (传统组织结构和战略文化不适用于网络行动), its operators were rooted in Soviet-era signals-intelligence habits, and the state leaned on a private sector that "values commercial interest over national duty" (更看重商业利益而非国家责任) (Wu, 2023). **[1]** Researchers at Nanjing University reinforced this reading. In a paper published in early 2026, two scholars portrayed the "strategic culture" (战略文化) of Russia's cyber warfare ecosystem as one that was too invested in a view of Russia as a great power and that "worship[ped] force" (力量崇拜). As a result, they assessed that Russia's rhetoric about pre-emptive strikes was undercut by a technology gap with the West (Guo & Shi, 2026). **[2]**

The subtext for a PLA audience is unmistakable: capability is worthless without unified command and civil-military fusion. This may in fact have been a key reason behind the PLA's organizational overhaul in April 2024 that stood up independent PLA branches under the Central Military Commission for cyber, information, and aerospace warfare. One PLA Daily commentary from that year effectively argued that the Information Support Force (信息支援部队) was an organizational remedy for the problems identified in Russia's system, stating that the network information system "directly determines the effectiveness of command, [intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance], fire-strike, and support systems"

(直接决定着作战指挥系统、情报侦察系统、火力打击系统、综合保障系统等方面的效能) (PLA Daily, December 6, 2024).

A minority of Chinese analysts have voiced skepticism about whether cyber operations can be a decisive factor in a conflict. Observers from the Shaanxi branch of the National Internet Emergency Response Center (CNCERT; 国家互联网应急中心) invoked a "trilemma" (三难困境)—the argument that a cyber operation cannot be simultaneously fast, intense, and controllable. Applying this to Ukraine, they conclude that cyber "did not substitute for, nor did it significantly supplement, conventional combat operations" (既没有取代也没有显著补充常规作战活动) (Ling, April 2023). **[3]** In a separate instance, the 30th Research Institute of the China Electronics Technology Group Corporation (CETC-30; 中国电科三十所) translated and circulated a commentary by the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) in the United Kingdom that described deterrence as being "enabled by cyber rather than unilaterally ensured by it" (RUSI, January 14; Chen, May 22). **[4]** CETC-30 is the principal research institute under the state-owned defense research and development conglomerate CETC for cryptography, information security, and secure communications.

These skeptics nevertheless conclude that cyber remains essential to enabling and supporting the broader fight. In their view, Russia's execution of cyber operations in the early stages of its invasion was simply poor. The diagnosis that a key limitation of Russia's capabilities has been an institutional one suggests that the Chinese side is confident it will not succumb to the same vulnerabilities.

Cyber Campaigns Against Command Nodes and Civilian Will Most Effective

The consensus among Chinese experts is that contemporary and future conflicts will begin with the targeting of an adversary's critical information infrastructure. In the early stages of Russia's invasion, researchers at the National University of Defense Technology and CETC-30 catalogued Russia's deployment of its offensive cyber toolkit against Ukrainian systems. They observed how operators seeded Ukrainian government, energy, and financial systems with data-wiping malware that erases files by overwriting a hard drive's partition tables so a machine "forgets" where its files are and goes dark. Russia then paired this with platforms and botnets that used distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks to swamp servers. The researchers flag a February 2022 attack on the Viasat KA-SAT satellite-modem network as "the first successful wide-area satellite-communications cyber engagement" (历史上首次成功实施的广域卫星通信对抗战例)—the moment cyber conflict visibly "extended into space" (延伸至太空领) (An & Hao, 2022). **[5]**

The scale of Russia's cyber force is evident in a 2023 paper that maps its order of battle. The study, authored by experts at the PLA Information Engineering University—at the time the cyber arm of the precursor to the Cyberspace Force, the Strategic Support Force—assesses more than 7,000 uniformed cyber personnel plus proxy groups and units 26165 and 74455 of Russia's foreign military intelligence agency, the Main Intelligence Directorate. Ukraine's forces were assessed as comprising roughly 270,000 volunteers dispatched through a Telegram channel, and supported by many more through some 22 international hacker collectives. The authors also trace how Russian cyber forces worked to force Ukrainian industrial-control systems to a halt. This process involved exploiting a web-server flaw and implanting a trojan, before corrupting host data, destroying the disk drive, overwriting its contents, and deleting the partition table. They also note that Ukraine was deploying a

ransomware called RuRansom to target Russian systems. This malware checks whether a machine's IP is Russian before irreversibly encrypting its files, and adding a text file with a message for Russian President Vladimir Putin (VMware Security Blog, April 12, 2022; Cao, Song & Zeng, 2023). **[6]**

The PLA authors argue that cyberattacks on infrastructure are most potent not as a single knockout blow but as a sustained "surgical" (外科手术式) campaign against an adversary's command nodes and civilian will. They observe that, starting in February 2023, Russian "directional destructive" (定向性破坏型) attacks nearly severed Internet connections offered by the satellite provider Viasat and the broadband provider Triolan, affecting a quarter of users in the city of Kharkiv and taking Mariupol offline. By that October, the attacks had shifted to rear-area water, power, and gas utilities, explicitly to manufacture distress among the Ukrainian people through the harsh winter months. The authors close with the blunt prescription that the PRC must "strengthen the protection of critical information infrastructure" (聚焦提升关键信息基础设施防护体系与能力建设) and "seize the initiative in cyber warfare" (在网络作战中掌握自主权和主动权) (Cao, Song & Zeng, 2023). **[7]**

Chinese analysts see the same template repeated elsewhere. In a study of the January 2026 U.S. operation Absolute Resolve in Venezuela, CETC-30 engineers describe a "system-breaking" (体系破击) sequence. This involved the U.S. mapping the Venezuelan critical information infrastructure network, cataloguing its vulnerabilities, and exploiting flaws in industrial software by pre-implanting trojans to interfere with Caracas's power grid, hijack the national telecom provider's core routers, poison its domain-name servers, and feed falsified radar data to its command system (Zhang et al., May 20). **[8]**

Experts see Self-Reliance as the Only Solution

Chinese experts repeatedly worry that reliance on adversary-controlled technologies is a strategic vulnerability. This is most clear in an essay by Yan Ming (严明), honorary director of the security committee of the China Computer Federation (中国计算机学会). After cataloguing how Western firms severed their business ties with Russia following its invasion of Ukraine, Yan notes that "the crisis facing Russia today may one day come to us" (俄罗斯当前面临的危机是否有朝一日也会来到我们面前). He then asks his readers: "If we face the same or fiercer service cutoff, supply cutoff, and network disconnection, are we ready?" (如果面临同样的甚至更加激烈的舆论战、网络战、信息战，面临全面停服、断供、断网等，我们准备好了吗?) (Yan, August 5, 2022). **[9]** A scholar at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), Lang Ping (郎平), voices similar concerns, warning that a fragmentation of the Internet would entrench U.S. dominance, as it would cement the positions of U.S.-based platforms that already dominate the global information space. Lang argues that this fragmentation would be a downstream effect of the weaponization of code, social media, and, most novelly, "Internet resources" (互联网资源) such as certificate revocation and DNS cutoffs (Lang, August 5, 2022). **[10]**

The primary remedy Chinese experts prescribe is one that Beijing has been pursuing for years. This is the push to develop "independent and controllable" (自主可控) indigenous technology. This includes a related concept, which the government refers to as "information technology application innovation" (信息技术应用创新) or simply xinchuang (信创). This, according to a recent state media article, is "the foundation for ensuring information technology security" (保障信息技术安全的基础) (Xinhua, February 14). Researchers at Sichuan University frame the war in this way as validating the

argument that the PRC needs to follow a model of technological sovereignty. For them, this entails full data localization and a "sovereign Internet" (主权互联网) modeled explicitly on Russia's RuNet as insurance against being forcibly disconnected (Yang & Cheng, May 19, 2025). **[11]** The urgency of these ambitions was underscored in late 2025, when the Ministry of State Security alleged that the U.S. National Security Agency had spent years penetrating the PRC's National Time Service Center (国家授时中心) (CCTV, October 19, 2025; China Brief, November 7, 2025). This followed earlier claims that the 2025 Harbin Asian Winter Games had been the victim of 270,000 attempted cyberattacks, of which nearly two thirds allegedly originated from IP addresses in the United States (Yang, July 23, 2025). **[12]** Whatever the merits of those attributions, commentators and authorities in the PRC have marshaled them to argue that the PRC already faces the same state-level operations seen in Ukraine.

A secondary lesson that Chinese experts have taken from Russia's war in Ukraine is the need to enhance the defensive engineering of domestic information systems. The scholar Zhang Shuai (张帅) and his colleagues at the National University of Defense Technology use their observations from the conflict to develop a five-phase planning cycle for the country's cyber defense. The cycle involves continuous red-team/blue-team drills, phishing exercises, and "active cyber defense" (积极主动的网络防御), and the authors write that their base assumption is the premise that "there is no clear boundary between peace and war" (和平与战争之间并无明确界限) (Zhang, 2025). **[13]** The infrastructure for running nationwide offense-defense exercises at scale is already in operation. A 2026 paper discusses distributed "cyber ranges" (网络靶场), virtual environments where cyber weapons are tested and operators are trained. These ranges are built by stitching a network of geographically separate ranges into one (Jiang, 2026). **[14]**

Additional ideas also emerge in the literature. Some scholars argue that the PRC should assert cyber self-defense but also push to de-militarize cyberspace (Sun, 2023). **[15]** Others, meanwhile, believe that the PRC simply needs to influence international governance institutions to shape emerging regulations for international cyberspace in ways that better support Beijing's priorities. A researcher at the Academy of Military Sciences, for instance, has urged Beijing to "seize the window of opportunity for making international rules" (抓住国际规则窗口期) at the United Nations to "actively shape an international rules system for cyberspace that is favorable to us" (积极塑造对我有利的网络空间国际规则体系) (International Cooperation Center, March 19, 2023).

Conclusion

Analysts in the PRC have spent over four years dissecting Russia's war in Ukraine to extract practical and actionable lessons that it can apply to enhance its own systemic resilience and military competitiveness. In the cyber domain, they broadly conclude that cyber warfare is a crucial factor in contemporary warfare, but that Russia executed its cyber operations badly at the outset of its invasion, in part as a result of flaws in the institutional design of its cyber ecosystem. More broadly, the conflict has convinced Chinese experts that dependence on adversary-controlled technologies is a serious vulnerability, and that cyber sovereignty and technological self-reliance are prerequisites for national security. This confirms many experts' prior assumptions rather than constituting a novel insight—Beijing was already forging ahead in building such a system by 2022.

Notable in Chinese analyses is a fairly objective view of Russian and Ukrainian strengths and

weaknesses. Many Western analysts would agree with points raised by Chinese experts diagnosing problems with Russia's cyber capabilities. An important takeaway from this literature, therefore, is that the PLA assiduously studies the techniques, tactics, and procedures of both parties to the conflict, assessing each side's merits and demerits, and picking and choosing those aspects that are most applicable for advancing its own capabilities.

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Notes

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Fuel prices are seen at a gas station on March 23, 2026 in Beijing. (Source: Lintao Zhang/Getty Images)

Continuity in Energy Strategy Amid U.S.–Iran War

Ethan Kessler
July 24, 2026

Executive Summary

- Energy diversification, stockpiling, and electrification cushioned the People's Republic of China (PRC) from the 2026 Strait of Hormuz closure. Official and unofficial commentary treats this resilience as vindication of the energy security strategy pursued since the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021–2025).
- Released soon after the June ceasefire, the "15th Five-Year Plan for the Construction of a New-Type Energy System" doubles down on the same three levers—import diversification fossil-fuel reserves, and non-fossil fuel capacity—with concrete commitments to expand overland pipeline capacity, stockpiles, and electrification.
- Beijing's reliance on stable energy flows from the Middle East, including Iran's Arab neighbors, will endure for the near term. This helps explain the PRC's limited support for Tehran during the war, a posture unchanged by the U.S.–Iran ceasefire's collapse in early July.

On June 26, the State Council Information Office unveiled the energy component of the 15th Five-Year Plan. In many respects, it signaled continuity from the previous plan, despite its arrival amid "drastic fluctuations" (剧烈波动) in global energy markets following the outbreak of war between the United States and Iran in late February. As officials made clear, however, the ability of the People's Republic of China (PRC) to weather those fluctuations was largely down to the previous plan's focus on stockpiling, import diversification, and electrification (China News, June 26).

PRC officials and commentators have treated the war as a vindication rather than a warning. This verdict has remained unchanged following the war's recent reignition in July. The PRC nevertheless remains substantially dependent on stable energy flows from the region, a fact reflected in Beijing's continued, cautious diplomacy that seeks balance between Iran and the Gulf Arab states.

The 14th Five-Year Plan Holds Under Fire

Recent commentary from Party-affiliated media and academic researchers has characterized PRC readiness for the energy crisis resulting from the closure of the Strait of Hormuz as both impressive and incomplete. April coverage from China Energy News (overseen by the People's Daily Press) is representative. It called the closure a "pressure test" (压力测试) for the PRC's energy supply system and quoted an expert from the China International Carbon Neutrality Economic Research Institute as saying the system was under "short-term pressure, but manageable in the long term" (短期承压长期可控) (China Energy News, April 6). The PRC's system has in fact held up. Following the Strait's closure in March, the PRC drew down oil from prewar stockpiles that were more than twice the combined size of U.S. and Japanese stockpiles. It also further cut import demand by idling petroleum feedstock plants (U.S. Energy Information Administration, April 20). By June, analysts credited the country's cut in crude imports and reduced refining activity as critical to offsetting the global supply shock, on par with Saudi rerouting and coordinated Western strategic reserve releases (CNBC, June 8). **[1]**

Electrification has supplied additional flexibility. According to the PRC's National Energy Administration (NEA) and Ministry of Transport, over the May Labor Day holiday, electric rail passenger traffic rose by over four percent year-on-year; the share of electric vehicles (EVs) on the road was up a third from a year earlier; and EV charging volume was up by more than 50 percent (Ministry of Transport, April 28; Xinhua, May 7). Meanwhile, coal-fired generation rose by more than three percent year-on-year in May, providing an additional buffer (Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air, June 18). NEA General Office Deputy Director Zhang Xing (张星) noted in an April press conference that Chinese coal spot prices increased by just 3.9 percent in the month after the start of the war—more than 10 percentage points less than global spot prices. This achievement underscores the "backstop role" (兜底保障作用) of domestically produced coal in the PRC's energy mix (NEA, April 27).

Officials have credited the 14th Five-Year Plan's energy strategy for this outcome. Three weeks into the Strait's closure, Lin Boqiang (林伯强), a member of the National Development and Reform Commission's (NDRC) Energy Price Consultation Committee, wrote that the crisis had demonstrated the energy strategy's "foresight, stability, and resilience" (前瞻性、稳定性与抗风险能力) (Global Times, March 18). In April, the NEA's Zhang Xing similarly credited the strategy with "ensuring the security of [energy] supply under various circumstances" (确保各种情形下的安全保供能力) (NEA, April 27).

The motivation for Beijing's strategy emerged more than two decades ago. At the time, officials worried about the country's hypothesized vulnerability to a U.S. blockade in the Strait of Malacca and other forms of energy disruption. These concerns were manifest in the 14th Five-Year Plan and its subsidiary "Plan for a Modern Energy System" ("十四五"现代能源体系规划), which included the goals of building the domestic portion of the PRC–Russia gas pipeline, constructing major oil reserve projects, and installing more ultra-high-voltage transmission capacity (China Brief, April 12, 2006, May 11; NDRC, March 2021, January 29, 2022). President Xi Jinping has underscored these goals on inspection tours, stating on one occasion that the PRC "must hold its energy bowl firmly in its own hands in order to develop the real economy" (要发展实体经济，能源的饭碗必须端在自己手里).

Since the war's outbreak, Chinese commentaries have celebrated the PRC's preparations for energy shocks (China Brief, March 31). This is not to say, however, that every aspect of the Iran war has been welcomed by PRC leadership. Beijing was likely not thrilled when Washington lifted longtime sanctions on Iran's oil program, which allowed Tehran to market to more buyers instead of selling only to Chinese refiners at a steep discount (NYT, June 17). Iranian attacks on infrastructure in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) will also hurt growth in major recipients of Chinese investment. And the Strait of Hormuz's closure will cast a long shadow on the PRC's economy, which took a hit from the closure of petroleum feedstock manufacturers and now faces overseas importers rocked by depressed demand (Center for Strategic and International Studies [CSIS], April 30). The consensus, however, is that pre-war policies of stockpiling, resource diversification, and electrification have paid off.

The 15th Five-Year Plan Doubles Down

The clearest signal of how Beijing has metabolized the war arrived after the June 17 ceasefire. On June 26, the State Council Information Office held a press conference on its newly issued energy plan, the "15th Five-Year Plan for the Construction of a New-Type Energy System" (新型能源体系建设"十五五"规划) (NDRC, June 25). NEA Director Wang Hongzhi (王宏志) told reporters that "international geopolitical conflicts continue to disrupt the oil and gas chain" (国际地缘冲突持续扰动油气供应链) and that the plan responds in three ways: by developing and storing fossil fuels, substantially increasing non-fossil supply, and strengthening the network of "energy cooperation partners" (能源合作朋友) (People's Daily, June 27).

The plan starts with a summary main objective: to establish by 2030 a "clean, low-carbon, safe, and efficient new-type energy system" (建成清洁低碳安全高效的新型能源体系). This is followed by four primary quantifiable goals: raising total annual energy production to 5.8 billion tons of standard coal equivalent (tce); raising the share of non-fossil fuels in energy consumption to 25 percent; raising the share of wind and solar power in installed generation capacity to 50 percent; and raising the share of non-fossil fuel energy in power generation to 50 percent. The first and second of these goals are "binding" (约束性), while the goal pertaining to wind and solar capacity finds a proxy in the binding goal of reducing carbon intensity. The final goal is labeled as only "indicative" or "anticipated" (预期性) (NDRC, June 25).

Increasing domestic energy production while accelerating the shift toward non-fossil fuels remains essential for the PRC's energy security goals because of the persistent gap between PRC energy demand and domestic energy supply. **[2]** Guidance for oil and liquefied natural gas (LNG) centers around the mandate to "stabilize oil,

grow gas" (稳油增气). This is reflected in the new plan, which leaves its predecessor's crude oil output goal unchanged. LNG's supporting role in reducing carbon intensity and the difficulty of extracting ever more crude oil from mature or hard-to-access domestic sources explain the continued prominence of this mandate (Reuters, May 19; NDRC, June 25; WeChat/NEA, July 21).

Beyond production, it is notable that the 14th Five-Year Plan's flexible-capacity target, which was set at 24 percent of generation capacity by 2025, was conspicuously absent from official August 2025 and June 2026 retrospectives. Those retrospectives instead reported that national energy production in 2025 (5.1 billion tce) overshot the official goal (4.6 billion tce), as did reported shares of both renewable energy power capacity (60 percent, versus a goal of 39 percent) and energy consumption from non-fossil fuels. Crude oil output hit a record high and both natural gas output and energy intensity reduction in 2025 exceeded official goals as well (NDRC, January 29, 2022; NEA, August 26, 2025; NBS, June 5).

Officials subtly acknowledged the challenge of "higher requirements for … safe and stable operation and flexible adjustment capabilities" (安全稳定运行和灵活调节能力提出更高要求) given rapid buildout of renewable energy capacity (NBS, June 5). This challenge is evident in growing national curtailment rates (the proportion of produced power not utilized) for both wind and solar power, demonstrating the PRC's growing need for power absorption solutions amidst massive electrification gains (International Energy Agency, October 7, 2025; Global Carbon Zero, April 10). **[3]**

The latest plan stays broadly within the bounds the overarching energy strategy articulated by President Xi over a decade ago. In a speech outlining the "Four Revolutions and One Cooperation" (四个革命、一个合作), he sought to make energy consumption more efficient, increase domestic energy supply, and enhance international cooperation to ensure resilience (National People's Congress, June 13, 2014). Like the previous plan, the new strategy still envisions non-fossil fuels comprising at least a quarter of energy consumption by 2030 (NDRC, January 29, 2022, June 25). Continuity is even clearer in the context of longer-term national energy goals, including the new plan's aim for the PRC to double the 2025 non-fossil fuel share of energy supply by 2035, which is the deadline for "basically achieving socialist modernization" (基本实现社会主义现代化) (NDRC, March 23, 2021, April 17; People's Daily, June 26).

The current crisis has revealed gaps in the PRC's energy strategy that some argue require a wholesale reorientation, especially given Asian reliance on Qatar for LNG. There is no evidence, however, that Beijing has decided to revise the energy policy guidance it finalized before the closure of the Strait of Hormuz. One official at the China National Petroleum Corporation, for instance, recently stated that oil and natural gas will serve as a "ballast" (压舱石) and "stabilizer" (稳压器) during the transition to greater renewable energy use (The Paper, June 28). Existing initiatives to increase overland gas capacity and diversify sources of oil (including coal-to-oil production) remain top priorities in the plan, which sets the goal of 500 billion cubic meters in primary LNG pipeline transmission capacity (the PRC just having surpassed 400 billion cubic meters last June) and commits to expanding coastal LNG terminals and underground gas storage clusters (NEA, August 29, 2025; NDRC, June 25).

Beijing Balances Diplomatic Ties and Energy Security

The PRC's interest in backing Tehran is tempered by Beijing's energy and financial interests in the Gulf Arab states. PRC reluctance

to extend substantial material aid or unqualified rhetorical support to Iran during the closure of the Strait is a reminder of this constraint, which is likely to endure beyond the current conflict given continued reliance on imported oil and LNG under the 15th Five-Year Plan.

Competing mandates to back Iran against the United States and Israel yet also to avoid the appearance of endorsing Tehran's retaliatory actions across the region are clear in official statements (Financial Times [FT], June 15). In an April 15 call with Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, PRC Foreign Minister Wang Yi (王毅) called for respecting Iran's sovereignty and security, then balanced this support with a thinly veiled swipe at Iran's blockade (PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs [MFA], April 15). This same stance has held through the ceasefire's collapse. At a July 8 press conference, an MFA spokesperson stated that renewed conflict "does not serve any party's interests" and that Washington and Tehran should implement the memorandum of understanding signed in June (MFA, July 8). A week later, an MFA spokesman reiterated this neutral stance, adding that "all relevant parties should meet each other halfway" (相关各方应相向而行) (MFA, July 14).

Positioning between Iran and the Gulf Arab states reflects the PRC's desire to guard its economic interests in the Gulf and to see traffic in the Strait return to pre-war levels, while simultaneously maintaining political backing for Iran. In 2025, PRC two-way trade with Iran was less than 40 percent of that with Saudi Arabia or the UAE; and from 2013–2025, PRC entities' investment in the UAE was triple that in Iran and five times that in Saudi Arabia. Beijing's 2021 pledge in 2021 to invest $400 billion in Iran over 25 years, by contrast, is less certain today, given limited prospects in the highly sanctioned economy compared to its far more diversified neighbors (CSIS, April 30).

Beijing's arms-length treatment of Iran is therefore likely to persist. Without it, Beijing risks an overconfident Tehran taking a more uncompromising stance in negotiations with Washington, which have gained more urgency after the ceasefire's breakdown (Washington Post, July 9). This is also underscored by a near-total lack of mention in recent MFA statements of Lebanon—the issue cited by Tehran in its threats to re-close the Strait—and the reiteration of the PRC–Saudi comprehensive strategic partnership in a June meeting between the two countries' foreign ministers (BBC, June 20; MFA, June 30). Most pointedly, Wang Yi has not called or met with his Iranian counterpart since June 22.

Conclusion

The PRC's response to the U.S.-Iran war has been defined less by adaptation than by confirmation when it comes to energy security. Stockpiling, import diversification, and electrification lessened the initial shock of the Strait's closure, which PRC officials have consistently credited that performance to a strategy set in motion with the 14th Five-Year Plan.

The 15th Five-Year Plan's new energy blueprint, unveiled shortly after the war paused in June, extends core elements of this strategy. Beijing's relatively evenhanded diplomacy toward Iran and the Gulf Arab states has proven equally durable. Party officials may yet signal adjustments to energy policy at the annual National Energy Work Conference in December, but the events of the war's first four months suggest continuity is the more likely path.

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Notes

[1] Energy analysis firm FGE NexantECA estimated that the PRC's crude imports in the second quarter of 2026 were down year-on-year by the equivalent of over a quarter of daily consumption in the month preceding the war. Analysts estimate that some of the demand loss will not return, accelerating the nation's transition to greater electrification (Bloomberg, June 22).

[2] This gap disproportionately comprises crude oil and liquid natural gas (LNG), which together account for about three-quarters of the PRC's net energy import volume despite only comprising around one quarter of its energy consumption (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2025; NBS, June 5).

[3] Curtailment rates for wind and solar climbed from 5.7 and 5.4 percent, respectively, in December 2025 to 8.5 and 9.2 percent, respectively, in February 2026. Curtailment rates also increased by about 1.5 percentage points annually from 2023 to 2025.

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BeiDou satellite in orbit. (Source: China Daily)

Technological Progress in 'Time War' With the West

Ryan Wu
July 24, 2026

Executive Summary

- The People's Republic of China (PRC) has identified control over time, and the precision behind the "granting of time" as a critical capability. It seeks to weaponize "chronopolitics" to gain geopolitical and military advantages—precise timekeeping is critical for the military's intelligentized warfare doctrine and is perceived as essential for avoiding GPS disruption.
- Two key aspects of Beijing's push for sovereignty over the technologies of time are the BeiDou Satellite Navigation system and the National Time Service Center, which help keep the financial system, the power grid, and weapons systems synchronized.
- "Time discourse power," the PRC's attempt to expand its global influence, is also evident in its growing importance in setting technical standards. By 2030, it hopes to entrench its timekeeping standards globally through developing the next quantum-based technologies that define the length of a second. Its strontium clock already accounts for 20 percent of the International Atomic Clock's national weighed calculation, which is shared between the United States, Britain, France, and Japan.

In the spring of 1996, the People's Republic of China (PRC) launched missiles into the sea around Taiwan to intimidate the island before its first free and direct presidential election. Then, by accounts that have since hardened into legend inside the People's Liberation Army (PLA), two of the missiles lost their way after the U.S. severed connection to the American satellite signal guiding them (Sina Military, December 31, 2012). From that humiliation, Beijing drew an enduring lesson: to achieve absolute security in its capabilities, it would have to control the technologies that enabled them. In this case, achieving control meant exerting power over the measurement of time itself.

Time is fundamental to the operation of the modern world, and the task of anchoring it has often intersected with political power. When the great powers fixed the world's meridian at Greenwich, England, in 1884, the clocks of all nations were forced to tick in line with British naval supremacy. Today, modern financial markets, satellites in orbit, and precision weapons all depend on a common understanding of time that is exact to the microsecond.

Beijing has long shared this view of its importance. The National Time Service Center (NTSC; 国家授时中心) describes time as a "core strategic resource for the state" (国家核心战略资源) and state media has similarly described synchronized time as a "strategic instrument bearing on national security" (关乎国家安全的战略重器). Top scientists, meanwhile, have declared that "wherever the nation's interests extend, its timing service will follow" (国家利益拓展到哪里，我们的授时服务就跟到哪里), and that "in an age of precision strike, the atomic clock matters no less than the atomic bomb" (在精确打击时代，原子钟的作用不亚于原子弹) (Xinhua, February 10, 2022; NSTC, May 29). As this suggests, "chronopolitics" (时间政治) is also central to military strategy, which weaponizes time with a view to converting control of the clock into military advantage and geopolitical power (Chinese Social Sciences Net, March 6, 2025; Taiwan Strait Studies, April 16).

Building a Domestic Supply Chain in Time

Central to Beijing's chronopolitical ambitions is the BeiDou Navigation Satellite System (北斗卫星导航系统), the domestic rival to GPS. The PRC government casts BeiDou as a "spatiotemporal benchmark" (时空基准) that the country must build and run independently in the name of national security (Xinhua, November 4, 2022; China Brief, March 1, 2024). Every BeiDou satellite in orbit is a clock. Collectively, these "grant time" (授时), which they broadcast to keep finance, the power grid, and weapons systems synchronized (Yuyuan Tantian, October 19, 2025).

BeiDou is only the visible layer of a broader national system that fuses satellites with long-wave radio and fiber-optic cables into a single space-and-ground whole (星地一体). This realizes an ambition that Qian Xuesen (钱学森), the father of the PRC's missile program, articulated back in 1974, to build "a single great clock for China" (中国大钟) (Xinhua, February 10, 2022). The BeiDou system is a mixed constellation that spans three types of orbits, unlike GPS, which relies on one. Its reach is increasingly global, with ground stations dotted along the partner countries of the Digital Silk Road (数字丝绸之路) (Reference News, October 10, 2025; Guangming Daily, May 28).

The key institution that issues national standard time in the PRC is the National Time Service Center (NTSC; 国家授时中心) of the Chinese Academy of Sciences. Located inland in Xi'an, it was initially set up in 1966 under the codename 326, and hewn into a mountainside with control rooms built to survive a nuclear attack (CCTV, October 19, 2025). The original purpose of the center, which now sets "Beijing Time" (北京时间) and transmits it across the country, was to

support weapons developed as part of what was retroactively named the "Two Bombs, One Satellite" (两弹一星) program (NTSC, November 10, 2022; Chinese Academy of Sciences [CAS], March 7, 2024; People's Daily, January 2, 2025). The NTSC's remit today is openly dual-use. Its synchronized time serves civilian applications including finance, telecommunications, the electricity grid, and transport, alongside military uses such as missile guidance, satellite tracking, and command and control systems (Beijing News, October 19, 2025).

The drive for autonomy extends down to the smallest constituent parts of each satellite. At the level of policy planning, the outline for the 15th Five-Year Plan calls for breakthroughs in quantum precision measurement (量子精密测量), the field from which ever smaller and more exact clocks now flow (Xinhua, March 13). Those breakthroughs are already taking place. Wuhan University's Satellite Navigation and Positioning Technology Research Centre (武汉大学卫星导航定位技术研究中心) recently unveiled what it calls the world's smallest chip-scale atomic clock. The device, which measures just 2.3 cubic centimeters, is roughly a seventh the size of its American equivalent, and its developers are now mass-producing it in the hope of breaking the foreign monopoly on these devices (Guancha, March 19; Changjiang Daily, April 20).

State media coverage has linked the clock explicitly to the Party's political aspirations, describing its purpose as keeping the nation's "time discourse power" (时间话语权)—in other words, PRC relative influence in chronometric technologies—in Chinese hands. The device already serves satellites in low Earth orbit, underwater BeiDou receivers, and drone swarms—all of which would be critical in a conflict in which PLA capabilities would be denied GPS access (Beijing Youth News, May 23, 2024; Changjiang Daily, March 12).

Time is of the Essence for the Military

Temporal precision is more important than ever for military applications. In 2017, the PLA Daily listed "command of time" (制时间权) among other new forms of battlefield control, and set it alongside older domains such as command of the sea (制海权) and the air (制空权) (PLA Daily, October 24, 2017). The PLA Daily article observed this development through the collapse of the U.S. military's kill chain from 48 hours in the 1991 Gulf War down to just 10 seconds in Iraq in 2003. Underscoring the growing importance of precision and speed, the article stated, "lose a millisecond at any link, and victory may change hands" (某个环节失之毫秒，就极有可能胜败易手) (PLA Daily, October 24, 2017).

More recently, former chief of staff of the PLA Rocket Force, Lieutenant General Li Jun (李军), urged the PLA to treat the "time battlefield" (时间战场) as a new domain of war, with its own wargaming system and tactical library for time-based attack and defense (时间攻防战术库) (PLA Daily, January 27).

Satellite navigation systems today rely on extreme precision in timekeeping, down to a billionth of a second: a one nanosecond lag time in a satellite navigation system causes an error of roughly 30 centimeters (Changjiang Daily, March 12; European Space Agency, accessed July 17). These systems also underpin the PLA's doctrine of intelligentized warfare (智能化作战), which seeks to fully remove human delay from the kill chain. This doctrine treats time advantage (时间优势) and the resilience of its time-unification system (时统系统) as core capabilities, and has spent several years working to build them (PLA Daily, February 2, 2023).

A recent alleged attack illustrates the PLA's sense of urgency. In October 2025, the Ministry of State Security accused the U.S. National Security Agency of penetrating the NTSC. It alleged that

the U.S. government agency had planted tools to paralyze the PRC's national time standard on command. This, state media alleged, was the gravest threat the country's "time security" (时间安全) had faced to date, and amounted to an act of aggression in an outright "time war" (时间战) (Yuyuan Tantian; CCTV, October 19, 2025; Sina, October 20, 2025; China Brief, November 7, 2025).

Time to Set Global Standards

The PRC's chronopolitics extends beyond the military domain. A broader campaign sees it as part of Beijing's attempts to influence international technical standards that others must follow. In 2021, the Party leadership issued a "National Standardization Outline" (国家标准化发展纲要) committing the PRC to build a standards system "with Chinese characteristics" (具有中国特色) by 2035 that the rest of the world would adopt as its own (Xinhua, October 10, 2021). As the PLA Daily had put the motivation for this several years prior, "whoever commands the standard commands all under heaven" (得标准者得天下) (PLA Daily, November 24, 2017).
Beijing already has made impressive strides in shaping international standards. By its own official count, as far back as 2018, it contributed close to a third of the world's 5G standard submissions and was leading two-fifths of standardization projects. It now contributes over 40 percent of global 5G standard essential patent declarations and more than half of its global 5G base stations. It means to expand these efforts, and ultimately set the terms for the systems the coming century will run on, from mobile networks to artificial intelligence (Economic Daily, May 22, 2019; Beijing Municipal Intellectual Property Office, July 19, 2024).

The contest over standards became more acute following a 2022 vote by the world's metrologists to redefine the second as a unit of time by 2030. The new definition will likely be far more exact, since the optical frequency standards of multiple national time services are now up to 100 times more accurate than the cesium standard (BIPM, 2022; National Institute of Metrology of China, November 23, 2022; CAS, February 21, 2023). **[1]** Optical clocks, which function by measuring these oscillations, are quantum machines, and the PRC has several advantages in the race to build them—it already leads on a number of subfields of quantum technologies, such as quantum communication (China Brief, June 11). The PRC's strontium clock NTSC-Sr2 (锶光钟) now helps steer International Atomic Time, a standard that until recently only the United States, Britain, France, and Japan kept. Its weight within that calculation has climbed from less than 6 percent in 2021 to nearly 20 percent, the second-largest national share (National Business Daily, October 20, 2025; Science and Technology Daily, February 13). The PRC has also placed the world's first optical clock in orbit, as part of a system to distribute ultra-precise time (CAS, November 1, 2022; NTSC, February 12).

Conclusion

The PRC increasingly treats timekeeping as an instrument of national power. It sees control over its ultra-precise measurement as critical to its economy and its military, and as an avenue to enhance its influence internationally through setting global standards.

In a Taiwan contingency, this domestic technology would enable Chinese forces to degrade GPS through electronic warfare while their own units rely on BeiDou, solving a problem Beijing was first confronted with 30 years ago. As more countries adopt the system, its resilience will grow even further.

Where the United States and much of Europe still keep time overwhelmingly based on satellite signals, the PRC has fused satellite, long-wave,

and fiber-optic cables into a single, integrated civil-military architecture. Beijing's weight in global timekeeping is climbing and its standards are spreading. The longer Washington and its allies treat time as settled infrastructure rather than contested terrain, the more of it they stand to forfeit.

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Notes

[1] In 1967, the 13th General Conference on Weights and Measures (CGPM) officially redefined the second, replacing the previous astronomical definition with an atomic one. Since then, one second has been defined as the duration during which the radiation associated with a cesium-133 atom undergoes 9,192,631,770 oscillations (BIPM, accessed July 16).

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An investment promotion conference to support the "Invest in the XPCC" initiative was held in Haikou, Hainan, in April 2025. (Source: XPCC Daily, April 13, 2025)

Xinjiang Dealmaking Overcomes Sanctions Deterrent

Jonah Reisboard
July 21, 2026

Executive Summary

- The Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC), sanctioned by the United States since 2020, is making overt appeals for international investment. This is likely a result of positive incentives and economic opportunities rather than a response to external sanctions.
- The ease with which the XPCC can identify foreign patrons and the candor of its calls for international investment suggest that the efficacy of U.S. sanctions is limited.
- Outreach, platformed by trade expos and elevated by the One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative, appears to have achieved both political and financial successes, with foreign politicians giving speeches at these events and investment deals inked since 2025 reportedly totaling over $1.5 billion.

The 9th China–Eurasia Expo (中国-欧亚博览会) convened in Urumqi from June 25–29, bringing more than 3,000 companies from around the world to the capital of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) (Belt and Road Journalists Network, June 28). The United Arab Emirates (UAE), Russia, South Korea, and Thailand were represented for the first time, and Kazakhstan and Pakistan were named nations of honor as longstanding participants (Xinhua, June 27; Belt and Road Journalists Network, June 28). This expo, and others like it, advance the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) goal of normalizing the XUAR among foreign elites, despite the CCP's ongoing human rights abuses in the region. **[1]**

The XUAR's geographic position makes it central to Beijing's efforts at global connectivity and overland economic engagement. Expos and other trade shows serve to integrate the XUAR's governance structures with global businesses. This integration continues to take place alongside successive CCP campaigns that erode Uyghur autonomy, and while U.S.-led efforts seek to restrict economic engagement with the region in response. **[2]** The clearest evidence of the limitations of those efforts is the successful global engagement of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC; 新疆生产建设兵团), which has capitalized on these expos to attract billions of dollars of foreign investment in recent years.

Expos Call to 'Invest in the XPCC'

Recent expos in Urumqi have voiced unique appeals to "invest in the XPCC" (投资兵团). These calls first emerged as an official characterization of bilateral signing ceremonies and now stand out as candid requests to support the CCP's settler-colonial body in the region. The XPCC, which maintains the paramilitary institutions of its origin as a settlement of decommissioned World War II soldiers, advances the Party-state's goals of diluting the Uyghur population, building an extensive surveillance network, and constructing prisons and internment camps (Uyghur Human Rights Project, April 26, 2018, August 27, 2020; Miller et al., May 2025). **[3]** While the United States sanctioned the XPCC in 2020, this lever never fully isolated the entity due to its "integration with the corporate, trade, and financial landscape within Xinjiang, China, and the greater region," according to analysis by the Center for Advanced Defense Studies (C4ADS) (Department of the Treasury, July 31, 2020; C4ADS, August 10, 2021).

The call for investment is likely driven more by opportunity than a result of any Western pressure. The People's Republic of China (PRC) established the China (Xinjiang) Pilot Free Trade Zone, covering Urumqi, Kashgar, and Khorgos, in 2023. Along with the development of the One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative's overland Silk Road Economic Belt (丝绸之路经济带), the XUAR has become a hub for overland trade as PRC–Eurasia trade flows increase (China Brief, October 17, 2025).

Foreign politicians have responded positively to the XPCC's appeals at recent investment conferences and expo sessions. At the 2025 Eurasia Commercial Trade Expo (亚欧商品贸易博览会), for example, an "invest in the XPCC" session saw speeches from Avazbek Kerimbaev, vice chairman of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Kyrgyzstan, and Yang Hai (杨海), president of the International Chamber of Commerce of Cambodia (Tianshan Net, June 28, 2025). Yang has supported economic engagement with the XPCC since at least 2024, when he established an XPCC branch for his chamber of commerce (柬埔寨国际商会新疆建设兵团分会) (Jianhua Daily, November 6, 2024).

In the 2026 China–Eurasia Expo, Malaysian senator and Malaysia–China Business Council chairman Low Kian Chuan (卢成全) gave the keynote address, where he suggested that Malaysia could serve as the conduit for the XPCC's entrance into Southeast Asia (The Star, June 30; Facebook/Malaysia-China Business Council, July 2). The participation of

these foreign participants, albeit in an unofficial capacity, reflects the lack of stigma attached to conducting business in the XUAR—and with the XPCC—in much of the world.

The XPCC's appeals for cooperation over the past few years have produced repeated financial successes. As a result of its participation in the 10th China International Consumer Goods Expo (中国国际消费品博览会) in 2025, the XPCC signed agreements for 12 projects priced at $750 million (XPCC Daily, April 15, 2025). At the 8th China International Imports Expo (中国国际进口博览会), also in 2025, the XPCC announced deals covering a further 23 projects, including ten foreign investments that totaled $440 million (XPCC, November 11, 2025). The most recent event, the 2026 China–Eurasia Expo, produced agreements for 18 projects, including 12 with foreign partners, totaling $516 million (China Daily, June 26).

Conclusion

The XPCC and the XUAR regional government have found a feasible and relatively simple workaround to U.S. sanctions. Rallying behind OBOR investments and the PRC's friendly relations with its neighbors, foreign investment now drives the XPCC's development, despite U.S. attempts to cut it off from the global economy. Its expo-based dealmaking shows that the financial burden of U.S. sanctions has been outmatched by the allure of OBOR-related profits.

If the XPCC can be so explicit in its calls for foreign investment and still come away with deals while under U.S. sanctions, the United States needs a new approach to achieve its foreign policy goals in the XUAR. As of now, the XPCC is still benefiting from the PRC's regional diplomacy and economic integration across Eurasia.

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Notes

[1] Religious and ethnic repression continue to take on new forms. For instance, the expo concluded just days before the Ethnic Unity and Progress Promotion Law came into effect on July 1.

[2] XUAR-based expos are the most visible aspect of the PRC's attempts to integrate the region with the global economy. Chinese digital trade networks, such as Alibaba's electronic world trade platform and its logistics arm, Cainiao (菜鸟), operate to obscure XUAR-origin goods and facilitate their shipment around the world (China Brief, May 28, June 6).

[3] Miller, Frank, Tung Ho, Kenneth Allen, and Arran Hope, eds. The People's Liberation Army as Organization Volume 3.0. Washington, D.C.: The Jamestown Foundation; Vienna: Exovera, 2025.

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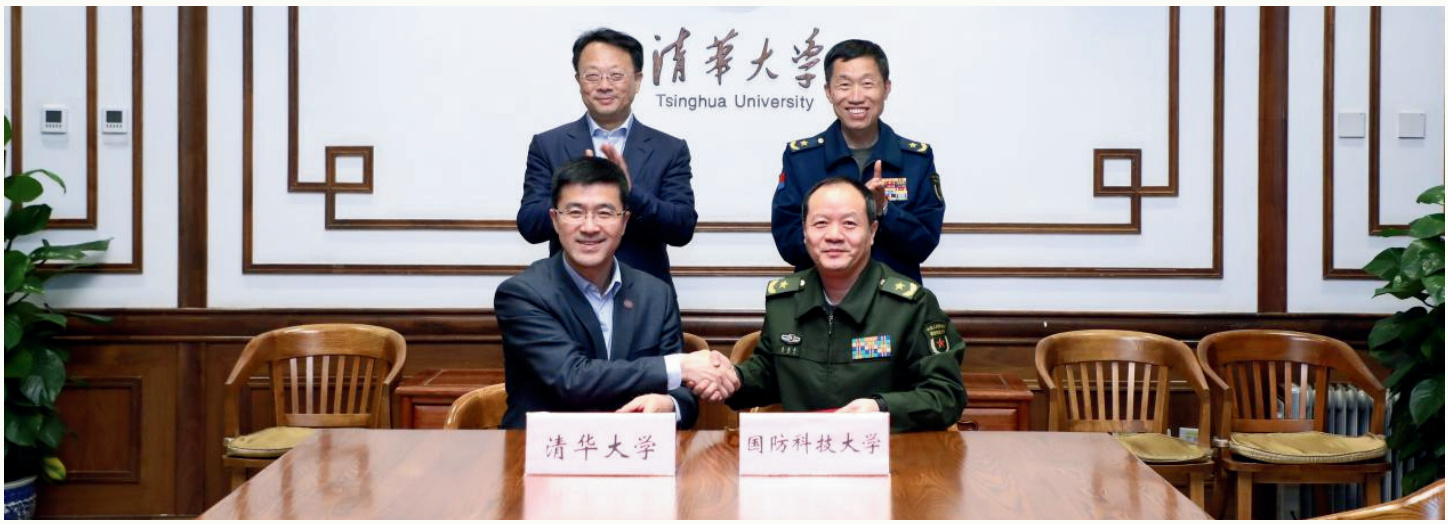

Tsinghua University signed a cooperation agreement with the National Defense Science and Technology University in 2023. (Source: Tsinghua University, April 24, 2023)

Draft Law Would Exploit Tech for National Mobilization

Samantha Hoffman
July 23, 2026

Executive Summary

- Draft revisions to the *National Defense Mobilization Law* seek to ensure that civilian enterprises and capabilities, such as artificial intelligence developers and cybersecurity firms, efficiently support national mobilization. They also call for the development of more advanced data services.
- The revisions are intended to make the system stronger and more operationally coherent, in part by taking advantage of technological developments from the past 15 years since the law's passage
- The proposed update would also reinforce the Party's ability to manage supply chains and ensure that the needs of the mobilization system are met. This would occur through mandating supply chain security assessments, as well as through the standardization of data collection, processing, and exchange across civilian and military systems so that civilian technological capacity can be rapidly converted into military capability.

Technology firm Moonshot unveiled its latest model, Kimi K3, in mid-July with claims that it rivals the best U.S. competitors (Kimi, July 16). State media coverage linked its success with the government policies that have "promoted an overall and systematic leap in the comprehensive strength of artificial intelligence" (推动人工智能综合实力整体性、系统性跃升) (Xinhua, July 17). Days after the model's release, however, a White House advisor accused the company of stealing capabilities from U.S. firm Anthropic, and the U.S. Treasury Secretary threatened sanctions (Fox News, July 21; X/mkratsios47, July 22). More troubling than these allegations, though, are the ramifications of these advances means in within the Chinese system. Artificial intelligence (AI) companies within the People's Republic of China (PRC) operate within a system that is both designed to and is making strides in efforts to convert civilian high-tech capabilities, including AI, to military use as a present requirement.

In April, the National People's Congress (NPC) proposed draft revisions to its National Defense Mobilization Law for the first time since its promulgation in 2010 (NPC Observer, April 27). The draft revisions codify deepened Party authority and institutional accountability, making the mobilization system stronger and more operationally coherent (China Brief, June 12). The revisions, which were drafted more than 15 years after the law's original passage, have been made in part to adapt to changes in technological circumstances, with implications for mobilization planning.

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) fuses national development interests with national defense interests as part of a single overarching agenda through the Integrated National Strategic System and Capabilities (INSSC). Technology is the area where that fusion is most apparent, because the capabilities driving economic development are increasingly directly tied to mobilization dependencies.

Controlling And Exploiting Technology for Mobilization

Since the National Defense Mobilization Law's initial adoption in 2010, technology's evolution has dramatically expanded what mobilization can achieve while simultaneously deepening the entanglement between civilian and military capability. The law's technology provisions focus on creating the conditions through which civilian technological infrastructure can be relied on as a foundational layer of capabilities that support military operations. As a March 2026 PLA Daily analysis described, the technologies, resources, infrastructure, and social mobilization capabilities of the civilian system can be directly integrated into the combat system (PLA Daily, March 26). **[1]**

The draft law contains substantial new technology-related content. These provisions reflect capabilities, infrastructure, and vulnerabilities that either did not exist or were in a far more nascent state when the 2010 law was adopted. The content included in the law covers three distinct areas: infrastructure supporting the mobilization system itself, including its digital and intelligent capabilities; data that will support real-time awareness of resource availability and supply chain chokepoints; and obligations placed on technology assets in wartime.

Infrastructure that can support a dynamic and adaptive mobilization system is central to this effort. Article 4 of the draft law explicitly calls for "raising national defense mobilization's informatization and intelligentization level" (提升国防动员信息化智能化水平) to strengthen mobilization (NPC Observer, April 27). Part of that process is focused on creating efficiency. The vision is for intelligent technologies like large models to enable the automatic conversion of national defense mobilization potential into actual capabilities, with digital resources

improving the movement of materials "from factories directly to battlefields" (工厂直达战场) (PLA Daily, March 21, 2025). Article 7 then calls for the development of a "national defense mobilization data services and support system" (国防动员数据服务保障制度). These mandates are reliant on the integration into the mobilization system of research institutes and companies that build and operate the underlying infrastructure. This ensures reliability and that the system works. The draft law's reinforcement of existing legal obligations on enterprises and institutions responsible for participating in mobilization work support this effort.

Supply chain security is critical for mobilization readiness and the state's sustained operations in a protracted conflict. Article 44 of the draft law introduces supply chain security assessments, an addition to the 2010 law. The article imposes on mobilization agencies the obligation to assess and actively manage the security and resilience of military equipment supply chains (NPC Observer, April 27). It remains to be seen, however, whether the state can ensure the "continuous mobilization of human, material, financial, and scientific and technological resources" (能否确保持续动员人力、物力、财力、科技等资源) in high-intensity, high-technology mechanized, informationized, and intelligentized warfare, while also ensuring that systemic "economic and social risks are not triggered in the process" (不引发经济社会系统性风险) (Soul of China, March 18).

The draft law also addresses what happens to technology assets once mobilization is declared. Articles 45 and 47 extend existing stockpiling and priority supply obligations to data and software, alongside other strategic assets like physical equipment, materials, and energy. Among the provisions of article 46 is a call for "promoting civil–military common technical standards" (推广军民通用的技术标准) (NPC Observer, April 27). The standardization of data collection, processing, and exchange across civilian and military systems is a precondition for the rapid conversion of civilian technological capacity into military capability. **[2]**

Once mobilization is declared, the draft law introduces two new provisions directly related to the information environment. Article 70 requires authorities to release authoritative information, manage all communications platforms, and standardize information dissemination order. Article 71 adds wireless communications to the list of sectors subject to wartime state control, which in practice could include everything from the requisition of civilian satellite communications systems to reprioritizing critical communications networks for military use.

Conclusion

The draft law's technology provisions largely reflect changes already underway in the PRC's mobilization system, but their codification is significant. Companies ranging from AI developers to cybersecurity firms to infrastructure operators are directly accountable to the PRC's wartime mobilization planning and future conversion requirements. As a result, models like Kimi K3, whatever their origins, exist within a legal architecture that treats it as a mobilizable asset. Moreover, because the law makes clear that integration into the mobilization system is a continuous requirement, the condition that critical and emerging technology must be dual-use should therefore be understood as a permanent one.

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Her work has shaped global approaches to understanding challenges posed by the Chinese party-state's harnessing of technology for security and propaganda purposes.

Dr. Hoffman is an adviser to the UK-based Coalition on Secure Technology (CIM-Coalition), and Senior Fellow at the Jamestown Foundation. She has publicly testified in the United States Congress, the House of Commons of the United Kingdom, and the European Parliament. She has been quoted in international media, including in outlets such as the BBC, The New York Times, The Financial Times, The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal, Foreign Policy, and The Guardian.

Dr. Hoffman holds a PhD in Politics and International Relations from the University of Nottingham (2017), an MSc in Modern Chinese Studies from the University of Oxford (2011), a BA in International Affairs from Florida State University (2010), and a BA in Chinese Language and Culture from Florida State University (2010)

Notes

[1] The relevant passage from the article reads: "Following the basic regulations of complex system coupling, resource allocation across all domains, and capability transformation between peacetime and wartime, the technologies, resources, infrastructure, and social mobilization capabilities carried by the civilian system can be directly integrated into the combat system through structural embedding, functional transformation, and systematic collaboration, providing strong support for the generation, expansion, and upgrading of military capabilities" (遵循复杂系统耦合、资源全域配置与能力平战转化基本规律，民用体系所承载的技术、资源、基础设施与社会动员能力，通过结构性嵌入、功能性转化与体系化协同，可直接融入作战体系，为军事能力生成、拓展与升级提供有力支撑).

[2] For example, see: Standards Administration of China, May 21, 2019; National Development and Reform Commission, January 2019; Dongfanghong Think Tank, January 2026.

To read this article on the Jamestown website, click here.

Taiwan President Lai Ching-te announces 17 major strategies to respond to five major national security and united front threats against Taiwan in March 2025. (Source: Office of the President of the Republic of China)

Taiwan Intensifies Resistance to PRC Political Warfare

Matthew Fulco
July 16, 2026

Executive Summary

- Under Lai Ching-te, Taiwan has significantly strengthened its countermeasures against political warfare from the People's Republic of China (PRC). Prosecutions of espionage cases, expulsions of influencers calling for military invasions of Taiwan, and tighter outbound travel restrictions to the PRC have increased since Lai unveiled his 17-point national security plan in 2025.
- Espionage is the most damaging aspect of the PRC's political warfare against Taiwan, and Beijing has been targeting members of its military. Taiwan has stepped up prosecutions, with convicted spies handed heavy prison sentences.
- Taiwan is choosing to respond to political warfare because, unlike military coercion, there is a lower risk of conflict escalation arising from more aggressive law enforcement efforts. The enforcement actions are also consistent with Taiwanese law.

Information Warfare

Taiwan is intensifying efforts to resist attempts by the People's Republic of China (PRC) to subvert its political system with the ultimate goal of annexation. In late June, its National Security Bureau announced the launch of a website for Chinese citizens to safely report intelligence tips with a video shared on social media (National Security Bureau, accessed July 1). The move mirrors steps taken by other Western intelligence agencies, but it also appears to be a direct response to the PRC's rollout of an online platform to encourage reporting of "Taiwan independence" (台独) activities (Taiwan Affairs Office, August 2, 2024; YouTube/Central Intelligence Agency, February 12).

The Lai Ching-te (賴清德) administration is aggressively prosecuting PRC espionage, cracking down on subversive Chinese influencers, and increasing oversight of Taiwanese politicians and retired military personnel traveling to the PRC. Taipei has been able to carry out these administrative measures because they do not require the approval of the opposition-controlled Legislative Yuan. This contrasts with a relative lack of progress on Lai's domestic defense agenda, where opposition legislators from the Kuomintang (KMT) and Taiwan People's Party (TPP) have stymied the efforts of Lai's Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), with troubling implications for Taiwan's military readiness.

Prosecuting Espionage

Espionage poses the most immediate national security risk to Taiwan of any PRC political warfare and the Lai administration has targeted it aggressively. In 2024, the most recent year for which government data is publicly available, Taiwan indicted 64 individuals for espionage-related crimes, up from 48 in 2023 and just 10 in 2022. Military personnel, including active and retired service members, accounted for two-thirds of the defendants in 2024, demonstrating the CCP's persistent attempts to infiltrate Taiwan's armed forces (China Brief, November 10, 2023, May 9, 2025).

Since Lai introduced a 17-point national security plan in 2025, high-profile espionage indictments involving the military have increased markedly (Office of the President of the Republic of China, March 13, 2025). In April, six Taiwanese military personnel—two active-duty and four retired—who had been indicted in November 2025 for leaking military secrets to the PRC received prison sentences of 4.5–8.5 years from Taiwan's High Court. Five of the defendants were found guilty of "developing organizations [for the PRC], and spying on, collecting, leaking, delivering, or transmitting classified information on military, national defense, and official matters" (發展組織、刺探、收集、洩漏、交付或傳遞軍事、國防、公務等機密資料). They also recruited Taiwanese citizens and active and retired military personnel. The PRC funneled NT$11.1 million ($348,000) into Taiwan to fund the operation, prosecutors say (Central News Agency [CNA], April 15).

In May, CTi News (中天新聞) reporter Lin Chen-yu (林宸佑), also known as Ma De (馬德), was indicted on charges of contravening the Anti-Infiltration Act (反滲透法) and other national security laws (RTI, May 6). Prosecutors say that Lin had recruited six military personnel (both active-duty and retired) to gather military intelligence and record pro-Beijing videos. The case allegedly includes leaked classified documents about the Taiwanese military's elite 333rd, 66th, and 99th brigades, known for their combat capabilities (The Liberty Times [LTN], June 21). The Taiwanese Army's 333rd Mechanized Infantry Brigade has trained and conducted exercises with the U.S. military for many years (The Taipei Times, June 22).

In yet another case involving Taiwan's military, Taiwan's Supreme Court in late June rejected the

appeal of former diabolo instructor Lu Chi-hsien (魯紀賢). Earlier this year, Lu was sentenced to 10.5 years in prison for spying for the PRC. He recruited seven military officers, soldiers, or their associates for these espionage crimes (SETN, June 25). Most notably, Lu and his accomplices leaked the itineraries for then-President Tsai Ing-wen's (蔡英文) 2023 Guatemala and Belize state visits to the PRC (Tai Sounds, June 16).

Influencer Crackdown

In tandem with its anti-espionage campaign, the Lai administration has cracked down on PRC influencers residing in Taiwan who have advocated on social media for its forceful annexation by Beijing. While such commentary was tolerated under previous administrations, which hesitated to punish individuals based on free speech grounds lest they be accused of authoritarian inclinations, mainstream opinion in Taiwan has hardened against the CCP's subversive activities.

For that reason, there has been limited pushback against the expulsion of several prominent PRC influencers who held dependency permits through marriage to Taiwanese citizens. The most prominent of them is Liu Zhenya (劉振亞), who has about 500,000 followers on the short-video platform Douyin. She was deported in March 2025 after the Taiwanese government assessed that her content supporting a PRC military takeover of Taiwan threatened national security. Specifically, she was found to have violated the Act Governing Relations between the People of the Taiwan Area and the Mainland Area (臺灣地區與大陸地區人民關係條例) (Ministry of Justice, accessed July 13). Her residency permit was revoked and she cannot reapply for a family-based permit for five years (EBC News, March 25, 2025).

During the same month, two other PRC influencers were expelled for similar offenses. The women, Xiaowei (小微) and Enqi (恩綺), had 150,000 and 80,000 Douyin followers at the time they were ordered to leave Taiwan, respectively (The Taipei Times, March 27, 2025).

The Lai administration's influencer crackdown widened in late June. At that time, the National Immigration Agency (NIA) announced that a Chinese man who filmed restricted parts of Taoyuan International Airport during a visit to Taiwan last year and uploaded the footage to social media would be barred from re-entering the country for two years. The video, which included footage of security screening and immigration inspection areas, was posted on the Shanghai-based video platform Bilibili (LTN, June 29).

Tighter PRC Travel Restrictions

The boldest aspect of the Lai administration's pushback against PRC political warfare is arguably the implementation of tighter restrictions on the travel of Taiwanese to the PRC. In this case, the policies are primarily preemptive and the people involved have not committed any crimes. The administration has recognized, however, that lax oversight of travel to the PRC undermines national security by providing Beijing with easy access to politically sensitive persons.

A notable policy shift came in September 2025 ahead of the PRC's massive military parade celebrating the 80th anniversary of World War II's end. A decade earlier, a delegation of mostly retired Taiwanese military officers attended the parade to celebrate the 70th anniversary, along with former KMT chairman Lien Chan (連戰), who also served as the country's vice president from 1996–2000. This embarrassed the Taiwanese government, handing the PRC a propaganda coup. Lien insisted on attending, even though then-president Ma Ying-jeou (馬英

九) of the KMT had advised against it (LTN, September 3, 2025). The Taiwanese attendees appeared subservient to the CCP leadership, reinforcing the PRC's "one China" principle that asserts Beijing's sovereignty over Taiwan.

For the 80th anniversary, the government banned all serving government officials and active-duty military from attending the parade, and permanently restricted former deputy heads (and higher) of agencies handling national defense, foreign affairs, and intelligence from attending related official PRC events. Violation of the restrictions could result in high administrative fines, suspension of pensions, and forfeiture of military awards (Taiwan Mainland Affairs Council [MAC], August 14, 2025).

The Lai administration upped the ante in June, barring personnel from both the central and local governments from attending the Straits Forum in Xiamen, Fujian Province (MAC, June 4). In 2025, only central government officials were prevented from attending. The administration's logic is sound: Under the guise of promoting cross-Strait business ties, the event is a hotbed of united front activity that aims to co-opt Taiwanese into supporting unification with the PRC. Forbidding attendance by government officials reduces national security risks, while not interfering with broader commercial ties. The personnel in KMT Vice Chairman Chang Jung-kung's (張榮恭) delegation were unaffected and attended the forum (China Times, June 5).

Conclusion

In the past 15 months, Taiwan has significantly stepped up resistance to the PRC's political warfare. It has tackled the problem from three main angles with aggressive prosecution of espionage crimes, a crackdown on subversive Chinese influencers and tighter travel restrictions on politically sensitive Taiwanese to the PRC. These actions are low-risk from a conflict escalation perspective, unlike responding to PRC military coercion, and also conform to Taiwanese law. As Beijing continues to wage public opinion and political warfare against Taiwan in the months ahead, the efficacy of Taipei's new measures will be put to the test.

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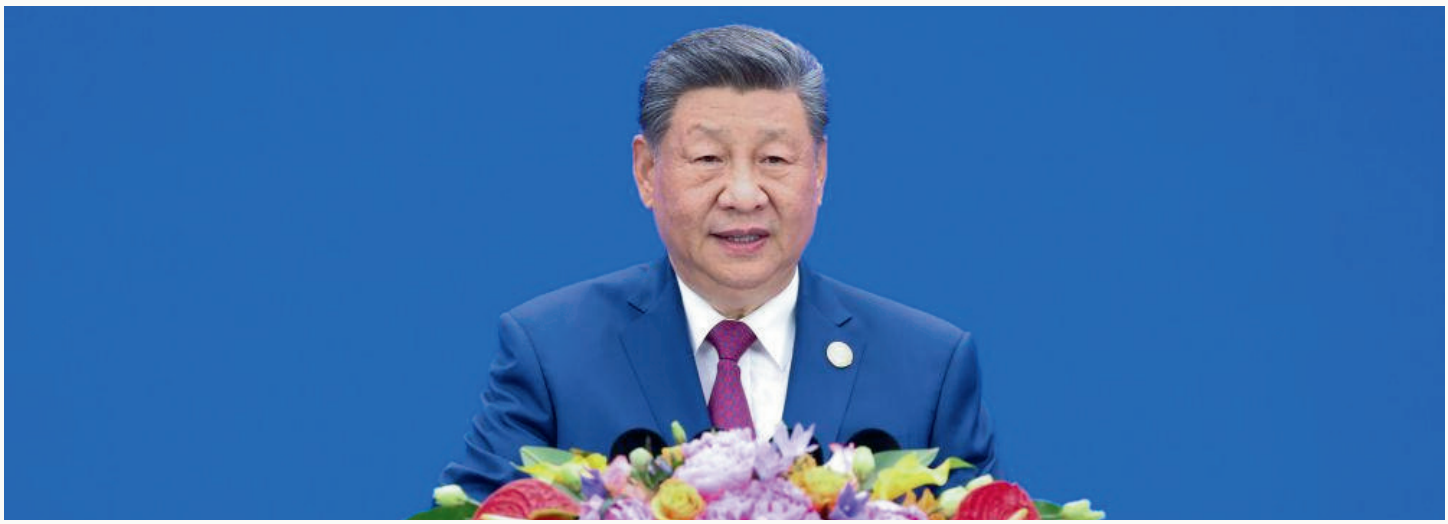

General Secretary Xi Jinping delivers opening remarks at the 2026 World Artificial Intelligence Conference and High-Level Meeting on AI Global Governance on July 17. (Source: Xinhua)

Xi Pursues AI Governance Leadership at Beijing Summit

Sunny Cheung & Shijie Wang
July 22, 2026

Executive Summary

- Xi Jinping signaled Beijing's desire to shape the global governance of artificial intelligence (AI) standards in a July 17 keynote at the World Artificial Intelligence Conference (WAIC) in Shanghai. He also unveiled a new institution, the World AI Cooperation Organization, which will anchor those efforts in the People's Republic of China (PRC).
- The PRC is seeking to embed its preferred security and governance objectives into global standards by first targeting global south countries, offering training programs, making Chinese AI models available, and providing draft templates for nations attempting to regulate AI.
- Xi's speech and the presence at WAIC of leading robotics companies underscore the prioritization of integrating AI with hardware, as well as the need to cultivate export markets for the country's intelligent manufactures.

On July 17, Chinese president Xi Jinping addressed the 2026 World Artificial Intelligence Conference and High-Level Meeting on AI Global Governance (世界人工智能大会暨人工智能全球治理高级别会议) in Shanghai. His remarks centered around the question, "when machines begin thinking, how will humans coexist with them?" (当机器开始思考，人类如何与之相处) (Xinhua, July 17).

One response announced at the conference was the creation of a World Artificial Intelligence Cooperation Organization (WAICO; 世界人工智能合作组织). This new institution, which is to be headquartered in Shanghai, is billed as the first intergovernmental body dedicated to artificial intelligence (AI) (Xinhua, July 17).

Xi's speech and the initiatives he unveiled are the public face of a strategy that has been building throughout 2026. This strategy has focused heavily on courting the developing world to buy into the PRC's domestic AI ecosystem via institutions, norms and standards, and the adoption of technologies in which Beijing excels at producing, such as robotics.

Xi Bridges Domestic Applications and Future Exports

Xi's pitch focused primarily on the developing world. He framed WAICO, which is to be headquartered in Shanghai, as aimed at closing the "intelligence gap" (智能鸿沟) for developing states (Xinhua, July 17). **[1]** Other opportunities targeting Global South countries include 5,000 AI "research and training opportunities" (研修培训名额) provided by centers in countries within ASEAN, the Arab League, the African Union, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Latin America, and BRICS. He also offered to provide the Mazu (妈祖) meteorological AI system to 30 countries (Xinhua, July 17).

This pitch is part of what the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) refers to as "inclusive" (包容) global governance. Under this framing, Xi called for open cooperation, keeping AI "under human control" (处于人类控制之下), pursuing AI based on an ethics shaped by "all humanity's shared values" (全人类共同价值), and global governance centered on the United Nations.

In concrete policy terms, the National Development and Reform Commission's (NDRC) released an eight-point "Action Plan" (行动计划) that laid out the breadth of Beijing's ambitions (NDRC, July 17). This plan is a blueprint for underwriting the entirety of global AI governance, from cooperation on research and development to shared data and computing power to embedding Beijing's preferred security and other norms into international rules and regulations. Beijing's hope is that it can exploit the current governance vacuum before Washington organizes an alternative. In this way, it is following an approach already taken across a range of other sectors, including humanoid robotics and electronic vehicles.

Xi's Pitch Focuses on Robotics and Regulation

Xi's materialist preferences, which in previous years have manifested in a focus on the "real" (实体) economy, now amount to an endorsement of the PRC's push toward embedding AI in physical robotics technology (Xinhua, July 17). In his speech, he noted AI's evolution "toward the 'physical world'" (向'物理世界') and the presence of intelligent terminals in "millions of households" (千家万户). The expo itself was full of showcases from robotics firms, and a series of advancements from dexterous robotics hands to brain-to-robot control platforms were announced (Xinhua, July 19, July 21; Sina; IT Home, July 19).

Underneath the obvious appeal of the PRC's robotics sector, the PRC also intends to win friends as a leader in regulating AI technologies.

This is clear in Xi's repeated references to the country's "AI+" agenda (China Brief, March 28, 2025, September 21, 2025, October 1, 2025). It is also apparent in a series of recent regulations that emerged in the first half of 2026. **[2]** Released in the runup to the conference, the regulations offer a state-led template that appeals to Global South regulators drafting AI rules. Countries including Cambodia, Thailand, and Kazakhstan have already endorsed Beijing's approach following the conference (MFA, July 17; People's Daily, July 19).

Conclusion

The PRC used the World AI Conference in Shanghai to pitch the world—though primarily developing countries—on its leadership in AI governance and technological development. Its proposals were informed by a series of recent domestic AI regulations and industrial policies, and are set to be distributed under the newly formed WAICO.

As Beijing seeks to simultaneously build multilateral institutions to govern emerging policy domains and secure export markets for its critical technologies, analysts should track the development of its latest initiatives and the responses of those countries Beijing seeks to draw closer into its orbit.

Notes

[1] The establishment of WAICO follows on the heels of the World Data Organization, which Beijing unveiled in May (China Brief, June 12).

[2] So far in 2026, relevant AI-related regulations include the "Interim Measures on AI Anthropomorphic Interactive Services" (人工智能拟人化互动服务管理暂行办法). Issued on April 10 by the Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC) and other regulators, these ban virtual companions for minors, mandate distress detection, and impose security assessment filings for popular platforms (CAC, April 10; Legal Daily, April 13). April also brought draft rules on digital virtual humans and public penalties against ByteDance-affiliated apps for failing to label AI-generated content (CAC, April 3; TechNode, April 29).

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