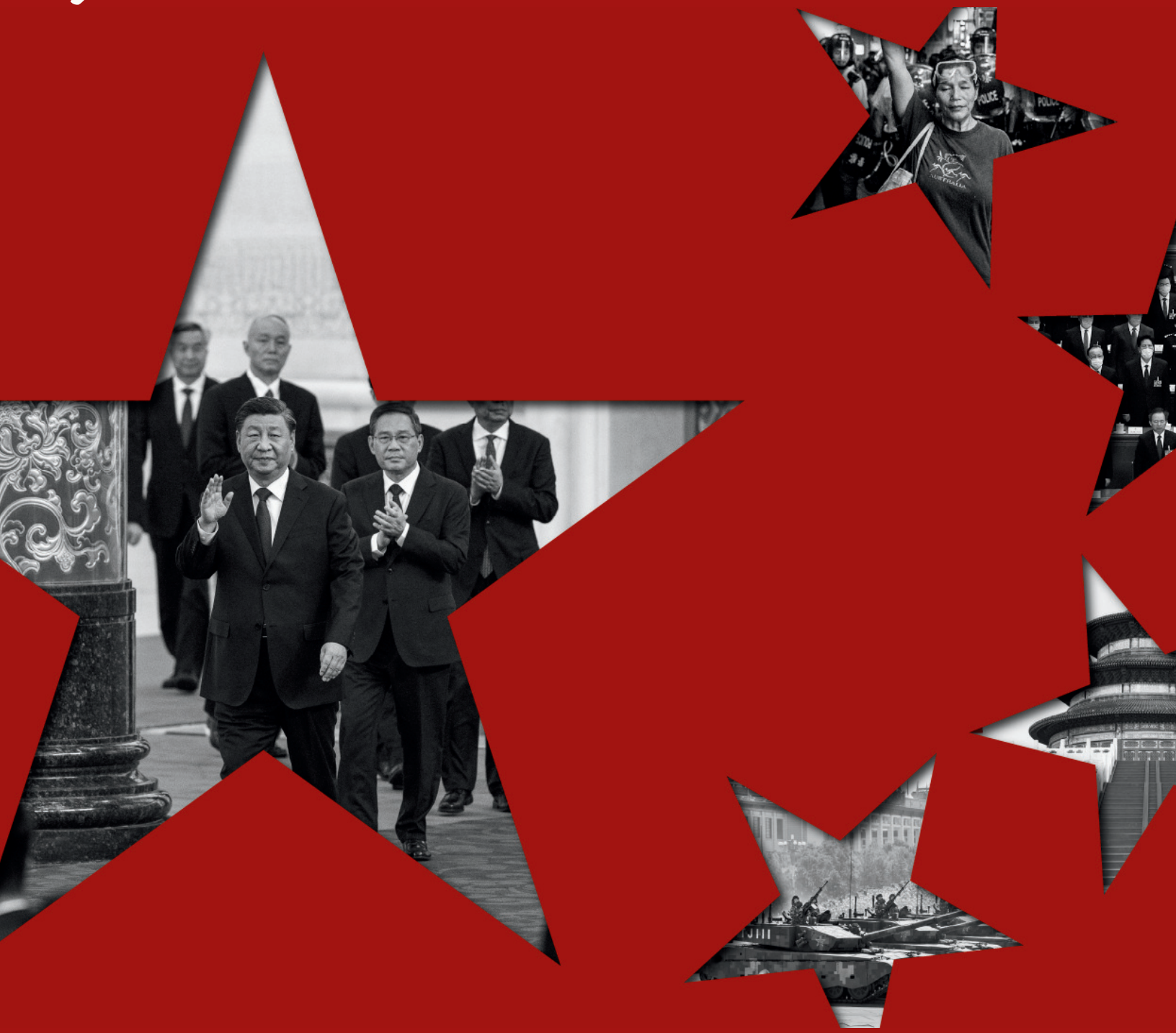
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Foreign Minister Wang Yi delivers a speech at the opening ceremony of the 2026 Global Governance Forum in Xiong'an.

Party Pitches Global Governance in Xi's Potemkin City

Arran Hope
October 30, 2026

Executive Summary

- The 2026 Global Governance Forum was carefully stage-managed by the Chinese People's Institute of Foreign Affairs—part of the united front system—to present an image of the People's Republic of China (PRC) as a benevolent provider of techno-utopian solutions for the rest of the world.
- Beijing is adept at using events like the forum, which capped a year of impressive consensus-building, particularly at the United Nations, and particularly among Global South countries, to enhance its legitimacy and expand its influence within the international system.
- Outcomes included position papers on shaping international rules for new frontiers (the deep sea, polar regions, and outer space) and for emerging domains (artificial intelligence and cyberspace). Concerted efforts were also made to shape the international human rights regime, which received support from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.
- The forum's aims are explicitly hostile to the West. Foreign Minister Wang Yi's speech accused the United States of pursuing a model that "monopolizes power and practices double standards," while a Party think tank report on the Global Governance Initiative described Beijing's approach as "breaking away from the traditionally Western-dominated narrative framework."

In a Fortnight

Over four days in late October, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) staged an ambitious event to stake its claim to global leadership to the outside world. This was the 2026 Global Governance Forum, which brought together members of the "strategic, political, academic, and business communities of 97 countries and international organizations" (来自97个国家和国际组织的战略界、政界、学界、工商界等代表) to provide a sheen of legitimacy to Beijing's attempts to refashion the international system in a way that better reflects its interests. The forum's theme was "Rebuilding Confidence and Cooperation: Changes Unseen in A Century and Reforming and Improving Global Governance" (重建信心与合作：百年变局与改革完善全球治理) (Xinhua, October 26).

United Front Fingerprints

The primary host for the event was the Chinese People's Institute of Foreign Affairs (CPIFA; 中国人民外交学会), a "mass organization" (群团组织) that operates under the direction of the Office of the Central Institutional Organization Commission. **[1]** Although it does not have direct ties to the Party's United Front Work Department, the institute functions as part of the Party's wider united front system—as do other mass organizations, such as the All-China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese and the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (China Brief, May 9, 2019, June 21, 2024).

The involvement of CPIFA, through which the Party works to shape foreign perceptions of the People's Republic of China (PRC), is key to understanding the forum's messaging function. While General Secretary Xi Jinping spent the weeks surrounding the forum stoking nationalism by exalting the heroes of the Party's "Long March" and doubling down on the Party's endemic corruption issues, the forum sought to dispel fears of the country's persistent economic problems by projecting a vision of a high-tech future.

The venue for the forum, Xiong'an New Area, underscored the propaganda value of the occasion. One of Xi's signature projects, Xiong'an is a planned city located just outside Beijing. The government argues that its functional role is to relieve congestion in the capital by relocating non-essential government offices, but in practice it is much more than this. Xiong'an is a hubristic project that, in under a decade, has sought to create a new type of digitally integrated city, incorporating the various emerging technologies that Beijing has championed in recent years.

Foreign Minister Wang Yi (王毅), in his keynote speech at the forum, hit all of the propaganda points used in the Party's messaging to describe the city. He called it "a project of millenial significance" (千年大计), "a city of the future" (未来之城), "a brand-new endeavor in exploring modernized governance" (探索现代化治理的崭新实践), and "an exemplar of high-quality development" (高质量发展样板) (PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs [MFA], October 23).

External observers have been more skeptical. Around the time that Wang Yi announced the Global Governance Forum earlier this year, the urban studies scholar Andrew Stokols wrote that Xiong'an "has been largely seen as a failure so far" (Substack/Sinocities, May 20). **[2]** The critique is largely based on concerns about the decision to build the city on a floodplain, the lack of demand from people wishing to relocate into the city, and the enormous investments made that are yet to realize returns.

Xiong'an nevertheless has significant propaganda value. As Stokols notes, the city is a "showcase for a new ideology of the urban under Xi Jinping" (Stokols, 2025). **[3]** Its conceptual structure of three cities in one—the built

environment above ground, an underground network of over 100 kilometers of utility tunnels below ground, and a digital twin in the cloud—is supposed to show the benefits of Chinese-style modernization and provide a model to the world. During the forum, a video pushed by a number of state media and PRC embassy accounts on Western social media platforms tried to dispel doubts about Xiong'an. But as of October 30, the short video, which is hosted by the Western, PRC-based influencer Tom Shanahan and funded by the Hebei International Communication Center, had accrued fewer than 200 views (YouTube/iHebei, October 26).

Participants literally signed on to the official narrative about Xiong'an at the forum, which the People's Daily framed as "both a grand gathering of ideas on global governance and an important window for the world to observe China's governance" (既是一场全球治理的思想盛会，也是世界观察中国之治的重要窗口) (People's Daily, October 25). After tours around the city, including to its "smart city innovation center," all participants affirmed in the "Forum Vision Document" (论坛愿景文件) released at the event that "we … believe that the principles upheld in [Xiong'an's] planning and construction have important reference value for reforming and improving global governance" (我们 … 认为雄安新区规划建设中秉持的理念对于改革完善全球治理具有重要借鉴意义) (Xinhua, October 26).

Xiong'an's importance for international messaging is evident in the sensitivity about the topic within the PRC. Stokols recounts an attempt to interview officials involved in the city's planning, but was rebuffed, with one professor declining to write a letter of introduction for fear of reprisals (Substack/Sinocities, May 20). Blunter commentators have described Xiong'an as a "Potemkin metropolis" (Hudson Institute, May 13).

Human Rights Hypocrisy Among Forum Outcomes

Beijing is adept at using events like the Global Governance Forum to enhance its legitimacy and expand its influence within the international system. Despite the fragile foundations of the event itself—echoed ironically in the choice of venue—the forum capped a year of impressive consensus-building, particularly at the United Nations, and particularly among Global South countries. Chinese experts have praised these efforts as helping the PRC "acquire the institutional capacity to coordinate positions and form a collective voice within the UN framework" (具备了在联合国框架内协调立场、形成集体声音的制度能力) (Guangming Daily, October 26).

Following Xi's proposal of the Global Governance Initiative (GGI)—his fourth global initiative—at the Tianjin Summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in September 2025, Beijing first set up a "Friends of Global Governance Group" at the UN in New York. This group has branches in Geneva and Vienna, and in May released a joint communiqué with signatories from over 60 countries (PRC Mission to the UN, December 9, 2025; MFA, May 29; People's Daily, May 30). In June, the State Council released a detailed white paper on "Building a More Just and Reasonable Global Governance System" (构建更加公正合理的全球治理体系), providing more detail on the specifics of Beijing's plans to reform global governance (SCIO, June 6; China Brief, June 26). Beijing already claims tangible results of the GGI, presenting the Hong Kong-based International Court of Mediation, the Shanghai-based World AI Cooperation Organization, and the Beijing-based World Data Organization as "vivid implementations" (生动实践) of the initiative (Guangming Daily, October 26).

Beijing's sought to use the forum to advance its agenda in several key directions. Amid the expected advocacy for expanding the discourse power of Global South countries within the UN system, including through reforms to the UN Security Council, and reforming the global financial and trade systems, two areas of intent stood out. The first is Beijing's desire to shape international rules in both new frontiers—such as the deep sea, polar regions, and outer space—and emerging domains—AI, cyberspace, and outer space. The clearest evidence for this was the release of a "Progress Report on the AI Capacity-Building Action Plan for Good and for All" (人工智能能力建设普惠计划〉进展报告) and a paper titled "China's Position on Strengthening Outer Space Governance" (关于加强外空治理的中国立场) (MFA, October 23; October 26).

As these and other documents released at the summit make clear, Beijing's institutional and normative innovations are explicitly anti-Western. Wang Yi presented his audience with a "stark" (对比鲜明) choice between a model that "exalts strength, favors self-interest, monopolizes power, and practices double standards" (迷信实力地位，推行本国优先、少数垄断、双重标准) and one that "champions multilateralism, and upholds sovereign equality, mutual respect and international law" (践行多边主义，坚持主权平等、相互尊重、国际法治) (MFA, October 23). A report released at the event by the Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy Studies Centre, meanwhile, lambasts the United States explicitly for "relying on self-defined legal standards such as the "effects doctrine" and "minimum contacts", extends the reach of its domestic law infinitely across the globe, exercising jurisdiction without the consent of other states, even carrying out arrests on the territory of third countries, completely disregarding the legal sovereignty and judicial jurisdiction of the states where the conduct occurs." It describes the GGI as "breaking away from the traditionally Western-dominated narrative framework of global governance, and avoiding the outdated discourse traps of 'a strong country is bound to seek hegemony' and 'bloc confrontation,'" while criticizing the "rules-based international order" for serving as "an ideological tool for a small number of states to pursue hegemonism and construct a hierarchical order" (Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy Studies Centre, October 2026). The outer space position paper, meanwhile, "opposes any country abusing its domestic laws to obstruct or impose unilateral sanctions on other countries' external airspace activities" (反对一国滥用其国内法对他国外空活动设置障碍或进行单边制裁).

Another area in which Beijing used the forum to press for material changes to the international system was in human rights. It was well placed to do so, as the event was co-organized by the United Nations Association of China, and its partners included the China Society for Human Rights Studies (中国人权研究会) and the China Foundation for Human Rights Development (中国人权发展基金会). Also in attendance were UN Under-Secretary-General for Policy Guy Bernard Ryder, the UN Human Rights Council's Independent Expert on the Promotion of a Democratic and Equitable International Order George Katrougalos, and, most pertinently, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees Barham Salih. Remarkably, Salih praised Xi's signature initiative, stating that the Human Rights Council "looks forward to building a close partnership with China … jointly addressing the refugee challenge within the framework of the GGI" (期待同中方构建紧密伙伴关系，开展"以人为本"的合作，在全球治理倡议框架下共同应对难民挑战) (People's Daily, October 24).

Such statements help fuel Beijing's revisionist approach to the international human rights regime. As Wang Yi declared in his speech, the PRC "promotes the recalibration of global human rights governance" (推动校正全球人权治

理), aiming to "place the right to development high on the multilateral human rights agenda" (将发展权置于多边人权议程突出位置)—in other words, to undermine individual human rights and censor critics of its own practices (MFA, October 23). The report from the Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy Studies Centre made this unambiguous, arguing that "we must reject the misguided notion of 'human rights above sovereignty,' and make it clear that it is up to the people of each country to assess and improve their own human rights situation" (Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy Studies Centre, October 2026).

Holding the forum in Xiong'an only underscored the reality of Beijing's approach to human rights. Not only were the homes of tens of thousands of villagers demolished to make way for the city, but the entire edifice is an exemplar of a technologically empowered surveillance state (Substack/Sinocities, May 20). As an article in the People's Daily lays out, the "Eye of Xiong'an" (雄安之眼)—which in English sounds unfortunately like the "Eye of Sauron"—integrates data feeds to allow for live monitoring of the entire city. And in the neighborhood of Nanwenying (南文营), which Xi inspected in 2023, "each of the more than 3,700 households has its own file" (3700多户居民'一户一档') that is "dynamically updated" (动态更新) every two months (Xinhua, June 23, 2023; People's Daily, October 24).

Conclusion

The success of the 2026 Global Governance Forum in Xiong'an is hard to assess. On the one hand, it was able to attract a diverse and influentional international crowd: beyond the UN representatives listed above, World Economic Forum founder Klaus Schwab, former Chancellor of Germany Gerhard Schröder, the Asia Society's John L. Thornton, and even New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman were in attendance; and prominent Western scholars, such as the political scientist David Shambaugh, sat on panels to opine on topics such as "Multilateral Solutions for Global Governance." On the other hand, no world leaders made appearances, and Xi himself only sent a letter, which Wang Yi duly read out. The active politicians that did attend were largely those already clearly aligned with the Party (or with the Party in opposition to the West).

The event itself nevertheless does appear to have advanced Beijing's international standing. It helped show that the PRC is serious about changing the rules of the game and is building support to shape how the world approaches emerging frontiers and domains; and through its efforts to build new governance institutions and enlist other countries to endorse its initiatives and adopt its standards, it will continue capitalize on a lack of a positive vision from the rest of the world.

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Notes

[1] Co-organizers of the event included Hebei's provincial government, the Administrative Committee of Xiong'an New Area, United Nations Association of China, China Institute of International Studies, China Foreign Affairs University. The event's partners included University of International Business and Economics, Renmin University of China, Red Cross Society of China, China International Communications Group, China Society for Human Rights Studies, and the China Foundation for Human Rights Development.

[2] Andrew Stokols has previously written for China Brief:

https://jamestown.org/analyst/andrew-stokols-100993/.

[3] Andrew Stokols, "A new city for a new era: Xiong'an as showcase of China's evolving urban ideology," Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society, Volume 18, Issue 2, July 2025, Pages 293–307, https://doi.org/10.1093/cjres/rsaf003.

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President Donald Trump welcomes General Secretary Xi Jinping to a state dinner in the East Room of the White House on September 24, 2026 in Washington, DC. (Source: Getty)

Beijing Uses Stability to Constrain U.S. Policy

Michael Kovrig, Thomas Shipley, and Patricia Xavier
October 29, 2026

Executive Summary

- Beijing wants a Washington that competes less, within limits that Beijing defines, for long enough that the balance keeps shifting its way. General Secretary Xi Jinping and President Donald Trump during their September 2026 summit reinforced a diplomatic framework of "constructive strategic stability" they had introduced in May 2026.
- However, the People's Republic of China (PRC) already treats the framework as a commitment to non-interference in its core interests. The stability is one-sided as it limits Washington's freedom of action in the bilateral relationship while the PRC is free to pursue its objectives. The PRC pays in reversible quantities and asks Washington for pledges that are difficult to undo.
- The PRC does not deny that it competes with the United States, but it refuses to let competition define the relationship. Outwardly, the PRC frames U.S. competitive measures as breaches of shared consensus. Domestically, the relationship remains defined as a contest, struggle, and "strategic stalemate."

During General Secretary Xi Jinping's state visit to the United States in September 2026, he and U.S. president Donald Trump reinforced a framework of "constructive strategic stability" (The White House; Ministry of Foreign Affairs [MFA], September 25). Beijing wants to define the terms of this stability to constrain U.S. policy by extracting a U.S. commitment to abstain from interference in its core interests. It remains to be seen whether the Trump administration accepts that framing as binding or treats it as a mere description of the current situation (Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, September 23).

PRC officials tell Americans the relationship has stabilized to lull them into complacency, while warning their own people that the struggle must continue (Xinhua, October 22). At the White House, Xi described ties as "a race of catching up with one another, not a wrestle" (你追我赶的赛跑，而不是你输我赢的角斗); a phrase that Chinese ambassador to the United States Xie Feng (谢锋) later reiterated (MFA, September 24; PRC Embassy in the United States, October 2).

The Trump administration had already largely dropped the competition framing from its own official descriptions of the relationship. Its 2025 National Security Strategy avoided the terms "great power competition" and "strategic competitor" to describe the People's Republic of China (PRC). Instead, the document pledges to "rebalance America's economic relationship with China, prioritizing reciprocity and fairness" (The White House, December 2025). The White House used the phrase "constructive strategic stability" in its May 17 fact sheet and repeated it on September 25, adding "respect," granting Xi what he needs most as the core leader of a regime looking to burnish its legitimacy (The White House, May 17, September 25; The Diplomat, September 23).

Beijing Defines Relations to Limit U.S. Action

Beijing is using its growing power to define the U.S.–PRC relationship for the first time. Chen Manyao (陈曼瑶) of Renmin University's Chongyang Institute noted that past positionings "were mostly proposed first by the United States, with China responding" (多由美方先提，中方予以回应) (Chongyang Institute, May 21). Similarly, commentator Zhang Sinan (张思南) quoted political scientist E. E. Schattschneider, saying "the definition of the alternatives is the supreme instrument of power" (对选项的定义，是权力的最高工具) (Zhi News, May 16). Marxist studies researcher Wang Peng (王鹏) characterized the Chinese initiative as one in which "you add the qualifier, and I supply the definition" (你加定语，我给定义) (The Paper, September 28).

The PRC's ability to more proactively define the relationship and set the agenda rests on three factors. First is its successful exercise of leverage over the United States through its control over the rare earths supply chain; second is Trump's interest in making deals; and third is a desire to capitalize on current conditions and lock in its preferred framing before the political weather in the United States changes. While both sides advocate for a relationship that is strategic, stable, constructive, and reciprocal, the Chinese side defines each of these terms in ways that do not necessarily align with U.S. understandings.

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) uses the term strategic (战略) to mean overall and long-term, and its counterpart is tactical (战术) (Xinhua, January 11, 2022). For example, Fudan University's Wu Xinbo (吴心伯) noted that the October 2025 Trump–Xi summit in Busan produced only an unsustainable and temporary "tactical stability" (战术性稳定), or truce. Strategic stability, by contrast, needs "major consensus on important issues" (在重要问题上形成重大共识) and a horizon of three years or more, a point Ambassador Xie reiterated in a signed article (Global Times, May 18; People's Daily, September 23).

"Strategic stability" therefore operates at the same level as strategic competition, replacing it as the primary characterization of the relationship. Originally, the term emerged out of the discourse surrounding nuclear arms control and was used by the United States to describe its relations with a peer competitor, the Soviet Union. In this context, "strategic" implies peer status, which Washington has long refused to grant Beijing. "Stability," meanwhile, is understood differently today than during the Cold War. While superpower relations then rested on mutually assured destruction and, in Wu's words, was "negative and non-constructive" (消极的、非建设性的), relations today are defined instead much more positively as "constructive" (Global Times, May 18).

The historical basis of the phrase "constructive strategic stability" underscores the evolution of bilateral ties. It recycles two words from the 1997 landmark summit between then PRC leader Jiang Zemin (江泽民) and U.S. president Bill Clinton, during which the two leaders agreed to build a "constructive strategic partnership" (建设性战略伙伴关系). In Chinese, both formulations use "relationship" (关系), but the new version replaces "partner" (伙伴) with "stability" (稳定), signaling reduced ambitions and tacitly acknowledging rivalry is structural (China Brief, June 5).

Defining the relationship as "constructive" and "reciprocal" is meant to limit U.S. statecraft. Foreign Minister Wang Yi (王毅) in September said reciprocity is "sovereign equality" (主权平等), with "no distinction between higher and lower" (没有高低之分), and fairness is "not seeking unilateral absolute advantage" (不追求单方面的绝对优势) (MFA, September 26). Under this view, U.S. export controls, allied coordination, and investment screening are "not constructive" and constitute unilateral breaches of agreed-upon "fairness." Beijing can now argue that persistent competitive actions violate the two countries' mutual understanding, pressuring Washington to make concessions; and given that Wang's definition of reciprocity entails respecting each other's territorial claims, Beijing will likely use this to seek reduced U.S. support for Taiwan (MFA, September 26).

Beijing Believes 'Struggle' Produced a Stalemate

Beijing acknowledges competition with the United States, but for domestic audiences frames it as concurrent struggle and stalemate. The Ministry of State Security (MSS) think tank China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR), particularly under its former president Yuan Peng (袁鹏), has described competition as "a fairly long historical process" (相当长的历史过程) in which "periodic easing or tension will be the norm" (阶段性的缓和或紧张会是一种常态), and where "neither side can swallow the other" (谁也吃不掉谁) (Guangming Daily, December 27, 2019; China News Service, October 21, 2021; CICIR, November 6, 2021). Yuan is reportedly now a vice-minister of state security under the name Yuan Yikun (袁亦鲲), which would lend direct MSS institutional weight to the perspective (Lianhe Zaobao, February 22, 2023).

Chen Wenxin (陈文鑫) of CICIR's Institute of American Studies more recently put forward the idea that the U.S.–PRC contest had by December 2025 entered a long and "comprehensive" stalemate (全面相持) (CICIR, December 31, 2025). Chen holds that the term is simply an application of the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) doctrine of protracted war, under which counter-offensive follows stalemate (Chinese Social Sciences Net, August 18, 2023). A CICIR report released hours before Trump arrived in Beijing in May 2026 repeated the "comprehensive stalemate framing" (CICIR, May 13).

For years, Xi has held that the PRC and the United States are in a period of strategic stalemate and

told Chinese officials to prepare for a counter-offensive. "It is unrealistic to try to change the other side" (想改变对方是不切实际的), the General Secretary has observed, warning that "the various struggles we face are not short-term but long-term" (我们面临的各种斗争不是短期的而是长期的) (Xinhua, September 3, 2019; MFA, November 16, 2023). He has directly stated that "many of the problems we face … must be understood from the perspective of protracted war" (我们遇到的很多问题……必须从持久战的角度加以认识) (Xinhua, July 30, 2020). And in a January 2026 speech that Qiushi published just two weeks before Trump's May visit, Xi told cadres to "build up a solid reserve of strategies and measures … and strive to turn unfavorable factors into favorable conditions for defeating the enemy" (扎实储备谋略举措 … 努力把不利因素转化为克敌制胜的有利条件) (Qiushi, April 30).

Scholars such as Renmin University's Jin Canrong (金灿荣) argue that the PRC has "won equality through strength" (用实力赢得了平等), laying a foundation for constructive strategic stability (Guancha, May 15). The People's Daily argues that the PRC's readiness to fight the tariff war is what made a return to talks possible (People's Daily, May 13). Chinese scholars disagree on how long the stalemate will last, however, and what could mark the end of it (Wenhui Daily, November 2021; China Review News, September 26).

The pause buys time to close gaps that Xi himself has conceded still remain, particularly in technology (Qiushi, May 31). For example, the PRC allocates roughly seven percent of research spending to basic research, compared with leading science powers at 15–20 percent (Qiushi, September 15). While some Western estimates suggest the PRC's artificial intelligence (AI) capabilities lag those of the United States by 6.5 months, broader AI developments and critical subsectors may be further behind (China Brief, October 14; Institute for Progress, October 19).

Beijing Presses U.S. on Taiwan and Trade

The CCP's definitions of each aspect of the relationship framework are intended to give Beijing a procedural lever to apply pressure over core issues. Beijing repeatedly insists that others respect its "four red lines" (四条红线), which Ambassador Xie recently adumbrated as including "Taiwan, democracy and human rights, [the PRC's development] path and [political] system, and its right to development (台湾、民主人权、道路制度、发展权利) (PRC Embassy in the United States, May 14, October 2).

Xi warns that mishandling the critical Taiwan issue could risk conflict, and both he and Wang Yi have applied pressure on Washington to actively oppose Taiwan independence rather than merely not endorsing it (MFA, May 14, May 15). Within days of the summit, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' spokesman employed the "stability" lever to bolster the PRC's position on the "Taiwan issue," stating that the U.S. side should "implement the important consensus reached at the China–U.S. leaders' meeting" (落实中美元首会晤重要共识) (MFA, October 6).

Party-state commentators also insist Taiwan must not be treated as a "bargaining chip" (交易筹码) in bilateral ties, and officials call on Washington to abide by the August 17, 1982, U.S.–China Communiqué governing arms sales to Taipei (Global Times, May 17; Ministry of National Defense [MND], May 28). Ambassador Xie also claimed that the two presidents "agreed to jointly safeguard the victorious outcomes" of the Second World War (同意携手捍卫二战胜利成果), among which Beijing includes Taiwan's "return" (回归) to China (MFA, September 17, 2025). The White House fact sheet records no such pledge (The White House, September 25; Newsweek, October 1).

The last of Beijing's "four red lines" invokes a rights-based framing to curtail what it sees as

hostile economic statecraft. It views U.S. tariffs, sanctions, and export controls as impeding the Chinese people's right to development, which officials have long avowed "cannot be taken away" (不可剥夺) (MFA, November 17, 2024). The stability frame limits foreign economic pressure by calling for a cap on measures that the United States and other countries consider necessary defenses against aggressive PRC mercantilism (Ministry of Commerce [MOFCOM], May 20).

The Party is careful to leverage Trump's perceived good relationship with Xi to promote predictability in bilateral relations, exculpating the U.S. president by warning that "some people" (某些人) in their statements on Taiwan are "complying in form while defying in substance" (阳奉阴违) (Taiwan Affairs Office [TAO], July 2; MFA, September 26). This rhetorically insulates Trump from broader U.S. policy moves that Beijing disagrees with, leaving open pathways for Trump to make its desired concessions.

One-Sided Stability

Although Xi in May 2026 tied the stability positioning to action, his regime has so far done little to translate this commitment into significant policy shifts (MFA, May 14). It has implemented limited measures to crack down on fentanyl precursors, made purchases of American coal that only the White House has quantified, and People's Liberation Army (PLA) air activity around Taiwan roughly halved year-on-year in the first half of 2026, returning to a previous baseline after reaching a historic peak in 2024–2025 (South China Morning Post, July 24; The White House, September 25; MFA, September 26).

Xi's negotiators have also sought to create an imbalance in the respective actions each side has agreed to. While the PRC has offered compromises on quantities of goods, licenses, or other measures, these measures are all easily reversible and often time-limited. Conversely, the concessions it demands from the U.S. side are far more complex to undo, such as "opposing" Taiwan independence and reconfiguring the U.S. alliance posture. This echoes the Party-state's portrayal of its restraint as a choice made from geopolitical strength, and U.S. commitment to the framework as "the trustworthiness and sense of responsibility expected of a great power"(大国应有的言而有信与责任担当) (CCTV, August 8). Beijing apparently wants to limit the constraints of "strategic stability" to U.S.–PRC relations, rather than allowing them to restrict the PRC's actions elsewhere in the Indo-Pacific region. This is underscored by the Party's uncompromising rhetoric, which blames Washington for every perceived risk, while the PRC's own conduct is always presented as blameless.

Conclusion

Beijing is attempting to convert a tactical pause into a framework that constrains U.S. policy while maintaining PRC freedom of action. The stalemate doctrine treats this détente as a phase, and indeed Chinese political scientist Zheng Yongnian (郑永年) notes its three-year duration as "tailor-made for President Trump" (给特朗普总统量身定制的) (Qianhai Institute for International Affairs, May 15).

The test for the Trump administration is whether it accepts the constructive strategic stability framework as a sincerely-shared vision and interpretation of bilateral relations, or judges it by concrete actions rather than rhetoric alone. For U.S. allies, the critical question is whether "reciprocity" includes how Beijing treats them, too.

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Macau Chief Executive Ho Iat-seng meeting with members of the China Organ Donation Administrative Center, including Huang Jiefu, , chairman of the National Organ Donation and Transplantation Committee. (Source: Government Portal of the Macau Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China)

Beholden to the Party: CCP Control in the Transplant Sector

Sarah Cook
October 21, 2026

Executive Summary

- Chinese Communist Party (CCP) control is embedded throughout the Chinese medical establishment and organ transplant sector and has tightened since 2018, raising serious doubts over official claims of comprehensive reform.
- There are no independent mechanisms for supervision or accountability in the transplant system within the People's Republic of China (PRC). The national transplant oversight body, professional association, and organ procurement organizations are dominated by CCP members or operate under a Party-led hospital hierarchy.
- Across 12 provinces, 19 identified transplant surgeons or center directors are CCP members, including six who hold senior Party leadership positions. These doctors are bound by a lifelong oath to remain loyal to the party and protect its secrets.

Editor's Note: This article builds on the findings of a study the author conducted that was published on October 20 by the International Coalition to End Transplant Abuse in China (ETAC). That study, which examines in detail the Party's hold on the medical profession and transplant sector in the People's Republic of China, can be read here.

On August 18, a Chinese news website announced the formation of the International Society of Organ Medicine (South, August 18). The English-language report touted the group as "the first global academic organization dedicated to the emerging field of organ medicine" and shared details of an inaugural online meeting joined by 20 Chinese doctors and 20 international experts from six countries. The organization's honorary presidents are Chinese transplant surgeon and former vice minister of health Huang Jiefu (黄洁夫) and John Fung, an American surgeon and president of the Transplantation Society. It is one of the latest examples of the international transplant community welcoming cooperation with the People's Republic of China (PRC) since Chinese officials announced in 2015 that they would no longer use prisoners as organ sources and henceforth rely only on voluntary donations.

This renewal of ties is occurring despite the 2020 findings of the China Tribunal—an independent people's tribunal convened by the non-profit the International Coalition to End Transplant Abuse in China (ETAC)—that harvesting of organs from prisoners of conscience had occurred on a "substantial scale" (China Tribunal, March 2020), as well as emerging evidence of falsified data, past violations of the dead donor rule, and mass blood testing of ethnic minorities and prisoners of conscience (Robertson et al., 2019; Robertson and Lavee, 2022; Robertson, 2024). **[1]**

The Chinese media article did not mention Huang's status as a member of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), a former alternate to the Central Committee, and former deputy director of the party committee responsible for top leaders' health (Institute for Hospital Management, Tsinghua University, accessed October 16). Such omissions are common for foreign-facing articles that, along with other naming choices related to the Chinese transplant system, appear aimed at obscuring the extent of the Party's footprint. In reality, the CCP dominates the transplant system's national oversight body and professional association, and subordinates all organ procurement organizations (OPOs) to the party-state. A substantial number of party members, meanwhile, are found among transplant surgeons and center directors.

All Party members swear an oath making a lifelong commitment to the Party, as well as to "protect the Party's secrets" (保守党的秘密) and to "never betray the Party" (永不叛党) (Xinhua, accessed October 16). A CCP member who violates this oath faces the Party's internal disciplinary system, including the extralegal liuzhi (留置) detention system, as well as potential criminal charges for leaking state secrets (Safeguard Defenders, 2022). For top transplant surgeons and oversight body members, therefore, Party affiliation has real-world implications for whether denials of organ transplant abuses and claims of comprehensive reform can be trusted in the absence of genuine independent verification.

Party Dominance of National Oversight Body and Professional Association

The PRC's entire organ donation and transplantation system is coordinated by the National Organ Donation and Transplantation Committee (NODTC). This is a state body established jointly by the National Health Commission and the Red Cross Society of China in 2013, and is under direct State Council oversight (Huang et. al, 2016). **[2]** The Red Cross

Society of China, which official sources describe as the "third-party" verifier in the donation process, is in fact a state-supervised social organization under Party leadership, rather than an independent humanitarian body in the way its name might suggest to Western readers (Huang, 2017). **[3]**

The latest publicly available membership list of the NODTC is from 2016 and names 33 members, most of whom remain active in the transplant sector today (National Health Commission, April 28, 2016). Among these 33, 17—over half—were confirmed CCP members, including nearly all top leadership positions. Huang Jiefu is listed as the committee's chairman. Other confirmed CCP members on the committee included at least six officials from the National Health and Family Planning Commission (the predecessor to the National Health Commission), three members from the Red Cross Society of China, and two officials from the Logistics Support Department of the Central Military Commission. The military presence highlights direct People's Liberation Army involvement at the highest level of transplant governance (ETAC Appendix 1A, October 20). Among other responsibilities, the NODTC oversees the state-managed China Organ Transplant Response System, a centralized digital platform through which all organ procurement and allocation flows (Huang et. al, 2016). **[4]** Although the full current make-up of the committee remains unclear, it has been publicly acknowledged as recently as February 2026 that Huang Jiefu retains his role as its chairman (Nashan et al., 2026). **[5]**

Professional bodies are similarly dominated by CCP cadres. The Chinese Medical Association, for instance, is a state-controlled "social organization" (社会组织) with an embedded Party leadership. Indeed, its current president, Zhao Yupei (赵玉沛), along with all 15 vice presidents appointed in 2021, are CCP members (Chinese Academy of Medical Sciences, May 2021). **[6]** This stands in contrast to countries like the United States, the United Kingdom, or Australia, where professional medical associations are voluntary bodies funded by members with diverse political viewpoints that set independent ethical standards, advocate for their members, and publicly criticize government health policy (Cao, 2011). **[7]** In the PRC, such a role is structurally constrained. It exists only within the boundaries of Party-state approval.

Subordination of Organ Procurement Organizations to the Party-State

In jurisdictions with ethical transplant systems, organ procurement is deliberately structured to reduce conflicts of interest between those who identify and manage donors and the transplant units that benefit from them. This separation exists so that those who perform transplants do not have institutional incentives to declare a patient a donor or to rush procurement. **[8]** In the United States, there is an especially high degree of separation, with 54 independent non-profit OPOs designated by the federal Department of Health and Human Services (Health Resources and Services Administration, accessed October 15). These OPOs are required to maintain governing structures separate from transplant hospitals. They risk federal investigations and decertification if problematic activity is found. **[9]**

In the PRC, there are no independent OPOs. Although Chinese authorities have appropriated the U.S. term, official Chinese sources explicitly acknowledge that in the PRC an OPO is "not an independent legal entity, which is different from that of the United States" (China Organ Transplant Development Foundation, 2020). **[10]** Instead, Chinese OPOs function as internal units within approved transplant hospitals and are subordinated to the hospital's management structure. At the top of that structure sits the

Party Secretary, above the hospital president and other medical or administrative staff (Baidu Baike/全国医院工作条例, 1982; author's interview with a former Liaoning doctor, October 2025). One Chinese academic paper describes the position of the OPOs vis-à-vis the Party-state as follows: "As a subsidiary institution of a public hospital, an OPO derives its resources from the government; consequently, its operational activities must be guided by government policies" (作为公立医院的下属机构，OPO 所获取的资源来源于政府，其运营活动必然要受到政府政策的引导) (Li Yushu et al., 2022).

Chinese medical sources reported 118 OPOs in operation as of 2022, serving over 180 hospitals qualified for organ transplantation with some OPOs functioning as regional hubs serving multiple hospitals (Jiang, 2022; Nashan et al., 2026). **[11]** In 2014, an organization called the China OPO Alliance (中国医院协会器官获取组织联盟) was established. Huang Jiefu was also named founding head of that body, illustrating again the interconnected nature of supposedly "independent" entities in the PRC's transplant sector, as well as Party members' dominance of those institutions (China News Guangdong, January 2, 2025).

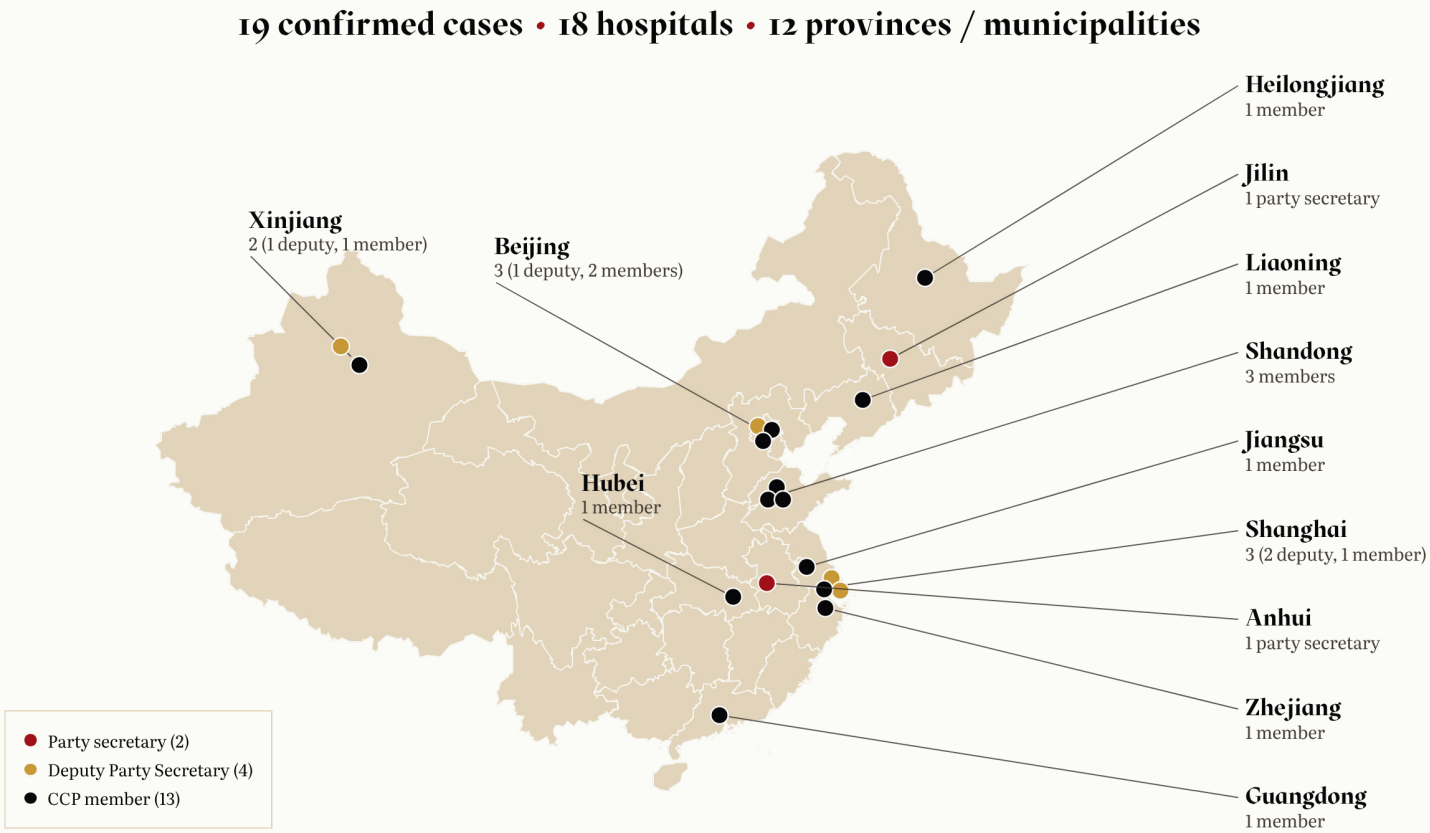
Party Membership among Transplant Center Leaders

Like other sectors of Chinese society, party control of the medical profession has tightened since 2018 under Xi Jinping's leadership (Xinhua, June 25, 2018). In 2021, this included a State Council opinion that called on public hospitals to "turn professional backbones into Party members and Party members into professional backbones" (把业务骨干培养成党员、把党员培养成业务骨干) (State Council General Office, May 14, 2021). This phenomenon of having clinical leaders join the Party or assume Party leadership positions is also evident in the transplant sector, where a number of transplant surgeons and center directors at major Chinese hospitals are members of the CCP (People's Daily Health, October 16, 2025).

Open-source research uncovered 19 cases of transplant surgeons or center directors who are documented CCP members, active in the period 2020–2025, with two recently deceased cases noted. **[12]** This was not a comprehensive audit. Rather, these results represent a sample of discoverable cases drawn from some of the PRC's largest and most active transplant centers across several provinces. The actual number of CCP-member transplant leaders nationally is certainly larger. The full list and affiliations of the 19 surgeons identified can be found in the ETAC report (ETAC, October 20).

Analysis of the 19 surgeons reveals several common features. First, the surgeons' locations are geographically diverse, encompassing 18 different hospitals in 12 provinces or major municipalities (see Figure 1). They span the country's largest cities and most prestigious medical centers and are present in every major transplant discipline: liver, kidney, heart, lung, and multi-organ programs. Included among the list are doctors considered to be among the top transplant surgeons in the PRC, such as heart surgeon Dong Nianguo (董念国) from Wuhan (Hubei Provincial Science and Technology Association Propaganda Department, June 6, 2023).

Second, nearly one-third of the sample hold Party leadership positions within their hospital. Two of the most notable cases are Lü Guoyue (吕国悦) in Jilin and Liu Lianxin (刘连新) in Anhui, who both simultaneously serve as their respective hospital's Party Secretary and play a leading role in transplant operations (National Genomics Data Center, December 2024; Anhui Provincial Hospital, April 12). In four other cases in Beijing, Shanghai, and Xinjiang, a prominent transplant surgeon also serves as Deputy Party



Secretary of the hospital (CN Healthcare, February 7, 2021; Mentougou District, October 25, 2024; Shanghai Yangpu government, March 11, 2025; Fuwai Hospital, accessed October 16).

Third, several surgeons hold dual roles in national political bodies. Three of the 19 surgeons have also held concurrent positions in political bodies involved in Chinese governance and co-optation of elites, namely the National People's Congress (NPC) and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC). Chen Jingyu (陈静瑜), the PRC's leading lung transplant surgeon, is a CCP member who served as an NPC delegate from 2008–2023 (Da Ai Qing Chen Public Welfare Foundation, March 19, 2017; Baidu Baike/陈静瑜, accessed October 16). Liu Lianxin was elected in 2023 to be a member of the 14th National Committee of the CPPCC (Anhui Provincial Hospital, April 12).

Fourth, the surgeons' hospitals overlap with regions that have large concentrations of populations most frequently identified as victims of forced organ harvesting. Two of the 19 confirmed individuals, Yang Yining (杨毅宁) and Wen Hao (温浩), are located in Xinjiang, where the Chinese government has detained hundreds of thousands of Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims in a network of internment camps and prisons since 2017 (Xinhua, July 25, 2016; CN Healthcare, February 7, 2021; Xinjiang Medical University, October 17, 2025). Independent research and Chinese official sources have documented the coercive extraction of biometric data, including systematic blood typing, from residents and detainees in Xinjiang—data that are directly relevant to organ matching (Robertson, CECC, 2024).

Other CCP members lead or work in transplant programs at hospitals throughout the

northeastern provinces of Jilin, Heilongjiang, Liaoning, as well as Shandong. These regions have high populations of people who practice Falun Gong, including those who have been detained for their faith, and were among the most active centers of Falun Gong practice before the CCP banned the group in 1999. They subsequently became hotbeds of its persecution, a trend that continues to the present (U.K. Home Office, November 2025). Transplant leaders who were also CCP members have been present at major hospitals in all four of these provinces: Lü Guoyue in Jilin; Jiang Hongchi (姜洪池) in Heilongjiang; Liu Yongfeng (刘永锋) in Liaoning; and Jin Bin (靳斌) and Cai Jinzhen (蔡金贞) in Shandong (Shandong University Second Hospital, June 4, 2021; Qingdao University, May 10, 2023; Organ Transplantation, June 5, 2023; Mudanjiang Medical University, June 12, 2023). **[13]** Cai was among several Chinese doctors who presented research at the Transplantation Society's international conference held in Australia in September 2026 (The Transplantation Society, September 22).

The connection between transplant leadership and the state's anti-Falun Gong apparatus is illustrated most directly by Zheng Shusen (郑树森), a prominent Zhejiang liver transplant surgeon who also held a leadership role in the Zhejiang Provincial Anti-Cult Association, a body whose activities are directed primarily against Falun Gong. In 2009, Zheng authored a preface to a book vilifying Falun Gong in which he likened the practice to a "virus" and a "cancer" of society, adding that "[l]aunching a deep political struggle against 'Falun Gong' … is a duty jointly shared by the whole Party, the whole country, and the whole society" (Zheng et al. 2009; China Tribunal, June 12, 2019; China Brief, May 15, 2020). **[14]** Zheng remains active in the transplant sector. He is dean at Shulan International Medical College and a senior figure at Shulan Hospital in Hangzhou, which he founded and where he previously served as president (Shulan Hospital, May 9, 2020; Zhejiang Shuren University, September 7, 2025; Zhejiang Shuren University, accessed October 16). He was also named a vice president of the Chinese Medical Association in 2021 and appears as an NODTC member on the 2016 list (Chinese Academy of Medical Sciences, May 2021; ETAC Appendix 1A, October 20).

Conclusion

The picture that emerges from this analysis of the PRC's transplant sector is one of total circularity. Every entity that Chinese officials present to international audiences as ostensibly independent or as a "third party" is in fact a node in the same Party-controlled system. The entire chain of activity—from the identification of a potential organ donor, through procurement and ethical review to allocation and transplantation—occurs within institutions operating under the CCP's direct political leadership. There is no external point of accountability.

This architecture does not prove that abuses are continuing. What it does demonstrate, however, is that the structural conditions for both systemic abuses and concealment are comprehensively in place. If the CCP and Chinese hospitals wanted to sustain a classified, non-voluntary sourcing stream for transplant organs alongside an official voluntary stream, they could do so within this framework without it being detectable from the outside. The CCP's long track record of successfully silencing doctors who try to expose abuses or health crises, or of incentivizing medical professionals to participate in violations like forced abortions or the politicized use of psychiatry reinforces this possibility.

The absence of Chinese whistleblowers related to organ transplant abuses, is thus not evidence that no violations are occurring. It could just as

well be evidence that the system is working as designed. As one former doctor from Liaoning province said during a recent interview, "Chinese people live in an environment filled with the CCP's culture. Under the terrifying pressure of the CCP, everyone knows—if you yourself dare to speak up, you'd be the next to disappear" (author interview, October 2025).

This reality has implications for any institutions engaged in or considering collaboration with Chinese hospitals. Requesting disclosures or independently checking the Party membership of Chinese transplant surgeons should be part of any due diligence related to joint projects, trainings, or conference presentations. Such a review might have rendered some of the international participants in the recent founding of the International Society of Organ Medicine more reticent to join.

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Notes

[1] Robertson, Matthew P., Raymond L. Hinde, and Jacob Lavee. "Analysis of Official Deceased Organ Donation Data Casts Doubt on the Credibility of China's Organ Transplant Reform." BMC Medical Ethics 20, no. 1 (2019): 79. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12910-019-0406-6; Robertson, Matthew P., and Jacob Lavee. "Execution by Organ Procurement: Breaching the Dead Donor Rule in China." American Journal of Transplantation 22, no. 7 (2022): 1804–1812. https://doi.org/10.1111/ajt.16969;

[2] Huang, Jiefu, Hai-Bo Wang, Shu-Sen Zheng, et al. "The New Era of Organ Transplantation in China." Chinese Medical Journal 129, no. 16 (2016): 1891–1893. https://doi.org/10.4103/0366-6999.187865.

[3] Huang, Jiefu. "The 'Chinese Mode' of Organ Donation and Transplantation." Hepatobiliary Surgery and Nutrition 6, no. 4 (2017): 212–214. https://doi.org/10.21037/hbsn.2017.07.08.

[4] Huang, Jiefu et al. "The New Era of Organ Transplantation in China."

[5] Nashan, Björn, Haibo Wang, and Jiefu Huang. "Legal Framework on Organ Donation and Transplantation in China." Transplantation 110, no. 6 (2026): e1185–e1199. https://doi.org/10.1097/TP.0000000000005623. (Epub 24 February 2026.)

[6] The association also contains an internal section, the Organ Transplantation Branch, which facilitates continuing education and research exchanges, including with external entities (Xi'an Jiaotong University News, April 20, 2023).

[7] Cao, Xuebing. "The Chinese Medical Doctor Association: A New Industrial Relations Actor in China's Health Services?" Relations Industrielles / Industrial Relations 66, no. 1 (2011): 74–97. https://www.erudit.org/fr/revues/ri/2011-v66-n1-ri/1005106ar.pdf

[8] Even in systems with this structural independence, a small number of serious failures have occurred. Recent U.S. investigations and reporting documented cases in which organ procurement organizations continued to pursue donation after circulatory death despite signs of neurological recovery in potential donors; these findings prompted federal investigations and at least one OPO decertification process. New York Times (2025), 'A Push for More Organ Transplants Is Putting Donors at Risk', 20 July, https://www.nytimes.com/2025/07/20/us/organ-transplants-donors-alive.html.U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2026), 'HHS

Decertifies Kentucky Organ Procurement Organization to Protect Patients, Restore Trust', 5 August, https://www.hhs.gov/press-room/hhs-decertifies-kentucky-organ-procurement-organization.html; Ars Technica (2026), 'US to shutter organ donation group accused of trying to take living man's organs', August, https://arstechnica.com/health/2026/08/us-to-shutter-organ-donation-group-accused-of-trying-to-take-living-mans-organs/.

[9] Every OPO in the United States is a member of OPTN. According to the OPTN website, accessed August 2026, there were 54 OPO members of the network, 47 completely independent, and 7 hospital based: Health Resources and Services Administration (n.d.), 'About OPTN Membership', https://www.hrsa.gov/optn/about/membership, accessed August 2026. For independent OPO requirements in the U.S., see United Network for Organ Sharing/OPTN membership rules and application criteria: United Network for Organ Sharing (n.d.), 'Application for Institutional Membership as an Independent Organ Procurement Organization (IOPO)', https://unos.org/c_opo_application_independent/, accessed August 2026.

[10] Huang, Jiefu, ed. Report on Organ Transplantation Development in China (2015–2018) [中国器官移植发展报告 (2015–2018)]. Beijing: China Organ Transplantation Development Foundation / Tsinghua University Press, 2020. English PDF: https://en.cma.org.cn/attach/0/1641321f95524992974c11f71da149b9.pdf.

[11] Jiang, Wenshi, Xiangxiang He, and XIaotong Wu. "Current Development Strategy of Organ Procurement Organization in China." Transplantation 106, no. 9S (September 2022): S317. https://journals.lww.com/transplantjournal/fulltext/2022/09001/341_8__current_development_strategy_of_organ.479.aspx; Nashan, Björn, et al. "Legal Framework on Organ Donation and Transplantation in China."

[12] Methodological note: Affiliations were uncovered by searching for the explicit designation "中共党员" (CCP member) alongside individuals' transplant-related leadership roles in public profiles or other announcements. The cases reviewed here are only a sample of discoverable cases, not a systematic or random survey of all Chinese transplant centers. Researchers began with individuals already known from prior work and then conducted targeted searches of publicly available official Chinese sources (e.g., hospital websites, Party announcements, professional profiles) for the explicit designation "中共党员" linked to transplant leadership roles at major hospitals across several provinces. Only cases with clear documentary confirmation were included. The sample therefore cannot support statistical inference about the overall prevalence of CCP membership among transplant leaders nationwide. It does, however, establish a documented lower bound and demonstrates that the phenomenon is present at a range of important, high-volume transplant centers. As evident from the detailed references provided for each doctor, sources used included hospital websites, government honor lists, online directory entries, academic profiles and official government announcements.

[13] Liu passed away in 2023, but was active until then.

[14] Zheng Shusen et al. eds., Selected Academic Papers on Evil Religion Prevention Research in the New Era [新时期邪教防治研究学术论文精选], Xinshiqi Xiejiao Fangzhi Yanjiu Xueshu Lunwen Jingxuan (Zhejiang Anti-Cult Association / Science and Technology Press, 2009).

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Head of the Social Work Department Wu Shenghan leads delegation to Jiangxi. (Source: Contemporary Jiangxi)

Society Work Department Deepens Party Control of Industry

Sense Hofstede
October 30, 2026

Executive Summary

- The United Front Work Department has always had an important role in managing capitalists in China, including their industry associations and chambers of commerce. Yet, a decoupling effort of government-linked groups that began in 2015 scattered vital Party work across several bodies. This has recently been addressed.
- Since it was created in 2023, the Society Work Department has been mainly known for its role in ensuring social harmony at lower levels and reaching new economic areas. That work, however, now also includes unified leadership of the party-building efforts in decoupled industry associations and chambers of commerce.
- Understanding the levers of control over China's industry associations and chambers of commerce matters more than ever now that global trade friction and international standard setting are central to Beijing's plans.

Chambers of commerce and other industry bodies play an important role in Beijing's control of the economy in the People's Republic of China (PRC). Their significance is growing as successful Chinese manufacturers become more involved in global governance processes. These bodies are overseen by the Party, but the mechanics through which this occurs have changed in recent years. Historically, local United Front Work Departments (UFWD) managed chambers of commerce but, since 2023, a new Party organization, the Central Society Work Department (CSWD), has taken over some of this work. **[1]** The central UFWD remains at the apex, but the creation of central and local Society Work Departments (SWDs) has led to a redivision of responsibilities after a 2015 reorganization of government-linked industry associations and chambers of commerce. Under the new structure, the UFWD oversees constituencies while SWDs oversee institutions.

One institution affected was the China Chamber of Commerce for Import and Export of Machinery and Electronic Products (CCCME, 中国机电产品进出口商会), which was a party to the legal challenge against the European Union's (EU)'s tariffs on Chinese electric vehicle imports in January 2025 from the PRC (Reuters, January 24, 2025). That same month, the chamber's party committee wrote on party-building progress in a CSWD publication (Shequ, January 22, 2025). These institutions and their purview matter for deepening Chinese Communist Party (CCP) control over emerging industries and export-oriented businesses, as clarified by various articles in China Society Work News, the CSWD's newspaper in October. One highlighted a provincial SWD that had set up a "joint meeting mechanism" for the reform and development of industry associations and chambers of commerce in order to "form a collaborative force for strengthening party-building and promoting supervision" (形成协同抓党建、促监管的合力). This supervision involves the Party's role in major decisions and senior personnel vetting of industry associations, and drawing up a negative list of banned behaviors (China Society Work News, October 16). Another article looks at how the SWD in Shanghai's Pudong New Area is engaging in party-building to strengthen industrial chains and clusters in key industries (China Society Work News, October 10). A third quotes a municipal SWD head as saying that the department's party-building work is "an effective tool for promoting industrial upgrading and helping enterprises expand overseas" (是推动产业升级、企业出海的有效抓手) (China Society Work News, October 21). The Party is concerned about both economic stagnation at home and intensifying international trade competition overseas. It is also mindful of the potential power of emerging technologies. Its solution, of which the SWD is a part, is to further exert Party control over business and industry.

Mobilizing Capitalists in China

"Industry associations and chambers of commerce" (行业协会商会) refer to several different types of organizations. Industry associations (行业协会), which represent companies in the same industry, previously fell under the ministries responsible for governing these industries until the 2015 reforms. Chambers of commerce, meanwhile, exist in several forms. Some organize businesspeople who share a particular non-local origin (异地商会), while others group certain industries (行业商会).

The UFWD has always had an important role in managing capitalists. Since the founding of the PRC it has used various tools to bind industrialists and businesspeople to Beijing. The UFWD also has a formal role in the system of chambers of commerce. The CCP's United Front Work Regulations give the Central UFWD an explicit role managing the All-China Federation

of Industry and Commerce (ACFIC; 工商联), the "people's organization" that oversees its subordinate chambers of commerce, and ACFIC's party secretary is dual-hatted as a UFWD deputy head (Article 11). The same Regulations, updated in 2020, designated ACFIC the "competent supervisory unit" (业务主管单位) for its subordinate chambers, making it responsible for the evaluation and assessment of said chambers' principal officers, as well as for discipline and party-building (Article 30) (Xinhua, January 5, 2021).

A significant change to this system came in 2015. Until then, a separate group of associations and chambers that may have been part of the UFWD's "business" constituency were still essentially run by central ministries and local government departments. But as part of the general trend of rationalizing the Party-state under General Secretary Xi Jinping, a set of reforms "decoupled" (脱钩) these government-run industry associations and chambers of commerce from their sponsoring ministries or local government departments to formally make them "non-governmental" (Xinhua, July 8, 2015). Responsibility for national organizations was allocated based on the former supervisor's Party structure, divided among the Central Government Organs Party Work Committee (中央直属机关工委), the Central State Organs Party Work Committee (中央国家机关工委), and the State-Owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission Party Committee (国务院国资委党委) (Xinhua, July 8, 2015; NDRC, June 17, 2019). Local organizations were to be looked after by the organization department and civil affairs department at their levels; chambers' foreign affairs work was put under provincial responsibility, as it generally involved attracting investment; and the Ministry of Civil Affairs and its local counterparts were responsible for registration. The call to create "social organization party-building work mechanisms" (社会组织党建工作机构) in many localities led to what generally became known as "two new" work committees (两新工委) under the local organization department, covering Party-building in both private firms and social organizations (Xinhua, September 28, 2015). This complicated division of labor, however, left an uncoordinated set of practical responsibilities that was spread widely across units.

Reforms Produced New Division of Responsibilities

In March 2023, the CCP created the SWD as part of Party-state structural reforms after the 20th National Party Congress of the CCP and the first session of the 14th National People's Congress (South China Morning Post, March 17, 2023). The limited press coverage it received at the time focused on its role in maintaining social stability and managing petitions, yet its remit is in fact much broader, including efforts to extend party-building to areas hitherto out of reach, and mobilizing society to pursue the CCP's centennial goals (MERICS, August 20, 2025; Wall Street Journal, August 31, 2025; Pieke2025). **[2]** Following its creation, the SWD engaged in party-building among platform economy workers and rectified association and chamber leadership. It now conducts this work under the guidance of a Central Social Governance Leading Group (中央社会治理小组) reportedly headed by Xi's top aide Cai Qi (蔡奇) (Ming Pao, September 8).

The rectification role points to an internationally overlooked part of the SWD's responsibilities, which consists of "exercising unified leadership over Party work in national industry associations and chambers of commerce" (统一领导全国性行业协会商会党的工作) and "coordinating and promoting deepening reform and the transformation and development of industry associations and chambers of commerce" (协调推动行业协会商会深化改革和转

型发展), explicitly absorbing (划入) the "two new" work committees' duties (Xinhua, March 16, 2023). The 2024 inaugural Society Work Conference repeated the "streamlining the management system for party-building work in industry associations … and chambers of commerce" (理顺行业协会…商会党建工作管理体制) attributed to the 20th Party Congress (Xinhua, April 13). The Center's July 2026 "Opinion on Strengthening Society Work for the New Era" (关于加强新时代社会工作的意见) contained the phrase "strengthen leadership transition regulations and the management of principal officers in industry associations and chambers of commerce, and continue to advance the governance of professional conduct" (加强行业协会商会换届规范和负责人管理，持续推进行风治理), placing the management of leading personnel, which is a Party task, within society work (People's Daily, July 24).

The new SWD's role came to the fore again this April, when Xinhua published a November 2025 "Opinion on Promoting Deepening Reform in Industry Associations and Chambers of Commerce" (关于推动行业协会商会深化改革的意见), issued by the General Office of the CCP Central Committee and the General Office of the PRC State Council (Xinhua, April 13). The Opinion explained that ACFIC-related organizations remain under that UFWD's substantial control: its opening item on "streamlining the party-building work management system" (理顺党建工作管理体制) describes how associations and chambers with a "competent supervisory unit" (业务主管单位) are under the "leadership and management" of those work units' Party organizations but "receive [party-building] work guidance from [local] social work departments" (接受党委社会工作部门的工作指导) at their level.

The Opinion also sets out local SWDs' role in personnel selection. These local SWDs "must emphasize political standards, strengthen political oversight, and ensure correct review of screening principal officer candidates" (党委社会工作部门要突出政治标准，强化政治把关，做好负责人人选审核工作), as well as "establish and improve systems for [their] nomination, review, public notice, supervision, and departure" (建立健全…人提名、审核、公示、监督、退出等制度). Article 5 refers to the continuation of the 2015 decoupling from the state as it calls to "establish and improve unified leadership by the [local] Party, [with] overall coordination by the [local] Party society work department" (建立健全党委统一领导，党委社会工作部门统筹协调). It also refers to the other organs involved, such as civil affairs and competent supervisory units. Article 15 enlists associations and chambers against "involution-style competition" ("内卷式"竞争) and in mediating disputes, both of which require coordination between companies' conflicting interests.

The Opinion instructs associations and chambers, particularly national ones, to play a role abroad. Article 17 covers their role in "setting international standards and rules" (国际标准、国际规则制定), as well as a role in "international economic and trade dialogue mechanisms" (国际经贸对话机制) and "international supply and procurement matching platforms" (国际供采对接平台). Given the PRC's growing dependence on exports, it is especially important for the CCP to use personnel selection and party-building to ensure the right people are pushing the right plans. For now, the SWD appears to have no role in Chinese chambers of commerce overseas. These are managed by the Ministry of Commerce, ACFIC, and the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade (CCPIT; 中国国际贸易促进委员会), a body that falls under MOFCOM and is linked to the UFWD (Sinopsis, May 4, 2023). Given that the SWD is responsible for party-building and ensuring social harmony at home, that is not surprising. The foreign and overseas tasks still fit the category of united front work.

SWD Responsibilities Emerging On The Ground

Continued references in Party documents to the "decoupling" reforms indicate that they are under way at lower levels, but not yet finished. In an article that discusses the ongoing confusion caused by the reforms, Shandong Party School professor Wang Gefang (王格芳) explains the principle of "whoever manages the field [i.e., the "competent supervisory unit"] leads the party-building" (谁主管业务、谁主导党建). He explains that both locality-focused and sector-divided chambers of commerce and industry chambers "should be managed primarily by ACFIC party organizations and should promote the integration of party-building with business services, attracting investment, and other related activities" (异地商会和行业商会，要以工商联党组织管理为主，推动党建与企业服务、招商引资等业务融合) (Shequ, September 2, 2025). The SWD's remit appears to be smaller at lower levels, yet a notice from 2024 explains that while the Ministry of Civil Affairs is responsible for the registration of decoupled non-local chambers and management and party-building fall under ACFIC, there is some say for the SWD, which has a role as well as a role as a consultation and information-sharing mechanism (会商和信息共享机制) (Ministry of Civil Affairs, December 31, 2024).

Progress in implementing the November 2025 Opinion varies, but the role of the organization department is clear and the "two new" work committees are still mentioned in most examples, as illustrated below. According to a news report from the China Society Work News (中国社会工作报), in Yingtan, Jiangxi province, a "five-level responsibility chain" (五级责任链条) has the local organization department taking the lead, the local SWD providing unified leadership, and three related groups taking on more practical roles (China Society Work News, May 11). At the provincial level, a different source on Shandong's implementation of the Opinion was jointly published by the local organization department, SWD, and five other bodies, again indicating the organization department's role (Shandong SWD, April 29).

A practical example came from Wenzhou, where the local SWD reports on a pilot area for implementing the "two healths" (两个健康), a united front work phrase concerning the healthy development and healthy growth of both the non-public sector economy and economic persons (100 Origins of the United Front, May 20, 2019). It documents party-building efforts that seem to include responsibility for a variety of slogans and campaigns, but also SWD's role in ensuring social harmony by "integrating social governance" (融入社会治理), an example of which involves industry associations and chambers of commerce in mediation to resolve disputes (Shequ, April 9). The Wenzhou article talks about "Measures for Managing the Appointment of Leaders of City-Wide Industry Associations and Chambers of Commerce (Trial)" (全市性行业协会商会负责人任职管理办法(试行)). Dongying City and Dalian have issued measures with the same title. The Dongying City measures discuss an approval process that is in the hands of the SWD (Dongying City Liaocheng Chamber of Commerce, accessed September 7). The Dalian announcement says the measures entrust the local SWD with "the appointment management of leaders of city-wide industry associations and chambers of commerce that have completed decoupling and direct registration" (已完成脱钩和直接登记的全市性行业协会商会负责人任职管理) (Dalian Society Work, September 12, 2025).

Conclusion

One of the SWD's roles is to ensure that the principal officers of industry associations and chambers of commerce follow the Party line. This allows authorities to retain control over

those organizations, even after decoupling them from the state in the 2015 reforms. The SWD is a new organization, however, and research on its activities remains limited. As a Party organization involved in managing entities outside the Party, its relationship with the UFWD is not entirely clear in all cases. Just as work was required to comprehend the role of MSS 12th Bureau as the civilian spy ministry's liaison with the UFWD, more work is necessary to understand what the new boundary is between UFWD and SWD (Mattis & Brazil 2018; Joske 2022; Chubb 2026). **[3]** As the new department appears increasingly involved in guiding Chinese businesses expanding overseas and shaping emerging industries, as well as party-building targeting new corporate forms in the age of artificial intelligence (AI), this work is increasingly urgent (Study Times, October 23).

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Notes

[1] For more information on the previous role of local UFWDs in governing industry associations, see: China Brief, June 19, 2018. Previous analysis of the CSWD has noted its role in party-building in the connected devices sector (China Brief, September 19, 2025).

[2] Frank N. Pieke, "The Communist Party of China's New Central Department of Social Work: Neo-Socialist Governance or Bolshevized Party Discipline?," Journal of Contemporary China 35, no. 159 (2026): 1467–79, https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2025.2490744.

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A Chinese PLA Type 99A main battle tank fires during the Center-2026 exercise. (Source: Global Times)

AI Lessons From Russia's War in Ukraine

Sunny Cheung
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Executive Summary

- Chinese military writers studying the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in Russia's war in Ukraine have concluded that its decisive value lies in shortening the kill chain rather than in fully autonomous weapons.
- In their reading, AI plays four roles: turning sensor data into targets, accelerating planning and command, keeping drones on target when jamming cuts the link, and mass-produced propaganda and deep-fakes.
- Each of these roles rests on the combat data, computing power, chips, and AI models that the PRC wishes to control domestically. Starlink's wartime restrictions and Russia's reliance on U.S. chips serve as warnings.
- The People's Liberation Army (PLA) is turning these lessons into AI planning systems, unmanned units, and procurement of domestic large language models (LLMs). Some concede that PLA's AI is still used mainly for auxiliary tasks, with these authors acknowledging that doctrine lags technological advancements.

Editor's note: This article is the latest in an occasional series by Jamestown China Studies Fellow Sunny Cheung on Chinese lessons from Russia's war in Ukraine.

On August 2, China Central Television (CCTV) aired an episode of Zhisheng (制胜; "Victory"), an Army Day documentary series, showing a People's Liberation Army (PLA) Air Force "intelligent strike-planning system" that enabled more than 100 tactical units to conduct synchronized strikes (Global Times, August 3). In early October, troops from the PLA Central Theater Command began returning from Russia's multinational Center 2026 exercise, where drone swarms fed precise target information to ground combat groups (Global Times, October 3). And on October 12, authors from the National Defense University's Joint Operations College wrote in the PLA Daily that artificial intelligence (AI) has "leapt from a combat auxiliary tool to the core enabling engine of the command-support system" (从作战辅助工具跃升为指挥保障体系的核心赋能引擎), citing Ukraine's Delta and Russia's Svod battle-management systems as proof (PLA Daily, October 12).

These developments show that Chinese military experts have consistently learned from Russia's war in Ukraine, which they see as the first major test of "intelligentized" (智能化) warfare—the PLA's term for war in which AI pervades command and weapons systems. Chinese research papers published in military journals over the last two years make clear that AI's principal contribution to military victory is in compressing the time lag in a kill chain from the initial order to executing a strike. It does this by assisting with four primary tasks: finding targets, making decisions, striking under jamming, and waging cognitive warfare.

Turning Data into Strikes

Chinese researchers are impressed by what Ukrainian writers call the "Didi ride-hailing" (滴滴打车) model, named after the PRC's Uber equivalent, in which small units accept piecemeal strike orders via tactical apps and report back when they have been carried out. In September 2024, Ukraine's Defense Ministry reported that its "Avengers AI" platform automatically detected roughly 12,000 Russian equipment targets per week via analysis of video from drones and fixed cameras, something that impressed researchers at the National University of Defense Technology (Ministry of Defense of Ukraine, September 23, 2024; Zhang and Liang, 2025). **[1]** A paper led by Fang Chao (房超), a professor at Huazhong University of Science and Technology and former chief strategy research scientist at Qiyuan Laboratory (启元实验室), contends that the GIS Arta artillery app, a Ukrainian targeting app that matches artillery units with targets reported by drones and spotters, has slashed the time between receiving a fire order and striking a target from 20 minutes to just 30 seconds (Fang Chao et al., 2025). **[2]** Researchers point to the whole process—from sifting through enormous volumes of drone and satellite feeds, to decoding intelligence gathered from intercepted communications and civilian tips, to the speed of target acquisition—as a model to emulate.

Experts from the National University of Defense Technology believe that the PLA should treat private sector AI and big data capabilities as part of its arsenal, cataloguing them as "potential resources" (潜力资源) for conversion into military uses (Zhang and Liang, 2025). **[3]** Li Chen (李晨) of Renmin University is more measured in his assessment, noting that although information-network operations and electronic warfare have figured heavily in the Ukraine conflict, they have not "paralyzed either side's operational system" (未导致任何一方作战体系瘫痪) (Li Chen, 2025). **[4]** Ultimately, he argues, the advantage from faster target identification has not been decisive.

AI Making Decisions in the Command Post

Several experts believe that AI will be instrumental in improving decision-making processes in future wars. An article in the journal Military Digest (军事文摘), for example, argues for the creation of "joint operations intelligent computing centers" (联合作战智算中心) and specialized large models trained on joint operations scenarios to deliver "dimension reduction strikes" (降维打击). This refers to attacks from a level of capability so far above the opponent's that it cannot respond in kind, which could be used against "the U.S.-allied intelligentized combat system" (美盟智能化作战体系). In a future high-end conflict, the author writes, "what is fought over is information, what is fought with is algorithms, and what is contested is intelligence" (斗的是信息，打的是算法，争的是智能) (Li Zhongqiang, 2025). **[5]**

The PLA has made progress in using gathered intelligence in the decision-making process. The Global Times reported that the Air Force strike-planning system seen on CCTV can coordinate targets, formations, and successive waves of attack far more quickly than conventional planning (Global Times, August 3). An aerospace editor at state-affiliated China Aerospace Daily reported the next day that intelligence gathered from PLA Air Force drones can be fed into an open-architecture system that relies on AI to evaluate it and "generate optimal operational plans in seconds or tens of seconds" (Global Times, August 4).

According to procurement records, PLA entities have issued tenders that explicitly call for tools based on DeepSeek and other domestically developed AI models, while university researchers use DeepSeek to examine battlefield scenarios and to improve drone-swarm targeting decisions (Reuters, October 27, 2025; China Brief, October 27, 2025). However, members of the People's Armed Police (PAP), the paramilitary police force under the command of the Central Military Commission, have acknowledged that PLA AI applications remain limited to auxiliary support functions such as answering queries and generating content, and lag foreign models in performance considerably. The application of AI in offensive combat remains at an exploratory stage (Li, Wu, and Wang, 2026). **[6]** Experts at the PRC's National Defense University see militaries moving toward a hybrid approach in which AI assists with various functions but humans make the final call (AI辅助推演、人类最终定夺)—something also referred to as "humans in the loop, machines speeding up" (人在回路、机在提速) (PLA Daily, October 12). Ukraine's new decision-support system Marichka is an early version of this kind of system. The same PLA Daily article voices fears, however, that if AI is integrated too deeply into decision mechanisms, "human-machine authority will be eroded in the pursuit of efficiency in war" (人机权责在战争中被效率侵蚀) (PLA Daily, October 12).

Mixed Views on Autonomy's Decisiveness

Autonomy addresses the problem of communications jamming. As Yang Zhen (杨震) of the China Electronics Standardization Institute wrote for the defense industry publication China Defense Conversion (中国军转民), "the core lesson of the Russia–Ukraine battlefield is that the electronic warfare environment determines the technology route" (俄乌战场的核心教训是电子战环境决定了技术路线), but fully autonomous use of lethal force is still far from being mainstream (Yang Zhen, accessed October 30, 2026). **[7]** Autonomy is nevertheless widely understood to be potent, and Chinese defense-industry researchers have been quick to take note of the use of autonomy in Ukraine. An engineer at the 54th Research Institute of the China Electronics Technology Group Corporation (CETC) mentioned that Ukrainian forces now routinely use "last-mile" autonomy, in which a drone can identify a target, hone in on it, and make impact

after communications with the operator are jammed. "Last-mile" autonomy boosts hit rates in a strike mission from 10–20 percent to 70–80 percent, and troops can learn to use the technology in under 24 hours (Hao Yunfeng, April 2025). **[8]**

Some PLA writers see autonomy as fully decisive. One author in the Military Digest urged the PLA to build forces around algorithms, stating that "algorithms are king, the system wins" (算法为王、体系制胜), and using Ukraine's June 2025 Operation Spiderweb as evidence that "human-out-of-the-loop" (人在回路外) operations are increasingly common. Despite the piece's enthusiasm, however, it makes unsupported claims about AI swarm coordination, and PLA doctrine lags behind its proposals (Liu Zhenggang, 2026). **[9]** As authors from PLA Unit 63893 wrote in 2025, drone attack-and-defense theory in general "has not yet formed valuable combat guidance manuals or regulations" (尚未形成有价值作战指导手册、作战条例等) and called deeper research "a real and urgent task for us" (对我们来说是一项现实而紧迫的工作) (Liu Zhengtang et al., 2025). **[10]**

The PLA is instead focusing on building unmanned ground units and counter-drone capabilities. At the September 2025 military parade in Beijing, unmanned ground formations were described as capable of "remote control, autonomous action, and flexible grouping" (远程操控、自主行动、灵活编组) (Xinhua, September 5, 2025). In an exercise the following month, a PLA brigade trained counter-drone tactics, using equipment that could detect drones' radio frequencies and match them to a catalog of more than 800 commercial drone models (CSIS, October 7).

Cognitive Warfare Offers Cheap Offensive Measures

The fourth PLA use case for AI is deception. Military researchers have worked on deepfake technologies with the aim of deceiving, persuading, and shaping the cognitive battlefield. Deepfake technology is cheap—researchers at a Chinese military academy note that they can create a voice clone by using just a ten-second audio sample and that the cost of creating deepfakes has collapsed to the point that "the side defending against deepfakes always pays more than the side using them" (防御深度伪造技术的一方付出的代价总是要多于应用它的一方) (Gu Junwei et al., 2025). **[11]**

Rather than curbing deepfakes through detection, the paper recommends "offense as defense" (以攻代守), or the pre-emptive creation of deepfakes by the defensive side. By creating a flood of its own deepfakes, an army can seize the "cognitive high ground" (抢占认知域的高地). Doing so, the authors argue, will save money and prove effective. Another paper cites an example of Russian attempts to create low-quality websites that, when scraped for data to train large language models, pollute the dataset (Wang Ling et al., 2026). **[12]** In this way, the authors argue, AI can be used to deceive the enemy, just as it is already used to deceive consumers.

There is some debate about how effective these techniques can be. Writing in the PLA Daily earlier this year, an academic from the Academy of Military Sciences argued that AI enables more granular targeting of propaganda, turning propaganda wars from "flood irrigation" (漫灌) into more precise "drip irrigation" (滴灌) (PLA Daily, April 13). By contrast, civilian scholars note that AI propaganda may not pay off. In Ukraine, they say, the sheer volume of AI-generated material led to massive fatigue and mistrust, and ultimately limited its influence (Shi and Huang, 2025). **[13]**

Fears of Hardware Dependencies

The AI technologies empowering modern military

capabilities rely on an array of software and hardware supply chains that are vulnerable. Chinese experts treat control of these resources as an essential military requirement. First, AI needs combat data for training. According to a Military Digest assessment of Russian military AI, Moscow started collecting combat data from unmanned combat systems in mid-2025 to train its AI models, which cannot be substituted by laboratories. Li Zhongqiang (李忠强), a PLA researcher, has called for "an all-army mechanism for reporting military training data samples" (全军军事训练数据样本上报机制) (Li, 2025). **[14]** Second, AI needs hardware. The same Military Digest assessment notes that Nvidia's Jetson Orin Nano, an edge AI computer, is used in Russia's long-range Shahed drone, the MS001, while more than half of the key AI components in Russia's unmanned systems are supplied by U.S. firms (Yuan Li et al., 2026). **[15]**

Third, AI needs networking. As Peking University researcher Pang Xun (庞珣) points out, SpaceX can unilaterally control the coverage area and functional scope of a sovereign state's critical wartime infrastructure by deciding where its Starlink system is available (Pang and Qu, 2026). **[16]** Gao Jixiang (高际香), a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, draws the conclusion from Russia's experience of Western sanctions that only self-controlled AI can ensure the continuation and iteration of a nation's AI system in the face of a blockade (Gao and Liu, 2026). **[17]** Moscow has thus turned to its Chinese partners for assistance, with Sberbank cooperating on the "joint improvement and adaptation of open-source large language models" (开源大语言模型的共同改进和适配) (S&T Daily, September 25, 2025). This assistance would be in conflict with Russia's draft AI law, however, which excludes foreign software or components from its definition of "sovereign" models (Gao and Liu, 2026). **[18]** Clearly, sovereignty is easier to claim than to achieve.

Conclusion

Chinese military writers interpret Russia's war in Ukraine as one in which AI matters most as an accelerator—of targeting, planning, and strikes under jamming—and as a cheap amplifier of propaganda. They also observe that all of these innovations rest on data, chips, and networks that must be brought under national control. They are divided, however, on some of the other takeaways from the conflict. Some argue that the PLA should develop AI planning systems, unmanned formations, and domestically-produced large language models, while others argue that the PLA should focus instead on developing "upstream capabilities" (上游能力建设) such as intelligence, navigation, communications, and command-and-control, as well as operator training, arguing that these are better investments than drones (Huang and Yan, 2026). **[19]**

The establishment of a system-wide method for collecting training data, formation of special units to employ unmanned systems, and exercises designed to test unmanned systems in heavily-jammed environments are all worth watching out for in the coming months. After all, PLA officers are aware of the shortcomings of PLA doctrine, performance of AI models, and lack of combat experience, and Beijing wants to understand the war in Ukraine before having to fight its own.

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Notes

[1] Zhang Chengxian [张成贤] and Liang Tian [梁天]. "Characteristics of Ukrainian Battlefield Target-Intelligence Support in the Ukraine Crisis" [乌克兰危机中乌军战场目标情报保障特点研究]. In Proceedings of the 13th China Command and Control Conference [第十三届中国指挥控制大会论文集], 153–57. 2025. Both authors are at NUDT's College of International Studies.

[2] Fang Chao [房超]. "Typical Features and Winning Rules of Intelligentized Warfare as Seen in the Russia–Ukraine Conflict" [从俄乌冲突看智能化战争的典型特征与制胜规律]. China Defense Conversion [中国军转民], no. 10 (2025): 14–17. Unattributed think-tank analysis republished in a defense industry magazine.

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[4] Li Chen [李晨]. "Technological Innovation, AI, and Great-Power Military Competition" [技术创新、人工智能与大国军事竞争]. Journal of National Security Studies [国家安全研究], no. 1 (2025): 46–64. Li is vice dean of Renmin University's School of International Studies.

[5] Li Zhongqiang [李忠强]. "The Use of AI Algorithms in Joint Operations and Reflections" [人工智能算法在联合作战中的运用与思考]. Military Digest [军事文摘], no. 3 (2025): 36–39.

[6] Li Xinfu [李新福], Wu Xingfang [吴星芳], and Wang Xiao [王啸]. "Research on AI-Driven Offensive Military Applications" [基于人工智能驱动的攻击性军事应用研究]. China Defense Conversion [中国军转民], no. 14 (2026): 45–46. The authors are with the PAP Shandong Corps and the PAP Engineering University. The paper concerns U.S. cyber operations rather than Ukraine; its account of those operations contains claims not supported by open sources.

[7] Yang Zhen [杨震]. "AI Research in U.S. Defense: From U.S. Policy to Combat Experience on the Russia–Ukraine Battlefield" [美国国防领域的人工智能研究——从美方政策到俄乌战场的实战经验]. China Defense Conversion [中国军转民], "Focus" section, n.d., 18–20. (issue number not printed on the pages). The China Electronics Standardization Institute is subordinate to the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology.

[8] Bondar, Kateryna. "Ukraine's Future Vision and Current Capabilities for Waging AI-Enabled Autonomous Warfare (Translation)" [乌克兰当前人工智能自主作战能力与未来愿景 (译文)]. Abridged translation by Hao Yunfeng [郝云丰]. Information Security and Communications Privacy [信息安全与通信保密], no. 4 (2025): 17–25. Originally published by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). The translator is an engineer at CETC's 54th Research Institute; the CSIS original was published in March 2025, one month before the translation.

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Opening Ceremony of the Second 2023 Training Program for Party Organization Secretaries of Beijing Primary and Secondary Schools. (Source: Beijing Daily)

New Rules Tighten Party Control Over Public Service Units

Christopher Nye & Charles Sun
October 30, 2026

Executive Summary

- The Regulations on the Registration and Management of Public Service Units, published on October 26, set "comprehensively strengthening Party leadership over public service units" as a legislative purpose. They give the Party leadership system in schools, hospitals, research institutes, and other public service units a basis in administrative regulations.
- The new penalties go as far as revoking a unit's legal person certificate. The regulations also complete the procedures for closing and merging public service units, in preparation for shutting down schools, hospitals, libraries, and other units in areas with shrinking populations.
- Party leadership is extending from Party and state organs and public service units into social organizations. Several regulations governing social organizations are on the State Council's legislative plan and will likely be revised along the same lines.

On October 26, the State Council published the Regulations on the Registration and Management of Public Service Units (事业单位登记管理条例), which seek to enhance Party control over entities that include most public schools, public hospitals, research institutes, and state media outlets (Xinhua, October 26). **[1]** The first legislative purpose of the new regulations, listed in Article 1, is "comprehensively strengthening Party leadership over public service units" (全面加强事业单位党的领导). The word "Party" (党) appears 20 times in the text of the new regulations, whereas it did not appear once in the 1998 Interim Regulations (暂行条例) that they replace (Ministry of Justice, June 27, 2004). **[2]**

The regulations are another step in the extension of Party leadership into organizations of all kinds under General Secretary Xi Jinping. In 2019, the Fourth Plenum of the 19th Central Committee called for improving the systems through which the Party leads "enterprises and public institutions, primary-level self-governing mass organizations, and social organizations" (企事业单位、基层群众自治组织、社会组织等制度) so as to "ensure the Party plays a leading role in all kinds of organizations" (确保党在各种组织中发挥领导作用) (Xinhua, November 5, 2019). Under Xi, the Party leadership system (党的领导体制) in public service units has spread from universities to hospitals and to primary and secondary schools. The new regulations give that system a basis in administrative regulations.

Regulations Codify Party Leadership System

The new regulations bind public service units to the Party in three ways. First, they give legal backing to the existing Party leadership system. Documents from the Central Organization Department describe this system as one in which "administrative leaders take responsibility under the leadership of the Party committee" (党委领导下的行政领导人负责制) (Xinhua, September 13). Similar systems have been implemented individually in various public service units up to this point. For universities, the 1998 Higher Education Law (高等教育法) announced that university presidents would take responsibility under the leadership of the Party committee (Wikisource, accessed October 28). For hospitals, a 2018 Central Committee opinion stipulated that "public hospitals implement a system of directors taking responsibility under the leadership of the Party committee" (公立医院实行党委领导下的院长负责制) (Xinhua, June 25, 2018). And for grade schools, in 2022 a separate Central Committee opinion called for "Party organizations in primary and secondary schools to exercise comprehensive leadership over school work" (中小学校党组织全面领导学校工作) (Xinhua, January 26, 2022).

These were all internal Party documents, whereas the new regulations are issued by the state. Article 6 of the latest regulations calls for "improving the Party leadership system in public service units" (完善事业单位党的领导体制), and Article 3 broadens the definition of bodies that may found such units from "state organs" (国家机关) to "all types of organs" (各类机关). This term is used in intra-Party regulations and signals that units founded by Party organs have now been brought within the regulations' scope.

Second, the regulations link "registration management" (登记管理) to "intra-Party oversight" (党内监督). The first item in a unit's annual report is the state of its Party building, an important instrument of political control. Under the regulations, "registration authorities" (登记管理机关) that find problems with Party building are required to "promptly notify the relevant parties" (及时通报有关方面). Party organizations in "supervising departments" (主管部门) and "sponsoring units" (举办单位) are responsible for conducting "inspection tours" (巡视巡察) of the units under them.

Third, although the regulations have been

released by the State Council, they empower a Party organ to enforce them. Registration of public service units is currently overseen by the Office of the Central Institutional Organization Commission (中央编办), which has been placed under the Central Organization Department since 2018 (Xinhua, March 21, 2018).

The regulations set no specific penalties for failures in Party building, likely because other rules already cover them. Because the leaders of public service units are managed by the Party's organization departments and supervised by its discipline inspection departments (纪检部门), the removal of a university president or hospital director has always been a decision for the Party committee at the next level up.

Regulations Tighten Exit Rules for Units

The official rationale for the revision is that some public service units have strayed from their public-interest objectives (Xinhua, October 26). Last year, the National Audit Office found that, at the central level, 88 percent of the money involved in irregularities was concentrated in units subordinate to central departments, including both public service units and enterprises (National Audit Office, June 24, 2025). The previous regulations contained limited provisions for disciplining public service units, however, listing only three grounds for penalties, and revoking a unit's registration required the consent of the authority that had approved its establishment. The new regulations address this challenge, expanding the list to include 13 grounds for penalties, with sanctions ranging from warnings to revocation of a unit's legal person certificate (法人证书). Four of these grounds allow authorities to restrict a unit's operations without a prior warning, the first two being "not operating for public-interest purposes" (不以公益为目的) and "setting up enterprises in violation of regulations" (违规举办企业). Universities, research institutes, and hospitals that run businesses therefore face considerable new risks.

The regulations also provide legal procedures for closing and merging public service units. For instance, units that are abolished or merged can now use simplified deregistration (简易注销). Where a unit that should be deregistered has failed to complete liquidation after one year, its supervising department and sponsoring unit will form a liquidation team (清算组). Legal person certificates now expire automatically. **[3]** Units that have conducted no business for more than a year can be penalized, up to revocation of their certificates.

The aim of these procedures is largely to consolidate public service units in areas with shrinking populations. In 2025, the total population of the People's Republic of China (PRC) fell by 3.39 million—the fourth consecutive annual decrease (National Bureau of Statistics, February 28). The same year, the number of elementary schools fell by roughly 8,000 (Ministry of Education, July 6). The Outline of the 15th Five-Year Plan calls for "improving mechanisms for allocating educational resources in line with population change" (健全与人口变化相适应的教育资源配置机制) and "optimizing the structure and distribution of public service units in public services" (优化公共服务领域事业单位结构布局) (Xinhua, March 13). Hospitals, libraries, and other institutions in these areas will likely be restructured alongside schools.

Party Leadership Set to Extend Further

Beyond state organs and public service units, Party leadership will continue to reach into every entity in society. Social organizations (社会组织), which the Ministry of Civil Affairs defines as registered social groups (社会团体), foundations (基金会), and social service organizations (社会服务机构), are likely to be the next to be fully incorporated (Ministry of Civil Affairs, April 3, 2024).

The Party's authority over social organizations is mainly derived from internal Party documents and personnel arrangements. It began laying institutional groundwork in 2016, when an Opinion on Reforming the Social Organization Management System (关于改革社会组织管理制度促进社会组织健康有序发展的意见), issued jointly by the General Offices of the CCP Central Committee and the State Council, called for "achieving full coverage of Party organizations and Party work" (实现党的组织和工作全覆盖) (Xinhua, August 21, 2016). The China Law Society (中国法学会) is a case in point. Its president, Chen Wenqing (陈文清), is a member of the Politburo and secretary of the Central Political and Legal Affairs Commission (Xinhua, January 11, 2025). Presidents of its subordinate research societies (研究会) are selected in "adherence to political standards" (坚持政治标准), and the list of candidates is confirmed by a meeting of the society's Party group (党组) or a president's office meeting (会长办公会议) (China Law Society, June 30, 2020). Most of these research societies, including those for criminal law, constitutional law, and criminal procedure law, are now headed by vice-ministerial-level (副部级) cadres who replaced scholars. **[4]**

State legislation is following suit. Following an amendment in 2023, the Charity Law (慈善法) stipulates that "charity work adheres to the leadership of the Communist Party of China" (慈善工作坚持中国共产党的领导) (NPC, December 29, 2023). The State Council's 2026 legislative work plan includes new Regulations on the Registration and Management of Social Service Organizations (社会服务机构登记管理条例), revisions to the Regulations on the Management of Foundations (基金会管理条例), and a draft Law on Industry Associations and Chambers of Commerce (行业协会商会法) (State Council, May 11). A 2016 draft of the social service organization regulations, released for public comment by the Ministry of Civil Affairs, already required such organizations to "establish Chinese Communist Party organizations" (设立中国共产党的组织) (China Law Translate, accessed October 28).

Conclusion

CCP leadership has extended from Party and state organs into public service units and will penetrate further into every corner of society. Party organizations have entered the decision-making bodies of schools, hospitals, research institutes, and social groups, and Party leadership is now written into the regulations that register them. The Party's rule is thus tightly bound to the functioning of these institutions. Xi likely believes that embedding the Party in society will help sustain one-party rule over the long term. In essence, this marks a return to the conditions of the Mao Zedong era. The separation of Party and government (党政分开) pursued since the Deng Xiaoping era died long ago, and the Party has now returned even more pervasively. Little remains of the political legacy of reform and opening up.

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Notes

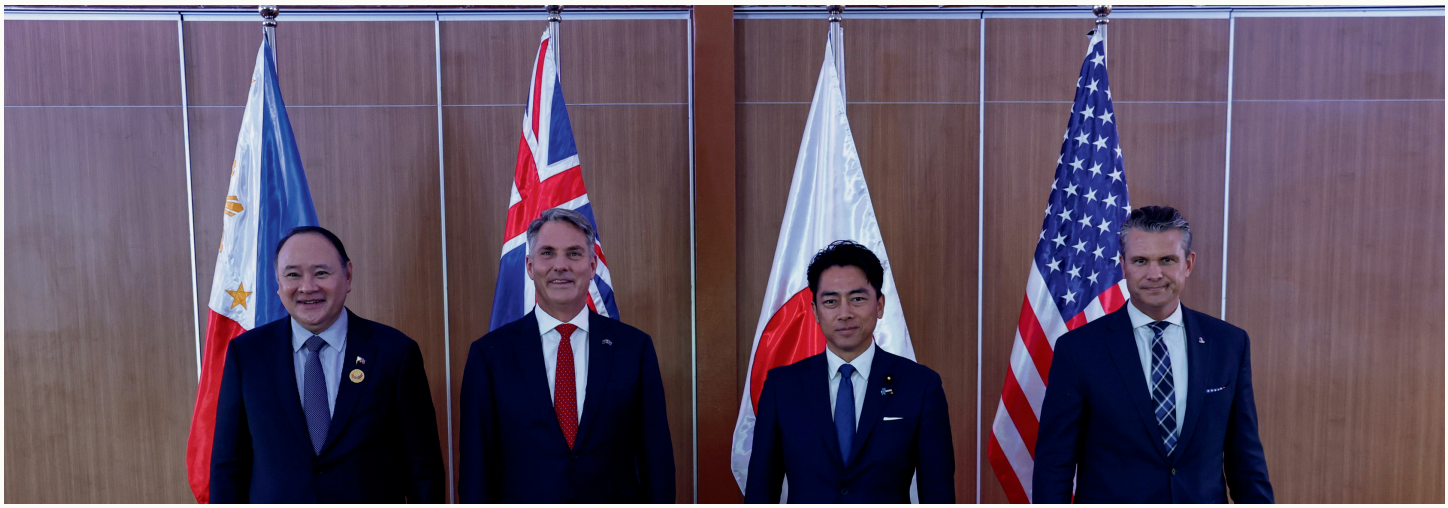
[1] The official English translation of 事业单位 is "public institutions." This article uses "public service units" to convey the term's meaning more precisely. According to official figures from 2014, the PRC had 1.11 million public service units with 31.53 million authorized staff positions (Ministry of Justice, May 15, 2014).

[2] Possibly with external audiences in mind, the official English-language version omitted the requirement in Article 6 that public service units "arm their minds with Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era" (用习近平新时代中国特色社会主义思想武装头脑) and the reference to "inspection tours" (巡视巡察) in Article 18 (Xinhua, October 26).

[3] Time-limited certificates and the temporary withholding of certificates both predate the new regulations. The regulations elevate these provisions from the lower-ranking Implementing Rules (实施细则) of the Office of the Central Institutional Organization Commission into administrative regulations (Beijing Municipal Government, January 24, 2014).

[4] In 2021, the presidency of the China Law Society's Criminal Law Research Society (刑法学研究会) passed from Beijing Normal University professor Zhao Bingzhi (赵秉志) to Jia Yu (贾宇), then chief procurator of Zhejiang Province and now president of the Shanghai High People's Court. That same year, the presidency of its Constitutional Law Research Society (宪法学研究会) passed from Renmin University of China professor Han Dayuan (韩大元) to Zheng Shuna (郑淑娜), a former deputy director of the Legislative Affairs Commission of the National People's Congress Standing Committee. In 2022, the presidency of its Criminal Procedure Law Research Society (刑事诉讼法学研究会) passed from China University of Political Science and Law professor Bian Jianlin (卞建林) to Jing Dali (敬大力), a former chief procurator of Beijing (Supreme People's Court, December 11, 2021, November 27, 2022; Constitutional Law Research Society, November 3, 2021).

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Philippine Secretary of Defense Gilberto Teodoro Jr., Australian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence Richard Marles, Japanese Minister of Defense Shinjiro Koizumi, and U.S. Secretary of War Pete Hegseth pose for a group picture during the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting on October 28, 2026, in Cebu, Philippines. (Source: Getty)

PRC Escalates Political Warfare Against Philippines

Matthew Fulco
October 30, 2026

Executive Summary

- Beijing is ramping up its political warfare targeting the Philippines. Beijing's escalation since the Ferdinand Marcos Jr. administration came to power in 2022 is likely due to what it perceives as Manila's increased maritime assertiveness and comments surrounding the Taiwan Strait.
- The Chinese government sanctioned Philippine defense minister Gilberto "Gibo" Teodoro Jr. in June, an unprecedented step against a cabinet official of a country with whom it maintains diplomatic relations. The sanctioning forecloses any deescalation, at least until Teodoro leaves his position.
- Beijing's political warfare is also targeting domestic Philippine politics. Philippine authorities have accused the People's Republic of China (PRC) of election interference and of improper financial links with Philippine vice president Sara Duterte. Beijing's response has been to sanction Philippine senator Francis Tolentino after he presented evidence of PRC electoral interference.
- The efficacy of the PRC's actions appears limited. Instead, the influence campaign is likely stoking Philippine nationalism and pushing the country closer to the United States, Japan, and Taiwan.

The People's Republic of China (PRC) is escalating its political warfare campaign against the Philippines in a bid to discredit the pro-U.S. government of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. and enable the victory of a more accommodationist leader in Manila's May 2028 presidential election. Elected in 2022, Marcos is limited by his country's constitution to a single six-year term (Constitution of the Republic of the Philippines, February 2, 1987).

In recent months, the PRC has verbally attacked senior Philippine officials, sanctioned the Philippine defense minister, claimed that the Philippines' Batanes archipelago is under Chinese sovereignty, and amplified propaganda narratives that support one of Marcos's political rivals.

Beijing's gambit, driven by anger with Manila's maritime assertiveness, is likely to backfire. Its actions will aggravate the high levels of distrust it already faces in the country while pushing Manila closer to the United States, Japan, and Taiwan.

Playing the Sanctions Card

The PRC and the Philippines have long been at odds over conflicting South China Sea claims. Notably, the PRC has refused to abide by a 2016 South China Sea international tribunal ruling in favor of Manila (PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs [MFA], July 12, 2016). Yet both countries have historically sought to prevent those tensions from undermining the broader bilateral relationship.

In recent months, however, the PRC has taken a hard line against the Philippines for its more proactive defense posture. Manila has refused to yield in the South China Sea, deepened security cooperation with the U.S. and Japan, and become more outspoken about its stake in cross-Strait peace.

Beijing has reserved the harshest treatment for Defense Secretary Gilberto "Gibo" Teodoro Jr., whom it sees as the architect of Manila's challenges to its so-called "core interests." In June, after Teodoro criticized Beijing's aggressiveness in its territorial waters at the Shangri-La Dialogue, an annual security forum in Singapore, Beijing banned him and his family from entering PRC territory and doing business with PRC entities (MFA, June 11). In October, a NetEase article mocked Teodoro as an "acting president" (代总统) with "pitiful approval ratings" (可怜的支持率) trying to undermine the Presidential Palace by "creating a separate policy towards China" (制定另一套对华政策) (NetEase News, October 15).

While largely symbolic, the sanctions are still significant. They marked the first time Beijing has targeted a sitting cabinet official of a country whom it diplomatically recognizes. By defining the Philippine defense secretary as a direct geopolitical adversary, Beijing has closed off a key de-escalation ramp with Manila until he leaves his position. **[1]**

The PRC, meanwhile, may double down on the sanctions tool. In October, Chinese-language Philippine media, citing "well-informed sources," warned that Beijing is "running out of patience" (失去耐心) with Manila. Among measures to punish the Philippines being considered is sanctioning a group of Filipino politicians considered "anti-China." The article further stated that if the Philippines allows Taiwan to open a representative office in Cebu, Beijing could demand that Manila close some of its consulates in the PRC, including the one in Hong Kong (Chinese Commercial News, October 21).

Claiming the Batanes

In some cases, the PRC aims to pressure the Philippines through lower-level unofficial

channels. For instance, at a June 30 academic symposium in Guangzhou, academics from Jinan University, Nanjing University, and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences argued that the northernmost Philippine island province of Batanes, which is about 88 miles from Taiwan, belongs to the PRC. To support this argument, they claimed that the archipelago is a natural geographic extension of Taiwan that was governed by the Ming and Qing dynasties. The academics said that the symposium was convened in direct response to the launch of maritime delimitation negotiations between the Philippines and Japan (South, July 2).

The National Historical Commission of the Philippines swiftly refuted the Chinese scholars' claims about the Batanes, noting that Spanish records from 1687 show no Chinese governance, that Spain claimed the archipelago in 1783, and that the islands have long been considered part of the Philippines (Philippine Daily Inquirer, July 10).

PRC media commentaries suggest the Batanes claim is not just a response to maritime delimitation discussions Beijing opposes, but also reflects more deeply-seated security anxieties. Highlighting recent U.S.-Philippines military cooperation in the Batanes, a July commentary published by the Jiangxi provincial government said, "Holding a knife to China's doorstep and calling it 'defense'—that's Manila's real intention" (把刀子架在中国家门口，还说是"防御"。这就是马尼拉的真实算盘) It further accused the Philippines of using the Batanes as "a springboard for intervening in the Taiwan Strait" (干预台海的跳板) (Sohu, July 15).

Political Interference

Arguably Beijing's most aggressive political warfare moves against the Philippines are its direct interference in Manila's domestic politics. In April 2025, Senator Francis Tolentino presented evidence during a Senate hearing linking the Chinese embassy in Manila to online disinformation campaigns against the Philippine government ahead of midterm elections the following month (Philippine Daily Inquirer, April 24, 2025). That prompted President Marcos to order an investigation into the alleged election interference. The PRC's foreign ministry spokesperson rejected these claims, insisting that it "adheres to the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries" (一贯奉行不干涉内政原则) (PRC MFA, April 24, 2025). It subsequently sanctioned Tolentino, barring him and his family from entering the PRC and any business dealings with Chinese entities (PRC MFA, July 1, 2025).

New allegations have emerged that suggest deepening PRC meddling in Philippine politics. In October 2026, Manila's National Security Council said that it would investigate reports of remittances totaling Philippine Peso (PHP) 319 million ($4.8 million) sent from the PRC to a company linked to the husband of Vice President Sara Duterte (Daily Tribune, October 8). Duterte, the daughter of former president Rodrigo Duterte, is a political rival of Marcos, despite serving as vice president in his administration (In the Philippines, the offices of president and vice president are elected separately.)

After the allegations surfaced, Sara Duterte was accused of improperly amassing wealth and impeached. Her trial is expected to run through December (Philippine News Agency, October 27). Duterte denies the allegations, claiming the Marcos administration is using them to sideline a political rival (Davao Today, October 7).

Duterte's public comments suggest, at a minimum, that she favors a more accommodating PRC policy than Marcos. She has consistently advocated for a less assertive stance on maritime sovereignty issues. At a recent press conference, she said that the Philippines is

"becoming a troublemaker in Southeast Asia," echoing PRC propaganda (ABS-CBN, October 14). When Marcos warned that the allegations against her could constitute a grave national security threat, she said that the president's statement "is a bold and dangerous challenge to China" (OneNews, October 13).

Chinese media has been supportive of Duterte. A Chinese scholar quoted by Global Times said "she holds relatively pragmatic stances," in contrast to the Marcos administration's "increasingly radical China policy" (Global Times, October 13).

Conclusion

The PRC has intensified its political warfare campaign against the Philippines in recent months to undermine the Marcos administration, underscore its sweeping maritime territorial claims, and lend support to Filipino politicians it sees as friendlier to its interests. Yet thus far, Beijing's strategy has failed to bear fruit.

Instead, the PRC's heavy-handed tactics have stoked Philippine nationalism, allowed Manila to strengthen its alliance network, and exposed the vulnerability of Marcos's Beijing-friendly political rivals. Even if Sara Duterte is found not guilty in her impeachment trial, her alleged close ties to the PRC and accommodationist approach to Beijing will be heavily scrutinized if she runs for president in 2028.

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Notes

[1] The PRC has sanctioned other politicians, such as Tom Tugendhat in the United Kingdom and Marco Rubio in the United States, but only before they were promoted to cabinet-level positions. And since sanctioning Teodoro Jr., Beijing has also sanctioned two more cabinet-level politicians: Francis Fonseca, Belize's foreign minister, and Gustavo Villate, Paraguay's minister of information and communication technologies. However, the PRC lacks official diplomatic relations with Belize and Paraguay due to their official recognition of Taiwan.

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PRC Premier Li Qiang met with president of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev in Beijing in 2024. (Source: China Daily)

U.S.–PRC Competition Enters New Phase in Central Asia

Bradley Jardine and Edward Lemon
October 7, 2026

Executive Summary

- U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio's recent visit to Uzbekistan marked Washington's most concrete push yet to compete with Beijing in Central Asia, especially on critical minerals and connectivity.
- Rubio emphasized that Washington would not force Tashkent to choose between the United States and the People's Republic of China (PRC), unlike the more confrontational approach of the first Trump administration.
- U.S. outreach to Uzbekistan still trails PRC engagement. The PRC announced $60 billion in investment in Uzbekistan just before Rubio's visit, as compared to a possible $16 billion in deals signed during the U.S.–Uzbekistan meetings. The same lag appears in the U.S. priority sector of critical minerals. The United States imports around 2 percent of the region's critical minerals, while the PRC imports nearly 50 percent.

Far from the geopolitical flashpoints of the Persian Gulf and Ukraine, double-landlocked Uzbekistan has become a new arena for competition between the United States and the People's Republic of China (PRC). On October 20, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio arrived in Samarkand, accompanied by an American business delegation totaling over 200 people (Daryo, October 14). On the city's historic central square, Rubio said in his speech that "we're here now" to advance U.S.–Uzbekistan connectivity, just as the historic Silk Road brought global trade through the region (U.S. Embassy in the PRC, October 20).

The PRC has spent decades investing in reinvigorating the very trade routes Rubio invoked. He recognized in a response to a local journalist that "it's a competition," but that American businesses should "have a fair shot to compete" (U.S. Embassy in the PRC, October 20). Anticipating Washington's overtures, Beijing dispatched Premier Li Qiang (李强) to Tashkent three days before Rubio's speech. For the PRC, Uzbekistan is a critical partner in its efforts to connect Eurasia. For the United States, the region's potentially vast critical mineral deposits offer an opportunity to diversify supply chains and reduce its frontier technology sector's dependence on Chinese components (RFE/RL, October 21).

Competition Overshadows Other Interests

Rubio's visit marked a change in regional strategy since President Donald Trump's first term. In 2020, then-Secretary of State Mike Pompeo drew attention to the PRC's mistreatment of Uyghurs and Kazakhs as a potential wedge between Central Asia and the PRC (Current Time, February 2, 2020). Fears of this binary approach recently resurfaced in the summer when the State Department sought to force Kazakhstan to choose between the United States's Pax Silica initiative and PRC's World Artificial Intelligence Cooperation Organization (RFE/RL, September 17).

The October visit presented a less confrontational approach. Rubio acknowledged that "Uzbekistan has been clear that they want to be friends with everybody," but said that the United States does not wish to force Uzbekistan to stop talking to somebody else or stop working with some other country (U.S. Embassy in the PRC, October 20). This suggests a U.S. recognition that Central Asian governments have become more capable geostrategic players in their own right. They can now effectively wield leverage to gain favorable relations with a wider range of actors than at any point since the collapse of the Soviet Union, including among themselves (Times of Central Asia, September 23).

Washington is seeking to challenge Beijing's dominance in Central Asia in critical minerals. After a regional minerals dialogue in 2024 and a White House summit in 2025, the United States signed a new investment framework with Uzbekistan in February 2026, targeting mineral exploration, extraction, and processing, along with plans for a joint investment company (Reuters, February 18).

Rubio's visit was the next test of whether Washington could turn those ambitions into tangible investment. Nearly 300 representatives of American businesses accompanied him and announced potential deals worth around $12 billion (Kun, October 25). Local media reports that almost 54 agreements were signed, including plans involving GE Aerospace, railway equipment manufacturer Wabtec, financial institutions such as Citigroup and BlackRock, and companies active in mineral development (Gazeta, October 19). Surprisingly, the joint statement issued after the visit failed to mention critical minerals specifically.

The statement emphasized supporting the development of Central Asian economies. It singled out the U.S. goal of helping Central Asia achieve its "export potential" by "developing innovative ways to increase value-added products within the region and [create] pathways to introduce these products to the international market" (Department of State, October 19). It also added that the United States seeks to "foster a region where e-commerce flourishes, innovative solutions abound, and talented entrepreneurs thrive" by leveraging "secure and trusted technology, American technological excellence, and the growing technology sectors of Central Asia."

PRC–Central Asia Relations Exceed U.S. Outreach

Even if realized, U.S. investments trail significantly behind the $60 billion that the PRC promised three days before the highly anticipated U.S. visit (President of Uzbekistan, October 17). This disparity also shows up in the critical minerals sector. The United States imports just 2.1 percent of the region's critical minerals, according to the Oxus Society's Central Asia Resource Tracker, while the PRC imports almost 50 percent (Oxus Society, accessed October 26).

Model of the BYD Car Factory in Jizzakh Free Economic Zone displayed in the Tashkent Islamic Civilization Center



(Source: Author's photograph)

The pattern extends to broader trends in PRC–Central Asian trade, which topped $100 billion for the first time in 2025, of which Uzbekistan accounted for $16 billion (Xinhua, January 18). In the broader region, the PRC is also the largest trade partner for isolated Iran and Afghanistan (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, October 23, 2023).

Tashkent sees the PRC as being essential to its modernization. Beijing is investing in renewable energy and advanced manufacturing, and is spearheading major infrastructure projects such as the China–Kyrgyzstan–Uzbekistan railway (Xinhua, October 18). During a recent visit to Tashkent, the authors saw how prominently these investments feature in the country's vision for the future. Inside the lavish, marble-clad, $150 million Center for Islamic Civilization, exhibits showcase Chinese-backed projects across Uzbekistan, including a scale model of BYD's auto factory in the southern Jizzakh region. The exhibits illustrated how much the Uzbek government is promoting the PRC's investments as part of its broader development ambitions.

During his meeting with Li Qiang on October 17, President Mirziyoyev described Uzbekistan–PRC relations as enjoying a "golden age," a phrase he had previously used in conversations with General Secretary Xi Jinping. He also reaffirmed Tashkent's support for the PRC's One-China policy and Beijing's efforts to combat what Chinese officials call the "three evil forces" of terrorism, separatism, and extremism (South China Morning Post [SCMP], October 18).

Model of New Tashkent Displayed at the Center of Islamic Civilization in Tashkent



(Source: Author's photograph)

In an interview with the South China Morning Post, Zhu Yongbiao (朱永彪), a regional specialist at Lanzhou University, emphasized the breadth of the PRC's commercial offerings, ranging from electric vehicles and renewable energy to ordinary manufactures. He argued that Chinese firms could provide products and solutions suited to individual Central Asian markets, which is "an advantage the U.S. simply lacks" (SCMP, October 18).

Conclusion

Chinese commentary on Rubio's visit has so far combined recognition of Washington's growing ambitions in Central Asia with skepticism about its capacity to act on them. In the lead-up to the trip, Zhang Jiadong (张家栋), a professor at Fudan University's Center for American Studies, argued that the U.S. was merely a "distant friend" (远方朋友) to the region (Global Times, October 19). Central Asian governments welcome Washington's engagement because it gives them greater leverage with the PRC. Unless U.S. investment follows, though, Washington will remain a "distant friend," lagging the PRC in influence and access.

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