

China after Communism: Preparing for a Post-CCP China

EDITOR: MILES YU



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Cover: Wild peach and apricot flowers are in full bloom in Yanqing District, encircling the Longquanyu Great Wall on March 25, 2025, in Beijing. (Hao Jihong via Getty Images)

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Note on Authorship

The decision to publish under full name, pseudonym, or anonymity was left to the discretion of each contributing author. In some cases, authors chose to withhold their identities due to professional, personal, or security considerations. The views expressed in this volume are those of the individual authors and do not necessarily reflect the positions of any affiliated institutions or sponsoring organizations.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Miles Yu

As the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) strengthens its regime and pursues global dominance, it faces significant and complex structural challenges. Domestically, Chinese economic growth is declining drastically under misguided policies while an aging population and declining birth rates affect the country's labor supply, consumption, and social security system. The housing market is in crisis as millions of apartments remain unsold and real estate developers go bankrupt, and high youth unemployment creates further instability. Political corruption in the CCP, bureaucratic inefficiency, and other waste also hinder economic progress and public trust.

Internationally, trade tensions with the United States and other Western nations threaten exports and foreign direct investment. And Beijing's coercive policies complicate relations with the Glob-

al South, where countries often owe debt to China. Diplomats and other officials at international organizations are increasingly skeptical of the China's global influence, making foreign policy more difficult.

While the People's Republic of China (PRC) has weathered crises before, a sudden regime collapse in China is not entirely unthinkable. Policymakers need to consider what might happen and what steps they would have to take if the world's longest-ruling Communist dictatorship and second-largest economy collapses due to its domestic and international troubles.

Photo: Honor guards walk next to the Museum of the First National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in Shanghai on February 27, 2025, ahead of the opening of the annual session of the National People's Congress. (Hector Retamal via Getty Images)

With chapters written by experts in military affairs, intelligence, economics, human rights, transitional justice, and constitutional governance, this report examines the initial steps that should be taken in the immediate aftermath of the CCP regime's collapse and the long-term trajectory China might take after a stabilization period. Drawing on historical analysis, strategic foresight, and domain-specific expertise, this anthology describes these challenges as an exercise in possibilities. The different chapters explore how a single-party system collapses in key sectors of the country and how political institutions transform, as well as China's unique political, economic, and social situation. Taken together, they assess the daunting tasks of stabilizing a long-repressed country after it has collapsed, in addition to the forces shaping China's future. In so doing, the authors hope to offer policy recommendations for managing the risks and opportunities of a transition.

The chapter "OSS in China Again: The Role of US Special Operations Forces after CCP Collapse," written by an author outside Hudson Institute, describes US operations in China during World War II and suggests that US special operations forces (SOF) can help stabilize a post-CCP China. It envisions SOF aiding provisional authorities, protecting critical infrastructure, and facilitating the peaceful emergence of a new government while working "by, with, and through" local actors. The chapter also underscores the cultural importance of narratives, historical memory, and symbolic legitimacy in a post-Communist transition.

In the second chapter, "Targeting Bioweapons Facilities with Precision after a CCP Regime Collapse," Ryan Clarke assesses the CCP's bioweapons infrastructure and warns that the People's Liberation Army's (PLA) dual-use biological research poses a strategic threat. He outlines three options for neutralizing bioweapons labs, with an emphasis on simultaneous operations, control of facility perimeters, and safe extraction or destruction of hazardous materials. The chapter argues for completely disabling the programs to prevent proliferation and catastrophe.

Clarke then advocates for overhauling the Chinese economy by recapitalizing the country while a new government repudiates illegitimate debts, privatizes state assets, and implements decentralization in "Restructuring the Chinese Financial System after CCP Collapse." He emphasizes that CCP policies have constrained China's economic potential and argues that a liberalized financial architecture is essential for both domestic prosperity and integration with global markets.

In the chapter "Securing China's Assets in America," Gordon G. Chang advises Washington to "get American businesses and citizens out of China" and to remove PRC entities from important sectors of the US economy. It highlights vulnerabilities of engaging with Beijing and describes what America should do with PRC assets in the US.

Rick Fisher in "Securing and Restructuring the PLA, PAP, and People's Militia" outlines a post-CCP demobilization and professionalization plan for China's vast security apparatus. It recommends retaining a leaner, more accountable military force focused on national defense and disaster relief while disbanding units associated with political repression. A Chinese military force without hegemonic ambitions can then help a new government integrate into peacekeeping operations and space exploration partnerships.

The chapter "Spy Versus Spy Versus Spies: The CCP's Security and Espionage Apparatus in the Absence of Central Authority" explores the potential fragmentation of the Ministry of State Security (MSS) and local Public Security Bureaus (PSBs). It draws lessons from European political transitions, particularly in dismantling secret police networks and opening archives for public scrutiny.

In "China's Autonomous Regions and Human Rights," Nina Shea discusses the importance of protecting human rights during a transitional period. According to her, the US should intervene to prevent ethnic violence, civil wars, and political ret-

tribution, with a special focus on China's five autonomous regions— Guangxi, Xinjiang, Tibet, Inner Mongolia, and Ningxia. She also highlights the need for measures to alleviate the grievances of other groups, including religious minorities like Christians and the Falun Gong.

The author of “How to Initiate a Truth and Reconciliation Process in China” describes how China can only move beyond past evils through the investigation and public disclosure of those crimes. The chapter recommends establishing a nation-

al truth and reconciliation commission modeled after South Africa's, and argues that peacefully transitioning to democracy will be difficult without forgiveness and reconciliation.

The final chapter, “A Constitutional Convention Plan,” focuses on how a post-Communist China can establish a constitutional democracy and draft a new constitution. It addresses how a constitutional convention would work, whether the boundaries of certain regions should be redrawn, how China's relationship with Taiwan should change, and what the new country's name should be.



OSS IN CHINA AGAIN: THE ROLE OF US SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES AFTER CCP COLLAPSE

Anonymous

The Nobel Prize–winning Russian author Boris Pasternak wrote, “I have found and given names to all this sorcery that has been the cause of suffering, bafflement, amazement, and dispute for several decades. Everything is named in simple, transparent, and sad words.” Pasternak’s words were a love story about a doctor named Yuri and “a girl from a different world” named

Lara who lived during Russia’s “chain of revolutionary decades.” Sorcery was the vast Bolshevik design to tear down the individual, remake society, and impose a world-historical ideology on

Photo: A US Air Force plane on a landing field in China during World War II, circa 1943. (Michael Ochs Archives via Getty Images)

private thoughts and beliefs: the “people had to be cured, by every means of terrorism, of the habit of thinking and judging for themselves, and forced to see what didn’t exist, to assert the very opposite of what their eyes told them.” To break the spell of the party-state’s elaborate shams and appropriation of the past, Pasternak offered simple, transparent, and sad words “to call each thing by its right name.”¹

There is much to name in China’s nineteenth-century encounter with a rising, encroaching international system and the chain of revolutionary decades that followed. After communism, the Boris Pasternaks of China, whom the Chinese government has long suppressed, will need to find and give names to a tortuous modern history. At stake in their work will be nothing less than China’s cultural and intellectual inheritance, the place of the Chinese people in modernity, and the disposition of the Chinese state toward the international system.

Like Pasternak, they will continue the task that an earlier generation of reformers and intellectuals began, a Marxist-Leninist revolution interrupted, and a totalitarian state commandeered. They will imagine Beijing as Pasternak once contemplated Moscow: not only “as the stage of the events . . . but as the main protagonist of a long story” portending freedom.² No government can ever prescribe the right names or correct interpretations of the past. Writers, historians, artists, former Chinese Communist Party (CCP) officials, and ordinary people will all put forward their own versions in a free, ongoing contest of ideas that spans the revolutionary decades of sorcery and recovers a collective memory.

The Land and the Sea

While CCP sorcerers slept during a fleeting period of frankness in the 1980s, one interpretation that made it past state censors to be broadcast on China Central Television was called *River Egypt*. The documentary depicted a land of yellow loess sediment in the interior of a broad continent. A river ran through it and carried the world’s heaviest silt load. In cycles, this river nurtured

and devastated the civilization born on its flood-prone banks. Its people came to view the world in cycles: of flood, of life and death, of rise and fall, of sowing and reaping, of the seasons. They worshiped the dragon, an amalgam of symbols representing life, death, and rebirth. They formed a cultural and psychological bond with the land. They built a Great Wall to defend the frontiers of the land and of agriculture. They sustained a self-sufficient order and a tradition of hierarchical governance bound to the land. “The land was the root of survival, a generational inheritance, the whole purpose of human life. Thousands of years of culture all accumulated in this yellow soil. Thus, it seems very mystical, as if it held the soul of the Chinese people.”³

As the events depicted in the documentary occurred, in another corner of the world the people of an island nation turned their gaze to the sea. They took to their ships and believed they were answering a calling: “Let us in God’s name leave off our attempts against the *terra firma*. . . . When we would enlarge ourselves, let it be that way we can, and to which it seems the eternal Providence hath destined us, which is by the sea.”⁴ They followed a linear rather than cyclical concept of fate. On the sea, they acquired a new character and a new mode of empire that conferred unprecedented economic and military power. They rose to the top of a maritime system of security and commerce that engulfed the world.

“Slowly, over the years, the English had become conscious that they were guarded by the sea and the sea was theirs to guard.”⁵ It was the beginning of world-historical changes unseen in a millennium, prompted by an extraordinary coincidence of geography, technology, commercial incentives, religious conviction, political tradition, national character, and timing. “England’s luck prepared it to rush to the head of the procession at just the time it mattered most to get in front. Full-blown capitalism was about to appear in the world; the country that mastered this new system would gather rewards that far outstripped all the treasures of any empire of the past.” It would pose a violent challenge to the heirs of the fertile river basins and heartlands of the world.⁶

In 1838, the continental empire in China that had resisted the incursions of inland herders and nomads for 2,000 years by building walls sent a commissioner to its southeastern coast to tend to a different frontier. Lin Zexu confiscated nearly three million pounds of opium that had arrived on foreign ships and washed it back out to sea. He prayed to the sea, but the sea brought war and humiliation. Britain's Royal Navy arrived in 1840, captured Shanghai and Zhenjiang, and sailed up the Yangtze River. Qing representatives settled for peace aboard HMS *Cornwallis*, moored outside Nanjing in 1842. It was the first "unequal treaty" between a people of the loess floodplain and an expanding maritime system.

China's defeat in the Opium Wars spurred reform-minded scholar-officials to promote a movement of "self-strengthening" and Westernization (洋务, literally "ocean matters") beginning in the 1860s. Yung Wing, the first Chinese graduate of an American college, returned to the United States in 1864 to procure machinery for a new arsenal and shipyard near Shanghai. In 1861, a Qing prince established the Office for the Management of the Affairs of All Countries (Zongli Yamen), a proto-Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to engage with the lands beyond the sea. Chinese students studied abroad at American high schools and colleges and at European naval and military academies. Still, the chain of humiliating defeats and unequal treaties continued. China lost its southern fleet in 1884 against France and its northern fleet in 1895 against Japan, which had responded more successfully to the West's naval challenge. Qing officials shut down the overseas educational mission and recalled their students from America in 1881. With inspiration from Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao, Emperor Guangxu issued a series of reform edicts over the course of 100 days in 1898. But the empress dowager Cixi suddenly placed him under palace detention, revoked his edicts, and executed six of the leading reformers. It was not easy for an empire of the land to adopt the sea.⁷

After the revolution of 1911, China entered a time of "no longer and not yet." The old order had irrevocably collapsed, while

the new dispensation was yet at hand. "Men, not weapons" (as Zeng Guofan once counseled Li Hongzhang) became weapons, not men as the military necessities of revolution and warlordism had momentarily outrun the growth of a public ideology. Ideology caught up on May 4, 1919, when student protesters in Beijing's Tiananmen Square ignited a searching reflection of China's past, present plight, and political and cultural future. Like an embryo, the May Fourth Movement contained the nascent potential of many possible forms of Chinese society and state: science, democracy, and Hu Shi's Pasternak-like appeal to plain language. But the movement also contained the early stirrings of the CCP, which would breed the real sufferings and unrealized hopes of ensuing decades.

In their final segment, the authors of *River Elegy* compare the May Fourth Movement to a "progressive cultural tide" that nonetheless failed to wash away the accumulated loess sediment of China's feudal age. "Over the ensuing decades, at times the sediment has resurfaced, and at times the whole surface has frozen over. Many matters in China, it seems, must start over anew from May Fourth."⁸

Pasternak, too, once compared the cultural achievements of Russia's intelligentsia to "frozen music" that the terrors of Stalinism interrupted, leaving a "truncated past" he hoped some future generation would inherit and resume. Likewise, *River Elegy* concludes with hopeful images of the blue sea, the yellow Loess Plateau, and the meandering Yellow River at last reaching the sea.⁹

The Yellow River is destined to cut through the Loess Plateau. It will finally flow into the blue sea. The greatness of the Yellow River was formed out of its suffering and its hope. Its greatness lies perhaps in the fact that it created a vast continent between the ocean and the plateau. The Yellow River has arrived at the great and painful threshold of the sea. After rolling across thousands of miles, the sediment will be deposited here

to form new land. The surging waves and the Yellow River will collide together here. The Yellow River must eliminate its fear of the sea. It must preserve the undaunted resolve and impulse that stems from the plateau. The water of life came from the sea, and to the sea it returns. After one thousand years of solitude, the Yellow River at last beholds the sea.¹⁰

A vast, frozen inheritance awaits China's present-day Pasternaks, spanning the Westernization and self-strengthening movement of 1861–95, the aspirations of 1895–98, the May Fourth Movement of 1919, *River Elegy* in 1988, and the Democracy Movement of 1989. By recalling this truncated past, they will continue a centuries-old endeavor to at last reconcile land and sea. Inevitably, they will traverse a "history that is howling to be told"¹¹ and confront a question that they have to answer: What became of land and sea during those intervening decades?

Proponents of the sea in China need to admit that their progressive tide enjoyed a formidable head start over the Marxist-Leninist revolution that ultimately prevailed in 1949. European missionaries had proselytized in China for centuries before Karl Marx ever wandered into the reading rooms of the British Museum to formulate *Das Kapital*. As Vladimir Lenin convened the First Congress of the Communist International at the Kremlin in 1919, Chinese reformers educated at American and European institutions had championed "Western learning for practical use"¹² for 50 years. Between 1905 and 1906, a Qing delegation traveled to Japan, the United States, Britain, France, Germany, Russia, and Italy to study their governments and propose constitutional reforms in China. US Army General Joseph Stillwell served as Chiang Kai-shek's chief of staff and coordinated Lend-Lease Act aid to the Chinese Nationalists (Kuomintang, or KMT) during the Second World War. The sea had ample opportunity, but on October 1, 1949, it was the chairman of the CCP, set against the sea, who stood triumphantly above the Gate of Heavenly Peace to announce the founding of a Marxist-Leninist people's republic. Who lost China?

One might forgive those Chinese who found Mao Zedong's CCP more appealing than Chiang Kai-shek's KMT during the Chinese Civil War for being ambivalent toward the ideas and institutions that came from the sea. Since 1839, the international maritime system had presented China with two Opium Wars, treaty ports and extraterritoriality, and defeat by the navies of France and Japan. With it had come the occupation of Beijing by the Boxer Relief Expedition ("the international system's first act of 'collective security,' with British, American, French, German, Belgian, Austro-Hungarian, Italian, Indian, and Japanese troops all involved"¹³). It had brought the unveiling of secret territory and sovereignty concessions at the Paris Peace Conference, fatal clashes between protesters and foreign security forces, and wartime atrocities under Japanese occupation—bitter subjugation by the maritime neighbor that had successfully adopted the sea. An alternative theory of history founded on a revolutionary ideology of the land, that declared private property illegitimate, that esteemed the countryside over the treaty ports, that had attained early triumphs in Russia (another continental empire), and that promised to upend a bourgeois world order grown wealthy and powerful through mastering the sea might thus find fertile ground in China.

A series of failed uprisings and KMT attacks nearly wiped out the CCP in 1927, and the communists abandoned their urban bases on the coast and fled to the plains, mountains, and lakes of China's vast interior. Its members reconstituted at rural bases inland, where they learned to mobilize the countryside, appeal to the masses of the land, and employ guerrilla tactics. The KMT held the coastal cities, drew its revenue from maritime customs duties, and modernized its armed forces with the aid of industrial powers across the sea. With an eye to popular sentiment, the CCP promptly declared war on Japan in 1932.

In contrast, Chiang Kai-shek's own subordinates kidnapped him in 1936 to compel a stronger anti-Japan policy. As KMT forces pursued them in 1935, CCP members embarked on a Long March overland ("a manifesto, a propaganda force, a

seeding-machine,”¹⁴ Mao exulted) to what would become its wartime capital of Yenan. Chiang also fled inland to Chongqing after Japan captured the coast, but his supporters flew him there on foreign-supplied aircraft.

Throughout the Second Sino-Japanese War, the CCP meticulously appealed to the psychology of the land, gaining the support of local farming communities, exploiting bitter anti-Japanese resentment, developing village militias for intelligence and logistical support, and organizing ideological campaigns to “awaken and arouse the popular masses.”¹⁵ In his diary, Chiang later lamented the KMT’s overreliance on overseas aid and its comparative neglect of the land, economic reform, ideology, and morale.

After Japan’s surrender in 1945, the US Army Air Forces and US Navy transported over 110,000 US-trained KMT troops by air and sea to key cities throughout north and northeast China. But a CCP army under the leadership of Lin Biao defeated them there through forced overland marches. KMT forces garrisoned the provincial capital cities as the CCP once again won the countryside.

Among a local population inclined to oppose the sea after years of Japanese occupation, the CCP implemented a program of land reform, thought reform, and mass mobilization. CCP regulars and local guerrillas won the civil war in the northeast, fighting on their native soil against KMT forces predominantly from south China who fought under the weight of heavy, foreign-supplied equipment. The villages surrounded the cities, and the cities surrendered their equipment. CCP forces extended their victories to the south and west through a new mastery of land power—conventional maneuver and massed artillery—and continued subversion, KMT troop desertions, and mass mobilization of millions of guerrillas. Fittingly, KMT forces won a resounding naval and amphibious victory at the Battle of Quemoy, thus guarding their maritime retreat to the island of Taiwan. On the mainland, the CCP prevailed. It would not forget its struggle against the sea.

Revisiting the Past

China’s post-1949 history has been a tangle of *antagonistic contradictions*: mass mobilization campaigns and famine, ideological fervor and social upheaval, purges and rehabilitations, tentative reform and deadly suppression. After communism, China’s most pressing task will not be to repudiate what remains of CCP ideology through another mass campaign. Most CCP members never really believed in Marxism-Leninism anyway. Instead, the country’s task will be to recover a collective memory—a national basis for legitimacy and statehood that reflects the historical experience and aspirations of the Chinese people—in place of the official canon that a party-state in continuous struggle against the rest of the world contrived. The CCP’s regime of near-total information control suppressed for decades the free exchange of ideas that ordinarily would have sustained this civic process. What the Chinese people have contemplated only in private or broadcast at great personal risk, they will widely debate for the first time beyond the sanction of the state. A national discourse on the meaning of the past will obviate the fraught question of whether the Chinese people are ready for democracy. Surely they will be, as any people would, to reflect freely on their own history. In doing so, they will lay the foundation of a free, post-communist China.

In this process, the role of governments in China and abroad should be to serve as mere masters of ceremonies: providing widely accessible media forums to the public, guaranteeing the free expression of diverse perspectives, and opening official records for research. Students, historians, writers, artists, journalists, dissidents, and longtime China watchers will play the principal parts.

Like Pasternak, first these actors will need to find and give names to sorcery, starting with the CCP’s official account of the past and its many revisions. Since 1949, the largest psychological operation in the world has been the one the PRC government organized against the Chinese people. Its elaborate regime of indoctrination and information control spanned

education, faith, language, the arts, family, work, and individual thought. The CCP devised a theory of world history by which it meticulously reshaped the public and private life of the world's most populous nation.

The first step after communism will be to plainly and transparently examine the aims and methods of this decades-long psychological project. It will serve as a curious subject for films, documentaries, comedy, literature, journalism, online commentary, and historical research. Those in China who lived through the CCP era of obfuscation will naturally wish to scrutinize the simple truth. China specialists abroad will benefit as well from a renewed attention to history and ideology, which convey what economics and political science cannot. A long trail of official party literature, campaigns, and propaganda will aid the Pasternaks of China in this task.

Next, these experts will need to find and give names to the land. Reformers and modernizers with the best intentions overlooked the land once before. The CCP responded with an ideology of the land set against the sea that silenced all contending schools of thought. After communism, the question of China's insular past and modern encounter with the international system will again loom large. Leaping forward and hastily embracing ideas and institutions from the sea might then be tempting. But doing so would repeat the mistakes of the KMT in the 1930s and 1940s, which the CCP derided as obsequiousness to all things foreign. The communist revolution then prevailed by appealing to an insular pride, self-reliance, and attachment to a native land that are inherent in human nature.

Post-communist China will need to start again with sentiments of nationhood from a time before the CCP commandeered and deformed them. China's proud cultural and intellectual inheritance will be more than sufficient to fill the void that CCP dogma leaves. The country's present-day Pasternaks have only to pick up where their distant predecessors left off, continuing a long story after its interruption. They might begin with the nation-

wide reflections of the May Fourth Movement or with the period of crisis and self-strengthening after 1840. They might recount what became of those projects and hopes through the tortuous decades of the twentieth century. Writers and reformers such as Kang Youwei and Lu Xun once took up the task of reconciling a proud inheritance with the shocks of modernity. The CCP deserted the one and subverted the other. After communism, the search for modern China will resume, this time free of encumbrance by any government or party doctrine. Taiwan's example proves that an enduring equilibrium is possible.

Finally, they will need to find and give names to the sea. During its rise and under its rule, the CCP appealed to the legitimate grievances of the land to wage a revolutionary struggle against ideas and institutions that came from the sea, which it labeled "bourgeois," "counterrevolutionary," and "imperialist."¹⁶ China's modern disenchantment, it is true, began with a British gunboat. It was China's great misfortune, and the world's, that it clashed with the international maritime system at the dawn of the age of Lord Palmerston. The Opium Wars featured all the iniquities of nineteenth-century imperialism—military intimidation, commercial greed, and moral decadence—that, then as now, exemplified the worst tropes of a menacing West. But the sea, like Pandora's box, concealed one vital idea: underneath Palmerston's imperious demands for diplomatic recognition and trade was the doctrine of the sovereign equality of states, the basis of modern world order.

The system that emerged from Europe's unscrupulous past and spread by the domineering sea power of the British Empire has itself evolved over the last two centuries. Today, sovereign nation-states around the world do not impose it but freely adopt it as the surest basis of human dignity and international security. China's Pasternaks will need to evaluate and debate this many-sided history on their own terms. Their work will determine whether historical grievances again become the inspiration for revolutionary struggle or whether post-communist China finds a lasting place in the modern world.

China's dialectic of land and sea existed long before the CCP appropriated it. It passed through many lost decades of sorcery and terror. The final synthesis of land and sea awaits the men and women of post-communist China. The future of world order depends on this reconciliation. There is more to China's cultural and psychological bond with the land than the communist revolution. There is more to the sea than British gunboats.

The civilizations of the world's great rivers and heartlands were the thesis; the maritime system that engulfed the earth was the antithesis. The synthesis is the modern international system of sovereign nation-states—at once of the sea, composed of global institutions, norms, and multilateral agreements among states, but also of the land, rooted in the fundamental and equal sovereignty of each nation-state with its distinct customs, identity, and history. Will a people of the land at last behold the sea? Can the two “live side by side without mortal danger to either”?¹⁷ That was Pasternak's wish for his own continental civilization. Recalling a frozen inheritance, he found and gave names to a truncated past. Perhaps this is the place to start.

US Government Response to CCP Collapse

The collapse of the CCP would open an opportunity for China to establish an enduring equilibrium with the modern international system of nation-states. China could at last continue what the CCP had interrupted over the last century and more—the self-strengthening movement, the hopes of reformers and modernizers in the late 1890s, the May Fourth Movement of 1919, and the Democracy Movement of 1989—to reconcile China with the modern world.

After the collapse of the CCP, the United States should unabashedly support the aspirations of the Chinese people to be free and to find a lasting place in the modern world. But it would not be the first time good intentions have arrived on China's shores. As much as possible, US policy should operate by, with, and through the provisional government of China. Otherwise, it would repeat the pitfalls of the past: another uninvited imposi-

tion of ideas across the sea. US policy, while supporting an international maritime system, should not again overlook the land.

China after communism needs to be sovereign, legitimate, strong, and free for the sake of international security. US government contingency plans responding to a CCP collapse should follow this principle.

Phase 0

Long before the CCP's collapse, US government agencies should launch a steady campaign of strategic messaging, public diplomacy, information operations, and covert influence. Their aim should be to reinforce the partitions between the party and the state, the party and the armed forces, and the party and the people. These partitions, however slight, will prove instrumental to a tenable state, military, and society after the fall—maximizing the likelihood that the party's collapse does not also bring down the rest of China with it. The capabilities of US special operations forces (US SOF) are well suited to this task, in concert with the US Department of State and other government agencies. Together, they should conduct a steady campaign of what George Kennan called political warfare, growing in scale and intensity as the fall of the CCP looms.

The CCP itself introduced a degree of separation between party and state under Deng Xiaoping, recoiling from the ideological excesses, turmoil, and disasters of the late Mao years. Deng's reforms demonstrated that, after all, not every feature of public and private life had to be an ideological matter—that the day-to-day necessities of government could turn on practical expertise and technocratic administration more than revolutionary ardor.

The generation that knew the horrors of the Cultural Revolution and came of age to a measure of administrative pragmatism after 1976 will naturally recoil at the return of an overbearing party hegemony in the Xi Jinping era. Years before a CCP collapse, a US political warfare campaign should steadily strengthen these schisms by primarily overt means.

Senior US officials should distinguish the Chinese people from the deeds of the CCP, and US public diplomacy should assert the same. Government, military, academic, and business interactions between the United States and the PRC should implicitly attest to the technical and practical natures of their day-to-day duties. Social media and comedies of all forms should satirize the absurdities of doctrine that the party so zealously imposes on such commonplace functions as banking, construction, food service, and parking management. Other covert and clandestine methods should sow distrust between the party and the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and within the CCP.

Except during the heady days of the revolution, no one ever wanted to contemplate Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin, and Mao Zedong all the time. The CCP's steady encroachment on everyday life will provoke cynicism, disaffection, and ominous recollections of the pitfalls of one-man rule. Most will know, and many will remember, that ideology does not fill empty stomachs. A US political warfare campaign to create vital distance between party and state will find fertile ground in Xi Jinping's China.

During this campaign, the US SOF—including US intelligence agencies like the Central Intelligence Agency's (CIA) Special Activities Center and other elements—will develop surrogate networks, train partner forces, enable cyber operations, and support other clandestine methods to deliver truthful information to populations inside China. These information operations should sow doubt in the CCP's presumed monopoly on the past. The obsession, paranoia, and meticulousness with which the CCP guards its doctrinal interpretation of history are familiar staples inside the PRC. The Party's strident and ubiquitous information apparatus does not exude confidence but suggests it has something to fear. US SOF can exploit the CCP's absurd and elaborate propaganda enterprise to highlight its insecurity and expose the international operations of its United Front Work Department. Concurrently, US SOF should expand combined training and operations with Taiwan's Political Warfare Bureau, stressing Taiwan's example as proof to populations inside the

PRC that a different political dispensation is possible. Small but vital doubts between the CCP and the rest of China, sown long in advance, will prepare the conditions for US contingency plans following the collapse of the CCP.

Phase 1

What will remain after the CCP's demise? Despite the ardent, timeworn assertions of party propagandists over the years, there can be a new China without the CCP. The very organs of central, provincial, and local government that the CCP cultivated after 1976—in substance more technocratic and bureaucratic than ideological—will serve as a bridge between the rising power and the dying one, enabling the country to function. A provisional State Council and subordinate Central Military Commission (CMC) will form from among these remnants, composed of former CCP members. It will be a necessary and useful intermediate stage. But the CCP's "regime of the mind" and instruments of "political work" should be left behind to their long overdue end.

As soon as possible following regime collapse, the US government should surge diplomats and defense attachés to the US embassy in Beijing and consulates in Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenyang, and Wuhan, along with roughly 20 US SOF at each location. Through existing channels, US diplomats and defense attachés should establish crisis communications between the US ambassador and the provisional State Council, and between the US Department of Defense and the CMC.

In these initial engagements, the United States should offer humanitarian assistance as the contingency requires, diplomatic recognition of the provisional central government of China, and an intelligence-sharing agreement to warn of opportunistic incursions along China's land borders. It should propose three urgent lines of effort for the provisional government, which the newly formed Chinese military will carry out and US SOF will assist: border security, humanitarian assistance in affected areas, and safeguarding of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) and

related material. Forebodings of a nation once again in upheaval will animate much of China in these early days. The first task of China's provisional leaders will be to forestall the real and perceived sources of danger, buying time for a new polity to emerge.

China inherited its misgivings toward the sea from its ancient bond with the land. The real iniquities of nineteenth-century imperialism aggravated them, and decades of CCP political work meticulously cultivated them. In the pivotal days after communism, the sea will need to find a salutary role in support of the land as China tenuously reenters the community of nations. The ability of US SOF to operate in small teams, in dispersion, through surrogates, and among the civilian population suits them well to this delicate purpose. A US government role in China that is too large or overt could undermine the legitimacy of a fledgling state by the appearance of foreign intervention. Instead, the US government should operate through small-footprint, low-visibility SOF targeting contingency needs so critical that few in China would begrudge them their role.

The first of these contingencies will be a pressing problem for land powers: border security. While many nations will welcome a sovereign, legitimate, strong, and free China that is not set against the rest of the world, others will watch with alarm as such a state emerges along their borders and will strive industriously to thwart this development. Throughout this uncertain period, Russia and North Korea will seize every opportunity by force or subversion to provoke disorder, nurture insurgencies, conduct intelligence operations, or secure buffer zones across their borders into China.

To deter these incursions, units of the PLA Northern Theater Command should enhance their posture and intelligence collection along China's northeastern borders. From the American consulate in Shenyang, US SOF should serve as liaison officers to the Northern Theater Command headquarters in the same city, share warning intelligence that national and theater assets

have collected, and coordinate the deployment of additional SOF to advise and accompany PLA units on border security missions. In Shenyang, US SOF will return to the city where their early predecessors from the Office of Strategic Services (or OSS, which conducted intelligence and special operations) were based in 1945. Members of that cardinal mission had witnessed the arrival of Lin Biao's Eighth Route Army and its fateful acquisition, with Soviet help, of surrendered Japanese arms and equipment stockpiles. In this region where CCP forces reconstituted and launched their final campaigns to defeat the KMT on the mainland, US SOF will continue an unfinished mission interrupted by many decades.

US SOF conducting combined border patrols and serving as liaison officers will be in an ideal position to understand the sentiments and networks among the population of post-communist China—a fatal oversight by US and KMT forces in pre-communist China. US SOF will reprise the morale operations and X-2 counterintelligence branches of the OSS. These operations will compete against CCP remnants for popular support of the new polity and disrupt the intelligence collection, sabotage operations, and insurgency planning of any elements still loyal to the CCP. Operating among the civilian population, US SOF will deny CCP guerrillas the uncontested influence and support they once enjoyed in their civil war against the KMT. These operations will also provide US SOF with the access, placement, and networks they will require in later phases.

As in Shenyang, additional US SOF should deploy as liaisons to the PLA Western Theater Command headquarters in Chengdu to support analogous PLA missions along China's western border with Russia. They should also accompany units of the PLA and People's Armed Police to deliver basic goods and services to areas in China's rural interior suffering the effects of the interruption of local government functions. Working for and among the civilian population, the PLA will start again from the spirit of its Three Rules of Discipline and Eight Points for Attention, which demonstrators invoked in the 1989 Democracy Move-

ment amid tense confrontations with PLA troops. Small US SOF civil affairs teams delivering humanitarian aid will represent the light hand from the sea supporting the land in these pivotal early days after the fall of the CCP.

Finally, US SOF should provide on-the-ground warning intelligence and options of last resort to prevent the proliferation of WMDs and related material. Joint contingency planning between the US government and the provisional central government of China should account for and secure key munitions stockpiles, facilities, and delivery platforms under the command and control of the provisional central government, including of sea-based nuclear ballistic missile submarines. Additional US SOF teams should accompany PLA Army and Rocket Force units to secure the most critical sites, provide early warning of imminent threats, and develop contingency plans to safeguard WMDs in an emergency. These plans should provide that, as a last resort, US SOF based outside China will conduct direct action missions to render WMDs and related materials safe.

In its combined operations with US SOF—keeping watch over land borders, delivering humanitarian relief, averting the catastrophic proliferation of WMDs, buying time for a free and legitimate government to coalesce—the PLA will take up a noble calling in a new China and leave behind its former charge as the military arm of the CCP.

Phase 2

Deprived of a totalitarian ideology to impose on the lives and thoughts of the Chinese people, the CMC's Political Work Department, its system of political officers at every command echelon of the PLA, and their counterparts in the Ministry of Public Security and Ministry of State Security will carry out two final, critical assignments after the collapse of the CCP. US SOF civil affairs and military information support teams should assist in both.

The first assignment will be to separate the dying regime from the rising nation-state. The PLA's political commissars, direc-

tors, and instructors will no longer be responsible for maintaining the military's devotion to the party. Instead, they will be well positioned to apprise their units of news from the provisional government and of the PLA's part in the nascent transition to a sovereign, legitimate, strong, and free China. Likewise, the CCP's vast media and propaganda apparatus should serve as a ready vehicle to communicate plain facts about the latest developments in Beijing, dispel rumors and disinformation, and foster optimism and confidence during an uncertain period. The great task before them, the hopes and labors of a new polity, will take the place of an affected party creed. With an eye to the practical and procedural, and with a minimum of ostentation, China's provisional government will turn the page on the revolutionary zeal of the CCP era.

Their second and final assignment will be to dismantle and repurpose what was the world's largest active psychological operation. Li Wenliang famously said, "A healthy society should not only have one voice."¹⁸ After communism, the CCP's regime of internet censorship, indoctrination, and mass surveillance will cease, and a global multitude of voices will mingle again across China. One of these will be the forums that eventually replace Voice of America, whose creation OSS Director William Donovan lobbied for because there was "not a single permanent agency to take over in peace time certain of the functions which OSS has performed in war time."¹⁹ Another will be the Voice of China (中国之音).

Independent from but supported by the provisional State Council, the Voice of China at its outset should include print, radio, television, and online programs broadcasting the latest announcements, developments, and plans of the provisional government. It will report transparently on the momentous affairs of China's present and near future, such as the election of representatives to a constitutional convention. Soon thereafter, an independent, free press will take over these functions.

The Voice of China should then turn to the past. An Office of the Historian under its purview should serve as an impartial chron-

icler of CCP-era sorcery. It should assemble official records and primary sources, conduct interviews, and open them for research. It should furnish physical and virtual forums for the public and prompt a national discourse on this period of China's history. It will be the end of the "old and stubborn refusal to face and name things as they are."²⁰

The elaborate apparatus of political officers and propagandists in the PLA, intelligence and public security agencies, and United Front Work Department should receive new roles at the Voice of China as guides and interpreters of the CCP's long psychological project. An intriguing choice to lead them would be Wang Huning, the fourth-ranking member of the Politburo Standing Committee, chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, and chief political theorist and ideological advisor to three consecutive CCP general secretaries. No one could offer a better first-person account of the CCP's recent political ideology than Wang, its principal author. In a new China, the memory of the old regime should retain a voice, so long as it is not the only one. Wang would be its representative, aiding China in the important task of reconciling a painful chapter of its modern history.

A healthy society will need to run its course through this intermediate phase and name everything in "simple, transparent, and sad words."²¹ Long ago as an academic, Wang wrote of the

need to combine the flexibility of China's traditional values with the spirit of modernity. This proved impossible under the CCP's misguided trajectory. A second chance in a post-communist China may entice Wang, helping the Chinese people recover a collective memory from the lost decades of CCP indoctrination and information control.

Conclusion

The exigencies of a CCP collapse may once again draw the United States—the world power with the shortest historical memory—into a land with too much to remember. It is a scenario that US SOF have known many times before, including once in China. The role of US SOF in the delicate aftermath of a CCP collapse should recall China's long memory of contradictions between an insular inheritance and an encroaching international system from the sea. The capabilities of US SOF operating by, with, and through the provisional government of China will balance the immediate needs of the contingency with the long-term legitimacy of a fledgling nation-state. For decades, the CCP's revolutionary ideology and skillful appropriation of the past obstructed the resolution of China's contradictions—a nation-state, one of many in an international system, that is sovereign, legitimate, strong, and free. After the collapse of the CCP, it will again be within reach. Like US SOF, China will continue a long-interrupted mission to establish an enduring equilibrium between land and sea.



TARGETING BIOWEAPONS FACILITIES WITH PRECISION AFTER A CCP REGIME COLLAPSE: KEY ASSETS AND LOCATIONS, MISSION OPTIONS, AND STRATEGIC EXECUTION PLAN

Ryan Clarke

Introduction and Strategic Rationale

Under the radar of multiple responsible bodies in the West, the CCP has architected the world's most aggressive dual-use pathogen research ecosystem that spans across nominally civilian and overt military facilities in China. China's Civil-Military Fusion Law guarantees that the PLA can, at any time, absorb any pathogen research activities within China, including work China carries out with international involvement. Unlike the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the American alliance structure (including in the Indo-Pacific), many senior PLA officers and CCP strategists do not view biological weapons as

unconventional platforms. Rather, there is increasing evidence that they view biological weapons as a core component of the PLA's standard order of battle.

The CCP has combined decades of massive investment in domestic Biosafety Level 3 and 4 (BSL3/4)²² laboratory capacity with a clandestine effort to absorb international, and specifically

Photo: An aerial view shows the P4 laboratory (center left) on the campus of the Wuhan Institute of Virology in central Hubei, China, on May 27, 2020. (Hector Retamal via Getty Images)

Western, expertise and technical know-how in high-risk gain-of-function (GoF)²³ techniques. This has resulted in a pathogen-diversified, geographically distributed, and increasingly offensively oriented CCP capability. The PLA cannot achieve strategic overmatch in conventional military domains against the American alliance structure (let alone NATO). However, bioweapons are one defense domain in which the CCP is likely to see distinct asymmetric advantages it can leverage strategically against its enemies.

It is essential that the United States has a directly executable set of options to target the full spectrum of China's dual-use pathogen research infrastructure if the CCP regime collapses. The CCP is already beginning to internationalize its networks, especially in Pakistan. CCP-driven proliferation of bioweapons to other hostile states, criminal syndicates, and other threat groups can fundamentally and irreversibly alter global security. Precision targeting is necessary to prevent any such scenario. This chapter provides a strategic-level overview of the CCP's key bioweapons research institutes and the specific type of high-risk pathogen research they are conducting. Based on these scenarios, it presents three precision targeting mission options followed by a fundamental execution plan for these missions. It concludes with a net assessment that argues for the outright destruction, not restructuring, of these bioweapons facilities.

Key CCP-Run Institutions

Wuhan Institute of Virology

The Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV)²⁴ was established in 1956 as a microbiology laboratory of the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS) and is one of the earliest national-level research institutes established after the PRC's founding in 1949.²⁵ In 1961, the microbiology laboratory of CAS was upgraded to CAS Central South Institute of Microbiology and then renamed CAS Wuhan Institute of Microbiology in 1962. In 1970, during the Cultural Revolution, it separated from CAS and was renamed

the Hubei Institute of Microbiology. In June 1978, it returned to the CAS and was named the Wuhan Institute of Virology of CAS with research disciplines adjusted accordingly.

After the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) outbreak, the CCP initiated the construction of the BSL4 laboratory (also referred to as a P4 laboratory in China). The CAS and the local Wuhan government jointly constructed WIV's BSL4 lab using technology and equipment from the BSL4 laboratory in Lyon, France. Chinese and French architects and scientists designed the laboratory together, and Chinese workers completed its construction and the installation of its main facilities and equipment. After more than a decade of work, they completed it in 2015.²⁶

WIV has established itself as a domestic "center of excellence" working with pathogens ranging from Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS), Zika, SARS, and SARS-like viruses to Nipah, Ebola, HIV, and various insect-borne viruses, such as malaria. Its official website lists 65 in-house scholars, including 36 senior, five junior, and 24 associate research fellows. Among them are 28 senior, one junior, and six associate research fellows who have educational, work-related, or academic visiting experience abroad.²⁷

Perhaps the most well-known researcher at WIV is Dr. Shi Zhengli, a French-trained and internationally recognized bat coronavirus expert with expertise in bioengineering and GoF research. Shi and several colleagues (both domestically and internationally based) have several landmark publications in leading scientific journals, such as *Nature* and *Archives of Virology*. Her international scientific collaborators include Dr. Wang Linfa (Duke–National University of Singapore Graduate School of Medicine), Dr. Ralph Baric (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill), Dr. Jonna Mazet (University of California at Davis) and Dr. Peter Dazsak (EcoHealth Alliance). Shi also works closely with a WIV colleague, Dr. Zhou Peng. Zhou was previously a postdoctoral fellow under Wang Linfa at the Duke–NUS Graduate School of Medicine.²⁸

Their studies used novel methods to enable a bat coronavirus to directly infect human beings without the need for an intermediate mammalian host. For example, the 2003 SARS coronavirus might have originated in bats and then infected humans via another mammal species, possibly pigs or civet cats. Additional experiments enabled these researchers to make this new chimera bat coronavirus more transmissible than even the most dangerous bat coronaviruses found in nature.²⁹

WIV has capabilities across a range of “wet lab” environments that deal with physical biological materials as well as “dry lab” environments that use advanced computational methods, including artificial intelligence and machine learning. This end-to-end capability enables WIV to conduct state-of-the-art experiments across multiple domains within the field of virology, including bat coronaviruses.³⁰

WIV previously acknowledged housing a military management division (MMD). This arrangement generated some concern about the potential dual-use nature of some of the research scientists were doing at WIV.³¹ There are now no direct references to the MMD on the WIV website, and information regarding previous official US State Department visits to WIV has been removed as well.³² WIV also has dense connections with other institutions in Wuhan, such as the Wuhan Institute of Technology, Wuhan University (specifically the medical school), the Wuhan University of Science and Technology, and the Wuhan branch of the Chinese Center for Disease Control (Chinese CDC), which is located roughly 200 yards from the Huanan Seafood Market. This market is still the official point of origin of the COVID-19 pandemic in Wuhan according to the CCP.

Harbin Veterinary Research Institute

The Harbin Veterinary Research Institute (HVRI)³³ was established in 1948, a year before the official founding of the PRC.³⁴ Located in Harbin, Heilongjiang Province, the HVRI is the go-to institute for information about various animal viruses (known as zoonoses) that may be lethal to livestock and/or humans. HVRI

has internationally recognized expertise in avian influenza viruses, namely the H5N1 and H7N9 viruses, but also studies swine flu and other influenza viruses that infect other animal species.³⁵ HVRI is organized under the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences (CAAS) and can award doctoral degrees. It became the PRC’s second BSL4 lab in 2018.

CAAS is a peak scientific academy in Beijing responsible for national development of agricultural science and related areas. Its 566 staff and 76 senior researchers conduct their work under CCP leadership and report to the State Council. The HVRI is expansive (about 750,000 square feet) and includes a 16.5 million square foot laboratory animal breeding farm in suburban Harbin. HVRI is presently developing a new site that covers nearly 3 million square feet. Given the scale of this expansion, it is likely to hire more staff.³⁶

One of the most well-known researchers at the HVRI is Dr. Chen Hualen, a leading veterinary virologist who worked at the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention from 1999 to 2002. Chen’s recent work focuses on avian influenza viruses. Some of her experiments, especially in bioengineering avian influenza viruses, have generated controversy.³⁷ A particularly controversial June 2013 study examined methods to enable the H5N1 avian influenza virus to develop pandemic potential by picking up entire genes from H1N1, the highly virulent influenza virus that caused a global epidemic in 2009. By combining segments of H5N1 and H1N1 viruses in her lab, Chen developed a hybrid that can transmit airborne between mammals. Such a chimera is not found in nature.³⁸

The Japan Initiative for Global Research Network on Infectious Diseases (J-GRID) brings together top Japanese virologists and other related specialists. It oversees joint programs in Thailand, Vietnam, Zambia, India, Indonesia, Philippines, Ghana, Myanmar, and China. The Japanese universities involved include Osaka University, Nagasaki University, University of Tokyo, Hokkaido University, Okayama University, Kobe University, Tohoku

University, Tokyo Medical and Dental University, and Niigata University.³⁹

J-GRID lead researchers at the University of Tokyo are responsible for the Chinese partnerships and have established a strong relationship with HVRI. The University of Tokyo team is the only international group that has strong scientific relationships characterized by jointly run labs at HVRI. Dr. Yoshihiro Kawaoka is a member of this leadership team and the chief of the China-Japan joint research group on avian influenza viruses housed in HVRI.⁴⁰ Though he is Japanese, Kawaoka is a key scientist in China's transnational virology research network. He also has an appointment at the University of Wisconsin at Madison and longtime scientific partnerships with Dutch avian influenza Gof specialists Dr. Ron Fouchier at Erasmus University in Holland and Dr. Chen Hualan at HVRI.⁴¹

While Kawaoka's work with his colleagues at HVRI focused on avian flu viruses, he has diversified to COVID-19 research too. In a July 2020 study, Kawaoka and his international team assessed the replicative ability and pathogenesis of SARS-CoV-2 isolates in Syrian hamsters. They found the isolates replicated efficiently in the lungs of hamsters and caused severe pathological lung lesions that shared characteristics with SARS-CoV-2-infected human lungs. They also found that SARS-CoV-2-infected hamsters mounted neutralizing antibody responses that protected them against reinfection. In addition, passive transfer of convalescent serum to previously uninfected hamsters efficiently suppressed replication of the virus in the lungs. Kawaoka and his colleagues claimed their findings prove this "Syrian hamster model" improves understanding of SARS-CoV-2 pathogenesis and testing of vaccines and antiviral drugs.⁴²

Chinese Academy of Medical Sciences and Peking Union Medical College

Presently, the Chinese Academy of Medical Sciences and Peking Union Medical College (CAMS-PUMC, commonly referred to as CAMS)⁴³ operates a full-spectrum, nationwide infrastruc-

ture of laboratories, including BSL3/4, hospitals, and educational facilities. CAMS is under the National Health Commission (NHC), a cabinet-level executive department of the State Council responsible for formulating national health policies. CAMS has 19 research institutes, six hospitals, and eight schools under its umbrella. Its expert team comprises 24 members from the CAS and Chinese Academy of Engineering (CAE), 1,073 PhD supervisors, and 1,437 supervisors for master's students. The CAMS Academic Advisory Committee has six academic divisions and 219 members, all of whom it advertises as top scientists. There are 23 national platforms for intramural scientific research, including six state key laboratories and five national clinical research centers. Eighty-nine extramural research institutions or units have been collaborating with other domestic institutions since 2019.⁴⁴

Within the field of virology at CAMS, the Institute of Medical Biology (IMB-Kunming), Institute of Animal Laboratory Sciences (ILAS-Beijing), Institute of Pathogen Biology (IPB-Beijing) and Christophe Merieux Lab (CML, a subunit of IPB in Beijing) are significant. ILAS in particular engages in high-risk pathogen research using animal models, such as humanized mice, ferrets, and non-human primates, to identify direct infection pathways to humans.

Recent legally obtained email communications between Dr. James LeDuc at the University of Texas Medical Branch (UTMB) in Galveston, Texas, and CAMS reveal that IMB houses a BSL4 lab. This lab appeared to be engaging in joint high-risk virology research with UTMB that is available to only a select few Chinese scientists.⁴⁵ Previously, many analysts assumed China had only two BSL4 labs, one at WIV and the other at HVRI.

The point person between the UTMB and CAMS is Dr. Shi Pei-Yong. Shi is a faculty member on LeDuc's team at UTMB and has conducted research manipulating SARS-CoV-2 spike proteins to make the pathogen more infectious than the variants that were circulating naturally.⁴⁶ This likely represented a common interest with his counterparts in Kunming.

Shi has also worked extensively with the PLA's Academy of Military Medical Sciences (AMMS) and CAMS on other infectious disease projects that involve the manipulation of viruses, such as chimeric Zika vaccine development and Zika GoF studies using mouse models. One of Shi's key collaborators, Qi Chen, is the director of the virology lab at the Institute of Microbiology and Epidemiology (AMMS).⁴⁷ Despite these well-established links, Chinese regulators abruptly shut the UTMB team out of the BSL4 lab in Kunming that they helped develop.⁴⁸

Dr. Chao Shan also held dual appointments at WIV and on LeDuc's team at UTMB. Chao has several joint publications with Shi and others demonstrating GoF research. In a 2020 PNAS study, Chao, Shi, and colleagues took a pre-epidemic Asian Zika virus strain (FSS13025, isolated in Cambodia in 2010) and inserted the V473M substitution. The substituted gene significantly increased neurovirulence⁴⁹ in neonatal mice and produced higher viral loads in the placenta and fetal heads in pregnant mice. This E-V473M mutant strain was further studied in competition experiments in cynomolgus macaques. This mutation increased Zika's fitness for viral generation in macaques, a clear demonstration of GoF based on reverse genetics techniques.⁵⁰

In September 2020, He Yuxian from CAMS and a joint team of researchers from AMMS, Beijing Institute of Lifeomics, and the Institute of Military Cognition and Brain Sciences (PLA) published a study describing their use of SARS-CoV-2 serial passaging. The rationale was to improve vaccine efficacy.⁵¹ Serial passaging involves continuously selecting for the most infectious viral strains, isolating them, then combining and reinserting them into mice to produce new viral strains that are more infectious, lethal, and/or drug/vaccine-resistant than SARS-CoV-2 viruses found in nature. The majority of He Yuxian's co-authors on this study come from overtly PLA-run institutions.

In October 2021, researchers from the CAMS-controlled CML in Beijing developed their own synthetic SARS-CoV-2 virus in the lab, which they refer to as the "SARS-CoV-2-GFP replicon."

The declared logic was that experimentation on this synthetic virus would more fully inform treatment options.⁵² Despite titling their paper "Construction of Non-Infectious SARS-CoV-2 Replicons and Their Application in Drug Evaluation," they note that their synthetic virus did in fact replicate over the course of their experiment.⁵³

Notably, none of the most effective SARS-CoV-2 vaccines produced globally have been developed through synthetic virus creation, serial passaging, or any other GoF techniques. Given the rates of protection that current vaccines provide against the development of severe disease, there is no clear civilian scientific justification to develop additional vaccines that protect against artificially enhanced SARS-CoV-2 viruses. The CAMS/CML study suggests CAMS, AMMS, the Institute of Military Cognition and Brain Sciences, and the Beijing Institute of Lifeomics continue to use the GoF methods that WIV was using⁵⁴ on bat coronaviruses.

CAMS is also conducting GoF research on MERS. In a study titled "An Animal Model of MERS Produced by Infection of Rhesus Macaques with MERS Coronavirus," Yao Yanfeng, Bao Linlin, Deng Wei, and Qin Chuan from CAMS set out to determine whether monkey models were effective to study the pathogenesis of MERS infections.⁵⁵ The research team sourced MERS samples from Dr. Ron Fouchier and used them to directly infect the lungs of rhesus macaques and observe their physiological responses. The researchers reported that infected monkeys showed clinical signs of disease, virus replication, histological lesions, and neutralized antibody production. They also confirmed that the monkey model supports viral growth and manifests respiratory and generalized illness along with tissue pathology. These researchers claim to have conducted similar experiments on mouse, ferret, and guinea pig models but decided not to publish the data.⁵⁶

Dr. Bao Linlin is of particular interest for this MERS study as well as for her multiple studies of H7N9 and her other GoF research

on avian influenza viruses. Some of Bao's GoF research is virtually identical to the research by Ron Fouchier⁵⁷ in that both have engineered avian influenza (H7N9 and H5N1) viruses transmissible between ferrets via droplets.⁵⁸ However, while some media and scientists criticized Fouchier's research, leading to its periodic cessation under European Union regulations related to weapons of mass destruction, Bao's research has continued with no apparent restrictions.

CAMS represents a major component of China's ambition to become the world's leading virological center of expertise. However, the international scientific community has not subjected its GoF research to any meaningful scrutiny regarding potential public health risks versus benefits. CAMS has successfully absorbed international expertise to develop and operationalize its own BSL4 lab in Kunming. This lab is now able to independently conduct high-risk virological research.

CAMS is now a world leader in developing synthetic viruses in the lab, including SARS-CoV-2 viruses, and engineering dangerous pathogens found in nature. This marks a major development in that CAMS can engineer a range of viruses for various applications, even if it is not possible to acquire sufficient natural samples. Access to samples is no longer a scientific bottleneck or a source of Western leverage against Chinese institutes such as CAMS.

Academy of Military Medical Sciences

China's AMMS⁵⁹ has emerged as possibly its most diversified and domestically self-sufficient high-risk virology research institute. AMMS has developed extensive in-house capabilities, domestic scientific partnerships (including with WIV and CAMS), and strategic international partnerships. Under the radar of many analysts and other responsible bodies, AMMS also formed and has sustained links with Dr. LeDuc's team at UTMB.⁶⁰

Interestingly, in 2021, AMMS partnered with Yunnan Walvax Biotechnology and Suzhou Abogen Biosciences to develop the

messenger ribonucleic acid (mRNA) vaccine ARCoV. Clinical trials have involved participants from Yunnan and Guangxi Provinces as well as from Mexico, Indonesia, and Nepal. ARCoV is currently in Phase 3 clinical trials.⁶¹ It is noteworthy that China initially viewed mRNA vaccines with suspicion and the CCP actively discouraged them.

A key PLA figure at AMMS is Major General Chen Wei (陈薇), a virologist, epidemiologist, and recognized biodefense and biological antiterrorism specialist. She was born in the small city of Lanxi in inland Zhejiang. Chen studied at Zhejiang and Tsinghua before completing a microbiology PhD at AMMS in 1998. The CCP designated her a part of the Class A talent pool, and she continued to work as a researcher at AMMS.⁶²

Chen simultaneously joined the PLA and AMMS in 1991 at the age of 25, and some reports claim she was "specially" recruited. Other reports claim she visited an AMMS laboratory shortly before graduating from Tsinghua and became inspired by AMMS's mission and Korean War-era history.⁶³ In September 2021, Canada's *Globe and Mail* reported that Chen Wei had collaborated on virus research with Qiu Xiangguo, a scientist who led the vaccine and antiviral sections of Canada's National Microbiology Laboratory (NML) in Winnipeg, the only BSL4 lab in the country. Qiu and her husband Chang Keding were fired from NML in January 2021. Officials also revoked the security clearances of Qiu and some of her students, and police removed them from the lab in July 2019.⁶⁴

Months earlier, Qiu had sent Ebola⁶⁵ and Henipavirus⁶⁶ samples to WIV, with the apparent knowledge of NML's leaders. The Canadian government ordered NML scientists not to discuss Qiu and Chang with the media and initially sued the House of Commons speaker to prevent the release of information about the couple's dismissal.⁶⁷

In 2021, researchers from WIV and the Chinese Communist Party Central Military Commission Joint Logistic Support Force

(CCP CMC JLSF, to which AMMS is subordinate) published a study describing a high-risk serial passaging experiment with a SARS-CoV-2 virus. One of the key scientists involved in this study was WIV's Shi Zhengli.⁶⁸ To further investigate the genetic susceptibility of SARS-CoV-2 during serial passage (a clear GoF technique) on different cells, this team identified nine cell lines (human, nonhuman primate, and swine) susceptible to the virus. They then serially passaged these cell lines with increasingly virulent variants of the virus and monitored them to identify the most transmissible combinations.⁶⁹ There is no identifiable civilian biomedical application for this type of research.

During the course of this serial passaging experiment, the viral loads of SARS-CoV-2 increased exponentially along with increased transmission fitness; evolutionary adaptations gained from serial passaging drove the changes. These scientists note that human (including lung, liver, colon, larynx, and skin), monkey (kidney), and swine (testicle) tissues were most susceptible to SARS-CoV-2. The scientists' key "discovery" in this 2021 study is that the SARS-CoV-2 virus replicated most efficiently in human cell lines (which they classified as Huh-7, Calu-3, and Caco-2 in this paper) and nonhuman primate cells (Vero E6 in this paper) but less so in swine cells. They present the specific verification that the Vero E6 cell line is suitable for viral amplification as a primary "scientific breakthrough."⁷⁰

These researchers also noted their surprise that none of the bat cell lines they tested supported SARS-CoV-2 replication. This finding appears to directly conflict with the assertion in the introduction of their paper that SARS-CoV-2 is natural in origin and entered the human population via bats.⁷¹ Scientists from the University of Hong Kong also observed this lack of viral replication in a 2020 study that the US CDC published.⁷²

This lack of SARS-CoV-2 replication in bat cell lines could also contradict the official CCP position that SARS-CoV-2 and the subsequent COVID-19 pandemic are the results of a zoonotic spillover event. *How is it possible to reliably determine the*

SARS-CoV-2 originated from bats in nature when the virus does not actually replicate in bat cells? Interestingly, this lack of transmissibility in bat cells is consistent with claims by other leading researchers that the virus is uniquely adapted to directly infect and transmit among human cells, not other animal species.⁷³

Qi Chen (director of Institute of Virology and Microbiology [IVM] under the Academy of Military Medical Science [AMMS]) has a well-established track record of high-risk pathogen research with Chinese counterparts from WIV and CAMS as well as with international collaborators at UTMB.⁷⁴ In July 2021, Qi and colleagues published a study involving deliberate infection of the olfactory system of humanized mice⁷⁵ to stimulate rapid viral replication, massive cell death, and neurological damage.⁷⁶ There is also no identifiable civilian biomedical application for this research.

Once scientists have discovered, characterized, and "optimized" this new human disease pathway, they have laid the foundation for additional high-risk research focusing specifically on the human brain. As SARS-CoV-2 infections primarily impact the respiratory system (and the lungs in particular), this specific study likely has dual-use applications. A key declared finding of this study is that SARS-CoV-2-infected humanized mice experienced a damaged olfactory system, degradation of immune cell function, and impaired olfactory function. The authors note that these findings have direct implications for human health. They detected robust viral replication and direct antiviral responses only in the olfactory systems of the infected humanized mice and not in other parts of the brain, identifying a new "efficient" route for SARS-CoV-2 infection in humans by using an angiotensin-converting enzyme 2 (ACE2) humanized mouse model.⁷⁷

Both Chen Wei and Qi Chen at AMMS have established histories of working with some of the world's most dangerous pathogens under questionable biomedical rationales. Qi has more publicly available research, in particular with Shi Peiyong and Chao Shan from UTMB, focusing on GoF experiments. However,

er, it is unclear whether this indicates Qi is indeed more active than Chen or whether much of Chen's research has remained confidential. Within the AMMS organizational structure, Chen is clearly a more strategic leader than Qi.

Chen's established links with Qiu Xiangguo (formerly of NML) are significant, especially in the domain of Henipah/Nipah virus. There has been no clinical detection of Henipah virus in China, and adequate diagnostics are already available. As clinical detection of this virus has occurred only in Malaysia, Singapore, India, and Bangladesh and features irregular and short-duration outbreaks, there is no viable market for a vaccine. Even if pharmaceutical companies claimed to have developed a Henipah/Nipah virus vaccine in China, it would be unlikely to have a substantial uptake in these countries.⁷⁸ *Given these epidemiological and market conditions, why would Major General Chen Wei be sourcing these viral samples from Qiu at NML in Winnipeg?*

Another key observation is that AMMS continued its high-risk research on SARS-CoV-2 even during the most acute phases of the global COVID-19 pandemic. Researchers have not credibly attributed any of this work, including the serial passaging experiments, to any new biomedical breakthrough. Much of the high-risk pathogen research at AMMS appears to be done in-house or with only a strict few transnational partners. As Chen Wei has overtly stated that self-reliance in the virology domain is her aim, AMMS is likely on the path to a nearly complete domestic orientation. While analysts have observed a similar trend with other Chinese virology research institutes, such as WIV, HVRI,⁷⁹ and CAMS,⁸⁰ it is more pronounced in the case of AMMS.

AMMS carries out high-risk experiments in its own right while also enabling other nominally civilian institutions in China. Displaced high-risk research that other institutes, such as WIV, previously conducted would have "top cover" protection, especially given Major General Chen Wei's status within the highest levels

of the CCP. Note that the 2021 SARS-CoV-2 GoF serial passaging study also involved Shi Zhengli from WIV.⁸¹ This is unlikely to be purely coincidental given the amount of global attention WIV now receives.

Three Mission Options: Destruction of the CCP's Bioweapons Program and Capture of Key Personnel

The high-risk pathogen research institutes that have been assessed in this chapter and their respective BSL3/4 laboratories pose a range of targeting challenges. Any actions, especially in the cyber domain, that involve sabotage or physical degradation can further escalate the risks these laboratories pose. Such actions could even increase the probability of a pathogen escape event by causing critical biocontainment equipment malfunctions. Therefore, any targeting operation would need to involve the entire physical removal of all bioweapons materials and enabling infrastructure while ensuring it is not possible, under any circumstances, to regenerate these capabilities at the site in question. Also, the geographically distributed and pathogen-diverse nature of the CCP's bioweapons program requires simultaneous targeting of these facilities. Sequential targeting would enable the various network nodes to "fail over" to each other and continue to operate.

In addition to the specific institutions identified in this chapter, Chinese CDC facilities in close proximity in Beijing, Wuhan, and Kunming should also be within the targeting scope. The Chinese CDC has complementary capabilities in these locations (as mentioned earlier, Wuhan CDC has a BSL3 lab roughly 200 yards from the Huanan Seafood Market), and any US strategy also needs to take this infrastructure offline. Lastly, the Pakistan Army's Defense Science and Technology Organization (DESTO) in Rawalpindi may need to be within scope as there is increasing evidence that WIV has mirrored some high-risk pathogen research capability at this institution.⁸² However, DESTO targeting options will be addressed in future work given the different set of variables associated with Pakistan.

Mission Option 1

The first mission option involves an initial team of specialists forcibly entering a bioweapons facility and executing the primary mission of bioweapons material removal while a second team remains behind to secure the site and maintain access control. This operation would require the establishment and robust maintenance of air superiority in and around the site. Remnants of the CCP, PLA, and/or Ministry of State Security (MSS) would have an incentive to physically destroy these facilities and the evidence of their bioweapons program in the event of regime collapse. There is also the potential for malicious pathogen releases.

On the ground, the American team would need to control the geography within at least a one-mile radius of the site in question with active deterrent and preventative patrols as well as integrated air defense. Mission Option 1 involves an overt American military presence alongside special operators and civilian specialists. In addition to the execution teams, the logistics of bioweapons material transportation, storage, and destruction is as critical as the initial site entry and physical removal components. Strategists would need to configure these logistics capabilities around the specifics of the known high-risk pathogens on-site (i.e., SARS-CoV-2 viruses).

Mission Option 1 can use information operations to generate perceptions of outbreaks within key CCP bioweapons facilities to minimize the number of people on site and/or in the immediate vicinity at specific times. During the most acute phases of the COVID-19 outbreak in China, both WIV and the HVRI were operating at severely reduced capacity, and many staff were working from home. However, staff deemed critical and PLA personnel remained on-site. In the case of WIV, Major General Chen Wei temporarily took over management in March 2020 before handing it back to the official leadership.⁸³ Given this precedent and demonstrated pattern of institutional behavior, it is likely possible to use targeted information operations to generate perceptions of an outbreak within the Chinese facilities in

question. By doing so, the US military could minimize the number of staff on-site at a given time and increase the probability of direct interaction with strategic personnel who have remained on-site.

Mission Option 2

The second option would not involve an overt American presence on the ground but would instead focus on physical destruction and, through the generation of extreme temperatures, the destruction of hazardous biological materials. The US military can achieve these effects through conventional air strikes or missile strikes (sea- and/or ground-launched) or a combination of the two. After-action damage assessment will be critical to evaluate operational effectiveness and determine the need for additional follow-up actions. Option 2 would involve the physical destruction of key CCP bioweapons research facilities and any additional evidence inside the site in question.

To accomplish Mission Option 2, ordnance would need to generate temperatures that eviscerate all known high-risk pathogens on site (i.e., Nipah virus) with at least a 50 percent overshoot ratio in case bioweapons researchers have further modified them for heat tolerance. Ordnance would also have bunker-busting capability because some (if not all) CCP bioweapons facilities may have subterranean structures.

Mission Option 3

A third option would aim to capture key CCP/PLA bioweapons personnel and eliminate these capabilities through a more controlled process based on specific knowledge of each site. However, it would still involve an American presence on the ground (and possibly in the air) during dismantlement of each site, although this could take less overt forms. Mission Option 3 would likely be the most challenging but also has the potential to capture the most intelligence regarding the CCP's bioweapons program while also obtaining a high degree of confidence in destruction of the entire program. *Aggressive mission planning could likely begin earlier than Mission Option 2 or 3 as some of*

those who have intricate knowledge of the CCP's bioweapons programs reside outside China.

Option 3 planning can involve the sabotage of critical supply chains associated with bioweapons research via coordination with American and allied multinationals. While the purely scientific component of China's high-risk pathogen research apparatus has decoupled from the West, it remains dependent on key Western multinationals for specialized laboratory equipment, machines, high-performance analytical software, and other critical inputs. As the CCP presently lacks any identifiable remedies for this dependence, there is an executable opportunity to directly target the key supply chains enabling high-risk pathogen research within China. Allied forces can execute this task onshore via the domestic Chinese offices of Western multinationals.

Key options include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Enabling remote access and control of equipment that China's allies have supplied to its laboratories and other facilities likely engaging in bioweapons development.
- Inserting performance issues into key equipment Chinese laboratories are likely using in bioweapons development. These performance issues would not produce nonlinearities or generate risks in experiments but would prevent researchers from conducting them at the last minute.
- Manipulating software to show completion and results of a specific experimental or analytical function that has not in fact taken place.

Another component of Mission Option 3 is the establishment of front companies in Southeast Asian, South Asian, and Middle Eastern countries to operate as on-shore/in-region high-value distributors of technologies that WIV, HVRI, CAMS, AMMS, or other Chinese institutions and/or companies have developed. As most countries in these regions lack their own advanced bio-

medical sector, there has been strong growth in the establishment of local or regional distributors who seek to sell Chinese diagnostics, vaccines, therapeutics, prophylactics, medical laboratory equipment, and other related products. Leading distributors can access the latest research and development (R&D) pipeline out of China by making up-front bulk purchases. This model enables Chinese institutions and companies to generate additional revenue sources and to directly access a range of markets via local partners who de-risk the environment for them.

This ongoing trend presents an opportunity to establish distribution companies that focus specifically on next-generation Chinese diagnostics, vaccines, and other capabilities that would provide a direct line of sight to the leading bioengineering/GoF research in Chinese institutions and/or companies with clear applications for mission planning, precision targeting, and recruitment of CCP bioweapons personnel.

The unique selling point of a high-value distributor is the ability to rapidly identify key emergent outbreak zones through effective surveillance and to dynamically route the relevant Chinese products (COVID-19 diagnostics, for example) to the locations in question. The distributor can accomplish this through innovative use of its existing COVID-19-specific production facilities and supply chains. On top of this existing physical infrastructure, the Chinese institute or company in question will layer key datasets, other unique scientific assets, and overall expertise and know-how regarding optimal COVID-19 surveillance strategies and outbreak response protocols. Fundamentally, a high-value distributor has the ability to establish a strategic partnership focusing on the development of next-generation, low-cost, and easy-to-administer COVID-19 diagnostics that take into account the full range and variation of not only current but also potential future COVID-19 strains. The United States and its allies can establish such companies in key countries of interest.

A final component of Mission Option 3 is to facilitate and enable defections from locations via academic or industry con-

ferences in perceived CCP-neutral countries. There is a widespread view within the CCP that Beijing is now the generator and distributor of best practices in the domain of biosecurity, having overcome its previous “junior partner” status as a consumer of best practices from the West. CCP information operations have effectively embedded the notion that China was the “first in, first out” of the COVID-19 pandemic across Southeast Asia and the Middle East. The United States and its allies can harness and repurpose these developments to recruit and enable the defections of leading Chinese scientists occupying various positions across the CCP’s high-risk pathogen research apparatus.

Scientists from WIV and elsewhere have already begun to host conferences in China with digital international participation to share China’s experiences in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. A natural progression of this trend is to host similar conferences that showcase Chinese “leadership” and focus on “joint capacity building” in countries that the CCP considers friendly (or at least neutral). Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, Burma, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Pakistan, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia could all serve as sites for these conferences. The United States and its allies could keep discrete travel arrangements on “hot standby” to bring Chinese conference participants to a preferred location on immediate notice.

Execution Pathway: Key Government Agencies and Use of Unconventional Assets

Mission Option 1

As Option 1 involves a two-phase, ground-based forced building entry and occupation focus, US Army Special Operations Command would take the lead in operational planning and execution. The initial entry team would need to be a combination of special forces operators, Army biodefense personnel (hazardous material management and transportation logistics), specialist civilian personnel with pathogen-specific expertise, and

possibly intelligence community specialists who can augment the operation.

US Army Ranger Chalks would provide strongpoints to secure and control the immediate geography and execute deterrent patrols until the entry team has completed their mission. Following the successful removal of all bioweapon materials and the destruction of all related infrastructure at the site in question, the Ranger Chalks who have been on deterrent patrols will shift to building control and protection, while fresh Ranger Chalks will be deployed to backfill them and carry out patrols. The experienced Rangers will transfer their local knowledge and tactical guidance to the newly deployed Rangers. The combined Ranger element will remain deployed on-site until leaders make a strategic determination that there is a zero probability of the specific sites in question undergoing reconstitution in any way.

Mission Option 2

As Option 2 involves conventional air and/or missile strikes that require the physical destruction of buildings and potential subterranean structures, the US Air Force and its fleet of strategic bombers, missiles, and fighter jets would take the lead in target development and deployment of the type of heavy ordnance necessary to achieve key mission endpoints. The US Navy can augment US Air Force operations, specifically through the use of missile strikes (submarine- and/or surface destroyer-based) to remove enemy air defense capabilities and/or to provide follow-on strikes after an Air Force bombing run.

Mission Option 2 would require some specialist involvement from the Army, intelligence community, and/or other civilian personnel. However, these inputs would focus more narrowly on ensuring the air and/or missile strikes will eviscerate all biological weapons materials and permanently destroy the sites in question with zero probability of reconstitution. There would be no effort to occupy the ground under Mission Option 2, and the exclusive focus would be on precision targeting (continuous, if necessary) using US Air Force and possibly US Navy assets.

Mission Option 3

Option 3 would involve unconventional and clandestine operations originating outside China to shape ground conditions in and around CCP bioweapons facilities. Given this mission focus, the CIA would serve as the lead with strategic augmentation from the State Department, US Joint Special Operations Command, US Department of Commerce, and US Department of the Treasury. The primary focus of Mission Option 3 is to strategically encircle, steadily degrade, and subsequently assume direct control of CCP bioweapons sites through asymmetric means. While the US military would likely be involved in the critical execution phases toward the end of the process, civilian agencies possess many of the tools, technical know-how, and export control capabilities to enable the effective execution of Option 3 alongside the CIA in the initial and middle phases.

However, it is essential that the CIA and US Joint Special Forces Command closely coordinate activities. Due to its nature, Option 3 could involve rapidly emergent opportunities to take direct action against a critical node in the network of one or more CCP bioweapons institutes. This could involve precision targeting a critical supply chain or facilitating the defection of a scientist from a third location. Mission Option 3 fundamentally requires the CIA's analytical and technical units to be in direct synchronization with civilian agencies such as the Departments of State, Treasury, and Commerce, while its operational units must also be ready to execute kinetically with US Joint Special Operations Command. While Mission Option 3 is the most multidimensional and complex, it is also the option that generates the highest probability of obtaining the most complete intelli-

gence picture of the CCP's bioweapons program and ensuring its complete destruction in the event of a CCP regime collapse.

Net Assessment: Destruction Is the Only Option

The CCP has consistently developed its bioweapons program without interruption virtually since the founding of the PRC. It has benefited from and absorbed extensive international technical expertise in GoF, synthetic virus creation, and other high-risk pathogen research domains. This pattern is in stark contrast to the former Soviet Union's biological weapons program, which was much more limited in its range of pathogens, was highly fragmented and clandestine, and did not benefit from knowledge transfer from the West. Over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, the CCP has demonstrated that it is willing to sacrifice the lives of millions of innocent people to protect the regime and its own corrupt interests.

It is unlikely that China can repurpose and reposition the bioweapons institutes that have been assessed in this chapter as pure public health research organizations. Bioweapons development as a core institutional focus, direct engagement with the PLA, and decades of CCP control and conditioning likely render WIV, HVRI, ILAS (CAMS), IPB (CAMS), CML (IPB-CAMS), AMMS, and their local China CDC counterparts unreformable. Never in human history has there been a biological weapons program such as the one the CCP has developed. American precision targeting will drive its elimination as well as the continuous surveillance and follow-up actions that will prevent its reconstitution after the CCP collapses.



RESTRUCTURING THE CHINESE FINANCIAL SYSTEM AFTER CCP COLLAPSE: RECAPITALIZATION, REPUDIATION, PRIVATIZATION, AND DECENTRALIZATION

Ryan Clarke

Introduction and Strategic Rationale

An unending stream of propaganda from the CCP, Wall Street, City of London firms, legacy media, and many think tanks and academic institutions claims that the China Model represents the future. In fact, the CCP is the master architect of what is on track to be the greatest economic and financial catastrophe since at least World War II, and possibly in human history. The CCP is China's shortest-lived dynasty and has had an unavoidable rendezvous with environmental degradation, demographic decline, and an economic and

financial system capable only of feeding off itself through debt growth.

The CCP-run financial system sits atop fundamentally unstable foundations and structural defects that render it highly vulnera-

Photo: A man walks past the entrance of a China Construction Bank branch adorned with festive decorations and red banners celebrating the upcoming Lunar New Year in Chongqing, China, on December 29, 2024. (Cheng Xin via Getty Images)

ble to immediate collapse in the event of CCP regime instability. Nonperforming loans (NPLs), misappropriately priced assets, gross capital misallocations, hidden debts and other liabilities, inaccurate profit-and-loss and capital reserve accounting, and a range of other issues permeate the entire financial system. As a result, China's Big Four banks and multiple other systematically significant financial institutions depend on continuous capital injections and other temporary relief from the People's Bank of China (PBOC, China's central bank). Thanks to this CCP-driven approach, the scale and consequences of the abovementioned problems and others are growing exponentially over time with an ever-decreasing margin for even minor miscalculations.

China's Big Four banks are the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC), Agricultural Bank of China, Bank of China, and China Construction Bank. All have nationwide networks of bank branches, ATM machines, and other related assets. Instability at even one of these banks can generate a nationwide bank run, an event that can lead to widespread instability and suffering among innocent ordinary depositors. The primary functions of major Chinese banks are to support the CCP's political and strategic objectives and to enable the corrupt enrichment of CCP leadership at national, provincial, and municipal levels. The maintenance of financial market stability, deposit protection, efficient credit creation, and other core banking functions is a distant secondary priority.

The CCP uses Chinese banks to reward friends and punish enemies. The banks are also essential to facilitating its illicit activities around the world, from synthetic narcotics trafficking to weapons smuggling. These banks are key enablers of CCP capital flight out of China and into leading financial centers and property markets worldwide. As such, major Chinese banks serve as the oxygen that enables the entire corrupt criminal enterprise that is the CCP to continue breathing and operating. Following the collapse of the party, targeted interventions will be essential to simultaneously prevent population-level catastro-

phe and prevent the CCP from using these financial institutions to reconstitute itself.

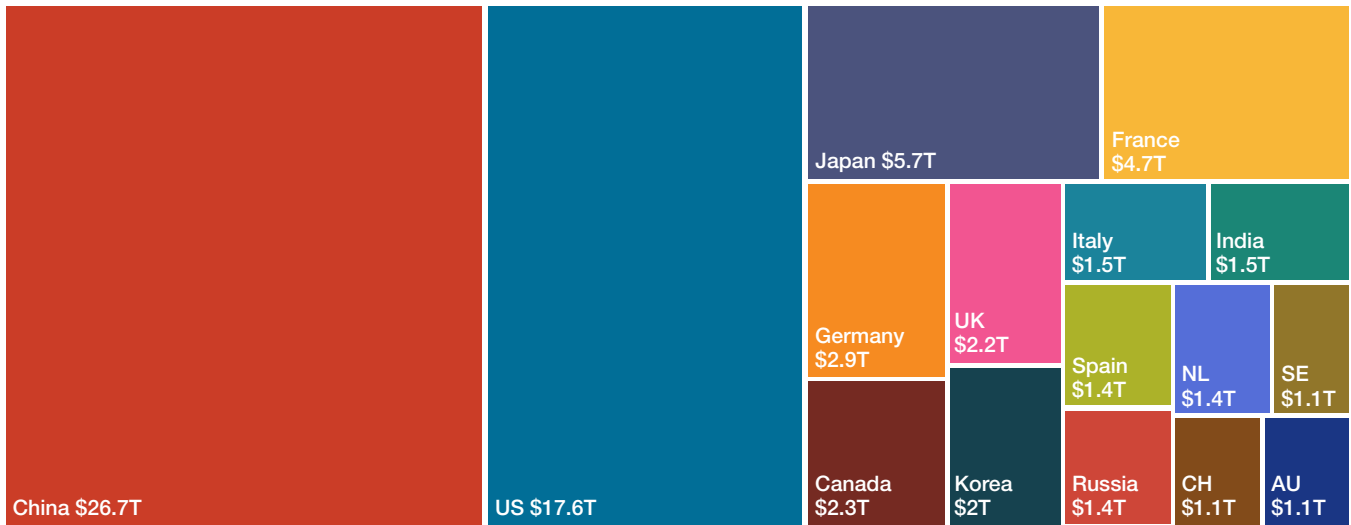
Unending Corporate, Government, and Household Debt Growth under the CCP

A recent estimate of China's corporate debt stands at \$27 trillion, equivalent to 31 percent of the global debt total (see figure 1). China's debt-to-GDP ratio of 159 percent (see figure 2) is also markedly higher than the global rate of 101 percent and twice that of the US, which hovers around 85 percent. Implied in the CCP's system is substantial financial and economic contagion risk across the domestic Chinese economy in overt and subterranean ways.⁸⁴ On top of this, debt servicing costs in China are roughly 15 percent of GDP with 3 percent yields on a 10-year Chinese government bond. This results in a structural situation in which China's debt continuously grows faster than its GDP. In contrast, debt servicing costs in Japan account for around 1 percent of GDP.⁸⁵

Unlike other countries that have devalued their currencies and exported their way out of debt-induced crises in the past, China does not have this option. While, for example, a 10 percent drop in the value of the Chinese renminbi against the US dollar may generate some additional export revenue, it also appreciates the cost of debt servicing. Chinese real estate developers are the most dominant actors in the CCP-run economy, behind the banks, and the country's largest issuers of US dollar-denominated debt. On the other hand, exporters tend to be small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that provide key semi-skilled manufacturing jobs but lack the same degree of political influence as real estate developers. Given these dynamics, Chinese financial industry experts assess that the expansion and contraction of credit actually have a much greater impact on Chinese economic activity than renminbi devaluation or even American tariffs on Chinese exports.⁸⁶

Beijing's previous decisions to reduce financial risk in the economy, specifically in nonproductive speculative activities (name-

Figure 1. CCP Leading a Race That No One Wants to Win: Corporate Debt as of June 2021



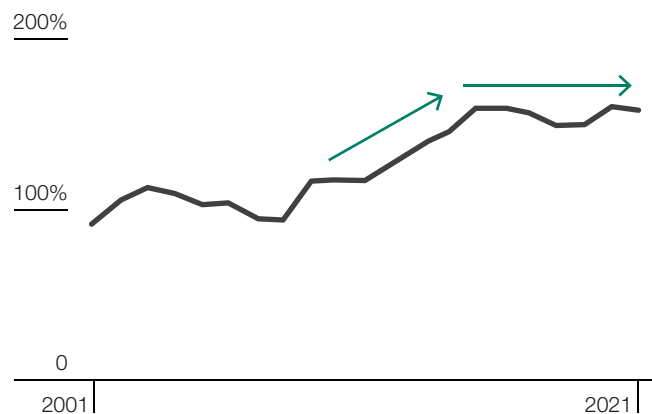
Source: International Institute of Finance

Note: AU = Australia, CH = Switzerland, NL = Netherlands, SE = Sweden.

ly real estate), immediately triggered acute liquidity stress for highly leveraged Chinese corporates. Three-fifths of Chinese entities are in the global quartile with the worst risk. Standard and Poor's (S&P) has estimated (based on a 5,000-plus-entity sample) that 58 percent of China's corporates are highly indebted (the global quartile with the highest credit risk). This is sharply higher than S&P's global sample of 38 percent. Half of these high-risk Chinese corporates are in construction or property, and 45 percent of the sampled China corporate debt is in construction and engineering. Of this, S&P assesses three quarters as highly indebted.⁸⁷ The CCP has lit and is now sitting on top of a deeply interconnected national economic and subsequently social time bomb.

Industry sources also note that real estate transactions have plummeted across major Chinese cities as the market assumption that prices will only continue to appreciate along with a high rate of turnover has been shaken and buyers have become more debt averse. Clearly recognizing this, the CCP has actu-

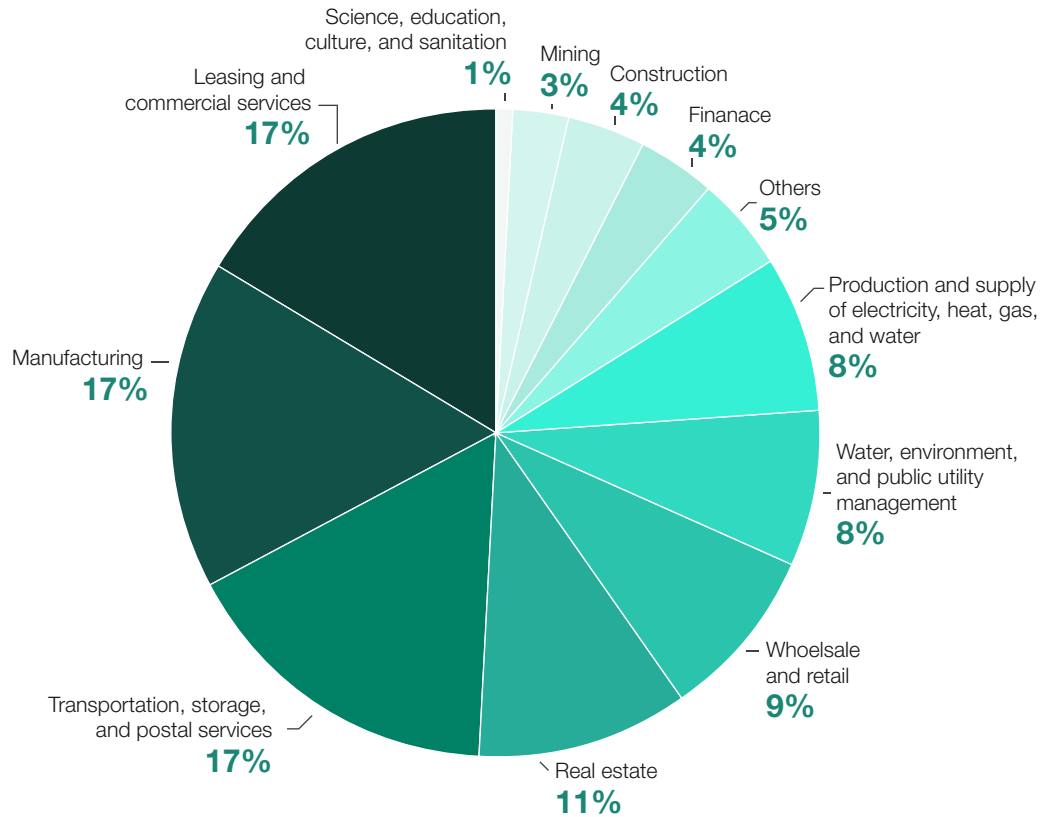
Figure 2. Chinese Corporate Debt Grows from Problematic to Catastrophic



Source: International Institute of Finance

ally resorted to the desperate measure of setting price floors, essentially dictating the minimum price for real estate to be

Figure 3. CCP Central Planning Leads to Critical Overdependence on Real Estate and Linked Industries



Source: Terence Chan et al., "Can China Escape Its Corporate Debt Trap?," S&P Global Ratings, October 19, 2021, https://www.spglobal.com/_assets/documents/ratings/research/100620188.pdf.

sold. Even with these authoritarian interventions, proprietary assessments claim household wealth across China dropped by 7 percent of GDP in 2021 due to real estate market contractions alone (see figure 3 for a chart depicting the Chinese banking industry's loan breakdown).⁸⁸

Despite this wide range of debt-related challenges, Chinese financial industry experts have noted that in Q3 and Q4 2018 the CCP began a surprisingly focused deleveraging process that quickly halted in Q1 2019. Following this abrupt cessation, the same rate of credit expansion that preceded the attempt-

ed deleveraging exercise resumed. This has led some industry veterans to conclude that the CCP has a predetermined course of action on the financial and economic front and that no American action will cause the CCP to deviate from its fixed, inflexible plan.⁸⁹

Exponential Growth of CCP Bank Balance Sheets since 2007: Catastrophic Insolvency

There is a range of fundamental structural defects in the CCP's financial system, none of which have any credible near- or even medium-term remedies. For one, industry experts estimate

that roughly one-third of all loans by China's major banks are NPLs. This NPL ratio has also scaled alongside a massive expansion in assets on the balance sheets of Chinese banks that began during the CCP's response to the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) in 2007–08. Prior to this period, analysts estimated that Chinese banking assets totaled around \$4 trillion. However, after the CCP's massive money-printing and debt-generation operation, they now estimate the figure at \$45 trillion with at least the same one-third NPL ratio. This is a historically unprecedented reckless expansion of bad banking assets.⁹⁰

In addition, industry executives have calculated there has been an additional \$40 trillion of mostly low-quality credit creation since 2007–08, a 1,000 percent rise. This exponential rise has occurred against the backdrop of a CCP financial system that has only \$2 trillion of bank equity and \$1 trillion of reserves. Of this \$1 trillion, the only liquid and accessible reserves are US treasury holdings. China's Big Four banks are also all technically insolvent and dependent on direct and continuous cash injections (in other words, subsidies) from the PBOC to continue lending to mostly state-owned enterprises (SOEs). Of these business loans, experts estimate 40 percent are loss-making themselves. The net effect of all these activities is a banking system that is 400 percent of GDP.⁹¹

Fortunately for the broader global financial system, only 1.8 percent of all international financial transactions are settled in renminbi, and nearly 100 percent of this figure represents China trading with Hong Kong.⁹² A major implication of these figures is that while an uncontrolled financial collapse in China would undoubtedly produce domestic chaos and misery, it would not likely spark another GFC. These CCP-run banks are not densely connected to the international financial system via the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT) network or the derivatives market. However, those holding the commercial paper of Chinese corporates (such as US dollar–denominated corporate bonds) would face challenges.

On paper, the CCP appears to have designed a sufficiently diversified and fundamentally sound financial system. As of January 2020, the Shanghai and Shenzhen stock exchanges had a combined market capitalization of \$8.5 trillion, making China the official second-largest equities market in the world after the United States. In addition to CCP-run banks, a variety of other financial institutions (i.e., brokerages, financial leasing companies, trust companies, financial technology companies) are active in China's financial market. Despite the claimed diversification, the Big Four banks continuously dominate China's financial sector and account for more than 80 percent of all assets held by Chinese financial institutions. They also provided 67.8 percent of all credit to the economy in 2019.⁹³

This massive centralization of risk results in an overly densely interconnected domestic financial system that renders it impossible to “firewall off” one major CCP-run bank from the rest of the system in the event of a crisis. With this much of the Chinese economy concentrated on the books of so few financial institutions, it functions as a monolith from a systems standpoint. A financial contagion in China can occur much faster and on a greater and more unpredictable scale than many mainstream economists appear to appreciate.

Time for America to Turn the Screws

The CCP's financial system depends almost completely on access to the dollar to maintain its own current account balance, procure critical resources for the state (i.e., food, energy, raw materials, and base metals), and fund the buildup of the PLA. Even as the CCP generates a continuous trade surplus with the United States, China's current account deficit is often negative overall. Its account must be growing in US dollar terms, not just renminbi terms, for the CCP to maintain its domestic freedom of action in the renminbi environment.⁹⁴ Also noteworthy is the fact that even when China is running substantial current account and trading account surpluses, its foreign exchange and currency reserves remain flat, a clear indication of massive capital flight.⁹⁵

Many economists discuss China's \$3.2 trillion of foreign exchange (FX) reserves with admiration by claiming it has achieved them by running an enormous trade surplus with the rest of the world. While this is accurate from a purely mechanical standpoint, it does not factor in the broader context. Given China's large industrial base, massive money supply (M2), and large import/export business, a certain amount of liquid reserves is necessary to run the country's day-to-day operations (i.e., working capital).⁹⁶ The International Monetary Fund has generated the formula for calculating this "reserve adequacy" metric:

$$10\% \text{ of Exports} + 30\% \text{ of Short-Term FX Debt} + 10\% \text{ of M2} + 15\% \text{ of Other Liabilities} = \text{Minimum FX Reserves}^{97}$$

For China, the equation is as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} & \$2.2T(10\%) + \$680B(30\%) + (139.3T \text{ renminbi} / 6.6) \\ & (10\%) + \$1.0T(15\%) = \$2.7T^{98} \end{aligned}$$

As can be seen in figure 4, China's liquid reserve position is actually below a critical level of minimum reserve adequacy, and China is currently out of the required level of reserves it needs to safely operate its financial system. The assessment that the CCP's reserves are a buffer it can burn through is incorrect.⁹⁹ The CCP has astonishingly little room to maneuver, and its open structural vulnerabilities can cascade across the entire financial system. The United States literally possesses a

Figure 4. The CCP Is Illiquid

OFFICIAL RESERVES (AS OF JANUARY 31, 2016)		\$3.2T
Hayman Adjustments:		
Less: China Investment Corporation (CIC)		-\$700B
Less: Policy Bank Injections		
China Development Bank (CDB)		-\$30B
The Export-Import Bank of China (Exim)		-\$30B
Agricultural Development Bank of China (Exim)		-\$10B
Less: Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) Initial Capital Commitment		-\$25B
Less: Open Short RMB Forwards by Agent Banks		-\$200-\$300B
Adjusted Official Reserve (Hayman Estimate)		About \$2.1-\$2.2T

Source: Bass, "The \$34 Trillion Experiment."

lever to choose life or death for the CCP; it should use this tool effectively and without apology.

Unplug the Digital Yuan

The CCP has marketed its Central Bank Digital Reserve Currency (commonly referred to as the digital yuan) as the long-awaited internationalization of the renminbi and proof positive that it is moving toward a free-market economy and a freely traded renminbi. As the previous sections have empirically demonstrated, this is not the case. Rather, the digital yuan is a coercive foreign policy tool, global surveillance mechanism, and enabler of sanctions evasion on a global scale. In the event of CCP collapse, one of the first American interventions in the Chinese financial system should be to “switch off” this trojan horse digital currency before it achieves a significant international scale.

Like in all domains of the CCP, the fundamental design principles of the digital yuan are centralization, control, and enablement of arbitrary coercion. For example, if a country’s central bank has a substantial number of digital yuan on the books, systemically significant financial institutions, major national corporates, or a substantial number of individual depositors, the CCP can force its leaders to support a range of CCP objectives. With the digital yuan deeply embedded throughout the economy in question, the CCP can credibly threaten to simply switch off its holdings in the country if, for example, the country refuses to support CCP actions against Taiwan or India, in the South China Sea, or against the United States. The CCP intends the digital yuan to achieve the same strategic effects as kinetic operations, namely direct control over the strategic decision-making of another sovereign state, through financial means that clandestinely translate into strategic ends.

The digital yuan also has the specifically engineered ability to track the financial activities of anyone who holds it. While this is of course a major counterintelligence issue at the level of individual liberty and privacy, it also escalates to a national security concern if and when the holder uses the currency to strategi-

cally acquire assets or companies. Due to its use as working capital to finance day-to-day operations, the CCP would have a direct line of sight into the mechanics of a range of critical national infrastructure assets, financial institutions (including consumer finance), and other companies that hold sensitive, potentially weaponizable personal data.

Lastly, a digital yuan deployed at scale could negate America’s ability to effectively implement sanctions against hostile states, terrorist groups, transnational organized criminal syndicates, and a range of other actors that directly threaten American and international security. The CCP’s Big Four banks are already engaging in this activity, albeit on a more traditional (i.e., non-tech-enabled) scale, and the digital yuan would serve as a major accelerant and driver of this activity globally. In addition to the evasion and negation of American or allied sanctions, the digital yuan would give the CCP unprecedented strategic influence and control over America’s enemies. These threat groups would be subject to the same coercive pressures as anyone else holding the digital currency, and the CCP would then be the monopoly (or near-monopoly) provider of their critical financial infrastructure.

Plug the Gaps for Illicit CCP Capital Flight and Protect Ordinary Chinese Depositors

Corrupt CCP officials, PLA officers, intelligence operators, law enforcement personnel, and others have used the CCP’s largest banks to carry out a range of illicit activities. In the event of a CCP regime collapse, these same individuals will seek to use the same illicit channels to rapidly move their capital out of China. If this occurs on a large scale, the CCP would have the financial resources to at least attempt to reconstitute itself and sabotage any attempts to build a new post-CCP China and a financial system that is market-driven and fundamentally sound.

The United States will need to move swiftly and decisively within the Chinese financial system once the CCP collapses. The United States is the only country that has deep enough liquidity

pools to recapitalize major Chinese banks, protect ordinary depositors, and prevent widespread misery across over a billion everyday Chinese citizens. America will offer technical and financial assistance in good faith but on one key condition: each recapitalized Chinese financial institution will hand over relevant account information and transaction history of all CCP members (at all levels) to American authorities, and these accounts will be frozen pending further investigation. The United States should also provide technical assistance and, if necessary, additional capital to stabilize prices and prevent hyperinflation.

As a CCP regime collapse and the associated chaos will likely also cause a collapse in real estate asset values, the United States should use the historical experience of the Bank of Japan, which took on distressed domestic assets in the immediate aftermath of World War II. While China would not be subject to anywhere near the same type of widespread physical destruction that Japan was, the principle of taking over bad assets, restructuring them, and floating them back onto the private markets is a sound one. Restructuring does not imply blanket bailouts or uniform recapitalization. China's real estate sector has served as a major source of money laundering and other criminal activity, leading to widespread social unrest, and is a key driver of China's demographic decline as young people cannot afford to buy a home. It has been a major source of economic inefficiency and capital misallocation and has distorted China's entire financial system.

Rationalize the Hong Kong–US Currency Peg and Free Hong Kong

Hong Kong's banking sector is 850 percent of GDP, and 280 percent of this figure represents lending to mainland Chinese property developers. The remainder is lending to local Hong Kong SMEs and mortgages. Since the handover in 1997, Hong Kong has also undergone an astonishing regression from a net goods exporter to a net goods importer and services exporter that now depends almost completely on China. Hong Kong's banking system has followed a process virtually identical to that of banks

in Iceland, Ireland, and Cyprus prior to the GFC. In these three countries, attempts to recapitalize the banks ended up bankrupting the sovereign.¹⁰⁰ Hong Kong now has the most highly leveraged banks and the most indebted households and corporates on the planet and has been forcefully fused onto China.

The Hong Kong dollar has remained tethered to the US dollar, a logic and synchronicity that was sound back in 1983 when the peg was first established. However, the geographic and economic reorientation that the CCP has forced on Hong Kong has generated enormous pressures. In the event of a CCP regime collapse, the United States can reestablish the fundamental underpinning of the Hong Kong–US currency peg by recapitalizing Hong Kong financial institutions. Like recapitalized mainland Chinese banks, recapitalized Hong Kong banks will need to turn CCP account holder information over to the United States.

However, prior to this recapitalization, Hong Kong's primary banks will need fundamental restructuring, which could also involve debt relief to local SMEs and households to reinflate the local economy and stimulate business and consumer demand. With such a massive private debt overhang, it will be nearly impossible for Hong Kong to achieve the growth rates necessary to reestablish its position as one of the world's great trading cities and financial centers. The CCP atrophied Hong Kong by design and with clear strategic intent to make it subservient and dependent on Beijing. Hong Kong would need to reverse this process to return to the trade pattern and economic structure that made it a magnet for talented and enterprising people from all over the world, including from mainland China.

Chinese Banks in a New Post-CCP Era: Recapitalize, Privatize, and Decentralize

The collapse of the CCP presents an enormous opportunity to restructure China's financial system. This restructuring will also simultaneously unleash and enable the world's largest country, which comprises some of the most entrepreneurial people on the planet. There is an old saying that "Chinese people are well

off everywhere except in China.” It is time to permanently relegate this phrase to the annals of history, and the establishment of a fundamentally sound financial system is essential to that process. This process should incorporate at least three core components:

1. Avoid previous mistakes by CCP-run banks, especially with regard to real estate and linked industries.
2. Avoid previous mistakes by American banks in the run-up to the GFC, specifically in relation to the growth of bank balance sheets far in excess of GDP.
3. Incorporate key lessons from the Bank of Japan post-World War II, picking up nonperforming or distressed assets and, as opposed to writing them off as losses or simply auctioning them off, restructuring them. When these assets returned to good health, they then floated back onto the private market for a new generation of Japanese entrepreneurs and investors to buy.

China is an enormous country with highly varied levels of economic development. An area like Shanghai has development and income levels that approximate many Western countries, while a province like Guizhou is on a similar level as sub-Saharan Africa. Such a complex economic system does not lend itself to centralized mega-banks and PBOC control. The fundamental design principle of the new post-CCP Chinese financial system should be “many and small” and allow market mechanisms to work. These many small banks will grow along various evolutionary pathways, engage in mergers and acquisitions, and generate a more diversified and decentralized financial system configured to local economic demands. Most importantly, it will be far less fragile and not subject to catastrophic collapse because of a mistake in one institution or in Beijing.

Regionalization and localization of Chinese banks will also serve as a check on the runaway asset bubbles that have plagued the United States and China (on a much larger scale) and have

caused chaos when they inevitably collapse. The creation of asset bubbles is an intentional act of monetary negligence. This is only enabled by overcentralization and disproportionate control over the money supply by a small, unrepresentative, and ultimately unaccountable group of people. With decentralization and local accountability serving as the primary founding principles of the new system, it will no longer be possible to engage in this financial recklessness, even if there are still individuals in China who want to.

Lastly, the principles from the Bank of Japan experience do not necessarily imply that the PBOC has to carry out the distressed asset restructuring process. This risks recentralization (albeit on a lesser scale than during the CCP period) and a repeat of Japan’s mistakes in the 1980s and 1990s.¹⁰¹ Instead, the PBOC can incentivize regional and local Chinese financial institutions to take on bad assets or companies, restructure them, and either keep them on their own books or sell them to other buyers on the private market. The PBOC’s primary role during this exercise should be inflation control and maintenance of price stability, as these two factors are essential during complex restructuring operations of enormous, distressed companies, such as Chinese real estate developers. If entrepreneurs and financial institutions cannot conduct basic financial due diligence, such as sensitivity analysis and discounted cash flow models, these zombie assets will remain stricken and continue to be deadweights on the new China.

China has unbelievable unrealized potential that the Chinese Civil War, Japanese invasion, and subsequent enslavement of the Chinese people by the CCP have parasitically and artificially constrained. American intervention following the collapse of the CCP must fundamentally focus on developing a financial system with healthy recapitalization, privatization, and decentralization. Only such a system will effectively serve the Chinese people while generating market opportunities for American enterprises, companies, and financial institutions to meaningfully contribute to the new China.



SECURING CHINA'S ASSETS IN AMERICA

Gordon G. Chang

Executive Summary

China's Communist Party is facing unprecedented challenges and could fail. Xi Jinping's ideological rule is disastrous for his regime. To prepare for a collapse, the Trump administration should use its emergency powers to get American businesses and citizens out of China. The less exposure America has in that country, the less leverage old or new ruling groups there will have to use against the United States.

Correspondingly, the United States should lessen its vulnerability to regime failure by removing Chinese parties from various economic sectors in America, such as food processing. Washington should also prohibit Chinese citizens and entities from owning farm or ranch land for national security and other reasons. In general, American policymakers should end their "engagement" policies and begin putting American interests before those of China.

This paper addresses this issue and asks a related question: What should Washington do with Chinese assets in America when the CCP regime fails?

A Ticking Time Bomb

Not long ago, virtually everybody thought the People's Republic of China was rising. Now, however, the narrative has flipped. It is evident that intractable problems plague the country. There are at this moment continuing debt defaults of major companies, falling property prices, a tumbling economy, worsening food shortages, a deteriorating environment, and failing local governments. The currency is weakening, businesses are leaving China, and money is gushing out of the country.

Photo: People walk by a Bank of China branch in New York City on July 16, 2024. (Jakub Porzycki via Getty Images)

Meanwhile, the Chinese people are angry. They took to the streets in a series of extraordinary protests beginning in late 2022 and continuing into 2023, with some boldly calling for the end of CCP rule. Other Chinese people have given up, opting to leave the country for good. During this period, there has been an unprecedented surge of Chinese migrants to America, primarily through the southern border. Speaking to Axios, “Sam,” a Chinese migrant who entered America in February 2023 at Brownsville, Texas, compared the migration to “an animal stampede before an earthquake.”¹⁰² “China is in trouble,” President Joe Biden declared in August 2023. He even called the country “a ticking time bomb.”¹⁰³ Even recently, President Donald Trump stated in May 2025, “[China is] suffering greatly. Their economy is suffering greatly because they’re not doing trade with the US.”¹⁰⁴ In short, the CCP regime might be entering its terminal phase.

The last failure of a Chinese regime occurred in 1949 when the swift advances of Mao Zedong’s PLA forced Chiang Kai-shek’s Nationalist government to flee to Taiwan. The Nationalists’ collapse and the proclamation of the PRC’s founding did not lead to immediate expropriations of China’s assets abroad. The Truman administration declared a national emergency and froze these assets 15 months later in response to China’s surprise entry into the Korean War. On December 17, 1950, the US Treasury Department, under the Trading with the Enemy Act of 1917, froze \$80.5 million of Chinese assets in the United States.¹⁰⁵ Eleven days later, Peking retaliated, seizing \$197 million of US assets in China.

While the Communist Revolution in China did not trigger expropriations, it was a war. Today many believe another war is now coming in East Asia, which will almost certainly involve the US. In June 2023 Henry Kissinger said such a conflict was “probable.”¹⁰⁶ Of course, war is not the same as a collapse of the CCP, the focus of this paper; but war in 1940s China led to collapse, and collapse led to more war. So the lessons of that era may very well apply now.

Why would China go to war against the United States? Most fundamentally, the United States stands in the way of Xi Jinping’s dreams of worldwide rule. He and his officials have been propagating not only the Chinese imperial-era notion that China’s rulers had the Mandate of Heaven to rule *tianxia*, or “all under Heaven,” but also that Heaven actually compelled them to do so. This, of course, means Xi believes the United States owes allegiance to him.

Moreover, an insecure Chinese regime worries about how America’s values and form of governance will inspire an unhappy Chinese people. Beijing consequently feels it will never be safe until it destroys America. That is one of the reasons *People’s Daily*—the CCP’s self-described “mouthpiece” and therefore the most authoritative publication in China—carried a landmark piece declaring a “people’s war” on America in May 2019.¹⁰⁷ This phrase has special meaning. “A people’s war is a total war, and its strategy and tactics require the overall mobilization of political, economic, cultural, diplomatic, military, and other power resources, the integrated use of multiple forms of struggle and combat methods,” declared an April 2023 column in *PLA Daily*, an official news website of the PLA.¹⁰⁸

More immediately, China may attack America because the democratic country stands in the way, militarily and otherwise, of its aim to annex Taiwan and portions of countries that have mutual defense treaties with Washington. The United States has obligations to defend, for instance, Japan and the Philippines against Beijing’s territorial ambitions.

The best thing Washington can do at this perilous time is get American assets out of China. The fewer US assets in China, the less America has to lose, which would give Washington more freedom of action in dealing with Chinese assets in the US.

Xi Jinping is relentlessly forcing American businesses to exit his country. Most notably, his regime criminalized the normal gathering of commercial information by amending its Count-

er-Espionage Law effective July 1, 2023. The amendments codified what had already been happening. Before the amendment, the law protected “state secrets,” but the amended law criminalizes the gathering of all “documents, data, materials, or articles related to national security and interests.” This, as a practical matter, means anything and everything related to business activities.

China’s regime has decided that economic research essential to business is related to national security or interests. It made this clear in March 2023 with the raid and closure of the Beijing office of the Mintz Group, an American corporate due diligence firm. Beijing also detained five local Mintz employees and fined the firm \$1.5 million for “unapproved” investigative work. Soon thereafter in April 2023, police visited the Shanghai offices of Bain & Co., an international consulting firm, and raided the office of Capvision, a network of experts;¹⁰⁹ these actions confirmed worries about Beijing’s crackdown. As Secretary Raimondo pointed out during her 2023 trip to China, these harsh tactics were “sending shockwaves through the US community” in that country. “Increasingly I hear from American business that China is uninvestible because it’s become too risky,” she said.¹¹⁰

Reducing Exposure to China before a Crisis

These actions and others by Xi’s regime have persuaded American companies to lessen exposure to China. Yet Trump could further accelerate the process of decoupling through his exercised authority under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act of 1977.¹¹¹ Better yet, he could view China the same way China views America: as an enemy. Trump could also consider the Trading with the Enemy Act, the legislation Truman invoked in 1950.

At this moment, the United States needs to take drastic action. It is apparent that Xi is not going to change course because he is prioritizing his perception of national security over economic prosperity.

So the warning signs are clear, and America needs to think about what it will do if China attacks Taiwan or the regime fails, each of which could occur soon. Time is of the essence. The Chinese people are currently blaming Xi for the country’s deteriorating economic situation, and because he has amassed almost unprecedented power, he has no one else to hold accountable. Moreover, during his rule, he has substantially increased the cost of losing political struggles. China’s ruler therefore must have a low threshold of risk. In short, Xi now has incentives to act recklessly.

Xi Jinping will soon have to make a choice. He can either let alarming internal developments take him down and end the rule of the CCP, or he can rally the Chinese people by mobilizing them against foreigners. Historically, China’s rulers have periodically inflamed the Chinese people to save themselves. For instance, another precarious-looking ruling group—the Qing rulers—fueled the anti-foreigner Boxer Rebellion. Xi might do something similarly radical since he has already exhibited anti-foreign sentiment with his campaigns to denigrate foreign culture and prohibit depictions of it.¹¹²

In this moment before a crisis, Trump should be getting American businesses out of China as fast as he can. Why should America wait for the disaster to occur?

Collapse Scenarios

With that background in mind, readers should consider the matter at hand: What should America do if—or when—China’s communist regime fails? There are three scenarios to consider:

1. Failure of the CCP followed by a smooth transition to a US-friendly Chinese group.
2. Failure of the CCP followed by a smooth transition to a group unfriendly to the United States.
3. A chaotic situation in which outsiders do not know who is in charge, or a long period in which no one is in charge.

Scenario 1: Smooth Transition to a Friendly Chinese Government

In the first scenario—the smooth transition to a ruling group America favors—the United States would need to do nothing unless the new Chinese leaders ask Washington to seize the assets of Chinese opponents. Some of those opponents may be US green card holders; some may even be US citizens. Moreover, some opponents of the new Chinese government may seek asylum in America. Therefore, court battles may occur in America.

These court battles can become epic struggles, such as the one that began after Ferdinand E. Marcos and his family fled the Philippines for Hawaii in 1986 on Air Force C-130s. The former strongman brought \$15 million in cash and assets with him, but some estimated that he controlled \$10 billion in wealth worldwide.

The successor government of President Corazon “Cory” Aquino, which was friendly to the United States, established the Presidential Commission on Good Government to recover “all ill-gotten wealth . . . whether located in the Philippines or abroad.”¹¹³ There were court cases both in the United States and elsewhere, and some have continued for decades.

Perhaps the most interesting of the cases is a human rights class action suit in a Hawaiian federal district court against the late dictator—Marcos lived in Honolulu until his death in 1989—pursuant to the Alien Tort Claims Act of 1789. That law permits, among other things, victims of torture in foreign countries and their families to sue in the United States if an American court has jurisdiction over the defendant. Attorneys filed the class action on behalf of 10,000 alleged victims of torture by the Marcos regime. The Hawaiian federal court awarded almost \$2 billion in damages in 1995. Although the Philippine Court of Appeals ruled against an enforcement petition in 2017 for lack of jurisdiction, the plaintiffs continued the case in the United States.

US courts have issued injunctions in connection with this case. In November 1991, a federal district judge in California froze Marcos’s estate, including \$320 million in Hong Kong and Swiss bank accounts, until the resolution of the torture lawsuit. The freeze came within 11 days of the Marcos estate settling a civil fraud case in Los Angeles, in which the Philippine government sought amounts it claimed Marcos had looted from the Philippines. The Los Angeles case resulted in the dissolution of a worldwide asset freeze that another federal judge had imposed in 1986. To protect their rights, the plaintiffs in the torture case obtained the new injunction.

Why is this relevant? The case now complicates American diplomacy. In 2011, the Hawaiian federal court held Marcos’s wife, Imelda R. Marcos, and his son, Ferdinand R. “Bongbong” Marcos, in their capacity as executors of his estate, in contempt in the torture case. The charge of contemptuous conduct—for sales of assets in America in violation of a federal injunction—was made in accordance with agreements with the Philippine government.

The Philippines elected Bongbong Marcos president in 2022. Could the courts, as lawyers for the plaintiffs contend, hold him in criminal contempt and jail him should he ignore a subpoena while present in America? After all, a federal judge in 2019 extended the injunction until 2031.¹¹⁴

The younger Marcos, who has tightly aligned his country with Washington after his anti-American predecessor Rodrigo Duterte, has in fact escaped legal consequences stemming from the injunction. In his official capacity, he has now made several trips to the United States, one in September 2022 for the United Nations General Assembly meeting in New York and the second in April and May 2023 to see President Biden in Washington, DC. In addition, he visited San Francisco to attend the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in November 2023.

The immunity of a head of state to civil suit is not well settled—there are conflicting decisions from the International Court of

Justice and the United Kingdom House of Lords¹¹⁵—and in any event, immunity ends after the individual leaves office. The torture case highlights difficult issues that will arise even under the easiest-to-resolve of the three collapse scenarios.

Although the Marcos class action is relevant to the resolution of civil cases involving a successor government in China, there is a crucial difference: The current President Marcos was not involved in the torture at issue in the lawsuit. Moreover, he did not commit genocide or other atrocities, and he did not kill Americans with, among other things, illicit fentanyl. Consequently, cases involving China are bound to be more explosive because Chinese officials have, among other things, committed genocide and other crimes against humanity against minorities, such as the Uyghurs and other Turkic peoples. It is likely, given the brutality of the CCP regime, that plaintiffs will institute claims under the Alien Tort Claims Act for these and other heinous official acts.

Both the Trump and Biden State Departments have officially determined that China has committed and continues to commit genocide. The United States has an obligation, as Article I of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide states, “to prevent and to punish” such acts.¹¹⁶

Moreover, a new Chinese government could very well demand that the United States hand over former Chinese officials who have found their way into America. As there is no extradition treaty between the PRC and the US, legal disputes are bound to head into uncharted areas. The United States could expel fleeing Chinese officials, but there would be no mechanism for turning them over directly to a successor government in China.

The US government should try to tip court cases—with amicus curiae briefs, for example—to those seeking justice for the American people and others, which might in some instances be a successor Chinese government and in other instances not.

Because judges will decide disputes rather than American officials, cases will turn on technical questions of law and not necessarily on considerations of national interest. As a result, there will almost certainly be complications with a new Chinese government, no matter how friendly it is to Washington.

Scenario 2: Smooth Transition to an Unfriendly Chinese Government

The American government should, upon the installation of an unfriendly ruling group in China, freeze all Chinese state and CCP assets pending the resolution of claims that will inevitably arise. It can always lift a freeze later, but if it does not impose one quickly, either the government or the CCP can move and hide assets, frustrating those seeking relief in American courts.

Three general types of disputes will undoubtedly arise:

1. The new ruling group in China will attempt to recover the assets of individuals fleeing China and their families in the US, just like in Scenario 1.
2. The new ruling group will demand that Washington unfreeze assets.
3. Private parties will file claims under the Alien Tort Claims Act and other statutes.

Numerous issues will almost certainly arise in these suits. One is basic: Who should courts consider the owner of Chinese assets in the United States?

Up to now, the American government has not had to differentiate between the assets of China's central government and those of the CCP because Washington has viewed them as one and the same. Of course, China is a party-state, but technically the party and the state are separate entities. The Chinese central government is the state and is therefore the sovereign. The party, accordingly, is not entitled to sovereign immunity in American courts.

Ownership—at least as America defines that term—is not especially relevant to Chinese central government and CCP assets. Control is the operative concept in China. Normally a sovereign, in this case the Chinese central government, is the asset owner. The State Council and the Chinese premier govern the central government. Although institutions such as state enterprises, state banks, and the Chinese military are nominally “state,” all of them report to the party, especially in Xi Jinping’s China, where the party is fast taking over responsibility that the state once exercised.

For instance, the PLA reports to the CCP’s Central Military Commission, not the state’s Central Military Commission, which is a vestigial organ. As Mao Zedong and all his successors have maintained, “the Party controls the gun.”¹¹⁷ Xi Jinping’s assertions in this regard have been especially frequent.

If institutions report to the party, and the party installs management and exercises all the attributes of ownership, are the assets not de facto party assets? They are, especially since in China these institutions, like others, owe allegiance not to the state but to the party. The party demands absolute obedience from all individuals and entities in China. The apex of political power in China is not the State Council or the National People’s Congress but the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the CCP. Any central government argument that it owns assets, other than perhaps the furniture in the offices of the State Council, is subject to question.

How can the CCP, the supreme authority, not have sovereign immunity? For one thing, the party has chosen the form of the Chinese government, which makes a distinction between government and party. Before Xi, there was a relatively clear separation of the two institutions. Moreover, there are eight other recognized political parties in China. These eight are, of course, window dressing, but they do play an official role in the National People’s Congress, the highest organ in the Chinese state. For this and other reasons, this window dressing should have legal

consequences. If the CCP is only one of nine political parties, how can it, no matter how powerful it is, be considered sovereign? The party is more powerful in China than the sovereign, the central government, but is not sovereign itself.

Is this elevating form over substance? Yes, but the CCP has chosen the form. If the form disadvantages itself in some aspects, it has no one else to blame.

Does this central government–CCP distinction make a difference? It does, for example, in American cases seeking damages from the Chinese central government for spreading COVID-19. Plaintiffs have brought three federal class actions, in the Northern District of Texas, the Southern District of Florida, and the Central District of California. Also, there is a federal case in the District of Nevada. As Missouri attorney general in 2023, Senator Eric Schmitt filed a case in the federal district court in his state.

Most legal analysts say these cases cannot succeed because of the Foreign Sovereign Immunities Act of 1976, which generally provides immunity for foreign governments. Unless they can fit themselves into one of the legislation’s exceptions,¹¹⁸ plaintiffs have to show that it was CCP, not central government, policies that caused the harm of which they complain. Chinese leaders announce many if not most actions as those of the government, but virtually all high government officials are also CCP members. And their government units have both a senior government official and a higher-ranking CCP secretary. Moreover, as the party states, all in China must obey its dictates, giving plaintiffs an argument that the party is the proper defendant.

The CCP has assets, including the assets of the PLA. As noted, the PLA is a party army, and all the party’s assets should be available to a plaintiff.

That sounds ridiculous, but let’s take this principle a step further. If state enterprises and state banks are party assets, they

are also subject to claims. This situation will come up, for instance, with regard to the planes of PRC airlines. At any one time, planes belonging to Air China or China Eastern are either sitting on tarmacs in America or flying through American airspace. Whether the asset in question is an Air China Boeing 777 on the tarmac at John F. Kennedy International Airport or a Chinese Type 052D destroyer docked in Djibouti, why should a federal court go out of its way to help an unfriendly government? Especially when the successor Chinese government is an unfriendly one, Washington should help plaintiffs make arguments subjecting the CCP to liability. In this circumstance, the US would have no interest in interpreting the Foreign Sovereign Immunities Act to help a defendant that, when it was in power, caused great harm to the United States.

So what should be the proper result when the new unfriendly Chinese government seeks to obtain assets under the control of what is left of the CCP? In this case, the United States may not have an interest in helping either side. Washington, of course, should maintain its freeze so that assets will be available to satisfy claims.

Scenario 3: Chaos after Communist Party Failure

Perhaps the most likely regime-change scenario involves chaos because Xi Jinping's CCP will fight to the end to keep power. Such an effort will prevent a smooth transition and could cause uncertainty for years, perhaps longer.

Xi Jinping is not Mikhail Gorbachev. In December 1991, Gorbachev, recognizing reality and surrendering to “the forces of history,”¹¹⁹ did not use force to keep the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics together. On Christmas Day, he resigned as president of the Soviet state and ended its existence.

The world almost universally hailed Gorbachev, but Xi Jinping did not. A month after becoming CCP general secretary in late 2012, Xi gave a secret speech to cadres in Guangdong Province severely criticizing the last Soviet leader. “Finally, all it took

was one quiet word from Gorbachev to declare the dissolution of the Soviet Communist Party, and a great party was gone,” Xi reportedly said. “In the end, nobody was a real man, nobody came out to resist.”¹²⁰ This suggests the willful true believer Xi will fight to the end in China.

The glorious CCP looks mighty, but it can fall fast. Why? The economy, the motor of China's decades-long rise, is now entering what could be a decades-long decline. The fact the country's economy did not begin a sustained recovery after the draconian COVID-19 lockdowns ended in December 2022 which surprised almost all observers, shows this decline may be starting.

There is now a mood of gloom about China as most analysts can see that its economic problems are structural and that Xi Jinping is a Maoist standing in the way of commonsense solutions. “Ideology is driving China's economic policy to a degree not seen since the country's opening to the West nearly half a century ago,” proclaimed *The Wall Street Journal* in August 2023.¹²¹

For example, Xi believes consumption is wasteful and inhibits the regime from making itself into a “world-leading industrial and technological powerhouse.”¹²² Almost every economist, however, believes consumption is the only sustainable path forward for the Chinese economy. Xi, therefore, is blocking long-term economic success. It was predictable that he has turned out to be such an ideologue. After all, he earned a degree in “applied Marxism” and during the Cultural Revolution was “redder than red.”¹²³ Xi gives all indications of being, as Brian Sullivan of CNBC called him, “a super communist.”¹²⁴

The failure of Xi's policies has political consequences because the Chinese people have rarely been docile during prolonged economic downturns. In fact, most had never experienced an economic downturn until Xi's dynamic zero-COVID policy mandated lockdowns. And although they might forgive an economic slowdown in the middle of an epidemic, the Chinese econo-

my's failure to get back on its feet has disappointed them. This disappointment is dangerous for the CCP. Bret Stephens of the *New York Times* restates "Tocqueville's paradox" this way: "Revolutions happen when rising expectations are frustrated by abruptly worsening social and economic conditions."¹²⁵

In August 2023, a source told me, "Chinese people and lots of foreigners mistakenly imagine that the People's Republic of China has a bag of magic tricks from which they will pull a solution to the present catastrophe when the time is right." If there is no such solution, there will undoubtedly be both local and global panics when the economy continues to fail.

So what should America do? Washington should, of course, freeze Chinese assets in America, pending resolution of claims of aggrieved parties, as discussed above. A freeze will be particularly important with regard to the assets of Chinese banks in the United States. China's banks have enormous sway and include the four largest banking institutions in the world by assets in 2022—ICBC, China Construction Bank, Agricultural Bank of China, and Bank of China.¹²⁶ They are all plugged into America's financial system.

Conceivably, these Chinese banks, which have established operations around the world, could just chug along when there is turmoil in China, impervious to developments in their homeland. And if this ultimately proves to be the case, there is nothing America would need to do, yet China's severe problems will almost certainly become the severe problems of its banks.

These banks already do not look solvent from a balance-sheet point of view—they are carrying bad and questionable debt galore—but the Communist Party keeps them liquid and in business because its existence depends on their existence. So although it may be a slight exaggeration, one can say this: No CCP, no Chinese banks. Like banks everywhere else, China's depend on confidence, and nobody would have confidence in these institutions should the party-state itself fail.

Political turbulence in China could destabilize the banks in many other ways. Suppose during a disturbance in China the CCP or another group uses the banks to destabilize the international financial system. Meanwhile, officials or others might loot the banks for funds. America's bank regulators would have to step in to protect American depositors and to stem volatility. Therefore, the comptroller of the currency, the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, and other federal regulators should act when there are signs that the CCP is failing or that there is chaos or uncertainty in China. "Earlier rather than later" should be Washington's policy.

These actions, of course, would be better if they are done in coordination with America's friends and partners around the world. Yet coordination takes time, and time will undoubtedly be in short supply in a China crisis. Washington should prioritize the safety of America's banking and financial systems over joint action. If US regulators do something that obviously makes sense, regulators in other countries will almost surely follow. Of course, the same logic applies to the very few non-bank Chinese financial institutions in the United States.

Another action item involves food security. A freeze of Chinese assets would be of particular importance to companies growing, raising, or processing food. Washington should consider the seizure of China's food assets at this time. In 2013, a Chinese party now known as WH Group purchased Smithfield Foods, the world's biggest pork processor and hog producer. During the COVID-19 epidemic, there were reports that Smithfield was shipping pork to China when it would have been more profitable to sell it in American markets: "When the pandemic hit, Smithfield increased pork exports to China even as the United States experienced widespread meat shortages due to supply chain disruptions and Smithfield closed some of its plants due to poor working conditions."¹²⁷

In short, an acquisition allowed China to change a company's operations to accommodate Chinese needs while severely dis-

advantaging Americans. The ultimate problem is that Chinese owners—even private ones outside China—do not have the freedom to act in their own self-interest. They are subject to directives of a system that demands complete obedience. This means the US government should consider Chinese commercial entities instruments of a hostile Chinese state.

Ownership confers privileges, and Smithfield had every right to do what it did. But the American government has an obligation to protect Americans in their own country. Because in an emergency the federal government cannot deal with all situations at once, eliminating Chinese ownership is one task it should accomplish ahead of chaos in China. Chaos now looks probable. Unfortunately, there is no political will to seize Smithfield, so the possibility of a crisis in China would be the perfect opportunity to do what the US government should have done long ago. As Rahm Emanuel famously said, “You never want a serious crisis to go to waste.”¹²⁸

There are critical industries that US regulators should not allow Chinese entities to participate in. On the topic of agriculture, there is already a move to prohibit Chinese ownership of American farm and ranch land.

Chinese parties are using land for illegal purposes. In Oklahoma, for instance, they are illegally cultivating marijuana and, it appears, basing human-trafficking operations in the middle of agricultural communities. Other suspicious activities are also taking place on Chinese-owned agricultural land there, such as the construction of fences to keep people in. There are reports of Chinese guards patrolling their Oklahoma farmland with machine guns. This is unacceptable, Chinese political crisis or no Chinese political crisis.

Also unacceptable are Chinese land purchases near sensitive military bases. For instance, last year the Biden administration cleared Fufeng USA, a subsidiary of a Chinese company, to own 370 acres within 12 miles of Grand Forks Air Force Base

in Grand Forks, North Dakota. Fufeng had announced plans to build a \$700 million wet corn milling and biofermentation plant on the site.

The Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States (CFIUS), a Treasury Department–led interagency task force, decided the purchase was not a “covered transaction” within the meaning of Section 721 of the Defense Production Act of 1950. Therefore, CFIUS decided it did not have jurisdiction to block the purchase. The Foreign Investment Risk Review Modernization Act of 2018 authorized CFIUS to review, among other things, purchases by foreign parties of land close to “specific airports, maritime ports, or military installations.”¹²⁹ Those military facilities are listed in an appendix to regulations. Grand Forks Air Force Base did not make the cut—in the words of trade and investment expert Alan Tonelson, a clear-cut case of legislative malpractice.

“The Chinese will now have the ability to conduct passive, persistent surveillance of both signals controlling experimental drones that are routinely tested at that [US Air Force] facility as well as signals that are routinely beamed to and from sensitive US military satellites,” said Brandon Weichert. “The worst-case scenario involves active sabotage of operations at the Grand Forks facility,” he explains in his book *Winning Space: How America Remains a Superpower*. “Should the US and China end up in a shooting war over, say, Taiwan, Fufeng’s property near the Air Force base could be used to send malicious signals to jam passing satellites or disrupt the operation of drones. We have made ourselves vulnerable on our own territory.”¹³⁰

For future cases, Tonelson argues, “either the law needs to be rewritten immediately to bring such cases under CFIUS purview or the President should issue an executive order mandating this change.” Frank Gaffney, vice chair of the Committee on the Present Danger: China, believes the Treasury Department needs to broaden the CFIUS mandate “to include any foreign investment that threatens our national security interests or, for

that matter, other vital interests, in the face of unrestricted and especially economic warfare.”¹³¹

In addition to changing laws, federal and state law enforcement officials should consider applying forfeiture provisions to properties where Chinese owners are committing crimes. It would be better to tend to these matters before political developments in China create an emergency. As the Grand Forks matter suggests, China can cause grave harm to America’s ability to defend its friends and partners before assets are frozen.

On the issue of evacuating Americans from China, such operations take time, are dangerous, and are not always 100 percent effective. In the case of China, it is hard to see how the US military can extract Americans from central locations. The US should not have to resort to that. It should get Americans out at the first indication of political disintegration. The State Department has already issued advisories for Americans in China, but many US citizens there are not listening. China is already taking hostages, most infamously Canada’s Two Michaels. The CCP detained Michael Spavor and Michael Kovrig in December 2018 in obvious retaliation for Canada’s detention of Huawei Chief Financial Officer Meng Wanzhou pursuant to an American extradition request.

All foreigners are at great risk of arbitrary action from a Chinese regime that has absolutely no respect for law, agreements, or treaties. The United States should not be surprised if China tries to use hostages to persuade Washington to unfreeze assets. Former Secretary of State Antony Blinken, during his June 2023 trip to Beijing, raised the cases of certain Americans wrongfully held captive.¹³²

Finally, amid a crisis in China, there will inevitably be analysts who say America should tailor policies to help one Chinese group or another prevail in a struggle for political power. Over the course of decades, American policymakers have tried to do precisely that, with spectacularly atrocious results because

most of the time they do not understand what is happening in the country. Moreover, Americans can be too full of themselves, thinking they know which groups of leaders are best for China. Furthermore, Chinese leaders have easily manipulated their American counterparts.

Washington policymakers should instead realize that their first responsibility is to protect Americans and defend American interests. Even when American policymakers think they should try to help good parties obtain power in China, they should never prejudice American interests in attempting to do so. The first responsibility of Americans is to Americans, not to Chinese parties who may or may not fulfill Washington’s hopes for China.

Conclusion

“The main challenge we will face from the People’s Republic in the coming decade stems not from its rise but from its decline,” journalist Bret Stephens has observed. As he correctly noted, the world does not need to worry about Graham Allison’s famous Thucydides Trap, which analyzed the confrontation between a rising China and a declining America.¹³³

At the moment, China is declining fast. There is, in addition to the crucial problems listed above, a demographic collapse, the steepest projected population decline in history. China, now about 1.4 billion people, could lose “more than half of its current population” by 2100.¹³⁴ Demography is the most fundamental factor shaping the future of a country, the ultimate “maker and breaker of civilizations.”

Xi Jinping, for demographic and other reasons, must be seeing a closing window of opportunity to achieve what he considers historic goals. In fact, the official Xinhua News Agency in 2020 ran a piece titled “Xi Stresses Racing Against Time to Reach Chinese Dream.”¹³⁵ Xi is right. “China is at the edge of a cliff,” Peter Huessy of GeoStrategic Analysis said in April 2023.¹³⁶ That poses a problem for America and all other countries: How does one deal with a militant regime that has incentives to be reckless?

For decades, American policy has been to support the CCP. Ever since Richard Nixon's historic visit to China more than five decades ago, and especially since the failure of the Soviet Union, Washington has encouraged links with China on the theory that the CCP would soon see it in its interest to uphold the existing international system. The State Department's Robert Zoellick expressed the mood of the times in 2005 when he talked about China becoming a "responsible stakeholder" in the international system.¹³⁷

And why wouldn't China wish to join that system? After all, Americans thought the end of the Cold War meant humankind had reached an inflection point, as Francis Fukuyama maintained in his landmark work *The End of History and the Last Man*. Events continued to occur, he noted, but by the last days

of the Cold War, "the evolution of human societies through different forms of government had culminated in modern liberal democracy and market-oriented capitalism."¹³⁸ Humanity had finally reached the "end point of mankind's ideological evolution."¹³⁹

Now, nobody endorses Fukuyama's optimistic vision, but the Trump administration is still engaging China. Engagement can be perilous, however, as the CCP stumbles.

The United States can avoid—or at least minimize—the consequences with a new approach. It can reduce the problems of trying to secure assets in the event of a change or failure of the CCP by not having assets in China. So it is time to sever links, to the greatest extent possible.



SECURING AND RESTRUCTURING THE PLA, PAP, AND PEOPLE'S MILITIA

Rick Fisher

This study imagines that a future crisis comes to terminate the dictatorship of the CCP. It then offers practical advice to other governments to help a new Chinese government survive and make choices that could forge a new era of stability. It also considers briefly the burdens of failing to convince a post-CCP government to choose accommodation and peace.

Assisting a post-CCP-era China to secure, rationalize, and restructure its People's Liberation Army, People's Armed Police (PAP), and Militia of China will be a crucial coalition project of the democracies. It will be necessary to promote internal security for any new era of Chinese pluralistic political development, and to create a new era of peace and stability in Asia and globally. It will also be a gargantuan task: the full-time forces of the PLA, PAP, and Ministry of Public Security (MPS) account for 4.59 million personnel,¹⁴⁰ while a 2018 Chinese source stated the part-time Militia accounts for 8 million.¹⁴¹

Unlike the fallen Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in 1991, in the hypothetical scenario of this study, the CCP falls as it comes close to reviving its historic hegemonic position in Asia and is on its way to achieving global hegemony. The CCP views such hegemony as necessary to diminish and control competitive political systems that could threaten its dictatorship in China.

One should understand that military building to eventual hegemony and ever greater internal repression was the CCP's main product. This task dominated state funding by harnessing technological and R&D sectors, especially technical universities and state-owned corporations, to produce that power.

Photo: Chinese President Xi Jinping reviews troops during his inspection of the Chinese People's Liberation Army garrison stationed in the Macao Special Administrative Region on December 20, 2024. (Li Gang via Getty Images)

The fall of the CCP would grant the world an epochal reprieve. The CCP's killing of an estimated 60–70 million Chinese since 1949¹⁴² and its role in the coronavirus scandal that has killed over 7 million worldwide¹⁴³ illustrate how the party could potentially kill hundreds of millions more in multiple wars following a conquest of Taiwan. It would do so on the way to securing a global hegemony that would crush the democracies and impose global CCP organs of control.

The Allies' Role in Chinese Reconstruction

Should a post-CCP government continue some part of the CCP's program of aggression or fall to a counter-revolt of former CCP-PLA elites, it will be crucial for the United States, Japan, and their allies to have requisite strategic and conventional power as a hedge to deter and dissuade. However, if a new post-CCP government is clearly open to pluralistic reform and has non-belligerent foreign tendencies, it will likely be weak and require immediate assistance.

A key self-defense project for the new government will be the rapid reduction of the national security sector by diverting state funds from military budgets for procurement, redundant production capacity, and R&D. It should instead devote these funds to the continuation of salaries, benefits, and payouts for a large number of demobilization packages—for the PLA, PAP, Militia, as well as the production and research sectors. To assist this project, the United States and Japan may have only weeks to assemble a division-sized, Mandarin-speaking reconstruction corps. They should deploy it strategically and broadly in China to help the new government defeat counter-coup plots in their early stages, then as quickly as possible begin to create loyal internal security and military control organs.¹⁴⁴

But for such a foreign political and military assistance corps to succeed, the new Chinese government will have to grant the US and its allies an unprecedented level of access. The allies may be able to persuade the new government to do so by making commitments—in China, Taiwan, and multiple other coun-

tries—to begin training a professional military, intelligence, and bureaucratic sector divorced from CCP control.

At the same time, the early post-CCP period may be the best period for the allies to influence the foreign and military objectives of a new government. The decisions they influence may in turn help determine the objectives and size of the new government's army, police force, militia, and intelligence agencies.

Before rationalizing the PLA, the allies will need to complete other major tasks:

- Convincing the post-CCP government to regard a free Taiwan as a living example of how to create and sustain pluralistic reform
- Ending support for North Korea
- Ending nuclear proliferation by North Korea, Pakistan, and Iran
- Settling territorial disputes with Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, and India
- Dismantling imperial control of the South China Sea
- Convincing the new government to abandon CCP goals for global and galactic hegemony

All of these actions should enable or encourage requirements for a much smaller military force. But right-sizing the PLA will also require avoiding a key mistake of the post-CPSU period: the failure to create enforceable agreements for conventional and nuclear force levels. The future of China's ability to benefit from global access should rest on a clear agreement that it will not have the means to conquer the democracies, as they will not have the means to invade and conquer China.

At this point, it becomes rational for the post-CCP government and the democracies to consider at what level would a Chinese military force not burden the new government while also being able to defend stability and respond to global humanitarian

crises. First, could a new PLA Ground Force (PLAGF) get by with five group armies instead of 13? Could a halving of the PLA Air Force (PLAAF) and PLA Navy (PLAN) follow? With its internal suppression mission gone, could China retain a fraction of the PAP and Militia mainly for emergency and disaster relief missions, with a steep reduction in the MPS? Such reductions would also require a new strategic nuclear stability.

After China adjusts the size of its military, it and the democracies can create agreements on passive and active military space systems and negotiate controls for the active military systems. Russia's post-CPSU space program can serve as an example of how space cooperation can be a centerpiece of post-CCP foreign engagement. Space cooperation can then become a real engine for realizing, in the coming decades and centuries, the potential of the space economy.

CCP Hegemonic Ambitions and Force Buildup

The fall of the CCP will be crucial to human development. The party is currently assembling the world's greatest military force not to defend itself but to project power, become a hegemon, and suppress opposition to sustain its dictatorship. Since the June 1989 demonstrations that culminated in the Tiananmen Massacre, the CCP has been building a military force for global domination and not just national defense. It identified foreign democratic and liberal systems as a key threat to its dictatorship, so it decided it needed to displace and suppress them. The CCP then implemented broad technology modernization, supported espionage, and devised plans to dominate Asia. These moves could help it become a global military and space power.

Simply by falling, the CCP will dramatically decrease China's ability to fight multiple wars while trying to achieve global hegemony. The Chinese book *Revealing the Six Wars China Must Fight in the Coming 50 Years* provided an early 2010s preview of these wars, and listed the following purposes for the six wars and their potential time frames:

1. To unify Taiwan (2020–25)
2. To recover the various islands of the South China Sea (2025–30)
3. To recover Southern Tibet, or Arunachal Pradesh (2035–40)
4. To recover the Diaoyutai and Ryukyu Islands (2040–45)
5. To unify Outer Mongolia (2045–50)
6. To recover the territory seized by Russia (2055–60)¹⁴⁵

While this book was not official CCP policy, its wide circulation on the Chinese internet implied it had tacit approval from Chinese Propaganda Department censors, perhaps to warn Chinese citizens. It does not mention that these wars stood a strong chance of involving the military forces of the United States and Japan.

To assist with its global projection plans, the CCP created quasi-alliances with an increasing military character in Central Asia (Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which has nine members and may include 12 others), Africa (China-Africa Peace and Security Forum, which has 53 African members), and the four-continent spanning BRICS (which includes Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa). With added leverage from its \$1 trillion Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) aid program, China gained global access to military bases in Djibouti, Myanmar, Thailand, Indonesia, Cuba, Kenya, Nigeria, Mozambique, Gabon, Bangladesh, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Tajikistan, Cambodia, Pakistan, the United Arab Emirates, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Angola, Equatorial Guinea, Seychelles, Tanzania, Venezuela, and Argentina.¹⁴⁶

In addition, in 2012 Russia's Vladimir Putin sought a military entente with the CCP, which Xi Jinping obliged. The two countries conducted joint air, naval, and land exercises to prepare for a Taiwan invasion and likely to coordinate strategic nuclear forces.¹⁴⁷ China's military support for Putin's Ukraine War staved off

Russia's defeat and increased CCP desires for global military projection.

With access to US, Israeli, and European military technology during the 1980s, mainly Russian tech from the end of the 1980s onward, and with its own rapidly built up military-technical research and production sectors,¹⁴⁸ the PLA has now achieved near-world-class capabilities that have begun to exceed those of the United States. A 2024 study by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute found China was the leader in 37 out of 44 critical technologies.¹⁴⁹

Under the leadership of CCP and PLA leader Xi Jinping, by late 2015 the PLA had completed crucial reforms that enabled it to realize joint warfare strategies and operations. Most important was the replacement of seven military districts with five theater commands, which enabled real joint force integration.

In December 2015, the PLA created the Strategic Support Force (SSF), which centralized space warfare and space power projection and integrated vast intelligence gathering, communications, cyberwarfare, and psychological operations. This, in turn, enabled faster integration of fifth- and sixth-generation technologies.

But the PLA apparently decided that placing numerous and broad space, cyber, and intelligence missions under one command was unwieldy and in April 2024 divided the SSF into three new services that enable a greater focus for resources and operations—in coordination with the PLA's five theater commands. The PLA Aerospace Force commands China's civil and military space programs and likely shares with the PLA Air Force missions below low earth orbit in near space. The PLA Cyberspace Force not only defends PLA cyber networks and assists internal controls, but also conducts broad foreign cyberespionage and cyberwarfare operations. The PLA Information Support Force supports the PLA theater commands with construction and operation of information systems in support of PLA joint force strategies.

PLA Ground Force

With centralized joint command, the Joint Staff Department at the CMC level, and five theater commands, the PLAGF (though based on 13 group armies and 80 combined arms brigades) became a modular force, with the power projection capabilities of six airborne, 13 army aviation, 11 marine, and three air assault brigades.¹⁵⁰ Heavy tracked armor and artillery were supplemented by medium-weight wheeled armor and artillery and specialized light/special forces units. Before the 2030s the PLAGF was also fielding light and medium unmanned combat vehicles assisted by unmanned aircraft and combat humanoid robots—which enable airborne projection.

Into the mid-2020s, the PLA had multiple ways to deploy theater missiles:

- PLA Rocket Force: DF-26; DF-21A/C/D anti-ship ballistic missile (ASBM); DF-17 hypersonic glide vehicle (HGV); DF-16; DF-15; DF-11A; CJ-10 land attack cruise missile (LACM)
- PLAAF: CJ-20 LACM; YJ-21 air-launched ballistic missile (ALBM); larger ALBMs
- PLAN: YJ-21 ASBM, with longer-range ASBMs on the way

The PLAGF also began forming artillery brigades armed with the Norinco PHL-16, which could fire two 750 mm short-range ballistic missiles (SRBMs) or eight 370 mm missiles of SRBM range. Depending on the number of sorties for 6x LACM carrying H-6K/J/N bombers, the number of total theater missiles could range from 4,000 to 5,000 or more.¹⁵¹

PLA Navy

Through the PLAN's three fleets—four if it conquered Taiwan—the CCP could extend its power throughout Asia and then globally. It will be on its way to 550 ships by 2030,¹⁵² with plans for 10 PLAN aircraft carrier groups in the 2040s¹⁵³ and the first completely nuclear-powered carrier, cruiser, and replenishment groups. Currently, PLAN nuclear submarine production has

spiked, and these vessels can more effectively protect China's force of 12 nuclear ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs) and prosecute those of the US Navy. It is building 25 large landing helicopter dock / landing platform dock (LHD/LPD) vessels to expand the PLAN's power projection options. Chinese unmanned submarines, surface ships, and large combat aircraft are world-class.

PLA Air Forces

The PLAAF has 1,800 combat aircraft with about 900 fourth-generation fighters, 200 Chengdu J-20 fifth-generation fighters,¹⁵⁴ and an advanced sixth-generation fighter program.¹⁵⁵ A world-class unmanned combat aerial vehicle (UCAV) sector will soon be producing fighter/bomber-sized autonomous cooperative platforms (ACPs) using artificial intelligence. The H-20 flying wing strategic stealth bomber will soon join a force of 150 modernized H-6K/J/N bombers.¹⁵⁶ A growing fleet of Y-20 heavy transports with aerial refueling tanker versions enables global power projection.

People's Armed Police

Since the reforms of 2018, the 660,000-strong PAP lost non-combat elements, and the CCP reorganized the police into three main elements: the Internal Security Corps, the Mobile Corps, and the China Coast Guard (CCG), of which it took control. The CCP also subordinated it to CMC control and increased its mechanization with wheeled armored vehicles to contribute to the occupation of Taiwan.¹⁵⁷ The PAP may have 32 regional commands, each with one or more mobile units (contingents).¹⁵⁸ Though a 2019 study mentions 25 mobile contingents (seven in Xinjiang)¹⁵⁹ as its main force for assisting internal security missions, in coordination with the MPS and the PLA, and are available to support external PLA missions.

The 1.9 million-strong¹⁶⁰ MPS controls internal security and local police forces, conducts domestic and foreign espionage, and manages the network of detention and reeducation camps that imprison 1 to 2 million Uyghurs in Xinjiang. It is this concentration

camp infrastructure that the Chinese government could also use to "process" conquered populations from Hong Kong, Taiwan, the Ryukyus, Arunachal Pradesh, and other future conquests.

The CCP also placed the coast guard under the PAP in 2018. The CCG is credited with over 520 ships, but 300 are small non-ocean capable patrol boats.¹⁶¹ Nevertheless, it is a major factor in gray-zone intimidation and political warfare operations against Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, and other Southeast Asian nations. The CCG will assist the PLAN in wartime. It has two of the world's largest coast guard cutters, the 12,000-ton *Zhaotao* class and the 1,800-ton Type-056 armed corvette from the PLAN, of which it received 22 in 2021.¹⁶²

People's Militia

While a 2018 *PLA Daily* article credited the Militia of China with having 8 million personnel, the article did not say this also accounted for the People's Armed Forces Maritime Militia and an Air Militia that can access China's 4,000 civilian airliners. Under the control of theater commands, ground force Militia are "responsible for combat readiness, defensive operations, and assisting in maintaining social order . . . actively participate in anti-terrorism and stability maintenance, emergency rescue and disaster relief, and border protection and border control."¹⁶³

The Maritime Militia includes full-time forces that participate in gray-zone intimidation operations but can access scores of civilian large roll-on/roll-off (Ro-Ro) ferries and large car carriers as well as thousands of large Ro-Ro river barges to greatly expand amphibious assault operations. They can also control much of China's large fishing fleet.¹⁶⁴ Furthermore, a Militia-like structure enables the PLA to mobilize the 4,000 Boeing and Airbus planes in China's airlines to support mobility exercises and transport invasion troops.

Securing the Post-CCP Government

Immediately after a future collapse of the CCP, the PLA, PAP, and Militia organs will need to restructure so that they can

secure a new government committed to dismantling the vast CCP control and suppression regime. The new regime will also need to establish foreign and defense priorities that reverse the CCP's growing conflicts with its neighbors and the democracies. These changes would allow for radical reductions from the CCP's military preparations for global superiority.

As mentioned earlier, the United States, Japan, and other allied democracies could create a division-size (10,000 members) reconstruction corps of Mandarin-speaking experts from varied professions to advise the new government. The group would also gather vital intelligence to warn of coup plots, monitor major economic or political issues that could cause revolts, and help identify and vet capable and loyal future officials. This group could also help government officials, many of whom would have served in the previous regime, appreciate the value of transparency, and it could completely change their outlook.

Such a tall task would require inducements such as training in China, Taiwan, Japan, the United States, and other countries. This would promote an understanding of democratic reform and a professional bureaucracy while also equipping the military to function without CCP control. Such education and training would create positive options for some of the 100 million former members of the CCP's security organs who would want to help build a new and free China. Temporarily helping to pay salaries and pensions and creating transition packages for millions of party and military members are other options that could minimize privation and prevent revolts against the new government.

How much would this cost? Estimating PLA budgets has been a long-standing inexact science due to the PLA's lack of transparency.¹⁶⁵ A Center for Strategic and International Studies study finds that personnel constituted about 30 percent of the PLA budget,¹⁶⁶ though 2018 reforms saw a 40 percent increase in PLA salaries. But 30 percent of the 2023 "official" PLA budget of \$224 billion is \$67.2 billion. Considering estimates that the real PLA budget is double the official one,¹⁶⁷ gathering \$60

billion or \$120 billion in aid just to quell military revolts would be an enormous challenge.

To be sure, in the early years after a CCP collapse, cuts from procurement and training could immediately fund salary extensions and transition packages. But unemployed factory workers would also require support, and many other sectors will be competing for the excess defense funds. As for foreign assistance, it may be possible to consider smaller aid packages by targeting regions key to the new government's stability, but for such an option to be appealing, democratic leaders will have to see the benefits.

Securing Access to Influence the Creation of New Foreign and Military Objectives

The post-CCP government will need to radically reduce the size of the former regime's broad PLA-PAP-corporate production and research complex. Convincing it to do so, again presuming it has a pluralistic reform tendency, will also require convincing it to abandon the dictatorship and foreign goals that justified building up that complex to begin with.

At the same time, there should be a plan to avoid adding to the "centuries of humiliation" trope that anti-reform factions will exploit. The goal of the United States, Japan, and other democracies is not to slay a powerful China but to help end a dictatorship's myriad evils. In addition, they aim to help the Chinese people realize the benefits of political and economic freedom and see their nation derive power from respecting and supporting universal principles, not from supporting their destruction.

As Chinese citizens begin seeing their country become much less powerful, supportive countries will need to show them the tragedy, waste, and opportunity cost of the CCP's drive toward hegemony. They need to see how a responsible China will be increasingly welcomed and have greater opportunities if it ceases to embroil Asia and other regions. Again, a reconstruction corps that has achieved access to and the confidence of the

new government could help. Specifically, the allied democracies should convince the new Chinese government to:

1. Denounce the CCP's drive for hegemony based on destroying democracies, in alliance with the Russian and North Korean dictatorships, starting with a peace agreement with Taiwan that renounces the use of force against the island and respects its sovereignty.
2. Abandon the CCP's goal of nuclear superiority in favor of pursuing an agreement on an equal number of nuclear warheads that China, Russia, and the United States will jointly agree upon and that missile defenses can neutralize.
3. Abandon the CCP's aggressive territorial claims against all its neighbors in favor of, where feasible, fair settlement and joint economic developments.
4. Halt the CCP's years of missile and nuclear proliferation to North Korea, Pakistan, and Iran.
5. Cease supporting dictatorships or military-authoritarian regimes in North Korea, Pakistan, and Iran in favor of supporting democratic reform movements there.
6. Stop trying to create regional and global power structures to contain the democracies, which are willing to bargain, cooperate, compromise, and welcome into leadership councils a China that is not seeking to destroy or dominate them.
7. End the CCP's cyber war, a war of infrastructure attack, military and civil espionage, and information manipulation, in favor of cyber principles that defend the security and property rights of China and the democracies.

End the CCP's quest for space hegemony in favor of mutual support in a very harsh environment and cooperation to advance scientific discovery and achievement as well as corporate profits.

But the opportunity to have deep access to the new Chinese government's decision-making process and to advance the above principles is also an opportunity to convince the new

government that China historically has not and likely will not face an existential threat from the democracies. A rogue Russia, North Korea, Pakistan, or Iran, the latter three with Chinese nuclear missile technology, could in fact pose threats. But the benefit for China is that the United States, Japan, and most of the other democracies would likely help China to contain or defeat such threats, or would at least help with reconstruction.

Restructuring and Professionalizing the PLA, PAP, and Militia

If the allied democracies succeed in helping the new Chinese government replace the CCP dictatorship architecture with an agenda of democratic reform, the government will more easily adopt the above list of new foreign and defense policy goals. In turn, it will also more readily professionalize the military and radically reduce its forces.

The fall of the CCP and the expected succession of a democratic reform government will provide an opportunity to create military organizations subordinate to a democratic government structure founded on the rule of law, not the arbitrary rule of the CCP. In this pursuit, the United States, Japan, and Taiwan have positive democratic military reform experiences that they can package, translate, and offer to supplement a new Chinese agenda for military professionalization. They can also offer deeper study abroad opportunities.

The end of the CCP also provides the opportunity to move beyond the frustrating one-sided, manipulative military-to-military engagement regime that usually favored the PLA's goals. Military confidence-building should have a foundation of equal access, equal degrees of acceptable transparency, and a commitment to solutions instead of historic Chinese stratagems intended to extend, not solve, conflicts.

Future Force Structure

In general, halving the former CCP's national security structure may be the best goal at first. A China that abandons

aggression in its neighborhood and hegemony beyond may require an even smaller military sector, but economic cost, economic growth, and political stability will likely determine the rate of reduction. Nevertheless, especially after achieving political and economic stability, a democratic Chinese government will require a military that protects justifiable national security interests, enables cooperation with other states to promote international security goals, and promotes national prestige.

Conventional force reductions, however, will require strategic nuclear stability. Here, sharp reductions may not be appropriate, at least early on. As there has never been a negotiated three-way nuclear stability, assurance may require a larger number of nuclear warheads initially, and the parties may then seek reductions with accumulated confidence. As the United States and Russia deemed 1,550 warheads sufficient to agree to New Start in 2010, double that number may provide assurance for each to deter the two others. However, these nuclear missile forces should be neutralizable by sufficient national missile defense systems—Ronald Reagan’s goal.

Ground Forces

A PLA of 13 group armies—mechanized with heavy, medium, and light brigades, integral artillery, increasing missile artillery, anti-aircraft artillery, surface-to-air missile systems, and a growing PLA Army Aviation Corps—is not a defensive force but an offensive one. These along with two amphibious army divisions, eight marine brigades, and seven airborne brigades are for offensive operations.

It is reasonable to suggest to a new Chinese government that a defensive posture would start with five or six group armies and half the amphibious army, marine, and airborne units, spread among the five theater commands. The PLA has sufficient rail, airborne, and road mobility to mass forces against a large threat or to assist coalition stability missions.

Navy

A democratic China will continue to have global interests that a navy will defend and advance. But the CCP intends to build a PLA Navy of more than 500 ships not just for defense but for territorial aggression and hegemony. Deriving naval confidence from a number of peacekeeping and stability coalition exercises may ease China’s demand for naval power, but this change may do the same for the allies. China may still prefer three fleets based on carrier aviation, large amphibious ships, and nuclear submarines, but the US and China may settle on navies in the 250-large ship range.

Air Force

If the Chinese government is no longer trying to achieve global hegemonic power, the Chinese air force can be smaller. It will likely consist of fifth- and sixth-generation fighters supported by large ACPs, a bomber force, impressive manned and unmanned electronic support platforms, and an impressive large transport and aerial refueling tanker force.

PAP, MPS, and Militia

With the fall of the CCP, the government will have a significantly smaller internal security mission and have less need for domestic espionage, repression, and surveillance missions. Eliminating the PAP and the MPS’s suppression and concentration camps will also be possible. But reassembling some elements of the PAP, MPS, and Militia into an emergency and disaster relief organization is justifiable. A smaller coast guard will also be necessary, but a massive maritime militia for missions of harassment or invasion will be unjustifiable.

Advantages and Risks of Cooperation in Space

As it did for the post-CPSU Russia, space cooperation between a post-CCP China and the West could offer near-term political and long-term economic benefits. But the countries will need to manage the risks of such cooperation as China’s behavior on Earth moves in a positive direction and as negotiated agreements restrain military competition in space.

Yet the CCP's fall will lessen tensions in the space domain. Beginning in 1992 with its 921 Program to control the moon along with many military space programs, the CCP sought to gain space combat superiority and then to achieve dominance over the Earth-moon system to better enforce its hegemonic ambitions on Earth.

A post-CCP China could decide to pursue dominance in space in lieu of dominance on Earth, especially if reductions in the PLA yield appropriate budgetary support. However, a major objective for the allies will be to convince the new Chinese government that realizing the potential for economic growth in concert with other space powers is the better strategic goal. This should include convincing China to favor Artemis Accord levels of commitment against space militarization and a stronger-than-Antarctica Treaty level of inspection for bases on the moon and Mars.

Russian Example

Despite the Soviet Union's development of ground-launched interceptors, co-orbital satellite interceptors, and manned combat Salyut space stations, the US and its democratic space partners decided early in the 1990s to pursue cooperation in space with post-CPSU Russia. Soviet and Russian designs for combat-capable Mir space stations and settlements on the moon crumbled with the CPSU.

From the June 29, 1995, docking of the US Space Shuttle *Atlantis* at the Russian Mir space station through the 2000–24 joint construction and manning of the International Space Station, cooperation in space offered a wider potential for Russia's post-CPSU relations with the West. But in the early 2020s, it narrowed to one of America's only positive engagements with Russia, reflecting the Putin regime's rising hostility after 2012. As such, the brief Cold War flourishes of US-Soviet space cooperation and its increasingly isolated place in Russian-Western/US relations after 2012 highlight the axiom: peace on Earth is necessary for peace in space.

It is also the case that Russian-Western cooperation in space could never reach its full potential. For three decades after

the Cold War, Russia certainly had the talent to design architectures for manned moon exploration; it revealed one at the August 2007 Moscow Airshow and another at the 2019 Paris Airshow.¹⁶⁸ But it never had the resources to realize such programs. And instead of pushing for deeper cooperation in this direction with the West, Russia created suspicion—by 1992 it became a key source of space technology for China's manned space program. China purchased Soyuz designs to develop its Shenzhou, then its docking and space suit systems, and likely stole Russian space station designs.¹⁶⁹

In the US, meanwhile, in 2010 Barack Obama foolishly canceled George W. Bush's Constellation program. While Donald Trump revived the US moon program in 2017, it was too late. In giving China a decade to develop its architecture of space launch vehicles (SLVs), moon landers, and moon base technology, Obama ensured that by the mid-2020s China would achieve momentum to contest dominance of the moon.

By refusing to side with the West, Russia lost broadly. Both the West and China chose to keep Russia as a subordinate space partner. After 2010, China stopped buying Russian moon architecture technology and instead chose to rely on indigenous designs. In addition, Russia may not be able to afford its own SLVs to reach the moon, doubling its dependence on China. Following Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, China became Russia's only and dominant space partner. For Beijing, the key lesson was to reject dependence on space partners in favor of an independent and ever more capable space power.

Arresting CPP Space Warfare Development

A key priority for the US and its allies before they can consider space cooperation with China will be Beijing's agreement to develop a regime of transparency and control, as well as to reduce its active systems for waging war in space. In 2024 the PLA created the PLA Aerospace Force, which controls China's space program to include all satellites, manned programs, moon, Mars, and deep space programs as well as combat operations in space.

In the early 2000s, the PLA had already deployed a network of powerful ground-based chemical laser anti-satellite systems. A China Aerospace Science and Industry Corporation (CASIC) ground-based interceptor conducted China's successful satellite interception and destruction on January 11, 2007, and CASIC has developed and deployed a series of ground-based low earth orbit (LEO) to medium earth orbit (MEO) ground-based anti-satellite interceptors. In January 2022, the SSF's SJ-21 grappling satellite grabbed another satellite and threw it out of orbit.¹⁷⁰

China could modify both its manned space station and its large unmanned *Tiangong* supply ship to perform military surveillance, combat, or Earth bombing missions, as would any future large orbital space plane¹⁷¹ or near-space hypersonic aircraft like the CASIC *Tengyun*. PLA Aerospace Force control of manned moon and Mars programs means they will include purpose-designed weapons or dual-use systems (drones, laser mining equipment). A 2022 Chinese journal article explored use of the moon to observe Earth and cislunar space, as well as placement of sensors in the LaGrangian Points to better surveil Earth and the whole Earth-moon system.¹⁷²

Space Hegemony or Realization of Space Economy

As it falls, the CCP will be well on its way to assembling the means for controlling the Earth-moon system, or hegemony in space. It will do so by realizing that the next phase in human economic growth could reside in the space economy, projecting a \$10 trillion Earth-Moon Economic Zone by 2050.¹⁷³ Beijing also seeks to build gigantic space-power collectors to beam energy to Earth,¹⁷⁴ reducing dependence on petroleum.

Then, in mid-August 2023, China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation (CASC) official Dr. Wang Wei proposed a 100-year program for China to build water-ice processing centers to produce oxygen and rocket fuel on Mars, planetary bodies, and asteroids extending through the solar system—which by implication would extend CCP hegemony as well.¹⁷⁵

China's post-CCP era in space will begin with a technical potential close to that of the United States. The CASC's Long March-9 SLV, which can transport 50 tons to the moon, is similar to the US Space Launch System. It could fly in a single-use version by 2030 and in a fully reusable version by 2035. The tri-core configuration Long March-10 will precede it in 2027, carrying 27 tons, and will also have a reusable version. These will closely follow the most advanced US SLVs, by SpaceX Corporation, limiting the period of economic advantage the United States will derive from them.

An early March 2023 Beijing exhibit on the 921 Program revealed a model of China's first moon lander, confirming it uses a detachable deceleration stage that crashed into the moon patterned after the Soviet-era LK Moon Lander. This could land on the moon before 2030, but soon after, China may build moon bases that use inflatable room technology but cover them in moon regolith. China may also plan a constellation of navigation and surveillance satellites for the moon.

China achieved the difficult landing of a probe on Mars in May 2021, and a Mars sample return mission may begin in 2028. But like the United States, China intends to send people to Mars and build settlements. China's deep space focus will be on reachable moons of Jupiter, and China will likely seek to mine resources on asteroids. Like the US, China will also use space telescopes to look for habitable exoplanets in distant solar systems and create capabilities to defend the Earth from large asteroids.

Into the 2040s this may be easier, as by the 2030s China could also be testing early nuclear space propulsion systems that could halve the time chemical propulsion takes to reach the moon and Mars. In March 2023, a blogger reported the 801 Institute of the Sixth Academy of CASC had developed a 100-kilowatt Brayton cycle nuclear thermo-electric space propulsion system.¹⁷⁶ This would be close to space nuclear propulsion developments in the United States and Russia.

The Burden of Failing to Help a Peaceful Post-CCP Regime Emerge

It is also necessary to consider the burden of failure. There are tremendous forces that would auger against a post-CCP Chinese government evolving toward pluralism and stability, forcing the democracies to forge deeper strategic cooperation with massive military investments.

The CCP has taken China to the precipice of not just global power but global hegemony. It has nearly restored the Middle Kingdom and has the power to harness vast information networks. The marriage of artificial intelligence and quantum technologies will make these networks even more powerful. In addition, the party is headed toward the achievement of a heretofore unseen level of military power based on the pillars of nuclear, space, and maritime superiority and the global projection of unmanned joint force formations.

A post-CCP Chinese government may choose to continue the pursuit of greater power, as previous Chinese dynasties did. And having done so, it may also decide the pursuit of global hegemony offers the best political justification for an authoritarian regime dedicated to global power in concert with other authoritarian regimes. Such an outcome would be disastrous for the democracies and could require generations of sacrifice in terms of lives and treasure. Deterring this China from choosing war would also require an enormous military force.

Nuclear deterrence of China, Russia, and smaller nuclear rogues may require a US nuclear force of 6,000 deployed warheads, 4,000 low- to ultra-low-yield regional nuclear weapons, 2,000 European warheads, and regional deterrent forces for Japan, South Korea, and Australia. A combined US, Japanese, Australian, and European naval force of 1,200 ships and 20 aircraft carrier battle groups, and a US air force of 1,000 sixth-generation combat and 3,000 unmanned combat aircraft may be necessary. At the same time, the allies will need to sustain a projection to the moon, Mars, and beyond to ensure access to

the space economy for future generations and to deter a Chinese-led space hegemony.

Conclusion

It is far preferable to imagine that a China after the fall of the CCP will make possible a long and positive stage in human history. In his 1996 memoir on how the United States won the Cold War, former CIA Director Robert Gates captured the 1991 sense of anticlimax: “And so the greatest of American triumphs—a triumph of constancy and purpose sustained over four decades at staggering cost—became a peculiarly joyless victory. We had won the Cold War but there would be no parade.”¹⁷⁷

At the very least, the United States, Japan, and allied democracies should be prepared, in the event of the CCP’s end, to analyze its demise. They should be ready to tell the Chinese people and the world, in great detail, the truth of its reign of terror and of its potential to have killed hundreds of millions more. They should have plans in place to help the Chinese people build a pluralistic future that does not threaten the world, such as by professionalizing and rationalizing China’s military, internal security, and intelligence forces.

But it will also be important to celebrate the demise of the CCP—globally, and for centuries to come. The party spent the 2010s building a system of concentration camps to exterminate Uyghurs’ nationalism and suppress their Muslim faith. This system is now available to “process” young believers in democracy in Hong Kong, Taiwan, the Ryukyu Islands, and other territories that might be conquered, as well as millions of prisoners whom China might capture in wars against the democracies. Averting this global reign of terror would offer a positive pivot for humanity, as nearly 20 percent of the world’s population would have a chance to escape the CCP’s harness of global domination and destruction. They would then be able to develop a Chinese democracy and expand the paths to prosperity, even galactic prosperity.

But to realize a much better future for China and the world, the United States, Japan, and the other allied democracies will need to mo-

bilize a division-sized reconstruction corps to secure the new Chinese government from revolts, especially from the PLA and security services, and to gather intelligence. The allies should then create a multinational advisory mission to assist the new government in formulating reform priorities, especially the professionalization of the former CCP's military and security service organs. Provided they can convince the new Chinese government to accept deep and unprecedented levels of transparency, the advisory mission should help the new government formulate foreign and defense priorities:

- End goals of global hegemony.
- Cease territorial claims to the South and East China Seas, Ryukyus, and Arunachal Pradesh.
- Establish a peace treaty with Taiwan and demilitarize the Taiwan theater.
- End weapons of mass destruction and dictatorship-sustaining support for North Korea, Pakistan, and Iran.

With acceptance of this new international stance, the advisory mission should work to convince the new Chinese government that a new professional military establishment can eliminate more than half of the mid-2020s PLA forces and nearly all of the PAP, but retain a residual military force plus a fraction of the Militia force, primarily for domestic disaster and emergency responses. The remainder would be sufficient for real national defense and multilateral missions to stabilize post-communist North Korea, Pakistan, or post-mullah Iran.

China will still have regional and global national security interests, but by divorcing its new government from the hegemony-dictatorship survival priorities of the CCP, the country could become a welcome partner in stability operations. Such a government, by shelving the former CCP ambitions for military superiority and hegemony in space, could also become a valuable partner in humanity's next phase of economic growth on the moon, Mars, and beyond.



SPY VERSUS SPY VERSUS SPY: THE CCP'S SECURITY AND ESPIONAGE APPARATUS IN THE ABSENCE OF CENTRAL AUTHORITY

Anonymous

Executive Summary

When united and at peace, China has almost always had emperors or emperor-like leaders who strongly grasped authority and competently handled politics and the challenges of national leadership. They were traditionally considered blessed from above with a Mandate of Heaven bestowed upon them because they worked in the interests of the people and maintained stability and peace. At other times, Chinese governments have struggled to maintain central authority, most recently during the Warlord Period (1916–28) and the first two years of the Cultural Revolution decade (1966–76).

If the central authority of the ruling CCP deteriorates in the near future, the precedents of these recent periods may influence how personnel in the party-state's internal security and espionage apparatus respond. These precedents will especially influence those based away from Beijing in China's provinces, municipalities, and autonomous regions (hereafter, "provinces and municipalities"). At these local levels, the party-state has organized its nonmilitary coercive power in provincial and munic-

Photo: A device to monitor passenger flow is seen at the Bund on March 31, 2023, in Shanghai, China. (Getty Images)

ipal state security bureaus (SSBs) and public security bureaus (PSBs) that focus, respectively, on foreign threats including espionage and on law enforcement.

Besides being subordinate to their ministries in Beijing,¹⁷⁸ these bureaus also answer to their local CCP committee, the ultimate authority in their area. Understanding the place of provincial and municipal SSBs and PSBs in the party-state can help policy-makers envision how these organs of state security might react to a decline of central authority and how to think about US policy options in response.

Policy proposals at the end of this chapter are as follows:

- Avoid the appearance of imperialist interference. Prepare to assist localities in China only if they request it.
- Prepare ahead for a possible decline in central authority by building up information on key provincial and municipal personalities, including psychological evaluations.
- Study, in advance, the actual effect of the CCP's massive surveillance programs on people in selected provinces and municipalities. Publicize the results on Chinese language news and media platforms.
- Publicize, in advance, the story of how Germany, Portugal, and the Baltic states neutralized their secret police organs and opened their files for public inspection.
- Prepare programs to assist Chinese provinces and municipalities to neutralize secret police and embrace transparency post-PRC.

Nothing Lasts Forever: How the Nature of Chinese Society Affects Policy Options

Chinese society has widely embraced the Mandate of Heaven concept (天命, *Tiān mìng*, hereafter “the Mandate”). Understanding it can help the United States and its allies predict how a collapse of central authority could affect workers at the local MSS and MPS bureaus, that is, at the SSBs and PSBs.

The Mandate is worth examining from the perspective of a popular Chinese source to ponder how people there might actually see it. Baidu (baike.baidu.com) is China's most popular search engine and also carries a Wikipedia-like reference website that the population carefully edits and widely reads. Should people in China begin wondering whether the CCP still possesses enough legitimacy to rule, Baidu will be a first stop for many seeking to refresh their understanding of the Mandate, which retains credibility despite its antiquity.

Selected for brevity below are portions of Baidu's explanation of the Mandate, translated as “the will of heaven” from the Chinese.¹⁷⁹ Note that the idea applies to the lives and fates of ordinary people as well as to those of the emperor:

The will of heaven; also refers to the destiny of people under the sovereignty of heaven. . . . The Records of the Five Emperors: “Then Emperor Yao grew old and ordered Shun to take charge of the administration of the son of heaven in order to observe the will of heaven.”

Xu Chi, The Night of Carnival: “As if the sun must come out from the east and go down from the west, the peasants believe that their miserable life is the fate of heaven and the law of nature.”

Another important part of the idea, also from the same Baidu entry, is that a decline in the emperor's authority is not necessarily a sign that he has lost *Tiān mìng*:

In ancient times, the power of the ruler was divinely authorized, and the ruler claimed to be commanded by heaven, which was called the Mandate of Heaven. Zuo Zhuan (左传-宣公三年): “Although Zhou's virtue has declined, the Mandate of Heaven has not changed, and the weight of the tripod has not been questioned.”

Baidu's definitions are almost certainly subject to the scrutiny of the company's CCP committee and therefore of the party itself, so inclusion of that last passage is not surprising. It gives the party an extension of sorts to maintain a claim to the Mandate even if the population perceives a decline in Beijing's authority. However, the regime would probably face increasing pressure against maintaining a claim to the Mandate if central authority significantly weakens. The right to govern in this concept is not perpetual, unlike the European idea of the divine right of kings, which allowed rule despite immorality or incompetence.

The first ruler of the Zhou Dynasty (1046–256 BC) conceived the Mandate to justify overthrowing the tyrannical and destructive ruler of the previous Shang regime. The Zhou Dynasty leaders claimed the Shang had lost authority because their last emperor was no longer working for the benefit of the people. God would withdraw authority from a tyrannical emperor, and the Chinese people had the duty to resist such a ruler.¹⁸⁰

If the popular perception that the regime in Beijing was no longer working for the people's benefit accompanied a sudden decline in central authority, some local authorities, particularly those who are armed, might see it as their duty to resist the regime or might do so for opportunistic reasons. Some might fail while others succeed.

This is where the provincial and municipal SSBs and PSBs become relevant, as would the military region-based units of the PLA and its subordinate force, the PAP. An accessible example of how a previous Chinese government declined and fell, and how the coercive forces responded, is the end of the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911).

The Challenge of Central Control

The decline of the Qing was different than it might be for the PRC, but provides an example that would come to the minds of many in China if central authority should decline.

Before the declaration of the Republic of China on January 1, 1912, foreign aggression plagued the Qing Dynasty for over 70 years, beginning with the First Opium War (1839–42). During the Qing's last three decades ending in 1911, Beijing pursued modernization schemes that were only partly successful and failed to transform the economy, reform the military, or curb rampant corruption.

When the Qing finally fell, Chinese elites—social, intellectual, bureaucratic, or military—were divided in their visions of how to save China from chaos, recover lost territory, and regain national sovereignty. Regional differences in language and culture may have contributed to that division, less perhaps among intellectuals and the Chinese Nationalist Party than among the armed and more dangerous military men left over from the Qing Dynasty's army. Due in part to this lack of unity, the Warlord Period (1916–28) followed, splitting the country into armed satrapies loyal only to their local leader.

By contrast, the CCP regime has been far more successful in resisting foreign opponents, modernizing its armed forces, and building perhaps the strongest economy in Chinese history. It has cultivated elites of different kinds at different stages of its short history. At each juncture, these various elites, from the worker-peasant-soldier ideal in the 1950s to the more expert cadres and businesspeople of today, have populated leadership roles and strengthened the CCP's grip on society. They have also been the targets of numerous purges, leading to widespread cynicism about politics as a vocation. However, central control has always been challenging even to the CCP, including under Mao Zedong himself, who complained of “mountaintops,” cliques within the party whose loyalty centered on senior communists other than Mao.¹⁸¹

China's large population, geographic size, and cultural diversity still contribute to this difficulty. Pervasive corruption persists and harms the application of central authority in local areas. Xi Jinping's government has dented but not eliminated corruption in

part because the CCP is the sole national authority but houses much corrupt activity. There is no institution independent of the party to solve waste, fraud, and abuse.

From afar, the CCP regime seems large and in charge, hardly at risk of a sudden downfall and decline into another warlord era. But Beijing's policies risk sowing popular dissatisfaction even as they boost the hard edges of authoritarian control. Beijing has subjected nongovernmental and non-party civil society organizations to attack for over a decade. CCP supremo Xi Jinping relentlessly pursues total personal control, saying that the party, with him as its core should lead everything. The MPS, under Xi's direction, has instituted a massive monitoring system that average people now realize can track their every move, establishing a surveillance baseline that is far higher than at the start of Xi's tenure as CCP general secretary. Even compared to Mao's time, with its pervasive neighborhood committees and other methods of personal control, the surveillance of today is extreme and all-encompassing.

As a result of these policies and technological advances, the provinces and large municipalities have far more coercive power over their own populations than before Xi's ascendance. Because the localities are ultimately responsible for the stability of their local areas, they wield their power somewhat independently, accountable to the center mostly for maintaining "stability." If central power suddenly declined, some local authorities and their SSBs and PSBs might perceive an opportunity to go their own way or make another choice that does not involve staying loyal to the center.

Provincial and municipal SSBs and PSBs alone are not automatically dominant in their areas because military units have superior firepower. But the nature of their missions makes them capable of, and practiced at, quick, violent action. That ability could become crucial even in the face of superior PLA and PAP forces if, for example, the local CCP committee, alongside the SSB and the PSB, decided to decapitate the regional military command and attempt to take control amid paralysis in Beijing.

Anticipating how such local scenarios would end requires a thorough understanding of the players and their motivations. That in turn requires the sort of continual study and monitoring recommended in the final part of this chapter.

Caveat Emperor

Recall that China emerged from thousands of years of rule by an emperor only a bit more than one hundred years ago. The tradition of an unchallenged ruler has, at least to a degree, continued. In 1945, Mao Zedong was criticized for setting himself up as the founding emperor of a future non-dynastic regime after the publication of his poem "Snow" in a leftist newspaper in the Nationalist Chinese wartime capital, Chongqing. In his poem, Mao showed himself to be anything but modest:

This land so rich in beauty
Has made countless heroes bow in homage
But alas! Qin Shihuang and Han Wudi
Lacked literary grace;
The founding emperors of the Tang and Song
Had little poetry in their souls;
And Genghis Khan,
Proud Son of Heaven for a Day,
Could only shoot eagles, bow outstretched,
All are past and gone!
For truly great men
Look to this age alone.¹⁸²

Casting the party leader as a new emperor was a tactic of Mao but also of his opponents.¹⁸³ After the victory Mao took this idea further, gradually building the infamous personality cult that enabled his dominance of the CCP and powered his effort to sweep parts of the party aside when he chose to reshape it during the Cultural Revolution.

Simon Leys, whose critical assessment of Mao in the 1960s was prescient, wrote that Mao turned out to be quite apt at being an emperor with updated characteristics: "More than two

thousand years of imperial tradition have created in the collective consciousness the constant need for a unique, supreme, quasi-mystical head; the shaky and brief Republican interlude did not succeed in providing any convincing substitute for this, and Mao knew shrewdly how to manipulate this traditional legacy to his own advantage.”¹⁸⁴

Mao’s success in casting himself as a founding emperor prolonged that tradition. The resilient place in Chinese political culture for an emperor-like figure explains why Xi Jinping built a personality cult, proclaimed himself the party’s core, and promulgated his thought as a national reference after he accumulated enough power and jailed enough opponents through his relentless anti-corruption campaigns to discourage opposition.

However, Xi lacks one crucial ingredient: the prestige of his two most important predecessors, Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping. Mao was truly the indispensable man of the Chinese Communist Revolution. His decisions saved the Red Army from annihilation during the early 1930s and the Long March (1934–35). He preserved the party’s fighting strength during the anti-Japanese War (1937–45), overcame steep odds to win the Chinese Civil War (1946–49), and fought the Americans to a standstill in Korea (1950–53). He proved time and again that he held the keys to success, at least until the Great Famine and the Cultural Revolution. Even then, belief in Mao’s superior insight prevailed until his death.¹⁸⁵

Only Mao was Mao. He commanded both awe and fear. Lin Biao’s son, who plotted to depose Mao, said that “the Chairman commands such high prestige that he need only utter one sentence to remove anybody he chooses.”¹⁸⁶ General Luo Ruiqing for example, the former PLA chief and ex-minister of public security whom Mao jailed, made a point of traveling to Tiananmen Square to bow in honor of the chairman after his death in 1976.

Deng Xiaoping’s prestige stemmed from his role as a CCP leader and PLA commissar during the revolution, particularly in the

closing year of the Civil War and in the subjugation of Tibet the following year.¹⁸⁷ Afterward, Mao considered him a rare and indispensable administrative talent for the party-state. Though Mao removed Deng from power in 1966 at the start of the Cultural Revolution, he thought of Deng as one of the most able in the party, saying in 1975 that Deng was a “good hand whether the subject was politics, military affairs, or literature.”¹⁸⁸ In the post-Mao years, Deng commanded such prestige that final decisions on major issues went through him even though he held no formal offices.¹⁸⁹

Xi Jinping has accumulated many offices and functions, and all major decisions go through him. He commands fear, but with neither revolutionary prestige nor wartime achievements, does he command awe? To be fair, Xi has had no experience in war—yet. But his seeming adherence to Mao’s playbook for dominance in the CCP does not change his lack of the prestige Mao commanded. As the father of Communist China, the chairman could make huge blunders but maintain deference among the elite. The question becomes, How many blunders is too many for Xi?

Xi Jinping, the Failing Emperor?

The idea that Xi Jinping might be losing his grip on the Mandate grew more sensitive in 2023 after the party awarded him a third term with no subsequent limits. It seemed they would allow the leader to maintain lifetime rule over China like an emperor of old or like Chairman Mao did in recent times. As economic pressures including unemployment mounted from the direct and indirect effects of the COVID-19 lockdown and other setbacks, negative reactions on Chinese social media indicated a decline in the party’s “already imperiled mandate of heaven.”¹⁹⁰

The regime is so sensitive about this idea that they habitually overreact to any suggestion that Xi’s legitimacy is slipping—just as they constantly overreact to even the smallest sign of opposition at home or abroad. This sensibility was apparent in October 2023 when the CCP required bookstores to withdraw a reprinted 2016 book and censored online discussion of it. The

book's new title was *The Chongzhen Emperor: Diligent Ruler of a Failed Dynasty* (崇祯: 勤政的亡国君).

Chongzhen was the last emperor of the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) who hung himself on the eve of Beijing's fall to the forces of the next dynasty, the Qing. Chongzhen had famously purged senior officials and mismanaged his kingdom, a history that carries an inevitable comparison to Xi Jinping's policies since his rise to power.¹⁹¹ Weibo censored discussion of the book online as well as searches for it, and the PRC mainland press did not cover the issue, though the Chinese language press outside the mainland wrote about it.¹⁹² One problem seems to have been the new blurb on the cover. As the semi-independent Hong Kong newspaper *Ming Pao* described it, the book "was previously published by the Forbidden City Press in 2016 under the title 'Past Stories of Chongzhen.' It has been marketed in the mainland for many years and was not banned there. In the new edition (2023), the cover introduction says: 'You make mistakes one after another, and the more diligent you are, the more your country will be destroyed!'"¹⁹³

At the Grassroots: The Security Services in the Provinces and Their Officers

To briefly review, the MSS and MPS are organized across China such that most personnel in each agency are based in the provinces and municipalities under SSBs and PSBs. This follows the pattern of CCP control from the center, establishing party committees from the provinces downward to the local level, each answerable to the next one up. The local CCP committee is the ultimate authority in its area, and all government departments, including the SSBs and PSBs, are subordinate to it. This means SSBs and PSBs report upward in two directions: to their local CCP committee and to their own ministries.

This arrangement is meant to advance the rule of the center and, at the same time, maximize the reach of the party's counterespionage and law enforcement apparatus. However, the differences in SSB and PSB missions indicate differences in how

their local-level leaders and officers might respond to a decline of central authority.

PSBs in the provinces and municipalities have a national police function—investigating the sorts of ordinary crime any local law enforcement authority would handle, along with investigating and apprehending dissidents, unauthorized religious adherents, and terrorists. Though the MPS has deployed special operations units on occasional anti-terror missions outside China—for example, to the Golden Triangle region where Burma, Thailand, and Laos meet—provincial and municipal PSBs normally focus on their own jurisdictions, not on cases or events abroad.

By contrast, some SSBs in the provinces and municipalities, owing to the nature of their mission, focus both on counterespionage in their localities and on selected intelligence operations abroad. For example, the Jiangsu provincial SSB was the workplace of Xu Yanjun—the Chinese intelligence officer arrested in Belgium in 2018, extradited to the US, and convicted in 2022 of attempting to steal jet engine technology from General Electric. Xu's work at the Jiangsu SSB appears to have focused on stealing technology from the aerospace industry.¹⁹⁴ The same SSB likely has other officers doing counterintelligence work, though they would not need Xu's competent level of English. The Shanghai SSB, which recruited Glen Duffie Shriver and tried to insert him into the CIA, may have focused on collection against US government targets.¹⁹⁵ It also has agents pursuing counterespionage work against perceived foreign enemies in China's largest city.

Because of differences in their missions, SSB personnel in the localities may be subject to more attention from their ministry in Beijing and stronger supervision than MPS gives to local PSBs. However, this requires further study to define, particularly from province to province.

The Good, the Bad, the Red, and the Expert

Professionalism, training, expertise, and political reliability seem to vary widely among Ministries of State Security and Public Security

officers. It is hard to obtain more than anecdotal evidence about the level of competence and, for lack of a better term, the loyalty of these officers, but here I can at least examine a range of my own encounters and those of people I interviewed for this chapter.

One academic account about the MSS and accounts from former intelligence professionals I interviewed, who have had contact with MSS officers, indicate that these officers are perhaps the closest thing to “true believers” in the CCP that one can find inside the system. They at least pretend to be, and many probably are, in near-total agreement with the CCP’s mission to restore China’s greatness and foster a socialist future.¹⁹⁶

Nigel Inkster is the former director of operations and intelligence at MI6 (UK Secret Intelligence Service) and the senior advisor on cybersecurity and China at the International Institute for Strategic Studies, a London think tank. He put it this way when Cindy Yu interviewed him on her podcast *China Whispers*:

The first thing to say is that the Ministry of State Security, [though] described as a ministry, is first and foremost an organ of the party. Its fundamental mission is to preserve and protect the security of the party. And Ministry of State Security cadre officers are sworn to be absolutely loyal to the party . . . and that is in many ways the primary qualification for being accepted into the Ministry of State Security.¹⁹⁷

This is a valuable insight into the MSS mindset, at least of those officers who operate abroad and at the headquarters in Beijing. Of the seven former and then-current MSS officers I have knowingly met (six in China, one in Washington), all stayed on message during meetings. None spoke English except for a young analyst from the MSS analysis organ, the China Institutes for Contemporary International Relations in Beijing.

In the 1990s, one MSS officer, admitting his affiliation, claimed to be a representative of a newly founded MSS-sponsored

company. He sought to “cooperate” with American technology firms, offering “valuable connections to government clients.” He spoke no English and was clumsy in his approach, but others are suave and smooth operators with good foreign language skills, like MSS former vice minister Yu Fang, aka Yu Enguang, whom the Australian scholar Alex Joske profiled in his 2022 book *Spies and Lies*. Writing about Yu’s activities in the early 1980s, Joske relates:

[Yu] was a witty and memorable character, skilled at interacting with targets and adept at English—something that stands out in all accounts. While posted to America undercover as a Xinhua journalist, he charmed a *Washington Post* reporter with his commentary on a Cantonese meal. . . . He’s been trained well, the ability to introduce Chinese cuisine to foreigners was specifically drilled into Chinese spies during their English language courses.¹⁹⁸

That was the 1980s–2000s (Yu died in 2013). More recently, the CCP posted another smooth operator to the United States, Christine Fang Fang (no relation to Yu Fang). As an attractive young woman who enrolled in California State University, East Bay in Hayward, California, she spent lots of time on extracurricular activities. While working on the campaigns of up-and-coming Democratic Party politicians, she developed sexual relationships with at least two of them. However, there were holes in her tradecraft: the FBI became alert to Fang when they observed her meeting an MSS officer based at the PRC consulate in San Francisco. In mid-2015, when the bureau began warning her contacts of these activities, Fang fled the country.¹⁹⁹

Nigel Inkster commented on the uneven nature of MSS officer skillsets in a separate interview, when he said about Chinese State Security officers:

We don’t see a predictable MO [modus operandi]. The Russians, for example, would always carefully kit

out the agents that they ran, but the Chinese don't do that; they are more hit and miss. That seems to include training of their own officers. The lack of standards and lack of care seem, at least in part, to indicate a disrespect for the US.²⁰⁰

A PSB contact in China with experience dealing with his local SSB once opined that there was a clear cultural difference between PSB and SSB officers: "We can be rough and rude, but State Security acts threatening and dangerous. . . . Chinese people prefer to avoid us, especially State Security. They just want to live their lives and keep their heads down."²⁰¹ I picked up a hint about that "threatening and dangerous" aspect of State Security officer behavior when they summoned me "for tea" in a northeast Chinese city in the 2000s. Their phone monitors had picked up my conversation with another American who was alarmed about a security threat. There was no rough stuff, just an unnecessarily menacing atmosphere.

Public Security officers seem decidedly more concerned with their image, if not perfectly so. *The New Yorker* correspondent Jiayang Zha wrote that they could be "at once harsh and accommodating, insidious and absurd." They temporarily detained, or "vacationed" (*bei lüyou*), her brother Jianguo in 2008 because of his political record; they did not jail him but gently removed him from his home during the visit of a foreign dignitary to prevent him from engaging in political activity that could embarrass the regime:

On the road, the three policemen assigned to Jianguo would look after him as though they were his assistants: they bought sightseeing tickets, checked in and out of hotels, helped with his luggage, took snapshots of him at scenic spots. They fussed over him at meals, heaping meats and vegetables onto his plate, ladling up additional bowls of soup for him. Sometimes they booked a trip through an agency and ended up travelling for days with a group of real tourists. The all-

male quartet aroused curiosity and inspired innocent guesses about their relationships. "So, are you father and sons?" "Colleagues?" And, pointing at Jianguo: "Is he your boss?"

It seems likely that SSB and PSB officers are different people depending on the nature of their jobs: more sophisticated and urbane abroad, tougher at home catching spies, rough-edged as police dealing with dissidents. But this is the CCP, a party that sees society as full of enemies within. A significant cultural attribute that may be common to all state security and public security officers at every level is fear: "Unending existential fear about enemies within; fear of being caught between CCP general secretary Xi Jinping's never-ending anticorruption drive and a culture that still fosters graft, as well as fear of being insufficiently loyal to Xi's 'thought' and to his status as the CCP's 'core.'"²⁰²

Provincial Instability

In the meantime, SSB and PSB officers operate in society at large. By all accounts, things are not going well in some parts of China; the organs of state security strive to control mounting unrest.

They may continue to succeed as long as party and state functionaries at the working level remain loyal and conscientiously strive to carry out Beijing's policies in spirit and letter. But it is hard to tell how well they actually follow directives from the center without sufficient inside information beyond accounts emerging from various purges and public criticisms of errant officials. Chinese mainland politics is such a closed process that measuring the strength of the CCP's grip *in each province, municipality, and autonomous region* requires detailed study, an analysis that the US should prioritize if it has not already.

Specific incidents can be revealing—like the 2011 and 2016 uprisings in Wukan, Guangzhou Province.²⁰³ Even then, the center's level of control remains obscure. The CCP generally does

not allow Chinese news media—especially now—to exploit data leaks and other unofficial information to dig into angles like emails between the center and local authorities and relevant official documents.

The MPS called the Wukan uprisings “mass incidents,” which it defined as any kind of planned or impromptu gathering formed because of “internal contradictions.” These include mass public speeches, physical conflicts, airing of grievances, and other forms of group behavior that may disrupt social stability. They can involve only a dozen or so people or be huge, such as the violent demonstrations in Weng’an County, Guizhou Province, when over 10,000 people protested the death of a schoolgirl, overturning police cars and setting fire to the local PSB.²⁰⁴ Such major incidents dwarf the COVID-19 lockdown protests across China in November 2022, when hundreds of people took to the streets in a number of locations.²⁰⁵

According to MPS figures, these incidents grouped together increased tenfold over the period 1993–2005, from 8,700 to 87,000. The last time the MPS released these figures was 2006. Foreign analysts estimated the number at 180,000 in 2010 based on a separate statement that the nationwide figure had doubled from 2006 to 2010.²⁰⁶ Unfortunately, no breakdown by province has been available.

The number of incidents nationwide may not have declined since 2010, because if it had, the MPS might have resumed issuing those statistics. The CCP’s massive surveillance may have reduced mass incidents, but it is impossible to know more without further study. Surveillance did not seem to stop people from hitting the streets in the COVID-19 lockdown protests, though the police later rounded many up for questioning and punishment.

Policy Proposals: Before the Deluge

This chapter has illustrated the heavy burden the CCP places on SSB and PSB officers in the provinces, municipalities, and autonomous regions. With uneven training and uncertain skill-

sets, these officers must defend a regime that has ever more oppressively surveilled its population. The CCP subjects officers to continual anti-corruption campaigns and other movements and expects them to regularly express loyalty in ways that have begun to resemble the political campaigns of the Mao era.

Meanwhile, many ordinary people not involved in state security or public security matters, particularly if they are not CCP members, live fairly normal lives. They prefer to avoid involvement in such affairs, possibly engendering an uncertain level of social isolation for officers.

Anticipating future instability or a decline of central power in China involves preparing to engage SSB and PSB officials outside Beijing in ways that evoke positive rather than negative reactions. To prepare for a destabilized scenario, the US should consider the following measures.

Build Relationships with SSB and PSB Officials

American diplomatic posts should improve contacts with provincial and lower-level officials from the security ministries and from the PLA in military regions. They should pursue profiles of key persons if they have not already. Ironically, Christine Fang Fang’s effort to profile up-and-coming American politicians for the CCP is an interesting counterpoint, minus the practice of seduction. US diplomats should consider creating psychological profiles of individuals who might decide, in a crisis scenario, to ignore orders from Beijing and begin making independent decisions.

The US should initiate a program to interview exiles and others who have had contacts with MPS/PSB and MSS/SSB officers at the provincial level and below to build a more comprehensive picture of key personalities and of the cultural changes that may be taking place in the security organs at localities.

Measure and Covertly Encourage Disloyalty to the CCP

Washington should study and define the actual effects of the CCP’s enhanced surveillance programs on local populations.

Some people welcome such surveillance, feeling that only criminals and swindlers have anything to fear. But others do not, and their feelings may also differ about other issues, such as Xi Jinping's drive to mandate the study of his thought. Valuable insights about the bewilderment and frustration building up in Chinese society are available in an October 2023 essay by Evan Osnos.²⁰⁷

The US also needs to focus analytic efforts to determine which provinces and municipalities are likely and not likely to stay loyal to the center in a crisis of central authority.

The West could publicize in Chinese language media the story of how Germany neutralized the East German secret police (Stasi) and opened their files for public inspection. The result was to demystify the Stasi's capabilities and reach, exposing how the Stasi had recruited enormous numbers of East and West Germans to spy on behalf of the communist government. Other examples of post-authoritarian exposure of secret police activities occurred in Portugal and the Baltic states, where, as in Berlin, specialized libraries open to the public offer local citizens and foreign researchers access to these annals of oppression.

Policy Proposals: After the Deluge

As described above, the governments of unified Germany, Portugal, and the Baltic states pursued programs that provide lessons on handling a defunct secret police organization and personnel. These examples may be useful in a post-PRC China, and the United States should make plans to help the Chinese people and their new leaders learn the following:

- How democratic outcomes can emerge from the downfall of authoritarian governments
- How Berlin punished lawbreakers while avoiding victor's justice
- How Germany worked to dispel myths and legends about the Stasi secret police by opening secret archives for public examination

In the end, these measures helped advance the newly freed nations along the road to democracy, an outcome that Washington should prioritize for China. If these nations are willing, they could, with American help, introduce post-PRC provinces, municipalities, and autonomous regions to similar programs through exchanges and educational visits. If possible, the governments of or nongovernmental organizations in Germany, Portugal, and the Baltic states should lead the efforts.

The US previously promoted exchanges with the PRC court system to explore juvenile justice solutions and other specialized matters. Such exchanges focused on police reform and should also consider counterespionage systems.

Washington may decide to encourage democratic outcomes, post-PRC, in China's provinces, municipalities, and autonomous regions. In doing so, it should carefully consider Chinese sensibilities about the legacy of modern Chinese nationalism, avoiding the appearance of interfering in the country's affairs. Few things can unite the majority Han Chinese population more quickly than actions they perceive as foreign interference, which can instantly prompt emotional reactions recalling the troubled decades before the 1949 CCP victory. Beijing's propagandists have successfully labeled that time the Century of Humiliation, and the US should avoid becoming connected with that idea.



CHINA'S AUTONOMOUS REGIONS AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Nina Shea

Executive Summary

In the transition period between the collapse of CCP rule and the establishment of a functioning democratic government in China, the United States will need to lead an effort to head off ethnic violence, civil wars, and violent political retribution and score settling. To put Chinese society on a stable footing for the future, US policies to advance democracy, religious freedom, freedom of speech, and other human rights will be critical. This priority is the focus of this chapter.

US policies should aim to maximize the possibility of a peaceful, orderly transition process and should become operational as rapidly as possible as the dissolution of the CCP regime becomes apparent. The recommendations in this chapter empha-

size diplomacy and civic action rather than kinetic military action. They should foster voluntary cooperation and participation by the people of what is now China, as far as possible.

A Chinese proverb defines a crisis as “an opportunity riding a dangerous wind.” These policies will encourage China’s various peoples to see an opportunity to create a better future amid what is certain to be great political uncertainty. Overall, they should give cause to hope for an opportunity to build a freer and more prosperous, just, and secure future for them-

Photo: A watchtower on a high-security facility near what is believed to be a reeducation camp where mostly Muslim ethnic minorities are detained in Xinjiang, China, on May 31, 2019. (Greg Baker via Getty Images)

selves, whether they are ethnic and religious minorities or religious minorities within the Han majority. This will advance American interests in an orderly transition toward a stable China at peace with its own peoples, including its minorities, and its neighbors.

This chapter draws on historical precedents to identify successful measures and lessons learned. On the one hand, the sudden collapse of Soviet communism three and a half decades ago ended the Cold War without a shot fired. Its first stages saw the liberation of millions of captive people who formed 20 new republics in Central and Eastern Europe, which have largely gravitated to the West in what historians consider a mostly peaceful transition. As the historian of the State Department describes the collapse of the Soviet Union itself two years later, “On December 25, 1991, the Soviet hammer and sickle flag lowered for the last time over the Kremlin, thereafter replaced by the Russian tricolor. Earlier in the day, Mikhail Gorbachev resigned his post as president of the Soviet Union, leaving Boris Yeltsin as president of the newly independent Russian state.” The historian’s record observes, “People all over the world watched in amazement at this relatively peaceful transition from former Communist monolith into multiple separate nations.”²⁰⁸

On the other hand, the examples of South Sudan and Iraq provide warnings of the dangers that can occur when abrupt regime change occurs in societies with religious, tribal, and political animosities or when border disputes are unresolved.

Implementing appropriate US policies in the context of regime change is an immensely complex operation everywhere, and even more so when it occurs within a population as vast as China’s. The undertaking will require calibrating varied policies or sets of policies to the needs of each region, locale, and demographic of that diverse country. Providing reassurances to and meeting the needs of the Uyghur Muslims, whom the CCP targeted for genocide in Xinjiang, and the repressed citizens of

Hong Kong, for example, demand distinct approaches.²⁰⁹ And those measures will differ again from those for the majority Han population on the mainland.

This chapter outlines a plan of action that the United States government should adopt, with the endorsement of Congress, to obtain a political consensus that can continue no matter who is in the White House. As the next section shows, even President George H.W. Bush came into office in January 1989 with policy assumptions concerning the Soviet Union that differed from those of the prior Reagan administration, in which he had just served as vice president. The fall of the Berlin Wall occurred only months after Bush took office. His questioning and review of the prior administration’s goal of defeating Soviet communism delayed the US policy response, leaving the United States inactive at a critical time. As it turned out, the Eastern and Central European transitions were almost miraculously peaceful, but the United States cannot count on events to unfold as smoothly in China. It should be prepared.

The plan’s eventual implementation will involve the State Department and Justice Department as well as public and private organizations and experts. The US government should form an interagency task force to coordinate this effort.

The plan depends on US leadership and cooperation with partners in existing international alliances that focus on China. While no single international or regional political infrastructure is available to serve this purpose, US partners could include the countries in the trilateral security pact for the Indo-Pacific region, AUKUS (a security pact that includes Australia, the UK, and the US). In addition, they could include New Zealand and Canada, which are part of the Five Eyes intelligence-sharing alliance already in place, and regional allies Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, India, and the Philippines. Some of these nations are part of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, or Quad, which focuses on Indo-Pacific security and which some observers are already viewing as a potential Pacific NATO.

The specific policies for the US in this chapter fall into three broad categories to achieve the principal goal of averting social violence and promoting social stability during China's political transition. They also largely draw from the United States' approach to the collapse of the Soviet Union. According to the State Department account, in addition to working to prevent "nuclear catastrophe," "amidst quick, dramatic changes across the landscape of the Soviet Union, Bush administration officials prioritized . . . the curbing of ethnic violence, and the stable transition to new political orders."²¹⁰

The policy categories discussed here are as follows:

1. Considerations for determining the future political status of the special administrative region of Hong Kong and the five autonomous regions Guangxi, Xinjiang, Tibet, Inner Mongolia, and Ningxia. By law, the CCP allows these regions a degree of self-governance and ability to legislate, but in practice it curtails that freedom. Together, these regions represent some 118 million people and include the homelands of China's most oppressed, and thus aggrieved, ethnic minorities.
2. Measures to immediately end severe human rights violations against the peoples of these hard-hit regions and to foster optimism that justice will be served without extralegal violence or retribution. These include specific measures to end the ongoing genocide against the Uyghur, Kazah, Tajik, and other Turkic and Muslim people of Xinjiang.
3. Measures to alleviate the fears and frustrations of various groups in mainland China. Christians and Falun Gong are two large religious minorities who are mostly Han and together account for up to 200 million people. The CCP also targets human rights lawyers, student protestors, and other dissidents in China's majority Han population with severe repression throughout China.

These three broad concerns encompass communities and individuals who are now experiencing the most intense political

suffering under the CCP. These populations are the ones most likely to give rise to unrest and retribution, if a new Chinese government ignores them, denies them justice, or leaves them without a clear and immediate path toward greater freedom.

In addition, it is from these oppressed groups that the world could see massive refugee flows. Surveys of refugees escaping East Germany at the end of the Cold War are instructive: "In more than 90 percent of the refugee cases, contrary to the expectations of many Western analysts, the two most frequently mentioned reasons for leaving were (1) general political, not economic, conditions and (2) the lack of political freedom, not consumer goods."²¹¹

These three points are the subject of the subsequent sections.

Autonomous Regions

Under China's law, the CCP gives a handful of geographic regions in China a degree of self-governance for administrative, legislative, and judicial purposes, though the party permits none to have a separate defense force or militia. It limits and manipulates this relative autonomy in practice, and in most cases the regions' populations face extreme oppression and chafe under CCP rule. As the CCP regime weakens, such areas may begin to declare sovereignty, following the pattern of the dissolution of the Soviet empire in which every region with a legal claim to sovereignty acted on it within three years. They will require immediate help from the United States and its allies to resolve their future legal status and overcome their painful past.

The five officially designated autonomous regions are Inner Mongolia, Guangxi, Tibet, Ningxia, and Xinjiang (see map 1). In addition, Hong Kong and Macau hold the status of special administrative regions. With the end of the CCP regime, these regions, representing some 118 million people, will each face the decision of whether to remain in China with reinforced autonomy or to separate and declare themselves independent sovereign states. Some may also consider unifying with neighboring states.

Map 1. China's Autonomous Regions and Special Administrative Regions



Source: Hudson Institute.

Working with its allies in the Indo-Pacific region, the United States should be prepared to support and advise these regions in making this decision. The US and its allies should not automatically assume a province will become independent due to its autonomous status in the PRC. Instead, American support for independence should depend on the will of the people of the province, various regional factors, and conditions that Washington defines in a set of guidelines reflecting US government interests.

The US government should adopt principles to determine which autonomous provinces aiming to separate from China merit

American support. Principles that the George H.W. Bush administration adopted on the eve of the Soviet Union's dissolution provide a solid basis. As that dissolution appeared imminent, on September 4, 1991, Secretary of State James Baker set forth five principles to guide US policy, establishing that, if prospective republics followed these principles, they could expect "cooperation and assistance from the United States." These principles were:

- Self-determination consistent with democratic principles
- Recognition of existing borders

- Support for democracy and rule of law
- Preservation of human rights and rights of national minorities
- Respect for international law and obligations²¹²

The United States should take the lead in weighing whether secession is a viable option for each autonomous region, on a case-by-case basis and in consultation with regional leaders and neighboring powers. In some cases, Washington may determine that secession is unrealistic or is not in American interests, in which case the United States should make clear its opposition.

The recent case of Iraqi Kurdistan serves as a cautionary example for any region that might proceed with independence in the face of international opposition. After the fall of Saddam Hussein and Baath Party rule and the defeat of the Islamic State, in which the Kurdistan Regional Government played a pivotal role, this autonomous region in northern Iraq pursued secession. Iraq's central government and the region's immediate neighbors—including Turkey, which threatened the region—opposed secession. Independence would also have been against US stated interests. Still, Iraqi Kurdistan held a referendum on secession in 2017 in which 93 percent of voters favored independence for the region, including disputed territories. This maneuver proved to be a setback to both Kurdistan and regional peace. A military conflict with Iraq ensued in which Kurdistan lost control of 20 percent of its territory, its leader was forced to resign, and it remained under Iraqi rule.

To facilitate self-determination within China's autonomous regions, the alliance should help draw up plans for secret balloting and a transparent vote count, and it will need to convince China and the regions' immediate neighbors to accept the outcome. Balloting should extend to areas with large numbers of diaspora from some of these regions since Beijing's forced assimilation policies have promoted a majority Han influx into minority ethnic autonomous regions, while many of the native population

have fled, been deported, or migrated to other parts of China. Since the 1959 CCP invasion of Tibet, for example, 150,000 Tibetan Buddhists have fled to refugee camps in India along with their spiritual head the Dalai Lama, of which as many as 40 percent have reportedly migrated recently to the West. In addition, since the 2020 imposition of a draconian national security law in Hong Kong, 88,000 Hong Kongers have left for Britain, availing themselves of its special visa policy, and 300,000 are likely to immigrate there within five years, according to the UK Home Office.²¹³ There is a precedent for extraterritorial balloting in areas where sizeable South Sudanese and other diaspora populations relocated.

Some or most of these regions might not wait for internationally arranged and supervised referendums to declare their independence. Catching the United States and the rest of the world off guard, in 1989, six Eastern European countries unilaterally declared their status as sovereign nations free of Communist control. Not all had been on the path of reform communism that Poland and Hungary seemed to be taking when they decided to reject their Soviet-allied Communist governments altogether. In fact, Soviet President Gorbachev had called Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Romania, and Bulgaria the Gang of Four for their Stalinist-Brezhnevite regimes, which nevertheless suddenly fell in 1989, too. At the beginning of 1989, Václav Havel was a political prisoner, but by the year's end, he was president of Czechoslovakia.

Sovietologist Martin Malia described the events at that time:

The chain reaction of events leading from the Polish elections of June, through the collapse of the Berlin Wall in November, to the fall of Ceausescu [in Romania] in December is the most stunning episode in the disintegration of Communism. Releasing the pent-up frustrations of forty years, six regimes collapsed in the space of seven months, and each crisis matured more rapidly than its predecessor.²¹⁴

The various ethnic republics of the Soviet Union also did not wait for American or international advice or help, which was slow to come. Scholars Lee Edwards and Elizabeth Spaulding write that the last president of the Cold War, George H.W. Bush, “played a minor role in the liberating events of 1989” and pursued “stability,” supporting the Soviet status quo until 1991.²¹⁵ The State Department’s historian observed:

Conditions in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, however, changed rapidly. Gorbachev’s decision to loosen the Soviet yoke on the countries of Eastern Europe created an independent, democratic momentum that led to the collapse of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, and then the overthrow of Communist rule throughout Eastern Europe. While Bush supported these independence movements, U.S. policy was reactive. Bush chose to let events unfold organically, careful not to do anything to worsen Gorbachev’s position.

While Bush outlined a strategy to reform Soviet style communism in early 1989, throughout that year the new countries declared sovereignty, and replaced communist rule with democracy . . . and the next year, as the United States, still cautious, urged their leaders to negotiate with Moscow, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania declared their independence.²¹⁶

Once it became apparent that the dissolution of the Soviet Union itself was imminent, the Bush administration took strategic and decisive diplomatic measures to help stabilize the region. Of course, the Reagan administration had been working toward the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of Soviet communism for the prior eight years. Nevertheless, when the collapse began unfolding in 1989, it seemed to come out of the blue. This underscores the importance of preparing a set of guidelines or principles for American diplomatic and economic support well in advance of the CCP regime’s collapse.

Critically, the United States quickly recognized the newly declared states of Eastern and Central Europe in 1989 and 1990 and exchanged diplomats with them. By mid-1990, democratically elected governments had replaced all of the former Communist regimes of Eastern Europe. In Poland, Hungary, East Germany, and Czechoslovakia, newly created center-right parties formed these governments.²¹⁷ However, some of the new democratically elected leaders, such as in Bulgaria and Romania, were reformed communists who emerged from the Communist Party, and the United States did not hesitate to recognize them as legitimate as well.

This policy undoubtedly facilitated the transition in the Soviet Union itself. Russia’s first president, Boris Yeltsin (1991–99), had been a 30-year Communist Party member and leader before becoming an independent in 1990. He won Russia’s first presidential election on June 12, 1991, and took office on July 10 following a March referendum that established the post of president of the Russian Federation. On December 1, 1991, voters in Ukraine approved independence by a referendum and elected a former Communist Party leader as their president. That month, Belorussia’s Communist leader unilaterally announced a Commonwealth of Independent States to replace the Soviet Union. On December 21, the presidents of the other Soviet republics (except Georgia) and the three Baltic states declared they would enter the commonwealth. Russia declared its independence from the Soviet Union on December 12, 1991, and on December 25, Soviet President Gorbachev dissolved the Soviet Union and resigned.²¹⁸

As the State Department’s Office of the Historian recounts, after the USSR ceased to exist, Bush promptly recognized all 12 independent Soviet republics and established diplomatic relations with Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Armenia, and Kyrgyzstan. In February 1992, the secretary of state visited the remaining republics and established diplomatic relations with Uzbekistan, Moldova, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan. After Georgia ended its civil war, the United States recognized it

in May 1992. Russian President Yeltsin met with President Bush at Camp David in February 1992 and received an invitation to a formal state visit that June. Leaders of Kazakhstan and Ukraine visited Washington in May 1992.²¹⁹

Due to the fast-moving events at the end of the Cold War, democratic voting to choose leaders of the new governments sometimes came months after the United States showed political support for the new de facto leaders. For example, with the large peaceful protest movement called the Velvet Revolution gaining momentum in Prague through November 1989, Czechoslovakia's Communist government resigned in December. The longtime Communist president, before resigning himself, appointed political dissident Václav Havel to replace him, which the Communist Party-dominated, rubber-stamp parliament unanimously approved. President Havel came to Washington for an official working visit on February 19, 1990, and the US government invited him to address a joint meeting of Congress on February 21. It was not until June 1990, six months after the former president appointed him to the post, that Czech citizens finally voted Havel into the presidency through free, democratic elections that established a new parliament.²²⁰

In another possible scenario, one or more of China's provinces may seek to merge with a neighboring country. The United States should give this careful consideration should it arise, keeping in mind the unique circumstances that allowed the reunification of East and West Germany. In November 1989, the administration of George H.W. Bush acted quickly and deftly in diplomacy, trade, and defense after West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl unexpectedly announced a program for free elections in East Germany and a path to reunification with West Germany. Edwards and Spalding write:

President Bush immediately endorsed the plan and pressed Kohl to accept NATO membership for a reunified Germany, arguing deeper European integration was essential for the West's acceptance of reunification.

When Britain and France, as well as the Soviet Union, expressed reservations about a united Germany, the U.S. State Department suggested a "2+4" solution—the two Germanys would negotiate the particulars of reunification while the four occupying powers—Britain, France, the United States, and the USSR—would work out the international details. Bush facilitated Soviet acceptance of the controversial plan . . . with a grain and trade agreement and a commitment to speed up arms control negotiations. In turn, the West German government made substantial economic concessions of many billions of dollars to the Soviets.²²¹

German reunification has been an acclaimed success for German and Western interests. Edwards and Spalding summarize the legal mechanics of the achievement:

In amazingly short order, and due in large part to the skillful diplomacy of the United States, the Treaty on German Unity was signed by representatives of East and West Germany on August 31, 1990, and approved by both legislatures the following month. Final approval was given by the four Allied powers on October 2. Forty-five years after the end of World War II and forty-one years after Germany's division, the German Democratic Republic ceased to exist, and the country was reunited.²²²

The United States supported the new democracies' request to become member states of the United Nations, for those that were not already. To strengthen their defense, beginning in 1999, the United States supported 14 of the new countries emerging from the Soviet empire in joining NATO. They now form nearly half of its 32 member states.

Below, each of China's autonomous provinces is briefly reviewed to highlight particularities for consideration of the separation question. Recent American policy precedents are relied on throughout.

Hong Kong

With a population of nearly 7.5 million, Hong Kong has a designation as a special administrative region of China.²²³ Its Basic Law, or constitution, guarantees it “a high degree of autonomy” (Article 2), including “executive, legislative and independent judicial power” and the right to have a “capitalist system and way of life” free of communist control, until 2047.²²⁴ Beijing agreed to this unique framework, known as the one country, two systems principle, when the UK returned Hong Kong to China in 1997. But Beijing has broken its agreement and is actively forcing Hong Kong to come under the same CCP rule it applies to mainland China. With its demonstrable passion for democratic freedom, Hong Kong will undoubtedly be at the forefront of those seeking independence from China as soon as the opportunity arises. And with its recent democratic experience, high degree of human development, and vibrant economy, it is the most likely to succeed.

Beijing repudiated its agreement on Hong Kong in 2019 when it attempted to impose an extradition law that would deny Hong Kongers their right to a fair trial under the Basic Law. The extradition rule would require them to stand trial for certain offenses in China’s courts under CCP laws. On a single day, June 16, 2019, some 2 million Hong Kongers—over a quarter of its population—marched in protest against this encroachment on their rights and freedoms.²²⁵ While this pressure caused the Beijing-controlled Hong Kong government to withdraw the extradition law, in 2020, the CCP regime cracked down on dissent and effectively ended Hong Kong’s special status by imposing the National Security Law. This vaguely worded, sweeping law ensures CCP control and effectively negates Hong Kongers’ democratic rights and freedoms. Days after its enactment, the Trump administration determined that Hong Kong was no longer sufficiently autonomous to warrant the benefits that the United States–Hong Kong Policy Act of 1992 had afforded it.

Since 2019, some 10,000 Hong Kongers, from nonagenarian Cardinal Joseph Zen to a 13-year-old, have been arrested for violating the National Security Law or taking a stand for democ-

racy.²²⁶ Of these, some 2,000 are currently political prisoners,²²⁷ while many others, including independent publisher Jimmy Lai, anxiously await the disposition of their cases, according to the documentation of the Hong Kong Democratic Council in Washington, DC.²²⁸

Moreover, Hong Kong, which has served as a global financial hub that was the envy of all Asia, is now seeing its international companies leave as CCP decrees make the acquisition of basic business data a serious national security crime. This across-the-board crackdown on Hong Kong’s civil, political, and economic freedoms is likely to spur its citizens to seek the restoration of democracy there as an urgent priority.

Hong Kong has a proto-national constitution in its Basis Law, a multiparty system, and a legislative and judicial infrastructure that it can reinvestigate with free and fair democratic elections, which should include those in the diaspora. It has been free of the ethnic tensions and border disputes that have impeded democracy in South Sudan and the Balkans. Hong Kong’s economy will likely strengthen with the reinstatement of the rule of law and fundamental freedoms. Like China’s other autonomous regions, it lacks a military and will need a plan for its future defense, an issue that is beyond the scope of this chapter.

Liberated from the National Security Law and CCP interference in its electoral system, Hong Kong would be in an excellent position to quickly stabilize and succeed as a sovereign democracy. It can base a claim for sovereignty on the Basic Law, which grants it fundamental freedoms and the right to manage its own affairs, and on Beijing’s breach of the Sino-British Joint Declaration of 1984.²²⁹ The United States and its allies should be prepared to give Hong Kong political, legal, and diplomatic support to make the transition to independence, consistent with the US guidelines.

Xinjiang

Xinjiang Autonomous Region will undoubtedly seek independence from China at the first opportunity, as no bonds of trust

with Beijing can exist given the intense repression and discrimination it has suffered under CCP rule. Several well-organized Uyghur diaspora organizations advocate for a peaceful democratic transition. They express pride in the Turkic ethnic groups' long history on the steppe of Central Asia, their millennia-old culture, and their Muslim religion.²³⁰ The United States should support Xinjiang in the determination of its future status.

The region spans one-sixth of China's landmass, and some Uyghurs refer to it as East Turkestan because of its distinct cultural identity as a Turkic Muslim homeland. Nearly half of its 26 million people are Turkic Muslims; the majority are Uyghurs but there are Kazakhs, Uzbeks, and Tajiks, while 42 percent of the overall population is Han Chinese.²³¹ Though underdeveloped, it has economic potential, being rich in mineral deposits and natural resources and located along ancient trade routes and the Silk Road.

Under its forced assimilation program, the CCP has targeted the Turkic ethnic groups for genocide, as then-Secretary of State Mike Pompeo stated in a determination in 2021 that Secretary of State Antony Blinken endorsed in the successive administration. The CCP regime has taken extreme measures to diminish their demographics through forced sterilization, deportations for forced labor, and efforts to eradicate their culture by destroying mosques and traditional architecture. Since 2017, it has detained over a million Uyghurs and other minorities in Xinjiang in camps to undergo Communist indoctrination and torture. It has also forced the mass transfer of nearly 900,000 Uyghur Muslim children from their families into government-approved boarding schools and orphanages as part of Beijing's ruthless policy to destroy their identity and annihilate them as a distinct community.²³²

For multiple decades beginning in the 1990s, Xinjiang has seen periodic violence connected with independence movements and Islamist extremism. Beijing blamed the militant Uyghur separatist group, the East Turkestan Islamic Movement, though

in 2020 the US government stated there was no credible evidence that they had been operating over the prior decade and removed them from its terror list.²³³ The CCP crushed all civic protests against forced assimilation in Xinjiang.

The CCP forced the region's incorporation into China. A short-lived East Turkestan Republic ended with a takeover by the PLA in October 1949. Signifying its tenuous link, China named the region Xinjiang, meaning "New Frontier," a name the Qing dynasty had first used after its conquest in the late nineteenth century.

Due to the CCP's harsh treatment, the Uyghurs and other Turkic people in Xinjiang have gained sympathy and support in the United States and other Western countries. This should translate into support for their independence in the wake of a CCP regime collapse. Beijing, however, views control of Xinjiang as a strategic imperative for its Belt and Road Initiative and has justified its oppression of the Uyghurs mainly as a counterterrorism measure. Whether a post-CCP Chinese government will continue to hold this position and oppose any declaration of Xinjiang independence remains to be seen.

Hudson Institute scholar Nury Turkel writes in his book about the Uyghur genocide, *No Escape*, "when the Chinese people learn what is being done in their name to millions of innocent people, will they still silently watch their video clips on TikTok and refuse to speak up? It is unlikely."²³⁴ A hint that Turkel's answer may be right came with the spontaneous mass protests against Xi's zero-COVID policy on the streets of dozens of Chinese mega-cities and scores of university campuses in late 2022. Those protests were a reaction to news reports that 10 Uyghur family members burned to death in a strict COVID lockdown in a Uyghur neighborhood in Xinjiang's capital of Urumqi.²³⁵ That many ordinary Chinese people risked their freedom to light candles and show support for the Uyghur victims indicates a remarkable degree of empathy for a community that CCP propaganda has indoctrinated the Chinese people to hate.

While Xinjiang would have numerous reasons for optimism as a free nation, it will have to overcome formidable challenges. These include its lack of democratic experience; ethnic divisions; resentment against its large Han minority, some of whom the CCP specifically sent there to oppress them; and a serious threat of Islamist terror and extremism spreading from neighboring Afghanistan and Pakistan. It will need strong assistance from the United States and its allies in these areas.

The diaspora organizations from Xinjiang in the United States and other Western nations will be a valuable resource. They and others can support referendums, elections, and democratic nation building. American policymakers should refrain from sending in as unelected rulers those who claim to be the “government in exile,” as the US government once attempted to do in Iraq. To alleviate resentment and help avert retribution, human rights reforms should receive priority attention. Such measures are discussed later in this chapter. The United States should expect Xinjiang to declare sovereign independence, and if this happens it should be prepared to support it, consistent with the US guidelines.

Tibet

The Autonomous Province of Tibet is home to the ethnic Tibetan Buddhist community. Ethnic Tibetan communities also live in Tibetan autonomous prefectures and counties in Sichuan, Qinghai, Yunnan, and Gansu Provinces. Small, defenseless, relatively poor, and severely oppressed, Tibet will face two choices with the collapse of the CCP regime: to pursue independent sovereignty or to remain as part of China with greater autonomy.

Most of Tibet’s population of about 3.6 million people no longer speak Tibetan, and many of them are Han Chinese transplanted there under the CCP’s forced assimilation policy.²³⁶ The party is continuously introducing new, extreme measures in pursuit of the policy. In 2023, several United Nations experts felt compelled to call on China to stop “what appears to be a policy of forced assimilation” of Tibetans into China’s majority Han cul-

ture, citing reports that authorities had removed as many as 1 million Tibetan children from their families and placed them in state-run boarding schools to indoctrinate them against their religious and ethnic Tibetan identity.²³⁷ It is precisely these and other repressive policies that some Tibetan groups in exile say make imperative Tibetan self-determination and a “homeland, free from China’s occupation”—one they hope would include the autonomous prefects of ethnic Tibetans.²³⁸

The Dalai Lama has been an important voice of peace, stability, and democracy for Tibetans, and his role will be critical to the success of the region as it goes forward. After fleeing a failed uprising of the local Tibet army against China in 1959, the Dalai Lama currently lives in exile in Dharamshala, India, along with nearly 150,000 Tibetan Buddhists in exile across India and Nepal.²³⁹ Beijing considers him a dangerous “separatist” who aims to sever Tibet from China. The CCP treats him as an enemy, pressuring Tibetans in government positions to criticize him and pressuring both locals and foreigners, including even American universities, to shun him.

However, the Nobel Peace Prize laureate publicly declares that he rejects independence for Tibet and instead seeks meaningful autonomy, espousing a “middle way” policy. For example, he unequivocally stated publicly in 2010 that Tibetans “are not seeking independence.” He further explained, “That’s why we [are called] middle way. We complain [about] the presence of policy in Tibet. It is actually very much damaging. . . . But [on the] other hand, we also do not want separation from China because . . . Tibet [is a] landlocked country, materially backward. Every Tibetan want modernized Tibet, so for that reason, [we] remain within the People’s Republic of China.”²⁴⁰

Whether the nonagenarian or his successor would continue to hold this view in the absence of the CCP remains to be seen. The Dalai Lama would likely have significant influence on the future status of Tibet, though its entire population, including the exile community, should have the opportunity to democratically

ly determine this. As well as being the Tibetan Buddhist religious authority, the current Fourteenth Dalai Lama followed the group's custom of assuming temporal leadership of his community until 2011, when he retired from his political office and ended the Tibetan Buddhist practice of merging the two roles. As the Dalai Lama's website declares, he established democratic governance for the Tibetan government in exile: "On 29 May 2011 His Holiness signed the document formally transferring his temporal authority to the democratically elected leader. In so doing he formally put an end to the 368-year-old tradition of the Dalai Lamas functioning as both the spiritual and temporal head of Tibet."²⁴¹

A last, important consideration for Tibet's prospects as an independent democratic nation is its borders. This dispute with China will require skillful American diplomacy to resolve—diplomacy even more complex than in the German reunification. Diplomats will also need to resolve whether and how to include the autonomous Tibetan prefectures and counties within four of China's provinces. China's ongoing conflict on Tibet's border with India, however, presents a significantly more difficult diplomatic challenge. Despite a recent agreement between China and India to ease border tensions, they intensified days later, in August 2023, when China issued the new edition of its standardized map showing Aksai Chin and the northeastern Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh (which China calls southern Tibet) within Chinese territory.²⁴² To ensure Tibet's stability, its border issues will require resolution.

The case of declaring sovereignty in South Sudan, which in 2011 became the world's newest country with a population of 10 million, offers a cautionary tale.²⁴³ Like Tibet, its borders were unresolved, and it suffered from internal ethnic tensions. But South Sudan went ahead with independence after enduring genocidal levels of ethno-religious repression. It gained sovereignty according to an internationally backed road map, based on the 2005 comprehensive peace agreement on Sudan that ended its two-decade war with its aggressor, Khartoum. Suc-

cessfully conducting a referendum process with American and international assistance, it decisively determined its population's desire for independence from Sudan, which in turn accepted this process.

These positive outcomes resulted largely from the pressure and deep engagement of the United States government, which had bipartisan support in Congress, and efforts by the African Union and a committed core group of African and European states. The alliance of "friends" of Sudan supported the referendum, ascertained balloting integrity, enabled balloting for its large refugee population around the world, and negotiated Khartoum's acceptance of the result.

Despite the unresolved issues, American leaders across the political spectrum celebrated South Sudan's declaration of independence in 2011. President Barack Obama asserted, "We know that southern Sudanese have claimed their sovereignty, and shown that neither their dignity nor their dream of self-determination can be denied."²⁴⁴ Yet, within two years, South Sudan devolved into an ethnic civil war (distinct from the Islamist extremism of the original north-south conflict) and has suffered from Sudan's violent aggression over an unresolved border dispute. Millions of South Sudanese citizens have fled the fledgling nation, escaping hunger and violence.²⁴⁵ A decade later, the United States remained South Sudan's largest single donor of aid, as 60 percent of the devastated country faced food insecurity and many world leaders view it as a failed state.²⁴⁶

Border disputes, particularly regarding the China-India border, pose a serious impediment to Tibetan independence. With pragmatic urgency, the United States and its allies should work to facilitate the resolution of these disputes before Tibet pursues sovereignty. They should be prepared to expend even greater diplomatic effort than German reunification required.

If there is no resolution to the Tibetan border problem, the United States should weigh measures to reinforce Tibet's autonomy in-

stead of supporting independence. The Tibetan Policy and Support Act, which President Trump signed into US law in 2020, lays some groundwork that the United States can build on.²⁴⁷ It establishes as official US policy the right of the Tibetan Buddhist community to select and venerate its own religious leaders, including the Dalai Lama, and specifies sanctions for Chinese officials who interfere in the selection of his successor. This is critical in light of China's ongoing measures to select the religion's spiritual leaders, such as in the disappearance of the six-year-old Panchen Lama in 1995, three days after his recognition by the Dalai Lama. In addition, the act requires the secretary of state to seek to establish a consulate in Lhasa, which he should do as soon as events allow by appointing a consul general and a full staff.

Regarding the risk of ethnic strife and efforts to avert retribution within Tibet, the region has a valuable asset in the Dalai Lama, a spiritual leader whom people respect and recognize worldwide for his advocacy and actions to promote peaceful coexistence. Additional priority human rights reforms to alleviate these tensions are proposed at the end of this section.

Inner Mongolia

The Autonomous Region of Inner Mongolia will face three choices: gaining independence, remaining as an autonomous part of China, or uniting with the neighboring Republic of Mongolia. Though unification may at first seem reasonable, a closer look indicates it is not likely, and the United States should support its sovereign independence instead.

Inner Mongolia borders the Republic of Mongolia, which is one of the world's most sparsely populated countries with just 3.3 million people and ranks among the free nations of the world.²⁴⁸ Once part of the Mongol Empire of Genghis Khan, Mongols on both sides of the border share a common language and continue contact with cross-border trade and travel. Some 95 percent of the residents of the Republic of Mongolia are ethnically Mongol, and many of them, like many within Inner Mongolia's ethnic Mongolian community, are Buddhist.²⁴⁹ Tibetan Buddhism arrived

there in the sixteenth century, and four centuries later, reportedly a third of the Republic of Mongolia's adult males were Buddhist monks. In 2016, the Dalai Lama discovered a boy there whom he considers the reincarnation of a high spiritual leader.²⁵⁰

Inner Mongolia, though, has been the target of accelerating forced assimilation measures in recent years, by which the CCP aims to abolish the Mongolian language in schools and in media. In 2020, large crowds protested these measures in several cities, and parents extracted their children from schools, stating that this was an attempt to erase their identity. "Our language is Mongolian, and our homeland is Mongolia forever! Our mother tongue is Mongolian, and we will die for our mother tongue!" students shouted during a protest. Defying Chinese government threats against those criticizing the new language policy,²⁵¹ some Inner Mongolians sent videos and messages of their protests to the Republic of Mongolia, where others reposted them on Facebook and Twitter.²⁵²

In addition, demographic manipulation by the CCP has had a large impact on Inner Mongolia. Any proposal to unify Inner Mongolia and the Republic of Mongolia is likely to be unacceptable to Ulaanbaatar, whose people would become an ethnic minority in their own country overnight in such an arrangement. The Chinese-speaking Han ethnic population now constitutes the overwhelming majority within Inner Mongolia's population of 24 million, vastly outnumbering its 5 million ethnic Mongolians and the republic's entire population of 3.3 million.²⁵³ The Republic of Mongolia may also fear that the sudden influx of a much larger population with no tradition of democracy would jeopardize its form of government. German reunification, by contrast, entailed the absorption of a proportionately smaller population of East Germans into West German democracy, and both were largely German ethnics.

That said, the Republic of Mongolia could consider some accommodation of citizenship for the Mongolians of Inner Mongolia and even for Tibetan Buddhists in Tibet, along the lines of the birthright citizenship policies of Israel for Jews and of Armenia

for ethnic Armenians. Controlled immigration could benefit the republic and offer a steam valve for tensions within the native minority communities of both Inner Mongolia and Tibet. This is an idea that the United States should explore.

The United States should expect Inner Mongolia to declare sovereign independence, and if this happens, it should be prepared to support it, consistent with the US guidelines.

Guangxi

Guangxi's formal name is the Zhuang Autonomous Region of Guangxi. Its largest ethnic minority, constituting up to a third of its population of over 50 million, is the Zhuang, who have lived there for some 2,500 years, speak their own language and dialects, and practice local folk religions.²⁵⁴ For millennia, Guangxi's Zhuang people have lived alongside the Han, who now comprise nearly two-thirds of the region's population. Populations in its eastern and southern parts speak Cantonese together with the Zhuang language. In recent decades, Guangxi has developed light industry, forestry, and mining while continuing traditional fishing and agriculture. According to scholars, the Han population has largely assimilated the Zhuang: "Because the minorities in Guangxi possess neither a unified organization nor support by fraternal groups, their assimilation by the Chinese is far more advanced than in the other autonomous regions."²⁵⁵

It is impossible to know the Guangxi population's views on separating from China without a free and fair referendum. Policymakers should remember that even the most Stalinist countries of the Soviet empire at the time of its breakup chose sovereignty when they had the chance. The United States should expect Guangxi to declare sovereign independence, and if this happens, it should be prepared to support it, consistent with the US guidelines.

Ningxia

China formed the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region for the ethnic Hui people in 1958. The Hui are mostly Muslims who constitute

38 percent of Ningxia's population of 7 million, while the Han are the other 62 percent. The Hui have assimilated into the Chinese culture and speak Mandarin, and 10.5 million of them are spread over several other provinces.²⁵⁶ Recent religious repression against them has resulted in an assertion of their religious identity and may spur Hui interest in independence from China.

Since 2018, the Hui Muslims have engaged in rare protests against the demolition of their mosques' domes, minarets, and displays of Arabic script under the CCP's Sinicization policy. In 2018, the international press reported that hundreds of Hui Muslims staged a sit-in to block the destruction of their newly constructed Grand Mosque in Weizhou, for which they had permits. In 2019, an NPR investigation found that the "same restrictions that preceded the Xinjiang crackdown on Uyghur Muslims are now appearing in Hui-dominated regions." NPR learned that since 2018, "Hui mosques have been forcibly renovated or shuttered, schools demolished, and religious community leaders imprisoned. Hui who have traveled internationally are increasingly detained or sent to reeducation facilities in Xinjiang."²⁵⁷ The magazine *Bitter Winter* reported that on May 27, 2023, thousands of protesting Hui Muslims gathered and clashed with hundreds of riot police at Najaiying Mosque in Yunnan. Reinforcement police and military came the next day to complete the job; they arrested some of the protesters and shut down the area's internet.²⁵⁸

Hui Muslims have indicated in interviews with the international media that they are aware of the massive repression against the Uyghurs and Tibetan Buddhists and expressed their fears that the CCP could also target them. They are among the growing number of communities in China who have lost trust in Beijing due to its denial of fundamental freedoms.

The United States cannot know whether Hui Muslims support independence until they have the opportunity to determine their political future in a free and fair referendum. They are a minority in Ningxia, but a vote for independence could prevail

there as a vote in 1991 for Ukrainian independence once did in Crimea, then a Russian ethnic majority region in Ukraine. The United States should expect Ningxia to declare sovereign independence and be prepared to evaluate, in particular, whether it could be a viable independent republic were it to be landlocked within a newly reconfigured greater China, as well as the other US guidelines.

Guangdong and Fujian

Guangdong Province borders both Hong Kong and Macau and, like Hong Kong, speaks Cantonese and is an economic powerhouse. Some commentators suggest it should break away from China and join Hong Kong in a single sovereign republic or opt for independence on its own. Both suggestions would be ill-advised.

Guangdong's people share much with Hong Kong. In fact, Hong Kong's most prominent champion of free speech and democracy is the aforementioned Jimmy Lai, who escaped from Guangdong at age 12 to seek freedom in Hong Kong. However, Guangdong would overwhelm Hong Kong, given the former's large population of 127 million and lack of democratic experience.²⁵⁹ For these reasons, unification would not likely serve Hong Kong's interests.

If Guangdong or any other province without autonomous status declared independence, it could embolden other areas and provinces to do so as well, fracturing China. For example, Fujian Province, with a population of 42 million and a border on the Taiwan Strait, might also seek unification with the Republic of China (Taiwan, population 24 million) or independent sovereignty.

In short, the secession of any Chinese province that lacks a legal status of autonomy would risk a violent response by China and set a precedent that could lead other provinces to race for the exits. Such scenarios would be certain to plunge greater Asia into destabilizing political and economic crises.

Stabilizing Human Rights Measures

Under CCP rule, China has been and continues to be among the world's harshest regimes. Its human rights abuses are egregious and widespread, and the US government considers its actions against the ethno-religious minorities in Xinjiang genocide. In many cases, these abuses warrant immediate remediation after a CCP collapse, and the United States should prioritize such efforts rather than postpone them until a new government is fully in place. This would both serve justice and mitigate frustration and suffering among the population that, left unaddressed, could lead to violent retribution.

An extensive list of China's abuses appears in reports by the US State Department on human rights and religious freedom, the US Commission on International Religious Freedom, and the Executive and Congressional Commission on China and in the accounts of a large array of diaspora and international human rights groups. A few examples of immediate action that a new Chinese government should take to stop egregious human rights abuses follow:

- Empty and shut all detention centers where people are held without due process or fair trial. Demolish Xinjiang's large detention complex for Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims, which has held over a million persons to force religious, ethnic, and political assimilation.
- Throughout China, free the thousands of political and religious detainees and prisoners, including those in unofficial detention places, or "black jails," and psychiatric institutes.
- Stop forced sterilizations and forced abortions of Uyghur and Turkic women in Xinjiang and of any other victims of such practices in China.
- In both Xinjiang and Tibet, release the combined estimate of 2 million children whom the CCP has forced into state boarding schools and reunite them with their families.
- Shut down all forced labor camps adjacent to prisons and detention centers throughout China. Secure the freedom of all Uyghurs and others pressed into forced labor.

- In all hospitals and medical centers in China, suspend organ transplant surgeries until, for each case, independent regulators establish that the source of the organ was a volunteer donor under international definition.
- Reopen mosques, churches, temples, and monasteries that have been shut or repurposed.
- Allow houses of worship and religious organizations to operate independently from patriotic associations and other state and party organizations.
- Rescind the ban on Falun Gong and shut down the bureaucratic infrastructure that President Jiang Zemin first created specifically to “eliminate” this spiritual group.
- Rescind bans on the underground Catholic and Protestant Churches, as well as Church of the Almighty God and any other peaceful religious group that can exist now only underground.
- End all programs of forced ethnic and religious assimilation and Sinicization throughout the country, including desecration and destruction of temples, churches, and mosques; interference in the selection of religious leaders; bans on teaching and publishing in minority languages; demographic manipulation; restrictions on access to religious literature; requirements to preach and teach official political ideology; subordination of religious groups to governmental and political oversight on internal religious affairs; and numerous other CCP control measures.
- Allow the return of refugees and exiles.
- End CCP spying and influence operations throughout China. These pervasive measures to exert control and intimidation poison human relations by destroying trust and heightening suspicion and anxiety. They are discussed further below.

A priority for consolidating democracy and encouraging social cooperation during the political transition will be to address two areas of CCP oppression that impact China as a whole. The first entails dismantling the party’s extensive system of surveillance

of the private sector, and the second requires ending the party’s pervasive ideological indoctrination and domination by promoting free speech and the free flow of information. The CCP has most onerously applies these repressive measures in the autonomous areas, but they affect all in China and are a principal means of coercion throughout the country.

Millions of people in China object to CCP policies and practices apart from the ethnic minority populations. Two Chinese dissidents, Lu Yuyu and Li Tingyu, documented some 70,000 collective protests in China between 2013 and 2016, until their arrests and eventual flight from the country.²⁶⁰ Most of those protests involved labor and economic grievances and were local in scale. They show the importance of stabilizing the economic sector, an issue addressed in chapter 3.

In addition to large political protests against CCP encroachment in Hong Kong in 2019, other such protests indicating the mounting frustrations of mainland Chinese against Xi Jinping and the CCP occurred against the zero-COVID policy. They represented the largest street demonstrations in China since the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989. In October 2022, police dragged away and disappeared into the penal system Peng Lifa, known as the bridge man, after he unfurled banners on a Beijing overpass that declared “Be citizens, not slaves,” “We want dignity not lies,” and other freedom slogans.²⁶¹ He undoubtedly spoke for many and in 2023 was among *Time*’s most 100 influential people in the world. The massive street vigils and White Paper Protests that brought down the zero-COVID policy a month later drew inspiration from him. Afterward, several protests repeating Peng’s slogans briefly popped up, and early in 2023, Chinese seniors protested in Wuhan and other cities about cuts in health benefits. Freedom House documented 937 protests in the third quarter of 2024, an increase over the same period of the previous year. And in the first quarter of 2025, various news outlets reported a violent protest against police over an alleged cover up of the circumstances of a boy’s death in Shaanxi province.²⁶²

These protests indicate both deep-seated grievances and continued yearning for rights and freedom among ordinary Chinese people. The CCP has punished and intimidated many of them even more as a result. Some will feel temptation to turn to street justice if they do not perceive prompt positive change after the regime falls.

In demonstrable defiance of CCP ideology, religious groups have seen exponential growth in recent decades. By 1999, there were more Falun Gong practitioners and, by 2018, more Christians—as many as 100 million each—than the 90 million CCP members.²⁶³ These examples indicate that, within China's Han majority population, there is significant dissatisfaction, rejection, and even resentment against the CCP. The US government needs to consider special outreach to them as well.

Increasing Information Access

The United States can address such aggrieved groups by providing reliable and accurate information to them, exposing CCP disinformation and human rights atrocities, and reporting real-time events during China's political transition. It should enable respected voices, such as various Chinese religious leaders, human rights lawyers, and other heroic dissidents, both inside China and abroad, to speak freely through social and other media to reassure the population, restore calm, and reach particular communities. US broadcasting on Radio Free Asia can be brought back for this purpose. Private short-wave broadcasting, such as Falun Gong's Sounds of Hope radio, is another resource. China's renowned blind dissident Chen Guangcheng, now in exile in the United States, told me in an email that supporters had smuggled a short-wave radio to him in prison, which was "very helpful" to him.

A new Chinese government needs to dismantle the so-called Great Firewall of China, which the CCP uses to censor and block internet access, and the US government should recruit cyber experts to make that happen as soon as possible. Virtual private networks (VPNs) can circumvent the wall, as the world

saw during the White Paper Protests, and the United States should make them widely available. It should also make apps such as X (formerly Twitter), WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram freely available; reports in early 2025 state that, after ordered by the Communist authorities, Apple removed WhatsApp and Threads (an X competitor) from the App Store in China.²⁶⁴ Falun Gong has Ultra Surf and other technology that can reach Chinese audiences on a limited basis, and the United States should work to scale it up.

The United States should also employ social media, in addition to broadcasts, to communicate official US news and commentary. In 2023, Li Ying, a 30-year-old Chinese artist in Italy, was shocked to find so many Chinese users on Twitter, which the CCP has blocked in China, making it accessible only through VPNs. In late 2022, it was Li's Twitter feed that informed the world of the White Paper Protests in real time and provided information on police locations to the protesters inside China. *The Washington Post* reported that Li's Twitter account became "the single most important clearinghouse for information about the protests."²⁶⁵ On March 23, 2023, it reported on another individual who successfully sent information into China and throughout the diaspora using TikTok: "Kim Wong, a longtime journalist in Hong Kong who now lives in the Boston area, has attracted a giant online audience with his Mandarin-language videos criticizing the Chinese government—including, he says, a substantial number of people inside China who use software tools to access information the Chinese Communist Party doesn't want them to see."²⁶⁶

Reforming Education

The United States should work quickly to help a new Chinese government reform education as well. The CCP has renewed efforts to Sinicize the education system, starting in first grade. In 2022, the party placed cells within schools on the mainland even though the party had controlled them for seven decades. The cells will cultivate "love for the party," run the schools, be "strong fighting fortresses" of CCP ideology, and "deeply inte-

grate the . . . inheritance of red genes into school education.”²⁶⁷ Meanwhile, Chinese textbooks indoctrinate students in Xi’s thought. For example, a textbook passage states, “Xi Jinping has emphasized that our state’s ideology and social system are fundamentally incompatible with the West. Xi has said ‘This determines that our struggle and contest with Western countries is irreconcilable, so it will inevitably be long, complicated, and sometimes even very sharp.’”²⁶⁸

Eliminating Oppressive Surveillance

The CCP has also relied on a vast network of technological surveillance and spies to control the Chinese population and influence their thinking. This system, in varying degrees of implementation, cuts across all regions and social groups, and China should promptly dismantle it. The party has blanketed urban areas with cameras that track speech and movement. Under the Sinicization of religion policy, it has placed facial recognition cameras inside houses of worship and monasteries to track who enters. It has also linked these cameras to police stations and social credit score systems. If the Chinese people do not tear them down first, the United States should take the lead in a systematic effort to do so.

The current Chinese government uses WeChat and other apps to censor and monitor users, even abroad. The Study the Great Nation app, for example, which the CCP requires certain professions to use, comes with a back door through which the government can view a cell phone’s data. Authorities in Xinjiang employed a comprehensive database to track the movements, mobile app usage, and even electricity and gasoline consumption of inhabitants in the region. They use a new smart religion app in some areas to track church attendance. The United States should widely publicize these back doors in China and work with a new Chinese government to disable them as soon as possible.

The CCP’s various systems of recruiting private actors to spy and report on neighbors should promptly end as well. A State

Department report reveals that a PRC government online portal allows informants to report on behavior believed to harm the country’s image. The CCP also uses a “grid system” surveillance tactic in several ethnic regions and Hong Kong. The US State Department report describes the grid as follows:

The government continued to use the “double-linked household” system in Xinjiang developed through many years of use in Tibet. This system divides towns and neighborhoods into units of 10 households each, with the households in each unit instructed to watch over each other and report on “security issues” and poverty problems to the government, thus turning average citizens into informers.²⁶⁹

In addition, the CCP pays individuals to report on each other. According to the State Department, in Tibet, “The maximum reward for information leading to the arrests of social media users deemed disloyal to the government increased to 300,000 renminbi (\$42,800), six times the average per capita GDP.”²⁷⁰ They are to report relatives abroad or lose their government benefits. In Xinjiang, the government goes further, requiring Uyghur families to accept government “home stays,” in which the CCP sends strangers to live in their homes and monitor their observance of religion for signs of “extremism.” In his book, *Nury Turkel describes this program, Chinese Becoming Family*, which amounts to party spies masquerading as relatives. The CCP moves them into Uyghur homes “like a hostile army being billeted on a restive population in the old days of empire.” At a morning flag-raising ceremony, they forced the affected Uyghur families to chant, “We love our relatives. We welcome our relatives. We don’t need to ask our relatives any questions.”²⁷¹

Bringing Oppressive Leaders to Justice

It is important to restore the rights and freedoms of the Chinese people as soon as possible. In advance, the United States should work with new Chinese leaders to plan and publicly announce restorative justice measures as soon as the regime

collapses. These should include Nuremberg-style tribunals and truth commissions to document and expose CCP atrocities and secret policies, directives, and deliberations; punish egregious perpetrators; and allow restitution. In post-Nazi Germany, post-apartheid South Africa, post-genocide Rwanda, and elsewhere, they have proven to be important in establishing a sense of justice and averting extralegal retributions. These investigations and proceedings will take time, even years, to carry out. In the short term, the steps outlined in this section can help alleviate suffering and bring optimism to the millions of victims of Chinese communism. This would go far in promoting stability within the aggrieved communities.

Conclusion

The following is a summary of important US policy actions that would be applicable to both autonomous regions and the rest of China. They have precedents in American policy and aim to promote stability as well as fundamental rights and freedoms.

1. Be prepared with guidelines—such as the five principles the Bush administration issued on September 4, 1991—setting forth conditions for US support of new republics emerging from the dissolution of the PRC: self-determination consistent with democratic principles, recognition of existing borders, support for democracy and rule of law, preservation of human rights and rights of national minorities, and respect for international law and obligations. The US should widely disseminate the guidelines.
2. Make a preliminary determination whether it would serve American interests for a specific autonomous region to pursue independence. As noted in the Kurdistan example, there may be unresolvable, preexisting border disputes, determined violent resistance by a neighbor, or some other unsurmountable reason that would make independence unviable.
3. Expect all of China's autonomous regions to exercise the right to self-determination. The presence of a Han majority in a minority area or strong CCP control over many years in a particular region does not preclude a vote for an independent democratic republic, as the collapse of the Soviet empire showed.
4. Use skilled US diplomacy to renegotiate more robust autonomy guarantees for any autonomous regions that decide to remain in China or have no realistic alternative.
5. Monitor the collapse of the CCP regime, which could follow the fast-paced, locally organized post-Cold War pattern or, as in South Sudan, cooperate with deliberate organization and supervision by an international team. In the latter case, be prepared to provide expert advice, logistical help, and validation of the outcome to ensure free and fair referendums. The US and its allies should also be prepared to help organize and observe elections for new governments.
6. Quickly recognize the new sovereign states and establish diplomatic relations with them. Prepare to help them gain China's and the world's acceptance. This will likely require complex US diplomacy to facilitate any mergers involving the new states, as occurred in German reunification, and in resolving border disputes, especially those concerning the China-India border.
7. Recognize as legitimate leaders China and newly independent countries choose in free and fair elections and referendums, including former CCP members. Invite heads of state and parliamentary leaders for official visits to Washington within months after they take office to empower them and their democratic system, strengthen their country's sovereignty, and facilitate bilateral relations.
8. Support the new republics' entry as member states into the United Nations, the World Trade Organization, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, and other key regional and international organizations to solidify their sovereignty. While full membership in NATO will not be available to these new democracies, regional defense alliances can and should embrace them.

9. Lead in ensuring priority human rights reforms in both the current autonomous regions and across China as soon as feasible. In addition to taking specific actions to end the human rights abuses and violations described in this chapter, as well as others that the United States may identify as priorities, begin implementing a plan to dismantle the

CCP's extensive surveillance system and ensure freedoms of religion and speech, in particular. These measures would honor America's own fundamental foreign policy principles, alleviate resentment, and avert score settling against former oppressors that can lead to relentless cycles of violence and even civil war.



HOW TO INITIATE A TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION PROCESS IN CHINA

Anonymous

Choose Forgiveness

In 1995, South Africa established the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, pioneering a new transitional model from authoritarianism to democracy. Its key purposes were to investigate and publicly disclose the crimes of past oppressors while granting amnesty for these crimes and achieving reconciliation.

For China, only through the investigation and public disclosure of past crimes can the country put an end to past evils and bid farewell to the era of oppression. Without forgiveness and reconciliation, a peaceful transition to democracy will be difficult to achieve.

Why is forgiveness important? Because after the fall of the CCP, the Chinese people should aim to change the system of

evil, not to punish specific individuals. To smoothly end that system of evil, they should be willing to forgo punishing the leaders who committed wrongdoing under that system. When authoritarian rulers lay down their arms and accept a peaceful transition, this act itself is a form of redemption. Even in violent revolutions (such as the Xinhai Revolution in 1911) when one side lays down its weapons, is willing to engage in talks, and accepts its opponent, the other side can forgive past actions.

Photo: A Chinese People's Liberation Army soldier stands guard in front of a portrait of late Communist leader Mao Zedong displayed outside Tiananmen Gate in Beijing on March 3, 2025, ahead of the country's annual legislative meetings known as the Two Sessions. (Pedro Pardo via Getty Images)

If the parties to a violent revolution can do this, surely China's people can do it in the case of a peaceful transition to democracy. Forgiveness leads to reconciliation, and reconciliation paves the way for the future.

The future democratic transition in China should also involve a truth and reconciliation process.

Organize Groups for Action

The new Chinese government should establish a truth and reconciliation commission as soon as possible. This commission can be an independent body under a parliament or cabinet, with a president or prime minister proposing it and parliament approving it. The president or prime minister can nominate a director and a deputy director of the commission, and prominent leaders from the government, parliament, or the judiciary can appoint these officials, after which parliament can approve them. The members of the truth and reconciliation commission can include government officials, parliamentarians, activists, scholars and experts in relevant fields, representatives of political victims or their families (such as the Tiananmen Mothers, pro-democracy groups, Falun Gong, and representatives of Tibetans, Uyghurs, Mongolians, and others). They may also include former government leaders. Furthermore, parliament should pass legislation and regulations regarding the truth and reconciliation process.

Before the government establishes the commission, civil society can form organizations such as truth and reconciliation promotion committees, to carry out various related tasks. In fact, civil society has already done a significant amount of work. For example, the Tiananmen Mothers have been collecting lists of those who died in the June Fourth Incident for the past three decades. Activists have published several comprehensive narratives in the public domain about the truth of the June Fourth Incident, along with concrete suggestions for seeking justice for it.²⁷² Chinese and overseas writers, journalists, scholars, and other individuals have written extensively about various ma-

ior political movements in Chinese history. Overseas Chinese scholars have established extensive databases on the CCP's various political movements, and so on.²⁷³

Specific Actions

In general, the truth and reconciliation process involves several actions. Of course, some of these activities can and should commence before the establishment of the commission.

Promote Freedom

Promote genuine freedom of speech, as well as freedom of the press, assembly, and association.

Release Prisoners of Conscience

Release all prisoners of conscience, including those whom the CCP has arrested and imprisoned for their speech, publications, assembly, or association.

This point may seem straightforward, but in reality it is quite complex. Since the era of Jiang Zemin, CCP authorities have adopted a strategy of “depoliticizing political issues” when dealing with dissidents. They have changed the previous “counter-revolutionary crime” into “crimes endangering national security.” In recent years, “crimes endangering national security”²⁷⁴ has become the primary charge authorities use to persecute dissidents. Furthermore, the CCP has broadened the scope of the “starting quarrels and provoking trouble” charge, using it to arbitrarily arrest dissidents. In addition, when cracking down on dissidents, CCP authorities no longer cite political reasons for prosecution but charge them with economic or other criminal offenses. In power struggles within the top echelons, the government also frequently levies economic or other criminal charges against those the party seeks to purge.

This makes the task of releasing prisoners of conscience quite complex. A new Chinese government can adopt the following approach:

1. Release all individuals who clearly qualify as prisoners of conscience.
2. For those whom the CCP convicted on other charges but who expressed dissenting views, consider each case individually.

For instance, some entrepreneurs who previously had no legal trouble were arrested after they expressed significant differences in political views, which indicates that the CCP essentially imprisoned them for their speech. However, the economic charges against them are not baseless accusations; there may indeed be some substance to those charges.

Nevertheless, numerous entrepreneurs face similar economic issues, but the authorities have not touched them. In such cases, the new Chinese government should treat them as prisoners of conscience and release them without any guilt. As for their economic issues, authorities should handle them separately, like they do for other entrepreneurs in similar situations. They should address the ill-gotten gains or “original sin” of individuals in this category accordingly, which includes requiring them to return any unlawfully acquired assets.²⁷⁵

The authorities should not subject these individuals to trial or punishment. Since the entrepreneur has already been imprisoned or fined and their property confiscated on economic charges, they have paid a price, often excessively so. Therefore, there is no reason to continue their detention. Some individuals may even deserve compensation.

Let Dissidents Return

End the blacklist and restore the right of Chinese citizens who have been living abroad due to political persecution, including for involvement in the June Fourth Incident, to freely return to China. Chinese citizens who have acquired foreign nationality and express a desire to reinstate their Chinese citizenship should regain it immediately.

Rectify Miscarriages of Justice

Simultaneously with the release of prisoners of conscience, rectify miscarriages of justice. This includes addressing wrongful convictions and other injustices both during and after the Mao era.

After Mao’s death, CCP authorities conducted a large-scale rectification of miscarriages of justice from the Mao era, but this process had significant limitations. For example, in cases involving landlords, their labels were removed, and the CCP said they had been reformed but did not acknowledge that the government had wrongly accused them in the first place. Therefore, these injustices still require rectification. The individuals who suffered them may have passed away, but authorities need to restore their reputations for historical accuracy.

In addition to those from the Mao era, the CCP has created numerous wrongful convictions and miscarriages of justice in the post-Mao era. These include the June Fourth Incident, the suppression of Falun Gong, the crackdown on human rights activists, the suppression of religious and faith groups, and the human rights abuses and cultural eradication of ethnic minorities in Tibet, Xinjiang, and other regions. Furthermore, a new Chinese government should also address the ongoing suppression of dissenting activities, human rights activism, family churches, and other religious and faith communities.²⁷⁶

Admit Wrongs

Reveal the truth of history. Identify and acknowledge significant human rights violations that have occurred during each period since the CCP came to power. In the Mao era, these include land reform, anti-rightist campaigns, and the Cultural Revolution. In the post-Mao era, they include the June Fourth Incident, the suppression of Falun Gong, the crackdown on human rights activism, and the human rights abuses and cultural eradication of ethnic minorities, among others.

Regarding violations in the post-Mao era, China will also need to address the issue of live organ harvesting. On March 15,

2015, Phoenix TV interviewed Huang Jiefu, former vice minister of health and then deputy director of the Central Health Committee and chairman of the Human Organ Donation and Transplantation Committee, regarding organ transplantation in China. He stated, “You don’t know where these organs come from, and the number of transplants performed is also a secret.”²⁷⁷

His statement implies that organs are not coming solely from death row prisoners and voluntary donors. It raises questions about why the current government is keeping this information confidential. The reason is simple: if the Chinese people knew the number of organ transplant surgeries performed each year and found it exceeded the number of executions and voluntary donors, it would suggest a significant number of transplanted organs are from living individuals. Huang Jiefu indirectly acknowledged the existence of large-scale live organ harvesting in China. Ordinary criminal activities cannot account for this, and it is likely a government-led operation. Therefore, a new Chinese government will need to include this crime as a severe human rights violation and investigate the truth behind it.

The truth and reconciliation commission should extensively collect materials, invite relevant parties to present their views, conduct various hearings, and make relevant archives public. Then it should compile a report and publish it for the world to see.

Compensate Victims

Economic compensation for victims of the CCP consists of two parts: general compensation, which provides a certain amount of financial compensation to victims of political persecution, and compensation for economic deprivation. For example, during land reform, the CCP expropriated land from its owners without compensation. The descendants of these landlords should receive appropriate compensation. Those who suffered political persecution and the confiscation of their private property should also receive appropriate compensation.

Assign Responsibility and Dispense Forgiveness

The new Chinese government and the Chinese people will need to determine the responsibility of oppressors and grant them forgiveness. Forgiving these individuals means choosing not to punish them or require them to admit guilt and apologize for the human rights violations they committed.²⁷⁸ However, it is essential to clarify their responsibility, which is also part of revealing the truth. The new government should encourage past wrongdoers to openly repent and apologize but without coercion. It should widely publicize the stories of those who offer genuine apologies to set an example and create public pressure on those who refuse to admit wrongdoing.

Embrace Transparency

As part of reform, the government should open political archives. It can divide this task into two categories. One includes the highest-level secrets of the party-state. These include the true number of people who died during the Great Famine, the name of the leader who gave the order to shoot during the Tiananmen Square protests, how the CCP issued and carried out orders, and so on. This situation is different from that of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Today’s CCP may be prepared for the idea of the party’s demise, and it may destroy some of the most secret archives. However, even in this case, it is essential to open the archives of the party-state’s highest levels to help the Chinese people understand the historical truth as much as possible.

The other category involves informants. Some Eastern European countries enacted lustration laws during their transitional justice processes, which required opening archives to make the activities of Communist secret police and informants transparent.²⁷⁹ Some countries advocated for some form of punishment for informants, such as prohibitions on holding public office, while others did not advocate for punishment but required openness as part of revealing historical truth. Taiwan has also had similar experiences. Consequently, people were surprised to learn that Lech Wałęsa, the leader of Poland’s

Solidarity trade union whom citizens later elected president, had once been an informant. The famous Czech writer Milan Kundera was also an informer in his youth, and there were strong suspicions that Taiwan's Democratic Progressive Party heavyweight, Joseph Wu, had engaged in informant activity as well.²⁸⁰

I have reservations about lustration laws and similar measures. In other countries, these laws exposed many dissidents who had worked as informants.²⁸¹ In China, it is highly likely there are numerous informants within the dissident community because the CCP has long persecuted and threatened this group, leading some to become informants under duress. Those who never participated in dissident activities would not have faced persecution or threats from the authorities and therefore would not have been compelled to become informants. If all archives related to the secret police became public, it could lead to a paradoxical situation in which the people view the dissident community with heavy suspicion while directing none toward those who never engaged in dissident activities.

Dissident activities in China are generally peaceful and open. Informant reports are not the cause of most dissident cases. Therefore, I advocate starting from the consequences, investigating and publicly disclosing only cases in which informant reports led to severe consequences. Other cases may not require such scrutiny. Furthermore, in a highly centralized China, political persecution incidents originate from the highest levels of leadership. The focus should be on the top rather than the bottom.

Truth and reconciliation processes require taking a case-by-case approach to some matters while maintaining a broad perspective on others. In general, authorities should consider the rehabilitation and compensation of victims with as much detail and individual application as possible. Regarding some minor perpetrators, it is more appropriate to be general than specific in clarifying their personal responsibility.

Prevent Reoffense

Propose a set of recommendations and establish mechanisms to prevent future human rights violations.

Remove Symbols of Tyranny

In China, there are too many symbols of tyranny, and during the early stages of transition, there may be significant disputes among various factions on many issues, making it difficult to make changes all at once. It may be appropriate to remove some symbols initially. For example, the portrait of Mao Zedong on top of Tiananmen Gate and the Mao Zedong Mausoleum in Tiananmen Square are the greatest symbols of tyranny. The new Chinese government should arrange the removal of the portrait atop Tiananmen Gate and transform the mausoleum in Tiananmen Square. Removing these two symbols has major symbolic significance in itself. The authorities can address other symbols of tyranny in public places gradually.²⁸²

Honor and Remember the Victims

Take symbolic steps to restore the reputation of victims, such as building memorials, statues, and museums. In locations with symbolic significance where large-scale human rights violations occurred, such as Chang'an Street in Beijing for the Tiananmen Square protests or Jiabiangou for forced labor camps, preserve the sites or establish memorials.

Require an Economic Reckoning

An economic reckoning is necessary to recover wealth stolen from the people, including inappropriate gains from party assets and property that the CCP elite privatized.

In democratic countries, legitimate party assets can include the following:

- Party dues paid by members
- Donations from various sectors, including party members
- Industries managed by the party

However, in China under one-party rule, the CCP has treated the entire country as its own and directly regarded the national treasury as its party treasury. This has made it the wealthiest party in the world. With China's transition, this needs to change completely.

First, the CCP, or any party that has descended from it and inherited its resources, needs to completely separate from the national treasury; this is self-evident. The assets it leaves behind, particularly the portion related to party-managed industries, should also undergo necessary adjustments. Take the media industry as an example. Strictly speaking, Xinhua News Agency and China Central Television (CCTV) belong to the state, while *The People's Daily* belongs to the party. *The People's Daily* is a CCP asset. However, *The People's Daily* has become a huge media industry in China because of the CCP's monopoly. Therefore, this party asset needs to undergo some form of divestment and streamlining. Other party assets should undergo similar treatment.

Privatization by the elite is a unique problem in China. Countries undergoing democratic transitions can be broadly divided into two categories: traditional capitalist societies and those with a history of state ownership.

Traditional capitalist societies, like South Korea and Taiwan, generally protect private property. In these places, transitioning to democracy mainly requires ending political persecution, achieving political reconciliation, and opening up democratic elections.

However, in countries with a history of state ownership, such as the former Soviet Bloc countries, two types of transition are necessary: a transition from authoritarianism to democracy and a transition from state ownership to private ownership. In the

former Soviet Bloc countries, political reform and economic reform happened simultaneously with democratic participation. Therefore, the results of privatization had legitimacy despite some issues. Generally speaking, the people in these countries accepted the outcomes of privatization.²⁸³

But China is different. China is a communist country, and before reform, it was characterized by state ownership rather than traditional private ownership. Mainland China differs from South Korea or Taiwan and more closely resembles the former Soviet Bloc countries. China needs to undergo both political and economic transitions. But unlike the former Soviet Bloc, China conducted economic reform without political reform, and it carried out privatization without democratic participation. This kind of privatization inevitably became privatization by the elite, and the people did not accept its results, so it lacked legitimacy. To this day, the elites have divided among themselves the assets of the nation and its collective property. The wealth gap in China is not a result of a market economy but of elite robbery.

Therefore, a future Chinese democratic transition should also involve an accounting of the elites' ill-gotten gains. To accomplish this, the new government can implement a strategy of rectifying the wrongdoing without punishing the wrongdoers. As long as they return the ill-gotten gains, there is no need for personal trials or punishments. The new government can use the returned wealth for public welfare and charity.

Truth and reconciliation are a process, and the entire transition is a process as well. The change cannot happen all at once, so it is vital to determine priorities. In advancing the process of truth and reconciliation, the top priorities are to ensure freedom of speech, restore fundamental human rights, and release all prisoners of conscience.



A CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION PLAN

Anonymous

The Constitutional Process

For China to establish a constitutional democracy in the future, it will need to abandon the existing constitution and draft a new one. In general, this process will involve the following steps:

1. The government convenes a constitutional convention.
2. The constitutional convention drafts a new constitution.
3. The convention submits a draft of the new constitution to the parliament, which represents the will of the people, for deliberation and approval.

Responsibility for convening the constitutional convention will lie with the new government that replaces the authoritarian CCP. This new government will not be democratically elected and will

therefore not have the mandate of the people, making it temporary and transitional, and one of its main responsibilities will be drafting a new constitution.²⁸⁴

About the Constitutional Convention

The number of participants in the constitutional convention can range from 151 to 201 people and should include individuals from the following categories:

1. Representatives of provinces, autonomous regions, and municipalities, regardless of size, which nominate an equal number of delegates

Photo: A security guard keeps watch before the second plenary session of the National People's Congress at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing on March 8, 2025. (Wang Zhao via Getty Images)

2. Representatives of major political parties
3. Representatives of various sectors (such as education, labor, business, and religious groups)
4. Representatives of minority groups and women
5. Constitutional law experts and scholars
6. Civilian representatives
7. Overseas representatives
8. Representatives of the interim government

A challenging question for this process is who should decide who attends the constitutional convention. For example, if a province has 10 seats in the convention, who should fill them? How should the province select these representatives?

For example, should the old CCP cadre decide who will attend the constitutional convention? Obviously, this is not ideal. However, if the Chinese people do not let them decide, whom should they allow? If China cannot find a workable mechanism, it may have to let the old CCP cadre make decisions temporarily. Given the nature of China's current system, when the central leadership changes, the changes will ripple down. Therefore, letting former CCP members govern briefly might be a practical option. The process of drafting a new constitution will be transitional, and abolishing all the old elements of government at once will be impossible. So in the initial phase of the transition, China may inevitably need to use some of the old elements.²⁸⁵

Regarding civilian and overseas representatives, China's civilian population and overseas Chinese and ethnic minority communities have many talented individuals and groups who can participate. These include independent scholars, pro-democracy organizations, human rights advocates, Falun Gong practitioners, independent churches, Tibetan exile groups, Uyghur advocacy groups, and Mongolian advocacy groups. So the constitutional convention should include representatives of both the civil-

ian population and overseas communities, and these groups should choose them through their respective mechanisms.

After the representatives arrive, an expert committee can draft the constitution, and individuals from the interim government or those designated by the interim government may chair the convention.

The constitutional process should involve public participation, and the public should be able to express their views on the new constitution. Its progress should be largely transparent to facilitate public awareness and engagement in discussions within society.

Once the convention drafts a new constitution, the representatives will submit it to the parliament for deliberation and approval.

Electing a New National Congress

The parliament responsible for deliberating and approving the new constitution should be a true representation of the people's will. Therefore, the existing National People's Congress is not up to the task. The people have not genuinely elected this body, and it has long served as a rubber-stamping entity under the CCP's oppressive rule. Therefore, it does not represent the will of the people and is not qualified to undertake the significant responsibility of reviewing and approving a new constitution. In other words, during the process of drafting a new constitution, the Chinese people will need to elect a parliament through genuine democratic elections that truly represent their will.

How should China form this parliament, and what rules and procedures should it follow? There are two methods to consider.

First, the country can follow the existing constitution. China's constitution and electoral laws include a set of rules and procedures for electing representatives at all levels, including those for the National People's Congress.²⁸⁶ However, the CCP has always manipulated elections and turned them into

sham elections by restricting free speech. Once there is freedom of speech, sham elections immediately become real elections, and a sham parliament (People's Congress) becomes a real one as well. Citizens elected the first real parliaments in the former Soviet Union, Eastern European countries, Mongolia, and elsewhere according to the rules and procedures of their old constitution in an open atmosphere with freedom of speech. China could also form its first real parliament using this method.²⁸⁷

However, there are drawbacks to this approach. According to China's old constitution and electoral laws, voters directly elect only county-level representatives, while representatives at the provincial and national levels are indirectly elected.²⁸⁸ This compromises the ability of the National People's Congress to reflect the will of the voters. Furthermore, this method would require three consecutive elections: first for representatives of counties; then for representatives of provincial governments, municipalities, and autonomous regions; and finally for representatives of the National People's Congress. The process would be time-consuming and costly.

Second, China can propose a new and different method, allowing voters to directly elect representatives to the National People's Congress. This would require introducing a new procedure to elect a parliament before the establishment of the new constitution and corresponding electoral laws.

This may seem like a chicken-and-egg problem. If China uses the second method to elect a real parliament, then this real parliament cannot approve the method. The government must enact the method unilaterally, and therefore it would have only transitional and temporary significance.

In summary, during the early stages of a transition—when the new government abandons certain provisions of the old constitution and old regulations due to inapplicability, and it has not yet established the new constitution and corre-

sponding new regulations through the necessary procedures—the government will need to enact a set of temporary regulations. These should include rules for electing members of parliament (National People's Congress representatives). This step is indispensable and unavoidable in the constitutional process.

Key Points of the New Constitution

The new constitution should aim to achieve six important goals:

1. Elevate fundamental human rights to a paramount position.
2. Establish a democratic government structure, a parliamentary system with two chambers (a senate and a house of representatives). The house of representatives represents the population proportionality, and the cabinet is formed from it. The senate mainly represents regional diversity and may also include a certain proportion of representatives from various interest groups. The cabinet obtains authorization from the parliament and is accountable to it. The head of state nominates the prime minister, and the parliament approves the appointment. The head of state is a ceremonial president.²⁸⁹
3. Establish a state structure (a federal system). Explicitly define local autonomy in the constitution for each province. Minority autonomous regions should have greater autonomy in language and script, among other aspects. Hong Kong and Macau should have more autonomy. Taiwan is subject to further discussion.²⁹⁰
4. Establish an electoral system featuring proportional representation and ranked-choice voting.
5. Establish judicial independence.
6. Nationalize the military.

Due to space limitations, this text will not delve into detailed discussions of these points. Instead, the following section highlights a few important issues.

Issues Worthy of Attention

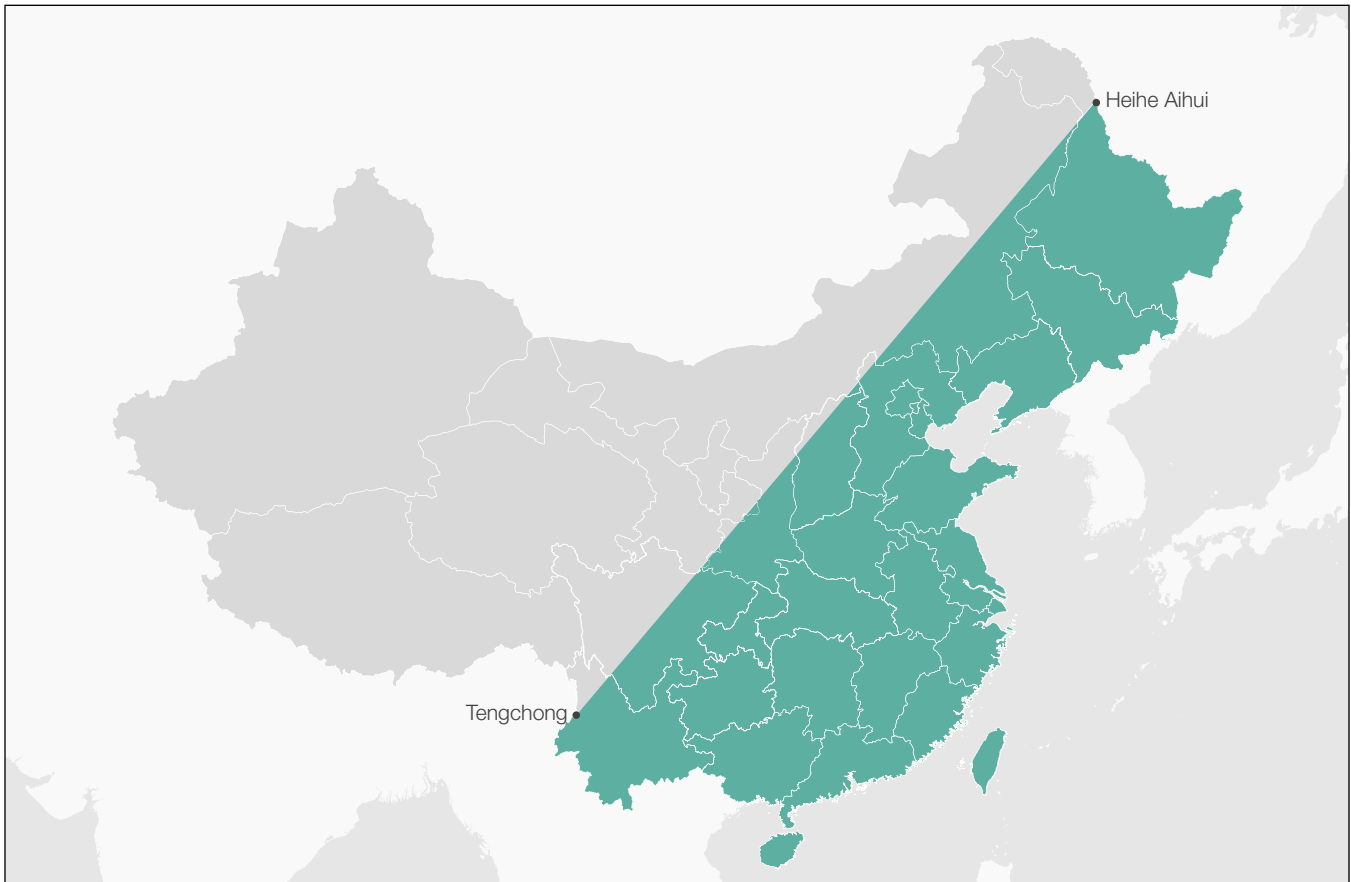
Implications of the Hu Huanyong Line

In 1935, geographer Hu Huanyong proposed drawing a straight line from Heihe in Heilongjiang to Tengchong in Yunnan, dividing China into two parts: the southeast and the northwest (see map 2). Only 4 percent of China's population inhabits the northwest, which makes up about 60 percent of the country's land area, while the southeast, covering 40 percent of the land, is home to 96 percent of the population. This line is known as the Hu Line, Heihe-Tengchong, or the Anhui-Tengchong Line.²⁹¹

Observing the Hu Line, it becomes apparent that several ethnic minorities in China—such as the Tibetans, Uyghurs, and Mongols, who differ significantly from the Han majority—primarily reside in the northwest, while the Han and other ethnically similar groups inhabit the southeast.

The Hu Line suggests that the future design of China's institutions, in addition to recognizing equal citizenship rights, should establish a diverse system based on non-majority and noncitizen voting. Otherwise, the majority will drown out and overlook the voices of minority groups like the Tibetans, Uyghurs, and

Map 2. The Hu Huanyong Line



Source: Adapted from Wikimedia Commons.

Mongols. This implies the need for ethnic regional autonomy in such areas and ensures that these ethnic groups have a greater representation in parliament than their population proportion.²⁹²

The Hu Line also indicates that, at this stage, the non-Han ethnic groups mentioned above are unlikely to achieve independence from China. Achieving independence without the consent or acquiescence of the majority ethnic group is virtually impossible, as the power imbalance in favor of the majority is too great. However, obtaining the majority's consent for the secession of minority groups is not an easy task, as it requires them to cede a significant portion of territory.

The pursuit of independence by non-Han ethnic groups has a moral justification, but in the early stages of transition, the strong Han-centric views of unity are likely to prevail. The authoritarian forces, which the Chinese people have already marginalized, can easily exploit the rhetoric of safeguarding unity to suppress opposition and possibly stage a comeback. Ultimately, the pursuit of independence by minority ethnic groups may face brutal repression, and the overall democratic progress of the country could suffer a severe setback. Therefore, government officials should temporarily set aside complex issues like separatism that can easily lead to zero-sum games during the early stages of a transition. Instead, the new government should implement genuine autonomy in non-Han ethnic regions, following the Middle Way approach that the Dalai Lama advocates.

Boundaries of Existing Administrative Regions

The current division of administrative regions, primarily provinces, has some areas of concern and may not be entirely rational. However, attempting to redraw these boundaries hastily during the initial implementation of a constitutional democracy could lead to disputes and may have destructive consequences. Therefore, the new government should not change these boundaries while drafting the new constitution.

However, the situation is different when it comes to the division of ethnic autonomous regions. In theory, for a region to become an autonomous region for a particular ethnic minority under the conditions of constitutional democracy, that ethnic minority should make up at least half of the population with voting rights. Otherwise, that minority will struggle to gain a majority of seats in parliament through elections, making ethnic autonomy difficult to achieve.

Understanding the demography of three major non-Han ethnic autonomous regions—Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, and Tibet Autonomous Region—can help illuminate the issues:

1. Inner Mongolia: When the government established this region in 1947, its total population was 5.617 million, with the Mongolian population accounting for only 832,000, or 14.81 percent.²⁹³ According to the 2020 census, the region's permanent population was 24.0492 million, of which 4.2478 million were Mongolian, accounting for 17.66 percent.²⁹⁴
2. Xinjiang: According to the first national population census in 1953, Xinjiang had a total population of 4.7836 million, with the Uyghur population at 3.6076 million, representing 75.42 percent. The 2020 census found Xinjiang had a total population of 25.8523 million, with 11.6243 million Uyghurs, accounting for 44.96 percent.²⁹⁵
3. Tibet: Tibetans have always been the absolute majority here. According to the 2020 census, the region's permanent population was 3.6481 million, with the Tibetan population at 3.1379 million, accounting for 86.1 percent.²⁹⁶

With this in mind, Tibet's boundary does not require revision, while Xinjiang and Inner Mongolia may benefit from boundary adjustments.

In Xinjiang, from a regional distribution perspective, the Uyghur population is mainly concentrated in four southern prefectures:

Kashgar, Hotan, Aksu, and Kizilsu Kyrgyz Autonomous Prefecture. According to the 2020 national population census data, 74.01 percent of Uyghurs in Xinjiang reside in these southern areas, where they constitute 83.74 percent of the local population.²⁹⁷ Therefore, it may be appropriate to divide Xinjiang into Southern Xinjiang, which becomes the Uyghur Autonomous Region, and Northern Xinjiang, which is not.

The situation in Inner Mongolia is more complex. In principle, it makes sense to designate areas where the Mongolian population is there majority as the Mongolian Autonomous Region, while excluding the other areas.

The convention should write the adjustment of Xinjiang's and Inner Mongolia's boundaries into the new constitution, but first, the new government will need to propose the changes in the temporary regulations it issues. The reason is simple: if it does not propose redrawing the boundaries of these two ethnic autonomous regions in the temporary regulations, then in the first elections of the new parliament, these regions will still elect their representatives based on the existing boundaries. In the current division, Uyghurs and Mongols are both minorities, and they may not gain a majority or even any representation in elections, which goes against the original intention of establishing ethnic autonomous regions.

In several ethnic minority regions, the proportions of different ethnic groups have changed significantly over the past few decades. This is particularly true in Xinjiang, where the proportion of Uyghur people has decreased significantly due to an influx of Han Chinese settlers. The challenge is that the new government cannot force Han Chinese who have already settled in Xinjiang to leave, and therefore it will need to implement regulations to address these situations.²⁹⁸

In the future, ethnic autonomous regions can retain a certain degree of autonomy in matters related to immigration, similar to the arrangements in Hong Kong and Macau. Non-local resi-

dents should obtain formal resident status in the region through a specified process, including the right to vote locally. Purchasing property and hiring labor should also require permits, with priority given to formal local residents to prevent marginalization of local ethnic groups in their own regions and disadvantages in employment opportunities. The assimilation of different ethnic groups should take place without violating the will of the local ethnic minorities.

Relationship with Taiwan

Due to over 70 years of separation between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait, the people of Taiwan have grown accustomed to their separate existence. Even if mainland China were to transition to a democratic constitutional system, the people of Taiwan may not immediately choose reunification. Therefore, in the early stages of establishing democratic constitutional governance on the mainland, it is advisable not to prioritize reunification but to maintain the status quo.

Currently, according to the existing constitutional system of the Republic of China (Taiwan), mainland China is also part of its territory.²⁹⁹ According to the Constitution of the People's Republic of China (PRC), Taiwan is part of the PRC's territory. Since both sides claim the same territory, they both consider it one country rather than two.

Additionally, Taiwan's constitution declares that Taiwan's territory falls under its jurisdiction, indirectly acknowledging that mainland China is not under its jurisdiction. This effectively acknowledges PRC governance of the mainland. In other words, Taiwan recognizes the existence of the PRC government.

On the mainland side, the PRC's effective governance has always been limited to the mainland territory and has never extended to Taiwan. However, the PRC government has not legally recognized this status quo. The new government should legally acknowledge it. It should recognize that the mainland territory is within its jurisdiction, while the territory

of Taiwan is not. In other words, the new government should acknowledge that the territory of Taiwan falls under the jurisdiction of Taiwan's government, not the PRC government. This is the concept of *one China, two governments*, or *one country, two administrations*, similar to the relationship between the two Koreas.

One China, two governments means the two governments have equal status. It implies that the government of the Republic of China can also join international organizations, such as the United Nations. Further, it means foreign governments can establish formal diplomatic relations with both the PRC government and the Taiwanese government, among other possibilities.

One country, two administrations does not mean reunification or independence. It retains the goal and vision of reunification while allowing room for independence. Therefore, both sides may be able to accept it.

The mainland should not rush toward reunification, and Taiwan should not rush toward independence. If Taiwan seeks to establish its own constitution and declare independence too early in the process of constitutional democracy on the mainland, it may provoke mainland nationalism. The marginalized authoritarian forces may exploit the situation to incite nationalist fervor in the name of national unity, leading to the resurgence of authoritarianism and threatening cross-strait peace. Therefore, during the early stages of constitutional democracy on the mainland, Taiwan's government should put the issue of independence on hold.

The Chinese Communist Party in a Time of Great Change

In the context of China's future transition to democracy, it is highly likely that the CCP will cease to exist. Drawing from the historical experiences of the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and Mongolia, when countries under communist rule experience a

significant transformation, the ruling Communist Party often disbands, undergoes a complete rebranding, or changes its name and symbols.³⁰⁰

There are a few instances when the party retains its name and maintains a significant presence in politics; the Russian Communist Party is one such example. However, the current Russian Communist Party is not a direct continuation of the Soviet-era CPSU but was reestablished in 1993, and many of its prominent figures were dissidents during the Soviet era. Moreover, its political agenda and stance differ significantly from those of the CPSU. For example, the contemporary Russian Communist Party advocates for private property rights, endorses multi-party democracy, and supports a market economy. Some Russian scholars argue that the current party and its predecessor are effectively two distinct political entities.

With this in mind, there are essentially two ways in which the CCP may vanish:

1. Dissolution: its members either form new parties or join other political parties.
2. Transformation: the party's constitution and name change, effectively moving away from the term *Communist Party*.

The CCP's name has garnered a negative reputation over time, making association with it unattractive to many. Furthermore, the original constitution of the CCP includes clauses that uphold authoritarianism and oppose democratic principles, which it would need to discard in the process of transformation. The CCP's constitution also promotes a communist ideological framework even though communism as an ideology has largely become obsolete. In practical terms, the CCP has already deviated from communism, so it is highly likely that any future amendment to the party's constitution would remove all references to communism and its guiding role.³⁰¹ In some other communist countries, the communist parties have names like

Worker's Party, Labor Party, or Socialist Party, with no explicit mention of communism. These parties may not necessarily change their names after a shift in ideology or policy. However, the specific inclusion of *communist* in the CCP's name would make a name change imperative to signal a departure from that ideology.

After the CCP has rebranded as well as changed its flag and ideology, different political tendencies and ideologies within the former CCP will emerge, leading to the formation of various political factions. These factions will compete for control of the party, which will likely result in a significant split. Those who fail to secure control may leave the party and join other political groups or establish new parties of their own. Some may wish to continue carrying the Communist Party banner. However, their numbers are likely to be very limited.

In the context of significant change, the CCP may hold a special representative assembly to change its party constitution and name. Given the party's large membership of 90 million, there will be a substantial exodus, causing a major split. However, many members are likely to remain. In the early stages of party politics, other political parties may struggle to consolidate, leading to a landscape of diverse political groups.

The reformed former Communist Party may still be one of the largest parties, given its history, membership composition, and connections, particularly with senior military leaders. This raises concerns about its potential to become an anti-democratic force.

Should the Country's Name Change?

Many communist countries changed their names after transitioning to democracy. For example, the People's Republic of Bulgaria became the Republic of Bulgaria; the People's Republic of Hungary became Hungary; the People's Republic of Albania became Albania; and the People's Republic of Mongolia became Mongolia.

It is ironic that countries with *People's* in their names often do not represent the people, but removal of the word signifies a shift toward a truly people-oriented government. If the People's Republic of China were to change its name by removing *People's*, its name would become the same as the English translation of the Republic of China (Taiwan). Considering that mainland China's transition to democracy may not necessarily coincide with reunification with Taiwan, this name change might pose a challenge. Charter 08 suggests the name Chinese Federal Republic as an alternative.³⁰²

ABBREVIATIONS

ACP: autonomous cooperative platform

ALBM: air-launched ballistic missile

AMMS: Academy of Military Medical Sciences (China)

ASBM: anti-ship ballistic missile

ATM: automated teller machine

AUKUS: Australia, United Kingdom, and United States

BSL3/4: Biosafety Level 3 and 4

CAAS: Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences

CAE: Chinese Academy of Engineering

CAMS: Chinese Academy of Medical Sciences and Peking Union Medical College

CAS: Chinese Academy of Sciences

CASC: China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation

CASIC: China Aerospace Science and Industry Corporation

CCG: China Coast Guard

CCP: Chinese Communist Party

CCTV: China Central Television

CDC: Center for Disease Control

CFIUS: Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States

CIA: Central Intelligence Agency

CMC: Central Military Commission (China)

CML: Christophe Merieux Lab

CPSU: Communist Party of the Soviet Union

DESTO: Defense Science and Technology Organization (Pakistan)

FX: foreign exchange

GDP: gross domestic product

GFC: Global Financial Crisis

GoF: gain of function

HGV: hypersonic glide vehicle

HVRI: Harbin Veterinary Research Institute

ICBC: Industrial and Commercial Bank of China

ILAS: Institute of Animal Laboratory Sciences

IMB: Institute of Medical Biology

IPB: Institute of Pathogen Biology

IVM : Institute of Virology and Microbiology

J-GRID: Japan Initiative for Global Research Network on Infectious Diseases

JLSF: Joint Logistic Support Force (China)

KMT: Kuomintang (Chinese Nationalist Party)

LEO: low earth orbit

LHD/LPD: landing helicopter dock / landing platform dock

M2: money supply

MEO: medium Earth orbit

MMD: military management division (China)

MPS: Ministry of Public Security (China)

MSS: Ministry of State Security (China)

NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NHC: National Health Commission (China)

NML: National Microbiology Laboratory (Canada)

NPL: nonperforming loan

NUS: National University of Singapore

OSS: Office of Strategic Services

PAP: People's Armed Police

PBOC: People's Bank of China

PLA: People's Liberation Army

PLAAF: PLA Air Force

PLAGF: PLA Ground Force

PLAN: PLA Navy

PNAS: Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences

PRC: People's Republic of China

PSB: public security bureau

RMB: Chinese renminbi

Ro-Ro: roll-on, roll-off

SLV: space launch vehicle

SME: small- or medium-sized enterprise

SOE: state-owned enterprise

SRBM: short-range ballistic missile

SSB: state security bureau

SSBN: ship submersible ballistic nuclear (nuclear ballistic missile submarine)

SSF: Strategic Support Force

UCAV: unmanned combat aerial vehicle

US SOF: US special operations forces

USD: United States dollar

UTMB: University of Texas Medical Branch

VPN: virtual private network

WIV: Wuhan Institute of Virology

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