

The Sources of CCP Conduct

The Chinese Communist Party is hard-wired for hostile expansion—and it poses a threat to the free world unlike any since George Kennan’s time.

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Mike Gallagher

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In his Long Telegram to the State Department in 1946, Wisconsin’s George Kennan argued that the nature of the Soviet regime led to irreconcilable differences with the United States. Soviet leaders were “committed fanatically to the belief that with [the United States] there can be no permanent *modus vivendi*.” In order to preserve their own power, it was necessary to break “the international authority of [the American] state.” Dealing with this threat, in Kennan’s view, would be the “greatest task our diplomacy has ever faced and probably greatest it will ever have to face.”

Today, we face a similar strategic challenge. As Vice President Mike Pence argued in his October speech outlining America’s strategic competition with China, decades of well-meaning U.S. engagement have emboldened China’s rulers. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has grown more aggressive in the East and South China Seas, in its distortion of free markets and theft of intellectual property, and in its challenge to democratic values within China and around the world. These actions represent a holistic approach to maximizing Chinese national power at the expense of the United States and the liberal norms that we, along with our allies, have sustained for decades.

The free world faces a threat unlike anything seen since Kennan’s time. Pence’s speech was a long-overdue recognition of this fact and the most prominent exposition to date of CCP aggression. Yet he did not explain why the CCP behaves the way it does.

Seven decades ago, Kennan wrote that the “characteristics of Soviet policy. . . are basic to the internal nature of Soviet power and will be with us. . . until the internal nature of Soviet power is changed.” Likewise, understanding the CCP is essential to understanding China’s external ambitions and why they cannot be reconciled with those of the free world. Until the internal nature of CCP power changes, the regime will pursue policies that undermine U.S. interests and those of our allies. What follows is a closer look at the sources of CCP conduct, or put differently, the link between the nature of this regime and its behavior.

The Long Shadow of Chinese History

The first source of CCP conduct is Chinese history—or, more precisely, certain strongly held and CCP-perpetuated narratives about China’s history. Two narratives stand out, both of which reflect politicized versions of true history and blend chauvinism, insecurity, and imperial ambition.

The first narrative comes from Chinese dynastic history. Unlike Europe, where countries competed constantly for power, China enjoyed long periods without true rivals.¹ Though dynasties rose and fell, the Chinese viewed themselves at the center of “all under heaven” or the central node in a world that revolved around them. To an extent, it did. Through a system that extended Chinese economic and political influence through much of East Asia, Chinese rulers received tribute “in exchange for economic and sometimes security benefits.” Echoes of this narrative can be seen in CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping’s 2014 declaration of a “new Asian security concept,” in which he called for “the people of Asia to run the affairs of Asia, solve the problems of Asia and uphold the security of Asia.”

Xi’s message is clear: It is time for the Americans to leave and for China to return to its idealized traditional primacy over its Asian neighbor-vassals.

The second narrative is that the greatest threat to China is weak central leadership that invites foreign aggression and corresponding national humiliation. This narrative springs from several different periods in Chinese history. One is the early fifth century to third century B.C.E., known as the Warring States era. During this window, Chinese politics more closely resembled Europe, with multiple independent states balancing against one another, shifting their allegiances, and vying for power. In another period of weakness a millennium and a half later, colonial powers progressively eroded Chinese sovereignty beginning with the 1839 Opium War and continuing until the 1945 Kuomintang and allied victory over Imperial Japan—a period the CCP calls the “Century of Humiliation.”

Contemporary CCP leaders manipulate these narratives to justify the repression and expansion of China’s periphery. From the Warring States period, Chinese leaders have inherited a deep insecurity over territorial fissures, including Taiwan and Tibet. This insecurity is why “unification” with Taiwan is central to General Secretary Xi’s “Chinese dream” of “national rejuvenation”—despite the fact that Taiwan has never been controlled by the CCP, and only very rarely by any mainland Chinese government. CCP leaders also continually foster a sense of grievance about foreign meddling that, in its telling, only the Party could have stopped, and only the Party can prevent from happening again.

Chinese history also guides CCP leaders by allowing them to draw upon longstanding traditions in what they call “barbarian handling.” Long before the founding of the CCP, China mastered the practice of making adversaries dependent upon its economic largesse. China also successfully indoctrinated competitors, pressuring the leaders of competitive states to gradually shift their value systems closer to China’s. Historian Edward Luttwak writes that these practices had the effect of making adversaries “psychologically as well as economically dependent on imperial radiance, which was willingly extended in brotherly fashion when the Han were weak, and then withdrawn when [rivals] were reduced to vassalage.”²

This history casts a long shadow over CCP policymaking. It predisposes China to view nations as either hegemons or vassals, not coequals. It teaches CCP leaders to foster economic dependence in other countries and to manipulate foreign elite opinion to perceive Chinese power as benign or beneficial. And

internally, it encourages a chronic anxiety that China could at any moment succumb to separatist movements and fall back into disunity. All of these traits are apparent in daily CCP behavior.

The CCP as an Influence Organization

The second source of CCP conduct, and one habitually discounted by Westerners, is the Party's own history as an underground influence organization. From its earliest days, the CCP has played the role of insurgent, first within China and then abroad as it has sought to expand its power. A central tool in this struggle has been "United Front" work, or "a range of methods to influence overseas Chinese communities, foreign governments, and other actors to take actions or adopt positions supportive of Beijing's preferred policies."³ Sometimes, the CCP channels such activities through seemingly benign organizations such as educational or cultural groups that quietly promote Party interests. Other times, United Front activities are clearly illegal, such as bribery or extortion. Regardless of its form, United Front work consistently aims to "stifle criticism of the CCP, spread positive views of China, and influence voters in foreign democracies to adopt domestic policies more favorable to China," as a recent congressional report put it.⁴

Although United Front work originated with Lenin, it has blossomed under the CCP. The Party spent its formative years too weak to pose a military threat to the Japanese or the Kuomintang, and relied instead on "intelligence" activities (a term the Party often used interchangeably with United Front work). The Party credits its underground influence operations for playing a decisive role in its victory in the 1949 civil war. The CCP Politburo went as far as to approve a resolution shortly after the establishment of the PRC that emphasized the role intelligence operations played in the Party's victory.⁵

Individuals well versed in United Front activities quickly rose to prominence within the Party bureaucracy. Many in the CCP's core leadership today, including General Secretary Xi himself, are the direct descendants of United Front leaders. John Garnaut, an Australian journalist-turned-policymaker who was instrumental in alerting Western leaders to growing CCP interference in democratic societies, has argued that men such as Xi's father, Xi Zhongxun, "did not earn their seats at the revolutionary head table by feats of military prowess on the battlefield. Rather. . . [they] were masters of United Front work and earned their stripes by massaging and manipulating the language, perceptions and actions of the Party's adversaries."

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Seen in this light, the CCP's roots were less as a political party than as an insurgent organization whose core mission was to manipulate external perceptions in order to advance its power. As Garnaut put it: "The Party's contemporary institutions, ideology and methodologies continue to reflect its origins as an underground organization." While the CCP's United Front Work Department (UFWD) is nominally

responsible for overseeing these efforts, “[a]ll of the Party’s 86 million members are expected to take on United Front responsibilities in their dealings with non-party members. In short, influence work is the Party’s stock-in-trade.”

In recent years, General Secretary Xi has singled out United Front work as a “magic weapon” to promote the “great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation,” establishing and personally leading a working group on United Front work, assigning UFWD officials to top posts, and adding about 40,000 UFWD cadres.⁶ These activities are increasingly bringing the CCP into conflict with democratic institutions abroad. United Front work is more than the CCP behaving badly; it is central to the Party’s identity, history, and global objectives. As long as the CCP governs China, United Front work will figure prominently into Chinese foreign policy.

Dictatorship and “Security”

The third defining source of CCP conduct is the dictatorial nature of its power. Like the ruling class in any autocracy, CCP leaders fear losing power. The party perceives itself to be engaged in a “life-or-death struggle” against Western ideas, including democracy, the universality of human rights, neoliberal economic policy, and even independent journalism.

In an infamous leaked memorandum known as Document No. 9, CCP leaders lay out an existential ideological struggle, couched in Orwellian terms, against “false ideological trends” at home and abroad. CCP propaganda hammers home this message by portraying liberal democracy as outdated and ineffective. As the PRC’s Xinhua state-run news agency puts it, “After several hundred years, the Western model is showing its age. It is high time for profound reflection on the ills of a doddering democracy which has precipitated so many of the world’s ills and solved so few.” The goal is to discredit Western ideas while presenting China as an alternative model for the developing world. For example, a CCP propaganda outlet argued the latest U.S. government shutdown showed American “democracy and government are unable to provide the solution to an enlarging income gap, opposition among different classes, worsening partisan polarization. [. . .] The government mechanism, designed more than 100 years ago, is malfunctioning.”

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The CCP’s sense of ideological struggle also creates an absolutist view of security. As China analyst Peter Mattis has argued, the CCP’s quest for total security is embodied in the 2015 National Security Law, which defines “national security” as the absence of internal and external threats to the regime, its economic interests, or its territorial integrity. Since the CCP cannot claim legitimacy through elections, it seeks legitimacy by expanding its power at home and abroad, particularly through the use of technology for social control. Analysis from the Jamestown Foundation suggests that China’s domestic security expenditures have sharply increased in recent years and began outpacing Chinese military spending

beginning in 2010. For example, spending on domestic security outpaced the budget for external defense by about 19 percent in 2017.

These investments support a “social credit” system, now in a pilot phase, that serves as an Uber-style rating for Chinese citizens collated from their most intimate data: their personal finances, their traffic infractions, the private messages they write on their phones, what they browse or buy online and in stores, where they go, and who they interact with—activities automatically monitored by hundreds of millions of surveillance cameras furnished with facial-recognition software. Loyalty to the government is also measured and, when deemed insufficient, punished. Citizens with higher scores receive perks such as easier credit, access to luxury hotels, lower insurance premiums, quicker access to government services, and scholarships to the best schools. Individuals who criticize or organize against CCP policies may find it hard to apply to college, travel, or even find a job.

Prominent CCP members and Chinese industrialists promote surveillance technology as a means of not only ensuring obedience to the Party, but also succeeding where every other Marxist experiment has failed. As Liu Qiangdong, founder of China’s online retailer JD.com, put it, “with the technologies we have laid out in the last two or three years, I have come to recognize that communism can indeed be achieved in our generation.” Alibaba founder and CCP member Jack Ma has argued that “with access to all kinds of data, we may be able to find the invisible hand of the market.” In both cases, a Silicon Valley-style blind faith in the transformative power of technology blends with the CCP’s concrete ambitions to centralize and optimize control over Chinese society and the economy.

The CCP has chosen the autonomous region of Xinjiang—where it feels threatened by separatists within the Islamic Uighur population—to field test its instruments of repression and provide a glimpse into the logical conclusion of its quest for security. As one UN report put it, the CCP has “turned the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region into something that resembled a massive internment camp shrouded in secrecy, a ‘no rights zone.’” In these camps, “detainees are subject to waterboarding, being kept in isolation without food and water, and [are] prevented from sleeping.”⁷ The total number detained in camps could be as high as three million—a number that would represent about 38 percent of the entire Uighur population of Xinjiang. Outside of the camps, Xinjiang’s population faces constant security checks and pervasive surveillance. Uighurs must download a smartphone application that scans personal data, including photos, videos, and documents for state review.

The CCP is using Xinjiang to perfect its totalitarian surveillance state throughout China. In the process, it is exposing the lengths it will go to stay in power and its intentions abroad.

United Front Work and the Subversion of Western Institutions

Driven by Chinese history, its own history as an influence organization, and its need for total security, the CCP is programed for interference in foreign societies. Like the Soviet Union in 1946, the CCP’s motivations, experiences, biases, and goals cannot be reconciled with those of the free world. The CCP does not believe in a permanent *modus vivendi*—at least not in the Indo-Pacific—with the United States.

As Chinese power has increased, it has become more aggressive, belligerent, and coercive. From the militarization of the South China Sea, to widespread technology transfer to seize the commanding

heights of the global economy, to debt-trap diplomacy in developing economies, the CCP's behavior makes sense considering its unique political personality. And as Vice President Pence outlined, the CCP's belligerence in one domain cannot be separated from its aggression in another. Military activities are directly connected to economic initiatives, which are in turn connected with political interference operations.

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The CCP's political interference operations—intended to subvert and corrupt key Western institutions—are the least studied, most subtle, and perhaps most important of these forms of aggression. While it is easy to understand the threat posed by planting military equipment on disputed islands or hacking the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, the CCP's systematic delegitimization of Western institutions is more insidious.

At the United Nations, for example, in the 15 years following the Tiananmen Square massacre, the CCP defeated a dozen resolutions condemning its human rights abuses, often leveraging its economic power to help secure the votes of developing nations. While the CCP has continued playing defense at the UN over human rights, in recent years it has gone on offense, using bribery and intimidation and in the process blurring the lines between corruption and United Front-style political warfare.

Consider the case of Sheri Yan, a Chinese-born socialite who in 2015 was arrested on charges of bribing John Ashe, a former president of the UN General Assembly. Through a complex network of intermediaries, including suspected CCP spies, Yan funneled hundreds of thousands of dollars from United Front-affiliated sources through her UN-designated NGO to influential UN officials, including Ashe. At the same time, her NGO employed the wife of a second General Assembly president, Sam Kutesa. Kutesa was allegedly taking \$500,000 in bribes from Patrick Ho, a United Front-associated former Hong Kong official. Ho was also accused of using a UN-associated non-profit to bribe UN diplomats, including both Kutesa and Ashe. Ho used his position of influence to advocate tirelessly for the Belt and Road Initiative. When asked about Ho's corruption and his support for Belt and Road, a UN spokesman echoed Xi Jinping's precise language, calling the initiative an avenue for "win-win cooperation."

CCP United Front work has also aimed at subverting the institution of free speech, especially at foreign universities. In light of the key role students played in the Tiananmen demonstrations, the CCP created Chinese Students and Scholars Associations (CSSAs) to reassert ideological control over students at home and abroad. The more than 142 U.S. CSSA chapters are publicly designed to assist Chinese students studying abroad, but also double as mechanisms for the CCP to restrain the free speech and liberty of the same students they are supposed to serve.⁸

The University of Tennessee CSSA mandates members “protect the motherland’s honor and image” while forcing students from Taiwan to support “national reunification.”⁹ CSSA chapters have threatened retaliation against schools that have invited the Dalai Lama to campus, while even those more hesitant to toe the CCP line have been pressured to submit proof of their cooperation to government officials.¹⁰ As more attention has focused on the state-supported nature of CSSAs, many chapters have taken to deleting, obfuscating, or otherwise concealing their financial connections to the CCP. Sometimes ties are more open, and CCP cells have sprung up in more than a half dozen states, spanning the country from California to New York. In one case from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, students returning to China after studying abroad were pressured to reveal whether their peers had demonstrated “anti-party thought.”

When a German journalism student studying in China was expelled after reporting on human rights abuses, Chinese state media ran an op-ed chiding him for not obeying Chinese laws. The op-ed argued: “If [the student] was a Chinese student studying in Germany, the Chinese people would accept he must obey German law. But the worst part is some Germans and Western people believe that their laws should play the dominant role in friction between China and the West, even in China. The reason is they believe their laws are universal.”

This rhetoric is disingenuous. Last November a Chinese soccer team cut short a visit to Germany after pro-Tibet demonstrators showed up at the game. A PRC Foreign Ministry spokesman stressed “mutual respect is what the official host should provide their guest, and that respect between any two countries should be mutual.”

*According to the Party, CCP norms, especially
when it comes to free speech (or lack thereof),
should prevail both at home and abroad.*

Besides free speech, the CCP is attacking the institution of state sovereignty by arguing all individuals of Chinese descent, regardless of citizenship, are beholden to the CCP. For example, in speaking of Malays of Chinese descent, the Chinese Ambassador to Malaysia said, “No matter how far you are, no matter how many generations you stay, (for) overseas Chinese, China is forever your tender maternal home.” He further warned that China would “not sit idly by” in the face of “infringement on China’s national interests or violations of legal rights and interests of Chinese citizens and businesses.”

In recent years, the CCP has expanded efforts to assert the nationality of “overseas Chinese,” regardless of their actual citizenship or wishes. In 2017, CCP officials laid out an expansive vision of United Front work to ensure “[a]ll Chinese both at home and abroad are striving to realize the Chinese Dream.” As part of this strategy, the CCP encourages overseas Chinese to become politically active in an effort “to mobilize public opinion. . . . to promote the PRC’s economic and political agenda abroad.”¹¹ Acting as if this overseas constituency votes as a bloc, the CCP recently threatened political repercussions if the Australian Labor Party did not support Beijing’s demands for an extradition treaty.

In a series of high-profile cases, the CCP has also detained foreign nationals it claims are PRC citizens. One Chinese-born Swedish citizen has been kidnapped twice by PRC authorities—once while on vacation

in Thailand and once right in front of Swedish officials on a train from Shanghai. The Swede released a hostage-style statement while detained: “Although I now hold the Swedish citizenship, deep down I still think of myself as a Chinese. My roots are in China.”

In another case, two young Americans, Victor and Cynthia Liu, along with their mother, are being arbitrarily held in China. While Victor was born on American soil, the Chinese Foreign Ministry has argued that all three are PRC citizens. In both cases, the CCP’s message is clear: Chinese blood supersedes the rights of other states and their citizens.

Why Should We Care?

Americans might reasonably ask why such Chinese aggression matters. China, like any powerful state, is aggressively pursuing its interests. And even if the CCP were to successfully create an “Asia for Asians” and displace the U.S. as the dominant Indo-Pacific power, America would still have a strong economy, a dominant position in the Western Hemisphere, and frayed but strong alliances, especially in Europe.

To understand why this scenario would be threatening to American interests, Kennan again provides a helpful framework. In 1948, he argued that there were five centers of industrial and military power: the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany and central Europe, the USSR, and Japan. America’s foremost interest was ensuring that Soviet political control did not extend over any of these centers beyond the USSR itself.¹²

Today the centers of economic production and power—the strongpoints Kennan sought to defend—have shifted to the Indo-Pacific. According to some estimates, Asia itself could comprise as much as half of global GDP by 2050. As Jakub Grygiel has argued, China’s growth in East Asia combined with Russia’s weakness in Eurasia have changed the locale of power, likely making the sea lanes of East Asia “the key lifelines of the world.”¹³ With this concentration of economic power in its own backyard, the CCP does not have to project power far in order to dominate the global economy.

Consequently, an American retreat from the Indo-Pacific would put the world’s vital hub of economic activity in Chinese hands. Given its track record, the CCP would use this Indo-Pacific sphere of influence to further subvert Western institutions and extract painful concessions.

The CCP would not be content “solving” the Taiwan or Tibet questions and then focusing on China’s internal development. It would expand the boundaries of its growing surveillance state, targeting non-PRC citizens who oppose its agenda. It would nurture dependence in weaker states, creating a system of vassals rather than partners. Most of all, the free and open world built by the United States and our allies in the aftermath of World War II, with corresponding gains in global standards of living and human rights, would be replaced by a chaotic contest for the global commons and the steady expansion of CCP social control. The CCP’s Orwellian nightmare would replace America’s Lockean dream.

Through their actions, CCP leaders have warned us repeatedly that this is the world they are working to build. CCP policies reflect a remarkably clear and comprehensive agenda to overtake the United States, displace us in the Indo-Pacific, and corrupt our foremost institutions. As Kennan said of the Soviets, they show a “cautious, persistent pressure toward the disruption and weakening of all rival influence and rival power.”

Toward a Counter-Finlandization Strategy

To prevent this future, we must first recognize that we are in a contest for global leadership—but until recently, only one side has been playing. There are some signs, however, that America is starting to take this challenge seriously. The 2017 National Security Strategy and 2018 National Defense Strategy both identify China as a revisionist power and America’s top threat. Congress has also taken important bipartisan steps over the past two years like lifting defense spending caps in 2018 and 2019, expanding authorities for examining CCP-directed investments in the United States, passing the BUILD Act to help meet growing international demand for infrastructure investment, and shining a light on CCP espionage threats on college campuses.

America, in other words, is awakening to the challenge, but we still need a clear framework to guide our actions. If containment was America’s operative framework vis-à-vis the Soviet Union, we need a new organizing principle today, at least while the CCP remains in power. One might be found by examining the Soviet Union’s relationship with not the United States, but Finland. “Finlandization” became a Cold War shorthand for a nominally independent but functionally subservient country. As one declassified CIA report describes, the Finns “hoped to keep their independence by significantly limiting it, to secure their neutrality by generally leaning to one side, and to maintain their democratic privileges by restricting them in certain key areas. . . . In practice, this policy has meant the frequent sacrifice of Finland’s economic interests and political preferences to the needs of assuaging Soviet suspicions and meeting Soviet demands.”

Today, the United States must focus its efforts on preventing the Finlandization of the Indo-Pacific and beyond. Ultimately, a counter-Finlandization strategy is about choice—not between China and the United States—but ensuring that allies and partners have the confidence and the ability to choose their own path, free from economic and military coercion.

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Countries that wish to preserve their independence, regional peace, and economic prosperity will have to act with the understanding that all three are under threat from the CCP. This does not mean our friends need to agree with us all the time—it merely means standing up for national self-interest when it diverges, as it often will, from China’s.

An effective counter-Finlandization strategy should emphasize three things: material power, allies, and values. Taken collectively, these elements constitute not only the foundation of an effective strategy but the sources of American national strength. Just as we have examined the sources of the CCP’s conduct, we must understand our competitive advantages and ground our strategy in the enduring American principles that have made us the most powerful nation in history.

This begins with material power, both economic and military. American economic power did not emerge out of thin air. Our open economy, free society, and respect for the rule of law created a culture of innovation and hard work that catapulted America to the forefront of the global economy. We have regulatory burdens, rent-seeking behavior, and special interest capture, to be sure, but our system

remains one that gives confidence to investors and entrepreneurs. This is a core advantage, and one we would do well to preserve.

As the global economy increasingly depends upon advanced—and easily manipulated—technologies, the private sector must voluntarily step up for the good of the nation and its own bottom line. Industry will need to make hard choices about the security of its information technology supply chains in China and research cooperation on dual-use technologies with the CCP. In particular, Silicon Valley, a leader in the corporate social responsibility movement, should modernize its conception of social responsibility to exclude technology partnerships with the CCP that are likely to lead to human rights abuses or the development of advanced weapons systems. We must ensure that the technologies that will shape the future of the global economy belong to the United States—and not the CCP.

Going hand in hand with economic power is American military power. Our foremost goal must be to ensure that the relative gap between U.S. and Chinese military capabilities is so wide that everyone— allies and adversaries alike—understands that any military conflict would end in a decisive U.S. victory. This is not just about winning a potential fight; it is about establishing a favorable peacetime condition in which allies and partners feel secure and Chinese leaders know that attempted coercion, even of smaller states, is futile. This will not come cheaply. But as former Defense Secretary James Mattis put it, “America can afford survival.”

Building on recent defense budget growth, the U.S. government must follow at the very least the National Defense Strategy Commission’s plan for three to five percent real annual growth in the defense budget to build force structure and next-generation capabilities.¹⁴ Furthermore, policymakers should focus on preventing what National Defense Strategy architect Elbridge Colby has described as “the most pointed form” of a potential Chinese attack: a fait accompli in which the People’s Liberation Army quickly seized territory and then raised the costs of a prospective counterattack to a level that would cause the United States to balk. The National Defense Strategy, punctuated by an under-appreciated shift from deterrence by punishment to deterrence by denial, is designed to do just this. Congress must exercise vigorous oversight to ensure the Pentagon follows through on this transformational shift.

America’s friends, allies, and partners constitute the second component of a counter-Finlandization strategy. Due to far-sighted policies implemented after World War II, the United States now enjoys a strong alliance system in the Indo-Pacific and beyond. The U.S. government must seize on every opportunity to draw closer to regional powers like Australia, Japan, South Korea, India, and Taiwan, while also seeking out emerging partners that share common interests.

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Simply put, we are the away team in the Indo-Pacific, and we will not be able to prevent Finlandization without establishing close working relationships with regional allies and partners. Nurturing local allies gives us greater military, political, and economic access and creates options for dealing with crises. As the Chinese academic Yan Xuetong wrote in 2011, “the core of competition between China and the United States will be to see who has more high-quality friends.”

Critically, this competition for friends is not limited to the Indo-Pacific. The CCP is trying to drive wedges between the United States and its partners wherever and whenever it can. Nowhere is this more

apparent than with the Five Eyes intelligence sharing alliance at the heart of America's global coalition. In recent weeks, China has exposed a critical gap in America's "special relationship" with the United Kingdom over its reported decision to allow Huawei onto its 5G network—a decision which ultimately cost Defense Secretary Gavin Williamson his job. At the same time, New Zealand has indicated it will work with China on One Belt, One Road, which Secretary of State Michael Pompeo has strongly criticized for its "predatory lending practices." Given that China has been able to score victories of this scale among the innermost core of the American coalition, it is not hard to imagine how the CCP will exploit and exacerbate tensions with other American partners.

Strengthening relationships with allies, friends, and partners will take actions both large and small. The administration should return to the congressional intent behind national security tariffs and end Section 232 actions and investigations against our allies. At the same time, the administration should offer and prioritize expanded trade relationships with countries that make responsible decisions such as banning firms like Huawei and ZTE from their future 5G networks and declining to join One Belt, One Road. Meanwhile, to fortify democratic governments, non-profits, academia, and the media should get to work on a public "United Front Tracker," as suggested by the Hudson Institute's Jonas Parelló-Plesner, that would shed light on ongoing CCP interference campaigns abroad.

Finally, we need to better incorporate values as a foundational element of our strategy. In 1946, Kennan challenged the U.S. government to "formulate and put forward for other nations a much more positive and constructive picture of sort of world we would like to see than we have put forward in past." As we think about what sort of world we would like to see—and how we should best communicate it—we could do a lot worse than grounding this vision in an expression of our foundational values: our internal sources of conduct outlined in our Constitution and the Declaration of Independence. This vision of equality, liberty, and the rule of law is a self-evident contrast to the future offered by the CCP. This is a contrast the U.S. government should draw explicitly and relentlessly, highlighting the human rights atrocities in the Xinjiang concentration camps, imposing harsh sanctions on the individuals responsible (like Communist Party Secretary for Xinjiang Chen Quanguo), and cutting off the flow of U.S. technology that enables repressive systems. If we fail to articulate the difference between our values—and our actions—and those of the CCP, we will be waging great power competition with one hand tied behind our back.

At the same time, if we abandon these values and instead try to "out China China"—going further down the road of social control, government antagonizing business through executive fiat, or reducing protections for privacy and free speech—we will lose our way. As Kennan put it: "the greatest danger that can befall us in coping with this problem of Soviet communism, is that we shall allow ourselves to become like those with whom we are coping." By better understanding our adversary and ourselves, we can avoid this outcome, prevent our friends, allies and partners from falling victim to Finlandization, and in the long run, leave the CCP on the ash heap of history.

NOTES:

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2 - *Ibid.*, p. 27.

3 - Alexander Bowe, "China's Overseas United Front Work: Background and Implications for the United States," Staff Research Report, U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission (August 2018), p. 3.

4 - Ibid., p. 6

5 - David Ian Chambers, "The Past and Present State of Chinese Intelligence Historiography," Studies in Intelligence Vol. 56, No. 3 (September 2012), p. 32.

6 - Bowe, p. 5-6.

7 - Jessica Batke, "Surveillance, Suppression, and Mass Detention: Xinjiang's Human Rights Crisis," Testimony before the Congressional-Executive Commission on China, July 26, 2018.

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Mike Gallagher is a Marine Corps veteran and Republican Congressman from Wisconsin's 8th district. He is a member of the House Armed Services Committee.