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Key Findings

Censorship Practices of the People's Republic of China

A report prepared for the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission

Nature and Reach of China's Censorship Apparatus

- Xi Jinping has dramatically expanded the PRC's censorship apparatus through:
 - ▶ Bureaucratic reforms aimed at streamlining Party control over internet content.
 - ▶ Operational reforms to improve the technical acumen of CCP censors.
 - ▶ Legal reforms intended to broaden CCP supervision over all forms of media.
- Stringency of censorship enforcement varies depending on context:
 - ▶ The CCP allows limited discussions of local corruption and mismanagement.
 - ▶ Criticisms of Central Party leadership and decisions are rigorously censored.
- Haphazard organization, uneven development and unfunded mandates undercut the effectiveness of CCP censorship and result in redundancies and coverage gaps.

Methods and Technologies Underpinning China's Censorship Apparatus

- Enforcement organizations includes the Central Propaganda Department, the Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC), the Ministry of Public Security (MPS), and the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT).
- Day-to-day online content management is not enacted directly by the Party-state. Legal liability incurred by private entities, drives them to self-police their platforms.
- CCP information control methods emphasize "spreading positive propaganda," and view deletion and blocking of posts a last-resort measure. However, local officials often default to blunt-force measures for social stability and their own career advancement.

China's International Censorship Practices

- PRC "international public opinion guidance" employs many of the same tactics used for domestic censorship. Foreign social media is frequently "flooded" with irrelevant content to hijack discussions on sensitive topics such as human rights abuses in Xinjiang and Tibet.

Implications for the United States

- Foreign access to corporate records, economic data, and scholarly research is being curtailed to obscure information on economic, political, and social trends in China.
- The PRC uses censorship abroad as a means to diplomatically isolate Taiwan and lessen international willingness to intervene in a cross-Strait conflict.
- Many AI-enabled censorship tools used by the CCP rely on off-the-shelf components imported from the United States, such as general processing units (GPUs), and cloud computing infrastructure.

Policy Considerations

Undermining the CCP's Domestic Information Monopoly

- 1) Support emerging telecommunications technologies, such as satellite-based internet constellations, to impose costs on the PRC's censorship apparatus.
- 2) Instruct the U.S. Department of State to expand U.S. public diplomacy efforts in China and provide objective reporting on misconduct and misgovernment by the Party-state.
- 3) Increase the budgets of federal funding agencies such as the National Endowment for the Humanities, National Science Foundation, and National Endowment for the Arts, to support scholars and journalists who conduct work related to China.
- 4) Support institutions that keep a public record of internet information such as the U.S. digital library service Internet Archive and its WayBack Machine in order to check the PRC censorship apparatus's ability to reshape China's public information environment.

Safeguarding the U.S. Information Space from PRC Censorship

- 1) Strengthen information sharing and collaborative research aimed at countering disinformation on social media.
 - a. Increase coordination with the private sector to combat PRC disinformation campaigns, which are often de facto global censorship campaigns.
 - b. Support the development of tools to prevent "information saturation" techniques such as botnets that hijack and algorithmically manipulate online discourse.
 - c. Deepen avenues for information sharing between the U.S. intelligence community and private sector on tactics, techniques, and procedures used by state-backed advanced persistent threat (APT) groups specializing in information operations.
- 2) Instruct the U.S. Department of Commerce to develop a set of best practices to support private firms that are subject to economic pressure by the PRC.

Protecting the International Free Flow of Information

- 1) Build international support for the current multi-stakeholder model of internet governance.
 - a. Step up efforts to counter PRC attempts to delegitimize the frameworks, norms, and organizations that enable a free and open internet.
 - b. Reaffirm U.S. commitment to the independence of organizations such as the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) and take steps to ensure that the deliberations and decisions of those organizations are not subject to nation-state interference.
- 2) Restrict the transfer of data, hardware, software, and expertise used by the CCP to build its next-generation censorship tools, and issue a public advisory listing PRC-based companies that support state censorship, including their subsidiaries or shell companies.



Read the full report at: <https://www.uscc.gov>