The Chinese Communist Party's power structure in international relations

information
decision

Central People's Government

- State Council
- Premier
- Ministry of State Security
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Ministry of Public Security
- Ministry of Commerce
- Ministry of National Defense
- People's Bank of China
- Xinhua News Agency
- National Press and Publication Administration
- National Radio and Television Administration
- State Administration of Foreign Exchange
- State Administration of Foreign Experts Affairs

information

Central Committee

CCP leadership

- General Secretary
- Politburo
  - Politburo Standing Committee
- Central Military Commission

- Central Commission for Foreign Affairs
- International Department
- Propaganda Department
- United Front Work Department
- Taiwan Work Office
- Political and Legal Affairs Commission
- Institute of Party History and Literature
- Central Party School
- *People's Daily*
- General Office

National People's Congress (NPC)

- Standing Committee of the NPC
- Foreign Affairs Committee of the NPC
- Overseas Chinese Affairs Committee of the NPC

People's Liberation Army

- Joint Staff Department
- Intelligence Bureau of the Joint Staff Department
- Attaché offices at diplomatic posts

People's Armed Police

Central Commission for Discipline Inspection

oversight

United Front

- Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference
- China News Service
- Center for China and Globalization
- Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries
- Chinese Students and Scholars Association
- Buddhist Association of China
- Islamic Association of China
- Three-Self Patriotic Movement
- Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association
- National Ethnic Affairs Commission
- Institute for China-America Studies
- China Council for the Promotion of Peaceful National Reunification
- China Council for the Promotion of International Trade
- China International Culture Exchange Center
- Government-organised non-governmental organisations (GONGOs)

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The **Central Committee of the CCP** is the principal driver of the People's Republic of China's foreign policy. In practice, the most important decisions and the formulation of strategy remain in the hands of the **CCP leadership**, namely the members of the **Politburo** and the Central Military Commission (CMC). The Politburo is a 24-member body that meets monthly to discuss the most important issues and make key decisions within the CCP. Decisions of relatively lesser importance are taken by the seven-member **Politburo Standing Committee (PSC)**, headed by the **General Secretary of the CCP**.

As a rule, the views of the PSC, and particularly those of the General Secretary, take precedence. Following the 1989 crackdown, the General Secretary has also been elected by the National People's Congress as Chairman of the People's Republic of China. However, this state office does not confer real political authority. Rather, it grants the party's most senior figure the diplomatic status of head of state. Members of the Politburo simultaneously hold the most important positions within the Central Committee apparatus, the state administration and provincial governments. This enables them to exercise direct control over both the work of these institutions and the implementation of decisions taken by the party leadership.

The **Central Military Commission** exercises party control over the People's Liberation Army (PLA), which functions as a party militia rather than a national army. In their day-to-day work, including on matters relating to international relations, the CCP leadership relies on a range of Central Committee bodies and the state administrative structures subordinate to them. These institutions provide information to the leadership, while the relevant Central Committee bodies are responsible for interpreting and analysing it. The **Central Commission for Foreign Affairs** is responsible for formulating the People's Republic of China's foreign policy and overseeing its implementation. However, other Central Committee bodies are also directly involved in conducting the party's international work.

The **International Department** is responsible for maintaining relations with political parties around the world, not only communist ones. The **Propaganda Department** is tasked with promoting party ideology, regulating the media, and producing and disseminating propaganda. It also serves as the principal body responsible for enforcing censorship and controlling the media. The **United Front Work Department** supervises and directs the activities of organisations and individuals operating under the umbrella of the United Front. It is one of the most important departments of the Central Committee and is actively involved in the CCP's international 'work'. The **Taiwan Work Office** is responsible for formulating policy towards Taiwan and overseeing its implementation. Under the name Taiwan Affairs Office*, which is formally presented as a non-governmental organisation, it also maintains direct contacts with pro-China groups on the island. The **Political and Legal Affairs Commission** oversees the civilian intelligence services, law enforcement agencies, the judicial system and, to a lesser extent, the work of the National People's Congress. Through its control of law enforcement bodies and the court system, it can exert considerable influence over the interests of foreign entities operating in China.

The **Institute of Party History and Literature** is responsible for shaping the CCP's historical policy. It develops the party's official interpretation of its own history and of China's relations with the outside world in the modern era. It also promotes values and themes aligned with the party's ideological objectives in literature. In addition to running educational programmes for political elites from countries of the Global South, the **Central Party School** is responsible for maintaining relations with foreign think tanks and research institutions. People's Daily is the official newspaper of the CCP Central Committee, and its publications reflect the party's current line. Articles published under the pen name Zhong Sheng (钟声) express the views of the CCP leadership on international affairs. The **General Office** serves as the General Secretary's principal instrument for directing the work of the Central Committee. It organises and coordinates the activities of Central Committee bodies. It can also, to some extent, prioritise or impede their activities.

The Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI), like the CCP Central Committee itself, is a body elected directly by the Party Congress. It works closely with foreign law enforcement agencies to secure the repatriation of fugitives, including opposition activists, often under the pretext of pursuing ordinary criminal offences. Its primary function, however, is to discipline other party organisations and ensure that they implement the leadership's decisions, including those relating to the CCP's international 'work'.

The People's Liberation Army (PLA) is directly subordinate to the CCP leadership through the Central Military Commission (CMC). The **Joint Staff Department** of the CMC serves as the equivalent of a general staff, while the **Intelligence Bureau of the Joint Staff Department** is responsible for military intelligence. **Military attaché offices**, organised in coordination with the **Ministry of National Defense** and the **Ministry of Foreign Affairs**, are responsible for military diplomacy. The **People's Armed Police** (PAP) serves as the CCP's internal security force and reports directly to the CMC, although it is not formally part of the PLA. The PAP also performs the functions of both a border guard and a coast guard in China. In this capacity, it plays a role in shaping policy on local cross-border movement. In interstate relations, it is responsible for cooperation on border security and the suppression of cross-border crime. Units of the People's Armed Police form the garrison of China's base in the Pamirs, near the Tajikistan–Afghanistan border, and conduct most of China's operations in the 'grey zone' in maritime areas disputed with other states.

The Central People's Government (CPG) comprises the entirety of the central state administration of the People's Republic of China. Its various departments operate under the supervision of the Central Committee bodies to which they are assigned. The most important institution is the **State Council**, the equivalent of a cabinet, whose Standing Committee and **Premier** are responsible for organising and directing the work of the CPG. The Premier, or a person designated by him (usually a Vice Premier), also leads negotiations in China's most important international relationships. The **Ministry of State Security** is the principal civilian intelligence agency. The **Ministry of Foreign Affairs** conducts day-to-day diplomatic activities and

implements foreign policy in accordance with directives issued by the CCP leadership. The Foreign Minister manages international relationships considered less important by the party leadership or provides technical support for more significant diplomatic engagements. The **Ministry of Public Security** is responsible for internal security, including counter-intelligence. It also monitors the activities of foreign diplomats and non-governmental organisations operating in China. The **Ministry of Commerce** oversees China's international economic relations and regulates foreign entities' access to the Chinese market.

The Ministry of National Defense does not command the PLA. Its primary role is to act as a liaison representing the Central Military Commission and the PLA in contacts with foreign armed forces. The **People's Bank of China**, which effectively operates as a government ministry rather than an independent central bank, is responsible for relations with other central banks and for China's participation in international organisations such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. **Xinhua News Agency**, which forms part of the central administration, conducts propaganda activities directly under the guidance of the **Central Committee's Propaganda Department.** Meanwhile, the **National Press and Publication Administration** and the **National Radio and Television Administration** ensure that all entities operating in China's media market comply with censorship guidelines (the PRC does not formally maintain a system of prior censorship) and advance propaganda objectives both domestically and internationally. The **State Administration of Foreign Exchange** and the **State Administration of Foreign Experts Affairs** are responsible for the technical aspects of international exchanges, including the recruitment of foreign experts. At the same time, they carry out intelligence-related tasks in support of broader state objectives.

The United Front (UF) is not an organisation but a CCP strategy for securing support and exercising influence over other organisations both within China and abroad. In practice, it consists of a complex, multi-layered network of organisations and influential individuals whose links to the CCP are usually concealed. Nevertheless, some of these individuals can be identified, including those responsible for aspects of the party's international 'work'. They serve as conduits for the CCP's overseas propaganda efforts. They collect information, identify potential agents or individuals sympathetic to the party and act as intermediaries in the management of other organisations. In doing so, they create an additional layer of separation that allows those organisations to distance themselves from the CCP and obscures the party's role in their activities. The **Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC)** is the PRC's principal advisory body, designed to create the appearance of a mechanism for public consultation. Its members include prominent figures from culture, sport and other fields, many of whom are not formally affiliated with the CCP. Their participation in the Conference is intended to give the impression that they influence the decision-making process, while also enhancing the institution's prestige and credibility in its interactions with foreign counterparts.

China News Service (CNS) originally focused on the Chinese diaspora but now conducts extensive propaganda activities at the international level. The **Center for China and Globalization** is a Beijing-based think tank officially registered in China. Its leadership claims that it is independent, that it has no links to the United Front and that its publications are not subject to censorship. However, the overall tenor of its output is consistent with the CCP's propaganda line. The **Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries** oversees the work of friendship associations with other countries, while the **Chinese Students and Scholars Association** coordinates the activities of organisations representing Chinese students and scholars abroad. Religious organisations in China – **the Buddhist Association of China, the Islamic Association of China, the Three-Self Patriotic Movement** (Protestant churches) and the **Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association** – are partly responsible for relations with their foreign counterparts. More importantly, however, they serve as evidence of the claim that freedom of religion exists in China. A similar role is played by the **National Ethnic Affairs Commission**, which not only oversees organisations representing China's ethnic minorities but also supervises contacts with related communities in neighbouring countries.

The **Institute for China-America Studies** is a Chinese think tank based in Washington, D.C., funded directly by the authorities of the People's Republic of China. Its tasks include direct participation in the US public debate on China and lobbying activities. The **China Council for the Promotion of International Trade** brings together industry and trade associations, as well as chambers of commerce, both in China and abroad, that maintain relations with Chinese entities. The **China International Culture Exchange Center** (CICEC) oversees the activities of organisations responsible for cultural and educational exchanges with foreign countries. The United Front also encompasses a vast number of government-organised non-governmental organisations **(GONGOs)** established by both central and local authorities. These entities, together with state-owned enterprises and universities, perform a wide range of functions, from propaganda and lobbying to information gathering and overt intelligence activities.

The National People's Congress (NPC) is a largely ceremonial parliament that meets once a year and plays no meaningful role in international policymaking. The **Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPCSC)** performs the functions of a legislature when the NPC is not in session, which is for most of the calendar year. During this period, it adopts legislation, ratifies international agreements and, together with the Supreme People's Court, may issue authoritative interpretations of laws. The Chairman of the NPCSC represents the NPC in international relations. The **Committee** of the National People's Congress and the **Overseas Chinese Affairs Committee** primarily serve as points of contact within their respective areas of responsibility. Their **role**, however, is largely limited to that of an intermediary.

* Both institutions are in fact the same entity, operating under the bureaucratic arrangement commonly described in China as 'one institution, two nameplates' (一个机构两块牌子).