

# Sharp Power: China's Solution to Maintaining the Legitimacy of its Non-Interference Policy

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## Introduction

Since the time of Mao Zedong, Chinese officials have promoted a foreign policy of non-interference. China has used its policy of non-interference to gain influence in Africa, South America, and Southeast Asia. China, as most states do, seeks power within the international community. Power is the “means

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of obtaining desired outcomes.”<sup>2</sup> In the past, to obtain power internationally, Chinese officials coupled non-interference with soft power mechanisms. Soft power is influence through attraction. However, with the onset of the 21st century the stance of the international community concerning non-interference shifted. Non-interference is no longer a sacrosanct policy which exclusively dictates interactions between states. There are instances in which the international community has recognized the limits of non-interference and sacrificed it in favor of protecting and promoting human rights. China, however, has held firm to its policy of non-interference. As such, it has been criticized by Western nations as favoring non-interference at the expense of human rights. China’s stance in opposition to the international community has meant that its influence globally has lessened. However, it has not renounced its policy of non-interference but neither has it been willing to accept diminished influence in the world. Therefore, China’s solution, to maintaining its policy of non-interference while strengthening its influence in the world, is sharp power. Sharp power, coined by the National Endowment for Democracy, describes the way in which authoritarian regimes, specifically China and Russia, perforate the media and political spheres of other nations to manipulate and influence public and governmental perceptions.<sup>3</sup>

Before outlining the sections of this paper, I will give a brief example of sharp power to contextualize what I will later be exploring within Australia and Argentina. One instance of the use of sharp power is the case of self-censorship by Cambridge University Press and Springer Nature, both major international publishing companies. In 2017, these two companies removed and censored content, at the behest of Chinese agencies, from subscribers in the People’s Republic of

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<sup>2</sup> Joseph Nye, “Soft Power and American Foreign Policy,” *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 119, No. 2 (2004).

<sup>3</sup> Christopher Walker and Jessica Ludwig, “From ‘Soft Power’ to ‘Sharp Power’: Rising Authoritarian Influence in the Democratic World,” Introduction to *Sharp Power: Rising Authoritarian Influence*, Washington, DC: National Endowment for Democracy, 2017.

China. After negative publicity, Cambridge University Press restored the content to its *China Quarterly* journal and *Journal of Asian Studies*. However, Springer Nature stood by its removal of 1,000 titles claiming that it was merely the price of doing business in China.<sup>4</sup> While the censorship in these circumstances only affected subscribers in China, it does show how the Chinese agents are able to influence independent international actors. William Callahan, professor of international relations at the London School of Economics and Political Science said that China's "increased power means that the debate has shifted from Westerners being concerned about censorship in China to all of us being concerned about how China is censoring what we're doing all around the world."<sup>5</sup> With this statement, Professor Callahan speaks to the importance of recognizing China's increased power within the world.

Firstly, in this paper I will analyze China's policy of non-interference in foreign affairs. Next, I will detail how the change within the international community has threatened China's influence in the world and thereby caused Chinese officials to develop new methods of influence. In the second part of this paper, I explain how China's use of sharp power has been manifested in the political spheres of Australia and Argentina. I have chosen Australia because the evidence of the Chinese Communist Party's influence in Australia's politics is undisputed and because it has caused much controversy within the country and internationally. Secondly, I have chosen Argentina because the CCP's influence there is in its beginning stages and therefore provides an interesting case to follow and monitor for future research. This paper does not address the numerous instances of sharp power used by the CCP in other nations of the world simply because the scope is too broad. I

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<sup>4</sup> Glenn Tiffert, "The Long Arm of China: Exporting Authoritarianism with Chinese Characteristics," Washington DC: Congressional-Executive Commission on China (December 13, 2017).

<sup>5</sup> Ellie Bothwell, "Chinese power 'may lead to global academic censorship crisis'," *Times Higher Education* (December 7, 2017).

argue that China has developed sharp power methods of influence because it seeks to bolster its power in the world, while still maintaining its policy of non-interference.

Numerous scholars argue that China's foreign policy is defined by certain events and key leaders from its past. These authors provide a clear picture of the development of the non-interference policy in the China of the past and in the China of the present. Aidoo and Hess outline the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence and their importance in China's development initiatives, particularly in Africa.<sup>6</sup> Mu emphasizes the ways in which China's years of national humiliation have re-enforced its policy of non-interference.<sup>7</sup> These authors also provide evidence for the apparent contradiction within China's policy of non-interference and how it is manifested in relations with the international community. Concerning soft power techniques used by the CCP, other scholars address the different tactics by which the CCP engages countries to influence international perspectives abroad. To speak to the importance of overseas Chinese in helping to propagate the CCP's foreign policy initiatives whether that be through direct or indirect influence.<sup>8</sup> Marie-Brady,<sup>9</sup> and de la Beaumelle,<sup>10</sup> identify the specific departments and groups in the CCP which are involved in foreign propaganda work. They also specify the ways in which their agendas come to fruition all over the world. Jian (Jay) Wang speaks to the recent change by the CCP in utilizing different forms of communication to influence the

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<sup>6</sup> Richard Aidoo and Steve Hess, "Non-Interference 2.0: China's Evolving Foreign Policy towards a Changing Africa," Vol. 44, no. 1 (2015): 107–139.

<sup>7</sup> Mu Ren, "An Analysis on the Contradiction Between China's Non-intervention Policy and Intervention Activities," *Ritsumeikan Annual Review of International Studies*, vol. 13 (2013): 127-155.

<sup>8</sup> James Jiann Hua To, *Qiaowu: Extra-Territorial Policies for the Overseas Chinese*, Leiden: Brill (2014).

<sup>9</sup> Anne Marie-Brady, "Magic Weapons: China's political influence activities under Xi Jinping," The Wilson Center (2015).

<sup>10</sup> Marcel Angliviél de la Beaumelle, "The United Front Work Department: 'Magic Weapon' at Home and Abroad," The Jamestown Foundation (July 2017).

outside world.<sup>11</sup> Edney discusses how the CCP's international power is linked to domestic political cohesion. He links the latter's success to the former through his many examples of the CCP's diverse approaches to propaganda.<sup>12</sup> Finally, Walker and Ludwig as well as Cardenal introduce the notion of sharp power. Walker and Ludwig provide a basic definition of this recently identified phenomenon in foreign relations,<sup>13</sup> while Cardenal traces the CCP's use of sharp power in Argentina.<sup>14</sup> Since sharp power was only coined as a term in December 2017, very few authors have tackled the way in which the CCP uses sharp power. None have yet linked China's foreign policy of non-interference to its current use of sharp power. To address this lacuna, this essay traces China's foreign policy rhetoric and action in the international community to discover the contradictory and clandestine nature of its current foreign policy, which uses non-interference as a guide to carry out increasing methods of sharp power to shape and sway international political policies.

### **A Brief History of China and Non-interference**

Non-interference is not a principle exclusive to the CCP. On the contrary, the notion of non-interference comes first and foremost from the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia. The first instance of China's stance on non-interference on paper came from article five of the Treaty of Friendship Alliance and Mutual Assistance between the People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union in February 1950. Under the treaty, China and the USSR agreed to assist each other in the event of a future Japanese invasion in their territories. Article five stipulates that

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<sup>11</sup> Jian Wang, "Introduction" to *China's Search of Soft Power in Soft Power in China: Public Diplomacy through Communication*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan (2011).

<sup>12</sup> Kingsley Edney, *The Globalization of Chinese Propaganda: International Power and Domestic Political Cohesion*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan (2014).

<sup>13</sup> Walker and Ludwig, "From 'Soft Power' to 'Sharp Power.'"

<sup>14</sup> Juan Pablo Cardenal, "Navigating Political Change in Argentina," Ch. 2 in *Sharp Power: Rising Authoritarian Influence*. Washington, DC: National Endowment for Democracy (2017).

each party will cooperate economically in the spirit of “mutual respect for the national sovereignty and territorial integrity and non-interference in the internal affairs of the contracting parties.”<sup>15</sup> The principle of non-interference was later expanded in a joint statement between the People’s Republic of China and India in 1954. It concerned border disputes between the countries. Within the document, China laid out the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. These principles would guide all future bilateral treaties and agreements between China and its partners in the world. The five principles include: non-interference, mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, equality and mutual benefit, mutual non-aggression, and peaceful coexistence.<sup>16</sup> According to the CCP, non-interference in internal affairs means not partaking or influencing a country in regard to “the overall situation of the people’s livelihood, such as political system, security arrangement and governance, and leadership selection.”<sup>17</sup> Non-interference has guided China’s actions, or lack thereof, in international affairs up to the present day.

While the UN and China both held the principle of non-intervention as sacrosanct in the years after the adoption of the UN Charter, the UN has sacrificed it in cases when humanitarian crises have called for greater leniency. There is a growing “transition from a culture of sovereign impunity to a culture of national and international accountability” in the UN.<sup>18</sup> In essence, there has been a shift from absolute protection of national sovereignty to a push for international accountability when a nation fails to protect its people. This is manifested in the ways in which the UN tries to balance the instances necessitating a breach of national sovereignty with the sovereign rights of the state; for example, the creation of the International Criminal Court, the non-binding Responsibility to

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<sup>15</sup> CIA, “The Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance Between the People’s Republic of China and the Soviet Union.” Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency (February 1950).

<sup>16</sup> Aidoo and Hess, “Non-Interference 2.0.”

<sup>17</sup> Yizhou Wang, *Creative Involvement: The Evolution of China’s Global Role*. London: Routledge, 2017.

<sup>18</sup> Gareth Evans and Mohamed Sahnoun, “Responsibility to Protect,” International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, Ottawa: International Development Research Center, 2001.

Protect commitment, the Convention on the Protection and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, and the growing use of UN peacekeeping troops in the world. Consider the Responsibility to Protect, a non-binding political commitment by UN members.<sup>19</sup> With its endorsement in 2005, UN members agreed to react to a state's inability or unwillingness to stop widespread violations of human rights, "by imposing sanctions, initiating international prosecutions and, in extreme cases, intervening with military force."<sup>20</sup> The Responsibility to Protect report states that "it is only when national systems of justice either cannot or will not act to judge crimes against humanity that universal jurisdiction and other international options should come into play."<sup>21</sup> In essence, UN member states acknowledge that there exist circumstances, albeit few, in which international action is necessary to stop intrastate atrocities. While the international community is more willing to consider action and possibly intervention in the case of humanitarian crises, it does not follow that it accepts intervention. Certainly, military intervention is the last resort and for the most part such a sentiment is shared by most states. Therefore, the steps taken by the UN to outline criteria for action, when a state cannot or will not protect its people, are not justifications for intervention. Rather, these steps are designed to protect vulnerable people within nations from grave human rights abuses perpetuated by their own governments. The principles of national sovereignty and non-interference will continue to be guiding principles of the international community in part because they are at the foundation of modern international relations theory and practice and in part because they assist in maintaining international stability and peace.

Compared to the United Nations, Chinese officials have been firmer in maintaining their principle of non-interference. In fact, China's stance on non-interference has remained relatively unchanged throughout its history. The century of humiliation at the hands of international aggressors has shaped China's foreign policy doctrine. This period, from 1839 to

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<sup>19</sup> Evans and Sahnoun, "Reprehensibility to Protect."

<sup>20</sup> Sarah Teitt, "The Responsibility to Protect and China's Peacekeeping Policy," *International Peacekeeping*, vol. 18, no. 33 (2011): 298-312.

<sup>21</sup> Evans and Sahnoun, "Responsibility to Protect."

1949, was a time in which imperialist powers from the West and Japan sought to control China. During the Mao Zedong era, Chinese rulers saw the principle of non-intervention as a safeguard against colonial and imperialistic agendas consistently imposed upon the country from the outside world. The struggle for sovereignty and state independence became the dominant diplomatic strategy for China.<sup>22</sup> Mao cast China as a victim of international aggression and so used China's plight to bolster nationalistic fervor.<sup>23</sup> In this way, non-interference became a vital part of China's identity. In 1949, Mao Zedong said at the First Plenary Session of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, "Ours will no longer be a nation subject to insult and humiliation. We have stood up."<sup>24</sup> Since then, while China no longer presents itself as a victim, the basic principle has been kept alive and used to justify its distrust of the international community and its overall stance on sovereignty.<sup>25</sup>

In speeches and discussions at the UN, Chinese officials have maintained sovereignty and non-interference as firm principles. For instance, Chinese representative Li Yongsheng, stressed the importance of sovereignty at the 8132nd meeting of the UN Security Council in 2017. In his statement, he made it clear that despite international consensus to intervene in the domestic affairs of Sudan, the CCP first and foremost supported sovereignty: "China believes that the international community should fully respect the... sovereignty of the Sudan."<sup>26</sup> Chinese officials argue that China has the right, as a permanent UN Security Council member, "to safeguard its [state sovereignty] legitimacy, justice, and effectiveness in the

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<sup>22</sup> Ren, "An Analysis on the Contradiction."

<sup>23</sup> Allen Carlson, *Unifying China, integrating with the World: Securing Chinese Sovereignty in the Reform Era*, Stanford University Press, 2005.

<sup>24</sup> Mao Zedong, "Opening address at the First Plenary Session of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference," September 21, 1949, Beijing, China, *Marxists.org*.

<sup>25</sup> Ruben Gonzalez-Vicente, "The Limits to China's Non-Interference Foreign Policy: pro-State Interventionism and the Rescaling of Economic Governance," *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 69, no. 2 (2015): 205–223.

<sup>26</sup> UNSC, "United Nations Security Council 8132nd meeting," United Nations Security Council Report (December 2017).

international community.”<sup>27</sup> In addition, China’s century of humiliation has cultivated the commonly held belief in China that intervention is synonymous with immorality.<sup>28</sup> This period in history has contributed to China’s strong stance on non-interference. Western powers preying upon weaker powers is characteristic of Western imperialism and Chinese officials have consistently directed policy in order to separate themselves from the aggressive, interventionist stance of the Western world, most notably that of the USA. In fact, at the nineteenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China, in October 2017, Xi Jinping stated that China will “oppose acts that...interfere in the internal affairs of others as well as the practice of the strong bullying the weak.”<sup>29</sup> In addition, defense of sovereignty has become a way in which China can separate its domestic and foreign policies. Chinese officials label international criticism of China’s internal affairs as interference, and this stance is legitimized by its policy of non-interference. Therefore, the emphasis on sovereignty provides a shield behind which the CCP does not experience the need to justify its internal affairs to the international community.

While non-interference has garnered domestic support in China, it has also been attractive to many developing nations, because it serves as an alternative to Western conditional investment. The Beijing Consensus, an informal term for the political and economic policies of the People’s Republic of China being replicated abroad, does not imply withholding investment or trade partnerships from nations which lack democratic political governance. China’s commitment to non-interference has facilitated the proliferation of Chinese business ventures and influence in less developed nations all over the world. Dr. Jorge Malena, the director of Contemporary Chinese studies at the Universidad del Salvador, echoes the sentiments of many within his country when he explains that the Chinese

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<sup>27</sup> Wang, *Creative Involvement*.

<sup>28</sup> Ren, “An Analysis on the Contradiction.”

<sup>29</sup> Jinping Xi, “Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era,” Speech at the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China. Beijing, China (October 18, 2017).

model is “an alternative superior to the Western model in cultural, political and economic matters.”<sup>30</sup> Thereby, non-interference, by virtue of itself, has allowed China to enter the economic markets of many nations in Africa and Latin America. This is because states prefer signing onto non-conditional trade and investment deals with China rather than agreements with nations of the West laden with conditionalities. China’s increased involvement in these regions places it in the perfect position to exert present and future influence.

As China under the leadership of the CCP continues to do business with Africa, South America, and Southeast Asia, it also seeks to become a respected and responsible power in the world. To gain this status, China needs to bolster its influence. Domestically, Chinese officials see China as a responsible power as evidence by Xi Jinping’s speech at the 19th National Congress in 2017: “China will continue to play its part as a major and responsible country.”<sup>31</sup> However, internationally, many nations are yet to consider China a responsible nation because of China’s hesitancy to alter its policy of non-interference, especially when instances of humanitarian crises call for the safeguarding of human rights over national sovereignty. Due to the changing perspective on non-interference within the international community, China’s soft power efforts have been less effective. Chinese officials, therefore, have the task of bolstering China’s image through greater influence within the world. However, by virtue of non-interference, Chinese officials must tread carefully in seeking influence because such overt efforts would contradict China’s policy of non-interference. Therein lies the task of Chinese officials and China’s foreign propaganda departments—to increase China’s influence in the world without undermining its policy of non-interference. Therefore, to appear faithful to its policy, China has within the last fifteen years used silent mechanisms of intervention to influence nations within the

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<sup>30</sup> Andrés Schelp and Andrés Saravia, “The role of Chinese academics in the decision-making process,” Buenos Aires: Consejo Argentino para las Relaciones Internacionales (May 2016).

<sup>31</sup> Xi, “Secure a Decisive Victory.”

international community.<sup>32</sup> These silent mechanisms of intervention have become known as sharp power.

### Evolution from Soft Power to Sharp Power in China

China's foreign policy evolution from employing soft power to sharp power has been one of seamless transition. In 2007, President Hu Jintao gave an important address at the 17th annual Party of the Congress. In his speech, he accepted Joseph Nye's term of soft power, stressing the importance of increasing China's soft power efforts abroad.<sup>33</sup> His speech signaled the beginning of a new phase of foreign policy, emphasizing Chinese propaganda on a larger scale. Before proceeding, it is important to contextualize soft power, a term coined by Joseph Nye in 1990.<sup>34</sup> Nye claims that with the "growing erosion of state sovereignty, the economic interdependence of states, creation of new communication channels and technologies, and the importance of non-state actors, the effectiveness of hard power has decreased."<sup>35</sup> Hard power is the use of coercive, often military force by a state against another state for some intended outcome, Soft power on the other hand, which Nye argues is more apparent and applicable in post-World War Two international relations, is persuasion in the form of values or cultural mechanisms.

According to Nye, a state relies in part on the attractiveness of its culture and values to influence or change perceptions in other states.<sup>36</sup> He has been critical of both the Chinese and Russian manifestations of soft power. His definition of soft power centers on the efforts of civil society, the private sector, and individuals as the main proponents. The

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<sup>32</sup> Qiao, Shitong, "Whither China's Non-Interference Principle?" Tallinn, Estonia: European Society of International Law, Fourth Research Forum, 2011.

<sup>33</sup> Hu Jintao, "Hold High the Great Banner of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Strive for New Victories in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All," Report to the 17th Party Congress (15 October 2007).

<sup>34</sup> Joseph Nye, *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*, New York: Basic Books (1990).

<sup>35</sup> Nye, "Soft Power and American Foreign Policy."

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

CCP's use of soft power mechanisms are directly overseen and promoted by government agencies, most notable of which is the State Council Information Office.<sup>37</sup> In 2007, Hu Jintao's China began to invest in China's broader definition of soft power mechanisms to strengthen its national power. However, as specified by Nye, the Chinese method of promoting soft power is exclusively controlled by the government. When Xi Jinping took over as general secretary of the Chinese Communist Party in 2012, he broadened further China's use of international propaganda and soft power. Xi, unlike Jintao, has sought not only to enhance China's national power, but also to promote China as a new global power. It is only in the era of Xi that the CCP has overtly espoused its desire to be a strong global power, something which Hu never publicly asserted.

Wang stresses that the credibility of China's international soft power efforts are undermined by the lack of freedom enjoyed by its domestic citizenry.<sup>38</sup> This is similar to Nye's acknowledgement of the lack of soft power coming from the private sector. Zhao and Tiao claim that China's soft power efforts to increase its international influence are unlikely to succeed if the CCP does not get rid of its "centrally-supplied ideas and societal values and entrainment" and focus upon the trends being created at the grassroots levels.<sup>39</sup> China's domestic control is linked to its policy of non-interference because non-interference means that outside nations have little claim to intervene in the domestic affairs of China. Not only has the international community's move away from non-interference diminished China's influence in the world but domestic restrictions within China have also caused many states to question China's claim of being a major responsible power. Thereby, China's soft power efforts have become less effective because nations are unable to reconcile a highly controlled and censored society with the qualities of a responsible power.

When Xi Jinping came to power, he sought to increase China's power internationally. However, this caused a dilemma

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<sup>37</sup> Joseph Nye, "The Limits of Chinese Soft Power," Prague: Project Syndicate (July 2015).

<sup>38</sup> Wang, *Creative Involvement*.

<sup>39</sup> Zhao Litao and Tiao Soon, "China's Cultural Rise: Visions and Challenges," *China: An International Journal* (2007).

for Chinese officials. Either they had to accept the reality that influencing an international audience to perceive China positively was lessened by China's domestic policies, or they had to allow for greater transparency in China's domestic sphere. China has accepted neither outcome. Instead, Chinese officials have taken steps to ensure control domestically while seeking to legitimize China's voice internationally. However, the actions of Chinese officials in seeking influence cannot be allowed to be perceived by the international community as a violation of China's long policy of non-interference. Therefore, these actions have taken shape in the form of sharp power. The intended and often actual result is that nations deal favorably with China in terms of trade, diplomatic favors, international support and the like. China's use of sharp power allows it to covertly shape public and governmental perceptions for greater influence. China need not focus on enhancing the credibility of its domestic media when its use of sharp power hides its role in shaping international media and politics. Its use of sharp power also allows it to appear as though independent international actors support its policies. It is important to note, however, that not every attempt by the CCP to change global perceptions are mechanisms of sharp power. For instance, China employs soft power when it helps sponsor a Chinese New Year's celebration in Argentina and invites political leaders to attend. This and many other examples of soft power by China are legitimate and should be welcomed by other nations. However, when an 'independent' businessman, actually an affiliate of the CCP, bribes a politician into supporting its stance in the South China Sea, then that is a form of sharp power.<sup>40</sup> In the previous instance, there is no visible or direct link from the independent businessman to the CCP, and so information is manipulated.

Chinese officials use sharp power mechanisms for three reasons. Firstly, Chinese officials use sharp power to safeguard domestic stability. Domestic stability is highly important to the CCP especially with its large population of 1.3 billion people. Dissidents within only serve to undermine its power and threaten China's growth and stability. It is an undisputed fact

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<sup>40</sup> Nick McKenzie and Richard Baker, "China's Operations in Australia: Payments, Power, and our Politicians," *The Sydney Morning Herald* (2017).

that the CCP has extensive control over the flow of ideas within China, as reflected by the recent statistical categorization of China as a ‘not free’ nation, or a score of 14/100 (lower numbers indicating greater suppression of freedom by the state) by Freedom House.<sup>41</sup> The report details how the CCP has tightened its control on media, online speech, religious groups, and civil society associations within the country. However, Chinese citizens are not completely barred from communicating with the international community or traveling abroad, where they are likely to encounter negative opinions of CCP rule. Dialogues contrary to CCP official propaganda have the potential to threaten the legitimacy of the CCP. If, however, the CCP is able to influence and effect control of dialogues abroad, it is better able to ensure domestic approval and thereby domestic stability. In addition, China does not need to focus on enhancing the credibility of its domestic media to ensure the credibility of its international media if so-called independents, who are actually backed by the CCP, support its rule. Clandestine investments and negotiations with international media organizations and governmental officials by Chinese officials are key to China becoming more powerful globally.

Secondly, it uses sharp power to enhance the way the international community views it, ultimately hoping to be viewed as a prosperous and responsible nation. It uses methods of indirect association with individuals and organizations in the international community to legitimize its role and efforts in the world.

Lastly, the CCP seeks to silence negative views of China through covert influence. Not only does China seek to appear benevolent through the eyes of the international community, it also seeks to squash potentially harmful views of itself coming from the West. Negative portrayals of the CCP within media and governmental spheres threaten China’s rise to becoming a major responsible power. As astutely stated by Joseph Nye, “a strong narrative is a source of power.”<sup>42</sup> Certainly, there are many other factors, economic prowess

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<sup>41</sup> Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2018*, New York and Washington, DC: Freedom House (2018).

<sup>42</sup> Joseph Nye, “China’s soft and sharp power,” Prague: Project Syndicate (January 4, 2018).

among them, which must be taken into account when defining a major global power. However, for China to become a leading responsible power in this world it must focus primarily upon its image, as it has already attained economic legitimacy. Therefore, if China is able to increase the dissemination of its own narrative to the international community, it can very easily become a major responsible power. Lessening the competing stories surrounding its initiatives and policies will go a long way to ensure this future success.

## **Argument**

Sharp power is the new method used by Chinese officials to influence perspectives abroad while preventing contradictions to its non-interference policy. It maintains this policy more as a warning to the international community to stay out of its internal affairs than as a pillar of its foreign policy. The question then becomes, why does the CCP hold onto this policy and create new methods of influence, in the form of sharp power, when it could instead influence more overtly? There exist two possible reasons for China's adherence to its policy of non-interference.

Firstly, the principle of non-interference is the major foundation for its relations with developing nations. Non-interference distinguishes the Beijing model from the Western model of international investment and development. Developing nations are more likely to deal with China because China forms bilateral partnerships as opposed to conditional and top-down deals offered by many Western nations. Thereby, non-interference bolsters the view that China is a reliable bilateral partner. Sacrificing this policy would only undermine its international development efforts.

Secondly, it legitimizes China's claim to attaining the position of a responsible major power. It is able to use sharp power techniques without much fear of international condemnation, at least initially, because its non-interference policy negates the possibility that it would engage in other nations affairs. It silences those claiming Chinese interference in their states by swiftly reminding the world of its policy of non-interference. In addition, if China is consistently viewed as

a nation which does not force itself into the domestic affairs of other nations, then it is more likely to be seen as a peaceful and non-imperialistic power, in direct contrast to the image of the United States.

It is important, however, to not over-react in the face of China's changing use from soft power into sharp power. Nations should not restrict all of China's efforts to spread influence in their countries, because soft power techniques are beneficial in maintaining peace. Cultural exchanges, festivals, language courses, *et cetera*. are important ways for open dialogue to take place between China and other nations. The international community would be doing itself and China a disservice by cutting off every form of influence from China. In fact, in today's globalized society it is impossible to prevent China from influencing other nations' societies. However, governments and leaders must be more aware of the changing methods in China's soft power mechanisms. They must consider whether a certain form of influence is a tactic of soft power or more a method of sharp power. Openness and transparency in media and political spheres are the tools necessary to identify methods of sharp power. In this way, as Nye mentions, democracies have the advantage.<sup>43</sup> Greater access to information will serve to expose instances in which the CCP manipulates information and pushes its policy agenda in a clandestine manner as opposed to those instances of genuine soft power.

### **Chinese Communist Party's Methods of Sharp Power**

China perforates political spheres to promote policy outcomes favorable to itself. China benefits from the openness of the International community, specifically the openness found in many emerging democracies. China uses the democratic platforms of other countries, in which diverse narratives and views are not restricted, to influence policy. Its membership in international organizations, such as the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization allow Chinese officials to access markets and

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<sup>43</sup> Nye, "China's soft and sharp power."

people while at the same time restricting and monitor the flow of information domestically. China participates in the international community but creates its own set of rules with which to sway outcomes. Granted, other nations do the same, but the methods which China is able to use in influencing narratives is distinct. These methods being sharp power. In addition, unlike the vast majority of nations in the international community, China has a very controlled domestic society. Therefore, the eagerness of Chinese officials to engage in and influence the domestic affairs of other nations is contrary to the way in which it restricts other nations from influencing its domestic sphere.

China's influence in the political spheres of other nations begins with the oversight committee known as the CCP Central Office of Propaganda (OFP), more broadly known as the State Council Information Office (SCIO).<sup>44</sup> The SCIO oversees the work of the CCP's international propaganda organization known as the United Front Work Department (UFWD). The UFWD plays an essential part in promoting the agenda of the CCP. It serves to reach out and guide key individuals and groups within and outside of China to "accept CCP rule, endorse its legitimacy, and help achieve key party aims."<sup>45</sup> The UFWD is made up of offices, bureaus, and subordinate units. The nine bureaus specialize in a particular geographical location or subject area abroad. Xi Jinping himself oversees the Leading Small Group of the United Front Work Department, the highest level of UFWD work. The UFWD extends its influence via overseas Chinese nationals and influential leaders in business and politics, who have become known as 'friends of China,' and encourages them to promote CCP agendas and policies within their own countries.

The work of the UFWD has been revitalized under Xi Jinping.<sup>46</sup> In September 2014, at the 65th birthday of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, Xi Jinping gave a speech stressing the growing importance of the work of the UFWD. He referred to the organization's work as a "magic

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<sup>44</sup> Marie-Brady, "Magic Weapons."

<sup>45</sup> Mercy Kuo, "China's United Front Work: Propaganda as Policy," *The Diplomat* (February 2018).

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

weapon” for the rejuvenation of China. At that same conference a year later, Xi Jinping spoke about the significant changes in China’s situation and mission, saying “the larger the change, the more the United Front under the ‘new situation’ needs to be developed, the more the United Front work needs to be carried out.” Lastly, he equated the work of the UFWD to that of the CCP by saying, “united front work is party work.”<sup>47</sup> Xi has substantially increased the attention and resources given to the UFWD as its work is now central to the aims of the CCP. Precise figures for the amount of money invested in foreign propaganda work are difficult to come by, however, international reports have put estimates at around \$7 billion to \$10 billion for the year of 2015.<sup>48</sup> However, these figures are only representative of the money spent on soft power efforts abroad. They do not account for the money invested in sharp power activities. In comparison, the United States spent around \$666 million on soft power efforts in 2015.<sup>49</sup> While the United States relies more on its allure through cultural mechanisms, it still spends conservatively six billion three hundred and thirty-four million dollars less on public diplomacy than China. Despite clear knowledge of the exact amount of money spent by the CCP on foreign propaganda efforts, it is clear the CCP is investing heavily in the development of foreign propaganda, more so than any other country in the world.

One of the many ways in which CCP officials increase China’s influence in the world arena is through Chinese nationals and ‘friends’ of China. These individuals help propagate narratives favorable to the CCP. Chinese nationals, which have emigrated from China in the last 30 years, are of particular interest to the CCP’s goal of promoting China abroad. Many within this group, which in 2015 was around 10 million people, have a sense of loyalty to the CCP and therefore provide an efficient way for it to influence people and leaders in other countries.<sup>50</sup> One instance of the CCP actively supporting Chinese nationals in influencing relations abroad is the speech made by politburo member Wang Zhaoguo in 2009

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<sup>47</sup> Xi Jinping as quoted in de la Beaumelle, 2017.

<sup>48</sup> Marie-Brady, “Magic Weapons.”

<sup>49</sup> Nye, “The Limits of Chinese Soft Power.”

<sup>50</sup> Marie-Brady, “Magic Weapons.”

at the Eighth National Congress on Returned Overseas Chinese. He urged his audience of overseas Chinese to “unite closely with the CCP in advancing China’s national interests under the banner of socialism with Chinese characteristics.”<sup>51</sup>

The CCP does not apply overt force upon Chinese nationals, rather it prefers to ‘guide’ in lieu of leading. It encourages the overseas Chinese communities to think of their roles abroad as service to the Motherland but also as a mutually beneficial arrangement, whereby positive outcomes are assured their communities while at the same time the CCP is able to promote its agenda internationally. The goal is to have overseas Chinese assist the CCP by creating a “friendly environment in which Beijing can pursue its international interests, moderate anti-CCP activity, and promote pro-CCP goals.”<sup>52</sup> In some cases, overseas Chinese have been known to participate in espionage activity at the behest of the CCP. For instance, in 2007 the Royal Dutch Shell company uncovered a “special interest group” of Chinese nationals gathering after work hours. These Chinese nationals were encouraged by the CCP to obtain confidential pricing information for Royal Dutch Shell’s operations in Africa. According to the source, these individuals were compelled to help for what they claimed was the “good of the Motherland.”<sup>53</sup> Espionage is still a tool employed by the CCP, but it is lessening in importance as sharp power methods are becoming more prevalent. The ultimate goal for engaging overseas Chinese nationals is that they will inadvertently and even proactively engage in activities and discussions which promote the CCP’s foreign policy goals.<sup>54</sup> Therefore, these Chinese nationals as well as ‘friends of China’ provide a necessary tie between the CCP and the outside world.

The efforts of the UFDW in conjunction with the CCP may not sound so dis-similar to the actions of other nations. However, the ways in which the UFDW works to influence, subvert, and manipulate political, media, and academic spheres in countries across the globe, in particularly that of New

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<sup>51</sup> To, *Qiaowu*.

<sup>52</sup> To, *Qiaowu*, 39.

<sup>53</sup> James Rossiter, “Chinese hackers target rolls-royce and shell,” *The Press* (December 2007).

<sup>54</sup> Marie-Brady, “Magic Weapons.”

Zealand, Australia, Germany, and Argentina, is unique as China's influence is growing. Certain efforts of the UFWD undermine the sovereignty and governance of countries and should demand further attention.

### **Evidence of Sharp Power in Australia and Argentina**

The Australia political system had been perforated by Chinese influence. In June 2017, Duncan Lewis, head of Australia's Security Investigation Organization (ASIO) warned: "Espionage and foreign interference are occurring here [Australia] on an unprecedented scale, with the potential to cause serious harm to this nation's sovereignty, its security, and . . . the integrity of our political system."<sup>55</sup> Polling undertaken in 2017 showed that 64% of Australians polled held a favorable view of China, up from 57% two years prior.<sup>56</sup> China's sharp power investments would appear to have paid off, at least initially. Since 2000, nearly 80% of foreign donations made to political parties in Australia were linked to China.<sup>57</sup> Certain key political and well-connected Chinese nationals, living in Australia, have through these political donations and favors influenced actors and have served to undermine the sovereignty of Australia's political system.

In 2012, Huang Xiangmo, a Chinese businessman with close connections to the CPP, began donating money to both the Liberal and Labor parties of Australia and since then has donated upwards of \$2,692,960. He began to ask for favors in 2013 in return for his donations. For instance, when in late 2012 he donated \$500,000 to the Labor Party, he implicitly requested that his friend Ernest Wong, a member of the Australian Chinese Council for the Promotion of Peaceful Reunification of China, be placed in the vacant seat in Australia's upper house.<sup>58</sup> This, among

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<sup>55</sup> June Teufel Dreyer, "A Weapon Without War: China's United Front Strategy," *South Asia Journal* (February 6, 2018).

<sup>56</sup> Margaret Vice, "In global popularity contest, U.S. and China – not Russia – vie for first," Washington, DC: Pew Research Center (August 2017).

<sup>57</sup> Joshua Kurlantzick, "Australia, New Zealand Face China's Influence," New York: Council on Foreign Relations (2017).

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

other requests, was accepted. Australian Labor Party Senator Sam Dastyari publicly supported Huang's bid for Australian citizenship and had attempted to secure a \$400,000 donation to the party from Huang. However, when Dastyari spoke in support of China's claims to the South China Sea in 2017, he was forced to step down as labor secretary after the scandal of his financial ties with Huang came to light

Another noteworthy case of the CCP's influence in Australian politics is that of Sheri Yan, former chief executive of the Global Sustainability Foundation. In October 2015, the Australian Security Intelligence Organization, ASIO, raided the apartment of Roger Uren and Sheri Yen.<sup>59</sup> It soon came to light, that Mrs. Yan had paid kickbacks to the president of the UN General Assembly, John Ashe. In return Ashe provided Yan with diplomatic appointments. As an affiliate of the CCP she was able to promote China's agendas through these appointments. Prosecutors estimate that General Assembly president Ashe took over \$1.3 million in bribes from Chinese businessmen, in exchange for Ashe promoting their interests at the UN. \$800,000 worth of those bribes were paid to Ashe through Yan's foundation, when she served as the liaison between Ashe and the Chinese businesspeople.<sup>60</sup> In light of these developments surrounding the CCP's influence in the political system of Australia, Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull and his government have passed legislation which, among other things, bans donations from foreign bank accounts, non-citizens, and foreign entities to Australian political parties and candidates.<sup>61</sup>

Another step taken by Australia along with India, Japan, and the United States is the the revival of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, more commonly known as the Quad, initiated in 2007 and dissolved in 2010, in part because of the negative response from China. This time around Australia is undeterred by the reaction of China. It is

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<sup>59</sup> McKenzie and Baker, "China's Operations in Australia."

<sup>60</sup> Nate Raymond, "N.Y. Foundation's ex-chief gets 20 months in prison in U.N. bribery case," *Reuters* (July 29, 2016).

<sup>61</sup> Katharine Murphy, "Coalition to ban foreign donations to political parties and activist groups," *The Guardian* (December 5, 2017).

taking a more cautious approach because of its recent encounter with China and its use of sharp power in the Australian political system. As mentioned in the Foreign Policy White Papers, Australia seeks to diversify its trade and investment portfolio, which this alliance would offer, because it no longer sees reason in remaining so dependent on China.<sup>62</sup>

One of the defining features of sharp power influence is the use of deception and the manipulation of information to change narratives. Through trips to China and CCP supported political organizations, the CCP has accomplished this aim of censoring certain information to ensure that an overall positive image of itself is propagated to important visitors. One such example of the direct impact that this tactic has on the Argentinian population is that of the intersection of people-to-people diplomacy and think tank sponsorship. China has begun to develop its relations with think tanks in Argentina as well as internationally.<sup>63</sup> The CCP uses think tanks to help disseminate views favorable to the CCP. Two notable think tanks in Argentina which have good relations with the CCP are the Argentine Council for International Relations (CARI) and the Center for the Implementation of Public Policies for Equity and Growth (CIPPEC). Members of the CARI think tank view China not as an authoritarian regime but instead as a consultive democracy.<sup>64</sup> The term consultive democracy was coined by Xi Jinping in 2014 to describe China's form of governing. It allows for the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference members, comprised of communist and non-communist affiliated politicians, to take part in the critique of party policies.<sup>65</sup> In essence, it is a way for only a small group of Chinese elites to provide feedback. However, the views of these individuals are almost always in-line with the

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<sup>62</sup> Grant Wyeth, "Why Has Australia Shifted Back to the Quad?" *The Diplomat* (November 16, 2017).

<sup>63</sup> Jérôme Doyon, "A Hundred Think Tanks Bloom in China," Berlin: European Council on Foreign Relations (August 2016).

<sup>64</sup> Cardenal, 2017.

<sup>65</sup> Li Changyu, "Consultative Democracy China's latest political buzzword," *China Global Times* (March 2015).

party ideology. It is worth noting that while leaders from Western countries see China as authoritarian, certain Argentinian leaders see China as a consultive democracy.

Another case of the CCP's indirect influence in Argentina is that of Gustavo Giradom. Giradon has been quoted as favoring China's position in the South China Sea dispute. He stated that the actions of the Philippines to involve the court of arbitration is "an inappropriate approach" to solving the problem, adding that "it is reasonable that China does not accept the arbitration."<sup>66</sup> He portrays a consistently positive view of China and its policy initiatives when informing Argentinian leaders and people.<sup>67</sup> Since 2015, he has been quoted in a number of articles from *Xinhua News* as well as the *People's Daily*, online news sources directly under the control of the CCP.<sup>68</sup> Both News sources use Gustavo Girado as a mouthpiece, directed at English, Spanish, and Chinese audiences, for legitimizing CCP policies. Therefore, Girado is an example of how the CCP uses 'friends of China' to propagate and advocate on its behalf within other countries. However, since Girado is not directly affiliated with the CCP he provides independent legitimacy to the CCP which someone such as Huang from Australia cannot. While these efforts may on the surface seem an extension of effective diplomatic policy by China, there exists an underlining concern: that China's soft power efforts are moving into the territory of sharp power. Manipulation of information and one-sided narratives from the CCP are influencing political and academic elites in Argentina. Argentinian politics have not reached the same stage of CCP influence as that of Australia, however, with time Argentina's relationship with China may sour to a similar fate.

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<sup>66</sup> Yao Jianing, "Argentina expert: Reasonable for China not to accept South China Sea arbitration," *China Military News* (June 2016).

<sup>67</sup> Carlos Liascovich, "Pymes, claves para exportar a China," *Clarín* (January 2016).

<sup>68</sup> Marie-Brady, "Magic Weapons."

## China's Response to Sharp Power Allegations

China has denounced the very idea that it is manipulating public and political perceptions abroad. With regard to Australia, criticism of how Australia has handled the situation has been quite apparent from Chinese media. In the *Global Times*, a CCP affiliated online news source, an op-ed was published in December 2017 which called the claims of China's interference in Australian politics as "disgraceful" and "symptoms of McCarthyism."<sup>69</sup> By equating the accusations to those of McCarthyism, the *Global Times* is attempting to erode the credibility of Australian news. The initial attempts by the Chinese media are to undermine Australian accusers while at the same time asserting China as a peaceful and non-interfering nation. After the revelation of the CCP's influence in Australia, Nick Bisley, Professor of International Relations at La Trobe University, went to China for an academic conference. He spent a week in China in December 2017 speaking with Chinese scholars, analysts, and commentators at an academic conference hosted by the CCP. At the conference, he noted that Chinese elites had reactions ranging from "puzzlement to outright hostility" for Australia's reaction towards China.<sup>70</sup> Bisley commented that many of the individuals had studied in Australia, sent their children there, and generally had a good disposition toward Australia. However, many were discouraged by the sinister tone and sensationalizing the situation by Australian media. However, Bisley made a point of noting that at these types of conferences, hosted by the CCP, Chinese elites must show they are on the same page as Xi Jinping.<sup>71</sup> Therefore, it is possible these individuals were constricted from expressing their full opinions. However, it is clear that CCP proponents are discouraged by Australia's portrayal of China's policies

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<sup>69</sup> *Global Times*, "West Suspicion of China infiltration absurd," *Global Times* (December 12, 2017).

<sup>70</sup> Nick Bisley, "Mistrust of Australia is growing in China," *The Interpreter* (December 4, 2017).

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

abroad.

Australia's steps to curb CCP influence in their political system have affected Chinese citizens living in China, as evidenced by a 2017 poll by the Chinese state-owned news portal *huanqiu.com* rating Australia as the least friendly country towards China. The poll asked Chinese citizens to choose the least friendly country to China and Australia received 60% of the votes or 8,589 votes.<sup>72</sup> The CCP disapproval of Australia's reaction is now manifest in the population of China who perceive Australia as being less friendly to China and Chinese citizens. China's state media has advised students not to enroll in Australian higher education and PRC delegations have cancelled visits to Australia.<sup>73</sup> As a result, less Chinese citizens are sending their children to colleges in Australia, preferring to send their children to America or Europe instead.

Other Chinese scholars have attempted to clarify the CCP's new role of increasingly clandestine soft power. According to senior propaganda official Hu Xiaohan, "The struggle for and against infiltration in the ideological sphere has become intense and complex. Hostile forces have whipped up successive waves of public opinion against China, and the international struggle for public opinion grows fiercer by the day."<sup>74</sup> Indeed, in Australia Chinese-Australians are experiencing the most criticism. Many Chinese-Australians who speak with a moderate or positive view of China are labelled as "CCP sympathizers", "Beijing trolls", and "panda huggers." These individuals are reluctant to share their opinions publicly because of the sentiments expressed by Australians against them. On the other side, Chinese-Australians who oppose the way the CCP has been involved in Australia are hesitant to speak publicly because they fear retaliation from the CCP.<sup>75</sup> As a result, Chinese-Australians are experiencing most of the negative

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<sup>72</sup> Kayla Wong, "Australia voted as the least friendly country to China in 2017 by Chinese netizens," *MotherShip* (January 2018).

<sup>73</sup> Jieh-Yung Lo, "Just because I have a moderate view on China doesn't make me a Beijing stooge," *The Guardian* (April 5, 2018).

<sup>74</sup> Edney, *The Globalization of Chinese Propaganda*, 77.

<sup>75</sup> Lo, "Just because."

reciprocation of the CCP's influence in Australia. The way in which Chinese-Australians have been excluded from the dialogue in Australia will only hinder relations and cause more paranoia. Individuals cannot disregard certain Chinese nationals simply because they have opposing views. Open dialogue must be encouraged, more than ever, because unaddressed resentment will only serve to divide the nation further.

## Conclusion

China seeks to be a responsible international power, but its domestic situation must not be forgotten. It is misguided to assume that China will uphold the values on the world stage which it does not uphold domestically. Why would the CCP support independent media abroad when it restricts and controls its domestic media? Therefore, nations must consider more carefully the situations in which CCP narratives are propagated through independent international media because it is possible that sharp power mechanisms are at play. The potential ramifications of China's influence in other countries should draw the attention of politicians and leaders because there is a possibility for their national sovereignty to be at risk. It is not necessarily the specific instances of sharp power which should cause alarm but rather the culmination of sharp power efforts which becomes problematic. Or perhaps sharp power is the way of the future and a world in which narratives are tailored and demented by governments is the reality we must all expect.

Perhaps transparency will no longer be a desired quality of nations and rather the manipulation of the truth which reasserts a nation's dominance in the world is the likely eventuality. Perhaps, in order to outsmart China, playing by the rules of its game is the only possibility. Perhaps it is as Orwell wrote in *1984*: "Who controls the past controls the future, who controls the present controls the past". By that logic whoever controls the narrative of the present controls the future. Sharp power has the potential to do just that. If China and other authoritarian regimes are able to control the present narrative so much so that public and

governmental perceptions of the past are changed, then they have the potential to control the future. I, however, do not accept that possibility. The only way to identify CCP influence, or for that matter any nations sharp power efforts, is through increased transparency and dialogue. Building barriers instead of constructing pathways of open communication will only increase the likelihood of the CCP and other nations involvement in covert influence.

It is important, however, to expose CCP sharp power methods without causing increased paranoia or aggression. This is particularly true in the case of Chinese nationals who have taken no part in China's sharp power methods. Chinese nationals will turn to the nation which accepts them and not the nation which blames them for actions they themselves have not committed. That is why bringing this issue to the forefront of public dialogue is the only way to strengthen security and ensure all sides of the debate are heard. Nations should not fall into the same pattern as China, silencing differing perspectives because that will only seek to divide. Rather, nations must continue to encourage research, the search for truth, and continue to value the democratic system. As Nye writes, "openness is a key source of democracies' ability to attract and persuade."<sup>76</sup> Relinquishing that openness from democracies would be to give up our most important asset, because the possibility of a future without transparency and open dialogue is not a future any of us should wish to see.

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<sup>76</sup> Joseph Nye, "How sharp power threatens soft power," *Foreign Affairs* (January 24, 2018).

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