

Military-Civil Fusion and the People's Republic of China

“Military-Civil Fusion,” or MCF, is an aggressive, national strategy of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Its goal is to enable the PRC to develop the most technologically advanced military in the world. As the name suggests, a key part of MCF is the elimination of barriers between China's civilian research and commercial sectors, and its military and defense industrial sectors. The CCP is implementing this strategy, not just through its own research and development efforts, but also by acquiring and diverting the world’s cutting-edge technologies – including through theft – in order to achieve military dominance.

What is MCF?

MCF is the CCP’s strategy to develop the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) into a "world class military" by 2049. Under MCF, the CCP is systematically reorganizing the Chinese science and technology enterprise to ensure that new innovations simultaneously advance economic and military development. PRC President and CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping personally oversees the strategy’s implementation. He chairs the CCP’s Central Military Commission and the Central Commission for Military-Civil Fusion Development.

Why is MCF so important to the Chinese Communist Party?

The CCP sees MCF as critical to advancing its regional and global ambitions. It believes that artificial intelligence (AI) will drive the next revolution in military affairs, and that the first country to apply AI to next generation warfare will achieve military dominance. MCF aims to pave the way for the PRC to be the first country to transition to “intelligent warfare,” and therefore develop the military capabilities it sees as critical to achieving these goals.

What technologies are targeted under MCF?

Key technologies being targeted under MCF include quantum computing, big data, semiconductors, 5G, advanced nuclear technology, aerospace technology, and AI. The PRC specifically seeks to exploit the inherent ‘dual-use’ nature of many of these technologies, which have both military and civilian applications.

How is the PRC targeting these technologies?

The CCP is developing and acquiring key technologies through licit and illicit means. These include investment in private industries, talent recruitment programs, directing academic and research collaboration to military gain, forced technology transfer, intelligence gathering, and outright theft. The CCP’s MCF strategy allows a growing number of civilian enterprises and entities to undertake classified military R&D and weapons production. The CCP also exploits the open and transparent nature of the global research enterprise to bolster its own military capabilities through bodies like the China Scholarship Council, which requires academic scholarship recipients to report on their overseas research to PRC diplomats.

Why should we be concerned about MCF?

MCF threatens the trust, transparency, reciprocity, and shared values that underpin international science and technology collaboration and fair global business practices. In a clandestine and non-transparent manner, the CCP is acquiring the intellectual property, key research, and technological advancements of the world’s citizens, researchers, scholars, and private industry in order to advance military aims. Joint research institutions, academia, and private firms are all being exploited to build the PLA’s future military systems—often without their knowledge or consent.