



**HARVARD**  
MODEL UNITED NATIONS  
**CHINA 2020**

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**A Background Guide in Brief**

for the

*Global Technology Summit*

*This Background Guide in Brief is an abbreviated version of your committee's Background Guide, and should provide you with a roadmap for important themes and topics as you begin preliminary research on the committee topic. This document is simply one resource available to you as you prepare for HMUN China, and all delegates are strongly urged to read and study the full Background Guide for their committees. Background Guides will be released on 1 November, 2019. Good luck with your preparation!*

This committee will have two key topic areas. One is addressing issues of data privacy and surveillance, particularly as they pertain to an individual's right to their privacy and personal information and to the role of corporates in supporting state surveillance. The other explores the competitive dynamics of the technology sectors to evaluate whether industry titans are abusing their market power, distorting competition and generating harmful economic inequities. These two issues are not unrelated: both call for a thoughtful analysis about the appropriate role of increasingly powerful private corporations as well as the societal implications of technological progress.

Regulating the domains of internet and technology is a contentious and pressing issue. Data leaks and the misuse of data have hit headlines repeatedly; there are serious concerns about consumer privacy given the prevalence of data collection. The rise in Internet-enabled devices, often labeled the Internet of Things, has underscored the potential scale of the issue and the urgency of solving the problem. We have seen a proliferation in techniques to leverage technology to learn more about individuals and to improve the underlying technologies—often without the explicit consent of the people involved. See, for example, Amazon's Alexa scandal, in which the company hired humans to transcribe audio clips from the device, which in some cases was recording private moments without people's knowledge. The potential application of advanced computing techniques in aiding repression by the state is also a matter of grave concern. China has taken an active role in developing surveillance technologies

both for use on its populace and for sale abroad. In the US, Google has refused to work with the Pentagon to develop artificial intelligence, while the outcry around the National Security Agency's surveillance programs remains in the public consciousness. Regulatory frameworks are not consistent across regions, with the European Union taking an aggressive stance—note, for instance, the implementation of the General Data Protection Regulation. The United States, whose firms have been dominant, too is placing pressure on companies to protect user data. Meanwhile, in China, the scope of the information held by technology companies is perhaps unrivaled, and tech giants are obliged to share user information with the government when so requested. They have recently expressed some reluctance in doing so.



Figure 1: Amazon's Alexa, a device which may be recording users without their knowledge

On the more directly economic front, there are growing concerns about the state of competition in the technology sector, and whether the incumbents' data and network effect advantages limit the potential of emerging firms in the sector. Established market leaders have enthusiastically acquired potential competitors and expanded horizontally, with implications for the concentration of wealth in society, fair competitive practices, and long-term rates of innovation and entrepreneurship among other potential issues. State attorneys general across America have launched coordinated antitrust investigations

into the tech giants, as smaller competitors and companies in other industries clamor to sue. In China, a government that has long been tolerant of the enormous size, influence and horizontal reach of its country's tech behemoths has also become more proactive in its measures to reign in corporate power. Investigations into the market power of technology companies are complicated because these companies often gain market share by providing customers services cheaply or free, profiting by leveraging consumer data after entrenching themselves as market leaders. Typically, monopolies financially squeeze the consumer. Creativity will be required in building a framework to assess and punish anti-competitive behavior. In the European Union, regulators and governments have begun taking a strong line on taxation and fines, particularly on American companies, leaving lingering questions about political motivations.



Figure 2: Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg testifying before the U.S. Congress in the wake of a scandal involving data privacy

This committee will seek to establish a cohesive international regulatory framework that can address these issues and others. Although I present these topics distinctly, it would be imprudent of us to claim that they can be viewed in complete isolation. I would look very favorably upon a committee that can draft a comprehensive, globally applicable document that sets forth principles for addressing these issues. This committee will be very content-heavy, and the flow of our debate will be directed by current events at the time of the conference. This “Background Guide in

Brief” is simply an introductory document—a teaser of sorts—that is the launching pad for a perusal of the completed background guide and a contextual framework that delegates can use to guide further reading. I anticipate there will be many between the date of the complete background guide’s publication and the conference. Successful delegates will be mindful of the latest developments in the area, and will effectively synthesize the torrent of information that they will be exposed to as they investigate the topic and their delegate’s viewpoint.