

# Media Warfare

## Taiwan's Battle for the Cognitive Domain

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**October 31, 2020**

**This report is the result of a *Taiwan Fellowship* generously provided to me  
by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Republic of China (Taiwan)**

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## Acknowledgements

Many individuals and organizations assisted me in the research and writing of this book. I owe very sincere gratitude to those listed below as well as to those who have asked to remain anonymous and thus are not recognized herein.

For their kind support while I was in Taiwan, I am deeply indebted to Foreign Minister of the Republic of China (Taiwan) *Joseph Wu*; *Dr. I-Chung Lai*, president of the Prospect Foundation; Major General *Tsung-Chi “Max” Yu* (ret.), former commandant of Fu Hsing Kang College at National Defense University; *Ms. Joanne Ou*, Director General of the Public Diplomacy Coordination Council and Spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; *Dr. Chiung-Chiu Huang* associate professor of the Graduate Institute of East Asian Studies at the College of International Affairs, National Chengchi University; and *Dr. Ji-jen Joseph Hwang*, associate professor at Chung-Yuan Christian University. I am also indebted to the staffs of the Institute for National Defense Studies and Research and the National Central Library’s Center for Chinese Studies.

In the United States, I am grateful for the support for my work by *Wallace “Chip” Gregson*, former U.S. assistant secretary of defense for Asian and Pacific security affairs; *Matt Pottinger*, U.S. deputy national security advisor; *James F. Moriarty*, chairman of the American Institute in Taiwan; and *Dr. Lukas Fuller*, Acting Director of the China Strategic Focus Group at Headquarters U.S. Indo-Pacific Command.

As stated, ROC and US officials, academics, and business leaders provided me insights for this report but requested anonymity. Research such as that related to People’s Republic of China Media Warfare and malign influence operations is a sensitive topic, so it is sometimes prudent for those engaged in this fight on the front lines to make such requests. I deeply appreciate the insights and recommendations these experienced professionals provided.

Finally, I sincerely thank the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of China (Taiwan) and the Taipei Economic and Cultural Officer (TECO) Thailand for generously providing my Taiwan Fellowship to assist me in the research and writing of this report.

## Preface

### Taiwan's Media Warfare Battlefield

Chinese Communist Party *Media Warfare* poses an existential threat to the Republic of China (Taiwan) and it encompasses an expansive battlefield. President Tsai Ing-wen acknowledged the severity of this threat in her Inauguration Speech of May 20, 2020, when she called for Taiwan to counter the PRC's *cognitive warfare* to achieve strategic multi-domain deterrence.<sup>1</sup> *Media Warfare* is central to *cognitive warfare*.

*Media Warfare* has contributed significantly to global *Political Warfare* successes by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).<sup>2</sup> Also called *Public Opinion Warfare*, *Media Warfare* uses public opinion as weapon “to weaken the adversary’s will to fight while ensuring strength of will and unity among civilian and military views on one’s own side.”<sup>3</sup>

As one of the *Three Warfares* that underpin the PRC’s general *Political Warfare*, *Media Warfare* is a powerful manifestation of Beijing’s *Sharp Power* and a vital weapon in Beijing’s drive to achieve global hegemony. Relevant to this study, *Media Warfare* plays a central role in the CCP’s push to achieve its goal of absorbing Taiwan into the People’s Republic of China (PRC). In conjunction with military threats, diplomatic containment, and economic absorption, the PRC employs *Media Warfare* to *divide and demoralize* the people of Taiwan. Beijing’s primary *Media Warfare* objective is to destroy Taiwan’s democracy to soften it up for the taking. In the interim, a key CCP objective is to deter any attempt by Taiwan to formally seek what Beijing calls “independence”.

While the PRC tried for many years to “win the hearts and minds” of the Taiwan populace to engineer its hoped-for “unification of China”, it has failed to do so. Following the exposure of CCP duplicity in Hong Kong regarding the false promise of the deceptively named *One Country, Two Systems* gambit and the PRC’s disastrous,

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<sup>1</sup> President Tsai Ing-Wen's Second Inaugural Address, Taipei Guest House, Taipei, Taiwan, 20 May 2020. <https://english.president.gov.tw/NEWS/6004>.

<sup>2</sup> As the People's Republic of China (PRC) is a "party-state" under the strict control of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the terms "PRC" and "CCP" are used interchangeably in this study.

<sup>3</sup> Elsa Kania, “The PLA’s Latest Strategic Thinking on the Three Warfares,” Jamestown Foundation, China Brief 16, no. 13, 22 August 2016.



exploitive mishandling of its COVID-19 pandemic, there is no chance to win Taiwan's *hearts and minds*, as evidenced by the 2020 election results. Consequently, the CCP has now largely abandoned that strategy.

Instead, Beijing is “intensifying efforts to corrode and undermine Taiwan’s democratic institutions, create social instability, further isolate Taiwan internationally, and hollow out Taiwan’s economy by attracting Taiwan’s talent.”<sup>4</sup> To this end, the CCP employs *Media Warfare* to undermine Taiwan’s democratic institutions, thereby corroding faith in these institutions and creating social instability. Specifically, Beijing utilizes *Media Warfare* to undermine Taiwan’s press freedom and democratic processes, fracture national unity, and destroy the elected government’s legitimacy.

Taiwan successfully combatted the PRC’s *Media Warfare* in Beijing’s effort to influence the 2020 presidential and legislative elections,<sup>5</sup> and the CCP has failed to convince the majority of Taiwanese of the appeal of *peaceful unification* or of the futility of resistance.<sup>6</sup> Prior to the election, Taiwan began fighting back through both civil society protests and resurgent national government will and capabilities. In fact, public backlash against PRC *Media Warfare* activities such as news media co-option and CCP-orchestrated textbook revisions helped lay the foundation for the *Sunflower Movement* and the landslide electoral victory in 2016 that changed of Taiwan’s governance from the PRC-friendly *Kuomintang* (KMT) party to the Taiwan-centric *Democratic Progressive Party* (DPP).<sup>7</sup> Public backlash against PRC *Media Warfare* in 2020 also led to the *Milk Tea Alliance* between activists in Taiwan, Thailand, and Hong Kong who fight back against the PRC’s international social media bullying.<sup>8</sup>

Nevertheless, Beijing continues to refine and employ its *Media Warfare* targeting Taiwan. The PRC’s rulers see *Media Warfare* as a “constant, on-going activity aimed at

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<sup>4</sup> Dan Southerland, “Unable to Charm Taiwan Into Reunification, China Moves to Subvert Island’s Democracy,” Radio Free Asia, 25 May 2018.

<sup>5</sup> Aaron Huang, “Combating and Defeating Chinese Propaganda and Disinformation: A Case Study of Taiwan’s 2020 Elections” (Harvard Kennedy School of Government, Cambridge, MA: Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, April 7, 2020), 5.

<sup>6</sup> J. Michael Cole, “Taiwan and CCP Political Warfare: A Blueprint,” *Sinopsis, Institute of East Asian Studies, Charles University, Prague*, December 27, 2019, <https://sinopsis.cz/en/taiwan-and-ccp-political-warfare-a-blueprint/>.

<sup>7</sup> Hsu and Cole, 212–214, 223–234.

<sup>8</sup> Emma Graham-Harrison, “Fighting Tyranny with Milk Tea: The Young Rebels Joining Forces in Asia,” *The Guardian*, October 25, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/oct/25/fighting-tyranny-with-milk-tea-the-young-rebels-joining-forces-in-asia>.

long-term influence of perceptions and attitudes” in its enduring war to end the political entity called the *Republic of China* and to take physical control of the people, territory and resources of Taiwan.<sup>9</sup>

It is also important to note that, as the PRC expanded its goal from seeking regional dominance to achieving global hegemony, it has used Taiwan as a “testing ground” for adaptation and improvement on media and political warfare weapons and techniques. The strategies, tactics, and techniques the CCP finds effective against Taiwan will eventually be used in other societies.<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, as Wu Jieh-min and Tsai Hung-jeng have written, Taiwan’s experience confronting Beijing’s political and media warfare “can shed light on China’s *modi operandi*” and its experience can be used to inform other countries under attack how to fight back.<sup>11</sup>

According to the chief editor of the *Taiwan Democracy Bulletin*, J. Michael Cole, these are specific objectives the PRC hopes to achieve through its *Media Warfare* against Taiwan:<sup>12</sup>

- corrode, bypass, and manipulate Taiwan’s democratic institutions, elections, and public trust therein;
- undermine Taiwan’s morale and weaken resistance to Beijing’s objectives by exacerbating feelings of abandonment, isolation and inevitability;
- sow confusion, exacerbate divisions, and contradictions within society;
- co-opt elites, businesspeople, politicians, retired military officers, civil society, and the media; and
- coerce the CCP’s opponents.

Despite Taiwan having been under PRC *Media Warfare* attack for seven decades, many in Taiwan are not aware of these malign objectives, and cannot recognize the strategies, tactics and tools employed against them on a daily basis. Although the CCP has waged *Media Warfare* against the Republic of China since the 1920s, public understanding of PRC *Media Warfare* began to lapse in Taiwan in the 1990s, following

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<sup>9</sup> Professor Stefan Halper, “China: The Three Warfares (Prepared for Andy Marshall, Director, Office of Net Assessment, Office of the Secretary of Defense)” (University of Cambridge, May 2013), 12–13, <http://cryptome.org/2014/06/prc-three-wars.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> Cole, “Taiwan and CCP Political Warfare: A Blueprint.”

<sup>11</sup> Hsu and Cole, *Insidious Power: How China Undermines Global Democracy*, 207.

<sup>12</sup> Cole, “Taiwan and CCP Political Warfare: A Blueprint.”

the end of authoritarian rule (*The White Terror*) and what appeared to be the end of the Cold War. Taiwan's ability to detect, identify, and combat Media Warfare was most seriously undermined beginning in early 2009, under the PRC-friendly Ma Ying-jeou administration. The resurgent interest in Taiwan in the PRC's *Media Warfare* and the general CCP political warfare that it supports is a recent development.

The media landscape on Taiwan is reported to include “more than 350 privately owned newspapers, four major newspaper groups, scores of local radio stations, more than 280 channels carried by satellite television operators, seven 24-hour news cable channels, and five terrestrial television stations”. Add to that media landscape the fact that nearly 90% of Taiwan's roughly 24 million people are active on social media, many with multiple accounts on various platforms. It is a landscape ripe for *Media Warfare* manipulation and interference.<sup>13</sup>

Taiwan's education system is also targeted in the CCP's *Media Warfare*. Books, including textbooks, are *media*. Through its *United Front* operations, the CCP has co-opted *Pan-Red* Taiwan academics.<sup>14</sup> In addition to propagandizing Taiwan's university students, these *Pan-Reds* worked with UFDW organizations such as the *Society for the Advancement of Chinese Cultural Development* to revise public school textbooks to reflect the CCP's narrative of history and current events.<sup>15</sup> Also targeted towards children and young adults are CCP-influenced video games, another form of media. Many popular video games are developed in the PRC or by PRC-affiliated enterprises, but few purchasers understand these games are often infused with CCP propaganda messages such as “Taiwan is a province of China” and “China always wins”.<sup>16</sup>

For a range of reasons, *Media Warfare* has proven a difficult topic to research and expose. This difficulty is addressed in part by Deputy Foreign Minister Dr. Hsu Szu-Chien. Hsu explains that PRC's *Media Warfare*, along with the broader political warfare

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<sup>13</sup> Gary J. Schmitt and Michael Mazza, “Blinding the Enemy: CCP Interference in Taiwan's Democracy” (Global Taiwan Institute, October 2019), 7–9.

<sup>14</sup> PRC United Front operations in Taiwan, as elsewhere around the globe, strongly target academia. Based on the author's personal experiences in Taiwan and discussions with security officials, some academics in Taiwan's universities have been co-opted into the PRC's United Front. These pro-PRC administrators and professors have incurred the derogatory name “Pan-Red Academics”, for they are no longer seen as KMT-leaning “Pan-Blue” or DPP-leaning “Pan-Green,” but have become agents of influence for the “Red” CCP.

<sup>15</sup> Hsu and Cole, *Insidious Power: How China Undermines Global Democracy*, 224–225.

<sup>16</sup> Discussions with Senior ROC Political Warfare Officers, Fu Hsing Kang Political Warfare College, National Defense University, 2018-2020.



it supports, is a challenge to address in open-source publication because such operations are “by design, secretive and highly deceptive, with their inner workings concealed behind a confusing maze of front organizations, ranks of witting and unwitting intermediaries, and clouds of bland rhetoric”. Also, *Media Warfare* is a *sensitive* topic in the sense that *sensitivities* can be weaponized to block investigation into it: allegations of the PRC engaging in it are often met with “angry denials, counter-accusations of McCarthyism, anti-Chinese bias, or racial prejudice”.<sup>17</sup> As standing operating procedure, Beijing savages those who “hurt the feelings of the Chinese people” for any reason contrived by the CCP, and lambasts as “racist” and “immoral” those who object to the CCP’s malign influence activities. Further, scholars and journalists seeking to shed light on PRC *Media Warfare* have been targeted for attack, to include legal and physical assaults.<sup>18</sup>

There are also other factors that make study of PRC *Media Warfare* a challenge to address in Taiwan, to include the legacy of *The White Terror*. This tragic era is examined in detail later in this study; one result of the White Terror is that the public lost faith in *counterintelligence* and other *law enforcement and security* functions that exist for the purpose of detecting and combatting political warfare operations like *Media Warfare*. The public simply does not yet fully trust those organizations established to protect and defend them, more than 30 years after the end of Martial Law. Also of note, in the first term of the Tsai Ing-wen administration, KMT legislators in the Legislative Yuan often stymied efforts to implement necessary legal and policy changes.<sup>19</sup>

Finally, the terminology of *Media Warfare* complicates its study. There is a wide-ranging vocabulary associated with *Media Warfare* and the larger, highly sophisticated PRC *Political Warfare* that it supports. The terminology associated with *Media Warfare* may seem overwhelming initially, and its complex terms and concepts

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<sup>17</sup> Hsu and Cole, *Insidious Power: How China Undermines Global Democracy*, Foreword by Aaron Friedberg.

<sup>18</sup> Amy King, “Hurting the Feelings of the Chinese People,” Wilson Center, 15 February 2017; Xinhua, “China Slams Use of Bringing up Human Rights Issues with Political Motives as ‘Immoral,’” *Global Times*, December 12, 2018, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1131428.shtml>; and Ben Blanchard, “China’s Top Paper Says Australian Media Reports Are Racist,” Reuters, 10 December 2017.

<sup>19</sup> Discussions with ROC Political Warfare Officers, Fu Hsing Kang Political Warfare College, National Defense University, 2018-20.



require careful study. Those who cannot identify and define how they are being attacked and destroyed cannot successfully fight back.

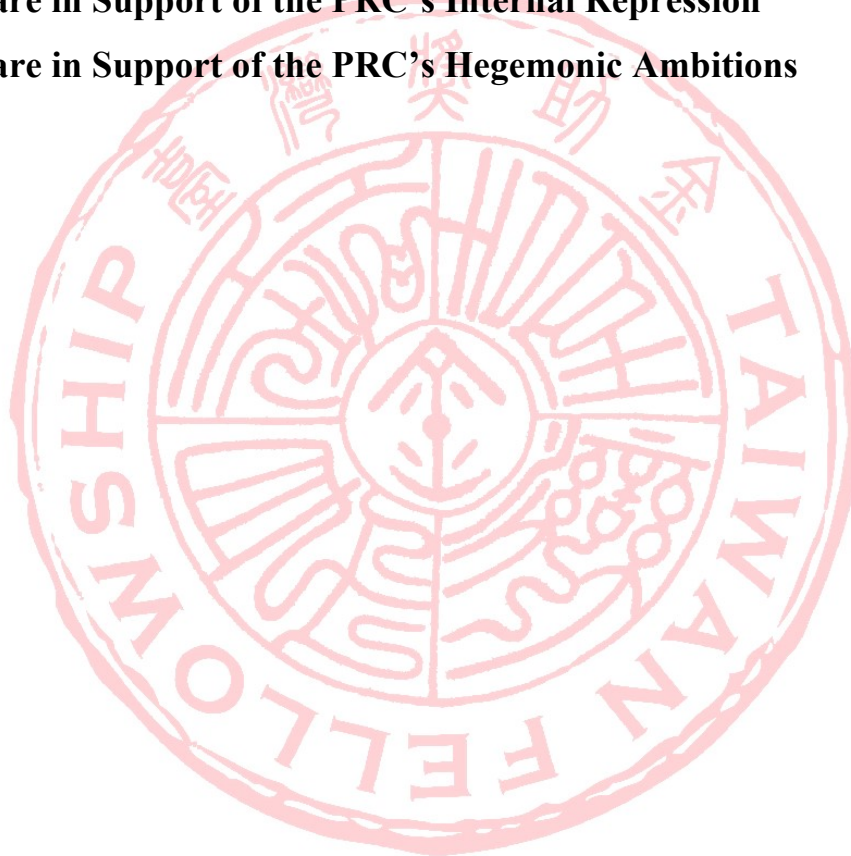
This study is designed to help the government, institutions, and people of Taiwan to better combat PRC *Media Warfare* so that it can retain its hard-won democracy, sovereignty, and political and economic freedoms.

- First, the study defines Media Warfare within the much broader context of the CCP's *Three Warfares* and the general *Political Warfare* that the *Three Warfares* support.
- The study then defines the often confusing, overlapping terminology of Influence Operations and Political Warfare, and examines concepts, strategies, tactics and tools that underpin this warfare.
- In a separate chapter, the study details the complex, interlocking organizational relationships of the CCP party-state and media entities engaged in *Media Warfare*.
- Over two more chapters, the study explores the historical evolution of CCP's *Media Warfare* against Taiwan. The first examines crucial milestones the history from the Chinese Civil war through the Xi Jinping era, while the second looks specifically at the war as it has been fought under the specific Taiwan administrations from Lee Teng-hui through Tsai Ing-wen. This historical detail is important to understand the evolving nature of the *Media Warfare* threat over time, and its rapid acceleration in the era of *new social media* and *multi-domain warfare*.
- The study then provides recommendations for how Taiwan might continue to effectively continue to build on its counter-*Media Warfare* successes that it achieved during the 2020 elections. These recommendations are designed to help Taiwan build on the global leadership platform it established in the COVID-19 battle to form a coalition of free, like-minded nations to work together in *counter-Media Warfare* efforts. Taiwan is perfectly positioned to help other nations to assess their own vulnerabilities, capabilities, and strategies to confront Beijing's *Media Warfare*.
- The Appendix describes how *Media Warfare* will be employed by the PRC in its combat operations, which is an especially pertinent topic in light of Xi Jinping's increasingly menacing words and actions.
- An extensive bibliography is provided to allow further exploration of Media Warfare and a list of common acronyms is provided at the end.

# Chapter 1

## An Introduction to Media Warfare

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# Chapter 1

## An Introduction to Media Warfare

The PRC's version of *Media Warfare* is expansive: it entails persuasion, incitement, buying, coercion, online terror, and propaganda, as well as false messages via misinformation, disinformation, and fake news.

And that is just a start.

According to the *Prospect Foundation*'s Yu-yen Chien, "studies show that, in addition to purchases of media stocks, system operators' stocks, and news content through media replacement, the PRC also exerts its sharp power using anonymous IP addresses to set the agenda, influence news trends, do news laundering, and get fabricated news into Taiwan Media."<sup>20</sup> These media manipulations, in turn, suppress Taiwan's "consciousness" which "impacts elections in Taiwan, Taiwanese people's national identity, and their feelings about China".<sup>21</sup>

Dr. Chia-Lung Lin, former chairman of the *Taiwan Thinktank*, reports:

*China is exploiting Taiwan's democratic and open system, via the raising of multiple wedge issues simultaneously, with the intent of causing contradiction, competition, and conflict within Taiwanese society.*

*In addition, China is facilitating the dissemination of false information through the control of newspapers, television, radio, and online media in Taiwan. Even more disturbing is that China has directly supported pro-China forces within Taiwan to speak on behalf of Beijing.*

*This piercing, infiltration, or penetration of the political and information environment allows authoritarian countries to use sharp power to infiltrate the social structure of a democratic system, and incite as well as widen the existing differences, and is the most serious challenge currently facing Taiwan.*<sup>22</sup>

While the origins of the PRC's *Media Warfare* extend back before the advent of the Chinese Communist Party in the 1920s, it was propelled far beyond any previously imagined capabilities beginning in 2009. As part of an overhaul of China's external propaganda structure

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<sup>20</sup> Yu-yen Chien, "The Influence of China's Sharp Power on Taiwan's Media," *Taiwan Strategists*, March 2019.

<sup>21</sup> Chien.

<sup>22</sup> Dr. Chia-Lung Lin, "How to Face China's Sharp Power Collaboratively between Taiwan-US: Welcome Remarks" (2018 2nd Annual TTT-GTI Conference on Taiwan-US Relations, Institute of Diplomacy and International Affairs, Taipei City, Taiwan, December 2, 2018).



caused by perceived “discourse power” failures leading up to the 2008 Beijing Olympics, the CCP devised its “Grand Overseas Propaganda Campaign.” In 2009, China announced that it would be investing 45 billion RMB (approximately \$6.6 billion USD) into strengthening the international presence of party-state media outlets.<sup>23</sup>

Since General Secretary Xi Jinping ascended to power in 2012, he has led a massive expansion in political and media warfare, investing new energy, attention, and resources to achieve once-hidden-but-now-openly-expressed global ambitions.<sup>24</sup> He has framed the importance of *Media Warfare* as part of his broader push to achieve China’s *National Rejuvenation* and the CCP’s *Two Centenary Goals*. Both are ambitious programs for reaching national prosperity and achieving strength and dominance in the Indo-Pacific region by the mid-21st century.<sup>25</sup> Further, both programs entail absorbing the free republic on Taiwan into the CCP’s cold embrace, either via Political Warfare or through military assault.

As stated, *Media Warfare* is one of *The Three Warfares* that lay the traditional foundation for the malign influence operations of the PRC. University of Cambridge professor Stefan Halper describes the Three Warfares as “a dynamic three dimensional war-fighting process that constitutes war by other means.” Of great concern, notes Halper, “this weapon is highly deceptive.”<sup>26</sup> *Media Warfare*--combined with the other two pillars of the Three Warfares (*Psychological Warfare* and *Legal Warfare*, also called *Lawfare*) and the recently developed concept of *Cognitive Warfare*--poses a unique threat to Taiwan’s continued freedom, sovereignty, and democracy. Before examining the PRC’s *Media Warfare* against Taiwan, though, it is essential to examine *Media Warfare* within the broader context of the CCP’s *Political Warfare*.

## **Media Warfare: A Pillar of CCP Political Warfare**

The CCP wages *political warfare* for control and influence, using coercion, corruption, and violent covert operations. The CCP claims that this war is meant to “rejuvenate” China to its former imperial grandeur as the *Middle Kingdom*—to once again be “everything under the sun,”

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<sup>23</sup> David A Gitter and Brock M. Erdahl, “‘Telling China’s Story Well: An Investigation into Chinese Influence Operations Targeting American Chinese-Language Media Outlets’” (1519 Connecticut Ave NW Ste 300 Washington DC 20036: Center for Advanced China Research (CACR), June 15, 2020), 1–2.

<sup>24</sup> Szu-Chien Hsu and J. Michael Cole, editors, *Insidious Power: How China Undermines Global Democracy* (Manchester, UK: Eastbridge Books, 2020), xxix–xxxix.

<sup>25</sup> Gitter and Erdahl, “‘Telling China’s Story Well: An Investigation into Chinese Influence Operations Targeting American Chinese-Language Media Outlets,’” 2–4.

<sup>26</sup> Stefan Halper, *China: The Three Warfares* (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2013), 11.

the all-powerful hegemon power. It is, as well, a war to ensure the CCP's total control over the PRC's population and resources. Taiwan is Beijing's immediate target for acquisition, but it is important to understand that the CCP seeks control of those of foreign nations that the Chinese have historically called "barbarian states," both nearby and throughout the world.<sup>27</sup>

Much like the emperors of the *Celestial Empire* at its peak, the CCP classifies these barbarian nations as either *tributary states* that recognize the PRC's hegemony or *potential enemies*. Despite the lofty pretext of peaceful national rejuvenation reflected in PRC ruler Xi Jinping's *China Dream*, the CCP has no desire for equality among nations. Nor, in the case of Taiwan, does the CCP have any intention of allowing a fiction it once described as "one country, two systems". Rather, Beijing seeks to impose its all-encompassing civilization on other lesser states. The ideological foundation of Xi's China Dream is ultimately totalitarian, Leninist, and based on Marxist principles.<sup>28</sup>

For the CCP, this is a total war for regional and global supremacy, and it incorporates elements of military, economic, informational, and political warfare. PRC political warfare (especially the media warfare component), is both offensive and defensive in nature. It takes the form of *unrestricted warfare* and it is conducted on an international scale.<sup>29</sup>

### **The Nature of the PRC Regime Matters!**

It matters greatly which side wins this war—a point missed by those enablers who have been co-opted by PRC's global malign influence campaign to appease the PRC, apologize or explain away its brutal expansionist objectives and actions, and even actively support the CCP's expansionist ambitions. The nature of the Chinese Communist Party matters!

Accordingly, as a prelude to this study, it is crucial to answer these key questions:

- *Why does it matter that the PRC seeks regional and ultimately global hegemony?*
- *Why can't the world accept and tolerate a "rising China," a seemingly nonthreatening term so often used by PRC propaganda outlets and Beijing's foreign advocates?*

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<sup>27</sup> Steven W. Mosher, *Hegemon: China's Plan to Dominate Asia and the World* (San Francisco, CA: Encounter Books, 2000), 1–2.

<sup>28</sup> Mosher, *Hegemon*, 3; Xi Jinping, "Full Text of Xi Jinping's Report at 19th CPC National Congress," *China Daily*, 4 November 2017; and Bill Birtles, "China's President Xi Jinping Is Pushing a Marxist Revival—but How Communist Is It Really?" Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 3 May 2018.

<sup>29</sup> Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui, *Unrestricted Warfare: Assumptions on War and Tactics in the Age of Globalization* (Beijing: PLA Literature and Arts Publishing House, 1999).

- *What is there to fear about “China’s peaceful rise” and the CCP’s goal of a “Chinese-led world order?”*<sup>30</sup>

The answer to each question is simple--and the same:

**The PRC is a coercive, expansionist, hyper-nationalistic, militarily powerful, brutally repressive, genocidal, fascist, and totalitarian state.**

“The world has seen what happens when expansionist totalitarian regimes such as [the PRC] are left unchallenged and unchecked,” testified an expert on the PRC, retired U.S. Navy Captain James E. Fanell. “In the world of this type of hegemon, people are subjects—simply property—of the state, and ideals such as democracy, inalienable rights, limited government, and rule of law have no place.”<sup>31</sup> The people in the PRC--the CCP’s “subjects”--are as much victims of this totalitarian regime as are the people of the countries that the PRC targets globally.

The PRC embodies the general characteristics of *totalitarianism*, such as the identification of individuals as merely subjects of the state; control of media outlets, economic sectors, and educational institutions; control by a single political party with a separate chain of command alongside that of the government; a lack of checks and balances; personality cults; militarism; and a historical narrative of humiliation leading to hyper-nationalism and an entitlement to aggression. These are defining characteristics that the world witnessed during the twentieth century in countries such as Vladimir Lenin and Joseph Stalin’s Soviet Union, Adolf Hitler’s Germany, Benito Mussolini’s Italy, Imperial Japan, and Pol Pot’s Cambodia. Such political structures and narratives established a framework of governance for empires and dictatorships like the PRC long before the founding of the CCP. There is nothing new or inherently Chinese about totalitarian fascism.

The danger of contemporary totalitarian Sino-fascism, however, is unprecedented. The power of modern technology is especially evident in the PRC’s *Media Warfare*, and in the CCP’s swift convergence of massive political, military, and economic power position it to be, according to Canada’s prestigious Fraser Institute, “world freedom’s greatest threat.”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> The terms are used in Michael Pillsbury, *The Hundred-Year Marathon: China’s Secret Strategy to Replace America as the Global Superpower* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2015), 16; and *China’s National Defense in 1998* (Beijing: State Council of the People’s Republic of China, 1998).

<sup>31</sup> Capt. James E. Fanell, USN (ret), “China’s Global Naval Strategy and Expanding Force Structure: Pathway to Hegemony,” testimony before the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, United States House of Representatives, 115th Congress, 17 May 2018.

<sup>32</sup> Fred McMahon, “China—World Freedom’s Greatest Threat,” Fraser Institute, 10 May 2019.



By successfully employing *Media Warfare* as one of its key strategies, the CCP has proven that it can effectively leverage the openness of democratic systems to achieve hegemony over those democracies. It prefers to achieve this hegemony peacefully if possible--not entirely *without a struggle* but ideally without kinetic combat. Nevertheless, the PRC has continually indicated that it is now strong and confident enough to fight a war to achieve that hegemony, even if it must pay a very large price.<sup>33</sup>

*Media Warfare* supports Beijing's political war aimed at "fracturing and capturing regional institutions that could otherwise raise collective concerns about China's behavior" and "intimidating countries in maritime Asia that seek to lawfully extract resources and defend their sovereignty, according to Ely Ratner at the Council on Foreign Relations,"<sup>34</sup>

### **Media Warfare in Support of the PRC's Internal Repression**

One priority for Beijing's *Media Warfare* is to conceal the extent of its brutal internal repression. In the past few years, the PRC has been criticized by organizations such as *Amnesty International* and governments including the United States and Taiwan for imprisoning at least a million ethnic Uighurs in "re-education camps" under particularly cruel circumstances.<sup>35</sup> In fact, the repression of Uighurs and other Muslim sects is part of a much more insidious trend—according to *The Washington Post*, "China's systematic anti-Muslim campaign, and accompanying repression of Christians and Tibetan Buddhists, may represent the largest-scale official attack on religious freedom in the world."<sup>36</sup>

Further, *The Washington Post* calls Beijing's suppression in Xinjiang "genocide"<sup>37</sup> as do other organizations--but to read PRC-controlled news media, both in China and globally, one only sees that such accusations are the "biggest lies of the century".<sup>38</sup> These accusations are

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<sup>33</sup> Jonas Parello-Plesner and Belinda Li, *The Chinese Communist Party's Foreign Interference Operations: How the U.S. and Other Democracies Should Respond* (Washington, DC: Hudson Institute, 2018); Discussions with senior Republic of China political warfare officers at Fu Hsing Kang College, National Defense University, Taipei, Taiwan, 2018-19; and Tara Copp, and Aaron Mehta, "New Defense Intelligence Assessment Warns China Nears Critical Military Milestone," *Defense News*, 15 January 2019.

<sup>34</sup> Ely Ratner, "Rising to the China Challenge," testimony before the House Armed Services Committee, United States House of Representatives, 115th Congress, 15 February 2018.

<sup>35</sup> "Up to One Million Detained in China's Mass 'Re-Education' Drive," Amnesty International, 24 September 2018.

<sup>36</sup> "China's Repressive Reach Is Growing," *Washington Post*, 27 September 2019.

<sup>37</sup> Editorial Board, "What's Happening in Xinjiang Is Genocide," *The Washington Post*, July 6, 2020, sec. Opinion, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/whats-happening-in-xinjiang-is-genocide/2020/07/06/cde3f9da-bfaa-11ea-9fdd-b7ac6b051dc8\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/whats-happening-in-xinjiang-is-genocide/2020/07/06/cde3f9da-bfaa-11ea-9fdd-b7ac6b051dc8_story.html).

<sup>38</sup> Xinhua Staff, "China Calls U.S. Accusations 'Biggest Lies of the Century,'" *Xinhua*, July 17, 2020, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-07/17/c\\_139218277.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-07/17/c_139218277.htm).

“groundless” and merely reflect the West’s “deep-rooted egotism and prejudice towards China”.<sup>39</sup>

Despite these indignant denials, the PRC’s internal political repression is long standing, and it involves a brutality much more lethal than religious suppression and thought control of the mass population. It involves mass murder.

The CCP is responsible for the deaths of millions of Chinese during disastrous large-scale reigns of terror such as the *Great Leap Forward* (1958–62) and *Cultural Revolution* (1966–76) and smaller atrocities such as the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre. Hong Kong-based historian Frank Dikötter confirmed, based on findings in the PRC’s archives, that during the Great Leap Forward alone, “systematic torture, brutality, starvation and killing of Chinese peasants” was the norm. More than 45 million people were “worked, starved or beaten to death” in China during those four years, while the Cultural Revolution resulted in the murder of at least 2 million more, and another 1 to 2 million were killed in “other campaigns, such as land-reform and ‘anti-rightist’ movements” in the 1950s.<sup>40</sup>

This murderous repression also includes plausible reports that the PRC currently executes Falun Gong practitioners and other prisoners of conscience on a mass scale “in order to harvest organs that can be monetized for substantial profits by [CCP] officials.”<sup>41</sup> Estimates of those in China killed directly or indirectly by CCP actions against the people of China are strongly debated, but during Mao Zedong’s reign alone they range as high as 70 million deaths.<sup>42</sup> But within China’s *Great Firewall* that censors online media, and through its domination of many newspapers and broadcast organizations worldwide, one sees and hears nothing in PRC-owned or controlled media of these holocausts.

The CCP employs *Media Warfare* to make it nearly impossible to access information about these systematic campaigns of mass murder and terror within the PRC. The depth and breadth of censorship both within its borders create a vacuum of information that can even

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<sup>39</sup> Xin Zhang, “Smearing Won’t Deny China’s Concrete Human Rights Progress,” *Xinhua*, July 7, 2020, [http://english.chinamil.com.cn/view/2020-07/07/content\\_9848322.htm](http://english.chinamil.com.cn/view/2020-07/07/content_9848322.htm).

<sup>40</sup> Arifa Akbar, “Mao’s Great Leap Forward ‘Killed 45 Million in Four Years’,” *Independent*, 17 September 2010; Ian Buruma, “The Tenacity of Chinese Communism,” *New York Times*, 28 September 2019; and Ian Johnson, “Who Killed More: Hitler, Stalin, or Mao?,” *New York Review of Books*, 5 February 2018.

<sup>41</sup> Matthew P. Robertson, “Examining China’s Organ Transplantation System: The Nexus of Security, Medicine, and Predation, Part 2: Evidence for the Harvesting of Organs from Prisoners of Conscience,” Jamestown Foundation, China Brief 20, no. 9, 15 May 2020.

<sup>42</sup> Johnson, “Who Killed More: Hitler, Stalin, or Mao?”

remotely be considered criticism of the CCP. *Media Warfare*--in the form of social media, the state-controlled news media, and the manipulation and suppression of foreign news media--plays a massive role in this thought suppression.

In her seminal work *The People's Republic of Amnesia: Tiananmen Revisited*, Louisa Lim details the extraordinary lengths to which the CCP employs *Media Warfare* to enforce "collective amnesia" to suppress any memory of the 1989 *Tiananmen Massacre* from Chinese consciousness.<sup>43</sup> As simple examples of the pervasive CCP program of "whitewashing" the massacre through *Media Warfare*, Lim writes:

*The authorities national reflex has been to simply clamp down, banning sensitive words on Weibo, the Chinese equivalent of Twitter, and deleting postings as quickly as possible. Every June 4<sup>th</sup>, the authorities' level of paranoia can be charted by increasingly lengthy lists of banned words. Terms deemed sensitive enough to be forbidden include "today", "tomorrow", "that year", "special day", and "sensitive word" . . . sensitive images are also often scrubbed from the Internet, including birthday cake candles featuring the numbers 4 and 6; photos of chrysanthemums, which are traditional flowers of mourning; anything with the slightest similarity to a tank, including LEGO tanks . . . (and) even yellow rubber ducks."*<sup>44</sup>

Although the CCP is responsible for what amounts to mass murder in its own country, it still tightly holds the reins of power in the PRC, and its media idolizes the man who presided over its deadliest repression: Mao Zedong. Evidence of the CCP's continued admiration for Mao is reflected nearly daily through state media. One example is the *China Daily's* fawning description as "unprecedented" respect and "piety" that Xi Jinping and the CCP displayed for Mao during celebrations for the seventieth anniversary of the founding of the PRC in October 2019.<sup>45</sup> Unlike Russia, with its eventual denunciation of Stalin's murderous reign, the CCP has proven ideologically incapable of acknowledging and atoning for its genocidal history. Through *Media Warfare*, the CCP tries to ensure the CCP's subjects in the PRC will never know the truth of Mao's murderous reign.

While *Media Warfare* is simply one weapon in the CCP's complex political warfare apparatus, it has a monumental impact. According to the *New York Times*, the PRC's *Media*

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<sup>43</sup> Louisa Lim, *The People's Republic of Amnesia: Tiananmen Revisited* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 72, 80, 85–86, 88, 96, 98–100, 129, 132, 136, 145, 156, 173, 210.

<sup>44</sup> Lim, 99–100.

<sup>45</sup> Laurence Brahm, "Nothing Will Stop China's Progress," *China Daily*, 2 October 2019.



*Warfare* machine “has mastered the power of symbol and symbolism in the mass media and social media era.” As a consequence of relentless exposure to PRC media, many Chinese eagerly embrace the CCP’s hyper-nationalistic “patriotic education” programs. Also, as part of this internal *Media Warfare*, those residing in the PRC face censorship and thought control unimaginable to most citizens of liberal democracies.<sup>46</sup>

Externally, through its extensive propaganda and influence outlets, Beijing savages rules or actions that, in the CCP’s view, “contain China’s power” or “hurt the feelings of the Chinese people.” Meanwhile, PRC foreign ministry and propaganda organs lambast as “immoral” those who criticize its egregious human rights abuses and as “racist” those who object to overseas Chinese malign influence activities.<sup>47</sup>

### **Media Warfare in Support of the PRC’s Hegemonic Ambitions**

Since 2004, the CCP has directly linked Media Warfare (especially involving foreign media) to its national security. Beijing seeks to “guide the international narrative on important issues like Taiwan, the South China Sea, the US military presence in Asia, and China’s economic and military activities overseas”.<sup>48</sup> In a May 2020 report to Congress, U.S. President Donald J. Trump highlighted the global impact of PRC *Media Warfare*: “China’s party-state controls the world’s most heavily resourced set of propaganda tools. Beijing communicates its narrative through state-run television, print, radio, and online organizations whose presence is proliferating in the United States and around the world.”<sup>49</sup>

The narratives these media platforms present promote positive views of a peaceful “Rising China” as well a benign perspective of *The China Model* (the CCP’s totalitarian regime); encourage investment in the PRC and openness to PRC investment and strategic engagement abroad; and suppress or curtail negative coverage of PRC’s political system. As the PRC has grown stronger and more open about its real intentions, it’s latest addition to its narratives presents the CCP’s “authoritarian governance style” as not simply benign: it is now the model

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<sup>46</sup> Li Yuan, “China Masters Political Propaganda for the Instagram Age,” *New York Times*, 5 October 2019.

<sup>47</sup> Liu Chen, “U.S. Should Stop Posing as a ‘Savior,’” *People’s Liberation Army Daily*, 27 September 2019; Amy King, “Hurting the Feelings of the Chinese People,” Wilson Center, 15 February 2017; Xinhua, “China Slams Use of Bringing up Human Rights Issues with Political Motives as ‘Immoral,’” *Global Times*, 12 December 2018; and Ben Blanchard, “China’s Top Paper Says Australian Media Reports Are Racist,” Reuters, 10 December 2017.

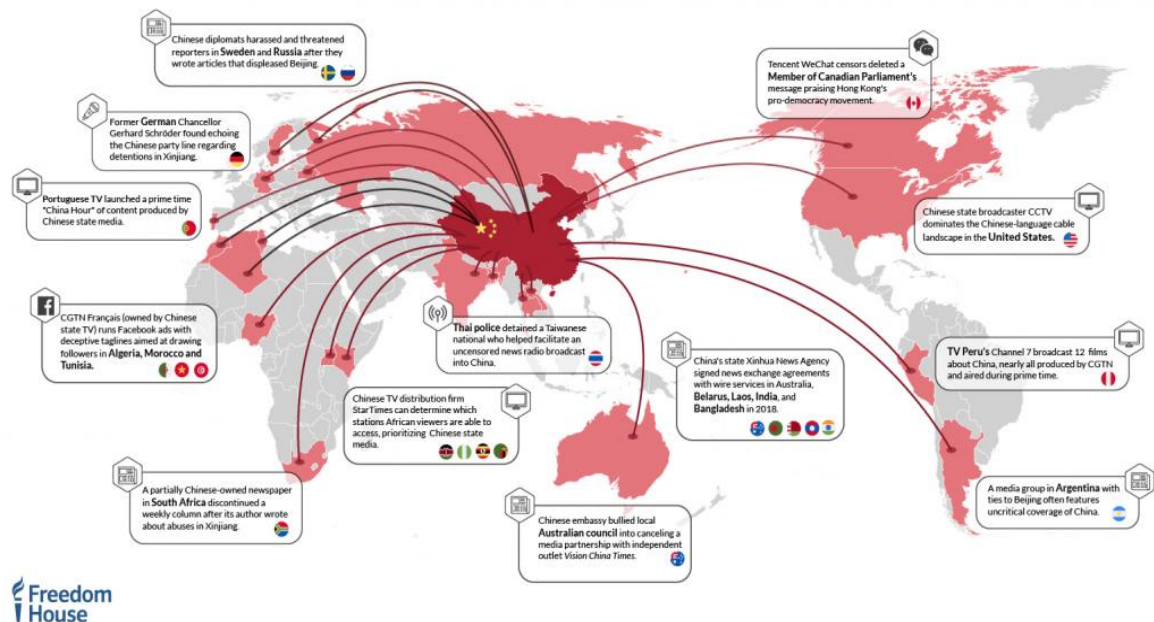
<sup>48</sup> Elizabeth Bachman, “Black and White and Red All Over: China’s Improving Foreign-Directed Media” (3003 Washington Boulevard, Arlington, VA 22201: Center for Naval Analysis, August 2020), 76.

<sup>49</sup> Donald J. Trump, “United States Strategic Approach to the People’s Republic of China,” White House, 20 May 2020.

for developing countries, challenging the attractiveness of both democracy and US international leadership.<sup>50</sup>

The breadth and scope of activities to convey these narratives is expansive and should be of urgent concern to Taiwan and democracies worldwide. Figure 1-1, from the *Freedom House 2019 Freedom and Media Report*, depicts examples of the scope of these global activities.<sup>51</sup>

### Beijing's Global Reach: Selected Cases of Chinese Media Influence Abroad



**Figure 1-1: Beijing's Global Reach: Selected Cases of Chinese Media Influence Abroad**

Freedom House highlights these current trends in the CCP's global Media Warfare aspirations:

- *The Chinese government, Chinese Communist Party (CCP), and various proxies have rapidly expanded their influence over media production and dissemination channels abroad. As a result, the CCP has enhanced its ability to interfere aggressively in other countries, should it choose to do so.*

<sup>50</sup> Sarah Cook, "The Implications for Democracy of China's Globalizing Media Influence," *Freedom and Media Report 2019: Media Freedom: A Downward Spiral* (Freedom House, 2019), <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-and-media/2019/media-freedom-downward-spiral>.

<sup>51</sup> Cook.

- *Chinese authorities influence news media content around the world through three primary strategies: promoting the CCP's narratives, suppressing critical viewpoints, and managing content delivery systems.*
- *These efforts have already undercut key features of democratic governance and best practices for media freedom by undermining fair competition, interfering with Chinese diaspora communities, weakening the rule of law, and establishing channels for political meddling.*

The report concludes (perhaps over optimistically) that policymakers and media development donors in democracies “will play a critical role in coming years in countering the potential negative impact of Beijing’s foreign media influence campaigns”. In the meantime, Beijing’s *Media Warfare* forces continue to shape the media environment worldwide, to include censoring and co-opting news media and related organizations on foreign soil.

The CCP’s censorship ensnares the news media on Taiwan, of course, as examined later in this study. It also ensnares American institutions such as the National Basketball Association (NBA), chastised in *The Washington Post* for “essentially importing to the United States China’s denial of free speech.” In fact, the CCP routinely censors world-famous brands including Marriott, United Airlines, Cathay Pacific Airways, Givenchy, and Versace, as well.<sup>52</sup> Beijing is quite clear in conveying its coercive censorship requirements, as reflected in a *Global Times* headline: “Global Brands Better Stay Away from Politics.” The article condemned “so-called ‘freedom of speech’” and carried explicit and implicit threats to those who did not toe the CCP line.<sup>53</sup>

Like Taiwan, America’s entertainment industry is a major target and tool for PRC Media Warfare. Hollywood has been co-opted “to avoid issues that the CCP would consider sensitive and produce soft propaganda movies that portray China in a positive light to global audiences.”<sup>54</sup> Through Hollywood, the CCP influences American and other foreign audiences to accept the PRC’s narratives on such issues as Taiwan and the South China Sea, according to cyber security

<sup>52</sup> “The Day the NBA Fluttered before China,” *Washington Post*, 7 October 2019; and Amy Qin and Julie Creswell, “China Is a Minefield, and Foreign Firms Keep Hitting New Tripwires,” *New York Times*, 8 October 2019.

<sup>53</sup> “Global Brands Better Stay Away from Politics,” *Global Times*, 7 October 2019.

<sup>54</sup> Ross Babbage, *Winning Without Fighting: Chinese and Russian Political Warfare Campaigns and How the West Can Prevail*, vol. I (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2019), 36.



policy expert Dr. Ji-jen Joseph Hwang.<sup>55</sup> Dr. Hwang cites TV series such as the *Netflix* series “Away”, which conveys PRC propaganda narratives that will be subliminally assimilated by American, overseas Chinese, and other audiences. By the PRC influencing these audiences this way, *PRC Media Warfare* aims to have Americans, overseas Chinese, and other foreign audiences ultimately influence Taiwan.

Economic coercion is another means by which the PRC exports its *Media Warfare*, while *Media Warfare* helps Beijing open the door for its economic expansion. As one example, the CCP uses the promise of its global *Belt and Road Initiative* (BRI, also known as One Belt One Road) to build what the *China Daily* describes as “a new platform for world economic cooperation.”<sup>56</sup> China’s global news media coverage of BRI presents a relentless refrain of BRI’s promise. One small but significant example is a widely distributed *China Daily* article in July 2020, in which PRC Foreign Minister Wang Yi praised Xi Jinping for proposing BRI in 2013, and claimed BRI is “a new public good for the world to promote international cooperation for common development”. Wang boasted that “by the end of January, 138 countries and 30 international organizations have signed 200 cooperation documents with China on joint building of the Belt and Road”.<sup>57</sup>

The BRI story is not so rosy, of course. David R. Stilwell, the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and Pacific Affairs, characterizes the BRI and other PRC economic coercion schemes less charitably than *China Daily* and Wang Yi. Stilwell reports that, through BRI, Beijing employs “market-distorting economic inducements and penalties, influence operations, and intimidation to persuade other states to heed its political and security agenda.”<sup>58</sup> Former U.S. National Security Council official Robert Spalding describes the BRI as “infrastructure warfare.” It may be, he writes, “the most subtle and most corrosive of China’s unrestricted aggressions. Though it is always packaged in PRC media as generous ‘win-win’ development deals, the ultimate goal is a bait-and-switch in which infrastructure is provided but full control of the

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<sup>55</sup> Dr. Ji-jen Joseph Hwang, Associate Faculty, George Mason University. Interviews by the author in Taipei, Taiwan, September 21 and October 16, 2020.

<sup>56</sup> Yang Han and Wen Zongduo, “Belt and Road Reaches out to the World,” *China Daily*, 30 September 2019.

<sup>57</sup> Desheng Cao, “Xi’s Thought on Diplomacy Shares Visions,” *China Daily*, July 21, 2020, <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202007/21/WS5f1624d8a31083481725ad84.html>.

<sup>58</sup> David R. Stilwell, “U.S. Policy in the Indo-Pacific Region: Hong Kong, Alliances and Partnerships, and Other Issues,” testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, United States Senate, 116th Congress, 18 September 2019.

platform is never fully given. It remains in the hands of Beijing.”<sup>59</sup> But the statements by Stillwell and Spalding received far less public attention than that allowed Wang, as a result of the PRC’s massive global media reach.

Of equal concern, the PRC employs *Media Warfare* to shape public opinion both inside and outside its borders “to undermine academic freedom, censor foreign media, restrict the free flow of information, and curb civil society.”<sup>60</sup> Taiwan’s experience with the aforementioned Pan-Red Academics working with the UFWD to infiltrate CCP-approved history into Taiwan’s textbooks is but one aspect of this interference, manipulation, and censorship.

In fact, there is an inextricable relationship between the UFWD and the Media Warfare. The PRC employs an extensive and extraordinarily complex United Front strategy to divide Taiwanese society by attempting to “sow divisions in Taiwan” and “lure Taiwanese people to support pro-China ideas and unification with China.”<sup>61</sup> In 2015, the CCP issued the first official regulation issued that “comprehensively governs United Front work and more importantly seeks to institutionalize, standardize, and establish procedures regulating this work.” The regulation explicitly links “the unification of Taiwan to the goal of the ‘great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation’ and the ‘China dream’.”<sup>62</sup> Taiwan authorities estimate that the PRC spends more than \$337 million annually on UFWD recruiting efforts in Taiwan, and there might be additional “invisible funding,” as well.<sup>63</sup> The *Taipei Times* notes that the PRC uses economic incentives to target “local townships, young people and students, Chinese spouses of Taiwanese, Aborigines, pro-China political parties and groups, temples, descendants of Chinese who retain roots in China, labor groups, farmers’ and fishermen’s associations, and military veterans.” Those who collaborate with the CCP are given public recognition in the media and/or economic rewards.<sup>64</sup>

But Taiwan is only one democracy of many impacted by the CCP. As President Trump reported to Congress, “Beyond the media, the CCP uses a range of actors to advance its interests in the United States and other open democracies. CCP United Front organizations and agents

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<sup>59</sup> BGen Robert Spalding, USAF (ret), *Stealth War: How China Took Over while America’s Elite Slept* (New York: Portfolio/Penguin, 2019), 162–63.

<sup>60</sup> Ratner, “Rising to the China Challenge.”

<sup>61</sup> Discussions with senior Republic of China political warfare officers at Fu Hsing Kang College, National Defense University, Taipei, Taiwan, 2018-19.

<sup>62</sup> Russell Hsiao, “China’s Relations with U.S. Allies and Partners in Europe and the Asia Pacific,” testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, 115th Congress, 5 April 2018.

<sup>63</sup> Chung Li-hua and Sherry Hsiao, “China Targets 10 Groups for ‘United Front’,” *Taipei Times*, 15 January 2018.

<sup>64</sup> Chung and Hsiao, “China Targets 10 Groups for ‘United Front’.”

target businesses, universities, think tanks, scholars, journalists, and local, state, and federal officials in the United States and around the world, attempting to influence discourse and restrict external influence inside the PRC.”<sup>65</sup>

Australia and New Zealand, Europe, Oceania and the Pacific Islands, South America, the Arctic nations, and Africa have all belatedly awoken to the remarkable degree to which the PRC’s malign influence, particularly *Media Warfare*, has infiltrated their regions in pursuit of Beijing’s diplomatic, economic, and military interests.<sup>66</sup> Canada and the United States have had equally rude awakenings regarding the efficacy of PRC united front operations, Media Warfare, and other forms of coercion, repression, and violent attacks within their borders.<sup>67</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic has also alerted many nations to the PRCs harmful intentions and influence, despite Beijing’s extraordinarily aggressive global propaganda campaign.<sup>68</sup>

Of equal concern, as the PRC has co-opted major international institutions, exercising extraordinary control and influence of organizations such as the *United Nations* (UN), *Organization of Islamic Cooperation* (OIC), and *World Health Organization* (WHO). Beijing’s “decade long campaign to secure more clout at the United Nations is now helping shield Beijing from international scrutiny,” according to a *Wall Street Journal* report.<sup>69</sup>

John Garnaut, a former senior advisor to Australian Prime Minister Malcolm B. Turnbull, notes the nature of many countries’ long-overdue awakenings concerning PRC political warfare as well as the lack of consensus on how they should respond:

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<sup>65</sup> Trump, “United States Strategic Approach to the People’s Republic of China.”

<sup>66</sup> John Garnaut, “Australia’s China Reset,” *Monthly*, August 2018; Didi Kirsten Tatlow, “Mapping China-in-Germany,” Synopsis, Charles University (Prague), 2 October 2019; Austin Doehler, “How China Challenges the EU in the Western Balkans,” *Diplomat*, 25 September 2019; Grant Newsham, “China ‘Political Warfare’ Targets U.S.-Affiliated Pacific Islands,” *Asia Times*, 5 August 2019; Derek Grossman et al., *America’s Pacific Island Allies: The Freely Associated States and Chinese Influence* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2019); C. Todd Lopez, “Southcom Commander: Foreign Powers Pose Security Concerns,” U.S. Department of Defense, 6 October 2019; Heather A. Conley, “The Arctic Spring: Washington Is Sleeping through Changes at the Top of the World,” *Foreign Affairs*, 24 September 2019; and Andrew McCormick, “‘Even If You Don’t Think You Have a Relationship with China, China Has a Big Relationship with You’,” *Columbia Journalist Review*, 20 June 2019.

<sup>67</sup> Tom Blackwell, “How China Uses Shadowy United Front as ‘Magic Weapon’ to Try to Extend Its Influence in Canada,” *National Post*, 28 January 2019; and Alexander Bowe, *China’s Overseas United Front Work: Background and Implications for the United States* (Washington, DC: U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, 2018).

<sup>68</sup> “World against the CCP: China Became the Target at the World Health Assembly,” Chinascope, 21 May 2020.

<sup>69</sup> See Yaroslav Trofimov, Drew Hinshaw, and Kate O’Keeffe, “How China Is Taking Over International Organizations, One Vote at a Time,” *Wall Street Journal*, September 29, 2020, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/how-china-is-taking-over-international-organizations-one-vote-at-a-time-11601397208?st=znpa21rp9j7kf75>, and Kenneth Roth et al., “Human Rights Watch World Report 2020: China’s Global Threat to Human Rights” (New York: Human Rights Watch (HRW), 2020), 8–9, [https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/world\\_report\\_download/hrw\\_world\\_report\\_2020\\_0.pdf](https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/world_report_download/hrw_world_report_2020_0.pdf).



*Belatedly, and quite suddenly, political leaders, policy makers and civil society actors in a dozen nations around the world are scrambling to come to terms with a form of China's extraterritorial influence described variously as 'sharp power,' 'United Front work' and 'influence operations'.*” He adds that “a dozen [other nations] are entering the debate . . . but none of these countries has sustained a vigorous conversation, let alone reached a political consensus.”<sup>70</sup>

The use of *Media Warfare* is not unique to the PRC, of course. All nation-states conduct influence operations that include *Media Warfare*, such as public affairs, public relations, and public diplomacy, to secure their own national interests. During the Cold War, for example, the United States and its partners and allies engaged in an ultimately successful political warfare effort, a major part of which involved *Media Warfare*, to bring down the Soviet Union's brutal Iron Curtain that divided much of the world. During China's civil war, the KMT also employed *Media Warfare* operations against the communists, and continued to employ it for decades against the PRC following the ROC's retreat to Taiwan in 1949. The ROC included in this battle a means of communicating with and combatting the PRC that it called *Media Diplomacy*.<sup>71</sup> These operations, in conjunction with broader propaganda efforts, were sophisticated if not always effective. They have been conducted through an array of organizations and through traditional (print, internet, TV and radio news broadcasts) as well as non-traditional means (video news releases, satellite broadcast, movies, TV entertainment programming), and targeted *Overseas Chinese* as well as audiences within the PRC and in Taiwan.<sup>72</sup>

But the PRC's version of political warfare is different than that of other nations, and the goals and intensity of its *Media Warfare* are unique, according to Singaporean diplomat Bihahari Kausikan. A highly respected expert of PRC malign influence, Kausikan notes that the PRC is a totalitarian Leninist state that takes a “holistic approach which melds together the legal and the covert” in conjunction with “persuasion, inducement and coercion.” Importantly, he argues that the aim of the PRC is not simply to “direct behavior but to condition behavior . . . In other words, China does not just want you to comply with its wishes. Far more fundamentally, it wants

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<sup>70</sup> Garnaut, “Australia's China Reset.”

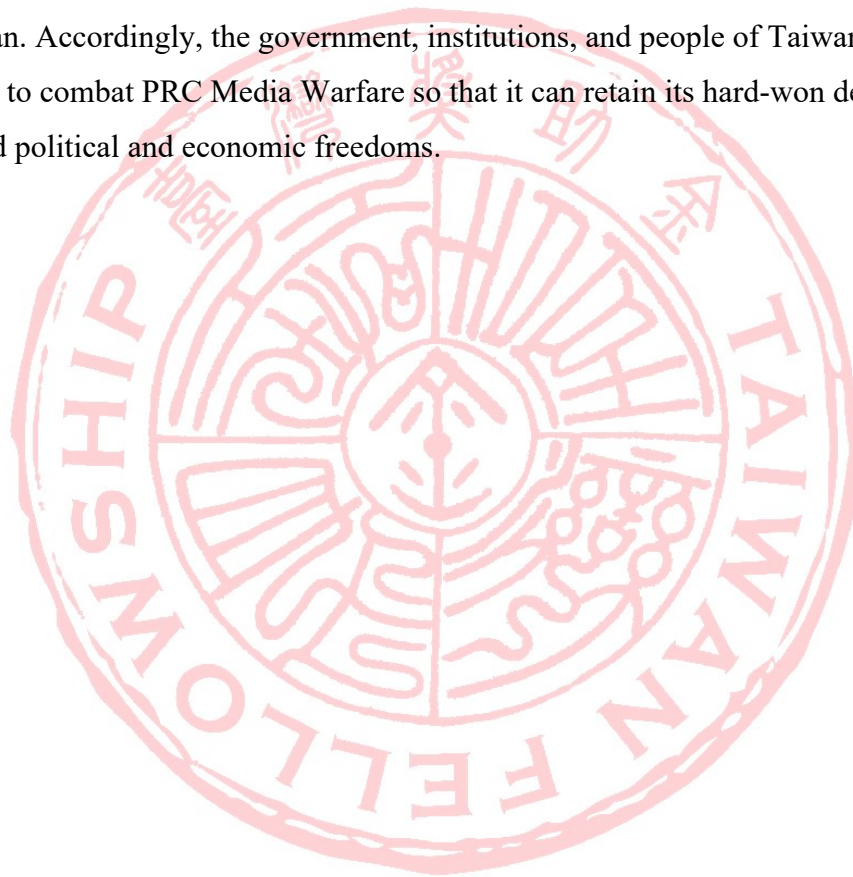
<sup>71</sup> Gary D. Rawnsley, *Taiwan's Informal Diplomacy and Propaganda*, Studies in Diplomacy (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York: Palgrave, 2000), 106-112.

<sup>72</sup> Rawnsley, 22-135.

you to think in such a way that you will of your own volition do what it wants without being told. It's a form of psychological manipulation.”<sup>73</sup>

As it wages global *Media Warfare* to achieve its diplomatic, economic, and military goals, the PRC exports authoritarianism, as detailed in studies by respected organizations such as the *National Endowment for Democracy*, *Freedom House*, and *Human Rights Watch*. Beijing intentionally undermines the credibility of democracy and individual freedoms to bolster support for its own totalitarian regime, which it calls the *China Model*.<sup>74</sup>

To this end, the PRC continues its *Media Warfare* to take control of the territory and people of Taiwan. Accordingly, the government, institutions, and people of Taiwan must better understand how to combat PRC Media Warfare so that it can retain its hard-won democracy, sovereignty, and political and economic freedoms.



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<sup>73</sup> Bihahari Kausikan, “An Expose of How States Manipulate Other Countries’ Citizens,” *Straits Times*, 1 July 2018.

<sup>74</sup> Juan Pablo Cardenal et al., *Sharp Power: Rising Authoritarian Influence* (Washington, DC: National Endowment for Democracy, 2017); Roth et al., “Human Rights Watch World Report 2020: China’s Global Threat to Human Rights,” 1–20, 130–42; and Cook, “The Implications for Democracy of China’s Globalizing Media Influence”.

## Chapter 2

### Media Warfare: Terms and Definitions

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## Chapter 2

### Media Warfare: Terms and Definitions

Terms and their definitions are, of course, crucially important. But the dizzying array of terminology of Media Warfare and its interrelated “warfares” and functions can be confusing; the complexity and seeming redundancy has often stymied effective response. So a careful study of this lexicon is essential.

*Media Warfare* “involves using public opinion as a weapon by propagandizing through various forms of media in order to weaken the adversary’s ‘will to fight’ while ensuring strength of will and unity among civilian and military views on one’s own side.” It “leverages all instruments that inform and influence public opinion including films, television programs, books, the internet, and the global media network” and is “directed against domestic populations in target countries.”<sup>75</sup>

Figure 2-1 depicts some of the terms that are used that form the context of Media Warfare, within such broader framework of *Political Warfare*.

**Table 2-1. General Political Warfare-Related Terms**

<i>media warfare</i>	<i>fake news</i>	<i>information warfare</i>	<i>hard power</i>
<i>cyber warfare</i>	<i>cognitive warfare</i>	<i>lawfare</i>	<i>sharp power</i>
<i>deception</i>	<i>gray zone operations</i>	<i>liaison work</i>	<i>soft power</i>
<i>unrestricted warfare</i>	<i>public opinion warfare</i>	<i>malign influence</i>	<i>smart power</i>
<i>diplomacy</i>	<i>hybrid operations</i>	<i>psychological operations</i>	<i>subversion</i>
<i>disinformation</i>	<i>Indoctri-tainment</i>	<i>active measures</i>	<i>three warfares</i>
<i>united front</i>	<i>influence operations</i>	<i>public diplomacy</i>	<i>false narratives</i>

*Source: compiled by the author.*

There are numerous definitions for these terms given by credible institutions, but often definitions vary somewhat, obscuring conceptual clarity. At a certain point, the dizzying array of terminology that government officials and academics accord to these activities becomes counterproductive, consuming time, intellect, and energy better invested in actually countering

<sup>75</sup> Halper, *China: The Three Warfares*, 12–13.

these malign influence activities. For the purposes of this study, the following terms are most pertinent: *Political Warfare*, *Unrestricted Warfare*, *The Three Warfares (Media/Public Opinion Warfare, Psychological Warfare, Legal Warfare/Lawfare)*, *Cognitive Warfare*, *United Front*, *Liaison Work*, *Public Diplomacy and Soft-to-Sharp Power*, and *Hybrid Warfare*. They are defined for the purpose of this study below, with amplifying discussion.

## Political Warfare

American diplomat George F. Kennan was best known for his delineation of Western grand strategy of *Containment* during the Cold War, as explicated in his famous “Long Telegram” of February 22, 1946.<sup>76</sup> Two years after proposing the ultimately successful policy of “containing” the Soviet Empire to end its totalitarian regime, Kennan drafted another memorandum entitled “The Inauguration of Organized Political Warfare.” His second landmark of strategic thinking laid out the nature of the threats from the *Union of Soviet Socialist Republics* (USSR—the *Soviet Union*) and defined *political warfare* as “the employment of all the means at a nation’s command, short of war, to achieve its national objectives. Such operations are both overt and covert. They range from such overt actions as political alliances, economic measures . . . and ‘white’ propaganda to such covert operations as clandestine support of ‘friendly’ foreign elements, ‘black’ psychological warfare and even encouragement of underground resistance in hostile states.”<sup>77</sup>

This definition is as valid today as it was in 1948. While Kennan was primarily concerned with the Soviet Union at that time, the CCP learned political warfare from the USSR, and has utilized it as an alternative to open kinetic warfare. It is Beijing’s preferred instrument of national power, employed to achieve its national objectives without fighting. However, the PRC’s version of political warfare has evolved in ways not fully understood during Kennan’s era, and new concepts and semantic battlegrounds have since emerged.

*Political warfare* is all-encompassing unrestricted warfare and a critical component of PRC security strategy and foreign policy. It is crucial to understand that all political warfare strategies, tactics, and techniques may be employed *simultaneously* and in what democracies consider to be peacetime, in periods of increased tension, and in wartime. As important, many of these strategies, tactics, and techniques overlap and are interrelated, which sometimes makes it

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<sup>76</sup> J.Y. Smith, “George F. Kennan, 1904–2005: Outsider Forged Cold War Strategy,” *Washington Post*, March 18, 2005.

<sup>77</sup> Kennan, “The Inauguration of Organized Political Warfare.”

difficult for those targeted to detect how and by whom they are being attacked. Finally, it is important to know that these political warfare activities are what the PLA considers to be *strategic support functions*, to be employed in conjunction with kinetic warfare of *without fighting* a kinetic war, and that the PLA has established a special structure (the *Strategic Support Force*, or SSF) to conduct these types of operations.<sup>78</sup>

The PRC's political warfare "seeks to influence emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and behavior of foreign governments, organizations, groups, and individuals in a manner favorable to [the PRC's] own political-military-economic objectives". It is far-reaching and secretive and highly deceptive at times. PRC political warfare goes beyond traditional united front and liaison work, such as building coalitions to support the PRC and "disintegrate" enemies, and the *Three Warfares*, which include public opinion/media warfare, psychological warfare, and legal warfare. Political warfare also involves active measures such as violence and other forms of coercive, destructive attacks.<sup>79</sup>

It is important to recognize that political warfare is the normal way that the CCP does business. In Taiwan and the U.S., such actions require special authorities and oversight for such operations, but the CCP sees political warfare as everyday *modus operandi*. Its political warfare operations include both commonly recognized and non-traditional methods, combining typical influence operations with other state functions such as espionage, clandestine actions, and violent active measures. The PRC's political warfare "arsenal of influence" includes operations identified previously, such as United Front activities and the Three Warfares, as well as propaganda; diplomatic coercion; disinformation; overt and covert media manipulation; active measures; hybrid warfare; and soft power functions such as public diplomacy, public affairs, public relations, cultural affairs activities, and "Indoctri-tainment."

## Unrestricted Warfare

The CCP conducts its political warfare activities under the rubric of *unrestricted warfare*, the underpinning of which was published in February 1999 by Liang Qiao and Xiangsui Wang, two senior People's Liberation Army (PLA) Air Force colonels with the Guangzhou Military District Political Department. Although perhaps not equal in academic stature to PLA's *The Science of*

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<sup>78</sup> John Costello and Joe McReynolds, "China's Strategic Support Force: A Force for a New Era," China Strategic Perspectives, No. 13 (National Defense University Press: Center for the Study of Chinese Military Affairs, Institute for National Strategic Studies, October 2018).

<sup>79</sup> Mark Stokes and Russell Hsiao, *The People's Liberation Army General Political Department: Political Warfare with Chinese Characteristics* (Arlington, VA: Project 2049 Institute, 2013), 3, 5–6.



*Military Strategy* and *The Science of Campaigns*, this book has great influence upon the CCP's senior-level strategic thought.

The colonels wrote that unrestricted warfare “means that any methods can be prepared for use, information is everywhere, the battlefield is everywhere . . . any technology might be combined with any other technology, and that the boundaries between war and non-war and between military and non-military affairs [have] systematically broken down.”<sup>80</sup> Their book, *Unrestricted Warfare*, recommends that the PRC use “asymmetric warfare” to attack the United States and offers “non-military ways to defeat a stronger nation such as the United States through lawfare (that is, using international laws, bodies and courts to restrict America's freedom of movement and policy choices), economic warfare, biological and chemical warfare, cyberattacks, and even terrorism.”<sup>81</sup>

The book received great attention and praise in the PRC, but after the 11 September 2001 terror attacks against the United States, many pro-Chinese academics and business leaders in America asserted that Qiao and Wang “were on the ‘fringe’ of Chinese thought and that their ideas should be dismissed.” These assertions were disingenuous and supported PRC political warfare. Both colonels were subsequently promoted in rank and lauded by the PRC military and civilian news media. Knowingly or unknowingly, those academics and business leaders in the United States were supporting a “carefully managed, secret, and audacious [public relations] and opinion-shaping operation” that was “supervised by the top leaders in Beijing.”<sup>82</sup>

### **The Three Warfares**

The Three Warfares, a PRC political warfare foundation incorporated in the CCP's *Political Work Regulations* in 2003, includes public opinion/media warfare, psychological warfare, and legal warfare.<sup>83</sup> In the PRC, these three types of combat are invariably linked together, as they are seen as interrelated and mutually reinforcing. University of Cambridge professor Stefan Halper describes the Three Warfares as “a dynamic three dimensional war-fighting process that

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<sup>80</sup> Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui, *Unrestricted Warfare: Assumptions on War and Tactics in the Age of Globalization* (Beijing: PLA Literature and Arts Publishing House, 1999), 6–7.

<sup>81</sup> Michael Pillsbury, *The Hundred-Year Marathon: China's Secret Strategy to Replace America as the Global Superpower*, First edition (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2015), 116.

<sup>82</sup> Pillsbury, *The Hundred-Year Marathon*, 116–17, 138.

<sup>83</sup> Elsa Kania, “The PLA's Latest Strategic Thinking on the Three Warfares,” Jamestown Foundation, China Brief 16, no. 13, 22 August 2016 and Stefan Halper, *China: The Three Warfares* (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2013), 27–29.

constitutes war by other means . . . . Importantly, for U.S. planners, this weapon is highly deceptive.”<sup>84</sup>

Elsa Kania at the Center for a New American Security states that the Three Warfares are “intended to control the prevailing discourse and influence perceptions in a way that advances China’s interests, while compromising the capability of opponents to respond.” Such operations conducted by the PRC against the Taiwan and other countries are designed to “seize the ‘decisive opportunity’ for controlling public opinion, organize psychological offense and defense, engage in legal struggle, and fight for popular will and public opinion.” This ultimately “requires efforts to unify military and civilian thinking, divide the enemy into factions, weaken the enemy’s combat power, and organize legal offensives.”<sup>85</sup>

According to Kania, key objectives of Three Warfares operations are as follows: “control of public opinion, blunting an adversary’s determination, transformation of emotion, psychological guidance, collapse of (an adversary’s) organization, psychological defense, [and] restriction through law.”<sup>86</sup>

## **Cognitive Warfare**

Cognitive Warfare is a tool that reportedly has enabled the PRC to “exponentially” extend its domination of cognitive domains globally, according to researcher Joanne Patti Munisteri.<sup>87</sup> The term refers to the deployment of instantaneous, multi-platform social media and highly personalized “mass personal communication” combined with the theory of reflexivity to impose perceived ideas on reality. This idea imposition impacts the mental cognition of a targeted group, shapes mainstream public opinion, and ultimately obtains a comprehensive strategic advantage, according to political warfare expert Yu Tsung-chi.<sup>88</sup> These social media often have, deservedly or not, much higher credibility than traditional media, and they disseminate information much faster.

The attacker employs “precision attacks.” The attacks are achieved with maximum effect at minimal cost, and create the most favorable circumstances for the attackers strategic purposes

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<sup>84</sup> Stefan Halper, *China: The Three Warfares* (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2013), 11, 33.

<sup>85</sup> Kania, “The PLA’s Latest Strategic Thinking on the Three Warfares.”

<sup>86</sup> Kania, “The PLA’s Latest Strategic Thinking on the Three Warfares.”

<sup>87</sup> Joanne Patti Munisteri, “Controlling Cognitive Domains,” *Small Wars Journal*, August 24, 2019, <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/controlling-cognitive-domains>.

<sup>88</sup> Tsung-chi (Max) Yu, “Winning Against Cognitive Warfare,” *Taipei Times*, February 9, 2020, <http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/editorials/print/2020/02/09/2003730624>.

or, in the case of election interference, preferred candidate. These attacks consist of “seemingly unrelated infiltration, one sided trade battles, cyber hacks and data sweeps in historically soft target sectors”.

The focus areas of PRC Cognitive Warfare include Media, Entertainment, and Information Operations; Education Systems; Finance-Financial Sectors; Health; and Security and Surveillance Industries.<sup>89</sup>

### **Media Warfare (Public Opinion Warfare)**

*Media warfare* (also called *Public Opinion Warfare*) uses overt and covert media manipulation to influence perceptions and attitudes. The purpose of the PRC’s media warfare is to shift the overall balance of strength between the PRC and its opponents, in the PRC’s favor. To fulfill this purpose requires more than just securing exposure for a particular point of view or a set of facts, as public relations or public affairs practitioners seek to do. In *Media Warfare*, the goals are to preserve friendly morale, generate public support at home and abroad, weaken the enemy’s will to fight, and alter the enemy’s situational assessment in self-destructive ways.<sup>90</sup>

According to PLA National Defense University texts, media warfare “involves using public opinion as a weapon by propagandizing through various forms of media in order to weaken the adversary’s ‘will to fight’ while ensuring strength of will and unity among civilian and military views on one’s own side.”<sup>91</sup> Public opinion/media warfare “leverages all instruments that inform and influence public opinion including films, television programs, books, the internet, and the global media network” and it is directed against domestic populations in target countries.<sup>92</sup>

Media Warfare is the “struggle to gain dominance over the venue for implementing psychological and legal warfare”, according to Heritage Foundation’ Dean Cheng.<sup>93</sup> It is perhaps best understood as a “constant, ongoing activity aimed at long-term influence of perceptions and attitudes,” says Cheng. Although the main weapon of public opinion/media warfare is the news

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<sup>89</sup> Munisteri, “Controlling Cognitive Domains.”

<sup>90</sup> Dean Cheng, “Winning without Fighting: Chinese Public Opinion Warfare and the Need for a Robust American Response,” Backgrounder (The Heritage Foundation, November 26, 2012), 4, <https://www.heritage.org/asia/report/winning-without-fighting-chinese-public-opinion-warfare-and-the-need-robust-american>.

<sup>91</sup> Kania, “The PLA’s Latest Strategic Thinking on the Three Warfares.”

<sup>92</sup> Halper, *China: The Three Warfares*, 12–13.

<sup>93</sup> Cheng, “Winning without Fighting: Chinese Public Opinion Warfare and the Need for a Robust American Response,” 3.



media, including both domestic and foreign entities, the focus of public opinion/media warfare is not limited to the press. It involves all of the instruments that inform and influence public opinion (e.g., movies, television programs, books).

Regarding the press, Ross Babbage at the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments writes, the PRC “operates the *Voice of China*, *Xinhua News Agency*, and hundreds of publications” that are “reinforced by the tailored use of local media outlets, strong social media capabilities, and cyber operations, all of which can be focused on current issues in particular countries.” Moreover, “agencies of the Beijing regime fund the monthly publication of newspaper supplements [that contain] pro-Beijing news coverage in the major cities of many Western and developing countries, including the United States, Australia, and Britain.”<sup>94</sup>

Media warfare also employs “Indoctrinainment,” which is exemplified in movies such as the propaganda blockbuster *Wolf Warrior II* (2017). Further, Beijing has co-opted much of the Western film industry. According to U.S. vice president Michael R. “Mike” Pence, “Beijing routinely demands that Hollywood portray China in a strictly positive light” and “punishes studios and producers that don’t. Beijing’s censors are quick to edit or outlaw movies that criticize China, even in minor ways.” The remake of *Red Dawn* (2012) “was digitally edited to make the villains North Korean, not Chinese,” while *World War Z* (2013) saw the cutting of “the script’s mention of a virus because it originated in China.”<sup>95</sup> By virtue of “the scale of its domestic market,” the PRC has ensured that Hollywood avoids “issues that the CCP would consider sensitive” and produces “soft propaganda movies that portray China in a positive light to global audiences,” such as *The Great Wall* (2016).<sup>96</sup>

Research and theoretical exploration of Media Warfare is not relegated only to military institutions such as the PLA’s NDU. For example, embedded in Tsinghua University’s School of Journalism and Communications is the *Future Media Warfare Research Lab*.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Ross Babbage, *Winning Without Fighting: Chinese and Russian Political Warfare Campaigns and How the West Can Prevail*, vol. I (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2019), 35–36.

<sup>95</sup> Michael J. Pence, “Remarks by Vice President Pence on the Administration’s Policy toward China,” speech, Hudson Institute, Washington, DC, 4 October 2018.

<sup>96</sup> Babbage, *Winning Without Fighting*, vol. I, 36.

<sup>97</sup> Szu-Chien Hsu and J. Michael Cole, *Insidious Power: How China Undermines Global Democracy* (Manchester, UK: Eastbridge Books, 2020), 78.

## Psychological Warfare

*Psychological Warfare* is defined by the U.S. Department of Defense as “planned operations to convey selected information and indicators to foreign audiences to influence their emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and ultimately the behavior of foreign governments, organizations, groups, and individuals. The purpose of psychological operations is to induce or reinforce foreign attitudes and behavior favorable to the originator’s objectives.”<sup>98</sup>

The PRC’s use of psychological warfare includes employing “diplomatic pressure, rumor[s], false narratives and harassment to express displeasure, assert hegemony, and convey threats.”<sup>99</sup> According to a variety of PLA National Defense University texts, Beijing’s psychological warfare strategy includes “integrating [psychological attacks] and armed attacks . . . carrying out offense and defense at the same time, with offense as the priority . . . [and] synthetically using multiple forms of forces.” During military operations, psychological warfare should be closely integrated to “intensify the efficacy of conventional attacks” while “taking advantage of ‘opportune moments’ and ‘striking first’ to seize the initiative.”<sup>100</sup>

Psychological warfare also involves military exercises and operations short of war, including the PLA Navy’s transit of Taiwan’s waterways, PLA Air Force overflights of Taiwan and Japan’s territorial waters, military exercises near Taiwan designed to demoralize Taiwan’s citizenry and leadership, and joint training exercises with other countries such as those between the PLA and Royal Thai Armed Forces.<sup>101</sup>

## Legal Warfare (Lawfare)

*Legal warfare*, or *lawfare*, has a particularly important role in supplying ammunition for the PRC’s Media Warfare. Lawfare exploits “all aspects of the law, including national law, international law, and the laws of war, in order to secure seizing ‘legal principle superiority’ and delegitimize an adversary.”<sup>102</sup> Tools used in lawfare operations include domestic legislation, international legislation, judicial law, legal pronouncement, and law enforcement, which are often used in combination with one another.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> *Psychological Operations*, Joint Publication 3-13.2 (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2010), GL-8.

<sup>99</sup> Halper, *China: The Three Warfares*, 12.

<sup>100</sup> Kania, “The PLA’s Latest Strategic Thinking on the Three Warfares.”

<sup>101</sup> Kasit Piromya, interview with the author, Bangkok, Thailand, 1 May 2018.

<sup>102</sup> Kania, “The PLA’s Latest Strategic Thinking on the Three Warfares.”

<sup>103</sup> Halper, *China: The Three Warfares*, 13.

In its Lawfare operations, the PRC is creative: it conjures up law or uses bogus law to inform claims to territory and resources, it employs bogus maps to “justify” claims (most notably the nine-dash line U-shaped line that encompasses approximately 1 million square miles of the South China Sea), it selectively employs provisions in UNCLOS and other international legal conventions for specific unintended purposes, and it distorts of the law in order to extend Beijing’s administrative writ into the South China Sea. Through these Lawfare attacks, the PRC justifies its actions as legally valid and psychologically undermines key audiences by creating doubts among adversaries, neutral nations or “fence-sitters” who have not yet chosen to support one side or another, and the broader international community about the justification of an opponent’s actions.<sup>104</sup>

In the PRC’s efforts to assert control over the South China Sea, for example, lawfare “has involved the utilization of rather tortuous interpretations of international law to oppose the Philippines’ position [in the dispute] and seek to delegitimize the arbitration process.”<sup>105</sup> The PRC has also used lawfare to bolster its territorial claims in the South China Sea by, for example, designating the village of Sansha, located on the disputed Paracel Islands, as a Hainan prefecture, in an attempt to extend PRC control far into the region.<sup>106</sup> In addition, Beijing uses lawfare to block U.S. military activities in Japan and Pacific island territories.<sup>107</sup>

Beijing’s use of legal warfare also includes its declaration of extraterritorial rights, which entails PRC security agencies to “extend their operations into the United States and other allied countries by attempting to operate with legal impunity and enforce their own domestic laws overseas.” Such lawfare deployments include *Operation Fox Hunt* and *Operation Skynet*, in which PRC agents penetrated foreign countries to apprehend allegedly corrupt ethnic Chinese and regime officials. As one example of these operations, Chinese agents attempted to kidnap an ethnic Chinese person in New York and smuggle him onto a China-bound aircraft.”<sup>108</sup>

Two examples of how the PRC integrates Media Warfare with Lawfare follow:

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<sup>104</sup> Stefan Halper, “China: The Three Warfares (Prepared for Andy Marshall, Director, Office of Net Assessment, Office of the Secretary of Defense)” (University of Cambridge, May 2013), 29–30, <http://cryptome.org/2014/06/prc-three-wars.pdf>.

<sup>105</sup> Kania, “The PLA’s Latest Strategic Thinking on the Three Warfares.”

<sup>106</sup> Halper, *China: The Three Warfares*, 13.

<sup>107</sup> Ross Babbage, *Winning Without Fighting: Chinese and Russian Political Warfare Campaigns and How the West Can Prevail*, vol. II (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2019), 17–25; and Kerry K. Gershaneck, “‘Faux Pacifists’ Imperil Japan while Empowering China,” *Asia Times*, 10 June 2018.

<sup>108</sup> Babbage, *Winning Without Fighting*, vol. I, 30–31.



- Beijing either finds or contrives “historical documents” to establish the legal basis for what it claims to be “indisputable sovereign rights” over contested (or other) territory, such as the islands in the Nansei Shoto area administered by Japan (called “Senkakus” in Japan and “Diaoyu” in Chinese). Then the CCP establishes an “online museum” website to showcase these documents. It then publicizes the website via its traditional media such as *Global Times* to help the CCP press its legal case and influence audiences globally.<sup>109</sup>
- In 2013, the CCP launched Media Warfare assaults as part of a ferocious Lawfare operation that successfully coerced the Spanish government to change its existing “Universal Justice” laws. These laws had been used to bring charges and arrest orders against senior CCP officials such as Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao, and Li Peng for crimes including genocide against Tibetans and Falun Gong members. Consequently, Spanish courts dismissed the cases and charges.<sup>110</sup>

## Active Measures

PRC political warfare campaigns include espionage and covert, Cold War-style *active measures*. The PRC’s active-measure tactics, techniques, and procedures include espionage, bribery, censorship, deception, subversion, blackmail, “enforced disappearances,” street violence, assassination, and the use of proxy armies such as the *United Wa State Army* in Myanmar. Many in Taiwan, the United States and other democracies fail to recognize such active measures, thereby imperiling their own national security.<sup>111</sup>

These tools may be used for specific purposes, such as when an enforced disappearance is conducted in Thailand to silence an expatriate Chinese critic of the CCP. But the critics themselves are not the only political warfare targets. Once such a disappearance is publicized within the host nation, the overall impact is substantial. Thai citizens and Chinese seeking refuge in Thailand learn quickly that, to use a term that E. Perry Link is credited with coining, “the anaconda is indeed in the chandelier”—and the Thai government cannot protect them from it.<sup>112</sup>

<sup>109</sup> Global Times Staff, “China Launches Diaoyu Islands Online Museum, Proves Sovereign Rights over Territory,” *Global Times*, October 3, 2020, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1202655.shtml>.

<sup>110</sup> Hsu and Cole, *Insidious Power: How China Undermines Global Democracy*, 147–61.

<sup>111</sup> Discussions with Thai and foreign academics, Thailand, 2013–18; Discussions with senior Republic of China political warfare officers at Fu Hsing Kang College, National Defense University, Taipei, Taiwan, 2018–20; and Interview with a senior U.S. Department of State official, Bangkok, Thailand, 30 December 2016.

<sup>112</sup> Kasit, interview with the author; and Perry Link, “China: The Anaconda in the Chandelier,” *New York Review of Books*, 11 April 2002.

## United Front Work

*United Front Work* is a classic Leninist political warfare strategy that is integrally engaged with Media Warfare. As successfully employed by the Bolsheviks during the Russian Civil War, the communists cooperate with non-revolutionaries for practical purposes—for example, to defeat a common enemy—and win them over to the revolutionary cause.

Mao adopted the United Front concept, under the principle of “uniting with friends and disintegrating enemies.” He called for worldwide revolution, using united fronts “to mobilize [the CCP’s] friends to strike at [its] enemies.” He described the united front as a “Magic Weapon” that could match the military power of the Chinese Red Army, the precursor to the People’s Liberation Army (PLA).<sup>113</sup> Following the CCP’s effective use of a united front strategy to defeat the Chinese nationalist faction, also known as the Kuomintang (KMT), in 1949 and force the Republic of China government from the mainland, this strategy came to be “an integral part of Chinese Communist thought and practice.”<sup>114</sup>

Taiwan officials estimate that the PRC spends more than \$337 million annually on UFDW recruiting efforts in Taiwan, and there might be additional “invisible funding,” as well.<sup>115</sup> The *Taipei Times* notes that the PRC uses economic incentives to target “local townships, young people and students, Chinese spouses of Taiwanese, Aborigines, pro-China political parties and groups, temples, descendants of Chinese who retain roots in China, labor groups, farmers’ and fishermen’s associations, and military veterans.”<sup>116</sup>

As noted earlier, the United Front Work Department supports the CCP’s Media Warfare through (among other CCP organizations) the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office (OCAO). While the PRC historically sought control over prominent overseas Chinese publications such as the once autonomous *Sing Tao Daily* and *Ming Pao* in Hong Kong, it also has increasingly focused on smaller local Chinese-language media as well. In 2001, OCAO and its affiliate *China News Service* (CNS) established the *World Chinese Media Forum* (WCMF). The purpose of this biannual gathering is to bring the leadership of top Chinese-language publications across the globe, with the stated goal of fostering connections between CNS and overseas Chinese-

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<sup>113</sup> Peter Mattis, “An American Lens on China’s Interference and Influence-Building Abroad,” ASAN Forum, 30 April 2018.

<sup>114</sup> Jonas Parelló-Plesner and Belinda Li, *The Chinese Communist Party’s Foreign Interference Operations: How the U.S. and Other Democracies Should Respond* (Washington, DC: Hudson Institute, 2018), 8–9.

<sup>115</sup> Chung Li-hua and Sherry Hsiao, “China Targets 10 Groups for ‘United Front’,” *Taipei Times*, 15 January 2018.

<sup>116</sup> Chung and Hsiao, “China Targets 10 Groups for ‘United Front’.”

language media. Key goals of the meeting are to convince overseas Chinese- language media to run CNS reports and to bring their messaging in line with the CCP's.<sup>117</sup>

Xi Jinping's has also dubbed the United Front a "magic weapon" in achieving his *China Dream*.<sup>118</sup> Under Xi, it remains a vital element of PRC political warfare, "not only for maintaining control over potentially problematic groups, such as religious and ethnic minorities and overseas Chinese, but also as an important part of China's interference strategy abroad." According to University of Canterbury politics professor Anne-Marie Brady, the CCP employed united front work for decades in both its domestic and foreign policy, but Xi, whose own father directed political warfare operations for much of his career, has expanded the strategy greatly.<sup>119</sup>

While the CCP's United Front Work Department has functional responsibility for these operations and activities, PRC united front work is a task of all CCP agencies and members. Every CCP agency, from the International Liaison Department and the Central Propaganda Department to the *Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries*, is tasked with engaging in united front activities, as are all PRC government departments and local authorities. Executives of China's state-owned enterprises are CCP members, and as the CCP increasingly intrudes into the management of joint ventures, it is safe to assume that there exists intense PRC business engagement in united front work.<sup>120</sup>

A key element of united front work is to co-opt international organizations. For example, the PRC uses institutions such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Criminal Police Organization (Interpol) to conduct its political warfare operations. Before the PRC admitted to detaining Interpol president Meng Hongwei in 2018, the U.S. Department of Justice was asked to investigate whether Meng, a former PRC vice minister of public safety, was abusing his position at Interpol to harass or persecute Chinese dissidents and activists abroad.<sup>121</sup> Concurrently, the WHO has been accused of turning a blind eye to the PRC's cover-up of the COVID-19 global pandemic, which has killed more than 1.6 million people globally as of this

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<sup>117</sup> David A Gitter and Brock M. Erdahl, "Telling China's Story Well: An Investigation into Chinese Influence Operations Targeting American Chinese-Language Media Outlets" (1519 Connecticut Ave NW Ste 300 Washington DC 20036: Center for Advanced China Research (CACR), June 15, 2020), 5–6.

<sup>118</sup> Pareello-Plesner and Li, *The Chinese Communist Party's Foreign Interference Operations*, 8.

<sup>119</sup> Anne-Marie Brady, "Exploit Every Rift: United Front Work Goes Global," in *Party Watch Annual Report 2018* (Washington, DC: Center for Advanced China Research, 2018), 34–40.

<sup>120</sup> Simon Denyer, "Command and Control: China's Communist Party Extends Reach into Foreign Companies," *Washington Post*, 28 January 2018.

<sup>121</sup> Bridget Johnson, "DOJ Asked to Probe China's Use of INTERPOL Notices to Persecute Dissidents," *PJ Media*, 30 April 2018.



printing. The WHO has also bowed to PRC direction by excluding Taiwan from the World Health Assembly during the past few years, in violation of its own charter.<sup>122</sup>

United front operations also target environmental activist groups, which have been compromised by PRC funding and influence. In May 2017, Greg Rushford at *The Wall Street Journal* exposed how multiple environmental organizations “are betraying their ideals in the pursuit of money and access in China.” His research highlighted the unwillingness of multiple activist groups—Greenpeace most notable among them—to take a stand against Beijing’s colossal environmental destruction in the South China Sea through its dredging-based artificial island-building program, as well as the silence of those activists regarding the PRC’s massive overfishing in the South China Sea.<sup>123</sup> In October 2019, Michael K. Cohen exposed in the *Journal of Political Risk* several activist groups cooperating to ensure that the PRC maintains a total monopoly on the production of strategically vital rare earths, an advantage that the PRC has already used as a weapon against Japan and which, it has public stated, it will use against the United States, as well.<sup>124</sup>

### **Liaison Work**

*Liaison work*, a phrase used primarily by the PLA, supports united front and other political warfare operations by vectoring military operations, intelligence, and finance “to amplify or attenuate the political effect of the military instrument of national power.” Mark Stokes and Russell Hsiao, citing PLA references, provide the mission of liaison work as:

Establishing military liaison work policies and regulations, organizing and executing Taiwan (subversion) work; researching and studying foreign military situations; leading All-Army enemy disintegration work; . . . organizing and leading psychological warfare education and training, . . . external military propaganda work; [and] assuming responsibility for relevant International Red Cross liaison and military-related overseas Chinese work.<sup>125</sup>

Liaison Work against Taiwan is similar in many respects to that practiced by the PLA against the United States. According to political warfare expert J. Michael Waller, this Liaison

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<sup>122</sup> Kerry K. Gershaneck, “WHO Is the Latest Victim in Beijing’s War on Taiwan,” *Nation* (Thailand), 22 May 2018.

<sup>123</sup> Greg Rushford, “How China Tamed the Green Watchdogs: Too Many Environmental Organizations Are Betraying Their Ideals for the Love of the Yuan,” *Wall Street Journal*, 29 May 2017.

<sup>124</sup> Michael K. Cohen, “Greenpeace Working to Close Rare Earth Processing Facility in Malaysia: The World’s Only Major REE Processing Facility in Competition with China,” *Journal of Political Risk* 7, no. 10 (October 2019).

<sup>125</sup> Stokes and Hsiao, *The People’s Liberation Army General Political Department*, 14–15.

Work is conducted “in an orchestrated campaign of good cop/bad cop”. Waller says PRC officials have gone directly to U.S. public opinion, trying to appeal to sentimental feelings of cooperation and partnership while literally threatening war. The operation is aimed at five levels: the American public at large, journalists who influence the public and decision makers, business elites, Congress, and the president and his inner circle.”<sup>126</sup>

Liaison work utilizes intelligence collection and analysis to create and exploit divisions within an opposing nation’s government, particularly its defense establishment. To this end, it “develops and sustains rapport with foreign defense elites through exchanges” and “influences perceptions on Taiwan and with other external audiences through propaganda [as well as] strategic, operational, and tactical-level psychological operations.” Finally, liaison work counters other nations’ efforts to “shape perceptions within China.”<sup>127</sup>

*Subversion*, more commonly referred to in PRC parlance as *disintegration work*, is the reverse side of friendly contact work. According to Stokes and Hsiao, ideological subversion targets the “political cohesion of coalitions, societies, and defense establishments.” Political warfare operatives target individuals or groups to find and exploit political and psychological vulnerabilities. They then leverage propaganda, deception, and intelligence to “undermine an opponent’s national will through [the] targeting of ideology, psychology, and morale.”<sup>128</sup>

Liaison work is also directed at counter-subversion against adversarial political warfare. The PRC views any external effort to “Westernize and weaken CCP control through peaceful evolution and [the] promotion of universal values” as subversion and responds by conducting psychological defense measures such as restricting media access and monitoring internet use.<sup>129</sup>

## **Public Diplomacy and Soft-to-Sharp Power**

Some academics conflate political warfare with *public diplomacy*, but it is incorrect to do so. Public diplomacy is international political advocacy carried out in a transparent manner through routine media channels and public engagements. It differs from political warfare in terms of both target and intent. While public diplomacy seeks to influence the opinions of large audiences, political warfare involves a calculated manipulation of a target country’s leaders, elites, and

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<sup>126</sup> Stokes and Hsiao, *The People’s Liberation Army General Political Department*, 14.

<sup>127</sup> Stokes and Hsiao, *The People’s Liberation Army General Political Department*, 14–15.

<sup>128</sup> Stokes and Hsiao, *The People’s Liberation Army General Political Department*, 15–16.

<sup>129</sup> Stokes and Hsiao, *The People’s Liberation Army General Political Department*, 16.

other influential citizens to undermine its strategies, defense policies, and broader international norms. Public diplomacy attracts, whereas political warfare compels.

Another way to view PRC political warfare is through the lens of the terms *soft power*, *hard power*, *smart power*, and *sharp power*. The first two terms have been in the common lexicon of international relations and national security for about two decades, while the third became popular around 2009 and the fourth gained credence in the past several years.

*Soft power*, as attributed to Harvard University's Joseph S. Nye Jr., describes gentler, non-coercive means of cultural, ideological, and institutional influence. Nye hypothesized that much of the world would want to be like the United States, which would consequently help the United States shape the world. According to Eric X. Li, "for Nye, the basis of U.S. soft power was liberal democratic politics, free market economics, and fundamental values such as human rights."<sup>130</sup>

In the realm of international relations, soft power simply means the ability of one nation to affect another's government and people through attraction to the former's culture, political ideals, economy, and even military. Such actions are often conducted by persuasion rather than pressure. *Hard power*, on the other hand, involves coercive measures, such as the threat of military attack, blockade, or economic boycott. *Smart power* was later described by Nye to accommodate the use of "smart strategies that combine the tools of both hard and soft power"—that is, the use of both carrots and sticks to achieve foreign policy objectives.<sup>131</sup>

While PRC political warfare entails soft, hard, and smart power, some of its operations and techniques are neither *hard* in the openly kinetic or forcefully coercive sense nor *soft* in the gentle "attract and persuade" sense. The PRC's very aggressive influence operations and political warfare activities comprise what is now commonly referred to as *sharp power*, a form of asymmetric warfare that exploits the openness of democratic societies. Unlike soft power, sharp power "is not principally about attraction or even persuasion; instead, it centers on distraction and manipulation," according to a National Endowment for Democracy (NED) report.<sup>132</sup> In open

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<sup>130</sup> Eric X. Li, "The Rise and Fall of Soft Power: Joseph Nye's Concept Lost Relevance, but China Could Bring It Back," *Foreign Policy*, 20 August 2018.

<sup>131</sup> Joseph S. Nye Jr., "Get Smart: Combining Hard and Soft Power," *Foreign Affairs* 88, no. 4 (July/August 2009): 160–63.

<sup>132</sup> Juan Pablo Cardenal et al., *Sharp Power: Rising Authoritarian Influence* (Washington, DC: National Endowment for Democracy, 2017), 6.



and democratic systems, sharp power acts like a Trojan horse that covertly sabotages social harmony.

Sharp power can be defined as *the aggressive use of media and institutions to shape public opinion abroad*. It is “sharp” in that it is used to “pierce, penetrate, or perforate the information [and political environments] in the targeted countries.” Those regimes that employ it “are not necessarily seeking to ‘win hearts and minds,’ the common frame of reference for ‘soft power’ efforts, but they are surely seeking to manage their target audiences by manipulating or poisoning the information that reaches them.”<sup>133</sup>

The NED report cautions that Beijing’s massive initiatives involving news media, culture, think tanks, and academia should not be misconstrued as “charm offensives” or efforts to “share alternative ideas” or “broaden the debate.” Rather, through sharp power, “the generally unattractive values of authoritarian systems—which encourage a monopoly on power, top-down control, censorship, and coerced or purchased loyalty—are projected outward, and those affected are not so much audiences as [they are] victims.”<sup>134</sup>

To some, sharp power represents a new front in the battle for public opinion. However, to those paying attention to the CCP’s covert and overt operations dating as far back as the 1920s, sharp power is merely a standard element of PRC political warfare in fashionable new wrapping.

## **Hybrid Warfare**

*Hybrid warfare* is defined by NATO political-military expert Chris Kremidas Courtney as “the mix of conventional and unconventional, military and non-military, overt and covert actions employed in a coordinated manner to achieve specific objectives while remaining below the threshold of formally declared warfare.”<sup>135</sup> Like Russia, the PRC successfully employs hybrid warfare—sometimes called *gray zone warfare*—to achieve its political aims.

In its hybrid operations, the PRC (like Russia) applies its “full spectrum of economic, legal, information, cyber, and paramilitary means to achieve [its] objectives in a slow and often ambiguous manner.” Beijing is generally careful to “not cross any threshold which would trigger collective military action in response,” thereby lowering the political price for its aggressive

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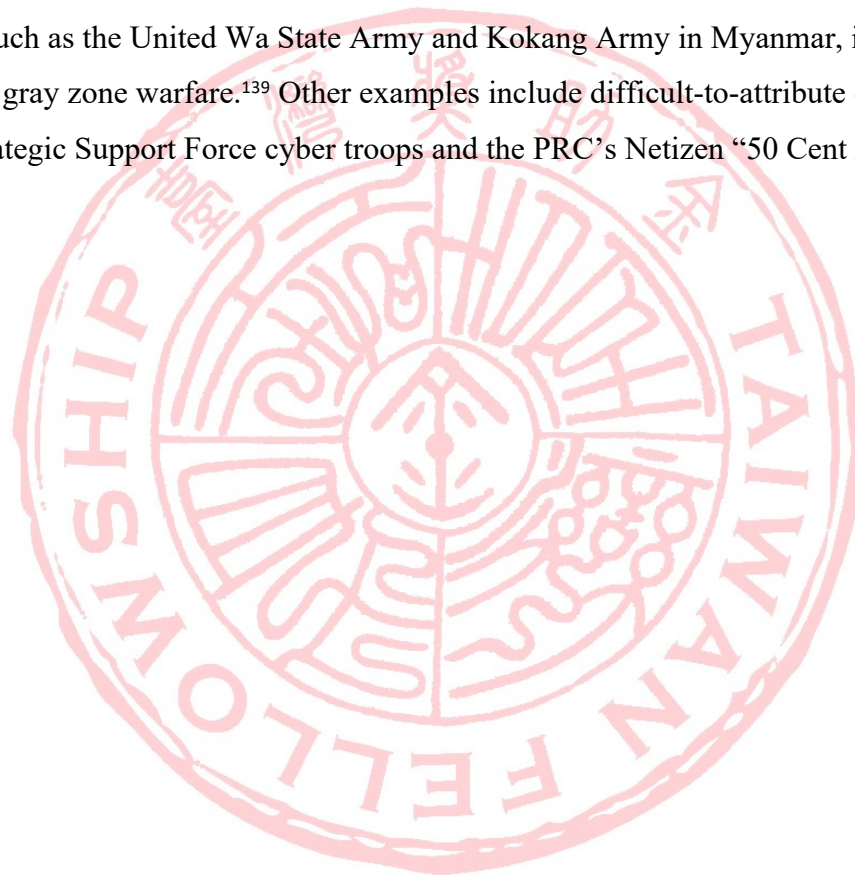
<sup>133</sup> Cardenal et al., *Sharp Power*, 6, 13.

<sup>134</sup> Cardenal et al., *Sharp Power*, 13.

<sup>135</sup> Chris Kremidas-Courtney, “Hybrid Warfare: The Comprehensive Approach in the Offense,” *Strategy International*, 13 February 2019.

expansionism.<sup>136</sup> For example, Beijing has “gradually expanded its control and influence in the South China Sea by constructing artificial islands [and establishing military bases on them], sending armed fishermen to patrol claimed territorial waters, and declaring an air (defense) identification zone.” It has exerted control over most of the South China Sea this way—“without firing a shot.”<sup>137</sup>

Further, the PRC’s employment of its Coast Guard and Peoples Armed Forces Maritime Militia in coercive, violent, at-sea confrontations with neighboring countries’ ships and fishing boats is another example of its approach to hybrid warfare.<sup>138</sup> Moreover, the employment of proxy armies, such as the United Wa State Army and Kokang Army in Myanmar, is another example of this gray zone warfare.<sup>139</sup> Other examples include difficult-to-attribute cyber attacks by the PLA Strategic Support Force cyber troops and the PRC’s Netizen “50 Cent Army.”<sup>140</sup>



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<sup>136</sup> Kremidas-Courtney, “Hybrid Warfare.”

<sup>137</sup> Kremidas-Courtney, “Hybrid Warfare.”

<sup>138</sup> Conor M. Kennedy and Andrew S. Erickson, *China’s Third Sea Force, The People’s Armed [SEP] Forces Maritime Militia: Tethered to the PLA*, China Maritime Report No. 1 (Newport, RI: China Maritime Studies Institute, U.S. Naval War College, 2017) and [SEP] Kerry K. Gershaneck and James E. Fanell, “White Warships and Little Blue Men: The Looming ‘Short, Sharp War’ in the East China Sea over the Senkakus,” *Marine Corps University Journal*, Fall 2017, 73, <https://www.usmcu.edu/white-warships-and-little-blue-men>.

<sup>139</sup> Anthony Davis, “China’s Loose Arms Still Fuel Myanmar’s Civil Wars”, *Asia Times*, January 28, 2020, <https://www.asiatimes.com/2020/01/article/chinas-loose-arms-still-fuel-myanmars-civil-wars/>. and Bertil Lintner, “A Chinese War in Myanmar,” *Asia Times*, April 5, 2017, <https://www.asiatimes.com/2017/04/article/chinese-war-myanmar/>.

<sup>140</sup> Keoni Everington, “China’s ‘Troll Factory’ Targeting Taiwan with Disinformation Prior to Election,” *Taiwan News*, November 5, 2018, <https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/3568146>.

# Chapter 3

## Goals & Strategies, Ways & Means

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## Chapter 3

### Goals & Strategies, Ways & Means

This chapter is divided into two sections.

- The first section addresses Media Warfare within the context of PRC general Political Warfare, by examining the goals and fundamental underpinnings of both. This section also addresses how Media Warfare is funded and related aspects pertaining to BRI.
- The second section addresses PRC Media Warfare against Taiwan: its goals, objectives, strategies, hoped-for outcomes, audiences, and themes. The discussion of these topics consists of answers to specific questions, in conformance with a survey format utilized by the author in discussions with Taiwan and other experts for this study.

### General Underpinnings of Political and Media Warfare

#### *Goals and Supporting Pillars*

Ross Babbage at the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments identified *four general strategic goals* of PRC political warfare operations.

*The first and most significant goal is “the maintenance of uncontested Communist Party rule.”* To achieve that aim, the CCP “employs sophisticated political warfare operations to suppress domestic dissent and reinforce Party loyalty as well as to undermine China’s international rivals.”<sup>141</sup>

*The second strategic goal is to achieve Xi Jinping’s “China Dream” to “restore China to what it sees as its rightful place as the preponderant power in the Indo-Asia-Pacific [region], in both its continental and maritime domains.”* To this end, writes Babbage, the CCP propagates a powerful narrative “that emphasizes the leadership’s determination to overcome the ‘century of China’s humiliation’ and restore the nation’s power, wealth, and influence.” The CCP employs proven-but-updated political warfare methods to achieve this goal: these methods allow it to “penetrate deeply into the opponent’s camps, gather intelligence, plant disinformation, recruit sympathizers and spies, sow disruption, undermine morale, and seize effective control of strategically important infrastructure.”<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Ross Babbage, *Winning Without Fighting: Chinese and Russian Political Warfare Campaigns and How the West Can Prevail*, vol. I (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2019), 24.

<sup>142</sup> Babbage, *Winning Without Fighting*, vol. I, 24.

*The CCP's third goal is to “build China’s influence and prestige” so that it will be “respected as equal, if not superior, to the United States.”* It conducts political warfare operations to “push the United States and its democratic allies from their predominant role in the Western Pacific and Eastern Indian Ocean” and to “build strategic strength in hitherto non-aligned parts of Central Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and South America.”<sup>143</sup>

*Finally, the CCP's fourth goal is to “export its model of tight authoritarian political control coupled with a managed but relatively open economy.”*<sup>144</sup> Its political warfare narrative is that the PRC approach to governance and development is a far more attractive option to that offered by the liberal democracies of the West. Princeton University professor Aaron L. Friedberg states that “China now seeks to present itself as providing an alternative model for development to that offered by the West, one that combines market-driven economic growth with authoritarian politics.”<sup>145</sup> Notable for its relevance to the CCP’s global intentions, Babbage assesses that “part of Xi’s vision is the fostering of a growing group of like-minded revisionist countries that, over time, may constitute an inter-national partnership, alliance, or even a China-centered empire.”<sup>146</sup>

Heritage Foundation’s Dean Cheng identifies the *general goals of Media Warfare* as follows:<sup>147</sup>

1. Preserve friendly morale
2. Generate public support at home and abroad
3. Weaken an enemy’s will to fight
4. Alter an enemy’s situational assessment.

To achieve these political and media warfare goals, PRC strategists build their operations on these *four pillars of media warfare*, according to Professor Stephan Halper:<sup>148</sup>

**1. Follow top-down guidance: Unity of effort is key.** Media Warfare efforts must be aligned with the larger national strategy as outlined by the CCP’s leadership, and must follow its direction on content and timing of release.

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<sup>143</sup> Babbage, *Winning Without Fighting*, vol. I, 24.

<sup>144</sup> Babbage, *Winning Without Fighting*, vol. I, 25.

<sup>145</sup> Aaron L. Friedberg, “Strategic Competition with China,” testimony before the House Armed Services Committee, United States House of Representatives, 115th Congress, 15 February 2018.

<sup>146</sup> Babbage, *Winning Without Fighting*, vol. I, 25.

<sup>147</sup> Cheng, “Winning without Fighting: Chinese Public Opinion Warfare and the Need for a Robust American Response,” 4.

<sup>148</sup> Cheng, 4.

**2. Emphasize pre-emption.** CCP media warfare practitioners follow the time-honored maxim that “the first to broadcast gains the advantage of dominating the airwaves, framing the debate and defining the parameters of subsequent coverage”. To support military strikes and other operations (some of which are pre-emptive strikes consistent with PLA doctrine), the CCP will pre-emptively “underscore the justice and necessity of its operations, accentuate national strength, and exhibit the superiority of its forces”. In addition, these pre-emptive media operations will attempt to undermine the PRC’s opponents’ will to resist.<sup>149</sup>

**3. Be flexible and responsive to changing conditions.** Operations must remain flexible and adjust to political and military circumstances. Specific media warfare operations must be tailored to address specific audiences –whether political audiences or global publics.

**4. Exploit all available resources.** Combine peacetime and wartime operations to pursue civilian-military integration and military and local unity. This civil-military fusion and unity of effort allows the CCP to leverage both civilian and commercial assets (such as news organizations, broadcasting facilities, and its Netizens and other internet users) in a comprehensive media warfare campaign.

Based on the preceding brief layout of basic PRC political and media warfare *goals* and *pillars*, it is useful to conduct a deeper examination of the PRC’s political and media warfare intentions and processes. A 2018 Hudson Institute study provides an apt, if somewhat informal, description of these intentions and processes:

*With the United States, whose geostrategic power the CCP perceives as the ultimate threat, the goal is a long-term interference and influence campaign that tames American power and freedoms . . . such as freedom of expression, individual rights, and academic freedom . . . . With deep coffers and the help of Western enablers, the CCP uses money, rather than Communist ideology, as a powerful source of influence, creating parasitic relationships of long-term dependence.” Target audiences include politicians, academics, businesspeople, students, and the general public. By changing how the United States and other democratic nations think and speak about the PRC, the CCP is “making the ‘world safe’ for its continued reign.”<sup>150</sup>*

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<sup>149</sup> Halper, “China: The Three Warfares (Prepared for Andy Marshall, Director, Office of Net Assessment, Office of the Secretary of Defense,” 72.

<sup>150</sup> Jonas Parelló-Plesner and Belinda Li, *The Chinese Communist Party’s Foreign Interference Operations: How the U.S. and Other Democracies Should Respond* (Washington, DC: Hudson Institute, 2018), 3–4.



However, the PRC's strategic goals extend well beyond CCP self-preservation. They include restoring China to what the CCP sees as its rightful place as the *Middle Kingdom*, particularly in eastern Eurasia but also across more distant continental and maritime domains.

Moreover, closely related to driving the United States from the Asia-Pacific region is the PRC's goal of seizing—or, as the CCP describes it, “re-unifying with”—Taiwan.

Taiwan remains a central focus of PRC political warfare. Mark Stokes and Russell Hsiao write that “from Beijing’s perspective, Taiwan’s democratic government—an alternative to mainland China’s authoritarian model—presents an existential challenge to the [CCP’s] monopoly on domestic political power.”<sup>151</sup> The CCP’s desired final resolution to the Chinese Civil War entails the destruction of the Republic of China (ROC) as a political entity and the absorption of Taiwan as a province of the PRC. Consequently, seizing Taiwan represents a key milestone in what Xi describes as “national reunification,” and he has clearly stated that he will use all means—including force—to achieve that goal.<sup>152</sup>

Regarding the United States and other advanced industrial nations, Friedberg identifies two additional PRC political warfare aims:

- *to gain or maintain access to markets, technology, ideas, information and capital deemed essential to China’s continuing economic success, and*
- *to discourage foreign governments, acting separately or in concert, from pursuing policies that might impede China’s rise or interfere with the achievement of its strategic objectives.*

Beijing seeks to attain its objectives by delivering two messages, write Friedberg:

- *that China is a peaceful, non-threatening and still-developing nation that is interested in ‘win-win cooperation, and*
- *that China is a fast-growing power whose rise is inevitable and unstoppable,” meaning that “prudent leaders [should] seek to curry favor by getting on board ‘the China train’ rather than incurring its wrath by opposing its wishes.*

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<sup>151</sup> Mark Stokes and Russell Hsiao, *The People’s Liberation Army General Political Department: Political Warfare with Chinese Characteristics* (Arlington, VA: Project 2049 Institute, 2013), 41.

<sup>152</sup> Chris Buckley and Chris Horton, “Xi Jinping Warns Taiwan That Unification Is the Goal and Force Is an Option,” *New York Times*, 1 January 2019.

Friedberg concludes that the PRC is “using a combination of its rapidly growing military, economic and political or information warfare capabilities to try to weaken the U.S. position in Asia with the aim of displacing it as the preponderant regional power.”<sup>153</sup>

A brief examination of how the PRC structures its political warfare efforts to achieve these goals follows, including a brief overview of PRC political warfare traits, ways, and means.

### ***PRC Political Warfare Traits***

Common traits of PRC political warfare that frame its employment of Media Warfare follow:

- A powerful centralized command of political warfare operations by the CCP through organizations such as the official and surrogate media, United Front Work Department (UFW) and the People’s Liberation Army (PLA).
- A “clear vision, ideology, and strategy” for the employment of political warfare.
- The employment of overt and covert means to influence, coerce, intimidate, divide, and subvert rival countries to force their compliance or collapse.
- Tight bureaucratic control over the domestic populace.
- A thorough understanding of rival nations being targeted by political warfare.
- The use of a comprehensive array of political warfare tools in coordinated actions.
- A willingness to accept high levels of risk resulting from the exposure of political warfare activities.<sup>154</sup>

### ***Measuring Success: Media Warfare Metrics***

In Bachman’s CNA study of PRC media, she analyzed an array of PRC journal articles regarding how “success” is assessed in its influence operations. She reports that the journals analyzed “mentioned few measures of success, and almost all were broad and vague (e.g., one article implied that the desired end-state of improving Beijing’s external propaganda power was to ‘become the ‘first and last definer’ in public opinion events concerning China’).”<sup>155</sup>

Bachman also reports that on the few occasions when the PRC commentators did use quantitative indicators, “they often included caveats that there was room for improvement in

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<sup>153</sup> Friedberg, “Strategic Competition with China.”

<sup>154</sup> Thomas G. Mahnken, Ross Babbage, and Toshi Yoshihara, *Countering Comprehensive Coercion: Competitive Strategies against Authoritarian Political Warfare* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2018), 54–57.

<sup>155</sup> Bachman, “Black and White and Red All Over: China’s Improving Foreign-Directed Media,” 67.

these areas and that audience engagement should become a higher priority than merely growing follower statistics”. Metrics cited in the journal articles included:

- *Overseas social media followers, including on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and other platforms.*
- *Alexa Internet Traffic Rankings for Chinese foreign-directed media websites.*
- *Citations to or reposting of Chinese media in foreign outlets.*

PRC media also closely track domestic and international public opinion. For example, “*Xinhua Online* conducts public opinion surveys that track foreign perception of China, while outlets like CCTV rely on domestic data collected by firms such as CSM Media Research to understand trends among Chinese viewers”.<sup>156</sup>

It is probable that, internally, the CCP has more sophisticated Media Warfare metrics measures. And it is also probable that from Politburo’s perspective, *mass* and *overwhelming presence* on the Media Warfare battlefields alone could be most meaningful measures of success.

### ***Funding and Economic Aspects***

The PRC does not publicize the amount of money it invests in its political warfare operations in general, nor its media warfare activities in particular. But the PRC is the world’s second-largest economy, and clearly the CCP invests enormous resources into media warfare and other influence operations abroad. According to one source, the estimated PRC investment in its foreign political warfare in 2015 was \$10 billion a year.<sup>157</sup> However, the 2015 estimate is likely too low, as a 2009 *South China Morning Post* article cited PRC officials were investing roughly \$6 billion USD in its news media outlets alone to “improve the country’s image internationally.”<sup>158</sup> Regardless of the exact amount in 2015, at the time of the publishing of this study in late 2020, that funding level is certainly much higher.

Cash is king in this global political war, augmented as needed by threats of overt or covert military, economic, or other attacks. Unlike the Cold War, ideology plays a very small role in this current conflict with the PRC. As the authors of *China and the U.S.: Comparing Global Influence* explain, “At hardly any time did countries aspire to adopt the Chinese model. Mao’s disastrous Great Leap Forward, Cultural Revolution, collective farms, state owned

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<sup>156</sup> Bachman, 67.

<sup>157</sup> David Shambaugh, “China’s Soft-Power Push: The Search for Respect,” *Foreign Affairs* 94, no. 4 (July/August 2015): 99–107.

<sup>158</sup> Bachman, “Black and White and Red All Over: China’s Improving Foreign-Directed Media,” 23.



enterprises, egalitarian poverty (except for Party insiders), and repressive government had little appeal except to other dictatorial regimes.”<sup>159</sup>

However, Beijing’s phenomenal economic growth over the past three decades has now provided a different model. The PRC’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) programs alone provide access to massive additional resources to support political and media warfare, since the BRI is rightly viewed as a global UFDW strategy.<sup>160</sup> Further, the new Chinese model is based on the “Beijing Consensus,” which largely rejects most Western economic and political values and models. The main attribute of this PRC model is for “people to be brought out of poverty, not necessarily to have legal freedoms.”<sup>161</sup>

With the scale and relatively rapid growth of the Chinese economy and seeming largess, the CCP is indeed helping many news media, political, and other influential elites worldwide come out of poverty. As stated, cash has proven to be the most compelling motivator for those supporting and enabling the PRC’s global ambitions. For those benefitting from this largess, their decisions seems justified by massive expansion of both the PRC’s military capabilities and its ever-watchful political warfare and intelligence apparatuses.

Beijing also frequently employs economic instruments in its Media Warfare campaigns. The PRC is the largest trading partner for nearly all countries in the western Pacific, and its goodwill is important for their development and prosperity. “Hence,” notes Babbage, “if the Chinese regime wishes to apply pressure on a regional country or on key corporate leaders, it has many economic levers it can pull and, periodically, it does. One notable case was China’s tourism sanctions, boycott of the Lotte retail chain, and other reprisals against South Korea following Seoul’s commitment to host American missile defense systems.”<sup>162</sup> Leading up to and following the reprisals, the PRC employs Media Warfare to magnify the impact of its actions.

Examples of such leverage in media outlets in Taiwan are numerous. According to American Enterprise Institute’s Linda Zheng, newspapers that carry advertisements from PRC-owned or affiliated commercial entities tend to have a more pro-Beijing message. In the broadcast realm, the SET cable television station once broadcast a DPP-friendly political talk

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<sup>159</sup> Thomas Lum et al., *China and the U.S.: Comparing Global Influence* (Hauppauge, NY: Nova Science Publishers, 2010), 7.

<sup>160</sup> Anne-Marie Brady, “Exploit Every Rift: United Front Work Goes Global,” In *Party Watch Annual Report 2018* (Washington, DC: Center for Advanced China Research, 2018), 36.

<sup>161</sup> Lum et al., *China and the U.S.*, 9–10.

<sup>162</sup> Babbage, *Winning Without Fighting*, vol. I, 38–39.

show *Dahua Xinwen* (Big Talk News). The network began restricting the topics allowed on the program after the KMT's Ma Ying-jeou won the 2008 election. Then the program banned discussion of the Tiananmen Square Massacre, the Dalai Lama, Falun Gong, and criticism of the PRC. Eventually, SET began negotiations with Chinese authorities on broadcasting its television dramas in the PRC, and canceled *Dahua Xinwen* in May 2012. In online media, the PRC normally blocks pro-independence outlets, while pro-PRC, pro-unification outlets are accessible: the pro-PRC/ pro-unification outlets thereby generate online advertising revenues while the pro-Taiwan, pro-independence outlets are denied sources of revenue.<sup>163</sup>

## **PRC Media Warfare Against Taiwan**

This section examines PRC Media Warfare operations against Taiwan, with focus on the CCP's goals and objectives, desired outcomes, strategies, tactics, themes, and audiences. It is formatted in a *Question and Answer* format, as it conforms to a survey form the author utilized to obtain input during research for this study.

### ***What are the PRC's Media Warfare goals, objectives, and strategies for Taiwan?***

The PRC's primary goal is to "unify China" by bringing Taiwan under Beijing's control as either a province or special administrative region. Intermediate objectives include *Balkanizing* Taiwan society and its body politics, effecting regime change, ensuring that Taiwan's economic and diplomatic efforts fail, and constraining the Taiwanese Independence Movement.

The PRC employs many strategies to achieve its objectives, with J. Michael Cole identifying these as the most prominent:<sup>164</sup>

- corrode, bypass, and manipulate democratic institutions, elections, and public trust therein
- undermine morale of the targeted society and weaken resistance to Beijing's objectives by exacerbating feelings of abandonment, isolation and inevitability;
- sow confusion, exacerbate divisions and contradictions within society;
- co-opt elites, businesspeople, politicians, retired military officers, civil society, and the media; and
- coerce the CCP's opponents.

### ***What are the desired outcomes of PRC Media Warfare against Taiwan?***

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<sup>163</sup> Linda Zheng, "How to Counter China's Disinformation Campaign in Taiwan," *Military Review: The Professional Journal of the U.S. Army*, China-Taiwan Reunification Conundrum, October 2020, 24.

<sup>164</sup> Cole, "Taiwan and CCP Political Warfare: A Blueprint."

Ultimately, Beijing seeks to destabilize Taiwan's leadership, demoralize its populace, and destroy its sovereign status to the point that Taiwan either willingly joins the PRC or becomes so internally weak that it cannot defend itself against military assault. Specifically, the PRC hopes to achieve the following outcomes:

- Taiwan is absorbed into the PRC and comes fully under CCP control, thus fulfilling PRC president Xi Jinping's "China Dream" of national reunification.
- The CCP finally resolves the Chinese Civil War on its own terms with the destruction of the ROC as a political entity.
- The PLA exploits Taiwan's natural resources and strategic location as well as the ROC's national defense technologies, expertise, and manpower to enhance PRC control of the South China Sea and support the defense of the Chinese mainland. Of equal importance, Taiwan provides the PRC the regional power projection platform necessary to break through the chokehold of the first island chain into the Pacific.
- The influence of the United States in the region becomes seriously, if not fatally, compromised.
- Taiwan's democratic system of government, which presents an existential challenge to CCP political authority, is discredited and effectively destroyed.
- The PRC achieves unchallenged political, military, economic, diplomatic, and cultural dominance, initially throughout the region and ultimately globally.

### ***What are the primary themes of PRC Media Warfare in Taiwan?***

The PRC's primary political warfare themes, highlighting the many economic and cultural ties shared between the people of the PRC and Taiwan, include the following:

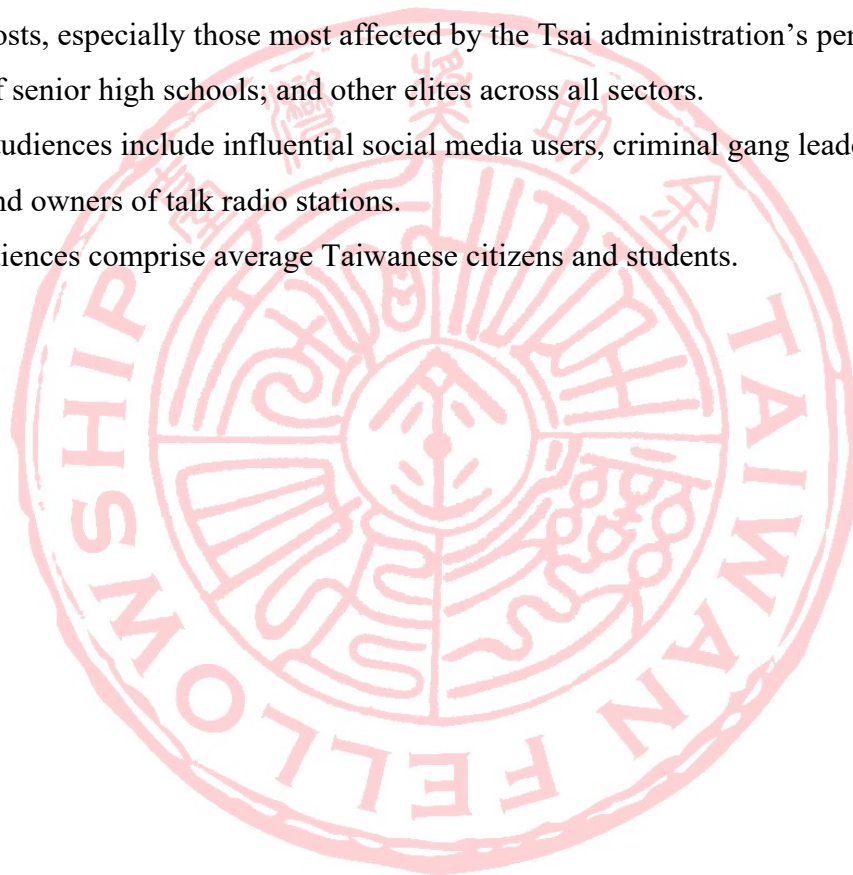
- There is only "One China" and both sides of the Taiwan straits belong to China.
  - *Sub-theme: The People's Republic of China is China.*
  - *Sub-theme: The era of the Republic of China has passed, similar to the Chin Dynasty, and it is now the People's Republic of China that rules China. (Since about 2015, this sub-theme has become increasingly popular in PRC TV "drama series" (soap operas) and other forms of Indoctrination.)*
- The peoples of the PRC and Taiwan are kin and must be reunited.
- Taiwan's "secessionist" position is doomed to fail.



- It is best to join the PRC now since it is at its strongest, while Taiwan is economically stagnant, politically divided, and diplomatically isolated.
- The PRC is strong, while the United States is weak and unreliable.
- Taiwan and America's scheme to get Taiwan invited back in the World Health Organization and World Health Assembly is doomed to fail.

**What are the PRC's primary, secondary, and tertiary audiences in Taiwan?**

- Primary Taiwan audiences of the PRC's political warfare include the news media; business communities; political officials; military leaders; academics; retirees from civil service and education posts, especially those most affected by the Tsai administration's pension reforms; principals of senior high schools; and other elites across all sectors.
- Secondary audiences include influential social media users, criminal gang leaders and members, and owners of talk radio stations.
- Tertiary audiences comprise average Taiwanese citizens and students.



## Chapter 4

### PRC Media Warfare Organization

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## Chapter 4

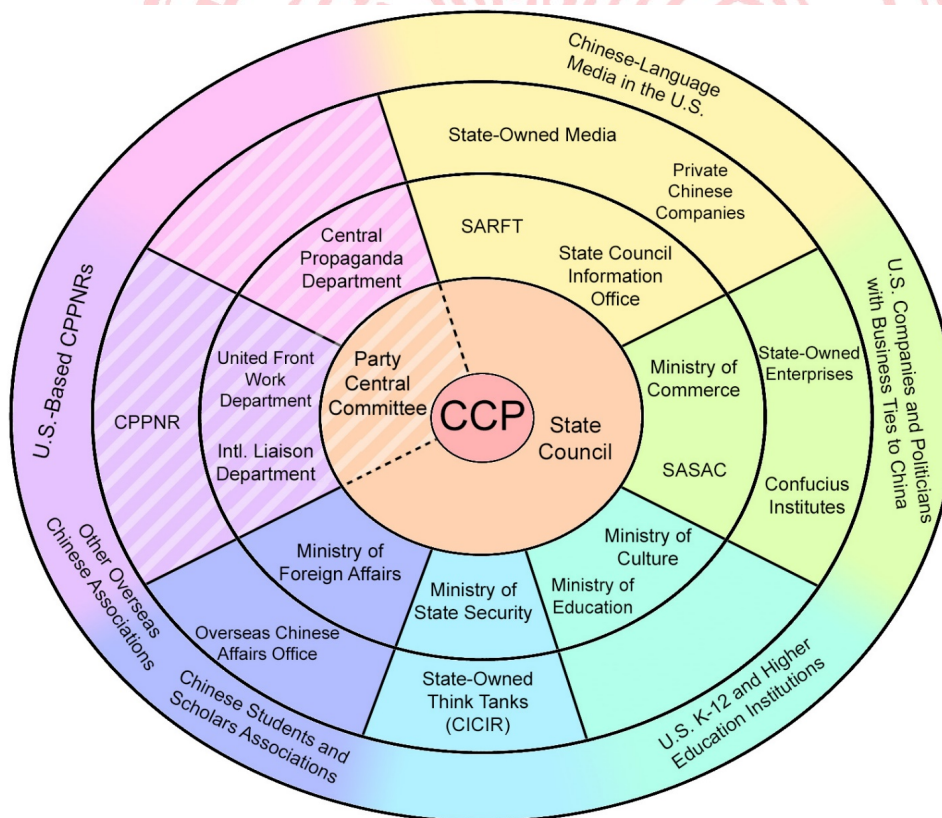
### PRC Media Warfare Organization

The CCP's Media Warfare is a pillar of its general *Political Warfare*. All party and state organizations support the CCP's political warfare and malign influence operations, so it is essential to examine how some of these key elements interrelate from the highest national-strategic political warfare levels down to the tactical "news media" outlet. This chapter will examine both the general political warfare structure, and then selected key structures responsible for managing Media Warfare.

#### Circles of Influence

The figure below, from a *Hudson Institute* study, illustrates the central role of the CCP in directing malign influence operations.

**Figure 4.1.** The CCP's "Circles of Influence"





Although the chart focuses on China's United Front operations and identifies U.S. targets, it offers a universal template for PRC political warfare. It illustrates many of the key actors that play roles in the *Party-State* apparatus as well as their target audiences.<sup>165</sup>

Peter Mattis at the *Jamestown Foundation* writes that there are three layers within this system: CCP officials, executive and implementing agencies, and supporting agencies that “bring platforms or capabilities to bear in support of united front and propaganda work.” According to Mattis, several CCP officials supervise the party divisions responsible for political warfare and other influence operations.

## The Politburo's Tangled Web

That organization flows down from the *Central Committee Political Bureau* (Politburo), the CCP's highest policy-making body. The *Politburo Standing Committee* (PSC) appears to be the “central place for decision-making about political warfare and political warfare” in the CCP/PRC hierarchy.<sup>166</sup> Among those receiving PSC direction are the Central Foreign Affairs Commission (FAC), Central Military Commission (CMC), Central State Security Commission (CSSC), Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), Central United Front Small Leading Group (CUFLSG), Central Propaganda and Ideology Small Leading Group, and Central Financial and Economic Commission (CFEC).<sup>167</sup>

The CCP's overall political warfare strategy is set by the CPPCC. The top United Front official serves as chairman of the CPPCC and is the fourth highest-ranking member of the PSC. Two additional top Politburo members direct the *Central Propaganda Department* (also known as now the *Central Publicity Department*) and the UFWD, respectively, and also sit on the CCP Secretariat, “which is empowered to make day-to-day decisions for the routine functioning of the party-state.”<sup>168</sup>

In turn, the CPPCC “brings together the various participants in this effort: intelligence officers, diplomats, propagandists, party elders, military officers, workers with the United Front, academics, media workers, and businesspeople.” The CPPCC Standing Committee directs the

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<sup>165</sup> Parello-Plesner and Li, *The Chinese Communist Party's Foreign Interference Operations*, 15.

<sup>166</sup> Hsu and Cole, *Insidious Power: How China Undermines Global Democracy*, 4.

<sup>167</sup> Szu-Chien Hsu and J. Michael Cole, *Insidious Power: How China Undermines Global Democracy* (Manchester, UK: Eastbridge Books, 2020), 49.

<sup>168</sup> Peter Mattis, “U.S. Responses to China's Foreign Influence Operations,” testimony before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific, United States House of Representatives, 115th Congress, 21 March 2018. See also Szu-Chien Hsu and J. Michael Cole, *Insidious Power: How China Undermines Global Democracy* (Manchester, UK: Eastbridge Books, 2020), 3-39.

*Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan Affairs Committee*, which orchestrate strategy that is then implemented by various organizations and agencies.

Those agencies implementing CPPCC direction include the State Council's *Taiwan Affairs Office* (TAO), the *People's Liberation Army* (PLA), the *United Front Work Department* (UFWD), the *Central Propaganda Department* (CPD), the *State Council Information Office* (SCIO)/*Office of External Propaganda*, various ministries, "and a plethora of other actors within society (foundations, think tanks, organized crime, private individuals) and enterprises". Implementation of this strategy, writes Cole, depends upon the "capture" (or co-optation) of counterparts in the targeted society.<sup>169</sup>

## **Intelligence Organizations**

Unlike the USSR and current Russian models of political warfare, PRC intelligence agencies such as the *Chinese Intelligence Service* (CIS) and *Ministry of State Security* (MSS) seem to play a subordinate role in foreign influence operations. Reports Peter Mattis, individuals assigned to these influence operations are rarely intelligence officers themselves but are generally party elite who understand the CCP's international objectives and are skilled in managing foreigners. Figure 4-1 reflects an apparently compartmented role for intelligence in the overall political warfare and influence spectrum.

Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that MSS is a "key player in influence operations"<sup>170</sup> and that intelligence collection by MSS, CIS, and the CMC Joint Staff Department Intelligence Bureau is an integral part of political warfare work as a foundation for both the successful execution and outcome of operations.<sup>171</sup>

## **United Front Work Department**

The UFWD is the "the executive agency for united front work" both within the PRC and abroad, reports Mattis, and it has a symbiotic relationship with Media Warfare. UFWD "operates at all levels of the party system," and its purview includes "Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan affairs; ethnic and religious affairs; domestic and external propaganda; entrepreneurs and non-party

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<sup>169</sup> J. Michael Cole, "Democracy Under Fire: China's Political Warfare Against Taiwan During President Tsai Ing-Wen's First Term" (Macdonald-Laurier Institute, July 2020), 9, [www.MacdonaldLaurier.ca](http://www.MacdonaldLaurier.ca).

<sup>170</sup> Hsu and Cole, 65, 69.

<sup>171</sup> Peter Mattis, "A Guide to Chinese Intelligence Operations," War on the Rocks, 18 August 2015.

personages; intellectuals; and people-to-people exchanges.” as well as the OCAO. The UFWD also leads the establishment of party committees in both Chinese and foreign businesses.<sup>172</sup>

The OCAO is particularly important in rallying the worldwide diaspora, and engaging with news media that informs and influences this diaspora. The mission of OCAO is to “enhance unity and friendship in overseas Chinese communities; to maintain contact with and support overseas Chinese media and Chinese language schools; [and] to increase cooperation and exchanges” between overseas Chinese and China’s domestic population in matters relating “to the economy, science, culture and education.”<sup>173</sup> To this end, it routinely brings researchers, media figures, and community leaders from Chinese communities in foreign nations back to China to attend conferences and meetings.

Alexander Bowe at the *U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission* writes that the UFWD is organized into nine major bureaus and four additional offices, all of which have a role in Media Warfare to some degree. Of note, the “Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, and Overseas Liaison Bureau” directly targets Taiwan, but each of the other entities in Bowe’s breakdown below can impact upon Taiwan and Taiwanese target audiences. The name of each entity is followed by Bowe’s brief description of it:

- Party Work Bureau: “Deals with China’s eight non-Communist political parties.”
- Ethnic and Religious Work Bureau: “Concerns China’s ethnic minorities”
- Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, and Overseas Liaison Bureau: “Deals with those areas and the international Chinese diaspora.”
- Cadre Bureau: “Cultivates United Front operatives.”
- Economics Bureau: “Liaises with less developed regions of China.”
- Independent and Non-Party Intellectuals Work Bureau: “Liaises with Chinese intellectuals.”
- Tibet Bureau: “Cultivates loyalty and suppresses separatism in Tibet.”
- New Social Class Representatives Work Bureau: “Cultivates political support of the Chinese middle class.”
- Xinjiang Bureau: “Cultivates loyalty and suppresses separatism in Xinjiang.”
- General Office: “Coordinates business and administrative work.”

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<sup>172</sup> Mattis, “U.S. Responses to China’s Foreign Influence Operations.”

<sup>173</sup> Mattis, “U.S. Responses to China’s Foreign Influence Operations.”



- Party Committee: “Responsible for ideological and disciplinary matters.”
- Policy Research Office: “Researches United Front theory and policy and coordinates propaganda.”
- Retired Cadres Office: “Implements policy concerning departing/retired personnel.”<sup>174</sup>

Bowe writes “a range of CCP military and civilian organizations are [also] active in carrying out United Front work, either working directly for the UFWD or under the broader leadership of the CPPCC.” For example, the *China Council for the Promotion of Peaceful Reunification* (CCPPR), which promotes the reunification of the PRC and ROC on Taiwan, has “at least 200 chapters in 90 countries, including 33 chapters in the United States registered as the *National Association for China’s Peaceful Unification*.”<sup>175</sup>

Numerous other party-state organizations also contribute to the CCP’s influence operations in general and Media Warfare in particular. Although they do not focus on propaganda work specifically, they can be used for those purposes. “Many of these agencies share cover or front organizations when they are involved in influence operations,” Mattis reports, “and such platforms are sometimes lent to other agencies when appropriate.” Examples of these party-state organizations include the Ministry of Civil Affairs, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of State Security, State Administration for Foreign Expert Affairs, Xinhua News Agency, the China Academy of Social Sciences, media-related organs described later in this chapter, and the Liaison Bureau of the PLA’s Political Work Department.<sup>176</sup>

## **The PLA’s Role in Media Warfare**

The PLA plays a significant role in the PRC political warfare organization, and in conducting Media Warfare. Under the leadership of the CCP’s Central Military Commission, the PLA’s Political Work Department (PWD) serves as its principle political warfare command. The PWD and its predecessor, the PLA General Political Department, have been described as “an interlocking directorate that operates at the nexus of politics, finance, military operations, and

<sup>174</sup> Alexander Bowe, *China’s Overseas United Front Work: Background and Implications for the United States* (Washington, DC: U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, 2018), 5.

<sup>175</sup> Bowe, *China’s Overseas United Front Work*, 8.

<sup>176</sup> See Mattis, “U.S. Responses to China’s Foreign Influence Operations” and Hsu and Cole, 57.

intelligence.”<sup>177</sup> The PLA Strategic Support Force (SSF) and its “311 Base”, along with the PLA News Media Center (PLANMC) provides much of the PWD’s *Three Warfares* operational capability.

Stokes and Hsiao note that Political Work Department liaison work “augments traditional state diplomacy and formal military-to-military relations, which are normally considered to be the most important aspects of international relations.”<sup>178</sup> The PWD and other influence organizations play a major role in establishing and facilitating the activities of a multitude of friendship and cultural associations such as the *China Association for International Friendly Contact*, a central organization in co-opting foreign elites, legislators, senior active duty and retired military officers, and executive assistants supporting senior civilian and military officials. Such co-option of foreign officials can reap significant Media Warfare benefits, as evidenced when a former U.S. Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff was co-opted to write an Op-Ed for a major publication and illegally lobby Congress to support the PRC against Taiwan.<sup>179</sup> Further, CAIFC officials co-opt foreign retired officials with lucrative business deals if they are willing to “publish editorials supporting China’s position on Regional issues”.<sup>180</sup>

## Media Warfare-Specific Organizations

Many different Party-state actors guide and execute Chinese external media warfare and propaganda, according to Elizabeth Bachman at the *Center for Naval Analysis*. They include the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), the CCP International Liaison Department, the CCP United Front Work Department, the Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO), various state and Party-affiliated news outlets, the Ministry of Culture, the Office of Overseas Chinese Affairs Office, and the Ministry of Education, among others.<sup>181</sup> Below is a brief description of some of the most important media warfare oversight, regulatory, and news media organizations.

Oversight is provided by the CCP’s general secretary and the Politburo members who oversee propaganda work, “Leading Small Groups” for propaganda and ideology and external

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<sup>177</sup> J. Michael Cole, “Unstoppable: China’s Secret Plan to Subvert Taiwan,” *National Interest*, 23 March 2015, and Hsu and Cole, *Insidious Power: How China Undermines Global Democracy*, 66. The People’s Liberation Army General Political Department was reorganized as the CMC Political Work Department in 2016.

<sup>178</sup> Stokes and Hsiao, *The People’s Liberation Army General Political Department*, 3, and Hsu and Cole, *Insidious Power: How China Undermines Global Democracy*, 66-67.

<sup>179</sup> CRS, “U.S.-China Military Contacts: Issues for Congress” (Congressional Research Service (CRS), January 5, 2015), 33-34,

[https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/20150105\\_RL32496\\_c568174a7b783237c7d89d015f864210b0046888.pdf](https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/20150105_RL32496_c568174a7b783237c7d89d015f864210b0046888.pdf).

<sup>180</sup> Hsu and Cole, *Insidious Power: How China Undermines Global Democracy*, 67.

<sup>181</sup> Bachman, “Black and White and Red All Over: China’s Improving Foreign-Directed Media,” 4-9.

propaganda, the Central Propaganda Department (CPD), and the State Council Information Office (SCIO)/Office of External Propaganda. [SEP]

At the top of the CCP hierarchy is General Secretary Xi Jinping, who is responsible for overall media warfare agenda-setting and ideological work. Other key personalities include Politburo members such as the chairman of the *Central Guidance Commission on Building Spiritual Civilization* and the head of the *Central Propaganda Department (CPD)*.<sup>182</sup> These officials are sometimes “dual hatted” as heads of small leading groups; for example, the head of the CPD is currently the head of the *Central Leading Small Group for Propaganda and Ideology*. Another important media warfare-related small group is the *Central Leading Small Group for External Propaganda Work*.

The CPD has significant responsibilities for conducting Media Warfare. Specifically, this department is the “party’s theoretical research; guiding public opinion; guiding and coordinating the work of the central news agencies . . . guiding the propaganda and cultural systems,” writes Mattis.<sup>183</sup> Among the CPD’s many media warfare responsibilities is the issuance of guidance explicitly directing how to frame news media coverage and what topics should be censored.

The most prominent and important Party-State organization charged with executing external propaganda work is the *State Council Information Office (SCIO)*. As with the “for foreign use-only” term *General Publicity Department*, the SCIO actually has two names: one for external consumption to create the impression the it is a “state” entity (SCIO), and one for internal use to reflect that in reality, it is a CCP organ: *Office of External Propaganda (OEP)*. SCIO/OEP plays a key role in media warfare by managing foreign press agencies operating in the PRC, analyzing international public opinion for the party-state, disseminating press releases and government white papers, and overseeing external reporting on major events. It is composed of nine functional bureaus and also controls has a variety of subordinate units engaged in external propaganda work, ranging from publishing houses to professional associations. The CPD guides SCIO, with the SCIO/OEP, with its head serving as a deputy CPD director.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> The CCP changed CPD’s official English name in 1998 to the “Central Publicity Department” but the Chinese name for the organization (*Zhongyang Xuanchuanbu* (中央宣传部) still translates as “Central Propaganda Department”.

<sup>183</sup> Mattis, “U.S. Responses to China’s Foreign Influence Operations.”

<sup>184</sup> Bachman, “Black and White and Red All Over: China’s Improving Foreign-Directed Media,” 6–7.



An examination of the SCIO/OEP nine bureaus is important to understand the scope of this organization's Media Warfare mandate. A CNA translation from the Chinese description of the bureaus on the SCIO/OEP website follows.<sup>185</sup> Note that the Sixth Bureau specifically targets Taiwan.

- “The *First Bureau* is responsible for press releases and external reporting on major events; [it] compiles Chinese government white papers and promotes external/foreign reporting in Chinese media.”
- “The *Second Bureau* is responsible for developing international public relations and promoting exchanges and cooperation with foreign news agencies and other relevant organizations.”
- “The *Third Bureau* is responsible for planning, preparing, and organizing the manufacturing and publication of foreign books, movies, and television programs, and comprehensive foreign exchange activities.”
- “The *Fourth Bureau* is responsible for researching policies, plans, and methods that introduce China externally, and analyzing international public opinion.”
- “The *Fifth Bureau* organizes and coordinates online news work, guides the planning and construction of news websites, and bears responsibility for work related to international exchanges and cooperation in Internet news.”
- “The *Sixth Bureau* guides the work of provincial (including autonomous regions and cities) news/information offices, and provides services for visiting reporters from Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan covering the Mainland.”
- “The *Seventh Bureau* promotes the introduction of China's human rights causes and Tibet's development situation externally and organizes foreign reports and exchange activities relating to human rights and Tibet.”
- “The *Eight Bureau* is responsible for managing and approving foreign institutions and news agencies operating within China and providing them with financial information in accordance with the law.”
- “The *Ninth Bureau* is responsible for guiding the construction and management of Internet culture and coordinating, supervising, and promoting such work.”

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<sup>185</sup> Bachman, 79.

Following a 2018 restructuring, organizations that function as administrators and regulators charged with enforcing policies outlined by the CPD include the National News and Publishing Administration, the National Radio and Television Administration, the National Film Bureau, and the Cyberspace Administration of China.

## PLA Media Organization

The PLA maintains significant Media Warfare capability within its Strategic Support Force structure, which includes the political warfare-focused “311 Base” deputy corps-level organization aimed at Taiwan. Perhaps the most important PLA media structure, though, is the *PLA News Media Center* (PLANMC), which was established in April 2018 amid Xi’s wide-ranging military reforms.

The PLANMC is a massive propaganda organization that reportedly is under the direct control of the Central Military Commission’s *Political Work Department*. It is responsible for integrating PLA-controlled media outlets, and development of traditional and new media. Its organization includes a *Radio and Television Department*, *Internet Department*, *Publication Department*, and *Political News Department*.<sup>186</sup> Two primary outlets are employed, aimed at Taiwan and foreign audiences as well as internal PRC audiences. These are *China Military Online* and the MND English-language website, both fall under the purview of the PLANMC. The constituent organizations of the PLANMC are depicted in this chart:



<sup>186</sup> See John Costello and Joe Mickeynois, *China's Strategic Support Force: A Force for a New Era*, *China Strategic Perspectives*, No. 13 (National Defense University Press: Center for the Study of Chinese Military Affairs, Institute for National Strategic Studies, October 2018), 17, 27-28 and Bachman, 11–13.

## PRC Publications and Broadcast Media

A wide range of publications and broadcast media contribute to the PRC's media warfare operations. According to the *Center for Naval Analysis*, some of these outlets are considered ministry-level institutions in the PRC bureaucratic hierarchy. This provides them the same rank as regulatory agencies such as the *National Radio and Television Administration*. A brief breakdown of the top seven media organizations follows:<sup>187</sup>

1. The ***People's Daily*** (*Renmin Ribao*) is the official newspaper of the CCP Central Committee and runs the most authoritative commentary of all Chinese media outlets. It is a ministerial-level institution, and it produces published an *Overseas Edition* (*Haiwaiban*) aimed at overseas Chinese audiences.

2. **China Central Television** (CCTV; *Zhongguo Zhongyang Dianshitai*) and **China Global Television Network** (CGTN; *Zhongguo Guoji Dianshitai*) comprise the PRC's official television broadcast organization. They operate dozens of channels, including CGTN, its international foreign-language news division, and are part of *China Media Group/Voice of China*, a ministerial-level media outlet under the State Council and directed by the CPD.

3. **China Radio International** (CRI; *Zhongguo Guoji Guangbo Diantai*) is the PRC's official international radio broadcaster, with 70 overseas radio stations and broadcasts in at least 44 languages. CRI is part of China Media Group/Voice of China.

4. **Xinhua** (*Xinhua She*) is the PRC's official news agency. It is a ministerial-level institution under the State Council, and is touted as the "eyes, ears, and mouthpiece of the Party and People".

5. **China News Service** (*CNS*; *Zhongguo Xinwen She*) is the PRC's second-largest press agency. Its importance in PRC political warfare is highlighted by the fact that it is a state-level organization directly under the UFWD, in UFWD's state capacity as the State Council's Overseas Chinese Affairs Office. The value of *CNS* to UFWD is that *CNS* primarily focuses on overseas Chinese.

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<sup>187</sup> Bachman, "Black and White and Red All Over: China's Improving Foreign-Directed Media," 14–16.



6. **China Military Online** (*Zhongguo Junwang*) is the English version of *PLA Daily*, the official newspaper of the Chinese military. It is a vice-ministerial-level news outlet under the CMC, sponsored by the PLA News Media Center.

7. **China Daily** is the PRC's national English-language newspaper. It frequently runs paid supplements called "China Watch" in a variety of prestigious foreign newspapers, as discussed elsewhere in this study.

## **Circumventing Pushback Against PRC Media**

Although the CCP has invested significant resources into official, direct media warfare capabilities through the expansion and consolidation of PRC party-state media outlets, it has achieved limited success. Distrust of CCP propaganda is widespread, all the more so since the COVID-19 global pandemic, and Taiwan and other democracies are increasingly raising barriers to direct external propaganda methods. Consequently, the CCP seeks surreptitious routes to Taiwan and other foreign audiences through direct and indirect control of foreign media. In particular, the CCP sees foreign media serving "overseas Chinese" (the Chinese diaspora) as a critical intermediary to relay external propaganda content indirectly. According to David Gitter and Brock Erdahl with the *Center for Advanced China Research*, in addition to founding new Chinese-language media conglomerates, Beijing also seeks to gain control of prominent independent media already in existence. The CCP political warfare term for this approach is "borrowing a boat to go to sea".<sup>188</sup>

## **Umbrella Organizations**

To influence or control media with largely Chinese-speaking audiences, at least five "umbrella groups" have been established on behalf of the CCP. Gitter and Erdahl report that these umbrella groups act as intermediaries that indoctrinate foreign media outlets and foster their connections with the PRC-CCP party-state.

Specifically, these organizations facilitate the indoctrination of foreign journalists, provide access to internet- and mobile-based dissemination platforms that upgrade user outlets' audience reach, provide free propaganda content and foreign policy statements favorable to Beijing, and coordinate the signing of "agreements" that formalize foreign media outlet relations

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<sup>188</sup> David A Gitter and Brock M. Erdahl, "'Telling China's Story Well: An Investigation into Chinese Influence Operations Targeting American Chinese-Language Media Outlets'" (1519 Connecticut Ave NW Ste 300 Washington DC 20036: Center for Advanced China Research (CACR), June 15, 2020), 4.

with PRC-CCP propaganda and United Front entities. They cultivate relationships with key individuals in the foreign media hierarchy, and invite them to the PRC to be honored.<sup>189</sup>

Three umbrella groups are either overtly or covertly party-state entities, while two are seemingly non-governmental bodies, but with strong party-state support. The umbrella groups are: the *All-China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese* (ACFROC), the *Chinese International Media Association* (CIMA), the *Global Chinese Media Cooperation Union* (GCMCU), the *International Chinese Media Union* (ICMU), and the *Overseas Chinese Media Cooperation Organization* (OCMCO).<sup>190</sup>

One stated mission of these umbrella organizations is to allow PRC and CCP propaganda organs such as CNS to hold media “professional seminars”. The seminars seem chiefly devoted to improving China’s image abroad, bolstering local economic development, and strengthening China’s soft power. As one example, umbrella organizations reportedly supported the 2019 “Cross-Strait Media People Summit”. This was the fourth such summit, and roughly 70 media personnel from Taiwan attended. During the summit, the 13th Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), Wang Yang gave specific direction to the Taiwan and PRC participants. Wang, a member of the all-powerful Politburo Standing Committee responsible for United Front work, told the media representatives they “must uphold national ethics, fulfill their social responsibilities, and jointly play the role of communicating to people on both sides of the Strait by promoting Chinese culture, deepening the integration of emotions, and continuing to promote the peaceful development of cross-Strait relations and promote the process of peaceful reunification of the mother-land, and strive to realize the China dream.”<sup>191</sup>

It is important to recognize that these umbrella groups do much more than just host foreign journalists to received direction on propaganda themes and for training sessions and meetings. For example, CGMCU opened a “Global Editorial Office” to “streamline the organization and production of media content” in print media and *new media* (internet- and social media-based) publications. The editorial office is described as “realizing cross-time zone cooperation, streamlined processes, constant monitoring, and one- gathering/multi-end [customer] distribution” and “offering assistance in integrating overseas Chinese media.” The

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<sup>189</sup> Gitter and Erdahl, 88.

<sup>190</sup> Gitter and Erdahl, 9–31.

<sup>191</sup> Gary J. Schmitt and Michael Mazza, “Blinding the Enemy: CCP Interference in Taiwan’s Democracy” (Global Taiwan Institute, October 2019), 10.

editorial office acts as “a one-time collection, multi-end user platform” and offers free access to foreign outlets that provide page space for its content. The platform is apparently fed by CNS data centers across the globe. Further, GCMCU provides an “Industry Center.” This center is described as “a cooperation platform to assist foreign Chinese-language media outlets by leveraging the . . . Global Editorial Office, complete with data centers and new media capabilities, and by providing “technological services, big data services, and a new production platform.”<sup>192</sup>

It is also useful to examine how these two purportedly non-governmental umbrella groups (CIMA and ICMU) try to distance themselves from the formal PRC/CCP Media Warfare apparatus. For example, to try to convince audiences that it is not PRC/CCP-affiliated, CIMA’s website proclaims it “does not belong to any national government, political party, financial group, or social force but is a... non-political civil organization.” The site says CIMA “promotes Chinese culture, positively propagates the political, economic, and social situation on both sides of the Taiwan Strait, promotes understanding, exchanges, and communication between Chinese people and people from all countries of the world, unites Chinese-language publications from around the world... and joins hands to initiate a new era of overseas Chinese-language mainstream media.” Gitter and Erdahl assess that while CIMA’s “mission as written seems broad, the heart of CIMA’s activities revolve around a shared platform for creating a consensus among its members which conforms to that of party-controlled media operating in China”.<sup>193</sup>

Finally, it is important to understand the insidious nature of the agreements foreign news media sign when they join these unions. For example, ICMU member publications agree to ICMU’s policy of “telling China’s story well” which translated into agreeing to spread the CCP’s ideology and improve the CCP’s and PRC’s image abroad. Regarding Taiwan, CIMA members agree to “positively propagate the political, economic, and social situation on both sides of the Taiwan Strait”; this translates into providing the PRC’s narratives such as Taiwan is a “renegade province” that must be “re-united” with the PRC by any means necessary.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> Gitter and Erdahl, “‘Telling China’s Story Well: An Investigation into Chinese Influence Operations Targeting American Chinese-Language Media Outlets,’” 22–26.

<sup>193</sup> Gitter and Erdahl, 16–21.

<sup>194</sup> Gitter and Erdahl, 53.



## Chapter 5

### Social Media Warfare in the Cognitive Domain

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## Chapter 5

### Social Media Warfare in the Cognitive Domain

“New information and communication technologies [have] magnified PRC propaganda and disinformation to an unprecedented degree,” writes Russell Hsiao. “The viral aspect of social media has made it an effective tool for propaganda and disinformation.”<sup>195</sup> Use of social media to attack Taiwan has resulted in new concepts and terminology, to include terms such as *Cognitive Warfare*, *WeChat Terror*, *Big Data Totalitarianism*, and *Social Media Warfare*.

According to Hsiao, Taiwan boasts one of the highest internet usage and smartphone penetration rates in the world, and it has a vigorous information and communication technology industry with one of the fastest Internet speeds in the Asia-Pacific region. The most popular social media platforms in Taiwan are Facebook, LINE, YouTube, and the *Professional Technology Temple* (PTT, the Taiwan equivalent of Reddit).<sup>196</sup> The CCP uses this extensive social media network to spread propaganda and disinformation in various ways as a part of its influence operations against Taiwan.<sup>197</sup> Its social media vectors vary: for example, as *Facebook* and *Twitter* have become more proactive removing fake content, the trolls have moved more to *YouTube*, even though on YouTube it is more difficult to create and edit a video than it is to write a post or make a meme.<sup>198</sup>

This chapter explores the growing role of this weapon within the context of *Cognitive Warfare* in general, while Chapter 7 examines the PRC’s Social Media Warfare during the 2018 and 2020 elections as well as the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Cognitive Warfare Overview

The PRC’s Cognitive Warfare capabilities have “exponentially” extended its “domination of cognitive domains globally,” according to researcher Joanne Patti Munisteri.<sup>199</sup> The cognitive warfare aspect, intertwined as deeply as it is with cyber warfare and unrestricted warfare, is particularly daunting. Accordingly, President Tsai Ing-wen has called for

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<sup>195</sup> Hsiao, “CCP Propaganda against Taiwan Enters the Social Age.”

<sup>196</sup> Chapter 7 examines the evolving role of PTT during the COVID-19 disinformation campaign.

<sup>197</sup> Hsiao, “CCP Propaganda against Taiwan Enters the Social Age.”

<sup>198</sup> Linda Zheng, “How to Counter China’s Disinformation Campaign in Taiwan,” *Military Review: The Professional Journal of the U.S. Army*, China-Taiwan Re-unification Conundrum, October 2020, 22; and Poyu Tseng and Dr. Puma Shen, “The Chinese Infodemic in Taiwan: A Preliminary Study on the Dissemination Model of Disinformation, Taking COVID-19 as an Example” (Taipei, Taiwan: Doublethink Lab, July 26, 2020).

<sup>199</sup> Munisteri, “Controlling Cognitive Domains.”

development of means to effectively combat Cognitive Warfare, as part of Taiwan's effort to strengthen its multi-domain deterrence.<sup>200</sup>

Cognitive Warfare refers to the deployment of instantaneous, multi-platform social media and highly personalized “mass personal communication” combined with the theory of reflexivity to impose perceived ideas on reality. These new ideas, in turn, change “real-life circumstances, to affect the mental cognition of a targeted group, shape mainstream public opinion and ultimately obtain a comprehensive strategic advantage”, according to political warfare expert Yu Tsung-chi.<sup>201</sup> These social media often have, deservedly or not, much higher credibility than traditional media, and they disseminate information much faster.

Since the publication of a 2019 PRC White Paper on the issue, commentaries have appeared with increasing frequency in PLA Daily and other official PRC media that address cognitive warfare, along with such concepts as *informationized warfare* and *intelligentized warfare*. For example, one such article entitled “Cognitive Warfare: Dominating the Intelligence Age” described a shift in opposing military centers of gravity toward the cognitive domain. More ominously, according to Michael Dahm, a senior researcher at the Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory (APL), these articles strongly suggest the PRC is working to employ Artificial Intelligence in its cognitive warfare operations.<sup>202</sup>

The PRC's cognitive warfare reach is “masterful and extensive” according to researcher Joanne Patti Munisteri. Based on her research and experience in the field, Munisteri reports, “seemingly unrelated infiltration, one sided trade battles, cyber hacks and data sweeps in historically soft target sectors”.

To achieve President Tsai's strategic goal regarding Multi-Domain Deterrence, Taiwan's elected officials and policy makers must change the way they think about these threats and “begin whole-of-nation preparations to deal with attacks in the cognitive domain and defend against them,” according to Deric J. Holbrook, a visiting fellow at the U.S. Army War College. Further, private companies need to protect intellectual property corporations like Google, Facebook and others must protect their customers from influence campaigns perpetrated by bots and hackers.

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<sup>200</sup> Tsai Ing-wen, “President Tsai Ing-Wen Second Inaugural Address.”

<sup>201</sup> Yu, “Winning Against Cognitive Warfare.”

<sup>202</sup> Michael Dahm, “Chinese Debates on the Military Utility of Artificial Intelligence,” *War on the Rocks*, June 5, 2020, <https://warontherocks.com/2020/06/chinese-debates-on-the-military-utility-of-artificial-intelligence/>.



To this end, Yu recommends: “Urgent attention should be paid to strengthening legislation, education and social information campaigns to equip the public with sufficient knowledge about, and immunity against, cognitive warfare . . . Only if every citizen is better able to see through the intentions and schemes of information manipulators and the government . . . seeks international cooperation to contain infiltration, social division and the manipulation of public opinion by external forces, will it be possible to effectively guarantee (Taiwan’s) national security”.

## Online Trolls and the 50-Cent Army

Keoni Everington at the *Taiwan News* writes that the PRC “has long regarded Taiwan as a test ground for its cyber warfare techniques, with an average of 100,000 cyber attacks reported per month in 2017 alone.” The PRC has also established its own version of the Russian *troll factory* that uses social media platforms to influence foreign attitudes and events.<sup>203</sup>

This troll factory, also called the *50 Cent Army* and *Cyber Army*, conducts Media Warfare with fake accounts, purchased accounts, content farms, and online media outlets to spread disinformation, create and/or circulate negative propaganda about Taiwan, propagate fake news, and coerce targeted individuals such as entertainers, according to U.S. diplomat Aaron Huang. The effects are further amplified online, on television, radio, and in newspapers and magazines by compromised traditional Taiwanese media. These fake news stories have the effect of not only changing perceptions but also dictating the narrative and topic of the day. For example, bought TPP accounts frequently post in the early morning hours, so that PTT users will see their posts first thing in the morning.<sup>204</sup>

Part of this Cyber Army is the *PLA Strategic Support Force* (SSF). The SSF is responsible for key aspects of PLA political warfare as well as for offensive and defensive cyber missions, intelligence operations, and technical reconnaissance. The PLA reportedly has approximately 300,000 soldiers serving with the SSF, while more than 2 million are alleged to be members of the “50 Cent Army” that manipulates public opinion and attacks PRC critics and

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<sup>203</sup> Keoni Everington, “China’s ‘Troll Factory’ Targeting Taiwan with Disinformation Prior to Election,” *Taiwan News*, 5 November 2018.

<sup>204</sup> Aaron Huang, “Combatting and Defeating Chinese Propaganda and Disinformation: A Case Study of Taiwan’s 2020 Elections” (Harvard Kennedy School of Government, Cambridge, MA: Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, April 7, 2020), 23.

other targets in support of the CCP.<sup>205</sup> This cumulative *Social Media Warfare* apparatus has the ability to rapidly deploy trolls, bots, cyborgs and “sock puppets” to swarm targeted individuals and pages, increase share volume, and possibly interfere with algorithms.<sup>206</sup>

Pro-PRC and pro-unification groups in Taiwan rely on CCP media such as Xinhua News Agency, *People’s Daily*, *Global Times*, CCTV, CGTN and *China Review News* (CRN) for online content to propagate. They also rely on content farms or mills “to generate and spread disinformation aimed at undermining support for the Tsai administration, widening social divisions, and promoting “peaceful reunification” and “one country, two systems.” Dozens of these sites have been identified. A notable trend is that they increasingly employ Taiwanese or Malaysia-based ethnic Chinese to generate more “credible” content. Some content farms were created by PRC nationals, while others were projects by Taiwanese businesspeople, many of who had attended the annual Strait Forum in cities across Fujian Province and were likely co-opted.<sup>207</sup>

## **Social Media Warfare Modus Operandi**

According to the ROC’s National Security Bureau, the PRC’s *modus operandi* is to “spread false news in Taiwan, focusing on cross-strait relations, military defense, and policy implementation by the Tsai administration, among other issues.” First, PRC state-run media outlets publish fake news stories about these topics. Next, PLA cyber soldiers and 50 Cent Army members disseminate the disinformation via Facebook, LINE, YouTube, and PTT.<sup>208</sup> Specific techniques include “circulating fake imagery, in the hopes that it will go viral and be picked up on by traditional media outlets in Taiwan.” For example, an image displaying PRC bombers flying near Yu Shan (Jade Mountain) in Taiwan was posted on social media, clearly as a psychological warfare tactic meant to “instill fear in the hearts of the Taiwanese public.” The photo was widely shared on social media before Taiwan’s defense ministry could deny the legitimacy of the image.<sup>209</sup>

The PRC also uses disinformation and propaganda on social media platforms to cause *social instability* in Taiwan by, for example, influencing the nation’s contentious pension reform

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<sup>205</sup> Everington, “China’s ‘Troll Factory’ Targeting Taiwan with Disinformation Prior to Election.”

<sup>206</sup> Cole, “Democracy Under Fire: China’s Political Warfare Against Taiwan During President Tsai Ing-Wen’s First Term,” 22.

<sup>207</sup> Cole, 21–22.

<sup>208</sup> Everington, “China’s ‘Troll Factory’ Targeting Taiwan with Disinformation Prior to Election.”

<sup>209</sup> Hsiao, “CCP Propaganda against Taiwan Enters the Social Age.”

debate. Hsiao writes that users of LINE and other platforms in Taiwan “reported a flood of messages and websites that falsely claimed that the central government was planning to impose draconian restrictions on pensioners,” forcing the ROC government to quickly issue a statement denying that charge.<sup>210</sup>

Another example of PRC social media warfare to divide Taiwan socially is the online onslaught that ensued when the Tsai administration attempted a long-overdue crackdown on the use of religious organizations by the UFWD. Members of Buddhist and Taoist temples are suspected of supporting UFWD activities through pilgrimages and exchanges with PRC organizations. Suspected PRC operatives appear to be using annual pilgrimages of the Goddess Mazu in Taiwan to set up closed-door meetings with their pro-PRC counterparts in Taiwan, and some temples are also suspected of funneling overseas money into Taiwan to fund UFWD activities. In 2017, the Tsai administration began addressing stronger oversight regulations for religious organizations, and in response the PRC content farm COCO01.net, launched a campaign of disinformation accusing Tsai of “persecuting religion.”<sup>211</sup>

Perhaps the most tragic example of the efficacy of PRC social media warfare was initiated from a content farm in Beijing and resulted in the suicide of Taiwan’s foreign ministry representative in Osaka, Japan. In September 2018 a powerful typhoon hit Japan and knocked out a bridge to Osaka’s Kansai International Airport. A PTT report, traced back to Beijing and posted on PRC media sites, falsely reported that the PRC’s consulate had evacuated Chinese nationals from the airport. Further, the PTT post said that if Taiwan citizens identified themselves as “Chinese”, they too could be evacuated from the airport. Taiwan’s senior diplomat in Osaka, 61-year old Su Chii-cheng, came under massive criticism for failing to aid Taiwan citizens and consequently committed suicide. This Media Warfare posting was designed to spark public anger against the Taiwanese consulate and to portray the Taiwanese government of being incapable of rescuing its citizens. Another disturbing aspect of this sad saga is that, following the Taiwan government’s exposure of the facts of the incident, one survey study reportedly indicated that less than half those familiar with the story understood it to be false.<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> Russell Hsiao, “China’s Intensifying Pressure Campaign against Taiwan,” Jamestown Foundation, China Brief 18, no. 11, 19 June 2018.

<sup>211</sup> Cole, “Democracy Under Fire: China’s Political Warfare Against Taiwan During President Tsai Ing-Wen’s First Term,” 16.

<sup>212</sup> Gary J. Schmitt and Michael Mazza, “Blinding the Enemy: CCP Interference in Taiwan’s Democracy” (Global Taiwan Institute, October 2019), 7–8, and Linda Zhang, “How to Counter China’s Disinformation Campaign in



Hsiao also notes that the PRC has reinvigorated another “time-honored tactic” in the new social media era: intentionally concealing or misreporting statements made by Taiwanese officials or ex-officials “to tarnish the person’s reputation or mislead the readers into believing that the person supports a particular political position held by the CCP.” Both PRC- and Hong Kong-based media outlets employ these tactics against ROC retired generals, national security officials, lawmakers, and even entertainers.<sup>213</sup>

## **Social Media Warfare Against the Entertainment Community**

The CCP’s social media warfare to control Taiwan’s entertainers and the entertainment industry has increased in recent years. In its campaign to influence and censor members of this industry, the PRC employs CCP organs such as the *Communist Youth League* in conjunction with hyper-nationalistic Netizens and cyber armies “to identify and shame Taiwanese members of the entertainment industry who are alleged supporters of Taiwanese independence; such targets are then compelled to issue public apologies and identify themselves as “Chinese.” Failure to comply with such demands has often resulted in the cancelling of roles in PRC movie productions or films funded by China, or the cancellation of concerts in China.

The CCP is quite clear in what it expects: in 2016 and again in 2020, it “issued edicts ordering members of Taiwan’s showbiz industry to vow to stay ‘politically correct’ in order to be allowed to perform in China”. In addition, the PRC and its agents “blacklist” popular YouTubers who criticize the PRC, or who have not supported CCP-favored candidates in Taiwanese elections. Also, whether coerced or not, some entertainers, socialites, and fashion models use social media to reproduce and spread CCP propaganda and disinformation, ostensibly in return for profitable opportunities in China.<sup>214</sup> In addition, Beijing employs Internet celebrities to wage United Front and “infiltration campaigns against Taiwan on video platforms or attack certain targets through social media, such as WeChat, in an attempt to circumvent legal regulations”.<sup>215</sup>

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Taiwan,” *Military Review: The Professional Journal of the U.S. Army*, China-Taiwan Reunification Conundrum, October 2020, 23.

<sup>213</sup> Hsiao, “CCP Propaganda against Taiwan Enters the Social Age.”

<sup>214</sup> Cole, “Democracy Under Fire: China’s Political Warfare Against Taiwan During President Tsai Ing-Wen’s First Term,” 18.

<sup>215</sup> Li-hua Chung, “China Uses Web Stars for Infiltration,” *Taipei Times*, September 27, 2020, <https://taipeitimes.com/News/front/archives/2020/09/27/2003744146>.

## Computational Propaganda

The CCP uses computational propaganda—typically in the form of social media, content farms, and bots—to “saturate Taiwan’s information space with pro-Beijing political propaganda.” J. Michael Cole argues “computational propaganda has allowed Beijing to insert itself into the battleground of domestic Taiwanese politics, so much so that various (dis)information campaigns can no longer be solely attributed to the KMT and other pan-blue forces.”

The PRC’s disinformation efforts have recently begun overlapping with “traditional blocking action by opposition legislators and civic groups opposed to reforms,” which includes “protests against pension reform, government plans to limit the . . . burning of large quantities of incense and ghost money at Buddhist temples, and limits for the Tsai administration’s *Forward-looking Infrastructure Development Program*.”<sup>216</sup>

## WeChat Terror

Finally, it is important to note the use of the PRC web platform WeChat--and *WeChat Terror*--in Taiwan. WeChat combines many of the features of Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and Skype. It is the single largest web platform for news and communication in the Chinese-speaking world, with half a billion users in the PRC alone.

WeChat is owned and operated by the Chinese web company Tencent, which reportedly cooperates very closely with the PRC’s state security apparatus. Accordingly, WeChat works alongside the PRC’s propaganda apparatus to track the communications of possible dissidents and to censor content, comments, and links deemed unfavorable to the CCP and its worldview. Since many Taiwanese citizens use WeChat, the PRC’s long security arm can censor communications within the Taiwan’s borders.<sup>217</sup> As one example, by March 2020, WeChat had assisted the PRC’s global COVID-19 propaganda campaign by blacklisting more than 500 keywords related to the coronavirus, and was found to have the capability to identify “certain users and [create] a portfolio about them, feeding other aspects of the [Chinese Communist Party’s] transnational repression apparatus.”<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> J. Michael Cole, “Will China’s Disinformation War Destabilize Taiwan?,” *The National Interest*, July 30, 2017, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/will-chinas-disinformation-war-destabilize-taiwan-21708>.

<sup>217</sup> Kerry K. Gershaneck, Discussions with Senior ROC Political Warfare Officers, Fu Hsing Kang Political Warfare College, National Defense University, 2018-19.

<sup>218</sup> Alexa Grunow, “WeChat Uses International Accounts To Advance Censorship In China” (The Organization for World Peace, May 11, 2020), <https://theowp.org/wechat-uses-international-accounts-to-advance-censorship-in-china/>.

Equally disturbing, the CCP uses WeChat and other social media platforms as a united front weapon to mobilize Chinese both within the PRC and abroad to organize street protests, as has been evidenced in major demonstrations in U.S. cities and student protests against campus free speech in Canada.<sup>219</sup> If it has not already been used to coordinate united front and other political warfare operations in Taiwan, WeChat's use in North America for such purposes proves the efficacy of social media platforms in PRC operations against Taiwan.

## **Purchased Social Media Accounts and Key Opinion Leaders**

PTT reaches between one and two million middle-class residents in Taiwan. It appears to be a major source of fake and purchased accounts and, consequently, is a major tool of PRC Media Warfare efforts. Schmidt and Mazza report that as early as 2015, “a cavalcade of Chinese ‘50 cent’ accounts was active on PTT. From their IP addresses, one could see they were all entering through dummy accounts.”

Prior to the 2018 election, a large number of PTT accounts were bought and sold on Shopee, an online auction site active in Taiwan and Southeast Asia. *CCP Watch*'s Jessica Drun reports PTT accounts have also appeared on Taobao, a PRC auction site. The most influential accounts are sold for as much as NT\$ 200,000 (approximately US\$6,500). Many accounts purchased ahead of the elections switched their content from “moderately pro-DPP to strongly pro-KMT or even pro-CCP”. The PRC purchases the social media accounts of Taiwanese politicians and social media influencers, as well as Fan pages with large numbers of followers; these accounts suddenly switched over to using simplified Chinese (the Taiwanese use traditional Chinese characters).

The purchased accounts helped the PRC's Media Warfare disinformation, misinformation, and propaganda go viral. These accounts are frequently posted in the early morning hours, so that PTT users will see their posts first thing in the morning and the postings would often set the daily agenda. Those PTT users include journalists for traditional media, who often repeat claims from PTT posts without prior fact checking. In many cases, Taiwan mass

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<sup>219</sup> Julie Makinen, “Chinese Social Media Platform Plays a Role in U.S. Rallies for NYPD Officer,” *Los Angeles Times*, 24 February 2016; and Gerry Shih and Emily Rauhala, “Angry over Campus Speech by Uighur Activist, Students in Canada Contact Chinese Consulate, Film Presentation,” *Washington Post*, 14 February 2019.



media outlets are too quick to amplify social media posts rather than take the time to verify them.<sup>220</sup>

Accounts are purchased, and so is the influence of “Key Opinion Leaders” (KOLs), according to security officials interviewed. A KOL is anyone with a substantial following online, whether as a celebrity or a perhaps a blogger. Many KOLs have been identified as shifting their positions regarding Taiwan and the PRC consistent with funding provided by the PRC.<sup>221</sup>

### **The Curious Case of Master Chain Media**

Another possible variation of “bought media” seems to involve *Master Chain Media*, a new online media organization that appeared in 2018. Master Chain Media quickly became the first Taiwan media to be officially accredited by the PRC.

Master Chain Media’s senior officials include retired top military and intelligence officers from Taiwan’s National Security Bureau (NSB) and Military Intelligence Bureau (MIB). After the Legislative Yuan’s passage of the Anti-Infiltration Law and other anti-interference laws in late 2019, Master Chain Media held an emergency board meeting at which it was decided that it would cease operating in Taiwan.<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> Gary J. Schmitt and Michael Mazza, “Blinding the Enemy: CCP Interference in Taiwan’s Democracy” (Global Taiwan Institute, October 2019), 8–9; Linda Zhang, “How to Counter China’s Disinformation Campaign in Taiwan,” *Military Review: The Professional Journal of the U.S. Army*, China-Taiwan Reunification Conundrum, October 2020, 22; and Jessica Drun, “Taiwan’s Social Media Landscape: Ripe for Election Interference” (Center for Advanced China Research (CACR), November 13, 2018), 22, <https://www.ccpwatch.org/single-post/2018/11/13/Taiwans-Social-Media-Landscape-Ripe-for-Election-Interference>.

<sup>221</sup> Discussions with Senior ROC Political Warfare Officers, Fu Hsing Kang Political Warfare College, National Defense University, 2018-2020.

<sup>222</sup> Cole, “Democracy Under Fire: China’s Political Warfare Against Taiwan During President Tsai Ing-Wen’s First Term,” 22–23 and Tzu-ti Huang, “Pro-China Master Chain Quits Taiwan,” Taiwan News, 1 January 2020, <https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/3848481>.

# **Chapter 6**

## **Historical Overview:**

### **The Civil War Through Xi Jinping**

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## Chapter 6

### Historical Overview:

### The Civil War Through Xi Jinping

Taiwan is the principal target of PRC political warfare, and political warfare is the PRC's primary means of destroying the ROC as a political entity and absorbing Taiwan with communist China.<sup>223</sup> *Media Warfare* is a primary component of that effort. While Xi's threats of attack and the PLA's increasing preparations for conventional war are of increasing concern, the PRC's media war poses an equally urgent threat to Taiwan's as it directly threatens Taiwan's press freedom, its democratic process, and ultimately its legitimacy.

To understand the PRC's contemporary Media Warfare against Taiwan, it is useful to examine in some detail the historical context. Accordingly, this chapter examines these aspects:

- the reasons the CCP wages Media Warfare so relentlessly against Taiwan,
- major milestones in the evolution of the CCP's political and media warfare in its enduring standoff with the ROC,
- key aspects of the KMT's authoritarian rule of Taiwan from 1945 until the late 1980's that feed the PRC's Media Warfare narratives and Taiwan's responses,
- advances in PRC Media Warfare against Taiwan under General Secretary Xi Jinping, to include mass media and social media

### The PRC's Media War Against Taiwan

Reasons for the PRC's relentless media warfare against Taiwan are straightforward. From the 1920s until 1949, Mao Zedong's CCP battled Chiang Kai Shek's KMT for control of the ROC, the government that then controlled China. The CCP eventually prevailed and drove the KMT-led government of the ROC from the mainland to Taiwan. Mao and the CCP then established the PRC, which claimed sovereignty over the entirety of its ever-evolving definition of "China." The CCP's territorial claim included Taiwan. However, because the KMT never surrendered the Chinese Civil War never technically ended, and while the ROC no longer claims to govern all of China, the ROC still asserts its status as a sovereign state.<sup>224</sup> Further, since 1949, the ROC (Taiwan) has evolved from an authoritarian regime into a free and democratic state: this poses an

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<sup>223</sup> Mark Stokes and Russell Hsiao, *The People's Liberation Army General Political Department: Political Warfare with Chinese Characteristics* (Arlington, VA: Project 2049 Institute, 2013), 3.

<sup>224</sup> Steven M. Goldstein, *China and Taiwan* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2015), 1–3.



existential threat to the CCP, as Taiwan is now proof that Chinese people do not need to be ruled by dictatorships.

With American support, the ROC on Taiwan evolved from an authoritarian government to a citizen-centric, democratic island nation now consisting of nearly 24 million citizens. The PRC, meanwhile, quickly established a tyrannical dictatorship on mainland China that caused the deaths of nearly 100 million of its own citizens and inflamed insurgencies and civil wars worldwide. Over time, it evolved into an economically and militarily powerful, fascist, totalitarian state that rules over roughly 1.3 billion subjects, and which possesses a highly sophisticated Media Warfare apparatus.

The CCP employs its Media Warfare apparatus to “divide and disintegrate” the democracy on Taiwan, with the goal of destroying the political entity known as the “Republic of China” and absorbing Taiwan into the PRC.

### **Soviet Influence on CCP Media Warfare**

In nearly all aspects, the Soviet Union initially provided the role model for Chinese communist policy, organization, and operations. Mao and his followers learned operational arts such as political warfare from the Moscow-led Communist International (Comintern). As Stokes and Hsiao report, the CCP adapted those operational arts to China’s own unique historical context; they merged Western revolutionary theory and practice with their own version of what might be termed “total war with Chinese characteristics.”<sup>225</sup>

Mao combined China’s historical strategic culture with Comintern instruction as well as individual insights from Carl von Clausewitz, Lenin, Stalin, Leon Trotsky, and others. He then developed a new concept of revolutionary war to defeat Chiang Kai-shek’s nationalist Kuomintang (KMT) government in the Chinese Civil War and force it into exile on Taiwan. Mao had also used his concept in his more limited efforts to fight Japanese forces that had invaded China during the Second Sino-Japanese War. Writes Elizabeth Bachman, “Even from the caves of Yan’an, where Mao Zedong and his colleagues sequestered themselves from both the Japanese Imperial Army and the Chinese Nationalists, the CCP worked to establish organizations and mechanisms to shape foreign perceptions. Despite the austere conditions, the Party cultivated

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<sup>225</sup> Mark Stokes and Russell Hsiao, *The People’s Liberation Army General Political Department: Political Warfare with Chinese Characteristics* (Arlington, VA: Project 2049 Institute, 2013), 6–7.

foreign journalists, printed its own newspapers, and broadcast its messages via its own radio station.”<sup>226</sup>

As the CSBA study on political warfare notes, “The importance of early political operations throughout the theatre of operations . . . became a key foundation of Chinese military doctrine for revolutionary and unconventional war, as well as for a broader range of operations.” Twentieth-century Chinese leaders “saw these political campaigns as being critically important not only on home territory but also in enemy countries.”<sup>227</sup> Like the Soviets, Mao envisioned his revolution as eventually engulfing other lands. He wrote, “Lenin teaches us that the world revolution can succeed only if the proletariat of the capitalist countries supports the struggle for liberation of the people of the colonies and semi-colonies . . . . We must unite with the proletarians of . . . Britain, the United States, Germany, Italy, and all other capitalist countries; only then can we overthrow Imperialism . . . and liberate the nations and the peoples of the world.”<sup>228</sup> Today, the PRC continues to use its Soviet-based political warfare concepts to “promote the rise of China within a new international order and defend against perceived threats to state security.”<sup>229</sup>

### **Media Warfare in the Continuing Chinese Civil War**

Russell Hsiao writes that during the Chinese Civil War, both CCP and KMT forces utilized media and other political warfare tools to “spread false information to sow discord in enemy-controlled areas, spreading rumors about defections, falsifying enemy attack plans, and stirring up unrest in an effort to misdirect enemy planning.”<sup>230</sup>

Media Warfare was integral to the CCP’s underground political warfare during that period, particularly in support of three key party organizations. The *Urban Work Department*, precursor to the *United Front Work Department* (UFW), “focused on ordinary citizens, minorities, students, factory workers, and urban residents.” The *Social Work Department* “concentrated on the upper social elite of enemy civilian authorities, security of senior CCP

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<sup>226</sup> Bachman, “Black and White and Red All Over: China’s Improving Foreign-Directed Media,” 3.

<sup>227</sup> Mahnken, Babbage, and Yoshihara, *Countering Comprehensive Coercion*, 26.

<sup>228</sup> Mao Zedong, *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung* (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1965), 104.

<sup>229</sup> Stokes and Hsiao, *The People’s Liberation Army General Political Department*, 3.

<sup>230</sup> Russell Hsiao, “CCP Propaganda against Taiwan Enters the Social Age,” Jamestown Foundation, China Brief 18, no. 7, 24 April 2018.

leaders, and Comintern liaison.” Finally, the *Enemy Work Department* was “responsible for political warfare against opposing military forces.”<sup>231</sup>

These departments sought to fulfill three main missions:

- “build and sustain a united front with friendly, sympathetic military figures”;
- “undermine the cohesion and morale of the senior enemy leaders and create tensions between officer and enlisted ranks”; and
- “win over and incite defection among those in the middle.”

Emphasis was placed on “psychological and ideological conditioning of senior enemy defense authorities in order to weaken national will, generate sympathy for CCP strategic goals, and develop clandestine sources of military intelligence.” Strategies used included “financial incentives, shame, and promises of leniency.”<sup>232</sup> Media Warfare underpinned all of these efforts.

### **Is Taiwan Part of China?**

Of great significance to this study is that fact that during the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–45) and World War II (1939–45), CCP leader Mao Zedong initially considered Taiwan a separate occupied nation. Mao supported the idea that Taiwan should be made independent after the war. The CCP’s Media Warfare supported that position until 1943.

There was solid basis for Mao’s opinion: after Sun Yat Sen’s successful revolution in mainland China and the establishment of the ROC on 12 February 1912, the new republic accepted all the Qing dynasty’s treaty obligations and debts. Foreign nations recognized the ROC’s sovereignty over all Qing territory as of 1911—but this territory did not include Taiwan, then still a part of Japan under the 1895 Treaty of Shimonoseki.<sup>233</sup> Several CCP documents, media warfare products, and policies from this era reinforce the idea that Mao viewed Taiwan as distinctly separate from China.<sup>234</sup>

In fact, CCP propaganda provides some of the most notable evidence of Mao’s position. Edgar P. Snow, an American claiming journalist status who was both a CCP sympathizer and propagandist, interviewed Mao in July 1936. Snow asked, “Is it the immediate task of the Chinese people to regain all the territories lost to Japanese imperialism, or only to drive Japan

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<sup>231</sup> Stokes and Hsiao, *The People’s Liberation Army General Political Department*, 6–7.

<sup>232</sup> Stokes and Hsiao, *The People’s Liberation Army General Political Department*, 7–8.

<sup>233</sup> Peter C. Y. Chow, ed., *The “One China” Dilemma*, 1st ed (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 30.

<sup>234</sup> Frank S. T. Hsiao and Lawrence R. Sullivan, “The Chinese Communist Party and the Status of Taiwan, 1928–1943,” *Pacific Affairs* 52, no. 3 (Autumn 1979): 446–67, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2757657>.



from North China, and all Chinese territory above the Great Wall?” According to Snow’s account, Mao answered:

“It is the immediate task of China to regain all our lost territories, not merely to defend our sovereignty below the Great Wall. This means that Manchuria must be regained. We do not, however, include Korea, formerly a Chinese colony, but when we have re-established the independence of the lost territories of China, and if the Koreans wish to break away from the chains of Japanese imperialism, we will extend them our enthusiastic help in their struggle for independence. *The same thing applies for Formosa.*”<sup>235</sup>

Key CCP documents and CCP media products before 1943 routinely addressed Taiwan, but never in the context that Taiwan was part of China. It was often referred to as an ally, much like Korea, in the fight against its Japanese occupiers. Between 1928 and 1943, the CCP consistently recognized Taiwan as a distinct “nation” or “nationality” and acknowledged the “national liberation movement” on Taiwan as a struggle of a “weak and small nationality” that was separate from the Chinese revolution and potentially sovereign. The CCP frequently called for forming a united front with the Taiwanese—specifically the small Taiwanese Communist Party (TCP)—“not because Taiwanese were derivatives of the same Han stock, nor because Taiwanese were also Chinese,” but because Taiwan was a small, weak nation oppressed by Japanese imperialism.<sup>236</sup>

After 1943, however, the CCP reversed these positions to be consistent with ROC leader Chiang Kai-shek’s views, disavowing Taiwanese ethnic “separateness” and rejecting the independence of political movements on the island. The Allies’ Cairo Declaration of 27 November 1943 called for the “unconditional surrender of Japan” and stated, “all the territories Japan has stolen from the Chinese, such as Manchuria, Formosa, and the Pescadores, shall be restored to the Republic of China.”<sup>237</sup>

The Cairo Declaration was neither a treaty nor a legally binding document, but it is often referred to by both the CCP and KMT as justification for China’s claim to Taiwan. Further, the declaration was historically inaccurate: Taiwan was not “stolen” from China, unless President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Prime Minister Winston Churchill believed the U.S. and England

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<sup>235</sup> Edgar Snow, *Red Star Over China: The Rise of the Red Army* (London: V. Gollancz, 1937), 88–89. Taiwan was also known as Formosa while under Japanese rule from 1895 to 1945. Italics added by author for emphasis.

<sup>236</sup> Hsiao and Sullivan, “The Chinese Communist Party and the Status of Taiwan,” 451.

<sup>237</sup> Chow, *The “One China” Dilemma*, 31–32.

were co-conspirators in the theft since both countries helped broker the 1895 Treaty of Shimonoseki. But both the U.S. and England wanted to keep China in the war against Imperial Japan at a time when Chiang Kai-shek appeared to be considering a separate agreement with Tokyo to end the fighting in China, so as U.S. diplomat George Kerr wrote, “the hyperbole and historical inaccuracy were enshrined in the declaration”.<sup>238</sup>

The surrender of Imperial Japan on September 2, 1945 marked a new chapter in the Chinese Civil War. It also initiated a new role for Taiwan, which had been under Japanese rule since China lost the first Sino-Japanese War in 1895. As the Nationalist forces fell back before the Red Army, Taiwan was now to become, in effect, the near entirety of the country called “The Republic of China”.

### **KMT Repression on Taiwan**

Consistent with the 1943 Cairo Declaration, ROC forces were transported to Taiwan on U.S. Navy ships to accept the Japanese surrender of Taiwan on 25 October 1945, and to occupy the island.<sup>239</sup> Although Taiwan’s population initially greeted the Chinese mainlanders as liberators, the people of Taiwan did not fare well under Chiang’s forces, which were “a rag-tag army of often ignorant, undisciplined recruits.”<sup>240</sup> The KMT troops treated the Taiwanese with disdain, viewing the islanders as more Japanese than Chinese. The occupying Chinese also resented the fact that Taiwan was prosperous and technologically advanced by mainland Chinese standards and was spared most of the ravages of the war with Japan that mainland China had seen. This disdain took the form of political repression on many levels, but most significantly by Taiwanese being excluded from the ROC constitution that was to go into effect in late 1947.

The ROC government, meanwhile, ruled in a corrupt and ineffective way that was far different than how the Japanese authorities had ruled. George H. Kerr, who was a U.S. naval officer and later a diplomat on assignment in Taiwan during this time, described the rapacious nature of the Nationalist rule: “Looting was carried forward on three levels . . . the military scavengers were at work at the lowest level. Anything movable . . . was fair prey for ragged and undisciplined soldiers. It was a first wave of petty theft, taking place in every city street and suburban village. . . The second stage of looting was entered when the senior military men . . .

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<sup>238</sup> George H. Kerr, *Formosa Betrayed*, 2nd ed. (Taiwan Publishing Co., 1992), 27, <http://homepage.usask.ca/~llr130/taiwanlibrary/kerr/kerrframes.htm>.

<sup>239</sup> Goldstein, *China and Taiwan*, 18.

<sup>240</sup> Goldstein, *China and Taiwan*, 14.

organized depots with forwarding agents at the ports through which they began to ship out military and civilian supplies. Next (Governor Chen Yi's) own men developed a firm control of all industrial raw materials, agricultural stockpiles and confiscated real properties turned over to them by the vanquished Japanese.” The KMT governor, Chen Yi, established monopolies over every economic sector to squeeze Formosans out of business and industry, which caused the cost of living to skyrocket. For example, from November 1945 until January 1947 the cost of foodstuffs shot up 700 percent. The Formosan middle class “began to vanish . . . and unemployment became a grave problem.” These factors, wrote Kerr, were “the ultimate cause of the 1947 rebellion.”<sup>241</sup>

A minor street incident involving official corruption and police brutality sparked the February 28, 1947 incident that would ultimately result in the massacre of thousands of civilians by mainland KMT troops. Over the next ten weeks, Taiwan’s political, business, education, cultural, medical, legal, media, and intellectual elites, as well as leading aboriginals, government officials, and students were methodically hunted down, arrested, tortured, and killed. The general populace faced indiscriminate arrests, random killings, rape, and other sadistic atrocities. Estimates of deaths range from 10,000 to at least 20,000.<sup>242</sup>

The protests led to 38 years of authoritarian suppression by the ROC, a period now known as the “White Terror.”<sup>243</sup> The KMT's White Terror did not start in Taiwan, as it was initiated to counter Communists “bandits” on the Chinese mainland, but according to Taiwanese historian Chou Wan-yao, “only on the small island of Taiwan could the net of terror be drawn so tightly and the methods become so brutal.”<sup>244</sup> The ROC declared temporary martial law, and denied subsequent pleas from Taiwanese that “Formosans” be entitled to the same rights and treatment as “Chinese.”<sup>245</sup>

The Chinese Civil War had reignited on the mainland shortly after the end of World War II, and by 1949 KMT armies had fallen back before the increasingly victorious CCP’s Red Army. Roughly 1.2 million—though some estimates extend up to more than 2 million—mainland Chinese escaped to Taiwan, many of them military personnel and civilian

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<sup>241</sup> Kerr, *Formosa Betrayed*, 114–15.

<sup>242</sup> Goldstein, *China and Taiwan*, 14–15. Kerr, *Formosa Betrayed*, 310.

<sup>243</sup> “Red” represents communism, and powers that oppose the Communist Party are often designated “white”, which also often refers to fascism. See Wan-yao Chou, *A New Illustrated History of Taiwan: Wan-Yao Chou ; Translated by Carole Plackitt and Tim Casey*. (Taipei: SMC Publishing, 2015), 332.

<sup>244</sup> Chou, 332–35.

<sup>245</sup> Goldstein, *China and Taiwan*, 15.



administrators. On May 19, 1949, the ROC government expanded its authoritarian rule over Taiwan by re-imposing martial law and by suspending articles of the constitution. This martial law would last until 1987, the longest period of martial law in the world during the twentieth century.<sup>246</sup>

In December 1949, ROC president Chiang Kai-shek and his government evacuated to Taiwan. Chiang still claimed to rule all of China but established the ROC's new national capital at Taipei.<sup>247</sup> Although comprising only about 15 percent of Taiwan's population, mainland Chinese dominated major government, military, and political positions. Discussion of Taiwanese nationalism or opposition to the KMT was equated with "communist sympathies" and was suppressed as part of the ROC's "de-Japanization and Sinicization" campaign, and Taiwanese were regularly subjected to systematic harsh treatment.<sup>248</sup> In addition to communist sympathizers and those merely alleged to be so, the secret police also brutally suppressed the cadre of Taiwan elites who advocated for U.S. or UN trusteeship over Taiwan.<sup>249</sup>

Journalist Jonathon Manthorpe reports that as many as 90,000 people were arrested during the White Terror, which lasted into the mid-1980s, with about 10,000 actually tried in military courts and perhaps as few as "three or four thousand" and as many as 45,000 summarily executed. Many of those detained were tortured, and many who were not executed were sent "indefinitely" to an infamous Green Island prison camp on off Taiwan's southeast coast.<sup>250</sup>

Historian J. Bruce Jacobs summarizes the KMT regime under the Chiang Kai-shek and his son Chiang Ching-kuo as "rule by outsiders in the interests of the outsiders. It was a dictatorship in which Taiwanese had no power and in which Taiwanese suffered massive and systematic discrimination."<sup>251</sup> Although the ROC suppressed the study of Taiwan's complex history and stressed Taiwan's ties with China, the distinction between the *waisheng ren*—people from outside the province—and the *bensheng ren*—people from the province—became the focal point for political and cultural division. This division would ultimately become a focus of the CCP's Media Warfare.

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<sup>246</sup> Chou, *A New Illustrated History of Taiwan*, 333.

<sup>247</sup> Goldstein, *China and Taiwan*, 15.

<sup>248</sup> Goldstein, *China and Taiwan*, 15–16.

<sup>249</sup> Kerr, *Formosa Betrayed*, 369.

<sup>250</sup> See Chou, 336, and Jonathan Manthorpe, *Forbidden Nation: A History of Taiwan* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 204, 207,

<sup>251</sup> Jacobs, "Paradigm Shift Needed on Taiwan."

## Mao Targets Taiwan

The CCP conserved the strength of its *Enemy Work Department* during the Japanese invasion of China, so after Tokyo's surrender it quickly shifted its political warfare efforts from resisting Japan to defeating the Nationalist Army and ROC government. Despite the recognition of both parties' legitimacy in October 1945 and an attempt to build a "united front" between the two sides, the civil war recommenced shortly thereafter.<sup>252</sup>

In 1946, the CCP established the *Taiwan Provincial Work Committee*, which was "responsible for integrated political-military operations to subvert ROC forces on Taiwan." Cai Xiaoqian, a Taiwanese native, was made secretary general of the committee. Cai left Taiwan in 1924 to study at Shanghai University, and he was an original standing committee member of the Taiwanese branch of the *Japanese Communist Party* when it formed four years later. In 1938, he was made director of the CCP's *Enemy Work Department*, and he deployed to Taiwan in 1946 to conduct united front work in preparation for hoped-for Red Army occupation of the island. Another Taiwanese native, Cai Xiao, was tasked with training "enemy work" operatives in Taiwan.<sup>253</sup>

In addition to Cai Xiaoqian and Cai Xiao, there was a large pool of Formosans in China from which the CCP could recruit. There were old, well-established Formosan communities in coastal cities: many from these communities were unable to escape back to Taiwan or elsewhere in the face of the Red Army onslaught. In addition, there was a "very large number of young (Taiwanese) men who were labor conscripts in the Japanese Army, stranded in China in 1945 wherever Japanese forces had surrendered". Thousands had no jobs and no place to go, and were treated roughly by Nationalists as "Japanized traitors". Also, in 1947 many young men and women from Taiwan sought refuge in China following the *February 28 Incident*, embittered at the KMT for its brutal abuse and at the U.S. for not stopping the KMT abuses. Many "recruits" simply had no choice: refusal to assist the CCP meant being branded a "reactionary" and inevitable execution. Many of these Formosans were sent for "re-education" and subversion and sabotage training at the *Taiwan Recovery Training Corps* camp near Shanghai.<sup>254</sup> These recruits would prove useful in PRC Media Warfare against Taiwan.

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<sup>252</sup> Stokes and Hsiao, *The People's Liberation Army General Political Department*, 8.

<sup>253</sup> Stokes and Hsiao, *The People's Liberation Army General Political Department*, 8.

<sup>254</sup> Kerr, *Formosa Betrayed*, 437–438.

According to Stokes and Hsiao, “Intensified PLA political warfare operations on Taiwan began after the fall of Shanghai in May 1949, when the CCP began deliberate planning for an amphibious invasion that was anticipated in April 1950.”<sup>255</sup> Hsiao explains that after the ROC government moved to Taiwan in 1949, “the two sides flooded propaganda and disinformation into enemy-controlled territories to affect public opinion and troop morale.”<sup>256</sup> As part of its Media Warfare campaign, the communists smuggled pamphlets and books into Taiwan. Part of the CCP’s media operations were designed to recruit mainland Chinese officers of the Nationalist Army to sabotage Chiang’s defense of Taiwan, and to “come home” (defect to the CCP). While that ploy had worked well with many Nationalist officers during the fighting on the mainland, it was less successful on the officers who escaped to Taiwan. Accordingly, subsequent PRC Media Warfare focused on subverting the mainland civilian refugees there. Meanwhile, the CCP utilized Hong Kong to facilitate networking between Formosan communists in Japan, China, and Taiwan.<sup>257</sup>

By 1951, ROC counterintelligence operatives had uncovered the covert CCP operation on Taiwan, resulting in the arrest of Cai Xiaoqian. Cai was recruited by the KMT, and more than 400 CCP agents on the island were subsequently exposed. Other CCP agents escaped to Hong Kong and joined the newly formed *Taiwan Democratic Self-Government League*, a CCP-backed pro-unification organization that remains in existence today.<sup>258</sup>

### **The Korean War and the Cross-Straits Crises**

In June 1950, North Korea invaded South Korea, igniting the Korean War. United Nations (UN) forces deployed to the peninsula to aid South Korea, and U.S. president Harry S. Truman ordered the U.S. Navy’s Seventh Fleet to block any foreign attack on Taiwan. Although Chiang Kai-Shek volunteered ROC troops to fight alongside the UN forces in Korea, they were not deployed for U.S. fear of widening the war and involving the PRC. Nonetheless, the PRC attacked UN forces in Korea in October 1950.<sup>259</sup> When guerilla forces from Taiwan began conducting raids along the South China Coast and KMT forces left behind in Burma periodically conducted raids into southern Yunnan province to divert the PRC’s military forces from the Korea fight, Beijing

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<sup>255</sup> Stokes and Hsiao, *The People’s Liberation Army General Political Department*, 8.

<sup>256</sup> Hsiao, “CCP Propaganda against Taiwan Enters the Social Age.”

<sup>257</sup> Kerr, *Formosa Betrayed*, 438–441.

<sup>258</sup> Stokes and Hsiao, *The People’s Liberation Army General Political Department*, 8.

<sup>259</sup> Goldstein, *China and Taiwan*, 19–20.



responded with Media Warfare and other propaganda onslaughts against Taipei along with its standard propaganda and psychological operations.<sup>260</sup>

After the Korean War ended in an armistice in July 1953, two key events in cross-strait relations occurred. Beginning in September 1954, the *First Taiwan Strait Crisis* saw the PRC shell and seize several ROC offshore islands in the Taiwan Strait, employing intense Media Warfare and psychological operations against the ROC that lasted into the following year. In March 1955, the *Sino-American Mutual Defense Treaty* between the ROC and United States was signed, initiated in large part to deter PRC plans to invade Taiwan.

In 1956, the CCP founded the *Taiwan Affairs Leading Small Group* (TALSG), a powerful organization responsible for overseeing political warfare operations against Taiwan. Stokes and Hsiao write that the CCP's primary goal during the next two decades was to "undermine the legitimacy of the governing ROC authorities on Taiwan, manage territorial disputes, and counter 'U.S. imperialism'" through propaganda and misinformation operations.

In August 1958, the PRC initiated the *Second Taiwan Strait Crisis* with the same intense artillery shelling and propaganda and psychological operations that had characterized the previous cross-strait conflict. The most severe shelling stopped by the end of the year, but the PRC's political and media warfare actions continued for nearly three decades. It is notable that the administration of U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower was concerned enough about the impact of the crisis on ROC morale that it directly provided supplies and Seventh Fleet support to Taiwan and deliberated use of nuclear weapons in defense of the island nation.

The cross-strait media and psychological war that began in the 1950s continued through the 1990s. After the Second Taiwan Strait Crisis, both the PRC and ROC remained engaged in an "intense international diplomatic contest" characterized by actions that included "covert operations, subterfuge, and other efforts to encourage defections by enemy officers through psychological warfare." According to Hsiao, "the two sides used megaphones and radio stations to spread propaganda and disinformation into enemy territory" and "utilized balloons and floating carriers to send leaflets and other objects seeking defectors, promising rewards and small gifts including underwear, toys, and cooking oil, among other messages meant to exert a

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<sup>260</sup> See Frank Holober, *Raiders of the China Coast: CIA Covert Operations during the Korean War*, Naval Institute Special Warfare Series (Annapolis, Md: Naval Institute Press, 1999) and Richard M. Gibson, ed., *The Secret Army: Chiang Kai-Shek and the Drug Warlords of the Golden Triangle* (South Tower Singapore: John Wiley & Sons (Asia), 2011)..

psychological effect on the targeted population.” The Media Warfare contest was perhaps most colorfully symbolized by artillery shelling with warheads full of propaganda leaflets rather than explosives.<sup>261</sup>

## **The PRC’s Era of Wars and Chaos**

While Taiwan remained the PRC’s central focus for Media Warfare during the 1950s and 1960s, the CCP also turned to other contentious areas, such as the occupation of Tibet in 1951 and the subsequent Tibetan uprising in 1959, as well as the Sino-Indian border war in 1962. Mao Zedong’s Great Leap Forward (1958–62), with its resultant widespread famine and millions of civilian deaths, also impacted PRC Media Warfare activities against Taiwan, as did the Sino-Soviet split (1956–66), which led to bloody border skirmishes in 1969.

Despite these distractions, Beijing sustained its Media Warfare against Taiwan. One example of Media Warfare during this era was a 1962 English-language media report out of Singapore that claimed that Chiang’s “inner circle had reached a secret agreement with the CPP after more than five years of negotiations” and that Chiang “had agreed to accept Taiwan’s status a self-governed autonomous region, but only after [his] passing.” This Media Warfare operation was intended to undermine resolve on Taiwan and create mistrust between Taiwan and the United States.<sup>262</sup>

During China’s Cultural Revolution (1966–76), as Mao threw the PRC into bloody turmoil, many of the PRC’s political warfare operations were significantly curtailed. However, the PRC achieved a major diplomatic—and, implicitly, political warfare—victory when the General Assembly of the United Nations voted in 1971 for the PRC to replace the ROC as the UN representative of China. As a result, Taiwan’s international standing suffered. In 1970, 68 nations recognized the ROC as “China” while 53 nations recognized the PRC, but by 1977 only 23 nations recognized the ROC while 111 recognized the PRC.<sup>263</sup> The nations that continue to recognize the ROC today remain vital Media Warfare battlegrounds.

## **Beijing Shifts Lines of Political Warfare**

U.S. president Richard M. Nixon’s 1972 visit to the PRC attenuated some of Beijing’s Media Warfare activities aimed at Taiwan and its relationship with the United States. In its Media

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<sup>261</sup> Hsiao, “CCP Propaganda against Taiwan Enters the Social Age.”

<sup>262</sup> Stokes and Hsiao, *The People’s Liberation Army General Political Department*, 9–10.

<sup>263</sup> Goldstein, *China and Taiwan*, 41.

Warfare between 1949 and 1972, the PRC framed the Taiwan “problem” in ideological terms by accusing American “imperialists” of “occupying Taiwan,” employing the theory of “class struggle” to judge Taiwan’s society, and routinely interpreting Taiwan’s political, economic, and educational systems using communist ideological jargon.<sup>264</sup>

Beginning in 1973, however, focus shifted. The PRC’s Media Warfare operations began systematically exploiting the *28 February 1947* massacre in Taiwan. Beijing began holding (and publicizing) anniversary ceremonies and study sessions to “win over the hearts” of the Taiwanese people. The first meeting hosted approximately 138 participants, nearly half of whom were Taiwanese, including KMT party officials, former military officers, government diplomats and administrators, academics, women, and young people. Media Warfare themes for the annual meetings included routine calls for Taiwan’s “liberation” and its unification with “the motherland,” as well as both coercive threats and offers for “peace talks.” Oddly enough, the CCP hosts also asserted that Mao inspired the *28 February* massacre. By taking credit for the incident, the CCP contrived “to establish the legitimacy and continuity of its leadership between the incident and any future political change on Taiwan.”<sup>265</sup>

The Cultural Revolution brought a decade of civil war, chaos, and ruin to mainland China. After its end, the PRC’s political warfare infrastructure was reconstituted in the late 1970s, with resultant renewed operations against Taiwan. In particular, it allowed the CCP to vastly expand its united front mission. United front work was originally focused internally on domestic objectives regarding the various factions and ethnicities in China, especially during the disastrous Great Leap Forward and the bloody Cultural Revolution. But beginning in 1979, Deng Xiaoping broadened the focus of united front work to include Chinese living outside of the PRC. Overseas Chinese were enticed to invest in the PRC to support Deng’s “Four Modernizations” of agriculture, industry, national defense, and science and technology in mainland China. The diaspora, which included Taiwanese, was also encouraged to support PRC policies and actions within the countries where they resided. This led to a vast increase in funding for the UFWD as well as the PRC’s economic revival.<sup>266</sup>

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<sup>264</sup> Chiu Hungdah, ed., *China and the Taiwan Issue* (New York: Praeger, 1979), 129.

<sup>265</sup> Chiu, *China and the Taiwan Issue*, 134.

<sup>266</sup> Discussions with senior Republic of China political warfare officers at Fu Hsing Kang College, National Defense University, Taipei, Taiwan, 2018.



This outward shift of United Front work also led to increased support for pro-PRC overseas Chinese-language media. The CCP leadership increasingly viewed the PRC's Chinese diaspora as a "magic weapon" of sorts, and over time recognized the importance of Chinese-language media in shaping the thinking and actions of the diaspora.<sup>267</sup>

While the deaths of Chiang Kai-Shek in April 1975 and Mao Zedong in September 1976 did little to change the nature of the Media Warfare competition between the PRC and ROC, the beginning of the Democracy Wall Movement in mainland China in 1978 and economic reforms in the country gave small hope that perhaps the PRC would become less totalitarian. To counter any reform within the PRC, the CCP would combine both wanton brutality and a massive Media Warfare offensive.

### **The Tiananmen Square Massacre and the CCP's Charm Offensive**

As late as the 1980s, the PRC was considered a pariah in much of the international community, seen a communist threat that had sponsored vicious revolutions exemplified by Cambodia's genocidal Pol Pot regime. The massive starvation and ultimate failure of the Great Leap Forward (1958–62) and subsequent brutal anarchy of the Cultural Revolution (1966–76) damaged the PRC's global image and greatly weakened the effectiveness of its political warfare and other influence operations.<sup>268</sup>

Internationally, the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre further diminished the PRC's influence. However, the CCP's success in expunging the memory of the massacre from the China's collective memory provided the CCP the definitive case study in Media Warfare. As Louisa Lim details in her seminal work *The People's Republic of Amnesia: Tiananmen Revisited*, the CCP employed Media Warfare to enforce "collective amnesia".<sup>269</sup> As one of many examples of the pervasive CCP program of "whitewashing" the massacre through Media Warfare, Lim writes:

*The authorities national reflex has been to simply clamp down, banning sensitive words on weibo, the Chinese equivalent of Twitter, and deleting postings as quickly as possible. Every June 4<sup>th</sup>, the authorities' level of paranoia can be charted by increasingly lengthy lists of banned*

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<sup>267</sup> David A Gitter and Brock M. Erdahl, "Telling China's Story Well: An Investigation into Chinese Influence Operations Targeting American Chinese-Language Media Outlets" (1519 Connecticut Ave NW Ste 300 Washington DC 20036: Center for Advanced China Research (CACR), June 15, 2020), 4–5.

<sup>268</sup> Kurlantzick. *Charm Offensive*, 16–20.

<sup>269</sup> Louisa Lim, *The People's Republic of Amnesia: Tiananmen Revisited* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 72, 80, 85–86, 88, 96, 98–100, 129, 132, 136, 145, 156, 173, 210.

words. Terms deemed sensitive enough to be forbidden include “today”, “tomorrow”, “that year”, “special day”, and “sensitive word” . . . sensitive images are also often scrubbed from the Internet, including birthday cake candles featuring the numbers 4 and 6; photos of chrysanthemums, which are traditional flowers of mourning; anything with the slightest similarity to a tank, including LEGO tanks . . . (and) even yellow rubber ducks.”<sup>270</sup>

Of particular note, the international backlash for the massacre served as a turning point for the CCP in terms of both internal propaganda and suppression and the refinement of its external influence capabilities.<sup>271</sup> The PRC has since advanced to a remarkable degree in its ability to utilize Media Warfare in its global political warfare operations, as reflected in its *Charm Offensive* campaign that began in the late 1990s.

On Taiwan, in 1991 the ROC officially ended its *National Mobilization for Suppression of the Communist Rebellion* (martial law) that was initiated in 1949, and by 1995 President Lee had instituted other democratic reforms that empowered the people of Taiwan, including ending the decades-long cover-up of the 28 February 1947 massacre.<sup>272</sup> All would impact PRC Media Warfare strategies and operations.

Cross-strait relations began to liberalize in the 1980s, and the CCP officially ended its overt propaganda program against Taiwan in 1991, reports Hsiao. “On the surface, the war without gunfire that had lasted for over 40 years appeared to be over—[but] this could not be farther from the truth. Rather, propaganda and disinformation found new outlets in the mass media and new media.”<sup>273</sup>

Despite missteps in the 1990s that generated even more international pushback, such as military actions against Vietnam and threats against Taiwan, by the end of the decade the PRC had initiated its very sophisticated global *Charm Offensive* campaign. It was based on a systematic, coherent soft power strategy that supported its overall political warfare objectives. Beijing employed a wide range of influence-related activities, such as expanding its Media Warfare platforms. As one of many examples, OCAO began aggressively seeking control of media platforms that served the Chinese diaspora by having its propaganda arm *China News Service One* establish the TV network *SinoVision* and the newspaper *Qiaobao*. This was

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<sup>270</sup> Lim, 99–100.

<sup>271</sup> Kurlantzick. *Charm Offensive*, 25–48.

<sup>272</sup> Goldstein, *China and Taiwan*, 73–74.

<sup>273</sup> Hsiao, “CCP Propaganda against Taiwan Enters the Social Age.”

accomplished covertly, through a *CNS* front company that obscured Chinese government involvement.<sup>274</sup>

Also of note during the 1990's, in the early part of the decade Taiwanese food company Want Want began to invest in the PRC, after its chairman, Tsai Eng-meng, downplayed the Tiananmen Square Massacre and the casualties there reported by non-PRC news media. In part because Tsai invested in the PRC at a time when the country was boycotted by major world powers and in part due to extensive Chinese government assistance, Want Want “was hugely successful and accumulated enormous capital”.

In late 2008, Want Want Group began purchasing Taiwan news media organizations. Specifically, it acquired *China Times*, China TV Company, and CTI Television Inc. (CtiTV), and organized them under the Want Want China Times Media Group. After Tsai met with Wang Yi, then the director of the State Council's Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO) in 2009 (and now PRC Foreign Minister), Want Want Media Group “began to reflect Beijing's rhetoric and political preferences”. From 2009-2011, the PRC provided “subsidies” of USD \$114 million, roughly 10 percent of the group's net profit. Further, Want-Want began covertly collaborated with *United Daily News* (UDN), a PRC-leaning newspaper, to publish pro-PRC propaganda and routinely uses official Central Propaganda Department “reporting” as source material.<sup>275</sup>

Following the 2008 Beijing Olympics, the CCP began to invest greater resources into its Media Warfare operations, due to embarrassments the CCP suffered in the lead-up to this otherwise massive propaganda victory. According to David Gitter and Brock Erdahl at *The Center for Advanced China Research* (CACR), the CCP overhauled its external propaganda structure under its *Grand Overseas Propaganda Campaign* and in 2009 it announced that it would invest 45 billion RMB (roughly \$6.6 billion USD) into strengthening the international presence of party-state media outlets.

## **Media Warfare in the Xi Jinping Era**

Since General Secretary Xi Jinping's ascension to power in 2012, the PRC has become even more sophisticated and ambitious in its use of political and media warfare to achieve its broad

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<sup>274</sup> Gitter and Erdahl, ““Telling China's Story Well: An Investigation into Chinese Influence Operations Targeting American Chinese-Language Media Outlets,”” 4–5.

<sup>275</sup> Szu-Chien Hsu and J. Michael Cole, *Insidious Power: How China Undermines Global Democracy* (Manchester, UK: Eastbridge Books, 2020), 212–214.



strategic objectives. Regarding Xi's Media Warfare, Hsu and Cole describe it as a "go-global, multi-platform, national and international strategic communications strategy".<sup>276</sup>

According to Princeton University professor Aaron L. Friedberg, "Beijing is employing a variety of techniques to shape the perceptions of both leaders and elites in the advanced industrial nations (including the United States) as well as in much of the developing world."<sup>277</sup> Friedberg continues that the PRC's Media Warfare methods include:

*all-expenses-paid junkets to China for foreign legislators and journalists; expulsion of foreign media that present unfavorable views of China to overseas audiences; increasingly sophisticated use of well-funded official, quasi-official and nominally unofficial media platforms that deliver Beijing's message to the world; (and) pressure on movie studios and media companies to ensure continued access to the vast Chinese market by avoiding politically sensitive content*<sup>278</sup>

Xi has extolled the importance of Media Warfare capabilities as part of his broader push to achieve China's "National Rejuvenation" and the CCP's "Two Centenary Goals", Xi's ambitious program for reaching national prosperity and achieving strength and dominance in the Indo-Pacific region by the mid-21st century. Beijing's Media Warfare messaging has since gone on a global offensive to tell the CCP's story in a strictly positive light and to establish "leadership and discourse power in the ideological domain."<sup>279</sup>

In 2016, Xi revitalized CCTV International, the PRC's television "voice" to the outside world, and re-branded it as CGTV (China Global Television). The CCP's English-language newspaper, *China Daily*, expanded its program of purchasing "supplements" in major newspapers globally, while Beijing signed media-cooperation partnerships with many news organizations in Europe and Asia.<sup>280</sup>

Following Xi's consolidation of dictatorial power at the 19th Party Congress, he initiated the *External Propaganda Flagship Media* concept. In 2018, the 13th National People's Congress (NPC) created the China Media Group. Known as "Voice of China" internationally, the massive new super-body was placed under CCP Central Propaganda Department management and

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<sup>276</sup> Hsu and Cole, xxxv.

<sup>277</sup> Friedberg, "Strategic Competition with China."

<sup>278</sup> Friedberg, "Strategic Competition with China."

<sup>279</sup> David A Gitter and Brock M. Erdahl, "Telling China's Story Well: An Investigation into Chinese Influence Operations Targeting American Chinese-Language Media Outlets" (1519 Connecticut Ave NW Ste 300 Washington DC 20036: Center for Advanced China Research, June 15, 2020), 2-3.

<sup>280</sup> Hsu and Cole, *Insidious Power: How China Undermines Global Democracy*, xxix-xxx.

absorbed state outlets CCTV, China Radio International (CRI), and China National Radio (CNR). Other “flagships” would follow.

Under a policy called “borrow a boat to go out on the ocean”, the PRC set up strategic partnerships with foreign newspapers, radio stations, and television networks. Part of the bargain was that the PRC provided these foreign media outlets with free content, a boon for increasingly cash-strapped media organizations in both developing and developed countries. In addition, official PRC media organizations engaged in strategic mergers and acquisitions with foreign media and cultural enterprises.<sup>281</sup>

Simultaneously, the CCP continued its long-term effort to control news media serving “overseas Chinese” by utilizing the strategies and tactics described. Xi built on an already solid foundation: by 2010, the OCAO began openly describing Chinese-language media as one of the “three treasures” of overseas Chinese communities during its interactions with Chinese abroad. Since then, OCAO’s cooptation activities targeting Chinese communities has increased markedly, and the PRC now has significant ownership, direct control, or varying degrees of influence over such outlets in an attempt to foster Chinese diasporic communities that support PRC goals.<sup>282</sup>

In recent years, the CCP has aggressively exploited the relatively new world of *social media* (such as WeChat) and merged it with its traditional media to amplify its time-honed political and media warfare capabilities. With social media platforms, the CCP can more easily reach global audiences in the developing world, the former Eastern Bloc, and developed countries simultaneously.<sup>283</sup> The added benefit of using social media to flood the CCP’s adversaries’ societies with propaganda and disinformation is that it ultimately weakens people’s faith in democracy and can create political instability.<sup>284</sup> In pursuit of social media dominance, the PRC has established PLA cyber force of as many as 300,000 soldiers as well as a Netizen “50 Cent Army” of perhaps 2 million individuals who “are paid a nominal fee to make comments on social media sites in favor of [CCP] propaganda.”<sup>285</sup>

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<sup>281</sup> Hsu and Cole, xxxvi.

<sup>282</sup> Gitter and Erdahl, “‘Telling China’s Story Well: An Investigation into Chinese Influence Operations Targeting American Chinese-Language Media Outlets,’” 4–5.

<sup>283</sup> Hsu and Cole, *Insidious Power: How China Undermines Global Democracy*, xxxv.

<sup>284</sup> Russell Hsiao, “CCP Propaganda against Taiwan Enters the Social Age,” Jamestown Foundation, China Brief 18, no. 7, 24 April 2018.

<sup>285</sup> Keoni Everington, “China’s ‘Troll Factory’ Targeting Taiwan with Disinformation Prior to Election,” *Taiwan News*, 5 November 2018.

Xi continues to employ Media Warfare *active measures*, which the CCP learned from the Soviet Union's employment of "black" and "gray" tools and tactics. Active measures involve "manipulative use of slogans, distorted arguments, disinformation, and carefully selected true information [to] influence the attitudes and actions of foreign publics and governments." Black active measures employ "covert media manipulation, and forgeries [to] shape foreign public perception and attitudes of senior leaders," while gray active measures leverage "united front entities, think tanks, institutes, and other non-governmental organizations that [enable] an ostensibly independent line from the Soviet party-state."<sup>286</sup>

Notably, Xi employs Media Warfare with United Front actions; one such activity is designed to continue to exploit the KMT's 1947 "2:28" massacre. As recently as 2017, for example, the CCP tried to co-opt (and highly publicize) the seventieth anniversary of the 28 *February* incident—as well as the thirtieth anniversary of the lifting of martial law in Taiwan—by hosting a commemorative event organized by its front organization, the Taiwan Democratic Self-Government League.<sup>287</sup>

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<sup>286</sup> Mark Stokes and Russell Hsiao, "PLA General Political Department Liaison Department: Political Warfare with Chinese Characteristics" (Project 2049 Institute, October 13, 2013), 6, <https://project2049.net/2013/10/14/the-peoples-liberation-army-general-political-department-political-warfare-with-chinese-characteristics/>.

<sup>287</sup> Hsiao, "Political Warfare Alert: CCP-TDSGL Appropriates Taiwan's 2-28 Incident."



# **Chapter 7**

## **Historical Overview:**

### **The Post-Democratization Era**

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## Chapter 7

### Historical Overview: The Post-Democratization Era

This chapter examines these aspects of the historical track on PRC Media Warfare against Taiwan after full democratization in the 1990s:

- PRC Media Warfare during the presidencies of Lee Teng-hui, Chen Shui-Bien, Ma Ying-jeou, and Tsai Ing-wen,
- the PRC's use of Media Warfare as a tool in interfering with Taiwan's two most recent election cycles, and
- the CCP propaganda campaign regarding Taiwan during the COVID-19 pandemic,
- military coercion in conjunction with Media Warfare.

#### The Lee and Chen Administrations (1988-2008)

As detailed previously, during the White Terror, which effectively lasted from 1947 through the mid-1980s, the KMT-run ROC government exercised tight control over Taiwan's news media. While press freedom for those on Taiwan was extremely limited during that era, the press freedom restrictions and censorship also limited the impact of PRC media warfare against and within Taiwan. That situation began to change dramatically in 1988.

After assuming the presidency in 1988 following death of Chiang Kai Shek's son, Chiang Ching-kuo, Lee Teng-hui expanded Taiwan's democratization, to include allowing far greater freedom of the press. Lee, Taiwan's first Taiwanese president and later the first democratically elected president, was instrumental in the nation's peaceful transition from autocratic rule to one of Asia's most vibrant democracies. As president, Lee cemented Taiwan's identity as distinct from China.<sup>288</sup> Lee's successor, Chen Shui-Bien, further expanded press freedoms in 2003, and Taiwan's media became more diverse and competitive. For example, in January 1988 there were only 31 legal newspapers in Taiwan; by 2011 there were 2,210. Also, by December 2006,

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<sup>288</sup> Kathrin Hille and Robin Kwong, "Obituary: Lee Teng-Hui, Former Taiwan President, 1923-2020," *Financial Times*, July 30, 2020, <https://www.ft.com/content/c8050b09-baf9-41eb-8aa0-6c00109ca219>.

television programming dramatically, with 81.6 percent of household having access to cable TV, with it plethora of news programs and 24-hour news channels.<sup>289</sup>

However, this new press freedom, combined with Taiwan's expanding capital markets, allowed the PRC expanded avenues for its malign influence. During Lee's presidency, hundreds of thousands of Taiwanese business people began investing in the PRC, and this enabled the CCP to influence Taiwan's politics, election, and news media organizations.<sup>290</sup> The Want Want food company's media acquisitions, previously discussed, led to censorship, self-censorship, uncritical dissemination of PRC propaganda and "paid news", disinformation (fake news), dismissal of editors who refused to follow the pro-PRC line, and intimidation of critics of the Want Want Group's misconduct.<sup>291</sup>

By the early 2000's, during Chen's presidency, the PRC began to expand its traditional Media Warfare based on former PRC leader Hu Jintao's concept of "*Entering the Island (of Taiwan), Entering the Household, and Entering the Mind*". This concept was announced in August 2004 as part of the CCP's unification strategy aimed at Taiwan through PRC propaganda in Taiwan's media.<sup>292</sup> To implement the concept, the CCP put more emphasis on *Clandestine Media Warfare*, using Hong Kong and other overseas media to influence public opinion in Taiwan. Later, the CCP employed Lenin's concept that "the easiest way to capture a fortress is from within". To this end, the CCP practiced "using business to surround the government" with help from co-opted media.<sup>293</sup> The PRC encouraged sympathetic Taiwanese businessmen to purchase media outlets, bought advertising in Taiwan's media to influence public opinion, and pressured media proprietors who had investments in China to stop publishing criticism of the PRC. Accordingly, despite the fact that even though PRC entities cannot directly own Taiwanese media companies without government approval, the PRC began making tremendous progress in infiltrating Taiwanese television and print media.

As one indication of the breadth of the PRC's media warfare strategy during this the Chen administration, in 2007 more than \$300 million USD was transferred from the PRC to

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<sup>289</sup> Chien-Jung Hsu, "China's Influence on Taiwan's Media," *Asian Survey* 54, no. 3 (June 2014): 515–516, <https://doi.org/10.1525/as.2014.54.3.515>.

<sup>290</sup> Hsu, 524.

<sup>291</sup> Hsu and Cole, *Insidious Power: How China Undermines Global Democracy*, 212–214.

<sup>292</sup> Hsu, "China's Influence on Taiwan's Media," 532.

<sup>293</sup> Hsu, 516.



Taiwan and Hong Kong to purchase Taiwan media.”<sup>294</sup> Even supposedly pro-Taiwan national identity, pro-DPP news media such as *Formosan TV* (FTV) (the “free to air” that first broke the KMT monopoly on “free to air” TV) and Sanli E-Television (SET) were publicly exposed for censoring news and other content to cooperate CCP’s organizations such as *China Central News TV* (CCTV) and the PRC’s Taiwan Affairs Office in pursuits of profits during this era.<sup>295</sup>

### **The Ma Ying-jeou “Dark Decade” (2008-2016)**

Between 2008 and 2016, ROC president Ma Ying-jeou of the KMT party, pursued a policy of rapprochement with Beijing, and interactions between Taiwan and the PRC increased quickly and extensively. “With rapidly expanding cross-strait travel, academic exchanges and investment,” writes J. Michael Cole of the Global Taiwan Institute, “the opportunities for China to engage in political warfare increased exponentially.”<sup>296</sup> The impact on Taiwan’s security was devastating, to the point that students and activists were forced to take to the streets to protect Taiwan from PRC Media Warfare activities that the government seemed unwilling or unable to confront.

The PRC viewed Ma’s election as a “historic opportunity” in its efforts to absorb Taiwan into the PRC. Ma endorsed the so-called “1992 Consensus” and publicly announced that the PRC and ROC agreed to “separate interpretations” of the *One China Policy*, with Taipei affirming that “China” was the ROC. There is, however, no record that any such agreement between the PRC and ROC was ever made. Ma also sought “meaningful participation” in international organizations, but not membership in the UN (consistent with Beijing’s desires). Consequently, Ma was able to reduce tensions and restart stalled cross-strait communications.<sup>297</sup>

However, as a result of Ma’s attempts at cross-strait rapprochement, the PRC was able to increase its political influence in Taiwan. Consequently, the CCP inflicted serious damage to the ROC’s security and national unity and garnering increasing resentment and criticism throughout the country. As PRC media outlets praised Ma and his cross-strait initiatives, Beijing continued to conduct a wide range of political warfare operations and cyber attacks against Taiwan, and

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<sup>294</sup> Hsu, 520.

<sup>295</sup> Hsu, 524–530.

<sup>296</sup> J. Michael Cole, “Unstoppable: China’s Secret Plan to Subvert Taiwan,” *National Interest*, 23 March 2015.

<sup>297</sup> Goldstein, *China and Taiwan*, 120; and interviews with a senior U.S. Department of State official, various locations, 2018–20.

PRC intelligence actions expanded significantly.<sup>298</sup> Ma's reign has been characterized as a "dark decade" during Taiwan's intelligence war with the PRC by Jamestown Foundation fellow Peter Mattis, who reports that Taiwan's "intelligence and counterintelligence failures" during the Ma administration damaged its "reputation and sowed doubt about its integrity."<sup>299</sup>

Academic exchanges between Taiwan and the PRC sent large number of highly educated but underemployed and unemployed Taiwanese, including many with PhDs, to mainland China in search of jobs. With little knowledge of how to identify or resist PRC intelligence enticements, they became easy prey to Confucius Institutes, the MSS, PLA agencies, and other organizations that offered funding for "research" and "consultant" services. These academics were often tasked with reporting on Taiwan's economy, politics, societal problems, security, and other issues of great interest to the PRC political warfare community, which vastly increased Beijing's ability to divide and demoralize the people of Taiwan.<sup>300</sup> In addition to inroads to Taiwanese academics and students, the PRC's political warfare and intelligence operatives also obtained far greater access to retired government officials, particularly military officers and ministerial-level administrators in charge of national defense, economic stability, foreign affairs, and other vital state functions. Many were co-opted with offers of free trips to the mainland and high-paying positions as advisers or director on the boards of PRC state-owned enterprises.<sup>301</sup>

Media infiltration and pro-PRC propaganda accelerated as well. For example, according to Associate Professor Tung Li-wen of the Central Policy University in Taipei, *Want Want Times* received a subsidy of \$477 million USD in 2011 and published a "remarkable number of the paper's news items were drawn from . . . the official PRC Xinhua News Agency."<sup>302</sup> *Want Want* played a key role in helping the PRC place "advertorials" in the form of apparent news coverage in Taiwanese media. In violation of Taiwan legal regulations, there were 269 instances of the PRC planting such PRC propaganda "advertorials" in one two-year period alone during this time, with 25 such "advertorials" embedded in *United Daily News* (UDN) and *United Evening News* (UEN) during November 2012 alone, with *Want Want* allegedly acting as the placing agent.

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<sup>298</sup> Discussions with senior Republic of China political warfare officers at Fu Hsing Kang College, National Defense University, Taipei, Taiwan, 2018-20.

<sup>299</sup> Nadia Tsao et al., "Ma Years 'Dark Decade' in Intelligence War: Analyst," *Taipei Times*, 2 October 2018.

<sup>300</sup> Discussions with senior Republic of China political warfare officers at Fu Hsing Kang College, National Defense University, Taipei, Taiwan, 2018-19.

<sup>301</sup> Discussions with senior Republic of China political warfare officers at Fu Hsing Kang College, National Defense University, Taipei, Taiwan, 2018-19.

<sup>302</sup> Hsu, "China's Influence on Taiwan's Media," 522.

One newspaper, *China Times*, was fined NT\$400,000 (USD \$13,333) for violating *the Law on Management of Promotion of Goods and Services from Mainland China* as a result.<sup>303</sup>

More insidiously, according to J. Michael Cole, as the PRC increased its influence on Taiwan's media environment, revenue from advertising became a weapon that threatened the viability of news organizations. "Media outlets that toe the corporate/government/China line will be rewarded with ad placements, and those that refuse to do so will ostensibly be punished by denial of such revenue." Cole correctly foresaw that "the greater Taiwan's dependence on China, the more serious will the revenue crisis be within the media industry, and consequently, the greater the pressure will be on editors to avoid 'problematic' news articles."<sup>304</sup>

"Ma opened the door to China's infiltration [in Taiwan], and this led to a large backlash against him yielding too much," said one ROC official, who asked for anonymity. Indeed, Ma's administration faced increasing criticism and protests for its pro-PRC policies. A high-level cross-strait visit to Taiwan in 2008 was perceived by many Taiwanese as a push for unification with the PRC and it led to violent protests. Molotov cocktails were thrown in the streets, and more than 140 police officers were reportedly injured. College students and professors launched a peaceful sit-in, known as the *Wild Strawberries Movement*, demanding a more reasonable assembly law and a stop to police violence.<sup>305</sup>

PRC Media Warfare played a significant role in another series of protests by Taiwan activists beginning in November 2012, in response to the attempt by the pro-Beijing Taiwan billionaire who owned Want Want to take control of the pro-democracy, pro-Taiwan *Next Media Group* operations. The Ma administration allegedly obstructed *Next Media* operations, and allegedly the PRC, working with Want Want, helped engineer the financial difficulties *Next Media* faced when its owner (Jimmy Lai) began negotiations with Want Want's owner, Tsai Eng-meng.<sup>306</sup> The attempted purchase of *Next Media* by pro-CCP Tsai deeply shocked many in Taiwan, who understood that its purchase would have allowed Tsai a decisive media monopoly. In July 2012, Want Want had already been granted conditional approval to purchase China News Service (CNS) cable television services. Student protests began shortly thereafter.<sup>307</sup>

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<sup>303</sup> Hsu, 530–32.

<sup>304</sup> J. Michael Cole, *Black Island: Two Years of Activism in Taiwan* (Taipei, Taiwan: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2015), 90–91.

<sup>305</sup> Associated Press, "Thousands in Taiwan Protest Talks with China," *New York Times*, 25 October 2008.

<sup>306</sup> Hsu, "China's Influence on Taiwan's Media," 533–34.

<sup>307</sup> Hsu, 534.



These ultimately successful protests against Tsai's purchase of *Next Media* present a useful case study, as they demonstrate what Taiwan's students, civic groups, academics and other activists were able to achieve when confront the toxic threat posed at this time by what J. Michael Cole describes "China, big business, censorship, improper oversight, dysfunctional government agencies, and a widening gap between the authorities and society."<sup>308</sup> These protests against the creation by Taiwanese businessmen of a "media monster" helped strengthen the foundation of activism that would lead to the 2014 *Sunflower* student movement that protested Ma's cross-straits trade policies, in part by physically occupying the Legislative Yuan for 24 days and even the Executive Yuan for several hours.<sup>309</sup>

The *Sunflower Movement* would ultimately bring up to half a million Taiwan citizens to the streets in protest on one day alone,<sup>310</sup> and was ultimately successful in blocking Ma's hugely controversial "Cross-Strait Services Trade Agreement" (CSSTA) that Ma's administration had negotiated in secrecy with the CCP and signed in China. The CSSTA was, in fact, less of an economic boon for Taiwan (as Ma had claimed) as it was a PRC political warfare vehicle "directly related to China's United Front and psychological warfare strategy" and designed to "facilitate China's efforts to position its own people in Taiwan."<sup>311</sup> Further, the movement brought into the open PRC Media Warfare and the complicity of certain Taiwan news media, to include censorship of web postings on *Wikipedia* by a pro-PRC Want Want China Times Group-affiliated site, and Beijing's use of "opinion monitors" armed with "advanced filtering technology" to identify and censor "false, harmful, incorrect, or even reactionary information" in social media posts in Taiwan.<sup>312</sup>

Despite the exposure of Want Want Times Group pro-PRC activities, its chairman (Tsai Eng-meng) began engaging in CCP-aligned cross-strait media forums. J. Michael Cole reports that four so-called "Cross-Strait Media People Summits" have been held in Beijing since 2015. "The first year, a total of 34 representatives from Taiwan participated in the summit. By May 2019, more than 70 did, from the print, TV, magazines, new media, film, and publishing sectors," according to a 2019 report in *Sinopsis*. Delegates were given direction from the

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<sup>308</sup> J. Michael Cole, *Black Island: Two Years of Activism in Taiwan* (Taipei, Taiwan: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2015), 9, 21-24.

<sup>309</sup> Austin, Ramzy, "As Numbers Swell, Students Pledge to Continue Occupying Taiwan's Legislature," *New York Times*, 22 March 2014. See also Cole, *Black Island*, 394.

<sup>310</sup> Cole, *Black Island*, 293.

<sup>311</sup> Cole, 249-51.

<sup>312</sup> Cole, 275-78.

CPPCC, such as that it was their “responsibility” to promote “peaceful reunification,” the “1992 Consensus” and the “One country, Two Systems” formula. Delegates also reportedly signed a series of “cooperation agreements”.

In November 2015, Ma met with Xi Jinping in Singapore, the first such meeting between the presidents of the PRC and ROC in 66 years. The meeting was perceived as “unequal,” and Ma was accused of sacrificing Taiwan’s democratic values and attempting to “re-Sinify” the nation.<sup>313</sup> By the end of his administration, many people in Taiwan believed that Ma had gone too far in the direction of PRC-ROC unification at the expense of Taiwan’s sovereignty and interests.<sup>314</sup> The DPP, dedicated to establishing a more “Taiwanese” national identity, won the 2016 presidential election by a landslide. Two years later, Ma was found guilty of leaking classified information and thereby violating the ROC’s Communication and Surveillance Act, further tarnishing his legacy.<sup>315</sup>

### **The Tsai Ing-wen “Cold Peace” Era (2016-Present)**

Following DPP candidate Tsai Ing-wen’s election as president of the ROC on January 16, 2016 and her inauguration on 20 May, a “Cold Peace” has defined cross-strait relations. Beijing has ratcheted up threats, economic pressure, and efforts to diplomatically isolate the island nation, to include attempting to interfere with both the 2018 and 2020 elections. Under Tsai, Taiwan warded off 2020 campaign interference and has become increasingly proficient at exposing and countering PRC Media Warfare. As discussed in Chapter 8, important legislation has been passed to help counter PRC political warfare in general, and important education programs have been initiated.

According to Dr. David D. F. Huang, then at Academia Sinica, the “essential parameters of ‘cold peace’ are a set of policies carried out by both China and Taiwan.” The DPP platform ultimately seeks a sovereign and independent Taiwan, and it accepts neither the PRC’s *One China Principle* nor the so-called *1992 Consensus*. Beijing has indicated that “unless [Tsai] accepted the [PRC’s] precondition of the ‘1992 Consensus,’ there would be no official or semi-official communications between China and Taiwan, no international space for Taiwan, and no more ‘economic handouts’ to Taiwan.” Tsai, meanwhile, is reluctant to consent to the 1992

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<sup>313</sup> Bill Ide, “Taiwan China Historic Talks Fuel Criticism at Home,” Voice of America News, 8 November 2015.

<sup>314</sup> Goldstein, *China and Taiwan*, 125–28.

<sup>315</sup> Lawrence Chung, “Former Taiwan President Ma Ying-Jeou Sentenced to 4 Months in Prison for Leaking Information,” *South China Morning Post*, 15 May 2018.

Consensus, since she “was elected president with an ambiguous pledge to maintain the status quo across the Taiwan Strait.”<sup>316</sup>

To counter PRC propaganda, Huang continues, Tsai stated that her government would “respect the ‘historical fact’ of the 1992 meetings and all developments thus following; would abide by the ROC constitution, and implement existing cross-Straits law and agreements as the previous administration had; and would construct a ‘consistent, predictable, and non-provocative’ framework of interactions with mainland China.” She also stated that there will be “no change of good will toward China, no change of her previous promises, no succumbing to China’s pressure, and no return to old ways of cross-Straits confrontation.”<sup>317</sup> The CCP is not satisfied with these assurances.

As a result, cross-strait relations between the PRC and Taiwan have developed into deadlock and have remained so into Tsai’s second term of office. Public-sector communication channels are cut off and private-sector exchanges reduced, while official channels between the PRC State Council’s Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO) and Taiwan’s Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) and between Taiwan’s Straits Exchange Foundation (SEF) and the PRC’s Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Straits (ARATS) have also been disconnected. The PRC’s ensuing strategy has been to increase diplomatic, economic, and military pressures on Tsai’s government through a wide range of united front and other political warfare activities. The CCP’s objectives are to effect regime change in Taiwan or prompt Tsai to mistakenly provoke China.<sup>318</sup>

The PRC’s Media Warfare against Taiwan has continued apace during the Tsai presidency across a broad front. All traditional and new media are employed, as well as co-opted and “bought” foreign news media. A look on any given day at the *People’s Daily*, CCTV, CGTN, *Xinhua*, *China News Service*, *China Military Online*, *PLA Daily*, and *China Daily*, or a few hours listening to *China Radio International* will invariably provide access to Taiwan-focused “news” and features--whether as direct threats or for other “re-unification”-focused propaganda purposes. These examples from the English-language PRC publications in the late

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<sup>316</sup> David W. F. Huang, “‘Cold Peace’ and the Nash Equilibrium in Cross-Straits Relations (Part 1),” Global Taiwan Institute, Global Taiwan Brief 1, no. 12, 7 December 2016.

<sup>317</sup> Huang, “‘Cold Peace’ and the Nash Equilibrium in Cross-Straits Relations (Part 1).”

<sup>318</sup> David W. F. Huang, “‘Cold Peace’ and the Nash Equilibrium in Cross-Straits Relations (Part 2),” Global Taiwan Institute, Global Taiwan Brief 2, no. 2, 11 January 2017.



September–early October 2020 timeframe give a sense of the CCP’s propaganda organs’ focus and tone:

**The more trouble Taiwan creates, the sooner the mainland will teach them a lesson**

Source: *Global Times* Published: October 6, 2020

<https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1202774.shtml>

**Taiwan authorities use 'trumped-up charges' to obstruct singers to mainland:**

**Taiwan Affairs Office**

Source: *Global Times* Published: September 30, 2020

<https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1202520.shtml>

**Seeking 'independence' via 'constitutional amendment' will get Taiwan secessionists burned: Taiwan Affairs Office**

Source: *Global Times* Published: September 30, 2020

<https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1202524.shtml>

**Chinese UN mission opposes U.S. ambassador's Taiwan-related activity, remarks**

Source: *Xinhua*, Published September 30, 2020

<http://en.people.cn/n3/2020/0930/c90000-9766197.html>

**Taiwan residents worry about war: surveys**

Source: *Global Times* Published: September 28, 2020

<https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1202381.shtml>

**DPP 'self-deceiving' in seeking secessionist presence of Taiwan in intl organizations**

Source: *Global Times* Published: September 28, 2020

<https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1202384.shtml>

**Taiwan’s high-profile missile tests no threat to PLA: experts**

Source: *Global Times* Published: 2020/9/25 15:32:17

<https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1202067.shtml>

**China will do what 'it takes' to halt secession**

Source: *China Daily* Published: September 25, 2020

<http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202009/25/WS5f6d294ca31024ad0ba7bb3d.html>

**PLA aircraft’s move target “Taiwan independence” secessionists: Spokesperson**

Source: *PLA Daily/China Military Online* Published: September 24, 2020

[http://english.pladaily.com.cn/view/2020-09/24/content\\_9908284.htm](http://english.pladaily.com.cn/view/2020-09/24/content_9908284.htm)

**China warns US on recent Taiwan moves**

Source: *China Daily* Published: September 22, 2020

<http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202009/22/WS5f692e13a31024ad0ba7ae06.html>

### **PLA conducts combat-ready patrols and exercises in Taiwan Straits**

Source: *China Military Online* Published: September 18, 2020

[http://english.chinamil.com.cn/view/2020-09/18/content\\_9905003.htm](http://english.chinamil.com.cn/view/2020-09/18/content_9905003.htm)

Unique to the PRC's Media Warfare during the Tsai Presidency are the following four topics, each of which will be examined in detail:

- means used to successfully influence the 2018 mid-term elections
- means used to counter PRC Media Warfare in the 2020 general elections.
- how Media Warfare has been used to attack Taiwan and its public health success in the era of COVID-19.
- how Media Warfare supports the PRC's military coercion

### **2018 Midterm Elections Interference: The Rise of Han Kuo-yu**

Taiwan's midterm elections in November 2018 resulted in resounding defeat at the local level for the DPP and unexpected victory for the KMT, which won mayoralties in Taiwan's three most populous cities. Tsai resigned as leader of the DPP, though she remained Taiwan's president.

While the political issues that drove the election were varied and complex, the PRC's Media Warfare contributed to a "massive and successful interference in Taiwan's elections", writes Josh Rogin at *The Washington Post*. Beijing "carried out a massive propaganda and social media campaign that spread false news designed to undermine Tsai's government," in which "the island's 23 million citizens were bombarded with anti-Tsai and anti-DPP content through Facebook, Twitter and online chat groups, promoted by China's '50-cent army' of paid social media trolls."<sup>319</sup> There are ongoing investigations, under the direction of the ROC National Security Bureau and military intelligence, into allegations of PRC social media engineering and illegal funding of Taiwanese candidates opposing Tsai and the DPP. However, ROC officials acknowledged during several discussions after the election that money laundering and social media engineering are difficult to prove and the investigations themselves are very time consuming.<sup>320</sup>

A Media Warfare-related problem acknowledged by DPP officials is that the Tsai government failed to educate the people of Taiwan about PRC political warfare early enough in

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<sup>319</sup> Josh Rogin, "China's Interference in the 2018 Elections Succeeded—in Taiwan," *Washington Post*, 18 December 2018.

<sup>320</sup> Discussions with senior Republic of China political warfare officers at Fu Hsing Kang College, National Defense University, Taipei, Taiwan, 2018-20.

the administration. “It was only in September [2018] that the DPP began to buy ads regarding ‘fake news’ and China’s influence operations,” said one knowledgeable official. By then, the allegations looked to some like an election ploy, and many Taiwanese were skeptical. Others who were buying ads and protesting against the administration’s policies took the “fake news” ads to be attacks on their loyalty and integrity.<sup>321</sup>

Rogin notes that after the elections, PRC propaganda organs and Beijing’s sympathizers “pointed to Tsai’s losses as evidence that her tough stance vis-à-vis China was unpopular and wrongheaded.”<sup>322</sup> Those propaganda platforms also depicted the election results as justification for Xi Jinping’s strategy of isolating Taiwan and undercutting its international standing since the DPP election victory in 2016.<sup>323</sup>

More ominously, on 1 January 2019, in Xi’s first speech ever devoted exclusively to the topic of Taiwan, his tone was threatening. One day after Tsai urged the PRC to settle the Taiwan issue peacefully, Xi declared, “The country is growing strong, the nation is rejuvenating and unification between the two sides of the strait is the great trend of history . . . We make no promise to abandon the use of force, and retain the option of taking all necessary measures.”<sup>324</sup>

Another important off-shoot of the 2018 elections was the unusual political rise of the man who would be President Tsai’s opponent in the 2020 presidential elections, Han Kuo-yu. Han’s improbable election to be mayor of Kaohsiung in 2018 rates special attention as a case study in successful PRC Media Warfare.

Han was “a backbench lawmaker, an unemployed husband and the general manager of an agricultural marketing company” with a “shady private life”. Yet in 2018 he benefitted from an “overwhelming media campaign apparently orchestrated by Chinese agencies and paid for by Taiwan’s China-friendly tycoons” to be elected mayor of Taiwan’s second largest city, Kaohsiung, which has historically been a DPP stronghold. To support his mayoral campaign, radio and social media were extensively employed. For months two local media stations controlled by pro-PRC business factions “bombarded the public with a ceaseless stream of flattering news about Han.” The stations, TVBS and CtiTV, “allegedly paid local eateries and

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<sup>321</sup> Discussions with senior Republic of China political warfare officers at Fu Hsing Kang College, National Defense University, Taipei, Taiwan, 2018-19.

<sup>322</sup> Rogin, “China’s Interference in the 2018 Elections Succeeded—in Taiwan.”

<sup>323</sup> Chris Buckley and Chris Horton, “Xi Jinping Warns Taiwan That Unification Is the Goal and Force Is an Option,” *New York Times*, 1 January 2019.

<sup>324</sup> Buckley and Horton, “Xi Jinping Warns Taiwan That Unification Is the Goal and Force Is an Option.”



hotels and other such popular sites . . . to have their broadcasts running 24/7, with algorithms doing a similar job in terms of social media coverage.”<sup>325</sup> As part of a broader PRC campaign of disinformation and coercion, similar radio and social media support catapulted Han into the 2020 presidential race as the KMT candidate.<sup>326</sup>

## **2020 Election Interference: Taiwan Effectively Fights Back**

Leading up Taiwan’s January 2020 presidential and legislative national elections, the PRC was emboldened by what it perceived as its midterm election success. Beijing had high hopes for the election of its favored candidate, the KMT’s Han Kuo-yu, now mayor of Kaohsiung. It was a false hope.

Taiwan’s leaders learned from the PRC aggressive Media Warfare in the 2018 election, and effectively combatted it in 2020 through an innovative, *whole-of-society* approach. The government vastly improved its ability to detect and debunk various forms of Media Warfare and, as important, to raise public awareness of these attacks. The U.S. government and other entities, public and private, assisted.

Taiwan’s public education effort was more sophisticated and effective than in 2018. President Tsai personally engaged in the effort, with such warnings in public speeches as this October 2019 statement: “China has increased its coercion tactics... It has been doing so through a combination of military threats, disinformation and propaganda, infiltration, and other methods.”<sup>327</sup> Consequently, civil society became more alert and created non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to detect, debunk, and block fake news online. Taiwan’s government passed sorely needed legislation (the *Anti-Infiltration Law*) to provide law enforcement and intelligence needed tools, it strengthened Taiwan’s institutions, and it formed its own *united front*—a public-private alliance--to fight back.

On 31 December 2019, 11 days before the elections, the Legislative Yuan passed the *Anti-Infiltration Law*, to help counter election disinformation.<sup>328</sup> Similar to the U.S. *Foreign*

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<sup>325</sup> Jens Kastner, “Beijing’s Man in Taiwan Crashes and Burns,” *Asia Sentinel*, 12 May 2020.

<sup>326</sup> Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian, “China Steps Up Political Interference ahead of Taiwan’s Elections,” *Axios*, 10 January 2020; Kastner, “Beijing’s Man in Taiwan Crashes and Burns”; and Raymond Zhong, “Awash in Disinformation before Vote, Taiwan Points Finger at China,” *New York Times* (website), 6 January 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/06/technology/taiwan-election-china-disinformation.html>.

<sup>327</sup> Jason Pan, “Beware of Disinformation Ahead of Vote, Tsai Warns,” *Taipei Times*, October 28, 2019, <http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2019/10/28/2003724792>.

<sup>328</sup> “How ‘Fake News’ and Disinformation Were Spread in the Run-up to Taiwan’s Presidential Elections,” *Global Voices*, 22 January 2020.

*Agents Registration Act*, the law penalizes organizations and individuals for secretly acting on the PRC's behalf.<sup>329</sup> Taiwan's Executive Branch also took important steps by strengthening its institutions, according to AEI's Zheng. Every ministry established a team to detect disinformation campaigns and respond rapidly with a counter-narrative, and a well-funded *Department of Cyber Security* was established to guard websites and databases against hackers. The Ministry of Justice fined both individuals and television media companies who shared misinformation.<sup>330</sup>

In the alliance, the government worked with major social media companies such as Facebook and LINE, and these companies became faster at finding and removing fake accounts and disinformation.<sup>331</sup> As the 2020 elections approached, *Facebook* took action against a number of pages and groups that were suspected of spreading disinformation. It also created a "war room" against disinformation that worked closely with the Central Election Commission, law enforcement agencies, and the campaign headquarters of all three presidential and vice presidential candidates. Additionally, Facebook shut down a total of 118 Taiwan-based fan pages (one with as many as 155,443 members) along with 99 public groups and 51 accounts used to administer these pages various pages and accounts. Many of these pages and accounts supported the then-KMT presidential candidate, Han Kuo-yu.<sup>332</sup>

As important, the companies assisted in the public information campaign about misleading social media content. For example, Facebook began tagging fake articles with a correction from the *Taiwan Fact Check Center* and alerting users who shared the article that it contained inaccurate information. Civil society joined the effort to promote media literacy and awareness campaigns with various groups, among them *DoubleThink Labs*, the *Open Culture Foundation*, and *Cofacts*. These groups worked to identify, track, and flag disinformation.<sup>333</sup>

In part because of this effective defensive operation, in Taiwan's fifteenth presidential and tenth legislative elections, President Tsai Ing-wen and her running mate William Lai won the presidential race by a landslide. They secured a record-breaking 8,170,186 votes, or 57.13

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<sup>329</sup> Allen-Ebrahimian, "China Steps Up Political Interference ahead of Taiwan's Elections."

<sup>330</sup> Zheng, "How to Counter China's Disinformation Campaign in Taiwan," 26.

<sup>331</sup> Aaron Huang, "Combating and Defeating Chinese Propaganda and Disinformation: A Case Study of Taiwan's 2020 Elections" (Harvard Kennedy School of Government, Cambridge, MA: Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, April 7, 2020), 5, 9–10, 28.

<sup>332</sup> Cole, "Democracy Under Fire: China's Political Warfare Against Taiwan During President Tsai Ing-Wen's First Term," 27–28.

<sup>333</sup> Zheng, "How to Counter China's Disinformation Campaign in Taiwan," 26.

percent, while the KMT, led by Han and Simon Chang received 38.61 percent of the vote with nearly 3 million fewer votes.<sup>334</sup> The people of Taiwan, the only liberal democracy in the Chinese-speaking world, endorsed Tsai's presidency for another four years after her humiliating 2018 local election defeat. Almost as important, Tsai's party retained majority control of the Legislative Yuan.

## **PRC Media Warfare in the 2020 Election**

As impressive as Taiwan's success was in combatting 2020 election interference, success was never assured as the Media Warfare and other interference strategies the PRC employed were daunting.

In the run-up to the 2020 elections, the PRC used elevated military intimidation with other tools for election interference in Taiwan that "are more insidious and less understood", according to a report by the Global Taiwan Institute. These tools included employment of criminal gangs<sup>335</sup>, exploitation of new and traditional media, and United Front-like penetration networkings in "grassroots wards, schools, farmers associations, religious organizations, family clans, and even indigenous tribes".<sup>336</sup>

The PRC Media Warfare generally followed the following six primary lines of attack:<sup>337</sup>

- questioning President Tsai's doctoral degree,
- attempting to influence top Taiwanese media leaders at a Beijing conference,
- rehashing contentious domestic issues such as same-sex marriage legalization,
- smearing a former Chinese spy who exposed China's covert influence operations,
- attacking the Taiwanese government's bill against foreign interference, and
- creating doubts around Taiwan's election integrity.

Other Media Warfare themes involved continuing to portray the PRC as the "land of opportunity" for Taiwanese and diplomatic coercion. Some themes were designed to influence the election by attacking Taiwan's relationship with the U.S. These themes included allegations

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<sup>334</sup> "60 Countries Have Congratulated Taiwan's President Tsai on Re-election: MOFA," *Taiwan News*, 13 January 2020.

<sup>335</sup> Criminal gangs and related violence have been an essential element of Taiwan politics since the 1500s, and they have been employed by the KMT as well as the PRC. See Jonathan Manthorpe, *Forbidden Nation: A History of Taiwan* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 6, 8, 118-119. See also Cole, *Black Island*, 104, 126, 140, 177-181.

<sup>336</sup> Gary J. Schmitt and Michael Mazza, "Blinding the Enemy: CCP Interference in Taiwan's Democracy" (Global Taiwan Institute, October 2019), 12-13.

<sup>337</sup> Huang, "Combatting and Defeating Chinese Propaganda and Disinformation: A Case Study of Taiwan's 2020 Elections," 9, 13-16.



that *Taiwan is just a chess piece to the US, that the US is an unreliable partner, that US President Donald Trump may sell out Taiwan, and that the US is meddling in Chinese internal affairs with its stance on Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the Taiwan Strait.*<sup>338</sup>

PRC Media Warfare methods identified in the lead up to the election ranged from online content farms, to exploiting YouTube, to offline rumor mongering at the all-important village levels in rural Taiwan. According to Dr. Puma Shen, an assistant professor at the *National Taipei University's Graduate School of Criminology*, who specializes in investigating this type of election interference, the social media-based news outlets that have direct affiliations with the CCP are mostly based in China. Other locations include Hong Kong and Malaysia<sup>339</sup>.

Facebook and social media “became a conveyor belt for disinformation” to support the Han campaign, according to J. Michael Cole, with much of it originating in the PRC. This social media onslaught was synchronized with pro-Beijing traditional media in Taiwan to accelerate Han to the frontrunner in the KMT. Social media, some PRC based, was also employed to convey death threats to those of any party who questioned Han’s viability.<sup>340</sup>

Other steps that the PRC took as part of its Media Warfare campaign included its continuing operation to make Taiwan’s media more Beijing-friendly. PRC agents “quietly paid five Taiwanese news outlets to publish articles casting China as a land of opportunity that would bring prosperity to Taiwanese.” Another Media Warfare line of attack to influence the election involved diplomatic coercion. During Tsai’s first presidential term, the PRC “poached more than half a dozen of Taiwan’s few remaining diplomatic partners. Two of these countries, Kiribati and the Solomon Islands, switched diplomatic recognition from Taipei to Beijing as recently as September 2019.” One PRC propaganda organ threatened that if Tsai was re-elected, Beijing would flip all of Taiwan’s remaining allies.<sup>341</sup>

## **Deepened Polarization**

While the PRC’s campaign interference failed in 2020, its Media Warfare played an important role in spreading disinformation that *deepened political polarization* within Taiwan. Building on divisive issues from the 2018 election, the PRC aimed to continue its drive to divide

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<sup>338</sup> Huang, 40–41.

<sup>339</sup> “How ‘Fake News’ and Disinformation Were Spread in the Run-up to Taiwan’s Presidential Elections.”

<sup>340</sup> Cole, “Democracy Under Fire: China’s Political Warfare Against Taiwan During President Tsai Ing-Wen’s First Term,” 32–33.

<sup>341</sup> Allen-Ebrahimian, “China Steps Up Political Interference ahead of Taiwan’s Elections.”

the people of Taiwan based on education, income, generation, and geography. As U.S. diplomat Huang states, this division is particularly useful to the PRC “because extreme polarization is a major weakness of democracies”. As societies split, reports Huang, “politics becomes more antagonistic and hostile, consensus becomes more difficult to build, it becomes more challenging for a government to serve the majority’s interests, and governing becomes harder”.<sup>342</sup>

## **The COVID-19 Pandemic Battleground**

As COVID-19 began to engulf the PRC and then the world, Beijing used the virus to intensify military and diplomatic pressure against Taiwan. Taiwan responded to the COVID-19 threat extraordinarily well, ignoring inaccurate information from the World Health Organization (WHO) and Beijing’s disingenuous assurances that all was under control. The Tsai administration instituted “early and aggressive measures informed by its experience battling the 2003 outbreak of SARS” that proved largely effective means of stemming the virus spread.<sup>343</sup>

From the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Beijing’s political warfare apparatus, exploiting strong influence over the WHO and global propaganda networks, was in play. The PRC’s influence within the WHO, which excludes Taiwan’s membership at Beijing’s behest, “undermined global health as the novel coronavirus COVID-19 swept the world in the early months of 2020 . . . . WHO officials consistently ignored Taiwan’s attempts to exchange information about the virus and share best practices for containing it.”<sup>344</sup> Subsequent efforts by the United States and countries friendly to Taiwan to have the WHO invite Taiwan to the 2020 World Health Assembly were met with a relentless CCP Media Warfare counterattack. The *Global Times*, among other propaganda organs, slammed the United States and Taiwan for “politicizing a health problem to serve a secessionist agenda that will never succeed”.<sup>345</sup> *China Daily* blamed Taiwan for its exclusion, as Taiwan refused to accept the One China policy.<sup>346</sup>

Meanwhile, Beijing aimed its Media Warfare apparatus directly at the people of Taiwan, with a disinformation campaign designed to spread panic and undermine support for the Tsai

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<sup>342</sup> Huang, “Combatting and Defeating Chinese Propaganda and Disinformation: A Case Study of Taiwan’s 2020 Elections,” 16.

<sup>343</sup> Anastasya Lloyd-Damnjanovic, “Beijing’s Deadly Game: Consequences of Excluding Taiwan from the World Health Organization during the COVID-19 Pandemic,” U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, 12 May 2020.

<sup>344</sup> Lloyd-Damnjanovic, “Beijing’s Deadly Game.”

<sup>345</sup> “Chinese FM Slams Taiwan DPP for Colluding with U.S. to Seek WHA Attendance,” *Global Times*, 15 May 2020.

<sup>346</sup> Li Zhenguang, “Evil Design behind U.S.’ Taiwan Rant,” *China Daily*, 15 May 2020.

administration's response to the outbreak. Early on, it appears PRC-aligned social media tried to use COVID-19 for voter suppression in the January 11 elections. According to Puma Shen and Poyu Tseng at *Doublethink Lab*, the theme of Facebook postings was "Beware getting pneumonia on election day." Shen and Tseng document that messages appeared on January 10, reminding people to wear masks during voting to prevent catching the unknown "Wuhan pneumonia", and there had already been confirmed cases in Taiwan, suggesting, "voting is risky." These "friendly reminders" contained disinformation of "confirmed cases in Taiwan" and may incite people's panic to suppress voting. The campaign's narratives ranged from there is "just a little pneumonia in the Mainland" to "Taiwan's epidemic is out of control."<sup>347</sup>

Tseng and Shen detail the rapidly evolving nature of the social media attack platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, Taiwan experts believed the primary battlefield for influencing public opinion was the PTT forum platform, the Doublethink Lab report that "in this new wave of disinformation attacks, it seems that PTT forums are playing no significant role. LINE groups, on the other hand, remain a primary staging ground for disinformation operations". Twitter also evolved into a major attack platform.<sup>348</sup>

As the COVID-19 pandemic reached its peak in April 2020, the Ministry of Justice Investigation Bureau (MJIB) disclosed 271 fake news cases related to the outbreak, of which 196 originated from the PRC. This campaign was "well coordinated among Chinese social media users and relied on fake accounts to spread the information on Facebook groups". Utilizing altered imagery and fake government announcements, this campaign disseminated misleading information about the number of confirmed cases and deaths, insinuating a government cover-up.<sup>349</sup>

As part of supporting psychological operations, the CCP employed foreign publications to generate uncertainty and fear that Beijing may be pushed by "nationalist fever" citizens to invade Taiwan during this opportune time. A *South China Morning Post* headline is indicative: "*Loud calls on social media urge Beijing to strike while world is busy with coronavirus crisis,*

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<sup>347</sup> Tseng and Shen, "The Chinese Infodemic in Taiwan: A Preliminary Study on the Dissemination Model of Disinformation, Taking COVID-19 as an Example."

<sup>348</sup> Tseng and Shen, 163.

<sup>349</sup> Cole, "Democracy Under Fire: China's Political Warfare Against Taiwan During President Tsai Ing-Wen's First Term," 24.



*but observers say the authorities do not want to be rushed.*”<sup>350</sup> Beijing reinforced this political warfare gambit with a prominently highlighted *Global Times* report on 23 May 2020 reporting that, after three decades of Beijing espousing “peaceful re-unification,” CCP policy no longer called for that reunification to be “peaceful,” and that military force remains “a final solution for the worst case scenario.”<sup>351</sup>

## **Military Coercion and the Media in the Time of COVID**

Beijing increased its coercion and intimidation efforts with a series of military exercises, conducted while the world was distracted by COVID-19, as part of a multi-faceted pressure campaign against Taiwan.<sup>352</sup> As examples, PLA aircraft crossed the median line of the Taiwan Strait three times in the early months of 2020; by comparison, there was only one such incursion in 2019. These line crossings “marked a sharp escalation in the military pressure”.<sup>353</sup> PLA forces also participated in a joint air and maritime drill over two days in February involving back-to-back circumnavigating flights around the island, while a Chinese aircraft carrier and attached group of warships sailed near Taiwan in April.<sup>354</sup> The PLA has also conducted recurrent live-fire combined arms drills.

Complicit media helped magnify the impact of these threatening actions and exercises, in conjunction with the PLA’s continued use of retired military generals conveying hawkish themes in interviews and articles. Beijing’s Media Warfare apparatus disseminates its narratives about these events globally, aided by Taiwan media and foreign media that give “undue credibility to articles that clearly contain fabrication and quotes by so- called ‘experts’ who are known to be unreliable”.<sup>355</sup>

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<sup>350</sup> Minnie Chan, “China Tries to Calm ‘Nationalist Fever’ as Call for Invasion of Taiwan Grow,” *South China Morning Post*, 10 May 2020.

<sup>351</sup> Yang Sheng, “Taiwan Separatists Panic as Mainland Drops ‘Peaceful’ in Reunification Narrative,” *Global Times*, 23 May 2020.

<sup>352</sup> Didi Tang, “China’s Island War Games ‘Simulating Seizure’ Rattle Taiwan,” *Times* (London), 15 May 2020.

<sup>353</sup> Lloyd-Damnjanovic, “Beijing’s Deadly Game.”

<sup>354</sup> Tang, “China’s Island War Games ‘Simulating Seizure’ Rattle Taiwan.”

<sup>355</sup> Cole, “Democracy Under Fire: China’s Political Warfare Against Taiwan During President Tsai Ing-Wen’s First Term,” 23.

## Chapter 8

### Assessment & Recommendations

As a prelude to making recommendations regarding PRC *Media Warfare* against Taiwan, it is important to assess progress Taiwan has made in this fight within the past 12 months. In general it has been successful. Most important is President Tsai Ing-wen's personal leadership in this effort, behind the scenes in mobilizing assets and most publicly visible in speeches such as her second inaugural address.<sup>356</sup> Also of particular note are the legislative achievements designed to assist the courts and law enforcement and intelligence officials, as well as the successful whole-of-society education efforts that have been initiated. Nevertheless, there is much left to do!

#### **Legal Foundations: Improving But Still Lacking**

Eight years of the Ma administration's pro-Beijing policies allowed the PRC a wide range of media warfare, espionage, and other corrosive malign influence successes against Taiwan. Governmental institutions were ill prepared and, in some cases, not interested, in taking on the fight. Consequently, despite being well aware of this existential threat, it took the Tsai Administration government until 2019 to begin to fight back effectively. J. Michael Cole attributes the delayed response, in part, "to forces in the opposition, which used democracy against itself to create a 'moral equivalence' by depicting any measure and legislative amendment adopted by the government to address hostile external influences as 'undemocratic.'"<sup>357</sup>

When Tsai assumed the presidency, the existing laws that provided the foundation for the executive branch to investigate and prosecute illegal acts in support of the PRC included the *National Security Act*, the *Political Donations Act*, and the *Organized Crime Prevention Act*. While there were some successful prosecutions, these legal foundations proved insufficient and it was clear that new laws would be required to empower the courts and intelligence and law-enforcement agencies to effectively confront the PRC's highly sophisticated political warfare. One major problem that had to be overcome was, posed by the ROC Constitution: Taiwan authorities were unable to categorize the PRC as an "enemy state". One consequence of this

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<sup>356</sup> Tsai Ing-wen, "President Tsai Ing-Wen Second Inaugural Address."

<sup>357</sup> Cole, "Democracy Under Fire: China's Political Warfare Against Taiwan During President Tsai Ing-Wen's First Term," 26–27.

legal limitation was that media owned by PRC-controlled entities and pro-Beijing groups could not be prosecuted for aiding the PRC in its Media Warfare against Taiwan.

In 2019, the Legislative Yuan amended the *Criminal Code* to help law enforcement and intelligence agencies act against individuals who collude with enemy forces in PRC, to include Macau, Hong Kong, and elsewhere. The Tsai administration also addressed weak laws that, for example, imposed small penalties for passing classified information to CCP agents. This longstanding failure to address this problem was a tremendous political warfare victory for the PRC, as it not only allowed it to more easily recruit spies in Taiwan but it also corroded U.S. faith in the value of working with Taiwan's government. In addition to the Criminal Code, bills governing national security that were amended included the *Act Governing Relations between the People of the Taiwan Area and the Mainland Area*, the *Classified National Security Information Protection Act*, and the *National Security Act*.

As important, on December 31, 2019, the LY passed the *Anti-Infiltration Act*. This act prohibits intervention in Taiwan's democratic political system through "infiltration sources" such as "individuals, institutions or organizations affiliated with or sponsored by a government, political party or other political group of a foreign hostile force". Under this act, a hostile foreign force is defined "as a country or political entity at war or engaging in a military standoff with Taiwan, including but not limited to China".<sup>358</sup>

Proving the relationship between the PRC and Media Warfare attacks poses a problem for Taiwan's intelligence and law enforcement agencies, though, due to limited assets. This allows Beijing "plausible deniability".<sup>359</sup>

Also, there remains an "absence of appropriate regulations to govern the media, especially the 'grey zones' involving new media and social media." Punitive measures adopted by the *National Communications Commission* (NCC) against media outlets that willingly generate or distribute false content are insufficient. One problem is the funding of these outlets: the businesses that fund them "have billions of dollars in their bank accounts and which receive large subsidies from China". Some have already accused the Tsai administration of instituting a "Green Terror" as a result of its efforts to improve legal authorities to confront PRC political

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<sup>358</sup> Taiwan Today Staff, "Anti-Infiltration Act Passed by Taiwan's Legislature," *Taiwan Today*, January 2, 2020, and AP Staff, Taiwan Passes Law Targeting Chinese Political Interference," Associated Press, 31 December 2019.

<sup>359</sup> Aaron Huang, "Combatting and Defeating Chinese Propaganda and Disinformation: A Case Study of Taiwan's 2020 Elections" (Harvard Kennedy School of Government, Cambridge, MA: Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, April 7, 2020), 45.



warfare with stronger laws. If its actions are not properly explained to the public and justified if, the administration may appear to be “excessively harsh”, which “would give Beijing what it wants by undermining Taiwan’s democratic values”.<sup>360</sup> Consequently, Taiwan has not yet pushed hard for regulating PRC-affiliated Media Warfare platforms. Ultimately stronger laws and regulations will be required.

## **Progress in Education**

Taiwan’s public education effort to confront Media Warfare leading up to the January 2020 elections was innovative, and much more effective than in 2018. In effect, Taiwan formed its own *united front* to fight back. It worked with major social media companies and other civil society organizations to counter the interference. President Tsai displayed strong leadership in educating the people of Taiwan about the Media Warfare and other multi-domain threats the nation must confront.<sup>361</sup>

Looking forward, government agencies have begun establishing education programs that address Media Warfare and Cognitive Warfare as part of the Multi-Domain Deterrence effort. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs established training programs within MOFA and at the and at the Institute of Diplomacy and International Affairs, and the Ministry of National Defense *Institute for National Defense Studies and Research* (IDNSR) is leading MND education efforts in this realm.

Various civic groups have also launched programs to promote media literacy in schools and with the elderly and raise awareness about the risks posed by disinformation. With the United States, Taiwan has also held three rounds of *Global Cooperation and Training Framework* (GCTF) conferences on media literacy and combating disinformation. Japan and Sweden have also officially joined the effort. The most recent one, held virtually in late April 2020, focused on disinformation during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to AEI’s Zheng, various academic workshops have been organized in collaboration with other democracies.<sup>362</sup>

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<sup>360</sup> Cole, “Democracy Under Fire: China’s Political Warfare Against Taiwan During President Tsai Ing-Wen’s First Term,” 24.

<sup>361</sup> Aaron Huang, “Combating and Defeating Chinese Propaganda and Disinformation: A Case Study of Taiwan’s 2020 Elections” (Harvard Kennedy School of Government, Cambridge, MA: Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, April 7, 2020), 5, 9–10, 28; and Jason Pan, “Beware of Disinformation Ahead of Vote, Tsai Warns,” *Taipei Times*, October 28, 2019.

<sup>362</sup> Linda Zheng, “How to Counter China’s Disinformation Campaign in Taiwan,” *Military Review: The Professional Journal of the U.S. Army*, China-Taiwan Re-unification Conundrum, October 2020, 26–27.

## Recommendations

Barring collapse of the CCP and the Chinese Communist state, Taiwan must expect a continuation of intense PRC Media Warfare for the foreseeable future. Xi Jinping has clearly indicated such operations will intensify as the PRC nears its 100-year anniversary of its founding. Accordingly, Taiwan must continue to rapidly strengthen its ability to engage in information operations and strategic communication similar in scope to the capabilities that were developed during the successful Cold War against the Soviet Union. To this end, below are nine major recommendations based on this study, with supporting discussion and recommendations. Some of the recommendations overlap to a degree, but some overlap is necessary to fully cover (and mutually reinforce) the range of policy, legal, and operational steps that must be taken. Given strong, visionary, agile leadership, the recommendations are achievable.

**1. Mandate the development of a national Taiwan strategy to counter general PRC political warfare, with appropriate organization, training, manpower, and funding.** Media Warfare must be confronted within the context of the general PRC *Political Warfare* it supports.

Accordingly, through legislation,

- a. mandate a national counter-Political Warfare strategy,
- b. appoint a highly respected coordinator for Political Warfare within Taiwan's National Security Council,
- c. establish a strategic operational center of gravity with broad authority to execute the strategy, such as a *Strategic Communications Agency* (see Recommendation 2).
- d. develop counter-political warfare primary and/or secondary career paths in diplomatic and intelligence organizations generally aligned with the existing military career path.
- e. as part of the strategy, mandate systematic whole-of-society education programs (See Recommendation 4).

**Discussion:** A *Center for Strategic and Budgetary Studies* study provides an excellent delineation of steps to be taken to build such a strategy. As first steps, Taiwan must first state its goals in combating political warfare, and then develop a “theory of victory” and an end state.”<sup>363</sup> Part of this strategy should focus on building a coalition of democratic allies to jointly counter such PRC warfare and win this battle of ideas against totalitarianism.

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<sup>363</sup> Ross Babbage, *Winning Without Fighting: Chinese and Russian Political Warfare Campaigns and How the West Can Prevail*, vol. I (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2019), 80.

**2. Establish a 21<sup>st</sup> Century *Strategic Communications Agency* (SCA) to execute the Counter-Political Warfare strategy, under direct control of the National Security Council.**

**Discussion:** The SCA would help focus the many useful-but-diffused counter-Media Warfare activities within the government, such as MOFA's successful education and fake news debunking programs and MND's superb online work by elements of the Political Warfare and Cybersecurity staffs. The SCA should be staffed with carefully selected personnel from all key Ministries and agencies, through recruiting from the private sector, and in partnership with civil society organizations. The breadth of knowledge, skills, and ability must span Strategic and Crisis Communications and National Security, Education, Economic & Commercial, Legal, Law Enforcement, Intelligence, Foreign Policy, and Ministry of National Defense Political Warfare functions. Augmentation from private enterprise, such as expertise from public relations and advertising "creative" and media data professionals, is essential for success, as these "out of the box thinking" capabilities do not normally reside in civil service or the media. Such an organization should be mandated and resourced on an urgent basis. A standard, mandatory *Mission and Functions Orientation Course* for all newly joining SCA personnel is essential: the rationale is that Taiwan no longer has education programs to prepare personnel to fulfill the crucial counter-Political Warfare/Media Warfare functions, so such an orientation is necessary to align all new SCA personnel from across the government, private sector, civil society, the legal community, and the news media.

**3. Institutionalize 2020 counter-election interference successes to ensure capacity to undertake such whole-of-society responses over the long term.**

a. Codify ministry/agency policies and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) that should have been written within Ministries and agencies based on the successes and failures of the past two election cycles.

b. Improve the the policies and SOPs with periodic workshops and test them periodically with table-top exercises and war-games. Countering Media Warfare "is an art even with an SOP in place", to paraphrase U.S. Diplomat Huang. To develop decision-making skills and mental and organizational agility, regular training programs must include workshops, tabletop exercises, and wargames for those officials engaged in the effort.



**4. Establish systematic education and training programs within its government, business, industry, academic, civil society and public communities regarding PRC political/media warfare operations.**

a. Perhaps under the direction of the proposed Strategic Communications Agency, the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, National Defense, Justice, Education, and Commerce, with support from the National Security Bureau and the National Communications Commission, should cooperate to systematize courses of varying lengths for senior-level and intermediate-level professionals. Entry-level courses should also be planned for students within the Foreign Service, military, intelligence, commerce, public affairs, and academic communities.

b. This education program would be voluntary for individuals within private-sector industries and nongovernmental organizations but compulsory for government workers, federal contractors, and students attending Taiwan-government education institutions. Similarly, the private sector and civic groups should initiate public information programs in coordination with news media organizations.

c. The focus of these courses will be on building internal defenses within the most highly valued PRC target audiences: elected officials, senior policy makers, thought leaders, national security managers, and other information gatekeepers. Retirees and those soon to be retired are also key audiences for this education program, based on PRC successes co-opting this influential segment of Taiwan's population. Similar governmental, institutional, and public education programs were employed successfully during the Cold War, with threat briefs and public discussion a routine part of each.

d. To this end, institutionalize Taiwan government support for civil society groups that have launched programs to promote media literacy in schools and with the elderly and raise awareness about the risks posed by disinformation.

e. Part of the training, as addressed in Recommendation 3, must include workshops, tabletop exercises and wargames for those officials and civil society representatives engaged in the effort.

**5. Continue working with the United States Government (USG) to improve each other's ability to deter, detect, confront, and defeat PRC Media Warfare.**

a. Part of this cooperation should entail continuation of the *Global Cooperation*

*and Training Framework* (GCTF) conferences on media literacy and combating disinformation. Push for broader participation from countries such as the Baltic States, which have extensive experience combatting Russian Media Warfare, as well as Japan and Sweden which have also officially joined the effort.

b. Seek USG support to establish consistent relationships between U.S.-based social media companies and the Taiwanese government and civil society groups, per Linda Zheng's proposal. The most popular social media platforms in Taiwan are U.S.-based companies. Facebook and YouTube were the top two social media outlets for Taiwanese internet users as of January 2019, and Facebook Messenger, Instagram, Twitter, and WhatsApp were also in the top eight.<sup>364</sup>

c. Per Zheng's proposal, pursue cooperation with the USG to more effectively employ Artificial Intelligence (AI) to counter PRC Cognitive Warfare in general and Media Warfare in particular. Taiwan has already begun to use AI to identify Social Media Warfare by automatically identifying and deleting content. The PRC emphasizes using AI to generate and spread disinformation and propaganda, so it is critical for Taiwan to accelerate its efforts in this technological race if it is to preserve its independent media environment.<sup>365</sup>

d. Establish an information exchange mechanism with the U.S. that provides systematic passing of information gleaned from each country's monitoring and reporting on PRC Media Warfare globally. Taiwan demonstrated superb abilities to monitor Media Warfare *in Taiwan* in the last election cycle, but it has less capacity to do so abroad. Both Taiwan and the U.S. have unique capabilities to monitor and assess the PRC's Media Warfare activities, but there is currently little systematic, consistent exchange of the information. This routine exchange would require more effort in the diplomatic and intelligence communities to monitor these Media Warfare operations abroad, to include trends, characteristics, and people and entities involved, but the payback would be substantial. The exchange would allow discussion of current efforts to combat Media Warfare and best practices. This collection function regarding Media Warfare will be new for both countries, but it will be worth the effort as it will expand each country's understanding of the scope of the threat and allow for more effective whole-of-society responses

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<sup>364</sup> Zheng, "How to Counter China's Disinformation Campaign in Taiwan," 27–28.

<sup>365</sup> Zheng, 28.

by each government. Further, this exchange mechanism should also afford the means to request mutual assistance in the monitoring and assessing mission.

e. Work with the US Treasury Department and State Department to sanction PRC Media Warfare-related entities under applicable laws and orders. As proposed by U.S. diplomat Huang, sanctions could be used to block these entities from hiring local agents and intermediaries in target countries for Media Warfare purposes. Propaganda and disinformation are often created and spread not by the attacking entities, but local intermediaries funded by these entities. In Taiwan's case, notes Huang, these intermediaries are compromised media outlets. Without local knowledge, expertise, and support, these attacks will likely be easier to identify and less effective in manipulating public opinion and discourse.<sup>366</sup>

f. Seek to coordinate with the U.S. State Department's special envoy on countering the PRC's U.N. influence. This would allow Taiwan to exchange information on how to understand and combat the PRC's efforts to use Media Warfare to reshape international norms and values. In addition, coordination with the US envoy might help in Taiwan's efforts to build partnerships with democracies to devise strategies and collaborate in countering such operations.

#### **6. Establish a regional Asian Strategic Communications Center of Excellence (ASCCE).**

**Discussion:** Taiwan showed it is capable of global leadership as it led the way in combatting COVID-19: it can show global leadership in combatting PRC Media Warfare as well. It should establish the ASCCE, which would be similar to the Finland-based *European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats* and the *NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence*. By establishing the ASCCE, Taiwan will build more powerful capacity in support of its own preservation; by focusing the ASCCE *outward* with an international focus, Taiwan helps build the capacity of like-minded nations and partially circumvents the PRC's diplomatic isolation campaign. The ASCCE's mission would be similar to this:

*To develop a common understanding of PRC political and media warfare threats and promote the development of a comprehensive, whole-of-government response at national levels in countering PRC and other political warfare threats.*<sup>367</sup>

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<sup>366</sup> Huang, "Combatting and Defeating Chinese Propaganda and Disinformation: A Case Study of Taiwan's 2020 Elections," 45–46.

<sup>367</sup> Kerry K. Gershaneck, "PRC Threat Obliges Political Defense," *Taipei Times*, 10 July 2019.



a. The ASCCE would be a whole-of-government effort, but in practice its primary Taiwan government sponsors would be the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, National Defense, Justice, Education, and Commerce, with support from the National Security Bureau.

b. The ASCCE will provide the intellectual foundation and education needed to develop and synchronize counter-political/media warfare and offensive political/media warfare capabilities. However, it would not have authority to conduct or coordinate those operations.

c. Notional ASCCE functions would be to:

- Encourage strategic-level dialogue and consulting between and among like-minded nations, in Asia and throughout the world.
- Investigate and examine political/media warfare operations targeted at democracies by the PRC and map the vulnerabilities of participating nations to improve their resilience and response.
- Conduct tailored training and arrange scenario-based exercises for practitioners aimed at enhancing the individual capabilities of and interoperability among participants in countering PRC political/media warfare threats.
- Conduct research and analysis into PRC political/media warfare methods to counter such operations.
- Invite and engage in dialogue with government and nongovernment experts and practitioners from a wide range of professional sectors and disciplines to improve situational awareness of PRC and other political/media warfare threats. Typical participants would be practitioners, scholars, policymakers, congressional staff, journalists, strategists, campaign planners, legal specialists, and selected entry-level, mid-grade, and senior civil servants as well as foreign service, military, intelligence, and law enforcement officers.

Ultimately the ASCCE's curriculum would comprise a wide range of courses of varying duration. However, a short, introductory course should be established immediately. With strong, agile leadership and competent faculty and staff, an initial ASCCE training program could be put in place within 90 days.

**7. Pass legislation that allows for more aggressive prosecution of Media Warfare-related activities in order to diminish the offensive power of PRC news media and social media.**

**Discussion.** Freedom of the press must be scrupulously safeguarded in Taiwan's democracy, but allowing the totalitarian PRC to dominate Taiwan's news media is the path to national suicide. Taiwan passed the vitally important *Anti-Infiltration Law*, but reportedly has not yet focused on regulating the media platforms; discussions with academics indicate this may be because Taiwan had success focusing on crowd-sourced fact checking, rapid government debunking, and raising media literacy for susceptible groups. But ultimately stronger laws and regulations will be required. As stated, punitive measures adopted by the *National Communications Commission* (NCC) against media outlets that willingly generate or distribute false content are insufficient.<sup>368</sup> It is, therefore, imperative to develop and pass stronger legislation, perhaps in the *National Security Law*.

a. Based on the U.S. experience with failed enforcement regarding PRC malign influence operations, in preparation for developing this legislation it will be important to review existing laws, legislation, and policies that apply to PRC Media Warfare to ensure the existence of clear mission statements, requirements for action, assessments of success, as enhanced analytical, investigative, and legal training.<sup>369</sup> If these fundamental requirements are lacking, they should be included as mandates in the legislation.

b. The *Ministry of Justice*, the *Ministry of Defense*, the *National Communications Commission*, and the *Intelligence Community* each play key roles in investigating, disrupting, and prosecuting PRC Media Warfare. In the legislation, task these and other relevant ministries, bureaus, and agencies with investigating, disrupting, and prosecuting Media Warfare activities, and hold these organizations accountable for success.

c. The efficacy of the *Anti-Infiltration Law* should be formally assessed at the one-year anniversary, to determine if it needs strengthening to ensure that it is effectively blocking PRC-affiliated entities from buying or engaging in any news media, business, education, or entertainment activities in Taiwan.

d. Legal experts should also examine legislative remedies to protect Taiwan citizens from interference by PRC-affiliated news media and businesses with free speech, censorship, and

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<sup>368</sup> Cole, "Democracy Under Fire: China's Political Warfare Against Taiwan During President Tsai Ing-Wen's First Term," 24.

<sup>369</sup> Peter Mattis, "U.S. Responses to China's Foreign Influence Operations," testimony before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific, United States House of Representatives, 115th Congress, 21 March 2018.

intimidation through direct threats to corporate business interests and physical harassment of individual journalists and their families.

**8. Raise the cost of the PRC's Media Warfare, both to the CCP organs and to those in Taiwan that engage in such malign influence or facilitate it. To this end, publicly expose covert and overt PRC political warfare operations on a routine basis.**

a. Through legislation and/or executive order, Taiwan should mandate an annual, National Security Council-led, publicly disseminated report on the CCP's Political/Media Warfare conducted against it.

b. The annual report would be similar to the U.S. Ronald Reagan-era annual report on Soviet active measures, with focus on PRC united front interference and influence operations. It would include practical advice for ordinary citizens about how to recognize and avoid those threats.

**Discussion:** Such an annual report on the CCP's activities would force Taiwan's ministries and agencies to come together to discuss the problem and make decisions about what information needed to be released for public consumption. It would also help raise awareness within the disparate parts of Taiwan's government that may not cooperate together on a routine basis. A classified annex could be produced for internal government consumption.<sup>370</sup> This annual report could be part of a broader annual report on PRC Political Warfare activities against Taiwan.

c. To operationalize the public exposure of PRC Media Warfare, Taiwan's government should continue to work with academic institutions, journalists, think tanks, and other organizations to map out PRC Media Warfare assets and operations and expose those that can be publicly uncovered without harming national security.

- One approach is to design a "PRC Narrative Tracker" that can expose PRC Media Warfare fronts, enablers, and operatives and hold them accountable, similar to the efforts by Doublethink Lab during the COVID-19 "Infodemic". This tracker could, for example, reveal news organizations that routinely parrot PRC talking points and narratives: this information could be objectively provided to the public so the public could see the patterns and make decisions accordingly. As Cole points out, the media organizations may not be capable of being shamed into stopping support for PRC

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<sup>370</sup> Mattis, "U.S. Responses to China's Foreign Influence Operations."



Media Warfare, but public exposure is useful to protect the credibility and viability of Taiwan's democracy.

- Other steps that should be taken include publicly identifying those involved in foreign censorship and influence in the news media. For example, many people in Taiwan are likely unaware that PRC-based news organizations are organs of the CCP and that their reporting is directed by the CCPs Propaganda Department, as opposed to the reporting of most commercial news media organizations. It is also important to publicize business organizations and public relations and law firms involved in supporting PRC Media Warfare enterprises, as well as academics and universities that facilitate and defend PRC Media Warfare.

**9. Encourage academic study and thesis development at government and public education institutions that focus on PRC Media Warfare and how to contain, deter, and/or defeat the threat.**

**Discussion.** The Taiwan government should support research into this existential challenge and how to combat it, provide funding to students researching the subject, and offer internships, assured government employment if qualified, and special high-level recognition and awards to encourage superior students to pursue this field of study. This government-funded push should cause Taiwan's institutions of higher learning to re-think their Strategic Communication curriculum to encompass a more multi-disciplinary focus. Fields of study that, when clustered, support counter-Media Warfare include Strategic Communications, Crisis Communications, Data Science, International Relations, Intelligence/Counterintelligence, National Security, and Advertising/Marketing/Public Relations.

## Appendix A

### Media Warfare in Support of PLA Combat Operations

Through the use of political warfare, the PRC has achieved notable strategic victories without fighting. However, if the PRC's rulers perceive that political warfare alone will not deliver the results they desire—regarding, for example, Taiwan, the East or South China Seas, or India—they may choose to achieve their goals through conventional combat operations augmented by unconventional warfare. It is also possible that a war could ignite inadvertently from the PRC's overly aggressive actions in pursuit of its gray zone and military coercion operations.<sup>371</sup>

Regardless of what sparks the conflict, the PRC will employ Media Warfare extensively in the conduct of the combat operations.

Former U.S. senior Naval Intelligence officer U.S. Navy Captain James E. Fanell assesses that in any armed conflict within the Asia-Pacific Region or elsewhere in the world, “the PRC's fight for public opinion will be [its] second battlefield,” on which it will conduct a “wide range” of political warfare operations.<sup>372</sup>

The PRC has used political warfare to support numerous military operations in the past, to include its 1950 intervention in the Korean War, its 1951 annexation of Tibet, the 1962 Sino-Indian War, the 1969 Sino-Soviet Union border conflict, its 1974 battle for Vietnam's Paracel Islands, the 1979 Sino-Vietnam War, its 1988 attack on Vietnam's Spratly Islands, its 1995 occupation of the Philippines' Mischief Reef, the 2017 standoff with India and Bhutan at Doklam, and its skirmish with Indian forces at Ladakh in 2020.

Specifically, the CCP will employ Media Warfare to preserve friendly morale; generate public support at home and abroad; weaken an enemy's will to fight, and alter an enemy's situational assessment. As important, Media Warfare will be employed to gain ‘dominance over the venue for implementing psychological and legal warfare’. The PRC's principle of “uniting with friends and disintegrating enemies” will guide its Media Warfare measures during armed

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<sup>371</sup> Cortez A. Cooper III, “China's Military Is Ready for War: Everything You Need to Know,” *National Interest*, 18 August 2019.

<sup>372</sup> CAPT James E. Fanell, USN (ret), “China's Global Naval Strategy and Expanding Force Structure: Pathway to Hegemony,” testimony before the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, United States House of Representatives, 115th Congress, 17 May 2018.

conflict, as the CCP devises its narrative of events, actions, and policies to lead international discourse and impact the policies of both its friends and adversaries.<sup>373</sup>

Further, Media Warfare will be employed to undermine the legitimacy of positions taken by its opponents in the conflict, particularly the U.S. and Taiwan, and it will seek to undermine allied willingness to support the U.S. and Taiwan in any efforts to defend those position with military force.<sup>374</sup> Chinese strategic literature particularly emphasizes the role of the *Three Warfares* to subdue an enemy before conflict can break out or ensure victory if conflict does occur.

According to Elsa Kania at the Center for a New American Security, the Three Warfares establish “a perceptual preparation of the battlefield that is seen as critical to advancing [PRC] interests during both peace and war.” PLA officers become acquainted with employing the Three Warfares early in their careers, and as they rise in rank they study the concept in depth in various texts on military strategy, including the PLA Academy of Military Science and PLA National Defense University editions of *Science of Military Strategy* as well as *An Introduction to Public Opinion Warfare, Psychological Warfare, and Legal Warfare*.<sup>375</sup> Through study of history and war games, senior CCP officials and PLA commanders learn to employ Media Warfare in conjunction with Psychological Operations and Lawfare to manipulate an adversary’s cognitive process both prior to and during a conflict by targeting national and theater command structures and forward deployed units.<sup>376</sup>

The Propaganda Department, Strategic Support Forces, the United Front Work Department, and other organs engaged in the Media Warfare effort will adhere to the “Four Pillars of Media Warfare” described in Chapter 3.

1. Follow top-down guidance.
2. Emphasize pre-emption.
3. Be flexible and responsive to changing conditions.
4. Exploit all available resources.

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<sup>373</sup> Stokes and Hsiao, *The People’s Liberation Army General Political Department*, 3.

<sup>374</sup> Halper, “China: The Three Warfares (Prepared for Andy Marshall, Director, Office of Net Assessment, Office of the Secretary of Defense,” 13, 162.

<sup>375</sup> Elsa Kania, “The PLA’s Latest Strategic Thinking on the Three Warfares,” Jamestown Foundation, China Brief 16, no. 13, 22 August 2016.

<sup>376</sup> Halper, “China: The Three Warfares (Prepared for Andy Marshall, Director, Office of Net Assessment, Office of the Secretary of Defense,” 90–94.



These media warfare pillars generally apply to both offensive and defensive operations. In offensive operations, Pillar 2, takes prominence: emphasizes pre-emption to establish the advantage. The pillars apply to defensive operations: they will be employed to counter an opponent's media warfare efforts, and ensure PLA personnel and the general PRC population is not exposed to opponents' messaging or that such messages do not take root within the public psyche.

Based on experience in crises over the past two decades, in a crisis or initial phase of a conflict PRC Media Warfare objectives and operations will likely unfold as follows:<sup>377</sup>

1. *Establish the PRC's Version of the Incident.* This CCP fully understands that whichever side gets its story out first has the public opinion advantage. Accordingly, statements for public release, to include polished products for broadcast, online, and print dissemination, will be prepared in advance (or, conflict initiation is unplanned, as soon as possible after initiation of the crisis) that will to establish the PRC position on exactly what happened. [SEP]

2. *Issue Statement of Principles for Resolution of the Incident.* PRC officials will usually use these "principles" at the start of any negotiations as setting the parameters for the discussions to come and as the benchmarks for a minimally acceptable resolution that meets Beijing's commitments to the PRC public. The Three Warfares will be used to broadcast a public statement of China's commitment to these principles, for both foreign and domestic audiences. [SEP]

3. *Shut Down Unofficial but Normal Information Channels.* The CCP will quickly establish information control and dominance of the media airwaves in order to continuously frame and shape the ensuing debate. U.S. senior officials, journalists, and academics often complain that their Chinese counterparts refuse communication, including via personal channels, once a probable crisis begins. This will be the CCP's standard operating procedure in an armed conflict as well.

4. *Emphasize Beijing's Commitment to the PRC's relationship with the Media Warfare target country.* By firmly expressing its own commitment to bilateral relations China implies that Washington, Tokyo, the EU, ASEAN, or any other target country or coalition does not take the relationship as seriously and is to blame for any potential damage to relations resulting from the

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<sup>377</sup> Halper, 73–74.

armed conflict. The crisis thus encompasses Beijing's attempt to make the crisis a testing point of the target country's good will and intentions.

In addition to employing the Three Warfares in an armed conflict, it is likely that the PRC will engage in "hybrid warfare" actions comparable to those used by Russia in its 2014 annexation of Crimea.<sup>378</sup> The PRC will very likely address its hybrid warfare operations through its media outlets, either through actual reporting or as part of broader deception operations. Cortez A. Cooper writes that hybrid warfare involves "military and para-military forces that operate below the threshold of war, such as increased presence in contested waters of fishing fleets and supporting maritime militia and navy vessels," which may "spark conflict when an opposing claimant such as the Philippines, Vietnam, or Japan responds."<sup>379</sup>

The PRC is already engaged in hybrid warfare against Taiwan, so this type of operations would likely increase in preparation for an attack against that nation.<sup>380</sup> Once armed conflict ignites, the CCP would quite likely coordinate its Media Warfare activities to support and perhaps conceal its hybrid warfare. To this end, Fanell contends that the PRC "will augment conventional military operations with non-conventional operations, such as subversion, disinformation and misinformation (now commonly referred to as 'fake news'), and cyberattacks. The operationalization of [psychological warfare] with cyber is key to this strategy." The PLA will employ its media and psychological warfare forces, especially at the 311 Base in Fuzhou, which is subordinate to the PLA's Strategic Support Force and works closely with the nation's cyberforces.<sup>381</sup>

The PRC will conduct media warfare operations before, during, and after any hostilities that it initiates. Prior to military confrontation, Media Warfare will support a worldwide political warfare campaign that employs united front organizations and other supporters to initiate protests and support "peace" rallies to stymie international response. In its Media Warfare campaign, it will use the internet, television, and radio to disseminate propaganda and conduct psychological operations. History proves that political warfare actions are often tied to the PRC's strategic

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<sup>378</sup> Fanell, "China's Global Naval Strategy and Expanding Force Structure."

<sup>379</sup> Cooper, "China's Military Is Ready for War."

<sup>380</sup> David R. Ignatius, "China's Hybrid Warfare against Taiwan," *Washington Post*, 14 December 2018.

<sup>381</sup> Fanell, "China's Global Naval Strategy and Expanding Force Structure."

deception operations, which are designed to confuse or delay adversaries' defensive actions until it is too late to effectively respond.<sup>382</sup>

The PLA will likely seize the initiative in the opening phase of war by “striking the first blow.” PRC policy stipulates that “the first strike that triggers a Chinese military response need not be military; actions in the political and strategic realm may also justify a Chinese military reaction.”<sup>383</sup> Such a trigger could be a perceived slight, diplomatic miscommunication, or statement by a government official that upsets China enough to warrant a response.

As the PLA engages in kinetic combat against its targeted enemy forces, the PRC will fight for worldwide public opinion on the “second battlefield.” Media Warfare operations will be employed to confuse and discourage the enemy while also attempting to win support for the PRC's position from “fence sitters” (initially undecided nations).

Fanell states, “In addition to standard propaganda, disinformation and deception will be employed, such as false reports of surrender of national governments and/or forces, atrocities and other violations of international law, and other reports intended to distract or paralyze decision making by the [United States] and its friends and allies.” This political warfare campaign, helping to rally mass support for the PRC's “righteous” actions, will continue during and after the military operation itself, regardless of the operation's success.<sup>384</sup>

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<sup>382</sup> Fanell, “China's Global Naval Strategy and Expanding Force Structure.”

<sup>383</sup> Anthony H. Cordesman and Steven Colley, *Chinese Strategy and Military Modernization in 2015: A Comparative Analysis* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2015), 109.

<sup>384</sup> Fanell, “China's Global Naval Strategy and Expanding Force Structure.”



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## Selected Abbreviations and Acronyms



ACFROC	All-China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese
APWCE	Asian Political Warfare Center of Excellence
ARATS	Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Straits
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CAIFC	China Association for International Friendly Contact
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CCTV	China Central Television
CGTN	China Global Television Network
CIMA	Chinese International Media Association
CIS	Chinese Intelligence Service
CMC	Central Military Commission
CNS	China News Service
CPD	Central Propaganda Department (aka Central Publicity Department)
CPPCC	Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference
CPPRC	China Council for the Promotion of Peaceful Reunification
CRI	China Radio International
CSSA	Chinese Students and Scholars Association
CUPP	Chinese Unification Promotion Party
DPP	Democratic Progressive Party
ETC	Eastern Theater Command
FTV	Formosan TV
ICMU	International Chinese Media Union
KOL	Key Opinion Leaders
KMT	Kuomintang (Nationalist) Party
MAC	Mainland Affairs Council
MSS	Ministry of State Security
OCAO	Overseas Chinese Affairs Office



OCMCO	Overseas Chinese Media Cooperation Organization
OEP	Office of External Propaganda
PLA	Peoples Liberation Army
PLANMC	PLA News Media Center
PRC	People's Republic of China
PTT	Professional Technology Temple
PSC	Politburo Standing Committee
ROC	Republic of China
SCIO	State Council Information Office
SEF	Straits Exchange Foundation
SET	Sanli E-Television
SSF	Strategic Support Force
TAO	Taiwan Affairs Office
TALSG	Taiwan Affairs Leading Small Group
UFWD	United Front Work Department
WCMF	World Chinese Media Forum
WHO	World Health Organization

