POLITICAL WARFARE
Strategies for Combating China’s Plan to “Win without Fighting”
Kerry K. Gershaneck
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DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF
George F. Kennan (1904–2005)

The extraordinary American statesman who authored “The
Inauguration of Organized Political Warfare” in April 1948
to mobilize the Free World for the overt and covert political
warfare required to prevail over the Soviet Union and
ultimately achieve victory in the long, hard-fought Cold War.
# CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foreword</td>
<td></td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td></td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td></td>
<td>xxi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selected Abbreviations and Acronyms</td>
<td></td>
<td>xxiii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter One</strong></td>
<td>An Introduction to PRC Political Warfare</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter Two</strong></td>
<td>Terms and Definitions</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter Three</strong></td>
<td>A Brief History of PRC Political Warfare</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter Four</strong></td>
<td>PRC Political Warfare Goals, Ways, Means, and Wartime Support</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter Five</strong></td>
<td>PRC Political Warfare against Thailand: An Overview</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter Six</strong></td>
<td>PRC Political Warfare against Thailand: A Contemporary Analysis</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter Seven</strong></td>
<td>PRC Political Warfare against Taiwan: An Overview</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter Eight</strong></td>
<td>PRC Political Warfare against Taiwan: A Contemporary Analysis</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter Nine</strong></td>
<td>Conclusions and Recommendations</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Appendix</strong></td>
<td>Curriculum for a Five-Day Counter-PRC Political Warfare Course</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selected Bibliography</td>
<td></td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index</td>
<td></td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Professor Kerry K. Gershaneck’s study on the People’s Republic of China’s (PRC) political warfare stands as a major contribution to the body of knowledge regarding this existential threat to the United States, its freedoms, and its values. He provides a well-researched and wide-ranging overview of the nature of the PRC threat and the political warfare strategies, doctrines, and operational practices used by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Further, Professor Gershaneck offers detailed and illuminating case studies of PRC political warfare operations designed to undermine Thailand, a U.S. treaty ally, and Taiwan, a close friend.

This book is not merely an academic study. It is also based in great part on Gershaneck’s extensive experience working in the fields of national intelligence, counterintelligence, international relations, strategic communications, and academia during the course of more than 35 years, at times literally on the front lines combatting PRC political warfare. He witnessed firsthand the United States at its zenith in the political warfare fight as well as its subsequent abandonment of high-level political warfare organization, education, and operations at the end of the Cold War.

As commander of U.S. Marine Corps Force Pacific in the early 2000s, I observed a disturbing trend, based in large part on the United States’ dismantlement of its own political warfare apparatus. It was becoming increasingly apparent that American government, business, academics, culture, and other elites were losing the ability to identify and confront PRC political warfare. By the time I assumed duties as U.S. assistant secretary of defense for Asian and Pacific security affairs in 2009, America’s unwillingness and inability to recognize and challenge Beijing’s malign persuasion, intimidation, coercion, infiltration, and subversion was even more evident. Even within the highest levels of the U.S. Department of Defense, with senior leadership focused more on combat operations in Southwest Asia than the rapidly emerging threat from China, it was very difficult to shift focus and resources to addressing the PRC.

As this book goes to print, the United States is engulfed in the Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic and a massive PRC
political warfare campaign to rewrite history regarding its role in the epidemic. The circumstances of this pandemic may be unusual, but this is a typical PRC political warfare campaign of cover-up, deception, misinformation, coercion, repression, and intimidation. Consequently, there is a rapid awakening in the United States about the nature of the threat from the PRC. This makes the publication of this book all the more pertinent and timely.

During the more than 25 years that I have known Professor Gershaneck, he has demonstrated superior abilities as a strategic planner, researcher, analyst, and operator in the field. He superbly masters both the realm of academic research and theory and the world of street-smart operational practice, and he brings his unique perspective and capabilities to this important project.

This book is a call to arms as well as a valuable study of the history and nature of the PRC political warfare threat. While the United States has recently begun to more seriously engage on the political warfare battlefield, much more work and investment of national resources lie ahead. Professor Gershaneck provides useful strategic-, operational-, and tactical-level recommendations to deter, confront, and defeat PRC political warfare operations, all of which are crucial to development of a coherent, successful national response.

Lieutenant General Wallace C. Gregson Jr., USMC (Ret)
U.S. Assistant Secretary of Defense for Asian and Pacific Security Affairs, 2009–11
Political warfare is not a new phenomenon. Its practice spans thousands of years, and it is not unique to the People’s Republic of China (PRC). Still, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is devilishly good at conducting its own particularly virulent form of it.

The PRC version of political warfare poses more than a unique challenge—it presents an existential threat to the United States and its friends and allies. The CCP no longer hides its disdain for concepts such as democracy, rule of law, freedom of speech, and human rights, nor does it conceal its intent to create a new world order based on its totalitarian model. Political warfare is a primary tool that the CCP employs to defeat the United States. It is the PRC’s magical path to victory, to win not so much without struggle but without having to resort to open kinetic conflict.

The PRC’s intent is not a theoretical conjecture. Beijing demonstrates on a daily basis its eagerness and ability to subvert and defeat—or, to use CCP parlance, to “divide and disintegrate”—the United States and other foreign nations. This intent and capability is explored in considerable detail in this book, which includes case studies of PRC campaigns to co-opt Thailand, a treaty ally of the United States, and take possession of Taiwan, with which the United States shares a special relationship.

The PRC’s complex and remarkably successful political warfare campaign against Thailand will surprise many readers, as will the extent and viciousness of its relentless efforts to capture Taiwan. What will be the result of PRC victory in these campaigns? Thailand risks assuming tributary-state status to Beijing, while Taiwan faces extinction as a sovereign entity, loss of its hard-fought freedom, and brutal repression of its people.

Of particular concern is that in the PRC’s war to divide and disintegrate us, we are not winning. Victory is not a given—nor, at this point, even in sight.

This is the main reason this book was written. We in the United States must reverse what appears to be inevitable defeat, which re-
quires us to relearn the means to deter, counter, and defeat the PRC’s daunting political warfare threat. But first, we as a nation must be willing and able to recognize that threat. This statement might seem like a blinding flash of the obvious, but the task is significantly harder than it appears.

While it took roughly 12 months to research and write this book, it is fair to say that this work is the culmination of more than 35 years of experience and study. As a young Marine Corps counterintelligence officer, I was initiated in PRC malign influence operations during a particularly dismal era of the Cold War, just after the fall of South Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos to PRC-backed Communist forces. At that time, I studied political warfare as practiced by the PRC and the Soviet Union, learning their approaches to espionage, sabotage, and subversion. I then had a golden opportunity to help combat their political warfare and espionage activities in Asia and elsewhere, albeit in a minor supporting role.

It is important to note that combating political warfare was easier in that era, as most senior U.S. government security and diplomatic officials, as well as American business, industry, and news media leaders, had at least some rudimentary understanding of that hostile threat. We are not so fortunate today.

This formative experience, combined with subsequent broader involvement in the fields of intelligence and counterintelligence, strategic communications, international relations, and academia, provided a strong foundation on which to write on this topic. As important was serving with the U.S. Information Agency as the Office of the Secretary of Defense liaison and experience acquired during assignments at U.S. Information Service offices abroad.

While the path to this book was filled with many inspiring experiences, it sometimes revealed deeply disappointing realities as well. Following is a brief overview of some of the disturbing insights I gained that convinced me that a book on this subject would be of great value.

First, the CCP is quite good at employing political warfare. By contrast, the United States is not. Yes, we mastered it pretty well during the Cold War, but we then declared victory over the Soviet Union—the “end of history,” in fact! We were living in a unipolar, nonthreatening world, we were told. Consequently, we shut down our cornerstone political warfare institutions and capabilities and dropped our guard for nearly three decades, during which our offensive and defensive political warfare skills atrophied. Despite some
effort devoted to combating radical Islam and a nod to Russia, we paid little focus to the greatest threat: the PRC.

Second, during the course of these three decades, we lost sight of how to prepare our elected officials and policy makers, military and foreign service officers, and business, industry, entertainment, commerce, news media, and academic leaders for the never-ending struggle that is the nature of hostile political warfare. Since the end of the Cold War, many American elites rose to lofty positions in these important fields with nothing to inform them of the dangers posed by political warfare or how to combat it.

After 1992, political warfare-related courses disappeared from the curriculum of the universities that traditionally produced America’s diplomats, elected officials, and military leaders. Consequently, there exists no systematic way to educate emerging national leaders about the political warfare threat and help inoculate them to its strategies and tactics. As evidence, I routinely talk with recent graduates of reputable master’s degree programs and U.S. military command and staff colleges. Invariably, the graduates tell me that at these esteemed institutions, they were generally taught that the PRC is our “partner” and not a threat. They learned a little about soft and hard power, but they were taught nothing about political warfare.

One consequence I have observed firsthand is that many U.S. government officials and bureaucrats cannot recognize political warfare at all. For many who at least acknowledge it exits, it is “too complex” or at most a mere “niche issue,” as I was told by a senior U.S. official at a major American mission in Asia who was assigned to assist my research in 2018.

Moreover, in stereotypical bureaucratic style, many in government and the private sector see political warfare waged by hostile countries against the United States as “important, but not my job.” In his superb book Stealth War: How China Took Over while America’s Elite Slept, former senior U.S. National Security Council (NSC) official Robert S. Spalding III details his painful experience dealing with the “not my job” syndrome as he tried to enlist the private sector and government officials to counter the PRC’s malign influence.¹

At the governmental and institutional levels, the United States has lost its ability to recognize the political warfare threat, educate its elites and officials about it, prioritize resources to engage it, and plan and conduct operations to deter, counter, and defeat it. In other

words, we have created the perfect prescription for defeat on the information battlefield.

Third, sometimes our failure to recognize and confront PRC political warfare is through simple ignorance and ineptitude—but often it is willful, resulting from co-option, coercion, bribery, indoctrination, intimidation, or psychological manipulation. Grant Newsham, a noted security analyst with extensive political warfare expertise, explains how the CCP sets the conditions for conscious decisions to aid, enable, apologize, and/or cover for its totalitarian regime. Newsham observes that the Chinese understand “their target’s vulnerabilities” and capitalize “on American avarice, ignorance, naiveté, vanity, and hubris.” Beijing, he says, attacks “on a broad front . . . successfully manipulating American business and Wall Street, government officials and the political class, academia, and even U.S. military leaders.”

Fourth, the CCP does not simply direct the behavior of the willing—it conditions behavior. Americans at the highest levels of government, business, and academia have proven surprisingly susceptible to PRC psychological manipulation. My experience with the U.S. government, particularly the Departments of State and Defense, provides useful examples of this important slice of American social structure. The following anecdotes highlight some of the challenges the United States faces to turn its “ship of state” in the right direction to face the PRC political warfare challenge. Cumulatively, they helped propel me to write this book.

In August 2017, Foreign Policy magazine ran what it must have considered to be a shocking exposé, with part of the headline declaring that “Foggy Bottom has shown inexplicable deference to Beijing.” The author urgently asserted that the U.S. Department of State had begun “tilting dangerously toward China”—but only since January 2017.1 While the allegation of the department’s tilt toward China is valid, the timeline provided offers a false narrative. For many years, key State Department officials seemed quite deferential to the PRC and, to put it charitably, inattentive to malign activities such as political warfare. How else can one explain why the acting U.S. assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs, Susan A. Thornton, a career foreign service officer, asserted in late 2018 that she had never “seen any evidence” of PRC covert influence operations in the United States?2

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1 Grant Newsham, “Chinese Psyops against America: One Hell of a Success,” And Magazine, 1 December 2019.
3 Koji Sonoda, “Ex-diplomat: U.S. Must ‘Figure out a Way to Work with China,’” Asahi Shimbum (Osaka, Japan), 6 November 2018.
Oddly enough, by the time that stunning statement was made, there was a flood of evidence available from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) regarding the massive PRC campaign to influence U.S. public opinion.\(^\text{5}\) It is not clear how Thornton, who was responsible for Washington’s China policy, could have been inattentive to such compelling evidence, nor is it clear why she would repeatedly “improperly block [U.S.] law enforcement agencies in their efforts to deal with China’s repeated violations of U.S. sovereignty and law,” as was alleged by a senior NSC official and is detailed in this book.\(^\text{6}\)

Moreover, in December 2016, the American chargé d’affairs at the U.S. embassy in Bangkok related during a 75-minute discussion that “Russian election interference” posed the greatest threat to the United States, while “China’s political warfare is not a threat” and that “we [Americans] can handle it.”\(^\text{7}\) His skewed threat assessment alone is deeply worrisome, but the story of why I was in his office in the first place is of equal concern.

Two months earlier, in October 2016, I was invited to the U.S. embassy in Bangkok by a U.S. House of Representatives staff delegation to brief its members on PRC political warfare against Thailand. I was a professor at Thammasat University and the Royal Thai Military Academy at the time, and I had gained unique insights regarding PRC political warfare campaigns in the region during the previous three years. For two hours, I provided the staff delegation key elements of what is written in chapters 5 and 6 of this book.

Ten minutes into my presentation, the U.S. embassy foreign service officers escorting the staff delegation looked agitated. Twenty-five minutes into the discussion, they neared hysteria and, in one case, became teary-eyed. They frantically tried to cut me off and convince the delegation to leave. The delegation leader calmly shut down their protests, and we completed a very fruitful two-hour discussion. But why the hysteria and tears? A confidant in the embassy later told me that these young foreign service officers felt I was being “too hard on China.” When I learned the astonishing reason for their inappropriate conduct, I asked to see the chargé d’affairs, hoping their view would be more enlightened than those of the young staffers. After our 75-minute discussion, it was very clear they were not.


\(^{7}\) Kerry K. Gershaneck, interview with a senior U.S. Department of State official, Bangkok, Thailand, 30 December 2016.
In another instance, as a guest lecturer at the Foreign Service Institute in Arlington, Virginia, several years ago, I asked instructors teaching courses on public affairs about the curriculum they used to educate State Department public affairs officers about PRC political warfare. I may as well have asked them to explain how they taught quantum mechanics or matter-antimatter asymmetry, for they had no idea what I was talking about. These instructors were responsible for shaping the State Department’s strategic communicators, to help them compete and succeed on the perilous information battlefield, and yet they did not understand what the term political warfare meant.

At numerous meetings and conferences I attended with senior U.S. diplomats since 1995, I heard many sneeringly deride the “Cold War mentality” of those who expressed concern about the PRC’s totalitarian governance, expansionist nature, or global political warfare. Though the PRC openly acknowledges that it is at “war” with the United States, there appears to be no more damning a personal denunciation in the foreign service community than to accuse someone of exhibiting “a Cold War mentality” toward China. Savvy young foreign service officers take their cues from senior diplomats on how to succeed in the State Department’s corporate culture. Those who learn quickly to withhold concerns about the PRC are generally promoted to more senior positions.

The State Department has recently begun reversing decades of ignorance, apathy, and appeasement toward the PRC, but there is still much to repair. Unfortunately, the situation has not been any better on the side of the U.S. Department of Defense, at least until rather recently.

At defense education institutions such as National Defense University, command and staff colleges, and the Defense Information School, systematic education about the PRC’s extensive global political warfare simply disappeared. In an experience similar to my visit to the Foreign Service Institute, I gave a guest lecture at the Defense Information School at Fort Meade, Maryland, and visited with the school commandant in their office. I proposed that the school begin a program of instruction to prepare the Defense Department’s strategic communicators to combat PRC propaganda, media warfare, and other forms of political warfare. The commandant smiled politely, but was clearly unfamiliar with political warfare as a topic. After asking me to better explain it, they informed me that they could not initiate such a program without being directed by higher authority.
 implied in their words and tone was that they were not going to ask for any such direction.

Within the Department of Defense, like the State Department, for many years it was a likely career death sentence to speak the truth about the nature of the PRC threat, whether it be political warfare, expansion into the South or East China Seas, or the increasingly threatening People’s Liberation Army (PLA). Senior officials set the tone: as the chief of staff of the U.S. Army, General Raymond T. Odierno, cheerily applauded U.S. Army-PLA camaraderie while visiting Beijing, he confidently proclaimed to America’s astounded allies that he saw no evidence of a PLA threat to neighboring Japan.8 Similar to Thornton’s perplexing declaration that she had seen no evidence of covert PRC influence operations in the United States despite ample public evidence to the contrary, there was then a flood of evidence of PLA threats and preparations for military operations against Japan’s southwest islands.9 Perhaps the U.S. Army’s massive G-2 intelligence staff could not find this evidence, but Google could.

Comparably, the commander of U.S. Army Pacific, Lieutenant General Francis Wiercinski, declared in 2013 that “the Chinese army no longer poses a threat” to the U.S. military, while a former vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral William A. Owen, who had business interests in China, lobbied Congress and the Pentagon on behalf of Beijing in 2012 to end U.S. arms sales to Taiwan.10 Meanwhile, highly respected U.S. senior intelligence officers who spoke up about the PRC threat were silenced. In one case, the U.S. Navy’s most respected China expert, Captain James E. Fanell, gave two public, unclassified speeches in 2013 and 2014 that exposed the PLA’s expansionist activities in the South and East China Seas. Navy leadership approved these speeches in part because Fanell presented them as his personal assessment. But his assessments countered the position of U.S. president Barack H. Obama’s administration that the PRC was not a threat. Senior U.S. government officials immediately denigrated the speeches, and eventually Fanell was fired.11 He was fired for doing his job: properly identifying a threat, analyzing what it means to U.S. national security, and exhib-

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iting the moral courage to speak the truth despite pressure to back down.

It is no surprise that many Department of Defense education institutions downplayed the PRC threat for many years. One conversation I had with two then-recent U.S. Army War College (AWC) graduates at a July 2019 conference is reflective of many similar talks. The officers told me that the “Army War College is very soft on the China threat” and that students “don't learn anything about [PRC political warfare] there.” Moreover, the AWC academic journal, Parameters, molds the thinking of future generals with highly lauded papers about “countering propaganda and misinformation” that fail to mention China even once.12 The snowball effect of this bias also comes as no surprise. It may explain why senior U.S. Army officers, who are presumably AWC graduates, would contract the Rand Corporation to provide a 355-page study on modern political warfare in 2018 that intentionally avoided focus on the PRC threat. Remarkably, the report actually states that Rand and the Army had the option to include the PRC as a focus country for this one-year study but consciously chose to focus elsewhere.13

In Stealth War, Spalding describes how such willful acquiescence to the CCP’s malign influence crosses many boundaries. On behalf of the NSC, Spalding sought to work with “leading think tanks, nongovernmental organizations, and law, auditing, and public relations firms that dealt with China” in the United States and was “eager to seek their help in exposing the Beijing government’s influencing operations and sanctioning of illegal behavior.”14 Astonishingly, he was routinely rebuffed—but why? Spalding writes that “some of the more forthright people” said that assisting the NSC “might anger their Chinese funders or business accounts. The list of organizations that refused to engage with me publicly in my official capacity was stunning. Top white-shoe New York law firms. Organizations with mandates to promote democracy, freedom, and human rights would refuse to support my mission.”15 Many of those institutions and elites were profiting off China, and they did not want to have those ties exposed.

While working at a prestigious think tank in Hawaii, I witnessed firsthand much that Spalding describes in Stealth War: naïve acquiescence in some cases, but all too often the corruption of values and

14 Spalding, Stealth War, 3.
15 Spalding, Stealth War, 3.
willful blindness to PRC political warfare and espionage activities. I observed PRC successes in co-opting elected and government officials, businesses, academic institutions, nongovernmental organizations, and civic organizations, among others. This highly successful PRC political warfare campaign continues to this day.

These anecdotes reflect only a small part of the challenge the United States and its democratic friends and allies face when confronting PRC political warfare. Much more essential information lies within this book. Still more can be found in publications of the writers and organizations cited herein. It is my hope that this book stimulates readers’ interest to seek out other references to expand their knowledge of PRC political warfare.

This book will help readers understand the nature of PRC political warfare to build the capacity to deter, confront, and defeat this existential threat. We face a perilous future if we fail to challenge the PRC’s totalitarian rule and its plan to divide and destroy our nation. If we fail to do so, our children and their children will pay the savage price for our egregious negligence.
Acknowledgments

Many individuals and organizations assisted me in the research and writing of this book. My vocabulary of wildly complimentary superlatives is quite extensive, but even it is insufficient to adequately express my gratitude to those who assisted me in this challenging endeavor. So, I will simply say, in gracious Hawaiian style, *mahalo nui loa* to those listed below whom I owe a special debt of gratitude and to those not listed who have asked to remain anonymous.

For their kind assistance and mentorship while I was in Taiwan, I am deeply indebted to Foreign Minister Jaushieh Joseph Wu; Ambassador Simon S. Y. Tu; Republic of China major general Tsung-Chi Yu (Ret), former commandant of Fu Hsing Kang College at National Defense University; Dr. I-Chung Lai, president of the Prospect Foundation; Associate Professor Chiung-Chiu Huang of the Graduate Institute of East Asian Studies at the College of International Affairs, National Chengchi University; and the ever-cheerful, ever-helpful staff at the National Central Library’s Center for Chinese Studies.

From the Kingdom of Thailand, I am grateful to former Foreign Minister Kasit Piromya as well as many trusted associates in government, news media, business, and academia who, for understandable reasons, have asked to remain anonymous.

In the United States, my work was generously supported by Wallace C. Gregson, former U.S. assistant secretary of defense for Asian and Pacific security affairs; Matthew Pottinger, U.S. deputy national security advisor; James F. Moriarty, chairman of the American Institute in Taiwan; and Ivan Kanapathy, U.S. National Security Council deputy senior director for Asian affairs.

My research and analysis was strongly influenced by often-heroic experts such as Russell Hsiao, executive director of the Global Taiwan Institute in Washington, DC, and Mark Stokes, executive director of the Project 2049 Institute in Arlington, Virginia. I am also indebted to security experts Captain James Fanell (Ret); Dr. Anders Corr; Marine Corps Reserve colonel Grant Newsham (Ret); and Coast Guard Reserve captain Bernard Moreland (Ret). All have
helped guide my thinking about PRC intentions, capabilities, and political warfare operations over the course of many years.

Finally, I sincerely thank Taiwan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs for generously providing me a Taiwan Fellowship to assist in the research and writing of this book.
Selected Abbreviations and Acronyms

APWCE.................................Asian Political Warfare Center of Excellence
ASEAN.................................Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BRI .......................................................Belt and Road Initiative
CAIFC.........................China Association for International Friendly Contact
CCP .......................................................Chinese Communist Party
CPPCC ......................Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference
CPPRC..........................Council for the Promotion of the Peaceful Reunification of China
CPT .....................................................Communist Party of Thailand
CSSA.....................Chinese Students and Scholars Association
CUPP ..................................................Chinese Unification Promotion Party
DPP ........................................................Democratic Progressive Party
ETC .......................................................Eastern Theater Command
KMT .................................................Kuomintang (Nationalist) Party
MSS ............................................................Ministry of State Security
OCAO .................................................Overseas Chinese Affairs Office
PAD ....................................................People’s Alliance for Democracy
PLA .....................................................People’s Liberation Army
PLAT ..................................................People’s Liberation Army of Thailand
PRC ....................................................People’s Republic of China
PSC .....................................................Politburo Standing Committee
ROC .....................................................Republic of China
SSF ..............................................................Strategic Support Force
TALSG...........................Taiwan Affairs Leading Small Group
TCP ...........................................................Taiwanese Communist Party
UFWD .............................................United Front Work Department
UN ...........................................................United Nations
POLITICAL WARFARE
The People’s Republic of China (PRC) is at war with the world. It is a war fought mostly for control and influence, using coercion, corruption, and violent covert operations. The PRC prefers to win this war by never having to fire a shot, but its increasingly powerful military and paramilitary forces loom ominously in the background in support of its expanding war of influence.

To the leaders of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), this war is meant to “rejuvenate” China to its former imperial grandeur as the “Middle Kingdom,” to once again be “everything under the sun,” the all-powerful hegemon power. It is a war to ensure the CCP’s total control over China’s population and resources, as well as those of foreign nations that the Chinese have historically called “barbarian states,” both nearby and throughout the world.1


Great victory at Niulan Hill, 1975. This painting depicts the Chinese perspective of the May 1841 Battle of Sanyuanli, a skirmish that led to an Anglo-Chinese “information war” that Cantonese scholars won.
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 president Xi Jinping’s “China Dream,” the CCP has no desire for equality among nations. Rather, it 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.¹

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, is both offensive and defensive in nature, taking the form of unrestricted warfare and being conducted on an international scale.²

As a prelude to this study, it is crucial to establish the answer to several key questions: Why does it matter that the PRC seeks regional and ultimately global hegemony? Why would the world not accept and tolerate a “rising China,” a seemingly nonthreatening term so often used by PRC propaganda outlets and foreign advocates? Why should the world be concerned about China’s long-term strategy to replace the United States as the global superpower? What is there to fear about “China’s peaceful rise” and the CCP’s goal of a “Chinese-led world order?”³

The answer is simple and stark: the PRC is a coercive, expansionist, hyper-nationalistic, militarily powerful, brutally repressive, fascist, and totalitarian state. According to retired U.S. Navy captain James E. Fanell, “The world has seen what happens when expansionist totalitarian regimes such as [the PRC] are left unchallenged and unchecked. 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.”⁴

It is useful here to establish a foundation regarding some 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 and militarism; and a historical narrative of humiliation leading to hyper-nationalism and an entitlement to aggression. These defining characteristics were witnessed by the world 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 and the PRC’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.”

The PRC has become a hegemon bent on controlling the world’s resources ostensibly to benefit China—or, in reality, to benefit the approximately 90 million out of 1.4 billion Chinese who are CCP members. As merely one indicator of the PRC’s wealth disparity, a 2016 Peking University study found that “the richest 1 percent of households held a third of the country’s wealth, while the poorest 25 percent owned only 1 percent of its wealth.”

The CCP has proven that it can effectively leverage the openness of democratic systems to achieve hegemony over those democracies. It prefers to do this peacefully if possible, not entirely without a struggle but ideally without kinetic combat. But 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.

As the PRC builds a navy that will be roughly twice the size of the U.S. Navy by 2030 and adds hypersonic missiles to its triad nuclear strike capability that now covers the entire U.S. mainland, Beijing defies international law and relies on corruption and coercion to achieve its diplomatic, economic, and military aims. According to

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Ely Ratner at the Council on Foreign Relations, the PRC’s strategies include “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.”

The PRC’s political warfare apparatus is a key weapon in its quest for regional and global hegemony. Brutal internal repression is one well-documented form of its unique brand of political warfare. The PRC is criticized today by organizations such as Amnesty International and governments including that of the United States for imprisoning at least a million ethnic Uighurs in “re-education camps” under particularly cruel circumstances. 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.”

However, the PRC’s internal political repression involves a brutality much more lethal than religious suppression and thought control. 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), the Cultural Revolution (1966–76), and smaller atrocities such as the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre. Hong Kong-based historian Frank Dikötter has 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. Another 1–2 million were killed in “other campaigns, such as land-reform and ‘anti-rightist’ movements” in the 1950s. 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.”

 Estimates of those killed directly or

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indirectly through CCP political warfare against the people of China are strongly debated, but during Mao Zedong’s reign alone they range as high as 70 million.\textsuperscript{15}

Though 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 it idolizes the man who presided over its deadliest repression: Mao Zedong. Evidence of the CCP’s continued admiration for Mao includes what the \textit{China Daily} described as “unprecedented” respect and “piety” that Xi Jinping and the CCP displayed for Mao during celebrations for the 70th anniversary of the founding of the PRC in October 2019.\textsuperscript{16} Unlike Russia, which eventually denounced Stalin’s murderous reign, the CCP has proven ideologically incapable of acknowledging and atoning for its near-genocidal history.

The PRC’s propaganda machine “has mastered the power of symbol and symbolism in the mass media and social media era,” and many Chinese eagerly embrace its hyper-nationalistic “patriotic education” programs. Those residing in the PRC face censorship and thought control unimaginable to most citizens of liberal democracies.\textsuperscript{17} Further, through its extensive propaganda and influence outlets, Beijing attacks 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.\textsuperscript{18}

In a May 2020 report to Congress, U.S. president Donald J. Trump highlighted this aspect of PRC political 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.”\textsuperscript{19}

CCP censorship ensnares American institutions such as the National Basketball Association (NBA), recently chastised in \textit{The Washington Post} for “essentially importing to the United States China’s denial of free speech.” In fact, the CCP routinely censors world-

\textsuperscript{15} Johnson, “Who Killed More: Hitler, Stalin, or Mao?”
\textsuperscript{17} Li Yuan, “China Masters Political Propaganda for the Instagram Age,” \textit{New York Times}, 5 October 2019.
famous brands including Marriott, United Airlines, Cathay Pacific Airways, Givenchy, and Versace, as well. Hollywood, too, 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.” 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. Beijing also exports violent active measures to foreign countries in support of its political warfare activities abroad, as will be detailed in subsequent chapters of this book.

Economic coercion has become one particularly visible PRC political warfare tool. 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.” U.S. assistant secretary of state for East Asia and Pacific affairs David R. Stilwell characterizes the BRI and other PRC economic coercion schemes less charitably, stating that Beijing employs “market-distorting economic inducements and penalties, influence operations, and intimidation to persuade other states to heed its political and security agenda.” Moreover, U.S. vice president Michael R. “Mike” Pence has specifically detailed American concerns regarding the PRC’s use of destructive foreign direct investment, market access, and debt traps to compel foreign governments to acquiesce to its wishes. Former U.S. National Security Council official Robert S. Spalding III 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 as generous ‘win-win’ development deals, the ultimate goal is a bait-and-switch in which infrastructure is provided but full control of the platform is never fully given. It remains in the hands of Beijing.”

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22 “Global Brands Better Stay Away from Politics,” Global Times (Beijing), 7 October 2019.
25 Michael J. Pence, “Remarks by Vice President Pence on the Administration’s Policy toward China” (speech, Hudson Institute, Washington, DC, 4 October 2018).
Of equal concern, the PRC shapes 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.”27 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 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.”28

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 has infiltrated their regions in pursuit of Beijing’s diplomatic, economic, and military interests.29 Canada and the United States have had equally rude awakenings regarding the efficacy of PRC united front operations and other forms of coercion, repression, and violent attacks within their borders.30 The COVID-19 pandemic has also alerted many nations to the PRCs harmful intentions and influence, despite an extraordinarily aggressive global propaganda campaign.31

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: “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

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27 Ratner testimony.
28 Trump, “United States Strategic Approach to the People’s Republic of China.”
31 “World against the CCP: China Became the Target at the World Health Assembly,” Chinascope, 21 May 2020.
none of these countries has sustained a vigorous conversation, let alone reached a political consensus.”

The use of political warfare, of course, is not unique to the PRC. All nation-states conduct influence operations such as traditional diplomacy and public diplomacy to impact the policies and actions of others in order 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 to bring down the Soviet Union’s Iron Curtain that divided much of the world. But the PRC’s version of political warfare is different than that of other nations, and, according to Singaporean diplomat Bilahari Kausikan, it seeks to achieve much more through its influence and political warfare operations.

Kausikan, a highly respected expert on PRC malign influence, notes that the PRC is a totalitarian 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 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.”

As it wages global political war to achieve its diplomatic, economic, and military goals, the PRC exports authoritarianism, as detailed in a study by the National Endowment for Democracy. Beijing intentionally undermines the credibility of democracy and individual freedoms to bolster support for its own totalitarian regime, which it calls the “China Model.” PRC political warfare has been especially effective in weakening U.S. status and alliances in Asia, such as when Beijing successfully exploited a growing rift between the United States and Thailand from 2014 to 2017 to consolidate its own political gains in this vital nation. Further, the PRC continues its work of more than 70 years to destroy the Republic of China on Taiwan, as well as Taiwan’s ability to retain its hard-won democracy, sovereignty, and political and economic freedoms.

While there has been relatively recent bipartisan agreement in the United States regarding the need to confront the dangers posed by the PRC, there is still insufficient attention devoted to countering

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32 Garnaut, “Australia’s China Reset.”
33 Bilahari Kausikan, “An Expose of How States Manipulate Other Countries’ Citizens,” Straits Times (Singapore), 1 July 2018.
the political warfare threat. Based on this author’s discussions with senior officials within the U.S. National Security Council, Department of State, and Department of Defense, there has existed a lack of will to identify and confront PRC political warfare. Consequently, there is no comprehensive approach at the strategic and operational levels that brings together the common vision, coherency, and resources needed to fight it. This situation was, until recently, further compounded by little inclination on the part of the U.S. government to even acknowledge the scope of PRC political warfare or its successes in Thailand and Taiwan. Accordingly, several chapters of this book will focus on PRC political warfare operations against these two nations.35

Related to this governmental-level inattention, and despite the vast importance of political warfare to the PRC and the existential threat it poses to virtually every nation in the world, there is relatively little open-source, English-language academic literature on the subject. Some organizations and individuals, however, have distinguished themselves in this fight by writing impressively, persistently, and heroically on PRC political warfare. Such organizations include the Project 2049 Institute, the Hudson Institute, the Jamestown Foundation, the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, and the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments. Individual scholars and reporters include Anne-Marie Brady, J. Michael Cole, June Teufel Dreyer, John Garnaut, Bill Gertz, Clive Hamilton, Russell Hsiao, Peter Mattis, Robert Spalding, and Mark Stokes.

Nevertheless, there still remains a deficiency in academic research on PRC political warfare. Reasons for this paucity of academic focus include academic censorship and self-censorship, as well as a clear understanding by many scholars who might otherwise pursue this topic that such research will face severe opposition within their academic environments. But the failure is also due in part to the unwieldy and sometimes unhelpful terminology associated with influence operations. One objective of this book is to get the major terminology correct to clarify the scope of the political warfare threat and allow for better political and operational responses.

While this book seeks to break new ground on the topic of PRC political warfare, there are many more aspects of the subject that deserve additional in-depth research and analysis. One important topic not addressed herein is how to take the political war back to the PRC, to play offense as well as defense in this conflict. This and other

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related topics should be the focus of subsequent research at numerous private and public research and education institutions.

It is worth remembering that, at one time, the United States was quite good at conducting political warfare operations. During the Cold War, the U.S. government successfully waged political warfare against the Communist Bloc using an array of methods. These included overt actions such as building political alliances, initiating economic development, and spreading propaganda, as well as covert actions such as supporting friendly foreign elements and resistance factions in hostile states, conducting psychological operations, funding noncommunist political parties, organizing intellectuals and artists against Communism, and supporting dissenters and freedom fighters behind the Iron Curtain.36

The United States and like-minded nations must invest heavily and with great urgency to combat PRC political warfare to safeguard their freedoms and sovereignty. There is a massive challenge ahead to inoculate institutions and citizens against the existential threat posed by PRC political warfare and effectively counter that threat. It is time to stop losing the political warfare contest, intelligently engage in the fight, and ultimately win the war.

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CHAPTER TWO

Terms and Definitions

If, as Prussian military theorist Carl von Clausewitz wrote, “war is the continuation of politics by other means,” then one could say that the People’s Republic of China’s (PRC) political warfare is the continuation of armed conflict by other means. It provides an al-

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ternative to open kinetic warfare and is a preferred instrument of national power, employed to win without fighting. This point was initially posited by American diplomat George F. Kennan, best known for his delineation of Western grand strategy during the Cold War as explicated in his famous “Long Telegram” of 22 February 1946. 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 states that, at that time, the United States was handicapped “by a popular attachment to the concept of a basic difference between peace and war, by a tendency to view war as a sort of sporting context outside of all political context . . . and by a reluctance to recognize the realities of international relations—the perpetual rhythm of [struggle, in and out of war].”

Kennan also briefly laid out the nature of the threats from 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.”

This definition is as valid today as it was in 1948. 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. Accordingly, it is useful to closely examine several key political warfare-related terms that are used in this book. Terms and definitions are, of course, crucially important. Influence operations and political warfare, for example, overlap extensively and are considered by many to be virtually interchangeable terms, but they differ in scope. Below is a short list of the vast collection of terms that civilian and military leaders must comprehend to effectively confront political warfare (table 1).

There are numerous definitions for these terms given by credible institutions, but each varies somewhat from the other, obscuring conceptual clarity. At a certain point, the dizzying array of terminology that government officials and academics accord to political warfare-related activities becomes counterproductive, consuming

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3 Kennan, “The Inauguration of Organized Political Warfare.”
time, intellect, and energy better invested in actually fighting the political warfare battle. Accordingly, for the purposes of this book, the following selected definitions apply.

**Influence operations** provide strategies and tactics used in support of broader political warfare campaigns. They are actions designed to influence foreign government leaders, businesses and industries, academia, media outlets, and other key elites in a manner that benefits the PRC. These operations are often, but not always, conducted at the expense of the self-interests of the countries at which the actions are directed.

**Political warfare** is all-encompassing, unrestricted warfare and a “critical component of PRC security strategy and foreign policy.” According to a Project 2049 Institute study, political warfare is an alternative to armed conflict that “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.” 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.⁵

The term *political warfare* is precisely what government officials

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and academics should use to describe the PRC’s extensive malign influence operations. Failure to name it as such blurs the fact that the PRC considers itself engaged in a political war with the United States and its partner nations and allies. Failure to understand the nature of this war severely undermines the ability to conceptualize the threat and to implement appropriate countermeasures. This failure ensures ultimate defeat.

It is important to recognize that political warfare is the normal way that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) does business. Whereas in the United States such actions require special authorities and oversight for such operations, the CCP sees political warfare as everyday *modus operandi*. Its political warfare operations include both commonly recognized and nontraditional 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 “indoctrainment.”

Following is a brief overview of the PRC’s primary political warfare concepts and weapons.

**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 Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui, 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 the PLA’s *The Science of Military Strategy* and *The Science of Campaigns*, this book has great influence on 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] sys-
tematically broken down.” 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.”

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.”

The Three Warfares

The Three Warfares, the traditional foundation of PRC political warfare, include public opinion/media warfare, psychological warfare, and legal warfare. University of Cambridge professor Stefan A. Halper describes the Three Warfares as “a dynamic three dimensional warfare process that constitutes war by other means. . . . Importantly, for U.S. planners, this weapon is highly deceptive.”

Elsa B. 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 United States 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
According to Kania, key objectives of Three Warfares operations are: “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.”12 Halper cites an example of a possible PRC Three Warfares operation against the United States as follows: “If the U.S. objective is to gain port access for the [U.S. Navy] in a particular country . . . China would use the Three Warfares to adversely influence public opinion, to exert psychological pressure (i.e. threaten boycotts) and to mount legal challenges—all designed to render the environment inhospitable to U.S. objectives.”13

Public Opinion/Media Warfare

Public opinion/media warfare uses overt and covert media manipulation to influence perceptions and attitudes. According to PLA National Defence University texts, it “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.”14 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 is “directed against domestic populations in target countries.”15

As 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.”16

Public opinion/media warfare also employs “indoctritainment,” which is exemplified in movies such as the propaganda blockbuster...
er *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.” 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).18

**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.”19

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.”20 According to a variety of PLA National Defence 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 with all forms and stages” to “intensify the efficacy of conventional attacks” while ‘taking advantage of ‘opportunite moments’ and ‘striking first’ to seize the initiative.”21

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

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17 Michael J. Pence, “Remarks by Vice President Pence on the Administration’s Policy toward China” (speech, Hudson Institute, Washington, DC, 4 October 2018).
21 Kania, “The PLA’s Latest Strategic Thinking on the Three Warfares.”
its citizenry and leadership, and joint training exercises between the PLA and Royal Thai Armed Forces.22

Legal Warfare

Legal warfare, or 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.”23 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.24

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.”25 The PRC has also used lawfare to bolster its territorial claims in the South China Sea by 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.26 In addition, Beijing uses lawfare to block U.S. military activities in Japan and Pacific island territories.27

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 incursions include Operations Fox Hunt and Skynet, in which PRC agents penetrated foreign countries to “apprehend so-called 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.”28

Active Measures

PRC political warfare campaigns include espionage and covert, Cold War-style active measures. As Kennan noted, the PRC refashions Clausewitz’s famous dictum that “war is the continuation of politics

22 Kasit Piromya, interview with the author, Bangkok, Thailand, 1 May 2018, hereafter Kasit interview.
23 Kania, “The PLA’s Latest Strategic Thinking on the Three Warfares.”
24 Halper, China: The Three Warfares, 13.
25 Kania, “The PLA’s Latest Strategic Thinking on the Three Warfares.”
26 Halper, China: The Three Warfares, 13.
by other means” by conducting political warfare as an alternative to armed conflict by other means. Many policymakers and diplomats in the United States and its partner and allied countries fail to recognize such active measures, thereby imperiling their own national security.29

As will be detailed in subsequent chapters of this book, 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 forces such as the People’s Liberation Army of Thailand and the United Wa State Army in Myanmar.

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.30

United Front Work

United front work is a classic Leninist political warfare strategy, successfully employed by the Bolsheviks during the Russian Civil War. In a united front, Communists “cooperate with non-revolutionaries for practical purposes—for example, to defeat a common enemy—and [win] them over to the revolutionary cause.” 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.”31

As will be detailed in subsequent chapters, the united front strategy is one of Xi Jinping’s “magic weapons” in achieving his China Dream.32 It is a vital element of PRC political warfare, “not only

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32 Parello-Plesner and Li, The Chinese Communist Party’s Foreign Interference Operations, 8.
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.\(^{33}\)

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.\(^{34}\)

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.\(^{35}\) 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 nearly 1.2 million people globally as of this writing. 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.\(^{36}\)

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

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\(^{35}\) Bridget Johnson, “DOJ Asked to Probe China’s Use of INTERPOL Notices to Persecute Dissidents,” PJ Media, 30 April 2018.

\(^{36}\) Kerry K. Gershaneck, “WHO Is the Latest Victim in Beijing’s War on Taiwan,” Nation (Thailand), 22 May 2018.
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. 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.

**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.

Regarding PLA liaison work focused on the United States, political warfare expert J. Michael Waller reports that “in an orchestrated campaign of good cop/bad cop, Chinese 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

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39 Stokes and Hsiao, The People’s Liberation Army General Political Department, 14–15.
who influence the public and decision makers, business elites, Congress, and the president and his inner circle.”

Liaison work uses 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.”

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.”

Liaison work is also directed at countersubversion 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.

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 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

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40 Stokes and Hsiao, The People’s Liberation Army General Political Department, 14.
41 Stokes and Hsiao, The People’s Liberation Army General Political Department, 14–15.
42 Stokes and Hsiao, The People’s Liberation Army General Political Department, 15–16.
43 Stokes and Hsiao, The People’s Liberation Army General Political Department, 16.
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, noncoercive 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.”

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.

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. In open 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

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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.”

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.”

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.”

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 expansionism.

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—

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47 Cardenal et al., Sharp Power, 6, 13.
50 Kremidas-Courtney, “Hybrid Warfare.”
“without firing a shot.” Further, the PRC’s employment of its coast guard and the People’s Armed Forces Maritime Militia in coercive violent confrontations at sea with neighboring countries’ ships and fishing boats is another example of its approach to hybrid warfare. Moreover, the employment of proxy armies, such as the United Wa State Army and Kokang Army in Myanmar, is an example of gray zone warfare, as are difficult-to-attribute cyberattacks by the PLA Strategic Support Force cyber troops and the PRC’s netizen “50 Cent Army.”

Self-Censorship, Totalitarianism, and Fascism

Finally, it is important to address self-censorship and how it relates to use of the terms totalitarian and fascist to characterize the CCP and the PRC as a society. Many government officials, academics, and business leaders in the United States and other democratic nations fall silent when these terms are used to describe the PRC, and some even attempt to deny it. This silence and denial reflects intellectual dishonesty at best. It is essential to use the terms that define the nature of the CCP regime, for failure to properly define the nature of the regime obscures necessary national-level response. Further, it allows the PRC’s apologists and defenders to assert the “moral equivalence” defense of China’s political warfare that the author has heard repeatedly: “Every country does it. So what?”

The “so what” is that the PRC is a fascist, totalitarian existential threat. Merriam-Webster defines fascism and totalitarianism as follows:

Fascism: “a political philosophy, movement, or regime (such as that of the Fascisti) that exalts nation and often race above the individual and that stands for a centralized autocratic government headed by a dictatorial leader, severe economic and social regimentation, and forcible suppression of opposition; a tendency toward or actual exercise of strong autocratic or dictatorial control.”

Totalitarianism: “centralized control by an autocratic authority; the political concept that the citizen should be totally subject to an absolute state authority.”

By these definitions, the PRC is inarguably both totalitarian and fascist, based on the CCP’s actions, laws, and culture. First, the CCP severely curbs the freedoms of its people, the people are allowed no rights to resist the will of their rulers, and dissent is crushed—violently, if necessary. Second, power is highly centralized, run on, as Xi Jinping claims, Marxist-Leninist tenets, and nominally Communist. Third, the nation is exalted above the people. Hypernationalism and jingoism are typically powered by a sense of historical grievance or victimhood. China is now overcoming its “century of humiliation” at the hands of Western imperialism, and every day Chinese children are exhorted to “never forget national humiliation.”

Additional justifications for labeling the PRC totalitarian are best explained by Chinese human rights lawyer Teng Biao and King’s College London political science professor Stein Ringen. Teng writes that Xi Jinping’s “new totalitarianism” and Mao Zedong’s “old style of totalitarianism” are not all that different: “Under this kleptocratic system, the assets of regular citizens have never been afforded any institutionalized protection.” Ideologically speaking, “the CCP has monopolized the media, created no-go zones in scholarship, instituted a brainwashing-style education system, established the Great Firewall, and persecuted intellectuals for their writing.” Legally, “the [CCP] has always ridden roughshod over the law. Black jails, forced disappearances, torture, secret police, surveillance, judicial corruption, controlled elections, forced demolitions, and religious persecution have all been rampant.” Teng concludes that “these abuses are a key element in the [CCP’s] system of control,” and that China is implementing a “sophisticated totalitarianism” that is “cruel and barbaric without being chaotic.”

Ringen wrote in a public letter to fellow China analysts in September 2018 that “the final straw has been the imposition of outright tyranny in Xinjiang, with extremes of surveillance, heavily intrusive thought-work, and mass detentions in ‘re-education’ facilities.” He also commented on “the relentless tightening of dictatorship during Xi Jinping’s reign, culminating in the decimation of the community

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of human rights lawyers that has stood as a bastion of courage and civility.”  

According to Ringen, the chief features of totalitarianism are that “rule is upheld by terror,” that “rule reaches into the regulation of natural human bonds in private spheres,” that “rule is exercised through an extensive and impersonal bureaucracy,” and that “the state operates under the authority of a commanding ideology.” He continues, “The state is deep into the regulation of private lives, now intensified in the ‘social credit system’ by which rewards and punishments are distributed in the population according to patterns of private behaviour.” Xi “has cast off pragmatism and clad his reign in the omnipresent China Dream ideology of nationalism and chauvinism. The result of totalitarian patterns of state rule is that social life is atomised and community crushed.”

Ringen concludes that he is aware of the “honest reluctance to [adopt] the language of totalitarianism. There has been hope and expectation of opening up. But in political life and civil society it is not happening. Far from it, the direction of travel is to shutting down. We should now [recognize] this in the language we use.”

While some argue that terms such as totalitarian and fascist do not apply to the PRC, most key government officials and many academics in democratic countries now realize that the terms are indeed accurate, even if they hesitate to use them for fear of retribution. To a degree, this fear is understandable, since the PRC employs a wide range of measures to ensure censorship and self-censorship. The Hudson Institute reports that these measures include coercive methods such as “denying visas to academics and blacklisting” as well as “subtler ways of inducing self-censorship. Publishers, for example, have an incentive to avoid books that might offend China’s censors because China can retaliate by cutting off market access.”

Economic links to the PRC may also prompt self-censorship since “many American universities receive significant donations from Chinese government entities, companies, and individuals.” The U.S. Department of Education General Counsel asserts that “the evidence suggests massive investments of foreign money have bred dependency and distorted the decision making, mission, and values of too many institutions.” Universities in the United States were given more than $56 million from Chinese sources in 2017 alone. As

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59 Ringen, “Totalitarianism.”
60 Ringen, “Totalitarianism.”
examples, Stanford University “received $32,244,826 in monetary gifts from China” during six years, while Harvard University “received $55,065,261 through a combination of contracts and monetary gifts.”62 Other American universities, meanwhile, have refused to cooperate with a federal investigation into their PRC income sources.63

Confucius reportedly said, “If names be not correct, language is not in accordance with the truth of things. If language be not in accordance with the truth of things, affairs cannot be carried on to success.”64 It is time to call the fight we are in by its right name: political warfare, the name the CCP calls it. In addition to adding this term to the daily lexicon, it is time for the U.S. government and academia to also use the terms totalitarian and fascist to describe the nature of the country posing the threat. It is also past time to counter the self-censorship that inhibits clear thinking about the implications of these terms as they pertain to the PRC.

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63 Ciccotta, “Multiple Universities Refuse to Cooperate with Federal Investigations into Ties to China.”
Chapter Three
A Brief History of PRC Political Warfare

Long live the great Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong thought. The foundations of Chinese political warfare were laid by the Soviet Union and the tenets of Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin, and Joseph Stalin. Mao Zedong adapted the Soviet model to embody “Chinese characteristics.” Pictured on the flag behind Mao, from left to right, are Stalin, Lenin, Friedrich Engels, and Marx.

Attaining one hundred victories in one hundred battles is not the pinnacle of excellence. Subjugating the enemy’s army without fighting is the true pinnacle of excellence. . . . The highest realization of warfare is to attack the enemy’s plans; next is to attack their alliances; next to attack their army; and the lowest is to attack their fortified cities. . . . Thus one who excels at employing the military subjugates other people’s armies without engaging in battle, captures other people’s fortified cities without attacking them, and destroys other people’s states without prolonged fighting.¹

~Sun Tzu

The precepts of Chinese political warfare extend back to at least 500 BCE, as reflected by Chinese general and military strategist Sun Tzu’s oft-quoted prescription above. However, the People’s Republic of China (PRC) has rapidly developed formidable political warfare capabilities, and its potential to conduct such operations on a global scale is arguably unprecedented in world history. An understanding of how the PRC conducts political warfare requires a brief overview of China’s unique historical context.

While the PRC is a newly modernized military and technological powerhouse, its current foreign and domestic policies have deep roots in China’s ancient history. The bloody Warring States period (~475–221 BCE), leading to the unification of the seven feuding states under the Qin Dynasty, plays a particularly important role in defining the PRC’s current approach to strategy, political warfare, deception, and stratagems with an emphasis on “overturning the old hegemon and exacting revenge.”

China expert Michael P. Pillsbury writes that the strategies used by Xi Jinping and his predecessors in the PRC’s drive for supremacy are largely the result of lessons derived from the Warring States period. Resultant stratagems are based on the following principles:

- Induce complacency to avoid alerting your opponent.
- Manipulate your opponent’s advisors.
- Be patient—for decades or longer—to achieve victory.
- Steal your opponent’s ideas and technology for strategic purposes.
- Military might is not the critical factor for winning a long-term competition.
- Recognize that the hegemon will take extreme, even reckless action to maintain its dominant position.
- Never lose sight of shi . . . [which includes] deceiving others to do your bidding for you [and] waiting for the point of maximum opportunity to strike.
- Establish and employ metrics for measuring your status relative to other potential challengers.
- Always be vigilant to avoid being encircled and deceived by others.

While acknowledging the impact of China’s long history in laying a foundation for the PRC’s current strategic culture, it is important to recognize that PRC political warfare has its strongest roots in the his-
A Brief History of PRC Political Warfare

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has a long history of deep-seated fears regarding the PRC’s geostrategic situation and the relationship between the CCP and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union during the first half of the twentieth century.

A Tough Neighborhood Fosters Xenophobia

Apologists for the CCP’s aggressive expansionist, repressive, and xenophobic policies often justify them due to China’s long history of conflict and invasion. There is, indeed, historical basis for the regime’s paranoia. According to a study published by the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments (CSBA), “Chinese regimes have been forced to fight for their survival against powerful invaders that either swept across the Eurasian plains or assaulted across the eastern seaboard” for thousands of years. “The few geographical barriers on this vast land mass have provided only limited protection, and the resulting security challenges foster compelling historical narratives, a strong civilizational identity, and deep nationalism. Successive regimes mobilized these historical and cultural strengths to reinforce their legitimacy and periodically generate xenophobia.”

While the CCP was not the first tyrannical regime to wholly arouse xenophobia, it has exploited it with exceptional success. Today, it possesses a compelling ability to control the information, thoughts, and actions of both its own population and those of foreign countries through means unimaginable to early emperors.

This totalitarian perspective, grounded in China’s experiences during the Warring States period and the worldviews of its first emperor, Qin Shi Huang, provides the traditional strategic culture of centralized despotism, coercion, and persuasion that lays the foundation for contemporary CCP political warfare. From the earliest rulers of the Shang and Zhou Dynasties, autocracy has been the natural order of life, with no compact like the Magna Carta or Declaration of Independence or concepts such as post-Westphalian rights intervening between emperors and control over their subjects.

Ancient Despots as CCP Role Models

Emperor Qin Shi Huang imposed the first totalitarian state in China, ruling with an iron fist and regulating every aspect of his subjects’

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lives. He instituted a regime that would later be copied by Communists throughout the world, assigning political commissars to spy on governors and military leaders to make sure they did not diverge from or criticize his policies.6

According to China expert Steven W. Mosher, Qin exerted control over the Chinese population through every aspect of their daily existence. For example, severe punishment was the order of the day: “For major capital crimes, the offender and his entire family were annihilated. For even the most minor infractions, millions were sent to forced labor projects such as building imperial highways and canals.” As the emperor “built his cult of personality to imbue himself with a godlike image and establish total supremacy both internal and external to his empire, [he] attempted to eradicate thought itself.” This thought eradication included his order for “the burning of all books in the Imperial Archives except his own memoirs. Private ownership of books was prohibited. Soon, pyres of burning books lit up cities at night, but three million men were branded and sent to labor camps for owning books nonetheless.”7

Qin’s foreign policy was one of aggressive expansionism, intended to attain complete control over the region—and eventually the world—to achieve total hegemony. The natural extension of totalitarianism, hegemony would lead to order, ensuring that the Chinese empire avoided the chaos that characterized so much of its history.

That relentless quest for hegemony was also inspired by a sense of racial superiority and supremacist entitlement. Both concepts would later serve as the basis of many totalitarian regimes, with Adolf Hitler’s Third Reich representing one of the most genocidal versions, that largely disappeared into the ashes of history following wars or other destructive forces. For the PRC, however, these factors still underpin the “China Dream,” which outlines how the PRC will, through stealth and strength—or, in CCP parlance, “secrecy and stratagem”—become the “world’s leading power, surpassing and then replacing” the United States.8 The characters for China, 中国, literally mean “middle kingdom,” and notions of China’s centrality and the superiority of the Han race permeate Chinese literature and thought. Throughout history, China’s rulers have encouraged a race-based nationalism and ethnocentrism to reinforce their legitimacy.

To become the hegemon, the dominant axis of power as well as the geographic and geopolitical center of the world, China required

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7 Mosher, Hegemon, 20–25.
that all other states become vassal or tributary states. Mosher writes
that Chinese elites “believed their emperor to be the only legitimate
political authority” in the world and “regarded themselves as the
highest expression of civilized humanity.” Accordingly, the Chinese
treated “barbarian” nations as a powerful suzerain would, by imposing
unequal conditions, exacting tribute, and influencing their leaders
and peoples through cultural, economic, and military power. For
two millennia, China’s hegemony in the region lasted, sustained by
powerful armies and political warfare.

The CSBA study notes that “there have been strong incentives
for China’s rulers . . . to not only harness all of the resources of the so-
ciety but also to do so in innovative ways.” As noted at the beginning
of this chapter, Sun Tzu “argued strongly for political, psychological,
and other non-combat operations to subdue enemies prior to com-
mitting armies to combat.

In the early twentieth century, Chinese Communists such as
Mao Zedong adapted Sun Tzu’s strategic analyses and Qin Shi
Huang’s totalitarian tactics to the inspiration they found in Marxist-
Leninist ideology. During that same time, the particularly virulent
views that Soviet Union leaders Vladimir Lenin and Joseph Stalin
held on attaining and maintaining power greatly influenced the
fledgling CCP.

Soviet Influence on the CCP
In nearly all aspects, the Soviet Union initially provided the role
model for Chinese Communist policy, organization, and operation.
Mao and his followers learned operational arts, such as political war-
fare, from the Moscow-led Communist International (Comintern).
As they adapted those Soviet 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.”

Mao combined China’s historical strategic culture with Comin-
tern instruction as well as individual insights from Carl von Clause-

\[^9\] Steven W. Mosher, Bully of Asia: Why China’s Dream Is the New Threat to World Order (Washington, DC: Regnery

\[^10\] Mosher, Hegemon, 2–5; and Mohan Malik, “Historical Fiction: China’s South China Sea Claims,” World Affairs 176,
no. 1 (May/June 2013): 81–90.

\[^11\] Mahnkken, Babbage, and Yoshihara, Countering Comprehensive Coercion, 25.

\[^12\] Mark Stokes and Russell Hsiao, The People’s Liberation Army General Political Department: Political Warfare with
nationalist Kuomintang (KMT) government in the Chinese Civil War and force it into exile on Taiwan. Mao had also used his concept in more limited efforts to fight Japanese forces that had invaded China during the Second Sino-Japanese War.

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.” Like the Soviets, Mao envisioned his revolution as eventually engulfing other lands. He wrote that “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.”

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.”

The United Front: The PRC’s Magic Weapon
As introduced in the previous chapter, the united front is a critical weapon in the PRC political warfare arsenal. Under the principle of “uniting with friends and disintegrating enemies,” Mao 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).

United front strategy was originally developed by the Bolsheviks during the Russian Civil War. It called for cooperating with nonrevolutionaries for practical purposes—for example, to defeat a common enemy—and winning them over to the revolutionary cause. In China, the strategy was first used in the 1920s to form an alliance between the CCP and KMT to end warlordism. Since then,

13 Mahnken, Babbage, and Yoshihara, Countering Comprehensive Coercion, 26.
15 Stokes and Hsiao, The People’s Liberation Army General Political Department, 3.
this focus on influencing, co-opting, demoralizing, and subverting enemy elites and military forces has remained consistent for almost 100 years. Co-option of non-Communist forces remains its essence today, although exporting revolution is less important now than exporting the totalitarian China Model.\footnote{Hearing on Strategic Competition with China, before the House Committee on Armed Services, 115th Cong. (2018) (testimony by Aaron L. Friedberg, Professor of Politics and International Affairs, Woodrow Wilson School, Princeton University), hereafter Friedberg testimony.}

In the early CCP, underground political work was divided into numerous systems. According to Mark Stokes and Russell Hsiao, the Urban Work Department “focused on ordinary citizens, minorities, students, factory workers, and urban residents,” while the Social Work Department “concentrated on the upper social elite of enemy civilian authorities, security of senior CCP leaders, and Comintern liaison” and the General Political Department “was responsible for political warfare against opposing military forces,” employing what is termed “enemy work and liaison work.”\footnote{Stokes and Hsiao, The People’s Liberation Army General Political Department, 6–7.}

A second united front between the CCP and KMT was established to fight the Japanese invaders during the Second Sino-Japanese War, but it broke down during the war. During the Chinese Civil War, CCP enemy work and liaison work were critical to undermining KMT morale and building domestic and international support to win the war on the mainland. The CCP prevailed over the KMT on mainland China in 1949 and founded the PRC.

The CCP “established its first organ responsible specifically for liaising with overseas Chinese communities” in 1940, and by the 1950s the strategy came to be “an integral part of Chinese Communist thought and practice.”\footnote{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); and Van Slyke, Enemies and Friends, 3.}

The success of PRC united front operations has fluctuated from the founding of the PRC, to the devastating Great Leap Forward of the 1950s, to the chaotic Cultural Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, to the Charm Offensive of the 1990s, and finally to the Belt and Road-aligned political warfare battle for global dominance that is underway today. Some of those successes will be explored in detail in subsequent chapters.

Active Measures in the Political Warfare Fight

One key to the PRC’s political warfare success is its relentless use of 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 “agents of influence, 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.” Conversely, “attributable statements of the Communist Party Propaganda Department” are referred to as “white,” or overt, propaganda.21

While the Republic of China (ROC) on Taiwan has been the historic primary target of PRC political warfare, the CCP has extended its political warfare objectives well beyond its traditional ROC enemy. Since regional and global hegemony is the PRC’s ultimate objective, the entire international community is now the target. The PRC has employed massive resources to its active-measure operations since 1949, both regionally as well as across the globe.

The PRC’s support of its proxy United Wa State Army (UWSA) in Myanmar seems an anomaly to many contemporary diplomats, academics, and journalists, but such support has always been the norm for the PRC. For more than four decades during the Cold War, Beijing’s “national liberation armies” waged revolutionary war throughout Southeast Asia and cost the United States and its allies dearly while severely undermining nation-building there.

Robert Taber, a leading counterinsurgency analyst, wrote that a “typical revolutionary political organization will have two branches: one subterranean and illegal, the other visible and quasi-legitimate.” The former comprises “activists . . . saboteurs, terrorists, arms runners, fabricators of explosive devices, operators of a clandestine press, distributors of political pamphlets, and couriers to carry messages from one guerrilla sector to another.” The latter includes “intellectuals, tradesmen, clerks, students, [and] professionals,” who are “capable of promoting funds, circulating petitions, organizing boycotts, raising popular demonstrations, informing friendly journalists, spreading rumors, and in every way conceivable waging a massive propaganda campaign aimed at two objectives: the strengthening and brightening of the rebel ‘image,’ and the discrediting of the regime.”22

Using these and related techniques, the PRC has funded, sup-

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21 Stokes and Hsiao, The People’s Liberation Army General Political Department, 6.
plied, and trained forces engaged in independence movements and insurgencies from the 1950s to the present day. Its focus was primarily on the newly developing nations of Southeast Asia, with some additional support given in South Asia, Africa, and Latin America. In Southeast Asia, insurgent forces proxy armies were the sharpest weapon in Beijing’s political warfare arsenal. These armies were ultimately successful in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, while countries like Thailand and Malaysia held the line only with massive support from the United States and United Kingdom, respectively, and innovative counterinsurgency concepts.

Today, the PRC continues its use of proxy armies, such as the UWSA in Myanmar. The UWSA was founded in 1989 when it emerged from the collapse of the PRC-backed Communist Party of Burma. It now administers a region the size of Belgium on the Sino-Myanmar border, a major hub in the Asian narcotics trade. With direct support from the PRC, the UWSA is at present the largest nonstate military actor in Asia, a well-equipped and well-led force that has achieved a serious measure of deterrence in relation to Myanmar’s armed forces. It is also the major power broker in Myanmar today, influencing the nation’s stalled peace process. The PRC-equipped Kokang rebels, of Chinese descent, are also viewed as proxies of Beijing in its reported efforts to annex the Kokang region of Myanmar, similar to the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014.

**China’s Charm Offensive and Rejuvenated United Front**

As late as the 1980s, the PRC was considered a pariah in much of the international community, seen as 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.

The 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre further diminished the PRC’s influence. Of particular note, the international backlash of the massacre served as a turning point for the CCP in terms of both internal propaganda and suppression and the refinement of its

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external influence capabilities.\textsuperscript{26} The PRC has since advanced to a remarkable degree in its ability to use soft power in its global political warfare operations, as reflected in its Charm Offensive campaign that began in the late 1990s.

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 which supported its overall political warfare objectives. Beijing employed a wide range of influence-related reforms, such as significantly upgrading the quality and sophistication of its diplomatic corps, to successfully engage the international community. The end of the Cold War in 1991 helped cloak its advances.

The PRC was assisted greatly in its progress by the United States’ retreat from the world stage under President William J. “Bill” Clinton. The United States dismantled its main public diplomacy and counterpolitical warfare organization, the U.S. Information Agency, in 1999, a victim of victory in the Cold War. Further, the Clinton administration neglected many of the multilateral institutions that were built after World War II and failed to intercede in either the 1994 Rwandan genocide or the 1997 Asian financial crisis.\textsuperscript{27}

Consequently, the foundation was laid for a “rising China” to assert itself on the world stage as the United States’ influence appeared to wane. As the CCP watched Washington “retreat from the world, consumed with its own economic boom, with the Internet, and with American culture wars,” its rulers felt confident that it now could surpass the United States. Accordingly, it set about “shaping its regional environment” by focusing its soft power tools to portray itself as “a benign, peaceful, and constructive actor in the world.”\textsuperscript{28} The PRC has since “adopted an increasingly active and pragmatic diplomatic approach around the world that emphasizes complementary economic interests.” In addition to a more sophisticated diplomatic corps bolstering influence and image, Beijing has funded infrastructure, public works, and economic investment projects in many developing countries.\textsuperscript{29}

\textsuperscript{27} Kurlantzick, \textit{Charm Offensive}, 43–44.
\textsuperscript{28} Kurlantzick, \textit{Charm Offensive}, 43, 51–52.
Political Warfare in the Xi Era
Since 2012, the PRC has become even more sophisticated and ambitious in its use of political warfare to achieve its broad strategic objectives. 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.” Friedberg continues that the PRC’s methods include:

- the funding of university chairs and think tank research programs;
- offers of lucrative employment to former government officials who have demonstrated that they are reliable “friends of China;”
- 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;
- pressure on movie studios and media companies to ensure continued access to the vast Chinese market by avoiding politically sensitive content; and
- mobilization and exploitation of overseas students and local ethnic Chinese communities to support Beijing’s aims.

The CCP has long employed propaganda and disinformation against its enemies, but in recent years it has found a “fertile information environment” in the new world of social media to “amplify its time-honed tactics of political and psychological warfare.” The added benefit of using social media to flood its adversaries’ societies with propaganda and disinformation is that it ultimately weakens people’s faith in democracy and can create political instability. 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.”

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30 Friedberg testimony.
31 Friedberg testimony.
32 Russell Hsiao, “CCP Propaganda against Taiwan Enters the Social Age,” Jamestown Foundation, China Brief 18, no. 7, 24 April 2018.
33 Keoni Everington, “China’s ‘Troll Factory’ Targeting Taiwan with Disinformation Prior to Election,” Taiwan News (Taipei), 5 November 2018.
PLA Reform and the “Omnipresent Struggle”
The PLA’s evolving role in political warfare and use of information and cyber operations rate special note. According to a U.S. National Defense University study, in late 2015, the PLA “initiated reforms that have brought dramatic changes to its structure, model of warfighting, and organizational culture.” These reforms include the creation of a Strategic Support Force (SSF) that consolidates most PLA cyber, electronic, psychological, and space warfare capabilities.

Specifically, the role of the SSF is significant to how the PLA plans to conduct information operations and fight informationized wars. The SSF “appears to have incorporated elements of the PLA’s psychological and political warfare missions,” which comes as a result of a “subtle yet consequential PLA-wide reorganization of China’s political warfare forces. This may portend a more operational role for psychological operations in the future.”

The PLA sees the SSF as essential for “anticipating adversary action, setting the terms of conflict in peacetime, and achieving battlefield dominance in wartime.” The SSF supports the overall political warfare goal of “winning without fighting” by “shaping an adversary’s decisionmaking through actions below the threshold of outright war, accomplishing strategic objectives without escalating to open conflict.” The PRC does not adhere to “Western models of conflict, in which peace and war are distinct stages.” Contrariwise, the CCP model is the “spectrum of omnipresent ‘struggle,’ a Maoist-Marxist-Leninist paradigm that sees a broad political front in an enduring clash of political systems and ideologies, with military competition and conflict being merely one part of that whole.”

As another key result of PLA reform was the establishment of the Eastern Theater Command (ETC) in February 2016, to replace the Nanjing Military Region. The ETC plays a major role in “directing political-military coercion against Taiwan,” and its reorganization into an expanded theater command increases its operational capacity.

The founding of the SSF in combination with the establishment of the ETC offers the PLA the organization and resources needed to advance its capabilities beyond that allowed by its previous Mao-era political warfare support structure.

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35 Costello and McReynolds, *China’s Strategic Support Force* , 2.
36 Costello and McReynolds, *China’s Strategic Support Force*, 45.
Bringing the United Front to the Forefront

While the CCP’s use of political warfare goes back to the party’s beginnings, the significance of those operations—particularly efforts to build what amounts to fifth columns overseas through the United Front Work Department—took on new impetus with Xi Jinping’s ascension to the leadership of the CCP and PRC in 2012 and 2013, respectively. Xi’s father, Xi Zhongxun, a Chinese Communist revolutionary and PRC official, led united front and other political warfare operations through much of his career, which clearly impacted Xi Jinping’s understanding of their value.

In Xi’s view, the time had come for a strong and confident China to move beyond former PRC leader Deng Xiaoping’s advice to hide its assets and bide its time. Arguably, Xi was elevated to implement the long-term strategy of no longer hiding the PRC’s capabilities or intentions, which Deng had not-so-subtly telegraphed and most Western politicians and analysts chose to ignore. Delegates to the CCP’s 18th Party Congress were lectured on the importance of united front work, and the bureaucracy hastened to comply.

In February 2018, Xi “issued a directive to cultivate greater support amongst the estimated 60 million-strong Chinese diaspora worldwide.” He encouraged “closely uniting” with Chinese living overseas in support of the China Dream and emphasized that “to realize the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, we must work together with our sons and daughters at home and abroad.” Xi continued that “it is an important task for the party and the state to unite the vast number of overseas Chinese and returned overseas Chinese and their families in the country and play their positive role in the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.”

The CCP’s united front work aimed at the outside world has consolidated since the 19th Party Congress, carrying on trends established during the previous five years. University of Centerbury professor Anne-Marie Brady reports that since then, “Xi has removed any veneer of separation between the [CCP] and the Chinese state. So while the United Front Work Department does indeed play an important role in CCP united front work, comprehending China’s modern political warfare tactics requires a deep understanding of all the CCP’s agencies, their policies, their leadership, their methodology, and the way the party-state system works in China.”

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Brady projects that future Xi-era united front activities will focus on four key areas: first, “stepped-up efforts to manage and guide the Chinese diaspora—both Han Chinese and ethnic minorities such as Uighurs and Tibetans—so as to utilize them as agents of Chinese foreign policy while meting out increasingly harsh treatment do those who do not cooperate”; second, “co-opting and cultivating foreign economic and political elites in the nations of the world to support and promote the [CCP’s] global foreign policy goals”; third, “a global, multi-platform, strategic communication strategy to promote the [CCP’s] agenda”; and finally, “the formation of a China-centered economic and strategic bloc”—the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). 41

Regarding the BRI, Brady describes Xi’s initiative as “a classic united front activity.” She notes that it is “pitched as ‘beyond ideology’ and designed to create a new global order, which [CCP] analysts describe as ‘Globalization 2.0.’” United front work supports the BRI, and vice versa. “The [CCP] has seeded allies and clients throughout the economic and political elite of many countries at the national as well as the local level and is getting them to promote acceptance for the [BRI] in their respective countries.”42

To influence the Chinese diaspora, much of the PRC’s propaganda effort targets overseas Chinese students and communities, who often feel a strong sense of patriotism toward their homeland. To build on and exploit these sentiments, the Chinese ministry of education declared in 2016 a priority to further spread the China Dream abroad by “harness[ing] the patriotic capabilities of overseas students” and “establish[ing] an overseas propaganda model which uses people as its medium.”43 With its increasing control of both Chinese-language and foreign news media organizations abroad, the PRC attempts to whip overseas Chinese into a hyper-nationalistic frenzy, and employ them to influence, obstruct, and politically paralyze any nation that opposes the PRC’s actions.44

During his congressional testimony in 2018, retired U.S. Navy captain James E. Fanell assessed that Xi and the CCP “will exploit these overseas Chinese to undermine military and political adversaries worldwide, and to advance [their own] political and military objectives. Prime among these will very likely be lobbying for the establishment of more PRC military access” for PLA forces operating globally. With an operational base already established in

41 Brady, “Exploit Every Rift,” 36.
42 Brady, “Exploit Every Rift,” 36.
Djibouti in the Horn of Africa, the PLA Navy now operates in the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean, Baltic, and Arctic Seas. The PRC has sealed long-term port deals that span the globe, including in Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Tanzania, Myanmar, Malaysia, Australia, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Greece, Namibia, Mauritius, Djibouti, Brunei, and the Strait of Malacca. These ports “have already started to provide critical berthing and logistics” to the PLA Navy, including maintenance, provisions, and refueling.\(^45\) The PRC is also attempting to acquire berthing in the Azores and is currently negotiating port deals in the Maldives, Scandinavia, and Greenland.

**PRC Political Warfare on the Offensive**

Anne-Marie Brady warns that despite worldwide revelations regarding PRC political warfare and influence operations, the PRC has not backed off. “Conversely,” she continues, CCP united front work “aimed at the outside world has gone on the offensive, fighting on all fronts, indicating that the [CCP] leadership believes it is in a position of strength and has no reason to hide its efforts.”\(^46\)

As described by Nadège Rolland at the National Bureau of Asian Research, the PRC has established a layered defense, starting with the protection of its domestic perimeter and incrementally extending outward. It stifles the inward flow of liberal democratic values and ideals within its territory through a “Great Firewall around China’s cyberspace” and by “strengthening party control over domestic media and information circulation.” The CCP has also intensified domestic propaganda and so-called patriotic education to inoculate its people against dangerous ideas that might slip through the first line of defense. In its “counterattack mode,” the CCP targets “audiences outside of the Chinese diaspora, striking deeper into the adversary’s territory, and hitting hard.” The PRC “is actively targeting foreign media, academia and business communities through the deployment of front organisations” to co-opt foreigners and is retaliating against those who it sees threatening its core interests at any level.\(^47\)

Due to their belief that the PRC now enjoys superior strength, Xi and CCP leaders no longer care as much about public exposure of their attempts to, for example, “leverage overseas Chinese as agents of influence, pressure foreign universities and movie studios to accept Chinese censorship guidelines, and co-opt foreign elites into

\(^{45}\) Fanell testimony.

\(^{46}\) Brady, “Exploit Every Rift,” 34.

supporting Beijing’s goals,” reports Brady. She concludes that “Xi is exploiting every rift and is fighting on all fronts—at the same time as continuing to seek partners to unite with against the chief enemy: the [United States] and other Western democracies. . . . For Xi Jinping, the Western democracies represent the ‘Old Era’ of the global order, which the 19th Party Congress has declared is officially over.”48

CHAPTER FOUR

PRC Political Warfare Goals, Ways, Means, and Wartime Support

Long live the victory of the Korean People’s Army and the Chinese People’s Army. This 1951 propaganda poster depicts Chinese and North Korean forces defeating U.S. Army general Douglas MacArthur and the United Nations armed forces during the Korean War.

In 2019, Ross Babbage at the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments identified four strategic goals of the People’s Republic of China’s (PRC) political warfare operations, the first and most significant of which is “the maintenance of uncontested Communist Party rule.” To achieve that aim, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) “employs sophisticated political warfare operations to suppress domestic dissent and reinforce Party loyalty as well as to undermine China’s international rivals.”

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

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its continental and maritime domains.” To this end, the CCP “has propagated 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: 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.”

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.”

Finally, the CCP’s fourth goal is to “export its model of tight authoritarian political control coupled with a managed but relatively open economy.” 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.” 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.”

Subsequent chapters in the book will provide detailed discussions of the specific strategies and tactics the PRC employs in its political warfare operations, but a 2018 Hudson Institute study provides an apt, if somewhat informal, description of PRC political warfare goals, target audiences, and strategies: “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 expres-

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4 Hearing on Strategic Competition with China, before the House Committee on Armed Services, 115th Cong. (2018) (testimony by Aaron L. Friedberg, Professor of Politics and International Affairs, Woodrow Wilson School, Princeton University), hereafter Friedberg testimony.
sion, individual rights, and academic freedom.” Target audiences include politicians, academics, businesspeople, students, and the general public. “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.” 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.”

However, PRC political warfare 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, “reunifying 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.” 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.

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.”

Friedberg also notes that Beijing seeks to attain its objectives by delivering two messages: 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 inevi-

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10 Friedberg testimony.
table 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.” 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.”

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, and organization, as well as how political warfare supports the PRC’s wartime and other military operations.

**PRC Political Warfare Traits**

The Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments identifies common traits of PRC political warfare as follows:

- A powerful centralized command of political warfare operations by the CCP through organizations such as the United Front Work Department (UFWD) 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.12

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11 Friedberg testimony.
Ways and Means: Funding and Economic Aspects

The PRC is the world’s second-largest economy, and the CCP has invested enormous resources into influence operations abroad, estimated in 2015 to reach $10 billion a year and certainly much higher by 2020. Further, the PRC’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) programs provide access to massive additional resources to support political warfare, since the BRI is rightly viewed as a global UFWD strategy.

Cash rules 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 political 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 enterprises, egalitarian poverty (except for Party insiders), and repressive government had little appeal except to other dictatorial regimes.”

However, Beijing’s phenomenal economic growth during the past three decades has now provided a different model. 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.”

With the scale and relatively rapid growth of the Chinese economy and seeming largess, the CCP is indeed helping many political, news media, and other influential elites worldwide come out of poverty. Cash has proven to be the most compelling motivator for those supporting and enabling the PRC’s global ambitions, especially when combined with a 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 political 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 Babage, “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

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tourism sanctions, boycott of the Lotte retail chain, and other reprisals against South Korea following Seoul’s commitment to host American missile defense systems.”

Organization
All party and state organizations support the CCP’s political warfare operations, and it is useful to examine how some of these key elements interrelate. 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. That organization flows down from the Politburo Standing Committee (PSC). The top united front official serves as chairman of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) and is the fourth highest-ranking member of the PSC. Two additional top Politburo members direct the Propaganda Department (now called the 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.”

Mattis describes the UFWD as “the executive agency for united front work” both within the PRC and abroad. It “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 personages; intellectuals; and people-to-people exchanges,” as well as the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office (OCAO). The UFWD also leads the establishment of party committees in both Chinese and foreign businesses.

The OCAO is particularly important in rallying the worldwide diaspora. Its mission 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.” To this end, it routinely brings researchers,