Political Warfare

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tourism sanctions, boycott of the Lotte retail chain, and other re-
prisals 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,
media figures, and community leaders from Chinese communities in foreign nations back to China to attend conferences and meetings.

Alexander Bowe at the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission writes that the UFWD is organized into nine major bureaus and four additional offices:

- **Party Work Bureau**: deals with China’s eight non-Communist political parties.
- **Ethnic and Religious Work Bureau**: concerns China’s ethnic minorities.
- **Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, and Overseas Liaison Bureau**: deals with those areas and the international Chinese diaspora.
- **Cadre Bureau**: cultivates United Front operatives.
- **Economics Bureau**: liaises with less developed regions of China.
- **Independent and Non-Party Intellectuals Work Bureau**: liaises with Chinese intellectuals.
- **Tibet Bureau**: cultivates loyalty and suppresses separatism in Tibet.
- **New Social Class Representatives Work Bureau**: cultivates political support of the Chinese middle class.
- **Xinjiang Bureau**: cultivates loyalty and suppresses separatism in Xinjiang.
- **General Office**: coordinates business and administrative work.
- **Party Committee**: responsible for ideological and disciplinary matters.
- **Policy Research Office**: researches United Front theory and policy and coordinates propaganda.
- **Retired Cadres Office**: implements policy concerning departing/retired personnel.²¹

Bowe adds that “a range of CCP military and civilian organizations are [also] active in carrying out United Front work, either working directly for the UFWD or under the broader leadership of the CPPCC.” The Council for the Promotion of the Peaceful Reunification of China (CPPRC), which promotes the reunification of the PRC and ROC on Taiwan, has “at least 200 chapters in 90 countries, in-

cluding 33 chapters in the United States registered as the National Association for China’s Peaceful Unification."^{22}

Mattis writes that the CCP’s Propaganda/Publicity Department is responsible for conducting the “party’s theoretical research; guiding public opinion; guiding and coordinating the work of the central news agencies [and] guiding the propaganda and cultural systems; and administering the Cyberspace Administration of China and the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film, and Television.”^{23}

Numerous party-state organizations also contribute to the CCP’s influence operations. Although they do not focus on united front or propaganda work specifically, they can be used for those purposes. “Many of these agencies share cover or front organizations when they are involved in influence operations,” Mattis reports, “and such platforms are sometimes lent to other agencies when appropriate.”

Examples of these party-state organizations include the Ministry of Civil Affairs, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of State Security, State Administration of Foreign Expert Affairs, Xinhua News Agency, and Liaison Bureau of the PLA’s Political Work Department.^{24}

The PLA plays a significant role in the PRC’s political warfare organization. Under the leadership of the CCP’s Central Military Commission, the Political Work Department serves as the PLA’s principle political warfare command. J. Michael Cole at the Global Taiwan Institute describes its predecessor, the PLA General Political Department, as “an interlocking directorate that operates at the nexus of politics, finance, military operations, and intelligence.”^{25}

Stokes and Hsiao note that Political Work Department liaison work “augments traditional state diplomacy and formal military-to-military relations, which are normally considered to be the most important aspects of international relations.”^{26} The Political Work Department, the UFWD, and other influence organizations play a major role in establishing and facilitating the activities of a multitude of friendship and cultural associations such as the China Association for International Friendly Contact, a central organization in coopting foreign military officers.

Unlike the Soviet and current Russian models of political war-
fare, PRC intelligence agencies such as the Chinese Intelligence Service and Ministry of State Security seem to play a subordinate role in foreign influence operations. Individuals assigned to these influence operations are rarely intelligence officers themselves, but are generally party elite who understand the CCP’s international objectives and are skilled in managing foreigners. Nevertheless, the Chinese Intelligence Service and Ministry of State Security are certainly engaged in PRC active measures, for intelligence collection is always an integral part of political warfare work as a foundation for both the successful execution and outcome of political warfare operations.  

**Political Warfare in Support of PLA Combat Operations**

Through the use of political warfare and deception, the PRC has achieved notable strategic victories without fighting. However, if the PRC’s rulers perceive that political warfare alone will not deliver the results they desire—in, for example, Taiwan, the East or South China Seas, or India—they may choose to achieve their goals through conventional and unconventional combat operations, or a war could ignite inadvertently from their actions.

Retired U.S. Navy captain James E. Fanell argues that in any armed conflict within the Asia-Pacific Region or elsewhere in the world, “the PRC’s fight for public opinion will be [its] second battlefield,” on which it will conduct a “wide range” of political warfare operations. The PRC has used political warfare to support numerous military operations in the past, to include its intervention in the Korean War in 1950, its annexation of Tibet in 1951, the Sino-Indian War in 1962, the Sino-Soviet Union border conflict in 1969, its battle for Vietnam’s Paracel Islands in 1974, the Sino-Vietnam War in 1979, its attack on Vietnam’s Spratly Islands in 1988, its occupation of the Philippines’ Mischief Reef in 1995, the standoff with India and Bhutan at Doklam in 2017, and its skirmish with Indian forces at Ladakh in 2020.

The PRC’s principle of “uniting with friends and disintegrating enemies” will guide its active political warfare measures during armed conflict, as the CCP devises its narrative of events, actions,
and policies to lead international discourse and impact the policies of both its friends and adversaries.\textsuperscript{30}

Chinese strategic literature particularly emphasizes the role of the Three Warfares—public opinion/media warfare, psychological warfare, and legal warfare—to subdue an enemy before conflict can break out or ensure victory if conflict does occur. According to Elsa B. Kania at the Center for a New American Security, the Three Warfares establish “a perceptual preparation of the battlefield that is seen as critical to advancing [PRC] interests during both peace and war.” PLA officers become acquainted with political warfare early in their careers, and as they rise in rank they study the concept in depth in various texts on military strategy, including the PLA Academy of Military Science and PLA National Defence University editions of *Science of Military Strategy* as well as *An Introduction to Public Opinion Warfare, Psychological Warfare, and Legal Warfare*.\textsuperscript{31}

In addition to employing the Three Warfares, it is likely that the PRC will engage in “hybrid warfare” actions comparable to those used by Russia in its 2014 annexation of Crimea.\textsuperscript{32} Cortez A. Cooper III writes that its political warfare doctrine and capabilities involve “military and para-military forces that operate below the threshold of war, such as increased presence in contested waters of fishing fleets and supporting maritime militia and navy vessels,” which may “spark conflict when an opposing claimant such as the Philippines, Vietnam, or Japan responds.”\textsuperscript{33} The PRC is already engaged in hybrid warfare against Taiwan, so this type of operations would likely increase in preparation for an attack against that nation.\textsuperscript{34} Once armed conflict ignites, the CCP would quite likely continue its hybrid warfare.

In addition, Fanell contends that the PRC “will augment conventional military operations with non-conventional operations, such as subversion, disinformation and misinformation (now commonly referred to as ‘fake news’), and cyberattacks. The operationalization of [psychological warfare] with cyber is key to this strategy.” The PRC has enlarged its psychological warfare forces, especially at the 311 Base in Fuzhou in Fujian Province, which is subordinate to the PLA’s Strategic Support Force and works closely with the nation’s cyberforces.\textsuperscript{35}

\textsuperscript{30} Stokes and Hsiao, *The People’s Liberation Army General Political Department*, 3.
\textsuperscript{31} Elsa B. Kania, “The PLA’s Latest Strategic Thinking on the Three Warfares,” Jamestown Foundation, China Brief 16, no. 13, 22 August 2016.
\textsuperscript{32} Fanell testimony.
\textsuperscript{33} Cooper, “China’s Military Is Ready for War.”
\textsuperscript{34} David R. Ignatius, “China’s Hybrid Warfare against Taiwan,” *Washington Post*, 14 December 2018.
\textsuperscript{35} Fanell testimony.
The PRC will conduct political warfare operations before, during, and after any hostilities that it initiates. Prior to military confrontation, it will initiate a worldwide political warfare campaign that employs united front organizations and other supporters to initiate protests, support rallies, and use the internet, television, and radio to conduct propaganda and psychological operations. History proves that political warfare actions are often tied to the PRC’s strategic deception operations, which are designed to confuse or delay adversaries’ defensive actions until it is too late to effectively respond.36

The PLA will likely seize the initiative in the opening phase of war by “striking the first blow.” PRC policy stipulates that “the first strike that triggers a Chinese military response need not be military; actions in the political and strategic realm may also justify a Chinese military reaction.”37 Such a trigger could be a perceived slight, diplomatic miscommunication, or statement by a government official that upsets China enough to warrant a response.

As the PLA engages in kinetic combat against its targeted enemy forces, the PRC will fight for worldwide public opinion on the “second battlefield.” Influence operations will be employed to confuse and discourage the enemy while also attempting to win support for the PRC’s position from initially undecided nations. Fanell states, “In addition to standard propaganda, disinformation and deception will be employed, such as false reports of surrender of national governments and/or forces, atrocities and other violations of international law, and other reports intended to distract or paralyze decision making by the [United States] and it friends and allies.” This political warfare campaign, helping to rally mass support for the PRC’s “righteous” actions, will continue during and after the military operation itself, regardless of the operation’s success.38

36 Fanell testimony.
38 Fanell testimony.
A historical overview of Thailand’s relationship with China is necessary to understand the relative ease with which the People’s Republic of China (PRC) has been able to infiltrate and influence the thinking and conduct of the Royal Thai government and other Thai institutions, as well as significantly multiply the impact of its influence operations, in recent years.

Relations between Thailand and China have strong historical roots, alternating between periods of Thai tributary-state status in deference to Chinese domination, Thai indifference toward China as the latter’s hegemony weakened, and extreme tension and open (albeit proxy) warfare. Key factors impacting the relationship between these two nations include their close geographic proximity to one another, their relations with neighboring states, and the influence...
of external powers with interests in the region, such as the United States and Soviet Union. Other important factors include Thailand’s historic “Bamboo Diplomacy,” which allowed it to largely fend off imperialist advances, the economically powerful Chinese community in Thailand, and the ideological compulsions of communism, especially after World War II.¹

In historical documents and analyses contained in R. K. Jain’s *China and Thailand, 1949–1983* (1984), the geographical, social, and historical factors that bound Sino-Thai relations during the mid-twentieth century are examined. Jain’s edited volume is uniquely valuable, as it appends copies of original key documents and reports and offers a near-contemporaneous account that does not suffer from revisionism reflected in much present-day writing regarding the PRC and Thailand. Benjamin Zawacki’s *Thailand: Shifting Ground Between the U.S. and a Rising China* (2017) is also very useful. Based primarily on diplomatic cables and other documents obtained by Wikileaks and an impressive array of interviews, Zawacki’s book defines the key events and decisions that led to the near-collapse of Thai-U.S. relations during the 2014–17 timeframe.

**Origins of the Sino-Thai Relationship**

Jain establishes that the Thai kingdom of Nanchao existed in what is now China’s Yunnan Province for several centuries before becoming a vassal state of China around 900 ACE. However, the ethnic Thais were forced south following the Mongol invasion of China in the thirteenth century and soon founded the Kingdom of Sukhothai. The kingdom sent a tributary mission to China in 1294 ACE, thereby submitting to the Middle Kingdom’s “family of nations.” When the Ayutthaya Dynasty came into power in 1350, it secured recognition from the Ming Dynasty in China and began sending systematic tributary missions to Beijing, which continued through 1853. After the 1853 tribute mission, China and Thailand ceased diplomatic relations.²

For hundreds of years following the Thai movement south, large numbers of people of Chinese origin moved into what is now Thailand, particularly during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Many left homelands in China’s Fujian and Guangdong Provinces due to poor living conditions. They also came by sea from Hainan and coastal mainland ports. Among the Chinese immigrants

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to Thailand were many Teochew, Hakka, Hailamese, Hokkien, and Cantonese people.3

The late Southeast Asia scholar Benedict Anderson noted that the exodus from China directly impacted Thailand’s present monarchy. The modern history of Thailand begins in 1767, when a Burmese army sacked, looted, and burned the ancient capital of the Ayutthaya Kingdom. Much of the vanquished realm then fell under Burmese occupation, its aristocracy annihilated. The subsequent Siamese Kingdom of Thonburi went through years of chaos and devastation. In time, King Taksin of Thonburi drove the Burmese out. Taksin was a Sino-Thai who, Anderson asserted, defeated the Burmese by “making use of experienced Chinese sailors who had settled in southeastern Siam.”4 Taksin the Great is revered in Thailand to this day, but after a 14-year reign, he was overthrown in a palace coup and executed along with his entire family. Maha Ksatriyaseuk, better known as Rama I, succeeded Taskin and founded the Chakri Dynasty in 1782, which has lasted in Thailand to this day.5

Both Taksin and Rama I were of ethnic Teochew stock. Toechew had become the dominant group among overseas Chinese in Siam, marrying into high-status families and being given important jobs at the court. Anderson wrote, “Only with the rise of [Thai and Chinese] nationalism did it become embarrassing to admit that the king might be an immigrant, and the Chakri began to conceal the Sino-Thai origins of their dynasty.”6

Increased Migration and Rising Nationalism

In addition to hundreds of years of Chinese migration to Siam (what is now Thailand), many Chinese men intermarried with Thai women and appeared to assimilate.7 During the reign of King Rama V, the Thai government encouraged the “immigration of poor, illiterate Chinese to work on commercial sugar plantations, or to build port facilities and a new transport network of roads and railways.”8 The government did not restrict Chinese immigration, permitted free movement, and imposed low taxes. However, there were occasional revolts by Chinese migrants against Siamese authorities, such as a rebellion in 1848 resulting from a tax increase. Government retribu-

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tion was severe, to include “a general massacre” of 10,000 Chinese men, women, and children at one battle site.9

Ultimately, the failure of Chinese to assimilate with Thais, combined with growing Thai nationalism and Chinese nationalism fostered by the Qing Dynasty, led to negative outcomes. Such nationalism manifested itself in the promulgation of the Chinese nationality law in 1909, a “tool that could maintain the affiliation of those beyond territorial sovereignty, either overseas or in extraterritorial zones, with the Qing state.”10 In effect, this law enlisted support for China from overseas Chinese and was arguably a forerunner of the PRC’s united front operations that employ overseas Chinese organizations today. Calls for Chinese abroad to support China strongly influenced the thinking of the Chinese population in Siam.

In 1910, a three-day strike coordinated by Chinese secret societies in Bangkok brought economic life in the kingdom’s capital to a halt. The reason for the strike was that the Chinese were protesting the fact that they had to pay the same annual tax required of Thai citizens. The Thai government was shocked by such a brazen demonstration of Chinese economic power within the kingdom. More ominously, the Thais perceived that the Chinese saw themselves as not subject to Thai law within Thailand, and they began to understand that an unassimilated mass that felt above Thai law could potentially rise up against the government.

The next 40 years would be trying times, as both Chinese and Thais sparred over issues of race, ethnicity, economics, and wartime alliances. The collapse of the Qing Dynasty and establishment of the Republic of China (ROC) in 1912 created a greater awareness of Chinese nationality among overseas Chinese, many of whom began establishing Chinese schools and newspapers to preserve their separate cultural identity and, in effect, resist assimilation. Thailand passed various laws to ensure the assimilation of all Chinese living in the kingdom, including the Thai Nationality Act of 1913. The following year, however, King Rama VI wrote a treatise under the pen name of “Asvabahu” that deemed the Chinese inassimilable because of their “racial loyalty and sense of superiority.”11

The ROC attempted to establish diplomatic relations with Thailand early after the Kuomintang (KMT) took control of China in 1911. However, because a treaty drafted for that purpose referred to Thai-

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Thailand refused China’s diplomatic overtures out of fear that formal relations would allow China the opportunity to interfere in Thailand’s internal affairs via its Chinese population. While the Communist Party of Siam reportedly existed in Thailand by the late 1920s, the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) would not be officially founded until 1942. The organization initially took its ideological lead from the Soviet Union, though it was aided significantly by Chinese leftists who had fled China following the KMT-Chinese Communist Party (CCP) split in 1927 and would eventually side with China’s Maoists during the Soviet-Sino split in the early 1960s. Following a June 1932 coup that replaced Thailand’s absolute monarchy with a constitutional monarchy, the ruling oligarchy was sufficiently concerned with the Chinese Communist threat that it enacted an Anti-Communist Act in 1933.

The War Years
In 1938, Phibun Songgram became prime minister of Thailand, establishing a military dictatorship and changing the country’s official name from Siam to Thailand the following year. A supporter of Imperial Japan, he approved of the Japanese invasion of China and took actions to suppress the anti-Japanese Chinese population within Thailand. As the Chinese community supported anti-Japanese boycotts in response to Japan’s aggression against China, the Thai government shut down many Chinese businesses, schools, and newspapers and deported politically active Chinese, despite China’s protests.12

During World War II, Thailand allied with Japan, declaring war on the United Kingdom and the United States and increasing restrictions on the ethnic Chinese population within its borders. Chinese were excluded from certain professions and forced out of many areas of the country deemed “military zones.” Further, Chinese who cooperated with the Nationalists in China were imprisoned.13 Restrictions on Chinese nationals lightened slightly after the ouster of Prime Minister Phibun in 1944. Meanwhile, as the Thai government worked with Japan and the Free Thai Movement endeavored to end that alliance, other Thais working with both the Soviet Union and Mao Zedong’s CCP established the CPT in 1942.

Following the defeat of Imperial Japan and the end of World War II, Thailand abolished the Anti-Communist Act in 1948. The Thai government was subsequently challenged by a series of military coups and political unrest, leading to the establishment of a civilian government in 1949. Despite this, Thailand continued to face internal political tensions and economic challenges, as it sought to modernize and integrate into the international community.

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War II in September 1945, Thai prime ministers Seni Pramoj and Pridi Banomyong worked to restore Thailand’s international status and curried favor with China and the Soviet Union to support Thailand’s joining of the United Nations (UN) in 1946. To this end, Thailand restored most of the rights enjoyed by Sino-Thais prior to 1939 and repealed the Anti-Communist Act.14

Formal Relations and Falling Out
In January 1946, Thailand and the China signed the Siamese-Chinese Treaty of Amity and Commerce to establish diplomatic relations based on “the principles of equality and mutual respect of sovereignty.”15 The first Chinese ambassador to Thailand arrived in Bangkok in September 1946, and the Thai-Chinese Friendship Society was established in 1947 with former prime minister Pridi Banomyong as a prominent member. After losing a power struggle with former wartime dictator Phibun Songgram, Pridi would later flee to China and set up a “Free (Greater) Thai Autonomous Region” in Yunnan.16

In 1948, Phibun once again became prime minister of Thailand. When the CCP emerged victorious in China’s long civil war the following year and established the PRC, the ROC government retreated to Taiwan. The ROC closed its five consulates in Thailand, and its embassy in Bangkok lost much of its influence. Nevertheless, Thailand refused to recognize the Communist PRC until 1 July 1975.

In the interim, Sino-Thai relations were fraught with distrust, suspicion, and bloodshed. The PRC rapidly began sponsoring national liberation movements and wars throughout the region. Out of concern for the Communist threat, the Thai government took steps against both Communists and the Chinese minority in general. Hundreds of Chinese union leaders were arrested, and schools and associations were raided.17 By 1949, Thai officials were worried that the PRC would assist Vietnamese and Laotian Communists working with secessionist elements in northeast Thailand and use the 50,000 Vietnamese refugees in Thailand for subversion. Although the PRC protested, the Thai government curbed the activities of ethnic Chinese Communities in Thailand, as most Communists in the country at that time were Chinese.

After the Korean War broke out in August 1950, Thailand be-

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16 Jain, China and Thailand, xiii.
came the second country in Asia to offer ground forces to the UN, which was fighting against PRC- and Soviet-backed North Korean forces. By entering into an economic and military assistance agreement with the United States that year, Thailand clearly aligned itself with the U.S.-led “free world” against the PRC and the Soviet Union. Also in 1950, China Radio International, a PRC state-run radio station, began broadcasting anti-American and pro-PRC propaganda in the Thai language to help lay the foundation for what would become a 30-year civil war waged by the CPT.

Despite a significant international PRC propaganda campaign, aided by former Thai prime minister Pridi, who was then living in exile in China, in 1954 Thailand became a founding member of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization, which was designed to align non-Communist countries to combat the Communist threat.18

PRC propaganda in Thailand during this era focused on themes of anti-Americanism, neutralism, the PRC’s “peaceful intentions” under the “five principles of peaceful co-existence” as espoused at the 1955 Bandung Conference, and formal recognition of the PRC. The Bandung Conference allowed the PRC to commence what might be called an early version of its 1990s-era Charm Offensive as part of its political warfare arsenal.19 Among other activities, a “Thai Peoples’ Mission for the Promotion of Friendship,” led by a former minister and leader of Thailand’s socialist opposition, visited Mao Zedong and PRC premier Zhou Enlai in Beijing in January 1956. Further, the PRC began a “people’s diplomacy” campaign and other efforts to develop foreign trade contacts. One result of these influence operations was a softening of Bangkok’s opposition to recognition of the PRC.20 But that softening would not last long.

While working to cultivate and neutralize Thailand, the PRC dubbed Thailand’s monarchy and military leadership as “fascist reactionaries,” “lackeys of imperialism,” and other pejorative names familiar to those who study terminology employed by the Communist International (Comintern). Other propaganda tactics employed by the PRC were to constantly blame the United States for “inciting Thailand and South Vietnam” against it and to support North Vietnamese attacks against the Thai government regarding the treatment of Vietnamese residents in the kingdom.21

In 1958, Cambodia, with which Thailand shares a long border, shocked Bangkok’s elites by formally recognizing the PRC. Thai

18 Jain, China and Thailand, xiv.
20 Jain, China and Thailand, xiv–xlvii.
21 Jain, China and Thailand, xlix, lxxii.
leaders assumed that the opening of a PRC embassy in the Cambodian capital of Phnom Penh would increase subversive activity in Thailand as well as Cambodia. Their suspicions were justified, as the PRC strengthened its support for the Viet Minh and Pathet Lao Communist forces in Vietnam and Laos. This served as a prelude to a period of intense Sino-Thai hostility that lasted a decade. By 1959, the PRC-initiated “Thai Autonomous People’s Government” in Yunnan was infiltrating northern Thailand and inciting unrest among the population there. As a result, Bangkok banned all trade with and personal travel to the PRC and strengthened relations with the ROC on Taiwan to give its Chinese community an alternate focus of loyalty.

As the PRC-backed Pathet Lao forces seized the eastern half of Laos, Thai leaders worked closely with the United States to fight Communist internal subversion and external aggression in their country. Following Thai-U.S. agreements in May 1962, U.S. military units began being stationed in Thailand to be used primarily for operations against the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam. Predictably, the PRC lambasted Thailand through propaganda organs such as People’s Daily for becoming “an active accomplice of U.S. imperialism in their aggression against the people of Indo-China” and for “interference in Laos’ internal affairs.” The stationing of U.S. forces in Thailand was portrayed by the PRC as American imperialism meant “to occupy Thailand” as well as “a serious threat to the security of China” against which the Chinese people had to react.

A PRC-Backed Guerrilla War in Thailand

In January 1965, PRC foreign minister Chen Yi effectively declared war on Thailand, in the eyes of Thai leaders and key nations supporting Thailand, when he told a visiting European diplomat that he hoped for “a guerilla [sic] war in Thailand within the year.” The Australia-New Zealand-United States (ANZUS) alliance determined that the PRC had identified Thailand as its next target, and fears of a “Chinese Korea-style invasion, most probably knifing through Northern Thailand” became very real.

The PRC and Thailand waged political warfare against each other on propaganda battlefields such as the UN and news media outlets. One of the PRC’s chief propaganda organs was the Voice of

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22 Jain, China and Thailand, li.
23 Jain, China and Thailand, lii-liii.
the People of Thailand radio station, established in Yunnan in 1962. PRC propaganda stressed that Thailand had become “the advance post for U.S. aggression in Indochina,” criticizing Thai military incursions into Laos and Cambodia and its provision of ground, air, and naval units to fight in South Vietnam during the Vietnam War. Thailand’s response to the latter was that it was merely defending “South Vietnam’s rights as well as [its] own vital interest against the encroachments resulting from Communist conspiracies against free nations.”

Meanwhile, the PRC-supported Thai Patriotic Front was established by the CPT in January 1965 to fill the role of the united front in the triangular “party-army-front” strategy. It conducted training in Yunnan camps located about 120 kilometers north of the Thai border and allowed the CPT to increase combat operations against the Thai government. Beijing made no secret of its support for the CPT’s armed struggle, openly congratulating it in its successes through such venues as the *Peking Review* and *People’s Daily*. PRC media outlets also worked to “arouse the masses and develop armed struggle in rural areas.”

Beijing’s target audience for this propaganda included Thailand’s Chinese population. In 1965, roughly half of Bangkok’s population was ethnic Chinese and comprised the largest “overseas Chinese” community in Southeast Asia. While this population posed a serious fifth column threat, Thai officials stressed that it was politics rather than ethnicity that formed the basis of their efforts to cut the CPT off from Thai-Chinese funding and other support. The Thai government implemented some measures, such as requiring that the Thai language be used to teach in Chinese schools and taking down Chinese-language signs in Bangkok’s Chinatown, but it did not apply population control measures, and it even began to allow Thais of Chinese ancestry to enter the Royal Thai Armed Forces.

Thailand did, however, rightfully target the PRC for its hostile actions. As a result of Beijing’s “open aggression, indirect aggression, and subversive activities,” Thailand voted against the PRC’s admission into the UN from 1966 to 1971. By this point, Mao’s Cultural Revolution, in which up to 2 million Chinese reportedly perished, was disrupting the PRC’s foreign policy to a point that would eventually greatly erode its influence within Southeast Asia. But the zeal

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of “cultural revolutionaries” elsewhere in the world nevertheless translated into even more enthusiastic PRC support for Communist revolutionary movements, including those in Thailand.

As part of regional “collective political defense” efforts against increased PRC aggression, Thailand helped found the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1966.\(^{30}\) Subsequent PRC political warfare against ASEAN was based in part on the assertion that the organization was “an instrument fashioned by U.S. imperialism and Soviet revisionism for pursuing neo-colonial ends in Asia.”\(^{31}\) The injection of the term “Soviet revisionism” reflected the then-deepening Sino-Soviet rivalry that would ultimately result in a complete rift between the two major competing Communist systems.

Through 1969, King Bhumipol and the Thai bureaucracy stood united in fighting the Communist insurgency in Thailand and resisting PRC aggression, even as the CPT announced the establishment of the People’s Liberation Army of Thailand (PLAT) that year. The Thais were confident in U.S. support, which was key to the government’s ability to succeed on both military and informational battlefields. At this time, roughly half a million American troops were in Southeast Asia, including some 48,000 operating out of seven airbases in Thailand, and the U.S. Department of State, the U.S. Information Agency, and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) were supporting Thai counterinsurgency operations.\(^{32}\) However, in the United States, a combination of successful political warfare operations conducted by North Vietnam and other nations and organizations fueled legitimate public concern about how the war in Vietnam was being waged. This led to increasing political division, social breakdown, and erosion of public and Congressional support in America for the defense of South Vietnam.

The Nixon Doctrine and Sino-Thai Reassessment
In 1969, newly elected U.S. president Richard M. Nixon announced the Nixon Doctrine. Also known as the Guam Doctrine, the policy principle mandated turning over responsibility for combat operations in Southeast Asia from the United States to its partner nations then at war, albeit with continued American material, training, and other support. Nixon subsequently began a partial withdrawal of U.S. forces from Vietnam and signaled his intent to normalize rela-

\(^{30}\) Zawacki, Thailand, 41.
\(^{31}\) Jain, China and Thailand, lv.
tions with the PRC. In reaction, Thailand’s prime minister Thanom Kittikachorn and his government reassessed their country’s relations with the PRC and began reaching out to Beijing. According to Thanom’s foreign minister, “Communist China will become pivotal to peace, security and freedom in Asia as it turns from internal preoccupations to outside interests and as the United States tries to sneak out of the Asian scene.”

In 1971, Nixon announced he would visit the PRC, a move that “shocked and shook” the Thai government, which had received no forewarning. Further efforts were made to enhance Thai-Sino relations in search of a “peaceful co-existence,” but those efforts were rebuffed by the PRC. During the vote that year for the PRC’s admission to the UN, Thailand offered verbal support for the PRC but ultimately abstained from voting because it wanted to vote separately to keep Taiwan in the UN, though that option was taken off the table.

By 1973, the Thai government publicly announced that its Communist insurgency had been “effectively contained” and offered to trade with the PRC as a way to ease tensions between the two nations and reduce PRC support for the CPT. By the end of the year, an oil deal had been penned, and in 1974 the Thai legislature passed authorization for “normal trade,” which had been prohibited since 1959. However, a brutal and bloody internal crackdown by Thailand’s military rulers in 1973 resulted in 3,000 university students, intellectuals, labor leaders, and others fleeing Bangkok to join CPT ranks in the jungles, forming a united front and providing better leadership and technical capabilities to both the CPT and the PLAT.

Seismic Realignment:
From Hot War to Cold Peace

In June 1975, and Thailand’s prime minister Kukrit Pramoj visited the PRC, and Bangkok established formal relations with Beijing the following month. While normal relations did not lead to an immediate end to PRC support for the CPT, it did lead to Thailand’s trade with the PRC increasing from $4.7 million (USD) in 1974 to $169 million in 1977.

The fall of Saigon in South Vietnam, Phnom Penh in Cambodia, and Vientiane in Laos to Communist forces in April 1975 led to a seis-
mic realignment in Asia. The North Vietnamese victory in the Vietnam War, though supported and applauded by Beijing, proved to be a liability for it as well, since the new Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV) pursued a strengthened relationship with the Soviet Union. To counter the SRV-Soviet alignment and to contest growing concerns about Soviet influence in Asia, Thailand and the PRC aligned more closely together. Among the PRC’s steps taken toward alignment with Thailand by mid-1975 was a promise to stop supporting CPT insurgents.38

While the PRC dealt with a violent leadership transition from Mao to Deng Xiaoping and confronted a hostile Soviet Union and Vietnam, with some irony it encouraged Thailand to keep a U.S. military presence there. The PRC’s rulers saw the United States as essential for regional security—including its own. With Communist victories to the north and east and without knowing how long the Cold War would last, King Bhumibol of Thailand strongly supported continued close relations with the United States.39

Nonetheless, under conditions established by Prime Minister Kukrit, within a year the last American bases in Thailand were returned to the Thais and U.S. operational forces left the country. In yet one more ironic twist, the PRC received credit for ending the Communist insurgency in Thailand that it had helped start and sustained for nearly 30 years.40 Further, Kukrit agreed that Thailand would sever diplomatic ties with Taiwan in support of the PRC’s “One China” principle.41

Following Kukrit’s loss in the 1976 election and a subsequent military coup, Sino-Thai relations again soured. The staunch anti-Communist Thanin Kraivichien was installed as prime minister, and he immediately took steps to reduce interaction with Beijing. This led to an increase in PRC support for the CPT and a resumption of PRC political warfare operations such as anti-Thai radio broadcasts assailing Bangkok’s “reactionary ruling clique” and the expansion of the CPT’s united front to include the Socialist Party of Thailand.42

However, Royal Thai Army general Kriangsak Chamanan replaced Thanin just one year later in 1977. Although anti-Communist, Kriangsak wanted to use the PRC to improve Thai-Cambodian relations in the face of a threatening Vietnam.

38 Zawacki, Thailand, 53.
39 Zawacki, Thailand, 49.
40 Although it claimed to have cut off aid for the CPT, the PRC sustained CPT bases in Laos and Cambodia and continued radio propaganda operations in Yunnan through 1979. It also maintained party-to-party relations between the CCP and CPT.
41 Zawacki, Thailand, 53.
42 Jain, China and Thailand, xi.
Kriangsak met with Deng Xiaoping twice in 1977 and allowed previously banned Chinese-language newspapers in Thailand to begin publication again. He then visited Beijing in March 1978 to sign a trade agreement. There, he was informed that the CCP would continue relations with the CPT but that Beijing considered the Communist insurgency in Thailand to be an “internal problem.” Kriangsak was also asked to join the PRC’s “opposition to imperialism and hegemonism.”

In December 1978, Vietnamese forces invaded Cambodia, then called Democratic Kampuchea, and in January ousted the genocidal PRC-supported, Pol Pot-led Khmer Rouge regime that had taken control three years before. That same month, the PRC and the United States established formal relations, and in February, with Thailand’s support, the PRC invaded Vietnam. Cooperation between Bangkok and Beijing accelerated rapidly, because the Thai government feared its forces would be no match for the Vietnamese. Thai military officers believed that if Vietnamese troops crossed the Thai-Cambodian border in the morning, they would “reach Bangkok in time for lunch.” The PRC invasion was designed to be brief and “teach [Vietnam] a lesson.”

During the Sino-Vietnamese and Cambodian-Vietnamese Wars, the latter of which pushed against Thailand’s eastern border, the Thai government allowed the PRC to use air and land routes across its territory to support Pol Pot’s Cambodian forces, which were also being supported by the CPT. According to Southeast Asia scholar Gregory Vincent Raymond, the Royal Thai Armed Forces supported the Cambodians by “conducting cross-border intelligence gathering missions,” by “initiating and developing contacts with Cambodian and PRC leaders,” and by “channeling significant amounts of military aid to the Khmer Rouge.” He concludes that transforming “what had been a very antagonistic relationship with China into a quasi-alliance against Vietnam [was] Thailand’s most telling and important manoeuvre.”

The PRC made concessions to Thailand to secure its support against Vietnam during the Sino-Vietnamese War. For example, the same PRC political warfare organs that had vilified Royal Thai Government leaders for nearly 30 years as “fascist reactionaries” and “lackeys of imperialism,” including the Peking Review and the People’s

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43 Jain, China and Thailand, ix.
44 Zawacki, Thailand, 99–60.
45 Zawacki, Thailand, 60.
46 Jain, China and Thailand, lxiii.
Daily, now glowingly emphasized Thailand’s readiness “to fight to safeguard its security, sovereignty, and integrity” against Vietnamese aggression. Further, senior PRC officials vowed to support Thailand “in its efforts to protect itself from aggression and expansion,” and asserted that the PRC would place “first priority” on Thailand in its efforts to strengthen its relations with ASEAN nations. Beijing also claimed to shut down its Voice of the People of Thailand and Radio Yunnan radio stations, though other reports contradicted such claims.48

Of greater importance, the ending of Chinese support to the CPT reduced Thailand’s internal security challenges. The PRC vowed to stop providing weapons to the PLAT, and Thai leaders in return continued to allow arms shipments to the Khmer Rouge to pass through Thai territory despite Bangkok’s official stance of “strict neutrality” concerning the fighting in Cambodia. Vietnamese attacks into Thailand in mid-1980 further solidified Sino-Thai relations. Although Thai-U.S. relations revived following these incursions with such cooperation as antitank weapons training and large-scale combined exercises, Thailand also dramatically increased its cooperation with the PRC, and it was ultimately the PRC that was credited with helping block the Vietnamese from conducting a full-scale invasion of Thailand.49

Economic and Political Convergence: The Rise of the Sino-Thais
Through the mid-1980s, Prime Minister Prem Tinsulanonda and the all-important Thai monarchy greatly strengthened relations with one another, which would pay off significantly in the coming decades. Further, Thailand’s ethnic Chinese community began being viewed as the country’s “most valuable economic resource.”50

Although Thailand’s food industry Charoen Pokphand (CP) Group had first established a presence in the PRC in 1949, it was in the early 1980s that the Thai leadership began encouraging larger business expansion into China. Prem tapped the CP Group to help lead the way, and its Thai-Chinese directors gained significant influence in the Thai government after being appointed as advisors to the foreign ministry.51 Through the present day, the CP Group continues to greatly influence Thailand’s government in the interests of

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48 Jain, China and Thailand, lxiv, lxxv.
49 Raymond, Thai Military Power, 163–64.
50 Zawacki, Thailand, 70.
51 Zawacki, Thailand, 70.
its business with the PRC, both directly through such activities as lobbying officials and other business leaders and indirectly through such means of directing advertising purchases.

Of equal importance during this era, Thais of Chinese origin leveraged business connections and their skills to not only influence politics but also become politicians. Chinese-Thai businessmen bought their way into what was dubbed the “Network Monarchy,” a “para-political institution” including the monarchy, the military, and other elites. Thai military officers were placed on boards of directors to curb the influence of Chinese business leaders, but many were co-opted by the very businesses they helped oversee. Other officers, however, resisted PRC business influence, the co-opting of their peers, and the warming of Sino-Thai relations, which ultimately led to the unsuccessful “Young Turks” coup attempt in 1981.

By the end of the 1980s, the PRC had ended CPT radio broadcasts from Yunnan and established a communications link between the People’s Liberation Army and the Royal Thai Supreme Command Headquarters. Senior-level civilian and military official visits between the two nations were routine, and PRC weaponry and munitions, often of dubious quality, were flowing into the Thai military units. Trade protocols calling for the PRC’s import of Thai agricultural products and Thailand’s import of PRC oil and machinery were in place. Although Thai leaders were wary of the PRC’s continued support of the Khmer Rouge in the Cambodian-Vietnamese War and took close note of the CCP’s wonton brutality during the June 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre, Sino-Thai relations continued to improve. Between 1989 and 2001, various Thai leaders sought to balance Thailand’s relations between the United States and the PRC. Chief among them was Chuan Leekpai, who as prime minister sought to maintain good relations with the United States as a “counterbalancing power to an ambitious and expansionist China.”

A military coup in 1991 led to the brutal suppression of political protests the following May and resultant intervention by King Bhumipol himself. Subsequently, Thailand experienced a “Thai Spring,” which spurred the birth of a modern, democratic Thai civil society that did not lend popular support to close relations with the PRC. But the 1997 Asian financial crisis, which began in Thailand, resulted in a dramatic shift in Thailand’s perspectives as to whether the United States or the PRC provided the most enduring friendship and benefit. As Thailand’s economy imploded, the United States of-

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52 Zawacki, Thailand, 68–71.
53 Zawacki, Thailand, 74.
54 Zawacki, Thailand, 77.
fered austerity measures while the PRC provided offers of seed capital, a move that would reap tremendous political dividends several years later.\textsuperscript{55}

While King Bhumipol was suspicious that the PRC had geopolitical designs on Thailand, he allowed his daughter, Crown Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn, to visit the PRC as often as once a month and Queen Sirikit to visit in 2000. Further, Thai citizens of Chinese ancestry, comprising approximately 10–14 percent of the population, continued to advance to previously unachievable levels in business, civil service, and the military through “money politics.” Benjamin Zawacki writes that during this period, Sino-Thais “advanced in prominence and power in Thailand just as China was doing so in the world outside.”\textsuperscript{56}

Regarding money politics, the rich and powerful CP Group, which had investments in every PRC province, assisted in the formation of a new political party in Thailand and lobbied on behalf of the PRC. According to a senior Thai official, the CP Group “was the only company that stood to gain from our close relations with China. It recruited the best brains. Diplomats were working for CP, everyone was working for the China lobby.” One example of the level of interaction between the CP Group and the PRC is that the former assisted the latter in its suppression the Falun Gong spiritual practice in Thailand after the CCP’s campaign against Falun Gong began in 1998.\textsuperscript{57}

The 1997 Financial Crisis and the Rise of Thaksin

The 1997 Asian financial crisis marked a significant turning point in Thai history. The crisis, largely the result of Thailand’s mismanagement of its economy, was pivotal in changing Thai perceptions about the PRC and the United States, for it turned into a regional economic emergency that drew contrasting responses from both nations. Washington and Beijing planted the seeds for their subsequent decline and rise, respectively, in Thailand’s twenty-first-century foreign policy calculation. While the United States was perceived as “dogmatic, arrogant, and wrong,” China offered unconditional assistance. Ultimately, Thais perceived the U.S. response under President William J. “Bill” Clinton to be inappropriate and “too little, too late,”

\textsuperscript{55} Zawacki, Thailand, 77.
\textsuperscript{56} Zawacki, Thailand, 80.
\textsuperscript{57} Zawacki, Thailand, 81–83.
while the PRC’s offer of $1 billion (USD) was perceived as timely and useful—even though the aid never actually materialized.\textsuperscript{58}

The political impact of the PRC’s unconditional-yet-never-fulfilled offer of financial assistance was very significant in Thailand. According to one senior Thai politician, “everybody was saying ‘Oh, thank you China’.” Japan, which actually provided significant help to Thailand, did not receive much public credit, which was perceived to be the result of the PRC’s “clever marketing.” In part because of that perception, Sino-Thais, who were perhaps hit hardest by the crisis, continued to expand their power and influence.\textsuperscript{59}

In February 1999, Thailand and the PRC agreed upon a Sino-Thai “Plan of Action for the 21st Century,” the first such agreement that the PRC would sign with any ASEAN nation. The plan reflected the PRC’s “desire for a decline in American power” and “outlined cooperation in trade and investment, defense and security, judicial affairs, science and technology, diplomacy, and culture.”\textsuperscript{60} By the start of the new millennium, Thai prime minister Chuan Leekpai had facilitated a vast increase in substantive exchanges with the PRC, with more than 1,500 Sino-Thai meetings—the most Thailand had with any other nation—occurring between 1998 and 2000.

Another largely overlooked focus of Sino-Thai interaction during this era is the idea for the Kra Canal. The concept, which has been discussed for hundreds of years, calls for digging a 50- to 100-kilometer canal across Thailand’s narrow Kra Isthmus to connect the Gulf of Thailand to the east with the Andaman Sea to the west. According to Zawacki, the canal would “render ancillary” the Straits of Malacca, thereby reducing the threat that U.S. military forces could pose to PRC energy and trade interests that transit them. From 1997 through the present day, Thai prime ministers have reexamined the feasibility of the concept, with increasing incentives from the PRC that align with its interest in the project.\textsuperscript{61}

In January 2001, Thaksin Shinawatra, a former Royal Thai Police lieutenant colonel from the Thai Rak Thai (Thais Love Thais) Party, which he founded three years earlier, won 41 percent of the ballots cast in Thailand’s general election, securing the largest electoral victory in Thai history. Thaksin was from a wealthy Sino-Thai family, reportedly of Hakka origin.\textsuperscript{62} That September, several commercial airplanes hijacked by Islamofascist terrorists brought down the

\textsuperscript{58} Zawacki, Thailand, 90–92.
\textsuperscript{59} Zawacki, Thailand, 94.
\textsuperscript{60} Zawacki, Thailand, 97.
\textsuperscript{61} Benjamin Zawacki, “America’s Biggest Southeast Asian Ally Is Drifting toward China,” Foreign Policy, 29 September 2017; and Zawacki, Thailand, 100.
\textsuperscript{62} Anderson, “Riddles of Yellow and Red,” 17.
United States’ World Trade Center and part of the Pentagon, initiating America’s lengthy distraction from Asia as it became consumed by its Global War on Terrorism. Both events shaped the increasing tilt of Thailand’s rulers and elites from the United States to the PRC.

Also shaping Thailand’s tectonically shifting landscape at the turn of the twenty-first century was what has been described as a “vacuum of competence” within the U.S. embassy in Bangkok and the U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs in maintaining the Thai-U.S. alliance. This vacuum contrasted greatly with the professional operatives within the PRC’s embassy in Bangkok and its Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Beijing assigned influential senior CCP operatives, most of who spoke fluent Thai, to its diplomatic posts in Thailand. According to former U.S. Ambassador to Thailand Ralph L. Boyce, they did a “masterful job of reaching out to Sino-Thais.” The PRC’s increasingly sophisticated approach to Thailand included soft power tools such as “panda diplomacy,” which involved Beijing gifting giant pandas to Thailand zoos and was very popular with the Thai people.

Prime Minister Thaksin was key to Thailand’s shift to the PRC. Benedict Anderson wrote that he “had become one of Thailand’s richest men thanks to a near-monopolistic mobile-phone concession, which he obtained under the last military regime.” After founding the Thai Rak Thai party, Thaksin “recruited a batch of ex-leftists” who were “eager to become leaders at long last.” In the end, Thaksin would tear Thailand apart and be deposed in a coup, but not before he gave first priority to enhancing relations with the PRC and dramatically shifted Thailand’s strategic focus from the west to the north.

Under Thaksin’s rule, Sino-Thai engagement became more comprehensive and geostrategic, all at the expense of interaction between Thailand and both the United States and Taiwan. As Beijing worked to establish the diplomatic, economic, and propaganda environment for this shift, Thaksin was backed by an increasingly dominant Sino-Thai population, which made up the “critical mass” of his Thai Rak Thai Party. These Sino-Thais focused on their ethnic Chinese identity rather than their “Thai-Chinese” identity as Thailand accepted the narrative that the PRC was to be “most important.”

At a commemoration of the 30th anniversary of Sino-Thai relations, Thaksin boasted that there were more Chinese in his cabinet than Thais. Encouraged and enticed by Beijing, he developed a

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strong strategic relationship with the PRC, designed a new regional architecture that featured the PRC and excluded the United States, and signed an unprecedented Sino-Thai trade agreement in 2003. He also appointed as his first minister of defense the pro-PRC general Chavalit Yongchaiyudh and vastly increased military sales and exchanges with Beijing. The PRC, meanwhile, initiated military training exercises with Thailand, its first with any Southeast Asian country, during the Thaksin era.\(^\text{65}\)

Thaksin’s professed commitment to democracy was limited to his own hold on power. He adopted the “China Model” of an authoritarian government and a “liberal” economy, while Beijing’s influence on his security policies was strong. Thaksin would ultimately “preside over Thailand’s worst human rights record since that of Field Marshal Sarit in 1957–1963,” waging a war on drugs that led to the deaths of at least 2,500 people, most of whom were killed extrajudicially and many of whom were simply political opponents or business competitors. In response to a continued Islamic terrorist insurgency in southern Thailand, the Thais began consulting the PRC on internal security issues as early as 2004, drawing especially from the PRC’s experience repressing Uighurs in western China. Thaksin responded to the Islamic insurgents’ war crimes with war crimes of his own, employing ruthless tactics similar to those used by the PRC, including enforced disappearances, systematic torture, extrajudicial executions, and arbitrary detention. The prime minister attacked individual journalists and the news media in general, initiating a steep decline in press freedom that is seen in all PRC-affiliated regimes.\(^\text{66}\)

On the propaganda front, Beijing dramatically increased its media presence in Thailand during Thaksin’s reign, impacting the nation as well as the larger region. Through its various organs, the CCP’s Propaganda Department developed close relations with Thai media outlets and funded trips for Thai journalists to the PRC, as it did in many other countries. The English-language China Central Television became quite popular in Thailand, and Mandarin-language broadcasts were made readily available. Xinhua News Agency, operating out of Bangkok since 1975, was joined in 2005 by the English-language China Daily newspaper, which established a regional hub there. Shortly thereafter, the People’s Daily newspaper, the Guangming Daily media group, and the China Radio International network were operating out of Thailand. The patterns of news coverage in Thailand shifted accordingly. For example, while PRC

\(^{65}\) Zawacki, Thailand, 105–32.

\(^{66}\) Zawacki, Thailand, 125–29.
“news agencies” routinely ran CCP propaganda regarding the suppression of “splitsists” in Xinjiang and Tibet, Thai media outlets ran similar stories after a PRC-sponsored Thai journalist visited Tibet in 2004.67

In conjunction with these overt intrusions in Thailand by the PRC state-run media, Thai media outlets progressively succumbed to the lure of PRC funding and influence, which was offered both directly and indirectly. Through “carrot and stick” methods directed by PRC-affiliated businesses, for example, Thai media outlets that toed the PRC line received advertising funding from those businesses or the PRC directly, while those that did not were refused any advertising support.68

Thailand’s “China Model”
By the early 2000s, many Thai-Chinese who had refrained from speaking Chinese dialects began using Mandarin publicly, while others sought to learn to speak the language. Chinese schools and associations proliferated, with the assistance of the PRC embassy and consulates. In support of the PRC’s rapidly expanding Confucius Institute language programs, Beijing flooded Thailand with hundreds of professors. Eventually, there would be more Confucius Institutes in Thailand than in all other ASEAN countries combined.69

By the time Royal Thai Army troops rolled through the streets of Bangkok to oust Prime Minister Thaksin in a coup d’état on 19 September 2006, the China Model was thoroughly ingrained in the psyche of competing Thai elites. The People’s Alliance for Democracy (PAD) “yellow shirt” leadership, comprised in part by Maoist guerrilla leaders from the 1970s who admired the PRC, were every bit as enamored with the China Model as were Thaksin’s Thai Rak Thai Party “red shirt” followers. Although it was caught off guard, Beijing assessed that it had nothing to fear from the coup against its most effective Thai partner in modern history. The PRC embassy in Bangkok “advised Beijing that China’s influence in Thailand remains strong for a variety of reasons,” including “growing commercial links, cultural ties, collegial diplomatic relations, and growing military cooperation programs.”70

According to former Thai foreign minister Kasit Piromya, the

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69 Kerry K. Gershaneck, interview with a senior U.S. Department of State official, Bangkok, Thailand, 30 December 2016; and Zawacki, Thailand, 111–16.
PRC began exerting even greater influence around this time by “buying up government and political leadership” and showing increasing sophistication in conducting influence operations, such as providing advisors to Thai businesses. “A lot of PRC students came [to Thailand] to influence the thinking of the Thai populace and build anti-U.S. sentiment,” Kasit stated. “You see this in editorials that appease PRC activities and criticize American and Western behavior.”

The Role of the United States

The only viable counter to the dramatic increase of PRC influence in Thailand during this period was the United States. As elites across Thailand’s political spectrum embraced the China Model and its implicit authoritarianism, American leadership routinely failed to act effectively.

In a pattern repeated all too often during the past two decades, the United States was ill-prepared to identify and counter PRC political warfare and largely failed to recognize the rapidly shifting ground beneath them. Two U.S. ambassadors were knowledgeable of the country, but three others were considered “out of their professional depth.” All were left adrift policy-wise, while sensitive Wikileaks cables that were leaked further damaged trust. The influence of Thailand’s king, the most steadfast American ally in Southeast Asia for seven decades, gave way to factions that favored the PRC.

Ambassador Darryl N. Johnson, who served in Thailand from 2001–4, brought great cultural understanding to the post but displayed “surprisingly limited” appreciation for the PRC’s increasing power and influence. Compounding this, the U.S. embassy closed its consulates in northern and southern Thailand. The U.S. Information Service, with its counterpropaganda mandate, had been closed in 1997, and there were far fewer seasoned Thailand hands assigned to the American embassy. Consequently, the embassy’s view toward Thailand became “centralized” and “myopic.” While Ambassador Ralph L. Boyce, who succeeded Johnson from 2005–7, had exceptional Thai language ability and “strong connections with the military, Privy Council, business leaders, academics, and politicians from all sides,” he was hamstrung by narrow-minded State Department direction and a staff that did not possess his depth.

This lack of institutional strength and inability to focus on the

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71 Kasit Piromya, interview with the author, Bangkok, Thailand, 1 May 2018, hereafter Kasit interview.
72 Benjamin Zawacki, interview with the author, 4 April 2016, hereafter Zawacki interview.
73 Zawacki, Thailand, 147.
PRC’s rapidly escalating influence toward Thailand would continue during the tenure of Ambassador Kristie A. Kenney, who served from 2011–14. In a speech given in Honolulu, Hawaii, in 2013, she admitted to a “lack of energy” in the alliance and to the fact that relations between Thailand and the United States would “never be the same.” When asked what steps she was taking to improve the relationship, she did not offer an answer. Kenney’s vision of public diplomacy was perhaps hampered by the increasingly troubled political breakdown in Thailand, but it was perceived as weak. Meanwhile, her PRC counterpart was speaking in public about $12.5 billion (USD) railway development deals. During Kenney’s tenure, influential Thais concluded that the United States had lost the ability to “connect, explain, and push a complicated set of interests, rather than only the security interests shared during the Cold War.” As a result, the U.S. relationship with Thailand was “slipping without any good coordination or good sense of direction.”

U.S. presidents George W. Bush and Barack H. Obama paid varying degrees of attention to Thailand during their administrations, but even with Bush designating Thailand as a “major non-NATO ally” in 2003 and Obama paying a highly publicized visit to the country in 2012, their actions seemed insufficient. An issue that drew special attention was Obama’s “pivot”—later called a “rebalance”—to Asia in 2012. The president’s move was an appropriate response to an evolving world situation, particularly with an increasingly threatening PRC. However, it was never backed by substantial security, economic, or political investment. In reality, it was the PRC which “pivoted” in response to Obama’s “non-pivot.”

A significant event occurred in another Southeast Asia country in 2012 that severely damaged Thai perceptions of the value of the Kingdom’s alliance with Washington. This was the Scarborough Shoal incident of April–June 2012. The shoal, 193 kilometers west of Subic Bay, is contested by many claimants including the PRC and the Philippines, but the Philippines held effective control in late May 2012. When Chinese vessels were discovered fishing illegally there, Manila responded, which ultimately led to a lengthy standoff with a fleet of PRC maritime enforcement vessels and PLA Navy vessels. The PRC employed economic coercion as well, slowing entry of Philippine agricultural products to China and drastically reducing the number of Chinese tourists allowed to visit the Philippines. After the U.S. Department of State brokered a compromise between the PRC

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75 Zawacki, Thailand, 148.
76 Zawacki, Thailand, 194–95.
and the Philippines and both sides pulled back, the PRC immediately ignored the agreement and abruptly seized the Shoal. Philippine president Benigno Simeon Cojuangco Aquino III flew to Washington to personally request the help of President Barack H. Obama, but received no specific statements of support. The PRC seized sovereign rights at Scarborough Shoal from a U.S. treaty ally without firing a shot, and all Southeast Asian nations took close note.

The head of the PRC’s Leading Group that orchestrated the seizure was at that time not well-known in the West: a man named Xi Jinping. This event made him a national hero just when he most needed the political legitimacy. The acquiescence of the United States became a significant turning point—the real “pivot”—for Xi and his vision to “restore” China’s territorial claims and destroy the system of alliances that had long contained its expansionism. While the Scarborough seizure was downplayed by the Obama administration and treated as a minor fisheries dispute, Chinese scholars recognized the significance of Xi’s template for mooting U.S. alliances by undercutting confidence in the agreements, calling it the “Scarborough Model.” The senior Thai civilian and military officials with whom the author worked at the Royal Thai Military Academy and Thammasat University in subsequent years, many of whom were pro-American, would refer to the Scarborough Model as a compelling reason why Thailand must focus on improving relations with Beijing and away from an unreliable Washington.

This inability or unwillingness on the part of U.S. diplomats to pay attention to PRC political warfare in Thailand continued after Kenny’s departure in November 2014. A subsequent American chargé d’affaires confidently asserted during an interview with this author that PRC political warfare in Thailand “is not a problem,” and the real threat was “Russian political inference.”

The 2014 Coup and Another Tectonic Shift

Thailand’s shift into China’s growing sphere of influence and away from that of the United States continued unabated under the five prime ministers who succeeded Thaksin, including Thaksin’s sister Yingluck Shinawatra, military leaders, and members of the main

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79 Gershaneck, discussions with Thai and foreign academics; and Kerry K. Gershaneck, discussions with Thai military officers, Thailand, 2013–18.
80 Gershaneck, interview with a senior U.S. Department of State official.
opposition party. By 2012, the PAD routinely touted the PRC’s anti-American propaganda by claiming the United States was attempting to overthrow the Thai monarchy, was hoping “to create instability so that it can install its military bases to block China’s influence,” and had developed space weapons that could cause natural disasters, which forced the PLA “to hold talks with its Thai counterparts.”

Perhaps coincidentally, the People’s Daily, the official newspaper of the CCP, established its first “overseas” edition in Thailand in 2012. It was launched with great fanfare, as the inauguration event in Bangkok was attended by more than 300 representatives from Thai and PRC academic, business, cultural, and political circles.

In 2013, Thailand’s Democrat Party, in an apparent bid to not be outdone by the PAD in making anti-American allegations, imitated a PRC propaganda narrative attacking the United States. The party accused the United States of conspiring with Thai government officials to establish a U.S. naval base in exchange for better trade deals. This occurred as Thailand and the PRC completed their first Sino-Thai Strategic Dialogue. Thailand continued to act on behalf of PRC interests that year, when, for example, it interceded with ASEAN on behalf of Beijing to separate the South China Sea dispute from the wider ASEAN-PRC relationship. Further, Thailand became increasingly enthralled with high-speed rail and other plans, such as the Kra Canal concept, that benefit the PRC’s Belt and Road initiative.

In the March 2014 parliamentary elections, “78 percent of the seats in Thailand’s parliament were occupied by ethnic Chinese, even though they accounted for just 14 per cent of the population.”

On 7 May 2014, after months of mass protests, violence, and political and legal maneuverings, Thai prime minister Yingluck Shinawatra was removed from her post after Thailand’s constitutional court found her guilty of legal violations. A week later, the Royal Thai Armed Forces declared martial law. After General Prayut Chan-ocha, commander in chief of the Royal Thai Army, was unable to obtain an agreement with legislators on a way to end long-standing violence and demonstrations in Bangkok, he led a coup against the government on 22 May. Unlike 2006, it was the U.S. embassy that was caught by surprise this time. Subsequent failures by both Thai and American politicians and diplomats led to a severe rift between

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81 Zawacki, Thailand, 289.
83 Zawacki, Thailand, 289–91.
Thailand and the United States that amounted to a significant geopolitical victory for the PRC.\(^8\)

As the United States condemned the coup according to its law and traditions, which was expected by the Thai military junta leaders, it did so in inept and inexperienced ways. According to one U.S. State Department official, this amateurish response “took a lot of our closest friends, people who had been admirers of the U.S. role in Thailand for the last 30 or 40 years, aback.” Conversely, the PRC ambassador to Thailand met with the junta leaders in early June and assured them of the PRC’s commitment to a good relationship, while Prayut, who had become prime minister on 22 May, gave a public speech in which he stated his commitment to “strategic partnership ‘at all levels’ with China.”\(^8\)

As noted by Thammasat University’s Thitinan Pongsudhirak, “Washington’s hardline reaction in 2014 was so conspicuous, Beijing’s embrace of the coup-makers became that much more salient. As the chorus of Western criticism against the junta gathered sound and fury, Thailand’s top brass sought and received succor from Beijing.”\(^8\) The PRC continued to exploit the Thai coup and American missteps, both real and alleged, as the junta accelerated trade and other ties with Beijing. Prime Minister Prayuth insisted that “Thailand remains committed as ever to its strategic partnership ‘at all levels’ with China.”\(^8\) Thailand’s civic and other organizations chimed in, supporting Beijing’s narratives and lambasting American “colonialism” and the United States’ response to the coup.\(^8\)

After Ambassador Kenney left her post in Thailand in November 2014, it took the United States nearly a year to replace her. Thailand and the PRC read much in the inability of the Obama administration to fulfill this most basic requirement at such a critical juncture. Since the 2014 coup, Sino-Thai engagement at the political, economic, military and security, educational, and cultural levels increased dramatically.

By 2017, the cumulative impact of PRC political warfare and other actions toward Thailand had produced an outcome unthinkable during the height of the Cold War: the majority of Thai military officers perceived the PRC, not the United States, to be Thailand’s most useful and reliable ally. This finding is of massive significance.

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\(^8\) Zawacki interview; and Zawacki, *Thailand*, 293.
\(^8\) Zawacki, *Thailand*, 293–94.
In the modern Thai state since 1932, the military forms a central pillar of governance and has often been the government’s most important political actor. It has also been one of the most pro-American factions of the Thai government because of its close working relationship with the U.S. military, which includes its use of common doctrine, weapons, and equipment and extensive education in the United States.

An Australian National University report for the U.S. Department of Defense, conducted during three years and surveying approximately 1,800 Thai military officers and defense officials, indicates a stunning shift in Thai perceptions toward the United States and the PRC. While the Thai military “still places great store on the United States for security” and prefers the use of English language and American military doctrine and procedures, the PRC has eclipsed the United States in influence and in terms of perceived power. The report notes that “Thai historical memory omits U.S. protection and largesse during the Cold War” and “downplays hostile Sino-Thai relations when China actively supported armed insurgents of the Communist Party of Thailand.” Equally disturbing is that despite those Thai officials’ “unease about China’s growing military capabilities” and views that “the U.S. security guarantee is still important for Thailand, there is significant ambivalence to the United States.” Offering a striking testament to the power of the PRC political warfare narrative and the failure of the United States and Thailand to properly reply, the respondents judged the military threat from the United States as greater than any other great power, including the PRC.90

Thailand’s prime minister Prayuth Chan-ocha confirmed the tectonic shift of Thailand’s relations with China and the United States in a June 2018 interview with Time. “The friendship between Thailand and China has been over thousands of years, and with [the United States] for around 200 years,” he said. “China is the number one partner of Thailand, along with other countries in the second and third place like the U.S. and others.”91

Thailand, according to former Foreign Minister Kasit, prides itself on its Bamboo Diplomacy, balancing foreign nations and “bending with the wind.” Right now, he says, the strong wind is blowing from Beijing.92

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90 John Blaxland and Greg Raymond, Tipping the Balance in Southeast Asia: Thailand, the United States and China (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic & International Studies; Canberra, Australia: Strategic & Defence Studies Centre, Australian National University, 2017), 3–6.
92 The term Bamboo Diplomacy refers to a flexible foreign policy. Kasit interview.
The following analysis is a detailed examination of current People’s Republic of China (PRC) political warfare operations directed against Thailand, including its goals, objectives, strategies, tactics, and themes. Much of it is based on extensive discussions between this author and current and former Thai and
U.S. officials, academics, and journalists, many of whom agreed to be interviewed on the condition that they not be identified by name or position. Each interviewee was asked a series of questions, their answers to which are summarized below. This analysis is also based on the examination of many documents, books, and reports cited herein, as well as on this author’s own personal experience while working in Thailand for more than six years at Thammasat University, the Royal Thai Military Academy, and the Royal Thai Naval Academy.

PRC Goals and Strategies for Conducting Political Warfare against Thailand
The PRC’s chief political warfare goal is to ensure that the Thai government is a compliant, reliable, and supportive ally. Strategies include:

- Employing traditional united front operations, liaison work, and other political warfare tools in conjunction with violence, economic pressure, military intimidation, and diplomacy as needed.
- Engaging Thailand on all fronts—including its economy, politics, diplomacy, military, monarchy, and membership in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)—both comprehensively and concomitantly, so that ebbs in any one area are offset by flows in others.
- Utilizing themes that exploit historical ethnic, ideological, trade, and security ties, as well as highlighting the “inevitable PRC victory bandwagon” that suggests it is best to join the PRC since it is now in its strongest position and the United States is growing weaker and increasingly irrelevant and unreliable.
- Encouraging Thailand’s rulers to adopt authoritarian governance based on the PRC model, to include resistance to “corrupt western ideals” such as democracy, freedom of the press, and freedom of expression.

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1 Kasit Piromya, interview with the author, Bangkok, Thailand, 1 May 2018, hereafter Kasit interview. Some Thais argue that the PRC’s actual goal is to make Thailand a vassal state or even southern province, as they perceive Cambodia and Laos to currently be, but Kasit believes that the PRC understands the latent anti-Chinese sentiment in Thailand and is therefore not striving to make Thailand a vassal state.
Through increased military engagement and sales, relegating U.S. military presence irrelevant and persuading Thailand to support the PRC’s efforts to push the United States from the region.²

Desired Outcomes of PRC Political Warfare in Thailand

Thailand becomes essentially a tributary state in full compliance with PRC strategic goals and supportive of PRC diplomatic, security, and economic objectives regarding ASEAN, the South China Sea, and other issues. Specifically, the PRC seeks to ensure that:

- Thailand offers its support or neutrality on contentious issues such as the PRC’s propaganda campaign to counter international outrage over its role in the COVID-19 pandemic and disputes in the Indian Ocean and East and South China Seas, its adherence to the PRC’s “One China” policy calling for the absorption of Taiwan and control of Tibet and Hong Kong, and its compliance regarding the PRC’s use of the Upper Mekong River and its regional Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).
- Thailand acts as an “enforcer” for the PRC and assists PRC political warfare efforts. If Thailand’s direct support is not feasible, then it will at least offer no resistance or interference.
- The Thailand-United States alliance is split completely.³
- Thailand supports the PRC achieving unchallenged political, military, economic, diplomatic, and cultural dominance throughout the region.

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² Kasit interview.
³ Kasit interview. While Kasit believes that the PRC wants to minimize the Thailand-United States alliance rather than completely terminate it, others argue that the destruction of American alliances in the Asia-Pacific region has long been a goal of PRC foreign and security policy.
Themes and Audiences of PRC Political Warfare in Thailand

The PRC’s primary political warfare themes include the following:

- The PRC is a nonthreat and a noncompetitor, but rather a partner in economic growth, to Thailand.
- The Chinese and Thai people are more than mere friends—they are as close as family.
- The PRC is strong, while the United States is weak and undependable.
- “Asia is for Asians,” as exemplified by the PRC, while archaic western values do not apply in the region.4
- The political and economic policies of the “China Model” should be adopted by Thailand as a “Thai Model.”

The PRC’s primary audiences in Thailand include national- and local-level elected officials, royal family members who are close to Beijing, senior military officials, the nation’s privy council, and elites across all sectors who are of Sino-Thai ethnicity. Secondary audiences comprise influential journalists and social media users as well as academics, while tertiary audiences include students and average Thai citizens. It is interesting to note that the PRC does not seem to place much emphasis on religious leaders, despite the strong influence of Buddhism in Thailand.

Tools, Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures for PRC Political Warfare in Thailand

China specialist Peter Mattis notes that the PRC uses many actions to “influence and shape the world, and Beijing leverages all means of national power to do so. Diplomatic and economic tools are at least as much of the party’s toolkit as united front work and propaganda.”5

This is a form of total war that employs active measures such as violence and other forms of coercive, destructive attacks.

Below is a brief overview of some of the political warfare activities that the PRC uses to shape Thailand. These examples are provided to demonstrate that even within a country that is quite favorably disposed toward the PRC, the PRC still wages political warfare operations on a routine basis. The outcome in Thailand is similar to that of many other countries throughout the world: the Thai govern-

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4 Kasit interview.
ment routinely submits to PRC demands for compliance across all spectrums, Thai academics avoid topics that Beijing deems sensitive, Thai students are intimidated from speaking freely, Thai media outlets and scholars self-censor themselves, Thai business and influential institutions curb their speech to placate the PRC, and the nearly 70 million Thai citizens are subjected daily to PRC propaganda disseminated through online, television, print, and radio media outlets run by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

Censorship
The Thai government’s well-documented willingness to censor on behalf of the PRC includes supporting the PRC narrative regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, as reported by Sophie Boisseau du Rocher of the French Institute of International Relations. Boisseau du Rocher writes of concerns that “angry voices emanating from civil society toward (the government) that . . . failed to take strong action to fight the virus (in a bid not to offend China, among other reasons) may end up in jails for ‘subversion’ or being sued with repressive methods on charges of conspiracy or incitement.”6 She also notes that, in support of the PRC propaganda campaign to blame countries other than China for the pandemic outbreak, “Thailand was first to blame ‘dirty Caucasian tourists’ for infecting Thailand ‘because they don’t shower and do not wear masks’.”7

The Thai government’s censorship for the PRC is also reflected in such wide-ranging actions as the detention and expulsion of Hong Kong democracy activist Joshua Wong in October 2016 and Prime Minister Prayut Chan-ocha’s threat to ban the film Operation Mekong (2016), which depicts a drug-running-related massacre involving murky PRC-affiliated organizations and Thai military forces, if it included scenes that would offend Beijing or the Thai junta in any way.

Thailand has arguably copied PRC censorship and restrictions on freedom of speech through such vehicles as the internet “Single Portal” (similar to the PRC’s “Golden Shield Project,” colloquially known as the “Great Firewall”) and reeducation camps for reporters and others who cover issues that displease the junta, as well as intimidation of journalists to force them to self-censor.8 Some publications, such as The Bangkok Post and The Nation, retain some editorial freedom regarding the PRC, but that latitude appears to be disappearing.

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8 Kerry K. Gershaneck, discussions with Thai and foreign academics, Thailand, 2013–18.
Academics routinely self-censor because they are often under pressure from their administration and other faculty members, as well as the PRC and Sino-Thais, to do so. The PRC embassy in Bangkok does not hesitate to try to censor criticism from current or former senior Thai officials. For example, after a former Thai foreign minister gave a speech in Taiwan regarding the prospects of PRC regional domination in October 2017, the PRC embassy lambasted Thailand’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs to force it to silence the official.

**Intimidation**

PRC agents and those acting on behalf of the PRC quietly intimidate Thai academics and other citizens, who then act as de facto PRC agents of influence. One public example of this observed by the author was an emotional insistence by a senior Huachiew Chalermprakiet University law professor during a June 2016 forum at Thammasat University that Thailand must support the PRC’s claim to most of the South China Sea. The professor’s rationale was that they had been informed by a PRC representative that if Thailand did not support the PRC’s position in the South China Sea, the PRC might choose to claim the Gulf of Thailand and designate it a “core interest,” due to China’s historic presence there.

Other Thai scholars report that PRC academics have told them that Thailand must support the PRC plan for the Kra Canal across Thailand’s Kra Isthmus, as it is important to both PRC trade and security and offers a way for the PRC to punish Singapore for its failure to support PRC positions. Those Thai scholars understood such comments to imply that the PRC could inflict similar punishment on Thailand if it failed to support PRC policies and actions.

**Detention, Expulsion, and Kidnapping**

The Thai government is reportedly complicit in blacklisting, expelling, and assisting in the abduction of PRC critics. One prominent example is the detention and expulsion of Hong Kong activist Joshua Wong from Thailand at PRC request in October 2016, when Wong had been invited to speak at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok. Two days after his expulsion from the country, Thai authorities allowed Wong to make a Skype call to a Chulalongkorn University audience—but only if he agreed to not criticize the PRC in the call. Armed police were in the room filled with students when

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9 Gershaneck, discussions with Thai and foreign academics.
10 Kasit interview.
11 Gershaneck, discussions with Thai and foreign academics.
Wong called to ensure his compliance. Other examples include the case of a dissident Hong Kong bookseller, a naturalized Swedish citizen, who was abducted in Thailand and taken to the PRC for trial, as well as ethnic Uighurs whose forced return to the PRC was condemned by Amnesty International. Regarding the bookseller, one of five individuals allegedly abducted by the PRC from the same bookstore, Human Rights Watch commented that “China’s willingness to snatch people in Thailand and Hong Kong with the apparent involvement of their governments adds to the concerns.”

Many critics of the PRC in Thailand today are convinced that there are “Chinese agents everywhere” and that they are not safe. This indicates a very significant psychological warfare victory for the PRC, as it sends the strong message: “If you displease us, Thailand is with us, and we can get you any place and any time.”

**Bribery, Blackmail, and Extortion**

Allegations of and questions about corruption regarding Thailand’s $1.2 billion (USD) purchase of a Chinese **Yuan**-class ST26-T submarine in 2017 have often been made on social and news media, as well as in private conversations between this author and various sources. While there is ample anecdotal evidence regarding the impact of bribery, blackmail, and extortion as tools of PRC political warfare operations in Thailand, this information is not used in this book for numerous reasons. These reasons include privacy issues and legal ramifications under Thailand’s severe Article 44, *lèse majeste* (insulting a ruler; treason), and other laws that have been used to prosecute journalists, researchers, and citizens alike.

**News Media: Coopting, Manipulation, and Ownership**

The PRC has assumed an increasingly dominant position in Thai, Chinese, and English-language news media regarding content and perspective in what has been dubbed “the Sinicization of Thai news.” The PRC’s news dominance precedes the COVID-19 pandemic but, as one news outlet reported, “Thai media is outsourcing much of its coronavirus coverage to Beijing.”

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15 Gershaneck, discussions with Thai and foreign academics.
PRC news media expanded its already imposing presence in Thailand during 2019, the year was christened by the Thai government as the “ASEAN-China Year of Media Exchanges.” Since then, the PRC “has been making tremendous inroads into Thai-language news and is beginning to make its appearance in English-language Thai newspapers.” At least 12 of Thailand’s most popular news agencies are provided, free of charge, between 60 and 100 articles from China Xinhua News, all translated into Thai. Readers often do not realize these articles are provided by the PRC. Of even greater impact, the Thai “China Xinhua News” Facebook page has 70 million followers.

Thai news media personnel are often afforded all-expenses-paid trips to the PRC, a program not unlike those run by other countries’ embassies. In conjunction with grooming Thai reporters and editorial staff, PRC propaganda organs purchase newspaper inserts with themes such as Sino-Thai friendship, increasing infrastructure and military cooperation between the two nations, and the growing importance of PRC tourism and investment in Thailand. The PRC embassy also offered grants to Thai media organizations, with conditions that the recipients attend workshops and training on topics important to China.

A weekly China Daily insert in the Thai newspaper The Nation in October 2018, for example, led its front page with a story headlined “Resisting Risks from the U.S.: Improper U.S. Practices Escalate Trade Tension with China and Pose Uncertainties for Asia’s Healthy Growth.” The 31-page insert was filled with anti-American articles whose headlines included “Beijing Report Defends Trade Practices,” “Tariffs Harmful, Says Former U.S. Envoy,” “U.S. Levies Challenge Global Commerce,” “America Reverting to Its Past, says Jacques,” and “U.S. Retailers Brace for an Uncertain Future.” Along with that heavy dose of propaganda, the insert was filled with fluff pieces on Chinese art, culture, and dining.

The same issue of The Nation also included a full-page story headlined “Trump’s ‘Meddling’ Claim Plays into China’s Trade Narrative,” which had originally run in The Wall Street Journal several days before. It read, “By claiming without offering proof that China is interfering in the U.S. midterm elections, President Trump not only escalated bilateral tensions, but he also provided ammunition to senior Communist Party members who say his real intention is to stop China’s ascent as a global power.”

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18 Chia, “Thai Media Is Outsourcing Much of Its Coronavirus Coverage to Beijing and That’s Just the Start.”
19 Gershaneck, discussions with Thai and foreign academics.
ysis” section also ran a quarter-page article under the column “What Others Say” titled, “America’s Unilateral Trade Policies Could Slow Growth.” Unsurprisingly, the source is the *China Daily.*

The PRC embassy in Bangkok and its consulates in the cities of Chiang Mai, Songkhla, and Khon Kaen have engaged in increasingly sophisticated media relations activities during the past decade, taking direct action to persuade or punish outlets that fail to heed the PRC line. For example, PRC embassy officials often contact the Press Council of Thailand and Thai Journalists Association to push Thai journalists to cover certain topics in the manner the PRC wants, such as publishing stories that compliment Thailand or criticize the PRC’s foes. Since 2018, however, the PRC embassy has shifted tactics, adopting a softer approach in its engagement with the Thai media. While still demanding that Thai journalists follow PRC narratives, the embassy has established a formal public affairs section, similar in name to its U.S. counterpart, and is beginning to award grants with no conditions attached. One such grant, which focuses on Chinese society and culture, is for more than 1 million baht ($31,350 USD) and allows the recipient to choose which topics to cover and select which cities to visit.

Ironically, China Radio International, a PRC state-run radio station, still broadcasts in the Thai language, as it has since it first began propaganda operations against the Royal Thai government and the United States in 1950. However, the station is now dedicated to “introducing China and the world to the Thai” and “promoting understanding and friendship between Chinese and Thai people.” Its current news reporting features programs developed in cooperation with Thai broadcasting stations at such education institutions as the prestigious Chulalongkorn University, Naresuan University, and Mahasarakham University.

Regarding media manipulation through funding and advertising, the PRC freely donates funds to organizations such as the Thai Journalists Association. There are also strong indications that PRC-affiliated business interests use advertising funding as a “carrot and stick” technique to ensure that no criticism of the PRC exists in Thai-language and other media. Reported tactics by major Thai business groups with deep relations to PRC business and government organizations include offering to invest in advertising in news media

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21 Gershaneck, discussions with Thai and foreign academics.  
22 Gershaneck, discussions with Thai and foreign academics.  
outlets that propagate PRC narratives and threatening to pull advertising from outlets that do not self-censor on behalf of the PRC.24

In 2016, the PRC video game conglomerate Tencent purchased one of Thailand’s biggest news and entertainment websites, Sanook.com. While the website’s content remains largely Thai-oriented and there appears to be no overt focus on changing Thai perspectives of the PRC, its otherwise sensationalist news coverage carefully avoids any coverage that could be perceived as “anti-China.”25

Conversely, some Thai media outlets are overtly owned by the PRC. One popular website, Thaizhonghua.com, serves as the media outlet for the Thailand China Information company. The majority of the website’s articles are published by Thailand China Network’s editorial office and Thaizhonghua’s parent agency, China Daily, which is the largest Chinese-language newspaper in Thailand. According to Thaizhonghua, the China Daily has long-term cooperative relationships with the PRC-run Xinhua News Agency and China News Service, as well as with mainstream Thai news media outlets.26

Propaganda and Psychological Warfare as Education and Cultural Programs

The PRC also uses education as an important weapon to exert its influence over Thailand. While Confucius Institutes, Chinese Students and Scholars Associations (CSSA), and Chinese Cultural Centers are chief among these educational tools, it should also be noted that Sino-Thai military education programs have expanded quite significantly since the 2014 coup in Thailand. All have enormous impact on the attitudes and frames of reference of future generations of Thai military leaders, some of whom will inevitably go on to lead the country.27

Confucius Institutes, established to promote the spread of Chinese culture and language in foreign nations throughout the world, are ultimately tools of political warfare. Thailand hosts 26 of their number, the most of any country in Asia and more than all ASEAN nations combined. Some reports claim that there are more than 7,000 volunteers in Thailand since the program’s inception there in 2006. The funding comes from Hanban, a PRC government entity. According to U.S. intelligence reports, the program limits discussion on topics that the PRC finds sensitive, such as the 1989 Tianan-
men Square massacre or the current political status of Tibet. The PRC uses Confucius Institutes to instill pro-China viewpoints in the minds both the students as well as the professors molding the thinking of Thailand's future leaders. Further, the program has been characterized as “an avenue to covertly influence public opinion and teach half-truths designed to present Chinese history, government or official policy in the most favorable light.”

While Confucius Institute language classes are quite popular in Thailand, scholarships are the program’s chief appeal. Each year, many Thai students apply via Thailand's Confucius Institutes to the China Scholarship Council for scholarships that will allow them to study in the PRC. As a result, Thailand ranks highly among foreign countries sending students to China. The PRC also awards annual grants to hundreds of Thai education officials to conduct classroom observations and visits in China. Consequently, the students and officials return to Thailand inculcated with PRC doctrine and perspective, effectively propagandized.

Confucius Institutes also sponsor various events across Thailand, such as the Chinese Cultural Festival held at Chiang Mai University in October 2018. Students from 16 Chiang Mai-area schools participated in the event, which consisted of a question-and-answer session, calligraphy lessons, and group performance competitions related to Chinese language and culture.

According to the Global Times and VOA, approximately 30,000 Chinese students studied in Thailand in 2016 and 2017; this number is twice the 2012 enrollment. These students are perceived as an “extension of Chinese soft power” and usually belong to CSSAs, which administer Chinese students and scholars studying outside of the PRC at foreign colleges, universities, and other education institutions. Many CSSAs are controversial, since there is a clear line of funding and authority between them and PRC embassies.

Investigations conducted by the New York Times and Foreign Policy magazine have found that PRC consular officials “communicate regularly with CSSAs, dividing the groups by region and assigning each region to an embassy contact who is responsible for relaying safety information—and the occasional political directive—to chapter presidents.” Moreover, several CSSAs “explicitly vet their members along ideological lines, excluding those whose views do not

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30 Gershaneck, discussions with Thai and foreign academics.
align with CCP core interests.” CSSAs exert direct political pressure, as well. For example, Chinese students studying in the United States have been told that candidates for upcoming CSSA elections who are CCP members would “receive preferential consideration.”

CSSAs have also worked “in tandem with Beijing to promote a pro-Chinese agenda and tamp down anti-Chinese speech on Western campuses.” Such organizations have protested a presentation about human rights violations in the PRC, harassed speakers and fellow students regarding positions on such issues as Tibet’s sovereignty and the PRC’s repression of Uighurs in East Turkestan, and attempted to censor comments at forums about relations between the PRC and Hong Kong. In some instances, members of CSSAs and other PRC student groups have even been accused of spying for Beijing. There is evidence that those groups work very similarly in Thailand.

Finally, there are a growing number of Thai-Chinese cultural centers in Thailand that are supported by the PRC government and Chinese business groups. The Chinese Cultural Center in Bangkok, established by the PRC in 2012, was the first of its kind in Southeast Asia. These centers host cultural activities that are designed to enhance Thai appreciation of the PRC. While there is nothing inherently wrong with celebrating culture, experience shows that such institutions are frequently used on behalf of larger PRC political warfare and influence operations that are detrimental to the interests of their host nations.

High-level Visits, Conferences, and Spies
As noted previously, high-level visits between Chinese and Thai officials are common now, having increased significantly since May 2014. These occasions include trips by Thai prime minister Prayut to Beijing and PRC president Xi Jinping to Bangkok, as well as routine visits made by many senior Thai officials to the PRC. Visits have also extended to other bilateral elements, including cabinet-level officials of nearly all Thai and PRC ministries, heads of businesses and banks, educators, and journalists.

It can be argued that this is simply normal diplomacy and not necessarily political warfare. However, these types of visits are the

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34 Gerry Shih and Emily Rauhala, “Angry over Campus Speech by Uighur Activist, Students in Canada Contact Chinese Consulate, Film Presentation,” Washington Post, 14 February 2019.
36 Gershaneck, discussions with Thai and foreign academics.
37 Tungkeunkunt, “China’s Soft Power in Thailand.”
heart of united front work, and they are certainly viewed in Beijing as indicators of the success of political warfare operations in Thailand. Visitors routinely appeal to shared economic interests and a common heritage and kinship between the Thai and Chinese people. For example, during a November 2018 visit to Thailand by Zhang Chunxian, vice chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress, Zhang repeatedly highlighted the “concrete benefits” that Thailand has received from the BRI and “encouraged Overseas Chinese to take the ‘proximity advantage’ of working with the PRC on it,” according to the Thai-language World Daily newspaper.38

Further, when PRC foreign minister Wang Yi held “strategic consultations” with Thai foreign minister Don Pramudwinai in Chiang Mai in February 2019, Wang stated that “China and Thailand are comprehensive strategic cooperative partners” who can “enhance strategic communication, boost strategic cooperation and work together to make [a] positive contribution to [the] peace, stability and development of the region.” He also said the PRC “is willing to join hands with Thailand to push forward the connection between the [BRI] and ASEAN’s overall plan on connectivity, promote regional connectivity and sustainable development, successfully hold the China-ASEAN Year of Media Exchanges, lift the level of defense and security cooperation and press forward the development of China-ASEAN relations and the cooperation in East Asia to achieve greater progress.” During these strategic consultations, Wang invited Thai prime minister Prayut to attend the second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in Beijing, stating that he hoped Prayut’s visit “will serve as an opportunity for the two countries to further boost mutually beneficial and friendly cooperation.”39

Similarly, conferences and other forums held at major Thai education institutions and universities routinely reflect predominantly PRC participation and perspectives. Often there is a large official PRC contingent, with few or no American or other countervailing voices invited to attend. A think tank called the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations funds, coordinates, and participates in many of these military and academic conferences as well as other forums and exchanges.40 That think tank, however, is an arm of the Ministry of State Security, a prime PRC espionage organization that is noted as much for its worldwide disinformation and

38 Gershaneck, discussions with Thai and foreign academics.
40 Gershaneck, discussions with Thai and foreign academics.
intelligence operations as for its conduct of legitimate research and analysis.\textsuperscript{41}

\textit{Cyber Infiltration and Social Media Use}

With some exceptions, Thai social media is not typically pro-PRC, so if one reads Thai, it is often easy to spot posts by a PRC-sponsored “online army” of internet trolls. Some bloggers are paid to post articles that will be widely viewed and are designed to change negative perceptions of the PRC. Because PRC tourists are a major irritant in social media complaints about the Chinese, the themes for suggested posts are often akin to “Chinese always look at Thais as friends, so Thais should do the same thing,” or “Thais should understand the psychology of Chinese people: Chinese were poor before, so we should understand why they behave the way they do now.”\textsuperscript{42}

Some websites and bloggers that have garnered popularity in Thailand, such as the New Eastern Outlook, are reportedly sponsored by Russia but contain pro-PRC propaganda themes and messages. There is also some evidence that the PRC-aligned “50-Cent Party” or “50 Cent Army,” made up of PRC-paid online commentators who are hired to manipulate public opinion and attack PRC critics and other targets in support of the CCP, does try to influence Thai public opinion. For now, however, those commentators are not perceived as being powerfully influential, as their posts are often poorly written and “childishly worded.”\textsuperscript{43}

Sometimes the PRC’s ultra-nationalist internet trolls, derisively called “Little Pinks,” push Thai online audiences in ways that cause the Thais to push back. In April 2020, after a Thai actor “liked” a photograph on Twitter that listed Hong Kong as a country, PRC trolls inundated his social media platforms, and the actor apologized for his “lack of caution [in] talking about Hong Kong.” But PRC netizens continued to attack both the actor and his girlfriend, dredging up other alleged transgressions, aided by large propaganda outlets like the \textit{Global Times}. That is when Thais started hitting back online, and the trolling campaign ultimately failed.\textsuperscript{44}

\textsuperscript{41} Bill Gertz, “Chinese Think Tank Also Serves as Spy Arm,” \textit{Washington Times}, 28 September 2011.
\textsuperscript{42} Gershaneck, discussions with Thai and foreign academics.
\textsuperscript{43} Gershaneck, discussions with Thai and foreign academics.
\textsuperscript{44} James Griffiths, “Nevev: Chinese Troll Campaign on Twitter Exposes a Potentially Dangerous Disconnect with the Wider World,” CNN, 15 April 2020.
We must liberate Taiwan. Although the PRC’s planned 1950 invasion of Taiwan was foiled by its intervention in the Korean War, this 1977 propaganda poster supported Beijing’s psychological warfare against Taipei and Washington, with Beijing’s continuing threat to seize the island by force. Unification with Taiwan remains the primary PRC political warfare objective today.

An overview of Taiwan’s relationship with China is necessary to understand the basis of the People’s Republic of China’s (PRC) sovereignty claims on Taiwan as well as the conduct of its political warfare operations against the island nation. Cross-strait relations between the PRC in mainland China and the Republic of China (ROC) on Taiwan have been much more extensively addressed in academic literature than Sino-Thai relations, so this chapter is structured somewhat differently than chapter five, providing less of a general historical background and focusing more closely on specific aspects of the contentious PRC-Taiwan-ROC relationships and the role of political warfare in those relations.

Mark Stokes and Russell Hsiao at the Project 2049 Institute identify Taiwan as the principal target of PRC political warfare. Political
warfare is still the PRC’s primary means of destroying the ROC and “reuniting” Taiwan with Communist China. Taiwan’s democratic system of government, they say, “presents an existential challenge to [the] political authority” of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Moreover, Beijing seeks the “political subordination of the ROC to the PRC under a ‘One Country, Two Systems’ principle.” The CCP’s desired final resolution of the Chinese Civil War entails the destruction of the ROC as a political entity and the absorption of Taiwan into the PRC. Beijing prefers to win this last phase of the civil war without resorting to brute military force, though PRC president Xi Jinping has made it clear that he will employ force if he deems it necessary.

Cross-Straits Relations: The Political Status of Taiwan

Chapter three details much of the general history of the PRC’s political warfare operations, a great deal of it focused against the ROC and Taiwan, so this overview centers on the question of what political entity currently exercises sovereignty over Taiwan. It is important to examine the evolution of Taiwan’s relationship with what eventually became China, its relations with the PRC after its founding in 1949, and the enduring civil war between the CCP and the ROC’s Chinese Nationalist Kuomintang (KMT) party.

Reasons for the PRC’s relentless political warfare against Taiwan are straightforward. From the 1920s until 1949, Mao Zedong’s CCP battled Chiang Kai-shek’s KMT for control of China. The CCP eventually prevailed and drove the KMT-led government of the ROC from the mainland to Taiwan. Mao and the CCP then established the PRC, which claimed sovereignty over the entirety of its ever-evolving definition of “China,” including Taiwan. However, because the KMT never surrendered, the Chinese Civil War never technically ended, and while the ROC no longer claims to govern all of China, it still asserts its status as a sovereign state on Taiwan.

With American support, the ROC has evolved from an authoritarian government to a vibrant democracy. The PRC, meanwhile, quickly established a tyrannical dictatorship on mainland China that caused the deaths of millions of its own citizens and inflamed insurgencies and civil wars worldwide. Over time, it evolved into an economically and militarily powerful totalitarian state possessing a highly sophisticated political warfare apparatus.

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Central to the PRC’s legitimacy is its “One China” principle. The simple PRC definition of this principle states that “there is only one China in the world, Taiwan is a part of China, and the government of the PRC is the sole legal government representing the whole of China.” The PRC is increasingly capable of forcing the international community to accept its definitions of One China and to acquiesce to, if not wholly support, PRC policies and objectives.

Since most nations now recognize the PRC as the legitimate government of China, the ROC has been increasingly isolated diplomatically. Nevertheless, Taiwan continues to resist the PRC’s efforts to persuade or coerce it to abandon its independent status and become a province of the PRC, and it continues to obtain the support needed for its survival. Historical reasons for Taiwan not readily acquiescing to Beijing’s coercion include its minimal ties to imperial China’s rulers over thousands of years, its close relationship with Japan that was forged by half a century as Tokyo’s first colony, and clear recognition of the repressive nature of the CCP. In recent years, reasons also include the trend of “Taiwanization” as the majority of Taiwan’s residents now prefer to identify as Taiwanese rather than Chinese.

These factors have strongly shaped Taiwan’s political landscape for more than 70 years. Especially significant in historical memory is the bloody repression of Taiwanese citizens by the KMT, including the 28 February 1947 massacre of tens of thousands of civilians by KMT troops. A contemporaneous *New York Times* article cites an eyewitness account that “troops from the mainland arrived [in Taiwan] on March 7 and indulged in three days of indiscriminate killing and looting. For a time everyone seen on the streets was shot at, homes were broken into and occupants killed. In the poorer sections the streets were said to have been littered with dead. There were instances of beheadings and mutilation of bodies, and women were raped.” The brutal KMT repression did end there. To this day, that watershed event and its underlying causes create strong Taiwanese antipathy for being absorbed into mainland China.

Following the retreat of the ROC government to Taiwan in 1949, Chiang suspended the nation’s constitution and excluded Taiwanese from all but the lowest levels of government. The KMT tried to

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4 Taiwan’s overseas presence is extensive, with offices in 73 countries, but most of these missions are unofficial and have no formal status. See Michael Reilly, “Lessons for Taiwan’s Diplomacy from Its Handling of the Coronavirus Pandemic,” Global Taiwan Institute, Global Taiwan Brief 5, no. 9, 6 May 2020.
7 Goldstein, *China and Taiwan*, 3–6.
“Sinify” the Taiwanese population by imposing mainland Chinese values, history, and language to replace those of Taiwan, which led to resistance. Since democratization in the 1980s, the people of Taiwan strengthened their identity as Taiwanese and viewed the ROC and PRC governments in Taipei and Beijing, respectively, as political equals. Today, many Taiwanese do not believe that Taiwan is a part of China and believe that Taiwan should be independent.8 Research shows this trend accelerating. In the 30-to-49-year-old age group, those who self-identify as strictly Taiwanese is at 64 percent, while the 50-years-old-and-up group is at 60 percent. Most significantly, in the rising 18- to 29-year-old age group, 83 percent view themselves as strictly Taiwanese.9

Taiwan and the United States
The United States has played a central role in allowing Taiwan breathing space to follow its own political path. Accordingly, any discussion of relations between the PRC and ROC, as well as PRC political warfare operations against Taiwan, must include a discussion of U.S. relations with each country. The United States supported the KMT in both the Second Sino-Japanese War and the Chinese Civil War. Although U.S. president Harry S. Truman was inclined to allow the PRC to take control of Taiwan as late as January 1950, he quickly reversed course after the PRC-backed North Korean invasion of South Korea in June of that year.10

Since then, the United States has supported the ROC government on Taiwan while remaining ambiguous as to the final sovereignty of the island nation. Since the 1950s, American administrations have employed military forces to defend the ROC against PRC aggression, such as when President William J. “Bill” Clinton deployed two aircraft carrier battle groups to the Taiwan Strait area as a show of force to halt the PRC’s threatening missile launches that bracketed Taiwan in 1996. Following the United States’ official recognition of the PRC in 1979, Congress ensured the continuation of unofficial diplomatic relations with Taiwan under the guarantees provided by the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA).11

While the TRA and U.S. president Ronald W. Reagan’s “Six Assurances” afforded Taiwan some confidence the United States would not abandon the island republic, the United States imposed several

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8 Goldstein, China and Taiwan, 5–6.
9 Devlin and Huang, “In Taiwan, Views of Mainland China Mostly Negative.”
10 Goldstein, China and Taiwan, 19–21.
unwritten rules and regulations on the relationship. These self-imposed prohibitions included not allowing the five top officials of Taiwan to come to Washington, not allowing higher level U.S. officials to meet with their Taiwanese counterparts, and not referring to Taiwan as a country.

The triangular relationship between the PRC, the ROC, and the United States has ebbed and flowed since Sino-American rapprochement in the early 1970s. Washington’s policy is currently one of “dual deterrence” toward both Beijing and Taipei. U.S. concerns include maintaining the confidence of its allies and friends in the Asia-Pacific region and domestic political constituencies by continuing to support democratic Taiwan against an increasingly assertive China, as well as ensuring that provocative policies resulting from Taiwan’s democratic politics do not trigger a violent PRC response. In this dual-deterrence balancing act, the United States has been consistent in its support for a peaceful resolution to the cross-strait impasse.

Since U.S. president Donald J. Trump took office in January 2017, relations between Taiwan and the United States have improved, and they appear set to remain strong as outlined in a recent report from the president to Congress. This support has been consistent: as one example, during an October 2018 speech, Vice President Michael R. “Mike” Pence highlighted the importance of Taiwan-U.S. relations and concluded that “America will always believe that Taiwan’s embrace of democracy shows a better path for all the Chinese people.”

As continuing indicators of improved relations, in March 2018 President Trump signed the Taiwan Travel Act, which allows high-level diplomatic engagement between Taiwanese and American officials and encourages visits between government officials of the United States and Taiwan at all levels. Further, in March 2020, President Trump signed the Taiwan Allies International Protection and Enhancement Initiative (TAIPEI) Act, designed to increase the scope of U.S. relations with Taiwan and encourage other nations and international organizations to strengthen ties with Taiwan. Of note, the TAIPEI Act intends to “send a strong message to nations

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12 Harvey Feldman, “President Reagan’s Six Assurances to Taiwan and Their Meaning Today,” Heritage Foundation, 2 October 2007.
14 Goldstein, China and Taiwan, 3–8.
16 Michael J. Pence, “Remarks by Vice President Pence on the Administration’s Policy toward China” (speech, Hudson Institute, Washington, DC, 4 October 2018).
17 van der Wees, “The Taiwan Travel Act in Context.”
that there will be consequences for supporting Chinese actions that undermine Taiwan.”

The United States has a One China policy, as Pence noted in his speech, but it is not, of course, the same as the PRC’s interpretation. While the PRC’s own One China principle offers a useful political warfare narrative, it is largely a myth.

The Myth of “One China”
It is currently the PRC’s position that there is only one China, and that Taiwan has always been a part of it. PRC propagandists relentlessly drive home this narrative regarding Taiwan as they do concerning Mongolia, Tibet, Xinjiang, and any other territory that suits its current expansionist aspirations. Historian Edward L. Dreyer explains the insidious effect of this narrative:

[The “One China” narrative] permits the PRC to deny the legitimacy of any aspirations to independence on the part of the Tibetans, Uighurs, Mongols, or any other minority ethnic group. Since their territories have “always” been part of “China,” their histories are, in some sense, part of Chinese history, even if the peoples in question are not native speakers of Chinese and do not identify with the dominant Han nationality. If Taiwan has always been part of China, then surely the PRC government has the right to ‘reunify’ the island with the mainland, even though the PRC has never exercised any authority over Taiwan.

History neither bears out the claim of One China, nor of China’s sovereignty over Taiwan. Throughout recorded history, China was divided for very long periods of time—indeed, for more than 3,000 years, disunity was more common than unity. The “unified China” of PRC mythology consisted primarily of the 18 provinces south of the Mongolian-Manchurian grassland and east of the Himalayas. Taiwan was not part of this empire. Further, Dreyer wrote, “Twice in history China has been part of a multinational empire ruled by non-Chinese people. The Mongol Yuan Dynasty was overthrown by the Ming in 1368, and after the Ming the Manchu Qing Dynasty ruled China from 1644 to 1912.”

The Qing initially kept the Chinese and non-Chinese parts of

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their empire separate, keeping Han Chinese away from Manchuria, Inner and Outer Mongolia, Tibet, and Xinjiang. Toward the end of the dynasty, however, distinctions between Chinese and non-Chinese parts of the Qing empire broke down, and provincial administration became the norm beyond China’s traditional boundaries. Major reasons for ending the exclusion of Chinese from the rest of the empire included the mass migration of Chinese into Manchuria and Mongolia and the strengthened ability of the Qing to exercise more consistent control over the region in the face of an “aggressive and expansionist Russian Empire.”

The extension of Chinese-style administration during the late nineteenth century contributed to the myth of One China existing since ancient times. Also adding to the false belief of One China was the fact that events were dated “according to the reign of kings or the [names of eras] decreed by emperors.” Dreyer argues that this approach to historiography “forced historians to choose a legitimate ruler for every year, even when political authority was actually divided among regimes of comparable strength.” For example, of the 1,363 years illustrated in Sima Guang’s *Zizhi Tongjian* (“Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government”), published in 1084 ACE, China only had a “degree of political unity” for approximately 570 years. The remaining years saw “either independent warlords challenging or ignoring imperial authority, or two or more rival dynasties claiming royal or imperial titles.” Even during the seemingly unified periods, massive rebellions occurred.

The Dutch settled on Taiwan in 1624 after abandoning their original outpost in the Pescadores Islands. Following a major survey of the island four years later, they found that it was largely inhabited by aboriginal villagers, with coastal villages harboring at most a few hundred Chinese from Fujian. It was not until 1636, when the Dutch began importing Chinese contract laborers to work their rice and sugar plantations, that a sizable Chinese population began to grow on Taiwan, but initially even these laborers stayed for only a few years, eventually returning to Fujian and taking their earnings with them. Australian historian J. Bruce Jacobs notes that there “were no permanent Chinese communities in Taiwan until the Dutch imported Chinese as laborers,” and that “Chinese who came during and after the Dutch period did not think of themselves as ‘Chinese’,” but rather adopted more local identities based on where they emigrated from.

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That is not to say, however, that China and its culture did not impact Taiwan over the centuries. While China and Taiwan were never well-integrated, Taiwan’s political, social, cultural, and economic systems all evolved in China’s shadow. And although Taiwan was settled initially by peoples from the Malay and Polynesian regions, it was also a major recipient of migrants from mainland China, who brought with them Han Chinese culture, Hokkien and Minnan dialects, and various religious beliefs. The Confucian family system, in particular, eventually dominated Taiwanese society.24

Otherwise largely unknown and ignored by China, Taiwan was annexed by the Qing Dynasty in 1684 to prevent its continued use by pirates who were loyal to the Ming.25 During the seventeenth century, the saga of Koxinga (a.k.a. Zheng Chenggong), a Chinese Ming loyalist who resisted the Qing in mainland China and established a dynasty on Taiwan, unfolded. Koxinga’s is a swashbuckling, colorful story involving betrayal, murder, and massive land and sea warfare among pirates, the Dutch, and the Qing. Koxinga’s victory over the Dutch on Taiwan in 1662 would later play into PRC political warfare narratives regarding the “liberation” of Taiwan by Chinese from the mainland and victory over foreign colonialism and imperialism.

As Taiwan often served as Koxinga’s base of operations, Chinese interest in the nearby island grew.26 The Qing finally perceived the need to annex Taiwan to control the pirate fleets in the Pescadores Islands, which they did in 1684. Qing-appointed officials on Taiwan reported to the provincial governor of Fujian, but the Qing did not establish normal governance systems on the island, indicating a reluctance to assume permanent annexation. This hesitancy appeared validated during a major rebellion on Taiwan against the Qing in 1786–88.27 In fact, revolt and rebellion against the Qing on Taiwan were quite common, according to historian George H. Kerr: “Two centuries of ineffective and abusive rule thereafter generated a local Formosan tradition of resentment and underlying hostility toward representatives of mainland authority. Riots and abortive independence movements took place so often that it became common in China to say of Formosa, ‘Every three years an uprising; every five years a rebellion.’” Kerr notes that there were more than 30 “violent outbursts” in the nineteenth century alone.28

In another complex series of events, the issue of Qing sovereign-

28 Kerr, Formosa Betrayed, 26.
ty over Taiwan became a thorn in the Chinese dynasty’s side regarding relations with a modernizing Japan. After the Meiji Restoration of 1868, Japan annexed the Ryukyu kingdom, which then comprised the Ryukyu Islands between Kyushu and Taiwan. When Taiwanese aborigines murdered 54 shipwrecked Ryukyuan sailors in 1871, an inept Qing “foreign ministry” did not recognize Japan’s rule of the Ryukyus and disclaimed responsibility for the actions of the aborigines, thereby effectively renouncing sovereignty over Taiwan. Japan eventually sent a naval expedition to exact retribution. The outcome was the eventual Qing recognition of Japan’s claim to the Ryukyus and Japan’s recognition of the Qing’s claim to Taiwan.

During the subsequent Sino-French War (1884–85) and several internal rebellions, the Qing extended greater control over Taiwan and began modernizing the island in ways that were more European than Chinese. Paved streets, electric lights, a modern postal service, and the beginnings of railway and telegraph systems, all of which did not yet exist on the mainland, signified an evolving Taiwanese society that was different than that in mainland China.29

Japan’s expansionist vision would accelerate Taiwan’s modernization in ways that were unforeseen by the island’s Qing-appointed governor. The First Sino-Japanese War (1894–95) proved disastrous to the Qing, as Japan won quick victories on land and sea. Consequently, the Qing ceded to Japan, “in perpetuity and full sovereignty,” Taiwan and the Pescadores Islands, as dictated by the Treaty of Shimonoseki of 17 April 1895. “Perpetuity,” however, lasted just 50 years, for Japan would exercise sovereignty over Taiwan only until 1945.30

The 1895 Treaty of Shimonoseki remains significant to this day, for it represents the last occasion in history that Taiwan’s territorial sovereignty has been subject to an international accord. Also notable is the fact that Britain’s minister to China, Sir Thomas F. Wade, and a former U.S. secretary of state, John W. Foster, were in effect “godfathers” to the treaty, since both England and the United States helped craft the agreement.31

The Taiwanese, displeased with their inept Qing rulers and unhappy with the treaty, proclaimed independence as the Republic of Formosa in May 1895 and attempted to fight back against the Japanese occupation of their country. By the end of October, however, Japanese forces had defeated all organized Taiwanese resistance, and Asia’s first independent republic was crushed.32

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31 Kerr, Formosa Betrayed, 27.
The Japanese proceeded to do more than simply occupy Taiwan—they incorporated Taiwan into Japan's national territory, much like the Ryukyu Islands had been in 1879. Japan's rule was, by Imperial Japanese standards, relatively humane, unlike the brutal treatment it imposed on later colonial conquests such as Korea, the Philippines, and China. This immersion of the Taiwanese into Japanese culture resulted in a people who "seemed more Japanese than Chinese . . . they spoke Japanese, dressed like Japanese, ate Japanese food, and, in some cases, had Japanese names." Ultimately, the people of Taiwan would pay a terrible price under Chinese rule for their Japanese assimilation.

Taiwan, the Republic of China, and Mao Zedong

After Sun Yat-sen's successful revolution in mainland China and the establishment of the ROC on 12 February 1912, the new republic accepted all the Qing Dynasty's treaty obligations and debts. Foreign nations recognized the ROC's sovereignty over all Qing territory as of 1911—which did not include Taiwan, then still a part of Japan. This was the perspective of both the Nationalist KMT and CCP camps for more than 30 years.

During the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–45) and World War II (1939–45), CCP leader Mao Zedong initially considered Taiwan a separate, occupied nation and supported the idea that Taiwan should be made independent after the war. Several CCP documents and policies from this era reinforce the idea that Mao viewed Taiwan as distinctly separate from China. The most notable evidence of Mao's position can be found in his statement to Edgar P. Snow, an American journalist and CCP sympathizer, made in July 1936. Snow asked, "Is it the immediate task of the Chinese people to regain all the territories lost to Japanese imperialism, or only to drive Japan from North China, and all Chinese territory above the Great Wall?"

According to Snow's account, Mao answered:

It is the immediate task of China to regain all our lost territories, not merely to defend our sovereignty below the Great Wall. This means that Manchuria must be regained. We do not, however, include Korea, formerly a Chinese colony, but when we have re-established the independence of the lost territories of China, and if the Koreans wish to break away from the chains of Japanese

33 Goldstein, China and Taiwan, 14.
34 Dreyer, "The Myth of 'One China'," 30.
imperialism, we will extend them our enthusiastic help in their struggle for independence. The same thing applies for Formosa.\footnote{Edgar Snow, Red Star Over China: The Rise of the Red Army (London: V. Gollancz, 1937), 88–89. Taiwan was also known as Formosa while under Japanese rule from 1895 to 1945.}

Key CCP documents dated before 1943 routinely addressed Taiwan, but never in the context that Taiwan was part of China. It was often referred to as an ally, much like Korea, in the fight against its Japanese occupiers. Between 1928 and 1943, the CCP consistently recognized Taiwan as a distinct “nation” or “nationality” and acknowledged the “national liberation movement” on Taiwan as a struggle of a “weak and small nationality” that was separate from the Chinese revolution and potentially sovereign. The CCP frequently called for forming a united front with the Taiwanese—specifically the small Taiwanese Communist Party (TCP)—“not because Taiwanese were derivatives of the same Han stock, nor because Taiwanese were also Chinese,” but because Taiwan was a small, weak nation oppressed by Japanese imperialism.\footnote{Hsiao and Sullivan, “The Chinese Communist Party and the Status of Taiwan,” 451.}

The nature of the CCP’s early support for the TCP is significant. Established on 15 April 1928 in Shanghai, the TCP was founded as a Nationality Branch of the Japanese Communist Party by order of the Communist International (Comintern). Though the five Taiwanese who attended the convention were CCP members, they supported Taiwan’s independence with such slogans as “Long Live the Independence of the Taiwan Nationality,” “Overthrow Japanese Imperialism,” and “Establish a Republic of Taiwan.” In its “Resolution on the Outline of Organization,” the TCP cited the 1895 establishment of the Republic of Taiwan as justification for national independence.\footnote{Hsiao and Sullivan, “The Chinese Communist Party and the Status of Taiwan,” 455.}

After 1943, however, the CCP reversed these positions to be consistent with ROC leader Chiang Kai-shek’s views, disavowing Taiwanese ethnic “separateness” and rejecting the independence of political movements on the island. The Allies’ Cairo Declaration of 27 November 1943 called for the “unconditional surrender of Japan” and stated that “all the territories Japan has stolen from the Chinese, such as Manchuria, Formosa, and the Pescadores, shall be restored to the Republic of China.”\footnote{Dreyer, “The Myth of ‘One China,’” 31–32.} The Cairo Declaration was neither a treaty nor a legally binding document, but it is often referred to by both the CCP and KMT as justification for China’s claim to Taiwan. Of equal concern, the declaration was historically inaccurate: Taiwan was not “stolen” from China, unless U.S. president Franklin D.
Roosevelt and British prime minister Sir Winston L. S. Churchill believed the United States and England were coconspirators in the theft while helping broker the 1895 Treaty of Shimonoseki. But both wanted to keep China in the war against Imperial Japan at a time when Chiang Kai-shek appeared to be considering a separate agreement with Tokyo to end the fighting in China.40

Consistent with the Cairo Declaration, ROC forces accepted the Japanese surrender of Taiwan on 25 October 1945, signifying that the declaration’s provisions had been carried out in good faith and were supported by the United States and the larger international community.41 Although Taiwan’s population initially greeted the Chinese mainlanders as liberators, they did not fare will under Chiang’s forces, who were “a rag-tag army of often ignorant, undisciplined recruits.”42 The KMT troops treated the Taiwanese with disdain, viewing the islanders as more Japanese than Chinese. The occupying Chinese also resented the fact that Taiwan was prosperous and technologically advanced by mainland Chinese standards and had been spared most of the ravages of the war that mainland China had seen. This disdain took the form of political repression on many levels, most significantly by Taiwanese being excluded from the ROC constitution that was to go into effect in late 1947.

The ROC government, meanwhile, ruled in a corrupt and ineffective way that was far different than how the Japanese authorities had ruled. George H. Kerr, a U.S. naval officer and later a diplomat who was on assignment in Taiwan at the time, described the rapacious nature of the Nationalist rule:

Looting was carried forward on three levels . . . the military scavengers were at work at the lowest level. Anything movable . . . was fair prey for ragged and undisciplined soldiers. It was a first wave of petty theft, taking place in every city street and suburban village. . . . The second stage of looting was entered when the senior military men . . . organized depots with forwarding agents at the ports through which they began to ship out military and civilian supplies. Next [KMT governor Chen Yi’s] own men developed a firm control of all industrial raw materials, agricultural stockpiles and confiscated real properties turned over to them by the vanquished Japanese.43

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40 Kerr, Formosa Betrayed, 25–27.
41 Goldstein, China and Taiwan, 18.
42 Goldstein, China and Taiwan, 14.
Chen Yi established monopolies over every economic sector to squeeze Formosans out of business and industry, which caused the cost of living to skyrocket. For example, the cost of foodstuffs shot up 700 percent between November 1945 and January 1947. The Formosan middle class “began to vanish . . . and unemployment became a grave problem.” These factors, wrote Kerr, were “the ultimate cause of the 1947 rebellion.”

A minor street incident involving official corruption and police brutality sparked the 28 February 1947 massacre of thousands of civilians by mainland KMT troops, during which Taiwan’s political, business, and intellectual elites were methodically hunted down, arrested, tortured, and killed and the general populace faced random killings and other sadistic atrocities. Estimates of deaths range from 10,000 to more than 20,000. The protests led to 38 years of authoritarian suppression by the ROC, a period now known as the “White Terror.” The ROC denied subsequent pleas from Taiwanese that “Formosans” be entitled to the same rights and treatment as Chinese.

The Chinese Civil War had reignited on the mainland shortly after the end of World War II, and by 1949, KMT armies had fallen back before the increasing victorious CCP forces. Roughly 1.2 million—though some estimates extend up to more than 2 million—mainland Chinese escaped to Taiwan, many of them military personnel and civilian administrators. In May, the ROC expanded its authoritarian rule over Taiwan by imposing martial law and by suspending articles of the constitution. That December, ROC president Chiang Kai-shek and his government evacuated to Taiwan, designating the island as a province under the ROC, which still claimed to rule all of China, and establishing the new national capital at Taipei.

Although comprising only about 15 percent of Taiwan’s population, mainland Chinese dominated major government, military, and political positions. Discussion of Taiwanese nationalism or opposition to the KMT was equated with “communist sympathies” and was suppressed as part of the ROC’s “de-Japanization and Sinicization” campaign. Consequently, Taiwanese were regularly subjected to systematic harsh treatment. In addition to Communist sympathizers and those merely alleged to be so, the secret police also brutally suppressed the cadre of Taiwan elites who advocated for U.S. trusteeship

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45 Goldstein, China and Taiwan, 14–15; and Kerr, Formosa Betrayed, 310.
46 Russell Hsiao, “Political Warfare Alert: CCP-TDSGL Appropriates Taiwan’s 2-28 Incident,” Global Taiwan Institute, Global Taiwan Brief 2, no. 9, 1 March 2017.
47 Goldstein, China and Taiwan, 15.
48 Goldstein, China and Taiwan, 15.
49 Goldstein, China and Taiwan, 15–16.
over Taiwan. Some analysts estimate that as many as 90,000 people were arrested during the White Terror, with about 10,000 actually tried in military courts and some 45,000 summarily executed. Many of those detained were tortured, and many who were not executed were sent “indefinitely” to an infamous Green Island prison camp on off Taiwan’s southeast coast.

Historian J. Bruce Jacobs summarizes the KMT regime under the Chiang Kai-shek and his son Chiang Ching-kuo as “rule by outsiders in the interests of the outsiders. It was a dictatorship in which Taiwanese had no power and in which Taiwanese suffered massive and systematic discrimination.” Although the ROC suppressed the study of Taiwan’s complex history and stressed Taiwan’s ties with China, the distinction between the waisheng ren, mainlanders from outside the province, and the bensheng ren, people from the province, became the focal point for political and cultural division.

Political Warfare in the Continuing Chinese Civil War
Russell Hsiao writes that during the Chinese Civil War, both CCP and KMT forces “spread false information to sow discord in enemy-controlled areas, spreading rumors about defections, falsifying enemy attack plans, and stirring up unrest in an effort to misdirect enemy planning.” The onset of the Second Sino-Japanese War and World War II had, however, led to a united front between the two factions and a truce of sorts.

According to Mark Stokes and Hsiao, CCP underground political warfare during that period was divided into several organizations. The Urban Work Department, precursor to the United Front Work Department (UFWD), “focused on ordinary citizens, minorities, students, factory workers, and urban residents.” The Social Work Department “concentrated on the upper social elite of enemy civilian authorities, security of senior CCP leaders, and Comintern liaison.” Finally, the Enemy Work Department was “responsible for political warfare against opposing military forces.”

These departments sought to fulfill three main missions: to “build and sustain a united front with friendly, sympathetic military figures,” to “undermine the cohesion and morale of the senior en-

50 Kerr, Formosa Betrayed, 369.
52 Jacobs, “Paradigm Shift Needed on Taiwan.”
53 Russell Hsiao, “CCP Propaganda against Taiwan Enters the Social Age,” Jamestown Foundation, China Brief 18, no. 7, 24 April 2018.
54 Stokes and Hsiao, The People’s Liberation Army General Political Department, 6–7.
emy leaders and create tensions between officer and enlisted ranks,” and to “win over and incite defection among those in the middle.” Emphasis was placed on “psychological and ideological conditioning of senior enemy defense authorities in order to weaken national will, generate sympathy for CCP strategic goals, and develop clandestine sources of military intelligence.” Strategies used included “financial incentives, shame, and promises of leniency.”

The surrender of Imperial Japan in September 1945 marked a new chapter in the Chinese Civil War. Having conserved the strength of its Enemy Work Department during the war, the CCP quickly shifted its political warfare efforts from resisting Japan to defeating the KMT and ROC government. Despite the recognition of both parties’ legitimacy in October 1945, the civil war recommenced shortly thereafter.

Targeting Taiwan

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

There was also a large pool of Formosans in China from which the CCP could recruit. Many individuals from old, well-established Formosan communities in coastal cities were unable to escape back to Taiwan or elsewhere in the face of the Red Army onslaught. In addition, there was a “very large number of young men who were labor-conscripts in the Japanese Army, stranded in China in 1945 wherever Japanese forces had surrendered.” Thousands had no jobs and no place to go, and they were treated roughly by Nationalist forces as “Japanized traitors.” Moreover, in 1947, many young men and women from Taiwan sought refuge in China following the 28 February massacre, embittered at the KMT for its brutal abuse and at the United States for not stopping those cruelties. Many “recruits” sim-

55 Stokes and Hsiao, The People’s Liberation Army General Political Department, 7–8.
56 Stokes and Hsiao, The People’s Liberation Army General Political Department, 8.
57 Stokes and Hsiao, The People’s Liberation Army General Political Department, 8.
ply had no choice, for refusal to assist the CCP meant being branded a “reactionary” and doomed to an inevitable execution. Many of these Formosans were sent for “re-education” and subversion and sabotage training at the Taiwan Recovery Training Corps camp near Shanghai.58

According to Stokes and Hsiao, “Intensified [People’s Liberation Army (PLA)] political warfare operations on Taiwan began after the fall of Shanghai in May 1949, when the CCP began deliberate planning for an amphibious invasion that was anticipated in April 1950.”59 Hsiao explains that after the ROC government moved to Taiwan in 1949, “the two sides flooded propaganda and disinformation into enemy-controlled territories to affect public opinion and troop morale.”60 As Communist pamphlets and books were smuggled into Taiwan, Beijing’s initial efforts focused on recruiting mainland Chinese officers of the Nationalist army to sabotage Chiang’s defense of Taiwan, and to “come home” by defecting to the CCP. While that ploy had worked well with many Nationalist officers during the war on the mainland, it was less successful among those who escaped to Taiwan. Accordingly, subsequent PRC propaganda focused on subverting the mainland civilian refugees there. Meanwhile, the CCP used Hong Kong to facilitate networking between Formosan Communists in Japan, China, and Taiwan.61

The following year, ROC counterintelligence operatives revealed the covert CCP operation on Taiwan, resulting in the arrest of Cai Xiaojian. Cai was recruited by the KMT, and more than 400 CCP agents on the island were subsequently exposed. Other CCP agents escaped to Hong Kong and joined the newly formed Taiwan Democratic Self-Government League, a CCP-backed pro-unification organization that remains in existence today.62

In June 1950, North Korea invaded South Korea, igniting the Korean War. United Nations (UN) forces deployed to the peninsula to aid South Korea, and U.S. president Harry S. Truman ordered the U.S. Navy’s Seventh Fleet to thwart any foreign attack on Taiwan. Although Chiang Kai-shek volunteered ROC troops to fight alongside the UN forces in Korea, they were not deployed due to U.S. fears of widening the war and involving the PRC. Nonetheless, the PRC attacked UN forces in Korea in October 1950.63 The Political Department of the Chinese People’s Volunteer Army was responsible for all

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58 Kerr, Formosa Betrayed, 437–38.
59 Stokes and Hsiao, The People’s Liberation Army General Political Department, 8.
60 Hsiao, “CCP Propaganda against Taiwan Enters the Social Age.”
61 Kerr, Formosa Betrayed, 438–41.
62 Stokes and Hsiao, The People’s Liberation Army General Political Department, 8.
63 Goldstein, China and Taiwan, 19–20.
political warfare actions against UN forces, while its Enemy Work Department was tasked with handling propaganda and misinformation operations as well as prisoners of war.\footnote{Stokes and Hsiao, The People’s Liberation Army General Political Department, 8.}

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

In 1956, the CCP founded the Taiwan Affairs Leading Small Group (TALSG), a powerful organization responsible for overseeing political warfare operations against Taiwan. Stokes and Hsiao write that the CCP’s primary goal during the next two decades was to “undermine the legitimacy of the governing ROC authorities on Taiwan, manage territorial disputes, and counter ‘U.S. imperialism’” through propaganda and misinformation operations. For instance, several letters sent to Chiang Kai-shek during that period proposed “direct peace talks” and “a negotiated solution that would grant the authorities on Taiwan a high degree of autonomy.”\footnote{Stokes and Hsiao, The People’s Liberation Army General Political Department, 9.} In another example, a 1962 English-language media report out of Singapore claimed that Chiang’s “inner circle had reached a secret agreement with the CPP after more than five years of negotiations” and that Chiang “had agreed to accept Taiwan’s status as a self-governed autonomous region, but only after [his] passing.” Such CCP efforts were intended to undermine resolve on Taiwan and create mistrust between Taiwan and the United States.\footnote{Stokes and Hsiao, The People’s Liberation Army General Political Department, 9–10.}

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

The cross-strait psychological war that began in the 1950s continued through the 1990s. After the Second Taiwan Strait Crisis, both
the PRC and ROC remained engaged in an “intense international diplomatic contest” characterized by political warfare actions that included “covert operations, subterfuge, and other efforts to encourage defections by enemy officers through psychological warfare.” According to Hsiao, “the two sides used megaphones and radio stations to spread propaganda and disinformation into enemy territory” and “utilized balloons and floating carriers to send leaflets and other objects seeking defectors, promising rewards and small gifts including underwear, toys, and cooking oil, among other messages meant to exert a psychological effect on the targeted population.” The political warfare contest was perhaps most colorfully symbolized by artillery shelling with warheads full of propaganda leaflets rather than explosives.67

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

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

U.S. president Richard M. Nixon’s 1972 visit to the PRC attenuated some of Beijing’s propaganda and other political warfare activities aimed at Taiwan and its relationship with the United States. Between 1949 and 1972, the PRC framed the Taiwan “problem” in ideological terms by accusing American “imperialists” of “occupying Taiwan,” employing the theory of “class struggle” to judge Taiwan’s society and routinely interpreting Taiwan’s political, economic, and educational systems using Communist ideological jargon.69

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67 Hsiao, “CCP Propaganda against Taiwan Enters the Social Age.”
68 Goldstein, China and Taiwan, 41.
69 Hungdah Chiu, ed., China and the Taiwan Issue (New York: Praeger, 1979), 129.
Beginning in 1973, however, focus shifted. The PRC systematically exploited the 28 February 1947 massacre in Taiwan by holding anniversary ceremonies and study sessions to “win over the hearts” of the Taiwanese people. The first meeting hosted approximately 138 participants, nearly one-half of whom were Taiwanese, including KMT party officials, former military officers, government diplomats and administrators, academics, women, and young people. Propaganda themes for the annual meetings included routine calls for Taiwan’s “liberation” and its unification with “the motherland,” as well as both coercive threats and offers for “peace talks.” Oddly enough, the hosts also asserted that Mao inspired the 28 February massacre. By taking credit for the incident, the CCP contrived “to establish the legitimacy and continuity of its leadership between the incident and any future political change on Taiwan.”

The Cultural Revolution brought a decade of civil war, chaos, and ruin to mainland China. After its end, the PRC’s political warfare infrastructure was reconstituted in the late 1970s, with resultant renewed operations against Taiwan. Up to that point, Beijing’s Taiwan policy staff work had been dominated by the PRC’s Central Investigation Department, which was focused on intelligence and political warfare operations and which was eventually incorporated into the Ministry of State Security (MSS). This was not necessarily a new PRC model, since during the height of the Chinese Civil War the united front, state security, and liaison work systems worked closely together as underground work entities.

The end of the Cultural Revolution also allowed the CCP to vastly expand its united front mission. United front work was originally focused internally on domestic objectives regarding the various factions and ethnicities in China, especially during the disastrous Great Leap Forward and the bloody Cultural Revolution. But beginning in 1979, Deng Xiaoping broadened the focus of united front work to include Chinese living outside of the PRC. Overseas Chinese were enticed to invest in the PRC to support Deng’s “Four Modernizations” of agriculture, industry, national defense, and science and technology in mainland China. The diaspora was also encouraged to support PRC policies and actions within the countries where they resided. This led to a vast increase in funding for the UFWD as well as the PRC’s economic revival.

While the deaths of Chiang Kai-shek in April 1975 and Mao Zedong in September 1976 did little to change the nature of the politi-