

# The Chinese Communist Party's Political Warfare Directed Against Taiwan: Overview and Analysis



John Dotson

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## About the Global Taiwan Institute

GTI is a 501(c)(3) non-profit policy incubator dedicated to insightful, cutting-edge, and inclusive research on policy issues regarding Taiwan and the world. Our mission is to enhance the relationship between Taiwan and other countries, especially the United States, through policy research and programs that promote better public understanding about Taiwan and its people.

### The GTI “Counter Ideological Work and Political Warfare” Research Series

This report is the first of a planned five-part series of GTI policy backgrounder reports on the means and methods employed in Chinese Communist Party (CCP) ideological work and political warfare directed against Taiwan—efforts that are intended to undermine Taiwan’s democratic system, its social cohesion, and its ability to resist coercive efforts for “reunification” on the CCP’s terms. The remaining research reports will be forthcoming throughout 2024. The topics to be addressed will be:

- Overview of CCP political warfare directed against Taiwan
  - The CCP's ideological narratives on Taiwan
- Gray zone operations, economic coercion, and “lawfare” directed against Taiwan
  - CCP intelligence, united front, and disinformation operations
  - Cyber operations and PLA political work directed against Taiwan

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## Executive Summary

**P**olitical warfare—a series of measures undertaken to undermine a targeted group’s resistance to the initiator’s desired end-state—is a key component of the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) overall program of achieving annexation of Taiwan, and subjection of the island’s citizens and democratic society to full CCP political control. The CCP’s methods of political warfare embrace a range of interconnected disciplines, but prominent among these are: directed propaganda and disinformation (in both traditional and online media), elite cooptation, political subversion, and coercive military and economic actions intended for psychological effect.

As addressed in this report, the CCP’s political warfare methods directed against Taiwan are discussed in seven broad categories—six of which can also be grouped into a trio of loosely-connected pairs. **The first political warfare category is manipulation of Taiwan’s information environment, with intent to impact the perceptions and attitudes of its citizens.** This includes efforts to exercise influence over content and editorial coverage in traditional media outlets such as newspapers and television news channels, largely by leveraging influence through local proxy figures—in particular, wealthy businesspersons who have extensive financial equities in China. It also takes the form of manipulating online content: either through the “pink model” of infiltrating pro-CCP content into social media news feeds, or else through algorithmic targeting of selected demographic groups assessed to be more vulnerable to disinformation.

The CCP’s manipulation of information has a related discipline in legal warfare (法律戰), or “lawfare.” **Lawfare is the process of actively and systematically promoting to international audiences and in international fora the PRC’s official interpretations of international law and diplomatic practice—positions selectively formulated to pursue PRC state interests—even when those positions contradict longstanding norms or logical coherence.** Like information manipulation, the objective of lawfare is to sow confusion and reduce

cognitive resistance to the CCP’s preferred narratives about Taiwan.

A third major category of CCP political warfare is that of “gray zone operations.” **Gray zone operations take the form of a range of activities—primarily, though not exclusively, military in nature—that encroach upon Taiwan’s aerial and maritime periphery, and which are intended to erode Taiwan’s sovereignty and the sense of security held by its citizens.** Such activities include naval exercises in the waters surrounding Taiwan, military aviation flights that steadily advance closer to Taiwan’s airspace, and coast guard “law enforcement” operations that interfere with Taiwan’s exercise of sovereignty and effective administration over its outlying islands. As with information manipulation, the paramount objective in such operations is the intended psychological effect on Taiwan’s population.

The counterpart to gray zone operations in the realm of trade is economic coercion. **Economic coercion is the employment of targeted trade measures—including, but not limited to, measures such as import bans, denial of market access, and politically-oriented trade and investment incentives—to punish groups within Taiwan for developments to which Beijing objects, to isolate Taiwan internationally, and to pressure other countries and international companies to conform to Beijing’s preferred policies on Taiwan.** This mode of political warfare has been employed against Taiwan—particularly in the form of politically-timed import bans of Taiwanese agricultural products—but also as a punitive measure against countries that take steps towards closer and more cooperative relationships with Taiwan.

A fifth category to be addressed in this report—and one often poorly understood by international observers—is that of “united front work.” **United front work embraces a range of measures—including financial and psychological cooptation, the use**

**of front organizations, and political subversion—that are intended to allow the CCP to coopt and control persons or social groups outside the ranks of the party.** In the case of Taiwan, united front measures may be observed in efforts to coopt business and political elites, the funding and manipulation of local organizations such as temple societies, and the support of fringe political parties employed to spread pro-CCP (and anti-American) narratives.

The sixth category of PRC political warfare, and a related pairing with united front work, is the PRC's employment of espionage and intelligence operations directed at Taiwan. ***Intelligence operations seek to acquire for the CCP, often through clandestine methods, inside information on political developments within Taiwan, and/or controlled national security information that could be beneficial in a future conflict; and to degrade the functions of Taiwan's own intelligence and security organizations.*** Like united front work, but often in a more covert form, intelligence operations seek to subvert Taiwan's society and institutions and to “soften” Taiwan's resistance to eventual annexation.

The seventh category to be addressed in this report, and in this report series, is cyber operations. ***Cyber operations consist of the use of directed online activity—including, but not limited to, clandestine network penetrations and directed online propaganda-cum-disinformation—in order to gather intelligence, identify exploitable infrastructure vulnerabilities, and sow confusion and social divisions in order to undermine Taiwan's society and democratic political system.*** Cyber operations are best understood not so much as an independent mode of political warfare unto itself—but rather as the operations conducted in one of the most critical domains of political warfare, and which intersect with and amplify efforts in other areas.

This report, the first in a planned five-part series, provides a framework and summary overview of the

CCP's concepts and methods for political warfare directed against Taiwan. Subsequent reports in this series, to be released by the Global Taiwan Institute throughout 2024, will discuss particular elements of the CCP's subversive political warfare efforts in further detail.

## Introduction: The Imperatives and Framework of CCP Political Warfare Against Taiwan

The ruling authorities of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP, 中國共產黨) are committed to bringing about “reunification” (統一) with Taiwan—to entail bringing the island under People’s Republic of China (PRC) sovereignty, and its citizens under full CCP political control. While eventual “reunification” has long been CCP policy, for decades Beijing was prepared to slow-walk this goal, as it was either consumed by internal turmoil, or else focused on domestic economic growth. This is no longer the case, and since at least 2017 the PRC has engaged in an increasingly assertive, aggressive, and multi-faceted effort to pursue its goals *vis-à-vis* Taiwan: shifting, as Beijing’s own messaging would express it, from a posture of “changing from preventing independence to pursuing unification” (“防獨”轉向“促統”).<sup>1</sup>

1 For examples of this discourse, see: “Scholar: The Central Emphasis of the Mainland’s Policy Is Changing from ‘Preventing Independence’ to ‘Promoting Unification’ and More Actively Taking Initiative to Achieve the Chinese Dream” (學者：大陸對台政策重點由「防獨」轉為「促統」更積極主動實現中國夢), *Global Times*, Nov. 15, 2017, <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1584129856792056664&wfr=spider&for=pc;>

Beijing seeks to bring about the annexation of Taiwan by means of non-violent pressure if possible, while simultaneously asserting its right to employ military force to compel unification. Accordingly, the CCP employs a variety of non-violent (or “non-kinetic,” in military terms) measures intended to wear down both the capacity and will of Taiwan’s government and citizenry to resist the imposition of an annexation settlement on the CCP’s terms: one that would not only incorporate Taiwan under PRC sovereignty, but also replace the island’s open and democratic political system with one subject to CCP dominance. Such measures will be discussed in this report under the rubric of “political warfare”—a blanket term subject to differing interpretations and definitions, as noted in the call-out box below.

and Jin Canrong (金燦榮), “「武統台灣」警告的指向性很清晰” (“The Direction of the Warning of ‘Armed Unification with Taiwan’ Is Very Clear”), *Global Times*, Dec. 13, 2017, <https://opinion.huanqiu.com/article/9CaKrnK61PV>.

### How Should We Define “Political Warfare”?

The blanket term “political warfare,” which can cover a broad range of actions across the political, diplomatic, military, intelligence, and economic realms, may often be subject to shifting definitions or the use of parallel terms. In a US context, one of the first efforts to define political warfare came in a US State Department classified internal memorandum circulated in 1948, when the US Government was rapidly adapting itself to the aggressive expansion of Communism around the globe. This document declared that:

*“Political warfare is the logical application of Clausewitz’s doctrine in time of peace. In broadest definition, political warfare is the employment of all the means at a nation’s command, short of war, to achieve its national objectives. Such operations are both covert and overt. They range from such overt actions as political alliances, economic measures [...] and ‘white’ propaganda to such covert operations as clandestine support of ‘friendly’ foreign elements, ‘black’ psychological warfare and even encouragement of underground resistance in hostile states. [...] We have been handicapped by a popular attachment to the concept of a basic difference between peace and war [...] and by a reluctance to recognize the realities of international relations—the perpetual rhythm of struggle, in and out of war.”<sup>2</sup>*

2 State Department Policy Planning Staff, “The Inauguration of Organized Political Warfare,” policy paper dated April 30, 1948 (originally classified Top Secret, declassified June 2008), <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/document/28654-document-10-poli>

The US Government does not appear to hold a publicly-articulated definition of political warfare, but similar terms are employed in certain contexts. For example, the official US Department of Defense (DoD) dictionary includes the term “information operations,” defined as “the integrated employment, during military operations, of information-related capabilities in concert with other lines of operation to influence, disrupt, corrupt, or usurp the decision-making of adversaries and potential adversaries while protecting our own.” The same dictionary also includes the term “subversion,” which is defined as “actions designed to undermine the military, economic, psychological, or political strength or morale of a governing authority.”<sup>3</sup>

In a 2013 study on Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA) political warfare, authors Russell Hsiao and Mark Stokes defined such efforts as actions taken “to influence emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and behavior of foreign governments, organizations, groups, and individuals in a manner favorable to one’s own political-military objectives.”<sup>4</sup> The PLA itself employs the official framework of the “Three Warfares” (三戰), consisting of the three component areas of “public opinion warfare” (輿論戰), “psychological warfare” (心理戰), and “legal warfare” (法律戰)—in which manipulation of the adversary’s information environment and perceptions, and concerted use of legal interpretations in international fora, are used to advance the CCP’s policy goals in both peace and wartime.<sup>5</sup>

For its part, Taiwan’s government employs the term and framework of “cognitive warfare” (認知作戰) to characterize PRC actions. A 2021 Ministry of National Defense (MND, 中華民國國防部) document stated:

*“Cognitive warfare is used to sway the subject’s will and change its mindset, and is not confined by time and space. Concerning its conventional applications, cognitive warfare is originated from the [disciplines] of intelligence warfare, psychological warfare, and public opinion warfare. From the perspective of innovation, it can make use of highly efficient modern computing systems, the internet, and social media, to twist the subject’s social ideologies, mentality, and the sense of law-and-order through cyber infiltrations and manipulation of mentality and public opinions. The PRC is exploiting the tactics of cognitive warfare, mixing with ‘Three Warfares’ [...] in an attempt to create postures to its own favor. [...] Psychologically, the PRC is trying to cause mental disarray and confusion, in order to weaken our fighting will,*

cy-analysis-paper-state-department-policy-planning-staffcouncil. The authorship of this document is not confirmed, but has been widely attributed to George Kennan.

3 DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms (March 2017), pp. 113 and 225, <https://www.tradoc.army.mil/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/AD1029823-DOD-Dictionary-of-Military-and-Associated-Terms-2017.pdf>.

4 Mark Stokes and Russell Hsiao, *The People’s Liberation Army General Political Department: Political Warfare with Chinese Characteristics*, Project 2049 Institute, October 2013, p. 3, <https://project2049.net/2013/10/14/the-peoples-liberation-army-general-political-department-political-warfare-with-chinese-characteristics/>.

5 For more in-depth discussions of this paradigm, see: Larry Wortzel, *The Chinese People’s Liberation Army and Information Warfare*, US Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, March 2014, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep11757?seq=5>; and Elsa Kania, “The PLA’s Latest Strategic Thinking on the Three Warfares,” *China Brief* (Vol. 16, No. 13), August 22, 2016, <https://jamestown.org/program/the-plas-latest-strategic-thinking-on-the-three-warfares/>.



determination to defending [sic] ourselves, and seize the dominance of public opinions [sic].”<sup>6</sup>

For the purposes of this GTI report, the following definition of “political warfare” shall be employed: **“Concerted and purposeful—and primarily, though not necessarily, non-violent—actions taken by a political actor to undermine a targeted group’s morale, social and political cohesion, and psychological resistance to the imposition of the initiator’s desired end state. These actions include, but are not limited to, directed propaganda and disinformation (in both traditional and online media), elite cooptation, political subversion, economic sabotage, and coercive military and economic actions intended for psychological effect.”**

6 ROC Ministry of Defense, *ROC National Defense Report 2021* (中華民國110年國防報告書), November 2021 (p. 46), <https://www.mnd.gov.tw/NewUpload/%E6%AD%B7%E5%B9%B4%E5%9C%8B%E9%98%B2%E5%A0%B1%E5%91%8A%E6%9B%B8%E7%B6%B2%E9%A0%81%E5%B0%88%E5%8D%80/%E6%AD%B7%E5%B9%B4%E5%9C%8B%E9%98%B2%E5%A0%B1%E5%91%8A%E6%9B%B8%E5%B0%88%E5%8D%80.files/%E5%9C%8B%E9%98%B2%E5%A0%B1%E5%91%8A%E6%9B%B8-110/110%E5%B9%B4%E5%9C%8B%E9%98%B2%E5%A0%B1%E5%91%8A%E6%9B%B8-%E8%8B%B1%E6%96%87%E7%89%88.pdf>.

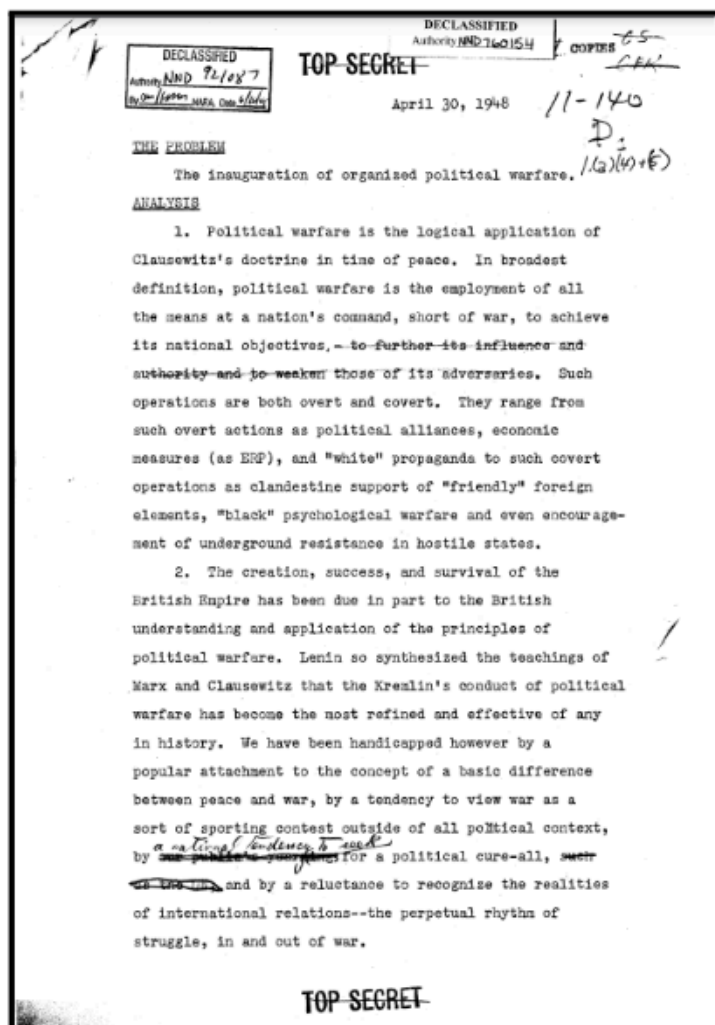


Image: “The Inauguration of Organized Political Warfare,” a 1948 internal US State Department policy memorandum that attempted to define the nature of this challenge, as the US Government sought to organize a response to Soviet political warfare in the early years of the Cold War. (Source: State Department Policy Planning Staff, “The Inauguration of Organized Political Warfare,” policy paper dated April 30, 1948 (originally classified Top Secret, declassified June 2008), <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/document/28654-document-10-policy-analysis-paper-state-department-policy-planning-staffcouncil>. The authorship of this document is not confirmed, but has been widely attributed to George Kennan.)

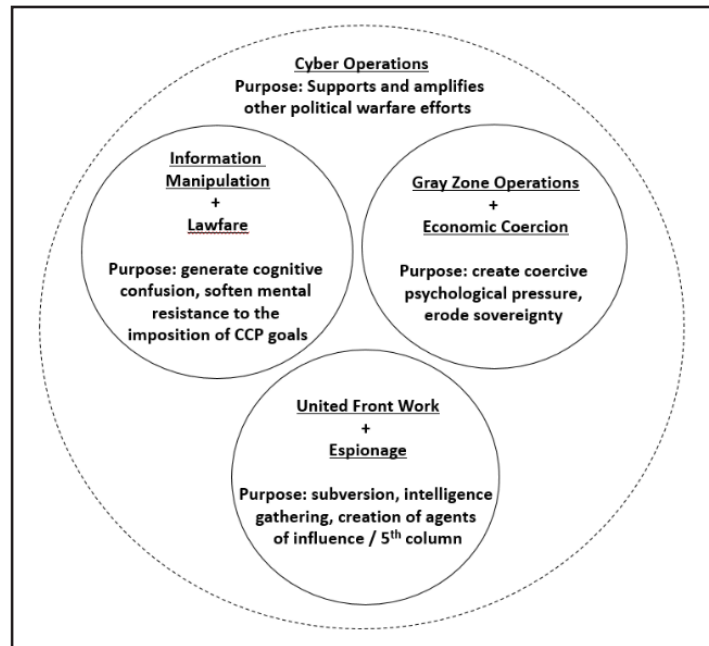
## The Major Categories and Methods of CCP Political Warfare Against Taiwan

The CCP employs a number of practices intended to impact public opinion and politics within Taiwan, as well as within the wider international community. Over the course of 2023, pro-CCP actors launched a number of measures targeting Taiwan, with particular intent to influence the outcomes of Taiwan's January 2024 presidential and legislative elections. Among these, some of the more colorful elements were the dissemination of fabricated opinion polls by paid Taiwan proxies, as well as the promotion of election gambling websites intended to provide users with a financial incentive to vote in ways aligned with CCP preferences.<sup>7</sup> However, there are many other tools in the CCP's political warfare toolbox.

This overview report will discuss the CCP's political warfare efforts in terms of seven broad categories: information manipulation, lawfare, gray zone operations, economic coercion, united front work, espionage, and cyber operations. Each of these categories could itself be subdivided into a number of further sub-categories. Many of these tactics seize upon age-old issues of human greed or other human weaknesses, while new developments in internet technologies and social media have opened up a broad array of new permutations for authoritarian actors like the CCP to make mischief in the online realm. A look at these categories of CCP political warfare, with accompanying illustrative examples, are offered below.

### *CCP Political Warfare vs. Taiwan: Information Manipulation*

The CCP—acting both directly through CCP agencies, and indirectly through local proxies—conducts political warfare efforts against Taiwan in multiple areas. **The first of these is manipulation of Taiwan's information**



*Graphic: The seven categories of PRC political warfare against Taiwan—six of which may be grouped into rough pairings, based on their methods and intended purpose. The seventh category, cyber operations, serves to support and enable efforts in the other six categories. (Source: Created by the author)*

**environment, with intent to impact the perceptions and attitudes of its citizens.** (This set of practices aligns with the CCP's own paradigm of "public opinion warfare" [輿論戰].) This involves efforts to assert influence over both traditional media organizations (newspapers, television news, etc.) and online social media platforms in order to advance the CCP's preferred narratives.

The CCP and its proxies seek to advance a number of narrative themes through such propaganda-*cum*-disinformation efforts, which include:

- Denigration of Taiwan's Democratic Progressive Party (DPP, 民主進步黨) as "separatist," as corrupt, and as a manipulated pawn of the United States;<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Russell Hsiao, "A Preliminary Assessment of CCP Political Warfare Targeting Taiwan's 2024 Elections," *Global Taiwan Brief*, January 10, 2024, <https://globaltaiwan.org/2024/01/a-preliminary-assessment-of-ccp-political-warfare-targeting-taiwans-2024-elections/>.

<sup>8</sup> John Dotson, *Chinese Information Operations against Taiwan: The "Abandoned Chess Piece" and "America Skepticism Theory,"* GTI occasional report, August 2023, <https://globaltaiwan.org>.

- The unreliability of the United States as an ally of Taiwan (a narrative commonly referred to in Taiwan as “America Skepticism Theory” [疑美論]);<sup>9</sup>
- Invoking the “1992 Consensus” (九二共識) as the necessary starting point for any negotiations between Beijing and Taipei;<sup>10</sup>
- The ethnic and historical unity of Taiwan and China under the “Both Sides of the Strait Are One Family’ Concept” (「兩岸一家親」理念).<sup>11</sup>

In addition to these specific themes, CCP-directed propaganda also seeks to attack Taiwan’s social cohesion through more general promotion of confusion and alienation, by filling the information ecosystem with false and confusing stories—very much in line with the “firehose of falsehood” information warfare tactics pursued by other authoritarian regimes, such as Russia.<sup>12</sup>

#### *Manipulation of Traditional Media:*

Taiwan is a polity experiencing a high level of political polarization, and its media is accordingly bifurcated into what are commonly called “blue media” (藍媒體, i.e., pro-Kuomintang and affiliated parties)

[org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/OR\\_ASTAW0807FINAL.pdf](https://www.gti.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/OR_ASTAW0807FINAL.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> “Why the Controversial ‘1992 Consensus’ Has Staying Power in Taiwan,” *TaiwanPlus News*, Dec. 21, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NIO84Q-cTas>; and John Dotson, “The CCP Commemorates the 30th Anniversary of the ‘1992 Consensus’—and Seeks to Change Its Meaning,” *Global Taiwan Brief*, Sep. 21, 2022, <https://globaltaiwan.org/2022/09/the-ccp-commemorates-the-30th-anniversary-of-the-1992-consensus-and-seeks-to-change-its-meaning/>.

<sup>11</sup> “第十五屆海峽論壇大會在廈門舉行 王滬寧宣讀習近平總書記賀信並致辭” (“The 15th Straits Forum Is Convened in Xiamen, Wang Huning Reads a Congratulatory Letter from General Secretary Xi Jinping and Delivers an Address”), *Xinhua*, June 17, 2023, [http://www.taiwan.cn/hxlt/15j/yw/202306/t20230617\\_12543187.htm](http://www.taiwan.cn/hxlt/15j/yw/202306/t20230617_12543187.htm).

<sup>12</sup> Christopher Paul and Miriam Matthews, “The Russian ‘Firehose of Falsehood’ Propaganda Model: Why It Might Work and Options to Counter It,” RAND Corporation, July 11, 2016, <https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE198.html>.

and “green media” (綠媒體, i.e., pro-DPP and affiliated parties) outlets. In recent years, the CCP has achieved considerable success in exerting substantial influence over the coverage and narratives in much of the “blue” traditional media environment. This process has often played itself out according to a recognizable template: a wealthy Taiwanese businessperson—one with considerable investments or other financial equities in the PRC, and often identifiable linkages with the Chinese government—will purchase a media outlet, shake up the existing staff, and undertake a conversion to a pro-unification, pro-PRC narrative line.<sup>13</sup>

#### *Online Propaganda / Disinformation:*

PRC state and state-affiliated actors—as well as local proxies within Taiwan itself—have also engaged in extensive information manipulation in the online domain intended to advance CCP policy goals.

Much of this manipulated online content takes the form of misinformation and disinformation<sup>14</sup> material circulated via social media—with Facebook and the messaging apps Telegram, WhatsApp, and LINE representing particularly prominent vectors for the dissemination of such material. In the case of Taiwan, a substantial amount of pro-PRC propaganda and disinformation material—alongside other suspect material promoting financial scams and quack health supplements—originates from Malaysia-based content farms, whose operators work primarily from a profit motive.<sup>15</sup> Much of it is also

<sup>13</sup> See: Jonah Landsman, “Assessing Taiwan’s Media Landscape and PRC Influence, Part One: The Dangers of Deregulation,” *Global Taiwan Brief*, July 12, 2023, <https://globaltaiwan.org/2023/07/assessing-taiwans-media-landscape-and-prc-influence-part-one-the-dangers-of-deregulation/>.

<sup>14</sup> These two terms are often used interchangeably, although they mean different things. “Misinformation” is false information spread through ignorance or indifference. By contrast, “disinformation” is false information that the disseminator knows to be false, but actively promotes nonetheless—usually because of a financial or political motive. See: “Misinformation v Disinformation: What’s the Difference?,” *BBC* (undated), <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/articles/z3hhvj6>.

<sup>15</sup> Jason Liu, Ko Hao-hsiang, and Hsu Chia-yu, “How a Con-



generated via what has been termed the “pink model” (粉紅模式) of content distribution: one in which groups either associated with, or sympathetic to, the PRC government (such as government-affiliated cyber militias, or members of Chinese nationalist online discussion groups) post propaganda/disinformation content into the social media news feeds consumed by audiences in Taiwan.<sup>16</sup>



*Image: The PRC's practices for influencing Taiwan's information environment and conducting "cognitive warfare" directed against its citizens, as laid out by the ROC Ministry of Defense. (Source: ROC Ministry of Defense, ROC National Defense Report 2021 (中華民國110年國防報告書), November 2021 (p. 46).)*

tent Farm in Malaysia Turned Fake News Directed at Taiwan into a Moneymaker," *Taiwan Gazette*, March 12, 2020, <https://www.taiwangazette.org/news/2020/3/10/fake-news-in-taiwan-comes-from-a-trans-national-content-farm-in-malaysia>; and Jason Liu, Ko Hao-hsiang, and Hsu Chia-yu, "Meet Boss Evan – The Man Behind Taiwan's Zombie Content Farms," *Taiwan Gazette*, March 16, 2020, <https://www.taiwangazette.org/news/2020/3/12/taiwans-content-mill-mafia-is-accepting-new-recruits-apply-here>. Also author's discussions with civil society researchers in Taiwan, December 2023.

16 For discussion of the "pink model" of propaganda distribution, see: Puma Shen (沈伯洋), "中國認知領域作戰模型初探：以 2020 臺灣選舉為例" ("Initial Exploration of the Chinese Cognitive Warfare Model: Taking the 2020 Taiwan Election as an Example"), *Prospect Quarterly* (遠景基金會季刊), Vol.22 No.1 (January 2021), <https://www.pf.org.tw/en/pfen/37-8137.html>.

In the lead-up to Taiwan's 2024 elections, online disinformation narratives played a prominent role—often building from, amplifying, and distorting narratives that emerged from within Taiwan's own discourse—in the effort to shape public attitudes about a range of social and political issues. Examples of this manipulated content included:

- Online trolling content surrounding an egg shortage in 2023, which both amplified safety concerns about imported eggs and asserted government malfeasance in their procurement.<sup>17</sup> While seemingly an innocuous issue, the controversy generated significant social discontent and resulted in the resignation of Minister of Agriculture Chen Chi-chung (陳吉仲) in September 2023.<sup>18</sup>
- TikTok videos intended to stoke fears of a war in the Taiwan Strait, depicted as part of a US-initiated plan to use Taiwan as a pawn to prevent China's national revival.<sup>19</sup> Such messaging itself dovetailed with campaign messages from both the Kuomintang Party (KMT, 國民黨) and the PRC government that the 2024 elections represented a choice between war (with the DPP) or peace (with the KMT).<sup>20</sup>

17 2024 Taiwan Presidential Election Information Manipulation AI Observation Report, Taiwan AI Labs, Jan. 31, 2024 (pp. 24-26), <https://ailabs.tw/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/2024-Taiwan-Presidential-Election-Information-Manipulation-AI-Observation-Report-2.pdf>.

18 "Agriculture Minister Chen Chi-chung's Resignation Accepted by Premier," *Central News Agency* (Taiwan), Sep. 19, 2023, <https://focustaiwan.tw/politics/202309190029>.

19 "In Regards to the Film 'How to Start a War in the Taiwan Strait to Constrain China's Rise' Propagated on the Internet, the Foreign Ministry Has the Following Response" (關於網傳「如何誘導台海戰爭遏制中國崛起」的影片事，外交部回應如下), ROC Foreign Ministry, July 24, 2023, [https://www.mofa.gov.tw/News\\_Content.aspx?n=95&sms=73&s=115115](https://www.mofa.gov.tw/News_Content.aspx?n=95&sms=73&s=115115).

20 Throughout campaigns for both the 2022 and 2024 elections, prominent KMT figures repeatedly emphasized the slogan "voting for the DPP means that youths go to the battlefield" (票投民進黨年輕人上戰場). (See: "馬英九桃輔選籲下架民進黨疾呼「票投民進黨年輕人上戰場」" ["Ma Ying-jeou Called for the Removal of the DPP During the Election, Shouting that 'Voting for the DPP Means that Young People Go to the Battlefield'"], *China Times*, Jan. 1, 2024, <https://www.chinatimes.com/realtimenews/20240101001644-260407?chdtv>.) Media firebrand

### *The Biological Warfare Laboratory Disinformation Story*

In summer 2023, a disinformation story was promoted in Taiwan that intertwined elements of both traditional media and online social media manipulation. In July, the United Daily News (UDN, 聯合報)—one of Taiwan’s major newspapers, with a firmly “blue” editorial line—published a pair of articles that purported to reveal the minutes of a secret government body called the “South Seas Working Committee” (南海工作會議). Included in this document was discussion of plans to construct a secret biological warfare laboratory—at American direction, and under American supervision—within an existing military medical institute. This was accompanied by a campaign of Facebook posts spreading the story that, in conjunction with the creation of the lab, the government academic institution Academia Sinica (中央研究院) was involved in a plan to collect 150,000 blood samples from the Taipei Veterans General Hospital (台北榮民總醫院) for the purpose of researching genetic warfare weapons directed at China.<sup>21</sup>

Examination of the document showed a number of discrepancies—beginning with the fact that no such government committee is known to exist, and the usage of distinctively PRC Mandarin—that revealed the underlying source document to be an evident forgery. Further, the online postings were spread by manipulated Facebook accounts.<sup>22</sup> Finally, elements of the story clearly matched a preceding Russian disinformation story about alleged US-funded biological warfare laboratories in Ukraine.<sup>23</sup> While the source material was crudely fabricated and major elements of the story were absurd, this example demonstrates how CCP-directed disinformation material was picked up by a major media outlet and successfully disseminated throughout Taiwan’s information ecosystem.<sup>24</sup>

and KMT vice-presidential candidate Jaw Shau-kong (趙少康) also called the elections a “choice between war and peace.” (“KMT’s Hou-Jaw Ticket Calls Election a Choice Between War and Peace,” *Central News Agency* (Taiwan), Nov. 26, 2023, <https://focustaiwan.tw/politics/202311260007>.) This was mirrored by statements by PRC government officials—such as Zhang Zhijun, head of the Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Strait (ARATS), who called for Taiwan voters to make the “correct choice,” as “The two elections coming up in the Taiwan region are important choices between the prospects for peace and war, prosperity and decline.” (“Chinese Official Urges Taiwan’s People to Make ‘Correct Choice’ on Election,” *Reuters*, Jan. 2, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/chinese-official-urges-taiwans-people-make-correct-choice-election-2024-01-03/>.)

21 “事實查核 | 媒體披露的「會議紀錄」證明了美國要求台灣發展生化武器嗎？” (“Fact-Checking: Do the ‘Committee’ Records Published by the Media Prove that America is Developing Biological Weapons in Taiwan?”), *Radio Free Asia*, July 20, 2023, <https://www.rfa.org/cantonese/news/factcheck/tw-07202023151014.html>.

22 “榮總交中研院血液樣本配合美國P4？製造病毒滅絕中國人？虛構內容” (“Are Blood Samples Given to Academia Sinica from Veteran’s Hospital Coordinated with the US P4? Creating a Virus to Exterminate Chinese People? Fabricated Content”), *MyGoPen*, August 5, 2023, <https://tw.news.yahoo.com/%E9%8C%AF%E8%AA%A4-%E6%A6%AE%E7%B8%BD%E4%BA%A4%E4%B8%AD%E7%A0%94%E9%99%A2%E8%A1%80%E6%B6%B2%E6%A8%A3%E6%9C%AC%E9%85%8D%E5%90%88%E7%BE%8E%E5%9C%8Bp4-%E8%A3%BD%E9%80%A0%E7%97%85%E6%AF%92%E6%BB%85%E7%B5%95%E4%B8%AD%E5%9C%8B%E4%BA-%E8%99%9B%E6%A7%8B%E5%85%A7%E5%AE%B9-151300118.html?guccounter=1>.

23 John Dotson, “Beijing’s Propaganda Support for Russian Biological Warfare Disinformation, Part 1: Accusations Concerning the War in Ukraine,” *China Brief*, June 17, 2022, <https://jamestown.org/program/beijings-propaganda-support-for-russian-biological-warfare-disinformation-part-1-accusations-concerning-the-war-in-ukraine/>; and John Dotson, “Beijing’s Propaganda Support for Russian Biological Warfare Disinformation, Part 2: Historical Context and Contemporary Motivations,” *China Brief*, July 15, 2022, <https://jamestown.org/program/beijings-propaganda-support-for-russian-biological-warfare-disinformation-part-2-historical-context-and-contemporary-motivations/>.

24 For a detailed examination of this disinformation story, see: John Dotson, “Beijing Dusts Off an Old Playbook with Disinformation about Taiwan Biological Warfare Labs,” *Global Taiwan Brief*, November 1, 2023, <https://globaltaiwan.org/2023/11/beijing-dusts-off-an-old-playbook-with-disinformation-about-taiwan-biological-warfare-labs/>; and the GTI public seminar “CCP Political



*CCP Political Warfare vs. Taiwan: “Lawfare”*

The CCP’s information manipulation also has a related political warfare discipline in the form of legal warfare (法律戰)—or “lawfare”—a series of practices incorporated within the CCP’s own paradigm of the “Three Warfares” (see. p. 4). **Lawfare is the process of actively and systematically promoting to international audiences and in international fora the PRC’s official interpretations of international law and diplomatic practice—positions selectively formulated to pursue PRC state interests—even when those positions contradict longstanding norms or logical coherence.** While information manipulation is directed towards both Taiwan and international audiences, lawfare is directed primarily towards international audiences and organizations—but it shares with the former discipline the objective of spreading confusion, and reducing cognitive resistance to the CCP’s preferred narratives about Taiwan. As with information manipulation, the ultimate purpose is to create cognitive confusion on the part of its audience.

Lawfare is openly discussed in authoritative Chinese-language writings as a tool of geopolitical competition, and even as a component of armed conflict. As written in 2004 by Major General Liu Jiaxin (劉家新), then-director of the PLA’s Xian Political Academy (西安政治學院), “Effective legal warfare is a sharp weapon for striking the enemy and protecting ourselves [...] [and] is a ‘magic charm’ for preventing disasters in war” (有效的法律戰是打擊敵人，保護自己的利器 [...] 是預防和遏制戰爭災難的“緊箍咒”). General Liu further described legal warfare as a “‘second battlefield’ coordinated with military operations” (配合軍事行動的“第二戰場”), and as a means of “inflicting soft casualties” (“軟殺傷”) on the enemy.<sup>25</sup>

Warfare and the 2024 Elections,” October 26, 2023, <https://globaltaiwan.org/events/october-26-ccp-political-warfare-and-the-2024-elections/>.

<sup>25</sup> Major General Liu Jiaxin (劉家新), “法律战——现代战争的第二个战场” (“Legal Warfare--Modern Warfare’s Second

The PRC’s employment of lawfare may be observed in a number of international issues, such as its distorted interpretations of international maritime law (as embodied most clearly in the *UN Convention on the Law of the Sea*, or UNCLOS) set forth in order to justify its irredentist territorial claims to virtually the entirety of the South China Sea.<sup>26</sup> In relation to Taiwan, the three most prominent lawfare narratives are:

- The “One China Principle”: The government of the PRC maintains a “One China Principle” (OCP, 一個中國原則), which holds that: there is only one China in the world; the PRC is that China; and Taiwan is an “inalienable” part of China’s territory, over which Beijing rightfully holds sovereignty.<sup>27</sup> This contrasts with the “One China Policy” adopted with varying interpretations by many governments around the world: to include the United States, which extends official diplomatic recognition to the PRC—while withholding it from the ROC—while avoiding commitments regarding Taiwan’s sovereignty status.<sup>28</sup> Despite this, the PRC presents its diplomatic and media lawfare messaging to assert that its “One China Principle” is universally accepted, and that maintaining diplomatic relations with the PRC is, ipso facto, an acceptance of the OCP.
- UN Resolution 2758: United Nations Resolution 2758 (UNR 2758), adopted in October 1971, removed the “China” United Nations seat from the

Battlefield”), *Guangming Daily* (光明日报), Nov. 3, 2004, <https://mil.news.sina.com.cn/2004-11-03/0958239693.html>.

<sup>26</sup> United States Department of State, Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs, *Limits in the Seas* paper series, No. 143 (“China: Maritime Claims in the South China Sea”), Dec. 5, 2014, <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/LIS-143.pdf>.

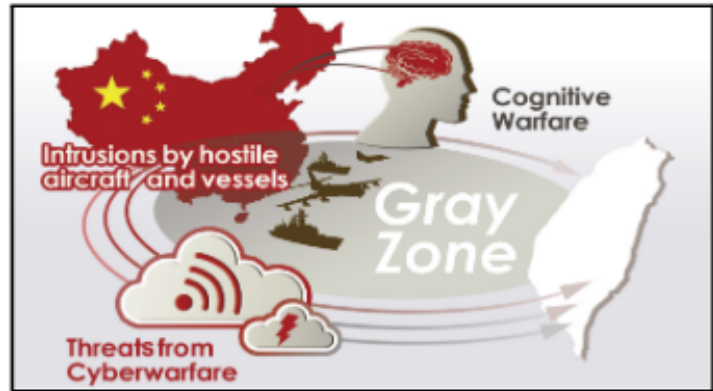
<sup>27</sup> PRC State Council Information Office, *The One-China Principle and the Taiwan Issue*, Feb. 21, 2000, <http://www.china.org.cn/english/taiwan/7956.htm>.

<sup>28</sup> Chong Ja Ian, “The Many ‘One Chinas’: Multiple Approaches to Taiwan and China,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Feb. 9, 2023, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2023/02/09/many-one-chinas-multiple-approaches-to-taiwan-and-china-pub-89003>.

Republic of China government in Taiwan and transferred it to the People's Republic of China. While the resolution stated that “the representatives of the Government of the [PRC] are the only lawful representatives of China to the United Nations,” the text of the resolution did not take any position related to the status of Taiwan.<sup>29</sup> Despite this, the PRC has consistently, and erroneously, invoked UNR 2758 as conveying with it UN recognition of its sovereignty claims over Taiwan.<sup>30</sup>

- Claiming the Taiwan Strait as territorial waters: Beijing has consistently adopted a series of positions related to territorial sovereignty and international maritime law that are intended to bolster the PRC's expansive territorial claims over both Taiwan and nearly the entirety of the South China Sea. Such positions often stand in clear contravention of both straightforward, plain text interpretations of international agreements (such as UNCLOS) and longstanding maritime custom. Beijing has continued to maintain such positions and to claim the justification of international law, even when its positions have been explicitly rejected by international tribunals.<sup>31</sup> In relation to Taiwan, the PRC has made a set

of claims, unsupported by custom or law, which assert that not only is Taiwan PRC territory, but that the entirety of the Taiwan Strait constitutes PRC territorial waters.<sup>32</sup>



*Image: The connection of gray zone operations to the PRC's larger program of “cognitive warfare” against Taiwan, as depicted in a graphic from Taiwan's MND. (Source: ROC Ministry of Defense, ROC National Defense Report 2021 (中華民國110年國防報告書), November 2021 (p. 47).*

### *CCP Political Warfare vs. Taiwan: Gray Zone Operations*

The CCP's political warfare efforts also take the form of what it terms “gray zone public opinion warfare” (「灰色地帶」輿論鬥爭) (hereafter “gray zone operations”) directed at Taiwan.<sup>33</sup> Gray zone operations take the form of a range of activities—primarily, though not exclusively, military in nature—that encroach upon Taiwan's aerial and maritime periphery, and which are intended to erode Taiwan's sovereignty and the sense of security held by its citizens. These efforts have increased markedly in scale in recent years,

29 Text of UN Resolution 2758 (“Restoration of the Lawful Rights of the People's Republic of China in the United Nations”), adopted by the UN General Assembly (October 25, 1971), <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/192054?ln=en&v=pdf>.

30 Russell Hsiao, “Resolution 2758 and the Fallacy of Beijing's UN ‘One-China Principle,’” *Global Taiwan Brief*, October 20, 2021, <https://globaltaiwan.org/2021/10/resolution-2758-and-the-fallacy-of-beijings-un-one-china-principle/>.

31 One clear example of this was the 2016 decision of the Permanent Court of Arbitration (The Hague, Netherlands) that ruled for the Republic of the Philippines (RP) and against the PRC in a case brought by the RP in relation to contested maritime claims in the South China Sea. [See: Permanent Court of Arbitration, *The South China Sea Arbitration (The Republic of Philippines v. The People's Republic of China)*, decision issued July 12, 2016, <https://pca-cpa.org/en/cases/71/>.] The PRC has simply ignored this ruling, while maintaining its excessive territorial sovereignty claims in the region.

32 John Dotson, “Beijing Ramps Up Its Rhetoric over Taiwan and Maritime Sovereignty,” *Global Taiwan Brief*, June 29, 2022, <https://globaltaiwan.org/2022/06/beijing-ramps-up-its-rhetoric-over-taiwan-and-maritime-sovereignty/>.

33 Xu Meng (徐萌), “打贏「灰色地帶」輿論鬥爭主動仗” (“Winning the Initiative in Public Opinion Gray Zone Warfare”), *Zhongguo Junwang* (undated), [http://www.81.cn/rmjz\\_203219/jsjz/2021nd6q/bktg\\_203297/10106896.html](http://www.81.cn/rmjz_203219/jsjz/2021nd6q/bktg_203297/10106896.html).

including: PLA aviation flights in closer proximity to Taiwan; increased PLA Navy exercises in the waters around Taiwan (including to the east of Taiwan); and more aggressive PRC Coast Guard and maritime militia activities around Taiwan's offshore islands.<sup>34</sup>

As the PRC's own terminology indicates, the psychological component of these operations is paramount. While gray zone operations also serve other purposes—such as providing greater proficiency training to PLA aircrews and naval personnel in the airspace and waters farther out into the Western Pacific—the intended effects of intimidating Taiwan's civilian population and eroding a sense of Taiwan sovereignty, both domestically and internationally, are the primary goals. For its part, Taiwan's MND has described the PRC's coordinated efforts at information manipulation and coercive military activity as part of a campaign of “civil attack, military intimidation” (文攻武嚇) intended to psychologically target the perspectives and morale of Taiwan's population.<sup>35</sup>

In keeping with the psychological emphasis of gray zone operations, the CCP seeks to coordinate such coercive military activity (and parallel “law enforcement” activity, as seen in the harassing actions taken by PRC Coast Guard vessels<sup>36</sup>)

with active propaganda. For example, by far the most dramatic and provocative example of PRC gray zone military activity seen in recent years was the large series of military exercises—including missile firings over Taiwan itself, and into the economic exclusion zone (EEZ) of Japan—conducted in the immediate wake of then-US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan in August 2022.<sup>37</sup> In conjunction with Speaker Pelosi's visit and the military exercises, the PRC Foreign Ministry released a strident statement accusing the United States of “playing with fire” by “embolden[ing] ‘Taiwan independence’ separatist activities,” and that “all the consequences arising therefrom must be borne by the US side and the ‘Taiwan independence’ separatist forces.”<sup>38</sup> Such

asia-68345292.

37 John Dotson, “An Overview of Chinese Military Activity Near Taiwan in Early August 2022, Part 1: Exercise Closure Areas and Ballistic Missile Launches,” *Global Taiwan Brief*, August 24, 2022, <https://globaltaiwan.org/2022/08/an-overview-of-chinese-military-activity-near-taiwan-in-early-august-2022-part-1-exercise-closure-areas-and-ballistic-missile-launches/>; and John Dotson, “An Overview of Chinese Military Activity Near Taiwan in Early August 2022, Part 2: Aviation Activity, and Naval and Ground Force Exercises,” *Global Taiwan Brief*, September 7, 2022, <https://globaltaiwan.org/2022/09/an-overview-of-chinese-military-activity-near-taiwan-in-early-august-2022-part-2-aviation-activity-and-naval-and-ground-force-exercises/>.

38 A more full-length selection from the statement is: “The Taiwan authorities have kept seeking U.S. support for their independence agenda. [...] The United States, for its part, has been attempting to use Taiwan to contain China. It constantly distorts, obscures and hollows out the one-China principle, steps up its official exchanges with Taiwan, and emboldens ‘Taiwan independence’ separatist activities. These moves, like playing with fire, are extremely dangerous. Those who play with fire will perish by it. [...] The position of the Chinese Government and people on the Taiwan question has been consistent. It is the firm commitment of the more than 1.4 billion Chinese people to resolutely safeguard state sovereignty and territorial integrity. It is the common aspiration and sacred responsibility of all Chinese sons and daughters to realize the complete reunification of the motherland. The will of the people is not to be defied, and the trend of the times cannot be reversed. No country, no forces and no individual should ever misestimate the firm resolve, strong will and great capability of the Chinese Government and people to defend state sovereignty and territorial integrity and to achieve national reunification and rejuvenation. China will definitely take all necessary measures to resolutely safeguard its sovereignty and territorial integrity in response to the U.S. Speaker's visit. All the consequences arising therefrom must be borne by the U.S. side and

34 Eric Chan, “Escalating Clarity without Fighting: Countering ‘Gray Zone’ Warfare against Taiwan (Part 1),” *Global Taiwan Brief*, April 7, 2021, <https://globaltaiwan.org/2021/04/escalating-clarity-without-fighting-countering-gray-zone-warfare-against-taiwan-part-1/>; and Eric Chan, “Escalating Clarity without Fighting: Countering ‘Gray Zone’ Warfare against Taiwan (Part 2),” *Global Taiwan Brief*, June 2, 2021, <https://globaltaiwan.org/2021/06/escalating-clarity-without-fighting-countering-gray-zone-warfare-against-taiwan-part-2/>.

35 ROC Ministry of National Defense, *2022 Chinese Communist Military Power Report* [111年中共軍力報告書], September 1, 2022 (pp. 20-21).

36 As one example, see: Kelly Ng, “China Coast Guard Caused ‘Panic’ by Boarding Tourist Boat, Says Taiwan,” *BBC News*, February 20, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world->



statements were accompanied by a renewed wave of online disinformation—to include the dissemination of videos supposedly showing PLA ground forces gathering in Fujian for an invasion, but which actually employed footage culled from previous military exercises.<sup>39</sup>



*Image: PRC Coast Guard and maritime militia vessels operating in tandem to harass Philippines vessels near Second Thomas Shoal in the South China Sea (September 7, 2023). The use of such nominally civilian assets is a common factor in PRC gray zone operations. (Source: Reddit post, September 2023 (undated). [https://www.reddit.com/r/WarshipPorn/comments/16dygwt/yesterdays\\_daunting\\_but\\_successful\\_resupply\\_run/](https://www.reddit.com/r/WarshipPorn/comments/16dygwt/yesterdays_daunting_but_successful_resupply_run/). Original source: Republic of Philippines Coast Guard.)*

the ‘Taiwan independence’ separatist forces.” (“Statement by China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Pelosi’s Visit to Taiwan,” PRC Foreign Ministry, August 2, 2022, [http://us.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/zmgx/zxxx/202208/t20220802\\_10732305.htm#:~:text=China%20will%20definitely%20take%20all,%22Taiwan%20independence%22%20separatist%20forces.](http://us.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/zmgx/zxxx/202208/t20220802_10732305.htm#:~:text=China%20will%20definitely%20take%20all,%22Taiwan%20independence%22%20separatist%20forces.))

39 Hui-An Ho and Summer Chen, “Nancy Pelosi’s Visit Sparks New Wave of Misinformation in Taiwan,” Taiwan Fact Check Center, August 13, 2022, <https://tfc-taiwan.org.tw/articles/8018>.

## CCP Political Warfare vs. Taiwan: Economic Coercion

As profiled above, gray zone operations represent Beijing's employment of military, law enforcement, and nominally-civilian-but-government-controlled civil maritime assets to encroach upon Taiwan's territorial space. **The economic corollary to gray zone operations is economic coercion: the employment of targeted trade measures—including, but not limited to, measures such as import bans, denial of market access, and politically-oriented trade and investment incentives—to punish or pressure groups within Taiwan, to isolate Taiwan internationally, and to pressure other countries and international companies to conform to Beijing's preferred policies on Taiwan.**

The PRC has long employed a combination of economic and diplomatic pressure to prevent other countries from forming closer relationships with Taiwan. In past decades, this was particularly the case in regards to higher-profile issues such as arms sales. For example, in the early 1990s the PRC shut French companies out of a range of potential deals in China—reportedly including a potential contract to build the subway system in the southern city of Guangzhou—following the sale of French-built Mirage fighter jets to Taiwan. In the wake of this pressure, French business interests reportedly successfully lobbied the French government to change policy and curtail any further arms sales.<sup>40</sup> As a result, the United States is virtually the only major arms manufacturing country still willing to sell military equipment to Taiwan.

Chinese economic coercion as a component of political warfare makes itself felt in overt forms such

40 Jim Mann, “Taiwan Arms Deals Open Doors to Civilian Contracts: Trade: Cold War Weapons Sales Were Often Linked to Ideology. Now They Are Yoked to Jobs and Exports,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 15, 1994, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1994-03-15-mn-34352-story.html>.

as the arms sales issue example cited above, but also in the more subtle and insidious form of encouraging self-censorship. This phenomenon has been observed in the United States in a host of ways in recent years, to include controversies involving professional sports and self-censorship by Hollywood film studios in the name of maintaining access to the Chinese market.<sup>41</sup>

Two prominent recent examples of Chinese economic coercion clearly linked to political events are:

- In 2022, the PRC imposed import bans on a range of Taiwanese agricultural goods—including pineapples, sugar apples, and grouper fish—citing as a pretext the presence of pests or chemicals in shipments of these products. As the PRC is Taiwan’s primary export market for these goods, the bans had a major impact on producers in these agricultural sectors.<sup>42</sup> The PRC began to selectively lift these restrictions in December 2023—just prior to Taiwan’s January elections—in ways intended to exert political influence. For example, the PRC lifted the ban on grouper fish imports for seven commercial fish farms that registered with the PRC government, and whose owners joined a delegation that “actively guided fish farmers

to make corrective measures and led them to visit China.” Such “corrective measures” were more political than health-based, including adherence to the “92 Consensus” framework for cross-strait negotiations.<sup>43</sup>

- In 2021, the government of Lithuania reached agreement for Taiwan to open the “Taiwanese Representative Office in Lithuania” in the capital city of Vilnius. In response, the PRC recalled its ambassador to Vilnius and demanded that Lithuania withdraw its own ambassador in Beijing.<sup>44</sup> The PRC followed these diplomatic protests with an undeclared but *de facto* economic embargo on Lithuania, to include a ban on products from elsewhere in Europe that included Lithuanian components. The damage from this embargo was limited due to the relatively small size of the PRC-Lithuania trade relationship, but had an impact in certain high-tech sectors such as lasers, while complicating broader EU-China trade.<sup>45</sup>

### *CCP Political Warfare vs. Taiwan: United Front Subversion*

Another fundamental pillar of the CCP’s political warfare directed against Taiwan is united front work (UFW, 統一戰線工作 or 統戰工作). United front work has a long history in both the international Communist movement more generally, and in the CCP specifically. However, it is a complex phenomenon that often defies easy definition, and is poorly understood among most foreign observers.<sup>46</sup> **For the**

41 Isaac Stone Fish, “How China gets American Companies to Parrot Its Propaganda,” *Washington Post*, Oct. 11, 2019, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/how-china-gets-american-companies-to-parrot-its-propaganda/2019/10/11/512f7b8c-eb73-11e9-85c0-85a098e47b37\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/how-china-gets-american-companies-to-parrot-its-propaganda/2019/10/11/512f7b8c-eb73-11e9-85c0-85a098e47b37_story.html); and *Made in Hollywood, Censored by Beijing: The U.S. Film Industry and Chinese Government Influence*, PEN America, August 2020, [https://pen.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Made\\_in\\_Hollywood\\_Censored\\_by\\_Beijing\\_Report\\_FINAL.pdf](https://pen.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Made_in_Hollywood_Censored_by_Beijing_Report_FINAL.pdf).

42 Zoe Weaver-Lee, “Combating Beijing’s Multifaceted Economic Coercion Strategy against Taiwan,” *Global Taiwan Brief*, February 8, 2023, <https://globaltaiwan.org/2023/02/combating-beijings-multifaceted-economic-coercion-strategy-against-taiwan/>.

43 Liu Tzu-hsuan, “Ministry Urges China to be Consistent,” *Taipei Times*, Dec. 23, 2023, <https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/front/archives/2023/12/23/2003811027>.

44 “Taiwan Opens Office in Lithuania, Brushing Aside China Opposition,” *Reuters*, November 18, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/taiwan-opens-office-lithuania-brushing-aside-china-opposition-2021-11-18/>.

45 Wendy Cutler and Shay Wester, *Resilience & Resolve: Lessons from Lithuania’s Experience with Chinese Economic Coercion*, Asia Society, April 17, 2024, <https://asiasociety.org/policy-institute/resilience-resolve-lessons-lithuanias-experience-chinese-economic-coercion>.

46 For a summary overview of what united front work



**purposes of this report, united front work shall be defined as: “A range of measures—including but not limited to financial and/or psychological cooptation, the creation and manipulation of front organizations, and political subversion—intended to allow the CCP to coopt and control persons or social groups outside the ranks of the party.”**

Many aspects of the CCP’s efforts directed at managing the “special administrative regions” (特別行政區) of Hong Kong and Macao, and its outreach-cum-cooptation efforts directed at Taiwan, are classified by the party as united front work. Many of the CCP’s united front operations are managed by the party’s United Front Work Department (UFWD, 統戰工作部), but the extent of united front work is much broader than this: as CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping has stated, “united front work is work for the whole party, [and] the whole party must attach to it great importance” (統戰工作是全黨的工作，必須全黨重視).<sup>47</sup>

In the context of Taiwan, one of the most obvious manifestations of united front work is the effort to leverage selected co-opted figures—particularly, wealthy businesspersons with considerable interests in the PRC—to spread pro-unification messages and to support CCP policies. Arguably the clearest example of this—and one that intersects with the issue of media influence—is the case of Tsai Eng-meng (蔡衍明), the owner of the conglomerate Want Want Holdings (旺旺集團). Originally a snack food company, Want Want entered the media sphere in 2008 by acquiring the

China Times Media Group (中國時報集團), and in subsequent years commenced a series of purchases that gave it a controlling stake in multiple flagship Taiwan media properties: including *CTV News* (中視新聞台), *Chung Tien Television* (CTiTV, 中天電視公司), and the newspapers *China Times* (中國時報) and *Commercial Times* (工商時報).<sup>48</sup> Tsai has been outspoken in his advocacy of unification with the PRC, and his companies frequently echo CCP narratives: in one example, the Want Want LinkedIn page states that the organization’s goal is to “promote harmonious development between both sides of the Strait,” thereby parroting a frequently recurring CCP slogan.<sup>49</sup> Reported accounts from Want Want Media employees have indicated that their organizations received direct instructions from the CCP’s Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO, 台灣事務辦公室) regarding news coverage and editorial commentary.<sup>50</sup>

The CCP’s united front efforts directed at Taiwan also take many other forms, including:

- Financial and media support for marginal, pro-annexation political figures and fringe parties, in order to promote a narrative that most of Taiwan’s citizens are in favor of unification

means for the CCP, see: Anne-Marie Brady, “On the Correct Understanding of Terms,” *China Brief*, May 9, 2019, <https://jamestown.org/program/on-the-correct-use-of-terms-for-understanding-united-front-work/>.

47 Xi Jinping, “Completely, Accurately, and Comprehensively Implement the Important Thought of Accomplishing the Party’s United Front Work in the New Era” (完整、准确、全面贯彻落关于做好新时代党的统一战线工作的重要思想), *Qiushi* (求是), No. 2, 2024, [http://www.qstheory.cn/dukan/qs/2024-01/15/c\\_1130059591.htm](http://www.qstheory.cn/dukan/qs/2024-01/15/c_1130059591.htm).

48 See: Jonah Landsman, “Assessing Taiwan’s Media Landscape and PRC Influence, Part One: The Dangers of Deregulation,” *Global Taiwan Brief*, July 12, 2023, <https://globaltaiwan.org/2023/07/assessing-taiwans-media-landscape-and-prc-influence-part-one-the-dangers-of-deregulation/>; and “Want Want China Times Media Group / Commercial Times” (旺旺中時媒體集團/工商時報), undated, <https://cec.ctee.com.tw/ctms/team/#:~:text=%E6%97%BA%E6%97%BA%E4%B8%AD%E6%99%82%E5%AA%92%E9%AB%94%E9%9B%86%E5%9C%98%E6%98%AF%E8%87%BA%E7%81%A3%E5%85%B7%E5%BD%B1%E9%9F%BF%E5%8A%9B,%E4%B8%AD%E6%99%82%E6%96%B0%E8%81%9E%E7%B6%B2%E3%80%8B%E7%AD%89%E3%80%82>.

49 “About Us,” Want Want Group LinkedIn page, undated, <https://www.linkedin.com/company/want-want-china>.

50 Brian Hioe, “Financial Times Reports That Taiwanese Media Outlets Are Seeking Chinese Government Approval for Stories,” *New Bloom Magazine*, July 18, 2019, <https://newbloom-mag.net/2019/07/18/ft-want-want-report/>.

with the PRC. These include the Chinese Unification Advancement Party (CUPP, 中華統一促進黨), led by the organized crime figure Chang An-lo (張安樂, also known as “White Wolf” [白狼]).<sup>51</sup> It also includes figures associated with the New Party (NP, 新黨), a pro-unification party that splintered from the KMT in the 1990s. The New Party no longer holds any significant role in electoral politics, but continues a shadow existence as a pro-PRC (and stridently anti-American) media proxy for the CCP.<sup>52</sup>

- The effort to cultivate and coopt political figures in Taiwan, including at the local level. One such example was the PRC government’s program in the weeks leading up to Taiwan’s January 2024 elections to provide over 400 discounted trips to China for local Taiwan officials, with subsidies provided by the CCP Taiwan Affairs Office.<sup>53</sup>
- Covert financing to local social and religious institutions in order to gain leverage over the leadership of such organizations. The effort to cultivate temple organizations—especially efforts to leverage the veneration of the sea goddess Matsu, a popular figure of devotion on both sides of the Strait—is a particularly prominent part of such cooptation efforts.<sup>54</sup> CCP-influenced

organized crime groups are also linked to such efforts, with the CUPP and Bamboo Union Triad (竹聯幫) reportedly exercising heavy influence over more than 30 temple organizations throughout Taiwan.<sup>55</sup>



*Image: A Matsu procession arrives at Bengang Gangkou Temple in Taiwan’s Chiayi County (2019). The CCP has invested extensive united front work in the effort to influence or take control over local temple associations throughout Taiwan. (Source: Taiwan Today, “Mazu pilgrimages spotlight Taiwan’s rich religious traditions,” New Southbound Policy Portal, April 12, 2019, <https://nspp.mofa.gov.tw/nsppe/print.php?post=152956&unit=408>.)*

51 J. Michael Cole, “On the Role of Organized Crime and Related Substate Actors in Chinese Political Warfare Against Taiwan,” *Prospect & Exploration*, Vol. 19 No. 6 (June 2021), [https://www.mjib.gov.tw/FileUploads/eBooks/6f2646eb-b06a4ddb-a2449c950a42533d/Section\\_file/8a0b255919bc48e1bc3d2a38825cd3c8.pdf](https://www.mjib.gov.tw/FileUploads/eBooks/6f2646eb-b06a4ddb-a2449c950a42533d/Section_file/8a0b255919bc48e1bc3d2a38825cd3c8.pdf).

52 John Dotson, *Chinese Information Operations against Taiwan: The “Abandoned Chess Piece” and “America Skepticism Theory,”* GTI occasional report, August 2023 (pp. 6, 14-15) [https://globaltaiwan.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/OR\\_AS-TAW0807FINAL.pdf](https://globaltaiwan.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/OR_AS-TAW0807FINAL.pdf).

53 Yimou Lee, “Exclusive: China lures hundreds of Taiwan politicians with cheap trips before election,” *Reuters*, December 1, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/china-lures-hundreds-taiwan-politicians-with-cheap-trips-before-election-sources-2023-12-01/>.

54 “Mainland Slams DPP Obstruction of Cross-Strait Exchanges,” *Xinhua*, Nov. 29, 2023, <https://english.news.cn/20231129/f3f1d23f2bc84e12abde-57d563e550a3/c.html>; and Hsia Hsiao-hwa, Mai Xiaotian and

Lee Tsung-han, “China Targets Taiwan’s Temples, Matsu Worshipers in Influence Ops,” *RFA*, Jan. 10, 2024, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/china/taiwan-goddess-01102024103041.html>.

55 J. Michael Cole, “On the Role of Organized Crime and Related Substate Actors in Chinese Political Warfare Against Taiwan,” *Prospect & Exploration*, Vol. 19 No. 6 (June 2021), [https://www.mjib.gov.tw/FileUploads/eBooks/6f2646ebb06a4ddb-a2449c950a42533d/Section\\_file/8a0b255919bc48e1bc3d2a38825cd3c8.pdf](https://www.mjib.gov.tw/FileUploads/eBooks/6f2646ebb06a4ddb-a2449c950a42533d/Section_file/8a0b255919bc48e1bc3d2a38825cd3c8.pdf).

## CCP Political Warfare vs. Taiwan: Intelligence Operations

Whereas united front activities are sometimes overt in nature, or else thinly-disguised behind front organizations, the PRC also directs a broad range of covert intelligence operations against Taiwan. **Intelligence operations seek to acquire for the CCP, often through clandestine methods, inside information on political developments within Taiwan, and/or national security information that could be exploited in a future conflict; and to degrade the functions of Taiwan's own intelligence and security organizations.** The three primary agencies involved in these efforts are:

- The United Front Work Department (*mentioned above*), which collects social and political information as well as conducting subversive activities;
- The Ministry of State Security (MSS, 國家安全部), the CCP's leading civilian intelligence service, which combines both external intelligence and domestic security functions for the CCP, and which engages in agent recruitment and other intelligence operations in Taiwan;<sup>56</sup>
- Multiple bureaucracies within the People's Liberation Army, to include influence and psychological warfare functions conducted by the Central Military Commission Political Work Department (軍委會政治工作部);<sup>57</sup> and military intelligence

functions under the newly reorganized PLA Information Support Force (PLAISF, 中國人民解放軍資訊支援部隊).<sup>58</sup>

One of the most damaging intelligence operations is agent recruitment. Taiwan's national security architecture has been bedeviled in recent years by a series of high-profile cases of defense and intelligence officials facing criminal charges for espionage, or otherwise facing serious allegations of acting as recruited agents for the PRC. In 2022-2023, Taiwan authorities reportedly broke up 11 spy rings, a dramatic increase from earlier years.<sup>59</sup> Whether such numbers represent an increase in espionage activity or an increase in reporting in unclear, but Taiwan clearly faces a serious problem. Agent recruitments often follow a pattern that has become clearly discernible in recent years: a retired military officer or intelligence official is recruited, often during a trip to China, by a PRC intelligence officer (often, though not always, one working for a regional bureau of the MSS). This person then returns to Tai-

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Article/793267/chinas-goldwater-nichols-assessing-pla-organizational-reforms/.

58 PLA military intelligence, once designated the Second Department of the PLA General Staff Department, became a component of the PLA Strategic Support Force following the 2015 reforms; but the April 2024 reorganization has changed command relationships again, and appears to place at least some of these functions under the newly-designated Information Support Force. Further time and analysis will be needed to see how this reorganization plays itself out. See: Joe McReynolds and John Costello, "Planned Obsolescence: The Strategic Support Force In Memoriam (2015-2024)," *China Brief*, April 26, 2024, <https://jamestown.org/program/planned-obsolescence-the-strategic-support-force-in-memoriam-2015-2024/>; and J. Michael Dahm, "A Disturbance in the Force: The Reorganization of People's Liberation Army Command and Elimination of China's Strategic Support Force," *China Brief*, April 26, 2024, <https://jamestown.org/program/a-disturbance-in-the-force-the-reorganization-of-peoples-liberation-army-command-and-elimination-of-chinas-strategic-support-force/>.

59 Peter Mattis, Zoë Moore, "The Cross-Strait Intelligence Contest Continues Without Quarter," *China Brief*, Nov. 10, 2023, <https://jamestown.org/program/the-cross-strait-intelligence-contest-continues-without-quarter/>.

56 Peter Mattis, "Counterintelligence Remains Weakness in Taiwan's Defense," *China Brief*, August 17, 2017, <https://jamestown.org/program/counterintelligence-remains-weakness-in-taiwans-defense/>.

57 The former CMC General Political Department was reorganized as the CMC Political Work Department in PLA organizational reforms carried out in 2015. For references, see: Mark Stokes and Russell Hsiao, *The People's Liberation Army General Political Department: Political Warfare with Chinese Characteristics*, Project 2049 Institute, October 2013, <https://project2049.net/2013/10/14/the-peoples-liberation-army-general-political-department-political-warfare-with-chinese-characteristics/>; and Phillip C. Saunders and Joel Wuthnow, "China's Goldwater-Nichols? Assessing PLA Organizational Reforms," *Joint Force Quarterly*, July 1, 2016, <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Media/News/>



wan and leverages both social contacts and classic human weaknesses (usually greed) to recruit currently-serving personnel into their network.

Examples of recent PRC intelligence operations include:

- In October 2023, retired ROC Air Force Colonel Liu Sheng-shu (劉聖恕) was convicted of running an espionage ring for the PRC, and given a 20-year prison sentence. Liu was reportedly recruited during a 2013 trip to China, and went on to build up a network of agents in the military services (five other officers from the navy and air force were also sentenced in the case), making payments to his sources through dummy companies. Taiwan authorities reportedly confiscated more than \$500,000 USD in assets they said represented illicit payments for Liu's services.<sup>60</sup>
- In July 2023, officials in Taipei arrested a retired army soldier and diabolo yo-yo instructor named Lu Chi-hsien (魯紀賢), and four other retired military personnel, for running an espionage ring on behalf of the PRC. Reportedly recruited during an earlier trip to the PRC, Lu sought out financially distressed military personnel by making inquiries among pawnbrokers and loan sharks near military bases, offering the servicemembers money in exchange for classified documents from their places of work. In this manner, Lu was reportedly able to build up a network of 10 sources by the time of his arrest.<sup>61</sup>



*Image: Former army soldier and diabolo yo-yo expert Lu Chi-hsien performing at an exhibition at Sun Yat-sen Memorial Hall in Taipei (Feb. 16, 2019). Lu was arrested in 2023 for running a spy ring that recruited financially distressed military personnel into providing information that he channeled back to intelligence officials in the PRC. (Image source: SYS Memorial Hall Facebook, [https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.2535392553169488&type=3&\\_rdr](https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.2535392553169488&type=3&_rdr))*

### CCP Political Warfare vs. Taiwan: Cyber Operations

The final category of political warfare against Taiwan to be addressed in this report is that of cyber operations. **Cyber operations consist of the use of directed online activity—including, but not limited to, clandestine network penetrations and directed online propaganda-cum-disinformation—in order to gather intelligence, identify exploitable infrastructure vulnerabilities, and sow confusion and social divisions in order to undermine Taiwan's society and democratic political system.** Cyber operations are best understood not so much as an independent mode of political warfare unto itself, but rather as the operations conducted in one of the most critical domains of political warfare—which intersect with and amplify efforts in other areas.

Material disseminated via directed cyber operations plays a key role in CCP information manipulation

60 “Taiwan Ex-Colonel Gets 20 Years for Spying for China,” *BBC News*, Oct. 26 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-67224725>.

61 Chang Wen-chuan and Jason Pan, “Five Detained Over China Spy Network,” *Taipei Times*, July 21, 2023, <https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/front/archives/2023/07/21/2003803505>.

campaigns, as profiled in the disinformation story about American-sponsored biological warfare R&D in Taiwan (*see p. 9 of this report*). Multiple PRC agencies are involved in conducting cyber operations against Taiwan, and profiling all such organizations is beyond the scope of this report. However, one key institutional actor is the PLA's Base 311 (Unit 61716), a facility in Fujian Province that serves as the PLA's "Public Opinion Warfare, Psychological Warfare, and Legal Warfare Base" (輿論戰心理戰法律戰基地). Originally founded under the direction of the former PLA General Political Department, Base 311 operates multiple front organizations focused on media penetration and united front work in Taiwan.<sup>62</sup> Base 311 was assessed to have shifted to the control of the Strategic Support Force's Network Systems Department (網路系統部) in 2015; and now, presumably, to the successor Information Support Force.<sup>63</sup>

Such institutional subordination reinforces the critical role of the online domain in Base 311's propaganda operations—as well as all of the PRC's political warfare operations writ large. Further research performed by civil society organizations in Taiwan has further profiled how the CCP's information warfare bureaucracies are increasingly adapting emerging technologies—such as the employment of generative algorithms—to make their disinformation material

more effective in engaging selected audiences in Taiwan.<sup>64</sup>

PRC cyber operations also play a key role in the CCP's efforts for intelligence collection, and threatening critical infrastructure in Taiwan and other countries. Speaking in a US context, FBI Director Christopher Wray stated in April 2024 that "The PRC has made it clear that it considers

PRC cyber operations also play a key role in the CCP's efforts for intelligence collection, and threatening critical infrastructure in Taiwan and other countries.

every sector that makes our society run as fair game in its bid to dominate on the world stage, and that its plan is to land low blows against civilian infrastructure to try to induce panic and break America's will to resist," and that such cyber efforts were particularly focused on the potentiality of a "crisis

between China and Taiwan by 2027."<sup>65</sup> Speaking more directly of Taiwan itself, the US Department of Commerce has stated that "Taiwan faces a disproportionately high number of cyberattacks, receiving as many as 30 million attacks per month in 2022. Due to its geographical position, Taiwan is a testing field for hackers that deploy a significant number of Advanced Persistent Threat (APT) attacks daily."<sup>66</sup> Such warnings have

62 Elsa Kania, "The Role of PLA Base 311 in Political Warfare against Taiwan (Part 3)," *Global Taiwan Brief*, Feb. 15, 2017, <https://globaltaiwan.org/2017/02/the-role-of-pla-base-311-in-political-warfare-against-taiwan-part-3/>.

63 J. Michael Dahm, "A Disturbance in the Force: The Reorganization of People's Liberation Army Command and Elimination of China's Strategic Support Force," *China Brief*, April 26, 2024, <https://jamestown.org/program/a-disturbance-in-the-force-the-reorganization-of-peoples-liberation-army-command-and-elimination-of-chinas-strategic-support-force/>.

64 2024 Taiwan Presidential Election Information Manipulation AI Observation Report, Taiwan AI Labs, January 2024, <https://ailabs.tw/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/2024-Taiwan-Presidential-Election-Information-Manipulation-AI-Observation-Report-2.pdf>.

65 "Chinese Government Poses 'Broad and Unrelenting' Threat to U.S. Critical Infrastructure," FBI Director Says, FBI press release, April 18, 2024, <https://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/chinese-government-poses-broad-and-unrelenting-threat-to-u-s-critical-infrastructure-fbi-director-says>.

66 US Dept. of Commerce International Trade Administration, "Taiwan Commercial Country Guide" (updated April 1, 2024), <https://www.trade.gov/coun>



also been sounded by private industry: with, for example, the cyber security firm Cloudflare assessing that the final quarter of 2023—the lead-up period to Taiwan’s January 2024 elections—saw a staggering 3,370 percent rise in dedicated denial of service (DDoS) attacks against Taiwan computer networks as compared to the same period in the previous year.<sup>67</sup> The CCP’s directed network penetration operations, in addition to preparing for a future conflict, serve as a corollary to gray zone operations in physical space: seeking not only to degrade Taiwan’s security, but also to create a corrosive psychological effect upon its people.

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try-commercial-guides/taiwan-cybersecurity#:~:text=Taiwan%20faces%20a%20disproportionately%20high,Threat%20(APT)%20attacks%20daily.

<sup>67</sup> Omer Yoachimik and Jorge Pacheco, “DDoS Threat Report for 2023 Q4,” *Cloudflare Blog*, Jan. 9, 2024, <https://blog.cloudflare.com/ddos-threat-report-2023-q4/>.

## Conclusion

The CCP's ongoing, persistent, and multi-faceted campaign of political warfare directed against Taiwan represents one the most important—if not *the* most important—components of the PRC's overall effort to compel Taiwan's government and population to accept annexation on the CCP's terms. Just as importantly, it also represents the core effort of the CCP to lay the groundwork for a post-unification settlement that would ensure CCP political control over Taiwan society—in a manner perhaps similar to, but by necessity even more harsh, than the manner in which the PRC authorities have asserted control over the formerly restive territory of Hong Kong.

To understand the nature of the CCP's ambitions for Taiwan—and perhaps by extension, to better understand the efforts by the PRC and other authoritarian regimes to undermine free societies more broadly—it is critical to understand this campaign of calculated political warfare. This initial research report in GTI's *Counter Ideological Work and Political Warfare* research series is intended to provide a general framework overview of how the CCP conceives of and conducts this program of corrosive political warfare. Subsequent papers in this series, forthcoming throughout the course of 2024, will delve further into the CCP's ideological formulations regarding Taiwan; its employment of gray zone operations, economic coercion, and “lawfare” to erode Taiwan's international space; CCP intelligence and united front operations; and its cyber operations and po-

litical warfare conducted by the People's Liberation Army.

The CCP's ongoing, persistent, and multi-faceted campaign of political warfare directed against Taiwan represents one the most important components of the PRC's overall effort to compel Taiwan's government and population to accept annexation on the CCP's terms.