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Taiwan and America: Partners in the Battle for the Cognitive Domain

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For nearly 100 years, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has waged relentless *Political Warfare* against the Republic of China (ROC). *Media Warfare* has been a key weapon in this war, and it helped contribute to the ROC's retreat to Taiwan in 1949. Over the ensuing 73 years, the CCP vastly expanded its media warfare in its increasingly intense battle for dominance of Taiwan's cognitive domain.

Kerry K. Gershaneck, author of the book "Media Warfare: Taiwan's Battle for the Cognitive Domain" and a visiting scholar at National Chengchi University in Taiwan,explains that "[m]edia warfare presents an existential threat to Taiwan. By employing media warfare to divide and demoralize the people of Taiwan, the CCP hopes to achieve its goal of annexing Taiwan without having to resort to open kinetic conflict."

Media warfare presents an existential threat to Taiwan. By employing media warfare to divide and demoralize the people of Taiwan, the CCP hopes to achieve its goal of annexing Taiwan without having to resort to open kinetic conflict. Over the past two decades, the CCP's media warfare capabilities have increased tremendously in scope and sophistication. It employs a massive apparatus to shape the "cognitive domain"—to conform the thinking of its target audiences globally—often with great success. While Taiwan made praiseworthy progress in confronting CCP media warfare in the 2020 election, it is still hampered by historical and political factors in its ability to detect, deter, and defeat it. Moreover, the CCP dramatically increased media warfare operations and other forms of intimidation against Taiwan in conjunction with seismic events such as Beijing's imposition of total control over Hong Kong in 2020 and America's rout from Afghanistan in August 2021. It is exploiting Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine with similar intentions.

If the CCP is successful, Taiwan faces extinction as a sovereign entity, loss of its hard-fought freedom, and brutal repression of its people. But there is no good reason that the CCP will succeed, so long as Taiwan invests the will, leadership, and resources required to win. To this end, the United States and Taiwan must work together to develop the capabilities to combat and defeat this common threat. Too often Americans imagine US-Taiwan relations only in terms of the support provided to Taiwan, but rarely do they consider the assistance Taiwan can render to America. The United States has much to learn from Taiwan: despite a few valuable efforts in recent years, the United States is still woefully deficient in its ability to counter People's Republic of China (PRC) political warfare.

As the CCP's primary target with a century of experience combatting CCP political warfare, Taiwan has much to teach America. Further, with American assistance, Taiwan can share that experience with like-minded nations also being targeted by PRC political warfare, so those nations can develop the means to detect, counter, and defeat attacks. Accordingly, below are recommendations that will help Taiwan and the United States work together to successfully counter PRC media warfare.

First, it is important to briefly examine the political warfare goals and strategies the CCP is employing against Taiwan, and the outcomes Beijing expects from this effort. The PRC's primary political warfare goal is to "unify China" by bringing Taiwan under Beijing's control as a province or special administrative region. Intermediate objectives include *Balkanizing* Taiwan society and its body politic, effecting regime change to oust the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) from power, sabotaging Taiwan's economic and diplomatic efforts, and constraining groups calling for Taiwanese "independence."

Key Strategies Employed by the PRC:

- Corroding and manipulating democratic institutions, elections, and public trust
- Undermining morale by creating feelings of abandonment, isolation, and inevitability of the PRC's "ultimate victory"
- Co-opting elites, businesspeople, politicians, retired military officers, civil society, and media through the PRC's United Fronts strategy, which peddles influence using overt and covert networks, and other means
- Intimidating and blocking the CCP's opponents and critics

Outcomes the PRC Hopes to Achieve

- Annex Taiwan, and discredit its democratic system
- Exploit Taiwan's strategic location to make it a regional power projection platform
- Exploit Taiwan's uniquely valuable technology, as well as its human and natural resources
- Achieve unchallenged political, military, economic, diplomatic, and cultural dominance, initially regionally and ultimately globally.

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Despite continuing COVID-19 disruptions and pushback against China's ill-concealed support for Russia's Ukraine invasion, the PRC will only intensify its efforts to annex Taiwan as it nears the 100-year anniversary of its founding in 2049. Accordingly, below are four recommendations that Taiwan and America can cooperatively implement to meet this threat.

1. **Develop complementary national strategies to counter general PRC political warfare.** Media warfare must be confronted within the context of the general PRC political warfare it supports. Accordingly, it is essential for both Taiwan and America to develop national-level counter-political warfare strategies. As part of these strategies, establish systematic whole-of-society education training programs within its government, business, industry, academic, civil society and public communities regarding PRC political/media warfare.

2. **Expand the US-sponsored *Global Cooperation and Training Framework* (GCTF) conferences on media literacy and combating disinformation to address the broader concept of political warfare.** Elevate CGTF from the current narrow, low-level focus on "disinformation" to meet the much broader holistic threat posed by the PRC's massive political warfare apparatus. Leverage the experience of Ukraine and Baltic States, which have extensive experience combatting Russian media warfare.

3. **Establish a global information exchange mechanism to systematically share data each country is collecting on PRC media warfare.** Both Taiwan and the United States have unique capabilities to monitor and assess the PRC's media warfare activities abroad, but a framework to consistently and systematically exchange information has yet to be established. The exchange would allow discussion of current efforts to combat media warfare and best practices.

4. **Establish a regional *Asian Strategic Communications Center of Excellence* (ASCCE).** Taiwan showed it is capable of global leadership as it led the way in combatting COVID-19: it can show equally powerful leadership in combatting PRC media warfare as well. America should help Taiwan establish the ASCCE, which would be similar to the Finland-based *European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats* and the *NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence.* The Center's international focus may also help Taiwan partially circumvent the PRC's diplomatic isolation campaign.

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This article is a brief synopsis of topics explored in greater detail in the author's two recently published books: *Media Warfare: Taiwan's Battle for the Cognitive Domain* and *Political Warfare: Strategies for Combating China's Plan to "Win without Fighting."*

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