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China's political warfare in Taiwan

Strategies, methods and global implications

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Introduction

This chapter¹ explores the contours of People's Republic of China's (PRC)² hybrid threats and hybrid warfare against Taiwan with an emphasis on political warfare. China's political warfare in Taiwan, which, according to Mark Stokes³ and Russell Hsiao⁴ has been 'the primary target of People's Liberation Army (PLA) political warfare',⁵ provides for a case to explore the sophistication and variety in measures employed for political warfare. The political warfare observed in Taiwan has certain aspects that are unique to the context and others that can be pursued in different environments. Taiwan's shared history with PRC before the retreat, the identity question and variation in Taiwanese people's approaches to cross-Straits relations, transpire as concerns that are somehow specific to Taiwan. In addition to these, the size of Taiwan's military against China's, Taiwan's economic benefit from China, 'pro-unification' supporters and parties in Taiwan, Taiwanese media's alleged openness to outside influence and Taiwan's diplomatic position in the global arena emerge as some of the vulnerabilities⁶ that an opponent can leverage when waging political warfare.

These concerns may facilitate the penetration of Chinese influence in Taiwan although they, alone or with other measures, do not guarantee full-fledged success. On the other hand, the channels through which Chinese influence is injected in Taiwan can emerge as the channels for political warfare in other countries if and when a country's legal, political, social and economic framework permits. These channels are (1) diplomatic pressure, (2) legal, (3) economic and (4) information domain. NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence's (NATO StratCom COE) report titled 'Hybrid Threats: A Strategic Communications Perspective' proposes these channels as the measures used in Chinese public diplomacy efforts in Taiwan.⁷ This chapter abides by the suggested categories and builds on them by expanding each with subcategories and detailed information.

Before moving forward, it must be stated that the political warfare is not a one-way process. Taiwan has its own tools to counter political warfare and spread its

influence outside its territories. However, the focus of this chapter is Beijing's political warfare in Taiwan and thus, Taiwan's efforts will not be covered here. It must also be added that China is not the only agent seeking to inject influence and sway opinions on certain political issues in Taiwan. Other countries, some of which are cited in this chapter, allegedly engage in the manipulation of the information domain as well. Here, receiving government's degree of tolerance towards different kinds of external influence plays an important role in the government's definition of the influence as a threat. More importantly, the employment of proxies, such as cyber troops, content farms and co-opted individuals from target population, and galvanization of netizens to act on sentimental issues could hinder the enquiries about the nature and potential orchestrator of attempts. Hence, the threat posed by and the level of CCP's involvement in political warfare against Taiwan emerges as a debate.

Following this Introduction (first section), the chapter is structured as follows: the second section is 'Historical context and changes'; the third section is 'Political warfare through diplomatic, legal, economic and information-based channels' and the fourth section is 'Strategic implications'.

Historical context and changes

The Chinese Civil War resulted in the retreat of Kuomintang (KMT) forces, led by Chiang Kai-shek, to Taiwan, Republic of China (ROC), in 1949. This opened a new chapter in the political warfare between PRC and ROC. From ROC's settlement in Taiwan to the opening up in relations in the cross-Straits, various measures of political warfare were employed to reach, confuse and manipulate the other side of the straits. Megaphones, balloons, floating carriers and radio carried propaganda across the straits.⁸ Amid the ongoing political warfare, a number of significant political events influenced the environment in which the political warfare has been conducted.

Beijing improved its international recognition at the expense of Taiwan's with some countries and supranational organizations switching their diplomatic ties from Taipei to Beijing. Among them, in 1971 the United Nations and in 1979 the United States declared a shift from Taipei to Beijing in diplomatic recognition.⁹ In 1987 the martial law in Taiwan was lifted.¹⁰ This democratization move was followed by policies that relaxed the interactions across the Straits including the termination of the prohibitions against forming political parties, relaxation of controls over newspapers and loosening of the travel ban to China for visits to relatives.¹¹ The Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) was established around this period. A few years later, in 1992, the term 1992 consensus was coined after a meeting between Taiwanese and Chinese semi-official representatives who agreed on the 'existence of One China',¹² with China and Taiwan interpreting the term 'One China' differently.¹³ In the succeeding years, KMT and DPP demonstrated different approaches to '1992 consensus' in their political discourses. Later in 1996, two weeks before Taiwan's first democratic presidential election, China 'test-fired'¹⁴ missiles towards Taiwan's coast. Lee Teng-hui, whom

'China suspected had pro-independence inclinations,'¹⁵ succeeded in the elections despite China's intimidation.¹⁶

Taiwan's post-martial law liberalization not only impacted the cross-Straits relations but also widened the difference between the political systems of PRC and ROC, and wedded Taiwan to democracy, which, as argued by others, with its openness, can be exploited by authoritarian regimes by way of information operations.¹⁷ The internet and advancements in technology brought about new measures and platforms for political warfare. The new technologies and platforms, among others, allow for easier information and intelligence collection; provide new opportunities for proxy operations; offer alternative channels, such as social media sites, to reach masses with targeted messages; and present cyber operations as an option.

PRC's tactics have also improved and shifted over time. The arguments on changes in PRC's approach claimed an increase in focus on 'narrow groups' or 'individuals' including 'co-opted candidates' and 'proxies' in Taiwan, while firming ties with KMT, investors in China, and enhancing economic relations to appeal to Taiwanese allegedly received more attention previously.¹⁸ Some suggest that the events such as the Sunflower Movement, which voiced concerns about China's economic influence on the island and its potential impact over Taiwan's democracy and DPP's election win, contributed to the shift in China's focus from macro policies to 'narrow groups or even individuals' under Xi Jinping's rule.¹⁹

The switch from macro to micro targeting and cultivation of ties with candidates, individuals and narrower groups is visible in the allegations voiced in news and scholarly articles. However, cases covered by newspapers and articles also show that the older mechanisms are still alive despite a potential decrease in dependence on these conduits with the emergence of new routes and mechanisms. Akin to this, an article by Project 2049 argues that China's political warfare strategy would 'not change in response to DPP victory itself', but it would be altered in accordance to major swings in 'demographics and political and cultural identity on the island'.²⁰ The following section details the means used to spread influence and compel Taiwan and Taiwanese to act in line with China's political and military objectives.

Political warfare through diplomatic, legal, economic and information-based channels

The NATO StratCom report on hybrid threats lists diplomacy, economy/finance, legal and information as measures China uses in its public diplomacy efforts in Taiwan. Public diplomacy and political warfare are not synonyms. According to Stokes and Hsiao the main difference between the two lies in the 'target and intend' with public diplomacy aiming to sway the opinions of masses and political warfare encompassing a 'calculated manipulation of opposing side's strategies, defence policies, and broader international norms'.²¹ With this differentiation in mind, the measures employed in China's public diplomacy in Taiwan involve diplomacy, economy, legal and information,²² while the objective of eroding trust in government, influencing strategies, defence policies and

international norms expose the political warfare dimension and expand the boundaries of these four measures. Herewith, the venues, agents and measures of China's political warfare in Taiwan will be explored under these four categories with attention to sub-methods that build each category.

Diplomatic pressure

Chinese diplomatic pressure on Taiwan involves the push of companies to avoid referring to Taiwan as a country, luring Taiwan's diplomatic allies to switch sides and hampering Taiwan's participation in international and supranational organizations.

China's pressuring of some companies, including airlines and hotel²³ groups, to avoid referring to Taiwan as a country sparked debates in Taiwan and elsewhere. Some companies, including Qantas, All Nippon Airways and United Airlines, yielded to pressure and changed the way they refer to Taiwan on their websites.²⁴ Taiwan's profile in the international arena has been dented further with some of its allies switching their recognition from Taipei to Beijing. Burkina Faso and the Dominican Republic are among the countries that shifted their recognition.²⁵ Taiwan also faces China's roadblock in its participation in supranational and international organization.²⁶ For instance, Taiwan has not been invited to the World Health Organization's 'decision-making'²⁷ arm World Health Assembly (WHA), allegedly due to Beijing's 'political pressure'.^{28, 29} Between 2009 and 2016, Taiwan attended the WHA as an observer with the 'Chinese Taipei' designation.³⁰

These three venues of diplomatic pressure, among others, receive coverage in Taiwanese newspapers and at times become subject of heated political debate amid the political rivalry. Thus, arguably, the diplomatic pressure not only limits Taiwan's manoeuvre space in the international arena but also influences domestic political debates. Impediments to participation in international and supranational organizations on the other hand segue into the legal dimension of political warfare with the problems it begets.

Legal

Taiwan faces difficulties in participating in some international and supranational organizations, allegedly due to China's pressure. This, as also argued by others, restricts Taiwan from having a say on international norms and regulations, and from collaborating with other countries on common concerns. The participation problem and other examples alike emerge as battleground for legal warfare. A core ideal of legal warfare is to fit an act into a legal framework while claiming the opponent's move infringes the law.³¹ In this respect, according to Dean Chang (21 May 2012), a number of Chinese laws concerning 'territorial claims over Taiwan' lay the framework of legal warfare and seek to shape opinions of the international community.³² For instance, the 'anti-secession law' entails an article that allows for the use of 'non-peaceful means' if 'Taiwan independence secessionist forces' – as named by the act – 'cause the fact of Taiwan's secession from China', or 'secession' materializes as a result of an event, or

all efforts of 'reunification' fail.³³ Such acts are also employed as discursive warnings. In 2018, the Chinese tabloid *Global Times* argued that by then Premier William Lai could be arrested for his words asserting Taiwan's status as a 'sovereign, independent country' and that he is a 'Taiwan independence worker' under the anti-secession law.³⁴ Additionally, some interpret 'the 31 measures'³⁵ China extended to Taiwan as a tool to 'lure Taiwan fully into its economic orbit',³⁶ attract Taiwanese investment and talent and 'outcompete'³⁷ Taiwan with the lift of barriers to studying, investing and working in China for Taiwanese.³⁸ Arguably, these measures, with the diplomatic and economic enticements they encapsulate and the regulatory ease they bring, can be explored in relation to diplomatic, legal as well as economic influence.

Economy

The political warfare of China in Taiwan involves the use of economy as a means to influence policies, decision-making and opinions. Besides, the economic ties between China and Taiwan manifest themselves in Taiwan's political sphere,³⁹ and the influence of cross-Straits relation on economy find reflection in policies, and feed the political rivalry between DPP, KMT and other parties. Correspondingly, Christopher Walker and Jessica Ludwig (2017) suggest exploring China's business activities in connection to Beijing's influence attempts.⁴⁰ There are, among others, two significant, connected passages for China to spread influence by means of economy in Taiwan. First, economic aspects of the cross-straits relations have political repercussions. Second, individuals as well as parties and groups are allegedly pressured or enticed by monetary traits to act and influence in a way aligned with China's policies.

Economic relations between Taiwan and China inform policies, decisions and at times, political choices in Taiwan. The 2014 Sunflower Movement provides for an example. The movement sparked with – among others – concerns about the potential rise of China's economic influence over Taiwan with The Cross-Straits Service Trade Agreement, which sought to reciprocally open some 'service-sector markets' in both countries to one another within the parameters of the Cross-Straits Economic Cooperation framework Agreement (ECFA).⁴¹ The economy continued to be a pressure point after the movement. Jason Li (2019) suggests that China responded to Tsai's election victory in 2016, DPP's 'pro-independence leanings' and Tsai's stance on issues such as the 1992 consensus by 'exploiting' Taiwan's reliance on China's market and constricting Taiwan's economy.⁴² Also, while Sunflower Movement scrutinized KMT's cross-Straits economic policies, the potential influence of the cross-straits related economic concerns on DPP's performance in the 2018⁴³ local elections emerged as a question.

Individuals, parties and groups with financial ties to China form the second channel of influence. Allegations include sponsored trips to China in return for 'assistance in helping select candidates win the elections',⁴⁴ sponsoring candidate banquets⁴⁵ and channelling funds to political campaigns via the business of Taiwanese operating in China.⁴⁶ Also, Taiwan's Ministry of Justice stated that it is inspecting the financial backing behind certain candidates, some of which were allegedly, indirectly financed by China's Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO).⁴⁷ Akin to this, the pro-unification Chinese

Unification Promotion Party⁴⁸ has been drawing attention with its alleged ties to China and questioned for the source of its funding. The party allegedly spreads its 'pro-unification' support via its strong connections with grassroots organizations such as temples, 'agricultural production and marketing groups' and charities.⁴⁹ Also, in 2018, three members of the New Party were charged under the National Security Act for 'espionage' and 'Chinese funding'.⁵⁰

Additionally, some see 'The 31 measures'⁵¹ as another tool to cultivate a larger group of Taiwanese with ties to China. The 31 measures seek to facilitate studying, investing and working in China for Taiwanese. Twelve of the 31 measures concern market access and competition and promise Taiwanese the option to invest in state-owned businesses and take part in public biddings.⁵² The remaining ones include measures that aim to attract successful Taiwanese to China to study and establish start-ups and to work in sectors that were hard to enter for Taiwanese before.^{53,54} Some argue that the measures grant Taiwanese similar access with Chinese citizens on multiple areas and provide employment prospects for Taiwanese, especially ones working in areas with lack of employment opportunities.⁵⁵ Whether and how 31 measures contribute to existing influence efforts is an area to observe.

Information and influence

Chinese influence by way of information is spread through multiple channels in Taiwan, and China's sharp power penetrates into different factions of Taiwanese society and governance with the help of diverse agents. United Front Work Department (UFWD) sits at the centre of various information and influence activities. UFWD undertakings include information gathering, 'co-opt[ing]' and 'control[ing]'; 'non-CCP elites'; 'promoting "one country, two systems" in Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan' and engaging 'pro-China people' from outside China.⁵⁶ UFWD is allegedly growing strong under Xi Jinping's leadership with the addition of new divisions and expansion of UFWD directive, especially after the inclusion of Religious Affairs Bureau, State Ethnic Affairs Commission and State Council's Office of Overseas Chinese Affairs under its mandate.⁵⁷ The activities of the UFWD allegedly include swaying academic debates on "sensitive" issues; acquiring, collaborating with or controlling the narrative in media outside of China; and establishing ties with 'influential' individuals with 'business interests or sympathetic views towards China'.⁵⁸ With this, although discussed under this section, UFWD activities stretch into the other aspects discussed earlier.

Within this environment, influence attempts by way of information can be roughly grouped under four, intersecting and interacting categories: activities of the agents of influence, information gathering and espionage; media; disinformation campaigns and cyberattacks. Each will be discussed, respectively.⁵⁹

Agents of Influence, information gathering and espionage

China allegedly seeks to cultivate and deploy agents of influence in Taiwan.⁶⁰ For instance, in relation to information gathering and cultivating ties, according to a

Financial Times article, China's TAO allegedly asked the members of the Association of Taiwan Investment Enterprises on the Mainland to join 'study sessions' and 'discussion forums' on Xi Jinping's current policies on Taiwan, citing 'six members in Shanghai and the provinces of Fujian and Jiangsu'.⁶¹ Also, Taiwanese students studying in Guangzhou and Chengdu claimed that the 'local authorities had organized meetings with Chinese student associations to discuss how Taiwan should be ruled after unification'.⁶²

Espionage, on the other hand, has constituted a central debate between two sides of the straits with both parties condemning the other of spying. For instance, both China and Taiwan blamed one another of attempting to leverage students as spies. China 'accused' Taiwan of increasing 'efforts to steal intelligence with the aim of "infiltration" and "sabotage"', and claimed that some Chinese students studying in Taiwan have been 'targeted by domestic spies who lure them with money, love and friendship'.⁶³ As to Taiwan, some of the individuals detained by Taiwan with spying allegations include a PRC student studying in Taiwan,⁶⁴ and the bodyguard of the former Taiwanese vice-president Annette Lu.⁶⁵ Also, four New Party members were accused of 'provid[ing] intelligence to' CCP in 2017,⁶⁶ and there were allegations of a retiree from PLA running a spy network in Taiwan and recruiting individuals including 'Taiwanese military personnel to work for China'.⁶⁷

Media

The media is an essential source for waging political warfare and it is a vital apparatus for China's media/opinion warfare. The media in Taiwan becomes an instrument in China's political warfare with its vulnerabilities that open it to exploitation including 'capital' relations with China (e.g. ownership ties and revenues from advertising), and problems concerning journalistic and industry practices.

Some Taiwanese media entities are enmeshed in a constricting relation with 'Chinese capital, advertising, and circulation market', which results in the censorship and propagation of China lenient content especially in private media companies.⁶⁸ Taiwanese Media's capital relation with China is embodied in various, public examples. For instance, the Want Want Group, which owns various media outlets,⁶⁹ profits from its businesses operating in China.⁷⁰ The group's chairman has been accused of accommodating biased, pro-Beijing reporting.⁷¹ Also, a Reuters article, upon interviewing 'ten reporters and newsroom managers' and analysing 'internal documents', suggested that 'at least five Taiwan media groups' received payment from 'mainland authorities' to give them 'coverage in various publications and on a television channel'.⁷²

Poor journalistic practices exacerbate the problem,⁷³ and as some argue, the twenty-four-hour news cycle and pressure to produce push verification to the background. For instance, the National Communications Commission (NCC) 'fine[d]' CtiTV News for 'failing to fact-check'.⁷⁴ The media outlet was also scrutinized for the high amount of coverage it allocated to Han Kuo-yu on certain days in February 2019.⁷⁵ At times, the lack of accuracy checks on the information in circulation results in misleading

information travelling from one platform to the other without questioning. This becomes especially problematic against the allegations of some Taiwanese journalists making 'news' out of information on social media platforms, as argued by the Reuters Institute and Oxford University 2018 Digital News Report⁷⁶ and others.⁷⁷ The example is given in the following section.

Before moving forward, it is essential to state that the focus on China does not mean that the domestic political actors do not have influence over Taiwanese media. For instance, according to the 2019 Freedom in the World Report many Taiwanese news outlets 'display strong party affiliation in their coverage'.⁷⁸ Despite the interaction and intersections between the domestic and external influence over media, this article elaborates on China's influence over Taiwanese media as the topic of this study concerns China's political warfare in Taiwan.

Disinformation campaigns and information manipulation in cyberspace

Disinformation campaigns and other attempts at online information manipulation may help sway opinions and decision-making, and with that, pollute the information domain in Taiwan. While there is a rough internal and cross-straits split and some experts explore the related issues with respect to these two dimensions, a clear-cut separation between internal and external agents and dynamics is rather troublesome for – primarily – three reasons. First, proxies in Taiwan are allegedly recruited or used for the benefit of external agents. Second, 'pro-unification' supporters in Taiwan hold a particular view on cross-strait relations and some may be prone to pass information confirming their views on cross-straits issues and at times propagate their view in online and offline spaces. The second point is particularly important as in Taiwan, where freedom of speech and democracy are upheld, pro-unification supporters have the freedom to voice their opinions, and they are a part of the political debate. The freedom of expression they enjoy demonstrates the good functioning of democracy in this regard. Third, some of the political debates segue into issues concerning cross-straits relations and blur the boundaries between domestic and external political issues. More importantly, challenges of attributing an incident to the actual perpetrator of the act, especially when proxies are leveraged, leave room for a debate on the main orchestrator of an act in some cases. With this in mind, some of the issues that invite manipulation, channels leveraged in disinformation campaigns and agents involved require a closer look.

There are a wide variety of issues that have been tainted by disinformation, such as military affairs, policies and acts of politicians, including the steps taken by President Tsai. Among them, military and defence-related information contribute to the construction of an opinion on the power play between Taiwan and China amid the risk of China's military intervention in Taiwan. The narratives on China's military spending, capacity of China and Taiwan's forces, and military drill of both sides, regardless of their accuracy, potentially kindle or subside fears. More importantly, in some occasions, real or manipulated cases of kinetic acts are coupled with disinformation. The fake photo showing 'Chinese bombers near close to Taiwan's Jade Mountain' is an example.⁷⁹ Smear campaigns and attacks on military, political and other public figures compose

another line of disinformation campaign. For instance, some media outlets operating in China and Hong Kong have 'misquoted' or 'obscured' the statements of Taiwanese officials including 'retired former generals, high-level defence officials, lawmakers', and 'entertainers' allegedly to stain their reputation or create the impression that they 'support a particular political position held by the CCP'.⁸⁰

The use of disinformation during the 2018 local election period also emerged as a debate, with division on – among others – the source and influence of disinformation in the run-up to the election. For instance, various government authorities accused China of leveraging disinformation to sway public opinion in Taiwan before the elections.⁸¹ On the other hand, after the elections, some KMT lawmakers argued that the DPP is pointing at the 'fake news' as an excuse for its poor performance in the election and blamed President Tsai's administration for suppressing 'freedom of speech and the press in the name of curbing the spread of false news reports'.⁸² During the election period there was disinformation targeted at the Kaohsiung candidate Chen Chi-mai, while some claimed that his opponent who later won the race, Han Kuo-yu, was supported by China.⁸³ With regard to the use of disinformation during the elections in general, the Criminal Investigation Bureau shared that it received sixty-four claims of disinformation and passed forty of them to prosecutors.⁸⁴

Chinese agents allegedly leverage multiple channels to penetrate disinformation in Taiwan. Michael J. Cole identifies some of the channels used by China in disseminating disinformation in Taiwan as 'state-run media (e.g., Global Times, China Review News); government-linked Weibo accounts; Internet platforms known as "content farms" or "content mills" (e.g., COCO01.net); media controlled by or associated with the PLA-linked 311 Base (Psychological Operations, and Legal Warfare Base, or 61716 Unit) in Fuzhou, Fujian Province; Facebook groups'; and 'online forums like PTT Gossiping (批踢踢八卦板)'.⁸⁵ Wikipedia has also been a battleground where entries on Taiwan were edited and reversed multiple time.⁸⁶ Disinformation is not limited to one of these sites; it occasionally travels from one platform to the other amplifying the visibility and arguably trustworthiness of the information. Official Chinese media outlets such as the China Review News and *Global Times* – allegedly – engage in propaganda or disinformation,⁸⁷ and some information promoted by such sources find their ways to Taiwanese newspapers and TV. The Reuters Institute and Oxford University 2018 Digital News Report argued that the Taiwanese media published stories originating from PLA run social media sites on PLA aircraft and ships 'patrol[ing]' Taiwan.⁸⁸ This circles back to the discussion on poor journalistic practices.

The content farms, cyber troops and bots are central to the debates concerning information manipulation in Taiwan. COCO01.net,⁸⁹ Qiqi Kan Xinwen (琦琦看新)⁹⁰ and COCO02.net⁹¹ are some of the content farms labelled as conveyors of disinformation. The Common Wealth magazine claimed that 'a group of pro-blue fan pages' have based their content on 'content farms' such as 'mission-tw.com', 'nooho.net' and 'taidushashi'.⁹² This is problematic given the possible followership of content farms. While the orchestrators behind these content farms could be hard to pinpoint, they are scrutinized for housing misleading content.

Some of these content farms also have Facebook pages. With regard to Facebook pages, Paul Huang, in an article in *Foreign Policy*, casted doubt on the authenticity of 'Han Kuo-yu Fans For Victory! Holding Up a Blue Sky' fan page, which was established a day after Han Kuo-yu announced his candidacy for the local elections.⁹³ Huang's search into the admins of the fan page revealed that there were three LinkedIn profiles with the same name three of the six admins of the fan page.⁹⁴ While all claimed to be Peking University graduates and Tencent employees, two profiles stated that they 'worked in public relations for many foreign companies'.⁹⁵ A further look into the phrase 'worked in public relations for many foreign companies' led Huang to 249 LinkedIn profiles with similar characteristics including 'mugshot-style photos cropped from decades-old graduation pictures and claims of being Tencent employees and Peking University graduates', suggesting a link between them.⁹⁶

The employment of cyber troops and bots to inject disinformation in different platforms, cheerlead a side of a debate or counter arguments against the view they support is another important dimension of the problem. According to Monaco (2017), the use of manual propaganda is more prominent, although bots activity is observed occasionally, at times in domestic campaigning efforts.⁹⁷ For instance, in Sia et al.'s inquiry into the Diba⁹⁸ case where Diba members made a call to flood President Tsai's Facebook page with comments, they did not encounter fully automated accounts while they found 'evidence of heavy coordination for mainland accounts' and suggested that automation could have been coupled with 'human intervention'.⁹⁹ According to Monaco (2017), while there was no clear indication of China's 50-cent party cyber troop's engagement in the incident, findings such as the use of narratives aimed at 'distracting or stifling discussion, rather than arguing' and 'little evidence of automation' conformed to King et al.'s research exploring 50-cent army.¹⁰⁰

According to Monaco (2017), bot use remains limited.¹⁰¹ One example offered by Monaco is the use of bots in the domestic political rivalry of 2014 Taipei mayoral race. While the independent candidate, Ko Wen-je's campaign allegedly involved the use of crawler bots for information gathering and targeted messaging built on the information collected, his opponent KMT candidate Sean Lien's campaign allegedly benefited from inauthentic accounts to spread information favouring Lien, countering Ko Wen-je.¹⁰² On the other hand, Major General of Taiwanese military's cybersecurity command unit Ma Ying-han argued that the 50-cent party is gradually 'replaced by artificially intelligent editing robots'.¹⁰³ Whether the use of bots will increase in the future remains a question. As to inauthentic accounts, some recently argued that there are PTT (bulletin board) and Facebook accounts available for purchase.¹⁰⁴ As purchased accounts would come with history, their propaganda may draw more attention and incite trust than a fake account with a constructed or no history.

The use of proxies and multiplicity of disinformation agents and channels complicate attribution and make it harder to judge whether some attempts are coordinated by the Chinese government or carried by galvanized citizens. Further complicating the problem, Beijing's immersion into Taiwanese domestic politics beclouds the separation between Chinese agents, and politically motivated domestic actors, such as 'pan-blue forces'.¹⁰⁵ According to Michael J. Cole, there has been cases where

'Chinese disinformation efforts have overlapped with – and in some cases appear to have co-opted – traditional blocking action by opposition legislators and civic groups opposed to reforms'.¹⁰⁶ The disinformation on pension reform and burning of incense are two examples. Furthermore, the use of information push and manipulation tactics for domestic policy by local agents and politicization of the debate on disinformation pollute the information domain and arguably damage trust in politics and politicians further.

Information manipulation tactics also influence the domestic political rivalry. This creates a fault line that can be exploited by external agents, who may amplify disinformation or biased information circulated by or on local political actors or their supporters. Online groups backing different political camps could have various motivations and come in different forms including online citizens voluntarily supporting political personalities they follow; 'political public relations' or 'marketing companies' motivated by monetary benefits or 'trading of favours'; and 'party workers and advisors' of different political camps.¹⁰⁷ These groups could have different aims and some, such as citizens supporting a political group, could unknowingly contribute to the circulation of misleading information. 'The Global Disinformation Order: 2019 Global Inventory of Organised Social Media Manipulation', by Samantha Bradshaw and Philip N. Howard, argues that there are politicians and political parties in Taiwan that engage in 'social media manipulation'.¹⁰⁸

Some government divisions were also embroiled in discussions about 'cyber armies'. For instance, KMT Legislator Arthur Chen called on Control Yuan and the Ministry of Justice to 'investigate the Council of Agriculture (COA)' on its 'cyber army', for which it allegedly budgeted to hire 'online workers for policy promotion', but according to Chen's claim 'funded Facebook groups to attack its opponents' instead.¹⁰⁹ COA minister Chen Chi-chung countered the allegations asserting that the council took initiatives to counter disinformation in a fast manner amid the surge in disinformation about farmers and agriculture industry.¹¹⁰ Amid the political rivalry and blurring boundaries of political communication, as others also suggest, the issue of disinformation campaigns become politicized and domestic debates on disinformation, coupled with the external threat, contribute to the emergence of an information environment prone to information pollution.

This section has focused on allegations of China's manipulation by way of disinformation and local political debates on disinformation that interact with or aid China's alleged influence objectives. Here it is essential to note that attribution of the activities of content farms, cyber troops and other intermediaries could be challenging and motivations of these groups likely vary. Nonetheless, regardless of the main orchestrators and aims, these intermediaries often pollute the information environment with manipulative, biased or false information. Also, it is important to state that China is not the only agent accused of injecting influence in Taiwan. For instance, Ketty Chen and Michael J. Cole argue that some conservative churches and institutions in the United States aided the efforts of 'anti-LGBT movement' in Taiwan against the same-sex marriage referendum.¹¹¹ Nevertheless, as this article concerns China's political warfare in Taiwan, this section only explored information manipulation attempts in relation to China's political warfare.

Cyberattacks

Taiwan is not foreign to cyberattacks. Targets allegedly include government bodies; NGOs; educational institutions; technology, finance and manufacturing companies; hospitals and others.¹¹² While attribution is getting harder with the sophistication of techniques, President Tsai argued that North Korea, Russia and China are using Taiwan as a 'test-bed' to advance their 'cyber-hacking' techniques before deploying them in other foreign countries.¹¹³ Majority of the attacks potentially 'come from groups supported by China' according to Howard Jyan, director of Executive Yuan's Cybersecurity department, who lists 'matching patterns', 'sophistication' and other factors as indicators.¹¹⁴ Also, a FireEye report on 'Cyber Threat Activity Targeting Elections' said it 'suspected Chinese threat actors target Taiwanese government entities with election-themed lures, utilizing TAIDoor malware'¹¹⁵ with reference to 2018.

Future assaults could be harder to detect and cause more damage. For instance, there are signs of advancement in techniques with the hackers' using of 'online platforms such as search engines to break into systems'.¹¹⁶ Hackers allegedly hide behind platforms such as Google and blogs and escape from investigators' attention by carrying their activities behind the scenes of a running platform.¹¹⁷ Also, attackers allegedly navigate their hacks through other countries, which make it harder to pin the actual location of the hacker.¹¹⁸

Strategic implications

In the twenty-first century, China continues to pursue the development, deployment and exercising of political warfare as a means to create advantages and influence events or strategic choices of not only Taiwan but also on the global stage.¹¹⁹ The resurgence of great power rivalries, particularly notable in East Asia, suggests that while wars and conflicts aren't inevitable, neither are they inconceivable. In potential military confrontations, however, between adversaries armed with substantial conventional arsenals and stand-off precision strike systems, there are considerable escalatory risks. Accordingly, China, Russia and the United States are engaging in competitive strategies to avoid large-scale wars of attrition, and instead rely on 'peacetime' non-military diplomatic, information and economic actions coupled with paramilitary operations to gain influence and territory without having to escalate to a major conflict.¹²⁰

These 'indirect' actions include the use of information operations and political warfare, cyberattacks, electronic warfare as well as paramilitary operations in disputed areas. The progressive complexity of cyber and information operations is reflected in cross-domain strategic interactions – between cyber, physical and cognitive information domains, civil and military spheres, and involves both state and non-state actors.¹²¹ These include confrontations in and out of cyber space, cyberattacks on physical systems and processes controlling critical information infrastructure, information operations and various forms of cyber espionage. Accordingly, nearly all great powers are developing advanced cyber capabilities – whether defensive, offensive or intelligence-driven, which are increasingly used as instruments of warfare – as a key

enabler and force-multiplier of 'kinetic' operations – enabling actions, capabilities and effects of land, sea, air, space and intelligence operations in all domains.¹²²

The resulting progressive complexity in strategic interactions and interdependencies between cyber, information, cognitive and physical domains present new challenges on traditional conceptions of deterrence and defence. In particular, the convergence of both military and non-military instruments of warfare through cyber and information means brought by emerging technologies are often viewed in the context of two interrelated strategic challenges: (1) 'cross-domain deterrence and compellence' (CDD&C) and (2) asymmetric Anti-Access/Area-Denial challenges – with both having significant impact on the character of warfare, particularly in East Asia. CDD&C refers to the act of deterring an action in one domain with a threat in another domain, where the domains are defined as land, under the land, at sea, under the sea, in the air, in space and in cyberspace, and may often use economic sanctions and other diplomatic, political and informational tools. In this context, CDD&C may leverage on both deterrence – dissuading an actor from taking an action before they act; and coercive diplomacy – persuading an actor to stop a particular course of action after they initiated action. In other words, cross-domain coercion uses threats of force in multiple domains to influence an opponent's strategic choices.¹²³

The concept of CDD&C is not new and has long existed in the history of warfare. For example, with the advent of air power in the early twentieth century, the concept of 'counter-value pre-emptive strikes' was seen as an attempt to gain an offensive advantage – that is, the case of Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. There are many other historical examples of CDD&C strategies. For example, NATO relied on the threat of nuclear use to deter superior conventional Soviet forces. Soviet advances in space and ballistic missile technology threatened the credibility of US/NATO nuclear forces by providing Soviets with means to threaten the US homeland in response to US/NATO nuclear threats. The United States used actions in multiple domains – a naval blockade, threat of an air campaign, and changes in nuclear posture – to compel the removal of Soviet missiles from Cuba while deterring an escalatory response through local conventional naval superiority and global strategic nuclear retaliatory capabilities.¹²⁴ Today, however, China relies on varying CDD&C strategies to project power and influence in areas vital to their strategic interests such as Taiwan by adopting measures that would be effective with minimum probability of proving retaliatory escalation. The use of cyber means as political instruments of warfare is increasingly reflected in Taiwan as well as the ongoing territorial disputes over the South China Sea.¹²⁵

Consequently, when contemplating how China's political warfare may further affect security and defence trajectories, US allies and strategic partners in East Asia, including Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore, will have to plan for China's increasing use of its 'non-kinetic toolkits': What types of challenges does this present for them? How will they operate in a contested environment characterized by the diffusion of sophisticated longer-range adversary capabilities and methods such as ballistic missiles, submarines, weapons of mass destruction and offensive space, cyberspace and information warfare assets? At the same time, however, the character of future conflicts in the regional 'grey zones' may also likely reflect low-level type intensity conflicts in 'peripheral campaigns', rather than high-end missions – given the

considerable escalatory risks. However, in a context where the battle space is crowded with both legally constituted combatants and non-combatants, this will present new challenges. Consequently, military-technological advantages will not be effective without corresponding strategic, organizational and operational adaptability – from identifying new techniques, tactics and procedures and ways and means to counter them.

Ultimately, the effectiveness of China's political warfare must be viewed in a relative context – through the lens of *competitive strategies* reflected in the efforts to develop effective counter-measures and responses. A key requirement will be the capacity of the select states and their militaries to educate both the officer corps and the rank-and-file on the changing character of war, what the laws of armed conflict permit military personnel to do. Under the conditions of strategic ambiguity, regional militaries will therefore have to redefine their 'theories of victory'. Ultimately, the next-wave of China's political warfare will increasingly aim to shape regional as well as global strategic choices, including defence planning, management and political priorities, propelling the need for effective strategic and operational counter-responses to prepare for, fight, win and deter new types of conflicts.

Notes

- 1 Please note that this chapter was written after 2018, before 2020 elections in Taiwan.
- 2 This study focuses on Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) attempts to inject influence in Taiwan. By referring to China, it does not intend to refer to China or Chinese citizens as a whole.
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- 10 Chou Hui-ching, 'Lifting Martial Law and Opening-up Taiwan', *The Commonwealth Magazine*, 24 December 2018. <https://medium.com/commonwealth-magazine/lifting-martial-law-and-opening-up-taiwan-a0965ccca511>. See Also 'Taiwan Country Profile', *BBC*, 1 February 2019. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-16164639>.
 - 11 Hui-ching, 'Lifting Martial Law and Opening-up Taiwan'. See Also 'Taiwan Country Profile', *BBC*.
 - 12 'Chinese Public Diplomacy in Taiwan' (NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence (NATO StratCom COE), 8 April 2019), 66.
 - 13 See JM Norton, '“One China,” 5 Interpretations', *The Diplomat*, 27 July 2016. <https://thediplomat.com/2016/07/one-china-5-interpretations/>.
 - 14 'Nations Condemn Chinese Missile Tests', *CNN*, 8 March 1996. http://edition.cnn.com/WORLD/9603/china_taiwan/08/.
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 - 29 The Covid-19 broke out during the review process of this article. Taiwan raised concerns about its ‘exclusion from’ the WHO amid the spread of the novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV). See Huileng Tan, ‘Taipei Lashes Out at China for Blocking Taiwan’s Access to the World Health Organization’, *CNBC*, 6 February 2020. <https://www.cnn.com/2020/02/06/coronavirus-taiwan-lashes-out-at-china-for-blocking-who-access.html>. See also ‘Coronavirus: Taiwan Calls China “vile” for Restricting Island’s Access to WHO on Wuhan Virus’, *The Straits Times*, 4 February 2020. <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/east-asia/coronavirus-taiwan-calls-china-vile-for-restricting-islands-access-to-who-on-wuhan>.
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- 35 Twelve of the 31 measures concern market access and competition and promise Taiwanese the option to invest in state-owned businesses and take part in public biddings. The remaining nineteen on the other hand aim to attract successful Taiwanese to China to study and establish start-ups and to work in sectors that were hard to enter for Taiwanese before. See Gunter Schubert, 'China's 31 Preferential Policies for Taiwan', *Taiwan Sentinel*, 23 March 2018. <https://sentinel.tw/china-31pp-taiwan-no-threat/>. See Also 'Chinese Public Diplomacy in Taiwan', (NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence (NATO StratCom COE), 8 April 2019).
- 36 Schubert, 'China's 31 Preferential Policies for Taiwan'.
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- 47 Cole, 'Chinese Interference in Taiwan's Elections is Part of a Two-Pronged Attack on Taiwan's Democracy'. See Also Tu, Ching-chuan and Hetherington, 'PRC Funding of Campaigns Probed'.
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- 53 Schubert, 'China's 31 Preferential Policies for Taiwan'.
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- 59 Please note that some examples delivered in this section include allegations covered in newspapers. As the chapter also seeks to survey local political debates on disinformation, accounts covered on newspapers are a part of the discussion. Nonetheless, examples including papers are delivered as allegations as newspaper coverages could also be questioned as per the section on journalism.
- 60 Here it must be stated for certain allegations it is rather difficult to make a conclusive judgement, as there is no criteria to judge accepted and rejected threshold of influence. It is also not possible to measure the intent, especially when claimed attempts to recruit agents of influence fit the legal framework and usual proceeding of exchanges.

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- 70 Wang, 'China Times Group Is Sold to Want Want'.
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 - 95 Huang, 'Chinese Cyber-Operatives Boosted Taiwan's Insurgent Candidate'.
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