

# Japan 2040: A Stark Appraisal

BY PROFESSOR KERRY K. GERSHANECK



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## Introduction

As the sun's rays break through the Tokyo's cold, gray eastern horizon on the morning of January 1, 2040, Japan stands alone. On Tokyo's streets and in the prime minister's office, where once national pride and confidence abounded, a sense of demoralization and defeat pervades. As a result of the China's aggressive, skillful, and persistent political warfare, Japan is now--in effect--a vassal state of the People's Republic of China: politically isolated; militarily, diplomatically, and economically impotent; fearful and uncertain.<sup>1</sup>

Japan is now *Haiboku Shita Nihon*—Defeated Japan!

To Japan's south, Chinese Navy ballistic missile and attack submarines routinely deploy from Taiwan's east coast, as People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy and Air Force aircraft and surface warships enforce China's "settled sovereignty" across

the East China Sea and through the Nansei Shoto, down through the South China Sea and the Bohai Channel.

When Taiwan (Republic of China) succumbed to China's relentless political warfare and reluctantly accepted annexation by the communist state in 2031, the "First Island Chain" (of which Japan is an integral part) was irreparably broken. PLA forces immediately occupied Taiwan's military bases, to ensure complete subjugation of (and retribution against) the "renegade province's" population and also to project outward China's military might. The occupying PLA air, naval and ground forces brought with them ballistic missiles that were quickly emplaced throughout Taiwan. Hundreds of these missiles are now aimed primarily at Japan; the Philippines has not posed a threat to China since 2024, when it abrogated its defense treaty with the U.S. and allowed the PLA unconstrained access to Philippine military facilities.

To Japan's southwest, the Korean peninsula

offers an equally bleak perspective. The PLA routinely sails and flies from bases in the Republic of Korea once reserved for American forces, before South Korea abrogated the ROK-US alliance in 2036. Chinese Navy flotillas sail from Pusan and Pohang routinely to join other PLA Navy fleets for live-fire exercises in the Korean Sea (formerly called the Sea of Japan) and East China Sea, and deep within Nansei Shoto waters. With Taiwan now in Beijing's hands, the Ryukyu islands are now the focus for Beijing's next regional conquest. An increasingly violent "Okinawa Independence Movement", funded in large part by CCP-affiliated organizations, initiates near-daily protests, strikes, and terrorist attacks on Japan Self Defense Force facilities in the prefecture as CCP-affiliated Okinawan news media feed the Ryukyuan population intense pro-PRC/anti-Japan propaganda on a 24/7/365 basis.

To Japan's northwest, the threat posed by Sino-Russian forces looms ominously, as it has since Russia and the PRC signed their *Treaty of Security and Mutual Defense* in 2026. Combined Russian and Chinese flotillas and aircraft formations now routinely circumnavigate the islands of Japan, with Beijing and Moscow disdainful of the meek demarches put forth in their capitals by Japanese diplomats in response. With its sea lanes of communications effectively blocked north, south, and west and subject to Beijing's decrees, Japan's seaborne commerce, fishing fleets, and ocean resources extraction industries suffer tremendously.

Throughout Japan's more-distant horizons, the political and military situation is similarly dismal. Cambodia, Thailand, and Myanmar now also provide

fulltime basing to PLA forces. The Association of Southeast Asia Nations (ASEAN), now effectively comprised of tributary states of Beijing, join the PRC routinely to batter Japan politically and economically as punishments for Tokyo's alleged wrongdoings and perceived failures, both historical and recent.

To the far south, Oceania is increasingly colonized by overwhelming numbers of Chinese migrants and co-opted by unsustainable debt-trap loans provided under the auspices of China's *Belt and Road Initiative* (BRI). Fiji and the Solomon Islands provide basing access for the PLA Navy and Air Force, effectively breaking "The Second Island Chain". This access allows afloat PLA Marine Corps expeditionary groups to provide the only consistent visible foreign military force in the region. With New Zealand firmly entrenched in the BRI and routinely hosting PRC naval and air force visits, Australia—now surrounded—is unwilling to risk Beijing's wrath to support Japan's economic or security needs.

To Japan's west Tokyo's only ally, America, appears small in the far distance, having withdrawn its last operational military forces from Japan in late 2039. Token headquarters staffs remain at Yokota, Yokosuka, and Camp Zama for bilateral military engagement, consistent with the Treaty of Mutual Defense. America's combat forces began falling back from Asia to Guam, Hawaii, and the U.S. West Coast consistent with its *National Security Strategy* of January 2025. Most U.S. facilities in Japan were shuttered or turned over to the JSDF by 2035.

Notably, as the PRC accelerated its already hyper-aggressive political warfare campaign in the early 2020's to seize dominance across the Indo-

Asia-Pacific Region, Japan and the U.S. expressed displeasure but failed respond with any effective countermeasures. America's friends and allies in the region noted the failure to respond and followed suit.

*Haiboku Shita Nihon*—a defeated Japan—was one of the CCP's main objectives for more than 100 years, and just as its Politburo long envisioned, without resorting to major kinetic combat operations China skillfully achieved that objective. Its chief weapon in achieving this astonishing victory was a massive, powerfully resourced, and centrally directed *Political Warfare* apparatus.

Equally astonishing is that fact that most of Japan's leaders chose to ignore the fact that they were under attack--until it was too late. Elected officials and policymakers invested little effort in understanding the threat. Consequently, they failed to establish the desperately needed capabilities to detect, deter, combat, and defeat China's relentless attack.<sup>2</sup>

These leaders set the ideal conditions for China's victory over *Haiboku Shita Nihon*.

Through ignorance, ineptitude, willful disregard, and greed, those who should have educated and protected Japan from this existential threat failed their people and their country.

Consequently, Japan's citizens were not educated by their government or the news media about China's political war against them, and thus were incapable of petitioning their government to successfully confront and defeat it. It is these average citizens—not Japan's elites—that will suffer most in *Haiboku Shita Nihon*.

This retrospective vision of Japan's bleak future as a defeated vassal state of the PRC is fiction,

of course—at least for now. But Japan is well on the pathway to allowing this hypothetical future scenario to become its bleak reality.

To alter Japan's self-destructive trajectory and deliver a positive future of assured freedom, sovereignty, and dignity, Japan's leaders and citizens must learn about the PRC's political warfare and devise the national will and capability to defeat it. This Occasional Paper provides a foundation for that education. Specific recommendations applicable to Japan may be found in Chapter 9 of the book *Political Warfare: Strategies for Combating China's Plan to 'Win Without Fighting'*.<sup>3</sup>

## China's Political Warfare: A Primer

The PRC is at war with Japan, just as it is at war with the United States and much of the rest of the world. But it is not a war in the traditional sense. The PRC is fighting this war for global influence and control to achieve its expansionist *China Dream*.<sup>4</sup> The PRC's weapons in this war include coercion, corruption, deception, intimidation, fake news, disinformation, social media warfare, cyberattacks, and violent covert operations that include assassination, physical assault, kidnapping, and well-armed proxy armies. The PRC prefers to win this war by never having to fire a shot, but its increasingly powerful military and paramilitary forces loom ominously in the background and actively support its expanding war of influence.

In the minds of Chinese Communist Party (CCP) rulers, this war is designed to restore China's former imperial grandeur as the Middle Kingdom—to once again be what China's rulers have called “Everything Under the Sun,” the all-powerful

Hegemon Power (*Baquan*).<sup>5</sup> It is a war to ensure the CCP's total control over the Chinese population and resources, as well as those of what China has historically called the *barbarian states*--and particularly its long-detested rival Japan. In fact, the CCP's expansionist vision is global.

Much like the emperors of the Celestial Empire at its zenith, the CCP effectively classifies other barbarian nations as either tributary states that recognize the PRC's hegemony or as potential enemies.<sup>6</sup> Despite the professed intention of simple, peaceful "national rejuvenation" reflected in Xi Jinping's China Dream, the CCP has demonstrated expansionist intentions and its actions reflect no desire for equality among nations.<sup>7</sup> Rather, it seeks to impose its all-encompassing civilization on other, lesser states, consistent with the book by a PLA officer that provided the ideological foundation of Xi's China Dream.<sup>8</sup> Of greatest concern, Xi's China Dream is one of unrepentant, totalitarian Marxist-Leninism.<sup>9</sup>

For the CCP, this is a *total war* for regional and global supremacy, and it takes the form of military, economic, informational, and—especially—*political warfare*. A simple definition of political warfare follows:

*Political Warfare employs all means at a nation's command—short of kinetic war—to achieve its national objectives. These means range from such overt actions such as political alliances, economic measures, and public diplomacy, to such covert operations, including coercion, disinformation, psychological warfare, assassination, criminal activities, violent attacks, and support for proxy armies and insurgencies.*

Since General Secretary Xi Jinping ascended to power in 2012, he has led a massive expansion in political warfare, investing new energy, attention, and resources to achieve global ambitions.<sup>10</sup> He framed the importance of political warfare as part of his broader push to achieve China's *National Rejuvenation* and the CCP's *Two Centenary Goals*. Both are ambitious programs for reaching national prosperity and achieving dominance in the Indo-Asia-Pacific region by the mid-21st century.<sup>11</sup>

What China's rulers call *The Three Warfares* lay the foundation for its general *Political Warfare*. The Three Warfares comprise a dynamic three-dimensional war-fighting process that is highly deceptive: they include *Psychological Warfare*, *Legal Warfare* (also called *Lawfare*), and *Media Warfare*.<sup>12</sup> Under close direction from the Politburo, the Three Warfares pose a unique threat to Japan's continued freedom and sovereignty.

The PRC's political warfare is both defensive and offensive in nature. It takes the form of *unrestricted warfare*, and it is conducted on a global scale. "Unrestricted Warfare" is China's rationalization that any means, to include biological warfare and terrorist attacks, are justified to achieve CCP objectives, whether China is formally at war with that nation or not.<sup>13</sup> One example of one of the 24 "warfares" identified for use, alone or in combination with other "warfares", is "Chem-Bio Warfare". Beijing's political warfare apparatus is currently engaged in a massive global effort aimed at redirecting blame for the COVID-19 pandemic, which began in China and was covered up there and has subsequently killed 3 million people globally. To



this end, the CCP is “sowing confusion and discord among China’s detractors”.<sup>14</sup>

In addition to brutally repressing China’s population, the CCP has proven it can effectively leverage the openness of democratic systems to achieve hegemony over those democracies.<sup>15</sup> It prefers to achieve dominance peacefully if possible: not really without a *struggle* but ideally *without major kinetic combat*—without “firing a shot.”<sup>16</sup> However, the PRC has repeatedly signaled that it is now strong and confident enough to fight a war to achieve that hegemony, even if it must pay a very large price.<sup>17</sup> To threaten Japan and other nations, it is rapidly building a navy that will, in eight years, be roughly twice the size of the U.S. Navy “perhaps qualitatively on a par with it, and building a hypersonic nuclear arsenal.”<sup>18</sup>

Beijing uses its navy and other maritime forces to routinely impinge on Japan’s territorial sovereignty, with claims on Japanese islands in the East China Sea (and even Okinawa) and threats to destroy Japan with nuclear weapons if it assists democratic Taiwan in the event of a PRC invasion. Former U.S. Deputy National Security Advisor Matthew Pottinger describes PRC intentions this way:

*“China is going to take Taiwan in order to render Japan unable to wage war, unable to even defend itself, unable to even supply itself, . . . if Taiwan were taken, basically China would be able to dominate the region and render Japan irrelevant.”*<sup>19</sup>

As it builds military strength, Beijing flouts international law and increasingly eschews existing rules and norms. According to former U.S. Vice President Michael R. “Mike” Pence, the PRC relies instead on coercion and corruption to achieve its

economic, military, and diplomatic aims.<sup>20</sup> Beijing’s strategies include “fracturing and capturing regional institutions that could otherwise raise collective concerns about China’s behavior, and intimidating countries in maritime Asia that seek to lawfully extract resources and defend their sovereignty,” according to Ely Ratner, who has been nominated to be the U.S. Assistant Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Affairs.<sup>21</sup>

In addition to well-orchestrated United Front operations designed to destroy enemies and unite CCP supporters, China controls the world’s most heavily resourced set of propaganda tools.<sup>22</sup> Beijing communicates its narratives through state-run television, print, radio, and online organizations whose presence is proliferating around the world. Through its propaganda organs and foreign media it controls, Beijing seeks to guide the narrative on issues like the Senkaku Islands, the South China Sea, the Japan-US security alliance, and China’s neo-colonialism overseas.<sup>23</sup> One of China’s favored—and most destructive—narratives is that the CCP’s authoritarian governance style is not simply benign: the “China Model” is now marketed as *the ideal* model for all developing countries, with democracy derided as ineffective and dangerous.<sup>24</sup>

Before examining in detail how the PRC wages political warfare against Japan, it is important to examine how CCP employs political warfare to support its internal repression as well as to support its global hegemonic ambitions.

## Support of Internal Repression

Brutal internal repression is one well-documented form of the PRC's unique brand of political warfare. The U.S. and other governments as well as NGOs such as *Human Rights Watch* and *Amnesty International* have cited as “genocide” the CCP's human rights abuses associated with the destruction of Uighur society and imprisoning at least a million Uighurs in so-called reeducation camps.<sup>25</sup>

In fact, the repression of Uighurs and other Muslim sects is part of a much more insidious trend: the *Washington Post* editorial board assesses that “China's systematic anti-Muslim campaign, and accompanying repression of Christians and Tibetan Buddhists, may represent the largest-scale official attack on religious freedom in the world.”<sup>26</sup> The late-2019 release of the PRC's secret “China Cables” provides confirmation of the gross atrocities and brutal repression against Uighurs.<sup>27</sup> The cables provide irrefutable evidence of the power and intensity with which the PRC uses political warfare against its minorities.

Historically, the PRC's internal political repression entails brutality much more lethal than religious suppression and thought control. The CCP is responsible for the deaths of millions of Chinese people during disastrous large-scale reigns of terror such as the *Great Leap Forward* (1958–60), the *Cultural Revolution* (1966–76), and smaller-scale atrocities such as the *Tiananmen Square Massacre* in 1989. Scholars such as Hong Kong-based historian Frank Dikötter have confirmed, based on the PRC's archives, that during the *Great Leap Forward* alone, “systematic torture, brutality, starvation and killing

of Chinese peasants [occurred] ... At least 45 million people were worked, starved or beaten to death in China over these four years.”<sup>28</sup> The Cultural Revolution resulted in the murder of at least 2 million more, and “another 1 to 2 million were killed in other campaigns, such as land-reform and ‘anti-rightist’ movements in the 1950s.”<sup>29</sup> Estimates of Chinese killed directly or indirectly through CCP political warfare against its own population are strongly debated, but they range as high as 70 million deaths--during peacetime and in generally good weather.<sup>30</sup>

While there is debate regarding the total number of Chinese killed by the CCP, there is no doubt that the *Chinese Communist Party* that is responsible for this mass murder still tightly holds the reins of power in the PRC and that it reveres the man who presided over the deadliest repression: Mao Zedong. Evidence of the CCP's continued reverence for Mao includes what *China Daily* described as the “unprecedented” respect and “piety” Xi and the CCP displayed for Mao during the 70th anniversary of the PRC extravaganza in October 2019.<sup>31</sup>

## Support of China's Hegemonic Ambitions

Although the PRC's “propaganda machine has mastered the power of symbol and symbolism in the mass media” and many Chinese eagerly embrace its hyper-nationalistic patriotic education programs, those residing in the PRC face censorship and thought control unimaginable to most citizens of liberal democracies.<sup>32</sup> Of even greater concern, the CCP's censorship and thought control have gone global: through its extensive propaganda and influence

tentacles, Beijing disregards rules or actions that, in the CCP's view, "contain" China's power or "hurt the feelings of the Chinese people."<sup>33</sup> The PRC's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and propaganda organs lambast as "immoral" those who criticize its egregious human-rights abuses and as "racist" those who object to overseas Chinese malign influence activities.<sup>34</sup>

The CCP's draconian censorship ensnares American institutions such as the *National Basketball Association*, which was chastised by the *Washington Post* editorial board for "essentially importing to the United States China's denial of free speech."<sup>35</sup> Further, an increasingly punitive Beijing now routinely censors world-famous brands, such as *Marriott*, *United Airlines*, *Cathay Pacific Airways*, *Givenchy*, and *Versace* as well.<sup>36</sup> Hollywood has been co-opted "to avoid issues that the Chinese Communist Party would consider sensitive and produce soft propaganda movies that portray China in a positive light to global audiences."<sup>37</sup>

Beijing is very clear in conveying its coercive censorship requirements, as reflected with the *Global Times* headline: "Global Brands Better Stay Away from Politics." The article condemned "so-called 'freedom of speech'" and carried explicit and implicit threats to those who did not tow the CCP line.<sup>38</sup>

Beijing also exports violence to other countries in support of its political warfare activities abroad. One example is its use of proxy armies. The PRC's support of its proxy armies in Myanmar, such as the *United Wa State Army* drug cartel, seems an anomaly to many contemporary diplomats, academics, and journalists, but such support has been the norm for the CCP since the founding of the People's Republic of

China.<sup>39</sup> Its proxy armies across Southeast Asia kept the United States and its allies in the region distracted and cost them dearly for more than four decades of the Cold War.<sup>40</sup>

Economic coercion has become a particularly visible PRC political warfare tool, as the CCP uses the promise of its global *Belt and Road Initiative* (BRI) to build what *China Daily* describes as "a new platform for world economic cooperation."<sup>41</sup> Then-U.S. assistant secretary of state for East Asia and Pacific Affairs, David R. Stilwell, characterized BRI and related PRC economic coercion less charitably in Congressional testimony: "Beijing . . . [employs] market-distorting economic inducements and penalties, influence operations, and intimidation to persuade other states to heed its political and security agenda."<sup>42</sup> Then-Vice President Mike Pence's foreign policy speech of 4 October 2018 specifically details American concerns regarding the PRC's use of destructive foreign direct investment, market access, and debt traps to compel foreign governments to acquiesce to its wishes.<sup>43</sup>

Of equal concern, the PRC shapes public opinion inside and outside its borders "to undermine academic freedom, censor foreign media, restrict the free flow of information, and curb civil society," according to Ely Ratner.<sup>44</sup> Worldwide, countries have belatedly awakened to the remarkable degree to which the PRC's diplomatic, economic, and military interests—and the PRC's malign influence—have infiltrated their regions. Australia and New Zealand as well as countries across Europe, Oceania and the Pacific Islands, South America, the Arctic nations, and many African countries are painfully beginning to realize the degree of CCP infiltration and subversion.<sup>45</sup>



Canada and the United States have had equally rude awakenings regarding the efficacy of the PRC's ability to co-opt institutions, organizations, and people (called *United Front* operations) and other forms of PRC coercion, repression, and violent attacks within their borders.<sup>46</sup>

## China's Political Warfare Against Japan

China wages Political Warfare against Japan for a variety of reasons. In simplest terms the CCP seeks to keep Japan subservient and militarily impotent; to punish it for its past crimes, both real and invented; and to reap its resources and technology. Specific CCP political warfare goals and objectives include rendering U.S. military facilities in Japan useless in a military contingency, breaking the Japan-America military alliance, seizing the Senkakus and its seabed resources, isolating Japan regionally and globally, embarrassing Japan internationally, preventing Japan from assisting Taiwan diplomatically or militarily, and acquiring Japan's technology.<sup>47</sup>

Strategies and tactics used against Japan are similar to those the PRC uses against the U.S., Taiwan, Australia, and other countries. These strategies and tactics include *elite capture*, *United Front* and *Friendship Organizations*, *Confucius Institutes* and *Chinese Student Associations*, *military threats and intimidation*, *co-option of retired and active-duty military personnel*, *economic inducements*, *campaigns to divide Okinawa Prefecture from Japan*, *support for violence and radical activists*, and a wide range of psychological warfare, media warfare, legal warfare, active measures and cyberwarfare operations, as detailed briefly below.<sup>48</sup>

### *Elite Capture*

The PRC's "elite capture" operations against Japan are targeted against those who exercise power and can make policy decisions that directly affect CCP interests. Operations include propagandizing the target audiences; entertaining and funding pliable politicians, news media, and academic institutions; and hosting trips visits by eager academics, Government of Japan (GOJ) officials, news media, and other opinion leaders to the PRC. The targeted politicians have often come from pro-PRC factions or parties such as the Tanaka/Takeshita faction of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP); the religious movement-based Komeito, which is part of the ruling-LDP coalition; pacifist and *faux pacifist* factions within the LDP; and powerful factions within the opposition coalitions. Based on the author's interviews with knowledgeable officials and academics in Japan, there is a strong pattern of Government of Japan (GOJ) and Prefectural officials as well as other key influentials being enticed by PRC agents. Enticements include sexual services and financial support, and many of those targeted are often subsequently blackmailed, to ensure their compliance with PRC objectives.<sup>49</sup> As Hsiao notes, these elite capture activities and channels are "often the most difficult to definitively analyze and uncover, given caution and sensitivities over the matter."

### *United Front and Friendship Organizations*

China's political warfare against Japan employs a strong *United Front* (*tongzhan gongzuo*) through which the CCP wields tremendous influence. New Zealand United Front expert Anne-Marie Brady reports that in Japan these operations often consist of "friendly exchanges" between Chinese academics and

legislators and their Japanese counterparts, as well as “Chinese people’s organizations” that bring Japanese students and businesspeople to China for visits where they can be wooed and cultivated.<sup>50</sup> China also employs its United Front to support radical activists (*kagekiteki katsudoka*) and so-called pacifists (*faux pacifists*) engaged in pro-Beijing, anti-Japan defense activities.

The PRC’s United Front Work Department (UFWD)-affiliated organizations in Japan include the Japanese branch of the UFWD’s *China Council for the Promotion of Peaceful National Reunification* (CCPPR) and affiliate branches of the CCPPR such as the *All-Japan Overseas Chinese China Peaceful Reunification Council*, the *All-Japan Chinese Council for the Promotion of the Peaceful Unification of China*, and the Japan Overseas Chinese Federation. These organizations facilitate communications and exchanges with civil society exchanges and work to influence local discourse”. In addition to UFWD front organizations directly subordinate to (or affiliated with) the CCP, Hsiao reports “there are also legitimate local organizations in Japan that engage with UFWD and other PRC political warfare organizations—some perhaps doing so knowingly, and others not”. Seven known Sino-Japanese friendship associations based in Japan that actively promote “cultural exchanges” between Japan and China include the *Japan China Friendship Association*; the *Association for the Promotion of International Trade, Japan*; the *Association of Japan-China Cultural Exchange*; the *Japan-China Economic Association*; the *Japan-China Friendship Legislative Alliance*; the *Japan-China Association*; and the *Japan-China Friendship*

*Center*.<sup>51</sup>

### ***Confucius Institutes and Chinese Student Associations***

Confucius Institutes are an important vehicle for PRC propaganda, influence, and coercion in many countries, and Japan is no exception. There are 15 Confucius Institutes in Japan and eight Confucius Classrooms, a relatively high number compared to other countries in the Asia-Pacific region. The Japanese government is increasingly aware that the Confucius Institutes are fully under the control of the CCP and have detrimental impact on academic freedom in the host institutions. Like concerns within the United States over the PRC Embassy’s control over Chinese student associations overseas, including espionage and academic intimidation, Japanese authorities are increasingly concerned about the activities of Chinese students and scholars’ associations and how they are controlled by the PRC Embassy in Japan.<sup>52</sup>

### ***Chinese Association for International Friendly Contact***

Of particular danger to Japan’s national security is the PRC’s highly successful employment of political warfare operations to co-opt retired foreign senior military officers and defense officials to lobby on behalf of PRC objectives. For example, the PLA has successfully co-opted foreign military flag and general officers through organizations such as the *Chinese Association for International Friendly Contact* (CAIFC).<sup>53</sup> Established in December 1984 as a PLA political warfare platform, CAIFC’s “main function is establishing and maintaining rapport with senior foreign defense and security community elites, including retired senior military officers and

legislators.”<sup>54</sup> CAIFC facilitates influence operations “through PRC foreign affairs, state security, united front, propaganda systems, and military systems.”<sup>55</sup> It routinely sponsors retired military officers of foreign nations for free visits to the PRC for what amounts to political indoctrination and recruitment sessions. Regarding recruitment, to entice foreign retired military officers, “CAIFC serves as a window to China’s broader business community.” In some cases, foreign retired officers have been required to “agree to publish editorials supporting China’s positions . . . in exchange for business development support in China.”<sup>56</sup>

In Japan’s case, CAIFC also engages with a wide range of sectors in Japanese society, to include religious organizations, such as the *Agon Shu* movement. In addition, CAIFC engages architects, calligraphy associations, and global printing companies, and hosts competitions involving Japanese players of the popular board game “Go”.<sup>57</sup>

### ***Military Threats: The Nexus of Kinetic, Psychological, and Media Warfare***

China routinely engages in military intimidation and *gray zone operations* to coerce Japan on such matters as ownership of the Senkakus,<sup>58</sup> the Japan-America Security Alliance, and Japan’s support for Taiwan. It utilizes its Media Warfare apparatus to amplify the psychological impact of the intimidation; in fact, China is now sufficiently emboldened that it has openly publicized its *willingness and ability* to devastate Japan through *nuclear attack*.<sup>59</sup> A small sampling of the daily *Psychological and Media Warfare* against Japan is reflected in the following headlines from PRC’s English-language propaganda

organ *Global Times*.<sup>60</sup> In these articles, the CCP threatens Japan with military attack to punish it for its alleged positions on issues such as the Senkakus dispute and the Japan-America Security Alliance. Some articles scold Japan for taking prudent actions such as investigating CCP infiltration in Japanese business and industry.

- ***Drill by PLA warships in Pacific via Osumi Strait ‘indicates far sea capability boost, warning to Japan’*** Published: June 2, 2021<sup>61</sup>
- ***China issues report on Diaoyu Islands to ‘reaffirm sovereign rights, warn Japan and US collusion’*** Published: April 26, 2021<sup>62</sup>
- ***PLA’s Type 055 destroyer enters Sea of Japan for 1st time*** Published: March 19, 2021<sup>63</sup>
- ***Japan should not be influenced by people with ulterior motives: Chinese embassy*** Published: December 30, 2020<sup>64</sup>
- ***Japan makes perilous gamble by coordinating with US strategy*** Published: August 18, 2020<sup>65</sup>
- ***Deploying aggressive US weapons will damage Japan’s security situation*** Published: August 19, 2020<sup>66</sup>
- ***Japan should not stand with US like Australia: experts*** Published: May 28, 2020<sup>67</sup>

As part of China’s sustained assault on Japan, such threats and coercive statements are published and broadcast through traditional and social media on a near daily basis. Often, the PRC’s narrative is picked up by non-PRC news media.<sup>68</sup>

## ***Target: Okinawa***

Okinawa Prefecture, a critical node in the Japan-America Security Alliance infrastructure and a flash point for anti-military/anti-bases protests, is the focus of special PRC attention. In a rare public acknowledgement of the PRC Political Warfare threat pertaining to Okinawa, Japan's *Public Security Intelligence Agency* (PSIA) reports that China has attempted "to form public opinion in Okinawa in its favor". Around 2012, China began a public disinformation campaign regarding what its propaganda organs assert is the "undetermined status of the Ryukyus". Under this pretext for China's designs on Okinawa, reports PSIA, China began "promoting academic exchanges and deepening relations with members of organizations calling for the 'independence of the Ryukyus.'" China reportedly sends its officials to Okinawa to contact these groups and promote independence. In addition to this academic infiltration, through its Media Warfare apparatus the PRC supports the Okinawan independence movement, as evidenced by *Global Times* headlines such as "*China should implement her major power's responsibility to support the independence of Okinawa*" (September 17, 2012) and "*We should call it Independent Ryukyu instead of Okinawa*" (August 12, 2016). Beijing has been "quietly stoking the issue from time to time," funneling cash to Chinese student associations in Okinawa, according to Dr. June Teufel Dreyer, a political science professor at the University of Miami. "Some funds may also find their way into support of Okinawans who are anti-U.S. bases," noted Dreyer, a Senior Fellow in the Asia Program at Foreign Policy

Research Institute who teaches course on China and national security at the University of Miami.<sup>69</sup>

Psychological Warfare operations include efforts to "educate" Okinawans that they are "from the same womb" as the Chinese--that is, to persuade them their allegiance is to China and not Japan. Another gambit has been for the PRC to claim that the Ryukyu islands, a kingdom until Japan abolished the royal government in 1879, historically belongs to China.<sup>70</sup>

An important Media Warfare strategy related to the *Global Times* headlines cited above is the PRC's successful efforts to establish direct linkages between leftist Okinawan (and other Japanese) news media organizations to CCP-directed PRC counterparts. Dr. Robert Eldridge, who worked on Okinawa for nearly a decade and observed PRC political warfare there closely, reports the PRC also is engaged in political interference there, as well as extortion, blackmail, bribery, and disinformation campaigns about U.S. bases and Japan Self Defense Force activities there as well. There is also evidence of extensive PRC infiltration of universities on Okinawa and mainland Japan.<sup>71</sup>

## ***Economic Warfare***

Economic activities supporting the PRC's political war against Japan are varied and range from embargos to investment. For example, as the PRC confronted Japan regarding the Senkaku Islands in 2010, Beijing restricted "rare earth" exports to Japan to force Tokyo to submit to the PRC's demands. "Rare earths" are called "rare" for a reason: they are vital materials used in the production of many advanced high-tech devices, including many with defense applications, but they are difficult to find and extract.



This embargo severely impacted Japan's high-tech sector.

More recent use by the CCP of economic weapons in its political warfare against Japan include heavy Chinese investment in Okinawa, especially the northern part where facilities are being constructed for U.S. military forces relocating from the heavily congested central part of the island. A related economic/political warfare objective for the PRC investment in Okinawa and Hokkaido is to develop political and economic leverage in what has been termed "a North-South Pinch". Further, until COVID-19 brought international travel to Japan to a near halt, the PRC sent increasing numbers Chinese tourists to Okinawa in recent years. As the PRC has weaponized tourism against other countries to coerce their compliance, it is clear the increased tourism is designed at least in part to build Okinawan economic dependence on Chinese visitors. It is also an effective means to gain greater access to political and economic elites and observe firsthand U.S. and Japanese military facilities.<sup>72</sup>

### **Radical Activists**

There is evidence that China directly and indirectly supports Japanese communist and radical activist organizations, often referred to as the *kagekiteki katsudoka*. During the Korean War, Japanese communists and other radical activists protested Japan's support for the United Nations (UN) forces fighting Communist Chinese and North Korean aggression. As they protested Japan's support the defense of South Koreans from one of the more oppressive, murderous states in world history, the *kagekiteki katsudoka* set their pattern for the rest of the Cold War and its aftermath: attack and undermine

liberal democracies and provide support for communist dictatorships.<sup>73</sup> They always accuse the democracies of militarism and fascist aggression, while ignoring (or defending) hyper-nationalistic, fascist aggression from communist dictatorships. Since the Korean War, China has built United Fronts with anti-defense, anti-bases organizations in Japan to obstruct military reform and to paralyze relocation of the U.S. Marine Corps' *Futenma Replacement Facility* on Okinawa.<sup>74</sup>

The pattern is well established, predictable, and blatantly hypocritical. Radical activist news media and anti-defense groups always find fault with any efforts by Japan to strengthen its defensive posture—yet they will never utter a word of criticism about the PRC's massive military buildup, illegal occupation of disputed islands, and ecological terrorism in destroying the South China Sea to build massive naval and air bases to threaten Asia and Oceania.

It is their *violence*, however, that earns them the title *faux pacifists* and takes simple hypocrisy to a different level--to criminal physical assault and active military sabotage that amounts to *terrorism*. In pursuit of their anti-defense agenda, radical activists have violently attacked women, schoolchildren, and employees at military installations; fired mortars against JSDF and US bases and at Narita Airport; attempted to cause aircraft to crash; booby-trapped military facilities, sabotaged military equipment, and blocked off gates to installations to interfere with essential emergency base functions.<sup>75</sup>

In a China-related crisis involving U.S. and Japan Self Defense bases in Okinawa and across Japan, the CCP will employ its Political Warfare



apparatus to target communities near those military facilities, according to a RAND Corporation report. Based on their past anti-bases position and actions, it is a near certainty that the *kagekiteki katsudoka* and *faux pacifists* will support the CCP's efforts. Operatives will attempt to disrupt and degrade U.S. military operations from those bases in advance of--and during--the conflict, through rumors and disinformation. Disinformation campaigns, likely combined with CCP-organized protests, will "strive to shut down operations by generating popular opposition; create an impression that the military is engaged in covering up accidents, crimes, or military setbacks; sow doubt about the wisdom and necessity of undertaking military operations in the face of Chinese opposition as a way to degrade morale; or encourage broader political opposition to decisions made in Washington, D.C., including by striving to split any allied war effort".<sup>76</sup>

## **PRC Political Warfare Focus, Organization, and Resources**

To better understand how the PRC is able to achieve these political warfare successes against Japan, it is important to examine the strategic guidance, organization, and resources that the CCP allocates to its conduct of this war.

### ***Political Warfare Goals***

In congressional testimony, Princeton's Professor Aaron L. Friedberg identified four strategic goals for the CCP, and hence for its political warfare operations: "First and foremost," said Freiberg, "to preserve the power of the CCP. Second, to restore China to what the regime sees as its proper, historic

status as the preponderant power in eastern Eurasia. Third, to become a truly global player, with power, presence and influence on par with, and eventually superior to, that of the United States."<sup>77</sup>

Further, Freiberg asserts the PRC finds concepts the CCP derisively refers to as "so-called universal values": freedom of speech and religion, representative democracy, the rule of law, and so on," which threaten the legitimacy of the CCP. Accordingly, the PRC has worked "openly and vigorously to make it safe for authoritarianism, or at least for continued CCP rule of China." He says the PRC's efforts have "intensified markedly" since the rise to power of Xi Jinping in 2012.<sup>78</sup>

A 2018 Hudson Institute study provides a description of PRC political warfare goals, target audiences, and strategies that is as applicable to Japan as it is to the U.S.:

*With the United States, whose geostrategic power the Party perceives as the ultimate threat, the goal is a long-term interference and influence campaign that tames American power and freedoms, in part by limiting and neutralizing American discussions about the CCP. Liberal values such as freedom of expression, individual rights, and academic freedom are anathema to the Party and its internal system of operation.*<sup>79</sup>

The CCP, by changing how democracies speak and think about the PRC, is making the world safe for its continued rise. However, as Friedberg testified, PRC political warfare goals extend well beyond CCP self-preservation. These goals include restoring China to what the CCP sees as its rightful place as the *Middle Kingdom*, particularly in eastern Eurasia

but also across more distant continental and maritime domains. To these ends, it seeks to drive the United States from the Asia-Pacific region, to subjugate Japan, and to take physical possession of Taiwan.

Friedberg assesses that the PRC has “stepped up its use of influence operations to try to undermine and weaken the ability of other countries to resist its efforts. Ultimately Beijing appears to envision a new regional system extending across Eurasia, linked together by infrastructure and trade agreements, with China at its center. Japan and other democracies are either integrated and subordinated or weakened and isolated, and the United States pushed to the periphery, if not out of East Asia altogether.”<sup>80</sup>

A brief examination of the ways and means the PRC devotes to its political warfare efforts to achieve these goals follows, including a brief overview of the PRC’s political warfare characteristics and traits, resources, and organization, as well as how the CCP might employ political warfare in a military confrontation involving Japan.

### ***Characteristics and Traits***

Common characteristics of the PRC’s political warfare strategy include such elements as a *strong centralized command* of political warfare operations by the CCP through organizations like the United Front Work Department and the PLA. These organizations provide a *clear vision, ideology, and strategy*, and they employ *overt and covert means* to influence, coerce, intimidate, divide, and subvert rival countries to force their compliance.

Key traits of the PRC’s political warfare programs include *tight control over the domestic*

*population and detailed understanding of targeted countries*. To achieve its goals, the CCP employs a comprehensive range of instruments in coordinated actions. As important, the CCP exhibits a willingness to accept a high level of political risk from the exposure of its activities.

### ***Organization***

A number of party and state organizations direct and support the CCP’s political warfare operations, and it is important to understand how the key elements interrelate.

The PRC’s Political Warfare organization flows down from the *Central Committee Political Bureau* (Politburo), the CCP’s highest policy-making body. Within the Politburo, it is a tangled and often deceptive web. The *Politburo Standing Committee* (PSC) appears to be the “central place for decision-making about political warfare” in the CCP/PRC hierarchy.<sup>81</sup> Among those receiving PSC direction are the *Central Foreign Affairs Commission* (FAC), *Central Military Commission* (CMC), *Central State Security Commission* (CSSC), *Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference* (CPPCC), *Central United Front Small Leading Group* (CUFLSG), *Central Propaganda and Ideology Small Leading Group*, and *Central Financial and Economic Commission* (CFEC).<sup>82</sup>

The CCP’s overall political warfare strategy is set by the CPPCC. The top United Front official serves as chairman of the CPPCC and is the fourth highest-ranking member of the PSC. Two additional top Politburo members direct the *Central Propaganda Department* (also known as the *Central Publicity Department*) and the UFD, respectively. The two

also sit on the CCP Secretariat, “which is empowered to make day-to-day decisions for the routine functioning of the party-state.”<sup>83</sup>

In turn, the CPPCC “brings together the various participants in this effort: intelligence officers, diplomats, propagandists, party elders, military officers, workers with the United Front, academics, media workers, and businesspeople.” The CPPCC Standing Committee directs the various other committees that orchestrate strategy that is then implemented by various organizations and agencies. Organizations implementing CPPCC direction include the PLA, the *United Front Work Department* (UFD), the *Central Propaganda Department* (CPD), the *State Council Information Office* (SCIO)/*Office of External Propaganda*, the *Taiwan Affairs Office* (TAO), various ministries, “and a plethora of other actors within society (foundations, think tanks, organized crime, private individuals) and enterprises”. Implementation of this strategy depends upon the “capture” (or co-optation) of counterparts in the targeted society.<sup>84</sup>

### ***Propaganda and Media Warfare Structure***

The Central Propaganda Department (CPD) has significant responsibilities for conducting Media Warfare and propaganda against Japan. Specifically, this department is the “party’s theoretical research; guiding public opinion; guiding and coordinating the work of the central news agencies . . . guiding the propaganda and cultural systems,” writes political warfare expert Peter Mattis.<sup>85</sup> Among the CPD’s many responsibilities is the issuance of guidance explicitly directing how to frame news media coverage and what topics should be censored.

The most prominent and important Party-State organization charged with executing external propaganda work is the *State Council Information Office* (SCIO). The SCIO actually has two names: one for external consumption to create the impression that it is a “state” entity (SCIO), and one for internal use to reflect that in reality, it is a CCP organ: *Office of External Propaganda* (OEP). SCIO/OEP plays a key role in media warfare by managing foreign press agencies operating in the PRC, analyzing international public opinion for the party-state, disseminating press releases and government white papers, and overseeing external reporting on major events. It is composed of nine functional bureaus and controls a variety of subordinate units engaged in external propaganda work, ranging from publishing houses to professional associations. The CPD guides the SCIO/OEP, and its head serves as a deputy CPD director.<sup>86</sup>

### ***Intelligence Organizations***

Unlike the USSR and current Russian models of political warfare, PRC intelligence agencies such as the *Chinese Intelligence Service* (CIS) and *Ministry of State Security* (MSS) reportedly play a subordinate role in foreign influence operations. Reports Peter Mattis, individuals assigned to these influence operations are rarely intelligence officers themselves but are generally party elite who understand the CCP’s international objectives and are skilled in managing foreigners.

Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that MSS is a “key player in influence operations”<sup>87</sup> and that intelligence collection by MSS, CIS, and the CMC Joint Staff Department Intelligence Bureau is an integral part of political warfare work as a foundation

for both the successful execution and outcome of operations.<sup>88</sup>

### ***United Front Work Department***

The UFWD is the “the executive agency for united front work” both within the PRC and abroad, reports Mattis. UFWD “operates at all levels of the party system,” and its purview includes “Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan affairs; ethnic and religious affairs; domestic and external propaganda; entrepreneurs and non-party personages; intellectuals; and people-to-people exchanges.” as well as the OCAO. The UFWD also leads the establishment of party committees in both Chinese and foreign businesses.<sup>89</sup>

The OCAO is particularly important in rallying the worldwide diaspora and engaging with news media that informs and influences this diaspora. The mission of OCAO is to “enhance unity and friendship in overseas Chinese communities; to maintain contact with and support overseas Chinese media and Chinese language schools; [and] to increase cooperation and exchanges” between overseas Chinese and China’s domestic population in matters relating “to the economy, science, culture and education.”<sup>90</sup> To this end, it routinely brings researchers, media figures, and community leaders from Chinese communities in foreign nations back to China to attend conferences and meetings.

Alexander Bowe at the *U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission* writes that the UFWD is organized into nine major bureaus and four additional offices, all of which have a role in Media Warfare to some degree. Of note, the “Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, and Overseas Liaison Bureau” directly targets Japan, but each of the other entities in

Bowe’s breakdown below can impact upon Japanese target audiences. The name of each entity is followed by Bowe’s brief description of it:

- Party Work Bureau: “Deals with China’s eight non-Communist political parties.”
- Ethnic and Religious Work Bureau: “Concerns China’s ethnic minorities”
- Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, and Overseas Liaison Bureau: “Deals with those areas and the international Chinese diaspora.”
- Cadre Bureau: “Cultivates United Front operatives.”
- Economics Bureau: “Liaises with less developed regions of China.”
- Independent and Non-Party Intellectuals Work Bureau: “Liaises with Chinese intellectuals.”
- Tibet Bureau: “Cultivates loyalty and suppresses separatism in Tibet.”
- New Social Class Representatives Work Bureau: “Cultivates political support of the Chinese middle class.”
- Xinjiang Bureau: “Cultivates loyalty and suppresses separatism in Xinjiang.”
- General Office: “Coordinates business and administrative work.”
- Party Committee: “Responsible for ideological and disciplinary matters.”
- Policy Research Office: “Researches United Front theory and policy and coordinates propaganda.”
- Retired Cadres Office: “Implements policy



concerning departing/retired personnel.”<sup>91</sup>

Bowe writes: “a range of CCP military and civilian organizations are [also] active in carrying out United Front work, either working directly for the UFD or under the broader leadership of the CPPCC.” For example, the *China Council for the Promotion of Peaceful Reunification* (CCPPR), which promotes the reunification of the PRC and Taiwan, has at least 200 chapters in 90 countries, including chapters in Japan discussed previously.<sup>92</sup>

Numerous other party-state organizations also contribute to the CCP’s political warfare although they do not specifically focus on this work. “Many of these agencies share cover or front organizations when they are involved in influence operations,” Mattis reports, “and such platforms are sometimes lent to other agencies when appropriate.” Examples of these party-state organizations include the Ministry of Civil Affairs, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of State Security, State Administration for Foreign Expert Affairs, Xinhua News Agency, the China Academy of Social Sciences, media-related organs described later in this chapter, and the Liaison Bureau of the PLA’s Political Work Department.<sup>93</sup>

### ***Resources: Funding and Economic Measures***

The PRC does not publicize the amount of money it invests in its political warfare operations, but the PRC is the world’s second-largest economy, and clearly the CCP invests enormous resources into influence operations abroad. According to one source, the estimated PRC investment in its foreign political warfare in 2015 was \$10 billion a year.<sup>94</sup> However, the 2015 estimate is likely too low, as a 2009 *South*

*China Morning Post* article cited PRC officials were investing roughly \$6 billion USD in its Media Warfare operations alone to “improve the country’s image internationally.”<sup>95</sup> Regardless of the exact amount in 2015, at the time of the publishing of this study in late 2021, that funding level is certainly much higher.

Cash is king in this global political war, augmented as needed by threats of overt or covert military, economic, or other attacks. Unlike the Cold War, ideology plays a very small role in this current conflict with the PRC. As the authors of *China and the U.S.: Comparing Global Influence* explain, “At hardly any time did countries aspire to adopt the Chinese model. Mao’s disastrous Great Leap Forward, Cultural Revolution, collective farms, state owned enterprises, egalitarian poverty (except for Party insiders), and repressive government had little appeal except to other dictatorial regimes.”<sup>96</sup> However, Beijing’s phenomenal economic growth over the past three decades has now provided a different model. The PRC’s BRI programs alone provide access to massive additional resources to support political and media warfare, since the BRI is rightly viewed as a global UFD strategy.<sup>97</sup>

With the scale and relatively rapid growth of the Chinese economy and seeming largess, the CCP is indeed helping many news media, political, and other influential elites worldwide come out of poverty. As stated, *cash* has proven to be the most compelling motivator for those supporting and enabling the PRC’s global ambitions. For those benefitting from this largess, their decisions seem justified by massive expansion of both the PRC’s military capabilities and its ever-watchful political warfare and intelligence



apparatuses.

Beijing also frequently *weaponizes* economic instruments in its Political Warfare campaigns. The PRC is the largest trading partner for nearly all countries in the western Pacific, and its goodwill is important for their development and prosperity. “Hence,” notes Babbage, “if the Chinese regime wishes to apply pressure on a regional country or on key corporate leaders, it has many economic levers it can pull and, periodically, it does. One notable case was China’s tourism sanctions, boycott of the Lotte retail chain, and other reprisals against South Korea following Seoul’s commitment to host American missile defense systems.”<sup>98</sup> China routinely employs other economic measures to apply pressure to countries such as the previously discussed withholding of rare earths from Japan, tourism sanctions, boycotts of multinational corporations and sports leagues, boycotts of goods such as Taiwan pineapples and Australian wine, and other reprisals.<sup>99</sup>

### ***The PLA’s Role in Political Warfare***

The PLA plays a significant role in the PRC political warfare organization. Under the leadership of the CCP’s Central Military Commission, the PLA’s Political Work Department (PWD) serves as its principle political warfare command. The PWD and its predecessor, the PLA General Political Department, have been described as “an interlocking directorate that operates at the nexus of politics, finance, military operations, and intelligence.”<sup>100</sup> The PLA Strategic Support Force (SSF) and its “311 Base” along with the PLA News Media Center (PLANMC) provide much of the PWD’s *Three Warfares* operational capability.

## **PRC Political Warfare in Combat Operations Involving Japan**

Through the use of political warfare, the PRC has achieved notable strategic victories without fighting. However, if the PRC’s rulers perceive that political warfare alone will not deliver the results they desire—regarding, for example, the Senkakus and the East or South China Seas—they may choose to achieve their goals through conventional combat operations augmented by unconventional warfare. It is also possible that a war could ignite inadvertently from the PRC’s overly aggressive actions in pursuit of its *gray zone* and military coercion operations. Regardless of what incident sparks the conflict, the PRC will conduct political warfare operations before, during, and after any hostilities. Former U.S. senior Naval Intelligence officer U.S. Navy Captain James E. Fanell assesses that in any armed conflict, “the PRC’s fight for public opinion will be [its] second battlefield,” on which it will conduct a “wide range” of political warfare operations.<sup>101</sup>

The PRC has used political warfare to support numerous military operations in the past, to include its 1950 intervention in the Korean War, its 1951 annexation of Tibet, the 1962 Sino-Indian War, the 1969 Sino-Soviet Union border conflict, its 1974 battle for Vietnam’s Paracel Islands, the 1979 Sino-Vietnam War, its 1988 attack on Vietnam’s Spratly Islands, its 1995 occupation of the Philippines’ Mischief Reef, the 2017 standoff with India and Bhutan at Doklam, and its confrontations with Indian forces in 2020 and 2021.

Specifically, the CCP will employ political warfare to preserve friendly morale, generate public support at home and abroad, weaken an enemy's will to fight, and alter an enemy's situational assessment. Media Warfare will be particularly important in gaining "dominance over the venue for implementing psychological and legal warfare". The PRC's principle of "uniting with friends and disintegrating enemies" will guide its political warfare measures during armed conflict, as the CCP devises its narrative of events, actions, and policies to lead international discourse and impact the policies of both its friends and adversaries.<sup>102</sup>

Chinese strategic literature particularly emphasizes the role of the *Three Warfares* to subdue an enemy before conflict can break out or ensure victory if conflict does occur.

Accordingly, political warfare will be employed to undermine the legitimacy of positions taken by its opponents in the conflict, particularly Japan and the U.S., and it will seek to undermine allied willingness to support Japan and the U.S. in any efforts to defend those positions with military force.<sup>103</sup>

The Three Warfares establish "a perceptual preparation of the battlefield that is seen as critical to advancing [PRC] interests during both peace and war." PLA officers become acquainted with employing the Three Warfares early in their careers, and as they rise in rank they study the concept in depth in various texts on military strategy, including the PLA Academy of Military Science and PLA National Defense University editions of *Science of Military Strategy* as well as *An Introduction to Public Opinion Warfare, Psychological Warfare, and*

*Legal Warfare*.<sup>104</sup> Through study of history and war games, senior CCP officials and PLA commanders learn to employ Media Warfare, Psychological Warfare, and Lawfare to manipulate an adversary's cognitive process both prior to and during a conflict by targeting national and theater command structures and forward deployed units.<sup>105</sup>

In support of the operational combat forces, the Propaganda Department, Strategic Support Forces, UFWD, and other organs engaged in the political warfare apparatus will actively support both offensive and defensive operations. In offensive operations, their focus will be on "pre-emption" to establish the information advantage. In defensive operations: they will be employed to counter Japanese and American information efforts and ensure PLA personnel and the general PRC population is not exposed to opponents' messaging or that such messages do not take root within the public psyche.

Based on experience in crises over the past two decades, in a crisis or initial phase of a conflict PRC political warfare objectives and operations will likely unfold as follows:<sup>106</sup>

*1. Establish the PRC's Version of the Incident.*

The CCP fully understands that whichever side gets its story out first has the public opinion advantage. Accordingly, statements for public release, to include polished products for broadcast, online, and print dissemination, will be prepared in advance (or, if conflict initiation is unplanned, as soon as possible after initiation of the crisis) that will establish the PRC position on exactly what happened.

*2. Issue Statement of Principles for Resolution of the Incident.* PRC officials will usually use these

“principles” at the start of any negotiations as setting the parameters for the discussions to come and as the benchmarks for a minimally acceptable resolution that meets Beijing’s commitments to the PRC public. The Three Warfares will be used to broadcast a public statement of China’s commitment to these principles, for both foreign and domestic audiences.

3. *Shut Down Unofficial but Normal Information Channels.* The CCP will quickly establish information control and dominance of the media airwaves to continuously frame and shape the ensuing debate. U.S. senior officials, journalists, and academics often complain that their Chinese counterparts refuse communication, including via personal channels once a probable crisis begins. This will be the CCP’s standard operating procedure with Japan in an armed conflict as well.

4. *Emphasize Beijing’s Commitment to the PRC’s relationship with Japan.* By firmly expressing its own commitment to bilateral relations China implies that Tokyo (or the U.S. or any other target country or coalition) does not take the relationship as seriously and is to blame for any potential damage to relations resulting from the armed conflict. By messaging through United Front and Three Warfares capabilities, the CCP will attempt to make the crisis a testing point of Japan’s good will and intentions.

In addition to employing the Three Warfares in an armed conflict, it is likely that the PRC will engage in “hybrid warfare” and other “active measures” comparable to those used by Russia in its 2014 annexation of Crimea.<sup>107</sup> The PRC will very likely address its hybrid warfare operations through its media outlets, either through actual reporting or as part

of broader deception operations. Cortez A. Cooper writes that hybrid warfare involves “military and para-military forces that operate below the threshold of war, such as increased presence in contested waters of fishing fleets and supporting maritime militia and navy vessels,” which may “spark conflict when an opposing claimant such as the Philippines, Vietnam, or Japan responds.”<sup>108</sup>

The PRC is already engaged in hybrid warfare against Japan, and the PRC will surely increase this type of operation in preparation for an attack on Japan.<sup>109</sup>

Once armed conflict ignites, the CCP would quite likely coordinate its political warfare activities to support and perhaps conceal its hybrid warfare. To this end, Fanell contends that the PRC “will augment conventional military operations with non-conventional operations, such as subversion, disinformation and misinformation (now commonly referred to as ‘fake news’) and cyberattacks. The operationalization of [psychological warfare] with cyber is key to this strategy.” The PLA will employ its media and psychological warfare forces, especially at the 311 Base in Fuzhou, which is subordinate to the PLA’s Strategic Support Force and works closely with the nation’s cyberforces.<sup>110</sup>

As stated, the PRC will conduct political warfare operations before, during, and after any hostilities that it initiates. Prior to military confrontation, its political warfare will support a worldwide political warfare campaign that employs united front organizations and other supporters to initiate protests and support “peace” rallies to stymie international response. In addition to so-called peace

rallies, Japan’s radical activists will be encouraged by the PRC to conduct violent operations to undermine Japanese and U.S. military response to the conflict, at military bases, key transportation nodes, and other strategic locations.<sup>111</sup>

In its Media Warfare campaign, it will use the internet, social media warfare, television, and radio to disseminate propaganda, conduct psychological operations, and implement sophisticated deception measures. History proves that political warfare actions are often tied to the PRC’s strategic deception operations, which are designed to confuse or delay adversaries’ defensive actions until it is too late to effectively respond.<sup>112</sup>

The PLA will likely seize the initiative in the opening phase of war by “striking the first blow.” PRC policy stipulates that “the first strike that triggers a Chinese military response need not be military; actions in the political and strategic realm may also justify a Chinese military reaction.”<sup>113</sup> Such a trigger could be a perceived slight, diplomatic miscommunication, or statement by a government official that upsets China enough to warrant a response.

As the PLA and its auxiliary forces engage in kinetic combat against Japan, the PRC will employ political warfare to confuse and discourage Japan’s decision makers while also attempting to win support for the PRC’s position from “fence sitters” (initially undecided nations). Fanell states, “In addition to standard propaganda, disinformation and deception will be employed, such as false reports of surrender of national governments and/or forces, atrocities and other violations of international law, and other reports intended to distract or paralyze decision making by

the [United States] and its friends and allies.”

Internally, the PRC political warfare campaign in support of the combat operations will be important in mobilizing mass support for the PRC’s actions. This political warfare campaign will continue through the military confrontation with Japan and after—regardless of the success or failure of the operation.<sup>114</sup>

## **Japan’s Response to PRC Political Warfare**

Japan faces a relentless, multifaceted onslaught of PRC political warfare strategies, tactics, techniques, and procedures. However, like many other democracies, it is ill-prepared to confront and defeat this insidious existential threat to its freedom, prosperity, and sovereignty. Dr. Eldridge cites many reasons for Japan’s failure to effectively detect, deter, and defeat the PRC’s political warfare, as listed below:<sup>115</sup>

- Weak, ineffective counterintelligence and anti-spying laws
- Underfunded Counter-Intelligence capabilities
- Weak and ineffective secrecy laws
- Weak and ineffective foreign land purchases laws
- Poor handling of naturalization files, which makes it difficult to track PRC agents
- Poor monitoring of foreign residents (Chinese represent most of them)
- Little oversight of foreign students and researchers (Chinese represent most)
- Japan’s historically dominant ruling party has been divided by pro-China factions
- The ruling (two-party) coalition has a pro-China party in it

Consequently, Japan's government officials, news media, and academia provide few unclassified public disclosures, media reports, and academic research papers on the topic of this existential threat. At the governmental and institutional levels, Japan has no real ability to recognize the political warfare threat, educate its elites and officials about it, prioritize resources to engage it, and plan and conduct operations to deter, counter, and defeat it. In other words, Japan created the perfect prescription for becoming *Haiboku Shita Nihon*.

It is long past time for Japan to intelligently assess its vulnerabilities, capabilities, and strategies in the face of Beijing's political warfare campaigns against it and build the will and capability to defeat it.

Japan's choice regarding China's political warfare challenge and its fate by the year 2040 is actually quite simple:

The Government of Japan must develop the will and capability to fight for Japan's democracy and sovereignty—or the people of Japan must learn to obsequiously kowtow in abject defeat before a brutally repressive, genocidal, totalitarian Chinese Communist Party.



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Previously, Prof. Gershaneck was a strategic planner and spokesman for the Office of the Secretary of Defense and a Senior Fellow and the Director of Governmental & Public Relations with Pacific Forum, Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS). A former U.S. Marine Corps officer, he has extensive intelligence, counterintelligence, special warfare, combat arms, and strategic communications experience. He worked with the U.S. Information Agency in Washington D.C. and at U.S. embassies in East and Southwest Asia. As a senior Civil Servant, he helped lead U.S. Department of Defense International Relations and Security Cooperation activities in 43 countries in the Indo-Pacific Region for 10 years. He is the recipient of the prestigious Defense Superior Service Medal and the Legion of Merit.

Prof. Gershaneck has more than 20 years of university-level teaching experience, with primary focus on political warfare, strategic communication, crisis communication, regional security, and international relations. He has published extensively in many periodicals including *Europa Atlantica*, *The National Interest*, *The Diplomat*, *Japan Forward*, *Asia Times*, *The Journal of Advanced Military Studies*, *The Global Taiwan Brief*, *Fu Hsing Kang Academic Journal*, *The Nation* (Bangkok), *Marine Corps University Journal*, *Project 2049 Institute*, *Bangkok Post*, and *Taipei Times*. He is the author of *Political Warfare: Strategies for Combating China’s Plan to “Win without Fighting”* (MCU Press, 2020).

## Endnotes

1 The scenario described in the Introduction is based primarily on plausible PRC regional expansion through 2035 envisioned in the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments (CSBA) study “Which Way the Dragon? Sharpening Allied Perceptions of China’s Strategic Trajectory” by Ross Babbage, Jack Bianchi, Julian Snelder, Toshi Yoshihara, Aaron Friedberg and Nadège Rolland, (August 6, 2020), Ch. 3, pp. 23-26. <https://csbaonline.org/research/publications/which-way-the-dragon-sharpening-allied-perceptions-of-chinas-strategic-trajectory>.

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