

Political Warfare against Intervention Forces

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Abstract

Political warfare plays a central role in Chinese military operations. China is currently conducting a deliberate, multi-layered campaign designed to weaken Taiwan's resolve and preempt US intervention. Through the "Three Warfares"—public opinion, psychological, and legal—Beijing employs influence operations, economic coercion, and military intimidation to shape the strategic environment in its favor. Rather than seeking a conventional military confrontation, the Chinese Communist Party aims to isolate Taiwan diplomatically, destabilize its internal politics, and deter foreign support through disinformation and gray-zone tactics. Should conflict arise, China's political warfare will intensify, targeting US force mobilization, alliance cohesion, and domestic morale. The objective is clear: to make Taiwan's subjugation appear inevitable and US resistance seem futile. Countering this strategy requires early recognition of China's asymmetric approach and a proactive effort to harden Taiwan and US regional positions against coercion before Beijing sets the terms of engagement.

"All battles are won or lost in the mind."

—Joan of Arc

Political warfare is the art of achieving strategic objectives through influence, subversion, and coercion. George Kennan, in a 1948 policy memorandum for the US Department of State, defined it as "the employment of all the means at a nation's command, short of war, to achieve its national objectives."¹ His warning was aimed at Soviet operations, which he called "the most refined and effective of any in history." But even as Kennan wrote this memo, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was proving that his definition was incomplete. The Party secured victory in

Note: This article is an adaptation of Prof. Gershaneck's earlier article in the *Journal of Advanced Military Studies*, Vol 15, No 2, entitled "China's 'Second Battlefield': Political Warfare in Combat Operations."

¹ Kennan, "The inauguration of organized political warfare." US Department of State, Policy Planning Staff Memorandum, 4 May 1948, <https://history.state.gov/>.

the Chinese Civil War through battlefield successes empowered by political warfare, including the use of ideological subversion, propaganda, and coercion.²

With the fall of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s and the subsequent dismantling of America's own political warfare capabilities, Beijing has refined and expanded its political warfare strategies and tactics, securing strategic gains with little resistance. The militarization of the South China Sea is a textbook case. Declaring sovereignty over vast swaths of international waters, constructing artificial islands, and turning them into forward military bases—all accomplished without provoking a meaningful global response.³ Former US Assistant Secretary of Defense Wallace C. Gregson described it as “a feckless global response,” a verdict reinforced when the Obama administration failed to act after Xi Jinping publicly reneged on his 2015 pledge not to militarize the region.⁴ Beijing's island-building campaign sent an unmistakable message: the United States was unwilling to confront the PRC in the South China Sea. The artificial islands, now fortified military outposts, serve a dual purpose: complicating US and allied access to the region while advancing the CCP's broader objective of pushing the United States out of the Western Pacific.

This, in turn, sets the stage for Taiwan's isolation and coercion into so-called “re-unification”—an outcome Xi has declared essential for the “great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation” (中華民族偉大復興). The fall of Taiwan, whether through capitulation or after a failed US intervention, would reverberate far beyond the Taiwan Strait. It would fracture America's global alliance network, hand the People's Liberation Army (PLA) a dominant position in the First Island Chain, and cement PRC hegemony over the Indo-Pacific.⁵ Integrating Taiwan's advanced semiconductor and technology sectors would supercharge China's industrial base, narrowing the technological gap with the United States and accelerating Beijing's challenge to American primacy on a global scale.

² The PRC is a party-state under the control of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP); so, the terms PRC and CCP are used interchangeably in this article. The existential threat to democracies today stems from the CCP's ideology, paramount leader Xi's highly adversarial outlook, and a party apparatus that supersedes the nation itself—not from “China” or the Chinese people per se.

³ J. Michael Dahm, “South China Sea Military Capabilities Series Studies,” John Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory, 2020. <https://www.jhuapl.edu/>.

⁴ LtGen Wallace Gregson, USMC, ret., interview by Kerry Gershaneck, 2 July 2022. Gregson stated, “While (the US) and the rest of the world chose to treat this as some sort of peacetime operation, one can argue that this Chinese action was essentially a daring attack to seize territory, and then fortify it, taking advantage of diplomatic, economic, and political preparation over years that set the conditions guaranteeing a feckless global response.”

⁵ David Santoro and Ralph Cossa, eds., “The World After Taiwan's Fall,” *Pacific Forum* 23, no. 2 (January 2023), <https://pacforum.org/>.

Yet Xi understands that political warfare alone may not be enough to bring Taiwan to heel—particularly after the CCP’s heavy-handed crackdown on Hong Kong’s 2019 protests reinforced Taiwanese skepticism of Beijing’s promises. The CCP has steadily dropped references to “peaceful reunification” from its official lexicon, signaling a shift in strategy. Instead of a high-risk full-scale invasion, Xi has pursued military coercion as a subset of political warfare, leveraging *gray-zone tactics*—constant pressure through military maneuvers, economic coercion, and disinformation—to wear down Taipei’s resistance while avoiding outright war. Since 2012, Beijing has refined this strategy, calibrating its actions to probe US and allied resolve while steadily tightening the noose around Taiwan.

Beijing’s early forays into gray-zone warfare were crude but effective—relying on fishing boats as proxies to maintain plausible deniability. Taiwan was not the initial target. Instead, China tested its coercive tactics on weaker regional actors. In 2012, at Scarborough Reef, the People’s Armed Forces Maritime Militia (PAFMM) swarmed the area, blocking Philippine naval access while the Chinese Coast Guard (CCG) loitered nearby, ready to escalate if necessary. In 2014, a similar script played out when China deployed the Hai Yang Shi You 981 oil rig in contested waters near Vietnam. PAFMM vessels, again under CCG protection, rammed Vietnamese ships attempting to intervene.⁶

Beijing escalated its pressure campaign further in November 2013 by declaring an air defense identification zone (ADIZ) over the East China Sea, covering the Japanese-administered Senkaku Islands and overlapping existing ADIZs from South Korea, Taiwan, and Japan.⁷ The move was more than symbolic. It laid the foundation for an aggressive airspace harassment campaign: People’s Liberation Army (PLA) incursions into Japan’s ADIZ surged from 96 in 2010 to 851 by 2016.⁸

Taiwan now bears the full weight of China’s gray-zone warfare. Over-fishing and sand-dredging degrade maritime resources, CCG “law enforcement patrols” assert Beijing’s claims, and PLA warplanes probe Taiwan’s defenses with near-daily ADIZ incursions. Joint coercion exercises, increasingly sophisticated and large-scale, send an unmistakable signal: China has calibrated its military posture to provide

⁶ Eric Chan, “Escalating Clarity without Fighting: Countering Gray Zone Warfare against Taiwan (Part 2),” *Global Taiwan Brief*, 2 June 2021, <https://globaltaiwan.org/>.

⁷ Brent Stricker, “East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone: a Primer,” *Center for International Maritime Security*, 10 November 2022, <https://cimsec.org/>.

⁸ Mercedes Trent, “Over the Line: The Implications of China’s ADIZ Intrusions in Northeast Asia,” *Federation of American Scientists*, 1 January 2020, <https://www.jstor.org/>.

Xi with a menu of escalatory options, with the ability to credibly threaten full-scale war at short notice.⁹

This strategy elevates political warfare to a central pillar of PLA operations, a fact often overlooked in conventional military assessments. This article examines the key facets of the PRC's political warfare doctrine—particularly how Beijing might weaponize these tactics to disrupt and degrade US and coalition forces in the event of a Taiwan contingency.

Countering Intervention as a PLA Priority

During the 1995–1996 Third Taiwan Straits Crisis, the CCP suffered deep humiliation when the PLA could not detect the presence of a US aircraft carrier battle group in the Taiwan Strait. Since then, the PLA has prioritized being able to find, fix, and counter US intervention forces in a Taiwan invasion scenario.¹⁰

To overcome what it perceives as US superiority in technology and human capital, the PLA has developed a redundant system-of-systems operational concept designed not to destroy but to paralyze its adversary. This doctrine, known as *systems destruction warfare* (系統破壞戰), shifts the focus from attrition to disruption.¹¹ While analysts have extensively covered the PLA's kinetic threats to an intervention force, its political warfare goals and methods receive far less attention. Yet within the CCP, political warfare is a strategic imperative.. It is a critical component of systems destruction warfare, albeit with distinct coercive objectives.

⁹ Amrita Jash, “China’s Military Exercises Around Taiwan: Trends and Patterns,” *Global Taiwan Brief*, 2 October 2024, <https://globaltaiwan.org/>. For a general overview of Xi’s acceleration of preparations for war, see John Pomfret and Matt Pottinger, “Xi Jinping Says He Is Preparing China for War: The World Should Take Him Seriously,” *Foreign Affairs*, 29 March 2023. For a detailed CCP overview, see this essay in *Qiushi*, the top theoretical journal of the CCP, authored under the byline “Jun Zheng” (a homonym for “military government” and assumed to refer to the Central Military Commission or Ministry of Defense): “Under the Guidance of Xi Jinping’s Thought on Strengthening the Army, We Will Advance Victoriously,” *Qiushi (Seeking Truth)*, 1 March 2023. The essay’s theme is “dare to fight, dare to win!” For the Xinhua perspective, see Ryan Woo, “China’s Xi Tells Military to Deepen War, Combat Planning, Xinhua Reports,” *Reuters*, 6 July 2023. For an example of the CCP’s threats via its propaganda organs, see Yang Sheng, “Taiwan Separatists Panic as Mainland Drops ‘Peaceful’ in Reunification Narrative,” *Global Times*, 23 May 2020. Regarding increased PLA military coercion, see ROC Ministry of Defense, *ROC National Defense Report 2021* (110”棲恹邀禩晚) (Taipei: ROC Ministry of National Defense, 2021), 43–46; and Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China 2023: Annual Report to Congress* (Washington: US Department of Defense, 2023), x, 41, 136–37.

¹⁰ Minnie Chan, “Unforgettable humiliation led to development of GPS equivalent,” *South China Morning Post*, 13 November 2009, <https://www.scmp.com/>.

¹¹ Joel Wuthnow, “Systems Destruction Warfare and the PLA,” *Institute for National Strategic Studies*, March 2023, <https://keystone.ndu.edu/>.

This approach is encapsulated in the “Three Warfares” (三戰): public opinion warfare (輿論戰), psychological warfare (心理戰), and legal warfare (法律戰). These tactics combined with the physical presence of the PLA, constitute the essence of Beijing’s gray-zone operations against weaker regional neighbors.

Coercing weaker states, however, differs from coercing the United States. The CCP frequently conflates *coercion* and *deterrence* under the term *weishhe* (威懾)—a concept that implies compelling an adversary into submission.¹² In places where the PLA cannot yet exert credible coercive pressure, the CCP relies more heavily on influence campaigns to execute the Three Warfares. These efforts aim to cultivate willful blindness, capture elite decision makers, and instill complacency.¹³

Meanwhile, before risking full-scale confrontation, the CCP must ensure that its armed wing—the PLA—can achieve its political warfare objectives. These include maintaining friendly morale, generating domestic and international public support, weakening the enemy’s will to fight, and shaping the adversary’s strategic assessments.¹⁴ Even more fundamentally, Xi must be certain of the PLA’s political loyalty. This imperative is codified in the CCP’s 2017 phrase, “The Three Whethers” (三個能不能), the first of which asks “whether the PLA can maintain the party’s absolute leadership.”¹⁵

The recent prolonged purge of senior PLA leadership demonstrates Xi’s ongoing concerns over the military’s vulnerability to political warfare. More significantly, it underscores his willingness to accept short-term disruption in exchange for greater Party control.¹⁶

Thus, if the CCP chooses to launch an all-out assault on Taiwan, it will do so only because Xi is confident in two things: the state of PLA modernization relative to the United States and the CCP’s ability to wage political warfare across all phases of the operation.

¹² Dean Cheng, “Chinese Views on Deterrence.” *Joint Force Quarterly* 60, no. 1 (2011): 92–94, <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/>.

¹³ House Committee on Oversight and Accountability, “CCP Political Warfare: Federal Agencies Urgently Need a Government-Wide Strategy,” 118th Cong., 2nd sess. (Washington: US House of Representatives, 27 October 2024), <https://oversight.house.gov/>.

¹⁴ Mark Stokes and Russell Hsiao, *The People’s Liberation Army General Political Department: Political Warfare with Chinese Characteristics* (Arlington, VA: Project 2049 Institute, 2013), 3–7, <https://project2049.net/>.

¹⁵ Dennis Blasko, “PLA Weaknesses and Xi’s Concerns about PLA Capabilities,” *Testimony before the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission*, 7 February 2019, <https://www.uscc.gov/>.

¹⁶ “Xi Jinping is obsessed with political loyalty in the PLA,” *The Economist*, 6 November 2023, <https://www.economist.com/>.

Countering Force Generation

The first step in forced unification is to ensure Taiwan's isolation—both physically and psychologically. At the strategic level, this means employing the Three Warfares to break Taiwan's will to resist and to deter US intervention. Failing that, it means delaying American force generation long enough to make intervention politically or militarily untenable. The CCP aims to accomplish this by shaping the narrative surrounding the conflict through a series of deliberate actions:¹⁷

- Control the incident's framing. Beijing requires a "controlled crisis" to drive the narrative. An attack will not come as a "bolt from the blue" but will follow a carefully orchestrated sequence of events, each designed for maximum public opinion advantage. The CCP will ensure a steady flow of polished messaging—broadcast, online, and in print—to legitimize its actions.
- Set the terms of resolution. PRC officials will issue "minimum benchmarks" to preemptively frame the boundaries of negotiation.¹⁸ In essence, this will amount to a call for Taiwan's surrender, packaged as a reasonable compromise.
- Sever external communication. The CCP views crisis hotlines and alternative communication channels not as mechanisms for de-escalation but as tools for adversarial narrative control. As a result, when crises escalate, US officials, journalists, and academics frequently find their Chinese counterparts unwilling to engage. A case in point: during the August 2022 crisis—manufactured by Beijing in response to US Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan—the PLA refused to answer calls from senior US military officials and canceled the China-U.S. Theater Commanders Talks.¹⁹

During the crisis phase, social media will be saturated with relentless, coordinated messaging. The core narrative is already well established, drawn from years of speeches by Xi and other senior CCP officials:

¹⁷ Stefan Halper, *China: The Three Warfares* (Washington: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2013), 73–74.

¹⁸ Friend and Thayer, *How China Sees the World*, 119–20.

¹⁹ Laura Seligman and Alexander Ward, "Pentagon Chiefs' Calls to China Go Unanswered amid Taiwan Crisis," *Politico*, 5 August 2022; and Guermantes Lailari, "What Does Taiwan Have to Do with the G20 Meeting in Bali?," *Taiwan News*, 14 November 2022.

- “Compatriots on both sides of the Taiwan Strait are brothers and sisters of the same blood.” (兩岸同胞是血脈相連的骨肉兄弟), a phrase used by Jiang Zemin²⁰ and Xi.²¹
- A crisis is the result of a collusion between Taiwan separatists “relying on foreign powers to seek independence” (挾洋謀獨), and the United States is “using Taiwan to control China” (以台製華).²²
- “Reunification” has entered “an irreversible historical process” (不可逆轉的歷史進程), which cannot be stopped by anyone, let alone an America in terminal decline.²³

This framework will be systematically tailored to target audiences using a system-of-systems approach, ensuring maximum saturation. A range of Party and military entities will coordinate the effort, including the Ministry of State Security (MSS, 國家安全部), which specializes in covert overseas espionage operations and domestic counterintelligence; the PLA’s 311 Base (311基地), specializing in political warfare against Taiwan); and the United Front Work Department (統一戰線工作部), specializing in political warfare against overseas Chinese and other foreigners. Two primary focal points will be US military base communities and overseas Chinese, particularly Chinese Americans.

The goal of this information campaign is not necessarily to persuade but to drown out competing narratives. The CCP will flood digital spaces with state-sponsored content, amplified through botnets, disinformation hubs, and algorithmic tweaking of social media platforms they control.²⁴ Beyond digital propaganda, China may resort to direct physical disruptions—one clear indicator of impending aggression would be the severing of Taiwan’s undersea internet cables, cutting off global access to real-time developments.²⁵

²⁰ Jiang Zemin, “Build a Well-off Society in an All-Round Way and Create a New Situation in Building Socialism with Chinese Characteristics—Report to the Sixteenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China,” *CSIS Interpret: China*, 8 November 2002, <https://interpret.csis.org/>.

²¹ Xi Jinping, “Speech at the Conference to Commemorate the 150th Anniversary of the Birth of Dr. Sun Yat-Sen,” *CSIS Interpret: China*, 11 November 2016, <https://interpret.csis.org/>.

²² Cao Qun, “The Taiwan Strait Game Between China and the United States: Risk Variables and Crisis Management,” *CSIS Interpret: China*, 13 May 2022, <https://interpret.csis.org/>.

²³ Liu Jieyi, “Reunification Has Entered an Irreversible Historical Process,” *CSIS Interpret: China*, 18 August 2022, <https://interpret.csis.org/>.

²⁴ Gary King, Jennifer Pan, and Margaret E. Roberts, “How the Chinese Government Fabricates Social Media Posts for Strategic Distraction, not Engaged Argument,” *American Political Science Review* 111, no. 3 (2017): 484–501, <https://gking.harvard.edu/>.

²⁵ Newsham, *When China Attacks*, 3–19.

Beijing's influence campaign will also leverage micro-targeting, drawing on personal data obtained from large-scale cyber breaches. At the strategic level, the business community will face pressure to oppose US intervention under the threat of corporate data leaks, property seizures, and sanctions. Politicians may find themselves co-opted or blackmailed, with Beijing threatening embarrassing disclosures—a tactic already documented in Australia and New Zealand by Professor Anne-Marie Brady.²⁶

Operationally, military base communities will be a priority target. Expect waves of false orders, fabricated threats of kinetic strikes, and psychological pressure directed at military dependents—warnings about the safety of their loved ones designed to foment uncertainty and disrupt force mobilization. In short, the CCP does not merely prepare for war; it prepares to define reality itself.

In the same vein, overseas Chinese, including Chinese and Taiwanese Americans, will be explicitly targeted to sow distrust and division. Under Xi, the CCP has intensified efforts to transform the Chinese diaspora from a “brain drain” liability into an exploitable asset—both wittingly and unwittingly.²⁷

However, according to the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), nationality, not ethnicity, is the key factor in the PRC's success in recruiting intelligence assets and covert operatives within the United States. A CSIS analysis of 224 publicly reported cases of Chinese espionage against the United States from 2000 to 2023 underscores this point: roughly 90 percent of cases involved PRC citizens, while only 10 percent involved non-Chinese actors, including Americans of Chinese descent. The true scope of Chinese espionage is undoubtedly larger, but the report's findings are instructive: “Chinese nationals who come to the United States to work or study are fertile ground for recruitment. Often they intend to return to China or have close family members resident in China, making them more susceptible to coercion. In contrast, Americans of Chinese descent are very unlikely to be recruited.”²⁸

Despite this challenge, Beijing views such recruits—especially those with military ties—as uniquely valuable. A RAND study warns that in a conflict, “one of China's first targets of disinformation on social media will be ethnic Chinese US military officers and service members,” using their families and social networks as

²⁶ Anne-Marie Brady, “China in Xi's ‘New Era’: New Zealand and the CCP's Magic Weapons,” *Journal of Democracy* 29, no. 2 (April 2018): 68–75, <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/>.

²⁷ Eric Chan, “Fifth Column Fears: the Chinese Influence Campaign in the United States,” *The Diplomat*, 24 September 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/>.

²⁸ “Survey of Chinese Espionage in the United States Since 2000 to March 2023,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, 29 March 2023.

indirect vectors to spread doubt and division.²⁹ Chinese security services have multiple avenues of exploitation: espionage, sabotage, and even the disruption of military cohesion through the strategic exposure of low-level operatives—whether real or fabricated. The CCP is acutely aware of American sensitivities surrounding racial profiling. If investigations into ethnic Chinese service members or government officials become public during a crisis, the PRC will seize on the opportunity, amplifying accusations of discrimination as part of its Three Warfares strategy.³⁰

The PLA has long recognized its deficiencies in personnel quality and officer capability compared to the US military—what it calls “The Two Inabilities” (兩個能力不夠).³¹ Undermining adversary trust and morale from within is one way to close that gap.

Senior US leaders must anticipate that force generation in a crisis will be conducted under sustained assault—not just through cyberattacks or kinetic strikes but through a relentless psychological campaign. The ultimate goal is to fracture American confidence: in their military, their government, and, most insidiously, in each other.

Historical Vignette: CCP Political Warfare during the COVID-19 Pandemic

The CCP’s handling of COVID-19 was a demonstration of its political warfare methodology.³²

First, defensive political warfare to suppress domestic dissent and establish CCP control over the narrative. In December 2019, as the virus spread in Wuhan, the local Party’s first priority was not containment but information suppression—silencing and arresting whistleblower physicians. By early March 2020, as cases in Wuhan initially plateaued, state media pivoted from scapegoating local officials to lavishing praise on Xi’s leadership.

Second, offensive political warfare to drown out competing international narratives. Xi’s highly publicized, triumphalist visit to Wuhan in March

²⁹ Scott W. Harold, Nathan Beauchamp-Mustafaga, Jeffrey W. Hornung, *Chinese Disinformation Efforts on Social Media* (Santa Monica: RAND, 19 July 2021), 5–6, <https://www.rand.org/>.

³⁰ Nomaan Merchant and Eric Tucker, “Spy Agencies’ Focus on China Could Snare Chinese Americans,” *Associated Press*, 16 June 2022.

³¹ Dennis Blasko, “The Chinese Military Speaks to Itself, Revealing Doubts,” *War on the Rocks*, 18 February 2019, <https://warontherocks.com/>.

³² Eric Chan and Peter Loftus, “Chinese Communist Party Information Warfare: US-China Competition during the COVID-19 Pandemic,” *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs* 3, no. 2 (Summer 2020): 146–58, <https://media.defense.gov/>.

2020 marked the launch of a global propaganda campaign designed to deflect blame for pandemic mismanagement, reframe China as a *responsible great power*, and assert the supposed superiority of the CCP's governance model over the West.

Chinese diplomats officially emphasized “scientific uncertainty” to cast doubt on the origins of COVID-19 with a veneer of respectability, countering allegations that the virus may have leaked from the Wuhan Institute of Virology. Meanwhile, they unofficially trafficked in conspiracy theories via personal social media accounts—most infamously, the claim that COVID-19 was introduced to Wuhan by the US military during the October 2019 Military World Games.

By July 2021, these theories had coalesced into an official state-backed disinformation campaign, with Beijing pushing the narrative that the virus originated at the US Army's Fort Detrick research facility. In parallel, the CCP co-opted the #StopAsianHate social media movement, using botnets and inauthentic actors to smear challenges to its COVID narrative as “racist.”³³

Throughout this period, Beijing stonewalled World Health Organization (WHO) investigators seeking access to China,³⁴ while successfully pressuring WHO leadership to repeatedly issue laudatory statements clearly provided by the CCP.³⁵

The CCP's pandemic response was not just a public health crisis—it was a global case study in the CCP's ability to manipulate perception, control information, and weaponize narratives to its advantage.

Countering Force Deployment

The CCP views political warfare as a critical tool for obstructing enemy force deployment and will likely employ a range of measures toward this end. The first is lawfare and the use of paramilitary forces to obscure aggression. As US forces

³³ Albert Zhang, “#StopAsianHate: Chinese diaspora targeted by CCP disinformation campaign,” *The Strategist*, 1 July 2021, <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/>.

³⁴ Emily Rauhala, “WHO chief, U.S. and other world leaders criticize China for limiting access of team researching coronavirus origins,” *Washington Post*, 30 March 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/>.

³⁵ Hinnerk Feldwisch-Drentrup, “How WHO Became China's Coronavirus Accomplice,” *Foreign Policy*, 2 April 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/>.

begin deploying to Asia, first contact may not be with the PLA. Instead, Beijing will likely escalate its gray-zone “cabbage strategy,” pushing the PAFMM and CCG to the forefront. The objective: maintain the fiction that the PRC is engaged in domestic law enforcement or a health-related “quarantine,” rather than executing a military blockade against a sovereign state. Operationally, PAFMM and CCG units—straddling the line between military and civilian status—will serve as shields, daring Taiwan, the United States, and allied forces to initiate kinetic action.

The PLA Navy will likely employ similar deceptive measures through the operational use of civilian roll-on/roll-off (RORO) ships, in violation of the law of armed conflict. Analysts have long noted that the PLAN lacks sufficient amphibious lift for a Taiwan invasion, despite China’s vast shipbuilding industry.³⁶ However, these assessments often overlook the massive expansion in civilian RORO ship production—nominally for China’s booming car export market.³⁷ Since 2016, these vessels have been designed to meet military sealift requirements and have participated in PLA exercises.³⁸ While they have minimal self-defense capabilities and do not train for defensive operations, that is largely irrelevant. Their primary shield is *perception*—they appear as noncombatant civilian ships. This suggests that the PLA either assumes these vessels will not be attacked or, more likely, that Beijing considers the propaganda value of “innocent Chinese civilian ships” under attack to be worth the operational risk.

Second, active measures short of war to spread chaos. These operations will likely be conducted before the initiation of a Joint Firepower Strike campaign to maintain plausible deniability that hostilities have begun. Beijing has already demonstrated a willingness to exploit fifth columnists and co-opted overseas Chinese students for intelligence gathering and harassment. PRC-affiliated buyers have acquired tracts of land near US and Japanese military installations—positions that could be leveraged for sabotage or disruption.³⁹ Meanwhile, civilian UAVs could be deployed in non-kinetic roles to distract defenders, disrupt operations, and increase paranoia within military communities. The documented use of Chinese

³⁶ Lonnie Henley, “Testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission Hearing on Cross-Strait Deterrence: PLA Operational Concepts and Centers of Gravity in a Taiwan Conflict,” 117th Cong., 1st sess., 18 February 2021, <https://www.uscc.gov/>.

³⁷ Matthew P. Funaiolo et al., “China Accelerates Construction of ‘Ro-Ro’ Vessels, with Potential Military Implications,” *ChinaPower*, 11 October 2023, <https://chinapower.csis.org/>.

³⁸ Conor M. Kennedy, “China Maritime Report No. 4: Civil Transport in PLA Power Projection,” *China Maritime Studies Institute*, December 2019, <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/>.

³⁹ Grant Newsham, *When China Attacks: A Warning to America* (Washington: Regnery Publishing, 2023), 3–19.

university students in the United States to surveil military bases,⁴⁰ combined with the recent surge in UAV incursions across the United States and Europe, should be viewed as adversary test runs.⁴¹

Closer to the theater, active measures will become more aggressive, specifically targeting allied and partner nations to fuel anti-American sentiment. These operations will likely be conducted through cutouts, particularly Chinese and transnational organized crime syndicates.

For decades, the CCP has maintained a symbiotic relationship with criminal networks in Hong Kong, Macau, Myanmar, Laos, and Vietnam, operating under an unspoken agreement: Beijing turns a blind eye to illicit activities in exchange for keeping violent crime outside PRC borders.⁴² This arrangement periodically expands into direct cooperation. During the 2019 Hong Kong protests, the CCP leveraged local triads to attack prodemocracy demonstrators, offering plausible deniability while simultaneously broadcasting footage of gang violence as “proof” that the unrest—allegedly instigated by the United States—had devolved into chaos.⁴³

This model of political-criminal collaboration has since expanded into Taiwan and the Philippines. In the Philippines, Chinese criminal syndicates running scam operations were exposed for attempting to insert a PRC influence agent into local mayoral elections.⁴⁴ Meanwhile, in Taiwan—particularly on the outlying island of Kinmen, located just five miles from the PRC—organized crime groups have been fully co-opted into Party-aligned political tools. Members of Taiwan’s infamous Bamboo Union gang (竹聯幫), with PRC funding and logistical support, have openly organized as the Chinese Unification Promotion Party (CUPP, 中華統一促進黨), acting as a direct proxy for Beijing. These groups have also engaged in violent targeting of pro-democracy activists and Hong Kong dissidents who sought refuge in Taiwan.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Associated Press, “5 Chinese nationals charged with covering up midnight visit to Michigan military site,” *CNN*, 2 October 2024, <https://www.cnn.com/>.

⁴¹ Haley Britzkey, “Drones continue to buzz over US bases. The military isn’t sure why or how to stop them,” *CNN*, 21 December 2024, <https://www.cnn.com/>.

⁴² USIP Senior Study Group on Transnational Organized Crime in Southeast Asia, “Transnational Crime in Southeast Asia: A Growing Threat to Global Peace and Security,” *The U.S. Institute of Peace*, 13 May 2024, <https://www.usip.org/>.

⁴³ Gerry Shih, “China’s backers and ‘triad’ gangs have a history of common foes. Hong Kong protesters fear they are next,” *Washington Post*, 23 July 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/>.

⁴⁴ Kathleen Magramo, “Who is the real Alice Guo? Fugitive mayor accused of spying for China faces legal reckoning after weeks on the run,” *CNN*, 6 September 2024, <https://www.cnn.com/>.

⁴⁵ Benjamin Sando, “Taiwan’s Underworld, Part 2: The Chinese Communist Party and United Front Work,” *Global Taiwan Institute*, 18 September 2024, <https://globaltaiwan.org/>.

During a crisis, the CCP can be expected to activate these criminal networks to disrupt US and allied logistics. This could include sabotage operations, targeted harassment, and even direct attacks on US and allied bases. By outsourcing these operations to deniable actors, Beijing can maximize disruption while minimizing attribution, further complicating the battlespace for Washington and its partners.

Historical Vignette: Party Political Warfare during the Chinese Civil War

The Chinese Civil War serves as the foundation of the CCP's modern political warfare concepts.⁴⁶

Direct fighting in the early 1930s between the CCP and the Nationalists—Kuomintang (KMT, 國民黨)—nearly led to the CCP's destruction. The KMT's blockhouse strategy, designed to encircle and strangle Communist-held areas in south-central China, almost succeeded. The CCP barely escaped through the Long March to Yan'an in Shanxi, where Mao consolidated control over the CCP and its forces.

The 1937 Japanese invasion of China provided the time and space the CCP needed to rebuild. As Japan captured the KMT's coastal urban strongholds, hyperinflation and economic collapse weakened the Nationalist government's legitimacy. Meanwhile, Mao carried out the Yan'an Rectification Campaign (延安整風運動), a mass purge that eliminated internal dissent and solidified his control over the Party.

By the end of World War II, Mao faced a precarious but opportunistic landscape. The United States maintained a significant presence in China—50,000 US Marines stationed in the north, the US Navy's 7th Fleet headquarters in Shanghai, and a US Army Advisory Group in Beijing. The KMT military, superior in numbers and equipment, was armed, trained, and logistically supported by the United States. However, Nationalist legitimacy was fragile, propped up by US economic assistance and reliant on the cooperation of local elites.

⁴⁶ Mariah Thornton, "Countering United Front Work: Taiwan's Political Warfare System," *LSE Ideas*, 21 March 2023, <https://lseideas.medium.com/>.

Recognizing that a direct military confrontation would be disastrous, Mao instead concentrated his 1945–1946 strategy on consolidating Communist strength while systematically undermining US political will to support the KMT. His first move was a diplomatic campaign targeting the United States, spearheaded by Zhou Enlai, whom he appointed as chief negotiator in US-led mediation talks for a unity government. As the architect of the CCP's intelligence apparatus, Zhou had a talent for telling the Americans what they wanted to hear—a skill he would later employ during negotiations with Nixon and Kissinger over US–PRC normalization. To cultivate the image of a willing peace partner, he was authorized to concede isolated and militarily indefensible Communist base areas.

Simultaneously, Mao ordered a covert guerrilla campaign against US Marines in northern China. These attacks served a dual purpose: to test Washington's commitment to defending the KMT and to chip away at US domestic support for intervention. Mao also leaned heavily on United Front influence campaigning, leveraging widespread economic hardship and dissatisfaction with KMT governance to rally popular support as “rural reformers”.

Mao's strategy proved devastatingly effective. The failure of US-led mediation—inevitable, as Mao never intended to share power—was placed squarely on the KMT by President Harry Truman. In response, Truman froze military aid just as Nationalist forces launched their offensive. Meanwhile, mounting public opposition to US involvement in China led to the withdrawal of Marines from the north, ostensibly to prevent further “escalation.”

Deprived of critical US support, the KMT advanced but failed to deliver a decisive blow against the Communists. Overextended and increasingly isolated, Nationalist forces found themselves vulnerable to piecemeal destruction. As the war dragged on, its economic toll proved unbearable—hyperinflation and internal discontent triggered widespread defections. One defeat bled into the next, and by 1949, the Nationalists had no choice but to retreat to Taiwan, leaving the mainland firmly in Communist hands.

In the present-day, Xi has made a concerted attempt to revive Chinese Civil War-era slogans (“Carry forward the Yan'an Spirit,” “Emulate the Yan'an Rectification Campaign,”) and propaganda organizations such as the United Front Work Department.

Fighting the Protracted War

A prolonged conflict poses a significant threat to the CCP. The PLA's concept of "war control" (控制戰爭) emphasizes the need to manage war objectives, methods, intensity, and scope to ensure favorable outcomes. Predictability is paramount. Beyond the obvious economic and societal strains, an extended war risks triggering multifront crises—what the PLA terms "chain reaction warfare" (連鎖反應戰爭).

In such a scenario, the CCP's strategic imperatives will shift to consolidation and risk management. Its first priority, regardless of war duration, will be to eliminate Taiwan's elected government and install an "interim government." This regime would likely consist of criminal syndicate members and pro-unification hardliners from the "deep-blue" faction of the KMT. The CCP is well aware of the legitimacy crisis this would create for its influence campaign against Taiwan. However, by the time the war has escalated into a drawn-out conflict with coalition intervention, the CCP will see its decades-long investment in Taiwan's "emotional integration" (情感融合) as a sunk cost. Instead, it will pivot to a more immediate solution: overwhelming Taiwan's information space with a "flood the zone" propaganda strategy aimed at eroding the island's will to resist and inducing war fatigue among intervening forces.⁴⁷

The "interim government" would act quickly to declare authority over Taiwan's military and order its surrender. Deception operations would feature PLA forces dressed in Taiwanese military uniforms to create a false narrative of domestic compliance. These forces would also play a key role in shaping the optics of a blockade and starvation campaign, ensuring that surrendering military personnel and civilians appear to be capitulating to a Taiwanese, rather than PLA, authority. Beyond its coercive function, the "interim government" would exert political pressure on the intervention coalition, forcing them to prioritize humanitarian aid over weapons shipments in contested supply lines. It is worth noting that *every single one of these techniques were used by the CCP in the Chinese Civil War*.⁴⁸

Beyond Taiwan, the CCP's second priority will be to turn international opinion against the United States and obstruct US military operations through United Front work. The CCP's vast global political warfare network, led by the United Front Work Department (UFW), will mobilize to shape elite opinion in key countries—particularly in the region and among nations capable of influencing the conflict's

⁴⁷ Ying Yu Lin, "China's Hybrid Warfare and Taiwan," *The Diplomat*, 13 January 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/>.

⁴⁸ Gary J. Bjorge, "Moving the Enemy: Operational Art in the Chinese PLA's Huai Hai Campaign," Leavenworth Paper, No. 22, Combat Studies Institute Press, 2003, <https://www.armyupress.army.mil/>.

outcome. The goal will be twofold: securing global legitimacy for the PRC's war objectives while undermining Washington's ability to leverage its alliance network.

The UFWD specializes in outreach and subversion. During the Chinese Civil War, the UFWD was instrumental in co-opting warlords, intellectuals, ethnic minorities, and rival political factions through appeals to nationalism and "temporary pragmatic cooperation."⁴⁹ This strategy was originally designed to "defeat enemies one by one" (各個擊破) before absorbing them into the CCP's orbit. Under Xi, the UFWD has been revitalized, placed under direct Party Central Committee control, and assigned an expanded foreign influence mission.⁵⁰ It now oversees a sprawling infrastructure of Party-linked organizations, with every CCP member expected to contribute to its operations.⁵¹

During the 2019 Hong Kong protests, the UFWD played a central role in the CCP's efforts to break the will of demonstrators. It refined and deployed new counter-mobilization tactics designed to neutralize the decentralized, flash-mob-style protests. These efforts included undermining civil organizations through contested patronage, coercing business elites into compliance, weaponizing media narratives to discredit the movement, and leveraging criminal syndicates as deniable enforcers. The campaign was a testbed for integrating political warfare with coercive force—methods that will be scaled up in the event of a broader conflict.⁵²

In a protracted war, the CCP will expand these tactics globally, seeking to fracture US alliances and disrupt Washington's ability to concentrate military power. The PLA, in coordination with the UFWD, will conduct "disintegration work" aimed at eroding the political cohesion of coalitions, destabilizing societies, and sowing division within defense establishments. At the operational level, the UFWD will play a key role in restricting US military access and freedom of movement, using its extensive influence networks to exert pressure on foreign businesses, civil institutions, and international organizations. These efforts will be designed to isolate the United States, degrade alliance structures, and ensure that any intervention in Taiwan becomes politically and logistically untenable.

The CCP is already conducting these activities today, laying the groundwork for a broader campaign in the event of war. Current efforts include:

⁴⁹ Lyman P. Van Slyke, "The United Front in China," *Journal of Contemporary History* 5, no. 3 (1970): 119–35, <https://www.jstor.org/>.

⁵⁰ Russell Hsiao, "Political Warfare Alert: CCP Updates United Front Regulations Expanding Foreign Influence Mission," *Global Taiwan Institute*, February 2021, <https://globaltaiwan.org/>.

⁵¹ Clive Hamilton and Mareike Ohlberg, *Hidden Hand: Exposing How the Chinese Communist Party Is Reshaping the World* (Melbourne: Hardie Grant Books, 2020).

⁵² Edmund W. Cheng, "'United Front Work and Mechanisms of Counter-Mobilization in Hong Kong,'" *China Journal* 83 (January 2020): 1–33, <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/>.

- Leveraging PRC businesses to gather intelligence on US port usage and logistics;⁵³
- Pressuring foreign companies in joint ventures with Chinese firms to sever logistical and industrial ties with the United States while compelling them to lobby on behalf of the CCP;⁵⁴
- Engaging in political subversion within allied and partner nations to delay or deny US military access;⁵⁵
- Co-opting international organizations—including the United Nations, the World Health Organization, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and Interpol—to isolate the United States diplomatically and cast it as the aggressor.

These efforts will intensify dramatically in wartime, mirroring the CCP's escalation in Hong Kong's 2019 protests, but on a global scale.

Third, the CCP will seek to break American political will through threats of unconstrained war. Western strategic thinking often assumes nuclear escalation is the primary coercive tool available to Beijing. While nuclear signaling will remain an option, it is unlikely to be the CCP's first resort, as it introduces an unacceptable level of uncertainty—especially in a scenario where the CCP is already managing political instability following operational failure. The CCP will seek to credibly threaten *unconstrained* war while ensuring that the war does not become *uncontained*.

Other coercive tools will include hostage diplomacy, as demonstrated by the 2018 detention of Canadian citizens following the arrest of Huawei's CFO on a US extradition request.⁵⁶ The CCP may also engage in mistreatment of prisoners of war—historical precedent suggests this would serve as a deliberate pressure tactic. PLA Rocket Force salvos targeting civilian infrastructure in Japan, Alaska, or US territories could also serve as a means of psychological warfare, aimed at eroding public support for continued intervention, as seen in Russia's strikes against Ukrainian nonmilitary targets. None of these actions would be designed to achieve

⁵³ Elaine Dezenski and David Rader, "How China Uses Shipping for Surveillance and Control," *Foreign Policy*, 20 September 2023, <https://foreignpolicy.com/>.

⁵⁴ Simon Denyer, "Command and Control: China's Communist Party Extends Reach into Foreign Companies," *Washington Post*, 28 January 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/>.

⁵⁵ Alex Joske, *The party speaks for you: Foreign interference and the Chinese Communist Party's united front system*, Report No. 32 (Canberra: Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2020), <https://ad-aspi.s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/>.

⁵⁶ Scott Kennedy, "Beijing Suffers Major Loss from its Hostage Diplomacy," *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, 29 September 2021, <https://www.csis.org/>.

battlefield victory, but rather to fracture the political will of the United States and its democratic allies.

Ultimately, the CCP's objective will be to make the conflict politically untenable for Washington, imposing global costs and forcing US policy makers to view Taiwan as a lost cause. For the CCP, *off-ramps to conflict involve the strategic breaking of US morale, and not simply imposing operational costs.*

Historical Vignette: Party Political Warfare through POWs

The PLA has a long history of integrating political warfare into operations as an offset to quantitative and qualitative inferiority. One example of this from the Chinese Civil War is the leveraging prisoners of war (POW) as instruments of political warfare, a tactic that proved crucial to its success.⁵⁷

During the conflict, the outnumbered PLA relied heavily on defections and surrenders to replenish its ranks. To facilitate this, the CCP implemented the “Lenient Treatment Policy for Enemy Prisoners of War,” which emphasized humane treatment and light indoctrination—deliberately contrasting with the harsh conditions faced by KMT conscripts. Political commissars played a key role in this effort, tasked with persuading captured soldiers to defect while releasing those who refused to join.⁵⁸

This strategy paid dividends. In the brutal fighting of 1948, the PLA absorbed hundreds of thousands of KMT prisoners, enabling it to sustain a high operational tempo at a time when KMT morale was collapsing. The rapid integration of surrendered forces proved decisive, allowing the PLA to maintain its momentum and outmaneuver an adversary already weakened by internal discontent and wavering support.

During the Korean War, approximately 75,000 UN and South Korean soldiers fell into the hands of PRC and North Korean forces. Initial PLA attempts to apply the “Lenient Treatment” approach largely failed—captured US and UN personnel came from vastly different backgrounds than the KMT conscripts who had been susceptible to defection.

⁵⁷ Bjorge, “Moving the Enemy.”

⁵⁸ Wu Qu, “A Cold Conflict amid a Hot War: US-Chinese Indoctrination Contest over the Prisoners of War during the Korean War,” *LibraETD* (blog), 17 April 2023, <https://libraetd.lib.virginia.edu/>.

By 1951, the strategy shifted. Prisoners were subjected to intense indoctrination and psychological coercion designed to induce lasting behavioral changes and serve the CCP's broader propaganda campaign.⁵⁹ They were forced to write propaganda leaflets, issue appeals for peace, denounce the United States, and falsely attest that US forces had deployed biological weapons against Korean civilians. The goal was not only to manipulate individual prisoners but to create a stream of propaganda that could be exploited both domestically and internationally.⁶⁰

These coerced statements became central to the CCP's domestic propaganda efforts, framing the United States as a continuation of the imperial Japanese atrocities of World War II. By invoking deep-seated historical grievances, the CCP sought to stoke nationalist sentiment and solidify domestic support for the war effort.⁶¹

On the international stage, the CCP weaponized prisoner "confessions" to disrupt US military operations. Zhou Enlai, now premier, warned that captured USAF pilots would be treated as "war criminals," an implicit threat aimed at deterring US air campaigns.⁶² Mao, however, saw a broader opportunity. In coordination with the Soviet Union, the CCP transformed these accusations into a global propaganda offensive designed to fracture United Nations Command cohesion and expand influence in Cold War battlegrounds such as India and Pakistan.⁶³

While this campaign has largely faded from Western memory, the CCP has not forgotten its effectiveness. It is no coincidence that both during the COVID-19 pandemic and in the lead-up to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the PRC and Russia pushed disinformation accusing the United States of

⁵⁹ *Communist Treatment of Prisoners of War: A Historical Survey* (Washington: Committee on the Judiciary, United States Senate, 92d Cong., 1972), 12–17.

⁶⁰ James Angus MacDonald, Jr., *The Problems of U.S. Marine Corps Prisoners of War in Korea* (Washington: History and Museums Division, Headquarters, US Marine Corps, 1988), <https://www.marines.mil/>.

⁶¹ Sei Jeong Chin, "The Korean War, Anti-US Propaganda, and the Marginalization of Dissent in China, 1950–1953," *Twentieth-Century China* 48, no 1 (January 2023): 23–47, <https://muse.jhu.edu/>.

⁶² Conrad C. Crane, "Korean War Biological Warfare Allegations Against the United States: A Playbook for the Current Crisis in Ukraine," US Army War College Press, 11 March 2022, <https://press.armywarcollege.edu/>.

⁶³ Milton Leitenberg, "False Allegations of U.S. Biological Weapons Use during the Cold War," in *Terrorism, War, or Disease?: Unraveling the Use of Biological Weapons*, ed. Anne L. Clunan, Peter R. Lavoy, and Susan B. Martin (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), 120–43, <https://spp.umd.edu/>.

developing biological weapons. In a future conflict, similar accusations will almost certainly resurface—alongside the use of captured POWs for indoctrination and coerced propaganda, both to shape domestic narratives and to influence international opinion.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This article provides a brief overview of how the PRC will conduct political warfare in wartime. The scale and intensity of the CCP's political warfare in peacetime is already unprecedented, often proving highly effective. In war, it will escalate even further. Given this clearly foreseeable threat, it is imperative that US national security leaders incorporate political warfare considerations into operational-strategic planning. To that end, we recommend the following actions for senior DOD leadership:

- Direct the establishment of professional military education courses on adversary use of political warfare. The PRC draws extensively on historical precedent to inform its political warfare operations. Understanding this history—how political warfare has been used, what vulnerabilities have been exploited, and what countermeasures have worked—will provide the foundation for preempting or mitigating future adversary actions. This is particularly critical given that the US military has not faced large-scale targeted political warfare since the Cold War era. Technological, societal, and political shifts since then have only heightened US vulnerabilities. Additionally, a deeper understanding of political warfare is essential in shaping America's own offensive strategies, determining when and how to leverage political warfare to maximum effect in a crisis.
- Wargame PRC political warfare operations against operational forces and home bases. These wargames should inform the development of counter-political warfare campaign plans, both country-specific and coalition-wide. Political warfare planning should not be confined to assessing threats—it must also identify opportunities. Misreading adversary capabilities can be just as dangerous as underestimating them. Prior to 2022, Western assessments of the Russian military often took Russian propaganda at face value, leading to inflated capability estimates (e.g., “Russia will decapitate Ukraine’s government in two days”) that only served to self-deter.⁶⁴ Are current worst-case assessments of the PLA,

⁶⁴ Karen DeYoung et al., “Russia could seize Kyiv in days and cause 50,000 civilian casualties in Ukraine, U.S. assessments find,” *Washington Post*, 5 February, 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/>.

particularly the PLARF, suffering from similar analytical flaws? Do assumptions about PLARF capabilities in the opening days of a war account for the CCP's political warfare imperatives—such as dividing coalitions, controlling escalation, and deterring strikes on the mainland? To what extent is the US military self-deterring or engaging in suboptimal force posture decisions due to over-inflated assessments—thereby doing the PLA's job for them?

- Engage with allied/partner militaries on best practices against political warfare. After its defeat in the Chinese Civil War, the KMT undertook sweeping military and political reforms, incorporating lessons learned from its experience with CCP political warfare. This resulted in a comprehensive framework linking psychological and material aspects of warfare, providing Taiwan with a durable defense against decades of PRC coercion. The United States and its allies should engage in systematic exchanges on political warfare experiences, share best practices, and coordinate strategies to counter gray-zone coercion. Strengthening coalition defenses against political warfare not only enhances collective resilience but also imposes costs on the PRC and presents it with a united front—turning its own tactics against it.

A failure to anticipate and counter PRC political warfare would represent a critical vulnerability in any future conflict. While the United States continues to focus on conventional deterrence, the CCP is waging a parallel campaign designed to shape the battlespace long before shots are fired. The PRC's ability to manipulate narratives, erode alliances, and fracture domestic political cohesion poses an asymmetric threat that, if left unchecked, could make conventional military superiority irrelevant. Winning this contest will require a paradigm shift—one that places political warfare at the center of strategic planning, not as an afterthought to traditional military considerations.

The battle for Taiwan will not be decided by missiles and warships alone. It will be fought in the information space, in the corridors of political power, and in the minds of those tasked with defending US and allied interests. If the United States fails to recognize and counter the PRC's political warfare campaign, it risks walking into a conflict already lost before the first engagement. Confronting this challenge requires more than just resilience; it demands a proactive strategy that leverages America's own strengths in influence, coalition-building, and strategic communication. The choice is clear: shape the narrative, or be shaped by it. 🌐

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Political Warfare against Intervention Forces

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