

Chinese Grey-Zone Tactics against Taiwan

Introduction

Since Taiwan has tried to assert its independence from China, China has not shied away, but firmly has asserted itself in the Taiwan strait. By conducting joint military drills and exercises near Taiwanese territory, and not actively engaging their military, a sense of pressure is being created.^[1] The Chinese have now understood that the Taiwanese are wary of Beijing and in the past couple of years the latter has constantly kept the former on their toes. This is one of the many ways China is exploring its non-kinetic means of warfare, with regard to Taiwan.

While there is a difference of opinion in Taiwanese sentiment towards China^[2], the prevailing one is that Taiwan wants to maintain status quo^[3] and operate as a sovereign unit.^[4] Yet, China continues to push its agenda; by hook or by crook^[5], Taiwan will be reunified with the mainland. The 'Three Warfares' strategy^[6] (although now includes other forms, and whose literature is not clear to the Chinese themselves) has been instrumental for the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in this regard. Time and again, they have successfully conducted various operations using this strategy to demoralise and fraction Taiwanese democracy.

Political Warfare

In interviews that he conducts with Taiwanese communists, Mr. Michael Gold, an editor at The Economist Intelligence Unit, discovers that "Communism occupies a peculiar place in Taiwan".^[7] Taiwan, historically, has actively tried to derail the communist dragon that is pushing to occupy its country, however, the country itself has had communist elements of its own. Unfortunately, those who showed any sign of belief in the ideology were persecuted and severely punished during the White-Terror era.^[8] The ban against communism was lifted in the 1980s.^[9] Post the ban, parties like Taiwanese Communist Party and Taiwan People's Communist Party have come up.^[10]

The question now arises, has China been able to channel the communist sentiment in Taiwan in their favour? The answer to this is not far behind in time. Last year, Taiwan indicted two leaders from Taiwan People's Communist Party, Party Chairman, Lin Te-Wang, and Vice Chairman, Chen Chien-Hsin for violating the Anti-Infiltration Act and Civil Servants Election and Recall Act.^[11] They were accused of attempting to influence the 2024 Taiwanese Presidential elections and Members of Legislative Assembly elections with funding they received from the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).^[12] This is not the first instance when one of the above has been accused.

Thus, the idea here is that the CCP can and has already found ways to tap into the communist elements in Taiwan to begin disintegrating their democratic spirit.

Psychological Warfare

China is infamous for spreading misinformation and propaganda online and through other channels to sow discord within Taiwan's society and push to create a more friendly perception of China and the PLA.^[13] Creating fake news stories that undermines trust in the Taiwanese government and promoting pro-unification narratives fuels their agenda.

Early this year, prior to the Taiwanese elections, the CCP was accused of posting fake videos of then President, Tsai Ing-Wen, through multiple social media accounts. A 300-page document called 'The Secret History of Tsai Ing-Wen' was released ahead of the Presidential election, that was meant to defame the former President and sow more seeds of mistrust in the public for the government.^[14] Upon inspection, it was found that all of it was false and were simply fabricated rumours. What is interesting is that the Taiwanese media would pick up on these news and report them. It was uncovered that they regularly receive monetary rewards from the CCP for the same.^[15]

Another tactic worth talking about is the reducing number of countries recognizing Taiwan. Smaller countries that recognised Taiwan as an independent nation-state are now cutting diplomatic ties with them.^[16] Many countries such as Honduras and Nauru, a Pacific Island, choose China instead, since, it offers investment opportunities and cash to them. Since countries like Honduras are in debt, they choose the pay-out.^[17]

According to Dr. Scott Harold, a senior political scientist at RAND Corporation, in one of his articles^[18], one of the many ways in their efforts of disinformation, China can continue to plant feelings of mistrust in the minds of the Taiwanese civilians about their political leaders and their military's capabilities. As this carries on, the government would perhaps see a decrease in public support which in turn puts Taiwanese ideals of democracy into jeopardy and allows for pro-unification messages to resonate with the people.

Harold also suggests that perhaps the Taiwanese believe that support from the United States is unwavering which may have made them complacent. Although a Brookings survey^[19] shows that the people have become more aware of China's growing threat, active disinformation efforts can continue to convince the public that they are truly on their own in this conflict.

Public Information Warfare

In the past several years, through bilateral exchange programmes, China has brought in Taiwanese students and given them economic and socio-cultural incentives to study in their universities.^[20] Many of the universities provide seats to Taiwanese students, and their travel to China is heavily subsidised.^[21] Taiwanese college students see this as a lucrative opportunity to gain exposure and also receive quality education. The Chinese see it as an opportunity to mold young minds which is far easier and cheaper. By bringing in these students, it allows them to easily shape narratives and impose their propaganda. For example, the United Front Work Department, of the CCP, sponsors tours for young Taiwanese to come and experience China. Many students claim that the sponsored trip was way to spread ideas about unity across the strait and promote Chinese nationalism.^[22]

Cross-strait marriages are not also uncommon and unheard of. While China holds a more positive attitude towards these marriages, Taiwanese authorities have imposed restrictions, such as on work and residency, on the mainland spouses in Taiwan.^[23] China, on the other hand, welcomes and provides better economic conditions and market in terms of international integration, to the Taiwanese spouses.^[24] This has caused a lot of Taiwanese citizens, especially women, to leave Taiwan and settle in China instead.^[25]

Conclusion

China has been active in using the 'Three Warfares' strategy as a means to weaken Taiwan's democratic resistance and has expanded the scope of the strategy with time. The CCP

understands that kinetic means of warfare may not always be a viable option nor a cheap one, hence, there is a need to play and experiment with non-kinetic means.

It is understood that the possibilities with these are endless and though may not bring immediate results, in due time, by employing some among many of the non-kinetic measures spoken above, it will fraction and reunify Taiwan .

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