



STATE OF THE GAME

BUILDING PACAF'S COMPETITIVE MINDSET

NOVEMBER 2020

THE WORLD'S LARGEST PROPAGANDA MACHINE

With a \$9B budget dedicated to propaganda, the PRC seeks to dominate the Information Environment.

The People's Republic of China (PRC) is the world's largest influence operations (IO) machine, exceeding even Russia's misconduct in global impact. With a massive propaganda budget, the PRC has built a sprawling infrastructure for manipulating information and disseminating its narratives domestically and internationally. Its investment of human capital enables the PRC to fund both overt and covert propaganda and tactics, like media production, United Front political work, and supposedly independent academic institutions.

This influence machine was perfected over the course of nearly a century, and with the dawning of the internet age, China was ready "with a [sophisticated propaganda model](#) already in place and decades of experience refining the individual, psychological, and tactical aspects of its application." Through its "Great Firewall," the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) limits what its domestic audiences view online, but it also employs similar tactics to project influence internationally.

For example, the "50-Cent Party" consists of up to two million state-controlled internet commenters who disingenuously spread pro-CCP sentiments on social media and news sites without revealing their connection to the Chinese government.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic presented a reputational challenge to the PRC. To counter the narrative that they did little to alert the world and prevent further spread of the disease, China quickly went on the information offensive. Chinese diplomats known as "Wolf Warriors" appeared on local news media to aggressively deflect blame, and pro-China troll accounts swarmed Western social media platforms. While it appears some of their most belligerent efforts have [backfired](#), the breadth of the PRC IO campaign means that some of their narratives still took hold.

Why It Matters: PACAF plays a vital role on the front lines of the narrative battle. Truthful narratives supported by military activities provide the foundation to push back on China's propaganda overreach.

\$9B

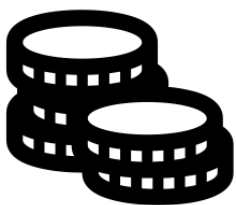
Estimated PRC investment in propaganda

450M

PRC-sponsored social media comments per year

6 to 8 Hours

PRC IO response time to a crisis media event



ARE “GOOD ENOUGH” WEAPONS GOOD ENOUGH?

China sells “good enough” weapons to the world but questions remain over quality and reliability.

China is the second-largest arms producer in the world, behind the United States but ahead of Russia. While many weapons are for domestic use, China has increased its sales to other countries in recent years, becoming the fifth-largest arms supplier in the world. China’s conventional arms sales [surged](#) from \$645 million in 2008 to \$1.04 billion in 2018. Besides the pursuit of profits, China uses its arms exports as an instrument of its foreign policy to project influence in regions deemed vital to its interests. Neighboring Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Myanmar remain top importers of Chinese weapons, making up more than half of China’s conventional arms sales since 2008.

In what has been [called](#) “the greatest intellectual property theft in human history,” China has attempted to close the gap with the West on high-end, technologically advanced systems, but buyers are finding that lower-cost PRC systems aren’t always the bargain they seem to be. This is illustrated in China’s unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) sales to countries such as the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt. While US combat UAVs, such as the MQ-9 Reaper, were Middle Eastern countries’ first choice, the Chinese Cai Hong (CH) series—at a cheaper price and with “[good enough quality](#)”—filled the void when US sales were restricted by arms control agreements



CHINA’S CH-4B DRONE (ABOVE) MIGHT LOOK A LOT LIKE THE AMERICAN MQ-9 REAPER, BUT THERE ARE [KEY DIFFERENCES](#); THE MQ-9 HAS SEVEN OUTBOARD STATIONS (VERSUS CH-4B’S SIX), AND CAN CARRY FIVE TIMES AS MUCH ORDNANCE.

or US policy. However, the inferior Chinese systems proved unreliable in their performance, prompting the Kingdom of Jordan to put its CH-4B UAVs for sale [merely three years](#) after the purchase. More broadly, Chinese technical training provided to foreign military personnel appears to be of inferior quality, consistently failing to match the standards of more experienced Western militaries.

The US is expanding its security provisions to trusted partners around the globe, including [recent sales](#) of the MQ-9 to Taiwan. Partners in the Asia-Pacific know they can trust the quality, reliability, and professionalism of the US when looking to enhance their security—and there’s increasing evidence that trying to buy air power on the cheap from China is a bad investment.

THE SPARK

Information to grow knowledge of China and spark curiosity about the Indo-Pacific region

Despite the Great Power Competition between the PRC and the US, our nations do cooperate where it advances the goal of maintaining a Free and Open Indo-Pacific. For example, the US and the PRC have established limited defense mechanisms, like the Military Maritime Consultative Agreement (MMCA) Working Group, to enable conversations about operational safety between the US Air Force and Navy and their PLA equivalents. Engagements like MMCA allow the US to voice concerns over unsafe maritime and aviation incidents in the hopes of decreasing the likelihood of miscalculation and escalation.

COMPETE DAILY

Want to learn more? The Strategic Competition Team recommends:

- The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) summarizes what’s happening in US-China relations. [Watch](#) here.
- [Learn](#) about the post-pandemic infrastructure in the Indo-Pacific from CSIS.
- [Listen](#) to CSIS’s podcast about China’s “Global Status Anxiety.”
- Want even more? Visit the [Strategic Competition Team’s NIPR Intelink page](#).



A monthly review of competition thoughts and activities from PACAF’s

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