

Grey Zone Escalation: How China's Hybrid Warfare is Reshaping Taiwan's Security

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Abstract

Grey-zone conflict and hybrid warfare have become increasingly prominent forms of strategic competition in the Indo-Pacific region, particularly in cross-strait relations. Unlike conventional conflicts marked by open warfare, grey-zone strategies operate below the threshold of war through ambiguous, incremental, and multi-domain coercive actions. In the context of Taiwan, China's pressure extends beyond military demonstrations to include information operations, cyberattacks, economic coercion, and maritime activities aimed at undermining political stability and weakening overall security resilience. This evolving environment suggests that Taiwan's security challenges have become more complex. This study examines two key issues: (1) how China's grey-zone strategy and hybrid warfare shape Taiwan's national security policies, and (2) the dominant forms of China's hybrid warfare tactics within grey-zone operations and their implications for Taiwan's security stability. The author employs a qualitative, descriptive-analytical approach, focusing on Taiwan. Moreover, data were collected through document-based research and media tracking, official statements, credible international news sources, and relevant academic literature. The data were analysed using Miles and Huberman's qualitative data analysis framework, which comprises data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification, to ensure a comprehensive analysis. The findings suggest that China's grey-zone escalation has driven significant adjustments in Taiwan's security policy, shifting from a primarily conventional defense orientation toward a broader framework of comprehensive security and national resilience. This shift is reflected in Taiwan's increasing emphasis on cybersecurity, counter-disinformation measures, and critical infrastructure protection. Moreover, information operations, cyber pressure, and military exercises emerge as the most dominant hybrid tactics employed by China. These tactics intensify the complexity of Taiwan's security environment, affecting both national defense priorities and socio-political resilience. In conclusion, China's grey-zone and hybrid warfare strategies function not only as coercive instruments but also as mechanisms that gradually reshape Taiwan's security agenda.

Keywords: Cross-Strait Relations, Grey Zone Strategy, Hybrid Warfare, Taiwan's Security, Cybersecurity

Abstrak

Fenomena konflik grey-zone dan hybrid warfare semakin menonjol sebagai bentuk kompetisi strategis di kawasan Indo-Pasifik, khususnya dalam hubungan lintas selat (cross-strait relations) antara Cina dan Taiwan. Berbeda dengan konflik konvensional yang ditandai dengan perang terbuka, strategi grey-zone beroperasi di bawah ambang perang melalui tindakan koersif yang bersifat ambigu, bertahap, dan multidomain. Dalam konteks Taiwan, tekanan China tidak hanya terbatas pada demonstrasi kekuatan militer, tetapi juga mencakup operasi informasi, serangan siber, koersi ekonomi, serta aktivitas maritim yang bertujuan melemahkan stabilitas politik dan ketahanan keamanan Taiwan. Kondisi ini menunjukkan bahwa tantangan keamanan Taiwan telah bergeser menuju "era normal baru" yang semakin kompleks. Penelitian ini menganalisis dua isu utama, yaitu: (1) bagaimana strategi grey-zone dan hybrid warfare China membentuk kebijakan keamanan nasional Taiwan, serta (2) bentuk-bentuk taktik hybrid warfare China dalam operasi grey-zone terhadap Taiwan dan implikasinya terhadap stabilitas keamanan Taiwan. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif-analitis dengan berfokus pada Taiwan. Data dikumpulkan melalui studi dokumentasi dan media tracking, yang mencakup dokumen kebijakan, pernyataan resmi, sumber berita internasional, serta literatur akademik yang relevan. Data

dianalisis menggunakan kerangka analisis kualitatif Miles dan Huberman yang meliputi reduksi data, penyajian data, serta penarikan dan verifikasi kesimpulan untuk menghasilkan analisis yang komprehensif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa eskalasi strategi grey-zone China mendorong penyesuaian signifikan dalam kebijakan keamanan Taiwan, dari orientasi pertahanan konvensional menuju kerangka keamanan komprehensif berbasis ketahanan nasional. Perubahan ini tercermin dalam meningkatnya perhatian Taiwan terhadap keamanan siber, kebijakan kontra-disinformasi, dan perlindungan infrastruktur kritis. Selain itu, operasi informasi, tekanan siber, dan latihan militer muncul sebagai taktik hibrida paling dominan yang digunakan China. Taktik tersebut memperbesar kompleksitas ancaman keamanan Taiwan, baik pada aspek pertahanan nasional maupun ketahanan sosial-politik. Dengan demikian, strategi grey-zone dan hybrid warfare China berfungsi tidak hanya sebagai instrumen tekanan, tetapi juga sebagai mekanisme yang secara gradual membentuk ulang agenda keamanan Taiwan.

Kata kunci: Hybrid Warfare, Hubungan Lintas Selat, Keamanan Siber, Keamanan Taiwan, Strategi Grey Zone

INTRODUCTION

Security dynamics in the Indo-Pacific region over the past decade have undergone a significant shift from conventional conflict toward more complex and sustained forms of strategic competition (Mazarr, 2015; Liff & Ikenberry, 2014). One of the most prominent manifestations of this transformation is the increasing reliance on grey-zone conflict and hybrid warfare as primary instruments in cross-strait relations between the People's Republic of China (China) and Taiwan (Mazarr, 2015; Shetler-Jones, 2025). Unlike open warfare, characterized by the explicit use of military force, grey-zone strategies operate below the threshold of war through ambiguous, incremental, and multi-domain coercive actions, thereby constraining the target state's ability to respond decisively without incurring broader escalation risks (Mazarr, 2015).

In the case of Taiwan, this approach has generated a persistent and complex threat environment, commonly described by observers as a "new normal era" in cross-strait security (Shetler-Jones, 2025). The urgency of this issue is underscored by China's intensifying pressure on Taiwan, particularly in the cyber and military domains. According to the National Security

Bureau (NSB) of Taiwan, throughout 2025, Taiwan's critical infrastructure was subjected to an average of approximately 2.63 million cyber intrusion attempts per day, allegedly originating from China-linked cyber actors (National Security Bureau, 2026). This figure represents an increase of around 6 percent compared to the previous year and a sharp escalation relative to the initial publication of such statistics in 2023.

These cyber operations targeted vital sectors, including energy systems, emergency services, hospitals, banking institutions, telecommunications networks, and strategic industrial zones that underpin Taiwan's central role in the global semiconductor supply chain (National Security Bureau, 2026; Reuters, 2025a). Such escalation demonstrates that digital conflict has become an integral component of broader strategic pressure against Taiwan's governance and social service systems (Chang & Cole, 2023).

Cyber pressure has unfolded in parallel with the intensification of grey-zone military activities conducted by the People's Liberation Army (PLA). Large-scale military exercises such as Justice Mission 2025, conducted in late December 2025, involved simulations of port blockades and joint operations using naval

vessels, aircraft, and drones across multiple zones surrounding Taiwan (Reuters, 2025b). These exercises served not only as demonstrations of PLA military capabilities but also as political signals to Taiwan and to external actors providing security support (Fravel, 2020).

The convergence of sustained cyber pressure and calibrated military demonstrations suggests a coordinated strategic pattern rather than isolated incidents, reflecting the integrated logic of China's hybrid warfare approach toward Taiwan (Hoffman, 2007; Mazarr, 2015). Within contemporary international security literature, these developments are widely analyzed through the conceptual lenses of grey-zone conflict and hybrid warfare. Studies by international research institutions such as the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) emphasize that China systematically employs ambiguous and incremental measures to alter the cross-strait status quo without triggering conventional warfare (Shetler-Jones, 2025; Shen, 2022).

Grey-zone activity is understood as a strategic space between peace and war that constrains the target state's response options due to political legitimacy and international legal considerations (Mazarr, 2015). Meanwhile, hybrid warfare scholarship highlights the simultaneous deployment of military and non-military instruments, including cyber operations, disinformation campaigns, economic coercion, lawfare, and political manipulation, to gradually weaken adversaries (Hoffman, 2007; Murray & Mansoor, 2012; Jacobs et al., 2023). In Taiwan's context, international media and

academic studies document the expansion of disinformation campaigns and the alleged involvement of China-linked "online troll armies" aimed at eroding public trust in the Taiwanese government and intensifying domestic political polarization, particularly during electoral periods (Reuters, 2025a; Kao, 2022; Hörster, 2024).

At the policy level, Taiwan's response to sustained grey-zone pressure reflects a significant shift in its security paradigm. Rather than relying solely on conventional military defense, Taiwan has increasingly adopted a comprehensive security approach that emphasizes whole-of-society national resilience (Shetler-Jones, 2025; Ministry of National Defense Taiwan, 2024). This shift is evident in strengthened cybersecurity capabilities, the development of counter-disinformation policies, enhanced protection of critical infrastructure, and improved inter-agency coordination alongside expanded security cooperation with international partners (National Security Bureau, 2026).

Measures such as increased patrols and monitoring of suspicious vessels near critical undersea cables further illustrate how grey-zone threats have translated into tangible changes in Taiwan's national security practices (Reuters, 2025c). Despite the growing body of literature on grey-zone conflict and hybrid warfare in the cross-strait context, a significant analytical gap remains. Much existing research concentrates on identifying threat typologies and tactical instruments employed by China. Yet, it often fails to systematically link these escalating tactics to concrete changes in Taiwan's security policy and their broader implications for

national and socio-political stability (Mazarr, 2015; Fravel, 2020; Bukhari et al., 2024).

As a result, the causal relationship between sustained grey-zone pressure and long-term security adaptation remains underexplored. Therefore, this article seeks to address this gap by examining two core issues: first, how China's grey-zone and hybrid warfare strategies shape Taiwan's security policy; and second, which hybrid warfare tactics dominate China's grey-zone operations against Taiwan and how these tactics affect overall security stability. Employing a qualitative descriptive-analytical approach and a Taiwan-focused case study, this research bridges tactical-level analysis and policy-level assessment. Academically, this study contributes both conceptually and empirically to the fields of International Relations and contemporary security studies.

Its contribution lies in systematically mapping the relationship between grey-zone escalation, security policy adaptation, and national resilience outcomes. In doing so, the article not only deepens understanding of cross-strait security dynamics but also offers an analytical framework applicable to other regions facing similar grey-zone pressures amid intensifying great-power competition.

Conceptual Framework: Grey-Zone Strategy

In the International Relations scholarship discussion, grey zone strategy refers to a mode of competition situated between peacetime and open warfare, characterized by deliberately ambiguous, incremental, and difficult-to-deter or counter coercive actions. A core premise is

that states can pursue strategic gains through calibrated aggression without provoking direct escalation into full-scale war, as the targeted actor often hesitates to respond decisively due to legitimacy constraints, political risks, and uncertainty surrounding applicable legal and normative thresholds.

Grey-zone strategy refers to an overarching campaign design in which a state pursues political objectives through sustained, integrated coercion below the threshold of open warfare, leveraging ambiguity and gradualism to avoid decisive retaliation while incrementally shifting the status quo (Carment & Belo, 2020; Bhatia, 2018). In this framework, strategy denotes the end state and the theory of action (e.g., normalizing a new baseline of control, imposing long-term fatigue, and managing escalation risk). In contrast, tactics are the discrete instruments and actions used to implement that design across domains. Typical grey-zone tactics include calibrated military signaling and proxy activity (e.g., maritime militia or paramilitary operations), cyber and information operations, economic pressure, and diplomatic measures, orchestrated to appear routine or deniable while generating cumulative strategic effects (Bhatia, 2018; Carment & Belo, 2020).

Whereas hybrid warfare is best treated as an operational method/toolkit, the coordinated blending of kinetic and non-kinetic means to generate ambiguity and complex effects, which can serve grey-zone aims but is not synonymous with the strategy itself (Mumford & Carlucci, 2023; Wither, 2023). Lawfare likewise functions primarily as a tactical-enabling instrument: the use of legal rules, processes, and

narratives to secure operational advantages, legitimize one's actions, and raise the political or reputational costs of an opponent's response, thereby reinforcing grey-zone ambiguity around thresholds and "appropriate" countermeasures (Welch, 2017).

Mazarr defines grey zone activity as "aggressive actions that fall between the traditional war and peace duality," emphasizing that such measures are intended to gradually alter the status quo while avoiding a forceful retaliatory response (Mazarr, 2015). Grey zone competition thus represents not merely low-intensity conflict, but a strategic approach that exploits escalation thresholds to advance political objectives (Mazarr, 2015).

A second assumption underlying the grey zone strategy is its reliance on incrementalism, often conceptualized as salami-slicing and *fait accompli* tactics. Rather than pursuing a single decisive action, grey zone operations advance through persistent, small-scale moves that cumulatively reshape the strategic environment and impose strategic fatigue on the opponent. This logic is consistent with Mazarr's argument that grey-zone competition proceeds through "incremental steps" designed to avoid crossing clear triggering points that might unify the targeted actor or prompt a robust military response (Mazarr, 2015).

Third, the grey zone strategy is inherently multi-domain, blending political, economic, cyber, and informational instruments with limited military activities primarily employed as signaling. This multi-domain character closely intersects with the

concept of hybrid warfare. Hoffman argues that hybrid threats combine "conventional capabilities, irregular tactics, terrorism, and criminal behavior" within a single operational space, creating complex effects that cannot be addressed by a single policy instrument (Hoffman, 2007). In this framework, hybrid warfare provides the operational toolkit, while the grey zone supplies the strategic context in which such tools can be deployed below the threshold of open war (Mazarr, 2015; Hoffman, 2007).

Applied to Taiwan, China's grey-zone escalation can be interpreted as a coercive strategy aimed at reshaping Taiwan's security calculus without resorting to direct invasion. Persistent air and maritime pressure, alongside demonstrations of force, constitute military-related actions that remain below the legal and political threshold of armed conflict. Concurrently, information warfare and influence operations seek to shape societal perceptions by portraying resistance as costly, unrealistic, or politically destabilizing (Sukumar & Deo, 2021). This reflects a defining grey zone dynamic: the production of an enduring yet ambiguous threat environment that generates a response dilemma-Taiwan risks being seen as overreacting if it responds forcefully, yet risks strategic erosion if it remains restrained (Mazarr, 2015).

A state can be assessed as employing a grey-zone strategy when its coercive behavior exhibits most of the following key concepts:

1. Deliberate ambiguity of attribution or intent (e.g., reliance on proxies or deniable

- actors, "routine" operational framing, and unclear red lines).
2. Below-threshold coercion calibrated to remain short of widely recognized triggers for "armed conflict" or alliance intervention.
 3. Incrementalism through salami-slicing or fait accompli tactics in which repeated small moves cumulatively shift the status quo (Mazarr, 2015). This approach is typically sustained through
 4. Persistence and normalization, whereby continuous pressure habituates the target and gradually establishes a new baseline of acceptable behavior.
 5. Strategic fatigue by driving resource drain, readiness strain, polarization, or decision paralysis over time.
 6. cross-domain integration, synchronizing limited military signaling with informational, economic, and cyber instruments in pursuit of a coherent political end-state (Mazarr, 2015).

Hybrid warfare, by contrast, is best understood as an operational method or toolkit that blends conventional capabilities with irregular tactics and other nontraditional means to produce complex effects within a shared operational space, and it may be employed either within grey-zone competition or during overt conflict (Hoffman, 2007; NASEM, 2016). Key concepts commonly associated with hybrid warfare include multimodal force employment (the simultaneous use of

conventional and irregular methods), domain convergence (coordinated effects across military, cyber, informational, and sometimes criminal or proxy channels), operational simultaneity and sequencing (synchronizing different instruments to overwhelm decision-making and dilute response options), attribution management and deniability (complicating identification of actors and intent), and psychological and informational effects aimed at shaping perceptions, cohesion, and political will to resist (Hoffman, 2007).

Lawfare differs again as the instrumental use of legal rules, processes, and narratives to legitimize one's actions, delegitimize the opponent, and constrain the opponent's response options by raising legal, political, and reputational costs, often reinforcing grey-zone ambiguity by contesting thresholds of legitimacy and escalation (Dunlap, 2001; Mazarr, 2015). Key concepts of lawfare include legal justification and normalization (portraying contested behavior as lawful or routine), delegitimization of countermeasures (casting the target's responses as illegal or escalatory), procedural and institutional leverage (using courts, regulations, and administrative mechanisms to delay, deter, or impose compliance costs), jurisdictional reframing (redefining disputes as domestic governance or law-enforcement matters), and strategic narrative alignment in which legal arguments are amplified through diplomacy and information operations to shape international and domestic perceptions (Dunlap, 2001).

These dynamics help explain Taiwan's shift from conventional defense planning toward a broader emphasis on whole-of-society resilience, including enhanced cybersecurity, counter-disinformation initiatives, and the protection of critical infrastructure (Kaloudis, 2024). In this sense, China's grey zone strategy directly contributes to "reshaping" Taiwan's security agenda by expanding the concept of national defense beyond territorial protection into the digital and cognitive domains (Mazarr, 2015; Hoffman, 2007). Ultimately, grey zone competition is designed to succeed by forcing the targeted actor into costly response choices. China's sustained and calibrated pressure on Taiwan, therefore, should be understood not as isolated incidents but as an integrated strategic design intended to weaken Taiwan gradually and normalize persistent competition below the threshold of war (Mazarr, 2015).

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative descriptive-analytical research design to examine how China's grey-zone strategy and hybrid warfare influence Taiwan's national security policy and overall security stability. A qualitative approach is considered appropriate given the study's focus on interpreting complex security phenomena, strategic behavior, and policy responses that can't be adequately captured through quantitative measurement (Creswell, 2014). The research adopts a single-case study design with Taiwan as the unit of analysis, enabling an in-depth exploration of the interaction between

China's hybrid warfare tactics and Taiwan's evolving security policies. Case study research is particularly suitable for analyzing contemporary security issues where the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly defined (Yin, 2018).

Data collection was conducted through document-based research and systematic media tracking, focusing on materials directly relevant to the research questions. Primary sources include official publications and policy documents issued by Taiwanese government institutions, such as national defense reports and statements from security agencies, which provide insight into policy adjustments and threat perceptions (Ministry of National Defense Taiwan, 2024; National Security Bureau, 2026). These were complemented by reports from international think tanks, peer-reviewed academic journal articles, and credible international news outlets that document China's hybrid warfare activities, including cyber operations, disinformation campaigns, economic coercion, and grey-zone military actions (Mazarr, 2015; Shetler-Jones, 2025; Reuters, 2025). The use of multiple data sources enables data triangulation, thereby enhancing the credibility and reliability of the analysis (Denzin, 2017).

The collected data were analysed using Miles and Huberman's qualitative data analysis framework, which consists of three interconnected stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). During the data reduction stage, relevant information was selected, coded, and categorized according to key analytical

themes derived from the research questions, including cyber threats, information operations, military signaling, economic pressure, and policy responses. In the data display stage, the reduced data were organized into analytical matrices and thematic tables to facilitate pattern identification and comparison between China's hybrid warfare tactics and Taiwan's security responses.

Finally, conclusion drawing and verification involved interpreting the observed patterns to assess how China's grey-zone and hybrid warfare strategies have shaped Taiwan's security policy and affected its security stability, while continuously verifying findings through cross-checking sources and ensuring analytical consistency (Miles et al., 2014). Through this methodological approach, the study provides a systematic and comprehensive analysis of China's hybrid warfare against Taiwan and its implications for security policy adaptation in a prolonged grey-zone conflict environment (Stošić, 2023).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

China's Grey-Zone Strategy and Taiwan's Security Policy Adaptation

China's grey-zone strategy against Taiwan exemplifies the broader coercive approach. That aimed to achieve strategic dominance without triggering full-scale conflict by employing multi-domain tactics such as cyberattacks targeting Taiwanese critical infrastructure, economic coercion through trade restrictions and investment controls, disinformation campaigns to undermine public confidence, and diplomatic pressure to isolate Taiwan internationally. Beijing seeks to

incrementally weaken Taiwan's political and security resilience while avoiding military confrontation (Mazarr, 2015; Hoffman, 2020; O'Rourke, 2021).

The use of maritime militia and paramilitary forces in the Taiwan Strait further illustrates this hybrid warfare, blending civilian and military elements to assert territorial claims and intimidate Taiwan without crossing the threshold of open warfare (Green & Button, 2019; Todd et al., 2024). These grey-zone tactics constrain Taiwan's ability to respond decisively, as any intense countermeasures risk escalation into the whole conflict. Consequently, Taiwan faces the challenge of navigating this ambiguous threat environment by enhancing diplomatic engagement, international cooperation, and adaptive defense postures to deter and manage China's multifaceted coercion while minimizing the risk of escalation (Kuo et al., 2023).

In response to China's coercive grey-zone tactics, Taiwan has recognized the imperative to reformulate its national security policy by prioritizing enhanced resilience through diversified international partnerships, strengthened asymmetric defense capabilities, and comprehensive diplomatic strategies aimed at deterring multifaceted threats and ensuring sovereignty protection (Wang & Huang, 2020; Lin, 2021; Smith, 2022).

This adaptation involves a strategic shift from traditional defense mechanisms to a broader set of responses that address the multi-domain nature of grey-zone operations across information, cyber, and economic dimensions (Rai, 2022; Shih, 2024). This comprehensive approach recognizes that the PRC's grey-zone tactics

seek to undermine Taiwan's resolve and capacity to resist through psychological warfare and cognitive manipulation, alongside direct military pressures (Sullivan, 2024). This multifaceted strategy, often referred to as "three warfares," systematically integrates psychological, public opinion, and legal warfare to achieve strategic objectives by influencing perceptions and weakening resistance without direct armed conflict (West & Insisa, 2023; Liang & Shao, 2024).

This condition includes a significant lawfare component that uses legal tools to define the operational perimeter and bolster the impact of Beijing's broader Digital, Information, Military, Economic, Financial, Intelligence, and Lawfare operations, transcending the "three warfares" framework (West & Insisa, 2023). This framework extends to weaponizing economic interdependence and global supply chains, leveraging them to achieve political goals and territorial gains by sinicizing Taiwan's interdependencies (Yelery, 2025).

Such strategies aim to reshape the international understanding of Taiwan's status while eroding its domestic confidence and autonomy, thereby establishing a new normal through incremental advancements (Chen et al., 2024; Sarjito, 2024). This strategy requires Taiwan not only to fortify its conventional defense capabilities but also to cultivate a robust, comprehensive security posture encompassing economic resilience, cyber defense, and information counter-offensives to mitigate these diverse threats (Sarjito, 2024). This condition includes developing asymmetric warfare strategies

to counterbalance China's numerical and technological superiority, focusing on making any potential aggression prohibitively costly and complex for Beijing (Yelery, 2025).

Nonetheless, from Beijing's perspective, coercive measures toward Taiwan are framed less as "aggression" than as the enforcement of sovereignty within what the PRC defines as a domestic political question. Scholarly analyses of mainland policy narratives show that Beijing consistently anchors its position in the one-China principle, treating Taiwan-related tensions primarily as the product of "separatist" activity and, crucially, intensifying foreign involvement, portrayed as hollowing out agreed understandings and undermining stability across the Strait (Xin, 2023; Yakti et al., 2025). Within this logic, demonstrations of resolve (including military signaling and other coercive instruments) are justified as deterrent communication aimed at preventing outcomes Beijing interprets as movement toward *de jure* separation and at discouraging external actors from deepening security engagement with Taiwan (Xin, 2023).

Complementing this narrative, China's legal-security framing is frequently interpreted in the literature as providing domestic legal rationalization for a dual-track approach that combines inducements with coercive deterrence. Analyses of the Anti-Secession Law emphasize that it channels both hard and soft instruments into a single framework, reinforcing a policy of maintaining cross-Strait "peace" through the credible threat of non-peaceful means while preserving deliberate ambiguity over

the specific thresholds that would trigger escalation (Ji, 2006).

In this reading, coercive pressure is presented as calibrated: it is intended to raise the costs of formal separation and shape bargaining dynamics, while retaining flexibility over timing and intensity in accordance with Beijing's evolving political and strategic calculus (Ji, 2006).

Furthermore, Taiwan's responses increasingly integrate international cooperation and diplomatic efforts to highlight China's grey-zone activities and garner global support for its sovereignty. Taiwan's strategic responses to China's grey-zone tactics have increasingly emphasized multilateral engagement and diplomatic initiatives to expose and counter these coercive measures on the international stage. By actively collaborating with regional partners and global institutions, Taiwan seeks to raise awareness of China's ambiguous aggression and reinforce the legitimacy of its sovereignty claims (Smith, 2022). These efforts include participation in international forums, bilateral dialogues, and security partnerships that underscore the importance of maintaining a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific (Chen & Wu, 2023).

Moreover, Taiwan leverages diplomatic channels to build coalitions that can collectively deter grey-zone provocations by signaling unified opposition to coercive actions that undermine regional stability (Lin, 2021). This approach not only enhances Taiwan's diplomatic standing but also complicates China's ability to politically isolate Taiwan, thereby strengthening Taiwan's resilience against multi-domain threats (Wang & Huang, 2020). Through these integrated

diplomatic and cooperative measures, Taiwan aims to shift the burden of response from unilateral defense to a broader, collective security framework that can more effectively address the complexities of grey-zone conflict.

This proactive stance is critical to counter China's ongoing efforts to diminish Taiwan's international diplomatic space and redefine its sovereignty through lawfare and cognitive operations (Feryna & Kutěj, 2023; West & Insisa, 2023). Taiwan recognizes that effective deterrence against such multifaceted threats requires a layered strategy that combines military readiness with societal resilience, bolstering its capacity to detect, analyze, and counter disinformation campaigns and economic coercion (Feryna & Kutěj, 2023). Moreover, Taipei has responded to China's multifaceted hybrid warfare tactics, which include technological, financial, legal, psychological, and cyber tools, by fostering international collaborations to share intelligence on cognitive operations and enhance media literacy among its populace (Çifçi, 2024; Feryna & Kutěj, 2023).

The response also involves expanding diplomatic agreements beyond trade and de facto embassy arrangements to include robust arms sales and military-to-military protocols (Press, 2023). This approach emphasizes that Taiwan's national security is not merely a military concern but a comprehensive challenge requiring a whole-of-society effort to build resilience against China's pervasive grey-zone pressures. This strategic shift reflects a more profound understanding that grey-zone operations demand a coordinated, multi-domain response, moving beyond purely military measures to include

diplomatic, informational, economic, and cyber countermeasures (Bachmann et al., 2019; Kirchberger, 2021).

The strategy also includes investing in advanced technologies to enhance self-reliance in critical sectors, thereby reducing vulnerabilities to external pressures, and fostering economic resilience to ensure swift recovery from crises (Constantinescu, 2023; Yelery, 2025). These adaptations underscore a broader shift towards a deterrence-by-resilience framework, emphasizing Taiwan's capacity to absorb and recover from various forms of coercion rather than solely relying on punitive deterrence (Protection et al., 2016). This adaptation involves a strategic broadening of its international partnerships, moving beyond traditional allies to engage with a broader array of like-minded democracies, and addressing regional development needs to bolster collective security (Rahman, 2025; Tyler et al., 2024). This comprehensive security strategy is further underpinned by an enhanced focus on indigenous defense capabilities and technological innovation to maintain a qualitative edge against potential threats.

Lastly, Taiwan's extension of mandatory military conscription from 4 months to 1 year represents a substantive qualitative shift rather than a mere quantitative increase in service length. Under the previous four-month system, training was widely criticized as insufficient, overly symbolic, and disconnected from realistic operational requirements, limiting its deterrent value and its contribution to national resilience. The new one-year term enables the armed forces to deliver combat-credible training,

including combined-arms exercises, live-fire drills, joint operations with active-duty units, and instruction in asymmetric warfare concepts such as anti-landing operations, urban defense, drone use, and protection of critical infrastructure.

The extended conscription period allows for a more comprehensive curriculum that includes advanced training in modern warfare techniques, fostering greater interoperability between conscripts and active-duty personnel (Xharo & Lami, 2020). This expanded training regimen also aims to instill a deeper understanding of Taiwan's unique geostrategic challenges and its critical role within the First Island Chain, particularly given its proximity to key US allies and its significance in global supply chains (Press, 2023: 63; Bellocchi, 2023). Such measures are crucial for demonstrating Taiwan's commitment to self-defense and its ability to withstand external pressures, thereby complicating any adversary's calculus and increasing the costs of aggression (Sullivan, 2024, p. 633).

Furthermore, this reform signals Taiwan's active engagement in shaping its own strategic diplomacy, moving beyond a purely reactive stance to proactively strengthen its defense capabilities and regional partnerships (Rahman, 2025: 188). This strategic pivot also leverages Taiwan's technological superiority, particularly in semiconductor manufacturing, to enhance its overall deterrent posture and reduce vulnerabilities to external pressures by fostering self-reliance in critical sectors (Yelery, 2025: 268). The integration of advanced technology and domestic industrial capabilities into the defense framework not only fortifies Taiwan's

military but also strengthens its economic resilience against potential coercion (Rahman, 2025: 188).

Dominant Hybrid Warfare Tactics and Their Implications for Taiwan's Security and Stability

China's hybrid warfare tactics against Taiwan encompass a sophisticated array of actions, including the deployment of uncrewed aerial vehicles, civilian aircraft, and hydrological research vessels to shield military assets near Taiwanese waters, alongside the regular stationing of military hardware such as radars, early warning systems, bombers, surface-to-air missiles, and anti-ship cruise missiles in the Taiwan Strait (Çifçi, 2024). These tactics aim to normalize China's presence in Taiwan's claimed airspace and maritime zones, progressively encroaching upon its sovereignty without initiating overt military conflict (Çifçi, 2024).

Additionally, China intensifies its cyber warfare activities, with Taiwan experiencing an average of 15,000 cyberattacks per second in 2023, predominantly originating from China, marking an 80% increase from the previous year (Çifçi, 2024). These cyberattacks often target critical infrastructure, government agencies, and private enterprises, disrupting operations, collecting intelligence, and instilling fear among the Taiwanese populace. Furthermore, China employs cognitive warfare, explicitly targeting the Taiwanese public through disinformation campaigns and propaganda, often originating from units like PLA Base 311, to influence perceptions and erode

trust in democratic institutions (Hung & Hung, 2022; West & Insisa, 2023).

These coordinated efforts, leveraging social media and other digital platforms, aim to create divisions within Taiwanese society and undermine its collective will to resist Beijing's reunification agenda (Bízik et al., 2022). This comprehensive strategy, sometimes referred to as "hybrid influencing," involves the synchronized execution of multiple activities across various domains diplomatic, intelligence, military, economic, financial, infrastructure, and law—to advance China's agenda and achieve its goals without resorting to kinetic warfare (West & Insisa, 2023). This multifaceted approach also includes the consistent breakdown of communication channels with Taiwanese authorities since mid-2016, coupled with persistent escalatory rhetoric involving threats and denigration (Kirchberger, 2021).

Such integrated psychological operations aim to manipulate public opinion and decision-making processes, thereby diminishing Taiwan's capacity for independent action and self-defense (Feryna & Kutěj, 2023; Sullivan, 2024). These tactics are part of a broader strategy that includes increasing both military and non-military instruments against Taiwan, such as a heightened military presence around the island, regular air and naval exercises, and continuous incursions by military aircraft into Taiwan's airspace (Çifçi, 2024; Kirchberger, 2021).

These actions demonstrate China's willingness to deploy its superior military capabilities and its theories of unrestricted warfare, including the Three Warfares strategy, against Taiwan (Çifçi, 2024). These include sophisticated disinformation

campaigns utilizing fake, selective, and mixed news to infiltrate online communities, provoke social panic, and exacerbate identity cleavages within Taiwan (Shih, 2024). This proliferation of misleading information on social media is often attributed to the CCP government. However, research indicates that some sources originate from non-state actors who employ "astroturf" tactics to mimic genuine individual opinions (Shih, 2024).

Such efforts are further amplified by social penetration, co-optation, and United Front operations, which seek to corrupt Taiwanese elections, media, and legal frameworks, while also systematically orchestrating domestic propaganda to cultivate unified public opinion regarding Taiwan (Shih, 2024; Sullivan, 2024; West & Insisa, 2023). These multifaceted strategies are designed to influence public perception by generating narratives that emphasize the benefits of integration with China and discredit the status quo and Taiwanese independence (West & Insisa, 2023).

This approach encompasses both coercive and non-coercive methods, leveraging political, diplomatic, legal, and economic pressures alongside public diplomacy, public relations, educational activities, and cultural exchanges to achieve its strategic objectives (Çifçi, 2024). These activities are further complemented by targeted cyberattacks and information operations aimed at undermining trust in democratic institutions and fostering internal divisions within Taiwan (Çifçi, 2024; Shih, 2024). These efforts frequently involve the propagation of narratives on social media platforms suggesting that Taiwanese people desire unification with

China, while concurrently asserting flaws in Taiwanese democracy and the unreliability of Western allies (Çifçi, 2024).

This strategy frequently involves creating scores of fake social media accounts designed to sow divisions and support Beijing-friendly political candidates in Taiwan, further aiming to destabilize the nation from within (Bízik et al., 2022). This approach to information warfare is meticulously crafted to sow distrust in the Taiwanese government and cultivate an environment where disinformation flourishes, thereby solidifying echo chambers and increasing the consumption of unverified information among the populace. This continuous bombardment of disinformation and propaganda creates fertile ground for political polarization, which can be exploited by Beijing to achieve its strategic goals by leveraging existing societal divisions (Shih, 2024).

Furthermore, the United Front Work Department, a critical component of the Chinese Communist Party, actively targets various Taiwanese constituencies, including indigenous groups, local communities, youth, and pro-China political entities, by indoctrinating, mobilizing, and manipulating non-CCP individuals and organizations to serve Beijing's policy objectives, often with substantial undisclosed funding (Monyae, 2018). The economic incentives offered by Beijing, such as preferential treatment for Taiwanese businesses and individuals in China, along with tax breaks and intellectual property protections, further illustrate China's multi-pronged strategy to integrate Taiwan into

its economic and political sphere (Monyae, 2018).

CONCLUSION

The escalating dynamic between China's multifaceted grey-zone strategies and hybrid warfare tactics and Taiwan's evolving security posture marks a significant shift in contemporary geopolitical competition. China's approach is characterized by ambiguous, incremental coercive actions, carefully calibrated to remain below the threshold of conventional warfare yet potent enough to achieve strategic objectives. These tactics extend beyond traditional military coercion to encompass a wide array of non-kinetic methods, including sophisticated information operations, relentless cyberattacks, economic coercion, and assertive maritime activities.

Lawfare is one of the most crucial strategies in which China leverages legal frameworks and narratives to justify its territorial claims, legitimize its actions, and systematically dismantle Taiwan's international standing (Song, 2016). Furthermore, the Three Warfares doctrine, integrating psychological, media, and legal warfare, aims to erode Taiwan's will to resist and foster a perception of inevitable integration, ultimately seeking to alter the regional status quo without direct military confrontation.

In response to this, China's multi-domain pressure, Taiwan has embarked on a significant recalibration of its national security policies. Moving beyond purely conventional defense paradigms, Taiwan is developing a comprehensive national resilience framework. This adaptive strategy encompasses not only

strengthening military doctrines and capabilities, particularly through asymmetric warfare to make any potential aggression prohibitively costly, but also robust civil defense measures and proactive international outreach. Taiwan's comprehensive security approach integrates economic resilience, advanced cyber defenses, and informational counter-offensives to mitigate diverse threats.

This response includes fostering international intelligence-sharing collaborations, enhancing media literacy to combat disinformation campaigns, and expanding diplomatic agreements to garner global support for its sovereignty. The shift reflects a deeper understanding that effective deterrence against such multifaceted threats requires a layered strategy that combines military readiness with societal resilience. The implications for Taiwan's security and stability are profound. China's hybrid warfare manifests in tangible actions such as the regular deployment of military and civilian assets near Taiwanese waters, intense cyber warfare targeting critical infrastructure, and cognitive warfare aimed at manipulating public opinion through disinformation and propaganda.

Moreover, economic incentives and United Front operations are employed to integrate Taiwan into China's political and economic sphere subtly. Taiwan's adaptation, therefore, involves a strategic shift towards "deterrence by resilience," emphasizing its capacity to absorb, adapt to, and recover from various forms of coercion, rather than solely relying on punitive deterrence. This comprehensive, whole-of-society effort is critical for Taiwan to maintain its autonomy and secure its future

amidst China's persistent grey-zone escalation.

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