

BONNY LIN, CRISTINA L. GARAFOLA, BRUCE MCCLINTOCK, JONAH BLANK,  
JEFFREY W. HORNUNG, KAREN SCHWINDT, JENNIFER D. P. MORONEY, PAUL ORNER,  
DENNIS BORRMAN, SARAH W. DENTON, JASON CHAMBERS

# Competition in the Gray Zone

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Countering China's Coercion Against U.S. Allies and  
Partners in the Indo-Pacific



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## About This Report

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How does China view competition in the gray zone? What drives and enables China’s use of gray zone tactics? How does China employ gray zone tactics? Which Chinese tactics could the United States prioritize countering? This report attempts to answer these questions to understand how the United States can better compete with and counter Chinese gray zone coercion against U.S. allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific. This report should be of value to the national security community and interested members of the general public, especially those with an interest in U.S.-China competition in the Indo-Pacific.

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# Summary

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## Issue

Few studies have systematically tracked how China is using gray zone tactics—coercive activities beyond normal diplomacy and trade but below the use of kinetic military force—against multiple U.S. allies and partners. Lacking a foundational empirical baseline, it is difficult to determine patterns and trends in Chinese activities to develop effective counters to them.

## Approach

RAND Project AIR FORCE developed a framework to categorize China's use of gray zone tactics against five U.S. allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific and to identify the most problematic People's Republic of China (PRC) tactics that the United States could prioritize countering. Based on open-source material, this report provides a more in-depth understanding of Chinese operations in the gray zone.

## Conclusions

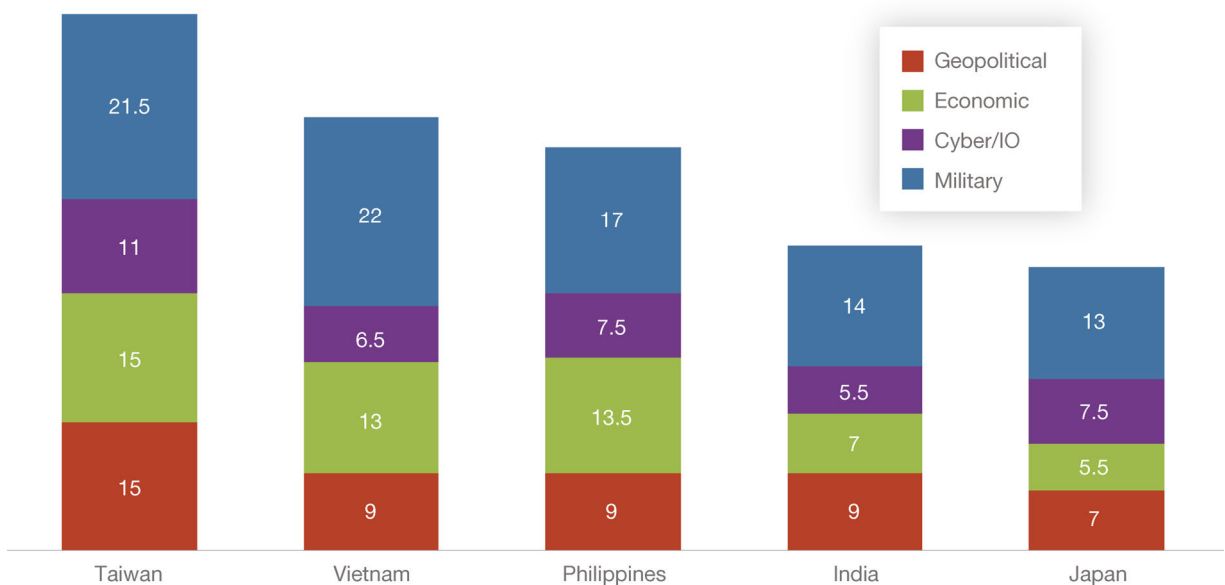
- China views gray zone activities as natural extensions of how countries exercise power and employs such tactics to balance maintaining a stable, favorable external environment with efforts to alter the status quo in China's favor without triggering major pushback or conflict.
- Four factors—centralization of government power; growing geopolitical, economic, and military power; linkages between military and economic growth; and co-optation of a variety of actors for military operations—enable China to engage in a variety of gray zone operations.
- Over the past decade, China employed nearly 80 different gray zone tactics across all instruments of national power against Taiwan, Japan, Vietnam, India, and the Philippines.
- China tailors its gray zone activity to the target and has more options, and its options for doing so have increased over time.
- Beijing layers different types of tactics to pressure targets via multiple dimensions. As a result, Beijing may not need to engage in significant escalation in any one specific domain.
- Since the mid-2010s, China has continued to rely on military tactics, exercised caution in using high-profile tactics, wielded more influence in international institutions or via third-party actors, and expanded its grassroots activities via local proxies or influence operations.
- On the nonmilitary side, China has emphasized geopolitical and bilateral tactics. On the military side, China has relied heavily on air- and maritime-domain tactics.

- There is no single agreed-on criterion for assessing which PRC tactics are most problematic. Experts could consider aggregating three different criteria or indicators to provide an inclusive picture: (1) the extent to which PRC tactics undermine U.S. objectives, (2) how difficult it is for allies and partners to counter tactics, and (3) how widely China uses the tactics.
- Many of the most challenging PRC tactics involve Chinese military or civilian activities around disputed territories, although several PRC geopolitical, economic, and cyber and information activities also pose significant challenges to U.S. allies and partners.

## Recommendations

- The U.S. government should hold gray zone scenario discussions with key allies and partners to better understand their concerns, responses, and needs.
- National Security Council staff or the U.S. Department of State should identify a set of criteria for determining the most problematic PRC gray zone tactics to counter via whole-of-government efforts. Given the three criteria this report lays out, the United States could prioritize countering Chinese activities in disputed territories and responding to PRC geopolitical international tactics and economic tactics.

**Figure S.1. China’s Use of Different Types of Gray Zone Tactics Against Allies and Partners**



NOTE: Counts of PRC tactics may not sum to whole numbers because of the way each tactic was coded. A 1 indicates relative confidence that China has used the tactic, while 0.5 indicates a suspicion that China has used the tactic against an ally or partner. IO = information operations.

- The U.S. Department of Defense should develop gray zone plans similar to existing operational plans but focused on responding to a variety of more-escalatory PRC gray zone scenarios.
- The U.S. Air Force should continue to build out intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance infrastructure in the Indo-Pacific and to improve regional cyberdefense capabilities to increase domain awareness, identify and attribute PRC activities, and counter PRC cyber and information tactics.

**Table S.1. Tiered List of the 20 Most Problematic PRC Gray Zone Tactics**

<b>Tier</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Tactic</b>
Top	Military	Establish military or dual-use air bases or facilities in disputed territories
	Military	Land or forward deploy military aircraft or equipment in or near disputed territories
	Military	Establish military or dual-use ground bases or facilities in disputed territories
	Military	Land or forward deploy military ground troops or equipment in or near disputed territories
	Economic	Use PRC companies or economic assets to advance disputed PRC territorial claims
	Military	Use People's Liberation Army Navy, China Coast Guard, or maritime militia to harass or disrupt target commercial activities in disputed territories
	Geopolitical	Support the target's adversaries or rival countries using a combination of political, economic, and military means
	Military	Establish military or dual-use maritime bases or facilities in disputed territories
	Military	Anchor maritime vessels and/or forward deploy military maritime troops and equipment in or near disputed territories
Second	Economic	Reduce trade or flow of specific goods (exports or imports)
	Geopolitical	Use diplomatic or political threats to disrupt normal business activities within the target
	Cyber/IO	Buy or control existing target media outlets (directly or through proxies)
	Military	Engage in highly publicized and large-scale, cross-service military exercises or shows of force near or against the target
	Military	Deepen military cooperation and/or establish military bases or potential dual-use facilities in neighboring countries to threaten the target
	Military	Build up or acquire military capabilities for deterring or countering the target
Third	Economic	Control or reduce availability of public or international resources to the target
	Economic	Engage in PRC economic or civilian activity in or near target-sensitive or key geopolitical locations
	Cyber/IO	Engage in cyber operations against target government or military activities
	Cyber/IO	Engage in cyber operations to disrupt or undermine target economic activity
	Geopolitical	Limit international sanctions or crack down on violent nonstate actors opposing the target and/or operating against the target

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# 1. Introduction

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In recent years, there has been extensive media coverage on how China has repeatedly used its growing geopolitical, economic, and military power to pressure countries to act according to Beijing's interests. These actions have ranged from maintaining a lengthy (2010–2017) ban on imports of salmon from Norway after the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to Chinese dissident Liu Xiaobo to using the China Coast Guard (CCG) to capture, beat, and force Vietnamese fishermen to sign documents stating that they had violated China's unilateral fishing ban in the South China Sea (SCS).<sup>1</sup> These coercive actions have led to an increasing focus in the United States and elsewhere on how and why China employs these types of tactics against its neighbors and international partners. This interest, in turn, has given rise to a large and growing body of literature on Chinese gray zone operations and tactics.

Western scholars and analysts largely define *gray zone operations* as those that fall into the ambiguous or “gray” space in between peace and war. Gray zone activities are thus aggressive actions that lie above day-to-day diplomacy but below the threshold of war. Beyond this general conception, there is substantial variation in how to define specific gray zone activities. A wide variety of terms have been used to describe the types of activities (and, in some cases, the actors conducting such activities) that could occur in this space, including *hybrid, irregular, asymmetric, incremental, indirect, subversive, nontraditional, illegitimate, and intended to create confusion or uncertainty*.<sup>2</sup> The variety within these definitions makes it difficult to make comparisons across studies of Chinese gray zone activities, and some studies have focused on

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<sup>1</sup> “Norway Signs Deal to Help Resume Salmon Exports to China,” Reuters, May 23, 2017; Nyugen Cao Viet Hung, “Vietnam’s Struggles in the South China Sea: Challenges and Opportunities,” Center for International Maritime Security, September 21, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> For a sample of the gray zone literature, see Kathleen H. Hicks, Alice Hunt Friend, Joseph Federici, Hijab Shah, Megan Donahoe, Matthew Conklin, Asya Akca, Michael Matlaga, and Lindsey Sheppard, *By Other Means, Part I: Campaigning in the Gray Zone*, Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2019; Lyle J. Morris, Michael J. Mazarr, Jeffrey W. Hornung, Stephanie Pezard, Anika Binnendijk, and Marta Kepe, *Gaining Competitive Advantage in the Gray Zone: Response Options for Coercive Aggression Below the Threshold of Major War*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-2942-OSD, 2019; Andrew S. Erickson and Ryan D. Martinson, eds., *China’s Maritime Gray Zone Operations*, Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2019; Ross Babbage, *Winning Without Fighting: Chinese and Russian Political Warfare Campaigns and How the West Can Prevail*, Vol. 1, Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2019; Frank G. Hoffman, “Examining Complex Forms of Conflict: Gray Zone and Hybrid Challenges,” *PRISM*, Vol. 7, No. 4, November 8, 2018; Scott W. Harold, Yoshiaki Nakagawa, Junichi Fukuda, John A. Davis, Keiko Kono, Dean Cheng, and Kazuto Suzuki, *The U.S.-Japan Alliance and Deterring Gray Zone Coercion in the Maritime, Cyber, and Space Domains*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, CF-379-GOJ, 2017; Michael J. Mazarr, *Mastering the Gray Zone: Understanding a Changing Era of Conflict*, Carlisle Barracks, Pa.: U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, December 2, 2015a; Philip Kapusta, “The Gray Zone,” white paper, MacDill Air Force Base, Fla.: U.S. Special Operations Command, September 9, 2015a; Philip Kapusta, “The Gray Zone,” *Special Warfare*, October–December 2015b.

providing illustrative examples—many of which have drawn significant media attention—of how China generally behaves in the gray zone.

This report builds on the existing literature in three main ways. First, we examine how Chinese strategists and experts view and understand Western views about the gray zone. This allows us to assess the variety of factors that drive and enable China’s use of gray zone tactics. Second, and more important, we identify and track nearly 80 types of Chinese gray zone tactics over time against five key U.S. allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific (Taiwan, Japan, Vietnam, India, and the Philippines) to document if, when, and how China has used certain types of tactics.<sup>3</sup> This large-scale data analysis effort allows us to move beyond illustrative examples to more systemically identify patterns and trends in China’s employment of different types of gray zone tactics and, when possible, provide some quantitative indicators of Chinese levels of effort. Finally, we develop a methodology to identify a subset of the most problematic People’s Republic of China (PRC) gray zone tactics that the United States could prioritize countering to help allies and partners resist PRC coercion.

## Scope of This Research

This report focuses on how China competes in the gray zone in the Indo-Pacific region and how China uses gray zone tactics against U.S. allies and partners.<sup>4</sup> Similar to much of the existing gray zone literature, we define Chinese gray zone tactics as *coercive* Chinese government geopolitical, economic, military, and cyber and information activities beyond regular diplomatic and economic activities and below the use of kinetic military force.

By *regular diplomatic and economic activities*, we refer to regular diplomatic engagement and regular economic trade and investment activities—day-to-day and typically lower-level fluctuations in diplomatic and economic activities between China and the target. We count significant changes in diplomatic activities and changes in economic activity under false pretenses as coercive tactics. Countries perceive that politically, large-scale focused diplomatic efforts (e.g., campaigns to limit the target’s participation in international organizations) and significant disruptions in diplomatic engagements (e.g., cancelling established and high-level exchanges in response to increased tensions) are coercive tactics meant to pressure the target. Economically, manipulating how goods, products, or services are provided or exchanged using

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<sup>3</sup> Our focus on PRC operations in the gray zone as *tactics*, instead of as an operational space along a certain segment of the continuum of conflict, also draws from previous RAND Corporation work on identifying gray zone tactics. For example, see Stacie L. Pettyjohn and Becca Wasser, *Competing in the Gray Zone: Russian Tactics and Western Responses*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-2791-A, 2019.

<sup>4</sup> We did not examine PRC use of gray zone tactics against the United States, although China does apply many of the coercive activities discussed in this report against the United States.

false pretenses (e.g., by falsely citing concerns about product quality) to deliver a political message is an example of PRC coercion that countries have reported.<sup>5</sup>

On the military side, we include PRC military activities interpreted by regional countries as China's attempt to coerce them without the use of kinetic force.<sup>6</sup> This includes China's investment in military capabilities and its use of military threats, exercises, and operations against the target. We considered but did not include China's cancellation or reduction of military-to-military exchanges as examples of gray zone coercion because China generally has limited military exchanges with most U.S. allies and partners.

Finally, we include PRC cyber and/or information operations (cyber/IO) activities as a fourth category of tactics that regional countries assess to be coercive and include both military and nonmilitary cyber or information activities in this category.

Our definition of *gray zone tactics* includes coercive PRC activities that U.S. allies and partners view as *intentional* (accompanied by Chinese government coercive messages or threats against U.S. allies or partners) or *ambiguous* (that U.S. allies or partners interpret as having coercive potential but that Beijing has not explicitly and officially messaged as such).

We include ambiguous PRC activities because China is not always explicit in its threats and coercive behavior and because China does not always employ methods that are attributable to the Chinese government or government actors. As Michael Mazarr explained, "dependence on global trade and markets, along with fear of escalation and other constraints, make[s] [China and other gray zone actors] anxious to achieve their goals with techniques short of major conflict—more gradual, less violent, and less obvious."<sup>7</sup> Chapter 2 will describe these drivers of PRC gray zone behavior in more detail. In general, ambiguous PRC coercive activity could be more difficult for targets to detect, attribute, and respond to. For instance, Beijing frequently times activity intended to punish the target with official statements expressing displeasure. China may provide unrelated reasons for well-timed punitive actions that do not mention the activity China officially protested. Their timing, however, causes regional countries to interpret them as part of China's overall coercive response. One example of this was China's destruction and limiting of banana imports from the Philippines from 2014 to 2016 because of alleged pesticide

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<sup>5</sup> In contrast, a decrease in trade of a particular product because of normal supply or demand issues within China would constitute regular economic activity and therefore not be counted here as a tactic.

<sup>6</sup> Our approach differs from some recent research that views gray zone coercion as distinct from military coercion. See Ketian Zhang, "Cautious Bully: Reputation, Resolve, and Beijing's Use of Coercion in the South China Sea," *International Security*, Vol. 44, No. 1, Summer 2019. Unlike Zhang, we found that China is increasing its use of military coercion in the gray zone, while recent reforms have increased the integration of China's military and paramilitary forces.

<sup>7</sup> Michael J. Mazarr, "Struggle in the Gray Zone and World Order," War on the Rocks website, December 22, 2015b.

contamination problems while Manila pursued an international tribunal ruling against China's SCS claims.<sup>8</sup>

Our definition of gray zone tactics is intended to be relatively inclusive to capture the variety of ways China uses coercion against U.S. allies and partners. PRC gray zone tactics are intended to pressure, punish, impose costs on, or undermine the interests or positions of targeted U.S. allies and partners. Our definition's focus on the coercive nature of PRC activities means that we do not view general increases in PRC influence as gray zone tactics.<sup>9</sup> For example, we do not define increases in PRC arms sales or economic aid to U.S. allies or partners as PRC gray zone tactics. This is because such increases in Chinese military or economic influence are not always coercive. However, should Beijing leverage its influence to pressure or punish countries—for instance, by threatening to limit or by cutting off military sales or economic aid—we would define the specific actions or activities China took to coerce target countries as PRC gray zone activities.

We found that three main factors drive China's interest in gray zone tactics: China's desire to defend its core interests in pursuit of stability for China's overall development, to realize a more favorable external environment, and to continue altering the regional status quo in China's favor, while acting below the threshold of eliciting a militarized response from the United States or China's neighbors.

China does not view gray zone activities as a new phenomenon but as extensions of how countries exercise their power and influence. Four factors—increasing concentration of power and authority within the Chinese central government; growing Chinese geopolitical, economic, and military power and influence; growing linkages between China's military development and economic growth; and greater PRC co-optation of nonmilitary actors for military operations—enable and provide options for China to engage in gray zone operations more effectively.

Through analysis of PRC activities against five allies and partners, we identified Chinese employment of nearly 80 different gray zone tactics across all instruments of national power.<sup>10</sup> China tailors its use of gray zone tactics to the target and has a growing list of options. China often layers the use of different types of gray zone tactics and does not need to rely on significant escalation or action in any one particular domain. Since the mid-2010s, China continues to rely

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<sup>8</sup> As relations with China improved under President Rodriguez Duterte, Philippine sales of bananas to China soared. See Michael Peel and Grace Ramos, "Philippine Banana Bonanza Sparks Debate on Shift to China," *Financial Times*, March 14, 2017.

<sup>9</sup> For assessments of relative U.S. versus PRC influence in the Indo-Pacific region, see Bonny Lin, Michael S. Chase, Jonah Blank, Cortez A. Cooper III, Derek Grossman, Scott W. Harold, Jennifer D. P. Moroney, Lyle J. Morris, Logan Ma, Paul Orner, Alice Shih, and Soo Kim, *Regional Responses to U.S.-China Competition in the Indo-Pacific: Study Overview and Conclusions*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-4412-AF, 2020.

<sup>10</sup> The 77 tactics we identified are likely not an exhaustive list of all recent PRC gray zone tactics. It is possible that information regarding some PRC tactics is not publicly reported. It is also possible that China uses additional tactics against other countries that our research does not cover, given this report focuses on PRC activities against Taiwan, Japan, Vietnam, India, and the Philippines.



on military tactics and exercises caution in its use of high-profile, bilateral geopolitical and economic tactics. China is more active in wielding its influence in international institutions or via third-party actors on targets. Since at least 2013, China has expanded its involvement on the ground in select regions, recruiting local proxies and engaging in various information efforts. In terms of nonmilitary tactics, China has used more geopolitical and bilateral tactics than other tactics. On the military side, China has employed more gray zone tactics that involved operations in the air and maritime domains.

Given the wide variety of PRC tactics, we have found that there are no agreed-on criteria for identifying the most problematic or challenging PRC tactics when examining a large number of tactics or a group of U.S. allies or partners. Instead, we developed three basic and separate indicators of how PRC tactics are problematic for the United States: (1) the extent to which PRC tactics undermine U.S. objectives and interests in the Indo-Pacific region, (2) how difficult it is for allies and partners to respond to and counter a given tactic, and (3) how widely China uses specific tactics (against one or multiple allies and partners). Each indicator generates a different list of most challenging PRC tactics. PRC military tactics pose the most challenges to U.S. objectives and interests for the U.S. allies and partners we examined, but these U.S. allies and partners are as concerned, if not more concerned, about nonmilitary PRC tactics. Nonmilitary tactics also constitute the bulk of the most widespread PRC gray zone tactics used.

Thus, to capture a more inclusive picture of the challenges PRC gray zone tactics pose, we combined all three indicators into an aggregate measure. Although there are many ways to combine the three indicators, we believe the most balanced way is to prioritize U.S. objectives and interests as much as allied and partner concerns and to weigh the prevalence of PRC tactics less than the previous two indicators. Using this aggregate method, ten of the top 20 most problematic PRC tactics are military activities that the People's Liberation Army (PLA) or Chinese paramilitary actors engage in, with many of the tactics involving operations near or in disputed territories. Other military tactics include China engaging in highly publicized and large-scale, cross-service military exercises; establishing military bases or potential dual-use facilities in neighboring countries to threaten the target; and building up or acquiring military capabilities for use against the target. Four economic tactics the PRC might employ—using PRC companies or economic assets to advance disputed territorial claims; manipulating trade or flow of goods under false pretenses; controlling or reducing availability of public or international resources to the target; and engaging in economic or civilian activity in or near target-sensitive or key geopolitical locations—also rank among the top 20. The list includes three cyber/IO tactics: buying or controlling existing target media outlets, engaging in cyber operations against a target government or military, and engaging in cyber operations to disrupt or undermine target economic activity. In terms of geopolitical tactics, supporting target adversaries or rival countries, using diplomatic and political threats to disrupt normal business activities, and limiting international sanctions or crackdowns on violent nonstate actors opposing the target are among the most problematic PRC tactics.

## Research Design and Methodology

We use four related primary research questions, each corresponding to specific chapters in the report, to analyze China's use of gray zone tactics against U.S. allies and partners:

- How does China view competition in the gray zone?
- What drives and enables China's use of gray zone tactics?
- How does China employ gray zone tactics?
- Which PRC tactics could the United States prioritize countering?

### *Understanding PRC Views of the Gray Zone*

In Chapter 2, we begin by examining how China conceptualizes the gray zone through analysis of the Chinese-language literature that mentions the gray zone and related topics. Mirroring Western definitions, China views the gray zone as harnessing national resources across military and nonmilitary domains—beyond diplomacy and other traditional approaches of statecraft but short of direct use of military force for escalation or a conflict. China has further refined how its military, the People's Liberation Army, could engage in coercive elements within a subset of military operations other than war (MOOTW).

### *Assessing Drivers and Enablers of PRC Gray Zone Activity*

In Chapter 3, we explore what drives China to use gray zone tactics and which factors enable China to operate in this space. Drawing from Chinese leadership speeches, key PRC policy texts, and major developments in China over time, we assess three main reasons for China's adoption of gray zone tactics and four factors that facilitate PRC gray zone activities.

### *Examining PRC Employment of Gray Zone Tactics*

In Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7, we use four case studies to analyze China's employment of gray zone tactics over time against U.S. allies and partners: Taiwan (1995–2020), Japan (2010–2020), Vietnam (2009–2020), and India (2014–2020). Beijing views Taiwan as an integral part of China, making Taiwan a prime target for Chinese gray zone coercion. China uses extensive gray zone tactics against Taiwan and has at times tested new tactics there before deploying them elsewhere, making the island an important case study for identifying PRC activities. Japan and Vietnam both have maritime disputes with China; comparing and contrasting China's approach to the two countries can highlight similarities and differences in how China employs coercion against a militarily capable and close U.S. ally versus a less-capable but key U.S. partner. In contrast with Vietnam and Japan, India has a contested land border with China and offers safe haven for the Tibetan government in exile. Examining PRC activities against New Delhi could reveal additional variations in China's approach.

For these case studies, we have drawn from a variety of publicly available information, including media reporting and allied and partner government documents, supplemented by interviews and consultations with regional experts.

### Categorizing PRC Gray Zone Tactics

In these chapters, we categorize PRC gray zone tactics in two ways. First, similar to much of the existing literature, we divide PRC tactics into four categories by *means*, or which instrument of national power China leverages for coercion:<sup>11</sup>

- *Geopolitical tactics* involve the PRC's use of diplomatic or political measures.
- *Economic tactics* involve the PRC's use of economic measures.
- *Military tactics* involve the PRC's use of military measures.
- *Cyber/IO tactics* involve the PRC's use of cyber or IO tactics. Military cyber and information activities fall into this category.

Second, within each category, we differentiate by *mechanism*—how China uses its power to pressure the target.

#### *Nonmilitary Tactics*

For nonmilitary tactics (geopolitical, economic, and cyber/IO tactics), we looked at whether China uses activities that are direct or indirect and external or internal to the target region. These form three subtypes of PRC tactics:

- *International tactics* involve pressuring the target *indirectly* and *externally* via international or regional institutions, manipulating international resources, or using third countries or third-party actors.
- *Bilateral tactics* involve pressuring the target *directly* and *externally*, such as manipulating normal two-way exchanges.
- *Grassroots tactics* require conducting significant activity *directly* on the ground within the target country or region (including in disputed territories) or involve leveraging *internal*, local proxies within the target country or region to act on behalf of China.

Combining the categories and subtypes allowed us to capture and differentiate among a wide variety of PRC tactics. For example, a PRC economic and international gray zone tactic is China leasing large swaths of land in Cambodia (a third country) that could be used to build facilities to allow China to project military power close to Vietnam.

#### *Military Tactics*

In contrast, we divided military tactics into four mechanisms or subtypes according to the domain in which they take place. Because most Chinese military tactics are bilateral, subdividing them into international, bilateral, or grassroots would not produce much additional insight.

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<sup>11</sup> For a sample of the existing literature on PRC gray zone tactics that divide Chinese tactics largely across similar elements of national power, see Morris et al., 2019; Babbage, 2019; Mazarr, 2015a.

Instead, examining PRC military tactics by domain can reveal whether Beijing leans on specific PLA service(s) more to engage in gray zone operations. The subtypes of PRC military tactics are as follows:

- *General tactics* involve the use of military tactics that either are not clearly associated with a particular service (such as a general military threat) or involve one or more services.
- *Air tactics* include military activities or operations in the air involving the People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) or the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) Aviation forces.
- *Maritime tactics* include maritime military (or quasi-military) activities or operations involving the PLAN, the CCG, or the Chinese maritime militia.
- *Land tactics* refer to ground-based military activities or operations involving the PLA Army or the People's Liberation Army Rocket Force.

This subdivision allowed us to look at military tactics in more detail than we did nonmilitary tactics. For example, we distinguished between China establishing an air base in a disputed territory and China establishing a naval base or port in the same region rather than coding both as establishing a military base or forward operating station in the region. This more detailed categorization of military tactics means that we could not directly compare the number of military tactics with nonmilitary tactics to conclude that China used more (or fewer) military tactics than nonmilitary ones. This report highlights comparisons within nonmilitary tactics and within military tactics when appropriate.

### *Limitations*

It is important to highlight two methodological limitations of our analysis. First, the ambiguous nature of many PRC gray zone tactics makes documenting and assessing them difficult. Some of the tactics we included may not necessarily be viewed by all as forms of PRC coercion, and whether some PRC activities are coercive or not may also depend on the specific local circumstances. For example, Chinese actors purchasing territory or opening businesses around U.S. allied or partner military bases could be Beijing increasing its ability to monitor and potentially disrupt activities at the military base. It could also be that Chinese nationals are seeking to engage in normal commercial activities and innocently selected a sensitive location. Because of this difficulty of discerning gray zone activities from normal activities, it is possible that a number of PRC activities are not well reported or detected (and thus not included in this report). It is also possible that, in our attempt to be as inclusive as possible on potential PRC gray zone activities, some of the specific examples we cover represent concerns allied and partners have but are not coercive activities China intentionally engaged in. To the extent possible, we drew from multiple sources—including information from media reports and allied and partner governments—to capture the range of PRC activities and allied and partner concerns.

Second, our research relies on publicly available information. It is possible that allied or partner governments receive private or informal warnings or threats from China that they do not wish to share with the public. It is also possible that individuals or organizations in allied or partner countries have been pressured to promote PRC agendas and, for various reasons, have not shared this information publicly. It could also be that, with improved communication and technology, including new and social media, documentation and detection of PRC gray zone tactics are better than in the past. As a result, we may be better at tracking PRC tactics used in the recent years compared to those used further back in time and also better at detecting tactics that are more public than private in nature.

Both methodological limitations bias our analysis toward capturing a partial picture of the variety of PRC gray zone tactics. Thus, while we are relatively confident in our analysis of gray zone tactics China has embraced, we are less confident in assessments that China has *not* used certain types of tactics (particularly as our analysis extends further back in time).

### *Identifying Patterns and Trends in PRC Gray Tactics*

Chapter 8 looks across U.S. allies and partners to assess larger patterns and trends of PRC use of gray zone tactics. In this chapter, we describe how we first systematically coded and categorized the tactics China used against Taiwan, Japan, Vietnam, and India, generating a list of 77 PRC tactics. We then expanded our data-collection effort by coding China's use of gray zone tactics against a fifth country, the Philippines (from 2012 to 2020), to see whether the addition of another case would reveal more PRC gray zone tactics. We present a short case study of PRC tactics against the Philippines in Appendix A. We did not find any additional PRC tactics that China only used against the Philippines. This fifth case study does not change any of our main findings and supports our analysis of larger patterns of how China employs different tactics.

### *Prioritizing PRC Gray Zone Tactics for the United States to Counter*

In Chapter 9, we discuss a potential way for U.S. policymakers to identify the most problematic PRC tactics to prioritize countering. We assume that the United States has neither the bandwidth nor the resources to respond to all PRC tactics. Allies and partners are also not requesting U.S. assistance against every PRC activity.

We developed an aggregate measure that incorporates the three separate indicators discussed earlier, under "Scope of This Research," to capture different ways PRC tactics could be challenging. Seven RAND experts were involved in coding the indicators, initially scoring the PRC tactics independently and then comparing results, adjudicating differences, and iterating as needed. In addition to discussing the individual and aggregate rankings presented in Chapter 9, we also include the full coding criteria for the individual and aggregate indicators in Appendix C.

This aggregate measure represents a relatively straightforward way of combining three different assessments of what constitutes problematic PRC tactics. The measure is not intended to be comprehensive, and it does not capture the full variety of factors that experts could

incorporate to evaluate PRC tactics. Each of the individual indicators contributing to the aggregate measure could also be coded to capture even more variation or nuance, and there is room for significant additional research and analysis. It is also important to note that, although assessments of which PRC tactics are generally most problematic (across U.S. allies and partners) are useful for U.S. policymakers looking at a variety of allies and partners, U.S. policymakers may still want to focus U.S. efforts to help allies and partners counter PRC tactics that policymakers find most problematic. Relatedly, individual allies and partners have different assessments of which PRC tactics are most problematic for them, and assessments based on aggregating allied and partner concerns may be less useful for any individual ally or partner.

Despite these caveats, we developed an aggregate measure to help inform a more comprehensive and needed internal U.S. government discussion and assessment of how to prioritize PRC gray zone tactics. To support this research and in close collaboration with Pacific Air Forces, we held a U.S. government-only workshop from August 24 to September 11, 2020, to explore the challenges of countering Chinese gray zone activities. Involving more than 90 U.S. interagency and U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) participants, the three-week workshop covered a variety of topics, including coordinating and prioritizing U.S. responses to PRC gray zone scenarios and tactics.<sup>12</sup> Chapters 9 and 10 leverage insights from the workshop and discussions with U.S. government participants to assess the most problematic PRC gray zone tactics and provide U.S. policy recommendations.

Finally, Chapter 10 summarizes the report's main findings and provides recommendations for the U.S. government, DoD, and the U.S. Air Force on how to better compete with China in the gray zone. Five appendixes provide supporting material on China's use of tactics against the Philippines, our coding for Chinese gray zone tactics against all five allies and partners, and coding to assess the most problematic tactics (Appendixes A through C) and brief summaries on the approach of another major gray zone actor, Russia, in the Indo-Pacific region and its use of gray zone tactics (Appendixes D and E).

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<sup>12</sup> Government officials may contact the authors for a summary of the workshop.

## 2. How Does China View Competition in the Gray Zone?

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Although Chinese analysts began using the term *gray zone* only recently, they view actions in the gray zone as measures that powerful countries, such as the United States and Russia (as well as the former Soviet Union), have employed, both historically and recently. Chinese experts see China as a target of gray zone tactics—specifically, that the United States engages in a wide variety of gray zone activities against China in peacetime competition. However, these experts do not describe Chinese actions in the gray zone using this term. Instead, the Chinese understanding of MOOTW includes some Chinese military operations that U.S. experts currently define as in the gray zone.<sup>1</sup> This chapter first discusses how China views the gray zone, before exploring how China conceptualizes the PLA’s role in gray zone competition.

### Chinese Views of the Gray Zone

After reviewing publications by Chinese foreign policy analysts and PLA analysts, we found that they introduced the term for gray zone [灰色地带] to the Chinese literature following their analysis of recent Western (particularly U.S.) and Japanese literature. A PLA article on the 2014 Beijing-Tokyo Forum, a conference involving government and military officials, academics, businesspeople, and media from both countries, noted that a Japanese expert raised the need for rules and mechanisms regarding gray zone activities affecting the Sino-Japanese relationship.<sup>2</sup> The term began appearing gradually in the Chinese literature between 2014 and 2016 in news and academic articles that focused on Japanese characterizations of Japan’s deteriorating security environment,<sup>3</sup> Chinese activities against the Senkaku Islands,<sup>4</sup> the nature of air defense

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<sup>1</sup> Chinese analysts define *nonwar military activities* [非战争军事行动] as encompassing stability maintenance, rights protection, and security and guarding operations. While some Chinese documents use *nonwar military operations* or *non-war military operations* in English translations, others use *MOOTW* (as one example, see State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China [SCIO], *China’s Military Strategy*, Beijing, May 26, 2015). We use *MOOTW* for convenience, given the similar U.S. term.

<sup>2</sup> Yao Jianing, “10th Beijing-Tokyo Forum Held in Japan,” China Military Online, September 29, 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Feng Wuyong [冯武勇] and Liu Xiuling [刘秀玲], “Japanese Government Approves 2014 Edition of ‘Defense White Paper’ Commentary” [“日本政府批准 2014 年版《防卫白皮书》评论”], Xinhua, August 5, 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Gao Lan [高兰], “Japan’s ‘Gray Zone Situation’ and Sino-Japanese Security Dilemma” [“日本 ‘灰色地带事态’ 与中日安全困境”], *Japanese Studies* [日本学刊], No. 2, 2016.

identification zones (ADIZs),<sup>5</sup> and U.S.-China competition.<sup>6</sup> Although the term continued to appear in 2017 and 2018, Chinese experts did not provide more-comprehensive assessments of the gray zone literature (mainly U.S. literature) until 2019.<sup>7</sup> Gui Yongtao has noted that Japan used the term *gray zone* earliest in its 2010 National Defense Program guidelines to describe clashes regarding territory, sovereignty, and economic interests that have not reached the point of use of military force.<sup>8</sup> He further describes the 2010 U.S. Quadrennial Defense Review report as the first significant introduction of the notion of a gray zone into contemporary strategic discussions.<sup>9</sup> Gui focused on the report's characterization of an "ambiguous gray area," which the report described as "neither fully war nor fully peace."<sup>10</sup> A 2015 U.S. Special Operations Command white paper fleshed out and more clearly defined the concept as "competitive interactions among and within state and non-state actors that fall between the traditional war and peace duality."<sup>11</sup> Some Chinese sources also discuss the term *hybrid war* or *hybrid warfare* [混合战争], often to characterize Russian or U.S. views of some gray zone activities, such as Russia's seizure of Crimea in 2014.<sup>12</sup>

Shen Zhixiong has assessed that U.S. experts assign four characteristics to gray zone activities:

1. limited use of means beyond diplomacy but lower than military force used in a conflict
2. use of asymmetric means by opponents to advance their interests that do not challenge U.S. core or critical interests

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<sup>5</sup> Luo Guoqiang [罗国强] and Tian Yuanxin [田园馨], "On the Nature of Air Defense Identification Zone: Causes and Characteristics of the 'Gray Area'" ["论防空识别区的性质—'灰色地带'的成因与特点"], *Pacific Journal* [太平洋学报], Vol. 24, No. 5, 2016.

<sup>6</sup> "U.S. Media Claim that U.S.-China Are Engaged in Gray Zone Competition: U.S. At a Disadvantage" ["美媒称中美在战与和灰色地带较量：美先天不足"], *Cankao News*, May 20, 2016.

<sup>7</sup> The Chinese literature using the gray zone term is still relatively limited but growing. Key works are Dai Zheng [戴正] and Hong Yousheng [洪邮生], "American Scholarly Views of the 'Gray Zone' Challenge" ["美国学界对'灰色地带'挑战的认知"], *Global Review* [国际展望], No. 4, 2019; Gui Yongtao [归泳涛], "'Competing in the Gray-Zone': A New Situation in U.S.-China Engagement with China" ["'灰色地带'之争：美日对华博弈的新态势"], *Japanese Studies* [日本学刊], No. 1, 2019; Shen Zhixiong [沈志雄], "'Gray Zone' and U.S.-China Strategic Competition" ["'灰色地带'与中美战略竞争"], *World Affairs* [世界知识], No. 11, 2019.

<sup>8</sup> Gui, 2019, pp. 45–46; See also David Fouse, *Japan's 2010 National Defense Program Guidelines: Coping with "Grey Zones,"* Honolulu: Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, April 2011.

<sup>9</sup> Gui, 2019, pp. 45–46.

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*, Washington, D.C., February 2010, p. 73.

<sup>11</sup> Kapusta, 2015a, p. 1. Referenced in Gui, 2019, pp. 45–46.

<sup>12</sup> Dai and Hong, 2019, pp. 89–92; Wang Xiangsui [王湘穗], "Hybrid War: Unprecedented Integration" ["混合战：前所未有的综合"], *PLA Daily* [解放军报], May 23, 2019. One defense technology futurist has also written about future "gray warfare" [灰色战争], which he defines as "behavior between wartime operations and non-war operations." See Wu Mingxi [吴明曦], *Intelligent Wars: Free Thinking on AI Military Affairs* [智能化战争：AI军事畅想], Beijing: National Defense Industry Press, December 2020, pp. 500–516. Wu's book was produced as part of the 13th Five-Year Plan's "national key publications publication planning project."



3. comprehensive use of economic, military, diplomatic, and legal means across domains
4. ambiguity of actors, tactics, and goals that complicate U.S. responses.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to these activities, Dai Zheng and Hong Yousheng noted that some U.S. experts include revisionism (actors seeking to revise the international order) and incrementalism (salami slicing or having a long time horizon) as characteristics of gray zone activities.<sup>14</sup>

Chinese experts point out that, while the gray zone concept has gained significant attention in the United States and elsewhere in recent years, the term is neither a new concept nor a new phenomenon.<sup>15</sup> Dai and Hong call attention to Henry Kissinger's discussion of the U.S. need to counter Soviet gray zone activities in the 1950s.<sup>16</sup> Chinese experts push back against the idea that China and other countries the United States labels as revisionist actors are the only ones engaging in gray zone activities. They argue that the United States has conducted similar activities since at least the Cold War and that the United States has been particularly active in the SCS in recent years. Gray zone activities are likely a key feature of long-term competition between countries. Although such activities could help avoid kinetic military conflict, they are likely to lead to arms races and an escalation of tensions.<sup>17</sup>

The box on the next page compiles examples of U.S. gray zone activities that Chinese experts have identified. Within the table, each list places higher-intensity U.S. gray zone activities at the top and lower-intensity activities near the bottom.<sup>18</sup> The table shows that Chinese experts have a relatively inclusive conceptualization of gray zone to cover the range of activities the United States may engage in against China in peacetime competition that are beyond normal diplomacy but short of direct use of military force for escalation or a conflict.

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<sup>13</sup> Shen, 2019, pp. 17–18.

<sup>14</sup> Dai and Hong, 2019, pp. 83–87. Gui, 2019, includes many of the same characteristics.

<sup>15</sup> Because gray zone activities are not new, Chinese experts have provided several reasons for the United States reviving the use of the term. Dai and Hong suggested that the reason is U.S. concern about the decline of its hegemonic status and represents a U.S. desire to reshape the international order for its own advantage. Shen offered that the United States is trying to understand why its foreign policy has failed, blaming China and Russia; seeking the moral high ground by labeling China and Russia as *revisionists*; and using the term to reorient changes in U.S. military strategy. Gui assessed U.S. gray zone concepts as being more focused on the strategic level, linked to competition with China and Russia, and related to efforts to preserve U.S. hegemony and shape the international order. In contrast, Japan's views about gray zone activities are more focused on securing territorial, sovereignty, and economic interests in the East China Sea (ECS). See Dai and Hong, 2019, p. 97; Gui, 2019; and Shen, 2019, p. 18.

<sup>16</sup> Dai and Hong, 2019, p. 95. See also Henry A. Kissinger, "Military Policy and Defense of the 'Grey Areas,'" *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 33, No. 3, 1955.

<sup>17</sup> Gui, 2019, p. 69.

<sup>18</sup> The box on the next pages uses Chen's spectrum of low to high intensity U.S. gray zone activities to sort U.S. activities by intensity. See Chen Yong [陈永], "U.S. Maritime 'Gray Zone Operations' Against China" ["美国对华海上'灰色地带'行动"], South China Sea Strategic Probing Initiative, Peking University, October 14, 2019.

## Examples of PRC Identification of U.S. Gray Zone Activities

### U.S. activities (1945 to present)

#### *Against China*

- U.S. military alliances in the Indo-Pacific and activities to strengthen the alliances
- U.S. deployment, posture, and presence in the Indo-Pacific, including presence operations, military training, military exercises, and surveillance and reconnaissance operations
- Strategic ambiguity toward Taiwan
- Secret support to Chinese Tibetan separatists
- Sending U.S. Navy research vessels to Taiwan
- Use of think tanks and media to propagate anti-Chinese information
- Labelling China a revisionist country

#### *Against other countries*

- Security competition with the Soviet Union during the Cold War
- Covert operations to penetrate and undermine communist countries in Eastern Europe during the Cold War
- Plans to assassinate Cuban leader Fidel Castro
- Efforts to undermine the Salvador Allende government in Chile

### SCS-specific activities

- U.S. freedom of navigation operations (FONOPs), including FONOPs conducted with allies
- B-52 bomber flights over the SCS
- Surveillance and reconnaissance operations
- The Southeast Asia Maritime Security Initiative, intended to increase the maritime capabilities of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries
- Involvement of the U.S. Coast Guard in SCS activities
- Support for the Philippines' U.N. arbitration case against China concerning the SCS
- Disinviting China from the Rim of the Pacific exercise
- Blaming China for militarizing the SCS
- Shaping the narrative by connecting economic issues, such as trade and investment, with maritime security

SOURCES: Chen Yong, 2019; Dai and Hong, 2019, p. 96; Gui, 2019, pp. 51–52; Shen, 2019, p. 19.

In addition to military actions, these experts have noted that the U.S. concept of gray zone includes diplomatic, economic (and related financial and trade actions), cyber/IO, and other nonmilitary forms of coercion.<sup>19</sup> As Chinese overseas interests expanded and as Chinese leaders, including Hu Jintao, were calling attention to their importance for China's continued economic development, earlier Chinese writings from the mid- to late 2000s had already explored the growing need to leverage "economic statecraft" or "economic diplomacy" [经济外交] to advance national interests.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Dai and Hong, 2019, p. 82; Gui, 2019; Chen Yong, 2019. See also Shi Xiaoqin and Liu Xiaobo, "Chinese Assessment of New U.S. Naval Strategy," *USNI News*, February 19, 2021.

<sup>20</sup> For more information on this literature, see Timothy R. Heath, "China's Evolving Approach to Economic Diplomacy," *Asia Policy*, No. 22, July 2016, especially p. 163.

As a recent example of how some Chinese experts view the use of the term *gray zone* as affecting China’s security environment, one 2020 Chinese scholarly assessment asserted that “securitizing” China’s activities in the SCS by depicting them as gray zone activities is part of a U.S. government cost imposition strategy against China.<sup>21</sup> Of the resulting challenges constraining Beijing, first, the use of the term is “not favorable” for maintaining U.S.-China maritime security mechanisms and the broader “military stability” of the two countries in the region.<sup>22</sup> Second, the United States will probably use this characterization as a rationale to combine its rebalance to the region with its Indo-Pacific strategy—leveraging regional allies and countries outside the region. Third, the United States will potentially employ “‘gray zone’ methods” against China to influence the China-ASEAN South China Sea Code of Conduct negotiations, which are still in a state of “uncertainty.”<sup>23</sup>

Chinese experts view U.S. actions in the gray zone negatively but do not typically describe Chinese actions using the same lens. One source actively rejected the notion that China’s actions in the SCS should be considered gray zone activities, stating that China’s actions consist of “lawful rights protection activities” and regular economic cooperation activities undertaken with Southeast Asian neighbors.<sup>24</sup> After the Scarborough Shoal incident in 2012, some Chinese analysts and media sources referred to China’s successful layering of diplomatic, administrative, economic, and nongovernmental activities (cyberattacks), supported by military deterrence against the Philippines, as a “Scarborough Shoal model” that China may harness elsewhere in the future to “protect Chinese maritime rights and interests”—but did not use the term *gray zone*.<sup>25</sup> However, some recent publications by Chinese analysts explicitly reference Chinese actions in the gray zone. For example, one analyst at a Ministry of Foreign Affairs–affiliated think tank used the term *gray zone* to describe Chinese actions vis-à-vis Taiwan as “prob[ing] ways to subdue the island without fighting” and “a better alternative to a military strike.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Dai Zheng [戴正] and Zheng Xianwu [郑先武], “The ‘Gray Zone’ and the ‘Securitization’ of U.S. Policy on the South China Sea” [“‘灰色地带’与美国对中国南海政策的‘安全化’”], *Southeast Asian Studies* [东南亚研究], No. 4, April 2020, p. 58.

<sup>22</sup> Dai and Zheng, 2020, pp. 60–63.

<sup>23</sup> Dai and Zheng, 2020, pp. 60–63.

<sup>24</sup> Dai and Hong, 2019, p. 96.

<sup>25</sup> Qin Hong [秦宏], “Facing the Philippines, We Have Sufficient Means” [“面对菲律宾我们有足够手段”], *Xinhua*, May 9, 2012; Zhang Jie [张洁], “The Huangyan Model and the Shift of China’s Maritime Strategy” [“黄岩岛模式与中国海洋维权政策的转向”], *Southeast Asian Studies* [东南亚研究], No. 4, June 2013. For additional information, see Andrew S. Erickson, “The South China Sea’s Third Force: Understanding and Countering China’s Maritime Militia,” testimony before the House Armed Services Committee Seapower and Projection Forces Subcommittee, Washington, D.C., September 21, 2016.

<sup>26</sup> Cui Lei, “Mainland China Is in No Position to Take Taiwan by Force,” East Asia Forum website, February 26, 2021.

## Views of PLA Roles in the Gray Zone

Because Chinese experts believe that countries have long engaged in gray zone activities (without labeling them as such), this section explores the concept in the Chinese literature that is most similar to the U.S. definition of gray zone and relevant for understanding how China may use its military for such activities: MOOTW.

### *Chinese Definitions of MOOTW*

The Chinese understanding of MOOTW includes some operations conducted by the Chinese military that U.S. experts currently define as gray zone activities.<sup>27</sup> Since the introduction of the term in the Chinese literature in 2001, Chinese experts have incorporated elements in their approach to MOOTW that go beyond common U.S. associations with humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR) operations, noncombatant evacuations, and peacekeeping operations.<sup>28</sup> The Chinese definition includes major operations that the PLA should embrace during peacetime and ways Beijing could leverage the PLA to serve national interests during peacetime. The 2008 Chinese defense white paper noted the need for the PLA to “enhanc[e] the capabilities of the armed forces in countering various security threats and accomplishing diversified military tasks,” and MOOTW is “an important form of applying national military forces.”<sup>29</sup> The 2011 *PLA Dictionary of Military Terms* defined MOOTW as “the armed forces’ use of military operations to protect national security and development interests that do not directly lead to war.”<sup>30</sup>

The 2013 *Science of Military Strategy* states that, since the end of the Cold War, the lower chance of traditional, large-scale conflict and rise in nontraditional threats have increased the need for MOOTW.<sup>31</sup> These operations have “appeared more and more frequently, and the types of operations are continually expanding; they are being used more and more broadly in social,

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<sup>27</sup> For a discussion of MOOTW’s relationship to escalation control, see Alison A. Kaufman and Daniel M. Hartnett, *Managing Conflict: Examining Recent PLA Writings on Escalation Control*, Arlington, Va.: CNA, February 2016.

<sup>28</sup> U.S. views about MOOTW have also involved stricter rules of engagement than conventional military operations. Common contemporary U.S. MOOTW operations adapted from Alan J. Vick, David T. Orletsky, Abram N. Shulsky, and John Stillion, *Preparing the U.S. Air Force for Military Operations Other Than War*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MR-842-AF, 1997, pp. 2–16.

<sup>29</sup> SCIO, *China’s National Defense in 2008*, Beijing, January 20, 2009.

<sup>30</sup> *PLA Dictionary of Military Terms* [中国人民解放军军语], Beijing: Military Science Press, 2011, p. 163. The basic definition also identifies six operations as part of MOOTW: counterterrorism and stability maintenance operations; HA/DR; operations to safeguard sovereignty and national interests; operations to safeguard safety and security; international peacekeeping; and international rescue and relief operations. See also Liu Xiaoli [刘小力], *Research on Military Operations Other Than War* [军队非战争行动研究], Beijing: People’s Armed Police Press, 2014, p. 5.

<sup>31</sup> According to Chinese experts, countries engaged in MOOTW during the Cold War. Examples include “the use of military strengths in incidents like Germany’s Berlin crisis, the Cuban missile crisis, and the Iranian Hostage crisis” (Shou Xiaosong, ed., *Science of Military Strategy*, 2013, Beijing: Academy of Military Science, 2013, p. 156).

political, and economic life and in international relations.”<sup>32</sup> Major countries are studying how to use military force in a peaceful environment, have embraced similar concepts, and increasingly engage and rely on such operations to advance national interests.<sup>33</sup>

The 2013 *Science of Military Strategy* identifies six features of Chinese views about MOOTW. First, this authoritative Chinese text identifies MOOTW as an “important strategic means for achieving the nation’s political intentions.”<sup>34</sup> MOOTW should be “centered on the nation’s political goals, support economic and social development, and are launched in coordination with diplomatic struggle.”<sup>35</sup> Second, MOOTW is an important way for China to carry out its military-strategic concepts and approaches in peacetime. MOOTW is supposed to support Chinese efforts to “defeat the enemy’s troops without fighting” and to “serve as major strategic practices and serve as important strategic measures” to support China’s active defense. Third, MOOTW allows the PLA to carry out new types of missions, including the historic mission and tasks China’s leaders have directed the PLA to support since the mid-2000s.<sup>36</sup> Fourth, MOOTW is an effective way to support the expansion of Chinese interests “through the abilities that the military itself has and through its role in deterrence, and through a combination of soft and hard power.”<sup>37</sup> Fifth, MOOTW provides tools to uphold world peace, and actively and effectively using MOOTW can contribute to a peaceful and stable security environment. Sixth, MOOTW helps enhance the PLA’s operational capabilities.

A 2015 Chinese defense white paper described “preparing for military operations other than war” as one of the tasks for the PLA under the mission of “preparation for military struggle.”<sup>38</sup> The white paper described MOOTW as necessary for the PLA “to fulfill [its] responsibilities and missions in the new period as well as an important approach to enhancing [PLA] operational

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<sup>32</sup> Shou, 2013, p. 154.

<sup>33</sup> Chinese experts note that the United States was the first to raise the concept of MOOTW to the level of military strategy in 1993. Although the United States has abandoned the concept since then, Chinese analysts point out that U.S. joint doctrine still includes the types of operations that used to fall under MOOTW. Russia, France, Italy, Japan, India, and other countries have also analyzed uses of military operations other than war but have used different terms to describe such activities. Synonyms for MOOTW include *nonviolent military operations*, *nonconventional military operations*, *special warfare*, or *special operations*. See Shou, 2013, pp. 157–158. Some Chinese documents use *nonwar military operations* or *non-war military operations* in English translations instead of MOOTW.

<sup>34</sup> Shou, 2013, p. 160.

<sup>35</sup> Shou, 2013, p. 160.

<sup>36</sup> Shou, 2013, p. 160. General Secretary Hu Jintao delineated a historic mission and tasks for the PLA in 2004 that included consolidating the ruling status of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP); helping ensure China’s sovereignty, territorial integrity, and domestic security to continue national development; safeguarding China’s expanding national interests; and helping maintain world peace. See Cortez A. Cooper, “The PLA Navy’s ‘New Historic Missions’: Expanding Capabilities for a Re-Emergent Maritime Power,” testimony presented before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission on June 11, 2009, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, CT-332, 2009.

<sup>37</sup> Shou, 2013, p. 161.

<sup>38</sup> SCIO, 2015.

capabilities.”<sup>39</sup> The 2019 Chinese defense white paper does not use the term but includes the tasks that were previously labelled as MOOTW.<sup>40</sup> Chinese experts and official sources continue to use MOOTW to describe peacetime PLA military operations.<sup>41</sup> Qiao Liang, for example, has urged the PLA to use “controllable” MOOTW to resolve problems in the SCS.<sup>42</sup>

### *Inclusive and Broad Chinese Definition of MOOTW*

Although there is no definitive Chinese list of MOOTW operations, there is consensus that MOOTW includes the spectrum of PLA domestic and international peacetime operations. Table 2.1 lists types of MOOTW activities in the order presented in the 2015 Chinese defense white paper. The table includes operations that involve confrontation against violent or subversive actors, operations to enforce PRC laws or rights, and aid and relief operations. These involve responding to sudden major incidents [重大突发事件], such as a natural disasters, terrorist attacks, or encroachments on China’s sovereignty. Although the 2013 *Science of Military Strategy* adds cooperative (international) operations as a MOOTW category, the 2015 defense white paper places MOOTW as separate from “military and security cooperation” with other countries.<sup>43</sup> The 2013 text notes that there is disagreement among Chinese experts as to whether military aid, military trade, military diplomacy, and military deterrence count as MOOTW.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> SCIO, 2015.

<sup>40</sup> SCIO, *China’s National Defense in the New Era*, Beijing, July 24, 2019. The 2019 text prioritizes and separates PLA tasks that were formerly binned together under “rights and interests protection” (in order of importance): safeguarding maritime rights and interests, safeguarding interests in major security fields (nuclear, space, cyber), and safeguarding overseas interests.

<sup>41</sup> See, for example, the MOOTW page on the PLA’s English-language website, which focuses on peacekeeping, escort missions, disaster relief, and counter terrorism operations (“MOOTW,” China Military Online, undated).

<sup>42</sup> *Unrestricted Warfare* is a non-authoritative text by PLA authors that examines tactics for weaker militaries to contest stronger militaries like that of the United States (Qiao Liang [乔良] and Wang Xiangsui [王湘穗], *Unrestricted Warfare* [超限战], Beijing: PLA Literature and Arts Publishing House [解放军文艺出版社], 1999. Qiao is quoted in Zhu Mengying [朱梦颖] and Zuo Tian [左甜], “Our Major General: Controllable Military Operations Other Than War Is Best Response to South China Sea Problem” [“我少将: 可控非战争军事行动是南海问题最佳应对方式”], Sina News, December 8, 2018).

<sup>43</sup> For discussion on evolving PLA attitudes toward MOOTW since the 2000s, see Morgan Clemens, “PLA Thinking on Military Operations Other Than War,” in Joe McReynolds, ed., *China’s Evolving Military Strategy*, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2016.

<sup>44</sup> Shou, 2013, pp. 162–164; SCIO, 2015.

**Table 2.1. Types of PRC Military Operations Other Than War**

<b>Types</b>	<b>Operations</b>
Emergency rescue and disaster relief [抢险救灾行动]	Flood rescue; earthquake relief; forest fire-fighting; nuclear, biological, chemical and contamination examination
Counterterrorism [反恐怖行动]	Attacking terrorist camps, counter-gunfire attack, counter-conventional explosive attack, counterinformation attack, counterhijacking, international joint counterterrorism
Stability maintenance [维护稳定行动]	Intimidation, sealing off incident area, stopping large-scale mass incidents, combatting serious violent crime (armed drug enforcement,* attacking transnational crime*), defending important targets, medical rescue/evacuation, aftermath cleanup
Rights and interests protection [维护权益行动]	Military deterrence operations* (large-scale military exercises,* military patrols,* security alerts*), onshore rights protection, maritime rights protection (protection of territorial claims,* operations to protect strategic maritime routes,* counterpiracy operations*), aerial rights protection, overseas rights protection, space rights protection, network and electronic domain rights protection
Security and guarding [安保警戒行动]	Ground security; aerial security; maritime (water-borne) security; nuclear, biological, and chemical attack rescue
International peacekeeping [国际维和行动]	International peacekeeping operations
International HA/DR [国际救援行动]	Natural disaster relief, accident disaster relief, medical assistance,* noncombatant evacuation operations*

SOURCES: Categories and subcategories are primarily based on SCIO, 2015. Categories or subcategories marked with an asterisk are additions based on Shou, 2013, and Liu, 2014.

NOTE: Categories highlighted in orange are most similar to U.S. definitions of Chinese gray zone activities involving the PLA.

Overall, it is possible to see Chinese views about MOOTW as PLA activities beyond normal day-to-day operations (beyond military diplomacy) that advance Chinese interests in peacetime. There is significant overlap between the coercive or confrontational external-facing PLA MOOTW activities—stability maintenance, rights protection, and security and guarding operations—with U.S. definitions of Chinese gray zone activities involving the PLA. Table 2.1 highlights these three sets of MOOTW activities in orange. On the protection of rights and interests, note that one PLA journal article further explored this concept by discussing the need to conduct “low-intensity maritime rights protection defense” [“低强度海上维权国防”].<sup>45</sup>

### *Characteristics of Chinese MOOTW*

Not only is there overlap between Chinese definitions of MOOTW and U.S. definitions of PLA gray zone activities, there is also significant similarity in Chinese descriptions of how to conduct these operations. Table 2.2 consolidates the characteristics of Chinese MOOTW described in key military texts. Chinese experts note that, while the military remains the main

<sup>45</sup> Yang Shengli [杨胜利] and Geng Yueting [耿跃亭], “The Strategic Thinking of Strengthening National Defense Mobilization for Low-Intensity Maritime Rights Protection” [“对加强低强度海上维权国防动员的战略思考”], *National Defense* [国防], No. 1, 2017. See also Erickson and Martinson, 2019.

force involved in MOOTW, PLA forces and capabilities should be applied flexibly and jointly with nonmilitary actors and means. Military-civil fusion [军民融合] is key for MOOTW and should involve, for example, surveillance and intelligence sharing between military and civilian actors, common communication and notification platforms, and common planning.<sup>46</sup> Operations should have unified command and coordination: The Party Central Committee and the Central Military Commission “should make decisions, issue orders about the operation, make arrangements for the operation, and clarify the requirements of the operation.”<sup>47</sup> In addition to the goals described earlier, MOOTW should strive to keep the situation from escalating and avoid starting a war.

**Table 2.2. Characteristics of PRC Military Operations Other Than War**

Characteristic	Description
Situation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of military force in nonconflict periods (peacetime)</li> </ul>
Actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involve the joint and flexible use of multiple types of forces and actors (including military and civilian actors) carrying out decisions made at high levels within the PRC state and military</li> </ul>
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Achieve strategic-level political objectives, including maintaining national security and development interests, social stability, and global peace</li> <li>• Defeat the opponent’s troops without fighting and enhance China’s active defense (i.e., set conditions for pursuing China’s overall military strategy)</li> <li>• Keep the situation from escalating (risks relatively controllable) and avoid starting a war</li> </ul>
Means	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use nonviolent or limited violent or kinetic means under the shadow or support of the country’s full range of military capabilities</li> <li>• Combine and/or coordinate military and nonmilitary means (e.g., diplomatic, economic, legal)</li> <li>• Typically involve smaller-scale, lower-intensity operations than wartime operations</li> </ul>
Mechanisms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contribute to psychological deterrence, deception, and confusion of opponents</li> <li>• Undermine opponent capabilities</li> <li>• Allow the country executing MOOTW to buy time, better understand the environment, or improve its capabilities</li> <li>• Complement wartime military operations—conflicts could build on MOOTW, result from MOOTW, or end with MOOTW</li> </ul>
Targets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Varied, but each operation should have defined and limited targets; could target countries, blocs or organizations, or such individuals as criminal actors or terrorists</li> </ul>

SOURCES: Based on Shou, 2013, and Liu, 2014.

In terms of means, Liu argued that China’s military combat capabilities provide the backstop needed for effective MOOTW.<sup>48</sup> Changing military deployments and engaging in activities to intimidate or warn an opponent are unlikely to have their intended effects without the support of

<sup>46</sup> Wang Yuren [王玉仁], “Military Operations Other Than War: Driver for Military-Civil Fusion” [“非战争军事行动, 军民融合式发展的引擎”], *PLA Daily*, December 20, 2012.

<sup>47</sup> Shou, 2013, p. 166.

<sup>48</sup> Liu, 2014.



a strong overall military capability.<sup>49</sup> In terms of mechanisms, MOOTW can contribute to psychological deterrence, deception, and confusion and can undermine the opponent's capabilities while allowing countries executing MOOTW to buy time, better understand the environment, and improve its capabilities.<sup>50</sup> Relatedly, MOOTW likely provides options for the PLA to conduct the *Three Warfares* [三种战法 or 三战] of public opinion, psychological, and legal warfare.<sup>51</sup> MOOTW complements wartime military operations in two main ways:

1. Countries may decide to engage in war if they cease to gain advantage through MOOTW, and MOOTW could include activities that prepare for conflict.
2. Countries could use MOOTW activities to help de-escalate from conflict.<sup>52</sup>

Finally, the targets of MOOTW are varied but should be well defined and limited.<sup>53</sup>

It is important to point out that the Chinese literature on MOOTW does not explicitly task the PLA to use asymmetric means to advance Chinese goals, and the PLA is not required to use ambiguous actors or an incremental, salami-slicing approach. Instead, China's focus is to empower the PLA to engage in peacetime operations to advance Chinese interests by leveraging all national resources available while managing the risk of military escalation. In the SCS, for example, one of the reasons China empowered its fishermen and maritime militia to defend China's maritime claims is that the PLAN and CCG did not have the capacity to patrol China's vast waters by themselves.<sup>54</sup> To manage escalation, China placed actors with weaker military capabilities up front and has, at times, moved gradually and cautiously to avoid significant backlash. This does not mean that China will continue this approach in the future, and the possibility that Chinese MOOTW could be symmetric or bold cannot be ruled out.

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<sup>49</sup> Liu, 2014, p. 9.

<sup>50</sup> According to Liu, an example of a MOOTW that undermines opponents' capability is the no-fly zone that United States, United Kingdom, and France established in Iraq after the Gulf War. The no-fly zone limited the Iraq military's recovery and growth. See Liu, 2014, p. 9.

<sup>51</sup> For more on the "Three Warfares," see Peter Mattis, "China's 'Three Warfares' in Perspective," War on the Rocks website, January 30, 2018.

<sup>52</sup> Liu, 2014, pp. 8–9.

<sup>53</sup> Shou, 2013, p. 168.

<sup>54</sup> For historical discussion of the PLAN's limited capability in the SCS (particularly through the 1970s) and early employment of militia units, armed fishermen, and other nonmilitary assets to advance Chinese claims in the SCS, see M. Taylor Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2008, pp. 275–293.

### 3. What Drives and Enables China's Gray Zone Activities?

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China is increasingly turning to gray zone operations to advance its geopolitical, economic, and military interests in the Indo-Pacific and to shape the behavior of its neighbors. This chapter explores three main drivers of PRC gray zone activities and four major developments within China that enable Beijing to expand its use of gray zone activities.<sup>1</sup>

#### Drivers of Chinese Gray Zone Activities

Chinese activities in the gray zone support Beijing's domestic, economic, foreign policy, and security objectives. Chinese leaders' overarching goal is to realize the "rejuvenation" of the Chinese nation by 2049, primarily in terms of China's continued socialist and economic development. Along the path to reaching the 2049 goal, there are also intermediate milestones for 2020–2021 and 2035.<sup>2</sup> As Mazarr notes, dependence on global trade and markets to achieve this rejuvenation and an aversion to taking overt, escalatory actions that might fundamentally destabilize economic relations with other countries incentivize China to incrementally pursue objectives via gray zone approaches.<sup>3</sup>

By dint of history, geography, geopolitics, economics, and security, Chinese leaders view the Indo-Pacific region (which China refers to as the *Asia-Pacific*) as China's priority region; therefore, the region is a crucial location to support rejuvenation in several ways.<sup>4</sup> First, Beijing seeks regional stability to enable China's continued development. In the pursuit of what they frame as mutually beneficial cooperation to enhance stability, Chinese leaders seek to build collaboration with neighbors via bilateral and regional forums, strengthen the scale and scope of

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<sup>1</sup> On the approach of another major gray zone actor, Russia, in the Indo-Pacific region and its use of gray zone tactics, see Appendixes D and E.

<sup>2</sup> Poverty eradication sets the stage for realizing a "moderately prosperous society" by 2021, the 100th anniversary of the CCP's founding. The 2049 goal is the second centenary goal and celebrates the 100th anniversary of the founding of the PRC. The CCP declared victory on its 2020 goal for eradicating poverty in December 2020, although senior Chinese leaders acknowledged that progress was complicated by the economic shock following the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak. See "Xi Announces Major Victory in Poverty Alleviation," *Xinhua*, December 4, 2020. The 2021, 2035, and 2049 goals are listed in Xi Jinping, "Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era," delivered at 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, October 18, 2017, *China Daily*, November 4, 2017; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "Premier Li Keqiang Meets the Press: Full Transcript of Questions and Answers," press release, May 28, 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Mazarr, 2015b.

<sup>4</sup> China's 2017 white paper on Asia-Pacific security cooperation states: "As an important member of the Asia-Pacific family, China is fully aware that its peaceful development is closely linked with the future of the region" (SCIO, *China's Policies on Asia-Pacific Security Cooperation*, Beijing, January 11, 2017). The white paper also focuses on promoting regional stability and a regional "community of shared future."

economic ties, increase security exchanges, and create new cultural and other people-to-people linkages. In the Indo-Pacific, China's traditional mechanisms include diplomatic channels; engagements with ASEAN and other regional forums; new trade and investment deals (including Belt and Road Initiative [BRI]-affiliated deals); growing PLA exchanges with other countries; and a variety of state-backed forums for academic, scientific, cultural, and other exchanges. Relatedly, gray zone tactics supplement China's existing options for defending its core interests because protecting them is important for realizing the dream of national rejuvenation.<sup>5</sup> China's core interests are to preserve the security of China's political system, defend China's sovereignty and territorial integrity (which includes Taiwan and other issues related to national unification), and safeguard the conditions that enable economic development. The geographic center of gravity for all three of these interests is in the Indo-Pacific. China's 2019 white paper additionally describes the three aims as "the fundamental goal of China's national defense in the new era."<sup>6</sup> China may employ more gray zone tactics to defend PRC core interests in the Indo-Pacific than for other interests because gray zone tactics are well suited to eroding others' challenges to PRC core interests while incrementally advancing PRC interests, particularly with respect to sovereignty and territorial disputes.

Second, China seeks to create a favorable international environment, including in the Indo-Pacific, in which countries align with and—in some cases—acquiesce to China's preferences. China's vision for a "community of shared future for mankind" in the region, which Xi articulated in 2014, "is for the people of Asia to run the affairs of Asia, solve the problems of Asia and uphold the security of Asia"—with China in a leadership role.<sup>7</sup> Chinese gray zone tactics pressure PRC neighbors to align with this vision while increasing the negative consequences for openly opposing it.

Third, China seeks to carve out a distinct path for its trajectory and rise that, if possible, avoids conflict between a rising power and declining power because conflict could endanger the stability fostering China's rejuvenation.<sup>8</sup> China's 2019 defense white paper describes growing challenges in the international order stemming from this changing balance in power. Specifically, United States and others' "growing hegemonism, power politics, unilateralism and constant regional conflicts and wars" undermine the international order, in contrast with China's approach

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<sup>5</sup> Timothy R. Heath, Kristen Gunness, and Cortez A. Cooper, *The PLA and China's Rejuvenation: National Security and Military Strategies, Deterrence Concepts, and Combat Capabilities*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-1402-OSD, 2016, pp. 14–15.

<sup>6</sup> SCIO, 2019, p. 7. See also Heath, Gunness, and Cooper, 2016, p. 14.

<sup>7</sup> Xi Jinping, "New Asian Security Concept for New Progress in Security Cooperation," remarks at the Fourth Summit of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia, Shanghai Expo Center, May 21, 2014.

<sup>8</sup> Chinese analysts have spent significant time analyzing historical case studies of the rise and fall of great powers and dissecting the Thucydides trap. See Lu Hui, ed., "Interview: US-China Conflict Avoidable if Patience, Mutual Understanding Applied, Says Expert," Xinhua, November 8, 2020; Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000*, New York: Penguin Random House, 1987.

of peaceful collaboration while “never seeking hegemony.”<sup>9</sup> China may employ gray zone tactics to avoid overt actions against its neighbors that could open Beijing up to accusations of adopting the unilateral and imperialist approach it ascribes to the United States.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, gray zone tactics could also help Beijing incrementally or subtly revise the existing international order to adapt to China’s influence without triggering as much regional or international backlash.

In summary, gray zone activities in the region balance Beijing’s pursuit of stability, its desire to realize a more favorable external environment, and its efforts to continue altering the regional status quo in China’s favor, while striving to remain below the threshold that would trigger an armed response by the U.S. and/or China’s neighbors. As one Western assessment notes (using the SCS as an example), “China’s use of gradual, multi-instrument strategies to amass a decisive legal foundation for its claims in the SCS represents the leading example” of a “persistent . . . campaign characteristic of warfare but without the overt use of military force.”<sup>11</sup> In this sense, Chinese gray zone tactics complement traditional diplomatic, economic, and military approaches by enhancing the variety and intensity of the pressure PRC authorities can apply to other countries. Gray zone tactics enable flexible and deniable options for Chinese leaders, while avoiding the multifaceted costs of outright state-on-state aggression in the modern age.<sup>12</sup>

## Enablers of Chinese Gray Zone Activities

Our analysis suggests that four primary enablers provide options that allow China to engage in gray zone operations more effectively. First, increasing centralization of power and authority within the central government (controlled by CCP leaders) enables Chinese authorities to harness nongovernmental personnel and assets for government missions, potentially including gray zone operations. Flowing from this key development, three other enablers also augment China’s gray zone capabilities. The second enabler is growing Chinese power and influence, including growing military capabilities, rapid economic development, and greater PRC involvement in international institutions. The third enabler is the growing linkages between China’s military development and economic growth, including military-civil fusion and China’s greater presence overseas. The fourth enabler is part of a series of broader military reforms; the integration of

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<sup>9</sup> SCIO, 2019, pp. 3, 8.

<sup>10</sup> During the 19th Party Congress, Xi Jinping contrasted pursuit of “hegemony” with China’s approach to advancing its interests: “China will never pursue development at the expense of others’ interests, but nor will China ever give up its legitimate rights and interests” (Xi, 2017). See also Zhang Yi, “Arms Race with US Does Not Fit China’s Development Goals,” *Global Times*, March 12, 2019.

<sup>11</sup> Mazarr, 2015a, p. 2.

<sup>12</sup> Mazarr, 2015a, p. 3; James Reilly, “China’s Unilateral Sanctions,” *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 35, No. 4, Fall 2012. A 2016 RAND report found that the economic costs and military casualties of a hypothetical war between China and the United States would be high for both countries but could be higher in some respects for China. See David C. Gompert, Astrid Stuth Cevallos, and Cristina L. Garafola, *War with China: Thinking Through the Unthinkable*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-1140-A, 2016.

military and paramilitary forces under the military high command, the Central Military Commission, should strengthen units' abilities to work together during peacetime and in the event of a crisis. These enablers facilitate Chinese gray zone activities in four key domains: geopolitical, economic, military, and cyber/IO.

Table 3.1 summarizes specific enablers of Chinese gray zone activities, including PLA-led and -supported operations. The rest of this section reviews the enablers and how they already or potentially facilitate select gray zone activities across the four domains.

**Table 3.1. Enablers for PRC Gray Zone Activities**

Category	Specific Enablers	Example Mechanisms
Centralization of power and authorities	New and revised national security laws	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Codify broad definition of national security</li> <li>• Require Chinese citizens, organizations, and companies to defend national security</li> <li>• Allow appropriation of nongovernment people and assets for national security purposes</li> </ul>
	Growing CCP presence in companies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Place high-level party cells in firms and labor unions</li> <li>• Offer state investment in firms in exchange for board seat</li> </ul>
Growing Chinese power and influence	Growing PRC geopolitical influence and involvement in multilateral institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use role in international or regional institutions to push PRC agendas or block efforts counter to PRC interests</li> <li>• Increase influence over third countries</li> </ul>
	Rapid Chinese economic development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leverage access to large PRC market to pressure countries and companies</li> <li>• Fund international or regional initiatives or provide foreign aid and investment</li> </ul>
	Improving PLA capabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use larger force structure, more-capable systems, and better-trained personnel to conduct more-sophisticated operations</li> <li>• Deploy to and operate from military bases on disputed features</li> </ul>
Increasing linkages between China's military development and its economic growth	Military-civil fusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adopt new technology within the military</li> <li>• Provide direct commercial support to military</li> </ul>
	Greater economic, military, and media overseas presence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Harness citizens, Chinese-built or operated infrastructure, and international media presence abroad</li> <li>• Increase overseas military presence to protect Chinese interests</li> <li>• Use commercial assets to support military operations</li> </ul>
Greater co-optation of nonmilitary actors for military operations	Reforming command relationships and providing material support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordinate PLAN, CCG, and People's Armed Force Maritime Militia (PAFMM) operations</li> <li>• Conduct "joint" training and support</li> <li>• Provide government subsidies to PAFMM fishermen</li> </ul>

SOURCES: Compiled by authors from the sources cited in footnotes in this chapter.

### *Centralization of Powers and Authorities*

The CCP has historically prioritized its control over government institutions, processes, and policies in the belief that the party is the sole legitimate governing authority in China. As a

Marxist-Leninist organization, the party also seeks to marshal an expansive set of institutions and processes across China to achieve party priorities in the economic, legal, industrial, scientific, educational, cultural, news media, and other spheres.<sup>13</sup> The extent to which power and authority have been centralized within senior party leadership, and the central government writ large, has waxed and waned over the history of the PRC. In the past decade, particularly under Xi's tenure, the CCP has put into place a number of laws, regulations, and policies that enable the central government to apply state power in a growing number of areas.<sup>14</sup>

### New and Revised National Security Related Laws

Since 2010, China's leaders have revised or enacted 11 laws that strengthen the Chinese central government's ability to target "hostile" forces using multifaceted tools and co-opt elements of Chinese society into supporting government goals. Collectively, the laws illustrate the difference between *rule of law* (applying laws and regulations to all citizens and organizations regardless of their position within society) and *rule by law* (deploying legal tools that the CCP can selectively employ against target actors under unclear circumstances), particularly when it comes to controlling the Chinese populace.<sup>15</sup>

China's focus on using legislation to strengthen national security was highlighted at the inaugural meeting of China's National Security Commission in 2014, where Xi introduced the concept of an "overall national security outlook" ["总体国家安全观"].<sup>16</sup> The concept advances China's national interests by improving CCP control of traditional and nontraditional national security approaches (which include mechanisms both within and beyond China's borders).<sup>17</sup> A 2014 *People's Daily* article stated that the commission was to help facilitate this outcome in four main ways: by improving and executing broad national security strategies, by developing and promulgating a national security legal system, by developing national security policies on such

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<sup>13</sup> For an authoritative reiteration of the guiding role of Marxism and Leninism in the modern CCP state, see Xi, 2017.

<sup>14</sup> China's legal tradition differs substantially from Western traditions, with one scholar summarizing China's legal tradition as the "system functions to serve state interests, not [generally] to protect individual rights or to resolve disputes among individuals" (Donald C. Clarke, "The Chinese Legal System," George Washington University Law School, July 4, 2005). For an extensive overview of China's legal system, see Randall Peerenboom, *China's Long March Toward Rule of Law*, Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

<sup>15</sup> The two concepts are sometimes delineated into "rule the nation according to the law" ["依法治国"] and "rule the nation by [using] the law" ["以法治国"]. The Chinese leadership has officially endorsed the former phrase, but it has not been implemented in practice. For more exploration of the distinction between *rule of law* and *rule by law*, see Josh Chin, "'Rule of Law' or 'Rule by Law?' In China, a Preposition Makes All the Difference," *Wall Street Journal*, October 20, 2014; George C. Chen, "Le Droit, C'est Moi: Xi Jinping's New Rule-By-Law Approach," Oxford Human Rights Hub website, July 26, 2017.

<sup>16</sup> "Overall National Security Concept: Action Guidelines for Maintaining and Shaping National Security" ["总体国家安全观: 维护和塑造国家安全的行动指南"], *Xinhua*, April 13, 2019.

<sup>17</sup> Research Institute of Party History and Literature of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China [中共中央党史和文献研究院], ed., "Excerpts from Xi Jinping's Expositions on Overall National Security Views" ["习近平关于总体国家安全观论述摘编"], *People's Daily*, March 2018; "Overall National Security Concept . . .," 2019.

topics as terrorism and territorial disputes, and by addressing stovepipes in China’s national security apparatus to implement more effective policies and coordination on national security problems. (This article was later removed from *People’s Daily’s* website.<sup>18</sup>) Although the National Security Commission’s role in China’s overall national security apparatus is not well understood, Xi has, in the intervening years, continued to emphasize the importance of advancing the overall national security concept in the political, economic, “territorial,” societal, and cyber domains,<sup>19</sup> reiterating China’s leaders’ commitment to “pursuing a holistic approach to national security.”<sup>20</sup>

It is important to note that PRC companies do not always comply with the provisions outlined in law, and regulators do not always enforce the laws.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, China has created a legal architecture that authorities can use to compel companies and individuals to comply with state requests. Eleven new or revised national security–related laws have been passed since 2010:

- **2010 National Defense Mobilization Law:** A revision of an earlier law, this law enables the Chinese government to co-opt PRC assets or facilities, which could affect both Chinese companies and foreign firms operating in China.<sup>22</sup> Article 21 states that for the “purposes of national defense mobilization, construction projects and key products which are closely related to national defense shall meet the national defense requirements and possess the national defense functions.”<sup>23</sup> Although China has yet to engage in a contemporary full (wartime) mobilization, the national defense mobilization process does enable partial mobilizations for limited contingencies.<sup>24</sup>
- **2014 Counter-Espionage Law:** This legislation states that all citizens, “state organs, armed forces, political parties and public groups, and all enterprises and organizations have the obligation to prevent and stop espionage activities and maintain national

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<sup>18</sup> David M. Lampton, “Xi Jinping’s High-Risk Policy Needs a National Security Commission,” YaleGlobal Online, May 5, 2015; Fu Yiqin, “What Will China’s National Security Commission Actually Do?” *Foreign Policy*, May 8, 2014. Fu summarizes and cites the *People’s Daily* article, which is no longer accessible at the original link.

<sup>19</sup> “Xi Calls for Overall National Security Outlook,” Xinhua, February 17, 2017.

<sup>20</sup> Xi, 2017.

<sup>21</sup> Samm Sacks, “Dangerous Partners: Big Tech and Beijing,” testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee Subcommittee on Crime and Terrorism, Washington, D.C., March 4, 2020.

<sup>22</sup> Dean Cheng, “Is There Still a Need for War Time Mobilization? China Thinks So,” paper, Washington, D.C.: Heritage Foundation, March 29, 2010.

<sup>23</sup> “National Defense Mobilization Law of the People’s Republic of China” [“中华人民共和国国防动员法”], February 26, 2010.

<sup>24</sup> Jonathan Walton, “China Plans for Internal Unrest: People’s Armed Police and Public Security Approaches to ‘Mass Incidents,’” in Andrew Scobell, Arthur S. Ding, Phillip C. Saunders, and Scott W. Harold, eds., *The People’s Liberation Army and Contingency Planning in China*, Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2015. See also the Dean Cheng, “Converting the Potential to the Actual: Chinese Mobilization Policies and Planning,” in Andrew Scobell, Arthur S. Ding, Phillip C. Saunders, and Scott W. Harold, eds., *The People’s Liberation Army and Contingency Planning in China*, Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2015.

security.”<sup>25</sup> State security organizations “must rely on the support of the people in counter-espionage efforts, mobilizing and organizing the people to prevent and stop espionage conduct threatening state security.”<sup>26</sup> Authorities can requisition “transportation [assets], communications tools, locations and buildings” from state organizations and individuals, other groups, “enterprises’ institutions,” and organizations.<sup>27</sup> Implementation rules released in 2017 defined “hostile organizations” to China as those that “endanger national security,” and activities that endanger national security to include “undermining national unity . . . publishing or disseminating text or information that endangers national security,” and establishing social groups, carrying out religious activities, or “inciting ethnic divides” that affect national security.<sup>28</sup>

- **2015 Counter-Terrorism Law:** This applies a broad definition of terrorism and means for Chinese authorities to target activities included in that definition. *Terrorism* is defined as “appeals and actions that create social panic, endanger public safety, violate person and property, or coerce national organs or international organizations, through methods such [as] violence, destruction, [and] intimidation, so as to achieve their political, ideological, or other objectives.”<sup>29</sup> The law requires “[t]elecommunications operators and internet service providers . . . [to] provide technical interfaces, decryption and other technical support assistance to public security organs and state security organs conducting prevention and investigation of terrorist activities.” Other sections authorize intelligence sharing and law enforcement activities between China’s border regions and neighbors and sending the PLA and People’s Armed Police abroad to conduct counterterrorism missions.<sup>30</sup>
- **2015 National Security Law:** This law provides a legal justification for punishing any actions that the CCP assesses “betray” or “split” China, “compromise . . . national security,” or threaten “overseas forces.”<sup>31</sup> The law covers most national-level CCP priorities by including them in its definition of national security and requires all peoples and institutions in China to defend these priorities. *National security* is defined as a “status in which the regime, sovereignty, unity, territorial integrity, welfare of the people, sustainable economic and social development, and other major interests of the state are relatively not faced with any danger and not threatened internally or externally and the capability to maintain a sustained security status.”<sup>32</sup> The law states that “[a]ll citizens of

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<sup>25</sup> “Counter-Espionage Law of the People’s Republic of China” [“中华人民共和国反间谍法”], November 2014. Translation from “Counter-Espionage Law of the People’s Republic of China,” unofficial translation, China Law Translate website, November 3, 2014.

<sup>26</sup> Counter-Espionage Law, translation from China Law Translate website, 2014.

<sup>27</sup> Counter-Espionage Law, translation from China Law Translate website, 2014.

<sup>28</sup> “Detailed Implementation Rules for the Counter-Espionage Law,” unofficial translation, China Law Translate website, December 6, 2017.

<sup>29</sup> “Counter-Terrorism Law of the People’s Republic of China” [“中华人民共和国反恐怖主义法”], December 27, 2015. Translation from “Counter-Terrorism Law of the People’s Republic of China,” unofficial translation, US-China Business Council website, December 27, 2015.

<sup>30</sup> Counter-Terrorism Law, translation from US-China Business Council, 2015.

<sup>31</sup> “National Security Law of the People’s Republic of China” [“中华人民共和国国家安全法”], July 1, 2015.

<sup>32</sup> “National Security Law . . .,” 2015.



the People’s Republic of China, state authorities, armed forces, political parties, people’s groups, enterprises, public institutions, and other social organizations” are responsible for contributing to China’s national security.<sup>33</sup>

- **2017 National Intelligence Law:** This provides justification for the Chinese state to co-opt organizations and Chinese citizens for intelligence gathering, with some limits of the state’s reach left undefined. Article Seven states that “[a]ny organization or citizen shall support, assist and cooperate with the state intelligence work in accordance with the law.”<sup>34</sup> China’s intelligence apparatus “may require relevant organs, organizations and citizens to” support its efforts, including by requisitioning buildings, personnel, communication tools, or entire organizations.<sup>35</sup> One section requires nonintelligence departments within the government and state-owned enterprises (SOEs) to support some administrative tasks. The intelligence apparatus is authorized to use the “necessary” means to carry out its work within China and overseas. Western intelligence agencies and legal and security analysts have flagged concerns about the law, particularly its applicability to compel support from both Chinese and foreign individuals, organizations, and institutions operating in China.<sup>36</sup>
- **2017 Cybersecurity Law:** A key part of China’s cyber governance framework, this law applies to networks within China, and provisions “the [s]tate [to] take . . . measures for monitoring, preventing, and handling cybersecurity risks and threats arising both within and without China.”<sup>37</sup> Article 28 requires cooperation from network operators—defined as network owners, managers, and network service providers—on national security grounds, stating that “[n]etwork operators shall provide technical support and assistance to public security organs and national security organs that are safeguarding national security and investigating criminal activities in accordance with the law.”<sup>38</sup>
- **2017 National Defense Transportation Law:** This law focuses on the “planning, construction, management and use of resources in such transportation fields as railways, roads, waterways, aviation, pipelines, and posts for the purpose of satisfying national defense requirements.”<sup>39</sup> It also authorizes the expropriation of civil transportation assets

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<sup>33</sup> “National Security Law . . . ,” 2015.

<sup>34</sup> “National Intelligence Law of the People’s Republic of China,” June 27, 2017.

<sup>35</sup> “National Intelligence Law . . . ,” 2017.

<sup>36</sup> William Evanina, “Keynote Remarks as Prepared for Delivery,” International Legal Technology Association (ILTA), LegalSEC Summit 2019, Arlington, Va., June 4, 2019; Murray Scot Tanner, “Beijing’s New National Intelligence Law: From Defense to Offense,” *Lawfare* blog, July 20, 2017; Mannheimer Swartling, “Applicability of Chinese National Intelligence Law to Chinese and Non-Chinese Entities,” Stockholm, January 2019.

<sup>37</sup> “Cybersecurity Law of the People’s Republic of China” [“中华人民共和国网络安全法”], June 1, 2017. Translation from Rogier Creemers, Paul Triolo, and Graham Webster, trans., “Cybersecurity Law of the People’s Republic of China [Effective June 1, 2017],” New America website, June 29, 2018. For more information on the development of this framework, see Paul Triolo, Samm Sacks, Graham Webster, and Rogier Creemers, “China’s Cybersecurity Law One Year on: An Evolving and Interlocking Framework,” blog post, New America website, November 30, 2017, and Samm Sacks, “China’s Cybersecurity Law Takes Effect: What to Expect,” *Lawfare* blog, June 1, 2017.

<sup>38</sup> Creemers, Triolo, and Webster, 2018.

<sup>39</sup> “Law of the People’s Republic of China on National Defense Transportation” [“中华人民共和国国防交通法”], September 3, 2016.

for national defense purposes. Similar to the Mobilization Law, the Transportation Law includes provisions for both wartime and peacetime activation.

- **2017 Overseas Nongovernmental Organization (NGO) Law:** This law requires foreign NGOs to register with the public security apparatus and imposes other notifications to authorities and restrictions. Foreign NGOs must not threaten “national reunification, security, or ethnic unity” or “damage China’s national interests.”<sup>40</sup>
- **2020 Cryptography Law:** DoD assessed that this law enables “the State Cryptography Administration and its local agencies to have complete access to cryptography systems and the data protected by those systems,” including encryption systems used for commercial purposes.<sup>41</sup>
- **2020 Export Control Law:** This law consolidates export control authorities under one national-level legal framework to restrict Chinese exports of military, dual-use, and technology products for national security and public policy reasons. The law allows for “temporary controls (for up to two years of duration) for products not on the control list” and provides China with legal justification to embrace tit-for-tat retaliation “if any country or region abuses export control measures to endanger the national security and national interests of the People’s Republic of China.”<sup>42</sup>
- **2021 National Defense Law:** DoD assessed that these revisions to an earlier law “broadened the legal justification for PLA mobilization to include defense of China’s economic ‘development interests.’”<sup>43</sup>

#### Growing CCP Presence in Companies

The CCP is seeking greater oversight of SOEs and private companies, including foreign firms. This includes large Chinese firms, particularly large technology firms, some of which are now valued at higher market capitalization than China’s largest SOEs.<sup>44</sup> One example is government organizations seeking to purchase stakes in private firms. Internet regulators and *People’s Daily* have offered to take “special management shares” in Tencent, Weibo, and Youku (owned by Alibaba) and to appoint officials to corporate boards—therefore gaining leadership roles in the firms.<sup>45</sup> The CCP has additionally established party cells with leadership roles in

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<sup>40</sup> “Law of the People’s Republic of China on Managing Domestic Activities of Overseas Non-Governmental Organizations” [“中华人民共和国境外非政府组织境内活动管理”], November 4, 2017; Mathieu Duchâtel and Agatha Kratz, “China: Waging ‘Lawfare’ on NGOs,” European Council on Foreign Relations website, November 20, 2015.

<sup>41</sup> “Cryptography Law of the People’s Republic of China,” October 26, 2019 (went into effect January 1, 2020); Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China 2020*, Washington, D.C., 2020, p. 16.

<sup>42</sup> “Export Control Law of the People’s Republic of China” [“中华人民共和国出口管制法”], October 17, 2020. Translation from Karen M. Sutter, “China Issues New Export Control Law and Related Policies,” Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, IN11524, October 26, 2020.

<sup>43</sup> “National Defense Law of the People’s Republic of China” [“中华人民共和国国防法”], December 26, 2020; OSD, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China 2021*, Washington, D.C., 2021, p. 3.

<sup>44</sup> Daniel Strauss, “These are the 14 Largest Chinese Companies,” Markets Insider, July 23, 2019.

<sup>45</sup> Li Yuan, “Beijing Pushes for a Direct Hand in China’s Big Tech Firms,” *Wall Street Journal*, October 11, 2017.

private firms across a variety of sectors.<sup>46</sup> The government is also experimenting with “send[ing] state-appointed officials to the labor unions in private companies.”<sup>47</sup> If the CCP is integrated into the corporate decisionmaking process, possible implications include a reduced ability for companies to avoid or mitigate party demands that the companies would otherwise be reluctant to follow.

### *Growing Chinese Geopolitical, Economic, and Military Power and Influence*

Increasing PRC geopolitical influence and sway in international institutions, economic heft, and military capability are also providing China with new or enhanced opportunities for employing gray zone tactics.

#### *Growing PRC Geopolitical Influence and Involvement in Multilateral Institutions*

In the 2000s and 2010s, China’s participation and roles in international and regional institutions increased. China acceded to the World Trade Organization and increased its voting shares in the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.<sup>48</sup> China has worked to place PRC personnel into leadership positions within the United Nations (UN) system and to insert CCP-preferred language into UN policies.<sup>49</sup> China established new regional institutions, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. China had also actively worked to counter fellow SCS disputants’ policy positions within ASEAN. As of April 2020, China is the head of five international organizations and holds top leadership positions in 24 UN organs, programs, agencies, or bodies; seven international trade and financial institutions; and five other international organizations.<sup>50</sup>

Beijing’s growing influence in these international institutions has allowed China to exert leverage on other countries in a number of ways, some of which we will cover in subsequent chapters. For example, following the COVID-19 outbreak, Beijing initiated reprisals against other countries for criticizing China’s delay of information-sharing with the World Health

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<sup>46</sup> Zhang Lin, “Chinese Communist Party Needs to Curtail Its Presence in Private Businesses,” *South China Morning Post*, November 25, 2018.

<sup>47</sup> Yue Hou, “The Private Sector: Challenges and Opportunities During Xi’s Second Term,” *China Leadership Monitor*, No. 59, March 1, 2019, p. 3; Yuan, 2017.

<sup>48</sup> Council on Foreign Relations, “China’s Approach to Global Governance,” webpage, undated; G. John Ikenberry and Darren J. Lim, *China’s Emerging Institutional Statecraft: The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the Prospects for Counter-Hegemony*, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2017.

<sup>49</sup> Jeffrey Feltman, *China’s Expanding Influence at the United Nations—and How the United States Should React*, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, September 2020.

<sup>50</sup> See U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, “PRC Representation in International Organizations,” memorandum, Washington, D.C., April 2020.

Organization (WHO)—although WHO officials publicly praised China’s efforts to combat COVID-19.<sup>51</sup>

### Rapid Chinese Economic Development

Economic growth and vitality are key inputs that states leverage to provide public goods to their citizens, advance government policies and programs, and shape the external environment. Chinese economic growth continues to provide these resources as it reshapes the international order; the World Bank has assessed that China’s gross domestic product (GDP) became larger than the U.S. GDP as of 2017, in purchasing power parity terms, and one RAND report estimated that China’s GDP could overtake U.S. GDP in terms of market exchange rates in 2027.<sup>52</sup> Decades of sustained growth have strengthened PRC trade and investment ties with other countries (many of which are looking to gain and maintain access to nearly 1.4 billion Chinese consumers) and yielded more resources to leverage for gray zone activities and more resiliency to bear the short-term costs associated with certain economic tactics.

Accordingly, since the late 2000s, Chinese experts have increasingly seen value in threatening or employing unilateral economic sanctions to influence other countries’ foreign policy decisions.<sup>53</sup> Unlike the United States and other countries, which typically carry out sanctions via established legal mechanisms or presidential-level processes, however, China prefers what some observers call *informal measures*. These can include indirect threats, canceling or delaying trips by senior leaders (and the potential economic initiatives associated with such visits), halting or resuming purchases of specific goods, reducing tourism or PRC student inflows to countries, singling out individual companies to maximize pressure, denying access to the Chinese market, and encouraging consumer boycotts by the Chinese populace.<sup>54</sup> Second- and third-order benefits of economic growth relevant for potential gray zone activities include new technology and talent flowing to China (or, for PRC-born talent, staying in China), the increased sophistication and competitiveness of Chinese firms, increased resources for the government to engage with civil society and overseas organizations, and China’s growing role in international economic institutions.

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<sup>51</sup> Salvatore Babones, “China Learns the Hard Way That Money Can’t Buy You Love,” *Foreign Policy*, October 14, 2020; “How China Blocked WHO and Chinese Scientists Early in Coronavirus Outbreak,” NBC News, June 2, 2020.

<sup>52</sup> World Bank, *Purchasing Power Parities and the Size of World Economies: Results from the 2017 International Comparison Program*, Washington, D.C., 2020, p. 1; Howard J. Shatz and Nathan Chandler, *Global Economic Trends and the Future of Warfare: The Changing Global Environment and Its Implications for the U.S. Air Force*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-2849/4-AF, 2020, p. 30. See also Tim Callen, “Purchasing Power Parity: Weights Matter,” *Finance & Development*, February 24, 2020.

<sup>53</sup> Reilly, 2012, pp. 122–123.

<sup>54</sup> Reilly, 2012, pp. 123–124; Peter Harrell, Elizabeth Rosenberg, and Edoardo Saravalle, *China’s Use of Coercive Economic Measures*, Washington, D.C.: Center for a New American Security, 2018; Richard Nephew, *China and Economic Sanctions: Where Does Washington Have Leverage?* Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, September 2019.

In the near to medium term, economic growth will continue to expand the overall resources that China can tap for gray zone activities, although real growth is likely lower than recent CCP targets for annual GDP growth, which have hovered slightly above 6 percent.<sup>55</sup> (No growth target was announced for 2020 because of the economic shock following the COVID-19 outbreak, but Chinese leaders will likely seek to pursue similar growth targets in the future.) Looking outward, most economic projections indicate that China’s growth will slow because the most efficient gains from increasingly productive use of capital and labor have already been absorbed and because of China’s transition to a middle-income economy with different structural challenges to address.<sup>56</sup> Whether or not China’s leaders endorse difficult structural reforms and enact policies to address social challenges in the coming years will shape China’s long-term economy trajectory, but in the near to medium term, economic expansion will continue to provide China’s leaders with options and opportunities to leverage in the gray zone.

### Improving PLA Capabilities

In a 2020 report, DoD contrasted its assessment of the Chinese military in 2000—“lack[ing] the capabilities, organization, and readiness for modern warfare”—to the present day, in which Beijing “has marshalled the resources, technology, and political will over the past two decades to strengthen and modernize the PLA in nearly every respect.”<sup>57</sup> China’s leaders have powered this modernization effort with consistent annual defense spending increases over the past two decades, and China’s official defense budget grew an annual average of roughly 8 percent from 2010 through 2019 (adjusted for inflation)—nearly doubling over that period.<sup>58</sup> In 2017, Chinese leaders directed the PLA to become a world-class military by 2049; the PLA also has milestone goals for 2020–2021 and 2035 concomitant with the CCP’s broader milestone goals for China’s overall development. The PLA’s decades-long modernization effort has resulted in an overall larger force structure comprising more-capable systems (particularly in the maritime domain), better-educated and better-trained personnel, and more rigorous training at the unit level, enabling the PLA to undertake longer, more-sophisticated missions farther from home, such as in disputed waters in the SCS. PLA modernization also includes efforts to improve capabilities in

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<sup>55</sup> Michael Pettis has argued that GDP growth is an input, rather than an output, of the Chinese economy given that the government sets the growth rate. China’s national-level statistics indicate that China largely meets CCP benchmarks for GDP growth, but many international economic analysts believe these statistics exhibit signs of manipulation. See Michael Pettis, “What is GDP in China?” *China Financial Markets*, January 16, 2019.

<sup>56</sup> Some Chinese firms are forecasting lower growth in the near to medium term. In a January 2020 internal assessment, State Grid—an SOE and China’s largest utility company—predicted that China’s GDP growth could fall as low as 4 percent by 2024. See Sun Yu, “State Grid Warns That China GDP at Risk of Slipping to 4%,” *Financial Times*, January 15, 2020.

<sup>57</sup> OSD, 2020, p. i.

<sup>58</sup> OSD, 2020, p. 139. Actual spending is significantly higher than the official defense budget, which omits some categories of spending. Growth in the official defense budget is slowing but continues at a strong pace; China announced a 6.6 percent increase in the official budget for 2020. See “China Focus: China Further Lowers Defense Budget Growth to 6.6 Pct,” *Xinhua*, May 22, 2020.

nonkinetic domains in which ambiguity and attribution challenges offer a variety of vectors for carrying out gray zone activities, such as cyber and space.<sup>59</sup> Relatedly, China's large-scale land reclamation and infrastructure building on disputed features enables military and paramilitary deployments, operations, and resupply missions, increasing PLA and paramilitary forces' presence in the SCS. China's leaders also see a capable PLA as a tool for advancing Chinese foreign policy initiatives.

### *Increasing Linkages Between China's Military Development and Its Economic Growth*

Chinese military strategists explicitly link China's ability to engage in MOOTW with the strength of the country's overall economy, particularly military-civil fusion.<sup>60</sup>

#### Military-Civil Fusion

The PLA has long sought to harness civilian innovation for military purposes, particularly for hardware modernization,<sup>61</sup> but China's military-civil fusion efforts were further prioritized in 2015 when China's leaders elevated military-civil fusion to a national strategy. DoD assesses that with military-civil fusion, China seeks to “‘fuse’ its economic and social development strategies with its security strategies to build an integrated national strategic system and capabilities in support of China's national rejuvenation goals.”<sup>62</sup> Characteristics of the strategy include supporting innovation within the defense industrial base, leveraging commercial science and technology (S&T) for military purposes, developing civilian infrastructure aligned with potential military and dual-use requirements, developing military S&T personnel, modernizing PLA logistics, and improving the national defense mobilization system (which includes leveraging the PAFMM).<sup>63</sup> China's leaders have also noted the need to advance from “early state fusion” to “deep fusion” military-civil fusion, with the long-term goal of integrating military-civil fusion throughout the tools of national power.<sup>64</sup> China's military-civil fusion strategy occurs in the context of broader plans and processes aimed at advancing China's technological

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<sup>59</sup> For military and nonmilitary examples of Chinese cyber activities, see Zack Cooper, *Understanding the Chinese Communist Party's Approach to Cyber-Enabled Economic Warfare*, Washington, D.C.: Foundation for Defense of Democracies, September 2018b.

<sup>60</sup> Wang, 2012.

<sup>61</sup> In Chinese, the term is always *military-civil integration* or *fusion*, but the English term sometimes reverses the order. For a review of military-civil integration [军民结合] prior to 2015, see Elsa Kania, “In Military-Civil Fusion, China Is Learning Lessons from the United States and Starting to Innovate,” *Strategy Bridge*, August 27, 2019.

<sup>62</sup> OSD, 2020, p. 18.

<sup>63</sup> OSD, 2020, pp. 19–21. See also “Xi Jinping: Deeply Implement the Military-Civilian Integration Development Strategy and Strive to Create a New Situation for Strengthening the Army” [“习近平: 深入实施军民融合发展战略 努力开创强军兴军新局面”], *Chinese Communist Party News*, March 13, 2015.

<sup>64</sup> Alex Stone and Peter Wood, *China's Military-Civil Fusion Strategy: A View from Chinese Strategists*, Montgomery, Ala.: China Aerospace Studies Institute, Air University, 2020, p. 6.

innovation and advantages in certain sectors, including many with implications for both defense modernization and commercial innovation.<sup>65</sup>

### Greater Overseas Presence

Another follow-on effect of China's economic growth and integration into the global economy is the expanding overseas presence of Chinese citizens, companies, and investment, which has led China's leaders to direct the PLA to support and defend Chinese emerging overseas interests. A high-profile example of recent initiatives is China's BRI—officially announced in 2013 and building on ongoing Chinese overseas investment and infrastructure projects—and related initiatives, such as the Digital Silk Road, the Polar Silk Road, and the Space Silk Road or BRI Space Information Corridor.<sup>66</sup> Chinese leaders have also directed state-owned media companies to expand Chinese-language media for overseas Chinese audiences and vernacular media in third countries that promotes Chinese policy aims.

The military has been directed to increase its overseas presence since 2004, when General Secretary Hu Jintao delineated a new historic mission and tasks for the PLA. The tasks include consolidating the ruling status of the CCP; helping ensure China's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and domestic security to continue national development; safeguarding China's expanding national interests; and helping maintain world peace.<sup>67</sup> In recent years, China's leaders have explicitly linked overseas initiatives to PLA roles. In January 2019, Xi called on the central government leadership to establish a “security support system” for BRI.<sup>68</sup> In July 2019, PRC Minister of Defense Wei Fenghe stated that the PLA would “deepen military exchanges and cooperation” with other countries, in this case Caribbean nations and Pacific island countries, “under the framework of” BRI.<sup>69</sup> Minister Wei also noted that China would seek to increase BRI-related military cooperation via MOOTW, such as counterterrorism, peacekeeping operations, and HA/DR. International PLA activities include conducting multilateral and bilateral exchanges, exercises, and competitions; participating in international defense

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<sup>65</sup> Some of these include the 2005–2020 Medium-Term Technology Plan, the 13th Five-Year S&T Military-Civil Fusion Development Special Plan, Made in China 2025, and artificial intelligence and other sector-specific strategies.

<sup>66</sup> “Labuan Grants China Construction Bank First Digital Bank Approval,” *Belt & Road News*, August 28, 2019; Michael S. Chase, “The Space and Cyberspace Components of the Belt and Road Initiative,” in Nadège Rolland, ed., *Securing the Belt and Road Initiative: China's Evolving Military Engagement Along the Silk Roads*, Seattle, Wash.: National Bureau of Asian Research, Special Report No. 80, 2019.

<sup>67</sup> See Cooper, 2009.

<sup>68</sup> “On January 21, 2019, Xi Jinping Attended the Opening Ceremony of the Seminar on Key Provincial and Ministerial-Level Leading Cadres, Insisting on Bottom Line Thinking, and Focusing on Preventing and Resolving Major Risks, and Delivered an Important Speech” [“习近平 2019 年 1 月 21 日出席省部级主要领导干部坚持底线思维着力防范化解重大风险专题研讨班开班式并发表重要讲话”], Xuexi, January 22, 2019.

<sup>69</sup> “China to Deepen Military Cooperation with Caribbean Countries, Pacific Island Countries: Defense Minister,” Xinhua, July 8, 2019.

exhibitions; undertaking military medicine engagements, port visits, and HA/DR activities; engaging in a small number of noncombatant evacuation operations; and conducting UN peacekeeping operations.

As the PLA continues to increase its overseas activities despite its limited overseas basing footprint (its first overseas base is in Djibouti), PLA analysts have written about the importance of “strategic strong points” [战略支点], such as Chinese-operated ports abroad that provide easier and more cost-effective means of conducting military resupply than working with a foreign port authority or commercial entity.<sup>70</sup> Some PLA authors have cited provisions within the National Defense Transportation Law as key to incentivizing commercial companies to develop and maintain the types of port infrastructure that the PLA requires.<sup>71</sup>

Finally, although China’s leaders prioritize control over messaging to the domestic Chinese audience to “maintain stability,” China’s leaders have also directed Chinese media organizations to increase focus on overseas media presence to better “tell China’s stories to the outside world” in recent years.<sup>72</sup> Chinese officials and analysts also refer to the concept of *discourse* or *discursive power* [话语权] in conveying the legitimacy of China’s domestic and foreign policy approach to international audiences.<sup>73</sup>

### *Increasing Co-Optation of Nonmilitary Actors for Military Operations*

Recent initiatives have strengthened military and paramilitary integration through at least three mechanisms.<sup>74</sup> First, reforms in 2017 and 2018 placed China’s paramilitary forces, the People’s Armed Police, under sole responsibility of the military high command, the Central Military Commission.<sup>75</sup> These paramilitary forces now also command the CCG, which was

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<sup>70</sup> Isaac B. Kardon, Conor M. Kennedy, and Peter A. Dutton, *Gwadar: China’s Potential Strategic Strongpoint in Pakistan*, Newport, R.I.: U.S. Naval War College, China Maritime Studies Institute, China Maritime Report No. 7, August 1, 2020; Peter A. Dutton, Isaac B. Kardon, and Conor M. Kennedy, *Djibouti: China’s First Overseas Strategic Strongpoint*, Newport, R.I.: U.S. Naval War College, China Maritime Studies Institute, April 1, 2020.

<sup>71</sup> Kardon, Kennedy, and Dutton, 2020.

<sup>72</sup> Yang Wanli, “Xi: Improve Telling of China Story to World,” *China Daily*, September 5, 2019.

<sup>73</sup> Elsa Kania, “The Right to Speak: Discourse and Chinese Power,” Center for Advanced China Research website, November 27, 2018; Jichang Lulu, “United Nations with Chinese Characteristics: Elite Capture and Discourse Management on a Global Scale,” *Sinopsis*, June 25, 2018; Peter Mattis, “China’s International Right to Speak,” *China Brief*, Vol. 12, No. 20, October 19, 2012.

<sup>74</sup> Andrew Chubb traces legal and policy developments relevant for maritime coercion to the late 1990s, following China’s ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), including the 1998 Law on the Exclusive Economic Zone and Continental Shelf reserving “historic rights” to waters in excess of UNCLOS provisions, and the establishment of China Marine Surveillance (CMS) in 1999 and subsequent building of CMS’s fleet through the mid-2000s. See Andrew Chubb, “PRC Assertiveness in the South China Sea: Measuring Continuity and Change, 1970–2015,” *International Security*, Vol. 45, No. 3, Winter 2020–2021.

<sup>75</sup> OSD, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China 2019*, Washington, D.C., 2019, p. 52; Joel Wuthnow, *China’s Other Army: The People’s Armed Police in an Era of Reform*, Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, April 2019, p. 11.



previously controlled by the civilian government apparatus.<sup>76</sup> Second, joint training and exercises could increase military and paramilitary linkages. PAFMM units already train with and support naval and coast guard units in maritime disputes, reconnaissance, fisheries, logistical, and search and rescue-related tasks, activities which are subsidized by the government.<sup>77</sup> Third, PRC government subsidies and provision of equipment to paramilitary units include equipment that allows sharing of intelligence and other information with military units.

New legislation is likely to further augment paramilitary actors' operations and integration with military actors. The China Coast Guard Law passed in 2021 authorizes the CCG to employ small arms in cases in which foreign ships are found operating "illegally" in "waters under the jurisdiction of China."<sup>78</sup> Also, a draft amendment to strengthen the maritime role of China's paramilitary forces could also result in more frequent and innovative employment of paramilitary actors to advance Chinese claims in maritime and territorial disputes, as well as stronger military and paramilitary integration.<sup>79</sup>

## How Enablers Shape Chinese Gray Zone Tactics

This section highlights how the enablers we have described provide Beijing an increasing diversity of options for carrying out PRC gray zone tactics in the geopolitical, economic, military, and cyber/IO domains, which the next chapters will examine in more depth.

Geopolitically, as China plays a more active role in international forums, it has sought to shape regional and global institutions to endorse and align with Beijing's preferred policies. In the Indo-Pacific, for example, China has successfully pressured some members of ASEAN to limit other SCS claimants from working within ASEAN to build consensus on opposing Chinese coercion. Countries are concerned that growing Chinese overseas investment, including via large-scale projects under BRI, also provides opportunities for China to rapidly increase its influence in target countries or their neighbors, reshaping previous regional balances of power. China may also seek to leverage people-to-people linkages in the gray zone, targeting academic, cultural, ethnic, religious, and other groups via United Front proxies and other PRC state-supported initiatives.

Economically, growing Chinese power provides potential forms of leverage for curtailing or resuming bilateral trade, investment, tourism, and enrollments of Chinese students in foreign universities during periods of tension. Regional and international initiatives, such as BRI, and

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<sup>76</sup> For more information on the missions and roles of the People's Armed Police, see Wuthnow, 2019.

<sup>77</sup> OSD, 2019, p. 54. For more information on the PAFMM, see Erickson, 2016.

<sup>78</sup> "People's Republic of China Coast Guard Law" ["中华人民共和国海警法"], January 22, 2021, Article 47.

<sup>79</sup> Zhang Han, "China's Armed Police to Join Maritime Law Enforcement: Draft Amendment," *Global Times*, April 27, 2020.

increasing levels of foreign aid and investment more broadly provide opportunities for China to grow its economic influence in third countries.

The increasing global presence of Chinese companies and individuals, including in the Indo-Pacific, also provides potential access points for Beijing to leverage Chinese companies and individuals to act on its behalf. For example, authorities could leverage Chinese firms' commercial acquisitions that are near other countries' military bases to provide intelligence on U.S. or partner military activities or, potentially, to disrupt such activities. As Chinese technology and equipment are increasingly being exported overseas, such systems as "smart cities" could provide nonkinetic exploits into the target country's government, commercial, and critical infrastructure networks. For example, Huawei components are part of more than 120 smart cities in over 40 countries.<sup>80</sup> Some countries have also raised concerns that Chinese telecommunications equipment in overseas fifth-generation (5G) networks provides opportunities for PRC-directed data exfiltration.<sup>81</sup>

Another potential area is directly employing personnel or assets from PRC government organizations, SOEs, or companies to advance China's interests in territorial disputes, such as SOE dredgers for land reclamation in the SCS. An offshore oil platform also played a role in a standoff with Vietnam in 2014, which we discuss further in Chapter 6. With a growing CCP presence in large companies, party leaders can potentially further shape corporate decisionmaking or employ commercial tools in gray zone contingencies or operations.

Militarily, China's military-civil fusion strategy enables the proliferation of lower cost, advanced dual-use technology that the PLA can potentially harness in the gray zone. As one example, the PLAN successfully advocated for leveraging China's BeiDou satellite navigation system to conduct command and control for the maritime militia.<sup>82</sup> The PLA has also experimented with direct commercial support to the military, including e-commerce companies directly supporting the PLAAF with unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) for logistics,<sup>83</sup> and the PLAN experimenting with commercial support, including civilian replenishment.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> In the Indo-Pacific, these include Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Mongolia, the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, and Thailand; some of India's smart cities incorporate Hikvision artificial intelligence technology (Huawei, "Better Governance, Better Livelihood, and Better Industry: New ICT, Creating a Smart City Nervous System," overview presentation, June 10, 2018; Huawei, "Leading New ICT Building a Better Smart City," brochure, July 27, 2017; Alice Ekman, *China's Smart Cities: The New Geopolitical Battleground*, Paris: French Institute of International Relations, December 2019; Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, "AI Global Surveillance Technology," interactive webpage, undated).

<sup>81</sup> "Huawei and ZTE Handed 5G Network Ban in Australia," BBC News, August 23, 2018.

<sup>82</sup> Andrew S. Erickson and Conor M. Kennedy, "China's Maritime Militia," paper presented at the CNA Conference on China as a "Maritime Power," Arlington, Va., July 28–29, 2015.

<sup>83</sup> Kania, 2019.

<sup>84</sup> Conor M. Kennedy, *Civil Transport in PLA Power Projection*, Newport, R.I.: U.S. Naval War College, December 2019.

As the PLA's overseas operations continue to grow, strategic strong points could provide replenishment, temporary basing or power projection, and other types of support to PRC military or paramilitary actors undertaking gray zone activities.<sup>85</sup> The PLA and People's Armed Police could also strengthen overall engagement with BRI participants that may improve their abilities to undertake gray zone activities in China's periphery, particularly in South and Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands.<sup>86</sup>

Placing paramilitary forces under Central Military Commission command provides additional gray zone options to China's leaders. The PLAN, the CCG, and maritime militia forces have conducted coordinated operations following the recent reforms that DoD assesses "could improve paramilitary forces' ability to provide support to PLA operations under the command of the [military's] joint theater commands."<sup>87</sup> Aligning the PLAN and the CCG under the same chain of command could help military and paramilitary units strengthen intelligence sharing, training, personnel exchanges, operations, and decisionmaking during crisis.<sup>88</sup>

In the cyber/IO domain, Chinese government- and military-linked cyber activity for espionage and commercial gain is well documented, with numerous examples in the Indo-Pacific and other regions.<sup>89</sup> Possible missions with relevance to the gray zone could involve hackers targeting commercial or defense technology that fellow claimants use to monitor areas of territorial dispute, conducting espionage to determine relevant governmental personnel and policy deliberations, and spreading disinformation or refuting the target country's policies or claims. China also has a demonstrated history of employing commercial hackers for government-supported missions and could similarly opt to do so to support gray zone-related activities.<sup>90</sup> In the most recent case, the U.S. Department of Justice issued a subpoena in 2018 for Chinese

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<sup>85</sup> For a discussion of Chinese port investments as presenting potential opportunities for China to increase its overseas military presence, including in the Indo-Pacific, see Devin Thorne and Ben Spevack, *Harbored Ambitions: How China's Port Investments Are Strategically Reshaping the Indo-Pacific*, Washington, D.C.: C4ADS, 2017, pp. 21–22. See also Isaac B. Kardon, "China's Overseas Base, Places, and Far Seas Logistics," in Joel Wuthnow, Arthur S. Ding, Phillip C. Saunders, Andrew Scobell, and Andrew N.D. Yang, eds., *The PLA Beyond Borders: Chinese Military Operations in Regional and Global Context*, Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2021.

<sup>86</sup> On Chinese influence in the Pacific Islands, see Derek Grossman, Michael S. Chase, Gerard Finin, Wallace Gregson, Jeffrey W. Hornung, Logan Ma, Jordan R. Reimer, and Alice Shih, *America's Pacific Island Allies: The Freely Associated States and Chinese Influence*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-2973-OSD, 2019.

<sup>87</sup> OSD, 2019, p. 52.

<sup>88</sup> Wuthnow, 2019, p. 38.

<sup>89</sup> Jon R. Lindsay, Tai Ming Cheung, and Derek S. Reveron, eds., *China and Cybersecurity: Espionage, Strategy, and Politics in the Digital Domain*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2015; National Security Agency, "Chinese State-Sponsored Actors Exploit Publicly Known Vulnerabilities," cybersecurity advisory, October 2020; FireEye, "Suspected Attribution: China," webpage, undated.

<sup>90</sup> At least three public incidents that the U.S. Department of Justice has confirmed since 2006 have involved Chinese government-authorized or government-supported theft by commercial actors. See Center for Strategic and International Studies, "Significant Cyber Incidents Since 2006," webpage, undated. The data are undated, but the most recent cases listed when we accessed it had occurred in November 2020.

government-affiliated hackers who had compromised managed-service providers for businesses and governments in the United States, Japan, India, and other countries, stealing intellectual property and other private business data.<sup>91</sup> The indictment states that the hacking group was employed by an S&T company in Tianjin but acting “in association with” the Tianjin State Security Bureau, the local arm of the Ministry of State Security.

In the information realm, Chinese state media’s expansion overseas, including making PRC-approved media available in a greater number of foreign languages and cultivating allied and partner journalists, could shape regional countries’ media reporting on and audiences’ awareness of Chinese activities.<sup>92</sup> China has also established content-sharing agreements and leased radio time in other countries,<sup>93</sup> invested in local media outlets,<sup>94</sup> invited foreign journalists to China for training and high-profile interviews,<sup>95</sup> and organized conferences for international journalists.<sup>96</sup> Chinese organizations have also spread disinformation to foreign audiences.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> The Tianjin hacking group is one of multiple advanced persistent threat (APT) actors accused of operating in direct support of Ministry of State Security goals and missions (*People v. Zhu Hua and Zhang Shilong*, 1:18-cr-00891, S.D.N.Y., indictment temporarily unsealed December 20, 2018).

<sup>92</sup> For examples of these narratives and other tools, see Heidi Holz with Anthony Miller, *China’s Playbook for Shaping the Global Media Environment*, Arlington, Va.: CNA, 2020.

<sup>93</sup> Koh Gui Qing and John Shiffman, “Beijing’s Covert Radio Network Airs China-Friendly News Across Washington, and the World,” Reuters, November 2, 2015.

<sup>94</sup> Heidi Holz and Ryan Loomis, *China’s Efforts to Shape the Information Environment in the Mekong Region*, Arlington, Va.: CNA, 2020, p. ii.

<sup>95</sup> Louisa Lim and Julia Bergin, “Inside China’s Audacious Global Propaganda Campaign,” *The Guardian*, December 7, 2018.

<sup>96</sup> David O. Shullman, “Protect the Party: China’s Growing Influence in the Developing World,” Brookings Institution website, January 22, 2019.

<sup>97</sup> Holz and Loomis, 2020, p. ii.

## 4. China's Gray Zone Activities Against Taiwan

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Having laid out what drives and enables China to operate in the gray zone, we begin to show in this chapter how Beijing employs gray zone tactics against key U.S. allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific, starting with Taiwan.<sup>1</sup>

Beijing views Taiwan as a core interest and an integral part of China, so the island is a prime target for Chinese gray zone coercion. China uses extensive gray zone tactics against Taiwan and has, at times, tested new tactics there before deploying them elsewhere, making Taiwan an important case study. This chapter examines Chinese tactics against Taiwan from 1995 to 2020.

China initially embraced a relatively heavy handed and coercive approach toward Taiwan (1995–2008) before moderating its strategy to emphasize the benefits of unification (2008–2016) and then ramping up coercion against Taiwan again (2016–present). Since 1995, China has engaged in gray zone activities against Taiwan via geopolitical, economic, military, and cyber/IO means. Some tactics were episodic, cyclical, and higher profile, while others were more consistent lower-level activities that grew more widespread or intense over time. Taiwan responded through external and domestic actions, including investing in more defense ties and capabilities and strengthening legislation to counter Chinese infiltration. Its efforts have met with mixed success at most, and there is little evidence that Taipei's actions have stopped or discouraged China from employing any significant gray zone tactic. China is likely to continue to ramp up its use of various gray zone activities against Taiwan until at least 2024, with the hope that a more pro-China Taiwan leader can be elected during the 2024 presidential elections.

### Historical Context and Overview

Since 1995, Beijing has adopted three different overall approaches toward Taiwan. From 1995–2008, China embraced a relatively heavy hand toward Taiwan and was willing to use a variety of high-profile coercive tactics. From 2008 to 2016, China began implementing a more moderate approach that downplayed high-profile displays of coercion while emphasizing the benefits to Taiwan of integrating with mainland China. This led to China avoiding most coercive tactics. From 2016 to present, China again ramped up pressure against Taiwan. Three key factors drive these overall approaches: (1) PRC leadership changes and views toward Taiwan; (2) Taiwan leadership changes and approaches toward cross-strait issues; and (3) the growth in Chinese coercive capabilities over time.

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<sup>1</sup> On the approach of another major gray zone actor, Russia, in the Indo-Pacific region and its use of gray zone tactics, see Appendixes D and E.

First, individual Chinese leaders based their policies toward Taipei on their timelines for unification with Taiwan and assessment of whether the previous PRC approach toward Taiwan had worked. Having presided over the 1997 return of Hong Kong to China, CCP General Secretary Jiang Zemin (1989–2002) believed he could make rapid progress on Taiwan and aimed for an “early settlement” and unification with Taiwan by 2020.<sup>2</sup> His ambition contributed to a coercive PRC approach, and crises flared up in the Taiwan Strait during his tenure (1995, 1996, 1999). In contrast, his successor, General Secretary Hu Jintao (2002–2012), came to view China’s coercive tactics as backfiring and causing Taiwan to strengthen its defense relationship with the United States.<sup>3</sup> During his tenure, he moderated Beijing’s approach to Taiwan by downplaying coercion and emphasizing the benefits of integrating with China. Hu believed China’s immediate goal was to oppose independence and had a longer timeline to achieve unification.<sup>4</sup> General Secretary Xi (2012–present), however, regarded China’s prior approach on Taiwan as too soft, contributing to the rise of proindependence leaders. Under Xi, China has increased pressure on Taiwan, escalating grassroots activity targeting the Taiwan populace, particularly the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) strongholds of central and southern Taiwan.<sup>5</sup> Although there is debate about whether Xi has laid out a specific timeline for unification, he has noted that unification “is a historical conclusion drawn over the 70 years of the development of cross-strait relations, and a must for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation in the new era.”<sup>6</sup> Some experts assess that Xi suggested unification might be possible by 2049 because 2049 is the goal Xi set for national rejuvenation.<sup>7</sup>

Second, the PRC approach toward Taiwan has varied, depending on whether Taiwan leaders support unification or independence. China has used more coercion against proindependence

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<sup>2</sup> Jiang Zemin, “Build a Well-off Society in an All-Round Way and Create a New Situation in Building Socialism with Chinese Characteristics,” report delivered to the 16th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC), Beijing, November 8, 2002; Jianwei Wang, “Hu Jintao’s ‘New Thinking’ on Cross-Strait Relations,” *American Foreign Policy Interests*, Vol. 29, No. 1, 2007, p. 25; John M. Glionna, “China, U.S. Each Hold Major War Exercises,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 20, 2004.

<sup>3</sup> Shirley A. Kan, *China/Taiwan: Evolution of the “One China” Policy—Key Statements from Washington, Beijing, and Taipei*, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, RL30341, September 7, 2016, pp. 21–26.

<sup>4</sup> Wang, 2007, p. 32.

<sup>5</sup> Chien-min Chao, “Cross-Strait Relations Under Xi Jinping,” paper presented at the International Conference on New Cross-Strait Relations and Future Prospects, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, D.C., October 3–4, 2013.

<sup>6</sup> “Xi says ‘China Must Be, Will Be Reunified’ as Key Anniversary Marked,” Xinhua, January 2, 2019. See also Richard C. Bush, “8 Key Things to Notice from Xi Jinping’s New Year Speech on Taiwan,” blog post, Brookings Institution, January 7, 2019a.

<sup>7</sup> Some posit that negotiations to unify with Taiwan could take as long as negotiations to unify with Hong Kong (15 years). If 2049 is the final unification date, Beijing would need to launch the negotiation or unification process no later than 2035. See Katsuji Nakazawa, “Taiwan’s Tsai Shoots Down Xi’s Unification Road Map,” *Nikkei Asia*, July 18, 2019; Richard C. Bush, *From Persuasion to Coercion: Beijing’s Approach to Taiwan and Taiwan’s Response*, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, November 2019b; Jie Dalei, “Three Big Takeaways from Xi Jinping’s Taiwan Speech,” *Washington Post*, January 10, 2019.

leaders, mainly from the DPP, than against leaders who advocate for the status quo and eventual unification with China—Kuomintang (KMT) leaders. Jiang used more coercive tactics when President Lee Teng-hui (1988–2000) presided over the island’s first democratic leadership election in 1995 and became the first popularly elected president in 1996.<sup>8</sup> China viewed DPP leaders Chen Shui-bian (2000–2008) and Tsai Ing-Wen (2016–present) as continuing to push for independence.<sup>9</sup> China paused more coercive measures during KMT president Ma Ying-jeou’s rule (2008–2016).

A final critical factor shaping PRC tactics toward Taiwan is the increase in PRC resources and capabilities over time. The expansion of cross-strait political and socioeconomic exchanges, particularly from 2008 to 2016, afforded China more avenues of influence and more exchanges to disrupt or limit. From 1995 to 2019, China’s annual trade with Taiwan grew from \$2 billion to \$150 billion,<sup>10</sup> giving China considerably more economic leverage given that Taiwan’s economy is small relative to China’s.<sup>11</sup> During the same period, China’s significantly improved military capabilities enabled Beijing to use sophisticated assets or new means to pressure Taiwan—including nighttime operations in the Taiwan Strait, circumnavigation of Taiwan, and new cyber operations.

## Variety and Types of Chinese Tactics

### *Geopolitical Tactics*

China uses a variety of geopolitical tactics against Taiwan, as depicted in Figure 4.1. On the international front, China continues to block Taiwan from participating in international organizations (although China did allow Taipei to participate in some organizations from 2009 to 2016);<sup>12</sup> warn the United States of “provocative” Taiwanese activities in hopes that the United

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<sup>8</sup> Lee led the KMT during his presidency but endorsed more proindependence candidates after he stepped down from power.

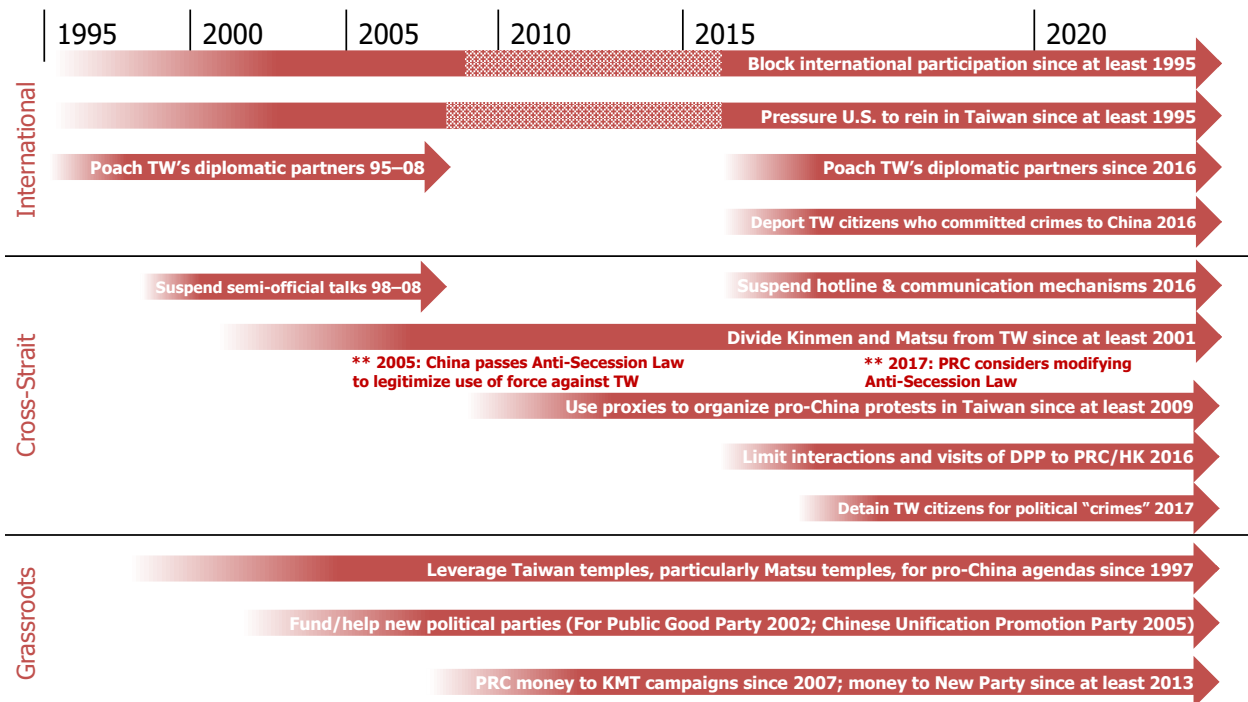
<sup>9</sup> Chen’s activities, including the 2004 referendum on whether Taiwan should buy more missile defense systems and whether the government should negotiate a framework for cross-strait stability with Beijing, challenged China’s efforts to unify with Taiwan. Tsai worked for both Lee and Chen.

<sup>10</sup> January 1995 to December 2019 data on annual trade are from Directorate General of Customs, Ministry of Finance, Taiwan (Bureau of Foreign Trade, “Trade Statistics,” Ministry of Economic Affairs of Taiwan, undated).

<sup>11</sup> In 2019, Taiwan’s real GDP (purchasing power parity) was \$1.14 trillion, and China’s was \$22.53 trillion. See Central Intelligence Agency, “Taiwan: Economy,” *World Factbook*, February 8, 2021b; Central Intelligence Agency, “China: Economy,” *World Factbook*, February 5, 2021a.

<sup>12</sup> For example, China allowed Taiwan to participate as an observer in the World Health Assembly in 2009 and as a guest of China in the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) in 2013. It is important to note that exclusion of Taiwan from these international organizations has economic implications for the island because it restricts the data, standards, and best practices these international organizations share with member countries. Without WHO membership, for example, Taipei does not receive firsthand updates on infectious diseases. Similarly, exclusion from ICAO also means that Taiwan does not have direct access to “vital international technical and operational

**Figure 4.1. Major PRC Geopolitical Gray Zone Activities Against Taiwan**



NOTES: Arrows indicate three or more cases of observed PRC activity over the specified period. Figure does not capture all PRC activities or tactics. \*\* indicates an individual activity. HK = Hong Kong; TW = Taiwan.

States would rein in moves that Beijing views as threatening cross-strait stability (since at least 1995, but most prominently from 1995 through 2008 and since 2016);<sup>13</sup> use diplomatic and political power to weaken Taiwan's influence and international relationships;<sup>14</sup> use diplomatic and political power to narrow Taiwan's international space by poaching its diplomatic partners

standards and information related to air navigation" (Ram S. Jakhu and Kuan-Wei Chen, "The Missing Link in the Global Aviation Safety and Security Network: The Case of Taiwan," in Anthony J. Masys and Leo S. F. Lin, eds., *Asia-Pacific Security Challenges: Managing Black Swans and Persistent Threats*, Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2018, p. 248). Instead, Taiwan must obtain or purchase this information through secondary sources. We have thus coded Taiwan's exclusion from these international organizations as both a geopolitical tactic and an economic tactic. See Jacques deLisle, "Taiwan in the World Health Assembly: A Victory, with Limits," Brookings Institution website, May 13, 2009; Shih Hsiu-Chuan, "Taiwan Only 'Guest' Due to China: ICAO," *Taipei Times*, September 26, 2013; Ralph Jennings, "Health Concerns Meet Politics amid Taiwan's WHO Exclusion," Associated Press, February 14, 2020a.

<sup>13</sup> Patrick E. Tyler, "As China Threatens Taiwan, It Makes Sure U.S. Listens," *New York Times*, January 24, 1996; Glionna, 2004; "China Presses U.S. to Rein in Taiwan's Chen," Reuters, May 29, 2007.

<sup>14</sup> China has pressured nondiplomatic allies of Taiwan to downgrade their relationships with the island, including to move Taiwan's representative offices to less-favorable locations or to ask Taiwan to remove references to the Republic of China or Taiwan on their overseas offices. See Russell Hsiao, "China's Intensifying Pressure Campaign Against Taiwan," *China Brief*, Vol. 18, No. 11, June 19, 2018; William A. Stanton, "Continuing PRC Efforts to Intimidate Taiwan and Its Friends," *Taiwan News*, February 24, 2020.



(1995–2008 and since 2016);<sup>15</sup> and pressure countries to extradite Taiwan citizens to China (since 2016).<sup>16</sup>

Bilaterally, China manipulates cross-strait relations to pressure Taiwan. China suspended semiofficial talks from 1998 to 2008 and has reduced high-level political and economic contacts since 2016.<sup>17</sup> Beijing passed the 2005 Anti-Secession Law to legitimize the use of force to unify with Taiwan and considered, but did not publicly specify, more conditions under which it would invade Taiwan in 2017.<sup>18</sup> Since at least 2009, China has used proxies (see discussion of proxies in the grassroots discussion in this section) in Taiwan to organize local pro-China or pro-unification rallies or counterprotests to publicly pressure Taiwanese leaders.<sup>19</sup> Since at least 2016, China has limited access and opportunities for proindependence leaders to travel to China

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<sup>15</sup> Jean-Pierre Cabestan, “Beijing’s Policy Towards President Tsai Ying-wen and the Future of Cross-Strait Relations,” *Journal of Diplomacy and International Relations*, Vol. 18, No. 1, Spring 2017.

<sup>16</sup> Various countries, including Armenia, Cambodia, Indonesia, Kenya, Malaysia, the Philippines, Spain, Thailand, and Vietnam, have extradited Taiwan nationals convicted of crimes to mainland China. See “Taiwan Lodges Protest After Armenia Deports Taiwanese Fraud Suspects to Mainland China,” *South China Morning Post*, September 8, 2016; “2 Taiwanese Deported to China from Philippines,” Focus Taiwan website, March 8, 2019; “Taipei Protests Jakarta’s Deportation of Taiwanese Suspects to China,” *Taiwan News*, August 4, 2017; “China Defends Deportation of Taiwan Citizens as Internationally Accepted,” Reuters, February 21, 2017.

<sup>17</sup> From 1999 to 2008, China also engaged in high-profile execution or shaming of Taiwanese spies. See John Pomfret, “Taiwanese Mistake Led to 3 Spies’ Executions,” *Washington Post*, February 20, 2000; Willy Wo-Lap Lam, “China Spy Drama Aims to Spook Chen,” CNN, January 21, 2004; David Lague, “China Executes Official Accused of Spying,” *New York Times*, August 8, 2006.

<sup>18</sup> Article 8 of Anti-Secession Law stipulates that Beijing may use nonpeaceful means against Taiwan “in the event that the ‘Taiwan independence’ secessionist forces should act under any name or by any means to cause the fact of Taiwan’s secession from China, or that major incidents entailing Taiwan’s secession from China should occur, or that possibilities for a peaceful reunification should be completely exhausted” (Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the United States of America, “Anti-Secession Law [Full text][03/15/05],” press release, March 15, 2005). Such experts as Alan Romberg have argued that the 2005 Anti-Secession Law provided a way for Hu Jintao to appear tough on Taiwan but defer the use of military force. See You Ji, “China’s Anti-Secession Law and the Risk of War in the Taiwan Strait,” *Contemporary Security Policy*, Vol. 27, No. 2, 2006; Jake Chung, “China Mulling More Conditions for Invasion: Report,” *Taipei Times*, February 9, 2017; Alan Romberg, “Cross-Strait Relations: In Search of Peace,” *China Leadership Monitor*, No. 23, Winter 2008.

<sup>19</sup> Although it is possible that China’s use of this tactic may have begun earlier than 2009, there are reports that Chinese proxy China Unification Promotion Party (CUPP) organized protests against the Dalai Lama’s visit to Taiwan in 2009. There is no reporting of similar protests against the Dalai Lama during his prior visit to Taiwan in 2001. Since 2009, Chinese proxies have organized pro-China protests against proindependence and prodemocracy activities in Taiwan related to Taiwan and Hong Kong and against the American Institute in Taiwan. In contrast, we have not seen Beijing allow large-scale Taiwan-related public protests in China. See J. Michael Cole, “The Return of Gangster Politics in Taiwan,” *The Diplomat*, February 26, 2014; Jason Pan, “Groups Support, Protest AIT Compound Unveiling,” *Taipei Times*, June 13, 2018a; Richard C. Bush, “American and Japanese Scholars View China’s Security and Foreign Policies,” Brookings Institution website, March 30, 2015; Jessica C. Weiss, *Powerful Patriots: Nationalist Protest in China’s Foreign Relations*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

and engage with PRC individuals.<sup>20</sup> China's 2017 NGO law further provided the legal basis for China to detain individual Taiwan citizens for political crimes.<sup>21</sup>

China is ramping up efforts to drive a wedge between Taipei and Kinmen and, to a lesser extent, Matsu, two groups of islands under Taiwan's control that sit less than 10 km off the coast of China. Kinmen and Matsu are KMT strongholds and were the first Taiwan counties to establish and expand links with China (see Figure 4.2).<sup>22</sup>

**Figure 4.2. Taiwan and Its Offshore Islands in the Taiwan Strait**



Several factors have driven the increased salience of these islands since 2016. First, China seeks to demonstrate that there is resistance within Taiwan to independence and that much could be gained from unification. China wants to use Kinmen and Matsu as experimental zones for

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<sup>20</sup> Cabestan, 2017, pp. 62–63.

<sup>21</sup> “Law of the People’s Republic of China on Managing Domestic Activities of Overseas Non-Governmental Organizations,” 2017; Benjamin Haas, “China Says It Has Detained Taiwanese Activist Missing Since 19 March,” *The Guardian*, March 29, 2017; Linda Lew, “Missing Taiwanese Professor Shih Cheng-Ping Detained in Mainland China over ‘Threat to National Security,’” *South China Morning Post*, November 13, 2019.

<sup>22</sup> Kinmen and Matsu established postal, transportation, and trade relations with mainland China in 2001. In 2015, Fujian Province signed an agreement to provide Kinmen with water. Leaders in Kinmen have further proposed three links: water, electricity, and bridges. See Edward Wong and Xiyun Yang, “Once a Redoubt Against China, Taiwan’s Outpost Evolves,” *New York Times*, September 16, 2011; “Kinmen Magistrate Opens Election Campaign Office,” Focus Taiwan website, October 18, 2018.

China's "one country, two systems" approach toward Taiwan.<sup>23</sup> General Secretary Xi's January 2019 "Message to Compatriots in Taiwan" mentioned the two sides should promote connectivity and could start with establishing four links with Kinmen and Matsu: electricity, natural gas, water, and bridges.<sup>24</sup> In August 2019, Beijing further exempted Kinmen, Matsu, and Penghu from the PRC ban on individual tourists travelling to Taiwan.<sup>25</sup> Second, China seeks to neutralize potential support the Taiwan military might receive from Kinmen and Matsu should China decide to conduct military operations, including amphibious invasion, against Taiwan.<sup>26</sup> Finally, increased ties could help China project police or military power onto the islands via improved infrastructure linkages.

At the grassroots level, China interferes in Taiwan's domestic politics, launching campaigns against specific Taiwan leaders and targeting the Taiwan populace more generally. In 2017, Yu Zhengsheng, then a member of China's Politburo Standing Committee, explained that China's approach toward Taiwan involves targeting one generation (the youth) and one stratum (the grass roots).<sup>27</sup> To do so, China seeks to leverage shared cross-strait ethnic identities, culture, and history in Beijing's favor. This includes developing cross-strait religious and cultural networks and influencing Taiwan temples, particularly Matsu temples, to support PRC agendas since at least 1997.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Some Chinese language media report that Kinmen County official Wu Cheng-tien recommended in August 2018 that Kinmen be a test site for China's one country, two systems approach. See Xu Chenpin [許陳品], "Xi's Five Points States Improve Cross-Strait Connectivity and Whether Kinmen and Matsu Can Be Pilot Sites for 'One Country, Two Systems'" ["习五点称两岸应通尽通 '一国两制' 能否金马先行"], *DW News*, January 7, 2019.

<sup>24</sup> Xi Jinping, "Working Together to Realize Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation and Advance China's Peaceful Reunification," speech at the meeting marking the 40th Anniversary of the Issuance of the Message to Compatriots in Taiwan, Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council, January 2, 2019. See also Amber Lin, "Will Kinmen, Taiwan's Frontline, Become the Next Crimea?" Pulitzer Center website, January 25, 2020; Liu Chin-tsai, "Localization of Cross-Strait Issues," *Taipei Times*, July 6, 2019.

<sup>25</sup> "China to Lift Individual Travel Ban for Taiwan's Offshore Counties," Focus Taiwan website, September 16, 2019.

<sup>26</sup> China is likely to seek to seize Kinmen and Matsu in a potential invasion of Taiwan. Given closer ties with China, one expert believes that many Kinmen residents are unlikely to resist a PRC invasion of Kinmen. See OSD, 2019, pp. 84–85; Nick Aspinwall, "6 km from China, Taiwan's Kinmen Charts Its Own Path," *The Diplomat*, September 4, 2018.

<sup>27</sup> Chia-Chien Chang and Alan H. Yang, "Weaponized Interdependence: China's Economic Statecraft and Social Penetration Against Taiwan," *Orbis*, Vol. 64, No. 2, February 2020, p. 323.

<sup>28</sup> In 1997, China sent a golden statue of the sea goddess Matsu to Taiwan to emphasize cross-strait cultural ties. Since then, China has elevated the importance of Matsu festivals and built connections with Taiwan temple associations and religious leaders to advocate for cross-strait ties. Temples play important roles in Taiwan elections and mobilize followers to engage in political activities. Some suspect that China has begun funding at least 30 Taiwan temples for pro-China political activities. See Chang and Yang 2020, p. 326; "China's Leaders Harness Folk Religion for Their Aims," National Public Radio, July 23, 2010; Lee Hsiao-feng, "Keep Matsu, Guan Gong from CCP's Interference," *Taipei Times*, January 4, 2020; "Taiwan Pilgrims Flock to Meizhou's Mazu Temple," *China Daily*, October 21, 2002; "Sea Goddess Statue Crosses Taiwan Straits for Blessing Tour," *China Daily*, September 23, 2017.

China also leverages Taiwan's political parties and proxies with links to organized crime. The For Public Good Party, a small fringe party with ties to the Hong Kong triad, was founded in Taiwan in 2002 to promote unification with China.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, China supported the Taiwan Red Party, established in 2017.<sup>30</sup> More influential than these smaller parties is the CUPP. CUPP is a pro-unification party whose founder, Chang An-Lo, was the former head of the Bamboo Union, one of Taiwan's most powerful criminal triads. Chang established CUPP in 2005 while hiding in China to avoid arrest by Taiwan. After Chang returned to Taiwan in 2013, CUPP became more active and willing to use violence or intimidation against prodemocracy or proindependence supporters in Taiwan.<sup>31</sup>

In addition to establishing new pro-China political groups in Taiwan, China also provides support to friendly political parties. China began funneling money to KMT campaigns since at least 2007.<sup>32</sup> In 2013, as it expanded grassroots efforts in Taiwan, China began investing more in groups beyond the KMT. This includes funding members of the New Party, a party that split from the KMT in 1993, to engage in pro-unification activities since at least 2013.<sup>33</sup>

### *Economic Tactics*

China embraces significant gray zone economic tactics against Taiwan (see Figure 4.3). Internationally, China invests in third countries to gain advantage over Taiwan. China has repeatedly offered investment, financial assistance, and loans to countries to switch recognition to China.<sup>34</sup> More recently, China has been offering countries the opportunity to join its BRI and is using BRI activities to strengthen China's position against Taiwan.<sup>35</sup> China is also pressuring

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<sup>29</sup> The For Public Good Party is related to the China Zhi Gong Party, a political party in China. China's United Front Work Department (UFW) supposedly provides financial support to the For Public Good Party. See Laurie Chen, "Fringe Party in Taiwan Calls on Triad 'Brethren in Hong Kong' Not to Join in Protests," *South China Morning Post*, July 26, 2019.

<sup>30</sup> J. Michael Cole, "Taiwan and CCP Political Warfare: A Blueprint," *Sinopsis*, December 27, 2019.

<sup>31</sup> There is suspicion that China funds CUPP and the Bamboo Union. Taiwan officials view CUPP as a key group to monitor, given that it is large, with 60,000 members, and has criminal links. CUPP has been active against prodemocracy and proindependence activists in Taiwan. In April 2014, for example, 500 CUPP followers sought to physically remove anti-Beijing protestors from the Taiwan parliament. See J. Michael Cole, "Nice Democracy You've Got There. Be a Shame if Something Happened to It," *Foreign Policy*, June 18, 2018a; Yimou Lee and James Pomfret, "Pro-China Groups Step Up Offensive to Win Over Taiwan," Reuters, June 25, 2019; Jason Pan, "'White Wolf,' Son Released, Blast Judicial System," *Taipei Times*, August 10, 2018c.

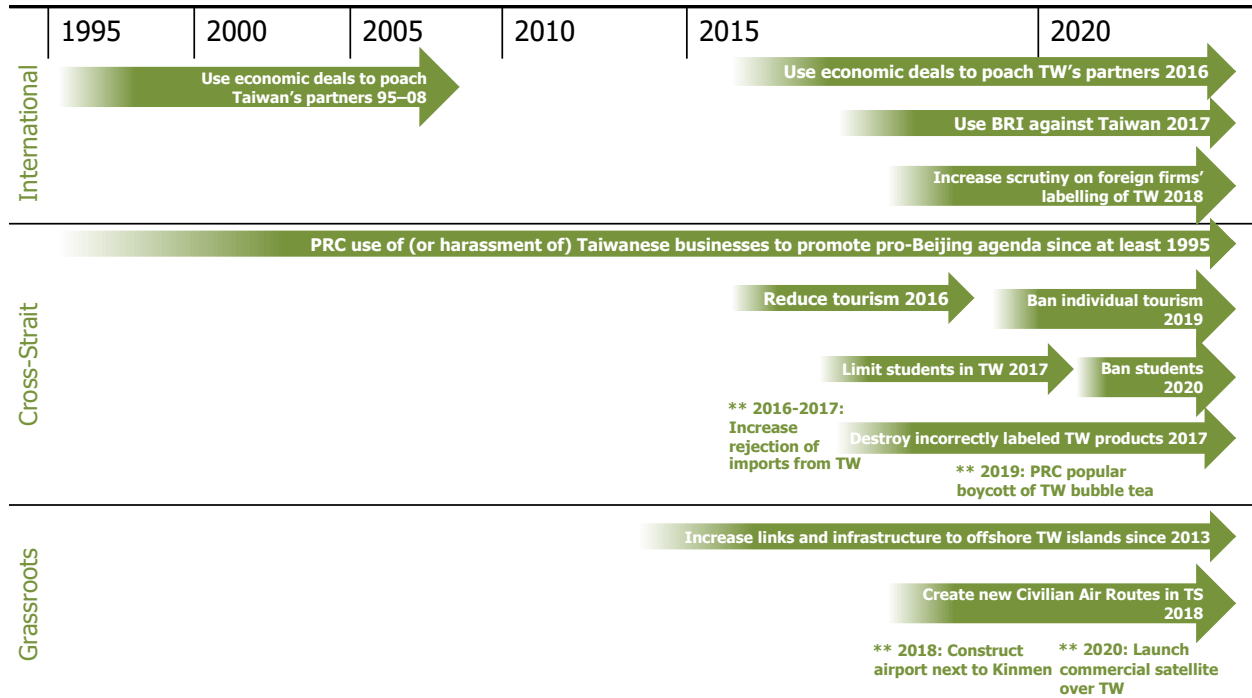
<sup>32</sup> Sophia Yang, "Taiwan's Ex-President Aided by Member of China's CPPCC," *Taiwan News*, December 6, 2019; Lawrence Chung, "Taiwan Investigates Spy's Claim Beijing Spent US\$200 Million Trying to Influence Presidential Election," *South China Morning Post*, November 23, 2019b.

<sup>33</sup> Jason Pan, "New Party's Wang, Others Charged with Espionage," *Taipei Times*, June 14, 2018b.

<sup>34</sup> China offered the Dominican Republic a \$3.1 billion package to switch recognition. See Jess Macy Yu and Ben Blanchard, "Taiwan Says China Dangled \$3 Billion to Grab Ally Dominican Republic," Reuters, April 30, 2018.

<sup>35</sup> In 2019, for example, China signed a BRI agreement with the Philippines to develop Fuga Island, which is in the northern Philippines, close to Taiwan. There was concern that this investment could be used to disrupt potential U.S.

**Figure 4.3. Major PRC Economic Gray Zone Activities Against Taiwan**



NOTES: Arrows indicate three or more cases of observed PRC activity over the specified period. Figure does not capture all PRC activities or tactics. \*\* indicates an individual activity. TS = Taiwan Strait; TW = Taiwan.

multinational or foreign firms to abide by Beijing's preferred Taiwan policies. In 2018, for example, Beijing ordered foreign firms operating in China, including the Marriott hotel chain and 30 airlines, to list Taiwan as part of China.<sup>36</sup> China has also punished firms that were importing goods labelled as made in Taiwan, such as Japan's Muji, or companies that were selling products that suggested the island is not part of China, such as The Gap.<sup>37</sup>

Bilaterally, China manipulates the cross-strait flow of goods and people. Beijing has a history of using and pressuring Taiwan corporate executives and firms operating in China to promote its agendas. This involves the use of carrots and sticks. On the carrot side, this includes providing Taiwan businesses with preferential policies to invest in or set up factories in China. On the stick

military support for Taiwan. As of October 2020, the deal appears not to have moved forward. See "Chinese Investors Plan Economic Zones in 3 Strategic Islands in the Philippines," *Straits Times*, August 5, 2019; Jens Kastner, "Duterte Unsettles Taiwan over Chinese Island Project," *Asia Sentinel*, August 18, 2020; "Kiribati Recognizes China over Taiwan, Joins Belt and Road Initiative," Silk Road Briefing website, October 11, 2019.

<sup>36</sup> Ralph Jennings, "China Demands Companies Stop Calling Taiwan a Country—Here's What They'll Do," *Forbes*, January 17, 2018.

<sup>37</sup> Michelle Toh, "China Fines Muji over Taiwan Label on Packaging," *CNN Business*, May 24, 2018.

side, this involves protests against Taiwan firms and harassment and detainment of business leaders since the 1990s.<sup>38</sup>

Although China increased cross-strait trade and travel during Ma Ying-jeou's tenure, Beijing has returned to embracing some measures to economically pressure Taiwan since 2016. In 2016 and 2017, for instance, China increased inspections and rejection of Taiwan agricultural goods, particularly those produced in DPP strongholds.<sup>39</sup> In 2017, Chinese customs heightened scrutiny and destroyed imports from Taiwan that failed to acknowledge Taiwan as a part of China.<sup>40</sup> Beijing reduced tourism to Taiwan by discouraging group tours in 2016 and banning individual travel in 2019.<sup>41</sup> In 2017, China halved the quota for PRC students in Taiwan and later suspended all PRC student programs in 2020.<sup>42</sup>

It is important to note that China has shown restraint in applying direct economic pressure against Taiwan and Beijing continues to provide significant economic incentives to Taiwan businesses and specific Taiwan groups in hopes that such incentives promote pro-China

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<sup>38</sup> In 2019, for example, when a branch of Taiwan bubble tea company Yifang supported Hong Kong protestors, Beijing allowed circulation of the information, leading to popular Chinese boycotts of Yifang and other Taiwan bubble tea brands. See Murray Scot Tanner, *Chinese Economic Coercion Against Taiwan: A Tricky Weapon to Use*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MG-507-OSD, 2007, pp. 113–134; “Bubble Tea Brawl: Taiwan Brands Face Mainland Boycott over Hong Kong Gesture,” Reuters, August 8, 2019.

For this PRC economic gray zone tactic of “harass, pressure, or co-opt businesses from the target region operating in China or competing for PRC products in the target,” we have the best public reporting of such Chinese activities against Taiwan. We know that China engages in this practice with respect to foreign firms in general, and we have evidence of such Chinese behavior against U.S. firms. For the remaining countries, we have scattered reporting on China at least seeking to co-opt business leaders who wish to continue to benefit from the China market and encourage them to lobby their governments to adopt policies that are less hostile toward China. In 2013, for instance, there was reporting of a delegation of Japanese executives visiting China during times of China-Japan tension and meeting with senior Chinese leaders. Chinese official media commented that these business leaders “appear to be increasing pressure on the hard-line Japanese prime minister to rein in his government’s hostility toward China” (Zhang Yunbi, “Japanese Business Leaders Visit China,” *China Daily*, November 20, 2013). We assess that China is likely seeking to harass, pressure, and co-opt Japanese, Vietnamese, and Indian corporate executives to carry out Chinese agendas (but with varying degrees of success). We have thus coded this tactic as a suspected PRC tactic against Japan, Vietnam, and India in our data analysis. See also Larry Diamond and Orville Schell, eds., *Chinese Influence & American Interests: Promoting Constructive Vigilance*, Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution Press, 2018; Yawen Chen and Hyunjoo Jin, “Beijing Urges U.S. Firms in China to Lobby Washington over Trade War,” Reuters, July 12, 2018; Isaac Stone Fish, “Opinion: Beijing Wants U.S. Business Leaders to Plead Its Case. Here’s Why They Shouldn’t,” *Washington Post*, January 18, 2021.

<sup>39</sup> In 2016, for example, 722 shipments of Taiwan food and cosmetics were rejected at Chinese ports. See U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *2017 Annual Report to Congress*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Publishing Office, 2017, p. 375. See also Kathrin Hille, “China’s ‘Sharp Power’ in Play in Taiwan,” *Financial Times*, November 21, 2018; “Cross-Strait Trade Down 4.5 Pct in 2016,” Xinhua, February 4, 2017.

<sup>40</sup> China destroyed products that were not labelled as “produced in Taiwan area” or “produced in Taiwan area, China.” See Tara Francis Chan, “China Is Destroying Imports That Say ‘Made in Taiwan’ as Part of Its Massive Political Crackdown,” *Business Insider*, January 17, 2018.

<sup>41</sup> This created massive losses. Taiwan’s tourism workers organized a 10,000 person protest in Taipei in 2016. See “China Bans Citizens from Travelling to Taiwan as Individual Tourists,” *Time*, July 31, 2019; Cabestan, 2017, p. 60.

<sup>42</sup> “China Halves Student Quota for Taiwan: Official,” Focus Taiwan website, July 5, 2017; Yang Sheng, “MOE Suspends Taiwan Education Programs for Mainland Students,” *Global Times*, April 9, 2020.

sentiment. Since 2016, China has not suspended any of the major cross-strait economic agreements signed earlier and has rolled out a number of additional incentives to benefit Taiwan firms and workers. This includes the 31 preferential policies in 2018 that decreased restrictions on investments from Taiwan firms and offered Taiwan firms equal treatment and opportunities as PRC firms, the 26 additional measures Beijing offered in late 2019 that allowed Taiwan nationals to use PRC consular services abroad and permitted Taiwan firms to participate in PRC 5G research, and the 11 new incentives in 2020 that aimed to help Taiwan companies operate in China during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Taiwan government and regional experts criticized these PRC measures as being influence efforts timed to sway Taiwan public opinion before local elections in 2018, prior to its presidential and legislative elections in January 2020, and prior to President Tsai Ing-Wen's inauguration in May 2020.<sup>43</sup> China's 14th Five-Year Plan (for 2021–2025), which lays out PRC development priorities, further seeks to sweeten the PRC economic policy package for Taiwan so that “the smart [Taiwan individuals] will realize that the reunification will be the only and best choice.”<sup>44</sup>

At the grassroots level, China uses a variety of economic activities to pressure Taipei. China leverages tourism and investment in Kinmen, Matsu, and Penghu to increase PRC activities on and control over these islands.<sup>45</sup> China also employs commercial activities near Taiwan to squeeze Taipei. In 2018, for example, China began constructing a major international airport 6 km from Kinmen in Xiamen City.<sup>46</sup> The same year, China established a new commercial air route (M503) and three extension routes (W121, W122, and W123) in the Taiwan Strait that violated cross-strait civil aviation agreements, complicated Taiwan Air Force operations, and encroached on Taiwan's airspace.<sup>47</sup> The PRC move was not a new idea—China had considered it

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<sup>43</sup> Ian C. Forsyth, “Analyzing China's 31 Measures for Taiwan,” China-U.S. Focus website, April 24, 2018; Nick Aspinwall, “Taiwan Rebukes Beijing's New 26 Measures for Cross-Strait Exchanges,” *The Diplomat*, November 9, 2019; Khari Templeman, *Taiwan's January 2020 Elections: Prospects and Implications for China and the United States*, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, December 2019; Chung Li-hua, “China Touts 11 New ‘Incentives,’” *Taipei Times*, May 17, 2020.

<sup>44</sup> Cao Siqi, “New 5-Year Plan to Tackle External Interference in HK and Taiwan,” *Global Times*, November 3, 2020. See also “Taiwan Compatriots Should Seize Opportunities Created by 14th Five-Year Plan: Spokesperson,” Xinhua, March 17, 2021.

<sup>45</sup> Kinmen, for instance, has allowed China to construct shopping centers and hotels since 2013. The islands are still key to deterring China, and Taiwan military forces remain on them. Experts fear that such PRC activities cede influence to the mainland and expose Taiwan's defense capabilities. See “Xiamen Huatian Group to Build Asia's Largest Hotel on Kinmen Island,” *China Daily*, April 2, 2013; Pat Gao, “Hubs of Cooperation,” *Taiwan Today*, January 1, 2016; Sarah Mishkin, “Taiwan's Small Islands Turn to Tourism to Stay Afloat,” *Financial Times*, June 3, 2013.

<sup>46</sup> George Liao, “Construction of Chinese Airport in Close Proximity to Taiwan's Kinmen Outrages Netizens,” *Taiwan News*, May 20, 2020.

<sup>47</sup> Taiwan views the M503 route as too close (7.8 km) to the Taiwan Strait centerline. The other routes could also interfere with flights between Taiwan and its offshore islands. See Yau Hon-min, “M503 and Beijing's ‘Three Warfares,’” *Taiwan Sentinel*, February 7, 2018; Matthew Strong, “Taiwan Demands Immediate End to China's 503 Route Over Taiwan Strait,” *Taiwan News*, January 4, 2018.

as early as 2007 but temporarily shelved the option when cross-strait relations improved under Ma.<sup>48</sup> Since at least 2019, there have been significant increases in the number of Chinese ships dredging sand near Taiwan-held islands in the Taiwan Strait, prompting elevated Taiwan Coast Guard patrolling activities.<sup>49</sup> In 2020, China launched commercial satellites from the Yellow Sea using a Long March–11 rocket that flew directly over Taiwan.<sup>50</sup> The launch involved use of military technology that challenged Taiwan’s defense of its airspace.

### *Military Tactics*

China uses a wide variety of military tactics against Taiwan (see Figure 4.4). Beijing has invested in more capabilities, deployed more assets, and expanded military facilities near Taiwan.<sup>51</sup> China, for example, had only one garrison of CSS-6 short-range ballistic missiles opposite Taiwan prior to 1998 and 400 ballistic missiles of all types covering Taiwan in 2000.<sup>52</sup> By 2009, the PLA had deployed between 1,050 and 1,150 short-range ballistic missiles opposite Taiwan. China currently has a significant advantage over Taiwan in the balance of military power: The two PLA theater commands responsible for Taiwan (the Eastern and Southern Theater) have more air, maritime, and ground force capabilities than Taiwan.<sup>53</sup>

Beginning in the mid-1990s, China has engaged in large cross-service shows of force against Taiwan. China conducted the most high-profile and escalatory activities against Taiwan in the mid-1990s. In July 1995, worried that President Lee was abandoning the one-China principle, China conducted missile tests and naval and air exercises near Taiwan, launching six surface-to-surface missiles around 100 miles from Taiwan. This was followed by more missile tests and naval exercises in August 1995 that involved live artillery and a simulated blockade of Taiwan, and a November 1995 PLA exercise that simulated amphibious landing and attacks on a Taiwan

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<sup>48</sup> Mark Stokes, “China’s Air Defense Identification System: The Role of the PLA Air Surveillance,” Arlington, Va.: Project 2049 Institute, May 5, 2014.

<sup>49</sup> Taiwan has repeatedly appealed to Beijing to rein in such “illegal” commercial dredging activities with no success. See Jake Chung, “Society Accuses China of Illegal Sand Extraction,” *Taipei Times*, May 8, 2020.

<sup>50</sup> Keoni Everington, “China Fires Long March Rocket Directly Over Taiwan,” *Taiwan News*, September 15, 2020c.

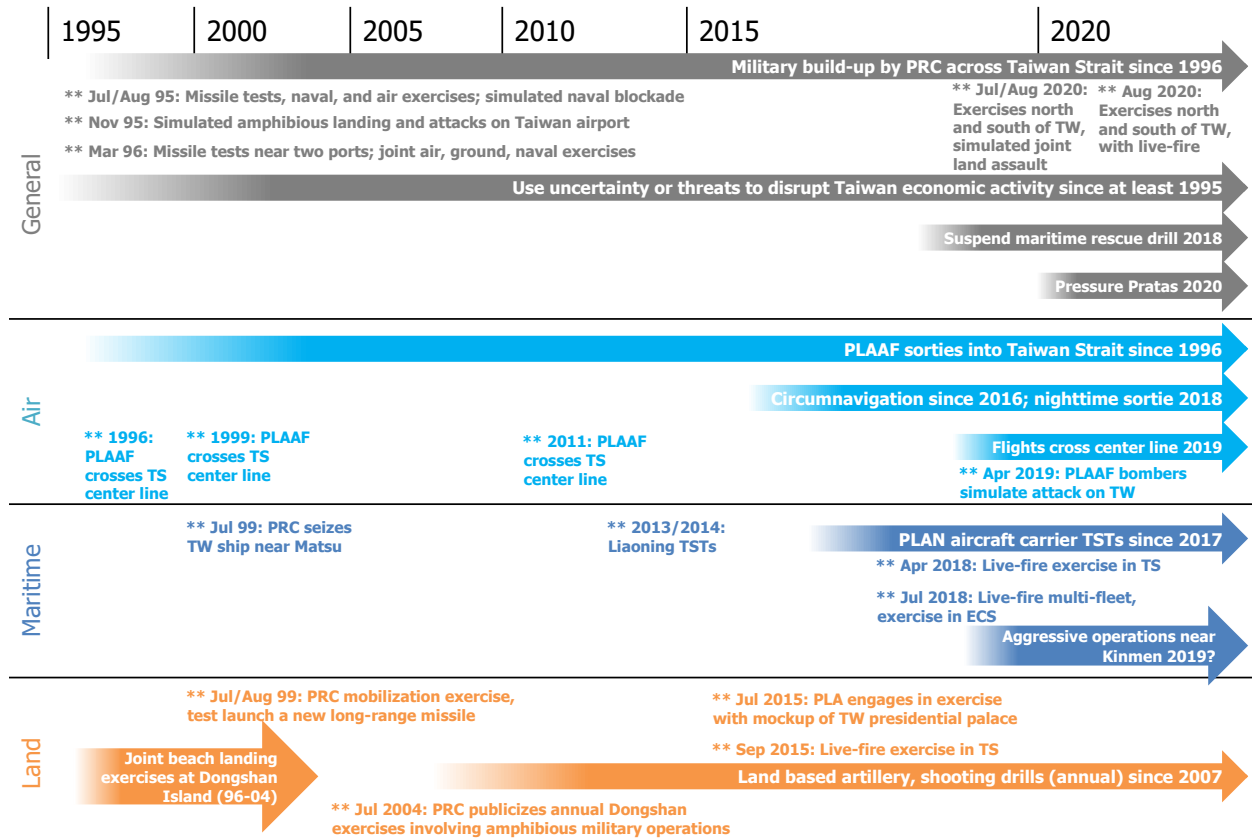
<sup>51</sup> Eric Heginbotham, Michael Nixon, Forrest E. Morgan, Jacob L. Heim, Jeff Hagen, Sheng Li, Jeffrey Engstrom, Martin C. Libicki, Paul DeLuca, David A. Shlapak, David R. Frelinger, Burgess Laird, Kyle Brady, and Lyle J. Morris, *The U.S.-China Military Scorecard: Forces, Geography, and the Evolving Balance of Power, 1996–2017*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-392-AF, 2015; Roger Cliff, *China’s Military Power: Assessing Current and Future Capabilities*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015; Mark Stokes, “Expansion of China’s Ballistic Missile Infrastructure Opposite Taiwan,” Arlington, Va.: Project 2049 Institute, May 5, 2014.

<sup>52</sup> U.S.-China Security Review Commission, *The National Security Implications of the Economic Relationship Between the United States and China*, Washington, D.C., July 2002, p. 161.

<sup>53</sup> OSD, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China 2010*, Washington, D.C., 2010, pp. 1–2; for more recent figures, see OSD, 2020, pp. 164–166.



**Figure 4.4. Major PRC Military Gray Zone Activities Against Taiwan**



NOTES: Arrows indicate three or more cases of observed PRC activity over the specified period. Figure does not capture all PRC activities or tactics. \*\* indicates an individual activity. TS = Taiwan Strait; TST = Taiwan Strait transit; TW = Taiwan.

airport. As Taiwan geared up for its first direct presidential elections in March 1996, China massed over 100,000 troops in Fujian Province and engaged in air and naval exercises. The exercises involved live fire and launching missiles near Taiwan’s two largest port cities, Keelung and Kaohsiung. These PRC activities did not yield favorable results: Taiwan held the 1996 and subsequent elections, and PRC actions may have driven some Taiwan voters to support Lee. The PRC’s threatening behavior led the United States to urge Taiwan’s political leaders to be more restrained in their efforts to promote Taiwan’s role in international society. But the behavior also led to an increase in U.S. defense planning and engagements with Taiwan and contributed to the 1997 revision of U.S.-Japan defense guidelines, which helped position Japan to potentially

support the United States in future Taiwan contingencies.<sup>54</sup> Beijing's use of coercive force also highlighted to Asia the growing PRC military threat.<sup>55</sup>

Since then, China has been more cautious about use of high-intensity military tactics. For example, in July and August 1999 and in response to then-Taiwan President Lee's remarks that China-Taiwan relations should be state to state rather than based on the one-China policy, Beijing did not use live fire but did engage in mobilization exercises along its southern coast across from Taiwan and launched a new long-range missile far from Taiwan's waters.<sup>56</sup> The PRC's reduced emphasis on high-profile displays of force does not mean that Beijing has ruled out the possible future use of force—indeed, the 2005 Anti-Secession Law spells out conditions under which China may use force.<sup>57</sup>

Recently, Beijing has embraced more-escalatory tactics in response to the DPP's return to power in 2016, growing U.S.-Taiwan defense ties, and more U.S. military operations near Taiwan. In 2018, China ended the limited cooperative contacts it had held with the Taiwan Coast Guard in the form of the joint maritime rescue drills the two sides had engaged in since 2010.<sup>58</sup> Separately, in July and August 2019, China conducted exercises at both ends of the Taiwan Strait, in the SCS and ECS, to maintain control of air and sea around Taiwan. The exercise came shortly after the United States approved a \$2.2 billion arms sale to Taiwan.<sup>59</sup> In August 2020, China engaged in four simultaneous military drills in three major maritime regions north and

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<sup>54</sup> Chinese actions against Taiwan in 1996 affected Japan, and many in Japan viewed a Chinese use of force against Taiwan as a serious security threat to Japan. Some of the missiles that China launched landed within 100 km of Okinawa. The USS *Independence*, which the United States sent near Taiwan during the crisis, was also homeported in Japan. See Michael Green, "The Challenges of Managing U.S.-Japan Security Relations After the Cold War," in Gerald L. Curtis, ed., *New Perspectives on U.S.-Japan Relations*, Tokyo: Japan Center for International Exchange, 2000; Qingxin Ken Wang, "Japan's Balancing Act in the Taiwan Strait," *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 31, No. 3, September 2000.

<sup>55</sup> Robert Ross, "The 1995-96 Taiwan Strait Confrontation: Coercion, Credibility, and the Use of Force," *International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 2, Fall 2000, pp. 94–118.

<sup>56</sup> There was also no major cross-service activity close to Taiwan in 1999. Similarly, although Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji warned Taiwan voters against choosing a proindependence leader during Taiwan's 2000 presidential elections, there were no major PLA movements against Taiwan then. See Seth Faison, "Despite Maneuvers, China Seems Cautious on Taiwan," *New York Times*, July 29, 1999a; Seth Faison, "In Unusual Announcement, China Tells of a Missile Test," *New York Times*, August 3, 1999b; "Taiwan's Unnerving President Does It Again," *The Economist*, July 17, 1999; Clay Chandler, "China Threatens Voters in Taiwan: Premier Issues Warning Near Election," *Washington Post*, March 16, 2000.

<sup>57</sup> China may use force if there is a "Formal declaration of Taiwan independence; Undefined moves toward Taiwan independence; Internal unrest in Taiwan; Taiwan's acquisition of nuclear weapons; Indefinite delays in the resumption of cross-strait dialogue on unification; Foreign intervention in Taiwan's international affairs; and Foreign forces stationed on Taiwan" (OSD, 2019, p. 83). See also Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the United States of America, 2005.

<sup>58</sup> Huang Tzu-ti, "China Unilaterally Ceases Joint Maritime Rescue Drill with Taiwan," *Taiwan News*, October 25, 2018.

<sup>59</sup> Ryan Pickrell, "China Kicks off Military Drills near Taiwan After Warning It's Willing to Fight over the Island," *Business Insider*, July 29, 2019.

south of Taiwan that involved live-fire exercises in some locations.<sup>60</sup> Similarly, in 2020, China began exerting more pressure on Pratas, a Taiwan-controlled island located near China's Hainan Island, and rumors spread of potential PRC interest in seizing the island to pressure Taipei.<sup>61</sup> By September, China began flying bombers and fighter jets, sending navy vessels, and engaging in exercises near Pratas.<sup>62</sup>

The increased frequency and variety of PRC military tactics against Taiwan have caused some to suspect that China is “waging a campaign of attrition” against Taiwan, stressing the island's defense capabilities and defense budget.<sup>63</sup> There is also growing concern over the PLA's ability to conduct low intensity conflict and military operations against Pratas; Itu Aba/Taiiping Island; and, potentially, Kinmen, Matsu, and Penghu.<sup>64</sup>

China has also used cross-strait tensions, including military exercises and threats, to cause financial pain for Taiwan. PRC threats, for example, have made Taiwan and international investors nervous about buying or holding Taiwan stocks—Taiwan's stock market experienced significant selloffs in July 1995, July 1999, January 2016, and March and May 2000 following PRC warnings against proindependence activities.<sup>65</sup> During the 1995–1996 Taiwan Strait Crisis, China's launching of missiles near Taiwan's two largest port cities disrupted commercial port activities and flights.<sup>66</sup>

## Air

China actively uses coercive airpower against Taiwan. PRC air assets began flying in the Taiwan Strait during the 1995–1996 crisis, crossing the centerline.<sup>67</sup> By 2005, China was flying around 1,220 to 1,380 sorties annually in the Taiwan Strait.<sup>68</sup> This number increased to around

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<sup>60</sup> Liu Xuanzun, “PLA Holds Concentrated Military Drills to Deter Taiwan Secessionists, US,” *Global Times*, August 23, 2020.

<sup>61</sup> Keoni Everington, “China to Dispatch 2 Aircraft Carriers Near Taiwan for War Games,” *Taiwan News*, May 27, 2020b; Keoni Everington, “China Warns it Could Turn Military Exercises into Invasion of Dongsha, Penghu, and Taiwan,” *Taiwan News*, May 15, 2020a.

<sup>62</sup> Michael Mazza, “Signaling from Chinese Military Exercises Around Taiwan,” Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, October 7, 2020; “Taiwan Slams China for Multiple Incursions into Its ADIZ,” Focus Taiwan website, September 10, 2020.

<sup>63</sup> Ben Blanchard, “Taiwan's Armed Forces Strain in Undeclared War of Attrition with China,” Reuters, September 26, 2020b.

<sup>64</sup> “Taiwan-China Low-Intensity Conflict Possible: Analysts,” *Taipei Times*, July 25, 2020; OSD, 2019, p. 114.

<sup>65</sup> Tanner 2017, p. 92; Faith Hung, “Taiwan Stock Selloff Seen Continuing as New President Takes Power,” Reuters, January 22, 2016.

<sup>66</sup> Ross, 2000.

<sup>67</sup> China also crossed the centerline in 1999. See “Fighter Incursion a Display of China's Displeasure at Taiwan-US Ties: Expert,” *Taipei Times*, April 3, 2019.

<sup>68</sup> Bonnie S. Glaser, “Military Confidence-Building Measures: Averting Accidents and Building Trust in the Taiwan Strait,” *American Foreign Policy Interests*, Vol. 27, No. 2, 2005, p. 92.

2,000 patrols a year by late 2019.<sup>69</sup> The PLA began longer distance bomber flights through the Miyako Strait in 2013 and Bashi Channel in 2015 before circumnavigating Taiwan in 2016.<sup>70</sup>

Figure 4.5 shows a significant increase in PLA bomber and fighter flights around and near Taiwan since 2016. The PLA was particularly active in 2017 and 2018. In 2018, the PLA experimented by conducting three consecutive days of circumnavigation; two simultaneous circumnavigations in different directions; and the first nighttime circumnavigation.<sup>71</sup> In 2019, Chinese experts warned that if the United States and Taiwan continue to engage in provocative activities, the PLA may no longer keep its activities to the west of the Taiwan Strait centerline. If needed, the PLA may even patrol the airspace above Taiwan to demonstrate Beijing's control.<sup>72</sup> In 2020, PRC experts explicitly called for the PLAAF to send fighter jets over Taiwan if "a U.S. military aircraft flew over the island."<sup>73</sup> In 2020, PLA aircraft increasingly crossed the Taiwan Strait centerline and engaged in escalatory tactics, such as locking radar on Taiwan aircraft.<sup>74</sup> In September 2020, 37 Chinese military aircraft crossed the centerline within two days; shortly thereafter, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that "there is no so-called median line."<sup>75</sup> As of October 2020, China conducted 1,710 military aircraft sorties into Taiwan's ADIZ in 2020, of which 219 sorties were in the southwest portion of ADIZ and 49 sorties crossed the centerline.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Lawrence Chung, "Chinese Military Aircraft Fly Close to Taiwan, Island's Defence Ministry Says," *South China Morning Post*, January 23, 2020.

<sup>70</sup> Derek Grossman, Nathan Beauchamp-Mustafaga, Logan Ma, and Michael S. Chase, *China's Long-Range Bomber Flights: Drivers and Implications*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-2567-AF, 2018; Edmund J. Burke, Timothy R. Heath, Jeffrey W. Hornung, Logan Ma, Lyle J. Morris, and Michael S. Chase, *China's Military Activities in the East China Sea: Implications for Japan's Air Self-Defense Force*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-2574-AF, 2018.

<sup>71</sup> "Taiwan Military on High Alert as PLA Aircraft Circumnavigate Taiwan Again: Rapid Improvements Warrant Attention" ["台军高度紧张解放军战机再次绕台:进步之快值得警惕"], Sina News, December 19, 2018.

<sup>72</sup> "Editorial: Mainland Aircraft Cross 'Taiwan Strait Center Line'? Hope It's True" ["社评:大陆军机飞越'台海中线'?希望是真的"], *Global Times*, March 31, 2019. Beijing also considered establishing an ADIZ over Taiwan as early as 2007. Some Chinese experts pointed out that Taiwan is an internal issue and that there was no need to declare an ADIZ. Many believe that establishing air control over Taiwan and the Taiwan Strait would help China resolve problems in the ECS and SCS. See Stokes, 2014.

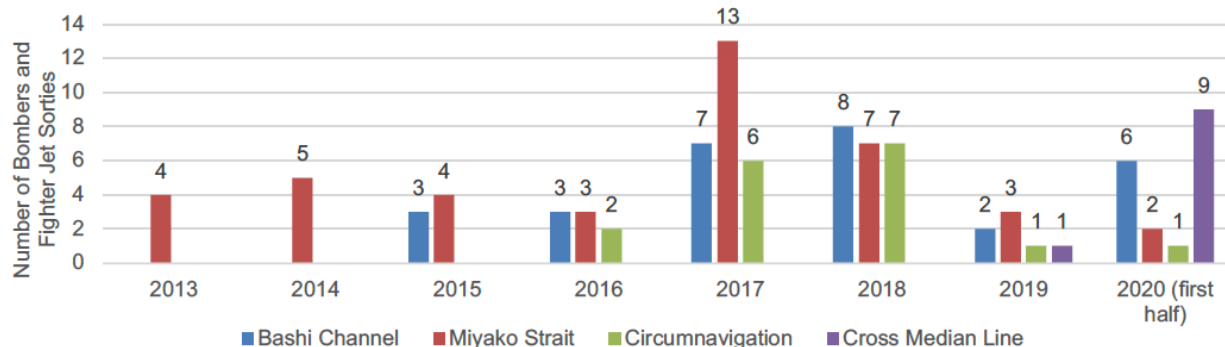
<sup>73</sup> Hu Xijin, "PLA Could Send Jets over Taiwan to Defend Sovereignty If US Military Jets Fly over Island," *Global Times*, October 24, 2020.

<sup>74</sup> Yimou Lee and Ben Blanchard, "'Provocative' China Pressures Taiwan with Fighters, Fake News Amid Virus Outbreak," Reuters, March 2, 2020.

<sup>75</sup> Brad Lendon, "Almost 40 Chinese Warplanes Breach Taiwan Strait Median Line; Taiwan President Calls It a 'Threat of Force,'" CNN, September 21, 2020.

<sup>76</sup> "Chinese Warplanes Make Most Median Line Crossings in 30 Years (Update)," Focus Taiwan website, October 7, 2020.

**Figure 4.5. PRC Bomber and Fighter Flights Near Taiwan, January 2013–June 2020**



SOURCES: Grossman et al., 2018; OSD, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China 2018*, Washington, D.C., 2018, p. 119, and various media sources.

NOTES: *Circumnavigation* refers to flights that flew through both the Bashi Channel and the Miyako Strait and includes the counts displayed for the Bashi Channel and Miyako Strait. The figure does not count flights by transport or surveillance aircraft.

Chinese aircraft have also conducted a number of exercises near Taiwan. This includes participating in live-fire exercises near Taiwan,<sup>77</sup> simulated air-to-air confrontations,<sup>78</sup> and a simulated attack on the southern and southeastern parts of the island.<sup>79</sup> China is also using UAVs, such as the Soar Dragon large spy UAV, to conduct operations near Taiwan, including to monitor a U.S. naval transit of the Taiwan Strait in mid-2019.<sup>80</sup>

### Maritime

On the maritime side, the PLAN has long engaged in maritime patrols and transits of the Taiwan Strait to demonstrate its resolve to unify with Taiwan, although there are no publicly confirmed cases of PLAN vessels crossing the Taiwan Strait centerline.<sup>81</sup> As of October 2020, China had conducted 1,029 military vessel sorties into Taiwan’s ADIZ in 2020.<sup>82</sup> China’s two aircraft carriers, *Liaoning* and *Shandong*, approached Taiwan’s maritime periphery 12 times from 2013 to 2019.<sup>83</sup> Since 2017, China has conducted at least one aircraft carrier transit per year.

<sup>77</sup> “Chinese Air Force Conducts Drill Around Taiwan,” Focus Taiwan website, April 26, 2018.

<sup>78</sup> Kristin Huang, “Chinese Air Force’s Drill ‘Aimed at Signalling Deterrent Around Taiwan,’” *South China Morning Post*, April 2, 2020a.

<sup>79</sup> Matthew Strong, “China Bombers Simulated Attack on Taiwan: Foreign Minister Joseph Wu,” *Taiwan News*, April 17, 2019.

<sup>80</sup> David Axe, “China Has a Bunch of High-Tech Spy Drones Now Too,” *National Interest*, March 13, 2020.

<sup>81</sup> Huang Tzu-ti, “Taiwan Strait Median Line Coordinates Revealed,” *Taiwan News*, July 30, 2019.

<sup>82</sup> “Chinese Warplanes . . .,” 2020.

<sup>83</sup> “Chinese Military Aircraft Patrol 2000 Times Per Year” [“中國軍機戰巡台海 一年 2000 架次”], *Liberty Times*, November 13, 2019.

The PLAN has engaged in repeated maritime exercises to pressure Taipei, particularly in the past few years. In April 2018, for example, the PLAN conducted a live-fire drill in the Taiwan Strait while the PLAAF was circumnavigating Taiwan for three consecutive days.<sup>84</sup> Two months later, in June, PLAN held another combat drill in the Taiwan Strait and Bashi Channel that involved the Type 052C destroyer for the first time.<sup>85</sup> The next month, the PLAN launched a large, multifleet, live-fire exercise in the ECS that involved a drill area the size of Taiwan and a complex, joint operation exercise designed to simulate combat against Taipei. The exercise was intended to deter Taiwan independence and U.S. cooperation with Taiwan and came after the USS *Mustin* and USS *Benfold* had sailed through the Taiwan Strait two weeks earlier.<sup>86</sup>

There are indications that the CCG and maritime militia may step up their presence and activities in the Taiwan Strait.<sup>87</sup> In 2018, there was one report of a CCG vessel trying to block resupply of Kinmen.<sup>88</sup> In 2019, China appointed Rear Admiral Wang Zhongcai, former deputy chief of staff of the East Sea Fleet, to become the new CCG commander. His appointment elevated the CCG, and his navy experience focused on Taiwan and Japan suggests that the CCG could become bigger and better armed, could come to be more integrated with PLAN operations, and could also expand its operations against Taiwan and Japan.<sup>89</sup> In March 2020, there were also two incidents of Chinese fishing boats, likely the maritime militia, using aggressive tactics against Taiwan coast guard and patrol vessels near Kinmen.

## Land

In terms of ground forces, China continues to amass military force opposite Taiwan and has engaged in large-scale land exercises opposite the Taiwan Strait and live-fire and simulated attacks on Taiwan targets. China conducted some of the most escalatory exercises in the 1990s. Under Hu Jintao, China first scaled down in 2004 and then, in 2005, canceled the Dongshan Island exercises in 2005, which had involved annual large-scale PLA maneuvers including joint beach landing drills opposite Taiwan since 1996.<sup>90</sup> By 2007, the PLA had switched to smaller-scale annual artillery, shooting, and other exercises, including at Fujian's Shishi shooting

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<sup>84</sup> Minnie Chan, "Has Beijing Just Put the Finishing Touches to Its Battle Plan to Take Back Taiwan?" *South China Morning Post*, April 19, 2018.

<sup>85</sup> "Chinese Warships Drill in Waters Near Taiwan," Reuters, June 26, 2018.

<sup>86</sup> Kristin Huang, "China Launches Live-Fire Drill to 'Test Combat Strength Against Taiwan,'" *South China Morning Post*, July 19, 2018; OSD, 2019, p. 23.

<sup>87</sup> Huang Hsin-po and Jake Chung, "Officials Warn of Chinese Militia," *Taipei Times*, April 17, 2020.

<sup>88</sup> Eli Huang, "China's Coastguard Fuelling Tensions in the Taiwan Strait," *The Strategist*, February 5, 2019.

<sup>89</sup> Tsukasa Hadano, "China Packs Coast Guard with Navy Personnel," *Nikkei Asia*, September 25, 2019; Ying Yu Lin, "Changes in China's Coast Guard," *The Diplomat*, January 30, 2019.

<sup>90</sup> The 2001 exercise was one of the largest involving all three PLA services. See "Maneuver Planned at Dongshan Island," *China Daily*, July 11, 2004; Arthur S. Ding and Paul A. Huang, "Taiwan's Paradoxical Perceptions of the Chinese Military: More Capable But Less Threatening?" *China Perspectives*, Vol. 4, 2011, p. 46.

range.<sup>91</sup> Although most recent reporting on PLA activities to pressure Taiwan has focused on PLAAF or PLAN activities, the PLA Army continues to play a key role in signaling toward Taiwan. In July 2015, for example, Chinese media publicized PLA ground troops engaging in a simulated assault on buildings that resemble Taiwan's presidential office and other key buildings.<sup>92</sup> This exercise, coupled with the annual PLA ground force drill in September 2015 opposite Taiwan, was likely targeted at coercing Taipei months prior to its January 2016 presidential elections.<sup>93</sup>

### *Cyber and Information Operations Tactics*

China also uses a variety of cyber/IO tactics against Taiwan (see Figure 4.6).<sup>94</sup> China had had minimal cyber capabilities during the 1995–1996 Taiwan Strait Crisis but, by 1997, had set up a 100-member elite corps to explore ways to use computer viruses to interrupt military communications and public broadcasting. By 1999, Chinese cyber warfare units had begun launching periodic cyberattacks against Taiwan, Japan, and the United States.<sup>95</sup> Since 2000, Chinese hackers have tried numerous times to “harass, disrupt, or paralyze Taiwan’s financial, transport, shipping, military, and other networks.”<sup>96</sup> Experts assess that Taiwan is the top target of PRC cyber/IO outside China: China uses Taiwan as a springboard to launch large cyber offensives and test new tactics.<sup>97</sup>

China engages in significant cyber/IO campaigns against the Taiwan government, military, economy, and populace. In 2019, Taiwan officials estimated that China launched about 18 million cyberattacks on the island monthly, constituting the majority of all cyberattacks on Taiwan.<sup>98</sup> In recent years, PRC cyberattacks on Taiwan’s government are becoming more difficult to detect, and the success rate of incursions is rising.<sup>99</sup> China is increasing cyber

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<sup>91</sup> Huang Tzu-ti and Keoni Everington, “Taiwan to Hold Han Kuang Military Exercise to Counter PLA Live Fire Drill,” *Taiwan News*, April 16, 2018.

<sup>92</sup> Victor Robert Lee, “Satellite Imagery: China Staging Mock Invasion of Taiwan?” *The Diplomat*, August 9, 2015.

<sup>93</sup> “Chinese Military Will Hold Live-Fire Exercises in the Taiwan Strait” [“中国军方将于台湾海峡举行实弹军事演习”], BBC News, September 10, 2015.

<sup>94</sup> As noted in our methodology discussion in Chapter 1, we include military cyber activities under cyber/IO tactics.

<sup>95</sup> Desmond Ball, “China’s Cyber Warfare Capabilities,” *Security Challenges*, Vol. 7, No. 2, Winter 2011.

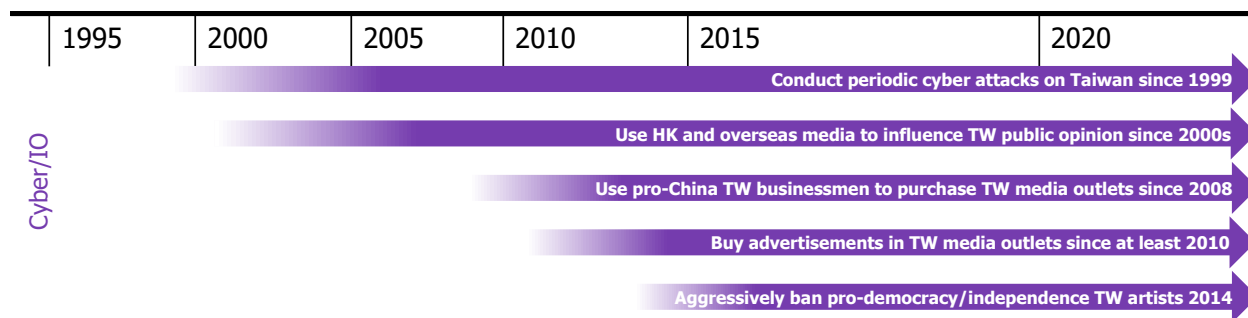
<sup>96</sup> Tanner, 2007, p. 97.

<sup>97</sup> Russell Hsiao, “Critical Node: Taiwan’s Cyber Defense and Chinese Cyber-Espionage,” *China Brief*, Vol. 13, No. 24, December 2013.

<sup>98</sup> Lawrence Chung, “Taiwan to Put Cyber Defenses to the Test in Drills with the US,” *South China Morning Post*, September 24, 2019a.

<sup>99</sup> For example, in 2017 alone, Taiwan’s military and military-associated networks suffered more than 200 million attacks from China. See Jess Macy Yu, “Chinese Cyber Attacks on Taiwan Government Becoming Harder to Detect: Source,” Reuters, June 15, 2018; Sophia Yang, “200 Million Cyber Attacks Hit Taiwan’s Military Networks in 2017: Expert,” *Taiwan News*, May 28, 2018; “Stealing Our Military Information, Military Websites Suffer from

**Figure 4.6. Major PRC Cyber and Information Gray Zone Activities Against Taiwan**



NOTES: Arrows indicate three or more cases of observed PRC activity over the specified period. Figure does not capture all PRC activities or tactics. HK = Hong Kong; TW = Taiwan.

operations against Taiwan companies: There were seven times more attacks on Taiwan’s technology industry, for instance, in 2018 than in 2017, and attacks in 2019 were on track to be 20 times more than in 2017.<sup>100</sup> Recent examples also include PRC hackers’ use of ransomware to disrupt the operations of multiple Taiwan energy and technology companies as cross-strait tensions increased.<sup>101</sup>

Chinese cyber actors have also meddled in Taiwan domestic politics to support or undermine particular political leaders. In 1999, for example, when President Lee sought to define cross-strait relations as “special state-to-state relations,” Chinese hackers responded by sabotaging Taiwan government, university, and commercial websites.<sup>102</sup> More recently, cyberattacks from China escalated in the weeks leading up to Tsai Ing-wen’s May 2020 presidential inauguration, seeking to disrupt computer networks.<sup>103</sup>

Chinese cyber actors are increasingly using social media platforms to sow disinformation and target the younger generation in Taiwan. As an example, PRC actors have flooded Taiwan Facebook pages with anti-Taiwan independence comments in 2016, created fake social media accounts to support KMT candidate Han Kuo-yu in the 2018 local elections, and spread false information that the Tsai government planned to implement broader and deeper cuts to benefits to pensions for Taiwan school teachers, public employees, and military in 2018.<sup>104</sup>

Over Two Hundred Million Attacks Last Year” [“疑竊取我軍方情資 國軍 5 民網去年遭網攻 2 億多次”], *Liberty Times*, May 28, 2018.

<sup>100</sup> Chung, 2019a.

<sup>101</sup> Sean Lyngaas, “Taiwan Suggests China’s Winnti Group Is Behind Ransomware Attack on State Oil Company,” *CyberScoop*, May 18, 2020b.

<sup>102</sup> Hsiao, 2013.

<sup>103</sup> Jason Pan, “Cyberattacks Might Be Test for Tsai’s Inauguration Day,” *Taipei Times*, May 7, 2020.

<sup>104</sup> China seeks to portray the Tsai administration and military as weak, corrupt, incompetent, not responsive to public needs, and implementing disastrous policies. See Scott W. Harold, Nathan Beauchamp-Mustafaga, and Jeffrey W. Hornung, *Chinese Disinformation Efforts on Social Media*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-4373/3-AF, 2021.



China also employs a variety of IO tactics. China has used media from China or Hong Kong to influence Taiwan public opinion since at least the 2000s.<sup>105</sup> China has engaged in high profile attacks against Taiwan leaders who have sought to revise Taiwan textbooks in ways that deviate from the one-China position.<sup>106</sup> China continues to ban, harass, or coerce prodemocracy or proindependence Taiwan individuals operating in China. China's targeting of these groups increased after 2014, when Taiwan students and civic groups protested the passing of the Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement (the 2014 Sunflower Student Movement) and when similar prodemocracy protests erupted in Hong Kong.<sup>107</sup>

At the grassroots level, China seeks to control Taiwan outlets, purchase media content, and support pro-China media. In 2008, for example, pro-China Taiwan businessman Tsai Eng-meng acquired China Times Group and encouraged censorship of articles that were too critical of China.<sup>108</sup> By at least 2010, China had begun embedding advertisements or advertorials in Taiwan news outlets that appeared to be news coverage.<sup>109</sup> In 2019, Reuters found evidence that Beijing paid at least five Taiwan media groups for favorable coverage.<sup>110</sup> In recent years, China has expanded the use of proxies to target DPP strongholds. CUPP, for example, is broadcasting pro-China messages on local radio stations and live-streaming Facebook content.<sup>111</sup>

A final tactic that China is beginning to employ is using Chinese actors or proxies to launch defamation or libel lawsuits against individuals and organizations that convey anti-China messages. In 2019, for example, Taiwan China Times Media Group filed a libel suit against a *Financial Times* correspondent for her reporting that PRC government officials had communicated with editors of the Taiwan media group to influence its content about China. In addition to taking action against the journalist, the group sued Taiwan's state-owned Central News Agency for quoting the article and also threatened to sue *Apple Daily*, a major daily newspaper in Taiwan, for reporting that Beijing subsidized the China Times Media group.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Chien-Jung Hsu, "China's Influence on Taiwan's Media," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 54, No. 3, May–June 2014, p. 516.

<sup>106</sup> "Tsai's Subversive Textbook Revisions Don't Alter Truth," *China Daily*, October 14, 2019.

<sup>107</sup> For example, 28 Taiwanese artists were among dozens of artists blacklisted by China in late 2016. More Taiwan scholars have also seen their visa applications to Hong Kong rejected. Beijing is worried that Taiwan and Hong Kong activists were colluding against China. See "China: Ministry of Culture Allegedly Blacklists 55 Artists," webpage, Freemuse, January 13, 2017; "Expanding 'Blacklist': Taiwanese Scholars Say Their Hong Kong Visa Applications Were Rejected," *Hong Kong Free Press*, December 22, 2017; James Pomfret and Yimou Lee, "Activists in Hong Kong and Taiwan Feel Heat as China Fears 'Separatist' Collusion," Reuters, March 15, 2019.

<sup>108</sup> Some suspect China provided funding to help Tsai to acquire the media company. See Hsu, 2014, pp. 518–524.

<sup>109</sup> Hsu, 2014, pp. 530–532.

<sup>110</sup> Yimou Lee and I-hwa Cheng, "Paid 'News': China Using Taiwan Media to Win Hearts and Minds on Island—Sources," Reuters, August 9, 2019.

<sup>111</sup> Chang and Yang, 2020, p. 331.

<sup>112</sup> "Journalist Sued for Exposing Chinese Meddling in Taiwan Media," CIVICUS Monitor, September 4, 2019.

Beijing is not just using actors in Taiwan to file lawsuits against Taiwan actors; Chinese actors are also bringing cases outside Taiwan to Taiwan courts, given the ease of doing so.<sup>113</sup>

## Trends in Chinese Tactics

Overall, there are several main trends in PRC use of gray zone tactics. First, China is increasingly using grassroots tactics against Taiwan. Beijing has transitioned from operating largely on the outside (and through use of external coercion) to pressure Taiwan in the 1990s and early 2000s to employing and coordinating efforts across a variety of local agents in Taiwan to push for pro-China agendas. This involves cultivating and funding proxies in Taiwan, investing in infrastructure or economic activities to pressure Taipei, and manipulating traditional and new Taiwan media to convey desired messages. Under Xi, these activities expanded to target all aspects of Taiwan society, with a particular focus on Taiwan youth and DPP strongholds in central and southern Taiwan. Beijing is no longer working with only a few proxies—such as the KMT, the CUPP, or China Times Media Group—but also trying to co-opt groups that are smaller or cater to particular segments of the Taiwan population.

Second, while Chinese tactics have increased in variety and sophistication, the growth in intensity of PRC use of all types of tactics over time has not been linear. In recent years, China has yet to engage in the high-intensity missile launches and exercises that Beijing executed in 1995–1996, although it has the option to do so if current tensions continue. Since 2004, the overall intensity of Chinese tactics—especially the use of high-profile tactics—against Taiwan has varied in response to the actions and activities of Taiwan’s leaders and public. For example, China tends to ramp up gray zone tactics to influence Taiwan public opinion prior to a presidential election but has come to avoid taking escalatory actions immediately preceding elections. There is concern that high-level public pressure from China prior to an election could backfire and generate more votes for proindependence candidates. Instead, Beijing has engaged in highly visible displays of displeasure at least a couple of months before the election and then, if the results are not favorable for Beijing, immediately after the election. Chinese military activities before, during, and after the 2016 Taiwan presidential elections followed this pattern.

However, some PRC coercion activities have intensified steadily over time. Since 1995, China has continued to augment its military capabilities vis-à-vis Taiwan regardless of Taiwan’s leadership. In recent years, this has expanded not only to building up in the mainland regions opposite Taiwan but also to potential investments in northern Philippine territories close to Taiwan. Although high-profile PRC military activities have varied over time, the volume of

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<sup>113</sup> Recently, a Hong Kong-based think tank sued a Canadian citizen in a Taiwan court over an article published in a U.S.-based magazine that supposedly caused losses to its corporate backer in Shanghai. One author has termed this “jurisdiction tourism,” whereby China sues an individual or organization in another region or country where the judicial system is relatively favorable to the plaintiff (J. Michael Cole, “A Survival Guide to [Chinese] Authoritarian ‘Lawfare,’” *Taiwan Sentinel*, December 19, 2018b).

lower-level PRC military activities—such as PLAAF patrols of the Taiwan Strait—has gradually increased over time. At the same time, China has steadfastly advanced its cyber/IO capabilities to shape or disrupt developments within Taiwan.

Although China has ramped up pressure against Taiwan since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, China’s recent approach to Taiwan is not inconsistent with Xi’s desire to increase pressure on the DPP and Beijing’s practice of responding to what it sees as problematic Taiwan activities. There is no question that Beijing has ramped up coercive tactics against Taiwan since 2020. Using the pattern of PRC activities surrounding the 2016 Taiwan presidential elections as a model, it is predictable that Beijing would do so to signal displeasure after Tsai won the 2020 Taiwan elections. Moreover, Beijing viewed Taiwan as engaging in additional provocative activities during the pandemic—including to expand its diplomatic space and independence.<sup>114</sup> Beijing is also wary of increased U.S. military activities and support for Taiwan in 2020, including U.S. arms sales to Taiwan, U.S. patrols near Taiwan, and high-level U.S. and Taiwan exchanges.<sup>115</sup>

Overall, compared with its gray zone activities against other regions, China has used a wider variety of tactics against Taiwan. Beijing has been willing to use more and higher-profile geopolitical and economic pressure against Taiwan than it has against other U.S. allies and partners. Beijing is far more active in its employment of grassroots tactics in Taiwan than in India, Japan, the Philippines, or Vietnam. Taiwan is one of the prime targets of PRC coercion and, in some cases, a location for China to test out new tactics. Given the importance Beijing attaches to Taiwan, China devotes significantly more resources and manpower to coerce Taiwan.

## Taiwan’s Response

Taiwan’s response to PRC gray zone tactics is at most a mixed success. Taiwan’s actions have not stopped or discouraged China from employing significant gray zone tactics. Some actions, such as deepening relations with the United States and Japan, may have had the opposite effect.

Taiwan is also seeking opportunities to expand its international space, including by responding to global calls for aid during the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>116</sup> Taiwan is working with the United States and other countries to lobby for participation in the World Health Assembly, the ICAO, and other international forums.<sup>117</sup> Taipei also appeals to individual countries and the

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<sup>114</sup> “Despicable Taiwan Authorities Make Ill Use of Coronavirus,” *Global Times*, February 7, 2020.

<sup>115</sup> Ben Blanchard, “U.S. Playing Dangerous Game, China Says, After Warship Sails Through Taiwan Strait,” Reuters, March 25, 2020a.

<sup>116</sup> John Ruwitch, “Taiwan’s Coronavirus Moment—and Delicate Balancing Act,” National Public Radio, April 29, 2020.

<sup>117</sup> Drew Hinshaw and Lukas I. Alpert, “U.S. Makes Diplomatic Push for Taiwan to Attend WHO Summit,” *Wall Street Journal*, May 7, 2020.

international community to reject PRC demands that harm Taiwan citizens or interests. To date, Taiwan has made limited progress pushing back against PRC efforts to narrow its international space.

Economically, Taipei launched the New Southbound Policy in 2016 to reduce economic reliance on China by subsidizing Taiwanese companies to set up operations in Southeast Asia, South Asia, Australia, or New Zealand. The policy also establishes tourism, education, and investment links between Taiwan and Indo-Pacific countries. Taiwan has sought to link its efforts with the U.S. free and open Indo-Pacific strategy, including to establish the Global Cooperation and Training Framework with the United States to aid infrastructure projects in Southeast Asia.<sup>118</sup> Despite such efforts, Taiwan remains heavily economically reliant on China.

Taiwan continues to invest militarily to counter PRC provocations. In 2019, Taiwan unveiled one of the largest increases to its defense spending (8.3 percent), which elevated its budget to \$13 billion.<sup>119</sup> As of October 2020, Taiwan has conducted nearly 3,000 such air sorties in 2020 alone to intercept and monitor PLA air and maritime intrusions. These operations cost nearly 9 percent of Taiwan's defense budget, straining Taiwan's military budget and readiness.<sup>120</sup> In response to PRC threats against Pratas, Taiwan also deployed additional forces to the island in 2020.<sup>121</sup> Taiwan is not only doing more to defend itself, it is also making public PRC military activities, including incursions into its airspace and across the centerline.<sup>122</sup>

Taiwan is deepening defense ties with the United States, Japan, and others. Under the Donald Trump administration, the United States increased military operations near Taiwan, normalized arms sales, and sold Taiwan one of its largest-ever defense packages—an \$8 billion sale of new F-16 fighter jets.<sup>123</sup> In 2019, Japanese lawmakers proposed creating a forum involving U.S., Japanese, and Taiwanese lawmakers to counter China's military strength. In 2020, Japan's

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<sup>118</sup> Prashanth Parameswaran, "Assessing Taiwan's New Southbound Policy," *The Diplomat*, April 23, 2019a; Humphrey Hawksley, "Taiwan's New Southbound Policy Is Decreasing its Reliance on China," *Nikkei Asia*, October 4, 2019; "Taiwan Reduced Dependence on China Long Before Pandemic: Economists," *Focus Taiwan* website, May 3, 2020.

<sup>119</sup> "Taiwan Sharply Boosts Defense Budget amid China Tension," *Reuters*, April 15, 2019.

<sup>120</sup> Taiwan did not disclose how many naval vessels were deployed to intercept PLA operations but noted that it cost NT \$570 million. This is in contrast to the NT \$31.2 billion spent on air intercepts. See "Chinese Warplanes . . .," 2020.

<sup>121</sup> Lo Tien-pin and William Hetherington, "PLA Drill Spurs Deployment of Troops to Pratas," *Taipei Times*, August 5, 2020.

<sup>122</sup> Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense, for example, has been sharing information about PRC flights into Taiwan airspace via Twitter since September 2020. See Ministry of National Defense, Republic of China, official Twitter account, various dates.

<sup>123</sup> Ellen Nakashima and Anne Gearan, "Trump Administration Plans \$8 Billion Fighter Jet Sale to Taiwan, Angering China," *Washington Post*, August 16, 2019.

annual foreign policy report elevated Taiwan to an “extremely important partner.”<sup>124</sup> These activities strengthen Taiwan’s defense capabilities but are far from reversing the unfavorable cross-strait balance of power.

Domestically, Taipei has enacted measures to limit China’s ability to influence Taiwan. These include fining media outlets and individuals for reporting inaccurate information,<sup>125</sup> working with Facebook and civil society fact-checking groups to limit the spread of false information,<sup>126</sup> and introducing a new school curriculum to better educate youth on how to spot disinformation. In January 2020, Tsai signed Taiwan’s Anti-Infiltration Act, which allows law enforcement to investigate individuals or organizations suspected of engaging in activity on behalf of a foreign actor that damages national sovereignty or undermines Taiwan’s democracy.<sup>127</sup> Its National Immigration Agency is also strengthening screening to deny CCP or PLA linked visitors entry into Taiwan.<sup>128</sup> Although these measures have potential to counter PRC influence within Taiwan, skeptics are concerned that they limit free speech and could hurt Taiwan’s democracy.<sup>129</sup>

The PRC tactics that Taiwan may have the most difficulty defending against are likely on the military and economic sides. Loss of diplomatic partners and an inability to participate in international organizations undercut Taiwan’s standing but do not fundamentally threaten Taipei’s ability to govern the island or affect the daily lives of most of the Taiwan public. By contrast, persistent PRC military operations against Taiwan could pose substantial defense and political costs on Taiwan’s leaders, and it may be difficult for Taiwan to support needed defense spending if it is simultaneously suffering from PRC economic pressure. There is also a risk that China could take action against one of Taiwan’s outlying islands. Similarly, PRC economic coercion is subversive and subtle and could impose significant costs on everyday Taiwan life.

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<sup>124</sup> “Cross-Party Group of Japan Lawmakers Looks to Increase Security Cooperation with U.S. and Taiwan,” *Japan Times*, November 11, 2019. Quote from Shotaro Miyasaka, “Taiwan is ‘Extremely’ Important, Japan’s Diplomatic Guideline Says,” *Nikkei Asia*, May 20, 2020.

<sup>125</sup> Emily Feng, “Taiwan Gets Tough on Disinformation Suspected from China Ahead of Elections,” *National Public Radio*, December 6, 2019.

<sup>126</sup> Taipei requires state agencies to publicly refute false claims related to their areas of responsibility on social media and the internet within two hours. See Flemming Rose, “The Taiwan Election: Dealing with Disinformation While Protecting Speech,” *CATO at Liberty* blog, February 7, 2020; “Newly Re-elected Tsai Signs Taiwan’s Anti-Infiltration Bill into Law,” *Kyodo News*, January 15, 2020.

<sup>127</sup> Mainland Affairs Council, Republic of China (Taiwan), “Legislative Yuan Passes Anti-Infiltration Bill to Strengthen Defense for Democracy and Preserve Stable and Orderly Cross-Strait Exchanges,” press release, December 31, 2019.

<sup>128</sup> “Taiwan Tightens Entry Restrictions on Communist Party-Linked Visitors,” *The Standard*, May 25, 2020.

<sup>129</sup> Chiu-Ti Jansen, “Taiwan’s New Anti-Infiltration Law Seeks to Curb Chinese Communist Influence, but It May End Up Hurting Democracy,” *South China Morning Post*, January 3, 2020.

## Potential Near- to Medium-Term Chinese Gray Zone Activities Against Taiwan

Looking forward, China is likely to continue to ramp up the variety of gray zone activities against Taiwan until at least 2024, with the hope that a more pro-China Taiwan leader can be elected during the 2024 presidential elections. If a more pro-China leader is elected in 2024, there is a chance that China will dial down the use of select, higher profile, gray zone measures against Taiwan. If a more pro-China leader is not elected in 2024, there is a risk that China may be more willing to engage in bolder moves, given a more pressing timeline for unification.

On the geopolitical and economic sides, China is likely to further squeeze Taiwan's international space. Beijing could impose additional requirements on Taiwanese companies or individuals operating in China and could further restrict cross-strait exchanges, including significantly limiting or cutting off imports of specific Taiwanese products. China could accelerate efforts to divide Kinmen and Matsu from Taipei and use both as examples of how unification provides benefits. Although China is likely to offer carrots, it could also reduce tourism or the supplies of goods or services to the offshore islands, which are highly reliant on the PRC.

China is likely to increase the variety and types of military operations against Taiwan as its military capabilities grows. We should expect to see more routine, lower-intensity PRC military activities that stress and stretch the island's defense capabilities and resources. This could involve more-frequent PLAAF and PLAN military exercises and operations in and around Taiwan, including crossing the Taiwan Strait centerline. China is likely to employ more CCG and fishing militia in the Taiwan Strait, particularly around Kinmen and Matsu.

There are a number of ways China could drastically escalate against Taiwan short of an invasion. China could expand air patrols or military exercises to involve operations directly above the island. Beijing could seize Pratas Island or other Taiwan-held features in the SCS: Zhongzhou Reef and Itu Aba/Taiiping Island. China could use the CCG or PLAN to harass or seize commercial ships headed toward or from Taiwan. China could launch more aggressive cyberattacks against Taiwan's critical infrastructure or electoral system, similar to what Russia did against Ukraine—such as destroying parts of the power grid, causing electricity blackouts, or crippling the operations of utility companies, banks, airports, ports, and government.<sup>130</sup> Many of these options could substantially stress Taiwan's ability to respond and underscore the need for Taiwan, as well as the United States and the larger international community, to invest more in countering PRC gray zone coercion in addition to deterring China from invading the island.

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<sup>130</sup> Laurens Cerulus, "How Ukraine Became a Test Bed for Cyberweaponry," *Politico*, February 14, 2019.

## 5. China's Gray Zone Activities Against Japan

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Since 2010, China has used a variety of geopolitical, economic, military, and cyber/IO gray zone tactics against Japan. China has increasingly used military tactics while changing how it uses tactics in other domains. From 2010 until 2014, China relied more on high-profile geopolitical and economic tactics. Since 2015, however, these tactics have been less dominant in China's playbook against Japan; rather, China appears to have increased its cyber activities. Regardless of the tactic, Japan has been relatively successful at countering a variety of gray zone activities or has found ways to mitigate their damage. This, however, has not caused China to moderate its behavior. Tokyo's dominant concern remains maintaining the status quo in the ECS and preventing or deterring provocative actions against Japanese territory. Believing there is no way to modulate China's behavior, the pervasive view in Tokyo is that the only thing Japan can do is continue doing what it is doing, particularly because there is no expectation that China will stop its gray zone activities in the years ahead. Short of any surprise changes, it is widely expected that China will continue to at least lean heavily on air and maritime gray zone activities while improving its abilities in new domains, such as cyber.

### Historical Context and Overview

Relations between China and Japan have never been close. Despite Japanese leaders wishing for early normalization of ties after World War II, pressure from the United States caused Japan to refrain.<sup>1</sup> It was only after Washington's rapprochement with Beijing that Tokyo could follow suit. Even although Japan and China normalized relations in 1972, and China began to welcome Japanese loans and capital under Deng Xiaoping, bilateral ties have never grown close. On the contrary, relations have worsened in recent years; Japanese positive feelings toward China have dropped from a high of 78.6 percent in 1980 to 14.8 percent in 2016, to roughly 20 percent in recent years.<sup>2</sup> Although trade has grown and political ties have been managed, Japanese anger over anti-Japanese nationalism in China—coupled with concerns over human rights abuses—and Chinese criticisms of Japan's handling of its wartime history have served to consistently irritate ties amid their ongoing territorial dispute over a set of islands that Japan has administrative control over (Senkaku in Japanese) but that China claims (Diaoyu in Chinese).

China's use of gray zone tactics against Japan appears to reflect pragmatic calculations to achieve specific ends. Japan views China's actions as means to call into question the current

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<sup>1</sup> Yutaka Kawashima, *Japanese Foreign Policy at the Crossroads: Challenges and Options for the Twenty-First Century*, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2003, p. 97.

<sup>2</sup> Cabinet Office, "Summary of Opinion Poll on Diplomacy" ["外交に関する世論調査"] の概要", Tokyo: Government of Japan, December 2019, p. 7.

status quo, which disadvantages Japan. Some believe that China's use of these tactics does not follow any clear rules or guidelines; rather, the tactics are used to fit the situation, which makes trying to predict future PRC activities difficult.<sup>3</sup> In the military domain, for example, China prods Japan's responses at the same time that it pressures Japan's ability to defend its sovereignty. Although some tactics enable China to retain plausible deniability, China is largely able to control how and when to escalate and de-escalate. In the air and maritime domains, in particular, China calibrates its use of gray zone tactics to prevent the United States from intervening to support Japan. Given the advantages such tactics provide China, it is likely that Beijing will continue to use gray zone tactics against Japan even as its conventional military capabilities improve.<sup>4</sup>

The following analysis occurs within this context. It includes Chinese activities back to 2010 to capture two critical events that shaped subsequent PRC gray zone activities. The first occurred on September 7, 2010, when a Chinese fishing trawler illegally fished within Japan's territorial waters around the Senkaku Islands and tried to escape from the Japan Coast Guard (JCG), ramming two JCG vessels in the process.<sup>5</sup> Japan arrested and detained the captain. The second event occurred on September 11, 2012. Following then-Tokyo governor Ishihara Shintarō's declared intention to purchase three of the Senkaku Islands from a private citizen, the Japanese central government purchased and nationalized them.<sup>6</sup> Although the action did not result in the change of ownership under international law, China viewed it as a change in the status quo and responded by increasing PRC activity near the Senkakus and declaring an ADIZ over the ECS in 2013.

Since these two events—hereafter referred to as the 2010 Senkaku and 2012 nationalization events—China has relied on military tactics in the airspace and waters around Japan, including the Senkaku Islands, to establish a new normal in which Japanese control is questioned. From 2010 until roughly 2014, China also used high-profile geopolitical tactics and economic coercion to discredit Japan's international reputation and punish it for perceived wrongs stemming largely from the Senkaku Island dispute, although these tactics largely receded after 2015.

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<sup>3</sup> Japan Ministry of Defense (MOD) official, RAND interview, May 7, 2020.

<sup>4</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan official, RAND interview, April 21, 2020; MOD official, RAND interview, May 11, 2020.

<sup>5</sup> Details provided in Michael Green, Kathleen Hicks, Zack Cooper, John Schaus, and Jake Douglas, *Countering Coercion in Maritime Asia: The Theory and Practice of Gray Zone Deterrence*, Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2017a, pp. 66–94; Morris et al., 2019.

<sup>6</sup> Tokyo purchased Uotsuri, Kita-kojima, and Minami-kojima. The United States still leases two islands—Kuba and Taisho (Tokyo also owns three other islets or rocks). Tokyo purchased the islands out of fear that Ishihara's move would spark a crisis because of his intent to build structures on the islands, something Tokyo has refrained from.



## Variety and Types of Chinese Tactics

### *Geopolitical Tactics*

Geopolitically, China uses a number of tactics against Japan (see Figure 5.1). On the international front, China continues to provide support to North Korea (Japan's adversary) and South Korea (Japan's rival).<sup>7</sup> From 2010 to roughly 2015, China pressured or offered incentives to third countries to shame or blame Japan by politicizing historical memory. For example, in an attempt to draw parallels with the victims of the Holocaust and Germany's attempts to reconcile its Nazi past, Xi wanted to make World War II a key part of his official trip to Germany to use German atonement as a means to embarrass Japan, but Chancellor Angela Merkel refused.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, in 2014 Xi made a proposal to South Korean President Park Geun-hye to hold joint memorial services to mark the 70th anniversary of Japan's defeat.<sup>9</sup> Even globally, China's ambassador to the UN accused Japan in front of the General Assembly of illegally stealing the Senkaku Islands in "an open denial of the outcomes of victory of the world antifascist war, and a grave challenge to the postwar international order and the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations."<sup>10</sup>

China has also stoked others' negative historical memories of Japan. For example, in January 2014, China unveiled a memorial to Ahn Jung-geun, a Korean who assassinated Japanese colonial-era Resident General Itō Hirobumi, who is considered one of modern Japan's founding fathers.<sup>11</sup> Four months later, China unveiled a monument to honor the Korean Liberation Army, forces that fought Japan in Korea.<sup>12</sup> A few months later, during a visit to the Republic of Korea (ROK), Xi reminded Koreans of Japan's military aggression against both nations in the 20th century and that their countries fought "shoulder to shoulder" against Japan

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<sup>7</sup> China often uses mutual feelings of victimization at the hands of Imperial Japan with South Korea (and North Korea) to strengthen bilateral ties. In 2015, for example, China worked with South Korea to seek United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) acknowledgement of Japanese wartime atrocities. Korean leaders have also been prominent guests at Chinese parades celebrating victory in World War II.

<sup>8</sup> Ben Blanchard and Michael Martina, "Exclusive: China, Eyeing Japan, Seeks WW2 Focus for Xi During Germany Visit," Reuters, February 23, 2014; Zachary Keck, "Germany Rebukes China's Anti-Japan PR Campaign," *The Diplomat*, March 29, 2014.

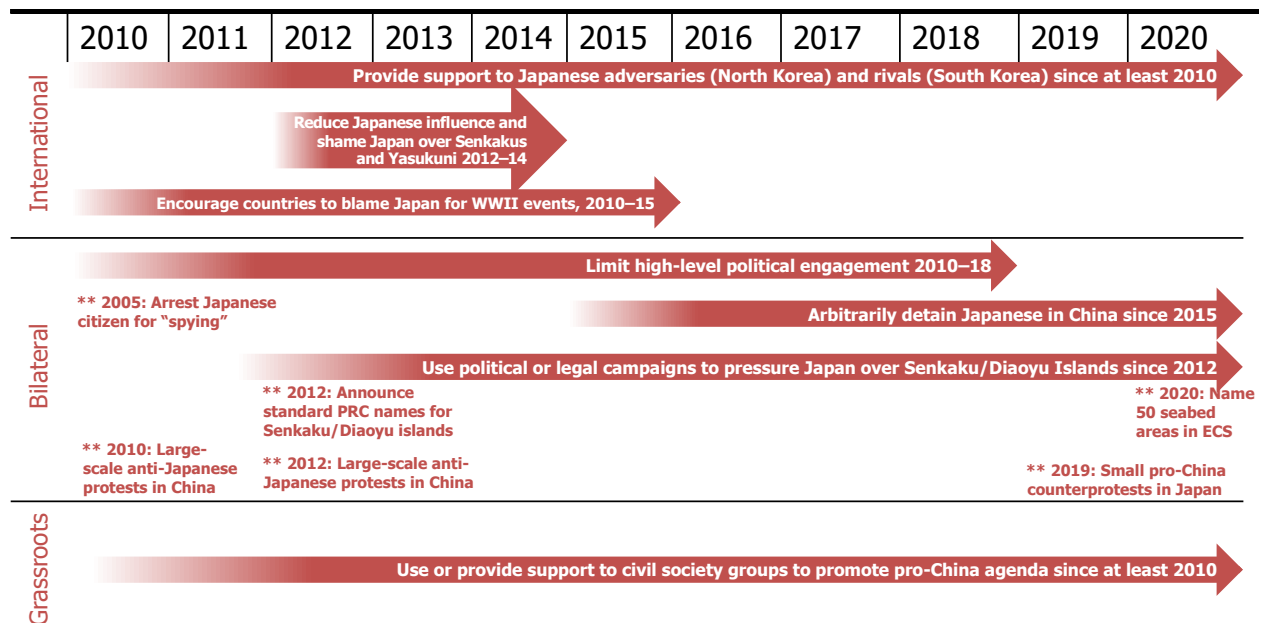
<sup>9</sup> Choe Sang-Hun, "Chinese Leader, Underlining Ties to South Korea, Cites Japan as Onetime Mutual Enemy," *New York Times*, July 4, 2014.

<sup>10</sup> Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the United States of America, "China's U.N. Ambassador Rebutts Remarks by Japanese Representative on Diaoyu Islands," press release, September 28, 2012b.

<sup>11</sup> This is notable because there are almost no memorials to other foreigners on Chinese territory.

<sup>12</sup> "China to Unveil Monument Honoring Korean Independence Fighters: Sources," *Korea Herald*, May 11, 2014; "Korean Liberation Army Honored in China," Korea.net, May 29, 2014; "China Memorial to Korean Assassin Sparks Japan Row," *South China Morning Post*, January 20, 2014.

**Figure 5.1. Major PRC Geopolitical Gray Zone Activities Against Japan**



NOTES: Arrows indicate three or more cases of observed PRC activity over the specified period. Figure does not capture all PRC activities or tactics. \*\* indicates an individual activity. WWII = World War II.

more than four centuries ago and that the people of both nations held Japan in “enmity.”<sup>13</sup> Because of the political traction these actions have in South Korea, China appears willing to use this tactic. In other countries where this shared history is absent or where an anti-Japan messaging does not resonate (or may backfire), China does not appear to have resorted to this tactic since 2015.

From 2012 to 2014, China aimed to reduce Japan’s influence globally through a coordinated shaming campaign in reaction to the 2012 nationalization and a visit to the controversial Yasukuni Shrine by Prime Minister Abe Shinzō in 2013. PRC diplomats, for example, told regional counterparts that Japan is a danger to the international order and is attempting to rewrite history and revive a militarist past; the diplomats penned commentary in local media in about 70 countries to challenge Japan’s claims over the Senkaku Islands.<sup>14</sup>

China has also embraced a variety of bilateral tactics against Japan. Beijing reduced or limited many senior official engagements following the 2010 Senkaku and 2012 nationalization

<sup>13</sup> Choe, 2014.

<sup>14</sup> China may have shifted away from this tactic since 2014 because it faced pushback from third countries or because China saves this tactic for high-profile Japanese actions related to the Senkaku Islands or Yasukuni, which have not occurred since. See Masaru Sato, “China-Japan Global Propaganda War Escalates,” *Nikkei Asia*, February 13, 2014; Kor Kian Beng, “China Tries to Rally World Against Japan’s Abe,” *Straits Times*, January 8, 2014; Chen Weihua, “China’s Ambassador to US Blasts Japan’s Abe,” *China Daily*, January 5, 2014.

events, including the cancellation of events to commemorate 40 years of diplomatic relations.<sup>15</sup> It took seven years for Xi and Abe to have their first dedicated bilateral meeting in 2018.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, to demonstrate PRC anger toward Japan and to pressure Tokyo, China allowed large-scale anti-Japanese protests to occur in China in 2010 and 2012.<sup>17</sup> Perhaps because of the uncontrollable nature of large-scale protests and the risk that these protests may turn against the CCP, such massive anti-Japan protests have not occurred in China since 2012. Instead, in 2019, there were reports of Chinese students and citizens engaging in moderate-size pro-China counterprotests in Japan and other countries. This was seen in the form of pro-China individuals countering locals protesting PRC actions against Hong Kong. A number of reasons may drive this pro-China activity, including either direct or indirect encouragement or support from the Chinese government or its associated local proxies.<sup>18</sup>

Beijing has used high-profile political or legal campaigns since 2012 to advance its claims over the Senkakus while attempting to discredit Japan's legal control. China claims that the islands have been part of its maritime territory since the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644)<sup>19</sup> and that Japan unlawfully stole the islands when China was weak.<sup>20</sup> In March 2012, Beijing announced standard names for the islands.<sup>21</sup> And on the same day as the 2012 nationalization, the China Meteorological Administration began publishing weather forecasts for the islands to be broadcast on China Central Television and elsewhere.<sup>22</sup> Three months later, China submitted information to the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf arguing that the continental shelf in the ECS is a natural prolongation of Chinese territory in an attempt to expand its exclusive economic zone (EEZ) and demonstrate possession of the islands as part of China's extended

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<sup>15</sup> "China Cancel Diplomatic Events with Japan Amid Islands Row," *The Guardian*, September 23, 2012.

<sup>16</sup> The two leaders did meet briefly in 2014 at a China-hosted Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation meeting; see Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Japan-China Summit Meeting," press release, November 10, 2014; Anna Fifield and Simon Denyer, "Japan's Prime Minister, a Trump Buddy, Now Tries to Cozy Up to China's President," *Washington Post*, October 22, 2018.

<sup>17</sup> Weiss, 2014.

<sup>18</sup> James Gant, "Is Beijing Clamping Down on Hong Kong Protesters in Japan? Pro-China Group Confront Demonstrators in Osaka and Drown Out Their Chants by Singing the National Anthem," *Daily Mail*, August 27, 2019; Claire Knox and Iris Zhao, "Chinese Government Voices Support for Counter Hong Kong Protests in Australia," ABC News (Australia), August 20, 2019.

<sup>19</sup> SCIO, *Diaoyu Dao, an Inherent Territory of China*, Beijing, September 2012; Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the United States of America, "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hong Lei's Regular Press Conference on September 5, 2012," press release, September 6, 2012a.

<sup>20</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "The Issue of Diaoyu Dao: Statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China," September 10, 2012.

<sup>21</sup> "China Announces Names of Geographic Entities on Diaoyu Islands," *Sina News*, September 22, 2012.

<sup>22</sup> Brian Spegele, "China's Latest Salvo in Senkaku Storm: Weather Forecasts," *Wall Street Journal*, September 12, 2012.

EEZ.<sup>23</sup> In 2020, after the Ishigaki (Okinawa prefecture) city council changed the name of the administrative area containing the Senkakus from *Tonoshiro* to *Tonoshiro Senkaku*, China's Natural Resources Ministry responded by announcing names for 50 seabed areas in the ECS, among them three that include the Senkaku Islands.<sup>24</sup>

Enabled by China's passage of the 2014 Counterespionage Law and 2015 National Security Law,<sup>25</sup> a newer tactic since 2015 is China's increasing arbitrary detention of Japanese citizens.<sup>26</sup> Prior to 2015, the only publicized case occurred in 2010, following the 2010 Senkaku event.<sup>27</sup> Between May 2015 and December 2019, China arrested 15 Japanese nationals in China on espionage charges, with nine receiving prison sentences.<sup>28</sup> This is likely a result of China's tightening of control over foreigners and clampdown on speech and thought.<sup>29</sup> China could also be using arrest and detention to warn nations about challenging PRC narratives or to punish countries for actions directed at China.<sup>30</sup>

At the grassroots level, China has used and provided support to educational and civil society groups, such as Confucius Institutes and the Japan branch of the China Council for the Promotion of Peaceful National Reunification, to promote pro-China agendas.<sup>31</sup> Many of these

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<sup>23</sup> People's Republic of China, *Concerning the Outer Limits of the Continental Shelf Beyond 200 Nautical Miles in Part of the East China Sea*, Executive Summary, submission to the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf, December 14, 2012.

<sup>24</sup> "Japan Protests China's Seabed Names Related to Disputed Islands," *Kyodo News*, June 25, 2020.

<sup>25</sup> "Counter-Espionage Law of the People's Republic of China," 2014; "National Security Law of the People's Republic of China," 2015.

<sup>26</sup> "Japanese Man Held by China on Spying Charge Released, Source Says," *Japan Times*, July 2, 2020.

<sup>27</sup> China arrested one Chinese and four Japanese employees of the Fujita Corporation for allegedly entering a military zone without permission and videotaping PLA facilities. All were released within a month.

<sup>28</sup> "Arresting Japanese in China One After Another on the Suspicion of Spying. Should Chairman Xi Jinping Be Invited as a State Guest?" ["中国で相次ぐスパイ容疑での日本人拘束。習近平主席を国賓として招くべきなのか?"], Federal News Network, December 7, 2019. Among those sentenced, the length of sentence and number of people receiving it varied: 3 years (one); 5 years (one); 5.5 years (two); 6 years (two); 12 years (two); and 15 years (one).

<sup>29</sup> This was made possible by the law on counterespionage ("Counter-Espionage Law of the People's Republic of China," 2014) and the 2015 laws on national security and counterterrorism ("National Security Law of the People's Republic of China," 2015, and "Counter-Terrorism Law of the People's Republic of China," 2015). See Shin Kawashima, "Why Is China Detaining More Foreigners?" *The Diplomat*, November 12, 2019.

<sup>30</sup> John Garrick, "China Has a New Way to Exert Political Pressure: Weaponising Its Courts Against Foreigners," *The Conversation*, June 29, 2020; "Is China Detaining Foreign Nationals to Gain Leverage Against the West?" *World Politics Review*, March 4, 2019.

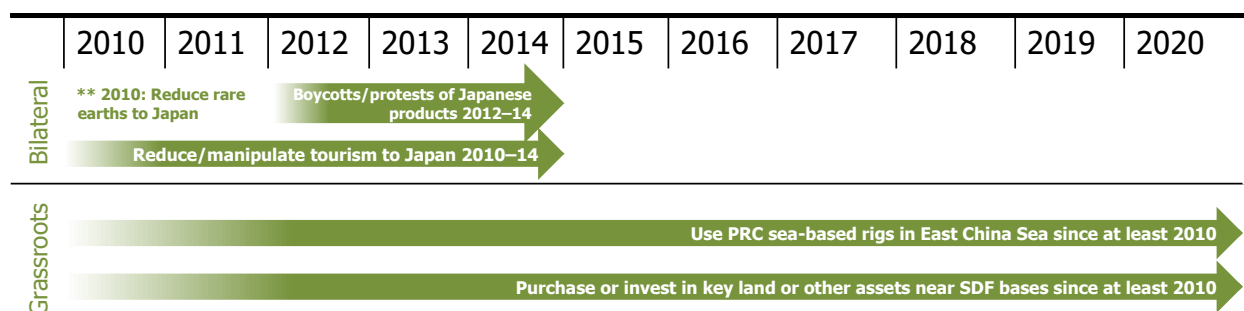
<sup>31</sup> Other organizations include the All-Japan Overseas Chinese China Peaceful Reunification Council, the All-Japan Chinese Council for the Promotion of the Peaceful Unification of China, the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries, the China Association for International Friendly Contact, and the Sino-Japan friendship associations with ties to the United Front and CCP. See Russell Hsiao, "A Preliminary Survey of CCP Influence Operations in Japan," *China Brief*, Vol. 19, No. 12, June 26, 2019.

organizations operated in Japan for years prior to 2010 and are not perceived as having much influence because of the Japanese public’s extremely negative view of China.<sup>32</sup>

### *Economic Tactics*

Perhaps because of the size and strength of the Japanese economy, China has not used economic tactics against Japan that have involved third countries or pressuring multinational firms. Instead, China has used several bilateral and grassroots economic tactics against Japan that have varied over time (see Figure 5.2).

**Figure 5.2. Major PRC Economic Gray Zone Activities Against Japan**



NOTES: Arrows indicate three or more cases of observed PRC activity over the specified period. Figure does not capture all PRC activities or tactics. \*\* indicates an individual activity. SDF = Self-Defense Force.

Bilaterally, China appears to have used economic coercion primarily between 2010 and 2014. The most sensational incident was China reducing exports of rare earth elements to Japan immediately following the 2010 Senkaku event.<sup>33</sup> Another tactic, used after the 2012 nationalization, saw Beijing supporting or allowing boycotts against Japanese goods and public protests (in China) against Japanese companies, resulting in both property damage and significant losses in revenue for Japanese companies.<sup>34</sup> And while never officially restricting travel to Japan, China did manipulate tourism to Japan following both the 2010 and 2012 events. Tourism plunged, and other cultural exchanges were cancelled, leading experts to believe that Beijing may have informally applied pressure.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>32</sup> An October 2019 Cabinet Office survey asking about the public’s sense of affinity toward China found only 22.7 percent answering in the affirmative (3.9 percent felt an affinity toward China; 18.8 percent felt a sense of affinity if pushed to say). This compares with 35.9 percent saying that, if pushed to say, they do not feel a sense of affinity and another 39 percent saying they do not. See Cabinet Office, 2019, p. 7.

<sup>33</sup> Although evidence suggests that China may have begun implementing these export restrictions earlier, China stepped up enforcement after the 2010 event, leading to the view that the restrictions were deliberate. See Phil Taylor, “Rush on for ‘Rare Earths’ as U.S. Firms Seek to Counter Chinese Monopoly,” *New York Times*, July 22, 2010; Harrell, Rosenberg, and Saravalle, 2018, pp. 9, 13–14, 42.

<sup>34</sup> Richard Katz, “Mutual Assured Production,” *Foreign Affairs*, July–August 2013.

<sup>35</sup> Green et al., 2017a, pp. 80–81.

It is difficult to confirm why China has refrained from using overt bilateral economic coercion against Japan since 2015. One possible reason is that China actively seeks high-tech Japanese investment and is worried that such tactics will deter Japanese companies from locating facilities in China.<sup>36</sup> A second possible reason is that these tactics backfired. After the 2010 Senkaku incident and China's restrictions on rare earth exports, for example, Japan worked with other states to diversify its rare earth supplies and to manufacture products with fewer rare earths, leading to a reduction in China's rare earth mining monopoly.<sup>37</sup> A final possible reason is that China tends to rely on these more visible economic coercion tactics only in response to specific events, particularly if they involve a core interest, such as a territorial issue, and there have been no major events regarding the Senkaku since 2012.<sup>38</sup>

Beyond bilateral tactics, China also uses economic grassroots tactics against Japan. Two tactics deserve a more detailed look.<sup>39</sup> The first is the use of sea-based oil and gas platforms in the ECS since 2010 to advance China's claims. Japan has viewed the operation of these platforms, even while remaining on the Chinese side of a Japan-declared median line that divides the two countries' EEZs, as highly provocative. Japan has argued that boundary delimitation should be based on the geographical equidistance line (i.e., median line).<sup>40</sup> China has never agreed, claiming instead a 200 nm EEZ from its shores and an extended continental shelf that would expand that EEZ further east.<sup>41</sup> Pending delimitation under international law, Japan limits its exercise of sovereign rights and jurisdiction to the Japanese side of the equidistance line.<sup>42</sup> Unlike China, however, Japan has never unilaterally conducted any resource exploration or extraction on its side.<sup>43</sup> Japan opposes China's advancement of its unilateral development, which involved erecting 16 structures on its side of the median line, 12 of them between June 2013 and

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<sup>36</sup> Harrell, Rosenberg, and Saravalle, 2018, p. 15.

<sup>37</sup> Eugene Gholz, *Rare Earth Elements and National Security*, New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2014.

<sup>38</sup> Harrell, Rosenberg, and Saravalle, 2018, pp. 12–13.

<sup>39</sup> A PRC tactic that we examined but did not include was China's seasonal fishing ban in the ECS from around May to August. Although China imposes a fishing ban on its own fishermen in the ECS, Beijing has yet to enforce this over Japanese fishermen. We have seen cases of China warning Japanese fishermen to leave or chasing Japanese fishing boats, but it is unclear whether these activities are related to the fishing ban. See "Chinese Ships Chase Japanese Fishing Boat near Senkaku Islands," *Japan Times*, May 9, 2020.

<sup>40</sup> The distance between China and Japan's territorial sea baselines in the ECS is less than 400 nm. See Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Japan's Legal Position on the Development of Natural Resources in the East China Sea," statement, August 6, 2015.

<sup>41</sup> China claims the natural prolongation of its continental shelf to the Okinawa Trough, which, if recognized, would give China a much wider EEZ than the equidistance solution would.

<sup>42</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan official, email to RAND, July 22, 2020.

<sup>43</sup> In addition to Japan refraining from exploring or extracting resources on its side of the median line, pending formal delimitation, Japan has never officially given up its entitlement to an EEZ west of that line.

June 2015.<sup>44</sup> Japan sees their construction as violating the 2008 agreement on joint exploration of resources and their placement as encroaching on Japan's EEZ. Tokyo fears that China could be siphoning reserves from its side of the median.<sup>45</sup> Many PRC rigs are also believed to house advanced radars, helipads, and other facilities, which Japanese officials fear could be used for military purposes.<sup>46</sup>

A second grassroots tactic that China has engaged in is buying land in Japan near sensitive military facilities. Although some of the reporting is questionable, reports suggest China's Ministry of Commerce uses private organizations to buy land in Okinawa, while other PRC funds are used to purchase land throughout Japan, including near SDF bases in Okinawa, Hokkaido, and Tsushima.<sup>47</sup> There is a risk that China could engage in surveillance and other activities on these properties that could undermine the security of operations conducted on Japanese military bases. According to the Hokkaido prefectural government, foreign capital owned 2,725 hectares of forested areas in the prefecture between 2012 and 2018, with China owning much of this.<sup>48</sup> Some of this land was purchased but never used. There are even reports that, after sales, local municipalities became more friendly toward China.<sup>49</sup> Although it is difficult to prove that Beijing directed this activity, and some of the purchases could be innocuous, China could be buying land for ulterior motives, either to obtain rights to much-needed natural resources or to observe SDF activities.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "The Current Status of China's Unilateral Development of Natural Resources in the East China Sea," webpage, March 31, 2021.

<sup>45</sup> "Japan Protests Chinese Gas Development in East China Sea," *Japan Times*, July 6, 2015; Nicholas Szechenyi, "Platforms of Mistrust: Natural Resource Development in the East China Sea," Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative website, August 5, 2015.

<sup>46</sup> In June 2016, China appears to have installed radar equipment on a platform. See Zack Cooper, "Flashpoint East China Sea: Potential Shocks," webpage, Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, April 27, 2018a; "Japan Protests over Chinese Radar in Disputed East China Sea Drilling Rig," *The Guardian*, August 7, 2016.

<sup>47</sup> MOD official, RAND interview, May 11, 2020; "Chinese Buyers Are Now Chasing After Land Around Military Bases?" *Sankei Shimbun*, tr. Japan Property Central, 2012; "Chinese and Korean 'Acquisition of Japan' Is Not Stopping, This is a War Without Weapons" ["中韓の「日本買収」が止まらない これは武器を持たない戦争"], *News Post Seven*, January 9, 2018; "Will Japan Disappear in Less Than 20 Years? China's Shadow Is Even Around ASDF Bases and Is Making Ghost Towns of Resort Home Areas for Chinese" ["日本が20年足らずで消滅? 空自基地周辺にも中国の影 ゴーストタウン化した中国人向け別荘地も"], *Sankei News*, May 15, 2016; Yoshiko Sakurai, "Chinese Capital Has Bought U.S. Military Land in Okinawa" ["沖縄米軍用地を中国資本が買っていた"], *Shukan Shincho*, November 3, 2016.

<sup>48</sup> It appears that foreign land-buying in Japan has been occurring for a long time because of lax laws on foreign buyers. See Hokkaido Prefectural Office, "Situation on Forest Acquisitions by Foreign Capital, etc." ["海外資本等による森林取得状況"], May 2019.

<sup>49</sup> For example, in the town of Shiranuka, high schools designated Chinese as a foreign language elective for second- and third-year students, and the municipal government poured more than ¥100 million in subsidies into a Chinese-run factory. See "China Moving Slowly into Hokkaido," *Japan Times*, May 24, 2018.

<sup>50</sup> For example, China could be purchasing land because Japan has fewer capital controls and because of the demand for inexpensive properties. Chinese investors could also be looking to buy property to cater to Chinese tourists

## *Military Tactics*

Despite improvement in bilateral ties, Chinese military activity vis-à-vis Japan has increased, including cases of unusual activity (see Figure 5.3). China has consistently relied on military tactics even as it shifts to using other tactics. PLAN ships and Chinese aircraft flying near Japanese lands or through international waterways near Japan have continued with increasing frequency, and China has deployed more-diverse, larger, and more-advanced assets near Japan. The reliance on this tactic appears to be because this is a low-cost way to probe Japan's military responses without a high risk of military conflict.<sup>51</sup> And China's near constant presence near the Senkaku Islands, as well as its oil and gas platforms near the median line in the ECS, appear to be attempts to promote China's legal arguments and call the current status quo of Japan's administrative control into question.<sup>52</sup>

Militarily, China has not directly or immediately responded via military means to every major Japanese defense or military activity.<sup>53</sup> For example, following significant changes in Japan's defense posture or U.S.-Japan alliance ties, when one would expect a Chinese response—such as then-Prime Minister Abe's reinterpretation of the constitution in July 2014 to enable Japan to exercise its right to collective self-defense and the passage of security legislation in September 2015 that expanded the SDF's roles and missions—there was no unusual Chinese military activity near Japan. Similarly, no PRC military activity followed the United States and Japan updating their mutual defense guidelines in April 2015.

At other times, Chinese activity does appear to follow closely after something Japan has done, potentially as punishment. For example, for four days in August 2016, 200 to 300 PRC fishing vessels swarmed the waters around the Senkaku, joined by 28 Chinese state-owned vessels that entered Japan's territorial waters and dozens more in its contiguous zone.<sup>54</sup> Although Japan did nothing regarding the Senkaku Islands that would have given China cause to respond,

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visiting Japan. See “Chinese Demand for Japanese Home Surges,” Juwai.com, June 13, 2019; “Hokkaido Lands Gobbled Up by Chinese Money,” *Asia Times*, November 20, 2017; Lam Ka-Sing, “Japanese Property on a Roll as Chinese Grow Weary of Traditional Hotspots Vancouver, Sydney,” *South China Morning Post*, June 7, 2019.

<sup>51</sup> ASDF officer, RAND interview, May 6, 2020; MOD official, RAND interview, May 7, 2020; MOD official, RAND interview, May 11, 2020.

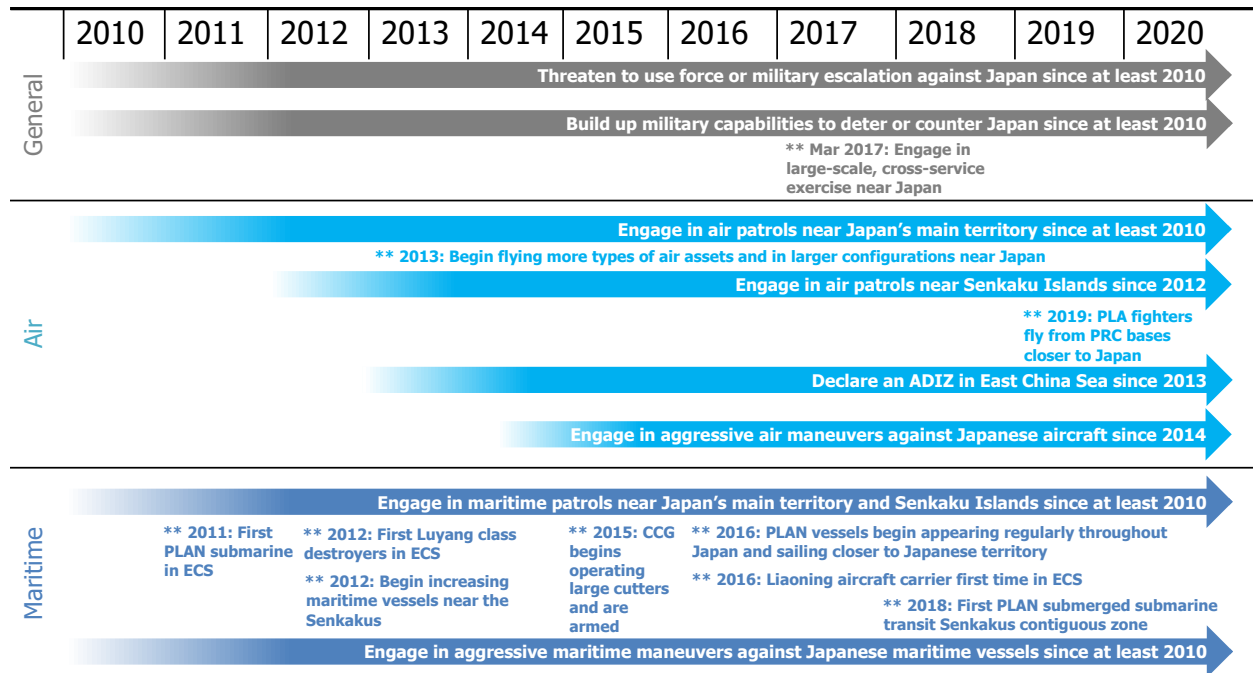
<sup>52</sup> MOD official, RAND interview, May 7, 2020; Tetsuo Kotani, “The East China Sea: Chinese Efforts to Establish a ‘New Normal’ and Prospects for Peaceful Management,” Maritime Issues website, July 8, 2017; Adam P. Liff, “China's Maritime Gray Zone Operations in the East China Sea and Japan's Response,” in Erickson and Martinson, 2019a.

<sup>53</sup> It is possible that China does not feel the need to respond immediately to Japanese activities. China could also view nonmilitary means (such as geopolitical, economic, or cyber/IO) as more appropriate to respond to some Japanese military activities. China could also assess that responding to what it views as Japanese militarization might have the opposite effect and further embolden Japan.

<sup>54</sup> Per UNCLOS, the contiguous zone extends up to 24 nautical miles (United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, December 10, 1982, p. 35). See also Prime Minister's Office, “Regarding the Situation of Activity by Chinese Fishing Boats and Chinese State-Owned Ships in Early August 2016” [“平成 28 年 8 月上旬の中国公船及び中国漁船の活動状況について”], press release, Tokyo, October 18, 2016b.



**Figure 5.3. Major PRC Military Gray Zone Activities Against Japan**



NOTES: Arrows indicate three or more cases of observed PRC activity over the specified period. Figure does not capture all PRC activities or tactics. \*\* indicates an individual activity.

Japan joined the United States, the Philippines and others one month prior in urging China to abide by the Permanent Court of Arbitration's ruling in favor of the Philippines in its maritime dispute with China. Some Japanese analysts and officials see the 2016 swarm as a possible reaction to this.<sup>55</sup> Others say there is no evidence to support this claim.<sup>56</sup>

A recent example of a Japanese action and a Chinese reaction followed the Ishigaki city council's 2020 resolution that changed the name of the administrative area containing the Senkaku Islands from *Tonoshiro* to *Tonoshiro Senkaku*. China warned that the resolution was a "serious provocation to China's territorial sovereignty," to which it reserved the right to respond.<sup>57</sup> A few weeks later, China made a new move against Japan by dispatching a survey ship for ten days to conduct marine research activity in the EEZ of Okinotorishima, Japan's

<sup>55</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan official, RAND interview, April 21, 2020; Bonji Ohara, Why Did China Escalate with a Mysterious Provocative Action by the Senkakus? ["中国はなぜ尖閣で不可解な挑発行動をエスカレートさせるのか"], *Newsweek Japan*, August 9, 2016.

<sup>56</sup> JCG expert, email to RAND, July 21, 2020; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan official, email to RAND, July 22, 2020.

<sup>57</sup> "Japan City Renames Area Covering Senkaku Islands, Triggering China to Warn of Reprisal," *South China Morning Post*, June 22, 2020.

southernmost territory.<sup>58</sup> At the same time, China's Foreign Ministry criticized "Japan's unilateral claim (to an EEZ around Okinotori) [as having] no legal basis" because it does not constitute an island, just rocks.<sup>59</sup>

Regarding aggressive behavior, while Chinese military aircraft do not appear to have intercepted Japanese military aircraft, PLA aircraft have engaged in aggressive air maneuvers, such as close air encounters in May and June 2014.<sup>60</sup> The PLA has also engaged in air patrols or intrusions near the Senkaku Islands. For example, on December 13, 2012, a Chinese State Oceanic Administration Y-12 surveillance plane flew over Uotsuri Island, marking the first time a Chinese government aircraft violated the territorial airspace around the Senkaku Islands.<sup>61</sup> Five years later, in May 2017, China took another new step when it launched a UAV from a CCG vessel in Japan's territorial waters.<sup>62</sup> And while Chinese air assets do not appear to have engaged in live fire near Japan, PLAN assets have engaged in simulated attacks on Japanese assets in two separate incidents on at least one occasion, in January 2013, when Chinese ships locked a fire-control radar on Maritime SDF (MSDF) assets.<sup>63</sup> China has also shown its willingness to engage in aggressive maritime behavior against Japanese maritime vessels, such as the August 2016 swarming incident and the 2010 Senkaku incident.

On at least one occasion, in March 2017, Chinese military assets engaged in a large-scale, cross-service military exercise near Japan. In addition to 13 aircraft (one Y-8 airborne early warning and control [AEW&C] system, six H-6 bombers, and six fighters) flying from the ECS through the Miyako Strait to the Pacific Ocean and back again, two *Luyang*-class ships were

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<sup>58</sup> Japan's legal claim to the islands has been questioned in the past, given that just the tops of small rocky outcroppings are visible at high tide and enhanced by concrete embankments that Tokyo built to avoid erosion. See "Japan Protests Chinese Maritime Survey off Southern Islets," *Asahi Shimbun*, July 21, 2020.

<sup>59</sup> "China Demands Japanese Fishing Boats Not 'Trespass' in Its Waters," *Kyodo News*, July 19, 2020.

<sup>60</sup> Prime Minister's Office, "Regarding Chinese Military Planes Approaching SDF Planes" ["中国軍機による自衛隊機への接近について"], press release, Tokyo, January 2016a, pp. 3–4.

<sup>61</sup> "Chinese Plane Invades Territorial Airspace South of Senkaku Emphasizing, 'This Is Chinese Territorial Airspace'" ["中国機、尖閣南方で領空侵犯「ここは中国の領空」主張"], *Asahi Shimbun*, December 13, 2012. This occurred at same time that four CCG vessels also enter the territorial waters around the island.

<sup>62</sup> Yoko Wakatsuki and Junko Ogura, "Japan: China 'Escalating' Tensions over Disputed Islands," *CNN*, May 19, 2017; Matthew M. Burke and Chiyomi Sumida, "Drone Spotted with Chinese Ships in Japan's Territorial Waters," *Stars and Stripes*, May 19, 2017.

<sup>63</sup> The first incident, on January 19, occurred on the high seas, when a *Jiangkai I*-class ship emitted radar signals against an SH-60K helicopter from the MSDF destroyer *Ōnami* flying several kilometers from the ship. The second incident, on January 30, occurred when a *Jiangwei II*-class ship emitted radar signals against the MSDF destroyer *Yūdachi* about 3 km away. See Reiji Yoshida and Mizuho Aoki, "Chinese Target-Locked MSDF Ship, Chopper," *Japan Times*, February 6, 2013; Abe Shinzō, "Sending Separate Written Answer in Response to the Question Submitted by Councilor Ono Motohiro Regarding the Fire Control Radar Irradiation by the Chinese Navy that Threatened Japanese Security" ["参議院議員大野元裕君提出日本の安全を脅かす中国海軍による火器管制レーダー照射に関する質問に対し、別紙答弁書を送付する"], Cabinet Committee, Question #21, 183rd Diet, Normal Session, Tokyo: House of Councilors, February 19, 2013.

observed about 120 to 200 km from Miyako Island and one *Jiangkai II*-class ship about 90 km from Kume Island.<sup>64</sup>

Since the COVID-19 outbreak, China has appeared to engage in a new form of aggressive behavior in the form of long-term presence in Japanese waters. From April 14 to August 2, 2020, Chinese ships set a record for time spent in the Senkaku Islands' contiguous zone by maintaining a continuous presence for 111 straight days, the longest on record.<sup>65</sup> The previous record was a streak of 64 days in April–June 2019.<sup>66</sup> Additionally, two Chinese ships were in the territorial waters around the Senkaku Islands for 30 hours and 17 minutes, stretching from the evening of July 2 to the night of July 3, 2020.<sup>67</sup> Until this, the longest Chinese boats have been in the Senkakus' territorial waters was 28 hours and 15 minutes in August 2013. Both ships returned to the territorial waters on the afternoon of July 4, 2020, remaining until the evening of July 5 and breaking the new record by staying for 39 hours and 23 minutes.<sup>68</sup>

It is also important to note that China has never shied away from explicitly threatening the use of force or military escalation against Japan. Beijing sees reclaiming the Diaoyu Islands as part of the government's highest objective. Xi has said, "We absolutely will not permit any person, any organization, any political party—at any time, in any form—to separate any piece of Chinese territory from China."<sup>69</sup> PRC Defense Ministry spokespersons have stated that the PLA "will decisively fulfill [its] tasks and missions . . . so as to safeguard China's maritime law enforcement activities and protect the country's territorial integrity and maritime rights"<sup>70</sup> and will "reserve the right to take necessary measures."<sup>71</sup> Similarly, should Japan escalate tensions, China's Foreign Ministry has warned that Japan would "face the full consequences."<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Because there were no major changes in Japanese defense policies, in activity around the Senkaku Islands, or in the U.S.-Japan alliance, the exercise did not appear to be in reaction to a specific event. See Joint Staff (Japan), "Regarding the Movement of Chinese Naval Vessels and the Flight of Chinese Military Planes" ["中国軍用機の飛行及び中国海軍艦艇の動向について"], press release, March 2, 2017.

<sup>65</sup> See months April through August 2020 in JCG, "Number of State-Owned Chinese Ships (Per Day) Intruding into the Territorial Waters and Entering the Contiguous Zone Around the Senkaku Islands (from September 2012)" ["中国公船等による尖閣諸島周辺の接続水域内入域及び領海侵入隻数 (日毎) (平成 24 年 9 月以降)"], various dates.

<sup>66</sup> "China Govt Ships' Intrusions Continue Around Senkakus," Nippon.com, July 21, 2020.

<sup>67</sup> "2 Chinese State-Owned Vessels, Unusually Long Intrusion in Senkaku Territorial Waters . . . Japanese Government Rigorously Protests" ["中国公船 2 隻、尖閣領海に異例の長時間侵入 . . . 日本政府は厳重抗議"], *Yomiuri Shimbun*, July 4, 2020.

<sup>68</sup> "Chinese State-Owned Vessels, New Record for Longest Time in Territorial Waters, 39 Hours, 23 Minutes Around the Senkaku Islands" ["中国公船、領海侵入最長時間を更新 n 尖閣諸島周辺で 39 時間 23 分"], *Mainichi Shimbun*, July 6, 2020.

<sup>69</sup> "Xi Says China Will Never Permit Loss of 'Any Piece' of Land," CNBC, August 1, 2017.

<sup>70</sup> "China on Guard Against Japanese Jets near Diaoyu," *China Daily*, December 27, 2012.

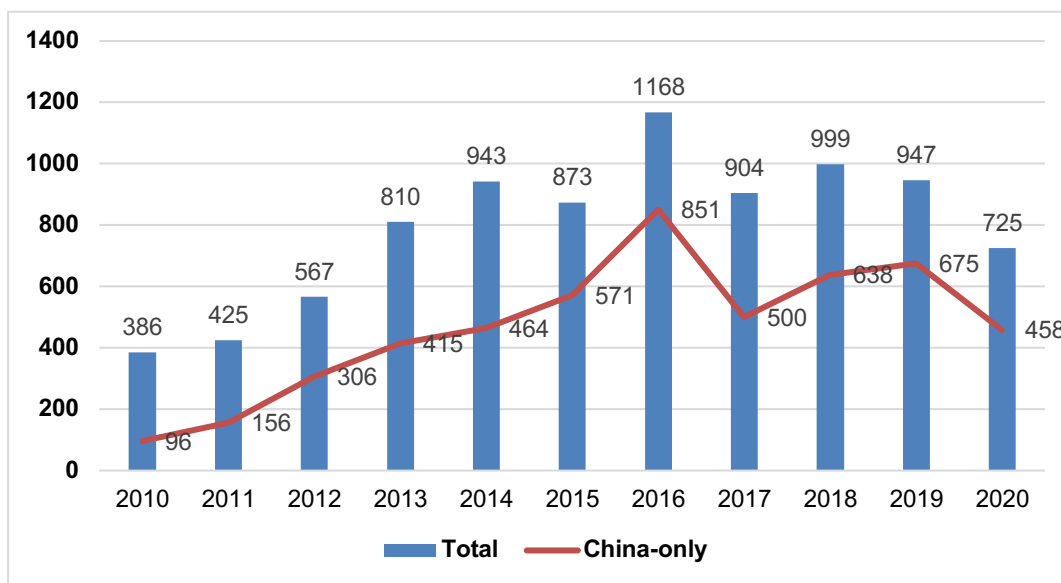
<sup>71</sup> "China Warns of Consequences as Japan Announces Purchase of Disputed Islands," *The Guardian*, September 11, 2012.

<sup>72</sup> "China Warns Japan Against Provocations on Diaoyu Islands," Xinhua, January 13, 2016.

## Air

Chinese air assets are regularly and increasingly engaging in air patrols or transits near Japan’s main territory and the Senkaku Islands.<sup>73</sup> For example, PLAAF assets flew over the waterway between Okinawa and Miyako on five occasions in 2013 but flew ten in 2018.<sup>74</sup> Lending support to a trend of increasing Chinese air activity around Japan is the growing number of scrambles the Air Self-Defense Force (ASDF) has launched against Chinese air assets (see Figure 5.4).<sup>75</sup>

**Figure 5.4. Japan SDF Air Scrambles Against All Foreign and Chinese Aircraft, 2010–2020**



SOURCES: Joint Staff (Japan), “Regarding the Status of Implementing Scrambles in FY 2015” [“平成 26 年度の緊急発進実施状況について”], press release, April 15, 2015, pp. 2, 4; Joint Staff (Japan), “Regarding the Status of Implementing Scrambles in FY 2019” [“令和元年度の緊急発進実施状況について”], press release, April 9, 2020, pp. 2, 4; Joint Staff (Japan), “Statistics on Scrambles Through FY2020,” press release, April 9, 2021, p. 1.  
NOTE: Data are for the Japanese fiscal year (FY), which runs from April 1 to March 31. Figures include scrambles against China, Russia, Taiwan, North Korea and “others.”

Since 2010, ASDF scrambles against Chinese air activity have increased. For all of FY 2010, the MOD reported 96 scrambles, compared with 675 in FY 2019. As of early 2021, the year with

<sup>73</sup> It is difficult to determine the precise amount of Chinese air activity because the Japanese government does not publish the details of all air activity. Japan’s Joint Staff does provide details on air activity deemed unusual through press releases detailing flight paths, the number and types of aircraft, and visual documentation. Japan’s definition of *unusual activity* includes same-day, round-trip flights over the same routes, such as through the Miyako Strait and into the western Pacific or from the ECS to the Sea of Japan and back.

<sup>74</sup> MOD, *Defense of Japan 2019*, Tokyo, 2019, p. 73.

<sup>75</sup> Not all scrambles are responses to illegal PRC activity. The number of scrambles correlates with the amount of air activity in or near Japanese airspace. The MOD data represent the number of scrambles carried out by the ASDF, not the actual number of incursions into Japan’s ADIZ. See Burke et al., 2018, pp. 12, 17–18.

the most activity remains 2016, when Japan scrambled a record 851 times against Chinese aircraft.<sup>76</sup> Most of this activity continued to take place over the ECS and the Miyako Strait, just as it did a decade earlier. However, China has deployed air assets in and around the Senkaku Islands as well.

China has been able to increase the frequency of flights near the Senkakus because, in 2019, it changed where it bases the fighters it sends toward the islands. In the past, PRC fighters used to fly from Zhejiang Province. Now they fly from Fujian, which is closer, taking them around 20 minutes to reach the islands (compared to the 25 minutes it takes Japanese fighters to reach the islands from Okinawa).<sup>77</sup> Because it takes ASDF fighters longer to reach the same airspace than it does Chinese jets departing from Fujian, the ASDF has reportedly changed its scrambling protocol to immediately scramble against any Chinese aircraft taking off from Fujian Province, as opposed to only the aircraft that approach Japanese airspace.<sup>78</sup> It has been reported that the ASDF now sends four planes to intercept each Chinese fighter instead of two, although the ASDF will not confirm or deny that report.<sup>79</sup>

Qualitatively, the types of PLA air assets employed against Japan have become more provocative. Historically, Chinese flew small Y-12s or larger Y-8 surveillance aircraft near Japan. This changed in 2013. In July 2013, a PLAAF Y-8 airborne early warning aircraft flew through the Miyako Strait, a first for a PLAAF asset.<sup>80</sup> In September, two H-6 bombers flew through the same strait for the first time.<sup>81</sup> The following month, two Y-8 AEW&C aircraft and two H-6 bombers followed the same flight pattern for three consecutive days.<sup>82</sup> And then, in

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<sup>76</sup> There were 96 scrambles in 2010, 156 in 2011, 306 in 2012, 415 in 201, 464 in 2014, 571 in 2015, 851 in 2016, 500 in 2017, 638 in 2018, 675 in 2019, and 458 in 2020. See Joint Staff (Japan), “Regarding the Status of Implementing Scrambles in FY2011” [“平成 23 年度の緊急発進実施状況について”], press release, April 25, 2012, p. 3; Joint Staff (Japan), “Regarding the Status of Implementing Scrambles in FY2015” [“平成 27 年度の緊急発進実施状況について”], press release, April 22, 2016, p. 3; Joint Staff (Japan), “Regarding the Status of Implementing Scrambles in FY 2019” [“令和元年度の緊急発進実施状況について”], press release, April 9, 2020; Joint Staff (Japan), “Statistics on Scrambles . . .,” 2021, p. 1.

<sup>77</sup> “Japan Now Instantly Scrambles Jets Against China’s from Fujian,” Kyodo News, July 19, 2020.

<sup>78</sup> Steven Stashwick, “Japan Sortieing More Jets During Heightened Senkaku Tensions,” *The Diplomat*, July 21, 2020.

<sup>79</sup> ASDF officer, email to RAND, July 22, 2020.

<sup>80</sup> Joint Staff (Japan), “Regarding the Flight of a Chinese Plane over the East China Sea” [“中国機の東シナ海における飛行について”], press release, July 24, 2013a.

<sup>81</sup> Joint Staff (Japan), “Regarding the Flight of a Chinese Plane over the East China Sea” [“中国機の東シナ海における飛行について”], press release, September 8, 2013b.

<sup>82</sup> Joint Staff (Japan), “Regarding the Flight of a Chinese Plane over the East China Sea” [“中国機の東シナ海における飛行について”], press release, October 25, 2013c; Joint Staff (Japan), “Regarding the Flight of a Chinese Plane over the East China Sea” [“中国機の東シナ海における飛行について”], press release, October 26, 2013d; Joint Staff (Japan), “Regarding the Flight of a Chinese Plane over the East China Sea” [“中国機の東シナ海における飛行について”], press release, October 27, 2013e.

November, a TU-154 surveillance aircraft debuted.<sup>83</sup> In subsequent years, China has introduced other aircraft, including the Y-9 surveillance aircraft in October 2014, fighter aircraft in September 2016, Y-8 electronic warfare aircraft in August 2017, and an unmanned aerial reconnaissance vehicle in April 2018. All these aircraft have continued to fly on a regular basis.

The configurations of Chinese aircraft have also grown. Prior to 2013, much PLA air activity was limited to a single aircraft. Around 2013, Chinese aircraft started appearing in larger numbers, beginning with the pair of H-6 bombers in September and then the H-6 bombers and Y-8 AEW&C aircraft flying together in October. Now, not only is it common to see variations of Chinese aircraft flying in groups, it is increasingly common to see large group formations. In addition to multiple cases of six-aircraft formations (typically some combination of H-6s, TU-154s, Y-8s, and fighters), other notable cases have included seven aircraft (in March 2019, four H-6s, one TU-154, and two fighters); eight aircraft (in September 2016, four H-6s, one TU-154, one Y-8 electronic warfare aircraft, and two fighters and again in January 2017, six H-6 bombers, one Y-8 AEW&C, and one Y-9 surveillance aircraft); ten aircraft (in July 2017, eight H-6, one Y-8 electronic warfare aircraft, and one Y-8 surveillance aircraft); and 11 aircraft (in November 2015, eight H-6, one Y-8 AEW&C, one Y-8 surveillance, and one TU-154). The largest number was 13 aircraft in March 2017, which we described earlier.

In an attempt to monitor and control the airspace that it claims, China unilaterally declared an ECS ADIZ in 2013 that overlaps with a large portion of Japan's ADIZ and covers the Senkaku Islands.<sup>84</sup> The Chinese ADIZ covers the islands and requires aircraft entering the ADIZ to report flight plans to Chinese authorities and maintain radio contact (even if aircraft are not flying toward Chinese airspace). Japan did not recognize the ADIZ because doing so could legitimize Chinese actions and weaken Japan's position regarding the Senkaku Islands.<sup>85</sup> Although China warned that aircraft that failed to cooperate would be met with armed forces adopting defensive emergency measures, there is little evidence China has ever followed through on this.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Joint Staff (Japan), "Regarding the Flight of a Chinese Plane over the East China Sea" ["中国機の東シナ海における飛行について"], press release, November 17, 2013f.

<sup>84</sup> Ministry of National Defense of the People's Republic of China, "Statement by the Government of the People's Republic of China on Establishing the East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone," *China Daily*, November 23, 2013.

<sup>85</sup> Jun Osawa, "China's ADIZ Over the East China Sea: A 'Great Wall in the Sky?'" Brookings Institution, December 17, 2013; Green et al., 2017a.

<sup>86</sup> Michael Pilger, *ADIZ Update: Enforcement in the East China Sea, Prospects for the South China Sea, and Implications for the United States*, Washington, D.C.: U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, March 2, 2016; Ian E. Rinehart and Bart Elias, *China's Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ)*, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, R43894, January 30, 2015.

## Maritime

Over the past decade, China has increasingly used maritime assets to patrol and transit near the Senkaku Islands and near Japan's main territory.<sup>87</sup> Prior to 2012, most of this activity occurred at a distance from Japanese territory, transiting to the south of Okinawa prefecture; through the Miyako Strait; or, on rare occasions, within the EEZ close to Yonaguni. Although most activity remains concentrated in the ECS and Miyako Strait area, PLAN ships began appearing in other parts of Japan after the 2012 nationalization, such as the Tsushima Strait in the west and the Ōsumi Strait in its southwest (see Figure 5.5). After 2016, PLAN vessels started appearing regularly around the Japanese archipelago, including the Tsugaru Strait in the north. For example, compared with a handful of PLAN passages through the Tsushima Strait into the Sea of Japan in the early 2010s, there were 17 in 2018.<sup>88</sup> Moreover, PLAN ships are sailing closer to Japanese territory, including Japan's territorial waters. For example, in June 2016, a *Dongdiao*-class electronic reconnaissance ship sailed into the territorial waters around

**Figure 5.5. Map of Japan and Surrounding Waters**



<sup>87</sup> As with air activity, it is difficult to determine with certainty the extent of PLAN activity, as Japan's Joint Staff only provides details of activity deemed unusual. *Unusual* activity includes same-day, round-trip transits through the Miyako Strait and into the western Pacific and round-trip transits from the ECS to the Sea of Japan and back.

<sup>88</sup> MOD, 2019, p. 74. Previous dates and iterations include 2010 (zero instances), 2011 (two), 2012 (zero), 2013 (two), 2014 (one), 2015 (two), 2016 (six), 2017 (four), and 2018 (17).

Kuchinoerabu Island and the contiguous zone of Kitadaitō Island, marking the first PLAN ship to enter into Japanese territorial waters since 2004.<sup>89</sup> And in 2018, a *Luhu*-class destroyer even sailed within 20 km of Tsushima Island.<sup>90</sup> Even more ships have sailed within 20 km of Tsushima Island.<sup>91</sup> Still more ships have sailed 50–80 km from shore. PLAN vessels have even entered the waters around the Senkaku Islands. In November 2015, a *Dongdiao*-class reconnaissance ship navigated back and forth along the Senkaku Islands’ contiguous zone.<sup>92</sup> Then, in June 2016, a *Jiangkai I*-class frigate fully entered that contiguous zone (along with three Russian naval vessels), marking a first for a PLAN ship.<sup>93</sup> In January 2018, a submerged PLAN *Shang*-class nuclear submarine (along with a *Jiangkai II*-class frigate) followed suit, marking the first time a submerged submarine was identified as transiting through the Senkakus’ contiguous zone.<sup>94</sup>

As with China’s activity in the air, the types of ships it is sailing near Japan have changed, increasing from sailing replenishment ships and *Jiangkai*-class frigates in the past to larger types of ships in recent years. In 2011, Japan saw the first PLAN submarine in the ECS. In 2012, the MSDF saw the first *Luyang II*-class, *Luzhou*-class, and *Luyang I*-class destroyers transiting near Japanese waters. Then, following a *Jiangdao*-class corvette sailing near the Senkakus for the first time in 2015, the PLAN has continued to deploy different ships, including the *Luyang III*-class destroyer and what was eventually named the *Liaoning* aircraft carrier in 2016; a submarine rescue vessel and *Dongdiao*-class electronic reconnaissance ship in 2017; the *Luhu*-class destroyer in 2018; and, in 2019, its *Fuyu*-class fast combat support ship. Today, these ships are regularly spotted transiting near Japan.

Chinese state-owned ships show similar trends. Japan defines these as being maritime law enforcement agencies’ ships—around the Senkaku Islands.<sup>95</sup> Prior to 2012, there were two cases of PRC ships entering the Senkakus’ territorial waters.<sup>96</sup> That changed with the 2012 nationalization. From October 2012 to July 2016, an average of 10.5 Chinese ships per month

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<sup>89</sup> In November 2004, a nuclear submarine transited through Japanese territorial waters (MOD, 2019, p. 72).

<sup>90</sup> Joint Staff (Japan), “Regarding the Movement of a Chinese Naval Vessel” [“中国海軍艦艇の動向について”], press release, April 25, 2018.

<sup>91</sup> Joint Staff (Japan), 2018.

<sup>92</sup> MOD, 2019, p. 72.

<sup>93</sup> “Senkaku Islands: Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga ‘Rising Tensions Extremely Regrettable,’ Chinese Naval Ship Enters Area” [“尖閣諸島 菅官房長官「緊張高め深刻に懸念」中国軍艦入域”], *Mainichi Shimbun*, June 9, 2016.

<sup>94</sup> MOD, “2. Military” [“2. 軍事”], *2018 Defense White Paper* [平成 30 年版防衛白書], Tokyo, 2018; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, “Opposition to Chinese Navy Submarine Entering the Contiguous Zone Around the Senkaku Islands” [“中国海軍潜水艦の尖閣諸島接続水域入域に対する抗議”], January 12, 2018.

<sup>95</sup> Unlike the Joint Staff data, this activity is documented in full.

<sup>96</sup> The first was in April 1978, when a swarm of Chinese fishery ships with maritime militia onboard intruded within three nautical miles of the islands; the second was in December 2008, when two CMS ships entered the territorial waters for approximately nine hours (JCG expert, email to RAND, May 1, 2020).



entered the territorial waters. This activity continued, with an average of nine Chinese ships per month from August 2016 to the end of 2019. A similar trend is seen in the activity in the Senkakus' contiguous zone, where an average of 65.5 Chinese ships per month entered over the same 46-month period from 2012 to 2016, followed by 66.3 ships per month over from 2016 to 2019. The most ships to enter the territorial waters occurred in 2013, with 188 ships (and 819 ships in the contiguous zone); the most ships entered the contiguous zone in 2019, when China sent in 1,097 ships (and 138 into the territorial waters). It is important to note that this increase in CCG activity is likely driven by a number of factors, including China responding to the activities of Japanese fishing boats and a Chinese desire to police and prevent provocative actions by Chinese actors. There have been reports of China preventing Chinese civilians from approaching the disputed islands.<sup>97</sup>

And as with the PLAN, the types of ships the CCG is sailing have also changed. A decade ago, CCG ships were generally standard-sized coast guard ships. But over time, these ships became larger and more militarized.<sup>98</sup> In 2015, the CCG began operating an exceptionally large cutter, the *Zhongguo Haijing* 2901, with a 12,000-ton displacement and a helicopter deck and hangar facilities that can accommodate medium-lift rotary-wing aircraft and UAVs.<sup>99</sup> Since 2015, these CCG ships, which are armed, have been continuously present near the Senkaku Islands.<sup>100</sup>

### *Cyber and Information Operations Tactics*

China has pursued some cyber operations against Japan, and scholars have only recently analyzed and identified PRC influence operations in Japan (see Figure 5.6). Apart from continuing efforts to try to get Japan to change or amend the content of its history textbooks, the most prominent PRC tactic has been an increasing use of cyber operations against Japanese government and defense manufacturers. China is likely increasing its use of cyber tactics to access Japanese data and government secrets and to take advantage of newer technologies to preposition itself against Japanese agencies and critical infrastructure to obtain operational advantages should a conflict break out with Japan.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Mike Mochizuki and Jiaxiu Han, "Is China Escalating Tensions with Japan in the East China Sea?" *The Diplomat*, September 16, 2020.

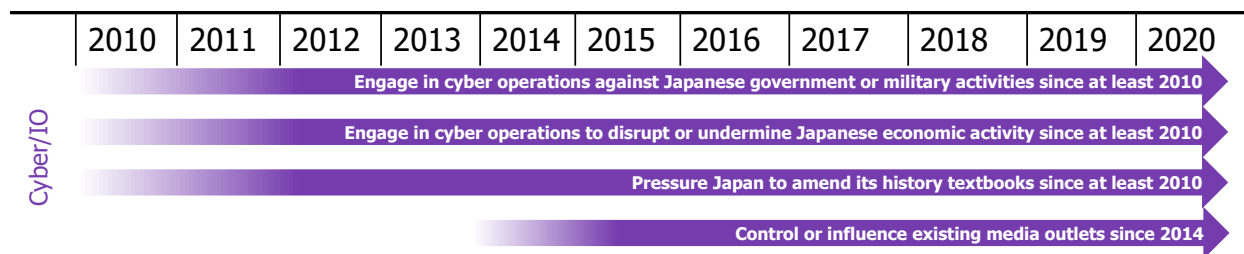
<sup>98</sup> Ships have grown to 3,500 tons and are equipped with 76 mm guns, close-in weapon systems, and a helicopter hangar. See Lyle J. Morris, "China Welcomes Its Newest Armed Force: The Coast Guard," War on the Rocks website, April 4, 2018; Jr Ng, "Coast Guard with Muscles," *Asian Military Review*, September 9, 2019; Adam P. Liff, "China, Japan, and the East China Sea: Beijing's 'Gray Zone' Coercion and Tokyo's Response," Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, December 2019b, p. 5.

<sup>99</sup> Ryan D. Martinson, "East Asian Security in the Age of the Chinese Mega-Cutter," Washington, D.C.: Center for International Maritime Security, July 3, 2015; Ng, 2019.

<sup>100</sup> Kentaro Furuya, "Maritime Security—The Architecture of Japan's Maritime-Security System in the East China Sea," *Naval War College Review*, Vol. 72, No. 4, Autumn 2019, p. 29.

<sup>101</sup> MSDF officer, RAND interview, June 2, 2020.

**Figure 5.6. Major PRC Cyber and Information Gray Zone Activities Against Japan**



NOTES: Arrows indicate three or more cases of observed PRC activity over the specified period. Figure does not capture all PRC activities or tactics.

Japan’s susceptibility to cyberattack was first demonstrated by a series of attacks on 16 government websites in January 2000; China was revealed to be the source of the attacks.<sup>102</sup> Since then, a number of cyberattacks have been launched against Japan from Chinese actors or from locations in China—some of these occurred during periods of heightened tensions between the two countries to coerce Japan and others were part of China’s general effort to steal information or technology from Japan. Random attacks occurred against Japan’s commercial sector (Honda in 2009, Sony in 2011), but the first noncommercial cyberattacks after the 2010 Senkaku event occurred back to back in 2011. First, emails and documents from Japanese lawmakers and their staffs were compromised in a phishing attack on Diet servers and lawmakers’ computers. Although the attack was never confirmed as coming from China, the hijacker’s machines communicated with a server in China, and the attackers had Chinese characters in their code.<sup>103</sup> Second, in the first known attack on a Japanese defense manufacturer, Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Ltd., the intruder gaining access to computers, and one report stated that its submarine, missile, and nuclear power plant component factories had been targeted.<sup>104</sup> Although the perpetrator was not confirmed, this attack came at the same time as others believed to be from China against U.S. defense contractors.

Since then, PRC cyberattacks have occurred with increasing frequency. Some of the cyberattacks targeting Japanese defense manufacturers (e.g., Kobe Steel, NEC Corp, Pasco Corp, Mitsubishi Electric) are believed to have been the work of the Chinese hacking group Tick (also known as Bronze Butler).<sup>105</sup> Tokyo identified other hacks that attempted to gain information on Japan’s North Korean policies as being the work of Chinese state-sponsored hacking group

<sup>102</sup> “Japan—Strategic Weapon Systems,” *Jane’s Sentinel Security Assessment—China and Northeast Asia*, May 29, 2020.

<sup>103</sup> Center for Strategic and International Studies, undated.

<sup>104</sup> “Japan’s Defense Industry Hit by Its First Cyber Attack,” Reuters, September 18, 2011.

<sup>105</sup> Sergiu Gatlan, “Japanese Defense Contractors Kobe Steel, Pasco Disclose Breaches,” Bleeping Computer website, February 6, 2020.

APT10.<sup>106</sup> One known attack was a direct a response to a Japanese action. Following the 2012 nationalization of the Senkakus, Chinese hackers attacked a wide spectrum of Japanese websites in September 2012, with the bulk (19) occurring between September 11 and 19, targeting government websites (such as the MOD, Supreme Court, and Ministry of Internal Affairs), banks, utility companies, newspapers, and universities, among others.<sup>107</sup> Even among these cases, with suspected links to China, Japan has been hesitant to attribute the attacks to China or discuss how coordinated it suspects the operations were.

Unlike cyber operations, PRC influence operations in Japan have been underexamined, and experts have only recently identified some influence efforts. In addition to continuing negative public sentiment regarding China that makes it difficult for pro-China messaging to flourish, Japan's media is dominated by traditional Japanese media outlets, limiting the ability of non-Japanese messaging to penetrate the mainstream market.<sup>108</sup> Within established Japanese media, we found Chinese purchase of a propaganda media insert in the *Mainichi Shimbun*, although that insert generally focuses on travel and cultural issues.<sup>109</sup> A 2020 report on disinformation further documents the Chinese government efforts to exert influence over or control two smaller Japanese-language media outlets: SearChina and Record China. Established by a Chinese filmmaker as a news site in 2005, Record China “has been a tool of the CCP for its influence activities since 2015 at least” and has largely echoed the CCP party line on such issues as Xinjiang.<sup>110</sup> The outlet has also been suspected of trying to inflame tensions between Japan and the ROK. China appears to have exerted control over Shanghai SearChina (a subsidiary) since approximately 2014, and SearChina appears to be “arbitrarily disseminating positive news about China to expand pro-China sentiment in Japan.”<sup>111</sup> By and large, however, it appears that Chinese influence in Japan is limited, although China has been working to increase its influence since at least 2014.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> “Chinese Hackers Targeted Japanese Defense Firms for North Korean Secrets, Experts Say,” *Fortune*, April 23, 2018.

<sup>107</sup> The attacks were of two varieties. One was a denial of service. The other was posting pro-Chinese messages about the Senkaku Islands on the site's homepage that included the Chinese national flag. See “Cyber Damage After Senkaku Nationalization, 19 Websites, National Police Agency Concluding Whether It Was an Attack from China” [“尖閣国有化後のサイバー被害、19サイト 警察庁まとめ 中国から攻撃か”], *Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, September 19, 2012; “Collecting Information on the Cyber Attack Related to the Senkaku Issue, Current as of October 2” [“尖閣問題関連のサイバー攻撃報道まとめ 10月2日現在”], *SHIELD Security Research Center*, October 2, 2012.

<sup>108</sup> Harold, Beauchamp-Mustafaga, and Hornung, 2021, p. 111.

<sup>109</sup> Lim and Bergin, 2018.

<sup>110</sup> Maiko Ichihara, “Influence Activities of Domestic Actors on the Internet: Disinformation and Information Manipulation in Japan,” in Asia Democracy Research Network, *Social Media, Disinformation, and Democracy in Asia: Country Cases*, Seoul, October 2020, p. 11.

<sup>111</sup> Ichihara, 2020, p. 22.

<sup>112</sup> Devin Stewart, *China's Influence in Japan: Everywhere yet Nowhere in Particular*, Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2020; Hsiao, 2019.

## Trends in Chinese Tactics

Although Chinese tactics have increased in diversity, China's use of all tactics over time has not grown linearly. China has relied on military tactics in the air and sea, increasing both the frequency of its activities and the type of assets it deploys, but it has varied its use of geopolitical and economic tactics. Shortly after the 2010 Senkaku and 2012 nationalization events, China relied heavily on geopolitical and economic tactics but appears to have shifted away from these tactics from 2015. Instead, China appears to have moved toward cyber tactics and arresting Japanese nationals. While China focuses its gray zone efforts vis-à-vis Japan on Japanese agencies, organizations, and armed forces, there is no evidence that China has employed gray zone tactics against U.S. agencies, organizations, or armed forces based in Japan.<sup>113</sup>

There are also noticeable differences between the tactics China uses against Japan and those it uses against other regional actors. For example, unlike in Taiwan, China has limited grassroots IO efforts in Japan. This could be because of the unforgiving domestic environment, in which such tactics are likely to have little effect, given Japan's low rate of positive feelings toward China and the strong control of private media in Japan. And unlike in the SCS, overt violent acts against Japanese fishermen or JCG vessels are noticeably absent. For example, apart from the 2010 Senkaku incident, no Chinese vessels have rammed or shouldered Japanese vessels. Even during the 2016 swarming incident, no ships collided with or shouldered each other, and the situation did not escalate into a confrontation.<sup>114</sup> The closest China has come is complaining to Japan about Japanese fishing boats trespassing in Chinese territorial waters near the Senkaku Islands and asking Tokyo to intervene.<sup>115</sup> There was also the incident in May 2020 of two CCG ships chasing a Japanese fishing boat that entered Japanese territorial waters near the Senkakus.<sup>116</sup>

Likewise, apart from the August 2016 swarming incident, China has not amassed large numbers of assets to overwhelm Japan.<sup>117</sup> There are no recorded instances of Chinese citizens—military or civilian—killing Japanese fishermen. Chinese military assets have not conducted live-fire exercises near Japan; rather, such exercises appear to occur in distant waters or in the skies over the Pacific Ocean.

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<sup>113</sup> There are several possible explanations. First, the United States and China do not share a territorial dispute. Given that most of China's activities against Japan are to assert its claim over the Senkaku Islands, it makes sense to not see similar PRC activity against the United States. Second, there are no areas for China to use its state-affiliated bodies or SOEs as tools to advance Chinese interests. Third, China likely seeks to avoid conflict with the United States and pushing the United States closer to Japan. Given that Chinese gray zone activities are designed to avoid triggering U.S. security commitments by exploiting ambiguity and asymmetry, it follows that China would want to avoid directly engaging the United States itself. See Green et al., 2017a, pp. 3–4.

<sup>114</sup> JCG expert, email to RAND, May 1, 2020.

<sup>115</sup> "China Demands Japanese Fishing Boats Not . . .," 2020.

<sup>116</sup> "Japanese Fishing Boat Chased by China Govt Ships Near Senkakus," Nippon.com, May 9, 2020.

<sup>117</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan official, RAND interview, April 21, 2020.

To date, Japan has successfully countered the PRC's gray zone activities or has mitigated the damage they caused. For example, in response to China's rare earth boycott, Japan diversified its global suppliers. To mitigate against economic damage from PRC protests or boycotts, many Japanese companies disinvested in China.<sup>118</sup> Despite China's provocations against the Senkaku Islands or other Japanese territory, Japan has been able to maintain the status quo through active monitoring, shadowing, and warning off PRC intrusions. This success stems from Japan's capable JCG fleet, a modern and sophisticated SDF that raises the costs of a military confrontation considerably, and a solid U.S.-Japan alliance that promises U.S. involvement should military confrontation occur. This success is not without cost, however. China's increased aerial intrusions, for example, have exacerbated ASDF fleet maintenance issues and negatively affected pilot training.<sup>119</sup> Similarly, increasing cyber activity has forced Japan to devote more resources to cyber defense.<sup>120</sup>

Some PRC activities remain challenging for Japan. For example, because China maintains its oil and gas platforms on its side of the median line, Japan cannot stop China's resource extraction activities. Likewise, Japan has not been able to stop Chinese land purchases connected with the CCP because there is no way to discriminate between types of PRC buyers.<sup>121</sup>

## Japan's Response

Japan engages in various efforts to respond to China's gray zone activities. Japan's dominant concern remains maintaining the status quo in the ECS and preventing or deterring threatening actions against Japanese territory. To date, there appears to be no evidence of Japanese actions modulating China's use of gray zone tactics, and there is a pervasive view in Tokyo that the only thing Japan can do is to continue doing what it is doing.<sup>122</sup>

In line with this thinking, in addition to its efforts to monitor and respond to PRC activities, Japan has been modernizing and increasing its arsenal of destroyers; submarines; fighters; and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) assets. Japan has also been working to better equip its forces to defend against and deter China's changing threats. This includes, for example, the Ground Self-Defense Force (GDSF) reducing some of its heavier assets, such as tanks and heavy artillery, and moving to develop more-mobile variants of existing equipment.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan official, RAND interview, April 21, 2020.

<sup>119</sup> Burke et al., 2018.

<sup>120</sup> The scope of Japan's cyberdefense remains relatively small. MOD official, RAND interview, May 11, 2020.

<sup>121</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan official, RAND interview, April 21, 2020; MOD official, RAND interview, May 11, 2020.

<sup>122</sup> MSDF officer, RAND interview, June 2, 2020.

<sup>123</sup> The GDSF has procured such equipment as amphibious assault vehicles and Osprey tilt-rotor aircraft.

Supplementing this has been an expansion of the SDF's ECS presence through the creation of new military units and new bases on Japanese islands.<sup>124</sup>

Analogous changes have occurred for the JCG. Over the past decade, it has seen annual increases in its budget and personnel.<sup>125</sup> It has grown quantitatively and qualitatively, with more patrol vessels capable of operating on the open ocean rather than only near the shore.<sup>126</sup> Finally, the sizes of JCG's patrol vessels have increased (although they are still much smaller than China's).<sup>127</sup> Japan has also improved the JCG's ability to monitor and respond to Chinese maritime activities.<sup>128</sup> This includes establishing a 12-ship Senkaku Territorial Waters Guard Unit at Ishigaki to patrol the waters near the Senkaku Islands and upgrading the Miyako Coast Guard Station to an office in 2016, which doubled its patrol staff and added eight new patrol vessels.<sup>129</sup> Even Japan's National Police Agency established its first special unit within the Okinawa prefectural police to respond to illegal landings of armed individuals on Japan's islands.<sup>130</sup>

Japan has strengthened and deepened its security ties with the United States and other states that share similar concerns regarding China. Along with the 2015 revision to the U.S.-Japan mutual defense guidelines, Japan and the United States have jointly advocated for the Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy, which originated in Japan to push back on China via the promotion of rule of law, freedom of navigation, free trade, connectivity, quality development assistance, and capacity-building focused on maritime law enforcement. Japan has also strengthened ties with other states in the Indo-Pacific and Europe.<sup>131</sup> Most visible has been Japan's push to revive

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<sup>124</sup> This includes efforts to expand the GSDF's footprint to four new bases in the Nansei Shotō, accompanied by the placement of surface-to-air missiles and antiship cruise missiles. Japan also established a 2,100-member amphibious rapid deployment brigade in Kyūshū to position the GSDF "to land, recapture and secure without delay any remote islands that might be invaded." Over time, it is expected to increase to approximately 3,400 personnel. The ASDF has also established a new air wing in Okinawa (by supplementing an existing fighter squadron with a second one). Quote from MOD, *Medium Term Defense Program (FY2014–FY2018)*, Tokyo, December 17, 2013, p. 5. See also Jeffrey W. Hornung, "Japan's Amphibious Joint Pain," in Harold et al., 2018, p. 29.

<sup>125</sup> JCG, "Summary of Budget Decision for Japan Coast Guard FY 2020" ["令和2年度海上保安庁関係予算決定概要"], December 2019, pp. 17, 20.

<sup>126</sup> By the end of Japan's FY 2020 (March 31, 2021), the JCG was slated to have 382 patrol ships, including 144 larger patrol vessels [巡視船] capable of operating on the open ocean. See JCG, "What Is the Difference Between Patrol Vessels and Patrol Craft?" ["巡視船と巡視艇の違いはなんですか?"], 5th Regional Headquarters, June 7, 2010; JCG, 2019, pp. 17, 20; JCG, "Japan Coast Guard," brochure, Tokyo, 2020, p. 33.

<sup>127</sup> The JCG's largest ships are 6,500 tons, with some that can carry helicopters. See Morris et al., 2019, pp. 100–101.

<sup>128</sup> Morris et al., 2019, p. 98.

<sup>129</sup> JCG, "Ships, Aircraft" ["船艇・航空機"], 11th Regional Coast Guard Headquarters, undated.

<sup>130</sup> Shimpachi Yoshida and Shinichi Fujiwara, "Police Task Force in Okinawa to Deal with Armed Intruders on Isles," *Asahi Shimbun*, August 30, 2019.

<sup>131</sup> Jeffrey W. Hornung, "Japan's Growing Hard Hedge Against China," *Asian Security*, Vol. 10, No. 2, 2014; Jeffrey Hornung, "Japan's Pushback of China," *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 38, No. 1, 2015.

the Quad, a grouping of Japan, the United States, Australia, and India, to advance Free and Open Indo-Pacific tenets.

In the cyber domain, Japan has been slowly addressing shortfalls in its defenses. It passed the Cyber Security Basic Act in 2014 and established the Cybersecurity Strategic Headquarters in the Cabinet in 2015. The headquarters is supported by the National Center of Incident Readiness and Strategy for Cybersecurity in the Cabinet Secretariat. The center is meant to serve as the control tower in responding to significant cybersecurity incidents. The MOD and SDF have strengthened the defenses of their networks and systems as well.

Finally, Japan is investing in diplomatic initiatives to shape international opinion about itself. By funding Japanese studies at think tanks and universities, promoting the global Cool Japan initiative, and establishing three Japan Houses worldwide, Japan has aimed to highlight Japanese culture and foster a deeper understanding of the country to project a positive global image.<sup>132</sup> Japan has also embraced more-targeted strategic communications by creating the Public Diplomacy Strategy Division in the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2012 to counter Chinese narratives by delivering Japan's positions on such things as wartime history and territorial issues.<sup>133</sup> Tokyo also attempts to bolster its case by exposing PRC gray zone activities. Most data on PRC air and maritime intrusions in this report, for instance, come from Japanese government websites.<sup>134</sup>

## Potential Near- to Medium-Term Chinese Gray Zone Activities Against Japan

Japanese officials view Beijing's use of gray zone activities as means to change the status quo to the disadvantage of Japan and believe that China is likely to continue to do so in the years ahead.<sup>135</sup> This is particularly likely in the air and maritime domains as technologies improve. On the water, there is an expectation that, as JCG capabilities improve, China will always come back with improved capabilities beyond Japan's in an endless cat-and-mouse game.<sup>136</sup> In the air,

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<sup>132</sup> Cabinet Office, "Cool Japan Strategy," webpage, Tokyo: Government of Japan, undated; Japan House, "What's JH," webpage, undated; "Japanese Government Funding More Japan Chairs at Think Tanks," *Think Tank Watch* blog, April 11, 2019; Warren A. Stanislaus, "Japan House: Tokyo's New Public Diplomacy Push," *The Diplomat*, July 22, 2017.

<sup>133</sup> This includes publishing information on Chinese activities, holding public events, and managing a section on the ministry's website devoted to explaining Japan's case for various territorial disputes, including the Senkaku Islands. There is also suspicion that Japan paid a foreign think tank, London's Henry Jackson Society, in 2017 to wage anti-China propaganda campaigns and push back against China's foreign policy. See Morris et al., 2019, pp. 103–104; Richard Kerbaj and Michael Sheridan, "Rifkind a Stoooge in Secret PR War on China," *The Times* (London), January 29, 2017.

<sup>134</sup> These sources include Joint Staff (Japan) press releases [報道発表資料] and information released by the Japan Coast Guard.

<sup>135</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan official, RAND interview, April 21, 2020.

<sup>136</sup> JCG official, email to RAND, May 6, 2020.

Japanese officials anticipate an increase in unmanned, fixed-wing PRC air activity. This would likely complicate matters for both the JCG and SDF because it prevents making visible confirmation of whether something is a Chinese asset and communicating directly with pilots to determine flight intent.<sup>137</sup> For the SDF in particular, this makes it more difficult to determine whether that asset is a threat that needs to be intercepted or destroyed.

As China strengthens its capabilities in the cyber, space, and electromagnetic domains, Japanese experts assess that China will likely employ more cyber tactics against Japan in the future.<sup>138</sup> Although most PRC gray zone activity to date has not been in these new domains, there is a belief in Tokyo that, if a war with China occurs, it will start with China attacking via cyber means and the electromagnetic spectrum. If Japan is ill-prepared to prevent or respond to such attacks, they could significantly cripple Japan's military assets.<sup>139</sup>

In terms of problematic future scenarios, the most prominent is if China deploys armed personnel onto the Senkaku Islands.<sup>140</sup> Japanese experts see the likelihood of this as low because of the difficulty of defending the islands and because of China's likely desire to avoid the high potential political and military costs involved. Were it to occur, Japan would have to fight its way in to take back the islands and deploy the SDF for a historic first: combat. Because of problems of jointness within the SDF, such an operation would prove challenging.<sup>141</sup>

A more likely military challenge is simply an onslaught of Chinese activity. Although the MSDF and ASDF have proven capable of managing the day-to-day situations and although the JCG has been able to handle nonnaval Chinese incursions, the August 2016 swarming incident showed that China can organize and direct many assets at Japan within a short time. If China pursued a similar action in the future, with PLA and CCG assets,<sup>142</sup> People's Armed Force Maritime Militia, and/or fishing vessels,<sup>143</sup> it could overwhelm Japan's ability to respond.<sup>144</sup> Similarly, if China engaged in extended periods of activity in Japanese waters, as in summer

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<sup>137</sup> ASDF officer, RAND interview, May 6, 2020; JCG official, email to RAND, May 6, 2020.

<sup>138</sup> MOD official, RAND interview, May 11, 2020.

<sup>139</sup> MSDF officer, RAND interview, June 2, 2020.

<sup>140</sup> Liff, 2019b, p. 5.

<sup>141</sup> Hornung, 2018.

<sup>142</sup> If the PRC activity included a larger number of the CCG's monster frigates, the JCG would be challenged because its largest ships, the *Shikishima* and *Akitsushima*, have full displacements of 6,500 tons, half the size of China's.

<sup>143</sup> If only PRC law enforcement vessels or fishing trawlers were involved, it would be difficult to have the SDF assist, short of declaring a maritime security operation [海上警備行動], which would enable the MSDF to lead a law-enforcement operation. Should PLAN commanders misunderstand the distinction of the MSDF mission in this case, seeing naval ships entering the waters might provide the PLAN with a reason to enter the fray and escalate tensions.

<sup>144</sup> As one Japanese official noted, "everything will be more difficult if they do it in much larger numbers" because that would have the potential to overwhelm Japan's finite forces (MOD official, RAND interview, May 7, 2020).



2020, China could put substantial stress on Japan's equipment maintenance timelines and personnel training schedules.

Beyond these, there is the potential that China may one day employ significant IO in Okinawa to encourage locals to seek independence from Japan. China could also explore ways to interfere in Japan's elections. Although China is likely to face difficulties in successfully employing either tactic, Japan is currently ill-prepared to respond.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> MOD official, RAND interview, May 7, 2020.

## 6. China's Gray Zone Activities Against Vietnam

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We identified several main trends in Beijing's use of gray zone tactics against Vietnam between 2009 and 2020. First, China employed a variety of geopolitical, economic, military, and cyber/IO tactics against Vietnam, including many new tactics since 2013. Second, some of the most aggressive PRC tactics, such as ramming Vietnamese vessels, often occurred in waters near the Paracel Islands, which China occupies but Vietnam claims (and previously occupied). Many encounters featuring aggressive PRC tactics have involved CCG vessels and/or armed or uniformed personnel on other vessels. Third, China has layered activities across domains to pressure Hanoi during periods of heightened tension, most notably during the 2014 oil rig standoff. Fourth, some especially violent and escalatory PRC maritime tactics do not appear to have been used since 2016. Chinese maritime forces have tended to avoid shooting and killing Vietnamese fishermen, kidnapping Vietnamese fishermen or vessels for ransom, employing water cannons against Vietnamese vessels, or cutting cables laid by seismic survey ships. Other forms of maritime pressure, however, continue with high frequency and scope.

### Historical Context and Overview

Tensions between China and Vietnam in the SCS solidified during the 1970s and 1980s amid broader frictions in the bilateral relationship.<sup>1</sup> In the 1990s, China and Vietnam normalized relations as both regimes focused on economic development. China appears to have increased its efforts to counter and shape Vietnamese behavior in the late 2000s, with some Chinese analysts pointing to sovereignty disputes as playing a role in the “fluctuations” in the relationship.<sup>2</sup> China's changing calculus may have been spurred by both countries' growing exploration of natural resources in the SCS and both countries' SCS claim submissions under UNCLOS in 2009. Beijing's calculus may have also changed after Secretary Hillary Clinton raised concerns about China's coercive SCS activities at the July 2010 ASEAN Regional Forum Foreign Minister's Meeting in Hanoi.<sup>3</sup> In the mid- to late 2000s, China's maritime militia began playing a greater role in maritime incidents, and Chinese vessels reportedly captured or arrested dozens of

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<sup>1</sup> In 1974, China seized Vietnam-claimed features in the Paracel and Spratly Islands, and the two faced off in a March 1988 skirmish in the Spratlys. China had built infrastructure on Mischief Reef by 1995 (Fravel, 2008; Bill Hayton, *The South China Sea: The Struggle for Power in Asia*, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> Pan Jin'e [潘金娥], “Predicaments and Reconstruction in Sino-Vietnamese Relations: A Methodological Reflection” [“中越关系的困境与重构: 一个方法论的思考”], *Studies on Party and Government* [党政研究], No. 1, 2016, p. 33.

<sup>3</sup> Denny Roy, *Return of the Dragon: Rising China and Regional Security*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2013, p. 233.

Vietnamese vessels and hundreds of personnel between 2005 and 2010, sometimes shooting or kidnapping Vietnamese fishermen and holding them for ransom. In 2012, China upgraded the administration level of Sansha City on Woody Island and pressured Cambodia to block an ASEAN statement critical of China's SCS actions.

Under General Secretary Xi, Chinese officials have affirmed two frameworks for China-Vietnam relations developed under Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, respectively: “long-term stability, future-oriented, friendly neighbor relations, and comprehensive cooperation” and “good neighbors, friends, comrades, and partners.”<sup>4</sup> Despite these affirmations, China has continued to apply pressure on Vietnam, and Hanoi has pushed back against Chinese coercion, strengthened partnerships with such countries as the United States and Japan, and worked within ASEAN to call out Chinese actions in the SCS.<sup>5</sup>

Three factors shape China's employment of gray zone tactics against Vietnam. First, China seeks to erode Vietnam's willingness to denounce and counter Chinese pressure, including Vietnam's domestic activities critical of China, pursuit of countermeasures in international and regional forums, and efforts to strengthen partnerships with like-minded third countries. Second, China seeks to obstruct Vietnam's continued pursuit of SCS resource extraction and, since 2014 has undertaken some of the most coercive and layered activities against Vietnam during standoffs related to oil and gas exploration. Third, China's growing presence and capabilities have provided it more ways to pressure Vietnam, including growing leverage over Vietnam's economy, neighbors, and capabilities in the maritime, air, and cyber/IO domains.

Official Chinese government statements on the 70th anniversary of Sino-Vietnam relations in 2020 reaffirmed the need to follow the “correct path” of bilateral relations by building on the “comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership” agreed to in 2013.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, China continues to use coercive approaches against Vietnam, including since the COVID-19 pandemic began.

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<sup>4</sup> Pan Jin'e, 2016; Jia Xiudong [贾秀东], “Crucial Points for Constructing the Sino-Vietnam ‘Four Goods’ Relationship” [“构建中越‘四好’关系的关键”], *Liaowang* [瞭望], April 15, 2015.

<sup>5</sup> Chinese analysts focus on U.S.-Vietnam relations especially as an area of concern. See Jia, 2015; Huang Xingqiu [黄兴球], “Seven Decades of China-Vietnam Relations: Axis and Direction” [“中越关系 70 年: 基轴与方向”], *Southeast Asian Affairs* [南洋问题研究], No. 1, 2020. Hanoi's most recent defense white paper reflects Vietnam's evolving strategy and views toward China, with increasingly negative (although subtle) language about Beijing. See Ministry of National Defence of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, *2019 Viet Nam National Defence*, white paper, Hanoi: National Political Publishing House, 2019.

<sup>6</sup> “Xi Jinping with Vietnamese Communist Party's General Secretary and President Nguyen Phu Trong's Mutually Sent Congratulatory Telegrams on the 70th Anniversary of China and Vietnam Establishing Diplomatic Relations” [“习近平就中越建交 70 周年同越共中央总书记、国家主席阮富仲互致贺电”], Xinhua, January 18, 2020.

## Variety and Types of Chinese Tactics

### *Geopolitical Tactics*

China employs a variety of geopolitical tactics against Vietnam (see Figure 6.1). Internationally, China works through third countries to pressure or reduce Vietnam's influence. China has gained influence in Cambodia and Laos by providing political, economic, and military support to both countries.<sup>7</sup> In 2012 and 2016, China's influence over Cambodia likely caused that country to block joint ASEAN agreements or communiqués that directly reference Chinese conduct in the SCS; after the 2016 meeting, the Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs warned that the SCS was “a test case for the unity and the central role of ASEAN.”<sup>8</sup> At the August 2019 ASEAN ministerial sidelines, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi reportedly asked Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov for Russia to halt Rosneft's activities with Vietnam at Vanguard Bank, but Lavrov declined—an instance in which Chinese efforts were not successful.<sup>9</sup>

Bilaterally, China manipulates political ties and legal campaigns to its advantage. China has long leveraged party-to-party ties to influence Vietnamese policy and has, at times, cut off these ties to apply pressure on Vietnam, such as during the 2014 oil rig standoff. Beijing has repeatedly pursued a legal approach to counter Vietnam's territorial and maritime claims and advance its own via submissions to UNCLOS in 2009 and further exchanges in 2019 and 2020. Beijing also employed such administrative tactics as upgrading the status of Sansha City in the Paracel Islands in 2012 and again in 2020 to solidify its claims over disputed SCS features.<sup>10</sup> China has also tacitly allowed small-scale anti-Vietnam protests in Beijing and Hong Kong.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> On Cambodia, see Ian Storey, “China's Tightening Relationship with Cambodia,” *China Brief*, Vol. 6, No. 9, April 26, 2006; Charles Edel, “Cambodia's Troubling Tilt Toward China: And What It Means for Washington's Indo-Pacific Strategy,” *Foreign Affairs*, August 17, 2018; and Somthea Tann, “How Chinese Money Is Changing Cambodia,” *Deutsche Welle*, August 22, 2019. On Laos, see Carlyle A. Thayer, “China's ‘New Security Concept,’ and Southeast Asia,” in David W. Lovell, ed., *Asia-Pacific Security: Policy Challenges*, Singapore: Asia Pacific Press, 2003; Martin Stuart-Fox, “Laos: The Chinese Connection,” *Southeast Asian Affairs*, 2009; and Joshua Simonidis and Ashling Stout, “Expensive Railway Highlights China's Growing Influence in Laos,” *cogitASIA* blog, October 29, 2014.

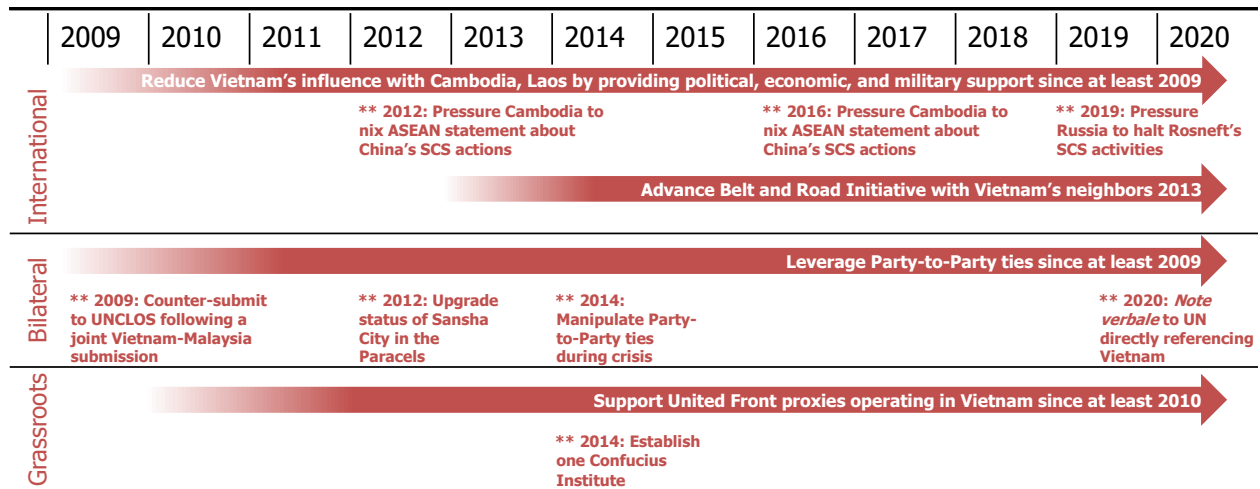
<sup>8</sup> Ernest Z. Bower, “China Reveals Its Hand on ASEAN in Phnom Penh,” Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, July 20, 2012; Manuel Mogato, Michael Martina, and Ben Blanchard, “ASEAN Deadlocked on South China Sea, Cambodia Blocks Statement,” Reuters, July 25, 2016; “Vietnam Warns South China Sea Is a ‘Test’ of ASEAN,” *VnExpress*, July 25, 2016.

<sup>9</sup> The Russian government owns half of Rosneft. See Carl Thayer, “A Difficult Summer in the South China Sea,” *The Diplomat*, November 1, 2019; Thu Huong Le and Sunny Cao, “Russia's Growing Interests in the South China Sea,” Real Clear Defense, December 18, 2019.

<sup>10</sup> Nguyen Hong Thao, “Extended Continental Shelf: A Renewed South China Sea Competition,” Maritime Issues website, April 17, 2020; OSD, 2019, p. 7.

<sup>11</sup> Joshua Kurlantzick, *A China-Vietnam Military Clash*, New York: Council on Foreign Relations, September 23, 2015; Trung Nguyen, “Vietnam and China at Odds over Territorial Note,” Voice of America, May 28, 2014.

**Figure 6.1. Major PRC Geopolitical Gray Zone Activities Against Vietnam**



NOTES: Arrows indicate three or more cases of observed PRC activity over the specified period. Figure does not capture all PRC activities or tactics. \*\* indicates an individual activity.

PRC involvement in Vietnam at the grassroots level is also shaped by Communist Party linkages, which extend from senior leaders down to provincial, city, and people-to-people exchanges. China has provided support for pro-China ethnic Chinese groups and other proxies in Vietnam under the auspices of the UFWD since at least 2010, although these groups do not appear to play a major role in shaping Vietnamese politics or society.<sup>12</sup> China also established one Confucius Institute in Hanoi in 2014.<sup>13</sup>

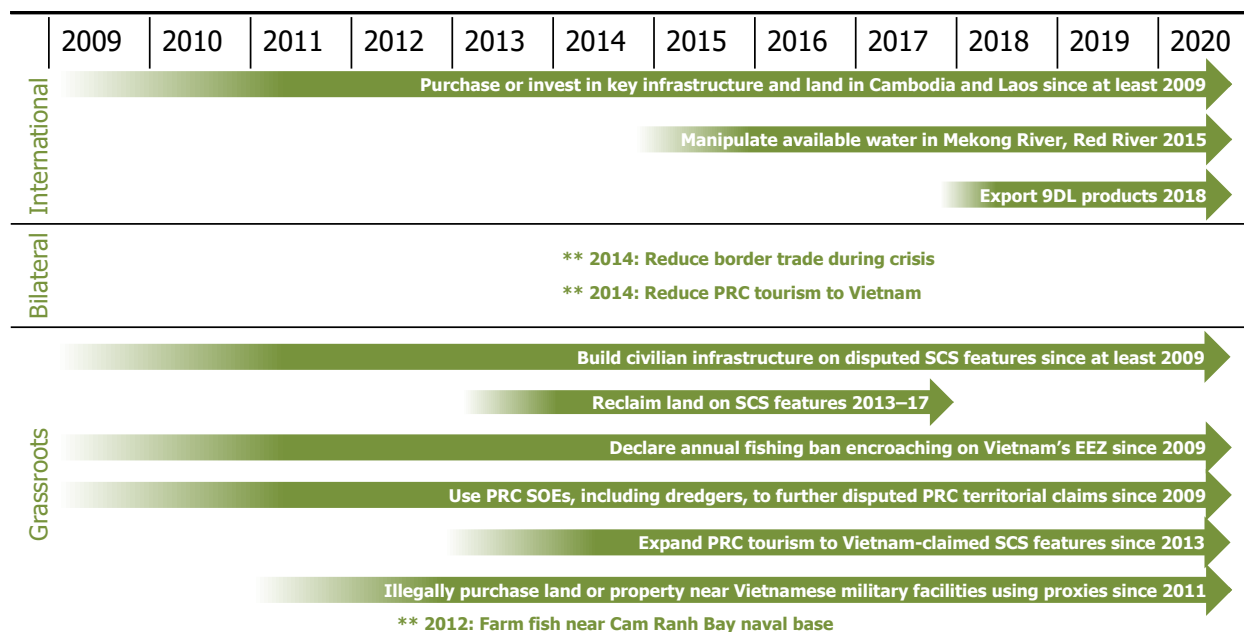
### *Economic Tactics*

China has used its economic power to strengthen its position vis-à-vis Vietnam (see Figure 6.2). Internationally, Vietnamese defense officials and analysts have raised concerns about Beijing commercially leasing large swaths of land in Cambodia, including potential

<sup>12</sup> Vietnam collaborates with China on United Front Work at some level. Some UFWD proxies are active in Vietnam: the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries [中国人民对外友好协会 or 对外友协] since at least 2010, the China Zhi Gong Party from at least 2016 through 2018, and the China Overseas Friendship Association [中华海外联谊会] in 2018 and likely other years as well. See Xu Yan, ed., "The Sixth Meeting of China-Vietnam People's Forum Held in China," Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries website, December 3, 2014; Amy E. Searight, "Chinese Influence Activities with U.S. Allies and Partners in Southeast Asia," testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Washington, D.C., April 5, 2018; All-China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese [中华全国归国华侨联合会], "Vice Chairman Qiao Wei Meets with Participants of the 23rd Session of the China Overseas Friendship Association Seminar for Young and Middle-Aged Overseas Chinese Representatives" ["乔卫副主席会见中华海外联谊会第 23 期 海外侨胞中青年代表人士研修班学员"], press release, May 10, 2018.

<sup>13</sup> The institute has kept a low profile following negative reactions from some Vietnamese commentators. See Huynh Thuc Vy, "Vietnam's Confucius Institute Distraction," *The Diplomat*, November 24, 2013.

**Figure 6.2. Major PRC Economic Gray Zone Activities Against Vietnam**



NOTES: Arrows indicate three or more cases of observed PRC activity over the specified period. Figure does not capture all PRC activities or tactics. \*\* indicates an individual activity. 9DL = nine-dash line; SCS = South China Sea.

dual-use facilities that could allow China to rapidly project military power toward Vietnam.<sup>14</sup> There are also concerns about growing PRC investment in Laos.<sup>15</sup> PRC upstream locations and manipulation of river water resources—particularly the Mekong River and Red River—have also been an area of focus for downstream countries, such as Vietnam, since 2015, with one Vietnamese economist framing Chinese dams as a tool of political pressure.<sup>16</sup> China has also used products it exports to strengthen its maritime claims, including products featuring Beijing’s nine-dash line SCS claims and map since 2018.<sup>17</sup> Bilaterally, China has been willing to limit or “enhance” supervision of its cross-border trade and restrict tourism with Vietnam to advance its

<sup>14</sup> “What to Be Concerned About When China Bought and Leased a Lot of Land in the Southwest Border Region?” [“Lo ngại nào khi Trung Quốc mua và thuê nhiều đất khu vực biên giới Tây Nam?”], Radio Free Asia, December 27, 2019; Malcolm Davis, “China’s Cambodia Gambit,” *The Strategist*, July 29, 2019.

<sup>15</sup> “Laos is No Longer a Backyard of Vietnam?” [“Lào không còn là ‘sân sau’ của Việt Nam?”], Voice of America in Vietnamese [VOA Tiếng Việt], June 5, 2016.

<sup>16</sup> Although there is currently no evidence that China manipulates water resources as a coercive tactic, China has increased or decreased the amount of water flowing downstream multiple times since at least 2015, in some cases without informing downstream countries. See “Vietnam Wakes Up to Disaster Possibilities After China Discharges Water in River,” *Thanh Niên News*, October 14, 2015; “China to Release Water from Dam to Alleviate SE Asia Drought,” Reuters, March 15, 2016; Viet Anh and Minh Nga, “Mekong Dying: China Wants More Than Just Electricity from Dams,” *VnExpress*, October 9, 2019; Kay Johnson, “Chinese Dams Held Back Mekong Waters During Drought, Study Finds,” Reuters, April 13, 2020.

<sup>17</sup> Sen Nguyen, “Vietnam Fights China’s ‘Nine-Dash Line’ Amid Old Enmities,” Al Jazeera, December 18, 2019.

interests, as was the case during the 2014 oil rig standoff.<sup>18</sup> We did not find evidence of PRC pressure on Vietnamese businesspeople operating in China or Chinese projects in Vietnam.

At the grassroots level, China has engaged in a number of economic activities in territories claimed by Vietnam. China continues to develop infrastructure on disputed features in the Paracel and Spratly Islands.<sup>19</sup> China conducted extensive land reclamation in the Spratly Islands from 2013 to 2015 and in the Paracel Islands from 2015 through 2017.<sup>20</sup> Since 1999, China has unilaterally announced annual fishing bans during late spring and early summer that cover waters within Vietnam's EEZ and has used Chinese-owned commercial oil rigs and dredgers to advance its claims since at least 2004.<sup>21</sup> In 2012, Chinese citizens illegally operated fish farms in Cam Ranh Bay close to a Vietnamese naval base using a Vietnamese cover business.<sup>22</sup> China has also promoted Paracel Islands tourism to Chinese civilians from at least 2013 through 2019.<sup>23</sup> Further, Chinese individuals and businesses have evaded Vietnamese laws to purchase properties in sensitive locations, such as near military bases, around Vietnam.<sup>24</sup>

### *Military Tactics*

Figure 6.3 depicts a variety of major PRC military activities affecting Vietnam since 2009. As China's military capability has grown, China's options for pressuring Vietnam have proliferated. China has improved the capabilities of its maritime militia, which has played a more

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<sup>18</sup> Thu Phuong, "Vice Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: China May Shut Down Several Border Gates Temporarily" ["Thứ trưởng NN&PTNT: Trung Quốc có thể tạm đóng một số cửa khẩu"], *Bao Dat Viet [Vietnamese Land News]*, June 28, 2014; Mike Ives, "China Tensions Choke Off Tourism to Vietnam," *New York Times*, July 21, 2014. The travel advisory lasted at least five months, from May to October 2014, which may indicate at least some punitive motivation in addition to protecting Chinese citizens. The protests in Vietnam ended in May, and the Chinese oil rig departed the disputed area in July. Carl Thayer, "China-Vietnam Defense Hotline Agreed: What Next?" *The Diplomat*, October 20, 2014.

<sup>19</sup> "China Approves Supply Dock Project in Disputed Paracel Islands," *The World*, April 27, 2012.

<sup>20</sup> OSD, 2019; Matthew Southerland, "China's Island Building in the South China Sea: Damage to the Marine Environment, Implications, and International Law," Washington, D.C.: U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, April 12, 2016; Victor Robert Lee, "Satellite Images: China Manufactures Land at New Sites in the Paracel Islands," *The Diplomat*, February 13, 2016; Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, "Update: China's Continuing Reclamation in the Paracels," webpage, August 9, 2017.

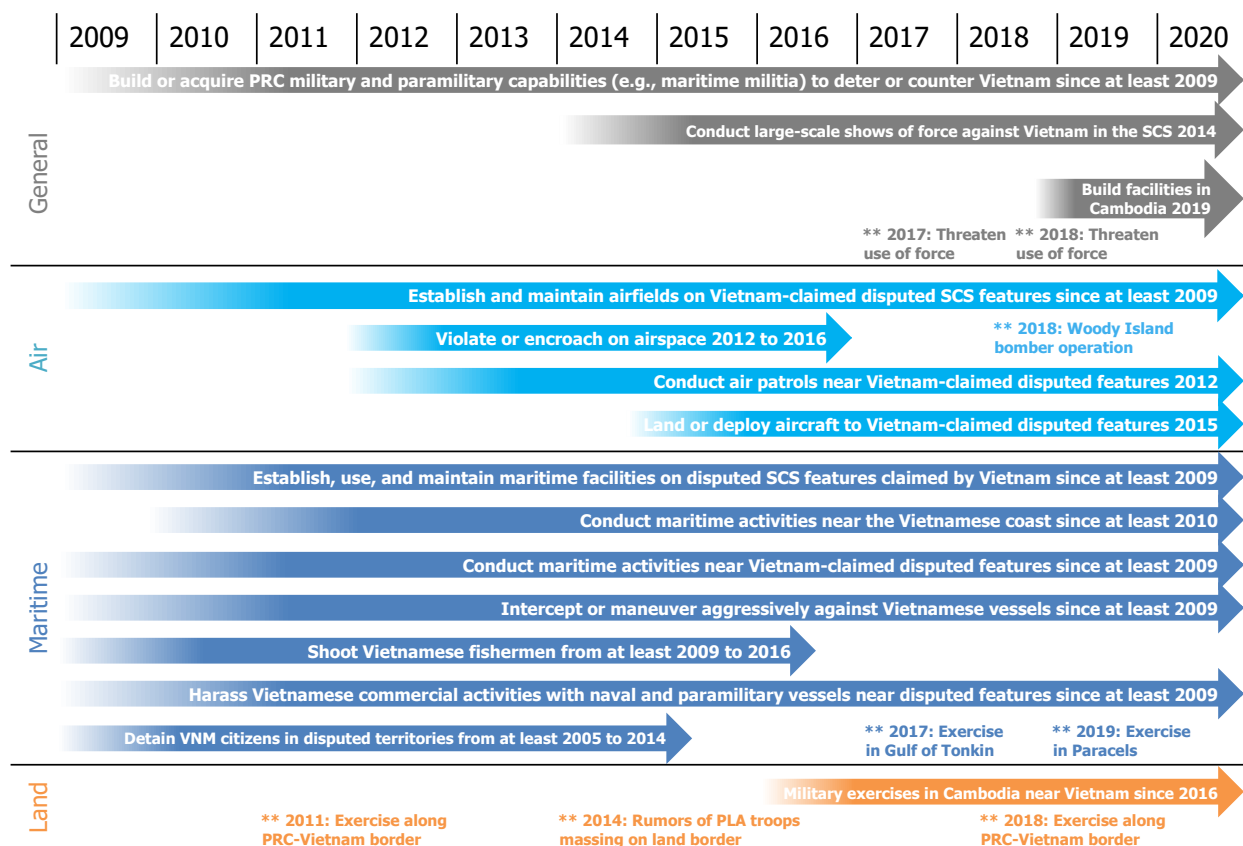
<sup>21</sup> Hua Xia, ed., "Summer Fishing Ban Starts in South China Sea," *Xinhua*, May 1, 2020.

<sup>22</sup> Nguyen Chung, "Urgent Report Demanded on Chinese Fish Farm on Cam Ranh Bay" ["Yêu cầu báo cáo khẩn về việc người Trung Quốc 'đóng bè' trên vịnh Cam Ranh"], *Thanh Niên News*, June 1, 2012.

<sup>23</sup> "Chinese Tour Ship Sets Sail to Disputed Paracel Islands," *South China Morning Post*, April 28, 2013; Khanh Linh, "China Boat Race near Paracels a Serious Violation of Vietnam's Sovereignty," *VnExpress*, May 23, 2019.

<sup>24</sup> The Vietnam Defense Ministry reported that, between 2011 and 2015, Chinese citizens and firms purchased up to 200 plots of land near the Nước Mặn Air Base in Da Nang, central Vietnam. See Gia Chinh, "Chinese Acquisition of Prime Land Worries Vietnam Defense Ministry," *VnExpress*, May 18, 2020; Trung Nguyen, "Chinese Land Buys, with Da Nang Residents' Help, Shock Vietnamese," *Voice of America*, December 8, 2015.

**Figure 6.3. Major PRC Military Gray Zone Activities Against Vietnam**



NOTES: Arrows indicate three or more cases of observed PRC activity over the specified period. Figure does not capture all PRC activities or tactics. \*\* indicates an individual activity. SCS = South China Sea.

assertive role since the mid-2000s.<sup>25</sup> China has also engaged in multiple military and paramilitary shows of force against Vietnam surrounding Vietnamese and Chinese natural resource exploration in the SCS. During most natural resource-related standoffs from 2014 to present, China has layered the use of military (maritime and nonmaritime) and nonmilitary tactics to increase pressure on Vietnam. For example, China has employed maritime militia, CCG, PLAN vessels, and military aircraft; threatened use of force against Vietnam by land or sea; and conducted cyberattacks against the Vietnamese government, infrastructure, and commercial firms.<sup>26</sup>

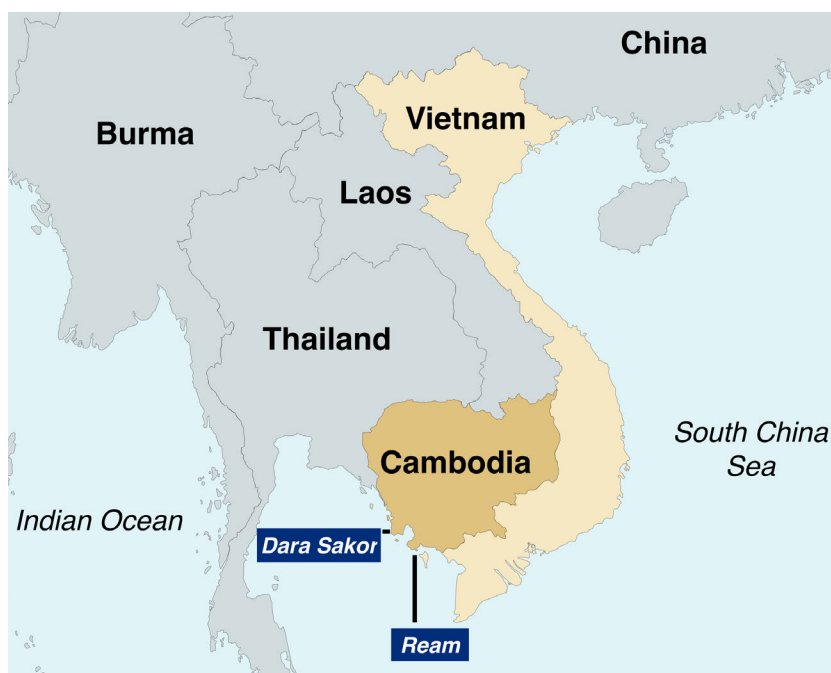
<sup>25</sup> Derek Grossman and Logan Ma, “A Short History of China’s Fishing Militia and What It May Tell Us,” *RAND Blog*, April 6, 2020. Andrew Erickson traces increasing Chinese maritime activity in the East and South China Seas, including by coast guard and militia units, to 2006. For more, see Andrew S. Erickson, “The Complete China Maritime Militia Bookshelf: Latest & Greatest,” homepage, December 19, 2018.

<sup>26</sup> Carl Thayer, “Alarming Escalation in the South China Sea: China Threatens Force if Vietnam Continues Oil Exploration in Spratlys,” *The Diplomat*, July 24, 2017; Grossman and Ma, 2020; Jose Elías Rodríguez, “Repsol Says Drilling Suspended on Vietnam Oil Block Disputed by China,” Reuters, August 2, 2017; James Pearson and Henning Gloystein, “Vietnam Halts South China Sea Oil Drilling Project Under Pressure from Beijing,” Reuters, March 23, 2018; Bill Hayton, “South China Sea: Vietnam ‘Scraps New Oil Project,’” BBC News, March 23, 2018.



In addition to PRC activities in the SCS, Hanoi is also concerned about potential Chinese military or dual-use projects in Cambodia in the vicinity of its border with Vietnam (see Figure 6.4). In 2019, China signed agreements to construct or operate military or dual-use facilities in Cambodia, including a Chinese naval base inside Cambodia’s Ream Naval Base complex and a possible Chinese air base at Dara Sakor.<sup>27</sup> The terms of the Ream deal reportedly allow China to use the naval base for 30 years, with automatic renewal every ten years thereafter. Ream is located approximately 60 miles (100 km) west of Cambodia’s border with Vietnam.<sup>28</sup> The Dara Sakor airport can accommodate large aircraft, such as bomber and transport aircraft, in a parcel accounting for 20 percent of the Cambodian coastline with a 99-year land lease.<sup>29</sup> Dara Sakor is also close to Vietnam’s border, located approximately 70 km west of Ream.

**Figure 6.4. Large PRC Military or Dual-Use Projects Near Vietnam**



<sup>27</sup> Jeremy Page, Gordon Lubold, and Rob Taylor, “Deal for Naval Outpost in Cambodia Furthers China’s Quest for Military Network,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 22, 2019; Scott Wingo, “Cambodia, China, and the PLAN’s Overseas Intentions,” Center for Advanced China Research website, September 19, 2019.

<sup>28</sup> Davis, 2019; Neou Vannarin, “U.S. Military Official Confirms China Deal to Use Cambodian Naval Base,” *Voice of America*, August 25, 2019.

<sup>29</sup> Wingo, 2019.

## Air

China's air operations vis-à-vis Vietnam have grown rapidly in the 2010s. Chinese aircraft intruded into or encroached multiple times on Vietnamese airspace between 2012 and 2016.<sup>30</sup> Although it is not clear whether such airspace violations have continued or ceased since 2016 because of lack of public reporting, it is possible that China may have decided to increasingly leverage other types of air activities vis-à-vis Vietnam, including operations to counter Vietnamese activities in the SCS. According to one report, Chinese aircraft also flew multiple times over a Vietnamese naval vessel carrying a delegation from Da Nang to the Spratly Islands in April 2012.<sup>31</sup> Chinese fighter jets and other aircraft flew over the area of the oil rig standoff multiple times in 2014.<sup>32</sup> In 2015, a Vietnamese search-and-rescue vessel was harassed by a CCG vessel, a naval ship, and an aircraft in the Paracels.<sup>33</sup>

Since establishing its first airport on a disputed SCS feature in the early 1990s, China has increased aircraft operations at Chinese-occupied SCS features.<sup>34</sup> China has landed military aircraft on disputed features claimed by Vietnam in the Paracel and Spratly Islands since at least 2015. China began flying H-6K bomber missions in the SCS in 2016.<sup>35</sup> Bomber operations in the Paracel and Spratly Islands have included flights near features, likely starting in 2016, and takeoff and landing training at Woody Island in 2018, which China's defense ministry stated had the goal to "improve our ability to 'reach all territory, conduct strikes at any time[,] and strike in all directions'" in the Western Pacific and the SCS.<sup>36</sup> PLA fighter aircraft, special mission

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<sup>30</sup> A Chinese aircraft was also spotted flying overhead in May 2011 when Chinese vessels cut Vietnam survey vessel cables in Vietnam's claimed EEZ. In 2015, the Da Nang Border Guard reported incidents of China sending not only naval and law enforcement vessels but also patrol aircraft to chase and capture Vietnamese fishing vessels. In January 2016, China conducted 46 flights through the Ho Chi Minh Flight Information Region without announcement, violating ICAO and other international regulations. See "Chinese Aircraft 'Threatened' Vietnamese Ship?" ["Máy bay Trung Quốc 'đọa' tàu Việt Nam?"], BBC News Vietnamese, May 1, 2012; Doan Nguyen, "Chinese Fishing-Disguised Reconnaissance Vessels Intruding Vietnamese Territorial Waters" ["Tàu trinh sát Trung Quốc giả tàu cá vào lãnh hải Việt Nam"], Zing News, January 8, 2016; "China Told to Stop Threatening Regional Air Safety," *Saigon Times Daily*, January 11, 2016.

<sup>31</sup> Thanh Phuong, "Chinese Aircraft Threatened Vietnamese Vessel Visiting Truong Sa" ["Máy bay Trung Quốc đe dọa tàu Việt Nam đi thăm Trường Sa"], RFI, May 1, 2012.

<sup>32</sup> Pham Anh, "Chinese Fighter Jets Appear at the Oil Rig" ["Chiến đấu cơ Trung Quốc lại xuất hiện ở giàn khoan"], *The Pioneer [Tien Phong]*, June 26, 2014.

<sup>33</sup> Tan Viet–Thanh Nhat, "Chinese 'Disguised' Vessels Act Aggressively in the East Sea" ["Tàu Trung Quốc 'ngụy trang' liêu lĩnh ở biển Đông"], *Online Law [Phap Luat Online]*, August 5, 2019.

<sup>34</sup> Chinese sources state that the airport on Woody Island was completed in April 1991. See "1990–1999," PRC South China Sea [中国南海网] website, July 22, 2016.

<sup>35</sup> PRC bomber missions sometimes also include fighter and special mission aircraft. See OSD, 2018, p. 118.

<sup>36</sup> Nathan Beauchamp-Mustafaga, Cristina Garafola, Astrid Cevallos, and Arthur Chan, "China Signals Resolve with Bomber Flights over the South China Sea," War on the Rocks website, August 2, 2016; Grossman et al., 2018, p. 19; Ian Burns McCaslin and Andrew S. Erickson, *Selling a Maritime Air Force: The PLAAF's Campaign for a Bigger Maritime Role*, Maxwell Air Force Base, Ala.: Air University, China Aerospace Studies Institute, 2019.

aircraft, and surface-to-air missiles have also deployed to disputed features, likely starting in 2015 to Woody Island and in 2016 to Vietnam-claimed features in the Spratlys.<sup>37</sup>

## Maritime

In the maritime domain, China began occupying features claimed by Vietnam in the Paracel Islands in 1974 and in the Spratly Islands in 1988, has established naval facilities and infrastructure, and has deployed weapon systems to the features it controls.<sup>38</sup> Chinese maritime pressure, involving harassment of Vietnamese fishermen near disputed features and numerous activities within Vietnam's EEZ, has been pervasive. Public reports suggest that the most aggressive and coercive Chinese activities have often taken place near the Paracel Islands, and at least 12 different CCG vessels have employed such tactics. China also conducted maritime exercises that Vietnam protested in 2017 and 2019.<sup>39</sup>

Chinese vessels have persistently harassed Vietnamese fishermen and vessels from 2009 to 2019. Incidents have included the following:

- arresting, seizing, or capturing fishermen and/or vessels (2005–2015: multiple reports nearly every year involving multiple Vietnamese ships and involving dozens to hundreds of fishermen most years)<sup>40</sup>
- detaining Vietnamese fishing vessels, sometimes for ransom (2005–2014: small number of episodic incidents reported)<sup>41</sup>
- robbing fishermen (2005–2019: multiple incidents reported near every year)
- shooting at and/or killing Vietnamese fisherman (2005, 2009, 2011, 2013, and 2016: incidents reported each year)<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> On deployments in the Paracels, see Wendell Minnick, “China Expands Presence with Fighters on Woody Island,” DefenseNews website, November 8, 2015; Steven Stashwick, “Missiles and Signals in the Paracel Islands,” *The Diplomat*, April 1, 2016; David Brunnstrom, “China Fighter Plane Spotted on South China Sea Island: Think Tank,” Reuters, April 6, 2017; Brad Lendon, “South China Sea: Satellite Image Shows Chinese Fighter Jets Deployed to Contested Island,” CNN, June 21, 2019. On deployments in the Spratlys, see Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, “An Accounting of China’s Deployments to the Spratly Islands,” webpage, May 9, 2018a.

<sup>38</sup> OSD, 2019, pp. 74–75.

<sup>39</sup> Vietnam protested Chinese military exercises in the Gulf of Tonkin in August 2017 and in the Paracels in August 2019. “Vietnam Protests over Chinese Military Drill in South China Sea,” Reuters, August 31, 2017; Phuong Vu, “Vietnam Opposes Chinese Military Training in Hoang Sa” [“Việt Nam phản đối Trung Quốc huấn luyện quân sự ở Hoàng Sa”], *VnExpress*, August 7, 2019.

<sup>40</sup> “Demand China to Release 13 Fishermen Immediately” [“Yêu cầu Trung Quốc thả ngay 13 ngư dân”], *Tuổi Trẻ*, August 5, 2009; “Vietnam Demands That China Release Fishing Vessels Early” [“Việt Nam yêu cầu Trung Quốc sớm thả tàu cá”], *Tuổi Trẻ*, May 24, 2012.

<sup>41</sup> Elena Bernini, “Chinese Kidnapping of Vietnamese Fishermen in the South China Sea: A Primary Source Analysis,” webpage, Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, September 14, 2017; “China Released 13 Vietnamese Fishermen” [“Trung Quốc đã thả 13 ngư dân Việt Nam”], Zing News, July 15, 2014.

<sup>42</sup> Le Trung, “Fishing Boat ‘Injured’ by Chinese Coast Guard Shooting Ball Bullets” [“Tàu cá ‘bị thương’ sau khi tàu hải cảnh Trung Quốc xối đạn bi”], *Tuổi Trẻ*, March 19, 2016; “Demand That China Address Armed Officers Using Force with Vietnamese Fishermen” [“Yêu cầu Trung Quốc xử lý nhân viên vũ trang đối xử thô bạo với ngư dân Việt Nam”], *Tuổi Trẻ*, October 21, 2009.

- physically beating fishermen or otherwise injuring them (2005–2018: multiple incidents reported most years but primarily between 2014 and 2016)
- cutting cables of Vietnamese vessels conducting seismic surveys (2011–2012: one or two incidents reported per year)<sup>43</sup>
- using water cannons (2013–2015: small number of incidents reported per year, mostly in 2014; 2019: one incident)
- chasing vessels away from certain areas (2013–2019: multiple incidents reported that affected up to dozens of Vietnamese vessels per year)
- ramming fishing vessels, sometimes causing them to sink (2013–2019: multiple incidents reported that affected up to six Vietnamese vessels per year)
- obstructing search and rescue of Vietnamese vessels and/or fishermen (2015: multiple incidents; 2016–2019: zero or one incident reported per year).

In terms of geographic location, a large proportion of the publicly reported incidents of Chinese maritime aggression toward Vietnam are described as occurring near the Paracels, with another cluster west-southwest of the Paracels, off the coast of central Vietnam. For the most aggressive and coercive maritime tactics—defined as ramming, shooting, sinking, or employing water cannons against Vietnamese vessels—the vast majority of publicly reported incidents took place in or near the Parcel Islands. Large numbers of Chinese vessels have also fished and operated within Vietnam’s EEZ since at least 2010 through at least 2018. In central Vietnam, Da Nang City Border Guard units have reported multiple incidents of finding and expelling Chinese fishermen, often operating within 40 to 50 nmi off the Vietnamese coast and sometimes escorted by nonfishing vessels.<sup>44</sup> Other regions have also reported large numbers of intrusions by Chinese fishing vessels from 2014 to 2016.<sup>45</sup>

It is not always possible to identify the Chinese ships and personnel involved in maritime incidents, but many publicly reported incidents, both in the Paracels and elsewhere, involve the CCG (or its predecessor, CMS) and/or fishing vessels or vessels of unknown provenance, some of which are armed. Large-scale incidents have involved at least a dozen unique CCG vessels, in addition to fishing vessels with uniformed or armed personnel and, sometimes, PLA helicopters and fighter aircraft.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> V.V.Thanh, “Chinese Vessels Cut Cables of Vietnamese Ship Again” [“Tàu Trung Quốc lại phá cáp tàu Việt Nam”], *Tuổi Trẻ*, June 9, 2011; Mai Ha, “Chinese Fishing Vessel Cut Cable of Binh Minh 02” [“Tàu cá Trung Quốc phá cáp tàu Binh Minh 02”], *Thanh Niên News*, December 4, 2012.

<sup>44</sup> For some examples of these reports, see “Expel 130 Chinese Fishing Boats out of Central Waters” [“Đẩy đuổi 130 tàu cá Trung Quốc ra khỏi vùng biển miền Trung”], *Tuổi Trẻ*, February 6, 2010; Doan Nguyen, “Chinese Fishing Vessels About 40–50 nm from Da Nang” [“Tàu cá Trung Quốc thường khai thác cách Đà Nẵng 40-50 hải lý”], *Zing News*, July 19, 2017.

<sup>45</sup> V.V.Thanh, “Many Chinese Vessels Approached Ly Son Island” [“Nhiều tàu Trung Quốc từng áp sát đảo Lý Sơn”], *Tuổi Trẻ*, June 29, 2015.

<sup>46</sup> This count includes both CMS ships and CCG ships; CMS was a predecessor organization to CCG. On the fighter jet incident, see “Courageous Fishermen” [“Những ngư dân can trường”], *Tuổi Trẻ*, June 6, 2014.

PLAN involvement is rarely mentioned in public reports, although PLAN ships participated in the 2014 oil rig standoff. In 2017, PLAN, CCG, and PAFMM ships patrolled around Thitu Island, a feature claimed by Vietnam, and planted a flag on a sandbar, but these activities may have been targeted at the Philippines rather than Vietnam.<sup>47</sup>

## Land

In the land domain, while both China and Vietnam have tended to avoid military exercises near their shared land border, the PLA has conducted at least two larger exercises near the Sino-Vietnam border (in 2011 and 2018).<sup>48</sup> China has also engaged in multiple exercises in Cambodia (with Cambodian forces) close to the Cambodia-Vietnam border.<sup>49</sup> In May 2014, during the oil rig standoff, there were rumors that the PLA had issued a “3rd-grade combat alert” and that PLA troops were massing near the border with Vietnam; Chinese state media rejected the rumor.<sup>50</sup>

## *Cyber and Information Operations Tactics*

China employs a variety of cyber/IO tactics against Vietnam (see Figure 6.5). PLA authors from 311 Base, also known as China’s Three Warfares Base, wrote in 2014 about the need to improve Vietnamese views of China—including on SCS issues—via media, academic, people-to-people, economic, cultural, and educational exchanges.<sup>51</sup> China has increased the digital, radio, and television media content it provides to Vietnamese speakers and news organizations

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<sup>47</sup> OSD, 2018, p. 72.

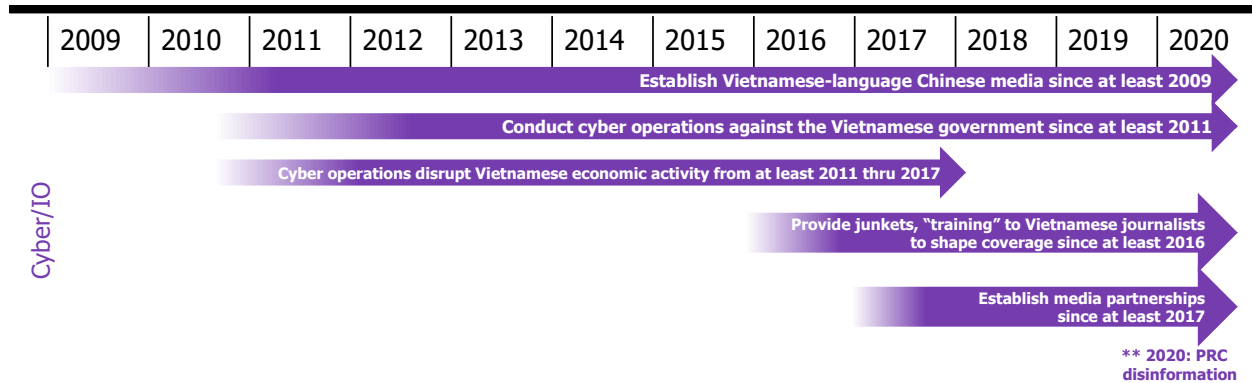
<sup>48</sup> In August 2011, China held a military exercise in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region along the border with Vietnam. In December 2018, China conducted a military exercise “confronting a[n unnamed] neighboring country” in Yunnan Province near the Vietnamese border. See “China Conducts Military Exercise Near Vietnam Border” [“Trung Quốc tập trận gần biên giới VN”], BBC News, August 10, 2011; Thu Thuy, “China Conducts Military Exercise near Vietnamese Border, New Type-15 Tank First Seen” [“Trung Quốc tập trận gần biên giới Việt Nam, xe tăng kiểu mới Type-15 lần đầu lộ diện”], *VietTimes*, December 20, 2018.

<sup>49</sup> China has conducted four iterations of Golden Dragon exercises with Cambodia not far from the Cambodia-Vietnam border. The 2019 and 2020 exercises were in the Cambodia province next to Vietnam (Kampot). See Mao Pengfei and Zhou Guoqiang, “China-Cambodia ‘Dragon Golden 2020’ Military Training Wraps Up,” China Military Online, March 31, 2020; Zhao Lei, “PLA Donates Medical Supplies to Cambodia amid Military Joint Exercise,” *China Daily*, March 22, 2020; Mao Pengfei and Li Jiansu, “China, Cambodia Kick Off Golden Dragon-2019 Joint Military Exercise,” China Military Online, March 14, 2019.

<sup>50</sup> Chan Kai Yee, “Large Number of Chinese Troops Seen Heading for China-Vietnam Border,” *China News Stories*, May 18, 2014; Duc Duong, “China Rejects Combat Alarm at Sino-Vietnamese Border” [“Trung Quốc bác tin báo động chiến đấu ở biên giới Việt-Trung”], *Investment Newspaper [Bao Dau Tu]*, May 16, 2014; Hai Anh, “China Rejects Alarm at Sino-Vietnamese Border” [“Trung Quốc bác tin báo động tại biên giới Việt-Trung”], Zing News, May 16, 2014. Two small-scale exchanges of fire occurred at the land border, in 2014 and 2015, but these involved nonmilitary personnel; see Kurlantzick, 2015; “Chinese Police Shoot Dead Two ‘Terrorists’ at the Sino-Vietnamese Border” [“中国警方在中越边境击毙两名 涉恐分子”], BBC News, April 17, 2015.

<sup>51</sup> Wei Qiang [韦强] and Mou Shan [牟珊], “Discussion and Analysis of the Vietnamese Populace’s Attitudes Toward China” [“越南民众对华心态评析”], *International Study Reference* [国际研究参考], No. 12, 2014. For more on 311 Base, see John Costello and Joe McReynolds, *China’s Strategic Support Force: A Force for a New Era*, Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2018.

**Figure 6.5. Major PRC Cyber and Information Gray Zone Activities Against Vietnam**



NOTES: Arrows indicate three or more cases of observed PRC activity over the specified period. Figure does not capture all PRC activities or tactics. \*\* indicates an individual activity.

beginning in at least 2009. Since at least 2016, China has invited Vietnamese and other Southeast Asian journalists from established media institutions to media programs in China, including months-long all-expense-paid programs, to “educate” Vietnamese reporters about China while limiting their access and reporting during these programs to only the positive aspects of China.<sup>52</sup> Content-sharing agreements and joint productions since 2017 may obscure the Chinese state media origin of some content for Vietnamese audiences.<sup>53</sup> Since 2020, Vietnamese concern has grown about potential PRC disinformation campaigns against Vietnam; Hanoi passed a new regulation in 2020 that fines those who spread disinformation on social media, including maps that do not accurately portray Vietnam’s claims in the SCS.<sup>54</sup>

Chinese state- and military-linked hackers, as well as self-proclaimed patriotic hackers, have targeted Vietnamese government and economic entities since at least 2011. Some of these attacks have occurred during or near periods of high bilateral tension. In 2011, China-linked operators hacked 1,500 Vietnamese government and commercial websites following the PRC cable-cutting of a Vietnam survey vessel.<sup>55</sup> The “Naikon” APT group linked to the PLA allegedly hacked the

<sup>52</sup> Yuan Zhou and Zhang Zhihao, “China Boosts Soft Power by Training Foreign Journalists,” *China Daily*, October 17, 2016; Ananth Krishnan, “China Is Buying Good Press Across the World, One Paid Journalist at a Time,” *The Print*, November 24, 2018.

<sup>53</sup> In 2017, the Vietnam News Agency (VNA), a Vietnamese state entity, signed a content-sharing agreement with Xinhua. In 2019, VNA leadership stated that the agency received thousands of photos from Xinhua each month, that VNA uses Xinhua-produced video content, and that VNA relies heavily on English-language content. In 2018, Guangxi People’s Radio Broadcasting and the Voice of Vietnam signed a partnership to coproduce television programs. See “Xinhua to Expand Cooperation with Vietnam News Agency,” *Viet Nam News*, October 16, 2019; “VOV, Guangxi Radio Station Partner for TV Programs,” *Voice of Vietnam*, March 22, 2018.

<sup>54</sup> Ryan Loomis and Heidi Holz, *China’s Efforts to Shape the Information Environment in Vietnam*, Arlington, Va.: CNA, 2020, p. 38; Phuong Nguyen and James Pearson, “Vietnam Introduces ‘Fake News’ Fines for Coronavirus Misinformation,” *Reuters*, April 15, 2020.

<sup>55</sup> Hong Nhung, “More Than 1,500 Websites Hacked” [“Hon 1.500 trang web Việt bị tấn công”], *Vietnam Net*, October 6, 2011.

Vietnamese government between 2010 and 2015 and again from late 2019 to early 2020.<sup>56</sup> In May 2014, less than a week after China had announced that its oil rig had begun drilling operations in the SCS, 220 Vietnamese websites, including government websites, suffered distributed denial of service attacks.<sup>57</sup> In August 2014, shortly after China withdrew its oil rig, 1937cn and other China-linked groups hacked 745 Vietnamese websites, including government websites.<sup>58</sup> In May 2015, 1937cn attacked 1,000 Vietnamese websites, including Vietnamese government webpages.<sup>59</sup> Vietnamese government organizations and commercial firms, including financial firms, were targeted in 2017 by 1937cn and another China-linked actor, the Conimes group.<sup>60</sup>

## Trends in Chinese Tactics

Two aspects of China's approach to Vietnam stand out. As two of the few remaining Communist Party-led states, China and Vietnam have party-to-party mechanisms and dialogues that China has sought to leverage. Vietnam is also the only fellow SCS claimant that shares a land border with China. This has made the Sino-Vietnamese border a hotspot during periods of tension. China's ability to potentially meter out or withhold riparian water resources to downstream neighbors for coercive purposes is also unique to mainland Southeast Asian countries, such as Vietnam.

Looking across the variety of PRC tactics, China has become increasingly capable of layering the use of military (maritime and nonmaritime) and nonmilitary tactics to pressure Vietnam since the mid-2010s. In 2014, for example, after China moved its Haiyang Shiyou 981 oil rig into an area of Vietnam's EEZ also claimed by China, Maritime militia, CCG and other maritime law enforcement, PLAN vessels, and military aircraft supported the oil rig's activities. Chinese authorities also cut party-to-party ties and threatened border trade, while rumors spread about PLA troops on the land border with Vietnam. Cyberattacks targeted the Vietnamese government.

On the maritime side, Chinese harassment of Vietnam has increased in intensity and frequency since 2017. Most reported incidents of Chinese maritime aggression toward Vietnam occurred near the Paracels, with a secondary cluster west-southwest of the Paracels, off the coast of central Vietnam. The majority of the most-aggressive and -coercive PRC actions have taken

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<sup>56</sup> Sean Lyngaas, "Chinese Spies Hop from One Hacked Government Network to Another in Asia Pacific, Researchers Say," *CyberScoop*, May 7, 2020a; "ThreatConnect and Defense Group Inc. Uncover Extensive Chinese Cyber Espionage Campaign Targeting South China Sea Interests," *Business Wire*, September 24, 2015.

<sup>57</sup> "220 Website in Vietnam Attacked by Self-Proclaimed Chinese Hackers," *Tuổi Trẻ*, May 13, 2014.

<sup>58</sup> "Chinese Hackers Attack 745 Vietnam Websites in a Week: Report," *Tuổi Trẻ*, September 6, 2014.

<sup>59</sup> "Chinese Hackers Attack 1,000 Vietnamese Websites in Two Days," *Tuổi Trẻ*, June 2, 2015.

<sup>60</sup> Matthew Tostevin, "Chinese Cyber Spies Broaden Attacks in Vietnam, Security Firm Says," *Reuters*, August 31, 2017.

place near the Paracels. Many involve the CCG and/or PRC fishing or other vessels, some of which were armed.

China has modulated its approach to Vietnam over time. Some tactics, such as suspending exchanges or restricting border trade, appear to be used sparingly or only in combination with other activities rather than on their own. Some more-violent tactics, such the use of water cannons and the kidnapping and shooting of fishermen, appear not to have been used since 2016. In at least one instance, China changed course by resuming high-level exchanges with Vietnam in 2014 after Vietnamese leaders publicly threatened to file an international arbitration case against China.

China has not stopped pressuring Vietnam during the COVID-19 outbreak. In April 2020, a CCG ship rammed and sank a Vietnamese fishing vessel near the Paracel Islands.<sup>61</sup> China called out Vietnam in its April 2020 UN *note verbale*, a high-level diplomatic message, which demanded that Vietnam remove all personnel and structures from features Vietnam “has invaded and illegally occupied.”<sup>62</sup> China also expanded its Sansha administrative organization, which claims Chinese jurisdiction over the Paracel and Spratly islands.<sup>63</sup> China has additionally named 80 disputed features in the SCS, the majority of which are located within Vietnam’s EEZ and beyond 12 nmi of Chinese-claimed features at high tide.<sup>64</sup>

## Vietnam’s Response

Vietnam has undertaken a variety of actions in response to Chinese coercion. These include continuing to invest in modernizing its military and paramilitary capability while also taking domestic actions, including allowing public protests and criticism of China in state-controlled media, imposing limits on PRC-linked economic activities close to sensitive Vietnamese locations, and scrutinizing and rejecting PRC products that include the nine-dash line map.<sup>65</sup> Vietnam has also embraced unilateral diplomatic actions to signal disapproval to China, such as issuing public critiques of China’s actions in the SCS since at least 2014, and has considered filing its own international lawsuit against China’s claims in line with the Philippines’ arbitration

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<sup>61</sup> Khanh Vu, “Vietnam Protests Beijing’s Sinking of South China Sea Boat,” Reuters, April 4, 2020.

<sup>62</sup> People’s Republic of China Permanent Mission to the United Nations, “CML/42/2020,” letter, New York, April 17, 2020. See also Nguyen Hong Thao, 2020.

<sup>63</sup> Zachary Haver, “Sansha and the Expansion of China’s South China Sea Administration,” Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative website, May 12, 2020.

<sup>64</sup> Quach Thi Huyen, “The ‘Four-Sha’ Claim: Signalling a Post COVID-19 Global Order,” Maritime Issues website, November 26, 2020.

<sup>65</sup> Frances Yaping Wang and Brantly Womack, “Jawing Through Crises: Chinese and Vietnamese Media Strategies in the South China Sea,” *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 28, No. 119, 2019; Phuong Hoang, “Domestic Protests and Foreign Policy: An Examination of Anti-China Protests in Vietnam and Vietnamese Policy Towards China Regarding the South China Sea,” *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs*, Vol. 6, No. 1, April 1, 2019; Trung Nguyen, 2015; Sen Nguyen, 2019.



case submitted in 2013.<sup>66</sup> Although Vietnam and China have pursued selected bilateral engagements and mechanisms in an attempt to manage tensions, they have made no progress on resolving their remaining bilateral disputes or on specific crisis-management mechanisms to employ during maritime incidents.<sup>67</sup>

Vietnam has also increased efforts to work with ASEAN, the United States, and other partners. Within ASEAN, Vietnam has pursued a binding SCS code of conduct as a follow-on to the 2002 Declaration of the Conduct of Parties that ASEAN and China agreed to.<sup>68</sup> As the rotating ASEAN chair in 2020, Hanoi was key to formulating the ASEAN statement in June 2020, which affirmed that the bloc views the 1982 UNCLOS as “the basis for determining maritime entitlements, sovereign rights, jurisdiction and legitimate interests over maritime zones.”<sup>69</sup> Vietnam has also sought to balance China via closer security engagement with the United States and has hosted senior U.S. officials and naval ships since 2011.<sup>70</sup> Senior Vietnamese officials’ statements have expressed support for an active U.S. role in the region, and Vietnam has repeatedly issued statements in support of U.S. FONOPs.<sup>71</sup> Vietnam has additionally increased its ties with key partners, such as Japan, India, Australia, and Malaysia.<sup>72</sup>

Overall, PRC pressure has not deterred Vietnam from speaking out, pursuing natural resource extraction, or reaching out to partners bilaterally or multilaterally. However, PRC pressure has continued in spite of Vietnam’s actions. Given fundamental structural asymmetries in the relationship—Vietnam’s economic dependence on China and China’s influence on the Indochina Peninsula—Vietnam is likely to remain cautious and calibrated vis-à-vis China.

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<sup>66</sup> David Hutt, “Vietnam May Soon Sue China on South China Sea,” *Asia Times*, May 7, 2020; Derek Grossman, “Why Vanguard Bank and Why Now? Explaining Chinese Behavior in the South China Sea,” *RAND Blog*, August 19, 2019.

<sup>67</sup> In 2011, Hanoi and Beijing signed an agreement on general guidelines for addressing maritime conflicts, but the two countries have never adopted a memorandum of understanding about how to resolve maritime disputes. China and Vietnam opened a bilateral emergency hotline following the May 2014 oil rig crisis. See Thayer, 2014.

<sup>68</sup> Vietnam’s additions to the leaked negotiating text call for a halt of construction of artificial islands or militarization of features, no blockading of resupply or provision-carrying vessels, no declaration of an ADIZ over the SCS, and no simulated attacks on others’ ships or aircraft. See Carl Thayer, “A Closer Look at the ASEAN-China Single Draft South China Sea Code of Conduct,” *The Diplomat*, August 3, 2018.

<sup>69</sup> Jim Gomez, “ASEAN Takes Position vs China’s Vast Historical Sea Claims,” *The Diplomat*, June 29, 2020.

<sup>70</sup> Derek Grossman, *Regional Responses to U.S.-China Competition in the Indo-Pacific: Vietnam*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-4412/6-AF, 2020.

<sup>71</sup> Grossman, 2020; My Pham, “Vietnam Gives Thumbs-Up to U.S. Regional Role as Pivot Stumbles,” Reuters, October 18, 2016; Thai An-Thuy Van, “Vietnam Comments on US Schedule of FONOPs in the South China Sea,” Vietnam Net, December 13, 2017.

<sup>72</sup> Grossman, 2020.

## Potential Near- to Medium-Term Chinese Gray Zone Activities Against Vietnam

In the near- to medium-term future, a desire to advance its maritime position is likely to encourage China to continue pressuring Vietnam using a variety of geopolitical, economic, military, and cyber means. Among the more-escalatory possible outcomes, additional Chinese seizures of disputed features over the next five to ten years could further tilt the balance toward China in the SCS.

On the geopolitical and economic sides, Chinese influence in Cambodia and Laos will remain an important factor for Vietnam's strategic calculus, and there is a risk that that Chinese forces may be able to conduct operations from Cambodia. Vietnam is also likely to closely monitor China's potential use of nontraditional levers, such as river-water availability. China will likely continue to press its claims in international forums and via lawfare approaches.<sup>73</sup>

Continued infrastructure improvements to China's SCS holdings will enable PRC military, paramilitary, and state-owned assets to more frequently train and/or operate out of the holdings. Some of these operations are already occurring; the Chinese survey vessel involved in the 2019 Vanguard Bank standoff refueled at Fiery Cross Reef and then returned to the area of the standoff. Future operations in the SCS are more likely to incorporate more unmanned systems and dual-use systems.<sup>74</sup>

More broadly within the PLA, the overwater operations and capabilities of Chinese air assets are likely to continue to grow, with PLA aircraft playing a greater role in maritime efforts. At the high end, ongoing reforms to PLA Army units, particularly efforts to improve the operational flexibility and capability of combined arms brigades, could significantly improve ground forces' effectiveness in potential conflict scenarios involving Vietnam. A 2020 revision to the People's Armed Police Law strengthens the maritime role of China's paramilitary forces and could also result in stronger military and paramilitary integration.<sup>75</sup> The 2021 Coast Guard Law authorizes the CCG to employ small arms if ships are found to be operating "illegally" in China's "jurisdictional waters."<sup>76</sup>

In the cyber/IO domain, Chinese state-sanctioned and patriotic cyberattacks are likely to continue, particularly during periods of tension. Although Vietnamese audiences are generally savvy to Chinese propaganda, content-sharing agreements between Chinese and Vietnamese

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<sup>73</sup> On the meaning of the term *lawfare*, see Charles J. Dunlap, Jr., "Lawfare: A Decisive Element of 21st-Century Conflicts?" *Joint Forces Quarterly*, No. 54, 3rd Quarter 2009.

<sup>74</sup> China has operated UAVs in the ECS since at least 2013 and based UAVs on Hainan in 2019 (Dan Gettinger, "Drone Databook Update," Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y.: Center for the Study of the Drone at Bard College, March 2020).

<sup>75</sup> People's Republic of China National People's Congress, "Law of the People's Republic of China on the People's Armed Police," June 20, 2020. See also Zhang Han, 2020.

<sup>76</sup> "People's Republic of China Coast Guard Law. . .," 2021, Article 47.

media organizations and China’s increasingly sophisticated disinformation toolkit could strengthen preferred Chinese narratives in Vietnam.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Pham Minh Phuong Hang, “China Trying to Etch Nine-Dash Line in Vietnamese Minds,” *VnExpress*, November 6, 2019; Nguyen Hong Thao, “Public Opinion War in the East Sea and the Power of Fiction Publications” [“Chiến tranh dư luận trên Biển Đông và sức mạnh của các tác phẩm hư cấu”], *Thanh Niên News*, May 20, 2015.

## 7. China's Gray Zone Activities Against India

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For at least 50 years, China has conducted significant gray zone activity against India in the military, economic, and geopolitical arenas, and more limited cyber/IO campaigns in recent decades.<sup>1</sup> Chinese efforts, particularly in the military arena, have accelerated since 2014. The key driver of this increase appears to be the coming to office of General Secretary Xi in 2012 and of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2014. Both leaders are committed to elevating their nations' regional and global position, and gray zone activities enable Beijing to do so without triggering a conventional military conflict (although China has also clashed with India since then).

China's gray zone activities against India are more heavily weighted toward semiconventional land warfare than for perhaps any other rival. The most noteworthy example was a violent confrontation on the disputed LAC in June 2020, which caused the first combat fatalities between the two nations in 45 years. Standoffs and jockeying for position by land forces along the LAC often involve air assets—for logistics and, occasionally, in just-short-of-combat missions. Beyond the use of gray zone tactics along disputed land territories, China's geopolitical and economic gray zone activities include use of BRI infrastructure projects to gain influence with nations in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). China's maritime gray zone activities against India include use of civilian fishing vessels and PLAN warships to engage in illegal activities inside India's EEZ.

China is likely to increase its activities in nonmilitary gray zone arenas, particularly through geopolitical and economic pressure on nations that India is seeking to influence, cyberwarfare, IO (especially through social media); and, perhaps, electoral interference. One of the key future areas will likely be the contest for religious or political influence over Tibet when the Dalai Lama passes away and his successor must be chosen.

### Historical Context and Overview

Since the late 1950s, the PRC and India have competed for influence over the same region. The only major exception came during the first decade after both nations achieved postcolonial independence, when they regarded each other as natural partners.<sup>2</sup> Within a few years, however,

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<sup>1</sup> Indian policymakers and analysts generally use the term *gray zone* to describe geography rather than strategy: It is most commonly applied to the disputed Himalayan area called the line of actual control (LAC), which separates the two nations. The tactics referred to as *gray zone* throughout this report are more commonly called *hybrid warfare* by Indian analysts. This chapter uses the term *gray zone* to refer to PRC tactics.

<sup>2</sup> In 1955, India's founding Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and China's Premier Zhou Enlai joined with Indonesia's President Sukarno to hold the Bandung Conference, which led to the Non-Aligned Movement. This period is sometimes referred to in India as "*Hindi-Chini bhai-bhai*" [Indians and Chinese [are] brothers].

such factors as the Sino-Soviet split and the flight of the Dalai Lama to India drove Beijing and New Delhi apart. In 1962, China invaded Indian territory in the only war the two nations have fought. Their current relationship—testy coexistence—has remained relatively constant since then.

The current phase of the India-China relationship began in 2014, when Narendra Modi assumed office as India's prime minister. Modi's approach to security policy is more assertive than that of his predecessors, both from the Congress Party (his opposition) and from Modi's own party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).<sup>3</sup> His ascension came just 14 months after Xi assumed the title of President of China and less than two years after Xi became General Secretary of the CCP. The timing virtually guaranteed increasing competition: Two leaders, each intent on restoring what he believed to be his nation's rightful place in the region and the world, were consolidating control to a degree not seen in either state since the 1980s.

Given that neither India nor China is eager for a conventional military conflict, this competition played out in the form of gray zone tactics. From India's perspective, China has been increasingly aggressive in the domain of land warfare along the disputed border. Three significant standoffs—in 2013, 2017, and 2020—each more serious than the previous one, have elevated the conflict to a level not seen since 1967.<sup>4</sup>

Beijing has a number of policy goals vis-à-vis India. These include resolution of its territorial disputes on terms favorable to China; cessation of India's support for the Tibetan government in exile and avoidance of actions that could destabilize Beijing's hold on Tibet; India accepting and deferring to China's economic and military presence throughout the IOR; and India's restraint in challenging China in any other arena, including not deepening the security partnership with the United States, not participating in SCS disputes, and not strengthening security ties with nations in Southeast Asia or North Asia. Although India will not readily agree to any of these goals, none of them are existential threats to India.

## Variety and Types of Chinese Tactics

### *Geopolitical Tactics*

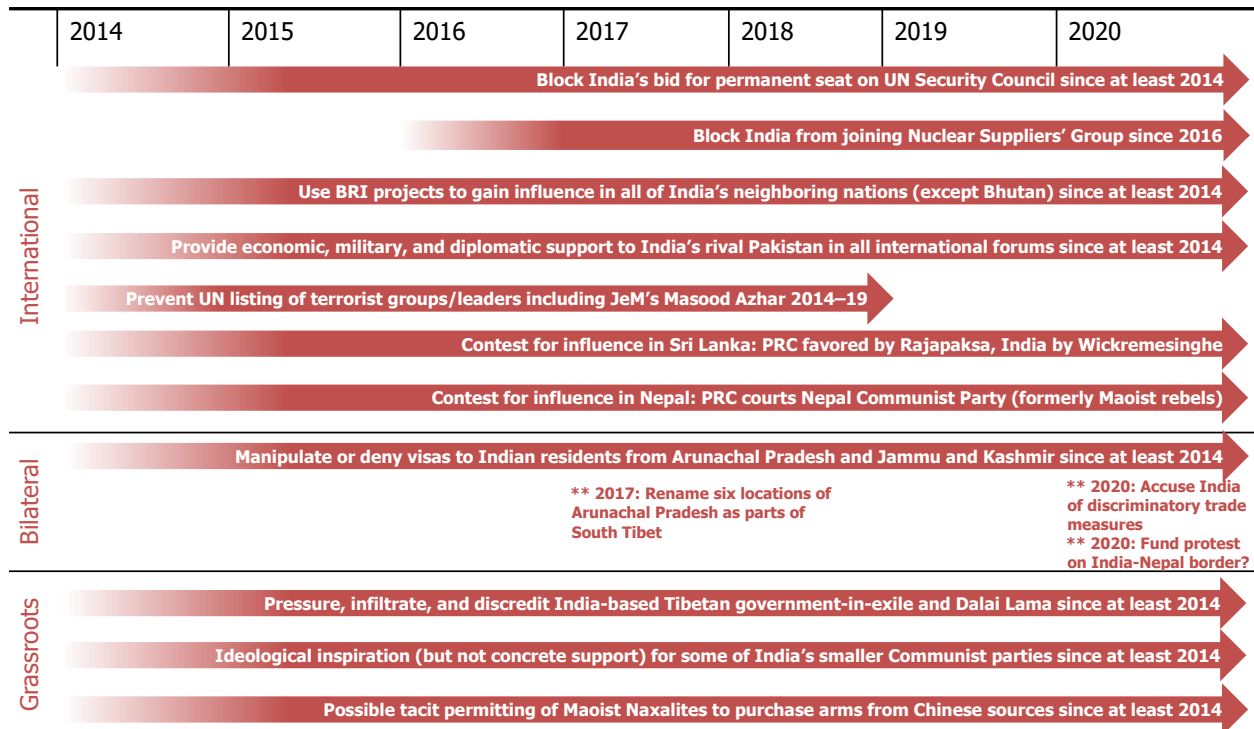
China uses its full geopolitical heft to advance its equities vis-à-vis India, with a particular focus on denying India's rise and potential to serve as a counterweight to China (see Figure 7.1).

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<sup>3</sup> Also important was the size of Modi's victory: His was the first Indian government since 1989 to hold an absolute parliamentary majority rather than having to rely on a tenuous coalition. The previous government to enjoy an absolute majority (the Congress Party, under Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi) had also embarked on an assertive foreign policy—in that case, sending 100,000 Indian troops to Sri Lanka on a peacekeeping mission that morphed into a counterinsurgency operation so bloody that it is often called "India's Vietnam."

<sup>4</sup> Although the 1962 conflict is the only war between India and China, the two nations engaged in serious clashes at Nathu La and Cho La (along the border between Tibet and Sikkim) in October 1967. Several hundred troops were killed, with the precise numbers being highly disputed. See Fravel, 2008, pp. 197–199.

**Figure 7.1. Major PRC Geopolitical Gray Zone Activities Against India**



NOTES: Arrows indicate three or more cases of observed PRC activity over the specified period. Figure does not capture all PRC activities or tactics. \*\* indicates an individual activity. JeM = Jaish-e-Muhammad.

On the global stage, China uses every available forum to limit India's geopolitical influence. The most noteworthy of these is the UN, where China has used its veto to prevent India from being allotted a permanent seat on the Security Council. Another forum in which China has repeatedly blocked India's entry is the Nuclear Suppliers Group, a multilateral export control regime that seeks to prevent nuclear proliferation. China opposes India's entry unless Pakistan also joins.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to curbing India's international participation, China has also used BRI to strengthen its relations with India's neighbors. Indian planners view BRI (discussed later, under "Economic Tactics") as being driven primarily by the desires to pressure or incentivize South Asian nations to align themselves with Beijing rather than New Delhi and to reduce India's geopolitical influence in its own neighborhood.<sup>6</sup>

China's geopolitical support for Pakistan is the area of most direct concern to India. China's support for Pakistan spans the gray zone, conventional security ties, and other realms of

<sup>5</sup> India formally applied for membership in the Nuclear Suppliers Group in 2016. See Martand Jha, "India and the Wassenaar Arrangement," *Mint*, February 5, 2018; Shadia Nasralla and François Murphy, "China Leads Resistance to India Joining Nuclear Export Club," *Reuters*, June 9, 2016.

<sup>6</sup> These concerns are manifest in each of India's neighbors: Pakistan (discussed separately), Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Maldives, and Myanmar. Bhutan, as a de facto protectorate of India, is in a different category—but even here, the pressures of China's geopolitical quest for influence were evident in the 2017 Doklam conflict.

statecraft. In terms of gray zone tactics, Beijing has provided support at the UN for Pakistan-based militants and terrorists (most notably, Lashkar-e Taiba and Jaish-e-Muhammad) which direct most of their operations against Indian targets.<sup>7</sup> China's support for Pakistan's position regarding the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir is particularly galling to India: While Beijing insists that other nations treat Xinjiang and Tibet as purely internal matters of no legitimate concern to other nations, it supports Pakistan's demand to treat the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir as disputed territory requiring international attention.

Bilaterally, China has used lawfare against India. In 2017, for example, China renamed six locations that India claims under Arunachal Pradesh as parts of China's claimed South Tibet.<sup>8</sup> In fall 2020, as India responded to tensions along the Sino-Indian border by banning Chinese internet applications and restricting foreign direct investment from China, China accused India of discriminatory and restrictive trade measures during a World Trade Organization meeting.<sup>9</sup> China's repeated efforts to shape international interpretations of UNCLOS to claim control over the SCS is also a detriment to India, which in 2006 purchased stakes in SCS oil and gas exploration blocks in waters claimed by Vietnam.<sup>10</sup>

China has also manipulated visas to Indian residents to advance its territorial claims. Since 2009, China has issued stapled visas to passports (instead of stamping visas on the passport pages) of Indian residents from Arunachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir. Beijing has also at times also denied visas to Indian officials from these two regions that China also claims.<sup>11</sup>

Although there is no evidence of Beijing backing large-scale anti-India protests in China, there is suspicion that China organized protests near the Indian border to pose challenges for New Delhi. Indian intelligence agencies alleged that China may have funded anti-India protests

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<sup>7</sup> Until May 1, 2019, for example, China protected Masood Azhar, the founder of Pakistan-based terrorist group Jaish-e-Muhammad, from being declared an international terrorist by the UN. Murali Krishnan, "Masood Azhar—a Global Terrorist—and the Implications for Pakistan," *The Interpreter*, May 31, 2019.

<sup>8</sup> China seems to have a pattern of renaming disputed locations to claim the legal high ground before pressing PRC claims through gray zone and other means. See Manoj Joshi, "Why Is China Renaming Seemingly Unimportant Places in Arunachal Pradesh?" *The Wire*, April 24, 2017.

<sup>9</sup> Kirtika Suneja, "China Accuses India of Discriminatory Trade Measures During a Meeting at the WTO," *Economic Times*, October 4, 2020.

<sup>10</sup> China and India share certain reservations about UNCLOS, including a shared belief that even peaceful activities by foreign military vessels within a nation's EEZ require host-nation approval. India ratified UNCLOS in 1995 and has grown generally more supportive of it. See Iskander Rehman, *India, China, and Differing Conceptions of the Maritime Order*, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, June 2017, p. 1; Mai Nguyen, Nidhi Verma, and Sanjeev Miglani, "Vietnam Renews India Oil Deal in Tense South China Sea," *Reuters*, July 6, 2017.

<sup>11</sup> Stapled visas are torn out when the visitor leaves China, leaving no record of the visitor having traveled to China on his or her passport. See Asgar Qadri, "Story Behind a Stapled Chinese Visa," *New York Times*, November 8, 2013; "India Takes Up with China Denial of Visa to Bamang Tago," *Economic Times*, November 17, 2016.

along the India-Nepal border in 2020 when relations between India and its neighbor worsened in mid-2020 because of their border dispute.<sup>12</sup>

At the grassroots level, China appears to be less active in India than some other nations. Little has been reported on Chinese activities to support specific political leaders, groups, or efforts to meddle in India's elections.<sup>13</sup> This lack of support is noteworthy, given that India has at least two dozen licit communist parties participating in electoral politics at the state and central level, as well as several major illicit Maoist (*Naxalite*) groups engaging or having historically engaged in various levels of insurgency throughout at least eight Indian states. Some domestic insurgent groups, both Naxalites and those with no ideological tie to China, rely to some degree on Chinese small arms.<sup>14</sup> There is little evidence of any direct Chinese government support for illicit arms purchases by these groups. However, some Chinese experts have openly raised the possibility that, if India increases its support for "Tibet secessionism," China might be justified in supporting insurgencies in Northeast India.<sup>15</sup> Beyond ideological inspiration and possible tacit support for some domestic Indian groups, China has established Confucius Institutes in seven Indian universities.<sup>16</sup>

A key element of China's gray zone activity against India has been the use of its geopolitical influence to police its redlines regarding Tibet and undermine the Tibetan government in exile in India. Since the Dalai Lama fled Tibet in 1959 and received sanctuary in India, Tibet has been a major driver of conflict between Beijing and New Delhi. The Dalai Lama has maintained his government in exile in the Indian town of Dharamsala for more than 60 years.<sup>17</sup> The provision of

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<sup>12</sup> "New Headache for Delhi? China Funding Anti-India Stir on Nepal Border, Say Sources," *New Indian Express*, September 4, 2020.

<sup>13</sup> One of the few reported instances of China targeting India's domestic political system was a very limited influence operation possibly undertaken during the 2019 General Election, discussed later under "Cyber and Information Operations Tactics."

<sup>14</sup> Insurgent groups that have reportedly relied on Chinese arms, with or without the support of Beijing, include the United Liberation Front of Assam, the National Democratic Front of Bodoland, and the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Khapang faction). At various points since the 1960s, several dozen militant groups located in the seven states of northeast India have engaged in both insurgent and criminal activity; many have relied on Chinese-made small arms, generally purchased on the international black market.

<sup>15</sup> Li Qingqing, "Playing Tibet Card Will Incur Damage to New Delhi," *Global Times*, September 3, 2020.

<sup>16</sup> Sanjeev Miglani, "Exclusive: India Steps Up Scrutiny of Chinese Influence Group," Reuters, September 15, 2020; Ananth Krishnan, "What are Confucius Institutes, and Why are They Under the Scanner in India?" *The Hindu*, August 9, 2020b.

<sup>17</sup> According to Indian government data, the Tibetan community in India numbered 150,000 in 2011, but declined to 85,000 by 2018. See Rahul Tripathi, "Tibetan Refugees Down from 1.5 Lakh to 85,000 in 7 Years," *Indian Express*, September 11, 2018. Although the Dalai Lama is the highest-profile actor on the Tibetan stage, China is also concerned about Himalayan territories that are culturally, religiously, and geographically proximate to Tibet: Sikkim, Ladakh, Arunachal Pradesh, and Bhutan.



sanctuary remains a thorn in Beijing's side, and China monitors and pressures India over New Delhi's engagement with and support for both Tibet and Tibetans in India.<sup>18</sup>

An example of geopolitical jockeying over Tibet occurred in 2016–2017. In October 2016, Modi encouraged U.S. ambassador to India, Rich Verma, to visit the state of Arunachal Pradesh, much of which is claimed by China.<sup>19</sup> Beijing issued a stern demarche, but the visit took place, followed in April 2017 by a visit of the Dalai Lama.<sup>20</sup> It is possible that these actions influenced Beijing's decisionmaking during the Doklam Plateau standoff just two months later.

In addition to pressuring the Indian government over its Tibet-related activities, China is also suspected of engaging in a variety of activities—internationally and within India—to pressure, infiltrate, and discredit the Tibetan government in exile.<sup>21</sup> This includes suspected efforts to use undercover PRC agents to infiltrate and spy on the Tibetan government in India and alleged plots of Chinese agents to assassinate or poison the Dalai Lama or other Tibetans in India to spread fear and chaos.<sup>22</sup>

### *Economic Tactics*

China uses its economic power to constrain India's freedom of action and to contest with India for regional influence (see Figure 7.2).

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<sup>18</sup> When Modi was sworn into office in May 2014, the head of the Tibetan government in exile, Lobsang Sangay, was an honored guest; after a sharp rebuke from Beijing, Modi did not invite Sangay to his second inauguration five years later. See Dipanjan Roy Chaudhury, "No Invite for Taiwan Representative and Tibet's Govt in Exile," *Economic Times*, May 30, 2019a.

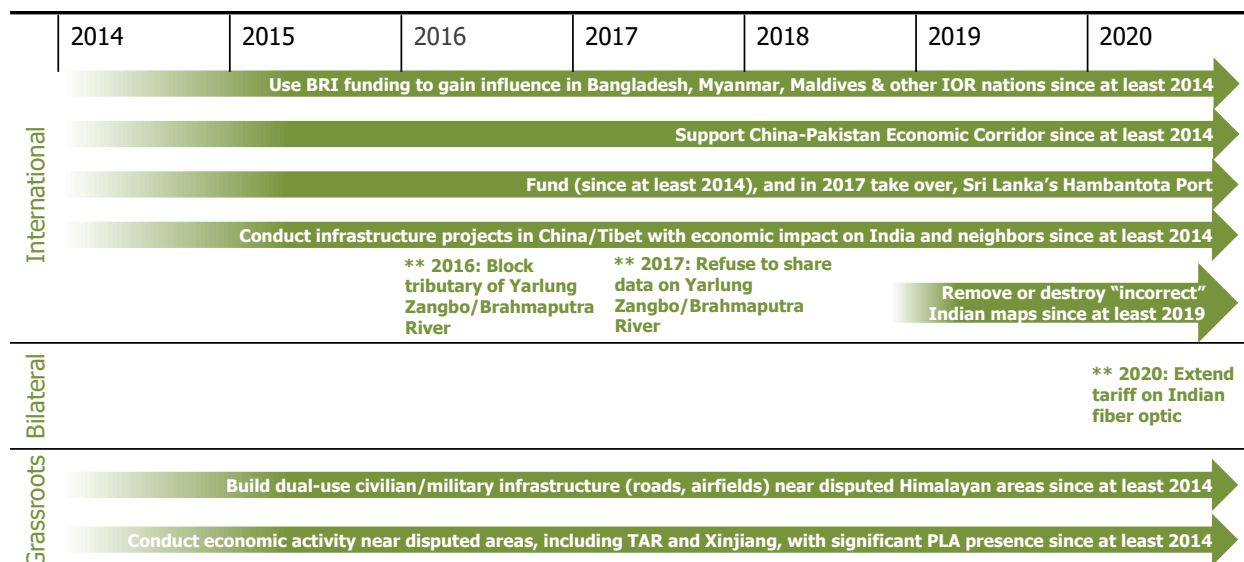
<sup>19</sup> This visit came less than three weeks after the Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister invited the Dalai Lama to visit and was probably the first trip to Arunachal Pradesh by an American ambassador ("After Inviting the Dalai Lama to Arunachal, India Welcomes US Ambassador in Tawang," *The Wire*, October 21, 2016).

<sup>20</sup> Beijing's Foreign Ministry warned that "China will firmly take necessary measures to defend its territorial sovereignty and legitimate rights and interests" ("As Dalai Lama Visits Arunachal Pradesh, China Vows to Take 'Necessary Measures,'" *The Hindu*, April 5, 2017).

<sup>21</sup> While we document China's use of this type of geopolitical gray zone tactic here and in Appendix B, we do not view Chinese activities against the Tibetan government in exile in India (or Tibetans in India) as targeted against India or the Indian government. This is because the majority of Tibetans in India are not Indian citizens, and the Central Tibetan Administration has significant autonomy to govern Tibetan settlements in India. Despite providing shelter for Tibetans, India has also tried to distance itself from the Tibetan community and has sought to limit its anti-Chinese activities. The 2003 Declaration on Principles for Relations and Comprehensive Cooperation Between the Republic of India and the People's Republic of China also specifies that India "does not allow Tibetans to engage in anti-China political activities in India" (Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Wen Jiabao, "Declaration on Principles for Relations and Comprehensive Cooperation Between the Republic of India and the People's Republic of China," Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India website, June 23, 2003). See also Tibet Justice Center, *Tibet's Stateless Nationals III: The Status of Tibetan Refugees in India*, Oakland, Calif., June 2016.

<sup>22</sup> Michael Bristow, "China Rejects Dalai Lama 'Assassination Plot' Report," *BBC News*, May 14, 2012; Naresh K. Thakur, "Spy Fear: CTA Steps Up Security, Issues Advisory to Officials," *Hindustan Times*, May 24, 2013.

**Figure 7.2. Major PRC Economic Gray Zone Activities Against India**



NOTES: Arrows indicate three or more cases of observed PRC activity over the specified period. Figure does not capture all PRC activities or tactics. \*\* indicates an individual activity. CPEC = China-Pakistan Economic Corridor; TAR = Tibet Autonomous Region.

Internationally, one of the most powerful economic tools China employ is its BRI (infrastructure) projects surrounding India (see Figure 7.3). Five countries have BRI projects in the IOR:

- **Bangladesh:** BRI projects here have a value of about \$10 billion, a sum equal to nearly one-third of the nation's total external debt.<sup>23</sup>
- **Myanmar:** Chinese projects include a deep-sea port at Kyaukpyu, a railway between the Burmese city of Mandalay and the Chinese city of Kunming, and several oil and gas pipelines.<sup>24</sup> By contrast, India's funding of refurbishment at the port of Sittwe and the linked Kaladan Multi-Modal Transport Project has faced continual delays.
- **Maldives:** BRI investment soared between 2014 and 2019 under the presidency of Abdulla Yameen.<sup>25</sup> During this time, Maldives accrued debt to the PRC and Chinese companies of over \$1.5 billion—in a country with a GDP of only about \$5 billion.

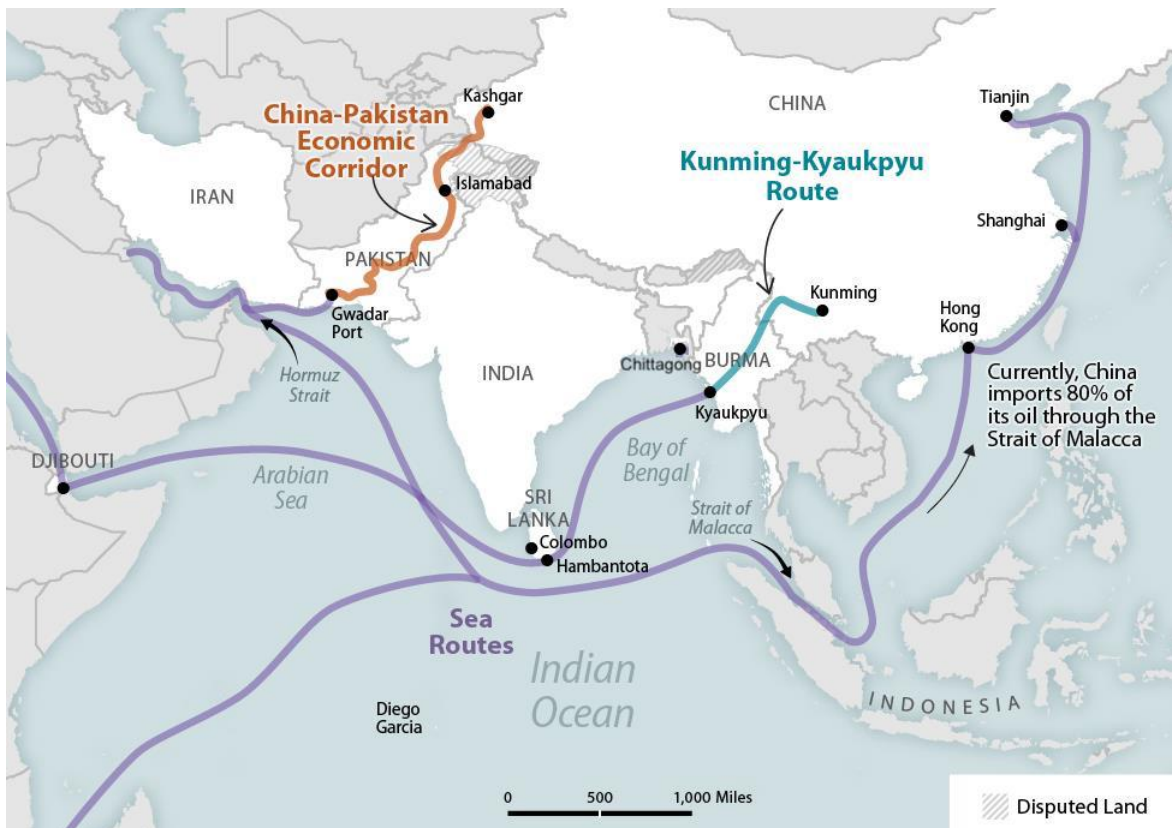
<sup>23</sup> These projects include a vital road and rail bridge across the Padma river and development of Chittagong Port, which represents the first major port development in the country's existence. See David Brewster, "Bangladesh's Road to the BRI," *The Interpreter*, May 30, 2019.

<sup>24</sup> Zhou Taidong, "Aligning the Belt and Road Initiative with Myanmar's Sustainable Development Plan: Opportunities and Challenges," *IDS Bulletin*, Vol. 50, No. 4, 2019.

<sup>25</sup> Following Yameen's departure from office in November 2019, the future of Chinese investment is less certain. According to data from the Maldives Ministry of Finance, the Maldivian government owed \$600 million to the PRC government and another \$935 million in sovereign guarantees to Chinese firms. See Simon Mundy and Kathrin Hille, "The Maldives Counts the Cost of Its Debts to China," *Financial Times*, February 10, 2019.

- **Djibouti:** Largely because of BRI projects, Djibouti’s public external debt rose from 50 percent of GDP in 2016 to 104 percent in 2018. One of the highest-profile projects is the Doraleh Ports—one berth of which is reportedly intended for PLAN use.<sup>26</sup>
- **Pakistan:** CPEC was formally inaugurated in 2013, with an announced value of up to \$62 billion. The most important project is Gwadar Port, which India fears will eventually host PLAN vessels.<sup>27</sup>

**Figure 7.3. PRC BRI Projects in the Indian Ocean**



SOURCE: Bruce Vaughn, *China-India Great Power Competition in the Indian Ocean Region: Issues for Congress*, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, R45194, April 20, 2018, p. 19.

NOTE: Chittagong added to map.

<sup>26</sup> Lauren Ploch Blanchard and Sarah R. Collins, *China’s Engagement in Djibouti*, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, IF11304, September 4, 2019.

<sup>27</sup> The overall value of CPEC had initially been projected to be \$46 billion and later increased to \$62 billion. The project has yet to be funded at anything approaching these levels. From India’s perspective, CPEC is the most geopolitically threatening element of BRI. See Muhammad Faisal Sultan, Israr Ahmed, and Muhammad Raghieb Zafar, “Measuring the Impact of China Pakistan Economic Corridor on the Socio-Economic Aspects of Pakistan: A Quantitative Research Highlighting the Public Opinion,” *Journal of Economics and Sustainable Development*, Vol. 8, No. 23, 2017; Jonah Blank, “Thank You for Being a Friend: Pakistan and China’s Almost Alliance,” *Foreign Affairs*, October 15, 2015.

A key example of how China translates BRI projects into geostrategic impact is Hambantota Port in Sri Lanka.<sup>28</sup> In December 2017, Hambantota passed to the control of the China Harbor Engineering Company, a firm closely linked to the government of the PRC.<sup>29</sup> Ten years earlier, Sri Lanka's President Mahinda Rajapaksa took out the first tranche of loans from China's Export-Import Bank. The terms mandated that construction be carried out by China Harbor. The interest rates charged (by public reports, 6.3 percent after a renegotiation) were higher than market value. Price-gouging and kickbacks have been widely alleged. In economic terms, Hambantota is not worth the cost paid for it or the amount lost on China Harbor's accounting books. But in geostrategic terms, there is concern that PRC control could give the PRC a dual-use port right off India's southern coast.<sup>30</sup>

In addition to these higher-profile actions, Beijing uses its control over the source of the Brahmaputra River (its stretch in the TAR is called the Yarlung Zangbo) as leverage over India and the region, manipulating water flow (for example, by blocking a tributary of the river during India-Pakistan dispute over the Indus Water Treaty in 2016) and through the selective sharing of hydrological data (as when China refused to share data with India in 2017).<sup>31</sup> Since China approved the construction of dams in 2013, its upstream projects have threatened the flow of water not only to the Indian states of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh but also to Bangladesh, a nation that China and India are vying for influence over. A lower-profile example of China's use of economic leverage to advance its goals in regard to India is its insistence that maps sold in China show the state of Arunachal Pradesh as Chinese territory (and maps with Jammu and Kashmir not depicted as part of India). There have been multiple reported incidents of Chinese authorities destroying or removing "incorrect" maps since at least 2019.<sup>32</sup>

Bilaterally, and partially in response to growing Indian economic actions against China resulting from China-India border tensions, China is likely to begin taking more action against

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<sup>28</sup> Maria Abi-Habib, "How China Got Sri Lanka to Cough Up a Port," *New York Times*, June 25, 2018.

<sup>29</sup> Kai Schultz, "Sri Lanka, Struggling with Debt, Hands a Major Port to China," *New York Times*, December 12, 2017.

<sup>30</sup> The Sri Lankan government has rejected the possibility that China could use Hambantota Port as a forward military base and has taken measures to improve security and control of the port. See Abi-Habib, 2018; "Sri Lanka Rejects U.S. Claims, Says No Chinese Military Base at Port," *Economic Times*, October 11, 2018.

<sup>31</sup> India is concerned that China may decrease (to reduce supply) or increase (to cause flooding) the flow of water, and Indian residents have witnessed the water supply rise and fall sharply in very short times. See Navin Singh Khadka, "China and India Water 'Dispute' After Border Stand-Off," BBC News, September 18, 2017; "China Blocks Tributary of Brahmaputra in Tibet to Build Dam," *The Tribune*, October 1, 2016.

<sup>32</sup> Suthirto Patranobis, "China Destroys Thousands of Maps Showing Arunachal as Part of India: Report," *Hindustan Times*, April 25, 2020a; "China Removes Map Showing J&K, Arunachal as Part of India," *The Statesman*, April 27, 2019.

Indian goods. In August 2020, China extended a 2014 tariff on Indian optical fibers for five years and is likely to take further trade actions as both sides respond to each other economically.<sup>33</sup>

At the grassroots level, China has engaged in significant economic activity near the disputed territory along the LAC. Most of the line itself runs through terrain too rugged and generally at too high an altitude to support significant economic development. Areas relatively close to the LAC, however, are more suitable for civilian use, and China has taken advantage of that fact. To solidify its control over the Tibetan and Uyghur populations of the TAR and Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, respectively, Beijing has fostered economic development (largely by ethnic Han) in these areas for decades. Such activity includes promotion of resettlement, manufacturing, and tourism—with increased air, road, and rail upgrades to support such activities. Although the primary purpose of such development and infrastructure construction has been related to internal rather than external security, the result has been a thickening and bolstering of China’s dual-use and military capabilities in areas near its disputed border with India, often near Indian military outposts along the LAC.<sup>34</sup>

### *Military Tactics*

Most of China’s gray zone activity against India takes place on the military side (see Figure 7.4). China continues to militarize and increase its security forces in Tibet and Xinjiang, the two regions of western China closest to India. In 2015, China reorganized its military to place the entire LAC under the PLA’s Western Theater Command to better enable joint operations against India.<sup>35</sup> At the same time, China ramped up domestic security spending in Tibet and Xinjiang—spending more on People’s Armed Police forces that could be used to support PLA forces in a China-India conflict.<sup>36</sup> China has deployed new and advanced military equipment to the region, including specialized equipment for operating in high Tibetan Plateau altitudes and equipment to counter growing Indian capabilities.<sup>37</sup> China has repeatedly engaged in large-scale military exercises in Tibet involving more than one PLA service and often with live fire.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Su-Lin Tan, “China-India Spat Shows No Sign of Slowing as Beijing Extends Anti-Dumping Tariff on Indian Fibre Optic Product,” *South China Morning Post*, August 15, 2020.

<sup>34</sup> Pratik Jakhar, “India and China Race to Build Along a Disputed Frontier,” BBC News, July 30, 2020.

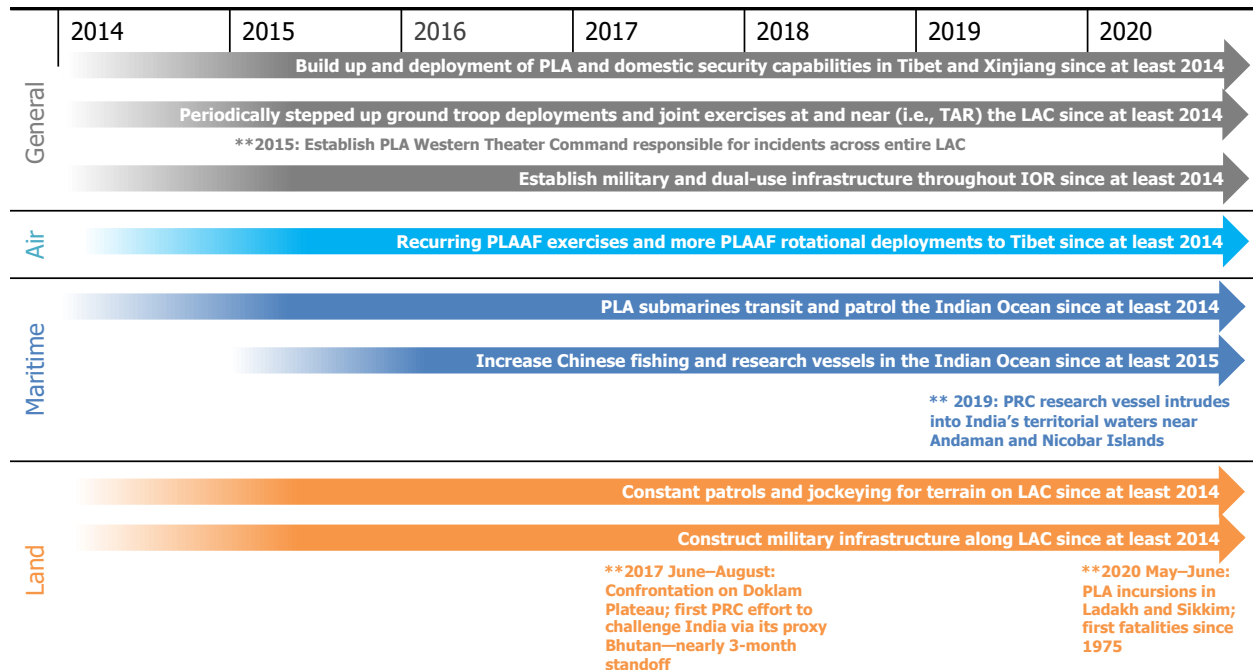
<sup>35</sup> Kenneth Allen, Dennis J. Blasko, and John F. Corbett, “The PLA’s New Organizational Structure: What Is Known, Unknown and Speculation (Part 1),” *China Brief*, Vol. 16, No. 3, February 4, 2016; Kevin McCauley, “Snapshot: China’s Western Theater Command,” *China Brief*, Vol. 17, No. 1, January 13, 2017.

<sup>36</sup> PRC domestic security spending in Tibet and Xinjiang increased by over 400 percent from 2007 to 2016 (Adrian Zenz, “China’s Domestic Security Spending: An Analysis of Available Data,” *China Brief*, Vol. 18, No. 4, March 12, 2018).

<sup>37</sup> “China Deploys Latest HQ-9 Missiles Near LAC to Check Indian Fighter Jets,” *Eurasian Times*, September 6, 2020; Suyash Desai, “Is China’s Western Theatre Command Confident Enough to Challenge India?” 9Dashline website, June 30, 2020.

<sup>38</sup> For a sample of large PLA exercises in 2015, see Jayadeva Ranade, “China’s Focus on Military Activities in Tibet,” Vivekanda International Foundation website, September 18, 2015.

**Figure 7.4. Major PRC Military Gray Zone Activities Against India**



NOTES: Arrows indicate three or more cases of observed PRC activity over the specified period. Figure does not capture all PRC activities or tactics. \*\* indicates an individual activity. LAC = line of actual control; TAR = Tibet Autonomous Region.

Since at least 2014, China has constructed what Indian strategists refer to as a string of pearls, an array of infrastructure projects throughout the Indian Ocean that includes ports that can accommodate military vessels. Some of these facilities are overt naval bases, such as the PLAN base in Djibouti.<sup>39</sup> Others include dual-use facilities, such as the ports in Gwadar (Pakistan), Chittagong (Bangladesh), and Hambantota (Sri Lanka).

#### Air

Encounters in the air above the LAC have been significantly less common than those on the ground: Since 1996, both the Indian Air Force (IAF) and the PLAAF observe a 10-km no-fly zone along the LAC.<sup>40</sup> Despite limited encounters above the LAC, the PLAAF has carried out

<sup>39</sup> Andrew Jacobs and Jane Perlez, “U.S. Wary of Its New Neighbor in Djibouti: A Chinese Naval Base,” *New York Times*, February 25, 2017.

<sup>40</sup> Most IAF missions along the LAC are geared toward transportation and logistical support for land units. IAF pilots and aircraft stationed at the IAF bases at Leh, Srinagar, and (periodically) Thoise undertake constant training exercises. Such training is necessary to make sure that pilots and aircraft are able to operate effectively in extreme cold and at the high Himalayan altitudes. See “Chinese Choppers Spotted near Ladakh LAC Prompt Alert, IAF Fighters Rushed In,” *Hindustan Times*, May 12, 2020. The limit applies to fixed-wing aircraft but not to helicopters or UAVs (Rajat Pandit, “Indian Jets Conduct Sorties Over Ladakh, Amid Heightened Tensions on Ground with Chinese Troops,” *Times of India*, May 12, 2020).

significant air exercises in the TAR and publicized some of these activities.<sup>41</sup> PLAAF (or, in some cases, PLA Army or PLA Army aviation) assets that are reported to have been deployed or exercised near the LAC include Su-27s, J-10s, J-11s, KJ-500s, Z-18s (White Heron), J-20 heavy stealth fighters, and UAVs.<sup>42</sup> Most of these aircraft are reportedly based at or deployed from Lhasa's Gonggar airfield. The military air base at Shigatse reportedly houses UAVs. Qamdo Bamda and Nyingchi airports are also reported to be sites of significant PLAAF activity.<sup>43</sup> In 2018, former IAF Air Chief Marshal B.S. Dhanoa noted the deployment of Su-27s and J-10s on a year-round basis as a particular concern.<sup>44</sup> In May 2020, overlapping with the land skirmishes in Ladakh and Sikkim, China reportedly flew military helicopters close to the LAC, and the IAF appears to have deployed two Su-30MKI fighters to counter them.<sup>45</sup>

## Maritime

India views China's increased activities in the Indian Ocean as challenging New Delhi's control and influence in the region and raising Indian concerns about potential PLA operations against India. Whereas PLAN operations in the Indian Ocean were near zero in the late 2000s, eight to ten PLAN ships, submarines, and research vessels a year were operating in the Indian Ocean as of 2019. Since at least 2012, China has periodically sent submarines to transit and patrol the Indian Ocean, and Indian Navy sources report an average of three to four Chinese submarine contacts every three months in the Andaman Sea.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Tom O'Connor, "China Shows Off Air Force in Direct Challenge to India's Military Power in Asia," *Newsweek*, February 21, 2018.

<sup>42</sup> "China's People's Liberation Army from Tibet Area Command Holds Major Military Drills," *Economic Times*, August 11, 2015; Dylan Malyasov, "China's J-20 Stealth Fighter Take Part in Military Drills in Tibet," *Defence Blog*, September 3, 2016; Rajeswari Pillai Rajagopalan and Pulkit Mohan, *PLA Joint Exercises in Tibet: Implications for India*, New Delhi: Observer Research Foundation, February 2020; O'Connor, 2018. For reports on UAV exercises in tandem with the 2020 Ladakh standoff, see Teddy Ng and Minnie Chan, "PLA Holds High Altitude Exercise as China-India Border Tensions Continue," *South China Morning Post*, June 3, 2020.

<sup>43</sup> Vinayak Bhat, "Tibet Sees Sharp Jump in Chinese Air Force Activity after Doklam Standoff with India," *The Print*, February 14, 2018.

<sup>44</sup> Shaurya Karanbir Gurung, "Significant Increase in Chinese Aircraft in Tibet Autonomous Region: IAF Chief B S Dhanoa," *The Economic Times*, April 27, 2018.

<sup>45</sup> According to Indian sources, the Sukhois were not scrambled in response to the Chinese helicopters but were on a routine training mission in the area. Pandit, 2020; "Chinese Choppers Spotted . . .," 2020.

<sup>46</sup> Yogesh Joshi, "China and India's Maritime Rivalry Has a New Flashpoint: the Andaman Sea," *South China Morning Post*, December 14, 2019. The first PLAN submarine visit to Colombo, Sri Lanka, was in 2014 and took India by surprise. Under Indian pressure, a PLAN request for a return visit in 2017 was denied. PLAN submarines also have visited Karachi, Pakistan, multiple times since 2015. See Shihar Aneez and Ranga Sirlal, "Chinese Submarine Docks in Sri Lanka Despite Indian Concerns," Reuters, November 2, 2014; "Sri Lanka Refuses Port Call for Chinese Submarine After Indian Leader Modi's Visit," *South China Morning Post*, May 12, 2017. As of late 2019, there does not appear to have been a subsequent Sri Lankan port call granted: Dipanjan Roy Chaudhury, "No Reports of Chinese Submarines in Sri Lanka: MEA," *Economic Times*, November 29, 2019b; Zachary Keck, "Watch Out, India: China Just Sent First-Ever Submarine to Pakistan," *National Interest*, June 29, 2015.

Of more direct concern to India are PLAN or other Chinese vessels entering India's EEZ. As of January 2020, India estimated that four to six PLAN research vessels and 600 Chinese fishing vessels operate in the Indian Ocean every year.<sup>47</sup> Indian analysts tend to view the PLAN "research" vessels as engaging in military surveillance and reconnaissance operations rather than engaging in scientific activities.<sup>48</sup> Although most of these vessels stay outside India's EEZ, there were at least two incidents in 2019 of PRC fishing or research vessels intruding into India's EEZ.<sup>49</sup> One incursion occurred in December 2019, when a PLAN vessel was encountered and warned away from the Indian Navy Base at Port Blair (Andaman and Nicobar Islands).<sup>50</sup> By operating along various areas of the Indian Ocean and pressing the limits of India's EEZ—and probing to see if India responds—these research and fishing vessels help increase Chinese awareness, if not surveillance and intelligence, of the Indian Ocean and also test India's readiness to respond.<sup>51</sup>

## Land

Tensions on the land border between China and India are the major driver of PRC use of gray zone tactics against India.<sup>52</sup> Since an accidental military encounter in 1975, no shots have been fired; until June 2020, no combat casualties were recorded. In 1996, the avoidance of lethal weaponry was formalized in a UN-brokered settlement, and subsequent skirmishes have consisted of fights without the use of firearms or of tense occupations of disputed terrain.<sup>53</sup> India

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<sup>47</sup> Experts estimate that there were 30,000 incidents of PRC fishing activity between 2015 and 2019 in the Indian Ocean. Each incident indicated a time when a Chinese fishing vessel's Automatic Identification System transponder was recorded by India's Information Management and Analysis Centre at Gurgaon. Thus, 30,000 "incidents" does not indicate that there were 30,000 unique vessels. See Shaurya Karanbir Gurung, "Alarm over Chinese Research Ships in Indian Ocean Region," *Economic Times*, January 30, 2020.

<sup>48</sup> Rehman, 2017, p. 9; Jayanta Gupta, "PLAN Ships Continue to Prowl Around Andamans," *Times of India*, February 26, 2016.

<sup>49</sup> In June 2019, for example, more than 200 crew members from ten vessels belonging to the Fu Yuan Yu fleet requested permission to enter India's EEZ off Ratnagiri in the state of Maharashtra during a warning for Cyclone Vayu. They appear to have engaged in illegal fishing for several days. See Badri Chatterjee, "In Troubled Waters: 10 Chinese Vessels Found Fishing Illegally in Maharashtra," *Hindustan Times*, June 20, 2019.

<sup>50</sup> Rajat Pandit, "Indian Warships Chase Away Chinese Vessel Near A&N Islands, Amid Ongoing Shadow-Boxing in IOR," *Times of India*, December 4, 2019b; Gurung, 2020.

<sup>51</sup> Sergio Miracola, "Chinese Hybrid Warfare," Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale website, December 21, 2018.

<sup>52</sup> The 50 years following the 1962 Sino-Indian War saw only two major conflicts: in 1967 (at two passes along the border of Sikkim) and in 1987 (following the integration of Arunachal Pradesh).

<sup>53</sup> Šumit Ganguly and Manjeet S. Pardesi, "Why We Should Worry About China and India's Border Skirmishes," *Foreign Policy*, May 23, 2020; Sutirtho Patranobis, "Lessons for India and China from 1967 Nathu La Clash," *Hindustan Times*, July 1, 2017. The last shot was fired in 1975, at Tulung La, when two patrols had an accidental encounter in foggy conditions (Ananth Krishnan, "The Last Sikkim Stand-Off: When India Gave China a Bloody Nose in 1967," *India Today*, June 30, 2017).



reports several hundred Chinese incursions across the LAC every year.<sup>54</sup> Along with incursions, the PRC has been expanding its military and dual-use infrastructure throughout the TAR for at least the past decade.<sup>55</sup> China has also been experimenting with use of nonkinetic options, such as electromagnetic attacks and communications jamming, to deter potential Indian advances.<sup>56</sup>

#### *Doklam Plateau Standoff, 2017*

Since 2014, there have been two major LAC confrontations.<sup>57</sup> On June 8, 2017, a platoon-sized PLA unit occupied a small patch of territory disputed between the PRC and Bhutan and provided protection for a Chinese construction crew to begin work extending a road running toward Indian population centers. Indian Army troops quickly took up positions to block the construction, and for nearly three months the two sets of soldiers faced off without violence.<sup>58</sup>

India had both military and geopolitical reasons for strongly opposing China's action: In military terms, Chinese control of Doklam would have threatened the 17-mile-wide Siliguri Corridor, colloquially known as the "Chicken's Neck," connecting India's seven northeastern states to the rest of the country.<sup>59</sup> In geopolitical terms, by focusing on territory disputed by Bhutan rather than by India itself, China implicitly challenged India's role as a security provider

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<sup>54</sup> The Indian government recorded 273 in 2016, 426 in 2017, and 326 in 2018. Indian military officials acknowledge, however, that they engage in minor cross-border incursions at least as often as their PLA counterparts. See "1025 Chinese Transgressions Reported from 2016 to 2018: Government Data," *Economic Times*, November 28, 2019; "If China Crossed into Grey Zone 100 Times, We Did the Double: Eastern Army Commander," *Economic Times*, August 27, 2019.

<sup>55</sup> One such project is the Lhasa-Nyingchi railway, which will run parallel to the LAC in Arunachal Pradesh in some sections, thereby providing valuable logistical support to PLA positions in this sector (Keith Barrow, "Construction Begins on Lhasa-Nyingchi Line," *International Railway Journal*, December 19, 2014; Tenzin Desal, "China's New Infrastructure Projects at India's Doorstep," Central Tibetan Administration, June 15, 2018). In 2018, India's Vice Chief of the Army Staff expressed concern that China was outstripping India on the construction of infrastructure needed to supply positions along the LAC (Rajeswari Pillai Rajagopalan, "India Is Still Losing to China in the Border Infrastructure War," *The Diplomat*, September 21, 2018). Other Indian military officials have expressed similar sentiments (Rajat Pandit, "India's Military Brass Wants Swifter Build-Up of Border Infrastructure with China," *Times of India*, April 14, 2019a).

<sup>56</sup> As far back as October 2011, the PLA was reported to be exercising "network-centric operations in a high-intensity electromagnetic environment" in the TAR (Mandip Singh "Integrated Joint Operations by the PLA: An Assessment," New Delhi: Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, December 11, 2011; "Tibet Military Region Forces Mobilize to Xinjiang for Live-Fire Mock Combat Exercise," *Global Times*, July 7, 2019).

<sup>57</sup> China and India engaged in a three-week standoff near the Indian outpost of Daulet Beg Oldie from April to May 2013. At the time, this was the most serious confrontation in more than two decades. It is possible that this episode had more to do with internal Chinese politics than with specific goals vis-à-vis India; it occurred as Xi Jinping was solidifying his control over the Chinese military and the CCP.

<sup>58</sup> Bhutan is not technically a protectorate of India but comes closer to that status than any other nation. The 1949 Treaty of Friendship between the two nations permitted India to "guide" Bhutan's foreign policy. A 2007 update obligates both countries to "cooperate closely with each other on issues relating to their national interests" (India-Bhutan Friendship Treaty, February 8, 2007, Article 2). See also John W. Garver, *Protracted Contest: Sino-Indian Rivalry in the Twentieth Century*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001, pp. 167–170, 175–185.

<sup>59</sup> The states that would have been vulnerable to a closure of the Siliguri Corridor are Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, and Nagaland.

for other regional states.<sup>60</sup> The standoff was resolved diplomatically on August 28, 2017, with a restoration of the status quo ante.<sup>61</sup> But satellite imagery showed a PLA buildup in areas very close to the disputed Doklam territory continuing after October 2017.<sup>62</sup>

#### *Galwan Confrontation, May–June 2020*

The most serious confrontation between China and India in more than 50 years began in May 2020 along the LAC in Sikkim and Ladakh. It culminated in June with the loss of 20 Indian troops and an unknown number of PLA soldiers. According to Indian accounts, the PLA initiated the skirmishes and seized 23 square miles of previously undisputed Indian territory in a bid to block military road construction that would have solidified India's control over key features.<sup>63</sup>

In early June, Beijing and New Delhi seemed to be moving closer to a diplomatic settlement, although commercial satellite imagery showed both sides reinforcing their positions. On June 15, for reasons that remain unclear, Indian and Chinese soldiers engaged in large-scale violence that ultimately proved fatal. Throughout decades of skirmishing along the LAC, troops on both sides had thrown stones at each other and sometimes engaged in fistfights; none of these actions had ever resulted in fatalities. On this occasion, however, the death toll reached double digits.<sup>64</sup>

Indian troops maintained that this was not a spontaneous brawl but a planned action involving prepositioned PLA troops specially equipped with clubs strung with barbed wire (examples of such clubs, reportedly recovered from PLA troops, were shown to the press). China denied any aggression but did not provide a detailed counternarrative. Satellite imagery revealed hundreds of PLA trucks near Galwan prior to the clash, however; according to Indian accounts the buildup of personnel and military supplies had been underway for weeks.<sup>65</sup> Chinese military infrastructure projects have been proceeding at numerous sites along the LAC for many years, and particularly since 2014.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> If Beijing had succeeded in separating Delhi from the only nation for which it is essentially obligated to provide security, such nations as Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Maldives would have felt pressure to accommodate Chinese demands. Beijing may also have been sending a message to New Delhi about its growing security relationship with the United States: During the pivotal initial weeks of the Doklam standoff—when Beijing was deciding whether to deescalate the conflict as it had in 2013 or to keep it running—Modi was on a high-profile visit to Washington.

<sup>61</sup> Xi faced internal pressure to resolve the situation before the end of summer: He was to host the leaders of Brazil, Russia, India, and South Africa for the 9th BRICS Summit at Xiamen (September 3–5) and lead the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (October 18–24).

<sup>62</sup> Vishnu Som, “Full-Fledged Chinese Military Complex in Doklam, Show Satellite Pics,” *NDTV*, January 17, 2018.

<sup>63</sup> The most significant of these was a road-construction project to facilitate logistical communication with the Indian post at Daulat Beg Oldie. See Ganguly and Pardesi, 2020.

<sup>64</sup> India confirmed that 20 of its soldiers had been killed; China declined to provide specifics (Suthirtho Patranobis, “‘For Sure It’s Fake News’: China Official on Losing 40 Soldiers in Ladakh,” *Hindustan Times*, June 23, 2020b).

<sup>65</sup> Vishnu Som, “China Moved 200 Trucks, Bulldozers Near LAC in a Week: Explainer in Pics,” *NDTV*, June 20, 2020.

<sup>66</sup> “Aware of Chinese Construction Along the LAC, Says MEA,” *The Hindu*, January 18, 2021.

The clash at Galwan may or may not have been preplanned—but the rules of engagement that permitted such an encounter to escalate so dangerously would necessarily have been preauthorized. With fatal casualties now part of the LAC equation, it is possible that future action here will no longer be confined to the gray zone, below the level of conventional combat.

### *Cyber and Information Operations Tactics*

China has likely been carrying out a variety of cyber/IO attacks against India, although the scope and details are difficult to discern (see Figure 7.5). PRC cyber activity has been pervasive, probably since the early 2000s, but attribution remains sketchy.<sup>67</sup> Much of the cyber activity overlaps with geopolitical action on Tibet, and the Tibetan government in exile is a target of growing PRC cyberattacks.<sup>68</sup> The PLA appears to have initiated some cyber activity against Indian military and government targets,<sup>69</sup> and other efforts involve other Chinese actors who target Indian government and commercial entities.<sup>70</sup> During the run-up to the 2019 Indian general election, the BJP alleged instances in which China-based companies promoted anti-BJP messages on social media platforms.<sup>71</sup> In 2020, Indian experts warned of a suspected Chinese purchase of a website related to Jammu and Kashmir that could be used for anti-Indian propaganda.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Elizabeth Radziszewski, Brendan Hanson, and Khalid Salman, “India’s Response to China’s Cyber Attacks,” *The Diplomat*, July 3, 2019.

<sup>68</sup> Tenzin Dalha, “The Cyber War Against Tibet,” *The Diplomat*, February 20, 2019; Elizabeth Montalbano, “ExileRAT Malware Targets Tibetan Exile Government,” Security Ledger website, February 6, 2019.

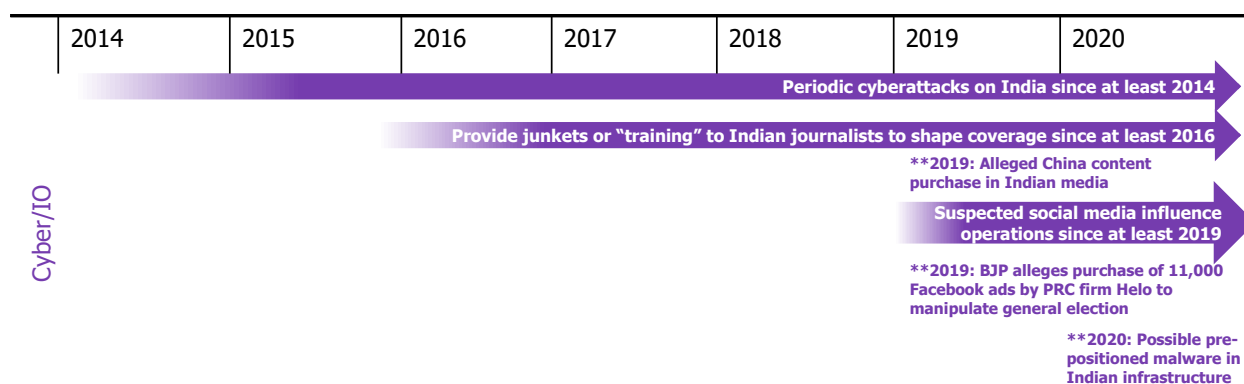
<sup>69</sup> According to Rajagopalan and Mohan, the PLA Strategic Support Force was established “to conduct electronic, cyber warfare and psychological operations” (Rajagopalan and Mohan, 2020). See also Adam Ni, “China’s Information Warfare Force Gets a New Commander,” *The Diplomat*, May 24, 2019; Elsa Kania, “PLA Strategic Support Force: The ‘Information Umbrella’ for China’s Military,” *The Diplomat*, April 1, 2017.

<sup>70</sup> According to the India Computer Emergency Response team, China-based hackers accounted for 35 percent of attacks on official Indian government websites in April and June 2018. U.S.-based ones, however, were second, with 17 percent. Russia accounted for 15 percent and Pakistan for 9 percent. The Indian companies affected included strategically important firms, such as the Oil and Natural Gas Corporation, the National Informatics Centre, the Indian Railways Catering and Tourism Corporation, and the Centre for Railways Information Systems. See “35 Per Cent of Attacks on Indian Sites Are from China: Here Are the Cyber Laws that India Should Know,” *India Today*, August 23, 2018.

<sup>71</sup> This includes allegations that PRC firm Helo had purchased 11,000 Facebook ads. These sources should be viewed as typical of BJP allegations of Chinese interference rather than as a disinterested source of fact. See Subhash Kapila, “Pakistan and China’s Hybrid Warfare Against India—Analysis,” South Asia Analysis Group website, February 4, 2020; Debarshi Dasgupta, “India Election: BJP Complains of ‘Chinese Interference,’” *Straits Times*, April 12, 2019. India does face IO attacks for political purposes, but the most extensive of these (typically on WhatsApp and Facebook) are conducted by domestic BJP allies, for internal political purposes. The most prominent actors are militant Hindu Nationalist factions, some of them strongly anti-Chinese.

<sup>72</sup> A Chinese user purchased a URL that was related to a Jammu-based daily newspaper, *Jammu Express* (Gursimran Singh, “China Buying J&K-Based Websites Amid Tensions with India; Experts Sound Alert,” *Republic World*, July 22, 2020).

**Figure 7.5. Major PRC Cyber and Information Gray Zone Activities Against India**



NOTES: Arrows indicate three or more cases of observed PRC activity over the specified period. Figure does not capture all PRC activities or tactics. \*\* indicates an individual activity. BJP = Bharatiya Janata Party.

Two of the best-documented cyber/IO attacks are the 2009–2010 Ghost Net and Shadow Network operations.<sup>73</sup> In 2009 and 2010, a team of Canada-based researchers publicly revealed two long-running cyberattacks on Indian networks.<sup>74</sup> The first attack, Ghost Net, focused primarily on the Dalai Lama—although researchers found that more than 1,000 systems (many of them government linked) had been compromised at sites across South and Southeast Asia. The perpetrators of Ghost Net used computer servers on PRC territory, on the island of Hainan. The second, Shadow Network, also targeted the Dalai Lama but focused on the government of India, the UN, and Pakistan’s embassy in the United States. The documents taken included classified documents outlining Indian military units, information about Indian missile systems, and sensitive diplomatic communications. Topics also included assessments of India’s security forces in the northeastern states and India’s domestic counterinsurgency campaign against Maoist Naxalites. Shadow Network appears to have been unrelated to Ghost Network and was rather more sophisticated. The Shadow Network attack appears to have been centered in Chengdu (Sichuan Province), and at least one hacker was affiliated with the University of Electronic Science and Technology. The report suggested a link to a criminal organization, but the choice of targets strongly suggests a geopolitical rather than a financial motive.

<sup>73</sup> In most cases, it is hard to determine whether a cyberattack has even occurred—and even when it has, firm determination of responsibility is often virtually impossible. An absence of evidence should therefore not be interpreted as evidence of absence: All India analysts we interviewed for this report and almost all whose written works we consulted or who were quoted in press accounts expressed the belief that China has been undertaking considerably more cyberattacks and IO than is publicly acknowledged. It is likely, however, that additional attacks have taken place since then that have either been conducted with greater stealth or whose existence has been more closely concealed by Indian authorities.

<sup>74</sup> All information on Ghost Net and Shadow Network here comes from the researchers who revealed it: Steven Adair, Ron Deibert, Rafal Rohozinski, Nart Villeneuve, and Greg Walton, *Shadows in the Cloud: Investigating Cyber Espionage 2.0*, Toronto and Ottawa: Information Warfare Monitor and Shadowserver Foundation, April 6, 2010. For a journalistic analysis of the data, see Kim Zetter, “Spy Network Pilfered Classified Docs from Indian Government and Others,” *Wired*, April 6, 2018.

More recently, concern and evidence have been growing that, when tension arises between China and India, China might seek to conduct cyber operations against infrastructure to warn and deter India. The authors of one 2021 report suspect that, as the two countries were engaged in a standoff in the Himalayas in summer 2020, China may have sent malware to intrude into ten different power-generation and transmission organizations throughout India.<sup>75</sup> Six local dispatch centers key to India's power grid and supply of electricity, two Indian energy and power companies, one high-voltage transmission substation, a coal-fired thermal power plant, and two maritime ports were affected. Some of these may have been targeted to cause the massive power outage in Mumbai in October 2020 that left millions without power and disrupted a variety of daily activities, including transportation, communication, and banking.<sup>76</sup> Although there is little evidence that China publicly or privately claimed responsibility for repositioning capabilities or for the October 2020 outage, the authors of the Insikt Group report believe that China may have engaged in the cyber activities to (1) "send a robust signaling message as a 'show of force'" to India, (2) "enable influence operations to sway public opinion during a diplomatic confrontation," and (3) "support potential future disruptive cyber operations against critical infrastructure."<sup>77</sup>

China has also conducted influence actions designed to shape how Indian media cover sensitive issues. China seems to have used persuasion more often than compulsion in dealing with Indian reporters. Since 2016, China has reportedly provided ten-month expense-paid junkets, including generous stipends, to journalists from India and other nations in South and Southeast Asia. Such arrangements come with an obligation: Journalists are reportedly not permitted to roam around the country freely but can travel only with government-provided escorts.<sup>78</sup> In 2019, there were suspicions of multiple cases of China buying and printing content in Indian newspapers to advance PRC narratives.<sup>79</sup>

## Trends in Chinese Tactics

The discussion so far has highlighted several trends in Chinese gray zone tactics. The main change since 2014 appears to have been increased risk tolerance and an appetite for

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<sup>75</sup> Insikt Group, *China-Linked Group RedEcho Targets the Indian Power Sector Amid Heightened Border Tensions*, Somerville, Mass.: Recorded Future, 2021.

<sup>76</sup> Insikt Group, 2021; David E. Sanger and Emily Schmall, "China Appears to Warn India: Push Too Hard and the Lights Could Go Out," *New York Times*, February 28, 2021; Kiran Tare, "Chinese Cyber Attack: Why Maharashtra Should Worry," *India Today*, March 2, 2021.

<sup>77</sup> Insikt Group, 2021, p. 11.

<sup>78</sup> Indian participant organizations included lower-tier outlets, such as the Indo-Asian News Service and Jansatta, but also the top-tier newspaper *The Indian Express* (Krishnan, 2018).

<sup>79</sup> Some of PRC articles appeared in the *Hindustan Times* and were supposedly funded by *China Daily*, a PRC government media outlet (T. G. Arya, "China Buying Indian Media for Propaganda Gimmick," Central Tibetan Administration, December 16, 2019; K. Bhattacharjee, "Propaganda War: The Undue Influence of the Chinese Govt over Indian Media Is a Matter of Deep Concern and Requires Urgent Intervention," *OpIndia*, September 29, 2020).

confrontation in land warfare skirmishes along the LAC. This inflection predates the time frame of this chapter: The PLA encampment at Daulat Beg Oldie, the first move of this magnitude in 25 years, occurred in April 2013.<sup>80</sup> The Doklam confrontation of 2017 represented a significant increase in Beijing's risk-tolerance and likely de-escalated because of Xi's need to focus on other foreign policy priorities and summits during fall 2017. To the extent that Beijing authorized rules of engagement enabling the June 2020 clash at Galwan, this represents the most risk-tolerant PRC action vis-à-vis India since the late 1960s.

Second, China's tactics in the military gray zone toward India are similar to those for the SCS but are in the land domain. In the Himalayas, China has consistently tried to establish new "facts on the ground," then defied India to try to change them. Beijing has done this by constant probing: pushing forward into disputed territory and withdrawing to a status quo ante (without ever accepting such a position as settled) only when firmly confronted.

Third, Beijing's gray zone activities often appear more improvisational than exquisitely calibrated. At Doklam, for example, any ingress was unlikely to succeed: As described earlier, India was highly unlikely to acquiesce to such a land grab. And here, unlike in certain other parts of the LAC, the terrain decisively favored the defenders over a potential aggressor.<sup>81</sup> With the Communist Party Congress in October 2017 providing a built-in time limit, any successful Chinese strategy would have been premised on a quick victory—one that circumstances of politics and terrain rendered highly unlikely. The 2020 clash, likewise, is hard to interpret as a carefully planned action: While the PLA certainly moved large numbers of troops and large amounts of supplies to the area, it is difficult to rationalize any goal this might have achieved as being worth the price of the first combat casualties in 50 years.

Fourth, China continues to employ all nonmilitary gray zone tactics regardless of external geopolitical circumstances. Beijing's efforts to expand its influence throughout the IOR appear to have been constant and consistent rather than ebbing and flowing with time. Even in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, Beijing has shown no desire to pull back from gray zone competition and (as the encounter at Galwan demonstrates) may even be willing to increase it.

## India's Response

Geopolitically, India has pushed back against China's efforts to exclude it from international forums. It has succeeded in gaining support for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council

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<sup>80</sup> The event may have been related to Xi's ascent and could potentially have been intended as a signaling gesture during a political season which laid the foundation for Modi's victory the following year but was not directly aimed at Modi himself.

<sup>81</sup> The nearby Indian Army units, in Sikkim, included significant artillery assets and occupied higher ground. If the PLA had succeeded in pushing further along the Doklam Plateau toward India proper, it would have had to make its attack uphill. Moreover, the logistics here are not conducive for deep penetration of Indian-held territory.

from four of the five permanent members, excepting only China.<sup>82</sup> On May 1, 2019, India orchestrated a UN listing of Masood Azhar, the Pakistan-based leader of the Jaish-e-Muhammad, as a specially designated global terrorist.<sup>83</sup> India has also moved closer to the global consensus on maritime issues.<sup>84</sup>

Economically, India has been becoming more active, particularly since 2020, to decrease its economic reliance on China, as well as carrying out a tariff spat with China. Domestically, India amended its foreign direct investment policies in April 2020 to require the approval of New Delhi on all future deals from neighboring countries (such as China).<sup>85</sup> The objective is to curb “opportunistic takeovers/acquisitions of Indian companies.”<sup>86</sup> Since June 2020, India has suspended PRC business deals in India, initiated anti-dumping and countervailing investigations against China, imposed additional taxes on select PRC products (such as solar photovoltaic cells), restricted PRC firms from participating in public procurement bids, and is considering additional tariffs on hundreds of PRC products.<sup>87</sup> Internationally, India has tried to provide an alternative to BRI funding (for example, at Myanmar’s Sittwe Port), although it cannot match the funding Beijing offers.

In the military arena, India has firmly resisted Chinese incursion and continues to invest in military capabilities to counter China. In the airpower domain, India has maintained a significant IAF presence along the LAC to counter any PLAAF incursion.<sup>88</sup> In the maritime domain, the

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<sup>82</sup> In 2011, China declared itself willing to support India’s bid—if it were delinked from a broader proposal for UN Security Council permanent membership that included Japan (Ananth Krishnan, “China Ready to Support Indian Bid for UNSC,” *The Hindu*, July 16, 2011). Whether this was a serious offer or a cynical attempt to drive a wedge between India and its key supporters is an open question.

<sup>83</sup> Morgan Ortigas, “United Nations 1267 Sanctions Committee Designation of Masood Azhar,” press release, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of State, May 1, 2019.

<sup>84</sup> India’s interpretation of UNCLOS remains at variance with those of the United States and other nations in such areas as the permissibility of foreign military vessels in an EEZ. In 2014, however, India accepted a UN panel’s judgement on a territorial issue in favor of Bangladesh, even though this tripled that nation’s EEZ in the Bay of Bengal (Abhijit Singh, “The Escalating South China Sea Dispute: Lessons for India,” New Delhi: Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, March 1, 2016; Zhang Haiwen and Vijay Sakhuja, “Security in the Maritime Commons,” in Ashley Tellis and Sean Mirski, eds., *Crux of Asia: China, India, and the Emerging Global Order*, Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2013; Rehman, 2017, p. 1).

<sup>85</sup> According to official figures from China’s Ministry of Commerce, China’s foreign direct investment in India is at least \$8 billion—up from \$1.6 billion in 2014. Official PRC figures may significantly understate investments, and when announced commitments are included, the value may be as high as \$26 billion. See Ananth Krishnan, “Following the Money: China Inc’s Growing Stake in India-China Relations,” Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, March 30, 2020a.

<sup>86</sup> Manish Singh, “To Avoid Hostile Takeovers Amid COVID-19, India Mandates Approvals on Chinese Investments,” TechCrunch website, April 18, 2020a.

<sup>87</sup> Niharika Sharma, “India May Not Have Anything to Gain in Trade Standoff with China, Experts Warn,” Scroll.in, September 8, 2020; Shruti Srivastava, “India Plans to Impose Strict Rules and Tariffs on Chinese Imports,” Bloomberg, June 25, 2020; Esha Mitra, Michelle Toh, and Sandi Sidhu, “India Suspends Three China Business Deals as Border Tensions Rise,” CNN, June 23, 2020.

<sup>88</sup> Pandit, 2020.

Indian Navy has forcibly expelled PLAN vessels entering India's EEZ for so-called research, most notably off Port Blair in late 2019, and is planning to invest in military and economic infrastructure and to fortify the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.<sup>89</sup> In the land domain, India has been most vigilant about preventing gray zone incursions.

Perhaps the most significant recent change in military strategy on India's part, however, has been resurrecting the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (commonly referred to as "the Quad") between the United States, Japan, Australia, and India and strengthening of India's relationship with Quad members. Although the Quad was initiated in 2007, it did not make much progress at first because countries had individual concerns about how the Quad would affect bilateral relations with China. India, as the only Quad nation that was not a treaty ally of the United States, had always been the group's most reluctant member. In 2017, however, "Quad 2.0" was launched.<sup>90</sup> In June 2020, as the Galwan standoff was still underway, but before it had grown deadly, India signed an important agreement with Australia, under which each nation could use the other's military bases for logistical support.<sup>91</sup> By late 2020, India had pushed to accelerate weapon purchases from the United States, including UAVs to be deployed to expand surveillance along its disputed border region with China, and no longer opposed the United States potentially expanding its military presence close to India's borders to counter growing PRC influence in the IOR.<sup>92</sup>

India is likely to continue its robust responses to China's salami-slicing tactics. India sees Doklam as a success—and Modi views the more assertive military stance against Pakistan (the surgical strike of September 2016, the Balakot raid of February 2019<sup>93</sup>) as a template for China. U.S. planners should continue to search for ways to increase engagement with India in the security sphere. In the wake of Galwan, India is likely to be more receptive than in the past. American planners, however, should not expect a rapid change in India's traditional hesitancy about close alignment with any superpower.

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<sup>89</sup> Joshi, 2019.

<sup>90</sup> Quad 2.0 has included working-level meetings in Manila (November 2017), Singapore (June and November 2018), and Bangkok (May and November 2019) and ministerial-level meetings in New York (September 2019) and Tokyo (October 2020). For a discussion of the Quad, see Ramesh Thakur, "Australia and the Quad," *The Strategist*, July 5, 2018; Tanvi Madan, "What You Need to Know About the 'Quad,' in Charts," Brookings Institution website, October 5, 2020.

<sup>91</sup> "India, Australia Seal Deal to Use Each Other's Military Bases," Reuters, June 4, 2020.

<sup>92</sup> In September 2020, the United States signed a framework with the Maldives to deepen defense engagement and cooperation to support maintaining peace and security in the Indian Ocean (Pranshu Verma, "In Wake of Recent India-China Conflict, U.S. Sees Opportunity," *New York Times*, October 3, 2020; U.S. Department of Defense, "The Maldives and U.S. Sign Defense Agreement," press release, September 11, 2020).

<sup>93</sup> On September 29, 2016, in retaliation for an attack on Indian troops at Uri by Pakistan-based terrorist group Jaish-e-Muhammad, India launched a special forces surgical strike on purported terrorist training camps in a Pakistan-administered portion of Kashmir. On February 26, 2019, in response to another Jaish-e-Muhammad attack, the IAF launched its first airstrike on undisputed Pakistani territory (that is, territory outside Kashmir) since the two nations' 1971 war.



In the cyber/IO area, India has also taken a number of steps, particularly since 2019. India is increasing scrutiny of Chinese Confucius Institutes and the activities of other Chinese nonprofit organizations in India.<sup>94</sup> India is also restricting and tightening existing policy on university collaborations with China.<sup>95</sup> In 2020, India banned 59 Chinese online applications, including TikTok, WeChat, and Helo, and 118 Chinese mobile applications.<sup>96</sup>

## Potential Near- to Medium-Term Chinese Gray Zone Activities Against India

China's geostrategic goals vis-à-vis India are a good fit for gray zone activities. We are likely to see a continuation, and, in some cases, escalation in the employment of PRC gray zone tactics against India. Gray zone tactics allow China to advance its interests against India with a lower risk of triggering a conventional military confrontation. As the Doklam and Galwan engagements demonstrated, Beijing's military superiority over India is far from decisive, at least in limited land warfare along the LAC (and, should tensions escalate, India has a survivable nuclear deterrent).

PRC geopolitical and economic gray zone activities are inherently less risky than military ones, and the PRC has no real disincentive for using such tools. BRI has proven an extremely effective tool for gaining Chinese influence in states traditionally oriented toward India, such as Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and the Maldives. The lure of economic engagement has given Beijing a foothold in Nepal and is even starting to create a slight distance between India and Bhutan. There is also a risk that the current escalating trade tensions between China and India might hurt India more because India is more dependent on trade with China than vice versa.<sup>97</sup>

One near-term potential for heightened geopolitical competition and for greater use of PRC gray zone tactics against India involves Tibet. China-India tensions over Tibet will reach an inflection point when the Dalai Lama, who is currently 86 years old, passes away.<sup>98</sup> China is likely to increase pressure on India through various means to persuade India to acquiesce to its

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<sup>94</sup> Miglani, 2020.

<sup>95</sup> Shuriah Niazi, "India Restricts University Collaborations with China," University World News, October 10, 2019.

<sup>96</sup> Manish Singh, "India Bans Tiktok, Dozens of Other Chinese Apps," TechCrunch website, June 29, 2020b.

<sup>97</sup> According to statistics from the International Monetary Fund, total Indian trade (imports and exports) with mainland China made up approximately 11 percent of India's trade with the world in 2019. By contrast, mainland China's trade with India was only 2 percent of China's global trade. See International Monetary Fund, "Direction of Trade Statistics (DOTS)," webpage, September 25, 2020.

<sup>98</sup> The selection of the 11th Panchen Lama in 1995 provides a preview of how this competition might play out. In that episode, China used the transition as an opportunity to solidify its control over much of the clerical establishment of Tibetan Buddhism. Beijing selected Chökyi Gyalpo, who has served in an officially recognized capacity since; the candidate anointed by the Dalai Lama and the clergy-in-exile, Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, is recognized as legitimate by the exile community and by many (perhaps most) Tibetan Buddhists in PRC-administered Tibet, but he has been in Beijing's custody ever since his anointment.

selection of the next Dalai Lama. Such tactics could include renewed or stepped-up military incursions along the LAC on the pattern of Doklam and Galwan, cyber/IO attacks against the Tibetan government in exile and the Indian political figures that support it, increased pressure against Indian objectives (including those unrelated to Tibet) at international forums, and increased support for Pakistan-based proxy forces unrelated to Tibet as a bargaining tool.

On the military side, China is likely to at least continue to incrementally advance its activities on land and in the Indian Ocean. Both sides are likely to continue the decades-long jostling along the LAC. China is likely to increase its maritime activities in the Indian Ocean, including intrusions into India's EEZ. It is possible that China's increased risk tolerance for escalation along the LAC and growing military capabilities could increase the frequency of border standoffs between the two countries as well as increase tolerance for sustaining casualties during these incidents. Some Indian experts also fear that, as China's navy capabilities increase and as its hold over the SCS solidifies, Beijing may turn to challenging India's control over the Andaman and Nicobar Islands through both legal and maritime means.<sup>99</sup>

Modi's divisive policies have created space for China to exacerbate India's domestic fissures through cyber/IO and possibly even electoral interference.<sup>100</sup> Such operations are low cost and potentially lower risk because of the difficulties of attribution. Although there is suspicion that China has begun some activities in this arena, little evidence has appeared in the public domain to indicate that China has undertaken such operations at a large scale. But Indian policymakers would be remiss if they failed to plan for such an eventuality. This represents a potentially useful avenue for U.S. policymakers to propose increased cooperation with and support for their Indian partners.

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<sup>99</sup> As early as 2016, at least one Chinese official hinted that, at some future date, India's ownership of the Andaman and Nicobar islands may be disputed and challenged internationally (R. S. Vasan, "Devious Plans of China to Bring in the Issue of Andaman and Nicobar Islands Ownership," South Asia Analysis Group, Paper No. 6152, July 21, 2016; Joshi, 2019).

<sup>100</sup> The socially divisive measures Modi enacted in 2019 included the abrogation of Article 370 of India's constitution (which gave a special status to Jammu and Kashmir, India's only Muslim-majority state) and passage of the Citizenship Amendment Act (which granted privileges to Hindus and other groups denied to Muslims).

## 8. Comparing China's Use of Gray Zone Tactics Across Regions

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Having examined how China has employed gray zone tactics against Taiwan, Japan, Vietnam, and India since at least 2014, we now assess variations and trends in China's use of these tactics in this chapter. We first systematically coded and categorized the tactics China used against all four regions, generating a list of 77 PRC tactics. We then expanded our data-collection effort by adding China's use of gray zone tactics against a fifth country, the Philippines, into our analysis before looking at larger patterns of how China employs different tactics.

### Nearly 80 Different PRC Tactics Used, Across All Instruments of Power

Table 8.1 lists the tactics China has employed against the four allies and partners that we covered in the previous chapters. We list each tactic by category, subtype, and the tactic number (which is based on the category). As discussed in Chapter 1, the category in which a PRC tactic falls indicates the *means*, or the instrument of national power China uses for coercion. We divide tactics into four means: geopolitical, economic, military, and cyber/IO. The subtype indicates the *mechanism*, or how China uses its power to pressure the target. For nonmilitary tactics, this includes looking at whether China uses activities that are direct or indirect and external or internal to the target region. This leads to three subtypes of international, bilateral, or grassroots tactics. We divide military tactics into four subtypes by domain: general, air, maritime, and land.

The full list includes 77 different tactics, of which China used 76 tactics against Taiwan, Japan, Vietnam, and India and employed one additional geopolitical tactic (20—engage in covert action) against the Tibetan government in exile in India (not any of the allies or partners). As noted earlier, the tactics we identified are likely not an exhaustive list of recent PRC gray zone tactics. It is possible that some PRC tactics are not reported or not detected.

**Table 8.1. List of PRC Gray Zone Tactics**

Category, Subtype	Tactic No.	PRC Tactic
Geopolitical		
International	1	Establish new major international initiatives or alternative international institutions to pressure or incentivize the target to accommodate PRC requests
	2	Exclude or limit the target's leadership and participation in existing international organizations
	3	Undermine the target's regional or international influence and partnerships, including by engaging in campaigns to blame or shame the target
	4	Support the target's adversaries or rival countries using a combination of political, economic, and military means

<b>Category, Subtype</b>	<b>Tactic No.</b>	<b>PRC Tactic</b>
	5	Limit international sanctions or crack down on violent nonstate actors opposing the target and/or operating against the target
	6	Use international influence on third countries to pressure target citizens to retract or recant specific views or positions (e.g., pressuring ROK companies to force Taiwanese artists to drop independence position)
<b>Bilateral</b>	7	Significantly manipulate or reduce high-level political contacts or engagements
	8	Use high-profile political or legal campaigns (lawfare) to pressure the target
	9	Engage in diplomatic or political activities to divide or split the target geographically beyond the territorial dispute (e.g., via preferred treatment to select territories, legal challenges)
	10	Use diplomatic or political threats to disrupt normal business activities within the target (e.g., create stock market volatility)
	11	Detain or harass target citizens in China (beyond journalists and academics)
	12	Impose restrictions on travel or visas for select target leaders, political parties, or individuals
	13	Organize public protests (or counterprotests) in China or in the target region to criticize target activities
<b>Grassroots</b>	14	Use and/or provide support to individual elites, political leaders, political parties, groups, or organizations to act on behalf of China in the target
	15	Use and/or provide support to religious groups or organizations to promote pro-China agenda
	16	Use and/or provide support to pro-China Chinese ethnic groups (e.g., ethnic business associations)
	17	Use and/or provide support to educational and civil society groups or organizations (that are not religious or political) to promote pro-China agenda (e.g., Confucius Institutes)
	18	Use and/or provide support to pro-China groups with criminal links or ties
	19	Use and/or provide support to other violent (insurgent, terrorist, or separatist) groups in the target
	20	Engage in covert action (PRC agents directly in the target country or region), such as assassination or harassment of opponents
<b>Economic</b>		
<b>International</b>	1	Purchase or invest in large civilian infrastructure or assets (such as land) in a third country (particularly neighboring countries) that pressure the target
	2	Export PRC products that advance PRC claims or narrative (e.g., products that portray disputed territories as part of China)
	3	Require products or services from international firms to adhere to PRC requests and/or claims compared with the target's claims <sup>a</sup>
	4	Control or reduce availability of public or international resources to the target (e.g., constructing dams to control the flow of the river to the target)
<b>Bilateral</b>	5	Reduce trade or flow of specific goods (exports or imports)
	6	Reduce provision of PRC direct investment or foreign aid
	7	Harass, pressure, or co-opt businesses from the target region operating in China or competing for PRC projects in the target
	8	Reduce PRC tourism to pressure the target
	9	Reduce number of PRC students to pressure the target
	10	Boycott, protest, destroy, or confiscate the target's goods or products in China, particularly goods that do not align with PRC interests
<b>Grassroots</b>	11	Purchase or invest (build civilian infrastructure) in or near disputed land or maritime features
	12	Engage in land reclamation or other economic activities to expand the size of disputed territory

<b>Category, Subtype</b>	<b>Tactic No.</b>	<b>PRC Tactic</b>
	13	Ban or prohibit certain economic activities in disputed territories (e.g., fishing ban)
	14	Use PRC companies or economic assets to advance disputed PRC territorial claims (e.g., use of PRC oil rigs)
	15	Expand or engage in new PRC commercial activity to, on, or near disputed territories, such as tourism, new commercial flight routes
	16	Engage in PRC economic or civilian activity in or near target-sensitive or key geopolitical locations (e.g., near military bases or facilities)
<b>Military</b>		
<b>General</b>	1	Engage in highly publicized and large-scale, cross-service military exercises or shows of force near or against the target
	2	Explicitly threaten the use of force or military escalation against the target if it takes certain actions
	3	Deepen military cooperation and/or establish military bases or potential dual-use facilities in neighboring countries to threaten the target
	4	Build up or acquire military capabilities for deterring or countering the target (e.g., military buildup in region near the target)
	5	Use large-scale or cross-service military activities or exercises (excludes cyber activities) to disrupt normal business activities within the target (e.g., missile launches that interfere with target commercial port activities)
<b>Air</b>	6	Declare an ADIZ near or surrounding the target
	7	Establish military or dual-use air bases or facilities in disputed territories
	8	Engage in large-scale air exercises near the target's home or main territory
	9	Engage in large-scale air exercises near disputed territories
	10	Engage in or increase air patrols or intrusions near the target's home or main territory
	11	Engage in or increase air patrols or intrusions near disputed territories
	12	Engage in military air intercepts or aggressive air maneuvers against target military aircraft
	13	Engage in live fire near the target or in simulated attacks (e.g., radar lock-on) on target assets
	14	Use PLAAF or PLAN Aviation to harass or disrupt target commercial activities in disputed territories
	15	Land or forward deploy military aircraft or equipment in or near disputed territories
<b>Maritime</b>	16	Establish military or dual-use maritime bases or facilities in disputed territories
	17	Engage in large-scale maritime exercises near the target's home or main territory
	18	Engage in large-scale maritime exercises near disputed territories
	19	Engage in or increase maritime patrols or transits near the target's home or main territory
	20	Engage in or increase maritime patrols or transits near disputed territories
	21	Engage in military maritime intercepts or in aggressive maritime maneuvers against target maritime vessels
	22	Anchor maritime vessels and/or forward deploy military maritime troops and equipment in or near disputed territories
	23	Engage in exchange of fire, live fire near the target, or simulated attacks (e.g., radar lock-on) on target assets via PLA maritime forces
	24	Use PLAN, CCG, or maritime militia to harass or disrupt target commercial activities in disputed territories (e.g., CCG harasses target oil exploration)
	25	Use PLAN, CCG, or maritime militia to detain or capture target citizens operating in disputed territories

Category, Subtype	Tactic No.	PRC Tactic
Land	26	Engage in border (or cross-border) skirmishes and/or mass troops on land border for demonstration of force
	27	Establish military or dual-use ground bases or facilities in disputed territories
	28	Engage in large-scale land exercises or movement of troops near land border
	29	Engage in exchange of fire, live fire near the target, or simulated attacks (e.g., radar lock) on the target assets via PLA ground forces
	30	Land or forward deploy military ground troops or equipment in or near disputed territories
<b>Cyber/IO</b>		
Bilateral	1	Engage in cyber operations against target government or military activities
	2	Engage in cyber operations to disrupt or undermine target economic activity
	3	Engage in cyber operations to interfere in the target's elections, including to support specific candidates or smear PRC opponents
	4	Ban or limit information or content produced by leading voices in the target that oppose PRC views (e.g., ban music from prodemocracy artists)
	5	Pressure or coerce the target to change or amend content written in textbooks (e.g., revise history textbooks)
	6	Coerce or attempt to buy target journalists and academics
Grassroots	7	Buy or control existing target media outlets (directly or through proxies)
	8	Buy content (e.g., pay for ads) in existing target media outlets or engage in content-sharing or joint production of content
	9	Support or fund the establishment of new or existing pro-China media outlets operating in the target
	10	Engage in social disinformation campaigns in the target
	11	Use defamation lawsuits to sue target researchers or organizations for voicing positions against China

NOTES: For the purposes of coding the tactics, we include the PLA Rocket Force among the PLA ground forces.  
<sup>a</sup> For this tactic, we focus on whether China pressures international firms over disputed claims related to the target, such as over the Senkakus for Japan. For Japan, for example, we do not count Chinese pressuring of Japanese firms over Taiwan as falling into this category.

## Adding the Philippines as a Fifth Case

It is also possible that China used additional tactics against other countries not included in our research. We engaged in a limited test of this examining PRC gray zone tactics for a fifth case: the Philippines from 2012 to 2020. Manila is a U.S. ally with an outstanding territorial dispute with China in the SCS. However, compared with the other cases, the Philippines' overall relationship with China improved under President Duterte since 2016. The Philippines thus presents an interesting case of whether China may use different types of gray zone tactics if China has better relations with the target country.

Appendix A summarizes the coercive gray zone tactics China has used against the Philippines since 2012. Appendix B provides the detailed coding of the tactics China has used against Taiwan, Japan, Vietnam, India, and the Philippines. We did not find any new PRC tactics that China used against the Philippines that it did not use against either Taiwan, Japan, Vietnam, or India. Instead, there are a number of similarities between the tactics China employed against

the Philippines and the tactics Beijing used against the four allies and partners. The following sections discuss these findings in more detail.

## Summary Statistics on PRC Gray Zone Tactics

Before we examine the patterns in PRC gray zone tactics, this section summarizes the statistics for our coding of the tactics. We counted tactics that we were relatively confident China had used at least once against the target during the time frame of our analysis as 1. We counted tactics that we suspected China used but were less confident about as 0.5.<sup>1</sup>

### *Largest Variety of Tactics Against Taiwan and Least Against Japan*

In terms of targets, China employed the largest variety of tactics (62.5 tactics) against Taiwan and the lowest variety of tactics against Japan (33 tactics). Figure 8.1 displays the tactics China used against each ally and partner, by category and count.

### *Large Number of Geopolitical and Bilateral Tactics*

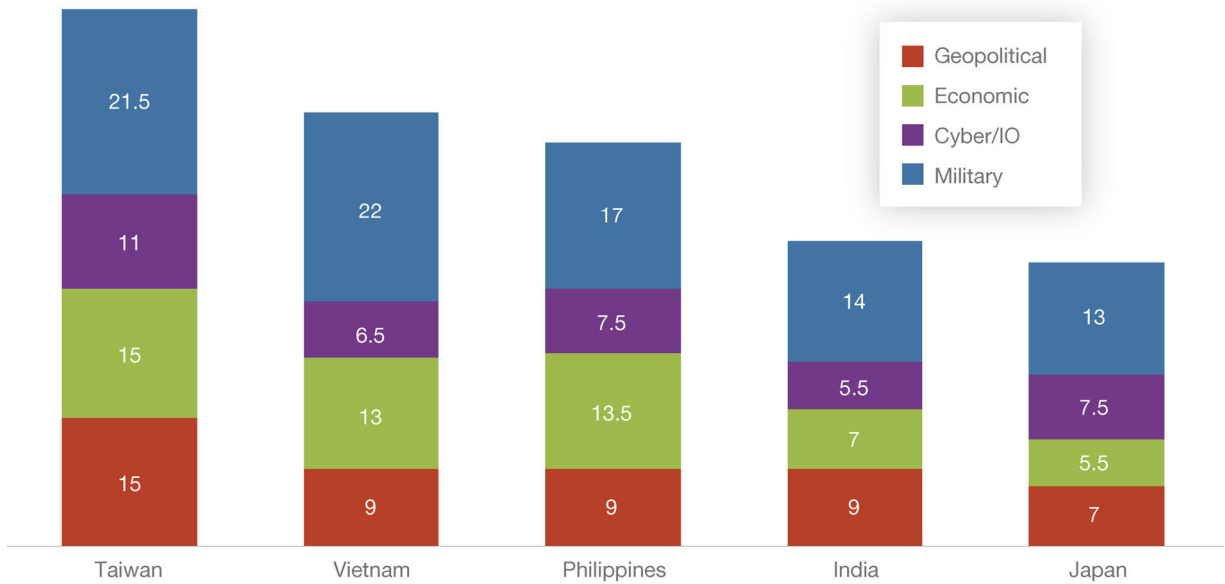
Looking first at nonmilitary tactics, China used 47 distinct tactics (see Figure 8.2). Of these, most were geopolitical tactics (43 percent), followed by economic tactics (34 percent), then cyber/IO tactics (23 percent). This suggests that China has more types of diplomatic tools available to coerce target countries but is also willing to employ economic and cyber/IO tools.

In terms of how China wielded its power, many of the tactics were employed externally and through bilateral channels (40 percent). A similar proportion involved China engaging in grassroots activity directly in the target region, including through leveraging proxies or local agents (38 percent). China used the fewest international tactics that involved coercing the target country through international or regional institutions or through a third country or external, third-party actor (21 percent).

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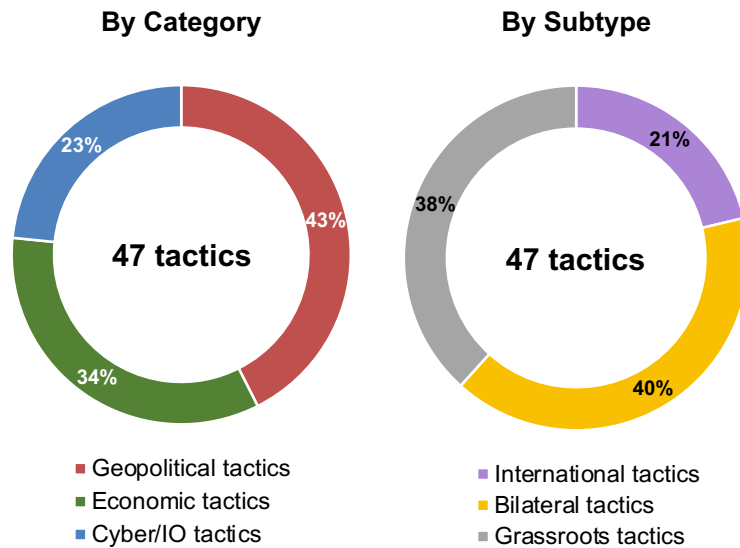
<sup>1</sup> Our confidence in whether China used a certain tactic against the target is based on whether there are at least multiple, authoritative publicly available reports of China engaging in the activity. We relied on publicly available U.S. and allied and partner government information, academic and scholarly analysis, and media reporting. If we could find only one or two articles reporting on the PRC activity, if the reports suggested strong suspicions that China engaged in a particular activity, but if the evidence to back up such suggestions was limited, we coded the tactic as possible but not confirmed (as 0.5 instead of 1). See Appendix C for details.

**Figure 8.1. Counts of Distinct PRC Gray Zone Tactics Against U.S. Allies and Partners**



NOTE: Counts of PRC tactics may not sum to whole numbers because of the way each tactic was coded. A 1 indicates relative confidence that China has used the tactic, while 0.5 indicates a suspicion that China has used the tactic against an ally or partner. IO = information operations.

**Figure 8.2. Breakdown of PRC Nonmilitary Tactics, by Category and Subtype**



NOTE: Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

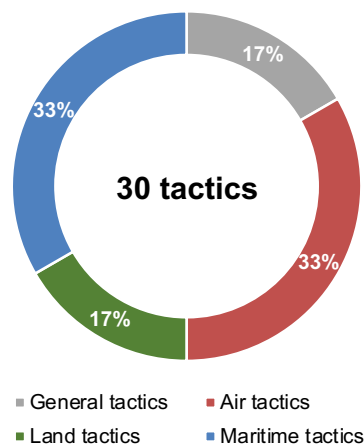


### *Reliance on Air and Maritime Tactics*

For military tactics, China relied the most on air (33 percent) and maritime (33 percent) tactics involving the PLAAF and PLAN, respectively (see Figure 8.3). This is not surprising; most cases we examined involved allies or partners that have a maritime dispute with China.

It is important to note that maritime tactics are not as important against India, where most PRC military tactics are related to PLA Army activities, supplemented by the PLAAF. For both India and Vietnam, the two countries that share a land border with China, China has embraced land-based military tactics to pressure both neighbors. China has even used land-based military tactics against Vietnam when tensions between Hanoi and Beijing escalated because of activities occurring in the SCS.

**Figure 8.3. Breakdown of PRC Military Tactics by Subtype**



### **Patterns in PRC Use of Gray Zone Tactics**

Given the statistics we have just presented and the analyses in Chapters 4 through 7, the following subsections highlight several different patterns and findings on how China uses gray zone tactics.

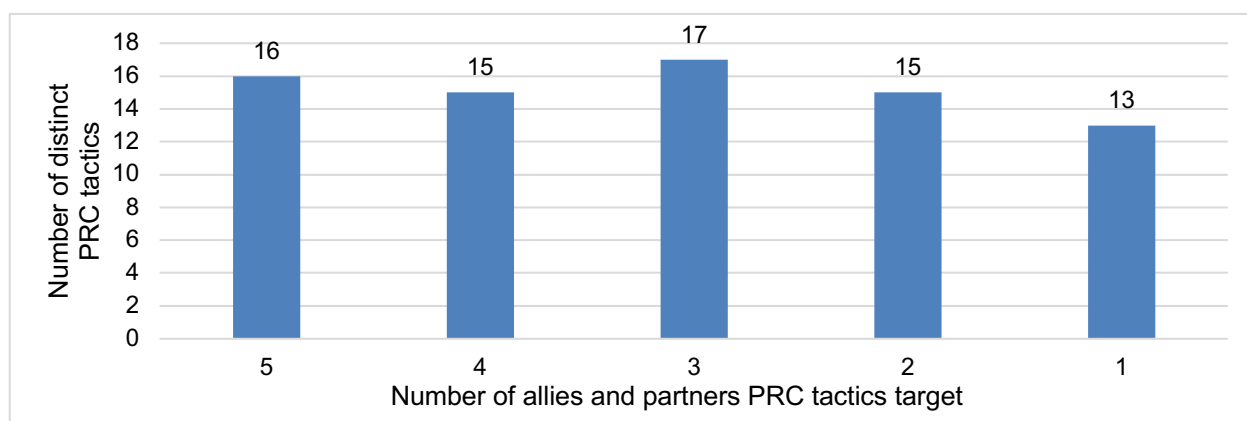
#### *Tailors Gray Zone Tactics to the Target*

First, China does not have a uniform set of standard gray zone tactics that it uses against all or most U.S. allies and partners but tailors its gray zone tactics to the target and specific situation. China did not, for example, use a large variety of economic or cyber/IO gray zone tactics against Japan but did do so against Taiwan, Vietnam, and the Philippines.

Figure 8.4 explores this by calculating how many distinct tactics China employed against specific numbers of allies and partners. If China had a relatively uniform approach to using gray zone tactics, we would expect to see a large number of PRC tactics used against all five allies

and partners in the study. We would still expect to see some (but fewer) tactics targeting a smaller subset of the allies and partners in this research if we assumed that China reserved more-escalatory tactics for U.S. allies and partners that are locked into tensor dynamics with China. The data in Figure 8.4, however, do not support this. The figure shows that similar numbers of tactics affected different numbers of allies and partners. On one end, China employed 16 different tactics against all five allies and partners. On the other end, China employed 13 tactics against only one ally or partner. This does not rule out the possibility that China has a smaller set of core gray zone tactics that it employs against most allies and partners and that, beyond this core set, there is significant flexibility about using additional tactics.

**Figure 8.4. How Widely China Employs Gray Zone Tactics**



NOTE: This figure includes and combines PRC tactics that we are relatively confident were used against the target and the tactics we suspect China used. As mentioned earlier, our data set includes one tactic, which we came across in our analysis of India, that China used against the Tibetan government in exile in India that does not target any of the five allies and partners in this research. This figure does not include that tactic.

### *Has a Growing Number of Gray Zone Tools*

Second, as the individual case studies highlighted, China has more options and capabilities to employ a wider variety of gray zone tactics in 2020 than it had five or ten years ago. As the following subsections will describe, China has more military tactics to choose from and more ability to use nonmilitary international and grassroots tactics. This is also true for nonmilitary bilateral tactics. China’s passage of the 2014 Counter-Espionage Law, 2015 National Security Law, and 2017 NGO Law, for example, has increased the legal basis for China to detain foreign individuals, including citizens of Taiwan and Japan, since 2015.<sup>2</sup> On the cyber/IO front, China’s growing cyber capabilities have meant that most of the regions we examined have experienced increased cyber operations from China. One of the more recent, prominent, and suspected cases

<sup>2</sup> “Counter-Espionage Law . . .,” 2014; “National Security Law . . .,” 2015; “Law of the People’s Republic of China on Managing Domestic Activities of Overseas Non-Governmental Organizations,” 2017.

was China's prepositioning of malware within India's power-generation and transmission infrastructure during increased tension along the disputed border between China and India.

### *Concentrates and Layers Tactics to Protect Core Interests*

The case studies and data also show that China layers different types of tactics to achieve its aims and is willing to employ more tactics for more-important goals. Not surprisingly, Beijing employs the most tactics (in both count and variety) against Taiwan, which Beijing regards as a part of Chinese territory and considers reunification to be a core national interest. Although China was more willing to use higher profile geopolitical and military pressure on Taiwan in the mid- to late 1990s, the PRC appears to have adopted a more nuanced, sequenced, and layered approach toward Taiwan by the mid-2010s. As the DPP returned to power in Taiwan in 2016, PRC first ramped up pressure via geopolitical and economic means in 2016. Although the PLA engaged in some exercises to warn Taiwan in mid- to late 2015, China was careful not to time the military actions to be too close to Taiwan's elections to avoid the military activities being counterproductive. Beijing did not significantly increase military pressure on Taiwan until 2017, and PLA activities against the island have grown in visibility and significance since 2018. This suggests that, if possible, China would prefer to coerce targets using nonmilitary means first before resorting to demonstrations of military might.

Beijing also uses a significant variety of gray zone tactics, against Vietnam, followed by the Philippines. As described in Chapter 6, on Vietnam, much of the use of PRC tactics against Vietnam is focused on protecting PRC sovereignty and territorial claims, another core PRC interest. This was also the case in our analysis of PRC tactics against the Philippines. Since 2014, China has undertaken some of the most coercive and layered activities against Vietnam during oil and gas exploration-related standoffs. In 2014, this included cutting off party-to-party ties, threatening border trade, flying jets over the oil rig, spreading rumors about PLA troops on the land border with Vietnam, and engaging in cyberattacks against the Vietnamese government.

### *Is More Cautious in Using Gray Zone Tactics Against More-Capable Countries*

By contrast, China appears to employ a smaller set of tactics against Japan and India, two countries that are more militarily and economically powerful than Vietnam and the Philippines, than against the latter two countries, suggesting more caution on Beijing's end. For example, while China imposes annual fishing bans in both the ECS and SCS, the CCG is particularly aggressive in enforcing the ban against Vietnamese fisherman, capturing, beating, and forcing

Vietnamese fishermen to acknowledge violations of the PRC ban.<sup>3</sup> By contrast, there are no reports of China detaining Japanese fisherman in the ECS.<sup>4</sup>

In terms of subtypes of tactics, China appears to prefer using bilateral measures against Japan and has had less success employing international or grassroots tactics against Tokyo. This is likely because of Japan's significant and active international influence and the strong anti-Chinese sentiment within Japan that makes it difficult for China to operate on the ground. Beijing relies mainly on international tactics against India, although it is beginning to use more bilateral tactics against India.

Looking beyond the five allies and partners in our research, China's exercise of more caution against stronger U.S. allies and partners is also evident in how China responds to countries in the Quad. With respect to the United States, Japan, India, and Australia, China appears to be less restrained in applying pressure on the weakest of the four countries—Australia—in trying to prevent the four countries from engaging in more geostrategic collaboration. Part of the early obstacles the Quad faced was reluctance from the four members to engage in activities that could damage their relationships with China. Australia withdrew from Quad efforts in 2008 out of concerns about how China might respond, given Canberra's economic reliance on China.<sup>5</sup> Since 2018, as Australia has been more active in countering Chinese coercion in the Indo-Pacific region and at home, China has significantly escalated diplomatic and economic pressure against Australia. Beginning in mid-2020, China banned or limited imports of processed meat, wine, lobster, barley, thermal and coking coal, cotton, and timber from Australia.<sup>6</sup> Chinese actors have also been particularly vocal, criticizing Australia and pointing out the economic costs that Australia has suffered as a result.<sup>7</sup> Recently, shortly after Australia and Japan signed the 2020 Reciprocal Access Agreement that strengthened military cooperation between the two countries, China condemned both Japan and Australia but put additional pressure on Australia by issuing a list of 14 grievances against Australia, including criticizing Australia for “poisoning” the China-Australia relationship.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Nyugen Cao, 2020.

<sup>4</sup> Part of this is likely because Japan has a capable coast guard to defend and protect Japanese fisherman (Michael Perry, “Cooperative Maritime Law Enforcement and Overfishing in the South China Sea,” Center for International Maritime Security website, April 6, 2020).

<sup>5</sup> Grant Wyeth, “Why Has Australia Shifted Back to the Quad?” *The Diplomat*, November 16, 2017.

<sup>6</sup> Finbarr Bermingham, “China-Australia Relations: Ex-PM Malcolm Turnbull Urges Canberra Not to ‘Buckle Under Pressure’ from Beijing,” *South China Morning Post*, November 13, 2020.

<sup>7</sup> “QUAD Members Fight for Interests with Each Other: Global Times Editorial,” *Global Times*, October 20, 2020.

<sup>8</sup> Jonathan Kearsley, Eryk Bagshaw, and Anthony Galloway, “‘If You Make China the Enemy, China Will Be the Enemy’: Beijing’s Fresh Threat to Australia,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, November 18, 2020; Phil Mercer, “China Condemns Historic Australia-Japan Defense Pact,” *Voice of America*, November 18, 2020.

### *Continues to Rely on Military Tactics*

China continues to rely on military tactics to advance its territorial claims. We do see modifications over time in use of select tactics. In Vietnam, for instance, we saw less Chinese use of particularly violent and escalatory PRC maritime tactics since 2016. This means fewer incidents of shooting and killing Vietnamese fishermen, kidnapping Vietnamese fishermen or vessels for ransom, employing water cannons against Vietnamese vessels, or cutting cables laid by seismic survey ships. This suggests that, because it has more gray zone tools to use, China may not rely as much on extreme forms of any particular tactic and could instead use a variety of means to squeeze the target from multiple angles.

### *No Evidence that China Uses Fewer Military Tactics as Its Military Capabilities Grow*

There is no evidence to suggest that growing conventional capabilities encourage China to use fewer military gray zone tactics. In fact, the opposite appears to be true. As its military capabilities grow, China has more ways to use them to pressure allies and partners without the use of kinetic force. Against Taiwan, for example, improved PLA capabilities have afforded PLAAF the ability to circumnavigate the island and conduct nighttime sorties. Similarly, the PLA has employed a larger variety of air assets against Japan and has sent aircraft in larger formations to contest control over the Senkakus. Improved ability to operate longer distances has also enabled the PLA to engage in air patrols near Vietnam-claimed disputed features and land and to deploy aircraft to disputed SCS features that Taiwan, Vietnam, and the Philippines also claim.

### *Not Clear that China Uses Fewer Military Tactics as Its Geopolitical or Economic Capabilities Grow*

Similarly, we found no support in our case studies to suggest that China uses less military gray zone tactics as its geopolitical or economic capabilities grow—the logic being that China can substitute military tactics with nonmilitary tactics. Instead, as its geopolitical and economic strength has grown, China has been willing to couple explicit or implied geopolitical or economic threats or punishment with military gray zone tactics to advance its claims in disputed territories. We saw this layering of different types of PRC tactics in all the case studies. It is further possible that China’s geopolitical or economic strength could enable China to take military gray zone actions in the hope of deterring regional countries from responding or at least being restrained in the types of responses they embrace.

### *China Continued Employing Military and Nonmilitary Tactics Even as Relations Improved*

We also saw that many of the PRC gray zone coercion activities have continued against the Philippines since 2016, even as the Southeast Asian country’s overall bilateral relationship with China improved. Although Beijing did soften some of its maritime tactics against Manila after 2016—such as using the CCG to harass and block Philippine fishermen from accessing

Scarborough Shoal (2012–2016) to sometimes allowing Philippine fishermen to access the shoal but still harassing them since 2016—the change in China’s tactics neither weakened PRC claims nor decreased Beijing’s overall level of activity or effort in the SCS.<sup>9</sup> The softening of some PRC gray zone tactics around Scarborough Shoal was also overshadowed by other coercive PRC military tactics against the Philippines in the SCS, including blocking resupply at Second Thomas Shoal (2018, 2019)<sup>10</sup> and the sinking of a Philippine fishing boat anchored in Reed Bank (2019).<sup>11</sup>

### *Carefully Embraces Higher Profile Bilateral, Geopolitical, and Economic Tactics*

Beijing has varied its use of geopolitical and economic tactics over time. The PRC appears to have used higher profile, bilateral geopolitical and economic tactics—large-scale pushback against U.S. allies and partners via boycotts of key products, massive protests or demonstrations in China, and reduction in tourism—less since around 2015. As discussed in the Taiwan chapter, Beijing has largely maintained all the cross-strait economic agreements and continues to offer Taiwan additional economic incentives. Most of the higher profile bilateral economic activities against Japan, Vietnam, and the Philippines since 2010 occurred from 2012 to 2014. Beyond the allies and partners covered in this research, however, China has used such high-visibility tactics since 2014. This includes pressuring South Korea over the deployment of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense anti-ballistic missile defense system to the Korean Peninsula in 2016 and 2017; delaying or suspending shipments of Canadian canola oil, beef, and pork in 2019 after Canada detained Huawei executive Meng Wanzhou; and similar actions against imports from Australia since 2020, given China’s perception of Canberra’s growing anti-Chinese efforts.<sup>12</sup>

There are several possible explanations for the decreased use of such tactics since 2015 against the allies and partners in our research. First, China might not need to resort to such tactics again because its use of them prior to 2015 had a chilling and deterring effect that encouraged allies and partners to self-censor and avoid activities that might trigger such Chinese pressure. Second, China could have also assessed that the backlash for using such measures might have outweighed the benefits—use of highly visible tactics risks worsening bilateral relations with the target region, generating anti-Chinese sentiment in the target country and the region at large, and raising regional concerns that a more powerful China is willing to intimidate and bully its neighbors (which would encourage countries to resist PRC power). Large-scale protests in China

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<sup>9</sup> Richard Javad Heydarian, “Filipino Fishermen Ask: ‘Are We Slaves of China?’” *Asia Times*, June 12, 2018.

<sup>10</sup> “China Coast Guard Blocked Resupply Mission to Ayungin Shoal—DND,” *Philippine Star*, September 19, 2019.

<sup>11</sup> Renato Cruz de Castro, “Incident at Reed Bank: A Crisis in the Philippines’ China Policy,” webpage, Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, June 20, 2019b.

<sup>12</sup> Jung H. Pak, “Trying to Loosen the Linchpin: China’s Approach to South Korea,” Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, July 2020; Moira Warburton, “Timeline: Key Events in Huawei CFO Meng Wanzhou’s Extradition Case,” Reuters, December 3, 2020.

could backfire against the CCP and challenge its legitimacy and control. Third, China could also be selective in using some of the higher-profile bilateral tactics because they might be effective only once or for a limited number of times before the targeted nation develops a coherent response or countermeasure that undermines the effectiveness of such tactics. Japan, for example, actively decreased its dependence on importing rare earths from China after China limited their export to Japan.

It is important to note that, even though China has been careful and selective in using higher-profile tactics against the U.S. allies and partners in our research, these options still remain within the PRC arsenal. They are powerful tools that China could leverage, particularly against weaker targets that have few means to respond. Indeed, the 2020 PRC Export Control Law could provide a legal basis for China to restrict commercial transactions with foreign countries in the name of national security and national interests. As China begins implementing the new law, it remains to be seen whether the law will encourage China to use economic sanctions against U.S. allies or partners more freely and frequently.

### *Has Increased Its Use of International Tactics*

It is possible that China has used fewer high-profile bilateral geopolitical and economic tactics because it has more alternative tactics to use. In particular, the PRC appears to have relied more on international geopolitical or economic tactics since around the mid-2010s. China is increasingly leveraging its growing international influence (e.g., using its role in international institutions to block unfavorable resolutions), new international initiatives (e.g., BRI), its influence in or over third countries (e.g., Cambodia or Pakistan), or control over resources (e.g., the Mekong and Brahmaputra rivers) to coerce U.S. allies and partners. These international tactics offer China more indirect and, in some cases, less visible and seemingly legitimate ways to pressure countries that could invite less regional or international criticism and pushback.

### *Is More Active at the Grassroots Level*

Finally, there has been an increase in PRC focus on grassroots tactics since at least 2013 to change dynamics on the ground, particularly in disputed territories, and to influence target region policies to align with PRC interests. This is most evident in Taiwan, where Beijing has stepped up the variety of activities it uses—funding political proxies or organizations, investing more in pro-unification Taiwan islands, buying media outlets—to shape Taiwan popular opinion and domestic politics. Beijing has recognized that pressuring Taiwan mainly from the outside, via either international or bilateral tactics, was not sufficient to advance China's goals and ensure that Taipei chooses what China views as the correct path. The increase in PRC grassroots activities is also seen in the likely involvement of PRC embassies and consulates in organizing a number of smaller pro-China counterprotests in Japan and other countries (in 2019 in response to local protests criticizing PRC actions toward Hong Kong). There are further growing signs of Chinese involvement in India's electoral process, support for preferred Philippine political

candidates, and social disinformation efforts in both countries.<sup>13</sup> China's growing economic ability to fund such grassroots activities and improved cyber capabilities and local presence have enabled China to be more active.

## Many PRC Tactics Remain Difficult for Allies and Partners to Counter

Even though U.S. allies and partners have taken a number of steps to respond to China, many continue to face challenges countering the growing diversity of PRC gray zone tactics. This section broadly describes the main types of PRC tactics that remain most difficult for allies and partners to counter. Note that allies and partners often perceive and respond differently to the same or similar PRC tactics. Chapter 9 will use a basic methodology to compare and rank specific tactics.

On the geopolitical side, difficult-to-counter PRC tactics include China's use of its growing international standing, including its roles in international and regional institutions, to advance its interests and block efforts that undermine its goals. For institutions that use consensus or in which China has a veto ability or significant influence, it may be difficult for U.S. allies or partners to oppose Chinese pressure, particularly if the U.S. ally or partner is excluded from the institution to begin with (e.g., Taiwan or India). As China seeks leadership positions in international organizations, often unchallenged, the United States may need to play a more active role in supporting and campaigning for U.S. allies and partners.<sup>14</sup>

As of this writing, there is little evidence that China has engaged in significant covert action in U.S. allies and partners (e.g., assassination of politicians, activists, journalists, or former officials opposed to China outside its borders), and we have not seen China embrace the more-aggressive geopolitical grassroots tactics that Russia has employed in its near abroad, such as honeycombing elites or leveraging vulnerable politicians in target countries.<sup>15</sup> While some insurgent groups in India rely on Chinese small arms to some degree, China has largely refrained from supporting violent insurgent, terrorist, or separatist groups against U.S. allies and partners since the Maoist era.<sup>16</sup> As discussed in the case study on India (and China's threat to leverage insurgent groups in Northeast India), China is likely wary that significant involvement in the domestic affairs of other countries could be seen as hypocritical in light of China's desire to limit

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<sup>13</sup> For the Philippines, see Gregory Winger, "China's Disinformation Campaign in the Philippines," *The Diplomat*, October 6, 2020.

<sup>14</sup> Since the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea entered force in 1996, for example, a Chinese judge has occupied one of five seats allocated to Asian countries. Except for the 1996 election of judges, no candidate nominated by China has ever faced competition from other Asian member states, and some suspect that other Asian countries are wary of putting forward names to challenge China because of the risk of potential PRC retaliation. See Jonathan G. Odom, "How the World Enables China's Legal Gamesmanship," *Lawfare*, August 10, 2020.

<sup>15</sup> Pettyjohn and Wasser, 2019, p. 18.

<sup>16</sup> William R. Heaton, "China and Southeast Asian Communist Movements: The Decline of Dual Track Diplomacy," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 22, No. 8, August 1982.



foreign involvement in its own domestic affairs, such as Chinese activities in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Xinjiang, or Tibet. However, as China's power grows and as Beijing continues to tighten internal control and influence over these regions, it is possible that China may be more open to using more aggressive grassroots tactics against elites or politicians in other countries. China may not need to rely as much on forcing or blackmailing individuals as Russia—China could buy such influence through bribery, payments, or funding preferred candidates or by dangling the sheer size of the Chinese market and promise of PRC economic aid or investment.<sup>17</sup>

On the economic side, Beijing has repeatedly manipulated access to the Chinese market or the spending power of Chinese consumers, tourists, or students to its advantage against countries and corporations. Similarly, China's economic strength has enabled Beijing to purchase assets (e.g., land, media outlets), fund activities (e.g., infrastructure), or buy influence (e.g., fund campaigns, junkets for journalists) in target regions or in neighboring countries to coerce the target. China's ability to leverage its economic power is likely to increase as its economy becomes larger in size and serves as an engine of global economic growth.<sup>18</sup>

Militarily, U.S. allies and partners are already stressed to respond to existing PRC tactics and are worried about further changes or escalation of PRC activities. Existing or potential PRC military tactics that U.S. allies and partners have identified as difficult to counter include the following:

- rapidly quarantining, occupying, or seizing disputed territories (e.g., Scarborough Shoal or Senkaku Islands) or offshore islands (e.g., Pratas) to either establish a presence on the territory or disrupt resupply or access to the territory
- no longer respecting previous tacit understandings about how to operate in disputed or contentious regions (e.g., China no longer operating to the west of the Taiwan Strait median line)
- making repeated intrusions into disputed territories or other territories, forcing allies and partners to respond using military or law enforcement assets, and draining and stretching allied and partner resources and capabilities
- swarming or overwhelming allies or partners with a large number of PLA or supporting paramilitary or civilian assets either in a single episode or over a sustained period
- deploying and using more-sophisticated and -advanced PLA assets against militarily weaker allies and partners
- intruding into or challenging areas that are more distant or difficult to defend (e.g., PLA operations in the waters near India's Andaman and Nicobar Islands)

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<sup>17</sup> Some Japanese politicians have been accused of receiving Chinese bribes, and China has also likely funded the campaigns of select political leaders in Taiwan and the Philippines. In the Philippines, China provided financial support to Duterte's campaign in 2016. Chinese nationals, including Michael Yang, targeted influential Filipino business leaders and allies of Duterte who might support a pro-China agenda, hoping to collect kickbacks and bribes for green-lighting Chinese infrastructure projects. See Stewart, 2020; Pia Ranada, "Duterte Visited Michael Yang in China Around Time He Finalized Presidential Bid," Rappler, March 27, 2019a; see also Pia Ranada, "Ex-Adviser Michael Yang Hosts Private Lunch for Duterte in China," Rappler, August 29, 2019c.

<sup>18</sup> China's economy is expected to be one of the only major ones to see positive growth—of 1.9 percent—in 2020 (Gita Gopinath, "A Long, Uneven And Uncertain Ascent," *IMF Blog*, October 13, 2020).

- increasing use of unmanned systems whose country of origin and intentions are difficult for allies and partners to confirm.

This list of PRC military activities that U.S. allies and partners are wary of does not include the more-provocative military activities China could embrace if it decided to take a page out of the Russian playbook or to revert to more-provocative Maoist era activities. Since the 1980s, for example, China has decreased its support for insurgent communist parties and has not tried to attempt to oust an uncooperative foreign government by force.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, China has neither tried to fuel a civil war nor intervened in an ongoing domestic conflict.<sup>20</sup>

Chinese cyber/IO gray zone activities are an area to monitor closely. The potential for China to ramp up such activities, accompanied by geopolitical grassroots activities that employ local proxies to act on behalf of China, is significant. Although, as of this writing, Chinese efforts have been more limited and more targeted (particularly compared with Russia’s relatively indiscriminate use of disinformation), China might seek to ramp up efforts in this domain, given the critical importance Beijing attaches to information warfare. There are signs that China is increasingly testing different cyber/IO tactics in the COVID-19 era to carry out Xi’s direction to “better tell China’s stories” to nondomestic audiences. There is growing concern that Beijing is borrowing from the Russian playbook to engage in more-aggressive influence operations, such as pushing out false messages to manipulate public opinion.<sup>21</sup> China’s suspected prepositioning of malware in Indian infrastructure in 2020 also raises concerns about whether China may be more willing to use cyber gray zone operations to disable or destroy infrastructure when tensions are high.

## Potential Near-Term Triggers for PRC Use of Gray Zone Tactics

A number of events in the near term could lead China to increase pressure on allies and partners to advance its interests:

- China may view key leadership transitions in Vietnam (2021), the Philippines (2022), India (2024), and other countries as opportunities to try to install pro-China leaders.<sup>22</sup>
- China may seek to shape or react to Taiwan’s next presidential election (2024), given Beijing’s goal to not push the reunification question continuously down the road.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Heaton 1982; Pettyjohn and Wasser, 2019, p. 18.

<sup>20</sup> Pettyjohn and Wasser, 2019, p. 17.

<sup>21</sup> According to one U.S. intelligence official, China is supposedly targeting members of the U.S. Congress “at a rate of approximately six times that of Russia and 12 times that of Iran” (Olivia Solon and Ken Dilanian, “China’s Influence Operations Offer a Glimpse into the Future of Information Warfare,” NBC News, October 21, 2020).

<sup>22</sup> Le Hong Hiep, “Previewing Vietnam’s Leadership Transition in 2021,” Singapore: Yusof Ishak Institute, May 8, 2020.

<sup>23</sup> “Experts Urge Taiwan to Prepare for War of Attrition with China,” Focus Taiwan website, October 4, 2020; William Zheng, “Xi Jinping Tells Marines to Focus on ‘Preparing to Go to War’ in Military Base Visit During Southern China Tour,” *South China Morning Post*, October 13, 2020.

- The Dalai Lama, who turned 86 in 2021, might pass away, leading to tensions between Beijing and the Tibetan government in exile in India over his successor.

Along with these potential geopolitical triggers, China is also likely to increase its use of gray zone tactics in response to more pushback against China from U.S. allies and partners. Vietnam, for example, has periodically considered submitting a complaint against China under the UNCLOS dispute settlement mechanism.<sup>24</sup> The Philippines, encouraged by the 2020 shift in U.S. policy in the SCS to support its claims, authorized companies to resume oil and gas exploration in the disputed sea following a six-year moratorium.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, India-China tensions have simmered since mid-2020, and India is considering economic and military measures to counter PRC coercion. There have also been calls for India to play more of the Tibet card or to deepen exchanges with Taiwan, moves that are likely to significantly agitate China.

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<sup>24</sup> For a discussion of Vietnam potentially considering submitting a complaint in recent years, see Mark J. Valencia, “Should Vietnam Take China to Arbitration over the South China Sea?” *Lawfare* blog, August 18, 2020.

<sup>25</sup> Manila currently relies on a gas reservoir at Malampaya for its energy needs, and the reservoir is expected to run out prior to 2030 and potentially sooner, in the early 2020s. See John Reed and Kathrin Hille, “Philippines to Restart Oil and Gas Exploration in South China Sea,” *Financial Times*, October 17, 2020.

## 9. Which PRC Tactics Could the United States Prioritize Countering?

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Given the wide variety of PRC gray zone tactics and the diverse collection of U.S. allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific region, the United States faces a difficult task of determining how to counter PRC activities. Although the previous chapter identified a variety of coercive PRC tactics, U.S. allies and partners have varying degrees of ability to respond to Chinese activities and may not request assistance from the United States or other likeminded countries. It is also unlikely that the United States has the resources to address all PRC tactics. Therefore, the United States will be better served by identifying and prioritizing the *most problematic* PRC tactics that might require a U.S. response. This chapter develops and employs an aggregate measure that could form a more comprehensive assessment that U.S. policymakers could use to identify the most problematic PRC tactics.

### Assessing Which PRC Gray Zone Tactics Are the Most “Problematic”

The U.S. government, experts, and academics have not agreed on criteria for assessing which PRC gray zone tactics are the most problematic. As part of our research, RAND organized a three-week workshop in late August and early September 2020 that involved participants from across the U.S. government to explore ways to counter PRC tactics.<sup>1</sup> During the workshop, we asked participants to vote on top PRC tactics to counter and to explain their criteria for doing so. U.S. government participants shared a variety of criteria—from prioritizing according to which office they represented to ranking tactics based on how effective the United States could be in responding to the PRC activity. Some recommended focusing on the PRC tactics that most challenge U.S. interests, while others proposed identifying what allies and partners need the most, including which types of U.S. activities would help win the hearts and minds of key U.S. allies and partners. A key takeaway from the workshop session was that no single criterion for prioritizing PRC gray zone tactics is likely to be sufficient to account for the various perspectives and factors that feed into U.S. decisionmaking.

Using insights from the workshop, and to address some of the difficulties associated with determining which subset of PRC tactics to counter, we developed an aggregate measure that captures three different ways PRC tactics could be challenging: (1) which PRC tactics challenge U.S. objectives and interests in the Indo-Pacific region the most, (2) which PRC tactics are more difficult for allies and partners to respond to, and (3) which PRC tactics are most widely used.

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<sup>1</sup> Government officials may contact the authors for a summary of the workshop.

These three indicators represent difficult criteria for ranking PRC tactics. The first, based on U.S. objectives, prioritizes countering the PRC tactics that are most challenging for what the United States seeks to achieve in the Indo-Pacific region. The second indicator ranks PRC tactics from the perspective of allies and partners—the United States may wish to help allies and partners against the PRC tactics that the countries are least capable of responding to on their own. The third places more importance on countering the PRC tactics that are more prevalent. Given resource constraints, the United States may not want to invest in measures to address the PRC gray zone tactics that China uses against only one or two allies and partners but rather may want to invest in resources to counter the tactics that China uses against most countries.

### *Indicator 1: PRC Gray Zone Tactics That Challenge U.S. Objectives and Interests*

We used a two-step process to develop our first indicator. We first identified the most important U.S. objectives and then matched and calculated the number of U.S. objectives each PRC tactic challenges.

#### Step 1: Identify Key U.S. Objectives that PRC Gray Zone Tactics Could Challenge

To identify the top U.S. objectives and interests that Chinese gray zone tactics challenge and threaten to undermine, we began by examining key U.S. policy and strategic documents and relevant research. The five main documents we relied on are the 2017 National Security Strategy, the public summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy, the 2019 DoD Indo-Pacific Strategy Report, the 2019 U.S. Department of State (DoS) report outlining the vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific, and the 2020 White House Strategic Approach to PRC.<sup>2</sup> These documents identify two overarching U.S. goals: promote a free and open Indo-Pacific and promote regional security and stability, including through ensuring a favorable balance of power.

#### *Promote a Free and Open Indo-Pacific*

The United States and regional partners are increasingly concerned by China's coercive activities, which directly challenge the vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific. This U.S. vision includes three subordinate components. The first is support for international law, norms, and

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<sup>2</sup> White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, Washington, D.C., December 2017; DoD, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America: Sharpening the American Military's Competitive Edge*, Washington, D.C., 2018; DoD, *Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnerships, and Promoting a Networked Region*, Washington, D.C., June 1, 2019; DoS, *A Free and Open Indo-Pacific: Advancing a Shared Vision*, Washington, D.C., November 4, 2019; White House, "United States Strategic Approach to the People's Republic of China," Washington, D.C., May 2020. We also referenced DoS, "Joint Regional Strategy: East Asia and the Pacific," Washington, D.C.: Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs and USAID Bureau for Asia, November 20, 2018; OSD, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China*, various issues; and Ronald O'Rourke, *U.S.-China Strategic Competition in South and East China Seas: Background and Issues for Congress*, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, R42784, various editions, 2020. We further drew from previous RAND research: Lin, Chase, et al., 2020; Morris et al., 2019; and David Ochmanek, *Restoring U.S. Power Projection Capabilities: Responding to the 2018 National Defense Strategy*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, PE-260-AF, 2018.

values. This refers to respecting the sovereignty and independence of all nations, respecting established international laws and institutions, and ensuring the peaceful resolution of regional disputes. It also involves promoting shared values relating to political freedoms, political rights, and responsible governance. The second is ensuring that common domains remain open and free. This includes ensuring access to common air, maritime, land, space, cyberspace, and information domains and ensuring access to international resources.<sup>3</sup> The third component is to maintain free, fair, and reciprocal economic relationships (or to counter PRC economic aggression). This involves opposing economic restrictions, tariffs, or regulations on imports and exports, providing support to allies and partners engaging in normal business activities, and protecting allies and partners from the PRC's use or threats of economic punishment. Given China's growing economic power, countering PRC economic coercion is particularly important.

*Promote Regional Stability and Security, Including a Favorable Balance of Power*

The United States wants to promote regional stability and security in the Indo-Pacific, including ensuring a favorable regional balance of power. This includes four subordinate objectives. The first objective involves bolstering allies and partners geopolitically and economically to limit expansion of undesirable Chinese influence in nonmilitary realms. The second—countering PRC military aggression (and the variety of ways China is leveraging the PLA to challenge the ability of allies and partners to defend their claims and territories)—remains key to ensuring a favorable regional balance of power and preventing China from further expanding its military activities. The third is on the military side: The United States will need to continue to assure and demonstrate its commitment to defending allies from potential PRC aggression. The fourth objective is to counter terrorism and violent extremist organizations (VEOs), including preventing China from supporting or using VEOs as proxies.<sup>4</sup>

**Step 2: Match and Calculate the Total Number of U.S. Objectives Each PRC Tactic Challenges**

We then assessed each PRC gray zone tactic against the seven U.S. objectives described in Step 1 and calculated the total number of U.S. objectives each tactic challenges. Although we weighted most of the U.S. objectives the same (as 1),<sup>5</sup> we attached more variable weight (of either a 1 or 2) to two U.S. objectives: maintaining free, fair, and reciprocal economic relationships; and countering PRC military aggression. For both objectives, we weighted highly

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<sup>3</sup> Some U.S. objectives that would fall under this include ensuring access to a free and open internet; ensuring the transparent flow of information without manipulation or censorship; maintaining access to and freedom of navigation within international boundaries and disputed areas, such as the SCS; guaranteeing access to international resources, such as water rights; and, finally, ensuring access to maritime choke points through which a significant amount of U.S. and international trade transits.

<sup>4</sup> As discussed in Chapter 7 on India, China has shielded various Pakistani terrorist groups and also has links to insurgent groups in Myanmar.

<sup>5</sup> A tactic that challenged a U.S. interest would receive a score of 1. A tactic that did not challenge an interest would receive a score of 0.

coercive, high profile, and significant PRC gray zone economic or military tactics twice as much (as a 2) as more routine, less escalatory economic or military tactics (weighted as a 1).<sup>6</sup>

Table 9.1 lists the 22 PRC tactics that challenge the most U.S. interests. One tactic—PRC establishing an ADIZ—falls into the top tier and is weighted the most (6) according to our criteria.<sup>7</sup> One tactic, with a weight of 5, falls into the second tier: China using large-scale or cross-service military activities or exercises to disrupt normal business activities. The remaining 20 tactics all have a weight of 4 and are tied for the third tier. They are arranged by category and subtype. See Appendix C for the weights of all 77 tactics.

**Table 9.1. Indicator 1: Top 22 PRC Tactics That Challenge U.S. Interests**

Tier	Category	Subtype	PRC Tactic
Top	Military	Air	Declare an ADIZ near or surrounding the target
Second	Military	General	Use large-scale or cross-service military activities or exercises (excludes cyber activities) to disrupt normal business activities within the target (e.g., missile launches that interfere with target commercial port activities)
Third	Geopolitical	International	Support the target’s adversaries or rival countries using a combination of political, economic, and military means
		Bilateral	Use diplomatic or political threats to disrupt normal business activities within the target (e.g., create stock market volatility)
	Economic	International	Control or reduce availability of public or international resources to the target (e.g., constructing dams to control the flow of the river to the target)
		Grassroots	Engage in PRC economic or civilian activity in or near target-sensitive or key geopolitical locations (e.g., near military bases or facilities)
	Military	General	Explicitly threaten the use force or military escalation against the target if it takes certain actions
			Air
			Engage in large-scale air exercises near disputed territories
			Engage in live fire near the target or in simulated attacks (e.g., radar lock-on) on target assets
			Land or forward deploy military aircraft or equipment in or near disputed territories
		Maritime	Establish military or dual-use maritime bases or facilities in disputed territories
			Engage in large-scale maritime exercises near disputed territories
			Anchor maritime vessels and/or forward deploy military maritime troops and equipment in or near disputed territories
			Engage in exchange of fire, live fire near the target, or simulated attacks (e.g., radar lock-on) on target assets via PLA maritime forces

<sup>6</sup> An example of a significant PRC economic tactic is cutting off imports of a key good produced by the target country. An example of a significant PRC military tactic is a large-scale military exercise involving capital PLA assets near the target country.

<sup>7</sup> A higher weight indicates a greater challenge to U.S. interests.

Tier	Category	Subtype	PRC Tactic
			Use PLAN, CCG, or maritime militia to detain or capture target citizens operating in disputed territories
		Land	Establish military or dual-use ground bases or facilities in disputed territories
			Land or forward deploy military ground troops or equipment in or near disputed territories
	Cyber/IO	Bilateral	Engage in cyber operations against target government or military activities
			Engage in cyber operations to disrupt or undermine target economic activity
		Grassroots	Buy or control existing target media outlets (directly or through proxies)

NOTES: The top tier consists of tactics weighted as 6; the second tier consists of those weighted as 5; and the third tier consists of those weighted as 4. Appendix C includes a list of U.S. objectives, provides more details on the weighting criteria, and lists the weights for all 77 tactics.

The majority of tactics that are the most challenging for U.S. interests are Chinese military gray zone tactics (15 out of 22 tactics), particularly PRC activities in or near disputed territories. Seven geopolitical, economic, and cyber/IO tactics also made the list. Declaring a PRC ADIZ near or surrounding the targeted U.S. ally or partner ranks the highest because it challenges the U.S. ally's or partner's claimed sovereign airspace, restricts access to airspace near the ally or partner, is likely to affect economic activity (particularly flight of commercial aircraft through the declared ADIZ), and is viewed as a relatively significant escalatory military gray zone tactic. China has used this tactic against two U.S. allies (Japan and South Korea) and a partner (Taiwan). Other PRC tactics similarly challenge U.S. interests but generally challenge fewer U.S. interests.

### *Indicator 2: PRC Gray Zone Tactics That Are Difficult for U.S. Allies and Partners to Counter*

The second indicator that we looked at is how challenging PRC gray zone tactics are to allies and partners. To do so, we first coded how difficult it is for each individual ally or partner to respond to every PRC gray zone tactic on a scale of 0, 1, and 2. We coded the difficulty as 0 if the ally or partner is able to effectively counter or develop responses to the PRC tactic and/or the PRC tactic is not conducive to (or effective for) pressuring the ally or partner. We coded the difficulty as 1 if the PRC tactic has a limited negative effect on the ally or partner. In this case, it is possible that the ally or partner developed some response to the PRC tactic but that the response or countermeasure is not fully able to mitigate or counter the coercive nature of the PRC tactic. We coded the difficulty as 2 if the tactic has relatively substantial negative coercive effect on the ally or partner. In this situation, it is possible that the ally or partner has not developed a coherent response to the PRC tactic or that the ally or partner is not capable of responding to the PRC tactic without external assistance.

We then averaged the coding across all affected allies and partners to generate an average difficulty score that represents broadly how difficult it is for U.S. allies and partners to counter a



specific tactic. This accounts for the possibility that allies and partners have different capacities to respond to China and that the same or similar PRC tactic may only be effective against select targets.<sup>8</sup> This indicator has a minimum of 0 and a maximum of 2.

Table 9.2 lists the top 26 most difficult to counter PRC tactics, with tactics in a higher tier more difficult for allies and partners to respond to. Many of the tactics are weighted the same and have similar rank. The top tier includes tactics with a weight of 2. The second tier includes tactics with weights of 1.5 and above, but below 2. The third tier includes tactics with a weight below 1.5 and above 1.<sup>9</sup>

**Table 9.2. Indicator 2: Top 26 PRC Tactics U.S. Allies and Partners Have Difficulty Countering**

Tier	Category	Subtype	PRC Tactic
Top	Geopolitical	International	Support the target's adversaries or rival countries using a combination of political, economic, and military means
	Geopolitical	International	Limit international sanctions or crack down on violent nonstate actors opposing the target and/or operating against the target
	Geopolitical	Bilateral	Use diplomatic or political threats to disrupt normal business activities within the target (e.g., create stock market volatility)
	Geopolitical	Grassroots	Use and/or provide support to individual elites, political leaders, political parties, groups, or organizations to act on behalf of China in the target
	Economic	Grassroots	Use PRC companies or economic assets to advance disputed PRC territorial claims (e.g., use of PRC oil rigs)
	Military	General	Deepen military cooperation and/or establish military bases or potential dual-use facilities in neighboring countries to threaten the target
	Military	Air	Establish military or dual-use air bases or facilities in disputed territories
	Military	Air	Land or forward deploy military aircraft or equipment in or near disputed territories
	Military	Maritime	Establish military or dual-use maritime bases or facilities in disputed territories
	Military	Maritime	Anchor maritime vessels and/or forward deploy military maritime troops and equipment in or near disputed territories
	Military	Land	Establish military or dual-use ground bases or facilities in disputed territories
Second	Military	Land	Land or forward deploy military ground troops or equipment in or near disputed territories
	Cyber/IO	Grassroots	Buy or control existing target media outlets (directly or through proxies)
	Military	Maritime	Use PLAN, CCG, or maritime militia to harass or disrupt target commercial activities in disputed territories (e.g., CCG harasses target oil exploration)
	Geopolitical	International	Exclude or limit the target's leadership and participation in existing international organizations

<sup>8</sup> For instance, a tactic that China has used against all five allies and partners is reducing trade or flow to specific goods. In terms of responding to this tactic, we would expect that Japan and India, given the size of their economies and their overall lower economic reliance on China for trade, would have less difficulty (coded as a 1) countering PRC limits on trade than Taiwan, Vietnam, and the Philippines (coded as a 2). The average difficulty score for this tactic would be  $(1 + 1 + 2 + 2 + 2)/5 = 1.6$ .

<sup>9</sup> We use above 1 as a cutoff for the third tier because most tactics (38 tactics) have a weight of 1.

<b>Tier</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Subtype</b>	<b>PRC Tactic</b>
	Economic	International	Purchase or invest in large civilian infrastructure or assets (such as land) in a third country (particularly neighboring countries) that pressure the target
	Economic	Bilateral	Reduce trade or flow of specific goods (exports or imports)
	Geopolitical	Bilateral	Detain or harass target citizens in China (beyond journalists and academics)
Third	Geopolitical	International	Undermine the target's regional or international influence and partnerships, including by engaging in campaigns to blame or shame the target
	Military	General	Engage in highly publicized and large-scale, cross-service military exercises or shows of force near or against the target
	Military	General	Build up or acquire military capabilities for deterring or countering the target (e.g., military buildup in region near the target)
	Geopolitical	International	Establish new major international initiatives or alternative international institutions to pressure or incentivize the target to accommodate PRC requests
	Geopolitical	Grassroots	Use and/or provide support to pro-China Chinese ethnic groups (e.g., ethnic business associations)
	Military	Land	Engage in border (or cross-border) skirmishes and/or mass troops on land border for demonstration of force
	Economic	International	Control or reduce availability of public or international resources to the target (e.g., constructing dams to control the flow of the river to the target)
	Economic	Grassroots	Expand or engage in new PRC commercial activity to, on, or near disputed territories, such as tourism, new commercial flight routes

NOTES: The top tier includes tactics with a weight of 2. The second tier includes tactics with a weight below 2 but above 1.5. The third tier includes tactics with a weight below 1.5 and above 1. Tactics in the first tier are listed by category and subtype. Tactics in the second and third tiers are listed from highest to lowest weight. Appendix C provides the weights for all 77 tactics.

Compared with looking at problematic PRC tactics from the perspective of U.S. interests, allies and partners appear more concerned with PRC nonmilitary tactics than military tactics. Of the 26 top tactics that are difficult for allies and partners to counter, 15 are geopolitical, economic, or cyber/IO. These nonmilitary tactics include China's use of its growing geopolitical and economic influence to support adversaries or rivals of allies and partners, limit international sanctions against VEOs operating against U.S. allies and partners, check or undermine the ally or partner's international or regional influence or involvement, operate in third countries against allied or partner interests, manipulate trade or flow of goods, control or reduce the availability of international resources to the target; and to interfere in the domestic politics of the ally or partner through various means. Similar to the previous list, U.S. allies and partners also face significant difficulties countering PRC military activities in disputed territories.

### *Indicator 3: PRC Gray Zone Tactics That Are Widely Used*

Our final indicator examines how widely China uses each gray zone tactic. We examined how many U.S. allies and partners China uses the specific tactic against out of our total sample of five U.S. allies and countries. For example, China uses high-profile, political, and legal campaigns to pressure all five allies and partners in our research (5/5). This tactic is thus more

prevalent than China’s leveraging of pro-China groups with criminal links or ties to pressure the target from within, for which we found credible evidence only in Taiwan (1/5). This indicator thus has a minimum of 0 and a maximum of 1.

Table 9.3 displays the top 28 most widely used PRC tactics. Tactics with higher prevalence scores are used more widely than those with a lower score. The top tier includes 12 tactics that we are relatively confident China has used against all five U.S. allies and partners. The second tier includes three tactics that we are relatively confident China has used against four allies and partners and suspect that China may have also used against a fifth (weighted as 4.5). The third tier includes 13 tactics with a combined weight of 4: (1) tactics that we are relatively confident that China has used against four allies and partners and (2) tactics that we are relatively confident China has used against three allies and partners and suspect that China may have also employed against the remaining two allies and partners. Within each tier, the tactics are listed by category and subtype. See Appendix C for weights for all 77 tactics.

**Table 9.3. Indicator 3: Top 28 Widely Used PRC Tactics**

<b>Tier</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Subtype</b>	<b>PRC Tactic</b>
Top	Geopolitical	International	Undermine the target’s regional or international influence and partnerships, including by engaging in campaigns to blame or shame the target
	Geopolitical	Bilateral	Use high-profile political or legal campaigns (lawfare) to pressure the target
	Geopolitical	Grassroots	Use and/or provide support to educational and civil society groups or organizations (that are not religious or political) to promote pro-China agenda (e.g., Confucius Institutes)
	Economic	Grassroots	Engage in PRC economic or civilian activity in or near target-sensitive or key geopolitical locations (e.g., near military bases or facilities)
	Military	General	Engage in highly publicized and large-scale, cross-service military exercises or shows of force near or against the target
	Military	General	Build up or acquire military capabilities for deterring or countering the target (e.g., military buildup in region near the target)
	Military	Air	Engage in or increase air patrols or intrusions near disputed territories
	Military	Maritime	Engage in or increase maritime patrols or transits near the target’s home or main territory
	Cyber/IO	Bilateral	Engage in cyber operations against target government or military activities
	Cyber/IO	Bilateral	Engage in cyber operations to disrupt or undermine target economic activity
	Cyber/IO	Bilateral	Coerce or attempt to buy target journalists and academics
	Cyber/IO	Grassroots	Engage in social disinformation campaigns in the target
Second	Geopolitical	Bilateral	Organize public protests (or counterprotests) in China or in the target region to criticize target activities
	Economic	Bilateral	Reduce trade or flow of specific goods (exports or imports)
	Cyber/IO	Grassroots	Buy content (e.g., pay for ads) in existing target media outlets or engage in content-sharing or joint production of content
Third	Geopolitical	Bilateral	Significantly manipulate or reduce high-level political contacts or engagements
	Economic	International	Require products or services from international firms to adhere to PRC requests and/or claims compared with the target’s claims

<b>Tier</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Subtype</b>	<b>PRC Tactic</b>
	Economic	International	Control or reduce availability of public or international resources to the target (e.g., constructing dams to control the flow of the river to the target)
	Economic	Bilateral	Reduce PRC tourism to pressure the target
	Economic	Grassroots	Purchase or invest (build civilian infrastructure) in or near disputed land or maritime features
	Economic	Grassroots	Use PRC companies or economic assets to advance disputed PRC territorial claims (e.g., use of PRC oil rigs)
	Economic	Grassroots	Expand or engage in new PRC commercial activity to, on, or near disputed territories, such as tourism, new commercial flight routes
	Military	General	Explicitly threaten the use force or military escalation against the target if it takes certain actions
	Military	Air	Engage in or increase air patrols or intrusions near the target's home or main territory
	Military	Maritime	Engage in or increase maritime patrols or transits near disputed territories
	Military	Maritime	Engage in military maritime intercepts or in aggressive maritime maneuvers against target maritime vessels
	Military	Maritime	Engage in exchange of fire, live fire near the target, or simulated attacks (e.g., radar lock-on) on target assets via PLA maritime forces
	Cyber/IO	Grassroots	Support or fund the establishment of new or existing pro-China media outlets operating in the target

NOTES: The top tier includes tactics with a weight of 5. The second tier includes tactics with a weight of 4.5. The third tier includes tactics with a weight of 4. Tactics are listed from highest to lowest weight. Appendix C provides the weights for all 77 tactics.

This list of the top 28 most widely used PRC tactics has some overlap with the previous two lists but also captures a number of the activities China engages in that are not especially challenging to U.S. interests and are also not that difficult for U.S. allies and partners to counter. For example, while China has used high-profile political and legal campaigns against all the allies and partners we examined, allies and partners are largely able to respond to this PRC tactic. China's use of such campaigns challenges only a limited set of U.S. interests. Similarly, China's attempts to coerce or buy target journalists and academics are relatively widespread but not that successful in encouraging journalists or academics to present China in a positive light. Of the 28 tactics, 19 are nonmilitary, suggesting that PRC military gray zone tactics make up only a minor proportion of the most prevalent PRC tactics.

## Aggregating Across Three Indicators to Identify the Most Problematic Tactics

Given the varied lists of most challenging PRC tactics generated using the three different indicators, it makes sense to combine all three indicators together as one aggregate measure for a more inclusive and comprehensive assessment of problematic PRC tactics. This requires identifying how much relative importance to attach to each indicator.

## Prioritizing U.S. Interests

We first explored this by attaching the most importance to U.S. objectives. For the sake of simplicity, we weighted U.S. objectives and interests the most, at 50 percent; the difficulty U.S. allies and partners have in countering PRC tactics as second most important, at 30 percent; and how prevalent the PRC tactic is as 20 percent.<sup>10</sup>

Table 9.4 presents the top 27 most problematic PRC gray zone tactics in three corresponding tiers.<sup>11</sup> The top tier includes all tactics weighted 12 and above. The second and third tiers include all tactics weighted 11 and 10 above, respectively. Within each tier, tactics are listed from higher to lower weight.

**Table 9.4. Aggregate Indicator—Prioritizing U.S. Interests:  
Top 28 Problematic PRC Gray Zone Tactics**

Tier	Category	Subtype	PRC Tactic
Top	Military	Air	Establish military or dual-use air bases or facilities in disputed territories
	Military	Air	Land or forward deploy military aircraft or equipment in or near disputed territories
	Military	Land	Establish military or dual-use ground bases or facilities in disputed territories
	Military	Land	Land or forward deploy military ground troops or equipment in or near disputed territories
	Economic	Grassroots	Use PRC companies or economic assets to advance disputed PRC territorial claims (e.g., use of PRC oil rigs)
	Military	Maritime	Use PLAN, CCG, or maritime militia to harass or disrupt target commercial activities in disputed territories (e.g., CCG harasses target oil exploration)
	Geopolitical	International	Support the target's adversaries or rival countries using a combination of political, economic, and military means
	Military	Maritime	Establish military or dual-use maritime bases or facilities in disputed territories
	Military	Maritime	Anchor maritime vessels and/or forward deploy military maritime troops and equipment in or near disputed territories
Second	Economic	Bilateral	Reduce trade or flow of specific goods (exports or imports)
	Military	General	Engage in highly publicized and large-scale, cross-service military exercises or shows of force near or against the target
	Military	General	Build up or acquire military capabilities for deterring or countering the target (e.g., military buildup in region near the target)

<sup>10</sup> The equation we used to calculate the aggregate score (out of 20) is: U.S. Objectives Score\*10/9 + Average Allied and Partner Difficulty Score\*3 + Prevalence of PRC Tactic\*4. We thus weighted U.S. objectives as 10 out of 20 points, average allied and partner difficulty score as 6 out of 20 points, and prevalence of PRC tactics as 4 out of 20 points. In case there is interest to explore how varying the weights may generate different aggregated scores, we include in Appendix C the coding of each individual indicator.

<sup>11</sup> Many of the most problematic PRC tactics identified via our aggregate measure are similar to the top PRC tactics that U.S. government workshop participants voted for using a variety of criteria.

<b>Tier</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Subtype</b>	<b>PRC Tactic</b>
	Economic	Grassroots	Engage in PRC economic or civilian activity in or near target-sensitive or key geopolitical locations (e.g., near military bases or facilities)
	Cyber/IO	Bilateral	Engage in cyber operations against target government or military activities
	Cyber/IO	Bilateral	Engage in cyber operations to disrupt or undermine target economic activity
	Economic	International	Control or reduce availability of public or international resources to the target (e.g., constructing dams to control the flow of the river to the target)
	Military	Air	Declare an ADIZ near or surrounding the target
	Geopolitical	Bilateral	Use diplomatic or political threats to disrupt normal business activities within the target (e.g., create stock market volatility)
	Cyber/IO	Grassroots	Buy or control existing target media outlets (directly or through proxies)
Third	Military	General	Deepen military cooperation and/or establish military bases or potential dual-use facilities in neighboring countries to threaten the target
	Military	General	Explicitly threaten the use force or military escalation against the target if it takes certain actions
	Military	Maritime	Engage in exchange of fire, live fire near the target, or simulated attacks (e.g., radar lock-on) on target assets via PLA maritime forces
	Military	Air	Engage in or increase air patrols or intrusions near disputed territories
	Military	Maritime	Engage in or increase maritime patrols or transits near the target's home or main territory
	Cyber/IO	Grassroots	Engage in social disinformation campaigns in the target
	Economic	Grassroots	Expand or engage in new PRC commercial activity to, on, or near disputed territories, such as tourism, new commercial flight routes
	Military	Maritime	Engage in large-scale maritime exercises near disputed territories
	Geopolitical	International	Limit international sanctions or crack down on violent nonstate actors opposing the target and/or operating against the target

NOTES: The top tier includes tactics with a weight of 12 or above. The second tier includes tactics with a weight of 11 or above. The third tier includes tactics with a weight of 10 or above. Tactics are listed from highest to lowest weight.

Of the 28 tactics, 16 are military, five are economic, four are cyber/IO related, and three are geopolitical. Most of the military tactics involved Chinese operations in or near disputed territories and high-profile PRC military activities or activities in third countries. Given the significant challenges these military tactics pose to U.S. interests, the fact that these tactics are escalatory, and China's willingness to use military gray zone tactics, it is not surprising that a large number of military tactics are among the most problematic PRC tactics. China's growing economic power and influence and Beijing's ability to co-opt economic actors to serve strategic purposes also explain why a variety of economic activities—use of PRC economic actors in disputed territories or near sensitive locations, PRC manipulation of international resources, and PRC manipulation of the bilateral flow of goods—are among the most difficult PRC tactics to counter. The most problematic cyber/IO tactics include PRC cyber and social disinformation operations against U.S. allies or partners and PRC efforts to buy or control allied or partner media outlets. The three most problematic geopolitical tactics involve PRC pressuring allies and

partners by supporting their adversaries or rivals, Beijing's use of threats to disrupt target economic activity, and China limiting international sanctions against VEOs operating against allies and partners.

### *Equal Weighting of U.S. and Allied and Partner Concerns*

In addition to the method we used for aggregating across indicators, we also explored a second approach: weighting the difficulty U.S. allies and partners face in countering PRC tactics as much as the extent that PRC gray zone tactics challenge U.S. interests. We weighted both indicators as 40 percent and weighted the prevalence factor by 20 percent. This approach took the concerns of U.S. allies and partners to be equally important as U.S. interests. Table 9.5 presents this weighting.

This approach generates a larger range of the weights for the tactics: the weights range from approximately 2.5 to almost 14 compared with the previous list that starts from around 2.5 to near 13. For this second list, we thus define the top three tiers to be tactics weighted from 13 and above (top tier), 12 and above (second tier), and 11 and above (third tier). We find 21 tactics in these top three tiers. Nonmilitary PRC tactics constitute slightly more than half of the most problematic Chinese tactics (11 out of 21). This is higher than the proportion of nonmilitary tactics from the previous list.

There is significant similarity between the two lists. Of the 21 tactics on this list, 20 were part of the previous list. The top tiers are exactly the same across the lists and variations only begin occurring in the second and third tiers, with some tactics moving up or down and some excluded because the second list is shorter. There is only one new tactic on the second list that did not make it on the previous list (the last tactic in the third tier): "use and/or provide support to individual elites, political leaders, political parties, groups, or organizations to act on behalf of China in the target."

**Table 9.5. Aggregate Indicator—Equal Weighting of U.S. Interests and Allied and Partner Concerns: Top 21 Problematic PRC Gray Zone Tactics**

<b>Tier</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Subtype</b>	<b>PRC Tactic</b>
Top	Military	Air	Establish military or dual-use air bases or facilities in disputed territories
	Military	Air	Land or forward deploy military aircraft or equipment in or near disputed territories
	Military	Land	Establish military or dual-use ground bases or facilities in disputed territories
	Military	Land	Land or forward deploy military ground troops or equipment in or near disputed territories
	Economic	Grassroots	Use PRC companies or economic assets to advance disputed PRC territorial claims (e.g., use of PRC oil rigs)
	Military	Maritime	Use PLAN, CCG, or maritime militia to harass or disrupt target commercial activities in disputed territories (e.g., CCG harasses target oil exploration)
	Geopolitical	International	Support the target’s adversaries or rival countries using a combination of political, economic, and military means
	Military	Maritime	Establish military or dual-use maritime bases or facilities in disputed territories
	Military	Maritime	Anchor maritime vessels and/or forward deploy military maritime troops and equipment in or near disputed territories
Second	Economic	Bilateral	Reduce trade or flow of specific goods (exports or imports)
	Geopolitical	Bilateral	Use diplomatic or political threats to disrupt normal business activities within the target (e.g., create stock market volatility)
	Cyber/IO	Grassroots	Buy or control existing target media outlets (directly or through proxies)
	Military	General	Engage in highly publicized and large-scale, cross-service military exercises or shows of force near or against the target
	Military	General	Deepen military cooperation and/or establish military bases or potential dual-use facilities in neighboring countries to threaten the target
	Military	General	Build up or acquire military capabilities for deterring or countering target (e.g., military buildup in region near the target)
Third	Economic	International	Control or reduce availability of public or international resources to the target (e.g., constructing dams to control the flow of the river to the target)
	Economic	Grassroots	Engage in PRC economic or civilian activity in or near target-sensitive or key geopolitical locations (e.g., near military bases or facilities)
	Cyber/IO	Bilateral	Engage in cyber operations against target government or military activities
	Cyber/IO	Bilateral	Engage in cyber operations to disrupt or undermine target economic activity
	Geopolitical	International	Limit international sanctions or crack down on violent nonstate actors opposing the target and/or operating against the target
	Geopolitical	Grassroots	Use and/or provide support to individual elites, political leaders, political parties, groups, or organizations to act on behalf of China in the target

NOTES: The top tier includes tactics with a weight of 13 or above. The second tier includes tactics with a weight of 12 or above. The third tier includes tactics with a weight of 11 or above. Tactics are listed from highest to lowest weight. Appendix C provides the weights for all 77 tactics.



This list is shorter than the one in Table 9.4 because of the cutoffs we used for the tiers. This meant that seven PRC tactics from the previous list did not make the cut for this list. Out of the seven tactics excluded, six are military tactics:

- Declare an ADIZ near or surrounding the target.<sup>12</sup>
- Explicitly threaten the use of force or military escalation against the target if it takes certain actions.
- Engage in exchange of fire, live fire near the target, or simulated attacks (e.g., radar lock-on) on target assets via PLA maritime forces.
- Engage in or increase air patrols or intrusions near disputed territories.
- Engage in or increase maritime patrols or transits near the target's home or main territory.
- Expand or engage in new PRC commercial activity to, on, or near disputed territories, such as tourism, new commercial flight routes.
- Engage in large-scale maritime exercises near disputed territories.

Tables 9.4 and 9.5 highlight tactics that are problematic given the two different ways to prioritize U.S. interests versus allied or partner concerns. Because the United States attaches significant importance to allies and partners, we believe the second list, which weighs allies and partner concerns as much as U.S. interests, provides a more balanced assessment of which PRC gray zone tactics are most problematic. We thus recommend the second list's ranking of the most problematic tactics as better for U.S. policymakers to consider, with two caveats. First, the methods we used to generate these indicators and aggregate lists were relatively straightforward, and significant additional research could be conducted to further refine these lists if these indicators are the ones U.S. policymakers think are most critical. Second, although assessments of which PRC tactics are generally most problematic (across U.S. allies and partners) are useful for U.S. policymakers looking at a variety of allies and partners, U.S. policymakers may still want to focus U.S. efforts to help allies and partners counter the PRC tactics that they find most problematic. Allies and partners differ in which PRC tactics they consider the most problematic, meaning that assessments based on aggregating allied and partner concerns may be less useful for any individual ally or partner.

Looking beyond identifying the top problematic PRC tactics, our assessments of the three individual indicators and aggregate indicator suggest that the United States should spend substantial effort countering both PRC military and nonmilitary tactics. Although PRC military tactics may challenge more U.S. interests, allies and partners are as concerned with PRC geopolitical, economic, and cyber/IO tactics as the operations of Chinese PLA or paramilitary actors. PRC nonmilitary tactics also make up the majority of the most widely used PRC gray

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<sup>12</sup> This is at least partially because the PRC has not enforced its declaration of an ADIZ over the ECS. If China declares and enforces a much different ADIZ elsewhere (such as in the SCS), this ranking will need to be adjusted.

zone tactics. In general, the most problematic PRC tactics tend to be activities China conducts in disputed territories (which are coded as grassroots activities for PRC nonmilitary tactics) or PRC activities that are difficult for allies or partners to counter bilaterally without external assistance or working with third countries (such as PRC investments in third countries, PRC support for allied or partner adversaries or rivals, and PRC use of influence in international organizations against allies or partners).

Table 9.6 uses the aggregate indicator from Table 9.5 (the measure that weights U.S. allies and partners equally) to visualize which subtypes of PRC nonmilitary tactics are most problematic. In the table, we average the weight of all the tactics that fall under each subtype. For reasons discussed earlier, the most problematic PRC activities are highlighted in red and are geopolitical international and economic grassroots tactics. Across the board, PRC economic activities are problematic and are at least orange. Chinese cyber/IO activities in the targeted region were also relatively problematic. PRC geopolitical grassroots activities and cyber/IO bilateral activities were less challenging.

**Table 9.6. Coding of Problematic Subtypes of PRC Nonmilitary Tactics**

	<b>International</b>	<b>Bilateral</b>	<b>Grassroots</b>
Geopolitical	10.5	8.1	7.1
Economic	8.7	8.4	10.6
Cyber/IO	N/A	7.0	8.9

NOTE: Number in cell is the average weight. Red indicates an average weight of 10 or more. Orange indicates an average weight between 8 and 10. Yellow indicates an average weight below 8.

## 10. Conclusions and Recommendations

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We used four related research questions to analyze how China competes in the gray zone in the Indo-Pacific. This conclusion revisits these questions to summarize key findings and identify relevant recommendations.

### How Does China View Competition in the Gray Zone?

Chinese analysts have begun using the term *gray zone* only in recent years based on their analysis of emerging literature from other countries but point to historical examples in asserting that countries have long engaged in gray zone activities. Chinese experts' inclusive conceptualization of the gray zone means that they see China as a *target* of gray zone tactics, particularly activities carried out by the United States. The PLA's role in the gray zone is encapsulated by the Chinese understanding of MOOTW, which extends beyond the common U.S. associations of MOOTW with HA/DR. There is significant overlap between coercive or confrontational external-facing PLA MOOTW activities—stability maintenance, rights protection, and security and guarding operations—and U.S. definitions of Chinese gray zone activities involving the PLA. China believes that MOOTW activities should leverage both military and nonmilitary actors and means and harness military-civil fusion.

### What Drives and Enables China's Use of Gray Zone Tactics?

Chinese activities in the gray zone support PRC leadership's overarching domestic, economic, foreign policy, and security objectives in the Indo-Pacific, which Beijing views as China's priority region. Gray zone activities in the region balance Beijing's pursuit of stability, its desire to realize a more favorable external environment, and efforts to continue altering the regional status quo in China's favor, while striving to act below the threshold of U.S. and neighbors' responses. Chinese gray zone tactics complement traditional diplomatic, economic, and military approaches by enhancing the variety and intensity of pressure PRC authorities can levy on other countries. These tactics also enable flexible and deniable options for Chinese leaders.

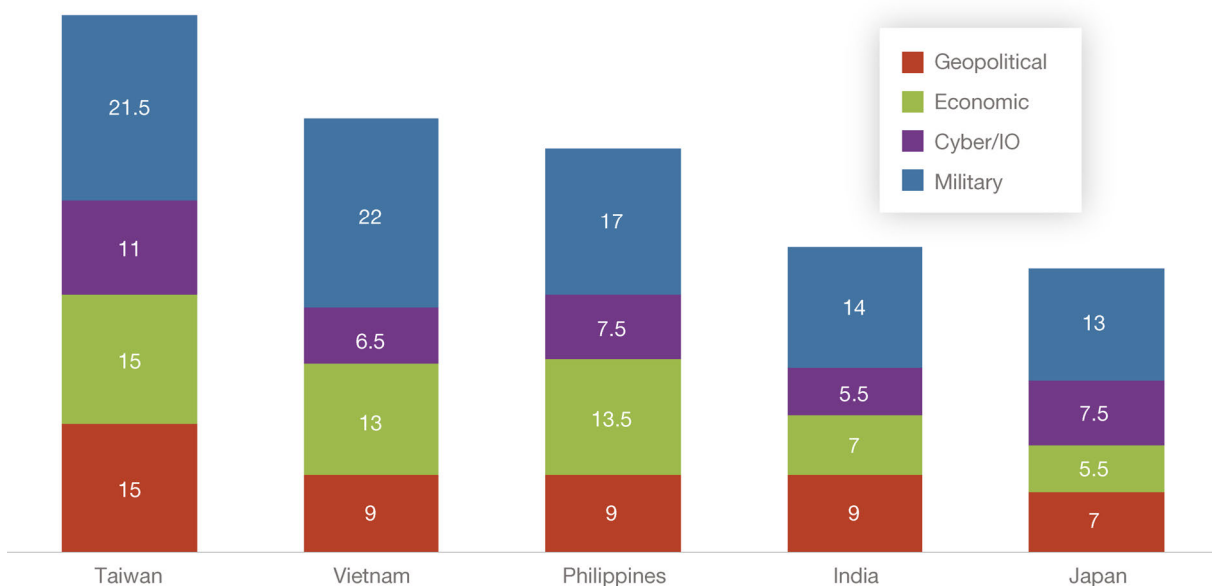
Four primary enablers provide options for China to engage in gray zone operations more effectively. The first is increasing centralization of power and authority within the central government, which enables Chinese authorities to harness nongovernmental personnel and assets for government missions. The three other enablers augment China's gray zone capabilities: growing Chinese power and influence (including growing military capabilities, rapid economic development, and greater PRC involvement in international institutions), growing linkages between China's military development and economic growth (including military-civil fusion and

China’s greater presence overseas), and greater integration of PRC military and paramilitary forces. These four enablers provide Beijing with an increasing diversity of options to carry out PRC gray zone tactics in the geopolitical, economic, military, and cyber/IO domains.

## How Does China Employ Gray Zone Tactics?

Overall, China tailors its gray zone activity to the target and has a larger menu of coercive tools to choose from now than before. Beijing layers the use of multiple gray zone tactics to pressure allies and partners, particularly on issues related to China’s core interests. Combining multiple geopolitical, economic, military, and cyber/IO activities means that China no longer needs to rely on significant escalation in any single domain. If necessary, China can also sequence actions to apply nonmilitary pressure before resorting to military activity. For example, in the case of Vietnam, perhaps because of the variety of pressure points available, China is now avoiding violent and escalatory tactics, such as shooting, killing, and kidnapping Vietnamese fisherman. As Figure 10.1 demonstrates, China also appears to be more cautious and selective in using gray zone tactics against more-capable countries—China uses a smaller variety of tactics against Japan and India than against Vietnam and the Philippines. Of the five countries we looked at, China uses the greatest variety of tactics against Taiwan.

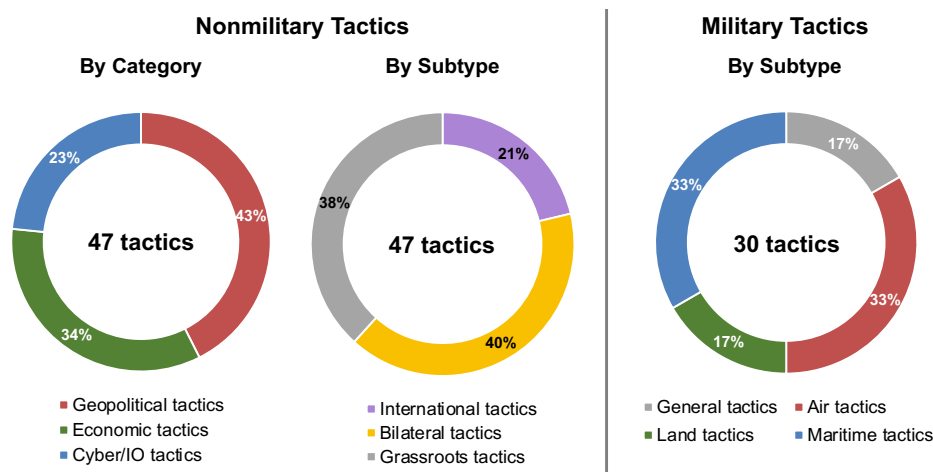
**Figure 10.1. Counts of Distinct PRC Gray Zone Tactics Against U.S. Allies and Partners**



NOTE: Counts of PRC tactics may not sum to whole numbers because of the way each tactic was coded. A 1 indicates relative confidence that China has used the tactic, while 0.5 indicates a suspicion that China has used the tactic against an ally or partner. IO = information operations.

In terms of particular types of tactics, China is increasingly leveraging military tactics; there is no evidence that China will use fewer military tactics as its overall military capabilities grow or that improved overall bilateral relations discourage China from pressing its territorial claims. Similarly, we found little evidence to suggest that China will use fewer military gray zone tactics as its geopolitical or economic power increases. Of the nonmilitary tactics China has employed, Beijing has used more geopolitical and bilateral tactics. On the military side, China has relied heavily on air- and maritime-domain tactics. Figure 10.2 illustrates the proportion of the 77 tactics we found by category and subtype.

**Figure 10.2. Breakdown of PRC Tactics by Category and Subtype**



NOTE: Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

In four out of the five cases examined, Beijing is using fewer high-profile, bilateral geopolitical and economic tactics than before. This likely results from multiple factors, including less willingness from regional countries to act in ways that might cause China to use such tactics and Chinese assessments that such high-profile tactics may not be as effective as other measures (or a combination of multiple gray zone tactics). This decrease in use of high-profile bilateral coercion appears to coincide with greater PRC use of its geopolitical influence in international institutions or via third-party actors. Similarly, since at least 2013, China has expanded its involvement on the ground in select regions, recruiting local proxies and engaging in various information efforts. This does not mean that China will not use high-profile, bilateral geopolitical or economic tactics—indeed, China has used such tactics against South Korea, Canada, and Australia in the past couple of years.

A number of PRC tactics remain difficult for U.S. allies and partners to counter. These include PRC tactics in which China uses its growing international standing, including its role in international or regional institutions, to advance its interests and block efforts that undermine its goals. Although China has not yet embraced the more-aggressive geopolitical grassroots tactics

that Russia has employed in its near abroad, China might increase its support for preferred elites or political candidates in other countries or might employ local proxies to act on its behalf. On the economic side, Beijing has repeatedly manipulated access to the Chinese market or the spending power of Chinese consumers, tourists, or students to its advantage against countries and corporations. Similarly, economic strength has enabled Beijing to purchase assets (e.g., land, media outlets), fund activities (e.g., infrastructure construction), or buy influence (e.g., fund campaigns, junkets for journalists) in target regions or in neighboring countries to coerce the target. Militarily, increasing or escalating PLA activities near or in disputed territories and deploying more-sophisticated or -advanced PLA assets are likely to continue to challenge allies and partners.

## Which PRC Tactics Could the United States Prioritize Countering?

Given the wide variety of PRC gray zone tactics and the diverse collection of allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific region, the United States faces a difficult task: determining how to prioritize which PRC activities to counter. The U.S. government, experts, and academics do not agree on the criteria for determining which PRC gray zone tactics are most problematic. We developed an aggregate measure that captures three different ways PRC tactics could be challenging: (1) the extent to which PRC tactics undermine U.S. objectives and interests in the Indo-Pacific region, (2) how difficult it is for allies and partners to respond to and counter the tactic, and (3) how widely China uses specific tactics (against one or multiple allies and partners).

Examining PRC gray zone tactics using each of the three indicators discussed in Chapter 9 produced three different lists of most challenging PRC tactics. Focusing on U.S. objectives and interests produced a list of top PRC tactics that is dominated by PRC military tactics. By contrast, examining PRC tactics that allies and partners find most challenging generated a list of top PRC tactics that are approximately equally divided between PRC military and nonmilitary tactics. Finally, PRC nonmilitary tactics constitute the bulk of the most widely used PRC tactics against allies and partners.

Given the differences between the three indicators, aggregating across them captured a more comprehensive and inclusive picture. Table 10.1 resulted from combining all three indicators to determine the 20 most problematic PRC tactics. We did so by weighing U.S. interests and objectives equally with those of allies and partners (40 percent each), with prevalence as a third element (20 percent). Of the top 20 tactics, ten are military activities that the PLA or Chinese paramilitary actors engage in, with many of the tactics involving operations near or in disputed territories. Other military tactics include China engaging in highly publicized and large-scale, cross-service military exercises; establishing military bases or potential dual-use facilities in neighboring countries to threaten the target; and building up or acquiring PRC military capabilities against the target. Four economic tactics—using PRC firms or economic assets to

advance disputed PRC territorial claims; manipulate trade or flow of goods under false pretenses; control or reduce access to or availability of public or international resources; and engage in economic or civilian activities in or near target-sensitive or key geopolitical locations—also rank among the top 20. The list includes three cyber/IO tactics: buying or controlling existing target media outlets, engaging in cyber operations against target government or military, and engaging in cyber operations to disrupt or undermine target economic activity. In terms of geopolitical tactics, supporting target adversaries or rival countries, using diplomatic and political threats to disrupt normal business activities, and limiting international sanctions or crackdowns on violent groups opposing the target are among the most problematic PRC tactics.

**Table 10.1. The 20 Most Problematic PRC Gray Zone Tactics**

<b>Tier</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Tactic</b>
Top	Military	Establish military or dual-use air bases or facilities in disputed territories
	Military	Land or forward deploy military aircraft or equipment in or near disputed territories
	Military	Establish military or dual-use ground bases or facilities in disputed territories
	Military	Land or forward deploy military ground troops or equipment in or near disputed territories
	Economic	Use PRC companies or economic assets to advance disputed PRC territorial claims
	Military	Use PLAN, CCG, or maritime militia to harass or disrupt target commercial activities in disputed territories
	Geopolitical	Support the target's adversaries or rival countries using a combination of political, economic, and military means
	Military	Establish military or dual-use maritime bases or facilities in disputed territories
	Military	Anchor maritime vessels and/or forward deploy military maritime troops and equipment in or near disputed territories
Second	Economic	Reduce trade or flow of specific goods (exports or imports)
	Geopolitical	Use diplomatic or political threats to disrupt normal business activities within the target
	Cyber/IO	Buy or control existing target media outlets (directly or through proxies)
	Military	Engage in highly publicized and large-scale, cross-service military exercises or shows of force near or against the target
	Military	Deepen military cooperation and/or establish military bases or potential dual-use facilities in neighboring countries to threaten the target
	Military	Build up or acquire military capabilities for deterring or countering the target
Third	Economic	Control or reduce availability of public or international resources to the target
	Economic	Engage in PRC economic or civilian activity in or near target-sensitive or key geopolitical locations
	Cyber/IO	Engage in cyber operations against target government or military activities
	Cyber/IO	Engage in cyber operations to disrupt or undermine target economic activity
	Geopolitical	Limit international sanctions or crack down on violent nonstate actors opposing the target and/or operating against the target

NOTES: This table reflects the top 20 tactics from the aggregate list in Table 9.5. Tactics are listed from highest to lowest weight.

Beyond this top tier, Table 10.2 visualizes which subtypes of PRC nonmilitary tactics are most problematic. The table presents averages of the weights of all the tactics that fall under each

subtype, calculated using the aggregate indicator mentioned earlier. The most problematic PRC activities are highlighted in red: geopolitical international and economic grassroots tactics. Across the board, PRC economic activities are problematic and are at least orange. Chinese cyber/IO activities in the targeted region were also relatively problematic. Relative to the other tactics, PRC geopolitical grassroots activities and cyber/IO bilateral activities have been less challenging. In terms of PRC nonmilitary tactics, this table suggests that the United States should devote significant effort to helping U.S. allies and partners counter PRC geopolitical international tactics and economic tactics (particularly PRC economic activity in the target region or in disputed regions). The United States may also wish to help allies and partners counter PRC economic tactics and PRC grassroots cyber/IO activities.

**Table 10.2. Coding of Problematic Subtypes of PRC Nonmilitary Tactics**

	International	Bilateral	Grassroots
Geopolitical	10.5	8.1	7.1
Economic	8.7	8.4	10.6
Cyber/IO	N/A	7.0	8.9

NOTE: Number in cell is the average weight. Red indicates an average weight of 10 or more. Orange indicates an average weight between 8 and 10. Yellow indicates an average weight below 8.

## Recommendations

We based a series of recommendations for the U.S. government, DoD, and the U.S. Air Force on the research described in this report. These are largely organized according to strategic, operational, and tactical levels of effort:<sup>1</sup>

- The National Security Council staff or the DoS should take the lead in working with departments and agencies to identify a set of criteria or a set of the most problematic PRC gray zone tactics on which the United States should focus whole-of-government efforts. This prioritization exercise could align and coordinate U.S. government response options. Without clear guidance, different departments or agencies might develop their own approaches to countering PRC gray zone activities that may not be effective without support from other U.S. government actors. As part of this,
  - For this prioritization effort, the U.S. government should hold gray zone scenario discussions or tabletop exercises with select key allies and partners to better understand which PRC gray zone scenarios and tactics are most difficult for these allies and partners to counter and what they are most concerned about and may need

<sup>1</sup> We did not conduct a comprehensive analysis of the costs, benefits, or feasibility of every recommendation. Using subject-matter expertise and existing research, we broadly considered the feasibility of identified options in terms of financial, materiel, and manpower costs and potential risks of escalation. We also considered the effects on mission or readiness if options required large-scale shift of resources.



- U.S. assistance with. These discussions should involve at least DoS and DoD and could form the basis for developing either U.S.-only or joint U.S., allied, or partner gray zone plans. These exchanges could also inform more-tailored DoD and U.S. Air Force security cooperation and engagement plans with select allies and partners.
- The U.S. government should also publicly identify coercive Chinese MOOTW operations as gray zone activities and seek to identify and develop response options that target non-PLA actors supporting PLA gray zone activities.
  - The U.S. government should prioritize efforts to counter PRC geopolitical international tactics. This includes, for example, expanding U.S. involvement in international and multilateral forums to support allies and partners and counter PRC coercion. This also includes increased advocacy for allied and partner entry into and participation in international and regional institutions. The United States should push back against Chinese attempts to secure more leadership positions in existing or new international and regional organizations by actively nominating and campaigning for allied and partner candidates for such positions.
  - The U.S. government should prioritize efforts to counter PRC economic tactics, with a focus on PRC economic activities in allied or partner territories and in disputed territories. This includes, for example, helping allies and partners limit or respond effectively to PRC economic activities that seek to expand or legitimize PRC control of disputed territories.
  - The U.S. government should consider different multilateral options to cooperate and work with allies and partners economically, including establishing a multilateral coalition that counters PRC economic pressure by retaliating against China or by providing economic assistance to the targeted country if China uses economic pressure against member states.<sup>2</sup>
  - The U.S. government should also invest significant resources in helping allies and partners counter PRC cyber/IO activities within their own territories. It may be particularly important to do so when allies and partners are undergoing key leadership transitions, such as holding presidential elections. This could come in the form of sharing more intelligence or information regarding potential PRC political interference or social disinformation efforts.
  - The U.S. government should actively message allies and partners that improving overall bilateral relations with China does not deter or stop China from using military or other gray zone tactics to press its claims. Instead, allies and partners should invest in more military and other capabilities to defend their territorial claims and deter China from engaging in more coercive military or other tactics.
  - DoD should play a key role in developing any whole-of-government approach to counter more-escalatory PRC gray zone scenarios and tactics. In particular, DoD should work closely with the interagency to develop a variety of gray zone plans similar to DoD's existing operational plans that deal with high-end conventional conflicts but focused on responding to China during peacetime competition. Although gray zone plans do not

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<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of what this multilateral option could involve and assessments of the benefits, costs, and feasibility, see Bryan Frederick, Bonny Lin, Howard J. Shatz, Michael S. Chase, Christian Curriden, Mary Kate Adgie, James Dobbins, Kristen Gunness, and Soo Kim, *Extending China: U.S. Policy Options for Asymmetric Advantage*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-A796-1, 2022, Not available to the general public.

have to be as detailed or exhaustive as operational plans, they should involve at least sequencing the potential whole-of-government actions the United States could take in the event that China engages in a set of highly escalatory gray zone activities against key U.S. allies and partners. The plans should also involve ensuring that proper authorities and capabilities are in place that could be delegated to lower echelons or submitted for approval to facilitate the timely planning and execution of potential U.S. responses.

- DoD and DoS should consider increasing security cooperation activities—exercises, foreign military sales, foreign military financing, or other means—that bolster targeted countries’ presence and persistence in disputed regions, particularly in the SCS. One of the main factors in the changing balance of power in the SCS appears to be China’s increasing ability to resupply assets, especially ships, from disputed features it controls. PRC assets can quickly return to the area of an incident, enabling more-persistent presence by dint of shorter turnaround times. Improving countries’ ability to monitor and/or rapidly respond to PRC activities could help the countries quickly publicize PRC actions with neighbors, partners, or broader audiences; demonstrate their own presence; and resolve despite the PRC activities, while contrasting their actions with problematic PRC behavior.
- The U.S. Air Force should support whole-of-government activities to increase transparency and awareness of problematic PRC activities by continuing to build its ISR infrastructure in the region.<sup>3</sup> For example, the Air Force could pursue longer-term ISR-focused security cooperation, including institutional support, training and exercises, and potential foreign military sales or capability development.<sup>4</sup> Air Force ISR investments could also include modernization of associated processing, exploitation, and dissemination (PED) capabilities to ensure that the data collected throughout the region is shared in real time to support U.S. and partner operational decisions. The current lack of intelligence collection and intelligence-sharing capabilities limits domain awareness and the ability to identify and attribute PRC gray zone activities and limits opportunities for collaboration with allies and partners. To address this,
  - The Air Force could conduct professional exchanges focused on developing a common data architecture, similar to Link-16, which supports the automatic and rapid exchange of information to support enhanced situational awareness.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> This recommendation is considered feasible, given existing Air Force requirements for additional investments in ISR and PED capabilities. However, it may be less feasible in terms of staff requirements for developing additional policies or authorities and when considered in terms of organization, training, leadership, and personnel. The recommendation may also require investments in terms of supporting doctrine, policies, or authorities and personnel. There is some risk of escalation, given that adversaries may perceive the expansion of ISR infrastructure and intelligence-focused security cooperation as investments made to support high-end warfighting missions, as opposed to benign security-cooperation activities. Additional analysis is required to properly assess the requirements relating to authorities and personnel and the potential risks of escalation.

<sup>4</sup> Examples of foreign military sales or capability development efforts include early warning capabilities, full-motion video, electronic intelligence, maritime and air self-defense capabilities, automatic transmission of intelligence from air and maritime assets, and other persistent situational awareness capabilities that enable a common operating picture.

<sup>5</sup> Although Link-16 architecture is often used to support battlefield awareness and targeting efforts in a conflict scenario, the architecture can still be used to support improved interoperability and communications and to build a

- These activities could be facilitated by linking U.S. air operations centers or control and reporting centers with partner-nation equivalents. When combined with expanded ISR capabilities in the region, improvements to PED capabilities, and supporting intelligence-sharing authorities, linking operations centers can facilitate intelligence fusion and shared situational awareness between the United States and select allies and partners.
- U.S. Air Force or appropriate cyber forces should support broader efforts intended to publicize and counter gray zone activities in the information domain. So far, U.S. responses to adversary tactics in the information domain have been ad hoc and uncoordinated, with overwhelming emphasis on detection as opposed to response.<sup>6</sup> For example, the Air Force could support DoD and whole-of-government efforts to “name and shame” coercive Chinese tactics and be integrated across existing joint force and interagency information initiatives.<sup>7</sup> Although data suggesting that these activities actually deter China are limited, such activities are nevertheless important in terms of highlighting cohesion and agreement among allies and partners.
- The U.S. Air Force should pursue appropriate authorities and agreements with partner nations that allow Air Force cyber personnel access to partner networks.<sup>8</sup> All the partner nations included in this research have been affected by Chinese IO or malicious cyber activity. With the appropriate authorities, U.S. cyber protection teams could improve partner computer network defenses by sharing cybersecurity best practices and helping identify malware. The benefits of this recommendation are threefold: The United States would help partner nations defend their networks and ensure free and open access to the internet; the United States would gain valuable information about the types of malware that cyber actors and APTs are using; and, once malware is identified, the United States can attribute the malware to the actor responsible; ensure that U.S. and partner network vulnerabilities are patched to prevent intrusion by the identified malware; and, finally,

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common operating picture between the Air Force, other services, and regional allies and partners. Several countries in the region have already installed Link-16 capabilities, including Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Thailand. Expanding these capabilities into Vietnam, the Philippines and India would help increase awareness of Chinese tactics in the ECS and SCS while also providing opportunities for personnel exchanges and training events focused on timely information-sharing and analysis.

<sup>6</sup> Raphael S. Cohen, Nathan Beauchamp-Mustafaga, Joe Cheravitch, Alyssa Demus, Scott W. Harold, Jeffrey W. Hornung, Jenny Jun, Michael Schwillie, Elina Treyger, and Nathan Vest, *Combating Foreign Disinformation on Social Media: Study Overview and Conclusions*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-4373/1-AF, 2021, p. 39.

<sup>7</sup> For an example initiative in this vein, see Executive Order 13721, *Developing an Integrated Global Engagement Center to Support Government-Wide Counterterrorism Communications Activities Directed Abroad and Revoking Executive Order 13548*, March 14, 2016.

<sup>8</sup> This recommendation will require the identification and pursuit of authorities and policies to facilitate these activities. Some partners are hesitant to cooperate with the United States in offensive or counter-PRC activities in cyberspace but may support and would likely benefit from improved cyberdefense and attribution of identified malicious cyber activity. This recommendation requires additional analysis to understand partner-nation willingness and to identify the required authorities or policies; some of this could be ascertained as part of the earlier recommendations to engage with allies and partners.

support ongoing naming-and-shaming efforts that work to underscore the extent of PRC gray zone tactics.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Air Forces Cyber (16th Air Force) currently conducts similar computer network defense and malware identification activities with European partners (U.S. Embassy Tbilisi, “U.S. Helps Allies Fight Cyberattacks,” press release, August 26, 2020).

## Appendix A. China's Use of Gray Zone Coercion Against the Philippines

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Chinese gray zone activities against the Philippines since 2012 have leveraged a mix of military and nonmilitary activities, increasing Chinese vessels' presence near Philippine-held features in the SCS while challenging Philippine physical control of some features. The Scarborough Shoal standoff in 2012 ended with China effectively controlling the contested land feature and surrounding waters, while a significant artificial island-building campaign in the Spratly Islands has enabled China to expand its military capabilities in the region. Beijing has backed its activities in the maritime and air domains with geopolitical, economic, and cyber/IO tactics designed to advance PRC objectives and legitimize Chinese claims. Following land reclamation in the SCS, China's use of coercive maritime and air activities and nonmaritime coercion continued and, in some cases, increased, even as Beijing promoted greater economic engagement with Manila after the election of Duterte in 2016. China's ability to conduct coordinated military and paramilitary operations, particularly in the maritime domain, augments its coercive activities.<sup>1</sup>

### Geopolitical Tactics

In the geopolitical domain, China has leveraged regional forums, primarily ASEAN, to frustrate Manila's attempts to multilateralize concerns regarding Chinese actions. China pressured Cambodia in 2012 to block a joint statement criticizing China at ASEAN's summit in 2012 and again in 2016 to block Philippine messaging when Manila hoped to leverage the arbitral tribunal's favorable ruling on the SCS.<sup>2</sup> Bilaterally, China has restricted engagements with Philippine leaders (such as following the 2012 Scarborough Shoal standoff) during tensions.<sup>3</sup> China also leverages administrative and legal approaches to advance its SCS claims vis-à-vis the Philippines, such as by establishing Sansha City on Woody Island in 2012 and the Nansha district in 2020.<sup>4</sup> In 2016, Chinese authorities tacitly allowed protests that called for boycotts of Philippine products following the Permanent Court of Arbitration's ruling favoring

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<sup>1</sup> For a description of the coordinated tactics these actors practice in the SCS, see Zhang Yigen [张毅根] and He Peng [何鹏], "Protecting the Drilling Platform: Military-Police-Civilian Exercise to Surround and Annihilate" ["保护钻井平台: 军警民南海演练围歼"], *National Defense News* [中国国防报], August 23, 2014. The specific exercise scenario focused on defending an oil rig platform and may have been geared toward Vietnam.

<sup>2</sup> Bower, 2012; Mogato, Martina, and Blanchard, 2016; Vijay Joshi and Daniel Malloy, "China Scores Diplomatic Victory, Avoid Criticism from ASEAN," Associated Press, July 25, 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Carmela Fonbuena, "China Cancels Invite to Aquino," Rappler, August 29, 2013.

<sup>4</sup> Haver, 2020.

Manila.<sup>5</sup> Chinese grassroots activities in the Philippines include supporting pro-China Philippine political leaders and parties, promoting PRC-friendly Sino-Philippine organizations, and creating new initiatives to strengthen education partnerships. In 2016, then-presidential candidate Duterte admitted that an anonymous Chinese donor paid for some of his initial campaign ads prior to the official start of the campaign season.<sup>6</sup> There is also suspicion that Beijing backed Michael Yang, a Chinese national, and helped him secure a position as Duterte’s economic adviser in 2018.<sup>7</sup> In 2015 and 2019, Yang hosted Duterte in Beijing for private meetings.<sup>8</sup> Yang and others have also donated to establish drug habilitation facilities in the Philippines, a Duterte administration initiative.<sup>9</sup> Chinese UFWD proxies are active in the Philippines,<sup>10</sup> and consortia of ethnic Filipino Chinese business leaders have been linked to pro-Beijing corporate executives close to Duterte, such as Yang, and to UFWD proxies.<sup>11</sup> Finally, Philippine critics have called for the removal of the five Philippine Confucius Institutes, arguing that China can use the institutes to propagate its preferred SCS narratives.<sup>12</sup> In 2019, both countries signed a memorandum to recognize each other’s degrees, open new Confucius Institutes in the Philippines, and increase bilateral university exchanges, programs, and visits for faculty and students.<sup>13</sup>

## Economic Tactics

In the economic domain, on the international level, China has exported products featuring the nine-dash line to the Philippines, advancing PRC narratives that the disputed territories belong to China.<sup>14</sup> China has also periodically restricted Philippine fishermen’s access to the Scarborough

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<sup>5</sup> “Chinese Protestors Urge Boycott of US and Philippines Products,” *San Diego Union-Tribune*, July 20, 2016.

<sup>6</sup> Mike Frialde, “Duterte Says Unknown Donor Paid for His Pre-Campaign Ads,” PhilStar Global website, March 10, 2016.

<sup>7</sup> Ranada, 2019c; Pia Ranada, “Malacañang Contracts Show Michael Yang Is Economic Adviser,” Rappler, November 5, 2018b; “Who Is Michael Yang? Online Media Flag Duterte’s Chinese ‘Economic Adviser,’” Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility, October 22, 2018.

<sup>8</sup> Ranada, 2019a; Ranada, 2019c.

<sup>9</sup> Pia Ranada, “What Connects Duterte to Fujian Normal University?” Rappler, August 20, 2019b. See also Anders Corr, “China’s Targeting of Overseas Chinese for Intelligence, Influence and Drug Trafficking,” *Journal of Political Risk*, Vol. 7, No. 7, July 2018.

<sup>10</sup> These include the China Zhi Gong Party and the Chinese People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries. See Searight, 2018.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Beltran, “Duterte’s Chinese Adviser: Proof of Beijing’s Pull on Philippines?” *South China Morning Post*, November 20, 2018; Searight, 2018; “Philippines-China Commerce and Trade Federation” [“菲律宾华商经贸联合会”], website, undated.

<sup>12</sup> Frances G. Mangosing, “Carpio: Shut Down Confucius Institutes Until China Accepts South China Sea Ruling,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, April 29, 2020b.

<sup>13</sup> “Philippines, China Sign Deal to Boost Academic Cooperation,” Rappler, August 29, 2019.

<sup>14</sup> Ralph Jennings, “China Launches Propaganda for Recognition of Disputed Maritime Claims,” Voice of America, July 27, 2020b.

Shoal since 2012.<sup>15</sup> Bilaterally, China has episodically restricted trade and tourism amid tensions in the SCS, including by banning imports of Philippine bananas from 2012 to 2016 and manipulating tourism in 2012 and 2014,<sup>16</sup> while rewarding Duterte's softer stance in the SCS by pledging \$24 billion in foreign direct investment and other assistance to the Philippines in 2016 and another \$12 billion on the sidelines of the Second Belt and Road Forum in 2019.<sup>17</sup> Although many of these large PRC state-backed infrastructure projects have yet to break ground, Chinese businesspeople are pursuing additional opportunities in the Duterte era, with one billionaire and philanthropist commenting in 2016: "As long as the Philippine government maintains a friendly relationship with China, I am very happy to invest in the Philippines."<sup>18</sup> Chinese economic gray zone tactics at the grassroots level are extensive, with activities ranging from constructing civilian and dual-use infrastructure on disputed SCS features to enforcing an annual fishing ban in waters near the Scarborough Shoal.<sup>19</sup> PRC commercial activity in and around the Spratly Islands has continued following the completion of China's dredging and land reclamation projects, which were supported by Chinese SOEs.

## Military Tactics

China has conducted a large-scale buildup of its military capabilities in the SCS vis-à-vis the Philippines by building and expanding dual-use facilities in the Spratlys, expanding the CCG and maritime militia, and increasing its military and paramilitary presence in and around the Spratlys. China has also conducted multiple large-scale exercises in the SCS in recent years, including an exercise involving both the PLAN and CCG in 2020 near the Paracels, which elicited strong condemnation from a senior Philippine official.<sup>20</sup> Beijing has also reportedly threatened the use

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<sup>15</sup> Michael Green, Kathleen Hicks, Zack Cooper, John Schaus, and Jake Douglas, "Counter-Coercion Series: Scarborough Shoal Standoff," Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative website, May 22, 2017b; J. C. Gotinga, "Defense Chief Hits China's 'Bullying' in Scarborough Shoal Takeover," Rappler, July 30, 2019a.

<sup>16</sup> Cliff Venzon, "China Uses Banana Diplomacy in Philippines to Edge out Japan," Nikkei Asia, July 26, 2019; Aurora Almendral, "Philippines Feels Force of China Travel Warning," BBC News, October 22, 2014.

<sup>17</sup> "Chinese Investors Plan . . .," 2019; Renato Cruz de Castro, "China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Duterte Administration's Appeasement Policy: Examining the Connection Between the Two National Strategies," *East Asia*, Vol. 36, 2019a; Karen Lema and Martin Petty, "Two Years After Philippines' Pivot, Duterte Still Waiting on China Dividend," Yahoo News, November 18, 2018.

<sup>18</sup> Nyshka Chandran, "The Philippines' Pivot Toward China Has Yet to Pay Off, as Manila Awaits Promised Funds," CNBC News, November 23, 2018; Adam Jourdan and Jackie Cai, "Beyond Philippines' Ties with China, a Billionaire and His Rehab Centers," Reuters, October 31, 2016; Pia Ranada, "Chinese Businessmen Flock to Duterte's Malacañang," Rappler, June 2, 2018a.

<sup>19</sup> Drake Long, "China Announces Summer Fishing Ban in South China Sea," Benar News, May 1, 2020a.

<sup>20</sup> Specifically, Philippine Foreign Secretary Locsin stated: "Should the exercises spill over to Philippine Territory . . . China . . . will be met with the severest response" (Sofia Tomacruz, "PH Issues Rare Warning of 'Severest Response' vs China Drills," Rappler, July 3, 2020). On the exercises, see Steven Stashwick, "Photos Show Massive Chinese Naval Exercise in South China Sea," *The Diplomat*, March 29, 2018; Ankit Panda, "China Conducts Naval Drills in South China Sea," *The Diplomat*, July 2, 2020.

of force against the Philippines. President Duterte has stated that, during his 2016 visit to China, Xi told him that China would go to war if the Philippines attempted to enforce the 2016 UNCLOS arbitration ruling by drilling for oil in SCS waters within the Philippines' EEZ.<sup>21</sup> Beyond land reclamation and weapon and support systems placed on Spratly features, we did not find additional specific Chinese activities that we could categorize as belonging to the land domain.

In the air domain, China has slowly routinized the presence of PLAN Aviation in the Spratly Islands, starting by landing first civilian and then military transport aircraft on Fiery Cross Reef in 2016;<sup>22</sup> expanding military flights to Mischief and Subi reefs by 2018;<sup>23</sup> and, in 2020, landing multiple aircraft and a helicopter on the features.<sup>24</sup> This regular presence suggests that PLAN Aviation could begin routinely basing aircraft on Fiery Cross Reef.<sup>25</sup> PLAAF fighters, bombers, aircraft, and tankers have operated near features claimed by the Philippines, including over Scarborough Shoal in 2016; around Mischief Reef, Subi Reef, and other features in 2017; over Alison Reef in 2018; and near Subi Reef in 2020.<sup>26</sup> A PLAAF transport aircraft reportedly landed on Fiery Cross Reef in late 2020.<sup>27</sup>

In the maritime domain, coercive Chinese presence and activities since 2012 can be divided into three categories. First, China used maritime assets to seize physical control of a Philippine-held feature, Scarborough Shoal, in 2012. After tensions at the shoal escalated to the point that dozens of Chinese government and fishing vessels were located near the shoal—vastly outnumbering Philippine ships—and with the PRC economic actions discussed earlier in this appendix, U.S. negotiators met with Chinese interlocutors to negotiate a compromise. After the Philippine ships withdrew, however, some Chinese ships remained near the shoal; the lead

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<sup>21</sup> Manuel Mogato, “Duterte Says China’s Xi Threatened War if Philippines Drills for Oil,” Reuters, May 19, 2017.

<sup>22</sup> Vivienne Zeng, “First Group of Civilians Land on China’s Controversial Artificial Island in South China Sea,” *Hong Kong Free Press*, January 15, 2016. “First Chinese Military Plane Landing on Fiery Cross Reef Made Public, Can Obtain Command of the Air for 1,000 Kilometers (Photos)” [“中国军机首公开降落永暑礁 可获 1 千公里制空权 (图)”], *Sina Military* [新浪军事], April 18, 2016.

<sup>23</sup> Frances Mangosing, “China Military Planes Land on PH Reef,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, April 18, 2018; Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, 2018a.

<sup>24</sup> “China Lands 2 More Planes in Disputed South China Sea—State Media,” Rappler/Agence France-Presse, January 6, 2016; Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, “China’s New Spratly Island Defenses,” webpage, December 13, 2016; J. C. Gotinga, “Satellite Image Shows Chinese Military Plane on Kagitingan Reef,” Rappler, March 30, 2020.

<sup>25</sup> Drake Long, “China’s Naval Aviation Force Shows Up at Fiery Cross Reef,” Benar News, May 13, 2020b.

<sup>26</sup> Grossman et al., 2018; Kristin Huang, “South China Sea: Chinese Air Force Steps Up Combat-Readiness Drills,” *South China Morning Post*, August 4, 2020b.

<sup>27</sup> Kristin Huang, “South China Sea: Why Did the PLA Land Its Massive Y-20 Warplane on Fiery Cross Reef?” *South China Morning Post*, January 1, 2021.



Chinese interlocutor denied that an agreement had been reached.<sup>28</sup> Philippine sources indicate that, since 2012, CCG vessels have become a constant fixture at Scarborough Shoal.<sup>29</sup> Despite Duterte's apparent rapprochement with Beijing in 2016, Philippine fishermen are reportedly still barred from entering the shoal, and harassment from Chinese vessels has continued.<sup>30</sup>

Second, China has leveraged maritime assets to increase presence near features and, at some features, to challenge Philippine physical control—Second Thomas Shoal and Thitu Island are key examples. Chinese military and paramilitary forces have undertaken efforts to block resupply missions to the small number of Philippine marines stationed aboard a beached World War II-era naval transport at Second Thomas Shoal.<sup>31</sup> Notable incidents involving Chinese surveillance ships, CCG vessels, and PLAN ships and a helicopter took place in 2013, 2014, 2018, and 2019.<sup>32</sup> China continues to maintain patrols near the shoal and occasionally intercepts Philippine ships, although such activities as blocking and ramming have not been reported.<sup>33</sup> Manila began upgrading the runway, a beaching ramp, and a sheltered port at Thitu Island between 2017 and 2020.<sup>34</sup> After construction began, the presence of nearby Chinese naval, coast guard, and other ships increased, with ships circling the island throughout the day and becoming a nearly constant presence by 2018.<sup>35</sup> Between January and March 2019, more than 600 Chinese vessels were reportedly identified operating around the island.<sup>36</sup> At one point in 2019, 113

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<sup>28</sup> Richard McGregor, *Asia's Reckoning: China, Japan, and the Fate of U.S. Power in the Pacific Century*, New York: Penguin Books, 2017, pp. 286–287. For two versions of the negotiations, see Green et al., 2017a, pp. 117–119.

<sup>29</sup> J. C. Gotinga and Sofia Tomacruz, “List: China’s Incursions in Philippine Waters,” Rappler, August 22, 2019.

<sup>30</sup> Gotinga and Tomacruz, 2019; Carmela Fonbuena, “Video Captures China Coast Guard Taking PH Fishermen’s Catch,” Rappler, June 8, 2018.

<sup>31</sup> Michael Green, Kathleen Hicks, Zack Cooper, John Schaus, and Jake Douglas, “Counter-Coercion Series: Second Thomas Shoal Incident,” webpage, Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, June 9, 2017c.

<sup>32</sup> Green et al., 2017c; Bonnie S. Glaser and Alison Szalwinski, “Second Thomas Shoal Likely the Next Flashpoint in the South China Sea,” *China Brief*, Vol. 13, No. 13, June 21, 2013; Darshana M. Baruah, “Second Thomas Shoal: The New Battleground,” *The Diplomat*, April 30, 2014; Paterno R. Esmaguél II, “China Chopper Harasses PH Rubber Boat in Ayungin Shoal—Lawmaker,” Rappler, May 30, 2018; “China Coast Guard Blocked . . .,” 2019.

<sup>33</sup> Green et al., 2017c.

<sup>34</sup> Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, “Philippines Launches Spratly Runway Repairs,” webpage, May 25, 2018b; Frances G. Mangosing, “Holding Ground, Building Hope on Pag-asa Island,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, June 12, 2020c; Frances Mangosing, “Pag-asa Gets Upgrade Amid China Objection,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, June 13, 2020d.

<sup>35</sup> Ankit Panda, “South China Sea: A Chinese ‘Invasion’ near the Philippines’ Pag-asa Island in the Spratlys?” *The Diplomat*, August 22, 2017; Frances Mangosing, “Chinese Boats Deny Filipino Fishermen Access to Sandbars,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, March 4, 2019; Mangosing, 2020c; Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, “The Long Patrol: Stare-down at Thitu Island Enters Its Sixteenth Month,” webpage, March 5, 2020.

<sup>36</sup> Rene Acosta, “Philippines Pushing Back Against Chinese Militia South China Sea Presence,” USNI News, August 15, 2019. For other 2018 and 2019 statistics, see J. C. Gotinga, “2019: Year of Rough Seas for PH in the Face of Belligerent China,” Rappler, December 10, 2019b.

Chinese fishing ships swarmed the island, with a similar incident in 2020 involving up to 76 Chinese ships spotted near Thitu.<sup>37</sup>

Third, China has deployed and operated weapon systems and platforms—including military and paramilitary ships—to and near artificially reclaimed features (the seven Chinese-held features in the Spratlys). Dredging on seven Chinese-held features in the Spratly Islands took place from 2013 to 2015, with facilities and systems on the largest three features including bunkers, hangars, radars, runways, and antiship and anti-air systems by 2018.<sup>38</sup>

Since 2012, additional notable characteristics of Chinese maritime pressure have included CCG vessels blocking Philippine vessels from entering the lagoon of Scarborough Shoal, firing water cannons at vessels there, and stealing fishermen's catches; expelling Philippine vessels from Second Thomas Shoal; forcing fishermen away from traditional fishing grounds at Jackson Atoll; and leveraging maritime military and CCG ships vis-à-vis Philippine vessels.<sup>39</sup> A presumed PAFMM vessel rammed and sank a Philippine fishing boat at Reed Bank in 2019.<sup>40</sup>

## Cyber and Information Operations Tactics

In the cyber/IO domain, bilaterally, China has engaged in cyber operations against the Philippine government and military for the purposes of intelligence collection, to disrupt economic activity, and to influence public opinion, with multiple incidents appearing to coincide with bilateral maritime incidents in the SCS or perceived changes to Philippine attitudes toward the SCS.<sup>41</sup> These include cyberattacks against the Philippines in 2012 (targeting a University of the Philippines website<sup>42</sup>), 2014 (espionage against government and military networks<sup>43</sup>), 2016 (a major distributed denial of service attack on national and local Philippine government

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<sup>37</sup> Acosta, 2019; Mangosing, 2020c.

<sup>38</sup> OSD, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2016*, Washington, D.C., 2016, p. 13; OSD, 2020, pp. 101–102; Hannah Beech, “China’s Sea Control Is a Done Deal, ‘Short of War with the U.S.’,” *New York Times*, September 20, 2018; “Beijing ‘Installs Missiles’ on South China Sea Islands,” Rappler/Agence France-Presse, May 4, 2018.

<sup>39</sup> “Timeline: The Philippines-China Maritime Dispute,” Rappler, July 12, 2016; Fonbuena, 2018; “Philippines Says China ‘Fired Water Cannon’ on Filipino Fishermen,” BBC News, February 24, 2014; “China Drives Away PH Ships from Shoal,” Rappler, March 10, 2014; “At Least 7 Chinese Ships Surround Scarborough Shoal” [“Di bababa sa 7 barko ng China nakapalibot sa Scarborough Shoal”], ABS CBN News, April 10, 2019.

<sup>40</sup> Acosta, 2019.

<sup>41</sup> Mark Manantan, “The Cyber Dimension of the South China Sea Clashes,” *The Diplomat*, August 5, 2019; FireEye, *Southeast Asia: An Evolving Cyber Threat Landscape*, Milpitas, Calif., March 2015, p. 3.

<sup>42</sup> “University of the Philippines Hits Hacking of Its Website,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, April 24, 2012.

<sup>43</sup> Matikas Santos, “Chinese Hackers Stealing Digital Info from PH Gov’t Agencies,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, May 15, 2015.

websites<sup>44</sup>), and 2019 (uptick in Chinese cyberattacks after Duterte strongly condemned ongoing PRC presence near Thitu Island<sup>45</sup>).

At the grassroots level, China has purchased content within existing Philippine media outlets and supported the establishment of traditional pro-China media outlets in the Philippines. For example, China held seminars and training sessions in May 2018 for Philippine media officials and journalists to learn about “socialist journalism with Chinese characteristics.”<sup>46</sup> Under a bilateral agreement, the Philippines and China agreed to enhance media cooperation via personnel exchanges, rebroadcasts, and joint production of media content.<sup>47</sup> At least one UFWD proxy collaborates with the Chinese embassy and a pro-CCP Philippine news organization.<sup>48</sup> Emerging information on social media disinformation campaigns in 2020 suggests Philippine audiences have additionally been subject to pro-China disinformation via Facebook and Instagram.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Anni Piiparinen, “China’s Secret Weapon in the South China Sea: Cyber Attacks,” *The Diplomat*, July 22, 2016.

<sup>45</sup> Manantan, 2019.

<sup>46</sup> Frances Mangosing, “Philippines Under China’s Expanding Media Influence—Report,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, January 18, 2020a.

<sup>47</sup> Mangosing, 2020a; Winger, 2020.

<sup>48</sup> Searight, 2018.

<sup>49</sup> Winger, 2020.

## Appendix B. PRC Use of Gray Zone Tactics Against Five Allies and Partners

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Table B.1 indicates which gray zone tactics China has used against each of the five allies and partners we examined in this report. In the table, *Yes* indicates that there are multiple reports of such PRC activity and that we are relatively confident that PRC used such tactics against the target at least once. A question mark indicates that there are one or more reports of such PRC activity or strong suspicions that China engages in such activity but that we did not come across solid reporting and/or documentation. As a result, we suspect but are less confident that China uses these tactics. Empty cells mean that we found no publicly available evidence of China’s use of such tactics against the specific ally or partner. Table B.2 provides counts of PRC tactics by category and subtype.

For Taiwan, the term *disputed territories* refers to Taiwan’s outlying islands, including Kinmen, Matsu, Penghu, Pratas, Itu Aba/Taiping Island, and Zhongzhou Reef.

Also, Chinese activities against the Tibetan government in exile in India (or Tibetans who have settled in India) are not coded as PRC gray zone tactics against India. This is because the majority of Tibetans in India are not Indian citizens and because the Central Tibetan Administration has significant autonomy to govern Tibetan settlements in India. Despite providing shelter for Tibetans, India has also tried to distance itself from the Tibetan community and has sought to limit its anti-Chinese activities. The 2003 Declaration on Principles for Relations and Comprehensive Cooperation Between the Republic of India and the People’s Republic of China also specifies that India “does not allow Tibetans to engage in anti-China political activities in India.”<sup>1</sup>

**Table B.1. PRC Use of Gray Zone Tactics Against Five Allies and Partners**

Category	Subtype	Tactic No.	PRC Tactic	Taiwan (1995–)	Japan (2010–)	Vietnam (2009–)	India (2014–)	Philippines (2012–)
Geopolitical	International	1	Establish new major international initiatives or alternative international institutions to pressure or incentivize the target to accommodate PRC requests			Yes	Yes	Yes
Geopolitical	International	2	Exclude or limit the target’s leadership and participation in existing international organizations	Yes		Yes	Yes	

<sup>1</sup> Tibet Justice Center, 2016; Vajpayee and Wen Jiabao, 2003.

Category	Subtype	Tactic No.	PRC Tactic	Taiwan (1995–)	Japan (2010–)	Vietnam (2009–)	India (2014–)	Philippines (2012–)
Geopolitical	International	3	Undermine the target's regional or international influence and partnerships, including by engaging in campaigns to blame or shame the target	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Geopolitical	International	4	Support the target's adversaries or rival countries using a combination of political, economic, and military means		Yes		Yes	
Geopolitical	International	5	Limit international sanctions or crack down on violent nonstate actors opposing the target and/or operating against the target				Yes	
Geopolitical	International	6	Use international influence on third countries to pressure target citizens to retract or recant specific views/positions (e.g., pressuring ROK companies to force Taiwanese artists to drop independence position)	Yes		Yes		
Geopolitical	Bilateral	7	Significantly manipulate or reduce high-level political contacts or engagements	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes
Geopolitical	Bilateral	8	Use high-profile political or legal campaigns (lawfare) to pressure the target	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Geopolitical	Bilateral	9	Engage in diplomatic or political activities to divide or split the target geographically beyond the territorial dispute (e.g., via preferred treatment to select territories, legal challenges)	Yes				
Geopolitical	Bilateral	10	Use diplomatic or political threats to disrupt normal business activities within the target (e.g., create stock market volatility)	Yes				
Geopolitical	Bilateral	11	Detain or harass target citizens in China (beyond journalists and academics)	Yes	Yes			
Geopolitical	Bilateral	12	Impose restrictions on travel or visas for select target leaders, political parties, or individuals	Yes			Yes	Yes
Geopolitical	Bilateral	13	Organize public protests (or counterprotests) in China or in the target region to criticize target activities	Yes	Yes	Yes	?	Yes
Geopolitical	Grassroots	14	Use and/or provide support to individual elites, political leaders, political parties, groups, or organizations to act on behalf of China in the target	Yes				Yes
Geopolitical	Grassroots	15	Use and/or provide support to religious groups or organizations to promote pro-China agenda	Yes				
Geopolitical	Grassroots	16	Use and/or provide support to pro-China Chinese ethnic groups (e.g., ethnic business associations)	Yes		Yes		Yes

Category	Subtype	Tactic No.	PRC Tactic	Taiwan (1995–)	Japan (2010–)	Vietnam (2009–)	India (2014–)	Philippines (2012–)
Geopolitical	Grassroots	17	Use and/or provide support to educational and civil society groups or organizations (that are not religious or political) to promote pro-China agenda (e.g., Confucius Institutes)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Geopolitical	Grassroots	18	Use and/or provide support to pro-China groups with criminal links or ties	Yes				
Geopolitical	Grassroots	19	Use and/or provide support to other violent (insurgent, terrorist, or separatist) groups in the target				?	
Geopolitical	Grassroots	20	Engage in covert action (PRC agents directly in the target country or region), such as assassination or harassment of opponents				(? <sup>a</sup> )	
Economic	International	1	Purchase or invest in large civilian infrastructure or assets (such as land) in a third country (particularly neighboring countries) that pressure the target	Yes		Yes	Yes	
Economic	International	2	Export PRC products that advance PRC claims or narrative (e.g., products that portray disputed territories as part of China)	Yes		Yes		Yes
Economic	International	3	Require products or services from international firms to adhere to PRC requests and/or claims compared with the target's claims	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes
Economic	International	4	Control or reduce availability of public or international resources to the target (e.g., constructing dams to control the flow of the river to the target)	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes
Economic	Bilateral	5	Reduce trade or flow of specific goods (exports or imports)	Yes	Yes	Yes	?	Yes
Economic	Bilateral	6	Reduce provision of PRC direct investment or foreign aid	Yes		?		Yes
Economic	Bilateral	7	Harass, pressure, or co-opt businesses from the target region operating in China or competing for PRC projects in the target	Yes	?	?	?	?
Economic	Bilateral	8	Reduce PRC tourism to pressure the target	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes
Economic	Bilateral	9	Reduce number of PRC students to pressure the target	Yes				
Economic	Bilateral	10	Boycott, protest, destroy, or confiscate the target's goods or products in China, particularly goods that do not align with PRC interests	Yes	Yes			Yes
Economic	Grassroots	11	Purchase or invest (build civilian infrastructure) in or near disputed land or maritime features	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes

Category	Subtype	Tactic No.	PRC Tactic	Taiwan (1995–)	Japan (2010–)	Vietnam (2009–)	India (2014–)	Philippines (2012–)
Economic	Grassroots	12	Engage in land reclamation or other economic activities to expand the size of disputed territory			Yes		Yes
Economic	Grassroots	13	Ban or prohibit certain economic activities in disputed territories (e.g., fishing ban)	Yes		Yes		Yes
Economic	Grassroots	14	Use PRC companies or economic assets to advance disputed PRC territorial claims (e.g., use of PRC oil rigs)	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes
Economic	Grassroots	15	Expand or engage in new PRC commercial activity to, on, or near disputed territories, such as tourism, new commercial flight routes	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes
Economic	Grassroots	16	Engage in PRC economic or civilian activity in or near-target-sensitive or key geopolitical locations (e.g., near military bases or facilities)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Military	General	1	Engage in highly publicized and large-scale, cross-service military exercises or shows of force near or against the target	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Military	General	2	Explicitly threaten the use force or military escalation against the target if it takes certain actions	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes
Military	General	3	Deepen military cooperation and/or establish military bases or potential dual-use facilities in neighboring countries to threaten the target			Yes	Yes	
Military	General	4	Build up or acquire military capabilities for deterring or countering the target (e.g., military buildup in region near the target)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Military	General	5	Use large-scale or cross-service military activities or exercises (excludes cyber activities) to disrupt normal business activities within the target (e.g., missile launches that interfere with target commercial port activities)	Yes				
Military	Air	6	Declare an ADIZ near or surrounding the target	Yes	Yes			
Military	Air	7	Establish military or dual-use air bases or facilities in disputed territories			Yes	Yes	Yes
Military	Air	8	Engage in large-scale air exercises near the target's home or main territory	Yes			?	
Military	Air	9	Engage in large-scale air exercises near disputed territories	Yes			?	
Military	Air	10	Engage in or increase air patrols or intrusions near the target's home or main territory	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	

Category	Subtype	Tactic No.	PRC Tactic	Taiwan (1995–)	Japan (2010–)	Vietnam (2009–)	India (2014–)	Philippines (2012–)
Military	Air	11	Engage in or increase air patrols or intrusions near disputed territories	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Military	Air	12	Engage in military air intercepts or aggressive air maneuvers against target military aircraft	Yes	Yes			
Military	Air	13	Engage in live fire near the target or in simulated attacks (e.g., radar lock-on) on target assets	Yes				
Military	Air	14	Use PLAAF or PLAN Aviation to harass or disrupt target commercial activities in disputed territories			?		
Military	Air	15	Land or forward deploy military aircraft or equipment in or near disputed territories			Yes	Yes	Yes
Military	Maritime	16	Establish military or dual-use maritime bases or facilities in disputed territories			Yes		Yes
Military	Maritime	17	Engage in large-scale maritime exercises near the target's home or main territory	Yes		?		
Military	Maritime	18	Engage in large-scale maritime exercises near disputed territories	Yes	Yes	?		Yes
Military	Maritime	19	Engage in or increase maritime patrols or transits near the target's home or main territory	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Military	Maritime	20	Engage in or increase maritime patrols or transits near disputed territories	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes
Military	Maritime	21	Engage in military maritime intercepts or in aggressive maritime maneuvers against target maritime vessels	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes
Military	Maritime	22	Anchor maritime vessels and/or forward deploy military maritime troops and equipment in or near disputed territories			Yes		Yes
Military	Maritime	23	Engage in exchange of fire, live fire near the target, or simulated attacks (e.g., radar lock-on) on target assets via PLA maritime forces	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes
Military	Maritime	24	Use PLAN, CCG, or maritime militia to harass or disrupt target commercial activities in disputed territories (e.g., CCG harasses target oil exploration)	?	Yes	Yes		Yes
Military	Maritime	25	Use PLAN, CCG, or maritime militia to detain or capture target citizens operating in disputed territories			Yes		Yes
Military	Land	26	Engage in border (or cross-border) skirmishes and/or mass troops on land border for demonstration of force	Yes		?	Yes	



Category	Subtype	Tactic No.	PRC Tactic	Taiwan (1995–)	Japan (2010–)	Vietnam (2009–)	India (2014–)	Philippines (2012–)
Military	Land	27	Establish military or dual-use ground bases or facilities in disputed territories			Yes	Yes	Yes
Military	Land	28	Engage in large-scale land exercises or movement of troops near land border	Yes		Yes	Yes	
Military	Land	29	Engage in exchange of fire, live fire near the target, or simulated attacks (e.g., radar lock-on) on target assets via PLA ground forces <sup>b</sup>	Yes				
Military	Land	30	Land or forward deploy military ground troops or equipment in or near disputed territories			Yes	Yes	Yes
Cyber/IO	Bilateral	1	Engage in cyber operations against target government or military activities	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cyber/IO	Bilateral	2	Engage in cyber operations to disrupt or undermine target economic activity	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cyber/IO	Bilateral	3	Engage in cyber operations to interfere in the target's elections, including to support specific candidates or smear PRC opponents	Yes			?	Yes
Cyber/IO	Bilateral	4	Ban or limit information/content produced by leading voices in the target that oppose PRC views (e.g., ban music from prodemocracy artists)	Yes	?	?	?	?
Cyber/IO	Bilateral	5	Pressure or coerce the target to change/amend content written in textbooks (e.g., revise history textbooks)	Yes	Yes			
Cyber/IO	Bilateral	6	Coerce or attempt to buy target journalists and academics	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cyber/IO	Grassroots	7	Buy or control existing target media outlets (directly or through proxies)	Yes				
Cyber/IO	Grassroots	8	Buy content (e.g., pay for ads) in existing target media outlets or engage in content-sharing or joint production of content	Yes	Yes	Yes	?	Yes
Cyber/IO	Grassroots	9	Support or fund the establishment of new or existing pro-China media outlets operating in the target	Yes		Yes		Yes
Cyber/IO	Grassroots	10	Engage in social disinformation campaigns in the target	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes
Cyber/IO	Grassroots	11	Use defamation lawsuits to sue target researchers or organizations for voicing positions against China	Yes				

<sup>a</sup> Against the Tibetan government in exile.

<sup>b</sup> Here, PLA ground forces include the PLA Rocket Force.

**Table B.2. PRC Tactics by Category and Subtype**

<b>Reported PRC Gray Zone Tactics</b>		<b>Taiwan (1995–)</b>	<b>Japan (2010–)</b>	<b>Vietnam (2009–)</b>	<b>India (2014–)</b>	<b>Philippines (2012–)</b>
Category	Geopolitical	15.0	7.0	9.0	9.0	9.0
	Economic	15.0	5.5	13.0	7.0	13.5
	Cyber/IO	11.0	7.5	6.5	5.5	7.5
Subtype	International	7.0	2.0	8.0	8.0	5.0
	Bilateral	19.0	12.0	9.5	7.5	13.0
	Grassroots	15.0	6.0	11.0	6.0	12.0
<i>Nonmilitary totals</i>		41.0	20.0	28.5	21.5	30.0
Category	Military	21.5	13.0	22.0	14.0	17.0
Subtype	General	4.0	3.0	4.0	3.0	3.0
	Air	7.0	4.0	4.5	5.0	3.0
	Land	3.0	0.0	3.5	4.0	2.0
<i>Overall total</i>		62.5	33.0	50.5	35.5	47.0

## Appendix C. Assessing Problematic PRC Tactics

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Table C.1 presents the coding criteria for how each U.S. objective is weighted for indicator 1 and provides some illustrative examples of PRC tactics that match the objective. Each PRC tactic can score a maximum of 9 if it challenges all seven U.S. objectives or a minimum of 0 if it challenges none of the U.S. objectives. Tables C.2 through C.6 present tactic coding for each indicator.

Note that Chinese activities against the Tibetan government in exile in India (or Tibetans who have settled in India) are not coded as PRC gray zone tactics against India.

**Table C.1. U.S. Objectives and Coding Criteria for Indicator 1**

<b>U.S. Objectives</b>	<b>Tactics</b>	<b>Coding</b>
Promote a free and open Indo-Pacific	1. Support international law, norms, and values	0,1
	• Promote respect for sovereignty and independence of all nations (e.g., counter PRC actions that intervene in the domestic affairs of allies and partners)	1
	• Promote respect for international law or established international institutions	1
	• Promote respect for peaceful resolution of disputes (e.g., prevent PRC unilateral activities in disputed territories; or counter PRC threats to use force against ally or partner)	1
	• Ensure political freedom, political rights, and responsible governance	1
	2. Ensure common domains remain open and free	0,1
	• Ensure access to common domains in air, maritime, land, space, cyberspace, and information (e.g., maintain freedom of navigation and access to maritime choke points; counter PRC actions that manipulate the information environment or censor flow of information in ally or partner nations)	1
	• Ensure access to international resources	1
	3. Maintain free, fair, and reciprocal economic relationships (counter PRC economic aggression)	0,1,2
	<i>Coded as 2 for direct, highly coercive, high-profile, or significant economic actions that have major impact on target country's economic activities; coded as 1 for more-routine activities or actions that have some, but more limited, negative or indirect economic impact.</i>	
	• <i>Free:</i> Oppose restrictions, tariffs, or regulations placed on import and export of goods and on movement of people for economic activities; support allies and partners in engaging in normal business activities	
	– Coding example: Restrict flow of key goods	2
	– Coding example: Export PRC products that advance Chinese claims	1
• <i>Fair:</i> Protect allies and partners from PRC use of economic punishment to harm their economies; reduce PRC ability to engage in economic activities that deny or prevent allies or partners from conducting similar economic activity (such as in disputed territories); reduce violations to human rights and the environment in economic activities with China or in China		
– Coding example: Use diplomatic or political threats to disrupt normal business activities within the target.	2	
– Coding example: Engage in land reclamation or other activities to expand the size of disputed territories (this prevents allies and partners from engaging in similar economic activities on the disputed territory, but does not significantly damage the economic growth of the target country)	1	

<b>U.S. Objectives</b>	<b>Tactics</b>	<b>Coding</b>
Promote regional security and stability and ensure favorable balance of power	4. Bolster allies and partners	0,1
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help allies and partners sustain or expand their regional geopolitical or economic influence, relationships, or standing</li> </ul>	1
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Defend against nonmilitary PRC efforts that significantly undermine allied or partner regional standing, the legitimacy of their political institutions, or internal stability in allies and partners</li> </ul>	1
	5. Counter PRC military aggression	0,1,2
	<i>Coded as 2 for direct, highly aggressive, significant, or escalatory military actions; coded as 1 for more-routine PRC military actions or nonmilitary PRC actions that support or enable military activities</i>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deny the PRC military basing or dual-use infrastructure</li> </ul>	2
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Counter significant PRC exercises or military operations intended to intimidate allies and partners</li> </ul>	2
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Counter highly aggressive PRC military tactics (use of live fire, etc.)</li> </ul>	2
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prevent China from deploying new types of assets or capabilities to disputed territories or significantly increasing its abilities in such regions (including land reclamation)</li> </ul>	2
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Counter routine PRC military intrusions or probes (e.g., day-to-day PRC operations that do not necessarily shift the status quo; routine operations)</li> </ul>	1
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deny the PRC the ability to use proxies (third countries or nonstate actors) to militarily threaten U.S. allies and partners</li> </ul>	1
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deny the PRC the ability to convert civilian infrastructure to potential dual-use infrastructure or engage military operations from civilian investments (e.g., building of roads and highways) or use economic activities to directly support military activities</li> </ul>	1
	6. Defend allies militarily	0,1
<i>Coded as 1 if “Counter PRC military coercion” is coded as 1 or 2 and if China has used that tactic against at least one U.S. ally (Japan or the Philippines). This coding captures the priority that United States places on defending U.S. allies</i>		
7. Counterterrorism and VEOs	0,1	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prevent China from supporting VEOs or undermining U.S., ally, or partner efforts to ensure domestic stability (against separatists or VEOs)</li> </ul>	1	

**Table C.2. Indicator 1: Extent to Which PRC Tactics Challenge U.S. Objectives and Interests**

<b>Category</b>	<b>PRC Tactic</b>	<b>Support International Laws, Norms, and Values</b>	<b>Ensure Free and Open Common Domains</b>	<b>Maintain Free, Fair, and Reciprocal Economic Relations</b>	<b>Bolster Allies and Partners</b>	<b>Counter PRC Military Aggression</b>	<b>Defend Allies</b>	<b>Counter Terrorism and VEOs</b>	<b>Sum</b>
	Coding	(0,1)	(0,1)	(0,1,2)	(0,1)	(0,1,2)	(0,1)	(0,1)	
Geopolitical	Establish new major international initiatives or alternative international institutions to pressure or incentivize the target to accommodate PRC requests	1		1	1				3
Geopolitical	Exclude or limit the target's multilateral activities, including leadership and participation in international organizations	1			1				2
Geopolitical	Undermine the target's regional or international influence and partnerships, including by engaging in campaigns to blame or shame the target				1				1
Geopolitical	Support the target's adversaries or rival countries using a combination of political, economic, and military means			1	1	1	1		4
Geopolitical	Limit international sanctions or crack down on violent nonstate actors opposing the target and/or operating against the target	1			1			1	3
Geopolitical	Use international influence on third countries to pressure target citizens to retract or recant specific views/positions (e.g., pressuring ROK companies to force Taiwanese artists to drop independence position)	1							1
Geopolitical	Significantly manipulate or reduce high-level political contacts or engagements								0
Geopolitical	Use high-profile political or legal campaigns (lawfare) to pressure the target	1			1				2
Geopolitical	Engage in diplomatic or political activities to divide or split the target geographically beyond the territorial dispute (e.g., via	1			1				2

<b>Category</b>	<b>PRC Tactic</b>	<b>Support International Laws, Norms, and Values</b>	<b>Ensure Free and Open Common Domains</b>	<b>Maintain Free, Fair, and Reciprocal Economic Relations</b>	<b>Bolster Allies and Partners</b>	<b>Counter PRC Military Aggression</b>	<b>Defend Allies</b>	<b>Counter Terrorism and VEOs</b>	<b>Sum</b>
	preferred treatment to select territories, legal challenges)								
Geopolitical	Use diplomatic or political threats to disrupt normal business activities within the target (e.g., create stock market volatility)	1		2	1				4
Geopolitical	Detain or harass target citizens in China (beyond journalists and academics)	1							1
Geopolitical	Impose restrictions on travel or visas for select target leaders, political parties, or individuals	1							1
Geopolitical	Organize public protests (or counterprotests) in China or in the target region to criticize target activities	1		1					2
Geopolitical	Use and/or provide support to individual elites, political leaders, political parties, groups, or organizations to act on behalf of China in the target	1			1				2
Geopolitical	Use and/or provide support to religious groups or organizations to promote pro-China agenda	1							1
Geopolitical	Use and/or provide support to pro-China Chinese ethnic groups (e.g., ethnic business associations)	1							1
Geopolitical	Use and/or provide support to educational and civil society groups or organizations (that are not religious or political) to promote pro-China agenda (e.g., Confucius Institutes)	1							1
Geopolitical	Use and/or provide support to pro-China groups with criminal links or ties	1			1			1	3
Geopolitical	Use and/or provide support to other violent (insurgent, terrorist, or separatist) groups in the target	1			1			1	3

<b>Category</b>	<b>PRC Tactic</b>	<b>Support International Laws, Norms, and Values</b>	<b>Ensure Free and Open Common Domains</b>	<b>Maintain Free, Fair, and Reciprocal Economic Relations</b>	<b>Bolster Allies and Partners</b>	<b>Counter PRC Military Aggression</b>	<b>Defend Allies</b>	<b>Counter Terrorism and VEOs</b>	<b>Sum</b>
Geopolitical	Engage in covert action (PRC agents directly in the target country or region), such as assassination or harassment of opponents	1			1			1	3
Economic	Purchase or invest in large civilian infrastructure or assets (such as land) in a third country (particularly neighboring countries) to pressure the target				1	1			2
Economic	Export PRC products that advance PRC claims or narrative (e.g., products that portray disputed territories as part of China)			1					1
Economic	Require products or services from international firms to adhere to PRC requests and/or claims (compared with the target's claims)			1	1				2
Economic	Control or reduce availability of public or international resources to the target (e.g., constructing dams to control the flow of the river to the target)		1	2	1				4
Economic	Reduce trade or flow of specific goods (exports or imports)			2	1				3
Economic	Reduce provision of PRC direct investment or foreign aid			2					2
Economic	Harass, pressure, or co-opt businesses from the target region operating in China or competing for PRC projects in the target			2					2
Economic	Reduce PRC tourism to pressure the target			2					2
Economic	Reduce number of PRC students to pressure the target			1					1
Economic	Boycott, protest, destroy, or confiscate the target's goods or products in China, particularly goods that do not align with PRC interests			2					2



<b>Category</b>	<b>PRC Tactic</b>	<b>Support International Laws, Norms, and Values</b>	<b>Ensure Free and Open Common Domains</b>	<b>Maintain Free, Fair, and Reciprocal Economic Relations</b>	<b>Bolster Allies and Partners</b>	<b>Counter PRC Military Aggression</b>	<b>Defend Allies</b>	<b>Counter Terrorism and VEOs</b>	<b>Sum</b>
Economic	Purchase or invest (build civilian infrastructure) in or near disputed land or maritime features	1		1	1				3
Economic	Engage in land reclamation or other economic activities to expand the size of disputed territory	1		1	1				3
Economic	Ban or prohibit certain economic activities in disputed territories (e.g., fishing ban)	1		2					3
Economic	Use PRC companies or economic assets to advance disputed PRC territorial claims (e.g., use of PRC oil rigs)	1		1	1				3
Economic	Expand or engage in new PRC commercial activity to, on, or near disputed territories, such as tourism, new commercial flight routes	1		1	1				3
Economic	Engage in PRC economic or civilian activity in or near target-sensitive or key geopolitical locations (e.g., near military bases or facilities)			1	1	1	1		4
Military	Engage in highly publicized and large-scale, cross-service military exercises or shows of force near or against the target					2	1		3
Military	Explicitly threaten the use force or military escalation against the target if it takes certain actions	1				2	1		4
Military	Deepen military cooperation and/or establish military bases or potential dual-use facilities in neighboring countries to threaten the target				1	2			3
Military	Build up or acquire military capabilities for deterring or countering the target (e.g., military buildup in region near the target)		1			1	1		3
Military	Use large-scale or cross-service military activities or exercises (excludes cyber activities) to disrupt normal business activities	1		2		2			5

<b>Category</b>	<b>PRC Tactic</b>	<b>Support International Laws, Norms, and Values</b>	<b>Ensure Free and Open Common Domains</b>	<b>Maintain Free, Fair, and Reciprocal Economic Relations</b>	<b>Bolster Allies and Partners</b>	<b>Counter PRC Military Aggression</b>	<b>Defend Allies</b>	<b>Counter Terrorism and VEOs</b>	<b>Sum</b>
	within the target (e.g., missile launches that interfere with target commercial port activities)								
Military	Cancel or limit military-to-military (or paramilitary-to-paramilitary) exchanges								0
Military	Declare an ADIZ near or surrounding the target	1	1	1		2	1		6
Military	Establish military or dual-use air bases or facilities in disputed territories	1				2	1		4
Military	Engage in large-scale air exercises near the target's home or main territory	1				2			3
Military	Engage in large-scale air exercises near disputed territories	1				2	1		4
Military	Engage in or increase air patrols or intrusions near the target's home or main territory	1				1	1		3
Military	Engage in or increase air patrols or intrusions near disputed territories	1				1	1		3
Military	Engage in military air intercepts or aggressive air maneuvers against target military aircraft					1	1		2
Military	Engage in live fire near the target or in simulated attacks (e.g., radar lock-on) on target assets	1				2	1		4
Military	Use PLAAF or PLAN Aviation to harass or disrupt target commercial activities in disputed territories	1		1		1			3
Military	Land or forward deploy military aircraft or equipment in or near disputed territories	1				2	1		4
Military	Establish military or dual-use maritime bases or facilities in disputed territories	1				2	1		4
Military	Engage in large-scale maritime exercises near the target's home or main territory	1				2			3
Military	Engage in large-scale maritime exercises near disputed territories	1				2	1		4

<b>Category</b>	<b>PRC Tactic</b>	<b>Support International Laws, Norms, and Values</b>	<b>Ensure Free and Open Common Domains</b>	<b>Maintain Free, Fair, and Reciprocal Economic Relations</b>	<b>Bolster Allies and Partners</b>	<b>Counter PRC Military Aggression</b>	<b>Defend Allies</b>	<b>Counter Terrorism and VEOs</b>	<b>Sum</b>
Military	Engage in or increase maritime patrols or transits near the target's home or main territory	1				1	1		3
Military	Engage in or increase maritime patrols or transits near disputed territories	1				1	1		3
Military	Engage in military maritime intercepts or in aggressive maritime maneuvers against target maritime vessels					1	1		2
Military	Anchor maritime vessels and/or forward deploy military maritime troops and equipment in or near disputed territories	1				2	1		4
Military	Engage in exchange of fire, live fire near the target, or simulated attacks (e.g., radar lock-on) on target assets via PLA maritime forces	1				2	1		4
Military	Use PLAN, CCG, or maritime militia to harass or disrupt target commercial activities in disputed territories (e.g., CCG harasses target oil exploration)	1		1		1	1		4
Military	Use PLAN, CCG, or maritime militia to detain or capture target citizens operating in disputed territories	1				2	1		4
Military	Engage in border (or cross border) skirmishes and/or mass troops on land border for demonstration of force	1				2			3
Military	Establish military or dual-use ground bases or facilities in disputed territories	1				2	1		4
Military	Engage in large-scale land exercises or movement of troops near land border					2			2
Military	Engage in exchange of fire, live fire near the target, or simulated attacks (e.g., radar lock-on) on target assets via PLA ground forces	1				2			3
Military	Land or forward deploy military ground troops or equipment in or near disputed territories	1				2	1		4

<b>Category</b>	<b>PRC Tactic</b>	<b>Support International Laws, Norms, and Values</b>	<b>Ensure Free and Open Common Domains</b>	<b>Maintain Free, Fair, and Reciprocal Economic Relations</b>	<b>Bolster Allies and Partners</b>	<b>Counter PRC Military Aggression</b>	<b>Defend Allies</b>	<b>Counter Terrorism and VEOs</b>	<b>Sum</b>
Cyber/IO	Engage in cyber operations against target government or military activities	1	1			1	1		4
Cyber/IO	Engage in cyber operations to disrupt or undermine target economic activity	1	1	1	1				4
Cyber/IO	Engage in cyber operations to interfere in the target's elections, including to support specific candidates or smear PRC opponents	1	1		1				3
Cyber/IO	Ban or limit information/content produced by leading voices in the target that oppose PRC views (e.g., ban music from prodemocracy artists)		1						1
Cyber/IO	Pressure or coerce the target to change/amend content written in textbooks (e.g., revise history textbooks)		1						1
Cyber/IO	Coerce or attempt to buy target journalists and academics	1							1
Cyber/IO	Buy or control existing target media outlets (directly or through proxies)	1	1	1	1				4
Cyber/IO	Buy content (e.g., pay for ads) in existing target media outlets or engage in content-sharing or joint production of content		1	1					2
Cyber/IO	Support or fund the establishment of new or existing pro-China media outlets operating in the target		1		1				2
Cyber/IO	Engage in social disinformation campaigns in the target	1	1		1				3
Cyber/IO	Use defamation lawsuits to sue target researchers or organizations for voicing positions against China		1						1

**Table C.3. Indicator 2: Difficulty Allies and Partners Face Countering PRC Tactics**

Category	Tactic No.	Subtype	PRC Tactic	TWN	JPN	VNM	IND	PHL	Average Difficulty
Geopolitical	4	International	Support the target's adversaries or rival countries using a combination of political, economic, and military means		2		2		2.00
Geopolitical	5	International	Limit international sanctions or crack down on violent nonstate actors opposing the target and/or operating against the target				2		2.00
Geopolitical	10	Bilateral	Use diplomatic or political threats to disrupt normal business activities within the target (e.g., create stock market volatility)	2					2.00
Geopolitical	14	Grassroots	Use and/or provide support to individual elites, political leaders, political parties, groups, or organizations to act on behalf of China in the target	2				2	2.00
Economic	14	Grassroots	Use PRC companies or economic assets to advance disputed PRC territorial claims (e.g., use of PRC oil rigs)	2	2	2		2	2.00
Military	3	General	Deepen military cooperation and/or establish military bases or potential dual-use facilities in neighboring countries to threaten the target			2	2		2.00
Military	7	Air	Establish military or dual-use air bases or facilities in disputed territories			2	2	2	2.00
Military	15	Air	Land or forward deploy military aircraft or equipment in or near disputed territories			2	2	2	2.00
Military	16	Maritime	Establish military or dual-use maritime bases or facilities in disputed territories			2		2	2.00
Military	22	Maritime	Anchor maritime vessels and/or forward deploy military maritime troops and equipment in or near disputed territories			2		2	2.00
Military	27	Land	Establish military or dual-use ground bases or facilities in disputed territories			2	2	2	2.00
Military	30	Land	Land or forward deploy military ground troops or equipment in or near disputed territories			2	2	2	2.00
Cyber/IO	7	Grassroots	Buy or control existing target media outlets (directly or through proxies)	2					2.00
Military	24	Maritime	Use PLAN, CCG, or maritime militia to harass or disrupt target commercial activities in disputed territories (e.g., CCG harasses target oil exploration)	2	1	2		2	1.75
Geopolitical	2	International	Exclude or limit the target's leadership and participation in existing international organizations	2		1	2		1.67

Category	Tactic No.	Subtype	PRC Tactic	TWN	JPN	VNM	IND	PHL	Average Difficulty
Economic	1	International	Purchase or invest in large civilian infrastructure or assets (such as land) in a third country (particularly neighboring countries) that pressure the target	1		2	2		1.67
Economic	5	Bilateral	Reduce trade or flow of specific goods (exports or imports)	2	1	2	1	2	1.60
Geopolitical	11	Bilateral	Detain or harass target citizens in China (beyond journalists and academics)	1	2				1.50
Geopolitical	3	International	Undermine the target's regional or international influence and partnerships, including by engaging in campaigns to blame or shame the target	2	1	1	2	1	1.40
Military	1	General	Engage in highly publicized and large-scale, cross-service military exercises or shows of force near or against the target	2	1	1	2	1	1.40
Military	4	General	Build up or acquire military capabilities for deterring or countering the target (e.g., military buildup in region near the target)	2	1	1	2	1	1.40
Geopolitical	1	International	Establish new major international initiatives or alternative international institutions to pressure or incentivize the target to accommodate PRC requests			1	1	2	1.33
Geopolitical	16	Grassroots	Use and/or provide support to pro-China Chinese ethnic groups (e.g., ethnic business associations)	2		1		1	1.33
Military	26	Land	Engage in border (or cross border) skirmishes and/or mass troops on land border for demonstration of force	1		1	2		1.33
Economic	4	International	Control or reduce availability of public or international resources to the target (e.g., constructing dams to control the flow of the river to the target)	2		1	1	1	1.25
Economic	15	Grassroots	Expand or engage in new PRC commercial activity to, on, or near disputed territories, such as tourism, new commercial flight routes	2		1	1	1	1.25
Geopolitical	6	International	Use international influence on third countries to pressure target citizens to retract or recant specific views/positions (e.g., pressuring ROK companies to force Taiwanese artists to drop independence position)	1		1			1.00
Geopolitical	8	Bilateral	Use high-profile political or legal campaigns (lawfare) to pressure the target	1	1	1	1	1	1.00
Geopolitical	9	Bilateral	Engage in diplomatic or political activities to divide or split the target geographically beyond the territorial dispute (e.g., via preferred treatment to select territories, legal challenges)	1					1.00

Category	Tactic No.	Subtype	PRC Tactic	TWN	JPN	VNM	IND	PHL	Average Difficulty
Geopolitical	13	Bilateral	Organize public protests (or counterprotests) in China or in the target region to criticize target activities	1	1	1	1	1	1.00
Geopolitical	15	Grassroots	Use and/or provide support to religious groups or organizations to promote pro-China agenda	1					1.00
Geopolitical	18	Grassroots	Use and/or provide support to pro-China groups with criminal links or ties	1					1.00
Economic	3	International	Require products or services from international firms to adhere to PRC requests and/or claims compared with the target's claims	1	1	1	1	1	1.00
Economic	7	Bilateral	Harass, pressure, or co-opt businesses from the target region operating in China or competing for PRC projects in the target	1	1	1	1	1	1.00
Economic	8	Bilateral	Reduce PRC tourism to pressure the target	1	1	1		1	1.00
Economic	9	Bilateral	Reduce number of PRC students to pressure the target	1					1.00
Economic	10	Bilateral	Boycott, protest, destroy, or confiscate the target's goods or products in China, particularly goods that do not align with PRC interests	1	1			1	1.00
Economic	11	Grassroots	Purchase or invest (build civilian infrastructure) in or near disputed land or maritime features	1		1	1	1	1.00
Economic	12	Grassroots	Engage in land reclamation or other economic activities to expand the size of disputed territory			1		1	1.00
Economic	13	Grassroots	Ban or prohibit certain economic activities in disputed territories (e.g., fishing ban)	1		1		1	1.00
Economic	16	Grassroots	Engage in PRC economic or civilian activity in or near target-sensitive or key geopolitical locations (e.g., near military bases or facilities)	1	1	1	1	1	1.00
Military	2	General	Explicitly threaten the use of force or military escalation against the target if it takes certain actions	1	1	1		1	1.00
Military	5	General	Use large-scale or cross-service military activities or exercises (excludes cyber activities) to disrupt normal business activities within the target (e.g., missile launches that interfere with target commercial port activities)	1					1.00
Military	6	Air	Declare an ADIZ near or surrounding the target	1	1				1.00
Military	8	Air	Engage in large-scale air exercises near the target's home or main territory	1			1		1.00
Military	9	Air	Engage in large-scale air exercises near disputed territories	1			1		1.00

Category	Tactic No.	Subtype	PRC Tactic	TWN	JPN	VNM	IND	PHL	Average Difficulty
Military	10	Air	Engage in or increase air patrols or intrusions near the target's home or main territory	1	1	1	1		1.00
Military	11	Air	Engage in or increase air patrols or intrusions near disputed territories	1	1	1	1	1	1.00
Military	12	Air	Engage in military air intercepts or aggressive air maneuvers against target military aircraft	1	1				1.00
Military	13	Air	Engage in live fire near the target or in simulated attacks (e.g., radar lock-on) on target assets	1					1.00
Military	14	Air	Use PLAAF or PLAN Aviation to harass or disrupt target commercial activities in disputed territories			1			1.00
Military	17	Maritime	Engage in large-scale maritime exercises near the target's home or main territory	1		1			1.00
Military	18	Maritime	Engage in large-scale maritime exercises near disputed territories	1	1	1		1	1.00
Military	19	Maritime	Engage in or increase maritime patrols or transits near the target's home or main territory	1	1	1	1	1	1.00
Military	20	Maritime	Engage in or increase maritime patrols or transits near disputed territories	1	1	1		1	1.00
Military	21	Maritime	Engage in military maritime intercepts or in aggressive maritime maneuvers against target maritime vessels	1	1	1		1	1.00
Military	23	Maritime	Engage in exchange of fire, live fire near the target, or simulated attacks (e.g., radar lock-on) on target assets via PLA maritime forces	1	1	1		1	1.00
Military	25	Maritime	Use PLAN, CCG, or maritime militia to detain or capture target citizens operating in disputed territories			1		1	1.00
Military	28	Land	Engage in large-scale land exercises or movement of troops near land border	1		1	1		1.00
Military	29	Land	Engage in exchange of fire, live fire near the target, or simulated attacks (e.g., radar lock-on) on target assets via PLA ground forces	1					1.00
Cyber/IO	1	Bilateral	Engage in cyber operations against target government or military activities	1	1	1	1	1	1.00
Cyber/IO	2	Bilateral	Engage in cyber operations to disrupt or undermine target economic activity	1	1	1	1	1	1.00
Cyber/IO	10	Grassroots	Engage in social disinformation campaigns in the target	2	1	1	0	1	1.00



Category	Tactic No.	Subtype	PRC Tactic	TWN	JPN	VNM	IND	PHL	Average Difficulty
Cyber/IO	11	Grassroots	Use defamation lawsuits to sue target researchers or organizations for voicing positions against China	1					1.00
Cyber/IO	9	Grassroots	Support or fund the establishment of new or existing pro-China media outlets operating in the target	1	1	0		1	0.75
Geopolitical	12	Bilateral	Impose restrictions on travel or visas for select target leaders, political parties, or individuals	1			0	1	0.67
Economic	6	Bilateral	Reduce provision of PRC direct investment or foreign aid	1		0		1	0.67
Cyber/IO	3	Bilateral	Engage in cyber operations to interfere in the target's elections, including to support specific candidates or smear PRC opponents	1			0	1	0.67
Cyber/IO	8	Grassroots	Buy content (e.g., pay for ads) in existing target media outlets or engage in content-sharing or joint production of content	1	0	0	1	1	0.60
Geopolitical	17	Grassroots	Use and/or provide support to educational and civil society groups or organizations (that are not religious or political) to promote pro-China agenda (e.g., Confucius Institutes)	1	0	0	0	1	0.40
Geopolitical	7	Bilateral	Significantly manipulate or reduce high-level political contacts or engagements	1	0	0		0	0.25
Cyber/IO	6	Bilateral	Coerce or attempt to buy target journalists and academics	0	0	0	0	1	0.20
Geopolitical	19	Grassroots	Use and/or provide support to other violent (insurgent, terrorist, or separatist) groups in the target				0		0.00
Economic	2	International	Export PRC products that advance PRC claims or narrative (e.g., products that portray disputed territories as part of China)	0		0		0	0.00
Cyber/IO	4	Bilateral	Ban or limit information/content produced by leading voices in the target that oppose PRC views (e.g., ban music from prodemocracy artists)	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
Cyber/IO	5	Bilateral	Pressure or coerce the target to change/amend content written in textbooks (e.g., revise history textbooks)	0	0				0.00
Geopolitical	20	Grassroots	Engage in covert action (PRC agents directly in the target country or region), such as assassination or harassment of opponents					— <sup>a</sup>	N/A

NOTES: TWN = Taiwan; JPN = Japan; VMN = Vietnam; IND = India; PHL = the Philippines.

<sup>a</sup> Chinese activities against the Tibetan government in exile in India (or Tibetans who have settled in India) are not coded as PRC gray zone tactics against India.

**Table C.4. Indicator 3: Prevalence of PRC Gray Zone Tactics**

Category	Tactic No.	Subtype	PRC Tactic	Number of Allies and Partners Affected	Prevalence
Geopolitical	3	International	Undermine the target's regional or international influence and partnerships, including by engaging in campaigns to blame or shame the target	5.0	1.0
Geopolitical	8	Bilateral	Use high-profile political or legal campaigns (lawfare) to pressure the target	5.0	1.0
Geopolitical	17	Grassroots	Use and/or provide support to educational and civil society groups or organizations (that are not religious or political) to promote pro-China agenda (e.g., Confucius Institutes)	5.0	1.0
Economic	16	Grassroots	Engage in PRC economic or civilian activity in or near target-sensitive or key geopolitical locations (e.g., near military bases or facilities)	5.0	1.0
Military	1	General	Engage in highly publicized and large-scale, cross-service military exercises or shows of force near or against the target	5.0	1.0
Military	4	General	Build up or acquire PRC military capabilities for deterring or countering the target (e.g., military buildup in region near the target)	5.0	1.0
Military	11	Air	Engage in or increase air patrols or intrusions near disputed territories	5.0	1.0
Military	19	Maritime	Engage in or increase maritime patrols or transits near the target's home or main territory	5.0	1.0
Cyber/IO	1	Bilateral	Engage in cyber operations against target government or military activities	5.0	1.0
Cyber/IO	2	Bilateral	Engage in cyber operations to disrupt or undermine target economic activity	5.0	1.0
Cyber/IO	6	Bilateral	Coerce or attempt to buy target journalists and academics	5.0	1.0
Cyber/IO	10	Grassroots	Engage in social disinformation campaigns in the target	5.0	1.0
Geopolitical	13	Bilateral	Organize public protests (or counterprotests) in China or in the target region to criticize target activities	4.5	0.9
Economic	5	Bilateral	Reduce trade or flow of specific goods (exports or imports)	4.5	0.9
Cyber/IO	8	Grassroots	Buy content (e.g., pay for ads) in existing target media outlets or engage in content-sharing or joint production of content	4.5	0.9
Geopolitical	7	Bilateral	Significantly manipulate or reduce high-level political contacts or engagements	4.0	0.8
Economic	3	International	Require products or services from international firms to adhere to PRC requests and/or claims compared with the target's claims	4.0	0.8

Category	Tactic No.	Subtype	PRC Tactic	Number of Allies and Partners Affected	Prevalence
Economic	4	International	Control or reduce availability of public or international resources to the target (e.g., constructing dams to control the flow of the river to the target)	4.0	0.8
Economic	8	Bilateral	Reduce PRC tourism to pressure the target	4.0	0.8
Economic	11	Grassroots	Purchase or invest (build civilian infrastructure) in or near disputed land or maritime features	4.0	0.8
Economic	14	Grassroots	Use PRC companies or economic assets to advance disputed PRC territorial claims (e.g., use of PRC oil rigs)	4.0	0.8
Economic	15	Grassroots	Expand or engage in new PRC commercial activity to, on, or near disputed territories, such as tourism, new commercial flight routes	4.0	0.8
Military	2	General	Explicitly threaten the use of force or military escalation against the target if it takes certain actions	4.0	0.8
Military	10	Air	Engage in or increase air patrols or intrusions near the target's home or main territory	4.0	0.8
Military	20	Maritime	Engage in or increase maritime patrols or transits near disputed territories	4.0	0.8
Military	21	Maritime	Engage in military maritime intercepts or in aggressive maritime maneuvers against target maritime vessels	4.0	0.8
Military	23	Maritime	Engage in exchange of fire, live fire near the target, or simulated attacks (e.g., radar lock-on) on target assets via PLA maritime forces	4.0	0.8
Cyber/IO	9	Grassroots	Support or fund the establishment of new or existing pro-China media outlets operating in the target	4.0	0.8
Military	18	Maritime	Engage in large-scale maritime exercises near disputed territories	3.5	0.7
Military	24	Maritime	Use PLAN, CCG, or maritime militia to harass or disrupt target commercial activities in disputed territories (e.g., CCG harasses target oil exploration)	3.5	0.7
Geopolitical	1	International	Establish new major international initiatives or alternative international institutions to pressure or incentivize the target to accommodate PRC requests	3.0	0.6
Geopolitical	2	International	Exclude or limit the target's leadership and participation in existing international organizations	3.0	0.6
Geopolitical	12	Bilateral	Impose restrictions on travel or visas for select target leaders, political parties, or individuals	3.0	0.6
Geopolitical	16	Grassroots	Use and/or provide support to pro-China Chinese ethnic groups (e.g., ethnic business associations)	3.0	0.6
Economic	1	International	Purchase or invest in large civilian infrastructure or assets (such as land) in a third country (particularly neighboring countries) that pressure the target	3.0	0.6

Category	Tactic No.	Subtype	PRC Tactic	Number of Allies and Partners Affected	Prevalence
Economic	2	International	Export PRC products that advance PRC claims or narrative (e.g., products that portray disputed territories as part of China)	3.0	0.6
Economic	7	Bilateral	Harass, pressure, or co-opt businesses from the target region operating in China or competing for PRC projects in the target	3.0	0.6
Economic	10	Bilateral	Boycott, protest, destroy, or confiscate the target's goods or products in China, particularly goods that do not align with PRC interests	3.0	0.6
Economic	13	Grassroots	Ban or prohibit certain economic activities in disputed territories (e.g., fishing ban)	3.0	0.6
Military	7	Air	Establish military or dual-use air bases or facilities in disputed territories	3.0	0.6
Military	15	Air	Land or forward deploy military aircraft or equipment in or near disputed territories	3.0	0.6
Military	27	Land	Establish military or dual-use ground bases or facilities in disputed territories	3.0	0.6
Military	28	Land	Engage in large-scale land exercises or movement of troops near land border	3.0	0.6
Military	30	Land	Land or forward deploy military ground troops or equipment in or near disputed territories	3.0	0.6
Cyber/IO	4	Bilateral	Ban or limit information/content produced by leading voices in the target that oppose PRC views (e.g., ban music from prodemocracy artists)	3.0	0.6
Economic	6	Bilateral	Reduce provision of PRC direct investment or foreign aid	2.5	0.5
Military	26	Land	Engage in border (or cross border) skirmishes and/or mass troops on land border for demonstration of force	2.5	0.5
Cyber/IO	3	Bilateral	Engage in cyber operations to interfere in the target's elections, including to support specific candidates or smear PRC opponents	2.5	0.5
Geopolitical	4	International	Support the target's adversaries or rival countries using a combination of political, economic, and military means	2.0	0.4
Geopolitical	6	International	Use international influence on third countries to pressure target citizens to retract or recant specific views/positions (e.g., pressuring ROK companies to force Taiwanese artists to drop independence position)	2.0	0.4
Geopolitical	11	Bilateral	Detain or harass target citizens in China (beyond journalists and academics)	2.0	0.4
Geopolitical	14	Grassroots	Use and/or provide support to individual elites, political leaders, political parties, groups, or organizations to act on behalf of China in the target	2.0	0.4
Economic	12	Grassroots	Engage in land reclamation or other economic activities to expand the size of disputed territory	2.0	0.4
Military	3	General	Deepen military cooperation and/or establish military bases or potential dual-use facilities in neighboring countries to threaten the target	2.0	0.4

Category	Tactic No.	Subtype	PRC Tactic	Number of Allies and Partners Affected	Prevalence
Military	6	Air	Declare an ADIZ near or surrounding the target	2.0	0.4
Military	12	Air	Engage in military air intercepts or aggressive air maneuvers against target military aircraft	2.0	0.4
Military	16	Maritime	Establish military or dual-use maritime bases or facilities in disputed territories	2.0	0.4
Military	22	Maritime	Anchor maritime vessels and/or forward deploy military maritime troops and equipment in or near disputed territories	2.0	0.4
Military	25	Maritime	Use PLAN, CCG, or maritime militia to detain or capture target citizens operating in disputed territories	2.0	0.4
Cyber/IO	5	Bilateral	Pressure or coerce the target to change/amend content written in textbooks (e.g., revise history textbooks)	2.0	0.4
Military	8	Air	Engage in large-scale air exercises near the target's home or main territory	1.5	0.3
Military	9	Air	Engage in large-scale air exercises near disputed territories	1.5	0.3
Military	17	Maritime	Engage in large-scale maritime exercises near the target's home or main territory	1.5	0.3
Geopolitical	5	International	Limit international sanctions or crack down on violent nonstate actors opposing the target and/or operating against the target	1.0	0.2
Geopolitical	9	Bilateral	Engage in diplomatic or political activities to divide or split the target geographically beyond the territorial dispute (e.g., via preferred treatment to select territories, legal challenges)	1.0	0.2
Geopolitical	10	Bilateral	Use diplomatic or political threats to disrupt normal business activities within the target (e.g., create stock market volatility)	1.0	0.2
Geopolitical	15	Grassroots	Use and/or provide support to religious groups or organizations to promote pro-China agenda	1.0	0.2
Geopolitical	18	Grassroots	Use and/or provide support to pro-China groups with criminal links or ties	1.0	0.2
Economic	9	Bilateral	Reduce number of PRC students to pressure the target	1.0	0.2
Military	5	General	Use large-scale or cross-service military activities or exercises (excludes cyber activities) to disrupt normal business activities within the target (e.g., missile launches that interfere with target commercial port activities)	1.0	0.2
Military	13	Air	Engage in live fire near the target or in simulated attacks (e.g., radar lock-on) on target assets	1.0	0.2
Military	29	Land	Engage in exchange of fire, live fire near the target, or simulated attacks (e.g., radar lock-on) on target assets via PLA ground forces	1.0	0.2
Cyber/IO	7	Grassroots	Buy or control existing target media outlets (directly or through proxies)	1.0	0.2

<b>Category</b>	<b>Tactic No.</b>	<b>Subtype</b>	<b>PRC Tactic</b>	<b>Number of Allies and Partners Affected</b>	<b>Prevalence</b>
Cyber/IO	11	Grassroots	Use defamation lawsuits to sue target researchers or organizations for voicing positions against China	1.0	0.2
Geopolitical	19	Grassroots	Use and/or provide support to other violent (insurgent, terrorist, or separatist) groups in the target	0.5	0.1
Military	14	Air	Use PLAAF or PLAN Aviation to harass or disrupt target commercial activities in disputed territories	0.5	0.1
Geopolitical	20	Grassroots	Engage in covert action (PRC agents directly in the target country or region), such as assassination or harassment of opponents	0.0 <sup>a</sup>	0.0

<sup>a</sup> Chinese activities against the Tibetan government in exile in India (or Tibetans who have settled in India) are not coded as PRC gray zone tactics against India.

**Table C.5. Aggregate Indicator—Prioritizing U.S. Interests: Problematic PRC Gray Zone Tactics**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Tactic No.</b>	<b>Subtype</b>	<b>PRC Tactic</b>	<b>Weight</b>
Military	7	Air	Establish military or dual-use air bases or facilities in disputed territories	12.84
Military	15	Air	Land or forward deploy military aircraft or equipment in or near disputed territories	12.84
Military	27	Land	Establish military or dual-use ground bases or facilities in disputed territories	12.84
Military	30	Land	Land or forward deploy military ground troops or equipment in or near disputed territories	12.84
Economic	14	Grassroots	Use PRC companies or economic assets to advance disputed PRC territorial claims (e.g., use of PRC oil rigs)	12.53
Military	24	Maritime	Use PLAN, CCG, or maritime militia to harass or disrupt target commercial activities in disputed territories (e.g., CCG harasses target oil exploration)	12.49
Geopolitical	4	International	Support the target's adversaries or rival countries using a combination of political, economic, and military means	12.04
Military	16	Maritime	Establish military or dual-use maritime bases or facilities in disputed territories	12.04
Military	22	Maritime	Anchor maritime vessels and/or forward deploy military maritime troops and equipment in or near disputed territories	12.04
Economic	5	Bilateral	Reduce trade or flow of specific goods (exports or imports)	11.73
Military	1	General	Engage in highly publicized and large-scale, cross-service military exercises or shows of force near or against the target	11.53
Military	4	General	Build up or acquire PRC military capabilities for deterring or countering the target (e.g., military buildup in region near the target)	11.53
Economic	16	Grassroots	Engage in PRC economic or civilian activity in or near target-sensitive or key geopolitical locations (e.g., near military bases or facilities)	11.44
Cyber/IO	1	Bilateral	Engage in cyber operations against target government or military activities	11.44
Cyber/IO	2	Bilateral	Engage in cyber operations to disrupt or undermine target economic activity	11.44
Economic	4	International	Control or reduce availability of public or international resources to the target (e.g., constructing dams to control the flow of the river to the target)	11.39
Military	6	Air	Declare an ADIZ near or surrounding the target	11.27
Geopolitical	10	Bilateral	Use diplomatic or political threats to disrupt normal business activities within the target (e.g., create stock market volatility)	11.24
Cyber/IO	7	Grassroots	Buy or control existing target media outlets (directly or through proxies)	11.24
Military	3	General	Deepen military cooperation and/or establish military bases or potential dual-use facilities in neighboring countries to threaten the target	10.93
Military	2	General	Explicitly threaten the use of force or military escalation against the target if it takes certain actions	10.64
Military	23	Maritime	Engage in exchange of fire, live fire near the target, or simulated attacks (e.g., radar lock-on) on target assets via PLA maritime forces	10.64
Military	11	Air	Engage in or increase air patrols or intrusions near disputed territories	10.33

Category	Tactic No.	Subtype	PRC Tactic	Weight
Military	19	Maritime	Engage in or increase maritime patrols or transits near the target's home or main territory	10.33
Cyber/IO	10	Grassroots	Engage in social disinformation campaigns in the target	10.33
Economic	15	Grassroots	Expand or engage in new PRC commercial activity to, on, or near disputed territories, such as tourism, new commercial flight routes	10.28
Military	18	Maritime	Engage in large-scale maritime exercises near disputed territories	10.24
Geopolitical	5	International	Limit international sanctions or crack down on violent nonstate actors opposing the target and/or operating against the target	10.13
Geopolitical	14	Grassroots	Use and/or provide support to individual elites, political leaders, political parties, groups, or organizations to act on behalf of China in the target	9.82
Geopolitical	1	International	Establish new major international initiatives or alternative international institutions to pressure or incentivize the target to accommodate PRC requests	9.73
Geopolitical	2	International	Exclude or limit the target's leadership and participation in existing international organizations	9.62
Economic	1	International	Purchase or invest in large civilian infrastructure or assets (such as land) in a third country (particularly neighboring countries) that pressure the target	9.62
Economic	11	Grassroots	Purchase or invest (build civilian infrastructure) in or near disputed land or maritime features	9.53
Military	10	Air	Engage in or increase air patrols or intrusions near the target's home or main territory	9.53
Military	20	Maritime	Engage in or increase maritime patrols or transits near disputed territories	9.53
Military	5	General	Use large-scale or cross-service military activities or exercises (excludes cyber activities) to disrupt normal business activities within the target (e.g., missile launches that interfere with target commercial port activities)	9.36
Military	26	Land	Engage in border (or cross border) skirmishes and/or mass troops on land border for demonstration of force	9.33
Geopolitical	3	International	Undermine the target's regional or international influence and partnerships, including by engaging in campaigns to blame or shame the target	9.31
Geopolitical	8	Bilateral	Use high-profile political or legal campaigns (lawfare) to pressure the target	9.22
Military	25	Maritime	Use PLAN, CCG, or maritime militia to detain or capture target citizens operating in disputed territories	9.04
Geopolitical	13	Bilateral	Organize public protests (or counterprotests) in China or in the target region to criticize target activities	8.82
Economic	13	Grassroots	Ban or prohibit certain economic activities in disputed territories (e.g., fishing ban)	8.73
Military	9	Air	Engage in large-scale air exercises near disputed territories	8.64
Economic	3	International	Require products or services from international firms to adhere to PRC requests and/or claims compared with the target's claims	8.42
Economic	8	Bilateral	Reduce PRC tourism to pressure the target	8.42
Military	21	Maritime	Engage in military maritime intercepts or in aggressive maritime maneuvers against target maritime vessels	8.42
Military	13	Air	Engage in live fire near the target or in simulated attacks (e.g., radar lock-on) on target assets	8.24



Category	Tactic No.	Subtype	PRC Tactic	Weight
Economic	12	Grassroots	Engage in land reclamation or other economic activities to expand the size of disputed territory	7.93
Cyber/IO	9	Grassroots	Support or fund the establishment of new or existing pro-China media outlets operating in the target	7.67
Cyber/IO	8	Grassroots	Buy content (e.g., pay for ads) in existing target media outlets or engage in content-sharing or joint production of content	7.62
Economic	7	Bilateral	Harass, pressure, or co-opt businesses from the target region operating in China or competing for PRC projects in the target	7.62
Economic	10	Bilateral	Boycott, protest, destroy, or confiscate the target's goods or products in China, particularly goods that do not align with PRC interests	7.62
Military	28	Land	Engage in large-scale land exercises or movement of troops near land border	7.62
Military	8	Air	Engage in large-scale air exercises near the target's home or main territory	7.53
Military	17	Maritime	Engage in large-scale maritime exercises near the target's home or main territory	7.53
Geopolitical	16	Grassroots	Use and/or provide support to pro-China Chinese ethnic groups (e.g., ethnic business associations)	7.51
Cyber/IO	3	Bilateral	Engage in cyber operations to interfere in the target's elections, including to support specific candidates or smear PRC opponents	7.33
Geopolitical	11	Bilateral	Detain or harass target citizens in China (beyond journalists and academics)	7.21
Geopolitical	18	Grassroots	Use and/or provide support to pro-China groups with criminal links or ties	7.13
Military	29	Land	Engage in exchange of fire, live fire near the target, or simulated attacks (e.g., radar lock-on) on target assets via PLA ground forces	7.13
Military	12	Air	Engage in military air intercepts or aggressive air maneuvers against target military aircraft	6.82
Military	14	Air	Use PLAAF or PLAN Aviation to harass or disrupt target commercial activities in disputed territories	6.73
Geopolitical	17	Grassroots	Use and/or provide support to educational and civil society groups or organizations (that are not religious or political) to promote pro-China agenda (e.g., Confucius Institutes)	6.31
Economic	6	Bilateral	Reduce provision of PRC direct investment or foreign aid	6.22
Geopolitical	9	Bilateral	Engage in diplomatic or political activities to divide or split the target geographically beyond the territorial dispute (e.g., via preferred treatment to select territories, legal challenges)	6.02
Geopolitical	6	International	Use international influence on third countries to pressure target citizens to retract or recant specific views/positions (e.g., pressuring ROK companies to force Taiwanese artists to drop independence position)	5.71
Cyber/IO	6	Bilateral	Coerce or attempt to buy target journalists and academics	5.71
Geopolitical	12	Bilateral	Impose restrictions on travel or visas for select target leaders, political parties, or individuals	5.51
Geopolitical	15	Grassroots	Use and/or provide support to religious groups or organizations to promote pro-China agenda	4.91
Economic	9	Bilateral	Reduce number of PRC students to pressure the target	4.91
Cyber/IO	11	Grassroots	Use defamation lawsuits to sue target researchers or organizations for voicing positions against China	4.91

Category	Tactic No.	Subtype	PRC Tactic	Weight
Geopolitical	7	Bilateral	Significantly manipulate or reduce high-level political contacts or engagements	3.95
Geopolitical	19	Grassroots	Use and/or provide support to other violent (insurgent, terrorist, or separatist) groups in the target	3.73
Economic	2	International	Export PRC products that advance PRC claims or narrative (e.g., products that portray disputed territories as part of China)	3.51
Cyber/IO	4	Bilateral	Ban or limit information/content produced by leading voices in the target that oppose PRC views (e.g., ban music from prodemocracy artists)	3.51
Cyber/IO	5	Bilateral	Pressure or coerce the target to change/amend content written in textbooks (e.g., revise history textbooks)	2.71
Geopolitical	20	Grassroots	Engage in covert action (PRC agents directly in the target country or region), such as assassination or harassment of opponents	N/A <sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Chinese activities against the Tibetan government in exile in India (or Tibetans who have settled in India) are not coded as PRC gray zone tactics against India.

**Table C.6. Aggregate Indicator—Equal Weighting of U.S. Interests and Allied and Partner Concerns: Problematic PRC Gray Zone Tactics**

Category	Tactic No.	Subtype	PRC Tactic	Weight
Military	7	Air	Establish military or dual-use air bases or facilities in disputed territories	13.96
Military	15	Air	Land or forward deploy military aircraft or equipment in or near disputed territories	13.96
Military	27	Land	Establish military or dual-use ground bases or facilities in disputed territories	13.96
Military	30	Land	Land or forward deploy military ground troops or equipment in or near disputed territories	13.96
Economic	14	Grassroots	Use PRC companies or economic assets to advance disputed PRC territorial claims (e.g., use of PRC oil rigs)	13.87
Military	24	Maritime	Use PLAN, CCG, or maritime militia to harass or disrupt target commercial activities in disputed territories (e.g., CCG harasses target oil exploration)	13.36
Geopolitical	4	International	Support the target's adversaries or rival countries using a combination of political, economic, and military means	13.16
Military	16	Maritime	Establish military or dual-use maritime bases or facilities in disputed territories	13.16
Military	22	Maritime	Anchor maritime vessels and/or forward deploy military maritime troops and equipment in or near disputed territories	13.16
Economic	5	Bilateral	Reduce trade or flow of specific goods (exports or imports)	12.67
Geopolitical	10	Bilateral	Use diplomatic or political threats to disrupt normal business activities within the target (e.g., create stock market volatility)	12.36
Cyber/IO	7	Grassroots	Buy or control existing target media outlets (directly or through proxies)	12.36
Military	1	General	Engage in highly publicized and large-scale, cross-service military exercises or shows of force near or against target	12.27

Category	Tactic No.	Subtype	PRC Tactic	Weight
Military	3	General	Deepen military cooperation and/or establish military bases or potential dual-use facilities in neighboring countries to threaten the target	12.27
Military	4	General	Build up or acquire military capabilities for deterring or countering the target (e.g., military buildup in region near the target)	12.27
Economic	4	International	Control or reduce availability of public or international resources to the target (e.g., constructing dams to control the flow of the river to the target)	11.76
Economic	16	Grassroots	Engage in PRC economic or civilian activity in or near target-sensitive or key geopolitical locations (e.g., near military bases or facilities)	11.56
Cyber/IO	1	Bilateral	Engage in cyber operations against target government or military activities	11.56
Cyber/IO	2	Bilateral	Engage in cyber operations to disrupt or undermine target economic activity	11.56
Geopolitical	5	International	Limit international sanctions or crack down on violent nonstate actors opposing the target and/or operating against the target	11.47
Geopolitical	14	Grassroots	Use and/or provide support to individual elites, political leaders, political parties, groups, or organizations to act on behalf of China in target	11.38
Military	6	Air	Declare an ADIZ near or surrounding the target	10.93
Economic	15	Grassroots	Expand or engage in new PRC commercial activity to, on, or near, new commercial flight routes	10.87
Geopolitical	2	International	Exclude or limit target's leadership and participation in existing international organizations	10.84
Economic	1	International	Purchase or invest in large civilian infrastructure or assets (such as land) in a third country (particularly neighboring countries) that pressure target	10.84
Military	2	General	Explicitly threaten the use of force or military escalation against target if target takes certain actions	10.76
Military	23	Maritime	Engage in exchange of fire, live fire near target, or simulated attacks (e.g., radar lock-on) on target assets via PLA maritime forces	10.76
Military	11	Air	Engage in or increase air patrols or intrusions near disputed territories	10.67
Military	19	Maritime	Engage in or increase maritime patrols or transits near the target's home or main territory	10.67
Cyber/IO	10	Grassroots	Engage in social disinformation campaigns in the target	10.67
Geopolitical	3	International	Undermine target's regional or international influence and partnerships, including by engaging in campaigns to blame or shame target	10.49
Geopolitical	1	International	Establish new major international initiatives or alternative international institutions to pressure or incentivize the target to accommodate PRC requests	10.40
Military	18	Maritime	Engage in large-scale maritime exercises near disputed territories	10.36
Military	26	Land	Engage in border (or cross-border) skirmishes and/or mass troops on land border for demonstration of force	10.00
Economic	11	Grassroots	Purchase or invest (build civilian infrastructure) in or near disputed land or maritime features	9.87
Military	10	Air	Engage in or increase air patrols or intrusions near the target's home or main territory	9.87
Military	20	Maritime	Engage in or increase maritime patrols or transits near disputed territories	9.87

Category	Tactic No.	Subtype	PRC Tactic	Weight
Geopolitical	8	Bilateral	Use high-profile political or legal campaigns (lawfare) to pressure target	9.78
Geopolitical	13	Bilateral	Organize public protests (or counterprotests) in China or in the target region to criticize target activities	9.38
Military	5	General	Use large-scale or cross-service military activities or exercises (excludes cyber activities) to disrupt normal business activities within the target (e.g., missile launches that interfere with target commercial port activities)	9.24
Military	25	Maritime	Use PLAN, CCG, or maritime militia to detain or capture target citizens operating in disputed territories	9.16
Economic	13	Grassroots	Ban or prohibit certain economic activities in disputed territories (e.g., fishing ban)	9.07
Economic	3	International	Require products or services from international firms to adhere to PRC requests and/or claims compared with the target's claims	8.98
Economic	8	Bilateral	Reduce PRC tourism to pressure target	8.98
Military	21	Maritime	Engage in military maritime intercepts or in aggressive maritime maneuvers against target maritime vessels	8.98
Military	9	Air	Engage in large-scale air exercises near disputed territories	8.76
Geopolitical	16	Grassroots	Use and/or provide support to pro-China Chinese ethnic groups (e.g., ethnic business associations)	8.62
Geopolitical	11	Bilateral	Detain or harass target citizens in China (beyond journalists and academics)	8.49
Military	13	Air	Engage in live fire near target or simulated attacks (e.g., radar lock-on) on target assets	8.36
Economic	12	Grassroots	Engage in land reclamation or other economic activities to expand the size of disputed territory	8.27
Economic	7	Bilateral	Harass, pressure, or co-opt businesses from the target region operating in China or competing for PRC projects in the target	8.18
Economic	10	Bilateral	Boycott, protest, destroy, or confiscate target's goods or products in China, particularly goods that do not align with PRC interests	8.18
Military	28	Land	Engage in large-scale land exercises or movement of troops near land border	8.18
Cyber/IO	9	Grassroots	Support or fund the establishment of new or existing pro-China media outlets operating in target	7.98
Military	8	Air	Engage in large-scale air exercises near the target's home or main territory	7.87
Military	17	Maritime	Engage in large-scale maritime exercises near the target's home or main territory	7.87
Cyber/IO	8	Grassroots	Buy content (e.g., pay for ads) in existing target media outlets or engage in content-sharing or joint production of content	7.78
Geopolitical	18	Grassroots	Use and/or provide support to pro-China groups with criminal links or ties	7.47
Military	29	Land	Engage in exchange of fire, live fire near target, or simulated attacks (e.g., radar lock-on) on target assets via PLA ground forces	7.47
Military	12	Air	Engage in military air intercepts or aggressive air maneuvers against target military aircraft	7.38
Cyber/IO	3	Bilateral	Engage in cyber operations to interfere in the target's elections, including to support specific candidates or smear PRC opponents	7.33
Military	14	Air	Use PLAAF or PLAN Aviation to harass or disrupt target commercial activities in disputed territories	7.07

Category	Tactic No.	Subtype	PRC Tactic	Weight
Geopolitical	9	Bilateral	Engage in diplomatic or political activities to divide or split target geographically beyond the territorial dispute (e.g., via preferred treatment to select territories, legal challenges)	6.58
Geopolitical	6	International	Use international influence on a third countries to pressure target citizens to retract or recant specific views/positions (e.g., pressuring ROK companies to force Taiwanese artists to drop independence position)	6.49
Geopolitical	17	Grassroots	Use and/or provide support to educational and civil society groups or organizations (that are not religious or political) to promote pro-China agenda (e.g., Confucius Institutes)	6.49
Economic	6	Bilateral	Reduce provision of PRC direct investment or foreign aid	6.44
Geopolitical	12	Bilateral	Impose restrictions on travel or visas for select target leaders, political parties, or individuals	5.96
Geopolitical	15	Grassroots	Use and/or provide support to religious groups or organizations to promote pro-China agenda	5.69
Economic	9	Bilateral	Reduce number of PRC students to pressure target	5.69
Cyber/IO	6	Bilateral	Coerce or attempt to buy target journalists and academics	5.69
Cyber/IO	11	Grassroots	Use defamation lawsuits to sue target researchers or organizations for voicing positions against China	5.69
Geopolitical	7	Bilateral	Significantly manipulate or reduce high-level political contacts or engagements	4.20
Economic	2	International	Export PRC products that advance PRC claims or narrative (e.g., products that portray disputed territories as part of China)	3.29
Cyber/IO	4	Bilateral	Ban or limit information/content produced by leading voices in target that oppose PRC views (e.g., ban music from prodemocracy artists)	3.29
Geopolitical	19	Grassroots	Use and/or provide support to other violent (insurgent, terrorist, or separatist) groups in target	3.07
Cyber/IO	5	Bilateral	Pressure or coerce target to change/amend content written in textbooks (e.g., revise history textbooks)	2.49
Geopolitical	20	Grassroots	Engage in covert action (PRC agents directly in the target country or region), such as assassination or harassment of opponents	N/A

NOTES: This table weights U.S. objectives and interests as the same as allied and partner difficulty (40 percent). We used the following equation to calculate the aggregate score (out of 20): U.S. Objectives Score\*8/9 + Average Allied and Partner Difficulty Score\*4 + Prevalence of PRC Tactic\*4. We thus weight U.S. objectives as 8 out of 20 points, average allied and partner difficulty score as 8 out of 20 points, and prevalence of PRC tactics as 4 out of 20 points. In case there is interest in exploring how varying the weights may generate different aggregated scores, Appendix B includes the coding of each individual indicator.

## Appendix D. Russia’s Approach to Gray Zone Activities in the Indo-Pacific

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Russia is heir to an extensive tradition of employing gray zone activities against other countries, with a long history of using coercive geopolitical, economic, military, and other activities beyond normal diplomatic engagements and below the use of kinetic military force. Contemporary authors have also variously described Soviet and Russian behavior as hostile *measures of influence, influence operations, or hybrid warfare*.<sup>1</sup> Although it does not refer to its activities as operating in the gray zone, Russia does embrace a variety of gray zone tactics against its neighbors and broader periphery in pursuit of its interests. As of this writing, however, Russia has not been a key gray zone actor in the Indo-Pacific. This research was completed in November 2020, before the February 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. It has not been subsequently revised.

### Angled West, Looking East

Russia does not view what it refers to as the Asia-Pacific as its priority region of influence and continues to focus the bulk of its external-facing policies and activities toward the West.<sup>2</sup> Russia’s focus on the Indo-Pacific has increased in recent years through multiple initiatives to increase diplomatic, economic, and security attention eastward over the past three decades. Since at least 2013, Russia has set expectations that the region is an area in which to expand its influence. Some analysts have seen Russian interest in China as a way to offset constrained economic links and influence in Europe following the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 and subsequent Western sanctions.<sup>3</sup> More recently, analysts have claimed that Russia’s focus on China is part of a growing recognition that the Asia-Pacific region is the “key to Russia’s prospects in the twenty-first century world—as a regional actor, global player, and good international citizen.”<sup>4</sup> As Russia’s 2016 foreign policy concept statement notes, “Globalization has led to the formation of new centres of economic and political power. Global power . . . is shifting towards the Asia-Pacific Region, eroding the global economic and political dominance

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<sup>1</sup> These terms generally refer to Western descriptions of the broad types of activity that match the definition of gray zone activities used in this report. For example, “[T]he term *hostile measures* encompasses a wide range of political, economic, diplomatic, intelligence, and military activities that could be perceived as harmful or hostile” (Raphael S. Cohen and Andrew Radin, *Russia’s Hostile Measures in Europe: Understanding the Threat*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-1793-A, 2019, p. ix).

<sup>2</sup> Bobo Lo, “Once More with Feeling: Russia and the Asia-Pacific,” Sydney: Lowy Institute, August 2019.

<sup>3</sup> Maria Shagina, “Has Russia’s Pivot to Asia Worked?” *The Diplomat*, January 10, 2020.

<sup>4</sup> Bobo Lo, 2019.

of the traditional western powers.”<sup>5</sup> Put another way, the region’s growing global impact and Russia’s desire to shape global dynamics to advance its own interests have led Russian leaders and analysts to focus on expanding Russia’s presence, engagements, economic linkages, and security ties in the Asia-Pacific.<sup>6</sup>

## Limited Utility of Gray Zone Actions, Given Russian Goals for the Region

Russia’s goals in the Indo-Pacific are to strengthen its strategic partnership with China;<sup>7</sup> diversify its regional relationships (particularly with countries that have dynamic economies);<sup>8</sup> bolster Russia’s international standing and economy, including through increasing trade, energy exports, and arms sales to the region;<sup>9</sup> and erode U.S. influence where possible. Moscow also seeks to strengthen its engagement with established regional forums, such as the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum, and to increase linkages between Asian and Eurasian organizations, such as ASEAN, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and the Eurasian Economic Union.<sup>10</sup> This desire for economic cooperation has grown over the past decade and intensified following Western sanctions placed on Moscow after Russia annexed Crimea.

Because its goals largely lie in the traditional areas of increasing diplomatic and economic engagement, Russia does not frequently leverage gray zone tactics in the Indo-Pacific region to pressure countries or shape their decisionmaking. Furthermore, Russia has fewer enablers at play in the region to provide options for gray zone tactics. For example, Russia is not a top trading partner for most regional countries; it does not have the economic heft or large population to manipulate investment, tourism, or student spending; and its military and paramilitary posture and capabilities in its Eastern Military District remain modest.<sup>11</sup> Russian employment of gray zone tactics is not completely absent; prominent examples of activity include cyberattacks and disinformation campaigns from Russian-speaking organizations targeting regional governments

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<sup>5</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, “Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation (Approved by President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin on November 30, 2016),” press release, December 1, 2016.

<sup>6</sup> For an example analysis on this topic, see Dmitri Trenin, *Russia’s Asia Strategy: Bolstering the Eagle’s Eastern Wing*, Paris: French Institute of International Relations, Russie.Nei.Visions No. 94, June 2016.

<sup>7</sup> Eugene Rumer, Richard Sokolsky, and Aleksandar Vladicic, “Russia in the Asia-Pacific: Less Than Meets the Eye,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace website, September 3, 2020.

<sup>8</sup> Dmitry Gorenburg and Paul Schwartz, “Russia’s Strategy in Southeast Asia,” Washington, D.C.: Program on New Approaches to Research and Security in Eurasia, Policy Memo No. 578, March 2019.

<sup>9</sup> Dezan Shira & Associates, “Opportunities for Russian Businesses as Vietnam Bilateral Trade Continues to Rise,” Russia Briefing website, May 21, 2019; Shagina, 2020; Bennett Murray, *Russia’s Awkward Dance with Vietnam*, Philadelphia: Foreign Policy Research Institute, October 2019; Prashanth Parameswaran, “Vietnam-Russia Military Ties: Look Beyond the Billion Dollar Boast,” *The Diplomat*, September 11, 2018; Prashanth Parameswaran, “New Arms Deals Highlight Indonesia-Russia Military Cooperation,” *The Diplomat*, May 1, 2019b.

<sup>10</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2016.

<sup>11</sup> Rumer, Sokolsky, and Vladicic, 2020.

and militaries.<sup>12</sup> However, the scope and scale of Russia’s activities are more limited than China’s, as are the frequency, variety, and pervasiveness of Russian tactics leveraged against European nations and relevant organizations.

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<sup>12</sup> “Sofacy Shifts Focus to Include Far East Defense and Diplomacy, Overlaps with Advanced Cyberespionage Groups,” Kaspersky website, March 9, 2018; Adam Hulcoop, John Scott-Railton, Peter Tanchak, Matt Brooks, and Ron Deibert, *Tainted Leaks: Disinformation and Phishing with a Russian Nexus*, Toronto: CitizenLab, May 25, 2017.



## Appendix E. How Russia Employs Gray Zone Tactics in Europe

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Russia frequently conducts gray zone activities in Europe, particularly its near abroad—although Russia has also employed gray zone tactics in Central Asia and against the United States in recent years.<sup>1</sup> Russia defines its *near abroad* as the independent republics, other than Russia, that were created after the collapse of the Soviet Union. President Putin has, for many years, referred to the near abroad as part of Russia’s sphere of influence and part of Russia’s vital interests.<sup>2</sup> In Europe, Russia views itself as “in a long-term political, economic, and social competition with the United States and seeks to use primarily nonmilitary tools for both long-term competitive advantage and short-term coercive effect.”<sup>3</sup> Russian gray zone approaches seek to (1) influence specific outcomes, such as elections; (2) shape other countries’ actions in ways that benefit Russia’s interests; and (3) punish countries to signal disapproval and deter them from undertaking similar actions in the future.<sup>4</sup> This research was completed in November 2020, before the February 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine—a large-scale military operation that transcends the gray zone. It has not been subsequently revised.

### Geopolitical Tactics

In the geopolitical domain, Russia builds political influence in target countries and occasionally leverages that influence or even acts unilaterally to achieve specific aims. Russia usually builds relationships with vulnerable politicians whom it can exploit later or supports pro-Russian groups to carry out its work. Clandestine or covert state actors usually conduct recruiting campaigns against political or military officials. Both approaches use internal actors to undermine any movement to align with the West and have grown increasingly aggressive in the recent past. In Ukraine, Russia reportedly managed to “honeycomb the Ukrainian military and special services with its agents, crippling Ukraine’s ability to counter Russia’s moves during the “Russian spring” of 2014.”<sup>5</sup> Even in mainly pro-Western Romania, Russia has sowed discord in the Hungarian minority.<sup>6</sup> Russia also seeks to sow discord in European organizations, particularly the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and leverages ethnic, religious, and

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<sup>1</sup> Morris et al., 2019, p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> Steven Erlanger, “The World; Learning to Fear Putin’s Gaze,” *New York Times*, February 25, 2001.

<sup>3</sup> Morris et al., 2019, p. 17.

<sup>4</sup> Morris et al., 2019, p. 15.

<sup>5</sup> Kirk Bennett, “Should the West Be Worried About Belarus?” *American Interest*, July 23, 2020.

<sup>6</sup> Andrew Radin and Raphael S. Cohen, “Russia’s Soft Strategy to Hostile Measures in Europe,” War on the Rocks website, February 26, 2019.

linguistic ties to gain influence with ethnic Russians in other countries, including by issuing Russian passports, offering social services, and granting or withholding visas.<sup>7</sup>

## Economic Tactics

In the economic domain, the intensity of Russia's economic coercion against target states varies depending on Russian levels of interest. A recent and well-documented high-end example was Putin's threat to cut off trade with Ukraine to convince Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovitch not to sign the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement with the EU, even after Yanukovitch had publicly agreed to do so.<sup>8</sup> Russia had hoped to pull Ukraine into its single market, the Eurasian Economic Union, which today includes Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan. Yanukovitch's decision to not honor his pledge to join the agreement catalyzed the Maidan revolution in Ukraine and shifted the Ukraine crisis from a gray zone activity into a special operations takeover of Crimea and the subsequent mixed unconventional-conventional military conflict. There are signs of Russian economic coercion in other near abroad countries, such as Russia's offer of a multibillion-dollar bailout to Kyrgyzstan in 2009 in an attempt to shut down the U.S. Transit Center at Manas—the only U.S. military base in the region and an irritant for Moscow (Kyrgyzstan ultimately closed the base in 2014).<sup>9</sup> Russia also regularly uses energy blackmail as a subset of economic coercion. Beyond the use of oil and gas to intimidate its near abroad, Russia has also worked to leverage energy dependence to influence Europe. As far back as 2006, the United States criticized Russia for using oil and gas as “tools of intimidation or blackmail, either by supply manipulation or attempts to monopolize transportation.”<sup>10</sup> In 2020, the Nordstream 2 pipeline—intended to carry natural gas directly from Russia to Germany—became the “focus of concerns in Washington that Russia's dominance of energy supplies to Europe could translate into political leverage for Moscow.”<sup>11</sup>

Reflecting Russia's relatively limited economic toolkit, Russia tends to use a negative approach in the economic realm, such as threatening to withdraw existing aid or financial agreements. Besides energy cutoffs and threats, Russia has also cut off trade with target states to coerce or punish them. In 2014, Russia banned imports of beef, pork, poultry, fish, fruit, vegetables, and dairy products from the United States, Canada, the European Union, Norway,

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<sup>7</sup> Cohen and Radin, 2019.

<sup>8</sup> David M. Herszenhorn, “Facing Russian Threat, Ukraine Halts Plans for Deals with E.U.,” *New York Times*, November 21, 2013.

<sup>9</sup> Paul Stronski and Richard Sokolsky, *The Return of Global Russia: An Analytical Framework*, Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, December 2017.

<sup>10</sup> Luke Harding, “Russia Is Blackmailing Europe over Energy, Says Cheney,” *The Guardian*, May 4, 2006.

<sup>11</sup> Stanley Reed and Laura Jakes, “A Russian Gas Pipeline Increases Tension Between the U.S. and Europe,” *New York Times*, July 24, 2020.

and Australia in response to Western sanctions.<sup>12</sup> In 2015, Russia imposed economic sanctions—including restrictions on imports of some Turkish goods, a ban on charter flights between the two countries, and an end to Russian tour operators selling trips to Turkey—following the Turkish shootdown of a Russian fighter near the Syrian-Turkish border.<sup>13</sup> Unlike China, Russia is not able to leverage large-scale infrastructure and investment initiatives to grow its influence within the target countries or to pressure target countries via third-country investments. Russia also cannot manipulate the movement of Russian tourists or students to impose substantial economic pain on target countries.

## Military Tactics

In the military domain, Russia's invasion of Georgia in 2008 and annexation of Crimea in 2014 were accompanied by both military and nonmilitary tactics to weaken the target country's opposition.<sup>14</sup> Russia also uses a variety of methods to strengthen pro-Russian proxy groups, including training and even arms transfers. In extreme cases, Russian military intelligence involvement, such as the Russian-backed coup attempt in Montenegro in the leadup to elections, sought to complicate Montenegro's NATO accession.<sup>15</sup> Russia also conducts snap military exercises or threatens weapon deployments for a show of force or for coercion.

## Cyber and Information Operations Tactics

In the cyber/IO domain, there are clear indications that Russia has consciously updated its use of measures short of war for the 21st century. Russia has consistently demonstrated that IO are a high priority form of modern competition.<sup>16</sup> It considers information warfare—which includes cyberwarfare (attacks on cyber systems) and influence operations (attacks on the thinking of the population)—as something that occurs at all times regardless of the state of relations with a target country.<sup>17</sup> For example, Russia exploits the shared language and presence of roughly 8 million ethnic Russians in Ukraine to maximize IO and spread separatist sentiment.<sup>18</sup> Russia recognizes the power of social media as a means of reaching target audiences

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<sup>12</sup> Paul Sonne and Anton Troianovski, "Russia Targets Western Imports," *Wall Street Journal*, August 8, 2014.

<sup>13</sup> Lin Jenkins, "Vladimir Putin Announces Russian Sanctions Against Turkey," *The Guardian*, November 28, 2015.

<sup>14</sup> Cohen and Radin, 2019.

<sup>15</sup> Dimitar Bechev, "The 2016 Coup Attempt in Montenegro: Is Russia's Balkans Footprint Expanding?" Foreign Policy Research Institute, 2018, p. 4.

<sup>16</sup> Cohen and Radin, 2019.

<sup>17</sup> Pavel Antonovich, "Cyberwarfare: Nature and Content," *Military Thought*, Vol. 20, No. 3, 2011; Bruce McClintock, "Russian Cyber Operations: Four Realities, Two That Can Change," presented at the U.S.-Russia Relations: Policy Challenges in a New Era conference, Berlin, May 30–June 4, 2017, Washington, D.C.: Aspen Institute, 2017, pp. 75–79.

<sup>18</sup> Eve Conant, "Ethnic Russians: Pretext for Putin's Ukraine Invasion?" *National Geographic News*, May 2, 2014.

more easily, and analysts claim that senior levels of the Russian defense and political establishments believe that information can be used to externally manipulate populations to take desired actions.<sup>19</sup> In Ukraine, for example, Moscow used focused social and traditional media to generate domestic support and to spread significant disinformation about the Maidan protests and the new government in Kyiv.<sup>20</sup> Ukraine provides the starkest example of the use of information warfare, but there are signs that Russia has used this approach throughout Europe.<sup>21</sup>

Even when nations protest Russia's breaches of the norms of acceptable international behavior, Moscow continues to engage in disinformation campaigns.<sup>22</sup> Most recently, this included disinformation intended to deepen the discord in the EU caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, while providing limited support for the (arguably less reckless) Chinese propaganda effort intended to shift responsibility for the outbreak.<sup>23</sup> Russia employs disinformation tactics widely and often indiscriminately.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Glen E. Howard and Matthew Czekaj, eds., *Russia's Military Strategy and Doctrine*, Washington, D.C.: Jamestown Foundation, February 2019, pp. 307–314.

<sup>20</sup> Michael Kofman, Katya Migacheva, Brian Nichiporuk, Andrew Radin, Olesya Tkacheva, and Jenny Oberholtzer, *Lessons from Russia's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-1498-A, 2017, p. 28.

<sup>21</sup> Keir Giles, *Handbook of Russian Information Warfare*, Rome: NATO Defense College, November 2016.

<sup>22</sup> Pavel K. Baev, *The Limits of Authoritarian Compatibility: Xi's China and Putin's Russia*, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, June 2020, p. 1.

<sup>23</sup> Robin Emmott, "Russia Deploying Coronavirus Disinformation to Sow Panic in West, EU Document Says," Reuters, March 18, 2020, p. 6.

<sup>24</sup> For an in-depth look at Russia's often indiscriminate use of disinformation, see Peter Pomerantsev, *Nothing Is True and Everything Is Possible: The Surreal Heart of the New Russia*, New York: Public Affairs Books, 2014.

## Abbreviations

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5G	fifth-generation
ADIZ	air defense identification zone
AEW&C	airborne early warning and control
APT	advanced persistent threat
ASDF	Air Self-Defense Force (Japan)
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CCG	China Coast Guard
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CMS	China Marine Surveillance
COVID-19	coronavirus disease 2019
CPEC	China-Pakistan Economic Corridor
CUPP	China Unification Promotion Party
DoD	U.S. Department of Defense
DoS	U.S. Department of State
DPP	Democratic Progressive Party
ECS	East China Sea
EEZ	exclusive economic zone
FONOP	freedom of navigation operation
FY	fiscal year
GDP	gross domestic product
GDSF	Ground Self-Defense Force (Japan)
HA/DR	humanitarian assistance and disaster relief
IAF	Indian Air Force
ICAO	International Civil Aviation Organization

IO	information operations
IOR	Indian Ocean Region
ISR	intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance
JCG	Japan Coast Guard
KMT	Kuomintang
LAC	line of actual control
MOD	Ministry of Defense (Japan)
MOOTW	military operations other than war
MSDF	Maritime Self-Defense Force (Japan)
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	nongovernmental organization
NT \$	new Taiwan dollars
OSD	Office of the Secretary of Defense
PAFMM	People's Armed Forces Maritime Militia
PED	processing, exploitation, and dissemination
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PLAAF	People's Liberation Army Air Force
PLAN	People's Liberation Army Navy
PRC	People's Republic of China
ROK	Republic of Korea
S&T	science and technology
SCIO	State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China
SCS	South China Sea
SDF	Self-Defense Force (Japan)
SOE	state-owned enterprise
TAR	Tibet Autonomous Region
UAV	unmanned aerial vehicle
UFWD	United Front Work Department
UN	United Nations

UNCLOS	UN Convention on the Law of the Sea
VEO	violent extremist organization
VNA	Vietnam News Agency
WHO	World Health Organization

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Few studies have systematically tracked how China is using gray zone tactics—coercive activities beyond normal diplomacy and trade but below the use of kinetic military force—against multiple U.S. allies and partners. Lacking a foundational empirical baseline, it is difficult to determine patterns and trends in Chinese activities to develop effective counters to them. The authors developed a framework to categorize China’s use of gray zone tactics against five U.S. allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific and to identify the most problematic People’s Republic of China (PRC) tactics that the United States could prioritize countering. Based on open-source material, this report provides a more in-depth understanding of Chinese operations in the gray zone. Among other conclusions, the authors observe that China views gray zone activities as natural extensions of how countries exercise power. China employs such tactics to balance maintaining a stable, favorable external environment with efforts to alter the status quo in China’s favor without triggering major pushback or conflict. It has used nearly 80 such tactics on its neighbors, often in relation to territorial disputes.

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