

# From Coercion to Capitulation

HOW CHINA CAN TAKE TAIWAN  
WITHOUT A WAR

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# Acronyms

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ADIZ	air defense identification zone
AMS	Academy of Military Sciences (PRC)
CAAC	Civil Aviation Administration of China (PRC)
CCG	China Coast Guard (PRC)
CCP	Chinese Communist Party (PRC)
CDOT	Coalition Defense of Taiwan
CGA	Coast Guard Administration (ROC)
CMC	Central Military Commission (PRC)
COA	course of action
COG	center of gravity
CONOP	concept of operations
CPD	Central Propaganda Department (PRC)
CPPCC	Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (PRC)
DDoS	distributed denial of service
DPP	Democratic Progressive Party (ROC)
DPRK	Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (North Korea)
ECFA	Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement
ETC	Eastern Theater Command (PRC)
FONOP	freedom of navigation operation
GACC	General Administration of Customs of the People’s Republic of China (PRC)
INDOPACOM	Indo-Pacific Command (US)
KMT	Kuomintang (“Chinese Nationalist Party”) (ROC)
LOE	line of effort
LY	Legislative Yuan (ROC)
MND	Ministry of National Defense (PRC)
MOFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs (PRC)
MOFCOM	Ministry of Commerce (PRC)
MPS	Ministry of Public Security (PRC)
MSA	Maritime Safety Administration (PRC)
MSS	Ministry of State Security (PRC)
PAP	People’s Armed Police (PRC)
PLA	People’s Liberation Army (PRC)
PLAAF	People’s Liberation Army Air Force (PRC)
PLAN	People’s Liberation Army Navy (PRC)
PLANEX	planning exercise
PLARF	People’s Liberation Army Rocket Force (PRC)
PRC	People’s Republic of China
ROC	Republic of China
ROCM	Republic of China military (ROC)

ROCN	Republic of China Navy (ROC)
ROK	Republic of Korea (South Korea)
SASAC	State-Owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission of the State Council (PRC)
SoWC	short-of-war coercion
SSF	Strategic Support Force (PRC)
SSF NSD	Strategic Support Force Network Systems Department (PRC)
TAO	Taiwan Affairs Office (PRC)
TPP	Taiwan People's Party (ROC)
TSMC	Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company
UFWD	United Front Work Department (PRC)

# Executive Summary

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Fear that the People's Republic of China (PRC) will invade Taiwan and draw the US into a massive war in the Pacific has for many years driven an increasing American focus on preparing for conflict with the PRC. The expansion of PRC military capabilities and Beijing's announcement of military expansion milestones in 2027 have intensified those fears and sparked intense debates about America's potential role in and readiness for deterring and defeating a PRC invasion.

Concerns about America's ability to defend Taiwan are valid and important because US interests would be severely damaged by the PRC's conquest of the island. Taiwan is strategically vital to the larger US-led coalition to contain the PRC: A US-friendly Taiwan links America's allies in the northwestern Pacific with US partners and allies to the south, whereas a PRC-controlled Taiwan would become a springboard for further PRC aggression and would seriously compromise the US-led coalition's ability to operate cohesively.

Yet the US and its regional allies and partners still lack a clear strategy for defending Taiwan, despite increasingly articulating the importance of preserving Taiwanese autonomy. Worse still, discussions in the US about Taiwan's defense have focused almost exclusively on deterring or defeating a PRC invasion and have largely ignored the likelier scenario, elements of which are already underway: a PRC coercion campaign that remains far short of invasion but nevertheless brings Taiwan under Beijing's control. The US and its partners must step back from the narrowing focus on a single dangerous scenario to reevaluate the full threat the PRC poses and develop a coherent set of strategies to defeat all aspects of that threat.

Strategic debates in the US about Taiwan's defense have largely centered on how to prevent the PRC from invading and annexing the island. These debates have become especially salient as the Taiwanese people's unwillingness to join the PRC voluntarily grows

and becomes increasingly obvious. The determination of Taiwan's people to retain their autonomy will encourage PRC leaders to choose more coercive paths to gain control of the island, up to and including invasion and occupation. The US and its allies must certainly prepare for the possibility of a PRC invasion, but they must also prepare for alternative PRC hybrid warfare and coercion strategies.

Our project recognized this significant gap in US strategic thought and has sought to examine whether such PRC short-of-war coercive approaches could cause Taiwan to capitulate to PRC demands absent an invasion or full-scale military blockade. We have developed a realistic approach the PRC could use to coerce Taiwan into a political settlement favorable to the PRC without invading and occupying the island. We refer to this comprehensive political-military campaign as the short-of-war coercion course of action (SoWC COA).

The COA presented in this report is a set of coordinated actions the PRC could pursue to convince Taiwan and its international partners to accept Chinese demands by means short of war. The Coalition Defense of Taiwan project, a joint effort between the American Enterprise Institute and the Institute for the Study of War, developed this COA through a yearlong planning exercise based on extensive research into PRC strategic thinking on political warfare, military operations, and hybrid warfare, as well as detailed studies of previous and ongoing PRC coercion campaigns against Taiwan and other states. This research enabled us to develop a COA that closely aligns with PRC grand-strategic objectives while minimizing negative domestic impacts for the PRC. We endeavored to place ourselves in the shoes of Chinese strategic planners tasked with bringing about the PRC's unification with Taiwan without provoking a major conflict.

The COA defines the PRC's primary problem as the PRC does—the continued resistance to unification

by ardent Taiwanese “separatists” who maintain Taiwan’s de facto independence and are buoyed by support from foreign powers, namely the US and its regional allies. This COA therefore seeks to set conditions in Taiwan to forcibly remove these “separatist” elements and transfer power to political figures who will accede to PRC demands in the form of a cross-Strait peace agreement. These conditions will be achieved by executing an “Anti-Separatism Campaign” that gradually intensifies over four years until it causes near-complete isolation of Taiwan while using the threat of further escalation combined with economic incentives and information operations to deter intervention by Japan, the US, and other regional actors.

The SoWC COA begins after a new Republic of China (ROC) government takes power in May 2024 and continues until the PRC and Taiwan reach a “peace” agreement sometime before, or shortly after, 2028. The COA groups PRC activities into four “pulses” that include coordinated actions in the air, sea, information, cyber, economic, cognitive, and other domains. The extended time frame and coordination of many different kinds of activities against many different targets allows PRC planners to obscure the larger unification campaign that each set of actions actually serves.

The COA’s success depends in considerable part on the failure of its targets even to recognize its existence as a coherent undertaking. By consistently increasing pressure and intensifying baseline coercive activity, the PRC aims to make life in Taiwan increasingly unbearable until critical sectors of the Taiwanese polity view accepting a PRC-proposed “peace process” as preferable to continued resistance.

The COA attacks four centers of gravity that currently provide the ROC government and Taiwanese people with the strength to resist PRC coercion.

- The first is the US-Taiwan strategic relationship, which involves comprehensive bilateral cooperation. The COA uses economic carrots and sticks, information operations, and military escalation to convince the US and Taiwan that their cooperation directly precipitates further

escalation, whereas peace and prosperity are just around the corner if this partnership is halted.

- The second center of gravity is the ROC government’s ability to function and provide essential services. Economic warfare, cyberwarfare, sabotage, rigorous (and pseudo-legal) inspections of ships carrying goods to Taiwan, air and sea closures, electronic warfare, and propaganda critical of government mismanagement seek to drastically decrease standards of living and erode the ROC government’s legitimacy in the eyes of its own people.
- Third, extensive and persistent cognitive and psychological campaigns aim to break the Taiwanese public’s will to resist by intimidating supporters of resistance, sowing doubt and fear among the population, and generating demands to trade political concessions for peace.
- Fourth, widespread information campaigns aim to decrease the US public’s and political leadership’s willingness to support Taiwan.

If Beijing successfully assaults each of these centers of gravity, the sense of abandonment among the Taiwanese people would be overwhelming, and the ROC government would be forced to consider a new paradigm for cross-Strait relations as an alternative to further pain and suffering.

After outlining the SoWC COA, the report proposes four “endgame scenarios,” possible situations that would allow the PRC to achieve its objectives and reach a favorable political agreement with the ROC government. This agreement, in the COA, would create a “cross-Strait peace commission”—which would increase PRC control over the ROC government and population under the guise of providing a space for open dialogue between the two governments. The endgame scenarios presented are based on research into the ROC constitution and legislative procedures.

The SoWC COA presented in this report reveals that Taiwan and the US remain unprepared to deter or prevent a concerted multiyear coercion campaign

intended to result in Taiwan's capitulation and eventual annexation. This report provides a list of recommendations for Taiwan, the US, and allied governments to more effectively counter potential future coercion campaigns in coordination with existing preparations to prevent an invasion of Taiwan. We recommend that Taiwan develop the capability to counter a wide range of PRC coercive actions aimed at decreasing ROC governmental capacity and the Taiwanese public's desire for autonomy.

The US also must recognize the possibility and danger of a coercion campaign that is far more intense

than the one currently ongoing against Taiwan and develop ways to prevent Taiwan's isolation through means short of war. Increased efforts in the information domain will be key to ensuring that the US government and friendly international audiences do not fall prey to PRC information operations intended to reshape the way Americans and key international actors think.

By forming a coalition of like-minded states in the Indo-Pacific, the US and its partners and allies can better deter a campaign like our SoWC COA—and other efforts intended to further PRC regional hegemony.

# From Coercion to Capitulation

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## HOW CHINA CAN TAKE TAIWAN WITHOUT A WAR

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The increasing military power and aggressiveness of the People's Republic of China (PRC), together with the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the intensifying efforts by Iran and its allies and proxies to transform the Middle East by force, have created the greatest threat to American national security since the end of the Cold War. The PRC is by far the strongest member of the coalescing new axis of states and groups whose aim is the destruction of the current US-led international order. Its economy rivals America's and Europe's, at least in straightforward—if slightly misleading—metrics such as gross domestic product and in some areas of innovation and production. It is increasingly devoting its formidable military and technological prowess to building a military capable of challenging America's ability to operate in the western Pacific. The PRC is also mastering the technique of weaponizing its economic strength and attractiveness as a market to advance its revisionist aims by means short of war. It poses the only serious short-term conventional military threat to the United States and, harnessing its powers of economic coercion and persuasion in tandem with its military power, could challenge America's ability to defend itself and its allies.

America has several important advantages over the PRC. Its economy remains stronger and more innovative. Its military remains much more powerful overall, despite the challenges the US faces in

concentrating its military power—which is spread across the globe—rapidly in the western Pacific. And it has built and maintained a coalition of allies and partners that are increasingly opposed to PRC expansion and aggression, increasingly militarily capable, and increasingly willing to work together despite enormous challenges.

American alliances with Australia, Japan, and South Korea anchor this coalition in the north and south of the western Pacific. America's alliance with the Philippines and partnerships with Vietnam and Taiwan form a vital geographical connection among US allies in the region. PRC leaders feel hemmed in by the “first island chain” thus formed—and they should. As long as Japan, the Philippines, South Korea, and Taiwan remain firmly in the pro-US camp, the PRC military will struggle to threaten the coalition militarily or expand farther into the Pacific arena.

Taiwan's importance to the US comes first and foremost from the crucial geostrategic role it plays in this coalition. With Taiwan part of the coalition, the PRC can be contained. Should the PRC gain control of Taiwan and, with it, the ability to turn the island into a massive military base for PRC air, naval, missile, and ground forces, the defense of the remaining members of the US-led Asian coalition would be gravely compromised. The US does and should support Taiwan's autonomy because of Taiwan's economic importance, especially in the realm of microchips—and because



American interests and values demand helping free, democratic peoples defend themselves against aggressive, revisionist autocracies. Yet the western Pacific's hard, geostrategic realities make Taiwan's defense essential to American national security interests regardless of these considerations.

US strategy in the western Pacific must therefore center on defending Taiwan in a way that strengthens the US-led coalition to contain the PRC. Developing such a strategy is more challenging than it might appear. Some US allies and partners in the region recognize Taiwan's importance to their own interests and are thus willing to engage directly on its defense. Others, however, prioritize the threats the PRC poses to them directly over Taiwan's defense. A strategy in which the US constantly demands that all its Asian partners and allies focus on the military defense of Taiwan could thus strain and ultimately weaken the coalition, itself the most important component of any broader US strategy to contain the PRC. A strategy that relies on long-range standoff weapons systems to defend Taiwan while leaving frontline states vulnerable to PRC aggression can similarly weaken the coalition even if it deters or defeats a PRC military attack on Taiwan. The Coalition Defense of Taiwan (CDOT) project, conducted jointly by the American Enterprise Institute and the Institute for the Study of War (ISW), is thus focused on offering alternative strategies for defending Taiwan that give priority to strengthening the US-led coalition to contain the PRC.

The CDOT project's first step was to consider the avenues by which the PRC might gain control of Taiwan with a broader aperture. Much of the existing academic and policy analysis of this problem focuses on the likelihood of a PRC military invasion of Taiwan and the larger PRC-US war that would ensue. This focus on a single, primarily military scenario is problematic.

It remains unclear whether the PRC views invading Taiwan as its best strategic option to achieve its political goals. The PRC has been explicitly building the military capability to invade Taiwan within the next few years, to be sure. PRC leaders speak openly about the prospect of launching an invasion, and the

PRC military has developed and fielded many weapons systems and platforms to prevent the US from bringing its military power to bear rapidly and effectively in the defense of Taiwan.

The US must meet this challenge, which is real and urgent. The CDOT project will therefore turn in 2024 to its own analysis of the invasion scenario and the broader western Pacific war that such a move may lead to, and it will support sensible recommendations to expand and develop American military capabilities necessary to counter the growing PRC military threat. But an exclusive focus on military-technical challenges relevant to a single, narrow subset of invasion scenarios tends to understate, if not ignore, the enormous risks and challenges the PRC would face. An all-out invasion of Taiwan would be an operation larger and more complicated than the World War II Normandy landings, but unlike the Allied forces, the PRC's military has never done such a thing and has not fought a serious war in more than four decades.

This focus on military-technical matters also tends to limit discussion of PRC political aims and requirements to simplistic and generally unexamined platitudes. What, concretely, does the PRC seek to achieve vis-à-vis Taiwan? How do PRC aims vis-à-vis Taiwan nest into larger PRC objectives in the western Pacific and the world? What risks would PRC leaders likely be willing to run to secure the concrete benefits of seizing Taiwan? What costs would they likely be willing to pay? What would the political end state of an invasion look like? Would a brutal PRC military occupation of a sullen and alienated Taiwanese population satisfy Beijing? Would a PRC military conquest of the island that results in global isolation and widespread refusal to recognize the legitimacy of the new conquest be acceptable to the leader who ordered it? How does the PRC intend and desire to rule Taiwan once it has seized it?

The answers to these questions are far from obvious and have received generally little attention in public discussions of the invasion scenario, yet they will be central to the thinking and decision-making of any PRC leader ordering his military into a dangerous war over Taiwan. Even brief considerations of

these questions lead to the conclusion that a direct invasion of the island would have many highly undesirable risks and significant costs for the PRC—and that the PRC leadership is unlikely to embark on such an undertaking if it sees a better way to achieve its aims.

The overly operational and technical nature of much of the discourse surrounding PRC invasion scenarios often presents PRC military capabilities as the key determinant of a PRC decision to invade. A common premise is that the likelihood of a PRC invasion of Taiwan will increase when the PRC judges that its military is ready to conduct the operation.<sup>1</sup> But this view fails to take adequate account of the broader geostrategic risks a PRC strategic planner would need to consider. A PRC invasion of Taiwan would likely lead to war with the US. The US would rely heavily on bases in Japan and possibly other Asian states to fight this war.

Would the US mobilize all its military power to defend the island? Would it take military action against PRC elements outside the immediate area around Taiwan? Would the PRC allow the US to use its bases in Japan freely, or would Beijing feel it necessary to attack those bases (many of which are jointly operated with the Japan Self-Defense Forces), thus bringing Japan into the war? Would the US seek to activate its mutual defense treaty with South Korea to use its bases there? Would the Philippines or Vietnam permit US military operations from their territory? Exactly how large might this war become? Would the PRC be willing to risk the war's expansion to most of the western Pacific and possibly even the Indian Ocean? These questions will be central to PRC decision-making and must receive far more attention when considering possible invasion scenarios than they generally have thus far.

Still another problem is that a sudden, full-scale invasion of Taiwan does not align well with either the PRC's strategic culture or its decades-long pattern of activity in the region. Beijing has advanced many of its strategic goals in its periphery through patient coercion, low-intensity conflict, and constant pressure. It is vital to recognize upfront, of course, that states sometimes make sudden shifts in long-held

approaches to problems and that the PRC is in the midst of a transformation in its leadership model, from a relatively cautious and conservative quasi-oligarchy back to one-man autocratic rule under Xi Jinping. It is also true that Xi and other PRC leaders could conclude that the previous approach has run its course and has set appropriate conditions for a more aggressive and riskier next phase. These and other factors are the reasons we regard preparations to deter and defeat an invasion as essential and why we will examine invasion scenarios in great detail in the next phase of the CDOT project.

But American strategists must at the same time consider the possibility that the PRC will continue to operate within the general paradigms and frameworks it has used and developed under Xi and his predecessors. The PRC's use of "hybrid warfare" operations and "nonwar military activities," to say nothing of the energy PRC theorists and strategists have invested in the idea of "winning without fighting," are well-known and documented.<sup>2</sup> These approaches have brought the PRC considerable gains in the South China Sea and elsewhere, and neither the US nor its allies and partners have shown the ability to defeat them.

Yet most discussions of the PRC threat to Taiwan ignore, dismiss, or minimize these approaches in favor of a focus on the military invasion scenario. Some argue that Taiwan cannot be conquered in such a fashion, that Xi is too impatient to achieve his aims, or that such threats are lesser challenges that will be addressed by simply preparing to defeat an invasion. These arguments deserve a serious response, which is why CDOT has begun with a major planning exercise (PLANEX), whose results are reported below. This exercise aims to answer these questions:

- Is there a plausible course of action (COA) the PRC could pursue to achieve its political aims in Taiwan by means short of war?
- What would such a COA look like?
- How could the US, Taiwan, and our allies and partners defeat it in a way that strengthens the coalition to contain the PRC?

We outlined in our earlier report *China's Three Roads to Controlling Taiwan*<sup>3</sup> that the PRC is more likely to pursue a short-of-war coercion (SoWC) campaign than an invasion campaign to “unify” with Taiwan, as this approach will place Beijing in a better position with respect to its long-term strategic goals of “national rejuvenation” and regional hegemony and is unlikely to undermine such goals. The current report presents the results of a yearlong PLANEX the CDOT team conducted to build out and evaluate such an SoWC COA.

We assess that the SoWC COA described below is a comprehensive and plausible strategy that the PRC could successfully employ. In other words, the PRC could secure its political objectives—namely, subjugating Taiwan and critically damaging US interests in the Indo-Pacific—without invading Taiwan. Many such COAs could be designed based on different assumptions and assessments of PRC aims, capabilities, and risk tolerance, among other variables. The purpose of presenting this specific COA in detail is not to assert that it is the COA the PRC *will* follow, but rather to lay out a realistic SoWC COA that the PRC *could* follow. This is to identify and describe strategies and actions that the US, Taiwan, and US partners and allies around the world can take to deter, disrupt, and defeat any variation of such a COA.

## Project Phases and PLANEX Methodology

The CDOT project uses a modified version of the US Army’s military decision-making process pioneered by the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) in the 2006 PLANEX that recommended the “surge” in Iraq. This PLANEX methodology has been subsequently used by ISW to recommend options for combating ISIS, as well as by ISW and the AEI Critical Threats Project to recommend options for confronting the Russia challenge.<sup>4</sup> The Army defines its military decision-making process as

an iterative planning methodology that integrates the activities of the commander, staff, subordinate

headquarters, and other partners to understand the situation and mission, develop and compare courses of action (COAs), decide on a COA that best accomplishes the mission, and produce an operation plan or order for execution.<sup>5</sup>

The CDOT team, like previous PLANEX teams at ISW and AEI, does not seek to produce concrete operation plans or orders, but rather to develop concepts of operations from the PRC point of view. This is to inform US military and other government agency development of concepts of operations to prepare for and counter PRC coercion campaigns and strategies.

The project team met weekly for a year and interacted with US experts, international experts, and government officials of some of the relevant Asian states. The project’s researchers began with deep dives into topics key to understanding the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) Taiwan-directed campaigns. The team closely examined the PRC People’s Liberation Army’s (PLA) structure, strategic thinking, and campaign design; the PRC’s Taiwan policy organs and decision makers; the military capabilities of regional allies Australia, Japan, and the Philippines; and the 2024 Taiwanese election. The team published weekly updates on PRC economic, political, and military events and specifically on PRC efforts to interact with and shape the outcomes of the Taiwanese election.

The team completed two important ancillary research lines of effort (LOE) during this phase. The first produced a set of detailed timelines of previous PRC coercive action in Australia, the East China Sea, Hong Kong, India, the South China Sea, South Korea, and Taiwan. These timelines enabled the team to examine changes in the PRC’s coercive strategies over time and get a better sense of the CCP organs and individuals responsible for carrying out these strategies. It also supported the team’s ability to understand the PRC’s SoWC tool kit, which formed the basis for the PRC actions presented in the COA below.

The second LOE examined the CCP’s management of COVID-19 to draw conclusions about Xi’s crisis decision-making and determine what, if any, impact the 2022 “White Paper” protests would have on CCP

governance. These research efforts strengthened our assessment that the short-of-war COA this report outlines is consistent with observed PRC strategy, decision-making, and patterns of activity over recent decades and specifically under Xi's rule.

The CDOT project's next phase focused on assessing in detail the PRC's strategic objectives regarding Taiwan. The team developed a set of assessed CCP strategic objectives and definitions of success based on observed PRC statements, actions, theoretical works, and policy discussions. The team then developed a comprehensive list of activities based on the SoWC tool kit, an ancillary research effort—some activities that the PRC has already used, others that it might use—to affect Japan, Taiwan, the US, and other US allies and partners, as well as the Chinese populace and the PRC's diplomatic allies and partners. The team next identified, again from the PRC's perspective, the centers of gravity (COGs) of Taiwan's resistance to PRC aims and the critical vulnerabilities the PRC could exploit to weaken or destroy those COGs. The team's definition and use of the expressions “center of gravity” and “critical vulnerability” will be discussed in more detail below.

We recognized that one of the most significant challenges in developing a plausible PRC SoWC COA is in presenting a concrete political mechanism by which the PRC could hope to achieve all its aims vis-à-vis Taiwan rather than only some of them. We observe that such a mechanism is essential in any COA the PRC might pursue vis-à-vis Taiwan—even the putative PRC invasion of the island must end with some political settlement acceptable to Beijing.

However, envisaging a settlement that would be a victory for the PRC but also prevent Taiwanese resistance, international pushback, and other negative consequences that could threaten other PRC objectives is far from straightforward. Even less straightforward is developing such a mechanism for the SoWC COA. CDOT therefore took pains to craft and present a plausible and defensible “end-state mechanism.” The team studied the Republic of China (ROC) constitution and other relevant

Taiwanese laws to identify realistic legal mechanisms the CCP and proxies in Taiwan could leverage to establish effective control of the ROC government within the framework of the SoWC COA.

The team then developed a notional PRC concept of operations (CONOP) in narrative form that sequences PRC activities inspired by the expanded SoWC tool kit discussed above over the course of four years—that is, through the 2028 Taiwanese election cycle. This CONOP is designed to attack and defeat the COGs that we assess the PRC leadership believes have driven and sustained Taiwanese resistance to PRC aims. It is also designed to execute the end-state mechanism described above to achieve Beijing's political objectives.

The project then analyzed PRC COGs and critical vulnerabilities as they relate to this COA in order to offer recommendations for Taiwan, the US, and allied governments to counter ongoing PRC coercion and deter, disrupt, and defeat a PRC SoWC COA, such as the one presented here.

One of the objections to the plausibility or importance of developing the SoWC COA is that the PRC is more likely to use the kinds of activities presented below to set conditions for an invasion than it is to use them instead of an invasion. We have argued that the US and Taiwan must take seriously the possibility the PRC will seek to achieve its aims without an invasion. We also recognize, however, that a COA like the one described below, if properly designed, could set advantageous conditions for an invasion. Furthermore, we recognize that a successful defense against this SoWC COA by Taiwan and the US-led coalition could spur Beijing to launch an invasion, rather than giving up its aims.

The next phase of the CDOT project will thus use some variation of this SoWC COA as the basis for exploring invasion scenarios, either because Beijing tries and fails to execute an SoWC COA or because PRC leaders intentionally use elements of this scenario to set conditions for the invasion. We thus believe that the work presented below should inform continued research, including for those who reject the premise that the PRC might seek to achieve its aims without an invasion.

## Report Structure

Much of the work that follows is presented from the PRC's perspective, based on our assessments. First, we provide our assessment of PRC strategic objectives regarding Taiwan, both positive (what the PRC hopes to achieve) and negative (what the PRC hopes to avoid). Second, we describe the Taiwan "problem" that Beijing faces from the perspective of PRC strategic and military planners, as well as our assessment of how they might develop a solution to that problem, including the political mechanism Beijing would use to translate SoWC actions into the political outcome it seeks. Third, we describe the specific objectives and COGs we assess the PRC would seek to pursue and attack for this COA to succeed. Fourth, we describe the PLA's strategic thinking and concepts that would undergird and inform a CCP coercive campaign. Fifth, we present the assumptions we assess the CCP would likely make when planning such a COA.

The sixth section is the heart of our report. It describes in detail the COA's CONOP, beginning with a description of the coercive campaign at a conceptual level, followed by four phases (which we call "pulses") of the strategic plan the PRC would execute over the four years before the 2028 Taiwanese election. This section delineates the specific actions the CCP would notionally undertake in the military, diplomatic, economic, information, and cognitive domains to force Taiwan to accept Beijing's preferred political solution by means short of invasion. The end of this section includes an analysis of what PRC planners would likely expect the COA to have accomplished over four years, through a strategy of graduated infliction of pain and pressure on Taipei and manipulation of the US and Taiwanese domestic political processes. Crucially, we offer a realistic family of endgame scenarios that describe how the PRC would translate coercive action into political results it considers favorable.

The seventh section pulls back from the PRC's perspective to evaluate the COA from the US-Taiwan perspective. Here we present our assessment of the COA's feasibility and practicality and our assessment of the United States' and Taiwan's vulnerability to

political warfare of this kind. Finally, we offer a menu of strategic options for the US, Taiwan, and their partners to consider to head off, prepare for, and ultimately thwart a coercive campaign of this type and magnitude.

## SoWC COA Presentation

This section examines the SoWC COA in greater detail to establish our assessment of PRC objectives and how PRC strategic planners would align activities to achieve those objectives.

**Assessed Chinese Strategic Objectives Regarding Taiwan.** The PRC frames its overall grand-strategic objective as the "Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation"—that is, the reversal of the effects of the "Century of Humiliation" and the restoration of China's "historical prestige" by becoming what it calls a "modern socialist nation." Accomplishing this "rejuvenation" requires achieving sufficient national economic, military, technological, diplomatic, and political power to advance PRC core interests both locally and internationally and capturing territories the CCP views as intrinsic parts of China.

Beijing's national aspirations are nothing less than the reordering of global politics to place the PRC at the center, as the world's preeminent leader. In this way, it would be able to change rules, institutions, and power distributions to better suit its own interests and those of other countries that agree to follow the PRC's political-economic model of "socialism with Chinese characteristics"—the mix of autocratic politics with state-dominated market economics that characterizes modern China. Beijing has already shown its determination to advance its territorial aims, which include the expansion of influence and control over its maritime periphery.

The PRC's claim to Taiwan is based on a historical, imperialistic perspective. Beijing views Taiwan as an "integral part of Chinese historic territory" because the Qing dynasty controlled much of Taiwan for two centuries before ceding it to imperial Japan. America's support for the ROC, its World War II ally, was shaky

and uneven after the ROC retreated to Taiwan at the end of the Chinese civil war in 1949—until the beginning of the Korean War in 1950. After the PRC supported North Korea's aggression against South Korea, the US committed to the ROC's defense on Taiwan. The PRC views this US commitment as a malign act of interference in its domestic matters.

The US has since helped maintain Taiwan's *de jure* and then, after breaking official relations with the island in 1979, *de facto* independence from the PRC. CCP leaders believe the United States and other powers now conspire with "separatists" in Taiwan to maintain an artificial cross-strait division to contain and divide the PRC against the Chinese people's will. In the party's view, returning Taiwan to its rightful place as part of a single, unified, PRC-controlled Chinese state will cement the CCP's legacy as a restorer of national greatness. So long as Taiwan remains administered separately from the mainland, this core element of the PRC's "rejuvenation" will remain incomplete.

Taiwan's integration into the PRC governance structure is only one part of the PRC's grand-strategic framework, however, and only one among several PRC grand-strategic objectives. PRC leadership must therefore develop an approach to securing control of Taiwan that advances its other grand-strategic objectives or, at a minimum, does not compromise them. Beijing has identified clear modernization goals that it is committed to achieving by mid-century, at which time it hopes to be at least a peer of the United States in all measures of comprehensive national power.<sup>6</sup> During this march toward comprehensive modernization, the PRC seeks to become a respected world power, reshaping the world order to better suit its interests and values and making "Chinese contributions" to global governance. While Taiwan is a critical pillar of the PRC's self-defined "rejuvenation," a war over Taiwan that undermines other pillars of the PRC's grand strategy is also unacceptable.

The PRC's objectives *vis-à-vis* Taiwan also go beyond military positioning and chip manufacturing: The PRC requires that the Taiwanese people willingly accept PRC rule over time. A situation in which the PLA crushes and then brutally rules over a sullen

and resistant Taiwanese population could undermine rather than advance the "Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation" by challenging the premise that Taiwan and its people are naturally and historically part of a singular Chinese state. Any COA to gain control of Taiwan must take these considerations into account.

A direct invasion of Taiwan without first setting adequate political conditions to fundamentally undermine resistance toward Beijing would fail to account for these issues. Initiating a major war against Taiwan and the US, which could rapidly expand to involve Japan and other Asian states, would risk many core components of the project of restoring the PRC to its proper place in the world. It would also maximize the likelihood that the Taiwanese population will resist, fight, and require force to conquer, leading to sullenness and resentment—and possibly insurgency—rather than a desire to be part of a PRC-controlled China. Circumstances may develop such that the PRC leadership determines an invasion is preferable to other plausible COAs, but we assess that the factors listed above currently make an invasion less attractive to the PRC leadership than the COA proposed here.

This COA posits that the PRC will seek to annex Taiwan while coercing the ROC government and its international supporters to acquiesce. So far, the PRC's efforts have combined many elements of PRC national power to pressure Taiwan to capitulate while intentionally avoiding the use of large-scale military force. Achieving the party's goals for Taiwan short of war would minimize the risks of damaging PRC economic development, political security, diplomatic prestige, and other key elements of its "Great Rejuvenation." Additionally, securing the Taiwanese people's acquiescence to peaceful unification, even through coercion, would advance the CCP's goal of demonstrating that its party-led system of governance is superior to Western-style democracy.

**Assessed PRC Strategic Negative Objectives.** Achieving the PRC's objective of unification with Taiwan without jeopardizing other goals that contribute to the "Great Rejuvenation" requires that the PRC avoid a number of potential negative outcomes.

Above all, the PRC must avoid a large-scale, direct conflict with the US and its allies, including Australia, Japan, and the Republic of Korea (ROK). Such a conflict would be costly and its outcome uncertain. Besides avoiding all-out war, the PRC must also prevent widespread damage to its territory and significant military casualties. This imperative also applies to Taiwan, since the PRC views it as a part of its own territory.

When limited military measures are necessary, the PRC must avoid being seen as an aggressor and must frame its actions as defensive responses to threats and interventions by foreign actors. It must avoid being perceived as having initiated large-scale hostilities with any side, which would create undesirable effects in the information domain, generate doubts about the PRC's commitment to a defensive strategic posture, and put escalation control at risk. The PRC must therefore ensure that any kinetic force it employs is limited in scope and accompanied with information efforts portraying such use of force as part of a strategic defense.

Measures taken to contain the PRC are likely to be most damaging when coordinated across many countries. Continued strong economic relations with

Europe and the Middle East are crucially important for the PRC's projects; the "Great Rejuvenation" cannot be accomplished if the PRC is isolated or excluded from the world's major economies, the country's major trading partners, and other key stakeholders in the global order. Therefore, the PRC must avoid inadvertently strengthening an anti-PRC regional or extra-regional coalition that could act militarily, economically, or diplomatically to jeopardize the PRC's strategic objectives. In particular, it must avoid actions that would alienate the European Union over the long term and coalesce a strong US-led military bloc against it. Gaining control of Taiwan while suffering such isolation or the formation of such a bloc would constitute a grand-strategic defeat for the PRC.

Finally, unrest within the PRC endangers social stability and threatens the CCP's leading role. The PRC must ensure that its people sufficiently trust the party's leadership and that its efforts toward "national unification" do not engender widespread opposition. Sustained opposition in Taiwan would jeopardize any breakthroughs on cross-Strait peace and therefore must also be avoided.

### **Problem Statement: People's Republic of China (PRC) Voice**

*These sections are meant to shed light on the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leadership's internal ideological framing and conceptualization of the "Taiwan problem" and the Coalition Defense of Taiwan project's assessment of how PRC strategic planners would devise a solution and mechanism to achieve their political objectives toward Taiwan.*

*In these sections specifically, CCP naming conventions are used for demonstration purposes.*

Taiwan's de facto independence is a problem that must be resolved. Two key obstacles to unification have developed that necessitate corrective action to prevent the situation from worsening. First, the Taiwan compatriots have not yet accepted the inevitability of unification.<sup>7</sup> US intervention, in the form of military and diplomatic support, has encouraged the Taiwan compatriots to believe that the status quo can continue indefinitely. Taiwan compatriots assume that the Taiwan authorities can continue to administer the Taiwan area separately from the mainland.<sup>8</sup> The Taiwan area has been militarized to an unacceptable extent, increasing the risk and danger of war. Separatism has spread unchecked, despite continual deterrence efforts and repeated attempts to demonstrate to the Taiwan compatriots the benefits of unification.<sup>9</sup>

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**Problem Statement: PRC Voice (Continued)**

Second, US warmongering has pressured Japan, Europe, and other countries under US hegemony to oppose China militarily and economically. Statements from US leaders and the US military buildup in East Asia make clear the US intent to oppose China's national unification. US propaganda persuades its population to favor a cold war with China. In Asia, US leaders back separatists in the Taiwan area and pressure Japan to revert to militarism. Not limited to Japan or the Taiwan area, the US provides other regional states with arms that threaten China and encourages those states to prepare for war against China. US leaders also seek to cut off China's longtime trade relations with Europe and elsewhere to ensure China's economic isolation in the case of conflict.

**Solution: People's Republic of China (PRC) Voice**

*These sections are meant to shed light on the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leadership's internal ideological framing and conceptualization of the "Taiwan problem" and the Coalition Defense of Taiwan project's assessment of how PRC strategic planners would devise a solution and mechanism to achieve their political objectives toward Taiwan.*

*In these sections specifically, CCP naming conventions are used for demonstration purposes.*

Peaceful unification is impossible as long as these obstacles are in place. Therefore, China must undertake special measures to undo these harmful developments and set conditions for the resolution of the Taiwan issue.

US support for the Taiwan authorities is detrimental to unification and cannot be tolerated. China must persuade the US that the Taiwan authorities desire to negotiate a new foundation for the cross-strait relationship. Furthermore, the US must understand that backing the Taiwan area's continued separation from China is not worth the risk of war with China. A positive relationship between China and the US offers immense benefits to both countries and will become feasible as soon as the US and China can move past the Taiwan issue. Lastly, the Taiwan compatriots must recognize that US pledges to intervene on their behalf during a crisis are only empty promises and accept that Taiwan's future is bound to China. Hard-core "Taiwan independence" activists, who will never accept unification, must also cease to wield influence in the Taiwan area's politics.<sup>10</sup>

The US government's ambiguous and often contradictory policies regarding Taiwan provide China with the opportunity to severely degrade the US relationship with "Taiwan independence" activists. The three joint communiqués of 1972, 1979, and 1982 and associated diplomatic actions, which together constitute the so-called "One China" policy, codify US recognition of the PRC as the government of China and call for a peaceful resolution between the mainland and the Taiwan authorities. The Taiwan Relations Act provides the US with the legal justification to continue to have unofficial relations with the Taiwan authorities and support the Taiwan area's militarization.

China can leverage US adherence to its so-called "One China" policy and official diplomatic recognition of China to disincentivize further support for the Taiwan separatists, weakening US resistance to resolute action from China. Since the US does not recognize the Taiwan area as a country, China has

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### **Solution: PRC Voice (Continued)**

significant room to maneuver in manipulating the Taiwan compatriots' fears of abandonment, playing up the unreliability of US support for Taiwan to convince the Taiwan compatriots that China is a more sincere and advantageous partner. China can also conduct information operations to confuse and paralyze Washington's Taiwan policy and persuade international opinion that Chinese actions that may otherwise seem provocative are in fact lawful Chinese domestic activities.

The US-Taiwan relationship is thus uniquely vulnerable to political warfare, presenting China with a high probability of success through a strategy that primarily employs political and cognitive warfare tactics rather than large amounts of military force. China has already successfully persuaded the US to downgrade its relationship with the Taiwan authorities once, in 1979. If the right conditions present themselves, that advance can be repeated.

While breaking the Taiwan compatriots' ill-founded belief that the US will reliably come to their defense, China can direct its efforts at convincing them that their last, best option is to conclude a deal with China. The Taiwan compatriots must accept that the most viable solution to the issue of unification is to accede to a mainland proposal of a framework for a comprehensive peace process. This process would remove the "Taiwan independence" activists' influence and enable the true representatives of the Taiwan compatriots, now with their full support, to conclude negotiations with China on the peace process.

Only a legitimate, voluntary agreement between the mainland and the Taiwan authorities can bring about a peaceful unification without provoking sustained unrest among the Taiwan compatriots or risking the further intervention of "foreign forces."<sup>11</sup> There is no precedent for such an agreement in Taiwan, however, and vocal assent from the relevant leaders of the Taiwan area will therefore be crucial. The agreement need not make explicit the goal of unification or the eventual restrictions of Taiwan's current autonomous status that it will bring about. It must, however, include conditions that make the full unification of the Taiwan area into a PRC-administered Chinese state inevitable.

### **Mechanism: People's Republic of China (PRC) Voice**

*These sections are meant to shed light on the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leadership's internal ideological framing and conceptualization of the "Taiwan problem" and the Coalition Defense of Taiwan project's assessment of how PRC strategic planners would devise a solution and mechanism to achieve their political objectives toward Taiwan.*

*In these sections specifically, CCP naming conventions are used for demonstration purposes.*

The political mechanism that will finally secure the Taiwan area's peaceful integration into the PRC-run Chinese state will emerge as the natural resolution of an increasingly tense and painful situation caused by the actions described below. It will be presented not as a unification plan, but rather as a plan for the peaceful resolution of disputes between the mainland and the Taiwan authorities using language fully in accordance with the United States' Taiwan Relations Act. It will also be presented as a plan that establishes cross-Strait relations as a bilateral affair, in which outside forces have no rightful role.

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### Mechanism: PRC Voice (Continued)

The Taiwan authorities must willingly commit to a formal agreement with the mainland that ensures peace and promises a reduction and ultimate end of tensions while reforging the Taiwan area's status quo to the mainland's advantage. As part of the agreement, the Taiwan authorities will pledge to cease their diplomatic, military, and other high-level contact with foreign governments unless they receive explicit consent from the mainland. The Taiwan compatriots will be promised the right to govern themselves internally with a high degree of autonomy.

The mainland government and Taiwan authorities will delegate binding authority on cross-strait relations to a new bilateral body (a "cross-strait peace commission"), which will be tasked with resolving disputes between the two sides. Both sides will have the right to veto the appointment of any individual they find objectionable. China can thus manipulate the composition of this body as the primary mechanism for future de jure erosion of the Taiwan area's autonomy and its eventual full integration into China.

**SoWC COA Introduction and Description.** The SoWC COA described and evaluated in this report is a deliberate COA that the PRC could pursue to coerce Taiwan, its international partners, and its supporters to accept the PRC's demands regarding Taiwan by means short of war. The SoWC COA is also referred to as the "Anti-Separatism Campaign" where appropriate, to reflect the PRC's likely conception of the COA. This phrasing reflects the PRC's reasoning that Taiwan is an intrinsic part of the PRC and that the campaign is intended to isolate and defeat separatists who do not accept this reality.

The SoWC COA consists of many specific actions, escalating over a period of roughly four years, that would collectively tear down the obstacles to unifying Taiwan with the PRC. The SoWC COA begins after a new ROC government takes power in May 2024 and continues until the PRC and Taiwan reach a "peace" agreement, sometime before or shortly after 2028. This report illustrates the COA's escalation by grouping the activities into four increasingly intense pulses. The activities in each pulse occur across many domains, including air, sea, information, cyber, economic, and cognitive.

The wide diversity, informational cover, and deniable tactics of these activities are intended to make them appear unrelated to their intended targets.

Success requires that neither Taiwan nor the US realize the PRC is directing these activities toward a single, specific objective. Taiwan, on the other hand, must experience consistently increasing pressure and intensifying baseline coercive activity from the PRC, making the ROC government's work unfeasible and life in Taiwan unbearable to the point at which accepting a PRC-proposed "peace process" seems preferable.

The COA we present would mark a sharp break from ongoing PRC cognitive warfare and gray-zone efforts in several ways. First, it assumes that the PRC leadership has decided to achieve its aims toward Taiwan by means short of war in a finite, relatively short timeline and that it is unwilling to wait indefinitely or until some opportune moment arises. This decision would reflect the Chinese leadership's assessment that current efforts to ward off "separatism" in Taiwan are no longer sufficient to induce the Taiwanese to meaningfully advance unification with the PRC. Thus, the new cohesive SoWC COA is needed. Its composite activities should be designed to occur within certain time periods, and the party-state leadership should be able to initiate it at a time of its choosing.

Second, the SoWC COA's escalation would be a paradigm shift in cross-strait relations. The PRC would

greatly increase the scale, coherence, and intensity of its SoWC efforts, rather than merely continuing or slightly intensifying what it already has been doing. By the end of the SoWC COA, activities would have escalated to the maximum possible intensity that does not trigger a meaningful US or international response. Thus, “short of war” does not necessarily mean devoid of all military activity or PRC or Taiwanese casualties; it means only that those activities must not trigger or lead to a major military conflict on Taiwan or with the US. The SoWC COA activities are designed to achieve the desired cognitive and psychological effects on the targeted polities while avoiding such a war.

Third, this COA assumes that the PRC leadership has demanded that any SoWC COA not only support but also actively set adequate conditions for an escalation to a forcible integration of Taiwan, should the SoWC COA fail or seem likely to fail. The primary purpose of the SoWC COA is to achieve the desired end state by itself rather than to facilitate an escalation to war, which the PRC actively desires to avoid, but the COA must not undermine or preclude the PRC leadership’s ability to escalate to full-scale war if necessary.

**COA Objectives.** The “Anti-Separatism Campaign” encapsulated in this COA has the following key objectives:

- Defeat “separatism” in Taiwan,
- Isolate Taiwan from the outside world, and
- Establish a new legal framework for cross-Strait relations.

Defeating “separatism” involves reshaping the Taiwanese political environment such that resistance to the PRC’s aims is insignificant. To accomplish this aim, the PRC must render the ROC government ineffective, making continued independent governance of the island effectively impossible and greater PRC involvement in Taiwan the best possible remaining option. The PRC must also marginalize hard-line anti-unification elements, ensuring

that ROC government authorities cannot effectively oppose the erosion of sovereignty.

Isolating Taiwan involves degrading its ties with the outside world and neutralizing foreign efforts to deter PRC aggression toward Taiwan. The PRC must convince US leaders and the American people to scale back the substance of the US-ROC security relationship. The PRC must deter US engagement with Taiwanese leaders, eroding their external political support. The PRC must also break Taiwanese confidence in the US security commitment and generate skepticism of US intentions toward Taiwan. The PRC must deter other global powers, especially Australia, the EU, and the ROK, from coordinating with the US or Japan to oppose the PRC’s actions.

Establishing a new cross-Strait legal framework involves securing the ROC government’s agreement to an arrangement by which the PRC can eventually annex Taiwan. The PRC must set conditions for a political leader willing to make such concessions to assume the presidency in 2028. Additionally, it must see through the signing of a concessionary peace agreement and the ratification of a binding cross-Strait decision-making body by elements of the ROC government viewed as legitimate by the Taiwanese people.

In parallel with the above objectives, the PRC must also set conditions for the successful prosecution of a large-scale, protracted war against Japan, Taiwan, and the US should the “Anti-Separatism Campaign” fail. The setting of these conditions must be conducted in a manner that does not signal an imminent invasion of Taiwan or otherwise trigger US military actions that could compromise an invasion’s success.

**Taiwan and Allied COGs.** The COA objectives are designed to attack specific COGs in Taiwan, the US, and likely members of a US-led anti-PRC coalition in order to deprive these states of the will and ability to effectively defend against COA activities. A COG, in US military doctrine, is defined as a source of power that provides a state with moral or physical strength, freedom of action, or the will to act. This COA identifies four primary COGs:

1. The US-Taiwan relationship,

2. The ROC government's ability to function and provide essential services,
3. The Taiwanese public's will to resist integration, and
4. US willingness to support Taiwan.

The COA attacks the Taiwan-US relationship to deter cooperation in the economic, military, diplomatic, and information domains by convincing both governments that this cooperation directly precipitates further PRC escalation. The COA degrades the ROC government's ability to provide essential services to the Taiwanese population in order to erode legitimacy and destroy public confidence in the ROC military's (ROCM) ability to defend Taiwan. COA actions target the Taiwanese public's will to continue resisting China's multi-domain coercion by building narratives and realities of rapidly eroding standards of living and a heightened risk of war with little to no prospects of improvement—other than by acquiescing to the PRC's demands.

The COA aims, finally, to convince the US government and public that supporting Taiwan is no longer in the United States' best interest by promoting US domestic political arguments that the costs of supporting Taiwan significantly outweigh the benefits. The COA's design aggregates the effects generated by the activities across each pulse to target these COGs—a concerted effort to coerce Taiwan into accepting the PRC's demands while fracturing attempts to coalesce US political will around actively defending Taiwan.

This COA specifically targets the Taiwan-US relationship to preclude coordinated resistance to the COA, because this relationship is existential for continued Taiwanese autonomy. The US government remains Taiwan's primary source of advanced weapons systems, ammunition, and intelligence, while the US military actively deters major PRC military activity in the Taiwan Strait through freedom of navigation operations (FONOPs) and regional exercises. The US government also provides diplomatic and informational support through political rhetoric, reciprocal

visits by high-level officials, and public advocacy for greater Taiwanese representation in global organizations. The US and Taiwanese economies are also highly intertwined, especially due to Taiwan's irreplaceable role in technological innovation and semiconductor production capacity.

The COA intends to target every element of this relationship to cut off the US as Taiwan's conduit to the wider global community, seeking to convince both governments that preserving this relationship is no longer in their mutual interest. This relationship need not be completely severed, but it must be degraded to the point that the US government and public no longer view Taiwan as a bastion of competent liberal-democratic society or as an irreplaceable element of the global economy.

Taiwan must also come to see interaction with the US as ultimately detrimental to its security and prosperity, since every interaction is a "provocation" to the PRC, which may respond with further escalation. The ROC government and Taiwanese people must conclude, finally, that the US simply will not come to their defense if the PRC attacks. Once the Taiwan-US relationship is sufficiently weakened, many COA effects will become much more pronounced and thus generate greater political results within Taiwan.

The COA seeks to erode the ROC government's ability to govern its territory and provide reliable public services to its citizens, causing lasting damage to the ROC government's legitimacy by worsening living conditions in Taiwan. Simultaneously, the COA produces escalating levels of political violence in Taiwan, including physical attacks that aim to demonstrate that the ROC government cannot ensure the safety of its citizens.

The COA's effects are designed to encourage the Taiwanese public to not only criticize the ROC government but also seek an end to Taiwan's suffering by accepting the PRC's proposed peace plan. The PRC's peace offer promising good governance, security, and prosperity becomes much more palatable when compared with rampant crime, a crashing economy, and a lack of food on store shelves. The COA pairs these effects with information-warfare narratives highlighting the PRC's own effective

governance to convince enough of the Taiwanese public that PRC rule is preferable to constant chaos under the ROC government.

The COA directly targets the Taiwanese public's collective will to maintain resistance to the COA's actions and regular PRC demands for negotiations. Public polling continues to indicate that Taiwanese citizens increasingly favor de facto independence and maintaining the status quo, reflecting their dismissal of China's proposals for unification and deeper integration thus far. The COA intends to make the status quo increasingly untenable for the Taiwanese public by setting conditions to erode its will to actively resist the COA and the ROC government's ability to find a solution.

Intensified information campaigns, united front activities, persistent fears of military escalation, and visible, escalating friction between the US and ROC governments are intended to affect public opinion and signal the futility of resistance. The COA compounds these efforts by creating scarcity in essential goods such as food, fuel, and medicine, as the COA's blockade-like effects significantly harm Taiwan's import-dependent economy.

The COA aims to significantly undermine the US government's and public's desires to continue providing Taiwan with substantial diplomatic, economic, and military assistance. The COA is designed to promote narratives that any US support for the Taiwanese "separatists" will "provoke" the PRC into escalation, thus portraying these public displays of support as counterproductive for both the US and Taiwan. The COA's information warfare within the US focuses on conflating this cycle of public support with constantly escalating tensions, provoking intense disputes within US domestic politics that build on existing US narratives of international retrenchment to focus on domestic issues.

These COA effects also leverage arguments that view US support for Taiwan as an impediment to US-PRC cooperation on a host of issues of common interest. Once Americans broadly perceive the US relationship with Taiwan as detrimental to US interests, the US political leadership will be increasingly unwilling to risk further inflaming tensions with the

PRC by taking actions to shore up Taiwan's will and ability to resist the COA's effects.

**Assessed PRC Strategic Thinking—Cognitive Warfare.** The SoWC COA's design is based on the CDOT project's current understanding of PRC strategic thinking, thus presenting a realistic means by which the PRC might seek to establish control over Taiwan. PRC strategic thinking places great emphasis on comprehensively attacking one's enemy using both cognitive and physical means. Throughout the course of this COA, the PRC will seek to crush the Taiwanese will to resist without declaring war or inciting significant US retaliation.

The following subsections introduce the core logic of this strategy based on PRC strategic thought, which is further developed throughout this report. There are seven key concepts in PRC strategic thinking that support our assessment that the PRC could choose to employ the COA laid out in this report.

*Systems Confrontation* (体系对抗). The PLA understands modern warfare as a confrontation between opposing systems. While the CCP discusses differences in ideology and government, systems confrontation refers not to political or economic systems but rather to operational systems (作战体系).<sup>12</sup> These operational systems are campaign-level entities that carry out actions necessary to the conduct of a military operation.

Successful systems confrontation requires a military to achieve "comprehensive dominance" in all domains and battlefields. For the PLA, these include the land, sea, air, space, cyberspace, electromagnetic, and psychological domains.<sup>13</sup> In a conflict between the PRC and Taiwan, the PLA's operational systems—composed of the command system, firepower strike system, information-confrontation system, reconnaissance intelligence system, and support system—will go up against corresponding Taiwanese systems.

PLA victory requires successful systems destruction warfare (体系破击战), in which the enemy's operational systems are paralyzed or destroyed and enemy fighters lose their will and ability to resist.<sup>14</sup> It is necessary for the success of this PRC effort to

integrate Taiwan that Taiwan “chooses” to become part of the PRC, even if this choice is forced on it following extended periods of intense coercion. Taiwan’s “willful agreement” to move toward unification marks the ultimate victory for the CCP. This PRC theory of victory shapes this SoWC COA’s design.

*Nonwar Military Activities* (军队非战争军事行动). In the 2013 edition of *Science of Military Strategy*, the Chinese Academy of Military Sciences (AMS)<sup>15</sup> first defined nonwar military activities as campaigns using limited military aggression in support of political objectives.<sup>16</sup> The AMS divides nonwar military activities into four main categories: confrontational, law enforcement, air and rescue, and cooperative.<sup>17</sup>

A fundamental component of Xi’s national security strategy is “peacetime employment of military force” (和平时期军事力量运用). This concept entails having the PLA conduct military actions on the pretext that they serve a nonmilitary purpose.<sup>18</sup> It is also referred to as “using war to prevent war,” the CCP’s idea that escalation and smaller conflicts can be useful in preventing a large-scale war.<sup>19</sup>

These ideas are not only key to shaping this report’s COA; they also explain why Beijing may believe that even its most escalatory behavior could potentially not be construed as an act of war by outside observers. The CCP’s efforts toward the “peaceful unification” of Taiwan can potentially include high levels of military action so long as they plausibly remain below the threshold of war as the US and its allies and partners define it. Choosing an SoWC campaign against Taiwan will mitigate the risk of escalation and US response by strengthening Washington’s belief that such actions do not constitute enough of a threat of military escalation to warrant US military involvement.

*Strategic Deterrence* (战略威慑). The PLA conceptualizes strategic deterrence as a set of military and nonmilitary capabilities that constitute a posture of “integrated strategic deterrence,” which defends national security interests. This posture requires military capabilities including nuclear, conventional, space, and cyberwarfare forces and nonmilitary

capabilities including diplomatic, economic, scientific, and technological strength.<sup>20</sup> PLA conceptualizations of strategic deterrence also encompass US notions of compellence.<sup>21</sup>

The modernization of the PRC’s nuclear forces and the development of new capabilities in cyberspace, space, and electronic warfare reflect the evolution of PLA thinking about the increased importance of military power in strategic deterrence. According to the most recent edition of the *Science of Military Strategy*, strategic deterrence is necessary in peacetime, crisis, and war and hinges on the PLA’s ability to remain flexible.<sup>22</sup> In a conflict over Taiwan, the PRC would take advantage of its growing strategic deterrence capabilities to threaten force against those who would challenge it, and at the same time the PRC would use its economic and diplomatic forces to ensure it is able to accomplish its political goals.

*Effective Control* (有效控制). Effective control is defined as the strategy of preventing or controlling conflict escalation while pursuing PRC strategic interests.<sup>23</sup> Effective control consists of “establishing posture” (营造态势) during peacetime to shore up strategic weaknesses, preventing and controlling crises (防控危机), and controlling war situations (控制战局) when conflict arises.<sup>24</sup> Effective control also depends on thorough preparation and “seizing the initiative” to ensure victory. This concept helps explain why the PRC may escalate tensions in a potential conflict scenario even if it seeks to prevent war breaking out.

*Cognitive Warfare* (认知战). Cognitive warfare is defined as using public opinion and psychological and legal means to achieve victory. Cognitive warfare tactics seek to achieve “mental dominance” (制脑权) and undermine enemy perception, decision-making, and overall resolve without resorting to physical combat.<sup>25</sup> The PRC National Defense University’s 2020 edition of *Science of Military Strategy* includes cognitive warfare in its “multi-domain integrated joint operations” strategy. Cognitive warfare is a key component of “intelligentized” warfare (智能化战争), the PLA’s newest concept of warfare, which focuses on human

cognition and controlling the will of one's enemy.<sup>26</sup> A significant portion of our SoWC COA is based on the idea that the PRC will seek to affect the minds of the Taiwanese people so significantly that they will believe they have no other choice but to agree to the PRC's offer of a "peace framework."

*Reflexive Control* (反射控制). Reflexive control is a Soviet and Russian concept defined as convincing one's enemy to voluntarily take an action benefiting the initiator at the expense of the targeted state, even though the targeted state believes it is acting in its own self-interest.<sup>27</sup> Within this report's COA, the PRC will shape the discourse space to align with its objectives, which will then force adversary leadership to independently choose actions that Beijing wants them to perform, always believing they are actually pursuing their own best interests.

*Hybrid Warfare* (混合战争). The PLA defines hybrid warfare as how countries use all aspects of state power, both physical and nonphysical, to confront an adversary indirectly.<sup>28</sup> Some aspects of state power identified in publications discussing hybrid warfare include public opinion, diplomacy, civil society, trade restrictions, and electronic warfare as a few of the tools available to conduct hybrid warfare operations.<sup>29</sup>

Hybrid warfare is seen as a way to confront great powers without directly engaging with them, slowly winning over the adversary populace and weakening state security efforts.<sup>30</sup> Our SoWC COA follows the tenets of a successful hybrid warfare campaign, as it presents a whole-of-government approach to winning over the Taiwanese and US populations without the need for conquering territory or extensive physical confrontation.

**The PRC Is Already Conducting Elements of the SoWC COA.** The PRC has long sought to "deter Taiwan independence." It has thus constantly engaged in coercive activities against Taiwan to discourage it from pursuing certain actions contrary to PRC interests while gradually wearing down Taiwan's capacity to respond effectively. In particular, the PLA's constant

military pressure on the island threatens to steadily degrade Taiwan's ability to confront PRC activities. This coercion extends beyond Taiwan to target Australia, EU members, Japan, the US, and many other states in seeking to advance the PRC's own interests and deter significant assistance to Taiwan.

A full-fledged SoWC COA as described here goes beyond the PRC's present-day coercion campaign by sharply accelerating current elements of "baseline" coercion, adding additional novel coercive activities, and portraying Taiwan and the US as the ultimate aggressors, all while keeping the campaign short of war. The PRC would seek to make each escalation look like a reaction to adversary "provocations."

The PRC would signal that it has "no choice" but to counter each provocation with its own demonstration of strength. These demonstrations would reiterate the PRC's redlines and communicate the CCP's strong determination to resolve the Taiwan issue in its favor. Thus, the "Anti-Separatism Campaign" would build on and escalate current coercive strategies that the PRC has waged against states around the world, using capabilities the PRC has already demonstrated and coalescing these activities into an integrated approach to achieve unification with Taiwan.

**CDOT Planning Assumptions for COA.** The SoWC COA was designed with the assumption that the following conditions would hold after the new ROC government's seating in May 2024. If any of these conditions are invalidated during this time, the COA would have to be significantly revised to remain viable.

Basic political conditions and military capabilities must remain largely unchanged for all relevant countries, including Australia, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), Japan, the Philippines, the PRC, the ROK, Taiwan, and the US. If the balance of military power shifts dramatically in favor of a US-led coalition, coercive narratives emphasizing PLA strength and American weakness will become much less effective. If the balance of military power shifts dramatically in favor of the PRC, the SoWC strategy could become less attractive to the PRC than an invasion. If political conditions shift strongly against the

PRC, leading relevant countries to support Taiwan more openly, pledge to defend it, or recognize its sovereignty, the SoWC COA will be rendered largely ineffective. If political conditions shift strongly in favor of the PRC, with relevant countries explicitly accepting the PRC's claims to Taiwan and referring to the cross-strait conflict as an "internal affair," this COA will likely become unnecessary.

The COA was designed to be most effective against the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) government that won the 2024 ROC presidential election. The activities throughout the COA were specifically created to attack William Lai and the DPP administration based on current trends in PRC, Taiwanese, and US political discourse. While this COA is designed with current Taiwanese leadership and political dynamics in mind, a coercion campaign similar to the one presented in this report could still be effectively used in future elections and against non-DPP candidates. The COA presented is not intended to argue that any political party or movement within Taiwan is detrimental to Taiwanese national security. Rather, the COA demonstrates that the PRC has the intent and capability to synthesize coercion and information operations to exacerbate political divides in democratic states in pursuit of its interests.

Defeated parties must accept the results of Taiwanese elections. If election results are contested, a constitutional crisis could ensue, yielding new political dynamics in Taiwan. These new dynamics may render key COA activities ineffective or potentially create more direct avenues that the PRC could leverage to advance its objectives toward Taiwan. The PRC must also not actively contest the results, as such contestation would indicate that Beijing is pursuing a different COA.

Current informational trends in Taiwanese domestic politics must continue through election day. If a staunchly anti-PRC consensus emerges across

political parties in Taiwan, for instance, future informational efforts could not operate in the same way.

European attitudes toward the US and regional allies must not have materially shifted to favor a stronger stance against the PRC. Specifically, if the EU becomes as hawkish toward the PRC as the US is, the chances of maintaining a productive economic relationship with the EU throughout the COA become much lower.

The PRC must not have materially changed its position on the Ukraine war or its relationship with Russia such that Russia is able to achieve a decisive victory over Ukraine.

The Middle East must remain free of large-scale, state-on-state conflict, and energy supplies must continue to flow freely to all states.

**COA CONOP.** *Our cutoff for designing specific activities within the SoWC COA was February 2024, and thus the most recent instances of PRC coercion may not be reflected here.*

The SoWC COA "Anti-Separatism Campaign" focuses on a gradual but near-complete isolation of Taiwan from its international relationships while deterring the intervention of key regional actors via threats of escalation. This COA is primarily directed at Taiwan and its crucial allies: the US and Japan. Some included actions are aimed at the broader international community. The COA is constrained by the need to prevent excessive harm to the PRC's interests outside of Taiwan. It should not provoke a concerted international reaction, lead to a conventional war, cause the PRC to lose escalation control, or incite significant domestic unrest.

The PRC intends for the campaign to cause isolation evident to the ROC government, military, and public, generating a sense of hopelessness and a popular demand for a resolution to the crisis. The futility of Taiwanese resistance without international support would further convince the ROC government that a peace framework is necessary to end the public's suffering. This is crucial to overcoming justified concerns that far-reaching, binding agreements with the PRC could create pathways toward unification.



## Story Arcs

A military plan would normally consist of multiple lines of operations or LOEs, but we have chosen to conceptualize and present this COA through a series of narrative threads we call “story arcs.” This phrasing reflects this COA’s cognitive nature. The story arcs are composed primarily of real-world activities with real-world effects—they are not only or even primarily information operations. But they are all intended to achieve specific cognitive effects that develop over time in a format more suited to the language of narrative than the language of war.

The SoWC COA narrative thus traces eight distinct story arcs, which develop in parallel over the four pulses. Story arcs capture the overall character and key elements of PRC coercion. Pulses are divisions of time used to split the narrative into four separate sections, allowing readers to compare PRC behavior at particular moments. We use the term “pulse” to emphasize that throughout this COA, the increase in pressure on Taiwan and the US would proceed in a fashion that may include periods of sharp escalation and other periods of relative constancy or more minor escalation.

1. The PRC uses cyberwarfare and physical sabotage to significantly degrade Taiwan’s essential services, such as clean water and electricity. Taiwan will be unable to effectively respond to these attacks, thus making the government appear grossly incompetent and creating feelings of insecurity in Taiwanese society.
2. Increased PLA activity around the island of Taiwan begins to exhaust and overwhelm the ROCM. PRC information warfare spreads the narrative that the ROCM is incapable of defending Taiwan and decreases trust in the military and feelings of security among the Taiwanese populace. The ROCM, insufficiently equipped to handle this significant uptick in activity, looks to the US for urgent assistance, which the US Department of Defense and US Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM) are reluctant to provide. The PRC reinforces this reluctance by initiating distracting crises through PRC-affiliated actors or rogue states, forcing the US to spread its resources to address urgent requests for aid by global allies and partners. Without a sufficient or rapid response from the US or Taiwan, the PLA gradually normalizes increases in military activity to further the narrative of ROCM incompetence and helplessness.
3. Taiwan becomes physically isolated through a series of increasingly frequent shipping inspections and aerial and maritime closures. As the international community increasingly avoids the Taiwan Strait and fails to come to Taiwan’s aid, the PRC further demonstrates its ability to escalate activities against Taiwan with impunity.
4. Taiwan also becomes informationally isolated through PRC subsea cable cutting, cyberwarfare, and electronic warfare activities that reduce reliable communications between Taiwan and the US.
5. The PRC uses cognitive warfare to divide Taiwanese society, particularly in terms of political and cross-Strait relations. Those within Taiwanese politics and society who are vocally opposed to unification are pressured, intimidated, and isolated. As Taiwanese society becomes increasingly divided and the situation on the island becomes increasingly dire, many look to blame the vocal “separatists” and find an alternative solution to alleviate their suffering.
6. US support for Taiwan continues to erode as the costs and risks of continued engagement rise. As more people in the US public and government grow worried about the heightened risks of war, many see continued support for Taiwan as a significant risk with little gain.

7. US companies and multinational corporations, presented with a combination of generous incentives and acute threats, also view Taiwan as a dangerous place to do business and are encouraged to move their operations to the PRC.
8. All these efforts support the creation and development of an operational end-state mechanism, which provides Taiwan with a peaceful means to diminish PRC coercion. This end-state mechanism allows for open dialogue between the PRC and Taiwan and advances efforts of peaceful unification.

The increase in pressure on Taiwan and the US will be steady and consistent in some pulses, while others include both periods of sharp escalation and periods of relative constancy or minor escalation. The PRC, as noted above, has already been pursuing activities that contribute to almost all these story arcs for many years. This COA's novelty is it supposes that the PRC leans heavily into all of them at the same time in a unified fashion, in execution of a plan designed to last four years. Beijing has not previously conducted any such effort.

**Pulse 1: Objectives.** In Pulse 1 (Figures 1–2), from May 2024 to December 2025, the PRC aims to politically and socially isolate Taiwanese “separatists” from the rest of the Taiwanese population by blaming them for an increase in tensions. The PRC also aims to materially and cognitively isolate Taiwan from the outside world, creating the effects of a blockade without initiating one formally. Additionally, the PRC aims to separate Taiwan from the US, reducing US willingness to support Taiwan militarily and politically—and breaking the US-Taiwan economic relationship by imposing costs on US companies with ties to Taiwan.

**Pulse 1: Narrative.** DPP candidate Lai emerged victorious in the 2024 presidential election. After he takes office in May 2024, he becomes the target of intense CCP criticism, beginning with a rebuke from the PRC's Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO) for not

committing to resolve fundamental cross-Strait problems in his inauguration speech. The CCP accuses Lai of being a warmonger who is pro-independence and too close to the US. While such narratives have been spreading around Lai since he announced his candidacy, they are now accompanied by consistently record-setting incursions into Taiwan's air defense identification zone (ADIZ).<sup>31</sup>

People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) aircraft frequently approach Taiwan's contiguous zone,<sup>32</sup> the People's Liberation Army Rocket Force (PLARF) tests missiles over and around the island of Taiwan, and the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) begins moving ships through Taiwan's contiguous zone in unannounced exercises.<sup>33</sup> At the same time, electronic warfare attacks target ROCM operations, satellite communications experience disruptions, and undersea cables to smaller Taiwanese islands are cut, all of which have the effect of degrading the ROCM's operational capacity.<sup>34</sup>

Western journalists and PLA watchers monitor this increase in activity, but they generally agree that this trend is in line with previous PRC responses to Taiwanese elections and does not indicate imminent invasion.<sup>35</sup> Within Taiwan, this increase in activity is largely ignored, as the population has long since been accustomed to reports of PLAAF planes passing overhead.

A few months later, a series of articles is released by PRC academics, discussing frameworks for peace between the PRC and Taiwan. These articles examine the state of cross-Strait relations and attempt to provide a “mutually beneficial” solution for Taiwan and the PRC, with the ultimate outcome of the peaceful unification of Taiwan with the PRC being largely unstated or obscured. These frameworks are unofficial and speculative, though many reference Xi's previously announced Fujian-Taiwan economic integration plan.<sup>36</sup> While they are from independent academics, not CCP officials, such proposals undoubtedly imply the approval of a high-ranking CCP official.

As these plans are released in obscure PRC academic journals, discussion of the frameworks is limited to PRC academics and dedicated foreign China watchers, rather than PRC officials or Western media

### **The PRC Can Use the US Focus on Invasion Scenarios to Obscure Short-of-War Courses of Action**

The growing fixation in the US about the supposedly imminent People's Republic of China (PRC) invasion of Taiwan can lead US intelligence analysts and military planners to focus narrowly on indicators that such an invasion plan has been launched. The PRC can use that focus to mask a short-of-war coercion course of action (SoWC COA) by ensuring that related military activities will not trip obvious indicators of invasion preparations. The PRC could hope thereby that US analysts and planners will downplay and disregard the real dangers posed by increasing PRC military activity on the grounds that it does not appear to be part of preparations for an actual attack. The US can mitigate this risk by expanding the aperture of indicators to include those for the SoWC COA and avoiding an overly narrow focus on the invasion scenario.

writ large. Those in Taiwan and the West who take notice are largely dismissive of them, believing that Taiwan would never agree to such terms. These criticisms spur other researchers to produce their own iterations of the frameworks later on. It is not apparent when these articles appear that they describe, in fact, the intended end state of a coherent COA the PRC is pursuing.

At the end of 2024, Xi delivers a speech declaring, "The time has come to solve the Taiwan problem and ensure it will not be passed along to future generations." Such a speech appears to many as simply a repetition of old rhetoric.<sup>37</sup> Others in the US fear that the speech signals an imminent invasion, prompting an intense review of relevant indicators, at the end of which the US military and intelligence community conclude that no such invasion is in active preparation. Unbeknownst to all but CCP officials, however, this speech marks the beginning

of a yearlong campaign to coerce Taiwan into capitulating to PRC unification demands by means short of war.

Following this speech, the PRC begins a series of coordinated information operations centered on inciting fears of a US-PRC war over Taiwan while accusing the US and Taiwan of instigating such a conflict. The PRC also amplifies Taiwan-US divisions by highlighting mutual disagreements over Taiwan's defense strategy and weapons procurement. While such narratives do not gain significant traction among the US or Taiwanese public at this time, they are clearly visible on social media in both countries and become increasingly part of the discourse and public consciousness. Near the end of the year, the PRC's National People's Congress releases an amendment to the 2005 Anti-Secession Law, which now threatens unspecified penalties against individuals in Taiwan who have engaged in "separatist" activities.<sup>38</sup>

The PLA begins conducting higher-intensity and more frequent exercises involving the PLAN, PLAAF, and PLARF, and unilateral air and sea area closures for these exercises increasingly disrupt civilian air traffic. At the same time, the China Coast Guard (CCG) begins infrequently conducting inspections of Taiwan-bound cargo vessels, citing environmental concerns and safety issues regarding the ships and their cargos.<sup>39</sup> While these inspections remain infrequent, they are combined with General Administration of Customs of the People's Republic of China (GACC) import bans on select Taiwanese-manufactured products, causing concern about an economic downturn among Taiwanese business leaders and economists.

The PRC's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) and PRC Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM) are quick to organize meetings with regional heads of state and business leaders. These meetings seek to reassure officials that the PRC is not planning to go to war and stress that recent escalation is the fault of Japan, Taiwan, and the US. Official statements confirming the PRC's willingness to engage in trade deals and debt negotiations with global partners are released, along with corresponding social media narratives spreading positive information about economic exchanges with the PRC. These high-level meetings

appease many regional leaders—though Japanese and American officials continue to condemn PLA activity around Taiwan as provocative and unjustifiable.

Many US companies selling weapons components or products with potential military applications (defined broadly by the PRC) to Taiwan report damaging cyberattacks. The perpetrators of these attacks remain anonymous, but most cyber experts assess that they are coming from the PRC or PRC-affiliated groups. New threats of PRC sanctions are leveled at these companies, which increasingly conclude that this harassment will continue as long as they do business with Taiwan. Many disregard the PRC's threats, but several US companies across various industries begin taking steps to reduce or remove Taiwan-based assets and investments.<sup>40</sup> The PRC indicates its desire to negotiate trade deals with the US, causing many in the business community to voice support for stable and less antagonistic US-China economic ties.

At the same time, the PRC executes a number of domestic initiatives. The international community does not manifest a strong negative reaction toward the PRC, but PRC campaign planners are aware that as coercive pressure on Taiwan and the US increases, the PRC could face backlash. CCP leadership, therefore, calls for state-owned enterprises and experts to identify parts of CCP supply chains that could be affected by international boycotts of PRC goods or attempts by the international community to punish the PRC through collective economic action. The CCP works to stockpile select goods and encourages domestic manufacturing in key industries, but it attempts to do so inconspicuously, to prevent domestic panic or international concerns of imminent invasion.

**Pulse 1: Situation Recap.** At the end of Pulse 1, general levels of concern in American, Taiwanese, and allied populations and governments remain low. All states have taken notice of increased PLA activity and CCG shipping inspections, but the US military has not observed any PLA or CCP behavior that indicates an impending invasion. Some China-focused academics are concerned that PRC coercion may continue to escalate, but the US military and US

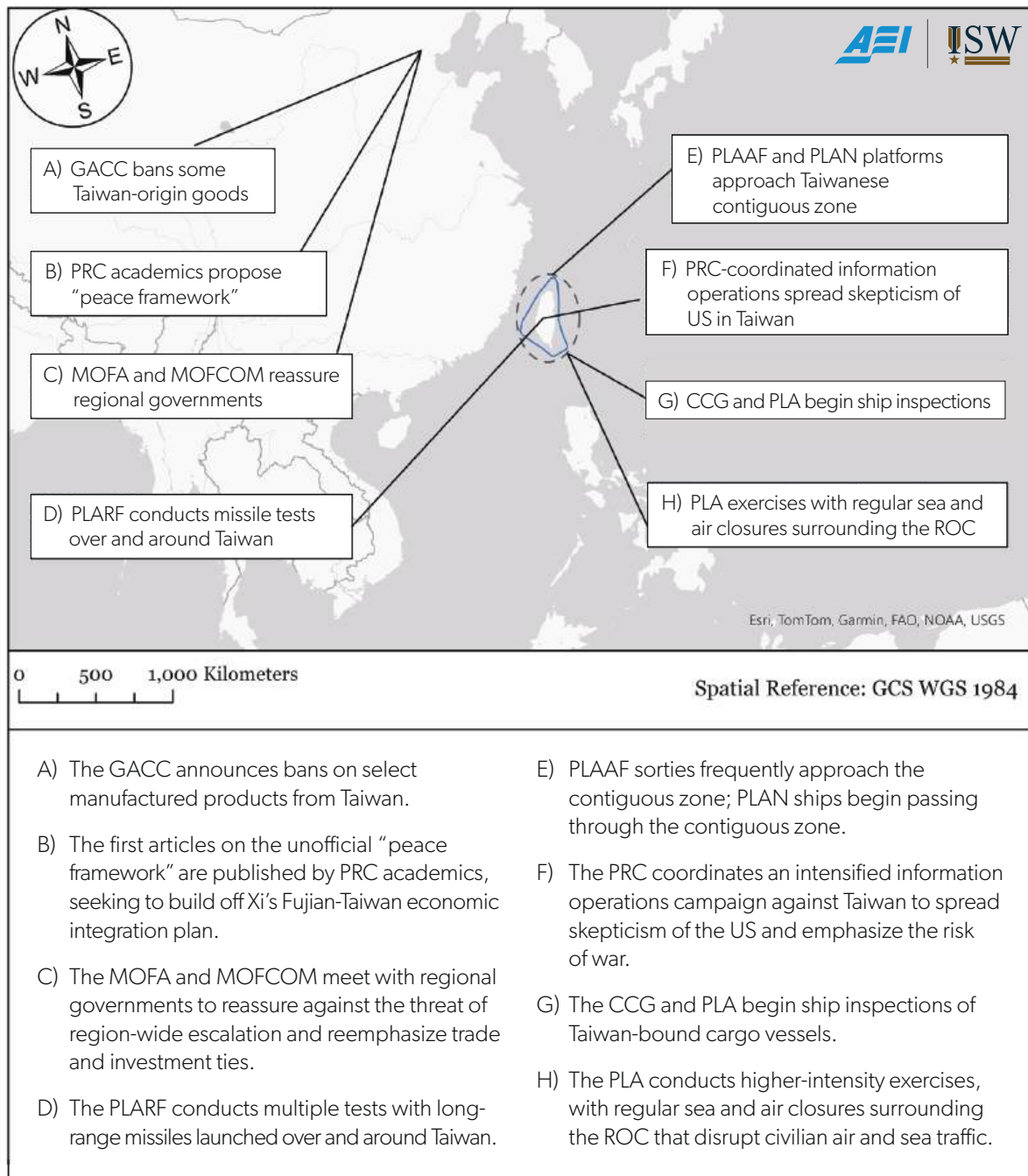
government generally are not overly concerned at this time. The US Department of State, however, is growing concerned with the PRC's increased diplomatic activity, and it decides to dedicate additional resources to engaging with nonaligned states to ensure they remain friendly to the US.

The US does not alter its aid to Taiwan at this time, despite ROC government calls for additional assistance to enable a more effective response to PLA activity. Taiwan determines that its best option is to double down on domestic weapons and matériel manufacturing, a strategy applauded by the US. Some ROC government and military agencies are beginning to feel the impact of PRC coercion, but the ROC government remains functional. Taiwanese domestic support for the government remains largely unaffected, though the seeds for further cognitive and psychological warfare have been planted.

**Pulse 2: Objectives.** In Pulse 2 (Figures 3–4), from January 2026 to December 2026, the PRC seeks to increase friction in the US-Taiwan relationship, inducing Taiwanese and US politicians and their respective populaces to blame their countries' bilateral relations for the increasing escalation, including by fueling isolationist currents in the US around the 2026 midterms. The PRC also seeks to stress and distract INDOPACOM, Japan, and South Korea with regional horizontal escalations seemingly disconnected from Taiwan, aiming to force a debate in the relevant countries on their respective force distributions.

**Pulse 2: Narrative.** In early 2026, the PRC MOFA puts out a press statement condemning "certain Taiwanese politicians" for colluding with "foreign forces to conduct subversive activity in the mainland."<sup>41</sup> The PLA begins a renewed escalation of military activity around Taiwan, ostensibly in response to this alleged subversive activity, with bombers and drones circumnavigating the main island.<sup>42</sup> Fighter aircraft fly deeper into the ADIZ than before.<sup>43</sup> Regular violations of Taiwan's maritime contiguous zone by PLAN vessels also provoke growing concern that the PRC will trespass into Taiwan's territorial waters.<sup>44</sup> Meanwhile, the PLARF launches ballistic missiles

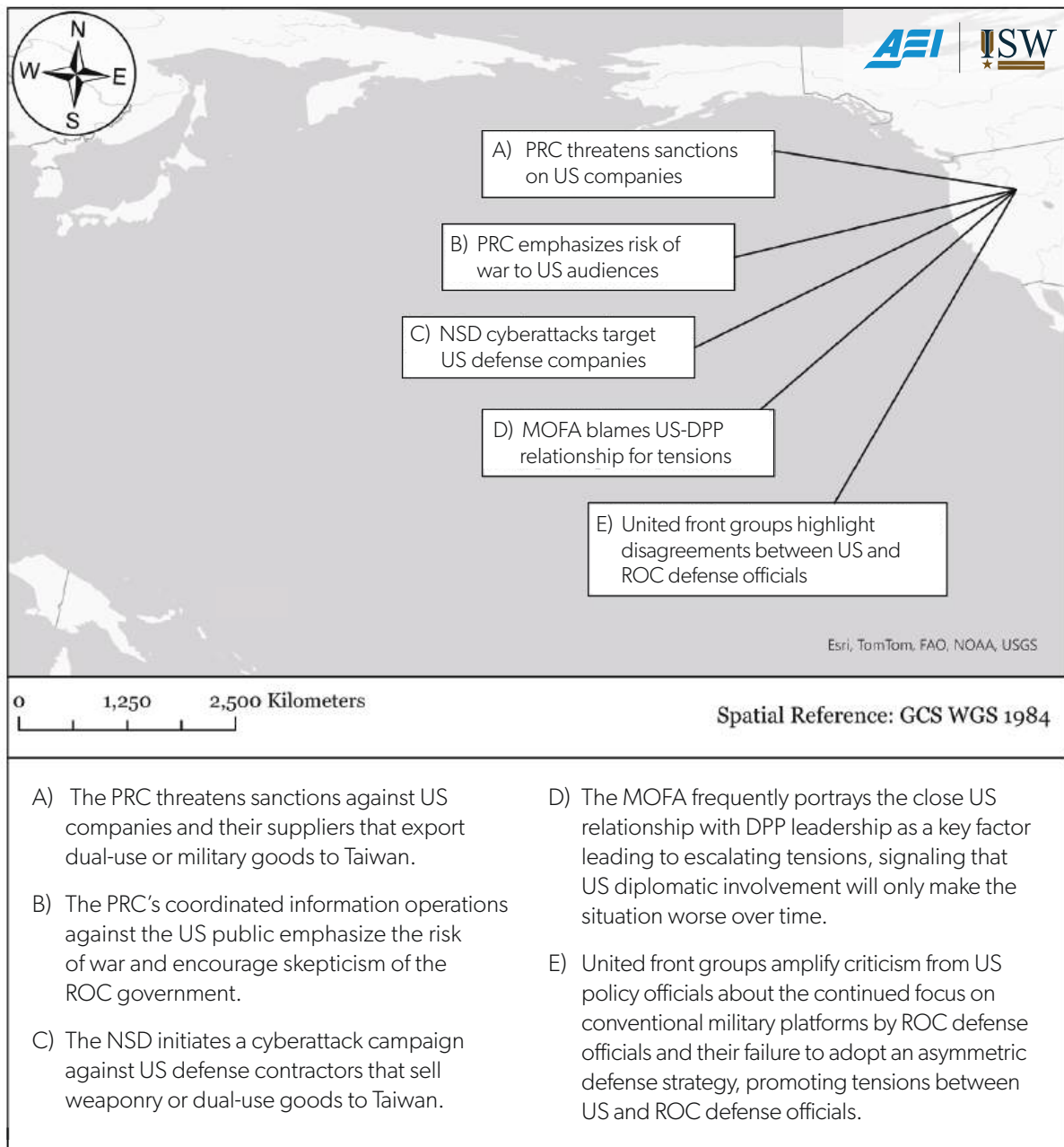
Figure 1. Pulse 1 Activities—PRC and Taiwan, May 2024–December 2025



Note: The blue line represents Taiwan's maritime contiguous zone boundary. The dotted gray line represents the PRC's quasi-blockade around Taiwan.

Source: Authors' projections; and Marine Regions, "Overlapping Claim Taiwan: Taiwan/China," <https://www.marineregions.org/eezdetails.php?mrgid=8321>.

**Figure 2. Pulse 1 Activities—US and Japan, May 2024–December 2025**



Source: Authors’ projections; and Marine Regions, “Overlapping Claim Taiwan: Taiwan/China,” <https://www.marineregions.org/eezdetails.php?mrgid=8321>.

that cross into Taiwanese airspace for the first time, which provokes criticism from neighboring countries.<sup>45</sup> In response, a PLA spokesperson clarifies that these exercises are conducted over PRC sovereign territory and therefore should be of no concern to other states.

The ROCM is slow to respond because of the PLA's successful electronic warfare efforts. The deteriorating security situation has created a growing sense of crisis among Taiwan's populace. Taiwan's supply chains have experienced disruptions due to the normalization of PRC shipping inspections and boardings in recent months, which the MOFA spokesperson states are intended to uphold international environmental standards and enforce PRC laws on navigational safety. Other states and companies develop plans to reroute shipping around the Taiwan Strait—despite the added time and cost.

Prompted by the missile incursion, President Lai delivers an address condemning the PRC's steadily escalating coercion and warning that this is a critical moment for Taiwan's national security. Lai stresses the need for resilience and emphasizes that the government will defend the people no matter what may come. From this point forward, the Presidential Office begins occasional press conferences detailing major episodes of PRC coercive activity, and a new comprehensive naval harassment reporting system is established to track PRC vessels and dispatch vessels from Taiwan's Coast Guard Administration (CGA) to intercept likely boarding and inspection attempts. If PRC vessels refuse to withdraw, Republic of China Navy (ROCN) vessels are instructed to engage them with nonlethal countermeasures. The public is initially reassured, but it remains to be seen whether the government's response can ward off further coercive escalation.

As the ROC government struggles to respond to the situation, negotiations for a new trade and investment agreement between the PRC and the US are announced. Official US statements continue to call on the PRC to halt its destabilizing behavior and for the PRC and Taiwan to peacefully resolve their differences. Some in the US government, focused on the

economic benefits of a PRC trade deal, are hesitant to vocally support Taiwan.

A congressional hearing on the Taiwan Strait's escalating tensions puts divisions between hawks and restrainers on display. The INDOPACOM commander testifies that indicators of PRC preparations for an invasion of Taiwan have not been tripped.<sup>46</sup> Isolationists on the fringes of Congress claim that Taiwan is "completely compromised" by PRC espionage and that supporting it would simply funnel money and technology to the PRC. Others adopt "pro-peace" rhetoric that is reminiscent of the narratives found in PRC-aligned global media.<sup>47</sup> Complementary PRC information operations boost online rhetoric that frames US aid to Taiwan as provocative and thus a threat to global peace and prosperity.

As the US midterm elections approach, foreign policy, aside from trade and economic issues, naturally receives less attention. Taiwan tries again for a significant increase in military aid from the US after the PLARF missile launches, especially for missile defense systems. But between the elections and the trade deal talks, congressional action on Taiwan is slow, and the US president seems to give only a half-hearted pledge of military support for Taiwan, prompting Taiwan to question the reliability of America's commitment to aid its national defense.

The PRC follows through on previously threatened sanctions on US companies with links or potential links to Taiwan's defense industry, and regulatory agencies such as GACC and MOFCOM broaden restrictions on multinational companies that have operations on the island. These sanctions cause some businesses to move away from Taiwan, as the associated costs to those companies' mainland operations become prohibitive. High-profile investors begin suggesting that it is time to "de-risk" from the Taiwanese economy. PRC MOFA statements emphasize that the politically fractured US is an unreliable partner of the Taiwanese people and that the US-Taiwan relationship will inevitably lead Taiwan down a path to complete international isolation. A sense of deeper abandonment takes root in the Taiwanese national consciousness.

After several months of continued pressure, public calls on the ROC government to find a resolution to the situation reach new heights. Ransomware and distributed denial-of-service attacks plague government websites, effectively shutting them down for extended periods.<sup>48</sup> China hawks and other public figures in Taiwan receive repeated, explicit death threats, which generate growing anxiety about public safety. Skepticism mounts about the ROC government's ability to manage military threats and the economic downturn.

Later in the year, articles discussing the new PRC-proposed unification framework begin to circulate, this time finding an international audience through academic studies and analyses by US and other international organizations. High-level Chinese officials and intellectual figures also comment on the unofficial proposals in op-eds and public statements. Discussions of the unification framework arise in Taiwan as well. While anything alluding to unification with the PRC is still unacceptable in Taiwan's policy discourse, after a year of intense coercion, there are several prominent figures, including some popular political commentators, who propose alternative frameworks that would be more acceptable to the Taiwanese populace.

Other international incidents distract from the situation in the Taiwan Strait: a PLARF ballistic missile landing beyond the "second island chain," a new North Korean high-yield underground nuclear test, a PRC rotational military deployment to the Solomon Islands,<sup>49</sup> and the PRC's MOFA and United Front Work Department (UFWD) front organizations' promotion of a narrative decrying the "Japanese militarization" of the Ryukyus all place demands on Australian, Japanese, and US attention.<sup>50</sup>

The international community remains largely muted about these crises as the PRC MOFA issues threats against any states that align with Taiwan or the US. "America skepticism" continues to grow in Taiwan, while others blame the DPP for the current situation. US support for Taiwan encounters internal resistance, as heated debates in the US raise questions such as whether aiding Taiwan is "worth it" and whether US involvement could lead to war.<sup>51</sup>

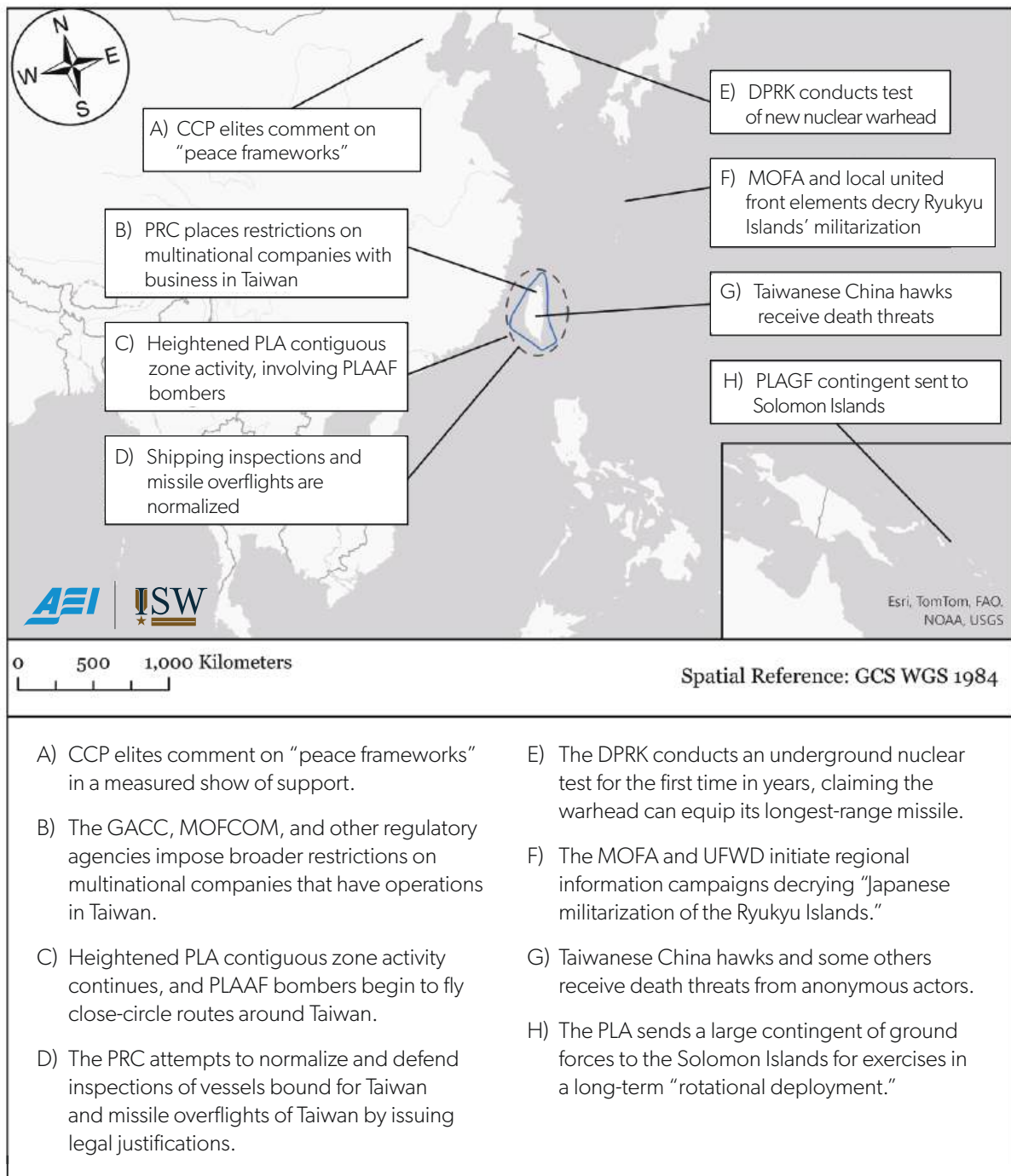
**Pulse 2: Situation Recap.** Taiwan is under considerable, but not yet unbearable, economic pressure, and US public discourse focuses on domestic issues rather than Taiwan's increasingly difficult situation. As Taiwan's security situation worsens and ship inspections ramp up, Taiwan experiences noticeable supply-chain disruptions, falling business revenues, and the withdrawal of some foreign investment. The Taiwanese public increasingly blames the DPP for the situation, as the Taiwanese opposition links the DPP's vocal campaign for procuring US weapons to "justified" PRC retaliation, business leaders lead the charge in arguing for "peace," and death threats convince a handful of politicians to join the peace camp or simply go silent.

The minority of US politicians who venture into foreign policy debates during the election see improving relations with the PRC as a useful way of discussing economic growth and job creation. Only the most hawkish continue openly calling for large packages of military aid to Taiwan, as most are wary of being seen as warmongers. The US public increasingly associates US entanglements in Asia with apocalyptic danger as new PRC nuclear delivery platforms, long-range missile tests, and deployments to the Solomon Islands make episodic headlines.

**Pulse 3: Objectives.** In Pulse 3 (Figures 5–6), from January 2027 to May 2027, the PRC intends to generate a sense of rapidly compounding crisis in Taiwan, disrupting everyday life and creating highly visible problems for the government. The PRC also seeks to play up US-PRC cooperation and amplify distrust and divisions between the US and Taiwan by contrasting the major US-PRC trade deal with recent US hesitancy to support Taiwan. Another important goal during this pulse is to identify an opposition-linked Taiwanese political ally, build up his reputation, and develop trust in him among the Taiwanese public. The PRC also aims to persuade foreign states to withhold direct assistance to Taiwan, convincing them instead to support a PRC-led diplomatic "peace process" to end the ongoing crisis.



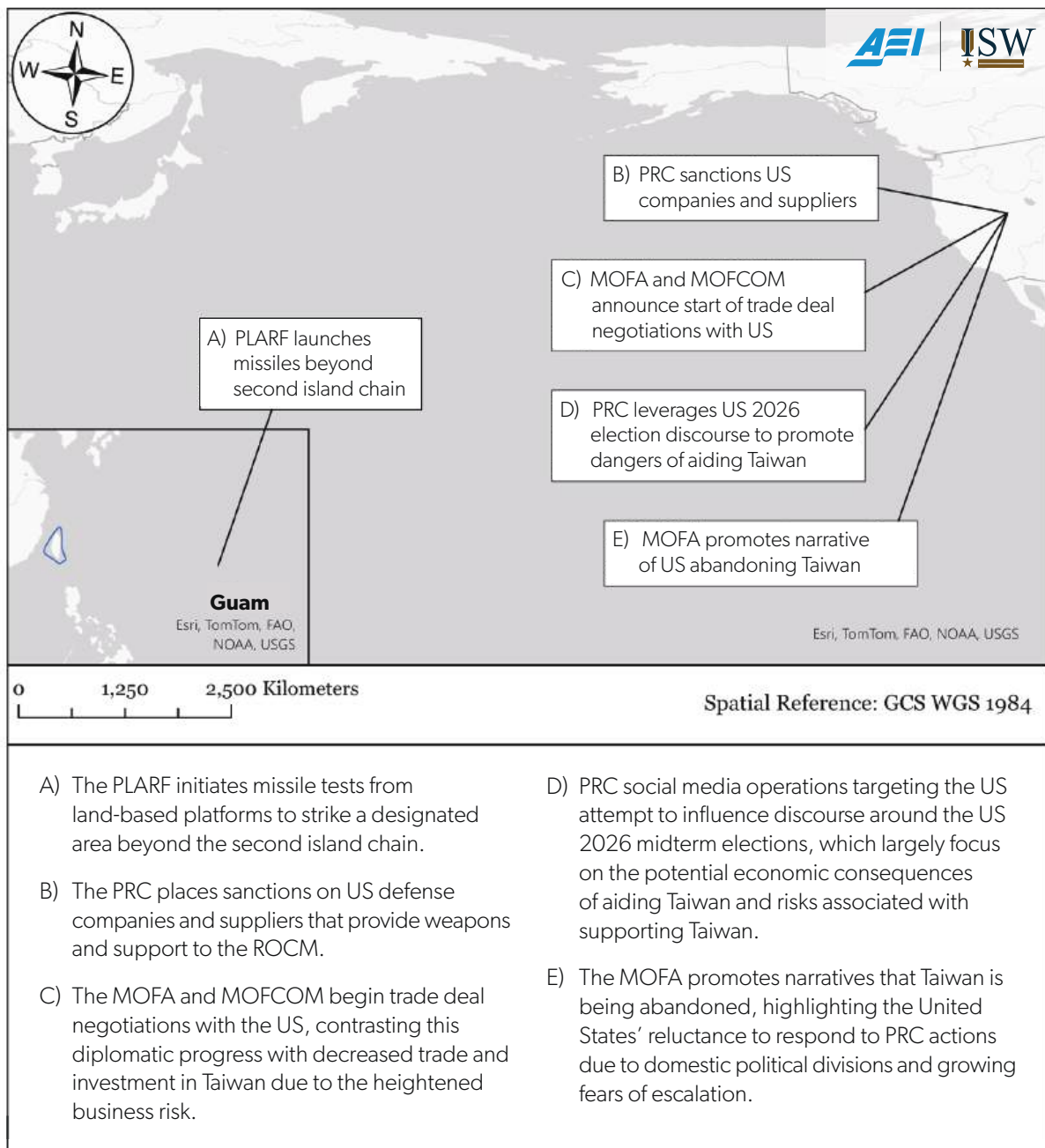
Figure 3. Pulse 2 Activities—PRC and Taiwan, January–December 2026



Note: The blue line represents Taiwan’s maritime contiguous zone boundary. The dotted gray line represents the PRC’s quasi-blockade around Taiwan. “PLAGF” is the People’s Liberation Army Ground Force.

Source: Authors’ projections; and Marine Regions, “Overlapping Claim Taiwan: Taiwan/China,” <https://www.marineregions.org/eezdetails.php?mrgid=8321>.

Figure 4. Pulse 2 Activities—US and Japan, January–December 2026



Note: The blue line represents Taiwan’s maritime contiguous zone boundary. The dotted gray line represents the PRC’s quasi-blockade around Taiwan.

Source: Authors’ projections; and Marine Regions, “Overlapping Claim Taiwan: Taiwan/China,” <https://www.marineregions.org/eezdetails.php?mrgid=8321>.

**Pulse 3: Narrative.** PLA air incursions repeatedly push up to the 12 nautical mile limit of Taiwan’s territorial airspace, constantly confronting Taiwanese pilots with the prospect of having to make good on the ROC Ministry of National Defense’s (MND) stated policy of firing on incursions past that line.<sup>52</sup> Ground-based missile defense units are on constant alert to be ready to respond to short-range ballistic missiles launched from the PRC’s southeastern coast, which now regularly pass through Taiwan’s airspace.

The PLA has also begun enforcing area lockdowns in the middle of the strait on ever-shorter notice, rapidly deploying air and sea assets to ward off all aircraft and maritime shipments that attempt to pass through. Taiwan responds with its own sea and air assets but only engages the PLA with non-lethal means, fearing escalation to open conflict. During these standoffs, the PLA begins locking fire-control radar onto Taiwanese assets, putting operators under immediate threat of attack. Taiwanese operators occasionally find themselves cut off from their commanders with no clear instructions on how to respond, their communications jammed by PLA electronic warfare. These incidents last for multiple hours and force civilian traffic to take significantly different routes. Some airlines reduce flights to Taipei.

Senior defense officials remain most worried, however, about threats to civilian vessels, as the CCG and PLAN have stopped multiple Taiwan-bound ships for inspection, events captured in viral videos causing outrage on social media in Taiwan. Inspections, previously rare, have become a regular occurrence in the Taiwan Strait, forcing the CGA to maintain constant patrols in high-traffic areas and triage inspection reports based on distance, vessel size, and nationality. Mariners who resist inspection before help can arrive are subjected to sonic attacks, pressured water blasts, and even ramming by large and heavily armed CCG vessels.<sup>53</sup>

Shipping companies see insurance rates skyrocket for their Taiwan routes as a result, causing significant price inflation for imported food, energy, and consumer goods. Some liquefied natural gas exporters have even canceled Taiwan contracts, succumbing

to intense pressure from the PRC’s MOFA and MOFCOM to stop abetting the “separatist” regime in Taiwan. The ROC Ministry of Economic Affairs scrambles to help CPC Corporation and Taiwan Power Company (Taipower) locate new sellers, but in the meantime, utilities in Taiwan see unprecedented price spikes.<sup>54</sup>

The PLA Strategic Support Force (SSF) delivers the most brazen blow to Taiwanese energy flows in the form of a cyberattack on the liquefied natural gas terminal at the Port of Taichung, halting operations there for almost 48 hours. The port shutdown, compounded by existing shortages, forces Taipower to institute temporary electricity rationing. The Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC) and other semiconductor manufacturers successfully lobby for exemptions, leading to protests among small business owners and local residents over the government’s partiality to large business interests. Stories alleging major cybersecurity oversights at the Port of Taichung and glaring vulnerabilities throughout Taiwan’s energy infrastructure spread on social media, with many commenters shocked at how “easily” these systems can be taken offline.

When asked about the situation unfolding in the Taiwan Strait, the PRC’s MOFA insists that the PRC is simply taking measures to ensure maritime safety in its sovereign waters. Spokespeople claim that mariners have nothing to fear if they comply with inspections, which do not target carriers in compliance with the relevant safety and customs regulations. MOFCOM simultaneously announces it will suspend the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA), citing repeated concerns about Taiwan’s compliance with the agreement’s terms and unspecified “negative developments” in cross-Strait relations.<sup>55</sup> PRC official media outlets then announce audits of highly visible Taiwanese firms operating in the mainland, while other firms report the appearance of new regulatory hurdles that challenge their existing and future mainland operations. Taiwanese pundits declare a PRC “blockade” and decry the ROC government’s unpreparedness.

The US and Japan move to station more forces across the Japanese archipelago, including the

southwestern islands, after the DPRK conducts a series of long-range missile tests that overfly Japan. The PRC's MOFA condemns the increased presence of US missile defense systems and other platforms in the region as provocative and destabilizing. Elements of the PRC's intelligence and united front apparatus leverage Japanese assets to foment protests in Okinawa calling for peace and demilitarization.

An altercation breaks out at the Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo after visiting PRC nationals heckle priests and worshippers for venerating those who committed atrocities against China during World War II.<sup>56</sup> Several people suffer injuries, including some PRC tourists. Doctored videos of the incident spread on PRC social media, sparking widespread nationalist outrage. The PRC's Ministry of Tourism issues a travel warning for Japan, citing a wave of "anti-Chinese sentiment." The PRC's MOFA amplifies the travel warning, claiming that Japan is guilty of offending the "feelings of the Chinese people" and suggesting that PRC citizens do not wish to visit a country that so blatantly supports Taiwanese separatists.

Some US political leaders call on the PRC to cease pressure on Taiwan and insist that the Taiwan Strait remain free and open for trade. INDOPACOM continues to conduct occasional transits in the strait, but it gives advance warning to the PLA to minimize the chance of coming into close contact. The US intelligence community is pessimistic about Taiwan's level of societal resilience and sees the ROC government and military as significantly compromised. An intelligence report to this effect leaks to the public and causes a stir in Taiwan. Though Taiwan denies the veracity of these reports, its public and government officials interpret them as evidence the US is backing away from its commitment to the island.

Senior US military leaders insist (accurately) that there are no signs of mobilization in the PRC for an invasion. The US president attempts to offer Taiwan some public reassurance about a US military commitment to prevent an invasion but makes no high-profile pronouncements about plans to address the current situation. US public opinion appears unfavorable toward US involvement in the crisis. Short videos on TikTok and other platforms from users claiming to

be Taiwanese "explain" the situation in Taiwan to young Americans, emotionally urging the US to stop its military "posturing" around Taiwan, contending that such actions are drawing their country to the brink of a war they do not want. Protests against US military activity in "China's backyard" spread across university campuses. Posters depicting a hypothetical ring of PRC military bases across a map of North America aim to demonstrate the hypocrisy of US condemnations of PLA activity in the Taiwan Strait.

PRC economic officials carry out a charm campaign directed at US business leaders, offering to make generous purchases in the agricultural sector and grant lenient terms to US firms looking to invest in the PRC. More targeted efforts offer special incentives to US firms with Taiwan operations to relocate to the mainland. Business leaders and members of Congress who seek to "de-escalate" push for an economic deal with the PRC to guarantee trade flows in medicine, agriculture, and semiconductors. Advocates portray a potential deal as an economic win-win, with no costs to national security and the additional opportunity to decrease tensions and ill will between the two sides.<sup>57</sup> Momentum for a deal builds in the administration, with many in the White House enticed by the political benefits of signing a major economic deal with the PRC in the run-up to the 2028 US presidential election.

The deal is not without its detractors, as hawks highlight recent flare-ups with the PRC such as a large-scale PLA drill in the Philippine Sea. The drill included a live-fire missile test in an area beyond the second island chain and demonstrated the PLA's ability to mass fires through joint ballistic and cruise missile launches from land-, sea-, and air-based platforms. Hawks claim that the PLA is threatening Guam and other US Pacific bases by demonstrating how it could conduct a saturation attack against distant, isolated targets. Additionally, the recent trend of CCP-aligned violence and violent threats made in US territory to PRC-origin dissidents and visiting Taiwanese politicians alarms the FBI and several members of Congress.

The US administration is nevertheless determined to not let these incidents jeopardize a

diplomatic breakthrough. The president signs a deal and expresses cautious optimism for stability in “the world’s most important bilateral relationship.” Subsequently, major PRC state-owned enterprises increase orders of American agricultural goods and publicly commit to investing in new manufacturing projects across the US, spurring US state and local politicians to laud the benefits of US-PRC trade.

Amid the deteriorating situation in the Taiwan Strait, the ROC government makes every effort to sustain a functioning economy and reassure the public. The economic damage has been significant, but work and classes have not yet been directly affected. Any remaining sense of normalcy shatters one day at rush hour, however, when monitors across the Taipei Mass Rapid Transit flash to a threatening message with a countdown timer, and a mainland-accented voice vows through the PA system to make “separatists” pay a price for their intransigence.<sup>58</sup>

Millions of commuters evacuate in panic before the countdown runs out, though nothing happens when it does. Articles appearing in online outlets and rapidly circulated on social media claim police have found explosive material in multiple trash bins and restrooms throughout the system, although authorities firmly deny the reports. Ridership on rail transit plummets across Taiwan, causing traffic jams across major Taiwanese cities and along the major north-south highways. The PRC’s TAO vehemently denies foreign media suspicion of PRC involvement and expresses concern over the “security situation” in the Taiwanese capital. Celebration of the incident dominates the conversation on PRC social media, however, with even the most vitriolic posts seemingly left alone by internet censors.<sup>59</sup>

The following week, as panic over the bomb scare begins to subside, a fire breaks out at a chemical plant outside of Tainan, destroying much of the facility and killing multiple workers and first responders. The plant belongs to a major Taiwanese chemical conglomerate whose owner is an outspoken proponent of further de-sinicization in Taiwan and a major contributor to pan-Green political campaigns.<sup>60</sup> The TAO again vehemently denies PRC involvement, expresses condolences for the victims, and indicates that Beijing

views the situation in Taiwan with growing concern. An initial investigation suggests that arson is the likely cause, but authorities do not make any arrests. The ROC Ministry of Justice instead announces the unrelated detention of a high-level Taiwanese official for colluding with the PRC, leading commentators in the US to question the ROC government’s degree of penetration by CCP agents. Critical voices in Taiwan note that the authorities failed to root out espionage when it mattered most to public safety.

The flurry of national crises continues when, a few months later, certain major companies across the high-tech, manufacturing, and financial sectors are struck with ransomware attacks demanding exorbitant cryptocurrency payments to avoid the permanent loss of company data.<sup>61</sup> Production is briefly taken offline at a high-profile semiconductor manufacturer, and affected banks are forced to institute withdrawal limits as they scramble to regain access to funds. One by one, the firms quietly deliver the ransom payments to minimize losses to their production and reputation. Account holders across Taiwan, still fearing future disruptions and losing faith in the government’s deposit insurance guarantee, move to withdraw unprecedented amounts, sending a shock through the financial system.<sup>62</sup>

The instability in Taiwan and the Taiwan Strait makes headlines around the world, and many regional leaders and PRC trading partners become nervous about the potential outbreak of conflict. The CCP’s top diplomat, along with the PRC’s foreign and defense ministers, carries out a diplomatic blitz of regional capitals to reassure leaders that the PRC desires peace and does not see war as the only option for the resolution of the Taiwan issue. They further urge world leaders to cut ties with the ROC government and refrain from deepening their security relationships with the US and Japan, insisting that such actions only back the PRC into a corner and increase the risk of open conflict. The PRC contingent at the UN rallies support from the Global South against multiple resolutions put forth by the US condemning the PRC’s actions toward Taiwan, successfully arguing that “Taiwan affairs” are strictly a matter of PRC national security and territorial integrity.<sup>63</sup>

A dramatic escalation of PRC interference with the flow of goods to Taiwan occurs when a PLA fighter intercepts a Taipei-bound EVA Air cargo plane over the Taiwan Strait.<sup>64</sup> The interception occurs inside a “closed area” announced unilaterally by the PRC, though this time the closure carries no advance warning, giving the affected aircraft no opportunity to alter its route. The plane is forced to land in the PRC, where authorities detain the crew and impound the aircraft for failure to comply with the closure. The PRC’s TAO and MOFA make statements insisting that the air closure notice had been issued with due warning and in compliance with all relevant regulations.

Customs authorities inspect the plane’s cargo and claim to discover biohazardous material, ostensibly backing prior PRC allegations that Taiwan is carrying out bioweapons development under US supervision. The ROC government lodges intense protests and demands the release of the two pilots and return of the aircraft, but the PRC’s MOFA responds that their release is contingent on the results of a full investigation. The KMT and other pan-Blue parties criticize the DPP government for its failure to secure their prompt return, citing the near-total lack of communication between the government and the PRC resulting from the DPP’s “confrontational” approach to cross-Strait issues.

The TAO issues a statement indicating that the PRC no longer has faith in the sincerity of some Taiwanese politicians’ commitment to the “1992 Consensus”; it announces that the PRC will now require Taiwan’s leader to demonstrate “an intent to make progress toward unification” as a new precondition for cross-Strait dialogue and peace. Many in the KMT feel betrayed, though others blame this policy shift on what they call the DPP’s continual intransigence.

Struggling to deal with a relentless coercive onslaught, the ROC government urges the US to signal its support, condemn the PRC’s actions, and intervene in the strait to ensure open lines of trade. The US president expands tactical intelligence sharing and continues to approve significant military aid packages, including the transfer of additional vessels to bolster the counter-inspection campaign, but

declines to engage the PLAN and CCG head-on. Many Taiwanese requests for intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance support fail to reach INDOPACOM in time, as PLA electronic warfare successfully disrupts high-level lines of communication between the two sides, leaving Taiwan’s MND with an incomplete picture of the situation in the strait.

Anxiety and anger abound on Taiwanese social media at the government’s failure to prevent the series of crises, including from within the DPP. Leaked, fabricated documents allegedly revealing the preparation of personal escape plans for high-level Taiwanese officials only add to the media firestorm, with pundits claiming that not only will the US abandon Taiwan in its moment of crisis but so too will Taiwan’s own leaders. Meanwhile, “red media” reports claim that CCP leaders have realized the hopelessness of winning over Taiwan’s population on the “one country, two systems” framework and have instead decided to unveil a new, more lenient framework with more robust guarantees for Taiwan’s autonomy. CCP-friendly commentators discuss in earnest what such a framework could look like and why Taiwan ought to consider Beijing’s offer this time around, given the unsustainable economic and security situation that has emerged.

A well-known Taiwanese business leader who previously served as an interlocutor between the CCP and the Taiwanese business community proposes a concrete plan for negotiating an end to the PRC’s increasing escalation. His musings about forming a new political movement with the goal of “resetting” the cross-Strait relationship are amplified by CCP-aligned proxy media in Taiwan.

**Pulse 3: Situation Recap.** ROC governance is under unprecedented strain. PRC coercion has mired Taiwan in a series of major crises affecting the flow of energy and other goods, the security of critical infrastructure, public safety, business operations at major firms, and the financial system. The PRC has asserted air and sea control of the Taiwan Strait, although its control is still contested consistently (if ineffectively) by Taiwan and feebly by the US. The US has leaned into its economic relationship with the PRC

and has dialed back its statements of political support for Taiwan. Public opinion in the US has become more skeptical of the US defense commitment to Taiwan. The PRC has begun high-profile economic coercion of Japan.

**Pulse 4: Objectives.** The PRC's objective in the final pulse (Figures 7–8), from June 2027 to December 2027, is to provoke an acute political crisis in Taiwan, paralyzing the ROC government and pushing Taiwan to the brink of collapse. Crucially, the PRC must keep the US from responding to a series of aggressive PRC actions, eliminating hopes that the US will intervene to protect Taiwan and end the crisis. Additionally, the PRC aims to marginalize other would-be supporters of Taiwan, such as Japan, so that no major powers stand in opposition to the PRC on the Taiwan issue.

**Pulse 4: Narrative.** PLA sorties toward and around Taiwan continue to grow in frequency, complexity, and scale. The PRC hosts a multinational exercise in the Taiwan Strait with its Russian and North Korean allies for the first time. One exercise area stretches into Taiwan's contiguous zone, and PRC official statements accompanying these exercises praise its allies' support for its sovereignty claims. The statement proudly concludes that any foreign military intervention in the PRC's or its allies' domestic affairs will face a united response.

PLAN destroyers begin to join PLAAF aircraft in approaching Taiwan's 12 nautical mile maritime boundary. PLA electronic warfare efforts and attacks on communications systems grow more complex, as the SSF Network Systems Department (NSD) increasingly targets satellites and ground stations and harasses Taiwan's internal communications networks to disrupt Taiwanese detection and response procedures. Worryingly, ROCM staff officers notice that communications between local command posts and the MND headquarters in Taipei are experiencing a variety of unusual technical issues.

Videos originating from PRC social media claim to show PLA vessels and aircraft operating uncontested in Taiwan's territorial waters. The MND forcefully denies the claims at a press conference, reaffirming

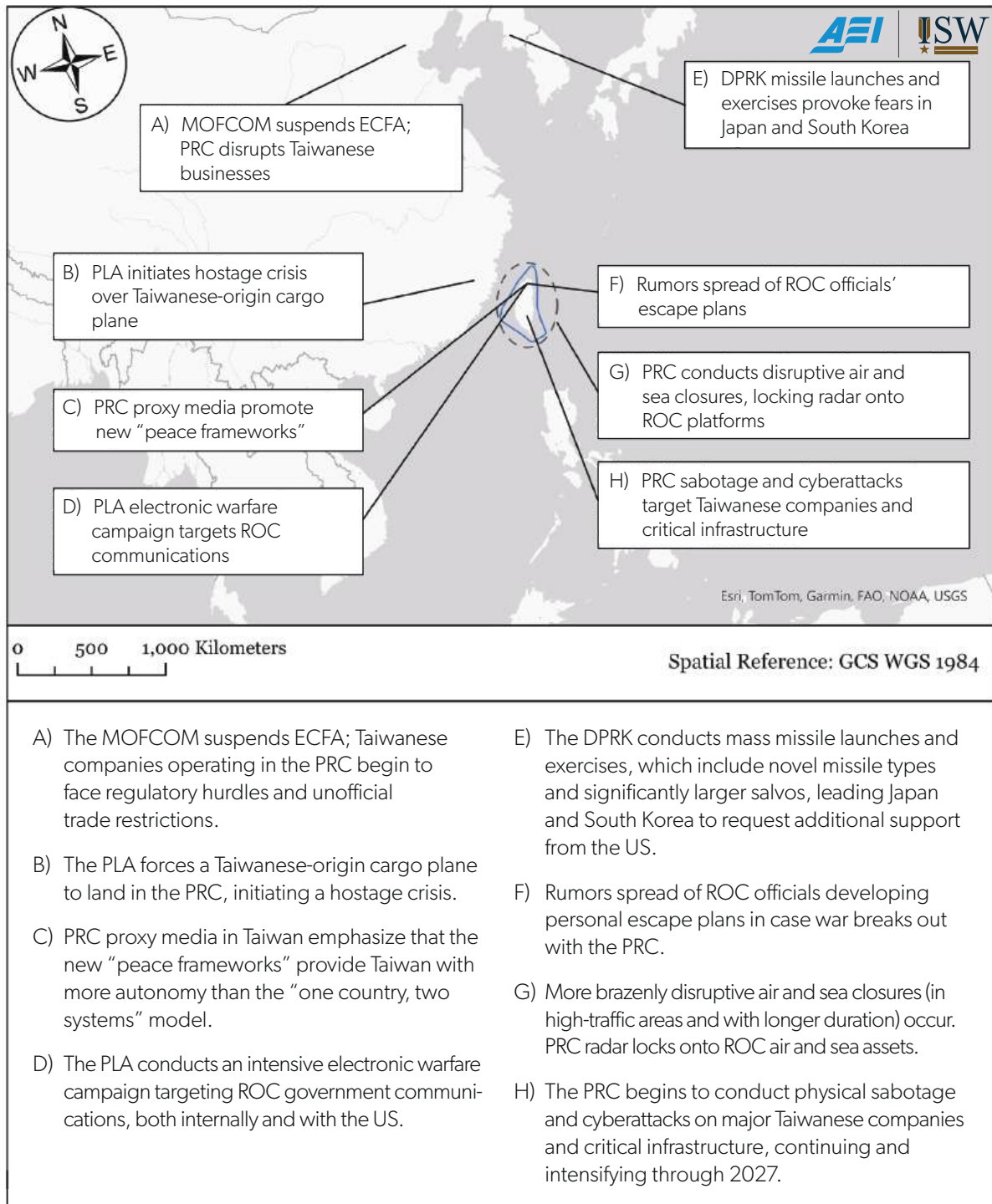
that it is continuing to manage the situation and optimally use Taiwan's military capabilities.<sup>65</sup>

An ROCN supply ship and its escort sailing to Itu Aba in the weeks after the press conference encounter a swarm of Chinese Maritime Militia boats preventing the convoy from moving forward.<sup>66</sup> A nearby CCG vessel demands that the convoy turn around or face retaliation for violating PRC maritime regulations. The PLA then uses its electronic warfare capabilities to disrupt the convoy's communications with Taipei. Unable to establish contact with his commanders, hours pass without a decision from the convoy's commanding officer while the confrontation intensifies. Ultimately, he orders the convoy to return home after CCG vessels begin firing warning shots and lock their fire-control radars onto the Taiwanese vessels.

The PRC's MOFA declares that it has begun a special "demilitarization" operation directed at Itu Aba based on intelligence revealing the construction of a US-backed biological weapons lab on the island. MOFA additionally warns all parties not to intervene, at the risk of retaliation.<sup>67</sup> It then demands that all military personnel leave the island to allow PRC engineers to safely dismantle the facility. Much of the statement berates the US for betraying the PRC's trust, especially in light of improving trade and diplomatic relations. The PRC's MOFA blames the US for using Taiwan as a weapon to threaten the PRC. The last accusation finds widespread sympathy in deep-Blue circles in Taiwan.<sup>68</sup> PRC authorities finally release the crew of the impounded Eva Air cargo plane, declare that they wish no harm toward innocent Taiwan compatriots, and point to this action as proof of the special connection between the populations on both sides of the strait while pointing to the Taiwan-US relationship as the source of conflict.

In Taipei, a shocked MND accepts the supply convoy's choice to return to Taiwan but tells the public that the Itu Aba outpost was designed to be self-sufficient for an extended period and that an appropriate response is forthcoming.<sup>69</sup> Separate statements from the Presidential Office of Taiwan and the US White House deny the existence of a biological weapons lab and state a shared wish to peacefully resolve the crisis. Scathing social media posts in

Figure 5. Pulse 3 Activities—PRC and Taiwan, January–May 2027

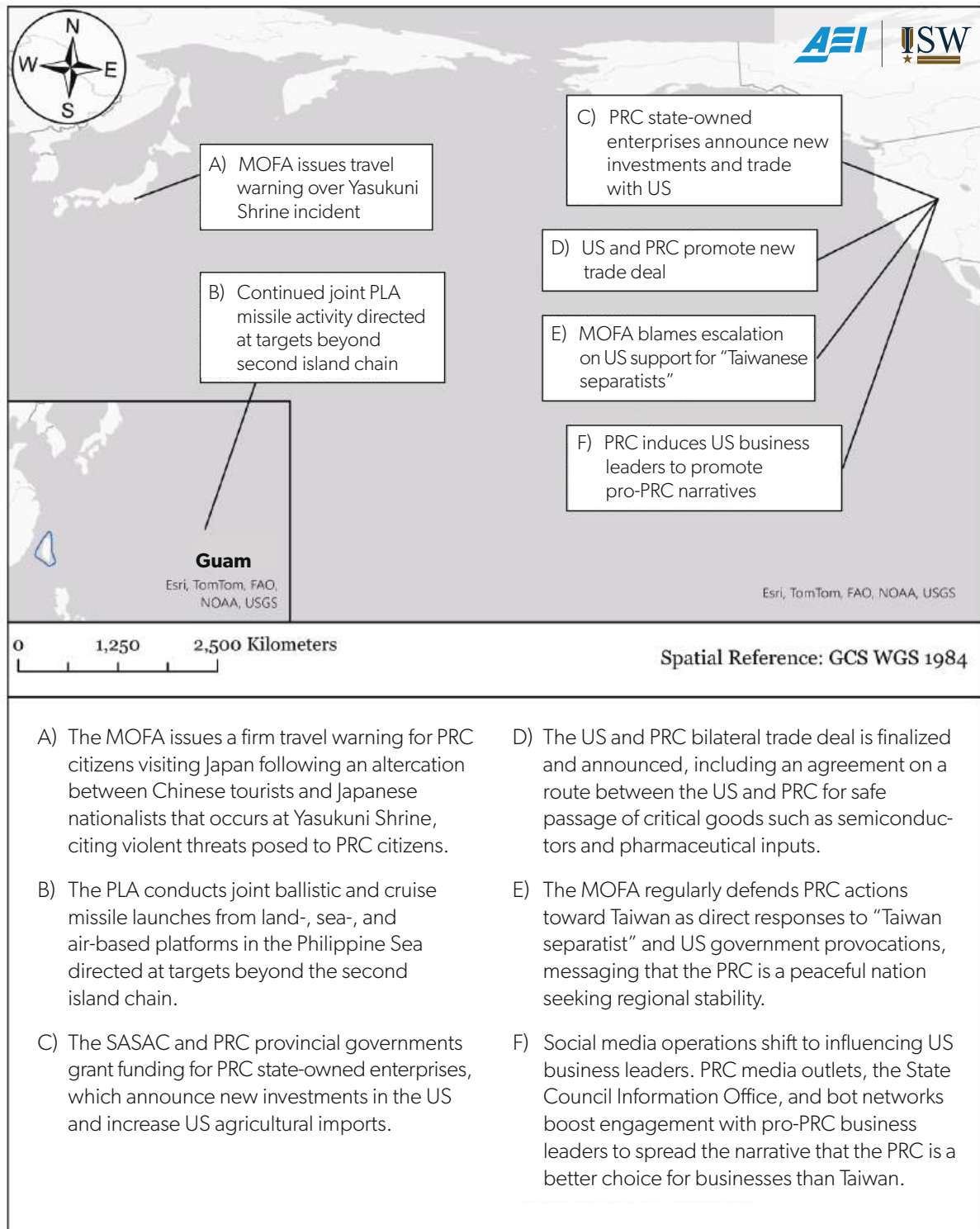


Note: The blue line represents Taiwan’s maritime contiguous zone boundary. The dotted gray line represents the PRC’s quasi-blockade around Taiwan.

Source: Authors’ projections; and Marine Regions, “Overlapping Claim Taiwan: Taiwan/China,” <https://www.marineregions.org/eezdetails.php?mrgid=8321>.



Figure 6. Pulse 3 Activities—US and Japan, January–May 2027



Note: The blue line represents Taiwan’s maritime contiguous zone boundary. The dotted gray line represents the PRC’s quasi-blockade around Taiwan. “SASAC” is the PRC State-Owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission of the State Council. Source: Authors’ projections; and Marine Regions, “Overlapping Claim Taiwan: Taiwan/China,” <https://www.marinerregions.org/eezdetails.php?mrgid=8321>.

Taiwan question why Taiwan dedicates its military resources to far-flung islands when it clearly cannot defend them. Taiwanese citizens openly wonder whether the military is capable of defending the main island in a direct attack.<sup>70</sup>

To add insult to injury, videos from the Taiwanese islands of Kinmen and Matsu show swarms of commercial drones flying over military and government facilities. High-quality videos from PRC social media display ROCM base layouts using drone footage, much to the embarrassment of the MND. President Lai orders ROCM garrisons to begin shooting down intruding drones, but other drones simply replace those shot down.<sup>71</sup>

The Taiwanese business leader who previously entered the political arena with a plan to “reset” cross-strait relations writes an op-ed in a major newspaper decrying the ROCM for investing so much money in far-flung bases, submarines, ships, and jets, when it is barely capable of shooting down commercial drones. He claims that direct negotiations with the PRC would guarantee safety and eliminate the need for such costly defense spending. PRC information-warfare units use social media and other proxies to amplify elements of his narrative to demographics likely to support him. His claim to have an unusual level of knowledge and experience in dealing with the CCP makes him an increasingly sought-after guest on talk shows, and he gradually hits all the major programs. As the Itu Aba crisis drags on, the PRC’s TAO adds the DPP to its list of criminal separatist organizations and declares that the PRC cannot look the other way when separatists are jeopardizing the lives of so many innocent people.

Reactions in Washington and throughout the US to the snap blockade of Itu Aba run the gamut from hawkish to cautious to isolationist. Hawkish commentators and members of Congress point to congressional testimony from military leaders raising alarm over the possibility of an imminent invasion, while restraint-oriented politicians cite continued statements from the Department of Defense clarifying that an invasion is not imminent. The attitude of Congress is starkly divided, but restrainers seem to have the upper hand in debates,

in no small part thanks to the influence of the US business community, which has begun to reap the benefits of the new trade and investment deal with the PRC.

The congressional maneuvers of a small, vocal faction of aggressive skeptics of “interventionism” stall new legislation to significantly increase military support for Taiwan. Drawing parallels to the withdrawal from Afghanistan, they claim that any equipment that makes it to the island would be captured by the PRC when the Taiwanese surrender, as the Afghans did.<sup>72</sup> The White House, attempting to manage the crisis and cool tensions, engages in relevant military-to-military and diplomatic dialogues with the PRC. The PRC shows surprising receptiveness, and the scope of the talks gradually expands to include strategic relationship management and global issues such as trade, climate, and arms control.

US-proposed UN Security Council resolutions critical of the blockade are vetoed, whereas a pro-PRC resolution at the General Assembly passes. A North Korean kamikaze drone attack on a South Korean naval patrol near the Northern Limit Line kills several sailors, and sightings of more drones are reported near South Korean critical infrastructure and power-generation facilities. This causes news media to quickly pivot attention to the new international diplomatic crisis as South Korea mulls retaliation. The US moves to reassure its allies, continuing to increase deployments of troops and matériel to Japan and South Korea.

These efforts are complicated and limited because of ongoing dialogues with the PRC, distraction caused by other crises, and domestic US opposition to “militarizing” this crisis. Japan, sensitive to the threat posed to its southern lines of communication, energetically attempts to rally international institutions such as the “Quad,” G7, and World Trade Organization to condemn PRC military and economic practices against Taiwan.

The SSF NSD, the PRC Ministry of State Security (MSS), united front organizations, and other political warfare units spread rumors in international media that the Japanese prime minister has begun an internal study on Japan’s indigenous development

of nuclear weapons. The PRC's MOFA promptly sanctions Japanese Liberal Democratic Party officials alleged to have supported the program, as well as those who meet with Taiwanese officials, claiming that the PRC will not tolerate Japanese attempts to threaten the PRC and interfere with its internal affairs. The Japanese government soon finds itself having to dedicate increased effort to address domestic political divisions over the nuclear issue and reassure its neighbors in South Korea and Southeast Asia that it has no such intentions.<sup>73</sup>

In Taiwan, the ever-tightening shipping-inspections regime and suboptimal routes necessitated by "navigational safety" area lockdowns gradually generate a backlog of civilian cargo ships destined for Taiwan.<sup>74</sup> The PRC's GACC succeeds at stopping virtually all non-semiconductor trade with Taiwan by refusing to process imports and banning the trade of alleged dual-use products. Continued audits and regulatory changes also halt the operations of Taiwanese-owned firms in the PRC.

Cargos of foodstuff increasingly spoil by the time they reach Taiwanese shores because of shipping delays. Rampant inflation, empty shelves in markets, energy rationing, a domestic financial crash, the loss of access to the PRC market, and the flight of foreign capital have led to widespread unemployment and public anger. Billions of dollars of investment in the PRC and the life savings of millions now seem to be in serious jeopardy.<sup>75</sup> Taiwanese crowds at spontaneous protests call for the president to resign over economic mismanagement, and desperate protesters clash with the police. Videos of these incidents spread rapidly over the internet, deepening the population's sense of fear and panic.

Then, without warning, an explosion rocks the Taipei office of a prominent DPP Legislative Yuan (LY) member known for her sharp criticism of the PRC and strong support for the armed forces. While the city mourns the victims, rumors planted by the MSS and NSD spread online that economic desperation caused an employee of the office to engage in dealings with organized crime. Popular debates obscure the role of PRC clandestine operatives who executed the attack.

Other apparently unrelated episodes of violence soon break out across the island. Every few weeks, another report of a stabbing or shooting makes headlines. The attacks, seemingly carried out by those who have lost work or can no longer afford to put food on the table, target former employers, black market sellers, and local politicians of all stripes. Some attacks are the result of PLA intelligence, MSS, and united front operations, but some are genuine imitative acts. Many people yearn for a return to stability and an end to the senseless chaos.

Amid this domestic trauma, a CCP mole in the Itu Aba garrison takes advantage of collapsing morale to organize a mutiny and surrenders the island to the PRC, against the MND's orders. Photos allegedly capturing the moment of the surrender appear on Chinese newspapers' front pages. PLAN marines, fresh, well equipped, and proudly holding a billowing red and yellow flag, stand opposite a detachment of scruffy Taiwanese troops holding a white rag on a pole.

Weeks later and hundreds of miles away, a joint PLAAF and PLAN task force sortieing just outside Taiwan's ADIZ fires a barrage of missiles at coast guard facilities on Pengjia Islet northeast of Taipei, killing and injuring dozens. As the MND races to explain how it was caught by surprise, the PRC's MOFA declares that the island was being outfitted with missiles designed to target PRC energy and transportation infrastructure in a desperate bid by Lai to strengthen his hand. MOFA adds that the PLA Eastern Theater Command made every effort to minimize casualties based on close scrutiny of available intelligence.

The US president strongly condemns the PRC's kinetic strikes a few hours later, states that the US will not intervene militarily, and calls for a peaceful resolution of the conflict. The US State Department, whose travel advisories for Taiwan have been steadily increasing in severity, finally issues a Level 4 ("Do Not Travel") advisory for the country.<sup>76</sup> In Taiwan, the news is interpreted as America's final abandonment of Taiwan. Local reporters discover that American Institute in Taiwan personnel, expats, and students have quietly been leaving the island. Pan-Blue,

independent, and a large segment of mainstream Green voters now view the US with a mix of resentment and anger. Opinion polling also shows a collapse in support for the DPP, as the party's long-term bet on the US-Taiwan relationship has catastrophically failed to pay off.

Taiwan is effectively isolated internationally as its partners are paralyzed by other crises. Japanese calls to defend Taiwan carry less weight in the international community than before the nuclear rumors, and US efforts to mobilize the UN remain effectively limited to its closest Western allies. Congress remains unable to reach a consensus on a response, and US public opinion becomes increasingly noninterventionist and anti-war.

Information and political warfare units across the whole of the PRC and the CCP bureaucracy work feverishly to stimulate social media discussion of the possibility of a disastrous war. Posts by isolationist commentators and politicians are amplified to the maximum extent, regardless of party. TikTok videos comparing the US and PRC nuclear forces go viral, and amateur open-source intelligence accounts on X mull new rumors of PLA superweapons—or “assassin's maces,” as they are known in the Chinese-language discourse—that the NSD drip feeds into the US information space. The US public is increasingly sympathetic to the view that whether it likes it or not, Taiwan is in the PRC's backyard and rightfully belongs to the PRC. Foreign policy commentators argue that US-PRC strategic dialogues provide a diplomatic path to resolve the crisis.

President Lai orders a mobilization of reserve forces in response to the direct attacks on Taiwanese territory. Mobilization efforts immediately encounter widespread public resistance among all but a small, deep-Green segment of the population. Few people wish to risk their lives for a military that has apparently lost the backing of the US and whose blunders led to the Itu Aba and Pengjia disasters. An anti-mobilization protest at a registration office in Taipei grows into a riot, and the police's forceful response incites similar protests across the country. The role of the PRC's MSS in funding and organizing the “pro-peace” protest

movement is apparent to few outside of Western intelligence agencies.

As dusk approaches, the national power grid is hit with a cyberattack, plunging most urban areas into darkness. Protestors disperse into the shadows as teams of engineers drive through the streets in a rush to restore power.

Not all the engineering trucks are authentic, however. Teams of PRC-affiliated infiltrators and saboteurs across Taiwan, who have prepared for this moment for months, race to plant explosives in water purification plants, rail corridors, power plants, fuel silos, and sewer systems. Others release pests and diseases into grain silos, food storage and processing facilities, and farms.<sup>77</sup> In the coming days and weeks, critical infrastructure sites not yet affected by these attacks are hit by crippling cyberattacks from the NSD. Even the Public Warning Cell Broadcast Service is compromised and occasionally pushes false alerts that declare PRC missiles are approaching population centers, leading to repeated evacuations.<sup>78</sup> Despite the ROC government's best efforts, the situation on the ground increasingly looks and feels hopeless.

The flight of Taiwan's 800,000-plus foreign nationals rapidly accelerates.<sup>79</sup> Airports experience severe overcrowding because their operations have been disrupted by PLA military activity around the island. PRC information and political warfare units aggressively spread photos and videos of these desperate crowds across the internet, particularly in Southeast Asia, Taiwan, and the US. Several Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries begin pressuring Taiwan to come to a temporary agreement with the PRC so that those countries' nationals can safely leave. Americans recall scenes of the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, and public opinion continues to oppose intervention in another foreign policy quagmire.

During the windows in which both the internet and power still function, social media discourse often turns toward the upcoming 2028 elections. Many voters, regardless of party, find themselves desperate for a way out of the current situation. The PRC's once-disregarded peace proposals are now eagerly discussed on talk shows, in the op-ed sections of

newspapers, and online. The steady media presence of the previously mentioned business leader and his lack of obvious political affiliation make him a relatively trusted figure among Taiwanese. His constant, withering critiques of the government's handling of the crisis and its refusal to enter negotiations with the PRC increasingly resonate with the public. Millions of Taiwanese prefer listening to his reports on the crisis rather than the government's.

He begins to claim that he could solve the crisis if he were in power. As his supporters debate whether he should formally enter politics, the NSD coordinates with small united front proxy news groups to spread disturbing rumors about a secret defense project. The claims quickly find their way to the front pages of major newspapers, and excerpts from alleged internal memos spread on social media. Claiming the president is desperate for a way to maintain Taiwan's de facto independence in the face of overwhelming odds, the rumors allege Lai is considering the development of nuclear weapons.<sup>80</sup>

Pundits see this as the nail in the coffin for the DPP in the upcoming election cycle. With public trust in the incumbent administration utterly broken, the only acceptable political discussions are those that involve a once-unthinkable alternative: a deal with the PRC. The PRC's TAO spokesperson states at a press conference in response to the nuclear rumors that the PRC will do whatever is necessary to protect the lives of "all Chinese on both sides of the strait," and that the many "Taiwan compatriots" who also desire peace and harmony will have an indispensable role to play in resolving the crisis.

**Pulse 4: Situation Recap.** Taiwanese civilians face a severe degradation of their quality of life and appear to have no way to escape further economic pain outside of dealing directly with the PRC. Militarily, the ROCM has been thoroughly degraded, surprised, and humiliated on multiple occasions. The public sees essentially no protective barrier between Taiwan and a PRC invasion. The compounded effects of the intensified customs regime, the unstoppable flight of international investment, and direct sabotage of critical infrastructure have

led to economic collapse and sapped public will to resist the PRC.

Only a small segment of the deep-Green electorate is willing to fight to the end. A portion of the deep-Blue camp admires the PRC's gall to confront and overcome both American and Taiwanese opposition. Most moderates bitterly resent global abandonment but resign themselves to negotiations with the PRC. Overall public opinion in the US is divided and ambivalent about defending Taiwan. The combination of an instinctually tension-averse executive branch, a divided Congress, and a public fearful of Armageddon limits the effectiveness of the US response to the PRC's actions. At the end of the pulse, the PRC's last remaining task is to operationalize the much-discussed "peace framework."

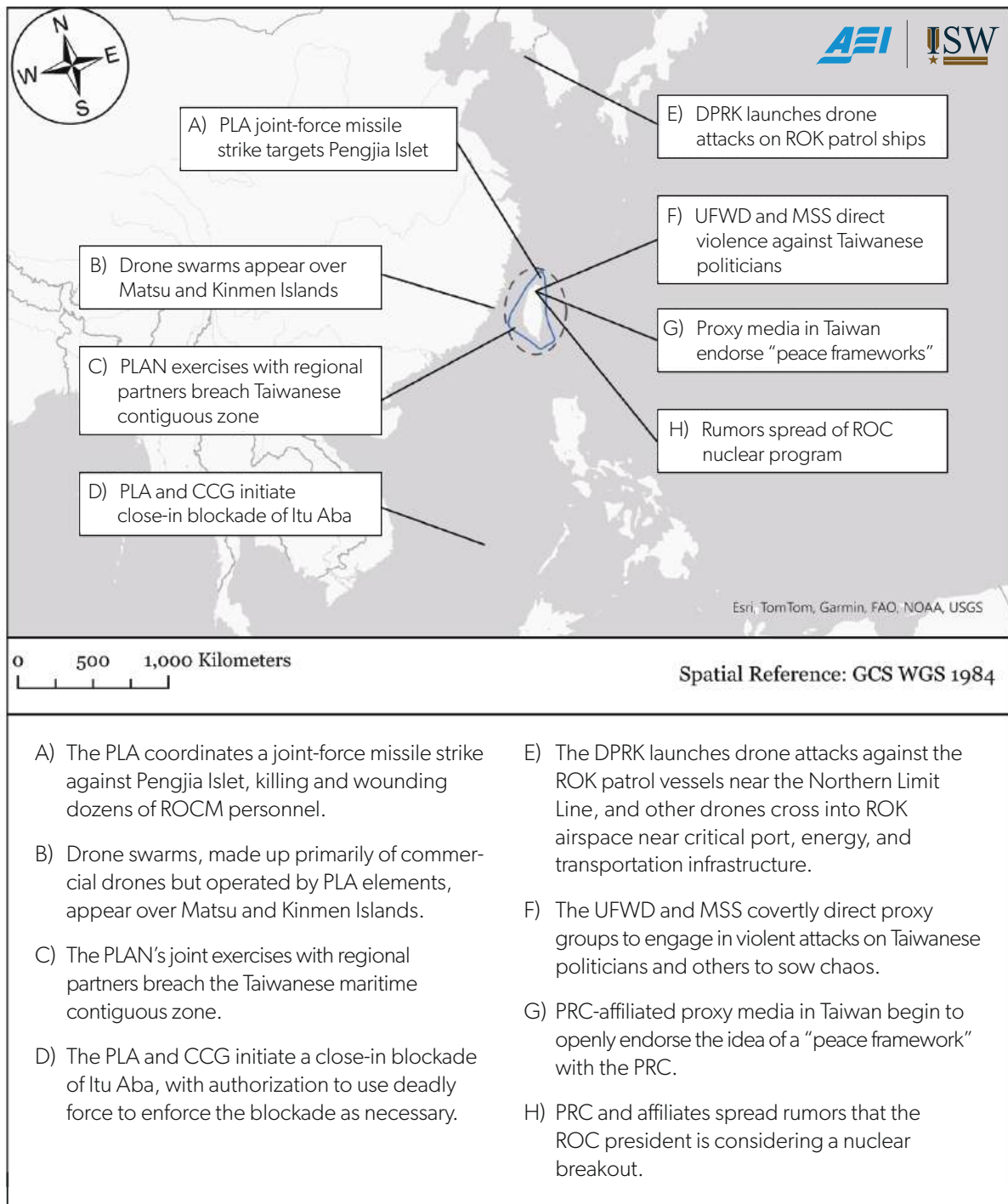
## CONOP Analysis and Conclusion

While some of the activities put forth in our SoWC COA may seem far-fetched, we have grounded the COA design process in PRC theoretical writings and the context of past PRC behavior to ensure that the activities carried out by the PRC in the four pulses (Figure 9) align well with PRC strategic thinking.

"Systems destruction warfare" efforts begin in Pulse 1, when Taiwanese ground- and space-based communications and command and control are targeted using electronic warfare and the physical destruction of undersea cables. As these attacks become increasingly frequent and destructive in the later pulses, Taiwan becomes unable to effectively communicate with the US and cannot rely on its own satellites to maintain awareness of PRC activity. With Taiwanese operational systems significantly degraded by Pulse 4 and with the ROCM's loss of confidence in US assistance, the ROCM is unable to resist further PLA attacks, thereby accomplishing the goals of systems destruction warfare.

Activities such as the CCG inspections and seizure of a cargo ship around Taiwan can be described as "nonwar military activities." The CCP argues that such inspections are law enforcement efforts and that the CCG is ensuring that all ships transiting through

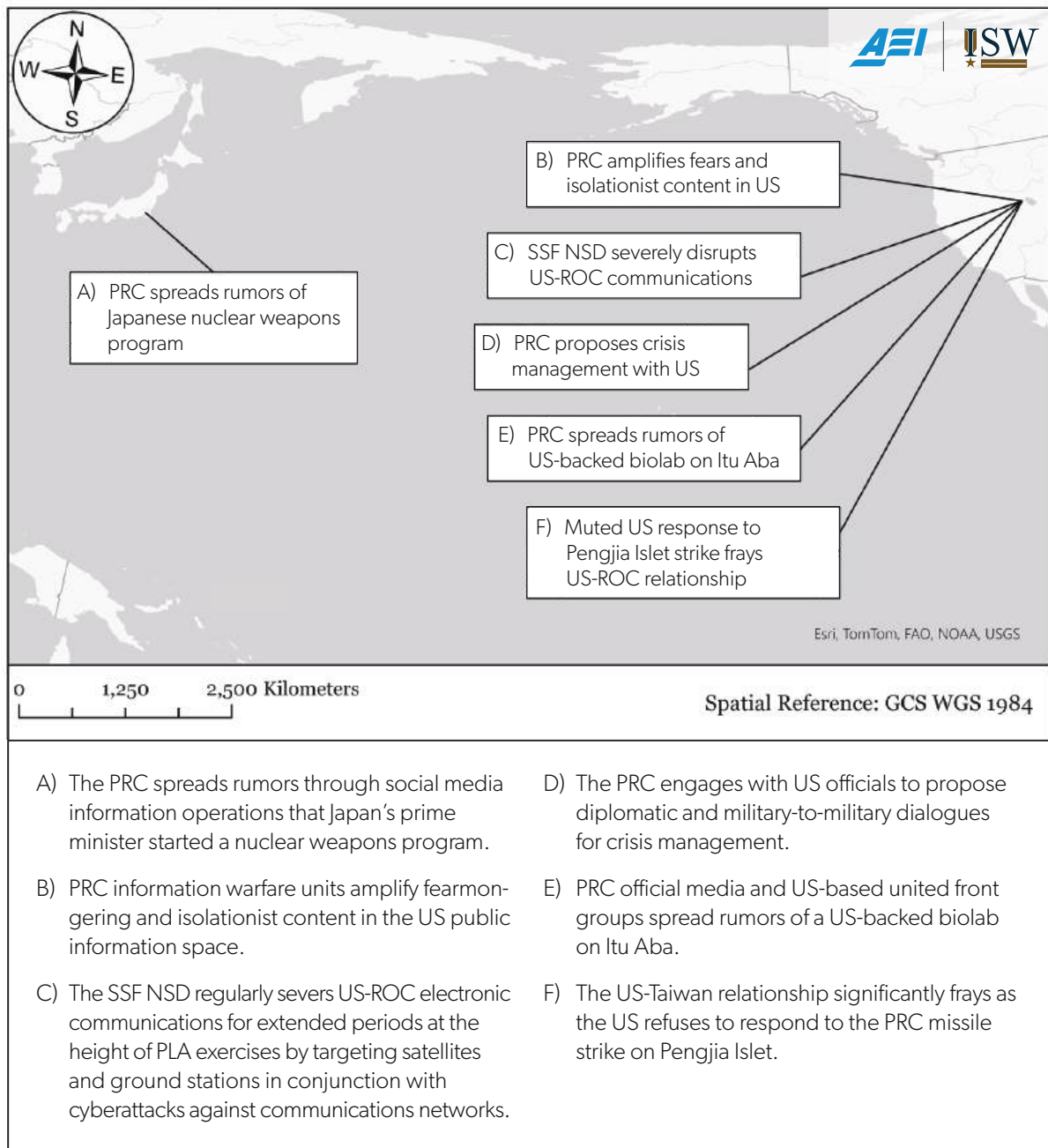
**Figure 7. Pulse 4 Activities—PRC and Taiwan, June–December 2027**



Note: The blue line represents Taiwan’s maritime contiguous zone boundary. The dotted gray line represents the PRC’s quasi-blockade around Taiwan.

Source: Authors’ projections; and Marine Regions, “Overlapping Claim Taiwan: Taiwan/China,” <https://www.marineregions.org/eezdetails.php?mrgid=8321>.

**Figure 8. Pulse 4 Activities—US and Japan, June–December 2027**



Source: Authors’ projections; and Marine Regions, “Overlapping Claim Taiwan: Taiwan/China,” <https://www.marineregions.org/eezdetails.php?mrgid=8321>.

PRC territory comply with environmental and safety regulations. Other PLA activity, such as air and sea transits, missile tests, the blockade of Itu Aba, and the missile strike of Pengjia Islet, fall into the category of “peacetime employment of military force.” While these attacks on their own may seem extreme, in the context of the broader COA, they are merely graduated escalations that progressively advance PRC interests. This effect reflects PRC thinking on “effective control,” which requires conflict escalation to remain at acceptable levels. Even the most escalatory attacks become normalized and are tolerated by those who seek to avoid war between the PRC and Taiwan.

“Strategic deterrence” is pursued throughout this COA through PLA displays of its own military capability. In particular, the PLA drone swarm, as well as electronic warfare and cyberwarfare targeting Taiwanese command and control and infrastructure, emphasize the PLA’s advanced capabilities to convince Taiwan of the PLA’s overwhelming military superiority. By Pulse 4, after failing to effectively respond to the PLA’s attacks, Taiwan relents on defending itself militarily and instead works to resolve problems through negotiation.

Many of the COA’s activities contain elements of cognitive warfare. The PRC’s cognitive warfare strategy throughout this COA centers on overwhelming Taiwan’s government and society with constant attacks on all fronts, causing most Taiwanese to decide that capitulating to PRC demands is their best option. This effect is partially accomplished through information-warfare efforts that spread narratives of incompetent Taiwanese leadership, a poorly equipped ROCM, and US abandonment. These narratives, when combined with economic pressure and constant military activity, create a feeling of insecurity among the Taiwanese populace. These feelings of insecurity become more tangible once acts of physical sabotage, attacks on independence advocates, and the missile strike on Pengjia Islet provide confirmation that Taiwan is falling into chaos.

“Reflexive control” is realized when the US makes decisions such as agreeing to a trade deal with the PRC and downgrading US-Taiwan relations. When

making these decisions, US leaders believe they are acting in America’s interest by creating economic opportunities for American businesses, improving diplomatic relations with the PRC, and ensuring the US is not drawn into an unpopular war. However, these decisions and the circumstances surrounding them are shaped by the PRC in such a way that the United States’ strategic decisions align perfectly with PRC objectives. The PRC does not want a strong alliance between the US and Taiwan. Therefore, decisions that downgrade US-Taiwan relations, even if they appear to be in America’s interest, advance PRC strategy.

## Potential Endgames

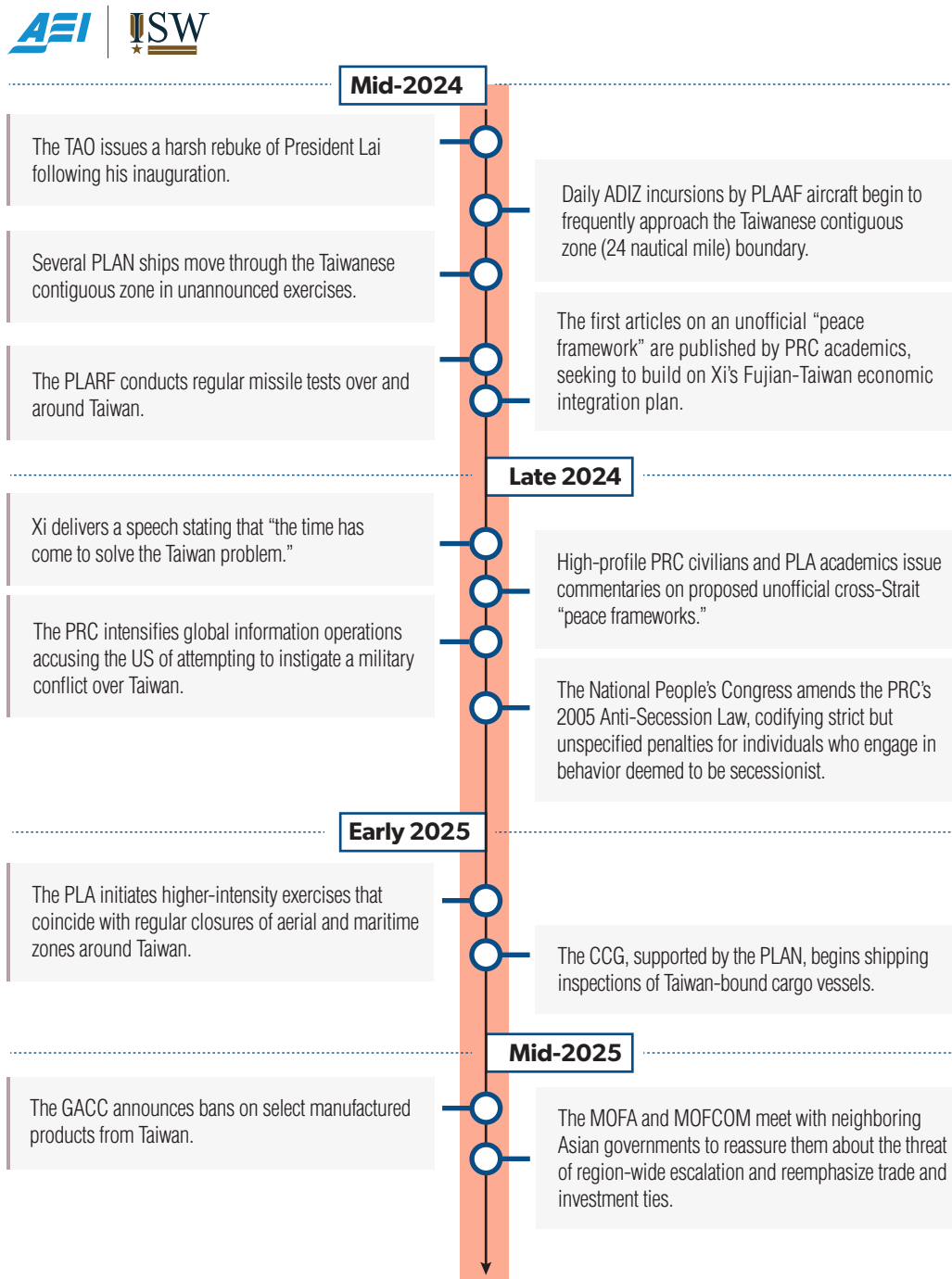
With Taiwan in chaos after a yearslong coercion campaign, all that remains for the PRC to achieve its objectives is to reach an agreement with the ROC government to restructure and formalize cross-Strait relations to the PRC’s advantage. The following scenarios represent branched possibilities for reaching such an agreement. Three main scenarios flow from the four pulses. One separate, alternative scenario reflects the possibility of a highly accelerated timeline of the COA’s key events.

**Endgame 1: Electoral Victory.** A “pro-peace” consensus has emerged in Taiwan as the 2028 presidential election approaches. The DPP, able to promise only continued, unbroken sovereignty with no compelling solutions for easing the pain caused by PRC coercion, has been sidelined. The KMT wins the presidency and a supermajority in the LY on a platform of making peace with the PRC and ending the slide into state failure.<sup>81</sup>

The new KMT president, who has established a reputation as a defender of Taiwan’s interests and who is adept at dealing with the PRC, counts many former DPP voters among his or her supporters. The president pledges to initiate talks with the PRC to forge a new status quo, adopting a conciliatory approach on “symbolic” matters like “one China” and eventual unification while promising that the

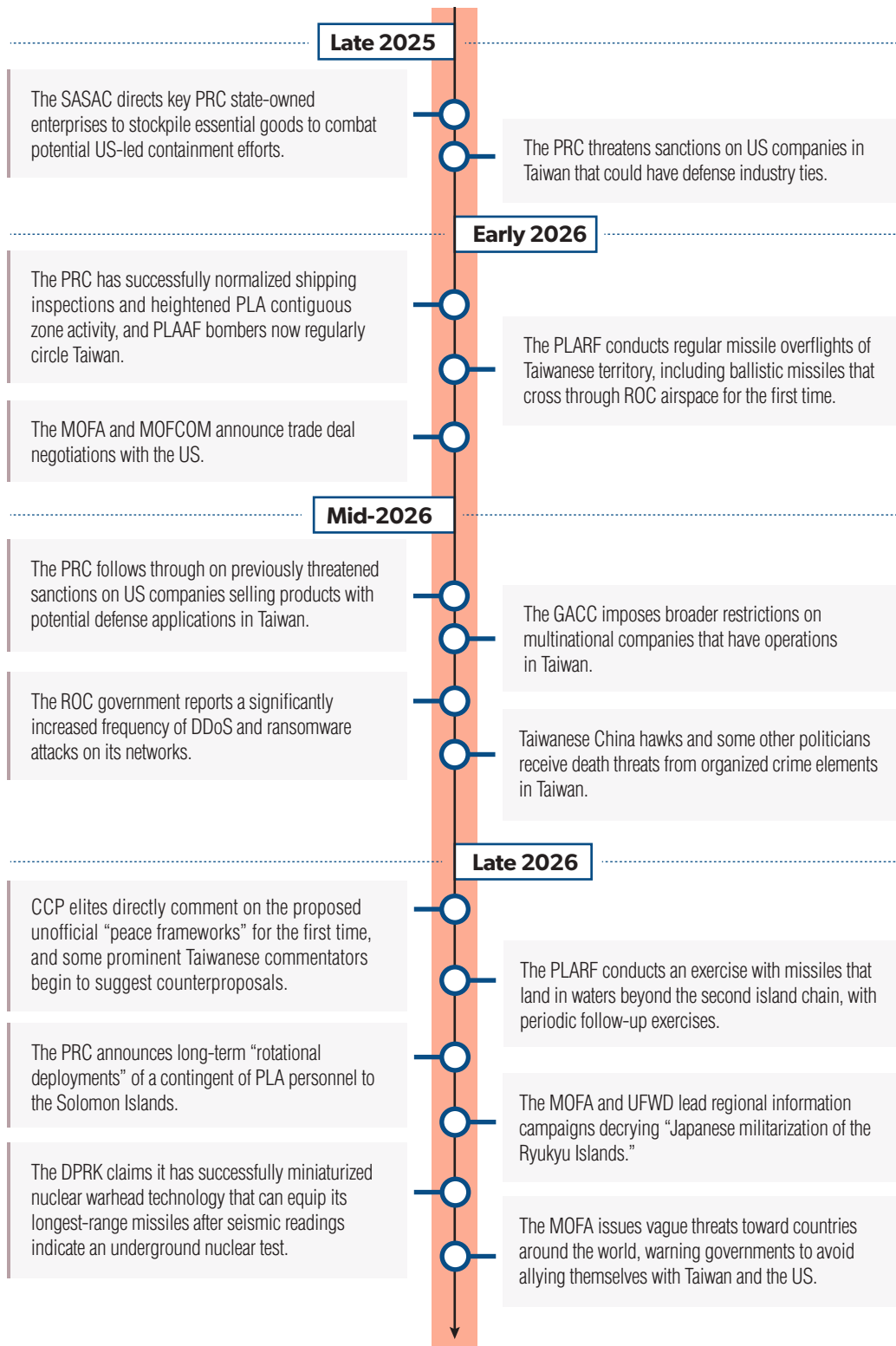


Figure 9. SoWC COA CONOP Timeline



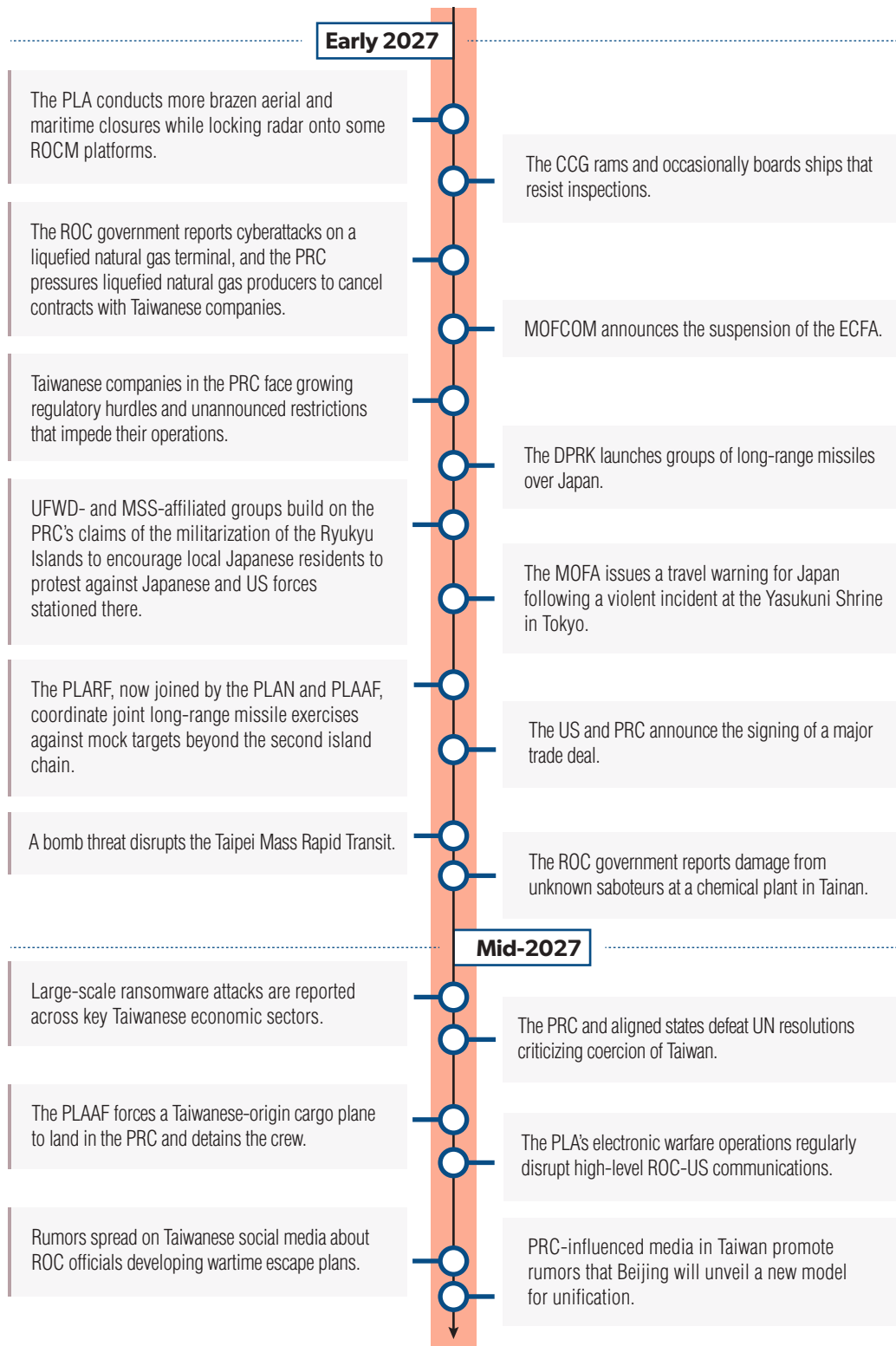
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Figure 9. SoWC COA CONOP Timeline (Continued)



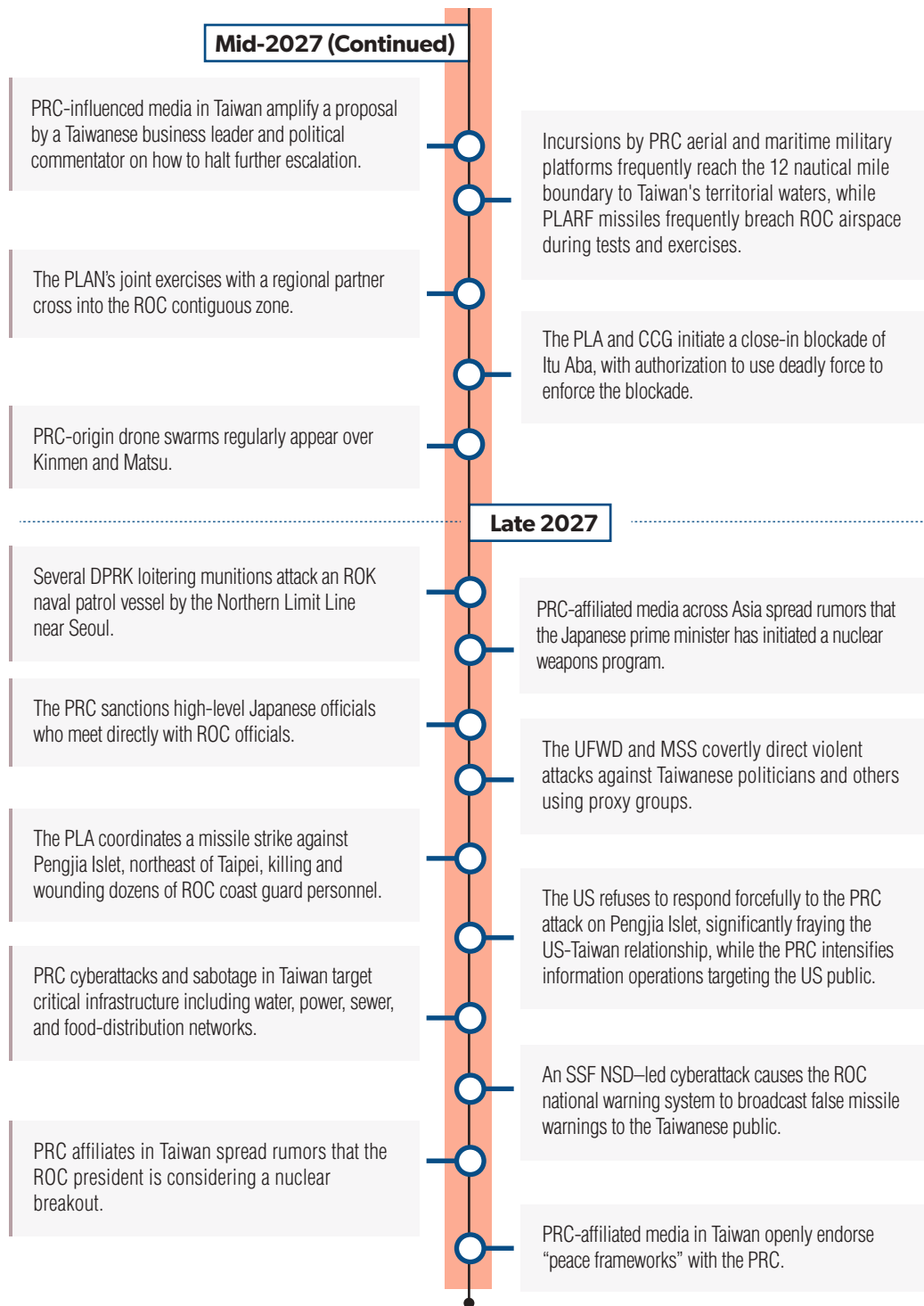
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Figure 9. SoWC COA CONOP Timeline (Continued)



(Continued on the next page)

Figure 9. SoWC COA CONOP Timeline (Continued)



Note: "SASAC" is the PRC State-Owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission of the State Council. "DDoS" is distributed denial of service.

Source: Authors' projections.

“actual” autonomy that Taiwan has enjoyed for so long will continue.

The president signs the cross-Strait peace agreement, followed shortly by the passage of a cross-Strait peace commission in the LY, with support from the Taiwanese public.

**Endgame 2: Elite Pressure.** While the DPP retains the presidency in the 2028 election, the CCP’s coercive activities and influence operations have convinced a slight majority of LY members that significant concessions are necessary to prevent war. As a result, the LY passes legislation creating a national peace commission, a new administrative body to be responsible for developing cross-Strait policies to resolve tensions.

The premier, the head of Taiwan’s Executive Yuan, refuses to abide by the LY’s request to staff the commission, citing its potential to infringe on Taiwan’s sovereignty.<sup>82</sup> While some LY members are not in favor of the initial legislation, they nonetheless find the premier’s action in clear violation of law. A vote of no confidence against the premier passes, forcing him or her to step down. The president appoints a new premier.

The president and vice president hold a press conference condemning the LY’s intervention and stating their intention to oppose any concessions to the PRC. In response, the CCP, through the TAO, calls on the president to respect the legislative process and the will of the “Taiwan compatriots.” The LY, viewing the president and vice president’s actions as violating democratic principles, initiates a motion of impeachment. The impeachment motion is passed in the LY with a two-thirds majority, drawing support from the KMT, the TPP, and even a few DPP members. When the case is then taken up by the Constitutional Court, more than two-thirds of the high justices find the president and vice president guilty, and both are summarily removed from office.<sup>83</sup>

The newly appointed premier assumes the presidency in an acting capacity. He or she follows through on the LY’s initiative, establishing the national peace commission. Meanwhile, a special election is held,

and a charismatic candidate who promises to end Taiwan’s period of suffering receives wide support from the electorate, winning the election. Under his or her administration, the cross-Strait peace agreement is signed, followed shortly by the LY passing the cross-Strait peace commission.

**Endgame 3: Grassroots Movement.** The DPP and KMT leadership and legislative caucuses remain committed to resisting the PRC coercion campaign, though an insurgent “pro-peace” faction has now won political control of the TPP and is mounting a serious challenge to the two main parties. While a “pro-resistance” KMT candidate narrowly wins the presidency in 2028, the “pro-peace” TPP surges to win a plurality of seats in the LY. The TPP presidential candidate, the previously mentioned charismatic business leader who established a reputation as an able interlocutor with the PRC and whose rise to prominence was aided by CCP influence operations, has become increasingly concerned about the plight of Taiwan’s citizens and the hopelessness of international intervention. He or she introduces a ballot measure to compel the president to seek a peace agreement with the PRC. The measure quickly gathers the roughly 2,000 signers and 300,000 cosigners required, and a vote on the measure is scheduled.<sup>84</sup>

A pro-initiative movement draws support from the TPP base and a significant portion of the KMT old guard, who had been reluctant to vote against their own party’s candidate in the election. CCP proxy media outlets in Taiwan lend positive coverage to the grassroots movement, and united front elements promote the movement heavily on social media and in private message groups. The new class of TPP members of the LY, as well as a handful of converts from the other major parties, rallies in support of the ballot measure. The TPP makes a compelling argument that the US and other countries will not save Taiwan and that delaying an agreement will doom Taiwan to a longer and more intense period of pain.

Ultimately, the “pro-peace” contingent’s conviction to save Taiwan coupled with disillusionment among even stalwart defenders of Taiwan’s autonomy proves to be enough for a decisive majority in

support of the ballot initiative. Despite the result, the president refuses to carry out the required negotiations with the PRC, seeing them as tantamount to capitulation. In response, the “pro-peace” movement, increasingly energized and organized, quickly shifts to pushing for a recall of the president.

Even many opponents of the ballot initiative now see the president as derelict in his or her duty to respect the legitimately expressed will of the people. The movement pressures the LY to initiate a recall, which proceeds smoothly amid increasing defections from the two major parties. The recall passes, and the vice president, convinced that any effort to oppose a peace agreement is futile, decides to resign, thereby elevating the premier to the role of acting president.

In the subsequent special presidential election, which is mandated by law following the recall of both the president and vice president, the TPP candidate emerges victorious after consolidating support from a majority of Taiwanese voters, who are united by dissatisfaction with the previous administration’s blind resistance and failure to relieve their suffering.<sup>85</sup>

The president signs the cross-Strait peace agreement, followed shortly by the passage of the cross-Strait peace commission in the LY.

**Alternative Endgame: Treason Scandal.** The CCP launches a rapid coercive assault in the months following Lai’s election victory. Coercive actions include those outlined in Pulses 1–4, but they are done on a condensed timeline, presenting Lai with a series of crises to deal with as soon as he takes office. Maritime disruptions, cyberattacks, terrorism, and missile harassment roil the first few months of the Lai-Hsiao administration.

Fabricated news reports start to emerge that Lai, as vice president, began secret collusion with the US to launch a biological weapons program. The Americans, these fabricated reports allege, had reportedly insisted that Taiwan develop such weapons as part of an “asymmetric” defense strategy, but then-President Tsai Ing-wen had refused. According to these fabricated reports, Vice President Lai, however, had been in favor of the program and began

back-channel communication with the US to oversee its launch.

The Taiwan High Prosecutors Office begins an investigation into Lai and associated officials in the former Tsai administration. Prosecutors uncover (fabricated) “evidence” of the collusion in the form of leaked (fabricated) communication between the American Institute in Taiwan and the Presidential Office discussing the plans for bioweapons, which were later terminated by Tsai. Separate, (fabricated) private communications between an American Institute in Taiwan staffer and Hsiao Bi-khim, Lai’s then-running mate, indicate Lai secretly continued the program, contrary to the president’s orders.

The High Prosecutors Office decides it has enough evidence to bring treason charges against Lai, on the basis that he conspired with a foreign power against the orders of the ROC president. Former President Tsai is initially silent on the allegations as her team reviews the (fabricated) evidence. President Lai, via his premier, instructs the Ministry of Justice to drop the charges, and he is not arrested. Tsai then clarifies that the leaked (fabricated) communications are fake, but the public takes little notice.

Lai’s perceived obstruction of justice leads to outrage in the LY, and pan-Blue legislators swiftly pass a recall motion against Lai and Hsiao. The electorate turns against him, and the recall motion succeeds. The premier assumes power and a special presidential election is scheduled.

A charismatic pragmatist wins the election on pledges to restore clean government and end the chaos. After inauguration, he or she immediately declares emergency powers, having convinced the LY that such measures are temporarily needed to restore life to normal.

The new president signs a cross-Strait peace agreement with a high-level PRC official and is rewarded with a break in the PRC’s coercive activity targeting Taiwan. The LY is caught off guard by the sudden movement away from the status quo, yet the president’s actions earn significant popular support as Taiwan returns to normal. The president cites the potential for the PRC to renege on the agreement if the LY does not follow up by ratifying a cross-Strait

peace commission. Some members of the LY oppose the cross-Strait peace commission, claiming it will forfeit Taiwan's sovereignty. The president calls for the recall of these legislators, and opposition to the cross-Strait peace commission falters. The LY finally passes the cross-Strait peace commission.

The scenarios described above involve various electoral and judicial processes (e.g., recall, impeachment, and trial of a president) that would likely occur over a protracted timeline in normal circumstances. Our construction of these scenarios anticipates the adoption of legal measures (up to and including emergency powers) that would accelerate these processes if necessary, given the dire circumstances Taiwan would find itself in.

### Mechanism of Erosion of Sovereignty

The notional mechanism for reconciliation between the two sides of the strait has two elements: a bilateral agreement between the two governments and subsequent legislation in the PRC National People's Congress and Taiwanese LY establishing a commission with binding authority to manage cross-Strait affairs.

A cross-Strait peace agreement stipulates that the ROC government cease its defense relationships and political contact with "foreign forces," including foreign military purchases, stationing of foreign military personnel or weapons in Taiwan, and visits of foreign officials to Taiwan without the PRC's consent. The PRC reduces some of its military "deterrence" activity in accordance with the spirit of cross-Strait reconciliation.<sup>86</sup> The PRC also reiterates its pledge to not station officials or military personnel in Taiwan or interfere with Taiwan's autonomy in local or trade affairs. The agreement is signed by Taiwan's president and a representative authority of the Central People's Government.

The subsequent cross-Strait peace commission is established to direct the future of cross-Strait relations and resolve all disputes between the two sides with binding authority. The commission consists of eight members, four from each side of the strait. It acts only by consensus; any member can veto any proposition. Further, either side can reject the admission of any member to the commission. All proposals initiated by any member receive prompt consideration.

The commission implicitly allows for the formal, legal integration of Taiwan under PRC jurisdiction at some point in the future, since its authority supersedes that of the governments of either side of the strait in the realm of cross-Strait affairs. To pack the commission with China-friendly representatives, paving the way for formal unification, the PRC could employ its veto power over an ever-broader range of candidates from Taiwan, eventually allowing only compliant candidates to gain admission. Should the ROC government fail to comply with a unanimous ruling of the commission, the PLA is authorized to use military action to enforce the commission's will.

### CDOT Evaluations

This COA could have extreme consequences for Taiwan and is more plausible than observers and analysts might imagine. It demonstrates the viability of crippling disruption and manipulation of a functional political system by an adversary in ways that avoid the outbreak of a larger war. Taiwan's unique geopolitical situation, sense of isolation, lack of diplomatic recognition by the US or any other major power, and absence of a security guarantee make it uniquely vulnerable to an SoWC COA.

The ambiguities inherent in Washington's "One China" policy leave ample opportunity for intense PRC manipulation, which would leave Taipei more isolated and Washington more paralyzed. Successfully framing responses to aggression as "provocations" is perhaps the most effective PRC manipulative strategy. Furthermore, coercive campaigns using elements of this COA that target other states, including

the US, can be imagined. Washington is still recovering from the unexpectedly potent political warfare inflicted against its political system by Russia in 2016, which resulted in greater political polarization and accentuated societal divisions.

The US and its many allies and partners therefore have a vested interest in developing the means to adequately respond to and prevent PRC coercive strategies. Developing these counter-coercive strategies would allow the US and its allies to protect their interest in not only maintaining a free and democratic Taiwan but also defending their own governance models against coercion, subversion, and manipulation by authoritarian states.

This SoWC COA would pose a particular challenge to the US government. Gradual intensification of information warfare and narrative campaigns makes them difficult to detect until the “cognitive overload” on US leadership is significant, which may diminish or preclude an effective response. By “cognitive overload,” we mean the potential paralysis of a governing system as it unsuccessfully attempts to ingest, uncover, and respond to multidimensional kinetic and non-kinetic assaults directed at its “brain.” For instance, the PRC campaign that threatened the safety of then-Speaker Nancy Pelosi before she traveled to Taiwan in August 2022, which insinuated that the visit would cause a major war in the western Pacific, was arguably meant to affect Washington’s collective psychology and engender a change in its behavior. Such an effort aims to degrade the ability of high-level decision makers to think clearly and respond with deliberation and efficacy.

This report’s COA designed campaigns of this sort to run with varying degrees of intensity for roughly four years. Without preexisting defenses in place, it can be incredibly difficult to halt the momentum of an intensive cognitive warfare campaign and seize back the initiative such that a system’s brains are neither simply reacting to provocations nor dissuaded from acting outright. This COA is specifically designed to take advantage of the political structure and ideology of liberal-democratic states whose governing and decision-making processes are intentionally diffuse, slow, and prone to fits of passionate reactivity

alongside processes of deliberation. Information warfare and narrative campaigns are difficult for the US and other democracies to combat because of their commitment to protecting individual political rights and freedoms.

The most effective way to prevent or disrupt a COA like the one in this report is to form a coalition of like-minded states attuned to such PRC stratagems and practiced in responding to them. A coalition that can immediately identify PRC cognitive warfare efforts and frame its reactions as responses thereto would be deadly for the PRC, which will work relentlessly to ensure no such grouping coalesces.

It is crucial that the US respond comprehensively and effectively to PRC coercive efforts like those in this report’s COA. If the PRC successfully executes the SoWC COA, allowing it to take control of Taiwan without US interference, the US will have set a precedent that it can be successfully coerced and manipulated by its chief geopolitical rivals. Despite the ambiguities in US policy toward Taiwan, US allies still view the US as Taiwan’s security guarantor, responsible for its defense against PRC assaults of any kind. A capitulation by Taiwan to coercion would therefore profoundly affect US alliance relationships, leading to doubts about the sincerity of US backing and security promises.

The fact that war does not break out in this scenario will not be a defense against charges that the US failed to prevent the subversion of a democratic ally and its ultimate control by the PRC. While it is certainly not easier or less risky to prepare for a full-scale war with the PRC over Taiwan and defeat decisive PRC force, it may be more complicated to defend against a COA like this from a psychological and political point of view. The PRC in this scenario never crosses the threshold that would force the US to respond with kinetic force against the PRC.

The US must therefore set new lines for itself regarding the types of political manipulation, cognitive warfare, and intimidation that merit a full-scale defense of Taiwan’s political system. The United States’ foundational strategic interest in Taiwan is the full functioning and continued development



of Taiwan's democratic political system. The system's destruction would result in the highly detrimental effects to US national security that this report has identified.

### COA Risks and Mitigations

This COA is full of risks for the PRC. Possibly the most significant risk is the loss of escalation control. Taiwanese and US resistance to PRC actions may be stronger than anticipated, even when taking care to limit the use of force. Several key COA objectives and activities may require the PLA and CCG to employ kinetic military force directly against Taiwanese or US military personnel at a time or place not of the PRC's choosing and in ways not intended within the COA.

The COA assumes that Taiwan and the US will continue to favor de-escalation to preserve the status quo. However, if the COA activities are not executed carefully or if Taiwan and the US feel substantially threatened, then the leaders of these states may decide to respond more forcefully than accounted for by the COA's assumptions. Such is the fog and friction of even low-intensity conflict. One need only to examine Russia's assumptions about the expected fall of Ukraine's government after a quick decapitation strike to see the dangers of relying on assumptions about how the adversary will react.

The COA mitigates this risk primarily through careful campaign planning accompanied by extensive research to develop accurate conceptions of how Taiwan and the US would likely respond to the COA activities. The PRC would also use realistic and thorough training to instruct PLA personnel on proper responses to various contingencies. Additionally, the PRC is likely to disincentivize strong Taiwanese, US, or coalition resistance by portraying these states as hyperaggressive and overly militaristic through the COA's information campaigns.

The key to mitigating the risk of a stronger US reaction is persuading both the US decision-making elite and public that an "overreaction" would lead to a major war (at a time when the US is engaged in

supporting allies in regional wars) while communicating that peace and prosperity are the alternatives. PRC efforts at striking economic deals in this report's COA accomplish the latter. The more the PRC can convince elite stakeholders that the tensions over Taiwan are complicated and not worth a major war, the more likely the COA is to succeed.

A second and very significant risk the PRC would face in executing this COA is that of triggering a substantial US or coalition response, resulting in rapid and meaningful support to Taiwan. The COA's success depends on a crisis of confidence in US-Taiwan relations and the emergence of a consensus in Taiwan that the US will not help it in the face of a PRC onslaught. A key COG of the COA is the bilateral relationship between the two democracies. If Taiwanese political elites and the Taiwanese public conclude that the relationship is beyond repair or useless, the political options laid out by the COA may appear both attractive and realistic. Taiwan simply cannot resist PRC pressure indefinitely without the US. Absent confidence in the US-Taiwan relationship, politics in Taiwan would change dramatically.

The COA deters heightened US support of Taiwan by repeatedly blaming escalations on the US presence in Asia and portraying increased US aid to Taiwan as aggression toward the PRC. Amplifying this perception would maximize US self-deterrence and incentivize Taiwan to be more conservative in requesting US aid—perhaps by seeking aid that would be less visible to both countries' populations, which in turn would reinforce the public perception of Taiwan's growing isolation. The COA's main diplomatic and informational elements must remain consistent and rest on two pillars: The US will provoke World War III if it intervenes forcefully, and focusing on peace and economic prosperity is the best option for the US as disputes across the strait will be worked out "peacefully."

A third risk of this COA relates to the way the PRC is currently perceived and the actions regional states are already taking to push back against its aggression. More aggressive action could lead to greater pushback from states not directly targeted by a Taiwan COA. Specifically, key states like Japan

and Australia, perhaps joined by the Philippines and South Korea, could consolidate a counter-PRC coalition to oppose any or all PRC coercion efforts. The US has recently secured closer bilateral and multilateral cooperation between many of its regional allies and partners based on common concerns over the PRC's growing assertiveness.

The COA mitigates these risks by leveraging bilateral and multilateral political, economic, military, and societal divisions among regional countries to stoke public opposition and controversy, with the goal of impeding coalition building. United front and MSS networks can further disrupt coalition formation by obstructing bureaucratic processes in regional states, fueling domestic political discord in those states, and encouraging public calls for policies that "avoid provoking China."

As the COA unfolds, the CCP will work to portray Taiwan's government as an aggressor and the US as a provocateur that seeks to change the status quo. Doubtless, the CCP will play into fears that further provocation will lead to a "second Ukraine," this time in Asia, which could be avoided if the US and Taiwan do not provoke the PRC. The CCP will take advantage of the fact that until present, none of the putative coalition members have done much to support Taiwan, neither in the international political arena nor in the security domain.

No country besides the US has anything like the Taiwan Relations Act or any legal basis to support Taiwan in a crisis. Most have not spoken up during the PRC's years of provocative behavior, from missile tests and ADIZ violations to creeping encroachment on digital and maritime sovereignty. The COA assumes that this passivity will more or less continue if the crisis does not seem likely to lead to major conflict. The PRC will also take measures to continue to arrest the development of a coalition that might have the resolve to undermine a coercion campaign.

A fourth risk for PRC planners arises from the COA's intention to generate significant disruptive effects in Taiwan through cyberwarfare, electronic warfare, and infrastructure sabotage. These tools may be much less effective than intended and could fail

to sufficiently disrupt both internal Taiwanese and external US-Taiwan communications. Such failures risk allowing Taiwan to preserve its vital information connectivity among military units and with its international partners. The PRC further risks revealing its most potent cyberwarfare, electronic warfare, and sabotage capabilities in ways that could enable its adversaries to identify and exploit weaknesses and develop effective countermeasures.

The PRC is thus likely to focus intelligence collection on US and coalition electronic warfare and counter-electronic warfare systems ahead of initiating the COA to better understand coalition defensive capabilities and to design more precise electronic warfare campaigns against Taiwan. The PLA is also likely to use the minimum level of electronic warfare capabilities necessary to damage Taiwanese internal and external communications while preserving the PLA's most capable systems and tactics for a potential large-scale conflict.

A fifth risk of the COA is that activities that directly or indirectly threaten US security and economic interests in the Indo-Pacific may consolidate US political support for significantly expanding the US military's regional force posture. This development could threaten the COA's success by providing US leadership with a wider range of options to resist COA activities and embolden Taiwan and the US to embrace greater risk when confronting the PRC's actions.

The PRC would seek to impede an expanded US force posture by targeting key political constituencies affected by the current US force posture to provoke greater public resistance to increased troop deployments, expanded bases, and the associated environmental damage. The PRC may further engage in information campaigns in the US that highlight America's global interests and commitments, which could be undermined by a more comprehensive and costly focus on Asia. PRC information campaigns would stress the risk of another major war, which could be avoided by US restraint.

A sixth risk is that the COA relies on cultivating PRC agents in Taiwan for clandestine activity. Such activity risks these agents being compromised, potentially

leading Taiwan, the US, and coalition states to jointly implement thorough and damaging counterintelligence campaigns before the desired COA effects are achieved. Taiwan, the US, and coalition governments have recently conducted public press conferences to identify alleged PRC agents and warn against similar future behavior.<sup>87</sup>

The PRC may preempt these counterintelligence campaigns by reinforcing narratives that any Taiwanese or US government-led efforts to expose PRC agents aim simply to play up fears of the PRC for political reasons. Moreover, the CCP could play on fears that Taiwan is undermining its own system's protection of free speech and individual rights by unfairly targeting individuals who "merely hold different views" about Taiwan's future with the PRC. PRC officials could also privately threaten Taiwan, the US, and coalition governments with retaliation by detaining suspected foreign agents within the PRC.

A seventh risk is that the COA requires the PRC's international diplomatic efforts to remain disciplined and closely aligned, with precise language used across many spokespeople and audiences, to generate the intended information-narrative effects. This level of coordination would be difficult to achieve, especially across the COA's multiple years, and PRC diplomatic personnel may prove unable to maintain a coherent narrative to justify the wide-ranging COA actions across many domains. The PRC can mitigate risks of incoherence by directing its diplomatic staff to default to blaming Taiwan, the US, and coalition states as being responsible for any escalation. Public-facing PRC diplomats and media personnel would also likely receive extensive training to refer to statements from Xi and his most trusted subordinates.

An eighth risk is that the COA is designed to induce severe negative economic effects in Taiwan that are unlikely to remain contained to the Taiwanese economy. Downstream effects will be felt acutely in the EU, Japan, South Korea, and the US, which will be greatly concerned with the damage these effects may cause to their own economies due to Taiwan's important role in high-tech supply chains. These COA effects may thus widely reinforce narratives

of the PRC's aggressive economic warfare tactics in ways that accelerate more comprehensive decoupling from the PRC economy while retaining investments in Taiwan as an alternative.

The PRC may mitigate this criticism and the risks of decoupling by providing economic incentives to foreign companies, such as generous subsidies, relaxed regulations, and expanded market access to the PRC economy. Using incentives in this manner would further reinforce efforts to isolate Taiwan economically while helping offset international companies' perception of the PRC economy as high-risk. Moreover, as economic pain is felt across coalition countries, the PRC can deploy the argument that such pain will dissipate if Taiwan merely makes some political concessions and stops its "provocative" behavior.

Lastly, the COA's activities run the risk that the ROC government and public rally to overcome domestic political divisions and harden resistance to COA activities rather than urgently seek concessions to de-escalate the crisis. PRC kinetic actions against ROCM personnel and civilians in particular risk causing the ROC government and population to rapidly mobilize to resist further PRC activities. The scope of political manipulation in Taiwan necessary for the COA to achieve its objectives should not be underestimated. The COA assumes that major changes can be effectuated in Taiwanese political sentiment such that once-unthinkable concessions become palatable when compared to the continuation of the pain the Taiwanese society is feeling and the risk that more is in store for its citizens.

The COA seeks to mitigate any potentially rallying effects by conducting widespread disinformation campaigns in Taiwanese media to discredit prominent public figures who promote continued staunch resistance to the PRC. The PRC will likely also promote narratives in Taiwanese media highlighting the consequences of continued support for "separatist" groups. These consequences will likely be heavily contrasted with the benefits of deeper integration with the PRC to highlight the immense costs of de facto independence. The credibility of such information, and of disinformation campaigns, will grow as the COA unfolds over several

years and the ROC governmental system is subject to serious degradation and disruption.

### **How the US, Taiwan, and Their Partners Can Exploit COA COGs**

If they maintain the will to do so, Taiwan, the US, and coalition governments can resist the PRC's actions by targeting identified COGs of the COA itself, thereby preemptively disrupting and degrading key effects the PRC must generate. Attacking these COA COGs does not eliminate all COA effects, but it can significantly mitigate the primary means of coercion against Taiwan. To do this, the US should

1. Successfully portray the PRC as the true aggressor,
2. Impede the PRC's ability to achieve blockade effects without implementing a blockade,
3. Publicly identify the COA's actions as a campaign explicitly intended to capture Taiwan, and
4. Harden the ROC government against PRC efforts to disrupt its ability to govern effectively.

The COA heavily emphasizes information campaigns to justify the PRC's actions as purely defensive, incentivize Taiwanese and US self-deterrence to avoid escalation, and undermine international public support for Taiwan. Taiwan, the US, and coalition states can severely disrupt the PRC's desired information effects by proactively discrediting PRC attempts to frame counter-COA actions as escalatory or provocative while sustaining broad public support to resist the COA's effects.

Taiwan and the US government especially must avoid self-deterrence and maintain effective bilateral cooperation, to both undermine the COA's attempts at isolating Taiwan and promote US public support for continued engagement with Taiwan. Such reciprocal

support and engagement are crucial to convincing the American public that Taiwan remains willing to vigorously defend its independence, thus reinforcing arguments that significant support for Taiwan is a worthwhile investment. Countering the PRC's widespread, coordinated information campaigns is also essential to disrupting many PRC efforts to gain influence globally beyond those in the COA and thus should be a consistent primary focus for Taiwan, the US, and coalition states.

The PRC's ability to establish and maintain blockade-like effects on Taiwan is an essential element of the COA's success and thus represents a key point of failure that Taiwan, the US, and the coalition can target. The COA intends to generate these blockade-like effects by leveraging the PRC's massive quantitative advantage in maritime vessels, both military and law enforcement, to directly impede Taiwan's sea lines of communication while deterring third-party intervention. The PRC seeks to wield its threat of overwhelming force to dissuade any state from using its naval forces or law-enforcement units to forcibly maintain Taiwan's global access.

The COA also intends to leverage a variety of legal, military, and economic means to disincentivize commercial air travel and cargo routes into Taiwan. Taiwan, the US, and coalition states must signal their clear willingness to actively maintain Taiwan's air and sea lines of communications while developing regional capabilities to effectively respond to the COA's actions. This must include efforts to counter the full range of lawfare, informational, and economic COA activities while deploying sufficient forces to defeat the COA's attempted isolation of Taiwan.

The COA attempts to obfuscate the true intentions of the PRC's collective actions to prevent Taiwan, the US, and coalition states from recognizing these actions as a coherent campaign to capture Taiwan. The COA seeks to exploit US susceptibility to distraction with global crises to preclude America's full focus on developing an effective response to PRC actions. The COA intends to provoke or take advantage of such distracting crises, sometimes in concert with the PRC's partners, to incentivize US global allies and partners to request urgent assistance in response

to regional conflicts and crises, thereby greatly overstretching US national resources and strategic focus.

The US and its allies must collectively maintain a coherent focus on preventing Taiwan's isolation and deterring the COA's most consequential actions throughout the entirety of the COA's timeline. This further requires the US to build a broad consensus among a coalition of states to defend Taiwan in order to maintain strategic discipline and reorient focus back to Taiwan whenever global events draw attention away.

The COA attempts—through the quasi-blockade and other impediments to commerce and through cyberattacks and other attacks on Taiwan's governmental infrastructure—to severely degrade the ROC government's ability to function. The US and Taiwan can defeat this effort by working in advance to make Taiwan's government more resilient under severe stress. This requires wargaming and evaluating the ways the PRC can disrupt and undermine Taiwan's effective governance through its own agents, local sympathizers, and cyber and cognitive means. It will require an educational effort within Taiwan to alert the Taiwanese population to the dangers of the PRC's cognitive warfare efforts, and it will require efforts to unmask PRC agents preemptively and, sometimes, publicly.

The ROC government must engage aggressively with Taiwanese businesses to harden their infrastructure against cyberattacks, including those enabled by insider threats, and physical attacks. Taiwan and the US should develop plans in advance to mitigate a wide array of potential supply-chain disruptions caused by PRC lawfare and other activities, as previously described. Above all, the US and Taiwan must prepare to identify PRC-directed clandestine operations rapidly and respond coherently and effectively in public and private. Taiwan, the US, and regional allies and partners should rehearse such responses.

## Recommendations for Taiwan

Here the CDOT team provides specific policy recommendations for the ROC government to deter further

PRC coercion and prepare to counteract targeted elements of the SoWC COA. Several of these recommendations pinpoint opportunities for the ROC government to bolster national security, beyond just the context of preparing to counter the SoWC COA.

### **Overhaul Mariner Training and Develop a Security-Oriented Taiwanese Merchant Marine.**

The Taiwanese Ministry of Transportation and Communications Maritime and Port Bureau should expand the security-oriented content of the current certification regime for ROC-national commercial mariners to include training to avoid, resist, document, and report foreign harassment or inspection.<sup>88</sup> The training should pay special attention to boarding and inspection contingencies, mariners' rights under international maritime law, and best practices for interacting with PRC vessels claiming law-enforcement authority. The ROC government should offer this training to crews of all types of domestic vessels, including private vessels and small commercial vessels, such as the kind boarded by the CCG off the coast of Kinmen in February 2024.<sup>89</sup> Programs like the Seafarer Rising Star Training Program offer existing avenues to implement this recommendation.<sup>90</sup>

The ROC government should stand up a reserve merchant marine consisting of ROC-flagged vessels and their crews that, once activated, could be used to transport critical goods in a blockade scenario, during which private shipping companies could be unwilling to maintain their normal operations.<sup>91</sup> Given that the intensity of a blockade could change throughout a campaign, relevant government ministries should draft full and partial mobilization plans for this fleet for a variety of scenarios.<sup>92</sup> The merchant marine fleet should receive training in activities such as the counterblockade resupply of outlying islands.

The ROC government should increase the size of the fleet of ROC-flagged commercial vessels by providing subsidies for ship construction or ship purchases by Taiwanese carriers that agree to register these vessels in Taiwan. While the total vessels controlled by Taiwanese companies could theoretically supply the country with most of its food and energy

needs, those that are ROC flagged would be unable to do so by a wide margin. Unlike foreign-flagged ships, ROC-flagged ships can be requisitioned by the state and crewed by the merchant marine to take certain actions for national security, which makes them critical in a blockade scenario.<sup>93</sup>

In addition, the ROC government should ensure Taiwanese carriers inform their ship captains (of any nationality) who service Taiwanese ports of their rights under international law and issue contingency guidelines in line with the updated training standards for ROC nationals. These requirements should be coupled with assurances to carriers and captains regarding the availability of CGA assistance in the event of maritime harassment. More broadly, the Ministry of Transportation and Communications should begin a dialogue with carriers to identify and address carrier concerns such as crew safety, damage to vessels, and heightened insurance rates during a contingency.

**Push for Joint Maritime Operations with Partners.** In addition to continuing to lobby for an invitation to the Rim of the Pacific exercises, the ROC government should also request invitations to the Pacific Indian Ocean Shipping Working Group and its Bell Buoy exercises.<sup>94</sup> Initiating regular international shipping escort exercises, law-enforcement patrols, and island resupply exercises could improve the CGA's capacity to track and respond to incursion, inspection, and outlying island or main island blockade attempts. This cooperation could be further supported by improving CGA ships' command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance interoperability with partner forces. Regular exercises of this sort can also complicate the PRC's efforts to conduct surprise provocations without risking initiating hostilities.

**Increase Public Awareness of a Short-of-War Contingency.** Increasing public awareness of the possibility for a short-of-war campaign against Taiwan would diminish the deniability of PRC coercion and strengthen the ROC government's mandate to respond. The new messaging could be diffused

into public discourse through standardized official statements, public service announcements, and military basic training sessions that emphasize this contingency. This concept could also be integrated into existing All-Out Defense Education efforts.<sup>95</sup>

**Enhance Taiwan's Civil Preparedness.** The ROC government should build out the existing national civil defense framework to develop a robust network of local groups prepared to respond to a variety of material and informational contingencies. Local groups should preempt and counter cognitive warfare by disseminating accurate, reliable information to the public; spreading a message of unity and confidence; and visibly displaying a high degree of public participation and preparedness.

These groups should also serve as a backstop to government in the event of essential-service disruptions due to cyberattacks, physical sabotage, or resource strain. They should also investigate potential cooperation with law enforcement on neighborhood-watch programs (both the physical and virtual "neighborhood") and counterterrorism efforts. The network should be decentralized and have a local focus, but missions and training should follow national standards, and recruitment should be a nationwide priority.<sup>96</sup>

The government-affiliated network should also investigate partnerships with extant nongovernmental civil defense or preparedness organizations to scale up training, recruitment, and scope of activity. Reforming the substitute military service system to include civil defense participation as a form of service should also be investigated.<sup>97</sup> Note that the above recommendations focus on the role civil defense groups can play in preparing for an SoWC contingency specifically, though these groups should also prepare for more traditional invasion and disaster scenarios.

**Prepare to Mitigate the Effects of a Blockade.** The ROC government should also consider making a sustained case to the public for stockpiling additional fuel, food, emergency aid, medicine, and industrial inputs to counter high-intensity coercion that could last for months. Transparency and professionalism should be at the core of these preparations. Periodic

and regularized disclosures of stockpile levels, expansions of storage facilities, and cold-chain storage upgrades would demonstrate the government's competence and resilience to the public. Stockpiling should be paired with rigorous preparation for the distribution of essential supplies in a degraded environment to mitigate the negative effects of cyberattacks, sabotage, and shipping disruptions.<sup>98</sup>

**Formally Document and Expose PRC Coercive Action.** International reporters could be invited by the CGA, ROC Air Force, and ROCN for ride alongs, during which they can assist in collecting and publicizing photo and video evidence of CCG attempts to use harassment and intimidation to enforce a coercive customs regime.<sup>99</sup> Official daily press conferences in the style of the Central Epidemic Command Center could flag PRC coercive activities and present visual evidence to the public and international community.<sup>100</sup> During periods of intense coercion, external messaging should emphasize the suffering of Taiwanese who are not politically active and those who support (or supported) conciliatory policies toward Beijing, highlighting the hypocrisy of Beijing's claims to target only "separatists."

**Develop Additional Legal Mechanisms to Reduce CCP Influence in the Media.** Taiwan should pass legislation to reduce CCP influence in the Taiwanese media industry. First, the LY should reconsider the proposed Foreign Influence Transparency Act of 2019.<sup>101</sup> The foreign agent reporting and disclosure provisions in that law would bring Taiwan to the global standard for countering foreign influence.<sup>102</sup> The US and Australia are robust democracies that have similar laws in place.<sup>103</sup>

Second, the LY should consider drafting legislation to establish cross-ownership restrictions that would bar industrial conglomerates, especially those with major business interests in the PRC, from becoming the dominant owners of major media outlets.<sup>104</sup> Separating industrial businesses from the media would insulate media companies from PRC economic and political pressure. The LY should also consider expanding the budgets and personnel at government

offices that track, investigate, and debunk disinformation, such as the National Security Bureau Operations Center, the Ministry of Justice Information Security Work Station, and other public-facing units across the whole of government.<sup>105</sup>

**Prepare Financial and Economic Contingency Plans.** Relevant ROC government ministries should formulate a financial and economic strategy for mitigating the inflationary effects of supply-chain disruptions and the potential flight of foreign capital in an SoWC contingency.

Energy costs are particularly vulnerable to inflation in the case of a blockade because Taiwan imports nearly all its energy supply. Thus, the ROC government should focus its near-term efforts on accelerating the expansion of energy storage facilities for oil, coal, and especially natural gas, as Taiwan's liquefied natural gas reserves were reported to be enough for just 11 days in April 2023.<sup>106</sup> Maintaining the ability to restart Taiwan's two decommissioned nuclear reactors at Jinshan and Kuosheng on short notice should also be a top priority, as this would unlock a significant amount of additional reliable electricity supply. Nuclear fuel's longevity and much greater energy density than fossil fuel make it suitable for stockpiling. Renewables, while theoretically useful at improving long-term energy security, will likely be unable to make a meaningful difference in the time frame of a near-future coercion-and-blockade campaign.<sup>107</sup>

A rise in shipping costs due to a quasi-blockade would likely lead to broad-based inflation, which may be mitigated by shipping insurance subsidies, the development of alternative routes for the speedy diversion of shipping, and additional capacity at ports on Taiwan's eastern shores, which would make alternative routes possible. Lastly, targeted fiscal support for Taiwan's most vulnerable low-income populations should also be considered to mitigate popular unrest.

Although state funding would have inevitable limits, Taiwan should also have a strategy to continue capital investment flows for capital-intensive industries as long as possible. Government loans will likely

be the most feasible strategy, but close coordination with the US on cross-border capital flow regulatory standards and contingency planning with relevant US officials could increase investor confidence and create opportunities for financial support from the US government.<sup>108</sup>

**Improve Internal Government Security Processes.** The LY should consider enacting landmark legislation to reform security-clearance and counterintelligence efforts in coordination with the US Congress. Sentences for espionage, whether involving violent activities or the illicit sharing of state secrets, should also be lengthened to reflect the serious threat that espionage poses to Taiwanese national security and deter potential collaborators.<sup>109</sup> Once passed, relevant US officials could be invited for a high-profile signing ceremony in Taiwan that would include joint pledges to significantly deepen intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance collaboration.

**Selective Defense Cooperation Disclosures.** Disclosures of previously unknown elements of joint Taiwan-US or other international defense cooperation activities could provide powerful counterarguments to narratives of isolation. Concrete examples of the international community's investments in Taiwan's defense will challenge arguments that Taiwan's allies are abandoning it and will strengthen the public's perception of the nation's capability to resist. This must be done carefully, without exposing sensitive cooperation programs. Publicizing little-known facts like the small US military presence in Taiwan could be a low-cost tactic. Disclosing them on terms favorable to the US and Taiwan can reduce the PRC's ability to weaponize their disclosure as part of this or another COA.

## Recommendations for Allies

Here the CDOT team provides specific policy recommendations for a notional counter-COA coalition, made up of US allies and Taiwan's international partners, to cooperate to deter PRC coercion and

prepare strategies to counteract key elements of an SoWC COA.

**Joint Intelligence Disclosures.** Allied governments should consider pursuing selective, joint disclosures of intelligence on specific acts of PRC coercion and the PRC state organs responsible, as the US government did in the run-up to Russia's 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

**Nonmilitary Asymmetric Responses.** Instead of relying solely on Taiwan's symmetrical responses to PRC coercion, such as scrambling aircraft to confront a median-line crossing, Taiwan's partners could asymmetrically respond by attacking other LOEs in the PRC's campaign. The US could tie Taiwan into regional alliance structures by inviting Taiwan to a named military exercise, beginning to jointly produce ships or munitions, or selling interoperable weapons systems. Taiwan's partners could also take advantage of PRC political sensitivities by using rhetoric, political visits, and other actions to set back PRC domestic and international information campaigns as responses to intensified military coercion. Increased military coercion should be met with political consequences unfavorable to the PRC.

**Develop Warning Indicators for a Coercive Campaign.** The US and its allies should consider developing a shared set of indicators to identify a PRC SoWC campaign. These shared indicators could also be used to coordinate responses and messaging. This joint monitoring would further encourage Taiwan to develop more secure and resilient communications with its partners that could mitigate the impacts of COA activities to cut off Taiwan's external communications.

**Defend the Integrity of Taiwanese Airspace.** Japan, Taiwan, and the US should hold joint aerial exercises and patrols in Taiwanese and Japanese territorial airspace to reaffirm the exclusive sovereignty that states have in the airspace above their territory, according to the Convention on International Civil Aviation.<sup>110</sup> Taiwan's partners should continue to



publicly support the recognition and respect of other significant air boundaries, such as the Taipei Flight Information Region.

Canadian lawmakers wrote a letter to the International Civil Aviation Organization in February to protest the PRC's unilateral adjustment of the M503 flight route so that it would be closer to the Taiwan Strait Median Line and the Taipei Flight Information Region. Taiwan's partners should consider expanding and deepening this model by making multilateral statements in support of Taiwan's aerial interests, push for Taipei's invitation to International Civil Aviation Organization assembly sessions, and negotiate on behalf of Taiwan should it remain excluded.<sup>111</sup> Should legal efforts fail to deter coercion, additional defensive exercises and patrols could be held in the Taiwanese and Japanese ADIZs.

**Reaffirm Taiwan's Rights.** Allied governments should prepare legal arguments to defend Taiwan's rights under international law. These include Taiwan's jurisdiction of its air and sea domains and its right to defend itself against an aggressive coercion campaign.

First, the US and its partners should clearly define the legal status quo, which is favorable to Taiwanese sovereignty. This includes specific rights that Taiwan has in the economic, maritime, aerial, cyber, and other domains—the same as any other country. It is imperative that the US and allies emphasize, whenever possible, that nonrecognition by the US does not change Taiwan's international legal status.

Second, the US and its partners should prepare joint statements of support to be released in various international forums, including the G7, the Quad, and NATO, in the case of a coercion campaign against Taiwan. As the coercion campaign's severity increases, international statements affirming Taiwan's rights should increasingly refer to specific rights and become less country agnostic—for example, rather than referring to just “peace and security across the Taiwan Strait,” the statements would specify “Taiwan's maritime security and maritime rights under international law.”<sup>112</sup> The

language should be designed to politically punish the PRC for using coercion against Taiwan. The calculation Beijing must be forced to consider is that the more it infringes on Taiwan's rights, the more likely it is for the international community to recognize those rights explicitly.

This strategy at heart acknowledges that even though the US does not recognize Taiwan diplomatically, Taiwan in fact enjoys all the rights of statehood under international law. The PRC's efforts to erase such rights should result in the opposite political outcomes from those Beijing intends. There is another benefit to such a response: The democracies will need a legal basis to defend encroachment on Taiwan's sovereignty if and as the PRC escalates.

**Facilitate Taiwan's Acquisition of Advanced Air and Missile Defense Systems.**

Developing a US-Japan-Taiwan common operating picture in addition to accelerating Taiwan's acquisition of advanced air and missile defense systems would allow for improved air incursion tracking and targeting of intruding PRC aircraft. Shared data between the three partners, who all operate the US-made Patriot surface-to-air missile system, could further illuminate the aggressive and interconnected nature of PRC posturing against both Japan and Taiwan. The effectiveness of new systems and joint operations could be demonstrated through inviting the ROC to participate in large-scale, US-hosted air defense exercises in its Pacific territories.

**Coordinate a Counter-PRC Sanctions Plan with Global Allies and Partners.**

This effort could begin with the creation of an economic deterrence working group composed of finance, commerce, and other relevant economic ministers from allied countries. The working group should draft a set of multilateral sanctions for the participating governments' consideration. These draft sanctions should be designed to prevent the PRC's vast market size from pressuring multinational corporations to pull out of Taiwan or other states that the PRC wishes to coerce.

## Recommendations for the US Military

Here the CDOT team provides specific policy recommendations for the US military to better deter PLA coercive activities, improve cooperation with regional allies and partners, and prepare strategies to counteract key elements of the SoWC COA.

**Increase the US Military's Presence in the Taiwan Strait.** The US military should establish a higher baseline aerial and maritime activity level around Taiwan and increase its footprint on the island as soon as possible. The US will face an international perception of militarizing the Taiwan Strait regardless of timing, but waiting until a conflict occurs is even riskier. Priority should be given to those US forces able to increase Taiwan's economic—including cyber—resilience and the ROC government's ability to function when under attack. The US must also refocus its force structure in the vicinity of the Taiwan Strait to better prepare for blockades, whether “full-on” blockades or the “leaky” blockades described in this report.

The US government should fully leverage the provisions of the Taiwan Travel Act of 2018 to dispatch relevant US military officers to Taiwan, where they can engage in joint strategic and operational planning for contingencies ranging from large-scale regional war to an SoWC and blockade campaign.<sup>113</sup>

**Develop Warning Indicators for a Coercive Campaign.** The US should unilaterally develop a set of indicators to identify a PRC coercion scenario similar to the possible SoWC COA presented in this report. This initial set of indicators could be the basis for initial consultations between Taiwan and INDOPACOM to coordinate responses to observed PRC coercion. The indicators could incentivize the hardening of the communications networks between the US and Taiwan to facilitate joint awareness of PRC coercive activities. The US could share these revised indicators with its allies and partners as it seeks to build an international coalition to defend

Taiwan, which could then be included in a wider intelligence-sharing network.

**Participate in Escort, Resupply, and Civil Defense Exercises with Taiwan.** The US should consider sending teams of relevant disaster-response and military experts to advise and participate in Taiwan's annual civil defense and critical infrastructure protection exercises. The US Navy could also leverage its role as a leader in humanitarian aid missions and natural disaster relief to begin holding annual US-Taiwan joint naval escort exercises for commercial vessels in the Taiwan Strait and resupply exercises for Taiwan's outlying islands.

Exercises could be expanded to include sustained humanitarian resupply from Japan to Taiwan. To develop blockade-breaking capabilities, future exercises in and around the strait could include protecting cargo ships from simultaneous threats, clearing mines, and other related efforts. Lastly, the US should consider formally inviting Taiwan to participate in preexisting US-hosted multinational exercises such as Rim of the Pacific and Bell Buoy. The ROCM should also be invited to join the Pacific Indian Ocean Shipping Working Group due to its key role in regional trade flows and the risk that it faces as a potential target of a PRC-imposed blockade.

**Grow the US Navy and Coast Guard, and Transfer Vessels to Taiwan.** The expansion of joint US-Taiwan patrol, escort, and humanitarian exercises would likely require an increased number of US Navy and US Coast Guard vessels to accommodate additional deployments and a higher tempo of patrols and exercises. Higher numbers of US Navy and US Coast Guard ships would enhance deterrence of the PRC's “nonwar military activities” at sea and provide the US with greater options to respond effectively to a wide range of COA activities. The transfer or sale of suitable decommissioned US Coast Guard vessels to Taiwan's CGA would accelerate current CGA expansion efforts and improve the CGA's capacity to resist ongoing or future PRC maritime coercion.<sup>114</sup>

## Recommendations for the US Government

Here the CDOT team provides specific policy recommendations for the US government to counter PRC political warfare in coordination with allies and partners and prepare strategies to counteract key elements of the SoWC COA.

**Reaffirm the Taiwan Relations Act's Applicability in a Coercion Scenario.** The Taiwan Relations Act explicitly states that it is US policy “to maintain the capacity of the United States to resist any resort to force or other forms of coercion that would jeopardize the security, or the social or economic system, of the people on Taiwan.”<sup>115</sup> US officials should publicly reiterate this policy when the previously mentioned coercion indicators identify a discontinuous acceleration of PRC coercive efforts against Taiwan. This action would provide a solid legal basis to justify the US responses to the American public and international community by showing that the US is committed by law to countering the PRC's coercive actions against the Taiwanese people.

**Accelerate the Passage of Legislation to Counter Economic Coercion.** Proposed legislation such as the Countering Economic Coercion Act of 2023 would enable the US president to support the Taiwanese economy if the PRC greatly intensifies its economic coercion campaign.<sup>116</sup> In the meantime, the US can take several significant steps, such as reducing tariffs on Taiwanese imports, providing sovereign loan guarantees, and offering increased foreign aid. Ultimately, the US may have to resort to a comprehensive sanctions plan that would inflict severe economic pain on the PRC while using incentives and sanctions to pressure multinational corporations to choose the US-Taiwan market over the PRC market.

**Hold a High-Level Briefing on Global PRC Media Influence and Disinformation.** The US president, accompanied by the secretary of state or representatives from the intelligence community, could hold a

high-level public briefing to deliberately call global attention to the PRC's malign influence over global media environments, especially in the US and Taiwan. In addition to identifying and explicitly naming media outlets subject to PRC or CCP financial influence, the briefing should focus on how PRC-influenced media uses content sourced from prestigious foreign outlets, particularly in the US, to promote false narratives and conspiracies and inflame societal divisions.<sup>117</sup>

The US should consider tasking the State Department's Global Engagement Center (supported by relevant US intelligence community components) with issuing periodic reports and holding press conferences to discuss the evolving content and narratives of PRC media influence campaigns. The center already publishes reports on disinformation trends, but because information operations will likely evolve rapidly in response to specific events, as we outline in this report, the US must work faster to keep pace with China's malign activities and information operations.<sup>118</sup> This effort can build public awareness of PRC media influence and help the US domestic media avoid unintentionally publishing imprecise or misleading information that the PRC would use for malign purposes, such as increasing anti-American sentiment in Taiwan.

**Establish Joint Law-Enforcement Task Forces to Address United Front Work.** The US should expand and deepen day-to-day law enforcement cooperation by setting up joint counterintelligence and law enforcement task forces with the relevant Taiwanese authorities to discover and remove united front networks in Taiwan. In an environment of greater US-Taiwan intelligence sharing and military networking, this effort would be a natural outgrowth of the deepening bilateral partnership and a demonstration of a shared commitment to countering PRC espionage and subversion.

Cooperation between the FBI and the ROC Ministry of Justice Investigation Bureau has already grown in recent years, as illustrated by the existence of an FBI legal attaché office in Taipei; training exchanges at the FBI's National Academy in Quantico, Virginia; and a publicized meeting between the directors of

the FBI and Ministry of Justice Investigation Bureau in 2022.<sup>119</sup>

## Conclusion

The ambiguities inherent in US policy toward Taiwan, once necessary to consummate an opening and détente with the PRC over a period of decades while not abandoning Taiwan, have now opened avenues for serious strategic manipulation by the PRC that could lead to calamitous consequences for US interests in the western Pacific. Put simply, Taiwan is uniquely susceptible to coercion, subversion, and strategic manipulation.

There is ample academic literature arguing that coercion rarely works, to be sure, and this body of work leads naturally to the conclusion that the PRC will have to use decisive force to secure unification with Taiwan. But coercion of the kind described in this report has not been tried in a serious and sustained manner against Taiwan, a country that is *sui generis* in international politics. Taiwan may not be able to survive the short-of-war equivalent of the Battle of Britain in World War II, because Taiwan is not imperial Britain. It is a young and isolated democracy.

Taiwan is not recognized by any major power; has no official diplomatic relations with the US, nor a security guarantee; and is often criticized for being “provocative” if it asserts its rights, even defensively. Taiwan’s sense of isolation is thus profound, and its dependence on the US is unique in international affairs. The PRC relentlessly plays on Taiwan’s fear of abandonment in its efforts to wipe Taiwan off the map of international politics, pressuring international organizations to disallow Taiwanese participation, pressuring multinational companies to change Taiwan’s name in their official documents to reflect the CCP’s insistence that Taiwan is a province of the PRC, pressuring the US to dial down relations, and threatening the US and Taiwan if certain types of high-level dialogues are held.

The PRC has already successfully coerced the US into not holding the kind of alliance dialogues needed with Taiwan for fear that meetings between the US and ROC military and defense leaderships would be

seen as “too provocative.” Moreover, the PLA and CCP leaderships have well-thought-out concepts for how to use force below the threshold of war to achieve strategic effects. These concepts include nonwar military activities, “peacetime employment of military force,” strategic deterrence, and cognitive warfare. These concepts share the common idea that force, together with other instruments of national power, can advance PRC interests and be carefully calibrated and linked closely to specific psychological and political outcomes.

This report takes seriously PRC writings on this type of warfare and the PRC’s current actions consistent with these writings. It reflects a year of PLANEX imagining a four-year PRC campaign to inflict enough pain on Taiwan that political sentiments on the island change dramatically.

It would take a campaign of this sort for politicians and civilians on Taiwan to accept a PRC peace offering, which would be a Trojan horse leading to eventual unification. This report recognizes the political fact that the Taiwanese will no longer choose unification voluntarily, as consistent polling has revealed the emergence of and widespread coalescence around a distinct Taiwanese identity and an overwhelming opposition to unification under the PRC.<sup>120</sup>

Instead, the COA described here focuses on destroying the link between the US and Taiwan and the social contract between the ROC government and its people, such that a significant percentage of the populace is open to discussing “peace” with the PRC, seeing no plausible alternative. Once a peace commission is empaneled and empowered, the PRC will manipulate it to bring the situation in Taiwan close enough to the PRC’s definition of unification, essentially ending Taiwan’s ability to conduct independent foreign and military affairs.

It is important to reiterate that the PRC’s campaign of pain envisaged here is unlike anything Taiwan has ever faced. The PRC would put Taiwan through four years of ever-increasing military pressure, physical and cyberwarfare attacks degrading essential services, a quasi-blockade through ship inspections, isolation through cyberwarfare and internet cable cutting, cognitive warfare, and kinetic operations on Taiwan’s

offshore islands. This constant pressure would be compounded when the US makes an economic deal with the PRC, cementing serious doubts that Taiwan can rely on the US to come to its aid.

The revealed penetration of Taiwanese society and government by many hundreds of agents of influence actively working to undermine the ROC government's functionality is another frightening but entirely plausible stratagem. Economic hardship would ensue, both the result of the quasi-blockade and expansive economic boycotts and sanctions. The Taiwanese populace would lose faith in its military, which would have no good answers to the pressure facing it. The US response would be inadequate. Public opinion would be divided, with many influential Americans desirous of peace during an era of warfare and reluctant to engage in another war, which the PRC would repeatedly threaten. The PRC would woo the international community with economic inducements while demonstrating its power to spread any potential war over Taiwan to other parts of the world, such as the Korean Peninsula. The rest of the world, having no Taiwan Relations Act or other political and legal basis to support Taiwan in a crisis, would follow the United States' lead.

It is hard, even painful, to imagine a democracy as robust and impressive as Taiwan's succumbing to PRC pressure. But as this report points out, before 2016 it would have been hard to imagine the Russians successfully running a political warfare campaign—one that was nowhere near the scope and intensity of what we have described the PRC doing here—against the US that would lead to real and enduring damage to US society. So we must imagine a PRC campaign against Taiwan, in all its detail.

The SoWC campaign can be defeated, however. The first task for policymakers and the strategic community is to take seriously the possibility that the PRC would pursue a COA like this. While decisive

force that would eventually lead to an invasion and occupation of the island is a real possibility, Beijing has time to first attempt another road to Taipei, such as the one described in this COA.

The key to defeating the scenarios described here is maintaining the crucial bond between the US and Taiwan despite facing intense pressure, manipulation, and misinformation and disinformation campaigns. The two sides must also practice defeating short-of-war campaigns together. Preventive measures will necessarily include actions that look "provocative" today but are essential to maintaining Taiwan's status. These actions include statements, together with allies, about the rights Taiwan enjoys under international law and what the international community will do to defend those rights.

Put another way, the information war needs to be engaged more forcefully, and it is time to describe in more detail what the status quo means for Taiwan's legal position. Taiwan enjoys the same sovereign rights over its maritime territory and its air and digital space as any other democratic country. This is neither an academic exercise nor an attempt to score rhetorical points against the PRC, but rather the beginning of an effort to provide the political basis to defend Taiwan's current status.

The US and Taiwan need to take a greater risk of provoking the PRC today in order to insulate themselves from the PRC's manipulation in the future. The two governments must focus their efforts today on enforcing sovereign rights, preparing to break blockades, ensuring high levels of societal and governmental resilience under pressure, and countering massive information campaigns. The key to success in a cognitive war is having the ability to identify that one is being perpetrated and then maintaining the capability to think clearly and continue the high-level functioning of one's government.

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## About the Coalition Defense of Taiwan

The Coalition Defense of Taiwan is a partnership between the American Enterprise Institute and the Institute for the Study of War. Its work examines alternative strategies for the United States and its allies to deter China's aggression and, if necessary, defeat the People's Liberation Army. The Coalition Defense of Taiwan evaluates countries' strategic interests and operational capabilities in order to create an effective coalition and identifies coalition courses of action that can counter Chinese campaigns against Taiwan.

## About the Institute for the Study of War

The Institute for the Study of War (ISW) advances an informed understanding of military affairs through reliable research, trusted analysis, and innovative education. It is committed to improving the nation's ability to execute military operations and respond to emerging threats in order to achieve US strategic objectives. ISW is a nonpartisan, nonprofit, public policy research organization.

# Appendix A

This appendix contains supplemental information to support our assessments of the People's Republic of China (PRC) government's structure (Figure A1) and general division of responsibilities (Table A1). This informed the design and sequencing of activities and intended effects within the short-of-war coercion course of action (SoWC COA). Here, Coalition Defense of Taiwan (CDOT) also provides further rationalization of the novel escalations that we outline in the SoWC COA, using previously observed PRC activities, to reinforce the plausibility of the COA's design.

## People's Republic of China and People's Liberation Army Command Structures

A COA of the complexity and scale necessary to achieve the PRC's objectives regarding Taiwan would require a coordinated effort across the whole of the PRC government. The COA in this report leverages all elements of power available to the party-state and requires precise collaboration between military and nonmilitary institutions.

The need for coordination is reflected in how PRC institutions can broadly be split into those that formulate policy and those that implement and operationalize policy decisions. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) itself leads whole-of-government and society coordination efforts, as the CCP constitution mandates that the party act "on the principle of guiding the overall situation and coordinating the work of all sides."<sup>121</sup>

The CCP Central Committee, the highest country-level party institution, houses the offices, commissions, and "leading small groups" that coordinate and formulate policy across the many parts of the PRC government. Although the Central Committee is nominally the top party institution, its most senior members in the Politburo and Politburo Standing Committee have a particularly strong influence over

the overall policy direction. Much of their power comes from the fact that many Politburo and Politburo Standing Committee members are the heads of major party institutions.

High-level policies are gradually implemented and administered by the CCP's own functional departments (such as the Central Propaganda Department) and the State Council's bureaucracy. The CCP also directly controls the country's armed forces through the Central Committee's CMC. The general secretary is typically the chairman of the CMC, and the implementation of the "Chairman responsibility system" in recent years has further consolidated Xi Jinping's power over the committee, making him the ultimate commander in chief of the PRC's armed forces.<sup>122</sup> The CCP has moved certain state bodies under its direct control and supervision so that it can use an expanded set of administrative and social tools to strengthen its rule.<sup>123</sup>

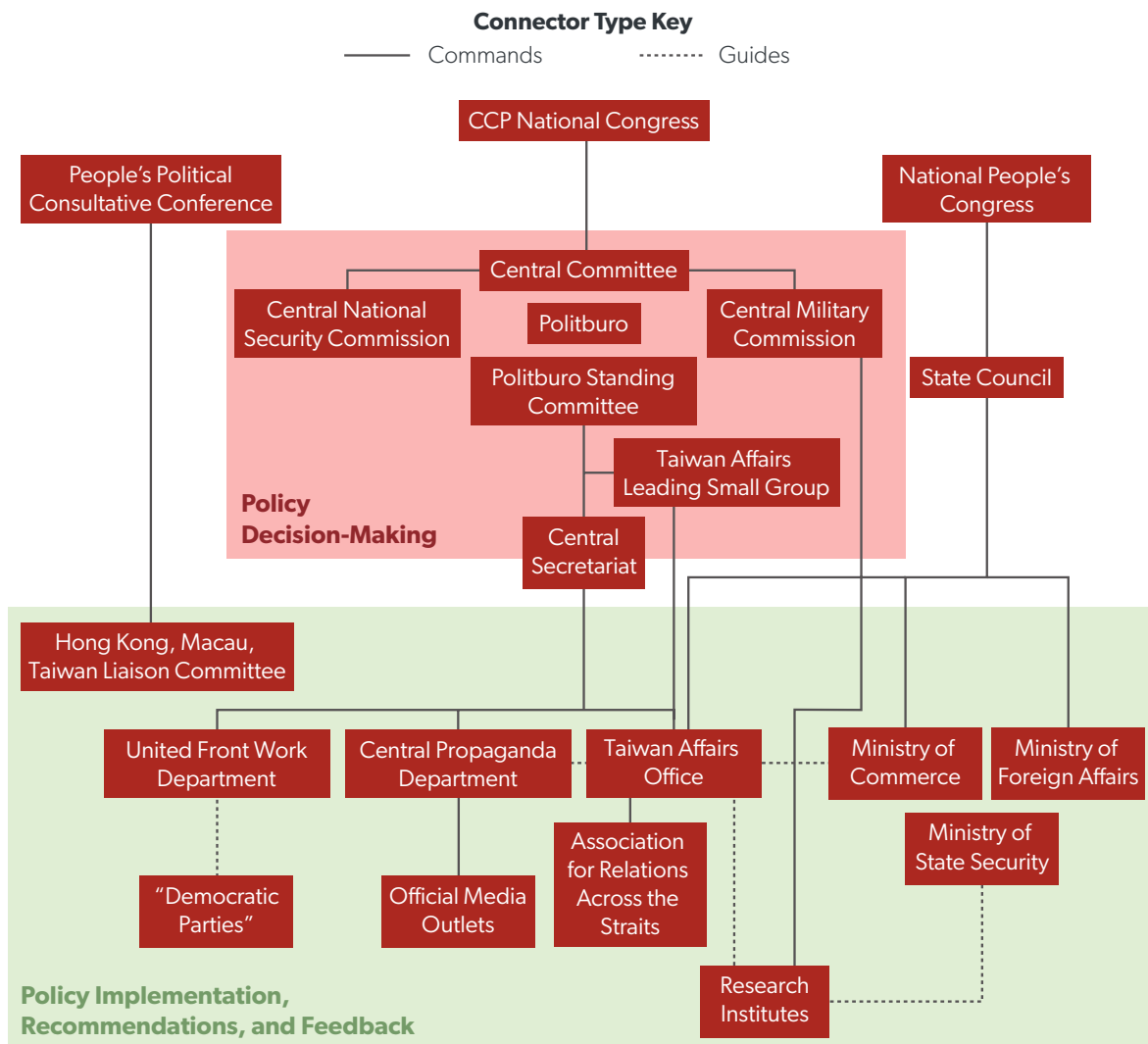
## Novel Escalation and Justification

The PRC has demonstrated many short-of-war capabilities in recent years to coerce Taiwan, the US, and other international actors into adopting pro-PRC policies or refraining from interfering with PRC activities due to the perceived risk of provoking costly retaliation from the PRC. This report's SoWC COA includes many novel escalations that reflect previously observed PRC capabilities but are dramatically more aggressive than the activities the PRC has conducted in its past and present coercion campaigns. These activities are also rooted in CDOT's assessment of the PRC's strategic thinking.

This appendix provides examples of the PRC's prior short-of-war coercive operations and campaigns and their applicability to a potential coercion campaign targeting Taiwan. Each example is broken down into three parts: (1) appearance in the SoWC COA, demonstrating how an escalation of previous



**Figure A1. Overview of the CCP’s Taiwan Work Organizational System**



Source: Adapted from Chien-Wen Kou, “Zhōngguó dàlù duì tái gōngzuò zǔzhī tìxì yǔ rénrènshì” [Organizational System and Personnel of Mainland China’s Taiwan Work Groups], Taiwanese Mainland Affairs Council, March 2019, 57, <https://ws.mac.gov.tw/001/Upload/295/refile/7845/73953/dad82e36-96d1-43bc-a57e-47e3b777064b.pdf>.

**Table A1. Expanded PRC and PLA Organizational Chart**

Organ and Key Leaders	Description and Key Responsibilities (with Examples)	COA Activities (Based on CDOT's Assessment of Projected Tasks Within the COA)	Hierarchy and Additional Context (as Necessary)
<p>Central Military Commission (CMC) 中央军事委员会</p> <p>Key Leaders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CMC Chairman Xi Jinping 习近平</li> <li>• Vice Chairmen Zhang Youxia 张又侠 and He Weidong 何卫东</li> </ul>	<p>Controls the People's Liberation Army (PLA); the People's Armed Police (PAP), which includes the CCG; and the militia (including the CMM). Primarily responsible for exercising command and control, planning campaigns, organizing joint training, formulating military strategy, and conducting capability assessments across all theaters and services.<sup>124</sup></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formulates military strategy for this coercion campaign</li> <li>• Directs ETC to carry out air and naval incursions of Taiwan's air defense identification zone (ADIZ)</li> <li>• Directs the CCG to carry out ship inspections</li> <li>• Directs PLARF to launch missiles over Taiwanese airspace</li> <li>• Directs the SSF to carry out electronic warfare and information campaigns</li> </ul>	<p>Xi has ultimate authority over the armed forces as CMC chairman.</p>
<p>Central Propaganda Department (CPD) 中国共产党中央委员会宣传部</p> <p>Key Leaders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Li Shulei 李书磊<sup>125</sup></li> </ul>	<p>Division of the CCP Central Committee responsible for ideology creation, media regulation, and propaganda dissemination.<sup>126</sup> The CPD is also referred to as the State Council Information Office.<sup>127</sup></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Directs social media campaigns aimed at American, Japanese, and Taiwanese populations</li> <li>• Conducts print media information operations</li> <li>• Publishes articles supporting cross-Strait "peace frameworks"</li> </ul>	<p>Responsible for the English-language newspaper <i>China Daily</i><sup>128</sup> and international television network CGTN.</p>
<p>China Coast Guard (CCG) 中国人民武装警察部队海警总队</p> <p>Key Leaders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Armed Police Maj. Gen. Yu Zhong 郁忠<sup>129</sup></li> </ul>	<p>Carries out research, rescue, and maritime law enforcement activities and consists of the North, East, and South China Sea sub-bureaus.<sup>130</sup></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inspects cargo vessels bound for Taiwan</li> <li>• Ensures that all ships transiting through PRC territory are following environmental and health regulations</li> </ul>	<p>Under the command of the PAP, which falls under the CMC.<sup>131</sup></p>
<p>China Maritime Militia (CMM) 中国海上民兵</p> <p>Key Leaders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Secretary General of the National Defense Mobilization Department Liu Faqing 刘发庆<sup>132</sup></li> </ul>	<p>A civilian component of the PRC's national militia, ultimately subordinate to the CMC through the National Defense Mobilization Department. It trains and operates with the PLAN and CCG.<sup>133</sup></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assists the CCG and PLAN with ship inspections</li> <li>• Joins the CCG and PLAN in incursions through Taiwan's sea boundaries</li> <li>• Enforces sea closures in the Taiwan Strait</li> <li>• Sabotages Taiwanese undersea cables</li> </ul>	<p>—</p>

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**Table A1. Expanded PRC and PLA Organizational Chart (Continued)**

Organ and Key Leaders	Description and Key Responsibilities (with Examples)	COA Activities (Based on CDOT's Assessment of Projected Tasks Within the COA)	Hierarchy and Additional Context (as Necessary)
<p>China Ministry of National Defense (MND) 中华人民共和国国防部</p> <p>Key Leaders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>National Defense Minister Adm. Dong Jun 董军.<sup>134</sup></li> </ul>	<p>Does not have operational command over the PLA or other elements of the PRC military. It instead functions as a liaison representing the CMC and PLA in dialogues with foreign militaries.<sup>135</sup></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Releases statements justifying PLA activity near Taiwan</li> <li>Holds dialogues with foreign military leaders, reassuring them that the PRC is not planning to invade and placing the blame for escalation on the US and Taiwan</li> <li>Hosts multinational exercises and releases corresponding official statements</li> </ul>	<p>Falls under the State Council's purview.<sup>136</sup></p>
<p>Chinese People's Armed Police (PAP) 中国人民武装警察部队</p> <p>Key Leaders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Armed Police Gen. Wang Chuning 王春宁<sup>137</sup></li> </ul>	<p>A PRC paramilitary force primarily responsible for internal security and counter-terrorism.<sup>138</sup> Its two mobile contingents in Shijiazhuang and Fuzhou are located to protect the capital and assist the PLA during a Taiwan contingency.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sustains and commands CCG activities</li> <li>Prepares Fuzhou and Shijiazhuang mobile contingents in case domestic tensions worsen</li> </ul>	<p>The CMC is responsible for overseeing the PAP.<sup>139</sup></p>
<p>Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) 中国人民政治协商会议</p> <p>Key Leaders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Chairman Wang Huning 王沪宁<sup>140</sup></li> </ul>	<p>The highest-ranking organ in the united front system. It provides political consultations on state and local policies and other matters of political and social concern.<sup>141</sup> As part of the united front, the CPPCC serves as a liaison with non-CCP members, for the purpose of convincing them to assist the CCP.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Directs united front activities in Taiwan and overseas Chinese communities</li> <li>Spreads pro-CCP and anti-US narratives online and in traditional media through united front agencies</li> </ul>	<p>Has a National Committee with 10 subcommittees, including the Liaison with Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, and Overseas Chinese Committee 港澳台侨委员会.<sup>142</sup></p>
<p>Civil Aviation Administration of China (CAAC) 中国民用航空局</p> <p>Key Leaders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CAAC Party Chief Song Zhiyong 宋志勇<sup>143</sup></li> </ul>	<p>Oversees national civil aviation affairs, which includes conducting air traffic management, developing comprehensive industry strategy, and ensuring flight and ground safety.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Releases notifications of airspace closures</li> <li>Bans companies from operating flights in PRC airspace if the companies do not comply with political requirements</li> </ul>	<p>Reports to the Ministry of Transport under the State Council.</p>

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**Table A1. Expanded PRC and PLA Organizational Chart (Continued)**

Organ and Key Leaders	Description and Key Responsibilities (with Examples)	COA Activities (Based on CDOT's Assessment of Projected Tasks Within the COA)	Hierarchy and Additional Context (as Necessary)
<p>Eastern Theater Command (ETC) 东部战区</p> <p>Key Leaders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ETC Commander Gen. Lin Xiangyang 林向阳<sup>144</sup></li> <li>• ETC Political Commissar Liu Qingsong 刘青松<sup>145</sup></li> </ul>	<p>One of the PLA's five theater commands. Its area of responsibility includes eastern China, the East China Sea, and the Taiwan Strait. ETC units include the 71st, 72nd, and 73rd Group Armies; the Eastern Theater Navy, its naval aviation division, and two marine brigades; and two air force divisions, two operational PLAAF bases, and one PLARF base. During wartime, the ETC would likely command some SSF units, the CCG, and the CMM in theater.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Directs in-theater air, naval, and rocket force activities in the Taiwan Strait</li> <li>• Receives intelligence support from the SSF to improve awareness and facilitate joint operations</li> <li>• Commands the CCG and CMM as they complete ship inspections and maritime closures</li> </ul>	<p>Along with other theater commands, reports directly to the CMC.</p>
<p>General Administration of Customs of the People's Republic of China (GACC) 中华人民共和国海关总署</p> <p>Key Leaders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minister Yu Jianhua 俞建华<sup>146</sup></li> </ul>	<p>Responsible for traditional customs control duties, tax collection, and inspection and quarantine of imported and exported products and commodities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implements product-specific import bans on Taiwanese goods</li> </ul>	<p>A ministry-level administrative agency under the State Council.</p>
<p>Maritime Safety Administration (MSA) 中华人民共和国海事局</p> <p>Key Leaders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Director Fu Xuyin 付绪银<sup>147</sup></li> </ul>	<p>Administers matters related to maritime and shipping safety, including the implementation of laws and regulations, supervision of maritime traffic safety, and prevention of pollution from ships.<sup>148</sup></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Announces ship inspections in the Taiwan Strait</li> <li>• Announces the closure of maritime regions in the Taiwan Strait</li> <li>• Accompanies CCG vessels during inspections</li> </ul>	<p>Subordinate to the Ministry of Transport.<sup>149</sup></p>

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**Table A1. Expanded PRC and PLA Organizational Chart (Continued)**

Organ and Key Leaders	Description and Key Responsibilities (with Examples)	COA Activities (Based on CDOT's Assessment of Projected Tasks Within the COA)	Hierarchy and Additional Context (as Necessary)
Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM) 中华人民共和国商务部  Key Leaders: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Minister Wang Wentao 王文涛<sup>150</sup></li> </ul>	Regulates foreign trade, foreign investment, various economic markets, and economic cooperation with international institutions. It represents the PRC in international trade agreement negotiations and manages economic cooperation with Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan. <sup>151</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promotes foreign trade and investment in the PRC</li> <li>Threatens to cut off trade with countries that do not sever business relationships with Taiwan</li> <li>Uses regulatory power to suspend the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA), withhold Taiwanese investments, and restrict Taiwanese imports</li> </ul>	Reports directly to the State Council.
Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) 中华人民共和国外交部  Key Leaders: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Foreign Minister Wang Yi 王毅<sup>152</sup></li> </ul>	Handles traditional diplomacy, subject to the guidance of higher-level party institutions and party leaders, such as the CCP Central Foreign Affairs Commission or "Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy." <sup>153</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Handles the international fallout of COA activities</li> <li>Provides informational justification for activities</li> <li>Reassures regional states and rallies global partners</li> <li>Announces changes in PRC policy</li> </ul>	Reports directly to the State Council.
Ministry of Public Security (MPS) 中华人民共和国公安部  Key Leaders: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Minister Wang Xiaohong 王小洪<sup>154</sup></li> </ul>	Responsible for public and political security, overseeing PRC law enforcement and the People's Police. It is responsible for police work, intelligence, counterintelligence, counterterrorism, and border security, as well as supervising public information networks. <sup>155</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Closely monitors domestic populations to ensure that unrest will not break out following an economic downturn or military activity</li> <li>Closely monitors Taiwanese populations living in the PRC</li> <li>Maintains security along border regions</li> </ul>	Has a First Bureau that controls a united front organization known as the China Association for Friendship. <sup>156</sup>
Ministry of State Security (MSS) 中华人民共和国国家安全部  Key Leaders: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Minister Chen Yixin 陈一新<sup>157</sup></li> </ul>	The PRC's primary civilian intelligence agency. It conducts foreign intelligence and influence operations toward foreign governments, foreign universities, and overseas Chinese populations, often with the help of the UFWD. Domestically, it is responsible for implementing counterterrorism measures and targeting and cracking down on dissidents. <sup>158</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communicates with CCP-backed media groups to ensure they follow party narratives</li> <li>Conducts intelligence operations in Japan, Taiwan, and the US</li> <li>Uses secret police to monitor and censor "dangerous actors" in the PRC</li> </ul>	Has a front organization, the China International Cultural Exchange Center 中国国际文化交流中心, that carries out united front work and is an important part of MSS overseas operations. <sup>159</sup>

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**Table A1. Expanded PRC and PLA Organizational Chart (Continued)**

Organ and Key Leaders	Description and Key Responsibilities (with Examples)	COA Activities (Based on CDOT's Assessment of Projected Tasks Within the COA)	Hierarchy and Additional Context (as Necessary)
<p>National People's Congress 中华人民共和国全国人民代表大会</p> <p>Key Leaders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Chairman Zhao Leji 赵乐际<sup>160</sup></li> </ul>	<p>The PRC's national legislature, serving a term of five years.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Acts as an authoritative, high-level voice to deliver an explicit ultimatum to Taiwan</li> <li>Establishes the PRC's sanctions regime</li> <li>Amends Anti-Succession Law to explicitly criminalize Taiwanese "separatism"</li> <li>Enacts the cross-Strait peace commission</li> </ul>	<p>—</p>
<p>People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) 中国人民解放军空军</p> <p>Key Leaders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Air Force Gen. Chang Dingqiu 常丁求 (rumored replacement for Liu Zhenli as chief of the Joint Staff Department)<sup>161</sup></li> <li>ETC Air Force Commander Wu Junbao 吴俊宝<sup>162</sup></li> </ul>	<p>Consists of the centralized PLAAF headquarters and five regional theater commands. It is composed of aviation, airborne, air defense, radar, electronic countermeasure, and communications forces.<sup>163</sup></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conducts ADIZ incursions</li> <li>Participates in incursions of Taiwanese airspace boundaries</li> <li>Enforces air closures announced by the CAAC</li> <li>Carries out missile strikes on Pengjia Islet</li> </ul>	<p>Has an ETC Air Force that is responsible for operations in the East China Sea and Taiwan.<sup>164</sup></p>
<p>People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) 中国人民解放军海军</p> <p>Key Leaders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adm. Hu Zhongming 胡中明<sup>165</sup></li> <li>East Sea Fleet Commander Wang Zhongcai 王仲才<sup>166</sup></li> </ul>	<p>The PLA's maritime branch, it is the largest navy in the world based on number of ships. PLAN force structure consists of three fleets and subordinate submarine flotillas, surface ship flotillas, aviation brigades, and naval bases.<sup>167</sup></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Transits through the Taiwan Strait</li> <li>Violates Taiwan's maritime contiguous zone</li> <li>Assists the CCG in conducting ship inspections</li> <li>Goes on rotational deployment to the Solomon Islands</li> <li>Blockades and seizes Itu Aba</li> </ul>	<p>Has an ETC Navy (or East Sea Fleet) that is responsible for operations in the East China Sea and Taiwan Strait. Also has a Southern Theater Command Navy (or South Sea Fleet) that is responsible for the South China Sea.<sup>168</sup></p>
<p>People's Liberation Army Rocket Force (PLARF) 中国人民解放军火箭军</p> <p>Key Leaders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gen. Wang Houbin 王厚斌<sup>169</sup></li> </ul>	<p>Controls the PLA's strategic nuclear and conventional missile forces, associated support forces, and missile bases.<sup>170</sup></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conducts missile tests over and around the island of Taiwan</li> <li>Conducts a ballistic missile launch beyond the "second island chain"</li> </ul>	<p>Reports directly to the CMC, as opposed to other branches of the PLA, which are split into theater commands. PLARF Base 61, which covers eastern and part of southeastern China, would be responsible for operations against Taiwan.<sup>171</sup></p>

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**Table A1. Expanded PRC and PLA Organizational Chart (Continued)**

Organ and Key Leaders	Description and Key Responsibilities (with Examples)	COA Activities (Based on CDOT's Assessment of Projected Tasks Within the COA)	Hierarchy and Additional Context (as Necessary)
<p>People's Liberation Army Strategic Support Force (SSF) 中国人民解放军战略支援部队</p> <p>Key Leaders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gen. Ju Qiansheng 巨乾生<sup>172</sup></li> </ul>	<p>An independent branch of the PLA that contains two major operational departments, the Space Systems Department and the Network Systems Department.</p> <p>The former operates the PLA's space assets, and the latter is the PLA's primary force for psychological, information, and electronic warfare, as well as cyberwarfare. The SSF is also responsible for military signals intelligence.<sup>173</sup></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Executes digital information operations and cyberattacks throughout the entire COA</li> <li>• Coordinates and collaborates with other military branches and political warfare organs on efforts such as electronic warfare and information campaigns and monitoring foreign military activity</li> </ul>	<p>Directly subordinate to the CMC and supports all theater commands.</p>
<p>Politburo Standing Committee 中国共产党中央政治局常务委员会</p> <p>Key Leaders:<sup>174</sup></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Xi Jinping 习近平</li> <li>• Li Qiang 李强</li> <li>• Zhao Leji 赵乐际</li> <li>• Wang Huning 王沪宁</li> <li>• Cai Qi 蔡奇</li> <li>• Ding Xuexiang 丁薛祥</li> <li>• Li Xi 李希</li> </ul>	<p>The CCP's highest-level decision-making body. The seven-person committee meets weekly to address important domestic and foreign issues. It is currently chaired by General Secretary of the CCP Central Committee Xi.<sup>175</sup></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decides to execute the COA</li> <li>• Guides the overall PRC responses to the fallouts of various COA actions</li> </ul>	<p>—</p>
<p>State-Owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission of the State Council (SASAC) 国务院国有资产监督管理委员会</p> <p>Key Leaders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chairman Zhang Yuzhuo 张玉卓<sup>176</sup></li> </ul>	<p>Oversees almost 100 of the PRC's leading state-owned enterprises, which collectively account for more than \$5 trillion of assets.<sup>177</sup></p> <p>It invests in state-owned enterprises and supervises capital management, corporate governance, compliance, and mergers.<sup>178</sup></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourages state-owned enterprises to comply with the COA economic strategy</li> <li>• Pursues efforts to improve supply-chain security and bolster trade and investment with the US</li> </ul>	<p>Reports directly to the State Council.</p>

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**Table A1. Expanded PRC and PLA Organizational Chart (Continued)**

Organ and Key Leaders	Description and Key Responsibilities (with Examples)	COA Activities (Based on CDOT's Assessment of Projected Tasks Within the COA)	Hierarchy and Additional Context (as Necessary)
<p>Taiwan Affairs Leading Small Group 中央对台工作领导小组</p> <p>Key Leaders:<sup>179</sup></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Xi Jinping 习近平</li> <li>• Wang Huning 王沪宁</li> <li>• Song Tao 宋涛</li> <li>• Wang Yi 王毅</li> </ul>	<p>A top-level deliberative body that guides and coordinates cross-Strait policy, which is then implemented by relevant bodies.</p> <p>It is chaired by the general secretary and composed of party members who lead economic, military, intelligence, and party institutions.<sup>180</sup></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deliberates on overall guidelines for the COA, such as the short-of-war strategy, defined timeline, high-intensity escalation schedule, and conditions for invasion COA if SoWC COA fails</li> </ul>	<p>Policy deliberation body within the Central Committee.</p>
<p>Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO) 中共中央台湾工作办公室 (国务院台湾事务办公室)</p> <p>Key Leaders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Director Song Tao 宋涛<sup>181</sup></li> </ul>	<p>Conducts day-to-day administrative work to implement PRC policy on Taiwan, as decided by the deliberations of the Taiwan Affairs Leading Small Group. It coordinates the implementation of Taiwan policy across the whole of the party-state. It conducts research on cross-Strait relations; handles trade, business, and transport links with Taiwan; develops propaganda for a Taiwanese audience; conducts political work directed at Taiwan; prepares PRC officials for meetings and negotiations with Taiwanese officials; and manages cultural, educational, and sports exchanges with Taiwan. It gains significant visibility through its spokespeople.<sup>182</sup></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develops propaganda lines for Taiwanese audiences</li> <li>• Denies or justifies PRC activities against Taiwan for foreign observers</li> <li>• Clarifies PRC positions on cross-Strait developments to foreign media and governments</li> <li>• Develops wording of cross-Strait peace agreement</li> </ul>	<p>An office of the CCP Central Committee. It is formally a party organization known as the Taiwan Work Office of the CCP Central Committee. It presents itself to foreign observers as the TAO of the State Council.</p>

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**Table A1. Expanded PRC and PLA Organizational Chart (Continued)**

Organ and Key Leaders	Description and Key Responsibilities (with Examples)	COA Activities (Based on CDOT's Assessment of Projected Tasks Within the COA)	Hierarchy and Additional Context (as Necessary)
United Front Work Department (UFWD) 中共中央统一战线工作部  Key Leaders: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• UFWD Head Shi Taifeng 石泰峰<sup>183</sup></li> </ul>	Shapes international perception of the PRC and influences policies toward the PRC through coopting, liaising with, and lobbying individuals and organizations, especially among the Chinese diaspora and in Taiwan. United front organizations have also assisted other PRC elements with industrial espionage and the policing of diaspora populations. <sup>184</sup> UFWD work is decentralized, occurring at all levels of the party and through international nongovernmental organizations. Total central government united front spending is estimated to be over \$1.4 billion per year. <sup>185</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supports information operations by organizing grassroots protests in Japan, Taiwan, and the US</li> <li>• Leverages its network of individuals and organizations to accelerate the spread of rumors</li> <li>• Supports clandestine operations and infiltration</li> </ul>	A functional department of the CCP Central Committee. <sup>186</sup>  The director of the UFWD's seniority has been elevated in recent years. Shi Taifeng, the current head, is a member of the CCP Secretariat and Politburo and is first vice chairperson of the CPPCC. <sup>187</sup>  Contains the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office, the State Ethnic Affairs Commission, and the State Administration for Religious Affairs. <sup>188</sup>

Note: Our cutoff for analysis and assignment of specific activities to actors in the PRC government was February 2024, and thus recent personnel or organizational changes may not be reflected here.  
 Source: Compiled by the authors from the sources cited in endnotes.

activities could appear; (2) action, supported by past examples; and (3) organ, identifying the agencies responsible for conducting the action in question. The examples are organized according to which of the COA story arcs they most closely align with.

*The PRC will use cyberwarfare and physical sabotage to significantly degrade Taiwan's essential services such as water and electricity.*

### Cyberattacks Against Essential Services

- **Appearance in the SoWC COA.** Cyberattacks first occur in Pulse 2, when ransomware and distributed denial of service (DDoS) attacks target government websites, and continue to occur regularly throughout Pulses 3 and 4.
- **Previous Activities.** On August 2, 2022, hours before then-Speaker Nancy Pelosi

arrived in Taipei for an official visit, multiple ROC government websites were hit with DDoS attacks.<sup>189</sup> Specifically, the attacks targeted the official websites of Taiwan's Presidential Office, Ministry of National Defense, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Taoyuan International Airport.<sup>190</sup> DDoS attacks aim to demonstrate the ROC government's inability to prevent disruption of its services, thereby harming the public's perception of security.<sup>191</sup> These attacks aim to compromise the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of sensitive data and systems while also causing economic damage and disruption to Taiwan's critical infrastructure.

- **Organ.** PRC-based hacking group APT27 claimed responsibility for the DDoS attacks, and another group, APT10, claimed responsibility for the financial supply-chain attacks.<sup>192</sup>

APT27 is reportedly affiliated with the CCP, and APT10 is reportedly affiliated with the MSS.<sup>193</sup> PLA cyberwarfare is conducted by the SSF NSD, which receives its orders from the CMC. The MSS may also carry out cyberattacks separately or in coordination with the PLA.

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*Increased PLA activity around the island of Taiwan begins to exhaust and overwhelm the Republic of China military (ROCM).*

### Missile Tests and Overflights of Taiwan

- **Appearance in the SoWC COA.** The PLARF launches ballistic missiles through Taiwanese airspace for the first time in Pulse 2. These overflights and missile tests continue in Pulses 3 and 4.
- **Previous Activities.** Following then-Speaker Pelosi's visit to Taipei in August 2022, the PLA conducted a series of missile tests near Taiwan, aiming to intimidate the Taiwanese populace. These were the first PLA missile tests near Taiwan and the first missile overflights of Taiwan since the 1995–96 Third Taiwan Strait Crisis.<sup>194</sup> Japan's Ministry of Defense reported that it detected nine missiles, four of which flew over Taiwan and five of which landed in Japan's exclusive economic zone.<sup>195</sup> Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense reported 11 Dongfeng missile launches and stated that those that flew over Taiwan mostly flew outside the atmosphere and thus posed no threat to Taiwan.<sup>196</sup>
- **Organ.** The ETC contingent of the PLARF has claimed responsibility for the August 2022 launches.<sup>197</sup> Analysts believe that ballistic missile operations involved in a conflict over the Taiwan Strait would be carried out by PLARF Base 61.<sup>198</sup> Any action taken by the ETC would be directly ordered or at least approved by the CMC.

### Blockading an Outlying Island

- **Appearance in the SoWC COA.** In Pulse 4, the PLA and CCG initiate a close-in blockade of Itu Aba in the South China Sea. These PRC forces would likely employ nonlethal attempts to block any Taiwanese resupply or reinforcement missions to Itu Aba. If these methods fail to deter Taiwan, the PLA and CCG could escalate to use deadly kinetic force to maintain the blockade.
- **Previous Activities.** Since 2014, the CCG and CMM have regularly attempted to block the Philippine Coast Guard's routine resupply missions that sustain Philippine Marines stationed onboard the tank landing ship BRP *Sierra Madre* (LT-57) on the contested Second Thomas Shoal, in the Spratly Islands.<sup>199</sup> Despite the 2016 ruling by the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague rejecting the PRC's nine-dash-line claim over the South China Sea, PRC officials assert that the Philippine Navy's resupply missions to *Sierra Madre* infringe on PRC territory. CCG ships use water cannons to deter approaching vessels and cause near-miss collisions by physically blocking the Philippine Coast Guard's smaller and slower patrol boats. In February 2023, the Philippine Coast Guard accused CCG ships of using "military-grade laser light" to temporarily blind a crew member of a Philippine Coast Guard vessel on a resupply mission.<sup>200</sup> On October 6, 2023, two commercial boats carrying supplies, escorted by two Philippine Coast Guard vessels, were met by two CMM vessels and a CCG ship five times the size of one of the Philippine Coast Guard ships.<sup>201</sup> A CCG vessel again collided with a Philippine Coast Guard vessel on December 10, 2023, and targeted the ship with a water cannon, reportedly causing serious damage to the vessel.<sup>202</sup>
- **Organ.** The CCG may provide a handful of ships to lead a blockade force that will also

likely include many smaller supporting vessels from the CMM. The CCG is under the command of the PAP, which ultimately answers to the CMC. The CMM is part of the PRC's national militia and falls under the control of the CMC National Defense Mobilization Department.

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*Taiwan will become physically isolated through a series of increasingly frequent shipping inspections and aerial and maritime closures.*

### Air and Sea Closures

- **Appearance in the SoWC COA.** Air closures are announced for the first time in Pulse 3.
- **Previous Activities.** The PRC civil authorities have announced the closure of sea and air regions around Taiwan for military and space activity. These closures aim to demonstrate the PRC's ability to exercise its claimed sovereignty and rights over the Taiwan Strait and the waters off Taiwan's east coast, and in the process, they seek to humiliate the ROC government for its failure to prevent such unilateral actions. The announced closure regions included portions of Taiwanese territorial waters and Taiwan's maritime contiguous zone, two areas where unilateral military activities are disallowed by the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, to which the PRC is a party.<sup>203</sup> Notably, the Fujian MSA announced the closure of several sea regions in the Taiwan Strait and waters off Taiwan's east coast during the August 2022 exercises following then-Speaker Pelosi's visit.<sup>204</sup> In addition to sea closures, the CAAC announced the closure of an air region about 85 nautical miles north of Taiwan, within Taiwan's ADIZ, shortly after the PLA's "Joint Sword" exercises.<sup>205</sup> The stated reason for the closure was "space activities," and rocket debris was later detected to have been in the area in question during the closure period.<sup>206</sup>
- **Organ.** The Fujian MSA was responsible for announcing the closure of sea regions during the August 2022 exercises. The CAAC notified Taiwan's authorities of the April 2023 airspace closure. The Fujian MSA made a separate announcement about the same airspace closure. Both the MSA (including regional branches) and CAAC are part of the State Council's Ministry of Transport.<sup>207</sup>

### Announcements of Shipping Inspections

- **Appearance in the SoWC COA.** The PRC first carries out shipping inspections in Pulse 1. They increase in frequency and aggressiveness throughout the following three pulses.
- **Previous Activities.** In April 2023, the Fujian MSA announced a three-day special inspection operation of vessels passing through the northern and central sections of the Taiwan Strait, to include "on-site inspections" of vessels by "maritime enforcement personnel."<sup>208</sup> The operation flotilla included MSA vessels reportedly led by the large CCG patrol ship *Haixun 06*.<sup>209</sup> The operation's stated purpose was to ensure the "orderly operation of key maritime projects."<sup>210</sup> Despite the announcement and accompanying warnings to civilian shipping, the flotilla reportedly did not conduct any inspections.<sup>211</sup>
- **Organ.** The Fujian MSA, a regional branch of the national-level MSA, announced the inspections. The MSA is an organ of the State Council's Ministry of Transport. The Fujian MSA was accompanied by the East China Sea Rescue Bureau, responsible for maritime rescue operations, and the Eastern Navigation Service Center, an organization under the national MSA responsible for maritime safety alerts, emergency response, and cleanup, among other activities.<sup>212</sup> The CCG, under the PAP, provided the lead vessel.

*Taiwan will become informationally isolated through PRC subsea cable-cutting, cyberwarfare, and electronic warfare activities that reduce reliable communications between Taiwan and the US.*

### Cable Cutting

- **Appearance in the SoWC COA.** The PRC begins to cut Taiwan's domestic subsea cable connections, such as between Taipei and Taiwan's offshore islands, as well as Taiwan's international connections, in Pulse 1 of the COA.
- **Previous Activities.** In early 2023, Taiwan reported that PRC vessels cut two of its submarine internet cables connecting the main island to the Matsu islands, an act that made clear the PRC's ability to cut Taiwan off from the internet. According to Taiwan's National Communications Commission, a PRC fishing vessel severed the first cable on February 2, 2023, about 50 kilometers (31 miles) from the shore. Taiwan's coast guard chased the fishing vessel, and it retreated to PRC waters. Six days later, on February 8, 2023, a PRC cargo ship cut the second cable. The National Communications Commission said it found two PRC ships in the area where the cables were cut, based on automated identification system data.<sup>213</sup> These incidents disrupted the islanders' internet access for nearly two months and raised broader concerns about the security of Taiwan's undersea cable network, which connects Taiwan to the outside world through 14 international undersea cables.<sup>214</sup> Matsu residents had to temporarily rely on backup Chunghwa Telecom microwave transmissions from Yangmingshan, but connectivity was slow and unreliable. The PRC has also been accused of cutting cables elsewhere in the world. An undersea gas pipeline and two telecommunications cables between Finland and Estonia were damaged on October 7–8, 2023, which Finnish investigators indicate may

have been caused intentionally by a PRC-owned vessel.<sup>215</sup>

- **Organ.** The PRC government has not claimed responsibility for cutting Taiwan's submarine cables, nor has it provided any explanation or apology for the incident.<sup>216</sup> While there has been no official confirmation, many speculate that the CMM may have been responsible, as it has frequently taken part in nonwar maritime coercive activity.<sup>217</sup> If the CMM conducted intentional cable-cutting operations, they would have been carried out at the direction of the CMC.

### Cyberwarfare

- **Appearance in the SoWC COA.** Cyberattacks first occur in Pulse 2, in the form of ransomware and DDoS attacks. They increase in severity and frequency throughout Pulses 3 and 4, decreasing public faith in the ROC government's ability to provide access to basic services.
- **Previous Activities.** The PRC has conducted cyberattacks with the aim of humiliating Taiwan's government and inducing fear in the broader public. After then-Speaker Pelosi's visit to Taiwan, PRC actors defaced National Taiwan University's website to display, "There is only one China in the world,"<sup>218</sup> and they hacked the monitors of over 6,000 7-Eleven stores and multiple train stations to display vitriolic anti-Pelosi and anti-US messages.<sup>219</sup> Soon after Tsai Ing-wen won the 2016 presidential election, PRC netizens launched over 35,000 coordinated spam attacks on her official Facebook page and those of Taiwanese media outlets, with the goal of harassing and intimidating Tsai and her supporters.<sup>220</sup> Additionally, in 2018, PRC hackers altered the ruling Democratic Progressive Party's (DPP) website to display simplified Chinese

characters and label the Taiwanese electorate as Chinese.<sup>221</sup>

- **Organ.** It is unclear which government entity was responsible for previous cyberattacks, as multiple entities, including the UFWD, PLA SSF, and TAO could plausibly conduct such operations in Taiwan. Even PRC local police agencies have been involved in social media influence operations.<sup>222</sup>

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*The PRC will use cognitive warfare to divide Taiwanese society, particularly in terms of politics and cross-strait relations.*

### Portraying the ROCM as Unprofessional and Unprepared

- **Appearance in the SoWC COA.** The ROCM becomes increasingly unable to respond to PLA activity by Pulse 3. By that point, extended periods of ship inspections and intense cyberattacks support PRC-led narratives about the ROCM's relative weakness.
- **Previous Activities.** The PRC has flown civilian drones to harass and surveil a military outpost on Taiwan's outlying island of Kinmen.<sup>223</sup> The drone flights, which captured footage that was later spread on social media, aimed to portray the ROCM as unprepared while highlighting its inability to keep PRC-origin aircraft out of Taiwan's airspace.
- **Organ.** The actor responsible for these particular drone flights is unknown.<sup>224</sup> It appears the flights did not involve military hardware. The PRC's MOFA gave a coy response when asked about the incidents.<sup>225</sup> In other instances, PRC-origin drones belonging to the PLA have been detected off Taiwan's coast.<sup>226</sup> Given the military applications of drone technology, it is likely that even drones

without military hardware would be controlled by the PLA.

### Disseminating Friendly Content in Taiwanese Media

- **Appearance in the SoWC COA.** Pro-PRC media narratives are present throughout all four pulses. Such narratives, which disparage the ROC government and promote the CCP as an entity for peace, will be more common in Pulses 3 and 4, as Taiwan faces an upcoming election.
- **Previous Activities.** The CCP advances narratives favorable to its goals in Taiwanese news and social media, with the aim to improve the Taiwanese public's perception of the PRC. The PRC exerts influence over multiple media groups in Taiwan by providing monetary incentives through the TAO and affiliated front companies in exchange for placing stories in their newspapers.<sup>227</sup> The most conspicuous example of PRC influence in Taiwanese media is the China Times Group, a Taiwanese conglomerate under the control of Tsai Eng-meng of the Want Want Group, which owns the major media organs *China Times*, Chung T'ien Television, and China Television. These three outlets have taken explicit direction on content from the TAO, to include daily calls between the TAO and their editorial desks.<sup>228</sup> The MSS has also contacted *China Times* reporters to remind them of "red line[s]" and provide tips on stories.<sup>229</sup> As a result, these media organizations have taken a strongly pro-CCP editorial line, maintaining a veneer of reputability while doing damage control for and spreading narratives favorable to the CCP, reducing or removing coverage of PRC human rights abuses, failing to cover major events of DPP administrations, and devoting disproportionate coverage to CCP-preferred opposition candidates.<sup>230</sup>

With social media, the PRC exerts influence through a variety of methods, including generating inauthentic or altered content; creating and maintaining fake accounts that impersonate authentic personas; using such accounts to compose, comment on, and share advantageous posts; paying or otherwise convincing authentic users or content farms to do the same; and even manipulating PRC-controlled platforms like Douyin.<sup>231</sup> Social media influence operations surged in volume during the 2018 local elections and remain ubiquitous within Taiwan's internet ecosystem.<sup>232</sup> Presently, the PRC is moving away from an influence-peddling model based on content farming, toward one that relies on providing Taiwanese domestic actors with the narratives and "credible" sources (often from Western newspapers) they need to autonomously promote PRC-preferred discourse.<sup>233</sup>

- **Organ.** The most prominent players in implementing and financing pro-PRC influence operations are the PLA SSF (especially its Base 311), the UFWD, and the CPD.<sup>234</sup> The Communist Youth League maintains "internet armies," playing a crucial role in volume-based operations.<sup>235</sup> The TAO (including its various front companies) and the MSS are all also involved in both social media influence operations and content placement in Taiwanese legacy media.<sup>236</sup>

### **Recruiting Assets in the ROC Government and Military to Obtain Confidential Information**

- **Appearance in the SoWC COA.** The MSS and UFWD would work to cultivate assets within Taiwan throughout the COA, with the goal of using these assets in acts of sabotage and physical attacks. The first explicit reference to these infiltrators occurs in Pulse 4, during attacks on Taiwan's infrastructure.

- **Previous Activities.** Taiwan was ranked ninth in overall infiltration by the PRC among 36 countries and first in media infiltration in 2022 by Doublethink Lab, a Taipei-based think tank.<sup>237</sup> In 2017, Taiwanese national security agencies estimated there were around 5,000 PRC agents in Taiwan.<sup>238</sup> Former Legislative Yuan Foreign and National Defense Committee Chairman Wang Ting-yu revealed that PRC agents infiltrate Taiwan through various channels, including cross-strait marriages and under the guise of academic exchange or business trips.<sup>239</sup> Common methods of recruitment include sending expensive gifts and inviting potential recruits to meals or on all-paid trips to the PRC, on which they might meet with PRC officials and be exposed to propaganda materials. There has also been a string of incidents in which PRC agents recruited active and retired senior ROCM officers to access classified documents and obtain information on the ROCM's readiness. In 2006, a PRC agent disguised as a Hong Kong businessman named Hsieh Hsi-chang recruited retired ROC Army Lieutenant Colonel Wei Hsien-i to cultivate a spying network for the PRC.<sup>240</sup> Wei then recruited retired ROC Air Force Maj. Gen. Chien Yao-tung. Wei was sentenced to a year and 10 months in jail in 2022, and Chien was sentenced to a year. In 2013, a PRC intelligence agency recruited retired ROC Air Force Col. Liu, who was on a business trip to the PRC.<sup>241</sup> Liu returned to Taiwan to establish a front company to develop a spying network and recruited at least seven active-duty ROCM officers, including a Col. Sun, a Maj. Liu, and a Songshan Base Command Maj. Cheng, to deliver classified information in exchange for 30,000–100,000 new Taiwan dollars. Liu and the officers involved were indicted in 2023 by the Kaohsiung branch of the Taiwan High Prosecutors Office. Between 2016 and 2018, retired Maj. Gen. Yue Chih-chung, retired Col. Chou Tien-tzu, and two retired colonels

of the ROCM intelligence bureau named Chang and Wang traveled multiple times between Taiwan and the PRC to introduce retired ROCM officers and deliver personnel information to their handler, known as “Mr. Wei.”<sup>242</sup> The four were indicted by the Taipei District Prosecutors Office in 2021.

- **Organ.** The exact actors involved in infiltrating the ROC government and military will differ depending on the specific circumstance. Given the nature of previous infiltration into the ROC government and military, it should be assumed that involved actors are somehow in connection with the MSS and UFWD, both of which develop relationships with people in Taiwan willing to work with the PRC.

### PRC Official Statements

- **Appearance in the SoWC COA.** These official statements occur throughout all four pulses, whenever the PRC needs to reassure other states of its intentions toward Taiwan or call for cooperation with sympathetic parties in Taiwan.
- **Previous Activities.** There have been three main types of announcements: calls for cooperation, condemnations of Taiwan’s government, and elucidations of PRC policy. The first two are more common and differ more in terms of their tone than the content of their messages. Both put forth cross-Strait dialogue and cooperation as the best hope for achieving peaceful unification, which China views as the ultimate goal. Government condemnations contain much of the same messaging on the importance of the “One China” principle, but they place the blame entirely on the ROC government for destabilizing the region.<sup>243</sup> The least common, but most meaningful, of the statements are those that attempt to provide greater detail to official PRC policy. One example is the July 12, 2001, statement

by then-Vice Premier Qian Qichen, in which he proposed seven concrete measures on the “one country, two systems” framework.<sup>244</sup> These measures included details about what features of the ROC government and national identity Taiwan could hope to keep if it were to agree to negotiations.

- **Organ.** The exact organ differs depending on the person or group delivering the statement, but the majority of statements come directly from the State Council. Given Taiwan’s importance to the PRC government, it is likely that State Council leadership, the TAO, and other high-level officials would have to approve any such statement on Taiwan. For more detailed statements like the one produced in July 2001, the concessions given to Taiwan would need to be approved by the highest level of PRC leadership.

### Criticizing the ROC Government and Politicians

- **Appearance in the SoWC COA.** These critiques will be evident throughout the COA, but they will increase in frequency in Pulses 3 and 4, as Taiwan gets closer to the 2028 election season and the PRC hopes to influence Taiwanese citizens to vote according to PRC interests.
- **Previous Activities.** The PRC engages in constant official criticism of Taiwan’s government and its foreign backers for furthering “Taiwan independence.” The main avenues of criticism are press conferences and press releases, articles and commentary in official media, and statements from PRC foreign missions or diplomats. Official criticism often engages in ad hominem attacks against prominent Taiwanese politicians, denigrating them as deceitful, incompetent, hypocritical, self-serving, and corrupt. This constant criticism is intended to spread skepticism of the

DPP and the ROC government among the Taiwanese public, communicate the PRC’s “bottom lines” to the ROC government to deter further “provocation,” and cultivate a negative view of the ROC government in the PRC. For example, the TAO criticized the DPP as “hypocritical” after the DPP and Taiwan’s Mainland Affairs Council released statements criticizing the prosecution of 47 Hong Kong democracy activists.<sup>245</sup> A September 2021 *Global Times* article singled out President Tsai, suggesting that she forged her doctorate from the London School of Economics. (The university later confirmed the doctorate’s authenticity.)<sup>246</sup> Furthermore, criticism has targeted the fundamental nature of Taiwan’s relationship with the US: TAO spokesperson Zhu Fenglian once claimed the Taiwan Relations Act was “illegal and invalid.”<sup>247</sup> Criticism has also targeted US politicians who support Taiwan. In response to then-Speaker Pelosi’s visit in August 2022, Xinhua ran a graphic claiming that Pelosi, in “scurrying to” Taiwan, committed six “deadly sins,” including “perfidiousness,” “using power to seek personal gain,” and “trampling on the rule of law.”<sup>248</sup> At the same time, the MND criticized the DPP for “leaning on foreign countries for self-importance” and “causing chaos” by inviting Pelosi to visit.<sup>249</sup> In conjunction with other media sites, CCP media organ *Qiushi* ran a story citing governments and international organizations that criticized Pelosi’s visit.<sup>250</sup> The PRC has also criticized smaller countries that have supported Taiwan, including Lithuania in November 2021 and the Netherlands in June 2022.<sup>251</sup>

- **Organ.** The TAO, especially its spokesperson, takes primary responsibility for criticizing developments in Taiwan and Taiwanese politicians’ actions, though the MOFA and its spokespeople also play a similar role. Various official media outlets run stories criticizing Taiwan, including state-run entities

Xinhua and China Taiwan Network (Taiwan. cn); party-run entities *People’s Daily*, *Global Times*, and *Qiushi*; and ostensibly third-party outlets affiliated with the united front such as Huaxia. The CCP Central Leading Small Group for Propaganda, Ideology, and Cultural Work oversees all party-state media.<sup>252</sup>

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*US support for Taiwan will continue to erode as the costs and risks of continued engagement rise.*

### Discrediting US China Hawks

- **Appearance in the SoWC COA.** PRC narratives attempting to discredit China hawks in the US would appear throughout the COA, but they would be particularly salient in Pulses 2, 3, and 4. These narratives first appear in Pulse 2, when the US Indo-Pacific Command denies that an invasion is imminent. As calls for the peaceful resolution of cross-Strait issues increase, being hawkish on the PRC will be increasingly unpopular.
- **Previous Activities.** While more people in Washington are calling out the threat posed by the PRC, their concerns do not necessarily align with the general public’s or important elites’ understanding of the “China threat.”<sup>253</sup> After all, Beijing dedicated major resources and efforts to reassuring Americans that its rise was peaceful, even as it was building its military capabilities and becoming increasingly aggressive.<sup>254</sup> This information campaign worked for almost two decades. As Beijing built up its power, grossly violated human rights, and bullied its neighbors, US policy was one of multidimensional engagement, strengthening the PRC and inviting it to play a greater role in international affairs. It was ultimately economic malfeasance that caused the US to impose across-the-board tariffs that ended such policy. Beijing can still exploit divisions in the American body politic about the nature of the “China threat.”



If it behaves “better” economically, or even merely promises to do so, it is more likely to quiet or marginalize hawkish voices. If it credibly threatens major war, it can play to the American concern that the PRC is easily provoked and stands at the ready to start and win a major war.

- **Organ.** This rhetoric could be spread by any number of PRC agencies, depending on the specific context. Some of the most likely mouthpieces are the MOFA press office and spokespeople, the State Council Information Office, and CCP-controlled media outlets. The exact language would likely originate from the TAO or the CPD.<sup>255</sup>

### Initiating Meetings Between Senior Government Officials to Improve PRC-US Relations

- **Appearance in the SoWC COA.** The PRC initiates negotiations with the US on trade and diplomatic cooperation beginning in Pulse 1 and continuing throughout the COA, peaking when the US and PRC announce new deals in trade.
- **Previous Activities.** US Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo visited Beijing and Shanghai in August 2023 to meet with PRC Vice Premier He Lifeng, Minister of Commerce Wang Wentao, and Minister of Culture and Tourism Hu Heping.<sup>256</sup> Minister Wang Wentao praised Secretary Raimondo’s openness toward US-PRC trade relations and said that Beijing is ready to work with Washington to facilitate a more beneficial environment for US and PRC companies under the principles of “mutual respect, peaceful coexistence and win-win cooperation.”<sup>257</sup> The meeting established a new commercial-issues working group between the US and PRC governments and private sectors, agreed to hold discussions with subject matter experts from both sides,

and launched the export control enforcement information exchange at the assistant secretary level.<sup>258</sup> Both parties also agreed to communicate regularly at the secretary and minister level and meet in-person at least once a year. The visit is seen as an indication of improvement in US-PRC relations.<sup>259</sup>

- **Organ.** High-level trade discussions between the US and the PRC would be facilitated by the MOFA and MOFCOM. CCP-affiliated media and MOFA spokespeople would publish announcements celebrating any agreements reached.

### Horizontal Escalation of Crises to Distract the US

- **Appearance in the SoWC COA.** Horizontal escalation first occurs in Pulse 2, when North Korea carries out new high-yield nuclear tests. This and other horizontal escalations that continue for the COA’s duration are intended to distract the US and its allies and force them to focus on areas other than the Taiwan Strait.
- **Previous Activities.** The PRC maintains a close economic relationship with North Korea, being responsible for 90 percent of its total trade volume along with most of its food and energy supplies before the COVID-19 pandemic. This trade with the PRC also provides a key source of revenue for Kim Jong Un’s regime.<sup>260</sup> The PRC and North Korea have cooperated closely in the past, as indicated by the PRC’s enabling of North Korea in skirting international sanctions and coordinating high-level meetings between President Xi and Kim.<sup>261</sup> North Korea has independently engaged in highly provocative actions in the past, including nuclear tests and ballistic missile launches over and in the vicinity of Japanese and South Korean territory.<sup>262</sup> The PRC could thus covertly offer trade deals or

business agreements to incentivize North Korea to undertake similar high-profile escalatory actions that would stress the ability of the US and its allies to remain intensely focused on the SoWC campaign against Taiwan.

- **Organ.** PRC foreign trade deals like the one discussed above would be carried out by MOFCOM, and diplomatic negotiations would be led by MOFA. If any trade deals were to affect the PRC's state-owned enterprises, they would be implemented by SASAC. Cooperative efforts between the PLA and foreign militaries are also possible; they would be carried out by CMC's Office of International Military Cooperation.

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*US companies and multinational corporations will view Taiwan as a dangerous place to do business and will be encouraged to move their operations to the PRC due to a combination of generous incentives and dire threats.*

## Trade Restrictions

- **Appearance in the SoWC COA.** The PRC first announces bans on select Taiwanese-manufactured products in Pulse 1. Cross-Strait trade will continue to decrease throughout the pulses, as the PRC attempts to use economic coercion to change Taiwan's behavior.
- **Previous Activities.** The PRC has placed restrictions on PRC consumption of Taiwanese goods and services, aiming to wield its market weight to impose costs on parties and politicians who oppose Beijing. Though the PRC maintained a largely "preferential" economic stance toward Taiwan before Tsai's 2020 reelection, employing subsidies and recruitment incentives to charm Taiwanese talent, trade, and investment, it had long shown a

willingness to use economic measures in response to perceived provocations.<sup>263</sup> In February 2016, soon after Tsai's election, the Taiwanese *Liberty Times* reported that the PRC had issued a "reduction order" in Chinese group tours to Taiwan.<sup>264</sup> Later that year, industry estimates predicted a 33 percent reduction in such tours, a decline that materialized, further fueling speculation that the PRC had used tourism restrictions in retaliation against the new Tsai government.<sup>265</sup> Since Tsai's reelection, the PRC has shown greater willingness to weaponize its trade relationship with Taiwan. Import bans on pineapples, sugar apples, wax apples, and grouper attempted to penalize the DPP following Tsai's reelection.<sup>266</sup> The PRC authorities did not explicitly link these bans to political provocation; rather, health and safety concerns were the stated reasons. However, other cases have been more directly attributed to politics. In 2019, the PRC's Ministry of Culture and Tourism suspended non-group travel to Taiwan, citing "Taiwan independence" activities.<sup>267</sup> And in August 2022, the PRC banned two-thirds of all varieties of food products imported from Taiwan, along with the export of natural sand used in semiconductor production. Unlike previous restrictions on physical goods, a PRC ambassador openly stated the most recent bans aimed "to deter 'Taiwan independence' separatist forces and the interference of external forces."<sup>268</sup>

- **Organ.** PRC trade restrictions are carried out by various state organs, including MOFCOM and the GACC. MOFCOM activities directed toward Taiwan are enforced by MOFCOM's Department of Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau Affairs.<sup>269</sup>

## Reducing or Threatening Preexisting Economic Agreements

- **Appearance in the SoWC COA.** MOFCOM announces that it will suspend the ECFA in Pulse 3, following significant trade restrictions and a wide array of bans on Taiwan-origin products.
- **Previous Activities.** Taiwan’s wide-ranging economic dependence on the the PRC market has given Beijing leverage to break or reduce preexisting trade agreements, used as an economic weapon to punish the allegedly pro-independence DPP government. One notable example is the PRC’s 2022 ban on grouper imported from Taiwan.<sup>270</sup> The fish is featured in the “early harvest list”—an array of certain products selected for tariff liberalization pending the agreement’s conclusion—under the ECFA, which came into effect in 2010.<sup>271</sup> The PRC’s ban essentially makes its previous agreement to remove trade tariffs on goods meaningless. After Tsai visited then-Speaker Kevin McCarthy, MOFCOM announced a review of 2,455 Taiwanese exports to evaluate whether they met the PRC’s fair-trade rules.<sup>272</sup> The findings of this review process could form the basis for a PRC repeal of ECFA.<sup>273</sup> On January 1, 2024, MOFCOM suspended ECFA tariff rates for 12 Taiwanese products and as of January 2024 is contemplating further suspension of tariff concessions.<sup>274</sup>
- **Organ.** The MOFCOM is under the State Council. MOFCOM activities directed toward Taiwan would be enforced by their Department of Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau Affairs. The TAO is overseen by the Taiwan Affairs Leading Small Group.

## CCP Coercion of Non-PRC Companies

- **Appearance in the SoWC COA.** In Pulse 1, the PRC threatens sanctions against a broad range of US companies with operations in Taiwan. Threats of sanctions and increased ship inspections result in many companies leaving Taiwan. Such “de-risking” measures become more common following MOFA and MOFCOM influence attempts with foreign business leaders.
- **Previous Activities.** In August 2019, the PRC banned Hong Kong’s Cathay Pacific from allowing aircrew who supported protests against a proposed extradition law to operate flights to the PRC or even enter PRC airspace. To operate in PRC airspace, the company must submit identification details of all aircrew, supposedly out of concern for PRC national security.<sup>275</sup> In 2018, the PRC threatened to revoke major global airlines’ ability to operate in the PRC if they did not change their references to Taiwan to language deemed acceptable by the CCP, prompting many companies to comply with these demands.<sup>276</sup>
- **Organ.** These bans and threats to international business are announced and enforced by the CAAC. The CAAC reports to the Ministry of Transport, a department of the State Council responsible for air and water transportation regulations.

## CCP United Front Campaign Targeting Australia

- **Appearance in the SoWC COA.** United front activities occur throughout the COA as the UFWD cultivates assets in Taiwan, the US, and allied countries. The first explicit instance of united front activity occurs in Pulse 3, when united front groups organize

protests in Okinawa, Japan, calling for peace and demilitarization.

- **Previous Activities.** The CCP has engaged in a widespread political influence campaign against countries around the world, with a recent high-profile campaign waged to convince Australian government officials and politicians to advance PRC interests and narratives. United front-affiliated individuals and organizations coordinated critical infrastructure purchases, campaign donations, lucrative job offers, gifts to politicians, and business deals to buy influence within the Australian federal government and Australian

local governments. Several of these politicians and officials then advocated pro-PRC policy stances or facilitated highly controversial business deals within Australia.

- **Organ.** United front operations such as the one described above would be carried out by the UFDW and corresponding individuals and organizations within target overseas communities. The exact actors involved would differ based on the target of the operations. The UFDW reports directly to the CCP Central Committee.

*The American Enterprise Institute and the Coalition for the Defense of Taiwan sometimes cite sources from foreign domains. All such links are identified with an asterisk (\*) for the reader's awareness.*

## Notes

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4. Frederick W. Kagan, Nataliya Bugayova, and Jennifer Cafarella, *Confronting the Russian Challenge: A New Approach for the U.S.*, Institute for the Study of War, June 2019, <https://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/ISW%20CTP%20Report%20-%20Confronting%20the%20Russian%20Challenge%20-%20June%202019.pdf>; and Frederick W. Kagan et al., *Al Qaeda and ISIS: Existential Threats to the U.S. and Europe*, Institute for the Study of War, January 2016, <https://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/PLANEX%20Report%201%20--%20FINALFINALFINAL.pdf>.
5. Center for Army Lessons Learned, *MDMP: Lessons and Best Practices*, March 2015, <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/AD1018227.pdf>.
6. The People's Republic of China (PRC) concept of comprehensive national power (综合国力) is a measure of the general power of a state, based on its military, economic, cultural, and political influence. The PRC's desire to increase its comprehensive national power to reach parity with the US is apparent through its recent strategic efforts in the military and diplomatic spheres. See Abigail Grace, "Comprehensive National Power with Chinese Characteristics: Regional Security Partnerships in the Xi Era," Brookings Institution, January 22, 2019, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/comprehensive-national-power-with-chinese-characteristics-regional-security-partnerships-in-the-xi-era>.
7. "Taiwan compatriots" (台湾同胞) refers to Republic of China (ROC) citizens.
8. "Taiwan authorities" (台湾当局) refers to the ROC government; "Taiwan area" (台湾地区) refers to territory controlled by the ROC government, including the main island of Taiwan, the Penghu Islands, the Kinmen islands, and the Matsu islands. This term is also used in the Taiwanese legal context, synonymous with the "Free Area [of the ROC]."
9. "Separatism" (分裂主义) broadly refers to the rejection of the idea that Taiwan belongs to "China" or explicit opposition to cross-strait unification. This term is usually applied to the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) and other pan-Green parties. It is also translated as "splittism" or "secessionism"; "China" (中国) refers to the PRC, the "only legitimate government of China" in the PRC view, including its claimed territories, such as Taiwan.
10. "Hard-core 'Taiwan independence' activists" ("台独"顽固分子) refers to those the PRC has designated as such on a list of the same name, including high-level DPP officials such as Joseph Wu, Su Tseng-Chang, and You Si-Kun. Here, the term refers broadly to any politicians perceived as hard-line anti-unificationists.
11. "Foreign forces" (外国势力) refers to the US and its allies.
12. Jeffrey Engstrom, *Systems Confrontation and System Destruction Warfare: How the Chinese People's Liberation Army Seeks to Wage Modern Warfare*, RAND Corporation, 2018, [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR1708.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1708.html).
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15. The PRC's Academy of Military Sciences (AMS) is a research organ under the direct control of the Central Military Commission (CMC). Given this relationship between the AMS and the People's Liberation Army's (PLA) decision-making body, official AMS publications should be considered reflections of high-level thinking on strategy and "military science."
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17. Kevin Bilms, "Beyond War and Peace: The PLA's 'Non-War Military Activities' Concept," Modern War Institute, January 26, 2022, <https://mwi.usma.edu/beyond-war-and-peace-the-plas-non-war-military-activities-concept>.
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19. Xi Jinping, "Zài jìniàn zhōngguó rénmín zhì yuàn jūn kàng měi yuán cháo chūguó zuò zhàn 70 zhōunián dà huì shàng de jiǎng huà" [Speech at the Commemoration of the 70th Anniversary of the Chinese People's Volunteers' Mission to Resist U.S. Aggression and Aid Korea], Xinhua News Agency, October 23, 2020, \*[http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/leaders/2020-10/23/c\\_1126649916.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/leaders/2020-10/23/c_1126649916.htm).
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31. Such narratives continue to be spread about William Lai, with PRC-backed media outlets referring to him as a Taiwan independence advocate whose relationship with the US is turning Taiwan "into a pawn" to be used against the PRC. See *Global Times*, "Lai Ching-te's Attempt to Seek 'Taiwan Independence' Hardly Concealed Under Guise of 'Peace,'" August 19, 2023, \*<https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202308/1296575.shtml>; Wang Shushen, "Lai's US Transit Threatens Cross-Strait Peace," *China Daily*, August 14, 2023, \*<https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202308/14/WS64d9e84da31035260b81c09c.html>; and Zhang Hua, "Lai's Provocative US Transit for Selfish Gains," *Global Times*, August 9, 2023, \*<https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202308/1295975.shtml>.
32. Contiguous zones extend from the outer edge of a country's territorial sea to up to 24 nautical miles from the coastal baseline.

See UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, “Part II: Territorial Sea and Contiguous Zone,” [https://www.un.org/depts/los/convention\\_agreements/texts/unclos/part2.htm](https://www.un.org/depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/part2.htm).

33. The PLA has been conducting daily air defense identification zone (ADIZ) incursions for years, reports of which the Taiwan Ministry of National Defense (MND) releases daily. In this pulse, such incursions would occur more frequently than previously observed, though not at a rate that would cause immediate concern. See Taiwanese Ministry of National Defense, “Jíshí jūnshì dòngtài” [Immediate Military Developments], \*<https://www.mnd.gov.tw/PublishTable.aspx?Types=%E5%8D%B3%E6%99%82%E8%BB%8D%E4%BA%8B%E5%8B%95%E6%85%8B&title=%E5%9C%8B%E9%98%B2%E6%B6%88%E6%81%AF>.

34. Cables connecting to the offshore island of Matsu have been severed approximately 20 times since 2017, so this action aligns with previously observed behavior. See Clarence Leong, “Taiwan Looks to Ukraine Playbook in Race to Build Satellite Internet,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 3, 2023, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/taiwan-looks-to-ukraine-playbook-in-race-to-build-satellite-internet-b46a5a92>.

35. Following Tsai Ing-wen’s electoral victories in 2016 and 2020, a marked increase in PRC influence operations occurred, including cyberattacks, increased air incursions, and military exercises. See Brian Hioe, “Cyberattacks on the Presidential Office Aimed at Benefiting the KMT, Opening Up Splits in the DPP,” *New Bloom*, May 21, 2020, \*<https://newbloommag.net/2020/05/21/tsai-inauguration-cyberattacks>; PLA Tracker, “Taiwan ADIZ Violations,” <https://www.platracker.com>; and Chun Han Wong, “Palace Intrigue: Chinese Soldiers Storm Replica of Taiwan Presidential Office,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 23, 2015, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/BL-CJB-27345>.

36. The Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) plan focuses on measures to make Fujian, the PRC’s closest province to the Taiwan Strait and one with shared heritage and linguistic ties to Taiwan, into an attractive region for Taiwanese business people. See Chinese Communist Party Central Committee, Taiwan Work Office, “(Shòuquán fābù) Zhōnggòngzhōngyāng guówùyuàn guānyú zhíchí fújiàn tànsuǒ hǎixiáiliǎng’àn rónghé fāzhǎn xīnlù jiànshè liǎng’àn rónghé fāzhǎn shìfānqū de yìjiàn” [(Authorized Release) Opinions of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council on Supporting Fujian in Exploring a New Road for Cross-Strait Integrated Development and Building a Demonstration Zone for Cross-Strait Integrated Development], September 12, 2023, \*[http://www.gwytb.gov.cn/topone/202309/t20230912\\_12566987.htm](http://www.gwytb.gov.cn/topone/202309/t20230912_12566987.htm). The CCP stated that such a plan would advance peaceful unification of the motherland. Taiwan’s government has rejected the proposal, seeing it as another opportunity for the PRC to divide Taiwanese society. See Chung Li-hua, Jonathan Chin, and Jake Chung, “MAC Rejects Fujian Plan,” *Taipei Times*, June 18, 2023, \*<https://www.taipetimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2023/06/18/2003801721>.

37. Similar rhetoric regarding the CCP’s responsibility to ensure that the “Taiwan problem” is not passed on to future generations can be found in Xi Jinping’s comments in a meeting before the 2013 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit and at the 40th anniversary of the issuance of the “Message to Compatriots in Taiwan.” See *People’s Daily*, “Xi Jinping Meets with Vincent Siew and His Delegation,” October 7, 2013, <https://interpret.csis.org/translations/xi-jinping-meets-with-vincent-siew-and-his-delegation>; and Xi Jinping, “Speech at the Meeting Marking the 40th Anniversary of the Issuance of the Message to Compatriots in Taiwan,” Xinhua News Agency, January 2, 2019, <https://interpret.csis.org/translations/speech-at-the-meeting-marking-the-40th-anniversary-of-the-issuance-of-the-message-to-compatriots-in-taiwan>.

38. The 2005 Anti-Secession Law emphasized the importance of achieving peaceful unification but stated that non-peaceful means would be implemented if “secessionist forces” attempted to bring about Taiwanese independence. See Hu Jintao, “Fǎn fēnlìè guójiāfǎ” [Anti-Secession Law], Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, March 14, 2005, \*[https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ziliao\\_674904/zt\\_674979/dnzt\\_674981/qtzt/twwt/stflgf/202206/t20220606\\_10699015.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ziliao_674904/zt_674979/dnzt_674981/qtzt/twwt/stflgf/202206/t20220606_10699015.html). The law is vaguely worded, making it unclear what actions could be punished and leaving the threat of PRC use of force ever present.

39. In April 2023, the Fujian Maritime Safety Administration (MSA) announced a three-day special inspection operation of vessels passing through portions of the Taiwan Strait, for the purpose of ensuring “navigation safety.” See Reuters, “China to Inspect Ships in Taiwan Strait, Taiwan Says Won’t Cooperate,” April 5, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/china-inspect-ships-taiwan-strait-taiwan-says-wont-cooperate-2023-04-06>. Despite the announcement, these inspections never occurred. In this report’s course of action (COA), we speculate on what might occur if the MSA carried out its plans in the Taiwan Strait.

40. American companies are already reporting complications conducting business in Taiwan due to rising tensions with the PRC. See Eric Cheung, “More US Firms in Taiwan Say They’re Seeing ‘Significant Disruption’ Due to Rising Tension with China,” CNN, February 9, 2023, <https://www.cnn.com/2023/02/09/business/taiwan-business-risks-us-china-tensions-intl-hnk/index.html>. Famously, Warren Buffet sold the entirety of his stake in the Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC), citing the danger of investing in Taiwan. Michelle Toh, “Warren Buffett’s Berkshire Hathaway Sells Entire Stake in TSMC,” CNN, May 16, 2023, <https://www.cnn.com/2023/05/16/investing/berkshire-hathaway-taiwan-tsmc-stock-exit-hnk-intl/index.html>.

41. This rhetoric occurs frequently as a way for the PRC to justify its military activity around Taiwan, often following a high-level meeting between Taiwanese and US politicians. See CGTN, “Beijing Blames Collusion Between Taiwan Politicians and Foreign Forces for Tensions with Chinese Mainland,” October 13, 2021, \*<https://news.cgtn.com/news/2021-10-13/Beijing-blames-Taiwan-politicians-collusion-with-foreign-forces-14kFVsgDBni/index.html>; and *Global Times*, “Collusion with US Places Taiwan Secessionists in a More Dangerous Position,” January 3, 2023, \*<https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202301/1283134.shtml>.

42. The People’s Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) has flown bomber aircraft and military unmanned aerial vehicles in a loop or partial loop around Taiwan previously. These flights originally took place in 2016, though they continued to occur at least until early 2020. See Nathan Beauchamp-Mustafaga, Derek Grossman, and Logan Ma, “Chinese Bomber Flights Around Taiwan: For What Purpose?,” War on the Rocks, September 13, 2017, <https://warontherocks.com/2017/09/chinese-bomber-flights-around-taiwan-for-what-purpose/>; and Mercedes Trent, *Over the Line: The Implications of China’s ADIZ Intrusions in Northeast Asia*, Federation of American Scientists, August 1, 2020, <https://uploads.fas.org/2020/08/ADIZ-Report.pdf>.

43. Since 2022, the PLAAF has increasingly flown across the Taiwan Strait’s median line and expanded its incursions into the southeast corner of the ADIZ. Additionally, in 2023, the PLAAF flew up to the edge of Taiwan’s contiguous zone. See PLA Tracker, “Taiwan ADIZ Violations”; Bonny Lin et al., “Tracking China’s April 2023 Military Exercises Around Taiwan,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, November 8, 2023, <https://chinapower.csis.org/tracking-chinas-april-2023-military-exercises-around-taiwan/>; and Ben Blanchard, “Taiwan Says Chinese Air Force Approached Close to Island’s Coast,” Reuters, June 24, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/taiwan-says-chinese-air-force-got-within-24-miles-its-coast-2023-06-24>.

44. People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) vessels have approached Taiwan’s contiguous zone in multiple documented instances since at least 2018–22. See Yu-chieh Liu, “Yuè lái yuè tiǎoxìn! gòngjī yuèguò táihǎi zhōngxìàn hòu jiěfāngūn jūnjiàn jīn rì jīnlín táihǎi ‘línjiēqū’” [Ever-More Provocative! After Communist Planes Cross Median Line of Taiwan Strait PLA Ship Today Edges Toward ‘Contiguous Zone’ of Taiwan Strait], *Newtalk News*, October 3, 2020, \*<https://tw.news.yahoo.com/%E8%B6%8A%E4%BE%86%E8%B6%8A%E6%8C%91%E9%87%81-%E5%85%B1%E6%A9%9F%E8%B6%8A%E9%81%8E%E5%8F%Bo%E6%B5%B7%E4%B8%AD%E7%B7%9A%E5%BE%8C-%E8%A7%A3%E6%94%BE%E8%BB%8D%E8%BB%8D%E8%89%A6%E4%BB%8A%E6%97%A5%E7%B7%8A%E9%84%Bo%E5%8F%Bo%E6%B5%B7-%E9%84%Bo%E6%8E%A5%E5%8D%80-101849216.html>; Shu-wei Wu, Tsong-hsian Tsai, and Hsian-yi Chen, “Gòngjī yùnjiū qíngbào jī jiējìn huádōng wàihǎi” [PLA Y-9 Intelligence Plane Approaches Sea near Hualien-Taitung], *Liberty Times*, September 26, 2020, \*<https://news.ltn.com.tw/news/politics/paper/1402155>; Yahoo Kimo, “Gòngjūn yòu lái rǎo tái guófángbù: quánhéng jiān zhēn” [PLA Again Harasses Taiwan, MND: Tracking All the Way], June 24, 2018, \*<https://tw.news.yahoo.com/%E5%85%B1%E8%BB%8D%E5%8F%88%E4%BE%86%E6%93%BE%E5%8F%Bo-%E5%9C%8B%E9%98%B2%E9%83%A8%EF%BC%9A%E5%85%A8%E7%A8%8B%E7%9B%A3%E5%81%B5-135943969.html>; and *Liberty Times*, “Duìbǐ tú pùguāng! gòngjūn yǎnxùn fānwéi bǐ 96 nián táihǎi wéiji gèng dà yǐ qinfān wǒ lǐnghǎi” [Comparison Chart Comes Out! PLA Exercise Area Even Larger Than 1996 Taiwan Strait Crisis, Encroached on Taiwanese Territorial Waters], August 3, 2022, \*<https://news.ltn.com.tw/news/politics/breakingnews/4012588>.

45. The People’s Liberation Army Rocket Force has previously conducted missile tests near Taiwan to intimidate the Taiwanese populace. The 2022 tests during then-Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s visit were the first missile overflights of Taiwan since the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis. During this and other such incidents, missiles never passed low enough to enter Taiwanese airspace. See Russell Hsiao, “A Preliminary Assessment of PLARF’s 2022 August Missile Tests,” Global Taiwan Institute, August 10, 2022, <https://globaltaiwan.org/2022/08/a-preliminary-assessment-of-plarfs-2022-august-missile-tests/>; and Andrew Scobell, *Show of Force: The PLA and the 1995–1996 Taiwan Strait Crisis*, Stanford University, Walter H. Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center, January 1999, <https://theasiadialogue.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Scobell.pdf>.



46. Given the scale of military activity and preparation required for a successful invasion of Taiwan, the US intelligence community would have the ability to detect when an invasion is likely to occur. Such a list of indicators would include economic, political, and military activities preparing Chinese society for a long-term conflict. See Gerard DiPippo, “Economic Indicators of Chinese Military Action Against Taiwan,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, August 16, 2022, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/economic-indicators-chinese-military-action-against-taiwan>; and Culver, “How We Would Know When China Is Preparing to Invade Taiwan.”

47. PRC state media publishes its own PRC-centered narratives that emphasize the PRC’s “peace-seeking policies,” which often quote an assortment of international scholars to give extra credibility to their arguments. State media may even publish an article written by a foreign scholar in its entirety if the argument advances PRC interests. The PRC’s extensive state media apparatus thus amplifies views that the PRC finds favorable and blurs the line between propaganda and the sincere beliefs of foreign commentators. See Xinhua News Agency, “Xinhua Headlines: Xi Urges Ceasefire in Gaza, Stresses Two-State Solution,” November 22, 2023, \*<https://english.news.cn/20231122/7d2doe81c63a430085672349cd900ba7/c.html>; Xinhua News Agency, “World Insights: U.S. Stance on Israeli-Palestinian Conflict Under Fire, Threatens Regional Stability,” October 22, 2023, \*<https://english.news.cn/20231022/32a8c833876f44f88f33fea4f86a3d61/c.html>; and Yahia H. Zoubir, “Gaza Crisis Puts US’ Unipolarity Push in Doubt,” *Global Times*, October 23, 2023, \*<https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202310/1300388.shtml>.

48. PRC-affiliated actors carried out distributed denial-of-service attacks on four ROC government websites before Pelosi’s arrival in Taipei on August 2, 2022. These attacks targeted the websites of the ROC Presidential Office, MND, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Taiwan Taoyuan International Airport. Similar attacks have targeted Taiwan’s financial sector. See Yimou Lee and Christopher Bing, “Attacks on Taiwan Websites Likely Work of Chinese ‘Hacktivists’—Researchers,” Reuters, August 2, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/attacks-taiwan-websites-likely-work-chinese-hacktivists-researchers-2022-08-02>; and Betty Hou and Jamie Tarabay, “Taiwan Calls on US Support to Defend Banks Against Hacking,” Bloomberg, December 11, 2023, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-12-11/taiwan-calls-on-us-support-to-defend-banks-against-cyberattacks>.

49. The Solomon Islands and the PRC announced their comprehensive strategic partnership in July 2023. See Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Xi Jinping Meets with Prime Minister of Solomon Islands Manasseh Sogavare,” July 10, 2023, \*[https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjdt\\_665385/wshd\\_665389/202307/t20230717\\_11114181.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjdt_665385/wshd_665389/202307/t20230717_11114181.html).

50. The Ryukyu Islands are a chain of Japanese islands running between Kyushu and Taiwan, the largest of which is Okinawa. Given their geostrategic importance, Japan has placed radar stations, air defense systems, and anti-ship missiles in the southern Ryukyus as part of a broader defense buildup. See Hal Brands, “These Tiny Japanese Islands May Have to Save Taiwan,” Bloomberg Opinion, September 12, 2023, <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2023-09-12/japan-s-ryukyu-islands-can-be-us-bases-in-conflict-with-china-over-taiwan>; and Steven Stashwick, “Japan Confirms New Missile Deployments to Ryukyu Islands,” *The Diplomat*, August 6, 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/08/japan-confirms-new-missile-deployments-to-ryukyu-islands>.

51. While certainly not as common as narratives supporting US involvement in a war with the PRC over Taiwan, there already exist articles arguing that it is not “worth it” for the US to support Taiwan. See Doug Bandow, “A Secret War in the Making: Americans Should Not Die to Defend Taiwan,” Cato Institute, January 2, 2023, <https://www.cato.org/commentary/secret-war-making-americans-should-not-die-defend-taiwan>; Daniel Larison, “War with China over Taiwan? Don’t Expect US Allies to Join,” Responsible Statecraft, July 17, 2023, <https://responsiblestatecraft.org/2023/07/17/war-with-china-over-taiwan-dont-expect-us-allies-to-join>; and Daniel L. Davis, “We Should Not Choose to Fight a War with China If They Invade Taiwan,” *The Hill*, September 14, 2023, <https://thehill.com/opinion/national-security/4204113-we-should-not-choose-to-fight-a-war-with-china-if-they-invade-taiwan>.

52. Taiwanese Defense Minister Chiu Kuo-cheng made statements in October 2022 and March 2023 that the ROC military (ROCM) would fire on unauthorized breaches of its territorial waters and the airspace above them. See Cheng-yu Chen, “Ruò zhōnggòng fādòng dì yī jí qiūguózhèng: guójūn néng dǎ xiàlái jiù dǎ xiàlái” [If CCP Initiates a First Strike Chiu Kuo-Cheng: ROC Military Will Shoot It Down If It Can], *Liberty Times*, October 18, 2022, \*<https://news.ltn.com.tw/news/politics/breakingnews/4092943>; and Chieh-yun Hsiao, “Màikǎxí rú láifǎng qiūguózhèng: gòngjūn kǒng túrù bǐjìn 12 hǎilí zhǐyào yuèguò jiù dǎdiào” [If McCarthy Visits, Chiu Kuo-Cheng: PLA Could Suddenly Press Close to Within 12 Nautical Miles, as Long as They Cross, They

Will Be Shot Down], CMMedia, March 5, 2023, \*<https://tw.news.yahoo.com/%E9%BA%A5%E5%8D%A1%E9%8C%AB%E5%A6%82%E4%BE%86%E8%A8%AA-%E9%82%B1%E5%9C%8B%E6%AD%A3-%E5%85%B1%E8%BB%8D%E6%81%90%E7%AA%81%E5%85%A5%E9%80%BC%E8%BF%9112%E6%B5%B7%E6%B5%AC-%E5%8F%AA%E8%A6%81%E8%B6%8A%E9%81%8E%E5%B0%B1%E6%89%93%E6%8E%89-044234630.html>.

53. Rumors of PRC use of sonic weapons against the US were reported in May 2018, and PRC scientists have developed handheld sonic weapons reportedly for the purpose of crowd control. See Charlotte Gao, “Is China Really Targeting US Diplomats with a ‘Sonic Attack?’,” *The Diplomat*, May 25, 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/05/is-china-really-targeting-us-diplomats-with-a-sonic-attack/>; and Stephen Chen, “Chinese Scientists Develop Handheld Sonic Weapon for Crowd Control,” *South China Morning Post*, September 19, 2019, \*<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/science/article/3028071/chinese-scientists-develop-handheld-sonic-weapon-crowd-control>. China Coast Guard (CCG) ships have used water cannons on Philippine boats in the South China Sea. See Brad Lendon and Kathleen Magramo, “International Backlash Grows After Chinese Vessel Fires Water Cannon on Philippine Boats,” CNN, August 7, 2023, <https://www.cnn.com/2023/08/07/asia/china-philippines-coast-guard-confrontation-south-china-sea-intl-hnk/index.html>. PLAN and CCG vessels have also engaged in ramming against Vietnamese and Philippine ships in the South China Sea. See Khanh Vu, “Vietnam Protests Beijing’s Sinking of South China Sea Boat,” Reuters, April 4, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-vietnam-china-southchinasea-idUSKBN21M072>; and Enrico Dela Cruz and Karen Lema, “Philippines Says Chinese Coastguard ‘Intentionally’ Collided with Its Boats,” Reuters, October 23, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/philippines-tells-china-stop-provocative-actions-south-china-sea-2023-10-23>.

54. The CPC Corporation is a state-owned petroleum, natural gas, and gasoline company in Taiwan. See CPC Corporation, “CPC at a Glance,” \*<https://www.cpc.com.tw/en/cp.aspx?n=2727>. The Taiwan Power Company (Taipower) is a state-owned electric power company. See Taipower, “History and Development,” \*<https://www.taipower.com.tw/en/page.aspx?mid=4448>.

55. The Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA) is a free-trade agreement between China and Taiwan. ECFA came into effect on September 12, 2010, following several rounds of negotiation. See Taiwan’s Mainland Affairs Council, “Cross-Strait Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA),” \*[https://www.mac.gov.tw/en/News\\_Content.aspx?n=69EE7CEA8C7550BB&sms=D6DoA9E658098CA2&s=FD1ADAC687DF1AC0](https://www.mac.gov.tw/en/News_Content.aspx?n=69EE7CEA8C7550BB&sms=D6DoA9E658098CA2&s=FD1ADAC687DF1AC0).

56. Yasukuni Shrine is dedicated to all Japanese who died in wars between the 19th century and World War II. While many Japanese pay respect to dead relatives there, the shrine includes among the enshrined war criminals convicted for atrocities committed throughout Asia. For that reason, historical victims of Japanese war crimes, especially Chinese and Koreans, find the shrine objectionable. The PRC recently lodged a formal complaint over a ritual offering made there by Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida. See Linda Sieg, “Explainer: Why Yasukuni Shrine Is a Controversial Symbol of Japan’s War Legacy,” Reuters, August 14, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/why-yasukuni-shrine-is-controversial-symbol-japans-war-legacy-2021-08-13>; and Reuters, “China Lodges Complaint over Kishida’s Ritual Offering to Yasukuni Shrine,” August 15, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/china-lodges-complaint-over-kishidas-ritual-offering-yasukuni-shrine-2023-08-15>.

57. One of the signature phrases of Xi’s diplomacy has been “win-win cooperation.” See What China Says, “‘Mutually Beneficial Cooperation’ or ‘Win-Win Cooperation,’” \*<https://whatchinasays.org/concept/3-mutually-beneficial-cooperation-or-win-win-cooperation>. This phrase is often used to promote Belt and Road Initiative investment, but the concept’s spirit can also be applied to the context of US-PRC relations. At a dinner with high-profile US corporate guests during the APEC summit in 2023, Xi outlined American and Chinese shared interests: “China is pursuing high-quality development, and the United States is revitalizing its economy,” adding that “there is plenty of room for our cooperation.” See Lingling Wei and Charles Hutzler, “U.S. Executives Get No Reassurance from Xi on Tougher China Business Environment,” *Wall Street Journal*, November 16, 2023, <https://www.wsj.com/world/china/chinas-xi-draws-standing-ovation-from-u-s-business-leadersand-some-doubts-13fc3ad2>.

58. Taipei Mass Rapid Transit is the main metro system that serves the cities of Taipei and New Taipei. Its high-capacity lines regularly serve over a million riders a day. See Metro Taipei, “Ridership Statistics,” January 15, 2024, \*<https://english.metro.taipei/cp.aspx?n=78C1963041B43CBF>.

59. After Pelosi’s 2022 visit to Taiwan, public monitors in train stations and 7-Eleven stores were targeted by PRC hacktivists and made to display vitriolic anti-US and anti-Pelosi messages. See Sheng-hsuan Chiu, “Kuàixùn/táitiě yíngmùqiáng chūxiàn ‘lǎo wúpó

cuàn fǎng táiwān': yíngjiē de rén jiāng shòu shěnpàn" [News Alert/Taiwan Railway Screens Display 'the Old Witch Visits Taiwan': Those Who Welcome Her Will Receive Judgment], ETtoday News, August 3, 2022, \*<https://www.ettoday.net/news/20220803/2308095.htm>; and Bang Xiao and Joshua Boscaini, "Taiwan Billboards Hacked with Anti-Nancy Pelosi Messages During Historic Visit," ABC News, August 4, 2022, \*<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-08-04/taiwan-billboards-hacked-with-anti-nancy-pelosi-messages/101300164>. The National Taiwan University website was also hacked, displaying the sentence, "There is only one China in the world." See Chieh-ling Chen, "Táidà 2 wǎngzhàn zāo hài chūxiàn 'shìjiè shàng zhīyǒu yī gè zhōngguó' xiàofāng qǐdòng yìngbiàn chéngxù" [2 Websites of National Taiwan University Hacked, Display 'There Is Only One China in the World,' University Initiates Response Protocol], Central News Agency, August 7, 2022, \*<https://www.cna.com.tw/news/ahel/202208070229.aspx>. An aggressive spam campaign targeted President Tsai's Facebook page shortly after she won her first election in 2016, inundating her page with 35,000 negative comments. See Marco Huang, "Chinese Netizens Flood Tsai Ing-wen's Facebook Page with Anti-Taiwan Independence Posts," *Wall Street Journal*, January 21, 2016, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/BL-CJB-28552>.

60. PRC and pan-Blue scholars often denigrate individuals who promote local Taiwanese culture, history, and identity as attempting to "de-sinicize" Taiwan. "Taiwanization" is a more positive term that emphasizes elements of a Taiwanese identity such as multiculturalism and tolerance. The practical effects of political Taiwanization include the rise to senior government ranks of those who descend from pre-1949 migrants to Taiwan and nomenclature changes of government institutions and documents to refer to "Taiwan" instead of "China." See Yoshihisa Amae and Jens Damm, "Whither Taiwanization? State, Society, and Cultural Production in the New Era," *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 40, no. 1 (2011), <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/186810261104000101>; *Wall Street Journal*, "Farewell Lee Teng-hui," March 24, 2000, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB953844671744684377>; and BBC, "Taiwan's Redesigned Passport Shrinks Words 'Republic of China,'" September 2, 2020, \*<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-54001811>.

61. TSMC's global prestige puts its suppliers at risk of targeting by cybercriminals. In June 2023, one of TSMC's hardware suppliers was hit by a ransomware attack, and the hackers demanded payment from TSMC. See Sean Lyngaas, "TSMC Confirms Supplier Data Breach Following Ransom Demand by Russian-Speaking Cybercriminal Group," CNN, June 30, 2023, <https://www.cnn.com/2023/06/30/tech/tsmc-supplier-ransomware/index.html>.

62. Taiwan's financial and trading sectors have already been targeted by the PRC state-sponsored hacking group APT10. A sophisticated attack from November 2021 to February 2022 initially manipulated large trades by Taiwanese financial institutions but was later discovered to have also exfiltrated sensitive, high-level company data. See CyCraft Technology Corp, "China Implicated in Prolonged Supply Chain Attack Targeting Taiwan Financial Sector," February 21, 2022, <https://medium.com/cycraft/china-implicated-in-prolonged-supply-chain-attack-targeting-taiwan-financial-sector-264b6a1c3525>.

63. Once in 2019, twice in 2020, and again in 2021, joint statements submitted at the UN Human Rights Council have expressed concern over the human rights situations in Hong Kong, Tibet, and Xinjiang. The PRC has responded each time with its own joint statements, ensuring that the mostly developing state signatories to its letters outnumbered the mostly Western critics. A 2022 US-proposed resolution to debate human rights violations in Xinjiang at the UN Human Rights Council failed to pass after the PRC rallied its friends to abstain or vote against it. The PRC's ambassador to the UN claimed the US was meddling to smear the PRC and interfere in its internal affairs and that the US would target other developing countries next. See Jun Kumakura, "China and the Joint Statement on Xinjiang and Hong Kong," Japan Institute for International Affairs, September 15, 2021, \*<https://www.jiia.or.jp/en/column/2021/09/china-fy2021-01.html>; and Nick Cumming-Bruce, "China Turns Back Move for U.N. Debate on Abuse of Uyghurs," *New York Times*, October 6, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/06/world/asia/china-un-xinjiang-uyghurs.html>.

64. EVA Air, a privately owned airline under the global shipping conglomerate Evergreen Group, is one of Taiwan's largest passenger airlines, though it also carries air freight. See EVA Air, "Operational Data," 2023, \*<https://www.evaair.com/en-us/about-eva-air/about-us/market-and-sales-overview/operational-data>.

65. The MND typically takes a measured and reassuring tone when making public statements. Responding to questions from members of the Legislative Yuan regarding a large-scale PLA exercise in September 2023, the Minister of National Defense Chiu Kuo-cheng stressed that the MND was monitoring the situation and "in control." See Liang-Ying Ou-yang, "Qiūguózhèng jīngbào 'zuìjìn díríng yìcháng' qiángdiào dōu zài zhǎngwò zhōng" [Shocking Statement from Chiu Kuo-Cheng: "Recently the Situation of Enemy Forces Has

Been Abnormal,” Emphasizes That Everything Is Under Control], *United Daily News*, September 22, 2023, \*<https://udn.com/news/story/10930/7457140>. Typical MND press releases emphasize monitoring; intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance; and the deployment of appropriate forces in response. See Taiwanese Ministry of National Defense, “Xīnwéngǎo” [Press Releases], \*<https://www.mnd.gov.tw/PublishTabs.aspx?parentId=65&NodeId=657&title=%E5%9C%8B%E9%98%B2%E6%B6%88%E6%81%AF&SelectStyle=%E6%96%B0%E8%81%9E%E7%A8%BF>.

66. The PRC has disrupted Philippine navy resupply missions to the BRP *Sierra Madre* in the Second Thomas Shoal numerous times over the past decade. For a 2022 example, see Center for Strategic and International Studies, “Update: China Blocks Another Philippine Resupply Mission,” July 27, 2022, <https://amti.csis.org/three-rounds-of-coercion-in-philippine-waters>. In 2014, China disrupted supply vessels, and it continued close-in patrols through 2015. See Michael Green et al., “Counter-Coercion Series: Second Thomas Shoal Incident,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, June 9, 2017, <https://amti.csis.org/counter-co-2nd-thomas-shoal>. China resumed direct aggression against supply ships by using water cannons, lasers, and dangerous maneuvers such as bow crossing from 2021, and this has continued to the present. See Ian Storey, “China and Second Thomas Shoal: For They Say, but Do Not,” *Fulcrum*, November 25, 2021, \*<https://fulcrum.sg/china-and-second-thomas-shoal-for-they-say-but-do-not>. The number of documented incidents drastically increased in 2023. See Feliz Solomon, “Philippines Says Chinese Ship Flashed Military-Grade Laser to Disrupt Coast Guard Mission,” *Wall Street Journal*, February 13, 2023, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/philippines-says-chinese-ship-flashed-military-grade-laser-to-disrupt-coast-guard-mission-a7c2228>; Jim Gomez, “Chinese Coast Guard Ship Blocks Philippine Patrol Vessel in New Stand-Off,” PBS, April 27, 2023, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/chinese-coast-guard-ship-blocks-philippine-patrol-vessel-in-new-stand-off>; Dzirhan Mahadzir, “Video: China Coast Guard Blast Philippine Military Resupply with Water Cannons,” USNI News, August 7, 2023, <https://news.usni.org/2023/08/07/video-china-coast-guard-blast-philippine-military-resupply-with-water-cannons>; Jim Gomez and Aaron Favila, “2 Philippine Supply Boats Breach Chinese Coast Guard Blockade in Hotly Contested South China Sea,” PBS, August 23, 2023, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/2-philippine-supply-boats-breach-chinese-coast-guard-blockade-in-the-hotly-contested-south-china-sea>; Dzirhan Mahadzir, “China Coast Guard Harass Second Thomas Shoal Resupply Mission,” USNI News, October 6, 2023, <https://news.usni.org/2023/10/06/china-coast-guard-harass-second-thomas-shoal-resupply-mission>; Dzirhan Mahadzir, “China Coast Guard Vessel Collides with Filipino Supply Ship in South China Sea,” USNI News, October 22, 2023, <https://news.usni.org/2023/10/22/china-coast-guard-vessel-collides-with-filipino-supply-ship-in-south-china-sea>; and Jim Gomez and Joael Calupitan, “Chinese Ships Block, Pursue Philippine Vessels as U.S. Renews Warning It Will Defend Its Ally,” PBS, November 11, 2023, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/chinese-ships-block-pursue-philippine-vessels-as-u-s-renews-warning-it-will-defend-its-ally>.

67. Conspiracies involving US-funded and -operated biological research labs were popularized by Russia and the PRC to justify the invasion of Ukraine and pin blame on the US for the COVID-19 pandemic, respectively. For Russia, see John V. Parachini, “Debunking Russian Lies About Biolabs at Upcoming U.N. Meetings,” RAND Corporation, September 12, 2022, <https://www.rand.org/pubs/commentary/2022/09/debunking-russian-lies-about-biolabs-at-upcoming-un.html>. For the PRC, see BBC, “Wuhan Lab Leak Theory: How Fort Detrick Became a Centre for Chinese Conspiracies,” August 22, 2021, \*<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-58273322>.

68. The idea that the US uses Taiwan as a “chess piece,” exploits the Taiwanese people, and will turn Taiwan into a “battlefield” are just three examples of “US-skepticism” narratives that have been empirically studied. These types of narratives arise from both PRC and Taiwanese actors, but PRC propaganda efforts increasingly borrow from domestic Taiwanese political discourse, as narratives spontaneously arising out of Taiwan are more likely to be amplified by partisan divisions and historical memory endogenous to Taiwanese society. Chih-hao Yu, “US Skepticism Narratives and Where They Come From,” Taiwan Information Environment Research Center, August 8, 2023, \*[https://iorg.tw/\\_en/a/us-skepticism-238](https://iorg.tw/_en/a/us-skepticism-238).

69. As the largest natural feature of the Spratly Islands, Itu Aba has enough soil and groundwater for the garrison to maintain gardens and provide its own drinking water. Steven Lee Myers, “Island or Rock? Taiwan Defends Its Claim in South China Sea,” *New York Times*, May 20, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/20/world/asia/china-taiwan-island-south-sea.html>.

70. Public confidence in the military has improved in recent years but still wavers near the 50 percent mark. See Ying-lung Yu, “2023 nián 2 yuè quánguóxìng mínyì diàochá zhāiyào bàogào” [February 2023 National Public Opinion Survey Summary Report], Taiwan

Public Opinion Foundation, February 21, 2023, \*<https://www.tpof.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/2023%E5%B9%B4%E6%9C%88%E8%A8%98%E8%80%85%E6%9C%83%E6%9B%B8%E9%9D%A2%E5%A0%B1%E5%91%8A.pdf>.

71. Beginning in August 2022, drones from the PRC began flying toward and eventually directly over ROCM facilities on Kinmen. After the first drone incident, photos of Taiwanese soldiers on the island circulated on PRC social media. See Keoni Everington, “Photo Taken by Chinese Drone of Taiwanese Troops on Kinmen Is Real,” Taiwan News, August 24, 2022, \*<https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/4636484>; and Gladys Tsai, Jorge Engels, and Jennifer Deaton, “Taiwan Fires Warning Shots at Unidentified Drone near Islands,” CNN, August 31, 2022, <https://www.cnn.com/2022/08/30/asia/taiwan-warning-shots-drone-china-intl/index.html>. President Tsai ordered a forceful response to further incursions, and the military shot down the next suspiciously loitering drone. See Gladys Tsai and Larry Register, “Taiwan Shoots Down Unidentified Drone over Island near China,” CNN, September 1, 2022, <https://www.cnn.com/2022/09/01/asia/taiwan-shoots-down-civilian-drone-kinmen-intl-hnk/index.html>.

72. According to a Department of Defense report, following the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, the Taliban was able to seize \$7.12 billion worth of inventory left behind by the US military. See US Department of Defense, Office of the Inspector General, “Lead Inspector General for Operation Enduring Sentinel and Operation Freedom’s Sentinel | Quarterly Report to the United States Congress | April 1, 2022–June 30, 2022,” press release, August 16, 2022, <https://www.dodig.mil/In-the-Spotlight/Article/3129145/lead-inspector-general-for-operation-enduring-sentinel-and-operation-freedoms-s>.

73. The PRC already engaged in a disinformation campaign against Japan with nuclear themes in August 2023, when Japan began releasing treated wastewater from the Fukushima reactor site. See Motoko Rich and John Liu, “China’s Disinformation Fuels Anger over Fukushima Water Release,” *New York Times*, August 31, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/08/31/world/asia/china-fukushima-water-protest.html>.

74. Due to supply-chain disruptions and high American consumer demand in early 2022, the Port of Los Angeles experienced a record high container ship backlog of 109 vessels in January. Average dwelling times for ships rose to 11 days during the peak of the backlog. See Brendan Murray, “The Container Ship Backlog Outside Los Angeles Ports Is Almost Cleared,” Bloomberg, August 30, 2022, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-08-30/flood-of-los-angeles-bound-container-ships-slows-to-a-trickle>. The Port of Los Angeles handles around 1,800 vessels each year. See Port of Los Angeles, “Facts and Figures,” <https://www.portoflosangeles.org/business/statistics/facts-and-figures>. The Taiwan International Ports Corporation, which operates Taiwan’s seven major ports, handled 38,223 vessels in 2022. With a much greater volume of inbound vessels, there is potential for an even more severe disruption than that experienced by Los Angeles. See Taiwan International Ports Corporation, “Annual Statistical Report,” May 2023, \*<https://www.twport.com.tw/Upload/A/RelFile/CustomPage/2958/cbdoodee-0c32-4f67-9e2a-ofd536e8bd7b.pdf>.

75. From 1991 through 2022, Taiwan approved \$203.33 billion worth of investments in the PRC. See Taiwanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Cross-Strait Relations,” \*[https://www.taiwan.gov.tw/content\\_6.php](https://www.taiwan.gov.tw/content_6.php).

76. “Level 4” is the highest advisory level given in situations in which there is great likelihood of life-threatening risk and limited prospects of US assistance in an emergency. The Department of State advises US citizens not to travel to Level 4 countries and to leave them as soon as they are able. See US Department of State, Bureau of Consular Affairs, “Safety and Security Messaging,” December 15, 2023, <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel/before-you-go/about-our-new-products.html>.

77. The PRC has been engaged in a campaign to infiltrate Taiwan’s government structures for decades, recruiting senior officers across the armed forces as agents and even compromising at least one member of President Tsai’s security detail. See Yimou Lee and David Lague, *Intrigue Island: T-Day, the Battle for Taiwan*, Reuters, December 20, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/taiwan-china-espionage>. Even social and cultural institutions such as the Taiwanese Ministry of Culture’s Mongolian and Tibetan Cultural Center have been targeted. With the PRC casting such a wide net, industrial infiltration is also likely possible. See Flor Wang and Lin Chang-hsun, “Civil Servant Accused of Spying on Tibetans in Taiwan for China Indicted,” Focus Taiwan, October 24, 2023, \*<https://focustaiwan.tw/politics/202310240026>.

78. After the October 7, 2023, terror attacks in Israel, the frequency of rocket launches toward the country increased dramatically. Hacktivists targeted popular apps used by Israelis to receive alerts about incoming missiles. Websites impersonating real apps and cyberattacks on legitimate apps gave users false alerts and collected sensitive user data. See Blake Darché, Armen Boursalian, and Javier Castro, “Malicious ‘RedAlert—Rocket Alerts’ Application Targets Israeli Phone Calls, SMS, and User Information,” Cloudflare,

October 13, 2023, <https://blog.cloudflare.com/malicious-redalert-rocket-alerts-application-targets-israeli-phone-calls-sms-and-user-information>. Additionally, just days before Taiwan's 2024 presidential election, a satellite-carrying rocket launched from southern China flew above Taiwan, triggering Taiwan's Ministry of Defense national alert system to transmit a bilingual message in English and Chinese. The English translation was inaccurate, warning of a "missile flyover" instead of a satellite launch. Kuomintang figures immediately argued that this was an electoral ploy by the DPP to scare voters into voting for them. Future alert errors in a more extreme context could lead to more damaging claims of military politicization and ineptitude. See Damien Cave, "A Missile, a Rocket or a Satellite? Chinese Flyover Sows Confusion in Taiwan," *New York Times*, January 9, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/01/09/world/asia/taiwan-alert-chinese-flyover.html>; and Kai-hsiang Yu, "Guójiājí jǐngbào wèixīng wù yìchéng fēidàn guófáng bù zhìqiàn" [National-Level Alert Mistranslates Satellite into Missile, Ministry of National Defense Apologizes], Central News Agency, January 9, 2024, \*<https://www.cna.com.tw/news/aip/202401095003.aspx>.

79. Taiwanese Ministry of the Interior, National Immigration Agency, "Foreign Residents, by Nationality," November 30, 2023, \*<https://www.immigration.gov.tw/media/100821/202311foreign-residents-by-nationality.xls>.

80. Taiwan previously had a nuclear weapons program that was formally shut down in 1988. See Nuclear Threat Initiative, "Taiwan Overview," September 6, 2023, <https://www.nti.org/analysis/articles/taiwan-overview>; and David Albright and Andrea Stricker, *Taiwan's Former Nuclear Weapons Program: Nuclear Weapons On-Demand* (Washington, DC: Institute for Science and International Security, 2018), 185–90. Due to its highly advanced economy and two remaining reactors at Maanshan Nuclear Power Plant, Taiwan could theoretically develop a nuclear weapon in the present. Although current political and technical factors strongly push against this possibility, the PRC's military threat to Taiwan is already existential and continues to grow. Acute coercion from Beijing and evident abandonment by the US could lead to a reassessment of nuclear strategy. Thus, Taiwan could still be considered a very low probability but nonetheless latent nuclear state. See Mark Fitzpatrick, *Asia's Latent Nuclear Powers: Japan, South Korea and Taiwan* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2016), 134–70.

81. The Legislative Yuan is the ROC's unicameral legislature.

82. The Executive Yuan comprises the various national-level government departments and councils. The premier is therefore the ROC head of government.

83. The impeachment process is outlined in ROC legislation. See Zhōnghuámínguó xiànfǎ [Constitution of the Republic of China] additional art., \*<https://law.moj.gov.tw/ENG/LawClass/LawAll.aspx?pcode=A0000002>; and Xiànfǎ sùsòng fǎ [Constitutional Court Procedure Act] (2019), \*<https://law.moj.gov.tw/ENG/LawClass/LawAll.aspx?pcode=A0030159>.

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**Neo4j** is a highly scalable native graph database that helps organizations build intelligent applications that meet today's evolving connected data challenges including fraud detection, tax evasion, situational awareness, real-time recommendations, master data management, network security, and IT operations. Global organizations such as MITRE, Walmart, the World Economic Forum, UBS, Cisco, HP, Adidas, and Lufthansa rely on Neo4j to harness the connections in their data.



**Babel Street** provides the most advanced identity intelligence and risk operations platform for the world's most trusted government and commercial organizations. The AI-enabled platform helps them stay informed and improves around-the-clock decision-making. Teams are empowered to rapidly detect and collaborate on what matters in seconds by transforming massive amounts of multilingual, enterprise and publicly available data into actionable insights so they can act with confidence. Babel Street is headquartered in the U.S. with offices near Washington, D.C., and Boston, along with Tokyo, Tel Aviv, London, Canberra, and Ottawa.



**Ntrepid** is a mission-driven provider of cutting-edge managed attribution technology solutions that allows organizations to discreetly and safely conduct sophisticated cyber operations in the most hostile online environments. We leverage our deep experience in the national security community to anticipate our customers' needs and provide solutions before the requirements are expressed. Our heavy investment in R&D allows us to stay ahead of the rapidly changing internet landscape. Ntrepid's innovative solutions empower advanced online research, analysis, and data collection, while obscuring organizational identity and protecting your mission.



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