Chronology of Possible Chinese Gray Area and Hybrid Warfare Operations

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There is no simple or reliable way to define Chinese “gray area” or “hybrid” civil and military operations that affect U.S. strategic interests. Many Chinese low-level operations, military claims, and political acts are reported as only serving commercial interests, reflecting local claims or interests, or supporting China’s broader security needs.

The impact of gray zone operations on China’s strategic competition with the United States may be highly indirect, and the motives behind Chinese actions may be highly uncertain. Many of these activities described in this chronology also do not have a direct impact on competition with the United States but have an impact on U.S. strategic partners, other states, and non-state actors. There also are gray zone operations that are not described accurately in open source literature or may not even be reported at all.

Much of the available reporting also is written in ways that highly compartmentalize civil, economic, and military activities. Military exercises involving air, land, and maritime claims are often described in tactical terms, but not in ways that explain that they too are a form of competition. Similarly, the motives behind civil activities like investments and major civil projects may only be reported in terms of their commercial merit or benefits, and not their overall strategic impact with the United States.

This chronology is not an attempt to define the motivations and reasoning behind Chinese grand strategy, rather it attempts to provide a broad historical timeline of Chinese civil, economic, and military actions that affect competition with the United States. Whether one calls it “gray area” or “hybrid” warfare, it is clear that operations under this category work in tandem to advance Chinese interests without ever escalating competition to a conventional battle.

Broadening the Definition of Gray Area, Hybrid, and Irregular Operations

This is a significant departure from some other approaches to strategic competition. Irregular warfare operations first garnered recent popular attention when Frank G. Hoffman labeled it as “hybrid war” in his 2007 Conflict in the 21st Century. He has since revised his definition in 2009 to describe “hybrid warfare” as:

Any adversary that simultaneously and adaptively employs a fused mix of conventional weapons, irregular tactics, terrorism and criminal behavior in the battle space to obtain their political objectives.

Hybrid warfare is also interchangeably used with the term “gray zone operations,” which Hoffman defines as:

Those covert or illegal activities of non-traditional statecraft that are below the threshold of armed organized violence; including disruption of order, political subversion of government or non-governmental organizations, psychological operations, abuse of legal processes, and financial corruption as part of an integrated design to achieve strategic advantage.

In 2013, the Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Federation’s Armed Forces, General Valery Gerasimov, gave a speech that was recognized by many U.S. academics for defining the Russian understanding of irregular warfare known to be called “non-linear warfare” which is when:

Wars are no longer declared, and having begun, proceed according to an unfamiliar template…the role of non-military means of achieving political and strategic goals has grown, and in many cases, they have
exceeded the power of force of weapons in their effectiveness. The focus of applied methods of conflict has altered in the direction of the broad use of political, economic, informational, humanitarian, and other non-military measures – applied in coordination with the protest potential of the population. All this is supplemented by military means of a concealed character, including carrying out actions of informational conflict and the actions of special operations forces.

However, it is important to note that Gerasimov’s article has been incorrectly labeled as the “Gerasimov doctrine,” and the Russian understanding of “non-linear warfare” has been recognized by many scholars and strategists to be a mirror image of Russia’s perception of U.S. activities in the irregular warfare domain.

This conceptualization also reflects the fact that U.S. strategic competition with other states like China, Iran, and North Korea involves political and economic competition, and that the word “warfare” goes beyond the military dimension on a global basis.

In 1999, two Chinese military analysts released a Chinese version of irregular warfare operations and labeled it as “unrestricted warfare.” Colonel Qiao Liang and Colonel Wang Xiangsui describe unrestricted warfare as, 4

Unrestricted war is a war that surpasses all boundaries and restrictions. It takes nonmilitary forms and military forms and creates a war on many fronts. It is the war of the future.

The Chinese use of “unrestricted warfare” has been further analyzed and sometimes referred to as “quasi warfare,” which is marked by the “three non-” warfares: non-contact (fei jierong), non-linear (fei xianshi), and non-symmetric (fei duicheng). 5

Non-contact (fei jierong) is warfare conducted in which the more advanced side is outside the immediate geographical zone of the enemy’s weapons, and therefore impervious to strikes while also retaining the ability to conduct its own direct strikes on the enemy. Non-linear (fei xianshi) is warfare that has no distinguishable battlefield due to the advancement of technology and codependent nature of the relationship between the sides – and it is usually carried out over the information space. Non-symmetric (fei duicheng) is warfare that engages the adversary in every strategic aspect with the use of limited military resources.

The U.S. commands and the Department of Defense (DoD) have also formally acquired their own term of “multi-domain operations” (MDO), which the 2017 Report released by the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command defined as, 6

Multi-Domain Battle is an operational concept with strategic and tactical implications. It deliberately focuses on increasingly capable adversaries who challenge deterrence and pose strategic risk to U.S. interests in two ways. First, in operations below armed conflict, these adversaries employ systems to achieve their strategic ends over time to avoid war and the traditional operating methods of the Joint Force. Second, if these adversaries choose to wage a military campaign, they employ integrated systems that contest and separate Joint Force capabilities simultaneously in all domains at extended ranges to make a friendly response prohibitively risky or irrelevant.

The U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command later released a revised version in 2018, which outlines the following: 7

- **Central idea.** Army forces, as an element of the Joint Force, conduct Multi-Domain Operations to prevail in competition; when necessary, Army forces penetrate and dis-integrate enemy anti-access and area denial systems and exploit the resultant freedom of maneuver to achieve strategic objectives (win) and force a return to competition on favorable terms.

- **Tenets of the Multi-Domain Operations.** The Army solves the problems presented by Chinese and Russian operations in competition and conflict by applying three interrelated tenets: calibrated force posture, multi-
domain formations, and convergence. Calibrated force posture is the combination of position and the ability to maneuver across strategic distances. Multi-domain formations possess the capacity, capability, and endurance necessary to operate across multiple domains in contested spaces against a near-peer adversary. Convergence is rapid and continuous integration of capabilities in all domains, the EMS, and information environment that optimizes effects to overmatch the enemy through cross-domain synergy and multiple forms of attack all enabled by mission command and disciplined initiative. The three tenets of the solution are mutually reinforcing and common to all Multi-Domain Operations, though how they are realized will vary by echelon and depend upon the specific operational situation.

- **Multi-Domain Operations and strategic objectives.** The Joint Force must defeat adversaries and achieve strategic objectives in competition, armed conflict, and in a return to competition. In competition, the Joint Force expands the competitive space through active engagement to counter coercion, unconventional warfare, and information warfare directed against partners. These actions simultaneously deter escalation, defeat attempts by adversaries to “win without fighting,” and set conditions for a rapid transition to armed conflict. In armed conflict, the Joint Force defeats aggression by optimizing effects from across multiple domains at decisive spaces to penetrate the enemy’s strategic and operational anti-access and area denial systems, dis-integrate the components of the enemy’s military system, and exploit freedom of maneuver necessary to achieve strategic and operational objectives that create conditions favorable to a political outcome. In the return to competition, the Joint Force consolidates gains and deters further conflict to allow the regeneration of forces and the re-establishment of a regional security order aligned with U.S. strategic objectives.

The practical problem is that such operations may or may not involve any form of conflict or actual fighting directly with China and Russia, and both countries now compete actively with the United State in other ways.

For the purposes of this analysis, gray zone operations can refer to any range of action from non-violent economic manipulation to low-levels of violence using mercenaries. They can involve changes in deployment, basing, advisory missions, arms transfers, or military exercises; claims to military zones; use of sanctions and trade barriers; economic warfare; technological competition; information warfare; support of other states and non-state actors; and other forms of competition designed to gain strategic and tactical advantage are all part of the current competition between the United States, China, and Russia.

In practice, finding new ways to compete is proving to be a critical part of American strategic competition with China and Russia, and U.S. strategy must be based on the assumption that there are no fixed rules that define “gray zone” operations, and that clearly separate the use of military force from political or economic action, or competition based on a wide spectrum of different activities on a national, regional, and global basis. This chronology lists “gray zone” and “irregular warfare” operations as broad guidelines to stress the need for U.S. strategy to respond to the full range of options, from the grand strategic to the tactical level, as the United States competes with Russia and China.

There are clear historical precedents for doing so. They include most of the portions of human history when major powers of empires were not committed to something approaching total war. Human history, and such competition, is a key focus of Clausewitz and especially Sun Tzu. It is also clear that China now actively competes with the U.S. on this basis, and any definition of this competition that excludes its full range of activities cannot be an effective basis for shaping U.S. strategy.

**The Uncertain Contents of this Chronology**

This chronology organizes the broad range of Chinese gray zone operations into campaigns where China is attempting to assert its influence and compete with the United States. The chronology
provides two maps that color coordinates these operations into specific campaigns. The first map demonstrates the countries that are part of China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

The second map represents broader gray zone operation campaigns. In the case of the United States, China is carrying out multiple gray zone operation campaigns. The colors also do not distinguish if these campaigns are positive or negative gray zone operations. However, countries which have a brighter and more vivid hue of a campaign’s color signify a strong positive economic, military, or civil relationship with China. These include, but are not limited to, military sales, military alliances, and joint civil development projects.

For the purposes of this analysis, countries that remain gray demonstrate either a neutral relationship with China or a relationship that does not share significant – whether it be positive or negative – statecraft with China. However, that does not negate the fact that China may be attempting to further develop its relationship with these countries.

The second map includes a Trade War campaign against the United States, an Espionage campaign against the United States, a Disinformation campaign, a Maritime campaign, a Russian-Relations campaign, a Separatist campaign, an Africa campaign, and an Arctic campaign.

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) campaign is China’s large scale project to connect Asia, Africa, and Europe through both economic networks and physical infrastructure. China has partnered with the following countries for its Belt and Road Initiative: Russia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Nepal, Maldives, Bhutan, India, Mongolia, Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, Vietnam, Singapore, Philippines, Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos, Brunei, East Timor, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Oman, Iran, Turkey, Israel, Egypt, Kuwait, Iraq, Qatar, Jordan, Lebanon, Bahrain, Yemen, Syria, Palestine, Poland, Romania, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovenia, Estonia, Croatia, Albania, Serbia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, and Moldova.

The Trade War campaign is the use of economic gray zone operations against the United States, which has devolved into a tit-for-tat exchange on traded goods between China and United States.

The Espionage campaign has historical pretense; however, China is now targeting the development of technological innovation from the United States, specifically, the Chinese tech giant, Huawei, is in direct competition with the United States to develop a 5G network.

The Disinformation campaign takes place in the United States, the European Union, Australia, and even South America to target any condemnation on China’s role in the spread of Covid-19. The campaign is a larger sustained effort to manipulate information on social media platforms.

The Maritime campaign is China’s geopolitical claim to artificial islands and maritime zones in the South China Sea. China conducts mostly negative gray zone operations, including aggressive military demonstrations of force and illegal construction of reefs.

The Russian-Relations campaign is China’s attempt to align itself with Russia to compete with the United States and the West.
The Separatist campaign is China’s response to separatist movements in Xinjiang, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Tibet. These gray zone operations use economic deterrence, military shows of force, and political demonstrations of disapproval.

The Africa campaign enables China to exploit an expanding market in the African continent including access to natural resources and a port in Djibouti. Many of these countries are already part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) however not all of these projects are part of the BRI campaign.

The Arctic campaign, which China sometimes refers to as the “Ice Silk Road,” is the cooperation and development of science and trade with Arctic countries, specifically Russia.

This chronology is a rough working attempt to illustrate the full range and depth of Chinese competitive activities. Many of the entries are uncertain or ambiguous while many more have almost certainly been omitted or have never been reported. A full analysis would involve a wide range of country experts and military experts. It also would require substantial intelligence analysis at classified levels to be truly comprehensive.

It still, however, illustrates the broader patterns of Chinese activity in competing with the United States, and serves as a starting point for a far more comprehensive analysis. An additional analysis of how U.S. competition with China interacts with U.S. strategic competition with Russia is provided in a separate Burke Chair analysis, entitled U.S. Competition with China and Russia: The Crisis-Driven Need to Change U.S. Strategy. This report is available on the CSIS website here.

Comments and Suggested Additions and Corrections

This is a rough working paper. Please send comments and suggest additions and corrections to Anthony H. Cordesman, Burke Chair in Strategy, CSIS, at acordesman@gmail.com.
Chronology of Chinese Gray Zone Operations

Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) Campaign

September 2013: China launches the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to invest in infrastructure development in almost 70 countries and organizations. BRI is composed of the “Belt,” which refers to the overland routes and the “Silk,” which refers to the maritime routes. China is also reported to start development of the “Ice Silk Road” along the Northern Sea Route in the Arctic, which Russia claims to be part of its international waters. China has the potential to use the BRI as a form of economic coercion by allowing loan deferral or even requesting early loan payment.

Trade War Campaign

April 6, 2017: President Xi urges trade cooperation with the U.S. at his first official meeting with U.S. President Donald Trump in Florida.

May 22, 2017: United States and China agree to a trade deal that would give US firms greater access to China’s agriculture, energy, and financial markets, while China gains access to sell cooked poultry to the United States.

February 7, 2018: The US implements ‘global safeguard tariffs’ – placing a 30 percent tariff on all solar panel imports, except for those from Canada, (worth US$8.5 billion) and a 20 percent tariff on washing machine imports (worth US$1.8 billion).

March 22, 2018: President Trump imposes sanctions on China including restrictions on investment and tariffs on $60 billion worth of products.

April 2, 2018: China announces it will impose 25% trade tariffs on a list of 106 U.S. goods, including soybeans, cars, and orange juice, in retaliation for similar US tariffs on about 1,300 Chinese products.

April 16, 2018: U.S. Department of Commerce concludes that Chinese telecom company ZTE violated US sanctions. US companies are banned from doing business with ZTE for seven years.

April 17, 2018: China announces antidumping duties of 178.6 percent on imports of sorghum from the United States.

May 19, 2018: U.S. China trade war put on hold. In a joint statement, the countries say China will "significantly increase" purchases of U.S. goods and services. Both sides agree to not impose new tariffs on one another while talks continue.


June 7, 2018: US and ZTE agree to deal that will allow ZTE to resume business.

August 14, 2018: The Chinese Ministry of Commerce announces that a formal case has been lodged at the WTO against the US for its tariffs on solar panels.

August 22-23, 2018: U.S. and Chinese mid-level representatives meet for the first time since early in the trade war to discuss ways to resolve the deepening trade conflict and escalating tariffs. Discussions end with no major breakthroughs.

December 2, 2018: The U.S. and China agree to a temporary truce to de-escalate trade tensions, following a working dinner at the G20 Summit in Buenos Aires on December 1, 2018. According
to the agreement, both the US and China will refrain from increasing tariffs or imposing new tariffs for 90 days (until March 1, 2019), as the two sides work towards a larger trade deal.

**April 1, 2019:** China announces that it will ban all variants of the synthetic opioid fentanyl, effective May 1, 2019, in what is considered a concession to the US amid trade talks. Because of the opioid crisis in the US, China’s treatment of fentanyl production and distribution had been a source of tension in bilateral relations.

**May 16, 2019:** The US Department of Commerce announces the addition of Huawei Technologies Co. Ltd and its affiliates on its “entity list’, which effectively bans US companies from selling to the Chinese telecommunications company without US government approval.

**November 1, 2019:** The World Trade Organization (WTO) said Friday that China can impose compensatory sanctions on US imports worth US$3.6 billion for the US failure to abide by anti-dumping rules on Chinese products. The announcement centers on a WTO case that originated nearly six years ago, long before the trade war.

**January 15, 2020:** U.S. and China finally signed the long-awaited phase one trade deal at the White House, easing 18-month trade tensions.

**May 8, 2020:** US Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, US Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer, and Chinese Vice Premier Liu He, representatives from the two countries spoke on the phone to pledge their continued support for the phase one trade deal.

**Espionage Campaign**

**April 1, 2001:** An American spy plane collided with a Chinese fighter jet, known as the “Hainan Island incident.” The U.S. spy plane was flying close to the People’s Republic of China (PRC) island province of Hainan and the Chinese Paracel Islands when it was intercepted by two Chinese fighter jets. One jet crashed into the U.S. plane killing the pilot and the U.S. crew was detained by Chinese authorities for two days and then released.

**2004:** China opens the Confucius Institute program to promote Chinese culture and language overseas. There has since been concerns that the Chinese Communist Party uses the program to spread propaganda and engage in espionage.

**April 21, 2009:** Computer hackers, that were traced back to China, breached the Department of Defense’s (DoD) Joint Strike Fighter project and stole information of F-35 fighter jets.

**November 2013:** The U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) networks were first breached. but it was not until **October 2014** that OPM officials realized that the hacker had gained millions of personnel records and information.

**September 25, 2015:** The U.S. and China reached a “common understanding” to not conduct or support cyber espionage and intellectual property theft for the purposes of commercial gain.

**January 2016:** Chinese officials kidnap a U.S. official working at the American consulate in Chengdu, China but released him the following day.

**August 10, 2016:** The U.S. indicted the China General Nuclear Power Group (CGN) for stealing nuclear secrets for the past two decades.

**August 15, 2019:** The U.S. added four Chinese companies, all subsidiaries of the China General Nuclear Power Group (CGN), to the “Entity-List” for stealing U.S. nuclear technology.
Disinformation Campaign

December 2019: The Coronavirus’s first case starts in eastern Hubei province and leads to widespread travel restrictions.

January 2020: Trump’s Deputy National Security Advisor Matthew Pottinger first proposed to shut down some flights from China in late January.

- In March 2020, he led a review that led the State Department slash a number of visas for Chinese journalists under the rationale that they worked for state-backed propaganda outlets. China responded by expelling journalists from U.S. publications, including The Washington Post.

January 28, 2020: The WHO Director-General (DG) Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus met with Chinese President Xi Jinping in Beijing. Following the meeting, Tedros commended China for “setting a new standard for outbreak control” and praised the country’s top leadership for its “openness to sharing information” with the WHO and other countries.

March 2020: Chinese disinformation campaign about Coronavirus conspiracies:

- Zhao Lijian, a Chinese diplomat, shared a conspiracy theory online accusing a U.S. Army service member of bringing the virus to China.
- A primary objective driving the CCP’s disinformation campaign is to spread false information that COVID-19 originated outside of China. The Taiwanese government reported that the CCP used proxy accounts and bots to disseminate false stories on numerous social media platforms around the world.
- United States intelligence agencies have assessed that Chinese operatives pushed disinformation messages across platforms, according to six American officials. The disinformation showed up as texts on many Americans’ cellphones, a tactic that officials said they had not seen before.

March 18, 2020: Beijing sells Italy protective gear for COVID-19 efforts.

March 21, 2020: China sends a train to Spain loaded with 110,000 medical masks and 776 protective suits as part of the “Health Silk Road.”

April 27, 2020: China asked Germany to put Chinese efforts to contain the coronavirus pandemic in a positive light, but Berlin rejected the request.

April 28, 2020: The Chinese ambassador to Australia threatened Canberra with economic retaliation if Australia pursued an independent inquiry into the COVID-19 pandemic, which would reveal Beijing’s policy failures during the crisis.

April 29, 2020: Secretary of State Mike Pompeo condemns Chinese response to COVID-19 in a press statement.

April 30, 2020: Chinese state-owned media attacked Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, devoting prime airtime to describe him as an “enemy of humankind” practicing “highly venomous” diplomacy. He’s a “super-spreader” of a “political virus.” He’s a “rumor monger” with a “dark mind.”

April 30, 2020: European Union’s report described Chinese and Russian efforts to spread falsehoods and propaganda about the pandemic. But The New York Times reported that the language had been toned down amid criticism from China.
June 10, 2020: The European Union accused China of a concerted effort to spread disinformation about the coronavirus pandemic.

Maritime Campaign

September 13, 2010: Japan arrests Chinese trawler crew in disputed waters in East China Sea. Japan later frees the crew but rejects Chinese demands for an apology.

September 23, 2010: Following a maritime standoff near the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu island with Japan in 2010, China restricted rare earths exports to Japan.
  - September 5, 2012: Japan purchases Senkaku islands from a private owner. China sends patrol ships to the area.
  - February 7, 2013: China denies allegations by Japan that its navy ships twice put radar locks on Japanese military vessels after disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu islands in the East China Sea.

April 12, 2012: Philippines and Chinese naval vessels confront one another off the Scarborough Shoal reef in the South China Sea, which may have significant reserves of oil and gas.
  - June 15, 2012: China increase ships present near the Scarborough Shoal reef.

November 2013: China says it has established a new Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) over an area of the East China Sea, covering disputed islands controlled by Japan and a disputed South Korean-controlled rock.

May 9, 2014: A row with Vietnam over disputed islands escalates, as ships from the two countries collide in the waters of the South China Sea. Chinese workers flee Vietnam after the row sparks anti-China riots.

May 22, 2015: The PLA Air Force (PLAAF) carried out military exercises past the first island chain through the Miyako strait near Japan and 1,500 kilometers from Guam.

October 2015: The Obama administration sent a guided missile destroyer, the Lassen, within territorial waters near the Subi Reef, one of several artificial islands that China has built in the disputed Spratly Islands chain.
  - October 2015: China expresses anger at U.S. naval ship sailing by artificial reefs Beijing is building among disputed Spratly Islands in South China Sea.

June 2016: Chinese fisherman is arrested by Indonesian authorities operating near Natuna Island – this time leading to an injury of one Chinese fisherman – has ratcheted up tensions between Beijing and Jakarta.

June 2016: China threatens to set up new Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) pending U.S. moves.

July 2016: The Permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague issued its ruling on a claim brought against China by the Philippines under UNCLOS, ruling in favor of the Philippines but while China is a signatory to the treaty, it refuses to accept the court’s authority.
  - From 2012 to 2015, Chinese clam harvesters severely damaged or destroyed at least 28 reefs across the South China Sea. The ecological results were devastating, and, in July 2016, the arbitral tribunal that ruled on a case brought against Beijing by
Manila found that China had violated its obligations under international law to protect the marine environment.

**August 30, 2016:** China sells Pakistan 8 new stealth attack submarines.

**October 2016:** Filipino President Duterte has agreed to 13.5 billion dollars in trade deals with China and softened his country’s claims to Scarborough Shoal.

**October 2016:** Filipino President Duterte called for the expulsion of U.S. troops.

**November 2016:** PLAAF begins sorties to circumnavigate the island—frequently involving H-6K bomber aircraft flying through the Bashi Channel, south of Taiwan. These flights serve two roles: they provide training for aircrews in conducting longer-distance sorties for a potential future conflict over Taiwan; and they also serve a propaganda role, with “island encirclement” sorties promoted in state media as part of a psychological warfare campaign to intimidate residents of Taiwan.

**January 6, 2017:** In 2017, Chinese attack submarines conducted port calls in Seppangar Malaysia and Karachi but Sri Lanka denied a port call request in Colombo. The patrols demonstrate the PLA’s dedication to protecting China’s sea lines of communication and power projection in the Indian Ocean.

**January-February 2017:** During the first two months of 2017, three Chinese ships patrolled the Luconia Shoals, an area of islets and reefs that are only about 90 miles north of Malaysian Borneo.

**June 2017:** The JS Izumo, the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force’s largest warship, sailed through the South China Sea for three months, making port calls to Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines and Sri Lanka.

**July 5, 2017:** Vietnam began drilling for oil in an area of the resource-rich South China Sea also claimed by China.

- On June 20 when Vietnamese officials rejected a demand to halt all oil and gas exploration so senior Chinese general cut short an official visit to Vietnam.

**July 14, 2017:** Indonesia’s Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries held a high-profile news conference to release its first national territorial map since 2005, unveiling the newly named North Natuna Sea. The new map also included new maritime boundaries with Singapore and the Philippines, with which Indonesia had concluded agreements in 2015.

**August 2017:** The John S. McCain, passed near Mischief Reef, which China claims as its territory. These freedom of navigation operations near contested islands and reefs across the South China Sea are meant to show that the United States does not accept that China.

**May 2018:** When two American warships — the Higgins, a destroyer, and the Antietam, a cruiser — sailed within a few miles of disputed islands in the Paracels in May, Chinese vessels rushed to challenge what Beijing later denounced as “a provocative act.”

**June 2018:** After the West criticized Myanmar for its treatment of the Rohingya minority, Beijing negotiated a deep-water port with Burma. This port is another “pearl” in China’s “String of pearls” in the Indian Ocean.

**March 31, 2019:** Two PLAAF J-11 fighters crossed the median line of the Taiwan Strait (an unofficial boundary, but one traditionally observed by military aircraft from each side), the first
such reported incident since 2011. This prompted a scramble by ROCAF fighters and a response from Taiwan President Tsai Ing-Wen who vowed the “forceful expulsion” of PLA aircraft repeating this action in the future.

**June 13, 2019:** Tensions in the disputed South China Sea ratcheted up as the Philippine government protested the sinking of a Filipino boat by a Chinese fishing vessel, which left 22 Filipino fishermen floating at sea before they were rescued by a Vietnamese boat.

**September 12, 2019:** Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte said he has been offered a controlling stake in a joint energy deal by Chinese President Xi Jinping in exchange for ignoring an international arbitration in Manila's favor on the South China Sea.

**September 25, 2019:** China launched the first Type 075 amphibious assault ship, with an estimated displacement of 30,000 to 40,000 tons.

**December 2019:** PLA Navy (PLAN)’s first indigenously-designed carrier SHANDONG (CV-17) was commissioned in mid-December 2019 at Sanya Naval Base on the southern Chinese island province of Hainan.

**December 26, 2019:** SHANDONG sailed through the Taiwan Strait in the course of conducting local-area training and sea trials.

**January 16, 2020:** The U.S. Navy guided-missile cruiser USS SHILOH (CG-67) transited the Taiwan Strait. PRC outlets condemned the action and called for the United States to abide by the PRC’s “One-China Principle.”

**January 21, 2020:** Multiple PLAAF Su-30 and Y-8 aircraft flew from airfields in southern China and passed through the Bashi Channel south of Taiwan, before returning the same way. ROCAF fighter aircraft were scrambled in response.

**January 23, 2020:** A formation of PLAAF aircraft passed through the Bashi Channel en route to the western Pacific Ocean.

**February 9-10, 2020:** PLA naval and air forces conducted joint drills in waters to the south of Taiwan. PRC state media explicitly linked the drills to the U.S. visit of Taiwan Vice President-elect Lai.

**February 9, 2020:** PLAAF carried out a long-distance training flight that crossed the centerline in the Taiwan Strait, prompting Taiwan to scramble F-16s in response. PLAAF aircraft circumnavigated Taiwan, flying through the Bashi Channel and into the western Pacific Ocean, before turning north and returning via the Miyako Strait to the northeast of Taiwan.

**February 12, 2020:** A U.S. Air Force MC-130J Commando II aircraft flew north to south along the airspace over the Taiwan Strait, while two U.S. Air Force B-52 Stratofortress bombers flew along Taiwan’s east coast.

**February 15, 2020:** The U.S. Navy guided-missile cruiser USS CHANCELLORSVILLE (CG-62) transited the Taiwan Strait.

**February 17, 2020:** A U.S. Navy P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft operating over international waters 380 miles west of Guam was allegedly targeted by a lasing device from the PLAN LUYANG III (Type 052D)-class destroyer HOHHOT.
February 28, 2020: A PLAAF H-6 bomber transited through the Bashi Channel south of Taiwan before circling back and returning to base.

March 5-9, 2020: The U.S. Navy aircraft carrier USS THEODORE ROOSEVELT (CVN-71) conducted a port visit in Da Nang, Vietnam.

March 16, 2020: People’s Liberation Army (PLA) Air Force aircraft conducted a set of unusual nighttime sorties over the sea to the southwest of Taiwan.

Although the nature of the mission was unusual—this marked the first time that PLA aircraft flew in the vicinity of Taiwan at night and follows more assertive rhetoric from People’s Republic of China (PRC) media outlets and spokespersons since the landslide reelection of Taiwan President Tsai Ing-Wen on January 11.

March 26, 2020: The U.S. Navy guided-missile destroyer USS MCCAMPBELL (DDG-85) transited the Taiwan Strait. A PRC spokesman called such actions “extremely dangerous.”

April 2, 2020: Vietnam claims China sunk a Vietnamese fishing boat. The fishing boat sank last Thursday in water near the Paracels, also known as the Xisha islands, in the northern part of the sea.

April 6, 2020: China holds South China Sea drills came after the US aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt passed through those waters on its way to Guam.

April 10, 2020: The Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Barry (DDG-52) sailed through the Taiwan Strait, according to the Navy.

April 21, 2020: The America, an amphibious assault ship, and the Bunker Hill, a guided missile cruiser, entered contested waters off Malaysia. At the same time, a Chinese government ship in the area has for days been tailing a Malaysian state oil company ship carrying out exploratory drilling.

April 22, 2020: “The Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Barry (DDG-52) sailed through the Taiwan Strait during routine underway operations.

When Barry transited the sensitive waters on Friday, China had just launched its second Type 075 amphibious assault ship. The first Type 075 launched in September.

April 28, 2020: Chinese authorities say they sortied ships and aircraft to “track, monitor, verify, identify and expel” the guided-missile destroyer USS Barry from the Paracel Island chain in the South China Sea.

April 29, 2020: The guided missile cruiser USS Bunker Hill sailed through the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea Wednesday for the second time, according to the U.S. 7th Fleet.

April 29, 2020: The Chinese carrier Liaoning and its five-ship strike group were spotted approximately 50 miles southeast of Miyako.

June 9, 2020: A group of Chinese warplanes flew into the Taiwan Strait and briefly approached Taiwan, just hours after a US transport plane passed over the island.

June 12, 2020: After China alluded that the U.S. navy was heavily affected by COVID-19, three American aircraft carriers are patrolling the Indo-Pacific waters.
To track Chinese artificial islands, see CSIS’s Asia Maritime’s Transparency Initiative.

**Russian-Relations Campaign**

1992: China and Russia issue the Joint Statement on the Basis of Mutual Relations between the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation, recognizing each other as friendly countries.

1996: China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan - dubbed the Shanghai Five - meet in Shanghai and agree to cooperate to combat ethnic and religious tensions in each other’s countries.

June 15, 2001: Leaders of China, Russia and four Central Asian states launch the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and sign an agreement to fight ethnic and religious militancy while promoting trade and investment. The group emerges when the Shanghai Five - China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan - are joined by Uzbekistan.


August 18, 2005: China and Russia hold their first joint military exercises.

July 2008: China and Russia sign a treaty ending 40-year-old border dispute which led to armed clashes during the Cold War.

February 2009: Russia and China sign $25 billion deal to supply China with oil for next 20 years in exchange for loans.

May 21, 2014: China signs a 30-year deal worth an estimated $400bn for gas supplies from Russia's Gazprom.

January 27, 2020: Russia delivers S-400 to China.

March 4, 2020: Russia accuses China of technology theft.

“Unauthorized copying of our equipment abroad is a huge problem. There have been 500 such cases over the past 17 years. China alone has copied aircraft engines, Sukhoi planes, deck jets, air defense systems, portable air defense missiles, and analogues of the Pantsir medium-range surface-to-air systems,” said Yevgeny Livadny, Rostec’s chief of intellectual property projects.

**Separatist Campaign**

**Taiwan**

April 24, 2001: U.S. President George W. Bush approves the sale of advanced weapons to Taiwan, including submarines, spy planes, helicopters, torpedoes and anti-ship missiles.

May 2001: The Bush administration grants Taiwanese President Chen Shui-bian permission to visit New York while en route to Latin America. China angrily accuses the U.S. of violating agreements to maintain relations solely with Beijing.

June 2, 2001: China carries out military exercises simulating an invasion of Taiwan, at the same time as the island's armed forces test their capability to defend Taiwan against a missile attack from China.
July 2001: A Chinese court convicts two Chinese citizens with permanent residency in the United States on charges of spying for Taiwan and sentences them to ten years in prison.

June 2008: China and Taiwan agree to set up offices in each other's territory at the first formal bilateral talks since 1999.

November 2015: China's President Xi Jinping and Taiwan's President Ma Ying-jeou hold historic talks in Singapore, the first such meeting since the Chinese Civil War finished and the nations split in 1949.

May 2017: After the election of Tsai Ing-wen as president, China restricted the flow of tourists to Taiwan, which resulted in 22% less Chinese tourists to Taiwan in 2017 compared to the previous year.

July 2017: Chinese news sources spread a rumor in 2017 that claimed the Tsai administration had banned the burning of incense and “ghost money” in Taoist temples. As a result, mass demonstrations occurred in Taipei demanding the government to lift the ban – although there was never even a ban.

December 2019: In December 2019, China’s new aircraft carrier, Shandong, sailed through the Taiwan Strait before the Taiwanese presidential elections.

January 11, 2020: Taiwan President Tsai’s is reelected for a second term.

March 26, 2020: Passage of the “Taiwan Allies International Protection and Enhancement Initiative” (“TAIPEI Act”), which was signed into U.S. law on March 26. The measure provides a symbolic statement of support for Taiwan.

June 11, 2020: A U.S. C-40A, a military version of the Boeing 737, entered Taiwan air space with permission, but it did not land at any Taiwan airports. China condemns the flight.

Tibet

May 2001: President Bush holds a "private meeting" with Tibet's exiled spiritual leader the Dalai Lama at the White House.

June 2003: China, India reach de facto agreement over status of Tibet and Sikkim in landmark cross-border trade agreement.

March 2008: Anti-China protests escalate into the worst violence Tibet has seen in 20 years, five months before Beijing hosts the Olympic Games.

January 2013: A Tibetan monk receives a suspended death sentence for inciting eight people to burn themselves to death. Nearly 100 Tibetans have set themselves on fire since 2009, many fatally, in apparent protest against Chinese rule.

November 2016: China restricted cross-border trade with Mongolia after Ulaanbaatar accepted a visit from the Dalai Lama.

July-August 2017: Row with India over disputed area of Himalayas, where China says Indian troops were trespassing.

Hong Kong
March 2010: Google ends its compliance with Chinese internet censorship and starts re-directing web searches to Hong Kong, in response to cyberattacks on e-mail accounts of human rights activists.

September-December 2014: Protests against Beijing’s plans to vet candidates for elections in 2017 begin in Hong Kong.

June 2019: Hong Kong sees start of months of anti-government and pro-democracy protests against a proposal to allow extradition to mainland China.

Xinjiang

July 2009: Scores of people are killed, and hundreds injured in the worst ethnic violence in decades as a protest in the restive Xinjiang region turns violent.

July-August 2011: Police kill seven Uighurs suspected of being behind separate attacks in the towns of Horan and Kashgar.

November 2013: Communist Party leadership announces plans to relax one-child policy and other reforms include the abolition of "re-education through labor" camps.

January 2019: Mass detention of Uighurs caught global attention.

Africa Campaign


February 2007: President Hu Jintao tours eight African countries to boost trade and investment. Western rights groups criticize China for dealing with corrupt or abusive regimes.

June 2016: China had more than 3,000 peacekeepers deployed to support 10 UN missions – the largest contingent of any permanent member nation of the UN Security Council—while also committing to establish another 8,000 member peacekeeping standby force.

Djibouti

February 2017: China opened a military base in Djibouti to monitor exports and imports that pass through the Bab el-Mandeb strait. This base also allows China to maintain a naval force in the regions.

Somalia

April 2017: China contributed to counterpiracy operation in the Gulf of Aden by deploying its 28th naval escort task forces in the region.

Yemen

2012: China National Corporation for Overseas Economic Cooperation (CCOEC) signed a deal to build three natural gas-fired power plants in Yemen.

2013: Yemen and China to expand two container ports in the southern cities of Aden and Mokha at a total cost of $508 million.

Sudan

August 2017: China’s first helicopter unity deployed to a UN mission in Sudan to support the UN African Union Mission in Darfur.
**Nigeria**

**May 16, 2018:** Nigeria has awarded a $6.68 billion contract to the China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation (CCECC) for work on a major segment of a railway linking the country’s commercial hub Lagos, in the southwest, and Kano in the north, Xinhua reported.

**Arctic Campaign**

**2015:** Russia’s Ministry for Development of the Russian Far East and China’s National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) signed a memorandum of understanding for cooperation on the Norther Sea Route.

**2016:** A Chinese company, China Communications Construction Company (CCCC), owned by the government, attempted to invest and build three new airports in Greenland.

**2017:** Beijing and Moscow declared a joint ambition to develop a “Polar Silk Road” as part of China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).


