Chronology of Possible Chinese Gray Area and Hybrid Warfare Operations

By Anthony H. Cordesman
With the assistance of Grace Hwang

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This analysis will be revised and update. Please provide comments to acordesman@gmail.com

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Chronology of Chinese Gray Area and Hybrid Warfare Operations

Anthony H. Cordesman with the assistance of Grace Hwang

This chronology is a working document that explores the range of Chinese competition with the United States, and focuses on China’s “gray area,” hybrid warfare, and multi-domain operations. It is a working document and will be updated over time. It takes a different approach to defining such operations from those used in a number of official sources and other reports, and its coverage is being steadily expanded in a number of areas.

It is also a working document that can only cover a limited number of events. As is discussed later in this chronology, the official and other open source reporting now available has serious limits. Many Chinese low-level operations, territorial and maritime claims, as well as political acts are only reported as serving commercial interests, reflecting local claims or interests, or supporting China’s broader security needs rather than as acts directed towards competition with the United States.

As a result, this chronology is designed to illustrate key patterns in such Chinese activity that competes directly and indirectly with the United States, and it is a starting point for a more comprehensive analysis. It does, however, highlight the need to look beyond the military and war fighting aspects of U.S. and Chinese competition, and the boundaries of some current definitions of “gray area,” hybrid warfare, and multi-domain operations.

It will be revised expanded overtime, and the authors will be grateful for any suggested revisions and additions. Please send these to Anthony H. Cordesman, Burke Chair in Strategy, at acordesman@gmail.com.


Any such chronology should be prefaced with the fact that there is no simple or reliable way to define the overall level of Chinese competition with the United States, or the range of Chinese “gray area” or “hybrid” operations that affect U.S. strategic interests. Competition occurs at a wide range of civil and military levels – as well as on a global basis – and “gray area” and hybrid operations are often only part of a much broader pattern of Chinese, U.S., and “third country” operations.

In practice, the impact of China’s gray zone, hybrid, and multi-domain operations on its strategic competition with the United States can be highly indirect, and the level of Chinese government direction of such activities, and the motives behind Chinese actions may be highly uncertain.

**Chinese Competition Cannot Be Compartmentalized in Military Terms**

Much of the unclassified or “open source” reporting now available is written in ways that compartmentalize China’s actions into separate streams of civil, economic, and military activities – rather than analyze all of the interactions between such activities and their cumulative impact. Military exercises involving air, land, and maritime activities are often described in terms of their potential impact on war fighting, but in ways that ignore their impact on Chinese influence and perceptions of China’s growing power. Key activities like the fortification of reefs in the South China Sea are often described in such terms even though the very fact China has carried out such actions has radically changed perceptions of China’s strength.
Similarly, the motives behind Chinese civil activities like investment and carrying out major civil projects overseas may only be reported in terms of their commercial merit or benefits, and not their overall strategic impact with the United States. The U.S. also may not be a direct target of Chinese operations. Many of the activities described in this chronology 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.

Other military and civil operations are covert or involve indirect action, competing through the support of unofficial disinformation campaigns, supposedly private business and NGO activities, or the support of foreign state and non-state actors. There almost certainly are many Chinese operations that are not described accurately in unclassified or “open source” literature, or they are not even reported at all.

It also is often hard to determine the level and location of Chinese decision-making that shapes a given form of competition, and there is a tendency to assume that such competition is driven by China’s most senior leaders – or a scribe some ideological motive – without providing any clear evidence that this is the case. Some competition clearly is the result of decisions at the highest level of the Chinese government. However, other competition may be initiated and carried out at lower and/or local levels – following broad patterns authorized at higher levels. Some competition may also be initiated at relatively low levels by non-state actors. Some Chinese “hacking” of computer and Internet systems seems to be an example.

This chronology does not an attempt to define the motivations and reasoning behind every event it lists, or to tie each event to some interpretation of Chinese grand strategy. It rather attempts to provide a broad historical timeline of Chinese military, economic, and civil actions that affect competition with the United States.

**Competition with China versus Competition with Russia and Lesser Powers**

It is important to note that this Chinese competition also has a unique character driven by China’s steadily growing resources. U.S., Russia, and China are often described as the world’s “superpowers.” Chinese efforts to compete with the United States differ sharply from those of Russia in several critical respects.

Russia’s resources are far more limited than when it was the Soviet Union and controlled a wide range of East European and Central Asian states. Russia now has a comparatively weak “petro-” economy that is highly dependent on gas and petroleum exports, as well as a post 1991 history of limited growth and development. China’s economic growth is reaching the point where it is approaching and may exceed the size of the U.S. economy. Both the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) and many non-governmental research centers estimate that China now spends some three times more per year on military forces than Russia.

By some metrics, China already has a larger industrial base, and it has become the world’s largest and most diverse trading power in manufactured goods. Other metrics show that China may well develop a larger technology base and larger STEM educational base, and it might reach technical parity with the U.S. at some point between 2030 and 2050. (These issues are analyzed in depth in a different Burke Chair report titled U.S. Competition with China and Russia: The Crisis-Driven Need to Change U.S. Strategy, https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/2020811.Burke_Chair.AHC_.GH9_.pdf.)
This broad process of Chinese economic growth alongside the rapid expansion of China’s industrial and technological base enables China’s growing expenditures on military forces. It shapes both China’s military and civil ability to compete and its ability to shape the course of future events, but it does not lend itself to a chronological analysis as distinguished from the analysis of broad trends. It also does not lend itself to a focus on military, gray area, or multi-domain operations. In fact, China’s civil development – and its expanding role in the global economy – may well have more impact overtime than its military and security efforts.

This helps explain why many aspects of such competition should not be referred to as some form of “warfare.” Many such operations are clearly intended to avoid or deter actual fighting and to avoid direct confrontation between China and the United States. They may be designed to work in tandem to advance Chinese strategic interests at the expanse of the United States. At the same time, China may actively be seeking to avoid any escalation to serious actual conflict – and especially to any form of conventional or nuclear warfare on either Chinese or U.S. territory.

**Broadening the Definition of Gray Area, Hybrid, Irregular and Multi-Domain Operations**

These issues have led to many debates over exactly how to define terms like “Gray Area,” “Hybrid,” and “Irregular Warfare.” In some ways, such debates are just as counterproductive as trying to separate the military and civil dimension of Chinese and Russian competition.

There are no rules or rigid patterns in Chinese competition with the United States, and there is no way to precisely define the differences between such operations, and a focus on creating a taxonomy which assumes that such rules exist is counterproductive. At a purely military level, the history of war is at least as much the history of irrational decisions, unpredictable attacks, and escalation as it is the result of the dictates from a prewar strategy. Today, this risk of irrational behavior is being steadily increased by major changes in great power relationships, the individual civil and military actions of great powers and lesser states, as well as the major shifts in military technology that have unpredictable real-world impacts.

Moreover, global competition means that much of the competition between the three great powers – the United States, China, and Russia – takes place in shaping the behavior of other countries and non-state actors at both the civil and military level. China is clearly seeking to develop its overall economy, and the supporting elements of its civil society, to compete directly with the United states. However, the United States and China – and to a lesser extent the United States and Russia – are involved in a constant process of both civil and military competition on a global basis where civil trade, investment, and presence in foreign countries plays a critical role. In many areas of military competition, they may not use their own forces at all – or use them in very limited ways – and economic competition may be more critical over time than military competition.

These broad streams of competition do not fit a narrow focus on the United States, China, and Russia – and they do not preclude many areas of cooperation and compromise between the competing powers. In many cases, specific areas of competition are shaped by opportunism and a process of action and interaction that will never fit any given attempt at military taxonomy or efforts to develop a clear doctrine.
Defining the Undefinable

Nevertheless, the efforts to develop theories about gray area operations, hybrid warfare, and multi-domain competition deserve attention. 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 then revised his definition in 2009 to describe “hybrid warfare” as:¹

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,²

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 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,³

… 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).”⁴

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 Evolving U.S. Official View of Multi-domain, and Gray Area and Hybrid Operations

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,⁵

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 (TRADOC) later released a revised version in 2018, which broadened the definition of competition but still emphasized military conflict.⁶
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.

**Taking the Right Approach to Defining Multi-Domain Warfare and Multi-Domain Operations**

It is important to again stress that many multi-domain operations will be civil and will not involve military forces in any way. Many others that do involve some use of military forces, aid, or arms transfers will be designed to avoid or minimize the risk of any direct clash between the U.S. and China or Russia, as well as to avoid any serious form of war or battle. China, in particular, is likely to use its growing economic strength to gain through the manipulation of “geoeconomics,” and both China and Russia are likely to use military force in ways more similar to the “geopolitical” competitions of the late 19th Century than the ideology-driven conflicts of the 20th Century, regardless of their continued use or non-use of Marxist and Communist rhetoric.

In this chronology, terms like “gray zone,” “hybrid,” “irregular,” and “multi-domain” are used to describe forms of hegemonic competition, and many operations that do not involve any form of combat. For the purposes of this analysis, these terms 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 as part of the current competition between the United States, China, and Russia.

This approach meets many of the criteria for multi-domain now being examined by the U.S. Joint staff, and that are used in the evolving definitions of “multi-domain” issued by the U.S. Army
Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC). For example, one TRADOC document issued in 2018 focused on actual battle:

**Multi-Domain** Battle requires converging political and military capabilities – lethal and nonlethal capabilities – across *multiple domains* in time and space to create windows of advantage that enable the Joint Force to maneuver and achieve objectives, exploit opportunities, or create dilemmas for the enemy.

Multi-Domain Battle necessitates that the U.S. view the operating environment, potential adversaries, and their capability sets from a different perspective. We must define the warfighting problem based on the complexities of the modern battlefield, the rate of change in terms of information access and decision, and the role that non-traditional or proxy/hybrid actors play to shape operations, especially prior to armed conflict. Multi-Domain Battle requires the ability to maneuver and deliver effects across all domains in order to develop and exploit battlefield opportunities across a much larger operational framework. It must include whole-of-government approaches and solutions to military problems and address the use of multinational partner capabilities and capacity.

Multi-Domain Battle entails collaboration and integration of comprehensive effects and enablers. The rapid pace of modern conflict requires a mission command construct for executing Multi-Domain Battle that includes common networks, tools, and knowledge products. It also necessitates mission orders, shared understanding and visualization of the battlespace, and subordinate commanders executing operations with disciplined initiative within the senior commander’s guidance that is empowered from above. Command and control is only a component of that philosophy.

To conduct Multi-Domain Battle, all domains and warfighting functions are integrated to deliver a holistic solution to the problem. Federated solutions will not work. We need a comprehensive, integrated approach inherent in our forces.

However, another 2017 TRADOC document took a broader and more realistic view that included civil, economic, and non-combat operations,

Four interrelated trends are shaping competition and conflict: adversaries are contesting all domains, the electromagnetic spectrum (EMS), and the information environment and U.S. dominance is not assured; smaller armies fight on an expanded battlefield that is increasingly lethal and hyperactive; nation-states have more difficulty in imposing their will within a politically, culturally, technologically, and strategically complex environment; and near-peer states more readily compete below armed conflict making deterrence more challenging. Dramatically increasing rates of urbanization and the strategic importance of cities also ensure that operations will take place within dense urban terrain. Adversaries, such as China and Russia, have leveraged these trends to expand the battlefield in time (a blurred distinction between peace and war), in domains (space and cyberspace), and in geography (now extended into the Strategic Support Area, including the homeland) to create tactical, operational, and strategic stand-off. For the purpose of this document, Russia serves as the pacing threat. In fact, Russia and China are different armies with distinct capabilities, but assessed to operate in a sufficiently similar manner to orient on their capabilities collectively.

In a state of continuous competition, China and Russia exploit the conditions of the operational environment to achieve their objectives without resorting to armed conflict by fracturing the U.S.’s alliances, partnerships, and resolve. They attempt to create stand-off through the integration of diplomatic and economic actions, unconventional and information warfare (social media, false narratives, cyber-attacks), and the actual or threatened employment of conventional forces. By creating instability within countries and alliances, China and Russia create political separation that results in strategic ambiguity reducing the speed of friendly recognition, decision, and reaction. Through these competitive actions, China and Russia believe they can achieve objectives below the threshold of armed conflict.

Press reports indicate that senior U.S. military planners are examining a similar approach to competition with China and Russia, although they continue to focus on the need for new approaches to multi-domain battle as critical elements in both deterring war and dealing with major levels of conflict if they occur. There are also some reports and background briefings that the NSC and the State Department are also examining new approaches to analyzing and countering all civil and military forms of competition with China and Russia.
The problem with even this definition, however, is that the military side of gray zone, hybrid, and multi-domain operations is only part of such operations. Many multi-domain operations will not involve the actual use of military force. Multi-domain operation will often be entirely civil or economic – using non-military means to achieve a strategic or tactical objective. It many other cases, the use of military forces will be demonstrative, involve sharply limited operations, or be entirely in support of other state or non-state actors. Multi-domain operations will be the tools of Sun Tzu rather than Clausewitz.

Moreover, most such operations are part of an enduring process of competition – and sometimes confrontation – between the U.S. and China, U.S. and Russia, or the U.S. against both China and Russia – that will occur indefinitely into the future, in many different ways, and in something approaching a global level.

Many are part of a “culture” of competition that is initiated and executed on something approaching a government-wide level without some master plan or detailed level of coordination. Some – like information warfare, using the Internet, or many lower-level industrial and technical espionage – will require mass efforts or be conducted on a target of opportunity level. This is clear from the number of lower level Chinese and Russian actors that have been identified in open source background briefings and from the number of reports on commercial, cultural, media, and trade efforts that are not associated in any way with the Chinese or Russian military.

In practice, finding new ways to compete that cut across the boundaries between civil, gray zone, and hybrid warfare has long been a critical part of American strategic competition with China. U.S. strategy must be based on the assumption that there are no fixed rules that define “gray zone” operations that clearly separate the use of military force from political and economic action or from competition based on a wide spectrum of different activities on a national, regional, and global basis. This assessment uses terminology like “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.

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 – alongside such forms of 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 their full range of activities cannot be an effective basis for shaping U.S. strategy.

As a result, one of the key issues for the U.S. is how to develop intelligence and analysis capabilities capable of tracking the full pattern of diverse Chinese civil-military competition, and assessing the relative impact, risk, and need for countermeasures. The one key question the U.S. will have to determine in the process is who in the Chinese government is actually making such decisions, what are the organizational centers of such activity, how do they relate to other countries on a global basis, and what U.S. response is needed if any. So far, it is unclear that there is any clear structure in the various Departments of the U.S. government – or in the U.S. intelligence community – that actually addresses Chinese strategic competition on this level.
The Need for Better U.S. Government Declassified and Open Source Reporting

It should be stressed that this chronology – and any open source attempt to list all of the aspects of Chinese competition with the United States – is seriously limited by the failure of the U.S. government to provide adequate open source reporting on Chinese activities.

This represents a fundamental failure within the United States government to respond to such Chinese activities and to compete in terms of the media, the Internet, and information warfare.

There has been extensive media and NGO reporting on Chinese disinformation efforts, efforts to influence elections, manipulation of trade terms, and other civil actions, but most such reporting is general in character, lacks detail, or relies on uncertain sources. As a result, the open source data now available are entries that are uncertain or ambiguous, and data on many actions have been omitted because they have never been publicly reported.

A full chronology – and analysis of Chinese and Russian actions – requires comprehensive open source reporting by the U.S. government at both the civil and military levels. It must draw upon a wide range of classified intelligence and other analysis to be properly accurate and comprehensive. Only the United States government can declassify suitable intelligence and official reporting, as well as make the full patterns of Chinese activity clear.

Such efforts seem more than justified and do not present meaningful security risks. The U.S. can easily declassify the necessary data without revealing sources and methods. The open source results would be a key tool in informing U.S. policymakers and analysts, and in informing strategic partners and other countries, media, and analysts. As other declassified U.S. reports have shown, information is a powerful weapon against concealment and disinformation.
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Organizing the Chronology by Campaign

The chronology that follows 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 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, the Indo-Pacific campaign, the Persian/Arab Gulf campaign, the Precision Strike campaign, a Russian-Relations campaign, a Separatist campaign, and an Arctic campaign.

**Key Chinese Gray Area, Hybrid, and Multidomain “Campaigns”**

When it comes to this chronology, it focuses on several key areas of Chinese competition with the United States, which are equivalent to campaigns in terms of their activity and intensity:

- **The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) campaign** is China’s effort 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 current chronology lists the official recognized projects under the BRI by country; however, there are many projects – including many currently in the approval process that may not have been listed.

- **The Trade War campaign** is the use of economic gray zone operations against the United States, which has partly devolved into a tit-for-tat exchange on traded goods between China and United States, but also involves a Chinese government directed set of trade, investment, aid, and loan activities in many countries throughout the world and especially in Asia. It is linked to China’s effort to develop new trade organization, and increase its influence in existing international and regional organizations, and create new trade groups.
The Espionage campaign involves a wide range of conventional intelligence activities, but it also involves a major effort to acquire military and industrial technology, penetrate into U.S. research and development centers, university and teaching institutions and U.S. NGOs and corporation. For example, China is now targeting the development of technological innovation from the United States. For example, 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 advance Chinese interests, counter any criticism of the Chinese state, and selective attack or undermine the U.S. For example, it targets 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 - South China Sea - campaign now focuses on China’s geopolitical claims to artificial islands and its maritime and air zones in the South China Sea and East China Sea and that affect several key countries in the Pacific and Southeast Asia. China conducts extensive gray zone operations, including aggressive military demonstrations of force and illegal construction of reefs. It is, however, steadily expanding to deal with Taiwan, claims against Japan, other island chains in the Pacific, Australia, the Indian Ocean Area, the Gulf and Red Sea, maritime time, naval/air exercises, and port development and facilities. It combines military and diplomatic pressure with continuing efforts to assert claims to islands, and sea and air control, in the region.

The Taiwan Campaign represents China’s most important claim to a specific territory and to what some other nations recognize as a separate country. It is a campaign that has been critical to China since the defeat of the Kuomintang on the Chinese mainland and a key source of tension with the United States. It has a major direct military dimension, its own military balance, and represents what may be the most critical area in terms of an actual potential conflict between the United States and China.

The Indo-Pacific campaign, where China is increasing its basing and power projection capabilities in the Indian Ocean, its ability to counter Indian and U.S. naval power, basing facilities and port access from Southeast Asia to Pakistan, and its capabilities to project forces into India in disputed land border areas.

The Persian/Arab Gulf and energy supply campaign, where China is expanding its military and commercial influence in the Gulf, has established a base and port in Djibouti in the Red Sea, anti-piracy forces near Somalia, and may be considering a major commercial and arms trade deal with Iran. The campaign is tied to efforts to reduce its vulnerability to reduction in its oil and gas imports from the Gulf through measures like a Russian pipeline, and other shifts in its balance of energy imports.

The Precision Strike campaign seeks to give China countervailing power by acquiring a wide-ranging family of precision guide weapons – ranging from drones and short-range missiles to “Assassin’s mace” -like weapons such as hypersonic glide weapons and long-range ballistic missiles – with conventional, nuclear, and dual capable warhead delivery. These systems may allow China to compensate for U.S. superiority in naval forces and conventional power projection capability in a wide range of scenarios – ranging from Taiwan and anti-carrier operations in the South China Sea to making China a far more
serious strategic nuclear power and one that must be taken far more seriously in terms of deterrence, arms control, and war fighting.

- *The Russian-Relations/Strategic Partnership* campaign is China’s attempt to work with Russia to help China compete with the United States and the West. It involves major technology and transfers from Russia and steadily growing cooperation in exercises - especially in the in the Pacific

- *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 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.

It should be noted that if all the events were organized into one chronology, the key patterns in Chinese activity would not be clear. At the same time, such a unified chronology would show a steady rise in the number of events over time, and in the level of Chinese competition that impact on both the United States and a wide range of other nations.

**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.

**Greece**

**2016:** Greece sold 51% equity of the Port of Piraeus to the China Ocean Shipping (Group) Company (COSCO).

**Hungary**

**June 22, 2020:** Hungary signs a $2.1 billion loan with China to start construction on the Budapest-Belgrade Railway, which will connect Budapest to the Chinese-owned Greek port of Piraeus.

**Serbia**

**May 2015:** The Chinese state-owned enterprise China Road and Bridge Corporation (CRBC) began construction on the Belgrade-Montenegro Bar Port Motorway, which will connect the Montenegrin port city of Bar with the Serbian capital of Belgrade.

**United Kingdom**

**January 2017:** The first train traveled from China to the United Kingdom, making London the 15th European city with direct rail links to China as part of the Europe-China Rail Link I and II.
Angola

August 2014: Construction of the Benguela Railway in Angola is completed by the China Railway 20 Bureau Group Corporation (CR20).

Djibouti

February 2013: Djibouti sells 23.5% of its 66.66% stake in the Doraleh Container Terminal (DCT) to China Merchants Port Holdings (CMP), the Hong Kong-based subsidiary of the state-owned conglomerate China Merchants Group.

January 2017: China finances a $4 billion, 756 kilometers (470 miles) railway between Djibouti and Addis Ababa, the continent’s first transnational electric railway.

July 5, 2018: China and Djibouti opened the first phase of the Djibouti International Free Trade Zone (DIFTZ), a $3.5 billion project that spans an area of 4,800 hectares.

Chad

November 2017: China Railway Design Corporation (CRDC) and China Friendship Development International Engineering Design & Consultation Company (FDDC) signed a deal with Sudan to construct the Chad-Cameroon & Chad-Sudan Railway.

Ethiopia

September 2015: The Addis Ababa Light Rail Transit (AALRT) is commissioned in Ethiopia. The China Railway Engineering Corporation Limited (CREC) constructed the project at a cost of 475 million U.S. dollars, with 85 percent of funding coming from the Export-Import Bank of China.

Kenya

December 2014: Construction began by the China Road and Bridge Corporation (CRBC) to build the Mombasa-Nairobi Standard Gauge Railway, which connects Mombasa, the largest port in East Africa, and Nairobi, the capital city of Kenya.

Nigeria

December 2014: Construction of the Abuja-Kaduna rail line in Nigeria is completed by the China Civil and Engineering Construction Company (CCECC).

July 2016: China and Nigeria agree to an $11 billion contract to build the Lagos-Calabar coastal railway, which will connect Lagos to the southern city of Calabar.

January 2018: Nigeria agrees to a $550 million deal to buy Chinese communication satellites with 15% of the cost covered by the China Exim Bank and the satellite manufacturer, China Great Wall.

May 2018: The China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation (CCECC), a subsidiary of Chinese state rail builder China Railway Construction Corporation wins a $6.7 billion contract to construct the Lagos-Kano railway in Nigeria.

July 2018: The Abuja Rail Mass Transit Phase I opens in Nigeria. The system was built by the China Civil Engineering and Construction Corp at a cost of $824 million and was partly funded by loans from the Export-Import Bank of China, which accounts for 60 percent of the project. The total project will be split into six phases.
June 2020: China agrees to loan $1.3 billion to Nigeria to construct the Ibadan-Kano standard gauge railway.

Sudan

January 2015: The Khartoum-Port Sudan Railway begins service after Sudan bought two trains from China at a total cost of around $13 million, which will be paid over about four years.

Uganda

December 2013: Construction begins on the Karuma hydropower plant, which is built on the Nile river near Kampala, Uganda. The power plant cost an estimated 568 million U.S. dollars, with 85 percent in a concessional loan from the Export-Import Bank of China.

Zimbabwe


Egypt

March 2019: The Suez Canal Economic Zone becomes part of the Belt and Road Initiative.

Iran

August 2017: China signs a contract with Iran to finance 88% of the Tehran-Mashhad Rail project, which will connect Tehran to the eastern city of Mashhad by an electric rail.

Israel

March 2015: Shanghai International Port Group wins the bid (as the sole bidder) to build the Haifa Port.

Oman

November 2018: The Chinese-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) increases funding support for the Duqm Port project in Oman.

Saudi Arabia

March 2015: Construction begins on the Dammam Riyadh Freight Line Phase 2 with the China Railway Construction Corporation.

United Arab Emirates

November 2016: Construction begins on the Hassyan Clean Coal Project with China’s Harbin Electric International.

December 2018: China Ocean Shipping (Group) Company (COSCO) is granted access to develop the Khalifa Port Terminal 2.

Turkey

September 2015: China Ocean Shipping (Group) Company (COSCO) and China Merchants Holding along with a third investor paid almost $1 billion for a controlling stake of the Kumport Terminal.
Russia

September 2013: The China National Petroleum Corps (CNPC) bought a 20% stake in Russian Novatek’s $20 billion Yamal LNG project, which will construct a liquefied natural gas (LNG) plant with an output capacity of around 16.5 million tons per year, using the South Tambey Field in Russia.

Georgia

September 2015: Georgia and China finalize the Nenskra Hydropower Plant project, with loans totaling $414 million from the Asian Development Bank and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank.

June 2017: Construction starts on the Batumi Bypass Road, a new highway to connect Georgia’s hinterland to the port city of Batumi through a series of mountain tunnels. The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) agreed to provide $114 million for the project.

Kazakhstan

May 2017: China and Kazakhstan sign a deal to launch the Khorgos Gateway dry port, which connects Kazakhstan to China by rail. Khorgos Eastern Gate is a Special Economic Zone that is exempt from import tariffs, land tax, property tax and value-added tax. The rail also connect to the Aktau port which is also a SEZ.


Tajikistan

December 2016: The Dushanbe-Uzbekistan Border Road Improvement Road project, a rehabilitation of a 5km section of the road within Dushanbe, begins.

March 2019: The first phase started to rehabilitate the Nurek Hydropower Plant in Tajikistan with a $60 million debt finance from the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB).

Uzbekistan

September 2013: The China Railway Tunnel Group signed a construction contract worth $455 million to work on the Agren-Pap Railway line, which is electrified railway line in eastern Uzbekistan that connects the city of Agren and Pap.

Bangladesh

May 2018: China Railway Design Corporation signs agreement to construct the Dhaka-Chittagong high-speed rail.

July 3, 2018: The Padma Rail Link Project is launched by the Bangladesh government with a $2.67 billion loan from China to build a 169 km road and railway connecting Dhaka to Jessore.

August 2019: The China National Machinery Import and Export Corporation (CMC) and Bangladesh’s North-West Power Generation Company (NWPGC) sign a $400 million joint venture to build renewable energy projects to provide a total 500 megawatts of power to Bangladesh by 2023.
Pakistan

**May 2013:** Construction begins on the Gwadar Port, deep-sea port and located in a free trade area, which is the flagship project of the $62 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor project.

**August 2013:** The Pakistani government announced the establishment of the Gadani Power Project with financing from China.

**2017:** The project was cancelled by China due to wasteful management.

**November 2013:** Oracle Coalfields signed a MOU with Chinese construction company SEPCO to build the Thar Mine Mouth Oracle Power Plant.

**May 2014:** Agreement signed between China and Pakistan to build the Orange Line Metro Lahore, Pakistan’s first mass transit system.

**May 2014:** Construction begins for the Sahiwal Coal Power Project with the China Huaneng Group.

**2015:** Construction begins on the HydroChina Dawood Wind Power Project by the Chinese firm HydroChina.

**January 2015:** China Three Gorges Corporation won the right to develop the Kohala Hydel project.

**March 2015:** Construction begins on the UEP Wind Farm with a Hong-Kong listed United Energy Group (UEG).

**April 2015:** Construction begins on the Sachel Wind Farm with a loan agreement from the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC).

**April 2015:** The Sahiwal Coal Power Project is announced with the Huaneng Shandong Rui Group.

**May 2015:** Construction begins for the Pakistan Port Qasim Power Project with a $1.56 billion loan from Exim Bank of China.

**May 2015:** Construction begins for the Quaid-e-Azim Solar Park with engineering, procurement, and construction by the Chinese TBEA Xinjiang SunOasis Co. Ltd.

**September 2015:** China Road and Bridge Construction finishes the reconstruction of the Karakoram Highway.

**November 2015:** Construction begins on the Balloki Power Plant with China’s Harbin Electric Company.

**December 2015:** China Railway Construction Corporation wins the $1.46 billion contract to build the Karachi-Lahore motorway.

The first phase of construction from Karachi to Hyderabad is part of the M-9 project. The second section from Faisalabad-Multan is part of the M-4 project. The M-5 project connects Multan to Sukkur. The M-8 project connects Sukkur to Larkana.

**2016:** The Khunjerab Railway is approved to be part of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.
April 2016: Construction began on the Engro Thar Block II Power Plant, a new coal-fired power station located in the Tharparkar district, Sindh, Pakistan. The 660MW power plant is part of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

May 2016: Construction begins on the Hakla-Dera Ismail Motorway as part of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

August 2016: The government of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province sign an agreement with SK Hydro Private Ltd. and the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China to build the Suki Kinari Hydropower project.

November 2016: The China Communication Construction Company (CCCC) and the China Harbour Engineering Company (CHEC) submit a proposal for the Quetta Mass Transit project.

December 2016: The Keti Bunder Port Project and the Karachi Circular Railway are approved to be part of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

May 2017: The Havelian Dry Port Project begins after approval of Chinese financing.

January 2017: The World Bank and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) signed a co-financing agreement, in which the World Bank will provide a loan of $390 million and the AIIB will provide a loan of $300 million, to fund the 5th extension of the Tarbela Hydropower Extension Project in Pakistan.

July 2017: A MOU was signed for the Rahim Yar Khan Power Plant between the Punjab government and China’s Huaneng Group.

January 2019: The project was cancelled by the Pakistani delegation to for Pakistan’s power market.

February 2018: The Bostan Industrial Estate is declared an economic zone under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

May 2018: An agreement was signed between China and Pakistan to construct the Matiari-Lahore Transmission Line Project.

November 2018: The ICT Model Industrial Zone is established as part of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

February 2019: The Pakistan-China Fiber Optic Project, an 820-kilometer long fiber optic cable project from Rawalpindi to Khunjerab, is made active for commercial use.

March 2019: Construction begins on the Gwadar International Airport with a Chinese loan of $230 million.

June 2019: Mipur special economic zone (SEZ) is established under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

December 2019: Construction begins for the Moqpondass special economic zone (SEZ).

January 2020: The Allama Iqbal Industrial City is designated a special economic zone (SEZ) under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

January 2020: The Pak-China Technical and Vocational Institute begins construction and will be fully funded by China.
May 2020: Pakistan awards the contract to build the Diamer-Bhasha dam, a 320 kilometer dam spanning from Pakistan’s border with China, to a joint venture of Power Construction Corporation of China and the Frontier Works Organization of Pakistan after China agreed to lend money for the project.

July 2020: Pakistan and China signed an agreement to construct the 700 MW Azad Pattan Hydel Power project in Pakistan occupied Kashmir.

August 2020: The China Harbour Engineering Company wins bid to construct the Dhabeji special economic zone (SEZ).

September 2020: China and Pakistan sign an agreement to construct the Rashakai special economic zone (SEZ) under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

India

2016: The World Bank and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank agree to fund the Amaravati Sustainable capital city.

July 24, 2019: After the World Bank pulled out of the agreement, AIIB also withdraws funding.

July 2017: The China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) approved a $329 million loan to build access roads to 4,000 villages in Gujarat in India known as the Gujarat Rural Roads (MMGSY) Project.

April 2018: The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank approved $140 million funding for the Madhya Pradesh Rural Connectivity Project.

December 2019: Chinese Firm CCRC corporation ltd. submits bid to build the Mumbai Metro Line 4.

June 20, 2020: The Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority scraps Chinese bid following clashes between China and India along the border.

Cambodia

October 2018: All 8 turbines of the 400-megawatt Lower Sesan II Hydropower Plant became operational in Cambodia as part of a joint venture among China's Huaneng Hydrolancang International Energy holding 51 percent of the stake, Cambodia's Royal Group owning 39 percent and Vietnamese EVN International Joint Stock Company possessing 10 percent.

Indonesia

January 2015: Construction begins on the Kuala Tanjung Port with the Zhejiang Provincial Seaport Investment & Operation Group Co, Ltd.

January 2016: Construction begins the Jakarta-Bandung Railway in Indonesia by the Kereta Cepat Indonesia China (KCIC), which consists of Pilar Sinergi BUMN Indonesia (owning 60 percent stake) and China's largest rail operator China Railway International Co Ltd (owning 40 percent).

November 2017: China invests in the Lake Toba Tourism District.

April 2018: China signs agreement to construct the International Airport Lembeh.
May 2018: The firm, China Jingye, wins the bid to build MNC Lido City, an entertainment and lifestyle development.

May 2018: Power China signed an agreement to construct Kayan River Hydropower Plant.

Laos

July 2020: Construction begins in Laos on the Vientane-Boten Railway, which will be built by the China Railway Construction Group Co., Ltd. (CRCG).

Malaysia

2014: Country Garden Holdings Ltd., a private Chinese developing firm, begins construction on Forest City, a new urban development made up of four man-made islands, in the Iskandar Malaysia Special Economic Zone in Johor, Malaysia.

February 2014: Construction begins to create Southeast Asia’s largest private marina, Melaka Gateway, which will house a maritime high-tech park and a free trade zone on four islands in Malaysia.

May 2018: The new government elected in Malaysia halts the Kuala Lumpur-Singapore High Speed Rail project with China.

October 2018: Malaysia awards the China Railway Construction Corporation, the China Railway Engineering Corporation, and the China Communications Construction Company to start construction on the Gemas-Johor Bahru Railway.

April 2019: China and Malaysia resume East Coast Rail Link (ECRL) project after it was temporarily halted when former Prime Minister Najib was ousted for corruption and quid pro quo agreement with Chinese firms in 2018.

Myanmar

December 2006: The Burmese Ministry of Electric Power No. 1 signed a MOU with the China Power Investment Corporation to build the Myitsone Dam.

September 2011: Under the new administration of Thein Sein, the project has been suspended.

2016: China’s CITIC Group Corporation won contracts to dredge a deep sea port and to create a special economic zone (SEZ) in Kyaukpyu.

Thailand

September 2019: Construction begins on the Bangkok-Nong Khai Railway in Thailand with China responsible for installing systems, design and the procurement of trains. The project was delayed in 2016 when Thailand rejected Chinese financing due to high interest rates.

Sri Lanka

August 2016: Construction begins on the $1.4 billion Port City project by China Communication Construction Company (CCCC) in Sri Lanka.

July 2017: Sri Lanka signs a $1.1 billion deal with China, giving a state-run Chinese company a 99-year lease on the Hambantota port and about 15,000 acres nearby for an industrial zone after the Sri Lankan government could not repay its loans to China.
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
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

East China Sea - Senkaku/Daioyu Islands

September 7, 2010: Chinese trawler collides with Japanese Coast Guard patrol boats near the Senkaku/Daioyu Islands.
**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 the maritime standoff with Japan, 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.

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

**East China Sea - Miyako Strait**

**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.

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

**1955:** Chiang Kai-Shek’s retreat to Taiwan begins the historical period when maritime claims became recognized; whereas prior, sovereignty over maritime territory was first-pick occupational presence.

**2002:** ASEAN and China signed the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea to establish a framework for the code of conduct in the South China Sea.

**May 2009:** Malaysia and Vietnam sent a joint submission to the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf outlining some of their claims in the South China Sea.

**2009:** China responded by submitting a map containing the “nine-dash line,” which outlines the edges of the South China Sea and encompasses all of the Sea’s territorial features as well as the vast majority of its waters. China claims it has sovereignty over the islands in the South China Sea and the adjacent waters.

**South China Sea - Parcel Islands**

**1947:** China claimed the Woody Island, forcing France and Vietnam to occupy Pattle Island.

**January 19, 1974:** In the Battle of the Parcel Islands, the naval forces of China and Vietnam compete over the Parcel Islands. China gained several features belonging to Vietnam, and Vietnam seized several other unoccupied features.

**May 9, 2014:** China and Vietnam clash over disputed islands located south of the Parcel Islands, which are claimed by Vietnam. Ships from the two countries collide in the waters of the South China Sea.

**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.”
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 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.

South China Sea - Spratley Islands

1946: China established itself on a few Spratley Islands.

1988: China forcibly occupied Johnson Reef, killing several dozen Vietnamese soldiers.

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.

China expresses anger at U.S. naval ship sailing by artificial reefs Beijing is building among disputed Spratly Islands in South China Sea.

August 2017: The John S. McCain, passed near Mischief Reef in the Spratley Islands, 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.

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.

Philippines – Scarborough Shoal

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.

May 3, 2012: China quarantines bananas from the Philippines.

June 15, 2012: China increase ships present near the Scarborough Shoal reef.

June 18, 2012: China and the Philippines agree to withdraw from the Scarborough Shoal areas; however, Chinese boats remain after Filipino forces withdraw.


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.

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.

June 9, 2019: A Philippine fishing vessel was anchored in the Reed Bank when it was rammed by a Chinese vessel, Yuemaobinyu 42212, 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.

Indonesia - Natuna Island

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.

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.

Malaysia - Luconia Shoals

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.

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.

Vietnam

July 5, 2017: Vietnam began drilling for oil in the region, known to Vietnam as Block 136-03 and known to China as Wanan Bei-21. China claimed the rights to the area was sold to a Hong Kong-listed company called Brightoil.

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

July 24, 2017: Vietnam halts drilling after China threatens military action.

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

To track Chinese artificial islands, see CSIS’s Asia Maritime’s Transparency Initiative.10

Taiwan Campaign

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.
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.

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.

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.

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.”

February 28, 2020: A PLAAF H-6 bomber transited through the Bashi Channel south of Taiwan before circling back and returning to base.

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

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.

September 18, 2020: China conducted “real combat” drills in Taiwanese air space. China flew two bombers and 16 fighters that crossed the median line of the Taiwan Strait. The drills follow Chinese dissatisfaction with U.S. senior official visit to Taiwan.

September 17, 2020: U.S. Undersecretary of State Keith Krach visits Taiwan. He is the most senior State Department official to visit Taiwan in 41 years.

The Indo-Pacific Campaign

Indian Ocean

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.

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.

Pakistan

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

August 5, 2019: India revokes special status for Kashmir from Article 370, which allows the Indian state of Jammu & Kashmir to make its own laws.

Disputed Land Border with India

1993: The Line of Actual Control (LAC) was established after the 1962 Sino-Indian War as a loose demarcation line separating China and India. According to the agreement, neither side can open fire within 2 kilometers of the LAC.

May 5, 2020: 250 Chinese and Indian soldiers clashed with melee weapons near Pangong Tso lake.

May 9, 2020: 150 Chinese and Indian soldiers clashed with melee weapons in North Sikkim.

June 9, 2020: Indian and Chinese Troops begin partial disengagement from some standoff points along the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

June 15, 2020: After an agreement between both sides, the Indian Army attempted to oversee the removal of two tents erected by the Chinese inside the Galwan Valley, which had transgressed the LAC. However, Chinese soldiers refused and attacked with melee weapons. The incident resulted in the death of 20 Indian soldiers and 12 PLA soldiers.
August 31, 2020: The Chinese PLA attempted to alter the Line of Actual Control (LAC) into Eastern Ladakh. Chinese forces attempted to secure the southern bank of the Pangong Lake.

However, the Indian Army pushed back, and no casualties occurred.

September 10, 2020: The Foreign Ministers of China and India met in Moscow to deescalate tensions along the LAC.

The Persian/Arab Gulf and Energy Supply Campaign

1999: China and Saudi Arabia sign a strategic oil cooperation agreement.

Saudi fossil fuel exports to China were worth $1.5 billion in 2000 and over $25 billion in 2010.

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.

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

February 2019: During Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman’s visit to China, several MOUs were signed for investment, such as one between Saudi Aramco and Norinco to build a $10 billion refinery in Liaoning.

July 13, 2020: An 18-page draft agreement between China and Iran outline billions of dollars of Chinese investments in Iran’s energy and military sector.

The Precision Strike Campaign

1980: China deploys the DF-4, an intermediate to intercontinental ballistic missile (IRBM/ICBM).

1981: China completes the development of the DF-5, a silo-based intercontinental-ballistic missile.

1990: China completes the development of the DF-15, a short-range ballistic missile.

1991: China deploys the DF-21 (Dong-Feng 21), a solid-fuel rocket, single warhead medium-range ballistic missile (MRBM).

1992: China enters the DF-11, a short-range ballistic missile, into service.

1995: The term shashoujian or “Assassin’s mace” first appeared in the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) military doctrines when China pursued its “two bombs and one satellite” program. Assassin’s mace refers to the capability to defeat a superior adversary in modern high-tech warfare.

1996: China enters into service the Hong Niao series (-1/-2/-3) of short- and intermediate-range cruise missiles.

June 2000: China’s secret project, assigned the code number 998, to develop “Assassin’s mace” was leaked. The program expanded to include the development of strategic weapons in order to achieve a “winning edge” against the United States.

2006: China deploys the DF-31, and intercontinental-range ballistic missile.

August 16, 2012: China conducts the first successful test of the JL-2, a second-generation submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM).
August 2013: China enters the DF-12, a short-range surface-to-surface tactical missile, into service.

April 2015: China deployed the YJ-18 antiship cruise missile (ASCM), which increased China’s A2AD capabilities in the Western Pacific.

September 2015: China showcases the DF-16, a short-range ballistic missile, at a military day parade.

September 2015: China showcases the DF-26, an intermediate-range ballistic missile, at a military day parade.

December 19, 2015: China’s People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) conducts its first successful patrol with its Type-094 Jin-class nuclear-powered ballistic submarine.

September 2016: China’s PLAAF Commander confirms China’s development of the next-generation, long-range strike bomber, which will be named Xian H-20. The H-20 is projected to be a subsonic stealth bomber which can carry nuclear weapons and 20 tons of payload capacity with a range of 12,000 kilometers. The project is expected to be completed in 2025.

September 2019: China showcases the first public appearance of the DF-41, an intercontinental-ballistic missile, which is still in development.

October 2019: China showcases the Dong Feng 17 (DF-17), at China’s National Day parade. The DF-17 is China’s first hypersonic boost-glide vehicle-equipped missile system.

October 2019: China showcases the latest variant of its H-6 bomber plane, the H-6N, at China’s National Day parade. The new H-6N bomber could carry the CJ-100 – the PLA’s third-generation ground-attack cruise missile – or the WZ-0 supersonic stealth spy drone and increase the maximum strike range to 6,000 km. The H-6N bomber is also China’s first nuclear capable air-to-air refueling bomber.

September 1, 2020: The U.S. Department of Defense released its annual report to Congress on the military and security developments of China.11

The report details that as of September 2019, China is in possession of about 750 to 1,500 short-range ballistic missiles capable of being launched up to 621 miles, about 150 to 450 medium-range ballistic missiles that can travel up to 1,864 miles, and about 270 to 540 ground-launched land-attack cruise missiles.

China also possess the DF-26 missile, or the “carrier killer,” which is capable of conducting conventional and nuclear precision strikes against ground targets as well as conventional strikes against naval targets in the western Pacific and Indian Oceans and the South China Sea.

September 4, 2020: China’s “experimental reusable spacecraft” completed its first test flight after orbiting the planet for two days. The spacecraft was launched with a Long March-2F rocket.

A military source suggests the spacecraft is part of the “Shenlong space plane project,” which could have military applications, such as striking satellites.

September 8, 2020: A photo was captured of a possible test flight of China’s FC-31 Gyrfalcon stealth fighter prototype, which aims to rival the U.S. F-35 fighter jets.
Russian-Relations/Strategic Partnership 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.

December 2009: China initiated a 3,000 km long “Power of Siberia” natural gas pipeline linking Russian Siberian oil fields to northeast China.

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.

Arctic Campaign

2004: China builds a research base, the Yellow River Station, on Svalbard Island.


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).

January 26, 2018: The State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) published a white paper on China’s Arctic Policy proclaiming itself as a “near-Arctic state.”

Summary Maps of Chinese Campaigns

Maps of the general location of these campaigns are shown below – along with a summary map of the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative.
Chronology of Chinese Gray Zone Operations


