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## What Is To Be Done About China's Threats Against Taiwan And/ Or The Philippines

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### ABSTRACT

Competition between United States and China in lieu of Taiwan and Philippine issue has aggravated in the recent times, very specifically due to Chinese assertions in the South China sea and its conflicting posture in the region. Enhanced military presence, employment of modern warfare technologies, cyber surveillance and disinformation campaigns are being employed by the Chinese government to attain its hegemonic objectives; however, these developments are critical for the US assertions in the realm of regional hegemony. China considers Taiwan as a core element of its One China policy; however, the US backs Taiwanese government, and has pledged to protect it under the Taiwan Relations Act 1979. Likewise, China is influencing Philippines through indirect approaches, with the sole objective to strip off its sovereignty. Since Beijing is cumulatively employing traditional and non-traditional means to dominate the region; whilst, expose the American vulnerabilities, the US is bound to strengthen deterrence in the region in the realm of information warfare. Mere application of military strategies will not lead US to secure its interests in the region, while simultaneously weakening the sovereignty and integrity of Taiwan and Philippines.

**Keywords:** Taiwan, China, Philippines, South China Sea, East Asia, First Island Chain

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### INTRODUCTION

The Indo-Pacific region has become the primary arena of most important strategic competition in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The boundaries of regional stability have shifted as China has become more assertive in its dealings with Taiwan and is slowly gaining influence in the South China Sea, particularly in the exclusive economic zone of the Philippines (Raska, 2019). To the policymakers of Washington, these developments are a critical question: *What is to be done in response to the threats of*

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*China to Taiwan and the Philippines?* It is an international structural issue, not simply a regional one. The actions of the United States in the Asian region are threatening the post-World War II order of sovereignty, democracy, freedom of navigation, and the alliance system that the United States leads.

Where the United States - Philippines Mutual Defense Treaty (1951) obliges both sides to act in the case of external armed attacks, the Taiwan Relations Act (1979) specifies that the United States must retain the capability to protect Taiwan (Voon, 2006). The past few years have seen a series of confrontations with China that have made latent tensions a possible flashpoint (encirclement exercises around Taiwan, harassment of Philippine vessels at Second Thomas Shoal, and Chinese grey zone actions in the waters near the Senkaku Islands). All these challenges have been enhanced during the Information Age. The coercion of China has now become a psychological warfare, cyber operations, and disinformation weapon aimed at undermining opposition even before shooting a bullet after the traditional power (Rehmat, 2024; Hamid et al., 2025). This kind of hybrid environment requires a multifaceted framework that connects information campaigns, political agendas and military operations and analyses them together. *Betts' as ends-mean coherence approach* defines this linkage between political ends and military means as the ultimate essence of strategy (Betts, 2000). China's approach in this information age is to deliberately break this linkage via utilizing various non-kinetic tools (such as disinformation campaigns, cyber warfare) to achieve its political objectives. This shows that China has recognized the limitations of military force in achieving its political goals and is fundamentally trying to create a coherence problem between the available means and desired end. So, the United States is facing an adversary that is politically aspirational, tactically adaptable, and strategically patient.

### **Problem Statement**

China has adopted an assertive approach with respect to its relationship with Taiwan and Philippines, which is creating challenges in terms of regional harmony, while aggravating its competition with the United States. Beijing is blending traditional warfare with non-traditional strategies, encompassing the use of force for limited operations, disinformation campaigns, cyber warfare and AI-enabled weapon systems, lethal autonomous weapons, robots and drones for the attainment of its respective objectives in air, water and land. This tendency has created problems for the US policymakers, ascertaining the very fact as how they must secure American objectives in the region, while concurrently defend Philippines and Taiwan in case of an attack from China.

### **Research Questions**

This research study has following underlying research questions;

1. How an integrated Chinese strategy against Taiwan and Philippines impact their survival and tendency to defend their autonomy and sovereignty in lieu of US cooperation?

2. How China's multi-domain warfare are influencing the morale and survivability of Taiwanese and Philippines defence forces?
3. What are the policy options for the United States to ensure the attainment of its objectives, in response to Chinese assertions across the region?

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study has employed qualitative methodology for carrying out this research work. Secondary sources of data have been consulted, which include books, research articles and policy papers of the reputed international journals. Moreover, data analysis has been carried out through document analysis. Contextual patterns of theme aligned with this research work were analyzed in order to comprehensive analyze the core research problem.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Deterrence theory is being applied on this research study in order to objectively evaluate the Chinese assertions in the Indo-Pacific region, its relationship with Taiwan and Philippines and its contestation with the United States in the region. Deterrence theory is grounded in the realist school of thought and establishes the idea that an adversary can be prevented from undertaking objectionable and unwanted actions by authentically intimidating to take actions that may overshadow the projected advancements and gains. Although this theory was initially developed in lieu of traditional and nuclear conflicts; its remains applicable by necessitating adaptive tendencies to Beijing's coercive actions towards Philippines and Taiwan. It can be ascertained that the regional strategies adopted by Beijing highlights core constraints associated with Classical Deterrence, which is its overt focus towards intensified conflicts. Since China has been operating and taking actions below the threshold of a traditional conflict through its maritime assertions in the South China sea, economic and technological leverage, aerial and military actions; it has been predominantly successful in attainment of its respective aspirations, without engaging in a full-scale conflict with either Taiwan or Philippine at the behest of United States. From a theoretical perspective, this tendency highlights Chinese calculations indicating that deterrence by chastisement can be uncertain and feeble at the sub-conflict domain; however, deterrence due to renunciation remains unfinished due to capacity gaps amongst the regional partners.

On the other hand, the US policy dilemma is effectively highlighted by the application of Deterrence theory. This conflicting situation amongst China against the Taiwan, Philippines and United States necessitates strengthening of deterrence by denial by enhancing the military capacity of both Taiwan and Philippines to endure Chinese coercion and intimidation during their frequent actions. This tendency can be attained by strengthening and frequently investing in the intelligence networks, aerial, marine and regular defense forces, integrated surveillance mechanism and cyber security of both states. Moreover, gray-zone has to be averted by ensuring the continued presence of the forces, which will eventually lower down the projected benefits of Beijing in the region. Normalization

of unlawful aggression and control by the Chinese forces has to be challenged on ground, as well as the international legal forums. Moreover, the application of punishment oriented deterrence has to be ensured in the gray area across the region. US and its associated partners must devise an integrated strategy indicating to Beijing that the ongoing aggression and hostile actions of PLA will eventually lead to an accumulative cost instead of a merely intimidating military posture. This cost can range from a legal action against the Chinese assertions to military actions, diplomatic sanctions, economic and technological penalties and any other response, that may be deemed below the threshold of a full-scale military conflict. It further needs to be ascertained that the Extended Deterrence remains a key component of this comprehensive strategy. While the Chinese aggression is predominantly aimed at Taiwan and Philippines, it is simultaneously testing the US alliance pledge to both these states; and Deterrence theory emphasizes that intimidation and coercion becomes more apparent, when the opponent deems the readiness of the defender as questionable, if it is acting on the behalf of partners. Hence, the forward presence, the apparent integration of the alliance and institutional responses are a prerequisite to the credibility and authenticity of American Deterrence across the regional sphere.

#### **China's Strategic Posture toward Taiwan and the Philippines**

Beijing's strategic posture towards Philippines and Taiwan can be highlighted through a 'Gray Zone' strategy; that has blended diplomatic, socioeconomic, political and military signaling in a coercive manner, with the objective to undermine their sovereignty and territorial claims; whilst concurrently circumventing a full-scale military conflict between any two sides. Whilst China aspires to ascertain the status quo dynamically and dissuade the competition from the United States and other regional stakeholders; nevertheless, its core objectives remain contested across the region in lieu of its relationship with Taiwan and Philippines. The motivation behind Chinese strategic calculation regarding Taiwan and the Philippines is the need to restore historical political control over East Asia and the United States dominated regional security system. Its activities on the two stages indicate a well-thought-out long-term strategy: To turn China into the undisputed maritime power of the Western Pacific and to expand American influence beyond the First Island Chain.

#### **Taiwan: The Core of China's National Reunification Vision**

Beijing considers Taiwan as an outcast province as well as the symbol of legitimacy and national renewal of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The People's Liberation Army (PLA), as described in *Crossing the Strait*, has been training for decades for the eventual invasion or blockade of Taiwan and has made extensive preparations for air and amphibious attacks to surround the island by the time the United States can intervene (Wuthnow et al., 2022). The PLA's exercises in and around Taiwan in 2022-2024 simulated encirclement, missile attacks, and information disruption, and demonstrated a doctrine of Joint Island Landing Operations intended to achieve rapid political surrender rather than total military annihilation. Nevertheless, there is still a risk that constrains China's calculus, even

in the face of growing military capabilities. So, in accordance with Betts end-means coherence criterion there lies a core dilemma for China: in terms of China's political objective (the end), it would be the complete political surrender of Taiwan(Dittmer, 2017). Beijing has highlighted intimidation and coercive strategies as an ancillary for agreement and consensus. Irrespective of Taiwan's democratic validity and autonomy; Beijing primarily focuses on intimidation through the use of force, with the objective to undermine the morale of Taiwanese government, while eroding its security and stability(Lim, 2025; Hamid & Awhinawhi, 2025). As of 2025, PLA has demonstrated considerable military activities in the region by deploying 2613 naval; 5446 aircraft sorties and 3763 aircrafts intentionally crossing the median line; thereby, highlighting a premediated exertion to completely disassemble perpetual norms across the Taiwan strait(Matthew Sperzel, 2025). More than 200 intrusions have been carried out by the Chinese defense force every month, indicating application of the abrasion strategy instead of merely defending their territorial sovereignty. This strategy has also been enforced with the objective to instigate the Taiwanese forces for initiating a conflict. Furthermore, China also conducted a full-scale drill exercise titled '*Justice Mission 2025*'; wherein the island was completely surrounded, while the rockets were fired in the vicinity; thereby, highlighting the PLA's intentions to practice a full-scale attack scenario by creating a situation of intensification and danger(Dotson, 2026). Although Beijing's actions are primarily preemptive instead of defensive; they highlight the application of deterrence theory; thereby, forestalling the classified intimidation.

However, an amphibious invasion of Taiwan would be one of the hardest operations in modern warfare and would entail having a presence in the air, on the sea, and on the cyber domain; thus limiting China's capacity to utilize traditional military means. Even China's elite special operations forces are designed for sabotage and small-scale infiltration rather than long term occupation, according to China Maritime Report No. 18(Chen & Wuthnow, 2022; Iqbal et al., 2025). In the early stages of a conflict, these units are meant to overthrow command structures, capture important political targets, launch psychological operations and paralyze Taiwan's defense infrastructure. *Chen and Wuthnow* also acknowledge the PLA SOF doctrine's limitation in terms using of conventional force to achieve the political objective of Taiwan's capitulation(Chen & Wuthnow, 2022). The current strategy emphasizes Beijing's preference for psychological and asymmetrical effects over physical force. However, keeping in mind the potential US intervention, Betts argues that this creates a vivid structural incoherence in pursued strategy as any erosion of public trust or cognitive collapse can lead to multiplication of friction points giving enemy the room to adapt disrupting tactics to politics casual chain(Betts, 2000).

### **The Philippines: The Peripheral, Yet Strategic, Pressure Point**

In contrast to Taiwan, China views the Philippines as a strategic stepping stone rather than a fundamental ideological goal. Securing maritime routes, claiming sovereignty over disputed territories, and illustrating the boundaries of United States influence are all goals of control or intimidation in the South China Sea(Heydarian,

2017). Chinese actions are part of a well-planned campaign of "grey-zone coercion," ranging from the construction of artificial islands to the deployment of maritime militia vessels close to Second Thomas Shoal. Here, Beijing's strategies capitalize on the uncertainty surrounding war and peace (Bhutto et al., 2025; Meiser et al., 2023). Beijing's strategy towards Philippines are excessively hostile, intimidating and legally objectionable in the South China sea. Whilst the Chinese Navy has been armed, with the objective to employ the force; its primary objective has been the reinforcement of extortionate maritime assertions (Robinson, 2025; Shabbir et al., 2021). Use of force by the Chinese coastguards revealed the human cost of the conflict as well; wherein member of Filipino military and civilians faced casualties due to water-cannon attacks and close-quarter maneuvers. China has been violating the international law, despite a ruling given against it in 2016, by obstructing the fishing operations and the resupply missions across Thitu Island, Scarborough Shoal, Sabina Shoal and Second Thomas Shoal (Blandin, 2025; Kanwal & Tasleem, 2025). Chinese reliance on non-military actors, including its coast guard, naval militia and state-owned fishing fleets, to slowly strip Philippine sovereignty over its own waters. This Salami-Slicing approach can enable China to expand its operating reach without breaching the United States - Philippines Mutual Defense Treaty (De Castro, 2022). As Arreguin-Toft explains in his book *How the Weak Win Wars*, such insidious tactics of erosion are typical when weaker countries fight stronger ones; success depends on deploying indirect strategies by exploiting the moral hesitation and political restraint of the foe rather than his military power (Arreguin-Toft, 2005). China's coercive military pressure is fundamentally based on the assumption that that United States would hesitate to intervene over incremental territorial expansion as the escalation cost exceeds over the achievable stakes for Washington in this dynamics. This also inverts the asymmetric conflict dynamics giving China a *strategic advantage* as it accepts sustained frictions at Thomas Shoals while betting on perceived weak political will/ reluctance of United States to eventually intervene (Arreguin-Toft, 2005).

### **The Shared Strategic Objective**

Nevertheless, despite differences in severity, the overall goal of China to change the regional order within an asymmetrically favorable environment is evident in both the Taiwan and the Philippines cases. The goal is to convince the region's actors that they are under United States protection and that siding with Beijing is unavoidable, not short-term conquest but long-term psychological domination (Pan & Phan, 2024). This supports Record's thesis in *Why the Strong Lose*, which identifies three main reasons of failure of strong power; first being misaligned political goals and means, second is domestic political exhaustion, and third is the failure of the strong to adjust to the indirect tactics of the enemy (Record, 2005). China combines all these three simultaneously through its "grey-zone strategy" to exploit US vulnerabilities. Beijing's strategy combines narrative warfare with traditional force modernization, influencing perceptions just as successfully as it does geography. While Beijing is overtly militarizing frequent encounters through its

forces; its broader strategy encompasses the elements of intimidation, rule-breaking and formation of a power imbalance in the region. Sovereignty of smaller states has been challenged; whilst the freedom of passage has been primarily diminished. Strategic polarization has been enhanced in the region, while the prospects for small-scale conflicts leading towards a greater conflict due to any sought of miscalculations and adventure can be deemed higher(Caverley, 2025). Taiwan has also postured its readiness for a military conflict; whilst the increasing alignment of Philippines with Australia, United States and Japan highlight its aspirations towards enhanced security and defence partnerships. The outcomes can be expected to be multifaceted, devastating and intricate; thereby calling into question the coherence of the alliance information and the legitimacy of US deterrence across the region(Record, 2005).

### **China's Military and Informational Approaches**

China has blended its military and informational warfare strategies in the recent times, which has actually diversified its areas of operations. A critical analysis of Chinese military and informational strategies through various domains are highlighted as follows;

#### **A. The Military Dimension: Preparing for “Intelligentised” Conflict**

Chinese special operations forces (SOF) have developed beyond their traditional commando roles to serve as precision tools in a system-of-systems approach, as detailed in China Maritime Report No. 18(Irw, 2022). In the event of a Taiwan contingency, their main objective would be targeted disruption rather than protracted combat-neutralizing leadership, cutting off communications, and destroying infrastructure to cause confusion in the early stages of hostilities(Arooj et al., 2025; Wuthnow et al., 2022). China's SOF are designed to take advantage of weaknesses in a technologically advanced environment, in contrast to conventional Western warfare, which prioritizes overwhelming force. Prior to a full-scale amphibious landing, these forces can distort Taiwan's command networks, isolate the island, and erode public confidence by using cyber operations, electronic warfare, and AI-enabled reconnaissance.

#### **B. The Informational Dimension: Cognitive Warfare and Perception Control**

Beijing's campaign is as much about information dominance as it is about physical control, as the Crossing the Strait volume emphasizes(Arreguin-Toft, 2005). The PLA Three Warfare strategy, comprising legal warfare, psychological warfare, and public opinion warfare, is the informational core of the Chinese military stance. These tools aim to shape perceptions at home and in the region, as well as internationally, by influencing the Taiwanese, their regional allies such as the Philippines, and the international community, before, during, and after any conflict.

China uses disinformation, economic pressure, and social media to make Taiwanese reunification seem inevitable(Huang, 2024). Similar to this, China's digital propaganda in the Philippines presents the United States as an outside destabilizer and presents itself as defensive. Betts describes China's strategy as the “*dialogue of the deaf*” where via tailored narratives across cultural divide it creates

confusion regarding United States' resolve (Betts, 2000). Given that democratic systems rely heavily on alliance cohesion and public legitimacy, Beijing limits United States freedom of action by controlling the informational narrative. Record's observations in *Why the Strong Lose* are reflected in this informational warfare. Record contends that strong states frequently use contradictory narratives and an excessive reliance on material superiority to undercut their own strategic objectives (Record, 2005). China has a psychological edge thanks to its cohesive narrative, which is based on nationalism and anti-Western sentiment.

### **C. The Philippine Theatre as Laboratory for Hybrid Coercion**

China is using its actions in the South China Sea as a "low-intensity rehearsal" for larger wars. Beijing uses its coast guard and maritime militia as hybrid tools in place of overt aggression, making it harder to distinguish between state and civilian actions. The best example is the Philippines' experience at Second Thomas Shoal: Chinese ships demonstrate their superiority without crossing the line of military action, using non-lethal tactics such as ramming, water cannons, and laser interference (Vo, 2026). Such a maneuver is comparable to the asymmetric forms that Arreguin-Toft is writing about, where the weaker party employs indirect strategies of ambiguity, persistence, and time to lure the stronger into exhausting his will to respond. China has managed to sustain a war without waging war by leveraging "structural asymmetry" and steadily expanding its territory and influence indirectly (Arreguin-Toft, 2005). Each of the incidents looks at the readiness of Washington to escalate over what could appear to be non-military provocations and challenge the determination of the United States under the Mutual Defense Treaty.

#### **Lessons for United States Policymakers**

Together, the readings show how ambiguity, asymmetry, and information control are key components of China's coercive strategy. The synthesis of all three frameworks where Arreguin-Toft shows superior resolve and endurance, Record discusses the three failure models leading to fragmentation and Betts provides an end-mean coherence which leads to a unified strategic imperative for analysis. The United States must rebuild deterrence around credibility in the information sphere; military superiority alone will not suffice (Clow, 2024). However, the US policymakers must also ascertain the fact that gray zone aggression pursued by the Beijing flourishes in asymmetry, unevenness, uncertainty and delayed reaction. Dissuading China in the Indo-Pacific region necessitates adoption of a sustained and integrated strategy; that has the tendency to comprehensively reinforce the alliance credibility, coherence, resiliency and regional stability. Likewise, convincing Beijing that coercive measures will fail politically as well as militarily requires psychological readiness in addition to forward-deployed capabilities, as the authors of *Crossing the Strait* stress (Arreguin-Toft, 2005). The United States needs to absorb a fundamental principle from Arreguin-Toft in order to effectively deter China: the balance of power can stabilize when a stronger actor adopts an asymmetrical adaptation strategy, mirroring the weaker actor's approach. However, few policy options that are prerequisite for a sustained deterrence are explained in-depth as follows;

## United States Policy Options and Strategic Recommendations

A successful strategy to be adopted by the United States must be comprehensive and integrative; while it must challenge Beijing's legal, military and informational narratives; thereby, combining deterrence by punishment (credible costs for escalation) and deterrence by denial (making Chinese objectives impossible).

### A. Harden Deterrence Through Disseminated & Resilient Posture

Invest in long-range fires, anti-ship systems, and ISR to counter amphibious or blockade threats; implement "porcupine" defense concepts, which call for smaller, mobile forces throughout the First Island Chain. The US policymakers must ascertain that dissuading China through Deterrence must be a long-term and continuous strategy, rather than acting episodic in case of a conflicting event. Beijing has normalized aggression against Philippines and Taiwan; and therefore, a sustained policy is required to counter the Chinese aggression (Swaine, 2025). US forces can permanently deploy its missions in the region in order to regularly conduct operations across the South China Sea; which will certainly impact the Chinese activities and its influence in the region through repetitive military actions (Montgomery & Yoshihara, 2025). The presence of allied forces must be normalized, which can be an effectual response to Chinese intimidation and military actions across the region. Following table highlights the military strategies and hard options that can be employed by the US policymakers against the Chinese assertions in the region;

S.No	Strategy	Philippines Application	Taiwan Application
	Layered Response	Mirror Deployment. Resupply mission with allies	Radio Warnings, UAV Monitoring, Selective Aerial Incursions
	Self-Defense Investments	Japan ships/radars; US task force for SCS coordination	\$1B TSCI funding, Procure 200K drones and train with partners
	Freedom of Navigation	US FONOPs; challenge "might makes right" claims	Support US transits; bolster sea denial (e.g., missiles)
	Document & Expose	Water Cannons, Record CCG ramming and sharing of videos globally	Systematically log ADIZ incursions; publicize via media
	Joint Exercises/Intel	Multilateral drills of US, Japan and Australia, ACSA pacts	Training Exchanges of US, Japan and European Union, Intelligence Sharing

Source: [Atlantic Council](#)

### B. Credibility at Sub-Conflict Level

It also needs to be ascertained by the American policymakers that application of deterrence at sub-conflict domain necessitates credibility and authenticity. US forces

must give a clear signaling that any sought of action, that may result in casualties or the obstruction of legitimate resupply will be responded proportionately. Ambiguity must be completely eliminated, while a clear messaging would eventually avert the risk-taking strategies of the Chinese forces(Wirtz, 2024). Furthermore, merely focusing on the military actions will not suffice, as legal actions against the Chinese assertions, restrictions in terms of ports accessibility, targeted sanctions and diplomatic downgrades will pacify the Chinese actions, will overtly reduce its room for any sought of experimentation and will ensure the maintenance of peace, stability and security in the region.

### **C. Strengthen Alliance Resilience**

Enhance the defense engagement between the United States and Taiwan and the Philippines by creating joint institutions that have shared interests in various domains including cyber resilience, civil defense and intelligence sharing(Istomin, 2023). There is a need to increase the partner's capacity to withstand dynamic pressure. Betts in his critique towards organizations says that only organization with incentivized aligned work function effectively so a trilateral command between US-Taiwan-Philippines based on shared interest might act as an organizational fix(Betts, 2000).

### **D. Counter Information and Lawfare**

Create an Indo-Pacific Strategic Communications Cell to coordinate allies in countering misinformation. Encourage reporting of violations in the grey zone and support lawsuits against maritime claims by China. This addresses Betts critique towards “dialogue of deaf” acting as a signaling fix where culturally tailored messages are spread across audiences which ensure clarity in meaning and interpretation(Chen & Wuthnow, 2022).

### **E. Manage Escalation and Signaling**

Clear red lines must be created, but operational ambiguity must be maintained. To enforce costs without resorting to force, adopt diplomatic threats and selective sanctions. This acts as a coercion fix to Betts critique where clear thresholds with relevant actions are taken to minimize ambiguity and maximize deterrence(Arreguin-Toft, 2005).

### **F. (Betts) Complexity as an opportunity to Enhance Cyber and Space Resiliency**

*Betts sees complexity as an opportunity to generate failure points;* defending C2 the satellite systems will break down China’s cyber SOF coordination(Betts, 2000).

### **G. Leverage Economic & Technological Statecraft**

To maintain regional alignment, diversify away from reliance on China and secure defense-critical supply chain systems. It is an ascertained face that Chinese dominance prevails globally and regionally due to its economic and technological dominance. The US policymakers have to diversify their strategies with respect to key commodities imported from China, protect the key infrastructure; whilst offer reliable alternates in terms of development finance, trade and investment. Denial of economic and technological leverage to Chinese companies, will pacify its military aggression as well in the region.

## H. Document and Expose Grey-Zone Incidents

To diminish China's plausible deniability, introduce uniform evidence-gathering practices for maritime intimidation and release validated information online. Combined, these moves transform the United States deterrence concept into active resilience rather than reactive containment, so that China cannot achieve the quick victories, its asymmetric doctrine calls for (Wang, 2025).

## CONCLUSION

The coercive way of China towards Taiwan and the Philippines in the Information Age is a critical strategic issue for the United States. It is a fight over legitimacy, perception, and time, not necessarily territory or numbers. This is the plan of Beijing to avert any fight by politically crippling the antagonists prior to the fighting by marrying advanced military prowess with wiles and games of influence. As such Washington grapples with countering coercion across its various forms, such as narrative control, cyber disruption, and grey-zone harassment, rather than just stopping the invasion, it must develop strategies for sustained competition. The main features of China's operational strategy are disorientation and speed, involving small elite units and the application of information operations aimed at de-centralized command and control, as described in China Maritime Report No. 18 and Crossing the Strait (Wuthnow et al., 2022). How the Weak Win Wars serves as a reminder that asymmetric tactics work by exploiting political hesitancy? Why the Strong Lose cautions that when great powers depend solely on their physical strength without flexibility or a clear goal, they will fail (Arreguin-Toft, 2005). All of these lessons point to the same necessity: rather than becoming complacent, the United States must adapt to combat asymmetry.

Resilient deterrence-alliances, technology, and narrative coherence that deny Beijing easy victories and reveal the futility of coercion is the cornerstone of a successful United States strategy. Strong information defenses, a dispersed military posture, and allies who see resistance as legitimate and valuable are necessary. It requires unambiguous communication that aggression will strengthen the alliance system rather than weaken it. In the end, addressing China's threats requires ongoing alliance renewal rather than a single act of deterrence. Whether information-age coercion can overturn a rules-based order will be decided in the contest for Taiwan and the Philippines. Deterrence will take, and the Indo-Pacific will not be free by chance, but by design, should Washington prove that asymmetric intimidation does not work and that technology, openness and unity can conquer even an emerging great power.

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