

UNDERSTANDING THE MARITIME GRAY ZONE CHALLENGES

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OUTLINE

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DEFINITION OF “GRAY ZONE” OPERATIONS

- Three major Characteristics define Gray Zone operations
- Also called “Hybrid Warfare”
- Focus on use by Russia and China (and Iran)
- China does not use the term “Gray Zone”

REASONS FOR RECENT EMERGENCE OF GRAY ZONE THREATS

- Costs/Risks of major state war
- Emergence of Integrated tools/techniques including information, economic and “lawfare”
- Gray Zone operations reflect emphasis on “Strategic Patience,” gradualism

IMPLICATIONS OF EMERGING GRAY ZONE OPERATIONS

- The New “Default Mode” of Conflict?
- Goal to undermine existing global order, especially US/Allied guarantees
- New Strategies and Tactics will be required to counter
- Gray Zone Operations increase risk of war by miscalculation, “crossing the threshold” to military conflict

EAST ASIA MARITIME GRAY ZONE OPERATIONS

- Prime Locations: South China Sea and East China Sea
- Military and related actions to assert maritime and air claims, with artificial island building and militarization in South China Sea, island patrols and declaration of Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) in East China Sea
- Tools used in addition to maritime forces include information operations/disinformation, political and economic coercion (“Non-Interference with Chinese Characteristics”)
- Blurring the line between Military and Non-Military Maritime Forces (e.g., “Cabbage Strategy” in South China Sea, with CCG, Maritime Militia/Fishing fleets, and PLAN)

RESPONDING TO GRAY ZONE CHALLENGES

- Understand the broadly integrated “Whole of State” nature of this challenge
- Need to stand ground together on principles of order and anti-bullying against the neo-colonial new hegemonism
- Need to recognize that Economics are a critical driver (by the time militaries get involved, gray zone tactics may have resulted in a fait accompli), so continuing economic engagement with Allies and partners is key to counter coercion
- Need to re-think national strategy and military operations, to acknowledge a problem exists, and then coordinate together with Allies and partners to develop options and equipment for Gray Zone
- Perhaps most important, need to “Speak Truth to Power” --no more free rides on criticism of what all know is wrong