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NEWS SUMMARY:

- Equipping Marine Littoral Regiments with Intermediate Force Capabilities would represent a forward-thinking approach to modern warfare and the contests for advantage across the competition continuum.
- Authorities used both pepper spray and tear gas to end a six-hour standoff in Maine that ended with the arrest of a 23-year-old man and his mother.
- Deputies in Pasco County, Florida, used "less-lethal" ammo to shoot a suspect with a gun.
- The Indian Army's Corps of Army Air Defence is focusing on developing "hybrid systems with a combination of soft and hard kill systems including Directed Energy Weapons."
- A wide range of counter-drone technology was on display at this month's IDEX 2025 defence exhibition in Abu Dhabi, including laser weapons to zap drones out of the sky and a "smart shooter" system which attaches to soldiers' guns and helps them to aim at the fast-moving objects.
- Opinion: China's modernization of its amphibious capabilities has taken a significant step forward with the development of new special barges., which aim to enhance the

People’s Liberation Army (PLA)’s beach-landing and logistics operations and blur the line between civilian and military operations, creating a significant “gray zone” challenge.

- Opinion: Our adversaries have evolved to a point that the United States is no longer afforded the luxury of a binary concept of war.

TABLE OF CONTENTS:

FEATURE: 2
Expanded Capabilities for Expanded Competition Error! Bookmark not defined.
DOMESTIC: 3
Maine man and his mother arrested after hourslong standoff in North Berwick 3
Pasco County deputies use ‘less-lethal’ ammo to shoot suspect with gun 5
OTHER FOREIGN COUNTRIES: 5
Indian Army’s Air Defence looking up with smart ammo, lasers, MW weapons..... 5
Zap, jam or shoot? Inside the war on drones at Idex 2025 6
CONTACT INFORMATION: 18

FEATURE:

Marine Littoral Regiments and Intermediate Force

(Joint Intermediate Force Capabilities Office, February 18)

The realities of the international security environment are expanding, opening up arenas of competition among nations, militaries, and non-state actors beyond the historical war vs peace dichotomy. Great power competition has surged back to the forefront, reshaping security dynamics not just in the Indo-Pacific but across the globe. Adversaries such as China and Russia are asserting their wills and positions against the United States and our Partners and Allies. These provocations call for a change in the security approach of the United States. The Marine Corps’ unique capabilities, placement, and access place it at the center of the shift toward integrated deterrence and readiness for high-end conflict. To meet these demands, it needs to blend lethality with innovative tools designed to address modern threats. Intermediate Force Capabilities (IFCs) can be an essential part of this strategy, providing solutions to fill gaps between presence and full-scale combat.

Adversaries operate across multiple domains and often take advantage of free maneuver space in what strategists have come to call the “gray zone”. Here is where the line between peace and conflict blurs and traditional military responses are no longer sufficient. The Joint Staff white paper “War Without Gunsmoke” lays out the gap in capability left by the fact that traditional military responses such as presence and threat of lethal force are insufficient as a deterrent tool against adversaries and threats who are more comfortable operating in the gray zone than the United States. IFCs, ranging from directed energy weapons to acoustic hailing devices, aim to give commanders a flexible set of options for managing escalating situations without resorting to

lethal force. The promise of IFCs lie in enabling precise, controlled responses that match the complexity of modern threats.

IFCs can play a significant role in enabling Marine Littoral Regiments (MLRs) to achieve U.S. strategic objectives globally. These regiments are being established as "self-deployable, multi-domain forces" equipped to operate autonomously in contested areas. In 2024, the Marine Corps activated the 3rd Marine Littoral Regiment in Hawaii, with the 12th Marine Littoral Regiment in Okinawa on track to complete its realignment during 2025. A third unit, the 4th Marine Littoral Regiment, is planned for Guam by 2027. Each MLR is designed to adapt to peer-level competition with autonomy, agility, and resilience at their core.

Operating from an Expeditionary Advanced Base, a Marine Littoral Regiment might face a sophisticated adversary relying on drones or civilian militia fishing vessels to disrupt operations. In such cases, tools like dazzling lasers, directed energy vessel stopping capabilities, and active denial systems can suppress or neutralize these threats with reversible effects and ensure freedom of movement for military and civilian purposes. These technologies offer commanders options to maintain operational tempo and gain and maintain an advantage across the competition continuum.

"Innovations in directed energy, vehicle and vessel stopping technologies, and non-lethal counter-personnel capabilities could provide MLR commanders with greater flexibility and time to assess developing situations," said Col. Douglas Peterson, the director of the Joint Intermediate Force Capabilities Office that works to bring IFCs to the warfighters. "These tools are effective within the gray zone of competition, providing responses that bridge the gap between mere presence and the use of lethal force."

Globally, the contest for advantage is relentless. Reconnaissance and counter-reconnaissance are key battlegrounds where IFCs could provide a decisive edge. By disrupting adversaries' surveillance efforts and revealing their intent, commanders gain the ability to de-escalate tensions before they escalate into conflict. The stakes could not be higher. Failing to act effectively in this domain risks endangering freedom of navigation, disrupting global trade routes, and threatening energy supply chains—with ripple effects for both national security and the global economy.

Equipping MLRs with IFCs would represent a forward-thinking approach to modern warfare and the contests for advantage across the competition continuum. With this combination, the Marine Corps would be best prepared to tackle existing and emerging threats with agility and precision. As these capabilities continue to evolve, they offer a vision of a future where the Corps remains adaptive, effective, and ready to lead in a world defined by uncertainty and competition.

[BACK TO TOP](#)

DOMESTIC:

Maine man and his mother arrested after hourslong standoff in North Berwick

(WMTW, February 19)

A Maine man who is accused of shooting at police in North Berwick is in custody following an hourslong standoff, along with his mother.

Adian Scott, 23, of North Berwick, is charged with a violation of a protective order, reckless conduct with a dangerous weapon and creating a police standoff, according to the North Berwick Police Department.

Churi Scott, 45, faces charges of creating a police standoff and hindering apprehension or prosecution.

Police said at about 10 a.m. Tuesday, they responded to a home on Shana Lane for a reported violation of a protective order where the suspect had reportedly fired a weapon.

"As we walked about the driveway, there were gunshots that came from the residence in our direction," said North Berwick Police Chief Stephen Peasley said. "We retreated and held our position."

No one was injured by the gunshots. The officers took cover and awaited the arrival of additional law enforcement resources. The Southern Maine Special Response Team and Cumberland County Emergency Services were among the agencies that responded and surrounded the home.

Police then obtained an arrest warrant for Adian Scott and over the next six hours, negotiators tried to convince Scott and his mother exit the home. Peasley said Churu Scott was not being held against her will and that she did not want to come out of the residence.

After negotiators were able to get the mother and son to exit the home, both tear gas and pepper spray were deployed into the residence. Churi Scott then exited the house and was taken into custody.

"(Emergency medical technicians) and paramedics have been checking her out to make sure she was fine," Peaseley said. "They're going to debrief her and find out what she knows."

After about another hour, Adian Scott exited the home and was arrested.

Police said the section of Elm Street between Dennett and Buffum roads, which is part of Route 4, was shut down during the standoff. Video from Maine's Total Coverage shows police had the roadway blocked as far up as the intersection of Somersworth Road and Madison Street.

The North Berwick Police Department said countless agencies responded to the scene and/or offered assistance, including North Berwick Fire and Rescue, the Southern Maine Special Response Team, Cumberland County Emergency Services, Berwick Police, South Berwick Police, Eliot Police, Sanford Police, Maine State Police, York County Emergency Management Agency and Sanford Regional Communications Center.

[BACK TO TOP](#)

Pasco County deputies use 'less-lethal' ammo to shoot suspect with gun

(News Channel 8, February 18)

A call regarding a disturbance in Port Richey Tuesday evening resulted in deputies taking down a suspect using "less-lethal" ammo, according to the Pasco County Sheriff's Office.

The incident happened around 7 p.m. in the Yew Tree Avenue area, officials said. Deputies arrived and found a person wielding a firearm.

Authorities said they tried to de-escalate the situation multiple times but eventually resulted to firing "less-lethal rounds" at the subject.

Less-lethal projectiles used by law enforcement typically include bean bag rounds, rubber bullets and other options designed to minimize injury.

The suspect was taken to a local hospital with non-life-threatening injuries, according to the sheriff's office.

Deputies said it appeared to be an isolated incident and there was no further threat to the public.

As of Tuesday afternoon, the investigation was ongoing, and no further information was immediately available.

[BACK TO TOP](#)

OTHER FOREIGN COUNTRIES:

Indian Army's Air Defence looking up with smart ammo, lasers, MW weapons

(The Week, February 22)

No longer are smart ammunition, lasers, and microwave weapons the stuff of science fiction movies; they are already here and look like they are here to stay.

With modern warfare rapidly changing with the dizzyingly fast proliferation of drones and unmanned aerial systems (UAS), the need to both operate and counter them is assuming unprecedented importance. In earnest, the Indian Army's Corps of Army Air Defence (AAD) formation is looking to equip itself with these new age weapons.

The AAD is basically mandated with the Tactical Battle Area (TBA) while the Indian Air Force operates in the much wider expanse.

From the point of view of the Indian military establishment, certain events have resulted in a compelling urgency to infuse next-generation weaponry. Some of these events are the September 14, 2019 drone attacks on Saudi Arabia's Aramco refineries, the precision-killing of Iranian general Qasem Soleimani on January 3, 2020, and closer home, the June 26-27, 2021 drone attacks on the Jammu IAF base. The Armenia-Azerbaijan and the Russia-Ukraine

conflicts have only fortified the belief that UAS have indeed changed the face of modern warfare.

Speaking to a group of journalists on India's state of preparedness against this unmanned aerial threat, on Friday, Lieutenant General Sumeer D'Cunha, who heads the AAD, said, "Emphasis is on to develop and induct hybrid systems with a combination of soft and hard kill systems including Directed Energy Weapons (DEW)."

Stating that the AAD has recently inducted the Integrated Drone Detection & Interdiction System (IDD&IS) into service which constitutes a hybrid system with multispectral detection, Gen D'Cunha said it includes electro-optical/infra-red and passive detector and Directed Energy Weapons (DEWS) like lasers (DEW) for interdiction.

"This was emergency procurement with lasers of 1 km. The Request for Proposal for nine more systems is out. We are now looking at capabilities to jam complete band of frequencies with enhanced ranges of detection and interdiction to include lasers."

The AAD director general underlined the effectiveness of fragmentation ammunition in countering UAS threats saying the RFI (request for information) for the indigenous fragmentation ammunition is out to the industry.

Making a case for smart ammunition, the DG said, "Every round can be programmed in smart ammunition, with 17 rounds of HE (high explosive) can be roughly equated to 1 round of smart, it increases kill probability and reduces logistics... we have taken out an RFI for fragmented ammunition for this also... fragmentation ammunition is the way forward."

These new age weapons are being developed or inducted alongside the ongoing effort to procure new guns and new integrated air defence systems like Quick Reaction Surface to Air Missile (QRSAM) and man-portable, short-range air defence systems like VSHORADS (Very Short-Range Air Defence system).

But in these efforts, the remarkable feature is to develop these platforms and systems indigenously in alignment with the 'Atmanirbharta' programme.

[BACK TO TOP](#)

Zap, jam or shoot? Inside the war on drones at Idex 2025

(The National, February 22)

Swarms of explosive drones are a dark cloud in the minds of military commanders three years after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, where many thousands of armoured vehicles and soldiers have succumbed to the weapons.

By some estimates, the majority of Russian and Ukrainian casualties have been caused by unmanned aircraft, mostly the smaller, short-range kind compared to large American drones like the Reaper.

Not even heavily armoured vehicles are safe. In December, a US-made M1A1 Abrams tank was destroyed after six direct hits from Russian first-person view (FPV) quadcopters. While it is not

clear how many of the quadcopters missed or were downed before the tank was a write-off, defence planners are not taking any chances.

Drones are critical ammunition in their own right, sometimes used in lieu of artillery, although big guns can be more destructive in the right circumstances, according to a recent report from the Rusi defence think tank.

A wide range of counter-drone technology was on display at this month's IDEX 2025 defence exhibition in Abu Dhabi. It ranged from laser weapons to zap drones out of the sky to low-cost rockets that fill the sky with shrapnel and a "smart shooter" system which attaches to soldiers' guns and helps them to aim at the fast-moving objects.

Less sophisticated options have been tested in combat, often used alongside more basic protective measures such as setting up "tunnels" of netting over roads.

The constant evolution of drone and counter-drone operations has been dubbed "near-surface warfare" by the British army.

Russian and Ukrainian soldiers both carry shotguns, but experts are divided over how effective they are because some FPVs fly at 150kph or faster. That means a travel rate of more than 40 metres per second – a target even a skilled shooter would struggle to hit.

Ukrainian troops have carried the semi-automatic BTS 12 shotgun while Russians have used semi-automatic shotguns such as the VEPR-12 and have even been spotted with a rig of 24 shotgun barrels.

Tactical drones cause terrible carnage, and range from FPVs that can chase down a target to larger "bomber" quadcopters and fixed-wing drones fitted with bombs such as Russia's Lancet, which uses computer vision to hunt targets.

Seconds to stop the threat

How, then, can modern armies respond? A common method is jamming radio signals and video feeds that keep tactical drones airborne and provide operators with a view of flight.

However newer drones find targets through computer vision, meaning that for the last part of their flight there is no signal to jam.

In Ukraine, both sides also use drones guided by thin fibre-optic cable that unravels over significant distances, often 10km or, some claim, even further, again making jamming useless. That means the last-ditch option is shooting down the drone, perhaps with seconds to spare.

Abraham Mazor is a representative of Smart Shooter, which makes a smart weapon sight used by the Israeli army and increasingly ordered by foreign customers including the UK. The gun sight uses an image processor to recognise and lock on to targets, enabling a relatively average rifleman to become a decent marksman.

"The main idea was to be able to hit a moving target on the ground with high probability. And then we said, 'If we can use it on the ground, why not in the air?'" Mr Mazor tells The National.

"Through a software adaptation it also works against drones. The drone's movement is not stable, but we have the computer to calculate the speed and predict direction of movement, and

then it can tell where to fire automatically. We like to remove the sensitivity of the shooter,” he says.

He says Smart Shooter creates a natural “layer” or network of air defenders to cover far more angles than fixed weapons. “We can give the software to every shooter, the technology allows him to be perfect, an expert in shooting and eliminating small unmanned aerial systems.”

To give a sense of how quickly drone warfare is evolving, Ukraine noticed the Russians using the fibre optic drones in March last year and had their own version within weeks. Now both sides regularly use them in a war where each produces or procures hundreds of thousands of quadcopters per month.

This has sparked debate over the extent armies need to use an array of antennas, each trying to jam a part of the spectrum of radio frequencies the drones could be operating on, knowing that any gap in frequencies could be exploited with deadly results.

Alternatively, “hard kill” methods – as opposed to “soft kill” electronic warfare – involve shooting or hitting them with lasers, or some combination of both. There are also increasingly smart methods of jamming, involving systems that detect a drone frequency and then generate the same frequency at higher power to block the signal.

But jamming has the drawback that the more it is deployed, the higher the risk that it interferes with your own communications and links to friendly drones.

Some armies now believe a layered approach is best, using several systems, something tested last summer by the US army at the Yuma proving ground against an attack of 50 small drones flying in fast at different angles. The Americans are also testing a system, Bullfrog, which uses computer vision to control an automated machinegun.

For effective protection against drones, “ideally you want several systems, jamming and electronic warfare and lasers are a good multi-layer approach,” says Hyonbin Hong, Vice President of Global Business at LIG Nex1, a South Korean defence corporation.

“The Korean government wanted various solutions, non-destructive and destructive, or to some people, ‘soft kill’ or ‘hard kill’, the first being electronic warfare and the second being missiles or laser systems. We’re considering all solutions,” he says.

Mr Hong’s company has developed a laser counter-drone system, which he says is still in testing. Lasers are touted as ideal to counter small drones because, unlike missiles that can cost many thousands or millions of dollars, they are said to cost a few dollars a shot. But challenges include making the delicate, complex systems rugged enough to function in a war environment.

Mr Hong says lasers often do not need high power to stop a drone – damaging its camera is enough to blind it, which especially important if the drone flies by computer vision or fibre optics.

“Our basic concept with the laser system is neutralisation and that destruction is not an ideal approach. This can be achieved with a small power level, you don’t need high power and one of our projects is a rifle laser gun and a ground vehicle-based high-power laser type. For larger classes of drone, we use high power, and to achieve longer range.”

In the UK and US, high-power microwave systems are also in testing. These machines, such as Epirus's HPM, send out blasts of electromagnetic energy which overload a drone's electrical system.

But many experts say it is hard to imagine solutions that do not include cheap and plentiful bullets, or increasingly rockets, which are cheaper than missiles.

Giorgio Markov says hard kills like this are increasingly vital, and his company, Hades Defence Systems, makes a 24-rocket pod that fills the sky with shrapnel.

"We're seeing a lot of saturation of soft kill systems on the market," he says. "With jammers, they're a very tailorable product. So with each particular communications band you would like to jam, you need to have a separate antenna for that.

"So you want to cover the full spectrum. You want to cover radio waves. You want to cover global navigation satellite system constellations like GPS or Glonass, all your standard navigation systems.

"You want to cover mobile frequencies, because a lot of drones do have mobile modules that connect cellular frequencies for communication. Basically, you want to cover the entire magnetic spectrum, you need a lot of antennas and a lot of power output," he says.

He points out that, aside from the power required, the enemy can quickly change drone-operating frequencies and, if using satellite navigation, some can now switch between GPS, Russia's Glonass or China's Baidu satnav systems.

"There is also directional versus omnidirectional jamming. Many people think that an omnidirectional antenna makes a bubble, an area of denial. But those bubbles are typically small, and they require a lot of power to maintain. So that's a very brute force approach.

"With directional jammers, we have a tight beam, which you need to focus exactly on the target and maintain it on the target which could be moving very fast. And with all cases, you will have a certain drop-off in the signal."

The speed problem is also becoming an issue with new Russian and Iranian drones, jointly developed, that are rocket-assisted.

"You jam the communications module, say, on a Shahed drone, a common Iranian weapon. The problem you're facing is those drones are outfitted with an inertial navigation system, so it has an onboard compass. It knows relatively where it started, where it needs to go, and which direction it's hitting.

Mr Markov says even though inertial systems are not very accurate, they are accurate enough to hit oil refineries that could be several kilometres across in size. "Jammers are good, but you cannot fully rely solely on jammers."

[BACK TO TOP](#)

COMMENTARY:

Why China's New 'Special Barges' Are a Worrying Sign for Taiwan

(The Diplomat, February 24, Jhih-Siang Liu and Yuan-Chou Jing)

Beijing's modernization of its amphibious capabilities has taken a significant step forward with the development of new special barges. Built by Guangzhou Shipyard International on Longxue Island, these specialized barges aim to enhance the People's Liberation Army (PLA)'s beach-landing and logistics operations. Integrating civilian roll-on/roll-off (Ro-Ro) technology, the special barges reflect China's evolving civil-military fusion strategy. Designed to deploy heavy equipment directly onto coastal roads, these vessels improve the PLA's maritime transport capacity and enable flexible multi-point landings that bypass traditional coastal defenses.

The traditional assumption has been that China would need to seize a few well-known beaches on Taiwan's western coast. The special barges could upend that calculus. By allowing landings at multiple less-defended points – including rocky coastlines or river estuaries – these barges complicate Taiwan's defensive planning and increase the likelihood of a successful amphibious incursion.

China's doctrine of civil-military fusion is evident in its dual-use fleet. Ro-Ro ferries, though built for commercial purposes, can also carry tanks, heavy equipment, and other supplies enabling rapid military conversion. Analysis points out that China has issued technical standards for civilian vessels to ensure they meet national defense needs. Combined with special barges, these dual-use platforms blur the line between civilian and military operations, creating a significant "gray zone" challenge.

China's Expanding Amphibious Fleet

China's amphibious fleet has grown substantially, most notably with the Type 075 and Type 076 amphibious assault ships. At least three Type 075s – the Hainan (commissioned April 2021), the Guangxi (commissioned December 2021), and the Anhui (commissioned October 2022) – are already in service, with a fourth reportedly launched in December 2023. Their rapid construction, beginning in 2018 and continuing at a steady pace, demonstrates China's high-efficiency shipbuilding program. Meanwhile, the Type 076 remains in an early stage of development, although one vessel was reportedly launched in December 2024.

Precise production numbers and timelines for the Type 076 remain undisclosed, but defense analysts anticipate additional hulls over the next few years, reflecting China's intent to field advanced drone and aviation capabilities for expanded amphibious reach.

Complementing these assault ships are Type 726 hovercraft, also referred to as Yuyi-class vehicles, which enable high-speed troop and equipment transport across shallow-water regions. Open-source estimates indicate at least a dozen hovercraft currently in service, with new units entering the fleet at a deliberate but steady rate.

This multi-pronged modernization strategy – a mix of large amphibious assault ships and smaller craft – equips the PLA with the ability to stage multi-point landings and project force beyond conventional beachheads.

By pairing these vessels with the new special barges and civilian roll-on/roll-off ferries, the PLA can deliver large numbers of vehicles and troops from offshore directly onto inland roads, circumventing hardened coastal defenses. Such flexibility not only heightens pressure on Taiwan's existing security posture but also underscores the urgency for regional actors to reassess their contingency planning for amphibious threats.

The Special Barges' Key Technical Features

The special barges feature a deployable bridge over 120 meters long, allowing direct offloading onto previously inaccessible shorelines such as rocky coasts, river estuaries, and shallow beaches. Inspired by World War II Mulberry Harbors, this innovation will enable the PLA to bypass Taiwan's well-defended Red Beaches, providing alternative landing zones that were previously unsuitable for large-scale amphibious operations.

In operational terms, the extendable bridge technology substantially expands PLA amphibious landing options beyond conventional ports and beachheads to include alternative, less fortified coastal zones. Moreover, the potential to rapidly transition from sea to inland roads accelerates mechanized force projection, ensuring swift mobilization. Additionally, the capacity for multi-axis assaults will force Taiwanese defenses to spread thinly across dispersed targets, complicating tactical responses. These specific advantages enhance the PLA's strategic reach and present significant challenges to adversary planning.

The special barges also have "jack-up pillars," which allow the platform to stabilize in rough sea conditions, transforming it into a temporary pier for tanks and heavy vehicles. This capability enhances unloading efficiency and reduces dependence on fixed ports, aligning with the PLA's emphasis on rapid deployment. The open deck design further facilitates quick loading and unloading, optimizing logistics for high-tempo amphibious operations.

To improve combat reliability, the special barges integrate dual pilothouses and redundant propulsion systems, ensuring continued operation in case of mechanical failure or damage. Satellite imagery analysis by Tom Shugart, an adjunct senior fellow at the Center for a New American Security, suggests that these design features prioritize high-intensity amphibious operations rather than civilian applications.

Despite these enhancements, special barges remain vulnerable without adequate escort protection or onboard defenses. Their slow transit speed and limited maneuverability increase their exposure to enemy interdiction, raising concerns about their ability to execute seamless cross-strait landings under contested conditions. Adverse weather or strong opposition could significantly disrupt deployment, underscoring the reality that special barges-based amphibious assaults are not invincible.

Policy Options for Taiwan and Its Partners

Despite their ability to bypass traditional defenses, the special barges remain highly vulnerable due to slow speed, lack of onboard defenses, and exposure during unloading. Taiwan's layered defenses provide multiple opportunities to interdict these vessels before and during landfall.

With no air or missile defenses, Hsiung Feng III supersonic missiles and AGM-84 Harpoons – launched from land, sea, air, and submarines – can easily target China's special barges. Tuo Chiang-class corvettes, equipped with Hsiung Feng II and III missiles, can execute hit-and-run strikes on slow-moving convoys. Hai Lung-class submarines can ambush special barges before they reach shore, while naval mines in shallow waters can disrupt or destroy approaching vessels.

Once a special barge deploys its bridge, it becomes a stationary target for artillery, precision rockets, and indirect fire. Unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), loitering munitions, and ground-based drones could disable the bridge mid-operation, stalling troop movement. M136 Volcano mines could block inland roads, disrupting mechanized forces post-landing. These vulnerabilities make special barge-based landings high-risk operations, susceptible to multi-layered interdiction from missiles, submarines, mines, and land-based strikes.

Taiwan's ability to rapidly detect and respond to movements of special barges hinges on a robust intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) framework. First, satellite imagery can offer near-real-time visual data on troop buildup, barge deployment, and the assembly of related civilian-military resources – such as Ro-Ro vessels – allowing Taiwan's defense apparatus to anticipate potential amphibious actions. Second, signals intelligence is crucial for intercepting and analyzing PLA communications, which can highlight shifts in operational schedules, routes, or objectives. When integrated into a joint maritime domain awareness system, these ISR streams yield a comprehensive view of maritime activity around Taiwan's coastline.

To further enhance this awareness, Taiwan should pursue deeper cooperation with allied partners that maintain robust ISR platforms in the Western Pacific. By forging intelligence-sharing agreements and conducting regular data exchanges, Taiwan can enrich its early-warning mechanisms. Developing a Common Operational Picture (COP) with such allies – potentially including the United States and key regional powers – would facilitate joint or coordinated responses in the event of suspicious mobilizations, including of special barges, on China's coast. This level of multinational coordination broadens Taiwan's situational scope while sending a deterrent message to any would-be aggressors.

Crucially, intelligence alone is insufficient without the means to act. Once ISR indicates incoming threats, Taiwan's military can interdict them. Unmanned systems, whether airborne or sea-based, could provide rapid initial engagement, while long-range anti-ship missiles ensure that special barges remain at significant risk before reaching Taiwanese shores. Such kinetic and non-kinetic assets, guided by timely intelligence, would allow Taiwan to shape the battlespace in its favor, slowing or halting amphibious operations before they consolidate a beachhead. Ultimately, enhancing intelligence and interdiction stands as a linchpin in Taiwan's strategy to preserve freedom of action and deter PLA aggression in an increasingly contested maritime environment.

Historically, Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense has identified several priority "Red Beaches" for potential amphibious assaults. However, China's new special barges can circumvent standard coastal defenses, rendering previously overlooked shorelines vulnerable. In response, Taiwan's Ministry's intelligence agencies must reassess and expand the definitions of a Red Beach.

Beyond its Red Beaches, Taiwan should bolster security at less conventional landing sites such as rocky shores and river outlets. Stationing mobile anti-armor units and mid-range missiles in these regions, supported by rapid-reaction forces, would help slow any PLA attempt to establish a foothold. Integrating new reconnaissance data and conducting thorough coastal vulnerability studies will ensure Taiwan's situational awareness remains robust. Updating defensive frameworks to account for these emerging threats is critical for sustaining rapid-response capabilities and preserving overall coastal security.

Conclusion

China's special barges are transforming amphibious operations in both the Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea. In the South China Sea, they could enable rapid deployment and resupply on disputed islands like the Spratlys and Paracels, bolstering the PLA's military presence. With their capacity to transport heavy equipment and establish temporary docking facilities, these platforms strengthen China's control over contested areas, complicating regional countermeasures.

Furthermore, it is vital to monitor ongoing PLA amphibious exercises for indications of special barges deployment. Future training may reveal how these platforms are integrated with Type 076 amphibious assault ships and UAV operations to conduct joint air-sea-land maneuvers. Observing the coordination of these multi-domain assets will offer critical insights into the PLA's evolving strategy.

By strengthening early warning systems, refining rapid-response protocols, and engaging in regional security cooperation, Taiwan can adapt its defense posture to counter these emerging amphibious threats and preserve its strategic edge in an increasingly complex security environment.

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[BACK TO TOP](#)

Clarifying Language for Victory

(Small Wars Journal, February 18, Joshua Edwards)

The Reality of Modern Warfare

Effective communication is vital for any team to achieve its goals, which is amplified as a team extends from team to country. The challenge becomes daunting when considering the cultural diversity between organizations and individuals in the melting pot of our country. One problem with communication is the inability to define fundamental terminology that can be used to frame common ground to facilitate understanding across diverse organizations and people. Another problem with communication is that terminology, once established, can take monumental efforts to effectively update in the face of common practice. On other occasions, terminology is established with the constraints of cultural bias, which can fail to communicate the threat. The point of this paper is to explore the need to update concepts of Irregular Warfare, gray zone activities, and introduce regular warfare to ensure effective communication for a combined national defense effort.

The armed forces have been the focal point of national defense for centuries. The United States (US) has consistently demonstrated the ability to field exquisite game-changing capability that would deter any rational actor from engaging in conventional warfare. Nuclear weapons, nuclear-powered submarines, stealth technology, and precision weapons are but a handful of capabilities that prevented a major adversary from irresponsible escalation. Adversaries must therefore adapt outside of military pursuits to realize their ambitions. These adaptations come in the form of statecraft, economic power, subversion, coercion, disinformation, and deception aimed at military and civilian targets.

The reality of 21st century strategic competition, coupled with the limitations of legacy perspectives, resulted in the US Department of Defense (DoD) developing the Joint Concept for Competing (JCC) in 2023 and in the process updating the US military's definition of irregular warfare (IW). According to the JCC, IW can be defined as "A form of warfare where states and non-state actors campaign to assure or coerce states or other groups through indirect, non-attributable, or asymmetric activities." The JCC's fresh perspective – enables the joint force to collaborate with interagency, multinational, and other interorganizational partners to be successful in strategic competition.

This paradigm shift paves the way for the US to update its perception of warfare by using an adversary's (both state and non-state) perspective of warfare. In the process, the JCC implies that the defense of our nation is no longer the sole responsibility of the armed forces. The DoD, and its respective services, must realize their respective limitations in defending against IW, while civilian agencies and civil societies must assume their responsibility to take an active role in national defense against adversary IW efforts.

While the definition may be clear to military professionals, it is potentially opaque to the civilian population that is required to defend against hostile IW operations. The potential need to seek further definitions for clarity demonstrates the lack of utility for the IW definition beyond military professionals. For example, the DoD's definition of asymmetric begins with a characterization of

military operations. The DoD defines asymmetric as “In military operations the application of dissimilar strategies, tactics, capabilities, and methods to circumvent or negate an opponent’s strengths while exploiting his weaknesses.” Many of these concepts fall into what are considered gray zone activities, or GZA.

When considering GZA, there is disagreement regarding a precise definition. Clementine Starling, however, offers that “the gray zone describes a set of activities that occur between peace (or cooperation) and war (or armed conflict). A multitude of activities fall into this murky in-between – from nefarious economic activities, influence operations, and cyberattacks to mercenary operations, assassinations, and disinformation campaigns.” Arun Iyer notes the irony that open and transparent societies are a strength, yet they provide the means for competitors to operate against those societies in the gray zone. However, I submit that the GZA name incorrectly implies an area of uncertainty. This perception of uncertainty is the result of a culture that perceives war in a binary state – where a country is either at war, or at peace. This is in contrast to the reality that adversaries are surreptitiously conducting non-kinetic warfare against the US across multiple domains to prevail before kinetic fighting is needed, or to set victory conditions for an upcoming kinetic war of their choosing.

Fundamental Questions

The conventional capability of the US encourages adversaries to seek indirect approaches. As the IW annex to the 2020 National Defense Strategy asserts, “Their intent will be to achieve their objectives without resorting to direct armed conflict against the United States, or buy time until they are better postured to challenge us directly. The purpose of competition is not only to gain military advantages, but also to defeat adversaries’ strategies, shape their perceptions, and deny their strategic objectives in the pursuit of national interests.” Remember, gaining military advantage is a way, not an end in itself. The US should gain, or maintain, military advantage to deter armed conflict and establish the conditions necessary to prevail in a crisis or armed conflict. Creating these conditions should not rest solely on the military.

Clausewitz notes, “War is not merely an act of policy but a true political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse, carried out with other means.” Further, he states that, “The political object is the goal, war is the means of reaching it, and means can never be considered in isolation from their purpose.” War, from a traditional sense, is the violent struggle among state and non-state actors to compel an enemy to accept an unfavorable outcome. Tradition, however, does not always reflect the realities of the modern world. Reflected of the preference for tradition over reality, the DoD fails to define warfare, regular warfare (RW), nor non-violent warfare.

Two questions remain, however. First, if IW is “a form of warfare where states and non-state actors campaign to assure or coerce states or other groups through indirect, non-attributable, or asymmetric activities,” what is RW? Secondly, how do policy makers communicate the danger of IW and GZA operations to non-military professionals?

Communicating Irregular Warfare

Every graduate of Joint Professional Military Education is taught that the destruction of the enemy's military force is not the unquestionable pathway to victory. The idea of attacking the enemy outside of direct action is not new. Sun Tzu provides an array of concepts that speak of a pathway to victory that is not unique to RW. Consider the following statements:

Warfare is a path of subterfuge. Be subtle, subtle even to the point of formlessness; be mysterious, mysterious even to the point of soundlessness: Thus, you can control the enemy's fate. Therefore it is said that victorious warriors win first and then go to war, while defeated warriors go to war first and then seek to win. Tire them while taking it easy, cause division among them while acting friendly. Attack where they are unprepared, emerge when they least expect it.

The Chinese way of warfare incorporates deception, shaping conditions before direct action, creating internal hostility (which reduces the enemy's capability to operate and distracts it from recognizing the emerging threat), attacking points of weakness, and using surprise. These sage words, and others by Sun Tzu, focus on weakening an adversary's government, economy, and civil society before engaging the adversary's military forces.

The US's civil society must recognize the existence of non-violent warfare, which is Sun Tzu's preferred way to wage warfare, and by extension, potentially China's preferred way to approach war today. This is problematic because of the historical trend of victory when one competitor adopts a simplistic interpretation of Clausewitz's definition of victory, but they are competing against an adversary inspired by Sun Tzu. This competition leaves no room for uncertainty – what one state considers nebulous activity between peace and war (GZA) is simply non-kinetic warfare to another. Thus, the GZA fails to normalize the characterization of circumstances, which prevents policy makers and citizens from understanding the nature of Sun Tzu's path to victory. For this reason, American society must be educated on the perceived vulnerabilities that Sun Tzu-inspired adversaries will exploit, and we should be responsible to find solutions that mitigate, or prevent, the risks to the US's national security.

A Path Forward

The first step is clear – eliminate GZA as a term. Ambiguity in communication is a challenge, not an asset, to clear understanding. Furthermore, the definition of IW should be revised to further promote clarity. For this paper, GZA is considered a subset of a revised definition of IW, thereby simplifying the communication of warfare across the elements of national power.

To that end, if it is acceptable to consider RW as direct action against the enemy's fighting force, then IW exists to attack the adversary's government, economy, and civil society to degrade or render the adversary's military forces irrelevant. Thus, IW should be redefined as the action taken against an adversary's non-military elements of national power – the diplomacy, information, and economic elements of DIME (diplomacy, information, military, and economy). These actions are made to weaken an adversary's political and public will, as well as their economic resources, both of which are critical requirements for the use of military force. From one perspective, this collects the diplomacy, information, and economic aspects of DIME and acknowledges how it supports the military. This is an important note because many of the US's

current adversaries have a comprehensive view of national power that extends beyond the US's traditional view of national power (DIME). China, for instance, employs coercion and subversion to attack their adversaries' governments, economies, and civil societies, with the intention of rendering those adversaries unwilling, or unable, to oppose Chinese strategic interests and objectives. This is "warfare without armed conflict;" or to win strategically without fighting militarily. This idea is foreign to the traditional American way of war.

Given that RW consists of direct action against a military force and IW is direct action against the non-military elements of power, there will be some exclusion and some overlap of weapons and forces. For example, cyber warfare may be used to strike at both military and non-military centers of gravity. Thus, cyber warfare could be a subset within both RW and IW. Economic sanctions could be considered an act of IW. From a force perspective, military-on-military engagement is clearly RW. Yet, military forces that are contributing to efforts to build military-civil relationships through humanitarian assistance to undermine or prevent adversary influence are engaging in IW.

Time Sensitive Change Requirements

The US must find a way to communicate the reality of 21st century warfare to every citizen so that the US can maintain the opportunities for its citizens to live the American Dream. To be clear, the following recommendations are not that the US should model itself after China, or ancient Sparta, for that matter. Rather, the intent is to advocate for the US to educate targeted members of its society, civilian agencies, and senior civil servants on the methodologies that China is employing across the DIME while creating the language and policies to facilitate effective deterrence that are aligned with the US's strategic interests and priorities.

Without clear communication the required defense against adversary IW efforts will be insufficiently pushed to the military to handle in its entirety. In failing to educate the rest of the US civil society in IW, the US misses an opportunity to provide a characterization for a way of war to those who are unfamiliar with Sun Tzu, and who might otherwise be oblivious to the constant Chinese attacks across DIME.

To be sure, anyone who has read the Sun Tzu's Art of War will recognize that the US has been under attack since Xi Jinping took power in 2013, if not longer. However, because there is not a clear departure from binary concepts of peace and war, many people simply fail to understand that China is working to win before going to war, or preferably, to deter US intervention altogether. This binary perspective has led Westerners to invent the "gray zone" concept, which effectively fails to convey the dangers of what some believe are isolated incidents.

The usage of RW and IW maintains the correct level of potency to address kinetic and non-kinetic offensive operations against the country. Conceptually, RW works directly against military forces. This is a concept that is intuitive. As already stated, IW works directly against the political, diplomatic, economic, and informational elements of national power that enable an adversary's government, economy, and civil society to function effectively in a crisis or armed conflict. The updated IW concept provided in this article provides an easily articulated area of interest. The consolidation of GZA and IW, the update of the IW definition, and the addition of

RW will allow policymakers to clearly articulate the reality of contemporary warfare, thus allowing those outside of the military to take on the responsibility of defending against adversary IW operations.

As stated in the JCC:

Deterring an adversary from competing in a particular area is a perfectly valid strategy in strategic competition. Equally, the more competitive the United States shows itself to be, the greater the likely deterrent effect it will have upon adversaries.

The reality is our adversaries have evolved to a point that the United States is no longer afforded the luxury of a binary concept of war. As the need to compete requires the participation of those outside of military professionals, the DoD and the joint force must find a way to effectively communicate the different domains of warfare.

The first step of this process is to distinguish RW and IW in a meaningful way. The national leadership must then provide the means for collaboration across society and stress the importance of non-military agencies being active in their role to defend the nation against IW campaigns. To assist with this, joint professional military education should become a requirement before an individual can compete for high-grade general schedule (GS) government employment and executive-level leadership positions.

The potential methods for an adversary to conduct IW is beyond capability and capacity of the military. Therefore, appropriate civilian government and non-government organizations must be prepared to deter and if needed prevail against select adversary IW operations. This paper does not suggest a nationwide call to arms, but rather calling for clarifying language for victory against adversary countries and appropriate multi-agency/organization collaborative efforts for defense. The warfighter is more than capable of conducting forward RW and IW operations and the responsible citizen is uniquely suited to deter or prevail against adversary IW operations within the US to protect their American Dream.

[BACK TO TOP](#)

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[BACK TO TOP](#)