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NEWS SUMMARY:

- China's continued high-power microwave and laser directed energy developments look set to be an especially significant part of this year's China International Aviation & Aerospace Exhibition.
- Taiwan's Coast Guard will offer rewards worth thousands of dollars for spotting Chinese activity at sea, which Taiwan officials say is part of Beijing's gray zone strategy.
- Russia is pushing gray zone limits in its campaign against the West.
- Police have arrested a man trying to enter the US Capitol with a torch and flare gun.
- South African police used rubber bullets and stun grenades to disperse a large group of Mozambican nationals attempting to forcibly cross into the country.
- Police fired tear gas at protest over deadly canopy collapse in Serbia.
- Opinion: Taiwan and the United States should respond to aggressive gray-zone behavior by imposing costs on China, and they need to exploit the gray zone themselves.
- Opinion: Western leaders are running out of non-military options for response to Russian sabotage and hybrid warfare tactics, but a more strenuous response is still needed.

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GRAY ZONE COMPETITION:

Massive Chinese Anti-Drone High-Power Microwave Weapon Emerges

(The War Zone, November 7)

A huge truck-mounted system is one of at least three large mobile ground-based high-power microwave directed energy weapons, primarily intended to down drones, at this year's Zhuhai Airshow. This underscores a global explosion of demand for counter-drone capabilities, as well as China's steady progress in the development, fielding, and exporting of microwave and laser directed energy weapons.

Officially known as the China International Aviation & Aerospace Exhibition, the Zhuhai Airshow also provides an opportunity for Chinese and foreign companies to showcase ground-based and maritime offerings. Pictures and videos of various aircraft and other systems have been steadily emerging ahead of the event's formal opening next week.

The imagery that has appeared online already amid the Zhuhai preparations includes a promotional video from state-run firms China South Industries Group Corporation (CSGC) and Norinco that features footage of two high-power microwave directed energy weapons, as well as other air defense systems.

The first of these is a microwave system consisting of a large planar array mounted on top of an 8x8 light armored vehicle chassis. The system also has small rotating radar, which would make sense for target detection and tracking purposes. The underlying vehicle looks to be the same one used in the Type 625E self-propelled short-range air defense system, or a variant or derivative thereof, another CSGC/Norinco offering also seen in the promotional video.

The CSGC/Norinco video also shows an even larger microwave system, again including a planar array and radar, but this time installed on a Shacman SX2400/2500-series 8x8 truck. This design is seen at the top of this story and below in its traveling configuration.

The video does not provide specific details about the full features or capabilities of either CSGC/Norinco high-power microwave weapon system, including whether they have additional sensors. A clip at the end does show a small drone being downed by one of the systems, with an infrared camera feed also visible. Electro-optical and infrared cameras are often combined with directed energy counter-drone systems to help positively identify and track targets.

Pictures of a third high-power microwave directed energy weapon system, which is also mounted on a Shacman SX2400/2500-series truck, have also emerged. This system has its microwave array on a different style of articulating mount at the rear of the vehicle, as well as what looks to be a radar inside a dome on an extendable mast toward the cab end.

Images that have been circulating online of the preparations for Zhuhai have also shown what look to be various laser directed energy systems, again likely primarily for counter-drone use, mounted on light armored vehicles and uncrewed ground platforms.

Work on directed energy weapons of various types, including for counter-drone use, in China and elsewhere around the world is not new. America's armed forces are actively pursuing a number of ground and ship-based systems. However, there has been a notable new clamor among armed forces globally, including the U.S. military, to expand their abilities to defend against uncrewed aerial threats in recent years. The ongoing war in Ukraine, which has become heavily defined by drone use by both sides at all levels, from long-range strikes to kamikaze attacks on forces right on the front lines, has been the primary driver. Increasing uncrewed aerial system use in other conflicts, including ones in and around the Middle East, have been contributing factors, too.

How a microwave directed energy weapon focuses its beam, along with its power levels, affect its maximum effective range and how many threats it can engage at once. However, the beams are typically relatively broad, especially compared to laser directed energy weapons, which also helps get on target faster. They are also often less impacted by environmental factors.

As such, high-power microwave-based systems present a particularly attractive option for defeating large volumes of threats, including drones operating as part of fully networked swarms, an additional concern that is only set to grow in the future. Microwave energy, which can disrupt or even destroy a range of electronic systems, presents a threat to other types of targets in the air and down below, including cruise missiles, as well.

On the counter-drone front, China is well aware of the ever-growing threat ecosystem given its own substantial and still expanding investments in the development and fielding of various tiers of uncrewed aerial systems, as well as swarming capabilities, which are also on display at Zhuhai. The country has also been making steady progress in work on directed energy capabilities, including multiple existing ground-based types.

The microwave directed energy and other systems that will be on display at Zhuhai highlight an additional export dimension, as well. China has already sold directed energy counter-drone systems abroad. Just in October, a Chinese laser directed energy weapon appeared in the Iranian capital Tehran during a high-profile appearance by Iran's Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Though it remains unclear what other capabilities were deployed to protect the Iranian Supreme Leader, The War Zone noted at the time that images from the event showed what looked to be a planar array as is commonly seen on microwave-based systems.

It is important to stress that the real capabilities of any these Chinese systems are unclear. At the same time, China has been steadily working to get those systems into at least some level of operational use while the U.S. military has notably lagged in doing so on and off traditional battlefields. When it comes to domestic drone defense considerations, American armed forces are also notably not interested at all currently in directed energy weapons, or more traditional kinetic effectors like surface-to-air missiles or guns, due in large part to legal and regulatory issues that you can read about more here.

In the meantime, China's continued high-power microwave and laser directed energy developments look set to be an especially significant part of this year's Zhuhai airshow.

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Taiwan coast guard to harness 'people power' to report Chinese activity

(Reuters, November 7)

Taiwan's coast guard said on Friday it would offer rewards worth thousands of dollars for spotting Chinese activity at sea, including warships or submarines, saying it was harnessing "people power" to boost its own limited workforce.

Taiwan, which China claims as its own territory, has complained for the past five years of stepped up Chinese military activity, and the Taiwanese coast guard has increasingly been involved in patrolling sea areas.

China's coast guard's involvement in these activities has grown, which Taiwan officials say is part of a "grey zone" strategy that stops short of war and aims to enforce what China calls its right to manage and control the Taiwan Strait.

Taiwan's coast guard said there was a growing threat at sea.

"The coast guard has limited manpower and there is endless people power at sea," it said in a statement.

"In order to build a dense notification network at sea and along the coast, and to eliminate grey area attacks, the coast guard calls on Taiwan's people to raise their awareness of maritime security and stay alert to the abnormal activities."

The highest reward of T\$200,000 (\$6,245) will go to those reporting piracy, murder, arson or hostage taking, while reporting illegal entry of Chinese nationals will net T\$50,000, the coast guard said.

For what it called "substantiated" reports of Chinese warships, including submarines, in Taiwan's waters then T\$3,000 per case would be offered, it added.

The coast guard has come in for criticism in Taiwan for failing to spot some cases of Chinese nationals crossing the strait and landing on the island, people who mostly used small boats that are hard for radars to detect.

In June, Taiwanese fishing boats in the strait took pictures of a Chinese submarine that had surfaced.

Taiwan has been boosting investment in its coast guard with larger more modern ships, some of which can be equipped with missiles in the event of war.

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Russia's campaign against the West is getting more aggressive

(Vox, November 7)

Though it's already been overshadowed in the deluge of post-election analysis of Donald Trump's victory, Tuesday also marked a serious escalation of Russia's global campaign of sabotage and intimidation targeting the US and other Western powers.

Polling sites in several states received bomb threats — later determined not to be credible — which the FBI said in a statement "appear to originate from Russian email domains." The threats forced several polling places to close temporarily in the swing state of Georgia. Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger told reporters on Tuesday, "We identified the source, and it was from Russia." Polling sites in the swing states of Michigan and Arizona also received threats, though it's unclear if these were part of the same campaign.

Other officials have suggested that someone could have been spoofing Russian email addresses, and the Russian government was quick to deny any involvement. The US intelligence community had warned prior to the election that the Russian government was promoting disinformation via social media in the US in order to "undermine the legitimacy of the election, instill fear in voters regarding the election process, and suggest Americans are using violence against each other due to political preferences." US authorities say the Russian government had been behind smear attacks targeting Democratic vice presidential candidate Tim Walz and false allegations of voter fraud, among other examples of disinformation.

As anyone following American politics over the past decade knows, the Russian government has tried to meddle in US campaigns before. As was the case in the past two elections, the

Russian government was believed to prefer Trump, who speaks frequently of his good relationship with President Vladimir Putin and has been critical of both NATO and US support for Ukraine.

This time, though, it ultimately may not have mattered that much. Though Russian disinformation was widely spread, including by X owner and Trump backer Elon Musk, nothing the Kremlin allegedly orchestrated in this election cycle appears to have had anywhere near the political impact of the hacking of the Democratic National Committee in 2016, which US intelligence agencies also believe Russia orchestrated.

Andrei Soldatov, an investigative journalist and analyst who has written several books on Russia's security services, says this year's campaign targeting the US election differed from past efforts. It was also different from recent alleged campaigns of fraud to help Moscow's preferred candidates in elections in the former Soviet states of Georgia and Moldova.

"The goal was not actually to change the results of the election," Soldatov told Vox. "It was about posturing, about reminding Americans what's at stake, and sending a message about what might happen if America continues its support for Ukraine."

Though the election is over, Russia's efforts to transmit this message are not, and they ultimately might take forms that are more violent and destructive than empty bomb threats.

Out of the gray zone and into the blue

Two days before the election, the Wall Street Journal reported that Western security services believed two incendiary devices seized on board planes in Europe over the summer were a test run for a Russian operation to start fires on US-bound planes. The devices detonated without injuries at logistics hubs in Germany and the UK, but the head of Poland's intelligence agency said, "I'm not sure the political leaders of Russia are aware of the consequences if one of these packages exploded, causing a mass casualty event." The Russian government has denied involvement.

This follows a campaign of arson and sabotage across Europe that intelligence officials say demonstrates an increasing recklessness on the part of the Kremlin. As the head of Britain's foreign intelligence service MI6 put it, "Russian intelligence services have gone a bit feral, frankly."

In recent months, Russian agents have been accused of plotting sabotage attacks against US and German military targets, arson attacks in the UK and Lithuania, and the attempted assassination of a major German defense contractor, among other plots.

Notably, Soldatov said this campaign goes beyond anything the KGB has attempted in Europe or the United States during the Cold War and should be seen as an attempt by Moscow to raise the costs of Western support for Ukraine, an effort that is separate from but complementary to Putin's periodic threats to use nuclear weapons.

“People sometimes think the only way Russia can escalate is with nuclear weapons,” Soldatov said. “But what we’ve seen in 2024 is that there are actually many more ways to escalate.”

Disinformation and sabotage are the kinds of tactics often referred to as “gray zone” or “hybrid” warfare: inflicting costs on an adversary while maintaining plausible deniability. The aim here is to cause just enough damage to get the point across without leaving an opening for an all-out military war. But that line is a narrow one, and some officials say Russia’s behavior is pushing the gray zone’s limits.

At the NATO summit in Washington in July, Lithuania’s foreign minister said on a panel, “I’m not sure it can be called hybrid events or gray zone events any longer. It’s quite clear that [these are] terrorist attacks by a hostile neighboring country against NATO countries.”

Moscow gets its man

Trump, after all, has promised to immediately end the war in Ukraine, presumably by pressuring Kyiv to accede to at least some of Moscow’s demands. Could the Kremlin dial back the campaign now that its preferred candidate is returning to the White House?

It’s possible. Russian leaders reacted with open jubilation to Trump’s victory in 2016 but were largely disappointed with his administration, which, for all his kind words for Putin, also saw a raft of new sanctions against Moscow and the sale of anti-tank weapons to Ukraine.

Moscow is being much more cautious this time around. In a statement Wednesday responding to Trump’s victory, the Russian foreign ministry credited him with countering the “globalist” course of America’s current administration. It also added, “We have no illusions about the president-elect, who is well known in Russia ... the US ruling political elite adheres to anti-Russia principles and the policy of ‘containing Moscow.’ This line does not depend on changes in America’s domestic political barometer.”

One of the risks of engaging in gray zone tactics is that you can’t always be sure how your opponent will react, and it’s difficult to know when a red line is finally crossed. Trump, for one, has prided himself on his unpredictability. Like everyone else after what happened on Tuesday, Putin is likely waiting to see what comes next.

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DOMESTIC:

Police arrest man trying to enter US Capitol with flare gun

(The Associated Press, November 5)

Police have arrested a man trying to enter the US Capitol with a torch and flare gun.

U.S. Capitol Police say the man was stopped Tuesday during a security screening at the Capitol Visitor Center. Authorities say he smelled of fuel and was carrying the flare gun and torch.

Officials have canceled public tours of the Capitol for the remainder of the day.

Police say they are still investigating.

The arrest comes as authorities are on heightened alert for security issues around the nation's capital and have increased patrols in areas downtown and near the White House around Election Day. Nearly four years ago, a mob of Donald Trump's supporters attacked the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021.

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OTHER FOREIGN COUNTRIES:

South African Police Use Rubber Bullets to Control Mozambican Crowd Trying To Enter The Country

(Gauteng, November 7)

Tensions reached a boiling point at the Lebombo Border Post between South Africa and Mozambique on Wednesday, November 6, 2024, when South African Police Service (SAPS) officers were forced to open fire on a large group of Mozambican nationals attempting to forcibly cross into South Africa. The police used rubber bullets and stun grenades to disperse the crowd after they grew aggressive and started pushing against the border gate. The crowd, many of whom were intoxicated, chanted outside the border and hurled insults at officers before resorting to throwing stones.

The Border Standoff

The situation escalated after Border Management Authority (BMA) officials informed the group that although they could travel into Mozambique, they would not be allowed to return to South Africa as no Mozambican authorities were present to process their passports. The group initially complied, but by early afternoon, frustration mounted. Around 14:00, protesters began chanting the Mozambican national anthem, before violently pushing the gates open, prompting a swift police response.

The standoff lasted several hours, resulting in multiple arrests and the use of force by SAPS to regain control of the situation. This incident comes amid rising tensions in Mozambique, where there have been reports of widespread looting, arson, and civil unrest.

Looting and Civil Unrest in Mozambique

Mozambican nationals, including those at the border, have expressed growing concerns about the situation back home. Paul Mthembu, a Mozambican witness at the scene, explained that youth-led riots in Mozambique have become a widespread issue. Looting and violent protests have ravaged parts of the country, with trucks, shops, and even alcohol warehouses being targeted. Mthembu also noted that much of the unrest had been fueled by alcohol, and the lack of coordinated leadership among the protesters made the situation even more volatile.

Reports from Mozambique indicate that protesters have continued to target businesses and trucks in the past 24 hours, while local police have retreated or gone into hiding. “The majority are under the influence of alcohol,” Mthembu said. “A truck has been placed across the road leading out of Mozambique, preventing vehicles from passing through.”

Concerns for Public Safety

The unrest in Mozambique has left many residents, including those at the border, fearful for their safety. Mozambican national Armando Makhura, who was among those unable to cross into South Africa, voiced concerns over the escalating violence. He warned that unless the situation is swiftly addressed by the Mozambican government, the unrest could result in more loss of life.

South Africa’s Response

On the South African side, the tension at the Lebombo Border Post is indicative of broader issues relating to border security and cross-border immigration. With many Mozambicans seeking refuge in South Africa due to worsening conditions at home, the border area has become a focal point of frustration.

South African authorities have expressed concern over the rising number of undocumented crossings and have vowed to continue reinforcing security measures at the border. However, incidents like this highlight the strain on law enforcement and the delicate balance between managing national security and humanitarian concerns.

The incident at the Lebombo Border Post reflects the growing tension between Mozambique and South Africa, fueled by the violence and unrest in Mozambique. While the SAPS response was swift, the situation remains unresolved, and the fear of further escalation is palpable. As the unrest continues to spiral in Mozambique, South African authorities must prepare for more potential disruptions at the border. For now, it is clear that the tensions between the two nations are far from over, and the situation will require careful monitoring as it develops.

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Police fire tear gas at protest over deadly canopy collapse in Serbia

(The Associated Press, November 5)

Protesters on Tuesday threw flares and red paint on the City Hall building in the Serbian city of Novi Sad in rage over last week’s collapse of a concrete canopy at the railway station that killed 14 people. Police responded by firing tear gas canisters.

The protesters surrounded the building in the city center, broke windows and threw stones and other objects despite calls by organizers to remain calm. Special police troops were deployed inside the building.

Serbia’s autocratic President Aleksandar Vucic said police were “showing restraint,” while warning that “horrific, violent protests are underway.”

“People of Serbia, please do not think violence is allowed,” he said on X. “All those taking part in the incidents will be punished.”

Miran Pogacar, an opposition activist, said “one glass window can be mended but we cannot bring back 14 lives. People are angry. Serbia won’t stand for this.”

Protest organizers said they wanted to enter the City Hall building and submit their demands, including that those responsible for the canopy collapse face justice.

Some of the protesters trying to get inside the building wore masks and were believed to be soccer hooligans who are close to the populist government.

Bojan Pajtic, an opposition politician, said he believed violence was being stoked by provocateurs, a tactic used before in Serbia to derail peaceful anti-government protests and paint the opposition protesters as enemies of the nation.

Earlier, thousands of demonstrators had marched through the city streets demanding that top officials step down because of the fatal outer roof collapse last Friday, including President Vucic and Prime Minister Milos Vucevic.

The protesters first gathered outside the railway station where they held a moment of silence for the victims as organizers read their names. The crowd responded by chanting: “arrest the gang” and “thieves.”

The protest started peacefully but some demonstrators later hurled plastic bottles and bricks at the headquarters of Vucic’s ruling Serbian Progressive Party and smeared red paint on posters of the Serbian president and the prime minister — a message that they have blood on their hands.

The protesters removed most of the Serbian national red, blue and white national flags that were apparently hung on the headquarters to prevent it from an attack. That triggered an angry reaction from the president.

“Our Serbian tri-color has been destroyed, hidden and removed by all those who do not love Serbia,” Vucic wrote on X. “Tonight, in Novi Sad, this is being done by those who tell us that they love Serbia more than us, the decent citizens of this country.”

As protests wound down later in the evening, Vucic made a surprise trip to Novi Sad and made a brief appearance before his several hundred supporters gathered outside the party headquarters.

Critics of Serbia’s populist government have attributed the disaster to rampant corruption in the Balkan country, a lack of transparency and sloppy work during renovation work on the station building which was part of a wider railway deal with Chinese state companies.

The accident happened without warning. Surveillance camera footage showed the massive canopy on the outer wall of the station building crashing down on the people sitting below on benches or going in and out.

Officials have promised full accountability and, faced with pressure, Serbia's construction minister submitted his resignation on Tuesday.

Prosecutors have said that more than 40 people already have been questioned as part of a probe into what happened. Many in Serbia, however, doubt that justice will be served with the populists in firm control of the judicial system and the police.

Opposition parties behind Tuesday's protest said they are also demanding the resignation of Vucevic and that documentation be made public listing all the companies and individuals involved.

The victims included a 6-year-old girl. Those injured in the roof collapse remained in serious condition on Tuesday.

The train station has been renovated twice in recent years. Officials have insisted that the canopy had not been part of the renovation work, suggesting this was the reason why it collapsed but giving no explanation for why it was not included.

The Novi Sad railway station was originally built in 1964, while the renovated station was inaugurated by Vucic and his populist ally, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, over two years ago as a major stopover for a planned fast train line between Belgrade and Budapest.

COMMENTARY:

China's Gray-Zone Offensive Against Taiwan Is Backfiring

(Foreign Policy, November 8, David Sacks)

In mid-October, China conducted yet another round of large-scale military drills in the Taiwan Strait, including practicing a blockade of Taiwanese ports. This time, the trigger was a series of unremarkable comments by Taiwanese President Lai Ching-te on the occasion of Taiwan's National Day a few days prior. Beijing "has no right to represent Taiwan," Lai had asserted, describing Taiwan as a place where "democracy and freedom are growing and thriving." Although Lai gave no indication that he would pursue independence or seek to change Taiwan's international status, Beijing used his remarks as a new pretext to ramp up the pressure.

Over the past two years, major Chinese military exercises around Taiwan have gone from comparatively rare to almost routine. Beijing launched major drills after former U.S. Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi visited the island in August 2022; when Lai's predecessor, Tsai Ing-wen, briefly stopped in the United States in April 2023; and again after Lai's inauguration in May 2024. But rather than isolated actions responding to specific events, these high-profile military drills should be viewed as a core component of China's larger campaign of "gray-zone" operations against Taiwan—coercive activities that fall below the threshold of armed force. As part of these tactics, China has levied tariffs and embargoes on Taiwanese exports, sought to increase Taiwan's international isolation, and employed disinformation campaigns and cyberattacks meant to destabilize its people and government.

The ultimate goal is forcing Taiwan to acquiesce to unification. In China's ideal scenario, the Taiwanese people would find the accumulating pressures of these gray-zone activities unbearable and ultimately capitulate, allowing Beijing to win control of Taiwan without having to fire a shot. Short of these maximalist aims, the Chinese leadership hopes to erode trust in Lai's ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) and sow division in Taiwanese society, including by raising questions about whether the United States would come to Taiwan's defense in the event of a Chinese blockade or invasion.

But it is already clear that China's gray-zone operations are backfiring. The threat against which China justifies its campaign—a Taiwanese push for independence—does not really exist: the Taiwanese people support the status quo and understand that pursuing independence would alienate the island's international partners and likely invite a Chinese attack. Instead, China's actions have hardened Taiwan's resolve to resist unification, making it only more likely that Beijing will have to resort to force to achieve this aim. Taiwan and the United States should therefore remain focused on deterring—and, if necessary, defeating—a Chinese blockade or invasion. And they should respond to aggressive gray-zone behavior by imposing costs on China that might change its calculus for an invasion or blockade. To prevent a hot conflict, they need to win the cold one. Put simply, Washington and Taipei need to exploit the gray zone themselves.

HONEY INTO VINEGAR

China's strategy for unifying with Taiwan has always rested on a combination of inducements and threats—a marriage proposal at gunpoint. Beijing has attempted to demonstrate to the Taiwanese people the benefits of a closer political and economic relationship and the costs of further estrangement. China's overtures were sweetest from 2008 to 2016, during the administration of Taiwanese President Ma Ying-jeou, whose party, the Kuomintang, emphatically rejected Taiwanese independence and favored a relatively conciliatory approach to Beijing, based on the so-called 1992 Consensus—a vague framework in which both sides agree there is “one China” but disagree on how to define it. During that period, Beijing and Taipei inked more than two dozen agreements on everything from trade to people-to-people exchanges. In 2016, however, Ma was succeeded by Tsai, of the DPP, which views Taiwan as an already independent and sovereign nation, formally called the Republic of China. Although Tsai, in her inaugural address, offered a formulation for cross-strait relations that satisfied the idea of “one China,” she declined to explicitly endorse the 1992 Consensus. Since then, China's approach has grown more antagonistic, especially in the past few years.

Since late 2020, People's Liberation Army aircraft have flown through Taiwan's air defense identification zone—a buffer area outside its territorial airspace—on a near-daily basis. In 2022, Chinese aircraft began routinely flying over the median line in the Taiwan Strait, a demarcation that both sides had previously respected for over half a century. China has progressively increased the sophistication of these sorties as well as their proximity to Taiwanese territory. Before, the People's Liberation Army Navy only occasionally operated in the waters near Taiwan; today, it stations warships around the island almost continuously. As a result, according to Taiwan's naval chief, Chinese forces “are ready to blockade Taiwan at any time they want.”

China is also targeting Taiwan economically, attempting to drive divisions within its society by penalizing industries typically located in municipalities that favor the DPP. In May, it announced it would reinstate tariffs on 134 imports from Taiwan and in September added another 34 products to that list. Beijing has also threatened and fined China-based subsidiaries of Taiwanese companies that it believes support the DPP and pressured Taiwanese companies with operations in China to publish pro-China public statements.

Politically, China continues to attempt to isolate Taiwan. It has succeeded in barring Taiwan from various world bodies, including the World Health Organization, Interpol, and the International Civil Aviation Organization. More recently, it has embarked on a sustained effort to persuade countries and global organizations to declare that Taiwan is a part of China's territory and to support its efforts to achieve unification. In one notable example, which occurred after Lai's inauguration, Nauru, a tiny island nation in Micronesia, severed diplomatic ties with Taiwan. This was not the first time a country had "flipped" to Beijing by cutting ties with Taipei, but it was the first time such a country explicitly recognized that "the Government of the [People's Republic of China] is the sole legal Government representing the whole of China, and Taiwan is an inalienable part of China's territory." In this narrative battle, China is attempting to establish that disagreements between Beijing and Taipei constitute an internal matter. If this perspective were to become broadly accepted around the world, Beijing could argue that any use of force would not be in violation of international law, making it more difficult for the United States to lead a response.

In June, China unveiled new legal guidelines meant to target Taiwan independence activists; these crimes, some punishable by death, include promoting Taiwan's inclusion in international organizations for which statehood is a requirement. A few months later, a Chinese court convicted a Taiwanese political activist who had moved to China and had previously advocated for Taiwan's inclusion in the UN, sentencing him to nine years in prison. (The Republic of China was a founding member of the UN, representing "China" even after its government fled to Taiwan. In 1971, however, the UN voted to move representation to the People's Republic of China; Taiwan has not had a presence in the body since.) China also continues to sanction Taiwanese officials—including its current vice president and national security adviser—and nationals it considers to be pro-independence.

Taiwan is now the target of more external disinformation attacks than any other democracy, with China producing the lion's share of large-scale operations against it. And Beijing's campaigns are growing increasingly sophisticated: in the run-up to Taiwan's most recent presidential election, actors linked to the Chinese government used generative artificial intelligence to create audio and video deepfakes of Taiwanese political leaders. In recent years, China has attempted to sow skepticism of the United States among the Taiwanese population, as well. Consequently, a new perspective has taken hold: a September 2023 poll by Taiwan's top research institution found that only 34 percent of Taiwanese people consider the United States to be a trustworthy partner, which represents a decline of 11 percentage points since 2021. Although this is a worrying trend, growing Taiwanese skepticism of the United States has not translated into a greater desire to unify with Beijing.

HARDENED STEEL

China's gray-zone campaign, intended to help achieve unification, is instead pushing Taiwan further away. It is fueling a growing conviction among Taiwanese that China is hostile and raising an awareness among the population that conflict is a real possibility. Taiwanese people also see Beijing's crackdown on democracy in Hong Kong as a harbinger of their likely fate following unification, and they are determined to prevent that from happening. Now, according to a long-running poll from National Chengchi University, in Taipei, less than seven percent of Taiwanese people desire unification with China at any point. That number was more than twice as high just six years ago.

Rather than buckling to Chinese pressure, Taiwan is stiffening its resolve, inspired in part by Ukraine standing up to Russia. In the past three years, Taiwan has consistently increased its defense budget, lengthened mandatory military conscription from three months to a year while overhauling its training regimen, invested in domestic missile and drone production, and made important strides in civil defense. In 2016, more than 80 percent of Taiwanese people believed that resistance in a potential conflict with China would be futile; by 2022, the proportion of the population expressing this view had nearly halved to 43 percent.

On the economic side, Beijing's pressure on Taipei has led to an erosion of its leverage over the island. Taiwanese firms, having witnessed the political risks of doing business on the mainland, are reducing their dependence on China. Investment in China made up 43 percent of Taiwanese outbound foreign direct investment in 2016, a number that dropped to just 11 percent last year. The island's commerce with China continues to decline as a share of its overall trade, as well. Beijing, on the other hand, remains reliant on Taiwanese technology products for its manufacturing industry, meaning that China is now arguably more vulnerable to a disruption in cross-strait trade than Taiwan.

China is unlikely to find a path from gray-zone coercion to unification that does not involve the use of military force. It cannot return to the niceties of the Ma era, either: its gray-zone campaign has revealed its strategic aims to an extent that many Taiwanese people find irreconcilable with their own desires—an outcome no tactical adjustment can reverse.

A MOVING TARGET

Although China's gray-zone tactics do not pose an existential threat, Taiwan cannot simply ignore them. Taipei should continue to diversify its economy away from China, build resilient communications networks, improve the cybersecurity of its key infrastructure and government ministries, stockpile critical supplies, and work with like-minded democracies on global challenges.

At the same time, there is a danger of Taiwan responding to Chinese pressure in such a way that eats up the finite resources the island needs to prepare for a blockade or invasion. Indeed, Taiwan's decision to respond to incursions into its air defense identification zone by scrambling fighter jets and to trail Chinese navy ships on the seas has heavily taxed its defense platforms and risks exhausting the military, thereby compromising Taiwan's readiness for direct conflict.

Continuing on this path would weaken Taiwan's ability to withstand a blockade or invasion just as China's use of force becomes more likely.

It is important for Taiwan to prioritize preparing for the fight that it cannot lose. This means adapting its defense strategies to the reality of the power imbalance: because it cannot match China tank for tank, plane for plane, or ship for ship, Taiwan should divest from some of these legacy platforms in favor of uncrewed systems, mines, and missiles, which Taipei can produce itself—or procure from the United States—in far greater quantities. To be sure, Taiwan's government cannot allow perceived gray-zone threats to go unanswered, and it must find some way of demonstrating to its citizens that it is protecting them. But with limited resources, preparing for genuine military escalation must remain the primary focus.

Meanwhile, the United States, which has a vital strategic interest in maintaining peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait, must raise the costs for China of pursuing these tactics. It should respond to gray-zone coercion by announcing additional military aid to Taiwan, deploying more of its high-end military capabilities to the region, and deepening its military engagement with Japan, particularly in that country's southwestern islands, which stretch toward Taiwan. China's military exercises in the Taiwan Strait are meant to signal to the United States that China's capabilities are too advanced for Washington to be able to intervene on Taiwan's behalf; likewise, the United States should respond with its own exercises that demonstrate that it can keep open critical sea-lanes near Taiwan and surge forces into the region as needed. Washington should also warn Beijing that its response to Chinese coercion against Taiwan would not be limited to the military domain—that further pressure on Taiwan will invite broader U.S. restrictions on high-tech exports to China.

This kind of coordination between Washington and Taipei would complicate Chinese plans for a blockade or invasion and may prompt Beijing to reexamine whether the costs of continuing on its current path outweigh the benefits. Even if China does not abandon its gray-zone playbook, such steps would, at the very least, better prepare Taiwan for a conflict that such coercion has made all the more likely.

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How and why Russia is conducting sabotage and hybrid-war offensive

(The Strategist, November 5, Jon Richardson)

Across Europe, we're seeing more confirmed or suspected instances of Russian sabotage. It is part of a broader hybrid war campaign against NATO countries, aimed at eroding support for Ukraine and damaging Western cohesion.

In the US, Russia is refraining from sabotage, but it's working hard on disinformation.

The head of MI5 warned in October that agents of Russia's military intelligence agency, the GRU, had conducted arson attacks, sabotage and other dangerous actions 'with increasing recklessness'. His MI6 counterpart said Russian intelligence services had gone 'a bit feral'.

The chiefs of Germany's three intelligence branches echoed these concerns, reporting a 'quantitative and qualitative' increase in acts of Russian-sponsored espionage and sabotage in their country. On 22 October, Poland announced it would close the Russian consulate in Poznan due to alleged sabotage attempts.

Russia has conducted arson attacks in Poland, Germany, Lithuania, Latvia and Czechia. Other reported sabotage attempts include flying drones over Stockholm airport, jamming of Baltic countries' civil aviation GPS systems and disruption of French railways on the first day of the Paris Olympics. Facilities linked to supplying Ukraine have also been targeted: a BAE Systems munitions facility in Wales, an air-defence company's factory in Berlin and a Ukrainian-owned logistics firm in London.

Authorities have arrested suspects for plots to bomb or sabotage a military base in Bavaria and a French facility supporting Ukraine's war efforts. Agencies disrupted a plot to assassinate the CEO of German arms maker Rheinmetall, a supplier of artillery shells to Ukraine. Latvian authorities tracked down saboteurs dispatched to several countries on paid missions. Norway's domestic intelligence service warns of the threat of sabotage to train lines and to gas facilities supplying much of Europe.

This upsurge in sabotage activity is a rebound from initial setbacks that Russian intelligence suffered in the 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Its assessment of likely Ukrainian resistance and Western unity was lacking, affecting its ability to analyse and influence those factors. Some 750 Russians with diplomatic cover were expelled from Russian embassies and consulates across Europe, mostly spies.

Russia's intelligence and security services rapidly regrouped. They have since managed to build new illegal networks and recruit criminals and other proxies through the dark web or social media platforms such as Telegram.

Sabotage operations are part of its larger hybrid war campaign. This is designed to cause fear and division in order to undermine support for Ukraine without going so far as provoking war. Russian hybrid warfare encompasses several tactics, most notably cyberattacks and disinformation campaigns.

Another grey-zone tactic is weaponising immigration. Russian authorities direct migrants into neighbouring European countries without proper documentation, instructing them to claim asylum there. The aim is to destabilise those neighbours. European officials reported Russian plans to set up a 15,000-strong force comprising former militias in Libya to control the flow of migrants. Migration routes through Libya link to other places with Russian military or paramilitary presence, notably through Central African Republic and Sudan, as well as Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger.

Fostering irregular migration further supports right-wing European parties which oppose immigration and European integration and which Russia funds. These include AfD in Germany, National Rally in France and Reform UK, which all gained in recent elections and are mostly Russia-friendly and critical of support for Ukraine.

So far, Russia has refrained from sabotage in the US, although European officials have warned that uncovered plots to plant incendiary devices on planes in Europe could be test runs for similar plans in the US. Russian disinformation efforts in the US have stepped up since 2022 and expanded during the presidential election campaign. Donald Trump's and MAGA Republicans' reluctance to support Ukraine makes Trump the clearly preferred candidate of Russia.

In the aftermath of hurricanes Milton and Helene in the US, Russia-affiliated social media accounts pushed fake narratives claiming the Biden administration's response had been incompetent, reflecting wider government failures and prioritisation of resources to Ukraine over domestic needs. The Justice Department has indicted two employees of Kremlin media propaganda arm RT for paying US\$10 million to a media company in Tennessee to spread disinformation.

Anti-US campaigns are also active in developing countries. Some aim to discredit US-funded anti-malaria programs in Africa.

Western leaders have been reluctant to call for a more vigorous response to Russian sabotage, probably out of fear of escalation. Some media reports even suggest that fears of retaliatory sabotage actions, such as attacks on US bases, have fed into US reluctance to lift restrictions on Ukraine's use of long-range missiles.

The West is running out of non-military options for response, since it is already imposing extensive economic and diplomatic sanctions against Moscow and has limited capacity or opportunity to retaliate in kind inside Russia. Still, a more strenuous response by Western governments is needed.

Former Finnish president Sauli Niinisto has suggested that the EU needs its own pan-European intelligence agency to help countries fend off threats, saboteurs and espionage. At the very least, the US and Europe should respond to Russian hybrid warfare by removing the shackles from Ukraine, allowing it to repel the Russian invaders from its territory.

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