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China's Response to a JMSDF Vessel's Transit of the Taiwan Strait: A Hybrid Warfare Perspective

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1. Introduction

On April 17, 2026, JS *Ikazuchi*, a Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) destroyer, transited the Taiwan Strait.¹ This marked the fourth transit of the Taiwan Strait by a JMSDF vessel and the first since political tensions between Japan and China escalated following a series of measures implemented by China in response to Japanese Prime Minister Takaichi Sanae's remarks on November 7, 2025 regarding the possible recognition of a survival-threatening situation in the event of a Taiwan contingency. These measures included calls for Chinese citizens to refrain from traveling to Japan,² a ban on imports of Japanese seafood products,³ and export restrictions on dual-use products targeting twenty designated Japanese companies and organizations.⁴

China reacted swiftly to the transit. On the same day, a spokesperson for China's Ministry of National Defense announced that the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Eastern Theater Command had organized naval and air forces to track and monitor *Ikazuchi* throughout its transit of the Taiwan Strait and had taken "effective control measures" to address the situation. The spokesperson further accused Japan of engaging in deliberate provocation and compounding its previous mistakes, asserting that Prime Minister Takaichi had made "erroneous remarks on Taiwan" and had yet to "show any sign of repentance." According to the spokesperson, the transit of *Ikazuchi* would stir up tensions in the Taiwan Strait and send the "wrong signal to 'Taiwan independence' separatist forces."⁵ Also on April 17, a spokesperson for China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs criticized the transit, stating that Japan was repeating its mistakes by deliberately dispatching a JMSDF vessel through "the Taiwan Strait to flex its muscles and deliberately provoke China." The spokesperson further characterized the transit as a "dangerous attempt" by certain elements within Japan to undertake "armed intervention" and undermine peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait.⁶

Two days after the *Ikazuchi* transit, on April 19, two People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) vessels (DDG 133 and FFG 577) transited northeastward through the waters between Amami-Oshima Island and Yokoate-jima Island toward the Pacific Ocean.⁷ Three days later, on April 22, the same vessels sailed northeastward through the waters between Yonaguni-jima Island and Iriomote-jima

Island toward the East China Sea (Figure 1).⁸ According to a statement by the Ministry of National Defense People’s Republic of China, the deployment constituted routine training conducted in accordance with an annual training plan and was not directed against any specific country or entity.⁹ Nevertheless, some Chinese media outlets explicitly linked the deployment to the *Ikazuchi* transit of the Taiwan Strait. For example, *Global Times*, a media outlet affiliated with the Chinese Communist Party’s flagship publication, *People’s Daily*, quoted an anonymous Chinese military expert who argued that the deployment, conducted immediately after the *Ikazuchi* transit of the Taiwan Strait, served as a deterrent against hostile forces and demonstrated China’s firm determination to safeguard its sovereignty and maritime rights and interests.¹⁰

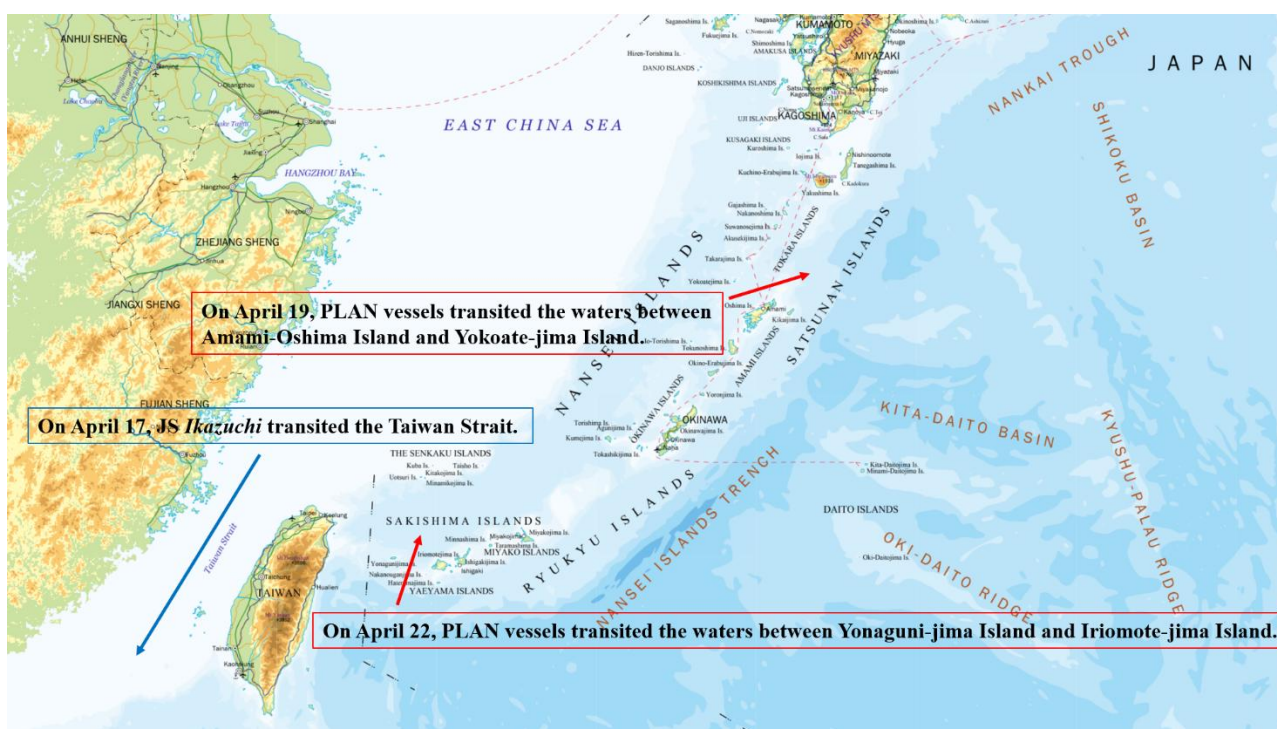


Figure 1. The *Ikazuchi* transit of the Taiwan Strait and the transits of PLAN vessels through the waters between Amami-Oshima Island and Yokoate-jima Island and between Yonaguni-jima Island and Iriomote-jima Island.

Source: Author’s compilation based on Japan Joint Staff press releases¹¹ and materials from the Geospatial Information Authority of Japan (GSI).¹²

The *Ikazuchi* transit represented the fourth transit of the Taiwan Strait by a JMSDF vessel and the third conducted solely by Japan.¹³ China’s decision to publicly disclose its monitoring activities on the day of the transit,¹⁴ its use of the particularly strong expression “armed intervention” in its official criticism of Japan, and the transit of the PLAN vessels through the waters between Amami-Oshima Island and Yokoate-jima Island only two days later collectively suggest that China’s response was stronger than in previous cases. In addition, in parallel with these military activities, Chinese

authorities—including the Ministry of National Defense, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and media organizations affiliated with the Chinese Communist Party—engaged in active information dissemination. Against this backdrop, what objectives was China attempting to achieve, and by what means? This article addresses these questions from the perspective of hybrid warfare.

2. “Three Warfares” —China’s Hybrid Warfare

(1) Overview of Hybrid Warfare

Hybrid warfare refers to the use of a combination of military and non-military means to achieve strategic objectives.¹⁵ Although there is no universally accepted definition of the concept, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), for example, describes hybrid threats as the employment of a combination of military and non-military, overt and covert means, including disinformation, cyberattacks, economic coercion, the use of irregular armed groups, and the deployment of conventional military forces.¹⁶

The defining characteristic of hybrid warfare, in contrast to traditional warfare, lies in its use of a wide range of means—both military and non-military—to achieve strategic objectives. Consequently, large-scale military operations conducted by regular armed forces, which have traditionally been regarded as indispensable for achieving wartime goals, are not necessarily required in hybrid warfare. Moreover, hybrid warfare places considerable emphasis not only on the exercise of power in the physical domain but also on influencing the decision-making processes of targeted actors in the information and cognitive domains. This distinguishes it from traditional warfare, which primarily seeks to compel an adversary to comply with one’s will through the application of military force. Because hybrid warfare does not necessarily depend on large-scale military operations and is fought across physical, information, and cognitive domains, it encompasses both overt and covert activities. Such activities may include concealing the identity of the perpetrator, employing means that make attribution difficult, or operating through proxies and deniable actors. For these reasons, hybrid warfare is inherently complex and often occupies the space between peace and armed conflict (Table 1). Actors engaging in hybrid warfare frequently exploit the continuity between peacetime and wartime conditions, deliberately blurring the distinction between the two in pursuit of strategic objectives.

One of the most prominent examples of hybrid warfare is Russia’s “annexation” of Crimea in 2014. In this case, armed personnel—including members of the Russian military who concealed their affiliation by removing identifying insignia—conducted covert operations in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea. These forces seized key facilities, including the regional parliament, airports, major transportation routes, and Ukrainian military installations. Russia subsequently facilitated a “referendum” and used its outcome to create a veneer of legitimacy for the “annexation” of the peninsula, thereby achieving its strategic objective.¹⁷ Notably, no large-scale conventional military confrontation occurred between Russian and Ukrainian regular forces. At the same time, cyberattacks,

disinformation campaigns, and other non-military methods were employed in parallel with military activities.

Table 1. Comparison of Traditional Warfare and Hybrid Warfare

Category	Traditional Warfare	Hybrid Warfare
Means employed	Military means	Military and non-military means
Large-scale military operations by regular forces	Necessary	Not necessarily required
Domains of conflict	Physical domain	Physical, information, and cognitive domains
Nature of activities	Overt	Overt and covert
Methods of exercising power against an adversary	Compellence through military force	Compellence and influence over decision-making
Relationship between peace and war	Discontinuous	Continuous

(2) China’s Approach to Hybrid Warfare

As the significance of hybrid warfare as a contemporary form of conflict has increased, China has also attached growing importance to this mode of competition. Chinese thinking on military affairs and warfare appears to place considerable emphasis on non-physical as well as physical means. In this context, China is widely regarded as employing the concept of the “Three Warfares,” consisting of “Media Warfare,” “Psychological Warfare,” and “Legal Warfare.”¹⁸ Because the “Three Warfares” combine military and non-military instruments, utilize legal and other non-military tools, and seek to shape public perceptions, cognition, and psychology, they can be understood as a Chinese variant of hybrid warfare.

In recent years, numerous cases have emerged in which China has conducted military activities in parallel with information operations, apparently with the intention of influencing target audiences across the physical, information, and cognitive domains. One such example is the incident that occurred on December 6, 2025, east of Okinawa Island, in which a fighter aircraft launched from the Chinese aircraft carrier *Liaoning* conducted radar illumination against a Japan Air Self-Defense Force (JASDF) fighter aircraft.¹⁹ In this case, China employed military assets to interfere with routine Japanese warning and surveillance activities while simultaneously conducting information operations, including the public release of what was purported to be recorded radio communications between PLAN and JMSDF vessels. Through these information operations, China disseminated the false narrative that the JASDF aircraft had deliberately engaged in a dangerous maneuver despite prior

notification by China of a designated military training area. In doing so, China not only exercised influence in the physical domain through military means but also attempted to shape perceptions in the information and cognitive domains by portraying the Japanese government and the Self-Defense Forces as actors undermining regional peace and stability.²⁰ The transit of the PLAN vessels through the waters between Amami-Oshima Island and Yokoate-jima Island, together with the accompanying information operations conducted in response to the *Ikazuchi* transit of the Taiwan Strait, can similarly be interpreted as part of a broader Chinese hybrid warfare strategy that combines military activities with information operations.

3. An Analysis of China's Response from the Perspective of Hybrid Warfare

(1) Overview

This section analyzes China's response to the *Ikazuchi* transit of the Taiwan Strait through the lens of hybrid warfare. As an analytical framework, it first introduces the Conceptual Model of hybrid threats developed by the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats (Hybrid CoE).²¹ The section then examines China's response by focusing on three principal instruments—coercive military activities, information manipulation, and the selective use of legal arguments—while drawing upon the Conceptual Model's categories of tools and targeted domains of hybrid warfare.²²

(2) Analytical Framework: The Hybrid Warfare Conceptual Model

The Conceptual Model developed by Hybrid CoE provides a useful analytical framework for understanding the overall landscape of hybrid threats. The model is structured around four pillars: actors and their strategic objectives, the tools employed by those actors, the domains targeted by hybrid activities, and the phases through which such activities unfold.²³ Together, these pillars enable analysts to identify how hybrid threat actors combine different tools to exert influence across targeted domains in pursuit of their strategic objectives, while also tracing the evolution of hybrid activities over time.²⁴

The Conceptual Model assumes that an actor conducts hybrid warfare through the use of one or more tools directed against one or more domains.²⁵ Among the 40 illustrative hybrid-threat tools identified by the model are military exercises, the exploitation of thresholds, attribution ambiguities, legal gaps, and legal uncertainty, as well as disinformation and propaganda campaigns.²⁶ Similarly, the model identifies 13 illustrative domains that may be targeted by hybrid activities: diplomacy, politics, culture, society, law, the military, space, public administration, infrastructure, the economy, intelligence, information, and cyberspace.²⁷

In this way, the Conceptual Model suggests that hybrid warfare involves the coordinated employment of a wide range of military and non-military tools against multiple domains of society simultaneously. Against this conceptual background, the following subsections analyze China's response to the *Ikazuchi* transit through three interconnected instruments of hybrid warfare: coercive

military activities, information manipulation, and the selective use of legal arguments.

(3) Coercive Military Activities: Demonstrating Military Presence and Readiness Beyond the First Island Chain

In recent years, the frequency of Chinese military operations extending beyond the First Island Chain from the East China Sea into the Pacific Ocean has increased markedly.²⁸ This trend appears to reflect the PLA's efforts to enhance its capacity to conduct operations at greater distances from the Chinese mainland. Furthermore, by conducting training activities in the western Pacific—an area likely to become a principal theater of military operations in the event of a Taiwan contingency and possible intervention by the United States—China can accumulate operational experience under increasingly realistic conditions while simultaneously signaling its military capabilities to Japan, the United States, Taiwan, and other regional actors.

The principal routes used by Chinese military forces to enter the Pacific Ocean from the East China Sea include: (A) the Osumi Strait; (B) the waters between Yakushima Island and Kuchinoshima Island; (C) the waters between Amami-Oshima Island and Yokoate-jima Island; (D) the waters between Okinawa Island and Miyako-jima Island; (E) the waters between Yonaguni-jima Island and Iriomote-jima Island; and (F) the waters between Yonaguni-jima Island and Taiwan (Figure 2).²⁹ Among these routes, the waters between Okinawa Island and Miyako-jima Island have traditionally been the most frequently utilized due to their greater width, deeper waters, and relative proximity to Taiwan. In recent years, however, Chinese forces have increasingly employed alternative routes as well.³⁰

The waters between Amami-Oshima Island and Yokoate-jima Island—through which the two PLAN vessels transited during the response examined in this article—constitute one such strategically significant route. Chinese military activity in and around this area has become increasingly prominent. In June 2020 and September 2021, submerged transits by submarines believed to be Chinese were detected within Japan's contiguous zone near Amami-Oshima Island.³¹ More recently, on April 12, 2025, a PLAN Dongdiao-class intelligence-gathering vessel (AGI 796) transited northeastward through the same waters en route to the Pacific.³² The waters between Amami-Oshima Island and Yokoate-jima Island possess several characteristics favorable to China. Compared with other routes discussed above, they are relatively wide and are situated closer to Chinese military bases along the East China Sea coast, including Ningbo, home to the headquarters of the PLA Eastern Theater Command Navy.³³ These advantages may explain why the Chinese military appears to attach strategic importance to this maritime area as a route for the deployment of naval vessels, including submarines, and as a potential alternative to the waters between Okinawa Island and Miyako-jima Island.

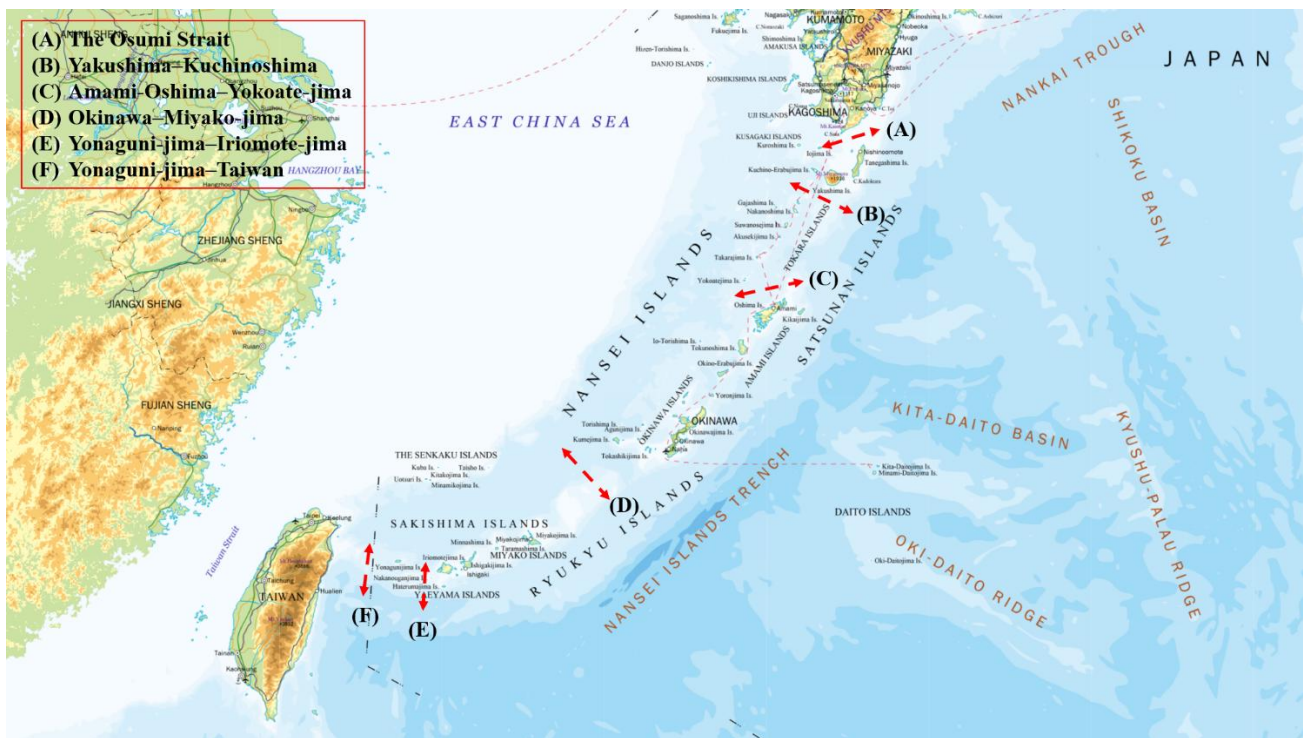


Figure 2. Principal Routes Used by Chinese Military Forces to Enter the Pacific Ocean from the East China Sea

Source: Author’s compilation based on materials from Japan Ministry of Defense³⁴ and Geospatial Information Authority of Japan (GSI).³⁵

Given the strategic significance of the waters between Amami-Oshima Island and Yokoate-jima Island, the transit of the PLAN vessels through this route only two days after the *Ikazuchi* transit of the Taiwan Strait appears intended to serve several purposes. First, it demonstrated China’s growing military presence and operational readiness beyond the First Island Chain while showcasing its ability to access the Pacific through multiple routes rather than relying solely on the waters between Okinawa Island and Miyako-jima Island, thereby exerting military pressure on Japan, the United States, Taiwan, and other regional actors. Second, by normalizing the use of multiple transit routes to the Pacific, China may seek to increase the operational burden on regional actors responsible for surveillance and monitoring activities, thereby complicating their defense planning and resource allocation.

(4) Information Manipulation: Framing Japan as a Destabilizing Actor in the Taiwan Strait

Neither the Japanese government nor the Ministry of Defense officially announced the *Ikazuchi* transit of the Taiwan Strait. Nevertheless, Japan has consistently maintained that freedom of navigation should be preserved and protected in accordance with the principle of the freedom of the high seas.³⁶ With regard to the Taiwan Strait, Japan has also repeatedly stated that peace and stability across the Strait are indispensable to the security and prosperity of the international community and that cross-strait issues should be resolved peacefully.³⁷

China, however, largely ignored Japan's longstanding positions and instead disseminated information capable of creating the impression that Japan had unilaterally escalated tensions surrounding the Taiwan Strait and interstate relations in the broader Indo-Pacific region. As noted above, Chinese officials characterized the *Ikazuchi* transit as a “wrong signal” directed toward “Taiwan independence separatist forces” and as an act of “armed intervention.” Chinese authorities further portrayed the transit as an attempt to undermine peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait. In addition, *Global Times* emphasized that April 17—the date of the *Ikazuchi* transit—coincided with the anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Shimonoseki, which concluded the First Sino-Japanese War and resulted in the cession of Taiwan to Japan. Citing a Chinese analyst, the newspaper suggested that Japanese political leaders had deliberately chosen this symbolic date in order to send a political signal to “Taiwan independence separatist forces.”

Chinese media also disseminated information whose accuracy could not be independently verified. On April 18, *Global Times* reported that the PLAN Type 054A guided-missile frigate *Honghe* had driven away a “foreign warship” attempting to transit the “Strait” after a twenty-hour standoff.³⁸ The report specified neither the location of the “Strait” nor the nationality of the “foreign warship” and was therefore characterized by a high degree of ambiguity. However, given that it appeared only one day after the *Ikazuchi* transit, it is likely that the report constituted an information operation aimed at creating a perception among both domestic and international audiences that Chinese naval activities had compelled a foreign naval vessel—implicitly the JMSDF destroyer—to abandon or alter its mission.

Taken together, these information activities formed a broader strategic narrative. This narrative portrayed Japan as engaging in provocative military behavior toward China, implied coordination between Japan and “Taiwan independence separatist forces,” and deliberately linked the *Ikazuchi* transit of the Taiwan Strait to the historical memory of the Treaty of Shimonoseki, under which Taiwan was ceded from the Qing dynasty to Japan. These narratives were not isolated statements but were rather strategically coordinated messages intended to shape perceptions. Through this framing effort, China appears to have sought to portray Japan as a revisionist actor attempting to alter the status quo through military means and thereby undermining peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait and the broader international order. Ultimately, by promoting such narratives, Beijing may have aimed to weaken Japan's relations with its ally and partners and to generate its diplomatic isolation in the international community.

(5) The Selective Use of Legal Arguments: Double Standards Regarding Strait Transit and Freedom of Navigation

In recent years, China has repeatedly asserted maritime claims and engaged in activities based on interpretations of international law that diverge from prevailing understandings of the existing maritime order. The most prominent example is China's continued assertion of “historic rights” within the so-called “Nine-Dash Line” in the South China Sea despite the 2016 arbitral tribunal ruling in the

Philippines v. China case, which rejected the legal validity of China's claims.³⁹

With respect to the Taiwan Strait, China has likewise advanced claims based on its own legal interpretation of maritime rights and jurisdiction, while Chinese media have actively promoted narratives consistent with those claims. In reporting on the *Ikazuchi* transit, *Global Times* cited a Chinese military expert who argued that the Taiwan Strait is neither part of high seas nor international waters. According to this interpretation, the Strait consists of China's internal waters, territorial sea, contiguous zone, and exclusive economic zone as defined under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and China's domestic laws. The report further asserted that China enjoys sovereignty and jurisdiction over the Taiwan Strait while respecting the "legitimate rights" of other states in its "relevant waters."⁴⁰ Notably, Chinese government statements criticizing previous transits of the Taiwan Strait by foreign warships had typically included language affirming respect for the "legitimate rights" of other states in the "relevant waters."⁴¹ Such language, however, was absent from official responses to the *Ikazuchi* transit of the Taiwan Strait. At the same time, the report addressed the waters between Amami-Oshima Island and Yokoate-jima Island. It argued that because these waters include areas characterized as "non-territorial waters," all states enjoy freedom of navigation and overflight in those "non-territorial waters" and the airspace above them in accordance with relevant legal provisions.⁴²

The precise meanings of terms such as "relevant waters" and "legitimate rights" remain unclear. Nevertheless, China's characterization of the Taiwan Strait as neither part of high seas nor international waters appears intended to support restrictions on freedom of navigation within the Strait. By contrast, in discussing the waters between Amami-Oshima Island and Yokoate-jima Island, the Chinese commentator avoided the concepts of high seas and international waters while employing the term "non-territorial waters" to justify freedom of navigation in that particular maritime area.⁴³

This double standard illustrates a broader pattern of selective legal argumentation. Rather than invoking universal concepts such as the high seas or international waters, China frames issues in terms of individual maritime areas and asserts that freedom of navigation applies within those portions of such areas that it characterizes as "non-territorial waters." Through this approach, Beijing appears to seek to narrow the scope of the debate by portraying incidents such as the *Ikazuchi* transit and China's responses to it not as issues concerning the broader international maritime order, but rather as localized disputes confined to specific geographic areas and the parties directly involved.

Behind these Chinese assertions appears to lie a pragmatic calculation: while China seeks to assert rights in the Taiwan Strait based on its own legal interpretation and to restrict the activities of other states, it also aims to create a favorable environment for its naval expansion beyond the First Island Chain into the Pacific. To that end, China has an interest in avoiding the generalization of issues related to transit and freedom of navigation in straits and instead confining them to specific, case-by-case contexts. Furthermore, unlike in previous cases, the Chinese government refrained, in its response to the *Ikazuchi* transit, from employing language referring to the "legitimate rights" of other states in the "relevant waters" of the Taiwan Strait. This omission may have been intended to

exert greater pressure on Japan. Viewed from the perspectives of hybrid warfare and the “Three Warfares,” these legal arguments constitute a form of “Legal Warfare” in which legal concepts are selectively interpreted and strategically employed in support of broader political and security objectives.

4. Conclusion

This article analyzes China’s response to the transit of the Taiwan Strait by the JMSDF destroyer *Ikazuchi* from the perspective of hybrid warfare. Specifically, it examines three principal instruments employed by China: coercive military activities, information manipulation, and the selective use of legal arguments.

With regard to coercive military activities, the transit of the PLAN vessels through the waters between Amami-Oshima Island and Yokoate-jima Island only two days after the *Ikazuchi* transit of the Taiwan Strait appears intended to demonstrate China’s military presence and operational readiness beyond the First Island Chain. Such activities serve not only to signal China’s capabilities to Japan, the United States, Taiwan, and other regional actors, but also to normalize the use of multiple routes into the Pacific Ocean and thereby increase the operational burden on those responsible for surveillance and monitoring activities.

Turning to information manipulation, China employs strategic narratives containing both verifiable and unverifiable elements in an apparent effort to frame Japan as a revisionist actor seeking to alter the status quo through military means, thereby undermining peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait and the broader international order. Through this narrative construction, Beijing appears to seek to weaken Japan’s relations with its ally and partners while generating Japan’s diplomatic isolation in the international community.

With respect to the selective use of legal arguments, China advances legal arguments that reflect a double standard regarding strait transit and freedom of navigation. In short, while employing concepts such as “non-territorial waters” to justify freedom of navigation within a particular area of the waters between Amami-Oshima Island and Yokoate-jima Island, China simultaneously maintains that the Taiwan Strait is neither part of high seas nor international waters and that it enjoys sovereignty and jurisdiction over the Strait based on its own legal interpretation. By doing so, Beijing appears to seek favorable conditions for Chinese military activities beyond the First Island Chain while preserving its ability to restrict the activities of other states in and around the Taiwan Strait. Furthermore, unlike in previous cases involving transits of the Taiwan Strait by foreign warships, including JMSDF vessels, Chinese authorities did not state that they respect the “legitimate rights” of other states in the “relevant waters” of the Taiwan Strait. This omission may indicate an intention to exert greater pressure on Japan than in previous instances. Whether China will adopt a similar approach in response to future transits of the Taiwan Strait by naval vessels from other countries merits close observation.

A common feature underlying these three instruments is the integration of military activities and information operations to influence decision-making processes. Through coercive military activities and demonstrations of presence, the dissemination of strategic narratives, and the selective interpretation and application of legal concepts, including the assertion of rights in the Taiwan Strait based on China's own legal interpretations, China appears to be seeking to influence decision-making at multiple levels—including governments, organizations, and individuals—not only in Japan, the United States, and Taiwan, but also across the broader international community. China's concept of the "Three Warfares" suggests that Beijing views not only the physical domain but also the information and cognitive domains as critical arenas of competition. China's response to the *Ikazuchi* transit reflects this understanding and can therefore be interpreted as a manifestation of hybrid warfare.

Japan's *National Security Strategy* notes that "it is highly likely that hybrid warfare, combining military and non-military means to achieve military objectives such as information warfare which utilizes the spread of disinformation prior to an armed attack, will be conducted in an even more sophisticated form in the time ahead."⁴⁴ China's response to the *Ikazuchi* transit provides a contemporary illustration of such sophisticated hybrid warfare. Similar operations integrating military activities with information operations are likely to remain a persistent feature of China's strategic behavior. The immediate impact of these actions on Japan, the United States, Taiwan, and the wider international community is likely to be limited. However, China's objective may not be the achievement of immediate effects. Rather, Beijing appears to be pursuing a long-term strategy of continuously employing hybrid warfare in order to gradually shape perceptions, influence decision-making processes, and create conditions favorable to its strategic objectives.

To effectively respond to this challenge, the Government of Japan and the Japan Self-Defense Forces must secure superiority not only in the traditional domains of land, sea, and air but also in the information and cognitive domains. Important steps have already been taken, including the strengthening of the Defense Intelligence Headquarters and the establishment of dedicated information operations units within the Ground and Maritime Self-Defense Forces.⁴⁵ Continued enhancement of capabilities for operating in the information and cognitive domains will nevertheless remain essential. Furthermore, given the increasing integration of the global information environment resulting from globalization and advances in information and communications technology, it is difficult for any single country to compete effectively in these domains on its own. Accordingly, Japan should deepen cooperation with the United States as its ally, as well as with partner countries and regions that share universal values such as freedom, democracy, respect for fundamental human rights, and the rule of law. Strengthening cooperation in the information and cognitive domains will become an increasingly important component of efforts to counter sophisticated forms of hybrid warfare in the future.

Notes

- ¹ *Yomiuri Shimbun*, “A JMSDF Vessel Transits the Taiwan Strait for the First Time in Ten Months: Tokyo Carefully Weighs Timing to Avoid Being Drawn into China’s ‘Public Opinion Warfare,’” April 17, 2026. Japanese title: 「海上自衛隊の艦船、10 か月ぶり台湾海峡通過…中国の『世論戦』に利用されぬよう慎重に時期検討」 (*Kaijō Jieitai no kansen, jukkagetsu-buri Taiwan Kaikyō tsūka ... Chūgoku no 'yoronsen' ni riyō sarenū yō shinchō ni jiki kentō*).
- ² *Yomiuri Shimbun*, “China Urges Its Citizens to Refrain from Traveling to Japan; Hotel and Flight Cancellations Spread,” November 18, 2025. Japanese title: 「中国政府の渡航自粛呼びかけ、宿泊・航空券キャンセルやツアー中止相次ぐ…日本の観光業界に影響」 (*Chūgoku seifu no tokō jishuku yobikake, shukuhaku/kōkūken kyanseru ya tsuā chūshi aitsugu ... Nihon no kankō gyōkai ni eikyō*).
- ³ *Yomiuri Shimbun*, “China Suspends Imports of Japanese Marine Products, Demands PM Retract Statement,” November 20, 2025. Japanese title: 「中国が水産物の輸入停止、首相答弁撤回を要求…中国紙『輸入停止は一つのシグナルにすぎない』」 (*Chūgoku ga suisanbutsu no yunyū teishi, shushō tōben tekkai o yōkyū ... Chūgoku-shi 'yunyū teishi wa hitotsu no shigunaru ni suginai'*).
- ⁴ *Yomiuri Shimbun*. “China Bans Export of Dual-Use Goods to Japan; Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Strongly Protests.” February 24, 2026. Japanese title: 「中国の軍民両用製品の対日輸出禁止、佐藤官房副長官『強く抗議』撤回要求…日本のみ標的に経済的威圧」 (*Chūgoku no gunmin ryōyō seihin no tai-Nichi yushutsu kinshi, Satō kanbō fukuchōkan 'tsuyoku kōgi' tekkai yōkyū ... Nihon nomi hyōteki ni keizaiteki iatsu*).
- ⁵ China Ministry of National Defense, “Chinese Defense Spokesperson Blasts Japanese Destroyer Transiting Taiwan Strait,” April 17, 2026, <http://eng.mod.gov.cn/2025xb/N/T/16455751.html>.
- ⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, “Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Guo Jiakun’s Regular Press Conference,” April 17, 2026, https://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/xw/fyrbt/202604/t20260417_11894293.html.
- ⁷ Japan Joint Staff, “The activity of Chinese Navy vessels in the waters surrounding Japan,” April 21, 2026., https://www.mod.go.jp/js/pdf/2026/p20260421_01e.pdf.
- ⁸ Japan Joint Staff, “The activity of Chinese Navy vessels in the waters surrounding Japan,” April 23, 2026, https://www.mod.go.jp/js/pdf/2026/p20260423_03e.pdf.
- ⁹ China Ministry of National Defense, “PLA Eastern Theater Command Dispatched Vessel Formation 133 to Transit Yokoate Waterway and Conduct Training in the Western Pacific,” April 19, 2026, <http://eng.mod.gov.cn/2025xb/N/T/16455996.html>.
- ¹⁰ *Global Times*, “PLA Announces Vessel Formation Transit of Yokoate Waterway for Western Pacific Training; Move Serves as Deterrent to Hostile Forces: Chinese Expert,” April 19, 2026, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202604/1359288.shtml>.
- ¹¹ Japan Joint Staff, “The activity of Chinese Navy vessels in the waters surrounding Japan,” April 21, 2026, https://www.mod.go.jp/js/pdf/2026/p20260421_01e.pdf; Japan Joint Staff. “The activity of Chinese Navy vessels in the waters surrounding Japan,” April 23, 2026, https://www.mod.go.jp/js/pdf/2026/p20260423_03e.pdf.
- ¹² Geospatial Information Authority of Japan, “GSI Maps,” accessed May 27, 2026.
- ¹³ Including the *Ikazuchi* transit, JMSDF vessels have transited the Taiwan Strait on four occasions. The first transit took place on September 25, 2024, when JS *Sazanami* sailed through the strait jointly with Australian and New Zealand naval vessels. The second transit was conducted independently by JS *Akizuki* in early February 2025. The third transit was carried out by JS *Takanami* in mid-June 2025. The fourth transit was undertaken by JS *Ikazuchi* on April 17, 2026. *The Asahi Shimbun*, “MSDF Destroyer Sends Message as It Sails Through Taiwan Strait,” September 25, 2024; *The Asahi Shimbun*, “MSDF Destroyer Makes 1st Solo Trip Through Taiwan Strait,” March 2, 2025; *The Asahi Shimbun*, “MSDF Destroyer Sails Through Taiwan Strait amid Tensions,” June 20, 2025.
- ¹⁴ This marked the first occasion on which China’s Ministry of National Defense publicly announced a JMSDF transit of the Taiwan Strait on the day it occurred. By contrast, the first, second, and third transits were initially reported by Japanese media based on information obtained from Japanese government sources. Regarding the first transit, a spokesperson for China’s Ministry of National Defense stated at a press conference on September 26, 2024, that the Chinese military had monitored the vessel throughout its passage through the Taiwan Strait. China Ministry of National Defense, “Regular Press Conference of the Ministry of National Defense on September 26,” September 26, 2024, http://eng.mod.gov.cn/xb/News_213114/NewsRelease/16343370.html.
- ¹⁵ For definitions of hybrid warfare and its principal characteristics, see: Gorō Matsumura, “The Essential Mechanism of Hybrid Warfare,” *Nakasone Peace Institute Research Note*, February 2, https://www.npi.or.jp/en/research/data/npi_research_note_matsumura_20240202.pdf; Gorō Matsumura, “Countering Hybrid Warfare to Prevent the Forced Unification of Taiwan—Addressing China’s Dual Threats of Hybrid Warfare and Full-scale Military Invasion—,” *Nakasone Peace Institute Research Note*. September 11, 2025,

https://www.npi.or.jp/en/research/data/npi_research_note_matsumura_20251119_en.pdf.

¹⁶ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, “Countering Hybrid Threats,” January 29, 2026, <https://www.nato.int/en/what-we-do/deterrence-and-defence/countering-hybrid-threats>.

¹⁷ Japan Ministry of Defense, *Defense of Japan 2022* (Tokyo: Ministry of Defense, 2022), 8.

¹⁸ Japan Ministry of Defense, *Defense of Japan 2025* (Tokyo: Ministry of Defense, 2025), 58.

¹⁹ Japan Ministry of Defense, “Radar Illumination of JASDF Aircraft by Chinese Military Aircraft,” December 7, 2025, <https://www.mod.go.jp/en/article/2025/12/90c1af84b1cce0dc35f51c768601d6921647ce5.html>.

²⁰ For an analysis from the perspective of hybrid warfare of the radar illumination incident involving a Chinese naval fighter aircraft and a JASDF fighter aircraft east of Okinawa in December 2025, together with China’s subsequent information operations, see: Futoshi Takabatake, “China’s Radar Illumination and Information Releases as a Hybrid Warfare Operation,” *East Asian Maritime Security Column*, February 27, 2026, <https://www.rips.or.jp/en/newsletter/monthlycolumn/chinas-radar-illumination-and-information-releases-as-a-hybrid-warfare-operation/>.

²¹ European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats, *The Landscape of Hybrid Threats: A Conceptual Model* (Helsinki, 2021).

²² Takashi Kawashima, “Evaluating the Applicability and Challenges of the Conceptual Model,” *Nakasone Peace Institute Research Note*, September 1, 2024,

https://www.npi.or.jp/en/research/data/npi_research_note_kawashima_20240901.pdf

²³ European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats, *The Landscape of Hybrid Threats*, 11–13.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 33–35.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 26–27.

²⁸ Japan Ministry of Defense, *Defense of Japan 2025*, 69–78.

²⁹ Japan Ministry of Defense, “China’s Activities in East China Sea, Pacific Ocean, and Sea of Japan,” April 2026, https://www.mod.go.jp/en/d_act/sec_env/pdf/ch_d-act_a.pdf.

³⁰ Of these routes, the Osumi Strait is designated as a Specified Sea Area under Japan’s Act on the Territorial Sea and the Contiguous Zone. Chinese military forces have utilized a variety of routes other than the Osumi Strait. For example, on August 31, 2024, a PLAN Shupan-class survey vessel entered Japanese territorial waters southwest of Kuchinoerabu-jima Island and subsequently proceeded into the Pacific Ocean via the waters between Yakushima Island and Kuchinoshima Island. See: Japan Ministry of Defense, *Defense of Japan 2025*, 70.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 70.

³² Joint Staff Japan, “Chinese Navy Vessel Sailed through Waters in Japan’s Southwest,” May 13, 2025, https://www.mod.go.jp/js/pdf/2025/p20250513_03e.pdf.

³³ For a discussion of the deployment and disposition of Chinese military forces, see: Japan Ministry of Defense, *Defense of Japan 2025*, 59–60.

³⁴ Japan Ministry of Defense, “China’s Activities in East China Sea,” April 2026,

https://www.mod.go.jp/en/d_act/sec_env/pdf/ch_d-act_a.pdf.

³⁵ Geospatial Information Authority of Japan, “GSI Maps.”

³⁶ Cabinet Secretariat (Japan), *National Security Strategy of Japan (Provisional Translation)* (Tokyo, 2022), 24–25.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 14.

³⁸ *Global Times*, “‘We Never Back Down on Our Own Doorstep’: PLA Guided-Missile Frigate Drives Away Foreign Vessel After 20-Hour Standoff,” April 18, 2026, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202604/1359202.shtml>.

³⁹ Japan Ministry of Defense, *Defense of Japan 2025*, 75–77.

⁴⁰ *Global Times*, “PLA Announces Vessel Formation Transit of Yokoate Waterway,” April 19, 2026.

⁴¹ A similar position was evident in the case of JMSDF transits of the Taiwan Strait. Following the transit of the Taiwan Strait by JS *Takanami* in June 2025, a spokesperson for China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that “China respects countries’ lawful right to navigation in relevant waters of the Taiwan Strait, but firmly opposes any country making provocations or threatening China’s sovereignty and security in the name of freedom of navigation.” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, “Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Guo Jiakun’s Regular Press Conference on June 20, 2025.” June 20, 2025, https://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/xw/fyrbt/202506/t20250620_11654061.html.

⁴² *Global Times*, “PLA Announces Vessel Formation Transit of Yokoate Waterway,” April 19, 2026.

⁴³ China has frequently relied on selective interpretations of legal concepts associated with the law of the sea to support its maritime claims. The Tokara Strait provides one such example. Although Japan maintains that the Tokara Strait does not qualify as an international strait, China has asserted that it does and has consequently claimed a right of transit passage through the strait.

It has been argued that this position reflects a broader strategic calculation. By asserting that innocent passage by foreign warships through China’s territorial sea is subject to prior authorization, Beijing can restrict access by foreign naval vessels. At the same time, by invoking the concepts of an international strait and the associated right of transit

passage rather than that of innocent passage, China can facilitate the deployment of its own naval vessels into the wider Pacific. This interpretation suggests that legal concepts are employed selectively in accordance with China's strategic interests. See: Koki Sato, "Chinese Naval Vessels' Navigation within Japan's Territorial Sea," *JMSDF Command and Staff College Column*, July 2, 2018, Japanese title: 「中国軍艦による我が国領海内の航行」 (*Chūgoku gunkan ni yoru wagakuni ryōkai-nai no kōkō*). For an analysis of Chinese arguments concerning the Tokara Strait, see: Yasuharu Kimura, "Repeated Chinese Naval Transits through the Tokara Strait," *Jitsugyō no Nihon Forum*, October 7, 2024, Japanese title: 「中国軍艦の相次ぐトカラ海峡進入、米国を頼れぬ日本の対抗策は」 (*Chūgoku gunkan no aitsugu Tokara Kaikyō shinnyū, Beikoku o tayorenu Nihon no taikōsaku wa*).

⁴⁴ Cabinet Secretariat (Japan), *National Security Strategy of Japan*, 6.

⁴⁵ Japan Ministry of Defense. *Defense of Japan 2025*, 202.