

Countering Hybrid Warfare to Prevent the Forced Unification of Taiwan —Addressing China’s Dual Threats of Hybrid Warfare and Full-scale Military Invasion—

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Introduction

The war of aggression against Ukraine by Russia, which began nearly three and a half years ago, continues to this day. In this war, both Russia and Ukraine have deployed large-scale ground forces to the front lines, engaging in full-scale ground warfare. However, was it really that President Vladimir Putin aimed to engage in a large-scale war to achieve victory? Many experts argue that President Putin’s original objective was to establish a pro-Russian regime in Ukraine within a short space of time, perhaps about a week.¹

In fact, even before large-scale Russian forces crossed the border and began their invasion on February 24, 2022, Russia had been conducting what is referred to as hybrid warfare, including infiltrating operatives to support pro-Russian forces, spreading disinformation to destabilize public sentiment in Ukraine, and launching large-scale cyberattacks to weaken Ukraine’s political, economic, and social sectors.² The culmination of this strategy is thought to have been a plan in which airborne units, guided by infiltrated operatives, would seize Kyiv under the threat of large conventional forces crossing the border and thereby establish a pro-Russian government. This operation itself was not intended to escalate into a full-scale military conflict between the armed forces of the two countries.

The failure of Russia’s operation is largely attributed to the fact that the United States and the United Kingdom, which had become aware of such movements since autumn 2021, supported

¹ Notable examples include Mykhaylo Zabrotskyi, Jack Watling, Oleksandr V Danylyuk, and Nick Reynolds, “Preliminary Lessons in Conventional Warfighting from Russia’s Invasion of Ukraine: February–July 2022,” Royal United Services Institute for Defense and Security Studies (RUSI), November 30, 2022.
<https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/special-resources/preliminary-lessons-conventional-warfighting-russias-invasion-ukraine-february-july-2022> (Accessed September 3, 2025).

² Jack Watling and Nick Reynolds, “The Plot to Destroy Ukraine,” Royal United Services Institute for Defense and Security Studies (RUSI) Special Report, February 15, 2022.
<https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/special-resources/plot-destroy-ukraine> (Accessed September 3, 2025).

Ukraine in various fields, including information warfare and cyber operations, thereby strengthening Ukraine's resilience against hybrid warfare. As a result, Russia failed to achieve its objectives through a short-term hybrid warfare campaign and was forced to shift to a long-term full-scale military conflict that had not been initially anticipated.³ In fact, Russia did not appoint the commander of its military operation in Ukraine until April 9, 2022, more than a month after the invasion began.⁴ It turned out that the month of March became a transition period for Russia to prepare for an unforeseen full-scale military war amid the chaos caused by the failure of its hybrid warfare.

The term “hybrid warfare” used here refers to military and non-military operations aimed at achieving objectives without escalating to full-scale military warfare involving large-scale firepower combat between regular armies. To define the term more precisely, it refers to “achieving objectives that have traditionally been attained through full-scale military warfare by combining various military and non-military means (hybrid methods), without escalating to full-scale military warfare.”⁵

In the following discussion, the term “hybrid warfare” is used in this sense. The article examines how China's Xi Jinping regime, having observed Russia's efforts, might combine hybrid warfare with a full-scale military invasion in an attempt to forcibly unify Taiwan. Furthermore, the article analyzes how effectively countering hybrid warfare can contribute to deterring and responding to a full-scale military invasion, as well as whether hybrid warfare itself can be prevented. Ultimately, the article seeks to clarify the overall role that addressing hybrid warfare can play to prevent the forced unification of Taiwan.

1. The Relationship Between China's Hybrid Warfare and Full-Scale Military Invasion Against Taiwan

As a method for forcibly unifying Taiwan, China could either physically occupy Taiwan through a full-scale military invasion by the People's Liberation Army or employ hybrid warfare to achieve a forced unification without resorting to a large-scale invasion. Chronologically, hybrid warfare would occur first, and, in some cases, it could lead to a full-scale military invasion. However, there are

³ For a detailed analysis of this point, see Kamino Takahiro and Matsumura Gorō, *Ukraine senso no kyokun to nihon no anzenhoshō* [Lessons from the Ukraine War and Japan's Security] (Japanese) (Tōshindō, 2022).

⁴ “Russia Appoints Commander, Aiming to Restructure Command Structure,” Asahi Shimbun Digital, April 10, 2022. <https://digital.asahi.com/articles/DA3S15262877.html> (Accessed September 3, 2025).

⁵ The definition of the term “hybrid warfare” or “hybrid war” has not been established either academically or in the media. The reason for using this definition in this article is explained in detail in Matsumura Gorō, “The Essential Mechanism of Hybrid Warfare—'Fight in the cognitive space' integrating military and non-military means to achieve the ultimate objectives —,” Research Note, Nakasone Peace Institute February 2, 2024. https://www.npi.or.jp/en/research/data/npi_research_note_matsumura_20240202.pdf (Accessed September 3, 2025)

multiple possible variations in the ways that these two possible approaches could relate. Figure 1 summarizes them into four patterns.

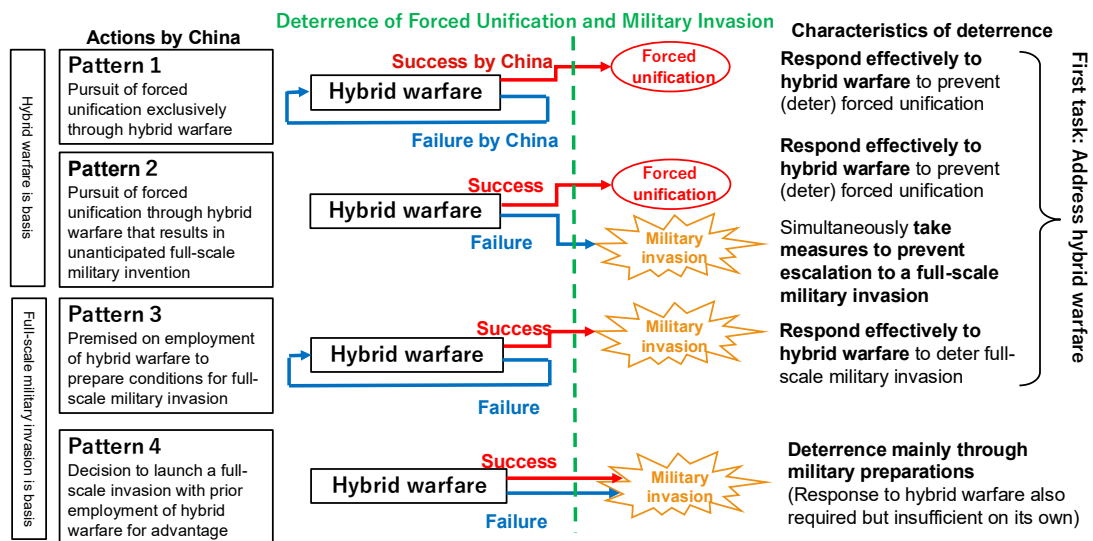


Figure 1. Four Patterns of Forced Unification of Taiwan by China

Prepared by the author based on Figure 2 (page 4; footnote 6) in the Maritime Security Study Group Report of Nakasone Peace Institute.
(https://www.npi.or.jp/en/research/data/npi_policy_maritime_security_en_20250331.pdf)

China's strategic approach can be broadly divided into two categories. The principal question is whether the main objective is to forcibly unify Taiwan through hybrid warfare or to occupy it through a full-scale military invasion. Pattern 1 involves pursuing hybrid warfare exclusively while avoiding a full-scale military invasion, while Pattern 2 involves initially pursuing hybrid warfare but does not rule out a full-scale military invasion if that approach fails, a situation which could be considered to correspond to that in Ukraine. The danger of this pattern is that a full-scale military war could break out at a time that even the parties involved in the conflict do not anticipate.

It might seem contradictory that a country pursuing hybrid warfare would be compelled to escalate to a full-scale military invasion following the ineffectiveness of hybrid warfare. However, a combination of factors could drive the shift, including the need to avert a domestic political crisis resulting from failure, to prevent the country from falling into a disadvantageous position in international politics, or to avoid a decline in the credibility of future threats after large-scale military intimidation failed to achieve its objectives. The combination of these reasons could force a country to transition to a full-scale military invasion for which it had not been prepared.⁶

In contrast, Pattern 3 and Pattern 4 involve preparing from the outset with a full-scale military invasion in mind. Pattern 3 involves creating certain conditions through hybrid warfare as part of the preparations and proceeding with a full-scale military invasion only if hybrid warfare is successful. Pattern 4 also involves conducting hybrid warfare, but regardless of whether it succeeds

⁶ First pursue unification by hybrid warfare, but if that fails, change course and transition seamlessly to a full-scale military invasion prepared in advance — this scenario can be regarded as a combination of Pattern 1 followed by Pattern 4, and therefore not included in Pattern 2.

or fails, a prior decision to proceed to seizure of Taiwan through a full-scale military invasion has already been made.

In Pattern 1, Taiwan would be forcibly annexed solely through hybrid warfare, but is such a scenario really possible? Upon closer examination, two specific courses of action can be identified.⁷

One course could be called the “Hong Kong-style” forced unification, which could be described as a coaxing strategy. In this case, economic incentives and media acquisition would be used by Beijing to advance pro-China sentiment in Taiwan. Once a sufficiently pro-China government is established, it would move to suppress anti-China factions and advance steps toward unification. In this scenario, influence operations would be conducted to undermine Taiwan’s relations with Japan and the United States by stirring up anti-Japanese and anti-American sentiment in Taiwan and anti-Taiwan sentiment in Japan and the United States.

The other course is the “civil war” scenario, representing a hardline approach. In this scenario, if pro-China efforts in Taiwan prove difficult, various influence operations, such as generating fear of war and economic inducements, would be used to exacerbate tensions between pro-China and anti-China factions within Taiwan. Ultimately, this would aim to plunge Taiwan into internal turmoil, allowing China to intervene militarily at the request of pro-China factions and steer the situation toward unification. Simultaneously, to reduce the likelihood of U.S. military intervention, influence operations could be carried out in Japan to stir up anti-American and anti-base sentiment, with the aim of driving a wedge between Japan and the United States and thereby prevent the use of U.S. military bases in Japan for operations concerning Taiwan.

In any case, a variety of hybrid methods would be employed against Taiwan across political, diplomatic, economic, socio-cultural, and military fields. Furthermore, similar hybrid methods would also be employed against Japan and the United States across various fields to create conditions that facilitate the forced unification of Taiwan.

Therefore, if Japan and the United States can collaborate with Taiwan to implement sufficient countermeasures against China’s hybrid warfare and ensure its failure, they may be able to prevent forced unification described in Pattern 1. However, in the case of Pattern 2 and the other Patterns, the analysis becomes more complex as it also involves the factor of a full-scale military invasion. The following sections examine these cases in detail.

⁷ For a detailed analysis of these two approaches and countermeasures, please refer to “Building Response Procedures and a Multilateral Joint Posture to Deter a Taiwan Contingency Part 2: Analysis of Hybrid Warfare by China for Taiwan Unification” (Marine Security Study Group, Nakasone Peace Institute, March 2025).

https://www.npi.or.jp/en/research/data/npi_policy_maritime_security_en_20250331.pdf

2. Deterring the Provocation of a Full-Scale Military Invasion After Effectively Countering Hybrid Warfare

As discussed above, although Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 was initially intended to come to a swift conclusion through hybrid warfare, it ultimately escalated into a prolonged full-scale military war. This was because, despite the failure of hybrid warfare, Russian President Vladimir Putin proceeded to full-scale ground warfare to pursue his original goal of making Ukraine pro-Russian or even bringing it under Russian control as a vassal state.

The same scenario could occur in the case of China's attempt at forced unification of Taiwan. Even if Chinese President Xi Jinping were to initially plan to annex Taiwan through hybrid warfare, he may be unable to back down if that fails and could instead shift to a full-scale military invasion that was not originally planned. This is Pattern 2.

In other words, even if Japan and the United States provide appropriate support to Taiwan, and Taiwan itself demonstrates sufficient capability to withstand various hybrid attacks and ultimately repel China's plans, the possibility remains that China may proceed toward a full-scale military invasion—an outcome it may not have originally desired. Of course, even in the case of hybrid warfare in Pattern 1, military force could also be employed. In addition, if the situation were to develop into Pattern 2, leading to the full-scale use of military force, the defending side would need defense readiness for both scenarios.

From a military perspective, effective deterrence requires maintaining a response posture that both prevents China from achieving victory if an invasion actually occurs and that also imposes unacceptable costs on China.

The defensive capabilities required for this purpose would be large-scale, and such capabilities may make it seem easy to counter the military means employed in hybrid warfare as in Pattern 1. However, the matter is not so simple, and bigger does not always work better.

In hybrid warfare like that described in Pattern 1 or the first half of Pattern 2, non-military methods in fields such as politics, diplomacy, the economy, socio-culture, and information are used in combination with military methods. The total effect of these combined methods is to compel Taiwan's leaders to accept forced unification. In this case, the military methods are not primarily intended to physically destroy the military forces of Taiwan, Japan, or the United States, but rather they are intended to force concessions from the citizens and leaders of Taiwan, Japan, and the United States. Broadly speaking, there are two types of strategy. The first is the direct threat of military force, and the second is the limited employment of military force to achieve certain objectives, thereby narrowing Taiwan's options and guiding it in a certain direction.

Generally speaking, deterrence through threat means using military force to psychologically intimidate the leaders and citizens of an adversary, thereby making it easier to achieve political objectives. This method can be further divided into two categories: (1) the use of large-scale regular military forces, and (2) sabotage and related operations carried out by small-scale irregular forces. If China were to employ these methods against Taiwan, the following operations are likely.

A large-scale deployment of forces would involve large-scale exercises in the maritime and airspaces around Taiwan and Japan, missile launches, the concentration of large forces along the coast facing Taiwan and, in some cases, preparations for an invasion. The maximum intimidation would be to surround Taiwan with a large number of ships so that Taiwan's maritime transportation could be disrupted at any time, or to dispatch ships carrying invasion forces toward Taiwan's coastline.

The aim of these methods is to instill fear and aversion to war among the citizens of Taiwan and Japan, thereby intensifying public pressure on the authorities to adopt an appeasement policy toward China, or to stir up conflict between appeasing and competitive factions within each society, thereby exacerbating domestic turmoil.

Of course, if the goal is to achieve objectives through hybrid warfare, the calculation is that such actions would be effective without actually engaging in combat with Taiwan or the Japan-US side. However, the use of such large-scale forces carries the risk of inadvertently triggering Pattern 2, even if not intentionally planned by the attacking side.

To counter the intention in Pattern 1, it may seem that fully equipping deterrence and response capabilities against large-scale military invasions would be sufficient, but that alone is not adequate. Even in the event of a large-scale military deployment or exercises by China, it is also important to maintain, on a daily basis, a defense posture that provides a sense of reassurance so that citizens do not become unsettled. It is essential to ensure in normal times that the general public fully understands and accepts that the defense postures of the Taiwanese military, U.S. military, and Self-Defense Forces are not only capable of dealing with a full-scale military war but also that they focus on protecting the lives of local residents in each operational area in response to Chinese intimidation. In other words, unless each and every citizen understands that considerations for protecting the people are firmly built into defense plans, and unless they have strong trust in government authorities, hybrid warfare cannot be dealt with effectively.

Next, as intimidation by small-scale irregular units through sabotage, it is possible that they could destroy critical infrastructure such as transportation, communications, and electric power to cause panic among the citizens and fear and distrust toward their own government. At the same time, it has to be assumed that sites with a greater psychological impact on citizens, such as nuclear power plants and airports, may be targeted. Moreover, these attacks may involve the use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) in combination with information manipulation through cyberattacks and disinformation. In any case, one characteristic of these various acts of sabotage is that it is often difficult to identify the actors.

In addition to these direct threats, it is also conceivable that limited military attacks on specific targets could be used to influence political, economic, socio-cultural, and information fields, thereby seeking to achieve the objectives of hybrid warfare. This could include pinpointing and capturing or assassinating political leaders, occupying specific territories such as remote islands to use as bargaining chips, or destroying undersea cables and satellite ground stations to restrict information transmission and facilitate information manipulation. These actions are also difficult to

attribute to specific actors and could serve as effective means to achieve the objectives of hybrid warfare without escalating to full-scale military conflict.

What capabilities are necessary for the defending side to deal with these relatively small-scale destructive activities carried out by actors whose state involvement is difficult to prove? Regardless of whether the opponent's objective is intimidation or limited target attacks, similar countermeasures would be required. In other words, it is necessary to establish a response system that closely coordinates police and defense forces, equip the military and Self-Defense Forces for that purpose, and conduct thorough training in cooperation with the police, fire department, local governments, and private corporations. It goes without saying that providing a sense of security to citizens is an important factor in this regard. Since the equipment and training required for this purpose differ from what is required for responding to a full-scale military invasion, separate efforts are necessary.

As described above, in the case of a Pattern 2 scenario, the defending military organization is required to make a dual effort: it must have the capability to deal with Pattern 1 hybrid warfare as well as prepare for a large-scale military invasion. If Taiwan were to be annexed through hybrid warfare, no extent of preparation for a large-scale military invasion would be meaningful. Therefore, methods to neutralize the effectiveness of military power in hybrid warfare are also essential.

On the other hand, if the defending side were to be equipped with the capability to deter even a large-scale military invasion in a worst-case scenario, the burden on the defending side would be enormous. To compensate for this burden, is there anything that can be done in advance to simultaneously prevent China from forcibly unifying Taiwan through hybrid warfare while also reducing the possibility of a large-scale military invasion?

If, even with intimidation by large-scale military force, the goals are not achieved, the threatening party could find itself unable to withdraw and be left with no choice but to follow through with use of force. The question, then, is how what could be called a “threat trap” might be prevented. One possible approach is to strengthen international pressure to prevent intimidation by large-scale forces during the hybrid warfare stage. Under the United Nations Charter, both the “threat of force” and “use of force” are prohibited. However, even the prohibition of the “use of force” has not been sufficiently established as an international norm, and, while the prohibition of “threat of force” has been proposed as an idea, it has not been sustained as an effective framework.

The concept of punitive deterrence—exemplified by mutual assured destruction by nuclear weapons, which was a principal normative concept in international politics during the Cold War era—can also be said to have been based on the effect of intimidation, and there are certain reasons that states have been reluctant to establish international norms in this area. However, even the United States, which has long been regarded as the leader in the formation of a liberal international order, is now seeking to shape the international order by intimidating other countries through power, including military power. As a result, the risk of such intimidation escalating into military conflict is growing increasingly higher.

Although it is a challenging task, now is the time for countries and regions such as Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, Australia, and the European states to take the lead in establishing new norms in this area. Forming international norms that restrict large-scale threatening military actions while allowing for the securing of defensive denial deterrence and applying pressure through diplomatic and economic sanctions in cases of violation seems possible.⁸ In this context, considering Taiwan's geographical characteristic of being surrounded by sea, unlike the situation between Russia and Ukraine, agreements concerning codes of conduct in the maritime domain would also be important.

If progress in this direction can proceed even to some extent, it could weaken China's tendency to rely on large-scale military intimidation in hybrid warfare, thereby widening the gap between hybrid warfare and large-scale military invasion. Therefore, by causing Pattern 1 hybrid warfare to fail, the risk of an undesirable scenario in which China would proceed directly to Pattern 2 large-scale military invasion could be reduced to at least some extent.

3. Deterring Large-Scale Military Invasion Through Effective Countermeasures Against Hybrid Warfare

In the previous section, assuming that China is primarily focused on hybrid warfare, we considered measures to prevent China from escalating to a full-scale military invasion if its hybrid warfare fails. Next, we will consider a case in which from the outset China bases its approach on a full-scale military invasion and utilizes hybrid warfare to increase its success rate. Of the four patterns outlined at the beginning, this corresponds to Pattern 3 and Pattern 4.

Pattern 3 involves first using hybrid warfare to create the conditions necessary for successful unification by military invasion, and only if the conditions are met is a full-scale military invasion initiated. From Taiwan's perspective, as long as it continues to effectively counter hybrid warfare, a military invasion can be prevented, meaning that countering hybrid warfare directly contributes to deterring a military invasion.

⁸ In the *Stockholm Conference on Confidence- and Security-Building Measures and Disarmament in Europe*, agreed upon in 1986 in Europe near the end of the Cold War, the European countries, including the Soviet Union, agreed that in order to prevent military intimidation through large-scale military activities, they would give prior notification two years in advance regarding military activities involving more than 4,000 personnel. However, with the end of the Cold War and the establishment of the Putin administration in Russia, its effectiveness gradually waned.

<https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/5/d/41238.pdf>

Eiichi Sugie, "Stockholm Document of the Conference on Disarmament in Europe," Chukyo University Academic Information Repository.

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In contrast, Pattern 4 involves China deciding to unify Taiwan through military invasion and conducting hybrid warfare beforehand to create favorable conditions for the invasion. In this case, Taiwan's response to hybrid warfare may contribute to facilitating the response to a full-scale military invasion, but by itself Taiwan cannot deter an invasion.

However, it should be noted that these two patterns are presented as model cases at opposite extremes to simplify the analysis, and if China were to carry out a military invasion, the actual course of events is likely to fall somewhere between the two extremes. In other words, it is not a binary choice between not carrying out a military invasion if hybrid warfare fails, or of resolutely carrying it out even if it fails. Instead, the more successful China is in creating favorable conditions through hybrid warfare, the lower the hurdle for deciding to launch a military invasion becomes, and conversely, the more such conditions are thwarted, the higher that hurdle becomes. In other words, the more effectively hybrid warfare is countered, the greater the likelihood of deterring a military invasion. With the understanding that the actual situation is likely to fall somewhere between the two extremes, for the sake of clarity, we will first examine the two extreme cases, Pattern 3 and Pattern 4.

In the Pattern 3 scenario, China is assumed to believe that, under the current circumstances, a full-scale military invasion is likely to fail. China would decide to launch an invasion only after first using hybrid warfare to first eliminate the factors that could lead to failure. The key question here is what those factors are and what kind of hybrid warfare China would employ to eliminate them. The most significant factor is likely to be U.S. intervention. In a typical example of Pattern 3, if China believes that as long as the United States intervenes, the likelihood of successfully unifying Taiwan through a full-scale military invasion is low, it would consider treating hybrid warfare as a prerequisite to create a situation in which the United States does not intervene.

In this context, hybrid warfare is an extremely effective strategy to both generate distrust between the United States and Taiwan to worsen their relationship as well as to drive a wedge between Japan and the United States. If the United States were to intervene militarily to defend Taiwan, the role of U.S. military bases in Japan becomes extremely important. If, due to various hybrid measures by China, including military intimidation, the creation of social unrest, and economic leverage, Japan were to adopt a position that does not permit the U. S. military operations to be conducted from its bases, U.S. military intervention would become significantly more difficult.

Conversely, if Japan, the U.S., and Taiwan each implement effective countermeasures domestically and maintain a strong cohesion among the three parties against China's hybrid warfare, this would directly contribute to deterring a military invasion under Pattern 3. This is just one example, but if there are other conditions that China seeks to create through hybrid warfare to start a military invasion, preventing those conditions would directly contribute to deterring a military invasion.

In the case of Pattern 4, it is assumed that regardless of the success or failure of its prior hybrid warfare, China would launch a military invasion. However, it is reasonable to assume that the use of various hybrid methods similar to those employed in hybrid warfare would continue not only before the military invasion began but also after it started. In other words, the military invasion would

likely be a cross-domain operation involving the simultaneous use of various methods. This scenario involves not only new technological domains such as space, cyberspace, and the electromagnetic spectrum, but also such fields as politics, diplomacy, the economy, socio-culture, and information. While these methods are similar to those used in hybrid warfare, which falls short of military warfare, they are employed for a different purpose: namely, to facilitate military operations.

Therefore, even if an initial response to hybrid warfare fails to effectively deter military invasion, it is extremely important to continue the response, keeping in mind that it will ultimately contribute to repelling military invasion. In other words, even if the sole objective is to deter military invasion, the preparations by Taiwan and the Japan-U.S. side must include not only the strengthening of military capabilities but also the development of capabilities to counter hybrid warfare in all domains and fields.

Furthermore, just as in the case of what Russia is currently doing against Western countries supporting Ukraine, even after a military invasion of Taiwan, hybrid warfare against countries other than direct belligerents would continue. Even if Japan and the United States were to become direct belligerents, if China were to disrupt support for Taiwan by waging hybrid warfare against other countries, it would be important for Japan, the United States, and Taiwan to respond effectively and secure support from other countries.

4. The Relationship Between Countering Hybrid Warfare and Preventing the Forced Unification of Taiwan

(1) Deterrence of full-scale military invasion and countering hybrid warfare

Among the four patterns of hybrid warfare and full-scale military invasion analyzed in the preceding sections, in Pattern 1 and Pattern 3, it would be possible to prevent the forced unification of Taiwan by effectively countering hybrid warfare.

Then, to what extent can effectively addressing hybrid warfare that precedes a full-scale military invasion described in Pattern 2 and Pattern 4 contribute to deterring a military invasion? In Pattern 2, in which China launches a full-scale military invasion as a result of failing in hybrid warfare, the defending side, having equipped itself with both the military power for countering hybrid warfare and the military power for countering a full-scale military invasion, would first respond appropriately to the hybrid warfare and, within that framework, establish a posture to deter the military invasion. This primarily relies on deterrence through military posture. However, as analyzed above, if efforts can be made to suppress large-scale military threats during the hybrid warfare stage, the gap between hybrid warfare and full-scale military invasion would widen, making deterrence of a military invasion more achievable.

In Pattern 4, which represents a typical scenario in which China is determined to forcibly unify Taiwan through a full-scale military invasion, the success or failure of countering hybrid warfare may have little impact on deterring a military invasion. However, as discussed in the previous section, the actual situation is likely to fall between Pattern 3 and Pattern 4, and the success or failure

of creating conditions for a military invasion through hybrid warfare is expected to significantly influence the final decision of whether to proceed with a military invasion. In reality, the ability to effectively counter hybrid warfare conducted by China is linked to the deterrence of a full-scale military invasion and to the ease of responding if deterrence fails, and thus the response to hybrid warfare is likely to play a major role in whether the forced unification of Taiwan can ultimately be prevented.

When all the above is judged comprehensively, effective countermeasures against hybrid warfare conducted by China may range between cases in which the countermeasures directly lead to the prevention of forced unification of Taiwan to those in which they make only a certain contribution to the success of deterrence or response to a full-scale military invasion. In any case, however, such countermeasures hold significant importance and the strengthening of countermeasure capability is an urgent task.

(2) The possibility of deterring hybrid warfare

So far, we have examined how effective countermeasures against China's hybrid warfare could contribute to the prevention of the forced unification of Taiwan. However, it goes without saying that it is preferable to prevent any act of aggression from occurring in the first place rather than responding to it after it has occurred. So then, is it possible to deter the opponent's hybrid warfare itself, which combines various methods, in advance?

In general, it is extremely difficult to deter the use of each of the individual hybrid warfare methods before they are actually employed. There are two main reasons for this. First, the individual methods used in hybrid warfare in various fields, such as politics, diplomacy, the economy, socio-culture, information, and military, range from very subtle methods used in peacetime to highly aggressive and intense methods, making it extremely difficult to determine at what point they began to be employed. Next, it is common for methods from various fields to be used in combination to achieve a specific objective. However, from the defending side, it is difficult to discern the unified objective or interconnections between these methods at the outset, and, by the time they become clear, the defending side is already caught up in the midst of hybrid warfare.

Therefore, when considering the deterrence of hybrid warfare, preventing the employment of every method in advance is unrealistic. Instead, various countermeasures should be implemented in each field to prevent the situation from escalating further, endeavoring to make the actor abandon its objectives at as early a stage as possible, thereby stabilizing the situation.

Lithuanian researcher Kersanskas presents a very insightful perspective on hybrid warfare:⁹ According to that viewpoint, for various hybrid warfare methods to be effective, the intensity of the

⁹ Vytautas Kersanskas, "DETERRENCE: Proposing a more strategic approach to countering hybrid threats," Hybrid CoE Paper 2, March 2020.

https://www.hybridcoe.fi/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Deterrence_public.pdf (Accessed September 3, 2025).

threat must be high enough to actually have a negative impact on the opponent's society, while at the same time it must be lower than the intensity that would result in a decisive counterattack from the opponent, including the use of force. In other words, the key to success for the actor lies in employing hybrid means within the range between the minimum intensity required for effectiveness and the maximum intensity that would trigger a counterattack. Viewed from the defending side's perspective, if society raises its resilience against various hybrid methods so as to render attacks ineffective while simultaneously lowering the red line for initiating a counterattack, then, as in Figure 2, the effective area of hybrid methods within this range will steadily narrow.

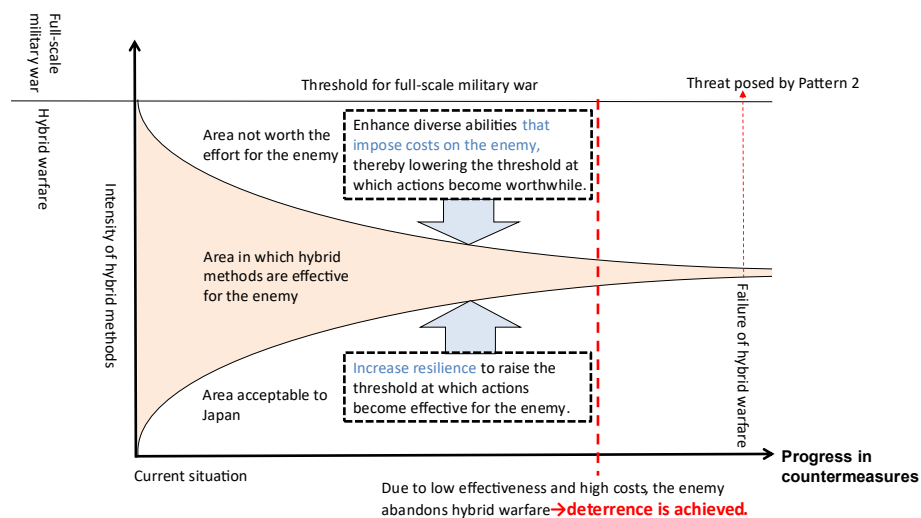


Figure 2. Conceptual Diagram of Hybrid Warfare Deterrence

Prepared by the author based on "DETERRENCE: Proposing a more strategic approach to countering hybrid threats" Figure 1 (page 12; footnote 8)

In theory, there could be an argument that a counterattack from the defending side should be perceived as a large-scale military offensive strongly signaled as a red line to be deterred by force. However, that would not only fail to deter full-scale military war under Pattern 2, as analyzed above, but would instead presuppose initiating an undesirable military conflict ourselves. Therefore, lowering the red line should not mean lowering the threshold for counterattack with large-scale military force. Instead, it would be more realistic to establish it as the point at which countermeasures are initiated through a combination of diverse methods, including using small-scale military response, but primarily through diplomatic and economic sanctions that impose unbearable costs on China across various non-military fields. This is schematically represented in Figure 2 as "enhance diverse abilities that impose costs on the enemy, lowering the level of reward they receive."

Various hybrid warfare methods target vulnerabilities in the political, diplomatic, economic, socio-cultural, information, and military fields of the opposing country. For example, employing a combination of methods, including those that exacerbate existing political divisions within the target

country, damage the target country's diplomatic relationships, disrupt overseas supply chains that are economically vulnerable, intensify historical divisions between regions, exploit the fluid social-media information environment, and expose the target country's military weaknesses to its own citizens can create and widen cracks in the opponent's weakest points.

Therefore, if Japan, the United States, and Taiwan and others each adopt measures to reduce vulnerabilities and enhance resilience in their respective fields, it will reduce the effectiveness of various hybrid methods by China and lead to a situation in which more intense methods are necessary to achieve results. In response, if China resorts to more intense methods, it will become more difficult to conceal state involvement. If Japan, the U.S. and Taiwan impose sanctions that force China to pay high costs for each individual method, further escalation beyond hybrid warfare could be deterred. In this context, if costs can immediately be imposed each time China employs a hybrid method, then a situation in which the cumulative effect of various costs becomes unbearable for China can be created and deterrence would become more effective.¹⁰

Viewed as a whole, while it is impossible to deter the start of hybrid warfare, by increasing our resilience against each hybrid method, we can reduce its effectiveness and, at the same time, impose costs on the opponent each time, thereby causing continued hesitation, and thus make it possible to force the opponent to abandon their hybrid warfare attempts midway. This differs from the concept of military deterrence, but it could be considered one approach to deterring hybrid warfare by forcing the opponent to abandon such efforts at a certain stage.

Applying this theory to Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Ukraine, with the support of the United States and other countries since the annexation of Crimea in 2014, has strengthened its resilience across various fields, including military defense capabilities and cybersecurity, while reducing its economic dependence on Russia. Further, by actively disclosing information about Russia's false flag operations and imposing economic sanctions through its allies, Ukraine forced Russia to pay diplomatic and economic costs, thereby causing Russia's hybrid warfare to fail. However, since Russia had already deployed large-scale military forces across the border and refused to retreat, this led to a full-scale military war under Pattern 2. If additional costs had been imposed on Russia at an earlier stage, it might have been possible to force Russia to abandon its hybrid warfare strategy midway through.

Drawing lessons from this experience, to prevent forced unification of Taiwan by China at the hybrid warfare stage and ultimately force it to abandon that and stabilize the situation, it is essential that Japan, the United States, and Taiwan swiftly advance measures to reduce vulnerabilities and enhance resilience in the political, diplomatic, economic, socio-cultural, information, and military fields. Further, while also establishing an international framework that can detect the use of hybrid

¹⁰ For more details on deterrence of hybrid warfare, please refer to Goro Matsumura, "*Haiburido kyoji no koshi wo do yokushi suru ka*" [How to Deter the Use of Hybrid Threats] (Japanese) in *Anzen hoshō wo kangaeru Security Issues*, No. 729 (Security Policy Forum, May 1, 2021). http://www.anpokon.or.jp/pdf/kaishi_792.pdf

methods by China at an early stage, the three parties should comprehensively assess their objectives and consistently impose costs on the use of individual hybrid methods. If Japan, the United States, and Taiwan could carry out these efforts not only individually but also in cooperation with Australia, the Philippines, South Korea, and like-minded countries in ASEAN, Europe, and Oceania, deterrence and stabilization will become even more solid.

Conclusion

This article examines four possible patterns of how China's Xi Jinping regime might combine hybrid warfare with a full-scale military invasion in attempting to forcibly unify Taiwan. It then considers how effectively countering hybrid warfare is crucial to preventing forced unification under any of the abovementioned patterns and further explores whether it is possible to deter hybrid warfare itself.

The findings of this analysis indicate that even if effective responses to China's hybrid warfare succeed in thwarting its attempts, it does not necessarily mean that a full-scale military invasion can be deterred. However, effective countermeasures against hybrid warfare can play a significant role in preventing forced unification short of military invasion and may also fulfill a certain role in the deterrence and response to military invasion. In other words, in any scenario, addressing hybrid warfare holds significant importance in preventing China's forced unification of Taiwan.

Furthermore, even if it is difficult to deter the outbreak of hybrid warfare in advance, cooperation among Japan, the United States, Taiwan, and other countries working together to strengthen resilience and impose greater costs can be effective in thwarting China's attempts at hybrid warfare without driving escalation and thereby contribute to the stabilization of the situation.

In other words, Taiwan, as well as Japan, the United States, and other countries working together to strengthen their hybrid warfare response capability can play an effective role in these efforts.

1. Neutralize China's hybrid warfare at the present stage and stabilize the situation.
2. Prevent China from continuing hybrid warfare and forcibly unifying Taiwan.
3. Deter China from launching a full-scale military invasion of Taiwan.
4. Contribute to effective response in the event of a full-scale military invasion by China.

Going forward, in parallel with preparations to respond to a full-scale military invasion, if relevant governments and authorities can work closely together to develop concrete countermeasures to strengthen capabilities for dealing with hybrid warfare in each field—including politics, diplomacy, the economy, socio-culture, information, and military—and steadily implement those countermeasures one by one, it should be entirely possible to continue to thwart attempts by China to forcibly unify Taiwan through a combination of hybrid warfare and a full-scale military invasion.