

Fifty Shades of Grey? How Chinese Hybrid Warfare is changing the face of Maritime Security

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Abstract:

Chinese activities in the maritime domain stretch far beyond peer competition in high-end warfare. At sea, China is engaged in coercion and competition 'below the traditional thresholds of high-end conflict'. Within this context, military planners in Beijing have developed a maritime strategy that is 'hybrid' both in the composition of its forces and in the way they are employed. They combine military, paramilitary and militia forces; they are synchronised with seemingly legally sound narratives, and such a combination of means are employed to pursue national objectives by exploiting the grey areas of international law.

This paper argues that Chinese hybrid strategy at sea is bringing a paradigm shift in maritime security in two significant ways. First, Chinese hybrid strategy seeks to exploit the grey areas and diverse possible interpretations of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) to legitimise activities aimed at asserting the control of disputed features and maritime boundaries. Second, Chinese hybrid strategy employs in a coordinated and integrated fashion enhanced law-enforcement capabilities as well as militia forces, seemingly operating in defence of inherent maritime rights, to coerce other claimants whilst intimidating responses from other actors.

Within this paradigm shift, the paper further postulates that there are three main implications for maritime security. First, maritime security is becoming an increasingly competitive affair. Second, core actors like coast guards are being militarised to assert national power rather than foster cooperation. Thirdly, whilst Chinese hybrid strategy focuses on regional disputes, it has broader strategic implications beyond the realm of constabulary functions generally connected to maritime security.

About the Author:

Dr Patalano is Senior Lecturer in War Studies at the Department of War Studies, King's College London, and specialises in East Asian maritime security and Japanese naval history and strategy. Dr Patalano is affiliated to the Institute for Contemporary Asian Studies, Temple University Japan, and the Japan Maritime Self-Defence Force Staff and Command College. He published in professional and academic journals in English, Japanese, and Italian languages. His latest book, titled *Post-war Japan as a Seapower: Imperial Legacy, Wartime Experience, and the Making of a Navy*, was published Bloomsbury in 2015. Dr Patalano contributes to professional forums debating in military and strategic affairs in Australia, Japan, the Republic of Korea, the Republic of China, and the United States. He also regularly comments on East Asian affairs on Radio Monocle 24, BBC World, SKY News, Al Jazeera, and France 24.

<http://www.kcl.ac.uk/sspp/departments/warstudies/people/lecturers/patalano.aspx>

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