



**Statement Before the  
House Armed Services Committee**

***“The Evolution of Hybrid Warfare  
and Key Challenges”***

A Testimony by:

**Andrew Shearer**

Senior Adviser on Asia Pacific Security and  
Director, Alliances and American Leadership Project,  
Center for Strategic and International Studies

**March 22, 2017**

**2117 Rayburn House Office Building**

Chairman Thornberry, Ranking Member Smith, distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify before you today on a subject of great importance: the evolution of hybrid warfare.

Like Russia and Iran, China is using an ambiguous fusion of conventional and unconventional capabilities and tactics to weaken liberal norms and institutions, erode U.S. influence, and impose its own security preferences on its neighbors. Left unchecked, this trend will undermine the regional and global order – endangering the security and prosperity of the United States and its allies.

China's hybrid warfare strategy draws on many of the elements also employed by Russia and Iran: exploiting the “gray zone” created by the West’s binary notion of “war” and “peace”; primarily using paramilitary, coast guard, or militia organizations while keeping regular military forces over the horizon; and combining all instruments of national power, including sophisticated cyber operations, economic incentives and sanctions, and legal and political warfare (“lawfare”).

Over the past decade – and particularly since President Xi Jinping took office four years ago – China has ramped up its assertiveness in the Western Pacific region. Recent examples include:

- Establishment of an air defense identification zone in the East China Sea (2013) and rejection of an international tribunal’s ruling on Beijing’s South China Sea claims (2016);
- Island building at seven disputed features in the Spratlys (since 2013);
- Deployment of an oil rig into disputed waters near Vietnam (2014);
- Harassment of supply missions to a Philippine military outpost (2014);
- Convoying more than 300 fishing vessels to the Japanese-controlled Senkaku Islands (2016);
- China-sourced donations to Australia’s major political parties (reported in 2016);
- And economic coercion, including limits on rare earth exports to Japan (2010) and fruit imports from the Philippines (2012), as well as ongoing measures to harm South Korean companies in retaliation for deployment of the THAAD ballistic missile defense system.

This incremental “salami-slicing” has enabled China to achieve much of its political and territorial agenda in East Asia without triggering a forceful military response from the United States and its allies. Beijing calculates it lacks the military capabilities (at least for now) to prevail in an outright conflict at an acceptable cost. Instead, it has used capabilities like maritime law enforcement where it has a comparative advantage, for objectives like offshore islands in which it believes Washington has little direct stake.

Backed by its expanding suite of advanced access denial capabilities, the intent of China’s creeping militarization of the South China Sea is to give itself the ability to restrict U.S. maritime

forces' traditional ability to project power and support allies within the First Island Chain. The effort is to complicate U.S. military planning, undermine regional countries' confidence in American security commitments, and ratchet up pressure on the U.S. alliance system.

We will be confronting a profoundly different Asia-Pacific region if the United States has to contemplate fighting its way back into the South China Sea.

To respond effectively, the United States needs to invest in adequate nuclear and conventional military capabilities to maintain a favorable regional military balance that can deter escalation, including attacks against U.S. or allied forces. Credible military forces are also vital for resisting coercion and shaping a benign security environment.

Continuing to deter any further move at Scarborough Shoal is particularly important. China's modus operandi is to target weak points; any further significant change in the status quo in the South China Sea will feed doubts in the region and increase pressure on U.S. alliances in Northeast Asia.

However, an effective U.S. strategy must extend beyond military might and overcome bureaucratic and military "seams" to match China's comprehensive national approach.

The starting point needs to be recognition that the United States is already engaged in an intense competition of interests and values in the Western Pacific. The outcome will shape not only the future of the region but the United States' long-term security and prosperity.

By building what Dean Acheson called "situations of strength," the United States can increase the costs to China of pursuing its gray-zone strategy. It should strengthen existing alliances and network them more closely, as well as working with allies to build capacity and resilience in Southeast Asia.

The United States also needs to continue to champion the rule of law and fundamental principles such as freedom of navigation.

Secrecy and deniability are part of Beijing's strategy, so wherever possible the United States should promote transparency about China's activities; this is the intention behind the CSIS Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative.

Finally, the United States should not cede non-military spaces to China, which also seeks to expand its wider influence. This is why continuing American leadership on trade and investment is so important – and why countries in the region look to the United States to engage actively

with regional institutions such as APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Conference), the East Asia Summit, and ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations).

The United States has the capacity to develop and implement an effective strategy. Your friends and allies are looking for reassurance that America has the clarity of purpose to do so, and the resolve to carry it through with firmness and consistency.