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# MAPPING OUT EUROPE'S RESPONSE TO GREY ZONE ESCALATIONS **AGAINST TAIWAN**

Andrew Yeh

ANALYSIS


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## Key point summary

- The government of the People's Republic of China (PRC) is carrying out a range of grey zone activities to undermine Taiwan's autonomy, wear down its defensive capabilities and pressure its people into unification with the PRC.
- Grey zone activities allow the PRC to strengthen its position against Taiwan while minimising the risk of an international response. Recent examples include near-daily incursions of military aircraft past the median line, large-scale military drills and economic coercion.
- This paper maps out a range of scenarios where the PRC could escalate grey zone activities against Taiwan. European policymakers must be prepared for a full range of scenarios, from incursions into Taiwan's contiguous zone to a 'quarantine' of Taiwanese goods and occupation of outlying islands.
- Europe has a clear strategic and economic interest in maintaining peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait. Countering the PRC's unilateral attempts to alter the status quo through grey zone tactics is essential to de-escalating the risk of conflict and is in line with European governments' long-standing policy on the PRC and Taiwan.
- This paper presents an anti-grey zone strategy that seeks to deter further escalations by taking proportionate, timely and effective responses to the PRC's tactics, while also acting to strengthen long-term preparedness. This strategy consists of:
  - **Raising the cost of the PRC's grey zone tactics:** By responding to grey zone escalations with diplomatic statements, sanctions on PRC military companies and proportionate engagements with Taiwan, European governments can help shift the cost-benefit calculus for Beijing to deter further escalations.
  - **Strengthening Taiwan's long term resilience:** By sharing its world leading expertise in cyber-security, infrastructure resilience and renewable energy, Europe can help Taiwan build resilience to the PRC's grey zone tactics while also providing major opportunities to European businesses.
  - **Reaffirming the international rules-based order:** By using their significant diplomatic influence, European governments can reinforce the rules and norms that underpin peace and stability in the region, from upholding freedom of navigation to countering the PRC's attempts to exclude Taiwan from multilateral systems.

# Part One: China's grey zone tactics

## What does China want from Taiwan?

The PRC claims to exercise sovereignty over Taiwan, despite never having ruled the island. This claim is rooted in the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) victory in the 1945-1949 Chinese Civil War, after which the newly established PRC claimed itself heir to the full territories of the preceding Republic of China (ROC) – including Taiwan. In reality, Taiwan has been a self-governing territory since the end of the Civil War, with the island becoming the seat of the defeated Kuomintang (KMT) nationalist-led ROC government in exile. While no EU Member States have formal diplomatic relations with Taiwan, many have strong economic, cultural and educational ties with Taiwan. Unofficial diplomatic relations are maintained through a series of de-facto embassies, with 14 EU Member States and the EU establishing such offices in Taipei.

Exercising control over Taiwan is a stated goal of the PRC government. Successive leaders have described Taiwan as an “inalienable part of China” and have refused to rule out the use of force to realise this. Under President Xi Jinping this rhetoric has been ramped up even further: Xi has described “realising China's complete reunification” as an “unshakeable commitment” and “historic mission” of the CCP. This commitment to “resolving the Taiwan question” is also a component of Xi's flagship vision of achieving the “Chinese dream of national rejuvenation” by 2049, the centenary of the founding of the PRC.<sup>1</sup> To what lengths Xi will go to achieve this vision remains to be seen. The PRC is opposed to the status quo of Taiwan's de facto independence but has so far been unwilling to initiate outright military conflict to force a change. Instead, the PRC's approach has been characterised by escalating ‘grey zone’ coercion in an effort to increase the political, economic and military pressure on Taiwan to submit to unification.

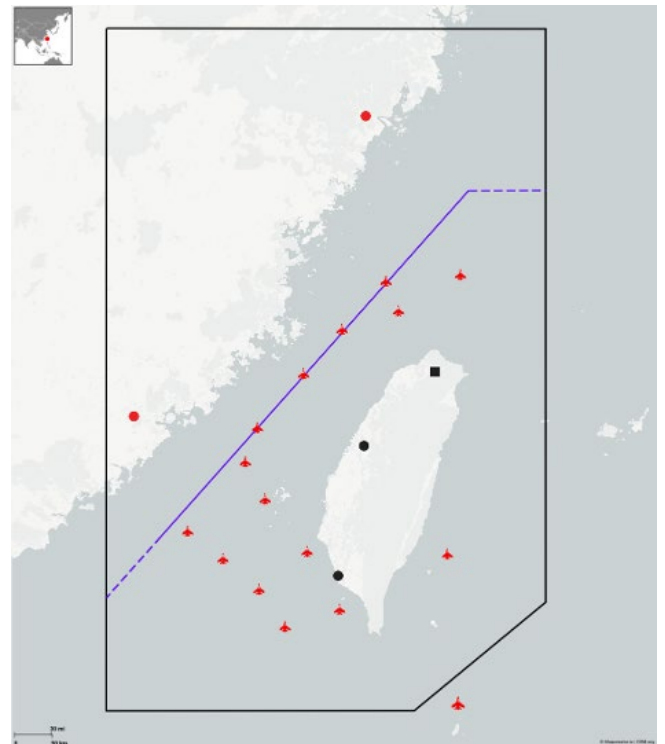
## The PRC's ramped up ‘grey zone’ tactics against Taiwan

Definitions of ‘grey zone’ activities vary, but generally use the term to encapsulate the broad range of activities which fall in the murky space between peace and open conflict.<sup>2</sup> Grey zone activities are designed to contain significant ambiguity around actors, methods or intent and often make use of non-military means and proxy actors. The most effective grey zone activities fall just below the threshold of acts of war, maximising the coercive effect while making it difficult for the opponent to respond without escalating into outright war.

The PRC's deployment of grey zone tactics against Taiwan is broad and wide-ranging, with notable recent escalations including:

→ **Incursions into Taiwan's air space:** Like many countries, Taiwan operates a self-designated Air-Defence-Identification-Zone (ADIZ) within which aircraft are identified, located and controlled. In recent years, the PRC has operated near daily flights of military aircraft into Taiwan's ADIZ, with a total of 1,703 in 2023.<sup>3</sup> Around 41.3% of these passed the unofficial “median line” dividing the Taiwan Strait. In April 2024, PRC fighter jets were estimated to be just 3 minutes away from Taipei before turning back.<sup>4</sup> Notably, a growing number of incursions are conducted by Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs, drones), making up around 10% of the total. UAV flights present a new challenge as they can fly riskier routes that manned aircraft might avoid.

**Figure 1 | Reported locations of PLA aircraft within Taiwan's de-facto ADIZ from 1 to 20 May 2024<sup>5</sup>**



Source: <https://online.mapcreator.io/>.

<sup>1</sup> Sacks, 'What Xi Jinping's Major Speech Means For Taiwan'.

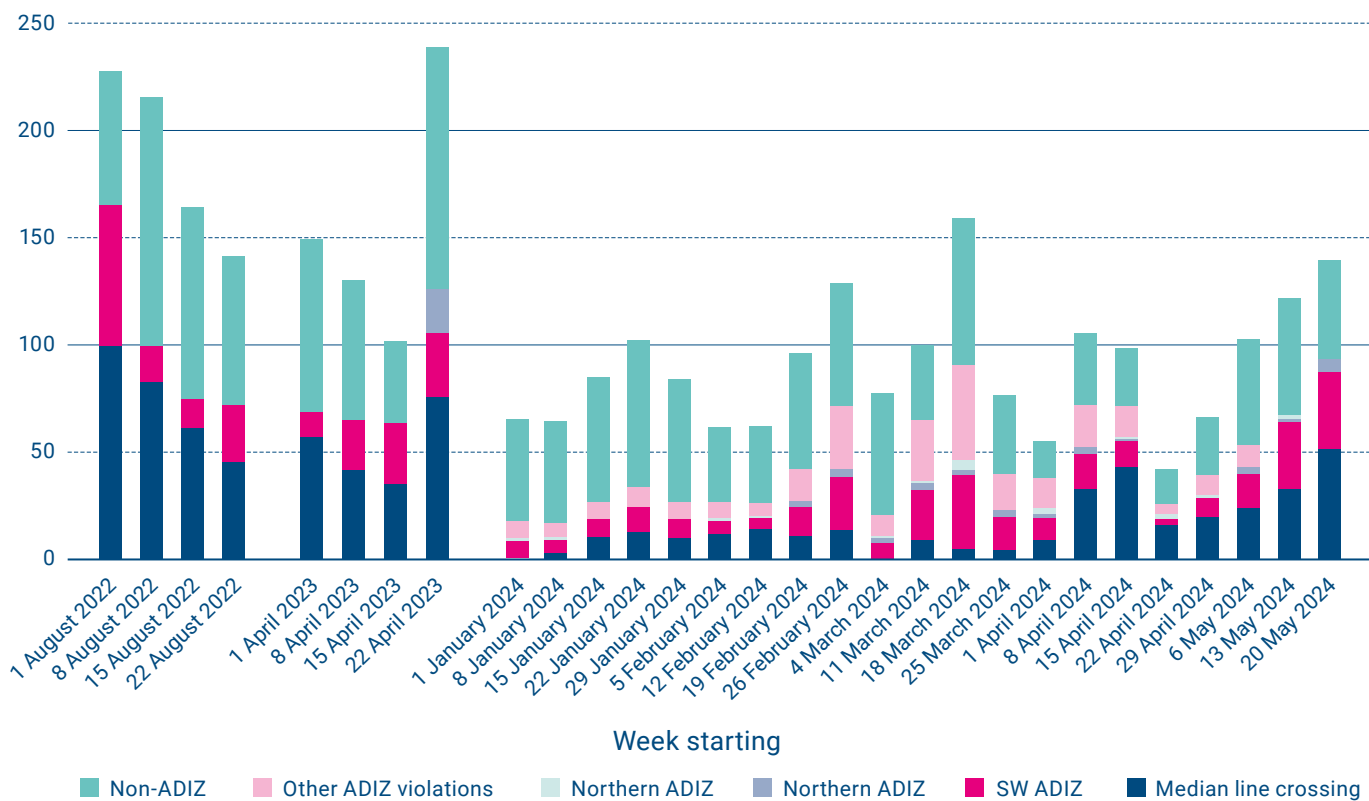
<sup>2</sup> See Lyle J. Morris et al., 'Gaining Competitive Advantage in the Gray Zone: Response Options for Coercive Aggression Below the Threshold of Major War' (RAND Corporation, 27 June 2019), [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR2942.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2942.html), p. 8: "The grey zone is an operational space between peace and war, involving coercive actions to change the status quo below a threshold that, in most cases, would prompt a conventional military response, often by blurring the line between military and nonmilitary actions and the attribution for events."

<sup>3</sup> Lewis, '2022 in ADIZ Violations'.

<sup>4</sup> 鍾, '中國軍機迫近台灣3分鐘可抵總統府 分析指520前向候任總統賴清德施壓'.

<sup>5</sup> Note that each red aircraft symbol on the map can represent multiple aircraft at approximately the same location spotted on the same or different days. Generated with mapcreator.io using aircraft location data published by Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense available at: <https://www.mnd.gov.tw/English/PublishTable.aspx?types=Military%20News%20Update&Title=News%20Channel>

### Chart 1 | Weekly number of PLA aircraft reported around Taiwan in 2024 <sup>6</sup>



→ **Large-scale military drills:** The PRC's People's Liberation Army (PLA) has staged three major military exercises near Taiwan in recent years in response to the visit of the then-US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to Taiwan (August 2022), then-President Tsai Ing-wen's transit stop in the US (April 2023) and after the inauguration of President Lai Ching-te (May 2024). The peak of the August 2022 exercises saw 13 vessels and 68 aircraft reported around Taiwan, forcing numerous civilian flights to reroute or cancel.<sup>8</sup> The April 2023 exercises saw the first ballistic missiles fired over Taiwan and included a threatened three-day no-fly zone north of Taiwan, though this was later reduced to 27 minutes.<sup>9</sup> The May 2024 exercises, described by Beijing as "punishment" for Lai's "separatism", were notable in the proximity of operations to Taiwan's outlying islands close to the PRC's Fujian Coast, including Kinmen, Matsu, Wuqiu, and Dongyin (illustrated in Figure 2).<sup>10</sup>

**Figure 2 | Areas covered by the 'Joint Sword-2024 A' military drills, May 2024<sup>7</sup>**



**Source:** Xinhua, 'PLA Conducts Joint Military Drills Surrounding Taiwan Island'; 劉, '解放軍 2024「聯合利劍」演習 vs. 2022首度環台軍演 操演範圍縮小又西靠 -- 上報 / 國際'.

6 'Ministry of National Defense R.O.C.-News Channel'.

7 Xinhua, 'PLA Conducts Joint Military Drills Surrounding Taiwan Island'; 劉, '解放軍 2024「聯合利劍」演習 vs. 2022 首度環台軍演 操演範圍縮小又西靠 -- 上報 / 國際'.

8 Hart et al., 'Tracking the Fourth Taiwan Strait Crisis'.

9 Davidson and Hawkins, 'China Appears to Backtrack over No-Fly Zone near Taiwan'.

10 AFP, 'China's Military Surrounds Taiwan as "Punishment"'.

- **Encroachments close to Taiwan's contiguous zone:** Taiwan's contiguous zone serves as a 12 nautical mile buffer zone around Taiwan's territorial waters and airspace, which in turn is 12 nautical miles from the coast of its main island. While, to date, PRC military aircraft and vessels are not known to have broached the contiguous zone, incursions are getting increasingly close. The April 2023 and May 2024 exercises saw dozens of PRC and Taiwanese vessels engaged in standoffs at the edge of Taiwan's contiguous zone, with military aircraft flying close to Taiwan's contiguous zone again in June and November that year.<sup>11</sup> Notably, PRC quasi-military vessels have begun to broach the contiguous zone, with nine intrusions by maritime research vessels since September 2023, a sharp increase from just two in each of the previous three years. Maritime research vessels are likely to be conducting mapping exercises to assist in future military operations in the waters.<sup>12</sup>
- **Ramped-up military capabilities:** The PRC has been rapidly building up its military capabilities against Taiwan in recent decades. The PLA now fields the world's largest conventional cruise and ballistic missile arsenal, which could be used to overwhelm Taiwan's air and sea defences and clear the way for an amphibious invasion.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, the PLA has bolstered its Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) capabilities, including new hypersonic glide missile systems and anti-ship ballistic missiles, challenging the US' ability to reinforce its deployments in the region in the event of escalating conflict. These capabilities serve a 'grey zone' purpose when not in use by holding a credible threat of invasion against Taiwan, increasing the pressure on Taiwan to agree to unification by peaceful means.
- **Restricting freedom of navigation through the Taiwan Strait:** The PRC claims the right to exercise "sovereign jurisdiction" over its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), which includes the Taiwan Strait. In particular, the PRC opposes the 'freedom of navigation' missions undertaken by military vessels through the Taiwan Strait. This is contrary to the UN Convention on the Laws of the Sea (UNCLOS) which allows for ships to pass through EEZs as if on the high seas. The PRC has attempted to enforce its interpretation by shadowing the foreign ships passing through the Strait, in some cases performing dangerous manoeuvres close to US ships.
- **Unilateral re-routing of civilian aircraft:** Earlier this year, the PRC's civil aviation administration unilaterally revoked cross-strait agreements to re-route a number of civilian flight paths through the Taiwan Strait. Notably, the new flight paths bring PRC civilian aircraft closer to the median line while also increasing traffic near flight paths to Taiwan's outlying islands of Kinmen and Matsu. This move challenges Taiwan's ability to control air traffic through the Taiwan Strait and further raises the stakes in an already contested airspace.<sup>14</sup>
- **Cyber-attacks on key services:** Taiwan is the target of 55% of cyber-attacks in the Asia Pacific region, with analysts recording 224.8 billion cyberattacks in the first half of 2023 – the vast majority of which are believed to originate from the PRC.<sup>15</sup> Notable recent cases by PRC state-backed hackers include an attack targeting dozens of Taiwanese government agencies, a hack stealing over 1.7tb of sensitive data from Taiwan's largest telecommunications company, and a severe ransomware attack temporarily paralysing Taiwan's state-owned oil producer CPC corp.<sup>16</sup> During Pelosi's visit to Taiwan, Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attacks forced government websites to go offline for a few hours, including the Presidential Office and Taipei Taoyuan International Airport.
- **Coercive economic diplomacy:** The PRC adopts a 'carrot-and-stick' approach to erecting and removing trade barriers with Taiwan. Although Taiwan has attempted to reduce its dependency on trade with the PRC, the PRC remains the largest buyer of Taiwanese goods, accounting for 22.1% of total exports from Taiwan in 2023.<sup>17</sup> Over successive DPP governments in Taiwan, the PRC has attempted to exert pressure by imposing import bans targeting a number of sectors with high dependencies on the PRC market, including agriculture, alcoholic beverages and fish.<sup>18</sup> In the lead-up to Taiwan's 2024 elections, the PRC suspended some tariff reductions within the cross-strait Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA) for the chemical sector and even threatened to terminate the agreement entirely. The timing of the suspension and the lifting of a ban on grouper fish soon after was interpreted as an attempt to give support to a key opposition party constituency.<sup>19</sup> Following the election of the DPP's President Lai, the PRC suspended tariff arrangements for a further 134 items under ECFA, targeting Taiwanese businesses across a range of sectors.<sup>20</sup>

11 Blanchard, 'Taiwan Says Chinese Air Force Approached Close to Island's Coast'; Lee, 'Chinese Forces Approached Close to Taiwan Coast to "intimidate" Voters before Key Elections – Sources'.

12 Gabert-Doyon, Cook, and Hille, 'Chinese Research Ships Increase Activity near Taiwan'; Funaiole, Powers-Riggs, and Hart, 'Skirting the Shores'.

13 US Department of Defense, 'Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2023'.

14 Shattuck, 'China's New Civil Flight Routes'.

15 Huang, 'Taiwan Hit by 15,000 Cyberattacks per Second in First Half of 2023 | Taiwan News | Aug. 17, 2023 11'.

16 Microsoft Threat Intelligence, 'Flax Typhoon Using Legitimate Software to Quietly Access Taiwanese Organizations'; Hou and Tarabay,

'Taiwan Calls on US Support to Defend Banks Against Cyberattacks - Bloomberg'; France24, 'Hackers Stole "sensitive" Data from Taiwan Telecom Giant'.

17 關港貿單一窗口CPT Single Window'.

18 Hioe, 'China Slaps Export Bans on Taiwanese Goods – Again'.

19 Hioe, 'China Threatens to End ECFA Ahead of Elections'; Reuters, 'China Lifts Ban on Taiwanese Grouper Fish Imports in Carrot and Stick Diplomacy'.

20 Jennings, 'Mainland China Suspends Tariff Arrangements on 134 Items under Taiwan Trade Deal'.



→ **Enforced diplomatic isolation:** The PRC has been highly successful in co-opting and coercing other states to exclude Taiwan from any meaningful participation in the UN and its sub-organisations, even from those for which full statehood is not a prerequisite. The PRC misuses UN General Assembly (UNGA) Resolution 2758 (1971) – which provided for the PRC's entry to the UN – to claim that its claims of sovereignty over Taiwan are recognised under international law, thereby justifying Taiwan's exclusion. This is despite the Resolution making no determination on the status of Taiwan's sovereignty nor precluding any form of engagement with Taiwan. Consequently, Taiwan is the most populous contested state not represented in any form at the UN. Countries which pursue closer bilateral ties with Taiwan come under significant pressure from the PRC. Lithuania was targeted by a range of punitive trade measures after the replacement of the "Taipei" with "Taiwan" in the name of Taiwan's Representative Office in Vilnius. Although a handful of countries do still recognise Taiwan's statehood, the PRC has been successful in gradually reducing this number – from 22 in 2014 to 12 today – through offering strong economic incentives to countries which switch recognition, as well as allegations of bribery and political interference.<sup>21</sup>

→ **Disinformation and influence campaigns:** The PRC has a long history of undertaking influence campaigns in Taiwan, with an uptick in such attempts around key elections. The growing importance of social media has led to novel attempts to spread misinformation and gain influence. In 2023, Meta uncovered a PRC influence campaign involving more than 7,500 accounts across different platforms, with many of the accounts targeting Taiwan. A number of Taiwanese NGOs have voiced concerns about the PRC co-opting social media influencers and journalists to amplify pro-CCP talking points.<sup>22</sup> As demonstrated by the hotly contested legislative reform bill proposed by the KMT and TPP following President Lai's inauguration, there are deep divisions within Taiwan's domestic politics that CCP influence operations will try to exploit. Notably, ahead of the 2024 elections, Taiwanese authorities also launched an investigation into alleged PRC attempts to bribe village and neighbourhood representatives with cheap tours to the PRC in an alleged attempt to gain grassroots local support.<sup>23</sup>

## Why does the grey zone matter?

The PRC's grey zone tactics against Taiwan serve a triple purpose. Firstly, grey zone activities are designed to encroach upon Taiwan's autonomy gradually. As demonstrated in the examples above, this includes undermining Taiwan's ability to manage its own air space and territorial waters, and weakening the significance of the previously respected "median line"

between the two territories. Beijing's 'salami slicing' strategy attempts to establish a new normal, gradually changing the status quo of Taiwan's autonomy without the need to resort to open conflict.

Secondly, grey zone activities are designed to implement 'cognitive warfare' by increasing the psychological burden on the Taiwanese people. By demonstrating its ability to impinge upon Taiwan at will, the PRC embarrasses and undermines the legitimacy of Taiwan's government and portrays the futility of resistance. By linking grey zone escalations to political events, such as the visit of then-US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to Taiwan, the PRC hopes also to influence Taiwanese public opinion against political leaders seeking more international standing for Taiwan – though sometimes these attempts may backfire. As Taiwan's domestic politics becomes increasingly fractured following the inconclusive results of the 2024 legislative elections, the PRC hopes to use grey zone tactics to put further pressure on its opponents and give further credence to its political allies in Taiwan.<sup>24</sup>

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*"Beijing's 'salami slicing' strategy attempts to establish a new normal, gradually changing the status quo of Taiwan's autonomy without the need to resort to open conflict."*

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Thirdly, grey zone activities are designed to gradually erode Taiwan's defences by draining resources and reducing alertness to new threats. The cost of responding to the increased number of incursions into Taiwan's ADIZ has led to Taiwan's Ministry of Defence announcing that fighter jets would only intercept on an "as needed" basis rather than every time.<sup>25</sup> Grey zone activities also allow the PRC to practise military manoeuvres that may later be used against Taiwan. The PRC's People's Liberation Army (PLA) are lacking in recent combat experience and benefit greatly from opportunities to test out manoeuvres and equipment.

## How does the grey zone undermine Europe's interests?

Europe's role in an escalating geopolitical crisis across the Taiwan Strait is often viewed through the lens of US-PRC competition. On the one hand, the US will expect Europe to broadly align with its approach, alongside Japan, Australia and other countries that have an interest in supporting both Taiwan's democratic system and the international rules-based order. On the other hand, the PRC has tried hard to discourage European states from getting involved in what it sees as an "internal affair", which it claims will allow the EU to adopt a form of "strategic autonomy" from the US.

<sup>21</sup> 呂, '北京施壓與台灣「斷交潮」持續: 民眾有何看法? 邦交國會否「清零」?', Panetta, 'A Wild Account of Chinese Political Interference Is Unfolding in Ottawa. No, Not That One'.

<sup>22</sup> Kelter, 'How Beijing Is Changing the Way It Involves Itself in Taiwan's Election'.

<sup>23</sup> 松仁, '北京干涉台灣大選直達基層 大批村長參加「優待」大陸行'.

<sup>24</sup> 楊, '台灣立法院朝野對立 分析人士'.

<sup>25</sup> Shattuck, 'The PLA Air Force Erases the Taiwan Strait Centerline'.



## EUROPE'S 'ONE-CHINA' POLICY

The EU and its Member States each pursue their own 'one-China' policy. In general, these recognise the government of the People's Republic of China as the sole representative of China, while maintaining close cooperation with Taiwan in a wide range of areas.<sup>26</sup>

However, the one-China policy held by European governments is not to be conflated with the PRC's "one-China principle", which states that Taiwan is an "inalienable part of China" and that the PRC is "the sole legal government representing the whole of China".<sup>27</sup> While multiple EU member states have "acknowledged" the PRC's claims of sovereignty over Taiwan, they have not recognised or agreed with this claim. Additionally, European countries and the EU have repeatedly stated that any resolution of cross-strait differences must take place peacefully "through dialogue" – in clear opposition to the PRC's current grey zone coercion strategy.

Relations between Taiwan and the EU and its Member States are maintained through a series of representative offices, with the EU and 14 Member States having established representative offices in Taiwan, and Taiwan maintaining 19 representative offices in the EU. Representative offices function as de-facto embassies, promoting trade and cultural links, as well as offering unofficial consular services and a forum for political exchange.<sup>28</sup>

Both of these perspectives miss Europe's distinctive and strategic interest in the Taiwan Strait and the broader Indo-Pacific region, regardless of what the US and PRC may want from Europe. This paper outlines three core objectives, which should form the starting point for understanding Europe's strategy for Taiwan.

Europe's first and foremost objective should be to **uphold peace and regional stability** in the region. Aside from the potentially catastrophic humanitarian costs of any conflict, the importance of the Taiwan Strait to trade flows between Asia and Europe means that conflict would have a detrimental impact on the European and global economies. Almost half of the world's container ships passed through the Taiwan Strait in 2022, and it is estimated that the conflict could cause USD

2.5 trillion in annual losses to the global economy even before including the impact of any economic sanctions and counter-sanctions.<sup>29</sup> Disruption will be particularly acute in semiconductor supply chains, with Taiwan producing over 70% of the world's total supply and 90% of the most advanced chips, with the potential for ramifications across nearly all manufacturing sectors.<sup>30</sup> Deterring the PRC from further escalating its grey zone aggressions is critical to reducing the chances of conflict in the region.

From this arises a second objective, **to re-affirm the status quo of Taiwan's autonomy** – i.e. de facto, but not de jure, independence. Despite hardening opinions on both sides of the Strait, this status quo is still the only peaceful option tolerable to both Beijing and Taipei, at least for the time being. As such, it is also the situation that Europe should seek to preserve, including by pushing back against the PRC's attempts to gradually force a change in the status quo through grey zone coercion. To do so is not in contravention of the 'one-China' policies held by most European countries, which generally state support for a peaceful resolution to the Taiwan question with the need for agreement on both sides of the Strait. Until such a peaceful resolution can be found, upholding the status quo of Taiwan's autonomy and reaffirming its right to determine its future peaceably and free of coercion must be core to Europe's strategy on Taiwan.

Finally, a third overarching objective of Europe's strategic interest in the Taiwan Strait must be the upholding of international law and **maintaining a free and open Indo-Pacific**. The PRC's grey zone activities against Taiwan undermine key provisions of international maritime law that form the foundation of shipping and trade in the region. The PRC claims that the Taiwan Strait does not constitute international waters and instead forms part of the PRC's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), and that it has the right to regulate military activity in this area. This assertion challenges a number of aspects of the UN Convention on the Law of the Seas (UNCLOS). Firstly, a number of countries have disputed the PRC's extensive EEZ claims, which include not only 90% of the South China Sea but also the Taiwan Strait and parts of the East China Sea.<sup>31</sup> These claims bring the PRC into dispute not only with Taiwan but also the Philippines, Vietnam, Japan and others. Secondly, and most crucially, even if the PRC's EEZ claims were accepted, this does not give it the right to police traffic through the Strait. Under UNCLOS all ships – including military vessels – would still have the right to use the Strait as a "transit passage" between the high seas for the purposes of international navigation.

<sup>26</sup> European Economic and Trade Office in Taiwan, 'The European Union and Taiwan | EEAS'.

<sup>27</sup> Mission of the People's Republic of China to the European Union, 'Questions and Answers Concerning the Taiwan Question (2): What Is the One-China Principle? What Is the Basis of the One-China Principle?'.

<sup>28</sup> Ličková et al., 'Taiwan's Quasi-Diplomatic Interactions with Europe'.

<sup>29</sup> Varley, 'Taiwan Strait: Tensions Raise Risks in One of Busiest Shipping Lanes - Bloomberg'; Vest and Kratz, 'Sanctioning China in a Taiwan Crisis'.

<sup>30</sup> Kohlmann, 'How Taiwanese Semiconductors Reign Supreme - DW - 08/04/2022'.

<sup>31</sup> Reuters, 'Australia Says China's South China Sea Claims Are Unlawful'.

## Part Two: Mapping out scenarios for escalation

Efforts to map out how the PRC could escalate aggressions against Taiwan have typically focused on the 'worst-case scenarios', namely an economic blockade or invasion of the main island. Focus on these scenarios is understandable given the high humanitarian cost and major disruption to the global economy that both cases would entail. How the international community should respond to such major escalations with far-reaching global consequences must be at the forefront of any government's foreign policy planning.

However, there are many reasons why the PRC may continue to take a more gradual and less overt approach to achieving its objectives for Taiwan. The PRC's grey zone strategy is already allowing it to make significant progress in undermining Taiwan's autonomy. As outlined above, this has allowed the PRC to erode the significance of both the median line and Taiwan's ADIZ – two key attempts by Taiwan to normalise its de-facto sovereignty over the island – without requiring direct military confrontation nor triggering a substantive international response. Policy strategists in Beijing may look at other 'red lines' around Taiwan's autonomy and gamble that these, too, can be gradually eroded through grey zone escalations.

Continuing to pursue a grey zone strategy poses far fewer risks to the PRC than conventional warfare. Firstly, it does not commit the PRC to extensive outlay of military resources to campaigns it may not win. Grey zone activities give the option to scale up or scale down escalations at any time without substantial loss of face or resources. Secondly, it minimises opportunities for an international response. Grey zone activities are, by definition, designed to fall below the threshold of 'acts of war' and are less likely to inspire outrage in the international community. Thirdly, grey zone activities are a better fit for the PRC's narrative of conflict over Taiwan as an 'internal affair' rather than an external war. A full-scale confrontation between the PRC and Taiwan's militaries risks appearing to both domestic and international audiences as a conflict between two warring states. In contrast, lower-level aggressions to undermine Taiwan's autonomy are more in line with the PRC's narrative of Taiwan as nothing more than an errant province of China.

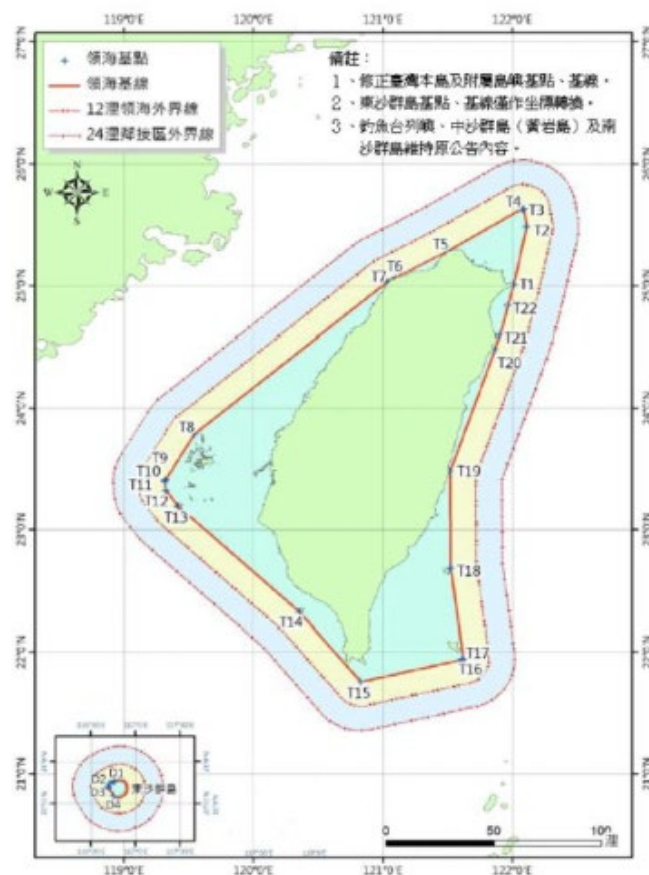
### Scenario 1: Establishing a temporary no-fly zone in Taiwan's ADIZ

One of the more unusual moves during the PRC's large-scale military exercises in April 2023 was the announcement of a temporary closure of airspace in a zone intersecting with Taiwan's ADIZ 85 nautical miles off Taiwan's north coast to allow for a satellite launch. Following complaints from Taipei, this position was largely retracted, with the no-fly zone reduced from 15 hours over 3 days to just 27 minutes. However, the episode shows how the PRC may choose to escalate grey zone activities in the future.

A temporary no-fly zone over a section of Taiwan's ADIZ – whether enforced for a period of hours or days – would cause significant disruption to a busy air corridor with high volumes of traffic. This would hurt Taiwan's economy while also undermining the Taiwanese government by challenging its authority to manage its own airspace. Provided such an activity does not take place over Taiwan's territorial airspace, this would also be an extremely difficult provocation for Taiwan to respond to. The nature of the aggression could be further complicated by the likelihood that the PRC authorities would not label the activity as a no-fly zone or a result of military activity. Instead, a no-fly zone could be justified with the protection of civilians – as in the case of the satellite launch during the April 2023 military exercises.

### Scenario 2: Incursions into Taiwan's contiguous zone

Figure 3 | Map of Taiwan's territorial sea and contiguous zone.<sup>32</sup>



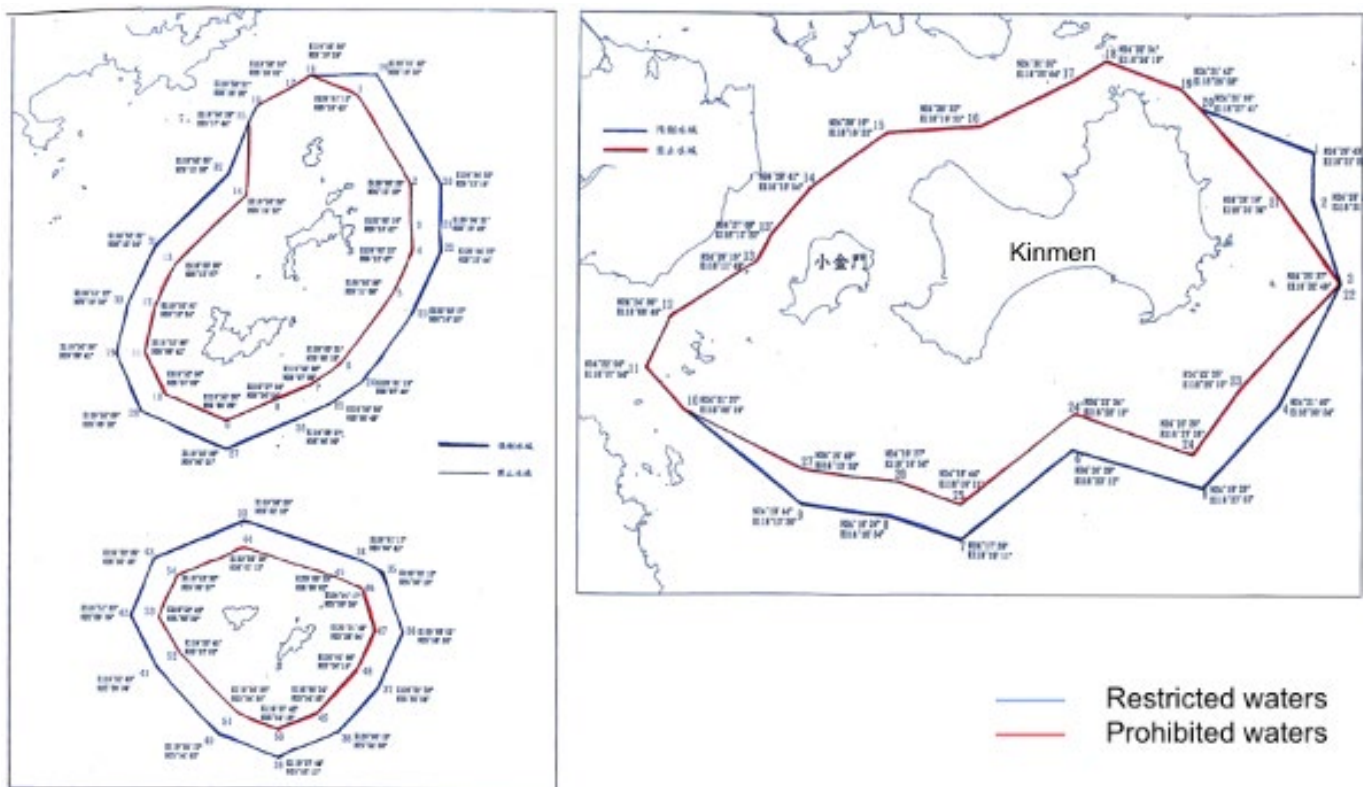
Source: 海洋委員會 Ocean Affairs Council of the Republic of China, '中華民國第一批領海基線'.

An incursion by a PRC military aircraft or vessel into Taiwan's contiguous zone would mark a significant escalation in grey zone activities. While air and sea incursions regularly broach the median line, no public record has yet been made of any PRC military aircraft or vessels broaching the contiguous zone. However, the growing number of military incursions by land and sea that have come close to Taiwan's contiguous zone since 2023 suggests that the PRC is testing these limits, too.<sup>33</sup> As with the median line, the PRC may see this as a further marker of Taiwan's autonomy that it can gradually erode with limited response. While Taiwan has said that it would treat any military aircraft or vessels intruding into Taiwan's territorial airspace as a "first strike" and thereby reserves the right to repel with force, no such commitment has been made about the contiguous zone. As such, it acts as an important

buffer zone to prevent miscalculation and escalation. By erasing this buffer zone, the PRC would be significantly raising the chances of grey zone activities spilling into open conflict.

To complicate this scenario further, incursions may not be led by the PLA aircraft or vessels. Avoiding using its formal armed forces gives the PRC plausible deniability and makes a clear response more challenging. This strategy has been most obvious in the South China Sea, where it has used its coast guard – rather than the Navy – to conduct high-risk manoeuvres against the Philippines' coast guard vessels in disputed waters. As noted above, a number of PRC maritime research vessels have already made multiple crossings into the contiguous zone, suggesting a similar strategy may be being used for Taiwan.

**Figure 4 | Restricted and prohibited waters around the Matsu Islands and Kinmen. Source: Mainland Affairs Council<sup>34</sup>**



Source: Collier, 'Chinese Hackers Spent 5 Years Waiting in U.S. Infrastructure, Ready to Attack, Agencies Say'.

### Scenario 3: Major cyber-attacks on Taiwan's infrastructure

Conducting a major cyber-attack on Taiwan's infrastructure would be in keeping with the PRC's known capabilities in this area. Developing offensive cyber-capabilities has been a core part of the PRC's military strategy since 2015 and has

already had significant success against targets in Taiwan.<sup>35</sup> PRC-backed hackers exploited 'living-off-the-land techniques' to remain undetected in major government and national infrastructure systems in the US, UK and elsewhere for years.<sup>36</sup> It is thus likely that the PRC already has malware in place ready to cause major disruption to Taiwan's critical infrastructure through a cyber-attack on command.

<sup>32</sup> 海洋委員會 Ocean Affairs Council of the Republic of China, '中華民國第一批領海基線'.

<sup>33</sup> Blanchard, 'Taiwan Says Chinese Air Force Approached Close to Island's Coast'.

<sup>34</sup> 中華民國大陸委員會 - Mainland Affairs Council Republic of China (Taiwan), '馬祖地區限制 (禁止) 水域圖'.

<sup>35</sup> Collier, 'Chinese Hackers Spent 5 Years Waiting in U.S. Infrastructure, Ready to Attack, Agencies Say'.

<sup>36</sup> 'NCSC and Partners Issue Warning about State-Sponsored Cyber Attackers Hiding on Critical Infrastructure Networks'.

A major cyber-attack that causes loss of life or severe physical damage could be considered an act of war and would mark a departure from the PRC's grey zone strategy. More consistent within the grey zone strategy would be cyber-attacks that embarrass the Taiwanese government and require costly repair and damage limitation in fields such as communications, energy, transportation systems and waste. Banking systems underpinning Taiwan's financial network have also been identified by analysts as particularly vulnerable to cyberattack, with the potential for impacts on the stock market and currency.<sup>37</sup> Depending on the scale and sophistication of the cyber-attack, there may be plausible deniability on behalf of the PRC. In any case, the PRC would likely deny responsibility for any of the attacks and try to obscure any links to the hackers.

Apart from a virtual cyberattack, Taiwan's reliance on submarine cables to connect to the internet also presents an infrastructure vulnerability that could be exploited in a grey zone scenario. In February 2023, two internet cables connecting the outlying Matsu islands to Taiwan were severed by PRC fishing vessels and sand dredgers in February 2023, leaving residents without internet for weeks. Although the Taiwanese government stopped short of claiming the incident was a deliberate provocation by the PRC, some commentators have called it a 'dry run' for further aggression.<sup>38</sup> The cutting of internet cables under the sea bed to Taiwan's main island would cause major disruption to its communications infrastructure, with knock-on impacts on logistics and global supply chains.<sup>39</sup>

#### Scenario 4: Partial economic blockade or 'quarantine'

While PRC military strategists have aired the possibility of enforcing a full economic blockade of Taiwan as a way to coerce it into unification, such a move would be risky and a marked departure from the PRC's grey zone strategy. Economic blockades are widely recognised as an act of war, and the response of Taiwan and the international community would be difficult to predict.

In contrast, a short, time-limited economic blockade could raise economic pressure on Taiwan while minimising the time window for the international community to respond in a coordinated manner. For example, the PRC could temporarily control the air and maritime space around Taiwan, preventing civilian ships and aircraft from entering or leaving Taiwan for a period of hours or days. Alternatively, a partial economic blockade could be limited by targeting only the import of specific goods. For example, Taiwan depended on fossil fuel imports for above 97.7% of its energy needs in 2021.<sup>40</sup>

While the Taiwanese government does hold stockpiles of these fuels, some, such as natural gas, had only 11 days' worth of reserve in 2022.<sup>41</sup> Either action could be sufficient to disrupt trade, weaken confidence in Taiwan's economy and undermine the legitimacy of Taiwan's government. As with previous escalations, this could be tied into attempts to punish Taiwan for perceived steps towards formal independence.

A further complication may be the choice of less overtly aggressive measures to disrupt Taiwan's trade flows. The PRC could conduct stop-and-search operations on Taiwanese ships headed to the mainland in order to block or delay Taiwanese goods exported to the PRC. This scenario is sometimes referred to as a 'quarantine' measure, as pest control has previously been used to justify import bans against Taiwanese agricultural exports. However, it is possible that a range of reasons could be used to obscure these measures, from health and safety to quality assurance. Warning signs that the PRC may already be considering these measures came as part of the April 2023 exercises, when the PRC's Fujian maritime safety administration announced a three-day "special joint patrol and inspection operation" within sections of the Strait, including on Taiwan's side, though none were reported to have taken place.

#### Scenario 5: Occupation of uninhabited outlying islands

While Taiwan's outlying Kinmen, Matsu and Penghu archipelagos all include larger, well-populated and heavily defended islands, each grouping also includes smaller uninhabited islands. Notably, the May 2024 large-scale military exercises saw drills close to Wuqiu and Dongyin, which lie less than 27 km and 50 km from the PRC's Fujian coast, respectively, as well as the larger Kinmen and Matsu islands. These smaller islands would present easier targets for PRC forces to occupy while minimising the risk of conflict and civilian casualties. Occupying these islands would allow the PRC to make small but tangible territorial gains and score a major propaganda victory. Occupation would give the Taiwanese government a difficult choice of whether to expend lethal force trying to remove PRC forces from their new positions and, in doing so, risk further escalation over relatively insignificant territories. If executed successfully, such a foothold could also be used by the PRC as a staging point for further grey zone activities or efforts to take other territories in the island groups.<sup>42</sup>

Again, the situation could be further complicated if the first occupiers of such islands are not formal PRC military forces. Taiwan's coast guard has ongoing issues with unregistered PRC fishing vessels conducting illegal fishing in "restricted"

<sup>37</sup> Hou and Tarabay, 'Taiwan Calls on US Support to Defend Banks Against Cyberattacks - Bloomberg'; Chiu, 'Analyzing Taiwan's Readiness And Response To PRC Offensive Cyber Operations - The Yale Review Of International Studies'.

<sup>38</sup> Braw, 'China Is Practicing How to Sever Taiwan's Internet'.

<sup>39</sup> Mok and Huang, 'Strengthening Taiwan's Critical Digital Lifeline'.

<sup>40</sup> Kucharski, 'Taiwan's Greatest Vulnerability Is Its Energy Supply'.

<sup>41</sup> Reuters, 'Taiwan to Boost Energy Inventories amid China Threat'.

<sup>42</sup> Chubb, 'Taiwan Strait Crises'.



and “prohibited” waters around the Kinmen and Matsu archipelagos, designations which Beijing does not formally acknowledge. PRC fishing fleets refusing to leave after seeking refuge on uninhabited islands in a real or feigned emergency would present Taiwan’s coast guard with a difficult problem. A deadly collision between the Taiwanese coast guard and an intruding PRC fishing vessel in February 2024 shows how such situations could escalate.<sup>43</sup> In the future, it is possible to see the PRC using such incidents to justify its coast guard or navy entering restricted waters to assist PRC fishing vessels in confrontations with Taiwan’s coast guard.

## Scenario 6: Seizure of larger outlying islands

Seizure of Taiwan’s larger outlying islands may also present an option for the PRC to increase pressure on Taiwan while stopping short of attacking the main island. This would allow the PRC to make tangible territorial gains while also demonstrating its military capabilities and political intent. Islands seized could act as strategic staging points for a future invasion of the main island, and could put further pressure on the Taiwanese government to submit to unification discussions.

**Figure 5 | Position of Taiwan’s outlying islands**



Source: <https://online.mapcreator.io/>.

The implications of this scenario will depend on which outlying island is seized. The islands of Kinmen and Matsu would represent highly symbolic and strategically significant seizures. These islands are the closest to the PRC and have comparatively large populations of 141 thousand and 107 thousand, respectively.<sup>44</sup> Both islands are heavily fortified, and quelling Kinmen, in particular, is seen by PRC military strategists as a necessary first step to any future invasion of Taiwan. Lying less than 10km from the PRC’s Fujian coastline, the PRC may judge that international reaction against these islands may be relatively muted. Historical (and now defunct) US military treaties with Taiwan did not include commitments to defend Kinmen and Matsu. However, the islands’ heavy fortification and large civilian populations raise the risk of a bloody, protracted and unpredictable conflict for the PRC. In contrast, the Pratas (Dongsha) and Taiping (Itu Aba) islands in the South China Sea are far from Taiwan’s main island, sparsely populated and less heavily defended than those in the Taiwan Strait. Seizing Pratas island could have some strategic benefits to extending the presence of the PLA Navy in the region, while Taiping island has an airstrip and is the largest of the PRC’s claims over the Spratly Islands – which Vietnam and the Philippines both also claim. However, these strategic gains are small compared to the potential costs of such moves. Aggressions in the South China Sea risk angering a much broader set of regional actors in a region already increasingly hostile to Beijing.

While such moves would mark a clear departure from the PRC’s current grey zone strategy, they would still be in keeping with the PRC’s incremental ‘salami slicing’ approach. While the seizure of outlying islands would be a clear act of war, there is a chance that it would be interpreted by some in the international community as showing a degree of restraint compared to an attack on the main island, thereby limiting the extent of any US or allied military response. While PRC forces would undoubtedly face resistance from Taiwanese defences, both sides might avoid escalating the conflict zone to either the PRC mainland or Taiwan island.

<sup>43</sup> Ng, ‘Taiwan’.

<sup>44</sup> DaftLogic, ‘Distance Calculator’; 澎湖縣政府 Penghu County Government, ‘人口統計’; 金門縣政府 Kinmen County Government, ‘金門縣政府全球資訊網’.

# Part Three: How can Europe respond?

## Building an anti-grey zone strategy

By definition, grey zone activities are designed to be difficult to respond to, falling just below the threshold of open conflict. Policymakers are understandably hesitant about getting caught up in an escalatory cycle that could spiral out of control. However, Europe’s clear strategic interest in maintaining peace and stability in the region means that it must leverage whatever resources it can to push back against the PRC’s grey zone escalations. The incremental, progressive logic of the PRC’s grey zone escalations means that interventions at the earlier ‘light grey’ stage are more effective and less risky than interventions at the ‘dark grey’ stage. Timely interventions to prevent the PRC from escalating aggressions is a far less risky conflict prevention strategy than waiting until Taiwan’s red lines are on the verge of being crossed.

*“Timely interventions to prevent the PRC from escalating aggressions is a far less risky conflict prevention strategy than waiting until Taiwan’s red lines are on the verge of being crossed.”*























This paper sets out a series of policy recommendations based on a three-part anti-grey zone strategy. Firstly, European governments must **raise the cost of the PRC’s grey zone aggressions**. By raising the diplomatic and economic costs of grey zone coercions, the EU and its allies can help shift the cost-benefit calculus to Beijing of maintaining and escalating such actions. To avoid escalating the situation further,

such responses must be proportionate to the severity of the grey zone aggression taking place and must also be reversible in order to provide an incentive for de-escalation.

Secondly, European governments must act now to **strengthen Taiwan’s resilience** to grey zone coercion. The PRC’s actions against Taiwan are not restricted to the military domain alone. By deepening trade cooperation and sharing expertise on renewable energy and cybersecurity, Europe can help Taiwan minimise the impact of coercive actions. With many of these recommendations operating outside of the military domain, these actions are also less overtly provocative towards Beijing. Many of these actions also present major opportunities for European firms, helping them expand their trade portfolios in the region.

Thirdly, the EU and its member states should utilise their significant diplomatic influence to **reaffirm the international rules-based order**, upholding peace and stability in the region. By upholding the rules, norms and structures of the multilateral system, Europe can reaffirm the foundations of a free and open Indo-Pacific. This helps to protect Europe’s interests not just in the Taiwan Strait but across the region.

Importantly, European governments should reassure the PRC that a more forthright response to Beijing’s grey zone tactics against Taiwan does not constitute a change in the ‘one-China’ policy of the EU and its member states, nor does it reflect support for Taiwan’s independence. Opposing the PRC’s escalations against Taiwan is in line with Europe’s longstanding policy on the issue, which has always emphasised its desire for a peaceful resolution of cross-strait differences through dialogue – not through threats, intimidation and coercion.

European countries/bodies that have made official statements in response to issues related to Taiwan (2022 – 2024)	
August 2022 military exercises	  & G7
April 2023 military exercises	      & G7
Support for Taiwan’s participation at the WHA	        & G7
Taiwan’s 2024 Presidential elections	     

# Policy Recommendations

## (1) Raising the cost of the PRC's grey zone aggressions

- **Increased statements publicising the PRC's grey zone activities:** The PRC's grey zone strategy is designed to slip under the radar of international scrutiny. By identifying, noticing, and publicising the PRC's aggressive behaviour, Europe can raise the diplomatic costs to Beijing for these actions. European government statements on the PRC's greyzone coercion have so far largely been limited to reactions to the large-scale military activities of August 2022 and April 2023. Raising other less obvious, but equally pernicious, grey zone activities will help to reaffirm norms around Taiwan's autonomy while gradually shifting the cost-benefit calculus for Beijing. Such statements are not out of line with the longstanding 'one-China' policies held by most European countries. Indeed, European governments can use these opportunities to highlight that the PRC's coercive activities are in opposition to the peaceful resolution of differences that European states have committed to under their 'one-China' policies.
- **Enhanced military and dual use export controls:** Although the European Council announced an EU-wide arms embargo on the PRC following the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre, it has been up to Member States to interpret and implement this embargo as they see fit.<sup>45</sup> In practice, while most EU countries have imposed restrictions on the export of lethal military goods to the PRC, export licences for other products with direct military applications have still been approved. For example, France, Germany, and other member states have approved exports of military-use imaging equipment; aircrafts, helicopters, and drones; chemical and biological agents and target acquisition and weapon control, and counter-measure systems in recent years.<sup>46</sup> At its peak, France issued 715 million euros worth of export licences for imaging equipment to China in 2015.<sup>47</sup> EU member states should tighten export control regimes for the PRC to include non-lethal military and dual-use equipment, particularly those which might be used in current or future actions against Taiwan, in response to grey zone escalations against Taiwan. Coordination should also take

place at the EU level, in line with European Commission proposals for a senior level forum for political coordination on export controls.<sup>48</sup>

- **Proportionate diplomatic engagement with Taiwan:** Europe can raise the diplomatic costs of coercive actions against Taiwan by linking future grey zone escalations to greater levels of engagement and international cooperation with Taiwan. This helps to counter the PRC's narrative that the West's engagement with Taiwan is deliberately provocative to Beijing by demonstrating that growing international concern over Taiwan is a direct result of the PRC's aggression. For example, government ministers or parliamentary delegations could visit Taiwan after significant grey zone escalations to take part in 'fact-finding missions' or to show solidarity and re-state their support for peaceful resolution under respective 'one-China' policies. Similarly, concern with the PRC's grey zone activities in the air and maritime domain could be used to justify calling for greater Taiwanese engagement with ICAO and IMO or to host unofficial side meetings with Taiwanese representatives at these conventions.
- **Sanctions on PRC military-linked companies:** Sanctions targeting a number of the PRC's military-adjacent companies can be a proportionate response to future escalations of grey zone activities. Sanctions can target companies directly linked to grey zone activities, for example, on aerospace companies supplying the PLA in the event of escalated air incursions on Taiwan or technology companies in the event of a major cyberattack. Sanctions could be designated under a PRC-specific-country list through a European Council Regulation, which is binding on individuals and companies in the EU. Alternatively, EU investors could be barred from investing in certain PRC military companies linked to grey zone escalations through proposals for a common EU outbound investment regime, currently under consultation. While the economic impact of such sanctions may be small in scale, such measures can still have an important signalling effect.

<sup>45</sup> European Council, 'Council of Ministers Declaration on China'.

<sup>46</sup> Common military list codes for the categories: ML15 – military-use imaging equipment; ML10 – aircrafts, helicopters, and drones; ML7 – chemical and biological agents; and ML5 target acquisition and weapon control, and countermeasure systems. The following link has more detailed information: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52014XG0409%2801%29&from=HR>

<sup>47</sup> Source: CAAT

<sup>48</sup> European Commission, 'New Initiatives to Strengthen Economic Security'.



## (2) Strengthening Taiwan's resilience to grey zone coercion

### → **Supporting Taiwan's renewable energy development:**

Taiwan's reliance on energy imports is a vulnerability that may be exploited in a number of grey zone scenarios. Supporting Taiwan's deployment of renewable energy helps to minimise these risks, while also providing major opportunities for European firms. In particular, Taiwan's potential for offshore wind – an area in which European companies have an edge – has led to it being a priority sector in the EU-Taiwan Trade and Investment Dialogue (TID).<sup>49</sup> Using Europe as an alternative source to PRC-made green technologies can also help reduce the risk of economic coercion through cyberattacks or export restrictions, with a number of Taiwanese companies exploring opportunities to manufacture next generation solar technologies. European governments should continue to support these companies with the resources of their representative offices in Taiwan. European governments should continue to support their companies exploring opportunities in Taiwan through bolstering the resources of the EU and member state representative offices in Taiwan and organising regular trade delegations to Taiwan.

→ **Launching cyber-defence collaborations:** The EU should launch a cyber-security dialogue with Taiwan which could be modelled on the EU-Ukraine Cybersecurity Dialogue, with representatives from the European Union Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA) and relevant Taiwanese officials taking part to share information on emerging cyber-threats and discuss effective responses. If needed, such discussions could take place privately, with ENISA officers stationed within the European Economic and Trade Office in Taipei to aid engagement. At a more informal level, Taiwanese officials could be invited to take part in training courses at the Helsinki based European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats (Hybrid CoE), an autonomous institution with close links to NATO and the EU. Taiwan's cybersecurity market – which is projected to grow by 10.8% annually through 2028 – also presents a significant opportunity for European firms. The US International Trade Association notes that Taiwan has high demand for cybersecurity solutions in areas such as firewalls, web application firewalls (WAF), antivirus software, and endpoint protections such as password management tools and software. European governments should resource their representative offices in Taiwan to promote European cybersecurity services through taking part in trade shows such as the annual Cybersec Forum Taipei or engaging with the Taiwan Information and Cybersecurity Service Consortium matchmaking service.

→ **Cooperation on infrastructure resilience:** The EU has already initiated efforts to assess and improve the security of its submarine cables, with the European Commission having published a Recommendation on the security and resilience of submarine cable infrastructures and committing to set up a Submarine Cable Infrastructure Informal Expert Group.<sup>50</sup> EU officials should work with Taiwanese counterparts to share information and best practices as these efforts progress. Such exchanges could take place with other regional partners through the Global Cooperation and Training Framework (GCTF) – a forum led by Taiwan to share best practice in common challenges across the region – or through EU officials seconded to the European Economic and Trade Office in Taipei.<sup>51</sup> The EU and its Member States should continue to provide support to Eutelsat OneWeb and other low earth orbit (LEO) satellite providers as they help Taiwan build back-up internet and communications infrastructure.<sup>52</sup>

→ **Resilience against disinformation:** Europe's challenge in countering Russian state propaganda and misinformation mirrors many of the difficulties faced by Taiwan. Taiwan has developed world leading expertise in this area – with a European Parliament report noting that the EU has much to learn from Taiwan's approach of engaging NGOs, social media platforms and civic education in a “whole-of-society” approach to combating misinformation. This presents a major opportunity for collaboration between Taiwan and Europe, both on the state and NGO level. European governments should engage with Taiwan to compare experiences and discuss best practice in combating disinformation. Such initiatives could take place through the GCTF, or through exchanges between EU and Taiwanese civil society groups supported by EU institutions.<sup>53</sup>

→ **Approving exports of military and dual-use technologies:** US arms sales to Taiwan have been held up by significant delays, with an estimated backlog of US \$19.1 billion in February 2024.<sup>54</sup> European governments should enter trilateral discussions with the US and Taiwan on what role European suppliers may be able to play in complementing US equipment sales and helping to clear order backlogs, with particular opportunities in air defence, command and control, integration of datalink, and electronic warfare. To avoid sensitivities, such sales could be routed via the US. Importantly, EU governments should approve attempts by the US, allied governments or other third parties to sell equipment manufactured by EU defence firms to Taiwan. While such sales are sensitive, they do have established precedent, with EU countries issuing more than €161 billion worth of military export licences to Taiwan from 2018 to 2022.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>49</sup> EU Directorate-General for Trade, 'EU and Taiwan Hold Second Trade and Investment Dialogue - European Commission'.

<sup>50</sup> European Commission, 'Recommendation on the Security and Resilience of Submarine Cable Infrastructures | Shaping Europe's Digital Future'.

<sup>51</sup> Global Cooperation and Training Framework, 'Global Cooperation and Training Framework'.

<sup>52</sup> Eutelsat OneWeb, 'Chunghwa Telecom Selects Eutelsat OneWeb for Low Earth Orbit (LEO) Satellite Services'.

<sup>53</sup> Ferenczy, 'EU-Taiwan Ties in a New Reality: Time for an Upgrade'.

<sup>54</sup> Gomez and Giltner, 'Taiwan Arms Backlog, February 2024 Update'.

<sup>55</sup> Campaign Against Arms Trade, 'EU Export Data Browser'.

<sup>55</sup> CNA News, 'Taiwan Aware of Recent French Warship Taiwan Strait Transit – Focus Taiwan'.

### (3) Re-affirming the international rules-based order

- **Coordinated Maritime Presence:** European governments should increase the number of freedom of navigation' operations (FONOP) through contested sections of the South and East China Seas, including the Taiwan Strait, to assert the rights of all ships to transit international waterways. 2021 saw a number of missions from European navies to the South China Sea, including the UK, France, Germany and the Netherlands, with a French nuclear submarine making passage through the Taiwan Strait. More recently, France sent a surveillance frigate through Taiwan in April 2023.<sup>56</sup> While positive, these efforts have been sparse and inconsistent. European governments should aim to increase the frequency and consistency of such visits, with a goal to coordinate a rotation of at least one European deployment to the South China Sea and Taiwan Strait each year. To institutionalise this, the EU could seek to establish a Coordinated Maritime Presence (CMP) in the region, which would allow information sharing and co-ordination between EU naval vessels. Given the UK's significant role in Europe's naval power, a CMP also presents an opportunity for UK-EU cooperation, as well as working with regional partners such as Australia and Japan. A EU or EU-UK led CMP in the region would both help to secure Europe's strategic interests in maintaining a free and open Indo-Pacific and push back against the PRC's attempts to use its maritime claims to restrict Taiwan's autonomy.
- **Resisting Beijing's international lawfare:** As highlighted above, the PRC's grey zone strategy is intertwined with contested international rules and norms. Europe should use its outsized influence in multilateral institutions to push back against these attempts. EU member states should follow the US in publicly stating its opposition to the PRC's attempts to use UNGA Resolution 2758 to justify Taiwan's exclusion from the UN, and could undoubtedly use it to portray any future escalations against Taiwan as an 'internal affair'. Instead, EU member states which voted in favour of Resolution 2758 in 1971 should clarify that the Resolution does not address questions of sovereignty over Taiwan or preclude any form of engagement with the UN.<sup>57</sup> Additionally, EU member states should oppose the PRC's attempts to claim the rights of an archipelagic state (laying claim to 'internal waters' between islands) despite clearly being a continental state, and its attempts to deny the right of 'innocent passage' to warships through its waters and extensive EEZ claims.<sup>58</sup>
- **Supporting Taiwan's participation in multilateral institutions:** While attempts to grant Taiwan full UN membership are unlikely to succeed, there is scope for participation in bodies for which statehood is not a prerequisite. EU Member States should coordinate efforts with its allies to promote Taiwan's participation in the World Health Organization (WHO), the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and other bodies. Given that Taiwan plays an important role in global shipping and aviation and that the PRC's grey zone activities have impacted civilian air and maritime traffic, there is also a strong case for Taiwan's participation in the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and the International Maritime Organization (IMO). Although statehood is a prerequisite for full membership of ICAO and IMO, relevant Taiwanese officials or industry leaders should still be invited to take part in consultations and working groups with key stakeholders. For UN conventions where Taiwan is denied participation, European officials should still show support for Taiwan's engagement by hosting and attending side meetings outside of the official agenda with Taiwanese representatives, and by providing briefings to Taiwanese officials on important meetings after they occur. Pushing for Taiwan's participation in multilateral institutions for which statehood is not a prerequisite is not in contradiction with the One China policy of the EU and its member states and has been supported in recent G7 statements.<sup>59</sup>
- **Engaging Taiwan through alternative institutions:** While Taiwan remains excluded from multilateral institutions, European countries should help to mitigate the impacts of Taiwan's isolation by engaging in alternative forums. In particular, European countries should deepen their role in Taiwan's GCTF by seeking partner status alongside Australia, Japan and the US. Europe and Taiwan share many common interests in areas such as supply chain resilience, renewable energy deployment and cyber-security, all of which could be addressed within the GCTF. France should also use its influence as the founder host of the 2025 AI Safety Summit to push for Taiwan's inclusion.

<sup>56</sup> 'Restoration of the Lawful Rights of the People's Republic of China in the United Nations'.

<sup>57</sup> Mastro, 'How China Is Bending the Rules in the South China Sea'.

<sup>58</sup> Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, 'G7 Foreign Ministers' Meeting Communiqué (Capri, 19 April 2024) – Addressing Global Challenges, Fostering Partnerships'.

<sup>59</sup> [https://air.mnd.gov.tw/EN/About/About\\_List.aspx](https://air.mnd.gov.tw/EN/About/About_List.aspx)

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**All maps** in this report, unless otherwise specified, are created with <https://online.mapcreator.io/>.



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## About the China Strategic Risks Institute



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