

The impact of PRC's Use of Gray Zone Operation: From Japan's View

LTG(Ret.) SHIBATA Mikio

Senior Research Fellow of SSRI

Abstract

The gray zone refers to a wide range of situations that are neither peacetime nor emergencies, and all acts other than the use of physical destructive force are considered gray zone operations.

The difficulty with gray zone operations is that they are legally conducted within a peacetime framework. The Self-Defense Forces, which have not been ordered to mobilize for defense, cannot take military action and must act based on their authority to deter and suppress illegal acts, just like the police.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine and China's military rise have significantly changed Japanese views on security. In response, the Japanese government developed and announced The National Security Strategy. It broadly describes the direction Japan should take for every Ministry and Agencies. The document also describes hybrid warfare in gray zone situations as a means of strengthening efforts to seamlessly protect Japan in all directions. These include responses to cyber warfare, space, oceans, economics, energy, and information, including cognitive warfare.

Then Japan's approach to fighting in these areas as a gray zone situation has become more realistic. Japan Coast Guard responds to intrusions into territorial waters by Chinese vessels, and the Self-Defense Forces monitor them to back them up. The people's sense of crisis regarding the defense of the Nansei Islands and the Taiwan emergency is growing stronger. Japan has also said it will engage in offensive cyber warfare, but there has been no major objection to this. Regarding the preservation of science and technology, the academic community's anti-military orientation and pro-China words and actions have also been criticized, and public awareness has begun to change. The concept of information warfare, which includes the cognitive domain, has appeared in national security. This is one of the most significant changes in public consciousness and deserves attention.

Overall, the public's awareness regarding gray zone operations has changed

significantly over the past few years, and the tone of the mass media, which was somewhat liberal, has also changed to more calmness and realistic one. The extent of Chinese gray zone operation impact on Japan especially on people's mind has significantly reduced.