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Analyzing China's Hybrid Warfare Methods in the South China Sea Dispute.

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China's hybrid warfare strategy in the South China Sea involves a multifaceted approach that leverages disinformation, salami slice tactics, and gray zone activities to assert its territorial claims and expand its influence. Disinformation campaigns are used to shape international perceptions and obscure the realities of China's actions, creating a narrative that supports its claims while undermining those of other nations (Chen et al., 2024; Cooper & Shearer, 2017).

Aside from this, China also swiftly craft their way through Salami slice tactics involve incremental advances that cumulatively alter the status quo, allowing China to gain control over disputed areas without provoking a significant military response (Chauhan, 2024; Wang & Siebens, 2023). These tactics has been deployed to various front that where China is currently facing with border dispute. The gray zone strategy, characterized by actions that fall below the threshold of open warfare, includes the use of coast guard, naval forces, and maritime militia to exert control and influence in contested waters (Chen et al., 2024; Arif et al., 2024; Martison, 2022).

China's approach to asserting its claims in the South China Sea (SCS) involves a combination of hybrid warfare tactics, including disinformation, salami slice tactics, and gray zone strategies. This literature review synthesizes the current understanding of these methods based on recent academic studies.

China's salami slicing technique focus on Beijing's incremental and strategic maneuver to gradually and systematically gain control over disputed territories. China use small, incremental steps to assert control over disputed areas. This method avoids large-scale confrontations and makes it difficult for other nations to respond effectively thus triggering the alarm on military responses. This tactic has been notably employed in the South China Sea, where China incrementally asserts its claims by building artificial islands and expanding its maritime presence (Chauhan, 2024; Wang & Siebens, 2023). The effectiveness of this approach lies in its ability to avoid large-scale confrontations while steadily altering the status quo in China's favour by using non-military and incremental policies to maintain strategic ambiguity, thereby avoiding direct confrontations with other regional players (Lanteigne, 2016).

The approach for gray zone strategies are characterized by actions that remain below the threshold of open warfare but are coercive and aggressive. In the South China Sea, China employs a combination

of its law enforcement agencies such as coast guard and maritime militia and People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) force to assert control and influence over disputed areas (Chen et al., 2024; Martison, 2022). These forces work synergistically to create a persistent presence that complicates the responses of other claimant states and avoids direct military conflict but effectively expands China's influence and control (Martison, 2022; Frassinetti, 2023).

The hybrid warfare tactics have significantly impacted the regional balance of power in the South China Sea. The rapid modernization of the PLAN and the strategic use of gray zone tactics have allowed China to challenge the presence and influence of other regional powers, including the United States. Beijing's utilization of law enforcement agencies to patrol disputed territorial waters have served as a limitation response by United States and her allies in deterrent strategies without provoking an all-out escalation (Takahashi, 2018; Fravel & Glaser, 2022; Hemmings, 2011).

China's hybrid warfare methods in the South China Sea dispute are multifaceted and strategically nuanced, reflecting a blend of military and non-military tactics designed to assert control without provoking outright conflict. It represents a sophisticated and calculated approach to achieving its strategic objectives. By blending economic, political, and military

tools, China is able to assert its claims and expand its influence while minimizing the risk of direct conflict. This strategy not only reshapes the regional security dynamics but also poses a challenge to the existing international order, necessitating a coordinated and multifaceted response from the international community.

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