

Armed Conflict Regarding Taiwan: the Challenges for Japan's Defense Capabilities

By Jun Nagashima



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The Japanese government is showing unwavering resolve to fundamentally upgrade Japan's defense capabilities as it ramps up the defense budget and revises the "Three Security-Related Documents" (National Security Strategy, National Defense Strategy, and Defense Buildup Program). Driving this is growing concern over the possibility that a situation similar to Russia's invasion of Ukraine could occur in areas affecting Japan, a narrow archipelago extending from north to south that is effectively bordered by states such as China, Russia, and North Korea, which seek to change the status quo of the international order.

The Lessons of Ukraine

Strategy

(1) The analog-digital balance in a hybrid space is the key to successful warfare.

Hybrid warfare is a combination of cyberattacks, deception, sabotage, disinformation, and other forms of non-military operations and kinetic military operations. It is drawing attention in the age of "post-heroic warfare" in a social environment where military casualties are politically unacceptable (*Chart*). Russia took little time to execute hybrid warfare in its invasion of Georgia (2008) and its annexation of Crimea (2014). While digitally driven warfare in virtual space is growing in importance with technological progress, there is renewed awareness of the importance of conventional "analog" factors such as the will of the people to resist and multilateral cooperation and support from third parties. It is necessary to continuously connect the diametrically opposed digital and analog elements within a dramatically changing security environment.

(2) When the objective of a war is not the short-term punishment of the other country but long-term annexation, the role of military power in the war declines in relative terms while civil operations gain in importance.

Globalization since the 1980s has

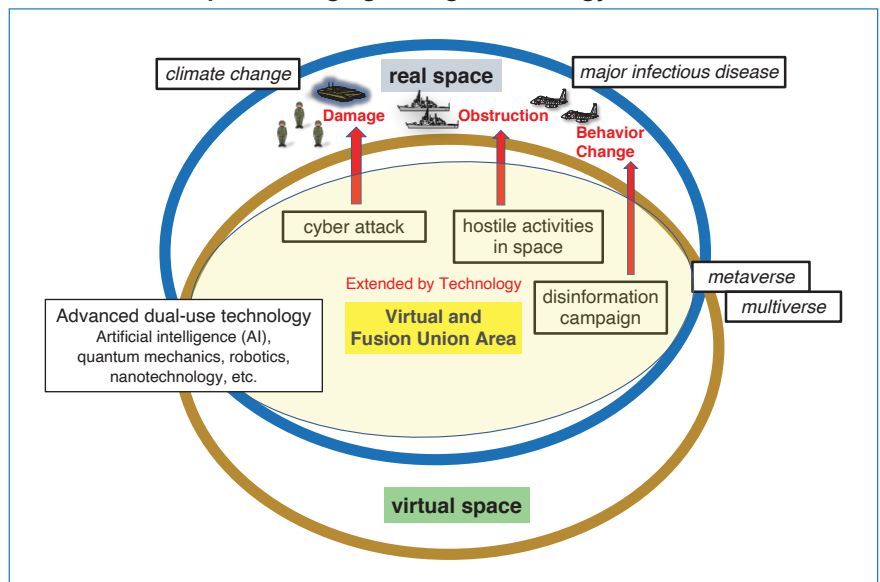
increased global interdependence, with progress in information and telecommunications technology (ICT) increasing the speed and scope of cross-border information sharing. Although the coercive force of military power maintains its importance for the parties to a war, the soft power of politics, diplomacy, society, and other factors has become more important. Strengths and weaknesses in the latter directly impact the partnerships that are the backstop of a wide variety of support and resilience in a crisis. When a war drags on, it can play an even more decisive role than military power.

(3) In hybrid warfare, fighting begins in the gray zone between armed conflict and peace and develops in a virtual-real integrated space, which means that direct support from allies and partners cannot be taken for granted at the beginning of the campaign.

The famous words of 19th century military strategist Carl von Clausewitz that "war is nothing but the continuation of policy with other means" highlight the multidimensionality and complexity of war. While the United States and Europe are willingly providing Ukraine with military supplies and information, NATO, as a military

CHART

Hybrid warfare Real and virtual spaces merging through technology



Source: Compiled by the author

alliance concerned over the possibility of spreading the calamity of war, is maintaining conflict at arm's length. The political and diplomatic circumstances of the parties to a war vary widely, but the defender must fend for itself until international public opinion is mobilized and an international support system is set up and running.

Tactics

(1) In addition to military support to Ukraine from the US and Europe, multilateral cooperation was effective in countering cyberattacks against civilian communications satellites and disinformation-driven cognitive attacks.

(2) There is a renewed awareness of the major impact of maintaining the ability to continue the conduct of warfare – war sustainability – including the stockpiling of artillery, ammunition, guided missile supplies and the like on the progression of the state of a war, even in this era of ever greater interdependence. Shortages in mil-spec semiconductor supplies for military equipment provided to Ukraine raised awareness of the importance of secure supply chains for technology-intensive parts and components.

(3) Technological progress has increased the role of commercial optical and SAR (synthetic aperture radar) satellites, electronic information collection satellites, commercial satellite Internet services, social media apps, and other civilian assets in warfare. This means that the enemy is likely to identify such assets as military targets. How the government should protect these civilian capabilities from attack and obstruction has emerged as a political challenge.

China's Taiwan Invasion Scenario

At the 20th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in October 2022, President Xi Jinping stated in his political report that “resolving the Taiwan issue and realizing China's complete reunification is, for the Party, a historic mission” and affirmed that “complete reunification of our country must be realized, and it can, without doubt, be realized!” Failure to achieve reunification will have existential consequences for the Chinese Communist Party and Xi. Defeat for the US in a military confrontation over reunification will lead to a decline in its presence in the Indo-Pacific and downfall as a sea power.

War between great powers has been avoided since the end of World War II as a means of settling disputes between sovereign

states. But this precipitous undertaking involving Taiwan that puts the fate of great powers at stake will not only raise tension in the region but also require preparation and action by Japan for an existential challenge.

China, recognizing the importance of asymmetrical warfare, will surely draw lessons from Russia's invasion of Ukraine and actively incorporate them into the plan for invading Taiwan. It would be inappropriate to apply the experience of the invasion of Ukraine directly to the scenario for the invasion of Taiwan, given the historical and geopolitical differences between the two nations. However, China and Russia have a comprehensive strategic cooperation relationship and are strengthening their already close military relationship, including frequent joint activities in the area surrounding Japan since 2019. Moreover, both states maintain autocratic and dictatorial regimes and continue to challenge the existing international order through military and nonmilitary means. Given these and other similarities, the invasion of Ukraine should be useful in considering a scenario for China's invasion of Taiwan.

Objective

The objective of the invasion of Taiwan will not be to destroy Taiwan but to absorb the state system as is, including its sophisticated industrial base and critical infrastructure. China will carefully choose the optimal timing and force to match the objective of the war in executing a military operation. There is an overwhelming gap between the military powers of China and Taiwan, with military budgets of 22.6 trillion yen and 1.4 trillion yen, 2.04 million and 0.17 million troops, and 1,000 and 300 fighter jets, respectively. China has also continued to build up its anti-ship and surface-to-surface/anti-ground ballistic missile, cruise missile, and submarine-mounted torpedo arsenals. Preparations for militarily subduing Taiwan are nearing completion.

In addition, the focus of an operation to invade Taiwan will be on (1) taking out the political and military leadership, (2) neutralizing the Taiwan forces, and (3) preserving critical civilian infrastructure. The operation will be aimed at ending the fighting as quickly as possible and minimizing damage to both China and Taiwan.

Summary of the Operation

The invasion of Taiwan will be preceded by repeated military provocations and threats and accompanied by hybrid threats such as heavy cyber and outer-space attacks. The objective here will be to

disrupt, obstruct, and neutralize civil functions, destabilize domestic security, and upset government institutions including Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense. China wants to increase Taiwan's institutional vulnerability as a state and diminish its structural resilience before it invades the latter militarily. It should also be expected that US forces as well as Japan and others will be targeted as potential obstacles during the actual invasion.

The military operation will be initiated with a surprise saturation attack using guided missiles under an A2/AD strategy to deny US forces and their allies access to Taiwan's surroundings. Simultaneously, China will secure air superiority over Taiwan using its overwhelming air power, isolate Taiwan politically, economically, logistically, and telecommunication-wise by blockading ports and slashing undersea transmission cables, and finally, it is expected to conduct a landing operation with amphibious assault ships. After it launches the military operation, it will also go on to take out Taiwan's political and military leadership, establish a puppet regime, and subdue the will of the local population using security forces and law enforcement organizations, in that chronological order.

Taiwan's Response

The lessons for Taiwan from the invasion of Ukraine are to make preparations during peacetime to conduct asymmetrical warfare in the event of a military invasion by (1) identifying institutional vulnerabilities and enhancing structural resilience, (2) building diplomatic and security partnerships and using strategic communication to secure effective multilateral support, (3) enhancing public literacy on cyber and cognitive attacks, and (4) aggressively adopting emerging and disruptive technology (EDT). And once the invasion begins, Taiwan should be conducting steady resistance in cooperation with the international community against the People's Liberation Army to delay its military operations and extend the fighting.

Japan's Defense Efforts

Going forward, concerns over the continued possibility of military conflict breaching the truce currently prevailing on the Korean Peninsula as well as a Chinese takeover of Taiwan by force continue to persist, guaranteeing that there will be no sign of improvement regarding the instability in the region and the clouded security environment there. Moreover, there is no collective security

mechanism similar to the likes of NATO in this region; instead, ensuring security in the region through a "hub-and-spoke" approach consisting of bilateral alliances with the US has become the norm in addition to the defense efforts of individual countries. There are efforts being made now to achieve an effect similar to a collective security alliance by coordinating the new quadrilateral cooperation between Australia, India, Japan, and the US (the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, commonly known as "The Quad") and trilateral partnership among Australia, the United Kingdom, and the US (AUKUS) and existing security arrangements such as the "Five Eyes", in addition to the US-Japan, US-South Korea, and other bilateral alliances. But issues remain before that can be achieved.

The many lessons that Russia's invasion of Ukraine has taught us drive home the importance of EDT and global partnerships. Innovation through EDT and partnerships that ensure close cooperation with allies and partners in seamlessly merged warfighting domains are key elements of integrated deterrence, which forms the core of the National Defense Strategy of the US.

Advanced Technology & Innovation

Under its "Military-Civil Fusion" strategy, China is currently investing heavily in dual-use technology – advanced civilian technology that can be adapted for military use as rapid advances in technological innovation in recent years have blurred the line between military and civilian technologies. The West regards this with wariness, concerned that such investments may erode the technological and operational superiority of China's competitors and destabilize the free and open international order.

China also continues to upgrade its asymmetrical warfare capabilities in space, cyber, electromagnetic, and cognitive spaces in order to avoid direct war with developed countries and secure superiority in hybrid warfare against the background of deepening international interdependence and changes in the social environment. It is focusing its investment on EDT, the destructive cutting-edge technologies that are the key to the success of this strategy, and is believed to be in a hurry to adopt artificial intelligence, robotics, biotechnology, and other automation and autonomy technology for military assets. Japan should deepen collaboration and cooperation with allies and partners so that it will not be left behind in adopting dual-use technology.

The need to protect civilian assets during wartime, given the exponential technological progress, is receiving notice. This is a

reflection of the crucial role that civilian assets such as optical satellites and synthetic aperture radar (SAR) satellites have been playing on the warfront. Japan must also hurry to consider operation protocols for their protection from enemy attacks, compensation for any damage, etc. with a view to maintaining the reliability of civilian assets and ensuring that they function properly during armed conflict.

Partnership & Multilateral Cooperation

There is a need for Japan to strengthen resilience in the face of cyberattacks, cognitive warfare, and other hybrid threats for a wide variety of crises including gray-zone situations, circumstances in which neither armed conflict nor peace prevail. To this end, it is necessary to secure a framework for multilateral cooperation and an interpersonal network so that sharing information and cooperating in operation activities between the countries concerned can be conducted in a smooth, timely, and appropriate manner.

Building this foundation of partnerships is an essential factor in securing the ability to continue the conduct of warfare. In the US and Europe, the provision of additional and continued support for providing ammunition, missiles, components, and other expendable supplies in addition to tanks, cannons, and other mainstay equipment is becoming a major political issue. It is necessary for Japan as well to assume that similar issues will arise regarding logistical support in the case of a crisis in East Asia. On this point, it is worth considering the promotion of ammunition and equipment interoperability between Japan, South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand as Asia-Pacific partners, using NATO's new efforts on logistical support for reference, as a means to enhance interoperability within the western world. If a framework is in place to facilitate and provide logistical support in the case of armed conflict, it can be expected to serve as the foundation for building interoperability that transcends regional boundaries. For the West, this could serve as a catalyst for the rearrangement of global supply chains and should present an important perspective in the consideration of economic security.

Responding to Hybrid Warfare

In hybrid warfare, attacks in the cyber, outer, and cognitive spaces occur in mutually reinforcing chain-reaction form; the results feed on each other, swelling and spilling out in a spiral. Once the actual military operation – the kinetic warfare – begins, these attacks have

the potential to accelerate rapidly, growing in intensity and sustained in order to push the kinetic operation towards a successful outcome. The Japanese government must secure resilience against hybrid warfare by reducing critical infrastructure and other institutional vulnerability. This means that the government must secure and maintain the framework for sustaining and guaranteeing existing functions and tasks while undergoing intensified hybrid warfare. As for maintaining civilian activities, it is essential to build the social means or framework to enable the functions of critical infrastructure to swiftly return to normal even when they are drastically reduced. The Ministry of Defense and the Self-Defense Forces are expected to undergo attacks centered on their command-and-control system and communication system near-simultaneously with the attacks on civilian activities. At the top of the national security ecosystem, the Ministry of Defense and the Self-Defense Forces should be expected to maintain interoperability and replaceability to enable the continuation of operations by enduring hybrid warfare damage and to maintain close collaboration and cooperation with the relevant civilian organizations in order to eliminate vulnerability in the civilian sector as the foundation for continuing the conduct of warfare. **JS**

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