

**Why has the Peoples Republic of China not invaded Taiwan?**  
Towards a new offensive realist perspective

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How can offensive realism theory explain that Taiwan has not been invaded by the Peoples Republic of China?

### **ABSTRACT**

*According to offensive realism theory, great powers seek to maximize their power within the international system. However in its current form it is unable to explain the current relation between Taiwan and the People's Republic of China. The reason for this is that the concept of warfare used by offensive realists is outdated and therefore do not take hybrid warfare strategies into account. Through this case study I argue for a more complete definition of warfare in order to increase the explanative power of offensive realism theory in modern warfare.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Offensive Realism, Economy, Hybrid Warfare, International Relations Theory.*

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## Chapter 1. Introduction.

According to offensive realism theory as proposed by John J. Mearsheimer, great powers strive to achieve regional hegemony.<sup>1</sup> When this theory is applied to the case of the recent actions, or more exactly the lack thereof, by the People's Republic of China (PRC), an apparent issue emerges. It is clear that the PRC has now reached a relative position within the international system where it has to be identified as a great power. Sporting the world's second largest economy, it has become the undisputed economic powerhouse within Asia.<sup>2</sup> The PRC has further shown that it is capable and willing to convert a sizeable amount of its newly acquired wealth into the growth and modernization of its armed forces. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), the PRC its military expenditure has gone from just 22237,1 million current US dollars in 2000 to 293351,9 million current US dollars in 2021.<sup>3</sup> So why has the PRC not yet used this military strength to remove those neighbouring countries that it perceives as a threat? To be more specific why has it not yet invaded the one country that it perceives as a persisting thorn in its side since the end of the Chinese Civil War, namely Taiwan? The main reason that would be given by offensive realists is that this is because of the actions of the only currently established regional hegemon within the international system, the United States of America (USA). According to offensive realism theory as proposed by Mearsheimer, once a great power manages to achieve regional hegemony, it will then seek to prevent other regional hegemons from emerging.<sup>4</sup> However, it must also be kept in mind that great powers are rational actors meaning that they will always strive to act in such a way that maximizes their chances of survival.<sup>5</sup> While the USA's goal as an established regional hegemon is to keep other great powers from rising to the same status, they will only do so if they can rationally assume that it will benefit their own position of power within the international system. Direct US military intervention in the case of a Chinese invasion of Taiwan, would by no means qualify as such a rational action. The reason for this is twofold. First the stopping

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<sup>1</sup> Mearsheimer, John J. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition)*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2003. 382.

<sup>2</sup> "GDP (Current US\$) - China | Data." Accessed May 8, 2022.  
<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?locations=CN>.

<sup>3</sup> "SIPRI Military Expenditure Database | SIPRI." Accessed November 23, 2021.  
<https://www.sipri.org/databases/milex>.

<sup>4</sup> Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition)*. 386.

<sup>5</sup> Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition)*.49.

power of water must be taken into account. Large bodies of water severely limit the amount of power that any great power can project. Amphibious operations also tend to favour the defender rather than the attacker. This means that barring a strong US military presence in or around Taiwan at the time of the assault, the USA's military intervention options are limited.<sup>6</sup> Adding to this is the fact that the PRC has heavily invested in its intelligence, arial and naval capabilities, further complicating a USA military response in support of Taiwan.<sup>7</sup> The question then becomes what the USA would gain if it were to intervene on behalf of Taiwan. The answer to that is unfortunately, not much. In 2021 the USA imported 77,137.6 million US dollars' worth of goods from Taiwan and exported 36,944.1 million US dollars' worth of goods to Taiwan.<sup>8</sup> This, compared to the 506,366.9 million US dollars' worth of goods that the USA imported from and the 151,065.2 US dollars' worth of goods that the USA exported to the PRC in 2021, is almost negligible.<sup>9</sup> This means that the USA has little to gain and much to lose when it decides to opt for a direct military intervention to any invasion of Taiwan by the PRC. Adding to this is the fact the USA has no formal defensive treaty with Taiwan and does not even recognise it as a country, means that it has little reason to interfere in case of such a conflict.<sup>10</sup>

To understand how the PRC its hegemonic challenge against the USA poses a threat to Taiwan, the origins of the antagonism between the PRC and Taiwan must be understood first. By understanding the historical context of Taiwan, a proper understanding of Taiwan its current actions can be obtained. Taiwan has deep historic ties to China, with Taiwan being formally incorporated as part of the Qing dynasty in 1683.<sup>11</sup> While Taiwan was eventually lost by China after the island was conquered by the Japanese in 1895 during the

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<sup>6</sup> Mearsheimer, John J. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition)*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2003. 132.

<sup>7</sup> "A Hard Look at Hard Power:" Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 2020. JSTOR. <http://www.jstor.org.eur.idm.oclc.org/stable/resrep27713>. 330.

<sup>8</sup> Division, US Census Bureau Foreign Trade. "Foreign Trade: Data." Accessed May 9, 2022. <https://www.census.gov/foreign-trade/balance/c5830.html>.

<sup>9</sup> Division, US Census Bureau Foreign Trade. "Foreign Trade: Data." Accessed May 9, 2022. <https://www.census.gov/foreign-trade/balance/c5700.html>.

<sup>10</sup> Zablocki, Clement J. "H.R.2479 - 96th Congress (1979-1980): Taiwan Relations Act." Legislation, October 4, 1979. 1979/1980. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/96th-congress/house-bill/2479>.

<sup>11</sup> Schreer, Benjamin, and Andrew T. H. Tan, eds. *The Taiwan Issue: Problems and Prospects*. London: Routledge, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429319082>. 59.

First Sino-Japanese War.<sup>12</sup> This already provides context necessary to fully understand the current situation surrounding both the PRC and the Taiwanese views towards reunification. On the one hand the PRC views Taiwan as an integral part of China, a stance that is understandable when considering that it has been a part of the country for more than two centuries. However, Taiwan has been occupied by Japan for more than a century as well helps to explain some of the distance that Taiwanese citizens feel towards the population of mainland China. This distancing effect of the Japanese occupation of Taiwan is further enhanced by the way within which the Japanese ruled Taiwan during this period. During Japanese occupation great effort was placed by the Japanese to convert the population of Taiwan to Japanese culture and away from Chinese culture.<sup>13</sup> The end of the Second World War saw Taiwan being reclaimed by China from the Japanese. However, the Chinese Civil War saw Taiwan once again become the subject of conflict. The CPC its victory over the ROC saw the latter retreat to Taiwan making it the last holdout of the regime of Chiang Kai-Shek.<sup>14</sup> This further explains the view of the PRC that Taiwan is an integral part of China.<sup>15</sup> First due to the strong historical ties that Taiwan has to China and secondly due to it being the last holdout of the CPC its historic enemy during the Chinese Civil War.

When this is analyzed from an offensive realist perspective the PRC and the Taiwanese current hostilities are a logical consequence of their historic ties. Both the PRC and the ROC have a history of hostilities that have to his day not been resolved. This means that both the PRC and the ROC have good reason to fear one another since they both have the reason and means to harm the other.<sup>16</sup> They have a reason to harm each other since both the PRC and the ROC see the other its territory as an integral part of their own. Furthermore, each one knows that they both share this view meaning that they have reason to suspect hostile action to be taken by the other when they find themselves in an advantageous

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<sup>12</sup> Schreer, Benjamin, and Andrew T. H. Tan, eds. *The Taiwan Issue: Problems and Prospects*. London: Routledge, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429319082>. 59.

<sup>13</sup> Schreer and Tan, *The Taiwan Issue*.. 59.

<sup>14</sup> Schreer and Tan, *The Taiwan Issue*. 59.

<sup>15</sup> Garcia, Carlos, and Yew Lun Tian. "China's Xi Vows 'reunification' with Taiwan." *Reuters*, October 9, 2021, sec. China. <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/chinas-xi-says-reunification-with-taiwan-must-will-be-realised-2021-10-09/>.

<sup>16</sup> Mearsheimer, John J. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition)*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2003. 49.

position to do so.<sup>17</sup> The PRC and ROC do however find themselves within different positions when it comes to this view of hostility towards the other. The PRC finds itself in a more advantageous position where it has the military capabilities to conquer and occupy Taiwan using military force.<sup>18</sup> However, they are hindered due to the uncertainty of the repercussions that this would have for them concerning their relations with other actors within the international system. The USA especially possess a risk factor for the PRC in its desire to reunite Taiwan with the rest of China by force. The USA its diplomatic stance of Strategic Ambiguity is the main reason for this.<sup>19</sup> This strategy uses a key aspect of offensive realism theory namely that states can never be certain of another state its intentions.<sup>20</sup> This uncertainty is used by the USA to keep the PRC from being able to properly plan for an invasion of Taiwan. Since the USA its stance is unclear, the PRC risks going to war with the USA if they were to invade Taiwan. This means that, when the PRC decides to invade Taiwan, they will have to commit a number of assets towards Taiwan that is capable of dealing with USA intervention. Thereby the cost of such an action becomes an extreme security risk to the PRC, since they are far from certain if they would be capable of resisting a USA counteroffensive against Taiwan. The reason for this uncertainty being the vast difference in military capacity between the USA and the PRC.<sup>21</sup> Therefore the risk that the PRC would have to take at present to reunite Taiwan with the rest of China by force would be its own very existence. This explains from an offensive realist perspective why the PRC has refrained from this course of action up until this point. The reason for this is that doing so would go against any state its ultimate goal namely to ensure its own survival.<sup>22</sup> Due to this risk the PRC will only take action against Taiwan when this risk to its own

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<sup>17</sup> Mearsheimer, John J. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition)*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2003. 48,49.

<sup>18</sup> “SIPRI Military Expenditure Database | SIPRI.” Accessed November 23, 2021.  
<https://www.sipri.org/databases/milex>.

<sup>19</sup> Chang-Liao, Nien-chung, and Chi Fang. “The Case for Maintaining Strategic Ambiguity in the Taiwan Strait.” *The Washington Quarterly* 44, no. 2 (April 3, 2021): 45–60.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2021.1932088>. !.

<sup>20</sup> Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition)*. 48.

<sup>21</sup> “SIPRI Military Expenditure Database | SIPRI.” Accessed November 23, 2021.  
<https://www.sipri.org/databases/milex>.

<sup>22</sup> Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition)*. 64.

survival is eliminated. Which is exactly what the PRC its current strategy entails. Using Hybrid Warfare methods, the PRC tries to ensure that hostile actions taken against Taiwan will not trigger a military response by the USA.<sup>23</sup> By eliminating or at least minimizing the threat of intervention by the USA, the PRC will be capable of pursuing regional hegemony within the region.<sup>24</sup>

## 1.1 Research Question

So why has Taiwan so far not been invaded by the PRC? I argue that this is due to a antiquated vision of warfare that is prevalent in our current understanding of offensive realism theory. To be more specific, offensive realism theory has so far not accounted for the effects of hybrid warfare on the way in which great powers compete with one another within the international system. The goal of this thesis is to open up a debate regarding the effects of hybrid warfare on state behaviour and relations from an offensive realist perspective, via a case study of the PRC and Taiwan. It is not my intention to fully rewrite an entire school of neorealist theory, merely to open up a debate about the way in which the rise of hybrid warfare will affect offensive realism theory.

The case of the current standoff between the PRC and Taiwan will be studied in relation to three aspects of hybrid warfare that, together explain the absence of an invasion of Taiwan by the PRC. The first among these is the changing role of soft power within modern warfare has to be taken into consideration in chapter 2. Offensive realism theory has traditionally focussed on hard power. However, I would argue that the rise of hybrid warfare has elevated the importance of soft power regarding ones position of power within the international system, that it is worthy of greater emphasis within offensive realism theory. In the conclusion I argue why the economic implications of an invasion of Taiwan by the PRC deters the PRC from pursuing this course of action.

Second is the importance of access to the international system will be covered in chapter 3. Here, I argue why today's great power politics require access to the international system and how an invasion of Taiwan would cut the PRC off from key parts of global markets and information networks. Several key aspects of hybrid warfare require access to the international system to be effective. Being barred from international markets

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<sup>23</sup> Weissmann, Mikael, Niklas Nilsson, Björn Palmertz, and Per Thunholm. *Hybrid Warfare: Security and Asymmetric Conflict in International Relations*. I.B. Tauris, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781788317795>. !.

<sup>24</sup> Mearsheimer, John J. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition)*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2003. 64.



derives one of the capacities to influence another nation its economy through trade and investment, (mis)information campaigns require access to international media networks. Thus, being locked out of the international system limits a nation its hybrid warfare capabilities, meaning that this will rationally only be done when the prospective reward outweighs these costs. Finally chapter 4 will explore the implications of hybrid warfare for the role and effectiveness of irregular warfare strategies. Chapter 4 will explain how the prospect of facing a long term guerrilla war, means that an invasion of Taiwan will cost the PRC more than it stands to gain from it. Even when the economic angle is ignored by arguing that the reunification of the PRC and Taiwan would be a matter of national pride aimed at obtaining domestic political support, the invasion is likely still to be counterproductive unless a swift victory can be obtained by the PRC. The latter of which being exactly what the Taiwanese asymmetric defence strategy is trying to prevent.

## **1.2 Theoretical Framework.**

The theoretical framework that will be used here is offensive realism theory as proposed John J. Mearsheimer.<sup>25</sup> The reason why I have chosen to use offensive realism theory is because it allows us to explain offensive as well as defensive actions by state actors as rational decisions. This allows for a comprehensive study off these actions as well as the reasoning behind them. Offensive realism as proposed by John J. Mearsheimer is based on what Mearsheimer refers to as ‘‘five bedrock assumptions’’<sup>26</sup>. First it views the international system as anarchic. This does not imply that the international system lacks any sort of order, it simply implies that there is no authority above nation states.<sup>27</sup> Secondly offensive realism recognises that states always possess inherent military capability enabling them to harm other states. This means that nation states always pose a potential threat to one another.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore states can never be certain of one another’s intentions. This means that, since states have inherent military capabilities, each state must be cautious of other states since they have the capability to harm them with no way of being certain whether they intent to

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<sup>25</sup> Mearsheimer, John J. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition)*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2003.

<sup>26</sup> Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition)*.47.

<sup>27</sup> Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition)*.48.

<sup>28</sup> Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition)*.48.

use this capability.<sup>29</sup> Next the main goal of any state is survival. This means that a state will never take any actions that would seriously endanger its own continued existence.<sup>30</sup> Finally, states are rational actors. This implies that states will always act in a manner that will best advance their interests based on the information at their disposal.<sup>31</sup>

Based on these bedrock assumptions Mearsheimer argues that the main driving force in international relations is fear. After all states can never be certain of another state its intentions while they are both capable of offensive military actions against one another. Seeing as to how survival is a states' ultimate goal, each state will see others as a potential threat to their existence, based on their ability to harm them and hegemony being a states' preferred position within the international system. This does not mean that each state lives in constant fear of every other state assuming that an attack is imminent. It simply means that states recognise that other states are capable of harming them. Furthermore, fear is not a fixed factor in this theory. The degree within which states fear one another differs based on a number of different factors. Previous relations, common interests, geological distance and relative strength all influence how much of a threat states pose to each other and in turn how much they fear one another.<sup>32</sup> This provides a solid framework through which to study the current situation between Taiwan and China, because it provides a clear framework through which the actions of states can be explained in a rational manner.

Offensive realism as proposed by Mearsheimer is not without criticism, however. A recent publication by Stanislav Myšička, criticizes the use of Mearsheimer his theory using the PRC's hegemonic challenge to the USA as a case study.<sup>33</sup> Myšička argues that Mearsheimer his theory fails to take into consideration many case studies and developments in military theory since the end of the Cold War that Mearsheimer his works fail to

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<sup>29</sup> Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition)*.48,49.

<sup>30</sup> Mearsheimer, John J. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition)*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2003.49.

<sup>31</sup> Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition)*. 49, 50.

<sup>32</sup> Mearsheimer, John J. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition)*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2003.

<sup>32</sup> Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition)*. 59-63.

<sup>33</sup> Myšička, Stanislav. "Offensive Realism and the Future of China's Rise\*." *Pacific Focus* 36, no. 1 (2021): 63–91. <https://doi.org/10.1111/pafo.12179>.

explain.<sup>34</sup> The main argument of Myšička entails that Mearsheimer's argument that the rising power of the PRC in a search for regional hegemony is dead set to end up in a military confrontation with the USA is incorrect and potentially dangerous. Myšička supports her argument by referring to the PRC having only sporadically used force to resolve international conflicts since the start of its rise in power. The argument is further supported by comparative examples of countries such as Germany also choosing not to use military force to assume a regional hegemonic status since the end of the Cold War.<sup>35</sup>

While offensive realism has thus been criticized over the last years, it is also being expanded. A recent article by Dong Jung Kim widens the scope of offensive realism to explain why states should refrain from protectionist trade policies.<sup>36</sup> According to Dong Jung Kim, offensive realism theory can be used to argue in favor of free trade, since it allows a country to maximize its power more efficiently than protectionism.<sup>37</sup> What this paper will contribute to this debate is to widen the understanding of power maximalization efforts made by states as proposed by Mearsheimer,<sup>38</sup> in a fashion similar to that of Dong Jung Kim.<sup>39</sup> By considering new developments in military strategies due to the rise of hybrid warfare and their impact on antagonistic state behavior, with the current military situation between Taiwan and the PRC as a case study.<sup>40</sup> In doing so I aim to widen our understanding of offensive realism theory, as well as further the discussion based on recent criticism regarding the explanatory power of offensive realism in modern military conflicts and how these can be overcome.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Myšička, "Offensive Realism and the Future of China's Rise\*." 86,87.

<sup>35</sup> Myšička, Stanislav. "Offensive Realism and the Future of China's Rise\*." *Pacific Focus* 36, no. 1 (2021): 63–91. <https://doi.org/10.1111/pafo.12179>. 87.

<sup>36</sup> Kim, Dong Jung. "Realists as Free Traders: The Struggle for Power and the Case against Protectionism." *International Affairs* 94, no. 6 (November 1, 2018): 1269–86. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iyy192>.

<sup>37</sup> Kim, "Realists as Free Traders." 1286.

<sup>38</sup> Mearsheimer, John J. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition)*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2003. 47.

<sup>39</sup> Kim, "Realists as Free Traders." 1286.

<sup>40</sup> Weissmann, Mikael, Niklas Nilsson, Björn Palmertz, and Per Thunholm. *Hybrid Warfare: Security and Asymmetric Conflict in International Relations*. I.B. Tauris, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781788317795>. 228.

<sup>41</sup> Myšička, Stanislav. "Offensive Realism and the Future of China's Rise\*." *Pacific Focus* 36, no. 1 (2021): 63–91. <https://doi.org/10.1111/pafo.12179>.

### 1.3 Literature review

To make any argument regarding the role of soft power within the international system, soft power itself as well as the current state of scholarship on the subject have to be understood first. Hendrick W Ohnesorge provides a clear overview of this in his book *Soft Power: The Forces of Attraction in International Relations*. Ohnesorge argues that the importance of soft power within international relations is often underestimated, while there are clear indications as to their effectiveness in achieving goals within international relations. At the same time, he argues that soft power and hard power are rarely used separately from each other and instead, tend to be used in unison with one another in international relations by nation states to achieve their respective goals..<sup>42</sup>

Next it is important to understand the PRC's current role within the international system in order to explain its actions. Shaun Breslin's *China Risen? Studying Chinese Global Power*, argues that the PRC is now at the point where it can be without any doubt considered to be a great power. This has mostly been realized by the PRC's massive economic growth rate over the last three decades. However, while the PRC's domestic market for its own goods are growing, it still needs access to foreign markets in order to sustain this growth.<sup>43</sup>

While this economic growth has helped the PRC to achieve great power status, it has also served a key role in the CCP's legitimization of authority over the PRC as it has been moving away from its revolutionary legacy. Jiwei Ci argues in his book *Democracy in China: The Coming Crisis* that by being dependent on this high economic growth rate as a tool of legitimization, the PRC is at risk of losing its long term ability to legitimize their rule over the PRC. The reason for this being that, while economic growth rates have worked to replace revolutionary legacy as a legitimizing tool in the short term, it will cease to function if this economic growth could no longer be realized. Based on this issue Jiwei argues for an alternative legitimization tool to be considered.<sup>44</sup>

According to offensive realism theory wealth maximization is one of the main

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<sup>42</sup> Ohnesorge, Hendrik W. *Soft Power: The Forces of Attraction in International Relations*. Global Power Shift. Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2020. 8.

<sup>43</sup> Breslin, Shaun. *China Risen? Studying Chinese Global Power*. Bristol Studies in East Asian International Relations. Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2021.

<sup>44</sup> Ci, Jiwei. *Democracy in China: The Coming Crisis*, 2020. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/j.ctvqmp2j6>.  
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strategies for states to grow their power.<sup>45</sup> This means that a clear understanding of the workings of global markets and their strategic implications is necessary to properly understand how states are able to maximize their accumulation of wealth in the current international system. Global supply chains and their effects on international relations and security issues are analyzed by Willy Shih in *Is It Time to Rethink Globalized Supply Chains?* Shih argues how the current state of global supply chains can cause economic as well as security concerns for nation states. Economic concerns here relate mostly to the vulnerability of global supply chains to shocks. The security aspect of this issue is that products that are key to a nation's security such as food, medication or military equipment often rely entirely or at least partially on foreign actors within their supply chains. Meaning that hostilities could lead to a sudden drop in supply with no clear alternative often being considered.<sup>46</sup>

Another aspect of modern global trade that cannot be ignored is the role that has been played by the coronavirus pandemic. Free, Clinton, and Angela Hecimovic. In, *Global Supply Chains after COVID-19: The End of the Road for Neoliberal Globalization?* Argue that covid-19 has accelerated an already existing trend of global supply chains starting to be reorganized based on realist notions of security and possible risks posed by foreign ownership of key aspects of global supply chains. The reason for this being the concerns of nation states that allowing themselves to be reliant on possible security rivals in their supply chains leads to increasing security risks.<sup>47</sup>

The economy however is only a single aspect of a greater whole. In order to gain a more complete understanding of the security situation between Taiwan and the PRC, a more general source on the nature of the relationship between Taiwan and the PRC as well as the tensions that arise from it is required. *The Taiwan Issue* a book edited by Benjamin Schreer and Andrew T.H. Tan, provides an extensive overview of the main challenges that Taiwan

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<sup>45</sup> Mearsheimer, John J. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition)*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2003. 53.

<sup>46</sup> Shih, Willy. "Is It Time to Rethink Globalized Supply Chains?" *MIT Sloan Management Review* 61, no. 4 (Summer 2020): 1–3.

<sup>47</sup> Free, Clinton, and Angela Hecimovic. "Global Supply Chains after COVID-19: The End of the Road for Neoliberal Globalisation?" *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal* 34, no. 1 (September 9, 2021): 58–84. <https://doi.org/10.1108/AAAJ-06-2020-4634>. 76.

is currently facing.<sup>48</sup> Being written within the last two years, meaning it provides a clear indication of the current state of research regarding Taiwan, as well as covering a wide range of topics, it is a great starting point for any research into Taiwan's military strategy. The fact that it covers such a wide range of topics also makes it a useful source to gain some insights into the current state of the debate regarding Taiwan's relation with the PRC, as well as its role within the international system. First of all the book provides a study for Taiwan as an example of small state survival. The main argument is that, as a small state, Taiwan's future is questionable at best. The reason for this uncertainty is that Taiwan's survival depends on the military support of the USA, meaning that its survival is directly tied to the USA's policies regarding the hegemonic rise of the PRC.<sup>49</sup> The key factor in the USA's support for Taiwan is argued to be the strategic benefits that the USA gains from its support of Taiwan. USA support for Taiwan, while being relatively strong, is seen as depending on the risk that is involved for the USA to maintain it. Meaning that the best strategy for Taiwan would be to avoid becoming a liability to the USA.<sup>50</sup>

Finally the adaptation of an asymmetric defense strategy by Taiwan against a potential PRC invasion is discussed. Growing power imbalance between the PLA and the Taiwanese armed forces, mean that Taiwan's former defense strategy of preventing the PLA from invading Taiwan altogether has become obsolete. Instead, the country has switched to an asymmetric defense strategy. The main goal of this strategy is to deter the PRC from taking military actions against Taiwan by making such an endeavor as costly as possible.<sup>51</sup> While potentially highly effective, the author also notes that this strategy still faces several challenges. The main challenge of this strategy revolves around Taiwan's limited defense budget forcing it to make concessions on either manpower or the modernization of its arsenal.<sup>52</sup>

While useful on its own, such a broad work will generally lack the detailed information that this thesis requires. To fill this gap, sources that go more in depth about the

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<sup>48</sup> Schreer, Benjamin, and Andrew T. H. Tan, red. *The Taiwan Issue: Problems and Prospects*. London: Routledge, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429319082>.

<sup>49</sup> Schreer and Tan, *The Taiwan Issue*. 24.

<sup>50</sup> Schreer and Tan, *The Taiwan Issue*. 119.

<sup>51</sup> Schreer and Tan, *The Taiwan Issue*. 182,183.

<sup>52</sup> Schreer and Tan, *The Taiwan Issue*. 183.

specific challenges facing Taiwan are required. *A look at hard power* provides a more detailed analysis of the challenges that Taiwan faces as a result of the PRC's hegemonic challenge against the USA. The book argues that Taiwan is facing a more advanced and numerous military adversaries in the PLA. This has resulted in Taiwan changing its defensive strategy from a symmetric to an asymmetric strategy. Furthermore, Taiwan is argued to have difficulty getting political and societal support for increased defense spending and expansion of its armed forces, hindering its defensive capabilities. This is combined with the fact that the Taiwanese military risks obsolescence when compared to the PLA. The reason for this, besides the funding issues mentioned before, is a lack of suppliers willing to sell the required weapon systems to Taiwan in order for Taiwan to keep up with the PLA in terms of modernizing its armed forces, the only viable supplier would be the USA. The USA in turn, however, is reluctant to provide such weapon systems to Taiwan out of fear of provoking the PRC. If the USA were to provide these weapon systems to Taiwan, it could provoke the PRC into taking military actions against Taiwan, thus resulting in the very scenario that the sale of such weapon systems is seeking to prevent.<sup>53</sup>

While the relationship between Taiwan and the United States is a key aspect, it is also important to consider the other side of the coin. The position of China within the international system also has strong implications on the Taiwan's strategic military capabilities. *Ascending China and the Hegemonic United States: Economically Based Cooperation or Strategic Power Politics?* written by Jörg Vogelmann can be a helpful source in this regard.<sup>54</sup> This work focusses heavily on the hegemonic challenge of China against the United States. Focusing heavily on the role of China its hegemonic rise and the several forms within which this manifests itself. This provides a great source of information to make sure that the effect that the role of China within the international system has on the Taiwanese strategic options is properly understood. The main argument made by Vogelmann is that the recent relations between the PRC and the USA remain to be characterized by power politics. Which implies that while the status quo might be preferable to the USA and Taiwan, it is far from assured that this status quo will not be challenged within the coming years. The main long-term variable that might result in a

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<sup>53</sup> "A Hard Look at Hard Power:" Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 2020. JSTOR. <http://www.jstor.org.eur.idm.oclc.org/stable/resrep27713>. 327.

<sup>54</sup> Vogelmann, Jörg. *Ascending China and the Hegemonic United States: Economically Based Cooperation or Strategic Power Politics?* Globale Gesellschaft Und Internationale Beziehungen. Wiesbaden, Germany [Heidelberg]: Springer VS, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-31660-0>.

conflict between the USA and the PRC is that the difference in military power between the two countries is shrinking. This means that military action will become more viable for the PRC since the potential risk that it faces in doing so will decrease. On the other side the USA is facing the prospect of it soon being unable to achieve military objectives against the PRC, meaning that if it were to deem such a course of action necessary, it would benefit them to strike as soon as possible while they still have the advantage.<sup>55</sup>

Based on this possibility, it is important to obtain a clear understanding of the nature of modern conflicts. *Hybrid Warfare: Security and Asymmetric Conflict in International Relations*,<sup>56</sup> analyses the use of hybrid military strategies within modern military conflicts. Hybrid warfare refers to a form of conflict where the lines between peace and war have become increasingly blurred, resulting in conflicts being fought in a grey-zone between what is traditionally understood as peace and war.<sup>57</sup> The concept has first been brought to the forefront during the Russian annexation of Crimea. And has since become a common denominator for Russian military strategies since then.<sup>58</sup> Hybrid warfare combines military and non-military actions to achieve a specific goal. This can range from the spread of misinformation and the targeting of digital infrastructure to armed conflict. What distinguishes this from previous military strategies is the degree within which such a wide variety of military and non-military actions are used as part of a single strategy.<sup>59</sup> An analysis of the role of the PRC regarding the use of hybrid warfare, concludes that the PRC is already employing the soft power aspects of these strategies on a large scale, mostly focusing on information warfare. There are however strong indicators that the PRC has recently began shifting its focus to several hard power aspects of hybrid-warfare and expand

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<sup>55</sup>Vogelmann, Jörg. *Ascending China and the Hegemonic United States: Economically Based Cooperation or Strategic Power Politics?* Globale Gesellschaft Und Internationale Beziehungen. Wiesbaden, Germany [Heidelberg]: Springer VS, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-31660-0>. 566,567.

<sup>56</sup> Weissmann, Mikael, Niklas Nilsson, Björn Palmertz, and Per Thunholm. *Hybrid Warfare: Security and Asymmetric Conflict in International Relations*. I.B. Tauris, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781788317795>. 228.

<sup>57</sup> Weissmann et al., *Hybrid Warfare*. 1,2.

<sup>58</sup> Weissmann et al., *Hybrid Warfare*. 3.

<sup>59</sup> Weissmann et al., *Hybrid Warfare* 61.



on its capabilities to use hybrid military strategies.<sup>60</sup>

While an important source for this thesis, it is in itself not enough to be able to provide a workable understanding of modern warfare. Especially in order to understand the way within which hybrid warfare interacts with other forms of military strategies. To this purpose *Nonstate Warfare: The Military Methods of Guerillas, Warlords, and Militias*. Written by Stephen D. Biddle, lends itself well. Being written in 2021 it provides a clear understanding of modern warfare strategies used by irregular combatants. Biddle argues for a more flexible view within academia with regards to the boundaries of what is to be considered irregular or conventional warfare. Biddle argues that it is rare for any armed force to adhere purely to one of these strategies, instead often employing those aspects of each strategy best suited to its strategic situation and the challenges that these present.<sup>61</sup>

## 1.4 Sources and methods

How can offensive realism theory explain that Taiwan has not been invaded by the Peoples Republic of China? To answer this question, adequate source material will be required. The first type of primary source that this paper will use to answer this question will be data regarding the defense spending of Taiwan, the PRC and the USA.<sup>62</sup> By studying how much these countries spend on defense and perhaps more importantly whereon these countries spend their defense budgets, a better understanding of their military strategy can be obtained. The main benefit of this course is that it provides a clear quantifiable basis for the research required to answer this research question. Using the defense spending data allows for a clear understanding of the Taiwanese defensive capabilities. This allows for an effective study into the strengths and weaknesses of the Taiwanese military to be conducted. Furthermore, it will provide me with a basis for understanding the Taiwanese defense strategy. After all by knowing what Taiwan its defensive capabilities are, significant insight in how it is likely to be used can be attained based on which assets it chooses to invest in. In fact as discussed in

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<sup>60</sup> Weissmann, Mikael, Niklas Nilsson, Björn Palmertz, and Per Thunholm. *Hybrid Warfare: Security and Asymmetric Conflict in International Relations*. I.B. Tauris, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781788317795..> 103.

<sup>61</sup> Biddle, Stephen D. *Nonstate Warfare: The Military Methods of Guerillas, Warlords, and Militias*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021.7.

<sup>62</sup> 'SIPRI Military Expenditure Database | SIPRI'. Geraadpleegd 23 november 2021. <https://www.sipri.org/databases/milex>.

the previous section, Taiwanese military spending purposes have been used by scholars before to gain insights into the future plans for their defensive strategy. Focusses on conventional high end material such as aircraft, tanks and submarines are seen as indicators of shifting more towards a symmetric defensive strategy.<sup>63</sup> on the other hand, defensive spending on tactical equipment related to more asymmetric styles of warfare such as anti-tank missile systems are seen as indications of Taiwan switching towards a more asymmetric defense strategy.<sup>64</sup> This information on military spending will be used as a basis from which to analyze the power projection capabilities and limitations of the PRC, USA and Taiwan. Furthermore secondary literature and case studies will be used to analyze the ways within which these states attempt to maximize their respective power based on the implications of their current military strength made clear by the defense spending data.

Military capacity alone does not define a state's military capabilities however. It is just as important to have a clear understanding of the military strategies that are available in order to achieve a specific objective. Taiwan's focus on an asymmetric defense strategy thus requires a clear understanding of how irregular defense strategies are used in modern warfare, as well as their capabilities and limitations. This will be analyzed via a number of case studies related to modern uses of irregular warfare in order to offer a comparative based from which process tracing can be used to understand the strategic implications of these strategies in the case of Taiwan.<sup>65</sup>

Hybrid warfare strategies however, do not just focus on military targets. Operating in a grey zone between war-and peace, hybrid warfare strategies generally aim to undermine entire societies rather than just combatants.<sup>66</sup> Because of this military spending alone will not be enough to gain a full understanding of the impact that hybrid warfare strategies have on target states. In order to gain a clear understanding of the broader societal impacts of

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<sup>63</sup> "A Hard Look at Hard Power:" Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 2020. JSTOR. <http://www.jstor.org.eur.idm.oclc.org/stable/resrep27713>. 354.

<sup>64</sup> "A Hard Look at Hard Power:" 339.

<sup>65</sup> Whiteside, Craig, Ian Rice, and Daniele Raineri. "Black Ops: Islamic State and Innovation in Irregular Warfare." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 44, no. 12 (December 2, 2021): 1190–1217. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2019.1628623>.

Opper, Marc. *People's Wars in China, Malaya, and Vietnam*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2020. 213.

<sup>66</sup> Weissmann, Mikael, Niklas Nilsson, Björn Palmertz, and Per Thunholm. *Hybrid Warfare: Security and Asymmetric Conflict in International Relations*. I.B. Tauris, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.5040/97817883177951>

hybrid warfare strategies I will use economic data from the world bank. Combined with case studies to study how hybrid warfare is used by states to increase their power within the international system.<sup>67</sup>

## Chapter 2 The role of soft power in modern warfare

At first glance it might seem weird to discuss soft power in the context of warfare. Warfare after all, involves the use of force and coercion in order for the warring parties to achieve their goals. However, recent conflicts, for example the US war in Afghanistan, have placed the role of soft power in warfare into a new light. During the war in Afghanistan, as well as other conflicts against terrorist groups such as Islamic State, it became clear that such conflicts could not be won through the use of hard power alone. In both cases there was a clear need to win over the hearts and minds of the locale populace as well as win success on the battlefield in order for the war to be won.<sup>68</sup> The reason for this being that without the use of soft power, a warring party will have to rely on coercion in order to achieve its goals. While this does not sound like much of a problem at first, it also implies that their influence will fade as soon as the use of coercion through the use of hard power is halted.<sup>69</sup> In the case of Afghanistan this flaw became clear when the Taliban regained control of the country as soon as the US military presence was removed.<sup>70</sup>

Another reason for the increasing importance of soft power is that in today's international arena, nation states are increasingly presented with challenges that are close to if not completely impossible to solve through the use of hard power alone. Cyber warfare, misinformation campaigns, and refugee crisis each present nation states with unique challenges that cannot be solved through the use of hard power.<sup>71</sup> The reason for this is similar to the case of Afghanistan presented above. While coercion can be used to solve immediate problems resulting from these issues, shutting down malicious actors in cyber space, censoring platforms spreading misinformation and forcefully preventing access to

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<sup>67</sup> "World Bank Open Data | Data." Accessed June 28, 2022. <https://data.worldbank.org/>.

<sup>68</sup> Ohnesorge, Hendrik W. *Soft Power: The Forces of Attraction in International Relations*. Global Power Shift. Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2020. 6

<sup>69</sup> Ohnesorge, *Soft Power*.55.

<sup>70</sup> Santucci, Julia. "After Afghanistan: Intelligence Analysis and US Military Missions." *Survival* 64, no. 1 (January 2, 2022): 157–78. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2022.2032994>. 175.

<sup>71</sup> Ohnesorge, *Soft Power*.10.

refugees, none of these methods presents the user with a permanent solution to the underlying issue. The reason for this being that solving such an issue requires one to not only achieve a direct military objective, but also to bring about societal, political and/or economical changes in its own and/or other nation states.<sup>72</sup>

So, while it is possible to react to these challenges through the use of hard power, it would be akin to treating the symptoms rather than the disease. Resulting in a scenario where the symptoms have to be treated over and over again, since the actual cause of the issue remains unresolved. The result of this is that the one using these hard power methods will have to continuously allocate resources to the treatment of these symptoms without providing them with any lasting solution to the issue that they are actively facing, leading to the actor in question spending unnecessarily large amounts of resources without it yielding any real results.<sup>73</sup>

This rising cost for the use of hard power is enhanced further by the lowering levels of entry to many of the relating strategies listed above. (mis)information campaigns, cyber warfare and terrorism campaigns can all be used to great effectiveness against a superior military opponents by an ever increasing number of potential actors.<sup>74</sup> The rise of terrorist in the last three decades illustrates this issue perfectly. Terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda or Islamic State operate outside of the direct control of any state government, previously the only actors considered meaningful in international power relations.<sup>75</sup> However, these groups were still able to pose a serious security risk to nation states and even proved challenging to defeat for great powers such as the USA. Especially nonstate actors that are more mature in their military strategies, meaning that they are organized in a fashion similar to a professional army, are capable of challenging states for at least a limited number of military objectives.<sup>76</sup>

This lowering cost of accessibility is not only relevant due to the rise of nonstate actors however. States themselves can use these lowering costs of entry to pursue new types

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<sup>72</sup> Ohnesorge, Hendrik W. *Soft Power: The Forces of Attraction in International Relations*. Global Power Shift. Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2020. 8

<sup>73</sup> Ohnesorge, *Soft Power*. 8.

<sup>74</sup> Weissmann, Mikael, Niklas Nilsson, Björn Palmertz, and Per Thunholm. *Hybrid Warfare: Security and Asymmetric Conflict in International Relations*. I.B. Tauris, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781788317795>. 1.

<sup>75</sup> Ohnesorge, *Soft Power*. 6, 7.

<sup>76</sup> Biddle, Stephen D. *Nonstate Warfare: The Military Methods of Guerillas, Warlords, and Militias*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021. 293.

of military strategies. An example of one such new strategy is the use of digital information campaigns. Perhaps the most well known of these campaigns is the Russian misinformation campaign surrounding the 2016 US presidential election. Here, the Russian Internet Research Agency (IRA), launched a misinformation campaign with the goal of increasing political tensions resulting from the 2016 US presidential elections, with the goal of destabilizing the USA. This was done mostly through the use of internet “trolls”, fake online profiles used to sow discord among and agitate other online users. Aimed at increasing existing political tensions between the supporters of different political candidates by starting and fostering controversies, scandals and arguments between the potential voter bases of the different candidates. While these trolls were often easy to identify and even traceable to Russia, they were highly effective in heightening US political tensions. A testament to this is the continuation of the program even after the US presidential election by Russia, providing them with a low risk, low cost method of weakening a rival great power with little to no direct risk to their own security.<sup>77</sup>

This combination of low costs to entry combined with great effectiveness means that the aggressor has an overwhelming advantage against the defender in each of these strategies. Attempting to suppress these strategies through the use of hard power thus results in a long and costly process for the defender who has to allocate a substantially higher number of resources towards containing the threat relative to the cost for the attacker. This in turn leaves the defender vulnerable to what Mearsheimer refers to as “bloodletting” strategies. Here a state tries to increase the cost of conflict for another state as much as possible in order to weaken their relative position of power within the international system relative to their own.<sup>78</sup> This means that any attempt to resolve such a challenge through the use of purely hard power methods will ultimately result in a loss of power for the defender relative to the attacker. This is not to say that these situations could be resolved through the use of soft power strategies alone, after all direct threats such as terrorist attacks still warrant a hard power based response in order to fend off the direct threat. However the use of hard power alone is insufficient to resolve the entire issue, which requires a combination of soft

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<sup>77</sup> McCombie, Stephen, Allon J. Uhlmann, and Sarah Morrison. “The US 2016 Presidential Election & Russia’s Troll Farms.” *Intelligence and National Security* 35, no. 1 (January 2, 2020): 95–114. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02684527.2019.1673940>. 110.

<sup>78</sup> Mearsheimer, John J. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition)*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2003. 173.

and hard power strategies in order to be effectively resolved.

## 2.1. The role of foreign relations

The need for hard power to be combined with soft power in order to be used to full effectiveness within the modern international system, can also be observed within the realm of foreign relations. While I do not argue against the need for hard power as a key requirement for a country to establish itself as a great power or a hegemon within the international system,<sup>79</sup> it is not the only tool at a state's disposal in order to gain power.

There are other ways for a society to influence other nation states. A state's cultural appeal is one such example. While often seen as negligible within realist scholarship, recent years have seen a renewed interest in the role of culture within international relations.

<sup>80</sup>Culture can be used to gain power within international relations in a number of ways. First of all, while nation states are considered rational actors within offensive realist theory,<sup>81</sup> this is not necessarily the case for a states population in general. The reason why this matters is because it implies that culture can be used to influence the opinion of a nation state's population regarding social and political issues. This in turn allows for nation states to gain power by increasing resistance against current political goals set by rival states or promote their own. The PRC is perhaps one of the most striking examples of a state taking actions to prevent foreign influence in its political system through popular culture. By restricting access to foreign, mainly Western based, popular culture, the PRC attempts to prevent political unrest within its own society. Examples of such actions include the censorship of US movies depicting material that the PRC views as opposed to its own political narrative, or the censorship of the internet to restrict access to certain historic information that the PRC considers damaging such as the Tiananmen square massacre.<sup>82</sup> This goes to show how the PRC views certain aspects of foreign culture as a potential threat to its own internal stability,

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<sup>79</sup> Mearsheimer, John J. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition)*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2003. 156.

<sup>80</sup> Ohnesorge, Hendrik W. *Soft Power: The Forces of Attraction in International Relations*. Global Power Shift. Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2020. 99.

<sup>81</sup> Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition)*.

<sup>82</sup> Democracy in china.

underlining the potential of culture to be used to weaken other state's position of power.

While culture can be used to weaken another state's position of power, it can also be used to strengthen one's own. In the case of the PRC the most striking example of this is perhaps the founding of Confucian Institutes. The official function of these institutes is to foster cultural exchange and provide access to education on Chinese language. They are however widely considered as part of a soft power campaign by the PRC, aimed at reducing the perception of the PRC as a potential threat in other countries.<sup>83</sup> Given the prevalence of fear as a motivator for state behavior in offensive realism theory,<sup>84</sup> reducing the perceived threat that a state poses in the eyes of another can be a major asset. By reducing the perceived threat posed by a state among another state's population, a state might lower hostility towards them by that state. While it would be naïve to say that any such actions could be used to mask strong hostile intentions towards another, it can at least help lower suspicion when state relations are somewhat cordial. Because states can never be sure of one another's intentions and are capable of harming one another they will always fear one another to a certain extent.<sup>85</sup> However showing a willingness to cooperate and share information can help to at least limit the degree within which a state is feared by another and therefore be used to increase ones relative position of power.

Another key aspect of soft power that affects the current relationship between the PRC and Taiwan is diplomatic relations with other nations. The most well known example of attempting to use diplomatic relations in the case of the PRC and Taiwan, Can be found in the PRC's efforts to prevent Taiwan from being recognized as an independent nation state by other states. By discouraging the recognition of Taiwan the PRC is able to achieve two different objectives both of which strengthen its position of power. The first objective is related to the origin of the PRC and Taiwan following the Chinese civil war. Both the PRC and ROC at this point claimed to be the rightful government of all of China. The result of this being that each of the two governments posed a potential liability to the other's legitimacy.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Hubbert, Jennifer. *China in the World An Anthropology of Confucius Institutes, Soft Power, and Globalization*, 2019. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:101:1-2020100814433050765846>. 10.

<sup>84</sup> Mearsheimer, John J. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition)*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2003. 50.

<sup>85</sup> Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition)*. 48.

<sup>86</sup> Schreer, Benjamin, and Andrew T. H. Tan, eds. *The Taiwan Issue: Problems and Prospects*. London: Routledge, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429319082>. 59.

As has been stated earlier this makes the reunification of Taiwan with the PRC is considered to be a major point of national pride by the PRC.<sup>87</sup> But it can also be considered to be a point of legitimacy. While the ROC has largely given up any attempts to gain control over the Chinese mainland, its origins as a rival government of China means that it still poses a potential threat to the authority of the PRC. This is especially relevant now that, as stated before, the PRC's ability to derive authority from its revolutionary origins is decreasing in its legitimizing capability, since it has largely moved away from its communistic roots and any direct links to the revolution are fading. With the PRC's 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary fast approaching, there will soon be no more people left within the PRC with any first hand memories of the revolution. By losing this tool of legitimization of authority, the PRC is thus losing one of its main assets of legitimizing its own rule over the Chinese mainland as opposed to the ROC. While the PRC's ability to realize economic growth has now largely replaced its revolutionary origins as a legitimizing tool, it can be argued that the ROC has also managed to achieve a high degree of economic growth. Thus, the ROC's existence remains a political threat to the legitimacy of the PRC.<sup>88</sup> Due to this remaining threat, it is in the PRC's interest to lower Taiwan's legitimacy as an independent nation state. Because in doing so, it decreases the potential risk that the ROC poses to its own legitimacy as the government of China. Thereby, it can be explained why the PRC attempts to prevent other nation states from recognizing Taiwan as an independent nation state. Since doing so means that the legitimacy of the PRC's government is less likely to be questioned by its own citizens due to the existence of another potential government of China.<sup>89</sup>

The second objective that the PRC is able to realize by hindering the recognition of Taiwan on the international stage, is that it allows the PRC to limit the options available for other nations to justify any intervention in a potential military confrontation between the PRC and Taiwan. Simultaneously, it also makes it easier for the PRC to justify such offensive actions against Taiwan by claiming it concerns a domestic issue for the PRC,

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<sup>87</sup> Garcia, Carlos, and Yew Lun Tian. "China's Xi Vows 'reunification' with Taiwan." *Reuters*, October 9, 2021, sec. China. <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/chinas-xi-says-reunification-with-taiwan-must-will-be-realised-2021-10-09/>.

<sup>88</sup> Schreer, Benjamin, and Andrew T. H. Tan, eds. *The Taiwan Issue: Problems and Prospects*. London: Routledge, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429319082>. 69.

<sup>89</sup> Weissmann, Mikael, Niklas Nilsson, Björn Palmertz, and Per Thunholm. *Hybrid Warfare: Security and Asymmetric Conflict in International Relations*. I.B. Tauris, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781788317795>. 175.



rather than the invasion of a foreign nation state.<sup>90</sup> Even though, according to offensive realism theory, international law is often seen as irrelevant because there is no authority above the nation state,<sup>91</sup> they are still made by nation states with certain goals in mind. Alliances between nation states, according to Mearsheimer, can be seen as ‘‘marriages of convenience,’’ which are made with a state’s own self-interest in mind. The goal of the alliance always being the ensuring of the state’s own survival through power maximization.<sup>92</sup> Working from this understanding, nation states join an alliance, including those where they ascribe to certain international laws, because they rationally perceive that doing so is in their own interest for the maximization of power. Based on this, a state will continue to adhere to these rules unless doing so would no longer meet that criteria.

The reason why a lack of official recognition of Taiwan as a nation would then effect a state’s decision to intervene in the case of the PRC invading Taiwan, is that it forces the state to weigh the benefits of such a course of action against the benefit of the alliance. Since breaking it would show it no longer seeing the adherence to the terms of the alliance as to being in its own best interest and thus suggest it is attempting to alter its place in the current balance of power. Doing so will increase the degree within which the state is feared by other states within the international system. This will be the case especially for those states that already have existing reasons to fear the state breaking the alliance, increasing the potential for conflict between them.<sup>93</sup> Thus the reason why international law can be considered to be meaningful even from an offensive realist standpoint, is that adherence or non-adherence to these laws relates to the degree within which other states are likely to fear the nation state in question, and thus affect the likelihood of a confrontation between the two from breaking out.

The reason why this matters regarding the recognition of Taiwan as a nation, is that by pressuring other nations to repeal their recognition of Taiwan as a nation, the PRC places itself into a more advantageous position in the case it decides to invade Taiwan. On one hand, doing so lowers potential increases in threat perception regarding the PRC since it can

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<sup>90</sup> Weissmann, Mikael, Niklas Nilsson, Björn Palmertz, and Per Thunholm. *Hybrid Warfare: Security and Asymmetric Conflict in International Relations*. I.B. Tauris, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781788317795>. 176.

<sup>91</sup> Mearsheimer, John J. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition)*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2003. 49.

<sup>92</sup> Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition)*. 53.

<sup>93</sup> Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition)*. 60.

argue to be operating within the bounds of international law and thus show willingness to respect the current balance of power. On the other hand it allows the PRC to argue that states willing to intervene in favor of Taiwan during a potential invasion, are in breach of international law and thus challenging the international balance of power, increasing the degree within which their other rivals view them as a potential threat.

This act of shaping the narrative within which a state's actions are perceived by other states will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 2, but here already it shows how soft power tools such as diplomatic relations and perceived adherence to the values of international law can have consequences for the balance of power between states, even when viewed from an offensive realist perspective.

## **2.2. The role of economic relations**

Understanding economic relations is key in understanding why the PRC has so far refrained from invading Taiwan. The reason why this is so important, is that wealth maximization is one of the main ways through which states seek to maximize their power within the international system.<sup>94</sup> The importance of access to the international system in order to realize the maximization of wealth effectively will be discussed further in chapter 2. In this section the focus will be on the way within which both the PRC's and Taiwan's economies contribute to preventing an invasion of Taiwan by the PRC.

The first thing to note is that there are strong economic ties between the PRC and Taiwan. Taiwanese investors and enterprises have played an important role in the early economic rise of the PRC and continue to be meaningful economic actors within the PRC to this day. This economic interdependence benefits both the PRC and Taiwan. In the case of Taiwan it provides access to a source of relatively cheap labor, land prices and lenient tax rates. For the PRC it initially provided access to capital and knowhow to help develop its own industries and continues to provide "linkage communities" between Taiwan and the PRC. These allow the PRC to strengthen economic and social ties between themselves and Taiwan, in order to assist in bringing about the unification of Taiwan and the PRC.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Mearsheimer, John J. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition)*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2003. 162.

<sup>95</sup> Tsang, Steve, ed. *Taiwan's Impact on China: Why Soft Power Matters More than Economic or Political Inputs*. 1st ed. 2017. The Nottingham China Policy Institute Series. Cham: Springer International Publishing : Imprint: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-33750-0>. 120.

These economic ties are thus beneficial to each side. While it is unlikely that these economic ties will be enough to stop any future conflict by themselves according to offensive realism theory, since these ties will only help foster peace if their preservation is seen by both sides as the best route to maximizing their own power. If one side were to surmise that attacking the other would improve its position of power even with the loss of economic might gained by trade between them, they would do so.<sup>96</sup> However, these economic ties still affect the potential for war between the PRC and Taiwan even if they are not considered to be a defining factor. This means they are worth taking into consideration when studying cross-strait relations, even from an offensive realist perspective.

While the existence of these economic relations in general are already worth considering, there is an aspect of the economic relation between the PRC and Taiwan that is of even greater consequence. A key aspect of economic relations which has helped prevent a PRC invasion of Taiwan so far, is that the PRC is dependent on imports from the PRC in order to effectively manifest its economic growth. To be more specific, the PRC is reliant on the import of Taiwanese high end semiconductors.<sup>97</sup> These high end semiconductors of which 90 percent of the world's supply are produced by the Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC), provides Taiwan with a strong economic incentive to discourage the PRC from attempting an invasion of the island. Since these conductors are key components in both high end civilian as well as military electronics, the PRC requires access to these semiconductors in order to be competitive with other great powers economically as well as militarily.<sup>98</sup>

One might ask why the PRC would not opt to invade Taiwan in order to gain control of the manufacturing of these semiconductors. After all they are clearly a strategic resource that pose a potential risk to the PRC's economic and military capacity were the supply of them to be halted by Taiwan. Great powers after all seek to maximize their share of global wealth because it translates to potential military might, which is especially relevant in this case since the resource in question is a key component in the production of military

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<sup>96</sup> Mearsheimer, John J. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition)*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2003. 419.

<sup>97</sup> Shih, Willy. "Is It Time to Rethink Globalized Supply Chains?" *MIT Sloan Management Review* 61, no. 4 (Summer 2020): 2.

<sup>98</sup> Reuters. "Taiwan Chip Industry Emerges as Battlefield in U.S.-China Showdown." Accessed June 23, 2022. <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/taiwan-china-chips/>.

hardware.<sup>99</sup> The answer to this is that the USA is dependent on the same type of semiconductors for its own military hardware. Furthermore, while the semiconductors themselves are produced in Taiwan, several key components of these semiconductors are produced in Western countries. This means that even if the PRC were to seize the manufacturing plants where these conductors are made, they would likely not be able to gain access to the required supply chains to restart production.<sup>100</sup> This shared dependence on Taiwanese high end semiconductors means, according to offensive realism theory, that both great powers will seek to prevent the other from obtaining exclusive access to such valuable resources. After all, allowing the other to gain exclusive control over such a resource would mean a weakening of ones position of power relative to the other great power, which is counter to a state's goal of power maximization to ensure its own survival.<sup>101</sup>

### **2.3 conclusion.**

As stated at the start of this chapter, soft power is often seen as irrelevant in offensive realism. However based on the cases presented here, it can be surmised that this is not necessarily the case. While I agree with the basic stance within offensive realism theory that hard power remains prevalent compared to soft power in determining a states position of power, it is not the only relevant factor that has to be taken into account within such determinations. While often more complex in their way of achieving their desired results, there are ways for soft power methods to achieve meaningful results that allow a state to increase its position of power.

In the case of foreign relations, even though states operate in an anarchic international system, that is not to say that agreements between states within this system are meaningless, only that they cannot be universally enforced by any agent other than the states themselves. So even though states cannot as Mearsheimer puts it "call 911" for help from a higher authority when they are the subject of antagonism by another state despite international agreements, the adherence to as well as the breaching of such agreements still affects the relationship between these states.<sup>102</sup> First of all these help to determine the degree

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<sup>99</sup> Mearsheimer, John J. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition)*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2003. 161.

<sup>100</sup> Reuters. "Taiwan Chip Industry Emerges as Battlefront in U.S.-China Showdown." Accessed June 23, 2022. <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/taiwan-china-chips/>.

<sup>101</sup> Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition)*. 163.

<sup>102</sup> Mearsheimer, John J. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition)*. 51.

within which a state is feared by other states which is considered the key factor in determining the level of antagonism between states. Since states operate in their own self-interest, adherence to these rules signals to others that cooperation is currently the most favorable course for them, breaching these agreements on the other hand signals to other states that cooperation is no longer perceived by them to be in their best interest meaning that the chance of them seeking to increase their share of world power through more aggressive means is more likely, thus increasing the degree within which a state is feared.

Secondly, even though states are rational actors, they are by no means omniscient. Therefore, states can use adherence to international agreements as a way of masking power maximizing activities while limiting the amount of fear that this generates within other nation states. Doing so can help to decrease the likelihood of a state becoming embroiled in a conflict with a more powerful state before it is ready for such a confrontation, by making their actions to be perceived as to being in the best interest for other states within the international system.

Economic ties can also be a useful tool for states to strengthen their own position of power as opposed to other states. Since wealth maximization is one of the main ways within which states seek to attain power, favorable economic ties can help to strengthen a nation's position of power within the international system. While as stated before, these strong economic ties are no hard guarantee for peace, they nevertheless do factor in to governments' considerations on whether or not a military confrontation would be in their own best interest.<sup>103</sup> Whether or not such a course of interest is in a state's best interest, depends on more than just the value of trade with the country in question as opposed to the benefits of a potential war. It also relates to the broader implications that such a conflict would have on the nation's relationship with other states and the implications that it would have on the state's position of power. In other words, what will be the effect on a state's relation with others within the international system?

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<sup>103</sup> Mearsheimer, John J. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition)*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2003.418.

## Chapter 3 The role of the international system

When referring to “the international system,” what is meant here is “the pattern of relationships between and among states.”<sup>104</sup> This includes patterns of diplomacy, state behavior and trade as determined by states in international agreements, be they between states or via international organizations such as the United Nations, the IMF or the World bank. It is true that offensive realism theory recognizes no authority above states, however this merely means that such institutions cannot force states to act according to their rules, instead potential enforcement is up to the member states themselves.<sup>105</sup>

Why then does this system matter in the case of a state’s ability to maximize its share of world power? The reason why this matter is because access to these international systems provides states with key components necessary to be competitive with other states in terms of their ability to maximize their share of world power. The first of these components is the need of access to international markets, trade, and monetary networks to be able to maximize wealth. The second component is access to foreign media and information networks in order to influence foreign populations. First the workings and importance of these components to a state’s power maximization capabilities will be explained. After that, it will be argued how the foreign and domestic implications these components can be used to explain why the PRC’s has so far refrained from an invasion of Taiwan.

### **3.1. Why does access to the international system matter for the use of hybrid warfare?**

Since the end of the cold war, nation states have become more and more interconnected. Lowering costs of transportation have resulted in many supply chains becoming more and more globalized. This increasing interconnectedness of global supply lines has coincided with an increasing interconnectivity of global markets. This has led to an increase in economic growth but also an increase in economic interdependence between nation states.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Brown, Garrett W., Iain McLean, and Alistair McMillan. “International System.” In *A Concise Oxford Dictionary of Politics and International Relations*. Oxford University Press, 2018.

<http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199670840.001.0001/acref-9780199670840-e-1685>.

<sup>105</sup> Mearsheimer, John J. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition)*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2003. 51.

<sup>106</sup> Shih, Willy. “Is It Time to Rethink Globalized Supply Chains?” *MIT Sloan Management Review* 61, no. 4 (Summer 2020): 2.

This economic interdependence has led to access to the international markets becoming a key requirement for any great power in order for it to remain competitive within the current international system.

The reason for this is that, due to these increasing levels of globalization of supply chains, access to global markets has become key to producing goods at a competitive cost. Even from an offensive realist perspective, there are now cases being made that underscore the benefits of free trade and the importance of access to global markets in order for a state to effectively maximize its wealth and power.<sup>107</sup>

If a state were to lose access this system, it risks worsening its own capabilities to accumulate wealth compared to any potential rivals that are able to retain access.

Global supply chains locate production of goods and services where they can be produced as profitably as possible. This has led to a decrease in costs of production but also to an increase in subcontracting within production chains. Meaning final products are often created from parts made by several different companies in different nations.<sup>108</sup> These supply chains present states that are able to access them with cheaper means of production improving their capabilities for wealth maximization by allowing them to have access to a larger sum of the world's wealth.<sup>109</sup> On the other hand, these supply chains also mean that production is dependent on their continued functioning in order to be effective. This has become abundantly clear to policy makers and business leaders all over the world during the COVID-19 pandemic. The lowering of production capacity in China, led to production issues and resulting shortages across the world, leading many leaders to question the ability of the current system to cope with sudden drops in productivity while also showing just how much they themselves depended on these supply chains in order to maintain economic stability and growth.<sup>110</sup>

This means that a country needs access to international trade in order to be

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<sup>107</sup> Kim, Dong Jung. "Realists as Free Traders: The Struggle for Power and the Case against Protectionism." *International Affairs* 94, no. 6 (November 1, 2018): 1269–86. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiv192>. 1270.

<sup>108</sup> Shih, Willy. "Is It Time to Rethink Globalized Supply Chains?" *MIT Sloan Management Review* 61, no. 4 (Summer 2020): 2.

<sup>109</sup> Mearsheimer, John J. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition)*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2003. 51.

<sup>110</sup> Free, Clinton, and Angela Hecimovic. "Global Supply Chains after COVID-19: The End of the Road for Neoliberal Globalisation?" *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal* 34, no. 1 (September 9, 2021): 58–84. <https://doi.org/10.1108/AAAJ-06-2020-4634>. 76.

competitive in terms of the ability to acquire economic power compared to other states within the international system that do have access to these resources. This does not mean that a state needs to be on good terms with every state within the international system, it merely means that a state will maintain amiable relations with states when doing so provides the easiest access to the resources that they need in order to effectively maximize their power.<sup>111</sup>

resources here also has to be understood in a broad sense of the word. These may include goods and services, but can also include less tangible assets that states can use to maximize their power. One such less tangible asset is found in economic influence. Obtaining control over important parts of another state's economy, provides a state with several potential hybrid warfare strategies with which it can increase its position of power. First of all, it provides a state with leverage over another state, making it a useful tool to exert pressure on another state. Perhaps the most striking example of this can be found in the current efforts by the USA and the European Union to weaken the Russian economy via economic sanctions.<sup>112</sup> The effects of these sanctions on Russia's ability to maximize their gain of wealth speaks for itself, according to a prediction by the Institute of International Finance (IIF) the size of the Russian economy is set to decrease by fifteen percent this year, wiping out one and a half decade of economic growth.<sup>113</sup> Here we can see a clear example of the risks associated with losing access to the international system, potentially leading to a serious loss of power.

Staying on the case of the Russian war in Ukraine, the conflict also provides an excellent example on the role of public perceptions and modern communication networks in hybrid warfare. Russia is identified by scholars as one of the first nations to widely embrace the use of hybrid warfare, especially information warfare via digital media.<sup>114</sup> These (mis)information campaigns are aimed at presenting another nation's population with

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<sup>111</sup> Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition)*. 51.

<sup>112</sup> Cohen, Patricia, Eshe Nelson, Valeriya Safronova, and Michael Levenson. "As Russia Diverges From the Global Economy, Soviet-Style Scarcity Looms." *The New York Times*, May 26, 2022, sec. World. <http://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/26/world/europe/russia-economy-sanctions.html>.

<sup>113</sup> Reuters. "Russia's Economic Slump Will Wipe out 15 Years of Gains - IIF." *Reuters*, June 8, 2022, sec. European Markets. <https://www.reuters.com/markets/europe/russias-economic-slump-will-wipe-out-15-years-gains-iif-2022-06-08/>.

<sup>114</sup> Weissmann, Mikael, Niklas Nilsson, Björn Palmertz, and Per Thunholm. *Hybrid Warfare: Security and Asymmetric Conflict in International Relations*. I.B. Tauris, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781788317795>. 1.



(mis)information intending to lower their morale, reduce their faith in their government and sow distrust of Western states and actors. With the ultimate goal of driving the country into Russia's sphere of influence with a minimal need for the use of force. While this strategy clearly failed in their latest attempts to gain control of Ukrainian territory earlier this year, it was used to great effect during the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014. Here Russian use of information warfare allowed for the annexation of Ukrainian territory with relatively little military force and without provoking a military intervention by nations other than Ukraine.

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Thus, the emergence of modern communication networks has brought with it an increasing importance of public perceptions within international relations. While this rising importance of public perceptions is most prevalent in democratic nations, even autocracies are to a certain degree dependent on a modicum of public support from their own population in order to effectively govern their respective nation states.<sup>116</sup> Besides the role played by a nation state's own domestic public opinion, public opinion within foreign states regarding a specific nation state must also be taken into consideration. Here, the influence relies on the effect that foreign public opinion can have on a nation's foreign policy. Because public opinion, at least to a certain degree, helps to shape a nation's foreign policy. Foreign policy can help and determine the relationship between different nation states. While nation states act rationally, based on the framework of offensive realism, the opinions of both domestic as well as foreign populations can influence the perceptions as well as the relationships between nation states.

First, public perception of foreign populations can affect the degree of fear that exists between nation states. While public perception is by no means the only factor that effects the degree of fear that exists between nation states, modern digital media has made it into a factor cannot be ignored in international relations.

Secondly, a government requires at least some degree of public support in order to effectively govern and ensure its own survival. This means two things. First a government needs to ensure that it has enough public support to efficiently govern. Second a government can be undermined by eroding domestic support for said government among its own

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<sup>115</sup> Weissmann et al., *Hybrid Warfare*. 200, 201.

<sup>116</sup> Weissmann, Mikael, Niklas Nilsson, Björn Palmertz, and Per Thunholm. *Hybrid Warfare: Security and Asymmetric Conflict in International Relations*. I.B. Tauris, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781788317795>. 3.

population.

Based on this it becomes clear how (mis)information campaigns can be used by states in order to strengthen their own position of power. By influencing the opinion of a state's population regarding their own or foreign governments. Either by weakening a government's public support and hold on power, or by influencing views on foreign nations in order to increase a government's motivation to enact certain foreign policies.<sup>117</sup> Here we can see how (mis)information campaigns can have hard power implications within the international system, even allowing for the potential undermining of a state's main objective, ensuring its own survival.

### **3.2. Domestic consequences for the PRC.**

The domestic consequences for the PRC are mostly related to the effect that the international system has on their domestic economy and by an extend of that, their political system. The reason why the international system affects these aspects of the PRC's domestic policy, is because of the ability that it provides foreign actors to use hybrid warfare capabilities against the PRC. The types of hybrid warfare that foreign actors could use against the PRC involve, the destabilization of the PRC's political system in order to weaken the threat that they pose to the foreign actors that use these the hybrid warfare strategies in question. the first strategy that a loss or limitation of access to the international system is likely to have for the PRC, is that it would limit their capability to facilitate the economic growth that the PRC has enjoyed since it opened up their domestic markets to international trade.<sup>118</sup> During this period the PRC has seen a from 1991 until 2010 the PRC has seen about a ten percent average annual growth of its GDP.<sup>119</sup> This major economic growth has served as a key aspect of the PRC's domestic political support allowing for a legitimization of the

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<sup>117</sup> Weissmann et al., *Hybrid Warfare*. 200, 201.

<sup>118</sup> Vogelmann, Jörg. *Ascending China and the Hegemonic United States: Economically Based Cooperation or Strategic Power Politics?* Globale Gesellschaft Und Internationale Beziehungen. Wiesbaden, Germany [Heidelberg]: Springer VS, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-31660-0>. 69.

<sup>119</sup> "GDP Growth (Annual %) - China | Data." Accessed June 19, 2022. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?end=2020&locations=CN&start=1961&view=chart>.

government's policy towards its citizens.<sup>120</sup> While the PRC's virtually unmatched economic growth within the last three decades has been the driving force behind the country's rise to great power status, this very same growth also poses a risk to the PRC. The reason for this is that the PRC its governing system built its authority over the PRC on its revolutionary history. when the revolutionary goals and means were largely abandoned after the reforms put forward by Deng Xiaoping, a new method of authorization had to be found for the CCP to legitimize its rule over the PRC. Instead of revolutionary legacy the CCP switched to its economic performance as the new means of legitimizing its rule over the PRC. The CCP's capability to realize high economic growth rates and increased standards of living took over the role of the revolutionary legacy as the CCP's legitimization of authority.<sup>121</sup>

Access to global markets has thus been a key aspect of the PRC's ability to realize the economic growth and increased living standards that have taken the place of revolutionary legacy as the CCP's main legitimization of authority. Losing access to global market systems would thus derive the CCP of its main legitimization of authority meaning that the primary goal of the state, according to offensive realism theory, would be jeopardized. By losing their main means of legitimizing their authority over the PRC, the CCP would put its own survival at risk. Since survival, according to offensive realism theory as presented by Mearsheimer, Is a state's ultimate goal, it is unlikely for the CCP to risk it unless they could rationally assume that the resulting loss off power could be avoided.<sup>122</sup>

This potential threat to the CCP's survival is being further enhanced by the fact that they are already facing several other potential threats to their legitimacy. The first one of these threats results form the already slowing economic growth experienced by the PRC. Due to a combination of rising labor costs within the PRC, security fears regarding the PRC by Western nations and economic losses suffered due to interruptions of global supply chains by the COVID-19 pandemic, the PRC's economic growth has slowed down considerably during the last three years.<sup>123</sup> With the PRC's economic growth for 2022

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<sup>120</sup> Ci, Jiwei. *Democracy in China: The Coming Crisis*, 2020. Ci, Jiwei. *Democracy in China: The Coming Crisis*, 2020. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/j.ctvqmp2j6>. 35, 36.

<sup>121</sup>Ci, Jiwei. *Democracy in China: The Coming Crisis*, 2020. 36.

<sup>122</sup> Mearsheimer, John J. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition)*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2003. 64.

<sup>123</sup> Free, Clinton, and Angela Hecimovic. "Global Supply Chains after COVID-19: The End of the Road for Neoliberal Globalisation?" *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal* 34, no. 1 (September 9, 2021): 58–84. <https://doi.org/10.1108/AAAJ-06-2020-4634>. 76.

projected to be around 4.3 percent,<sup>124</sup> This slowing down of the rate of economic growth within the PRC shows no sign of stopping any time soon. This slowing growth has already been brought forward as a potential liability to the CCP's ability to use it as a legitimizing tool for their authority over the PRC.<sup>125</sup> Any loss of economic growth as a result of sanctions leading to loss of access to global supply chains, would thus come on top of the PRC's already lowering rate of economic growth, further increasing the potential risk that this poses to the CCP's legitimization of authority over the PRC.

Furthermore, it has to be kept in mind that even if the PRC were able to successfully invade Taiwan and reunite it with the rest of China, it would then still have to contend with a population that is widely opposed to reunification with the rest of China.<sup>126</sup> These would be added to a long list of areas where the CCP's popular support and perceived legitimacy is poor at best and wavering at worst. Areas such as Xinjiang, Tibet and Hongkong have long since been hotbeds of dissent against CCP rule for a variety of reasons. This has come to a head most recently in Hongkong with the rise of the Umbrella Movement. During this protest by residents of Hongkong against further direct control of the PRC's central government over the city, there were already ideological links being made between members of the Umbrella Movement and Taiwan.<sup>127</sup> The reason why these links might be a risk to the CCP, is because of their potential to spread towards other parts of the PRC if dissatisfaction with the CCP's governing performance increases. In Hongkong the CCP already had difficulty in getting protests against its increasing influence there under control, requiring an intense and prolonged response by law enforcement to get the region back under its control.<sup>128</sup> At the same time in its efforts to quell dissent in Xinjiang, the CCP has made the

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<sup>124</sup> World Bank. "China Economic Update - June 2022." Accessed June 27, 2022.

<https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/china/publication/china-economic-update-june-2022>.

<sup>125</sup> Ci, Jiwei. *Democracy in China: The Coming Crisis*, 2020. Ci, Jiwei. *Democracy in China: The Coming Crisis*, 2020. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/j.ctvqmp2j6>. 35, 36.

<sup>126</sup> Schreer, Benjamin, and Andrew T. H. Tan, eds. *The Taiwan Issue: Problems and Prospects*. London: Routledge, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429319082>. 74.

<sup>127</sup> Chan, Melissa, Philip Caruso, Grace Hearty, Pamela Kennedy, Sahana Kumar, Brandon Lee, Heidi Obermeyer, Noah Metheny, and Ali Wyne. "Hong Kong and Taiwan: Two Davids Facing a Chinese Goliath." Perspectives on Taiwan. Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), 2020. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep29479.6>. 21.

<sup>128</sup> Ci, Jiwei. *Democracy in China: The Coming Crisis*, 2020. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/j.ctvqmp2j6>.

region home to one of if not the most elaborate systems of citizen surveillance in the world. Besides the high costs that comes with setting up and maintaining such a broad system of surveillance, research has also show that it helps to foster a climate of fear and dissent aimed at the PRC's central government.<sup>129</sup>

This means that even if the PRC were to reunify Taiwan with the rest of China by force, maintaining control of the island might be more trouble for the PRC than it is worth. As in doing it would have to face the costs that would come with maintaining order in the region, the details of which will be discussed further in chapter 3, it would also be faced with a new hotbed of dissent within its borders. This dissenting region would then be added to the list of groups dissatisfied with the PRC's current regime. Seeing as to how some of these groups already acknowledge strong ties between themselves, there is a distinct possibility of these groups pooling their resources and bases to achieve their shared goals.<sup>130</sup>

Since the barriers to entry to several hybrid warfare strategies are relatively low, it would not be impossible for such a group to use (mis)information campaigns, partisan warfare, sabotage to undermine the CCP's legitimacy and hinder its ability to effectively govern.<sup>131</sup> This possibility presents the CCP with a conundrum. On the one hand, invading Taiwan would derive them of a long standing foreign threat to its authority, but doing so might result in them gaining a domestic one.

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<sup>129</sup> Leibold, James. "Surveillance in China's Xinjiang Region: Ethnic Sorting, Coercion, and Inducement." *Journal of Contemporary China* 29, no. 121 (January 2, 2020): 46–60. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2019.1621529>. 59.

<sup>130</sup> Chan, Melissa, Philip Caruso, Grace Hearty, Pamela Kennedy, Sahana Kumar, Brandon Lee, Heidi Obermeyer, Noah Metheny, and Ali Wyne. "Hong Kong and Taiwan: Two Davids Facing a Chinese Goliath." *Perspectives on Taiwan*. Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), 2020. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep29479.6>. 21.

<sup>131</sup> Weissmann, Mikael, Niklas Nilsson, Björn Palmertz, and Per Thunholm. *Hybrid Warfare: Security and Asymmetric Conflict in International Relations*. I.B. Tauris, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781788317795>. 2.

### 3.3. Foreign consequences for the PRC.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, a potential invasion of Taiwan by the PRC is certain to worsen the perception of the PRC within the international system. The reason for this worsening perception is twofold. First it will signal other actors within the international system that it is no longer willing to accept its current position of power within the international system and is willing to improve this position through the use of force. While, according to offensive realism theory, a success of such a course of action might indeed increase the PRC's relative position of power in Asia furthering its goal of obtaining regional hegemony, such course of action will inevitably lead to an attempt by the USA to prevent the PRC from achieving hegemony in Asia. After all one of the key threats of a regional hegemon such as the USA, is that it will seek to stop other regional hegemons from establishing themselves.<sup>132</sup>

While these options include an all-out war between the two great powers, this is not the only option available to the USA. While it is true that a quick military victory won by either side would lead to a strong gain in power over the other, a protracted war would be detrimental to both nations, especially considering the potential use of nuclear weapons.<sup>133</sup> As long as there is no clear path to a quick military victory for either the USA or the PRC a direct military response is thus unlikely since it would cost both great powers more in terms of their share of world power than they would stand to gain. A more probable course of action to follow for the USA would be for it to intensify hybrid warfare operations. The aim of these strategies will likely be akin to what Mearsheimer refers to as *bloodletting*.<sup>134</sup>

This strategy would entail using means below the threshold of formal war to make the cost of invading and occupying Taiwan as high as possible for the PRC, in order to minimize the amount of power that such a course of action would gain them.<sup>135</sup> This can take a variety of different forms. First it could seek to strengthen Taiwan's armed forces by providing them with military equipment and intelligence, in order to increase the cost of

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<sup>132</sup> Mearsheimer, John J. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition)*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2003. 59.

<sup>133</sup> Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition)*. 168.

<sup>134</sup> Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition)*. 170

<sup>135</sup> Weissmann, Mikael, Niklas Nilsson, Björn Palmertz, and Per Thunholm. *Hybrid Warfare: Security and Asymmetric Conflict in International Relations*. I.B. Tauris, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781788317795>. 1.

invasion for the PRC by protracting the conflict as much as possible.<sup>136</sup> A second option would be to weaken the PRC's economy via sanctions and trade embargoes.<sup>137</sup> While the Chinese domestic market has grown significantly over the last years, it is still dependent on exports for a large portion of its economic growth.<sup>138</sup> This would allow for a weakening of the PRC's ability to amass wealth and thus weaken its ability to gain power. Within the international system.

Sanctions however only include the most direct type of damage that the PRC would suffer. Sanctions by the USA and its allies would also imply a further weakening of the PRC's own capabilities to use economic hybrid warfare strategies to gain power. If PRC owned corporations were to lose their ability to do business with the USA and its allies, the PRC would also use any power projection capabilities that these companies possess. Apart from the obvious ability to amass wealth without the need for military actions, these companies also provide the PRC with influence over foreign populations and their perception of the PRC. Investments in political campaigns beneficial to the PRC's state interests, intelligence gathering opportunities and (mis)information campaigns can all be executed via these companies.<sup>139</sup> This means that any invasion of Taiwan by the PRC will have to weigh the power gained by the invasion against not just the direct costs, but also against the cost of potential assets for hybrid warfare strategies in the West.

### 3.4 Conclusion

The international system matters for the PRC in its consideration whether or not to invade Taiwan, because such an invasion brings with it the risk of the PRC losing access to the assets of power maximization that they gain by having access to this system. Access to global supply chains is key for the PRC to maintain a competitive rate of wealth

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<sup>136</sup> Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition)*. 170

<sup>137</sup> Weissmann, Mikael, Niklas Nilsson, Björn Palmertz, and Per Thunholm. *Hybrid Warfare: Security and Asymmetric Conflict in International Relations*. I.B. Tauris, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781788317795>. 2.

<sup>138</sup> Breslin, Shaun. *China Risen? Studying Chinese Global Power*. Bristol Studies in East Asian International Relations. Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2021 152..

<sup>139</sup> Weissmann, Mikael, Niklas Nilsson, Björn Palmertz, and Per Thunholm. *Hybrid Warfare: Security and Asymmetric Conflict in International Relations*. I.B. Tauris, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781788317795>. 2.

maximization as opposed to other great powers.<sup>140</sup> This poses a domestic as well as a foreign threat to the PRC. Domestically significant losses in economic growth rates could worsen already existing issues to the CCP's ability to legitimize its authority over the PRC, for which the realization of high economic growth rates is now the most prevalent.<sup>141</sup> It would also derive the PRC of hybrid warfare capabilities granted to it via economic influence in Western countries, via state owned corporations. Additionally the PRC is already suffering from a growing amount of discontent with its current rule in several region such as Xinjiang, Tibet and Hongkong.<sup>142</sup> A forceful reunification of Taiwan with the rest of China would add the Islands population, which by and large opposes CCP rule over the island, to this growing pool of discontent. This would mean that the PRC would have to contend with the added burden of containing this growing challenge to its legitimacy, as well as risk it spilling over to other regions of the PRC.

#### Chapter 4. The challenges of guerilla warfare.

Asymmetrical warfare refers to a kind of warfare being waged between two armies who both use vastly different military strategies in the same conflict. The most common and well-known type of asymmetrical warfare is guerilla warfare. Here, an army uses hit and run tactics combined with ambushes, sabotage, and the elimination of high-profile enemy targets in an attempt to minimize the advantages of the other warring party. This other party usually takes on the form of a conventional army possessing superior weapon systems and more manpower than their opponent.<sup>143</sup> While guerilla wars are by no means a new phenomenon in modern warfare, the way in which it is conducted as well as the effects that it has on a society have been effected by the use of hybrid warfare strategies. Here I will first briefly go over these effects of hybrid warfare on guerilla warfare in chapter 2.1 and then discuss how this has effected the PRC its decision to refrain from invading Taiwan up to this point in chapter 2.2. Finally, I will go over the possible implications of the use of irregular warfare

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<sup>140</sup> Breslin, Shaun. *China Risen? Studying Chinese Global Power*. Bristol Studies in East Asian International Relations. Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2021 152..

<sup>141</sup> Ci, Jiwei. *Democracy in China: The Coming Crisis*, 2020.  
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/j.ctvqmp2j6>. 36.

<sup>142</sup> Ci, *Democracy in China*. 367.

<sup>143</sup> "Guerrilla Warfare | Facts, Definition, & Examples | Britannica." Accessed May 15, 2022.  
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/guerrilla-warfare>. 177, 178.



strategies by rival great powers for the PRC in chapter 2.3.

#### **4.1 The effects of hybrid warfare on asymmetric warfare.**

The effects of the emergence of hybrid warfare on the use of guerilla warfare has a number of different facets that need to be discussed. The most defining facet however, is the way in which hybrid warfare has affected guerilla tactics based on the means of waging warfare available to them. One of the main focus points of hybrid warfare is the combination of irregular warfare strategies, such as guerilla warfare, with modern weaponry and intelligence.<sup>144</sup> The first aspect of this relates to warfare no longer being viewed as constricted to conventional denominations between war and peace, the idea is that a state will do anything in its power to achieve victory at the lowest possible risk to itself.<sup>145</sup> This ties in with the bedrock assumptions of offensive realism theory as proposed by Mearsheimer. These assumptions being that states have both the capabilities to harm one another as well as the rational to use these capabilities in a way that they perceive as to being most beneficial to their ultimate goal, this being their own survival through maximization of power.<sup>146</sup> Previously, the means of using such capabilities in an effective manner during major military conflicts, lay mostly in the hands of nation states. However, within the last two decades we have seen a stark rise in nonstate actors using these strategies with great effect.

Already during the Cold War the increasing accessibility of guerilla warfare tactics in modern conflict started to become apparent. Perhaps the most iconic example of this is the use of guerilla warfare by the Vietnamese National Liberation Front (NLF). Here, a foe that was militarily weak compared to the combined forces of South-Vietnam and the United States military in particular, managed to secure a victory. While a full analysis of the effects of the Vietnam War on the evolution of guerilla warfare is beyond the scope of this thesis, it does provide us with an interesting indication of the difficulties that attackers face in modern warfare when they are met with an irregular resistance force.

The first aspect that is worth noting is that both the use of conventional and

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<sup>144</sup> Weissmann, Mikael, Niklas Nilsson, Björn Palmertz, and Per Thunholm. *Hybrid Warfare: Security and Asymmetric Conflict in International Relations*. I.B. Tauris, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781788317795>. 63.

<sup>145</sup> Weissmann et al., *Hybrid Warfare*. 2.

<sup>146</sup> Mearsheimer, John J. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition)*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2003. 49.

asymmetric warfare by an army is determined by the tools available to them as well as the goal that they seek to achieve by using them. In *Nonstate warfare: the military methods of guerillas, warlords, and militias*, Stephen D Biddle proposes a distinction between traditional ‘‘Napoleonic’’ and irregular ‘‘Fabian’’ warfare strategies. These strategies are used by warring parties depending on their military capabilities, the goal that they aim to achieve and the stakes that the conflict has for them. However Biddle also notes how within most military conflicts, militaries tend to use strategies that can be attributed to both of these styles of warfare, with a purely Fabian or Napoleonic strategy being the exception not the rule.<sup>147</sup> The use of more guerilla or ‘‘Fabian’’ style military strategies are effective when the strategic situation does not require the defender to maintain direct control over the territory but rather seeks to undermine the enemy’s capacity of doing the same.<sup>148</sup> This is the aspect of guerilla warfare that undermined the USA’s military strategy in Vietnam. Whereas the USA sought to achieve victory via a conventional military strategy aimed at conquering and maintaining control over enemy territory, the NLF mostly avoided large scale open confrontations. Instead the focus for the NLF lay on maintaining support among the rural population while at the same time hampering US efforts of doing the same.<sup>149</sup> However, even in a conflict as closely associated with guerrilla warfare as the Vietnam War, Biddle mentions how there are still symptoms of a combination of irregular and conventional military strategies, such as the Tet offensive which he describes as a clear example of conventional warfare.<sup>150</sup> This supports the argument that modern day irregular warfare is not intrinsic to a specific type of actor, but rather as a combination of the goals and available means to achieve them.

What has changed since the onset of the Vietnam War, is not so much the character of irregular warfare itself, but rather the rapid increase of means that it has at its disposal in order to achieve the intended purpose for which it is employed. The first change that has occurred since the end of the Vietnam War is the introduction of modern precision weaponry. These types of weapons were only introduced near the closing days of the

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<sup>147</sup> Biddle, Stephen D. *Nonstate Warfare: The Military Methods of Guerillas, Warlords, and Militias*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021.7.

<sup>148</sup> Biddle, *Nonstate Warfare*. 12.

<sup>149</sup> Opper, Marc. *People’s Wars in China, Malaya, and Vietnam*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2020. 213.

<sup>150</sup> Biddle, *Nonstate Warfare*. 20.

Vietnam War when they were no longer able to make any sort of significant impact on the overall outcome of the conflict.<sup>151</sup> A further development, the importance of which cannot be overstated, is the emergence of modern communication systems. The internet and social media in particular have greatly lowered the entry costs of information warfare. It enabled even nonstate actors such as terrorist groups access to a wide range of information warfare capabilities including , propaganda and (mis)information campaigns<sup>152</sup> These two new developments combined have resulted in a new type of irregular warfare. One that has a low cost of entry and can be used to great effect against even the most powerful opponents.<sup>153</sup> The most striking example of this new kind of irregular warfare can be found in the war against Islamic State. First of all this conflict drove home for many policy makers the degree within which digital media could be used for strategic military purposes. These include (mis)information campaigns, propaganda aimed at recruitment or influencing morale and intelligence gathering. Each of these were accessible to Islamic State due to the drastic lowering of the cost of entry for these military strategies.<sup>154</sup> Secondly, the war against Islamic State demonstrated how irregular military operations could be used to great effect when combined with modern military training, weaponry and tactics.<sup>155</sup>

A further significant development regarding the effects of hybrid warfare on irregular warfare, has been caused by the Russian adaptation of the concept. The Russian concept of hybrid warfare or ‘‘gibridaya voyna’’ differs to a significant degree from the Western connotation of the concept of hybrid warfare. The term became prevalent within Russian military scholarship during the late 200’s. It is often used to describe multidimensional warfare that consists of non-military as well as possible conventional military strategies.<sup>156</sup> Russian understandings of hybrid warfare differs from the western understanding of the

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<sup>151</sup> Biddle, Stephen D. *Nonstate Warfare: The Military Methods of Guerillas, Warlords, and Militias*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021.20.

<sup>152</sup> Weissmann, Mikael, Niklas Nilsson, Björn Palmertz, and Per Thunholm. *Hybrid Warfare: Security and Asymmetric Conflict in International Relations*. I.B. Tauris, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781788317795>. 36.

<sup>153</sup> Weissmann et al., *Hybrid Warfare*. 37.

<sup>154</sup> Whiteside, Craig. “Lighting the Path: The Evolution of the Islamic State Media Enterprise (2003-2016).” International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, 2016. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep29438>. 27.

<sup>155</sup> Whiteside, Craig, Ian Rice, and Daniele Raineri. “Black Ops: Islamic State and Innovation in Irregular Warfare.” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 44, no. 12 (December 2, 2021): 1190–1217. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2019.1628623>.

<sup>156</sup> Weissmann et al., *Hybrid Warfare*. 83.

concept in the sense that it views hybrid warfare as a means of breaking the spirit and will to resist of a foreign nation through a variety of means. These means primarily include non-military means that are supported by the military.<sup>157</sup>

The Russian military views hybrid warfare as a kind of conflict within which the war effort is centered around an information campaign. The waging of hybrid warfare is seen by the Kremlin as an affair involving every branch of government. This whole of government approach has led to a focus on centralization within the Russian military command structure as well as the incorporation of non-military institutions within such structures for the purposes of waging hybrid warfare.<sup>158</sup> The fact that this increase in coordinating capacity is seen as a priority for the Russian military, can be best surmised by the creating of the Russian National Defense Control Center (NDCC) in April 2014.<sup>159</sup> The NDCC is aimed at centralizing Russian security policy to include non-military as well as military organizations. The NDCC is composed of Russian federal executive authorities as well as state corporations and Russian defense enterprises.<sup>160</sup> Furthermore there are likely similar structures set up in smaller scale within other branches of the Russian government. While there is no way to accurately project the degree and makeup of these instances, there are indications of at least some degree of cooperation between Russian government ministries and other Russian societal institutions. This is supported by a statement from the Russian Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov in March 2016. Here Gerasimov stated that every ministry of the Russian government must have the means and structure to combat potential hybrid warfare threats in a matter of hours.<sup>161</sup> While the accuracy of this statement can not be independently verified, it does show the extent as to which hybrid warfare is on the minds of Russian policy makers, even among those within the highest levels of government.

The strategy behind Russian hybrid warfare is to make every other aspect of the war subservient to the information campaign. The ultimate goal of this form of warfare is to gain

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<sup>157</sup> Weissmann, Mikael, Niklas Nilsson, Björn Palmertz, and Per Thunholm. *Hybrid Warfare: Security and Asymmetric Conflict in International Relations*. I.B. Tauris, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781788317795>. 86.

<sup>158</sup> Clark, Mason. "RUSSIAN HYBRID WARFARE." Institute for the Study of War, 2020. JSTOR. <http://www.jstor.org/eur.idm.oclc.org/stable/resrep26547>. 18.

<sup>159</sup> Clark, "RUSSIAN HYBRID WARFARE." 18.

<sup>160</sup> Clark, "RUSSIAN HYBRID WARFARE." 18.

<sup>161</sup> Clark, "RUSSIAN HYBRID WARFARE." 19

complete control over the way within which the target state is governed.<sup>162</sup> The reason why such great importance is placed on the information campaign, is the perceived rising power of information within state-conflicts. The Russian military places this increase in importance on information warfare because, in the words of Gerasimov ‘‘falsification of events and restriction of activity of mass media, can be comparable to the results of large-scale use of troops and forces.’’<sup>163</sup> The argument that the information campaign is key in modern military confrontations is further supported by examples derived from US military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. In both cases the USA suffered from war weariness among its population due to it being unable to properly control the information space.<sup>164</sup>

Another aspect of irregular warfare that is discussed in the Russian understanding of hybrid warfare is the diversification of the parties involved in modern military conflicts. These new warring parties are commonly referred to as illegal armed forces within Russian military studies. Illegal armed forces are used as an over encompassing term for most if not all non-state military actors such as militant groups, terrorist organizations, armed insurgents or private military companies.<sup>165</sup> This once more underpins the increasing role of irregular warfare within modern military confrontations discussed above as well as the decreasing level of entry required for a party seeking to achieve its goals through the use of irregular warfare.<sup>166</sup> While these forces can of course wage irregular warfare based on their own interests, the Russian interpretation of hybrid warfare looks at illegal armed forces mostly as an extension of foreign state actors. The main benefit that is ascribed to the use of illegal armed forces by nation states is based on its ability to minimize the risk involved with the use of kinetic military operations. First of all they allow for a degree of legal cover that is needed in order to avoid international legal issues that come with the use of a nation states its own military forces. The use of these illegal armed forces thus allows a nation to enact kinetic military operations against a rival state in the grey zone between war and peace. The

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<sup>162</sup> Clark, Mason. ‘‘RUSSIAN HYBRID WARFARE.’’ Institute for the Study of War, 2020. JSTOR. <http://www.jstor.org.eur.idm.oclc.org/stable/resrep26547>. 15.

<sup>163</sup> Clark, ‘‘RUSSIAN HYBRID WARFARE.’’ 19.

<sup>164</sup> Clark, ‘‘RUSSIAN HYBRID WARFARE.’’ 19.

<sup>165</sup> Clark, ‘‘RUSSIAN HYBRID WARFARE.’’ 22.

<sup>166</sup> Weissmann, Mikael, Niklas Nilsson, Björn Palmertz, and Per Thunholm. *Hybrid Warfare: Security and Asymmetric Conflict in International Relations*. I.B. Tauris, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781788317795>. 37.

reason why this cover is needed is based on the risk that is involved with a conventional military confrontation between two nation states. Using one's own military forces would almost always result in a war between the attacker and the target state. Using illegal armed forces removes much of the risk involved with kinetic operations against another nation state with effects that are at least comparable to those that could be obtained by the use of the state's own armed forces.<sup>167</sup>

#### **4.2 The implications of irregular military strategies for the defense of Taiwan against the PRC.**

Understanding the PRC's deference from an invasion of Taiwan, first requires an understanding of what it would face if it were to engage in a full scale invasion of Taiwan and what the PRC would gain from it. At a first glance invading Taiwan seems like small feat for the PRC to pull off. Taiwan's military budget pales when compared to those of the PRC after all.<sup>168</sup> However, such an invasion entails more than a simple match of military might. While it is undeniable that Taiwan would stand basically no chance of defeating the PLA in a direct military confrontation, an invasion of Taiwan by the PLA would be anything but that. Instead of a symmetric military confrontation between two armies whose strength and strategies are more or less comparable, such an invasion would entail an asymmetric military conflict. Within recent years Taiwan has been shifting its defensive strategy towards such an asymmetric defensive strategy.<sup>169</sup> The Taiwanese Overall Defense Concept presented in the National Defense Report of 2019, lays out the details of this asymmetric defensive strategy.<sup>170</sup> This strategy in short is aimed at surviving the first strike that the Taiwanese military will have to endure in the case of an invasion by the PLA. This is done by concealing and or increasing the mobility of strategic targets, implementing fast repair and damage mitigation plans, as well as attempts to hinder the opponent's operational capacity.<sup>171</sup> Furthermore the Taiwanese defensive strategy is aimed at maximizing the cost of

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<sup>167</sup> Clark, Mason. "RUSSIAN HYBRID WARFARE." Institute for the Study of War, 2020. JSTOR. <http://www.jstor.org.eur.idm.oclc.org/stable/resrep26547>. 23.

<sup>168</sup> "SIPRI Military Expenditure Database | SIPRI." Accessed November 23, 2021. <https://www.sipri.org/databases/milex>.

<sup>169</sup> "A Hard Look at Hard Power:." Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 2020. JSTOR. <http://www.jstor.org.eur.idm.oclc.org/stable/resrep27713>. 335.

<sup>170</sup> "A Hard Look at Hard Power:." 336.

<sup>171</sup> "Taiwan's Overall Defense Concept, Explained." Accessed May 15, 2022. <https://thediplomat.com/2020/11/taiwans-overall-defense-concept-explained/>.

a PLA invasion while also slowing the PLA's advance as much as possible.<sup>172</sup> A further focus is placed on a guerilla style of defense. This is done through using geographic advantages combined with procurement of mobile missile systems well suited for guerilla and urban warfare.<sup>173</sup> The overall goal of this whole strategy is thus to drag out a PLA invasion of Taiwan into a long term guerilla war, aimed at minimizing the effects of the PLA's relative military strength compared to Taiwan. The risk that the PLA faces here can perhaps be best compared to the challenges faced by the USA during the Vietnam War. While the PRC might be able to occupy large parts if not the whole of Taiwan, given the fact that it is willing to allocate a sufficiently large part of the PLA to the war effort, it would then face the issue of maintaining control of the island. Given the current lack of support among the Taiwanese population in favor of unification with the PRC, let alone through the use of force, it is unlikely that the PRC will be able to garner enough public support to legitimize its control over Taiwan.<sup>174</sup> This, combined with the Taiwanese focus on an asymmetric warfare strategy, would mean that the PRC would have to resort to the military occupation of large parts of Taiwan. At the same time, the PLA would have to deal with guerilla style warfare from the Taiwanese armed forces. Such a scenario will put the PRC into a position similar to that of the USA during the Vietnam War. While the USA and South Vietnam possessed a considerable advantage in military strength when compared to North Vietnam, it was unable to achieve a military victory due to the fact that it was unable to gain the required popular support that it needed among the population of Vietnam to justify its occupation. At the same time, it suffered substantial losses against an opponent against whom the USA possessed a substantial advantage in military strength. This led to increasing dissatisfaction among the US public quickly eroding morale and public support for the war.<sup>175</sup> While this might seem like less of an issue in an authoritarian state such as the PRC then in a democracy such as the USA, it has to be kept in mind that both need popular support in order to function properly. Furthermore, such a scenario would result in the war

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<sup>172</sup> "Taiwan's Overall Defense Concept, Explained."

<sup>173</sup> "Taiwan's Overall Defense Concept, Explained."

<sup>174</sup> "More and More Taiwanese Favor Independence – and Think the US Would Help Fight for It." Accessed May 15, 2022. <https://thediplomat.com/2020/12/more-and-more-taiwanese-favor-independence-and-think-the-us-would-help-fight-for-it/>.

<sup>175</sup> *People's Wars in China, Malaya, and Vietnam*. University of Michigan Press, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1353/book.71801>. 231.

becoming essentially counterproductive for the PRC. This is in large part due to the differing objectives that the PRC faces in the event of an occupation of Taiwan compared to the objective of the defenders. Similar to both the situation faced by the USA during the Afghanistan and Vietnam War, the PRC will have to commit to securing control over Taiwan. Seeing as to how most of their attempts at changing public perceptions among the Taiwanese people in favor of the PRC have largely failed over the last two decades, it is even more unlikely for such efforts to bear fruit after an invasion of the island.<sup>176</sup> This leaves the PRC with the prospect of a long time commitment of military personnel in order for it to maintain control over Taiwan. Such a course of action in turn would result in the PRC having to fight against an opponent using irregular military strategies in an environment that is very well suited to the implementation of such strategies.<sup>177</sup> This means that the PRC would have to either resort to time and resource consuming counterinsurgency strategies that would limit the potential economic benefits of occupying Taiwan.

Even when the invasion is interpreted as a means of achieving domestic political purposes for the PRC, there is still a high risk of this being endangered due to irregular warfare strategies.<sup>178</sup> Here these strategies once again can be seen as comparable to the situation faced by the USA during the Vietnam War. By dragging out the conflict to irregular warfare strategies, the defender is capable of undermining the domestic perceptions of the effectiveness of the military.<sup>179</sup> While it is unlikely that the effects of an invasion of the PRC being dragged out due to it facing opponents using irregular warfare will be similar to those faced by the USA during the Vietnam War, mainly due the difference in political systems, it would defeat the intended purpose of increasing domestic political support.

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<sup>176</sup> Schreer, Benjamin, and Andrew T. H. Tan, eds. *The Taiwan Issue: Problems and Prospects*. London: Routledge, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429319082>. 68.

<sup>177</sup> Biddle, Stephen D. *Nonstate Warfare: The Military Methods of Guerillas, Warlords, and Militias*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021. 12.

<sup>178</sup> Schreer and Tan, *The Taiwan Issue*. 59.

<sup>179</sup> Opper, Marc. *People's Wars in China, Malaya, and Vietnam*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2020. 213.



### 4.3. The effect of irregular warfare by rival great powers.

As mentioned before, an occupation of Taiwan by the PRC also faces the potential risk of provoking a military response from other great powers within the international system. The USA being the most prominent example, since as a regional hegemon within the international system, it can be expected to seek and prevent the rise of other regional hegemons.<sup>180</sup> At the same time however, they are unlikely to pursue this course at any cost, only engaging in a direct military confrontation when they could rationally assume a quick victory to be the most likely outcome. If this is not the case, a more likely course of action for the USA to follow would be to make the invasion as costly as possible for the PRC by protracting the conflict.<sup>181</sup>

A good example of what such a strategy would look like can now be observed in Western support for Ukraine in the current Russo-Ukrainian War. While the states that are providing aid do not engage in direct military confrontations with the attacker, they provide the defender with economic support, military equipment and intelligence. At the same time economic sanctions are issued against the attacker in order to weaken their capability to amass wealth to convert into military power.<sup>182</sup> By providing this aid, the supporter is able to make the conflict exceedingly more costly for the attacker than it would have been otherwise, because both its economic power and military power are linked to those of the supporting states, increasing their ability to resist.<sup>183</sup> By effectively linking two of their sources of power to that of the defender the supporter can use its power to achieve military victories against the defender without engaging them in a formal war. differences in technological advancement of military equipment .<sup>184</sup>

This strategy does provide the supporter with another added benefit besides weakening the attackers position of power however. It also provides them with an

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<sup>180</sup> Mearsheimer, John J. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition)*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2003. 59.

<sup>181</sup> Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition)*. 170

<sup>182</sup> Reuters. "Russia's Economic Slump Will Wipe out 15 Years of Gains - IIF." *Reuters*, June 8, 2022, sec. European Markets. <https://www.reuters.com/markets/europe/russias-economic-slump-will-wipe-out-15-years-gains-iif-2022-06-08/>.

<sup>183</sup> Weissmann, Mikael, Niklas Nilsson, Björn Palmertz, and Per Thunholm. *Hybrid Warfare: Security and Asymmetric Conflict in International Relations*. I.B. Tauris, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781788317795>.

<sup>184</sup> Mearsheimer, John J. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition)*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2003. 59.

information advantage against the attacker. Mearsheimer argues that while wealth is an important factor in determining state power since it can be converted into military power, it is not always key. The reason for this being that states tend to convert their wealth into military assets that they deem to be the most effective in combating the military challenges that they expect to face. However states are not always able to accurately predict which type of military assets are most effective in the conflicts that they will stand to face. This brings with it the risk of mispending their defense budget on the wrong military assets for combatting the threat that they are presented with.<sup>185</sup>

By supplying the defender with a portion of its own military hardware and intelligence, the supplier can test their effectiveness against the attackers. This provides them with key insights into the effectiveness of its own combat strategies and military equipment in a potential future conflict with the attacker. This provides the supplier with a sizeable information advantage since it will have gained new insights into the performance of its military equipment and strategies against the attacker as well as providing them real examples of the attackers capabilities. This means that the supplier is able to adjust their defensive spending to more accurately reflect the needs of its armed forces in the case of a future confrontation with the attacker. Thus, the supplier can lessen the chance of mispending and more effectively convert its wealth into military power, increasing their own position of power as opposed to the attacker.<sup>186</sup>

#### **4.4 conclusion.**

In its calculations whether or not to invade Taiwan, the PRC needs to consider more than just the strength of its armed forces as opposed to Taiwan. It also needs to consider the strategic and international complications that it will face when it chooses to launch an invasion. Examples from modern military conflicts have shown that within modern irregular warfare, an irregular combatant is able to confront a conventional opponent even when there is a strong power imbalance between the two sides.<sup>187</sup> Furthermore even if occupation of

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<sup>185</sup> Mearsheimer, John J. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition)*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2003. 99.

<sup>186</sup> Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition)*. 99.

<sup>187</sup> Weissmann, Mikael, Niklas Nilsson, Björn Palmertz, and Per Thunholm. *Hybrid Warfare: Security and Asymmetric Conflict in International Relations*. I.B. Tauris, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781788317795>. 37.

territory is achieved, an irregular opponent is still capable of carrying out military operations against the occupier, as long as it is able to maintain the capacity to fight. This results in the occupier having to keep a sizeable military presence within the occupied territory greatly increasing the costs of invasion.<sup>188</sup>

Finally it has to be kept in mind that engaging in a protracted war with an irregular combatant leaves one vulnerable to hybrid warfare actions by rival great powers via this irregular combatant. By providing the irregular combatants with economic support, military equipment and intelligence, rival great powers are able to protract the conflict further increasing the cost for the attacking great power. It also provides rival great power with key insights into the effectiveness of their military hardware and strategies against the attacking great power, providing them with a future military advantage against them.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Opper, Marc. *People's Wars in China, Malaya, and Vietnam*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2020. 213.

<sup>189</sup> Mearsheimer, John J. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition)*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2003. 99.

## Chapter 5. Conclusion.

While states act according to the bedrock assumptions of offensive realism theory as put forward by John J. Mearsheimer, the current understanding of offensive realism theory fails to take new methods of warfare into consideration which has led to the theory struggling to explain several aspects of the modern security competition, including the case of Taiwan. In this case the economic fallout that would result from any PRC invasion of Taiwan, has served to dissuade the PRC to attempt an invasion up to this point. While the economy is often seen as an aspect of soft power, it has gained increasing hard power connotations. The first and most obvious of these has already been pointed out by Mearsheimer, namely the conversion of economic power into military power. However, there are several other angles within which the economy affects a nation's capability to project power. The first of these is a nation's ability to sustain itself during military engagements. In other words, the degree within which a nation can resist what Mearsheimer refers to as bloodletting strategies.<sup>190</sup> Secondly, a nation that derives a lot of its legitimacy from economic growth generated for its citizens, such as the PRC, needs to be able to access the international system for access to international trade in order to sustain this growth or find another way of legitimizing its authority. While nationalism can be used to this degree to some extent, this is difficult to achieve in a nation that already faces challenges to its legitimacy in several regions such as Tibet and Hongkong.<sup>191</sup> With nationalism an unlikely to be able to replace economic growth as the legitimizing factor for the CCP, the CCP cannot risk its economic growth by invading Taiwan. While states, according to Mearsheimer, seek to maximize the share of the world's wealth that they control, It has to be taken into consideration that attempting to seize wealth can bring with it the risk of losing a share of the world's wealth that the state already controls.<sup>192</sup>

Overall offensive realism theory has mainly focused on hard power as to being key

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<sup>190</sup> Mearsheimer, John J. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition)*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2003. 172.

<sup>191</sup> Chan, Melissa, Philip Caruso, Grace Hearty, Pamela Kennedy, Sahana Kumar, Brandon Lee, Heidi Obermeyer, Noah Metheny, and Ali Wyne. "Hong Kong and Taiwan: Two Davids Facing a Chinese Goliath." Perspectives on Taiwan. Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), 2020. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep29479.6>. 21.

<sup>192</sup> Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition)*. 162.

in determining positions of power within the international system.<sup>193</sup> While I do not disregard the importance of hard power within determining a state's position of power, I would argue that the role of soft power in determining a state's position of power is underestimated. While hard power remains key in a state its capability to achieve military objectives over other states, it is no longer the only or most efficient way within which this can be achieved. This is characterized by the rise of hybrid warfare. This allows states to harm their rivals relative position of power compared to their own without many of the risks associated with conventional warfare, especially in a conflict involving nuclear powers.<sup>194</sup>

The reason why the PRC would find itself in this position if it were to invade Taiwan, is due to the role of the international system in capacity within which a state is able to generate wealth. The increasing diversification of supply chains has led to most corporations being dependent on one or more foreign companies for the supplies they need to function, making any disruption or loss of global supply chains detrimental to domestic economies.<sup>195</sup> Furthermore, the PRC its position as an export economy, with exports being as part of the PRC's GDP being 18,5% in 2020, means that it is highly dependent on access to key foreign markets to maintain its economic growth.<sup>196</sup>

The PRC also has to take into account that an invasion of Taiwan could result in a protracted military confrontation between its armed forces and an irregular defender. This would force the PRC to dedicate a sizeable military presence to Taiwan for a protracted period of time to subdue these irregular forces. Increasing the prospective cost of invasion.<sup>197</sup> If the PRC were to place itself in this position, it would furthermore leave itself vulnerable to hybrid warfare strategies by rival great powers. These could seek to limit the PRC's gains in power from the invasion by prolonging the military conflict as much as possible by supporting these irregular defense forces with military equipment, intelligence

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<sup>193</sup> Ohnesorge, Hendrik W. *Soft Power: The Forces of Attraction in International Relations*. Global Power Shift. Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2020. 8.

<sup>194</sup> Mearsheimer, John J. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition)*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2003. 164.

<sup>195</sup> Shih, Willy. "Is It Time to Rethink Globalized Supply Chains?" *MIT Sloan Management Review* 61, no. 4 (Summer 2020): 1.

<sup>196</sup> Exports of Goods and Services (% of GDP) - China | Data." Accessed June 23, 2022.

<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NE.EXP.GNFS.ZS?locations=CN>.

<sup>197</sup> Schreer, Benjamin, and Andrew T. H. Tan, eds. *The Taiwan Issue: Problems and Prospects*. London: Routledge, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429319082>. 59.

and economic support. It would also mean that these rival great powers would be able to gain insights into the usefulness of their military against the PRC thus giving them an information advantage in future conflicts.<sup>198</sup>

Thus, because hybrid warfare capabilities by its rivals increase the perspective costs of an invasion of Taiwan for the PRC to such an extent that it would outweigh the prospective power benefits. The reason for this being that the PRC would be faced with both the high cost of invasion and occupation, as well as a loss in revenue from foreign trade with rival great powers and their allies.<sup>199</sup>

Furthermore the PRC would also have to factor in that when its state-owned companies lose the ability to operate within rival great powers, they lose these companies as potential tools for power projection. This includes the direct economic loss in power suffered from closure or seizure of the company by the rival great power, but also their capability to serve as assets from which to influence the great powers political, economic and information networks. In the case of Taiwan itself this is an even more relevant issue, since these channels enable the PRC to enact hybrid warfare operations against Taiwan. These operations allow the PRC to increase its influence over Taiwan without the need for military intervention. Deepening economic ties between Taiwan and the PRC, allow the PRC to influence Taiwan. Examples include funding political candidates that are favorable of closer ties with the PRC, obtaining intelligence via espionage, or the spread of (mis)information to increase public support for unification. Under the rule of Xi Jinping the use of these strategies against Taiwan have increased significantly. With actions taken against Taiwan ranging from cyberattacks, to the funding of Taiwanese political actors to influence the island's political system.<sup>200</sup>

Based on all of these factors it becomes clear how the PRC's decision to refrain from invading Taiwan up to this point can be explained from an offensive realist perspective. The prospective damage to the PRC's economy, caused by both the invasion itself as well as costs derived from a loss of access to key parts of the international system, would cost the

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<sup>198</sup> Weissmann, Mikael, Niklas Nilsson, Björn Palmertz, and Per Thunholm. *Hybrid Warfare: Security and Asymmetric Conflict in International Relations*. I.B. Tauris, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781788317795>. 37.

<sup>199</sup> Breslin, Shaun. *China Risen? Studying Chinese Global Power*. Bristol Studies in East Asian International Relations. Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2021 152..

<sup>200</sup> Weissmann, Mikael, Niklas Nilsson, Björn Palmertz, and Per Thunholm. *Hybrid Warfare: Security and Asymmetric Conflict in International Relations*. I.B. Tauris, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781788317795>. 178.

PRC more power than they would stand to gain. At the same time hybrid warfare strategies that are being enacted by the PRC are already providing them with a potential means of reunifying Taiwan with the rest of China at a much lower cost. In other words, the PRC has not given up on reunification of Taiwan with the rest of China, it simply does not believe military force to be the most effective tool for doing so at this point. Instead it is seeking to gain control over Taiwan at as low a cost towards its own wealth and power in the process.

In the words of Sun Tzu: *In war, victory is the prize, not long campaigns. The wise man knows that the leader of an army influences also the fate of the population at large, and steers his country towards safety or danger.*<sup>201</sup>

## **5.1 Theoretical argument:**

While I agree with the bedrock assumptions and overall theoretical framework of offensive realism theory<sup>202</sup>, it has more and more difficulty explaining state behavior after the end of the Cold War. I argue here that this is not due to the theory itself being flawed, but because it overlooks the emergence of hybrid warfare strategies and its implications for international relations. Because war is viewed within offensive realism theory as a binary system of war and peace, it fails to explain the effects of modern hybrid warfare which does no longer operate within just these binary positions, both rather in the grey zone between them. These strategies can be easily incorporated within our current understanding of offensive realism theory. After all the objectives that states seek to achieve, namely the maximization of power in order to ensure their own survival, remains unchanged, the only thing that changes are the means available to them to achieve it. Hybrid warfare allows for states to increase their own position of power relative to that of other states without the risks associated with fighting a conventional war. In the case of Taiwan, The PRC has by no means given up on its desire to gain control of the island, it has merely recognized that there are other options for the PRC to gain control of the Island, which offers an opportunity to obtain the island without the cost of a conventional invasion of Taiwan.

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<sup>201</sup> Sunzi, and Jonathan Clements. *The art of war*, 2017. 51

<sup>202</sup> Mearsheimer, John J. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition)*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2003. 49, 50.

## 5.2 Societal relevance.

The role played by hybrid warfare in the security competition between Taiwan and the PRC, provides us with a clear example of how the increasing interconnectedness between states, markets and populations that the world has experienced over the past three decades, are presenting states with opportunities for growth but also with a new set of challenges. Global supply chains present states with access to cheaper means of production but also makes them more dependent on other nations for its economic growth. Digital media platforms have led to populations becoming more interconnected than ever before, but at the same time also provided the most efficient platforms for (mis)information campaigns the world has ever seen. These provide nations as well as non-state actors with new tools to gain power. Tools that operate largely outside the common boundaries of warfare. Because of this the line between war and peace is becoming ever more blurred, with these strategies targeting states populations, not just their armed forces.<sup>203</sup> Here, I hope to have provided a clear example of how these new challenges affect the modern security environment of the international system and how they affect not just the relations between states, but also their populations, meaning that future rivalry between states has the potential to be waged of the battlefield as much as on it.

## 5.3 suggestions for future research

While the consideration of hybrid warfare strategies in modern state conflict allows for offensive realism theory to be able to better explain the PRC's decision not to invade Taiwan due to economic risks of such actions and a hybrid military strategy providing a safer alternative, this is still only one case study. Therefore, I would encourage a testing of this hypothesis against a wider variety of cases. The current war in Ukraine already presents us with new insights into the future of warfare in the twenty first century. Especially the fact that Russian hybrid warfare strategies seem to largely have failed to bring about their desired result.<sup>204</sup> Studying the reason behind this apparent failure might lead to valuable insights into the limits of hybrid warfare, allowing for a clearer understanding of its capabilities as well as its limitations.

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<sup>203</sup> Weissmann, Mikael, Niklas Nilsson, Björn Palmertz, and Per Thunholm. *Hybrid Warfare: Security and Asymmetric Conflict in International Relations*. I.B. Tauris, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781788317795>. 1.

<sup>204</sup> Weissmann et al., *Hybrid Warfare*. 200.



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