



**Death by a Thousand Cuts:
The Consequences of the West's Tepid Response to Grey Zone Activities**

Lieutenant Colonel Piotr A. Gajewski

JCSP 49 DL

Exercise Solo Flight

Disclaimer

Opinions expressed remain those of the author and do not represent Department of National Defence or Canadian Forces policy. This paper may not be used without written permission.

© His Majesty the King in Right of Canada, as represented by the Minister of National Defence, 2024.

PCEMI n° 49 AD

Exercice Solo Flight

Avertissement

Les opinions exprimées n'engagent que leurs auteurs et ne reflètent aucunement des politiques du Ministère de la Défense nationale ou des Forces canadiennes. Ce papier ne peut être reproduit sans autorisation écrite.

© Sa Majesté le Roi du chef du Canada, représenté par le ministre de la Défense nationale, 2024.

CANADIAN FORCES COLLEGE - COLLÈGE DES FORCES CANADIENNES

JCSP 49 DL - PCEMI n° 49 AD
2022 - 2024

Exercise Solo Flight – Exercice Solo Flight

**Death by a Thousand Cuts:
The Consequences of the West's Tepid Response to Grey Zone Activities**

Lieutenant Colonel Piotr A. Gajewski

“This paper was written by a candidate attending the Canadian Forces College in fulfilment of one of the requirements of the Course of Studies. The paper is a scholastic document, and thus contains facts and opinions which the author alone considered appropriate and correct for the subject. It does not necessarily reflect the policy or the opinion of any agency, including the Government of Canada and the Canadian Department of National Defence. This paper may not be released, quoted or copied, except with the express permission of the Canadian Department of National Defence.”

« La présente étude a été rédigée par un stagiaire du Collège des Forces canadiennes pour satisfaire à l'une des exigences du cours. L'étude est un document qui se rapporte au cours et contient donc des faits et des opinions que seul l'auteur considère appropriés et convenables au sujet. Elle ne reflète pas nécessairement la politique ou l'opinion d'un organisme quelconque, y compris le gouvernement du Canada et le ministère de la Défense nationale du Canada. Il est défendu de diffuser, de citer ou de reproduire cette étude sans la permission expresse du ministère de la Défense nationale. »

Death by a Thousand Cuts: The Consequences of the West's Tepid Response to Grey Zone Activities

Introduction

In recent years, totalitarian and authoritarian regimes have embraced the use of *grey zone* activities to help advance their revisionist agendas and to sow discord among their adversaries. What are these grey zone activities? Hal Brands, a Senior Fellow in the Foreign Policy Research Institute's Program on National Security, offers the following concise definition: "*activity that is coercive and aggressive in nature, but that is deliberately designed to remain below the threshold of conventional military conflict and open interstate war.*"¹ Typical examples of grey zone activities include cyber-attacks, the use of criminal syndicates as proxies, and political interference; however, grey zone activities can also be more akin to campaigns, such as China's building of artificial islands in the South China Sea, or Russia's campaign against Ukraine that led to the annexation of Crimea in 2014. While a host of nations operate in the grey zone, this essay will focus on China and Russia, as their activities pose the greatest threat to the rules-based international order.

The primary advantage of operating in the grey zone is that the activities, despite being aggressive and coercive, do not constitute acts of war, therefore making it unreasonable for defenders to retaliate with state-on-state conflict. Additionally, grey zone activities are often difficult to attribute to a nation, especially those activities that are easily outsourced to proxy agents, such as cyber-attacks. Prolific grey zone actors, such as China and Russia, know this, and when coupled with the rules and regulations that ostensibly hamper the West from a retaliation perspective, the decision to operate in the grey zone in a business-as-usual manner is a no-brainer. While the West likely carries out its own grey zone activities, especially in the cyber domain, authoritarian and totalitarian regimes are not bound by the same rules as the West, and therefore the breadth of grey zone 'tools' available at their disposal is much wider than that of the West.²

Though some grey zone activities are difficult to attribute, examples such as China's expansionism in the South China Sea and Russia's annexation of Crimea illustrate that some are brazen. Despite the brazen nature of these activities, the West has demonstrated a half-hearted approach to counter them, leaving China and Russia free to operate with nothing more than light sanctions as the response, which, as the case studies will show, were largely inconsequential. Such tepid responses to grey zone activities conducted by Russia, China, and their proxies, only serve to embolden the perpetrators and place the West at a strategic and operational disadvantage in the long-term. This is evident through China's expansionism in the South China Sea affording it significant military and economic benefits in the region, and Russia gaining control of large swathes of Ukrainian territory in the prelude to invasion. These, along with other grey zone activities carried out by China and Russia will be analysed through case studies, followed by an analysis of the West's responses, and the implications of those responses.

Case Studies – China

In 1999, two People's Liberation Army (PLA) colonels, Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui, wrote a treatise titled *Unrestricted Warfare*, in which the authors proposed that war is no longer confined to the military, but instead able to be fought through various other mechanisms, using examples such as financial warfare, economic warfare, and cultural

¹ Hal Brands, 'Paradoxes of the Gray Zone', Available at SSRN 2737593, 2016.

² Elisabeth Braw, *The Defender's Dilemma: Identifying and Deterring Gray-Zone Aggression* (Washington, DC, UNITED STATES: AEI Press, 2022), <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/cfvlibrary-ebooks/detail.action?docID=6884132>, p10-11.

warfare, amongst others.³ While *Unrestricted Warfare* was not government policy, it provided an insight into the thinking of senior military officials at the time, and based on China's current embrace of grey zone activities, the treatise likely influenced Chinese policy makers in the years following its publication. Today, China uses a raft of grey zone activities such as legally ambiguous expansionism, economic coercion, intellectual property theft, cyber-attacks, and engineered incidents around Taiwan to achieve a broad range of outcomes in support of its political, economic, and military objectives. This essay will focus on two contemporary cases of China's grey zone activities: expansionism in the South China Sea, and economic coercion.

Expansionism in the South China Sea

Arguably, the most controversial grey zone activity China has undertaken in recent history is its creeping expansionism in the South China Sea. China asserts territorial claims out to the so-called 'nine-dash line' that demarcates its territory, and which it justifies based on a historical atlas that it published in 1933 and later updated in 1953.⁴ The claimed territory is vast and rich in minerals, oil, gas, and fishing resources,⁵ but this is only partially the reason why China so aggressively defends its claims. The territory is host to four major archipelagos and numerous reefs and shoals, some of which were already big enough to host infrastructure, such as the Paracels, and those which were not, such as (with the exception of the Taiwan administered Itu Aba Island) the Spratlys.⁶

Not content with the status quo in the South China Sea, China commenced the process of constructing artificial islands over its claimed reefs in the Spratlys about a decade ago, gaining approximately thirteen square kilometres of land surface in the process.⁷ This newly acquired land was then built upon, primarily with military and logistics infrastructure such as runways, hangars, port facilities, and populated with military hardware such as radars and missile batteries.⁸ What is particularly interesting about China's terraforming exercise is that it went largely unopposed by the West; in fact, it was not until 2020 that the US implemented sanctions against individuals and companies that were involved in the construction of the islands.⁹

In what can only be described as a masterful display of operating in the grey zone, China solidified its territorial claims and gained a significant operational advantage through the ability to project military force approximately 1200km from its mainland – a significant distance that confers tangible benefits when considering operational ranges of radars, missiles, and military aircraft. Furthermore, China's ability to host a meaningful military presence in the disputed region is arguably critically important for exercising control of the shipping lanes in the region.

³ Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui, *Unrestricted Warfare* (Beijing: PLA Literature and Arts Publishing House Arts., 1999), p55.

⁴ Dominic Alessio and Wesley Renfro, 'Building Empires Litorally in the South China Sea: Artificial Islands and Contesting Definitions of Imperialism', *International Politics* 59, no. 4 (1 August 2022): 695–696, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41311-021-00328-x>.

⁵ *Ibid*, 695.

⁶ *Ibid*, 692.

⁷ *Ibid*, 694.

⁸ Michael J Mazarr et al., 'What Deters and Why: Applying a Framework to Assess Deterrence of Gray Zone Aggression', 2021, 26.

⁹ Warsaw Institute, 'USA Sanctions Chinese Companies Involved in Building Artificial Islands on South China Sea', September 2020, <https://warsawinstitute.org/usa-sanctions-chinese-companies-involved-building-artificial-islands-south-china-sea/>.

Economic Coercion

China's position as the world's second largest economy¹⁰ confers it a significant power imbalance when negotiating with the overwhelming majority of its trade partners. China is still largely dependent on cordial relations with its trade partners to ensure the steady flow of the exports that bring it the wealth it has today; however, it is not afraid to exert pressure in the form of economic coercion on nations that it perceives to have infringed its core interests.¹¹ A salient example of such coercion is Beijing's retaliation to Norway's awarding of the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize to a Chinese dissident. In this instance, in addition to halting trade and diplomatic ties, Beijing implemented a series of regulatory measures and sanitary requirements to significantly reduce imports of salmon from Norway.¹² The issue was eventually resolved when after initially rejecting requests for an apology from China, Norway folded and not only apologised, but also admitted to harming "*mutual trust*".¹³ The economic coercion was so powerful that Norway declined an invitation to meet the Dalai Lama years later.¹⁴ It is readily apparent that China's economic coercion tactics are not ad-hoc or ill-prepared, but rather a well-practiced tool of Chinese economic statecraft used with surgical precision to bully nations into submission.

Case Studies – Russia

Russia sees operating in the grey zone as a fundamental part of *gibridnaya voyna*, or 'hybrid warfare', a term that is often linked to 'Gerasimov Doctrine', named after General Valerii Gerasimov, who originally coined the term as a reference to Western hybrid warfare tactics used against Russia in Libya and during the Arab Spring.¹⁵ While the term was originally used to characterise the West's actions against Russia, and the concepts sometimes diverge from the Western notions of hybrid warfare, *gibridnaya voyna* nonetheless encompasses actions whose purpose are to avoid the conventional battlefield and instead defeat an adversary through a combination of financial, political, ideological and informational techniques that tear apart its society and cause an internal collapse.¹⁶ Russia has embraced *gibridnaya voyna* and its associated grey zone activities over the past decade, evidenced by its undertaking of cyber operations, political interference, misinformation and disinformation campaigns, and assassinations, all of which Russia routinely denies carrying out, despite evidence to the contrary.¹⁷

Little Green Men

One of the most prominent Russian grey zone activities in recent history is the *little green men* campaign in Crimea. Almost immediately after Ukraine's 'Maidan Revolution' in February 2014, during which the Russian aligned president Victor Yanukovich was ousted, armed men in Russian military fatigues without insignia began occupying Crimea and seizing

¹⁰ U.S. Bank, 'Analysis: China's Economy and Its Influence on Global Markets | U.S. Bank', May 2024, [https://www.usbank.com/investing/financial-perspectives/market-news/chinas-economic-influence.html#:~:text=Is%20China%20the%20largest%20economy,Gross%20Domestic%20Product%20\(GDP\).](https://www.usbank.com/investing/financial-perspectives/market-news/chinas-economic-influence.html#:~:text=Is%20China%20the%20largest%20economy,Gross%20Domestic%20Product%20(GDP).)

¹¹ Rafał Wiśniewski, 'Economic Sanctions as a Tool of China's Hybrid Strategies', *Polish Political Science/Polish Political Science Yearbook* 50, no. 3 (September 2021): 91–103, <https://doi.org/10.15804/ppsy202133>.

¹² Peter Harrell, Elizabeth Rosenberg, and Edoardo Saravalle, *China's Use of Coercive Economic Measures* (Center for a New American Security Washington, DC, 2018), p9.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Mikael Weissmann et al., 'Hybrid Warfare: Security and Asymmetric Conflict in International Relations.' (London (UK): I.B. Tauris, 2021), <http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781788317795>, p22.

¹⁶ Ibid., p86.

¹⁷ Ibid., p24.

government buildings and blockading Ukrainian military bases.¹⁸ Despite Moscow's denial, the little green men were in fact Russian special forces who set the conditions for a Ukrainian surrender and bloodless seizure of Crimea.¹⁹ Shortly after Russian forces took control of Crimea, Moscow installed a pro-Russian government and organised a referendum that resulted in the secession of Crimea from Ukraine.²⁰ In mid-March, the new pro-Russian government requested to become part of the Russian Federation, and before the end of March, Russia had formally annexed Crimea.²¹ In less than a month, Russia had managed to render useless the Ukrainian forces stationed in Crimea, seize the entire Crimean peninsula, and organise a sham referendum that resulted in the seizure of Crimea from Ukraine. The use of little green men as proxy agents was a prime example of grey zone tactics, whereby Russian involvement, although easily deduced, could not be definitively attributed. The ambiguity caused by the unattributable agents protected Russia from a response by inducing a hesitation to respond, as any defender is likely to exercise a greater deal of caution when responding to such a situation.²²

Playing the Long Game

In hindsight, the little green men campaign marked the beginning of an eight-year Russian grey zone campaign against Ukraine that would eventually culminate in a full-scale invasion in 2022. Russia was angered by the 2014 Euromaidan protests, the ousting of its puppet leader, and Ukraine's broader shift away from Russia and towards Europe, and likely felt that it needed to act in the fear that Moscow would lose influence in Ukraine. The annexation of Crimea marked the first major milestone of Moscow's grey zone campaign. In Apr 2014, only a month after annexation of Crimea, the war in the Donbas commenced, and pro-Russian separatists declared independence of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic.²³ Sham independence referendums were soon held, with an overwhelming 'yes' vote declared – the results were recognised by Russia, but not by Ukraine or the West.²⁴

Over the coming years, Russia would commence other lines of effort in the grey zone. In 2015, Moscow began using energy as leverage by cutting off gas to Ukraine and not only demanding upfront payments for future supply, but also demanding immediate repayment of outstanding debts associated with prior supply.²⁵ Later that same year, Ukraine's power grid would become the target of cyber-attacks. While the likely culprit was Russia, again, Ukrainian government and NATO officials could only ever ascribe a probability to the assertion that it was indeed Moscow that carried out the attacks.²⁶ Russia's use of the cyber domain soon extended beyond attacking Ukrainian infrastructure and institutions. Russia used cyber operations as a key enabler for their misinformation and disinformation activities,

¹⁸ Steven Pifer, 'Crimea: Six Years After Illegal Annexation', March 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/crimea-six-years-after-illegal-annexation/>.

¹⁹ Mark Galeotti, "'Hybrid War' and 'Little Green Men': How It Works, and How It Doesn't", June 2016, <http://www.e-ir.info/2015/04/16/hybrid-war-and-little-green-men-how-it-works-and-how-it-doesnt/>.

²⁰ Mikael Weissmann et al., 'Hybrid Warfare: Security and Asymmetric Conflict in International Relations.', p216

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Romain HOUËIX, 'From the Maidan Protests to Russia's Invasion: Eight Years of Conflict in Ukraine', France 24, 2022, <https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20220228-from-the-maidan-protests-to-russia-s-invasion-eight-years-of-conflict-in-ukraine>.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Dani Belo, 'Conflict in the Absence of War: A Comparative Analysis of China and Russia Engagement in Gray Zone Conflicts', in *Trade and Conflict* (Routledge, 2022), p79.

²⁶ Ibid, p81.

which not only targeted Ukraine, but also ventured into international political interference, such as occurred during the 2016 and 2020 US presidential elections.²⁷

Analysis of the West's Response to Grey Zone Activities

As illustrated by the case studies, there have been a number of occasions where the West has either not responded at all to aggression in the grey zone, or at best, responded in a token manner, such as was the case with limited sanctions against some of the parties involved in artificial island construction in the South China Sea. In the case of sanctions, to the credit of the West, sanctions were significantly expanded against Russia upon the invasion of Ukraine. Despite this, we are now two years into the war, and Russia is ostensibly weathering the sanctions rather well, mostly due to issues with enforcement. While Russia's natural gas exports have been crippled, it has still been able to sell its oil to Asian customers and partially replace the market it lost in Europe.²⁸ There is little that can be done to force Russia's Asian customers to join in on the Western sanctions, so for the sanctions against Russia's energy sector to truly bite could take many years. Other sanctions against Russia that have been largely ineffectual are those related to the semiconductors needed for advanced technologies. The West imposed strict sanctions against the export of semiconductors and related equipment, however, there have been reports that a steady stream of these items is still making its way to Russia via intermediary nations such as China and Hong Kong, Thailand, India, United Arab Emirates, and even the Maldives.²⁹

There is sound reasoning behind the absence of decisive action against grey zone activities, particularly those activities carried out by Russia and China – both of whom have considerable military power and in the case of China, economic power. The first and foremost reason is likely the fear of escalation to a point where it draws multiple parties into a conventional conflict. From a political perspective, it may be more prudent to exercise restraint and prevent a flashpoint for war, especially if the grey zone activities are not directly impacting the West. While this may seem like a reasonable approach, one cannot help but draw parallels with the road to the Second World War, and the apathy that allowed Germany to achieve numerous early quick victories and gain operational advantage, the consequences of which were arguably a much more difficult six years of war for the Allied powers. The second reason for not pursuing decisive action, especially in the case of China, likely stems from the threat of economic coercion, especially for those nations where China is a key market, such as Australia, where 34.2% of its total exports in 2019 were to China alone.³⁰ For nations reliant on China as a trade partner, especially for exports, ensuring cordial relations is just *realpolitik*.

Conclusion

While it may be difficult for the West to counter grey zone activities, there are long-term consequences that need to be considered should a weak response policy be adopted. Weak responses will invite further grey zone aggression not only from Russia and China, but also from other opportunist perpetrators that realise they can get away with such actions. One such example is Russia's ally Belarus joining the fray by weaponising migrants with

²⁷ National Intelligence Council (US), *Foreign Threats to the 2020 US Federal Elections* (National Intelligence Council, 2021).

²⁸ Vladimir Milov, 'Oil, Gas, and War: The Effect of Sanctions on the Russian Energy Industry', May 2024, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/content-series/russia-tomorrow/oil-gas-and-war/>.

²⁹ Chris Miller, 'The Impact of Semiconductor Sanctions on Russia' (American Enterprise Institute, 2024), JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep58545>.

³⁰ Australian Government, 'TREASURY MINISTERIAL BRIEF - Economic Impact of China's Trade Restrictions on the Australian Economy' (Australian Government - Department of Treasury, December 2021), <https://treasury.gov.au/the-department/accountability-reporting/foi/3001>.

impunity in an effort to cause a migrant crisis on the Polish border.³¹ Cyber-attacks on Western institutions and corporations are becoming more common. Each time a leak of personal data from a trusted institution occurs, it results in massive economic losses for the target nation and undermines the population's confidence in the government. Political interference in the West is arguably a high pay-off activity. For China and Russia, meddling with a nation's politics requires little investment and results in little punishment for the outsized reward of undermining a nation's institutions, and sowing discord and division among the target population. Lastly, the use of transnational criminal elements as proxies has become a permanent fixture in the grey zone toolbox. In some cases, nations need not have the criminal elements on the payroll; simply turning a blind eye to transnational criminal activities that foster social discord, instability and misery is a convenient way for nations to mask attribution. The following is a pertinent example regarding the fentanyl crisis in the United States:

While China takes counternarcotics diplomacy in Southeast Asia and the Pacific very seriously, its operational law enforcement cooperation tends to be highly selective, self-serving, limited, and subordinate to its geopolitical interests. Beijing rarely acts against the top echelons of Chinese criminal syndicates unless they specifically contradict a narrow set of interests of the Chinese Government. Chinese criminal networks provide a variety of services to Chinese legal business enterprises, including those connected to government officials and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).³²

If the West is serious about addressing the grey zone issue, it needs to disincentivise operating in the grey zone. As long as grey zone actors can operate with little risk and reap disproportionately high rewards, it logically follows that grey zone aggression will only increase in frequency and audacity. Sanctions need to be complemented with strict policies of enforcement, which includes the early identification and closing of loopholes. Western governments need to work together to develop unified responses as sharing of information and unity of effort will increase the efficiency and efficacy of responses. Lastly, Western governments need to have honest dialogue with their constituents so that responses to grey zone activities are not hijacked by partisan politics. The West must not allow itself to be divided and conquered by totalitarian and authoritarian states.

³¹ Elisabeth Braw, 'Belarus's Weaponized Migrants Offer a Primer on Gray-Zone Warfare', *Defense One* (Washington: Government Executive Media Group, 3 November 2021), 2915959650, ProQuest Central, <https://login.cfc.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/magazines/belarus-s-weaponized-migrants-offer-primer-on/docview/2915959650/se-2?accountid=9867>.

³² Vanda Felbab-Brown, 'China's Role in the Fentanyl Crisis', March 2023, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/chinas-role-in-the-fentanyl-crisis/>.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alessio, Dominic, and Wesley Renfro. 'Building Empires Litorally in the South China Sea: Artificial Islands and Contesting Definitions of Imperialism'. *International Politics* 59, no. 4 (1 August 2022): 687–706. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41311-021-00328-x>.
- Australian Government. 'Treasury Ministerial Brief - Economic Impact of China's Trade Restrictions on the Australian Economy'. Australian Government - Department of Treasury, December 2021. <https://treasury.gov.au/the-department/accountability-reporting/foi/3001>.
- Belo, Dani. 'Conflict in the Absence of War: A Comparative Analysis of China and Russia Engagement in Gray Zone Conflicts'. In *Trade and Conflict*, 73–91. Routledge, 2022.
- Brands, Hal. 'Paradoxes of the Gray Zone'. *Available at SSRN 2737593*, 2016.
- Braw, Elisabeth. 'Belarus's Weaponized Migrants Offer a Primer on Gray-Zone Warfare'. *Defense One*, Washington: Government Executive Media Group, 3 November 2021. 2915959650. ProQuest Central. <https://login.cfc.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/magazines/belarus-s-weaponized-migrants-offer-primer-on/docview/2915959650/se-2?accountid=9867>.
- . *The Defender's Dilemma : Identifying and Deterring Gray-Zone Aggression*. Washington, DC, United States: AEI Press, 2022. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/cfvlibrary-ebooks/detail.action?docID=6884132>.
- Felbab-Brown, Vanda. 'China's Role in the Fentanyl Crisis', March 2023. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/chinas-role-in-the-fentanyl-crisis/>.
- Galeotti, Mark. "'Hybrid War" and "Little Green Men": How It Works, and How It Doesn't', June 2016. <http://www.e-ir.info/2015/04/16/hybrid-war-and-little-green-men-how-it-works-and-how-it-doesnt/>.
- Harrell, Peter, Elizabeth Rosenberg, and Edoardo Saravalle. *China's Use of Coercive Economic Measures*. Center for a New American Security Washington, DC, 2018.
- Institute, Warsaw. 'USA Sanctions Chinese Companies Involved in Building Artificial Islands on South China Sea', September 2020. <https://warsawinstitute.org/usa-sanctions-chinese-companies-involved-building-artificial-islands-south-china-sea/>.
- Liang, Qiao, and Wang Xiangsui. *Unrestricted Warfare*. Beijing: PLA Literature and Arts Publishing House Arts., 1999.
- Mazarr, Michael J, Stephanie Pezard, Joe Cheravitch, and Jeffrey W Hornung. 'What Deters and Why: Applying a Framework to Assess Deterrence of Gray Zone Aggression', 2021.
- Mikael Weissmann, Niklas Nilsson, Björn Palmertz, and Per Thunholm. 'Hybrid Warfare: Security and Asymmetric Conflict in International Relations.' London (UK): I.B. Tauris, 2021. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781788317795>.
- Miller, Chris. 'The Impact of Semiconductor Sanctions on Russia'. American Enterprise Institute, 2024. JSTOR. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep58545>.

Milov, Vladimir. 'Oil, Gas, and War: The Effect of Sanctions on the Russian Energy Industry', May 2024. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/content-series/russia-tomorrow/oil-gas-and-war/>.

National Intelligence Council (US). *Foreign Threats to the 2020 US Federal Elections*. National Intelligence Council, 2021.

Pifer, Steven. 'Crimea: Six Years After Illegal Annexation', March 2020. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/crimea-six-years-after-illegal-annexation/>.

Romain HOUËIX. 'From the Maidan Protests to Russia's Invasion: Eight Years of Conflict in Ukraine'. France 24, 2022. <https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20220228-from-the-maidan-protests-to-russia-s-invasion-eight-years-of-conflict-in-ukraine>.

U.S. Bank. 'Analysis: China's Economy and Its Influence on Global Markets | U.S. Bank', May 2024. <https://www.usbank.com/investing/financial-perspectives/market-news/chinas-economic-influence.html>

Wiśniewski, Rafał. 'Economic Sanctions as a Tool of China's Hybrid Strategies'. *Polish Political Science/Polish Political Science Yearbook* 50, no. 3 (September 2021): 91–103. <https://doi.org/10.15804/ppsy202133>.