

# The Grey Zone Dilemma: Understanding and Responding to Political Warfare in Modern Defence Strategies

As an Australian Federal Senator, it is my responsibility to critically evaluate our nation's defence strategies and policies. The notable absence of 'grey zone' activities in the recent Australian Defence Strategic Review (DSR, 2023) presents a concerning gap in our national security framework. This omission is particularly striking when contrasted with the Defence Strategic Update (DSU, 2020), where the term was explicitly acknowledged. This critical analysis aims to unpack the implications of this oversight and the necessity for Australia to adapt to the evolving landscape of political warfare.

## Understanding the Grey Zone

The term 'grey zone' refers to activities that fall between the traditional spectrums of war and peace. These tactics are employed by state and non-state actors to achieve their strategic objectives without triggering an outright war. The DSU (2020) aptly defined these as activities "designed to coerce countries in ways that seek to avoid military conflict." The omission of this concept in the DSR (2023) raises questions about Australia's preparedness and understanding of these emerging forms of conflict.

## The Implications of Ignoring Grey Zone Activities

Ignoring grey zone activities in defence planning is akin to overlooking a critical dimension of modern warfare. Nations, including adversaries, are increasingly resorting to political, economic, and cyber tactics to influence and coerce without resorting to open conflict. By not explicitly addressing these tactics, Australia risks being unprepared for the subtle yet potent threats that these activities pose to national security and geopolitical stability.

## Adapting to Political Warfare

Adapting to political warfare demands a comprehensive approach that integrates military, diplomatic, economic, and informational tools. It calls for a nuanced understanding of the grey zone tactics and a robust strategy to counter them effectively.

**Enhanced Intelligence and Cyber Capabilities:** To counter grey zone threats, Australia must invest in advanced intelligence capabilities and cyber defence. This includes not only protecting our critical infrastructure but also being able to identify and respond to disinformation campaigns, cyber-attacks, and economic coercion.

**Strategic Communications:** Grey zone conflicts often involve battles of narratives. Australia needs a more concerted effort in strategic communications to counter propaganda and disinformation. This includes building resilience within our population against such tactics.

**Interagency Coordination:** Effective grey zone strategies require close coordination between various government departments and agencies. This includes defence, foreign affairs, trade, finance, and intelligence agencies working in unison to counter multifaceted grey zone tactics.

**Alliance Strengthening and International Cooperation:** Grey zone challenges are often transnational. Strengthening alliances and international cooperation, especially with nations facing similar threats, is crucial. Sharing intelligence, best practices, and joint training exercises can enhance collective defence against grey zone activities.

**Legal and Normative Frameworks:** There is a need for developing legal and normative frameworks at both national and international levels to address grey zone tactics. This includes setting clear red lines and consequences for nations that engage in such activities.

The omission of grey zone activities in the DSR (2023) represents a significant oversight in our national defence strategy. As a nation, we must recognise that the nature of conflict has evolved. The lines between war and peace are increasingly blurred, and our adversaries are exploiting this ambiguity. Australia must adapt its defence strategy to effectively counter and deter grey zone activities. This requires not only a reassessment of our military capabilities but also a holistic approach involving diplomatic, informational, and economic measures. As we move forward, it is imperative that we develop a comprehensive understanding of these unconventional tactics and integrate them into our national security framework to ensure the safety and prosperity of Australia in the complex geopolitical landscape of the 21st century.