



United States Institute of Peace

INDO-PACIFIC CRISIS RESPONSE
INSIGHTS FROM
A GRAY ZONE GAME

Making Peace Possible

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VISION

A world without violent conflict.

MISSION

To prevent, mitigate, and resolve violent conflicts around the world by engaging directly in conflict zones and linking analysis, training, and field programming in partnership with those working for sustainable peace.





WHAT IS THE IGF?

The **Interorganizational Global Forum (IGF)** is an annual activity organized by USIP in partnership with the Joint Staff J-7 to consider a complex global security challenge of key importance to U.S. national security and global peace and stability. It aims to bring together representatives from the U.S. government, allies and partners, international organizations, non-governmental organizations, academia, think tanks and the private sector to consider the issue.



IGF 2023

The April 2023 IGF focused on a **HA/DR scenario on Taiwan** amid geopolitical tensions between the United States and the People's Republic of China.

Day 1: A Gray Zone Game tabletop exercise

Day 2: Panel discussion with subject matter experts



IGF 2023 GOALS

Enhance stakeholder understanding of interorganizational efforts to develop more effective approaches to a humanitarian assistance and disaster relief effort during a crisis in the Indo-Pacific.

Inform policy, planning, and programming to include the direct and indirect impact of one country's intent and capability to influence another polity's internal affairs and external interactions during a crisis.



GRAY ZONE GAME: SANDBOX

USG Interagency (Washington)

National Security Council
Department of State
Department of Defense
USAID

USG (Hawaii)

INDOPACOM
CFE- DM

↑ Unscripted, Free Range for
Participant Responses

White Cell
Control 

Red Cell

↑ Scripted "Menu" of
Responses

Allies & Partners

Japan
Australia

Actors on Taiwan

Taiwan Authorities
Taiwan NGOs

↑ Unscripted, Free Range for
Participant Responses

Global Cells

International Industry
International Organizations

↑ Drafting analysis
throughout



GRAY ZONE GAME: STORY ARC

STARTEX

ENDEX



Inciting Incident
Natural Disaster


'Fukushima...
on Taiwan'


Rising Tension-
Unwelcome
Aid is Coming


Risk of Conflict-
Aid Arrives on
Taiwan


Modal
Outcome


MOVE 1

'Think'
+6 hours

MOVE 2

'Decide'
+48 hours

MOVE 3

'Act'
+72 hours



GRAY ZONE GAME: MOVE #1

+6 HOURS

- Earthquake/Tsunami on Taiwan
- Taiwan domestic response capabilities overwhelmed
- PRC demands countries to route aid through Beijing
- PRC uses state media to dominate the global narrative
- U.S. focuses on getting aid to Taiwan as quickly as possible

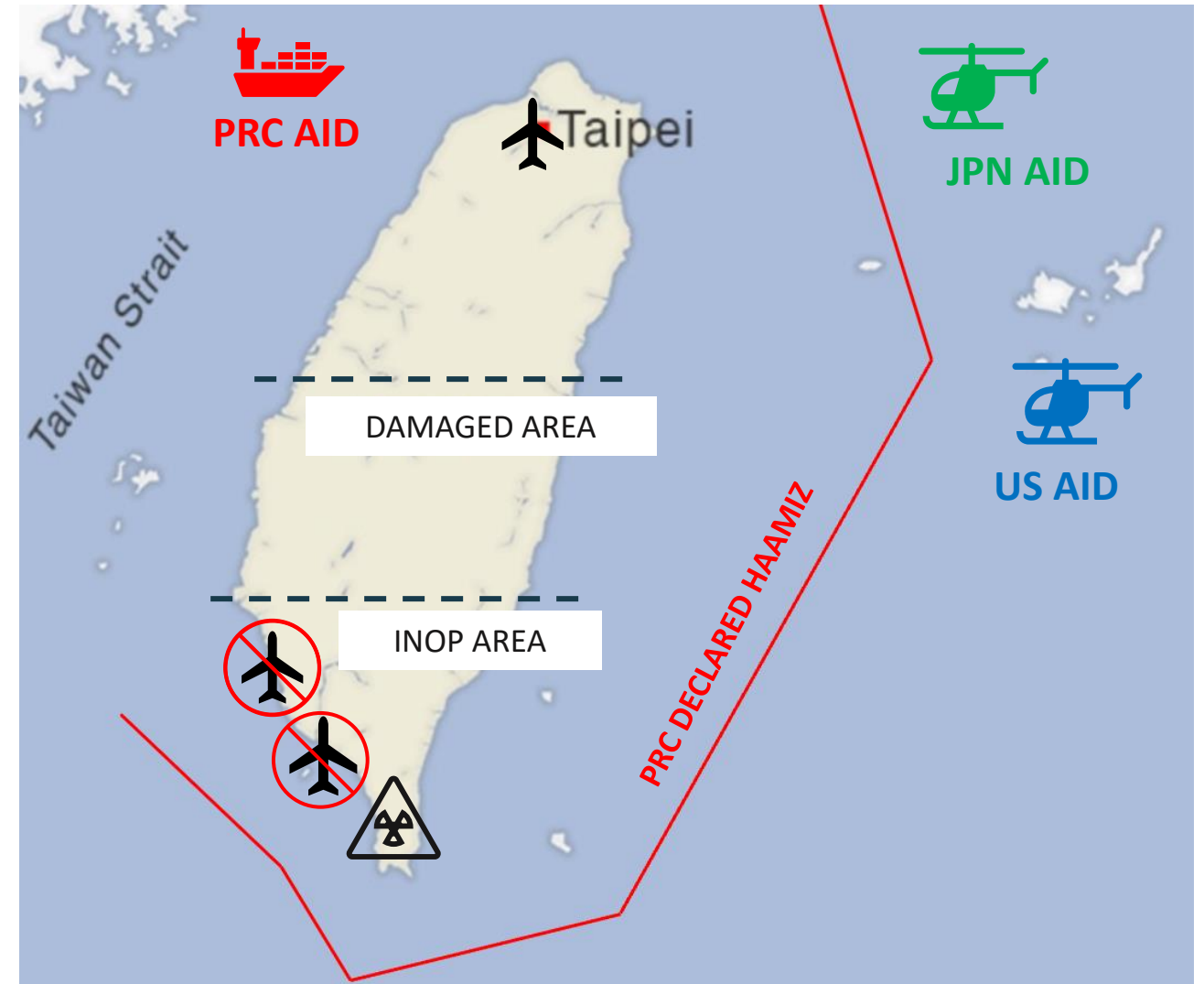




GRAY ZONE GAME: MOVE #3

+72 HOURS

- PRC declares Humanitarian Aid Air & Maritime Identification Zone
- PRC aid flotilla en route to Taiwan
- Taiwan government feels alone in countering PRC coercion
- Taiwan NGOs feel unsupported as they respond to humanitarian disaster
- U.S. and Japan dispatch military aircraft to provide relief aid





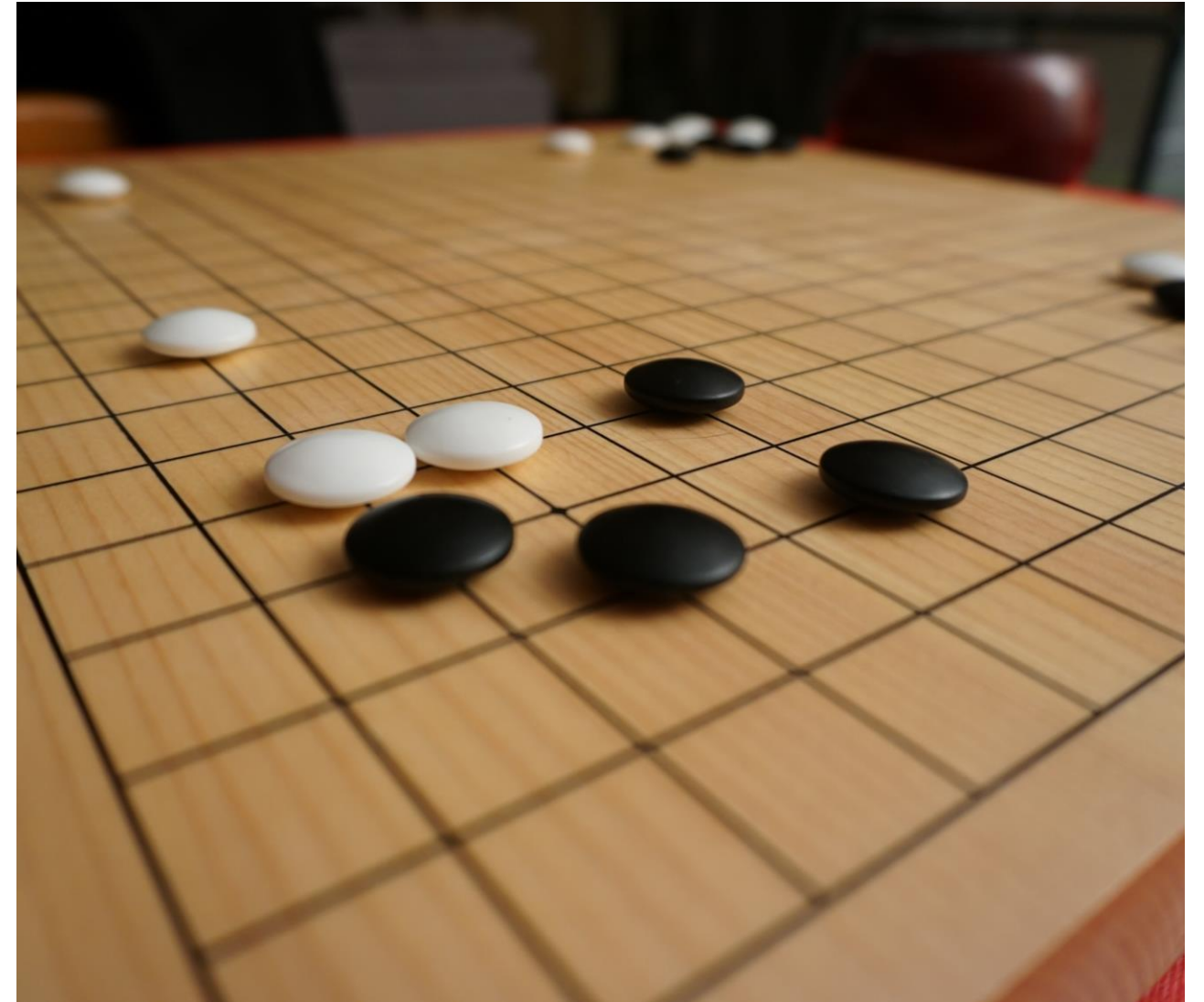
CAVEATS – CAUTION IN DRAWING INSIGHTS

One Gray Zone Game

- A single TTX
- A specific scenario

Generalizing from Taiwan

- Unique case but one with universal themes
- Common big country-little country asymmetric dynamics





TOPLINE TAKEAWAYS 1 -- GRAY ZONE GAME

- Highlights the value of gray zone games: as important as war games in providing **insights into the murky continuum** between outright armed conflict and unambiguous peace
- Useful for simulating nexus between complex conditions, numerous actors, multiple processes, and underappreciated dynamics
- Reminder that malevolent actors do not need to be the instigator of a crisis but can opportunistically exploit an unfolding crisis not of their own making



TOPLINE TAKEAWAYS 2 – GRAY ZONE GAME

- Gray Zone Games require the inclusion of **a wider array of actors** than a traditional war game since the arena of competition is far larger and more variegated
- Unclassified simulations permit the participation of a more diverse range of players, to include members of civil society, NGOs, academia, business community, the media, and international organizations
 - For many players, especially NGO representatives, this was the first time they had participated in a tabletop exercise



TOPLINE TAKEAWAYS 3 – GRAY ZONE GAME

- The scenario highlighted the **bifurcation of bureaucratic systems and processes** in government responses to humanitarian crises and security threats
 - Department of Defense and U.S. Agency for International Development dominate different systems but must cooperate for a successful outcome
- Beware of bureaucratic bottlenecks and single points of failure
 - Taiwan's Fire Agency was overtaxed by a multiplicity of disaster response duties
- A whole of government response is necessary but not sufficient; success requires significant **government-society coordination**
 - Taiwan's civil society organizations were underutilized despite being a clear national asset



TOPLINE TAKEAWAYS 4 – GRAY ZONE GAME

- In **hybrid crises** underappreciated dynamics can take on outsized importance
- Don't overlook the value of clear strategic communications
 - A timely and effective material response to a crisis is essential but an early and cogent public narrative advanced thru consistent messaging is key for maintaining domestic morale and for building and sustaining international support
- Improve mechanisms for multinational coordination in hybrid crises where humanitarian disaster and geopolitical confrontation intersect
 - Taiwan's government and civil society felt disconnected and unsupported



THANK YOU