



NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL

MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

THESIS

**THICKENING THE CONTACT LAYER: ACCOUNTING FOR
THE PARADOX OF PURPOSE IN THE JOINT COMBINED
EXCHANGE TRAINING PROGRAM TO ANCHOR SPECIAL
OPERATIONS IN GREAT POWER COMPETITION**

by

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December 2020

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GREAT POWER COMPETITION**

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ABSTRACT

The joint combined exchange training (JCET) has been a cornerstone of special operations forces (SOF) engagement in the Indo-Pacific region since its original legislation in 1991. These training events are the platform by which U.S. SOF maintain access to partners and allies across the United States Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) theater while remaining in compliance with U.S. Title 10 oversight and authorities. This thesis describes how the United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) can integrate the JCET further into the National Defense Strategy's (NDS) global operating concept (GOC) and allow for SOF to campaign more effectively in pursuit of competition with the People's Republic of China (PRC). Using the traditional ends, ways, and means model, this thesis details the additional platforms and resources available to SOF in Asia, explains the JCET's role in that assortment of actions, and asserts that a change in JCET policy is required to best capitalize on the uniquely flexible event. Finally, recommended updates to current policy that account for the new demands on SOF relative to the NDS goals are provided. These recommendations focus on considerations specific to the current resource-informed environment by taking into account available SOF resources, manpower, and focus.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AOR	area of responsibility
APRI	Asia Pacific Regional Initiative
ASD-SOLIC	Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict
BILAT	bilateral exchange
BPC	build partner capacity
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
C4ISR	command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance
CCDR	combatant commander
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
COIN	counterinsurgency
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CT	counterterrorism
DOD	Department of Defense
FMS	foreign military sales
FSF	foreign security forces
GCC	geographic combatant command
GOC	global operating concept
ICS	integrated country strategy
IMET	international military and education training
JCET	joint combined exercise training
JP	Joint Publication
MOE	measures of effectiveness
MOP	measures of performance
MTT	mobile training team
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDS	national defense strategy
NMS	national military strategy

NSS	national security strategy
O&M	operations and maintenance
OAI	operations, activities, and investments
OPCON	operational control
OPE	operational preparation of the environment
OPSEC	operational security
PDSS	pre-deployment site survey
PE	preparation of the environment
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PN	partner nation
PRC	People's Republic of China
SCUBA	self-contained underwater breathing apparatus
SECDEF	Secretary of Defense
SOA	special operations activities
SOC PAC	Special Operations Command—Pacific
SOF	special operations forces
SMEE	subject matter expert exchange
TACON	tactical control
TCP	theater campaign plan
TSOC	theater special operations command
UN	United Nations
UNCLOS	United Nations Conventions on the Law of the Sea
USASOC	United States Army Special Operations Command
USCENTCOM	United States Central Command
USG	United States Government
USINDOPACOM	United States Indo-Pacific Command
USSOCOM	United States Special Operations Command
WMD	weapon of mass destruction

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The year 2020 has been a hallmark year of change for the Department of Defense (DoD). In 2017, the Trump Administration crafted a new U.S. National Security Strategy (NSS), one that highlighted the need to rethink the nation's engagements with near-peer competitors like Russia and China. While the DoD's response in the 2018 U.S. National Defense Strategy (NDS) recognized the need to reinvigorate concepts of deterrence and engagement, real-world counterterrorism (CT) and counterinsurgency (COIN) requirements in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, the Horn of Africa, and dozens of other nations prevented significant progress. In 2020, that situation has significantly changed and a new phase of competition with China has begun. To best capitalize on their strategic advantages, the United States must adopt a combined offensive and defensive strategy. Beginning with defense, the United States must continue to outspend China militarily and continue pressing U.S. deterrence advantage. The might of the U.S. military globally, and its ability to fight and win any conventional war with China must never be in doubt. This defensive position forces China to remain in its hybrid box. Offensively, the United States must adopt unrestricted warfare strategies of its own, requiring the use of the U.S. special operations community.

A defensive strategy which incorporates U.S. special operations forces (SOF) builds a wall between China and war with the United States, while a SOF focused offensive strategy simultaneously reduces China's influence on vulnerable nations in Asia, denies China's expansion to new markets, and makes partnerships more costly and less productive. To accomplish this offensive strategy, the special operations community requires access to partners, allies, and would-be friends of the United States across the globe and, specific to this paper, the United States Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) region. Obtaining legal access to these communities for SOF to do their work is often limited by Title 10 *U.S. Code*, specifically the ability to legally deploy SOF abroad for non-CT purposes. Our research highlights a number of existing programs that allow SOF to interact with partners abroad and will focus specifically on suggestions to refine one such existing program: the joint combined exchange training (JCET) program.

The study is divided into a chapter each for ends, means, and ways. The ends portion will draw heavily from the most recent NSS and NDS to show what we believe to be SOF's new purpose with respect to the new global operating concept (GOC). The means will provide an examination of doctrine and historical records to explain the history of the JCET program, its original intent, and its historical context. Finally, the ways section will show how the JCET program can nest into a SOF operating concept to anchor SOF operations in the contact layer. Once complete, our research will demonstrate what we believe to be a disconnect in legalities which limit the overall impact of JCETs in USINDOPACOM and describe how SOF can effectively campaign in the gray zone rather than participate iteratively in it.

The JCET program, while appropriate to the task of training U.S. SOF is suboptimal for compliance to global operating concept requirements and preparation of the environment tasks. Limiting the primary purpose of these events to be the "training of U.S. SOF" reduces the incentive for whole of government participation, creates barriers between U.S. SOF teams and their host-nation partners, and inhibits the theater special operations command's ability to plan the development and resilience of partners in an iterative and purposeful manner. The results of our survey demonstrated that the secondary or residual benefit of JCETs to SOF partners is significantly oversold as U.S. Special Forces members surveyed prioritized "developing partner resilience" third out of four and favored "training the team" and "building regional expertise (for the team). Title 10 limitations have incentivized preparing for the comparatively low risk of combat operations in the blunt and surge layers of the GOC at the expense of developing deterrence through resilience in the contact layer.

Additionally, JCET execution appears to be out of step with competition priorities related to expansion of Chinese positional influence. If competing with China for partners in Asia is the goal, we find that U.S. SOF is neither pressuring them out of favor with critical partner nations, nor are we deterring them from gaining new partners. While U.S. conventional forces are shifting to more cooperative and foreign internal defense focused training venues (such as Pacific Pathways), and despite legislative signals from Congress (such as passage of the multi-billion dollar Pacific Defense Initiative), SOF's ability to flex

perspectives to partner development remains limited and additional authorities remain unrequested. Removal of the primary purpose clause allows SOF to refocus their access to bolstering partner needs as the priority to edge out Chinese competition—to “thicken the contact layer.” It also places SOF in better position to augment or amplify U.S. country team requirements in an effort to layer the effects of a whole of government approach and may harden access in support of preparation of the environment requirements.

Our clear recommendation is a revision to Title 10 *U.S. Code* §322 which removes the “primary purpose” clause in subsection B—Purpose of Training. Doing so allows for an increase in the deliberate planning and execution of JCETs geared toward contact layer requirements as outlined in the GOC model. Additionally, the recommended change allows for increased access and focus toward comprehensive partner development in pursuit of resilience development. The net effect of this change is more meaningful SOF engagement with partners and allies to address their requirements as related to Chinese aggressive policies. A repurposed engagement then allows for partner resilience in the contact layer thereby developing a deterrent effect against the spread of Chinese influence. More importantly, this change provides SOF the access and focus required to anchor competition with China in the contact layer, and potentially avoids the pitfalls of conventional attrition warfare altogether.

The changes discussed in this thesis stress an evolution of current procedures rather than a revolution. Despite buzzwords like innovation and modernization trending in the DoD community, we contend that a gradual shift in current procedures, coupled with moderate adjustments to current policy, provide a feasible and rational potential to be successful in meeting the challenges put forward in the NDS. Regarding SOF’s role in that effort, the relatively small adjustment to legislation and removal of the “primary purpose” clause provide a significant payoff to SOF operations in the contact layer. We view these kinds of sustainable and moderate adjustments as a natural evolution to SOF capabilities, and a response to shifting policy needs. By making this small adjustment, SOF can reexamine its purpose in the contact layer, thereby allowing itself to find and capitalize on those contact points which are appropriate to the needs of the geographic combatant command’s theater strategy. In doing so, SOF can align its limited resources to maximum

effect and demonstrate a response to changing requirements toward great power competition.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The year 2020 has been a hallmark year of change for the Department of Defense. In 2017, the Trump Administration crafted a new U.S. National Security Strategy (NSS), one that highlighted the need to rethink the nation's engagements with near-peer competitors like Russia and China. While the DoD's response in the 2018 U.S. National Defense Strategy (NDS) recognized the need to reinvigorate concepts of deterrence and engagement, real-world counterterrorism (CT) and counterinsurgency (COIN) requirements in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, the Horn of Africa, and dozens of other nations prevented significant progress. In 2020, that situation has significantly changed. The global pandemic of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), commonly referred to as the coronavirus, has dramatically shifted attention and resources to the country of origin: China. The effect of the virus has been severe across all aspects of U.S. Foreign Policy, and has highlighted the vulnerabilities the DoD faces in remaining committed to a global footprint. Additionally, Beijing's casual, tone-deaf, and often hostile rhetoric toward the United States during the outbreak highlights the concerns first expressed in the 2017 NSS. The United States Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) Commander, Admiral Phillip S. Davidson, recently expressed concerns about China's attitude regarding COVID-19 at a meeting with the nonprofit association of military and national security correspondents stating that the Chinese Communist Party "seeks to exploit this current global pandemic crisis, and they're doing so with more assertive military behavior, malign diplomatic and information behavior throughout the Indo-Pacific and, really, across the globe."¹ In short, China appears determined to use the effects of the pandemic as an opportunity to advance its theory of unrestricted warfare and press for advantage against a virus-infected U.S. rival.

In response, the United States must first recognize China's strategy and develop plans accordingly. China has openly adopted a strategy of unrestricted warfare in order to

¹ Jim Garamone, "Indo-Pacific Commander Details Regional Deterrence Efforts," Defense News, July 22, 2020, <https://www.defense.gov/Explore/News/Article/Article/2283231/indo-pacific-commander-details-regional-deterrence-efforts/>.

account for its inability to win in direct military conflict. This unrestricted strategy is a de facto admission by Beijing that all options are on the table, creating uncertainty regarding their government's willingness to hold with international norms. Our research will show that the U.S. military maintains significant advantages in direct armed conflict with China, and will demonstrate that China's unrestricted strategy contains within it their recognition of its disadvantages. In fact, its unrestricted warfare concept is itself a signal that China knows it would lose conventional war with the United States. This reality was recently emphasized in an article written by the very generals who helped craft the original unrestricted strategy for Beijing. In the article, "*Has the Wind Changed?*," People's Liberation Army (PLA) General Dai Xu reflects on China's "new understanding" of American behaviors learned since the publication of unrestricted warfare, stating:

Once Imperial America considers you as their "enemy," you're in big trouble. They "will never stop until their goal is reached." As with their fight against terrorism, once they decide that you are a threat, they will continue to fight against you using all their resources, with generations of presidents working on the same national strategy.²

General Xu goes on to advise his contemporaries about the dangers associated with direct conflict against the United States, thematically recommending patience and rational behavior and generally supporting the notion that China recognizes its positional disadvantages.

To best capitalize on its strategic advantages, the United States must adopt a combined offensive and defensive strategy. Beginning with defense, the United States must continue to outspend China militarily and continue pressing U.S. deterrence advantage. The might of the U.S. military globally, and its ability to fight and win any conventional war with China must never be in doubt. This defensive position forces China to remain in its hybrid box. Offensively, the United States must adopt unrestricted warfare strategies of its own. To compete with China, the United States must compete with China. In other words, the United States must have the access and ability to win the irregular fight in Asia. This offensive strategy necessitates the use of the U.S. special operations community, in

² GM36, "Has the Wind Changed? PLA Hawks General Dai Xu and General Qiao Liang Release Odd Articles," *Gnews* (blog), July 12, 2020, <https://gnews.org/257994/>.

coordinated efforts with the interagency community, to press advantages which deny China positions of advantage. A defensive strategy which incorporates U.S. SOF builds a wall between China and war with the United States, while a SOF focused offensive strategy simultaneously reduces China's influence on vulnerable nations in Asia, denies China's expansion to new markets, and makes partnerships more costly and less productive.

To accomplish this offensive strategy, the special operations forces (SOF) community requires access to U.S. partners, allies, and would-be friends across the globe and, specific to this paper, the USINDOPACOM region. Obtaining legal access to these communities for SOF to do their work is often limited by U.S. Title 10 code, specifically the ability to legally deploy SOF abroad for non-CT purposes. Our research will highlight a number of programs that exist to allow SOF to interact with partners abroad, and will focus specifically on suggestions to refine one such existing program: the Joint Combined Exchange Training (JCET) program. Through our research we seek to demonstrate that the JCET allows the flexibility, responsiveness, and focused attention required to develop resilience in our partners and allies abroad, despite originally being designed to focus on training our own SOF forces. We further assess that the JCET, when properly integrated, can play a pivotal role in developing both partner resilience and U.S. military preparation.

Our research will prioritize focus toward JCETs in the U.S. Indo-Pacific region (USINDOPACOM) in order to maintain scope and because the NSS insists upon attention toward competition with China. We will layer together Arreguín-Toft's strategic interaction theory with the initiatives and goals of the NSS to describe a legal pathway of execution of special operations activities (SOA) in USINDOPACOM using the JCET as the tool of engagement.³ Next, we will describe potential revisions to *U.S. Code* Title 10 to best legally capitalize on the outcomes and effects of the interaction provided by the JCET event. Based on this research, we aim to develop a legal and resourced framework for an integrated SOF campaign in Asia which seeks to harden the contact layer through

³ Ivan Arreguín-Toft, "How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict," *International Security* 26, no. 1 (2001): 93–128, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3092079>.

development of partner resilience capitalizing on SOF's unique access and placement to our partners.

A. APPROACH

Art Lykke's strategy stool, which has become a widely used tool in development of U.S. strategy is described as a three-legged stool of ends, ways, and means. According to Lykke, "the ends are 'objectives,' the ways are the 'concepts' for accomplishing the objectives, and the means are the 'resources' for supporting the concepts."⁴ This stool is then balanced by the "risk" associated with any specific course of action developed. This paper will examine each of these components, re-arranged as ends, means, and ways, in an effort to provide a linkage down from U.S. policy to available action. In weighing the "ways" available to adversaries of China on countering specific Chinese action, this paper will examine the utility of the JCET exercise as a mechanism of SOF engagement strategy for USINDOPACOM. Coupled with information operations and other aspects of psychological warfare, we assess that the access provided by the JCET program is undercapitalized with respect to development of partner resilience. The NSS and NDS are clear that partner attitudes and policies toward China are key terrain in the "contact layer."

The body of the study will be divided into a chapter each for ends, means, and ways. The ends portion will draw heavily from the most recent National Security and National Defense Strategies to show what we believe to be SOF's new purpose with respect to the new global operating concept (GOC) mandated in those instruments of policy. Next, an examination of United States Army Special Operations Command's (USASOC) doctrine and historical records will explain the history of the JCET program, its original intent, and its historical context. Next, we will thoroughly review the legalities of the JCET—how it is planned, funded, and approved to show how these events are unique to U.S. SOF and discuss the relevance all the way up to Congressional oversight. Once complete, our research will demonstrate what we believe to be a disconnect in these legalities which limit

⁴ H. Richard Yarger, "Toward a Theory of Strategy: Art Lykke and the U.S. Army War College Strategy Model," Volume I: Theory of War and Strategy (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 2012), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep12116.6>.

the overall impact of the JCET with regard to our partners in USINDOPACOM. This will be done by developing a theoretical model of SOF interaction drawn heavily from the works of Arreguín-Toft, Mack, and Osgood. We believe this model, once integrated with revisions to the JCET program, will allow for a benefit in SOF's ability to effectively campaign in the "gray zone" rather than participate iteratively in it.

We will next develop a model of U.S. SOF engagement in the region in an attempt to demonstrate how this disconnection in purpose prevents a unified and coherent response to Chinese expansion. This engagement model will be compared to a similar model of Chinese interaction to determine whether we are optimizing our efforts relative our adversary. We believe these two models will become a graphic representation of what strategic military engagement focused on competition looks like in Asia. Essentially, we seek to explain SOF's role in soft power and define how SOF can enable a "thickening" of the contact layer described in the GOC. Within this model we will explain the parallels between past concepts of the "gray zone" and the GOC's "contact layer." It is our position that the "contact layer" is a new way to describe the same concept as the gray zone, but allows for better definition of SOF's role in support of subsequent layers.

We will then cross-examine this new purpose with impressions from the force through surveys and interviews to determine whether that message is acknowledged in the conduct of these events. Our goal is that the impressions gathered, coupled with the new models, will allow for the development of refined measures of effectiveness (MOE) and measures of performance (MOP) related to the JCET program which will again demonstrate the misalignment in priority. This project will not attempt to develop those MOEs and MOPs but rather will lay the foundation for their future development by follow on researchers.

Finally, we will conclude our research with recommendations for United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) and the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict (ASD-SOLIC) regarding the future of the JCET program. These recommendations will include revisions to current United States Code Title 10 pertaining to the conduct of a JCET and will require Congressional attention for implementation. Through our research, we seek to demonstrate why these revisions are

necessary and allow an informed discussion about how to authorize and resource SOF's new role as focus shifts from counter-terrorism operations toward great power competition.

B. RESEARCH QUESTION

Our research will seek to answer the following question: can U.S. SOF JCET events contribute to deterrence of Chinese expansion in Asia under the GOC? If so, how? If not, why not? This research focuses on SOF's ability to develop resiliency against China's regional influence as a consequence of focused partner engagement. The logic then follows that, as the JCET is the cornerstone event of that engagement, then the JCET is the current tool for developing resiliency. The question then becomes is this happening under current conditions or is there some missing engagement factor to consider moving forward?

C. LIMITATIONS

While many of the considerations proposed in this research are likely applicable to global SOF operations, our research will focus only in the USINDOPACOM region for two reasons. First, the NSS insists upon focused attention toward countering Chinese aggression and influence in the region, and secondly for purposes of scope. Additional projects would be beneficial to examine Chinese activities in other geographic combatant command (GCC) theaters. Additionally, while numerous legal platforms exist within the Joint-USSOCOM formation to address competition in the contact layer, our research will prioritize JCETs conducted by the Joint-USSOCOM force from 2010 to 2020. This limitation is based on availability of historic data. Additionally, we will conduct a survey focused on perceptions from the force related to the value of the JCET program. While it would have been beneficial to survey the entire Joint-USSOCOM force, restrictions related to cross-departmental surveys and interviews have been imposed by the DoD. As such, our survey focused only on U.S. Army Special Forces active duty officers, warrant officers, and non-commissioned officers.

The scope of research grows considerably when considering additional OAI from the Air Force, Navy, and Marines as well as other elements of Army SOF such as Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations. This omission is solely to allow for appropriate

attention to Army Special Forces' OAI within the constraints of one research thesis. Again, each element of joint-force interaction would benefit from thorough review.

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II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. NATIONAL CONTEXT

In 2017, the Trump Administration published new guidance in its NSS. The strategy provides a renewed emphasis on competition with revisionist great powers, namely China and Russia. In it, the administration explains that:

the United States often views the world in binary terms, with states being either “at peace” or “at war,” when it is actually an arena of continuous competition. Our adversaries will not fight us on our terms. We will raise our competitive game to meet that challenge, to protect American interests, and to advance our values.⁵

The area between these binary terms, the competition space (referred to by SOF as the “grey zone”), is the focus of this paper. Because this is a vast and broad issue, we will focus specifically on competition with the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in the USINDPACOM theater. The research will aim to provide context to SOF in that competition. The first area of focus will be what specific capabilities exist to capitalize on SOF’s unique access and placement. This will draw heavily on Arreguín-Toft’s Strategic Interaction Theory and Mack’s works on Big Nations Losing Small Wars.⁶ Next, we will examine the DoD strategy for interaction in competition and contrast that strategy with USASOC’s strategic vision for utilization of SOF. This area of focus will also seek to determine whether the USINDOPACOM strategy is being adequately addressed via SOF activities. Finally, we will examine U.S. policy and law related to SOF’s authorities and permissions when acting in the competition space to determine whether gaps or opportunities exist for revision of existing statutes to further capitalize on SOF’s efforts related to countering PRC influence in Asia.

⁵ White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States* (Washington, DC: White House, 2017), 28, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>.

⁶ Arreguín-Toft, “How the Weak Win Wars”; Andrew Mack, “Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars: The Politics of Asymmetric Conflict,” *World Politics* 27, no. 2 (1975): 175–200, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2009880>.

B. THEORETICAL CONTEXT

The NSS describes America’s intent to “strengthen our long-standing military relationships and encourage the development of a strong defense network with our allies and partners” as a priority action.⁷ We interpret this direction as a need to build resiliency in our partners and allies. This need to build resiliency in our partners provides a two-fold benefit. The first is an imposition of Arreguín-Toft’s Strategic Interaction Theory into our partner’s doctrinal approach to PRC influence. In his theory, Arreguín-Toft describes four hypotheses of interaction between strong actors and weak actors. For purposes of this research we will assume that that relative strength comparison provides China the role of the strong actor, leaving all other Asian competitors the weak actor role. Arreguín-Toft describes his hypotheses in five parts:

1. When strong actors attack using a direct strategy and weak actors defend using a direct strategy, all other things being equal, strong actors should win quickly and decisively.
2. When strong actors attack with a direct strategy and weak actors defend using an indirect strategy, all other things being equal, weak actors should win.
3. When strong actors attack using an indirect strategy and weak actors defend using a direct strategy, all other things being equal, strong actors should lose.
4. When strong actors employ barbarism to attack weak actors defending with a GWS [Guerrilla Warfare Strategy], all other things being equal, strong actors should win.
5. Strong actors are more likely to win same-approach interactions and lose opposite-approach interactions.⁸

He further explains that the “key causal mechanism of the strategic interaction thesis is time.”⁹ Explained more broadly, the actor with the more resilient populace can outlast the strength of the opponent. In our context, where China is the strong actor, Arreguín-Toft’s theory provides a key area of focus to accomplishing the partner development mentioned in the NSS. By focusing on the strength of our partnerships, we infer an increase in the

⁷ White House, *National Security Strategy*, 47.

⁸ Arreguín-Toft, “How the Weak Win Wars,” 107–10.

⁹ Arreguín-Toft, 111.

time required for PRC influence to manifest; in effect, we protract the conflict to inflict cost on China's resilience.

As Arreguín-Toft provides the theoretical context for pressuring an adversary's resilience, Mack seeks to answer the question of "how and why the external power was forced to withdraw."¹⁰ Drawing heavily on Clausewitzian theory of war in its "pure form," Mack explains that only when a nation is faced with an existential element of threat to their way of life, can a "full mobilization of national resources become a possibility, and only then will the diverse and sometimes conflicting goals that various national groups pursue in time of peace be displaced by a single overriding strategic aim."¹¹ It would seem that the PRC is determined to capitalize on this inference by executing a campaign that capitalizes on the discrepancies in their target's political will. Their practice of "Unrestricted Warfare" is based on the premise that they can squeeze their influence into the spaces between political disagreements incrementally until they have built a solid foundation between the divisions.¹² If Mack is to be believed, then the NSS emphasis on partnership must include vigorous focus on building unified public will against Chinese nefarious intent, and include an alternative to Chinese bribery and coercion. The question to then ask is whether U.S. partnership framework is focused toward this unification.

C. POLICY CONTEXT

In the 2018 National Military Strategy (NMS), the Joint Chiefs "acknowledge the unique contributions of allies and partners, a strategic source of strength for the Joint Force."¹³ This acknowledgement, while important, understates the importance of resiliency as the cornerstone of engagement. The opportunities presented through military cooperation in Asia to build a focused understanding of Chinese intent is lacking in the

¹⁰ Mack, "Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars," 176.

¹¹ Mack, 182.

¹² David Barno and Nora Bensahel, "A New Generation of Unrestricted Warfare," War on the Rocks, April 19, 2016, <https://warontherocks.com/2016/04/a-new-generation-of-unrestricted-warfare/>.

¹³ Strategy Development Division, *Description of the National Military Strategy 2018* (Washington, DC: Joint Staff, 2018), 3, https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Publications/UNCLASS_2018_National_Military_Strategy_Description.pdf.

current strategy. This interaction focuses resources and intentions toward the importance of interoperability and joint strength in an attrition scenario. Excepting maritime aggression in the South China Sea, China has shown almost no inclination toward outright military hostility or a desire for an attrition-based conflict with the United States or our allies. It favors a softer campaign of unrestricted warfare wherein elements of asymmetric advantage are available. In line with Mack and Arreguín-Toft's interaction theories, the current NMS misses the opportunity to promote partner opposition to China as a priority of U.S. engagement. It is in this area that SOF have a strategic advantage.

In contrast to the NMS, USASOC defines its strategic value as the “ability to expand the options necessary for decision-makers to wield influence and manage escalation in the competition space.”¹⁴ By focusing on partner influence and managed escalation, SOF can provide a unique advantage in countering Chinese influence with their partners and allies through exploitation of their unique access and placement throughout Asia. This approach builds upon the 2018 NDS's Global Operating Model, which accordingly consists of four layers “contact, blunt, surge, and homeland.”¹⁵ The USASOC model provides emphasis toward the contact layer in an effort to deter adversary's willingness to progress toward the subsequent layers. For purposes of this research we will consider the USASOC strategy in this regard to “harden” the contact layer. The question then becomes whether the appropriate legal backbone and framework exists for appropriate execution of this strategy. Additionally, this research will determine whether current operations specific to engagement in Asia are adequate to the task or if a revision in implementation is required.

¹⁴ United States Army Special Operations Command, *Army Special Operations Forces Strategy* (Fort Bragg, NC: United States Army Special Operations Command), 6, accessed February 8, 2020, https://www.soc.mil/AssortedPages/ARSOF_Strategy.pdf.

¹⁵ Jim Mattis, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2018), 7, <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>.

D. LEGAL CONTEXT

Department of Defense operations are governed under *U.S. Code* Titles 10 and 50. For purposes of this unclassified research, we will focus specifically on the Title 10 aspect. Restrictions based on COVID19 limited our ability to build a classified annex and addresses potential Title 50 contributions, it is recommended that one be developed through future research. USSOCOM is designated as a unified command under Title 10 *U.S. Code* § 167- *Unified combatant command for special operations forces*.¹⁶ Under these provisions, USSOCOM is assigned authority over SOA which are designated as:

1. Direct action.
2. Strategic reconnaissance.
3. Unconventional warfare.
4. Foreign internal defense.
5. Civil affairs.
6. Military information support operations.
7. Counterterrorism.
8. Humanitarian assistance.
9. Theater search and rescue.
10. Such other activities as may be specified by the President or the Secretary of Defense.¹⁷

Special operations forces in theater are further assigned to a theater special operations command (TSOC) which is subordinate to the GCC. The GCC maintains final authority for all SOA in the area of responsibility. For the purposes of this research that area is defined as USINDOPACOM and the TSOC is Special Operations Command—Pacific (SOCPAC). A significant portion of SOA conducted in the USINDOPACOM region are the JCETs. These events fall into a unique category of engagement as they are governed under a separate portion of U.S. Title 10 Code. In Title 10 *U.S. Code* § 322—*Special Operations Forces: Training with Friendly Foreign Forces*, the authorities for JCETs are defined and the primary purpose is described as “to train the special operations forces of

¹⁶ Unified Combatant Command for Special Operations Forces, 10 U.S.C. 167 (2012), 165, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/USCODE-2012-title10/pdf/USCODE-2012-title10-subtitleA-partI-chap6-sec167.pdf>.

¹⁷ Unified Combatant Command for Special Operations Forces, 167.

the combatant command.”¹⁸ The description goes on to explain that some secondary benefit to the partner nation is acceptable and expected, but the majority shareholder in benefit from the money expended on training must be U.S. SOF. These events exist to provide a venue for SOF operators to “learn to train” with indigenous forces.

Here is where the paradox of purpose between policy and execution can be observed. Given the reliance on JCETs as SOF’s interaction in the aforementioned USINDOPACOM contact layer, how can SOF campaign in a deliberate manner while assembling their interaction based on U.S. training needs? How does SOF iteratively develop or enable partners in the region, and how does this approach contribute to partner resiliency in the face of pressure from China?

E. CHINA CONTEXT

Because this research focuses on competition with China in Asia, it is important to note the policies and positions the PRC is taking in pursuit of their goals. The cornerstone of their policy appears to be based on the 1999 publication “Unrestricted Warfare” written by PLA Colonels Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui. In their publication, Liang and Xiangsui argue for an indirect strategy of warfare against a superior U.S. foe; one that militarizes other elements of national power to develop a cumulative effect against the United States. These elements can be summarized to include the use of lawfare, economic warfare network warfare, terrorism and essentially anything else which may offer any kind of an advantage. Qiao goes so far as to state that “the first rule of unrestricted warfare is that there are no rules, with nothing forbidden.”¹⁹ In the years since, China has been roundly condemned for their willingness to steal intellectual property, particularly regarding digital and military technology. In *The New Art of War*, William Holstein provides case studies

¹⁸ Special Operations Forces: Training with Friendly Foreign Forces, 10 U.S.C. 322 (2018), 283, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/USCODE-2018-title10/pdf/USCODE-2018-title10-subtitleA-partI-chap16-subchapIII-sec322.pdf>.

¹⁹ Liang Qiao, Al Santoli, and Xiangsui Wang, *Unrestricted Warfare: China’s Master Plan to Destroy America* (Panama City, Panama: Pan American Publishing, 2000), xviii.

of China's efforts which range from hacking U.S. secrets to penetrating U.S. government institutions.²⁰

China demonstrates their willingness to engage in lawfare in the South China Sea, where they use an ambiguous interpretation of disputed maps to exploit language in the United Nations Conventions on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) to lay claim to the exclusive economic zones of numerous nations including Vietnam, Indonesia, and the Philippines among others. Rather than wait to settle claims before expanding into these disputing areas, China rejects other nation's claims and has developed an expansive system of control in the area, including man-made islands with runways and defensive positions; all while their lawyers delay and distract UN enforcement. Rather than distancing themselves from such aggressive and illegal tactics, Chinese officials encourage their forces to participate. The concept is referred to as the "cabbage strategy," illustrated most effectively by Chinese General Zhang Zhaozhong, who coined the term:

The fishermen conduct normal production there. In the area around the island, fishing administration ships and marine surveillance ships are conducting normal patrols, while in the outer ring there are navy warships. The island is thus wrapped layer by layer like a cabbage...For those small islands [held by other states], only a few troopers are able to station on each of them, but there is no food or even drinking water there. If we carry out the "cabbage" strategy, you will not be able to send food and drinking water onto the islands. Without the supply for one or two weeks, the troopers stationed there will leave the islands on their own. Once they have left, they will never be able to come back.²¹

Tactics such as the cabbage strategy are indicative of China's brazen willingness to own the concepts of conflict explained in the unrestricted warfare concept. Our research will consider the implications of an unrestricted policy as we examine competition options from the U.S. perspective and seek to define response options which are appropriate under U.S. law. It is our position that U.S. response options must remain anchored in U.S. policy and

²⁰ William Holstein, *The New Art of War: China's Deep Strategy inside the United States* (Dering Harbor, NY: Brick Tower Press, 2019).

²¹ Craig Hill, "China Boasts of Strategy to 'Recover' Islands Occupied by Philippines," *China News* (blog), May 28, 2013, <https://chinanewsstories.com/2013/05/28/china-boasts-of-strategy-to-recover-islands-occupied-by-philippines/>.

global norms as a hedge toward the legitimacy of actions taken to counter China's aggression. By doing so, the United States can offer an alternative to China's actions to partners and allies in the region in pursuit of developing resilience against China's bullying tactics.

III. ENDS—U.S. STRATEGIC MILITARY GOALS IN ASIA

A. U.S. UNIPOLARITY AND THE NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY

The year 2019 marked a transition in the way the DoD views its role in enforcing global norms. Serious negotiations with the Taliban appeared to be leading toward a drawdown and potentially an end to that 20-year conflict. Counter-terrorist operations in Syria, Iraq, Africa, the Philippines, and Yemen appeared to have reached some semblance of stability and have demonstrated an economy of force strategy may be appropriate in the future. The looming “next horizon” appeared to be what the NSS refers to as “Great Power Competition”—that is, a return to deterrence of peer or near peer actors in pursuit of enforcement of global norms as mandated by U.S. hegemony. While the administration made clear its expectations in the 2017 NSS, implementation and policy has taken time to catch up. 2020 appears to be the turning point.

An urgency permeates the DoD based on a perception that U.S. unipolarity suffered during the height of the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan—a sense that the United States “took our eyes off the ball” and are now behind our competitors. This general sense is especially prevalent with respect to China. While DoD priority has been fighting in United States Central Command (USCENTCOM) over the last 20 years, China has embarked on its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and brokered deals that make it a regional power in Asia. China has made gains, but while its status has clearly increased in the last 10 years, it does not necessarily mean that the United States has “fallen behind.”

The United States is the unipolar superpower in the world. In 2019, U.S. defense budget was US\$686 billion.²² In comparison the next highest spending country was China with US\$181.1 billion.²³ Figure 1 highlights the discrepancy between these two top spending nations and paints a different picture than the perception that somehow China is

²² “FY 2019 Defense Budget: Restoring and Rebuilding America’s Military,” U.S. Department of Defense, accessed May 4, 2020, <https://dod.defense.gov/News/SpecialReports/Budget2019.aspx>.

²³ Lucie Beraud-Sudreau, “Global Defence Spending: The United States Widens the Gap,” *International Institute for Strategic Studies Military Balance Blog* (blog), February 14, 2020, <https://www.iiss.org/blogs/military-balance/2020/02/global-defence-spending>.

on pace to directly challenge the United States for superiority. Rather, it allows an understanding of why China acts the way that it does with respect to international rules and norms. China understands that it is being out spent three-to-one. China understands that it does not possess sufficient combat power to mount and win a total war with the United States under conventional methods; instead China is choosing to conduct its business in a more unconventional way. Their actions are a recognition that the United States is in the position of strength and demonstrates that China plans to push forward despite that power imbalance. It appears that China will push forward via a practice of unrestricted or combination warfare. For purposes of this thesis, unrestricted and combination should be considered interchangeable.

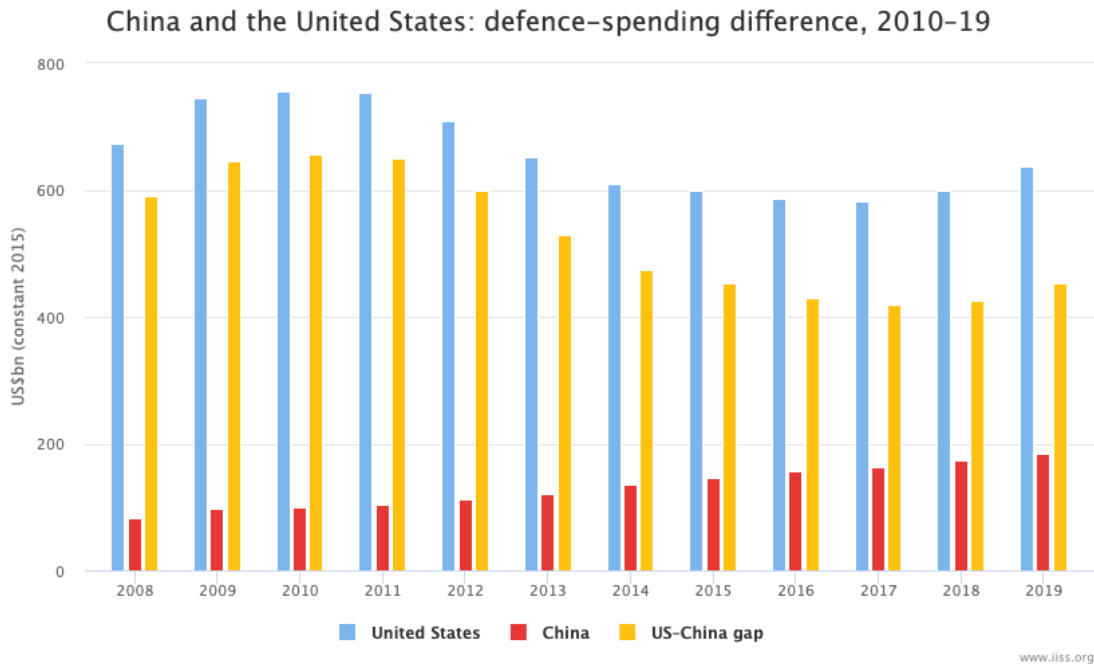


Figure 1. U.S.—China Defense Spending 2010–2019.²⁴

²⁴ Source: Beraud-Sudreau.

B. COMBINATION WARFARE

Combination warfare is the mechanism by which China has exerted regional influence in support of its BRI. By weaponizing the majority of its foreign policy tools, such as finance and information, China has bullied and cajoled for regional influence. China's center of gravity, however, has always been the perception of complete control of its internal population of over 1.4 billion. This control provides allies and competitors alike the perception of stability and unity of purpose inside the country and the party. Through combination warfare, China's adversaries can and should target those perceptions. This targeting need not be inventive or illicit, but simply highlighting the numerous instances and examples of Chinese bad behavior through support of its under-served or oppressed populations will provide more than enough ammunition.

Despite the seemingly rapid pace of regional aggression from China, this power imbalance may actually be a net positive toward deterrence and avoiding direct conflict. Mearsheimer points out that “deterrence is most likely to hold when the costs and risks of going to war are unambiguously stark. The more horrible the prospect of war, the less likely war is. Deterrence is also more robust when conquest is more difficult.”²⁵ China's tactics, and the messaging acknowledging U.S. military superiority contained therein, demonstrate the restraint included in their hybrid strategy and invite a counter strategy of hybrid warfare. Escalatory risks of more conventional war are mitigated via China's indirect policies—China has acknowledged its own inability to win conventional war. Additionally, China now appears to recognize their accountability on the world stage as a regional power and can be expected to respond reasonably to operations in the contact layer. Recent protests in Hong Kong demonstrate this concept.

The world waited for the next Tiananmen Square as protests over democratic rights developed in Hong Kong. Instead, China addressed the demonstrations in a mostly peaceful way, especially when compared to the Tiananmen Square incident in 1989. In that massacre, Chinese officials waited only six weeks to respond to non-violent protests with

²⁵ John Mearsheimer, “Why We Will Soon Miss The Cold War,” The Atlantic Online, August 1990, <https://www.theatlantic.com/past/docs/politics/foreign/mearsh.htm>.

lethal force. Today, the widely publicized protests in Hong Kong, which are considerably more violent relative to Tiananmen, lasted over eight months and were met with significantly more restrained enforcement. This restraint demonstrates that Chinese leaders recognize that they are now accountable to the world community for the actions they take on internal matters.²⁶

The opportunity to open non-violent civil discourse on a broad range of issues, from human rights to fair trade, with less fear of violent overreaction on the part of the Chinese security apparatus opens new forms and categories of competition and warfare. Hong-Kongers are showing the world China's vulnerability to internal civil disobedience, even if their demands are not yet being met. Just the idea that civil unrest can take place without China's swift and violent overreaction is a turning point in Chinese internal politics. Communities such as the Uighurs, Tibetans, and Taiwanese should be taking notes. International adversaries of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) who would seek to increase strategic decision-making problems on the CCP should consider whether now is the time to press these issues, thereby increasing the strategic tension on the Party. As China continues to exert new and inventive forms of economic and technical warfare against its adversaries, it would be prudent for China's adversaries to respond in kind. As Callard and Faber point out "in combination warfare, anything and everything can and should be considered a weapon."²⁷ Callard and Faber would refer to this tactic as a "supra-domain combination," stemming from a combination of "moral warfare" and "media warfare."²⁸

As China's regional and global influence has grown as a result of its assertive financial and informational aggression, a consequence has emerged. The consequence is the fact that China's influence now hinges upon its credibility; upon China's ability to

²⁶ Daniel Victor and Mike Ives, "Why Are People Protesting in Hong Kong?," *New York Times*, October 15, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/15/world/asia/what-are-hong-kong-protests-about.html>.

²⁷ James Callard and Peter Faber, "An Emerging Synthesis for a New Way of War: Combination Warfare and Future Innovation," *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs* 3, no. 1 (2002): 65, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43133476>.

²⁸ Callard and Faber, 64–65.

practice what it preaches in its foreign policy known as the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence.²⁹ This consequence presents a vulnerability that China's adversaries can and should seek to exploit. Exploitation should not come through traditional conflict theories of strategic interaction, but rather more discretely through unrestricted warfare applied to infinite game theory time horizons. Additionally, it signals to rivals of China that room exists for irregular and unconventional competition.

C. ASYMMETRIC CONFLICT AND THE INFINITE GAME

Arreguín-Toft's strategic interaction thesis states that asymmetric conflict "demands two central elements: (1) preparation of public expectations for a long war despite U.S. technological and material advantages, and (2) the development and deployment of armed forces specially equipped and trained for COIN operations."³⁰ Focusing on the second half of his thesis, an opportunity emerges in the information age to rethink the concepts of "deployment," "armed," and "COIN." It may be that, in the information age, the application of irregular warfare, defined by the Joint Staff as "violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant populations" presents a counter in concept to the terms singled out above.³¹ If the "violent struggle" within the non-state actor community was promoted internally through orchestrated protests and civil-disobedience (supported externally) through appropriate application of information and political warfare, Arreguín-Toft's "demands" may be less required in the traditional sense. Mack seems to support this argument by stating "for students of strategy the importance of these wars lies in the fact that the simplistic but once prevalent assumption-that conventional military superiority necessarily prevails in war-has been destroyed."³²

²⁹ "The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence -- The Time-Tested Guideline of China's Policy with Neighbours," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, July 30, 2014, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zwjg_665342/zwbd_665378/t1179045.shtml.

³⁰ Arreguín-Toft, "How the Weak Win Wars," 123.

³¹ *Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept*, Version 1.0 (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2007), 1, https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/concepts/joc_iw_v1.pdf?ver=2017-12-28-162020-260.

³² Mack, "Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars," 177.

The difference is a willingness to change traditional concepts of “winning” and “losing” to adopt a disposition that seeks positions of competitive advantage, recognizing that those advantages will ebb and flow over an infinite horizon. As Simon Sinek describes:

When we play with a finite mindset in an infinite game, the odds increase that we will find ourselves in a quagmire, racing through the will and resources we need to keep playing. This is what happened to America in Vietnam. The United States operated as if the game were finite, fighting against a player that was playing with the right mindset for the Infinite Game they were actually in.³³

Recognition that the goal of China’s adversaries is not to “beat the Chinese” but rather to seek positions of relative advantage, denying them key elements along the way, is an important distinction. It is a recognition that China, with its 1.4 billion inhabitants has a place of value in the world society, and that China’s adversaries will simultaneously remain in cooperation and competition with them. This does not imply that the U.S. unipolarity must necessarily be challenged. Only a tyrannical superpower demands complete cooperation with all aspects of its policy. Instead, the infinite game is simply a recognition that seeking positions of U.S. relative advantage is a constant, not a single task which can be won.

D. ATTACKING THE FIVE PRINCIPLES

Chinese foreign policy has purported to be based upon the same five core principles since the 1950s. These principles are: “Mutual respect for each other’s territorial integrity and sovereignty, mutual non-aggression, mutual non-interference in each other’s internal affairs, equality and cooperation for mutual benefit, and peaceful co-existence.”³⁴ Focusing toward principle number four, China claims to seek peaceful coexistence with its neighbors by committing to “equality and mutual benefit.”³⁵ Under recent efforts of Xi

³³ Simon Sinek, *The Infinite Game* (United States of America: Portfolio/Penguin, 2019), 16.

³⁴ John Gee, “China’s Foreign Policy Principles Under Stress,” *The Business Times*, May 10, 2018, <https://www.businesstimes.com.sg/opinion/chinas-foreign-policy-principles-under-stress>.

³⁵ Gee.

Jinping and the CCP, however, a rising attempt at invoking nationalism appears to be challenging that commitment. While examples exist demonstrating the potential for mutually beneficial BRI inclusion, doubts loom regarding the long-term effects of doing business with an expanding China.³⁶ These doubts are made doubly concerning by increasing CCP control of regional issues and by rhetoric contained in unrestricted warfare concepts published out of Beijing. Viewed thusly, the Chinese idea of mutual benefit may in reality be predatory lending practices and financial warfare on the part of the CCP.

China's adversaries have an emerging opportunity to highlight these predatory practices, not only for the world community, but perhaps more importantly for the Chinese people. Through information warfare, China's adversaries should seek to determine whether the potential for condemnation of CCP predatory practices on neighbors and competitors alike are available from Chinese citizens. For example, the nearly \$40 Billion worth of investments China has made in Gwadar, Pakistan "has the potential to mire China in internal Pakistani conflicts" while simultaneously leaving China "unable to guarantee the safety of Chinese nationals working in Gwadar or travelling to and fro in the region."³⁷ Certainly this creates a potential for justified civil-unrest in the community of Chinese workers in Gwadar, a population that could reach as many as 500,000 by 2022.³⁸

E. U.S. NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY—AN INDIRECT APPROACH

The 2017 NSS clearly describes China's goals in Asia stating, "China seeks to displace the United States in the Indo-Pacific region, expand the reaches of its state-driven economic model, and reorder the region in its favor."³⁹ It is equally clear when describing the expected U.S. military's response to China's behaviors stating, "we will maintain a forward military presence capable of deterring and, if necessary, defeating any adversary.

³⁶ Tanner Greer, "One Belt, One Road, One Big Mistake," *Foreign Policy*, December 6, 2018, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/12/06/bri-china-belt-road-initiative-blunder/>.

³⁷ Gee, "China's Foreign Policy Principles Under Stress."

³⁸ Logan Pauley and Hamza Shad, "Gwadar: Emerging Port City or Chinese Colony?," *The Diplomat*, October 5, 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/10/gwadar-emerging-port-city-or-chinese-colony/>.

³⁹ White House, *National Security Strategy*, 25.

We will strengthen our long-standing military relationships and encourage the development of a strong defense network with our allies and partners.”⁴⁰ Then Secretary of Defense James Mattis interpreted the NSS guidance when drafting the NDS—which addressed the military’s role in responding to NSS guidance. The 2018 NDS includes a new operating concept for the DoD to address the shifting emphasis from countering terrorism to deterring adversary aggression. The resulting model, termed the Global Operating Concept, is defined in the NDS:

The Global Operating Model describes how the Joint Force will be postured and employed to achieve its competition and wartime missions. Foundational capabilities include: nuclear; cyber; space; C4ISR; strategic mobility, and counter WMD proliferation. It comprises four layers: contact, blunt, surge, and homeland. These are, respectively, designed to help us compete more effectively below the level of armed conflict; delay, degrade, or deny adversary aggression; surge war-winning forces and manage conflict escalation; and defend the U.S. homeland.⁴¹

Focusing on the four layers of global engagement for the DoD: contact, surge, blunt, and homeland, we can begin to discern which layers comprise the competition space, and which layers begin to favor warfighting functions and the development of combat power. In Figure 2 we have developed a visual model of the GOC to enable clarity of this new purpose.

⁴⁰ White House, 47.

⁴¹ Mattis, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy*, 7.

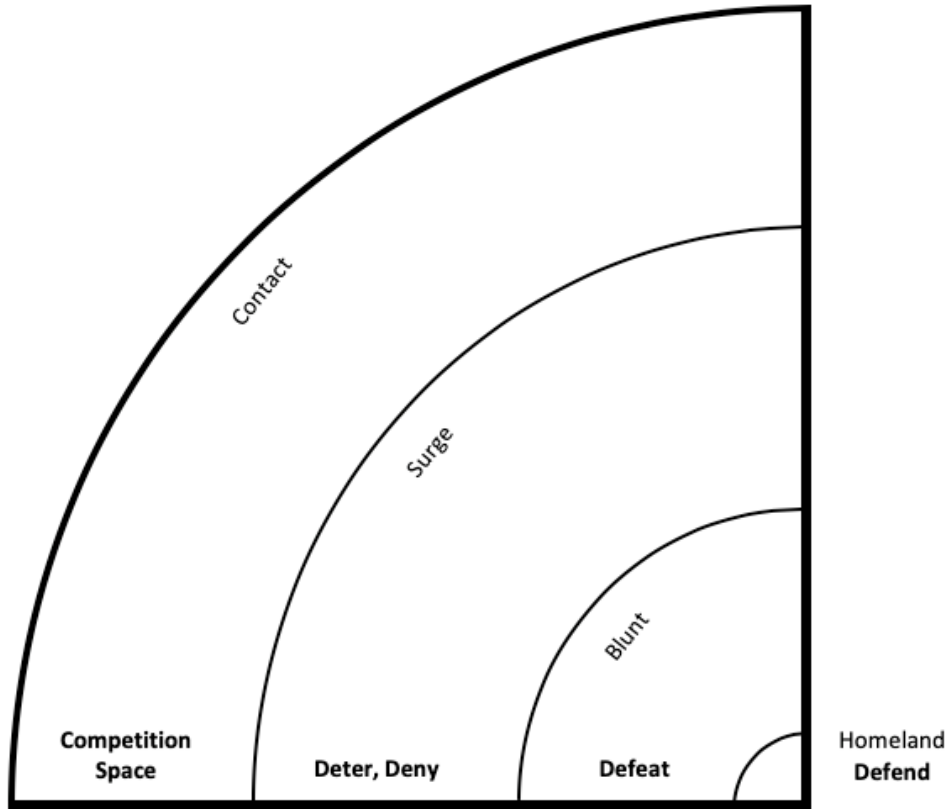


Figure 2. NDS Global Operating Concept Model

Looking back to the guidance from the NSS, we can see a linkage in priorities moving through these layers. Table 1 demonstrates the focus for each layer as related to the tasks in the NSS. It also assigns a priority warfighting function to each layer with expected outputs.

As a whole in Asia, the GOC is focused on denying China's goals as stated in the NSS. The ends of the GOC are to reimpose a balance of U.S. unipolarity in the region, promote U.S. and allied freedom of maneuver, and stabilize China's influence.

Table 1. NSS by Military Warfighting Function.⁴²

NSS Task	Global Operating Concept layer	NDS Description of Layer	Priority Warfighting Function	Outputs
Maintain a forward military presence	Contact	Help us compete more effectively below the level of armed conflict	Intelligence	An operationally prepared environment Situational awareness and serialized reporting Resilient partners Combat capable forward presence
Strengthen our long-standing military relationships				
Encourage the development of a strong defense network with our allies and partners				
Deter	Blunt	Delay, degrade, or deny adversary aggression	Protection Sustainment	Military presence – partnered and unilateral
Defeat	Surge	Surge war-winning forces and manage conflict escalation	Movement and Maneuver Mission Command	Postured for decisive combat advantage
	Homeland	Defend the U.S. homeland	Protection Fires	Postured to defend U.S. homeland and territories preemptively or in response to attack

Focusing on the contact layer, we begin to observe where SOF’s value proposition exists in the new GOC. While potentially important to operational plans in the blunt, surge, and homeland layers, SOF’s small footprint and limited combat power relative other instruments of warfare make them uniquely suited for operations in the contact layer. The ability to deploy in small teams, distributed across large areas of operation with limited mission command, and force multiply by building healthy relationships with partners has been the strength of SOF since the days of the Office of Strategic Services in WWII.

⁴² Adapted from Combined Arms Doctrine Directorate, *Operations*, ADP 3-0 (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2019), chap. 5, https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/pdf/web/ARN18010_ADP%203-0%20FINAL%20WEB.pdf.

We will consider the tasks provided in the NSS to be the key tasks of these layers. In the case of the contact layer and SOF, that means SOF's key tasks are to strengthen military relationships and develop a strong defense network, while managing the potential for escalation.

F. MANAGING ESCALATION

1. Covert Action as the “Third Option”

The spread of Soviet and Chinese communism was a pressing concern for the Eisenhower administration at the end of WWII, but both the president and the populace were extremely war weary after paying the heavy toll inflicted by that conflict. Eisenhower recognized that diplomacy alone would not address the potential spread of communism however, he was in no position to engage militarily. This need to counter communist spread, while managing escalation, resulted in the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) being tasked with sole authority to conduct covert action. These actions were designed to allow the CIA to create strategic problems for communist adversaries and would-be communist governments around the globe. Daugherty defines covert action as, “a program of multiple, subordinate, coordinated, interlocking intelligence operations, usually managed over a long period of time, intended to influence a target audience to do something or to refrain from doing something, or to influence opinion.”⁴³ Covert action has been informally referred to as the “third option” since it was officially assigned to the CIA in 1954.

Recognizing that the CIA is tasked to handle the covert action aspects of the areas between diplomatic efforts and war, the question becomes: does the “third option” label limit the thinking around what other tools are available? Particularly for the DoD, significant options exist within similar spaces as covert action when considering the Secretary of Defense's authorities to conduct “preparation.” In fact, when considering the new GOC, it is apparent that DoD shares much of the space within the spectrum of conflict between diplomacy and war. Figure 3 represents that space depicted graphically along the GOC layers.

⁴³ William J Daugherty, *Executive Secrets: Covert Action and the Presidency* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2006), 12.

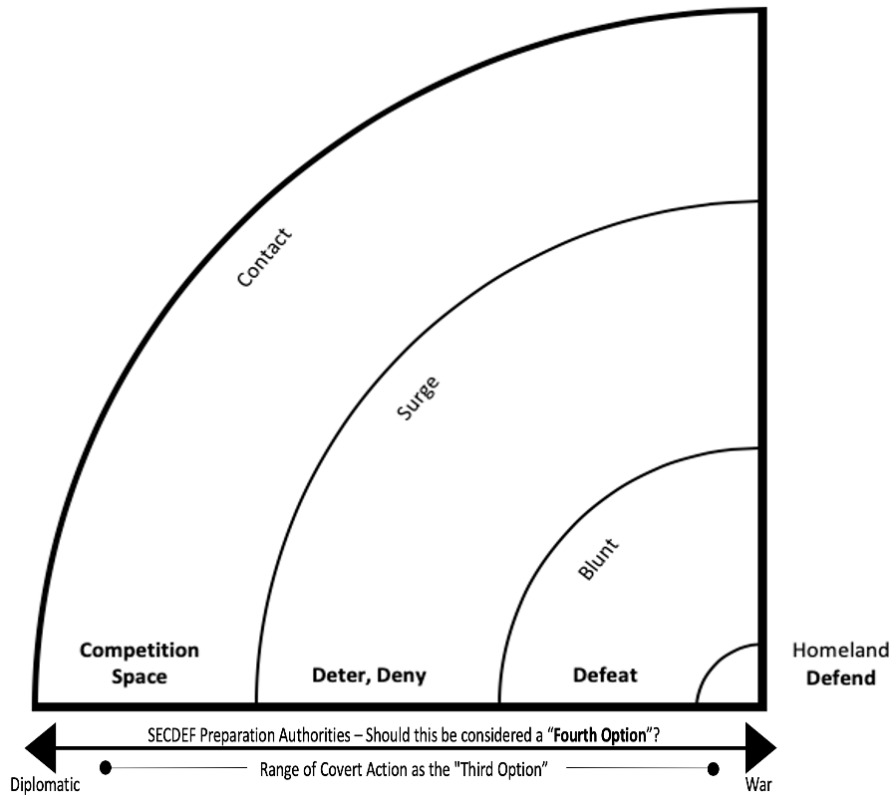


Figure 3. GOC with the DoD Fourth Option

As in the Eisenhower administration, the contact layer recognizes the need for Americans to change the way we manage conflict. Whether termed hybrid warfare, unrestricted warfare, liminal warfare, limited warfare, or otherwise, the new reality emphasizes activities prior to armed conflict and attempts to shape the situation in favor of the nation’s interests without fighting. In contrast to the post-WWII environment, however, there is no insistence on the “covertness” of these new interactions. DoD is quite clear in its intentions to curtail Chinese influence in Asia. This clarity allows for discussion about a new “Fourth Option,” and SOF are well positioned to provide it.

2. SOF as a “Fourth Option”

DoD Joint Publication (JP) 3-0: *Joint Operations* provides a framework for the “Range of Military Operations” and describes them as “encompassing three primary categories”:

1. Military engagement, security cooperation, and deterrence
2. Crisis response and limited contingency operations
3. Large-scale combat operations⁴⁴

While SOF focus on all three of the primary categories, we will focus on SOF's role in the contact layer by tying that responsibility to the "military engagement" range defined in JP 3-0 as:

ongoing activities establish, shape, maintain, and refine relations with other nations and include military engagement activities with domestic civil authorities (e.g., state governors or local law enforcement). The general strategic objective is to protect or further U.S. interests at home and abroad by enabling support from PNs, enhancing their capacity or capability for security and stability, and maintaining or establishing operational access. These activities seek to build networks and relationships to develop situational and cultural awareness that allows the U.S. to develop more-informed options to address emerging situations and opportunities. These occur continuously in many parts of the GCC's AOR even when combat operations may be occurring in other parts.⁴⁵

By focusing on the need to "shape, maintain, and refine relations," SOF's value proposition to operations in the contact layer becomes particularly evident, considering the scale, flexibility, and diverse nature of SOF capability. The development of relationships, networks, and partnerships to enhance situational awareness, particularly in tandem with informing policy makers of opportunities related to emerging situations can sound similar in scope to much of the CIA's covert action mission discussed in the previous section. The difference is in the nature of the fourth option engagement: SOF's role remains stated, public, and understood by all parties involved.

Building upon the foundation of military engagements set in JP 3-0, SOF provides particular attention to the term "shape" in JP 3-05: *Special Operations*. Regarding SOF's role in military engagement, JP 3-05 provides the following guidance:

SOF's primary role in military engagement, security cooperation, and deterrence is in support of a broader whole-of-government approach, integrated with both USG and partner capabilities. SOF's unique

⁴⁴ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Operations*, JP 3-0 (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2018), V-4, https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/jp3_0ch1.pdf?ver=2018-11-27-160457-910.

⁴⁵ Joint Chiefs of Staff, V-5.

capabilities support the U.S. military instrument of national power and support the USG departments and agencies, partner nations, or intergovernmental organizations (e.g., UN, North Atlantic Treaty Organization [NATO]) to protect and advance national security interests, deter conflict, and shape regional security. SOF provides a critical capability for the GCC to support and influence these activities. SOF provides an efficient and effective DoD commitment that builds and develops regional security forces while maintaining a positive forward presence during persistent engagement and pre-crisis periods. The military and security cooperation engagements during these activities emphasize the regional stabilization goals outlined within the GCC's TCP. During this stage, distributed SOF elements influence stability through building or sustaining partnerships, and developing capability and capacity in FSF.⁴⁶

It is important to note at this point the use of the word “primary.” If we suppose that the current NDS insists on SOF attention to the contact layer, the use of the word primary insists that attention is paid to SOF's supporting role to the broader whole-of-government approach. It follows then, that SOF's participation in that effort develops from their operations conducted in the military engagement category. Put simply—everything SOF does in the military engagement category as described in JP 3-05 is designed to support the broader whole-of-government effort, particularly the development of partner capabilities. In this effort, SOF's goals must be aligned with USG goals, and the logical distribution of SOF efforts in that primary task must be aligned accordingly. Recalling the gap between policy and execution described in Section II, how is SOF aligning the purpose of deployment tasks (such as JCETs) to support this primary task? Are resources and goals aligned in a way designed to foster whole-of-government harmony with respect to development of partners or are these events “one-off” training venues which focus on training of SOF forces? Current Title 10 authorities insist upon the latter, thereby highlighting the priority issue.

G. OPERATIONAL PREPARATION OF THE ENVIRONMENT

One of the components of SOF shaping operations is its conduct of operational preparation of the environment (OPE) defined in JP 3-05 as “the conduct of activities in

⁴⁶ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Special Operations*, JP 3-05 (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2014), III-12, https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/jp3_05.pdf?ver=2018-03-15-111255-653.

likely or potential areas of operations to prepare and shape the operational environment.”⁴⁷

It is further described in that joint publication as:

OPE is broadly understood as the conduct of activities in likely or potential operational areas to prepare and shape the operational environment. CCDRs conduct OPE to develop knowledge of the operational environment, establish human and physical infrastructure, and for general target development. OPE activities include, but are not limited to, passive observation; area and network familiarization; site surveys; mapping the information environment; the operational use of individuals; developing nonconventional assisted recovery capabilities; use of couriers; developing safe houses and assembly areas; positioning transportation and telecommunication assets; and cache emplacement and recovery.⁴⁸

These operations exist under the broader umbrella term “preparation of the environment” (PE), which describes the need to “develop an environment for future special operations.”⁴⁹ In this case, the broader definition is so vague so as to be of little academic use, so we will focus on the more specific term OPE, with the understanding that SECDEF Title 10 authorities for PE lead to authorities for OPE. OPE can look a lot like an intelligence activity, and the secrecy of these operations can easily be confused with covert action. This confusion allows for inefficiencies in development of military requirements for war plans and divides decision authority between agencies. By again focusing on SOF’s primary role in the contact layer as described above, we can determine a need to integrate these efforts in a more consistent manner with the broader whole-of-government approach and be inclusive of partner nation requirements in shaping future or potential operations.

Focusing on the first portion of the OPE definition, we see again the need to focus efforts toward shaping the operational environment. This task includes the need to integrate partner capabilities and to build them if they do not exist. In the face of Chinese expansion, the development of partner capabilities, through OPE efforts in the contact layer, results in an increase in the resiliency of relationships against China’s presence. SOF OPE efforts allow for expansion of partner capacity to resist the temptation of China’s enticements by

⁴⁷ Joint Chiefs of Staff, IV-4.

⁴⁸ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Special Operations*, IV-4.

⁴⁹ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Special Operations*, GL-9.

offering an alternative while simultaneously allowing for enhanced situational awareness for U.S. policy makers through increased visibility of the environment.

This section established a link between U.S. NSS policy goals and the conduct of special operations in support of those goals. This link was first described down through the NDS' Global Operating Concept by establishing SOF's role in the contact layer. Next, it was further established through joint doctrinal definitions which establish the responsibilities to shape and prepare while remaining committed to the primary task of supporting the whole-of-government, and allocating limited resources accordingly. Finally, it demonstrated the tactical task of OPE as a mechanism of accomplishing the goal linked to policy. The following sections will describe what security cooperation tools exist to allow SOF to legally deploy in support of the tactical task. It will focus on the means of SOF presence as a requirement to conduct OPE and provide support to shaping operations, particularly those operations which bolster partner nations' capacity and resiliency while providing U.S. policy makers a decision advantage in the contact layer.

IV. MEANS—TOOLS AND AUTHORITIES

The U.S. security cooperation program is a key component of the DoD's whole of government support to national interests. Counter to the customary view of military diplomacy as the hard-power application of force when other diplomatic efforts fail, security cooperation performs a crucial role in U.S. soft-power efforts to shape the global security environment. Security cooperation efforts reside within three main categories for partner nations: apply capacity and capabilities, provide access, and partner nation support of U.S. interests. While technically a component of security cooperation, primary sentiment within SOF consider the JCET a mechanism of internal training through its associated language in *U.S. Code*. The mixed messaging in authority and policy create confusion within the force on proper utilization and purpose of a JCET. DoD Directive 5123.03 from 2016 establishes security cooperation terminology that broadly encompasses:

All DoD interactions with foreign defense establishments to build defense relationships that promote specific U.S. security interests, develop allied and partner nation military and security capabilities for self-defense and multinational operations, and provide U.S. forces with peacetime and contingency access to allied and partner nations. This also includes DoD-administered security assistance programs.⁵⁰

The U.S. struggle to define and manage security cooperation programs and efforts has been an ongoing process. Establishing terminology in 1997 during the Defense Reform Initiative, managers of U.S. security cooperation have continually sought to better define the term while consolidating management and fiscal oversight of the associated programs through doctrine and authorities.

Policies guiding U.S. SOF security cooperation consist of an evolving patchwork of authorities found within *U.S. Code* and the annual National Defense Authorization Act. Residing primarily within Title 10 and Title 22 of *U.S. Code*, this myriad of *U.S. Code* and Public Laws add complexity to the resourcing, planning and execution of SOF-specific

⁵⁰ Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, *DOD Policy and Responsibilities Relating to Security Cooperation*, DOD Directive 5132.03 (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2016), 17, https://open.defense.gov/portals/23/Documents/foreignasst/DoDD_513203_on_Security_Cooperation.pdf.

security cooperation.⁵¹ Joint doctrine, specifically JP 3-05 *Special Operations* and JP 3-20 *Security Cooperation*, add additional variance relative to the primary roles and purpose of JCETs and security cooperation. This set of terminology, doctrine, and authorities set the foundation for misalignment of the JCET program in expectation and execution alongside GCC requirements and component resourcing. Figure 4 introduces the “three primaries” in authority, expectation, and execution that instigate JCET misalignment.

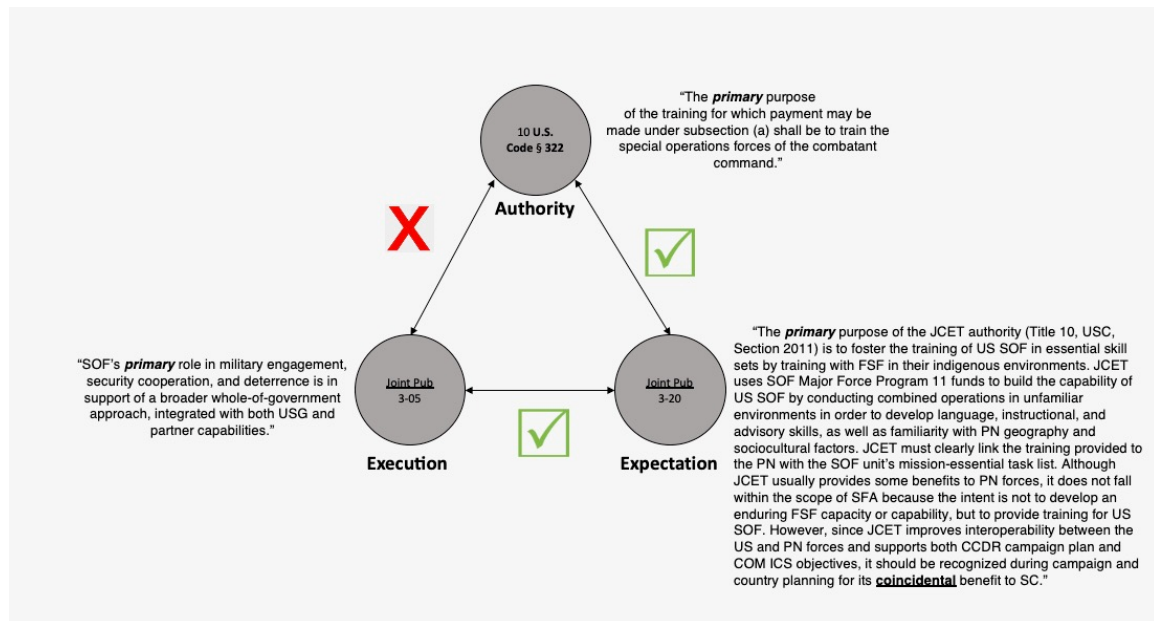


Figure 4. The Three Primaries of JCET Misalignment

In addition to the JCET program, the United States conduct security cooperation through a variety of programs and activities. The below list is not all inclusive, but provides examples of the most common means for SOF to conduct security cooperation:

- 10 U.S. Code §127e Support of special operations to combat terrorism
- 10 U.S. Code §321 Training with foreign countries: payment of training and exercise expenses

⁵¹ David E. Thaler et al., *From Patchwork to Framework: A Review of Title 10 Authorities for Security Cooperation* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2016), 2.

- 10 *U.S. Code* §322 Special operations forces: training with friendly foreign forces
- 10 *U.S. Code* §333 Foreign security forces: authority to build capacity
- Subject Matter Expert Exchange (SMEE)
- Bilateral Exchange (BILAT)
- Mobile Training Team (MTT)

Title 10 *U.S. Code* §127e stipulates the authorities for SOF to provide support to foreign forces, irregular forces, groups, or individuals engaged in supporting or facilitating authorized ongoing military operations to combat terrorism. *U.S. Code* §127e does not give authority to conduct covert action and the ASD-SOLIC has primary responsibility for oversight. The 127e programs receive appropriation of up to \$100M in annual DoD operations and maintenance (O&M) funding for use by special operations. An example of this program is the transportation, training, and equipping of a foreign force supporting U.S. SOF conducting CT operations against non-state actors in a partner nation.⁵²

Title 10 *U.S. Code* §321 provides authority for general purpose forces to conduct training with friendly nation military forces or other security forces deemed of national security interest. This code combined and replaced two previous programs in 2016, “1203—Training of General Purpose Forces of the U.S. Armed Forces with Military and other Security Forces of Friendly Foreign Countries” and “Developing Country Combined Exercise Program (DCCEP).” While not a SOF specific program, SOF units can utilize the 321 program to integrate non-SOF assets and force multipliers into the training with partner nation forces. The training must support the mission essential tasks of U.S. armed forces and promote human rights and legitimate civilian authority in the respective foreign country. The 321 program receives appropriation to cover deployment expenses, a developing foreign country’s directly related incremental expenses, and small-scale

⁵² Support of Special Operations to Combat Terrorism, 10 U.S.C. 127e (2018), 127–28, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/USCODE-2018-title10/pdf/USCODE-2018-title10-subtitleA-partI-chap3-sec127e.pdf>.

construction related to the exercise that does not exceed \$750K. An example of this program is the transportation of U.S. general purpose forces to a partner nation for the conduct of a combined exercise.⁵³

Title 10 *U.S. Code* §322 specifies requirements for SOF to conduct training with friendly foreign forces. This section provides the authorities for conduct of the JCET program. JCETs are intended for U.S. SOF to train on mission essential tasks primarily associated with unconventional warfare and foreign internal defense while improving language capabilities and gaining valuable cultural familiarity. The training must support the mission essential tasks of U.S. SOF and promote human rights and legitimate civilian authority in the respective foreign country. Although the primary purpose of a JCET is to fund and conduct training of U.S. SOF, the program can pay for incremental training expenses of the host nation's participating forces. Approval and regulation of a JCET is limited to the Secretary of Defense. According to this authority, a JCET is limited to the transportation of U.S. SOF to a partner nation to conduct mission essential task training through engagement with partner forces.⁵⁴

Title 10 *U.S. Code* §333 provides the authority for SOF to build capacity and is most commonly known as the Build Partner Capacity or BPC program. This authority is designed to provide training, equipment (defense articles), and services (defense services) to partner nations to improve their capacity and/or capability to conduct:

- Counterterrorism operations
- Counter-weapons of mass destruction operations
- Counter-transnational organized crime operations
- Maritime and border security operations

⁵³ Training with Friendly Foreign Countries: Payment of Training and Exercise Expenses, 10 U.S.C. 321 (2018), 281–82, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/USCODE-2018-title10/pdf/USCODE-2018-title10-subtitleA-partI-chap16-subchapIII-sec321.pdf>.

⁵⁴ Special Operations Forces: Training with Friendly Foreign Forces, 283.

- Military intelligence operations
- Operations or activities that contribute to an existing international coalition operation that is determined by the Secretary to be in the national interest of the United States

BPC programs are typically funded through DoD O&M funding, but may be appropriated with additional funding from Congress. Sustainment for equipment supplied during execution may be continued for up to five years. BPC programs are mostly used to provide support to foreign military forces, but can include other partner nation security forces in some cases. These programs require joint development, planning, and implementation between Secretary of Defense and Secretary of State, with ultimate concurrence required from the Secretary of State and a notification to Congress.⁵⁵

Subject Matter Expert Exchange (SMEE) and Bilateral Exchange (BILAT) are formalized opportunities to foster an interaction between the U.S. and partner nations to open communication, share ideas on tactics and planning, and establish familiarity between countries. As of the 2013 Department of Defense Appropriations Act §8083, funding for the Asia Pacific Regional Initiative (APRI) can be earmarked through specified Navy O&M funds. This appropriation enables USINDOPACOM to execute security cooperation SMEEs that include humanitarian assistance and exercises with foreign security forces.⁵⁶

A Mobile Training Team (MTT) is a group of U.S. military personnel operating in a foreign country to train partner forces on the operations and maintenance of systems and equipment. MTTs may be funded from either Foreign Military Sales (FMS) or International Military Education and Training (IMET) Programs.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Foreign Security Forces: Authority to Build Capacity, 10 U.S.C. 333 (2018), 286–91, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/USCODE-2018-title10/pdf/USCODE-2018-title10-subtitleA-partI-chap16-subchapIV-sec333.pdf>.

⁵⁶ Department of Defense Appropriations Act, H.R. 5856, 112th Cong. (2013), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/112th-congress/house-bill/5856>.

⁵⁷ Defense Security Cooperation Agency, “Electronic - Security Assistance Management Manual,” Defense Security Cooperation Agency, accessed May 25, 2020, <https://www.samm.dsca.mil/listing/esamm>.

All of these programs are employed by GCCs and TSOCs in support of their respective theater security cooperation strategy. However, in USINDOPACOM the majority of these events are conducted through the JCET program. The JCET program is historically such a large part of USINDOPACOM’s strategy that they are often referred to as “how USINDOPACOM gets after it in the region.” In a measure to keep this paper grounded against the scope and scale of the broader security cooperation activities, we will restrict a comparison between historic JCET and PRC engagements in Asia. Further research could be conducted on the effectiveness of other security cooperation activities in countering Chinese influence in the region. Figure 5 reflects U.S. JCET and PRC military engagements within the USINDOPACOM region from 2012 to 2016.

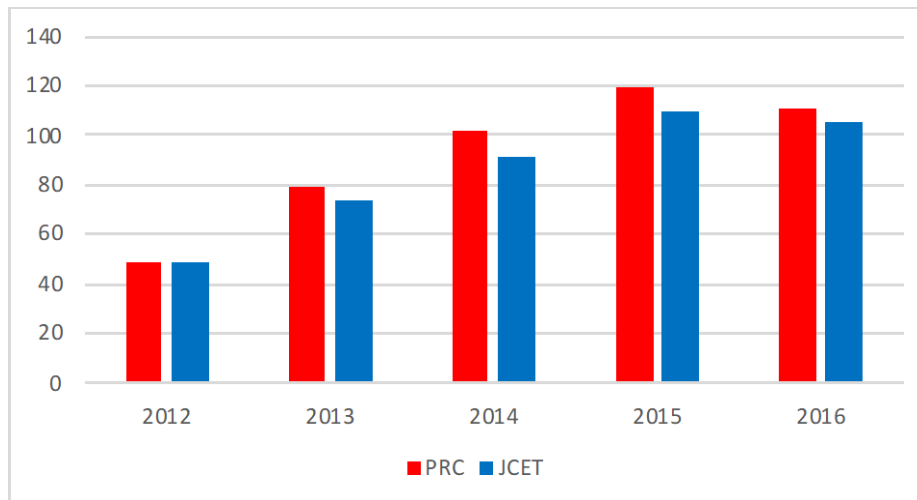


Figure 5. U.S. JCET and PRC Engagement in USINDOPACOM.⁵⁸

As seen in Figure 5, U.S. JCET and PRC military engagement have remained consistently close during this timeframe. The application of U.S. SOF through the JCET program directly competes with the number of PRC engagements within the region.

⁵⁸ Source: Kenneth Allen, Phillip C Saunders, and John Chen, *Chinese Military Diplomacy, 2003-2016: Trends and Implications* (Washington, D.C: National Defense University Press, 2017), <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Media/News/Article/1249864/chinese-military-diplomacy-20032016-trends-and-implications/>; and Richard Manley and Gilbert Bailey, unpublished data, February 2020.

However, in Figure 6, we can see how the location priority of JCET activities during this same period does not correlate to the locations of PRC priority military engagement.

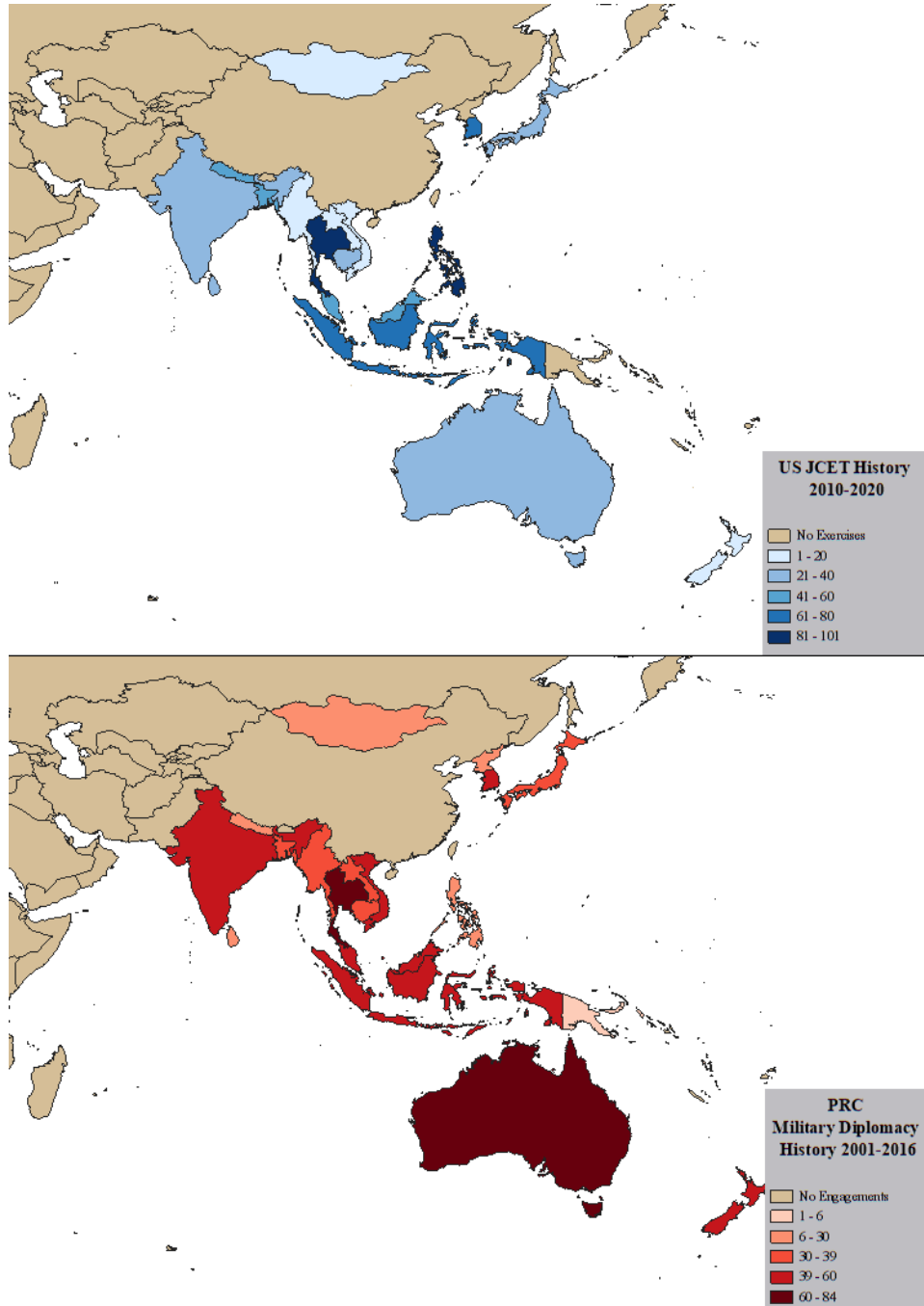


Figure 6. U.S. JCET and PRC Military Diplomacy in USINDOPACOM⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Source: Allen, Saunders, and Chen; and Manley and Bailey, unpublished data, February 2020.

With these figures it is easy to identify the differences in regional priorities of effort between the overarching PRC military diplomatic effort and the GCC/TSOC application of the JCET program. These figures begin to show how the misalignment of JCETs as an internal training venue skews with theater security cooperation efforts supporting a holistic U.S. approach countering Chinese influence in the region. The doctrine and authorities highlighting training in JCETs as opposed to developing resilience and access in security cooperation with partner nations has a fundamental disconnect between strategy expectation and exercise execution. The GCC/TSOC expect JCETs to provide a means to develop partner resilience while the component and executing units execute JCETs as an overseas training event. This disconnect between expectation and execution becomes clear when discussing JCET success and purpose with the SOF force.

The authors conducted an anonymous survey to measure the perceived value of the JCET within the SOF community. This survey consisted of U.S. Army Special Forces officers, warrant officers, and non-commissioned officers at the Group and USASOC levels with familiarity toward JCETs in the USINDOPACOM region. The primary goal of the survey was to determine whether the JCET is viewed an opportunity to build resilient partners in concert with the security cooperation goals to meet competition in the contact layer, or whether it is conversely associated with an opportunity to train the team on internal requirements. The importance of these opposing views cannot be understated as it is the crux of our research—is the JCET really doing both advertised functions? Is it training U.S. SOF while simultaneously providing a tangible secondary benefit of partner development? Colloquially, the JCET is regarded as a “51/49 percent” issue. In other words, U.S. SOF receive 51 percent of the benefit but SOF partners can expect 49 percent focus. It is important to note that, from our perspective, this colloquial explanation of the JCET focus highlights the difficulties associated with executing a training event in a partner nation and remaining compliant with *U.S. Code* Title 10 guidance that U.S. SOF must receive “primary benefit” from the event. This is important because of the way the JCET is marketed through the GCC, U.S. Country Teams, and SOF’s partners as a dual or mutual benefit.

The information gathered in the survey provides quantitative analysis related to JCET perceptions and expectations within the U.S. Army Special Forces. Figure 7 identifies the perceived importance of the JCET to unit mission accomplishment.

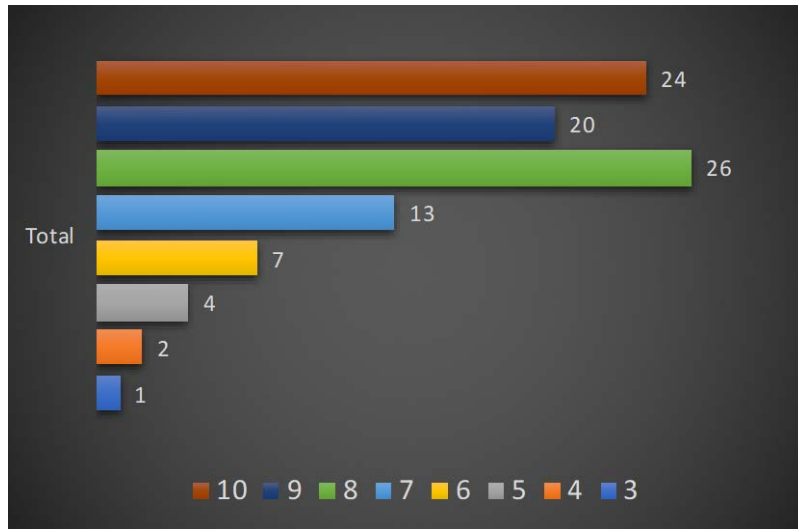


Figure 7. Perceived Importance of the JCET 1–10 Scale

Survey respondents largely agree that the JCET is important in accomplishing their organization’s mission. On a 1–10 scale, the JCET received 795 out of 980 possible points from respondents; no participants rated the JCET with less than a three and a majority 71% rated JCET events with a seven or higher.

Limitations within the survey did not distinguish if the level of importance was a direct correlation to internal training or toward improved regional security cooperation. Figure 8 illustrates how respondents prioritized effects of the JCET program.

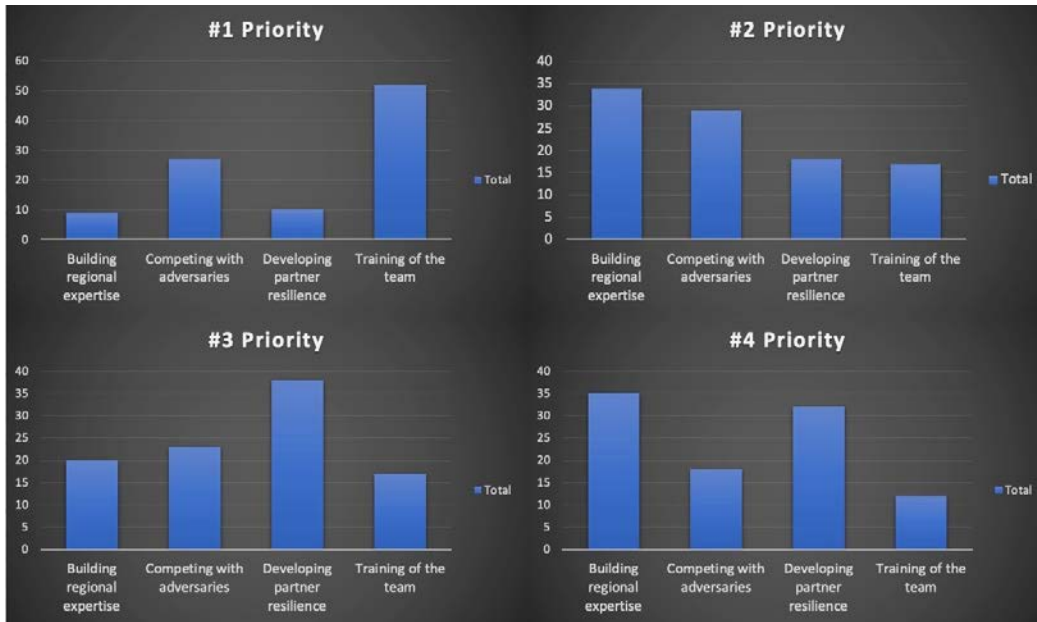


Figure 8. Survey Respondent Prioritized Effects of the JCET Program

Of four possible outcomes, respondents measured the first two priorities of a JCET as training the team and building regional expertise for the team. Respondents identified developing partner resilience as the third priority while competing with adversaries never achieved a majority of votes at any of the four prioritization levels. Competing with adversaries did register its highest level from respondents in the second priority but still fell behind building regional expertise. These findings support the idea that the GCC/TSOC are overselling JCET impact within theater strategy. The tactical and operational level's priority is clearly to build internal preparedness over security cooperation. We can conclude from this that Special Forces tactical and operational units are focused on training and preparing for future conflict as a priority rather than viewing these events as an opportunity to compete with China now; preparing for war rather than operating today to deny Chinese influence and maneuver.

A. SOF OPERATING CONCEPT

Recognizing that JCET misalignment through expectation and execution hampers SOF security cooperation, we will now organize these components/ideas to establish a SOF operating concept—one that demonstrates the layered capacity SOF can bring to bear within

the competition space to develop offensive countermeasures for China’s aggression. JP 3-20 asserts security cooperation activities have a non-hierarchical relationship due to their “overarching functional relationship with all other associated programs, activities, and operations.”⁶⁰ However, SOF security cooperation in the current resource constrained environment requires greater clarity to maintain steady-state resource management. Figure 9 shows the SOF Operating Concept Model and, for purposes of this paper, where JCETs fit in SOF contact layer operations.

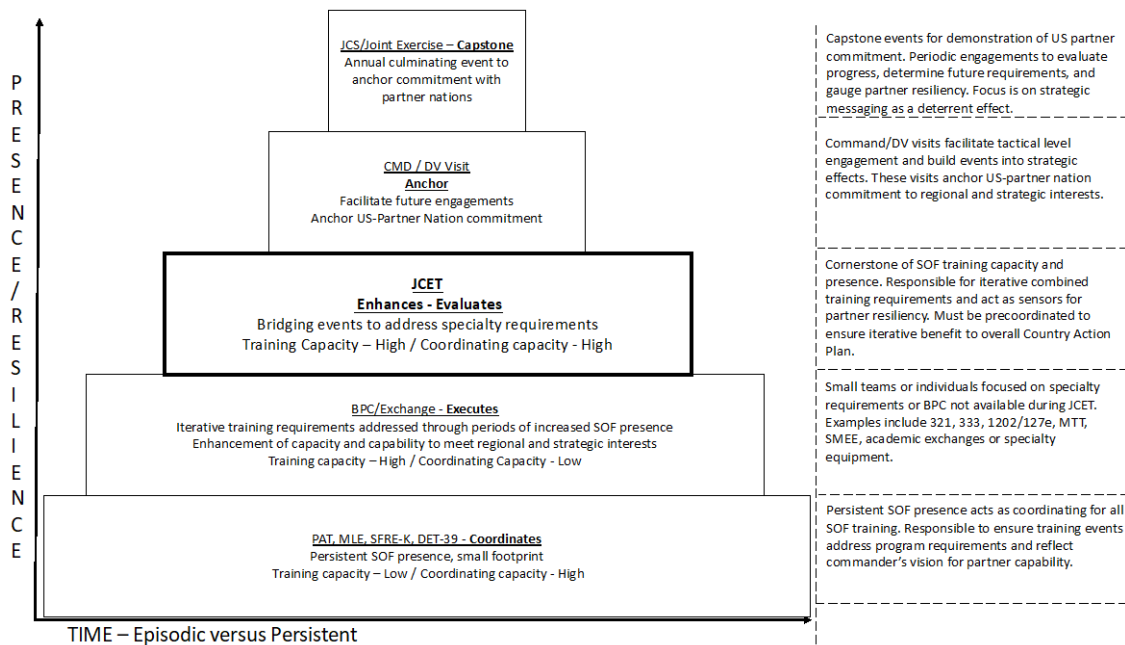


Figure 9. SOF Operating Concept Model—Developing Partner Resiliency

Within the SOF Operating Concept, the JCET is the central tier in SOF’s security cooperation efforts to build resilience and support national interests. The lower tier and longer term SOF persistent presence activities provide coordination and execution of SOF operations supporting regional security plans and country action plans. The top tier episodic or annual events build SOF efforts into strategic effects and competition

⁶⁰ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Security Cooperation*, JP 3-20 (Washington DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2017), I-1–2, https://fas.org/irp/doddir/dod/jp3_20.pdf.

deterrence messaging. The JCET's central placement represents the opportunity and flexible presence important to U.S. regional and partner nation strategies. From this position, JCETs can provide additional access and focused effort where needed to support overall security cooperation efforts—from enhancement events supporting JCS exercises and command/distinguished visitor visits to reinforcing and evaluating exchanges and BPC training of partner forces. The current misalignment of JCET execution with expectation suppresses SOF's layered strategic potential as outlined within this SOF Operating Concept and promotes JCET underutilization and missed opportunities.

B. VIGNETTES—DEMONSTRATING THE POTENTIAL VALUE OF THE JCET

In the course of providing the research survey to U.S. Army Special Forces, we were contacted by a number of soldiers wishing to share stories and examples of what they perceived to be missed opportunities or under-capitalized access during the conduct of a JCET. Most Special Forces soldiers we have met during our service have a “JCET story,” we believe the short vignettes below provide some context to our research and give a ground truth assessment of the potential utility that the JCET allows. For purposes of operational security (OPSEC) the soldiers will remain anonymous, and the specific locations of their JCET will be generalized. This is to protect both the identity of the soldier involved as well as the details of potential future interactions in the host nation.

1. Reacting to Pandemic

An Army Special Forces Operational Detachment—Alpha (ODA) was participating in a 10-man JCET to an island nation in the South Pacific when news of a global pandemic began surfacing around the globe. The ODA was training in the island nation focused on basic tasks such as trauma management, rifle marksmanship, and leadership. As COVID-19 began to take a toll on global health, this ODA was informed to expect a curtailment of their mission and an early trip home. The ODA pleaded with their HQ to allow the JCET to continue as they had made strong connections to senior officials of that country's naval command. Through the course of their JCET they had developed a

working relationship with these senior officials by providing access to observe training and allowing conversations intended to develop future training at a more senior level.

As signs of the pandemic began to show in the island nation, the majority of the U.S. Embassy staff was instructed to shelter in place, essentially cutting off the majority of diplomatic interactions. Meanwhile, the island nation was determining the best courses of action in developing a quarantine plan. As it happens, the senior officials with whom the ODA had been interacting was tasked to develop a plan for running quarantine facilities and disease prevention. These officials turned to the ODA, the only available form of U.S. interaction, for help and advise on how to move forward. The ODA medics (18Ds) quickly provided expertise and knowhow on pandemic management given resources at the time.

Not only did this ODA enable the island nation to better prepare for the strain on their healthcare system, they also did so by working by, with, and through local systems. During a China-based healthcare crisis, this ODA provided U.S. presence in effects management, increasing rapport with the island nation and providing a bulwark against future Chinese nefarious activity. Had the “primary purpose” language in 10 *U.S. Code* § 322 been different, the ODA could have re-leveraged operational mission funding against the problem and provided small purchasing power to augment the already cash-strapped local system. The JCET could have been extended to allow for longer-term crisis counseling by the 18Ds and cementing the bond between the ODA and senior island-nation officials.⁶¹

2. Exposing and Connecting Resilience Opportunities

An ODA was conducting a JCET combined with a similar partner force in a Southeast Asian country. The outlying location of the training event inhibited a more in-depth interaction from any of the persistence presence individuals working out of the U.S. Embassy or country’s capital region. During the conduct of the JCET and associated interaction with the partner force, the ODA was able to collaborate with other foreign military forces stationed in the area. Through this engagement, the ODA was able to reveal

⁶¹ Interview with Special Forces Non-Commissioned Officer, September 14, 2020.

ground truth on a partner nation maritime awareness defense concept that supports the country action plan and U.S. national strategy. The ODA was then able to build a relationship between the foreign military force and SOF persistent presence in the country.

In this example, the ODA's actions during a JCET highlight the potential flexibility to foster additional access and focus in developing partner nation resilience supporting U.S. national strategy. Historically this type of outcome is an exception and not the norm of JCET events. The misalignment of expectation and execution stifles this type of outcome. Changing the language in JCET authorities and policy would allow an alignment of priorities down to the tactical level. In this example, alignment of these priorities strengthened US—partner nation resilience efforts and expanded U.S. SOF—partner nation networks in the contact layer to counter regional Chinese influence.⁶²

3. Building Partner Capacity but Missing the Resilience

An island nation in the South Pacific indicated a desire to develop an underwater maritime capability to a U.S. Special Forces ODA during a pre-deployment site survey (PDSS) in support of a planned JCET. That nation desired an underwater infiltration capability across their joint services to address a capability gap they had identified to deal with their primary regional security concern. The underwater-operations focused ODA went to work developing a five-week program of instruction that facilitated a cadre of 26 students comprised of host nation Army Special Forces, Navy, Marines, and Coast Guard. The idea was that this event would develop the nation's initial joint cadre and allow them to train future classes across the force. The ODA worked to incorporate their own SCUBA-related mission essential tasks into the training concept to provide justification of training in concert with the "primary purpose" clause pertaining to expense of funds.

The training was modelled on the U.S. Maritime Assessment Course and Special Operations Dive School curriculum (i.e., pool skills, basic to advanced SCUBA, tactical underwater navigation and infiltration, mission and dive planning). The event exceeded host nation expectations and culminated with a full mission profile exercise simulating the

⁶² Interview with Special Forces Warrant Officer, August 15, 2020.

host nation's primary security concern with a live fire target. Of note this happened to be the first culminating exercise the host nation had ever conducted as a joint force. As a byproduct of this JCET, the ODA left behind a working knowledge of how to run and maintain SCUBA-based operations along with newly developed facilities to allow for safe operation of host nation SCUBA equipment.

As the ODA was preparing to depart, they were informed by the host nation exercise Commander that another training force, this one from the PLA of China, was arriving to a nearby training facility. In fact, the unit from the PLA was inbound to the same tiny island as the ODA, causing serious concerns amongst the U.S. and host nation forces of OPSEC concerns. While the training was unclassified, the host nation preferred a low-profile status of their relations with U.S. SOF. The ODA Commander reported witnessing a host of PLA soldiers and officers arrive to the island just prior to the ODA's departure.

As an unfortunate consequence of the "paradox of purpose" discussed throughout this thesis, the next JCET to the island nation did not capitalize on this newfound placement and access opportunity nor the momentum of the above event. In fact, the next JCET was assigned to a non-SCUBA qualified ODA and, because that ODA's mission essential tasks did not include underwater operations, had nothing to do with maritime operations. The original ODA watched as Chinese forces occupied the training site that U.S. SOF developed in support of the host nation's primary training concern, and the next ODA had no ability to harden the U.S. position there. Without the "primary purpose" clause, this site could have been a critical position within the contact layer to demonstrate U.S. resolve to China and commitment to the partner nation. Instead, China's presence there went unchallenged and follow on SOF operations were not focused against the host nation primary objective, leaving that space open for China to potentially fill.⁶³

⁶³ Interview with Special Forces Commissioned Officer, August 19, 2020.

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V. WAYS—IMPLEMENTING THE SOF OPERATING CONCEPT

A. STRATEGIC INTERACTION THEORY

In his foundational article on the theory of asymmetric conflict, Arreguín-Toft recounts the famous “Rumble in the Jungle” boxing championship match from 1974.⁶⁴ In this example, Arreguín-Toft shows how Muhammad Ali taunted and teased his opponent, George Foreman, into abandoning his strategy and, ultimately, wearing himself out. Ali knew that Foreman’s ability to maintain pressure over time would fade, and that only once he had worn down his stronger opponent did he have a chance at winning the bout. Arreguín-Toft uses this event to compare and contrast the relative strength and military capabilities of “strong actors” and “weak actors,” eventually distilling this comparison into a strategic interaction model seen in Figure 10.

		Weak-Actor Strategic Approach	
		Direct	Indirect
Strong-Actor Strategic Approach	Direct	Strong actor	Weak actor
	Indirect	Weak actor	Strong actor

Figure 10. Arreguín-Toft’s Strategic Interaction Theory Model.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Arreguín-Toft, “How the Weak Win Wars,” 93–94.

⁶⁵ Source: Arreguín-Toft, 108.

If Arreguín-Toft is correct, this model demonstrates that if the “weak actor” (China) has adopted an indirect strategy (unrestricted warfare) than the “strong actor” (the US) must adopt an indirect strategy as well in order to maintain primacy and advantage—note that we avoid deliberately the use of the term “win.” But is this a complete strategy? Does indirect vs indirect complete the story in this case? We contend that the components of an indirect strategy must be explained in greater depth.

B. BOXING NOT BRAWLING

Staying with the boxing example, George Foreman had every advantage to win his championship bout with Ali. He was bigger, stronger, punched harder, and was the 4 to 1 favorite. So why did he take Ali’s bait? His strategy appears to have been unilateral: punch hard and often until Ali falls. This was an overreliance on an offensive approach and lacked a defensive strategy. As mentioned earlier in this paper, we contend that a comprehensive strategy to counter China’s unrestricted warfare requires an offense and defense; the ability to box with China in a controlled way, recognizing the effects of punching and counterpunching. If the defensive component of U.S. military strategy relies on overwhelming conventional strength, we can only win when we can throw hard punches. This was Foreman’s downfall and should be avoided. To properly incorporate both elements of this strategy, our defensive approach must maintain overwhelming strength while executing deliberate restraint; we must not take the bait the way Foreman took Ali’s. A well-balanced defensive component avoids direct conflict, which we have determined from Arreguín-Toft’s model is an appropriate outcome. Rather the point of the defensive strategy is to keep China firmly rooted in their “hybrid” box by demonstrating and assuring them that direct military conflict is not in their national interest and would not be favorable.

While the defensive strategy keeps China in their box, we must have an offense, preferably one that is sustainable over time and does not force us to over-rely on strength and fade in the late rounds. This is the difference between boxing and brawling and we contend that we want to box with China, not brawl. This offense must have the capacity to compete indirectly with China by providing better solutions and programs to would-be partners and allies in the competition space—to win in the contact layer. In order to win in

the contact layer, the offense needs access to the people and partners in it, and this access is the key to going on offense indirectly against China.

We have demonstrated throughout this thesis that one mechanism of access which can place our special operators in the contact layer to do their work is the JCET. We can consider the JCET the footwork and ring-control aspects of the boxing match. Essentially the JCET allows U.S. SOF to set the tone and tempo of indirect competition as well as determining where in the ring we will seek advantage and where we will give ground. Here we contend strongly that, with some minor modification to policy, we can reengineer the JCET program to focus on the needs of our partners, allies, and would-be friends in order to challenge China's influence throughout USINDOPACOM.

The sustainable and balanced SOF force described under Arreguín-Toft's model must remain anchored to the priorities described in the NDS while executing their SOF mission. This component of strategy development is a cornerstone of the offense in boxing with China, but in doing so must remain balanced to the other instruments of military deterrence described in the GOC. As the NDS makes clear, the preponderance of competitive offense—the boxing—takes place in the contact layer. Figure 11 shows the utility of SOF's competitive advantage along the spectrum of conflict described in the GOC, the darker shaded are those in which SOF offers the most influence and capability. The lighter the phase, the less SOF can rely on unilateral combat power and must be incorporated into larger conventional conflict.

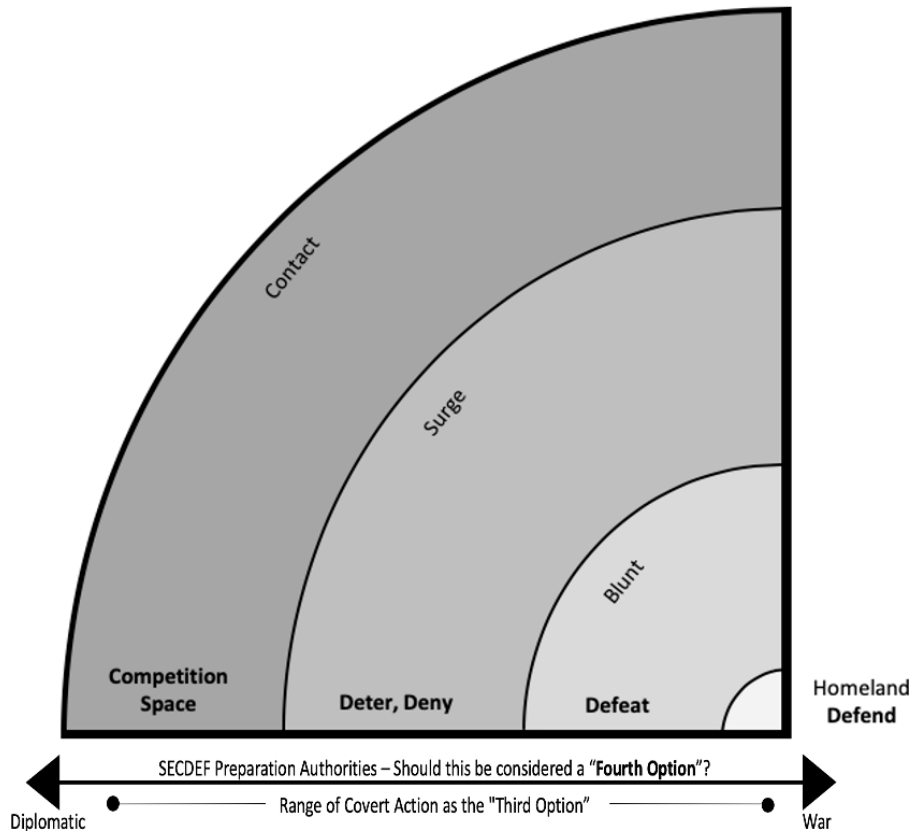


Figure 11. SOF Advantage in the GOC Spectrum of Conflict

Here, the utility of SECDEF’s preparation authorities cross-leveraged against the scale of military conflict become apparent. Also apparent is SOF’s combat power relative to the conventional threat; the closer we are to attrition-based warfare, the less unilateral utility SOF can bring to the fight. This is not to say SOF cannot play a decisive role in surgical strike or combat multiplication, but they cannot do so without significant conventional combat power to counter their relatively low organic capacity. The true combat power of SOF’s unique capabilities may be to deter or delay the onset of conventional conflict, thereby anchoring competition in the contact layer rather than encouraging escalation.

C. MOST SPECIAL OPERATIONS REQUIRE NON-SOF ASSISTANCE

In the SOF community there are five SOF Truths—guiding principles that allow SOF to remain grounded in what makes “special” special. The truths are:

1. Humans are more important than hardware.
2. Quality is better than quantity.
3. SOF cannot be mass produced.
4. Competent SOF cannot be created after emergencies occur.
5. Most special operations require non-SOF assistance.⁶⁶

The SOF Truths were first drafted by John Collins in a report written for Congress entitled *United States and Soviet Special Operations* in 1987.⁶⁷ Retired special operator and editor at *SOF-news* John Friberg explains that Collins—a retired U.S. Army Colonel working for the Congressional Research Service—was attempting to distill the essence of what makes special operations forces special to best represent SOF to Congress.⁶⁸ While all five are important to SOF’s role in competition with China, this research will focus specific to number five—most special operations require non-SOF assistance—as it highlights another problem area in the legislation governing the JCET program.

If we assume that the fifth truth is true, it follows that we must define what non-SOF assistance is required for a JCET to be successful. SOF support systems organic to SOF’s formation, such as supply, transportation, and lift are either controlled through SOF systems or available via commercial solutions. All of the framework to physically conduct a JCET exist inside SOF’s system of control. But the JCET exists in a space between SOF control and larger-scale military diplomacy, or even U.S. diplomacy writ large. Whenever a SOF team deploys overseas to conduct a JCET, they do so under the authority of the GCC, in the case of Asia this would be the USINDOPACOM Commander. While the authorities to deploy exist at the GCC, the TSOC Commander, in this case SOCPAC, is delegated operational (OPCON) and tactical control (TACON) of the SOF forces while in

⁶⁶ “SOF Truths,” United States Special Operations Command, accessed August 12, 2020, <https://www.socom.mil/about/sof-truths>.

⁶⁷ John Collins, *United States and Soviet Special Operations*, 72-338 (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1987), <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015039055655&view=lup&seq=1>.

⁶⁸ John Friberg, “SOF Truths,” *SOF News* (blog), October 28, 2017, <https://sof.news/sof/sof-truths/>.

Asia. It is important to define this command structure to root the SOF activity, in this case the JCET, to the authorities provided the GCC by the SECDEF under Title 10 authorities. Unfortunately, this is where the simplicity of JCET execution ends.

Planning and executing any JCET requires a significant amount of interagency coordination. SOF relies on working partnerships with the Department of State and Department of Justice to accomplish the JCET mission. This coordination, ranging from diplomatic clearances to bring weapons into a country to human rights vetting of JCET partners, takes place between the executing SOF unit's headquarters, the TSOC, and the U.S. country team or embassy in the country of execution. Oftentimes the chief of mission or the charge de affairs is briefed on the JCET plan by the executing SOF unit and provides inputs related to limits of training, limits of embassy services, and partnership goals from their perspective. Typically, the defense attaché is also included in these briefs in an attempt to ensure that partner training emphasis does not run counter to the wider security cooperation mission. More often than not there is little friction during this coordination, however it is important to remember why the SOF team is in the country: to train themselves. Because the emphasis of training is mandated to be for the benefit of SOF forces, the incentive for U.S. country team buy-in of the event is limited to that portion of training which they perceive to be beneficial to their mission. It is then worth asking: why should a U.S. Embassy, already busy with their own contact layer requirements, prioritize support to an event which is primarily for training of SOF?

To account for the paradox of purpose, the TSOC and SOF teams make all efforts to demonstrate that the JCET event is appropriate to the U.S. country team vision for their efforts in a particular country. Typically, the training schedule and intended topics are reviewed against the integrated country strategy (ICS—a U.S. Embassy's guiding mission statement) to ensure that the secondary benefit of SOF presence is appropriate to a U.S. Embassy's goals. This, however, is problematic in that the SOF team must then seek approval of the same training topics from their headquarters as appropriate inside their own primary requirements. This is the tail wagging the dog and the result is that SOF teams miss opportunities to focus on their primary internal training requirements, the partner nation gets only the portion of training which overlaps with team requirements, and the

country team risks having a SOF team participate in training which is potentially out of alignment with their goals for that unit. All three parties suffer from the mismatch of priorities and the lack of focused engagement toward partner development.

If we believe that most special operations require non-SOF assistance, it follows that SOF works best when incorporated in the interagency. SOF endeavors to compete in the contact layer now but prioritizes much of current operations on future combat contingencies. Meanwhile U.S. country teams are focused on problems today. In the current environment, JCETs are undervalued because they are currently focused on SOF training, not developing a partner now. The secondary benefits JCETs provide for partner capacity are the primary considerations for the country team. The sooner the JCET is viewed as an indirect platform of engagement against China's aggressive behavior in Asia and not as a venue for SOF teams to meet administrative annual training requirements, the sooner SOF can expect a more closely aligned interagency partnership and a better-supported training environment.

D. ACCESS AND FOCUS

We contend that two critical components must exist for SOF interaction to have a positive effect on U.S. partner relations over time: access and focus. In the SOF Operating Concept, we see that the JCET is the cornerstone of SOF training capacity and presence. As such the JCET must be focused against the critical components: building and maintaining access while remaining focused on collective objectives for the partner. Access and focus can be further developed to incorporate the core attributes required to effectively determine whether we have access or if we are focused. Figure 12 depicts these characteristics with the X-axis representing U.S. SOF access and the Y-axis representing the focus of U.S. SOF engagements. It further incorporates core attributes of access and focus to allow planners to determine whether appropriate utilization of SOF events exists.

The goal of SOF JCETs, and associated policy for legal conduct, clearly exists in the third quadrant of the chart: high access and high focus. SOF are invested in countries where regular and predictable engagements exist with a partner where SOF influence is either already high or growing, and the training being exchanged is focused on measurable

improvements in partner capacity relative a U.S. policy objective for that country as determined by the U.S. country team and GCC. However, language in Section B of Title 10 § 322 which defines the purpose of JCET training as “ The primary purpose of the training for which payment may be made under subsection (a) shall be to train the special operations forces of the combatant command.”⁶⁹ Our argument continues to be that this language limits the access of U.S. JCETs to those partners who are willing to train on U.S. SOF requirements, not necessarily their own, and eliminates the potential for focused JCETs as defined above. This language essentially forces all U.S. SOF JCETs into either quadrant 1 or quadrant 4.

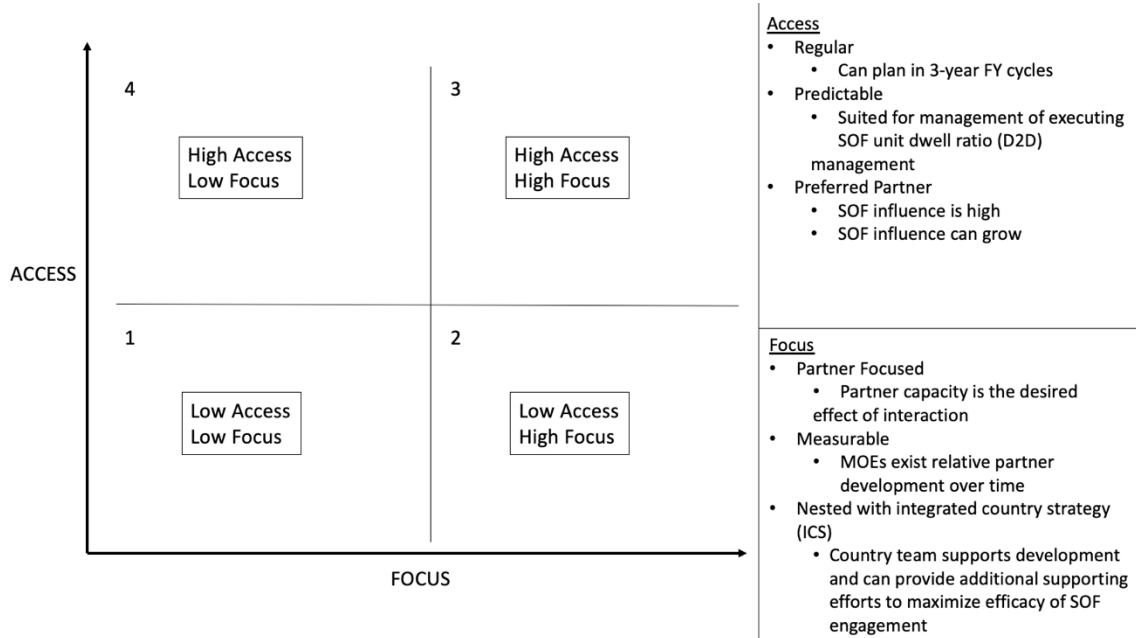


Figure 12. SOF Access and Focus in the SOF Operating Concept

In the quadrant 1 scenario, we have limited regular access because our goals for the JCET are focused on training the trainers, meaning we have no partner focused objectives to stitch together iterative events into a coherent path leading to measurable partner development. This is potentially compounded by the risk that tasks from previous

⁶⁹ Special Operations Forces: Training with Friendly Foreign Forces, 283.

interactions may have been very different than current tasks, leading to out-of-sequence development of complex tasks which should be provided iteratively. Country team buy-in on quadrant 1 events is often difficult based on potentially competing objectives and always undervalued as SOF JCETs may not be building toward country team goals. Additionally, quadrant 1 events typically do not build the type of predictable future access as the partner nation may not be achieving their own training priorities as a result of the interaction. Quadrant 1 interactions are particularly vulnerable to cancellation or postponement, especially considering China's ability to make the unit in question a "better deal" than the United States. Anecdotally, events in Nepal, Vietnam, and Cambodia have fallen prey to the pitfalls of quadrant 1, and U.S. SOF relations have suffered as a result.

Quadrant 4, while enjoying increased access, serves little better purpose in practical application. Quadrant 4 events may be regular and predictable but can fall into a pattern of training redundant tasks over and over, with little progress toward actual development. Tasks such as basic rifle marksmanship and combat marksmanship may be extremely important to train when considering ODA X's mission essential task list, but the previous four JCET missions may have focused on the same task with the same unit. This limits excitement around the event, denies progression, and creates partner complacency. Here again we see significant vulnerability to China, who may be willing to offer training to the partner unit which the United States has denied. This leads to degradation of historically positive relationships. Anecdotally, events in the Philippines, Bangladesh, and Malaysia are increasingly challenging based on the drawbacks of existing inside quadrant 4.

The goal of this research is to demonstrate that by removing the "primary purpose" language from sec 2011, we can move quadrant 1 events to quadrant 2 and quadrant 4 events to quadrant 3. We recognize that, while the goal is to have as many U.S. JCET events in quadrant 3 as possible, some partners will remain in quadrant 2. These partners will remain the battleground contests in competing with China and must be viewed as opportunities not losses. Use of the access/focus metric allows U.S. SOF planners to visualize the contact layer and better understand what point in the conflict scale in which they are operating.

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VI. CONCLUSION

The strategic shift in U.S. focus from terrorism to competition with China and other world powers provides an opportunity for revision of doctrine and tactics to meet changing priorities. The changes discussed in this thesis stress an evolution of current procedures rather than a revolution. Despite buzzwords like innovation and modernization trending in the DoD community, we contend that a gradual shift in current procedures, coupled with moderate adjustments to current policy, provide a feasible and rational potential to be successful in meeting the challenges put forward in the NDS. The last thing the DoD needs right now are large-scale sweeping changes which provide a shock to the system and abandon the hard-earned lessons developed over the last 20-years of war. Regarding SOF's role in that effort, the relatively small adjustment to legislation related to the JCET can provide a significant payoff to SOF operations in the contact layer. We view these kinds of sustainable and moderate adjustments as a natural evolution to SOF capabilities, and a response to shifting policy needs. By making this small adjustment, SOF can reexamine its purpose in the contact layer, thereby allowing itself to find and capitalize on those contact points which are appropriate to the needs of the GCC's theater strategy. In doing so, SOF can align its limited resources to the maximum effect and demonstrate a response to changing requirements.

Legislative signals from Congress demonstrate to DoD that views within that body are changing with respect to China. Legislative action such as the recent appropriation of \$6 billion to the Pacific Deterrence Initiative demonstrate Congress's intent to support DoD in competition with China.⁷⁰ A significant portion of the \$716 billion DoD budget is focused toward development of overwhelming conventional capability to maintain U.S. unipolarity in the Pacific region. These efforts enjoy largely bipartisan support in a U.S. Congress that is very far apart on virtually every other issue. Our research indicates that with the removal of the phrase "primary purpose" from 10 *U.S. Code* § 322, SOF can

⁷⁰ Joe Gould, "Senate Panel OKs \$6 Billion Military Fund to Confront China," Defense News, June 11, 2020, <https://www.defensenews.com/congress/2020/06/11/senate-panel-oks-6-billion-military-fund-to-confront-china/>.

expect an increased capability to develop partner resilience against aggressive Chinese expansion. This relatively small adjustment to legislation related to SOF JCETs seems a logical next step in keeping with that demonstrated legislative intent and provides a virtually cost-free augmentation to on-going SOF operations.

As the focus of SOF expands from countering terrorism to include deterring nation state competition, it is appropriate to look back on what SOF has done well in the last 20 years of warfare. SOF was able to remove the government of the Taliban in 2001 not by drastically overhauling their tactics and techniques, but by focusing on their strengths and aligning them with the needs of the nation. On October 9, 2001, just 28 days after the attacks on the World Trade Center, then SECDEF Donald Rumsfeld gave an interview to CBS News in which he stated: “We’re so conditioned as a people to think that a military campaign has to be cruise missiles and television images of airplanes dropping bombs, and that’s just false. This is a totally different war. We need a new vocabulary. We need to get rid of old thinking and start thinking about this thing the way it really is.”⁷¹ Rumsfeld had placed enormous trust in SOF’s ability to align their tactics to the needs of the nation, and further observed that the larger Joint Force would struggle to see the potential value of a SOF focused strategy. His words were not aimed at the SOF operators successfully executing an irregular warfare campaign in Afghanistan, those operators knew that their tactics would win the day if authorized and supported appropriately.

In 2020, the nation again finds itself at a crossroad with regard to China, and a new vocabulary is emerging. To the larger DoD, Rumsfeld’s message still carries weight. Cruise missiles and bombs are the last thing any leader desires from this military campaign. Joint force concepts about maneuver warfare will have to adapt if they are to expand out of their defensive role. For the special operations forces, as in 2001, no drastic action is required to assume the offensive role in this competition. The same flexibility, adaptation, and creativity, will allow SOF to succeed in competition if supported by the larger joint force and enabled with the appropriate authorities.

⁷¹ America Fights Back: Rumsfeld Interview, October 9, 2001, CBS Evening News, video, 13:21, <https://youtu.be/r9NaQI-Bj1c>.

We end this thesis by examining a transformative period in modern U.S. military history because we believe that a similar situation exists within the U.S. SOF community today. We have outlined throughout this research the paradox of purpose within the JCET program as it relates to SOF responsibilities in the contact layer. A staple of U.S. SOF engagements around the world, the JCET is at a crossroad similar to the products above. This research has demonstrated that, with some modest adjustments to policy and practice, the relatively commonplace JCET may be the key to U.S. SOF's ability in solving the elusive challenge of how SOF campaigns in the contact layer.

Our clear recommendation is a revision to Title 10 *U.S. Code* §322 and remove the “primary purpose” clause in subsection B—Purpose of Training. Doing so allows for an increase in the deliberate planning and execution of JCETs geared toward contact layer requirements as outlined in the global operating concept model and puts SOF on the ground where they are needed most. Additionally, the recommended change allows for increased access and focus toward comprehensive partner development as highlighted in the SOF operating concept. The net effect of this change is more meaningful SOF engagement with partners and allies to address partner requirements as they relate to China's aggressive policies. A repurposed engagement then allows for partner resilience in the contact layer to develop a deterrent effect against the spread of Chinese influence. More importantly, incorporating the changes detailed throughout this paper provides SOF the access and focus required to anchor competition with China in the contact layer, and potentially avoid the pitfalls of conventional attrition warfare altogether.

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