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<b>14. ABSTRACT</b>  The People's Republic of China's aggressive approach to competition in Southeast Asia and the SCS has established a new status quo that creates an unacceptable risk to the rules-based international order. China's actions isolate and intimidate United States' allies and partners, and threaten freedom of navigation, trade, security, and the once-abundant natural resources in the region. The Tri-Service Maritime Strategy (TSMS) provides a multi-service, strategic framework that establishes goals for the Naval Service to address challenges associated with Great Power Competition and can alter the status quo vis-à-vis the PRC. To realize the TSMS's full potential INDOPACOM should operationalize to employ all domain naval power in innovative ways or novel combinations across the competition continuum to achieve theater objectives. The maritime-focused theater campaign will maximize the Naval Force's contribution ultimately improving cooperation, managing PRC's coercive activities, and setting conditions for crisis and conflict.					
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**Strategy in Action:**

**The Tri-Service Maritime Strategy in the Western Pacific**

## INTRODUCTION

### **The Status Quo a *Fait Accompli*?**

The People's Republic of China's (PRC) aggressive approach to competition in the Western Pacific established a new status quo that creates unacceptable risk to the rules-based international order. Beijing's actions isolate and intimidate United States' allies and partners and threaten freedom of navigation, trade, security, and the region's once-abundant natural resources. INDOPACOM's current rotations-based, exercise-focused approach to the region is disjointed, inconsistent, and insufficient to counter PRC's attempt at a *fait accompli*.

In 2020, the United States Navy, Coast Guard, and Marine Corps released The Tri-Service Maritime Strategy (TSMS) to integrate United States Naval Forces to "advance the prosperity, security, and promise of a free and open, rules-based order" in this era of Great Power Competition (GPC).<sup>i</sup> INDOPACOM should operationalize the TSMS in a maritime-focused theater campaign that maximizes Naval Force capabilities across the competition continuum to improve cooperation, manage PRC's coercive activities, and prepare for crisis and conflict.

## STRATEGIC AND OPERATIONAL DESIGN

### **The Environment and Approach**

#### **The Problem**

The PRC altered the status quo in the Western Pacific by using coercive and deceptive influence operations paired with physical intimidation first conceptualized in the book, *Unrestricted Warfare*. Based on observations of the U.S. military in the Gulf War and NATO operations in Kosovo the authors explain their conception of a state of conflict where "all boundaries lying between military and non-military will be totally removed."<sup>ii</sup> Qiao Liang and

Wang Xiangsui posit that China should employ all means to compel adversaries because, “the new principles of war no longer use armed forces to compel the enemy to submit to one’s will, but instead use all means, including armed force or non-armed force, military and non-military, and lethal and non-lethal means to compel the enemy to accept one’s interests.”<sup>iii</sup> This combination includes the three warfares categorized as psychological warfare, media or public warfare, and legal warfare.<sup>iv</sup> The PRC achieves objectives by using an integrated, grey zone approach that keeps conflict below the violence threshold making counters difficult.<sup>v</sup>

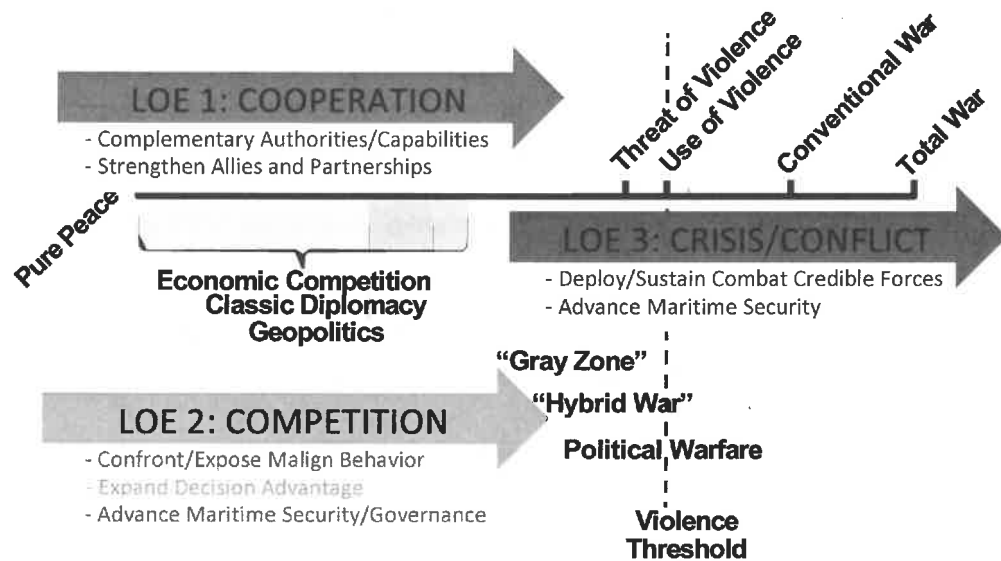
Beijing employs physical intimidation from the People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN), the Chinese Coast Guard, and the People’s Armed Forces Maritime Militia (PRC Naval Forces) to underwrite the three warfares. These activities and maritime enforcement operations intimidate smaller, periphery nations with which it competes in the South China Sea (SCS).<sup>vi</sup> This use of power is consistent with the Chinese way of war that generates asymmetries at the tactical level creating operational and strategic effects leading to victory.<sup>vii</sup> Gains made in this grey zone enable the PRC to succeed by creating de facto control in areas consistent with “Sun Tzu’s observation that the apex of achievement is to win without fighting.”<sup>viii</sup> This layered approach bolsters its claims by forcing competitors out of disputed areas allowing it to monopolize resources and preclude others from securing sovereign territory.

### **Approach**

The TSMS provides an opportunity for Geographic Combatant Commands (GCC) to employ naval forces in novel ways and combinations to achieve objectives. Operationalizing the TSMS will improve cooperation and coordination between naval forces and regional partners while achieving aims without resorting to violence.<sup>ix</sup> The TSMS organizes along five lines of effort (LOE): advance global maritime security and governance, strengthen alliances and

partnerships, confront and expose malign behavior, expand information and decision advantage, and deploy and sustain credible combat forces.<sup>x</sup> Within these, the service chiefs' offer complementary capabilities to "deter and set conditions" with allies and partners, expand operational maneuver space, and achieve national security objectives.<sup>xi</sup> Conceptualizing the TSMS with the competition continuum provides a framework for operationalization and illuminates opportunities to counter PRC coercion.<sup>xii</sup>

The TSMS must be translated into a theater campaign that increases INDOPACOM's effectiveness in the cooperation and competition "phases" of the continuum by "synchronizing the complementary capabilities, investments, and authorities of the naval service" through integrated all domain naval power.<sup>xiii</sup> This enhances cooperation opportunities with allies and partners while taking a more assertive approach to day-to-day competition and by creating unity of effort to "confront and expose malign behavior," expand "information and decision advantage," and undermine PRC's influence and control in the SCS.<sup>xiv</sup> The campaign organizes along three lines of effort that use naval power in innovative ways or novel combinations to accomplish objectives. The first two LOEs set conditions, establish relationships, and satisfy requirements for the third LOE (Figure 1). LOE 1, Cooperation, expands maritime security by maximizing the complementary authorities and capabilities of the naval forces to strengthen and empower allies and partners. LOE 2, Competition, employs coordinated naval forces and operations in the information environment (OIE) to counter PRC influence operations while expanding information and decision advantage.<sup>xv</sup> The final LOE, Crisis/Conflict, synchronizes the advantage derived from the other LOEs to set conditions for the Joint Force to execute key operating concepts if required.<sup>xvi</sup>



**Figure 1: TSMS Campaign Across the Competition Continuum<sup>xvii</sup>**

Countries desire alternatives to Beijing's coercion. Applying integrated all-domain naval power in conjunction with aggressive OIE would boost partner confidence and resilience and mitigate three warfares' effectiveness.<sup>xviii</sup> This campaign turns the tables on *unrestricted warfare* by employing grey zone methods in competition to improve resilience in vulnerable audiences. Additionally, partners and allies increase their ability to provide security making it easier for partners and allies to resist PRC coercion.<sup>xix</sup> The campaign also sets conditions for INDOPACOM to deny Beijing its objectives should it resort to hostilities.

### **LOE 1: COOPERATION**

#### **Give them what they want**

To maximize cooperation with allies and partners the TSMS campaign increases the USCG's role in the Western Pacific, operationally controlled by Pacific Fleet (PACFLT). The PRC conducts aggressive grey zone techniques in the maritime domain to exert control and prevent competitors from accessing claims and resources in the region. Many SCS countries

have limited ability to compete with Beijing in the physical and cognitive domains and the USN and USMC do not offer effective options when the source of competition has legal or commercial characteristics. The USCG offers options that are suited for maritime security and law enforcement. Increasing its presence, in conjunction with the USN and USMC, provides enhanced capabilities and greater options for allies and partners to counter PRC coercion.<sup>xx</sup>

The Coast Guard Commandant offers his service as a complementary capability to achieve GCC objectives. While the USCG already conducts theater security cooperation activities in the region, this campaign enhances its contributions in military-to-military and build partner capacity roles in conjunction with naval counterparts. Maritime law enforcement-focused capacity and capability building will enhance partner nations' maritime security proficiency and competency. It is also likely to attract hesitant countries to the United States because it addresses critical needs consistent with national interests in areas where smaller countries are vulnerable to PRC coercion and compellence. This could lead to additional opportunities for the Naval Force and INDOPACOM that are discussed later.

### **Implementation: Secure the Maritime Commons**

The USCG's capabilities and authorities better facilitate cooperation with countries struggling to counter PRC coercion without sparking conflict. The USCG's mission profile includes "law enforcement, fisheries protection, marine safety, and marine security," which could be used in conjunction with the other naval services' "hard power" capabilities to counter the PLAN's aggressive use of its Coast Guard and Maritime Militia.<sup>xxi</sup> The "soft power" offered by the USCG can be more politically acceptable for countries that are hesitant to compete militarily with the PRC but desire to secure maritime claims and protect natural resources, such as Vietnam. Since 2014, when the PRC began drilling within Vietnam's Exclusive Economic

Zone (EEZ), it has been interested in cooperation with countries such as the United States and Japan.<sup>xxii</sup> Coast Guard-led engagement will maximize Vietnam's ability to compete with the PRC without the same risk as Navy-Navy engagement.

This LOE centralizes the USCG's law enforcement and maritime security capabilities, supported by integrated Navy and Marine forces, allowing the force to distribute across the region and the competition continuum. Cooperative maritime security and law enforcement activities focused on maritime enforcement or fisheries protection can build confidence and generate goodwill because it is more attentive to partner nations' domestic concerns. Employing combined Coast Guards in disputed areas in maritime enforcement roles aligns with the international and territorial character of the disputes and are effective "non-military mechanisms to keep the peace amongst interested governments."<sup>xxiii</sup> The increased cooperation could encourage the establishment of additional mutually beneficial relationships with others in the DoD and interagency.

Combining all domain effects in cooperation helps achieve theater objectives. Cooperative employment includes the Coast Guard working with Vietnam's or Philippines' Coast Guards and commercial fishermen to secure fisheries and conduct environmental protection activities while the USN and USMC conduct other operations, activities, and investments (OAI) in the area. By finding common concerns and offering palatable solutions INDOPACOM can create new opportunities for partnerships that establish mechanisms of cooperation and address critical needs such as in water and maritime security, humanitarian and disaster relief/response, and resource management.<sup>xxiv</sup> Additionally, integrating these capabilities in cooperation with partners creates a security architecture that offers a unifying maritime



security and enforcement message that INDOPACOM and others can distribute via strategic communication to counter the PRC's narratives.

### **Value Gains: More Partners, Safer Environment**

Employing the Naval Services as an integrated force maximizes each's contributions by capitalizing on their diverse capabilities and unique authorities to increase cooperation opportunities and overall effectiveness vis-à-vis the PRC. Operating with and through partners and allies in areas best suited for the USCG increases the cost on Beijing reducing the effectiveness of its coercion campaigns. The PRC is less likely to aggressively enforce its faulty claims within other's EEZ or in commercial areas if multiple coast guards operate cooperatively near Navy and Marine forces. In essence, this replicates the PLAN's use of its Maritime Militia and CCP Coast Guard, degrading its perceived advantage over claimant nations. This low-cost, high-return cooperation increases opportunities to integrate competition activities and operations while creating effective countermeasures in competition.

## **LOE 2: COMPETITION**

### **Win Without Fighting**

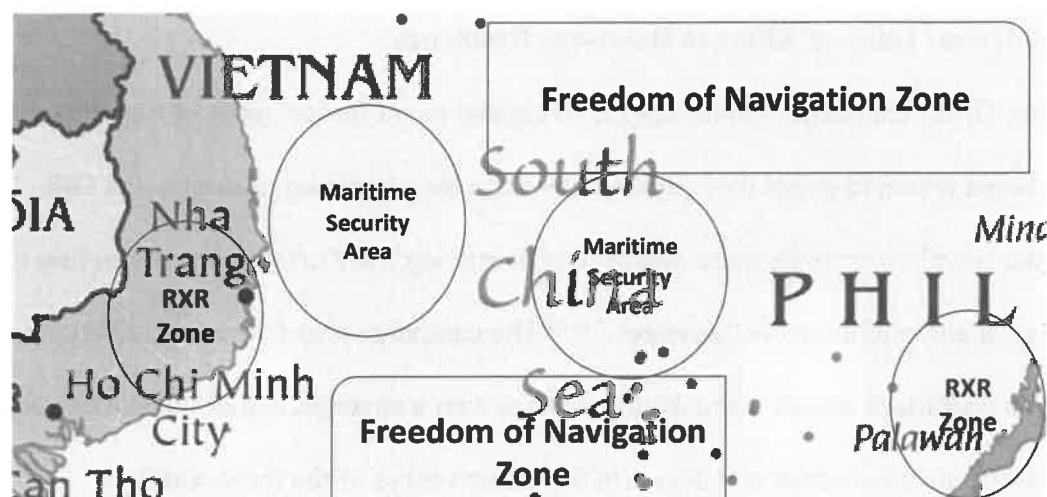
As INDOPACOM assesses the benefit of improved cooperation, it should manage Beijing's hegemonic desires and reduce its effective cognitive and physical control in the region via competition OAI's.<sup>xxv</sup> While this campaign models the TSMS over the competition phenomena sequentially, the continuum and this campaign are designed to influence complex adaptive systems, "meaning they have many parts and these parts interact with each other in nonlinear, often unpredictable, ways."<sup>xxvi</sup> Competition and cooperation are non-linear, and effectiveness depends on the perceptions of participating actors.

**Implementation: Unity of Effort to Reinforce Resilience**

The TSMS campaign maximizes the integrated naval forces' unity of effort by dividing the operational area into zones that improve coverage for partnering, security, and OIE. This requires the Naval Force to be more assertive in disrupting the PLAN and undermining its psychological and public/media "warfares."<sup>xxvii</sup> The campaign also federates collections and information operations across the maritime domain with a strategic communication plan that bolsters cooperative countries and degrades the effectiveness of the three warfares.

This assertive approach includes the Naval Force operating as a cohesive unit in zones of action unilaterally or with allies and partners (Figure 2). The Maritime Security Area consists of the USCG conducting maritime enforcement actions within competing EEZs to protect fisheries or secure other maritime activities. Concurrently, in the Freedom of Navigation Zone, the USN conducts activities such as freedom of navigation operations or naval exercises in international waters. The USMC conducts collections and area development activities in the reconnaissance counter-reconnaissance (RXR) zone on the landward side of the littorals. While the Naval Forces routinely conduct these activities, the novel combination maximizes unity of effort and unity of command by planning and executing OAs concurrently and under PACFLT's control.

A key to maximizing effects during these activities is collections and OIE. Each service conducts collections and other information operations within its assigned area. PACFLT fuses the information and shares it with partners or releases it as part of a communication strategy. Providing a real-time alternate narrative from across the maritime domain will increase partner confidence and reduce Beijing's effectiveness.



**Figure 2. TSMS Campaign Employment Concept<sup>xxviii</sup>**

### **Value Gains: Greater Confidence increased Attraction**

Taking a more assertive approach through integrated maritime operations will alter the status quo. In his article on China's "Three Warfares," Edwin S. Cochrane explains, "the purpose of the "Three Warfares" is to establish "discursive power" (huayu quan) over an adversary to control perceptions and shape narratives that serve Chinese interests while undermining those of an opponent."<sup>xxix</sup> TSMS campaign activities cover more of the maritime domain, resulting in greater coverage and the ability to sense, expose, and deter PRC's malign activities to coerce and compel others. A timely and truthful counter-narrative can also expand cognitive and operational maneuver space by building partner confidence and undermining PRC conviction in the effectiveness of its efforts.

## **LOE 3: CRISIS AND CONFLICT**

### **Set Conditions to Win the Fight**

All OAIs in the campaign should be integrated with a purpose that satisfies requirements or sets conditions for crisis or conflict. All efforts should be multi-purposed and aligned to

operational requirements. Examples include establishing a combined communication network to secure maritime fisheries, building safe ports for mariners, or constructing schools and networks to educate populations. LOE 3 is linked as an output of LOEs 1 and 2 and the potential input for a branch campaign should deterrence fail.

### **Implementation: Consolidate Gains**

The benefit of the OAI conducted in the first two LOEs directly affects the conditions that exist at the start of a crisis or conflict. By focusing on integrated all domain naval power, maximizing the complementary authorities of the naval services, increasing unity of effort with allies and partners, and rehearsing complimentary operations INDOPACOM would be better postured for crisis. In relation to current and future operating concepts, it could improve placement, access, and overflight; domain awareness with allies and partners; sustainment and logistics support; and common operating procedures and information-sharing practices. The TSMS campaign would also minimize the cognitive effects that support Beijing's physical force. This will create conditions for INDOPACOM to execute its operating concepts free of the subversion and estrangement the PRC attempts to induce.<sup>xxx</sup> Thus, each campaign LOE and the supporting OAI should set conditions for crisis or conflict.

OAI in the first two LOEs establish the physical network required to operate above the violence threshold against the PRC. A crisis or conflict with the PRC in the Western Pacific will be fought in both cognitive and physical dimensions.<sup>xxxi</sup> These can include establishing redundant networks for sharing information or targeting data, establishing infrastructure capable of supporting military activities, or maintaining supply points. This resilient physical and cognitive network can be used to expose PRC psychological warfare activities or determine intentions should Beijing commence hostilities or deny access to the region.<sup>xxxii</sup> These networks

would enhance collection and information activities such as notifying fishermen of hostile PRC forces or sharing intelligence during a conflict. This will help cooperating leadership resist the coercion and manipulation that is likely to precede a Beijing-initiated crisis.

### **Value Gains: Reap the Reward**

Successful psychological and media warfare requires credibility and an undeveloped or missing counternarrative. In keeping with its patterns and literature, Beijing is likely to employ all tools prior to armed conflict to achieve its objectives via the most rapid, cost-effective means.<sup>xxxiii</sup> Using the relationships, processes, and networks established along the first two LOEs will help expose PRC intentions and reduce its effectiveness while shaping for the use of physical force. The Biden Administration did this when it exposed the Russian Federation's misinformation during its buildup for the February 2022 Ukraine invasion. The true and timely counternarrative supported by photographic evidence gained early, unified support for Ukraine and condemnation of Russia.

In addition to information and intelligence preparation of the environment, the campaign creates opportunities to counter anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) effects. With distributed positions throughout the region, naval forces can create cross-domain synergy, execute preemptive counters to A2/AD systems, and conduct sustainment activities for contact and blunt forces.<sup>xxxiv</sup> Throughout the campaign, the force should be scouting and preparing distributed infrastructure capable of supporting small formations during crisis or conflict. These could include schools capable of enduring typhoons with shelters reinforced from winds and blasts that are large enough to store critical classes of supply or sports fields reinforced to sustain weights commensurate with aircraft. This interrelated and interdependent LOE creates unity of effort to set the conditions necessary to win in conflict.

## COUNTERARGUMENT

### **The PRC goes to War**

Opponents may argue that modifying the INDOPACOM's employment methods, adding partners, or synchronizing naval activities in competition will incite Beijing to increase coercive activities and "adopt a more aggressive approach of deterrence by denial."<sup>xxxv</sup> They would contend that changes in the status quo may force Beijing to seek objectives by force. The same contributors may argue that the status quo is acceptable as commercial lines of communication are open and there have not been open hostilities in the region for decades.

### **Rebuttal: Not Willing to Pack it in**

This defeatist approach to GPC does not reconcile Beijing's strategic aims with its effect on international markets and global security. It also lacks an understanding of PLAAF Colonels Liang and Xiansui contention that bloodless warfare has displaced violence and countries need not rely on military means alone to achieve national interests.<sup>xxxvi</sup> If INDOPACOM chooses not to employ grey zone methods by using OAs below military force to counter the PRC, it may be left with no option but to use force.

## CONCLUSION

### **If you want peace, prepare for war<sup>xxxvii</sup>**

The TSMS gives statutory support to GCCs in the form of options for use in GPC by establishing a maritime-focused campaign across the competition continuum that is cost-effective and foundational. This campaign highlights the importance of maximizing the naval force's complementary authorities and capabilities to improve cooperation with allies and partners. It progresses INDOPACOM's effectiveness in day-to-day competition by building partner resilience and neutralizing the effectiveness of PRC's influence campaigns. Finally, this

concerted, complementary approach prepares INDOPACOM for operations above the violence threshold by increasing placement and access, reducing PRC's influence in the region, and raising PRC's cost for creating crisis or conflict.

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- <sup>ii</sup> Sangkuk Lee, "China's 'Three Warfares': Origins, Applications, and Organizations," *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 37, no. 2 (2014), 201.
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- <sup>iv</sup> Doug Livermore, "China's 'Three Warfares' in Theory and Practice in the South China Sea," *Georgetown Security Studies Review*, <https://georgetownsecuritystudiesreview.org/2018/03/25/chinas-three-warfares-in-theory-and-practice-in-the-south-china-sea/>.
- <sup>v</sup> Grey zone (or gray zone) from the 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review and in common parlance describes operations that exploit seams in the common conceptions of warfare by keeping activities below the violence threshold.
- <sup>vi</sup> *Advantage at Sea*, 1.
- <sup>vii</sup> Edwin S. Cochran, "China's 'Three Warfares': People's Liberation Army Influence Operations," *International Bulletin of Political Psychology* 20, Iss 3, Article 1 (2020).
- <sup>viii</sup> Dean Chang, "Winning Without Fighting: The Chinese Psychological Warfare Challenge," *Backgrounders*, no. 281 (2013), 6.
- <sup>ix</sup> *Advantage at Sea*, 3.
- <sup>x</sup> *Advantage at Sea*, 10.
- <sup>xi</sup> *Advantage at Sea*, 10.
- <sup>xii</sup> Headquarters Marine Corps, *Competing*, Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 1-4, (Washington, DC: HQMC, 2020).
- <sup>xiii</sup> *Advantage at Sea*, 7.
- <sup>xiv</sup> *Advantage at Sea*, 10.
- <sup>xv</sup> *Advantage at Sea*, 10.
- <sup>xvi</sup> Key operating concepts include Distributed Maritime Operations (DMO), Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations (EABO), Stand In Force Operations, and Army Multi-Domain Operations (MDO).
- <sup>xvii</sup> HQMC, *Competing*, 1-6.
- <sup>xviii</sup> Michael Clarke, "China's Application of the 'Three Warfares' in the South China Sea," *Orbis*, Published for the Foreign Policy Research Institute, (2019), 199, doi: 10.1016/j.orbis.2019.02.007.
- <sup>xix</sup> HQMC, *Competing*, 2-9 – 2-11.
- <sup>xx</sup> *Advantage at Sea*, 11.
- <sup>xxi</sup> *Advantage at Sea*, 11.
- <sup>xxii</sup> Alexander L. Vuving, "Vietnam, the United States, and Japan in the South China Sea," *Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies*, (2014), <http://www.jstor.com/stable/resrep14029>
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- <sup>xxiv</sup> The White House, *Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: Executive Office of the President, National Security Council, 2022), 9-10.
- <sup>xxv</sup> HQMC, *Competing*, 1-7.
- <sup>xxvi</sup> HQMC, *Competing*, 2-6.
- <sup>xxvii</sup> In "China's Application of the 'Three Warfares' in the South China Sea and Xinjiang," Michael Clarke explains, "the potential manipulation of information in open, liberal societies that has emerged as a central 'front' in the strategic competition between the United States and the authoritarian and 'revisionist' actors," 188.
- <sup>xxviii</sup> Peter J. Hotez, "The South China Sea and Its Neglected Tropical Diseases," *PLoS, Neglected Tropical Diseases*, [https://www.researchgate.net/figure/The-South-China-Sea-Map-modified-from\\_fig1\\_299539149](https://www.researchgate.net/figure/The-South-China-Sea-Map-modified-from_fig1_299539149)
- <sup>xxix</sup> Cochran, "China's 'Three Warfares': People's Liberation Army Influence Operations," 3-4.
- <sup>xxx</sup> Ralph D. Sawyer and Mei-Chün Lee Sawyer, *The Tao of Deception*, 375.
- <sup>xxxi</sup> Ralph D. Sawyer and Mei-Chün Lee Sawyer, *The Tao of Deception*, 394

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<sup>xxxii</sup> Toshi Yoshihara and James R. Holmes, *Red Star Over the Pacific: China's Rise and the Challenge to U.S. Maritime Strategy*, (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2010), 11

<sup>xxxiii</sup> Derived from themes in Ralph D. Sawyer and Mei-Chün Lee Sawyer, *The Tao of Deception* and Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui, *Unrestricted Warfare*.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> Sam G. Tangredi, *Anti-Access Warfare: A2/AD Strategies*, (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2013).

<sup>xxxv</sup> Clarke, "China's Application of the 'Three Warfares' in the South China Sea," 197.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui, *Unrestricted Warfare*, 190

<sup>xxxvii</sup> "Si vis pacem para bellum" is attributed to Roman General Publius Flavius Vegetius Renatus, is etched in the Republic of Korea War Memorial Museum in Seoul, Republic of Korea, and popularized in the John Wick movies.