

Outmatching Chinese strategy requires bold new US thinking by Thomas A. Drohan

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We don't comprehend China's use of confrontation and cooperation as strategy, much less the complex warfare that it is. Perhaps it's because our security cultures are so different. The way Chinese leaders think about warfare is more comprehensive than finding technological offsets for combined arms superiority. If we crush the enemy's military forces, we expect to win. That may be true in the short term, but one of the critical lessons from operations in Afghanistan and Iraq is that advanced technology does not guarantee better tactics, and neither equates to superior strategy. Superior tactics or technology can win battles, but superior strategy is needed to win wars.

Current US military operations, for instance, are filled with tactics and leveraged by technology, but for what strategic purpose? In the Pacific, demonstrations of force, freedom-of-navigation operations and multilateral exercises signal resolve and help build partnership capacity, but what strategy do these activities support? More broadly, how do these operations fit with military-to-military ties, and political-economic relations, especially with China? Without specifying our desired effects, tactics and technologies can easily end up justifying themselves. Existentially powerful, their effects are not automatically relevant in an instrumental sense.

For examples of long-term effective strategies, we should look at China's use of instruments of power to achieve combined effects, not just combined arms. China uses an array of confrontational and cooperative tools to fragment rivals on China's borders and occupy China-claimed territories. The Chinese way of warfare works through predatory laws and territorial seizures, social movements, crowd-sourced and information operations, cyber-attack and theft, military-economic raids and occupation. Domestically, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) exerts control over separatist and democracy movements. Military exercises and selective economic engagement suppress formal independence by Taiwan. In the South China Sea, China's warships, coast guard, and their commercial proxies enforce exclusive territorial claims and economic rights. In the East China Sea, China's state-owned energy and military operations establish a sovereign presence to erode Japan's control in disputed territory. China's economic lifeline toward North Korea keeps

the peninsula divided, Beijing's preference to a unified and independent Korea. How do these combined-effects strategies work?

The operating logic is this: psychological and physical tools target an actor's will and capability to bring about different types of effects. (To focus attention on combinations of different effects, I capitalize the Effects and italicize the cooperative ones.)

Tools on Targets for Effects (Confrontation / Cooperation)

Psychological:

- intimidate will/neutralize capability to Deter - Compel
- assure will/enhance capability to *Dissuade* - *Persuade*

Physical:

- punish will/deny capability to Defend - Coerce
- demonstrate will/exercise capability to *Secure* - *Induce*

This language exposes forms of strategy that realize the aims of classic warfare. The threat or use of force is combined with other instruments of power. In over a dozen instances of Chinese territorial expansion (reclamation, from Beijing's perspective) efforts since 1949, China has intimidated, assured, and punished others' will while demonstrating its own willpower. China has also neutralized, enhanced, and denied others' capabilities while exercising its own diverse capabilities. Any tool may be considered, which opens up the strategy of warfare well beyond the use of military force. The PRC's territorial acquisitions indicate this approach enjoys great success.

In 16 cases of territorial disputes, beginning with the invasion and occupation of Tibet in 1950 and continuing today, China has employed diplomatic, informational, military, economic, and social (DIMES) forms of different effects. The combinations of effects, or "combined effects," feature the following: diplomatic compellence, deterrence, coercion, *persuasion*, *dissuasion* and *inducement*; informational *persuasion*, compellence, coercion and *inducement*; military coercion, compellence, *inducement*, deterrence, *persuasion* and defense; economic *inducement*, *dissuasion*, *persuasion*, compellence and deterrence; social *inducement*, *persuasion* and *compellence*.

Each of these cases is different and is described in my study. But there is a general pattern: Chinese strategy leads with inducement and follows with confrontational and cooperative, physical and psychological DIMES-wide effects. Often the combined effect serves to isolate and divide opponents, forcing continued acquiescence. Consider two of China's territorial seizures in the South China Sea.

Having ejected Vietnamese forces from the Paracel islands in the previous decade, China in 1987 occupied Fieri

Cross Reef in the also-disputed Spratly islands. That induced Vietnamese forces to back up their counterclaims in 1988 in three successive attempts. The matter was settled near Johnson South Reef where the Peoples Liberation Army (PLA) Navy sunk three Vietnamese ships, killing over 70 soldiers. China then occupied half a dozen more reefs. China's growing inventory of maritime law enforcement vessels and modernized PLA Navy and PLA Air Force (PLAAF) combatants deters resistance and compels compliance. Today, Fiery Cross Reef hosts a 10,000-foot long runway, military radars and refueling of fighter patrols. A growing number of PLAAF H-6K bomber flights over disputed maritime territories signals Beijing's resolve to coerce continued acquiescence.

A second example is Scarborough Shoal, north of the Spratlys and within the Philippines' exclusive economic zone. Negotiations with the Philippines led to a Declaration of the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea frequently breached by China's fishing vessels and armed ships. Diplomatic coercion became clear in 2012, when a Philippine Navy frigate attempted to arrest Chinese fisherman with an illegal catch. Chinese maritime surveillance ships arrived to prevent the arrest and compel the Philippine ships to withdraw. In addition to intimidating the obsolete Philippine Navy with a modern PLA Navy presence, China used economic coercion: sudden inspections of Philippine banana imports and a ban on tourist travel to the Philippines. China's economic inducements to buy Filipino acquiescence with arms and infrastructure is an add-on effort designed to erase US influence in the Philippines.

How should the United States and others adjust our thinking to go beyond the scope of combined arms to one of combined effects?

One US strategy is to confront China's illegal actions with regional cooperation, leveraged by an independent and collective commitment to applying dilemma-inducing effects. The goal would be to ensure access to international space and to preserve the legitimate sovereignty claims of all states. The following combinations of effects are possible.

Diplomatic Compellence: encourage claimants to submit claims against Chinese actions via the Permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague, as the Aquino administration of the Philippines did, to compel China to accept international rule of law.

Informational Persuasion: promote liberal values in venues such as summits, conferences, and social media to call for adherence to and enforcement of the rule of law, exposing China's claims to rigorous scrutiny and global condemnation.

Military Security, Defense and Inducement: plan and practice operations to secure and defend the global commons, inducing China to evacuate illegally obtained territory as a precondition to participate in such operations.

Economic Inducement: use economic media and partnerships to attract East Asian investments not subject to China's neo-mercantilist control to induce China's adherence to an open international economy.

Social Dissuasion: expand social networks in China to promote awareness that realizing the "China Dream" depends upon international standards of conduct and relations.

Each approach needs to be pressed with uncommon post-Cold War persistence to have a synergistic effect. Let's step through each notional, perhaps fanciful, line of effect.

Diplomatic compellence begins with issue consistency across our own interagency. This requires the will and capability to confront China on its illegal seizures in the South China Sea while cooperating with China in other matters. Informational persuasion, if it is to be effective, should question China's domestic abuses of human rights as well as international legitimacy to lead organizations. The military security, defense, and inducement element of the combined effect entails no less than cross-cultural integration of the Departments of State and Defense. This combination provides a path toward a trusted leadership role for China. However, a predominant US capability to secure and defend is essential to obtaining military inducement. Economic inducement needs the Department of Treasury with Congressional support to risk the long-term formation of capital, rather than short-term protection of labor. Social dissuasion has to out-compete the CCP's blunt appeal to nationalistic narratives skewed by selective evidence. Together this combined effect would present a dilemma: comply with international norms or face costly consequences.

Such a strategy requires sustained US leadership to maintain its own contributions as well as to embolden a network of partners. US military forces have to maintain operational breadth with unmatched capabilities under resource constraints. Economic strength is foundational. The test is whether the open US trade, finance, and political system can adapt to global changes better than China's state-centric model. None of this is easy. Each requirement will take a sustained and substantial commitment.

US combined arms superiority by itself is not an effective response to the kind of warfare China is waging. A force posture of forward presence for unspecified "stability" falls flat among pragmatic allies and partners looking for tangible results. Technological offsets and trained capabilities for cross-domain dominance must be coupled with a superior strategy that integrates our most relevant and appropriate instruments of power.

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