

The United States and China: The Future of INDOPACOM

A Monograph

by

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Abstract

The United States and China: The Future of INDOPACOM, by MAJ Nicholas Yetman, US Army, 43 pages.

China's precipitous rise onto the global stage challenges the international status quo and the United States' interests across the globe. China's ascendancy concurrently increases the chance of strategic miscalculation while providing the United States with an opportunity to expand its influence. China's resurgence is most acute in the INDOPACOM area of responsibility. The purpose of this study is to provide insight into Xi Jinping's Chinese Dream, the Belt and Road Initiative, and China's use of unrestricted warfare. Therefore, the primary research question asks how does China's strategy in the INDOPACOM AOR inform US military strategy? The underlying thesis of this study argues China uses unrestricted warfare to implement the Belt and Road Initiative as its grand strategy to achieve the "Chinese Dream" policy in INDOPACOM. By understanding how China uses unrestricted warfare to implement the Belt and Road Initiative, US military planners can glean vital information to develop and maintain a proactive and pragmatic military strategy to counter China's bid for regional hegemony.

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Acronyms

ADRP	US Army Doctrine Reference Publication
AIIB	Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
AOR	Area of Responsibility
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASPSI	Indo-Asia-Pacific Stability Initiative
A2AD	Anti-Access/Area Denial
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CFIUS	Committee of Foreign Investment of the United States
FIRMA	Foreign Investment Risk Review Modernization Act
INDOPACOM	US Indo-Pacific Command
JP	Joint Publication
LOC	Line of Communication
LOO	Line of Operation
MDO	Multi-Domain Operations
NDS	National Defense Strategy
NSS	National Security Strategy
OE	Operating Environment
PLA	Peoples Liberation Army
PSBC	Politburo Standing Committee
RCEP	Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership
RIMPAC	Rim of the Pacific
SCS	South China Sea
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organization
UN	United Nations

USIDFC	United States International Development Finance Cooperation
UW	Unrestricted Warfare
WTO	World Trade Organization

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Introduction

The best military policy is to attack strategies; the next to attack alliances; the next to attack soldiers; and the worst to assault walled cities.

—Sun Tzu, *The Art of Warfare*

In the 21st century, China's rise challenges the international status quo and the United States' (US) interests across the globe. In a globalized and hyper-interconnected strategic operational environment, China's expansion simultaneously increases the chance of strategic miscalculation and conflict while providing the United States opportunities to expand its influence. The 2017 *National Security Strategy* states, "China is using economic inducements and penalties, influence operations, and implied military threats to persuade other states to heed its political and security agenda."¹ China's strategy reflects its geopolitical positioning which is most acute in the United States Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM) area of responsibility (AOR).

The INDOPACOM AOR is crucial to the United States' future and national interest. Concomitantly, China views the South China Sea and the INDOPACOM region as their historical sphere of influence and vital in expanding China's geopolitical influence. In 2012, Xi Jinping declared China was not only a regional power but an emerging global powerhouse, and he seeks global affirmation of China's position and role in the international system.² China uses unrestricted warfare (UW) to implement the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as its grand strategy to achieve the "Chinese Dream" policy in INDOPACOM.

As China continues to challenge US interests across the globe, how can the United States maintain the status quo? The problem is compounded by the fact that both states have nuclear weapons, influence key supranational organizations, and boast the world's two largest economies. Additionally, China's unrestricted warfare uses the indirect approach to achieve an asymmetric

¹ Donald Trump, *National Security Strategy* (Washington, DC: The White House, 2017), 3, accessed November 25, 2018, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>.

² Elizabeth Economy, *The Third Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 186.

advantage in pursuit of regional hegemony and global aspirations. This study submits that by analyzing the BRI in INDOPACOM the United States can develop a proactive operational approach that contests China's UW strategy.

The purpose of this study is to provide insight into Xi Jinping's Chinese Dream, the BRI, and China's use of UW to expand its power in INDOPACOM. This study analyzed both US and Chinese strategic lines of operation, basing, and geoeconomic initiatives to deduce potential strategic aims, friction, and opportunities within INDOPACOM. This study examined the BRI within the context of the theory of UW as part of China's whole-of-government operational approach to increase its influence in the INDOPACOM AOR. If the US can glean China's objectives, operational requirements, and elements of UW as part of BRI, then the US can exploit opportunities while simultaneously contesting China's rise.

This study is significant because it is one of the first analysis identifying both US and Chinese strategic aims, political and military objectives, and overlays their respective operational approaches in the INDOPACOM AOR. By examining China's Belt and Road initiative, military planners can generate pragmatic solutions to future problems within INDOPACOM and the BRI writ large. This study contributes to US military planners understanding of the intricacies of each respective states' operational approach and assists in avoiding strategic miscalculation and the Thucydides Trap.³

This study examines the BRI in INDOPACOM through the lens of unrestricted warfare as an operational approach consisting of a combination of stratagems including geoeconomics, supranational organizations, coercive diplomacy supported by military basing, and a whole-of-government approach. To establish a common language and understanding, this study provides the definitions of some key concepts used throughout the paper. The key terms reflect updated

³ Graham Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape the Thucydides's Trap* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017), vii.

terminology from the original publication of *Unrestricted Warfare*, and serve as an amalgamation of the eight principles and countless combinations of UW to address the modern operational environment.⁴

Unrestricted warfare is a type of warfare that “transcends all boundaries and limits.”⁵ UW is a whole-of-government approach orchestrating a concerted effort towards a common end with all available means. It consists of eight principles: omnidirectionality, synchrony, limited objectives, unlimited measures, asymmetry, minimal consumption, multidimensional coordination, and adjustment and control of the entire process. These principles are arrayed in an infinite combination of stratagems encompassing state power, supranational organizations, transnational, and nonstate actors. Unrestricted warfare focuses on the indirect approach and intends to avoid superior military hard power.⁶

Geoeconomics is vital to the success of China’s BRI. Geoeconomics consists of a number of economic mechanisms to obtain national interest and to yield desirable geopolitical results. Essentially, geoeconomics influence the actions of other nations to obtain political goals. Geoeconomics tools include foreign direct investment, infrastructure development, trade policy, foreign aid, and energy and commodities.⁷ The best way for a state to use geoeconomics is at the head of supranational organizations leveraging coercive diplomacy.

Coercive diplomacy leverages political position in supranational organizations, geoeconomics, and hard power to achieve desired outcomes. The intent behind coercive diplomacy is to “back one’s demand on an adversary with a threat of punishment for noncompliance that he will consider credible and potent enough to persuade him to comply with

⁴ Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui, *Unrestricted Warfare* (Beijing: PLA Literature and Arts Publishing House, 1999), 213.

⁵ Ibid., 12.

⁶ Liddell Hart, *Strategy* (New York: Meridian, 1967), 326.

⁷ Robert Blackwill and Jennifer Harris, *War by Other Means: Geoeconomics and Statecraft* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016), 20.

the demand.”⁸ Coercive diplomacy is an effective political stratagem, but is not a one size fits all solution. There are several variants of coercive diplomacy strategy: the classic ultimatum, tactic ultimatum, try-and-see, gradual turning of the screw, and the carrot-and-stick approach.⁹ Ultimately, for Coercive diplomacy to be effective, a state must apply the correct variant and possess credible military power.

China’s use of unrestricted warfare as an operational approach to implement the BRI is the emphasis of the study. The study tested four hypotheses to determine the validity of the argument. First, an increase in China’s use of geoeconomic tools at key geographical choke points and resource-rich areas in the Pacific indicate the use of unrestricted warfare. Second, China’s creation of supranational organizations in the INDOPACOM region while simultaneously subverting US-led supranational organizations reflects the use of UW. Third, as China consolidates its gains it will increase military basing to buttress its geoeconomic investments and leverage coercive diplomacy. Fourth, China’s whole-of-government method applies an indirect approach to achieve its strategic aims reflects the use of unrestricted warfare. This study seeks to verify these hypotheses by answering the following research questions:

1. What is the strategic context in INDOPACOM?
2. What is China’s strategic aim?
3. What are China’s political and military strategic objectives?
4. Is there evidence of elements of unrestricted warfare?
5. What is the United States’ strategic aim?
6. What are the United States’ strategic objectives in INDOPACOM?
7. What is the United States’ operational approach?
8. How have the United States’ actions contested China’s strategy?

⁸ Alexander George, “Coercive Diplomacy,” in *The Use of Force*, ed. Robert Art and Kelly Greenhill (New York: Roman and Littlefield, 2015), 106.

⁹ Ibid., 109.

There are three significant limitations within the study. First, the author lacks access to Chinese primary documents. Furthermore, Chinese resources printed in English are used to influence its audience, and do not necessarily reflect objective truth. Second, there is a momentous barrier in terms of language and culture between China and the United States. Finally, analysis of the entire BRI is beyond the breadth and depth of this study.

To hone the scope of the analysis, this study focuses on the BRI in INDOPACOM from 2015 to the present. However, there are several exceptions to the delimitation timeline that affect the development of the BRI. Specifically, the creation of supranational organizations and prepositioning of military bases in the South China Seas. Geographically the study will examine the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road using Sri Lanka as its Western boundary, Indonesia in the South, and the South China Sea (SCS) as a primary focus. Additionally, the study analyzes the China-Indochina Peninsula economic corridor.

This study makes several key assumptions. First, the international system is anarchic.¹⁰ Second, China will continue to expand its power and influence in INDOPACOM. Third, as China challenges the status quo the likelihood of strategic miscalculation increases in INDOPACOM. Fourth, China uses UW to usurp US interests and bypass points of friction. Finally, a state can never be certain of the intentions of another state.¹¹

This study consists of six sections and proceeds as follows. First, the introduction provides background information, purpose, and significance of the study, as well as the introduction includes the primary research question, the relating hypotheses, and the research questions. Additionally, the introduction identifies key terms, limitations, delimitations, and assumptions that all have a significant impact on the study itself. Second, the literature review section explains key terminology and concepts. The third section describes the methodology

¹⁰ John Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2014), 30.

¹¹ Ibid., 31.

behind the research. The fourth section, examines the United States and China within the strategic context of INDOPACOM. The fifth section, yields the findings and comparative analysis between the United States' and China's operational approach. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the methodology, literature background, findings, and implications of the case study.

Literature Review

This section reviews the primary source literature on strategy. Specifically, the theory of unrestricted warfare and the concepts of the indirect approach and asymmetric warfare. The review has three subsections: theoretical, conceptual, and empirical. The theoretical section examines unrestricted warfare as an operational approach to China's Belt Road Initiative in INDOPACOM. The conceptual section provides definitions and information used to measure the key criteria within the case study. Finally, given the theoretical and conceptual framework, the empirical section examines several prevailing studies and opinions on China's strategy and the BRI. A fundamental understanding of unrestricted warfare and the BRI enables a comparative analysis of US and Chinese strategies in INDOPACOM.

The theoretical concept of unrestricted warfare focuses on achieving an asymmetric advantage via an indirect approach. As an operational concept, unrestricted warfare is inextricably interwoven within an overarching strategy. Strategy, as explained by Colin Gray, is "the direction and use made of any or all of the assets of a security community, including its military instrument, for the purposes of policy as decided by politics."¹² Furthermore, strategy is driven by assumptions based on available means and ways to achieve ends, shaped by geography, and can be either direct or indirect.¹³ Unrestricted warfare diverts from traditional security strategy by expanding the Chinese security aperture into a "large security view."¹⁴ Based on

¹² Colin S. Gray, *The Future of Strategy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015), 47.

¹³ Ibid., 48.

¹⁴ Liang and Xiangsui, *Unrestricted Warfare*, 118.

China's geopolitical position, as well as available means, UW advocates for the comprehensive inclusion of national interest to include political, economic, cultural, and information security.¹⁵ Ultimately, unrestricted warfare avoids conflict where enemy forces have a distinct advantage and relies on an indirect approach to outmaneuver China's opponent.

China's use of UW avoids direct confrontation with the United States. The indirect approach is a strategy that focuses on avoiding an enemy's strengths by using stratagems and deception to achieve the desired ends. Sun Tzu believed a strategy's measure of effectiveness was not to fight and win multiple battles, rather, the sign of excellence was to "subdue the enemy's army without fighting at all."¹⁶ B.H. Lidell Hart argued the true aim of strategy was "to seek a strategic situation so advantageous that if it does not itself produce the decision, its continuation by battle is sure to achieve this."¹⁷ The indirect approach's ultimate goal is to produce strategic dislocation with minimal cost, thus, UW uses the indirect approach to achieve an asymmetric advantage over a stronger militarily opponent.¹⁸

Colonels (COL) Liang and Xiangsui defined their concept of UW as, "warfare that transcends all boundaries and limits."¹⁹ UW's operational concept focuses on the amalgamation of state capabilities, supranational organizations, transnational actors, and nonstate actors to achieve the desired objective. It consists of eight principles: omnidirectionality, synchrony, limited objectives, unlimited measures, asymmetry, minimal consumption, multidimensional coordination, and adjustment and control of the entire process. These principles provide an infinite number of stratagems within a state-centric system to achieve objectives with minimal expense. This author defines unrestricted warfare as a whole-of-government strategy combining

¹⁵ Liang and Xiangsui, *Unrestricted Warfare*, 118.

¹⁶ Sun-Tzu, *The Art of Warfare*, trans. Roger Ames (New York: Ballantine Books, 1993), 111.

¹⁷ Hart, *Strategy*, 325.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 326.

¹⁹ Liang and Xiangsui, *Unrestricted Warfare*, 12.

all available means to achieve desired ends by avoiding superior military power and arraying assets in time and space to attain an asymmetrical advantage via the indirect approach.

China's use of UW is critical to understanding the expansion of the Belt and Road Initiative. In 2015, the BRI emerged as the Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road programs merged into one cohesive government-led effort. Xi Jinping sees the BRI as the nexus of infrastructure development, a robust economy, and a strong Peoples Liberation Army (PLA) to achieve increased influence in the South China Sea and beyond.²⁰ To achieve this end, Xi Jinping wields all government resources in one cohesive direction. He utilizes all aspects of UW to bypass friction points with the United States in an effort to strategically dislocate US status and influence while simultaneously trading time for space to develop a stronger military.

The BRI's six economic corridors represent China's strategic lines of operation. For the BRI to be successful, China must place military bases in key areas that allow China to bypass US strategic chokepoints, like the Strait of Malacca, to secure access to natural resources and markets. Xi Jinping uses four specific tenets of UW in the form of geoeconomics, supranational organizations, coercive diplomacy with military basing, and a whole-of-government approach. China must provide security along the vital strategic lines of operation, and use unconventional warfare to attain its objectives. These tenets warrant further defining to ensure a thorough assessment.

Robert Blackwill and Jennifer Harris define geoeconomics as, "the use of economic instruments to promote and defend national interests and to produce beneficial geopolitical results; and the effects of other nations' economic actions on a country's geopolitical goals."²¹ The seven geoeconomic tools include: trade policy, investment policy, economic and financial sanctions, cyber, aid, financial and monetary policy, and energy and commodities.²² For the

²⁰ Economy, *The Third Revolution*, 190.

²¹ Blackwill and Harris, *War by Other Means*, 9.

²² Ibid., 49.

purpose of this study, and in line with Blackwill and Harris, geoeconomics will focus on China's geoeconomic endowments in Southeast Asia in an effort to expand its sphere of influence via the BRI. This study will measure the financial investment, in US dollars, in China's geoeconomic endowment as an indicator of UW.

The second tenet this study analyzes is the use of supranational organizations. Specifically, the UW principles of omnidirectional and multidimensional coordination to subvert US influence while simultaneously increasing China's. China's Liang and Xiangsui define omnidirectional as, "combining the use of all war resources which can be mobilized, to have a field of vision with no blind spots...there is no longer a distinction between what is or is not the battlefield."²³ In the same vein, Liang and Xiansui describe multidimensional coordination as, "the coordination and cooperation among different forces in different spheres in order to accomplish an objective."²⁴ Although the number of supranational organizations can be quantitatively measured, this study will focus on the involvement of supranational organizations in regards to the BRI development.

The third tenet measured is military basing. US Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 3-0, *Operations*, defines basing as, "a locality from which operations are projected or supported."²⁵ The increase in basing directly correlates to China's strategic lines of operations within the BRI. ADRP 3-0 defines lines of operation as, "line that defines the directional orientation of a force in time and space in relation to the enemy and links the force with its base of operations and objectives."²⁶ As China consolidates its gains, it will increase military basing to buttress its geoeconomic investments and leverage coercive diplomacy. This study will analyze

²³ Liang and Xiansoi, *Unrestricted Warfare*, 206.

²⁴ Ibid., 214.

²⁵ US Department of the Army, *Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 3-0, Unified Land Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2016), 2-6.

²⁶ Ibid., 2-5.

the number of current bases, and the number of ports within the BRI that could serve as tentative basing locations.

Finally, China's whole-of-government method applies an indirect approach to achieve its strategic aim which reflects the use of unrestricted warfare. Hart describes the purpose of an indirect approach as "to achieve victory without any serious fighting" with the goal to strategically dislocate your opponent.²⁷ Hart believed to achieve strategic dislocation, one would have to array forces and capabilities in time and space to "dislocate enemy distribution and organization; separate his forces; endanger his supplies; and menace routes needed to establish his base."²⁸ Ultimately, this leads to taking the path of least resistance to achieve psychological dislocation, which causes an enemy to feel trapped and act in such a manner they normally would not.²⁹ Joint Publication (JP) 5-0, *Joint Operation Planning*, defines an indirect approach as "attacking the enemy's center of gravity (COG) by applying combat power against a series of decisive points that lead to the defeat of the COG while avoiding enemy strength."³⁰ This study will analyze China's challenges to US influence in regards to basing, sea lines of communication, and economic corridors. Although previously discussed, taken in totality, the study can examine where and how China is attempting to strategically dislocate the United States.

Since its inception in 2015, several authors have written about China's Belt and Road Initiative and strategy, and what it could mean reference the Chinese and US relationship in INDOPACOM. However, the term unrestricted warfare is not directly mentioned. Regardless of the semantics, the means and ways China employs geoeconomics, supranational organizations, coercive diplomacy supported by basing, and whole-of-government approach represents an

²⁷ Hart, *Strategy*, 324.

²⁸ Ibid., 326.

²⁹ Ibid., 327.

³⁰ US Department of Defense, Joint Staff, *Joint Publication (JP) 5-0, Joint Operation Planning* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 2011), III-32.

overarching strategy codified by the indirect approach, and what this study asserts as unrestricted warfare.

In *The Hundred-Year Marathon*, Michael Pillsbury argues China is bent on becoming the regional hegemon and will use a whole-of-government approach to achieve its ends.³¹ Pillsbury believes China's intent, behind what he refers to as the hundred-year marathon, is to use stratagems and all available resources to usurp US influence and achieve the "Chinese Dream." He writes, "Xi soon demonstrated that he had a dream of his own – one of a resurgent China that would reclaim its rightful place atop the global hierarchy."³² Additionally, Nadege Rolland argues the BRI has become the "defining concept of China's foreign policy and is omnipresent in official rhetoric."³³ China is using its resources and wealth to achieve asymmetric capabilities thereby trading space for time to improve its conventional forces.

Additionally, Pillsbury asserts China's development of supranational organizations, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), is designed to not only provide traditional security cooperation, but trade and financial security.³⁴ Ultimately, China uses its position within the United Nations (UN) and the World Trade Organization (WTO) to undermine US influence while simultaneously developing parallel organizations to increase its sphere of influence. In *China's Eurasian Century*, Nadege Rolland, supports Pillsbury's claim, describing the development of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the Silk Road Fund as a way to bypass the World Bank and International Monetary Fund.³⁵ To date, the Silk Fund has contributed, or designated, \$40 billion towards BRI infrastructure, resources, and investment

³¹ Michael Pillsbury, *The Hundred-Year Marathon* (New York: Henry Holt Company, 2015), 9.

³² Pillsbury, *The Hundred-Year Marathon*, 17.

³³ Nadege Rolland, *China's Eurasian Century?* (Washington, DC: The National Bureau of Asian Research, 2017), 57.

³⁴ Pillsbury, *The Hundred-Year Marathon*, 191.

³⁵ Rolland, *China's Eurasian Century*, 57.

programs.³⁶ This study concurs with Rolland, and believes the BRI is used as part of China's geoeconomic attempt to expand its sphere of influence within INDOPACOM.

In *War by Other Means*, Robert Blackwill and Jennifer Harris argue China uses geoeconomics in INDOPACOM to achieve three "interrelated objectives."³⁷ First, China employs geoeconomics to "impose costs on countries that cross China on territorial disputes." Second, China uses geoeconomics and supranational organizations to "disrupt the US system of alliances in Southeast Asia." Finally, the BRI and geoeconomics keep countries like Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar firmly within China's sphere of influence. Additionally, Blackwill and Harris contend China's claim to the "nine-dash line" in the South China Sea will enable China to expand military basing thereby securing its "string of pearls" better-known now as the BRI.³⁸

In *The Third Revolution*, Elizabeth Economy believes China's initiatives such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) buttresses the BRI and pulls Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries into China's geoeconomic orbit.³⁹ With such gargantuan investments, China will protect its interests in the BRI to further their overarching strategy. China must secure its strategic lines of operation along the BRI, and expand its military bases in INDOPACOM. In 2016, China established a base in Djibouti to secure BRI investments, and serve as an anchoring point for the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. This should serve as a foreshadowing for similar port projects in Pakistan, Cambodia, and Sri Lanka.⁴⁰ However, China must first establish and reinforce bases in the South China Sea in a manner that avoids direct confrontation with the United States.

³⁶ Rolland, *China's Eurasian Century*, 58.

³⁷ Blackwill and Harris, *War by Other Means*, 111.

³⁸ Ibid., 111.

³⁹ Economy, *The Third Revolution*, 199.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 213.

In *Destined for War*, Graham Allison argues China uses the “nine-dash line” as justification for the militarization of the Paracels and Scarborough Islands. If left uncontested, China’s claim will create a “South China Lake.”⁴¹ China’s claim to the “nine-dash line,” by its interpretation of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, permits China to develop bases on the respective islands. Subsequently, China will use anti-access/area denial (A2AD) “sea denial” tactics to indirectly challenge the US Navy’s freedom of navigation while biding time to develop a blue-water navy of its own.⁴² Since 2015, the year of the BRI announcement from Xi, China claimed more than 2,900 acres of land and immediately built its military capacity to protect its investment. Allison writes, “China has built ports, airstrips, radar facilities, lighthouses, and support buildings” all designed to extend China’s operational reach and military capabilities in the South China Sea.⁴³ China is using the BRI to pull ASEAN states into its economic orbit while simultaneously working towards strategically dislocating the United States in the South China Sea and INDOPACOM.

This study agrees with the aforementioned analysis and conclusions detailed by Pillsbury, Blackwill, Harris, Kaplan, Economy, Allison, Rolland, and Cohen. Additionally, this study aims to reinforce the overarching idea of China’s rise in INDOPACOM by applying the theoretical concepts of unrestricted warfare. This study will test this assertion by testing four hypotheses. First, an increase in China’s use of geoeconomic tools at key geographical choke points and resource-rich areas in the Pacific indicate the use of unrestricted warfare. Second, China’s creation of supranational organizations in the INDOPACOM region while simultaneously subverting US-led supranational organizations reflects the use of omnidirectionality and multidimensional coordination. Third, as China consolidates its gains it will increase military basing to buttress its geoeconomic investments and leverage coercive diplomacy. Fourth, China’s

⁴¹ Allison, *Destined for War*, 127.

⁴² Robert Kaplan, *Asia’s Cauldron* (New York: Random House, 2014), 38.

⁴³ Allison, *Destined for War*, 128.

whole-of-government method applies an indirect approach to achieve its strategic aim reflects the use of unrestricted warfare. If these four hypotheses are correct, this will support the thesis that China is using unrestricted warfare to establish the BRI and challenge the status quo in INDOPACOM.

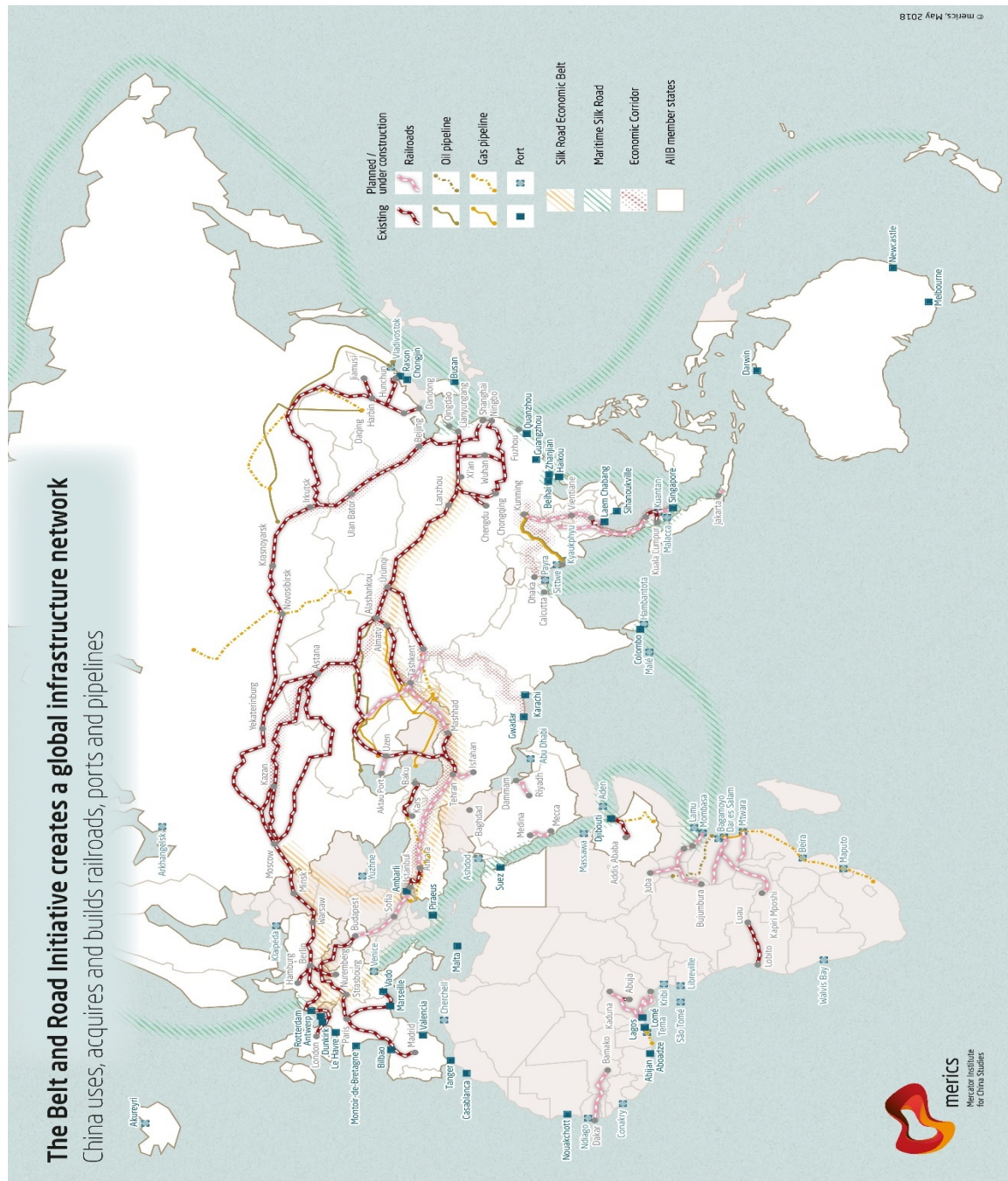


Figure 1. The Belt and Road Initiative. Data from Merics, “Merics Belt and Road Tracker,” accessed January 7, 2019, <http://china-trade-research.hktdc.com>.

Methodology

This study uses the structure, focused comparison methodology to quantitatively and qualitatively assess China and the United States via eight standardized research questions. The “structure” is provided by the eight research questions, and as such, used to acquire data to analyze the case. Concomitantly, the “focus” is on the phenomena of unrestricted warfare as it pertains to the BRI in INDOPACOM. By comparing China and the United States, this study seeks to identify points of friction and opportunity to inform US military strategy. By identifying China’s use of UW within the BRI, this study intends to compare US and Chinese strategic line of operations and basing. Finally, the rest of this section provides a brief overview of the case study, identifies the structured research questions, and the resources used to obtain qualitative and quantitative data.

This monograph analyzes the United States and China in INDOPACOM. The analysis is set within the context of China’s Belt and Road Initiative as well as current Chinese and US basing in the region. The case study was selected because the two powers are the major actors in the region, and strategic miscalculation by either could have serious repercussions for the world writ large. Both the United States and China have vital national interest in South East Asia. However, US and Chinese strategies differ. The former is the current hegemon and status quo power while the latter seeks to become the regional hegemon and expand its influence. This study focuses its analysis on the BRI since 2015. However, notable exceptions include geographic, historical, and cultural factors bearing on the strategic operational environment. Additionally, both US and Chinese bases established prior to 2015 as well as previous programs incorporated under the current umbrella of the BRI are included in the study.

The study used eight focused questions to amass empirical data and compare the United States and China. The structured, focused comparison method was developed to yield critical information on foreign policy issues. This author was able to focus the study by generating

research questions that apply to both state actors and by structuring the means to collect the data for the case.

This study's research questions first set the stage with the strategic context and then progress to national military strategy and operational level considerations. The first research question is: what is the strategic context in the Indo-Pacific AOR? This question examines the strategic operational environment and the implications across diplomatic, informational, military and economic elements of national power. The second question is: what is China's strategic aim? Understanding China's strategic aim allows this study to establish China's national interest and serves as its strategic ends. The third and fourth questions provide insight into ways and means available to achieve the desired ends by asking: what are China's political and military strategic objectives?; and, is there evidence of elements of unrestricted warfare?

In the same vein, this study examines US strategic aims through the lens of a status quo power in comparison to a rising power. The fifth question: what is the United States' strategic aim? Examines the difference of vital versus peripheral national interests, and focuses on establishing strategic ends within INDOPACOM. The sixth and seventh questions enable the study to examine the United States' strategic lines of operations, basing, and military strategy by asking: what are the United States' strategic objectives in INDOPACOM?; and, what is the United States' operational approach? Finally, the eighth question asks: how have the US actions contested China's strategy? This final question is of the utmost importance, as this study analyzes the possibility for strategic miscalculation and how the United States checks China's rise while thwarting Thucydides Trap.⁴⁴

This study relied on peer-reviewed articles, historical studies, US military doctrine, official reports, international relations and military theory, and a multitude of studies from prominent think tanks. Furthermore, this study used a combination of both primary and secondary

⁴⁴ Allison, *Destined for War*, vii.

sources. However, this author acknowledges two major limitations concerning access to data. Namely, this author lacks the access and linguistic capabilities to analyze Chinese primary documents. Additionally, the author recognizes the only English sources available from China are intended to influence its audience, and do not necessarily reflect objective truth. The six books used most extensively in this study are Blackwill and Harris' *War by Other Means*; Nadege Rolland's *China's Eurasian Century: Political and Strategic Implications of the BRI*; Graham Allison's *Destined for War*; Elizabeth Economy's *The Third Revolution*; Michael Pillsbury's *The Hundred-Year Marathon*; and Robert Kaplan's *Asia's Cauldron*. Along with several academic studies and peer reviewed articles, this study will cross-reference all sources to ensure the utmost accuracy.

This section explained the structure, focused methodology used throughout this study. Additionally, it introduced the United States and China case study along with the eight focused research questions that will aid in confirming or denying this studies four hypotheses. This methodology ensures accurate quantitative and qualitative data that will ultimately prove or disprove this author's thesis. Specifically, China employs geoeconomics, supranational organizations, coercive diplomacy, and a whole-of-government approach as an overarching strategy codified by the indirect approach, and what this study asserts is unrestricted warfare.

Case Study

The case study section answers the eight focused research questions as part of the "structure, focused comparison" method described in the methodology section. By answering the focused research questions, this section defines the strategic operational environment in INDOPACOM, and collects relevant data and information for the case. Furthermore, it provides the foundation for comparing the respective strategies of the United States and China in INDOPACOM.

This section is organized into three sub-sections and proceeds as follows. In the first section, this study provides an overview of the historical background and strategic context

between the United States and China. The second section answers the first four focused questions on China. Finally, the third section concludes by answering the remaining focused research questions on the United States. In both instances, the past is most certainly prologue, and examining each state in turn provides valuable empirical data across time, space, and scale.⁴⁵

China and the United States: The Middle Kingdom and the Status Quo

In its over 5,000 years of history, China cultivated a uniquely Confucian culture.⁴⁶ China was known as “Zonghou,” meaning the Middle Kingdom, and prior to the 19th-Century, it dominated Asia’s international hierarchy.⁴⁷ Throughout China’s history, it has ebbed and flowed between great, regional, and declining power. However, the name “Middle Kingdom” demonstrates how China perceives itself in relation to the international order. Essentially, China believes its rightful place is atop the international relations hierarchy, and its current policy seeks to achieve just that. To understand China’s future, one must understand its past. There are four key events that shaped China’s current leadership, policy, and BRI strategy: The Opium Wars and the Century of Humiliation; the Communist Victory in 1949 and Mao Zedong’s subsequent consolidation of power; Washington and Beijing rapprochement in the 1970s; and the election of Xi Jinping and the Chinese Dream initiative.

In 1839, the Qing Dynasty attempted to thwart the opium trade by “expelling the British from Canton,” and announcing a cessation of the trade of opium in China sparking the First Opium War.⁴⁸ Britain immediately resorted to military power to defeat the Qing Dynasty. In the Treaty of Nanking in 1842, Britain forced China to pay reparations and grant access to ports. Following suit, in 1844, the United States negotiated for access to Chinese ports and markets in

⁴⁵ John Gaddis, *On Grand Strategy* (New York: Penguin Press, 2017), 21.

⁴⁶ Samuel Huntington, “Clash of Civilization,” *Foreign Affairs*, no. 3 (Summer 1993): 22-49.

⁴⁷ Humphrey Hawksley, *Asian Waters: The Struggle Over the South China Sea and the Strategy of Chinese Expansion* (New York: Overlook Press, 2018), 17.

⁴⁸ Michael Green, *By More Than Providence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 35.

the Treaty of Wanghia. Summarily, the Qing Dynasty faced the Taiping Rebellion and the Second Opium War. Collectively, these events triggered what the Chinese call the “Century of Humiliation.”⁴⁹ Humphrey Hawksley writes, “China regards its defeat by Britain in the First Opium War as the start of the Century of Humiliation, and that is now central to just about every policy move it makes.”⁵⁰ The Century of Humiliation concluded with Mao Zedong’s Communist victory in the Chinese Civil War.

In 1944, the United States began to shape the post-war international order, and hosted forty-four representatives from nations all over the world at Bretton Woods, New Hampshire. Bretton Woods was the next step in the evolution of the Atlantic Charter, and resulted in the creation of the International Monetary Fund and “the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (which later expanded to become what is known today as the World Bank Group).”⁵¹ The creation of those international organizations, backed by US naval capabilities, ensured free trade and proved “critical to American strategic preeminence in Asia and the Pacific.”⁵² At the end of the war, the United States emerged as the sole remaining democratic world superpower. From 1945 to 1951, the United States led the construction of regional and global institutions including “the United Nations, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and U.S.-Japan security treaty” that would serve as the foundation of the liberal international order founded on free trade, collective security, and liberal democratic values.⁵³

For China, the conclusion of World War II enabled Mao and Chaing Kai-Shek, Nationalist forces generalissimo, to turn their attention away from the external existential threat and focus on resuming the Chinese Civil War. By 1949, Mao harnessed enough state power to

⁴⁹ Green, *By More Than Providence*, 38.

⁵⁰ Hawksley, *Asian Waters*, 32.

⁵¹ Green, *By More than Providence*, 236.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 237.

⁵³ John Ikenberry, *After Victory* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001), 9.

declare the existence of the sovereign Peoples Republic of China (PRC), and resumed the war against Chaing's forces.⁵⁴ Mao's strategy comprised of "judicious use of force, diplomatic outreach, and appropriate management of the political economy."⁵⁵ Mao unleashed his forces along three lines of operations, categorized as the "battles of the southern land, battles for the coast and islands, and the battles for China's far west."⁵⁶ In late 1949, the Communists were on the verge of defeating Chaing's forces. On 10 December 1949, Chaing Kai-Shek fled to Taiwan. By 1950, the PRC conquered the Hainan Islands thereby solidifying the PRC's claim to the South China Sea. Chaing's establishment of a government in Taiwan led to the implementation of the United States One China Policy in 1972.⁵⁷

In 1971, President Nixon and Henry Kissinger began rapprochement between China and the United States. The gradual thawing of relations between the PRC and the United States yielded several key results relevant to today's strategic environment. First, during negotiations Kissinger agreed to the One China Policy in an effort to encourage Mao to bring North Vietnam to the negotiating table and balance against the Soviets. Mao agreed and encouraged the Vietnamese to allow Nixon to "save face," but in so doing, Mao ruptured China's relationship with Vietnam.⁵⁸ Second, Kissinger ceded China's seat on the United Nations Security Council to the PRC. Third, Kissinger granted China most-favored-nation status thus paving the way for Deng Xiaoping's "reform and opening initiative."⁵⁹ Xiaoping wanted to modernize and incorporate China into the international system by modernizing agriculture, industry, defense, and science and technology.⁶⁰ Xiaoping's economic policies served as the harbinger for the rise of

⁵⁴ Sulmaan Khan, *Haunted By Chaos* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), 39.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁵⁷ Henry Kissinger, *On China* (New York: Penguin Press, 2011), 250.

⁵⁸ Khan, *Haunted by Chaos*, 120.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 119.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 122.

China over the following three decades into a global power, and laid the foundation for Xi Jinping and the BRI.

In 2012, Xi Jinping secured his position as the general secretary on the Politburo Standing Committee (PSBC) of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).⁶¹ Xi Jinping's Chinese Dream policy reflects the fundamental belief that China is, and always has been, a great civilization and must assume its rightful position in the international order. Xi asserted that the Chinese Dream was "rooted in collective values" and focused on increasing economic capacity, developing a military capable of securing national interest, and an increase in the standard of living for the Chinese people.⁶² In 2013, Xi introduced his strategy for the "New Silk Road" which included the Silk Road and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. Elizabeth Economy writes, "As with Xi Jinping's rejuvenation narrative (Chinese Dream), the Belt and Road Initiative also carries with it memories of China's historical greatness."⁶³ In 2015, Xi directly correlated the BRI with the rise of China and achieving the Chinese Dream.

As of this writing, the BRI is in the midst of the planning phase while simultaneously laying the foundation to implement the grand strategy by 2049. Currently, the BRI consists of over 60 countries and includes 19 Chinese provinces. Under the umbrella of the Belt and Road initiative, China is hedging its investments by developing both an overland program, the Silk Road Economic Belt, and a maritime contingent, the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. The Silk Road Economic belt consists of the "New Eurasian land bridge, the China-Pakistan economic corridor, the China-Mongolia-Russia economic corridor, and the China-Central Asia-West Asia economic corridor."⁶⁴

⁶¹ Economy, *The Third Revolution*, 190.

⁶² Ibid., 4.

⁶³ Ibid., 193.

⁶⁴ Rolland, *China's Eurasian Century*, 89.

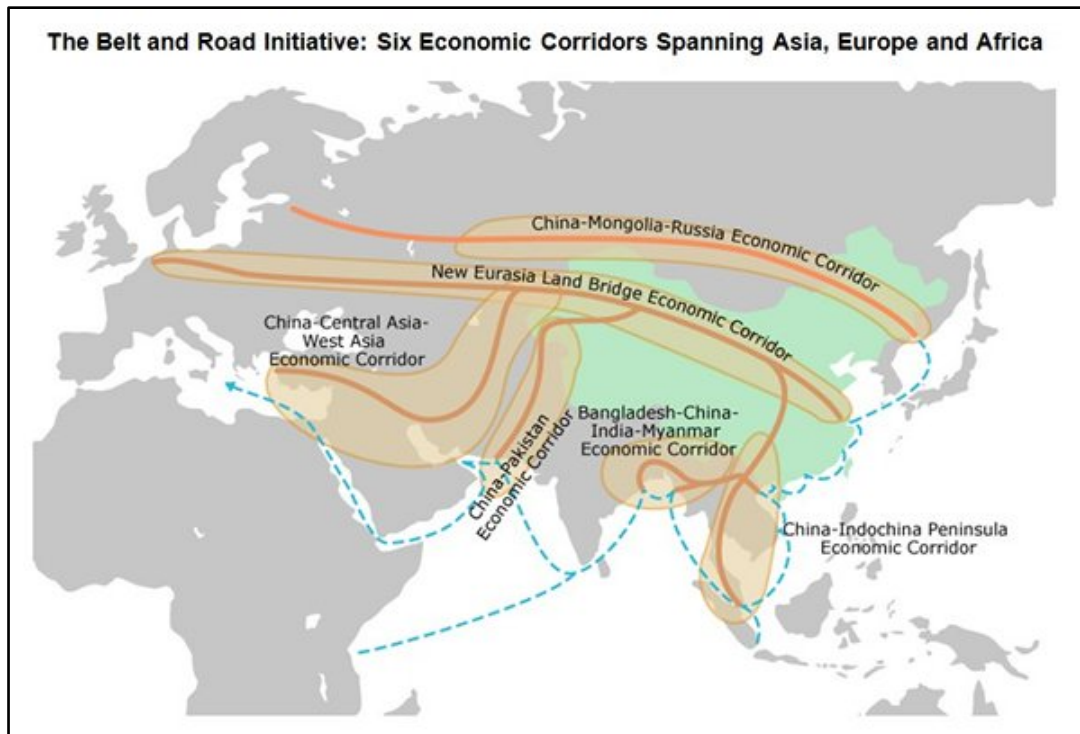


Figure 2. The Belt and Road Initiative. Data from HKTDC Research, “Belt and Road Initiative,” accessed January 7, 2019, <http://china-trade-research.hktdc.com>.

The 21st Century Maritime Silk Road consists of the China-Indochina Peninsula and Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar economic corridors. As a whole, the BRI uses supranational organizations as the driving mechanism to promote economic and infrastructure development.⁶⁵ China’s Silk Road Belt is poised to extend its influence into the greater part of Eurasia, what Mackinder called the world-island.⁶⁶ Concomitantly, the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road engulfs what Nicholas Spykman called the Rimland, comprised of the littorals of China, Southeast Asia, South Asia, and Japan.⁶⁷ The BRI is China’s grand strategy. Rolland writes, “Chinese mobilization of national power, both hard and soft, linking internal and external dimensions

⁶⁵ Rolland, *China’s Eurasian Century*, 89

⁶⁶ John Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality: A Study in the Politics of Reconstruction* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1919), 186.

⁶⁷ Robert Kaplan, *The Revenge of Geography* (New York: Random House Trade, 2013), 96.

resemble not an engineering project but rather a grand strategy.”⁶⁸ Qiao Liang, coauthor of *Unrestricted Warfare*, described the BRI as a “strategy for the shrewd.”⁶⁹

China: Focused Research Questions

Prior to examining China’s strategic, political, and military objectives, it is essential to describe INDOPACOM’s strategic context. INDOPACOM is one of six combatant commands (COCOMS), consists of 36 countries, and includes strategically vital locations such as the Strait of Malacca, the Korean Peninsula, and the South China Sea. INDOPACOM is home to some of the United States key allies including Japan, South Korea, and Australia. Additionally, INDOPACOM contains a key democratic and international partner, India. The *National Security Strategy* (NSS) describes INDOPACOM as the “most populous and economically dynamic part of the world.”⁷⁰ The NSS purports, “China’s infrastructure investments and trade strategies reinforce its geopolitical aspirations. Its efforts to build and militarize outposts in the South China Sea endanger the free flow of trade, threaten the sovereignty of other nations, and undermine regional stability.”⁷¹ INDOPACOM contains four of the six economic corridors of the BRI as well as key ports and infrastructure in the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. Essentially, INDOPACOM is the center of gravity for China’s BRI grand strategy. Which begs the question, what is China’s strategic aim?

China’s strategic aim is to achieve Xi Jinping’s Chinese Dream and return China to the center of the international order. Nadege Rolland writes, “the BRI address both China’s economic situation and security environment in order to realize Xi’s Chinese Dream...the BRI is meant to serve China’s unimpeded rise to great-power status.”⁷² Graham Allison agrees with Rolland’s

⁶⁸ Rolland, *China’s Eurasian Century*, 118.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 118.

⁷⁰ Trump, *National Security Strategy*, 46.

⁷¹ Ibid., 46.

⁷² Rolland, *China’s Eurasian Century*, 119.

assessment, he states that Xi's Chinese Dream will inevitably, "alter the international balance of power in a way that causes even longtime US allies in Asia to tilt from the United States toward China."⁷³ Finally, Elizabeth Economy identifies three core elements of the Chinese Dream: "developing a prosperous society, building a military capable of fighting and winning wars, and reclaiming China's place as a global power."⁷⁴ Xi must accomplish political and military objectives prior to the Chinese Dream coming to fruition. What are China's political and military strategic objectives?

China's ultimate political objective is the survival of the state. Sulmaan Khan writes, "the goal remains to keep the state intact: this, in turn, requires political cohesion, economic growth, a favorable balance of power, and strong armed forces."⁷⁵ As such, Xi must reinvigorate and legitimize the CCP to serve as the "vanguard and guardian of China."⁷⁶ Upon his ascendancy, Xi launched a war on corruption in the CCP to solidify control of the state, which in turn, allows him to pursue external political objectives producing a mutually reinforcing goal of state survival and power projection. Elizabeth Economy believes Xi will transform China from an "emerging or regional power to that of a global power."⁷⁷ China's political objectives include attacking US "alliances and partnerships in the region which is a web that threatens to tie China Down," and stepping up as a new global leader of an international order shaped more in the image of China than the US.⁷⁸ China's political goals require the expansion of the BRI, which requires accomplishing strategic military objectives.

⁷³ Allison, *Destined for War*, 24.

⁷⁴ Economy, *The Third Revolution*, 43.

⁷⁵ Khan, *Haunted by Chaos*, 232.

⁷⁶ Allison, *Destined for War*, 120.

⁷⁷ Economy, *The Third Revolution*, 190.

⁷⁸ Khan, *Haunted by Chaos*, 232.

China's 2015 National Security Strategy identifies its national interest as, "peaceful development, pursuit of an independent foreign policy of peace and a national defense policy that is defensive in nature, opposes hegemonism and power politics in all forms."⁷⁹ Furthermore, China identifies internal security, maritime rights and interests in the South China Sea, and reunification with Taiwan as essential elements to achieve its national security. The CCP tasked the Peoples Liberation Army with the following military strategic objectives: "Safeguard the sovereignty and security of China's territorial land; safeguard the security of China's overseas interests; maintain strategic deterrence; participate in regional and international security cooperation; perform emergency rescue and disaster relief."⁸⁰ China's military strategic objectives are vertically nested with its political objectives. China intends on securing the state via the expansion of the BRI under the protection of military strength, but is there evidence of elements of unrestricted warfare?

In short, there is evidence of China using unrestricted warfare specifically geoeconomics, supranational organizations, coercive diplomacy, and a whole-of-government approach. Eliot Cohen argues China uses a type of war layered in deception, perservernace, and indirect approach.⁸¹ Simultaneously, Beijing is biding time to increase its conventional forces capabilities to close the relative military advantage between China and the United States in INDOPACOM. China's defense budget is over \$165 billion annually and ranks second in the world.⁸² Additionally, Blackwill and Harris purport that China uses geoeconomics, coupled with hard power, to achieve three interrelated objectives, namely, "imposing costs on countries that cross China on territorial disputes, disrupting the US system of alliances in Asia, and keeping old

⁷⁹ Xi Jinping, *China's Military Strategy* (Beijing: State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, 2015), 3, accessed 24 November 2018, <https://jamestown.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/China%E2%80%99s-Military-Strategy-2015.pdf>.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 9.

⁸¹ Eliot Cohen, *The Big Stick* (New York: Basic Books, 2016), 110.

⁸² Ibid., 100.

friends (Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar) close.”⁸³ China’s use of relatively cheap and indirect asymmetric warfare combined with its use of geoeconomics signal the use of unrestricted warfare.

China continues to develop supranational organizations such as the Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank, Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and the Asian Development Bank to challenge the US-led institutions, expand the BRI, and achieve the Chinese Dream. Elizabeth Economy writes, “Alongside the BRI, Xi Jinping has also moved to cement China’s leadership position in the Asia-Pacific region through the creation or support of a number of regional institutions.”⁸⁴ Moreover, China uses what Peter Navarro refers to as “lawfare” in an effort to operate, “within the existing legal framework to effectively bend – or perhaps rewrite – the rules of the international order in China’s favor.”⁸⁵ Ultimately, China is using a whole-of-government approach to employ an adroit operational approach to achieve the BRI and the Chinese dream. Rolland writes, “As China gains political influence over its neighborhood, it will be able to push back against US dominance and reclaim its own regional strategic space.”⁸⁶ China’s approach to securing its strategic, political, and military objectives indicate the use of unrestricted warfare, and its attempts to subvert the international order championed by the United States.

United States: Focused Research Questions

The United States’ strategic aim is to pursue its national interests and lead the liberal international order. The NSS describes the national interests as four pillars that serve as the bedrock of a pragmatic realist approach. First, protect the American people, the homeland, and the American way of life. This pillar focuses on securing US borders and territory, pursuing threats, cybersecurity, and promoting American resilience in a proactive rather than a reactive

⁸³ Blackwill and Harris, *War by Other Means*, 111.

⁸⁴ Economy, *The Third Revolution*, 190.

⁸⁵ Peter Navarro, *Crouching Tiger* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2015), 109.

⁸⁶ Rolland, *China’s Eurasian Century*, 120.

manner. Second, the United States seeks to promote American prosperity. The United States aims to increase its domestic economy by seeking dynamic economic relationships while simultaneously leading the world in technology and innovation. The United States must protect its security innovation base and intellectual property from theft in a highly interconnected globalized world.⁸⁷ To achieve these aims in the face of revived geopolitical competition, the United States must preserve peace through strength and advance American influence.

The third pillar is preserving peace through strength. At the core, the United States must incorporate the political, economic, and military elements of national power.⁸⁸ In preserving peace through strength, the United States will renew military capabilities that deter our competitors while simultaneously securing overmatch. In turn, the renewed capabilities enable the diplomatic element of national power. Diplomacy and statecraft are key components in preserving peace through strength. The NSS states, “Diplomacy catalyzes the political, economic, and societal connections that create America’s enduring alignments and build positive networks of relationships with partners.”⁸⁹ Using diplomacy and statecraft, the United States can counter China’s efforts to pull American allies into China’s sphere of influence.

Finally, the NSS seeks to advance American influence through “encouraging aspiring partners, achieving better outcomes in multilateral forums, and championing American values.”⁹⁰ Essentially, the United States wants to support ambitious democratic partners thereby “advancing our common interests and values.”⁹¹ Advancing American influence mutually reinforces the previous three national interests by simultaneously increasing collective security, providing new markets for the economy, and protecting the American way of life. Additionally, the United

⁸⁷ Trump, *National Security Strategy*, 4.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 37.

States continues to expand its influence in multilateral forums. The United States reinforces the pre-established and legitimate international institutions which “establishes the rule for how states, business, and individuals interact with each other, across land and sea, the Arctic, outer space, and the digital realm.”⁹² Ultimately, American values are essential in ensuring the continued success of not only the United States but the international world order it leads. This leads to the next question, what are the United States strategic objectives in INDOPACOM?

The INDOPACOM strategic objectives mirror the regional geopolitical situation, opportunities, and challenges facing the United States. INDOPACOM has three vital objectives. First, the political priority seeks to re-ensure US commitment to our allies and partners to the “free and open international order.”⁹³ Second, the economic priority focuses on securing freedom of navigation, increasing the net of like-minded states in support of the free market, and foreign direct investment that supports infrastructure development. The United States’ efforts will reduce the geoeconomic gravitational pull of China while simultaneously increasing mutually beneficial trade and access to global markets. Finally, the military and security priority emphasizes the force posturing of military forces and capabilities, and the importance of “re-energizing” US alliances and partnerships to deter adversaries from subverting the United States and its allies efforts within the AOR.⁹⁴

The *National Security Strategy*, *National Defense Strategy*, and *National Military Strategy* shape the development of INDOPACOM’s strategic approach. INDOPACOM’s strategic approach contains four core elements, which in turn, informs and directs the operational approach. First, INDOPACOM maintains credible combat power and works with the Air Force, Navy, Marines, and Army to array a joint force to address current and future problems. Second,

⁹² Trump, *National Security Strategy*, 40.

⁹³ Jim Mattis, *National Defense Strategy* (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of the Department of Defense, 2018), 8, accessed November 25, 2018, <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>.

⁹⁴ Trump, *National Security Strategy*, 46-47.

INDOPACOM expands its security network “while reinforcing the free and open international order.”⁹⁵ Third, INDOPACOM exercises freedom of navigation and operates across all domains within the confines of international law. Furthermore, US forces within INDOPACOM deter, and if need be counter, attempts by regional actors to deny those rights. Finally, INDOPACOM works diligently to develop its counterterrorism, law enforcement, and natural disaster response capabilities.⁹⁶ The four core elements mutually reinforce one another, and coupled with strategic basing, provides the foundation for commanders to develop adroit operational approaches to achieve the four pillars of national interests.

The United States’ operational approach in INDOPACOM focuses on basing, lines of operation (LOO), and lines of effort (LOE). Basing is essential in projecting power, posturing joint forces, and defeating the tyranny of distance. Specifically, US basing along the First and Second Islands Chains enables US forces to project combat power. The First Island Chain extends from Japan in the northeast traveling southeast through Taiwan and the Philippines, while the Second Island Chain emanates from Japan south to Guam.⁹⁷ During World War II, US military strategy in the Pacific Theater reflected the same Mahanian idea of forward strategic basing. Throughout the prosecution of the war, military planners secured and held these “strategic ‘stepping stones’ across the Pacific.”⁹⁸ These are the same bases that enable the United States to posture forces and reassure allies and partners. US strategic basing is augmented by partners and allies with access to key ports such as Vietnam’s Cam Ranh Bay, Singapore, and the Philippines’

⁹⁵ Admiral Harry Harris, *U.S. Pacific Command Posture: Hearing before the House Armed Services Committee*. 115th Cong., 2nd sess., on February 14, 2018, 5, accessed 25 November 2018, <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/AS/AS00/20180214/106847/HHRG-115-AS00-Wstate-HarrisJrH-20180214.pdf>.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁹⁷ Green, *By More than Providence*, 207.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

Subic Bay which provides key access for securing lines of communication, trade, and deterring Chinese aggression.

INDOPACOM's lines of operation are vital to the United States' operational approach. The sea lines of communication throughout the AOR are extremely important in maintaining access to economic markets and supporting allies. The continued freedom of navigation operations in the Strait of Malacca and the South China Sea directly impact national security. The Strait of Malacca is a vital sea line of communication from which over half of the worlds "merchant fleet tonnage passes, and a third of all maritime traffic."⁹⁹ Maintaining freedom of navigation and maneuver along this sea line of communication is at the core of the United States' operational approach, and requires support from its partners and allies. The lines of operation reflect the importance of geography and allies. In turn, the United States operational approach includes key lines of effort to reinforce both basing and LOOs by increasing interoperability between allies, partners, and the joint force.

Informed by the NDS, INDOPACOM's key LOE focuses on reinvigorating relationships with our partners and allies while simultaneously securing access to vital basing and LOOs as part of a joint-multinational force. For example, in 2018, the United States designated India as a "major defense partner," and changed the name of the COCOM from PACOM to INDOPACOM thereby reflecting the importance of India in the AOR.¹⁰⁰ Additionally, the joint-multinational LOE reflects the importance of geography and allies adjacent to the Strait of Malacca and the South China Sea. Furthermore, the reinvigoration of relationships has duality. First, it recognizes the importance of interoperability of allies and partners within the AOR. Second, it identifies the need for the United States to revisit and rejuvenate joint capabilities and interoperability to provide the effects and forces needed to operate in multidomain operations.

⁹⁹ Kaplan, *Asia's Cauldron*, 9.

¹⁰⁰ Harris, *U.S. Pacom Posture*, 37.

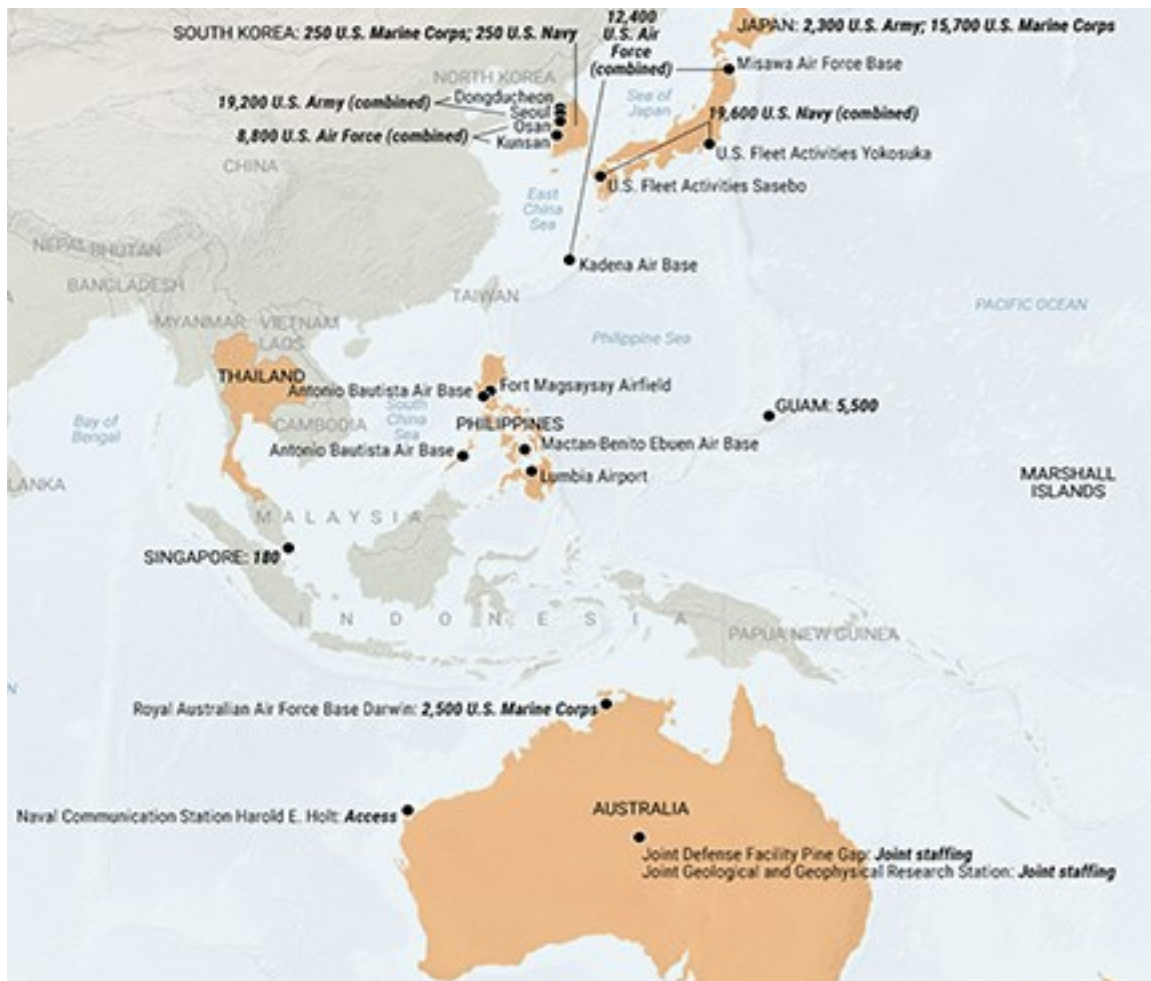


Figure 3. US Bases & Deployments in Asia-Pacific. Mauldin Economics, “The US is Not Abandoning Asia,” accessed January 7, 2019, <https://www.mauldineconomics.com>.

The Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) 2018 Exercise is the epitome of the United States operational approach. RIMPAC 2018 was a joint-multinational exercise with participation from 26 nations and over 25,000 service members.¹⁰¹ Participants ranged from allies such as the United Kingdom, Japan, and Germany to a state the United States considers a competitor, China. The participating states indicate the importance of basing and the lines of operation within INDOPACOM. For example, Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore, and Malaysia are all critical to securing the sea lines of communication through the Strait of Malacca. While

¹⁰¹ “RIMPAC 2018,” America’s Navy, accessed December 11, 2018, <https://www.public.navy.mil/surfor/Pages/Rimpac-2018.aspx>.

Vietnam, Brunei, and the Philippines territorial waters are threatened by China expanding in the South China Sea. Essentially, RIMPAC sent a clear message to China about US commitment to strategically important allies and partners.

Additionally, RIMPAC 18 served as the testing bed for the integration of the Army's new operating concept, Multi-Domain Operations 2028, into the joint force. Admiral Harris described RIMPAC 18 as the initial "crawl phase...in the fusion of joint capabilities across domains."¹⁰² The intent is to move from experimentation in RIMPAC 18 to the validation of the Army's Multi-Domain Task Force in RIMPAC 2020. Ultimately, RIMPAC is the quintessential example of the United States operational approach in INDOPACOM. It is designed to rejuvenate relationships, secure trade and economic lines of communication, ensure basing to project power, and increase interoperability of the joint-multinational force.

The final question examines how the United States' actions have contested China's strategy. The United States maintains its multifaceted "engage but hedge approach to China."¹⁰³ First and foremost, the United States increased its own geoeconomic position in INDOPACOM by offering allies, partners, and businesses an alternative to the BRI. On 30 July 2018, the United States announced an investment of \$113 million in a Pacific investment program under the guise of the newly established United States International Development Finance Corporation (USIDFC). Additionally, the United States declared an additional \$60 billion in private investment opportunities for infrastructure development, and \$75 million more in technology and energy market development as part of a wider Asian investment strategy.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Harris, *U.S. Pacific Command Posture*, 31.

¹⁰³ Economy, *The Third Revolution*, 235.

¹⁰⁴ Robert Delany, "US Competes with China's 'Belt and Road Initiative' with US \$113 Million in Asian Investment Program," *South China Morning Post*, July 30, 2018, accessed December 13, 2018, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/economy/article/2157381/us-competes-chinas-belt-and-road-initiative-new-asian-investment>.

Second, the United States expanded the power and role of the Committee of Foreign Investment of the United States (CFIUS) to protect US innovation, intellectual property, and technology from Chinese cyber-attacks, investment, and theft.¹⁰⁵ Under the umbrella of CFIUS, the new Foreign Investment Risk Review Modernization Act (FIRMA) intends to magnify China's investments and economic activities within INDOPACOM "including real estate transactions in the vicinity of military installations, which threatens to undermine our national security objectives and those of our allies and partners."¹⁰⁶ The United States provides security to protect new US investments, generate new geoeconomic opportunities, and re-ensure partners and allies within INDOPACOM.

Finally, the United States continues to expand its security effort within INDOPACOM. In 2017, Congress approved the Indo-Asia-Pacific Stability Initiative (ASPSI) to increase US investment in the region by \$7.5 billion dollars over five years.¹⁰⁷ The ASPSI increased US investment in force posture within the INDOPACOM AOR to counter China's aggressive behavior and secure US interests in the region. The United States continues to conduct freedom of navigation operations throughout the AOR to reaffirm its commitment to free markets, navigation, and trade. Furthermore, the United States Military doctrine and equipment continues to evolve to address China's asymmetric capabilities such as its A2AD, growing conventional capability, and cyber capabilities. Finally, the United States continues to expand its network of allies and partners to ensure mutual security, interoperability, and support to the liberal international world order and maintain the status quo.

¹⁰⁵ Norris McLughlin, "The Expanding Scope of the Committee of Foreign Investment in the United States," JD Supra, December 11, 2018, accessed December 13, 2018, <https://www.jdsupra.com/legalnews/the-expanding-scope-of-the-committee-on-35169/>

¹⁰⁶ Harris, *U.S. Pacific Command Posture*, 10-11.

¹⁰⁷ Yun Sun, "China and the Asia Stability Initiative," China-US Focus, May 23, 2017, accessed December 13, 2018, <https://www.chinausfocus.com/finance-economy/2017/0523/15028.html>.

Findings and Analysis

The findings and analysis section reviews the empirical data gathered throughout the research with respect to the United States and China case study. The intent is to use the focused questions to provide analysis of whether the data supports, does not support, or presents mixed data reference the four hypotheses, and the validity of the underlying argument. This section proceeds by examining each structured, focused question in turn against the respective hypothesis by examining the findings of the study followed by the applied analysis.

The first question examined the strategic context in INDOPACOM. As expected, this author found that the past is truly prologue with both the United States and China. US and Chinese overall strategy and operational approach are shaped by both history and geography. Four key events influenced China's BRI initiative and the use of unrestricted warfare: The Opium Wars and the Century of Humiliation; the Communist Victory in 1949 and Mao's consolidation of power; Washington and Beijing's rapprochement in the 1970s; and the election of Xi Jinping and the China Dream initiative. The United States approach continues to reflect the tyranny of distance and stresses the importance of strategic basing and allies and partners. The First and Second Island Chains continue to be of the utmost strategic importance. Furthermore, the United States strategy reflects the enduring importance of the post-World War II international order created and buttressed by American power.

The second question asked: what is China's strategic aim? The empirical data indicates China's strategic aim is to become the regional hegemon, return to the center of the international order, and implement Xi's Chinese Dream policy. Ultimately, China desires to change the status quo in INDOPACOM by expanding its sphere of influence into the SCS and attacking US networks and allies. Xi intends to reclaim China's position as a global power by using UW to implement the BRI at the expense of the United States and its allies.

The third question is: what are China's political and military strategic objectives? The empirical data indicated three political objectives: the survival of the state and Xi's regime;

attacking the United States network of allies; and expanding influence via the BRI initiative. Furthermore, the data indicated that China's military objectives were firmly nested with its political endstate. Namely, China's military objectives are to secure the state, protect the BRI initiative as it develops, secure the South China Sea, and the reunification of Taiwan.¹⁰⁸

The fourth question asked if there was any evidence of unrestricted warfare. The findings indicate China does use unrestricted warfare as a whole-of-government approach to attack US interests indirectly. Specifically, China simultaneously uses geoeconomics, supranational organizations, coercive diplomacy supported by military basing, and a whole-of-government approach to usurp the international order and American interests in INDOPACOM. Simultaneously, China develops its conventional warfare capabilities to consolidate its gains and slowly changes the balance of power.

The fifth question examined the US strategic aim. The US strategic aim is to pursue its national interests embodied by the four pillars in the NSS. The four pillars are: protect the American people, the homeland, and the American way of life; promote American prosperity; preserve peace through strength; and advance American influence. Ultimately, the United States' strategic aim is to maintain the international status quo.

The sixth question is: what are US strategic objectives in INDOPACOM? The INDOPACOM strategic objectives are vertically nested in pursuit of the four pillars in the NSS, and embody the guidance in the NDS. First, the United States will re-ensure its commitment to our allies and partners to support the regional status quo. Second, the United States economic priority focuses on freedom of navigation, foreign direct investment, and access to the free market. Finally, the military priority is honed on force posturing and rekindling US alliances and partnerships.

¹⁰⁸ Xi Jinping, *China's Military Strategy*, 3.

The seventh question is: what is the United States' operational approach? The United States operational approach is centered on basing, lines of operation, and lines of effort. Specifically, the United States must maintain access to basing along the First and Second Island Chinas and key ports in the South China Sea. Concomitantly, the United States uses these bases to secure vital sea LOCs, specifically, the Strait of Malacca. Finally, the United States major line of effort focuses on reinvigorating relationships with allies and partners. Namely, the United States conducts key exercises such as RIMPAC to hone capabilities operating as a joint-multinational force.

Finally, the eighth question asked: how have US actions contested China's strategy? The empirical data suggest the United States uses an "engage but hedge" strategy.¹⁰⁹ First, the United States continues to increase its geoeconomic positions by providing allies and partners an alternative to the BRI. Second, the United States expanded the power and role of the CFIUS to protect US companies from China's cyber-attacks and innovation theft via the FIRMA Act. Third, the United States continues to increase its security efforts in the INDOPACOM AOR through programs such as ASPSI, continued freedom of navigation operations, and the development of doctrine and capabilities to counter China's UW.

The first hypothesis purports China's increase in the use of geoeconomics at key geographical choke points and resource-rich areas in the Pacific indicate the use of UW. The findings and empirical evidence from the case study suggest that the hypothesis is supported. China continues to assert its claim to the nine-dash line in the South China Sea. China is involved in eight territorial disputes in the SCS and perpetually leverages geoeconomics to coerce other states to bend to its whims. For example, China's aggressive posture in the SCS threatens up to 70% of Vietnams exclusive economic zone.¹¹⁰ Furthermore, China has increased its trade with the

¹⁰⁹ Economy, *The Third Revolution*, 235.

¹¹⁰ Blackwill and Harris, *War by Other Means*, 113.

Association of Southeast Asian Nations to over \$350 billion dollars annually to include \$136.4 billion directly with the Philippines, Vietnam, and Indonesia thereby threatening not only the SCS but the Strait of Malacca.¹¹¹ Both the SCS and the Strait of Malacca are pivotal for Xi's Chinese Dream and the BRI, and its geoeconomic priorities mirrors the geographic importance.

The second hypothesis asserts China's creation of supranational organizations in INDOPACOM while simultaneously subverting US-led supranational organizations reflects the use of omnidirectionality and multidimensional coordination. The empirical evidence and findings support the hypothesis. China created the AIIB to support the evolution of the BRI. Furthermore, China created regional institutions such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership while simultaneously expanding the membership and capacity of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization to threaten US allies and develop parallel organizations.¹¹² Additionally, China uses "lawfare" within the United Nations to justify its claim to the nine-dash line and leverage its policy aims.¹¹³

The third hypothesis contends that as China consolidates its gains it will increase its military basing to buttress its geoeconomic investments and leverage coercive diplomacy. The empirical evidence is supported by the case study. In fact, India has voiced concern that with the BRI comes the threat of "naval encirclement" as China continues to extend its tentacles from the SCS.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, China persists in aggressively occupying and militarizing the Paracel and Spratly Islands in the South China Sea to reassert its claim to the nine-dash line. From these respective locations, China can leverage military capability against both Vietnam and the Philippines while simultaneously securing the BRI.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ Blackwill and Harris, *War by Other Means*, 113.

¹¹² Economy, *The Third Revolution*, 215.

¹¹³ Navarro, *Crouching Tiger*, 109.

¹¹⁴ Economy, *The Third Revolution*, 195.

¹¹⁵ Navarro, *Crouching Tiger*, 135-138.

Finally, the fourth hypothesis states China's whole-of-government method applies an indirect approach to achieve its strategic aim reflects the use of UW. Xi Jinping is biding time and using a "salami slicing" strategy in the guise of the BRI.¹¹⁶ He is gradually expanding China's control in the SCS while simultaneously increasing its conventional military capability by spending over \$165 billion annually on defense.¹¹⁷ Xi's Chinese Dream is the overarching policy, the BRI his grand strategy, and UW his operational approach. Xi has adroitly used China's position within the current international order to subvert the status quo while simultaneously creating parallel supranational organizations. China's growing conventional military capabilities securing the BRI will eventually enable it to transition from an indirect approach to a direct approach.¹¹⁸

The evidence from the case study and available empirical data support all four hypotheses. The four hypotheses buttress this study's thesis that China uses UW as an operational approach to achieve the BRI and bring the Chinese Dream to fruition. Specifically, China's indirect approach combines elements of geoeconomics, supranational organizations, coercive diplomacy supported by military basing, and a whole-of-government approach to achieve an asymmetric advantage in pursuit of regional hegemony.

Conclusion

This study focused on China's and the United States' strategies in the INDOPACOM AOR. Specifically, this study examined China's operational approach through the lens of unrestricted warfare as an indirect strategy intended to change the regional and international status quo by using geoeconomics, supranational organizations, coercive diplomacy buttressed by military basing, and a whole-of-government approach. This study emphasized the Belt and Road

¹¹⁶ Navarro, *Crouching Tiger*, 142.

¹¹⁷ Cohen, *The Big Stick*, 110.

¹¹⁸ Economy, *The Third Revolution*, 229.

Initiative enables China to expand its sphere of influence in the SCS in an attempt to change the balance of power by attacking US national interests below the threshold of conventional war. The empirical data of the study supports the underlying thesis that China's uses UW as the operational approach to achieve the Belt and Road Initiative pursuant to the Chinese Dream policy.

This study analyzed the United States and China case study using the structured, focused comparison methodology. This author utilized both primary and secondary sources to quantitatively and qualitatively analyze the case study using eight research questions. The research questions focused on the BRI in the INDOPACOM AOR. The questions ranged from historical and geographical impacts on the strategic operational environment, China's strategic aims and strategy to the United States' respective strategy, aims, and approach. Essentially, the findings from the case study supported the hypotheses thereby confirming the study's thesis.

The United States' future success is directly linked to its national interests in the INDOPACOM AOR. The comparison of US and Chinese strategies enables planners at all levels to glean targets of opportunity and develop an adroit strategy and approach while simultaneously identifying potential friction points between nuclear powers and thwart the Thucydides Trap. Through examining the BRI in INDOPACOM, US military planners gain insight into the intricacies and methodologies China employs as part of unrestricted warfare to accomplish its grand strategy, which in turn generates pragmatic solutions to the BRI writ large.

This study focused on China's use of unconventional warfare to achieve the BRI in INDOPACOM pursuant to the Chinese Dream; however, additional research is required to develop an understanding of the BRI writ large. Additional studies could explore how China would tailor its unconventional warfare operational approach in each respective combatant command. Based on each respective combatant command, potential questions might ask: how will China employ unconventional warfare across multi-domain operations? Where can China utilize geoeconomics to secure an initial foothold within the COCOM? How will China exploit

globalization to secure essential commodities? How does geopolitics and geography influence unrestricted warfare, the BRI, and the Chinese Dream?

China's regional and global ambitions are not something the United States can afford to ignore. China employs unrestricted warfare to change the balance of power in its favor within INDOPACOM. China is a regional powerhouse with global aspirations, and the methods it uses as part of the BRI in INDOPACOM informs how and where it will attack US interests across the globe. The United States operational approach in INDOPACOM continues to evolve to counter China's aggression proactively. The United States must take a pragmatic approach to enable freedom of navigation, support its networks of allies and partners, and secure its national interests. There is no avoiding conflict with China, and the lingering question remains: will the United States continue to lead the international order it created in the ashes of World War II, or is it content to be consigned to the annals of history as the great power that faltered in the 21st Century?

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