

Implementing the Pacific Deterrence Initiative

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13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES A paper submitted to the faculty of the NWC in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the curriculum. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the NWC or the Department of the Navy.					
14. ABSTRACT The Pacific Deterrence Initiative (PDI) is a congressional investment program focused on bolstering U.S. deterrence and posture, assuring allies and partners, and increasing defense capability and readiness in the Indo-Pacific. To ensure the PDI is successfully implemented in support of the National Defense Strategy objectives, the Commander of USINDOPACOM must establish a Joint Force Maritime Component Command (JFMCC) to campaign through day-to-day competition against Chinese forces in the South China Sea. As a result of this deliberate action, it will be possible to operationalize a <i>compete-deter-win</i> strategy by conducting assertive freedom of navigation operations in the contact layer, posturing forces to conduct sea denial in the blunt layer, and strengthening alliances and partnerships to set conditions for success in the surge layer. Implementing the PDI at the operational level requires innovative thinking and a robust application of design methodology. If implemented successfully, the PDI will fund the resources and capabilities for USINDOPACOM to sustain a JFMCC and achieve operational objectives that allow the U.S. to gain a strategic advantage over China in the Indo-Pacific.					
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INTRODUCTION

In the wake of the 2013 international arbitration case filed against China's maritime claims in the South China Sea (SCS) and the 2014 Russian annexation of Crimea, the post-Cold War international order gave way to an era of renewed strategic competition. China's emergence as a regional hegemon threatens U.S. national interests and the stability of the commercial and geopolitical environment in the Indo-Pacific.¹ 2021 marked the rollout of the Pacific Deterrence Initiative (PDI) – a congressional investment program focused on bolstering U.S. deterrence and force posture, assuring allies and partners, and increasing defense capabilities in the Indo-Pacific.² The PDI is the latest in a wave of theater strategy supporting national strategy and U.S. policy aims concerning China.³ Will it be effective? How can it best be implemented at the operational level?

To ensure successful implementation of the PDI in support of National Defense Strategy (NDS) objectives, the Commander of USINDOPACOM must establish a Joint Force Maritime Component Command (JFMCC) to campaign through day-to-day competition against the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and paramilitary forces in the SCS. As a result of this deliberate action, it will be possible to operationalize a *compete-deter-win* theater strategy through three lines of effort. First, conduct assertive freedom of navigation (FON) operations in the contact layer to maintain a free and open maritime commons and deter incremental PLA and paramilitary aggression. Second, posture U.S. forces to conduct sea denial in the blunt layer to

¹ Lloyd J. Austin III, "Advance Policy Questions," Senate, *Hearing before the Senate Armed Services Committee on the Nomination of Mr. Lloyd J. Austin III to be Secretary of Defense*, 117th Cong., 2021, 43-44.

² *National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2021*, HR 6395, Sec. 1251, 116th Cong., 1st sess, (7 August 2020).

³ Cornell Overfield, "Biden's 'Strategic Competition' Is a Step Back," *Foreign Policy*, 13 October 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/10/13/biden-strategic-competition-national-defense-strategy/>.

deny PLA operational objectives in the SCS. Third, strengthen alliances and partnerships to assure continued access to the SCS and set conditions for success in the surge layer.

BACKGROUND

In 2014 President Barack Obama launched the European Reassurance Initiative (ERI) to reassure NATO allies of the U.S. commitment to security in Europe.⁴ Subsequently, the initiative was expanded into the European Deterrence Initiative (EDI) to deter further Russian aggression.⁵ In the SCS, China enforces maritime claims contrary to the 2016 Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) ruling and pursues a *de facto* presence through PLA forward operating bases (FOB) built on disputed land features.⁶ The 2018 NDS prioritizes long-term strategic competition against China and Russia to deter aggression and, should deterrence fail, the capacity and capability for decisive action.⁷

The 2018 NDS establishes a layered global operating model for Joint Force employment to increase effective competition below armed conflict (*contact*), delay, degrade or deny adversary aggression (*blunt*), and *surge* combat-successful forces.⁸ Long-term competition is a continuum along which rivals interact through cooperation, competition, and armed conflict.⁹ In competition, U.S. Naval forces interact with rivals on a day-to-day basis.¹⁰ Deterrence applies

⁴ Paul Belkin and Hibbah Kaileh, *The European Deterrence Initiative: A Budgetary Overview*, (Washington DC: Congressional Research Service), 1 July 2021.

⁵ Belkin and Kaileh, *The European Deterrence Initiative: A Budgetary Overview*.

⁶ Caitlin Campbell, *China's Military: The People's Liberation Army (PLA)* (Washington DC: Congressional Research Service, 4 June 2021), 18.

⁷ U.S. Department of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense), 4-6.

⁸ U.S. Department of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America*, 7.

⁹ Chairman, U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Competition Continuum*, Joint Note 1-19 (Washington, DC: CJCS, 2018), 2.

¹⁰ Kenneth J. Braithwaite et al., *Advantage at Sea, Prevailing with Integrated All-Domain Naval Power*, (Washington, DC: Department of the Navy, December 2020), 2.

across the competition continuum, and a U.S. force campaigning through competition below armed conflict can deter aggression by addressing current challenges.¹¹

In April 2018, Admiral Philip Davidson commented on how the PLA will be able to use their FOBs in the SCS to challenge U.S. presence and overwhelm the military forces of other coastal states.¹² He concluded, “China is now capable of controlling the South China Sea in all scenarios short of war...”¹³ Concerned by this threat and armed with the successful implementation of the EDI, congressional leaders were eager to employ a similar program in the Indo-Pacific. Admiral Davidson provided Congress an assessment of the USINDOPACOM resource requirements – \$18.5 billion in capabilities to employ a “strategy of deterrence” by 2026.¹⁴ His four-year plan focused on increasing joint force lethality through investments in cutting-edge technologies and capabilities.¹⁵ This prioritization of employing capabilities over legacy systems was enacted in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 National Defense Authorization Act as the Pacific Deterrence Initiative.¹⁶

The Department of Defense (DoD) is responsible for publishing a PDI breakdown within its annual base budget request.¹⁷ The FY22 DoD budget highlights \$5.1 billion of PDI investments, mostly procurements to increase lethality through strike and stand-off platforms, including warship and F-35 orders.¹⁸ The DoD acknowledges that refinements are needed to

¹¹ Chairman, U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Competition Continuum*, vii.

¹² Admiral Philip Davidson, “Advance Policy Questions,” Senate. *Hearing before the Senate Armed Services Committee on the Nomination of Admiral Philip Davidson for Commander, U.S. Pacific Command*, 115th Cong., 2018, 18.

¹³ Davidson, “Advance Policy Questions,” Senate, 18.

¹⁴ U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, *National Defense Authorization Act 2020, Section 1253 Assessment, Executive Summary, Regain the Advantage, U.S. Indo-Pacific Command Investment Plan for Implementing the National Defense Strategy, Fiscal Years 2022-2026* (Camp Smith, HI: U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, 2019), 1.

¹⁵ U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, *Regain the Advantage*, 1.

¹⁶ *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021*, HR 6395, Sec. 1251.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ U.S. Department of Defense, *Pacific Deterrence Initiative, Department of Defense Budget, Fiscal Year 2022* (Washington, DC: Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller) May 2021), 1, 5, 7, 13.

ensure future budget displays align with the PDI.¹⁹ Despite the current budget disparity, the PDI provides the DoD strategic guidance and a viable funding source to plan and execute a campaign to compete against PLA forces and deter Chinese incremental and conventional aggression in the Indo-Pacific.

ASSERTIVE FREEDOM OF NAVIGATION

The SCS has emerged as the arena for competition between U.S. operational freedom of action and Chinese control of the maritime commons. A JFMCC conducting daily FON operations in the SCS would demonstrate the U.S.'s capability and willingness to ensure free and open seas and deter the PLA from making unlawful maritime claims. Krista Wiegand, Global Security Program, Howard H. Baker Jr. Center for Public Policy, argues that the underlying purpose of FON operations is to “credibly signal resolve and U.S. capabilities while limiting the potential for military escalation.”²⁰ Lynn Kuok, Brookings Center for East Asia Policy Studies, argues for using assertive FON operations to challenge China's excessive maritime claims and “preempt” future excessive claims.²¹ She proposes that FON operations would clearly communicate the U.S.'s capability and willingness to assert maritime rights and counter the PLA's *de facto* control over the SCS by increasing the costs of additional excessive claims.²² FON operations conducted with increased frequency and clarity of purpose would credibly signal U.S. resolve to deny unlawful maritime claims in the SCS. Moreover, a JFMCC conducting FON operations to reinforce the 2016 PCA ruling would be asserting a maritime right affirmed under international law, increasing U.S. legitimacy and further delegitimizing PLA claims in the SCS.

¹⁹ U.S. Department of Defense, *Defense Budget Overview, Department of Defense Budget, Fiscal Year 2022* (Washington, DC: Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller)/Chief Financial Officer, May 2021), 2-4.

²⁰ Krista E. Wiegand, “How Biden Should Handle the South China Sea Disputes,” *War on the Rocks*, 24 November 2020, <https://warontherocks.com/2020/11/how-biden-should-handle-the-south-china-sea-disputes/>.

²¹ Lynn Kouk, *The U.S. FON Program in the South China Sea. A lawful and necessary response to China's strategic ambiguity*, East Asia Policy Paper 9, June 2016, iii. <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/the-us-fon-program-in-the-south-china-sea.pdf>.

²² Ibid.

Assertive FON operations could also encourage SCS coastal states to uphold their maritime rights and demonstrate freedom of action. By employing a modified deterrence by denial approach, a JFMCC would make future unlawful or excessive claims unsustainable and unbeneficial for China and dissuade Beijing from expanding their effective control of the SCS.

An integrated JFMCC conducting FON operations would deter the Chinese Coast Guard (CCG) from aggressively enforcing excessive maritime claims in the SCS. Melanie Sisson, Foreign Policy Center for Security, Strategy, and Technology, argues that U.S. forces should be operationally predictable when campaigning through competition.²³ She claims that influencing the behavior of adversaries will depend on the U.S.'s ability to "reduce uncertainty about the reasons for U.S. military actions" to avoid unintentional escalation and establish the credibility to impose limits on behavior.²⁴ The 2021 Tri-Service Maritime Strategy promotes employing an integrated Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard in day-to-day competition against China.²⁵ A JFMCC integrating U.S. Navy (USN) and U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) platforms could employ a deterrence in-depth approach against China's methods of enforcing excessive maritime claims. This approach would mirror how China uses the CCG and PLAN in layers. In the first layer of deterrence, USCG cutters conducting assertive FON operations would demonstrate U.S. resolve to challenge aggressive tactics used by the CCG to enforce maritime claims. The USCG's law-enforcement posture can also de-escalate any confrontations without resorting to military force. This posture would mitigate the risk of unintentional provocation and also impose a reputational cost on the CCG every time one of its cutters acts in a manner contrary to international law or

²³ Melanie W. Sisson, "A Strategy for Competition," *Center for New American Security*, 27 August 2020, <https://www.cnas.org/publications/commentary/a-strategy-for-competition>.

²⁴ Sisson, "A Strategy for Competition."

²⁵ Braithwaite et al., *Advantage at Sea*, 10-12.

maritime norms. In the second layer, a JFMCC presents the CCG and PLAN with a combat-credible navy transiting daily through the SCS commons.

A JFMCC operating daily in the SCS would also create the opportunity to expose incremental Chinese aggression through information operations against Chinese maritime actors. Marines and Sailors operating sea-launched unmanned ISR platforms would provide the capability to monitor and record all FON operations.²⁶ This capability would allow the JFMCC to compile evidence of CCG and Maritime Militia actions that violate international law and publicize this information to delegitimize China's position in the SCS. Furthermore, the JFMCC could build on the former Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Charles Richard, 2019 warning that the U.S. will respond to aggressive acts by CCG and Maritime Militia vessels as it would PLAN ships.²⁷ By exposing and recording illegitimate and hostile acts, the JFMCC could provide evidence to support a U.S. policy that Chinese maritime actors assisting the PLAN during hostilities will be considered combatants. The risk of such a scenario may be too great for militia vessel operators and would deter them from assisting the PLAN and CCG altogether.

SEA DENIAL

A forward-deployed JFMCC postured to conduct sea denial around key maritime terrain would deny the PLA's objective of enhancing China's internal security by establishing a maritime buffer zone in the SCS. Cummings *et al* argue in their *War on the Rocks* commentary that countering a *fait accompli* in the SCS would be effectively impossible unless a naval force is

²⁶ Ibid., 12, 18.

²⁷ Demetri Sevastopulo and Kathrin Hille, "US Warns China on Aggressive Acts by Fishing Boats and Coast Guard," *Financial Times*, 28 April 2019, <https://www.ft.com/content/ab4b1602-696a-11e9-80c7-60ee53e6681d>.

already present and, should deterrence fail, that force would conduct sea denial operations.²⁸ In a series of wargames examining conflict scenarios against a PLAN-led limited attack in the Spratlys, the Training and Education Command Warfighting Club (TWC) observed that forward-based capabilities are significantly more effective in destroying and surviving against PLA forces than those entering the objective area after the start of hostilities.²⁹ Posturing a force to conduct sea denial requires already having forward-deployed forces in the area of potential conflict. Integrating the Third Marine Expeditionary Force and the Seventh Fleet headquarters into a JFMCC would provide a persistently forward-deployed, mobilized capability in the SCS. This presence and mobility would enable the JFMCC to conduct sea denial around Palawan, the Spratlys, and the first island chain littorals. Thus, denying PLA forces the unimpeded use of this key maritime terrain to expand their maritime claims in the SCS and strengthen their internal security footprint.

In the blunt layer, a forward-based JFMCC could provide an inside ground force to support sea denial and set the conditions for a JTF to execute sea control. The TWC ran sea denial simulations around Palawan using a reinforced Marine battalion based on the island with anti-ship missiles and supported by armed unmanned aerial systems, unmanned surface vehicles, and over-the-horizon fleet assets.³⁰ In each iteration, the Marines were able to force Chinese naval and aviation forces to culminate before they could seize Palawan.³¹ When supported by a JTF, the Marines defeated the Chinese offensive forces, and in some iterations, the force was

²⁸ Jeff Cummings et al., “Charting a New Course for the Navy-Marine Corps-Coast Guard Tea,” *War on the Rocks*, 8 May 2019, <https://warontherocks.com/2019/05/charting-a-new-course-for-the-navy-marine-corps-coast-guard-team/>.

²⁹ The TECOM Warfighting Club, “National Security. Tackling our Nation’s most pressing challenges,” *Marine Corps Gazette*, July 2019, 80, <https://mca-marines.org/wp-content/uploads/National-Security.pdf>.

³⁰ Roy Draa, “Localized Sea Denial: Countering Chinese Aggression in the South China Sea,” *Center for International Maritime Security*, 22 July 2019, <https://cimsec.org/localized-sea-denial-countering-chinese-aggression-in-the-south-china-sea/>.

³¹ Draa, “Localized Sea Denial: Countering Chinese Aggression in the South China Sea.”

able to make limited strikes on PLA FOBs in preparation for a follow-on surge force.³² The simulations demonstrate that an integrated JFMCC could successfully counter a PLA use of force on a limited objective. A persistently forward JFMCC would initially compete against PLA forces in the contact layer by using FON operations to secure access to key maritime terrain, such as Palawan or the Spratlys. This position would then reinforce the JFMCC's capability to conduct sea denial and deter PLA actions on and around key maritime terrain in the SCS. Though it is unlikely China would engage in hostilities against the U.S., the JFMCC must gain an operational advantage in the contact and blunt layers to set the conditions for a JTF to conduct sea control and follow-on forces to achieve a decisive victory.

STRENGTHEN ALLIANCES AND PARTNERSHIPS

Increased support from U.S. allies through multilateral maritime operations in the SCS would enhance the JFMCC's ability to compete against PLA forces in the contact layer. In her *War on the Rocks* commentary, Krista Wiegand highlights that the U.S. and the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue members, plus South Korea, France, and the United Kingdom, should provide more substantial support in the "deterrence of Chinese expansion."³³ In August 2021, the Royal Navy carrier, HMS *Queen Elizabeth*, deployed to the Indo-Pacific with a U.S. Marine Corps F-35B squadron onboard and a U.S. Navy destroyer escort.³⁴ Multilateral FON operations and deployments with allies would communicate to China that free and open access to the SCS is also a priority for like-minded nations. Furthermore, a collective demonstration of the capability and willingness to protect trade routes and sea lines of communication would deter PLA forces

³² Ibid.

³³ Wiegand, "How Biden Should Handle the South China Sea Disputes."

³⁴ Nick Childs and Matthieu Lebreton, "UK Carrier Strike Group: meeting Indo-Pacific expectations?" *Military Balance Blog, International Institute for Strategic Studies*, 12 August 2021, <https://www.iiss.org/blogs/military-balance/2021/08/uk-carrier-strike-group-indopacific>.

and the CCG from interfering with military and commercial freedom of navigation. Such a collective deterrence posture would also allow the JFMCC commander to allocate more resources to posture a force for sea denial operations in the SCS.

Increased U.S. security cooperation activities would improve the defense and security capabilities of SCS coastal states and assure access for JFMCC forces. Per Joint Publication 3-20, security cooperation activities enable partners to “provide the U.S. access to territory, infrastructure, information, and resources; and/or to build and apply their capacity and capabilities consistent with U.S. defense objectives.”³⁵ For instance, a JFMCC conducting security cooperation to enhance the Philippines’ military and economic capacity would set the conditions for engaging the new presidential administration on the issue of bases for U.S. forces. Assigning U.S. Army forces, such as a Security Force Assistance Brigade, to the JFMCC would provide the USINDOPACOM commander with a force multiplier ashore in the Philippines to conduct security cooperation activities to support operational objectives in the maritime domain. In addition to military-to-military interoperability training, JFMCC Army forces could work to improve port infrastructures and logistics in Luzon and Palawan, the provinces closest to the Paracels and Spratlys. Furthermore, U.S. Army medical corps could be employed to distribute and administer COVID-19 vaccines as part of a U.S. vaccine diplomacy effort. Securing bases or pre-positions for U.S. forces in Luzon and Palawan would assure operational access to the littorals and reassure Philippine leadership of the U.S. commitment to the Mutual Defense Treaty. Thus, the USINDOPACOM Commander should focus on building the defense and security capabilities of SCS coastal states to protect their sovereign interests. Consequently, a

³⁵ Chairman, U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Security Cooperation*, Joint Publication (JP) 3-20 (Washington, DC: CJCS, 23 May 2017), v.

JFMCC could benefit from access and overflight agreements, positioning forces to conduct sea denial and promoting a collective defense approach against China in the surge layer.

HIGH-END DETERRENCE

Some may argue that a high-end deterrence approach is required to operationalize the PDI in support of NDS objectives. USINDOPACOM's primary role in strategic competition against China is to bolster deterrence by being prepared to deny a Chinese invasion force its objective and defeat a *fait accompli*. The Center for a New America Security (CNAS) research and analysis suggests that a U.S force optimized for daily competition would fail to counter incremental Chinese aggression and lose a high-end conflict.³⁶ Furthermore, the research finds that a competition approach increases the risk of inadvertent escalation and forgoes long-term investments in advanced technologies.³⁷ The CNAS highlights that the forces and posture necessary to compete against China are notably different from those required to defend Taiwan from a conventional attack.³⁸ However, the CNAS suggests that a force optimized for high-end deterrence can be both capable of winning a "big conflict" and countering sub-conventional Chinese aggression.³⁹ The CNAS asserts that because it is unlikely the DoD can build a full-spectrum force within a credible budget, a high-end deterrence approach "is the best path forward."⁴⁰ This research demonstrates that in a fiscally constrained environment, the USINDOPACOM Commander must operationalize a high-end conflict deterrence approach that addresses the higher stakes of a major conflict with PLA forces and can mitigate the short-term

³⁶ Stacie Pettyjohn, Becca Wasser, and Jennie Matuschak, "Risky Business: Future Strategy and Force Options for the Defense Department," *Center for a New American Security*, 1, https://s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com/files.cnas.org/documents/RiskyBusiness_Budget22_Web.pdf?mtime=20210720095157&focal=none.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., 26.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 1.

risk of incremental Chinese aggression in the SCS. A PDI budget that prioritizes long-term modernization over short-term capabilities will enable USINDOPACOM to sustain a technological advantage over China and more effectively achieve the NDS objectives of strengthening deterrence in the Indo-Pacific and sustaining the capability for decisive action.

A JFMCC forward-deployed in the SCS would not bolster U.S. deterrence in the Indo-Pacific. Michael Mazarr, RAND Corporation, argues that the “local balance of forces” does not “consistently explain the success or failure of deterrence” by denial.⁴¹ Even if a JFMCC helps maintain a superior balance of forces in the SCS, China may still determine for geostrategic or domestic political reasons that the PLA must continue to enforce excessive maritime claims and make sub-conventional land grabs.⁴² Moreover, Ian Bowers, Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies, argues that conventional deterrence by punishment does not “necessarily require” forward-deployed forces in the region of potential conflict.⁴³ Instead, a state must possess power projection capabilities such as strike aircraft and cruise missiles to threaten an adversary with punishment “should an unwanted act occur.”⁴⁴ A PDI budget that prioritizes increased lethality through strike and stand-off assets would provide the power projection capabilities needed to operationalize a USINDOPACOM deterrence by punishment approach. This PDI budgetary approach would also support DoD long-term modernization efforts. Thus, a forward-deployed JFMCC campaigning through day-to-day competition in the SCS would be unable to credibly deter, by denial or punishment, PLA or Chinese paramilitary forces from incremental aggression or high-end conflict. Increasing the lethality of the current USINDOPACOM force structure

⁴¹ Michael J. Mazarr, “Understanding Deterrence,” *RAND Corporation*, 5, https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/perspectives/PE200/PE295/RAND_PE295.pdf.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 6.

⁴³ Ian Bowers, “Small State Deterrence in the Contemporary World,” *Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies, IFS Insights*, September 2018, 2, https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/resrep25795.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A8d7e0ae3c8fa1c6a1d4da2c2a36d7ff6&ab_segments=&origin=&acceptTC=1.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

through power projection assets would create a force optimized for high-end deterrence by denial with the capability to punish, bolstering U.S. deterrence in the Indo-Pacific and more effectively operationalizing the PDI.

SECURING NATIONAL INTERESTS

This argument, however, fails to consider that maintaining free and open access to the Indo-Pacific maritime commons and preventing China from expanding its effective control of the SCS advances and protects U.S. economic and security interests. Oriana Mastro, Assistant Professor of Security Studies at Georgetown University, argues that if China draws straight baselines around the Spratlys, it could claim ten percent of the SCS as internal waters.⁴⁵ There is no right of transit or innocent passage in this scenario, significantly impacting commercial fishing, trade routes, and sea lines of communication in the region.⁴⁶ Furthermore, China could then claim an EEZ from these straight baselines encompassing almost all of the SCS.⁴⁷ Mastro recommends that the U.S. establish a “credible deterrent” through military means to prevent Chinese forces from exerting effective control over the SCS. She proposes increasing the tempo of U.S. military operations, including FON operations with like-minded nations, and expanding the U.S. military presence in SCS coastal states through access agreements.⁴⁸ A JFMCC forward-deployed in daily competition against PLA forces and paramilitary would demonstrate that a free and open SCS is a U.S. priority and challenges threats to the economic and security interests of the U.S. and its allies and partners. Increased U.S. support to SCS coastal states would allow the

⁴⁵ Oriana Mastro, “Military Confrontation in the South China Sea,” *Contingency Planning Memorandum No. 36, Council on Foreign Relations*, 21 May 2021, <https://www.cfr.org/report/military-confrontation-south-china-sea>.

⁴⁶ Mastro, “Military Confrontation in the South China Sea.”

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

JFMCC to posture forces and capabilities to exercise freedom of navigation and conduct sea denial to maintain free and open access to the SCS commons for the benefit of all.

Unmanned maritime systems would provide a JFMCC with an operational advantage that enhances assertive FON operations and bolsters a deterrence by denial approach. In his *War on the Rocks* commentary, U.S. Navy Commander Trevor Prouty argues that unmanned platforms would provide the U.S. Navy with an asymmetric approach to counter the larger size of the PLAN and its naval paramilitaries.⁴⁹ Prouty argues that unmanned maritime systems would permit a higher operational tempo for FON operations in the SCS and increase the number of forces and surface assets available for operations in the blunt and surge layers.⁵⁰ A deterrence by denial approach requires forward-deployed forces that can mobilize and defend areas in danger of attack. By increasing the use of unmanned platforms for FON operations in the SCS, a JFMCC would more effectively and efficiently campaign through daily competition to deter Chinese forces and sustain the capability to engage in decisive action, should deterrence fail.

CONCLUSION

Implementing the PDI to achieve NDS objectives concerning China requires the employment of a forward-deployed integrated naval force, with enhanced support from allies and partners, competing daily against PLA forces and Chinese paramilitary in the contested SCS. The employment of a dedicated JFMCC in the SCS would send a strong message to China and reassure allies and partners about the DoD's commitment to strategic competition in the Indo-Pacific. By ensuring freedom of navigation in the SCS and securing basing options in the Philippines, the USINDOPACOM Commander would be able to posture JFMCC forces to

⁴⁹ Trevor Prouty, "Freedom of Navigation Operations: A Mission for Unmanned Systems," *War on the Rocks*, 2 July 2021, <https://warontherocks.com/2021/07/freedom-of-navigation-operations-a-mission-for-unmanned-systems/>.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

conduct sea denial and, should deterrence fail in the contact or blunt layers, set the conditions for success in the surge layer.

Through the PDI, Congress provides an asymmetric approach to the asymmetric challenge of competing against PLA and paramilitary forces and deterring sub-conventional and conventional aggression. Moreover, the PDI addresses the lack of a NATO-like group in the Indo-Pacific by providing direction and funding to strengthen allies and partners in the region. A short-term approach of competing against China in the SCS ensures freedom of action for aircraft, commercial vessels, and warships, securing U.S. national interests in the long term.

The FY23 defense budget is expected to align with the PDI. Furthermore, the 2022 NDS will likely provide more definitive guidance on strategic competition below the level of conflict. In a time of diminished contingency funding options and increased budget transparency, the PDI provides the military instrument of power with strategic direction and a funding mechanism to execute a *compete-deter-win* strategy against China. Its implementation at the operational level requires innovative thinking and a robust application of design methodology. If implemented successfully, the PDI will fund the resources and capabilities for USINDOPACOM to sustain a JFMCC and achieve operational objectives that allow the U.S. to gain a strategic advantage over China in the Indo-Pacific.