

SUBVERSION IN SUPPORT OF MILITARY OPERATIONS, AND VICE VERSA

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14. ABSTRACT Recent events with Russia's invasion of Ukraine highlight the increasing importance of the information domain to present and future conflict. An evaluation of the Russo-Japanese War shows that destabilizing a regime is a credible way to manipulate perceptions to support military objectives during a conflict, and further displays some key principles by which these efforts function. In examining the potential for conflict with China, this paper identifies the vulnerabilities and exploitation means necessary to use subversion to support a military, and ultimately political, objective. Finally, the paper forms recommendations of how to best empower military commanders and other parties to support subversion efforts and draws conclusions on the impact of destabilization on future conflicts.					
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INTRODUCTION

If Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine can teach us anything about modern warfare, the paramount lesson is the impact of the information domain. As U.S. and European leaders grasp for levers to change Vladimir Putin's actions, a focus on Russia's internal stability has come to the forefront when discussing how to resolve the conflict. Economic sanctions, raising military costs, and amplifying Ukrainian military success could change Russian domestic opinion and thus impact Putin's decisions. While Russia limits that potential through a chokehold on information and law enforcement crackdowns, shaping internal dissent among Russian elites still shows a potential lever.¹ Outside of Russia, information on the conflict has proved critical to shaping international contributions on both sides of the conflict. The information domain, and especially the battle of perceptions, will have a significant bearing on the conflict's progress and ultimately affect its outcome. The same will hold true with any shape that a military conflict between China and the U.S. takes on in the future.

Given the relationship and the tensions autocratic governments have with their populace, it stands to reason that threatening that very relationship will affect a nation's political will to prosecute conflict.² Autocracies are more prone to seek control over their people, and undermining that control can prove decisive in altering that regime's calculus. This raises the question: To what extent can destabilizing an adversary's regime impact their

¹ Douglas London, "Why Russia's Elite Are the Key to Putin's Downfall," CNN, April 1, 2022. <https://www.cnn.com/2022/03/31/opinions/russia-elite-putin-opinion-london/index.html>.

² Clausewitz signifies the importance of the will of the people in war: Clausewitz, *On War*, vol. 117, vol. 117.pg 12 (I.28.), pg 219 (III).

ability to wage war? The U.S. should be considering this question when planning for a military confrontation with China.

History has shown that regime destabilization campaigns have affected the operational level of war and would support U.S. objectives against China in a future fight. By examining the research question in the context of the Russo-Japanese War, one can draw out key principles for a destabilization campaign. From these principles, the nature of the influence campaign against China becomes clear: (1) Chinese domestic stability is the key to regime stability and, as such, it is their critical vulnerability which the U.S. can exploit; (2) vulnerabilities in Chinese domestic stability and lessons from the Russo-Japanese War point to feasible lines of effort (LOEs) for the influence campaign; and (3) an effective narrative combined with certain capabilities support those LOEs.

BACKGROUND

In past wars, one can find many examples of an aggressor's attempts to degrade the will of a government and a people to fight, but it is rare to find evidence of a focused effort to turn the people directly against their government. In such isolated instances, it is rarer still to find effective results alongside a comprehensive record of the ways and means of destabilization efforts. Thucydides makes minor mention of Athenian support to helot uprisings in Sparta, though he does not provide details on the performance and effectiveness.³ In WWII, the Allied campaign to support anti-Nazi movements saw success in occupied nations, but it failed to generate successful anti-Nazi movements among the German population.⁴ Throughout the Cold War, U.S.-supported programs that aspired to

³ Robert B. Strassler, "The Landmark Thucydides: A Comprehensive Guide to 'The Peloponnesian War,' Trans," Richard Crawley (rev.ed, 1996, 43).

⁴ Indeed, SOE, Free French, and OSS efforts in France were so notable that GEN Eisenhower remarked that the resistance "played a very considerable part in our complete and final victory." - William J. Casey, "Remarks of

topple Communist regimes provided rigorous frameworks, but fell well short of intended goals.⁵

However, one historical example does stand out in the case of the Russo-Japanese War. During the conflict, the Japanese government made a calculated effort to support Anti-Tsarist movements inside Russian borders to distract the Russian government from the war effort. Colonel Akashi Motojiro, the Japanese Military Attaché to St. Petersburg, directly and indirectly orchestrated most of these efforts. By the end of the war, Japan's General Staff had supported Akashi's operations with an estimated total budget of one million yen⁶ to support Japan's strategy to "encourage the political and ethnic opposition groups to revolt against the Russian regime with the intention of interfering with the mobilization of troops dispatched to Manchuria in European Russia and weakening Russian military power in the Far East."⁷ Akashi courted the likes of Lenin, Trotsky, and Gapon (leader at the "Bloody Sunday" massacre), but maintained particularly close coordination with Konrad Zilliacus, leader of the Finnish independence movement. *Figure 1* juxtaposes some of the key events of the war alongside subversion efforts, and the next section will go on to describe the principles for destabilizing a regime in support of conflict and corresponding evidence from the Russo-Japanese War.⁸

CIA Director William J. Casey before the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations at Georgetown University, Washington, D.C. 6/25/86." United States: Central Intelligence Agency, 1986. <https://link-gale-com.usnwc.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/CK2349250101/USDD?u=navalwc&sid=bookmark-USDD&xid=4f125c0a&pg=4>.

⁵ Thomas Ahern, "The Way We Do Things - Black Entry Operations Into North Vietnam, 1961-1964," United States: Central Intelligence Agency, 2005. <https://link-gale-com.usnwc.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/CK2349654037/USDD?u=navalwc&sid=bookmark-USDD&xid=6993a5a6&pg=1>

⁶ 1 million yen in 1905 is the equivalent to approximately 10.6 billion yen or 85 million USD in 2022, based on Rakka Ryusui and Bureau of Labor and Statistics Data.

⁷ Antti Kujala and Olavi K Fält, "AKASHI MOTOJIRO, Rakka Ryusui: Colonel Akashi's Report on His Secret Cooperation with the Russian Revolutionary Parties during the Russo-Japanese War," 1988

⁸ Many of these principles also coincide with requirements for supporting insurgencies and conducting Covert Action. Robarge, "History of CIA Covert Action."

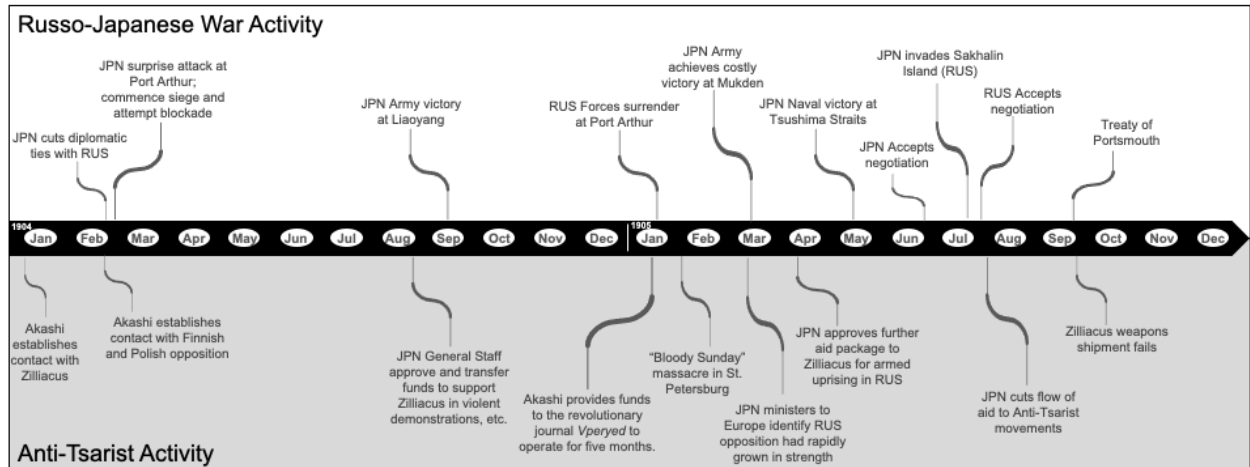


Fig 1. Timeline of Russo-Japanese War and Anti-Tsarist Activity.⁹

I. The operational and strategic destabilization campaigns are interdependent. Akashi used Japanese military effectiveness in Manchuria to support his destabilization efforts in Moscow: “With the fall of the Port Arthur on 2 January and Bloody Sunday, the massacre in St Petersburg on 22 January 1905, as turning points, the Russian Revolution of 1905 burst into flames.”¹⁰ Within Russian urban centers, the Army grew increasingly aligned with opposition forces and hesitant to follow government orders to use force against the populace.¹¹ The Japanese General Staff further turned destabilization efforts into operational effects as they “attempted to demoralize Russian soldiers by distributing pamphlets written about disturbances in European Russia.”¹² The Japanese also supported distributing Anti-Tsarist propaganda originated from outside Japan to the prisoners. One such propagandist

⁹ Kujala and Fält, “AKASHI MOTOJIRO, Rakka Ryusui: Colonel Akashi’s Report on His Secret Cooperation with the Russian Revolutionary Parties during the Russo-Japanese War.”

¹⁰ Ibid., 76.

¹¹ Ibid., 66.

¹² Ibid., 78.

believed that “of the seventy thousand prisoners in Japan at least fifty thousand went back to Russia with new ideas of government...”¹³

II. Destabilization efforts must resonate with a preexisting grievance within a target population. The Japanese co-opted preexisting movements by the various separatists and Russian political dissidents while amplifying those groups’ efforts with supporting propaganda against the government, providing venues to coordinate, and supplying weapons and other equipment. The campaign resonated with the interests of the parties rebelling against the state, and not with the foreign power supporting them; there is significant risk in undermining a revolutionary’s cause by associating it to the interests of a foreign power.

III. Well-established networks are a prerequisite to effective influence. Akashi had developed thorough intelligence networks and knew which grievances to capitalize on before executing the influence campaign. Human relationships are one component, but the means by which to communicate are another critical aspect.

IV. Authoritarian regimes have inherent vulnerabilities to destabilization. These come in the form of paranoia, centralized control, and suppressed grievances within the population, which the Japanese saw manifest in the Bloody Sunday massacre. While authoritarian regimes mitigate their vulnerabilities through controlling the narrative and information conduits, these measures also make the truth inherently dangerous to authoritarian control. Thus, enabling free access to information that a regime desires to conceal is often more valuable than conveying a specific message, affording an advantage to any actor seeking to destabilize that regime.

¹³ Frederick F. Travis, “The Kennan-Russel Anti-Tsarist Propaganda Campaign among Russian Prisoners of War in Japan, 1904-1905,” *The Russian Review* 40, 40, no. 3 (1981): 273. <https://doi.org/10.2307/129375>.

V. Protracted war puts an at-risk regime at an even higher risk. As costs of war increase for a regime and begin to ripple through a population, domestic unrest rises accordingly, as seen in Russia as the Russo-Japanese War dragged into its second year.

VI. In a war with limited aims where regime change is not the ultimate purpose, creating the perception of an effective regime destabilization campaign achieves the same military ends with lower risk. The Japanese government was averse to total regime change for both the risks of widening the conflict and the view that “a thorough-going revolution in Russia would be undesirable, for the Japanese would have no one with whom to negotiate peace.”¹⁴ In fact, regime change as an objective creates even more risk to the operation, as leaders will lash out when put on death ground.

While Akashi’s activity and the overall destabilization effort did not lack in measures of performance, the measures of effectiveness are subject to some debate. The Japanese government was quite slow early in the war to commit to the efforts, which accounts for the initial 6-month delay in approval, along with other bureaucratic hiccups along the way. The most ambitious of Akashi’s efforts was providing Zilliacus a ship full of weapons to conduct an armed uprising – this ended up falling well behind schedule and ultimately failed when the ship ran aground. On the other hand, even if the subversion efforts were not decisive inside the duration of the Russo-Japanese War, they contributed to the continued degradation of Russia’s regime. Had it not been for Akashi’s support for propaganda inside Russia, the Tsar could have suppressed news of Japanese military successes in the Russo-Japanese War, which proved a boon for revolutionary fervor. One author goes so far as to claim that Lenin

¹⁴ John Albert White, *Diplomacy of the Russo-Japanese War*, Princeton University Press, 2015, 140

would not have survived to 1917 without Akashi's support.¹⁵ Had Japan not found a lasting treaty with Russia at Portsmouth in 1906, destabilization efforts would have become a decisive factor in a protracted conflict.

DISCUSSION / ANALYSIS

CHINA'S CRITICAL VULNERABILITY

At the strategic level, "China's center of gravity is clearly identified as the [CCP]."¹⁶ Xi Jinping confirms this with his statement in the 2021 CCP centenary speech that "China's success hinges on the Party."¹⁷ As the Party directly exercises Command and Control of the Chinese military through its Political Commissars (PC), this COG also relates directly to the Theater Strategic and Operational levels in times of war.¹⁸ In a 2012 study for the U.S. Army War College, LTC Abernethy dedicates detailed analysis to deconstructing this COG into capabilities, requirements, and vulnerabilities.¹⁹ Of his findings, the critical vulnerabilities largely revolve around the CCP's ability to maintain domestic stability and respond to emergent crises. While LTC Abernethy focuses on the many vulnerabilities to PRC regime stability, one can extend his analysis to the one vulnerability most susceptible to exploitation.

This paper will thus focus on Chinese domestic stability as the critical vulnerability in their ability to assert their will on the international stage. China has prioritized preserving domestic stability through a variety of methods: robust domestic surveillance, internet

¹⁵ Noel Fairchild Busch, *The Emperor's Sword: Japan Vs. Russia in the Battle of Tsushima*. Funk & Wagnalls, 1969, 122.

¹⁶ Andrew Scobell and Larry Wortzel, "Chinese National Security: Decisionmaking Under Stress," US Army War College Press, October 1, 2005, 244. <https://press.armywarcollege.edu/monographs/31>.

¹⁷ "Full Text of Xi Jinping's Speech on the CCP's 100th Anniversary," Nikkei Asia, July 1, 2021. <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Full-text-of-Xi-Jinping-s-speech-on-the-CCP-s-100th-anniversary>

¹⁸ Jeff Benson and Zi Yang, "Party on the Bridge: Political Commissars in the Chinese Navy," Center for Strategic and International Studies, June 29, 2020. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/party-bridge-political-commissars-chinese-navy>

¹⁹ James Abernethy, "The Chinese Communist Party: A Strategic Center of Gravity Analysis," U.S. Army War College, 2012.

censorship, the social credit score system, and its goal to achieve a harmonious society by 2049.²⁰ China's quest for domestic harmony is well justified. The Chinese Empire has undergone massive upheavals throughout its long history, resulting in the most violent unrest the world has known. To this point, five out of the ten deadliest wars in history were Chinese civil wars.²¹ As a truism for China's recent history, and a foreshadowing for its future, a historical novel about one particularly bloody period in China stated, "The empire, long divided, must unite; long united, must divide. Thus it has ever been."²² The CCP's desire for ensuring social stability are thus grounded in reality.

However, the means the CCP uses for social stability also show a clear divergence from reality. Instead of seeking harmony by addressing population concerns, the Party prioritizes resources to quash dissent and create the perception of harmony through censorship, targeted arrests, political re-education programs, and state-run media. While this house of cards has proven to withstand the winds of peacetime, it will be another case in the whirlwind of war. Given the value China places on domestic harmony, any credible threat to it would pose increasing risk for the CCP. This provides an opportunity to distract and ultimately challenge the Party's decision-making cycle during war.

While the present PRC regime still presents some of the vulnerabilities captured in LTC Abernethy's work, the regime has plugged several of the holes.²³ Whether the CCP read this study or self-identified and closed these loopholes, it proves itself an adaptive system. Despite this, there are persistent threats to Chinese domestic stability that will exacerbate

²⁰ "Document: China's Military Strategy." USNI News, 2015, sec. Aviation.

<https://news.usni.org/2015/05/26/document-chinas-military-strategy>

²¹ Jeremy Macias, and Amanda Bender, "5 Of The 10 Deadliest Wars Began In China," Business Insider, October 6, 2014. <https://www.businessinsider.com/bloodiest-conflicts-in-chinese-history-2014-10>

²² Luo Guanzhong, *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, Penguin UK, 2018.

²³ Examples of vulnerabilities the CCP has addressed in recent years include: the CCP's lack of political accountability, ethnic minority unrest, availability of mass communications, and deficiency of soft power.

during conflict. One RAND study aptly sums up the consequences of a severe prolonged conflict in China:

“The *danger of unrest derives from the dependence of the regime’s legitimacy on economic well-being and patriotic pride*; to the extent both are fractured by war losses and costs, segments of the society (e.g., elites, middle class, workers, and peasants) could sour on the leadership. Not just capital but also capitalists might flee the country. *While domestic turmoil might not imperil the regime, it could force it to crack down on large swaths of an angry public, further undermining its legitimacy.* The danger of separatism lies in the opportunity separatists in Tibet or Xinjiang might see if the state were preoccupied with a damaging and demanding war with the United States. Because significant PLA ground forces and other internal-security forces would presumably remain available even in the event of a major conflict with the United States, *the regime would be able to crush separatists, but at a cost of resources and of domestic and international legitimacy at a time when both could be in short supply.*”²⁴ (emphasis added)

The United States must posture to capitalize on the Chinese unrest that will emerge during war, and such a posture cannot occur by accident. As shown with the Russo-Japanese War, Motojiro’s conduits for Anti-Tsarist activities largely existed as human intelligence sources prior to hostilities. The same need for access to key populations would also apply to China,

²⁴ David C. Gompert, Astrid Stuth Cevallos, and Cristina L Garafola. “War with China: Thinking Through the Unthinkable.” RAND Corporation, 2016, 54.

though would have to rely more heavily on digital access as human intelligence in China has become increasingly challenged in recent years.²⁵

The RAND Study goes on to highlight that degrading the CCP's ability to manipulate information to avert disorder could cause "spontaneous and opposing opinions" to carry through the Chinese population."²⁶ This would support the Center for New American Security's proposal for a new American Way of War: "Instead of striving for information dominance, the DoD should seek 'degradation dominance' as a way of achieving an advantage in the techno-cognitive confrontation with China and Russia."²⁷ Put another way, the information domain is massive in scope, and China will surely maintain dominance in large portions before and during conflict; however, efforts to degrade China's dominance in key aspects will contribute to an overall disruption to decision-making.

INFLUENCE LINES OF EFFORT

Having shown that degrading Chinese domestic stability in conflict would support the objective to disrupt CCP decision-making, an effective influence campaign should consider the current and potential grievances and parties to those grievances. Through the lens of principles gleaned from the Russo-Japanese War, taken alongside the vulnerabilities in Chinese domestic stability, the United States can derive LOEs that support the objective of the influence campaign objectives. These should focus on the popular base, fissures within Chinese Communist Party (CCP), separatist movements, and amplifying the U.S. military campaign.

²⁵ Zach Dorfman, "Botched CIA Communications System Helped Blow Cover of Chinese Agents," Foreign Policy, August 15, 2018. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/08/15/botched-cia-communications-system-helped-blow-cover-chinese-agents-intelligence/>

²⁶ Gompert, Cevallos, and Garafola, "War with China: Thinking Through the Unthinkable," 53.

²⁷ Chris Dougherty, "More than Half the Battle: Information and Command in a New American Way of War," Center for a New American Security, May 20, 2021. <https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/more-than-half-the-battle>

First, the U.S. should capitalize on the inevitable dissent among ethnic Han to increase CCP perceptions of instability. Ethnic Han are staring at declining demographic trends with long-term economic impacts, and will certainly bear a heavy economic burden in time of war.²⁸ A recent survey of Chinese citizens finds: "...citizens who have grown accustomed to increases in living standards will expect such improvements to continue, and citizens who praise government officials for effective policies may indeed blame them when such policy failures affect them or their family members directly."²⁹ The Chinese government has tempered the propensity of ethnic Han to participate in large-scale unrest in recent years, but some historical examples prove the potential for further unrest: the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests, the 2008 Weng'an riot, and in Wukan in 2011 and associated land seizure protests since. Because of disparities in impact and types of grievances, U.S. influence planners should sub-divide the Han into narrower target audiences across socio-economic classes and region (especially rural vs. urban). Such an effort would be analogous to Japan's support to groups present in Moscow and St. Petersburg during the Russo-Japanese War.

The U.S. can complement the above LOE with an effort to turn the PRC government against itself. Just as the Japanese government found opportunities to further divide the military against the Tsar's regime, such an opportunity exists in the People's Liberation Army. The tension between the principle of unity of command and the co-equal status between PCs and commanding officers presents one such lever. This effort should further

²⁸ The RAND study estimates China's economic costs after one year of severe war as a 90% decline in bilateral trade, 80% decline in regional trade, and 50% decline in global trade, for a net loss of 25-35% of China's GDP (compared with 5-10% loss of U.S. GDP).

²⁹ Cunningham, Edward, Tony Saich, and Jessie Turiel. "Understanding CCP Resilience: Surveying Chinese Public Opinion Through Time." Harvard Kennedy School. Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation, 2020. <https://ash.harvard.edu/publications/understanding-ccp-resilience-surveying-chinese-public-opinion-through-time>

exploit tensions within the Party itself, among the “elitist” and “populist” factions at the senior levels and between regional/national CCP leadership and those at the local level.³⁰

To create further dilemmas for the CCP, the U.S. should seek to support key separatist movements. In comparison to the Russo-Japanese War, this would be equivalent to Japan supporting Polish and Finnish resistance through arms shipments, information sharing, and aiding coordination. The primary potential target separatist groups in China include ethnic Uyghurs and Tibetans, and could include Taiwan’s independence movement if the circumstances afford such an opportunity.

Finally, in support of the above efforts, the U.S. should plan to exploit success of military operations during conflict. After Japan gained control of Port Arthur in the Russo-Japanese War, it nimbly exploited battlefield success to bolster Anti-Tsarist propaganda efforts. In turn, Japan used Russian domestic unrest to degrade the morale of Russian Forces in East Asia. A U.S. conflict with China should leverage the same principle, amplifying the outcomes of successful U.S. military, allied, or partner engagements to target Chinese domestic opinion and demoralize PLA forces.

While the LOEs above have separate audiences, the ultimate target remains the CCP, and the best approach is to address LTC Abernethy’s key finding of a “lack of synergy among the various sources of instability within China.”³¹ The best way to stitch the disparate efforts together is what has been used throughout history in political movements and more recently in support of military operations, commonly referred to as “the power of the narrative.” The underlying rationale for this narrative is that the U.S. can weaponize the truth

³⁰ Abernethy, “The Chinese Communist Party: A Strategic Center of Gravity Analysis,” 17, 27, 55.

³¹ Abernethy, 83.

more effectively than the PRC as the former does not tailor the information accessible by its own citizens.

EXPLOITATION MECHANISMS

The narrative is the most fundamental aspect of the influence campaign as it relates the LOEs to the delivered content. The U.S. should adapt the narrative to events that precipitate conflict and take place throughout execution, and use it to highlight inconsistencies in CCP messaging (the “say-do gap”). In the end, we want key messaging to pivot from four key themes aimed to undermine CCP stability and legitimacy:

1. *CCP repression of all Chinese people.* Example: ‘The Chinese Communist Party has a storied history of repressing the freedom of thought and expression of all the people of China, which has afforded the highest members of the Party to defraud the people they should be serving while enriching themselves. The Party has further engaged in the brutal repression of ethnic and religious minority groups.’
2. *Unbearable costs to engaging in conflict.* Example: ‘China’s engagement in this war will only lead to economic ruin for its middle class, causing the collapse of its vital trade and ultimately the inability to feed its population.’
3. *Value of the international order.* Example: ‘China’s actions in this conflict seek to revise the very international order that has enabled the prosperity of the Chinese people, and recent actions are only taken to empower the elite.’ For the U.S. and its allies, the court of international opinion is strategic key terrain. Perceptions of legitimacy and being on the “right side of history” are significant to the conflict.
4. *Futility of China’s military effort.* Displays U.S. (and allied) military capabilities, and success on the battlefield in operating against China or militaries with like

capabilities. This intrinsically ties to LOE 2 and can also highlight internal friction within the CCP.

To accomplish the narrative, both national and military resources should deliver content to the ethnic Han population in China and marginalized ethnic minorities. Because of the difficulty in messaging to these populations, a variety of means will have to be employed with redundancy to ensure resilience. Some of these recommended means are below.

Bypass and Disrupt the “Great Firewall” (GFW).³²

Doing this will provide the greatest opportunity to reach the broadest audience possible. Despite its naming, the GFW is not as impermeable as many believe. Chinese citizens commonly use Virtual Private Networks (VPN) to do some limited circumvention, but advanced methods could provide them unfiltered access to the open internet.³³ As PRC updates the GFW to prevent circumvention, those supporting destabilization efforts will need to pass modified instructions for bypassing the GFW. Leveraging botnets to create a presence on Chinese social media is another means to pass content.

Disrupting the GFW is an alternative option to bypassing. Given that the PRC recently consolidated their internet censorship efforts under two primary agencies, this task has grown far easier in that it now involves targeting two key nodes for a given region.³⁴ As the U.S. Congress has been funding the advancement of global internet freedom, which

³² GFW is the term that covers the combination of legal, organizational, and technological means by which the CCP moderates internet content and surveils internet activity within China.

³³ One example of a more advanced method is using The Onion Router with an obfs4 bridge, which have some proven success in circumventing the GFW.

³⁴ “Until 2018, a myriad of Chinese government and CCP offices shared responsibility for internet censorship, resulting in a delicate and often inefficient balance of power (New America, March 26, 2018). But after the Party’s reorganization that year, two organizations [(the Cyberspace Affairs Commission and Network Security Bureau)] absorbed the lion’s share of internet surveillance and content moderation responsibilities.” – derived from *Buying Silence: The Price of Internet Censorship in China*, The Jamestown Foundation, January 12, 2021. <https://cset.georgetown.edu/article/buying-silence-the-price-of-internet-censorship-in-china/> (accessed 10 March 2021)

includes censorship circumvention technology development, any operations to bypass or disrupt the GFW can use this technology.³⁵

Whatever the selected method, disrupting or bypassing the GFW would open significant amounts of information flow to the Chinese populace. Former Deputy National Security Adviser Matt Pottinger³⁶ reinforces this support for a dialogue with China's domestic audience: "free and open societies—and the companies that flourish in them—must make it easier for Chinese citizens to access information from outside China's Great Firewall, and to communicate with one another away from the watchful eye of Beijing's digital panopticon."³⁷ While Mr. Pottinger advocates for these measures during peacetime and the author supports his view, the desired effect in wartime would be to turn on the firehose. Should a persistent information firehose not be achievable, information pushes should be timed for logical/temporal decisive points that include times of increased unrest, Chinese military defeats, or other events that support the narrative.

Leverage military information operations capabilities.

Military forces should leverage organic information delivery platforms to further support the narrative. These can include radio broadcasts, mass SMS distribution, leaflet drops, and other information-related capabilities. Employing these capabilities will have to balance time/space/force considerations, as U.S. military forces earlier in the campaign will incur more risk to close the distance between them and target audiences. These delivery platforms can also support GFW circumvention by delivering content with URLs and QR

³⁵ Patricia Maloney Figliola, "Internet Freedom in China: U.S. Government Activity, Private Sector Initiatives, and Issues of Congressional Interest," Congressional Research Service, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, May 18, 2018, 5. <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/R45200.pdf>

³⁶ Mr. Pottinger is also a fluent Mandarin speaker who worked as a journalist in China for Reuters and later The Wall Street Journal.

³⁷ Matt Pottinger, "Beijing's American Hustle: How Chinese Grand Strategy Exploits U.S. Power," Foreign Affairs, 2021. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/asia/2021-08-23/beijings-american-hustle>

Codes to provide Chinese citizens a means to access more information. Other content reinforcing the narrative should support the point at which the situation is most quickly developing (i.e. tactical to operational echelons) and/or where expertise on the target population resides. Mission command in the information realm is critical to messaging appropriately and effectively.

Empower international actors to support the strategic narrative.

Other countries have authorities and capabilities that will increase the scope and depth of any influence campaign, and the U.S. military is often the best placed to coordinate with those countries during conflict. For example, Taiwan, Japan, and the Philippines can offer unique linguistic and cultural perspectives on messaging, while using their own capabilities to project into China. This will expand the audiences and thus the effectiveness in disrupting CCP decision-making. For this coordination to succeed, it must go beyond superficial discussions with partners through intelligence sharing agreements and information/intelligence fusion centers.

In addition to working through other governments, the U.S. should empower non-governmental organizations and even consider the utility of hacktivist groups reaching target audiences in China. Such groups have had significant effects during the 2022 Russia/Ukraine war. For instance, the hacking group Anonymous supported Russian citizen resistance with information through defaced government websites, modified television services, and printed content to every Russian printer they could hack.^{38,39} This empowerment carries limited risk

³⁸ Thomas Kika, “Anonymous Hacks into Russian Printers to Deliver Resistance Information,” Newsweek, 2022, sec. World. <https://www.newsweek.com/anonymous-hacks-russian-printers-deliver-resistance-information-1690269>

³⁹ Joe Tidy, “Anonymous: How Hackers Are Trying to Undermine Putin,” BBC News, March 20, 2022, sec. Technology. <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-60784526>

of impeding an influence operation intended to support degradation dominance against the CCP. However, international perceptions of legitimacy being predominately with the U.S. in a conflict with China is key to ensure the hacktivist blade does not cut in the direction opposite than intended; this idea further extends to all international engagement.

Conduct Unconventional Warfare.

As a complementary effort at degrading the CCP's ability to wage a focused conventional military campaign, enabling resistance movements would further complement destabilization efforts. The prerequisite dissatisfaction to support such movements is already present in Tibet and Xinjiang.⁴⁰ In the event of a Taiwan invasion, local insurgency movements can also challenge any invading forces. The information necessary to fuel wider discontent can leverage the same information penetration means listed above. Engagement and recruiting will primarily occur virtually at the onset of conflict, but military commanders should identify physical cross-border locations in which to train resistance forces. Figure 2 captures the logical progression of the movement. But as in the case of the Russo-Japanese War, the Japanese sought to keep most of the resistance faction activities in the bottom half of the pyramid to not complicate peace negotiations. The U.S. should consider a similar approach for a conflict with China.

⁴⁰ "Unconventional Warfare Pocket Guide," United States Army Special Operations Command, Fort Bragg, NC: United States Army Special Operations Command, April 5, 2016.
https://www.soc.mil/ARIS/books/pdf/Unconventional%20Warfare%20Pocket%20Guide_v1%200_Final_6%20April%202016.pdf

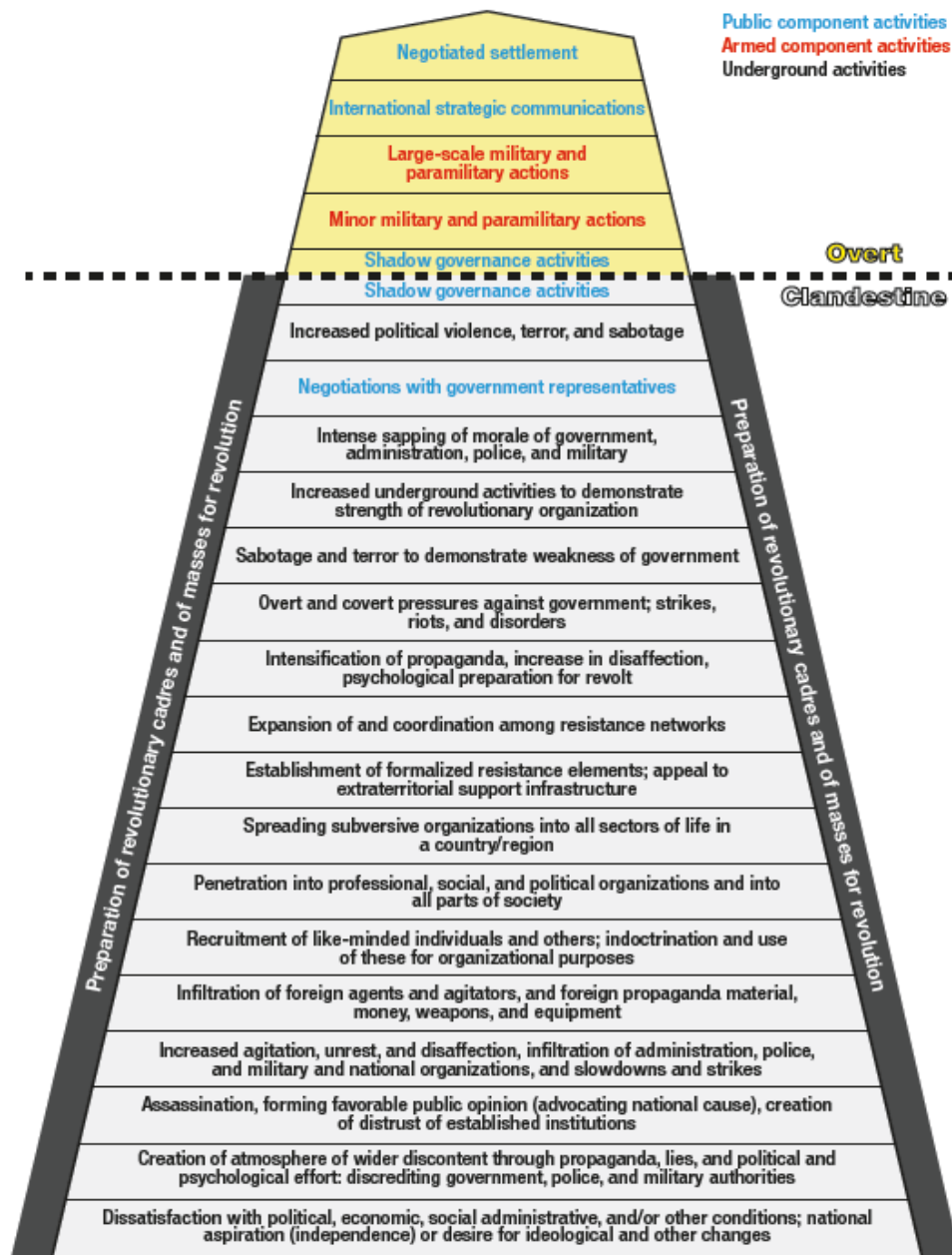


Fig 2. Activities of an Insurgency or Resistance Movement⁴¹

OPPOSING PERSPECTIVE

Some might argue that a regime destabilization campaign will not be effective against China. To support this view, one can point to the success of the CCP in controlling the media

⁴¹ Ibid.

to such an extent that it can marginalize any discord, and present dissent is minimal among the middle class and ethnic Han. In the most recently available Chinese public opinion survey (2020), Harvard's Ash Center finds that "since the start of the survey in 2003, Chinese citizen satisfaction with government has increased virtually across the board."⁴² Moreover, the CCP effectively capitalizes on conflicts and challenges to consolidate power at home (e.g. the Korean War and the Great Leap Forward), and will find a conflict with the U.S. as another such opportunity. Even Mao Zedong saw opportunity in having enemies: many years after Japan invaded China, a Japanese visitor to Mao expressed regret for the event; Mao rebuffed him and explained that a worthy opponent is necessary to making a group stronger.⁴³

To add further fuel to the counterargument, there are plenty of historical examples of homegrown insurgencies failing to prevail over effective central governments. In fact, U.S. covert action measures intended to overthrow the CCP in the 1950s were abject failures. The Truman administration sought to increase these measures after China's incursion into North Korea to "distract and slow down the Chinese advance." The CIA thus supported political subversion based in Hong Kong and trained Chinese paramilitary forces in Japan and Saipan. The political subversion resulted in various published journals, though most of the information never left Hong Kong; meanwhile, the paramilitary operations that have been uncovered all resulted in failure. One author attributes a key reason for the failure as a lack of popular support for such a movement given the context of the time: "the Chinese people after

⁴² Edward Cunningham, Tony Saich, and Jessie Turiel. "Understanding CCP Resilience: Surveying Chinese Public Opinion Through Time," Harvard Kennedy School, Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation, 2020.

⁴³ Robert Greene, *The 48 Laws Of Power*, Profile Books, 2010, 15.

Mao's victory did not see the Communists as invaders, but as a homegrown movement that had opposed the invaders. CIA should not have counted on even benign support from the population of the mainland."⁴⁴

REBUTTAL

Despite the contrary views, China's efforts to control the media and ultimately the sentiment of its population is a battle against entropy. China must increasingly quash dissent to retain control over its local population, and eventually there will be too many required government controls to manage all of their problems. In case of conflict, China will suffer large economic costs, which will inevitably lead to greater unrest that an effective adversary can exploit.

While the failed CIA efforts to create a "third force" in China appear an enticing parallel, they heavily focused on the paramilitary aspect of the operation while neglecting a widespread political subversion effort that accounted for Chinese ideological alignments. Another flaw in comparing this example is that the CIA's operation held the unlimited objective of regime change. On the other hand, the Japanese in the Russo-Japanese War knew that regime change in Russia would greatly complicate war termination efforts. Thus, any future subversion campaign should limit itself to creating the perception of a credible threat of domestic instability. CIA further undermined the effects of their efforts in the 1950s by keeping them stovepiped within their own agency and not layering them with military and diplomatic efforts. In the Russo-Japanese War, the front-line Russian troops were an extended audience through which to demoralize and amplify the effects of unrest on their

⁴⁴ These operations were codenamed HTMERLIN and BGMARQUE, and collectively referred to as Third Force Operations. This information was derived from: Nicholas Dujmović, "Review Essay: Covert Action to Promote Democracy in China during the Cold War," *Studies in Intelligence* 64, no. 4 (December 2020). <https://www.cia.gov/static/58b7c48bd76884f38902a2891a5a3cea/Covert-Action-in-China.pdf>

homefront. A military confrontation with China should also use military placement, access, and capabilities to supplement subversive activities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

I. *Consider information warfare (and specifically the cognitive realm) as the supported effort in modern conflict.* As Clausewitz reduced war to a battle of wills, breaking the enemy's will to fight comes down to forcing decisions through both violent and non-violent means. The cognitive effects are thus the supported effort, and the U.S. military should consider lethal force and other means of influence as supporting efforts. While it may run counter to conventional thinking on the matter, such an approach is increasingly necessary. As the PRC will use their global economic and informational reach to support military objectives, the U.S. must find more means to increase the PRC's level of risk and degrade its grasp on the information environment. Doing this effectively will prove fruitful in case of conflict and can reduce the risk of escalation.

II. *Plan to delegate authorities during war.* Few people inside the U.S. government are likely to understand the thought-process of a PLA Naval Commander better than a U.S. Naval Commander engaging them in combat. Component commanders have access to detailed intelligence reports on their adversaries and the tactical experience to contextualize their actions. Component commanders can also recognize changes in the environment and find opportunities to capitalize on them at a much quicker pace than a Joint Task Force, COCOM, or National Command Authority. Supporting operational commanders with delegable message release authority will afford flexibility, timeliness, and a robust layering to a strategic influence campaign. A military social media presence is also vital to supporting the strategic battle for legitimacy.

III. *Build access now.* The U.S. must develop the intelligence networks, conduits, and shaping operations for the influence campaign early to be effective in war. Advocate for intelligence sharing agreements to empower partners and allies, and create venues to coordinate intelligence and information sharing.

IV. *Bridge the doctrine gap.* The influence campaign advocated for in this paper leverages aspects of two information related capabilities: Military Deception (MILDEC) and Military Information Support Operations (MISO). MILDEC seeks to leverage all effects across all domains to affect adversary decision maker calculus, and has a clear targeting methodology with the see-think-do planning framework. On the other hand, MISO conveys selected truths to target audiences, but it divorces itself from other battlefield effects with influence treated as an intermediate objective vice a campaign objective. The MISO planning and execution methodology is also less defined than MILDEC and does not consider intelligence means as conduits for the messaging campaign. The influence campaign should ultimately employ a combination of both, though truthful information comprises most, if not all, of the messaging.

CONCLUSION

The ultimate goal of the described influence campaign is to gain a competitive edge against the threat China poses to the United States and the international order. Regime destabilization is no silver bullet, but rather a complementary tool to support achieving military objectives. Operational military forces can and should support an influence campaign aimed to disrupt the CCP, and such a campaign will have bearing on operational level outcomes based on the impacts found in the Russo-Japanese War and the China research that this paper builds upon. Regardless of how effective the subversion effort is, if

the CCP view foreign threats to domestic stability as credible, it will effectively raise the risk they incur for initiating or continuing a conflict, thus supporting U.S. deterrence, competition, and victory if needed.

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Offers a unique de-classified insight into previous Covert Action by the CIA and its predecessor the OSS.

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This report details the role of Political Commissars in the PLA Navy, and contrasts the relationship between PCs and military commanders with those of the Soviet Union and other Communist nations. As opposed to being a mere deputy, the PC in the PLA Navy is equal in rank to the Commander and shares (if not trumps) decision-making authority of the Commander in many situations. One of the signature Chinese phrases in this construct is "Build the army with politics."

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Clausewitz’s signature work has many themes that are relevant to this paper. One that is especially poignant lays out the “only conditions under which a general uprising can be effective... 1. The war must be fought in the interior of the country; 2. It must not be decided by a single stroke; 3. The theater of operations must be fairly large; 4. The national character must be suited to that type of war; 5. The country must be rough and inaccessible, because of mountains, or forests, marshes, or the local methods of cultivation” (pg 480). All five of these points directly relate to how to wage a destabilization campaign in China, though the information environment (or digital/logical terrain) will change the terrain considerations Clausewitz had in mind at the time of his writing. For point four (national character), the uprisings that have occurred throughout Chinese history clearly demonstrate the people’s aptitude for unrest.

Cunningham, Edward, Tony Saich, and Jessie Turiel. “Understanding CCP Resilience: Surveying Chinese Public Opinion Through Time.” Harvard Kennedy School. Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation, 2020. <https://ash.harvard.edu/publications/understanding-ccp-resilience-surveying-chinese-public-opinion-through-time>

This represents the most recent and comprehensive outside survey data of Chinese citizens, specifically to address the question of government legitimacy in China. Perceptions of CCP leadership are overall favorable and have grown so over time, which is largely attributed to government reforms and rising standards of living. The authors do note that findings suggest “that support could be undermined by the twin challenges of declining economic growth and a deteriorating natural environment.” While the survey results show the challenge of destabilizing the Chinese regime in peacetime, it also implies that such an effort can be fruitful during war.

DiResta, Renee, Carly Miller, Vanessa Molter, John Pomfret, and Glenn Tiffert. “Telling China’s Story: The Chinese Communist Party’s Campaign to Shape Global Narratives.” Hoover Institution. Stanford Internet Observatory, 2020. <https://cyber.fsi.stanford.edu/io/news/new-whitepaper-telling-chinas-story>

A through exploration of the CCP’s overt and covert means of information operations globally. One of the key audiences it highlights is the Chinese diaspora. The report goes into specific analysis of China’s influence surrounding the 2019-2020 Hong Kong protests, 2020 Taiwan election, and COVID-19 Pandemic. The robust global influence capability of the CCP will clearly challenge U.S. efforts at perceptions of legitimacy in conflict.

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