PRISM

Strategic Statecraft in a Fragmented World

ABOUT

PRISM is the Irregular Warfare Center's (IWC) flagship journal of national and international security affairs. PRISM's mission is "To provide unique insight for current and future national security leaders on emerging security challenges beyond the strictly military domain of the joint force, including transnational, multi-domain threats, gray zone conflict, the technological innovation challenge, and geoeconomic competition among the great powers."

COMMUNICATIONS

PRISM welcomes unsolicited manuscripts from policymakers, practitioners, and scholars, particularly those that present fresh thought, enduring insight, or best practices related to the emerging national security environment. Publication threshold for articles and critiques varies but is largely determined by topical relevance, continuing education for national and international security professionals, scholarly standards of argumentation, quality of writing, and readability. To help achieve this threshold, authors are strongly encouraged to recommend clear solutions or to arm the reader with actionable knowledge. Our review process can last several months. The PRISM editorial staff will contact authors during that timeframe accepting or regretfully rejecting their submission. If the staff is unable to publish a submission within four months of acceptance, PRISM will revert publication rights to the author so that they may explore other publication options. Constructive comments and contributions are important to PRISM. We also welcome Letters to the Editor that are exclusive PRISM—we do not publish open letters. The PRISM editorial staff will contact authors within two months of submission if they accept the letter for publication. Please direct all comments and submit manuscripts in electronic form to dsca.iwc-prism@mail.mil.

DISCLAIMER

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Director's Introduction

Dr. Dennis Walters, Director, Irregular Warfare Center

Greetings and welcome to the first edition of *PRISM: The Journal of Complex Operations* under the aegis of the Irregular Warfare Center (IWC). Many of you have been reading *PRISM* for years and are familiar with its high standard of writing and deep, thought-provoking articles that have been the gold standard for the Department of Defense. You may be less familiar with the IWC, so I wanted to offer you a brief overview of us and explain why the IWC is now publishing *PRISM*.

We established the IWC almost three years ago by order of the Secretary of Defense. Congress gave the Department the authority to establish the Center in the 2022 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). Congress recognized the United States lacked a single organization to coordinate IW activities across the government, and with partners and allies. The NDAA gave the Department five broad authorities to work across the U.S. government, with partners and allies, as well as in the civil sector both in the United States and abroad.

When the National Defense University (NDU) began looking for a new organization to take over the responsibilities of *PRISM*, the IWC expressed strong interest in assuming ownership of this highly respected journal. After a discussion with the NDU President, and a longer discussion with our lawyers, we agreed to partner with NDU for a joint edition before fully taking on the responsibilities of publishing this amazing journal.

PRISM is now the Irregular Warfare Center's flagship, peer-reviewed periodical, dedicated to advancing the theory and practice of irregular warfare (IW), hybrid threats and complex statecraft. As the global security environment remains dynamic, defined by strategic competition, gray zone operations, and hybrid threats, the need for fresh thinking and bold ideas has never been greater. *PRISM* exists to serve as a conduit between the IW community and a broader public audience, connecting scholars, practitioners, and policymakers with cutting-edge insights from the field and classroom.

We view *PRISM* as a "big tent" publication. Much like my view that IW is a team sport, I also believe we need diverse opinions on all aspects of the discipline, and this requires a "big tent" of authors. While rooted in the IW discipline, our pages are open to contributors whose work challenges traditional assumptions, pushes conceptual boundaries, and reframes how we understand influence, competition, and resilience in today's contested global landscape. From security cooperation and proxy conflict to cognitive operations and governance in fragile states, *PRISM* seeks to surface the ideas that matter most—especially those that question the *status quo*.

Our strength and quality come from our contributors: the article authors, book reviewers, and thought leaders who give *PRISM* its voice and vitality. Whether you're a seasoned practitioner or an emerging scholar, if you have an idea that can shape the future of IW or complex statecraft, we want to hear from you. We invite you to submit your work and become part of a dynamic community committed to excellence, innovation, and impact.

Join us in advancing the conversation. Shape the field. Write for *PRISM*.

Letter from the Editors

Kevin D. Stringer, Ph.D., Joshua Hastey, Ph.D., Sandor Fabian, Ph.D.

Welcome to the inaugural issue of *PRISM: The Journal for Complex Operations* under the new sponsorship of the U.S. Department of Defense's Irregular Warfare Center. PRISM had a long and distinguished history of literary excellence as part of the National Defense University. Since the 2024 acquisition of PRISM by the Irregular Warfare Center, the editorial team of Dr. Kevin D. Stringer, Dr. Joshua Hastey, and Dr. Sandor Fabian have worked diligently to assemble this first issue of 2025 in the spirit of PRISM's illustrious past. With the support of PRISM Editor Emeritus Michael Miklaucic, the editors have organized Volume 11.1 with an eclectic mix of six irregular warfare articles and three book reviews.

This issue starts with a thematic focus on societal resilience, state building, and stabilization operations. Robert Burrell's article "What the Red Dragon Fears: Assessing Resistance in China," examines intrastate conflict within China in terms of resilience and resistance. Resiliency deals with the ability of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to overcome adversity imposed from internal or external subversion, coercion and/or aggression, while resistance deals with potential threats to current CCP governance within China. The article assesses the likely success for external support to either the CCP's resilience or resistance to it. Kacper Grass follows with an investigation into economist Roger B. Myerson's novel theory of decentralized democratic state-building, which emphasizes the paramount role of local politics in foreign state-building operations. The article postulates that foreign assistance, channeled through decentralized and democratic institutions, is positively associated with political and economic stability in the target state. This stability is a contributor to national resilience and enables states to withstand hybrid threats. To test this hypothesis, he conducts a qualitative analysis of the three independent countries that emerged from the United Nations Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands—the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Republic of Palau. These countries are within the contested space of Sino-American competition, and hence susceptible to Chinese gray zone activities. Finally, Roger Myerson's contribution "Decentralized Stabilization Assistance" furthers the discussion on stabilization operations with an analysis on the need for the US to carefully consider its future approach in the aftermath of Afghanistan. He posits that America's refusal to prepare for subsequent stabilization missions after the collapse of South Vietnam ensured that both Afghanistan and Iraq would become quagmires.

Shifting to hybrid operations, David J. Scheffer's "Strategizing Lawfare as a Key Irregular War Modality" comprehensively explores lawfare, defined as the use or misuse of law as an alternative

to or in support of kinetic warfare. His contribution suggests implementing a defensive and offensive lawfare strategy complemented by three general recommendations-- the creation of an independent "Lawfare Strategy Group", the development of common lawfare terminology, and the establishment of appropriate education courses for policy-makers and military officers. Robert Redding and Balz Torkar revisit the resistance and total defense concepts that led to Slovenian independence. Their piece "Slovenian Independence and the Resistance Operating Concept: A Comparative Analysis" juxtaposes the framework of the US Special Operations Command Europe and Swedish National Defence University published Resistance Operating Concept (ROC) with the real-world efforts of the Slovenian Maneuver Structure of National Protection (MSNP), offering a unique perspective on the dynamics of national defense strategies.

Lastly, Daniel Eerhart's paper "The Iatrogenic Paradox: When Information Operations Undermine Strategic Objectives" argues that ineffective and often counterproductive military information operations necessitate a fundamental reassessment of their role within U.S. strategy. The iatrogenic outcomes of the Afghanistan war demonstrate that rather than serving as a panacea for influence, military information operations must be narrowly focused, carefully integrated with non-military efforts, and isolated against strategic backlash.

The issue concludes with three book reviews. In the first, Whitney Grespin reviews Frank Sobchak's *Training for Victory: U.S. Special Operations Forces Advisory Operations from El Salvador to Afghanistan*, arguing that it is a serious contribution to the ever-important literature on advisory missions. In particular, she highlights Sobchak's attention to the preeminence of consistency in the composition of successful advisory operations. To promote a spirit of debate and discussion, our final two reviews assess the

same book, and come to differing conclusions on its merits. Mark Grzegorzewski reviews Michael Sobolik's *Countering China's Great Game: A Strategy for American Dominance* as a historically rooted strategic analysis, He finds value in its diagnosis of America's failure to recognize the PRC's whole-of-society threat to the U.S.-led world order as well as its call to a return to the containment strategies of the Cold War. While William Mengel finds some value in Sobolik's work as an introduction to the CCP's strategic thought and challenges to the US, he assesses the depth of historical and cultural analysis lacking and, ultimately, undermining the book's core thesis. We present both reviews with the hope that readers will benefit from the divergent evaluations and make judgements of their own.

As we launch this inaugural issue under the aegis of the Irregular Warfare Center, we extend our deepest gratitude to the distinguished contributors who made this transition possible. We are grateful to National Defense University for establishing *PRISM*'s legacy of excellence, and to Editor-in-Chief Emeritus Michael Miklaucic for his role in passing that heritage to the Irregular Warfare Center. Moving forward, we remain steadfast in our commitment to publishing rigorous, innovative scholarship that advances our understanding of irregular warfare and complex statecraft.

PRISM, like any journal, depends on its contributors for excellent articles and book reviews. We invite military professionals, security scholars and practitioners, and subject matter experts from across the national security enterprise to submit their research, analysis, and book reviews for consideration in future issues. In our new institutional home, *PRISM* will continue to serve as the essential forum for critical thinking about the evolving challenges of irregular threats and the complexities of modern statecraft, fostering the kind of intellectual engagement that strengthens our understanding of global events and our nation's security.

What the Red Dragon Fears
Assessing Resistance in China

By Robert S. Burrell

T he image of an unidentified Chinese protestor, referred to as "Tankman," heroically blocking Chinese Communist Party (CCP) tanks in Beijing in 1989 remains one of the greatest examples of nonviolent action. For this reason, this famous photograph remains prohibited in China.[2] Fundamentally, the CCP wants to erase "Tankman" from history. The CCP inherently fears resistance, particularly from the Han Chinese in-group. Instead of assessing the fire, teeth, and scales of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), Western nations should take a deeper examination into what terrifies the Red Dragon.

This paper assesses intrastate conflict within China in terms of resilience and resistance. Resiliency deals with the ability of the CCP to overcome adversity imposed from internal or external subversion, coercion and/or aggression. Resistance deals with Chinese society's, the population's, or a subgroup's opposition to endogenous power structures. The study leverages analytical data from top universities, financial institutions, governmental agencies, and nongovernmental organizations.[3] Initially, the research measures the resiliency of the CCP, as well as resistance potential to current governance within China, and then assesses the likely success for external support to either the CCP's resilience or resistance to it. Subsequently, it identifies prevalent or influential resistance organizations within China, and then categorizes these organizations along a continuum to classify their general nature. Following, the research assesses one Chinese belligerent (as defined in international law)[4]—Taiwan, by taking a deeper look at its leadership, motivation, operating environment, organization, and activities. Finally, it subjectively assesses the information gathered to make recommendations concerning potential Western foreign

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Figure 1. Comparison of China's Resilience Factors in Governance with the Indo-Pacific, 2024
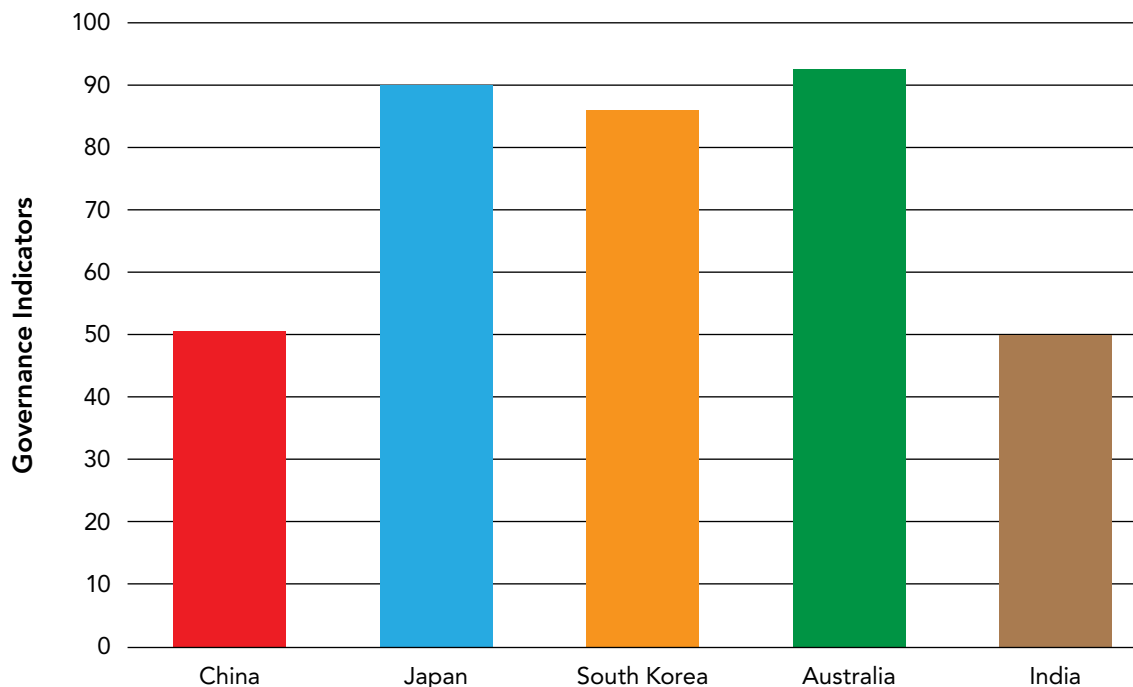
Source: Author

policy regarding China's intrastate conflict, either to support the CCP's resilience, support resistance to the CCP, or prepare the environment for a future foreign policy which supports resilience or resistance.

MEASURING CHINA'S RESILIENCE AND RESISTANCE

China's significance for measuring resiliency and resistance lies in its potential for possible uses of external support to increase CCP's resiliency, and possibilities for subversion and destabilization of the CCP by a competitor.

Measuring the Chinese Communist Party's Resiliency

The peoples of China have an ancient history going back the 13th Century B.C. However, much of the modern nation state's contemporary outlook was formed by the historical record of the Qing Dynasty, which collapsed from internal discord in 1912. From a Chinese perspective, the "Century of Humiliation" spans from the 1830's through the 1940's, when European powers and Japan subverted the legitimacy of China's rulers to exploit its economic markets.[5] The resulting fracturing of China also led to losses of territory during these years (which the previous Qing Dynasty laid claim to) – territory that the CCP maintains an entitlement to, including Tibet, Mongolia, Taiwan, and islands in the South China Sea. Even without enforcing these claims in terms of land mass, China remains the fourth largest country in the world.

Official CCP portrayals of national unity overstate the actual degree of China's unity. China remains a communist party state, led by the CCP of which there are about 100 million members, around

seven percent of the population. China has a population of 1.4 billion peoples, over 90 percent which are Han and ethnic minorities making up the rest.[6] In terms of language, the population is more diversified than its ethnography suggests, with about 70% speaking Mandarin, and a significant portion of the rest preferring other dialects, including Yue (Cantonese), Wu (Shanghainese), Minbei (Fuzhou), Minnan (Hokkien-Taiwanese), Xiang, Gan, and Hakka.[7] Since the time of Mao Zedong, the CCP has made extensive efforts to subvert and erase religion from society, but many subgroups remain who follow forms of folk religion around 22%, Buddhist at 18%, Christian at 5% and Muslim at 2%.[8] As these metrics indicate, despite the CCPs efforts to maintain an image of "one China" (to include its diaspora of around 10 million), its ethnolinguistic, religious, and political fractures remain a considerable liability to its desired image.[9]

Relative to other nations, CCP governance leaves much to be desired. In terms of state fragility, China ranks above average at 99 out of 179 countries and between Bhutan and Bahrain (a fragility of 55.31% in comparison with others).[10] In terms of preparation for climate change, it ranks fairly well at 38 of 185 nations (or 79.46% globally).[11] Similarly, CCP's resilience to crime is 49 of 193 nations evaluated (or 74.61% in comparison).[12] According to the World Bank, and relative to all other nations, China ranks 7.35% in government accountability, 25.12% in political stability, 73.58% in government effectiveness, 38.68% in regulation efficiency, 52.83% in rule of law, and 54.25% in control of corruption.[13] Averaging these nine metrics equally, the CCP's resiliency in 2024 is calculated as 50.87%. The following figure illustrates these governance metrics in relation to other Indo-Pacific nations.[14] Both China and India share challenges in resiliency with average indicators overall, while Japan, Republic of Korea, and Australia exhibit exceptional resiliency. The CCP's resiliency to coercion, subversion, or revolution remains average in comparison with other

nations globally, but, importantly, with extremely low numbers in government accountability and political stability.

A few China scholars have wondered how the CCP over time has achieved fairly popular legitimacy and long-term resiliency in a totalitarian system which retains comparable low metrics in governance as dictatorships. Runya Qiaoan and Jessica Teets describe CCP control approaches in terms of responsible authoritarianism. In other words, the CCP attempts to convey accountability with established feedback mechanisms in which citizens can voice their opinions on policies to the government. Additionally, in the 21st Century, the CCP has remained somewhat tolerant of nonviolent protest, specifically from the Han in-group, as a means for the population to identify social and economic issues which can be addressed with policy reforms. Nevertheless, under Xi Jinping's leadership, the CCP appears to be less responsive to popular dissent. Instead, Xi appears to respond more to the concerns of Chinese elites.[15]

In addition to hard metrics on the effectiveness of governance, the resiliency of the people's support of the CCP remains a subjective but important measure. To measure national will, this analysis utilizes four survey questions (given the difficulties in getting opinion polls from Chinese citizens and based on available polling data).[16] The following four factors are assessed as indicators of national will in China:

1. Citizens are satisfied with CCP governance (93.1%, adjusted to 64.6%, see endnote).[17]

2. Citizens maintain below average perceptions of local officials' integrity (65.3%, adjusted to 36.8%).[18]

3. Chinese espouse hawkish views on the use of military force to enforce territorial claims in the South China Sea at roughly 80%.[19]

Table 1. Basic Factors of National Morale in China

FOUR FACTORS	RATING	POLL
Satisfaction with CCP Governance at the national level	Above average	64.6%
Positive perception of the integrity of local government officials	Below average	36.8%
Believe China should use the military to reclaim islands in South China Sea	High	80%
The proportion of national defense spending should increase	Average	54%
MEAN		**58.85%**

4. Chinese want an increase in military spending for the defense of the nation, even at the expense of social programs. This appears consistently average from 1998-2015. In 2015, about 54% recommended an increase in defense spending.[20]

   Averaging all four factors equally, the estimated national will of Chinese to support the resiliency of the CCP from external aggression or internal subversion is slightly above average, 58.85%.

Reinforcing Resilience Potential

In estimating the chance of an external sponsor in successfully offering aid to the CCPs resiliency, three factors are assessed:

- China's international relations with other states or organizations (i.e. CCP's friends, allies, and adversaries).

- Current stability of the state and its innate ability to defend the people's human security needs without assistance (implying additional resources would be put to effective use).

- The ability of the CCP to develop national defense capabilities independently without the need for external support (i.e. the extent to which external military assistance may be additive).

   While China has developed numerous bilateral agreements, it has little in terms of genuine alliances, although some might argue the CCP's treaty with North Korea is akin to a military alliance.[21] Instead, however, it has established nine treaties of cooperation with several neighbors.[22] It maintains a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council, but its relationship with its nearest regional organization, Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), remains contentious, primarily due to a lack of trust and controversy over the control of islands in the South China Sea. China, does however, participate with Russia and India (and another couple dozen partners) in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Additionally, China participates in BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) group of economic cooperation. In contrast to a military or economic alliance, the CCP and others participation in both SCO and BRICS likely represent their attempt to challenge the U.S. led international order.[23]

   An external sponsor could attempt to further reinforce resiliency of the CCP, which many Western nations have done, inadvertently or not, for economic reasons since the 1970s. Currently, U.S. foreign relations with CCP attempts to address many points of contention, and the United States views China as a rival.[24] Additionally, other Western states remain wary of China. In sum, most nations view the CCP with suspicion but welcome collaboration which bring economic advancement. As it has historically, China stands mostly alone, both regionally and globally. Consequently, the chance of an external state dedicating resources specifically

Figure 2. Chinese Communist Party Defense Spending in U.S. Billions, 2014-2022

Source: Author
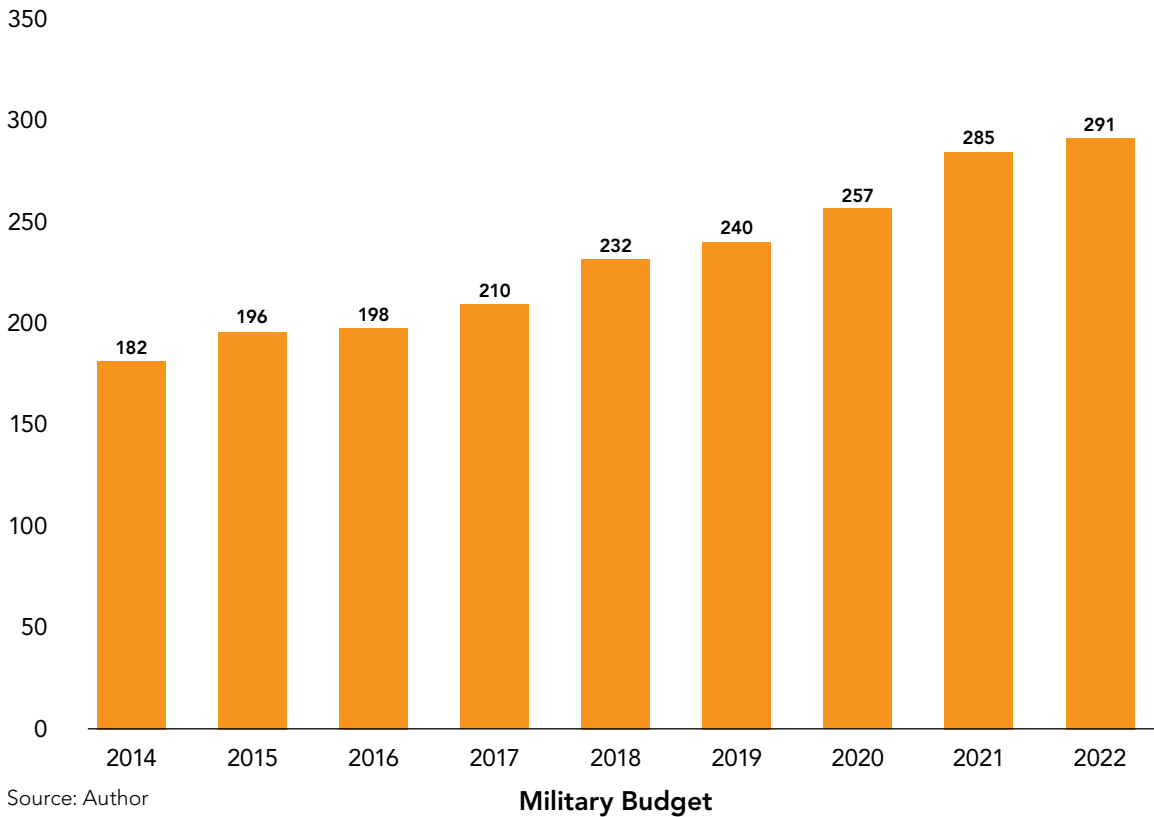
to safeguard the resilience of the CCP at their own expense remains unlikely.[25]

While economic investment in China remains high, it simultaneously has little need for economic aid and primarily offers aid itself to others. Foreign direct investment in the first five months of 2024 equaled $56.8B, but Western aid packages remained inconsequential.[26] U.S. economic assistance to China primarily encompasses programs to protect and preserve Tibetan culture.[27] Foreign aid has dropped significantly since 2013 ($100 million) to a minimal current amount of $2.25 million in 2022 (generally in support of enforcing nonproliferation agreements and environmental protections). The top Western agency funding development in China remains United States Agency for International Development (USAID), with around $900k in 2022.[28] While little transparency exists, China contributes aid to numerous countries, particularly in support of its One Belt One Road initiative. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) estimated China's aid contributions to developing countries in 2018 was over $4.4B.[29] Due to its present economic resiliency, if a nation (or organization) chose to support the CCP in terms of foreign aid, the estimated success of such efforts toward stabilization remains relatively high.[30]

Presently, China upholds national security functions without the need for military assistance. Using roughly 1.7% of its gross domestic product, the CCP maintains the second highest military budget in the world, estimated at over $291B in 2022[31]

(the following figure illustrates CCP investments in the PLA from 2014-2022).[32] Additionally, China maintains a defense industrial complex to build its military capacity domestically, without the need of external suppliers. In fact, China competes with Russia and the United States in arms sales abroad (in 2024, the CCP began surging arms sales to Russia to back its war in Ukraine).[33] In terms of foreign arms sales, security sector assistance, and foreign military training, the United States has an arms embargo on China since 1989.[34] Despite U.S. foreign policy objectives seeking changes to CCP behavior, economic trade with China continues to grow, reaching $772 billion in 2017 (China remains the third largest exporter of trade goods to the United States, only surpassed by Mexico and Canada).[35] One might surmise that specified Western foreign policy objectives to decrease CCP regional aggression and curtail domestic human rights abuses are currently circumvented by their collaborative economic ventures. Based on the CCP's demonstrated ability to build national defense capabilities, other nations who have interests in reinforcing CCP resiliency with security sector assistance have a high potential of success.[36]

After evaluating China's lack of alliance partners (slight chance of outside assistance), the possibility of foreign aid increasing the CCP's demonstrated ability to secure human security (high chance of success), and the possible impact of security sector assistance to increase the capacity of the PLA (high chance of success), and considering these three factors equally, the potential of external support (such as from Russia, Iran, or North Korea) to increase the CCP's resiliency to aggression, coercion, or subversion has an above average estimated realization.

Measuring the Potential of Resistance in China

China retains a few disturbing indicators which suggest significant potential for resistance to the CCP. In terms of how China compares to most other states, the CCP ranks 42.22% in perceptions of corruption,[37] it ranks 105% globally in lack of political rights,[38] 81.67% percent in unprotected civil liberties,[39] and in shadow governance 10.76%.[40] The obvious lack of political rights results in the CCP wielding tools of a police state to monitor and control its population, but it also requires the CCP to deliver on other aspects of governance, like rule of law (and economic progress) to ensure the population's cooperation.

As discussed earlier when describing the population, Chinese society remains much more fractious than CCP propaganda relates. Societal fractionalization develops seams and gaps which resistance can harness against the state. One can measure China's fractionalization in terms of ethnicity, language, and religion, in comparison with other nations. China ranks 35 of 189 nations and between Hungary and Greece (or 18.52%) in terms of ethnic diversity.[41] It ranks 53 of 200 nations and between Lebanon and Tuvalu (or 26.5%) in terms of language multiplicity.[42] Remarkably, it ranks 177 of 213 nations and between Congo and Malaysia (or 83.1%) in terms of religious diversity.[43] Consequently, ethnic, linguistic, and particularly religious factors in China have influenced the CCP to implement policies which minimize these negative influences on a desired amalgamation of a homogeneous society.

Within this setting of China's resistance potential, the CCP continues to repress its population. Over a three-year period between 2018 and 2020, *Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project* recorded over 900 acts of violence carried out against civilians by state forces "targeting petitioners, activists, political dissidents, religious groups, and ethnic minorities."[44] *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* reports three major protests in China in 2023 by Muslims, retirees, and coronavirus activists.[45] The *Global Terrorism Database* tracks twenty-one incidents of attacks on the police and private institutions in 2020 (most of these were in Hong Kong).[46]

Figure 3. Resistance Comparison of China with other Indo-Pacific Nations
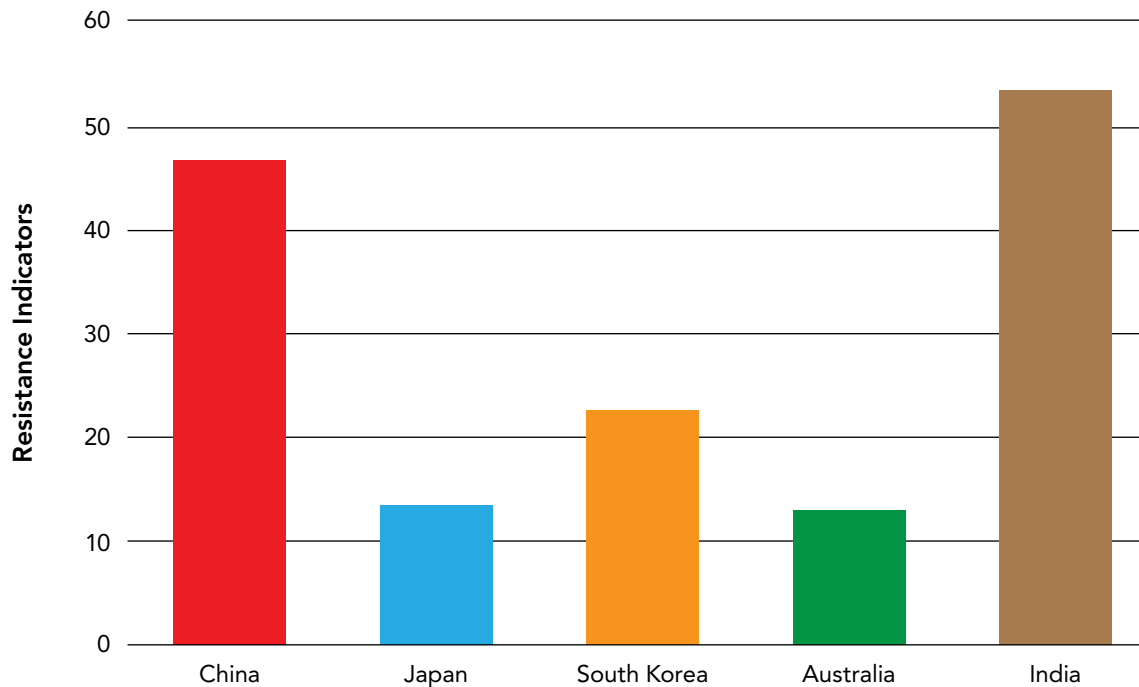
Source: Author

Several other metrics can surmise resistance potential in China. China's vulnerability to climate change is low at 39 of 187 nations evaluated, or 20.86%.[47] However, in terms of internal unrest, China ranks 88 out of 163 at 53.99%.[48] *Freedom House* describes China as definitively "not free," and one of the worst records globally, with a 82.9% negative score in terms of liberty.[49] China experiences pervasive organized crime, ranking 33 of 193 countries evaluated, or 82.9% in comparison.[50] Underdeveloped nations routinely suffer from resistance to governance, but human progress in China appears solid. Correspondingly, the United Nations ranks China as 47 of 193[51] nations in terms of gender inequality and 75 of 193 nations[52] in terms of poor human development (24.35% and 38.86% respectively in comparison with other nations). Finally, the CCP has also done well in addressing food insecurity, ranked as 26 of 113 nations by the *Food Security Index* (or 23.01%).[53] The following figure illustrates resistance potential in China in comparison with Japan, Republic of Korea, Australia, and India. China has four times the resistance potential as Japan and significantly more than developed Indo-Pacific states.

Adding up the thirteen resistance indicators described previously and averaging them equally, the potential for resistance in China can be evaluated at 47.06%, a significant metric but tempered by totalitarian state control measures to suppress dissent. Simultaneously, the CCP ranks near the bottom in the globe in terms of protecting political rights and civil liberties, while also containing one of the largest societal divides in terms of religion. This implies resistance in China maintains potentially explosive causes for resistance to leverage.

Figure 4. Income Disparity in China by Population Size and Purchasing Power, 2022
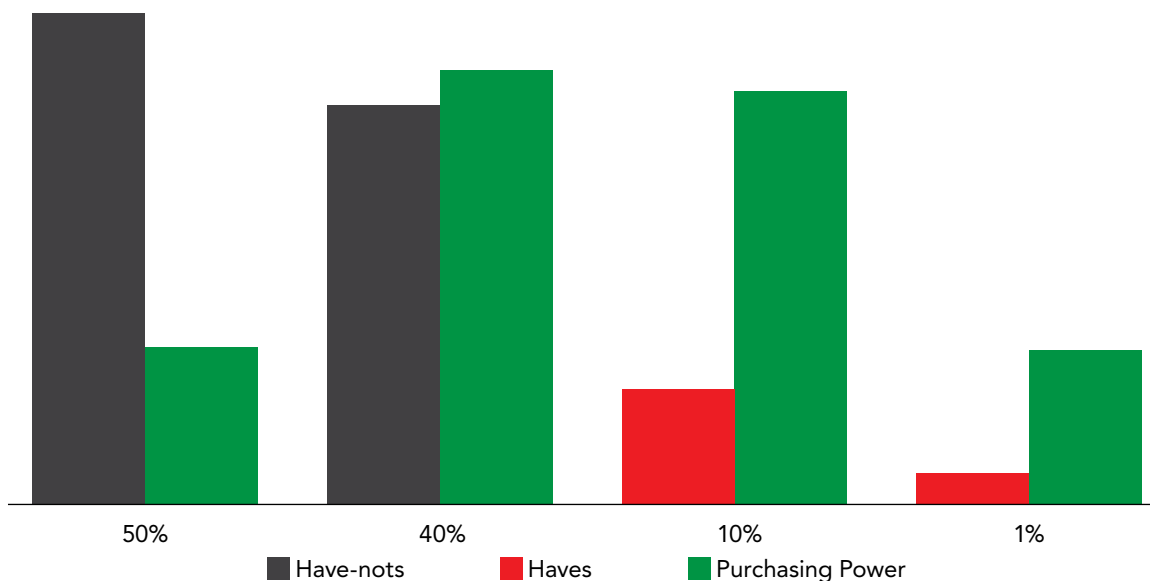
Source: Author

Support to China's Resistance Potential

For context regarding support to resistance, much of the nation's imports and exports are with Western nations, which provides opportunities to influence behavior and leverage in support of foreign policy objectives, but these trade relations also prove important to sustain the economies of Western states, which makes undermining the CCPs legitimacy risky despite its competitor status. Additionally, a support to resistance strategy has some human and geographical weaknesses to consider. The Han Chinese majority in China at over 90% could make it challenging to simply identify an ethnolinguistic minority vying for power; still, there exist several resistance movements in China, most not based on ethnicity (as discussed later). Additionally, in political terms, 93% of the population remains disenfranchised from political power as they are not members of the CCP—making a Han Chinese resistance a strong possibility. In fact,

as shown in Figure 6, China has some of the greatest income inequality in the world where 1% of the population wields the same income as the bottom 50%, a situation completely incompatible with communist principles, and remains a significant factor in Han resistance potential, particularly in times of economic recession (see following chart for wealth disparity).[54] As China remains a strategic rival of the United States (exhibited in U.S. foreign policy in the *National Security Strategy* and the *National Defense Strategy*), a Western option to support Chinese resistance remains a prime candidate for consideration.[55]

Historical case study analysis completed by Chris Mason in the Study of Internal Conflict at the Army War College poses four important questions to indicate the possible success or failure of a Chinese armed insurgency.[56] (1) For an insurgency to be successful, 15% or more of the population should not identify as a citizen of China. Most of the population

almost certainly identify as Chinese, making this factor difficult. (2) An additional metric of successful insurgencies includes cases in which 15% or more of the population does not acknowledge the legitimacy of the regime. The CCP has remained in power on the mainland for decades. Areas which do not accept CCP authority may include peoples in Tibet, the Uyghurs in Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, the population in Hong Kong, and citizens in Taiwan. However, numbers of these persons likely total less than 15% of the Chinese population. (3) Other successful insurgencies include those when 15% or more of the population have meaningful communication with a resistance movement. With the totalitarian control measures implemented by the CCP, current underground or resistance organization's contact with Chinese people remains isolated and far less than 15% of the total. (4) Finally, if sanctuary exists for an armed component of resistance in a neighboring state then insurgencies almost always succeed. In this respect, most neighbors of China have friendly relations, with two major historical exceptions – Vietnam and India.[57] While future circumstances might allow for a Chinese insurgency with sanctuary in a neighboring state, that situation appears unlikely at the moment. In summation, armed insurgency to the CCP does not have strong indicators for success, making a stand-alone support to resistance campaign by a rival unreliable.

Summarizing China's Resiliency

Summarizing China's resilience and resistance metrics, the CCP can be judged as having average resilience to external coercion or internal subversion, driven primarily by extremely low public voice and accountability in governance (50.87%). Meanwhile, Western nations are indirectly reinforcing the CCP's resiliency via strong trade relations, but direct programs to enhance the CCP in terms of human and national security (by Russia, DPRK, or Iran) has a slightly above average chance of success. Inter-nal resistance to the CCP has unrealized potential (47.06%), particularly attractive due to the CCP's dismal ranking in providing political rights and protecting civil liberties. However, external support to armed resistance from an outside power has a low probability of success, likely short-lived unless accompanied by a conventional military campaign.

IDENTIFYING CHINA'S RESISTANCE MOVEMENTS

The CCP retains various powerful state means of control for curtailing protest and nonviolent action. Still, according to Harvard's *Mass Mobilization Protest Data* information, 6 million people mobilized to protest in China between 1990 and 2020.[58] Some of the groups were mobilized in the hundreds but eighteen events occurred with hundreds of thousands of people. Most of these large protests occurred in Hong Kong, with an estimated 5.4 million mobilized between 1997 and 2020.[59] Of the multiple organizations, the Pan-Democracy Camp (made up of multiple political parties in Hong Kong), represents the most influential group. The Chinese Communist Party has charged the young and popular Hong Kong activist Joshua Wong (leader of Scholarism – a pro-democracy student activist group) multiple times for subversion, and he has served time in prison. The political party Wong formed in 2016, Demosisto, was disbanded in 2020.

Another important nonviolent action party consists of Tibetan monks, who have maintained various forms of protest since the PLA's occupation of Tibet in 1950.[60] The spiritual ruler of Tibet, the Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyatso, maintains essentially a government-in-exile in Dharamsala, India. From 2009 to 2022, 131 Tibetan men and 28 Tibetan women have conducted public self-immolation as an act of protest to the CCP's infringement on civil rights, particularly religious freedom. Two other Tibetan monks-in-exile conducted self-immolation in Nepal. An additional

Figure 5. Diagram of China's Resistance Continuum
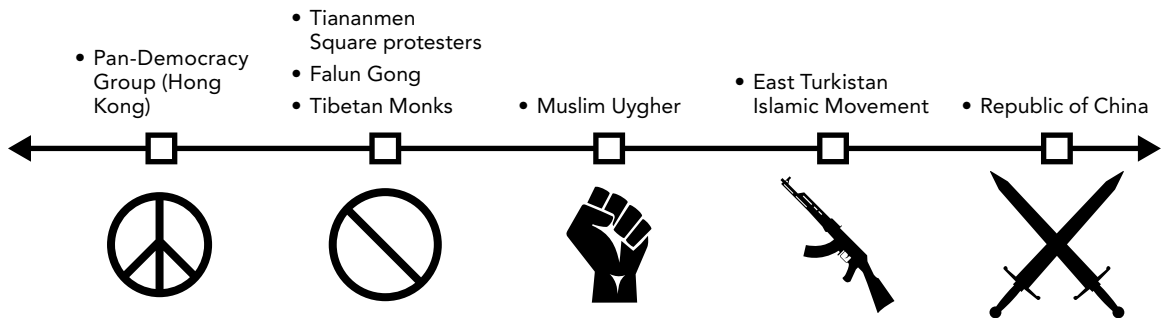
Source: Author

religious group under CCP eradication (and hence illegal) remains the Falun Gong. In 1999 and 2000, at least 14,000 members of Falun Gong protested in ten marches to oppose the CCP's policies, primarily in the capital of Beijing.[61] Lastly, labor protests and strikes remain frequent in China but generally sporadic, grass roots, and unorganized.

Nonviolent protests under the CCP's authoritarian regime have not done well thus far. Harvard's *Nonviolent and Violent Campaigns and Outcomes (NAVCO)*, lists three major campaigns since 1989. (1) Beijing's Tiananmen Square protest (an example illustrated previously in the Tankman photo). (2) Tibet's Kirti Monastery Protests in 2012, and (3) the Hong Kong Pro-Democracy protest (or Umbrella Movement) from 2014-2019.[62] NAVCO evaluated all of these as failures. In review, identifiable nonviolent legal protest groups in China consist of the Pan-Democracy Group, while nonviolent illegal protest includes: (a) an active underground and public component of remaining members of the Tiananmen Square protest,[63] (b) an active underground (possibly in the millions) and public component of Falun Gong,[64] and (c) both an underground and public component of Tibetan Buddhist Monks.

In western China, conflict with Islamic groups abounds, particularly in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. According to *Uppsala Conflict Data Program* (UCDP), the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) is aligned with both al-Qaida as well as Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and has established base camps in both Afghanistan and Syria over the past two decades. ETIM violence is Xinjiang is associated with 65 deaths since 1990.[65] The Muslim majority of the Uyghur population in Xinjiang remains opposed to CCP's Sinicization policies and Han immigration. UCDP categorizes their activities as "organized violence," with over 25 battle-related deaths in 2009.[66] Of the 11 million Uyghurs, the CCP has imprisoned one million "in reeducation camps since 2017."[67] The most recent significant protest in 2023 includes over 1,000 Muslims in Yunnan province protesting communist dictates on Islam, but this did not include violence.[68] One could surmise that the CCP has committed to programs which equate to cultural genocide against the Uyghur. In terms of violent resistance, I would categorize the ETIM as an insurgency and the seemingly unorganized (at least currently) Muslim Uyghurs activities as low-simmering rebellion.

The largest and most significant resistance movement in China remains the Republic of China in Taiwan. The Republic of China has been in a state of conflict with Communist China since 1927. In 1949, Communist China gained control of the mainland and the Republic of China relocated to

Taiwan. The United Nations recognized the Republic of China as the legitimate Chinese government until 1971. However, only thirteen sovereign states today continue to recognize the Republic of China as a legitimate government.[69] Both the Republic of China and the CCP recognize a one China policy, but both claim legitimacy over it. The Republic of China should be categorized as a well-established belligerency. The following figure illustrates these significant Chinese resistance movements across a continuum.[70]

ASSESSING CHINA'S RESISTANCE MOVEMENTS

After identifying China's resistance movements along a continuum, we take a deeper look at the Republic of China (ROC).[71] This analysis allows a potential external sponsor of resilience or resistance in China to better evaluate threats and/or partnerships for instilling desired change.[72] In assessing Taiwan, this study examines five attributes: (1) actors, (2) causes, (3) environment, (4) organization, and (5) actions.[73]

Actors in the Republic of China

The ROC was formed by the Kuomintang (KMT) party in 1919. Its most influential leader was Chiang Kai-shek, who formed an alliance with the

United States and the British Empire during World War II. Following military and political defeats on the mainland, from 1949 onward, the KMT largely retained power in Taiwan until 2016. Since then, Taiwan has been governed by the Democratic Progressive Party. The most recently elected president in May 2024 is Lai Ching-te. The former president, Tsai Ing-wen (also from the Democratic Progressive Party), received some international recognition, but her engagements were limited to developing nations, including the Kingdom of Eswatini, Guatemala, Belize, Palau, Nauru, Marshall Islands, and Paraguay.[74] The ROC's international engagements with minor powers has proven essential for its legitimacy, but the lack of recognition from middle or major powers indicates a general reluctance to advocate for Taiwan. The United Nations also does not recognize the ROC as a state.[75]

While the Democratic Progressive Party remains nominally in power with control of the presidency, recent elections have made it a minority party in the legislature.[76] In 2024, 71.9% of voters turned out, leaving 28.1% of the population fence sitters. The ROC has 113 seats in its legislature, called the Legislative Yuan. Of these, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) retains 51 seats. The KMT has 52 seats and has established an opposition government that includes 2 independents and 8 members from the Taiwan

Figure 6: Scale of Popular Support for and Resistance Against the Democratic Progressive Party
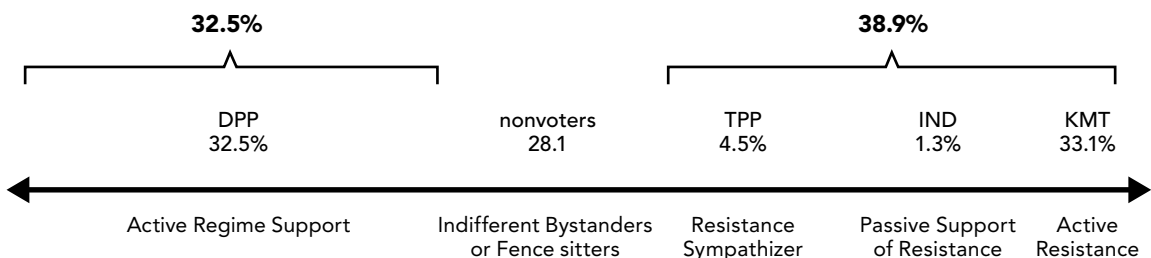
Source: Author

People's Party (TPP). The following figure illustrates these groups along a spectrum.[77]

Taiwanese opinion on reunification with the People's Republic of China (PRC) appears at record lows. A census in 2022 showed that: 28.6% desire the status quo indefinitely; 25.2% want to move towards independence; 5.2% want status quo and decide on reunification at a later date, and only 1.3% desired to reunify with PRC immediately. When asked about identity, 63.7% identified as Taiwanese, 30.4% identified as both Taiwanese and Chinese, and only 2.4% as Chinese.[78] These numbers indicate significant favor in continued support for the ROC and opposition to PRC, but certainly not a unified opinion on the matter.

While most nations do not recognize the ROC as a sovereign state, many share economic and national security interests with the independent island.[79] Ironically, the PRC is the ROC's largest trading partner, accounting for 25% of its total trade in 2021. Other major partners include Japan (10%), Hong Kong (8%), and Republic of Korea (6%).[80] The United States continues to sell weapons to the ROC—about $500 million worth in August 23 of 2023 and $2 billion worth in October of 2024.[81] Meanwhile, the U.S. Navy conducts freedom of navigation operations in the Taiwan strait, despite vehement CCP protest. Notwithstanding ROC resistance, the CCP has successfully and doggedly attacked the legitimacy of the ROC over the past two decades. As one example, the CCP lobbied the Olympic Games Committee to remove ROC's flag and anthem from the Olympics (athletes from the ROC must compete under the "Chinese Taipei" designation).[82] In sum, the ROC attempts to secure its legitimacy through international support, but the CCP consistently threatens and erodes the ROC's status as well.

Cause of the Republic of China

At its heart, the rational for the continued existence of the ROC remains a compelling counter-vision for Zhongguo (greater China) to that of the CCP—essentially a democratic and free China. Another lesser cause includes an independent ROC, recognized as a sovereign state and not part of the PRC. However, that vision interferes with the objectives of Zhongguo, and these two ideas compete with one another. For the CCP, both causes cause a great deal of angst. The official position of the Democratic Progressive Party is "establishing the Republic of Taiwan as a sovereign, independent, and autonomous nation" (i.e., the lesser vision).[83] Meanwhile, the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) continues to support Taiwan as part of greater China and as the legitimate choice opposed to the CCP (i.e., the larger vision). Based on the latest polling data presented earlier, about two-thirds of the Taiwanese population agrees with one or both causes, but there remains no consensus. With a population of 23.5 million, Taiwan represents less than 2% of the total 1.4 billion in the PRC.[84] Consequently, the greater vision appears increasingly unlikely, but the lesser vision remains possible.

Resistance Environment of the Republic of China

The environment in which the ROC persists has some distinct advantages and disadvantages. The islands of Taiwan distance themselves from the PRC with a maritime border of about 100 miles. However, the ROC remains entirely dependent on sea lines of communication. While the maritime domain facilitates a degree of security, the loss of sea control around Taiwan could potentially spell its demise. For similar reasons, control of the air domain around Taiwan remains critical for its safety. In terms of authority, the ROC remains a democracy. This form of governance starkly clashes with the authoritarian nature of the PRC and comprises

a visible internal threat to the CCP. On Taiwan, nearly 90% of those polled oppose the attempts of the CCP to integrate the islands into the PRC, and 75% of those polled stated they were willing to pick up arms and fight.[85] This indicates serious support to resistance efforts led by the Democratic Progressive Party. In terms of technology, the ROC has access to, and Taiwan even produces, some of the most advanced products.[86] The expertise on Taiwan for utilizing technology in support of resistance has real potential, not only in terms of defense but for disruption of the CCP on the mainland. In terms of external support, the ROC continues to officially attract recognition from smaller states, most recently Lithuania.[87] However, the potential for other supporters is great, including the United States, Australia, Japan, and South Korea (if they should choose to do so). Support from the United States is the lynchpin for a greater umbrella of nation states to legitimize the ROC. A poll in August 2023, showed that 38% of Americans would support utilizing the U.S. military to defend the ROC.[88]

Organization of the Republic of China

As is the case in most belligerencies, the ROC has all the trappings of statehood, including governance, rule of law, and a uniformed military. Its governance and leaders are veritably overt, without the need for an underground. The Democratic Progressive Party is a mass organization, giving it legitimate weight. However, it is also easy to penetrate and the threat of CCP infiltration into every major Taiwanese organization is very real and difficult to block. The armed component of Taiwan consists of 169,000 active uniformed personnel and 1.66 million reservists.[89] In comparison, the PLA consists of around 2 million regulars.[90] The ROC spent $19 billion dollars on defense in 2023.[91] In comparison, the CCP spent $200 billion.[92] The ROC has 474 military aircrafts,[93] while the PLA wields 2,500.[94] While the PRC has a substantial advantage

over the ROC in terms of military power, the ROC has perhaps one of the most developed and capable armed components of resistance in the world. As far as an auxiliary, Taiwan can leverage its entire economy to support resistance. Taiwan's greatest weakness may derive from food insecurity. Food self-sufficiency in Taiwan was only 31% in 2021.[95] Another disadvantage remains air and sea lines of communication, as important commodities, like petroleum, ammunition, medical supplies, and equipment, require the use of the air or sea domain for delivery. In so far as a public component, the Democratic Progressive Party maintains an active campaign plan for legitimizing Taiwan as a nation state. Major Taiwanese influencers include nonprofits like Keep Taiwan Free, public organizations like the Taiwanese American Council of Greater New York, and artists groups like Shen Yun.[96] In sum, the Democratic Progressive Party wields a comprehensive resistance organization and should armed conflict reinitiate, the ROC has potential for increased international support. The following figure illustrates ROC investments in its armed component from 2014-2022, equating to roughly 1.8% of its gross domestic product.[97]

The ROC represents a well-established belligerency to the rule of the CCP, in which the ruling Democratic Progressive Party seeks international recognition of its own legitimacy to rule over the islands of Taiwan, and it does so through international engagement, military defense, and economic prosperity. Violent conflict between the CCP and Taiwan generally ended in the 1970s (although sporadic military engagement has persisted).[98] In 1971, the United Nations recognition of China transitioned from the ROC to the PRC. After which, open hostilities devolved to provocative actions by the CCP to violate the ROC's air and sea space. Officially, the United States supports a one China policy, but it also supports Taiwan's self-defense and opposes any CCP aggression to force reunification,

Figure 7. Republic of China Defense Spending in USD Billions, 2014-20

Source: Author
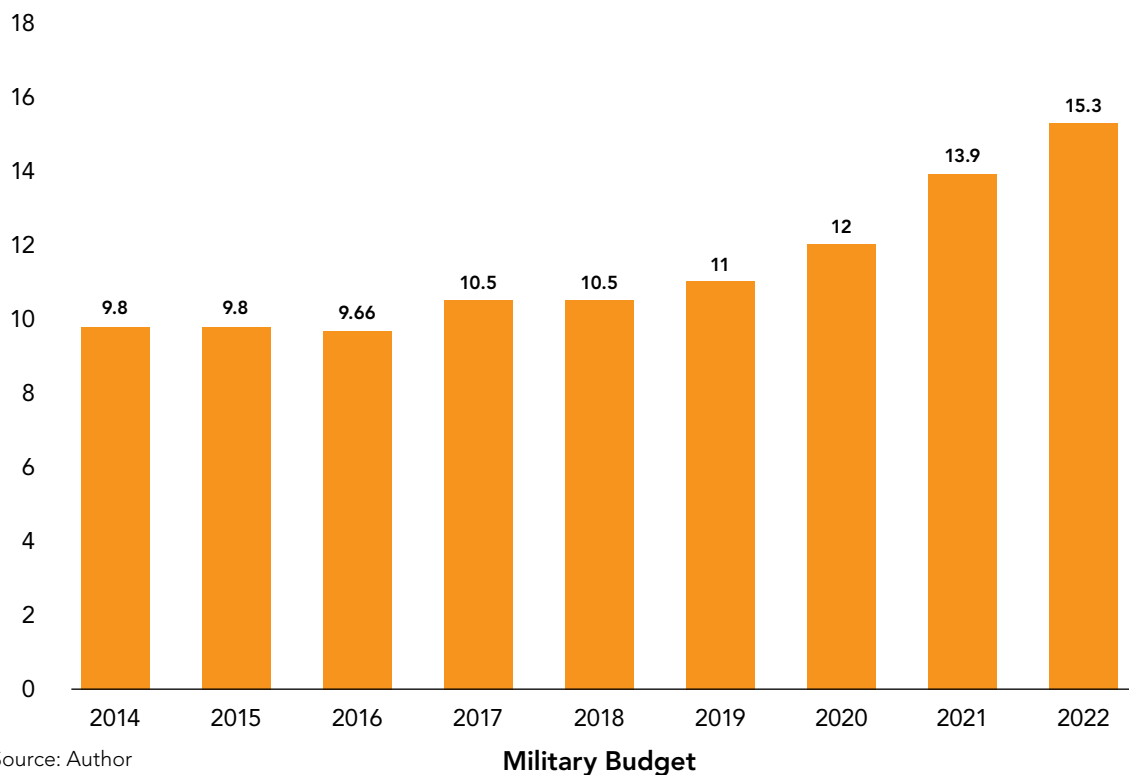
a position spelled out in the 2022 *National Security Strategy*.[99] Meanwhile, the ROC continues its military buildup and modernization and has simultaneously embarked on a campaign for international recognition.[100] To further fund its resistance capacity and independence strategy, Taiwan has developed a robust economy and designed production of technological goods which integrate into global supply streams. It is rated as the 16th largest world exporter with gross domestic product of $33 billion in 2021, commensurate with Poland or Sweden.[101]

Summarizing Chinese Resistance

In summary, seven prominent resistance organizations to the CCP can be divided along a continuum, ranging from nonviolent protest through bellig-

erency, and include: the Pan-Democracy Group (Hong Kong), Tiananmen Square protesters, the Falun Gong, Tibetan Monks, Muslim Uyghur, East Turkistan Islamic Movement, and the ROC. In particular, the ROC (or Taiwan) represents a well-established belligerency to the CCP.

FOREIGN POLICY OPTIONS

Foreign policies which support both the resiliency of current governance and resistance to the same simultaneously can prove extremely challenging to implement. However, China represents an interesting case study in that regard. The United States supported resistance to the CCP from 1945-1979, and then transitioned to supporting the CCP (1979-present) while simultaneously supporting resistance to inspire

change. Following World War II, the United States supported the KMT and nationalist China. This persisted, even when the CCP gained control over the mainland in 1949 and the KMT fled to Taiwan. Additionally, from 1950-1975, the United States covertly supported an insurgency in Tibet to CCP occupation.[102] Finally, in 1979, the United States recognized the CCP as the legitimate government of China. By opening up trade relations and bringing about economic prosperity, many U.S. strategists in the 1990s believed it inevitable that China would evolve into a democracy.[103] However, during this period (and today), the CCP remained. Consequently, the United States, while recognizing the legitimacy of the CCP and treating it favorably in terms of economic relations, has also supported change by supporting human rights in Tibet and selling arms to the ROC—a very nuanced policy.

Despite the preceding complexity, the typical suggestion for compiling a foreign policy option with a competitor consists of one of three options: (a) support the resilience of the CCP to subversion and/or aggression, (b) support resistance to the CCP, or (c) prepare the environment for a future opportunity to support resilience or resistance.

Supporting Resiliency of the Chinese Communist Party

Supporting resilience in the CCP generally includes further legitimizing the party in domestic and international forums. Most particularly, support to CCP resiliency includes continuing free trade relations without addressing the adverse consequences for its deceptive business practices and human rights abuses. In turn, this ensures the Chinese economy continues to thrive, which reinforces a key metric for its domestic stability. Supporting resilience could also imply countering and subverting resistance to the CCP, including resistance in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Tibet, and the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (or at the very least

ignoring resistance in China).[104] Such a strategy might embrace the previous Western assumption that economic development will bring about democracy. Pervasive technology might also bring about more transparency imparting the Chinese population with increased incentive for a representative government versus an authoritarian regime. However, such hopes have fallen flat over the past five decades.

Supporting Chinese Resistance

The CCP's fear also comprises its critical vulnerability, a fact which it fully recognizes. In December 2024, President Xi Jinping met with President Joe Biden and outlined the CCP's four red lines that the United States must respect, stipulations which tell a great deal about the CCP's fear of internal resistance to its legitimacy.[105] First, Xi stated that the United States must recognize Taiwan as part of the PRC. Second, that the United States should cease its support for human rights in Xinjian, Tibet, and Hong Kong. Third, that the United States should accept the totalitarian system of rule that the CCP provides. And, fourth, that the United States should not use tariffs or other tools to limit China's economic development. Essentially, Xi paradoxically outlined the most effective ways to counter the CCP's authority.

The West (and other partners like India and Japan) has significant influence in harnessing Chinese resistance potential, particularly the United States. The most powerful foreign policy tool would be recognizing the Republic of China as an independent nation state. This could be followed by recognizing Tibet as an independent state with the Dalai Lama its legitimate leader-in-exile. Additionally, the West could provide concrete diplomatic support to ASEAN nations in defending their territories within the South China Sea. Also, the West could offer more overt support to Uyghur resistance, perhaps initially by filing a motion with

the World Court on the CCP's genocidal activities. All four of these actions require little in terms of national resources, do not require military capabilities or covert action (unless desired), but would have huge ramifications in challenging the CCP's legitimacy. This would certainly provoke the CCP, resulting in risk regarding its response, but the results would be profound gains in terms of coercing, disrupting, or changing CCP behavior and subverting its domestic support.

The second greatest Western tool in supporting Chinese resistance would consist of challenging China's one-sided (and often illicit) economic practices, establishing trade sanctions, and creating pressures to cause a downward spiral in the CCP's socialist market economy. The rationale could be based on several CCP abuses, including genocidal treatment of the Uyghurs, human rights abuses of Tibetans, radical oppression of the Chinese people's liberties, and/or unlawful aggression in the South China Sea. These activities must include a coalition of allies and comprise a long term, deliberate, and comprehensive strategy.[106] Such actions could result in a Chinese economic crisis, which would enhance the resistance potential in the Han majority and create opportunities for partnership when resistance emerges.[107]

In terms of military planning, the West should develop support to resistance strategies that compliment any conventional contingency plans opposing the CCP. Such strategies offset the CCP's geographic advantages—a government-in-exile (or a shadow government) can impose obstacles to the legitimacy of an occupying power, undergrounds can sabotage strategically important objectives, spies can provide essential intelligence, and guerrillas can weaken enemy strength.[108] Rather than conventional forces, asymmetric, irregular, and political warfare have the most potential in undermining the CCP.

Preparing the Environment for Future Policy

Choosing to prepare the environment rather than decisively supporting resilience or resistance should be the result of a conscious choice following a full evaluation of the options. Based on the metrics presented, the direct involvement of an external sponsor to Chinese resistance has a below average chance of achieving the desired results. Additionally, covert or overt support to Chinese resistance could prove destabilizing, not only to the CCP but to other nations and international organizations. Meanwhile, supporting CCP resilience proves a more successful gamble. Both options, however, are not conclusive, so waiting could prove prudent. However, there may be limited remaining opportunity to shape the trajectory of China in terms more favorable to the West.

CONCLUSION

Understanding what the CCP fears can inform the policies and campaign design of Western military planners, foreign policy officers, and even nongovernmental organizations. Assessing the CCP's resiliency to subversion, coercion, or aggression, as well as Chinese resistance to endogenous power structures, results in human-centric insights not currently present in either conventional war plans or foreign policy documents, and results in three possible options: (a) to support the CCP's resiliency, particularly to domestic resistance; (b) to subvert the CCP's legitimacy by supporting resistance; (c) or to prepare the environment for a future opportunity to support either resilience or resistance. The data shows the CCP as having average resilience to internal and external subversion. It also demonstrates average potential for domestic opposition to the CCP—resistance realized by multiple movements utilizing both nonviolent and violent

methods. External support to the CCP has some potential for success, while external support to resistance has a low likelihood of long-term success unless accompanied by a conventional campaign.

The ROC exemplifies a well-established belligerency (but only one of several active resistance movements). On the one hand, the ROC can continue its efforts to gain international recognition as a separate nation; on the other hand, within the context of a unified China, the ROC demonstrates a democratic alternative to the communist system. In either case, an independent and democratic Taiwan remains a persistent manifestation of the CCP's dread. PRISM

Notes

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[2] David Goldman, "Microsoft Removed "Tank Man" Images on Tiananmen Square's Anniversary," *CNN Business*, June 6, 2021.

[3] Datasets leveraged for analysis include those generated by: the Fragile States Index (Fund for Peace), Resilience Index (Swiss Re Institute), World Governance Indicators (World Bank), Trust in Governance (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development), Foreign Assistance (U.S. State Department), Global Protest Tracker (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace), Study of Terrorism and response to Terrorism (University of Maryland), Vision of Humanity (Freedom House), Study of Internal Conflict (Army War College), Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, Global Nonviolent Action Database (Swarthmore College), Mass Mobilization and Protest Data (Harvard), Uppsala Conflict Data Program (Uppsala University), and others. It does use more subjective data at times, often indicated.

[4] International law concerning what constitutes a belligerency, as opposed to a rebellion or insurgency, originates from a written treatise of UK government lawyers in 1957. Ironically, the case study utilized was actually the civil war between Republic of China and the People's Republic of China. This argument on what constitutes a belligerency consisted of four criteria. (1) There must exist an armed conflict of a general (as distinguished from a purely local) character. (2) The contesting party which is not the legitimate government must occupy and administer a substantial portion of the national territory. (3) The above-named contesting party must conduct the hostilities in accordance with the rules of war and through organized armed forces acting under a responsible authority. (4) There must exist circumstances which make it necessary for outside states to define their attitude by means of recognition of belligerency. These four criteria continue to fit for the situation in Taiwan. For a full legal discussion, see J. P. Jain, "The Legal Status of Formosa: A Study of British, Chinese and Indian Views," *The American Journal of International Law*, vol. 57, no. 1, 1963, pp. 25–45. Also see, Rob McLaughlin, "Whither Recognition of Belligerency," *Lieber Institute, West Point,* 17 September 2020, found at https://lieber.westpoint.edu/whither-recognition-of-belligerency/, accessed on 6 January 2025.

[5] Alison Adcock Kaufman, "The 'Century of Humiliation,' Then and Now: Chinese Perceptions of the International Order," *Pacific Focus*, vol. 25, no. 1, 2010: 1–33, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1976-5118.2010.01039.x.

[6] Ibid. Minorities include Zhang, Hui, Manchu, Uighur, Miao, Yi, Tujia, Tibetan, Mongol, Dong, Buyei, Yao, Bai, Korean, Hani, Li, Kazakh, and Dai.

[7] Kaufman, "The 'Century of Humiliation.'"

[8] Kaufman, "The 'Century of Humiliation.'"

[9] For numbers in the diaspora, see Daniel Goodkind, *The Chinese Diaspora: Historical Legacies and Contemporary Trends*, (Washington D.C.: U.S. Census Bureau, August 2019).

[10] See *Fragile States Index*, found at https://fragilestatesindex.org/, accessed on 7 January 2025. All following percentiles indicted as percentages in comparison with other nations.

[11] The Notre Dame index measures overall readiness for climate change considering three components – (1) economic readiness, (2) governance readiness and (3) social readiness. Found at https://gain.nd.edu/our-work/country-index/rankings/, accessed on 7 January 2025.

[12] The Global Organized Crime Index is a key flagship project of the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC). The resiliency to organized crime score is made up of 12 factors in the index, and rank state governance systems in terms of persistent organized crime activity. Found at https://ocindex.net, and accessed on 7 January 2025.

[13] Percentile rank indicates rank of a country among all countries in the world, with 0% as the lowest and 100% as the highest. See the World Bank indicators at https://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/, accessed on 7 January 2025.

[14] Illustration by authors. Data for all nations utilizing the same methodology prescribed.

[15] Runya Qiaoan and Jessica C. Teets, "Responsive Authoritarianism in China: A Review of Responsiveness in Xi and Hu Administrations," *Chinese Journal of Political Science*, vol. 25, no. 1, 2020: 139–53, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11366-019-09640-z.

[16] This methodology normally attempts to utilize data akin to the opinion questions opposed by Delbert C. Miller, but these types of Chinese polls proved unattainable. See Delbert C. Miller, "The Measurement of National Morale," *American Sociological Review* 6, no. 4 (1 August 1941): 487–498. One study by RAND in 2018 shows promise as a method but remains overly oriented on particular military units. Another academically related effort (written by the same author, Ben Connable) in *Journal of Advanced Military Studies* in 2022 expands upon the former and takes a more strategic look at national militaries as a whole. See Ben Connable, et. al., *Will to Fight: Analyzing, Modeling, and Simulating the Will to Fight of Military Units*, (RAND Corporation: Santa Monica, CA, 2018), and Ben Connable, "Structuring Cultural Analyses: Applying the Holistic Will-to-Fight Models," *Journal of Advanced Military Studies*, 2022, https://doi.org/10.21140/mcuj.2022sistratcul009. For an example of the difficulty in finding available general opinions of the Chinese population, see *The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development* (OECD) Trust in Governance Index lists over 40 developed nations, but does not have a metric for China, found at https://data.oecd.org/gga/trust-in-government.htm, accessed on 2 July 2024. One important polling source remains that of Edward Cunningham, Tony Saich, and Jesse Turiel published on CCP resilience in 2020. Edward Cunningham, et al, "Understanding CCP Resilience: Surveying Chinese Public Opinion Through Time," *Harvard Kennedy School: Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation,* July 2020. This study finds that between the years 2003-2016, popular support of CCP governance has proven more popular, particular due to rising economic fortunes and President Xi Jinping's campaign against corruption. As a counterbalance to this study on CCP resilience, a factor of 28.5% overstatement in positive responses to direct questions may exist. This bias was articulated in the work of Erin Baggott Carter, Brett L. Carter, and Stephen Schick in their 2024 study. See Erin Baggott Carter, et. al., "Do Chinese Citizens Conceal Opposition to the CCP in Surveys? Evidence from Two Experiments," *The China Quarterly*, Vol. 1., 2024: 1-10. Other opinion poll questions are also incorporated, as indicated in the following footnote.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid.

[19] See Jessica Chen Weiss, 'How Hawkish Is the Chinese Public? Another Look at "Rising Nationalism and Chinese Foreign Policy," *The Journal of Contemporary China*, vol. 28, no. 119, 2019: 686-687, https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2019.1580427.

[20] Ibid.

[21] For more on this controversy, see Son Daekwon and Han Yongjon "We Are Brothers but Not Allies: The Sino-DPRK Alliance Revisited, Pacific Affairs, Vol. 97 Issue 1, pp. 5–28, 2024.

[22] These treaties of cooperation include Afghanistan, Pakistan, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Russia, Kazakhstan, Mongolia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. See "Outlook on China's Foreign Policy on Its Neighborhood In the New Era," Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the United States of America, October 24, 2023, found at http://us.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/zgyw/202310/t20231024_11167100.htm, accessed on 2 July 2024.

[23] Adam Gallagher and Andrew Cheatham, "What's Driving a Bigger BRICS and What Does it Mean for the U.S.?" United States Institute for Peace, 17 October 2024, found at https://www.usip.org/publications/2024/10/whats-driving-bigger-brics-and-what-does-it-mean-us, accessed on 6 January 2025.

[24] The United States foreign policy for China attempts to address five issues: (a) soliciting CCP pressure to end North Korea's nuclear program, (b) reducing U.S. trade deficit with China, (c) stopping illegal opioids entering the United States from China, (d) readdressing China's territorial ambitions in the South China Sea, and (e) addressing China's poor record on human rights. See Department of State Bilateral Relations Facts at https://www.state.gov/u-s-bilateral-relations-fact-sheets/, accessed on November 1, 2023.

[25] This estimate is based on the following factors. If China had only adversarial or limited diplomatic relations internationally = 25%; if the CCP had at least one recognized partner = 50%; if the CCP has established and maintained multiple alliances (or similar arraignments) with other nations = 75%.

[26] Tracy Liu, "Foreign Investment in China Falls for Past Year as Economy Struggles," *Voice of America*, 2 July 2024, found at https://www.voanews.com/a/foreign-investment-in-china-falls-for-past-year-as-economy-struggles/7682513.html#, accessed on 2 July 2024.

[27] Liu, "Foreign Investment in China Falls," *Voice of America.*

[28] For more information on U.S. support to China, see https://www.foreignassistance.gov/cd, accessed 23 August 2023.

[29] "10 development Co-Operation Profiles at a Glance," *Development Cooperation Report,* 2020, 276.

[30] To subjectively determine if foreign aid provided would increase the regime's ability to provide for human security functions, the following is considered. If human insecurity appears endemic, then foreign aid will likely not provide long term security (25%). If aid reinforces sound governance structures which are simply at risk temporarily (50%). If the regime receives little aid due to the strength of endogenous resources (75%).

[31] *China Military Power: Modernizing a Force to Fight and Win*, DIA-02-1706-085 (Washington D.C.: Defense Intelligence Agency, 2018), 21.

[32] Illustration by author. Data from https://www.macrotrends.net, accessed on 16 July 2024. For a similar chart, see *China Military Power: Modernizing a Force to Fight and Win*, 21. For criticism about the validity of these figures and that the CCP spends more military spending than public information available, these were validated against the numbers offered by the Defense Intelligence Agency in *China Military Power: Modernizing a Force to Fight and Win* on page 21. DIA figures for 2014-2018 are actually around $50B lower each year than those on https://www.macrotrends.net.

[33] Aamer Madhani, "US intelligence finding shows China surging equipment sales to Russia to help war effort in Ukraine," *Associated Press*, 19 April 2024, found at https://apnews.com/article/united-states-china-russia-ukraine-war-265df843be030b7183c95b6f3afca8ec, accessed on July 3, 2024.

[34] For more information on U.S. arms sales, foreign military training, and security sector assistance, see https://securityassistance.org/, accessed 23 Aug. 2023. Also see, "China: U.S. and European Union Arms Sales Since the 1989 Embargoes," *United States General Accounting Office*, 28 Apr. 1998.

[35] Ibid.

[36] To subjectively determine if security sector assistance would increase the regime's ability to provide for national security functions, the following is considered. If military insecurity appears endemic (25%). If military aid might reinforce somewhat reliable security forces which simply require temporary external support (50%). If the nation receives little security sector assistance due to the strength of endogenous resources (75%).

[37] The global rank in perceptions of corruption comes from *Transparency International,* found at https://www.transparency.org/en. It can also be found at *The Global Economy*, found at https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/, accessed on 7 January 2025. 180 nation states are ranked by this metric, of which Chinar ranks 76th.

[38] Freedom House ranks political rights in China as -2 out of a total 40 possible. This data derives from Freedom House, found at https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world, accessed on 7 January 2025.

[39] Ibid. Freedom House ranks civil liberties in China as 11 of 60 possible.

[40] This data comes from *The Global Economy*, found at https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/, accessed on 10 June 2024. Original data comes from the work of Leandro Medina and Friedrich Schneider, *Shadow Economies Around the World: What Did We Learn Over the Last 20 Years?* (International Monetary Fund, 2018). Data from 2015 and 158 nations evaluated. In this case, the inverse of the figure indicates potential resistance.

[41] A. Alesina, et al, "Fractionalization," *Journal of Economic Growth* 8, 2003, 155–194. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1024471506938.

[42] Alesina, et al, "Fractionalization."

[43] Alesina, et al, "Fractionalization."

[44] See Josh Satre, "Violence Against Civilians by State Forces in Mainland China: 2018-2020," *Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project*. 3 Dec. 2020. Found at https://acleddata.com/, accessed on November 1, 2023.

[45] See https://carnegieendowment.org/, accessed 23 Aug. 2023.

[46] See https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/, accessed 23 Aug. 2023.

[47] Notre Dame's vulnerability index measures a country's exposure, sensitivity and ability to adapt to the negative impact of climate change. Found at https://gain.nd.edu/our-work/country-index/rankings/, accessed on 7 January 2025.

[48] Percentile rank indicates rank of a country among all countries in the world, with 0% as the lowest and 100% as the highest. See https://www.visionofhumanity.org/maps/#/, accessed 7 January 2025.

[49] See Freedom House at https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world, accessed on 7 January 2025.

[50] The criminality score in the Organized Crime Index, made up of 20 indicators in criminal markets and criminal actors, ranks the comparison of states in terms of persistent organized crime activity. Found at https://ocindex.net, accessed on 7 January 2025.

[51] This report by the United Nations ranks countries in accordance with (1) maternal mortality ratio, (2) adolescent birth rate, (3) share of seats in parliament, (4) % of population with secondary education, and (5) labor force participation. See https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/thematic-composite-indices/gender-inequality-index#/indicies/GII%09%09%09, accessed 7 January 2025.

[52] This report by the United Nations ranks countries in accordance with four factors (1) life expectancy, (2) expected years of schooling, (3) mean years of schooling, and (4) gross national income per capita. See https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/documentation-and-downloads, accessed 7 January 2025.

[53] "Global Food Security Index 2022," *Economist Impact*, found at https://impact.economist.com/sustainability/project/food-security-index, accessed 6 January 2025.

[54] Andrew G. Wilder, "China's Extreme Inequality: The Structural Legacies of State Socialism," *China Journal*, Vol. 80, July 2023, https://doi.org/10.1086/725576. Also see, John Knight, "China's Evolving Inequality," *Journal of Chinese Economic and Business Studies,* Vol. 14, No. 4, 307-323, https://doi.org/10.1080/14765284.2017.1317171. Illustration by author. Data from "World Inequality Report 2022," *World Inequality Database*, page 13, found at https://wir2022.wid.world/www-site/uploads/2023/03/D_FINAL_WIL_COUNTRY_SHEETS_2303.pdf, accessed 19 July 2024.

[55] See https://www.state.gov/u-s-bilateral-relations-fact-sheets/ for foreign policy objectives. Also see Joseph Biden, *National Security Strategy*, (Washington D.C.: White House, Oct. 2022), as well as Lloyd Austin, *National Defense Strategy*, (Washington D.C.: Department of Defense, 2022). For determining support to resistance as a foreseeable policy option, the following factors are considered. If the regime is a strategic rival of a strong competitor, then 100%. If the regime faces strong opposition by rivals, then 75%. If the regime is not good diplomatic terms with other states but not a declared rival, then 50%. If the regime remains on good terms with most states, then 25%. If the regime is an ally of the United States, then 0%.

[56] For additional information on this methodology, see chapter by Chris Mason, "Measuring and Quantifying State Fragility: Why Governments Lose Internal Conflicts and What That Means for Counterinsurgency," *Resilience and Resistance: Interdisciplinary Lessons in Competition, Deterrence, and Irregular Warfare*, edited by Robert S. Burrell (Tampa, FL: Joint Special Operations University Press, expected publication in 2024). Chapter available upon request.

[57] In terms of the probability of resistance success, there are a few neighboring nations which could offer a sanctuary. However, due to China's large military, only India could viably do so and still possibly avoid a conventional cross border response by the PLA, but possibility of India actually offering a sanctuary to a Chinese armed resistance organization remains small.

[58] David Clark and Patrick Regan, "Mass Mobilization Protest Data," *Harvard Dataverse,* January 9, 2021, https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/HTTWYL, accessed in September 1, 2023.

[59] Clark and Regan, "Mass Mobilization Protest Data."

[60] See "Tibetan monks protest Chinese rule (Lhasa Protests), 2008," in the *Global Nonviolent Action Database*, found at https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/, accessed on October 3. 2023.

[61] See https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataverse/MMdata.

[62] See Erica Chenoweth and Christopher Wiley Shay, "List of Campaigns in NAVCO 1.3," *Harvard Dataverse*, March 17, 2020, https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/ON9XND.

[63] The CCP has issued arrest warrants for the 21 leaders of the Tiananmen Square protest in Beijing. Many of these persons remain active and vocal public resistance efforts. See, Eddie Cheng, "How Chinese Students Shocked the World with a Magnificent Movement for Democracy and Liberty that Ended in the Tragic Tiananmen Massacre in 1989," *Standoff At Tiananmen*, November, 2020, found at http://www.standoffattiananmen.com/, accessed 3 Oct. 2023.

[64] See Sarah Cook, "Falun Gong: Religious Freedom in China," *Freedom House*, 2017, found at https://freedomhouse.org/report/2017/battle-china-spirit-falun-gong-religious-freedom, accessed on 3 Oct. 2023.

[65] See "Uppsala Conflict Data Program," *Uppsala University*, found at https://ucdp.uu.se/exploratory, accessed November 1, 2023.

[66] "Uppsala Conflict Data Program," *Uppsala University*.

[67] Lindsay Maizland, "China's Repression of Uyghurs in Xinjiang," *Council on Foreign Relations*, September 22, 2022, found at https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/china-xinjiang-uyghurs-muslims-repression-genocide-human-rights#:~:text=About%20eleven%20million%20Uyghurs%E2%80%94a,forced%20labor%2C%20and%20forced%20sterilizations, accessed on October 3, 2023.

[68] See Chenoweth and Shay.

[69] See "Countries that Recognize Taiwan, 2023," *World Population Review*, found at https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/countries-that-recognize-taiwan, accessed on September 28, 2023.

[70] Illustration by author.

[71] The methodology utilized derives from Jonathon Cosgrove and Erin Hahn, *Conceptual Typology of Resistance*, (Fort Bragg, NC: U.S. Army Special Operations Command, circa 2018). For definitions, see Cosgrove and Hahn, 6.

[72] This essay utilizes the assessment methodology developed by U.S. Army Special Operations Command and Johns Hopkins University. See Jonathon Cosgrove and Erin Hahn, *Conceptual Typology of Resistance*, (Fort Bragg, NC: U.S. Army Special Operations Command, circa 2018).

[73] For definitions, see Cosgrove and Hahn, 6.

[74] See "Steadfast Diplomacy: Foreign Visits," *Office of the President Republic of China (Taiwan)*, found at https://english.president.gov.tw/Page/262, accessed on 3 Oct. 2023.

[75] Sigrid Winkler, "Taiwan's UN Dilemma: To Be or Not To Be," Brookings, 20 Jun. 2012. Found at https://www.brookings.edu/articles/taiwans-un-dilemma-to-be-or-not-to-be/, accessed on 3 Oct. 2023.

[76] The Democratic Progressive Party has lost significant popularity since 2016, when it wielded nearly 7 million of the 12 million total votes, double of the KMT. See Sean O'Connor and Ethan Meick, "Taiwan Opposition Party Wins Presidency and Legislative Majority in Historic Elections," *U.S. China Economic and Security Review Commission*, January 28, 2016. For 2024 election data, see Ogasawara Yoshiyuki, "Analysis of the 2024 Taiwan Presidential Election," *Asia-Pacific Review,* vol. 31, no. 1, 2024: 123–143, https://doi.org/10.1080/13439006.2024.2339601.

[77] See Ogasawara, 133. Illustration by author.

[78] John Feng, "Taiwan's Desire for Unification with China Near Record Low as Tensions Rise," *Newsweek*, July 14, 2022. Found at https://www.newsweek.com/taiwan-china-politics-identity-independence-unification-public-opinion-polling-1724546, accessed on October 3, 2023.

[79] The United States dubs its own relationship as "unofficial." See "Taiwan," *U.S. Department of State*. Found at https://www.state.gov/countries-areas/taiwan/, accessed on October 3, 2023.

[80] "Taiwan – Country Commercial Guide," *International Trade Commission*, 15 Sep. 2022. Found at https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/taiwan-market-overview#:~:text=10.2%20percent%20of%20Taiwan%20imports,of%20Korea%20(6.1%20percent), accessed on October 3, 2023.

[81] Matthew Lee, "US approves new $500M arms sale to Taiwan as tension from China intensifies," *Associated Press*, August 23, 2023. Also see Simina Mistreanu, "US approves $2 billion in arms sales to Taiwan including advanced missile defense system," *Associated Press*, 28 October 2024, found at https://apnews.com/article/us-taiwan-china-arms-sale-missile-defense-bd14986ada-9cfc894c5b1168aea27d02, accessed on 6 January 2025.

[82] "Why is Taiwan not called Taiwan at the Olympics?," *Taipei (Agence France-Presse)*, 27 July 2021, found at https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20210727-why-is-taiwan-not-called-taiwan-at-the-olympics, accessed on October 4, 2023.

[83] "Democratic Progressive Party Platform," *Democratic Progressive Party*, 2, found at https://www.dpp.org.tw/en/upload/download/Party_Platform.pdf, accessed 4 Oct. 2023.

[84] See the CIA Factbook found at https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook, accessed on 4 Oct. 2023.

[85] "Growing Majority in Taiwan Reject the CCP's "One Country, Two Systems" and Oppose Beijing's Military and Diplomatic Suppression," *Mainland Affairs Council Press Release No. 94*, October 24, 2019, found at https://www.mac.gov.tw/en/News_Content.aspx?n=2BA0753C-BE348412&sms=E828F60C4AFBAF90&s=FCC754F-2C0A6E0B9, accessed October 4, 2024. Also see "Special Report Taiwan: Cognitive Warfare," *The Economist*, March 11, 2023: 8.

[86] As but one example, Taiwan represents a world leader in producing microchip semiconductors. See, "Special Report Taiwan: Chips with Everything," *The Economist*, 11 Mar. 2023: 7.

[87] See, "Special Report Taiwan: Help Wanted," *The Economist*, March 11, 2023: 10.

[88] He Hong-ju and Chao Yen-hsiang, "Poll shows 38% Americans back direct military intervention over Taiwan," *Focus Taiwan: CNA English News,* found at https://focustaiwan.tw/politics/202308170006, accessed on October 4, 2023.

[89] Chad de Guzman, "Taiwan Is Extending Conscription. Here's How Its Military Compares to Other Countries," *Time*, January 6, 2023, found at https://time.com/6245036/taiwan-conscription-military-comparison/, accessed on 4 Oct. 2023.

[90] *China's Military Power,* (Washington D.C.: Defense Intelligence Agency, 2019), 7.

[91] de Guzman.

[92] *China's Military Power*, 21.

[93] de Guzman.

[94] *China's Military Power*, 83.

[95] Hsing-Wei Lin and Wan-Yu Liu, "How to Enhance the Food Self-sufficiency Rate of Taiwan? Applying the Theory of Planned Behavior to Decision Making for Food Away from Home," *Journal of Agriculture and Food Research* Volume 12, June 2023, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jafr.2023.100629.

[96] Liu Tzu-hsuan, "Taiwanese in New York March for UN Inclusion," *Taipai Times*, 19 Sep. 2022, 2. Alberto Mingardi, "Shen Yun and Advocacy," *Econlib*, April 11, 2023, found at https://www.econlib.org/shen-yun-and-advocacy/, accessed on October 4, 2023.

[97] Illustration by author. Data from "Taiwan Military Expenditure," *Trading Economics*, found at https://tradingeconomics.com/taiwan/military-expenditure, accessed on 16 July 2024. For a similar chart, see *China Military Power: Modernizing a Force to Fight and Win*, 21.

[98] The last major battles between the ROC and PRC occurred during the Taiwan Straits Crisis, 1954-1955 and 1958 (although artillery barrages continued through the early 1970s). See Office of the Historian, "The Taiwan Straits Crises: 1954–55 and 1958," Department of State, date unk. Found at https://history.state.gov/milestones/1953-1960/taiwan-strait-crises, accessed on October 4, 2023.

[99] Joseph Biden, *National Security Strategy*, (Washington D.C.: The White House, Oct. 2022).

[100] For instance, "it attended the World Health Assembly (WHA) as an observer from 2009 to 2016 and it attended the International Civil Aviation Organization's (ICAO) Assembly in 2013." See Jessica Drun, "Taiwan's Engagement with the World: Evaluating Past Hurdles, Present Complications, and Future Prospects," *Atlantic Council*, December 20, 2022. Found at https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/issue-brief/taiwans-engagement-with-the-world/, accessed October 4, 2023.

[101] *Government Portal of the Republic of China*, "Economy," found at https://www.taiwan.gov.tw/content_7.php, accessed on October 4, 2023.

[102] For more information, see "Secret War in Tibet," chapter of Robert S. Burrell, *Resilience and Resistance: Interdisciplinary Lessons in Competition, Deterrence, and Irregular Warfare* (Joint Special Operations University Press: Tampa, FL, expected release in 2024). Available upon request.

[103] For one example, see Henry S. Rowen and James R. Lilley, "Is China Becoming More Democratic," *The American Enterprise*, vol. 9, no. 4, 1998: 20.

[104] Several U.S. Government publications help outline these approaches, including the *Stabilization Assistance Review*, JP 3-22 *Foreign Internal Defense*, JP 3-07 *Stability*, and JP 3-20 *Security Cooperation*. See *Stabilization Assistance Review: A Framework for Maximizing the Effectiveness of U.S. Government Efforts to Stabilize Conflict-Affected Areas,* (Washington D.C.: Department of State, USAID, and Department of Defense, 2018); Joint Publication 3-22: *Foreign Internal Defense*, (Washington D.C.: Department of Defense, 2 Feb. 2021); Joint Publication 3-07: *Stability*, (Washington D.C.: Department of Defense, 11 Feb. 2022); and Joint Publication 3-20: *Security Cooperation*, (Washington D.C.: Department of Defense, 9 Sep. 2022).

[105] David Sacks, "Unpacking China's 'Four Red Lines' and Its Warning to Trump," *Council on Foreign Relations*, 12 December 2024. Found at https://www.cfr.org/blog/unpacking-chinas-four-red-lines-and-its-warning-trump, accessed on 7 January 2024.

[106] For a comprehensive analysis of trade sanctions against China, see Emily Kilcrease, "No Winners in This Game: Assessing the U.S. Playbook for Sanctioning China," *Center for New American Security*, 1 December 2023, found at https://s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com/files.cnas.org/documents/EES-No-Winners_Final-1.pdf, accessed on 25 July 2024.

[107] A resistance should have compatible goals with those of the sponsor and behave within acceptable norms of behavior. Via nonviolent resistance, a solid strategy might include the principles of Gene Sharp as articulated in Robert L. Helvey, *On Strategic Nonviolent Conflict: Thinking About the Fundamentals* (The Albert Einstein Institution, 2004). If the external sponsor desires the inclusion of military support to an indigenous insurgency, see Army Technical Publication 3-05.1: *Unconventional Warfare at the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force Level,* (Fort Bragg, N.C.: U.S. Army Special Operations Command, Apr. 2021).

[108] The latter half of this sentence is paraphrased from Robert S. Burrell, "Defending an Achilles' Heel Evolving Warfare in the Philippines, 1941–1945," *Joint Forces Quarterly*, Issue 113, 2nd QTR, 2024: 101-12.

Decentralized Democratic State-Building

Evidence from the United Nations Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands

By Kacper Grass

INTRODUCTION

The post-colonial Pacific is a region that recurs frequently in the intervention and state-building literature. Common case studies from the area include East Timor, Papua New Guinea, and the Solomon Islands, all of which experienced chronic political and economic instability after gaining independence and so required intermittent assistance from the international community to end conflicts and prevent future humanitarian crises.[1] Conversely, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Marshall Islands, and Palau—while also post-colonial Pacific countries—have attracted relatively sparse attention from researchers in the field.[2] On the one hand, this is a good thing, as the post-colonial histories of all three countries have been marked by a degree of political and economic stability that has not warranted intervention from the international community. On the other hand, to neglect these cases

in the intervention and state-building literature is to forgo an opportunity to understand one of the decolonization era's greatest achievements: the political and economic transformation of underdeveloped and vulnerable territories into stable, modern states. Therefore, the aim of this study is to address a question that has been of great interest to both scholars and policymakers since the beginning of the global decolonization movement in the mid-20th century: under what conditions do fragile states achieve political and economic stability?

By examining the United States' administration of the United Nations Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands from its establishment in 1947 to its dissolution in 1994, this study conducts an empirical test of Myerson's novel theory of decentralized democratic state-building, which emphasizes the paramount role of local politics in foreign state-building operations.[3] While an emphasis on local politics has been a

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prominent feature of studies in related research areas like public administration, peacebuilding, and foreign aid, the role of local politics has been overlooked in much of the intervention and state-building literature.[4] While a number of studies have either framed local politics as a potential obstacle to state-building efforts or have viewed the empowerment of local actors as an end in itself, Myerson's theory of decentralized democratic state-building is unique in its view of treating local politics as the primary mechanism of successful state-building operations.[5] Although Myerson's theory has been gradually developed over the course of an extensive research project, the resulting hypothesis is straightforward: foreign assistance channeled through decentralized and democratic institutions is positively associated with political and economic stability in the target state.[6]

While decentralized democratic state-building is rooted in historical anecdotes from colonial administration in the British Empire as well as critiques of the United States' top-down approach to state-building in Afghanistan and Iraq, the theory has yet to be tested empirically.[7] Therefore, this study contributes to the literature on intervention and state-building by filling this crucial gap through a qualitative historical analysis of state-building operations in the Federated States of Micronesia, the Marshall Islands, and Palau under United States administration of the Trust Territory. The study finds support for the decentralized democratic state-building hypothesis in the United States' successful bottom-up approach to developing the political and economic systems of the aforementioned countries. Furthermore, it reveals that if the state-building process is conducted in a decentralized and democratic manner, the future institutional arrangements of the target states—whether federal or unitary—do not influence the outcomes of political and economic stability.

The study begins by presenting an overview of Myerson's theoretical claims against rival hypotheses in the state-building literature before proceeding to address the research design and relevant methodological considerations of the empirical test. The empirical portion of the study examines the three aforementioned cases for evidence of decentralized democratic state-building during the trusteeship period, reviews their institutional arrangements after independence, and assesses the stability of their political and economic systems to the present day. The study concludes with a summary of its findings, a list of its implications for foreign policymakers and the international community, a reflection on its limitations, and a suggestion of avenues for future research.

THE INSTITUTIONAL DEBATE IN STATE-BUILDING THEORY

Traditional Approaches to State-Building

Although Tilly's theory of political and economic development through warfare has had a profound influence on the state-building literature, scholars like Lustick have questioned its relevance to the contemporary postcolonial context.[8] As Brown observes, while the United Nations has supported national self-determination through secession, it has set powerful norms against irredentism that, for better or for worse, effectively make the pre-Westphalian European order irreproducible in postcolonial regions.[9] Therefore, rather than being absorbed by their neighbors through military conquest, fragile postcolonial states in the contemporary international system are instead subjected to stabilizing interventions by powerful states whose national interests are jeopardized by the instability, or by the international community, which aims to strengthen the target states' capacities so that their governments can provide services for their citizens and participate in efforts to solve transnational issues such as terrorism and migration.[10]

In this contemporary state-building context, some scholars question whether immediate democratization is a feasible option. As Taylor notes, "one of the most crucial tasks is creating governing institutions that can maintain security and provide citizens with their basic needs."[11] She continues to posit that "dictatorships—because they are less beholden to popular support—are in a better position to initiate major policy changes and stave off crises than democracies, where the electoral cycle makes politicians beholden to particularistic concerns."[12] Similarly, Huntington observes that

"where traditional political institutions are weak, or collapse, or are overthrown, authority frequently comes to rest with charismatic leaders who attempt to bridge the gap between tradition and modernity by a highly personal appeal.[13] To the extent that these leaders can concentrate power in themselves, it might be supposed that they would be in a position to push institutional development and to perform the role of 'Great Legislator' or 'Founding Father.'"[14]

Other scholars, however, warn that development through dictatorship is ultimately an untenable option. Notably, Acemoglu and Robinson observe that dictatorial regimes are most frequently associated with extractive institutions that alienate most of the population from the benefits of economic relations and political participation, while democratic regimes are more prone to fostering inclusive institutions based on universal property rights and political pluralism.[15] Their broad analysis of historical and modern societies in Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Americas concludes that inclusive economic and political institutions are a key variable for avoiding state failure.

Assuming, therefore, that the target state is to be developed democratically—either out of a sincere commitment to democratic values or in compliance with democracy as an international norm—many scholars view institutional centralization as the key to democratic success. Addressing the issue of federalism in multiethnic states, Hale claims that "in ethnofederal countries where one group dominates in population but where that group is divided up into a number of distinct federal regions rather than united in one core ethnic region, the dominant group faces major obstacles to collective action that inhibit it from creating the most serious dual-power situations, that reduce the threats perceived by minority ethnic regions, and that hinder the efforts of political entrepreneurs to promote collective imagining of an independent core nation-state."[16] Likewise, Persha and Andersson warn of the association between bureaucratic decentralization and elite capture, which "refers to the process by which local elites—individuals with superior political status due to economic, educational, ethnic, or other social characteristics—take advantage of their positions to amass a disproportionately large share of resources or a flow of benefits."[17]

Decentralized Democratic State-Building

In contrast to classical theories of state-building through warfare, decentralized democratic state-building posits that fragile states can be stabilized through either unilateral or multilateral interventions, so long as the intervening powers adhere to the principles of institutional decentralization and democratic governance, both of which considerably shift agency in the operation from the intervening power to local politics.

According to Myerson, the critical question of political economy:

is whether property rights are securely protected only for a small elite who actively support the national ruler, or does the circle of trust extend more broadly to include people throughout the nation… A fundamental fact of modern economic growth is that it requires decentralized economic investment by many individuals who must feel secure in the protection of their right to profit from their investments. Thus modern

economic growth requires a wide distribution of political voice and power throughout the nation.[18]

Assuming that the intervening power has established security, the priority therefore should be to establish a political system that is most conducive to channeling foreign assistance. In Myerson's view:

political systems can differ on at least two major dimensions that fundamentally affect the distribution of power in society: democracy and decentralization. Democratic political systems distribute political voice more broadly in a nation by making leadership of government dependent on free expressions of popular approval from a large fraction of the nation's citizenry. Decentralized political systems distribute power more widely to autonomous provincial and local units of government.[19]

Myerson's argument finds support in Smith, who affirms that

"decentralization—from limited decentralization to a full federal model—is one of the possible institutional solutions to address high levels of social polarization and elite hegemony present in unitary and centralized states" and adds that *" federal systems are generally thought to be better suited to deliver democratic outcomes, as they institutionalize the types of power sharing that make democracy more likely to develop and be strengthened.*[20] *Similarly, elements of self-government for subnational units are believed to reduce incentives for conflict by members of ethnic and communal groups."*[21]

The proposition to immediately devolve political and financial decision-making to local politicians in post-colonial states with relatively limited experiences of self-government has been put into question by other scholars. For example, Hess warns that post-colonial societies in which traditional authority lies not in elected officials but rather in patrimonial systems of loyalty can become dependent on foreign assistance and form rentier states that are not conducive to economic growth.[22] In such a scenario, Verkoren and Kamphuis argue that

the "centralization of rents and the introduction of a central bureaucracy can produce stable and sustainable states in spite of patrimonial structures."[23]

In response to this dilemma, Myerson proposes that "the key to successful democratic development is to increase the supply of leaders who have reputations for using public funds responsibly to provide public services, and not just to give patronage jobs to their supporters."[24] Therefore, "when authority over substantial public budgets is distributed across two or more separately elected levels of government, officials at the lower local level have opportunities to develop a reputation for spending public funds effectively, and the possibility of winning election to higher office can motivate their efforts to earn such a reputation."[25] This means that "the possibility of democratic advancement in decentralized federal democracy can provide an incentive-compatible mechanism for increasing the supply of trusted political leaders who can improve governance and eliminate corruption."[26]

While such rational-choice mechanisms may seem intuitive from the perspective of the intervening powers, critics like Arredondo and Castellon argue that much of the failure to develop post-colonial states can be attributed to "implementing the policy prescriptions coming from western thinking, which emphasizes the role of the market forces and pushes for deregulation, recommending measures like reducing collective bargaining and low minimum wages."[27]

While it is certainly true that policy prescriptions cannot be generalized universally, the argument that Western modes of development cannot be applied to non-Western contexts overlooks the positive examples set by post-colonial states like Singapore or Taiwan, which—albeit after initial development under authoritarian rule—established free-market economies compatible with Western neoliberal models. More accordingly to Myerson's line of thought, Murtazashvili argues instead that

"one of the reasons why state building has not lived up to its promise is because these efforts are mainly top-down endeavors that leave little role for self-governance in the reconstruction process. This top-down drive for reconstruction, with its focus on building new state institutions or generating strong central government capacity, reflects the continued misdiagnosis of the causes of conflict in society."[28] One of the most serious misdiagnoses, she concludes, is that fragile states are "ungoverned spaces."[29]

Indeed, rather than dismissing Western models of statehood as fundamentally incompatible with traditional societies or assuming that there is a universal formula for stabilization operations, intervening powers are more likely to be successful state-builders when they recognize and take into account already existing traditional forms of government. In this sense, the ability to establish and maintain legitimacy after the intervention requires a significant degree of congruence between the traditional culture of the "nation" and the institutional structure of the "state."[30]

In their study of developing and multi-ethnic states in Latin America, Falleti and Riofrancos note that decentralized political structures, or what they refer to as "participatory institutions," play a crucial role in representing local cultures and in so doing help legitimize the political and economic system as a whole.[31] Such an approach posits that a democratic culture can be developed in traditional societies at an earlier stage of economic development than post-industrialization, as proposed by Inglehart and Welzel, or even during industrialization, as originally proposed by Lipset.[32]

Hypotheses

Decentralized democratic state-building argues that local politics are the key to successful state-building operations, so the more representative and accountable a central government is to local actors, the more likely it is to remain stable. Since Myerson views political and economic stability as reciprocal and interdependent outcomes, an increase in political stability is also associated with an increase in economic stability. The decentralized democratic state-building theory therefore hypothesizes that foreign assistance channeled through decentralized and democratic institutions is positively associated with political and economic stability in the target state. Applied to the three cases of the present study—all of which emerged from the United Nations Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands as democratic states—the theory expects the Federated States of Micronesia and Palau, which adopted decentralized, federal systems of democratic government, to be more politically and economically stable than the Marshall Islands, which adopted a centralized, unitary system.

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

Case Selection

As a historical episode of intervention and state-building in the decolonization era that spanned the second half of the twentieth century, the United Nations Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands has been largely overlooked by the existing literature. In contrast to East Timor, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, and other postcolonial states in the Pacific region, the three states that emerged from United Nations trusteeship—namely, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Marshall Islands, and Palau—have all attained relatively high levels of political and economic stability, albeit to varying degrees. Therefore, by examining these three cases within the framework of decentralized democratic state-building, this study aims to make both a theoretical and empirical contribution to the relevant literature.

The Battle of Peleliu, codenamed Operation Stalemate II by the US military, was fought between the United States and Japan during the Mariana and Palau Islands campaign of World War II, from September 15 to November 27, 1944, on the island of Peleliu.

Here, it is important to note that, in addition to the three aforementioned states, the United Nations trusteeship also resulted in the establishment of the Northern Mariana Islands. However, unlike the other three cases, which emerged as sovereign states in free association with the United States, the Northern Mariana Islands requested—and was granted—commonwealth status, effectively becoming an unincorporated territory of the United States. This distinction is important because, under the Compact of Free Association, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Marshall Islands, and Palau are all sovereign, self-governing states whose defense and foreign policies are administered by the United States.[33] On the other hand, as an unincorporated territory, the Northern Mariana Islands enjoys a degree of internal autonomy but is nevertheless subject to a higher degree of political and economic oversight from the United States.[34] Owing to this continued dependence on the United States, political and economic outcomes in the Northern Mariana Islands cannot be compared to those of independent states such as the Federated States of Micronesia, the Marshall Islands, and Palau.

Since the aim of this study is to perform an empirical test of decentralized, democratic state-building, the research design must be compatible with this research goal. As Van Evera explains, "Case studies offer three formats for testing theories: controlled comparison, congruence procedures, and process tracing. Controlled comparison uses comparative observations across cases to test theories."[35]

Since the three cases selected for this study share several theoretically relevant historical and structural characteristics, which are addressed in greater detail below, they make appropriate candidates for controlled comparison using Mill's method of difference—which examines cases that share similar characteristics with respect to possible explanatory variables but produce different outcomes on the dependent or study variable. Thus, "If we seek to establish the causes of the study variable, the investigator then asks if values on the study variable correspond across cases with variables that define its possible causes. If we seek to establish the effects of the study variable, the investigator asks if its values correspond across cases with values on variables that define its possible effects."[36]

However, regardless of whether the research goal is to establish the causes or effects of the study variable, "Similar cases are picked to control for the effect of third variables: the more similar the cases, the less likely that the action of third variables explains past tests."[37]

Variables

Since the central hypothesis of decentralized, democratic state-building is that foreign assistance channeled through decentralized and democratic institutions is positively associated with political and economic stability in the target state, the explanatory variables in this theory-testing study are institutional structures. However, since all three cases in this study have been governed by democratic regimes since their independence from United Nations trusteeship, the relevant explanatory variable of analysis is the degree of centralization.

While institutional centralization can be conceptualized as a continuum between highly centralized and decentralized ends of a spectrum, this study instead conceptualizes institutional centralization in categorical terms. Following Van Belle's definition, unitary states are those with centralized institutional systems.[38] Although "the laws apply to everyone regardless of where they live in the country, everyone shares all governmental benefits equally, [and] there is no redundancy in services, [...] this does not necessarily mean that there is no local government."[39] Indeed, "the central national government can choose to allow some local governing boards to have a say in the decision-making that will affect local communities; however, the ability to make these decisions is at the mercy of the national government, and that national authority could also choose to revoke this power from the local boards or to override any decisions the boards make."[40]

In contrast to unitary systems, those in which "the final authority for at least some aspects of government is left to the local or subnational level are called federal systems. In a federal system, sovereignty is, at least theoretically, shared between the national and the local government units."[41] Lijphart offers a similar definition, by which "federalism means a constitutionally guaranteed division of power between the central government and the governments of the member units or component units of the federation."[42] Unlike unitary systems, federalism "is usually accompanied by decentralization, that is, substantial autonomy for the members of the federation."[43]

Although there exists significant variation among both unitary and federal states with respect to the ways in which institutional powers and responsibilities are divided, unitary states like the Marshall Islands are, by definition, more institutionally centralized than federal states like the Federated States of Micronesia or Palau.

Returning to the hypothesis that foreign assistance channeled through decentralized and democratic institutions is positively associated with political and economic stability in the target state, the dependent variables in this study are political and economic stability.

First, following a set of indicators originally introduced by Hurwitz and subsequently developed by Eli Margolis, this study operationalizes political stability by observing four dimensions: peacefulness (absence of violent conflict), structural continuity (absence of regime change or irregular transformation of government), patterned political behavior (absence of geopolitical realignment), and control (ability to exercise sovereignty over the whole of state territory) in each of the three cases.[44] Thus, a violation of any of these indicators would indicate an instance of political instability in the case where the violation is observed.

Second, in order to operationalize economic stability, the study follows Grieco and Ikenberry's assertion that "economists interested in understanding the dynamics of a country's economy look at its gross national product (GNP), which is the money value of the final goods and services produced by residents of a country during some period of time, usually a quarter or a year.[45] They are particularly interested in knowing whether GNP is growing, whether it is being generated at a level that makes

full use of the productive resources of the country (especially its labor force), and whether national supply and demand conditions surrounding the generation of GNP are in balance and thus producing neither unemployment nor price inflation."[46]

Following this logic, a significant decrease in GNP would indicate an instance of economic instability in any case where the decrease is observed.

Sources of Data

The empirical portion of this study is based on both primary and secondary sources. While the historical introduction to the United Nations Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands draws mostly on the relevant scholarly literature, information regarding the United States' administration of the territory is based on archival records and reports from the Dag Hammarskjöld Library of the United Nations. These archival materials include foundational documents of the United Nations Trusteeship Council as well as periodic reports compiled by Trusteeship Council visiting missions to the Trust Territory between 1951 and 1993. Moreover, information regarding the institutional arrangements adopted by each of the states examined in this study after independence is taken from their respective constitutions, which are published by the Comparative Constitutions Project. Finally, quantitative data regarding the gross national product (GNP) trends of each state after independence are drawn from the research platform Macrotrends.

HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

United Nations Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands

Spain was the first European power to discover and claim the region of the Pacific known as Micronesia in 1521. Unable to subdue the Indigenous

people of the Caroline Islands and uninterested in developing the Marianas or the Marshalls, Spain ceded Guam to the United States in 1898 after its defeat in the Spanish–American War and sold the remaining territories to Germany the following year. Unlike Spain, Germany was able to subjugate the Carolinian Islanders and constructed a cable and radio station on the island of Yap but did not pursue any further development in the region.[47]

After Germany's defeat in World War I, the islands were transferred to Japan as a League of Nations Class C mandate, which was "reserved for small, sparsely populated territories that were either remote from centers of civilization or geographically contiguous to the administering authority and thus believed to be least capable of self-government."[48] However, instead of developing the islands in preparation for future self-government, Japan violated the mandate by using them for military purposes in preparation for its campaigns in World War II.

After Japan's defeat and the end of the war, the defunct League of Nations mandates were adopted by the United Nations Trusteeship Council, whose objectives were "to promote the political, economic, social, and educational advancement of the inhabitants of trust territories, and to promote their progressive development towards self-government or independence."[49]

As the administering authority of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, the United States was granted "full powers of administration, legislation, and jurisdiction over the territory," as well as permission to "apply to the trust territory, subject to any modifications which the administering authority may consider desirable, such of the laws of the United States as it may seem appropriate to local conditions and requirements."[50] Due to their historical underdevelopment and neglect by previous colonial powers, the districts into which the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands was divided posed a considerable challenge to the state-building

assignment of the United States. Spread over an area of approximately 3,000,000 square miles, the Trust Territory included only 687 square miles of land. This land was divided into over 2,000 islets, which together formed 96 atolls, only 64 of which were permanently inhabited. Although collectively referred to as Micronesians, the inhabitants of these atolls were divided into speakers of nine major Indigenous languages and had no common culture or identity.[51] Moreover, apart from lacking political integration in the international system, the islands were also isolated from the global economy, as most inhabitants survived through subsistence farming and fishing. Indeed, the only goods the islands could use for export were copra and artisanal handicrafts.[52]

For its own administrative purposes, the United States divided the Trust Territory into five districts—Saipan, Palau, Truk, Ponape, and the Marshall Islands—but initially refrained from granting the districts any political autonomy. Given that the islanders had no sense of common identity or political unity, it was recommended that "the development of local government must begin from the family or clan level and progress from these to the village, island, district, and Territory as a whole" because "an attempt to force this process of advancement would inaugurate a social revolution which would have unforeseeable repercussions throughout the whole structure of the indigenous society."[53] In other words, "the leaders and people generally must be shown and convinced of the advantages which may be gained by wider political associations of any type in order to induce them to make the necessary changes and adaptations in their institutions."[54]

Heeding this advice, the United States adopted a bottom-up approach to state-building that focused first and foremost on the development of institutions at the municipal level. Once elections by popular ballot were introduced, elected magistrates began to replace hereditary chiefs as local leaders. The first district-level congress was established in

the Marshall Islands and served as an advisory body to the United States District Administrator on the needs and expectations of the Marshallese people. With respect to the political development of the Trust Territory, it was concluded that remaining difficulties "will be reduced as economic progress is achieved and as a higher level of political consciousness is reached, but the [United Nations visiting mission] believes that a central body, if established, could not for some time to come be more than an inter-regional commission which might usefully attempt to co-ordinate economic and other problems."[55]

Indeed, the lack of local economic capacity posed a considerable obstacle to the state-building project. In 1957, the Trust Territory generated a revenue of $1,846,000, while the United States contributed a sum of $7,356,000 in funding and aid.[56] In these early years, most of the Trust Territory's labor force was directly employed by the United States Administering Authority as a means of acquiring the skills and knowledge necessary to practice modern vocations and professions. Although employment by the Administering Authority created a stable source of income for many residents of the Trust Territory, it impeded local entrepreneurship and the development of a local job market. While working to expand the Trust Territory's agricultural and fishing sectors, the United States also established a system of local taxation to promote a degree of fiscal responsibility among the islanders. Once political development throughout the Trust Territory had reached a level that allowed for district-level congresses to begin assuming legislative capacities, "district taxes levied by district congresses on cigarettes and other tobacco products, beer, copra, trochus, and on imports of all commodities into a district[,] [were] utilized for the maintenance or support of schools, scholarships, district buildings[,] and for the payment of salaries of district officials."[57] Additionally,

"municipal taxes [were] levied and collected by the municipalities for the payment of municipal officials such as the magistrate, secretary, and policemen[,] and for the provision of certain other municipal services."[58]

With municipal governments throughout the Trust Territory having successfully transitioned from traditional hereditary to modern democratic rule and district-level congresses having gained autonomous legislative capacities, the subsequent step toward**s** political development was to create **a** central Inter-District Advisory Committee that would comprise representatives from each of the five districts to collaborate with the United States Administering Authority on setting an agenda for the future independence and self-government of the Trust Territory as a whole.

Progress toward the ultimate goal of independence for the Trust Territory was conducted slowly but steadily, as it was understood that the process of political and economic modernization would necessarily be a multi-generational project. In 1978, the Saipan District adopted a constitution that would prepare it for continued dependence on the United States as the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. The following year, the Truk and Ponape Districts combined to form the Federated States of Micronesia, which, along with the Marshall Islands, adopted constitutions in preparation for independent statehood. The Palau District followed suite by adopting its own constitution in 1981. Although it had originally been the expectation of the Trusteeship Council that the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands would emerge as a single state, the ultimate decision to separate was respected under the principle of self-determination. As its role as Administering Authority came to an end, the United States was commended for "the steps that have been taken to encourage 'micronization' to enable the people of the Trust Territory to obtain as much experience as possible in all fields of public service before the termination of the Trusteeship Agreement."[59] In one of its last reports on the Trust Territory, however, the United Nations visiting mission's praise for the Administering Authority and optimism about the Trust Territory's independent future was offset by reported "criticism of the top-heavy structure of the Federated States of Micronesia and resentment that so high a proportion of the state budgets went to the central government" as "the officials felt that there should be greater autonomy at the state level."[60]

Independent Statehood

In the end, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Marshall Islands, and Palau opted for independent statehood under a Compact of Free Association with the United States, which "permitted self-government in all fields of affairs, except in foreign policy matters which could be contrary to U.S. interests as defined by mutual consultations, and in defense matters which are of the sole responsibility of the American federal government."[61] On the other hand, by adopting commonwealth status, the Northern Mariana Islands effectively opted out of sovereignty in favor of continued dependence on United States political and economic regulation.[62] As the last of all the United Nations trust territories, the dissolution of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands in 1994 marked the end of operations of the Trusteeship Council and the closing of a chapter in the history of decolonization.

The constitution of the Federated States of Micronesia formally establishes a three-tiered system of national, state, and local governments.[63] The Congress, or federal legislature, consists of one member elected at large from each state on the basis of state equality, while additional members are elected from congressional districts in each state according to population. The Congress elects the president for a maximum of two four-year terms by a majority vote of all members. Both the federal

Ngerulmud, Melekeok State, Palau: Capitol of Palau - neo-classical building of the Palau National Congress, the Legislative Building, the parliament of Palau.

and state governments are granted the power to appropriate public funds, borrow money on public credit, and establish systems of social security and public welfare. Although federal taxes are imposed uniformly, a minimum of 50% of the revenues must be paid to the treasury of the state from which the taxes are collected. Any foreign financial assistance received by the federal government is deposited in a central Foreign Assistance Fund and distributed in equal share among the states, except where a particular distribution is required by the terms or special nature of the assistance. The constitution makes no mention of the rights of local governments.

Like that of the Federated States of Micronesia, the constitution of Palau establishes a federal system that recognizes both the federal and state governments.[64] The Olbiil Era Kelulau is the federal legislature, which consists of delegates who represent their states on the basis of both equality and population. The president is elected by popular vote for a maximum of two four-year terms. Among the powers granted to the federal government are the powers to levy and collect taxes that must be uniformly applied among the states, to borrow money to finance public programs or to settle public debts, to provide a monetary and banking system, to create or designate a national currency, as well as to create or consolidate states with the approval of the states affected. However, subject to laws enacted by the federal legislature, state governments also have the power to impose taxes that must be uniformly applied throughout the states, as well as to borrow money to finance public programs and settle public debts. Moreover, each state is granted exclusive ownership of all living and nonliving resources, except highly migratory fish, from the land to twelve

Figure 1: GNP by Country, 1994-2021 (in Billions of USD)

Legend: Federated States of Micronesia ● Palau ● Marshall Islands
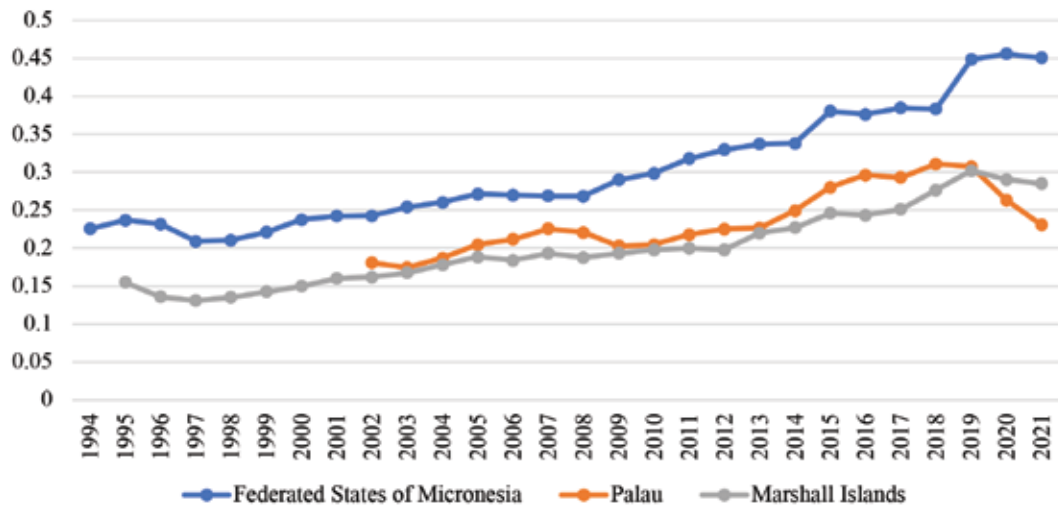
Figure 2: GNP Per Capita by Country, 1994-2021 (in USD)

Legend: Federated States of Micronesia ● Palau ● Marshall Islands
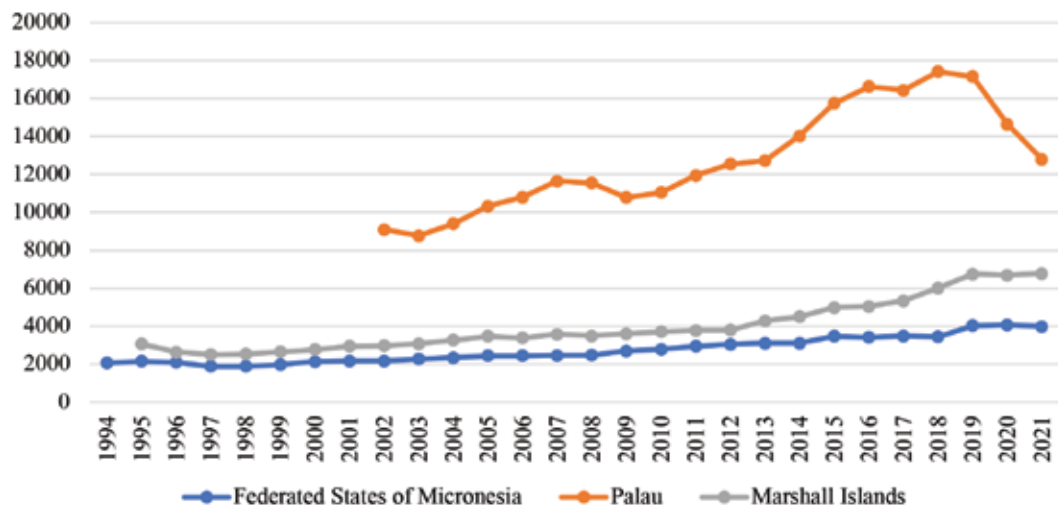
nautical miles seaward from its traditional baseline. The constitution makes no mention of the rights of local governments.

In contrast to the constitutions of the Federated States of Micronesia and Palau, the constitution of the Marshall Islands establishes a unitary system of government.[65] The Nitijela is the central legislature and consists of members elected by population from each of the country's electoral districts. The president, who is a member of the Nitijela, is appointed by a majority of the legislature. While generally vague about the specific rights and responsibilities

of the central government, the constitution does mention that the secretary of finance shall be responsible for the preparation of the accounts relating to all public revenues and expenditures for each financial year and for advising the minister of finance on all matters pertaining to the budget. Despite its unitary nature, however, the constitution of the Marshall Islands is explicit in outlining the rights of local governments, whose jurisdictions extend to five nautical miles from the baselines of the islands on which they are located. So long as they do not violate any acts of the Nitijela, local governments may make ordinances for the areas in which they have jurisdiction. Such ordinances may include the levying of taxes and the appropriation of funds for local purposes.

Political and Economic Stability

Since their independence, all three countries have remained politically stable, as none of them have violated any of the indicators—peacefulness (absence of violent conflict), structural continuity (absence of regime change or irregular transformation of government), patterned political behavior (absence of geopolitical realignment), and control (ability to exercise sovereignty over the whole of state territory)—used to operationalize political stability. Here, it must be noted that Palau experienced the most difficult transition from trusteeship to independence, as it took seven referendums before its citizenry finally approved the Compact of Free Association with the United States. During the prolonged negotiations, the country's first president, Haruo Remeliik, was assassinated by an unknown shooter in 1985, and the country's second elected president, Lazarus Salii, committed suicide while holding office in 1988. However, as neither of these events led to violent conflict or the overthrow of Palau's democratic regime, the episodes did not violate the indicators of peacefulness or structural continuity. Similarly, although the state of Chuuk

has made several attempts to hold a referendum on secession from the Federated States of Micronesia, its continued integration means that the country has not violated the indicator of control.

Moreover, all three countries have remained economically stable as well. Figure 1 illustrates that, despite occasional fluctuations, the economies of all three countries have steadily grown since independence, while Figure 2 reveals that national incomes have followed suit. Nevertheless, the sharp decline in Palau's GNP and GNP per capita since 2019 is troubling for the prospects of continued economic stability. The country's well-developed tourist industry and comparatively small population are the primary factors in its ability to achieve high-income status, as opposed to the upper-middle-income status of the Marshall Islands and lower-middle-income status of the Federated States of Micronesia, both of which have neglected their potential for profiting from international tourism due to their continued reliance on foreign aid.[66] However, despite all the benefits that international tourism has had on Palau's economy, travel restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted the country's tourist industry and thus resulted in a sharp decline in economic growth and wages.

Discussion

The results of this study do not support traditional theoretical approaches to state-building. Contrary to hypotheses that evoke the European experience of state-building through warfare, the case study demonstrates that political and economic stability can be achieved in new postcolonial states.[67] Indeed, not only can such stability be achieved, but it can be done democratically without relying on a transitional dictatorial regime to enforce policies of rapid political and economic modernization.[68] Moreover, neither the Federated States of Micronesia nor Palau—the two cases that developed federal institutional systems after independence—experienced collective

action issues associated with ethnofederalism or elite capture issues associated with bureaucratic decentralization.[69] While it is true that continued reliance on foreign aid from the United States, particularly in the Federated States of Micronesia and the Marshall Islands, has created a rentier issue that impedes the diversification of local industries, it has not posed an obstacle to democratic consolidation.[70]

Here, it must also be noted that the results of this study do not initially seem to support the decentralized democratic state-building hypothesis either. After all, it was expected that by adopting federal institutional systems, the Federated States of Micronesia and Palau would achieve greater political and economic stability than the Marshall Islands, which adopted a more centralized unitary institutional system. Instead, three decades after independence, all three countries have remained both politically and economically stable, with relatively minor variations in their respective outcomes. While in a strict sense this result may seem problematic for Myerson's theory of decentralized democratic state-building, it nevertheless supports his broad theoretical claims. Before independence, all three countries experienced over four decades of bottom-up state-building during the trusteeship period, during which time the United States adopted a decentralized approach to fostering local politics. Chronologically, the United States Administering Authority pursued state-building in the Trust Territory in the following steps: first, by promoting democratic processes at the municipal level (i.e., replacing hereditary rulers with elected magistrates); second, by establishing broader and more complex institutions (i.e., district congresses); and third, by creating a central body to serve as a common forum for dialogue and decision-making (i.e., the Inter-District Advisory Committee). As time was not a limiting factor, the institutional development of the Trust Territory occurred over several generations. At each hierarchical level—municipal, district,

and territorial—institutions were first created as nominal instruments under complete control of the United States Administering Authority before progressively being granted more autonomous governance in collecting revenue, approving budgets, and funding public services like law enforcement and education. By the time the Trust Territory was dissolved in 1994, all three countries had undergone a successful process of decentralized democratic state-building.

Finally, since the fact that all three cases examined in this study do not have standing militaries of their own may raise concerns that their enduring political and economic stability is due to the impossibility of internal military interference rather than the merits of the decentralized democratic state-building process, it is worthwhile to briefly compare all three cases to that of the Solomon Islands. Located to the south of the former Trust Territories, the Solomon Islands are also a small, postcolonial country with a multiethnic population territorially divided across an extensive archipelago in the Pacific Ocean. Like the Federated States of Micronesia, the Marshall Islands, and Palau, the Solomon Islands has not had a military since gaining independence in 1978, relying instead on a police force for domestic security. Despite the absence of a regular military to act as a democratic spoiler, ethnic conflicts have brought the country to the brink of state failure. Between 1998 and 2003, violence between rival nationalist factions resulted in an Australian-led multinational intervention that would last until 2017, only to resume again in 2021 and require a second Australian intervention to reinstate stability.[71]

CONCLUSION

By examining the three independent states that emerged from the United Nations Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands—namely the Federated States of Micronesia, the Marshall Islands, and Palau—this

study performs the first empirical test of Myerson's theory of decentralized democratic state-building, which argues that local politics are the key to successful state-building operations. In sum, Myerson's theory proposes that the more representative and accountable a central government is to local actors, the more likely it is to remain politically and economically stable. The findings reveal that, after a sufficiently long period of decentralized democratic state-building, target states are likely to remain stable regardless of the institutional arrangements they adopt after independence, at least insofar as centralization is concerned. These findings have a number of implications for policymakers and the international community.

First, even the most traditional and underdeveloped countries can undergo significant transformations without relying on warfare or dictatorial rule as instruments of modernization. Although there may not be a universal formula for state-building, Western political and economic systems can be successfully adopted by postcolonial states in the Global South.

Second, effective state-building through foreign intervention is an expensive and lengthy commitment that can take generations to complete. Attempts to conduct stabilization operations by taking shortcuts to save time and resources are likely to end in frustration and disillusionment with the state-building project.

Third, the experience of decentralized democratic state-building in the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands can serve as a model for future state-building operations in politically and economically fragile postcolonial contexts. Although the representativeness of the cases observed in this study can be questioned due to their uniquely small sizes and populations, what refers to as the "micro-state problem," their colonial histories and late development make them akin to many other fragile states throughout the Global South.[72]

Nevertheless, due to its limited scope and consequently limited generalizability, this first empirical test of decentralized democratic state-building should not be the last. Qualitative case studies of state-building in other regions and quantitative analyses that control for a greater number of variables are necessary for the further examination of Myerson's theory across broader geographic and temporal contexts. As Gilley aptly mentions, whether it is referred to as "'shared sovereignty,' 'conservatorship,' 'proxy governance,' 'transitional administration,' 'neo-trusteeship,' [or] 'cooperative intervention,'" or any other technical term, the fact of the matter remains the same.[73] So long as fragile states struggle to maintain political and economic stability independently, foreign state-building will be an ongoing challenge for the international community. Though it may not be a panacea for the ills of underdevelopment and instability, decentralized democratic state-building merits further examination as a potential cure. PRISM

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Decentralized Stabilization Assistance

By Roger Myerson

A PRACTICAL AND THEORETICAL QUESTION

The fall of Kabul in 2021 was a stark reminder that policymakers need to understand much more about how to promote stable and effective government in a failed or fragile state. Some may prefer to swear off any further involvement with state-building or political stabilization missions, but the problems of failed states cannot be ignored when they export violence and suffering across international borders. Like wars, foreign stabilization missions should be avoided whenever possible, but we should not pretend that they can always be avoided. As the Special Inspector General on Afghanistan Reconstruction has noted, America's refusal to prepare for future stabilization missions after the collapse of South Vietnam did not prevent the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq but instead ensured that they would become quagmires.[1]

Even if policymakers do not want to think about it, the question of what international assistance can do to support the establishment of an effective and accountable state is very interesting for a theoretical social scientist. It requires us to think about the basic foundations of political order that are essential for a peaceful and prosperous society. Given that this is an area where practitioners need to understand more, we may hope that a careful theoretical analysis could help to identify some key points that have been overlooked.

Our analysis here begins with basic observations about the importance of local politics. Social order in a failed or fragile state must rely

Armed transport in Taliban-controlled Kabul, August 17, 2021

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on decentralized local leadership, and successful democracies also depend on a functional relationship between local and national politics. For these reasons, a democratic state-building intervention needs a team that can engage with national and local leaders as they negotiate a mutually acceptable distribution of power. We discuss the need for special professional norms for state-building agents, who may be sent by their home nation to promote accountable government in another country, where their mission would require involvement with local political issues that are difficult for their home government to monitor. A strategy of decentralized political engagement was widely and effectively applied in global interventions over a century ago. As an example, to illustrate basic operational principles for a well-organized stabilization assistance team, we also consider the Office of Rural Affairs, which provided American support for local development in South Vietnam from 1962 to 1964. Finally, we consider how the essential principle of decentralized political engagement can help to clarify many of the lessons that experts have drawn from recent state-building missions.

THE ESSENTIAL ROLE OF LOCAL LEADERSHIP IN DEMOCRATIC STATE-BUILDING

In history, invasions have often led to foreign-dominated governments that were stabilized by the invaders' threats to violently suppress any resistance to their regime. It is appropriate for us to focus here on state-building interventions which accept the democratic sovereignty of the resident population, so that the new government can be stable only if it is freely supported by most people in the country.

When foreign forces have intervened with such benevolent intentions for the target or recipient country, one might hope that their democratic state-building goals could be largely achieved once the people there have been given an opportunity

to elect a new national leadership in a free and fair election. Such hopes may be based on a centralized theory of democratic state-building which assumes that, once basic security has been established, the critical tasks for political reconstruction would be (1) holding elections to ratify a national constitution and select a national leader, and (2) supporting the formation of effective government agencies and security forces under this elected leadership.

Unfortunately, the hopes of this simple centralized theory of state-building have been severely dashed in Afghanistan and elsewhere. We should try to understand how there can be widespread opposition to the establishment of a new national government, even when its leader got the most votes in a recent election. A basic explanation is that, in a country where the state has been weak or nonexistent, there might not be anyone whom people throughout the nation would trust to ensure that the new national government will not claim excessive powers and abuse them. Indeed, a lack of trusted national leadership would be a fundamental reason for political fragility of a national state.

A failed state is not an ungoverned blank slate, however. In any weak or failed state where people cannot rely on a national government, they must get basic protection and other essential public services from local groups. People have lived in communities with various forms of local leadership since long before the first nation-states, and local community organizations still have a vital role in people's lives even in strong states. When a national government has failed to serve its people, local leadership becomes even more important to them.[2]

The positions of these local leaders could be threatened by the establishment of an effective state under new national leadership, and many people may trust their familiar local institutions more than they trust the newly proclaimed national leaders. People could realistically fear that the new national leadership will not be responsive to their local

concerns, and that an effective national government could forcefully suppress the institutions of local leadership on which they have relied. Thus, a key challenge in any state-building intervention will be inducing people to accept some transfer of power to the center of a new and unproven state. If the intervention would respect the political preferences of people in the target country, then the interveners must expect to be involved in basic questions about the distribution of powers between the new national government and various local institutions.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LOCAL AND NATIONAL POLITICS IN SUCCESSFUL DEMOCRACIES

The successful establishment of America's own constitutional government was characterized by long and intense negotiations about the appropriate balance of power between local authorities and the new national government. The ratification of the U.S. Constitution was managed by institutions of provincial government, and so the authors of the Constitution had to provide credible assurances that the new national government would not be able to suppress the existing local authorities. Today, however, new national constitutions are generally ratified by a national plebiscite in which the voters are not given any clear constitutional alternatives. The leading authors of a new constitution, who are generally confidants of the likely first national leader, have more freedom to promote a centralization of power in the hands of a national elite in which they expect to be included.

Successful democratic states generally depend on a balanced functional relationship between local and national politics, for at least three reasons. First, people can be confident that a local official will be responsive to the concerns of their community only if the community has some power over the official's career, and such local accountability becomes reliably enforceable when the official is locally elected.

If local officials are appointed by the central government, then other national political interests may take priority over local concerns. When the national leader can allocate offices of local government as patronage rewards for key political supporters, then the central government may be expected to tolerate some corrupt profit-taking by these officials, at least in areas where the local voters are not considered essential to the national leader's re-election.[3]

Second, people's basic willingness to fight for the defense of a political system may be greater in communities where respected local leaders have a valued role in this system. Individuals can be motivated to help defend the state when they expect that their service can earn them higher status in their community, but such an expectation is plausible only if people see some connection between service to the state and leadership in their community.[4] Trusted community leaders who have a stake in the state can encourage local volunteers with promises of honor and respect for those who fight to defend it.[5] A national centralization of power, however, would leave many communities where local leaders feel alienated from a state that has no use for them.

Third, successful democracy at the national level depends on a competitive supply of political leaders who are known for exercising power responsibly in public service. Autonomously elected local governments with meaningful powers and responsibilities can provide the ideal environment for cultivating this kind of competitive democratic leadership. When responsible leaders of both national and local governments are democratically elected, then popularly trusted local leaders who prove their ability to provide good public service in local governments can become strong competitors for higher office, thus strengthening democratic competition at the national level.[6] However, an incumbent national leader might naturally prefer not to face competition from such candidates who have demonstrated effective leadership in local governments. As a

result, national leaders can be expected to advocate for a more centralized state, where autonomous local political institutions are weak or nonexistent.[7]

These observations offer a perspective that differs significantly from the centralized theory of state-building. This decentralized perspective begins with an understanding that (1) any national political reconstruction needs to recognize and reassure a wide range of local groups that have been serving people in their communities, and (2) the new political system can actually be made stronger and more accountable by assurances that popularly trusted local leaders will continue to have substantial power to serve their communities. With this view, we can agree with Ashraf Ghani and Clare Lockhart[8] that assistance should aim to promote effective government that is accountable to its people, but we should not expect all the lines of public accountability to go through a national leader in the capital. Some significant public responsibilities should be held by local leaders who are directly accountable to their communities.

From this decentralized perspective, a primary task for a democratic state-building mission is to facilitate a complex system of negotiations between national and local leaders, to help them develop a balanced working relationship with a mutually accepted distribution of powers and responsibilities. A program of foreign assistance that focused only on central administrative capabilities could implicitly threaten the local institutions that people have come to trust, by supporting national leaders' ability to govern without them. State-building missions regularly offer mentoring and training for recipient-government officials about various aspects of successful modern government, but it may be particularly important to include some instruction about how successful nations allocate powers and responsibilities to autonomous subnational governments.[9]

This recognition of the essential local foundations for national political reconstruction has fundamental implications for the organization of

any international mission to support this process. To support negotiations towards a broadly acceptable distribution of powers, an international state-building mission needs to be actively engaged with local leaders throughout the country, not just with national political leaders. The strategic direction of the state-building mission must be informed by a detailed understanding of local political concerns in every part of the country, as well as the views of those who would lead the new national government. For such local political engagement, an effective state-building mission needs a team of field officers who can monitor and respond to local political issues in every part of the country.

Thus, if an international intervention to rebuild a failed state would truly respect the ultimate sovereignty of the people who live there, then the intervention's first action should be to send a team of local stabilization officers to districts throughout the country, to engage with people at the local level where their political life has been based under the failed state.[10] During the term of the intervention, its local stabilization officers should have primary responsibility for directing all foreign aid in their district, to ensure that the aid serves to support and encourage trusted local leaders who work constructively with the new state.

PROBLEMS OF STANDARD ADMINISTRATIVE CONTROLS IN STATE-BUILDING MISSIONS

Government is an extensive network of agents who exercise substantial power in their society. Agents of the state are individuals with their own personal goals and desires, but the effectiveness of the state depends on these agents acting according to state policies, not according to their own personal preferences. Systems of internal accounting, administrative procedures, and professional norms in government agencies can all help to solve these moral hazards. State-building missions may try to

improve the capacity of the recipient government by teaching its agents to apply such systems and procedures in their positions.

Yet, professionalized government agents may still not serve the public's interests if the government leaders are not politically motivated to demand real public service from their agents, who may have been given government jobs as patronage rewards for political support. That is why the principal goal of a state-building mission must be the establishment of a broadly acceptable political compact that addresses the basic concerns of people throughout the country, so that effective government agencies can be formed under appropriately accountable political leadership.

Of course, a state-building mission is itself composed of a network of agents, organized by governments of intervening nations and sent to assist in the formation of an effective government for the target country. It is important to recognize the potential for moral hazard within the state-building mission itself.

The U.S. federal government has well-developed systems for managing normal problems of moral hazard by government agents. A standard principle for structuring operations in U.S. federal agencies is that the government's power and the taxpayers' money should be used only with regular controls to ensure meaningful accountability to the American people through their elected political representatives. The ultimate goal of an American state-building intervention should be to support the development of a government that is accountable to its own people, not to Americans. If the members of a stabilization assistance team are too responsive to American political concerns, then they could be reasonably perceived by people in the target country as agents of foreign influence who should be resisted. This is one basic reason for exempting a stabilization team from many controls that are standard in other U.S. agencies.[11]

Stabilization teams require increased autonomy and flexibility because of the informational challenges inherent to their missions. To induce positive political change, a stabilization officer must identify key local leaders and offer them appropriate incentives to cooperate in forging a national political compact. For this purpose, the effectiveness of foreign stabilization assistance depends on its local political conditionality. Local leaders should understand that they and their supporters can benefit from foreign assistance only if they cooperate with the wider program of national political reconstruction. In a typical project for international economic development, results might be measured by counting the number of people who have observably benefited from the assistance provided. By contrast, when the goal is political development, it is essential to understand which local groups are benefiting and what they and their leaders have done to support national reconciliation.

So, for American assistance to encourage political development, the criteria for distributing assistance must depend on conditions that can be understood by the local recipients, but not necessarily by people in America. Indeed, these local political conditions are generally very difficult for anyone outside the country to assess. Thus, when America's political leaders have decided that a mission to help rebuild a failed state would be in America's interest, the budgeted resources for the state-building mission should be managed by a team of stabilization officers. Selected and trained for this role, these officers can be trusted to spend the money appropriately according to local conditions in remote communities of the failed state, where normal controls of the U.S. federal government would be very difficult to apply.

Local stabilization officers also need professional norms to mitigate risks of their intervention adversely transforming local politics. Foreign aid can exacerbate problems of corruption in local institutions if the aid is out of proportion with the

customary resources of local leaders. When stabilization officers are not committed to encouraging local accountability, external support can reduce leaders' need to maintain political support from their own communities.

These are fundamental reasons why a stabilization assistance team should be composed of professionals who, by training, share a dedication to promoting inclusive and accountable government anywhere, even above other special interests of their home nation. Such professional norms cannot be expected in a team that is brought together on an ad-hoc basis for one state-building mission. Furthermore, the essential priority that stabilization officers must put on building relationships of trust with foreign officials and local leaders would diverge significantly from what is normally expected of diplomats and soldiers. For these reasons, foreign stabilization assistance would be best managed by a permanent agency in which individuals with appropriate talents and skills can make a rewarding career in the company of others who share a dedication to the norms of their profession.

DISTRICT OFFICERS AND DECENTRALIZED POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT IN THE BRITISH EMPIRE

We have argued theoretically that recent state-building missions needed a more decentralized focus on local political development to ensure that the political system included trusted local leaders in every part of the country. Although international interventions to promote political change have a long history, we should seek to learn from the organizational structures of those missions that were relatively effective in achieving their goals. During the era of European colonial expansion in the late 19th century, it did not seem so difficult for colonial agents to establish stable political regimes in distant foreign lands at negligible cost to the do-

mestic taxpayers of their home countries. Of course, interventions for colonial domination had political goals that were fundamentally different from interventions for democratic state-building, but there are basic principles in the development of political order that apply to any form of government.

In fact, when the British Empire had the world's most successful operation for foreign political stabilization, it actually applied an organizational strategy of decentralized political engagement.[12] While this point may be well known in the literature on colonial history, it has not been widely recognized in the recent literature on national security and counterinsurgency operations.

District officers formed the essential backbone or core of Britain's colonial administration in the late-19th and early-20th centuries. Within a district which might typically have about 50,000 inhabitants, the district officer was the local plenipotentiary representative of the colonial intervention, responsible for supervising all aspects of local administration and politics.[13] This allocation of colonial authority can be described as both decentralized and concentrated, in that wide discretion and responsibility were delegated to local administrators, but this decentralized power was concentrated in the hands of one district officer in each district.

This concentration of effective power over a district's relations with the external world helped to maximize the district officer's ability to influence local leaders with minimal use of force. Operating locally, but with globally authorized powers, the district officer combined an ability to act forcefully with an intimate understanding of the local political issues that motivated and constrained local community leaders.

When wide powers over remote communities are concentrated in the hands of one official, however, one cannot rely on good character alone to prevent abuse of power. District officers were

supervised by a provincial commissioner, who would be an experienced former district officer, and whose province typically included only three or four districts. A practice of regularly re-assigning district officers to different districts every few years provided another form of monitoring, as local complaints about one officer would be heard by his successor. To maintain continuity, provincial commissioners were expected to stay longer in one province, and they worked to ensure consistency between district officers' practical responses to local challenges and the broader political strategy of the intervention.

Thus, over a century ago, an expert on the British Empire's strategy for political stabilization summarized it by three principles: decentralization, cooperation, and continuity.[14] In our terminology, the colonial intervention decentralized substantial authority in each district to a local stabilization officer, whose duty was to use this authority for encouraging cooperation of local groups and leaders in establishing political order. While these local stabilization officers were regularly reassigned to a different district every few years, continuity of policies was maintained by supervision from regional coordinators, who were expected to serve longer terms. However, colonial district officers tended to interpret the cooperation principle very narrowly, by promoting a concentration of local power in the hands of one cooperative chief, whereas a democratic stabilization officer should support the authority of a broadly inclusive local council and try to work with all its members.

AN EXAMPLE OF A WELL-ORGANIZED AMERICAN STABILIZATION ASSISTANCE TEAM

In the recent history of American interventions, a good example of a well-organized stabilization assistance team can be found in the Office of Rural

Rufus Phillip's Study Visit to Hamlets in Phu Yen and Quong Ngai with Province Chief

Affairs, which was created by Rufus Phillips and Bert Fraleigh in 1962 to help the government of South Vietnam reach people in rural communities throughout the country. The ultimate failure of the U.S. government to rely on this initiative may also be instructive.

The primary organizational principle for the Rural Affairs Office was decentralization. The Office fielded a network of local stabilization officers, who were then called provincial representatives. To each province of South Vietnam, the Rural Affairs Office sent a local stabilization officer who was authorized to work with local Vietnamese officials in spending the funds for development assistance that were budgeted for this province. With the available resources, these local stabilization officers worked to promote the formation of locally elected community councils and then to assist these councils with funding for local development

projects. The decentralization of spending authority was considered essential for ensuring prompt and effective responses to the needs of remote hamlets and villages, where the government needed to earn people's confidence and support against the Communist insurgency.[15]

The core mission of the local stabilization officers was to encourage cooperation between trusted local leaders and officials from the national government, to form a broad coalition for local governance that would strengthen the local foundations of the state. Many of the national government's provincial officials might view a program of local power-sharing as a threat to their authority. For this reason, it was essential that the local stabilization officer could direct foreign aid to support both their initiatives and those of local councils. Such judicious distribution of foreign assistance could provide vital encouragement both for national government officials and for local community leaders, to work together in developing a shared responsibility for local governance.

In this way, the Rural Affairs Office could have provided the basis for effective counterinsurgency in South Vietnam, but its basic operational principles were ultimately rejected by others in the U.S. government. The principle of delegating broad authority over the direction of American assistance to junior field officers who specialized in monitoring local political issues was fundamentally objectionable to senior officials of the development-assistance bureaucracy.[16] The provision of foreign assistance through multiple independent channels may indeed be appropriate when the goal of assistance is to promote economic development. When the objective is to promote political development, it may be more effective to place authority over the local allocation of foreign assistance with a field officer who can use it to build a broad coalition of local supporters for the new political compact. Unfortunately, the normal operational principles of

the U.S. federal government generated an imperative to direct American assistance through agencies that were better designed for justifying their work in Washington. As a result, the 1964 reorganization of the rural assistance program critically curtailed its essential responsiveness to local political concerns in remote villages, where greater popular support for counterinsurgency could have been decisive.

If the Rural Affairs Office in South Vietnam had not been disbanded so quickly, its managerial hierarchy would have confronted the basic problem of continuity in such an organization for decentralized political engagement. Local stabilization officers could be expected to serve in a district or province for a term of one or two years, but then they would be rotated to other assignments, so that they could not establish independent personal authority in a district. Then reliable continuity of aid policies would require that each local stabilization officer be supervised by a regional coordinator who could be expected to take long-term supervisory responsibility for a region which might include several provinces. The managerial hierarchy of the Rural Affairs Office included four regional coordinators, called corps area representatives, under the national program director. With this organizational structure, a local stabilization officer could make credible promises of future assistance to people in the province when the commitments were approved and recorded by the supervising regional coordinator.

Thus, the local stabilization officers and their regional coordinators formed a stabilization assistance team that could monitor and respond to local political issues throughout the target country.[17] The team's flat three-level hierarchical structure, from local field officers through regional coordinators to the national headquarters, could provide for efficient communication of situation reports and strategic guidance to top policymakers. Local stabilization officers would need to work full-time in the

Rufus Phillips inspecting strategic hamlet defenses with the Quang Ngai Province chief (dark suit) in June 1962. MAAG sector advisor (back to camera) and Tom Luche of United States Operations Mission to Vietnam look on.

field. Alternatively, the regional coordinators and the program director might return regularly to their home nation, where their meetings with policymakers could be a vital channel for ensuring that the strategic direction of the state-building mission was based on a broad understanding of local political concerns throughout the target country.

In September 1963, when Rufus Phillips returned to Washington from Vietnam as the director of the Rural Affairs Office, his participation in policy discussions at the highest level was severely limited by his status as the mere director of one program in a foreign country. During high-level meetings for America's counterinsurgency strategy in South Vietnam, Phillips was warned not to speak without permission even on subjects about which he may have been the best-informed person in the room; and on the one occasion when President Kennedy invited him to speak, his advice as a mere program director counted for little against the views of higher officials in Washington.[18] The resulting misdirection of American policies in Vietnam during this period show why an agency for decentralized stabilization assistance needs to have

a director with a recognized professional status that can demand the attention of top policy-makers.

DECENTRALIZED POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT AS THE FIRST PRINCIPLE OF STATE-BUILDING

In the aftermath of recent state-building interventions, several thoughtful experts have offered lists to summarize lessons that should be remembered for the next such mission. These lists generally emphasize points that appear to have been insufficiently understood by policymakers in Washington at the times when strategic decisions went wrong. Many of these points could quickly become evident to a team of local stabilization officers upon their arrival and initial engagement with local leaders in their districts, and then top policymakers would just need to recognize the importance of strategic guidance from this team.

For example, the first concluding point in the "good enough governance" advice of Karl Eikenberry and Stephen Krasner is that policy-makers in a foreign intervention must set modest goals that are realistic and attainable.[19] As Rory Stewart and Gerald Knaus have argued, interveners can support positive political change in a country only by working with political leaders there, and so attainable goals of an intervention cannot exceed what local allies are prepared to do.[20] If excessively ambitious goals demanded more than local leaders could realistically achieve, the problem would become quickly apparent to the local stabilization officers working alongside them.

Thus, the list of lessons that need to be remembered could be shorter and more straightforward if it began with the following principle of decentralized political engagement: In any mission to promote political development in a country, the first priority must be to send in a team of local stabilization officers who can encourage cooperation among local leaders in every part of the country. Major

decisions about the mission's goals and strategies should then be based on guidance from the coordinators of this team.

This principle may be seen as complementary to much of Eikenberry and Krasner's "good enough governance" advice. For example, Eikenberry and Krasner urge policy-makers to acknowledge that there can be painful tradeoffs between economic growth and political stability, when proposed economic reforms would stimulate competitive growth by eliminating rent-seeking opportunities that rewarded cooperative elites.[21] When we understand the need for goals to be realistic and attainable within the bounds of such difficult tradeoffs, the next question must be who in the intervention will be competent to offer judgements about what actually is realistically attainable. For a state-building mission to a failed state, this judgement requires detailed information about political realities in a country where there is no consensus about national political leadership. To get such information, a foreign intervention needs a network of local political observers like the stabilization assistance team that has been described here, and policymakers need to understand the importance of taking strategic guidance from this team.

America's interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq ultimately did get substantial direction from officers who became actively engaged with local leaders in many provinces, but this involvement with local political realities was not initiated early enough. As a result, the interventions lost many people's confidence during the initial period when strategic decisions showed insufficient sensitivity to local concerns. For political goals to be realistic and attainable from the onset of the mission, the intervention's first arriving agents need to include a team of local stabilization officers, and then the coordinators of this team can provide essential political information for formulating realistic goals and strategies.

Another lesson that needs to be remembered by policymakers of an intervening nation appears as the seventh point in Keith Mines's concluding list: that nation-building is a very long game, and so interveners should pace themselves, offering only a level of support that they can sustain for many years.[22] It has been argued here that the local stabilization officers should to be given authority to direct the local distribution of all assistance that is being provided under the intervention, so that they can have maximal leverage to reward cooperation of local leaders. However, the total amount of assistance that is being provided must be decided by top policymakers of the intervening nations, and these policymakers must judge how much long-term investment their taxpayers can be asked to make for stabilizing the target country.

A democratic state-building mission will also ultimately need an exit strategy. At some point, the intervention's goal of supporting political development must yield to the normal principle of international respect for national political independence. Then, during a period of transition, the portion of foreign assistance that is directed by the team of local stabilization officers may be reduced gradually from 100% down to 0; and other independent aid organizations may be encouraged to fill in wherever needs are identified by the recipient country's national and local authorities. Even during this exit process, the local stabilization officers' effectiveness might still depend on their ability to promise future assistance in exchange for current cooperation. After the withdrawal of local stabilization officers, their regional coordinators could maintain consular offices for a few more years to continue honoring the mission's past commitments to local leaders, when feasible and appropriate. PRISM

Notes

[1] John F. Sopko, *What We Need to Learn: Lessons from Afghanistan Reconstruction* (Arlington, VA: Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, August 2021), xii, 96, https://arks.princeton.edu/ark:/88435/dsp011j92gb60m.

[2] For a broad cogent discussion of these points, see Jennifer Murtazashvili, "A Tired Cliché: Why We Should Stop Worrying About Ungoverned Spaces and Embrace Self-Governance," *Journal of International Affairs* 71, no. 2 (2018): 11–29, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26552327. See also Roger Myerson, "Local Politics in Nations and Empires," to appear in *Handbook of New Institutional Economics*, 2nd ed., ed. Claude Ménard and Mary Shirley (Springer, forthcoming), https://home.uchicago.edu/~rmyerson/research/niehandbk.pdf

[3] For a formal model, see Roger Myerson, "Local Agency Costs of Political Centralization," *Theoretical Economics* 16, no. 2 (2021): 425–448, https://econtheory.org/ojs/index.php/te/article/viewFile/3763/30632/869.

[4] Edward Lansdale described people's willingness to support the state as a vital "X factor" in counterinsurgency; see Rufus Phillips, *Why Vietnam Matters: An Eyewitness Account of Lessons Not Learned* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2008).

[5] Responsible democratic local governments in Ukraine, which were created between 2015 and 2020, contributed significantly to the country's mobilization and resistance against the Russian invasion in 2022. See Tymofii Brik and Jennifer Murtazashvili, "The Source of Ukraine's Resilience: How Decentralized Governance Brought the Country Together," *Foreign Affairs*, June 28, 2022, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/ukraine/2022-06-28/source-ukraines-resilience.

[6] For a formal model, see Roger Myerson, "Federalism and Incentives for the Success of Democracy," *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 1 (2006): 3–23, https://dx.doi.org/10.1561/100.00000002.

[7] Of course, local politics can be as problematic as national politics. In particular, ethnic rivalries can infect politics at either level; but in a balanced federal system, authorities at each level should have some power to protect minorities against oppression by authorities at the other level, as long as at least one level has inclusive political leadership.

[8] Ashraf Ghani and Clare Lockhart, *Fixing Failed States: A Framework for Rebuilding a Fractured World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[9] The phrase "path to Denmark" has been used to describe goals for a state-building mission that seem too good to be feasible; but few have noted that Denmark is one of the most decentralized nations in the world. In most successful democracies, autonomous subnational governments may manage between 20% and 50% of all public spending, but Denmark has decentralized 65% of its public spending. The first step on a path to Denmark should be to talk about how public spending can be devolved to locally elected councils. See OECD (2018), *OECD Regions and Cities at a Glance 2018* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2018), 114–15, https://doi.org/10.1787/reg_cit_glance-2018-en.

[10] In contrast, it was not until six months after the 2003 invasion of Iraq that the Coalition Provisional Authority had a network of local political coordinators in every province and began soliciting weekly political reports from them, and violent insurgencies took root during these months of misdirection. See, for example, James Dobbins, Seth G. Jones, Benjamin Runkle, and Siddharth Mohandes, *Occupying Iraq: A History of the Coalition Provisional Authority* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2009), 27, 259; and Emma Sky, *The Unraveling: High Hopes and Missed Opportunities in Iraq* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2015), 7–72.

[11] The example of an American state-building agency is considered here only to emphasize the point that the normal controls which maintain the general effectiveness of agencies in the U.S. federal government could become fundamentally ineffective in a foreign state-building mission. We are not suggesting here that a capability for democratic stabilization should be developed by America rather than by some other nation or international organization. The same points would apply if such a capability were developed by another nation or by an international organization.

[12] See Roger Myerson, "Stabilization Lessons from the British Empire," *Texas National Security Review* 6, no. 1 (2023): 35–50, https://dx.doi.org/10.26153/tsw/44437.

[13] See Anthony Kirk-Greene, *Symbol of Authority: The British District Officer in Africa* (London: I. B. Taurus, 2006).

[14] Frederick Lugard, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* (1922; 5th ed., 1965, reprint, London: Routledge, 2005), 113. Lord Lugard was one of the founders of British colonial rule in Malawi, Uganda, and Nigeria.

[15] See Rufus Phillips, *Why Vietnam Matters: An Eyewitness Account of Lessons Not Learned* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2008), chaps. 8–10. The budget in 1962 was about $150,000 per province.

[16] See Rufus Phillips, *Why Vietnam Matters: An Eyewitness Account of Lessons Not Learned* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2008), chap. 17; and see Andrew J. Gawthorpe, "Rural Government Advisers in South Vietnam and the U.S. War Effort, 1962–1973," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 23 (Winter 2021): 196–227, https://muse.jhu.edu/article/788384/pdf.

[17] For more on stabilization assistance teams, see Rufus C. Phillips III, *Stabilizing Fragile States: Why It Matters and What to Do about It* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2022). See also Roger Myerson, "Local Politics and Democratic State-Building," *Journal of Democracy* 33, no. 4 (2022): 62–73, https://muse.jhu.edu/article/866642.

[18] See Rufus Phillips, *Why Vietnam Matters: An Eyewitness Account of Lessons Not Learned* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2008), chap. 13.

[19] Karl W. Eikenberry and Stephen D. Krasner, *Good Enough Governance: Humility and the Limits of Foreign Intervention in Response to Civil Wars and Intrastate Violence* (Cambridge, MA: American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2021), https://www.amacad.org/publication/good-enough-governance.

[20] Rory Stewart and Gerald Knaus, *Can Intervention Work?* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2012).

[21] See also Douglass C. North, John Joseph Wallis, and Barry R. Weingast, *Violence and Social Orders: A Conceptual Framework for Interpreting Recorded Human History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

[22] See Keith Mines, *Why Nation-Building Matters: Political Consolidation, Building Security Forces, and Economic Development in Failed and Fragile States* (Lincoln, NE: Potomac Books, an imprint of the University of Nebraska Press, 2020), 319–24.

Strategizing Lawfare as a Key Irregular War Modality

By David J. Scheffer

INTRODUCTION

The year is 2028. China threatens an imminent invasion of Taiwan. The U.S. 7th Fleet mobilizes in the far Pacific with an unprecedented surge of naval and air assets. But there is also a powerful weapon of lawfare primed to confront Chinese ambitions: Let it be known that if China attacks Taiwan, the United States and several of its allies and partners will officially and immediately recognize the State of Taiwan, as a sovereign allied island nation, and destroy the one China principle that Beijing thought could be manipulated to justify launching a kinetic war to conquer Taiwan. The American initiative would be an act of lawfare, demonstrating to the world that the United States is prepared to weaponize the law in defense of the people and indeed of the newly designated sovereign nation of Taiwan.[2]

With so much at stake today and in the future, nothing in the arsenal of weapons should be overlooked. During the last quarter-century, a cousin of warfare, termed "lawfare," has been the object of definitional jousting and unbridled application in irregular warfare, but now requires a serious rethink of both its definition and usage beyond its bumper sticker appeal. Enough variance has been introduced into the breadth and character of "lawfare" to merit a sharpening of its meaning and pragmatic usage so that the armed services, political and legal communities, the media, and commentators speak, to the extent possible, with one understanding of this very powerful concept. This task is essential as the national security implications of proper or improper use of the modality "lawfare" in the realm of irregular warfare can greatly influence strategic outcomes not only for the United States but also for its allies and friends across the world. Beyond the term's definition, the way lawfare has been waged, particularly by adversaries of the United States and its allies, requires fresh scrutiny so that the future can be mapped out with greater precision. The Departments of Defense and State, with National Security Council inter-agency coordination, should take the lead in developing and implementing a

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modern United States strategy for a proactive lawfare policy of both defensive and offensive character in the conduct of irregular warfare.

A necessary predicate to the study of lawfare is the recognition that law matters in times of both peace and war. No matter how irregular and disruptive the concept of irregular warfare becomes, law remains the fulcrum of how the United States and its allies should approach the often very difficult and provocative challenges posed by irregular warfare. Law as a social contract confers "legitimacy" in the minds of relevant populations. Law enables political leaders to rally support and mobilize resources of domestic and international polities. The fact that law embodied in treaties or applied as customary principles can suffer from lack of enforcement or

of disrespect by adversaries or home-grown cynics does not diminish the value of law in advancing and defending national security. Law, either of national or international character, occupies center stage in the survival of democratic societies threatened by lawless foes and those adversaries determined to distort and manipulate law to prevail. Military strength remains essential. But projecting that strength is most effectively achieved when holding true to the values Americans have enshrined in the law.

Given lawfare's definitional journey, in this article, I will explain how the term has been understood by various scholars and practitioners over the years. In researching this article, I also have drawn upon three virtual convenings of experts that I moderated in March 2025 and at which the academic literature was reviewed and views, without attribution, were frankly delivered about the past, present, and future of lawfare.[3] Lawfare usage has been of particular concern to the United States in connection with situations in Israel and the West Bank and Gaza, China, Taiwan, Russia, and Ukraine. I argue that the modern meaning of lawfare should be used within a framework of national security interests and aimed at pragmatic and impactful usage by the United States and its allies. This will require implementing a lawfare strategy proactively on the defense (counter-lawfare) and, more importantly, on the offense to protect fundamental values embodied in the normative framework of national security and of international law as well as advance the interests of the United States. While lawfare is a form of "soft power," there remains the need to understand and deploy lawfare with much greater precision and effectiveness.

In that spirit, this article proposes three general recommendations including (1) the creation of an independent "Lawfare Strategy Group" to devise and oversee the tactical and strategic utilization of lawfare in the pursuit of national interests for both offense and defense (2) the creation of common

definitions of lawfare to be understood throughout the U.S. Government, and (3) the inclusion of lawfare principles into the education of key officials involved in constructing and implementing strategy including senior military, government civilians, and political appointees.

TERMINOLOGY

 "Lawfare" is akin to a loaded gun that can be used for very good purpose or misused for deadly purpose. It also is not a term that is particularly popular with some lawyers because the entire universe of law—its creation, administration, and enforcement—demands a wide range of skills and strategic thinking that lawyers in all fields of practice and scholarship exercise every day in a multitude of societal endeavors. Moreover, in public policy, one typically associates the union of the noun "fare" with "war" and hence "warfare." So, pairing "fare" with "law" appears, at first impression, rather novel as a new word in search of a definition, rather than a well-established practice deserving of a definition of little if any controversy. For the last quarter century, a debate has ensued between those who would define lawfare very narrowly as posing an adversarial threat to U.S. national security interests and those who would expand its parameters into a wide range of activities of both offensive and defensive character relevant not only to the United States and its allies, but other nations as well. U.S. authorities need to recapture the terminology to stop it from being hijacked by politically or ideologically motivated individuals, non-state actors, and nations and ensure that it serves pragmatic purposes tied to military operations and other national security interests.

Lawfare has not yet become a staple term in the lexicon of irregular warfare, but it should assume that posture. In doing so, however, there should be a clear understanding that it would be misleading and inaccurate to label all lawfare and all counter-lawfare as "illicit," even if one seeks to describe a modern definition of irregular warfare as characterized by "illicit" conduct.[4] Indeed, much of lawfare and counter-lawfare can be identified as legitimate on its face, particularly as procedural steps such as access to courts to lodge claims, and then be interpreted to reveal manipulative objectives, to advance unsubstantiated allegations, or to support perfectly valid rebuttals (counter-lawfare) in legal fora and through political discourse. Lawfare is a crucial weapon in the irregular warfare toolbox and should be far more prominently identified as such.

Over the years, scholars have sought to establish both the definition and parameters of usage of the term "lawfare."[5] Several of the most impactful contributors to lawfare scholarship are introduced in this article. There have been prominent examples where adversaries have used lawfare tactics and strategies to thwart military operations or create legal scenarios that would deter a nation from exercising its power and rights under international law. Those examples are studied below alongside the explication of the scholarship.

The Dunlap Formulation

The "Dunlap formulation" refers to the scholarship of Major General, U.S. Air Force (Ret.) Charles J. Dunlap, Jr. and his many speeches and publications on the subject of lawfare.[6] In 2001, General Dunlap, at that time a Judge Advocate General who retired in 2010 and now teaches at Duke University School of Law, spoke of lawfare in a speech at Harvard University. He defined the term as "a strategy of using—or misusing—law as a substitute for traditional military means to achieve an operational objective."[7] He further described the term as "a method of warfare where law is used as a means of realizing a military objective."[8] While any party to an armed conflict could "use law as a weapon of war," Dunlap cautioned that in the hands of American adversaries, lawfare is "a cynical manipulation of the rule of law and the humanitarian values it represents."[9]

Perhaps unintentionally, Dunlap's speech opened the floodgates to lawfare consciousness in public policy and legal circles.

Dunlap elaborated on lawfare in further speeches and articles since his 2001 Harvard speech and stressed the balance he seeks to achieve for a common understanding of the term. His 2008 article, "Lawfare Today: A Perspective," in the *Yale Journal of International Affairs*, emphasized, "Lawfare can operate as a positive 'good.' Ideally, substituting lawfare methodologies for traditional military means can reduce the destructiveness of war, if not its frequency."[10] Dunlap concluded that "lawfare—in both positive and negative forms—is now a fact of modern life."[11]

In 2010, Dunlap participated in the first, and still most widely cited, major academic symposium on lawfare that was hosted by Case Western Reserve University School of Law.[12] There he explained his original conception of the term but also expanded upon its broader and more constructive applications:

To be clear, "lawfare" was never meant to describe every possible relation between law and warfare. It focuses principally on circumstances where law can create the same or similar effects as those ordinarily sought from conventional warmaking approaches. In military terms, lawfare represents a form of effects-based operations…[which] reflect an approach to warfare that is not preoccupied with particular methodologies, but rather on actions "designed to achieve specific effects that contribute directly to desired military and political outcomes." Law often can do that just as successfully as more violent means. Furthermore, the term was always intended to be ideologically neutral, that is, harking back to the original characterization of lawfare, as simply another kind of weapon, one that is produced, metaphorically speaking, by beating law books into swords. Although the analogy is imperfect, the point is that a weapon can be used for good or bad purposes, depending upon the mindset of those who wield it. Much the same can be said about the law.[13]

Dunlap cautioned how manipulative use of lawfare by an adversary can lead to "self-inflicted lawfare," namely, restraints on U.S. or allied military operations while the enemy unlawfully exposes civilians to risk, with the likely consequence of shielding enemy forces and actually increasing civilian casualties.[14] He pointed to how the adversary—be it a political group or some other non-state actor or state actor—can manipulate international humanitarian law to delegitimize in the eyes of world opinion the military action by, for example, the United States or an ally like Israel. Hamas, the Taliban, ISIS, or Hezbollah can use its own people (or hostages) as human shields, unlawfully, to ultimately deter use of air or artillery power or other armed force against its fighters by a state actor seeking to avoid civilian casualties for fear of validating the adversary's public allegations that it had violated international humanitarian law or the law of armed conflict. These are devious and unlawful tactics, and they can derail legitimate military operations by invoking the law and its purported violation with the creation of fresh facts on the ground as a set-up for violations of the law.

Dunlap basically argued for an "eyes wide open" strategy to both identify and understand an adversary's lawfare with the urgency and comprehensiveness required in tactical and strategic planning and implementation of any complex military operation. "[S]elf-imposed lawfare can have dire impacts if practitioners do not fully educate themselves on the facts and conduct dispassionate and thorough analysis. If the existence of the concept of lawfare—even as an epithet of sorts—serves as nothing more than a way to alert practitioners to how their efforts might be warped and exploited, it would seem to be serving an undeniably productive purpose."[15]

Dunlap nonetheless cautioned against viewing negatively those who use the "courts or other legal processes to address the myriad of security-related

issues of the post-9/11 world."[16] Using American courts should be seen as normal and anticipated lawyering in a rule of law society like the United States. Dunlap was less confident about international tribunals where adversaries' access to them could lead to "abusive lawfare."[17] But he also argued that "we need not be too pessimistic about lawfare's implications simply because some belligerents seem to manipulate the law while operating largely outside of it. Consider the evidence that the behavior of those who formally reject international law may nevertheless find themselves temporized as lawfare, in whatever form, exposes it."[18]

In 2021, 20 years after his Harvard speech, Dunlap concluded that "the law can be employed as something of a weapon—an instrumentalization of the law that purists abhor but which to me reflects reality. Whether such use is for good or for ill depends much upon who is wielding it and why. There are legitimate forms of lawfare that can serve to mitigate the destructiveness of war, but there are also abusive interpretations which seek to turn adherence to the law into a vulnerability to be exploited by malevolent actors."[19] In the same essay, Dunlap proposed the critical agenda item further discussed at the close of this article: "It is imperative…that beyond mere acknowledgement of the concept, the U.S. and its allies need to develop a strategy (along with tactics, techniques, and procedures) to be well positioned not only to maximize the proper use of the law, but also to be ready to counter adversaries' efforts to manipulate the law to their benefit. We have a lot to do to match the well-developed lawfare strategies of America's opponents, so it's time to get to work."[20]

In that spirit, Dunlap wrote shortly after the Hamas attacks on Israel and its population on October 7, 2023, about lawfare initiatives Hamas might take when faced with Israel's superior military power and how to strategize effective responses to them with immediate impact. The aim would be to minimize their influence on both the military

and diplomatic fronts as the fighting unfolded between the Israel Defense Forces and Hamas in Gaza.[21] Israel did not label as genocide (regardless of whether it could be immediately proven as the crime of genocide), the October 7th Hamas attacks on residents of Israeli kibbutz and attendees at a music festival, leading to the deaths of approximately 1,200 Israelis and foreigners and injuring an estimated 5,431 victims. One might speculate that by failing to scream "genocide," in international legal fora Israel forfeited a measure of goodwill that it clearly could have gained as the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), in an act of self-defense that also should have been prominently articulated as such by Israeli authorities, entered the territory of Gaza and engaged in warfare with Hamas. Israeli officials made unnecessary and provocative public statements that became self-inflicted wounds in the theater of world opinion and gave impetus to legal action by South Africa and several other nations against Israel at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in December 2023.[22] South Africa brought its action under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Genocide Convention), to which Israel and South Africa are both States Parties and which requires that disputes between them under the Convention be litigated before the ICJ. The State of Palestine is a State Party to the Genocide Convention and, under the *erga omnes* principle of international law,[23] South Africa has the right to bring a case involving alleged genocide on the territory of the State of Palestine against any other State Party to the treaty, such as Israel.

South Africa argued that Israel had violated, and was continuing to violate, the Genocide Convention by withholding humanitarian aid to the Palestinian population in Gaza and in how it was waging its military operations there. The case and its hearings before the 15 judges of the ICJ in The Hague, including American Judge Joan Donoghue, the President of the ICJ at that time,

garnered significant media attention and facilitated an aim that Hamas could capitalize upon: using international law to fight the IDF in a courtroom rather than militarily in Gaza, where Israel had demanded surrender by Hamas or face devastating bombardments and IDF ground operations aimed at eliminating Hamas as a governing and military entity in Gaza.

The South Africa lawsuit could have been repelled by counter-lawfare if, ideally, any one of the more than 140 nations recognizing the State of Palestine had filed a new application, in the same legal forum—the ICJ—against the State of Palestine on the grounds that Hamas committed genocide on Israeli territory on October 7, 2023, and hence the relevant State Party to the Genocide Convention, the State of Palestine, should be ordered to fulfill its obligations under that treaty to punish Hamas leaders and prevent any further genocide by Hamas, in

particular. My article in the *Lawfare* blog on June 26, 2024,[24] sets forth how this could be done, especially by any one of the 33 States that recognize the State of Palestine, are party to the Genocide Convention (thus giving rise under that treaty's Article IX to sue any other State Party), and are neither Arab nor Islamic nations (as none of them likely would entertain the idea). That list includes Antigua and Barbuda, Armenia, Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Bulgaria, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Georgia, Guatemala, Iceland, Ireland, Montenegro, Nepal, Norway, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Romania, Rwanda, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Ukraine, and Uruguay.

Of course, Israel, whose people suffered the Hamas "genocidal" attacks on October 7, 2023, would be the ideal State Party to lodge such a case

against the State of Palestine but Israel's (as well as the United States') longstanding non-recognition of the State of Palestine would be upended, and create a political firestorm at home, by dealing with the State of Palestine before the ICJ as if it were a sovereign nation. Nonetheless, the rebuttal to that argument would have Israel dealing with the territories of the so-called State of Palestine solely in their capacity as a State Party to the Genocide Convention and not as representing a sovereign nation or as a country that qualifies for membership in the United Nations (which it has not achieved solely because of American exercise of the veto in the U.N. Security Council).

Procedurally, the State of Palestine, which nonetheless is an observer non-member State of the United Nations and still not party to the Statue of the ICJ, sought to intervene in support of the South Africa case and had accepted "with immediate effect the competence of the International Court of Justice for the settlement of all disputes that may arise or that have already arisen covered by Article IX of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948), to which the State of Palestine acceded on 2 April 2014." This acceptance declaration added that "[i]n doing so, the State of Palestine declares that it accepts all the obligations of a Member of the United Nations under Article 94 of the United Nations."[25]

As of this writing, the absence of an application to the ICJ under the Genocide Convention against the State of Palestine remains a missed opportunity to engage South Africa and the nations that joined its lawsuit, including the intervention by the State of Palestine in the case, with such counter-lawfare action. It would offer much-needed balance to the lawfare tactics waged against Israel in connection with its military operations in Gaza, the latter generating severe international condemnation with allegations

that Israel is violating international humanitarian law and depriving the civilian population in Gaza of critical humanitarian assistance. Israel's leadership may have chosen not to tarnish their own reputations with an acknowledgement that genocide against Israeli citizens occurred on their watch in government. They chose instead to describe the Hamas attacks as acts of *terrorism* for which military operations by the IDF are required to eliminate such terrorist threats for the future. Such a strategy was blind to the advantage that would have been gained in world opinion by using a powerful legal weapon, the Genocide Convention, for the interests of Israel when confronted with South Africa's lawfare case before the ICJ, and to do so by persuading one of the 33 States Parties to the Genocide Convention listed above to lodge such a Genocide Convention case or to do so itself.

The Kittrie Treatise

Also present at the Case Western Reserve symposium in 2010 was Professor Orde F. Kittrie of the Arizona State University Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law. Like Dunlap, Kittrie contributed an article[26] to the compendium of scholarship emerging from that symposium. Five years later he published the most comprehensive treatise on the subject: *Lawfare: Law as a Weapon of War.*[27] In his book, Kittrie embraces much of Dunlap's formulation and focuses on how to use it to confront the prospect or reality of kinetic warfare. The Kittrie treatise essentially throws the 'kitchen sink' and everything in it at the theory and practice of lawfare. Its deeply researched scholarship shows how substantial lawfare is and can be for the future of U.S. national security policy. Kittrie employs Dunlap's framework of analysis and offers an exhaustive treatment of lawfare with a fulsome range of examples centering not only on kinetic warfare but also on anti-terrorism and financial lawfare. The latter

primarily involves litigation against adversaries to constrain and penalize them with respect to their operations through 'strategic lawyering' to block their financial transactions, assets, or commerce.

Kittrie's portfolio of lawfare categories are grouped as either "instrumental lawfare" or "compliance-leverage disparity lawfare," words that may be useful for scholarly purposes but probably would fail as digestible pragmatic terminology for operational purposes by military or government officials. Nonetheless, instrumental warfare is the "use of legal tools to achieve the same or similar effects as those traditionally sought from kinetic military action."[28] Compliance-leverage disparity lawfare is "lawfare, typically on the kinetic battlefield, which is designed to gain advantage from the greater influence that law, typically the law of armed conflict, and its processes exerts over an adversary."[29] Instrumental lawfare creates and uses laws and organizations to the detriment of adversaries and to diminish or eliminate the threats they pose. Compliance-leverage disparity lawfare seeks to use the law, and typically the claim of non-compliance with the law of armed conflict and international humanitarian law, to influence an adversary's military actions on the battlefield.

The case studies of lawfare in the Kittrie volume provide a rich menu of examples and are most informative in their recognition of how financial lawfare has been used to confront key national security threats posed by Iran and key parties (Israel, Hamas, and the Palestinian Liberation Organization) in the Israel/Palestine conflict. Further, the book's examination of how the People's Republic of China uses "legal warfare" to lay the foundation for sovereignty claims under international law and in the waters of the South China Sea and on its islands provides illuminating insights into the reality of persistent lawfare, which would be ignored at the peril of U.S. national security.

Kittrie's scholarship demonstrates how usage of the law can be valuable to achieve kinetic objectives, during hostilities or to deter war, and why the United States should develop a strategy to deploy law to defend or advance national security interests through compliance with both domestic and international law but also to reject rationalizing actions that are "patently unlawful or morally reprehensible."[30] Like Dunlap, Kittrie in 2016 recommended the creation of a lawfare strategy group in the U.S. Government, which remains long overdue.

OTHER SCHOLARS OF LAWFARE

Four additional scholars merit special attention for their perspectives on lawfare during the last decade.

Joel P. Trachtman

The first such scholar is Professor Joel P. Trachtman of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University. In a law review article, appearing in the same year, 2016, as Kittrie's treatise, Trachtman observed that the multiplicity of legal rules, the proliferation of legal fora and universal jurisdiction opportunities, and the information surge generated by new sources of surveillance and evidence "empower legal argumentation and prosecution like never before."[31] He points to lost opportunities to capitalize upon the illegal aggression of Russia against Crimea in 2014 and impose higher costs, including reputational costs, by rebutting more effectively with legal arguments the Russian claim of self-defense on behalf of the Russian ethnic minority in Crimea. This would not have been easy in the face of Russian comparisons with comparable if not larger U.S. military actions in Panama and Iraq and Afghanistan. Russia also used the legal rationale of humanitarian intervention, citing the example of NATO's intervention in Kosovo and use of air power over Serbia in 1999.[32]

Double standards in a nation's foreign policy are hardly new, and the practice can undermine the use of lawfare as a counterweight to an adversary's kinetic use of force. But they need not cripple strategizing pragmatic responses guided by international law. If there had been a vibrant lawfare strategy in place in Washington in 2014, the United States could have led its allies in a powerful counterpunch with the rule of law and in utilizing international fora far more effectively than what transpired and doubtless encouraged Russian President Vladimir Putin to launch Russia's second and far more ambitious aggression against Ukraine in February 2022. Russia's lawfare against Ukraine since then includes the dubious argument, made before the International Court of Justice,[33] that Ukraine was committing genocide against the Russian-speaking minority in eastern Ukraine. That case remains in litigation at the ICJ but Ukraine's full engagement there resulted in a masterstroke of counter-lawfare that led the ICJ to issue provisional measures against Russia on March 16, 2022.[34]

As noted earlier, China has used legal arguments to position itself in the South China Sea for territorial gains, maritime entitlements, access to seabed minerals, and construction of military bases on island atolls. Trachtman identifies this as "an example of an integrated lawfare strategy" where "China is actively enhancing some of those land features in order to enhance its claims." [35] All of this makes a significant difference in the context of military preparedness in the South China Sea and any prospective confrontation there with the United States or its allies, like the Philippines, which is a major non-NATO ally. He notes the significance of the 1999 People's Liberation Army paper on "Unrestricted Warfare" where lawfare strategy was explained as a combined force-structure component and a legal component to achieve Chinese superiority on military projection in such critical areas as the South China Sea.[36]

Trachtman also briefly describes the legal joust between the Philippines and China before the Permanent Court of Arbitration regarding China's various encroachments in the South China Sea and where final judgment against China was issued on July 12, 2016.[37] China's blunt rejection of the arbitral award favoring the Philippines demonstrated that Beijing would not concede its legal position, and in fact, China doubled down on lawfare tactics to strengthen its military and economic stakes in the South China Sea and with respect to Taiwan.

Trachtman views "lawfare, in particular circumstances, as a substitute for kinetic warfare. It substitutes for warfare, where it provides a means by which to compel specified behavior with fewer costs than kinetic warfare, or even in cases where kinetic warfare would be ineffective. It is difficult to say with certainty that any particular dispute that has been resolved through legal debate or formal dispute settlement would, if not for the legal resolution, have resulted in war. Yet, it seems likely that at least some disputes have had this character. Often the reference to international law or a court ruling can reduce pressure on governments to escalate to kinetic warfare."[38]

Considering the importance he attaches to lawfare in policymaking, Trachtman recommends the integration of a lawfare command with kinetic commands in the military. His proposal for the functional attributes of a lawfare command merits full quotation here as it provides a thoughtful approach to strategizing lawfare and counter-lawfare capabilities in the U.S. military. Trachtman introduces the following

"list of areas in which an integrated legal component may improve strategic and tactical outcomes:

- *Identify disputes in which legal resolution is unlikely in order to predict more accurately the context for kinetic disputes.*

- *Join in the planning of new weapons systems*

and adaptation of existing weapons systems to maximize effectiveness given legal restraints.

- *Anticipate challenges to rules of engagement and target policies and identify methods to maximize effectiveness despite potential challenges.*

- *Identify circumstances where opponents are creating legal facts on the ground that may give them an advantage in future conflicts, such as the Chinese South China Sea operations.*

- *Identify circumstances in which it may be attractive to create legal facts on the ground for advantage.*

- *Identify circumstances in which opponents are seeking to create international legal rules or modify or apply existing international legal rules that will restrict use of weapons in which your forces have an advantage.*

- *Propose international legal rules or modify or apply existing international legal rules that will restrict use of weapons in which your forces are at a disadvantage.*

- *Identify competitors' efforts to block your access to material and formulate legal responses.*

- *Identify competitors' needs for material and seek to block access within applicable law."*[39]

These items also should be factored into not only a "lawfare command," which presumably would be situated in the Department of Defense, but also into the strategy of an inter-agency lawfare strategy group that will be discussed later in this article.

Cheng Deng Feng and Tim Boyle

Turning to the specific challenge of China and Taiwan in the realm of lawfare, Cheng Deng Feng and Tim Boyle recently published a commentary on March 11, 2025, in which the two military lawyers (Cheng Deng Feng is an officer in the armed forces of the Republic of China (Taiwan) and Tim Boyle is an officer in the U.S. Navy Judge Advocate General's Corps and soon be staff judge advocate for the U.S. Seventh Fleet) argued the need for Taiwan's international supporters "to strengthen deterrence, including dismantling China's legal pretext for aggression and implementing coordinated counter-lawfare strategies to challenge Beijing's lawfare campaign." They write, "By crafting a legal basis for war, China is not only preparing its domestic landscape for a Taiwan invasion but also seeking to influence global narratives, erode Taiwan's international support, and reduce the likelihood of foreign intervention."[40]

Cheng and Boyle provide a clear-eyed assessment of China's lawfare strategy to seize control of Taiwan by leveraging "its 'one China principle' as a purported legal justification for a Taiwan invasion, labeling the issue an 'internal matter' exempt from the U.N. Charter's prohibition on the use of force." China's 2005 Anti-Secession Law, which the authors describe as the cornerstone of Beijing's lawfare campaign against Taiwan, "mandates 'non-peaceful means' if Beijing identifies undefined 'major incidents' entailing secession, or deems peaceful 'reunification' unachievable."[41] More recent laws authorize regulation and control of the "co-called "'jurisdictional waters'" near Taiwan and create the basis for Chinese military action "to defend China's claimed territory," which China contends would include Taiwan's territorial sea and areas of the Taiwan Strait despite international law guarantees for the high seas.[42] A host of other laws, including the National Defense Mobilization Act (2010), Cybersecurity Law (2017), National Defense Transportation Law (2017), and National Intelligence Law (2018) set the stage for military action against Taiwan. Beijing also promulgated "22 new rules to bolster enforcement of the Anti-Secession Law, criminalizing support for Taiwan independence and expanding its authority to prosecute alleged 'separatists.'"[43]

China thus has taken critical lawfare steps under national law to prime the pump for a military invasion of Taiwan. Cheng and Boyle write, "Beijing aims to achieve what the Chinese military's 'three warfares' strategy calls 'legal principle superiority'—a position of strategic dominance intended to legitimize escalating coercion and potential aggression. A recent Lowy Institute report highlights progress toward this goal, revealing that nearly half of U.N. member states now endorse Beijing's one China principle and all efforts toward unification. Crucially, this support comes without explicit conditions for peaceful resolution, arguably signaling tacit consent for Chinese military aggression. Indeed, Beijing's strategic use of lawfare appears to be gaining ground in preparing both the legal and physical environments for potential conflict."[44]

China's future use of lawfare in relation to Taiwan likely will center on solidifying the one China principle in international instruments, including secret memoranda of understanding with U.N. organizations, Cheng and Boyle report. China can press its case for territorial sea control through, for example, publishing "straight baselines around Taiwan under the guise of Article 16 of the Law of the Sea Convention, mirroring the legal strategy it used to assert control over the Paracels, Senkakus, and more recently, the Gulf of Tonkin and Scarborough Shoal." Further, China may attempt, as it did with Hong Kong, to enact a "'Taiwan basic law' that purports to establish autonomy for Taiwan under Communist China's rule….If Taiwan rejects a basic law, Beijing could cite this as evidence that peaceful measures have been exhausted, or alternatively, use the law to justify declaring a 'major incident' following a perceived provocation, thus triggering the mandatory use of force under the Anti-Secession Law."[45]

Cheng and Boyle call upon policymakers to "recognize the legal environment as a battleground and implement coordinated counter-lawfare strategies to challenge China's lawfare campaign." These strategies would include explicit refutations of China's relevant laws and public postures at the United Nations, as well as its reading of historic declarations and controversial interpretation of the U.N. Charter. Inviting Taiwan into global forums also would help counter China's narrative about current governance of the island and Beijing's efforts to isolate Taiwan internationally. Finally, Cheng and Boyle caution that "officials should exercise combined legal vigilance as a core tenet of counter-lawfare. This entails continuous monitoring and assessment of the legal environment to ensure early detection of significant changes—ranging from subtle shifts in China's national mobilization framework to cover declarations under the Anti-Secession Law."[46] This is precisely the kind of thinking—about lawfare and counter-lawfare—that should reflect the integrating of lawfare and warfare as described by Trachtman in his 2016 article.

One could take Cheng and Boyle's innovative thinking about the fate of Taiwan one step further for lawfare purposes. In August 2023, I published an article in *Just Security* in which I argued that the United States should be preparing for deterrence lawfare to save Taiwan, if that becomes necessary.[47] That act of lawfare would arise if China invades Taiwan, thus violating the entire framework of the one China policy as understood by the United States. The Taiwan Relations Act of 1979,[48] which remains in force, reflects the Shanghai Communique of 1972[49] by making "clear that the United States' decision to establish diplomatic relations with the PRC rests upon the expectation that the future of Taiwan will be determined by peaceful means." I wrote, "If that future is not 'determined by peaceful means' because China has invaded Taiwan, then there is nothing in America's longstanding one China policy or the Taiwan Relations Act that would prevent United States recognition of the democratically elected Taiwan government, even if its officials

must govern the more than 23 million inhabitants of Taiwan in exile."[50] If the United States could coordinate such an action and execute it simultaneously with its most trusted allies and partners, the lawfare impact would be even stronger.

Under this stratagem of lawfare, the United States and its allies and partners would recognize the State of Taiwan while continuing to recognize the People's Republic of China and its government as the governing authority for mainland China. Taiwan would be recognized as a new, self-governing State but not as the legitimate seat of the government for the entirety of China, which had been its original claim after 1949 and the rise of Communist China. The aim of announcing such a deterrent policy would be to send a strong signal to Beijing, putting it on notice of American policy to use international law to officially recognize the State of Taiwan if China militarily invades Taiwan, but to refrain from doing so if China seeks a peaceful unification with Taiwan. The law of recognition thus would be weaponized by Washington in response to any kinetic warfare launched aggressively by China, with the goal being that it would never have to be used because China would be deterred, at least in part, by such an American lawfare threat. Of course, deterrence of a Chinese invasion of Taiwan likely would rest on far more than lawfare and indeed primarily on American and allied military strength in the Pacific as well as significant economic retaliation in trade relations and with sanctions and perhaps overall prohibitions on trade and financial transactions with China.

Joop Voetelink

The Dutch scholar Joop Voetelink of the Faculty of Military Sciences of the Netherlands Defence Academy authored "Reframing Lawfare" in 2017.[51] His aim in the article was to narrow the definition of lawfare. He first described how law can be misused by an adversary to essentially disarm the military force that might be conducting warfare lawfully. He writes that a weak or less equipped party to an armed conflict, "unable to directly engage a better equipped, stronger opposing force, leverages its opponent's sensitivity to alleged violation of law, in particular the laws of armed conflict. They attempt to create the image that their opponents cause disproportionate collateral damage and civilian casualties, thereby undermining the perception of legitimacy'. Tactics based on this concept are designed to have a double effect on a law-sensitive opponent. Firstly, it may lead an opponent to impose additional constraints on his own actions whenever civilian casualties or damage to civilian property are to be expected, rendering its forces less effective. Secondly, the tactic may cause a loss of popular and international support for allegedly operating in violation of the laws of armed conflict."[52]

Voetelink reaches back to the Vietnam War as "the first example of a party systematically exploiting its opponents', i.e., U.S. concerns over civilian casualties….Since the Vietnam conflict, many forms of this type of lawfare have been reported."[53] Voetelink affirms the longstanding rule that civilian populations can suffer under the laws of armed conflict if the attack is proportionate. "In other words, attacks are allowed if expected civilian casualties or damage to civilian property (collateral damage) is not excessive in relation to the concrete and direct military advantage anticipated."[54] He notes that the conflicts between Israel and Hamas generated similar examples. In an assessment that would resonate during the Israel-Hamas war beginning in October 2023, Voetelink writes, "Especially in the conflicts between Israel and Hamas in 2009 and 2014 lawfare played a significant role. Hamas frequently employed 'tactics designed to gain advantage from the greater leverage which the law of armed conflict and its processes exert over Israel than Hamas.' On many occasions Hamas operated from residential areas using the presence of civilians as protection

against Israeli attacks. Hamas was fully aware that the IDF was poised to reduce collateral damage as much as possible, knowing that Hamas would document collateral damage incidents and exploit them in the media. As the number of civilian casualties had risen, so would have international pressure on Israel to end the hostilities which would typically have entailed making concessions to Hamas."[55]

Voetelink confines lawfare to "achieving an operational goal" whether by using or misusing law. But he argues, "Legal actions designed to help shape a possible future battle space do not qualify as lawfare then."[56] What Kittrie and Tractman and others would argue is lawfare waged by China in the South China Sea and against Taiwan, Voetelink describes "as part of the policy and diplomatic instruments of a State when advancing its international, political goals. As such, it cannot be called lawfare from his perspective. An option would be to introduce a broader category for actions that are aimed at having an effect on a political level under the header political lawfare."[57]

Despite his narrowing of the definition of lawfare, Voetelink acknowledges that "lawfare can be directed at others than the armed forces and armed groups participating in hostilities." He cites as an example the prevention of a flotilla assembling in Greece in 2011 to support the needs of Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip by threatening criminal charges and civil liability under U.S. law and denying insurance and satellite communications to ships in the flotilla. Such actions "had a direct effect on an ongoing military operation (enforcing a naval blockade) and helped achieve a specific military goal, i.e. prevention of an actual breach of the blockade."[58]

In summarizing his perspective, Voetelink concludes,

"When the military is conducting its operations in accordance with the law, law is merely the context for military action and not the instrument. Furthermore, the flip side of the rule of law coin entails that the armed forces and their service members can be held accountable for their actions. When law is either used or misused to achieve an operational goal, an action can be qualified lawfare….Conducting lawfare by misuse of the law is a common tactic used by less advanced parties to an armed conflict. They try to exploit their opponents' sensitivity to alleged violations of the law by creating the image that they operate in violation of these laws. Both the use and misuse of law can be effective instruments to a party to a conflict. Therefore, its adversary must be conscious of the challenges it poses and be prepared to counter the threats, inter alia, by taking counter lawfare actions."[59]

Voetelink clarifies that "lawfare is more than simply using or misusing law. It requires an action deliberately designed to achieve an operational goal….[P]olitical and legal actions that are not intended to have a direct effect on ongoing military operations should be left out of the interpretation as it would bring lawfare outside its actual intended playing field."[60] He then sums up lawfare with his own restatement of the Dunlap formulation:

The concept of using or misusing law by a participant in a military operation or an entity acting under its control, with its consent or in coordination with it, as a substitute for traditional military means deliberately designed to achieve an operational military goal in an ongoing military operation. A wide variety of activities that are now referred to as lawfare, do not qualify as such under this definition. It must be stressed that the proposed interpretation results from an analysis carried out from an Oplaw perspective. A political analysis, for example, would undoubtedly yield other results. As lawfare is an attractive term, it cannot be claimed for exclusive use in the field of Oplaw. Therefore, it is suggested to refer to other legal activities by taking the field of research as a starting point, for example political lawfare or financial lawfare.[61]

The message here is clear: that lawfare is a term which, on its bare terms, applies only to military operations. When lawfare is qualified with an adjective such as "political" or "financial," then it means the use or misuse of law in another context not directly associated with an ongoing military operation. If the adjective is important for any use of the term "lawfare," then one might speak of "battlefield lawfare" as embodying the meaning of what Voetelink describes as "lawfare."

Michael A. Newton

Michael A. Newton, Professor of the Practice of Law at Vanderbilt University Law School and a former Judge Advocate General of the U.S. Army, wrote a book chapter, *Winning at the Strategic Seams*, published in 2024, in which he postulates that "proponents of grey zone tactics [such as lawfare] and misappropriation of international law rights and duties should not be permitted to benefit from their misconduct."[62] He utilizes the Clean Hands doctrine, known to both national and international law, which "prohibits a party from benefiting from their wrongful conduct." In a bid to inject some flexibility into how nations respond to grey zone challenges which help define irregular warfare, Newton argues, "Grey zone warfare would become a much less desirable tactic and hence less effective if law-abiding States were entitled to revert to something of the Lotus era standard from a century ago by which their responses to grey zone challenges were entitled to deference absent an express and consensual prohibition drawn from a precise rule of international law."[63]

Newton believes that grey zone conflicts represent an existential threat to the legal architecture

that democracies have developed to preserve fundamental norms and values, such as human dignity, self-determination, and personal freedoms. He argues for a full defense of such norms "with vigor" in the face of grey zone challenges and cautions that "we must recommit ourselves to decisive action rather than whining in the face of adversity."[64] Instead of permitting the hijacking of international law by the "enemies of Western interests and institutions," Newton essentially issues a call to arms to repel any "artificial crippling" of combatant capabilities and to use strategies reflecting the strength of international law. "Sustaining the rule-based international order is the *sine qua non* of authentic deterrence," Newton writes. He views "the imperative for legal integration as a cornerstone of effective action to counter grey zone challenges."[65] In short, he advocates counter-lawfare with the confidence and "vigour" that Western nations/democracies must exercise to resist grey zone attacks.

Newton points particularly to "China's salami-slicing tactics in the South China Sea and its frequent invocation of core concepts of sovereignty [that] mask efforts to undermine stability in the Indo-Pacific region."[66] In his view, "Similar to the Russian presence in the Sahel region and in Syria, Chinese diplomats invoke international norms of peace and security, even as they wield grey zone tactics to undermine international comity along with peace and security in fact. Thus, the force of otherwise binding international law is delegitimized, even as its proponents use the grey zone to undermine sovereign self-defense and regional unity." He sees the stresses of grey zone conflicts as placing international law and its institutional structures "on the verge of irrelevance" and the indecision of States to uphold human rights and international order as signaling "indifference to those values."[67]

Newton believes that, "We must be clear-eyed and resolute regarding the optimal end state for current grey zone conflicts. Western allies along

with other States that believe that international law serves an important expressive value in clarifying the desired relationship between States and international organizations should confront these challenges without equivocation."[68] He concludes with words highly relevant to counter-lawfare: "Resisting grey zone efforts to erode human dignity and institutional integrity requires adaptive techniques and legal interpretations, firm resolve, and resilient defence."[69]

A MODERN PRAGMATIC UNDERSTANDING OF LAWFARE

The scholarship on lawfare described in this article offers a firm foundation upon which to confirm an updated and pragmatic understanding of the term. This objective merits attention so that the rule of law not only is upheld effectively and with clarity in matters of national security, but also to ensure that America's adversaries understand the futility of distorting the law to stymy or prevent U.S. or allied military operations.

Lawfare is the use or misuse of law as an alternative to or in support of kinetic warfare. When employed absent a qualifying adjective, lawfare is confined strictly to methodologies of law creation, advocacy, or litigation directly associated with threatened, imminent, or ongoing military operations or with the projection of national security interests that could lead to kinetic warfare with adversaries. The misuse of law in this context involves a state or non-state actor seeking to manipulate principles of international law, usually international humanitarian law and the law of armed conflict relating to the protection of civilian populations, or to falsely create facts on the ground that bear on national security interests, such as territorial expansion risking kinetic challenges, or to misrepresent the character of an adversary's military operations with the intent to delegitimize such

actions as violations of international humanitarian law or the law of armed conflict.

Joined with the adverb "counter," the term "counter-lawfare" refers to the methodology employed by a state or non-state actor to respond factually and with sound legal arguments and defensive initiatives in judicial and international forums to lawfare attacks of an illegitimate, manipulative, or misleading character. Counter-lawfare typically should be utilized as an immediate priority against adversaries that have misused the law in the context of military operations. The longer a nation or non-state actor waits to use counter-lawfare, the more difficult it will become to gain the advantage, particularly in world opinion, as to the justness of the military operations at issue.

Beyond lawfare and counter-lawfare, the term "lawfare" can be applied when joined with an adjective describing usage that may not necessarily be associated with kinetic military operations or the projection or protection of national security interests. For example, economic lawfare would refer to the imposition of economic sanctions against an adversary for purposes that may or may not concern military operations or national security. Financial lawfare would impede an adversary's access to monetary funds, assets, and use of commercial tools such as insurance. While financial lawfare clearly can be employed during armed conflicts, it may also be used in the context of, for example, human rights violations, anti-terrorism operations or drug enforcement, and thus not military operations or national security *per se*.

Accountability lawfare is essentially law enforcement relating directly to the character of military operations by investigating and bringing to justice alleged war criminals who have committed genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, or aggression. But such accountability often will be rendered well after military operations have ceased and thus would relate to the aftermath of war rather than ongoing hostilities. The building of criminal tribunals, the massive and complex investigations that atrocity crimes generate, and the trials or court martials of alleged perpetrators of atrocity crimes before either established or newly conceived national or international courts can send powerful signals of deterrence to would-be perpetrators, particularly at the leadership level. But it could be misleading to view the pursuit of national and international justice strictly through the prism of lawfare. The quest for accountability ranges very far beyond war and can include atrocity crimes, such as genocide and crimes against humanity, that sometimes are committed completely or largely outside of the context of armed hostilities.

Information lawfare, which might otherwise be described as the traditional practice of propaganda, also may have nothing to do with war or other military operations but rather apply to ideological or political agendas of an adversary. Where propaganda exists, there is value in building a viable response mechanism that can rebut misrepresentations and distortions of policy views and this often must occur in non-militarized situations of interstate competition and threats. Cyber lawfare is an unlimited terrain of both offensive and defensive actions within cyberspace and beyond the reach of this article. Where cyber lawfare intersects with military operations, one can correctly speak of lawfare in its more narrow construction.

Finally, much that occurs outside the realms of lawfare and counter-lawfare is emblematic of *strategic lawyering*, not necessarily lawfare, to ensure that the rule of law prevails and that tactics and strategies in the institutional domains of law (courts, regulatory agencies, governments, and regional and international organizations) are the province of professional lawyers who may have some thoughts about warfare, but are too busy with the toilsome duties of lawyering to ponder the fate of military operations, which in the end are and should remain the business of the armed services and their civilian

leaders, albeit accessing the counsel of military and civilian lawyers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The first of three recommendations set forth below seeks to create an institutional home for lawfare within the national security community and ensure that strategizing how to wage lawfare and counter-lawfare can be executed rapidly and effectively in defense of the interests of the United States and its allies. The second and third recommendations focus on common definitions and the education of lawfare principles among key government officials

Create a Lawfare Strategy Group

As described earlier in this article, Dunlap, Kittrie, and Trachtman have proposed the creation of some type of lawfare strategy group within the national security sector of the federal government. Trachtman provides a checklist of topics, recited above, that should be in the work plan of any such group. The "Lawfare Strategy Group" (LSG) would be prepared to respond to lawfare attacks quickly and to develop a continuous, updated strategy that would explore opportunities to use lawfare proactively and on the offense against threats to national security and during U.S. military operations. The LSG should include lawyers, including Judge Advocates General, highly trained and experienced in international humanitarian law and the law of armed conflict and with expertise about the states and non-state actors commonly engaged in lawfare tactics. The LSG would collaborate with counterparts in allied nations to present a united front against lawfare attacks. A subcommittee of the Deputies Committee of the National Security Council would coordinate among the Departments of Defense, State, Justice, and Treasury, as well as the Intelligence Community, to examine the work of the LSG and formulate lawfare strategy for the U.S. Government.

The LSG also should create rapid response teams to reply in real time to scurrilous or otherwise unfair lawfare attacks, particularly when those attacks are directed against the United States or its interests. Especially in this age when an assertion, whether true or demonstrably false, can circle the globe in minutes via social media and other internet vehicles, reaching and influencing potentially millions or even hundreds of millions of persons, the U.S. Government and other relevant actors need to be quicker and better focused in addressing such attacks. The importance of organizing to systematically and proactively use responsible lawfare to try to gain traction for a proper and truthful narrative before a false one can gain dominance in world opinion should be a key objective of the LSG.

Common Definitions

The term "lawfare" should be used with a common interpretation of its meaning and, where necessary, properly caveated to distinguish types of lawfare that are not necessarily tied to military operations. The discussion preceding these recommendations examines a modern pragmatic understanding of lawfare, which should be more commonly understood and applied by practitioners and scholars. To summarize:

- Lawfare is the use or misuse of law as an alternative to or in support of kinetic warfare.

- "Counter-lawfare" responds factually and with sound legal arguments and defensive initiatives in judicial and international forums to lawfare attacks of an illegitimate, manipulative, or misleading character.

- The term "lawfare" can be joined with an adjective describing usage that may not necessarily be associated with kinetic military operations or the projection or protection of national security interests. These caveated terms

include economic lawfare, financial lawfare, accountability lawfare, information lawfare, and cyber lawfare, and should always be described as such so as to distinguish such usage from lawfare that is associated with kinetic warfare.

■ The LSG would be well-positioned to develop a common doctrine or common vernacular to to create cognitive interoperability particularly when so much is at stake in conflicts with adversaries across the globe.

Educating Legal and Non-legal Strategists

Generally, national security professionals should be educated in the value of the law, including international law, for operational purposes of both offensive and defensive character, as this understanding throughout the ranks of the military and other national security professionals is vital for framing effective policy embodying the core values of America's rule of law society.

At the more granular level of lawfare, those in the legal profession can intuitively grasp how lawfare operates in various contexts and the value of strategic lawyering. That said, there would be great value in adding lawfare instruction to the course curriculum of the Judge Advocate General schools of the Army, Navy, and Air Force. Other military officers, political appointees, and civilian national security professionals who are not lawyers might be inclined to consider the law (particularly of armed conflict, of the sea, of humanitarian imperatives) as an afterthought in the strategic discourse, or even worse, as a boundary or restrictive barrier to action. The latter mindset can foolishly jeopardize success in achieving national security objectives. Since our adversaries already consider lawfare a pillar of their strategic planning, our own mindset should be focused on lawfare as well and, as starters, exposed to the concept as a regular feature of educational training.

CONCLUSION

Lawfare and counter-lawfare are here to stay. They are vital components influencing military operations and the protection and advancement of national security interests as a key modality of irregular warfare. As Professor Paul Williams and Laura Livingston concluded in their review of the Kittrie treatise, "[G]iven the frequent attempts to manipulate or distort international law, combating lawfare is certainly a war worth fighting. Ultimately, it is a war that is most effectively fought through embracing international laws, norms, and processes as a means to defeat efforts to handcuff modern democracy and the humanitarian values that it represents."[70] The precise terminology of lawfare for this "war worth fighting" remains critical. This article has aimed at fine-tuning lawfare in its relationship with military operations and national security interests while also conceding that types of lawfare employed largely outside of those objectives nonetheless can be described with relevant adjectives such as economic, financial, accountability, information, and cyber lawfare. But in all situations of lawfare, the skills of strategic lawyering will remain paramount. PRISM

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Slovenian Independence and the Resistance Operating Concept
A Comparative Analysis

By Robert Redding and Blaž Torkar

INTRODUCTION

The Slovenian independence movement and the subsequent war from Yugoslavia in 1991 marked a pivotal moment in European history. This movement emerged from growing nationalistic sentiments and democratic aspirations within Slovenia against the backdrop of a disintegrating Yugoslav federation.

Yugoslavia, at that time, was a state that had been formed of several Slavic nations, each with its own history. While the Slovenian people had not yet had their own country, the Slovenian people had sought liberty and independence for over a millennia. The Slovenian Republic of 1991 was part of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which was the last of a succession of historical states that included the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Slovenia, striving for greater autonomy and disillusioned by the Serb-led centralized governance of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, pursued a path toward independence. This was catalyzed by multi-party elections in 1990 and a subsequent independence referendum that garnered overwhelming support for secession.

The declaration of Slovenian independence in June 1991 was met with military intervention by the Yugoslav People's Army (YPA). However, Slovenia's preparation through the establishment of the Maneuver Structure of National Protection (MSNP, or in Slovene: Manevrska struktura narodne zaščite), as well as political and financial preparations, enabled it to effectively counter the YPA's efforts. The conflict, while brief, was significant and marked the beginning of the Yugoslav Wars. The Slovenian case is notable for its rapid transition to independence and relative lack of prolonged violent struggle, in contrast to the subsequent wars in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

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## THE MSNP AS AN EXAMPLE OF MODERN RESISTANCE CONCEPTS

The practical implementation of Slovenia's independence efforts presents an opportunity for comparative analysis against the Resistance Operating Concept (ROC) published by the Swedish National Defence University and U.S. Special Operations Command–Europe.[1] By juxtaposing the framework of the ROC with the real-world efforts of the Slovenian MSNP, as well as the Slovenia Republic's political and financial preparations for independence, this study offers a unique perspective on the dynamics of national defense strategies. It bridges the gap between theoretical resistance models and their application in a specific historical context, highlighting the adaptability and relevance of the ROC themes in varied geopolitical scenarios. This analysis not only sheds light on the Slovenian path to independence but also provides insights into the broader implications of structured resistance strategies in national defense planning.

The ROC is a strategic framework designed to guide nations in developing effective resistance capabilities against foreign occupation or aggression. Originating as a response to the evolving nature of modern conflicts, the ROC emphasizes the importance of comprehensive defense strategies that involve not just military forces but also civilian participation and governmental support. It advocates for a "whole-of-society approach" where all elements of a nation are prepared and coordinated to resist effectively. The ROC underscores the necessity of resilience, legal frameworks, and psychological preparation in building a robust resistance infrastructure. The Slovenian journey to independence provides a compelling real-world example of the practical application of the themes found in the ROC. It demonstrates how well-defined organizational structures, strategic legal maneuvers, robust societal involvement, and a deep understanding of psychological operations can create an effective blueprint for national defense and resistance. As such, Slovenia's experience stands as a testament to the relevance and efficacy of ROC themes, offering invaluable insights into how a nation can leverage these concepts to successfully navigate its way to sovereignty.

MSNP ORIGINS: YUGOSLAVIA'S TOTAL DEFENSE DOCTRINE

The Total Defense Doctrine of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, also known as the Total People's Defense System or Total National Defense, was established during the Cold War era and had characteristics similar to those found in the ROC.[2] Yugoslavia's autocratic leader, Josip Broz Tito, had developed a policy of non-alignment for Yugoslavia that led to the ultimate development of the Total Defense Doctrine.[3] By not aligning with any major power bloc during the Cold War, Yugoslavia main-
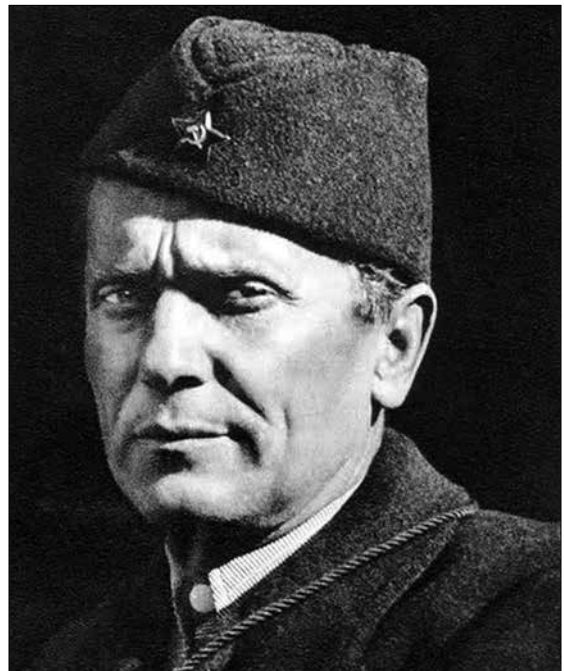
A photograph of Josip Broz Tito in 1942, likely during his time as a leader of the Yugoslav Partisans.

Demonstration against the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, Helsinki.

tained its independence in international affairs. This stance necessitated a unique defense strategy, leading to the development of the doctrine. It emphasized the mobilization of the entire nation in defense against external aggression, integrating conventional military forces with territorial defense units and civil defense organizations, creating a multi-layered defense structure. This approach was designed to ensure widespread resistance capabilities across the country, involving not just the military but also civilians in the defense. Not surprisingly, and even after Tito's death, 'Titoism' (the ideology of Yugoslav self-reliance, collective identity, and socialism) permeated this system of people's defense and social self-protection, resulting in a remarkable security awareness of the general population.[4] Total Defense reflected Yugoslavia's unique position as a non-aligned state during the

Cold War, demonstrating a robust and inclusive defense strategy against potential threats from any direction.

Specific to this novel doctrine, Yugoslavia's military had two components that provided defense capabilities as part of Total Defense: the YPA and the Territorial Defense (TD). The former was the main military body of the Socialist Federal Republic, comprised of ground forces, a navy, and an air force. Designed to defend the state's sovereignty and socialism, it was a set of military services with professional cadres filled by citizens in mandated conscript service. The latter, formed in 1968, was a reserve ground force of local units constituted in the various Yugoslav republics (Croatia, Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Slovenia, Serbia, and Montenegro) and manned by the resident population of former conscripted soldiers which were to be

mobilized in case of aggression. Both the YPA and TD were tasked to protect the sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of Yugoslavia. However, the Total Defense doctrine assigned a new, greater importance to the TD as it was now required by the doctrine to lead the nation's long-term resistance against an invader, thereby enhancing the YPA's direct warfighting operations against a stronger opponent.

With urgent encouragement from the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, Yugoslavia's 1969 Defense Act further prescribed that it was the right and duty of every Yugoslav to participate in national defense and that authorities at all levels would be part of planning, organizing, and executing the defense of the country.[5] This refined strategic defense design would have the YPA defend against invading enemy forces with traditional warfare techniques. The TD would support the Yugoslav Ground Forces (YGF) along the border as necessary, activate defenses in-depth across all of Yugoslavia, and prepare for partisan warfare if the worst occurred and the country was overrun. Interestingly, Total Defense doctrine actually reduced the previous emphasis on some previous civil protection service activities, such as the wholesale evacuation of populated areas, in lieu of increasing societal resilience through the development of community-based engineering, sanitation, radiation-chemical-biological defense, firefighting, veterinary, and security units.[6] Even with this change, each of the republics' civil protection services remained vital to the success of this Yugoslav triad's success.

Since NATO was not really an offensive geopolitical threat to Yugoslavia and local nation-state competitors acting unilaterally were not either, it is clear that this doctrine was designed to confront the prospect of a large-scale decisive attack led by the Soviet Union. This circumstance would likely have Soviet and Warsaw Pact forces presenting overwhelming forces in classic military terms, characterized by general air superiority, a large-scale armored land invasion, and attempts to quickly seize Belgrade and key cities with parachute and helicopter-borne troops.

Given this most likely scenario, the first task of the YGF would be to employ a defense in-depth while avoiding significant losses, with the effect of delaying the advance of the enemy's penetration. The YGF's units, after withdrawing from border areas, would wage an active defense alongside the TD throughout the country. The expected outcome was a merger of the front and rear, with the transformation of the entire country into a comprehensive defensive system where there were no easy targets for enemy forces to engage. The YGF and TD units would fight on where they controlled the ground, employing conventional tactics. In occupied territories, both urban and rural, TD forces would initiate partisan warfare. If the entire country were conquered and occupied, the YGF would join the TD and transition solely to partisan tactics, as during the Second World War.

This Yugoslav national strategy, which was fully designed, implemented, and exercised by the mid-1970s, is assumed to have been effective in deterring presumed Soviet aggression (as was observed in Czechoslovakia) and was a part of the way of life for Yugoslavia through the 1980s. Consequently, Yugoslavia's Total Defense strategy became the foundation for the Slovenian independence movement's MSNP, which was effective in setting the conditions for Slovenian independence in 1991.

SLOVENIAN POLITICAL PREPARATIONS FOR INDEPENDENCE

Although the disintegration of Yugoslavia began with the death of Tito in 1980, the issuance of the 1974 Yugoslav Constitution provided several legal bases for what would later be used by the Slovenes for the dissolution of the Socialist Federal Republic

of Yugoslavia, including the subordination of the Slovenian TD to the Slovenian republic. While attempting to balance the principles of self-management socialism with the organization of the six constituent Yugoslav republics, the constitution also provided space for the democratization of the social and political systems within Yugoslavia. The consequential disintegration of the socialist ideological model, as well as the reduction of authority of the League of Communists, allowed in late 1989 for the establishment of new political parties across Yugoslavia during the run-up to the scheduled April 1990 elections.[7]

Democratization made the most progress in Croatia and Slovenia, with the other republics in Yugoslavia being slower in their pursuit of autonomy from what was essentially the Serbian-dominated federal republic. The narrative that quickly emerged in Slovenia was that Yugoslavia required a constitutional redefinition that granted the republics more autonomy, with the desired result being Yugoslavia reorganized as a confederation. As part of that, some in Slovenian political leadership, as well as common Slovenians, began calling for the establishment of an independent national state. In the fall of 1989, a coalition of political parties called the Democratic Opposition of Slovenia, known as DEMOS (Demokratična opozicija Slovenije), formed in preparation for the April 1990 Slovenian plebiscite. DEMOS received the majority of votes in that election and positioned itself to form a government for the Slovenian republic in May 1990.

With a clear mandate, the DEMOS government planned to enact legislation and constitutional amendments that created legal and administrative separation between the Slovenian republic and federal Yugoslavia. These measures were to be crucial to the eventual establishment of Slovenia's sovereignty and independence.

THE FEDERAL YUGOSLAV GOVERNMENT RESPONSE IN SLOVENIA

All of this was seen as a significant threat by Yugoslav federal authorities and, particularly the Serb-dominated YPA, which held itself to be the principal guardian of Tito's vision of Yugoslavia. While the federal Yugoslav government led by Ante Marković pursued political means to suppress Slovenian independence moves, the YPA's opposition against this emerging reality manifested itself in several practical actions, including a series of orders that increased YPA scrutiny of TD activities.[8] One of the most significant measures to exert control over the TD was an order issued by Yugoslav Defense Minister Veljko Kadijević on May 15, 1990, which preceded the formation of the DEMOS government of Slovenia by two days. Under the thin veil of modernization and enhanced security, the YPA effectively ended Total Defense as a doctrine and assumed control over the entirety of national defense at the federal level.[9]

This order was passed on to the TD by its Slovenian commander, Lieutenant General Ivan Hočevar. This order immediately nullified Slovenia's 1974 Yugoslav Constitution defense authorities and, in effect, extended authority and actual control over the republic's Territorial Defense weaponry, which were stored in TD barracks as well as municipal armories across Slovenia. The YPA's order required all Slovenian weapons to be transported to YGF military barracks in Slovenia for permanent storage. For those already held at YGF facilities, such as the two-thirds of TD weapons, the locks were changed by YPA officers. With emerging resistance from Slovenian politicians during the course of the confiscation, the YPA was only able to secure about 84% of the TD's weapons.[10]

This very public action taken by the YPA, supported by Slovenia's senior TD leadership that had

Standard of the Federal Secretary of National Defense of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

A view of a Soviet SA-7 Grail surface-to-air missile.

remained loyal to the Yugoslav federal government, caused outrage among the Slovenian republic's political leadership and the Slovenian people writ large. Milan Kučan, the past chairman of the League of Communists but now the newly elected President of the Republic of Slovenia, immediately demanded that the weapons be returned to the TD. Of more immediate concern to Slovenian political authorities was how this planned disarmament would reduce

Slovenia's capability to defend the republic against the emerging threats to Slovenia's move toward independence—both internally and externally.

MANEUVER STRUCTURE OF NATIONAL PROTECTION: THE ORIGINS

It did not take long for Slovenes to begin to implement an unconventional solution that was simultaneously tactical and strategic in nature. At noon on May 17, 1990, news that the YPA intended to confiscate their unit's weapons reached a particular cadre of Slovenian TD officers. With that, the first recognized resistance activity leading to Slovenian independence occurred when some of these officers sent an official letter to the mayors of their municipalities urging them not to surrender their weapons under any circumstances to the YPA and that the municipality should immediately inform the newly elected Slovenian republic of what they were planning to do. Across Slovenia, nascent clandestine activities emerged that were eventually organized to be collectively called the Maneuver Structure of National Protection (MSNP).

Initially self-organized cells of trusted contacts, these underground organizations predictably consisted of the members of the TD, Slovenian civilians, and the Slovenia Militia (Milicija). Of note, the Slovenian Militia was a component of the Socialist Yugoslavia's national police force and the principal law enforcement agency for the republic.[11] It was a gendarmerie-like organization that, while ostensibly a federal organization, was by organization and manning a purely Slovenian entity.

Not surprisingly, their resistance efforts spontaneously developed in line with what would be expected from a population that for generations had been indoctrinated and trained to participate in Yugoslavia's Total Defense. These cells began to collaborate with others and develop plans for Slovenia to stand up against the federal Yugoslav government

and protect the Slovenian republic in the case that the YPA were to intervene in the ongoing democratic processes and eventual democratization of Slovenia—although that end state was not clear in the summer of 1990. At the same time, the members of these cells kept their activities covert and continued their official jobs and obligations, including the official meetings of the TD.

During the development of this shadow organization, the role of Slovenian national identity was clearly playing a crucial part in the country's push toward independence. The sense of national identity has been the primary defining characteristic of the Slovene people throughout history.[12] As the YPA showed its intentions to control the TD, the Slovenes kept these activities secret, in part by having exclusive social spaces that excluded Serb and other Yugoslav nationality officers of the TD and YPA, as well as non-Slovenian Yugoslav bureaucrats. Volunteer fire departments, shooting clubs, and other social activities in Slovenian society served as safe spaces for planning and discussing the national agenda while minimizing the risk of surveillance or interference by those who would oppose the goal of Slovenian independence. Additionally, in 1990, there were still plenty of Slovenian partisans alive who could remember being brutally occupied by the Germans, Italians, and Hungarians, and still retained the knowledge and experience of the consequent resistance movement that evolved into the Liberation Front of the Slovene Nation.[13]

As the summer of 1990 progressed, the threat from the federal Yugoslav government and the YPA to Slovenia's move toward independence became more obvious. The political authorities in Belgrade demonstrated an increasingly negative outlook on the continuation of the democratic process, especially the efforts of the Slovenian and Croatian republics regarding their independence from Belgrade. The efforts to maintain secrecy could only go so far with the original construct of the

underground movement, so a stronger and more extensive organization started forming in July 1990. What was essentially an informal shadow organization that had been derived from the TD and Militia was to become more formal.

The task to continue organizing the nascent resistance and independence movement fell to Janez Janša (Slovenian Minister of Defense) and Igor Bavčar (Slovenian Minister of the Interior), both of whom had been selected for their ministerial roles by Prime Minister of the Slovenian Republic Lojze Peterle after the DEMOS coalition took power. Both Janša and Bavčar had been Slovenian dissidents against the federal Yugoslav overreach that accelerated in the late 1980s and thus were already connected to extensive resistance networks. Knowing that the independence movement needed a more solid concept for its provisional defense organization, they chose Tone Krkovič, one of their close associates who was an officer in the TD and, at that time, commanded a unit in the TD in Kočevje. They also recruited Vinko Beznik, who was commander of the militia training center in Jasnica near Kočevje. Soon thereafter, Jože Kolenc, another senior militia commander, joined these two to form the core leadership of the MSNP.[14]

Between the three of them, Krkovič, Beznik, and Kolenc had relationships that gave them broad access to both the TD and the militia, and they began recruiting people who they trusted to join the MSNP. As their efforts progressed, they used personal networks to form the cadre of this shadow organization and began forming MSNP cells in parallel to all of the official Slovenian republic's military and security organizations: the TD, militia, and civil protection service.[15] Authorized and funded by federal Yugoslavia, the Slovene Civil Protection Service was a purely Slovenian organization that was specifically organized as part of the system for protection against natural and other disasters, and included management bodies, units and services for

protection, rescue, and assistance, protective and rescue equipment, as well as facilities and systems for protection, rescue and assistance.

By September 1990, the MSNP had evolved into its final form. The leaders of the Slovenian republic gave the MSNP's leadership the task of expanding its organization to include cells at every municipality in Slovenia, clarified which TD and militia units would be deliberately included in the secret defense plans and organization, and generally directed them to establish an organized chain of command throughout Slovenia. Krkovič, Beznik, and Kolenc led the establishment of additional clandestine MSNP organizations, with the full chain of command being composed of the headquarters at the Slovenian republic level, thirteen regional commands, and sixty-two headquarters at the municipal level. This command structure was compartmentalized, with the division beginning at the top with two parallel chains of command: one for MSNP cells that supported the TD and one for those that were oriented on militia units. As directed by the Slovenian republic leadership, the military structure was oriented on the TD units that were selected to be mobilized in case of an intervention. These selected TD units comprised approximately 21,000 TD servicemen, which corresponded to the number of weapons that the MSNP had been able to protect from Yugoslav confiscation. An MSNP command structure was also developed for all militia units, comprising 10,000 active and reserve militiamen. With the MSNP structure in place and a tentative defense plan prepared, Janša, Bavčar, Krkovič, Beznik, and Kolenc had a clandestine meeting on September 7 at Pristava nad Stično to adopt and formalize the strategic plan for the defense of the Republic of Slovenia and its eventual independence. This plan included mobilization plans for the TD and militia and deployment plans in anticipation of YPA actions.[16]

THE TASKS OF THE MANEUVER STRUCTURE

With an uncertain future but a plan for Slovenian independence, Slovenia's leadership designed and created the MSNP to fill a command, control, and authority gap that was created when the YPA exerted direct control over the TD, confiscated most of its weapons, and effectively removed the Slovenian republic's capability to employ its military and security forces capability as prescribed by the Total Defense aspects of Yugoslavia's 1974 Constitution. The MSNP became an effective clandestine defense network that continued to prepare for independence while giving decision space to the political leaders of the Slovenian republic as they worked to legally regain control of the TD from the federal Yugoslav government.

Even before it was fully functional, the leadership of the MSNP began working on tasks to prepare for a direct fight with the YPA. They did so at all echelons, from the clandestine cells in the towns and villages to the halls of the Slovenian republic's parliament. As the organization matured, it was able to take on more complex tasks while successfully maintaining operational security.

ARMS PROCUREMENT AND STORAGE

After most of the TD's modern weapons came under the control of the YPA, Slovenia faced significant challenges in rearming the TD due to the complexities of international arms trading and the need to keep these efforts hidden from Yugoslav authorities. Arms procurement was carried out through various covert operations, often involving complex international transactions and smuggling routes.[17] Some specific examples of arms procurement efforts include:

- **Purchase of Arms Abroad:** MSNP agents engaged in covert operations to purchase arms

from foreign countries. This often involved middlemen and complex logistical arrangements to transport weapons into Slovenia without detection by Yugoslav or international authorities. The MSNP created or co-opted international smuggling networks to bring weapons into Slovenia. These networks often operated under the guise of civilian commercial operations to avoid detection and often involved the tacit, if not deliberate, collaboration of nearby European countries. In addition to small arms, this included covertly purchased lightweight anti-tank and anti-aircraft missile systems from abroad, including SA-7 Grail (Strela) anti-aircraft missile systems and German-designed Armbrust anti-tank systems.

- **Domestic Production and Modification:** Members of the MSNP also initiated efforts to produce or modify existing weapons and equipment within its borders. This included the adaptation of industrial facilities for the production of arms and the modification of civilian vehicles for military use.[18]

- **Clandestine Weapons Storage:** The MSNP developed a network of secret storage facilities for weapons and ammunition across Slovenia. These included barns, caves, vineyard cottages, and other locations that were difficult for those Yugoslavs who were not part of Slovenian society to access. Additionally, MSNP leadership was able to move heavy arms that had escaped seizure by the YPA to clandestine locations in neighboring Croatia.[19]

- **Theft and Seizure from YPA Armories:** The TD's arms and military equipment were stored by the YPA at munitions storage centers located within Slovenia, as were significant YPA war stocks. With MSNP guidance, TD officers used the pretense of training requirements, subterfuge, and the general confusion surrounding

this issue to draw weapons and ammunition from YPA storage with assurances that they would be returned accordingly. The TD subsequently did not return these munitions and hid them. Additionally, deliberate plans were developed for Slovenian forces to quickly seize these arsenals upon the initiation of conflict, thus gaining access to a substantial cache of weapons and military equipment.[20]

TRAINING

The MSNP focused on training individuals and small units in guerrilla warfare tactics, recognizing the need to conduct an asymmetrical defense against any YPA action against Slovenia. This training was crucial due to the Slovenian forces being significantly outnumbered and outgunned by the YPA; however, it really complemented the existing training that was already provided to TD and militia units as part of Yugoslavia's Total Defense doctrine. The MSNP's operational design included preparing for hit-and-run operations and ambush strategies, especially in Slovenia's challenging terrain, to maximize their defensive capabilities despite limited resources and manpower.

INTELLIGENCE AND SURVEILLANCE

The MSNP's intelligence and surveillance efforts were essential for monitoring YPA activities as well as the activities of TD units that remained out of the tacit control of the MSNP. By closely observing troop movements and gathering critical information on the YPA plans, the MSNP could strategically position Slovenian forces and prepare for imminent engagements. This intelligence gathering was not just limited to military observation but also included political and strategic insights, allowing Slovenia to anticipate and counteract the moves of the YPA effectively. In a parallel effort, the

Slovenian Agency for State Security, also part of the independence plot, deliberately provided deceptive information through liaison to intelligence officers at Yugoslavia's Directorate for State Security.[21]

CONTINUOUS DEFENSE PLANNING

The MSNP's military planning included identifying and fortifying critical locations and infrastructure within Slovenia to ensure a robust defense against potential YPA aggression. This involved a meticulous evaluation of geographic and strategic assets that could provide tactical advantages or were essential for maintaining Slovenia's operational capabilities during the eventual conflict.

FINAL POLITICAL MOVES

In the meantime, the political struggle between federal Yugoslavia and the Slovenian republic continued. The TD's commanding general, Hočevar, although Slovene, remained loyal to Yugoslavia and continued efforts to keep the TD under the control of federal Yugoslavia. As such, the Slovenian republic political authorities decided to fix the paralyzed military system of the TD through constitutional action. Since, due to the legal-political circumstances, the only way to do this was to amend the constitution, the Slovenian authorities drew up two constitutional amendments, which the Slovenian republican assembly adopted on September 28, 1990. These two Slovenian constitutional amendments, within authorities provided by the existing Yugoslav federal constitution, gave full Slovenian control of the TD back to the Slovenian government and ceased the provision of Slovenian draftee soldiers to the YPA as part of the annual conscription cycle. The adoption of the constitutional amendments meant that legally, the Slovenian authorities could take over the management and command of the TD despite the resolute opposi-tion of the federal authorities and the leadership of the YPA. So, on 28 September 1990, the Slovenian Presidency appointed an acting commander of the TD of Slovenia, reserve Major Janez Slapar, who had until then been the regional commander of the National Defense for the Gorenjska region. With the fix in place, Krkovič transferred the command of the MSNP to Slapar on October 3.

ASSESSMENT OF THE MSNP'S ACTIONS

With the ability to completely control the assignment of officers assigned to the TD, the Slovenian republic had completed the navigation of a crucial, risky period with what was essentially its own army under its control. The MSNP had played a pivotal role in the clandestine preparation for the country's defense during its transition to independence. Formed as an informal defense network due to distrust in the YPA's intentions and the YPA's control over the TD, the MSNP was legalized by the Slovenian republic's government led by DEMOS, yet it remained a secret organization as long as it needed to.

The MSNP had embarked on a series of crucial tasks aimed at preparing for a potential war with the YPA. These tasks included coordinated action planning, war planning, intelligence gathering, organization of independence forces, and the establishment of secret weapon and military equipment storage facilities.

With the support of the MSNP, Slovenia's militia were prepared to be involved in various operations against the YPA, highlighting the strategic importance of the Slovenian republic's internal security forces in preparation for independence. The integration of the militia into the broader defense strategy enabled by the MSNP allowed Slovenia to effectively mobilize its full resources in preparation for independence.

The MSNP was established amidst the crucial phase of Slovenia's push for independence, tailored to the specific political and military realities of the time. It represented a multifaceted initiative that required a comprehensive approach, blending elements of military strategy and political foresight. Initially rooted in the need for self-defense in response to the YPA disarmament efforts against the TD in May 1990, the MSNP also served as a covert command network. This network not only facilitated clandestine control over the TD, which was technically part of the Yugoslav armed forces, but also symbolized the burgeoning Slovenian leadership's efforts to assert autonomy. Ultimately, the MSNP embodied the conceptualization of Slovenia's distinct defense forces, integrating both military and militia units in a unique defense framework.[22]

A COMPARISON WITH THE THEMES OF THE ROC

The themes that emerge from a contemporary analysis of the Resistance Operating Concept (ROC) with the Slovenian independence movement's application of similar themes are found in four areas: organizational structures, legal maneuvers, societal involvement, and psychological elements.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES

ROC Themes:

- Emphasizes a structured resistance organization, including a clear hierarchy and roles such as underground networks, guerrilla units, auxiliary support, and a shadow government.

- Advocates for interoperability among national forces and those of allies and partners, ensuring a coordinated effort across all levels of society and government.

Slovenian Application:

- The Slovenian independence movement established the MSNP, integrating military and civil defense components to form a cohesive resistance network against Yugoslav forces.

- The MSNP served as a decentralized yet co-ordinated framework, leveraging local territorial defense units and incorporating civilian support structures, embodying the ROC's envisioned organizational structure. This element was also responsible for managing the movement of arms from outside of Slovenia: both from illicit sources and through covert partnerships with neighboring countries.

The ROC's guidance on structured hierarchical resistance is mirrored in the Slovenian MSNP's approach, which integrated military, militia, and civilian components into a unified defense system. This alignment in organizational structure ensured effective command, control, and communication, essential for coordinated resistance efforts. In the Slovenian case, the blending of professional and civilian resources created a versatile and adaptable defense mechanism, embodying the ROC's advocacy for such integrated defense forces. This organizational strategy was crucial in mobilizing resources efficiently and responding to various challenges during the independence movement.

LEGAL MANEUVERS

ROC Themes:

- Stresses the importance of establishing a legal framework to legitimize resistance efforts, ensuring internal and international support while maintaining the rule of law.

- Legal preparations are critical for the resilience

and sustainability of resistance operations, providing a moral and legal basis for actions taken during the resistance.

Slovenian Application:

- Slovenia's path to independence was marked by significant legal maneuvers, including the constitutional amendments that transferred control of the Territorial Defense forces from federal Yugoslav authorities to the Slovenian republic, legitimizing their defensive efforts.

- These legal steps not only empowered the Slovenian defense structures but also reinforced the legal and moral grounds for independence, aligning with the ROC's emphasis on legal preparedness.

Adhering to the ROC's themes, Slovenia utilized legal frameworks to legitimize its independence movement and defense strategies. Through constitutional amendments and legal restructuring, Slovenia established a solid legal foundation for its actions, akin to the ROC's emphasis on legal support for resistance. This approach not only provided legal legitimacy to the Slovenian resistance but also aligned their actions with international laws and norms, which is a critical aspect underlined in the ROC.

SOCIETAL INVOLVEMENT

ROC Themes:

- Advocates for a whole-of-society approach, engaging all segments of the population in resistance efforts, from direct military involvement to support and logistics.

- Encourages the development of national resilience through widespread societal participation, fostering a unified national identity and

purpose.

Slovenian Application:

- The Slovenian independence movement saw extensive societal involvement, with civilians actively participating in the MSNP, supporting logistical operations, and contributing to the national defense effort.

- This widespread participation was indicative of a strong national identity and resolve, mirroring the ROC's themes of societal involvement and resilience.

Reflecting the ROC's whole-of-society approach, the Slovenian independence movement extensively involved civilians in its defense plans, ensuring widespread public support. This societal involvement was crucial for the movement's success as it fostered a sense of collective responsibility and unity. This strategy aligns with the ROC's theme that emphasizes public support and participation in resistance, demonstrating the power of a united societal front in the face of challenges.

PSYCHOLOGICAL ELEMENTS

ROC Themes:

- Highlights the importance of psychological preparation and the role of strategic communications in building resilience and maintaining morale among the population and resistance fighters.

- Psychological operations are deemed crucial for undermining the enemy's efforts and bolstering the resistance's resolve.

Slovenian Application:

- The Slovenian movement extensively utilized psychological elements, maintaining high morale and a sense of national purpose through strategic communications and the promotion of a unified Slovenian identity.

- The effective use of media and public messaging to counter Yugoslav propaganda efforts played a key role in sustaining the psychological resilience of the Slovenian population.

The psychological preparation and resilience discussed in the ROC were evident in the Slovenian experience. Maintaining public morale and a steadfast belief in the independence cause was pivotal in sustaining the movement, especially during difficult periods. This focus on psychological resilience mirrors the ROC's emphasis on mental preparedness and highlights the importance of maintaining a positive and determined mindset in resistance efforts. The Slovenian case exemplifies how psychological strength and resilience can be decisive factors in the success of a resistance or independence movement.

A CLEAR CONNECTION BETWEEN THE THEMES OF THE ROC AND SLOVENIA'S INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT

Similarities

The Slovenian independence movement's strategies and themes closely align with those outlined in the ROC. The organizational structures, legal maneuvers, societal involvement, and psychological elements of the Slovenian movement reflect a practical application of ROC's theoretical framework, demonstrating the effectiveness and relevance of such themes in a real-world context of national defense and resistance.

The Slovenian preparation for independence and the ROC doctrine share several key similarities. The ROC advocates for a comprehensive approach to resistance, emphasizing the need for early and thorough preparation. Similarly, prior to declaring independence, Slovenia undertook extensive preparatory actions. Both approaches underscore the importance of establishing robust legal and organizational frameworks as a foundation for effective resistance or independence movements.

One of the main areas of alignment is in the development of legal structures. The ROC recommends establishing legal frameworks that support resistance activities, ensuring that actions taken are grounded in law. Slovenia mirrored this approach by implementing constitutional amendments and legal reforms, which were instrumental in legitimizing their independence movement, maintaining control of the Slovenian republic's defense structures, and aligning it with international standards.

Organizational preparedness is another common thread. The ROC stresses the importance of creating structured, hierarchical resistance organizations with clear lines of command and communication. In Slovenia, the formation of the MSNP exemplified this theme. It was a well-organized structure combining military, militia, and civilian elements into a unified defense mechanism. This organizational strategy was crucial for mobilizing resources efficiently and for effective coordination during the independence movement.

Lastly, both the ROC and the Slovenian strategy highlight the role of societal involvement. The ROC advocates for a whole-of-society approach where public support and participation are critical. In Slovenia, the independence movement saw extensive civilian involvement, ensuring widespread public support and fostering a sense of collective responsibility and unity.

Slovenian Partisans

DISSIMILARITIES

While there are significant parallels between the Slovenian independence preparations and the ROC doctrine, there are also notable dissimilarities. One key difference lies in the context and impetus for action. The ROC is primarily focused on resistance against foreign occupation or aggression, whereas the Slovenian effort was a movement towards independence from an existing political union, driven by nationalistic and democratic aspirations. This difference in context influenced the strategic emphasis and the nature of preparations.

Furthermore, the ROC emphasizes psychological operations and information warfare as integral parts of preparation, aiming to undermine the adversary's will and legitimacy. In contrast, Slovenia's focus was more on consolidating internal support and strengthening its own legitimacy rather than engaging in psychological operations against the Yugoslav regime.

Additionally, the scope of civilian involvement, as recommended by the ROC, involves a broader range of societal functions, including covert intelligence gathering and civil disobedience. The Slovenian approach, while inclusive of civilian participation, was more concentrated on formalizing a national defense structure rather than organizing widespread civilian resistance activities. Regardless, civilian support for resistance, directly and indirectly, emerged upon conflict initiation. These

included activities that seem natural to perform as part of part Slovenia's multigenerational implementation of Yugoslavia's Total Defense Doctrine. These included the establishment of barricades on major routes into the capital using civilian buses and commercial trucks, and providing TD soldiers with food and lodging as they deployed into defensive positions.

These differences highlight the nuanced adaptations of resistance concepts to fit the unique circumstances of Slovenia's path to independence, underscoring the flexibility required in applying theoretical models like the ROC to specific historical and geopolitical contexts.

In conclusion, the Slovenian independence movement's strategic maneuvers, organizational resilience, and societal mobilization offer a compelling real-world embodiment of the Resistance Operating Concept's (ROC) identified themes. Through the establishment of the Maneuver Structure of National Protection (MSNP), Slovenia effectively navigated the complex terrain of legal restructuring, civic engagement, and psychological warfare, thereby orchestrating a swift and relatively peaceful transition to sovereignty.

Applying the themes of the ROC to the Slovenian independence project involves acknowledging the differences between resisting an occupation and striving for independence from an oppressive central government. The ROC emphasizes the importance of a whole-of-society approach, which can be seen in the Slovenian context, where various societal and governmental elements, including civilians, were integral to the resistance efforts. The ROC's focus on resilience, legal frameworks, and psychological preparation aligns with how Slovenia organized its defense, demonstrating adaptability, legal maneuvering (such as constitutional amendments), and widespread societal support for independence.

This historical episode not only validates the ROC's advocacy for a comprehensive, whole-of-society approach to resistance but also underscores the indispensable role of legal legitimacy, organized resistance structures, and the unifying force of national identity in the face of external aggression. As such, the Slovenian experience serves as an instructive model for nations developing resistance strategies within the ROC framework, illustrating the adaptability of these themes across varied geopolitical landscapes, and the intrinsic power of a society united in its quest for independence and self-determination. PRISM

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The Iatrogenic Paradox
When Information Operations Undermine Strategic Objectives

By Daniel Eerhart

INTRODUCTION

Shortly following the traumatic events of September 11, 2001, the U.S. military entered Afghanistan to topple the Taliban government and dismantle al-Qaeda, costing the United States over $2 trillion and 2,324 American military lives.[1] Counterinsurgency doctrine served as the core strategy in Afghanistan and attempted to win "hearts and minds" to reduce popular support for the Taliban.[2] Despite two decades of advanced information operations integrated into tactical successes, the Taliban's strength grew from approximately 45,000 personnel in 2001 to a current reported strength of 164,918 in 2024.[3] The alarming iatrogenic impact of America's most protracted war demands reevaluating the U.S. military approach to information operations, particularly the concept of iatrogenic influence, where information operations produce outcomes contrary to their intent. As U.S. policymakers grapple with their strategies in a global information war, evaluating historical roles and responsibilities will help illuminate the most efficient areas to concentrate resources. This paper argues that ineffective and often counterproductive military information operations necessitate a fundamental reassessment of their role within U.S. strategy. The iatrogenic outcomes of the Afghanistan war demonstrate that rather than serving as a panacea for influence, military information operations must be narrowly focused, carefully integrated with non-military efforts, and isolated against strategic backlash.

The lessons drawn from Afghanistan extend beyond counterinsurgency and raise questions about how the United States should engage in the global information environment against state and non-state actors alike. Throughout history, propaganda, information, and influence have been necessary tools of war. However, the formalized existence of information operations organizations within the military is relatively new. Historically, non-military actors have led operations to inform and influence populations. As the military

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transitions away from the counterinsurgency strategies of the Global War on Terror (GWOT) and develops expertise for large-scale combat operations (LSCO), it should reevaluate the utility and limitations of military information operations. This paper examines the U.S. information operations landscape and assesses current capabilities. Then, the role of information operations and iatrogenic influence is examined in the context of the war in Afghanistan to explore whether military information operations are a viable tool for achieving strategic objectives. This paper offers recommendations to refine the role of military information operations and better integrate U.S. information efforts to reduce iatrogenic influence and maximize effectiveness. The analysis aims to generate greater effectiveness and strategic impact in the information domain by addressing the limitations of military information operations.

INFORMATION OPERATIONS: CONCEPTS AND CHALLENGES

The Department of Defense (DOD) defines Information Operations within Joint Publication 3-13 as "the integrated employment, during military operations, of information-related capabilities in concert with other lines of operation to influence, disrupt, corrupt, or usurp the decision-making of adversaries and potential adversaries."[4] This definition emphasizes that information operations occur during military operations and have a specific purpose to support military objectives. Successful information operations rely upon the effective integration of information-related capabilities. While integrating multiple information-related capabilities generates a comprehensive information strategy, this analysis primarily focuses on the capabilities that involve disseminating an information product (such as leaflets, radio broadcasts, or internet posts) to a target audience. Joint Publication 3-13 outlines fourteen information-related capabilities.[5] The following

Central Command Area of Responsibility (Mar. 21, 2003) Coalition aircraft dropped leaflets urging Iraqi personnel to stay clear of military operations. Leaflets also laid out the consequences of such actions in an effort to ensure local civilian populations are properly informed.

are particularly relevant, as they frequently involve the dissemination of products or influencing the transfer of information:

1. Electronic warfare: using the electromagnetic spectrum to disrupt or degrade adversary communications and systems.[6] During the war in Ukraine, military forces have jammed adversary Global Positioning System (GPS) signals to disrupt the ability to guide precision munitions, such as the Excalibur GPS-guided artillery shells and High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS).[7]

2. Cyberspace Operations: activities conducted in the cyber domain to achieve objectives, often grouped into offensive, defensive, and Department of Defense Information Network (DOD-IN).[8] Prior to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, hackers disrupted the Viasat communication network in an attempt to provide a tactical advantage to invading forces.

3. Military Information Support Operations (MISO): activities that seek to influence a target audience's perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors.[9] Sometimes referred to as Psychological Operations. During the 2003 U.S. invasion

of Iraq, psychological operations forces used leaflets and radios to persuade Baath Party fighters to surrender.

4. Civil-Military Operations: operations that foster a relationship between military and civilian populations, governments, or organizations.[10] Civil affairs soldiers deployed to Africa have provided training and medical care to the local populations.[11]

5. Military Deception: involves deliberately misleading adversaries to influence their decision-making.[12] During World War II, British intelligence officials led *Operation Mincemeat*, which allowed Spanish soldiers to discover a fictitious British officer as part of plans to disguise the 1943 Allied invasion of Sicily.[13]

6. Public Affairs: activities to provide public audiences with accurate and timely communication of military operations and objectives.[14] Following the capture of Saddam Hussein, U.S. military officials spoke with reporters and held a press conference to discuss the capture.[15]

Within information operations, there is potential for an operation to result in iatrogenic influence, which draws from the medical term of iatrogenesis, where the effects of disease treatment create adverse

Two US Army Military Police escort a detainee to a cell at Camp X-Ray, Guantanamo Bay Navy Base, Cuba, the holding facility for detainees held at the US Navy Base during *Operation Enduring Freedom*.

outcomes that are often worse than the disease.[16] For example, in 2002, the U.S. military established Camp X-Ray in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.[17] During the camp opening, U.S. military public affairs took photos of the detainees in orange jumpsuits, surrounded by barbed wire with their eyes and ears covered.[18] The intent for the deliberate release of the photos was to build trust within the international community that the United States was treating prisoners within the guidelines of the Geneva Convention.[19] However, the photos spurred outrage throughout the world. Throughout the GWOT, violent extremist organizations used the Camp X-Ray photos as evidence of American cruelty.[20] Had the public affairs officials understood the indicators of iatrogenic influence, they may have modified their communication plan. Table 1 summarizes key indicators of iatrogenic influence, providing practitioners with a framework to identify potential risks.

Within information operations, iatrogenic influence primarily occurs when there is a lack of credibility within the target audience, a lack of planning by disseminating forces, or information fratricide contradicting other messaging. Information fratricide occurs when different information-related capabilities inadvertently conflict, undermining each other's effectiveness.[21] For example, if a leaflet asks the audience to call a phone number, then the Soldiers jam phones. Similarly, a MISO campaign to counter adversary propaganda may inadvertently amplify adversary messages if it fails to anticipate how the target audience processes information, particularly among broad general audiences. Cultural competence and an awareness of the iatrogenic influence indicators enable commanders to reduce the risks of negative externalities if they understand the information environment rooted in examples of iatrogenic influence.

The information-influence relational framework is a core component of information operation planning, which provides a structured approach to

shaping audience behavior.[22] Information Operations practitioners perform the integrated application of information-related capabilities within the information-influence relational framework to identify a target audience, cultivate an understanding of how the target audience receives information, and utilize information-related capabilities to achieve the desired behavior. The information-influence relational framework serves as a tool for planning and supporting all phases of military operations. It uses designated means and ways to achieve an end through the influence of a target audience.
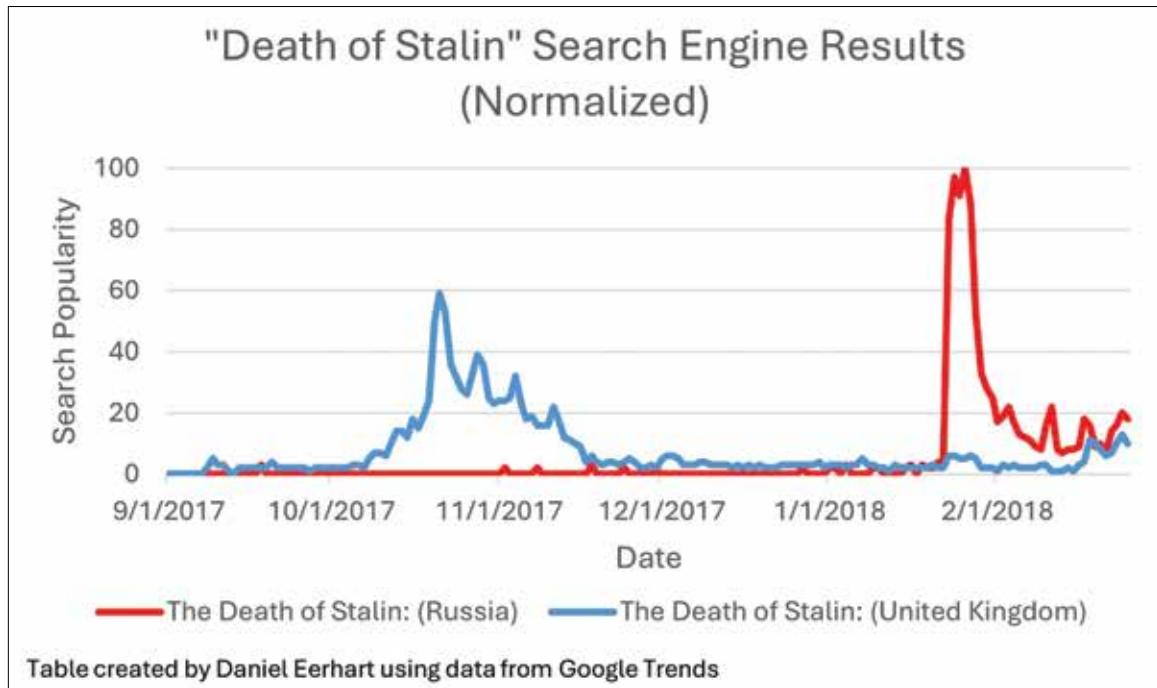
Information operations primarily serve as a means of influencing, disrupting, corrupting, or usurping adversary decision-making. Within military planning, there is frequent consideration of the "OODA Loop," a decision-making process that involves observing the operating environment,

Table 1: Iatrogenic Influence Indicators
(First Presented by Daniel Eerhart at Post-9/11 Lessons Learned Conference)

Indicator	Description	Risk
Broad General Audience	The operation targets a broad, general audience rather than a specific group, which makes performing target audience analysis difficult.	The messages may be misrepresented or misinterpreted, resulting in rejection, resentment, confusion, or opposition.
Inconsistent Delivery Mechanism	The dissemination method is inconsistent with the desired behavior or outcome.	The target audience may question the nature of the messages and perceive them as superficial.
False Cultural Lens	The operation's disseminators view products through their own cultural lens rather than the target audience's perspective.	Messages may inadvertently provoke backlash or negative emotions for violating the target audience's cultural norms, beliefs, or values.
Inconsistent Messaging/ Information Fratricide	Inconsistent or contradictory messaging among various stakeholders that are supposed to be mutually supportive.	Undermines credibility and leads to skepticism or confusion about messaging and the messengers.
Historical Mistrust	The target audience has a history of mistrust or negative perceptions towards the source.	Messages are more likely to be dismissed or viewed skeptically, exacerbating existing tensions.
Deceptive Tactics	The campaign relies on deception, disinformation, or manipulation.	Loss of credibility and trust if deception is uncovered; adversaries can exploit to discredit the campaign.
Ethical and Moral Concerns	Tactics or messages raise ethical or moral concerns.	It provokes outrage and condemnation, undermining the operation's legitimacy and enabling adversary propaganda.
Insufficient Feedback Mechanisms	There are no mechanisms to gather and respond to feedback from the target audience.	Adverse reactions may go unnoticed and unaddressed, allowing iatrogenic influence to grow.
Over-Simplification of Issues	Campaign oversimplifies complex issues.	They are perceived as superficial or patronizing, failing to resonate and potentially reinforcing adversary narratives.
Dynamic and Rapidly Changing Environment	The environment is dynamic and rapidly changing.	Messages can become outdated or irrelevant, perceived as incompetent or detached from current realities.

Figure 1: Normalized Search Engine Results 2017 - 2018

"Death of Stalin" Search Engine Results (Normalized)

The Death of Stalin: (Russia) — The Death of Stalin: (United Kingdom)

Table created by Daniel Eerhart using data from Google Trends

orienting observations, deciding on an optimal course of action, and then acting on the course of action.[23] By integrating an operational option that does not involve the tactical application of force, Commanders gain an alternative for disrupting an adversary's OODA Loop, mitigating the risk to its tactical forces. The rise of ubiquitous digital communication platforms has transformed the application of information operations and transitioned controlled information flows to cascading networks.

A CASE STUDY IN IATROGENIC INFLUENCE: *THE DEATH OF STALIN*

An example of iatrogenic influence occurred in 2018 when the Russian government banned the satirical film *The Death of Stalin*. The film had low public awareness among the Russian people, had minimal promotion, and only anticipated a few screenings. On January 22, 2018, the Russian Ministry of Culture held a private movie screening for govern-

ment and cultural figures.[24] Just before the movie's scheduled release on January 25, 2018, the Ministry of Culture revoked the movie's distribution license and banned the movie from public screenings.[25] The Russian government used a multi-medium approach in their attempt to decrease viewership of the film, including official statements to the press, critical commentaries, newspaper articles supporting the ban, and use of social media influencers on Vkontakte (VK) and Twitter.[26]

Despite being released in the United Kingdom in October of 2017,[27] search engine data indicates that the movie had very little publicity in the United Kingdom and almost no publicity within Russia. Search engine analytic data indicates that on January 23, 2018, when the government implemented the ban, the search engine interest experienced a dramatic spike, reaching 83 on the normalized scale (approximately 27 times higher than the previous day's value of 3). On January

26, the search interest rose again three days later, increasing to 100 on the normalized scale. This spike represents an interest level 33 times higher than the pre-ban value of 3. The Russian government's efforts to suppress interest in the film fueled public curiosity and piracy. One theater, the Pioneer Cinema in Moscow, played the movie despite the ban.[28]

Even for the Russian government, with complete control over dissemination methods and a synchronized cultural background, the iatrogenic effect of the ban far surpassed any fallout that may have occurred through allowing the film to show or limiting the showing license. One critical lesson within the information environment is that inaction is always an option. It can often be the most prudent approach to prevent cascading effects, even if it conflicts with a leader's desire to act. Achieving an information advantage necessitates a long-term strategy, where accepting a temporary setback can be preferable to enduring a prolonged and comprehensive failure.

The Russian movie ban is just one example of iatrogenic influence, where information operations inadvertently counteract the desired behavior. Throughout the GWOT, coalition forces repeatedly misstepped in the information environment, unable to achieve success in the war for "Hearts and Minds." Since September 11, 2001, the U.S. government has rapidly and meaningfully expanded its capabilities to operate within the information environment.[29] Military and non-military organizations keep expanding their capabilities to engage in the global "information war," even though such a conflict cannot be decisively "won." The information environment functions more like a stock market, with infinite potential participants and no clear signal of victory. Instead, state actors should concentrate on providing consistent and persistent influence while maintaining the ability for short, rapid spikes supporting tactical objectives. The military provides necessary short spikes, while

non-military capabilities provide the enduring global influence. Achieving this end state requires an inventory of military and non-military information operations assets and clearly distinguishing areas for each asset's focus. The Russian government's experience illustrates how iatrogenic influence can amplify poorly calibrated information operations. The case study underscores the necessity for military and non-military organizations to refine their operational approaches to meet the challenges of a complex and dynamic information environment.

THE EVOLUTION OF NON-MILITARY INFORMATION OPERATIONS

The Russian government's difficulties during its ban on the Death of Stalin highlight the importance of well-planned information operations. As long as the military has existed, it has had a vested interest in competing in the information environment to enable commanders an advantage in battle, while non-military information operations have historically shouldered the responsibility for influencing populations. The Committee on Public Information (CPI), established during World War I, was the first non-military U.S. governmental organization concentrating on propaganda, disinformation, and influence activities.[30] Established in 1917 under President Woodrow Wilson, the CPI had domestic and foreign branches supporting and enabling U.S. efforts during World War One.[31] Domestically, the CPI generated public support for the war using speeches, films, leaflets, and posters to spread pro-American messages.[32] The foreign branches focused on Europe and Latin America, using similar mediums to build support for U.S. war efforts.[33] Despite serving as a temporary organization, the CPI was the U.S. government's first attempt at non-military information operations.

In 1940, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, concerned about intelligence gaps as the Second World

War loomed, directed General William Donovan to draft plans for an intelligence service based on the British MI6.[34] Donovan recommended establishing a single agency capable of performing specialized operations, including disinformation activities. In June 1942, President Roosevelt established the Office of Strategic Services with a Morale Operations Branch specializing in psychological warfare and propaganda being established in January of 1943.[35] While CPI primarily utilized overt propaganda to build popular support for American ideals openly, the OSS specialized in more clandestine methods such as spreading disinformation, forging documents, misattributed leaflets, and fake broadcasts.[36] The OSS covert operations complemented the Office of War Information's (OWI) more overt efforts and drove the potential for information operations into new territory.

After the disbanding of the OSS in 1945, the Central Intelligence Group became the immediate successor to centralized U.S. Intelligence Efforts.[37] Later, in 1947, the Central Intelligence Agency was established and adopted the OSS's previous roles in covert operations.[38] The CIA adopted psychological warfare and information operations capabilities, such as the establishment of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL).[39] RFE/RL was established by the CIA in 1949, targeting Soviet satellite states and the Soviet Union to counter the appeal of communism.[40] In addition to radio broadcasts, the operations included leaflet drops through meteorological balloons, rallies, rumors, and movies as the CIA continued to evolve its information operations capabilities.[41]

President Dwight Eisenhower established the United States Information Agency to complement the CIA's covert operations, focusing on overt public diplomacy and influence campaigns.[42] The USIA aimed to counter the spread of communism globally by disseminating messages that told the American story to the world. Building a positive impression of the United States involved the establishment of Voice of America (VOA).[43] This pro-U.S. radio broadcast service provided uncensored news in regions where the governments may have restricted access to information.[44] In addition to radio, the USIA produced magazines, films, and pamphlets tailored for foreign audiences while providing traveling libraries of American literature and educational materials.[45]

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, members of Congress began to question the utility of the USIA. The Foreign Affairs Reform and Restructuring Act of 1998, Division G of the Omnibus Consolidated and Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act dissolved the USIA, with broadcast services transitioning to the Broadcasting Board of Governors, and the U.S. Department of State absorbed its remaining functions under the Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy.[46] The Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy leads overt U.S.-attributed information operations, providing a range of methods from digital media through traditional television and radio broadcasts and in-person exchanges like the Fulbright program and international visitor leadership program.

In 2011, President Barrack Obama issued Executive Order 13584 to expand the State Department's information Operations capabilities and establish the Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications (CSCC).[47] The center's mission was to support communication activities against violent extremism and terrorist organizations. In 2016, the organization was renamed the Global Engagement Center, and in 2017, the center's mission expanded to address foreign propaganda, misinformation, and disinformation operations.[48] Prior to its closure on December 23rd, 202, the center had five interconnected areas:[49]

1. Analytics and research

2. International partnerships

3. Programs and campaigns

4. Exposure

5. Technology assessment and engagement

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy led the U.S. international effort to address disinformation about vaccine safety and influence global health efforts by disseminating factual information through embassies and international broadcasts.[50] In 2018, the Broadcasting Board of Governors, which oversaw the U.S. broadcasting entities, was renamed the United States Agency for Global Media.[51] Despite its roots in the CIA and State Department, the USAGM is an independent government organization that does not have any requirement to synchronize or coordinate with any other U.S. information operations-related agency. While its independent status lends credibility to its journalist qualifications, it remains a U.S. government organization operating within the information sphere without guidance or synchronization with other information-related organizations.

Outside the State Department, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence oversees the U.S. government's most significant non-military information operations capabilities. The Office of the Director of National Intelligence oversees the U.S. government's intelligence agencies.[52] Organizations with roles in Information Operations, such as the Central Intelligence Agency, National Security Agency, and Federal Bureau of Investigation, receive oversight from the ODNI. Additionally, the ODNI maintains five centers that have roles in the information environment. The five centers are:[53]

1. National Counterproliferation and Biosecurity Center

2. National Counterintelligence and Security Center

3. National Counterterrorism Center

4. Foreign Malign Influence Center

5. Cyber Threat Intelligence and Integration Center

Each ODNI center plays a role in the information environment. The NCTC publishes alerts and warnings, the NCSC performs outreach and awareness campaigns, the NCBC discourages and deters the acquisition of WMD resources, the CTIIC influences cyber threat actors, and the FMIC exposes and deters foreign influence threat actors.

Non-military government agencies shoulder the most considerable burden of information operations, leading efforts in both overt and covert operations. The immense resources devoted to influencing foreign populations and protecting U.S. citizens from foreign malign influence results in consistent and persistent messaging in the information environment to support U.S. national objectives. However, during times of crisis and conflict, the U.S. government turns to DOD to lead information operations in support of military objectives. While non-military agencies have led U.S. government information operations in both overt and covert capacities, times of crisis or conflict may necessitate the supplanting of civilian agencies by military information operations. DOD's primacy in areas of conflict is primarily due to the inability of civilian agencies to reach target audiences or have any immediacy in performing influence activities.

STRUCTURE AND CAPABILITIES OF MILITARY INFORMATION OPERATIONS

While non-military agencies lead U.S. information operations in most contexts, DOD's structure and capabilities require it to dominate during crises or conflicts. This section examines the organization and capabilities of military information operations. DOD maintains eleven Combatant Commands, each led by a four-star General and supported by Service Component Commands representing the various military branches.[54] For example, U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) has the service component commands of U.S. Army Central (ARCENT), U.S.

Naval Forces Central Command (NAVCENT), U.S. Air Forces Central Command (AFCENT), U.S. Marine Corps Forces Central Command (MARCENT), U.S. Special Operations Command Central (SOCCENT), and U.S. Space Forces Central (SPACECENT).[55] Despite each service having a different lexicon regarding operations in the information environment,[56] each service maintains a deputy operations officer responsible for overseeing MISO, operations security, data science, and operations research to support the commander's objectives.[57]

Beyond the geographically aligned combatant commands, three functional combatant commands maintain significant information operations capabilities.[58] Under U.S. Special Operations Command, the Joint MISO Webops Center (JMWC) conducts internet-based MISO.[59] U.S. Strategic Command maintains the Joint Information Operations Warfare Center (JIOWC),[60] which coordinates and executes information operations at the strategic level in support of the Joint Chief of Staff to "meet combatant command information-related requirements, improve the development of information-related capabilities, and ensure operational integration and coherence across combatant commands and other DOD activities."[61] For instance, the Joint MISO WebOps Center conducts internet-based influence campaigns to counter adversary disinformation. At the same time, the Joint Information Operations Warfare Center supports strategic-level operations by integrating information-related capabilities across multiple domains. Lastly, there is the U.S. Cyber Command, which is building up the Theater Information Advantage Detachments.[62]

In February of 2024, the Army Force Structure Transformation Plan approved the creation of three TIADs.[63] One TIAD will support the European theater, a second will support the Pacific region, and the third will serve as an interterritorial detachment under the U.S. Army Cyber Command.[64] The TIADs combine information-related capabilities, such as cyber, electronic warfare, data system engineers, information operations, intelligence, and psychological operations, into a cohesive team capable of obtaining an information advantage.[65] The establishment of TIADs reflects a recognition of the increasing importance of integrated information capabilities in modern conflict. These detachments aim to give commanders a decisive information advantage in complex operational environments by consolidating cyber, intelligence, and psychological operations under a single framework.

As military information capabilities continue to expand, the question remains about what role the military should play within the information sphere. The military operates under strict legal frameworks that necessarily limit the ability to perform activities domestically. In the international realm, the military strictly follows international law and maintains domestic oversight of its activities. The result is an ethical military structure that performs its duties with restraint and can account for its activities publicly. What role should the military play in the grey zone of information operations, and can it even compete against adversaries not abiding by the same moral obligations? As the military continues to expand its information-related capabilities, its role in the information environment requires reevaluation. The following section explores the strategic and operational implications of the military's role in the information environment, asking whether the end of the GWOT is a signal to transition the military's information operations responsibilities back to civilian agencies.

REEVALUATING THE ROLE AND RELEVANCE OF MILITARY INFORMATION OPERATIONS

While DOD has robust structures capable of operating within the information environment, their effectiveness and relevance in modern conflicts require examination. This section reevaluates the role of military information operations in light of

Figure 2: Taliban Personnel Strength 2001 - 2024

Sources: USGOV Info, DoD, ISAF, White House, & SIGAR
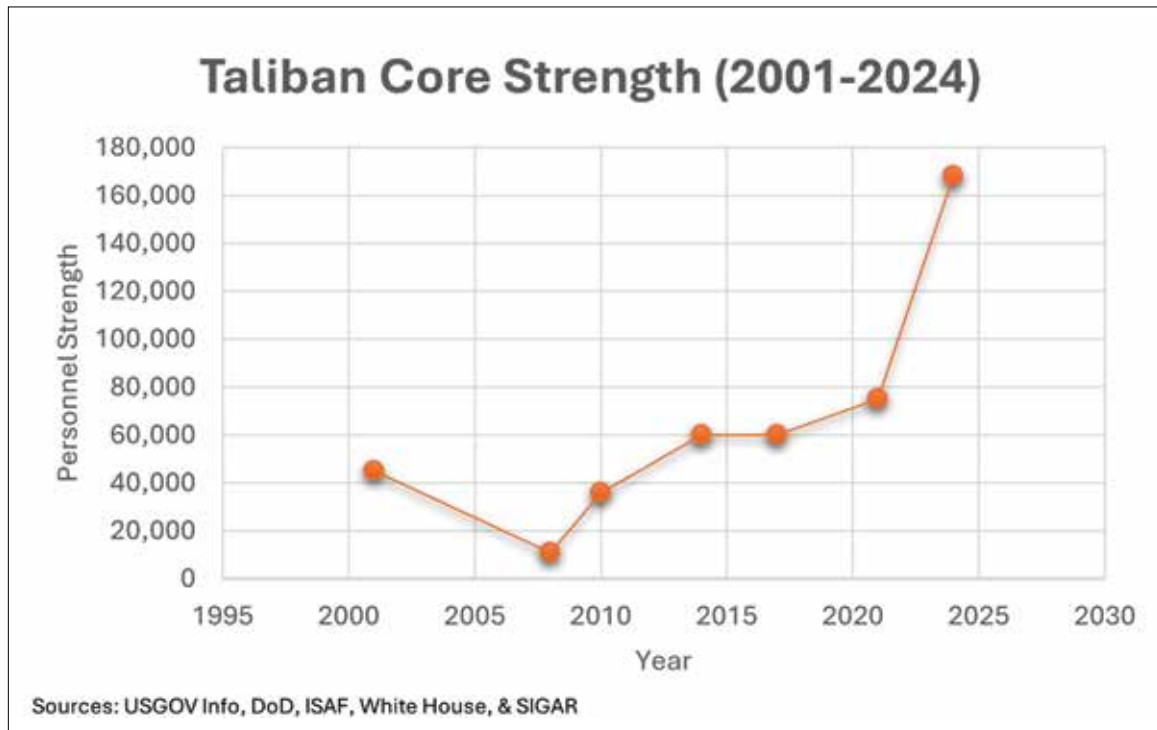
lessons learned during the GWOT. The presence of robust non-military information operations capabilities for covert and overt operations begs the question: What role should military information operations play? Throughout the GWOT, United States and coalition military information operations actors shouldered the primary burden of waging an information war against violent extremist organizations. Despite numerous tactical successes, the Taliban's strength grew from approximately 45,000 personnel in 2001[66] to 60,000 in 2014[67] and 75,000 by 2021,[68] when they regained control of Afghanistan. The unfortunate reality of the data seems to be that the military is ineffective or incapable of competing with violent extremist organizations with the speed and granularity required to wage effective information operations. Violent extremist organizations operate with agility, leveraging local knowledge and decentralized networks to disseminate propaganda.

In contrast, military information campaigns often lack the speed and granularity to respond effectively to such dynamic threats. The U.S. war in Afghanistan had its iatrogenic effect on the Taliban, where they had more personnel and resources at the end of the war than at the beginning. This section explores three potential approaches: expanding military information operation capabilities, dissolving them in favor of non-military assets, or focusing on a specialized and refined mission set.

With evidence indicating that Al-Qaeda has experienced a similar iatrogenic boost in personnel followership, aggregating major affiliates in Syria, Yemen, and throughout Africa,[69] the question remains: How is it possible that twenty years of war increased the strength of the groups we set out to destroy? The negative externalities from years of iatrogenic influence have outweighed the

tactical successes achieved by coalition members in Afghanistan. The iatrogenic effects observed in Afghanistan highlight the need to reevaluate the military's role in information operations and refine its approach to avoid negative externalities.

The first option would be to dramatically expand U.S. military information operations capabilities to meet the demands of the global information war. This option would argue that the inability to influence populations in Afghanistan effectively was due to the lack of resources. As such, the answer is to increase resources to meet the challenge, which suggests that there is a correlation between budget and effectiveness. A 2012 report from RAND assessed the effectiveness of information operations themes in Afghanistan, and determined that all nine themes either had mixed effectiveness or were ineffective, despite annual changes in budget allocation.[70] Proponents of this option are misunderstanding the impacts of the GWOT. The most prominent iatrogenic influence effects occurred due to coalition forces lacking legitimacy with local populations and not understanding the cultural intricacies of Afghan society, that they are nonhomogenous and more closely identify with their tribe, ethnicity or region.[71] Western militaries could not compete with violent extremist organizations' dynamic and asymmetric influence capabilities because they could not understand their audiences as quickly or rapidly undergo the bureaucratic processes required to disseminate products. Occasionally, military forces attempted to expedite bureaucratic processes to increase dissemination speed, but this only exacerbated the lack of cultural knowledge and multiplied the impact of iatrogenic influence.

One example of this occurred in Parwan province, Afghanistan, in 2017. U.S. military forces propped leaflets with a white dog intended to represent the Taliban.[72] The white dog had the Shahada, the Muslim call to prayer, printed upon it.[73] The use of a Muslim symbol of faith on a dog deeply offended the local populace, and a Taliban suicide bomber later detonated outside an American base, claiming it was retaliation for the leaflet. Such a significant oversight would not have been prevented by simply increasing budgets or streamlining approval processes. The problem was that Western military actors were not the right actors to attempt to transition citizens away from the Taliban ideologically. In these situations, the widespread application of information operations is not only a waste of resources but is often counterproductive and should not be engaged in at all. Expanding information capabilities without addressing underlying issues risks amplifying existing inefficiencies and perpetuating iatrogenic effects.

The second option is to dissolve all information operations capabilities and rely entirely upon non-military assets for influence. The vast amount of non-military resources lends credibility to the argument that military capabilities are now transitioning into the realm of superfluous. This view would ignore the historical necessity for information operations and would be a flawed emotional reaction to the war in Afghanistan. While non-military agencies maintain significant capabilities, they lack the operational immediacy and scalability that the military provides during conflict. Eliminating military information operations would create a critical capability gap, exacerbating difficulties. All major militaries participating in the Great Power competition maintain an information operations capability and apply it where necessary. To dissolve the military's ability to perform these operations would unnecessarily give adversaries a competitive advantage and disregard the historical role information has played in the conflict. Furthermore, it would ignore the instances of success in Afghanistan, which occurred primarily through face-to-face communication. In conflict zones, the military has greater access and placement in areas that enable effective influence.

Information and psychological operations have been critical in operational success in U.S. military

history. While propaganda, influence, and information operations have played significant roles throughout the history of the United States, the U.S. military had no formalized capability prior to World War I.[74] Despite President Woodrow Wilson's opposition to the military's use of propaganda, a small section called the "Propaganda Section" printed 5.1 million leaflets during the war and had 3 million disseminated by volunteer pilots or hydrogen balloons.[75] Interrogations indicated the leaflets were effective at eroding adversary morale and increasing surrenders. However, the War Department dissolved the section after the war.[76]

During World War II, the military sought to relearn the lessons of influence, and the Psychological Warfare Branch used leaflets and radio broadcasts to demoralize adversaries and increase surrender rates.[77] Military information and psychological operations continued to function ad hoc throughout American history until July 1953, when the military established a permanent psychological operations capability.[78] A historical evaluation of information's use in military operations makes it clear that the military is necessary and effective in four areas:

- Defection/Surrender Campaigns: These operations target enemy forces, aiming to persuade them to abandon their positions, defect, or surrender.

- Civilian Protection/non-interference: These operations target civilian populations to persuade them to avoid conflict zones and not interfere in military operations. They often involve warnings about military action and instructions for safe evacuation.

- Enemy Demoralization: These operations seek to weaken the will and cohesion of enemy forces or disrupt their perceptions of the battlefield. Highlighting hardships or tactical losses is a common theme during these operations.

- Boosting Friendly Morale: These operations, often conducted by a public affairs officer, emphasize mission success and motivate friendly forces. Recognition of achievement and reassurance of progress toward mission success are common.

Observing these four critical mission areas leads to the third and best option for military information operations to specialize and excel in a limited mission set. Reviewing the Mission-Essential Task Lists (METL) for any maneuver organization will reveal a standard list of tasks that the unit refines and perfects to maintain its effectiveness on the battlefield. Conducting a movement to contact, conducting an attack, and conducting an area defense are typical tasks that any maneuver organization within the U.S. military will recognize and understand how to execute. However, a similar or comparable task list must be more present in the manuals and task list of influence actors. Just as maneuver units perfect a defined set of mission-essential tasks, information operations units should focus on mastering their core task, specifically within LSCO. Expertise in baseline skills enables the military to adapt and improvise during unexpected situations. By focusing on well-defined essential tasks and developing deep expertise in these areas, the military can ensure its information operations remain adequate and relevant in the needed areas. Rather than dominating all areas of influence, a limited approach focusing on LSCO helps achieve the specialization needed within the military.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MILITARY INFORMATION OPERATIONS

After identifying the most effective roles for military information operations, the next priority is to realign resources to meet the needs of its role. Four specific recommendations provide the most effi-

cient strategy to maximize operational effectiveness and mitigate the iatrogenic influence. As the U.S. military adapts its forces to concentrate on LSCO, it must likewise adapt its information forces to meet the challenges of a modern battlefield. The Western world must avoid repeating the mistakes of Afghanistan, where twenty years of information operations inadvertently increased ideological support for the Taliban. In preparation for the next conflict, the United States should adapt its information capabilities to maximize effectiveness and reduce the risk of iatrogenic influence.

First, non-military organizations must integrate and generate products based on their experience and spheres of influence rather than relying on military information and influence capabilities to lead global information operations. Countering violent extremist propaganda requires a long-term focus with specialized expertise that exists within non-military organizations, such as the National Counterterrorism Center. Their ability to integrate intelligence and influence efforts ensures precision while maintaining credibility with target audiences. The National Counterterrorism Center is a repository of intelligence and information about terrorist threats. Their Joint Operations Center should serve as the center of U.S. efforts to counter the influence of violent extremist organizations. However, they should concentrate only on counterterrorism influence and avoid creeping into different mission sets. Specific and concentrated efforts with the highest possible level of precision will produce the most significant information advantage for the United States, avoiding generalized approaches in the information environment, which is key to reducing incidents of iatrogenic influence.

Second, military information missions should align with the most historically effective ones. Rather than wasting resources in areas where Western militaries are incapable of competing or lacking legitimacy, concentrated expertise allows information actors to provide the most valuable benefits to their military commanders. For example, during World War II, the U.S. military successfully used leaflets to encourage mass defections among enemy forces. The surrender campaigns were well suited to the military's capabilities. Advocating for improving performance with ineffective military mission sets, such as persuading civilians to align with the United States ideologically, ignores the reality that some missions are inherently unachievable. However, there is no point in optimizing a mission set that should not exist, and the ideological persuasion of civilians away from the Taliban and toward the United States was a mission with no chance of success. The military must focus on mission sets that can be achieved in short deployments and utilize tactics uniquely available to them, such as face-to-face communication.

Third, the U.S. State Department should absorb the U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM). The Office for Public Affairs and Public Diplomacy is the most significant asset in the U.S. arsenal for performing overt foreign information activities. USAGM simultaneous broadcasting capabilities must be synchronized with public diplomacy efforts to maximize efficiency and effectiveness. USAGM's overt affiliation with the U.S. government inherently limits perceptions of neutrality and is not mitigated by claims of independent status. Merging with the State Department streamlines resources and reduces redundancy. Any perceived loss of credibility from moving to the State Department is negligible.

Fourth, clarify duties and responsibilities for all information operations organizations. With so many organizations participating in the information environment, senior leadership must specify and distinguish which efforts belong to each agency. Clear role delineation would ensure a unified approach, reducing information fratricide and enhancing operational efficiency. Eliminate wasteful overlap and reduce information fratricide

by hyper-focusing organizational lines of effort. U.S. Special Operations Command has done this well by designating its JMWC as its lead effort for internet-based MISO.[79] Other organizations can save time by outsourcing learning the legalities and intricacies of internet-based MISO to the JMWC.

Additionally, other organizations know where to go for synchronization, and the JMWC can develop expertise in its singular mission. The level of mission granularity demonstrated by the JMWC must permeate the other military and non-military organizations to eliminate waste and identify gaps. By implementing these recommendations, the United States can manage the execution of effective and precise information operations.

CONCLUSION

The recommendations of this paper aim to refine the roles and responsibilities of military information operations to maximize their effectiveness and minimize the risk of iatrogenic influence. Lessons from the GWOT, notably the iatrogenic surge in Taliban forces, illustrate the need to recalibrate the U.S. approach in the information environment. The military should exercise restraint in the information environment where it lacks a competitive advantage and instead focus primarily on tasks where it has historically excelled and supported operational missions, such as surrender appeals, civilian non-interference, and enemy demoralization. While these mission sets do not entirely encapsulate the U.S. military's influence abilities, they are optimized for deployment timelines and utilize the unique access and placement of military forces.

This paper does not advocate for the United States to abdicate its responsibilities to compete in the information environment. On the contrary, precise expertise in a few missions enables the military to execute its responsibilities efficiently and exposes information gaps for other agencies to fill. Strategic information operations require consistent

and persistent messaging over long durations. In contrast, military deployments typically last six or nine months, barely enough time to approve a single MISO plan. The military's structural limitations make it ill-suited for consistent long-term messaging and stand in stark contrast to the multi-year assignments of State Department public affairs officers or CIA officers. Rather than haphazardly attempting to force long-term planning upon short-term deployers, the military should concentrate its efforts on achievable missions within their timeline.

The United States can leverage all agencies' strengths for a more comprehensive information plan by aligning the military with achievable goals and enhancing collaboration with civilian agencies. Centralizing dissemination methods within major agencies, such as the USAGM within the State Department, reduces the risks of information fratricide and enables narrative synchronization at the national level. While the military hones its expertise in core mission sets for LSCO, non-military agencies must simultaneously enhance their capabilities to disrupt adversary OODA loops, ensuring a coordinated and unified approach to the information environment.

As technology advances, the information environment will perpetually become more complex. The recommendations presented provide a pathway towards a strong information foundation and more significant strategic impact. The United States can maximize its ability to influence target audiences to support national security objectives by optimizing military and non-military missions to fit their strengths and limitations. Failing to learn from historical missteps risks cascading consequences in an increasingly interconnected world, where the stakes of influence operations are higher than ever. **PRISM**

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Training for Victory: U.S. Special Forces Advisory Operations from El Salvador to Afghanistan

By Frank K. Sobchak
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Reviewed by Whitney Grespin
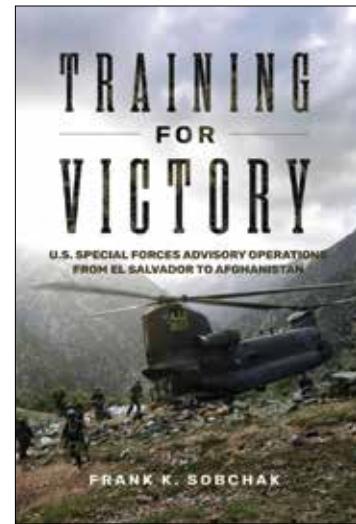
Frank Sobchak's book offers an accounting and dissection of five U.S. Special Forces advisory operations in El Salvador, the Philippines, Colombia, Iraq, and Afghanistan that were implemented over the four decades of 1981 through 2021. The author's firsthand experience with and knowledge of the challenges of these operations is evident in this practitioner-oriented but policy-relevant piece of scholarship. Evidence from interviews, government documents, public reporting, and reflective publications contribute to a formidable body of notes and tables that augment the body of the work.

Underpinned by a strong historical foundation of the context of each effort, the narrative arc of the chapters allows readers to understand the differing complexities of each country case. Understanding the environment is fundamental to being able to operate effectively within it—a skill that Special Forces excel at but that has largely been allowed to atrophy elsewhere across the force.[1] The book revisits this theme and related language capabilities repeatedly but offers much more in addition.[2]

As a practitioner advisor at the strategic level, the reviewer found many salient (and similar) challenges in practice as identified by Sobchak at the tactical and operational levels. Having an accurate understanding of the basic limiting factors of absorptive capacity of the recipients (such as basic literacy and numeracy) is foundational to the development of reasonable expectations for such missions.[3] Relatedly, recipient fatigue and overtraining/retraining on unneeded topics wastes the social capital of advisors who rotate in and are redundant in their work rather than adding value through new capability development or capacity enhancement.[4]

Sobchak's work also offers insights into the limiting factors on the advisor side, such as the implicit bias of comparing or conflating one theatre with another, tensions related to the lack of rank equivalency between advisors and their partners, and the importance of understanding public perception of

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historical relationships with the United States and the optics of American troop presence. Relatedly, the book touches on the limiting effect of the American "bunker mentality," in which U.S. government employees face varying restrictions on engaging with partner forces—particularly when it comes to accompanying them into combat. This is problematic in many ways that are being explored elsewhere in academic literature but is particularly applicable to the (lack of) willingness to take risk alongside the partner.[5]

An oft overlooked but foundational element of tactical success is also recognized across multiple case studies via the attention paid to corruption in logistics chains and management.[6] This topic was treated extensively in Jamal and Maley's *The Decline and Fall of Republican Afghanistan* and should be considered as a core component of building partner capacity rather than being discarded as a peripheral component.

Sobchak's findings dovetail with those of the reviewer, who has studied the use of contractors to deliver train, advise, and assist services in deployed/frontline environments, insofar as focusing on the importance of relationships and continuity and the personality traits of the advisors and advisees.[7] Indeed, Sobchak's work finds that, "In Sum, consistency circumvented some of the information asymmetry in principal-agent theory that makes it so hard for advisors to achieve their objectives."[8]

However, perhaps the most overarching offering of this work is that of commentary on the "sovereignty clock" and its sand that starts running through the hourglass upon arrival and the subsequent risk of failure via the inability of advisees to perform without advisors present.[9] Given the preference for advise and assist missions in lieu of boots-on-the-ground, this book offers a solid starting point for a more honest reflection on American-led advisory operations and opportunities for improvement of the practice.

Notes

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[3] Sobchak, *Training for Victory*, 32, 158.

[4] Sobchak, *Training for Victory*, 116-117, 156.

[5] Sobchak, *Training for Victory*, 42, 100, 165, 182.

[6] Sobchak, *Training for Victory*, 44, 69, 72.

[7] Sobchak, *Training for Victory*, 9, 90, 94, 152, 156.

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Countering China's Great Game: A Strategy for American Dominance

By Michael Sobolik
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Reviewed by Mark Grzegorzewski

Why are Xi Jinping and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) seeking to change the world? What does China hope to accomplish? What can America do to counter China? Michael Sobolik, former legislative assistant to Senator Ted Cruz and current Hudson Institute senior fellow specializing in United States–China relations, thoughtfully and fully addresses these questions in *Countering China's Great Game: A Strategy for American Dominance*.

Focusing on the strategic question of how the United States arrived at its current position with China, the author points to America's so-called original sin after its Cold War victory: the George H. W. Bush administration's decision not to condemn China for the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre. At a moment when communist regimes were collapsing around the world, Washington chose to extend the Chinese Communist Party a lifeline by avoiding criticism of its internal repression and maintaining economic ties. As we know, this was done with the belief that economic reform would eventually lead to political liberalization. How wrong the United States

was, and, as Sobolik argues, in so doing helped to create the adversary it faces today. The author does not present this view with a conspiratorial tone focused on elites and globalization. Rather, he shows that the triumphalist spirit of the 1990s misled many who were convinced that the United States could remake the world in its image. It was during this period of supposed peacetime until today, Sobolik notes, that the CCP engaged in irregular competition through cunning and deception. Sobolik's book centers on how these early decisions by the United States set the stage for the long-term strategic challenge it faces today.

Reframing how the United States understands the nature of the China challenge is the central focus of Sobolik's book. Informing this focus is his central assumption: Xi Jinping seeks to achieve his objectives short of war. These goals are part of a broader strategy to accelerate America's decline in the international system and usher in a new era of Chinese imperialism. Xi himself has described the current moment as "the East is rising, and the

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West is declining."[1] As Sobolik highlights, Xi sees the Chinese Communist Party as simply the latest dynastic ruler in China's long imperial history. For Xi, "modernity" is just another word for Western control of China, and he views his leadership of the CCP as restoring China's rightful place in the world. Sobolik contends that grasping insights like these and developing a deeper understanding of Chinese identity and history is the only way the United States can hope to prevail against the CCP.

In this important work, Sobolik brings out something new, at least to this reviewer, by discussing the division between *Zhongguo* and *Tianxia*.[2] Those familiar with international relations literature will recognize *Zhongguo* as the idea that ethnic Chinese see themselves as belonging to a superior civilization. *Tianxia*, however, offers a deeper lens for understanding the CCP's drive to expand beyond China's physical borders and create a buffer zone in all directions. The concept envisions Chinese political influence extending "all under heaven," a vision that, in practice, very likely encompasses the entire globe.[3]

The CCP taps into this ancient mandate to build legitimacy within China's political culture, performing to long-standing expectations about the natural order of rule. It is through this claimed authority—or, in the CCP's case, authoritarianism—that it asserts its right to govern, following the preceding pattern of dynasties. This context helps explain why Xi Jinping so often invokes China's long-standing cultural superiority, and why such signals should not be dismissed by the United States. They reveal that China does not seek to integrate into the current international system but to dominate it. Put differently, China cannot be understood by looking only at its actions today. China must be seen through the long arc of its civilizational history. The CCP views this moment not as a rise to power but as a return to the natural order in which China sits atop the international system. In Xi's worldview, China's superiority requires America's decline.

As part of its geopolitical strategy, China has expanded projects like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Rather than viewing the BRI purely through the lens of economics or security, Sobolik urges readers to see it through the concept of *Tianxia*. The initiative spreads Chinese influence under the guise of economic development, allowing territorial and political expansion without physical conquest. While the CCP's use of debt-trap diplomacy—seizing control of infrastructure projects to extend its reach—has been covered elsewhere, the author offers a different angle: the BRI serves to co-opt low- and middle-income countries, encouraging them to self-censor in the face of Chinese misconduct in exchange for economic incentives. In turn, it enables China to shape international opinion on issues like Taiwan's legitimacy without ever firing a shot. One limitation of the author's analysis is that the discussion of shifting supply chains could have gone deeper. A concentrated examination of how the CCP is positioning itself to control chokepoints for critical resources—resources essential to U.S. wartime capabilities—would have strengthened the analysis and amplified the CCP threat even more.

In discussing how to counter the CCP, Sobolik highlights a problem this reviewer has also identified: once you are on top in the international system, there is nowhere to go but down. For the United States, that means the public must shake off its complacency and embrace risk to compete. China, by contrast, operates with little to lose and everything to gain. Sobolik argues that Americans must understand this is not merely an economic competition but a clash of systems with only one winner. To succeed, he contends, the United States must redirect the CCP's "investments, deter its adventurism, and shift the competition onto ground where China cannot effectively fight."[4]

The book finishes strongest when it turns to its recommendations. Rather than trying to be something it's not, Sobolik argues that the United States

should return to the strategies that worked against the Soviet Union—namely, exploiting an adversary's weaknesses. China has few true allies, and many countries now resemble disgruntled tributaries stuck with bad BRI deals. Why not capitalize on that discontent? This does not even account for how overextended the BRI project has become, strained by China's slowing domestic economy.

Strategically, the United States could target corruption within the BRI by exposing the shady contracts handed out to Chinese state-owned enterprises (SOEs). As Sobolik points out, this would hurt the CCP economically at home while also damaging the credibility of BRI projects abroad. By rediscovering its own strengths—such as the rule of law, transparency, and openness—the author argues the United States can shift the playing field back in its favor and win the broader clash of systems.

This book comes highly recommended for policymakers, academics, and decision-makers working on China. It serves both as a cautionary tale of where the United States went wrong and a prescriptive guide for how it can still set things right. While Sobolik does an outstanding job outlining practical steps forward, he also flags a major vulnerability: the United States political system's habit of thinking in two- and four-year cycles rather than across decades. There is a real risk that the United States could lose sight of the larger clash of systems, mistaking transnationalism for strategy. Rather than calling for extended term limits or sweeping government reforms, Sobolik argues that the United States should double down on what makes it different from the CCP. This reviewer agrees. It is time to stop reacting to China's moves and lean into its strengths to start setting the tempo in a competition the United States cannot afford to lose.

Notes

[1] As first reported publicly in early 2021, Xi Jinping stated that "the East is rising and the West is declining," in comments from the October 2020 fifth plenary session of the CCP Central Committee.

[2] Michael Scott Sobolik, *Countering China's Great Game: A Strategy for American Dominance* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2024).

[3] See discussion of tiānxià (天下, "all under heaven") in Chinese thought, denoting both the ancient imperial order and a modern cosmopolitan vision—Zhao Tingyang, *All Under Heaven: The Tianxia System for a Possible World Order* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2021); on "humane authority" under Xi's "community of shared destiny," see Jacksonian Tianxia commentary in *The Weekend Roundup*, *The WorldPost*, Feb 10, 2018.

[4] Michael Scott Sobolik, *Countering China's Great Game: A Strategy for American Dominance* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2024).

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Reviewed by William Mengel

Michael Sobolik's *Countering China's Great Game* is a policy-driven argument advocating for stronger U.S. measures to counter the growing influence of the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP). Sobolik, a former staffer for Senator Ted Cruz (R-TX) and a fellow at the American Foreign Policy Council, has been an advocate for a realist-based opposition to Chinese competition. He joins the chorus of China-focused national security specialists who see the need for a cohesive, proactive strategy to address the confrontational and competitive behavior of the CCP. Sobolik's book is not an academic study but rather a policy argument in the form of an extended interpretive essay that promotes specific actions the United States should take to counter China's global ambitions.

Sobolik's work is historically deterministic, arguing that China's modern ambitions are a direct continuation of its imperial past. This overreliance on historical analogies weakens his ability to analyze the CCP's modern Marxist-Leninist approach, making his recommendations less grounded in the actual ideological foundations of CCP strategy. His tendency to craft theatrical images that evoke an emotional response can, at times, overshadow the logic of his arguments. If one can overlook the distracting problems of the history sections, there are some interesting policy recommendations and insights that may bear further consideration.

Overall, this book can provide a useful introduction to some of the strategic problems that the CCP has generated, and some well-thought-out frameworks for countering (isolate and dismantle) Chinese expansion. On a theoretical basis, Sobolik uses a realist framework, assuming a zero-sum game in which every CCP gain is to the detriment of the United States. His initial chapter presents the argument that U.S. policy towards China has been misguided, based on a flawed triumphalist interpretation of the end of the Cold War in 1989-91. He notes decades of U.S. complacency in parallel with growing and unchecked Chinese aggression leading to the current state of competition.

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In the second chapter, Sobolik diverges into a distracting exposition of Chinese history, attempting to make the argument that the policy of aggressive state expansion was born out of a distinctive strategic culture of Chinese origin. Sobolik will no doubt draw criticism from specialists who will note his teleological interpretation of Chinese history and civilization. His highly selective use of evidence and questionable interpretations drive the reader towards his thesis: that fundamental aspects of Chinese civilization provide the core of a strategic culture espousing continual and boundless territorial aggression. He provides the reader with highly simplified definitions of *zhongguo* and *tianxia*,[1] terms he then liberally employs throughout the book to buttress his deterministic arguments. Sobolik makes the interesting and controversial comment that Confucianism "was silent on statecraft."[2] This assertion seems difficult to reconcile when examining the role of works such as the *Spring and Autumn Annals* and the body of Confucian literature exploring how a virtuous monarch, or sage-emperor, should conduct statecraft. Sobolik's ambiguous use of the term "imperial Confucianism"[3] is somewhat confusing. He appears to describe the concept of the "Han synthesis," applying the term "Imperial Confucianism," which he mistakenly attributes to Pamela Crossley. However, he then makes an abrupt shift in his use of the term "imperial," going from a description of the employment of an ethic-based ideology to legitimize a centralized, authoritarian bureaucratic structure serving an emperor to an aggressive territorially expanding state focused on attacking its neighbors. For the remainder of the book, he seems to rely on this second definition of "imperial," appending the term "Confucianism" as a placeholder for "Chinese" as opposed to a philosophical concept. Some of the frustrating sections on Chinese history and civilization might be explained by a rather broad leveraging of Dennis Bloodworth's *The Chinese Looking Glass*, a rambling description

of folklore and pop culture of "old China" prior to the upheavals of the Maoist era. Sobolik eventually describes his own challenge: "China's imperial history defies oversimplification. The vastness of this era humbles the United States in its infancy and complicates the efforts of American strategists to understand the ebb and flow of China's history."[4]

Yet to overly focus on his treatment of Chinese history and civilization is to ignore the most important part of his contributions: his call for cognizance of CCP expansionism and oppression and advocacy for nuanced U.S. approach and sophisticated policies towards countering this aggression.

Sobolik is on firmer ground when he focuses more directly on contemporary CCP behavior. He frames his work around the Liu Xiaobo affair, a clumsy attempt by the CCP to block dissident Liu Xiaobo from being recognized as a Nobel Peace Prize laureate.[5] Sobolik also relates the oppression faced by Li Wenliang, when his efforts to raise awareness of COVID-19 ran afoul of CCP policies.[6] His noting of the 14K triad role in advancing CCP objectives on Palau[7] is admirable, but would have been more impactful for the analysis had he placed this anecdote more firmly within the framework of broader CCP-organized crime cooperation. It is unclear from his account if this is a single such incident, perhaps due to a corrupt individual seeking a non-standard solution to a particular problem, or an unintentional but fortuitous (for the CCP) correspondence of tactical objectives, or if this is part of a larger deliberate strategy that systematically integrates these efforts. Excellent studies of this type of collaboration are in the secondary literature, but Sobolik has not leveraged the existing scholarship to provide a more holistic analysis of these topics.

Sobolik attempts to link the CCP and the Ming, suggesting a weakness of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is a belief that the CCP seeks external validation to maintain domestic political legitimacy, and offers a tenuous comparison with the Ming tribute

system.[8] He observes the CCP's historicizing rhetoric, aimed at providing a legitimizing framework to CCP projects such as BRI, but seems to invert causality.[9] His brief treatment of the Zheng He voyages is interesting but misses the context of the internal power struggle within Ming China, which is critical to understanding both the purpose of the voyages as well as the reason for their rapid termination. He makes an effort to describe Zheng He's voyages as a template that matches the BRI map.[10] However, this simplification seems to ignore the perhaps more important factor of geography. The routes of Zheng He and the BRI also seem congruent with hundreds of years of other commerce, such as the British, Dutch and Portuguese merchants plying the region in between the eras of Zheng He and the BRI.

The strongest section is his recommendations for policies to counter the BRI. He aligns with many China experts who observed that the 2008–09 period marked a shift in the execution of CCP strategy and argues that this shift was based on a flawed CCP assessment that the United States had begun to decline." He provides a useful description of the BRI, his interpretation of its strength and weakness is a bit unclear—he oscillates between emphasizing its strength and arguing that China has overextended.

The core of his recommendation is a two-prong strategic approach, countering the BRI not only across the globe but deliberately targeting two key enabling capabilities—Xinjiang and the Great Firewall.[11] Sobolik draws a parallel with U.S. actions during the Cold War with the Soviet Union, making the argument that we need similar programs and legislation, and take proactive steps focused on BRI vulnerabilities, such as reliance on corruption and use of U.S. dollars. Specifically, he argues we need increased on-the-ground diplomacy with smaller states that are subject to CCP influence.[12] The United States should fund public diplomacy and information operations to deliberately expose corruption and other malign behavior that enables the

BRI,[13] sanction commerce associated with human rights concerns in Xinjiang,[14] use cyber capabilities to undermine CCP censorship,[15] and information operations to counter CCP narratives.[16]

The most significant weakness in his description of CCP strategy is the near complete omission of Marxist, Leninist and Maoist elements. After dismissing the CCP as "one tributary in a long river"[17] Sobolik then elides nearly all aspects of these ideological systems from his subsequent analysis. He briefly mentions but fails to engage seriously with, Rush Doshi's analysis of CCP strategy, even though Doshi's documentation of China's economic and diplomatic efforts aligns with Sobolik's own argument for a stronger U.S. response.[18] His dismissal of Doshi rather than leveraging the clinical analysis of CCP strategy in *The Long Game* to buttress his own thesis is inexplicable.

Overall, this book provides useful concepts to consider for policy implementation, albeit obscured by some distracting emotional appeals and an inadequate understanding of Chinese history and civilization. Sobolik could have used significant editing support from a China expert, who would have no doubt corrected many of the shortfalls that undermine the argument, as well as more trivial inaccuracies not mentioned here. One might be inclined to skip the initial chapters and focus on the anecdotes of CCP behaviors and suggested U.S. counters.

He offers excellent observations that we should stop being reactive, recognize and reject the false triumphalism that has blinded U.S. policymakers, and take a proactive approach toward countering CCP aggression. These are all useful remarks, but buried under a tangle of vague and unhelpful anecdotes from Chinese history, his most thought-provoking points can be difficult to identify.

Notes

[1] Michael Sobolik, *Countering China's Great Game: A Strategy for American Dominance* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2024), 29-31.

[2] Sobolik, *Countering China's Great Game,* 36.

[3] Sobolik, *Countering China's Great Game,* 36-37.

[4] Sobolik, *Countering China's Great Game,* 100-101.

[5] Sobolik, *Countering China's Great Game,* 125-137.

[6] Sobolik, *Countering China's Great Game,* 143-145.

[7] Sobolik, *Countering China's Great Game,* 115-117.

[8] Sobolik, *Countering China's Great Game,* 111-112.

[9] Sobolik, *Countering China's Great Game,* 44-49.

[10] Sobolik, *Countering China's Great Game*, 65.

[11] Sobolik, *Countering China's Great Game,* 134.

[12] Sobolik, *Countering China's Great Game,* 120-121.

[13] Sobolik, *Countering China's Great Game,* 122.

[14] Sobolik, *Countering China's Great Game,* 142.

[15] Sobolik, *Countering China's Great Game,* 152-153.

[16] Sobolik, *Countering China's Great Game,* 152, 158–59.

[17] Sobolik, *Countering China's Great Game,* 29.

[18] Sobolik, *Countering China's Great Game,* 76-77.

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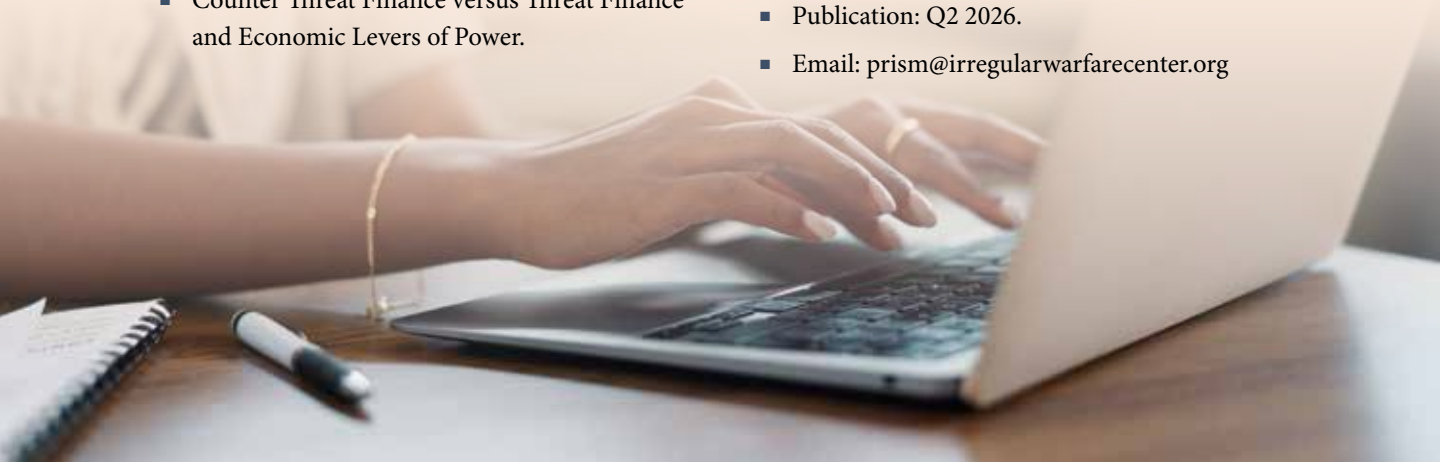- Innovation, Emerging Technology and Future Challenges in Counter Threat Finance.

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