



Dr. Major Choden of the Royal Army of Bhutan greets physician's assistant Major Anthony Rafosky from the U.S. Army's 97th Civil Affairs Battalion during a Disaster Response and Preparedness Subject Matter Expert Exchange in Thimphu, Bhutan, on 14-16 November 2019. Photo by U.S. Marine Corps Corporal Derek Mol.

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JSOU Report 20-4

Special Operations Forces Civil Affairs in Great Power Competition

Clemens



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Travis Clemens

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Joint Special Operations University and the Department of Strategic Studies

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Back cover. Dr. Major Choden of the Royal Army of Bhutan greets physician's assistant Major Anthony Rafosky from the U.S. Army's 97th Civil Affairs Battalion during a Disaster Response and Preparedness Subject Matter Expert Exchange in Thimphu, Bhutan, on 14-16 November 2019. Photo by U.S. Marine Corps Corporal Derek Mol.

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Foreword

After close to three decades of unrivaled military power, changes in the international system by 2018 forced the United States Department of Defense to re-conceptualize how it employs military forces. The return to great power competition prompted the Joint Staff to move beyond the peace-war binary underpinning the traditional phase-oriented planning model. Instead, the Joint Staff recognized the imperative to perpetually seek political and military advantage below the level of armed conflict and issued the Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning as a means for doing so. While the military must be prepared for high end combat, its activities to shape the environment for advantage must be aligned with—and oftentimes in support of—interagency, intergovernmental, multilateral, and corporate partners.

As U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF) adapt to the new concepts, the enterprise will increasingly have to reimagine its operating concepts and application of capabilities. While the enterprise's most recent history has been shaped by kinetic counterterrorism (CT), counterinsurgency, and counter threat network operations, it possesses in its repertoire two essential aspects of competing below the level of armed conflict: vast experience with populations-centric missions and influence-oriented capabilities.

This monograph explores one key element of the ability of SOF to compete below the level of armed conflict—civil affairs (CA). Although the CT fight has featured kinetic operations as the quintessential SOF strength, great power competition will likely see CA assume a more prominent role as the U.S. and its competitors seek broader influence across the Global South. The author, Major Travis Clemens, provides a terrific overview of how CA can contribute in new and highly valuable ways in seeking advantage in the context of great power competition.

Although the author is specifically focused on helping SOF transition to the new operating concepts, this monograph also arguably contributes to the growing body of Joint Special Operations University literature on how to approach CT for more sustainable strategic effect. Many of the recommendations Major Travis makes for great power competition would also provide non-kinetic support to expanding U.S. or partner influence to either bolster resilience of affected communities or erode violent extremist organization

influence where it currently exists. As the enterprise wrestles with adapting itself for the future, assessments from members of the force, such as this one, will become increasingly important.

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About the Author

Major Travis Clemens is an active duty civil affairs officer in the U.S. Army. He holds a master's degree in defense analysis with a specialization on special operations and irregular warfare from the Naval Postgraduate School and a bachelor's degree in engineering from California Polytechnic State University.

He has had multiple Special Operations Forces (SOF) and conventional forces deployments including Iraq, Senegal, Niger, and Chad and has worked through the greater SOF enterprise with Naval Special Warfare, Army Green Berets, and Marine Special Operations Teams. His interests in the complexity, history, and social factors of international relations focused his research on how national myths and history influence modern decisions in governments and the effects that has on the contemporary international environment.



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Introduction

[Civil affairs officers] are designed to work with friendly networks and engage neutral networks to help achieve commander's objectives. Engaging with [indigenous populations and institutions], interagency partners, NGOs [nongovernmental organizations], and international organizations creates a better shared understanding of the OE [operating environment], informs USG [United States Government] decision makers, and influences informal networks towards U.S. national interests.¹

The Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning improves how Joint Force leaders and interorganizational partners integrate military efforts and align military with non-military activities to achieve acceptable and sustainable strategic outcomes.²

The purpose of this research is to articulate the role of Special Operations Forces (SOF) civil affairs (CA) in the return to great power competition. More specifically, the ideas offered here are directed toward the 95th Civil Affairs Brigade more than the U.S. Army Reserve CA brigades; the reasons for this distinction are elaborated upon in chapter 2. Analyzed through the lens of how SOF CA can help the U.S. military as it specifically faces a rising China and a dissatisfied Russia, this monograph details primary roles and needed adjustments for SOF CA under current and future international competition. Rather than inventing new roles or ways to use SOF CA, this monograph intends to codify the overall framework of where SOF CA currently fits in the range of military operations conducted in the competitive environment. A secondary purpose is to provide the SOF CA branch a consolidated way to express its role within great power competition so that, when asked by a non-CA professional, "What does CA do?" it offers a unified and well-structured answer.

SOF CA is the only "tribe" in Army special operations that specifically works with local institutions and civil organizations, and its population-centric orientation aligns it with competition below the level of armed conflict. Its officers and noncommissioned officers are specially selected and trained to build relationships in foreign countries, understand the environment and

vulnerabilities that weaken societies and governance, and work across the spectrum of governmental and nongovernmental organizations (NGO) to mitigate these vulnerabilities. The force can also gain access to the populations that adversaries increasingly target. Historically, extremist organizations exploit civil vulnerabilities to draw popular support away from the recognized government. Modern great powers are taking notice of these tactics and the power of influencing populations. Adversaries are not just targeting populations, but also seek to influence or coerce governments through their populations. The changing environment places SOF CA in a position to play an increasingly important role as the United States adapts its strategies and goals.

In the recent past, CA has focused on stability and counterinsurgency (COIN). Currently, the CA community finds itself at a turning point where it must disentangle itself from the stability and COIN doctrine that has come to define active duty CA forces. Now, CA must find its place in a broader construct of national competition that materializes as economic statecraft, military posturing, international legal arbitration, information dominance, and computer network infiltration and attacks. The conventional military informed by centuries of development, enjoys a clear role in this environment, but the relatively new and continually evolving concept of special operations requires constant assessment to identify gaps that it can fill. SOF CA feels this constriction especially since it was only recently reactivated as an active duty branch and organization (the 95th Civil Affairs Brigade) in 2006 and 2007, respectively.³

Background

To properly understand how SOF CA can contribute to great power competition, it is important to establish a foundation of knowledge about the current international environment. Since the fall of the Soviet Union and the defeat of Saddam Hussein's forces in Kuwait, the U.S. has relied on its overwhelming military force as the backdrop to achieving strategic victory. The subsequent foray into the counterterrorism (CT) decades of the new millennium somewhat blinded the United States to the growing reality that, as Clausewitz famously stated, "the defeated state often considers the outcome merely as a transitory evil, for which a remedy may still be found in political conditions at some later date."⁴ The so-called defeated states, it

seems, have been working diligently to cast off this “transitory evil,” and the era of great power competition has returned with multiple nuclear-armed players.⁵ China engages in political warfare to weaken U.S. alliances and to suppress international dissent while Russia interferes in elections and violates its neighbors’ territories. Despite new and evolving tactics like cyber operations, the key factor—nuclear weapons and the ability to deploy them worldwide—establishes the underlying structure of the contemporary competitive environment and drives the policies that states pursue.

Although the concept of great power competition dates back to the writings of Thucydides, the modern environment contains unique features that states have never before had to consider. The universality of communications infrastructure, enmeshed economic systems, increased precision of military technologies, and evolving understanding of war itself interact in various ways that create a complex, nuanced environment that requires deep understanding before SOF CA can affect needed change.

The idea of military involvement in the civil component or human domain is not new to warfare either, of course. Militaries have always had to deal with populations, and commanders often used those populations to their advantage. Genghis Khan pardoned or slaughtered entire cities to gain a strategic advantage over his adversaries. U.S. Marines in Vietnam conducted CA to “restore, consolidate, and expand governmental control so that nation building could progress throughout the Republic of Vietnam.”⁶ The U.S. has recognized the need for specially trained soldiers since the end of WWI when the Army occupied the Rhineland for almost five years, the first time that the Army acknowledged the sustained requirement for specialized units to conduct “military government.”⁷

Independent from the evolving international playing field, the U.S. Army established CA as an active duty branch in 2006 and aligned the newly reactivated 95th CA Brigade—the only active duty CA organization at the time under the U.S. Army Special Operations Command (USASOC). The 95th’s purpose was to fill a special operations gap: SOF needed an organization capable of engaging the civil component of the CT and COIN wars in the Middle East.⁸ In other words, SOF CA was born in the midst of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan to fulfill the need to engage with the civil populations to understand the complexities of the human domain, build relationships, and degrade insurgent networks that enabled the insurgency to exist. As the United States comes to terms with the new version of great

power competition, SOF CA must come to terms with its role in the wider range of potential operations and different strategic goals in which it might find itself employed.

Research Question

What is new and what this monograph attempts to establish is how SOF CA forces should be employed in the competitive environment especially when current doctrine fails to provide instruction. This monograph thus aims to answer the following: What roles are best filled by the unique SOF CA capabilities and in what type of situations should these capabilities be employed against the United States' strategic competitors in the modern competitive environment?

SOF CA finds itself uniquely positioned to play a critical role in how the U.S. competes with China and Russia around the world. This research identifies and describes four roles for SOF CA in the competitive environment that support U.S. and Department of Defense (DOD) goals: initial entry, reconnaissance, engage and influence, and support to resistance (STR). Additionally, using the framework built by Michael Mazarr et al., this monograph provides a series of categories, or domains, of competition through which China and Russia currently compete with the U.S. and each other.⁹

Methodology

Some may argue this monograph should draw its analysis of SOF CA roles only from historical case studies. While that may provide useful insights into specific activities, drawing from history would be insufficient for a depth understanding of how SOF CA can use its capabilities in the current environment. Rather, as much as Major General William Donovan relied on ingenuity, innovation, and audacity as he founded the Office of Strategic Services, succeeding in a novel environment requires understanding history as it impacts today's global competition, understanding capabilities, and an innovative eye as to how current capabilities can meet the missions of today and tomorrow. Therefore, rather than drawing solely from history, this monograph intends—through interviews with SOF CA leadership, planners and trainers, and a review of doctrine and literature—to identify the roles for which SOF CA is the best element to fulfill in the contemporary

competitive environment and provide any needed adjustments for SOF CA to achieve the mission.

Guidance for the Analysis

This research took several factors into account to establish the role of a military organization within the larger construct of military operations: directives or foundational guidance; capabilities defined as the overall interaction between doctrine, organization, training, and equipment; and, to a limited extent, authorities to employ that organization.

To determine the specifics of what makes SOF CA unique, this monograph relies upon a variety of sources. It begins with the published national and DOD strategies that provide guidance on the employment of the force. To understand how the DOD expects SOF CA to be employed while further developing established ideas, the author interviewed senior CA leadership from the CA Proponent, 95th CA Brigade (Special Operations) (Airborne), U. S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), and 1st Special Warfare Training Group.

The missions that SOF CA execute in the modern environment have some historical precedent from which to draw lessons, but few that can provide direct conclusions. Accordingly, this monograph needed to find distinct situations, develop the ways in which SOF CA could be employed in those situations, and then explore the potential implications and considerations.

Case Study Selection

This monograph uses two case studies to explore different situations in which SOF CA elements might find themselves employed to support competitive lines of effort. Not unexpectedly, the two cases this monograph uses are the Russian Federation (Russia) and the People's Republic of China (China or the PRC). The interaction between these two countries and the U.S. defines the competitive space in which SOF CA must find its role. This monograph chose China and Russia specifically because they are not only nuclear-capable but have the capacity to deliver nuclear weapons worldwide. Furthermore, both China and Russia have the financial strength, diplomatic clout, and military industry to reach around the globe. Based on U.S. strategic documents, including the 2017 National Security Strategy (NSS) and 2018 National Defense Strategy (NDS), possession of nuclear weapons and

delivery capabilities, and also the capacity to exert nuclear international pressure, present a clear discriminator by which to identify potential great powers. Because Iran and North Korea are, at most, regional powers, with relatively small populations and limited resources that are both subject to heavy international sanctions, their abilities to exert international influence remains limited and are thus not considered in this monograph. Therefore, this monograph focuses on Russia and China as the potential great power competitors. From these case studies, the monograph identifies and establishes general roles that SOF CA should fill in great power competition.

Assessing the Competitive Environment

Having identified Russia and the PRC as potential strategic competitors, this monograph uses the methodology developed by Michael Mazarr et al. to assess the competitive environment's various factors that determine how SOF CA forces should be employed.¹⁰ Mazarr et al. developed this methodology from their own literature review of international relations (IR) theory, resulting in the following five questions that, when answered, should provide a thorough understanding of the competition between nations.

1. What are the essential characters or natures of the competing nations?
2. What do the participants compete for (what are their goals)?
3. How do they compete (what strategies or capabilities do they employ)?
4. What specific international systemic patterns or structures come to characterize the competition?
5. To what degree does the competition reflect factors that theory and history suggest determine its intensity?¹¹

These questions can be organized against the identified great powers to describe a full picture of the competitive environment, revealing the strengths and weaknesses of each state. For instance, that Russia's national identity "place[s] it in a competitive relationship with Europe" would seem to indicate that Europe, especially eastern Europe, weighs more in Russian priorities than does the United States,¹² so that actions involving the Russian-European relationship will likely affect Moscow. Additionally, in their assessment of strategic competition, Mazarr and team conclude that:

because of a combination of the risk of nuclear escalation, the continued (if less predominant) U.S. military capabilities in key regions, and the desire to preserve status in the eyes of the world community, these challenger states have adopted strategies to coerce and apply military pressure below the threshold of major war.¹³

This conclusion also helps describe the overall competitive environment. Fear of nuclear escalation will constrain competitors' actions, instilling a hard limit. Of course, unintended escalation is still a risk, and states will likely only conservatively execute strategies to avoid accidental escalation. These strategies may consist of anything from subverting influence or support away from an adversary, breaking up inter-state relationships, disrupting strategic resource flow, or holding forces at risk should war break out.

Beyond Mazarr et al.

What research by Mazarr et al. did not do, however, is present a comprehensive analysis of great powers' national identities, goals, and competitive strategies.¹⁴ This monograph partially fills that research gap to understand the contextual framework within which the United States should employ SOF CA. While a full analysis of Russia and China's strategies within the competitive environment is beyond the scope of this monograph, a short analysis serves as the contemporary setting against which to test SOF CA roles.

After examining their essential characters, goals, and competitive strategies, the monograph examines five domains where the PRC and Russia compete with the United States and describes the necessary historical and cultural foundations to develop any framework to compete against the PRC or Russia: population/political warfare, economic statecraft, cyber operations, armed conflict, and international institutions. While competition within international institutions remains extremely important, it does not fall within the scope of SOF CA's capabilities and, therefore, this monograph considers it only tangentially.

Finally, this monograph takes the approach of "building the airplane in flight" when determining the best roles for SOF CA. This monograph looks at the airplane as it is to identify how its construction lends itself to various roles. How long of a range does the airplane have? Does it possess sensor systems? What are the maintenance requirements of the airplane as it is currently built? As a force, SOF CA has a long history and is currently "in the

fight,” carrying out its assigned tasks and missions as best it and the theater special operations commands (TSOCs) know how, meaning that the branch already possesses various capabilities stemming from previous requirements, influential leaders, and history. Again, however, this monograph does not attempt to deconstruct SOF CA and then rebuild it in an ideal way. Instead, it acknowledges where the force is now, compares that to the environment in which it will play a role, and, by so doing, identifies what roles the branch is best fit to serve. From there, recommendations naturally follow to help ensure SOF CA can best fulfill the roles for which it is built.

Overview of the Monograph

Chapter 1 reviews the relevant joint concepts, doctrine, and literature to build a foundation from which this monograph begins its analysis. The Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning (JCIC), Joint Concept for Operating in the Information Environment (JCOIE), and Joint Concept for Human Aspects of Military Operations (JC-HAMO) give a starting point for understanding how the joint force approaches the changing international environment. Doctrine informs the skills and capabilities that SOF CA currently possesses and Michael Mazarr et al. give a framework for understanding the competitive environment. Chapter 2 examines SOF CA from its foundations, capabilities—defined as doctrine, organization, training, and equipment—and presents four roles that SOF CA is best positioned to fill. Chapters 3 and 4 analyze China and Russia, respectively, to understand how their histories, cultures, geopolitics, and leaders influence their actions today. The chapters then provide an analysis of the various strategies each country uses within the domains of competition and how the CA capabilities of SOF can enable the U.S. to campaign in each domain of competition for U.S. goals. Chapter 5 summarizes how SOF CA finds itself well positioned to serve a key role in enacting U.S. policy vis-à-vis strategic adversaries and the changes that the force will likely need to make. It concludes by offering recommendations for changes needed to hone the capabilities of SOF CA in great power competition to further establish it as a premier capability for the DOD and U.S. government.

Chapter 1. Operational Art and CA Doctrine for Great Power Competition

While the introduction set the stage for understanding how SOF CA can uniquely aid the United States in the current great power competition, chapter 1 delves into the foundations through a review of four relevant concepts: (a) the Joint Staff’s three operational art concepts that provide a framework for understanding how the joint force sees itself in the competitive environment, (b) the doctrinal foundations of SOF CA that serve as the brigade’s baseline, (c) the framework by Mazarr et al. to define and further understand “competition,” and (d) existing U.S. policy. Together, these four sections lay the groundwork to understand how SOF CA can help the United States compete with Russia and China.

Joint Concepts

Starting in 2016, the DOD published three joint concepts describing the department and the joint force’s shifting understanding of the competitive environment: the JCIC, JCOIE, and the JC-HAMO.¹⁵ These joint concepts create an interdependent, nested framework of understanding about how the joint force should campaign to achieve U.S. goals. The JCIC lays out the overall framework of campaigning in the competitive environment. The JCOIE then identifies the information environment as the core domain toward which the joint force should orient its efforts to achieve strategic success.¹⁶ Finally, the JC-HAMO outlines how the will of relevant actors serves as the foundation upon which the joint force must build messaging and influence campaigns.¹⁷ The framework of the JC-HAMO should inform the information operations of the JCOIE that, in turn, should form the basis for the campaigning as described by the JCIC.

JCIC

The JCIC provides a conceptual framework with associated vocabulary to describe the competitive environment in broader terms than previous doctrine. Published in early 2018, this concept aligns with the 2017 NSS and 2018 NDS identifying strategic competition as the primary environment for the joint force.¹⁸ The authors explicitly advocate to “eliminate institutional

remnants of the obsolete peace/war binary conception of the operating environment.¹⁹ Instead, they offer continuum of conflict that allows for progressive, fluid movement across the continuum as interests and circumstances change. Moreover, the authors recognize that two actors can be in simultaneous conditions, such as armed conflict and cooperation, as Ukraine and Russia demonstrate with their forces facing off while still cooperating on oil and gas exports.



Figure 1. Competition Continuum. Sources: JCIC; Department of Defense, Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning.

The JCIC’s strength is emphasizing campaigning across the three environments of the competition continuum in a manner that aligns with the broader U.S. government agencies.²⁰ Within armed conflict the joint force can defeat, deny, or degrade the enemy.²¹ In competition below armed conflict the joint force can improve its strategic position, counter an adversary’s actions or position, or contest a position to gain advantage over an adversary.²² Even in an environment of cooperation the joint force can engage selectively with the adversary or with a third nation, maintain its relationship with a nation, or advance the U.S. goals and the partner nation’s goals concurrently.²³ The concept also provides a new lexicon for describing specific

mechanisms—strengthen, create, preserve, weaken, position, inform, and persuade—giving a way to describe the activities to achieve U.S. policy.²⁴

The military will likely hold a supporting position in U.S. government efforts in the competitive environment because, as the JCIC notes, “historically the translation of military success into acceptable and sustainable outcomes has been one of the most difficult elements of campaigning.”²⁵ This acknowledgment should drive the joint force to further integrate with interagency, NGOs, and international organizations because the competitive environment is driven by local, domestic, and international politics with only some regard for military activities. The joint force must respond and adapt to this changing environment quickly and, therefore, support other organizations better suited for various activities below the level of armed conflict than the joint force.²⁶

The authors then describe how China and Russia aim to “create ambiguity meant to confuse public opinion, paralyze political decision making, subvert legal frameworks, and avoid crossing the threshold of military response.”²⁷ Understandably, China and Russia apply their respective instruments of national power in the international arena to attain their own goals. It is important to highlight that, although China and Russia want to “avoid crossing the threshold of military response,” they have not shied from operating in the armed conflict domain of competition as described by this monograph. This monograph uses a nuanced definition of armed conflict which includes deterrence and denial systems and not merely active hostilities. Although the JCIC describes armed conflict as a domain which the joint force must learn to avoid, this monograph holds all domains of competition at equal value. A competitive mindset does not mean to ignore the possibility of uncontrolled escalation. Increased U.S. military operations, build up, or expanded influence could push an adversary to respond aggressively or in kind creating a security dilemma.²⁸ The JCIC explicitly states this is a risk that must be mitigated but notes that “Joint commanders must recognize that a failure to counter actors’ malign activities may reinforce that behavior and may not give national leaders the range of options they need to achieve national objectives without resorting to armed conflict.”²⁹

CA likely has a strong role within the JCIC’s framework (see fig. 2), as demonstrated by the first five Concept Required Capabilities relating to “understand[ing] the environment.”³⁰ The joint force needs the ability to assess relevant actors and third party interventions in strategic locations.

These locations are, by definition, not armed conflict zones because the JCIC's goal is to avoid armed conflict. CA usually operates outside of armed conflict with the specific goal of avoiding future conflict indicating that CA has a key role in competition continuum.³¹

JCOIE

The joint force must build information into operational art to design operations that deliberately leverage the informational aspects of military activities.³²

The JCOIE attempts to provide a conceptual framework showing actions have “informational aspects that communicate a message or intent.”³³ This joint concept places information as the impetus for conducting an operation instead of serving as an enabling function to an operation.³⁴ The joint concept highlights this below:

Instead of relying primarily on physical power, the Joint Force must transition to an approach that builds information into operations that deliberately leverage information and the informational aspects of military activities to affect the perceptions, attitudes, and other elements to drive desired behaviors.

Commanders' intent must describe the desired conditions in terms of desired behaviors needed to support enduring strategic outcomes.³⁵

In other words, the information aspect must become the goal with the operation supporting the desired information-based effects. However, the JCOIE further states—perhaps erroneously or exaggeratingly—that “it is impossible to conduct military activities without communicating a message.”³⁶ The concept also promotes innovation within the joint force, even to the extent of suggesting change to the joint force's organizational structures.³⁷

The JCOIE critiques how the current model of the information environment describes information flow in a command-and-control construct, not as a method of influencing a relevant actor.³⁸ Therefore, the JCOIE proposes three new aspects for which it claims a future model of the information environment must account.³⁹ These new aspects are the informational, physical, and human aspects.⁴⁰ The informational aspect consists of the information

Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning Logic Map

Implications of Recent, Ongoing, and Emerging Challenges

- The Joint Force must eliminate institutional remnants of the obsolete peace/war binary conception of the operating environment.
- Recognition that following through to accomplish or enable policy aims is an inherent element of campaigning in armed conflict as well as an essential facet of campaigning outside of armed conflict.
- Military power alone is insufficient to achieve sustainable political objectives, and there are limited means to achieve integration across the instruments of national power.
- A complex and rapidly changing operating environment will require a construct for employing the Joint Force in competition below armed conflict.



Joint Force Problem

How do the Joint Force and its inter-organizational partners prepare to conduct globally integrated operations to achieve acceptable and sustainable outcomes, taking into account:

- the complexity of the environment;
- interactions with adaptive adversaries;
- transregional challenges;
- emerging patterns of competitions below the threshold of armed combat; and
- the challenge of integrating military activities within the DOD and aligning those activities with inter-organizational partners.



Solution: Integrated Campaigning

The JCIC defines *integrated campaigning* as Joint Force and interorganizational partner efforts to enable the achievement and maintenance of policy aims by integrating military activities and aligning non-military activities of sufficient scope, scale, simultaneity, and duration across multiple domains.

The Joint Force integrates among staff elements and service components within a command, among different combatant commands, and within the DOD, while also aligning with interorganizational and multi-national partners.

The central idea consists of four interrelated elements that broadly describe how the Joint Force and its interorganizational partners can effectively campaign:



1. Understand the Operating Environment through the lens of the competition continuum and the use of a new lexicon to foster civil-military dialogue

2. Design and Construct the Campaign using the factors of integrated campaign design and competition mechanisms to align military and non-military activities



4. Assess and Adapt the Campaign based on the continuous analysis of results in relation to expectations, modifying both understanding and subsequent campaign objectives.

3. Employ the Integrated Force and Secure Gains in campaigns tailored to the new operating environment



Figure 2. JCIC Logic Map. Source: JCIC. Source: Department of Defense, Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning, vii.

flow between individuals, groups, information systems, and sensors.⁴¹ The JCOIE describes the physical aspect as the “material characteristics, both natural and manufactured, of the environment that create constraints and freedoms on the people and information systems that operate in it.”⁴² In other words, the physical aspects of the information environment are the things that affect, or lead to, the human aspects. The human aspects are those considerations of language, culture, and psychology and the effects they have on how information is processed and understood by individuals.⁴³

Strategic adversaries are pushing against contested norms, and the international environment has degraded into “persistent disorder” creating challenges that the joint force will face.⁴⁴ This idea of the persistent disorder is an important one to understand. It refers to the current environment of conflict, weak states, and failing states.⁴⁵ It is in this environment that violent extremism flourishes and that adversary states can exploit for their gain. The joint force has yet to integrate information capabilities into its culture and has “lacked emphasis, policy, resources, training, an education to address the full power of information,” exacerbating the effect of challenges.⁴⁶

Although the JCOIE makes many positive, strong recommendations and acknowledgements, it falls short in some areas. First, it seems to conflate messaging with psychological effects. The authors provide an example of how dropping a Massive Ordnance Air Bomb—a fuel-air bomb—in Afghanistan “sends a message.”⁴⁷ Dropping bombs, or specific military actions, are not always a message in themselves. They may be part of a message or they may create psychological effect as the result of the action, but that is different than

A better way to generalize the use of military strikes, or similar activities, is that the joint force should design them to support, strengthen, or advance the strategic narrative and goals, rather than purely to produce military effects.

“sending a message.” A better way to generalize the use of military strikes, or similar activities, is that the joint force should design them to support, strengthen, or advance the strategic narrative and goals, rather than purely to produce military effects. This is the general theme throughout the JCIC, regardless of the example it provides in this context. Second, the JCOIE does not present new concepts. Instead it rebrands old ideas in an admirable attempt

to bring the joint force back to tried and true methods. The JCOIE describes “information power to achieve three ends.”⁴⁸

To change or maintain the observations, perceptions, attitudes, and other elements that drive desired behaviors of relevant actors.

To protect and ensure the observations, perceptions, attitudes, decisions, and behaviors of the joint force, its allies, and its partners.

To acquire, process, distribute, and employ data to enhance combat power.⁴⁹

Propaganda, disinformation, and deception encompass the JCOIE's first two ends for information power. In 1928, Edward Bernays stated, "modern propaganda is a consistent, enduring effort to create or shape events to influence the relations of the public to an enterprise, idea or group."⁵⁰ Another way to state this is that propaganda is used to influence an individual or population's predisposition.⁵¹ Predisposition is another way to frame the "observations, perceptions, attitudes" of an adversary or friendly actor.⁵² Donald Daniel and Katherine Herbig describe deception with two goals: increase ambiguity or to mislead an adversary.⁵³ Deception, therefore, affects the "other elements that drive desired behaviors of relevant actors."⁵⁴ The third end is merely a restatement of the purpose of intelligence as defined by Field Manual (FM) 2-0.

The purpose of intelligence is to provide commanders and staffs with timely, accurate, relevant, predictive, and tailored intelligence about the enemy and other aspects of the operational environment. Intelligence supports the conduct—planning, preparing, executing, and assessing—of operations.⁵⁵

The JCOIE uses the term "combat power" whereas the Army FM states "supports the conduct ... of operations" but these two terms mean generally the same thing.⁵⁶

Despite these shortcomings, the JCOIE is a step in the right direction. It attempts to realign thinking in the joint force to focus on how relevant actors receive and process information which affect the actors' decisions. With the JCOIE in mind, the JC-HAMO finishes the overall framework of campaigning.

JC-HAMO

At its core, the JC-HAMO describes the need to focus on the will of “relevant actors” and human interactions to achieve strategic victory.⁵⁷ The Joint Staff published the JC-HAMO in 2016, two years prior to the JCIC, and the overall framework focuses on COIN and CT operations. The concepts within the JC-HAMO, however, are still equally applicable in the JCIC framework for integrated campaigning in great power competition as they are to COIN. When applied to the JCIC framework, the JC-HAMO has an almost Clausewitzian lean to it by specifically targeting the will of an adversary.

The JC-HAMO makes the point with four imperatives which the joint force must understand to account for the human aspects:

- Identify the range of relevant actors and their associated social, cultural, political, economic, and organizational networks.
- Evaluate relevant actor behavior in context.
- Anticipate relevant actor decision making.
- Influence the will and decisions of relevant actors (“influence” is the act or power to produce a desired outcome on a target audience or entity.)⁵⁸

When applied to the Commander’s Decision Cycle (plan, direct, monitor, and assess), these imperatives should ensure the joint force plans and conducts operations that are nested in the broader political goals and designed to achieve strategic victories.⁵⁹ This shows how the competitive environment has a strong foundation in the population and political element. As the JC-HAMO states, “the key is to identify ‘human objectives’ that focus on influencing relevant actors.”⁶⁰ In other words, advocates taking actions that change the risk calculations, strengthen or weaken a predisposition, or convince the relevant actors to make a decision beneficial to U.S. policies and goals.

The concept also describes what it calls the “Elements that Shape Human Behavior.”⁶¹ These elements—social, cultural, physical, informational, and psychological—are viewed through a temporal lens to understand how those aspects affect relevant actors’ decision making and behavior over time.⁶² The Social element consists of the “society, its institutions, and key relationships.”⁶³ This differs from the cultural element which focuses on the beliefs and customs of a people.⁶⁴ The authors specifically note that Thucydides’ “fear, honor, and interest” fall into the cultural element.⁶⁵ The

effects of the physical environment are taken into account to understand the “choices, outlook, values, and behavior” of relevant actors.⁶⁶ The final two elements, informational and psychological, seem to be the hardest to categorize. The JC-HAMO describes the informational element as the “sources, availability, and uses of data” but then goes on to discuss issues of perception and propaganda which is a separate, albeit related, topic.⁶⁷ As this monograph will show later, the JCOIE attempts to tackle the information element but still falls short. The psychological element makes this point better by describing the informational element as “how people perceive, process, and act upon information.”⁶⁸ The JC-HAMO also notes that the informational element is the hardest element to categorize and use, despite its obvious importance when dealing with the HAMO.⁶⁹

The joint force must use these elements to identify, evaluate, anticipate, and influence the relevant actors and their decision making.⁷⁰ This becomes especially important when attempting to anticipate the decisions which a relevant actor may make. In the same way that staffs develop possible enemy courses of action, they must apply this concept to develop courses of action that they expect relevant actors to take.⁷¹ Whereas forces available, terrain, and likely (or known) objectives inform an enemy course of action, the elements of human behavior and interactions with the friendly force will inform relevant actors’ decisions.

The JC-HAMO points out that the joint force “must determine whether to use deception, coercion, persuasion, cooperation, avoidance or some other approach or combination of strategies to influence relevant actors.”⁷² The JC-HAMO actually identifies strategies instead of tactics here, a welcome change from many other strategic documents. Additionally, deception is at the front of this list, indicating the importance of deception in defeating an adversary decision maker.

The role of CA within the construct of the JC-HAMO is self-evident. As the civil reconnaissance (CR) element for the joint force, CA forces should provide much of the cultural context and analysis for Commanders. Capability requirement 7.1 specifically states the need to “identify the range of relevant actors and their associated networks.”⁷³ As part of civil-military engagement, SOF CA already specifically conducts network analysis as stated by FM 3-57.⁷⁴ Published during the height of the counter-Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) campaign, the JC-HAMO likely refers to a COIN/CT type network of relevant actors, but this does not preclude applying the techniques

to state leaders and influencers in a great power competition environment. In this regard, the JC-HAMO fits well within the JCIC framework. In the competitive environment where adversaries attempt to avoid direct military warfare, the human aspects become crucial. For example, SOF CA's value could be in engaging local populations, perhaps even defending them, or through security force assistance or foreign internal defense activities that help to create partner or host nation CA forces that provide utility to their own populations. These might be important non-kinetic ways to generate positive influence given the way Russia and China are positioning themselves. The popular will becomes a key tool to coerce governments and great powers can directly influence populations by engaging with key leaders, mitigating a civil vulnerability by providing security or resources, or enabling the host nation to provide governance capabilities to the population.

Doctrinal Foundations

Coming back from joint concepts to practical applications, the baseline doctrines for CA operations are Joint Publication (JP) 3-57 and FM 3-57. These documents set forth the basic functions of CA and civil-military operations, but provide little insight into how CA operations are to conduct special operations. According to FM 3-57, the purpose of CA operations is “to enhance awareness of, and manage the interaction with, the civil component of the operational environment; identify and mitigate underlying causes of instability within civil society; and/or involve the application of functional specialty skills normally the responsibility of civil government.”⁷⁵ In other words, the U.S. military uses CA forces to legitimize military presence or operations in the eyes of the affected population and influence that population to behave in a specific way.

To determine if an operation constitutes a special operation, and thus whether SOF CA should fill the role or not, the operation must meet the definition set forth by JP 3-05, *Special Operations*.⁷⁶ JP 3-05 describes special operations as the following:

Special operations require unique modes of employment, tactics, techniques, procedures, and equipment. They are often conducted in hostile, denied, or politically and/or diplomatically sensitive environments, and are characterized by one or more of the following: time-sensitivity, clandestine or covert nature, low visibility, work

with or through indigenous forces, greater requirements for regional orientation and cultural expertise, and a higher degree of risk.⁷⁷

JP 3-05 thus establishes three sets of criteria for evaluating whether an operation is “special” versus conventional: (a) unique modes, tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs), or equipment, (b) environment, and (c) characterization of the operation. If an operation meets one of the factors in each of the three criteria then it is, by doctrinal definition, a special operation. USSOCOM breaks down the JP 3-05 definition into methods and conditions to serve as a check if an operation should be considered special.⁷⁸ The methods of a special operation must “[u]tilize unique modes of employment, tactical techniques, equipment, and training ... and are typically conducted in hostile, denied, or politically sensitive environments” while the conditions of the operation “[a]re often time sensitive, clandestine, and require low visibility ... are often conducted with and/or through indigenous forces, leveraging regional expertise ... and involve a high degree of risk (political, mission, or force).”⁷⁹

When assessing the role of SOF CA, this definition should be met to establish that SOF CA is the proper element to apply towards the problem instead of conventional CA forces. SOF CA soldiers and officers receive specialized training specifically to operate in these environments and are a limited resource when compared to conventional CA forces, and, therefore, their role should not include things that conventional CA forces are equally capable of conducting.

Understanding the Great Power Competition

In terms of great powers, defining competition can be difficult. Should competition be relegated to large scale war? Proxy wars? Economic competition? In their RAND report, Mazarr et al. consolidated a definition of great power competition from multiple IR publications.

First, there must be some degree of perceived or measurable contention involved ... Second, competition is generally viewed as a contest in which each party (or one of the two parties) aims to enhance its power and influence, typically relative to another. Third, while not all situations are zero-sum or focused on relative gains, generally the term refers to a situation in which there is either (1) scarcity in

the object of the competition or (2) significance of getting more of that object than someone else.⁸⁰

This definition provides a foundation from which to examine the U.S. relationship with China and Russia and any other potential competitive adversaries.⁸¹ Mazarr et al. also give some context into why the world is seeing a “return” to great power competition now. He states it is because cooperative eras tend to come immediately following large wars, but fade over time as the scars and lessons from those wars also fade and the environment changes.⁸² Additionally, competition often results in actual conflict if one or both of the states in competition seek to disrupt the contemporary international order.⁸³

Analysts are able to describe the nature of the competition between various states (countries) through the framework of five questions from Mazarr et al. regarding the states’ “essential character;” goals; strategies; “international patterns or structures” that “characterize the competition;” and “to what degree ... the competition reflect[s] ... theory.”⁸⁴ For example, these factors can be applied in case studies to gain fidelity on how or why countries locked in competition behave in certain ways or perhaps explain certain actions that do not make sense based on a rational actor judgment or other theoretical perspective.

One crucial factor in understanding the nature of international competition is understanding the character of the nations involved specifically in three ways: type of regime, importance of national or state identity, and the level of dissatisfaction with the current international order.⁸⁵ Regime type is important because, according to democratic peace theory, democracies generally do not go to war with each other or, according to some versions of the theory, do not go to war at all.⁸⁶ National or state identity is “the most fundamental filter through which states interpret the character of a competition,” which is to say that a state’s sense of self, values, and history all affect how that state, and the organizations and people of power within it, contextualize the place the state takes in the international realm.⁸⁷ Third, as to the level of dissatisfaction, also referred to as “revisionist intent,” states that are highly dissatisfied with their current place in the international order are naturally more likely to attempt to upend or change the order toward their favor.⁸⁸

Mazarr et al. provide some analysis of Russia and China through this framework, establishing several hypotheses. First, their research suggests that the competitive environment is not going to be a general competition between many states but, instead, between only a select few who have “status grievances and countervailing regional and global coalitions.”⁸⁹ Additionally, they posit that the competition will focus around the relationship between the United States as the prevailing state in the “rule-based order” and China as the “leading revisionist peer competitor”⁹⁰ and that specific forms of competition in various competitive spaces, rather than general competition in all things, will exist.⁹¹ Their research also argues that the primary focus for U.S. efforts will be in “managing the escalation of regional rivalries” to keep the U.S. out of conflicts irrelevant to its interests.⁹² Fifth, this modern competition will likely center around national identity and influence rather than territorial expansion or “the conscious, intentional resort to large-scale war.”⁹³ Military conflict, therefore, will not likely be at the forefront of the competition; instead, it will focus around “nonmilitary areas of national advantage” that confer increased risk of escalation.⁹⁴ Although, conceptually, power balancing and international structural influences are clearly realist concepts, Mazarr et al. hold that this competitive environment will take place within the liberal, postwar order established by the United States, in which the United States holds an inherent advantage.⁹⁵ Mazarr et al. also highlight two “obvious flashpoints” in this modern competitive environment: territorial claims and the “tendency of authoritarian states to seek to extend their reach and control beyond their borders.”⁹⁶ This points to their final hypothesis: that this competition will not be defined by victory on one side, but, instead, by continual “contestation, competition, and cooperation.”⁹⁷

The Competitive Environment

Moving forward, the U.S. must establish mechanisms for dealing with this new competitive environment. Large combat forces have become analogous to strategic deterrence platforms such as submarine-launched nuclear missiles.⁹⁸ These forces must train to deploy, fight, and win the nation’s wars much as nuclear missile crews must constantly train to launch world-ending missile strikes, but actual employment of these forces would initiate catastrophic results. The analogy exists because conventional combat forces would elicit a nuclear response from Russia if conventional forces

were deployed “in situations critical to the national security of the Russian Federation.”⁹⁹ China’s no-first-use policy seems to weaken this analogy, but some question if China should stick to this policy in the changing

These forces must train to deploy, fight, and win the nation’s wars much as nuclear missile crews must constantly train to launch world-ending missile strikes, but actual employment of these forces would initiate catastrophic results.

international environment.¹⁰⁰ In other words, using large conventional forces against a strategic adversary will almost assuredly result in a nuclear exchange, thus these forces become strategic deterrence in the same manner as the nuclear forces themselves.

This change in the environment leads to competition that avoids large scale conflict in the first place. As this monograph will show, China and

Russia compete across five primary domains of competition: population/political warfare, economic statecraft, cyber operations, armed conflict, and international institutions. These domains are built upon the specific tool, or lever, that a state can use to coerce, influence, or otherwise get another state to behave in a specific way.

Population/political warfare exploits the government’s desire to follow the will of its population or the key leaders in the government itself. This domain rests upon the people and how they can influence the government to act in a certain way. Populations exert pressure upon their governments through various means such as voting, protesting, press and publications, or even violence. Targeting the population to apply pressure can coerce a government to take actions that benefit an adversary. Adversaries can target key leaders within the foreign government as well. Influencing, coercing, or convincing key leaders can cause the same results as targeting the population but in a less observable way.

Economic statecraft is merely the application of economic principles through the various economic mechanisms available to any government. This can be trade policy, financial structures, private business, or state-owned enterprises (SOEs). Through these mechanisms a state can apply great pressure to a foreign government to the point of severe damage to the foreign state’s economy. Alternatively, a state can apply beneficial pressures to a foreign government which act as an incentive for the foreign government to adopt policies that benefit the state applying the pressures.

Cyber operations are those that exploit the global communications and computer infrastructure. This can take the form of, among many other activities, hacking into an adversary's government computers to disrupt processes or infrastructure, stealing intellectual property, gaining intelligence about an adversary, or communicating with actors in a clandestine manner. Using the internet, media, or other electronic means to distribute messaging does not fall into this domain, however, unless that method requires exploiting vulnerabilities or hacking security systems to do so. Messaging through various means falls within the population/political warfare domain.

Armed conflict is exactly as it seems: military violence. This domain has some nuance, however, that must be understood. This domain does not require actual violence to take place. It also includes the threat of violence or prospect of some violent act against an adversary. Anti-Access/Area Denial systems meet the bar for the armed conflict domain. A state can use these systems to apply violence, but their primary purpose is to deter an adversary from taking military action near the state. This domain also does not require a state's own military forces to engage in conflict with an adversary. State sponsored insurgency falls within this domain as it is one state leveraging violence against another through a proxy force. Finally, a hybrid of these activities would obviously fall within the category of armed conflict.

The international institution domain refers to the many multilateral organizations, institutions, and structures that comprise the modern international environment. Organizations such as the United Nations, Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), NATO, World Bank, or Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank serve as examples of these sorts of institutions. This monograph does not examine this domain closely because SOF CA has very little, if any, role within this domain of competition. This domain exists between the heads of state and legislatures of a nation, and thus exists outside of SOF CA's scope of capabilities.

If the U.S. is to compete in these domains effectively it must have many tools at its disposal to use. One of those tools is SOF CA. As the next chapter will lay out, SOF CA has the ability to gain access and placement in populations, with leaders, and organizations to provide an understanding to higher headquarters, adjacent SOF elements, or U.S. interagency partners. The force can also engage and influence populations and leaders to counter adversary information operations. Finally, it provides a key capability as part of a larger STR effort against an adversary in a variety of situations.

Chapter 2. Special Operations CA

Building from the doctrine and joint concept review, chapter 2 first analyzes the historical foundations, current directives, and current capabilities of SOF CA with a recognition of current authorities. From this analysis arise four primary roles in which SOF CA can be employed to conduct within the framework of great power competition: initial entry, reconnaissance, engage and influence, and STR. Given the statutory and department level guidance that informs doctrine, unit organization, training, and equipment, this chapter demonstrates that SOF CA is the organization that can best conduct these activities as part of the larger efforts in the competitive environment and concludes with resulting implications.

Foundations, Directives, and Capabilities

To establish the role of any military organization within the larger construct of military operations, several factors must be taken into account: directives or foundational guidance; capabilities, defined as the overall interaction between doctrine, organization, training, and equipment; and, to a limited extent, authorities to employ that organization.¹⁰¹ Directives establish what an element, such as SOF CA, should do and a general sense of how it should go about conducting those activities and also provide the legal guidance underpinning the establishment of any sort of military capability. Military capabilities refers to the doctrine, unit organization, training, and equipment that allow a military unit to conduct its activities. The interaction of doctrine, organization, training, and equipment in a specific military unit create an alignment of unique attributes to accomplish a specific type of task; other forces with different unique attributes are not as likely to best complete that task. For example, infantry platoons—organized into four squads, each subdivided into teams and a squad leader—are designed specifically to enable effective command and control over multiple soldiers in a gunfight with an enemy. Like all military units, an infantry platoon trains on specific tasks. Could a platoon of truck drivers fight in an infantry battle? Yes, but they are going to be much less successful than a properly organized, trained, and equipped infantry element.

SOF CA Foundations

As chapter I noted, Army CA traces its lineage from military government activities in the aftermath of WWI.¹⁰² While occupying the Rhineland for almost five years, the Army had to establish and document how it would govern the region until the civilian government could reconstitute. The Army had previous experience in occupational governments, but this was the first time that the experience was documented and institutionalized for future use.¹⁰³

From the lessons of WWI, the Army established its military government capabilities and, in 1942, created a school to train officers for military government duties in the occupied regions during WWII.¹⁰⁴ Throughout every conflict since, military government units, also referred to as CA/military government, governed occupied areas.¹⁰⁵ In 1959, the Office of the Chief of Civil Affairs and Military Government was renamed the Office of the Chief of Civil Affairs and the military government moniker faded into the broader concept of CA.

During periods of conflict, the Army activated various CA units only to deactivate them at the conclusion of the conflicts, leaving only the reserve elements intact. After Congress established USSOCOM, all CA units were realigned under USASOC where they remained until 2006. At this point, the Reserve Component CA Command, U.S. Army Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations Command, was once again realigned to the Army Reserves, and, in response, the Regular Army established CA as a branch, stood up the 95th Civil Affairs Brigade (Airborne), and aligned it under USASOC to

The CA proponent must write doctrine which encompasses both conventional and special operations, creating confusion when CA units work with non-CA organizations who do not understand the difference in missions and capabilities.

fill the gap created by the realignment of Reserve CA. The repercussions of the “great divorce” still affect CA doctrine, training, and employment today.¹⁰⁶ The CA proponent must write doctrine which encompasses both conventional and special operations, creating confusion when CA units work with non-CA organizations who do not understand the difference

in missions and capabilities. Currently, there are nine Army Reserve CA Brigades, one active duty brigade subordinate to USASOC, and one active

duty battalion supporting Army Forces Command. The vast majority of CA units are designed to support the conventional force with only the 95th CA Brigade conducting special operations. Likely because of the disparity in numbers, the majority of CA doctrine is written for the conventional elements rather than SOF CA.

SOF CA Directives

U.S. Code Title 10, section 167, tasks USSOCOM to conduct CA as a special operations activity, establishing the statutory foundation for SOF CA.¹⁰⁷ Additionally, DOD Directive 2000.13 creates the overall requirement for CA as a military capability, stating “[t]he DOD must maintain a capability to conduct a broad range of civil affairs operations necessary to support DOD missions and to meet DOD Component responsibilities to the civilian sector in the operational environment across the range of military operations.”¹⁰⁸ The DOD directive goes on to establish specific activities that are considered CA operations (CAO), such as coordinating with other U.S. Government entities, supporting stability operations, humanitarian aid, and military governance.¹⁰⁹ While these general functions focus on how the conventional force uses CA capabilities, the DOD directive is not all-inclusive, leaving flexibility for USSOCOM’s application of CA operations. USSOCOM Directive 525–38, Civil-Military Engagement is USSOCOM’s implementation of Title 10, Section 167 and DOD Directive 2000.13 to conduct CA operations and maintain a CA capability.

Capabilities: Doctrine, Organization, Training, and Equipment

SOF CA has several key capabilities which it derives from doctrine, organization, training, and equipment. These include the ability to operate in politically-sensitive or denied environments; analyzing and engaging with friendly or neutral networks; requiring little logistics support; and integrating interagency, nongovernmental, and international partners into a coordinated effort.

Doctrine

As mentioned in the literature review, the baseline CA doctrines are JP 3-57 and FM 3-57. These documents set forth the basic functions of CA and civil-military operations but provide little insight into how CAO are utilized to conduct special operations. JP 3-57 states that CAO:

“are designed to work with friendly networks and engage neutral networks to help achieve commander’s objectives. Engaging with [indigenous populations and institutions], interagency partners, NGOs, and international organizations creates a better shared understanding of the [operational environment], informs USG decision makers, and influences informal networks towards U.S. national interests.”¹¹⁰

In other words, the U.S. military uses CA forces to legitimize military presence or operations in the eyes of the affected population and influence that population to behave in a specific way.

Formal doctrine has not fully encapsulated the CME directive. The CA proponent partially solved this by including portions of the CME directive into the April 2019 update to FM 3-57, thus codifying, in part, the acknowledgement that there is some separation between SOF CA and conventional CA.¹¹¹ Prior to this, Army Techniques Publication 3-57.80 *Civil-Military Engagement* gave the only acknowledgement of SOF CA as a separate capability.¹¹² Published in 2013, this manual fails to capture how the intervening six years changed SOF CA operations. FM 3-57, which builds from JP 3-57, identifies several CA activities which are key to SOF CA capabilities: CR, network analysis, and network engagement.¹¹³

Network analysis is a key capability that the 95th CA Brigade (SO)(A) strives to perfect, as demonstrated when the brigade specifically identified network analysis as one of six mission essential tasks in 2018.¹¹⁴ FM 2-0, *Intelligence*, highlights that there is no standardized way to analyze civil information, but it does acknowledge that network diagrams with link/node analysis are a part of understanding the civil considerations.¹¹⁵ The various terminologies—the 95th refers to analytics as “Human Network Analysis” while FM 3-57 refers to civil information management (CIM)—demonstrates the difficulty in standardizing this task and this represents one of the largest gaps in the branch.¹¹⁶ Strategically, this means understanding broader networks of groups and collective concerns for these groups. It also means using this analysis to strengthen relationships and build trust. SOF CA has many mechanisms through which to accomplish this, but it is important to note the only force that put network analysis as a mission essential task is SOF CA.

Organization

SOF CA organization provides one key capability that few other elements possess: small size. A SOF CA team consists of four personnel: one officer and three noncommissioned officers. This small size allows the team to quickly move around an area of operations with little logistics requirements and lends itself to decreasing political risk to U.S. diplomats who must authorize their presence in a country. A small team is not likely to create a perception of overt military presence in a sensitive region or country. Additionally, one member is a Special Operations Combat Medic, trained to sustain an injured person over a long period as well as to provide day-to-day medical care for the team, decreasing the risk that the team's military commander must assume if the team is deployed in austere locations.

Training

The members of SOF CA teams are also trained in survival, escape, resistance, and evasion skills, low visibility marksmanship, advanced off-road driving, social network analysis, and preparation of the environment. These skills set SOF CA apart from conventional CA and also other SOF elements especially because they are trained to conduct these activities in small, four-man teams. Special forces teams train on similar tasks but do so in a twelve-man element that may allow for decreased risk in some cases but with increased exposure and with the possible appearance of overt military action. It should also go without saying that SOF CA teams specifically train to conduct CR, network engagement, and network analysis, for which no other forces train.

Equipment

SOF CA's training and organizational aspects are supported by its specialized equipment, including concealable handguns for low visibility force protection. Additionally, SOF CA mostly uses non-tactical vehicles, further decreasing their "signature" as U.S. military, which helps the teams operate in politically-sensitive environments where the U.S. embassy and host nation governments do not want an overt military presence for various political or safety reasons. SOF CA teams also deploy with small satellite internet systems allowing for access to DOD unclassified and classified networks in the most austere locations, giving the teams access to their chains of command,

the intelligence community, and other U.S. resources that would otherwise be inaccessible in these environments.

All of these factors—doctrine, organization, training, and equipment—create a force that is well-suited for low-visibility operations in politically-sensitive or high-risk environments to engage with populations and indigenous institutions that the U.S. embassy and other U.S. agencies would not otherwise be able to engage. The low-visibility aspect also allows SOF CA teams to downplay, but not deny, their military association creating a situation where partners and other key civil leaders are more willing to interact when they otherwise would not with overt military forces. SOF CA organization, training, and equipment mitigate risk to force while lowering approval obstacles to their employment and increasing commanders' willingness to authorize their use in austere, semi-permissive, or even hostile areas. There is a measure of feedback in this model that has not been addressed. As previously stated, directives guide capabilities—doctrine, organization, training, and equipment—which then guides authorities. This process is not linear, and the authorities will affect how a unit assigned to a mission trains and equips itself, which, given enough time, will affect doctrine as the CA branch has demonstrated.

The Role of SOF CA

Based on SOF CA's foundations, directives, and capabilities, four roles become evident. Initial entry, reconnaissance, engage and influence, and STR leverage the unique capabilities of SOF CA in ways that no other branch, organization, element, or capability can match. Some other elements, such as special forces or cavalry, may possess overlapping attributes that lend themselves to conducting similar activities, but none possess the capability created by the interaction of SOF CA doctrine, organization, training, and equipment. Much as a truck driving platoon could conduct infantry operations but should not, special forces or cavalry or any other number of lightly-equipped ground forces, should not be used to fill these four roles either.

Special forces may claim that they have been tasked with many of these roles, but that argument no longer applies. When the Army established SOF CA as a separate entity from conventional CA and special forces, it abdicated special forces from the role of conducting CA operations. Modern doctrine shows this, as FM 3-05 explicitly states that "Civil Affairs operations are

performed or supported by CA forces.”¹¹⁷ Do not mistake this to mean that special forces do not have a reconnaissance role themselves, for example, because they certainly do. The special forces reconnaissance role, however, differs significantly from the SOF CA reconnaissance role presented in this monograph. This monograph argues that SOF CA’s reconnaissance role is broader than the doctrinal definition of CR, thus the use of reconnaissance in a general sense. The roles of special forces complement SOF CA roles, especially regarding reconnaissance efforts. Joint Combined Exchange Training (JCET) events build relationships between special forces detachments and their partner forces, serving the purpose of making inroads with a foreign government but this is different than SOF CA’s activities to build relationships with populations and key leaders directly; JCETs bring different skills and more political risks than SOF CA teams. The optics of a fully-armed special forces detachment are very different than a four-man SOF CA team, and country teams pay very close attention to how these optics affect their relationship with the host nation government.

If SOF CA is to fully assume these four roles within great power competition, it will necessitate changes to their capabilities so that they can fulfill those roles in a more efficient, less risky, or more effective manner. Admittedly, this is a recursive process that may seem self-serving—SOF CA is the best to fill these roles because it is what they are designed for—but, up to this point, there has been no established role for SOF CA within great power competition, only an implicit role within COIN and CT operations. Upon adopting a role, an organization or element will refine itself to better fit that role. The JCIC emphasizes that the joint force must experiment with organizational structure to meet the needs of the competitive environment.¹¹⁸ SOF CA likely does not currently possess the knowledge or skills required by the competitive environment, despite being the best force to fill these roles. The conclusion chapter further addresses recommended changes.

Initial Entry

SOF CA should serve as the initial entry for SOF elements into a permissive or semi-permissive country that does not already have a U.S. SOF presence to engage civil networks in support of logistics and to provide access and placement to other U.S. elements. In their current missions, civil military support elements (CMSEs)—the term describing deployed CA teams—already work closely with and in their respective U.S. embassies. They possess the

institutional knowledge and skills to work with other U.S. agencies and departments, build relationships and establish trust. Some specific situations may require CMSEs to serve in this same role for follow-on regular forces, which would only make sense if the regular units require extensive coordination with host nation authorities or initial reconnaissance that is not feasible for the unit's organic pre-deployment site survey to conduct and a SOF CA team is already in country or able to easily deploy to the target country.

In many cases, CMSEs already serve as the first U.S. SOF element into a country although they are deployed for another purpose, not specifically to set conditions for follow-on U.S. SOF. CMSEs can be deployed for their own missions and provide initial entry for other U.S. SOF, but they must understand that initial entry is one of their missions and conduct themselves accordingly. Having initial entry as a mission means fostering relationships in the U.S. embassy that increase the country team's trust and confidence in U.S. SOF to gain the required permissions for follow-on elements. CMSEs

Having initial entry as a mission means fostering relationships in the U.S. embassy that increase the country team's trust and confidence in U.S. SOF to gain the required permissions for follow-on elements.

should also build the relationships and network within the host nation military to identify potential partner forces if that is a requirement for follow-on U.S. SOF such as special forces detachments or SEAL platoons.

Outside of the country team or host nation military forces, CMSEs are also well-positioned to engage networks within the host nation that are involved with logistics that U.S. forces may or will need to use for future movements and operations. CMSEs should

identify key leaders and individuals who manage ports or other major infrastructure sites and individuals involved in the approval and coordination process involved in any large U.S. military logistics movement through the host nation. In a country where a planned or potential need to move military equipment exists, the geographic combatant command (GCC) must have up to date infrastructure assessments to know details such as if the roads can handle the equipment being transported on trucks or whether railways are the same gauge as adjacent countries. While these activities should not be the primary mission for CMSEs in country, they can be a secondary mission conducted concurrent to their primary mission.

Finally, in regard to initial entry, CMSEs already provide access and placement to other U.S. SOF elements as a benefit from their normal activities in theater. This relationship should continue and be institutionalized so that commands know to direct CMSEs to gain access or placement within population, organizations, or locations to facilitate another U.S. SOF activity that does not enjoy the freedom of movement that most CMSEs possess.

SOF CA's initial entry role clearly meets the method and condition requirements for a special operation as shown in figure 3. It requires special training and TTPs and is conducted, in the competitive environment, in a politically-sensitive and high-risk environment.

Initial Entry	Method	
	Unique TTPs, equipment or training?	Hostile, denied, or politically sensitive?
	Integrating U.S. Country Team and HN goals with TSOC objectives	Operations supporting follow-on SOF elements or to set conditions for follow-on SOF are generally politically sensitive in nature
Conditions		
Time sensitive, clandestine, low visibility?	Indigenous forces or regional expertise?	High degree of risk?
Gaining access and placement to a population requires CMSEs to maintain a low profile	A direct component of supporting follow-on SOF is to engage with the host nation	Actions intended to counter another great power increase the risk to force and political risk

Figure 3. Initial Entry—Methods and Conditions. Adapted from JP 3-05 and USSOCOM Competition Series. Source: Department of Defense, *Special Operations*, I-1; “The Competition Series: A USSOCOM Perspective on Competition Short of Armed Conflict.” Presentation at USSOCOM, MacDill AFB, FL, 10 April 2019.

CMSEs are the best element to fill the initial entry role because of their benign image and reputation. CAO conjures images of teams digging wells and distributing humanitarian aid; although not completely accurate, it is a useful reputation to cultivate.¹¹⁹ CA's benign reputation helps facilitate strong relationships with the State Department and the United States Agency for International Development personnel in the U.S. embassies because a CMSE

presents a low political risk to the U.S. country team due to the small element size and legitimate reason to be in country supporting the U.S. embassy's stabilization goals or humanitarian activities, from which expanded freedom of movement and relationships can be derived.

Reconnaissance

SOF CA forces should be utilized explicitly as a reconnaissance element to provide early warning of adversary influence or effects, to support other U.S. or U.S. SOF operations by preparing the environment, and to facilitate movements and transitions. Although not governed by FM 3-98, *Reconnaissance and Security Operations*, this concept of reconnaissance derives much of its nature from conventional reconnaissance. FM 3-98 describes seven roles for cavalry organizations:

- Enable mission command,
- Provide accurate and timely information to the operations process and intelligence collection cycle,
- Operate as combined arms air-ground teams,
- Provide reaction time and maneuver space,
- Preserve combat power and achieve economy of force,
- Facilitate movement and transitions, [and]
- Fight for information.¹²⁰

Many of these roles translate naturally within the construct of special operations and SOF CA. SOF CA conducts CR and civil engagement to enable mission command—through developing a civil common operating picture—and provides accurate and timely information that gives the commander reaction time while preserving combat or other SOF power. As a force, SOF CA is well-known as the component that conducts CR, but how SOF CA elements are specifically utilized to conduct reconnaissance is not institutionalized.

The JC-HAMO specifically describes the requirements to “determine relevant actor desired behavior,” “develop warning intelligence,” “communicate a compelling narrative,” and “disrupt support to adversaries at the international, national, local, and sub-national levels.”¹²¹ SOF CA's reconnaissance role plays a part in all of these capabilities. With their inherent access and placement, CMSEs are best positioned to monitor for adversary operations or effects in the target population, especially when no other U.S.

element has access to a specific population. This provides the TSOC and U.S. embassy with early warning of adversary activities that otherwise might go unnoticed until it is too late. CMSEs also interact with many relevant actors and can gain an understanding of how that relevant actor may respond to various influence methods. CMSE's interactions with local populations and leaders also mean that the teams can provide the context and nuance for psychological operations teams to develop a "compelling narrative."¹²² Finally, CMSEs can also meet the requirements of the JC-HAMO by providing the timely information about which populations or leaders support adversary efforts, enabling the TSOC to develop plans to counter these efforts.

Separate from the tactical capability to monitor adversary operations, CMSEs also can conduct reconnaissance to support TSOC, GCC, or interagency engagement strategies in their respective countries or regions. When properly coordinated, information requirements drive CMSE operations that feed back into planning processes. This enables the GCCs and U.S. embassies to enact U.S. policy vis-à-vis a competitor rather than purely reacting to adversary operations. By providing access and an understanding of key populations, CMSE reconnaissance activities enable targeted engagement with groups, civil societies, and leaders.

Other SOF elements, or the TSOC in general, often have information requirements or desired shaping effects that lend themselves to SOF CA teams more than any other asset. Information requirements relating to individual personalities, social structures or trends, civil vulnerabilities, or civil infrastructure all fall under the capabilities of SOF CA. Much as conventional reconnaissance "fight[s] for information" and "provide[s] reaction time and maneuver space," SOF CA teams conducting reconnaissance can engage civil networks to gather information about the civil component, neutral networks, or threats. They also engage civil networks to address civil vulnerabilities, thereby degrading an adversary's ability to mobilize a population against U.S. interests and giving the TSOC or other SOF elements time to conduct their operations. By building relationships with local actors and influencers, SOF CA teams extend the area in which other U.S. elements, such as interagency partners, can enact competition mechanisms from the

CMSEs also interact with many relevant actors and can gain an understanding of how that relevant actor may respond to various influence methods.

JCIC like weakening an adversary’s position, persuade partners, or position the U.S. in an advantageous way.¹²³

Building on the initial entry role, SOF CA also uses reconnaissance to facilitate transitions between U.S. SOF supported elements, such as indigenous military forces and their law-enforcement counterparts, and the movement of civilians or materiel through non-standard logistics. Understanding and engaging an area’s civil networks enables the CMSE to provide key insights into patterns of life, transportation routes, civil authority structures and zones, and other considerations that must be understood and accounted for when conducting non-standard logistics or other movements.

SOF CA’s reconnaissance role meets all of the requirements of a special operation, as shown in figure 4. However, in this case as in other potential cases, there could be situations in which conventional CA forces could fulfill a similar role, given their similar training or TTPs in some aspects; the specific force of choice would depend on the operation. If conditions are such that they meet the definition of a special operation, then SOF CA is the force to employ in that environment.

Reconnaissance	Method	
	Unique TTPs, equipment or training?	Hostile, denied, or politically sensitive?
	Civil Reconnaissance and Network Engagement require unique TTPs and training	Operations supporting follow-on SOF elements or to set conditions for follow-on SOF are generally politically sensitive in nature
Conditions		
Time sensitive, clandestine, low visibility?	Indigenous forces or regional expertise?	High degree of risk?
Gaining access and placement to a population requires CMSEs to maintain a low profile	Engaging a friendly, neutral or threat network requires cultural expertise and often the use of indigenous interlocutors	Actions intended to counter another great power increase the risk to force and political risk

Figure 4. Reconnaissance—Methods and Conditions. Adapted from JP 3-05 and USSOCOM Competition Series. Source: Department of Defense, *Special Operations, I-I*; “The Competition Series: A USSOCOM Perspective on Competition Short of Armed Conflict.” Presentation at USSOCOM, MacDill AFB, FL, 10 April 2019.

SOF CA unquestionably fits into the role of reconnaissance in the civil component. CA forces, in general, are known to conduct CR as a primary task and doctrine reflects this.¹²⁴ Gaining access and placement to understand and engage with a population requires a persistent presence which SOF CA teams are explicitly designed to do.¹²⁵ Cavalry doctrine can serve as an analogy describing the role which SOF CA conducts for broader SOF campaigns in the civil component or the human domain. FM 3-98, *Reconnaissance and Security Operations*, states “[c]avalry units should deploy in the planning phase to shape preparation activities and execution,” mirroring the purpose of SOF CA teams conducting preparation of the environment as part of their reconnaissance role.¹²⁶ Like cavalry units, SOF CA teams are small and present a low-profile thereby decreasing the risk to force, political risk, and risk to the overall mission. This is not to say that SOF CA is the force that should shape the battlefield for large scale combat operations—cavalry is the force for this—but the analogy works when applied to special operations.

Engage and Influence

As opposed to initial entry and reconnaissance, SOF CA’s engage and influence role is composed of specifically directed activities to influence populations in ways that align with U.S. goals. The engage and influence role is more expansive than described here (this section only describes how this role is applied in the competitive environment). A SOF CA team has other goals under this role when applied to other situations, such as COIN, which are outside of the scope of this monograph, but should still be kept in mind when planning CAOs in those environments. The engage and influence role requires SOF CA teams to work directly with key leaders, influencers, and populations for one of three specific goals: to inoculate a target population from adversary information operations, to counter the effects of adversary information operations on a population, or to mobilize a population in support of U.S. goals.

To inoculate a population, SOF CA teams work with their networks to raise awareness of misinformation or propaganda. Chris Paul and Miriam Matthews describe how this works.

“Propagandists gain advantage by offering the first impression, which is hard to overcome. If, however, potential audiences have already been primed with correct information, the disinformation finds

itself in the same role as a retraction or refutation: disadvantaged relative to what is already known.¹²⁷

Working by, with, and through their friendly and neutral networks, SOF CA teams can prime the population with correct information or with the knowledge that propaganda is likely incoming. For example, Paul and Matthews describe Russian propaganda as “the firehose of falsehood,” which is extremely difficult to directly counter or contradict.¹²⁸ They determined that the best ways to render Russian propaganda less effective was to prepare the target audience ahead of time so they knew that they would be the target of propaganda and were, therefore, inoculated from it.¹²⁹ Inoculating a population from propaganda’s affects requires close planning with psychological operations forces who possess the skills and knowledge to identify potential target populations that the SOF CA teams would then confirm through reconnaissance. Once the target population is identified and confirmed, SOF CA teams can begin engaging and developing networks to ensure that population has the knowledge and tools to neutralize adversary propaganda. These efforts should also include interagency coordination and participation, rather than a one-off activity by Psychological Operations and SOF CA. The JCOIE refers to this as blunting:

The Joint Force blunts adversary tactics by reinforcing compelling narratives through deliberate informational and physical actions designed to promote cooperation and to reassure allies and partners. The Joint Force and interorganizational partners must understand how and when to lead with information in order to shape the future security environment.¹³⁰

Alternatively, Paul and Matthews recommend working to counter the effects of Russian propaganda through means other than attempting to refute its claims or highlighting the fact that certain messages were propaganda.¹³¹

Countering adversary information operations is the more difficult task under this role and requires persistent engagement with the effected population. If, for example, the purpose of adversary information operations is to decrease the number of people who vote in a particular election, the SOF CA team should work with the civil authorities, NGOs, and civil societies to break down obstacles that would normally keep certain parts of the population from voting. Helping to ensure voter-access can be accomplished by

providing transportation to polling locations or providing funding to the host nation to increase the number of polling locations in the target area. Another countering example would be to increase the difficulty of populations to protest against policies or actions that are within U.S. interests. If adversary information operations are working to mobilize a population, then SOF CA teams can create barriers. Like when engaged to inoculate, SOF CA is not the only organization that should be used to counter adversary information operations. Psychological operations, information operations, public affairs offices, special forces, and cyber operations all have a role to play in countering adversary information operations. The Department of State also plays a major role in how the USG works to counter adversary information operations. SOF CA, however, can gain access and placement within the population itself to change the environment with which adversary information operations must contend. Any efforts where SOF CA campaigns against adversary information operations must be fully integrated with other appropriate military capabilities and U.S. departments.

Psychological operations, information operations, public affairs offices, special forces, and cyber operations all have a role to play in countering adversary information operations.

Mobilizing a population means to convince a segment of a population to take physical action to change an aspect of the environment. This does not necessarily require violence or protests of any sort—these sorts of activities are described in the next section, support to resistance. Instead, it could take the form of providing humanitarian support to a nearby community suffering from a disaster or bringing a community together to solve a problem it faces. SOF CA can provide information, logistics, coordination, planning, or other resources to aid or encourage a population to mobilize. In the great power context, SOF CA teams may need to mitigate a civil vulnerability threatening a strategic community or group, or, perhaps, to tie in with countering or inoculating a community from adversarial influence.

Clearly this role supports the JC-HAMO, and thus the JCOIE and JCIC. The JC-HAMO requires an “ability to communicate a compelling narrative,” “disrupt support to adversaries at the international, national, local, and sub-national levels,” and “mobilize individuals, groups, and populations.”¹³² As with the reconnaissance role, SOF CA’s interactions with populations place it in a position where it can influence those populations with a strong,

culturally-tailored message directly to the people or influencers in a population. While psychological operations teams can project mass-messaging or use technical communications methods, CA works directly with the target audience.

SOF CA is exquisitely positioned to conduct both of these engage and influence activities given that they are the specific military element directed to engage with populations and civil networks and also that they have the capabilities of doing so in sensitive and high-risk environments with indigenous forces. Because information operations such as Russia’s “firehose of falsehood” specifically target a population, CA is ideally suited for engage and influence operations as the primary component that interacts with populations on behalf of the U.S. military in support of the commander’s objectives. SOF CA’s engage and influence role, when applied against strategic competitors, also meets the definition of a special operations as shown in figure 5.

Engage and Influence	Method	
	Unique TTPs, equipment or training?	Hostile, denied, or politically sensitive?
	Civil Reconnaissance and Network Engagement require unique TTPs and training	U.S. forces working with populations to counter adversary messaging is likely politically sensitive or potentially conducted in denied/hostile areas
Conditions		
Time sensitive, clandestine, low visibility?	Indigenous forces or regional expertise?	High degree of risk?
Countering adversary messaging requires low visibility else the adversary will change methods	SOF CA teams must understand the environment they are operating in to have any success and work through IPI	Actions intended to counter another great power increase the risk to force and political risk

Figure 5. Engage and Influence—Methods and Conditions. Adapted from JP 3-05 and USSOCOM Competition Series. Source: Department of Defense, *Special Operations*, I-1; “The Competition Series: A USSOCOM Perspective on Competition Short of Armed Conflict.” Presentation at USSOCOM, MacDill AFB, FL, 10 April 2019.

STR

The final and narrowest role that SOF CA plays in the competitive environment is STR. STR can be described as a “shared approach among U.S. government departments and agencies to provide support to resistance movements that can help confront hostile state and non-state actors.”¹³³ A recent Joint Special Operations University monograph notes that this definition is broader than the constricted definition of unconventional warfare (UW), which is often the central concept for resistance efforts.¹³⁴ Others in special operations have noted that UW is a poor way to frame the activities of supporting resistance and also focused on terminology similar to STR.¹³⁵ Much of the UW doctrine is useful, however, in framing resistance efforts and providing a method of organizing a resistance for various means. Specifically, JP 3-05, *Special Operations*, states that “UW consists of operations and activities that are conducted to enable a resistance movement or insurgency to coerce, disrupt, or overthrow a government or occupying power by operating through or with an underground, auxiliary, and guerrilla force in a denied area.”¹³⁶ STR, although broader in scope, can still use these elements to define its concepts. Coerce, disrupt, or overthrow are the three STR purposes, accomplished through an underground, auxiliary, or guerrilla force.

SOF CA’s STR role is to help deter (a form of coercion) an adversary from taking action against an area or disrupt an adversary; resist (which can be coercive or disruptive depending on the objective) an adversary’s presence, actions, or activities in an area that the adversary controls or occupies; and undermine (disrupt) adversary goals and efforts in an area in which the adversary is conducting activities but does not have control. Figure 6 shows these three categories and specific activities related to each.

SOF CA would not likely be the lead element in any STR efforts, but instead would provide supporting operations for any part of the STR that engages or requires the population, civil component, NGOs, or indigenous institutions to create the desired effects. Thus, the next four paragraphs articulate the specific STR role that SOF CA is best positioned to fulfill and to describe, more broadly, STR-related roles that SOF CA will play in the great power competition.

Deterrence requires changing the adversary’s calculation of risk and reward for an action. Deterrence can be accomplished through STR by establishing or bolstering a resistance capability in a country that an adversary is

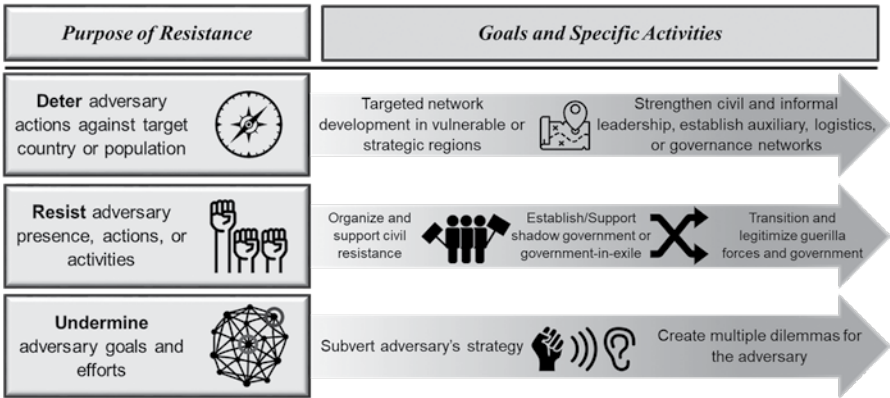


Figure 6. Categories of SOF CA's STR. Icons by the Noun Project. Source: Icons by The Noun Project used under Creative Commons license. Fists created by zidney from Noun Project. Compass created by Stanislav Levin from Noun Project. Network created by IconsGhost from Noun Project. Protest created by Fahmihorizon from Noun Project. Listen riots created by corpus delicti from Noun Project. Shuffle created by Bluetip Design from Noun Project. Treasure Map by Berkah Icon from the Noun Project.

planning or likely to invade, occupy, or attempt to control. Small military adventurism, such as demonstrated by Russia in Georgia and the Ukraine, requires the attacking force, regular or irregular, to advance quickly and for the civilian population to allow it, tacitly or explicitly. If the adversary perceives either of these factors as unlikely, the risk of military adventurism increases. This can be scaled to larger levels as well, and, while the increased risk may not deter an adversary, the increased force and material requirement to succeed in the face of an organized resistance may deter the adversary.

SOF CA's part in deterrence-oriented STR is to identify populations vulnerable to adversary military actions or strategic populations that can best serve as a civil resistance. Then, in conjunction with the larger STR plan, SOF CA elements engage civil networks to strengthen leadership, build resilient communities, and establish auxiliary elements or logistic networks or governance networks. SOF CA personnel would serve as intermediaries between networks or advise local leadership while assisting organization of a civil resistance or auxiliary to support the larger resistance effort. Given the right authorities, they could also provide funding or resourcing to civil networks to build capacity to remain resilient against adversary actions.

Should deterrence fail or never have been in place, SOF CA would support efforts to resist adversary presence, actions, or activities in an area controlled or occupied by an adversary. Resistance effort could either be to coerce the adversary to withdraw from the territory or to disrupt adversary efforts and forces to tie up resources or increase cost to the adversary. Civil resistance, auxiliary networks supporting guerrillas, and resilient communities can all create pressure on an adversary that must balance the international opinion about its actions. These resist actions can breakdown a narrative about how a population supposedly supports the adversary’s invasion if there are large scale uprisings, violent or nonviolent, in opposition to the uprising, which would severely undermine an adversary’s *fait accompli*. Separately, a civil resistance can be used to tie up resources or increase the cost to the adversary—a strategy that the United States has employed on occasion with success.¹³⁷ This is where well-established SOF CA STR tasks are already accepted in UW doctrine as shown in figure 7.¹³⁸

Support to Resistance	Method	
	Unique TTPs, equipment or training?	Hostile, denied, or politically sensitive?
	UW and resistance activities do not fall within conventional training, tactics, or equipment	Deterrence and Undermining efforts are in politically sensitive environments. Resisting efforts are in hostile or denied environments.
Conditions		
Time sensitive, clandestine, low visibility?	Indigenous forces or regional expertise?	High degree of risk?
Working directly against an adversary's military goals requires clandestine or low visibility operations	Resistance efforts are integrally tied to indigenous forces and cultural concepts	Working in a hostile or denied area or in an area which the forces work directly against adversary goals is high risk

Figure 7. STR– Methods and Conditions. Adapted from JP 3-05 and USSOCOM Competition Series. Source: Department of Defense, *Special Operations*, I-I; “The Competition Series: A USSOCOM Perspective on Competition Short of Armed Conflict.” Presentation at USSOCOM, MacDill AFB, FL, 10 April 2019.

Finally, as regards SOF CA's STR role, in the more likely situation where an adversary is conducting efforts and operations but has not invaded or gained control over a territory, SOF CA forces should be used to undermine those efforts. Similar to the purpose of engage and influence, SOF CA forces can engage civil networks to disrupt adversary activities, tie up resources, or increase the cost to the adversary. Working with civil authorities, SOF CA

Similar to the purpose of engage and influence, SOF CA forces can engage civil networks to disrupt adversary activities, tie up resources, or increase the cost to the adversary.

forces can subvert the adversary's strategy and create multiple dilemmas, specifically discussed in subsequent chapters that the adversary must overcome to continue its efforts in the area.

Many of these activities are already doctrinally established for CA forces to conduct or support.¹³⁹ Although not explicitly stated in UW doctrine, any STR activities

are inherently special operations due to their sensitivity, unique requirements, and the environment in which they are employed. As stated before, STR is a narrow role in the range of military operations and SOF CA's piece of STR is narrower still, but that does not discredit the importance of SOF CA's key role as a part of STR. Certain skills necessary to create an effective resistance fall solely within the training and doctrine of CA. The most relevant of these is CIM and CR. As closely engaged as they are with the civil population, SOF CA elements could passively detect and report any indications of nascent resistance—especially civil resistance—in a host country. In this respect, they could be prime contributors to a formal assessment of resistance potential in a country. Indeed, without a robust and established process of understanding the human domain, attempts at organizing individuals, groups, or civil societies runs the risk of working against the social and community structures if the wrong ones are privileged due to faulty analysis.

Implications for the Competitive Environment

SOF CA's four primary roles—initial entry, reconnaissance, engage and influence, and STR—present opportunities for the United States to create desired effects and execute foreign policy in the competitive environment. To fully identify these potential opportunities, however, the environment

itself must be fully described and understood. The following chapters detail, using Mazarr et al.'s methodology to assess the competitive environment, and then identify several key ways in which SOF CA forces can be employed in these roles. Several assumptions have to be made prior to this, however. First, SOF CA must be employed as one of many facets in a broader integrated campaign, such as presented by the JCIC, and not as an individual effort. In many countries, SOF CA forces are the sole U.S. military element present, which is not necessarily the wrong way to approach the problem, but, in those cases, the SOF CA efforts should complement or support a broader plan. Additionally, SOF CA forces must deploy with the full understanding of that plan and their role within it to ensure proper utilization of those forces. This is an assumption that should go unsaid, but, in the cycle of constant deployments, the reason for being in a location is often lost on the team.

The next two chapters present an analysis of the PRC and Russian Federation through the lens of great power competition. This analysis draws out the background factors, cultural implications, goals, and strategies in the form of the five competitive domains that each country uses. Each chapter then examines how SOF CA's four roles can be applied to these domains of competition. SOF CA's roles apply to four of the five domains, with international institutions as the sole domain that has little applicability for SOF CA's capabilities.

Chapter 3. The PRC

This chapter describes how the effects of Chinese history, the Chinese leader's and people's perception of this history, play a fundamental role in the actions it takes. The chapter follows Mazarr et al.'s questions in assessing great power competition.¹⁴⁰ First, following a short background, the chapter considers China's essential national character—regime type, national identity, and international position—and the degree to which China's leaders allow the national character to influence foreign policy and, therefore, competition. Second, the chapter examines PRC objectives, and then, third, its strategies as viewed through four domains of competition. Finally, chapter 3 examines SOF CA's role as it relates to China in those same four domains of competition: population/political warfare, economic statecraft, cyber operations, and armed conflict.

Background

China boasts a rich and complex history going back thousands of years, and indeed for much of that time boasted one of the most advanced and militarily powerful civilizations in the world. The fall of this “Middle Kingdom between heaven and Earth” began with the so-called “century of humiliation,” usually dated from 1839 to 1949, the establishment of the PRC.¹⁴¹ Since the PRC's founding, the country has experienced the rule of Mao Zedong and his cultural revolution, the slow and cautious opening up to the external world under Deng Xiaoping and his successors, the fall of the Soviet Union and U.S. world dominance in the 1990s, the global financial crisis of the late-2000s, and its rise as a global power under the leadership of Xi Jinping since 2012. All of these interrelated factors affect how Xi and other key leaders in China understand the world and their place in it.

Mao Zedong established the PRC based on Leninist principles of single party government and Communist socialism. The idea of class struggle continued, providing the rallying idea that legitimized the government as the “dictatorship of the proletariat.” Mao's cult of personality took the country inward, and the socialist movement focused on keeping socialist ideology at the forefront of the people's minds as the foundations of legitimacy for the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP's) rule over the country; it also resulted

in the death of millions of Chinese people due to political and economic mismanagement. With Mao's death in 1974, the strict adherence to his closed society began to break. His successor, Deng Xiaoping, implemented vast reforms to open the country to the international economy. These reforms continued apace for over two decades until the CCP reached a major economic and political inflection point in 2012. The CCP appointed Xi Jinping as president, and he began to implement the Chinese dream: developing a prosperous society, building a military that can win wars, and "reclaiming China's place as a global power."¹⁴² With Xi's goals established, the Deng-era reforms began to backslide, and the PRC quickly restricted the "flow of ideas, culture, and capital into and out of the country."¹⁴³

The PRC's Essential Character

The PRC is not and will not become a liberal state; the only question has been the extent to which it would be willing to liberalize relative to its Communist underpinnings. Under Xi, there is the question of how to classify the foundational theories behind how the government sees its relationship to its people, however. Modern China's roots lie in socialism where the focus was on state control of the means of production, seen, for example, in Mao's movement of people to work in farms and state-owned factories. Although Deng's economic reforms began to break down the strict adherence to socialist ideals, the CCP still operates on the foundational concepts of socialism.

The fall of the center of communist gravity, the Soviet Union, in 1991—combined with the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests and the Gulf War—shook the CCP to the core. The party needed to reform its legitimacy of rule in the face of liberalism's apparent victory over socialism. It found this legitimacy in nationalism and engendering a nationalist spirit in the Chinese people, but the CCP never truly excised socialism. Instead, the modern PRC seems to have adapted to a nationalist-socialist model domestically and a nationalist-institutionalist model internationally.¹⁴⁴ Gone is the rhetoric of revolution, which could threaten the legitimacy of the Chinese government, but state ownership of production remains. In fact, Xi's government has increased the role of SOEs, highlighting the remaining core socialist tenets the CCP follows. SOEs serve as icons of the social agreement that the state should provide employment for the people, despite the fact that they only employ about 40 million out of 800 million workers in the country.¹⁴⁵

Additionally, the class struggle narrative continues to drive an increased standard of living that Xi articulates as the first tenet of his Chinese dream to build a prosperous society.¹⁴⁶

The Chinese state should still be considered a socialist regime with the unique characteristics that China's history and geopolitical situation require, or what Deng Xiaoping first referred to as "socialism with Chinese characteristics."¹⁴⁷ Despite its increasing use and preference for international institutions—a notable feature of liberalism though not a defining one—the core actions of the Chinese party-state remain fundamentally socialist.¹⁴⁸

Gone is the rhetoric of revolution, which could threaten the legitimacy of the Chinese government, but state ownership of production remains.

Issues of Identity

With a history spanning thousands of years, the Chinese national memory has many inflection points and reverberations present today. In the last thirty years, however, the CCP has taken on an education campaign to shape and control the Chinese national memory that deeply affects how the Chinese respond to events and how they view their place in the world.¹⁴⁹ What is the purpose of the CCP's education campaign? It has the same goal that drives almost all CCP decisions: to stay in power.

The CCP is the sole party in power in China and aims to keep it this way. Since the waning of Communist ideology, which became evident with the Tiananmen Square protests of May-June 1989, the CCP needed to find something else to which it could anchor its legitimate claim to rule over the Chinese people.¹⁵⁰ It found this legitimacy in nationalism and the population-mobilizing idea that the CCP delivered the people from past national humiliations caused by foreign invaders.¹⁵¹ Leveraging the "century of humiliation" as a mechanism to build nationalism and legitimacy also brought new considerations for the CCP's foreign relations.¹⁵²

To understand why the idea of national humiliation struck such a chord with the Chinese population, one needs to understand the concepts of *Zhongguo* and *tianxia*. *Zhongguo* is the Mandarin name for China that literally translates as the "middle kingdom," referring to China as holding the central place in the world.¹⁵³ *Tianxia* is the "realm under heaven" in Chinese belief that the Middle Kingdom rules.¹⁵⁴ When this sense of "choseness," as

Zheng Wang puts it, ran into the reality that China is but one country among many—especially considering that its people tangibly experienced this in the context of foreign invasions and annexations—it created a cognitive dissonance in the national memory that the CCP now uses to engender support from the Chinese population.¹⁵⁵ This explains the “conspiracy mentality” of Chinese leadership when responding to crises and international events; the PRC sees every U.S. action as part of a “plot” or “provocation” with the intent of destabilizing the CCP’s rule over the country.¹⁵⁶

Through this lens, the PRC’s actions against the global liberal order make sense. If its central role in the world has been stolen, it is only natural that it should reclaim what belongs to it. The PRC desires more influence in the international realm. The reality that the United States established—and,

The PRC desires more influence in the international realm.

therefore, exerts extensive influence over—most international institutions, like the United Nations, World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund, and others that, in turn, exert influence over their member states,

flies in the face of China being the central world power.¹⁵⁷

International Position

China’s unsurprising desire to change the international order¹⁵⁸ and, thereby, increasing its power makes sense given its economy, military, and population power. Marc Lanteigne notes that “China is the first great power to develop within an international system so dominated by institutions.”¹⁵⁹ China has been a rising nation for decades, bringing millions of its people out of poverty, reshaping the geopolitical landscape with the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and an increasingly capable military, demonstrating the hallmarks of a great power, including ambition.

However, the only current great power any contemporary can look to is the United States. After building the liberal world order following WWII, the U.S., in effect, became the center of the modern world, creating a dissonance with the idea, and history, of the Middle Kingdom. The PRC has spent great amounts of time and capital joining and forming international institutions and generally favors “partnerships rather than alliances.”¹⁶⁰ Seemingly, if Xi could have his way, China would be central to all relevant international institutions, exerting its will but not bound to the risks of formal alliances, like going to war for a cause not strictly in China’s interests. China seems

to have responded to the dissonance also by leveraging its size and location to involve itself with existing institutions, such as the Association of South East Asian Nations, or to create new institutions, like the SCO and Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. All of these are multinational institutions that increase the PRC's influence in the region and, more recently, around the world. China seeks a position in the international system commensurate with its national identity and justifies this by the sheer size of its population, economy, and history.

Foreign Policy Debate

China's foreign policy does not solely result from the CCP's monolithic power and its supposed control over all things that the country does.¹⁶¹ Modern China's foreign policy results from many influencing factors, some which conflict with each other, causing what onlookers might find seemingly detrimental actions. The perception of the century of humiliation, mass access to the internet and media, and the increased role of economic and business interests together play a large role in affecting China's foreign policy decisions.

Chinese history continues to reverberate through modern China's foreign policy in the form of *wei qi* (or Go), the ancient Chinese game played on a board with stones which each player attempts to encircle the other to win. Kissinger noted that "China's greatest strategic fear is that an outside power or powers will establish military deployments around China's periphery capable of encroachments on China's territory or its domestic institutions."¹⁶² The PRC perceived U.S. military buildups in Korea and, later, in Vietnam through the lens of *wei qi*, and it is reasonable to assume that the current leadership continues to subscribe to the fear of encirclement.¹⁶³ The importance of this mindset cannot be understated. The U.S. must consider the deep-seated fear of encirclement and understand that its actions will likely be perceived by China's leadership through this lens.

Although the United States and China have many complementary foreign policy goals, such as nuclear non-proliferation and CT, several incidents in recent history serve as stark reminders of different ideological drivers for the two countries. Zheng Wang, author of *Never Forget National Humiliation*, highlights three key events that epitomize this difference: the Taiwan Strait crisis, the bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, and the U.S. EP-3 plane collision.¹⁶⁴ Wang posits that an "unusual and unexpectedly

strong reaction to allegedly mischievous behavior on the part of the United States” drove China’s reaction to all three incidents.¹⁶⁵ Each event resulted in mass protests near U.S. embassies and consulates around China, organized and supported by the CCP despite the CCP’s usual prohibition on demonstrations.¹⁶⁶ The EP-3 incident, where a Chinese fighter collided with an American EP-3 surveillance plane off southern China’s coast, was not fully resolved until the United States “adequately apologized” despite the fact that the U.S. aircraft never left internationally-recognized airspace.¹⁶⁷ The incident, according to Wang, demonstrates how the inculcated sense of national humiliation and a conspiratorial mentality against the United States can result in intentional escalation by the PRC.¹⁶⁸

The effect of this collective memory of national humiliation cannot be overstated when viewing the PRC’s foreign policy decisions. Many CCP leaders’ speeches recall various events in China’s past such as the Boxer Rebellion and Opium Wars where Western powers invaded parts of China for imperialist gains or to forcibly open markets on the Chinese mainland.¹⁶⁹ These events have been seared into the Chinese collective memory through the CCP’s patriotic education campaign as a foil against which to mobilize the population and legitimize the CCP’s rule.¹⁷⁰ The campaign has seen incredible success to the point where Chinese citizens around the world have protested against perceived oppression, with some protests seeming spontaneous while others are incited by Chinese consulates to coerce the host nation into a specific action such as cancelling an invitation to the Dalai Lama.¹⁷¹

The increased internet and media penetration in China complicates the PRC’s response to international incidents.¹⁷² The CCP built its legitimacy on the narrative that only the Communist Party could, and did, free China from foreign oppression, so when the Chinese public becomes aware of incidents involving those “foreign oppressors,” the CCP must respond with an appropriately angry response or else face questions about its very legitimacy.¹⁷³ The full explanation, according to Wang, must also include the cultural component of collective memory and national identity that overrides the realism theory of IR.¹⁷⁴

Finally, the influences of economic and business interests in China’s foreign policy cannot be ignored and are exemplified in the BRI, which many analysts claim is a release valve for the large overcapacity of China’s manufacturing industry, among many other things.¹⁷⁵ Since Deng Xiaoping’s reforms and especially over the last thirty years, China’s rise has been

partially on the back of heavy industries such as construction and metal works.¹⁷⁶ With the decreasing need for construction around the country, the PRC faces a dilemma: many SOEs are in the construction and energy industry; without a market, they face bankruptcy, causing decreased jobs and state revenue, which, in turn, would threaten the CCP's basic socialist tenets. Many other factors influence the BRI, China's largest foreign policy vehicle, but the business aspect and how it ties to CCP legitimacy cannot be ignored.

Leader Perception of Competitive Environment through National Character Lens

To address the final question from Mazarr et al., to gain a deeper understanding of national identity and extract a basic understanding of how Xi and other CCP leaders view the competitive environment, CCP leaders' public statements can be reviewed in combination with the cultural context described in the preceding sections. Although factions and differences of opinion exist, the PRC leaders generally seem to see the competition taking place in the framework of international institutions, current or new, and issues of influence more broadly also seem to matter quite a bit.¹⁷⁷ For example, CCP actions show a regular concern over the importing of ideas—especially “dangerous ideas” from the West through the internet—likely the reason that the PRC has established such tight control over the internet within China.¹⁷⁸ The competition for ideas appears to matter to CCP leaders, and the nature of the interconnected world makes this important in how the PRC deals with other countries.

CCP leaders also seem to have absorbed another way of understanding the appropriate methods of engaging in the competitive space: the unrestricted method. In 1999, two People's Liberation Army (PLA) colonels published a book, *Unrestricted Warfare*, describing how they believed China should approach warfare in the 21st Century based on the Gulf War, economics, and state-led terrorism.¹⁷⁹ Colonels Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui provide an impressive window into the way that Xi and the CCP seem to view international competition, describing war as the total, whole-of-government approach to competing with other powers by employing all aspects of national power toward a specific and coordinated national interest. They describe a new type of warfare where “[m]ethods that are not characterized by the use of the force of arms, nor by the use of military power, nor even

by the presence of casualties and bloodshed, are just as likely to facilitate the successful realization of the war's goals, if not more so."¹⁸⁰

In November 2012, at the National Museum adjacent to Tiananmen Square, the new President Xi Jinping laid out his vision of the Chinese dream, which he later clarified as the "great revival of the Chinese nation."¹⁸¹ Many observers have noted that Xi's Chinese dream reverberates with the classic American dream and was likely influenced by the American version.¹⁸² Specifically, Xi's Chinese dream consists of three goals: "developing a prosperous society, building a military capable of fighting and winning wars, and reclaiming China's place as a global power."¹⁸³ As is often found in China, this slogan and the location from which Xi announced it is wrought with symbolism. The National Museum, where the "Road to Revival" exhibit advances the propaganda-laden Patriotic Education Campaign to inculcate a national collective memory of the "century of humiliation," could not serve as a better literal background to the "Chinese dream."¹⁸⁴

At the most basic level, Xi and his supporters seem to see the great power competition as one of international prestige and power and of regaining China's historical dominance in Asia, at least. Through the Patriotic Education Campaign, the CCP has tied its legitimacy as the sole party in power to attaining regional dominance and also international prestige.¹⁸⁵ To achieve this position, the CCP has exploited the "chosenness-myth-trauma" of the Chinese people to recover from the Tiananmen Square protests, the fall of the Soviet Union, and America's astounding victory over Saddam Hussein in the Gulf War.¹⁸⁶

PRC Objectives

Undoubtedly, the PRC strives to increase its influence in East Asia and globally.¹⁸⁷ The 2018 Annual DOD Report to Congress states that the PRC has the following objectives:

Perpetuate CCP rule; Maintain domestic stability; Sustain economic growth and development; Defend national sovereignty and territorial integrity; Secure China's status as a great power and, ultimately, reacquire regional preeminence; and Safeguard China's interests abroad.¹⁸⁸

However, the PRC prioritizes domestic issues over international ones; with the amount of public discourse about China's rise, that understanding can get lost. Survival of the CCP requires constant attention to internal issues and threats such as separatism in the western reaches of the country, internet censorship, and economic growth to sustain and build the country's middle class. The drive to regain China's "historical" position in the world seems to be derived from the young generation's sense of nationalism, which may result from the Patriotic Education Campaign, but it is also deeply rooted in China's history. After all, it was 1949 when Mao Zedong stated that "China has stood up."¹⁸⁹

The goals summarized by the U.S. DOD match Xi's Chinese dream and can be distilled into several international goals or foreign policy objectives. First, "developing a prosperous society" apparently requires continued economic growth, protection of domestic companies from foreign competitors, and protecting the people from the "seven perils" of "universal values, press freedom, civil society, citizens' rights, the party's historical aberrations, the 'privileged capitalistic class,' and the independence of the judiciary."¹⁹⁰ These components have international implications as China acts, whether to censor the internet, restrict foreign capital and companies' ability to buy Chinese companies, or to promote the BRI as a mechanism for expanding markets. The second goal, to build "a military capable of fighting and winning wars," has led to drastic reforms in the PLA such as changing doctrine to enable more joint (cross-service) operations, better command and control, enhanced precision strike capabilities at long ranges, increased information operations, and the deploying of anti-ship defensive missiles.¹⁹¹ Additionally, the CCP has extended the PLA Navy's (PLAN) forward projection ability by establishing foreign basing, in Djibouti, for example, and possibly the recently acquired port in Hambantota, Sri Lanka.¹⁹² Then, China's establishment of military basing on PRC-created artificial islands in the South China Sea enables the PLA's projection abilities, extending the reach of anti-access/area denial (A2AD) technologies far beyond the Chinese mainland. The increased military capability, naval basing, and South China Sea development are all in addition to President Xi's anti-corruption campaign, which has hit the PLA leadership, although some question whether the anti-corruption campaign is an attempt to cleanse the military or an opportunity for Xi to tighten his control over the military.¹⁹³

Finally, the last goal of Xi's Chinese dream is to "[reclaim] China's place as a global power."¹⁹⁴ Using "reclaim" indicates Xi's perspective, which reflects the country's perspective, regarding China's place in the world. China did produce almost a third of the world's GDP prior to the "century of humiliation"—a feat that the United States has yet to replicate—giving credence to China's previous power, but many leaders have used a nation's historical dominance as a narrative to mobilize its population.¹⁹⁵ As Elizabeth Economy aptly states, the PRC acts as "an illiberal state seeking leadership in a liberal world order."¹⁹⁶

PRC Strategies: Domains of Competition

To develop, build, and reclaim, the PRC applies several strategies including modernizing and expanding its military and economy, establishing or gaining outsized influence in key international institutions, suppressing dangerous ideas and dissent within and outside of China, and using political warfare to weaken U.S. alliances and to suppress international dissent. It is these strategies with which the United States and any other competitor must deal in the competitive space to achieve their own goals. Sometimes, China's strategies may directly conflict with U.S. interests while, at other times, they may only tangentially relate. As this chapter discusses, SOF CA's role in this great power competition will not affect all of the PRC's strategies, but it is important to take all strategies into account to determine the role of SOF CA in the competitive space.

Population/Political Warfare

The PRC censors ideas and attempts to guide the discussion about itself abroad to influence foreign governments by mobilizing populations and directly influence key leaders around the world. Many countries try to maintain a specific reputation around the world and carefully craft their public diplomacy, but the PRC's actions in the information realm center around an extremely specific picture.

Some might argue that controlling the public discourse is an internal issue, but the CCP's motivations lie in its contradictory views of classical liberal, and thus Western, ideologies. In an official document, referred to as Document 9, the PRC promulgated its public discourse policy and "painted the CCP as in the midst of an intense struggle with Western liberal values."¹⁹⁷ This document laid out the goals for the PRC to censor and repress any

discussion that related to the seven perils.¹⁹⁸ This monograph is not taking a moral stance on whether a country should oppose these concepts; how the concepts of Document 9 drive the CCP to interact with the rest of the world is precisely the point of this chapter, however.

The vast, complex, and interconnected nature of the internet in the modern age creates a situation in which a sort of cosmopolitan interaction is inevitable, and the founding principles of unrestricted internet access enable this inevitability. The CCP and President Xi apparently view an open internet as dangerous to their rule over China and invoke ideas of sovereignty in the strictest Westphalian sense to justify state censorship and control over all telecommunications within China's territorial borders.¹⁹⁹ China has also established many layers to control the speech of its citizens from "politically trustworthy internet commentators" who "guide Internet discussions in politically acceptable directions" to the Great Firewall that blocks many international websites such as Facebook, Wikipedia, and Twitter.²⁰⁰

Outside China's borders, the PRC still attempts to silence dissent of Chinese citizens and emigres despite having no authority to do so.²⁰¹ Through the United Front Work Department (UFWD), the PRC extends its reach by using "ethnic, cultural, economic, or political ties to mobilize sympathetic overseas Chinese communities—ideally of their own accord—to advocate for the interests of the CCP and marginalize its opponents."²⁰² The UFWD primarily focuses on domestic control and influence over people in China but also has an arm specifically designated to influence Chinese-born people overseas including students on temporary visas, workers, and permanent residents of other countries. Chinese embassies and consulates in conjunction with Chinese intelligence services often fund and coordinate efforts to get ethnic Chinese people to work for the Chinese government in monitoring countrymen or by opposing, through protests or other political movements, and host nation policies that conflict with the approved CCP narrative.²⁰³ Many Chinese

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student and scholar associations have ties to the UFWD; in the case of the Confucius Institutes, all of them have formal ties to the UFWD.²⁰⁴ UFWD

efforts are particularly difficult to disrupt since the UFWD specifically uses ethnic Chinese people, and others targeting them can create the appearance of racism, which the UFWD then tends to exploit to protest counter-UFWD actions.²⁰⁵ In some cases, the UFWD has been completely open about paying and directing Chinese Americans to conduct activities in support of the PRC. The Hoover Institute has noted that members of various local Chinese communities “received letters of appointment from local provincial and city United Front agencies in China to serve officially as ‘overseas propaganda agents’ on their return to their home countries. These commissions obliged them to accept responsibility for promoting the decisions of the Party’s recent national congress in their home countries.”²⁰⁶

PRC efforts to advance its interests generally fall under the idea of “sharp power,” an offshoot of Joseph Nye’s “soft power” description of how nations lead other nations by creating conditions or values that other nations desire to follow.²⁰⁷ Christopher Walker and Jessica Ludwig describe “sharp power” as efforts by authoritarian regimes to “pierce, penetrate, or perforate the information environments in the targeted countries” to silence dissent or shift the public conversation away from undesired topics towards more politically—in the eyes of the authoritarian regime—acceptable topics.²⁰⁸ Thus, rather than softly making something else look desirable—rather than a narrative or regime that inspires other countries to want to follow—sharp power efforts tend to deny or shift the focus from anything other than what the authoritarian states want discussed by distorting the narrative, corrupting key leaders, or exploiting the openness of democracies to try and change the policies or attitudes of a target country.²⁰⁹

The UFWD is one of the best-known examples of China’s “sharp power” with its efforts to penetrate many organizations and civil societies in target countries. Recent reports indicate that the UFWD, or associated organizations and people, are inserting money into political systems through donations to current or former politicians who are then being hired by Chinese companies, as has been seen in Australia.²¹⁰ With substantial influence, these leaders can sway public opinion through statements and actions, so if they lack integrity, they can easily put forward a corrupt narrative. Politicians are not the only targets, either. UFWD-associated organizations have donated to U.S. universities and think tanks, such as the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies, an extremely influential institution.²¹¹ While the organization that donated the endowment claims it was

unconditional, the PRC appears to be “[cultivating] enough people in the right places [so that the CCP starts] to change the debate without having to directly inject [its] own voice.”²¹² Evidence indicating this tactic can be seen from Twitter during the Hong Kong protests. In August 2019, Twitter leadership released the following statement.

This disclosure consists of 936 accounts originating from within the People’s Republic of China (PRC). Overall, these accounts were deliberately and specifically attempting to sow political discord in Hong Kong, including undermining the legitimacy and political positions of the protest movement on the ground. Based on our intensive investigations, we have reliable evidence to support that this is a coordinated state-backed operation. Specifically, we identified large clusters of accounts behaving in a coordinated manner to amplify messages related to the Hong Kong protests.²¹³

A *New York Times* investigation identified that these accounts likely resulted from the hacking of user accounts, which were then bought by Chinese information operations and used to obfuscate the narrative around the Hong Kong protests.²¹⁴

China’s interference is, again, not limited to the United States; it can be seen in Australia, New Zealand, Taiwan, Canada, France, Germany, Japan, the United Kingdom, and Singapore.²¹⁵ The common thread seems to be the use of ethnic Chinese communities as a vector for interacting with key leadership or organizations, inserting money in usually legal but ethically dubious ways that compromise the integrity of the people or organizations associated, controlling the majority or all Chinese-language media outlets in the country, and in direct, but perhaps informal, connections between the target government and UFDW organizations.²¹⁶

Another approach that the PRC takes is using the BRI to “develop strong economic ties with other countries, shape their interests to align with China’s, and deter confrontation or criticism of China’s approach to or stance on sensitive issues.”²¹⁷ While the main purpose of expanding and opening markets for PRC companies is likely relevant, the PRC has used the BRI as a vector to gain access to key political leadership around the world.

In the final lead up to the January 2015 election, Sri Lankan incumbent President Mahinda Rajapaksa received over seven million dollars in campaign funding directly delivered to his residence.²¹⁸ All of these funds had

come from accounts belonging to China Harbor Engineering Company—the company building the controversial port at Hambantota—which happens to be in Rajapaksa’s home district and a project for which he pushed.²¹⁹ Despite the influx of cash, Rajapaksa lost, but, soon after, in 2016, Sri Lanka defaulted on the loans, and the PRC was able to force Sri Lanka to cede control of the port to the China Merchants’ Port, a partially SOE, for 99 years.²²⁰ The port construction provided the PRC with a vector to influence the Sri Lankan elections as well as a port they now control and can potentially use for other strategic purposes such as logistics support to PLA Navy ships.

China’s activities in Sri Lanka exemplify how economic activities can be used for political or other strategic goals. Beyond Sri Lanka, China is actively trying to weaken the U.S. alliance network, which it sees as one of the United States’ biggest strengths and China’s vulnerabilities.²²¹ China targeted New Zealand and Australia, both of which are Five Eyes countries, and thus are party to some of the highest levels of shared intelligence with the United States, and attempted to subvert their U.S. relationship or infiltrate high levels of government.²²² Apparently, China wants to influence the international community through institutions and not bilateral alliances, something it views as a vestigial structure from the 20th century.²²³

Cyber Operations

China views cyberspace very differently than the United States. Much like Russia, China sees cyberspace operations as more than just actions within the physical network and logical networks and interactions among cyber personas, as understood by the U.S. DOD.²²⁴ Added to the Chinese understanding of cyberspace operations is what the U.S. government calls information operations.²²⁵ Therefore, to the Chinese, cyberspace can only be understood by taking into account the effects of information traversing cyberspace. In fact, the CCP sees information operations via space, cyber, and electronic warfare as the “tip of the spear” in any future conflict to shape the narrative and obtain information superiority, thereby paralyzing a more powerful enemy.^{226, 227}

The CCP has further expanded upon its idea of cyberspace with the 2015 creation of the Strategic Support Force (SSF), which some analysts view as an enhanced counterpart to U.S. Cyber Command (USCYBERCOM).²²⁸ The SSF not only focuses on the traditional deny, degrade, disrupt, destroy, and manipulate operations of USCYBERCOM, but has also added space,

electronic, and psychological warfare.²²⁹ Housing these different but complementary aspects of cyberspace within the same command is expected to create synergies that these capabilities would not be able to achieve on their own.²³⁰ Moreover, having these functions housed within the same command during peacetime gives the CCP the ability to seamlessly transition to an integrated campaign during wartime.²³¹ While China has not openly published a cyberspace strategy, scholars and practitioners are in widespread agreement as to what the CCP aims to achieve through its actions in cyberspace. In no particular order, the CCP aims to control the flow of information to and within China to maintain domestic stability, preserve economic growth through commercial espionage, and maintain the power of the CCP.^{232, 233}

China asserts that, just as every nation is sovereign within its borders, all states should also be sovereign over its cyberspace.²³⁴ This challenges the U.S. view that information should be allowed to flow freely across borders.²³⁵ China considers the control of information within China as vital as “controlling the maritime domain in the eighteenth century or controlling the air domain in the twentieth century.”²³⁶ Therefore, in order to maintain harmony within China and produce disrupt effects outside of China, the CCP has increasingly improved its information operations in recent years.

In regards to maintaining economic growth, China’s operations against economic targets and the

While China has not openly published a cyberspace strategy, scholars and practitioners are in widespread agreement as to what the CCP aims to achieve through its actions in cyberspace.

commercial sector are viewed as the greatest transfer of wealth in history by former USCYBERCOM Commander Keith Alexander.²³⁷ While the CCP continues to claim the economic espionage is not the work of the government but rather criminal elements within China,²³⁸ the cybersecurity group Fire Eye has been able to identify with a high degree of certainty that there are at least 10 advanced persistent threats (APTs) operated by the CCP, nine of which focus on industrial espionage.²³⁹

In addition to these government-supported APTs, China also has a very large patriotic hacker community that it can mobilize when needed.²⁴⁰ Due to the extensive cyberspace dragnet that the CCP has put in place, the government is aware of the activities of these hackers and can stop them when

it desires.²⁴¹ However, the CCP has also employed this hacker talent as an arm of the state while at the same retaining plausible deniability since these patriotic hackers are not formally part of the state.²⁴²

Tied to both of the first two aims, China sees the use of cyberspace as maintaining the legitimacy of the CCP. Therefore, CCP has to maintain economic growth and control the flow of information within China. This explains why both economic cyberspace espionage and information operations have seen increased investment by the Chinese military in recent years.²⁴³ Moreover, the CCP has leveraged its commercial sector into supporting the state's interests, as seen in the 'Made in China 2025' plan, which encourages Chinese companies to create dual use technologies that can also be employed by the military.²⁴⁴ This coupling of the state and private enterprise is seen in China's Cyber Security Law and National Intelligence Law requiring that 'any organization and citizen shall, in accordance with the law, support, provide assistance, and cooperate in national intelligence work, and guard the secrecy of any national intelligence work that they are aware of.'²⁴⁵

Economic Statecraft and Armed Conflict

China's economic and military expansion are interrelated topics; as Chinese companies expanded into the world, the PRC seems to have realized, especially after the fall of Ghaddafi in Libya, that it could not protect its citizens abroad.²⁴⁶ The result partially fueled the push to modernize the PLA and PLAN and established foreign basing, such the PLAN base in Djibouti. The modernization and expansion was accompanied by the newly announced BRI through which Chinese foreign investments have exploded in scale and number and increased the need for the PRC to be able to respond to potential crises. In the absence of PLA capability, some of the security requirements have been met by private security companies protecting various BRI sites around the world, but this method brings up questions of legal status under international law.²⁴⁷

China's technology industry must also be able to support the needs of the PLA in precision strike weapons, ships, and aircraft, but that is not the primary driver for economic expansion. Instead, the CCP's social contract with China's people drives the continued upward economic trends for the country.²⁴⁸ To accomplish a "prosperous society," many recent advancements have come through intellectual property theft and corporate espionage against leading corporations that commit the resources and time to developing new

technologies. Rather than the costs of investing in their own research and development, espionage allows Chinese companies to gain the benefit of cutting edge research without the time commitment, resources, and risk. The drawback, however, is the pushback from the United States and other countries that have become aware of the strategy and have initiated actions against it.

International Institutions

To secure its “status as a great power,” the PRC apparently believes that it must establish its own quasi-liberal international institutions that it can control while avoiding a competition with the U.S. for influence and control.²⁴⁹ Just because this monograph establishes the criterion for great power status as nuclear capability does not mean that the PRC agrees. Institutions such as the SCO and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank serve as alternatives to U.S.-led institutions in which the PRC can wield larger influence.²⁵⁰ The PRC seems to be following the model that the United States established after WWII, minus the concerns over human rights and corruption.²⁵¹

Additionally, the PRC is leveraging vast outreach from BRI to increase influence and gain concessions in numerous countries around the world.²⁵² As President Xi Jinping’s signature initiative, BRI seeks to expand Chinese influence, open new markets, and utilize excess production capacity.²⁵³ It gives the PRC opportunities to integrate with foreign governments at all levels as part of the normal coordination for massive projects. In some cases, the PRC uses the companies, state-owned or otherwise, in an attempt to influence policy and elections in strategic locations.²⁵⁴

SOF CA’s Role

The four roles for SOF CA can be applied in four of the five domains of competition against China: population/political warfare, economic statecraft, cyber operations, and armed conflict. Again, SOF CA’s roles must be part of a larger campaign or effort and not a singular CA activity. While SOF CA may be the sole U.S. military element in a country, its activities must be integrated with U.S. Department of State and GCC regional operations.

Population/Political Warfare

In the population/political warfare domain, SOF CA forces should conduct initial entry, reconnaissance, engage and influence, and STR operations.

SOF CA efforts should focus on the Chinese diaspora populations around the world and the Chinese workers building and running the facilities created as part of BRI, a prime target for UFWD psychological operations and propaganda. SOF CA forces should conduct reconnaissance to understand the civil environment and how the diaspora and worker populations interact and are influenced by the local populations. Additionally, SOF CA forces can monitor and better understand UFWD efforts against the ethnic Chinese populations in other countries. Understanding UFWD's themes and narratives and the mechanisms it uses to transmit those narratives provides

SOF CA forces should conduct reconnaissance to understand the civil environment and how the diaspora and worker populations interact and are influenced by the local populations.

TSOC Commanders with crucial information in developing plans to counter PRC and UFWD information operations. SOF CA forces can also assess the infrastructure, including new and planned construction of BRI projects, to support preparation of the environment for other potential operations in the country.

When SOF CA identifies the methods and goals of UFWD activities against the ethnic population, SOF CA elements should engage and influence those communities to counter PRC efforts that conflict with U.S. national policy. Many UFWD efforts in other countries are targeted to influence the host nation's policies, and SOF CA can conduct activities to create obstacles to UFWD's success. If a local PRC consulate is illegally funneling money to an organization, for example, SOF CA can work with the host nation's legal and community structures to disrupt or stop the cash flow.

SOF CA should also offer STR efforts to directly impede PRC goals if necessary. Resistance efforts to coerce a government succeed more than other types of resistance efforts, although resistance efforts to disrupt an adversary tend to succeed more than fail, suggesting that the goal of SOF CA STR should generally be to coerce a specific action from either the host nation or PRC but also that decision makers should not exclude resistance to disruption from consideration.²⁵⁵ SOF CA's part would be to organize and enable civil resistance movements. Protests, nonviolent sabotage, or strikes are some of the activities that SOF CA elements can plan, organize, or support with materiel. The PRC has shown sensitivity to international protests

against its policies or actions and often responds with counter-protests that increase media coverage.²⁵⁶

Economic Statecraft

Economic statecraft consists of activities conducted mostly at the senior government level. Because of this, SOF CA's role within the second domain is limited to initial entry and reconnaissance with the potential to conduct STR activities in very limited and rare cases. Initial entry activities can take place throughout SOF CA operations to set the conditions for planned follow-on special operations with other forces.

Reconnaissance is going to be the most useful and likely use of SOF CA in the economic statecraft domain. In its reconnaissance role, SOF CA can maintain relationships in key or strategic areas through which they can gain familiarity with the activities of those populations. Properly executed, this places SOF CA elements in areas where they could easily identify either the effects of China's economic statecraft or could directly observe PRC economic activities in a region. New construction sites or talks of contracts with Chinese investors are often topics broached during regular, above board meetings and contacts. SOF CA reconnaissance would allow the TSOCs and U.S. embassy to maintain awareness of the reach and civil effects of BRI throughout countries.

Potentially, SOF CA might engage in STR activities in the economic statecraft domain, should the U.S. choose a subversive strategy against the adversary. For example, SOF CA elements could organize civil resistance or protests against BRI activities or work with the host nation legal and community structures to slow or disrupt customs, licensing, or permit processes. NGOs, especially environment-oriented ones, often have legitimate concerns over the effects of construction or various policies, but they may not have either the access or knowledge to resist the activities. Here the concept of integrated campaigning becomes operationally crucial because SOF CA will likely need to support other agencies in such activities.

Cyber Operations

Much like the economic statecraft domain, cyber operations have little overlap with SOF CA capabilities, but here also SOF CA's roles of initial entry and reconnaissance remain relevant. SOF CA can provide initial entry for other SOF elements to come into country in support of a cyber campaign

or as part of a broader campaign. Additionally, SOF CA elements can also act as sensors conducting reconnaissance in areas that the PRC has already targeted or may target for cyber operations. Through reconnaissance, SOF CA elements can build relationships with key leaders or influencers and enable the U.S. embassy and TSOCS to maintain awareness of how potential cyber operations would affect the population, leadership, or civil institutions.

Armed Conflict

China's application of armed conflict in the competitive environment consists mostly of threats to invade Taiwan and A2AD—the large-scale establishment of defensive military equipment around the borders or periphery of a country. In China's case, A2AD includes the militarization of the Spratly Islands and other constructed islands in the South China Sea.

SOF CA has little role in the constructed islands but can target the PRC's fleet of maritime militia by conducting reconnaissance to identify the civil vulnerabilities which the PRC may exploit to attract support to the maritime militias and mitigating those vulnerabilities by engaging with the population and key leaders. SOF CA reconnaissance in the armed conflict domain would aid in understanding potential threats to the U.S. Navy, which, in turn, would allow the GCC to strategically mitigate the risk. Additionally, SOF CA could create an opportunity to offer STR efforts to disrupt the maritime militia or coerce them out of non-Chinese harbors.

In a situation where the PRC invades Taiwan, SOF CA would be a part of any U.S. STR on the island. If the U.S. adopts a policy opposing PLA occupation on the island, SOF CA elements would fill parts of pilot teams, coordinate civil resistance to PLA or CCP attempts at subduing the population, and support or establish a shadow government that could coordinate with the government-in-exile.

Chapter 4. Russian Federation

While chapter 3 considered China's rising role in the great power competition, chapter 4 turns to Russia. Some argue that Russia is not a great power, but a waning power or even a rogue state.²⁵⁷ Its declining population, international isolation, and fragile economy mean that, if Russia were to attempt to flex its muscle beyond its immediate borders, it would likely result in a coordinated response from the whole of Europe and European allies.²⁵⁸ While that may be true, Russia's nuclear capability, diplomatic influence, vast geographic size and resources—combined with the Russian self-image as a great power—warrant taking the country into consideration as such.

In this analysis of the competitive environment, Russia must be considered as a factor, but not necessarily as a primary competitor for the United States. Although Russia “interferes in foreign elections, subverts foreign democracies, and works to undermine European and Atlantic institutions,” it can also likely “be contained, employing updated versions of defense, deterrence, information operations, and alliance relationships that held the Soviet Union at bay for half a century.”²⁵⁹ Nonetheless, while Russia will likely have a smaller influence on the competitive environment as a whole, it still requires analysis. Chapter 4, therefore, describes how Russian attitudes since the fall of the Soviet Union have influenced its international position and activities to bring the Russian elites' desire for international status closer to the country's actual status. Many sources specifically refer to Russian elites as the primary driver for how the state behaves. It may be obvious that a state's elite class possesses larger influence over the government apparatus than common citizens, but elite influence is doubly the case in Russia where oligarchs with personal ties to President Vladimir Putin carry out functions and activities on behalf of the Kremlin.

Many sources specifically refer to Russian elites as the primary driver for how the state behaves.

Mirroring chapter 3, chapter 4 first considers Russia's essential national character—regime type, national identity, and international position—and the degree to which Russia's leaders allow the national character to influence foreign policy and, therefore, the competition. Second, the chapter examines

Russia's objectives and then, third, its strategies as viewed through four domains of competition. Finally, chapter 4 examines SOF CA's role as relates to Russia in those same four domains of competition: population/political warfare, economic statecraft, cyber operations, and armed conflict.

Russia's Essential Character

Russia's Tsarist and Soviet history place Moscow as the center of a powerful empire, a centuries-old self-image difficult to reconcile with the modern realities of Russia's international position. The dissonance drives many Kremlin decisions but does not account for every action Moscow takes. Hobbesian realism influences much of "Putinist" foreign policy, and many Russian policymakers believe "that the world is an alien and often hostile place, in which the strong prosper and the weak get beaten."²⁶⁰ Russian elites often see the world as a zero-sum game in which someone must lose in order for someone else to win. Russia, therefore, tends to emphasize hard power, but, with a realization that military might is no longer the primary means of competition, the state also adopts "soft coercion" to attain its goals.²⁶¹ For example, energy exports serve as a political tool to increase Moscow's international power.²⁶² Energy exports are a one-trick pony, however, and present vulnerabilities for Russian influence should partner states refuse to accept Moscow's terms.

Although the Russian government has the institutional veneer of democracy, it at best meets the criteria of an illiberal democracy. After an unsuccessful democratic transition following the fall of the Soviet Union, it has been marked since the ascension of Vladimir Putin by authoritarian tendencies such as "managed elections, populist appeals, [and] a foreign policy focused on enhancing the country's geopolitical influence."²⁶³ President Putin, a former head of the *Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti* (KGB), which translates to "Committee for State Security" in English, has maintained power since 2000 through several presidential terms and also a term as prime minister. He has kept power despite seeming to "ignor[e] the independent middle class, entrepreneurial interests, and the cultural elite."²⁶⁴ Business elites continue to support increased power for President Putin and the central government because they depend on the state to keep their wealth and power, creating a cycle of corruption not seen since the days of the tsars.²⁶⁵ Russian oligarchs, who obtained their wealth through

the privatization of former Soviet industries, have regular meetings with the president where he provides general guidance or desires that the oligarchs are expected to follow or fulfill.²⁶⁶ The Duma, Russia's legislature, has held little power since former Russian President Boris Yeltsin solidified power in the years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union.²⁶⁷ President Putin has kept a strong executive branch with a weak legislature and exercises his power through the oligarchs and other personal connections.

Issues of Identity

Much like China, Russia's national identity seems to drive many decisions. Prior to the fall of the Soviet Union, Russian history consisted of centuries of the Tsarist empire followed by the Soviet Union—an empire that controlled a number of other states and was a contender for being the strongest power in the world. When the Soviet Union dissolved, Russia's people saw a defeated homeland without the heroism and glory of a war, even one that ends in defeat; in other words they experienced humiliation on a grand scale and at the hands of the West.²⁶⁸ The humiliation, specifically from the United States, was exacerbated during the Kosovo conflict when Russian troops were sent to Pristina but got cut off as neighboring countries denied Russia overflight permissions critical to resupplying those troops.²⁶⁹ Russia wanted to establish a sector for its peacekeepers but instead was forced to negotiate with NATO to bring its forces into Kosovo Force operation.²⁷⁰

President Putin used this defeat to build his own political clout by claiming that Russia's apparent weakness was due to the disorder caused by the fall of the Soviet Union and Russia's political turmoil of the times, and he promised to regain Russia's rightful place on the international stage.²⁷¹ Similar to China, President Putin also uses the narrative of humiliation and weakness to justify an increase in military strength. Dimitar Bechev sums it up well: "So long as Moscow was not in a position to use military force to balance NATO, it would not be treated as a co-equal player by its Western interlocutors, or indeed the local powerbrokers."²⁷²

Similar to China, President Putin also uses the narrative of humiliation and weakness to justify an increase in military strength.

Russians seem to believe that their country is a great power and has been since the Tsarist period, but that national identity does not balance with the reality of the international world.

Although still a member of the U.N. Security Council, Russian power has dwindled since the Cold War. It no longer has the institutional ties to direct the activities of its neighboring republics, its population is in decline, and the only industry it can leverage for foreign policy influence is energy production, making it susceptible to a concerted effort by European nations to counter its actions.²⁷³ This dichotomy influences Russian elites, including President Putin, to attempt to close the gap between the two realities by competing with the world's other great power since WWII, the United States.²⁷⁴

More than as a competitor, however, Russia's elites see the nation as key to a multipolar balancing effort against American domination of the world, which hints at the underlying realism in the Kremlin's outlook on the world. The balancing act also plays to the Russian identity as a great power because only great powers can balance other great powers. While sort of a circular and self-sustaining logic, if one accepts the premise that Russia is a great power—which its leaders claim is “an inalienable historical right, irrespective of Russia's circumstance”—then it follows that Russia should balance against the United States and NATO.²⁷⁵

Ultimately, the imperial mindset has apparently not dissipated in the decades since the fall of the Soviet Union.²⁷⁶ The Kremlin continues to assert, tacitly or otherwise, its right to influence or intervene in the policies and actions of the former Soviet republics.²⁷⁷

International Position

Issues of identity interact to engender a sense of entitlement to the privileges and respect due to great power status, and the reality of Russia's international position creates a grievance. Moscow is not satisfied with its relative position and is actively working to entrench its great power status, which, from Russia's perspective, seems to mean counter-balancing U.S. dominance, controlling or guiding neighboring states' domestic affairs while maintaining absolute sovereignty in its own domestic affairs, and playing a key role in the international community as a great power that exerts control over international affairs.

Russia participates in many multilateral institutions—foremost as a permanent member of the UN Security Council—as a mechanism for reestablishing itself as a great power. Until it invaded Crimea, Russia held a seat in the G8, now the G7—the economic organization made up of the seven most economically advanced countries. As part of its Eurasia strategy, Russia

maintains regional influence through the Commonwealth of Independent States and Shanghai Cooperation Council. It has also been key in establishing the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) as a coordinating entity of rising powers, but BRICS does not have the international political or economic influence of the G7. Russia does not seem to desire to create a new international structure, which could be said of China, but instead wants to “change its place in the existing ranking.”²⁷⁸ Although Russia’s desire for increased international standing persists, the fact that it remains a member of the UN Security Council and maintains its nuclear arsenal lends a level of credibility to its claim of already having great power status.

Foreign Policy Debate

As with any country, Russia’s self-image and ideologies are not homogeneous across its people, and there is always contention between various interest groups as regards foreign policy. Bobo Lo notes how “Putinism has emerged as a hybrid of centralized political power, economic rent-seeking, social materialism, conservative morality, and an assertive international posture.”²⁷⁹ From the common Russian belief about the world being alien and hostile, where it is better to be strong than weak, arises the need for a strong military and a sense to always maintain a position of strength above all else. Interestingly, however, Russian oligarchs are also likely to experience some dissonance between carrying out their own business interests and Russian foreign policy at President Putin’s behest.²⁸⁰ Although working, directly or indirectly, for the state, these oligarchs and their businesses must still turn a profit, remaining viable in Russian society and for the president to continue to use them as part of his governing apparatus. Finally, there is still the lingering influence of “Westernizers,” those who believe that Russia’s future lies with the West and Western ideals, structures, or systems. Despite its contentions with the West, for centuries Russia has defined itself in relation to Europe and still looks to Europe, or the West in general, more than towards the east.²⁸¹

Leader Perception of Competitive Environment through National Character Lens

Thus, there exists a perception of competition in the multilateral space, but, in reality, Russia’s policies pursue competition in a multipolar form: basic realism and balance of power politics, explicitly seen in a goal of the Russian

NSS of 2015: to “[enhance] its role in shaping a polycentric world.”²⁸² Russia’s leadership views its place in the competition as one pole in the multi-polar international environment led by the great powers where Russia has an increased “role in resolving the most important international problems, settling military conflicts, and ensuring strategic stability and the supremacy of international law in interstate relations.”²⁸³ Although, in this official document, the Kremlin notes the importance of international law, in action it only cares for international law when it supports Russian interests. For example, President Putin criticized foreign involvement in the 2004 Ukrainian election in which Russia itself played a heavy influencing hand.²⁸⁴ Effectively, despite equal seating in multilateral institutions such as the UN General Assembly, Moscow views small states as mere means for great powers, particularly itself, to achieve ends.²⁸⁵

Russia’s Objectives

Russia has three interrelated goals in its foreign policy: amplify its great power status, control or be the primary influencer in the former Soviet states, and decrease the power disparity between itself and the United States.²⁸⁶ Consolidating power is arguably Russia’s first and foremost foreign policy objective. Russia’s foreign policy goals stem from its prevailing self-image as a great power regardless of the current station, its history as the seat of empires, and the domestic turmoil it experienced after the Cold War. Russia’s role in the international system has been the foundational concern among the Russian elites for decades now and President Putin has taken concrete steps to accomplish increased international influence. Three main indicators

Consolidating power is arguably Russia’s first and foremost foreign policy objective.

allow Russia to claim itself a great power: its nuclear arsenal, its seat on the UN Security Council, and its unmatched involvement in the former Soviet states.

Moscow views the former Soviet states as a particularly unique set of “neighbors” toward which Russia’s policy is not fully considered foreign policy.²⁸⁷ While buried, another goal set forward in the 2015 Russian NSS presents its objective to increase national security “in the sphere of culture” by “the development of a common humanitarian and information-telecommunications medium on the territories of the CIS member states and in contiguous region.”²⁸⁸ An

interesting tenet of national security—its regional telecommunication goal—seems to indicate Moscow’s attitude toward the CIS. How must the Kremlin view the CIS if it believes it has the right to develop a common cultural and telecommunications “medium” throughout foreign states? By the telecommunications goal and other actions, Moscow does not seem to accept the CIS as sovereign states but, instead, views them as Russian territory or, at a minimum, within its exclusive sphere of influence. Additionally, Russia’s 2010 Military Doctrine explicitly mentions how regime change in the CIS presents a direct threat to Russia, which could indicate how Russia views its ties with neighboring countries or justify its involvement in those states or both.²⁸⁹ Regardless, Moscow has repeatedly demonstrated and stated its goal to remain the dominant voice with its neighbors.

Finally, Russia also seeks to establish more parity between itself and the United States. The Kremlin knows that it cannot match U.S. military dominance but can increase capabilities in other domains and decrease U.S. strengths through indirect methods. Russia seems to want to decrease the power gap by any means, including weakening or altogether breaking NATO.²⁹⁰ Russia has long bristled at the fact that NATO remains a strong alliance, especially as it was formed as an alliance directly opposed to Soviet aggression.²⁹¹ NATO’s expansion, including to some former Soviet states, angered Russia, setting off the invasion of Georgia and Ukraine to exacerbate territorial disputes and keep those countries out of NATO.²⁹²

Russia’s Strategies: Domains of Competition

Russia views competition, as this monograph defines it, with the United States and the West generally as war. In the same manner that any nation would compete in various domains for its own foreign or domestic policy goals, Russia approaches the competition with the fervor of a government at war. While partially due to Russia’s perceived need to reestablish itself as a great power, Russia seems to see the U.S.-led world order as a direct threat. When competing against this world order, then, Russia engages in every form of warfare it can muster.

Population/Political Warfare

Moscow employs a number of methods to mobilize populations or support Russian political goals including propaganda, disinformation, and political subversion, but also exerts a strong influence through NGOs, civil society

organizations, and lobbyists.²⁹³ It reaches the news networks around the CIS that feature many pro-Russian commentators who play up, in an almost cult-like fashion, President Putin or portray Russia as a fair and moderate power that works for the good of the international community.²⁹⁴ Russia Today, now known as RT, a globally-broadcast Russian cable news network well-known for Russian propaganda, peppers the news with stories with pro-Russian narratives. Like any propaganda, RT's propaganda seeks to create a favorable predisposition or decrease the audience's negative predisposition, in this case painting Russia in a positive light.

Additionally, Russia relies heavily on disinformation and deception to obfuscate its involvement in other countries. When Malaysian Airlines MH-17 was shot down over Ukraine, for example, Moscow's disinformation capabilities went into full operation. The Russian Ministry of Defense held a press conference in a massive, war-room style center while positing various theories, many of which crossed into the realm of conspiracy, about how the airliner was shot down by either Ukrainian surface to air missiles or a Ukrainian fighter jet. The Ministry of Defense used doctored images showing a false course that it claimed MH-17 took, a fabricated image showing a billboard as proof that the anti-air missile was launched from Ukrainian controlled territory, and a false radar track of a supposedly Ukrainian Air Force fighter in the area near to MH-17 when it lost contact with air traffic control.²⁹⁵ All three claims were false, but they served to increase the ambiguity surrounding the incident by adding to the "noise" of the discussion when, in fact, a Russian missile, from a Russian BUK launcher that came from Russia's 53rd Anti-Aircraft Missile Brigade, shot down the airliner.²⁹⁶

Russia has been using this method of disinformation, what Chris Paul calls a "Firehose of Falsehood," effectively to create enough confusion that Moscow can accomplish its goal or avoid responsibility for its actions.²⁹⁷ Russia used similar disinformation methods in Crimea until Russia had achieved a *fait accompli* in its invasion, at which point it did not matter as much that Russian troops were assisting the "separatists." Denials and disinformation go hand-in-hand in Russia's efforts. President Putin initially denied the presence of any Russian troops in Crimea, even responding to a question about uniforms with a witty retort about how those uniforms could be bought in any store.²⁹⁸

Russia seems to have figured out a key method to keep foreign governments and the international community off of its back long enough for it to

use limited aggression to attain territorial goals. By confusing the discussion in the media, online, and in various international forums, the Kremlin can prevent the international community from acting swiftly enough to stop Russia's aggressive actions; once Russia seized Crimea, the world was not willing to commit to a potential global conflict to restore the borders.

Russian military intelligence, known as the GRU, has also used cyber operations to complement political subversion efforts. In the U.S. 2016 presidential elections, GRU hackers broke into email accounts belonging to U.S. Democratic National Committee (DNC) and Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee employees and leadership and then sent those email archives to DCLeaks and Wikileaks for distribution.²⁹⁹ Russia thus used a cyber-enabled information operation to create confusion in the lead-up to the U.S. elections, with the first “hack and dump,” featuring emails indicating the DNC's support for Secretary Hillary Clinton over Senator Bernie Sanders, apparently specifically timed to coincide with the Democratic National Convention. Russia thus discredited the Democratic Party and threw chaos into the American election process as a whole, making it appear corrupt and disconnected from the will of the people. Similar to the two-legged approach frequently seen on RT—where Russia wants to increase its positive light and decrease negative connotations—Russia's first email release came just hours after the release of then-candidate Donald Trump's infamous Access Hollywood interview, in which he suggested his sexual assault of women to be commonplace, suggesting that Wikileaks or the GRU wanted to overpower a negative news cycle with something that would help the Republican's campaign.³⁰⁰

In conjunction, although not necessarily in coordination with the GRU hack and dump operations, another Russian entity executed a different massive influence campaign also to subvert the U.S. elections and support a U.S. candidate that would benefit Russia. Employees of the Internet Research Agency (IRA)—a Russian entity funded by Russian oligarch Yevgeniy Prigozhin “with the goal of sowing discord in the U.S. political system” through social media manipulation, fraudulent news, and fraudulent online personas—created personas on various social media sites pretending to be U.S. citizens and activists for various causes, many political or divisive in nature.³⁰¹ Through these personas and bot networks, IRA employees organized divisive events and spread content written by other IRA employees to increase exposure.³⁰² Thus, during the height of the election season, some

U.S. news outlets unknowingly reported or displayed tweets and other social media posts created by IRA controlled accounts.³⁰³ Russia did not make a small effort to distort the U.S. elections: officials at Facebook, alone, testified to Congress that IRA content reached an estimated 126 million people from 2014 to 2016.³⁰⁴ Conflicting evidence exists as to whether IRA efforts actually affected the 2016 U.S. election, in terms of changing votes, but, regardless of the result, Russia clearly sought to influence the U.S. population during a critical moment in American politics.³⁰⁵

Russia uses other, similar, methods to influence populations in its near abroad. In the Republic of Srpska, (in Serb-controlled Bosnia), a Russian motorcycle gang, the Night Wolves—well known for setting up roadblocks in Crimea and fighting with the rebels as well as having close ties to Putin—traveled to various churches in a “pilgrimage” of their Orthodox faith where they met with many “local nationalists” throughout the region.³⁰⁶ Although this particular visit may not have had the desired effect, it still served to show Russian support for the separatist-inclined people of Srpska. Putin has used the Night Wolves for numerous operations when he needs deniability to continue a deception operation for Russia’s activities.³⁰⁷

This narrative tying Russia to Orthodox Christianity—as its protector—is not new, and Moscow heavily uses it in its propaganda and other influence efforts. Recently in Crimea, Russia played up ancient Christian history, including that, after the fall of the Byzantine Empire in 1453, Moscow claimed itself the center of Christianity and to be the Third Rome,³⁰⁸ but it claims the narrative stretches back even farther, relating the current annexation to Russian history where Prince Vladimir the Great had married a Byzantine princess.³⁰⁹ Further, the word “spiritual” is mentioned 16 times in the roughly 30 pages of Russia’s 2015 NSS, demonstrating how hard Russia is pushing the narrative that Moscow is the protector of Christian Orthodoxy.

Economic Statecraft

Petroleum exports, and “the cross-border connections they entail,” are the primary economic levers available to Moscow.³¹⁰ Its large oil and gas production and relatively small domestic consumption puts Russia at the center of other countries’ energy dependency, giving it outsized leverage. The EU’s policy towards Russia is explicit regarding “maintaining a stable supply of energy.”³¹¹ Russia used its energy leverage by shutting off flow in all gas pipelines going through the Ukraine during political spats in 2006 and 2009.

These cutoffs were particularly stinging because they took place in the winter, resulting in many people losing all heating for their homes.

Russia uses other countries' dependency on its petroleum to bolster its image as a great power; it can exert influence or control over former Soviet states through gas and oil, thus fulfilling one of Moscow's definitions of a great power.³¹² Pipelines themselves give Russia power, more than just the energy resources they transport. The routing of pipelines, which allow host states to charge transit fees, gives Russia a strong platform from which to negotiate, and it has used potential pipelines as bargaining chips or punishment, for example, the South Stream

pipeline, which would reroute gas from an existing pipeline through Ukraine. Although Gazprom—an SOE—would own the pipeline, President Putin himself negotiated with foreign governments

Pipelines themselves give Russia power, more than just the energy resources they transport.

to get their acceptance.³¹³ In Bulgaria, language for the legislation to allow the pipeline came directly from Moscow.³¹⁴ Ultimately, the pipeline agreement collapsed, but the efforts indicate how the Kremlin views and uses the economic levers available to it.

Cyber Operations

As previously mentioned, the Russian intelligence service regularly makes use of computer network attacks to gain an advantage over adversary states in the population and politics competitive domain, but that is not the only way Moscow uses the computer network lever. Russia has used computer network attacks as reprisal for decisions not supported by the Kremlin and to bolster effects of its military operations. For example, in response to the Estonian government moving a Soviet-era statue from the center of Tallinn, the capital city, Russia kicked off the first computer network attack aimed at an entire country.³¹⁵ Estonian communication systems, email, news, and banking systems all suffered during the bot-run denial of service attacks that lasted for weeks. The country had to eventually shut off its external internet connections, isolating it from the rest of the world temporarily. Of course, Russia denied any involvement, but computer forensics experts noted that most of the connections from the attack stemmed from Russia and that the “timing, and the effects [it] generated, suggested they were part of a larger, coordinated information operations campaign by the Kremlin.”³¹⁶ In 2008,

the Georgian government suffered a similar computer network attack. Botnets and denial of service attacks disrupted Georgian communications as Russian troops were invading South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Although the effects were minimal, for various reasons, this still showed Russia's willingness to employ computer network attacks in conjunction with military operations.³¹⁷

Moscow's efforts increased in complexity and success in Ukraine before, during, and after the annexation of Crimea. In 2015, hackers allegedly originating from Russia used software and techniques far more sophisticated than non-state entities would have to use to access the Ukrainian power control network and kill power for over 220,000 people.³¹⁸

Armed Conflict

Russia's use of military might aligns with the Kremlin's idea that a great power must have a strong military but also acknowledges the vast disparity between the Russian military and U.S. or NATO military power by selectively applying coercive force.³¹⁹ Unlike the PRC, which is actively increasing the size of its military force, Russia moved to downsize its military while increasing the professionalism and capabilities of its members.³²⁰ Careful and intentional in how it decides to apply military force, Russia's use of its military to this point seems to be very tightly tied to its goal to destabilize NATO and the international order.

Russia's use of armed conflict to support its broader foreign policy goals is nothing groundbreaking, but the way Russia applies armed conflict to achieve goals is key to larger understanding. It used the separatists in Georgia, including by inflaming the movement in 2008, to keep NATO from allowing Georgia entry into the treaty organization.³²¹ Although the invasion of Georgia was relatively conventional, in terms of military forces, it seems to have demonstrated to the Kremlin military shortfalls and initiated a doctrinal change.

Many may think that Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 points toward a conventional military occupation of a neighboring territory by a great power, but the conflict was nothing of the sort. Instead, Russia invaded and occupied Crimea with very little direct confrontation between Ukrainian and Russian forces, partially due to Russia's extensive strategic deception, but also because of how Russia is beginning to see the future of war.³²² Jānis Bērziņš notes Russia's new concept for warfare:

Thus, the Russian view of modern warfare is based on the idea the main battlespace is the mind and, as a result, new-generation wars are to be dominated by information and psychological warfare, in order to achieve superiority in troops and weapons control, morally and psychologically depressing the enemy's armed forces personnel and civil population.³²³

This new form of warfare uses other domains of competition to decrease the need for physical military assets and conflict, thus decreasing the risk to the aggressor state, both in terms of resources and politics. Propaganda, disinformation, coercion, bribery, and deception all precede Russia's military actions, blockades and no-fly zones followed by targeting strikes of various types in conjunction with heavy reconnaissance and special operations to mop up any remaining resistance.³²⁴

In Syria, Russia is using military force to prop up an ally and to "double down in a broader, self-driven competition with Western powers."³²⁵ Since the Syrian civil war started in 2011, Russia has supported the Assad regime with weapons and supplies. It also increased its support with troops and aircraft as Assad's hold on the country began to wane, placing Russian and U.S. forces in close proximity to conflict areas as U.S. forces worked with the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) to defeat ISIS in northeastern Syria. Although U.S. forces have not directly engaged with Russian troops, U.S. and SDF forces came into a confrontation with the Russian private military company Wagner Group in February 2018. The SDF, supported by U.S. SOF, had occupied a gas plant near Deir ez-Zur when pro-Syrian forces with Wagner Group personnel began to mass near the facility.³²⁶ The Syrian forces attacked the facility with armored vehicles and artillery but were repelled by U.S. air power, resulting in the deaths of 200–300 people, many of whom were Russian nationals.³²⁷ Russia denied any involvement, which could be true since Wagner Group is a private military company and likely to enter a contract with the Syrian government on its own volition; however, Wagner Group is not wholly independent from the Kremlin. Rather, it is funded through a well-known Russian oligarch with close ties to President Putin, has a training base located near a GRU training base in Southern Russia, and is known to receive GRU equipment and training.³²⁸

Russia has increased its use of private military contractors (PMC) that allow Moscow to deny involvement in a military operation or other organized

violence against geopolitical opponents.³²⁹ More than political deniability, PMCs also decrease the cost and resources of directly deploying Russian armed forces.

SOF CA's Role

SOF CA's role in the competitive environment vis-à-vis Russia is similar to its role vis-à-vis China. With the force's specific capabilities focused on the human domain, or civil component, the majority of SOF CA activities will take place in the population and political domain of competition. However, as it relates to Russia, the economic and armed conflict domains should not be ignored. With its focus on energy exports, Russia has a vulnerability that SOF CA efforts, in conjunction with the U.S. embassy and NGOs, could exploit to loosen Moscow's political grip on its neighboring countries. Because Russia's paradigm of the "New Generation Warfare" specifically depends on influence and information operations to succeed, SOF CA could have a role in either countering or disrupting Russian efforts, should the United States chose such a policy.³³⁰

Population/Political Warfare

Ultimately, all four SOF CA roles are relevant in the population/political warfare domain of competition. TSOs and GCCs should use SOF CA for low profile initial entry into former Soviet states to establish relationships with the U.S. embassies in those states and with the host nation government, civilian influencers, and bureaucracies.

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Using a small, inconspicuous SOF team to set-up the relationships in a country makes U.S. involvement less visible to adversaries, increasing chances of success while decreasing risk to mission and force. Once relationships and agreements with the host nation are in place, the United States will effectively have *fait accompli* for involvement in the country—supported by the host nation regardless of Russia's desires.

As an economic force, SOF CA can also provide key *reconnaissance* capabilities across many states with potential or current Russian information operations. Russia claims a unique right

to interfere in the domestic politics of the former Soviet Union's constituent states—a wide range of countries in which Russia has direct national interests that might in some cases conflict with those of the United States. Understanding, gauging, and monitoring Russia's information and influence efforts in these states is key for U.S. commanders and policy makers and requires a persistent presence that SOF CA is specifically tailored and trained to conduct. SOF CA teams and personnel can maintain contact in vulnerable regions or with potentially targeted populations to monitor Russia's influence effects or to serve as early warning against the first phase of Russia's new generation warfare, specifically "classic 'agitprop' information operations ... to exploit ethnic-linguistic-class differences ... intimidation of local officials ... [or]recruiting discontented elements."³³¹

If Russia is already conducting information or influence operations in a given area, SOF CA elements should be used to engage and influence the targeted populations or leaders to counter the effects of Russia's influence campaigns. SOF CA can support counter-protests against visits by the Night Wolves or mobilize populations to support counter-Russian policies or activities. In locations or populations that have not been targeted, but are assessed as vulnerable or critical, SOF CA elements can inoculate those populations against Russia's propaganda and disinformation by exposing the populations and key influencers to Russia's methods before it deploys them. Chris Paul notes that forewarning people of persuasion efforts has the added benefit of causing a higher level of entrenchment in the previously held beliefs.³³² If these beliefs align with U.S. goals or policies, then inoculating a population can decrease the effectiveness of Russia's influence while increasing strength of beliefs beneficial to U.S. policy.

STR may be the most important use of SOF CA in the population/political warfare domain of competition as regards Russia. Russia has gained footholds into neighboring territory by artificially propping up already present pro-Russian resistance elements. SOF CA organizing and supporting pro-host nation resistance elements in key locations would serve to disrupt Russia's commonly used narrative that places like Donetsk and Crimea want to be free from Ukraine and rejoin Russia. STR to resistance would likely result following a concerted reconnaissance effort to identify the proper area, population, and narrative followed by gaining a foothold with the populations through engage and influence activities. SOF CA would not engage in

a lone effort initiated in a vacuum, but rather in the later stages of a much larger campaign.

Economic Statecraft

Russia's leveraging of its energy exports to sway foreign governments creates a critical vulnerability for Moscow. A simple decrease in demand would result in a proportional decrease in Moscow's political leverage. Through reconnaissance, SOF CA elements can identify key populations that are especially vulnerable to Russian energy control and work with those populations and the U.S. embassy to mitigate their dependence. SOF CA elements can also engage with NGOs and industry to identify alternative energy options for the population, influencing critical locations without the need to change the entire country's energy infrastructure. For example, SOF CA could influence a key town in northeastern Europe that holds sway over national leadership—for any number of reasons such as voting districts or familial ties—to adjust how the population heats their homes in the winter to decrease reliance on Russia's gas. Merely working with such a town may give its politicians enough confidence to resist Russia's economic power plays.

If the United States adopts more drastic policies, SOF CA elements could offer STR by hindering planned pipeline construction through environmentally sensitive areas or culturally significant regions. These efforts, combined with U.S. embassy coordination with the host nation, could provide the host nation government with political leverage to resist Russia's efforts to sway its key leaders. Of course, SOF CA teams should also be used as initial entry into countries where the United States has further SOF goals to counter Russian economic statecraft efforts.

Cyber Operations

As with countering PRC cyber efforts, to identify effects of Russian computer network operations and to provide early warning of Russia's cyber plots, SOF CA teams primarily should be used for initial entry for other SOF elements and for reconnaissance in critical or vulnerable areas. Additionally, providing detailed information about the effects of Russia's computer network operations could aid in quickly crafting a narrative to decrease international support for Russia's efforts.

Armed Conflict

SOF CA employment in the armed conflict domain of competition is less intuitive than the other domains, but, given Russia's paradigm shift in regards to war, SOF CA is likely to be very important in this domain. All four roles apply to armed conflict in the same ways as they apply in population/political warfare vis-à-vis Russia but with a focus specifically to disrupt Russia's efforts prior to Russia openly admitting its activities.

Various sources describe Russia's new generation warfare as starting with "political subversion" or being "population-centric"³³³ as key to Russia's strategy of avoiding conventional military conflict. Without the foothold—artificial or otherwise—in the population, Russia's efforts are much more likely to fail or, at least, result in a slide towards conventional conflict, thus negating Russia's advantages and increasing its disadvantages. To combat Russia's political subversion, engage and influence and STR will likely blur into a single role of SOF CA mobilizing the host nation population in favor of a pro-U.S., or against a pro-Russia, narrative. Russia gains its legitimacy to act in foreign countries based on its long-used narrative of supporting pro-Russia groups in those regions. If the pro-Russia narrative—again, artificial or otherwise—is eclipsed by anti-Russia sentiment, Moscow loses its political coverage for naked aggression.

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In many cases, Russia's aggression will not have encompassed an entire foreign country, but merely a small region that borders Russia. In such a case, SOF CA elements should conduct initial entry for other SOF elements to gain access to regions or populations near these conflict areas but not necessarily within them. Reconnaissance efforts should be conducted in regions with heavy pro-Russia groups or large clusters of ethnic Russians. Much like the PRC targets ethnic Chinese diaspora populations, Russia also targets Russian populations in its near abroad. SOF CA can also target these populations and local government capabilities to insulate these people from Russian influence. Such endeavors would mean SOF CA identifying where these populations are located, with whom who they interact, and key influences within and without the population groups.

Conclusion

SOFC A is at a critical juncture as a military capability and as an organization still working out its role within the U.S. Army. It is the force of choice to engage with populations that are becoming key points of conflict in the competitive environment. Combined with a shifting geopolitical environment, the juncture presents the branch with a unique opportunity to define itself in relationship to the larger global context. This concluding chapter describes the competitive environment, specifically the five identified domains of competition, details how SOFC A roles fit into this environment, and offers recommendations for the branch to better fulfill these roles. The fact that SOFC A is uniquely situated to fulfill the four roles of initial entry, reconnaissance, engage and influence, and STR does not mean that it is perfectly or effectively constructed to fulfill those roles to the greatest effect; to do so would require some smart adjustments to the branch's doctrine, organization, training, and equipment to better support joint force campaigning as laid out in the JCIC.³³⁴

Competitive Environment

The modern competitive environment can be organized into five broad categories or domains. First, the population/political warfare domain encompasses where the human element is the target of a nation's activities. People, whether the entire populations or key political leaders, are the source of power in the population/political domain and influencing them, therefore, gives the competitor nation power over an adversary by disrupting the adversary's command and control, national will, or domestic politics. Gaining such power might allow the aggressor nation the room to maneuver—politically or physically—to attain a *fait accompli* in some cases; in other cases, such power may allow the aggressor nation to coerce its adversary into specific actions or policies. The PRC has an entire division dedicated to warfare in the population/political domain—the UFWD—that, among many other efforts, targets Chinese-born people who live overseas to mobilize them or funnel money to coerce foreign governments to behave in a pro-China manner. The Kremlin, for example, dispatches the Night Wolves to show solidarity, to spread the Russia-as-protector-of-the-Christian-Orthodoxy

narrative, or to stir up political trouble in former Soviet states while obfuscating the international dialogue through its “Firehose of Falsehood.”³³⁵ These disinformation efforts stall international responses to Russia’s actions, allowing Moscow to avoid accountability or to achieve its military objectives with little loss of life or resources.

The competitive environment’s second domain, economic statecraft, is where an aggressor nation uses national economic policies and control to coerce foreign governments into actions that benefit the aggressor nation. Russia’s economic statecraft can be seen in its leveraging of energy dominance and in President Putin’s personal involvement in pipeline negotiations. Withholding gas from Europe is a method that Moscow can and has employed in retaliation for certain European legislation or policies of which it did not approve. China also leverages economic statecraft, particularly visible in deploying its BRI as an economic incentive for dozens of countries to grow closer to China through infrastructure development, which, in turn, gives China access to senior leadership throughout the target countries, ties those countries to China’s industrial standards, and provides an outlet for China’s overproduction.

Cyber, or computer network, operations should be considered a lever of national power in the competitive environment in its own right. Russian hack and dump activities played a role, although the extent is arguable, in the U.S. 2016 presidential election. Other Russian hacking activities forced Estonia to cut off its internet connection with the rest of the world and disrupted Georgian communications during Russia’s invasion supporting South Ossetia and Abkhazia. China has heavily depended on computer network operations to steal intellectual property and research data from U.S. and other companies as a means to rapidly, and with limited costs, bring its technology capacity on par with the United States.

Armed conflict, often conflated with great power competition itself, is still a viable domain of competition but bears little resemblance to conventional war. It can be broken down further into large scale combat operations, state-sponsored insurgency—which was common during the Cold War and demonstrated as still viable in Crimea and Donetsk, a hybrid of the two, and deterrence, also referred to as A2-AD. China is establishing military outposts on artificially constructed islands in the South China Sea that can serve to put U.S. naval assets at risk or potentially block them from interfering in a conflict in the South China Sea.

The final domain is the institutional domain, which this monograph does not examine deeply because of its only tangential relationship to SOF CA operations. However, as Mazarr et al. point out, “the postwar multilateral order provides the essential framework in which the emerging competition will unfold,”³³⁶ so that institutions remain vital to the competitive environment. Russia has attempted to increase its status in this world order by building parallel structures, although with minor success, while China seeks to change the order itself into something that better accommodates the CCP’s worldview.

SOF CA’s Role in the Competitive Environment

SOF CA has four primary roles in the competitive environment: initial entry, reconnaissance, engage and influence, and STR. Each role is not equally applicable across the domains of competition as shown in figure 8.

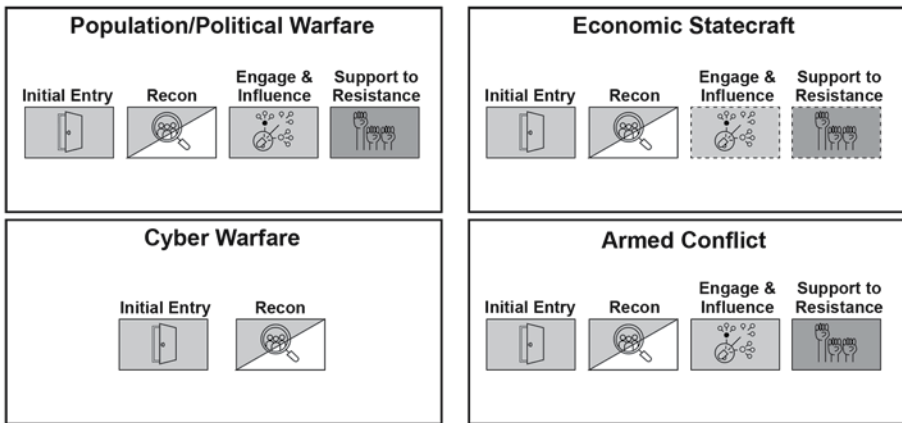


Figure 8. Roles of SOF CA in each domain of competition. Icons by the Noun Project. Source: Icons by The Noun Project used under Creative Commons license. Door created by Angriawan Ditya Zulkamain from Noun Project. Magnifying Glass created by Trendy from Noun Project. Viral Marketing created by Priyanka from Noun Project. Fists created by zidney from Noun Project.

Initial entry is the use of SOF CA forces to set conditions and establish relationships with U.S. embassy personnel and key leaders in the host nation to support follow-on SOF deployments to the country. SOF CA teams are

small and present a low political risk to the U.S. Country Team, making them the perfect element to lay the groundwork for other SO organizations that need access to the country. SOF CA can also provide access and placement within a population for other SOF elements that otherwise would be unable to access specific populations or areas. SOF CA's initial entry role applies across all four relevant domains of competition, but would be somewhat limited in armed conflict based on force protection concerns and depending on the specific form of conflict.

Reconnaissance is SOF CA's bread and butter, the force's primary role. In the same manner that conventional cavalry shapes the battlefield, informs the commander, and fights for information, SOF CA elements do the same within the civil component. SOF CA reconnaissance applies across all four domains; SOF CA elements can be used to gain an understanding of the civil component, to monitor effects of other operations or adversary operations, and to give commanders and staffs information about the civil component necessary to make decisions and gain the desired effects.

In the realm of more active measures, SOF CA teams engage and influence populations and key individuals. Within the competitive environment, SOF CA engages and influences specifically to counter or inoculate against adversary information operations or influence. SOF CA's engage and influence role should be primarily applied in the population/political warfare domain but has a place in armed conflict and, depending on the given policy and situation, in the domain of economic statecraft. SOF CA's engage and influence role is where SOF CA elements maintain close contact with relevant populations or individuals to degrade adversary messaging by countering the effects of the messaging or creating a resistance to the messaging itself, thus denying an adversary the benefits of a confusing narrative, supportive population, or docile population.

The final role of SOF CA in the great power competition is STR. SOF CA offers STR efforts in conjunction with larger STR efforts by mobilizing populations or popular support to either deter adversary actions, resist adversary presence or activities, or undermine those activities themselves. STR can be used in population/political warfare and in armed conflict with additional applications in the economic statecraft domain should a particularly active policy be applied. SOF CA would likely not lead these activities, but its ability to gain access to populations and maintain relationships enable the branch to provide a capability unique to SOF and DOD.

Recommendations

Although SOF CA possesses unique directives and capabilities that make it the best force for these four roles, its directives, capabilities, and authorities are not explicitly built to accomplish all of these operations in the required manner. To best fill these roles, the branch needs to update its capabilities—doctrine, organization, training, and equipment—to match mission requirements. Authorities would also follow, based on the policies and political objectives of the competition and environment against which they are applied.

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Doctrine

SOF CA needs its own distinct doctrine to drive its role in great power competition. The 2019 update to FM 3-57 still fails to fully grasp the capabilities of SOF CA and fails to explain the roles of the branch in a manner relevant to outside sources.³³⁷ Furthermore, although the updated FM 3-57 highlights civil-military engagement, it also fails to provide a concise explanation of how the roles of SOF CA differ from conventional CA forces. More detailed doctrine, in the form of Army Training Publications exist but are outdated. For example, ATP 3-57.80 *Civil Military Engagement* does not even match the current CME directive and therefore needs to be completely rewritten.³³⁸

As this monograph describes, updated doctrine should highlight SOF CA roles as separate from conventional CA. SOF CA possesses unique capabilities that differ from conventional CA and, therefore, should be used in a different role than conventional CA.

Recommendation 1: Revise ATP 3-57.80 to include SOF CA's role in the introduction, as a whole and not just in great power competition, in the same manner that FM 3-98, Reconnaissance and Security Operations, describes the role of Cavalry. The revision should encapsulate the four roles that this monograph identifies and also include the broader perspective of COIN operations.

Recommendation 2: Define CIM and establish SOF CA templates, methodologies, and underlying structures regarding conducting research and analysis. In all four of its roles in great power competition, SOF CA comes into contact with massive amounts of information that can provide

commanders, GCCs, and U.S. Embassies with a nuanced understanding of the environment and, therefore, aid planning, but this information often overloads even the SOF CA echelons. Without a methodology and supporting analytical structure, the information goes into repositories where it sits, often never looked at again. Instead, the gathered information gathered needs modern, valid methods analysis to support planning and to identify trends over time. Such methodologies as well as force structure, training, and technical requirements would likely require more research, possibly a project for future researchers.

Organization

SOF CA teams' small size, four people, is a key capability that enables better access and lower risk, political or otherwise, to commanders and U.S. ambassadors; however, the small team size also presents a critical vulnerability: communications. Currently, the team consists of a team commander, a team sergeant, a CA noncommissioned officer (NCO), and a special operations combat medic. All, with the occasional exception of the medic, are SOF CA trained officers and NCOs, but no one individual is consistently trained to handle communications systems or information/intelligence analysis. SOF CA teams need communications and research analysis skills to meet mission under the roles in great power competition.

Special Forces Operational Detachments-Alpha (SFOD-A) have, by doctrine two Special Forces Communications Sergeants trained on numerous methods of communication to support their teams in austere environments with high end communications or, as needed, ad hoc communications. SOF CA teams often operate in similarly austere environments but lack this organic capability, often forcing them to rely on adjacent SFOD-As to provide the necessary skills, which burdens the SFOD-A. Instead, adjusting to include a dedicated NCO trained and employed to provide SOF CA communications for the team would better match mission. Currently, some CA NCOs are able to attend training of various sorts to address this shortfall but a sustainable training adjustment would better match the need.

SOF CA teams also lack data or information analytics training. Some NCOs attend training on social network analysis, but the course is usually only a week while the skills often take months to learn. If SOF CA teams are to operate independent of their respective company headquarters and to

actually identify trends, understand the civil networks, and create effects in or with those networks, they require information analysis skills to handle the information they gather in a robust and valid way. These skills, such as social network analysis, require intensive training and constant use else they atrophy. SOF CA teams need an NCO dedicated to processing and analyzing the vast amounts of gathered information and to working with team leadership to create the desired effects, either within a network or through it.

Additionally, although many SOF CA personnel claim that SOF CA teams can conduct split operations—where part of the team operates separately from the other part—this is rarely true. In any higher risk environment, commanders require the presence of a medic with the team in the event of injury, sickness, or contact with enemy. Since one medic cannot split him or herself in two, a SOF CA team cannot conduct split operations in any higher risk environment; if the team cannot operate, then there is no reason to deploy SOF CA when the environment allows for conventional CA to fulfill the mission. In the high-risk environments, especially when operating against a great power adversary, SOF CA teams will likely need to split their forces and thus need two medics per team.

Recommendations 3 and 4: Since SOF CA teams in high-risk environments need an additional medic and two additional skillsets, they should be restructured to a six-person structure.

Additionally, the team sergeant should be a master sergeant. Engaging with and utilizing civil networks requires maturity and experience in some very complex fields, and managing such a team means that the team sergeant should have a breadth of experience on which to draw. The current SOF CA team structure has the team sergeant as a sergeant first class. With a six-person team, there would be two sergeants first class already on the team, meaning their direct supervisor, the team sergeant, should be one rank above them. Furthermore, the slight restructuring would increase the combined experience of the team, keeping NCOs on the team longer and keeping that experience available to the team commander, usually a junior captain with little SOF experience. The structure of the recommended six-person team is shown in table 1.

Table I. Six-Person SOF CA Team Concept

Position	Rank
Team Commander	Captain
Team Sergeant	Master Sergeant
SOF CA Analyst	Sergeant First Class
SOF CA Communications Sergeant	Staff Sergeant
SOF CA Medical Sergeant (Senior)	Sergeant First Class
SOF CA Medical Sergeant (Junior)	Staff Sergeant

Training

As already identified, SOF CA personnel lack critical training to fully leverage their unique capabilities. Updates and improvements to the Civil Affairs Qualification Course address much of this gap, carving out time to teach many of the necessary tactical skills, CR, and analysis skills that are necessary across the force.³³⁹ While this is a step in the right direction, it does not provide the full analytic capability needed in SOF CA teams and company level headquarters. This monograph did not focus on developing the specific analytic requirements, methodologies, and training for SOF CA teams in the great power competitive environment, therefore more research is needed on this topic. It is clear, however, that because FM 3-57 specifically requires network analysis that the academically-accepted field of social network analysis is likely required.³⁴⁰

Recommendation 5: Establish a robust, academically or professionally accepted methodology to analyze human networks and institutionalize these methods. The competitive environment extends across the globe, in every type of physical environment possible. Thus, SOF CA teams can be deployed almost anywhere and must be able to operate without raising the level of risk above an acceptable point. For example, a team operating on Pacific islands would likely need an escape and evasion plan that includes a maritime component, yet no institutionalized maritime training exists for any SOF CA teams. Skills such as handling a small boat, tides and currents, and other maritime specific topics could be the difference between life and death for a team operating far from support. SOF CA Battalions should assign specialty skills to teams, such as maritime or mountain skills, and institutionalize training requirements to maintain

those skills. Designating specialty teams creates focused skillsets that can be drawn upon by other teams, but also gives the battalion a specific team that can be employed in a higher risk area while mitigating some environmental risks. Specialized SOF CA teams would also serve as a forcing function for the SOF CA brigade to maintain a capability to train those skills, which can be accomplished through an Advanced Skills Company in the same manner by which Special Forces Groups maintain specialty skills training organic to the group.

Recommendation 6: Identify specialty training which is required by some teams, but not all, based on deployment environments or required capabilities. Assign certain teams as the specialty team(s) for these specific skills to institutionalize the knowledge and training. Additionally, the force lacks robust education in ethnographic and political analysis fields. SOF CA elements need validated approaches and methodologies to understand and assess the cultures, populations, and individuals with which they engage. Concepts such as theory of mind as presented by Robert Greene Sands and Darby Arakelian can provide SOF CA professionals with these capabilities, but they require the force to maintain higher levels of education separate from training.³⁴¹

Recommendation 7: Establish education pipelines by grade plate that leverages DOD institutions to teach academic skills, methodologies, and research to SOF CA officers and NCOs. This education should also include interagency partnerships to further integrate SOF CA capabilities into broader integrated campaigning approaches. Return these officers and NCOs to the force to put their knowledge and education to use in campaigning against adversaries.

Equipment

Unlike other SOF elements whose capabilities are often defined by equipment, SOF CA is a population-centric force not heavily steeped in technical solutions. If SOF CA can be used to fulfill the four roles that this monograph outlines, some increased equipment is needed. Designated specialty teams will need equipment based on their environments. Maritime teams will need watercraft on which to train and, potentially, with which to deploy. Mountain teams may need high altitude- or climbing-specific equipment depending on the team's doctrinal requirements. All teams will likely require

increased communications equipment, such as high frequency radio systems and other low-profile communications systems. Future researchers could determine equipment specifics, but it is safe to say that adopting the roles put forth in this document will require slight equipment adjustments by SOF CA elements.

Conclusion

This monograph demonstrates that SOF CA, as the force directed to engage with and effect civil populations and networks, has the unique capabilities to carry this mission out within the environment of great power competition. With the paradigm shifting away from CT and COIN and toward great power competition, the SOF CA branch must relearn how it fits into the broader U.S. military strategy. The three joint concepts described in the literature review provide a framework within which SOF CA's capabilities are a prime candidate to fill. SOF CA already campaigns persistently and the CA branch as a whole exists to interact and manage the human aspects of military operations. Publishing the JC-HAMO acknowledges the importance of the human domain and the JCOIE ties these concepts into a broader framework of information and influence. This monograph concludes that SOF CA is already, with some adjustments, ideally suited to accomplish missions for the U.S. military within four specific roles: initial entry, reconnaissance, engage and influence, and STR. Operating as part of a larger team and campaign, SOF CA has crucial responsibilities within the great power competition. ↑

With the paradigm shifting away from CT and COIN and toward great power competition, the SOF CA branch must relearn how it fits into the broader U.S. military strategy.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

A2AD	anti-access/area denial
APT	advanced persistent threats
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa
CA	civil affairs
CR	civil reconnaissance
CAO	civil affairs operations
CIM	civil information management
CME	civil military engagement
CMSE	civil military support element
COIN	counterinsurgency
CT	counterterrorism
DOD	Department of Defense
FM	field manual
DNC	Democratic National Committee
GCC	geographic combatant command
IR	international relations
IRA	Internet Research Agency
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
JC-HAMO	Joint Concept for Human Aspects of Military Operations
JCET	Joint Combined Exchange Training
JCOIE	Joint Concept for Operating in the Information Environment

JCIC	Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning
JP	joint publication
KGB	<i>Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti</i>
NSS	National Security Strategy
NDS	National Defense Strategy
NCO	noncommissioned officer
PMC	private military contractors
PLA	People’s Liberation Army
PLAN	PLA Navy
PRC	People’s Republic of China
SDF	Syrian Democratic Forces
SFOD-A	Special Forces Operational Detachments-Alpha
SOE	state-owned enterprise
SOF	special operations forces
SOF CA	special operations civil affairs
STR	support to resistance
TSOC	theater special operations command
TTPs	tactics, techniques, and procedures
UFWD	United Front Work Department
USCYBERCOM	U.S. Cyber Command
USASOC	U.S. Army Special Operations Command
USSOCOM	U.S. Special Operations Command
UW	unconventional warfare

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