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# NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL

MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

## THESIS

**THE “THREE WARFARES”: PLA SOFT POWER  
ASPIRATIONS ALONG THE COGNITIVE DIMENSION**

by

Chris J. Kelshaw

June 2011

Thesis Advisor:

Alice L. Miller

Second Reader:

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**THE “THREE WARFARES”: PLA SOFT POWER ASPIRATIONS ALONG THE  
COGNITIVE DIMENSION**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS IN SECURITY STUDIES  
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## **ABSTRACT**

China's sustained modernization effort across the branches of the PLA over the past 25 years has produced several innovations. Among them, in 2008, the U.S. Office of the Secretary Defense (OSD) in its annual report to Congress on China's military power mentioned for the first time a new Chinese military concept called the "three warfares." However, this and subsequent reports have offered little elaboration of the meaning and substance of the term. This thesis seeks to fill a gap in existing literature on this aspect of PLA modernization by offering a more comprehensive understanding and explanation of the "three warfares," its origins, and its intended aims as a complement to PLA war fighting doctrine. It argues three points. First, the foundation of the PLA "three warfares" concept has roots in certain aspects of both Chinese and Western strategic thought. Second, the PLA desire to develop its "three warfares" concept is strongly influenced by Western views on information in war in general and by U.S. information operations doctrine and experiences in particular. And finally, the PLA sees its "three warfares" both as a complement to its warfighting capabilities and also as a militarized soft power component within a larger Chinese national strategy.

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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

|       |   |
|-------|---|
| CCP   | Chinese Communist Party                   |
| CMC   | Central Military Commission               |
| DoD   | U.S. Department of Defense                |
| GPD   | General Political Department              |
| HA/DR | Humanitarian assistance / disaster relief |
| IO    | Information operations                    |
| IW    | Information warfare                       |
| OSD   | Office of the Secretary of Defense        |
| NATO  | North Atlantic Treaty Organization        |
| UN    | United Nations                            |
| U.S.  | United States                             |

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## I. INTRODUCTION

China's sustained modernization efforts across the branches of the PLA have been significant. Beyond simply the protection of its homeland and the preservation of its sovereign interests, the PRC is at a point where it is now setting its sights on becoming a regional power with commensurate full spectrum military capabilities.<sup>1</sup>

In 2008, the U.S. Office of the Secretary Defense (OSD) in its annual report to Congress on China's military power mentioned for the first time what it considered to be a new and emerging Chinese military concept called the "three warfares" or san zhong zhanfa (三种战法).<sup>2</sup> However, the report offered little in terms of elaborate explanation and substance on the subject, simply stating that media, legal, and psychological warfares "are being developed for use in conjunction with other military and non-military operations."<sup>3</sup>

Subsequent OSD reports for years 2009 and 2010 have continued to briefly mention this emerging Chinese warfighting idea but, much like the 2008 version, with a frustrating paucity of detail.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, many non-U.S. sources that discuss the "three warfares" are equally as vague in their descriptions. Overall, it would seem that the "three warfares" as a topic has not been adequately explored in Western literature. For those interested in gaining a better understanding of this particular aspect of China's military modernization some very basic yet important questions remain unanswered.

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1 Full-spectrum is best defined as having military capabilities that span the areas of offensive, defensive, stability, and support operations as outlined in U.S. Army FM 3-0 Operations.

2 Office of the Secretary of Defense, Annual Report to Congress - Military Power of the People's Republic of China 2008 (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, [2008]), [http://www.defense.gov/pubs/pdfs/China\\_Military\\_Report\\_08.pdf](http://www.defense.gov/pubs/pdfs/China_Military_Report_08.pdf) (accessed Nov. 2010).

3 Ibid.

4 Office of the Secretary of Defense, Annual Report to Congress - Military Power of the People's Republic of China 2009 (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, [2009]), [http://www.defense.gov/pubs/pdfs/China\\_Military\\_Power\\_Report\\_2009.pdf](http://www.defense.gov/pubs/pdfs/China_Military_Power_Report_2009.pdf) (accessed June 2010).; Office of the Secretary of Defense, Annual Report to Congress - Military Power of the People's Republic of China 2010 (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, [2010]), [http://www.defense.gov/pubs/pdfs/2010\\_CMPR\\_Final.pdf](http://www.defense.gov/pubs/pdfs/2010_CMPR_Final.pdf) (accessed Nov. 2010).

For example, what constitutes and defines the “three warfares?” What are its origins, and what, if any, are the traditional and theoretical foundations that support such a concept? Further, why does the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) consider the development of a “three warfares” capability beneficial? These are the questions that this thesis attempts to answer.

First, the foundation of the PLA “three warfares” concept has roots in certain aspects of both Chinese and Western strategic thought and tradition. Second, the PLA desire to develop its “three warfares” concept is informed and strongly influenced by Western views on the importance of information in war in general and by U.S. information operations doctrine and experiences in particular. And finally, the PLA sees utility in achieving its “three warfares” aims both as a complement to its warfighting capabilities and also as a militarized soft power component within a larger Chinese national strategy.

This thesis seeks to fill a gap in existing literature on this particular aspect of PLA modernization by offering a more comprehensive understanding and explanation of the “three warfares,” its origins, and its intended aims as a complement to PLA war fighting doctrine.

## II. ORIGINS AND CHARACTERIZATIONS

The People's Republic of China (PRC) mentioned the "three warfares" for the first time in the 2003 "Notification Regarding Distribution of 'Regulations on Political Work in the People's Liberation Army' by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China."<sup>5</sup> In this official pronouncement, the responsibility for "wartime political work" was given to the General Political Department (GPD), assigning it the task of "conducting public opinion [media] warfare, psychological warfare, and legal warfare."<sup>6</sup>

The GPD, or *zongzhengzhi bu*, is one of the four general headquarters departments under the Central Military Commission (CMC) and is responsible for all political and ideological activities within the PLA. Aspects such as "morale building (often referred to as cultural affairs) and propaganda (publicity) functions," which include media such as "newspapers, magazines, television, film, and the Internet," are central to the mission of the GPD.<sup>7</sup> The GPD is "also responsible for personnel matters, including party discipline, internal security, legal affairs, management of dossiers, and promotions."<sup>8</sup> In carrying out these political and ideological activities, political commissars work in party committees within all PLA units "to help guide ideological training and participate in collective or consensus decision making [as well as being] active in all aspects of military training [and] political training."<sup>9</sup> Any orders or guidance at the national level "are passed down the chain of command through a series of party committee meetings extending from Beijing to the grass-roots unit level [after which subordinate PLA] unit leaders hold training session with all soldiers to ensure understanding and compliance."<sup>10</sup>

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5 Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, "Regulations on Political Work in the People's Liberation Army," Chapter 1, Article 1 – Chapter 10, Article 106.

6 Ibid.

7 Dennis J. Blasko, *The Chinese Army Today: Tradition and Transformation for the 21st Century* (London; New York: Routledge, 2006), 28–29, <http://www.loc.gov/catdir/enhancements/fy0808/2007310490-d.html>.

8 Ibid., 29.

9 Ibid., 29.

10 Blasko, *The Chinese Army Today: Tradition and Transformation for the 21st Century*, 29.

In the 2003 order noted above, the GPD was directed by the CMC to study the “methods and means of using modern science and technology to improve political work [along with] studying the legal and regulatory systems and policies for establishing political work.”<sup>11</sup> All of the activities and goals outlined in this 2003 announcement apply to the “principal political departments of the General Staff Department, subordinate work departments of the General Political Department, political departments of the General Logistical Department, and political departments of the General Armament Department.”<sup>12</sup> Further, regional level sub-departments were given the task of guiding wartime political work by “utilizing the combat function of political work.”<sup>13</sup>

PLA group army and components at division level and below (e.g., regiment, brigade, battalion, company) have been apparently given perhaps a more narrow focus that emphasizes psychological warfare while leaving out the media and legal components. Essentially, lower tactical level PLA elements have been directed to meet with “related departments to organize and launch psychological warfare” that could “disintegrate the enemy military” suggesting perhaps that the “three warfares” concept as a whole is more strategically focused.<sup>14</sup>

As mentioned above, OSD has included the “three warfares” in its 2008, 2009, and 2010 reports on the Chinese military. However, the 2010 report, while short on detail, does offer what is perhaps the most authoritative and objective definition of “three warfares” by external observers. In particular, it states that “the concept of the ‘three warfares’ is being developed for use in conjunction with other military and non-military operations”<sup>15</sup> Media warfare “is [being] aimed at influencing domestic and international public opinion to build public and international support for China’s military actions and to dissuade an adversary from pursuing policies perceived to be adverse to China’s

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11 "Regulations on Political Work in the People's Liberation Army," Public Law 15, (2003): Chapter 1, Article 1.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 Office of the Secretary of Defense, Annual Report to Congress - Military Power of the People’s Republic of China 2010, 26.

interests.<sup>16</sup> Psychological warfare seeks “to undermine an enemy’s ability to conduct combat operations through psychological operations aimed at deterring, shocking, and demoralizing enemy military personnel and supporting civilian populations.”<sup>17</sup> And legal warfare intends to use “international and domestic laws to gain international support and manage possible political repercussions of China’s military actions.”<sup>18</sup>

On the surface, the media and psychological warfare components seem clear. But the 2010 OSD report includes more detail in describing legal warfare. For example:

China has incorporated the concept of Legal Warfare into its attempts to shape international opinion and interpretation of international law. [For example,] an overwhelming majority of nations throughout the world, including the United States, believe that customary international law, as reflected in the [United Nations] Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), effectively balances the resource-related sovereign rights of littoral states, in their EEZ with the freedoms of navigation and overflight and other internationally lawful uses of the sea of other nations. This majority view is based upon a sound reading of the negotiating history of UNCLOS, the actual text of UNCLOS itself, and decades of state practice. The PRC, however, appears to be making concerted efforts, through enacting domestic legislation inconsistent with international law, misreading the negotiations and text of UNCLOS, and overlooking decades of state practice in attempts to justify a minority interpretation providing greater authority by littoral states over activities within the EEZ.<sup>19</sup>

In 2004, the PLA published its *Analysis of 100 Cases of Legal Warfare*.<sup>20</sup> Each case is described in detail, an analysis is given, and a “moral” is offered to the reader. For example, Case 3—“War Waged By A State to Check Secession”—discusses the Russian government’s first and second Chechen conflicts in the 1990s. Analysis of these cases points out and emphasizes the importance of the Kremlin’s efforts in “restoring the

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16 Office of the Secretary of Defense, Annual Report to Congress - Military Power of the People’s Republic of China 2010, 26.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.

20 Wensheng Cong, ed., *Analysis of 100 Cases of Legal Warfare* [Faluzhan Yibaili Jingdian Anli Pingxi], trans. Open Source Center (40 Dianmen Avenue West, Beijing, Postal Code: 100035: PLA Publishing House, 2004), www.opensource.gov (accessed Jan. 2011).

legal system and constitutional order in accordance with the Russian federal laws and ordinances” so that legal justification for anti-terror combat operations could be eventually achieved.<sup>21</sup> This PLA legal warfare guide concludes its analysis of this particular case by pointing out that regarding separatists “one must show no mercy” and that “legitimate and legal grounds are necessary to make sure that military operations are justified.”<sup>22</sup> Lastly, the PLA legal guide suggests that “intensifying and perfecting domestic legislation provides strong domestic legal support for the operation to crack down on the separatist forces.”<sup>23</sup> This case in particular no doubt resonates within the PLA and was most likely chosen by the PLA authors due to its similarity vis-à-vis potential separatist actions by Taiwan.

Neighboring nations have similarly offered their own general and somewhat vague descriptions of “three warfares”. For example, a recent Japanese government assessment has stated that the PLA “three warfares” appear “to emphasize not only physical means but also non-physical means with respect to military affairs and warfare, incorporating the concept of ‘three warfares’...into the tasks of the political work by [its] military, and declaring a policy of close coordination between military struggle and political, diplomatic, economic, cultural and legal endeavors.”<sup>24</sup>

Some in Taiwan claim that the PLA has broken media warfare in particular down to six methods— “[seizing] initiatives, concentration, target critical weaknesses, penetrating, follow the situation to create favourable [sic] conditions, and confront enemy propaganda attacks.”<sup>25</sup> These Taiwanese analysts state that psychological warfare aims to “weaken opposition psychology,” deter the enemy’s will, use emotion, deceive, “divide-and-rule, and conduct special operations.”<sup>26</sup> And finally, the PLA intends for

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21 Wensheng Cong, ed., *Analysis of 100 Cases of Legal Warfare*.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.

24 Ministry of Defense of Japan, *Defense of Japan 2010 (Tentative Translation)* (Tokyo: Ministry of Defense of Japan,[2010]), <https://www.opensource.gov> (accessed 2010).

25 Chi Le-i, *Taiwan Book Summary: Examination of Crisis in Strait 'Under New Situations'* (Taipei, Taiwan: Li-ming Publishing,[2008]), <https://www.opensource.gov>.

26 Ibid.

legal warfare to consist of “legal deterrence, legal attack, legal counter-attack, legal constraint, legal sanction, and legal protection.”<sup>27</sup>

These descriptions, when taken together, do afford a general understanding as to what the “three warfares” consist of. However, many of these available sources offer definitions or descriptions of the “three warfares” that are quite simple, less than insightful, and fall short of providing any real substance or rationale for such an idea. That said there is certainly more to understand about this concept, especially those aspects of both Chinese and Western strategic thought and tradition that serve to underlie and provide rationale for including such an approach.

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<sup>27</sup> Chi Le-i, *Taiwan Book Summary: Examination of Crisis in Strait 'Under New Situations.'*



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### III. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS AND STRATEGIC RATIONALE

China's strategic traditions, like those of other cultures, have roots in its respective history and culture.<sup>28</sup> According to Alistair Iain Johnson, "...within the China field [of security studies] there seems to be little controversy about the proposition that 'deep' history and culture are critical sources of strategic behavior [and choice]."<sup>29</sup> Chinese strategic culture has its roots "in early formative military thought and practice," which affect how PLA strategists perceive their strategic environment and how they respond to that environment.<sup>30</sup>

Take for example a key characteristic of Chinese strategic culture that places an "apparently low estimation of the efficacy of violence, as embodied for instance in Sun Zi's oft-cited phrase, 'not fighting and subduing the enemy is the supreme level of skill.'"<sup>31</sup> Given the aforementioned definitions and general descriptions, the "three warfares" seems consistent with this general idea by seeking to utilize non-lethal or non-kinetic methods to achieve a strategic goal.

But more importantly, if Chinese history serves as an influential source for strategic behavior and development, it is helpful to consider certain important periods in ancient Chinese statecraft and how they relate to Chinese views regarding the current and future security environments. The Warring States period (463–221 BCE) is an especially important historical example and is particularly relevant in that it has provided Chinese strategists with what they consider to be two important lessons: how to become a hegemon and how to survive destruction at the hands of one.<sup>32</sup>

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28 Alastair I. Johnston, *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1995), 3.

29 Ibid., 22.

30 Ibid., 25.

31 Ibid., 25.

32 Michael Pillsbury, *China Debates the Future Security Environment* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press: For sale by the U.S. G.P.O., 2000), xxxv.

bury, *China Debates the Future Security Environment* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press: For sale by the U.S. G.P.O., 2000), xxxv.

During this period, the Qin state and its inhabitants were considered “the guardians of the frontier” with warfare being their primary occupation.<sup>33</sup> While the Qin was viewed by many of its neighboring states as being “too small, weak, and remote” to pose a serious threat to them, it was acknowledged that Qin military and political officials were also “masters of strategy and tactics, using diplomacy, espionage, propaganda, and treachery adroitly.”<sup>34</sup> As the Warring States period ended, the Qin state emerged the victor in what was a multipolar competition for power.

Quite like the Warring States period, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leadership “throughout its history has relied on intellectuals and ideologues to rationalize the quirks of its decision making.”<sup>35</sup> These individuals have provided analysis and advice to CCP officials quite like strategists did during the Warring States era.<sup>36</sup> And in the minds of many of these modern Chinese intellectuals, the Warring States era is quite analogous to the world in which the PRC found itself after the fall of the Soviet Union.<sup>37</sup>

Specifically, this view holds that without two competing superpowers, a powerful unchecked U.S. hegemon would most likely seek to build coalitions that could possibly contain and restrict China’s growth and interests. After the Soviet collapse, He Xin, a “well connected” and influential Chinese academic proposed that China now found itself in an environment that was “amazingly” similar to the Warring States period.<sup>38</sup> Within the PLA itself, Chinese General Gao Rui, a former vice president of the Academy of Military Science, has proposed that the Warring States era “shines with the glory of truth,” illustrating a “splendid military legacy” for China.<sup>39</sup>

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33 Rhoads Murphey, *East Asia: A New History* (New York: Addison Wesley Longman, Inc., 1997), 54.

34 *Ibid.*, 54.

35 H. Xin and G. Barme, "A Word of Advice to the Politburo," *Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, no. 23 (1990), 50.

36 *Ibid.*, 50.

37 Pillsbury, *China Debates the Future Security Environment*, 382.

38 Xin and Barme, *A Word of Advice to the Politburo*, 60. Pillsbury, *China Debates the Future Security Environment*, xliii, xxxvi.

39 *Ibid.*, xxxvi.

The Qin state in particular serves as a positive example for those Chinese strategists that acknowledge PRC weakness vis-à-vis the United States in general, and PLA weakness in particular. If so, the Qin then serves as a likely early inspiration and justification for “three warfares” as a component to PLA warfighting given that the Qin were especially “adept at psychological warfare and at keeping their enemies guessing, frequently breaking agreements, shifting sides, and suddenly mounting lightning attacks without warning—often after disarming their opponents or weakening their morale through propaganda.”<sup>40</sup> Ultimately, a Qin state that was considered to be a weaker power when compared to its rivals in quantitative terms was able to “win out in a troubled age of contention” because of the successful employment of skills like these.<sup>41</sup>

Writing about Chinese strategy, Michael Pillsbury stated “the Chinese approach to deterrence and crisis management—as evidenced by their classical writings—has been to keep the adversary off balance and attempt to influence its perceptions in order to deter.”<sup>42</sup> These ancient lessons “provide the PLA with a military heritage that is imprinted on soldiers before they enter the service through their social roots and then throughout their professional military education experience.”<sup>43</sup>

Another important influence on Chinese strategic thought that emerged from the Warring States era was the writings of Sun Zi.<sup>44</sup> Works like *The Art of War*, set down during this period, apparently remain an integral part of PLA professional military education. Additionally, many of Sun Zi’s stratagems emphasize deception as an important part of any effective strategy.<sup>45</sup> Before attempting to completely destroy an enemy, “Sun Zi stresses the use of deception” by stating “all warfare is based on deception.”<sup>46</sup> This type of approach apparently advocated by Sun Zi emphasizes the need

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40 Murphey, *East Asia: A New History*, 54.

41 *Ibid.*, 54.

42 Michael Pillsbury, "Strategic Acupuncture," *Foreign Policy*, no. 41 (1980), 53.

43 Blasko, *The Chinese Army Today: Tradition and Transformation for the 21st Century*, 92.

44 Sun Zi, Ralph D. Sawyer and Mei-Chün Sawyer, *The Art of War* [Sunzi bing fa.] (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), 375.

45 Blasko, *The Chinese Army Today: Tradition and Transformation for the 21st Century*, 92.

46 Sun Zi, Sawyer and Sawyer, *The Art of War*, 168.; Blasko, *The Chinese Army Today: Tradition and Transformation for the 21st Century*, 93.

to manipulate information that may distort an enemy's perceptions.<sup>47</sup> This also supports a "three warfares" capability in general and perception management and psychological operations in particular as part of a comprehensive military effort.

Sun Zi emphasized that if possible, one should attempt to disrupt alliances as part of defeating the enemy's strategy without actually battling them.<sup>48</sup> Having as part of a military strategy the use of the media and international legal regimes in particular to shape perceptions or weaken the legitimacy of an enemy position vis-à-vis within the United Nations for example seems consistent with this idea. Much like ancient Chinese strategists, "three warfares" also appears to be a non-warfare method to achieve the strategic ends sought by coordinating political and diplomatic measures in an offensive manner "to psychologically disintegrate the enemy forces and subdue them."<sup>49</sup>

Sun Zi also recommended that strategists study and adhere to the morally influential factors that lead to harmony between the people and their leadership.<sup>50</sup> Lessons like these inform "the relationship of war to the state and the army to the Chinese people [as] fundamental precepts adopted by Mao which live on today in the PLA's ever-adaptable understanding of [Mao's] 'people's war.'"<sup>51</sup>

Later, Mao Zedong in developing his own body of strategic thought and guidance "adopted many of Sun Zi's principles and applied them to the conditions China faced in the mid-twentieth century."<sup>52</sup> But most importantly it was the emphasis that Mao placed on political or ideological matters over purely hard military means that is especially relevant and informative when explaining the traditional logic behind the "three warfares" concept.

In December 1929, during the Ninth CCP Congress of the Red Fourth Army, Mao warned of "many kinds of non-proletarian ideas in the party [that exert] an extremely

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47 Blasko, *The Chinese Army Today: Tradition and Transformation for the 21st Century*, 93.

48 Ibid., 93.

49 Pillsbury, *China Debates the Future Security Environment*, xxxvii.

50 Sun Zi, Sawyer and Sawyer, *The Art of War*, 167.

51 Blasko, *The Chinese Army Today: Tradition and Transformation for the 21st Century*, 92.

52 Ibid., 94.

power influence and constitute a great obstacle to the implementation of the party's correct line."<sup>53</sup> Mao was specifically targeting what he considered to be the emergence of a "purely military viewpoint" that neglected political matters, which he considered to have primacy.

Mao stated that those with a "purely military viewpoint" regarded "military affairs and political work as opposed to each other, and fail to recognize military work as only one of the tools to accomplish the political tasks."<sup>54</sup> Mao further stated that "some even declare: 'When military work is well done, political work is naturally done well; when military work is not well done, political work cannot be well done either.' This is to go one step farther and regard military work as leading political work."<sup>55</sup>

Some of Mao's military leaders and strategists believed that the army's task was to simply fight. But Mao pointed out that these commanders failed:

...to recognize the fact that the Red Army [was] an armed force for carrying out the political tasks of the class. In its work, especially in China today, the Red Army definitely does not exist merely for the sake of fighting. Besides fighting, it must also shoulder such important tasks as agitating, organizing, arming and helping the masses, and building political power. The Red Army does not fight merely for the purpose of fighting. It fights in order to agitate, organize, arm and help the masses and build political power. Apart from such objectives, fighting loses its meaning and the Red Army the reason for its existence.<sup>56</sup>

Most importantly when considering "three warfares," Mao warned his commanders and strategists of overlooking "the importance of the propaganda team in propaganda work."<sup>57</sup>

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53 Tse-tung Mao and United States. Joint Publications Research Service, *Collected Works of Mao Tse-Tung (1917-1949)* (Arlington, Va; Springfield, Va: Joint Publications Research Service; for sale by the National Technical Information Service, 1978), 165.

54 Ibid., 166.

55 Ibid., 166.

56 Ibid., 166.

57 Ibid., 166.

The Chinese leadership and the PLA have acknowledged many times in the past their hard power weaknesses relative to other nations, especially the Soviet Union and the United States. This has often resulted in Chinese strategies that sought to use more indirect methods. Zhu De, a former Chinese military leader, has stated “The kind of war to fight depends on what kind of arms we have.”<sup>58</sup>

During the period of improved Sino-U.S. relations between 1972-1989, the Chinese believed “that disseminating and popularizing a view of the Soviet Union as economically weak, socially divided, and beset with ethnic difficulties [would] encourage increased resistance to Soviet efforts to expand its influence. [By creating and fostering this perception, especially in the minds of American strategists, Chinese policymakers saw] the ultimate target [of these efforts as being] more the emotions than the rational calculations of the Soviet leaders.”<sup>59</sup> In this case, an approach that sought to psychologically agitate the Soviet leadership seemed to have utility in the minds of Chinese strategists. Essentially, the Chinese sought to “agitate the Soviets in a variety of ways designed to upset them emotionally.”<sup>60</sup> The Chinese strategic approach was to repeatedly provoke Soviet emotions by agitating with “exquisite control.”<sup>61</sup>

It must be noted that, “unlike many militaries the PLA unfortunately does not publish a National Military Strategy document explicitly outlining its warfighting [concepts].”<sup>62</sup> However, reading many of the publications intended for senior officers that have emerged from the National Defense University in Beijing and other similar institutions proves helpful in piecing together different elements of PLA warfighting concepts and theories.<sup>63</sup>

Michael Pillsbury’s *Chinese Views of Future Warfare* however contains a number of insightful essays by PLA officials written during the 1990s. The writings from this

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58 This quote is contained in David L. Shambaugh, *Modernizing China's Military: Progress, Problems, and Prospects* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 60.

59 Pillsbury, *Strategic Acupuncture*, 57–58.

60 Ibid., 54.

61 Ibid., 54.

62 Shambaugh, *Modernizing China's Military: Progress, Problems, and Prospects*, 59.

63 Ibid., 59.

period in particular are especially important because they grant the reader insight into how Chinese military leaders at that time perceived a changing strategic environment in which the PRC found itself immediately after the end of the Cold War. It is reasonable to conclude that they also largely drove the logic and thinking behind what eventually emerged in the form of the 2003 CMC order directing the development of the “three warfares.”

Many of these essays discuss the importance of information and its role in conflict with many of the Chinese authors advocating its advantageous usage in combat as an essential part of a comprehensive national effort. In “Weapons of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,” Chang Mengxiong, who served during this period on the Committee of Science, Technology and Industry of the System Engineering Institute, states that “information-intensified combat methods are like Chinese boxer[s] with a knowledge of vital body points who can bring an opponent to his knees with a minimum of movement.”<sup>64</sup>

Information is also considered a key element by many Chinese military strategists due to its importance in helping change an inferior strategic position into a superior one. Pillsbury’s compendium includes an important essay by Shen Kuiguan, a former professor at the PLA AF Command Institute in Beijing. Shen argues that “the law of conversion from superiority to inferiority or vice versa is an important principle of military dialectics.”<sup>65</sup> This law, according to Colonel Shen, “is composed of superior political conditions, powerful military forces, abundant material base, full war preparations, correct operational directions, advantageous natural conditions, *favorable mass opinion and international support*, among which some factors occupy a dominant position.”<sup>66</sup> Conversely, “unfavorable mass opinion and lack of international support” can lead to an inferior or “disadvantageous position.”<sup>67</sup> Shen concludes that “the real

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64 Michael Pillsbury, *Chinese Views of Future Warfare* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1997), 253.

65 *Ibid.*, 214.

66 *Ibid.*, 215. Italics added here for emphasis.

67 *Ibid.*, 215.



cause for the victory of one side and the defeat of the other” includes “the comprehensive superiority founded on many war factors particularly the political nature and the subjective direction of the war.”<sup>68</sup>

Colonel Shen’s views suggest that the PLA sees utility in the “three warfares” in that they serve to complement physical isolation on the battlefield by isolating an enemy in the cognitive dimension as well. He cites the 1991 Gulf War as a key example in that Iraq was in an “isolated position” with respect to international public opinion and that efforts to “strengthen the capacity and efficiency of the whole operational system” of warfare would help prevent the PRC from being in a similar disadvantageous position in a future conflict.<sup>69</sup>

Major General Wang Pufeng, a former Director of the Strategy Department in the Academy of Military Science in Beijing, wrote in 1995 that the Chinese military “must strive for an active approach in a reactive situation and use every means possible to destroy the opponent’s information superiority and transform our inferior position in information.”<sup>70</sup> He suggested further that efforts to deceive an opponent would be beneficial to “muddle the opponents perceptions and inspire false assessments” and that “before and after war, information hassling never stops for a moment.”<sup>71</sup>

The aforementioned *Analysis of 100 Cases of Legal Warfare*, first published in 2004 and later in 2006, offered up a moral to Case 18—“Using Tricks Legitimately”—to remind the PLA student and practitioner of “three warfares” that Sun Zi placed great emphasis on deception and provides an additional link between the old and the new regarding Chinese strategic thought. It states that:

to subdue the enemy, [the PLA needs] to rely on strategies and maneuvers, or deceptions and ruses. Effective usage of ruses has also been extensively employed in various wars in the modern times. Also, as long as wars or military conflicts exist, the principle of ‘war is a game of deception’ will not lost its viability. We need to learn to master and

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68 Michael Pillsbury, *Chinese Views of Future Warfare* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1997), 216.

69 Ibid., 216–217.

70 Ibid., 322.

71 Ibid., 322–323.

employ the principle of ruses in the law of war to detect the enemy's tricks timely, expose the ruses of the enemy which are in violation of the ruse rules, and adopt flexibly various types of effective and legitimate ruses to deceive and defeat the enemy.<sup>72</sup>

It is clear that the Warring States period, the example of the Qin state, Sun Zi, and early Maoist and more recent PLA thought all serve as important traditional and conceptual Chinese examples that undergird the basic rationale for “three warfares.” However, there are also Western examples that are equally as informative and that also stress the importance of information with respect to perception and morale.

Many classic Western military works on strategy emphasize similar factors and serve as further theoretical foundations for “three warfares.” For example, Clausewitz stressed in his classic work *On War* that the state, its military, and its population—what he referred to as a “paradoxical trinity”—are the most essential factors when considering and developing grand strategy.<sup>73</sup> Clausewitz believed in particular that a state's “passions [needed to be] kindled in war” in order to provide the moral justification for the state and military to be successful in achieving the strategic ends sought.<sup>74</sup> Appealing to the will, seeking the support, and sustaining the morale of a state's populace while attacking those of an opponent becomes equally relevant to purely military matters (e.g., relative force numbers).

Antoine Jomini's *The Art of War* also placed emphasis on morale, but more in terms of the military in particular.<sup>75</sup> Jomini states, “the first means of encouraging the military spirit is to invest the army with all possible social and public consideration.”<sup>76</sup> Emphasizing the importance of strengthening the collective psyche of one's own forces, and its leaders in particular, Jomini is clear in stating that it is “particularly important that this spirit should pervade the officers and non-commissioned officers: if they be capable

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72 Michael Pillsbury, *Chinese Views of Future Warfare* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1997).

73 von Clausewitz, Howard and Paret, *On War*, 89.

74 Ibid., 89.

75 Antoine Henri de Jomini and Charles Messenger, *The Art of War* (London; Novato, Calif: Greenhill Books; Presidio Press, 1992), 410.

76 Ibid.

and the nation brave, there need be no fear for the men.”<sup>77</sup> Essentially, the national psyche (i.e., Clausewitz) and military’s morale (i.e., Jomini) must both be strengthened and protected. This strongly suggests that attacking the national psyche and morale of one’s enemy should be pursued in order to achieve the military and greater political aims desired.

B.H. Liddel Hart has stated that “whatever the *form*, the *effect* to be sought is the dislocation of the opponent’s mind and dispositions.” In his book *Strategy*, Hart analyzes twenty-five centuries of warfare and comes to the conclusion that the morale of one’s enemy is a viable target and that propaganda has utility when seeking what he felt was a more advantageous indirect approach, as opposed to a direct one. Hart points out a quote by Lenin who stated “the soundest strategy in any campaign is to postpone battle and the soundest tactics to postpone attack, until the moral dislocation of the enemy renders the delivery of a decisive blow practicable.”<sup>78</sup> Hart also defined proper strategy as “the art of distributing and applying military means to fulfill the ends of policy” while suggesting a “wider variety of military means” to achieve what are ultimately political objectives sought through warfare.<sup>79</sup>

When considering the aforementioned examples, there are clearly aspects of both Chinese and Western strategic thought that serve as theoretical inspiration for a PLA “three warfares” concept. But these are not sufficient alone in explaining the “three warfares” and its influences.

There are equally important modern Western thoughts and views on the importance of information in war in general and U.S. information operations doctrine and experiences in particular that serve as powerful inspirations for the PLA in their pursuit of a “three warfares” concept and an associated doctrine. It is to these that we now turn.

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<sup>77</sup> Antoine Henri de Jomini and Charles Messenger, *The Art of War* (London; Novato, Calif: Greenhill Books; Presidio Press, 1992), 410.

<sup>78</sup> Basil Henry Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, 2 rev ed. (New York, N.Y., U.S.A.: Meridian, 1991; 1967), 147.

<sup>79</sup> Gabriel Marcella and Army War College (U.S.). Strategic Studies Institute, *Teaching Strategy: Challenge and Response* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2010), 14.

#### IV. SIMILARITIES TO AND INFLUENCES OF U.S. INFORMATION WARFARE AND OPERATIONS DOCTRINE

For much of the later half of the twentieth century, many military theorists have come to recognize that advances in computers, communications, weapons, and guidance technologies would revolutionize warfare.<sup>80</sup> Thoughts and predictions regarding what were once futuristic concepts of warfare came to manifest themselves in conflicts during the 1990s and 2000s. U.S. military actions during these periods particularly showcased how warfare has evolved. Further, as a result of these conflicts, the U.S. military formally began to codify its thinking on how information should be treated in war.

Additionally, the study of warfare and associated military reforms undertaken by the PLA, while reflecting those aspects of both Chinese and Western strategic traditions discussed thus far, have greatly involved “the [consideration of] wars of other nations” as well.<sup>81</sup> This seems reasonable considering that the last major combat operation that the PLA has undertaken was China’s “punitive” attack on Vietnam” in 1979 when Mao’s “people’s war” at that time had been modified to include “modern conditions.”<sup>82</sup> While this military adventure served as an important impetus for PLA modernization afterward, “China lost a great deal in the 1979 war, whether the balance sheet is measured in lives or political cost. But perhaps the greatest loss was in a more intangible product—China’s reputation.”<sup>83</sup>

But while the PLA has learned from both classic studies of war and its own experiences, Chinese military officials and strategists have also studied modern campaigns to assist in developing their own operational doctrine.<sup>84</sup> Over time, “the mainstays of PLA operations and deployments [have been] subjected to doctrinal reform”

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80 Quote from Gary Pounder, "Opportunity Lost," *Aerospace Power Journal* 14, no. 2 (Summer, 2000), 59.; Alvin Toffler and Heidi Toffler, *War and Anti-War: Survival at the Dawn of the 21st Century*, 1st ed. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1993), 302.

81 Blasko, *The Chinese Army Today: Tradition and Transformation for the 21st Century*, 92.

82 Gerald Segal, *Defending China* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 223, 226.

83 *Ibid.*, 227.

84 Blasko, *The Chinese Army Today: Tradition and Transformation for the 21st Century*, 92.

and modern U.S. military campaigns have served as a critical catalyst for such reforms.<sup>85</sup> This was especially so during the 1990s in the wake of the U.S.-led Gulf War and NATO's intervention in the former Yugoslavia.<sup>86</sup>

Prior to the U.S. war with Iraq in 1991, there were many, not only in the PLA, who "pre-supposed that the war in the Gulf would be a typical industrial-era war."<sup>87</sup> But in the end, the Gulf War had "a jarring effect on the PLA" after dire Chinese predictions regarding U.S. prospects for success prior to the conflict ultimately proved incorrect while "remind[ing] the PLA High Command of its deficiencies" in many areas, especially information warfare.<sup>88</sup>

Information warfare and its associated operations were thought by some in the PLA to have played "a significant role in the U.S. victory."<sup>89</sup> PLA Major General Wang Pufeng, who some refer to as the "father of Chinese IW," has stated that the 1991 conflict against Iraq was the archetype of information war.<sup>90</sup> Later, toward the end of the decade, the U.S. military provided the PLA with further examples on how a modern military attempts to manage, control, and guide information, particularly that which is public, during a conflict.

U.S. military missions in Iraq in 1991 and the former Yugoslavia in 1999, along with recent U.S. military activity in both Afghanistan and Iraq, have been highly influential in the development of U.S. military information warfare doctrine. When considering "three warfares," what has been especially critical is the impact on the PLA, which has given much thought and attention to these conflicts in general and U.S. methods involving information operations in particular.<sup>91</sup>

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85 David L. Shambaugh, *Modernizing China's Military: Progress, Problems, and Prospects* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 66.

86 *Ibid.*, 66.

87 Toffler and Toffler, *War and Anti-War: Survival at the Dawn of the 21st Century*, 75.

88 *Ibid.*, 69.

89 Mulvenon, James C., Richard H. Yang, Center for Asia-Pacific Policy (Rand Corporation), United States. Air Force., Rand Corporation. National Security Research Division., and Project Air Force (U.S.). "The People's Liberation Army in the Information Age." Rand, 1999,178.

90 *Ibid.*, 178.

91 Shambaugh, *Modernizing China's Military: Progress, Problems, and Prospects*, 66.

As David Shambaugh has noted, “Over the past three decades, reforming doctrine has been a catalyst for a vast range of PLA reforms [which seek to reconfigure]...the force structure...military education...training regimens...research and development...and [PLA] operational strategy.”<sup>92</sup> Shambaugh also believes that the PLA looks to other modern militaries, mostly that of the United States, for ideas and inspiration. According to him, “One can clearly see the lessons learned by the PLA from foreign conflicts and the resulting changes in doctrine as applied to military exercises and force structure [of PLA training] in recent years.”<sup>93</sup>

Regarding information warfare and operations in particular, the 1991 Gulf War has provided an example for the PLA of how information can be used and shaped to better legitimize military action. For example, President George H.W. Bush’s “effective mobilization of United Nations support was accompanied by propaganda suggesting that the United States, rather than acting in its own interest, was merely doing the UN’s bidding. The strategic purpose of this [perception management] campaign was to isolate Iraq diplomatically” which proved highly successful.<sup>94</sup> Additionally, at the operational level the U.S. military employed a number of psychological operations methods (e.g., pamphlets, broadcasts) in order to weaken Iraqi military morale and cast doubt into the minds of those opposing U.S. and coalition forces as to the legitimacy of their cause.

Later, the 1999 U.S.-led NATO military campaign in Yugoslavia, dubbed Operation Noble Anvil by the Americans, proved to be perhaps “the first true ‘media war,’ in which the power of instantaneous coverage and dramatic visual images rendered strategic importance to a handful of tactical events,” highlighting the influential power that public information, especially television coverage, could have on public opinion.<sup>95</sup> In preparing for the bombing campaign against the Serbs, the United States military and other NATO members developed a comprehensive IO campaign plan and organized

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92 Shambaugh, *Modernizing China's Military: Progress, Problems, and Prospects*, 56.

93 Ibid., 56.

94 Toffler and Toffler, *War and Anti-War: Survival at the Dawn of the 21st Century*, 196.

95 Pounder, *Opportunity Lost*, 57–58.

IO cells that were tasked with integrating and employing “such diverse tools as civil affairs, electronic warfare, intelligence, and public information in an effort to control and dominate the ‘information battle space.’”<sup>96</sup>

This was the U.S. military’s “first major test for IO doctrine and organization” and Operation Noble Anvil in particular showed how “media preoccupation” of events greatly affected how the NATO mission was both militarily and morally judged by the public.<sup>97</sup> This conflict continued to underscore that “in an era of relentless, real-time coverage, the media has an indelible impact on public opinion, long identified as a critical center of gravity for any U.S. military campaigning.”<sup>98</sup> Further, the U.S. military continued to realize that public affairs in particular and “through its public information mission,” could “clearly supply some of the capital required for winning the media war (as part of the IO campaign) and [could] bolster public support for the overall military effort.”<sup>99</sup>

The conflict in the Balkans also caused U.S. military commanders to respond “to manipulation of the media by Bosnian, Serb, and Croatian political leaders.”<sup>100</sup> For example:

The Serbs used government-controlled media to target only Serb citizens with its distorted messages (rather than the international community). Government leaders sowed fear and paranoia in Bosnian-Serbs, who in turn developed a violent hatred of Bosnian and Croat ethnics within Yugoslavia, further convincing the Serbs that they were indeed struggling for their survival as a people.<sup>101</sup>

Both Operation Desert Storm and Operation Noble Anvil have given observers insight into those aspects of information warfare and operations that are proven to work. But in addition to these more explicit examples that primarily incorporated information

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96 Pounder, *Opportunity Lost*, 58.

97 Ibid., 57, 59.

98 Ibid., 58.

99 Ibid., 58.

100 W. Richter Major, "The Future of Information Operations," *Military Review* 89, no. 1 (Jan/Feb, 2009), 105.

101 Ibid., 105.

operations at the operational level of war, the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) has in the past sought to develop its own deliberate strategic level perception management capabilities.<sup>102</sup> And these examples are perhaps the strongest impetus for the PLA “three warfares,” given their strategic focus.

For example, “Perception Management: Iran,” developed during the 1979 hostage incident deliberately targeted those closest to Ayatollah Khomeini in order to influence the Iranian leader.<sup>103</sup> Later during 1980s, the Reagan Administration continued similar perception management efforts at the DoD and subordinate service and combatant command levels. Casper Weinberger, Secretary of Defense at the time, recommended that the United States should “employ sophisticated strategic deception operations” as part of military competition with the Soviet Union.<sup>104</sup>

*Washington Post* reporter Bob Woodward reported that a “secret plan, adopted at a White House meeting [targeting Libya] was outlined in a three-page memo that John M. Poindexter, the president's national security affairs adviser, sent to President Reagan.”<sup>105</sup> A key aspect of this information shaping strategy was to combine ““real and illusionary events—through a disinformation program—with the basic goal of making Gadhafi think...that there [was] a high degree of internal opposition to him within Libya, that his key trusted aides [were] disloyal, that the U.S. [was] about to move against him militarily.”<sup>106</sup> Woodward further reported that this plan included ““a series of closely coordinated events involving covert, diplomatic, military and public actions,’ according to Poindexter's memo.”<sup>107</sup>

A year before the official 2003 CMC “three warfares” directive, *The New York Times* reported in 2002 that “the Pentagon [was] developing plans to provide news items,

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102 Jeffrey T. Richelson, “Planning to Deceive,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 59, no. 2 (Mar/Apr, 2003), 64.

103 Ibid., 65.

104 Ibid., 67.

105 Bob Woodward and Washington Post Staff Writer, “Gadhafi Target of Secret U.S. Deception Plan; Elaborate Campaign Included Disinformation that Appeared as Fact in American Media,” *The Washington Post* October 2, 1986.

106 Ibid.

107 Ibid.



possibly even false ones, to foreign media organizations as part of a new effort to influence public sentiment and policy makers in both friendly and unfriendly countries.”<sup>108</sup> While acknowledging that the U.S. military has a long history of waging information warfare against America’s enemies, the *Times* report described U.S. military-led efforts to create the Office of Strategic Influence that would serve to “broaden [the perception management] mission into allied nations in the Middle East, Asia and even Western Europe...a role traditionally led by civilian agencies, mainly the State Department.”<sup>109</sup>

This “small but well-financed Pentagon office...established shortly after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, was a response to concerns in the administration that the United States was losing public support overseas for its war on terrorism, particularly in Islamic countries.”<sup>110</sup> The U.S. military sought to “counter the pronouncements of the Taliban, Osama bin Laden and their supporters” by apparently hiring former advertising executives to manage a “public diplomacy office” along with creating “ a public information ‘war room’ to coordinate the [Bush Administration's] daily message domestically and abroad.”<sup>111</sup>

The Office of Strategic Influence effort attempted to coordinate several DoD tools in attempting to shape the perceptions of foreign audiences. For example, “one of the office's proposals [called] for planting news items with foreign media organizations through outside concerns that might not have obvious ties to the Pentagon.”<sup>112</sup> Other designs involved “sending journalists, civic leaders and foreign leaders e-mail messages that promote American views or attack unfriendly governments” along with “psychological activities and deception” that would utilize “the instruments and staff of the military's globe-spanning public affairs apparatus” and would include “scientific

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108 James Dao and Eric Schmitt, "A Nation Challenged: Hearts and Minds; Pentagon Readies Efforts to Sway Sentiment Abroad," *The New York Times*, sec. A; Foreign Desk, February 19, 2002.

109 Ibid.

110 Ibid.

111 Ibid.

112 Ibid.

polling and focus groups” to determine effectiveness.<sup>113</sup> Then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Richard B. Myers described these U.S. military efforts as a “strategic influence campaign” that would include both psychological operations and public affairs.<sup>114</sup>

Many of these examples, especially U.S. efforts to develop the Office of Strategic Influence, show that the United States has continuously sought to develop and demonstrate its desire to manage perceptions of how others, its enemies in particular, view and process its actions. Current PLA efforts to develop the “three warfares” seem highly comparable to these past U.S. examples, serving as powerful influences on Chinese military doctrinal development. In fact, the purposes of the Office of Strategic Influence seem quite analogous to what is generally understood about PLA media, legal, and psychological warfare aspirations.

After witnessing how the United States military has incorporated its information operations (IO) into past campaigns, it seems that the PLA is attempting to mirror U.S. doctrine by developing its own information operations (IO) (i.e., “three warfares”) but with Chinese characteristics. There seems to be no doubt that the PLA views information warfare (IW) and its associated operations as something “similar to what is known as a ‘force multiplier’ in the U.S. military: ‘A capability that, when added to and employed by a combat force, significantly increases the combat potential of that force and thus enhances the probability of successful mission accomplishment.’”<sup>115</sup> It is within these three realms—media, legal, and psychological—where informational and ideational conflict is to be waged between the PLA and its enemies.

Understanding that “one of the problems in analyzing PLA IW strategy...is disaggregating it from translations or outright copying of U.S. doctrinal writings,” there is an increased difficulty in discerning the true design and intent of associated PLA doctrine.<sup>116</sup> For example, the PLA has “often selectively lift[ed] verbatim text from U.S.

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113 James Dao and Eric Schmitt, "A Nation Challenged: Hearts and Minds; Pentagon Readies Efforts to Sway Sentiment Abroad," *The New York Times*, sec. A; Foreign Desk, February 19, 2002.

114 Ibid.

115 Blasko, *The Chinese Army Today: Tradition and Transformation for the 21st Century*, 107.

116 Mulvenon and others, *The People's Liberation Army in the Information Age*, 181.

military operational guides such as *Information Operations* (FM 100–6) and the Joint Chiefs of Staff’s *Joint Doctrine for Command and Control Warfare Operations*, and *Joint Vision 2010*.”<sup>117</sup> It seems apparent that “protection of intellectual property rights is not a priority in PLA writings on [information warfare].”<sup>118</sup>

Additionally, PLA general Su Enze’s assertion that information warfare includes “electronic warfare, tactic deception, strategic deterrence, propaganda warfare, psychological warfare, [and] computer warfare” is “virtually identical to the U.S. Air Force’s doctrinal ‘Six Pillars of Information Warfare.’”<sup>119</sup> Examples like these, along with the apparent impact that U.S. military actions throughout the last twenty years, strongly suggest that current U.S. information warfare and operations doctrine are an influence on PLA IO doctrine.

Therefore it is also reasonable to assume that there is a strong guiding influence from U.S. IO doctrine on the PLA “three warfares” concept. While perhaps not the sole influence, U.S. IO doctrine and theory is certainly a major component to PLA thought that drives its own doctrinal evolution. And it seems worthwhile to briefly highlight some important aspect of U.S. information operations doctrine to see how they relate and inform the PLA “three warfares” doctrinal concept.

U.S. military doctrine defines a unit and its commander’s operational environment as a physical area that includes “factors (of the air, land, maritime, and space domains) and the *information environment*. Included within these are the adversary, friendly, and neutral systems that are relevant to a specific joint operation.”<sup>120</sup> Most importantly, the information environment is considered to be “the aggregate of individuals, organizations, and systems that collect, process, disseminate, or act on information.” The U.S. military’s idea of an information environment is quite similar to Habermas’s concept of a public sphere, and includes leaders, decision makers, individuals, and organizations

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117 Shambaugh, *Modernizing China's Military: Progress, Problems, and Prospects*, 78.

118 *Ibid.*, 78.

119 Mulvenon and others, *The People's Liberation Army in the Information Age*, 182.

120 United States. Joint Chiefs of Staff, "Joint Operations," Joint Chiefs of Staff.

among the actors that reside within this environment.<sup>121</sup> Essentially, it is an environment “where humans and automated systems observe, orient, decide, and act upon information, and is therefore the principal environment of decision making.”<sup>122</sup>

U.S. doctrine divides the information environment further into three main interrelated dimensions. The first is the physical dimension “where the information environment overlaps with the physical world.”<sup>123</sup> This is the “supporting infrastructure that enable[s] individuals and organizations to conduct operations across the air, land, sea, and space domains.”<sup>124</sup> The second is the informational dimension “where information is collected, processed, stored, disseminated, displayed, and protected.”<sup>125</sup> Third, and most critical to gaining a better concept and understanding of the PLA “three warfares”, is the cognitive dimension within the information environment. The cognitive dimension is best described as:

... encompass[ing] the mind of the decision maker and the target audience (TA). This is the dimension in which people think, perceive, visualize, and decide. It is the most important of the three dimensions. This dimension is also affected by a commander’s orders, training, and other personal motivations. Battles and campaigns can be lost in the cognitive dimension. Factors such as leadership, morale, unit cohesion, emotion, state of mind, level of training, experience, situational awareness, as well as public opinion, perceptions, media, public information, and rumors influence this dimension.<sup>126</sup>

The cognitive dimension within an information warfare environment is a place where media, legal, and psychological warfare would best be waged by the PLA due to the stated fact that it seeks to affect the minds of decision makers and the public at large, and involves factors such as morale, perception, and emotion.

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121 Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy* [Faktizität und Geltung.] (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996), 631.

122 United States Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Information Operations* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2006), I-1.

123 *Ibid.*, I-1-I-3.

124 *Ibid.*

125 *Ibid.*

126 *Ibid.*, I-2.

The aforementioned OSD description of media warfare as “aimed at influencing domestic and international public opinion to build public and international support for China’s military actions and to dissuade an adversary from pursuing policies perceived to be adverse to China’s interests” fits well within the U.S. description of the cognitive dimension.<sup>127</sup> So does PLA psychological warfare insofar as it seeks “to undermine an enemy’s ability to conduct combat operations through psychological operations aimed at deterring, shocking, and demoralizing enemy military personnel and supporting civilian populations.”<sup>128</sup> Both are clearly targeting elements within the cognitive dimension as described above.

Even the third component, legal warfare, which seeks to utilize “international and domestic laws to gain international support and manage possible political repercussions of China’s military actions,” strongly suggests that the minds of relevant adversary decision makers and collective public opinion would be the intended “three warfares” targets. U.S. IO doctrine also encourages “laws, regulations, and procedures relevant to information and decision making” as key “[c]ognitive properties of the [i]nformation [e]nvironment.”<sup>129</sup> Clausewitz would agree, given that decision makers and the collective opinion of the people constitute two out of the three poles in his trinity. Additionally, both affect and bestow legitimacy, either domestically or internationally along the cognitive dimension.<sup>130</sup>

U.S. IO doctrine states that there are five core IO capabilities – psychological operations, military deception, combat camera, public affairs, civil-military operations, and defense support to public diplomacy.<sup>131</sup> Psychological operations are “planned operations to convey selected truthful information and indicators to foreign audiences to influence their emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and ultimately, the behavior of

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127 Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress - Military Power of the People’s Republic of China 2010*, 26.

128 Ibid.

129 United States Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Information Operations*, III-2-III-3.

130 Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress - Military Power of the People’s Republic of China 2010*, 26.

131 United States Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Information Operations*.

their government, organizations, groups, and individuals.”<sup>132</sup> Military deception is defined as “those actions executed to deliberately mislead adversary decision makers as to friendly military capabilities, intentions, and operations, thereby causing the adversary to take specific actions (or inactions) that will contribute to the accomplishment of the friendly forces’ mission.”<sup>133</sup> The mission of combat camera activities is to provide U.S. military officials at all levels “with an imagery capability in support of operation and planning requirements across the range of military operations” by developing and disseminating “products that support strategic and operational [information operations] objectives.”<sup>134</sup> Public affairs activities are defined as “those public information, command information, and community relations activities directed toward both external and internal audiences with interest in [the Department of Defense].”<sup>135</sup> Civil-military operations are those activities that help to “establish, maintain, influence, or exploit relations between military forces, governmental and nongovernmental civilian organizations and authorities, and the civilian populace.”<sup>136</sup> And finally, defense support to public diplomacy seeks to “facilitate the diplomacy efforts of the [U.S. Government]” by promoting U.S. Government policy abroad by influencing “foreign audiences and opinion makers and by broadening the dialogue between American citizens and institutions and their counterparts.”<sup>137</sup>

While not exactly alike, U.S. and Chinese IO concepts appear to be generally congruent. If one were to combine the associated activities of U.S. psychological operations, military deception, combat camera, and public affairs as defined by U.S. doctrine above, both PLA media and psychological activities and intended goals would indeed seem analogous.

The GPD has begun to incorporate “three warfares” into PLA joint training among the different branches by developing “publicity campaigns using the modern

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132 United States Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Information Operations*, II-1.

133 United States Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Information Operations*, II-2.

134 *Ibid.*, II-7-II-8.

135 *Ibid.*, II-8.

136 *Ibid.*, II-9.

137 United States Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Information Operations*, II-10.

electronic media to mobilize the Chinese population and demoralize the enemy,” employing “propaganda leaflets and loudspeakers on the battlefield to encourage defections or surrender,” and emphasizing the need for PLA forces to “minimize civilian casualties [in order] to avoid collateral damage to cultural treasure [and] respect the laws of war [vis-à-vis the] treatment of prisoners and non-combatants.”<sup>138</sup> The *PLA Analysis of 100 Cases of Legal Warfare* stresses that:

It is necessary to increase the accuracy of training and education in the laws of war for the Chinese military, improving the alertness and battlefield identification and handling capabilities of officers and soldiers, effectively guarding against the perfidious behavior of the enemy, ensuring that future military struggles of the Chinese military will not be exploited or used by the enemy, satisfactorily completing the operational tasks assigned by the [Chinese Communist Party] Central Committee and the Central Military Commission.<sup>139</sup>

As with U.S. IO, “the goal of the ‘three warfares’ is to seize the political initiative and contribute to the success of military campaigns.”<sup>140</sup>

However, there is a key difference between PLA “three warfares” and U.S. information operations. U.S. IO doctrine clearly states that:

[Information operations] may involve complex legal and policy issues requiring careful review and national-level coordination and approval. The United States constitution, U.S. laws, and international law set boundaries and establish precedence for military activity in the information environment. Another country’s legal basis and limitations for military activity in the information environment may differ. U.S. military activities in the information environment, as in the physical domains, are conducted as a matter of law and policy. U.S. forces, whether operating physically from bases or locations overseas or virtually in the information environment from within the boundaries of the US or elsewhere, are required by law and policy to act in accordance with US law and the [law of armed conflict].<sup>141</sup>

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138 Blasko, *The Chinese Army Today: Tradition and Transformation for the 21st Century*, 164.

139 Ibid.

140 Ibid., 164.

141 United States Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Information Operations*, V-2.

There is no evidence to support or suggest the idea that such legal barriers or constraints limit PLA IO in general, and the “three warfares” in particular.

The United States and other Western militaries have demonstrated their desire to affect their enemies in the cognitive dimension. During the 1991 Gulf War, the 1999 U.S.-led NATO bombing campaign against the Serbs, and even during the most recent U.S. military action against Libya, perception management in the form of information operations has proven to have utility as an aspect of waging modern war at the operational and tactical levels.<sup>142</sup>

At the strategic level, the United States has sought to develop a comprehensive perception management capability most exemplified by U.S. Defense Department efforts to develop an Office of Strategic Influence. The PLA has indeed learned from these examples, as well as from evolving U.S. IO doctrine.

If U.S. political and military officials continue to recognize the benefits and utility of IO capacities within the cognitive dimension that have the potential to affect adversary decision makers, and given the influence that the United States military has had on the PLA in the past, it would seem quite reasonable to infer that the same can be said about Chinese views regarding the utility of its IO designs.

In summary, it seems quite clear that the cognitive dimension is where the PLA “three warfares” is to be employed. By influencing perceptions with PLA narratives injected within the public sphere, media warfare seeks to influence key domestic and international decision-making. PLA psychological warfare, much like its U.S. equivalent would simply seek to target an enemy’s morale and emotions to degrade its fighting abilities.

And much like past U.S. efforts, PLA legal warfare would favorably interpret applicable and relevant laws and regulations within the cognitive dimension of the public sphere to build legal legitimacy. All “three warfares” components are quite consistent with U.S. doctrinal equivalents.

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<sup>142</sup> Eric Schmitt, "U.S. Gives its Air Power Expansive Role in Libya," *The New York Times*, sec. U.S., March 28, 2011, 2011, [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/29/us/29military.html?\\_r=1&ref=ericsschmitt](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/29/us/29military.html?_r=1&ref=ericsschmitt) (accessed April 1 2011).



But quite unlike its U.S. IO counterpart, PLA “three warfares” most likely have no legal constraints or operational restrictions in attempting to shape and manage perceptions. Essentially, the “three warfares” is unbounded in that sense.

## V. PLA SOFT POWER ASPIRATIONS IN THE COGNITIVE DIMENSION

PLA modernization programs continue to focus on developing parsimonious, complementary, and synergistic capabilities that will grant the PRC the ability to achieve quick, decisive, and favorable resolution of regional conflicts involving land, sea, air, and the informational offensive and defensive realms. If successful, efforts like these will certainly constitute hard power gains for the PRC. However, as part of its broader national strategic goal of increasing what it calls “comprehensive national power” (CNP) or *zōnghé guóli*, Beijing also seeks to cultivate greater attractiveness as well.<sup>143</sup> This was an idea perhaps devised early in 1980s that “stemmed from Chinese traditional military philosophy” developed during the Warring States era.<sup>144</sup>

According to David Lampton in *The Three Faces of Chinese Power – Might, Money, And Minds*, CNP is “the sum total of coercive, economic, and ideational power of a nation.”<sup>145</sup> Additionally, the idea of CNP “shapes the way Chinese understand their national circumstance and strategy” and “resonates with the thinking of traditional strategists such as [Sun Zi].”<sup>146</sup> It is the inclusion of “ideational power,” or what Joseph Nye terms “soft power,” with hard power elements (i.e., military, economic) that is most intriguing and obvious when considering the “three warfares” concept.<sup>147</sup>

In his 2004 book *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, Nye elucidates his concept by describing what soft power is and is not.<sup>148</sup> With soft power resources like cultural attraction, information, or diplomatic appeal “a country may obtain the outcomes it wants in world politics because other countries—admiring its values,

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143 David M. Lampton, *The Three Faces of Chinese Power: Might, Money, and Minds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 20–25.; Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, 1st ed. (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), 191.

144 Pillsbury, *China Debates the Future Security Environment*, xxxvii.

145 Lampton, *The Three Faces of Chinese Power: Might, Money, and Minds*, 21.

146 Ibid., 20–21.

147 Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), 191.

148 Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, 191.

emulating its example, aspiring to its level of prosperity and openness—want to follow it.”<sup>149</sup> This is essentially a concept based in values and ideals.

Specifically, soft power is a more indirect or ideationally persuasive way for a country to get what is desired and is in stark contrast to a state’s use of “hard” power, which includes material means like military or economic factors, to coerce and influence others. Instead, a nation’s soft power “co-opts people rather than coerces them” by attracting and seducing others to get them to want what you want without the sole use of hard power carrots and sticks.<sup>150</sup> Many officials within the Chinese government have increasingly realized that soft power has utility and that mass communications must be used to nurture and grow China’s soft power to counter what has been a Western dominated narrative.

On a number of occasions, both Chinese leaders and state run media have often mentioned the importance of soft power development as a complementary part of China’s comprehensive national power. For example, in 2006, Chinese President Hu Jintao stated that China must “promote vigorous development and prosperity of socialist culture” and that “to improve China’s ‘soft power’ is a paramount state mission.”<sup>151</sup> Additionally, Xinhua News Agency has reported on “how the need to develop China’s soft power has emerged as a hot topic at the annual session of China’s parliament and [within] top political” bodies.<sup>152</sup>

*People’s Daily*, as well, has “proclaimed that China has to substantially increase its soft power in order to play an active role in international competition.”<sup>153</sup> This widely circulated government newspaper takes the view that “we cannot be soft on ‘soft power’”

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149 Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, 5.

150 *Ibid.*, 5.

151 First Quote is from Hu Jintao’s political report to the 17<sup>th</sup> National Congress as cited in David Bandurski, “Hitting Hard with “soft Power”: China Explores Macro-Measures to Bolster its Global Cultural Prowess,” China Media Project, <http://cmp.hku.hk/2007/12/19/797/> (accessed Aug/22, 2010); Second quote is from Hu Jintao’s speech at the 8<sup>th</sup> Artists’ Conference as cited in J. Zhang, “Making Sense of the Changes in China’s Public Diplomacy: Direction of Information Flow and Messages,” *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* 4, no. 4 (Nov. 2008), 303, 310.

152 *Ibid.*, 310.

153 Mingjiang Li, *Soft Power: China's Emerging Strategy in International Politics* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2009), 275.

and makes clear that “culture is a key integral part of a country’s overall national strength, what people have called ‘soft power’, and it has become a point of competitions between national power.”<sup>154</sup>

Taking perhaps a more Hobbesian view, some Chinese officials see this struggle in the global public sphere as just another dimension of conflict. Li Shulei, the CCP congressional delegate from the Central Party School has stated that “...some powerful foreign nations wish to use culture as a weapon against other nations, and for this reason we must work hard to raise our country’s ‘soft power.’”<sup>155</sup> And Li Changchun, the current propaganda and ideology coordinator for the CCP Standing Committee, suggests that Chinese media organizations, or “cultural organizations,” should become what he calls “aircraft carriers” (i.e., powerful Chinese conglomerates) that are “equipped to do battle with foreign media groups like [Rupert Murdoch’s] News Corp.”<sup>156</sup> Clearly, these are highly influential Chinese policy makers who see Western domination of mass communications as a threat to be countered.

But while enjoying the ability to censor the news media domestically, the Chinese government has very little control over the global public sphere and has had to create and communicate a more sophisticated and appealing message. To accomplish this, Chinese officials have increasingly realized that to be more effective, the Chinese media must “upgrade [their] persuasion methods.”<sup>157</sup>

But China is also being helped by the fact that the Western dominated narrative has actually waned in its ability to monopolize the global public sphere. While new communications technologies have resulted in lowered barriers to entry and an increase in competition, “Western mass communication is losing influence in the developing

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154 Bandurski, *Hitting Hard with “Soft Power”: China Explores Macro-Measures to Bolster its Global Cultural Prowess*.

155 Ibid.; Carola McGiffert and Center for Strategic and International Studies (Washington, D.C.), “Chinese Soft Power and its Implications for the United States Competition and Cooperation in the Developing World: A Report of the CSIS Smart Power Initiative,” CSIS (Center for Strategic & International Studies), [http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/090305\\_mcgiffert\\_chinesesoftpower\\_web.pdf](http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/090305_mcgiffert_chinesesoftpower_web.pdf)

156 China Media Project, “The Three Closenesses 三贴近,” Journalism & Media Studies Centre, The University of Hong Kong, (accessed Sep 11, 2010).

157 Zhang, *Making Sense of the Changes in China's Public Diplomacy: Direction of Information Flow and Messages*, 303, 306.

world.”<sup>158</sup> Whereas the BBC World Service “has been a reliable and respected voice in distant lands,” media outlets like Al Jazeera, which is popular in the Middle East, are now viable media alternatives for non-Western cultural tastes and preferences. China seeks to provide similar alternatives.

Beijing has increased the budgets of many of its mass communications entities like China Central Television (CCTV), which has developed CCTV 9, a satellite news channel that targets and is specifically tailored to foreign markets. This furthers the reach of Beijing’s version of events by providing 24-hour international news in English, Spanish, French, with Russian and Arabic forthcoming. In light of a post-Cold War retreat by Western powers in using mass communications public diplomacy to enhance their soft power, China now sees an opportunity to fill this vacuum. With increased investments like these, the PRC hopes to “outspend America hugely in coming years.”<sup>159</sup>

In the 1990s, China acknowledged that its hard (i.e., military and economic) power lagged far behind other more developed countries, especially the United States, and that when it did decide to wield what military force it had (e.g., during the 1995–1996 Taiwan Straits crisis), public views toward China became more negative and thus counter-productive.<sup>160</sup> Conversely, in the wake of the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, China’s decision to not lower the value of its currency earned it appreciation and praise throughout much of South East Asia in particular.

American journalist Joshua Kurlantzick argues that this incident caused Chinese leaders to better appreciate the use of soft power to persuade instead, rather than seeking to coerce through the sole use of hard power means.<sup>161</sup> Kurlantzick states that China’s “growing attractiveness is conveyed through various means, including culture,

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158 "Leaders: News from Everywhere; International Broadcasting," *The Economist* 396, no. 8695 (Aug 14, 2010), 12.

159 *Ibid.*, 12.

160 Joshua Kurlantzick, "China's Charm Offensive," *Commentary* 122, no. 3 (Oct. 2006), 35, 36.

161 Joshua Kurlantzick, *Charm Offensive: How China's Soft Power is Transforming the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 306.

diplomacy, participation in multinational organizations, businesses' actions abroad, and the gravitational pull of China's economic strength."<sup>162</sup>

Beginning with United Nations recognition in 1971, China has become increasingly integrated into the international order in an economic, diplomatic, and informational sense. While this growing interconnectedness has proven extremely beneficial, it has also placed constraints on China's leaders. If Chinese leaders decided to take military action against Taiwan in an effort to achieve unification for example, they must not only consider domestic factors such as public support for such an action, but must now also seriously consider international reactions as well.

For example, Chinese officials understand that negative international economic or diplomatic reactions in particular could potentially endanger China's continued rise. PRC leaders now recognize that for any PLA military action to be complementary to continued national development and greater CNP gains, securing both favorable domestic and relative international agreement is critical. For the CCP, this is a very difficult balance between domestic and international public opinion.<sup>163</sup>

While the PLA certainly seeks to increase its hard military power, it also desires complementary capabilities that enhance soft power. Therefore, PLA political cadres in particular are especially desirous of achieving a perception management and soft power capability through media, legal, and psychological efforts that shapes and protects not only domestic perspectives but enhances China's international image as well. As past U.S. military actions and current U.S. IO doctrine have illustrated, these methods have utility and complement hard military capabilities. GPD "three warfares" "are envisioned as being integrated not only into military campaigns but also into China's larger national strategy employing all forms of power, including political, diplomatic, social, and economic means."<sup>164</sup>

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162 Kurlantzick and Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, *China's Charm: Implications of Chinese Soft Power*, 7.

163 Susan L. Shirk, *China: Fragile Superpower* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 320.

164 Blasko, *The Chinese Army Today: Tradition and Transformation for the 21st Century*, 164.

In his essay “Future Military Trends,” Gao Heng links “every field related to comprehensive national power” together to prepare for what he refers to as “war in depth.”<sup>165</sup> It seems reasonable to include areas associated with the “three warfares”—public opinion, legal means, and morale—under CNP. Media, legal, and psychological warfare, to be effective, must be able to reach into and affect an enemy even within its own borders, deep within the enemy’s cognitive dimension.

An article in 2007 in *Jiefangjun Bao*, the daily newspaper of the General Political Department of the PLA, stated the following regarding the military’s adoption of soft power and its utility as a hard power complement:

While hard power is visible and violent, soft power is invisible and mild. Because of this, in modern times, power ought to be perceived as an integration of hard and soft powers, a mutual complementation of hard and soft powers, as well as a win-win outcome jointly secured by hard and soft powers. In the final analysis, the concept of “soft power” refers to the concept of “grand power.” As hard power usually finds expression in weapons and equipment, the armed forces must come up with redoubled efforts in developing weapons and equipment. Nonetheless, it should be noted that in modern times, weapons and equipment contain both “hard” and “soft” ingredients. Military software has not only secured the normal operation of weapons and equipment but also expanded and upgraded the functions of weapons and equipment or even “remade” weapons and equipment.<sup>166</sup>

Dennis Blasko states the following regarding CNP and its relationship with warfare:

While overt military strength is important, other aspects of national power are also essential to waging war. In modern China, calculations of [CNP], including factors such as political, economic, geographic, scientific and technological conditions, as well as military might, are commonly used to judge the relative power of nations and inform national decision-makers. In fact, for Sun Zi, political, diplomatic, and economic means are preferred methods to achieve victory.<sup>167</sup>

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165 Pillsbury, *Chinese Views of Future Warfare*, 87.

166 Enze Su, "Soft Power may Accomplish Much," *Jiefangjun Bao*, [www.opensource.gov](http://www.opensource.gov) (accessed March 23, 2011).

167 Blasko, *The Chinese Army Today: Tradition and Transformation for the 21st Century*, 93.

In this context, it is reasonable to infer that Chinese strategists view the “three warfares” as a militarized variant that fits within a strategy in pursuit of greater national CNP. Further, this is perhaps why the PLA, as opposed Western views, considers informational conflict in particular more broad and inclusive and not solely confined to conflict involving purely military forces.<sup>168</sup>

Recent Chinese thought regarding information warfare makes a point in establishing what some Chinese military officials consider an important relationship between military and social science. According to a former president of China’s Academy of Military Science, “it is imperative to have not only wide basic knowledge of military science but also a rich knowledge of politics, economics, and history from the social sciences” that can be used for military purposes.<sup>169</sup>

Pillsbury states, “the ‘spiritual (including psychological) and intellect power soft factors’ that ‘determine the effectiveness of the material form (hard) national power’ include politics, foreign affairs, and culture and education.”<sup>170</sup> He states further that:

The contents of CNP and the roles of these factors have changed throughout history and will continue to do so in the future; therefore, new aspects may be added or dropped when evaluating different time periods. Today, the rapidly increasing significance of information as a source of power is a case of a new factor of growing importance. [Many Chinese strategists believe] in the current world, because of the development of new means of communication, different types of information about market trends can be promptly delivered to various places in the world, therefore, as a facet, in international relations the role of information power is growing and can be compared with political and economic factors.<sup>171</sup>

As part of their pursuit of national ideational or soft power, some Chinese leaders are determined to “break the U.S. and Western media monopoly.”<sup>172</sup> Much like “PRC diplomats [who] are becoming more adept at using the mass media,” similarly the PLA

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168 John Arquilla and others, *The Advent of Netwar* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1996).

169 Pillsbury, *Chinese Views of Future Warfare*, 211.

170 Pillsbury, *China Debates the Future Security Environment*, 223.

171 *Ibid.*, 220.

172 Lampton, *The Three Faces of Chinese Power: Might, Money, and Minds*, 159.



must do the same.<sup>173</sup> This would seem consistent with the public perception or media warfare subcomponent of “three warfares” in particular and how it suggests informational combat between non-state entities (i.e., media sources) in order to positively influence populations, either domestic or international.

Given the influence that U.S. military operations and doctrine have on PLA concepts of modern warfare, together with those set by the “U.S. military’s successful use of [information operations] during the two Iraq wars [and] the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan,” along with Nye’s concept of soft power, some PLA authors now mention “military soft power” as something to be developed.<sup>174</sup>

PLA attempts to insert favorable media narratives into both the domestic and global public spheres could serve to strengthen and bolster support for Chinese military actions or endeavors.<sup>175</sup> Media actions such as Beijing’s periodic release of defense white papers to the international community or publishing articles in prominent journals can be viewed as a persistent efforts to manage or shape public perceptions of China’s military modernization or its overall rise as a great power.<sup>176</sup> Further, in pursuing its “three warfares,” the PLA has sought to highlight through media reporting its humanitarian and peacekeeping efforts.

Shaping and inserting narratives like these into a more global and networked public sphere seems useful if Beijing desires to appeal to “Chinese civilians who want to see their military...engaged in socially beneficial functions and their country taking an active role as a responsible member of the international community.”<sup>177</sup> Further, media

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173 Lampton, *The Three Faces of Chinese Power: Might, Money, and Minds*, 128.

174 Alison Kaufman and James Bellacqua, *How to make Friends, Influence People, and Win Wars - Examining PLA Views of "Military Soft Power"* (Alexandria, Virginia: Center for Naval Analysis Corp., [2008]), www.opensource.gov (accessed March 2011).

175 China Media Project, "The Three Closenesses 三贴近," Journalism & Media Studies Centre, The University of Hong Kong, <http://cmp.hku.hk/2007/03/20/212/> (accessed Sep 11, 2010).; Steven Livingston, *Clarifying the CNN Effect: An Examination of Media Effects According to Type of Military Intervention* (Cambridge, Mass: Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, 1997), 18.

176 Zheng Bijian, "China's "Peaceful Rise" to Great-Power Status," *Foreign Affairs* 84, no. 5 (2005), 18.; Edward Wong Anfield, "China Lays Out a Vision for its Military in 'Volatile' Times: [Foreign Desk]," *New York Times* 2011.

177 Blasko, *The Chinese Army Today: Tradition and Transformation for the 21st Century*, 180.

efforts like these are also critical to China's international relations given that "many outsiders continue to level moral condemnation and opprobrium toward the PLA for its role at Tiananmen."<sup>178</sup> The PLA is highly aware that "foreign perceptions of [its actions] have an impact both on its operational capabilities...and the way the PLA interacts with professional militaries of other countries."<sup>179</sup>

Both prior to and during any future conflict, PLA leadership would also hope to gain and maintain legal justification especially through self-serving interpretations of international law and regulations for any PRC military action to be effective and considered domestically and internationally legitimate. Apparently fearing a similar negative international backlash like that experienced by the United States after its invasion of Iraq in 2003 for example, Chinese officials have sought preemptively to "legislate [their] own legal riposte to [Taiwanese independence]."<sup>180</sup> Beijing also seeks the ability to use multilateral organizations "to reassure other nations [and] to constrain the big powers acting in the region" as a complement to its "coercive measures."<sup>181</sup>

While it seems that the legal warfare component of "three warfares" cannot be solely confined to PLA activities in that they involve more diplomatic or political activities than purely military ones, national or whole-of-government efforts like these certainly nest well within PLA military efforts in that they serve to "legitimize Chinese policies while undercutting the authority or justification of enemy actions."<sup>182</sup>

Lastly, purely psychological efforts that target an enemy's morale while bolstering the morale of PLA forces and the greater Chinese population would be beneficial. That said psychological warfare methods are now routinely included in many PLA training exercises.<sup>183</sup>

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178 Blasko, *The Chinese Army Today: Tradition and Transformation for the 21st Century*, 181.

179 Ibid., 181.

180 Shirk, *China: Fragile Superpower*, 204–206.

181 Ibid., 174.

182 Blasko, *The Chinese Army Today: Tradition and Transformation for the 21st Century*, 164.

183 Ibid., 147.

But while the “three warfares” certainly is intended to be used offensively, it also seems reasonable to conclude that there is also a defense aim as well. This is simply due to the fact that the “three warfares” is a GPD responsibility and is consistent with PLA tradition.

The purpose of GPD “political [and ideological] training [has always been] to disseminate official party and military guidance, promote good morale [(c.f. Clausewitz, Jomini)], and ensure discipline among the troops.”<sup>184</sup> This is especially so given the current context in which China finds itself. Those responsible for China’s internal security and military morale consider information and its use as especially essential in stopping “potential internal disturbances [within the cognitive dimension] to prevent opponents from utilizing them. The symptoms of disturbance must be found and stopped as soon as possible. In case disturbances break out, we should gather a dominant power to suppress them rapidly. And if they are difficult to suppress, we must contain their sphere of influence.”<sup>185</sup> Much like the PLA has been used in the past to provide order and stability during times of crisis (i.e., Cultural Revolution, Tiananmen uprising), the GPD undoubtedly sees the “three warfares” as another important way by which domestic stability can also be achieved along with other material methods albeit in the cognitive dimension.

Defensive control or shaping of information according to some PLA officers could perhaps be useful in keeping “effective control over military elements [by introducing important thoughts and views, and military actions concerning foreign affairs.”<sup>186</sup> After the 1989 Tiananmen uprising, views like these became more popular within the PLA in the 1990s and provide further rationale and purpose for PLA “three warfares” activities.

In today’s information age, the exchange of ideas within a global public sphere faces increasing competition. This is an increasingly noisy, fast paced, and expanding public arena where the ideas and messages of many diverse formal and informal

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184 Blasko, *The Chinese Army Today: Tradition and Transformation for the 21st Century*, 163.

185 Pillsbury, *Chinese Views of Future Warfare*, 107.

186 *Ibid.*, 108.

collectivities simultaneously seek communicative power through increasingly diverse forms of powerfully persuasive media.<sup>187</sup> This is also an environment where a 24-hour international news cycle and real-time reporting give mass media the ability to shape political discourse and public opinion which can also be referred to as the “CNN effect.”<sup>188</sup> Many national and military leaders in particular have had to come to grips with this phenomenon because of its influence on popular attitudes toward state activities, especially military engagements.<sup>189</sup> China’s leaders and PLA officials are no different.

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187 Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy* [Faktizität und Geltung.] (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996), 631.

188 Steven Livingston, *Clarifying the CNN Effect: An Examination of Media Effects According to Type of Military Intervention* (Cambridge, Mass: Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, 1997), 18.

189 Pounder, *Opportunity Lost*, 61–64.

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## VI. CONCLUSION

This thesis has argued three very basic points. First, the foundation of the PLA “three warfares” concept has roots in certain aspects of both Chinese and Western strategic thought and tradition. Second, the PLA desire to develop its “three warfares” concept is informed and strongly influenced by Western thoughts and views on the importance of information in war in general and U.S. information operations doctrine and experiences in particular. And finally, the PLA sees utility in achieving its “three warfares” aims, both as a complement to its warfighting capabilities and also as a militarized soft power component that nests within a larger Chinese national strategy.

The People’s Republic of China (PRC) through its 2003 official pronouncement tasked the GPD with developing a mostly strategic media, legal, and psychological warfare capability in order to improve political and ideological work. However, many of the available descriptions of the “three warfares” are quite simple, less than insightful, and fall short of providing any real substance or rationale for such an idea.

China’s history and its strategic traditions serve as an influential sources for strategic behavior and development. The Warring States period (463–222 BCE) is an especially important historical example and is particularly relevant in that it has provided Chinese strategists with a number of important lessons. The Qin state in particular was considered by its neighboring states to be weak and of little threat in what was a multipolar competitive power struggle. However, the Qin was able to employ strategy and tactics that adroitly employed psychological methods such as propaganda, which resulted in victory over its more powerful neighbors. In the minds of many modern Chinese intellectuals, the Warring States era is quite analogous to the world in which the PRC found itself after the fall of the Soviet Union and the Qin state in particular serves as a positive example for those Chinese strategists that acknowledge PRC weakness vis-à-vis the United States in general, and PLA weakness in particular. Warring States era works like Sun Zi’s *The Art of War* remain an integral part of PLA professional military education and emphasize deception, the disruption of hostile alliances, and the effective

manipulation of information and enemy perceptions in war. Sun Zi also recommended that strategists study and adhere to the morally influential factors that lead to harmony between the people and their leadership.

Later, Mao Zedong developed his own body of strategic thought and guidance that placed heavy emphasis on political or ideological matters over purely hard military means. Mao specifically targeted what he considered to be the emergence of a “purely military viewpoint” that neglected political matters, which he considered to have primacy. Most importantly, Mao warned his commanders and strategists of overlooking the importance of propaganda.

The Chinese leadership and the PLA have acknowledged many times in the past their hard power weaknesses relative to other nations, especially the Soviet Union and the United States. This has often resulted in Chinese strategies that sought to use more indirect methods.

Military thought during the 1990s placed emphasis on the importance of information and its role in conflict with many of the Chinese authors advocating its advantageous usage in combat as an essential part of a comprehensive national effort. Information was viewed as being important in helping change an inferior strategic position into a superior one. Specifically, unfavorable mass opinion and lack of international support were to be avoided and could lead to a less than advantageous position for China.

The Warring States period, the example of the Qin state, Sun Zi, and early Maoist and more recent PLA thought all serve as important traditional and conceptual Chinese examples that undergird the basic rationale for “three warfares.” But there are also Western examples that are equally as informative and that also stress the importance of information with respect to perception and morale.

Clausewitz stressed that the state, its military, and its population are the most essential factors when considering and developing grand strategy. Appealing to the will, seeking the support, and sustaining the morale of a state’s populace while attacking that of an opponent becomes equally relevant to purely military matters (e.g., relative force

numbers). Antoine Jomini emphasized the importance of strengthening the collective psyche of one's own forces, and its leaders in particular. Both strongly suggests that attacking the national psyche and morale of one's enemy should be pursued in order to achieve the military and greater political aims desired.

Hart stressed that morale of one's enemy is a viable target and that propaganda has utility when seeking what he felt was a more advantageous indirect approach, as opposed to a direct one. Hart also advocated for a strategy that employed a wide variety of military means to achieve the political ends sought by warfare.

There are clearly aspects of both Chinese and Western strategic thought that serve as theoretical inspiration for a PLA "three warfares" concept. But these are not sufficient alone in explaining the "three warfares" and its influences.

Western views on the importance of information in war in general and U.S. information operations doctrine and experiences in particular that serve as powerful inspirations for the PLA in their pursuit of a "three warfares" concept and an associated doctrine. U.S. military actions during the 1990s and 2000s showcased how warfare continues to evolve. Further, as a result of these conflicts, the U.S. military began to formally codify its thinking on how information should be treated in war.

While the PLA has looked to classic Chinese studies of warfare along with its own experiences, Chinese military officials and strategists have also studied modern conflicts in order to develop its own doctrinal concepts. Modern U.S. military campaigns have served as a critical catalyst for such reforms.

The United States and other Western militaries have demonstrated their desire to affect their enemies in the cognitive dimension. During the 1991 Gulf War, the 1999 U.S.-led NATO bombing campaign against the Serbs, and even during the most recent U.S. military action against Libya perception management in the form of information operations has proven to have utility as an aspect of waging modern war. At the strategic level, the United States has also sought to develop a comprehensive perception



management capability most exemplified by U.S. Defense Department efforts to develop an Office of Strategic Influence. The PLA has indeed learned from these examples, as well as from evolving U.S. IO doctrine.

If U.S. political and military officials continue to recognize the benefits and utility of IO capacities within the cognitive dimension that have the potential to affect adversary decision makers, and given the influence that the United States military has had on the PLA in the past, it would seem quite reasonable to conclude that the same can be said about Chinese views regarding the utility of its IO designs. Therefore, it is clear that the cognitive dimension is where the PLA “three warfares” is to be employed.

By influencing perceptions with PLA narratives injected within the public sphere, media warfare seeks to influence key domestic and international decision-making. PLA psychological warfare, much like its U.S. equivalent would simply seek to target an enemy’s morale and emotions to degrade its fighting abilities. And much like past U.S. efforts, PLA legal warfare would favorably interpret applicable and relevant laws and regulations within the cognitive dimension of the public sphere to build legal legitimacy. All “three warfares” components are quite consistent with U.S. doctrinal equivalents. However, quite unlike its U.S. IO counterpart, PLA “three warfares” apparently has no legal constraints or operational restrictions in attempting to shape and manage perceptions.

PLA modernization programs continue to focus on developing parsimonious, complementary, and synergistic capabilities that will grant the PRC the ability to achieve quick, decisive, and favorable resolution of regional conflicts involving land, sea, air, and the informational offensive and defensive realms. As part of its broader national strategic goal of increasing CNP, Beijing also seeks to cultivate greater attractiveness as well.

Many Chinese leaders have increasingly realized that soft power has utility and that mass communications must be used to nurture and grow China’s soft power to counter what has been a Western dominated narrative. Chinese leaders and state run media have often mentioned the importance of soft power development as a complementary part of China’s comprehensive national power.

Chinese officials see this struggle in the global public sphere as just another dimension of conflict and many highly influential Chinese policy makers see Western domination of mass communications as a threat to be countered. But while enjoying the ability to censor the news media domestically, the Chinese government has very little control over the global public sphere.

If Chinese leaders were to take military action against Taiwan in an effort to achieve unification for example, they must not only consider domestic factors such as public support for such an action, but must now also seriously consider international reactions as well. Chinese officials understand that any negative international economic or diplomatic reactions in particular could potentially endanger China's continued rise. PRC officials, and the CMC in particular, now recognize that for any PLA military action to be complementary to continued national development and greater CNP gains, securing both favorable domestic and relative international agreement is critical.

While the PLA certainly seeks to increase its hard military power it also desires complementary capabilities that enhance soft power. Therefore, PLA political cadres in particular are especially desirous of achieving a perception management and soft power capability through media, legal, and psychological efforts that shapes and protects not only domestic perspectives but enhances China's international image as well. As past U.S. military actions and current U.S. IO doctrine have illustrated, these methods have utility and complement hard military capabilities. PLA media, legal, and psychological warfare, to be effective, must be able to reach into and affect an enemy even within its own borders, deep within the enemy's cognitive dimension.

Additionally, it is reasonable to consider that Chinese strategists view the "three warfares" as perhaps a militarized variant that fits within a greater national CNP pursuit strategy.

Given the influence that U.S. military operations and doctrine have on PLA concepts of modern warfare, the U.S. military's successful use of [information operations] during its conflicts, and Nye's concept of soft power, some PLA authors now refer to a "military soft power" as something to be developed.

But while the “three warfares” is certainly intended to be used offensively, it also seems reasonable to conclude that there is also a defensive aim as well. This is simply due to the fact that the “three warfares” is a GPD responsibility and is consistent with PLA tradition. Defensive control or shaping of information according to some PLA officers could perhaps be useful in keeping control over the Chinese military over military elements.

In today’s information age the exchange of ideas within a global public sphere faces increasing competition. This is an increasingly noisy and fast paced broadened public arena where the ideas and messages of many diverse formal and informal collectivities simultaneously seek communicative power through increasingly diverse forms of powerfully persuasive media. And many national and military leaders in particular have had to come to grips with this phenomenon because of its influence on popular attitudes toward state activities, especially military engagements. China’s leaders and PLA officials are no different and, as a result, all involved see enormous benefit to be gained from further development of the “three warfares.”

While this thesis serves to fill a gap in existing literature on this particular aspect of PLA modernization by offering a more comprehensive understanding and explanation of the “three warfares,” its origins, and its intended aims as a complement to PLA war fighting doctrine, further research would certainly benefit by exploring the ability of the PLA to develop the “three warfares”, its potential effectiveness and prospects for success, and those constraining and limiting factors that could possibly inhibit its efforts.

At this point in understanding the “three warfares,” it seems reasonable to conclude that any adequate response to Beijing’s media, legal, and psychological warfares requires at least a like, or optimally, a greater degree of believability, legitimacy, and soft power attractiveness in order to ultimately provide the necessary support for effective IO activities that can compete with the PLA along the cognitive dimension.

Additionally, any potential PLA opponent, the United States military included, would be wise to first observe how effective the “three warfares” actually is. For now, this seem difficult given that PLA media, legal, or psychological warfare is an unknown

entity in terms of its actual effectiveness, and it is questionable as to whether the “three warfares” has ever been deployed or actually tested against an adversary.

But quite unlike the PLA, the U.S. military has put into practice its own IO activities along the cognitive dimension as shown here. That having been said, the U.S. military would be wise to continue to develop and refine its own IO doctrine and practices further.

However, like Beijing, Washington must work to ensure that it also has a comprehensive national IO perception management capability that is part of and supports a larger national strategy. This would greatly benefit and enhance the resonance within the global public sphere of those IO activities conducted and associated narratives promulgated at lower levels within the U.S. military and would increase the likelihood that they will be coherent, consistent, and nested within such a strategy.

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