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“Testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission”  
Panel on Beijing’s Doctrine on the Conduct of Irregular Forms of Warfare

***Beijing, Unrestricted Warfare, and Threat Potentials* ©**

I have been graciously asked to participate on a panel focused on “Beijing’s doctrine on the conduct of irregular forms of warfare.” Implicit in this topic is the consideration that such a doctrine would be directed at the national security interests of the United States. It is both a privilege and honor to support the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission in this endeavor in support of our great nation. I thank you for your time, consideration, and indulgence.

My intent is to focus upon three interconnected themes: the Chinese work *Unrestricted Warfare*, best estimates concerning the state of Beijing’s Irregular Warfare Doctrine and Capability, and how the first two themes relate to Beijing Threat Potentials when viewed through modified 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review threat categories.

It should be noted that the analysis of these themes is derived from secondary (translated) Chinese open source materials, US and allied author views on Chinese military writings and capabilities, and my own sustained research into terrorism, and unconventional and emerging forms of warfare— not primary Chinese military documents.<sup>1</sup>

**Unrestricted Warfare**

I’d like to start my testimony by providing some thoughts on the 1999 Chinese work *Unrestricted Warfare*. This work I suspect is well known to the members and staff of the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission and for this reason I will try to get straight to my analysis.<sup>2</sup>

The work is meant to ask the question how Beijing can counter the absolute US domination of modern conventional warfare. This makes perfect sense given the background and professional focus of the authors— military officers who are trained in the conduct of war on behalf of their nation. In answering this question, the authors argue that the laws of Western warfare, the definition of the battlefield (battlespace), and much of the international system established since the Second World War promote the status quo— that is, US superiority in traditional warfare and its political dominance in global affairs.

The solution to this military, and ultimately political, log jam for Beijing is not to play the US game. With the cards are too heavily stacked in favor of the US, the logic follows that Beijing should start from scratch:

...the new principles of war are no longer ‘using armed force to compel the enemy to submit to one’s will,’ but rather are ‘using all means, including armed force or non-armed force, military and non-military, lethal and non-lethal means to compel the enemy to accept one’s interests’.

If indeed Beijing should redefine warfare to suit its own needs and interests, with force applied in all forms and in whatever combinations are effective, then seemingly “anything goes.” The battlefield can be in anyplace and at anytime. A long list of types of non-military warfare is present in the work; ecological warfare, psychological warfare, smuggling warfare, media warfare, drug warfare, network warfare, technological warfare, fabrication warfare, resources warfare, economic aid warfare, cultural warfare, and international law warfare to name but a few examples of the ‘cocktail mix’ discussed. Many of the lessons learned are borrowed from non-state groups— terrorists, insurgents, and hackers—and, in this sense, *Unrestricted Warfare* is akin in some ways to an al Qaeda manual for states. However, while al Qaeda manuals are tactical and operational in focus, this work is operational and strategic, even grand strategic, in orientation.

When *Unrestricted Warfare* is combined with one earlier Chinese classic on warfare, specifically Sun Tzu’s *The Art of War*, Beijing has now been well positioned, at least intellectually, to flourish in its pursuit of irregular and post-modern forms of warfare. Whether it has been, or will in the near future be, approaching future conflict with the *tabula rasa* (clean slate) handed to it by the authors of *Unrestricted Warfare* is an entirely different matter— bureaucratic politics, stake holders vested in traditional forms of warfare, competing schools of military thought, and military institutions themselves are all typically very resistant to change which does not directly benefit them and issues related to China’s capability in this regard will be discussed in the next section.

*Unrestricted Warfare* is a significant document because of its intent and content but also, since its publication, a certain amount of notoriety and indeed infamy has surrounded it in some US circles. Most telling is a section from the FBIS editor’s note:

In the Zhongguo Qingnian Bao interview, Qiao was quoted as stating that “the first rule of unrestricted warfare is that there are no rules, with nothing forbidden.” Elaborating on this idea, he asserted that strong countries would not use the same approach against weak countries because “strong countries make the rules while rising ones break them and exploit loopholes . . . The United States breaks [UN rules] and makes new ones when these rules don’t suit [its purposes], but it has to observe its own rules or the whole world will not trust it.”

The fallout from this one section— which may either be a premeditated psychological warfare statement or an author’s off-the-cuff remark picked up by the FBIS editor— has been immense in its effect on US views and analysis of Beijing’s foreign activities. Every time Beijing engages in an economic, political, cultural, business, media or other form of foreign activity, we are now forced to ask ourselves if this is a component of China’s unrestricted warfare tactics— because we have been informed in the above document that there are no rules and nothing is forbidden.

The ‘perceptual trauma’ this ambiguity is causing us in our analysis of Beijing’s foreign activities cannot be understated. Regardless of the intentionality involved, we now find ourselves in a “disruptive targeting” situation. Akin to a deer frozen in place by the headlights of an approaching car, in our present venue we are immobilized by this passage from the work *Unrestricted Warfare*. What is

troubling about our present situation with Beijing is that it is quite similar to activities being conducted by al Qaeda affiliates and like-minded individuals in the surveillance and probing of US, British, and allied critical infrastructure. Just as we are often not quite sure whether the occasional security-challenging incident involving a person arguably suffering delusion or mental illness—think of this as the Richard Reid (the failed shoe bomber) factor—is in fact a well-planned test of our defenses, we are left to ponder what challenge each action by Beijing in any number of areas might entail. It is possible that the ‘generation of ambiguity’ that al Qaeda utilizes as a TTP (tactic, technique or procedure), Beijing has elevated to a component of strategy— yet we are not sure.

What this does tell us, however, is that:

- a. When dealing with irregular challenges, we will have to accept the fact that ambiguity will be a large component. This has always been part and parcel of the ‘crime and war operational environment’ we have found ourselves in. This ambiguity will cause us immense problems at all levels, will be actively used against us, and it is something that we must always plan for in our relations with Beijing and other entities—both state and non-state.
- b. We need to respond or create some form of countermeasure to the ‘perceptual trauma’ this ambiguity is causing us in our strategic analysis of Beijing’s foreign activities.

### **Beijing’s Irregular Warfare Doctrine and Capability**

The second component of my testimony will address best estimates concerning Beijing’s irregular warfare doctrine and capability.

Currently, at least four competing schools of military thought appear to exist in Beijing; the *Traditionalists* who focus on People’s War (Mao Zedong) or active defense; *Neo-Traditionalists*— who focus on regional power projection; *Military Revolutionists*— who focus on high tech 2030 type change; and *Unrestricted Warfare* advocates.<sup>3</sup> For states, especially great powers, the bulk of military expenditures—in capital, people, and intellectual resources— go to the creation and maintenance of armies, navies, and air (rocket) forces. Beijing is no different in this regard and has heavily focused on traditional military capabilities— in this instance, based on ‘active defense’ and ‘new-period army building.’<sup>4</sup> Thus, *Traditionalist* and *Neo-Traditionalist* military thinking still predominates.

While military and police special forces exist, these units have now been tasked with new duties ‘...counter-terrorism, hostage rescue, combat search and rescue, and direct attack missions’ and as anti-riot squads to maintain ‘social stability’ in addition to their traditional roles (reconnaissance operations).<sup>5</sup> Beijing’s special operations and armed police forces therefore have what I would consider a very limited ability to engage in irregular warfare as outlined in *Unrestricted Warfare*. At the very least, it is likely that some of the younger members of the political, military, and intelligence (operations) structures are actively debating this form of warfare and it is probably being gamed in ad hoc (at a minimum) table top and role playing type exercises. *Unrestricted Warfare* advocates are currently a small and younger subgrouping but it will be those in this group whose beliefs overlap with the *Military Revolutionists* who will ultimately have the most significant impact.

The writings of Sun Tzu contain certain tenets of irregular warfare which probably offer the best insight for looking deeper into Beijing's doctrine and capability. The most important of these tenets are:

- 'All warfare is based on deception.' (I.17)
- 'For to win one hundred victories in one hundred battles is not the acme of skill. To subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill.' (III.3)
- 'Thus, what is of supreme importance in war is to attack the enemy's strategy;' (III.4)

It would be Beijing's best strategy to task special directorates and political groups with actively establishing 'non-military' warfighting doctrines but to use every form of deception at its disposal to keep the existence of such groups hidden. This is where a secretive, methodical, and strategic opponent—if Beijing is indeed one—would nurture and grow a true *Unrestricted Warfare* capability. Whether this gives Beijing's old political guard too much credit is a question for other panelists with more expertise in that particular area.

Importantly, it must be asked whether Beijing really needs or even wants an institutional capacity to conduct irregular forms of warfare that is derived from its own special operations forces and other military units. Beijing's agents directly engaging in irregular warfare attacks on US, or even Taiwanese, soil would be foolhardy. Once their origin was traced back, the ensuing political and economic fallout and heightening of tensions could ultimately result in an outbreak of traditional warfare—an area where the US enjoys a distinct advantage.

In contrast, to more truly employ the strategies of Sun Tzu and *Unrestricted Warfare* type thinking, Beijing would be best served by employing non-state soldiers as 'invisible proxies' to carry out such acts. Non-state and private sector individuals are more useful overall in this form of warfare. The use of Muslim non-state operatives is questionable, however, because of Beijing's internal tensions with these groups such that the substantial capability offered by these groups against the US would potentially not be exploited. The use of non-state soldiers would likely mimic US outsourcing—e.g. the use of private security and mercenary forces in Iraq— but would be far more circumspect and ambiguous, based on chains of go betweens and cut outs, and in such a manner that no 'smoking gun' link back to Beijing could be traced. The last thing Beijing would want is such groups to be viewed as Beijing proxy forces, rather, it would be far better to make them look like they are tied to other states and non-state groups.

Due to the reasons set forth above regarding the current state of sophistication, skill sets, and culture of the People's Liberation Army, the "what if" scenarios posed by the Commission concerning actual methods of attack against the US are not likely to be conducted via Beijing's own military. Beijing's military never had a monopoly on *Unrestricted Warfare* and, in fact, may never get really good at it because it is such an alien form of warfighting, by nature "unmilitary" in its conduct. To be fair, the US military is probably in the same predicament. The real professionals in this regard need to be drawn from force pools including terrorists, mercenaries, economists, legal scholars, advertising executives, image and campaign consultants, hackers, private computer security firms, and those with similar "out of the box" thinking.

The Commission should thus be chiefly concerned with Beijing's standing up special governmental or quasi-governmental directorates that combine out-sourced talent (the real professionals listed above) into *Unrestricted Warfare* teams or working groups. The hiring of this outside talent may be difficult as much of it is currently loyal to the US and her allies but, at the point the Chinese are able to secure it, any of the 'what if scenarios' posed could then be studied, planned, and implemented in concert with other military activities as part of a greater strategic plan.

## **Beijing Threat Potentials**

The third component of my testimony will focus on Beijing threat potentials viewed through a modified lens derived from 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) threat categories.

The current QDR threat categories are based on a 4 square box with Irregular Challenges in the upper left hand corner and in a clockwise fashion Catastrophic Challenges, Disruptive Challenges, and Traditional Challenges listed in turn (See Figure 1). The threats are migrating away from Traditional Challenges into the other 3 squares of the box. At the same time it is recognized that the US must continue 'sustaining its capabilities to address traditional challenges.'

I would suggest that a better way of viewing these threat categories is through a modified diagram which factors in each category (Irregular, Catastrophic, Disruptive, and Traditional Challenges) from the perspective of threat level and time. We will call this visual *Beijing Threat Potentials* (See Figure 2). From this perceptual lens, warfare can currently be thought of as transitioning from the Modern to the Post-Modern era—just as the political and economic systems are doing [systems which include the rise of challengers to the nation-state form (e.g. al Qaeda, drug cartels), endemic state failure, the European Union attempt at creating a post-Westphalian regional state, the rise of informational and bio-technical economies, mass migration to the internet (cyberspace), and increasing globalization].

As an outcome of this epochal transition—a Revolution in Political and Military Affairs (RPMA)—the traditional challenges of the Modern era are becoming less significant of a threat, even more so given the US domination of this form of warfare. As we begin the transition into the Post-Modern era, as one human civilization comes to an end and another begins, irregular challenges become the greatest threat to US national security interests. This transitional period is marked by deinstitutionalization, privatization, and outsourcing as governmental institutions are no longer able to contend with the scope of change in all matters of human civilization including the technological, organizational, and legal realms. These changes include the return to and probable ascendancy of non-state soldiers (terrorists, insurgents, guerillas, mercenaries, and private security contractors) on the battlefield. Eventually, as this historical process continues through the coming decades and we begin to enter the Post-Modern era, disruptive challenges will at some point become the most significant threat to US national security interests. This will come about as Post-Nation States re-institutionalize non-state soldiers, their network structures, advanced weaponry, and concepts of operations (CONOPS) into their forces. Catastrophic challenges are an interesting case in that they should not so much be considered a stand alone challenge but one that can be thought of as an additive threat to the Traditional, Irregular, and Disruptive challenges that exist. For instance, terrorists with tactical nuclear devices are a far greater threat to the US than terrorists employing conventional explosive devices.

Also, when viewing Beijing threat potentials, while it is understood that a sequence of challenges will dominate over time— first Traditional (the past), second Irregular (the present), and third Disruptive (the future) with each modified by Catastrophic challenges (as an additive threat)— this would not limit Beijing to utilizing each challenge in a separate and discrete manner. Rather, in the cocktail mixes advocated in *Unrestricted Warfare*, these challenges should be mixed and matched in such a way as to tailor them to specific situations (Fig 2. *See Beijing Cocktails*). A prime example of this would be the layering of irregular and disruptive challenges such as proxy terrorist use of directed energy weapons, e.g. the Chinese ZM-87 blinding laser (NORINCO) comes to mind, against US civil aviation assets as an asymmetric response to the future fielding of US man portable air defense systems (MANPADS) counter-measures.

Such cocktail mixes of challenges is currently being discussed in the most recent *Marine Corps Gazette* in reference to the QDR threat categories under the term ‘Hybrid Wars’:<sup>6</sup>

‘Our greatest challenge will not come from a state that selects one approach but from states or groups that select from the whole menu of tactics and technologies to meet their own strategic culture and geography.’ [p. 58]

None of this thinking is all that new in the sense that combined arms approaches (infantry, artillery and cavalry) have been known for centuries in the military arts. The only differences with the cocktail mixes is that they abstract things a bit by mixing and matching non-military methods to military methods in anything goes combinations.

## **Summation**

I would suggest that the main points of my testimony are as follows:

- When *Unrestricted Warfare* is combined with one earlier Chinese classic on warfare, specifically Sun Tzu’s *The Art of War*, Beijing has now been well positioned, at least intellectually, to flourish in its pursuit of irregular and post-modern forms of warfare.
- The statement “the first rule of unrestricted warfare is that there are no rules, with nothing forbidden” has caused immense detrimental effects on US views and analysis of Beijing’s foreign activities. Every time Beijing engages in an economic, political, cultural, business, media or any other form of foreign activity we have now been forced to ask ourselves if this is a component of unrestricted warfare. Regardless of the intentionality involved, we now find ourselves in a “disruptive targeting” situation. We need to respond or create some form of countermeasure to the ‘perceptual trauma’ this ambiguity is causing us in our strategic analysis of Beijing’s foreign activities
- Given the Traditionalist and Neo-Traditionalist thinking that still predominates along with the multi-tasking of Beijing’s special operations and armed police forces, China’s own military currently has what I would consider to be a very limited ability to engage in irregular warfare as outlined in *Unrestricted Warfare*.

- The question of whether Beijing really needs or even wants an institutional capacity, derived from its own special operations forces and other military units, to conduct irregular forms of warfare must really be asked. Beijing's agents directly engaging in irregular warfare attacks on US, or even Taiwanese, soil would be foolhardy. Beijing would be best served by employing non-state soldiers as 'invisible proxies' to carry out such acts.
- It would be Beijing's best strategy to task special directorates and political groups with actively establishing 'non-military' warfighting doctrines but to use every form of deception at its disposal to keep the existence of such groups hidden. This is where a secretive, methodical, and strategic opponent—if Beijing is indeed one—would nurture and grow a true *Unrestricted Warfare* capability. Whether this gives Beijing's old political guard too much credit is a question for other panelists with more expertise in that particular area.
- Based on the current state of sophistication, skill sets, and culture of the People's Liberation Army, the "what if" scenarios posed by the Commission concerning actual methods of attack against the US are not likely to be conducted via Beijing's own military. Beijing's military never had a monopoly on *Unrestricted Warfare* and, in fact, may never get really good at it.
- The Commission should be chiefly concerned with Beijing's standing up special governmental or quasi-governmental directorates that combine out-sourced talent into *Unrestricted Warfare* teams or working groups. The hiring of this outside talent may be difficult as much of it is currently loyal to the US and her allies but, at the point the Chinese are able to secure it, any of the 'what if scenarios' posed could then be studied, planned, and implemented in concert with other military activities as part of a greater strategic plan.
- I would suggest that a better way of viewing 2006 QDR threat categories is through a modified diagram which factors in each category (Irregular, Catastrophic, Disruptive, and Traditional Challenges) from the perspective of threat level and time (Figure 2).
- When also viewing Beijing threat potentials, while it is understood that a sequence of challenges will dominate over time— first Traditional (the past), second Irregular (the present), and third Disruptive (the future) with each modified by Catastrophic challenges (as an additive threat)— this would not limit Beijing to utilizing each challenge in a separate and discrete manner. Rather, in the cocktail mixes advocated in *Unrestricted Warfare*, these challenges should be blended and matched in such a way as to tailor them to specific situations.

In closing, I once again would like to thank the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission for this opportunity to testify on this panel. It is hoped that this testimony may, in some small way, support the important duties of the Commission in its mission of upholding the economic and security interests of the United States of America in our nation's relations and dealings with Beijing.

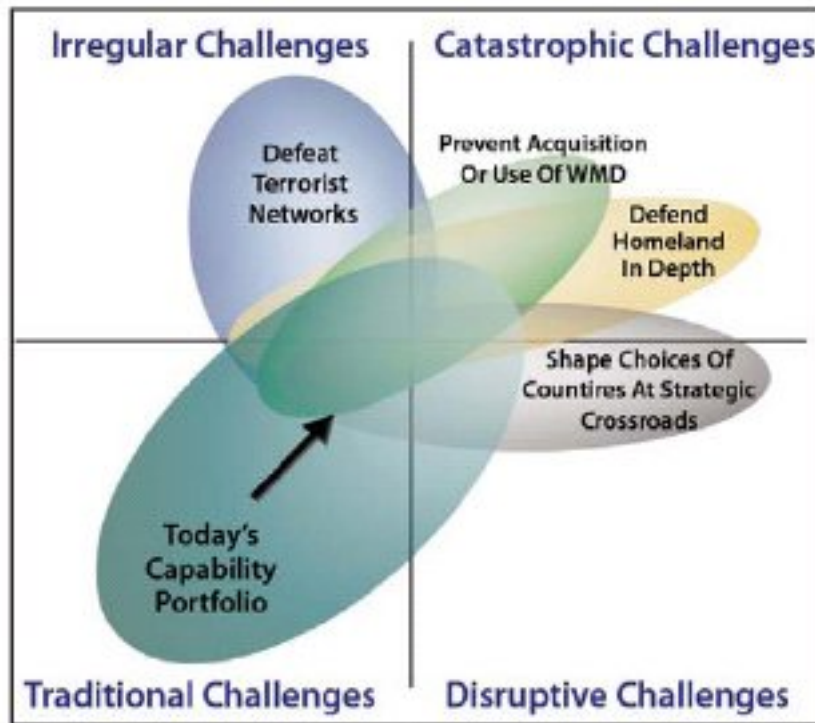
## Notes

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1. Research experience has shown that US Military doctrines and supporting manuals do not always reflect operational reality. For instance the US Navy ‘Maritime Strategy’ of the 1980s was budgetary focused— not operationally focused. The US Army’s use of the concept ‘Operations Other Than War (OOTW)’ in the 1990s reflected its doctrinal bias against unconventional conflicts waged by non-state forces— even though these missions were becoming dominate in Army deployments. Chinese military biases must thus be taken into consideration concerning the potential to cloud their doctrinal thinking.
2. The work written in 1998 by two Chinese military officers, Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui, and has gained immense international attention since its publication in February 1999 (Beijing: PLA Literature and Arts Publishing House) and subsequent US FBIS translation. A commercial version of the work appeared in 2002 and is presently available at amazon.com. Its sensationalized cover sports a picture of the 9-11 World Trade Center attacks. The work has been reviewed in traditional academic and policy journals and on the internet in a wide range of blogs and websites ranging from the credible through a wide mix of conspiracy e-venues. These traditional analyses include the review essays by Andrew Scobell, Robert J. Bunker, and Dean Cheng in *Small Wars & Insurgencies*. Vol. 11. No. 2. Spring 2000. pp. 112-129. A simple google search for the term “Unrestricted Warfare” currently yields 47,900 hits as of March 13, 2007 and at least one US conference series dedicated to this subject now exists. *Unrestricted Warfare Symposium*, March 20-21, 2007, Johns Hopkins University. Access: [http://www.jhuapl.edu/urw\\_symposium/](http://www.jhuapl.edu/urw_symposium/).
3. Charles F. Hawkins, “The Four Futures: Competing Schools of Military Thought inside the PLA.” *Taiwan Security Research*. March 2000. <http://taiwansecurity.org/IS/IS-0300-Hawkins.htm>.
4. *Annual Report to Congress: Military Power of the People’s Republic of China, 2006*. Chapter Three: China’s Military Strategy and Doctrine. <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/2006/2006-prc-military-power03.htm>.
5. Martin Andrew, “Terrorism, Riots, and the Olympics: New Missions and Challenges for China’s Special Forces.” *China Brief*. Vol. 5. Iss. 19. September 13, 2005. [http://www.jamestown.org/publications\\_details.php?volume\\_id=408&issue\\_id=3453&article\\_id=2370204](http://www.jamestown.org/publications_details.php?volume_id=408&issue_id=3453&article_id=2370204).
6. Lt.Col. F.G. Hoffman, USMCR (Ret), “Preparing for Hybrid Wars.” *Marine Corps Gazette*. March 2007. pp. 57-61.



Figure 1. 2006 QDR Threat Categories, p. 19.



As the diagram shows, the Department is shifting its portfolio of capabilities to address irregular, catastrophic and disruptive challenges while sustaining capabilities to address traditional challenges.

**Fig 2. Beijing Threat Potentials**

*Modified 2006 QDR Challenges Model, p. 19.*

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