FORWARD OBSERVER WEBCAST

UNRESTRICTED WARFARE

Friday, 03 March @ 1400

Join the Forward Observer intel team as they discuss Unrestricted Warfare, the PLA manual on how to defeat the United States

🌐 Find details and our events schedule at https://forwardobserver.com/events

TRANSLATED FROM THE ORIGINAL PEOPLE'S LIBERATION ARMY DOCUMENTS

UN-RESTRICTED WARFARE

BY COL. QIAO LIANG AND COL. WANG XIANGSUI

This book summary is provided to Forward Observer subscribers free of charge. It's for educational purposes and intended to foster a critical discussion.

If you find value in this book summary, I encourage you to purchase and read the book. - M.S.

The United States has had no appreciable military victory after Desert Storm, when it introduced unrivaled conventional weapons against a conventional opponent. Ever since, the complexities of unconventional and irregular environments have imposed limitations on conventional military means. (*This book was written prior to Afghanistan and Iraq, making this a particularly astute point.*)

A reliance on conventional warfare (tanks, bombers, etc.) means that opponents will pursue other forms of warfare, characterized as "semi-warfare, quasi-warfare, and sub-warfare." Post-Desert Storm, the U.S. saw a drop in conventional warfare but an increase in "political, economic, and technological violence." This is because, after Desert Storm, war's definition -- "the use of armed force to compel the enemy to submit to one's will" -- was increasingly redefined to "using all means, including armed force or non-armed force, military and non-military, and lethal and non-lethal means to compel the enemy to accept one's interests."

Technological advancement almost always causes more problems than it solves. Using the example of the automobile, rapid transit meant that new technology had to be developed to meet new material needs: steel, rubber, oil and gas, roadways, etc. The authors describe this as the "ramification effect," in that technology always carries with it additional ramifications.

One ramification of advancing technology is the use of new, non-war technologies in warfare. Cyber warfare, economic warfare, and information warfare don't meet the traditional definition of war, but will increasingly be employed on traditional and non-traditional battlefields. (*The authors are basically saying that the U.S. is behind in understanding new forms of war, and the authors are redefining war in this book.*) "Unrestricted warfare," therefore, is defined as "non-war actions... constituting future warfare... which transcends all boundaries and limits."

Chapter 1 - The Weapons Revolution Which Invariably Comes First

Chapter 1 makes some important philosophical observations about the nature of weapons and warfare. The authors point out that the American way of weapons production is focused on technology and revolutions in military affairs, instead of weapons that were actually required on the battlefield. They use the F111 as an example -- a fighter jet that was in "a class by itself at the time" but shelved because it was too advanced for actual use on current battlefields.

The authors liken the American approach to cooking food for a banquet without first knowing who your guests are, which is a euphemism for creating weapons without first knowing who you'll be fighting. The authors point out that high tech weapons are sometimes no match for low tech fighters and unconventional tactics.

As pointed out in the introduction, a singular focus on building higher and higher tech weaponry will drive a country into bankruptcy.

The authors argue that China should develop a new concept of weapons that include the ability to produce "man-made earthquakes, tsunamis, weather disasters, or subsonic wave and new biological and chemical weapons." The authors point out that literally anything can be weaponized, including "a man-made stock market crash, a single computer virus invasion, or a single rumor of scandal" that can disrupt an adversary.

Authors also point out that the history of weaponry focused on creating greater lethal effect. With nuclear weapons, humans arrived at "ultra-lethal" from "heavy-kill" and "light-kill" weapons.

Arriving at the pinnacle of killing, technological advances have now paved the way for "kinder" weapons, which are either non-kinetic or surgical. Non-kinetic weapons are used to control, not kill. They cause fear and erode an adversary's will to fight, which is a kinder way of warfare. New concepts (again, 1999) like computer viruses and "media weapons" could become the preferred way to win a war because it inflicts the least lethal damage while still enabling martial victory. This is a revolution in military affairs, write the authors, that will spur new weapons that can't be imagined or predicted (in 1999).

Chapter 2 - The War God's Face Has Become Indistinct

Chapter 2 dives a bit deeper into the changing face of war, given the shifting world order. Key points include:

- After the end of the Cold War, the world became more fragmented internationally and expressed greater self-interests than interest in binary sides (Soviet bloc vs. the West).
- The authors criticized the U.S. and the West, in general, for hiding its self-interest in the Gulf War (oil) behind world peace (the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait).
- The authors criticized the U.S. for being behind on the theory of "total war" -- not total annihilation, but the using combination of military and non-military weapons to win conflicts.
- War will increasingly be fought by hackers (again, written in 1999 -- ahead of its time) rather than soldiers, where war is very intense but results in "practically no bloodshed."
- Previous divisions between military and civilian technology will break down, as will the lines between professional soldier and non-professional warrior.
- "Thus, the battlefield is omnipresent."
- "[W]arfare no longer is an exclusive imperial garden where professional soldiers alone can mingle."
- Given this shift, nation-states will be forced to fight a limited war using unlimited means against a smaller non-state actor fighting an unlimited war with limited means. "[I]t will often prove very difficult for the nation state or national armed force to gain the upper hand."
- The authors name four main U.S. warfighting capabilities: information warfare, precision warfare, joint operations, and military operations other than war.
- The authors again criticize the U.S. for not yet getting the concept of "non-military war operations" -- things like trade wars, financial warfare, ecological warfare, and "new terror" wars that will force the U.S. to "use a sledgehammer to kill an ant."
- For the reasons stated above, China would redefine war from "using means that involve the force of arms to force the enemy to accept one's own will" to "to use all means whatsoever -- means that involve the force of arms and means that do not involve the force of arms, means that involve military power and means that do not involve military power, means that entail casualties and means that do no entail casualties -- to force the enemy to serve one's own interests." In other words, the Chinese method of war would include subduing the enemy by forcing him to pursue his own self-interests (i.e., survival) instead of his geopolitical or strategic goals (i.e., protecting Taiwan).

The authors spend a considerable amount of time breaking down how the U.S. fights wars, but continue to point out that even though the U.S. has military and technological superiority (in 1999), they remain the laggards in thinking about the aforementioned "new concept of weapons."

Basically, the authors recommend that China should weaponize anything they can against the United States because it circumvents the American theory of war.

Chapter 3 - A Classic that Deviates from the Classics

  The classics for future warfare can only be born by departing from traditional models. When attempting to use wars that have already occurred to discuss what constitutes war in the age of technical integration-globalization, only "Desert Storm" can provide ready-made examples. Desert Storm unfolded and concluded for the world to see the many combatant countries involved, enormous scale, short duration, a small number of casualties, and glorious results.

  In the new age, "going it alone" is not only unwise, but it is also not a realistic option. The alliance formed by the U.S. to take action against Iraq involved numerous countries. 110 countries took part in the embargo against Iraq, and more than 30 countries took part in the use of force, including numerous Arab countries. This level of international support also lends legitimacy to the United State's actions in Iraq even though many saw it as an internal struggle that needed to be solved internally. Aside from legitimacy, technical and logistical support from allied nations is also necessary to field that massive level of technology and ordnance in such a rapid manner.

  The appearance of this "overnight" alliance also brought an era to a close. Prior to Desert Storm, alliances were primarily fixed-form that began with the signing of the military alliance between Germany and Austria-Hungary in 1879. Following the Cold War, alliances based on ideology faded away and began to be formed based on interests. This results in the appearance of short, interest-based coalitions that disband after the interests are met.

  Right before Desert Storm, the U.S. also introduced the "Reorganisation Act" which changed the structure of command for overseeing all the branches of the U.S. military. Prior to the act, each branch acted independently in many ways, trying to implement multiple strategies for the same missions. After the act, Desert Storm gave the U.S. the opportunity to test its new command structure in which all branches received orders from a single top-down decision maker departing from its original tree-branch style command structure. This allows for a unified approach to achieving military goals across all branches.

  In regards to land warfare during Desert Storm, the U.S. achieved a staggering victory against enemy armor without the use of its own armor. With the exception of one battle, the vast majority of Iraqi tanks were destroyed by helicopters. These air mobile weapon platforms shifted the land battle paradigm with their ability to rapidly infill troops and supplies as well as provide significant fire support against both armored and unarmored combatants. The U.S., however, failed to follow through in implementing further strategies with these successes. It reverted back to focus on the use of tanks and other armor as the king of land battle.

  The U.S also heavily utilized the media like it hadn't before in any conflict. This is partly due to the increase in technology and its ability to spread rapidly around the world. The U.S. showcased its technological prowess, constantly broadcasting its capabilities. The media was flooded with visuals that shocked the world and had a profound impact on support and operations. Desert Storm marked the first mass use of technologically sophisticated weaponry

with effective psychological operations and fast and loosely formed coalitions to bring significant combat power to bear in a very short period of time.

Chapter 4 - What Do Americans Gain by Touching the Elephant?

The Gulf War was the turning point in modernizing the US Army's ground forces. The four-day ground campaign paled compared to the Air Force's month-long bombings and airstrikes, and after the Cold War ended and tensions subsided, funding was going to start to diminish as well. General Sullivan predicted this and began a complete restructuring of the Army to modernize it by becoming a "digitized force." Playing on the ignorance of politicians who trusted he knew how to win future conflicts best, General Sullivan knew he'd have to get more money, creating a never-ending cycle of increased funding and spending for the latest technology.

Linking an armed force's fate to technology or reliance on technology has created what the authors call an "electronic Maginot Line." These are expensive endeavors that ultimately only offer a false sense of security. The rhythms between proposed requirements for military equipment/technology and the advancement of the technology don't sync. It can take as long as ten years for the military to test and decide on new equipment, while the development of computer technology works off an 18-month cycle and network technology off a 60-day cycle. By the time the military has decided on new equipment/technology, much better stuff has already been developed. It becomes extremely costly to try and keep up with the changing technology in modernizing a force.

The US military and its leadership also abuse technology and spending to achieve two things in war.

1. Reduce casualties
2. Achieve its objectives

Reduction in casualties comes at an unnecessary monetary cost proportionally to the objective. The US spent $61 billion in 42 days in the Gulf War for its bombing and strike campaigns against the Iraqi Army. The US only sustained 148 fatalities and 458 wounded.

The stomach for sustaining casualties by our military has significantly dwindled since the Vietnam War era, and the Chinese believe the secret to success against the US military is simply targeting the rank-and-file soldier. Given the Chinese view on unrestricted warfare, this approach can take many different forms. Americans typically view war as eliminating the enemy and taking territory via kinetic means. The Chinese, however, can conduct war against our rank-and-file by influencing politics and economics that shape our military's leadership, structure, sustainability, and foreign policy.

The Chinese assess that the US military sees war as an opponent to technological development because war tests the money being poured into the war machine. Americans believe winning the war is done by having the leading technology on the battlefield. You can see this take form down to the individual soldier and their equipment. Training and tactics at the

lowest level are often reliant on extensive equipment and technology, making the US soldier a catalyst for moving pieces of technology around a battlefield as opposed to being thinking and adaptable fighters supplemented by technology.

The restructuring of the US armed forces after the Gulf War attempted to make each military branch (Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force) equal capability and blend their use on the battlefield. This attempt to remove the distinction between the branches and have joint operations as the primary means of conducting war limits the US capabilities on a broader spectrum. While integrated use of branches is effective on the kinetic battlefield, it limits capability in other realms that require unique approaches like cyber, economic, and biological warfare.

There has also been an attempted shift in the US military's approach to viewing conflict as "total dimensional warfare." This is like the Chinese unrestricted warfare though the US failed to define the dimensions. The US thought regarding conflict still falls within traditional means of thinking involving operations that include attack, defense, stabilization, and support. These approaches are for specific operations. Though this consists of both combat and non-combat operations, it is still not total dimensional.

The US has mistaken advances in military technology for advances in military thought, form, and function. For the military to truly be revolutionized and adapt to future conflict, it must change its way of thinking and conduct on the battlefield and what is considered a battlefield. To the US, it looks pretty odd to view contention for resources and markets, controlling capital, trade sanctions, and other economic factors, dealing with territorial disputes and religious factions, dissemination of information and thought, competing for control of the cyber world, and a host of other things as battlefields. As the world becomes increasingly intertwined, these different "battlefields" will become more influential and cannot be ignored as military targets.

Chapter 5 - New Methodology of War Games

Everything that the American military does, it does in preparation for a victory in a major war against a near-peer adversary. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, relevancy for the American war machine began to wane, and politicians, officers, and federal agencies began searching for and creating a means of justifying their existence in its current state. Instead of adapting to the conflict against non-traditional means of war and actors, the US actively seeks ways to intervene in disputes to flex its technological development for the battlefield as they know it. Without an enemy, the US must create one.

A system of rules for the conduct of warfare had primarily been established over the last millennia, especially within the 20th century. Treaties formed for the conduct of the war against the use of biological agents, nuclear proliferation, purposeful targeting of non-combatants, etc., attempted to tame warfare within traditional means as much as possible. Many of these rules have been ignored and broken with the evolution of the battlefields. Invasions of sovereign nations without formal declarations of war, genocides against nations' peoples, and other war crimes are being committed in the name of combatting existential threats as everything becomes a battlefield and every person a potential combatant. Committing harm to others or one's nation can come in other forms, like shifts in culture and demographics or takeovers of financial institutions through established and legal means. While ethically and morally wrong when done to the detriment of a nation, the ends of their standards are often either ignored or deliberate.

From the beginning of recorded history, victory in a battle to now all share a commonality: the militaries used the power of combined arms. Historical examples included artillery with infantry from the Napoleonic era and phalanx formations with flanking cavalry from Alexander the Great, amongst many others. The winner was always the one who could create the right combination of forces to use against an opponent. The thinking surrounding these combinations needs to shift from traditional schools of military thought. When fighting an enemy, thinking of combinations to attack their finances, economy, culture, infrastructure, etc., are all equally important.

Western thinking tends to be fixated on specific methods based on past successful engagements, regardless of the current threat composition. Americans want to force the enemy to fit the mold they want to fight against. This willful blindness prevents anticipation of non-traditional attacks. It leaves our country vulnerable, particularly to civil unrest due to strikes on institutions like our finance and infrastructure like our power grid.

Many conflict operations methodologies can be applied in different combinations to get the desired outcome. These warfare methods are:

- Atomic
- Diplomatic
- Financial

- Conventional
- Network
- Trade
- Biological
- Intelligence
- Resources
- Ecological
- Psychological
- Economic Aid
- Space
- Tactical
- Regulatory
- Electronic
- Smuggling
- Sanction
- Guerrilla
- Drug
- Media
- Terrorist
- Virtual
- Ideological

The methods used in the Gulf War were: conventional + diplomatic + sanction + media + psychological + intelligence.

Chapter 6 - Seeking Rules of Victory

Rules in traditional military thought often change in the conduct of warfare, but one has remained since the first recorded battles were analyzed, and that is the rule of the golden ratio. Every successful piece of armament and technology, troop placement and movement strategy, the ratio of troop combinations, the trajectory of rounds, etc., follows the golden ratio of 0.618. The side principal rule accompanies the golden ratio. The breakdown of the side principle as it relates to the Chinese language is that primary center words, descriptors, and/or qualifiers on either side of it give it purpose or context. The same rule applies to formations, troop composition, ratios of leadership, etc. 0.618 is approximately 2:3 or 3:5, which is the ratio to be followed. There is a primary entity (leader, strategy, technology, etc.), and the supporting aspect is split in the golden ratio.

The principal takes a dominant position and is always accompanied by its side principals in the appropriate ratio. Dominant principal relationships take the form of:

- Dominant weapons and supporting weapons
- Dominant force and supporting forces
- Dominant direction and supporting directions
- Dominant sphere and supporting spheres
- Dominant means and supporting means

Again, in the example from the Gulf War, the dominant weapons used by Allied forces were stealth aircraft, cruise missiles, and precision bombs, with all other weapons playing a subordinate role. The dominant means were the 38 consecutive days of aerial bombardment, with different means playing a supplemental role. The dominant force was the air force. The dominant direction was to hit the Republican Guard, etc.

There is no rule in a war that is true all the time. The key is understanding the principles and ratios and being flexible in their applications. Anticipation and adaptation of situations, coupled with an understanding of applying dominant/supporting ratios in troops, strategy, etc., are the surest means of victory.

Chapter 7 - Ten Thousand Methods Combined As One

Traditional military thinking places boundaries on acceptable engagements. War would occur within the confines of engagement types and geographical locations with restrictions against targeting civilian populations, religious and cultural structures/areas, and other potential critical infrastructure. After the Gulf War, military thinking began to shift, especially in China, to remove all limitations on what was considered a traditional military target or method of attack. Restrictions on the military application of technical, scientific, theoretical, psychological, ethical, traditional, customary, and other boundaries are opened as potential war targets.

Traditional views on what is considered militaristic are also shifting. It does not require a kinetic engagement of two opposing forces anymore. It can be any action intending to institute long-term change favorable to the initiator and harmful to the receiver. This also transcends notions of boundaries or territories because much of this is done in the digital space, influencing culture, politics, finance, etc.

The concept of transcending boundaries in multi-domain conflicts can be categorized as "supra-national," which has power or influence that transcends national boundaries or governments. The US relies heavily on supra-national power by influencing virtually everything happening worldwide. A saying goes, "when the US has a cold, the world sneezes." It is in the interest of other allies or neutral parties to support the US in any of its endeavors.

The concept of selecting a primary method and supplementing it with others (like discussed previously) applies here as well to supra-national influence in the conduct of war; instead of combining arms like aircraft, artillery, and infantry, it combines means of influencing a country's actions to harm a specific domain. For example, in 1995-96, China announced it would conduct test launches of missiles and military exercises in the Taiwan Strait. This immediately set off a crash in Taiwan's markets without direct action. The primary target of the attack was economic, but to achieve this, they feigned a potential invasion.

The combinations of methods and domains must be implemented at the appropriate level of war to be the most effective. The four levels of war, according to the Chinese, are:

1. War Policy
2. Strategy
3. Operational Art
4. Tactics

Grand War is military and non-military actions of warfare with supra national as the upper limit and the nation as the lower limit. The strategy involves the political stratagems of warfare at the national and non-state levels. Operational art refers to combat actions lower than a war but higher than battles. Tactics are combat actions on the most fundamental scale.

Chapter 8 - Essential Principles

As technology advances and the means to conduct war expands, principles shift to meet the new methods of war's needs. While many general rules still apply, much like the lessons from Sun Tzu's Art of War, these principles are more specific to Unrestricted Warfare:

1. Omnidirectionality – 360-degree observation and design, a combination of all related factors.
2. Synchrony – Conducting actions in different spaces within the same period of time.
3. Limited Objectives – Set a compass to guide action within an acceptable range for the measures available.
4. Unlimited Measures – The trend is toward unrestricted employment of measures but restricted to the accomplishment of limited objectives.
5. Asymmetry – Seek nodes of action in the opposite direction from the contours of the balance of symmetry.
6. Minimal Consumption – Use the least amount of combat resources to accomplish the objective.
7. Multidimensional Coordination – Coordinating and allocating all the forces which can be mobilized in the military and non-military spheres covering an objective.
8. Adjustment and Control of the Entire Process – During the entire course of a war, from its start, through its progress, to its conclusion, continually acquire information, adjust action, and control the situation.

The basics demand of omnidirectionality is to give all-round considerations to all factors related to unrestricted warfare, and when observing the battlefield or a potential battlefield, designing plans, employing measures, and combining the use of all war resources which can be mobilized, to have a field of vision with no blind spots, a concept unhindered by obstacles, and orientation with no blind angles.

Synchrony is the technical measure employed in modern warfare, particularly in information technology. The emergence of long range warfare technology; the increased ability to transform the battlefield; the linking of battlefields that stretch forever, are scattered, or are different by their nature; and the introduction of various military and non-military forces on an equal footing into the war.

Limited objectives mean limited measures used. The principle of setting limited objectives means that the objectives must always be smaller than the measures used. One must avoid the allure of grand successes in battle and consciously pursue limited objectives you're currently capable of achieving.

Unlimited measures do not mean any method for any objective. Measures are tied directly to objectives and are unlimited to the point of necessity for accomplishing the objective. The use of nukes, for example, could accomplish the objective of taking out an enemy brigade;

however, that is far excessive and can have unintended consequences. The measures used must be tempered.

Asymmetry operates outside the confines of traditional military operations and tactics where they most heavily gravitate. Guerilla warfare is the classic example of the use of hit-and-run tactics to weaken superior forces and shift the balance of capability.

Minimal consumption requires the compression of objectives to simplify operations and designate the appropriate time and resources to each one without exceeding the necessary amount to accomplish the objective.

Multidimensional coordination is the coordination and cooperation among different forces in different spheres to accomplish an objective. While this isn't a novel idea in war, the differentiating factor from the unrestricted warfare point of view is it involves non-military and non-war actions as factors to consider.

Adjustment and control of the entire process are receiving feedback and revisions throughout the whole course of the war. It is maintaining flexibility in the development of the war and adjusting the methods used necessary to accomplish the objective.