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UNRESTRICTED WARFARE IN CHINESE AND IRANIAN FOREIGN POLICIES: IS THE PHOENIX WALKING INTO THE RED DRAGON'S FOOTSTEPS?

LCol M.R. Perreault

JCSP 42

Exercise Solo Flight

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EXERCISE *SOLO FLIGHT* – EXERCICE *SOLO FLIGHT*

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As the international community welcomed the Iranian nuclear deal and its implementation, the eyes of the world turned to the Persian Gulf region with hopes about how relations with the enigmatic Islamic Republic would unfurl. The P5+1 benefited from the positive political fallout, markets reacted favourably to the deal's implementation and businesses around the world are eager to develop new business opportunities. With Iranians rejoicing at the end of sanctions, President Rouhani sailed to successful elections as he continues to engage the international community and reform Iranian economic policies. Iran continues to position itself on the international chessboard.

Meanwhile, China is also implementing its own chess strategy. The Red Dragon engages international organisations and economic markets, reaches out to the world using its soft power while making territorial claims in the South China Sea and expanding its military presence beyond its region via the establishment of a naval base in Djibouti.

No similarities readily stand out between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the People's Republic of China: the former is an important oil producer turning the page on several sanctions (but not all of them) while the latter is the world's factory as it continues its extraordinary economic progress. Digging further into how China got to where it is today and where Iran seems to be headed, clouds dissipate and offer a different view as they seem to follow a common logical thread in how they interact with the outside world and how they use various means to reach their foreign policy objectives.

With this in mind, we can ask ourselves *why does the Iranian foreign policy seem to be following the same logic as the Chinese one, and to which extent will it be called to follow the same development?* Using the concept of *Unrestricted Warfare* as a theory backdrop outlined in

a book bearing the same name by Colonel Qiao Liang and Colonel Wang Xiangsui, both from the People's Liberation Army (PLA), this essay will demonstrate that *the Iranian foreign policy follows the same logic as the Chinese foreign policy because it is affected by similar factors, which in turn explain its use of the Unrestricted Warfare concept.*

The first part will consist of an overview of *Unrestricted Warfare* concept's main principles to establish a firm basis of analysis. The second part will be devoted to the genesis of the Chinese foreign policy to determine the historical elements and cultural determinants that led to what it is today against which the Iranian foreign policy will be compared. This will be done by considering the evolution of both foreign policies through three lenses: how they see themselves, how they see the world, and how to act. Following this, similarities between the two will be presented. Leaning on these findings, a prospective analysis of the Iranian model against the concept of *Unrestricted Warfare* will be performed.

UNRESTRICTED WARFARE

The concept of total war outlined in the book *Unrestricted Warfare* will be referred as such throughout this essay. It outlines that the conduct of war is no longer exclusively limited to the use of force to compel an enemy to one's will, but rather through one's use of military and non-military means in various domains to get an enemy to comply with one's interests.¹ It is important to note that the PLA published the book and that since the Chinese Communist Party

¹ Liang Qiao and Xiangsui Wang, *Unrestricted Warfare: China's Master Plan to Destroy America* (Panama City, Panama: Pan American Publishing, 2002)., p xxii.

(CCP) praised it, the content is likely not that “out of step with official thinking.”² It is therefore considered as Chinese doctrine for the purpose of this essay.

Principles of *Unrestricted Warfare*

Colonels Liang and Xiangsui outline six essential principles in *Unrestricted Warfare*: omnidirectionality, synchrony, limited objective, asymmetry, minimal consumption and multidimensional coordination³. *Omnidirectionality* calls for the combined use of all factors involved in a war and to keep an eye out for anything and anyone that could contribute to the attainment of objective at all levels – maintaining a 360 degrees field of vision to remain aware of any changes to the current situation and of any available resource available.⁴

With the evolution of military technologies actions can be taken in ways allowing simultaneous accomplishment of tasks, yielding simultaneous outcomes. Contrary to what its name may seem to indicate, *synchrony* is not about simultaneous action at a very specific timing but rather calls for action “within the same time period”⁵. It means using all elements considered under omnidirectionality to apply them during a specific time window, at the instigator’s liking.

The selection of objectives becomes important in this concept. Through *limited objectives*, it underlines the importance of choosing objectives that will actually be feasible, within reach and abilities.⁶ In essence, it is better to select objectives at all levels within one’s reach and to build on small successes over time rather than being the frog wishing to be the ox.

² Jeffrey W Bolander, *The Dragon's New Claws*, Vol. 85 (Quantico: Marine Corps Association, 2001)., p59.

³ Qiao and Wang, *Unrestricted Warfare: China's Master Plan to Destroy America*, p177.

⁴ Ibid., p177.s

⁵ Ibid., p 178.

⁶ Ibid., p179.

With this, a *minimal consumption* of resources favours a rational use of these resources, which is not to be mistaken with an economy of resources since the latter concept is useless if the objective is not reached, whereas the former seeks to use the right amount of resources to be successful.⁷

With the proper resources and objectives selected, *Unrestricted Warfare* also calls to avoid directly facing a stronger opponent. With *asymmetry*, the idea is to find the opponent's weakness and exploit it in the least expected way.⁸ It then leaves an opponent using conventional forces and measures to "look like an elephant in a china shop, unable to make use of the power it has."⁹ The *multidimensional coordination* will ensure the proper coordination and cooperation of the resources in place to accomplish a specific objective.¹⁰ Such action can be taken using various combinations.

Combinations

One premise of *Unrestricted Warfare* is that we must think beyond the conventional battlespace as we know it, for the "struggle for victory will take place on a battlefield beyond the battlefield."¹¹ In addition, it views limits and boundaries as being something we impose on ourselves and advocates for exceeding them through transcending ideology and thinking outside the box, selecting the best means to reach the objectives. It does not mean to imply that extreme

⁷ Ibid., p 183.

⁸ Ibid., p 183.

⁹ Ibid., p 183.

¹⁰ Ibid., p 183.

¹¹ Ibid., p 153.

means must always be selected in all places, but rather that there is always a means which can break through those limits.”¹²

Unrestricted Warfare also calls for those wanting to win tomorrow’s conflict to “combine all of the resources of war which they have at their disposal and use them as mean to prosecute war.”¹³ It also underlines that using means by themselves is not sufficient to reach victory and requires combining them. The result is a wholesome concept: “modified combined war that goes beyond limits.”¹⁴ Four combinations are borne from this: 1) supra-national combinations, 2) supra-domain combinations, 3) supra-means combinations, and 4) supra-tier combinations.

Supra-national combinations

States are closely linked through economic markets and integrated networks of information and ideas. Meanwhile, non-state actors are posing a threat to states accustomed to fight conventional threats and adversaries. With this, countries start realizing they can’t face such diverse threats in isolation because of the means available to them, but also because multilateralism is preferred by the international community – acting in isolation can erode one’s legitimacy of action as sometimes demonstrated by Washington in the accomplishment of its objectives. Hence the necessity to ask and even rely on the help of other states and organisations to support reaching national objectives.

Unrestricted Warfare finds the resolution of conflict and the conduct of warfare can’t be done solely with national power.¹⁵ As pure conventional military strength will no longer be the

¹² Ibid., p154.

¹³ Ibid., p 155.

¹⁴ Ibid., p 155.

¹⁵ Ibid., p 159.

sole element to decide the victor between two states, the use of supra-national means will help the victor to achieve its objectives “on a stage larger than the size of a country.”¹⁶ Therefore, a state will be able to use its own power, combined with the one of supra-national, transitional and non-state actors and through such combinations, will be able to “accomplish national security objectives and security strategic interests.”¹⁷

Supra-domain combinations

The combination of domains supposes the combination of battlefields in a manner outlined and related to all or some of the principles outlined above depending on the situation, since each of those could become where the conflict is waged. Domains like politics, religion, economics culture, diplomacy and military affairs are becoming intertwined¹⁸ and have opened the door to new kinds of warfare to be waged on a global level. This is showing that the conduct of warfare is no longer restricted to the military arena in a world where emergent technologies can even enable virtual domains to become a battlefield, sometimes at a fraction of the cost to national power resources. As such, supra-domain combinations are about considering and selecting which domain, i.e. battlefield(s), will be the best for a state to reach its objectives.¹⁹

Supra-means combinations

These combinations must be viewed in association with supra-domain and supra-national combinations. Means can present themselves as such but also as objectives, depending on which

¹⁶ Ibid., p 156.

¹⁷ Ibid., p159.

¹⁸ Ibid., p161.

¹⁹ Ibid., p163.

domain and level of operation we see them, and have a reach across levels and domains²⁰: just as a prism reveals colours composing light, a different angle of vision will reveal a different colour. It also shows that means, even if used in various domains, can be linked together to multiply a desired effect. For example, a state may use information means in the military domain through an information operation campaign to achieve strategic and tactical effects, while also using it in the diplomacy domain to support military objectives. In an increasingly complicated world environment with fluid situations and issues, the flexibility and multiplied power provided by supra-means combinations signifies that a means used by itself will not have greater effect than a combination of the same.²¹

Supra-tier combinations

Instead of adopting a sequential approach to warfare, whereas an objective needs to be accomplished before getting to the next one, these combinations allow for simultaneous completion of actions to various levels to break down “all the stages and link up and assemble these stages at will”.²² Building on the three previous combinations, this provides the state the initiative of time and freedom to combine effects at different stages, breaking down the boundaries and limits imposed by processes.

Despite critics by some that the inspiration of the concept comes from “western futurists, US military theorists and US department of Defense (DoD) document”²³, *Unrestricted Warfare* does outline age-old concepts which point to possible alternatives while providing a “broad

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., p166.

²² Ibid., p169.

²³ Van Messel, Major John A., "Unrestricted Warfare: A Chinese Doctrine for Future Warfare?" (Masters of Operational Studies, United States Marine Corps School of Advanced Warfighting - Marine Corps University, 2005), ., p 2.

perspective on the implications of combining tactics and technologies in the new era of globalism.”²⁴

GENESIS OF THE CHINESE FOREIGN POLICY

How they see themselves

The last century has left a deep mark on Chinese society. With the “100 years of shame and humiliation”²⁵ it lived through invasions and attempts by the US and the USSR to deny development of nuclear weapons and unification with Taiwan. A narrative emerged whereas the Chinese viewed themselves as a weakened nation, victims of years of foreign intervention and abuse, and wary of any outside threats to national integrity. However, it has recently evolved to a *great power mentality* focusing on China’s outcomes in the economic field and its rising global status.²⁶ The victim narrative remains as a soft power tool to shape public opinion and for use in diplomatic relations.²⁷

The Middle Kingdom Status narrative also relies on history but calls upon China’s past regional importance as having a “supreme role in the region.”²⁸ It builds on the changing perception linked with the *great power mentality* and links with the changing victim narrative, seeking “international respect as a great power, which is a major feature of contemporary

²⁴ Ibid., p9.

²⁵ Evan S. Medeiros, Project Air Force (U.S.) and Rand Corporation, *China's International Behavior: Activism, Opportunism, and Diversification*, Vol. MG-850 (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2009)., p 10.

²⁶ Ibid., p11.

²⁷ Ibid., p11.

²⁸ Shaun Breslin, *Handbook of China's International Relations* (New York: Routledge, 2010)., p51.

Chinese national identity.”²⁹ By recalling the past they remember where they don’t want to find themselves again, and by adopting a more positive discourse they set the ground for what they want to become.

How they see the world

China’s self-perception influences its views of the world. Building on the victim narrative, Mao used it to support suspicion toward foreign countries’ intentions as being “driven by ulterior, or even evil, intentions.”³⁰ This has supported beliefs about foreign powers wanting to constrain China’s rise while getting it into a crisis to exploit its vulnerabilities.³¹

China also keeps a close eye on the international order. Preferring polarity, it opines the world is moving toward multipolarity and attempts to determine exactly which country(ies) could become a pole.³² While keeping an eye on the American unipolarity, Chinese leadership wonders why US power has not declined in favour of China, admitting that they “consistently underestimated the United States.”³³ They however believe that conditions are now in place for the balance of global order to lean toward multipolarity again.

Another perspective of Beijing’s world view links to multilateralism, seen first and foremost a tool and a tactic, “not an intergovernmental mechanism or institutional

²⁹ Ibid., p51.

³⁰ Ibid., p 48.

³¹ Medeiros, Project Air Force (U.S.) and Rand Corporation, *China's International Behavior: Activism, Opportunism, and Diversification*, p11.

³² Henry R. Nau and Deepa Mary Ollapally, *Worldviews of Aspiring Powers: Domestic Foreign Policy Debates in China, India, Iran, Japan and Russia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012)., p42.

³³ Ibid., p43.

arrangement.”³⁴ Going from the Maoist view that everybody is out there to get China, Deng’s reform of the foreign policy corrected the Chinese leadership’s sight: as the country’s global interests grew, Beijing saw an advantage to engage with diverse organisations “to gain more “goods” and information from the international system.”³⁵

Finally, China views its security environment in six elements: no major power war, globalization, the global power balance, non-traditional security challenges, energy insecurity and its own rise.³⁶ While Beijing does not foresee a major conflict in the medium term, it has realized the benefits (and obligations) of globalisation. Further, it sees multipolarity as gaining speed and is discovering emerging threats which will call for new methods to confront them. Finally, with a status of net oil and gas importer, the safe transit of such resources carries an inherent security component.

How to act

Medeiros sees Beijing’s foreign policy being guided by five objectives: foster economic development, develop and implement reassurance measures, counter constraints, diversify its access to natural resources and a reduction of the international space used by Taiwan.³⁷

First, China determined it had to use diplomacy to minimize potential global threats which would necessitate a reallocation of resources away from the economic sector; while also

³⁴ Ibid., p45.

³⁵ Marc Lanteigne, *Chinese Foreign Policy: An Introduction* (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2013), p 60.

³⁶ Medeiros, Project Air Force (U.S.) and Rand Corporation, *China's International Behavior: Activism, Opportunism, and Diversification*, p xvii.

³⁷ Ibid., p 45.

using it to foster political contacts which bring access to trade, aid, investment opportunities, technologies and resources.³⁸

Second, as China's economic and military capabilities grew, its neighbours became anxious. That was addressed with a "great peripheral diplomacy" aimed at presenting China as a responsible major power involved in multilateral organisations of the region.³⁹ Beijing coined the expression "peaceful rise" to address these anxieties. At the same time, it is not looking to confront any of its neighbours since if would disrupt its growth while reducing the Chinese Communist Party's hold on power⁴⁰, a pragmatic approach to issues-solving being preferred to reduce tensions.

Third, they wish to prevent other nations from limiting their ambitions. However, a balance must be maintained: while on the one hand Beijing needs to negate the capability of other nations from affecting its rise, on the other hand it must not cross a line that would turn them against it.⁴¹ By placing importance on the sanctity of the state, China shows its preference for a Westphalian order.⁴²

Fourth, China needs to protect its growth through unimpeded access to natural resources. Doing so requires the use of its diplomacy to create new and expand existing relationships, thus

³⁸ Ibid., p 51.

³⁹ Ibid., p 52.

⁴⁰ "China Rising: How the Asian Colossus is Changing our World," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, , accessed April 11, 2016, http://carnegieendowment.org/files/FPspecialreportchina.pdf., p 47.

⁴¹ Medeiros, Project Air Force (U.S.) and Rand Corporation, *China's International Behavior: Activism, Opportunism, and Diversification*, p 57.

⁴² Lanteigne, *Chinese Foreign Policy: An Introduction*, p 23.

providing alternative providers of resources and alternate supply routes, while also preventing foreign interdiction.⁴³

Finally, with a view to reunify Taiwan with China, Beijing looks at ensuring that other countries do not seek to support Taiwan's independence.⁴⁴ Despite the efforts to ensure a continuous growth free of conflict with neighbours and claims about not wanting to be a regional hegemon, John Mearsheimer presents a critical view. According to him, a scenario where China rises peacefully is not feasible since if it continues to grow as it does, Beijing and Washington will be "likely to engage in an intense security competition with considerable potential for war."⁴⁵

CHINESE STRATEGIC CULTURE AND *UNRESTRICTED WARFARE*

The Chinese strategic culture is an ambiguous one. On the one hand, China prefers a pacifist approach using for example soft power and diplomacy to other instruments available to the state to deal with issues, its involvement in regional and international organisations being a manifestation of this approach.⁴⁶ On the other hand, it will use force legitimately and without hesitation to defend its sovereignty or territorial integrity despite a preference to means other than war to be seen as a player in the international arena.⁴⁷ It will however do so in a pragmatic way after having exhausted all nonviolent alternatives and assessing the cost of using force

⁴³ Medeiros, Project Air Force (U.S.) and Rand Corporation, *China's International Behavior: Activism, Opportunism, and Diversification*, p 58-59.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p 59.

⁴⁵ Spence et al., *China Rising: How the Asian Colossus is Changing our World*, p 47.

⁴⁶ Valérie Niquet, "Culture Stratégique Et Politique De Défense En Chine" (Maison de la Chimie, Paris, Institut français des relations internationales, September 26-28, 2007, 2008)., p 8.

⁴⁷ Éric Ouellet and Pierre Pahlavi, *Research on Political - Military Wargaming for Irregular Warfare: Red Actors Studies Report* (Toronto: Defence Research & Development Canada - Centre of Operational Research and Analysis,[2011])., 3.

against a foe: confrontation must be done at the moment that guarantees victory and if a retreat is required it is not a failure but rather a circuitous route to follow toward victory.⁴⁸

The Chinese strategic culture makes a full use of all military and non-military means available to the state while seeking an enemy's weak points through a circuitous route strategy and using asymmetric warfare at the time of their choosing. All of this is done by using strategic combinations as outlined in *Unrestricted Warfare*. Beijing will use supra-national combinations by reaching out to regional and international organisations to seek legitimacy and seek help to deal with emergent threats while saving on national resources that can be dedicated to support its growth. Supra-domain combinations will bring various means to different planes of operations as it follows circuitous routes to achieve its objectives. In addition, supra-means combinations will also seek economy of resources and maximise their effect. Finally, supra-tier combinations will breakdown the time factor in that means and actions will be performed at a time of China's choosing. This serves to achieve surprise or ensure that the conditions are in place to ensure victory.

It could be tempting to argue the concept of *Unrestricted Warfare* is a self-fulfilling prophecy since it emanates from the culture that ultimately led to its creation. However, the way it harnesses what was valid centuries ago to a contemporary application reflects well on China's strategic culture and shows that using *Unrestricted Warfare* as the basis of comparison between the Chinese and Iranian foreign policies is pertinent.

GENESIS OF THE IRANIAN FOREIGN POLICY

How they see themselves

⁴⁸ Niquet, *Culture Stratégique Et Politique De Défense En Chine*, p 11.

Iranians consider their ancient history as one of greatness less for the 150 years preceding the 1979 Revolution, which they qualify of national humiliation and intervention by foreign powers.⁴⁹ They also consider themselves as the sole country apt to determine its destiny and as the only one which can exert influence beyond its borders thanks to its long historical presence in the area under the concept of “*Iran –zamin.*”⁵⁰

Consequently, Tehran brands itself as the only regional power capable of ensuring peace and stability in its region and as the standard-bearer of Shia Islam. Thinking it has what it takes to become a hegemon in the Persian Gulf, the war against Iraq was however a mirror where they saw their weaknesses and the importance of possessing “a strong army, more specifically, a nuclear capability.”⁵¹

Iranian self-perception is double-sided. On the one hand it outlines the importance of survival for Iranians (perception of being victimized) since they were invaded throughout history, foreign interference and infringing of its sovereignty having left a negative mark on the Iranian psyche.⁵² On the other hand, they give themselves a sense of importance which stems from their imperial past⁵³ while being determined to be recognized as a regional power and an unavoidable regional actor. Through adversity and this duality Iranians draw the motivation and

⁴⁹ Glenn E. Curtis, Eric J. Hooglund and Library of Congress. Federal Research Division, *Iran: A Country Study* (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, Federal Research Division, 2008), xxxix.

⁵⁰ Raymond A. Hinnebusch and Anoushiravan Ehteshami, *The Foreign Policies of Middle East States* (Boulder, Colo: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002), 286.

⁵¹ Philippe Dumas, "Iranian Foreign Policy since 2001. Alone in the World, Thomas Juneau Et Sam Razavi, 2013, New York, NY, Routledge, 232 P," *Études Internationales* 45, no. 3 (2014), 50.

⁵² Hinnebusch and Ehteshami, *The Foreign Policies of Middle East States*, 285.

⁵³ Nau and Ollapally, *Worldviews of Aspiring Powers: Domestic Foreign Policy Debates in China, India, Iran, Japan and Russia*, 120.

will to put the Islamic Republic where it belongs: with the big players of the region and the related recognition of being as such by the international community.

How they see the world

With the US and their allies' presence in the Persian Gulf, Iranians see their environment constraining and oppressing the Islamic Republic. They are concerned the Americans, through regional and international influence, are preventing Tehran from being at the table of discussions on the regional security construct.

Iran sees the Middle East as its own area of influence and views its interests are best served when no other entity is infringing it. Unsurprisingly, Tehran interprets the presence of foreign military and naval forces across the region as a threat. Notwithstanding these concerns related to physical borders, Iran does see beyond the fortress with the Pan-Shiism mind frame: the Muslim world is a battlefield for its ambitions.⁵⁴

While the US presence may not be welcome, Tehran did make strategic gains following US invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan with the disappearance of Saddam Hussein and the weakening of the Taliban regime. Iranians also saw an opportunity in the US entanglement in Iraq, leading former President Ahmadinejad to reach out to Saudi Arabia to exploit a power vacuum following US departure from Iraq.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Pierre Pahlavi, "The Place of Shi'ism in Iranian Grand Strategy," *Défense Nationale Et Sécurité Collective* 64, no. 8/9 (Aug-Sep 2008) (2008)., 56.

⁵⁵ Frederic M. Wehrey et al., *Dangerous but Not Omnipotent: Exploring the Reach and Limitations of Iranian Power in the Middle East*, Vol. MG-781 (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2009)., 12.

Furthermore, the Iranian nuclear deal with the P5+1 had the effect of many sanctions being lifted, which in turn favoured greater diplomatic and economic relations with Western states. As it looks to the East and the “BRICS”, it sees a counterbalance to the West: Russia and China, as permanent members of the UN Security Council, can serve as a counter-weight to US and their allies while they can initiate economic links with emerging markets.

How to act

Survival

Three elements guide Iran’s actions: survival, projection of power and a drive toward regional supremacy. Although Tehran viewed its foreign policy through an ideology prism following the Revolution, survival was at risk. Khomeini issued a *fatwa* in 1989 which claimed the state had precedence over Islamic regulations in the interest of Iran’s defence.⁵⁶ The Islamic Republic showed the signs of a trans-Westphalian state which Ouellet and Pahlavi describe as being rooted in history, acknowledging modernity despite being defined in a pre-modern past and seeing this approach as a way to ensure survival through the adoption of Westphalian forms of legitimacy, at least on the surface.⁵⁷ Thus, similar to Deng’s foreign policy reform after the Maoist era, Iran adopted a pragmatic approach where the “raison d’état” overcomes religious principles evocated by the Revolution, a means to an end instead of an end by itself.

⁵⁶ Emilian Kavalski, *The New Central Asia: The Regional Impact of International Actors* (Singapore: World Scientific, 2010), 217.

⁵⁷ Ouellet and Pahlavi, *Research on Political - Military Wargaming for Irregular Warfare: Red Actors Studies Report*, 17.

Iran also secured its survival through an expansion of its diplomacy beyond the Persian Gulf, seeking global actor status⁵⁸ and leveraging its visibility within the region to support and legitimize its claim as standard bearer of Shia Islam by exploiting common ethnic and religious affinities with the people of the region. It did so by combining its diplomacy and religion.

Projection of power

As Iran claims its place in the Persian Gulf region and beyond as the only regional power capable of ensuring peace and stability, it faces its neighbours and their common ally, the US, which has shown its capability to alter a region's power equilibrium.

The Islamic Republic did not rebuild its conventional forces after the war with Iraq to an *ante bellum* level.⁵⁹ It realized its survival rested with asymmetric warfare and developed various ways of using military resources through state and non-state proxies to avoid head-on conflict against a more powerful enemy. This is reflected in the Mosaic Defence doctrine, which provides Tehran with a forward defence to keep its enemies outside the Islamic Republic through "hybrid warfare, conventional and non-conventional or irregular forces and means of waging war (...) reflecting the actual capabilities of Iran's military forces."⁶⁰

As the Americans implemented their policy of containment, Iranians countered with a strategy of deterrence: 1) asymmetric low-intensity war inside and outside the country, 2) modernization of Iran's weapons systems, 3) developing indigenous missile and antimissile

⁵⁸ Pierre Pahlavi, "La Vraie Nature Du Pouvoir Iranien," *Politique Internationale*, été 2008, ., 194.

⁵⁹ Anthony H. Cordesman and Martin Kleiber, *Iran's Military Forces and Warfighting Capabilities: The Threat in the Northern Gulf* (Westport, Conn: Praeger Security International, 2007)., 20.

⁶⁰ D. W. Smith and Canadian Forces College, "Iran: An Examination of the "Mosaic Defence" in a Conflict with the West" Canadian Forces College, 2013), ., 4.

systems and 4) nuclear program.⁶¹ It also complements its military power with the use of information, showing resolve to domestic as well as international audiences and nurturing doubt about its actual precise capabilities.

In addition, Tehran determined that its influence could be projected through participation in international organisations such as Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, the Economic Cooperation Organisation and as one of the founding countries of the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries. The recent Nuclear deal also provides Tehran with an opportunity to use its positive image to further the projection of its influence by demonstrating good will.

Drive toward regional supremacy

Tehran engaged the international relations arena beyond its region to grow its international status and to acquire the full status of an actual power. Therefore, Iranian leaders are busy building a grand strategic alliance that Tehran is lacking.⁶² Above and beyond linking with international organisations, Iranians also want a relationship with countries which share the same anti-US feeling,⁶³ therefore allowing Tehran to shape and influence these organisations without US containment, all the while serving its strategic interests.

IRANIAN STRATEGIC CULTURE AND *UNRESTRICTED WARFARE*

The drivers of Iran's foreign policy are mainly its sense of victimhood and perpetual distrust with a feeling of strategic importance in the region. While their past history has taught

⁶¹ Mohsen M. Milani, "Tehran's Take," *Foreign Affairs*, 2009, ., 49-51

⁶² Pahlavi, *The Place of Shi'ism in Iranian Grand Strategy*, 58.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 58.

them to be careful and prepare for any eventualities while being wary of others' true intentions, a feeling of Iranian strategic self-importance for the region and its religious brethren exists. In addition, a revolutionary aura is maintained to counter the victim sentiment while seeking international recognition of Iran's strategic self-importance. It seeks peace and stability, either by choice or to adopt an acceptable "social" behaviour among nations, while supporting groups whose role is to wreak havoc, appearing on the surface as working against what Tehran wishes for in the first place.

To the outside observer, making sense of this is arduous since Iranians are "masters in the art of cultivating ambivalence and blurring lines"⁶⁴ and in analysing them, we have a compartmentalised vision of their strategic thinking while in fact they consider many factors at once. The key to the enigma may not be how they operate but rather how we look at them, i.e. we should be looking at the forest instead of looking at individual trees.

By using all the means available to it, Tehran practices a multifaceted policy⁶⁵ to drive its foreign policy. Whether it is religion, oil and political diplomacy, the nuclear variable, its soft power and propaganda, the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps and its proxies, all means are used and integrated. Iran's ability to switch between Pan Shiism and Pan Islamism, in addition to be a joker card useable in a wide array of settings and purposes, also takes down actual geographic boundaries⁶⁶ and opens up different domains on which Iran can operate either in isolation or in combinations.

⁶⁴ "A Country in Search of Might," The Mark - News and Perspective, last modified May 2009, http://www.themarknews.com/articles/167-a-country-in-search-of-might.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Pahlavi, *The Place of Shi'ism in Iranian Grand Strategy*, 57

Related to this multifaceted policy, Iran's military doctrine keeps in mind its strengths and weaknesses and considers how to approach a stronger opponent. As Iran opts for a deterrence model of attrition warfare⁶⁷, asymmetric warfare is the answer to the situation. Focusing on its strengths while also looking for an opponent's weaknesses, Iran increases the risk for the opponent.

When considering the complex web of routes composing Iran's strategic culture, they lead to principles of *Unrestricted Warfare*. It is at that point that we see the forest instead of individual trees and that we get a glimpse of the actual logic and wisdom hiding behind Tehran's actions. As *Unrestricted Warfare* is followed by Iranians, it also provides an observer a key to break the code of Tehran's thought process.

THE RED DRAGON AND THE PHOENIX

Common and similar factors

While Beijing calls upon its "supreme role in the region" and Tehran brands itself as the sole country apt to determine its region's destiny, they both share a victim narrative.

Their views of the world are also similar. China sees that foreign powers are out to constrain its rise and prefers a multipolar world order, keeping a close eye on Washington and leaning toward multilateralism as a tool and tactic. The Islamic Republic also keeps an eye out for Washington, similarly feeling constrained in its environment and in its attempts to expand its

⁶⁷ "Iran's Military Doctrine," United States Institute for Peace, , accessed March 8, 2016, http://iranprimer.usip.org/resource/irans-military-doctrine.

regional influence and improve its image as a powerful state. It also discovers the benefits of multilateralism in terms of gaining allies and support.

Beijing focuses on its economy while reassuring its neighbours, countering constraints and looking after diversifying its sources of natural resources. Tehran looks into surviving, projecting its power and establishing a regional supremacy. They both require security to ensure proper resources are allocated to their survival and growth, while seeking to expand their webs of influence through diplomacy and involvement in regional and international organisations. The Red Dragon's economy grows while the Phoenix's should soon be reaping the benefits of the nuclear deal with the P5+1.

Strategic culture and *Unrestricted Warfare*

As China prefers to adopt a peaceful approach to foreign policy problem-solving, it will not hesitate to use force but not without a careful pragmatic consideration of the cost on resources. It will also make use of various means in numerous combinations, including circuitous routes, and act at the time of its choice to have the best chances of victory. In Iran's case, seeking peace and stability will be the way to follow from a pragmatic perspective (mainly to regain a positive public perception) while using all resources available to the state also in a myriad of combinations, following a multifaceted policy.

In addition, both China and Iran use irregular warfare as part of the foreign and security policies. Characterized as trans-Westphalian states by Ouellet and Pahlavi, China and Iran can be respectively seen as "Soft Big Player" and "Wanna be Big Player."⁶⁸ The "Soft big Player"

⁶⁸ Ouellet and Pahlavi, *Research on Political - Military Wargaming for Irregular Warfare: Red Actors Studies Report*, 17-18.

enjoys external legitimacy (sought to gain influence and power) and avoids direct confrontation with potential foes while also not seeking violence as a means to achieve its goals and seeks legitimacy.⁶⁹ In sum, it keeps a 360-degrees field of vision and uses all means available onto a long term horizon, irregular warfare providing all the flexibility it requires.⁷⁰

The “Wanna be Big Player” enjoys less external legitimacy and less resources which can bring it to be more confrontational although it will not necessarily use violence, aware that this could hurt its legitimacy among the audiences where it cultivates grievances upon which it will draw some sort of legitimacy.⁷¹ This player will also make use of all means available to it while maintaining a 360 degree consideration of how to use them although it operates on a medium horizon with irregular warfare being a tool to impose itself faster.⁷²

So what?

The Iranian foreign policy follows the same logic as the Chinese’s by adopting a pragmatic approach and fully using available means in various combinations and “battlefields”. This is exemplified in Iran’s multifaceted strategy as it moves its resources around while seeking a stronger enemy’s weak points. For an outside observer, this may look like a disjointed way of conducting a foreign policy. It gets easier to understand when one looks deeper and sees the webs between the means and the various domains where they are exploited.

In consequence, as Iran is affect by similar factors as China and as, like China, it follows precepts of *Unrestricted Warfare*, we can deduce that the Iranian foreign policy is positioned to

⁶⁹ Ibid., 18.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 18.

⁷¹ Ibid., 18.

⁷² Ibid., 18.

follow the same logic as the Chinese's in that it will make a full use of all means and resources available to the state while following a pragmatic approach in their use and taking into consideration the means available to the state. While China is taking its time, Iran wants to catch up, hence a more aggressive approach. But as Iran's foreign policy matures and as its basis of legitimacy and economic strength grows in the wake of the nuclear deal, Tehran is likely to continue its ascension and follow a development similar to China's.

CONCLUSION

While this essay made a comparison between two countries' foreign policy considerations, it only scratches the surface of what constitutes two countries already linked by oil and international politics. As they both have intricate and rich histories, they share similarities despite different cultural heritages. They both want to become major players in their regions, they do not seek to become hegemons and make territorial gains (at least for now in China's case) and are both determined to become involved in regional organisations in a way that the US will not be able to interfere either directly or through allies and proxies.

While some may criticize *Unrestricted Warfare* for its lack of novelty and make it appear as nothing more than a recollection of warfare principles already outlined by great warfare thinkers like Sun Tzu, it still delivers a powerful message about the importance of keeping a 360 vision to ensure the use of all resources, battlefields and means to manage foreign and security policies. It means not thinking in a linear fashion by marking items on a to-do list. *Unrestricted Warfare* tells us that in today's fast paced and perpetually changing environment, those who can't have the cognitive agility to master or at least consider these aspects will be bound for failure.

China and Iran seem to be following some of these concepts while making steps to adapt and overcome the challenges and changing situations today's politics and security environment bring us.

A potential follow-on research would be to consider the moment at which China and Iran started to move towards principles of *Unrestricted Warfare* and compare this timeline not only to the US but to the West in general and to consider where some of our weaknesses may be.

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