

How to Win Strategic Competition Across the Competition Continuum

Unfortunately, many of our defense establishment processes presuppose clearly defined states of peace and war. The Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning (JCIC) remedies some of these deficiencies, improving the ability of the Joint Force to face the challenges of the future operating environment. The heart of the concept is the fundamental insight that the Joint Force plays an essential role in securing and achieving national aims in conditions sometimes regarded as outside of the military sphere: competition below the threshold of armed conflict and the often-lengthy consolidation of gains that inevitably follows war. Rather than attempting to impose a false dichotomy of peace or war, or to assume an artificially static environment that can be broken into discrete campaigns with fixed end states, the JCIC recognizes the need for proactive, on-going campaigning that adjusts to fluid policy environments and changing conditions to create favorable and sustainable outcomes.
[General Paul J. Selva](#), 2018.

Six years ago, Vice Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff General Selva acknowledged that the prevailing paradigm of “clearly defined states of peace and war” was no longer relevant. Today, the joint force focuses on deterring armed conflict while our adversaries compete and wage effective warfare. We still lack whole-of-government campaigning across the competition continuum (Figure 1 below). Success in strategic competition requires it, and the Department of Defense (DoD) is critical to enabling better alignment of military and non-military activities.

The 2018 *Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning* fully supports “integrated deterrence,” described in the [2022 National Defense Strategy](#) as “using every tool at the Department’s disposal, in close collaboration with our counterparts across the U.S. Government and Allies and partners, to ensure that potential foes understand the folly of aggression.” The joint concept and national defense strategy agree on the need for whole-of-government, integrated campaigning across the competition continuum (Figure 1) to achieve U.S. national security.



FIGURE 1: Competition Continuum

This paper explains *how* the DoD can succeed in strategic competition by implementing guidance from the [2022 National Security Strategy](#), the *2022 National Defense Strategy*, the *Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning*, and related guidance and doctrine. We will not describe every aspect of how the United States can compete to win. Instead, we offer a new approach for the DoD to improve national security by enabling whole-of-government integration. For context, we trace the progression of thinking about effective operations that led to the [2023 DoD Strategy for Operations in the Information Environment](#) (SOIE).

Specifically, we introduce how cognitive maneuver, a compelling national narrative, and [combined effect influence](#) exploit critical vulnerabilities by integrating all elements of national power. The key to this approach is the DoD's ability to coordinate the military element with other elements of national power. The linchpin is the DoD's willingness to support whole-of-government efforts to combine informational and physical power for effective operations in the information environment.

Many DoD concepts and doctrinal publications beginning in 2016 led to the strategy for operations in the information environment. Two key documents were the original DoD SOIE, which inspired the revised version, and the [Joint Concept for Human Aspects of Military Operations](#). The latter advised the joint force to identify and analyze influential, relevant actors. In 2018, the [Joint Concept for Operations in the Information Environment](#) advised the joint force to integrate operations in the information environment into operational design and planning. One imperative becomes clear when we study these publications as a single body of work. Long-term, integrated, whole-of-government

campaigning is how the joint force can expand its mindset and coordinate the military element with the other instruments of national power.

Joint concepts are general descriptions of what the joint force should do. Therefore, key doctrinal publications provide details supporting the SOIE. For example, the strategy cites [*Information in Joint Operations*](#) (*Joint Publication 3-04*, September 2022) in defining key terms, including the “information environment,” “informational power,” and “operations in the information environment.” Definitions’ summaries follow:

- **Information Environment (IE)**: The aggregate of social, cultural, linguistic, psychological, technical, and physical factors that affect how humans and automated systems derive meaning from, act upon, and are impacted by information...

- **Informational Power**: The ability to use information to achieve objectives and gain an information advantage...to exert one’s will...

- **Operations in the Information Environment (OIE)**: Military actions involving the integrated employment of multiple information forces to affect drivers of behavior by informing audiences, influencing foreign relevant actors...

* Any organization or capability may be tasked to conduct activities to support OIE, whether or not assigned to an OIE unit.

The current SOIE describes “FUTURE” essential capabilities as “Integration of Informational and Physical Power” during “planning initiation” (Figure 2). Its broad context described above clarifies how to succeed in strategic competition. The outset of planning must include coordinating military actions and objectives in the information environment with diplomatic, informational, and economic actions and objectives. Integrated planning must combine informational and physical power.



FIGURE 2: Past and Future Operations in the Information Environment

Figure 3 presents a four-step process called the cognitive maneuver methodology. The basic concept is to better understand the situation before and during planning while assessing progress and adjusting plans. It's analogous to focusing on the "aim" portion of "ready, aim, fire." At strategic level, we first achieve an unprecedented understanding of ourselves, our adversaries, and our strategic environment. Then, we analyze our adversary to identify critical vulnerabilities we can exploit through focused engagement, assessment, and adjusting plans to achieve objectives. U.S. Army TRADOC G-2, Dr. Ian Sullivan, provides an example of understanding our adversary: "[The PLA's plan is to be fully "intelligentized" by 2035.](#)" Intelligentized means applying AI to achieve decision dominance. Be ready for AI because it's already here.

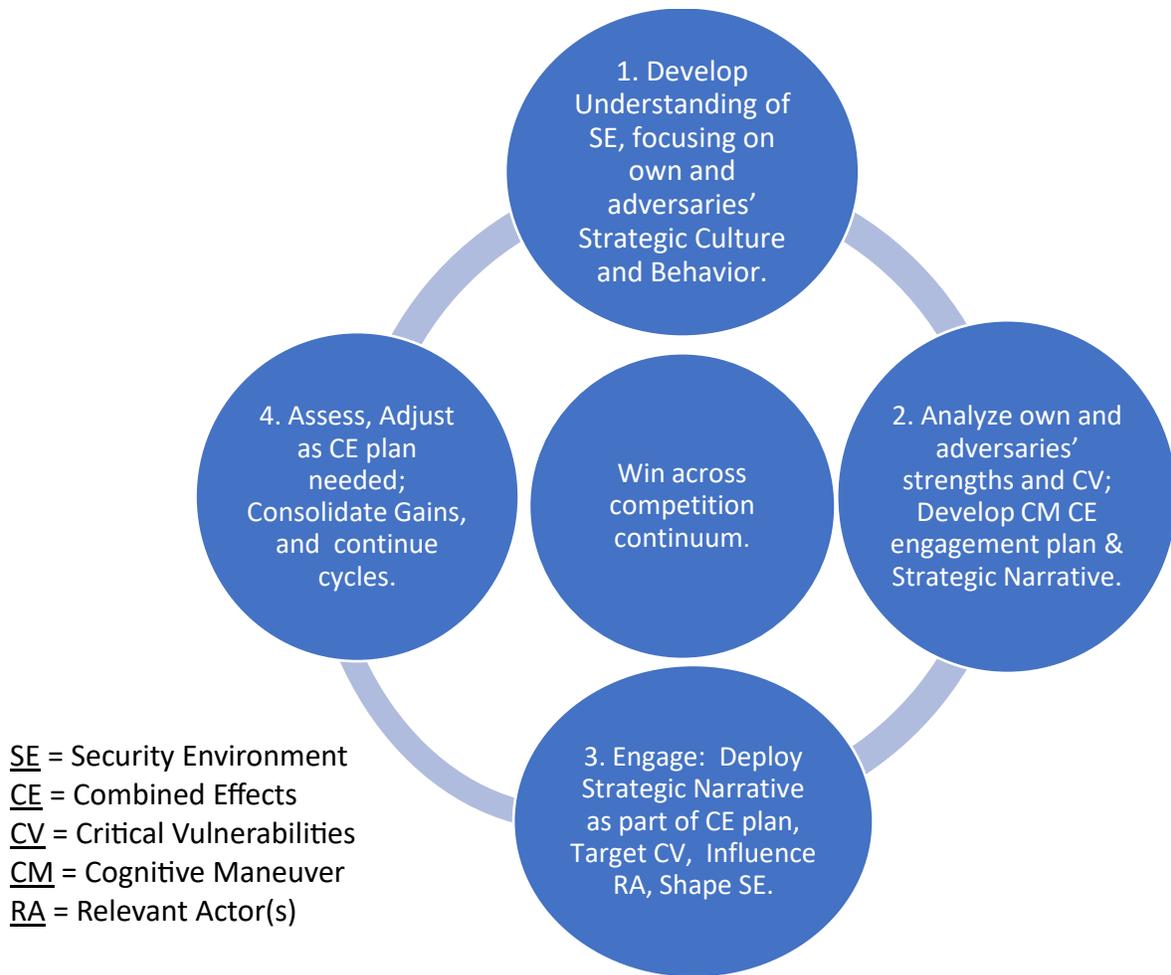


FIGURE 3: Cognitive Maneuver Methodology

Our core challenge is combining efforts across the DoD, U.S. Joint, Interagency, Intergovernmental and Multinational (JIIM) allies, and partners. Joint force-led planning enables whole-of-government operations in the information environment. To succeed, the joint force must surpass military strategies' limitations and adopt a more expansive mindset. We must understand that triumph extends beyond the battlefield. Therefore, the joint force must collaborate with instruments of national power to achieve a unified effort. Integrated campaigning is an essential enabler. The JCIC emphasizes, "Military power alone is insufficient to achieve sustainable political objectives, and there are limited means to achieve integration across the instruments of national power."

A comprehensive approach is vital to integrate military actions into a strategic effects framework. According to [Joint Warfighting \(Joint Publication 1\)](#), "The alignment of the instruments of national power is fundamental to US activities in the strategic security environment." By leveraging synergies among elements of national power, the joint force

can efficiently respond to immediate threats and contribute to shaping the strategic landscape. This coordination promotes unified objectives in national and interagency strategies. A holistic government approach aligned with a national strategic narrative maximizes U.S. power in an era in which, thus far, the U.S. has yet to lead a comprehensive effort to succeed in strategic competition.

Narrative strategy is vital to transforming perspectives and increasing unity of effort. The joint force must enable JIIM allies and partners to unify their efforts based on the national narrative. A national narrative shapes culture, encourages innovation, and motivates allies and partners to commit collectively to improve strategic effectiveness.

We must understand our adversaries' narratives to develop a compelling national narrative. We know that our adversaries seek acceptance from the global community. This tendency highlights why we must craft a national narrative. Adversaries' perspectives, motivations, and objectives also provide insight into strategic competition's changing character and enduring nature. Analyzing their narratives helps us identify vulnerabilities, anticipate their actions, and strategically impede their influence. This information advantage fosters adaptability within the joint force. We need that to create a compelling "United Strength" narrative that shapes the global narrative landscape.

For example, the strategic narrative of "United Strength" for the JIIM force would serve as a rallying call highlighting that our true strength lies in the unity of effort across all agencies and instruments of national power, including our allies and partners. The United States is a source of credibility and influence. Our strength is rooted in unity of effort. By uniting with allies and partners and integrating all elements of national power, we will succeed in strategic competition.

Furthermore, a strategic narrative emphasizing United Strength demonstrates our commitment to a shift in our mindset. It underscores that we are willing to navigate complex modern challenges and emerge stronger through an integrated approach. By embracing a JIIM approach, we leverage the synergies among our diverse capabilities, fostering collaboration, adaptability, and innovation.

United Strength emphasizes that success relies on our dedication to transformation, ensuring that every action, strategy, and operation is harmonious, magnifying our collective impact. This is how the strategic narrative enhances and compels our unity of effort. The responsibility for shaping and promoting this narrative of United Strength falls significantly on commanders and leadership at all levels. The narrative must be internally accepted and externally focused. Its effectiveness depends on building consensus and shaping global perceptions. Communicating this narrative through engagements, public diplomacy efforts, international media engagement, digital platforms, joint exercises with allies, and military exchange programs is crucial. Consistent messaging and aligning our actions with our words, deeds, and images will reinforce the narrative's impact.

Additionally, being open to feedback and addressing shortcomings contribute to the narrative's credibility, logic, and emotional impact. It's a strategy designed to last for

decades. As such, it must align whole-of-government efforts with our understanding of international relations, geopolitics, and the pursuit of national interests.

A compelling strategic narrative enhances the instruments of national power alongside the combined effect influence strategy. It enables us to target our adversaries' vulnerabilities using a combination of effects that leverage all elements of national power. This integration is how we achieve success in strategic competition.

The combined effect influence strategy includes the information environment, where strategic competition constantly rages. Any operation must align with tactical, operational, and strategic efforts because it generates influence across the competition continuum. The contest for advantage is a *psychological and physical blend of cooperation and confrontation to prevent and cause* combined effects. Keep in mind that the Competition Continuum ranges from Cooperation to Armed Conflict. Armed conflict is just one form of extreme confrontation. Succeeding across this continuum requires combining informational and physical power in a unified hierarchy of effort, as shown in Figure 4:

Hierarchy of Effort for Operations in the Information Environment

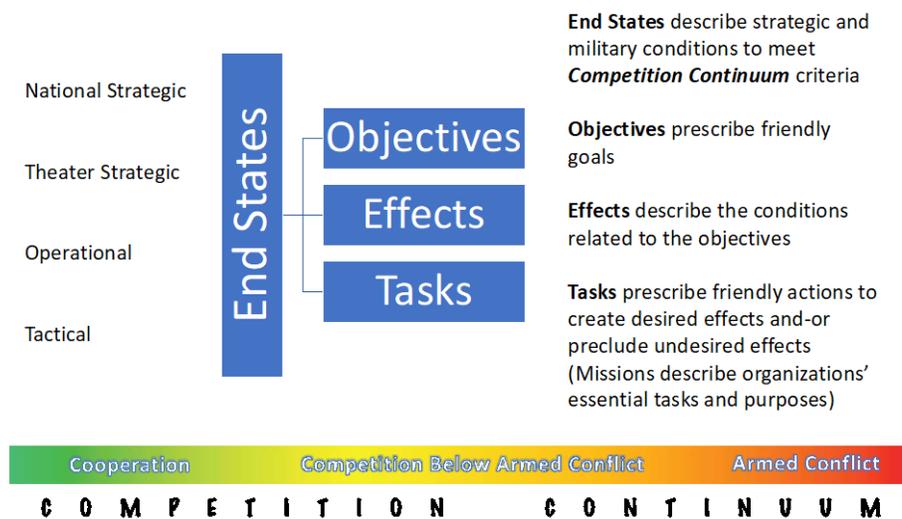


FIGURE 4: Hierarchy of Effort for Operations in the Information Environment (an expansion from [Joint Planning](#), Joint Publication 5-0)

DoD strategy and joint doctrine call for integrated “[information forces](#)” to lead operations in the information environment. However, Service functions, specialties, and plans concentrate on armed conflict. This focus is necessary but insufficient to win against adversaries that deter armed conflict while achieving objectives by other means.

Information forces can fill this gap by operating across the competition continuum. Winning this competition requires a JIIM effort. Activities must be considered based on

their impact across this continuum because opportunistic adversaries exploit any vulnerability to achieve a competitive advantage.

To win, joint operations must shape favorable terms of cooperation and confrontation while fully prepared to win armed conflict. This fight requires in-depth knowledge of diverse threat networks and their strategies. Any instrument of power that helps target vulnerabilities and generate superior effects is relevant to the fight.

Three fundamental questions guide Ends, Ways, and Means (“strategy”) at any level:

- (1) How *causative and preventive*?
- (2) How *psychological and physical*?
- (3) How *cooperative and confrontational*?

The answers help design superior strategies in cognitive maneuver and narrative with eight causative and preventive effects and 16 concepts of influence. Cooperative psychological effects are persuasion and dissuasion; cooperative physical effects are inducement and security. Confrontational psychological effects are deterrence and compellence; confrontational physical effects are defense and coercion. All these effects are combinable. “[Concepts of influence](#)” (see Chapter 6) specify *how* an activity influences an audience’s will and capability to achieve the desired effects. They strengthen concepts of operations by showing how to bring about an effect. A narrative, for instance, influences human will through perceptions and creates psychological and physical effects-

Figures 5a and 5b detail these combinable effects and their concepts of influence. The framework promotes combined effect JIIM operations beyond combined arms.

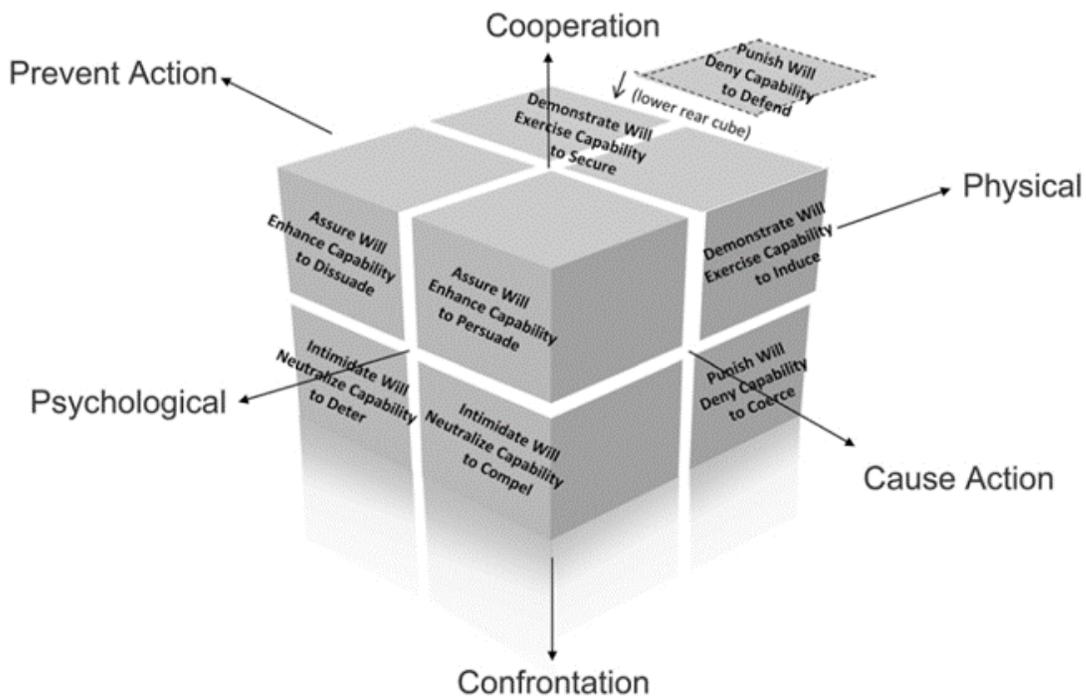


FIGURE 5a: 3-D Cube of Basic Combinable Effects and Concepts of Influence

Cube Quadrant → / Basic Effects ↓	Cooperative / Psychological	Cooperative / Physical	Confrontational / Psychological	Confrontational / Physical
Preventive Effects	1. Dissuade	3. Secure	5. Deter	7. Defend
Causative Effects	2. Persuade	4. Induce	6. Compel	8. Coerce

Cube Quadrant → / Concepts of Influence ↓	Cooperative / Psychological	Cooperative / Physical	Confrontational / Psychological	Confrontational / Physical
Concepts of Influence	1. Assure Will to Dissuade 2. Enhance Capability to Dissuade 3. Assure Will to Persuade 4. Enhance Capability to Persuade	5. Demonstrate Will to Secure 6. Exercise Capability to Secure 7. Demonstrate Will to Induce 8. Exercise Capability to Induce	9. Intimidate Will to Deter 10. Neutralize Capability to Deter 11. Intimidate Will to Compel 12. Neutralize Capability to Compel	13. Punish Will to Defend 14. Deny Capability to Defend 15. Punish Will to Coerce 16. Deny Capability to Coerce

FIGURE 5b: 2-D Chart of Basic Combinable Effects and Concepts of Influence

For example, China’s combined effects on a U.S. defense of Taiwan are depicted in Figure 6: (a) defense that denies U.S. capability access to areas, (b) dissuasion of support for a U.S. defense by assuring a “United Front” will to influence Taiwan, (c) security with Russia by demonstrating the will to cooperate and exercising partnership capability, (d) compellence and deterrence by intimidating U.S. leaders’ will to be loyal and cognitively neutralizing U.S./allied capability to perceive the truth, and (e) coercion by punishing Taiwan’s will to resist. The People’s Liberation Army (PLA) actively learns and wages “cognitive warfare,” as Japan Ground Self-Defense Force Colonel Koichiro Takagi points out. Authoritarians already combine effects well beyond deterrence.

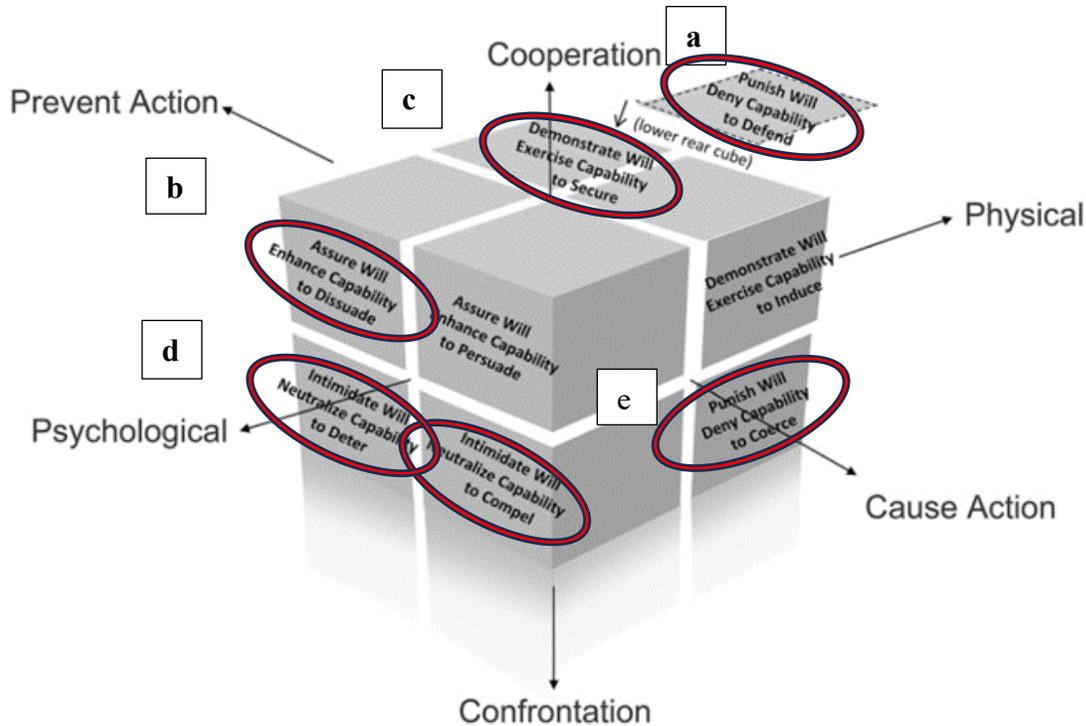


FIGURE 6: PLA Strategy Against Taiwan

Figure 7 depicts the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command strategy: (a) security by demonstrating the will to cooperate, (b) inducement by exercising the capability to innovate and invest in asymmetric allied forces, (c) deterrence by denying adversaries a dominant air-sea capability, and (d) coercion and (e) defense by denying PLA capability to invade Taiwan when deterrence fails. Unlike China's, this approach engages allies and partners but only regards combat operations as “fighting to win.”

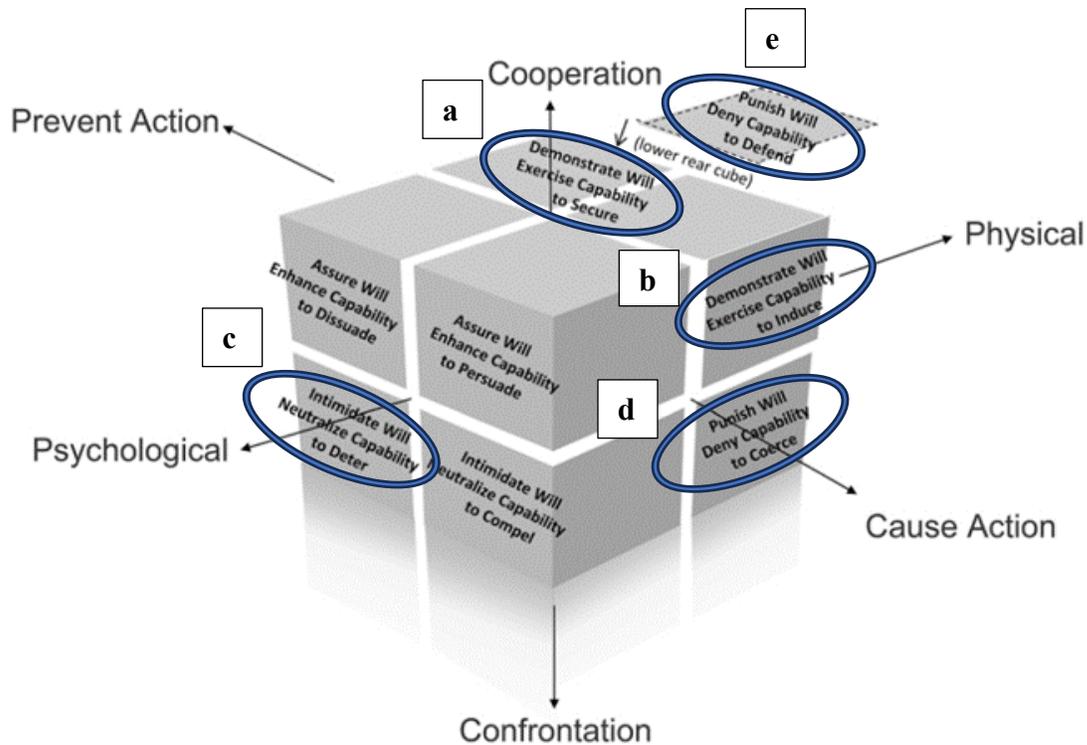


FIGURE 7: U.S. Indo-Pacific Command Strategy

Information forces are essential to out-competing China’s combined effect influence. Plenty of examples show why.

China’s effects on the Philippines include physical coercion against fishing boats, psychological persuasion of officials, cooperative financial inducements, and confrontational compellence against residents. Our counterstrategy sails around and flies over China’s constructed territorial seizures.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) alliance faces similar combined effects from Russia. Putin’s national narrative portrays NATO as a fascist threat, amplifying historical distrust among some ethnic Russians. [Ongoing Russian integrated campaigning](#) blames the West for conflict in Gaza and Ukraine. Understanding such societal vulnerabilities is critical to competing for advantage.

In conclusion, the United States must implement integrated campaigning to sustain and win strategic competition. The DOD plays a vital role in deterring *while* defeating threats to national security, particularly as adversaries leverage AI for novel effects. Cognitive maneuver methodology, a compelling narrative, and the combined effect influence framework integrate informational and physical power. These three enablers operationalize the DoD strategy for more effective and efficient operations across the

competition continuum. Together, they help recognize and target our adversaries' vulnerabilities. This proactive effort requires coordinating military and all instruments of national power to generate superior effects with lasting influence.