



**START**

# **Operations in the Information Environment: Course of Action Analysis Exercise**

*Report to the Joint Staff Strategic Multilayer Assessment Office*

July 2021



**National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism**  
*A Department of Homeland Security Science and Technology Center of Excellence  
Led by the University of Maryland*

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## About This Report

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## About the ICONS Project

The ICONS Project creates simulations and scenario-driven exercises to advance participants' understanding of complex problems and strengthen their ability to make decisions, navigate crises, think strategically, and negotiate collaboratively.

## About START

The National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) was originally created by the Science and Technology Directorate of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security through a Center of Excellence program led by the University of Maryland. START uses state-of-the-art theories, methods, and data from the social and behavioral sciences to improve understanding of the origins, dynamics, and social and psychological impacts of terrorism. For more information, contact START at [infostart@start.umd.edu](mailto:infostart@start.umd.edu) or visit [www.start.umd.edu](http://www.start.umd.edu).

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## Introduction

*“Right now, Operations in the Information Environment (OIE) is the annex they remember **after** they wrote the plan.”*

*~ Lieutenant General (Ret.) Edward Cardon*

The ICONS Project, a wargaming and simulation organization at the University of Maryland, was asked by the Joint Staff, J39, DDGO, Strategic Multilayer Assessment Office (SMA), to design, execute, and analyze a Table Top Exercise (TTX) in support of the Integration of Information in Joint Operations (IIJO) research effort – which in turn supports the ongoing efforts by the Department of Defense (DOD) to institutionalize and codify advancements in the area of Operations in the Information Environment (OIE).

The J39 in every Joint endeavor bears responsibility for OIE, as it is developed and promulgated. This particular TTX was viewed as an opportunity to leverage the development of the new Joint Operating Concept for OIE. The efforts of the Joint Staff and the Air Force (HAF/A3), as well as all the other Service, Command, and Component participants, also used this TTX to examine the role of the DOD in OIE for major scenarios of concern going forward. Scenarios for these TTXs were selected on the basis of two criteria, in combination: 1) most likely adversaries the U.S. will face in the OIE space over the near term; 2) critical scenarios for OIE which have different structures – in this case, a crisis, and a slowly evolving competition.

The following report is a summary of the outputs and analytical assessment of the exercises. Included in this report are: 1) the design of the TTX, based on the analytic intent of the project, including team recruitment and exercise format; 2) the scenarios and the guiding Course of Action (COA) questions presented to the teams for response during the TTX; 3) observations derived by the Control Team members and other observers, which are relevant to the DOD OIE enterprise.

## Simulation Mechanics

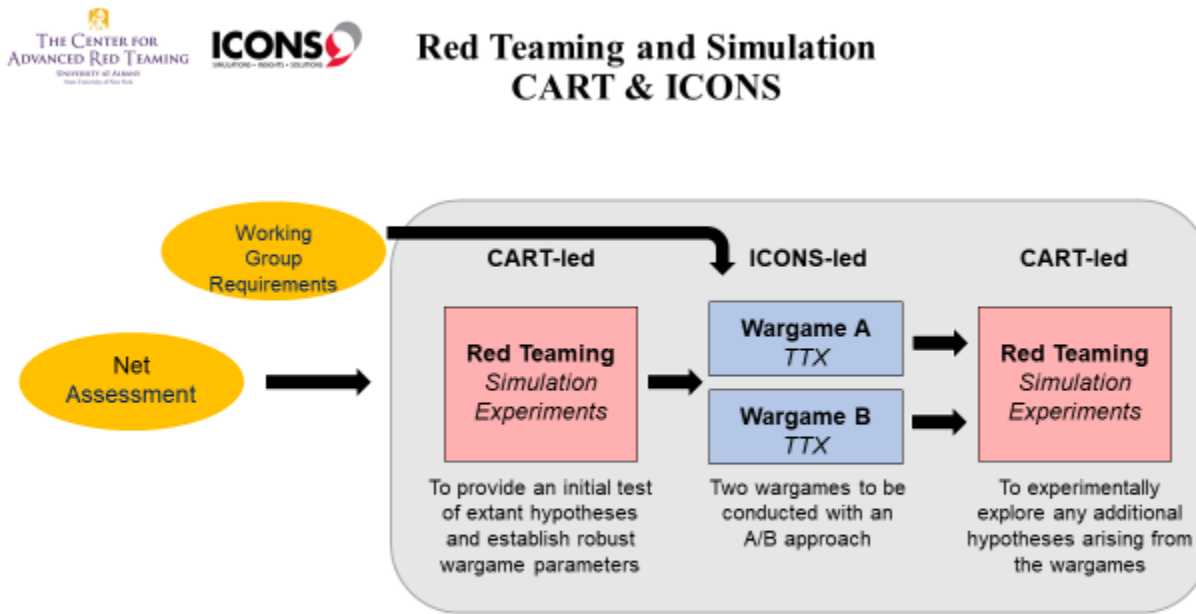
### Methodology

The exercise was conducted online over the ICONSnet distributed Internet-based platform, which is a web application that allows users to interact with scenario materials, chat, trade messages, and file reports – all of which can be reviewed by the exercise controllers. The TTX was run twice, with two different cohorts of participants, in each case distributed over the course of two rounds, and two sessions per round to accommodate time zone differences between INDOPACOM, Washington, D.C., and EUCOM.

The ICONS team collaborated closely with the Center for Advanced Red Teaming (CART) at the University of Albany, which provided both Target Audience Population (TAP) survey work on key scenario questions, as well as the active Red Team during the TTX. The ICONS and CART teams sought to integrate – to the greatest extent possible – the emerging data and findings from the larger SMA net assessment process into the scenario design, as well as the design of the COA questionnaires themselves. The figure below is a graphical representation of the process connecting the TTX to the larger IIJO project. It is important to note that ultimately the scenarios and team structure varied between TTX Beta and TTX

Alpha (which ran second), in order to try and capture some regional dynamics that the project team felt were important to examine.

In each iteration of the TTX, the Blue Teams were presented with a start-state scenario and then a COA “report” containing a series of questions they were to address. They had until the end of the round to discuss and decide their COAs and submit them to the Control Team. At the same time, the Red Team was also preparing a COA report for the same scenario. In Round II of each iteration, the scenarios were updated, based on the inputs from the COA reports and the adjudication decisions of the Control Team. The Round II COA reports then included additional questions which were specific to the changes in the scenario driven by Round I decisions.



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**Integration into Overall IIJO Effort:**

As noted, the TTXs took place in the context of the larger SMA IIJO effort. Both the ICONS and CART teams followed the development of the overall IIJO products – especially the Net Assessment effort – closely in preparing the approach to the TTXs. Through iterative consultation with the SMA staff and government stakeholders, it was determined that the TTX was an ideal element within the overall study to focus closely on U.S. capacities and limitations in OIE.

Since the development of the TTXs and the finalization of the Net Assessment were moving in tandem, the ICONS team worked with the core SMA team to identify the emerging findings which were both a) most relevant to the ‘Blue Team assessment’, and b) most appropriately explored in a wargaming format.

The following **hypothetical** propositions which emerged from the early findings of the Net Assessment were most influential in shaping the structure and focus of the TTXs:

- The proposition that China and Russia have more mature and centrally directed strategic aims for OIE than the U.S.
- The proposition that the U.S. does not posture itself sufficiently in training and exercising to succeed in OIE to the same degree as key rivals.
- The proposition that the U.S. – in both policy and tactics – is far more risk-averse than key adversaries, and that this can sometimes create an asymmetric disadvantage.
- The proposition that the core of U.S. OIE appeal will always be messaging around the fundamental values of democracy and freedom, and that the U.S. should not sacrifice those strategic appeals for short-term information control advantage.

It is important to note that these elements were not conveyed in any way to the participants – even though they were key to shaping the structure of the CART Red Team approach, the examination of the COAs by the control team, and the after-action analysis.

## Participants

### Recruitment:

Participant recruitment was based on three criteria:

1. Operational experience in one or more of the components of OIE.
2. Regional experience relevant to Europe or East Asia, and/or specific experience at EUCOM or INDOPACOM.
3. Ability to participate in the TTXs under the requirements (i.e., UNCLASS, online, etc.)

Recruitment was conducted formally and informally through the networks of the Joint Staff, the Services, civilian agencies, and the University of Maryland.

### Team Structure:

Participants were grouped into teams within the TTXs to provide one team for each of the two COCOMs implicated by the scenarios (INDOPACOM and EUCOM), one team representing the centralized functions of the DOD and Joint Staff, and one Interagency team (at a working level implicit to the National Security Council Staff). This was done to simulate critical organizational divides between the theatres and Washington, which were repeatedly referenced as important in the elicitations from the rest of the IiJO project. In the TTX structure, these four Blue Team cells were labeled: BLUE DC, BLUE EUCOM, BLUE INDOPACOM, and BLUE INTERAGENCY.

### Participant Profiles:

Participants in the Blue Teams included employees of the U.S. Department of Defense (both uniformed and civilian), Department of State, and Intelligence Community. All the Blue Team members are either currently or have previously worked in the Information Operations and/or Public Affairs fields in their

respective agencies and postings. In each case, the players were matched to the team that best suited their background and experience geographically, and organizationally. It is worth noting two items with regard to TTX Alpha: 1) uniformed DOD participants for TTX Alpha were generally more junior (O-4 to O-5) than their counterparts in TTX Beta (O-5 to O-6) and also generally had less diversity of experience in terms of their postings and regional experience.<sup>1</sup>

For this TTX, as referenced above, the Red Team was managed by CART at the University of Albany. The team consisted of several experts in both Chinese and Russian influence operations in their areas of interest, including proficient linguists and individuals with deep cultural knowledge, as well as direct operational experience. The members of the team were recruited by both the ICONS and CART teams, and the internal Red Team COA process was run by CART director, Gary Ackerman during the TTXs.

The Control Team (White Cell) for the exercise was composed of the directors of ICONS and CART, as well as two senior social science experts on influence operations, a regional SME for Russia and one for China, and a retired Air Force Lieutenant General with a deep background on OIE. Collectively, with input from the Red Team members, and observation from the SMA leadership, the Control Team carried out the adjudication of scenario updates in between rounds and provided the core of the analysis of the COAs.

Participants were given the following instructions on the conduct of the TTX when signing up. They were also given a training video, which demonstrated the use of the ICONnet platform, and verbally walked through the process and goals of the TTX.

#### Registration Instructions:

***“DATES AND TIMES:*** *The Table Top Exercise (TTX), will be broken down into two rounds, each consisting of two sessions – in order to accommodate time differences and adjudication time, these are planned as follows (all times ET):*

***TTX Alpha:*** *Round I – DC & Europe* (original dates and times omitted from this report)  
*Round I – Pacific*  
*Round II – DC & Europe*  
*Round II – Pacific*

***TTX Beta:*** *Round I – DC & Europe* (original dates and times omitted from this report)  
*Round I – Pacific*  
*Round II – DC & Europe*  
*Round II – Pacific*

***Note: It is not expected that CONUS and Europe located participants will attend the Pacific time slot or vice versa.***

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<sup>1</sup> While we cannot rule out the possible impact of these differences in rank upon the different results between Alpha and Beta TTX iterations, it is difficult to further extrapolate on this point without the ability to meaningfully quantify this factor.



**TEAMS:** We are recruiting for four cells within the Blue Team: BLUE DC, BLUE EUCOM, BLUE INDOPACOM, and BLUE INTERAGENCY. Please feel free to indicate all teams for which you have suitable background. Team assignments and rosters will be shared ahead of the exercise.

**FORMAT:** This is a Course of Action (COA) Analysis style TTX. In each round the teams will be presented with the game scenario and asked to work together to generate a Proposed COA report for their team – based on a template which will be provided. Periodically the Red Team or White Cell may add information to the scenario through injects. At the conclusion of each round, the reports will be submitted. During the off-day between rounds, the White Cell will update the scenario based on the COA Reports. During Round II, there will be a new report template with updated questions based on the outcomes of Round I.

**PARTICIPATION:** Participants will be logged into an online platform, allowing for participation remotely for the entire exercise. The platform will provide an area for communication within and between cells, but certain cells may also elect to hold a concurrent Microsoft Teams call during participation, as long as the controllers are notified.

Details of the online platform and login instructions will be provided to all participants at the same time as the team assignments. Prior to the start of the TTX, a comprehensive training video, including both a walkthrough of the platform, as well as detailed participation instructions will be provided to all participants.”

### Scenario Selection:

Extensive planning and iterative discussion with the Joint Staff and other stakeholders went into the selection of the TTX scenarios. The primary goals for the scenarios were identified as follows:

1. Represent the regional AORs of greatest concern to near term U.S. national security policy;
2. Examine multiple states or phases of OIE in the non-kinetic environment.

Given this guidance, the ICONS team developed three scenarios integrating these requirements:

- One in the INDOPACOM AOR, which was a rapidly emerging and the potential for escalation to kinetic conflict
- Two in the EUCOM AOR, which could be described as a “slow burn” situations, with a very different tempo of information response.

## Major Findings and Recommendations

### Observations of Blue Team (Practitioner) Actions

#### The Critical – But Challenging – Role of “Whole of Government” Effort:

A theme that was continuously highlighted in the internal discussions of the various Blue Teams – and which is apparent in the COA decisions contained in this report – is the critical role that all the players assigned to a “whole of government” approach to OIE. Given the clear guidance from the DOD leadership on this issue, it is both appropriate and natural for this to be the case. However, these discussions actually

served to point out some areas in which this emphasis makes developing and conducting OIE more difficult for the defense enterprise.

There were two core issues: first, players consistently felt that the leeway for unilateral action by the DOD was quite constrained in the information and influence environment. In some instances, this appeared to constrain the degree of creativity and initiative in the proposed COAs. Secondly, the lack of specific directives from the White House on policy goals to guide messaging was noted numerous times, and also served as a constraint. Interestingly, this was also a theme frequently brought up in the Blue Interagency Team, which adds another dimension to the problem. It should be noted that the design of the scenarios deliberately did not include strong guidance from the National Command Authority in order to specifically examine this issue.

Strong interagency coordination on policy goals, leading to clear and actionable directives for operators in all spaces – including the Information Environment – is highly desirable. And in major national crises, it is to be expected that the White House will wish to articulate a message for the whole of government to follow. However, the day-to-day management of U.S. foreign and national security policy may be guided by high-level directives, but it often does not come with specific, fine-tuned narratives for the information environment from the National Security Council. The critical concern is compression of missions to the highest level for information and influence operations. Given the size and diversity of the mission space for the DOD, the downside risks of tactical level OIE relying too heavily on high-level, interagency approval, could be serious.

A final note on this front, was an observation by the Control Team that even in the Blue D.C. and Interagency teams (playing the higher level of strategic responsibility for the outcomes of the COAs) were not routinely asking “how this ends” when crafting messaging goals – leaving the narrative initiative with the Red Team.

#### **U.S. Tendency to be Reactive:**

Overall, during the course of the TTXs, the Control Team observed repeatedly that the Blue Teams tended to be strongly *reactive* in their COAs. This appeared to be driven by two main factors: 1) the interagency dynamics mentioned above, which discouraged forward leaning initiative – especially within the COCOMS; 2) the need for all the Blue Teams to discuss and coordinate their actions internally.

The second factor noted is partly an artifact of the TTX design, which brought together players who often had not worked together previously, however the same was also true of the Red Team, which displayed considerably more initiative and creativity in their inputs. The Control and Red Teams were divided on the importance of this point. Several members felt strongly that the lack of proactivity on the part of the Blue Teams was indicative of a larger, and regrettable aspect of how the USG handles OIE in practice in the real world. It was observed that this reflects a gap between Red and Blue activity not only in the TTXs but also in the real world, where especially Russia, has shown repeatedly an ability to act more swiftly and creatively in the OIE space than the U.S.

It is worth noting, however, that some members of the Red and Control Team felt that, while reactivity is a reality for many USG information operations, that it was still appropriate to the way foreign and national security policy more broadly is conducted by the U.S.

#### Issues of Clarity and Feasibility:

Throughout the TTXs, it was observed repeatedly during adjudication that there could sometimes be considerable vagueness in the Blue Team COAs. This manifested itself in statements such as “using social media platforms to positively influence the population.” While this was certainly not always the case, and there were also many detailed elements in some COAs, it occurred frequently enough to be brought up consistently in Control Team discussions. The main concern raised was that these COAs appeared to be aspirational goals more than executable activities. While it is certainly understandable in a relatively short amount of exercise time to skip tactical granularity about things like specific messaging or narrow Target Audience Populations, the bigger issues lay around feasibility. Presented without an assessment of whether the proposed activity was likely to be accomplishable with the time, personnel, resources, and audiences based on the scenario, some of these COAs could give higher commanders unrealistic views of what could be accomplished in terms of OIE.

#### Issues of Audiences and Metrics:

A persistent concern in adjudication of the Blue Teams COAs during the TTXs was a sense that they lacked metrics by which to judge the outcomes of their efforts. Again, this may be partially an artifact of the timeframe of the exercise, but that was not the view of the Control Team, which felt this reflected a common lack of clear metrics for OIE outcomes in the real world. This is not true across all types of OIEs in the COAs – something which will be discussed further in the next section. It is also worth noting that metrics can be hard to develop on the fly, and this can be exacerbated by the larger issue, already discussed, of uncertainty about specific policy objectives and desired outcomes across the whole of government.

A related, but distinct issue that was raised several times in adjudication was a tendency for the Blue Team COAs to focus on influencing *governments and International Organizations* as opposed to *populations*. There could be a number of reasons for this. Some of the easier tools available to COCOMS and the interagency in the field are routine channels of statecraft between one nation and another – such as having diplomats or attaches reach out to their counterparts to impress the USG agenda. There can also be certain requirements in both AORs covered in this scenario with regard to working by, with, and through allied countries. Nevertheless, the Control Team was disappointed to observe this general trend, especially after the continuous emphasis on “winning hearts and minds” during the U.S. military engagements of the last twenty years. A direct observation from one Control Team member: “We message to people, not to places or buildings. And people are dynamic, in groups, in situations.”

#### Not All OIE are Created Equal:

As mentioned above, certain activities within the OIE space seemed to have more clearly articulated goals and resources than others. Military Information Support Operations (MISO), for example, is an area where there was higher comfort with objectives and potential details, because they are clearly connected

to a specific, near term, measurable objective. Conversely, across the internal discussions of the Blue Teams, it was repeatedly observed by participants that they were uncertain about the appropriate boundaries of DOD-specific OIE below the threshold of conflict. It was also clear that while there are many assumptions baked into U.S. planning about “shaping” adversary activities through actions like exercises and other visible demonstrations of U.S. resolve, that: a) coordination of these in conjunction with other OIE requires greater attention by commanders to the integration of OIE as a supported activity, and; b) *These are critical observations* as the Department, Services, and Joint Staff have been trying to address this issue coherently for some time now, and the development of the new Joint Publication and other doctrinal advances and streamlining clearly aim to do so.

## Core Recommendations

### Consider Greater Delegation:

As discussed frequently above, there is a significant amount of bureaucracy and need for guidance from above in how we currently think about OIE. Despite being critical initiatives, operating successfully in the information and influence spaces has been hampered by long approval chains and a lack of operational autonomy and support to those conducting Human Domain-oriented operations. Field commanders – much less line operators – possess little authority to conduct information and influence operations based on specific operational goals. Ultimately, we deny ourselves the opportunity to take the initiative and so, by default, we find ourselves relegated to reactive versus proactive engagements in the Human Domain.

Shortening chains for messaging and giving greater flexibility to the operators could make U.S. OIE more effective by allowing them to react to the ground truths of their daily environment in a manner consistent with the speed of modern information cycles. During a fire fight the military does not ask a platoon commander to request targeting guidance from Higher Headquarters. While the analogy won’t ever be exact, it nevertheless reflects how the DOD might begin to think of operators in the information environment.

It is important to note that successfully implementing this rests on the successful implementation of the recommendations that follow as well.

### Improve Whole of Government Messaging Coordination:

The need for greater speed, integration, and unity in USG messaging has been highlighted repeatedly in this report. While it is outside the remit of the Department to effect this unilaterally, it is nevertheless a guiding principle we recommend the Department to support. It is still recommended that this be done with an eye to creating greater tactical flexibility for operators in day-to-day environments – rather than having every element micromanaged at the NSC staff level. However, creating that flexibility, while still achieving national objectives, requires strong coordination at the highest levels in order to provide clear, workable goals and narratives.

### Review Doctrine and Authorities for OIE Success:

As observed above, the TTX discussions highlighted a lack of certainty by the Blue Team participants on the bounds of DOD legal authorities for OIE under the threshold of conflict. As the development of OIE as a major tool of USG national power continues, it will remain important to continuously review where existing authorities create seams or potential conflicts between the war-time footing (which they were developed for) versus the modern requirements for OIE to successfully support policy goals.

Additionally, a member of the Control Team offered this specific observation with regard to the way the DOD thinks about OIE: “There’s no place in current planning doctrine for theories of change - identification of the current state of the social system, the mechanisms of change, and the next-state of the social system. And the next-state requires a goal statement. To the degree this was mentioned, it was de-escalation, tension reduction, etc. So what is the goal in the SCS, or in the Eastern Med, what are the changes necessary to achieve those, and what narratives or identities need to be addressed? How are those things enacted - through deeds and words? In turn, what do you need to say first, to set expectations? What do you need to do, or focus attention on in the real world? How do you consolidate a sense of change? In turn, this means we need to think more explicitly about the emotional states and narratives in other heads. Communication is emotional, not merely cognitive bits and bytes.”

### Improve Training and Exercising for OIE:

Despite the excellent skill sets and knowledge base present in the Information Operations community, the Department does not currently do enough to provide consistent integration of social sciences education and training into the core development of service members (or civilians). Too often operators are relying on instinct, accrued personal experience, or the subject matter expertise of others to plan – but especially evaluate – OIE. This is at odds with the extensive degree of investment the military has made in Operations Research. This may be partially a matter of institutional culture since most kinetic activities can rely on extremely quantifiable metrics for both development and education. For example, one can know with relative certainty how to direct fires to eliminate a specific target based on decades of physics and engineering research. The information environment is inherently less quantifiable and requires a greater understanding of how to assess risk (as well as a greater tolerance for it). However, if the information environment is to truly be a major area of U.S. strategic competition and excellence, then a greater investment in developing the core science of influence and training and educating the force on these areas rigorously should be a crucial priority.

Additionally, the Department should improve and expand exercising and wargaming of OIE. All exercises should regularly incorporate influence and information operations into the scenarios. Most large-scale wargames that include OIE do so in name only. The operations themselves tend to be decided at the discretion of the adjudicator and/or SMEs without reference to testing or data. Not only does the static approach to testing units on their ability to counter an adversary’s information or influence operations diminish the value of the outputs overall, but it also fails to force commanders to respond to a complex and non-linear challenge. Additionally, few opportunities are available for units to test messaging concepts or information operations capabilities. Rehearsals and training events do not force commanders to account for the time it takes a message or any psychological operation to enter and populate enemy

communications and thinking – even less consideration is given to the civilian population (friendly or enemy) or how long it will take to get approval to act or if the messages will be effective. Estimates like this are outside the normal intuitions of most serving decision-makers because the answers are more contingent and less certain than would be required for kinetic operations.

### Way Ahead:

The challenges highlighted by this TTX are numerous and difficult. However, the members of the Control Team and the other staff of the games wished to also point out the extreme dedication to mission, intelligent assessment of the scenarios, and professionalism shown by all participants. While certain institutional – and whole of government – areas for improvement have been the focus of these recommendations, on an individual level, each service member and foreign and civil servant who participated in the TTXs was impressive. The decision by the Department to support studies like this one and move towards major improvements and closer integration of OIE is a critical one. The TTX team is hopeful some of the observations and recommendations here will prove useful to that mission, and to the national security.

## TTX Alpha<sup>2</sup>

### Round I

#### Scenario

#### In the South China Sea

Tensions continue to rise in the Philippine Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) in the South China Sea with escalating clashes between Chinese Maritime Militias, and the new Philippine CAFGU Active Auxiliary (CAAS) militia – as well as increasingly aggressive statements by both governments. In the wake of a major typhoon, the BRP SIERRA MADRE, sitting atop Second Thomas Shoal shows signs of significant structural damage to its deck.

Plans have been discussed for replacement structures, and last week, the Philippine Western Command announced that the ship will be repaired, and a platform erected across the damaged portions of the deck. Preparations have been made for a convoy to take the requisite materials as well as rotate the Marines stationed on the SIERRA MADRE.

Before the convoy departed, the People's Republic of China (PRC) Foreign Ministry issued a strong statement denouncing Manila's intentions to begin illegal construction on the shoal and insisting that the remains of the SIERRA MADRE should be sunk and abandoned. Beijing further declared that the PRC is prepared to take steps to prevent such illegal construction and hinted that personnel from nearby Chinese Coast Guard (CCG) forces could be deployed to the ship to prevent repairs.

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<sup>2</sup> Note that the messages exchanged between teams, as well as the internal deliberations of each cell are not included in this report. If you wish to request access to these data, please contact the Strategic Multilayer Assessment Office in the Joint Staff, J39 DDGO.

The Philippine government vigorously denounced the Chinese statements and insisted that the repair of the ship through the addition of a platform is not 'construction' of a new structure of any kind, does not violate the 2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DoC) signed by China and ASEAN, and that it is being undertaken because refurbishment is required to improve safety and living conditions for the Philippine personnel. Manila also stated that the SIERRA MADRE is a commissioned Philippine Navy vessel, that any attempt by the PRC to place personnel on the ship would constitute an intolerable breach of international law and may be considered an act of war, and that such personnel would be removed "by any means necessary." It was also announced that the resupply convoy would be carrying representatives of Philippine and international media.

Twenty-four hours ago, Philippine navy and coast guard ships set out to return a garrison to the vessel and bring new steel pylons of sufficient depth to provide the basis for a future platform. The government ships stopped fifteen nautical miles from the SIERRA MADRE, while the marines and equipment were transferred to a civilian trawler which then headed for the remains of the vessel. However, the CCG dispatched a task force which intercepts the Philippines convoy and effectively blocks it from reaching the SIERRA MADRE. As the CCG ships maneuver themselves between the Philippine convoy and its destination, PLAN ships from the South Sea Fleet deploy about 30nm north of Second Thomas Shoal. The Philippines Western Command has launched a C-295 flight with the goal of dropping short term supplies on the SIERRA MADRE until the full resupply can take place.

Meanwhile, in the EUCOM AOR...

The crisis in the South China seas detailed above has come on the heels of a major announcement of the first large-scale military exercise in the Mediterranean involving the European Union Naval Force (EU NAVFOR) and the Chinese People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN).

Following the highly successful round of top-level mil-to-mil meetings between Chinese and Southern European leaders, this week China has announced the Janus 2021 maritime interoperability exercise. Janus 2021 is to involve coordinated maneuvers between the PLAN and Hellenic Navy components of NAVFOR, planned to take place in the Saronic Gulf – an area explored by Turkish vessels for natural gas. A special forces component is planned at the port of Piraeus. The latest intelligence reports suggest that a small unit of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) Ground Forces is to join the latter part of the exercise. In addition, the exercise will include a small component of PLA CH-92A drones, similar to those sold to Serbia in 2020. There is apparently interest on the part of the Greek government in making a similar acquisition.

China and Greece have previously held a much smaller joint exercise in these contested waters - and European powers had backed the Greek claims against Turkey at the time. Unsurprisingly, Ankara has reacted badly to this latest step-up in the scope and intensity of military activity, is dispatching additional naval vessels to patrol the drilling sites and starting regular rounds of fighter jet overflights. In addition, NGOs working in North-western Turkey have already started to report an up-tick in the number of refugees, many of whom are testing positive for COVID-19 – Eastern Greece would be the first to be hit by this influx.

Sources in several European capitals have indicated that the decision makers seem somewhat caught off balance by these sudden developments. Unlike the previous Greek-Chinese exercise, Brussels has been in no rush to express continued support to Greece in the face of the Turkish outcry. However, there does not seem to be any immediate actions in the works to warn Turkey off either - so it is really not clear how Europe might balance this out. Regarding European reactions to the Chinese military step up in the continent, sources close to decision makers in Southern and Eastern Europe suggest that the fear of losing considerable Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) investments are likely to make it difficult to find a consensus response, especially through NATO channels.

Despite long-held concerns by the U.S. and NATO over a Chinese-Russia rapprochement, Moscow also seems put off by China's stepping into what Russia considers its back yard. Intelligence reports suggest that several Liquid Natural Gas (LNG) terminals controlled by the same company in the port of Piraeus have been experiencing a ransomware attack with a possible attribution to a known Russian non-government actor. In addition, several German and French parliamentarians have been approached by lobbyists linked to significant business stakes in Russia. There are indications that the Russian calls for mutually deepening trade relations are being well received in European economies exhausted by COVID. Such developments would likely break the EU consensus when the time comes to vote on extending sanctions on Russia in the near future.

With Greece wrapped up in a rapidly escalating multi-frontier crisis, and the U.S. focused on the situation in the South China seas, European capitals are facing unenviable choices. NATO seems torn between internal geopolitical struggles and U.S. requests for extraterritorial support, and the need for a strategic response to China at a time when unity is so hard to come by.

#### **BLUE EUCOM COA REPORT:**

##### **1. Please outline the OIE activities you believe the commands and organizations in your AOR should be engaged in to address the current scenario.**

Preface: Looking at this scenario, we feel it is better to not directly counteract the PLAN and participating countries during the exercise. As this is an exercise related to interoperability and humanitarian assistance/disaster relief, aiming to counter the exercise publicly is likely to make the U.S. seem "anti-China" versus having the intended effect to undermine Chinese influence. Instead, we feel collecting intelligence and looking for opportunities to exploit or amplify PLA missteps would be a better overall path. Concurrently, U.S. organizations should promote the benefits of partnering with U.S., NATO, and other partners who provide better benefits.

Objectives:

- 1) Increase differential between US and Chinese influence in region
- 2) Prevent Chinese basing around NATO southern flank

Activities:

1. EUCOM, NSA - Priority intelligence collection on PLAN exercise and Russian hacking activities. This collection would enable future "dynamic targeting" such as exploiting exercise failures, pollution,



misdeeds by PLA personnel. Collection against Russians would be more for an exploitation of their hacking tactics in the future.

2. DOS - Defense attachés and deputy chiefs of missions (not ambassadors) - engage military and political counterparts to quietly raise concerns about the outcomes of partnership with China such as basing and compromised communication infrastructure.

3. DOS - PAOs - highlight U.S. contributions to these countries to counter-balance PLA communication/propaganda.

4. DOS - Global Engagement Center - Social media collection and surveying in exercise areas. Potential for targeted AdTech messaging if intelligence provides exploitable material.

5. EUCOM - LOEs: 1) OIE OAIs focused on degrading Chinese influence in AOR, 2) Observe and collect on Chinese activities in the AOR, 3) Increase US favorability in the region

5.a. SOCEUR - Detail SOF forces to observe and collect on the exercise.

5.b. NAVEUR - Highlight any ongoing planning efforts for future naval exercises in the area of interest.

5.c. USAFE - Collect aerial imagery of the exercise.

**2. Identify the key stakeholders for OIE in your AOR, given the current scenario, along with the most important message for each to be receiving.**

Primary Target Audience: National and military leaders in Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria, and Hungary.

"Engagement with China comes with strings attached."

National and military leaders in EU countries surrounding the primary exercise participants. "Neighbors' gaps and shortfall create opportunities for exploitative actors to take advantage. Helping your neighbor now may help you in the long run."

Other EU countries with influence in the primary exercise participant nations (Germany, France, Italy, etc.). "Neighbors' gaps and shortfall create opportunities for exploitative actors to take advantage. Helping your neighbor now may help you in the long run."

NATO leadership. "NATO leadership can substantially deter bad actors by removing opportunities for exploitation. Engagement now saves significant headache later."

Turkish national leadership. "Escalation is in no one's best interest. Let's work together to develop sustainable solutions."

China (as an assessment target, not target for messaging)

Russia (as an assessment target, not target for messaging)

**3. What OIE activities are/should be already in place in the relevant AOR, prior to the development of this scenario, that would support US efforts?**

Multi-intelligence collection.

Annual military exercises.

Freedom of navigation operations.

National Guard State Partnership Program.

JMWC messaging on LOE 1, LOE 2

Non-attributable US messaging on LOE 1, LOE 2

C2 of OIE platform for monitoring and measuring effects in the IE

**4. What kinds of metrics would you use to assess whether OIE activities in your AOR are achieving the desired effect in this scenario?**

MOE 1 - Sentiment analysis - Digital platform collection (social media, internet, etc.) to establish a baseline (if not already done) and periodic analysis (quarterly or every six months) to show trendline differences of the influence of each stakeholder in the region.

MOE 2 - Observable behavior - More/less commercial deals between China and participating exercise nations. More/less exercise engagement between China and participating exercise nations. More/less diplomatic or political engagement between China and participating exercise nations. Participating exercise nations engage the U.S. more/less.

**5. What role should OIE be playing in the current scenario compared to other military activities?**

Prior to the exercise: Messaging to seed the IE to be favorable EUCOM LOEs.

During exercise: Monitoring Chinese activity to prepare to exploit emerging opportunities. Per the preface, direct engagement may be counter-productive and harmful to identified objectives and LOEs.

Post exercise: Develop engagement opportunities based on collected intelligence and exercise outcomes.

**BLUE DC COA REPORT:**

**1. Please outline the OIE activities you believe the DOD should be taking to address the current scenario. Please also note where the lead role for coordinating action should sit with OSD Policy, and where it should sit with the Joint Staff.**

OIE activities would include:

Cyber (denial and protection); Civil Affairs (coordination); Electronic Warfare (protection and security); Key Leader Engagements (engagements both public and private); MISO (inform, counter and deter); Public Affairs (communicate, provide clarity, correct mis/dis-information).

OSD Policy will have the lead role. Within Policy, there is coordination/link between OASD Policy - Int'l Security Affairs (EUCOM-related) and OASD Policy - Indo-Pacific Security Affairs. Joint Staff J5 (coord. with JS J3) will be looking at the long-term consequences of the scenario if it played out as is OR if the U.S. actively interjected; and will be queuing off of NSC. J5 should be asking how does the present situation in the EUCOM AOR affect the present course of U.S. foreign policy objectives/outcomes? Does it diverge? Is there no impact? Is it supportive? etc.

**2. Identify the key stakeholders for OIE in both AORs, given the current scenario, along with the most important message for each to be receiving**

Department of State (USEMB); USEUCOM (as GCC coordinating authority), USINDOPACOM, USAFRICOM, and USSTRATCOM; NATO (in response to present Greece - Turkey relations)

Message 1 (DoS/DoD): The U.S. unequivocally opposes any bilateral exercise with the PRC by a fellow NATO member(s) and urges Greece to seriously reconsider its military relations with the PRC. The PRC offers nothing in comparison to the ever-present and superior security assurance of its regional partners and allies, to include the long-standing economic and military security support of the United States. The use of PRC Special Operations forces in the region not only creates instability in a region already destabilized by non-state actors and malign activity, but puts into question the political interests of Greece and holds at risk Europe's future stability.

Message 2 (GCCs): The [CCMD] U.S. military is ready and postured to meet any and all regional security matters raised by our allies and partners with collaboration, speed and resolve.

**3. What OIE activities are/should be already in place in the relevant AORs, prior to the development of this scenario, that would support US efforts?**

The DoD should take a broad approach to the established accesses and OAI that would deter/avert most developing [potential] crisis situations in coordination with Nat'l Security guidance/policy. Any specific, tailored approach requires additional time and resources. Activities for consideration where authorities (may) already exist at the CCMD-level are: Cyber operations, Civil Affairs, Electronic Warfare, Key Leader Engagements, MISO, Public Affairs, Space Operations, OPSEC, MILDEC, STO, etc.

**4. What kinds of metrics would you use to assess whether OIE activities across the two AORs are achieving the desired effect in this scenario?**

Outcome metrics will include: number of countries/messaging statements supporting de-escalation, number expressing measured support for the Philippines, the number supporting the PRC, and the number of forces in the area; reduced military activity in both areas. The key impact metric will be whether coordinated public statements by the U.S., allies, and international organizations achieve the U.S. object of de-escalation and enter into negotiations over the future of the area. Something that is measurable is the number of allies and partners in support of and echoing the U.S. narrative/message.

**5. What role should OIE be playing in the current scenario compared to other military activities?**

All "other military activities" are going to reflect in the Information Environment. The OIE should be viewed as the main effort during these scenarios. DoD should conduct OIE convergence by synchronizing DoD and coordinating with WoG OAI to degrade Chinese and Russian malign influence, assure allies and partners and maintain U.S. freedom of movement and action.

## Round II

### Scenario:

European capitals have had mixed reactions to cautious U.S. response to the JANUS 21 exercise. EUCOM has coordinated with attaches throughout NATO and the Balkans to send a government-level message minimizing concern and dampening any questions about China's growing global military role. Unfortunately, the message has been largely sidelined by growing concerns over the SIERRA MADRE incident in the South China seas. In Asia DoD and State messaging has been far more forward leaning and critical of Beijing, and the cognitive dissonance has been noticed by European leaders. Privately, several ambassadors have been told by their foreign ministry counterparts that there is growing concern over the friction between NATO members over the Chinese led exercises and worry that the U.S. is not doing more to shape the narrative around them given the crisis in the Philippines. There is particular concern that the U.S. response has been limited to engaging with regional governments, rather than taking any robust public positions. Indeed, the regular social media monitoring tools are turning up reports of mounting negative public sentiment towards the U.S., particularly in the Balkans – interestingly, sentiment analysis indicates a shift towards more positive outlook to Russia in Western Europe as of lately.

Meanwhile, the EU has been wrapped up in increasingly fierce debates on whether to extend the sanctions on Russia – which seems increasingly less likely with pro-Russian lobbying efforts in Germany and France meeting relatively little resistance during these times of crisis.

While Moscow and Beijing seem to continue to gently needle each other over the exercise, and purported zones of influence in Europe, the U.S. appears to be the primary target in critical public messaging on both adversarial fronts. After Serbia quietly withdrew its participation from the JANUS 21 exercise, Russia's foreign minister praised the country's leadership for an unrelated issue during an RT interview, while Beijing stayed silent. However, Chinese social media commentators smugly noted that Moscow could still persuade neighboring states not to take actions it objected to – but Washington apparently could not...

This narrative is also being hammered home across Russian media outlets and proxies throughout Europe: NATO is being torn apart by the rising tension between Greece and Turkey, the U.S. cannot keep its so-called allies in the fold when they are given the chance to conduct military exercises with a strategic competitor, and the whole post-war Western system is beginning to crack at the base, as it is overtaken by the changing global order.

Overall, Beijing's position, while less on-the-nose, is still clear. State backed media have run constant coverage of the JANUS 21 exercise, including many panels and interviews with international experts touting the importance of this step in China's rise as a true global superpower. Chinese social media is also full of coverage, tightly linked to celebration of the CCP anniversary, and promoting the leadership of Xi Jinping on the global stage. In her regular Wednesday morning press conference, the spokesperson for the PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs was asked about the tensions over JANUS 21 and answered: "Many countries conduct joint military exercises together all the time to improve their ability to operate together safely and effectively. Tensions between Greece and Turkey should be resolved bilaterally – as is China's position about most international disputes – and do not involve the PRC. Nor will those disputes impact the PRC's ability to engage effectively and continually with both countries, who are partners and friends. With regard to questions about U.S. concerns, first, the U.S. is not in any way a party to these exercises, nor have they asked to be observers. And as far as the geography of the JANUS 21, it is important to remember that the U.S. and many other countries conduct military exercises in maritime areas very near China – and very far away from their own territory. So it hardly seems fair or appropriate for anyone to object to China doing the same." In addition, following the successful performance of Chinese-produced drones in the exercises, Hungary and Czech Republic have expressed an active interest in opening talks with the PRC about adding them to their own fleets. Meanwhile in the South China Sea...

It has been a week since the start of the standoff over the SIERRA MADRE. China Coast Guard vessels continue to enforce their effective blockade of the resupply convey, while now joined by a significant number of maritime militia "fishing vessels" which are engaging in dangerous behavior towards PHL vessels (shadowing too closely, playing "chicken" etc). Their presence is being covered in Chinese mainstream and social media as a spontaneous act of national pride. A substantial PLAN presence (three DDGs and two FFGs) has also taken up position at a distance sufficient to intervene should there be further escalation – but described as a "routine exercise."

At the direction of SecDef, in order to maintain appropriate options for POTUS, significant movement has been initiated throughout the US military presence in the INDOPACOM AOR – including substantial and observable changes in readiness, and the re-deployment of the RONALD REAGAN from a port visit in Singapore to sail by Palawan on her way to Japan.

The situation is being continuously and widely covered by global media. US officials from State, Defense, and the White House have maintained a calm but firm line against “Chinese aggression in the South China Sea,” and a focus on the importance of respecting Philippine sovereignty and concern for the wellbeing of the PHL personnel. Overall, US allied governments in the region have echoed these concerns and have expressed support for the ongoing US role in the region. Questions about the actual prospect of direct military support to Manila, have, however, been deflected by all. Importantly, Manila has also generally avoided mentioning any need or desire for US support and has downplayed the importance of the situation in international media.

Domestically in the Philippines the situation appears complicated. Some media – especially anti-government media – are carrying stories calling the stranded Marines national heroes and condemning a lack of stronger action. However, other anti-government media – with strong backing from PRC aligned international media – are running the storyline from Beijing: the entire incident is the result of a corrupt alignment with historically imperialist interests from the US, and not in favor of the actual national security interests of the Philippines. This story is being bolstered by some leaked documents purporting to show that the contractors hired to provide the repair supplies for the SIERRA MADRE had bribed a government official with money obtained from a US businessman.

Elsewhere, Beijing is also on the offensive, with a concerted media campaign accusing the Philippines and the US of militarizing a civilian police matter. “This is a straightforward maritime law dispute,” the PRC Foreign Ministry spokeswoman said on Wednesday, “as it always has been – which the Philippine government, with the tacit support of the US, has irresponsibly escalated into a potential military confrontation.”

Behind closed doors, the attitude in DC is nervous. Communication with Manila is minimal and terse. Formal bilateral coms have not been requested on the military side, and informal consultations have suggested serious reservations, not only from the political leadership, but the MOD, to ask for US support. A note from the Defense Attaché in Manila, which has been circulating, contains the phrase: “They are frankly afraid to ask us for backup, because they worry there won’t really be an answer – or worse, the answer will be no.”

#### **BLUE EUCOM COA REPORT:**

Guidance from the administration now is that “we need to stop playing defense – on the OIE front in particular.” The administration is concerned that the situation is undermining efforts to strengthen Transatlantic relationships. In answering the below, please assume you can exercise the full extent of

current EXORD authorities to respond to Red in the OIE space. In your responses please be specific on messaging.

**1. How would you update your previous COAs based on the evolving scenario and the guidance from the Administration?**

Our overall goal is to focus on countering Chinese strategy rather than Chinese operations. In the competition space, focusing on short-term gains won't lead us to a continuing position of advantage. We need to have a long-term strategy aimed at achieving the US objectives of degrading support for Chinese influence in the AOR and increasing US favorability in the region. To this end, the EUCOM response is to publicly:

1) Engage with NATO leadership and partner nations to deescalate the dispute between Greece and Turkey. Request a snap meeting of NATO partners to address the situation.

1a) Offer senior EUCOM military leaders to U.S. ambassadors to do KLEs with NATO leaders and Greece/Turkey to deescalate.

1b) Put out a statement calling for calm between Turkey and China with the shutdown of the drone. US should refrain from taking sides in this dispute, unless issue escalates into further action from either party. Specific messaging: "European Command calls on our NATO allies Greece and Turkey to de-escalate current tensions and refrain from any physical attacks. In the face of revisionist powers, corrupt actors, and violent extremist activity in the region and around the world, we must remain united as a force for peace, prosperity, and collective action. We urge an immediate return to diplomacy."

2) Maintain a consistent narrative on the PLAN participation in the HA/DR exercise from the previous recommended COA:

2a) Possible messaging to use if asked but not proactively: "We welcome China's participation in the international community as a positive actor in accordance with international laws and norms, however we are concerned about the use of PRC Special Operations forces in the region creates instability in a region already destabilized by non-state actors and malign activity"

3) Reiterate that the U.S. military is ready and postured to meet any and all regional security matters raised by our allies and partners with collaboration, speed and resolve

The following are EUCOM actions that are not public:

4) Task the DATT in affected countries to determine why NATO countries are partnering with China versus their treaty allies.

5) Counsel patience to military leadership. Short-term losses don't equal long-term failures. The US military must be focused on the long-term objectives of protecting US interests and maintaining stability in the region.

6) Continue to monitor intelligence gathering efforts to find opportunities to degrade Chinese support in the region (For example, look for evidence of malign or not public objectives, evidence of forces doing anything other than an HA/DR mission, etc.). Immediately amplify messaging that can erode support for Chinese participation with primary target audience (Greek/Hungarian/Bulgarian/Serbian leadership).

7) Monitor and deconflict U.S. military activity such as previously planned naval activity to ensure previously scheduled movements don't create unintended consequences.

**2. What publicly visible OIE might be taken to strengthen the US position in this scenario?**

Note to White Cell: We interpreted this question to mean OAIs that show up in the IE, not necessarily attributable to the US. Some of the OAIs below will not be attributed to the US Gov.

1. EUCOM commander (ideally with supporting messaging with NATO) calling for calm between Greece and Turkey.
  - 1.a. IO amplification of EUCOM Commander calling for calm
  2. PA & IO amplification of KLEs alongside NATO leaders working with Greece and Turkey
  - 2a. Amplify themes displaying NATO effectiveness in unifying partner nations
  3. Immediately amplify themes that can support objective 6 above (degrade support for Chinese participation with primary target audience)
    - 3a. Immediately amplify via MISO any messaging from primary TA questioning, doubting, or denouncing Chinese participation.
    - 3b. Amplify messaging from secondary TA (Greek, Hungarian, Bulgarian, Serbian public) that aligns with Objective 6 (degrade support for Chinese participation with primary target audience)

### **3. What would a narrative win in the Information Environment look like for the US in this scenario?**

Successes should be focused on long-term gains, not short-term battles. For example, after follow-on engagement between DOS and Greece, a win would mean Greece and other NATO countries refrain from future military partnership with China. However, expecting an immediate and measurable outcome is unrealistic when it comes to the IE.

On the Turkey/Greece front, near term victory looks like immediate de-escalation of physical hostilities and a return to conversation and diplomacy based on our interaction with both parties.

### **4. Are there any structural or other constraints to implementing your proposed course of action?**

1. Rapid declassification authorities and processes need to be established prior to engagement in the IE. Without a clean plan for declassifying information, quick response in the IE is ineffective.
2. U.S. Gov needs to maintain consistent messaging with all departments/agencies involved in the AOR. If the EUCOM commander makes a statement calling for calm, the DoS representatives, CIA, WH, or other US actors need to maintain a similar narrative. For this reason, a national information strategy must exist prior to engagement in the IE.
3. The U.S. does not have an information strategy, effective mechanisms to operationalize strategic national guidance (when there is some), and the capacity to effectively measure influence over time in areas of interest compared to competitors. Without these in place, the vast majority of U.S. activity is just that - activity. If corrected, the U.S. can move to a concerted campaign with a somewhat clear score of how we are influencing internationally.

### **BLUE DC COA REPORT:**

Guidance from the administration now is that “we need to stop playing defense – on the OIE front in particular.” In answering the below, please assume you can exercise the full extent of current EXORD authorities to respond to Red in the OIE space. In your responses please be specific on messaging.

#### **1. Please provide an updated response to the situation in the Eastern Med.**

NATO and participating partners typically conduct exercises throughout the year with the goal of building cooperation against any potential crisis or disasters. The JANUS 21 exercise is an example of our

member nations conducting joint military exercises together to improve their ability to operate together safely and effectively.

Therefore, we ask Turkey to participate in JANUS 21, at a minimum as an observer or planning partner, in order to strengthen strategic solidarity in Europe. Europe and North America must continue to work together, in strategic solidarity and must strengthen our commitment to collective defense because we are facing many great challenges; the rise of China, sophisticated cyber-attacks, disruptive technologies, climate change, Russia's destabilizing behavior.

Additionally, China's participation in JANUS 21 is creating a disruptive environment which is counter to the purposes of such exercises. We ask them to scale-back their participation in JANUS 21.

**2. Beijing is clearly using military movements in the INDOPACOM AOR as a talking point about the US being escalatory. How should this be responded to?**

Launch a short messaging campaign to publicly reinforce U.S. and partner nation relations and international security. Include diplomatic and military key leader engagements to both highlight the risk of getting too close to China and promote better cooperation with the US to avoid this scenario in the future.

Message: China's employment of military assets in the area are a provocation and they must be withdrawn immediately. The U.S. is committed to a de-escalation of the situation and calls for both sides to work out a balanced solution.

The U.S. made no escalatory moves and does not intend to further tensions, however it is increasing its force readiness to protect international law and U.S. interests. U.S. military is ready and postured to meet any and all regional security matters raised by our allies and partners with collaboration, speed and resolve. If asked by our allies, we will assist in any humanitarian assistance as needed.

**3. Please provide COA options for responding to two potential outcomes in the South China Sea: 1. The PHL MOD has proposed a plan to use its Japanese-supplied MPACs, which can outrun the present CCG vessels, to evade them and return a larger contingent of Marines to the SIERRA MADRE, along with emergency supplies. This prolongs the standoff, while solving the emergent problem – but also introduces Gray Hulls to the situation directly. 2. The governments of Indonesia and Singapore have proposed an off-ramp option privately to Manila, Beijing, and Washington: a “Singapore Conference” in which various legal options for the resolution of the Second Thomas Shoal issue are explored. This potentially includes many unacceptable ideas and may end in no resolution. 3. In both cases, what action should be taken to address the potential concerns of other allies in the region?**

1. The U.S. would discourage this COA; it would possibly escalate the crisis and is not a long-term solution. This activity would be seen as a military escalation of the situation. One option back would be to use the MPACs to rescue the Marines and scuttle the ship. The U.S. could discuss replacing the vessel from a decommissioned grey or white hull.

2. The U.S. is committed to a de-escalation of the situation and calls for both sides to work out a balanced solution. US should support the Singapore Conference for building a long-term solution

3. Launch a short messaging campaign to publicly reinforce U.S. and partner nation relations and international security. Include diplomatic and military key leader engagements to both highlight the risk of getting too close to China and promote better cooperation with the US to avoid this scenario in the future.



**4. What would you consider a narrative win for the US in this dual scenario?**

A win for the US and NATO would be international media and social media labeling China as an aggressor in the South China Sea by creating an unnecessary humanitarian crisis on SIERRA MADRE. A win in the European scenario would be Russia, NATO members, international media and social media labeling China as an encroacher and antagonist by meddling in European affairs with their participation in JANUS 21.

**5. Are there any structural or other constraints to implementing your proposed course of action?**

Other than the political dimensions of the situation as well as possible institutional barriers between DoS and DoD from a messaging standpoint, there are no known impediments to enacting the messaging campaign mentioned above.

**RED TEAM COA REPORTS:**

**1. Please outline the influence activities you believe would be taken by RED in both AORS relevant to the scenario as it stands.**

PRC

- *Note:* Operations are coordinated and follow preplanned narratives and tropes, adjusted for the current situation
- **Media:** Immediately engage in a) mass and news media campaigns and b) social media campaigns criticizing the US and the Philippines for militarizing the incident. Some elements of these campaigns include:
  - Spreading conspiratorial narratives suggesting ulterior motives for the opposing government’s actions in the South China Sea. For example:
    - Philippine government has been put up to this by the Americans who want to undermine the stability of the region.
    - The resupply ship is manned with special forces units, not journalists.
  - “Leaking” fake government documents suggesting Philippine corruption or government malfeasance regarding the incident (for example: the government gave the original contract to a well-connected company that did shoddy work), shared through social media group chats with the goal of eventually having the images broadcast on the news
  - Spreading old and/or doctored photos of Chinese aircraft or vessels claiming they were downed by the other party
  - Regional newspapers publishing op-eds criticizing the US and the Philippines for destabilizing the region and trying to militarize the incident.
- **Military Support:** Maintain a “cabbage strategy” with respect to the incident, where any escalation is portrayed as an unprovoked attack on “civilian” Chinese vessels that then require intervention by Coast Guard or PLAN:
  - PRC fishing boats protesting at the site of the SIERRA MADRE
  - PLA coastguard ships protecting the fishing boats and interdicting the convoy
  - PLAN ships protecting the coastguard ships
- **Political:**
  - Attempt to pass a resolution in the UN general assembly (putting pressure on countries with interdependencies with China) to stymie a timely US or Philippines response; put

forward a resolution in the UNSC to muddy the waters and call on the Philippines to exercise restraint.

- Incite a pro-Beijing protest in Manila criticizing the US government militarizing the incident.
- Beijing threatens Manila to pull back all economic aid from the Philippines  
<https://business.inquirer.net/313538/china-emerges-as-phs-most-important-source-of-investments>
- Later in the scenario: endorse the Russian-Turkish plans and laud the “burgeoning friendship” between two “regional powers”; criticize Greek interference.<sup>3</sup>

- **Cyber:**

- Philippines government websites hijacked to embarrass Manila and send a tacit warning of their vulnerability.
- Cyber-attacks on the companies contracted to fix the SIERRA MADRE.

- **Other:** Place both explicit and backdoor financial pressure on the companies contracted to fix the SIERRA MADRE from CCP-affiliated financial institutions

## Russia

- **Media:** Influence activities center around producing narratives and publication in media and social media. Some elements of this include:
  - Basics of narrative: looking for any angle that demonizes the US, EU, or NATO, and presents them in the most negative way.
    - Western policies in the region continue to be against Serbian interests.
    - Satellite countries like Greece are subservient to the US, and the West will always side with ethnically similar countries against the Turks in NATO.
    - Where possible, tie messages to the anniversary of NATO airstrikes, or the current Kosovo situation. Portray this as continuing aggression of the West against the Balkans (particularly Serbia) and that, while the West is not currently bombing Serbia, their activities represent a continuation of aggression against Serbia and Russia and continue to threaten the region.
    - Russia is standing up to the bullies, protecting Serbia in the process.
    - Any international activity that includes Kosovo forces will play into this narrative.
  - In the past, this type of propaganda has been rudimentary, written by Russians that did not understand the local Balkan / E. Mediterranean context. During this crisis, the Russians leverage local contacts and networks that they have invested in and that are able to effectively repeat messages that are resonant locally and reflect local voices.
  - Extensive use of online trolls and injects of propaganda into existing news and information streams.
- **Political:**
  - Official Russian pronouncements praising Erdogan’s strength in standing up to NATO bullies.
  - Thinly veiled warning from the Russian Foreign Ministry not to underestimate Russia or interfere in its desire to develop new partners.
- **Cyber:**

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<sup>3</sup> Note: hyperlinks inserted by participants in original exercise transcripts.

- Mild to moderate yet diverse cyberattacks on Greek financial and government institutions (mainly as a “shot across the bow”).

**2. Identify the key stakeholders for OIE in both AORs, given the current scenario, along with the most important message for each to be receiving**

PRC

- **International governments and governments and mass media:** provide accurate, clearly labeled satellite imagery of the situation in the South China Sea that can be shared with the public, giving a sense of absolute transparency.
- **Local Philippine and regional populations:** focus on narratives of Western interference, Philippine corruption and Chinese restraint, but leave the dissemination of these to trusted local sources rather than directly from OIE.

Russia

- **Serbian government and public:**
  - The exercise is not taking place in Serbia, so no coverage in local language which gives disinformation outlets ability manipulate even further
  - Messaging to general public and political elites/decision makers will be the same.
  - Local supporters who help explain to the local public how this is good for Serbia and the region. How the global order is changing. How this is good. Include local analysts and experts, pro-Russian, they approve activities to confirm the thesis.
  - Themes: new alliances being created in Europe. America cannot push Turkey around. Erdoğan is close to Putin, Russia helping to shape the future of the region, West is no longer in control. The situation is changing and the US, EU, NATO no longer powerful.
  - Multiple aspects of the messages - technical, political, and local.
    - Technical aspects about the great, amazing aspects of Russian military prowess and superiority of Russia’s systems. Will show the power and strength of their systems.
    - Second layer is political. How well thought out and superior the Russian approach is, based on its brilliant grand strategy.
    - Third component, local politics. Linking the current scenario to the bombing of 1999, thereby attempting to remind the audience that Russia is your protector, and the West your enemy. Also, see how the West treats even its supposed “allies,” thus proving that Serbia should give up from integrating into Europe
  - Some regulars who produce pro-Russian content:
    - Mitar Kovac, runs pro-Russia outlet
    - Dušan Proroković, Serbian journalist, runs NGO Center for Strategic Alternatives
    - Miroslav Lazansky, Serbian journalist, currently Serbian Ambassador to Russia
- **Internationally:**
  - Big foreign media outlets that are producing content with their message. These supportive foreign media entities produce the themes. For example, Russia has planned this glorious exercise with Turkey, this is a new example of how the West is collapsing, we are working with new brothers to fight the outsiders telling us what to do. Russia is a reliable and capable world leader.

### 3. What kinds of metrics would you use to assess whether OIE activities in your AOR are achieving the desired effect in this scenario?

#### PRC

- The number of news outlets disputing versus accepting PRC claims.
- How many times were PRC original inserted propaganda (e.g., fake posts) shared and did the frequency decrease after government/media rectification?
- Analyze Philippine government social media posts and news media coverage:
  - Did they get ahead of PRC narrative spread?
  - Did the first news reporting explicitly refer to PRC influence activities as false information?
- The level of engagement and sharing of pro-Beijing social media activities, both in the Philippines and regionally, as well as internationally.
- The time spent for the targets of PRC cyberattacks to recover hacked websites and .gov accounts and the extent to which the PRC is blamed for these.
- The number of statements from other states in support of the Philippines government versus adopting PRC talking points.
- How many states support PRC resolutions in the UN General Assembly.

#### Russia

- Monitoring media coverage, not just in disinformation outlets but all mainstream media.
- Closely follow the comments in media and social media, match similarities of messaging and how people are expressing their views, looking for repetition of Russian catch-words and phrases.
- Count the number of the articles being reprinted and number of posts shared.
- Monitor the messaging of leaders and decision makers. Are they using similar talking points to those Russia is putting forth and to what extent are they parroting Russia's narratives?
- Measuring how much skepticism (if any) Russian messages are generating in the general public in Serbia and the region.

### 4. What role should OIE be playing in the current scenario compared to other military activities?

#### PRC

- Central to resolving the crisis in its favor.
- Other military activities should be closely coordinated with the OIE.
  - For example, the timing of any aggressive moves will be in part determined by current performance of the PRC information campaign detailed above. Moments where the PRC detects the most doubt locally in the Philippines and the most support internationally would be ripe for military movements near the shoal in our favor.
  - PRC might even stage a collision or other interaction between one of its fishing vessels or Coast Guard ships and the Philippine convoy in order to justify PLAN direct involvement (or at least continued presence near the shoal).

#### Russia

- Information, narrative development, and distribution of messaging is as critical as the exercise of military units. Operating in information space is an essential part of the effort, a part of the hybrid warfare approach.
- Movement of military units or equipment will most likely be done to send messages, not as part of improving military readiness. For example, the deployment of an air-to-air system will be the center of a message of power, ability, and assistance. The system is not deployed to improve military capabilities or interoperability with allies. It is information, messaging is critical.
- The perception of military might, rather than military prowess itself, is essential and indeed is one of the most important aspects of the disinformation effort. Russia will use local actors to repeat the message, narrative. This messaging has a cumulative effect. Targets will be bombarded on a daily basis with stories promoting Russia's military might.

## *ROUND II*

### **Red Team Inputs to New COA Developments – SMA-IIIO TTX**

#### **ALL BUT INDOPACOM: Please provide COA options for responding to two potential outcomes in the Eastern Med:**

1) There is a full-on NATO exercise per Greek requests, and it goes over badly with Turkey, as well as suffering from Russian IO response.

-Will use NATO exercise as “proof” that led by the United States, NATO remains an aggressor as it was in 1999, and that this directly threatens Serbia

-Increase in local appearances of local politicians and leaders across the media, increasing shrillness of rhetoric

-Putin and Erdogan are strong leaders, in charge and standing up against U.S. and the West. Increase use of local politicians to emphasize this message, standing side by side with Russian dignitaries.

-Announce visit of Russian Foreign Minister to Belgrade, who will speak in strong terms about Russia's support for Serbia, and how Russia will defend Serbia against NATO aggression

-Visit of Russian Minister of Defense to Belgrade, announce that Turkey is considering purchase of SU-35 instead of F-35. Emphasizes that Turkey is changing strategic direction, NATO is not relevant, so Serbia should be considering joining the new, stronger, regional order

-Discuss deployment of Russian systems to Serbia to protect against aggression. Russia must also exercise with Serbia to protect against the NATO threat to the region. Tie this to 1999, will never let NATO threaten Serbia again.

-Narrative that “facists” threaten the peace and stability in the region and Russia is working with likeminded allies to address this. With the rise of nationalism in parts of Central and Eastern Europe. The narrative can be spun in many ways, bottom line, the EU and U.S. are tolerant of fascists, Russia is the true anti-facist, it proved this in the past and continues to be the true fighter against facism. Look at the threats all around us, ignored or encouraged by the West, because the West are hypocrites. The U.S. does not really care, it will even support pro-Nazis as long as they are against Russia. The U.S. seeks its satellite countries to fight against Russia the real fighter of facism...so it responds to the RU-TU exercise with a threat of force.

-Announce the creation of a joint Russian-Serbian committee to erect a monument to fighting fascism. (other narratives that result in politically motivated action...not just narratives but action. Ceremonies, commemorations, memorials)

2) There is a limited, bilateral exercise, which goes over badly with Turkey and suffers from Russian IO response.

-Will look for any angle to re-enforce the already prevalent narratives and amplify them, the response to both a NATO exercise and limited, bilateral exercise will be similar in approach, perhaps only more limited in scale. Will push the limits to emphasize narratives.

- Increase television appearances of pro-Russian pundits and politicians on popular prime-time news shows

-NATO alliance is crumbling, Turkey, a senior member of the alliance, is switching sides, not working closely with NATO, so why should Serbia?

-NATO is a thing of the past; Serbia should stay out of the EU and should not be part of any alliance with the West or the U.S.

-Western order is collapsing, so why join something that has no future perspective

**There is concern from the NSC that Beijing could be drawn into the Eastern Med scenario due to the heavy investments made in Greece. What mitigation measures, in terms of OIE, should the DOD be taking in anticipation of that eventuality?**

- Provide proactive and persistent information about what the NATO exercise is designed for. Not just official press releases but assisting local media to present fact-based news and analysis of the exercise, from a local level...not the NATO, EUCOM level.

- Regular NATO exercises ensure interoperability and build capacity which is the cornerstone of the success of the alliance. NATO historically holds exercises to achieve these objectives and will continue to.

**ALL BUT EUCOM: Beijing is clearly using military movements in the INDOPACOM AOR as a talking point about the US being escalatory. How should this be responded to?**

**Please provide COA options for responding to two potential outcomes in the South China Sea:**

1) The PHL MOD has proposed a plan to use its Japanese-supplied MPACs, which can outrun the present CCG vessels, to evade them and return a larger contingent of Marines to the SIERRA MADRE, along with emergency supplies. This prolongs the standoff, while solving the emergent problem – but also introduces Gray Hulls to the situation directly.

- Circulate images of MPACs with a photoshopped Imperial Japanese flag on them on regional and global social media platforms and chat apps.
- Use the escalation to send in the Liaoning carrier strike group to the site
- Initiate air patrols with J-15s from the Liaoning carrier.
- Use the footage of the air patrols to promote nationalism in the PRC. Use the footage in regional newspapers and news outlets to intimidate the PHL gov.
- Organize a snap naval exercise with Cambodia and Myanmar near the site.
- A Pro-Beijing flotilla of civilian ships carrying PRC and regional journalists appear at the site protected by CCG ships. They include Russian, European, LATAM, and African peace activists too. They report live from the site to regional and global news media outlets. They get close and provoke PHL personnel on the SIERRA MADRE. Live footage of PHL personnel attacking the journalists and civilians on the flotilla is widely shared, engaged, and amplified in regional and global social and news media platforms. Live interviews of civilians bleeding from the PHL attacks are broadcast live.
- PHL politicians and NGOs organize a press conference condemning the US for militarizing a humanitarian incident. They urge Duterte to restore PHL sovereignty and work directly with Beijing to resolve the incident.

2) The governments of Indonesia and Singapore have proposed an off-ramp option privately to Manila, Beijing, and Washington: a “Singapore Conference” in which various legal options for the resolution of

the Second Thomas Shoal issue are explored. This potentially includes many unacceptable ideas and may end in no resolution.

- Organize a SCO meeting with all member states plus Russia to offer an alternative mediation forum.
- Organize an emergency ASEAN meeting to reinforce the CCP's role in keeping the incident "civilianized" and regional. Use the BRI to induce full ASEAN members to condemn the US' "militarization" of the incident. Issue an ASEAN resolution encouraging the PHL gov to work directly with Beijing to resolve the incident.
- Start a chat-app based information campaign in all affected countries to protest against the American subversion of PHL sovereignty.
- Start an encrypted chat-app based campaign in all affected countries to encourage cyber defamation on PHL gov and US gov websites
- Key capitals see an increasing rate of protests against US embassies and facilities in the region.
- PHL gov sites are hijacked to show the PRC flag flying.
- The CCP uses the images of such protests to enhance its social media and mass media campaigns criticizing the US' subversion of regional stability and sovereignty.
- Pressure Indonesia with the threat of withdrawing BRI projects not to participate in the Singapore conference.

**In both cases, what action should be taken to address the potential concerns of other allies in the region?**

- Targeted vilification campaigns to drive a deep wedge between the PHL gov. and the USG to ensure other allies lessen their dependence on the USG.
- At the same time, promote regional and "Asian" collaboration to sideline the USG.
- Promote the CCP as the main defender of regional stability and independence from the USG.
- Punish the PHL gov for working with the USG. But reward regional allies supporting the CCP's position on the incident.
- Use the incident to elevate the strategic significance of ASEA and the CCP's role in it.
- Continue to support local pro-Russian pundits and politicians in Macedonia and Montenegro to look for any angle to reenforce the already prevalent narratives and amplify them.
- NATO is threatening regional stability. We are all subservient to NATO and the U.S. and are losing our sovereignty.

**TTX Beta<sup>4</sup>**

**Round I**

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<sup>4</sup> Note that the messages exchanged between teams, as well as the internal deliberations of each cell are not included in this report. If you wish to request access to these data, please contact the Strategic Multilayer Assessment Office in the Joint Staff, J39 DDGO.

## Scenario

### **In the South China Sea**

Tensions continue to rise in the Philippine EEZ in the South China Sea with escalating clashes between Chinese Maritime Militias, and the new Philippine CAAS militia – as well as increasingly aggressive statements by both governments. In the wake of a major typhoon, the BRP SIERRA MADRE, sitting atop Second Thomas Shoal shows signs of significant structural damage to its deck.

Plans have been discussed for replacement structures, and last week, the Philippine Western Command announced that the ship will be repaired and a platform erected across the damaged portions of the deck. Preparations have been made for a convoy to take the requisite materials as well as rotate the Marines stationed on the SIERRA MADRE.

Before the convoy departed, the PRC Foreign Ministry issued a strong statement denouncing Manila's intentions to begin illegal construction on the shoal, and insisting that the remains of the SIERRA MADRE should be sunk and abandoned. Beijing further declared that the PRC is prepared to take steps to prevent such illegal construction and hinted that personnel from nearby CCG forces could be deployed to the ship to prevent repairs.

The Philippine government vigorously denounced the Chinese statements and insisted that the repair of the ship through the addition of a platform is not 'construction' of a new structure of any kind, does not violate the 2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DoC) signed by China and ASEAN, and that it is being undertaken because refurbishment is required to improve safety and living conditions for the Philippine personnel. Manila also stated that the SIERRA MADRE is a commissioned Philippine Navy vessel, that any attempt by the PRC to place personnel on the ship would constitute an intolerable breach of international law and may be considered an act of war, and that such personnel would be removed "by any means necessary." It was also announced that the resupply convoy would be carrying representatives of Philippine and international media.

Twenty-four hours ago, Philippine navy and coast guard ships set out to return a garrison to the vessel, and bring new steel pylons of sufficient depth to provide the basis for a future platform. The government ships stopped fifteen nautical miles from the SIERRA MADRE, while the marines and equipment were transferred to a civilian trawler which then headed for the remains of the vessel. However, the CCG dispatched a task force which intercepts the Philippines convoy and effectively blocks it from reaching the SIERRA MADRE. As the CCG ships maneuver themselves between the Philippine convoy and its destination, PLAN ships from the South Sea Fleet deploy about 30nm north of Second Thomas Shoal. The Philippines Western Command has launched a C-295 flight with the goal of dropping short term supplies on the SIERRA MADRE until the full resupply can take place.

### **Meanwhile, in the EUCOM AOR...**

The crisis in the South China seas detailed above has come on the heels of a major announcement of the first large-scale military exercise in the Mediterranean involving the EU NAVFOR and the PLAN.



Following the highly successful round of top-level mil-to-mil meetings between Chinese and Southern European leaders, this week China has announced the Janus 2021 maritime interoperability exercise. Janus 2021 is to involve coordinated maneuvers between the PLAN and Hellenic Navy components of NAVFOR, planned to take place in the Saronic Gulf – an area explored by Turkish vessels for natural gas. A special forces component is planned at the port of Piraeus. The latest intelligence reports suggest that a small unit of the PLA Ground Forces is to join the latter part of the exercise. In addition, the exercise will include a small component of PLA CH-92A drones, similar to those sold to Serbia in 2020. There is apparently interest on the part of the Greek government in making a similar acquisition.

China and Greece have previously held a much smaller joint exercise in these contested waters - and European powers had backed the Greek claims against Turkey at the time. Unsurprisingly, Ankara has reacted badly to this latest step-up in the scope and intensity of military activity, is dispatching additional naval vessels to patrol the drilling sites, and starting regular rounds of fighter jet overflights. In addition, NGOs working in North-western Turkey have already started to report an up-tick in the number of refugees, many of whom are testing positive for COVID-19 – Eastern Greece would be the first to be hit by this influx.

Sources in several European capitals have indicated that the decision makers seem somewhat caught off balance by these sudden developments. Unlike the previous Greek-Chinese exercise, Brussels has been in no rush to express continued support to Greece in the face of the Turkish outcry. However, there does not seem to be any immediate actions in the works to warn Turkey off either - so it is really not clear how Europe might balance this out. Regarding European reactions to the Chinese military step up in the continent, sources close to decision makers in Southern and Eastern Europe suggest that the fear of losing considerable Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) investments are likely to make it difficult to find a consensus response, especially through NATO channels.

Despite long-held concerns by the U.S. and NATO over a Chinese-Russia rapprochement, Moscow also seems put off by China's stepping into what Russia considers its back yard. Intelligence reports suggest that several LNG terminals controlled by the same company in the port of Piraeus have been experiencing a ransomware attack with a possible attribution to a known Russian non-government actor. In addition, several German and French parliamentarians have been approached by lobbyists linked to significant business stakes in Russia. There are indications that the Russian calls for mutually deepening trade relations are being well received in European economies exhausted by COVID. Such developments would likely break the EU consensus when the time comes to vote on extending sanctions on Russia in the near future.

With Greece wrapped up in a rapidly escalating multi-frontier crisis, and the U.S. focused on the situation in the South China seas, European capitals are facing unenviable choices. NATO seems torn between internal geopolitical struggles and U.S. requests for extraterritorial support, and the need for a strategic response to China at a time when unity is so hard to come by.

## BLUE INDOPACOM COA REPORT:

### **1. Please outline the OIE activities you believe the commands and organizations in your AOR should be engaged in to address the current scenario.**

National Military Command Center (NMCC) Pentagon monitoring situation. J3 alerts the CJCS and SECDEF while developing crisis COAs for senior leader consideration. POLADS (policy advisors) engaged with DOS country representatives to launch de-escalation procedures. DoD messaging is prepared to amplify and reinforce NATO and EU positions.

Specifically dispatch U.S. Navy amphibious ready group (ARG) with a Marine expeditionary unit (MEU) prepared to conduct interdiction operations. Maneuver requisite U.S. Navy group in the region as a physical presence to amplify U.S. and allied messaging.

J9/J5/POLAD conduct Inter-Agency coordination to generate guidance from Joint Staff, DoD and the National Security Staff, as well as to generate from Allies/Partners support for pressure vs PRC and support to the RoP.

-- Specific actions: a senior delegation of US and Allies to meet with PHIL JCS for consultations aligned, request for a special envoy to meet with regional leaders to build consensus against PRC efforts to stop the humanitarian relief to the SIERRA MADRE while ensuring that this story is pressed with all news bureaus. Placing DoS in the lead while backing that lead with a unified US and partner engagement keeps us deescalated strategically while buying the maneuver space for diplomacy or additional movement of surge capabilities.

INDOPACOM-On-going processes for synchronizing Ops, Actions, Investments at USINDPACOM via CommSynch WG and development of Information Concept of Support (Concept/Comms Obj/Desired Perceptions/Audiences/Relevant Actors/Key Themes/Information Support Matrix)

J39-Conduct MISO in AOR; Coordinate with USAGM on regional messaging

J2: Expand/promote info sharing to support USDAO/DATT to increase regional partner/Allied interaction/support

PAO: Conduct Media/Social Media operations highlighting CDR Statements/Engagements, OA&I that supports mission—(Inform U.S. and communicate to PRC, RoP and others intent/capability of U.S.)

CDR/SLE: Develop scripts for and use meetings/phonecalls to Generate support for U.S. actions ISO RoP and of Int'l law.

Assessment: Polling, SM monitoring, sentiment analysis, KLE statements, J5 PHI, JPN, AUS, NZL and other support requested actions.

J35/J3: Conduct operations/movements to demonstrate support for desired outcomes and coordinate with J39/PA/SLE to reflect activity in media/SM and engagements.

### **2. Identify the key stakeholders for OIE in your AOR, given the current scenario, along with the most important message for each to be receiving**

Allies--

Govt of Philippines, populace: Key Message (KM): Aggression against RoP is a common threat to our regional stability, we will cooperate to defeat it. (OBJ: Assure Govt /people of Philippines of U.S. support); Perception: U.S. support/actions demonstrate commitment to Mutual Defense.

Regional Allies & Partners: Specifically: Japan, Aus/NZ--Shared commitment to regional stability and any aggression is common threat (OBJ: A&P assured of U.S. commitment to stability/security)

Relevant Actors: PRC/CCP/PLA--PRC threats of force are counter-productive and U.S. will protect interests/Allies. (OBJ: Deterrence) Perception: PRC rethinks actions

Inform only: U.S. Population: Populace aware of threats to and alliance support for RoP.

**3. What OIE activities are/should be already in place in the relevant AOR, prior to the development of this scenario, that would support US efforts?**

All above should have processes in place to support in day-to-day operations and established or adaptable plans to support.

Regular FON ops are ongoing not only by U.S. forces, but also Japanese and Australian. The British and French have said they would join these FON ops.

The U.S. administration has said, more than once, China's maritime claims are unlawful and, words to the effect, "the PRC and all whose forces operate in the South China Sea must know, responsible maritime forces act with professionalism and restraint in the exercise of their authorities."

**4. What kinds of metrics would you use to assess whether OIE activities in your AOR are achieving the desired effect in this scenario?**

Assessment: Polling, SM monitoring, sentiment analysis, KLE statements, J5 PHI, JPN, AUS, NZL and other support requested actions.

**5. What role should OIE be playing in the current scenario compared to other military activities?**

OIE should be the predominant response in this situation (even a FON op or a military overflight sends a message, and therefore constitutes Operations in the Information Environment) until INDOPACOM is directed otherwise by the National Command Authorities.

**BLUE EUCOM COA REPORT:**

**1. Please outline the OIE activities you believe the commands and organizations in your AOR should be engaged in to address the current scenario.**

1. Clear and unified, preferably NATO-led strategic messaging.-- Agreed and due to the emphasis put on the disunity of sentiment out of US media and media commentary (like CNN/FOX) there would need to be a strong message coordinated with possibly OSD, but delivered through DOS, EUCOM should have the resources to help influence and/or energize this discussion. (CJM)

2. Development of a consistent narrative. -- Depending on the definition of this word, this will typically be set by the WH and iteratively aligned to by subordinate structures, DOD/DOS>EMB/COCOM>Subordinate/service elements. (CJM)

3. Activation of an Information Warfare team to bring together the core IW disciplines (ISR, IO, EMSO, Cyber, WX) into a single planning team. -- I believe this exists already in a standing capacity, it would be more of a concerted effort to enact any relevant plans into current, pre-conflict phasing. Additional IW/IRC disciplines which need be heavily considered are any which focus on strategic/national-level engagements, such as POLMIL, SCOs, etc. Additionally, these types of disruptive actions traditionally have significant amounts of disinformation and misinformation associated which can distract from other adversarial objectives. There will need to be proactive communications to mitigate dis/misinfo in the IE, as well as outreach with non-owned communication assets (for example EU vs Disinfo or Bellingcat type entities). (CJM)

4. The command should look at what exercises are taking place in the Eastern Med, particularly with NATO allies and partners, where the command can message the strength of the alliance. -- I think we're taking the combined exercise request with Greece as a given, however is there consideration going into the "tit for tat" nature this is establishing and is a combined exercise the right answer at this time? Does it send a message of reacting to RUS and Turkey, which is an inherent position of weakness or is it really showing strength? I would imagine this is a good opportunity to explore other COAs to both provide to the CDR and also to the Greeks if there's still time to offer adjustments. (CJM)

**2. Identify the key stakeholders for OIE in your AOR, given the current scenario, along with the most important message for each to be receiving**

NATO – unity and steadfast nature of the Treaty members

Senior National Reps – US commitment

EUCOM (+CENTCOM due to Turkish proximity) – Unity of effort

EU – Stability is our goal

US – The strength of our partners and allies ensures our national security

**3. What OIE activities are/should be already in place in the relevant AOR, prior to the development of this scenario, that would support US efforts?**

Informational warfighting/competition cross-functional teams

Interagency coordination cells/mechanisms

Combined coordination/engagement mechanisms with exercise and plans either input or integration (could be a relationship between SHAPE, the SCO, and EUCOM J7 and/or J5)

**4. What kinds of metrics would you use to assess whether OIE activities in your AOR are achieving the desired effect in this scenario?**

- NATO communications (qualitative)

- Adversarial actions (quantitative and qualitative)

- NATO nation actions (quantitative and qualitative)

- Public sentiment assessments/surveys (qualitative)

- IE (adversarial/friendly/neutral) message penetration (qualitative and quantitative)

**5. What role should OIE be playing in the current scenario compared to other military activities?**

OIE efforts should focus on:

- Amplifying upcoming combined exercises and operations

- Mitigating disinformation/misinformation effects

- Maintaining cyber postures

- Deterring further escalation of RUS aggression (may be unattainable or hard to measure)

- Aligning to WH and NSC priorities while maintaining enduring relationships in the EUCOM AO

**BLUE D.C. COA REPORT:**

**1. Please outline the OIE activities you believe the DOD should be taking to address the current scenario. Please also note where the lead role for coordinating action should sit with OSD Policy, and where it should sit with the Joint Staff.**

Per current guidance, the USD(P) actual should personally be the lead for coordinating action in their capacity as the Principal IO Advisor. SECDEF guidance appears to prevent this from being delegated. On the Joint Staff side, the J39 should be the lead for coordination.

Potential Activities include:

**2. Identify the key stakeholders for OIE in both AORs, given the current scenario, along with the most important message for each to be receiving**

The NSC policy coordination committee (PCC) responsible for information statecraft and/or the current crisis. Apologize, not certain if this terminology reflects the current administration, so speaking generically.

DOD

ASD(PA)

JS J39

Combatant Commands (Functional and relevant geographic)

JS J3 Crisis Action Team

DTRA

DOT

DOE

DOC

DOJ

USAID

USAGM

FFRDCs

Think Tanks

**3. What OIE activities are/should be already in place in the relevant AORs, prior to the development of this scenario, that would support US efforts?**

Development of an operational approach laying out a framework for activities - identification of the current situation, the desired end-state, relevant audiences, desired behaviors of the relevant audiences (objectives), lines of effort to achieve those objectives, measures of performance of activities along each line of effort, and measures of effectiveness to determine how we are assessing if we are achieving what we want to achieve

Approval of the relevant authorities for information capabilities to conduct measures of performance along each lines of effort (e.g. space, STO, MILDEC, MISO, etc) and to assess the identified measures of effectiveness

Standing guidance for the employment of information capabilities in theater (e.g. space, STO, EW, PA, MISO, OPSEC)

Approval of sufficient funding in the POM for the available information capabilities to conduct the designated measures of performance and to assess the identified measures of effectiveness

Establishment of the procedures (e.g. working groups, etc) for how information capabilities coordinate their activities within the theater and the procedures for cross-combatant command coordination with OSD and the JS.

**4. What kinds of metrics would you use to assess whether OIE activities across the two AORs are achieving the desired effect in this scenario?**

Assessment is about understanding current and desired conditions in the OE, and observing changes in the OE, based upon actions taken. Metrics would include both qualitative and quantitative measures of target audiences and their activities. Given strong analysis of the current situation, it would be possible to measure the volume (quantity metrics) of activity across media outlets, to measure interest. Perceptual change can also be measured against baseline interests to give insights into qualitative change (quality metrics), relative to stated goals and objectives. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a dynamic tool to provide rapid analysis (scanning key words across foreign language responses) to produce a rapid assessment of "tone" within target audiences.

**5. What role should OIE be playing in the current scenario compared to other military activities?**

If uncontrolled escalation is authorized, OIE still plays a critical role in how we think through the implications of our actions. This is where Commanders often come-up short in exercising their OIE responsibilities. There are different considerations above and below the level of armed conflict...but essential IO obligations none-the-less. How do all of our potential actions support the NSC and DoS narratives?

If the intent is to achieve the U.S. desired end-state while mitigating the risk of escalation above the threshold of armed conflict, then OIE should be in the lead for all activities - every action contemplated should be assessed in terms of the behavior desired from relevant audiences. Careful attention should also be given to controlling for the likely potential misperceptions as adversaries interpret the incoming information they receive from US/Partner/Ally operations, activities, and investments.

**BLUE INTERAGENCY COA REPORT:**

**1. Please outline the activities you believe agencies other than DOD should be carrying out to provide an advantage to the US in the information environment across these two scenarios.**

The USG goal in the South China Sea scenario is de-escalation. The topline message is to urge all parties to remain calm. Message of support for the Philippines must be muted in order to avoid giving Manila the impression it has a blank check. Any DOD public statements must be cleared by NSC. NSC will coordinate diplomatic strategy led by State/EAP and supported by EUR, Public Affairs, and Global Engagement Center. EAP will draft press guidance and Department statement and coordinate with WH SPOX. EAP and EUR will instruct Embassies, USEU, USNATO, and USASEAN to seek joint statements from allies (particularly London, Paris, Berlin, Seoul, Tokyo, and Canberra) echoing U.S. urge for calm. Privately, USNATO will convene other members to get Greece and Turkey to sign on to joint statement reinforcing solidarity vis-a-vis Russia, while USEU will urge von der Leyen to convince Greece to temper its rhetoric. Efforts at USASEAN will focus on coordinating statements from friendly countries with SCS concerns (Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam; perhaps Thailand). EUR and GEC Russia Threat Team will track Russian-affiliated media statements on Turkey, but not respond directly to avoid giving them oxygen. State IO will instruct USUN to monitor Philippines' interest in an emergency security council session; NSC and State will continue to consider whether to support or head off in line with carefully calibrated support for Manila.

**2. Identify the key stakeholders for OIE in both AORs, given the current scenario, along with the most important message for each to be receiving**

Primary stakeholders are national governments (Beijing, Manila, London, Paris, Berlin, Seoul, Tokyo, Canberra, Athens, Ankara; perhaps Jakarta, KL, Hanoi, Bangkok) and international organizations (UN, EU, NATO, ASEAN). Topline message is to urge Beijing and Manila to de-escalate: They should stop their provocations immediately, withdraw to pre-typhoon positions, and enter into negotiations over the future of the area. Secondary message for Russia and Greece is importance of NATO solidarity. State PA and GEC and Embassy/IO Mission PAOs will use social media, traditional media, public events to amplify State/NSC talking points, Department/WH statements, coordinated ally/IO statements. Given the urgency of de-escalation, a separate messaging strategy to publics in the AORs is not warranted, and in the case of the PRC, Philippine, or Greek/Turkish publics could backfire by raising tensions rather than calming them.

**3. What OIE activities are/should be already in place in the relevant AOR, prior to the development of this scenario, that would support US efforts?**

Robust public diplomacy in the affected countries, to allow speedy amplification of U.S. and coordinated ally/IO statements. VOA is a perennial resource that the USG could use to issue editorials, but it has no Philippines-specific, Tagalog service. Ongoing, long-term USAID development assistance in the Philippines and other key ASEAN countries (to the extent that it improves public view of the United States).

**4. What kinds of metrics would you use to assess whether OIE activities in your AOR are achieving the desired effect in this scenario?**

The key impact metric will be whether coordinated public statements by the U.S., allies, and international organizations achieve the U.S. object of de-escalation -- specifically, convincing Beijing and Manila to stop provocations, withdraw to pre-typhoon positions, and enter into negotiations over the future of the area. Outcome metrics will include: number of countries/IO statements supporting de-escalation, number expressing measured support for the Philippines, the number supporting the PRC, and the number of forces in the area.

**5. What role should OIE be playing in the current scenario compared to other military activities?**

At this stage of the scenario, efforts to defuse the crisis will depend almost exclusively on OIE in the form of traditional private diplomacy and limited public diplomacy. DOD OIE efforts will support and amplify the whole-of-government response led by NSC and State. Additional U.S. and allied military action would be counterproductive at this time.

## Round II

### Scenario:

#### The South China Sea:

It has been a week since the start of the standoff over the SIERRA MADRE. China Coast Guard vessels continue to enforce their effective blockade of the resupply convey, while now joined by a significant number of maritime militia "fishing vessels" which are engaging in dangerous behavior towards PHL vessels (shadowing too closely, playing "chicken" etc). Their presence is being covered in Chinese mainstream and social media as a spontaneous act of national pride. A substantial PLAN presence (three

DDGs and two FFGs) has also taken up position at a distance sufficient to intervene should there be further escalation – but described as a “routine exercise.”

At the direction of SecDef, in order to maintain appropriate options for POTUS, significant movement has been initiated throughout the US military presence in the INDOPACOM AOR – including substantial and observable changes in readiness, and the re-deployment of the RONALD REAGAN from a port visit in Singapore to sail by Palawan on her way to Japan.

The situation is being continuously and widely covered by global media. US officials from State, Defense, and the White House have maintained a calm but firm line against “Chinese aggression in the South China Sea,” and a focus on the importance of respecting Philippine sovereignty and concern for the wellbeing of the PHL personnel. Overall, US allied governments in the region have echoed these concerns, and have expressed support for the ongoing US role in the region. Questions about the actual prospect of direct military support to Manila, have, however, been deflected by all. Importantly, Manila has also generally avoided mentioning any need or desire for US support, and has downplayed the importance of the situation in international media.

Domestically in the PHL the situation appears complicated. Some media – especially anti-government media – are carrying stories calling the stranded Marines national heroes, and condemning a lack of stronger action. However, other anti-government media – with strong backing from PRC aligned international media – are running the storyline from Beijing: the entire incident is the result of a corrupt alignment with historically imperialist interests from the US, and not in favor of the actual national security interests of the Philippines. This story is being bolstered by some leaked documents purporting to show that the contractors hired to provide the repair supplies for the SIERRA MADRE had bribed a government official with money obtained from a US businessman.

Elsewhere, Beijing is also on the offensive, with a concerted media campaign accusing the Philippines and the US of militarizing a civilian police matter. “This is a straightforward maritime law dispute,” the PRC Foreign Ministry spokeswoman said on Wednesday, “as it always has been – which the Philippine government, with the tacit support of the US, has irresponsibly escalated into a potential military confrontation.”

Behind closed doors, the attitude in DC is nervous. Communication with Manila is minimal and terse. Formal bilateral coms have not been requested on the military side, and informal consultations have suggested serious reservations, not only from the political leadership, but the MOD, to ask for US support. A note from the Defense Attaché in Manila, which has been circulating, contains the phrase: “They are frankly afraid to ask us for backup, because they worry there won’t really be an answer – or worse, the answer will be: no.”

## **The Eastern Med**

Meanwhile, in the eastern Med this week...



After internal debate, the administration has greenlighted the Greek request for a joint LIVEX. Consultations are now underway through NAC mechanisms on whether this should be a bilateral or a NATO exercise. Media coverage in Europe has been extremely mixed, with considerable expressions of skepticism on the value of inflaming tensions with Russia over what a prominent French public intellectual described as “parochial tensions between Turkey and Greece which are really a cover for the extractive industry to get ahold of the few litres of hydrocarbons we have not already sucked out of the seabed.”

However, concern has also been rising in Brussels, with significant public and private discussion by EU leadership about the problem, and how to craft an appropriate response that does not lead to a perceived EU/US/NATO rift, while still maintaining national, sovereign options with regard to both Russia and Turkey. A BBC-Europe poll conducted early in the week showed mixed responses to the situation, with many respondents in the Central European countries and the Balkans expressing skepticism about the Greek government’s position and the desirability of any US involvement in the dispute. Meanwhile, NGOs working in North-western Turkey have started to report a tick-up in the number of refugees, many of whom are testing positive for COVID-19.

Publicly, the US administration has continued to emphasize its strong and revitalized commitment to Transatlantic security. In private conversations, close European allies are questioning what actions the US would be willing to commit to in this evolving situation. There is perceptible frustration on the working level regarding the slow and reactive nature of NATO’s responses thus far.

In addition, the international events of the past week did not go unnoticed by the US domestic public - the US administration is picking up increasing flak from local business lobbies for “allowing China to walk all over us”, and the more liberal think-tanks and activists are increasingly vocal about the US failure to lead internationally, yet again.

In the last few hours, US ISR has indicated that several natural gas terminals controlled by the same company in Greece appear to be experiencing a ransomware attack with a possible attribution to a known Russian non-government actor....

#### **BLUE INDOPACOM COA REPORT:**

Guidance from the administration now is that “we need to stop playing defense – on the OIE front in particular.” In answering the below, please assume you can exercise the full extent of current EXORD authorities to respond to Red in the OIE space. In your responses please be specific on messaging.

- 1. Beijing is clearly using military movements in the INDOPACOM AOR as a talking point about the US being escalatory. How should this be responded to?**

Messaging:

The US will honor regional commitments to peace and stability as well as historic treaty obligations. Working with and through our allies and partners is one of the great strengths that the US offers to the community of nations. Nations either support the existing international norms that have provided for

prosperity, or they call into question if their motives are cause for greater concern regionally and globally.

China's actions are unlawful.

Sending PLAN and CCG ships is a clear escalation and bullying tactic. Note: U.S. must amplify and intensify through our actions in this crisis our policy position stated in 2019, WRT PAFM and CCG when operating in military capacities. In January 2019, at a meeting between Admiral John Richardson, the Chief of Naval Operations for the U.S. Navy, and his Chinese counterpart, People's Liberation Army Navy chief Vice Admiral Shen Jinlong, CNO told them that we would treat these forces as military if they misbehaved.

China's unlawful bullying over the Second Thomas Shoal and its surrounding waters has a long history. China has ignored set international law, and has consistently re-written history. They act as if China is still an empire and that neighboring powers are tributary states beholden to the PRC as the suzerain. The Chinese have said, more than once, they are a big country, and their neighbors are small countries. China is a large country, with much to offer the world. But being a big country does not mean China can freely ignore the sovereign and legal rights of other countries. It cannot be allowed to bully other nations.

China has created a humanitarian and security crisis.

The U.S. stands with its ally, the Republic of the Philippines.

SLEs:

SecDos to SecFA, SECDef to SecND, NSA to NSA

Rationale, further actions:

U.S. message should reinforce a one-hundred plus year history of preserving sea lines of communications for all countries throughout the region. The messaging must also include the global audience since the denial of free access to waterways impacts the global economy as well as individual nation GDP. This messaging campaign should be bolstered by a demonstration of rapid joint force deployment of forces deployed to shore-up the Philippian government's military and ambitions to preserve and secure their sovereign rights to this area. This U.S. (Joint Force) messaging initiative must be employed while 1) protecting Joint Forces from malign influences; 2) support human and automated decision-making and 3) inform and influence relevant actors throughout the conflict and well into the post-conflict phase in order to reinforce and amplify U.S. and allied successes.

- 2. Please provide COA options for responding to two potential outcomes in the South China Sea: 1. The PHL MOD has proposed a plan to use its Japanese-supplied MPACs, which can outrun the present CCG vessels, to evade them and return a larger contingent of Marines to the SIERRA MADRE, along with emergency supplies. This prolongs the standoff, while solving the emergent problem – but also introduces Gray Hulls to the situation directly. 2. The governments of Indonesia and Singapore have proposed an off-ramp option privately to Manila, Beijing, and Washington: a “Singapore Conference” in which various legal options for the resolution of the Second Thomas Shoal issue are explored. This potentially includes many unacceptable ideas and may end in no resolution.**

Outcome 1:

In both case, a P\* overflight with international media. Ensure wide coverage of ensuing reports.

COA 1: Clandestinely help the Philippines provide airdrop of supplies (rationale: PH has successfully conducted airdrop before. Even if we help, let PH take credit.)

Clandestinely conduct sabotage scalable effects campaign for a short duration against CCG and CMM vessels in the immediate area and where ever found globally. Seek to highlight CMM vessels do not meet the legal requirements as part of the PLA(N) and may be subject to being declared Pirates or Terrorist vessels which may be prosecuted to the fullest extent of Maritime and local nation law. Request FVEY, FRA, JPN and ROK issue similar statements.

COA 2: Utilize PHL fishing and craft of opportunity to resupply SIERRA MADRE, Grey hulls utilized to shadow CCG or PLA(N) vessels in the area overtly, must be willing to accept damage in games of "chicken". Surge US theater SOF to embark US vessels, and conduct no-notice training with regional maritime forces on Enhanced- Maritime Interception Operations to include boardings and seizures of "illicit and illegal" vessels violating national sovereignty. Conduct similar events in other GCCs wherever large portions of the PRC fishing fleet and factory ships may be found.

Utilize USCG internationally to conduct "safety and sea worthiness" inspections, request that allies and partners conduct similar operations and where able, seize any illicit cargo, vessels.

COA 3: US announce its intention to send commercial vessel under US FLAG to provide supplies to SIERRA MADRE to include construction materials. Any attempt to interfere with freedom of navigation by foreign military or NON-military forces will be treated as an unfriendly act and will be treated as such at the time and place of the US choosing. The US respects and supports PHL sovereignty claims in the West Philippine Sea, as established by the 2016 Hague ruling, this ruling being legal and binding to all states, and will aid in ensuring that damage to SIERRA MADRE does not pose any ecological threat to the maritime environment or people in the region.

OUTCOME 2:

COA 1: Fully embrace the conference, ensure media coverage of acceptance. Appeal to regional nations and Manila to attend this venue. Accept that no resolution will come from the venue but more time will be gained during which PHIL can bolster the manning of SIERRA MADRE and also conduct necessary repairs to the vessel.

COA 2: Conditionally accept conference, but only AFTER Beijing. Assert that one topic of the conference must be acceptance of the 2016 Hague ruling as legal and binding. Expect this will be unacceptable to PRC, but keeps US and PHL position clearly rooted in international law, and makes any PRC responses counter-productive (or can be easily framed in that light).

COA 3: Accept the concept of a conference, but bring to UNSC for Russia to host said conference. Takes Russia off E. MED, provides the image of Russia as a great power, potentially puts Russia and PRC at odds if Russia accepts. Cite that Russia has no territorial interests in the SCS, but does is a Pacific nation with global economic and security interests that they are best suited to oversee this issue. Expect that while no endstate, acceptable to the parties involved, will be reached. There are a number of "wins" that can be exploited across the whole of government, and by other SCS nations. This would enable the US to reuse many of the tools used by Secretary Kissinger in placing the PRC and Russia in competition with each other, causing a reassessment of the correlation of forces.

In either case, if conference fails as expected, publicize China's failure to cooperate.

### **3. In both cases, what action should be taken to address the potential concerns of other allies in the region?**

Messages to allies and partners:

1. Respecting freedom of navigation and adhering to international norms are essential for peace and economic growth in the Indo-Pacific. \*\*\*The PRC must abide by the rules-based international order and diplomacy; their actions to date are contrary to that and antagonize their neighbors.
2. We will cooperate with China to reduce the risk of miscalculation and to deescalate, but they must act in good faith with all parties.. \*\*\*We seek to maintain open lines of communication between our countries and militaries to reduce the risk of miscalculation and reaffirm we will operate wherever international law allows.
3. We are greatly concerned by the PRC's continued efforts to violate the rules-based international order throughout the Indo-Pacific. \*\*\*China's actions stand in contrast to U.S. and A&P vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific, in which all nations, large and small, are secure in their sovereignty, free from coercion, and able to pursue economic growth consistent with accepted international rules and norms.
4. The PRC seeks to weaken regional order and the sovereignty of countries, the international rights to the global commons; the flourishing network of allies, partners and friends who seek a Free and Open Indo-Pacific; and it undermines, as well, institutions such as ASEAN and its member states.
5. The PRC is seeking to establish a more robust overseas logistics and basing infrastructure to allow the PLA to project and sustain military power at greater distances in the Indo-Pacific theater.\*\*\* This crisis is an example of their plan to use all of its diplomatic, economic, military and information powers to achieve its desired end state.
6. The PRC believes in a hierarchy where it is the only superpower and will leverage all of its capabilities and capacities to achieve that goal.
7. We are grateful to be here with our closest allies, partners and friends...to increase our ability to work together and underscore we are stronger together than alone.

KLEs and Senior Leader interactions with Ally and Partner nation counterparts are critical to building trust-based international relationships:

9. Deep, enduring relationships with allies and partners are what allow us to succeed, and distinguish us from the PRC.

-- DoS & DoD KLEs with Japan, SKorea, Thailand, India, Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore, Australia, New Zealand (no priority order). The PRC will want to sideline as many of these A&Ps who also have concerns with PRC actions as it relates to maritime territorial boundaries and EEZs.

-- DoS KLE with TWN. The fear could be this incident is used as a PRC diversion for an invasion of TWN. We will need to make sure they stay out of the mix and not provoke a broader problem set for the U.S. and other A&Ps.

-- The PRC has demonstrated (especially with ROK and AUS) to use economic punishment when they've supported U.S. positions in theater. They will be concerned with any other near-peer military competitor than can be dragged into the fight (JPN, SKOR, AUS, Singapore). They will want to know if they can expect economic support. from USG.

Note:

Do we or should we anticipate any ABO issues with other allies in the region to provide support to PHL, or possibly require unilateral action or treaty enforcement requirements. If so, we will need to make sure that is addressed and clearly marked what we need from them and in turn what will turn them away from us.

## BLUE D.C. COA REPORT:

Guidance from the administration now is that “we need to stop playing defense – on the OIE front in particular.” In answering the below, please assume you can exercise the full extent of current EXORD authorities to respond to Red in the OIE space. In your responses please be specific on messaging.

- 1. Please provide COA options for responding to two potential outcomes in the Eastern Med:  
1. There is a full on NATO exercise per Greek requests and it goes over badly with Turkey, as well as suffering from Russian IO response. 2. There is a limited, bilateral exercise, which goes over badly with Turkey and suffers from Russian IO response.**

Key to countering Russian IO response in both potential outcomes is proactive communication of truthful messaging and imagery through diplomatic channels, key leader engagement, public affairs, with NATO in the lead and NATO member amplification. DoD role should be active engagement through interagency process (PC/DC/PCC) in encouraging DOS to take lead role in diplomatic outreach to Turkey and Greece and to notify USEMB in region to conduct key leader engagement to support those efforts. DoD need to alert Senior Defense Officials of need for military to military outreach to support DOS efforts and to discuss coordination of U.S. and Ally messaging activities. DoD needs to open direct channel with NATO to discuss coordination of messaging activities. DoD needs to develop options for public engagements by Senior Defense Officials to provide context for US/NATO activities as a proactive means of countering Russian IO response. Whatever happens, we should avoid a tit-for-tat counter to Russian IO - all that is likely to do is make the issue more visible and is unlikely to convince anyone of anything.

The following options apply to both outcomes. However, IF the bilateral exercise is sanctioned by NATO. Then NATO should also take the lead in this issue and we should support NATO efforts to resolve this via the NAC. NATO should definitely take the lead if there is a full on NATO exercise.

The following options are for US support to NATO multilateral efforts and not intended as a purely bilateral response.

Across all options, we are going to want to attribute at the earliest opportunity the pipeline attack to the responsible party. Additionally, add this to discussion with Turkey. Recognize that Turkey is not directly responsible for the attacks but NATO will not be intimidated by such activity.

In addition, DoD needs to develop and push comm guidance to CCMDs and services. There would/should be J39 coord as a matter of course - especially when it comes to identifying relevant audiences, desired perceptions, etc. Key challenge is lack of any central authority to do this work and coordinate it across the department. Having a PIOA dedicated to this effort would address that problem - question is whether USD(P) would have time or if they delegated the work to someone who was not the PIOA whether they would have the authority.

Option 1: Diplomatic Hard Ball. Call TUR AMB in for consultations with DOS/White House. USAMB meeting with TUR FM/President. Military to Military engagement with TURMIL. Communication of benefits of NATO and potential consequences of further escalation. Identification of "carrots" to use with TUR (e.g. trade, economic, military assistance) to encourage cooperation. Identification of potential "sticks" (e.g. trade, economic, military assistance) to discourage escalation. Synchronize private communications with active key leader engagement and strategic communications by Senior White House, DOS, and DoD Officials to provide context and keep pressure on. In addition, Services can align

efforts with the broader DOD effort in such a way as that even units not directly tied to the theaters can showcase capability, readiness, resolve, etc.

Option 2: De-escalation and informal pressure campaign. USAMB engagement with TUR FM and Military to Military engagement with TURMIL to communicate understanding of TUR position and to emphasize limits of exercise and its impact on TUR national interests. Communication of benefits of NATO and potential consequences of further escalation. Identification of "carrots" to use with TUR (e.g. trade, economic, military assistance) to encourage cooperation. Synchronize private communications with key leader engagement and strategic communications by Senior White House, DOS, and DoD Officials to provide context and encourage de-escalation.

Option 3: Counter-attack. Non-attributional escalation directly against RUS and their affiliates below the threshold of armed conflict to impose costs on their IO response and malign influence on TUR.

Option 4: Hybrid option of some combination of options 1-3.

**2. There is concern from the NSC that Beijing could be drawn into the Eastern Med scenario due to the heavy investments made in Greece. What mitigation measures, in terms of OIE, should the DOD be taking in anticipation of that eventuality?**

Focus comments on the Departments continued support for NATO relationships and exercises. This will be a diplomatic juggling act between Greek NATO alignment and Chinese investment. Unfortunately, China is heavily invested in Greece to include wanting to make a Greek port of Piraeus the largest hub for European trade to china. China is heavily invested in the energy and other sectors of Greek economy. Greece announced in 2018 that it was participating in Chinas one belt on road initiative.

Key to mitigating the risk of Chinese involvement is to make environment hostile to that involvement. This must occur prior to Chinese involvement for it to work as a mitigation measure. Key is going to be development of interagency options highlighting potential for US/Ally investment. We are going to need some real potential options from DOS (USAID), Energy, Treasury, etc... to provide a meaningful difference between the US and its allies and China.

Illuminating the malignity of the Chinese investment is helpful if we can leverage third party advocates for public communication - those that don't seem overtly aligned to the US (no-kidding real victims). The rub is the skepticism that they have been "coached". We saw this in the run up to Desert Storm. It needs to be authentic from people with influence within the relevant audiences of concern.

Once we have some potential deeds on the table, we can turn to words. Recommend proactive communication of truthful messaging and imagery through diplomatic channels, key leader engagement, public affairs, with NATO and NATO member amplification about the downsides of heavy Chinese investment. Key is increasing relevant audience understanding of malign Chinese economic practices (belt and road) and how their seemingly friendly economic support is actually designed to exploit the host-nation and accrue long-term gains to China and Chinese interests at the expense of the host nation population. This may also be a good time to reinvigorate examples of when China treats host-nation populations poorly (racism, bias, discrimination).

An issue we also need to consider in more detail is how China might leverage its involvement in Greece to reduce our involvement with PHL, or vice versa. If we expect Greece to explain that the future of Piraeus is at risk unless the Chinese back down in PHL, then there would have to be some significant US-to-Greece economic guarantees as a fallback. State and Commerce would have to be the biggest part of that discussion.

### **3. Beijing is clearly using military movements in the INDOPACOM AOR as a talking point about the US being escalatory. How should this be responded to?**

Nothing is going to stop China from claiming the U.S. is being escalatory.

Question is who is believing them - need to start by identifying relevant audiences whose current behavior is preventing achievement of U.S. desired endstate / national interests. Then we need to develop objectives laying out the effects we want to achieve on those relevant audiences to create specific behaviors and the purpose of those behaviors and how they support U.S. goals. Once we have those objectives, we need to identify measures of effectiveness for how we determine our success (or not) creating our desired behavioral change - then we can identify measures of performance to create the change.

Likely key to measures of performance is providing context to shape how relevant audiences interpret incoming information about Chinese and US activities. This should involve proactive communication of truthful messaging and imagery through diplomatic channels, key leader engagement, public affairs, with ally and partner amplification. This messaging should not be escalatory. It should truthfully highlight the significant differences between the "made-up" / not credible Chinese civilian response directly interfering with PHL humanitarian efforts and the U.S. moving forces into the area a long way from where the action is taking place.

While we measure volume of activity across traditional media outlets, we could also measure engagement and sentiment across social media to provide some insights on perceptions and attitudes (and how they change with the introduction of major informational changes). We can even do this, to some extent, regionally (at least with non-adversarial audiences).

Recommend continuing with deployment of RONALD REAGAN. The US has a long presence in the AOR. Site the numerous ship transits and participation with various nations via exercises. As an aside in earlier April this year there were articles ref the USS MUSTIN shadowing a Chinese carrier. During PC/DC/PCC engagements stress the need for US/PHL dialogue, to avert a compromising position.

### **4. Please provide COA options for responding to two potential outcomes in the South China Sea: 1. The PHL MOD has proposed a plan to use its Japanese-supplied MPACs, which can outrun the present CCG vessels, to evade them and return a larger contingent of Marines to the SIERRA MADRE, along with emergency supplies. This prolongs the standoff, while solving the emergent problem - but also introduces Gray Hulls to the situation directly. 2. The governments of Indonesia and Singapore have proposed an off-ramp option privately to Manila, Beijing, and Washington: a "Singapore Conference" in which various legal options for the resolution of the Second Thomas Shoal issue are explored. This potentially includes many unacceptable ideas and may end in no resolution. 3. In both cases, what action should be taken to address the potential concerns of other allies in the region?**

To really build options, we need National Command Authority identify the USG national interests in place and our desired endstates (preferably in some kind of rank-order).

As far as we know, official lines between the US and PHL are not open. Need to seek NSC advice via DC/PC/PCC channels - especially in light of the DATs memo. A potential way to open dialogue is to publicly support PHL statement "repair of the ship through the addition of a platform is not 'construction' of a new structure of any kind, does not violate the 2002 Declaration on the Conduct of

Parties in the South China Sea (DoC) signed by China and ASEAN, and that it is being undertaken because refurbishment is required to improve safety and living conditions for the Philippine personnel.”

For potential outcome 1, question is whether potential escalation or prolonging the crisis is desirable (or not) to the USG. If desirable because we are trying to impose costs on China, then hardball options might work. If undesirable, options should instead look for ways to de-escalate without capitulating to Chinese pressure.

If escalation/prolonging crisis is desirable options should include decreasing PHL uncertainty about CHN intentions (e.g. intelligence sharing) while increasing CHN uncertainty about PHL and its Ally/Partner capabilities. Moving additional assets into region (but nowhere near the SIERRA MADRE) would be desirable. Technical effects to protect critical information and present misleading indicators of available capabilities would also be beneficial. Non-attributional action against Chinese interests in other regions to impose costs on their activities would also be an option. In combination with a diplomatic pressure campaign backed by strategic communications.

If we are trying to deescalate, then options to address the immediate situation on the SIERRA MADRE might be best. Leveraging more neutral countries or non-governmental/international/inter-governmental organizations to provide supplies or address humanitarian concerns might be more palatable than introduction of gray hulls in into the situation directly.

For potential outcome 2, same question and options apply.

However, the difference is that the pressure campaign and non-attributional activities to impose costs would be for the purpose of driving China to the negotiating table. If we impose costs, we can decrease those costs as China cooperates which is potentially more likely to achieve desired effects than increasing costs if the do not cooperate.

In both cases, to address the potential concerns of other allies in the region, we need to walk the tightrope between mitigating future risk of a rising China seeking territorial gain and economic expansion / influence at the expense of their neighbors with creating a self-fulfilling prophecy by creating so much push-back to China that they seek territorial gain and economic benefit in the near-term. Most of China's neighbors will be very sensitive to their asymmetry with China. They recognize that China is a very large state with a very large bureaucracy and that some of the things they do are because they are big (bull in china shop) and not because it is entirely intentional. As a result, they try to avoid unwanted Chinese attention that increases the pain they feel because they have China's attention - but necessarily the attention of Senior PRC leadership necessary to ensure a finely tuned policy.

U.S. needs to show its allies and partners that it is not out to provoke China - knowing that the Chinese response will fall on China's neighbors more directly than it will fall on the US. The U.S. needs to highlight the long-term benefits of working with the U.S. and its rules-based international order relevant to China and its version of international order based solely on national interest and the ability of the strongest to get what they want. Then, it needs to leverage that distinction to encourage efforts that prevent China from achieving its goals while mitigating risk of immediate/direct Chinese actions that punish our allies/partners.

This approach would definitely be easier in the Singapore Conference outcome. Pushing back on China with company would enable de-escalation and mitigate risk of retaliation. Even if it does not resolve the issue, our allies and partners might still value that outcome more than direct opposition and escalation with China.



## BLUE INTERAGENCY COA REPORT:

Guidance from the administration now is that “we need to stop playing defense – on the OIE front in particular.” In answering the below, please assume you can exercise the full extent of current EXORD authorities to respond to Red in the OIE space. In your responses please be specific on messaging.

- 1. Please provide COA options for responding to two potential outcomes in the Eastern Med:  
1. There is a full on NATO exercise per Greek requests and it goes over badly with Turkey, as well as suffering from Russian IO response. 2. There is a limited, bilateral exercise, which goes over badly with Turkey and suffers from Russian IO response.**

### COA 1:

1. There is a full on NATO exercise per Greek requests and it goes over badly with Turkey, as well as suffering from Russian IO response.

NSC - postures and messaging would route through NATO, Embassies and EUCOM.

-Emphasis would be to ensure that Turkey and Greece are involved in planning and participating in the exercise.

-Messaging: The overall message of the exercise is that this is routine coordination among allies, nothing to see here.

-NATO would coordinate social media, traditional media, KLEs, public events to amplify solidarity and to neutralize Russian messaging efforts.

-The exercise would also provide diplomatic engagements with Turkey and Greece to smooth over issues.

-Typical statements would include: "NATO typically conducts exercises throughout the year. The current exercise is to build cooperation against any potential crisis or disasters".

-Additional statements: “Europe and North America must work together, in strategic solidarity and must strengthen our commitment to collective defense because we are facing many great challenges; the rise of China, sophisticated cyber-attacks, disruptive technologies, climate change, Russia's destabilizing behavior.”

### COA 2:

There is a limited, bilateral exercise, which goes over badly with Turkey and suffers from Russian IO response.

NSC - postures and messaging would route through NATO, Embassies and EUCOM.

-Emphasis would be to ensure that Turkey and Greece are involved in planning and participating in the exercise.

-NATO would coordinate social media, traditional media, KLEs, public events to amplify solidarity and to neutralize Russian messaging efforts.

-The exercise would also provide diplomatic engagements with Turkey and Greece to smooth over issues.

-Typical statements would include: "NATO typically conducts exercises throughout the year. The current exercise is to build cooperation against any potential crisis or disasters"

- 2. There is concern from the NSC that Beijing could be drawn into the Eastern Med scenario due to the heavy investments made in Greece. What mitigation measures, in terms of OIE, should the DOD be taking in anticipation of that eventuality?**

1. NSC would direct State and US Trade would coordinate with USEMB Athens on reaching out to the PRC counterpart to discuss concerns, assure that China's strategic interests would be respected and protected

from harm or harassment during the exercise and offer for China to have observers to monitor and advise on any issues.

2. USNATO Ambassador to reach out to the Greek NATO Ambassador to see if they could ask the PRC military to avoid the exercise area.

**3. Beijing is clearly using military movements in the INDOPACOM AOR as a talking point about the US being escalatory. How should this be responded to?**

White House daily press brief:

"The U.S. calls for both sides to work out a balanced solution and that the U.S. made no escalatory moves, but is increasing it's force readiness to protect international law and U.S. interests.

**4. Please provide COA options for responding to two potential outcomes in the South China Sea: 1. The PHL MOD has proposed a plan to use its Japanese-supplied MPACs, which can outrun the present CCG vessels, to evade them and return a larger contingent of Marines to the SIERRA MADRE, along with emergency supplies. This prolongs the standoff, while solving the emergent problem – but also introduces Gray Hulls to the situation directly. 2. The governments of Indonesia and Singapore have proposed an off-ramp option privately to Manila, Beijing, and Washington: a “Singapore Conference” in which various legal options for the resolution of the Second Thomas Shoal issue are explored. This potentially includes many unacceptable ideas and may end in no resolution. 3. In both cases, what action should be taken to address the potential concerns of other allies in the region?**

1. The U.S. would discourage the COA. One option back would be to use the MPACs to rescue the Marines and scuttle the ship. The U.S. could discuss replacing the vessel from a decommissioned grey or white hull.

2. Support the Singapore Conference for building a long-term solution

3. Launch a short campaign to message to publicly reinforce U.S. and partner nation relations and international security. Include diplomatic and military key leader engagements to both highlight the risk of getting too close to China and promote better cooperation with the US to avoid this scenario in the future.

**RED TEAM COA REPORT:**

**5. Please outline the influence activities you believe would be taken by RED in both AORS relevant to the scenario as it stands.**

PRC

- *Note:* Operations are coordinated and follow preplanned narratives and tropes, adjusted for the current situation
- **Media:** Immediately engage in a) mass and news media campaigns and b) social media campaigns criticizing the US and the Philippines for militarizing the incident. Some elements of these campaigns include:
  - Spreading conspiratorial narratives suggesting ulterior motives for the opposing government's actions in the South China Sea. For example:

- Philippine government has been put up to this by the Americans who want to undermine the stability of the region.
    - The resupply ship is manned with special forces units, not journalists.
  - “Leaking” fake government documents suggesting Philippine corruption or government malfeasance regarding the incident (for example: the government gave the original contract to a well-connected company that did shoddy work), shared through social media group chats with the goal of eventually having the images broadcast on the news
  - Spreading old and/or doctored photos of Chinese aircraft or vessels claiming they were downed by the other party
  - Regional newspapers publishing op-eds criticizing the US and the Philippines for destabilizing the region and trying to militarize the incident.
- **Military Support:** Maintain a “cabbage strategy” with respect to the incident, where any escalation is portrayed as an unprovoked attack on “civilian” Chinese vessels that then require intervention by Coast Guard or PLAN:
  - PRC fishing boats protesting at the site of the SIERRA MADRE
  - PLA coastguard ships protecting the fishing boats and interdicting the convoy
  - PLAN ships protecting the coastguard ships
- **Political:**
  - Attempt to pass a resolution in the UN general assembly (putting pressure on countries with interdependencies with China) to stymie a timely US or Philippines response; put forward a resolution in the UNSC to muddy the waters and call on the Philippines to exercise restraint.
  - Incite a pro-Beijing protest in Manila criticizing the US government militarizing the incident.
  - Beijing threatens Manila to pull back all economic aid from the Philippines  
<https://business.inquirer.net/313538/china-emerges-as-phs-most-important-source-of-investments>
  - Later in the scenario: endorse the Russian-Turkish plans and laud the “burgeoning friendship” between two “regional powers”; criticize Greek interference.
- **Cyber:**
  - Philippines government websites hijacked to embarrass Manila and send a tacit warning of their vulnerability.
  - Cyber-attacks on the companies contracted to fix the SIERRA MADRE.
- **Other:** Place both explicit and backdoor financial pressure on the companies contracted to fix the SIERRA MADRE from CCP-affiliated financial institutions

## Russia

- **Media:** Influence activities center around producing narratives and publication in media and social media. Some elements of this include:
  - Basics of narrative: looking for any angle that demonizes the US, EU, or NATO, and presents them in the most negative way.
    - Western policies in the region continue to be against Serbian interests.

- Satellite countries like Greece are subservient to the US, and the West will always side with ethnically similar countries against the Turks in NATO.
    - Where possible, tie messages to the anniversary of NATO airstrikes, or the current Kosovo situation. Portray this as continuing aggression of the West against the Balkans (particularly Serbia) and that, while the West is not currently bombing Serbia, their activities represent a continuation of aggression against Serbia and Russia and continue to threaten the region.
    - Russia is standing up to the bullies, protecting Serbia in the process.
    - Any international activity that includes Kosovo forces will play into this narrative.
  - In the past, this type of propaganda has been rudimentary, written by Russians that did not understand the local Balkan / E. Mediterranean context. During this crisis, the Russians leverage local contacts and networks that they have invested in and that are able to effectively repeat messages that are resonant locally and reflect local voices.
  - Extensive use of online trolls and injects of propaganda into existing news and information streams.
  - **Political:**
    - Official Russian pronouncements praising Erdogan's strength in standing up to NATO bullies.
    - Thinly veiled warning from the Russian Foreign Ministry not to underestimate Russia or interfere in its desire to develop new partners.
  - **Cyber:**
    - Mild to moderate yet diverse cyberattacks on Greek financial and government institutions (mainly as a "shot across the bow").
- 6. Identify the key stakeholders for OIE in both AORs, given the current scenario, along with the most important message for each to be receiving**

PRC

- **International governments and governments and mass media:** provide accurate, clearly labeled satellite imagery of the situation in the South China Sea that can be shared with the public, giving a sense of absolute transparency.
- **Local Philippine and regional populations:** focus on narratives of Western interference, Philippine corruption and Chinese restraint, but leave the dissemination of these to trusted local sources rather than directly from OIE.

Russia

- **Serbian government and public:**
  - The exercise is not taking place in Serbia, so no coverage in local language which gives disinformation outlets ability manipulate even further
  - Messaging to general public and political elites/decision makers will be the same.
  - Local supporters who help explain to the local public how this is good for Serbia and the region. How the global order is changing. How this is good. Include local analysts and experts, pro-Russian, they approve activities to confirm the thesis.
  - Themes: new alliances being created in Europe. America cannot push Turkey around. Erdoğan is close to Putin, Russia helping to shape the future of the region, West is no longer in control. The situation is changing and the US, EU, NATO no longer powerful.

- Multiple aspects of the messages - technical, political, and local.
    - Technical aspects about the great, amazing aspects of Russian military prowess and superiority of Russia's systems. Will show the power and strength of their systems.
    - Second layer is political. How well thought out and superior the Russian approach is, based on its brilliant grand strategy.
    - Third component, local politics. Linking the current scenario to the bombing of 1999, thereby attempting to remind the audience that Russia is your protector, and the West your enemy. Also, see how the West treats even its supposed "allies," thus proving that Serbia should give up from integrating into Europe
  - Some regulars who produce pro-Russian content:
    - Mitar Kovac, runs pro-Russia outlet
    - Dušan Proroković, Serbian journalist, runs NGO Center for Strategic Alternatives
    - Miroslav Lazansky, Serbian journalist, currently Serbian Ambassador to Russia
  - **Internationally:**
    - Big foreign media outlets that are producing content with their message. These supportive foreign media entities produce the themes. For example, Russia has planned this glorious exercise with Turkey, this is a new example of how the West is collapsing, we are working with new brothers to fight the outsiders telling us what to do. Russia is a reliable and capable world leader.
- 7. What kinds of metrics would you use to assess whether OIE activities in your AOR are achieving the desired effect in this scenario?**

PRC

- The number of news outlets disputing versus accepting PRC claims.
- How many times were PRC original inserted propaganda (e.g., fake posts) shared and did the frequency decrease after government/media rectification?
- Analyze Philippine government social media posts and news media coverage:
  - Did they get ahead of PRC narrative spread?
  - Did the first news reporting explicitly refer to PRC influence activities as false information?
- The level of engagement and sharing of pro-Beijing social media activities, both in the Philippines and regionally, as well as internationally.
- The time spent for the targets of PRC cyberattacks to recover hacked websites and .gov accounts and the extent to which the PRC is blamed for these.
- The number of statements from other states in support of the Philippines government versus adopting PRC talking points.
- How many states support PRC resolutions in the UN General Assembly.

Russia

- Monitoring media coverage, not just in disinformation outlets but all mainstream media.
- Closely follow the comments in media and social media, match similarities of messaging and how people are expressing their views, looking for repetition of Russian catch-words and phrases.
- Count the number of the articles being reprinted and number of posts shared.
- Monitor the messaging of leaders and decision makers. Are they using similar talking points to those Russia is putting forth and to what extent are they parroting Russia's narratives?

- Measuring how much skepticism (if any) Russian messages are generating in the general public in Serbia and the region.
- 8. What role should OIE be playing in the current scenario compared to other military activities?**

### PRC

- Central to resolving the crisis in its favor.
- Other military activities should be closely coordinated with the OIE.
  - For example, the timing of any aggressive moves will be in part determined by current performance of the PRC information campaign detailed above. Moments where the PRC detects the most doubt locally in the Philippines and the most support internationally would be ripe for military movements near the shoal in our favor.
  - PRC might even stage a collision or other interaction between one of its fishing vessels or Coast Guard ships and the Philippine convoy in order to justify PLAN direct involvement (or at least continued presence near the shoal).

### Russia

- Information, narrative development, and distribution of messaging is as critical as the exercise of military units. Operating in information space is an essential part of the effort, a part of the hybrid warfare approach.
- Movement of military units or equipment will most likely be done to send messages, not as part of improving military readiness. For example, the deployment of an air-to-air system will be the center of a message of power, ability, and assistance. The system is not deployed to improve military capabilities or interoperability with allies. It is information, messaging is critical.
- The perception of military might, rather than military prowess itself, is essential and indeed is one of the most important aspects of the disinformation effort. Russia will use local actors to repeat the message, narrative. This messaging has a cumulative effect. Targets will be bombarded on a daily basis with stories promoting Russia's military might.