

Unrestricted Warfare

Studying Chinese communist military doctrine

reviewed by GySgt David Nass

As the focus of the Marine Corps continues to shift to strategic competition with the People's Republic of China as a pacing threat, it is essential that Marines understand this new potential adversary. This education should include translated Chinese military writings, providing both Chinese internal doctrine recommendations in addition to views on American military thought. *Unrestricted Warfare* by People's Liberation Army Colonels Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui is one such book, detailing outside the box strategies to fight "warfare which transcends all boundaries and limits." At the time of publica-

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warfare is shaped largely off the success of the United States in Iraq in the first Gulf War (1991) as well as the U.S. military doctrinal and organizational changes that the war propelled. Highlighted are precision guided munitions, joint operations concepts, "overnight alliances," information warfare practices, and command and control mecha-

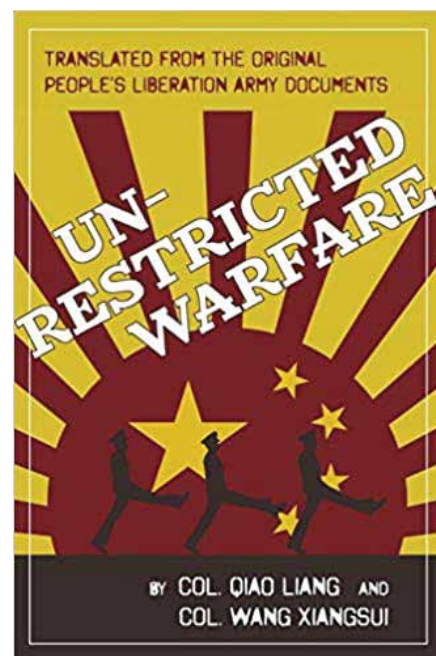
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tion, Liang and Xiangsui were assigned to political departments in the People's Liberation Army Air Force. While it is unclear how influential the book has been in Chinese policy, *Unrestricted Warfare* sheds light on how strategies like economic, cyber, and influence warfare could be used with or in place of traditional warfare in the future. As China drives to be the world leader in new artificial intelligence technologies while at the same time pushes aggressive economic policies as part of the One Belt One Road Initiative, could the author's views of warfare be coming to fruition today?

The book is divided into two parts of roughly equal length. Part One lays the foundation and background for unrestricted warfare. This new view of

nisms. The authors boldly claim that the technology changes in the early 1990s represent the most dramatic revolution in military affairs in history. Part Two discusses the principals and rules of a new form of warfare: "beyond-limits combined war." This type of warfare is no longer confined to the military sphere or battlefield but also encompasses political, economic, diplomatic, cultural, psychological, and non-military operations. The authors conclude with eight essential principals for new warfare: omnidirectionality, synchrony, limited objectives, unlimited measures, asymmetry, minimal consumption, multidimensional coordination, and adjustment and control of the entire process.

Unrestricted Warfare is a provocative vision for what irregular warfare, omni-



UNRESTRICTED WARFARE: China's Master Plan to Destroy America. By Col Qiao Liang and Col Wang Xiangsui. Brattleboro, VT: Echo Point Books & Media, 1999.

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directional warfare, or multi-domain warfare could look like in the early 21st century. This vision pushes readers past conventional military thought into how information, cultural, economic, media, or environmental warfare could shape future conflict, making it "difficult for the military sphere to serve as the auto-

matic dominant sphere in every war.” The authors use financial crisis, environmental disasters, terrorist attacks, and drug networks to illustrate what their view of warfare could look like in the future. This vision of irregular warfare is contrasted with the view of much

than as a playbook for how China might look to out-manuever or defeat the United States. The majority of the citation and research conducted by the authors is based on U.S. doctrine and reflection. While the authors frequently reference historic Chinese thought, there is little

recognize how important it is to understand the culture and thought process of our potential adversary. Including translated Chinese books like *Unrestricted Warfare* in our professional military education will not provide a specific answer to what the Chinese strategy is, but will help educate Marines on how the Chinese think about warfare and what warfare might entail. If warfare is truly everywhere, as the authors argue, how might we train and educate our force to ensure we are prepared to fight in any clime and place? This book is recommended for both small unit leaders and strategic policy makers.



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of the American military leadership at the time, with its focus on hard-power and technological superiority after the overwhelming success of the first Gulf War.

If readers are looking for specifics on Chinese tactics and techniques, this book will serve more as a background and broad idea of “unrestricted warfare”

to no citation of modern day Chinese military thinking. Moreover, it is not until the last ten pages of the book that the authors lay out their main argument: the eight essential principals to the new way of war.

As the U.S. military reflects on nearly twenty years in Afghanistan and shifts focus to strategic competition, Marines