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AMERICA'S ACUPUNCTURE POINTS PART 2: The assassin's mace

By Victor N Corpus

(Click here for Part 1, [Striking the US where it hurts](#))

If America ever goes to war with China, Chinese military doctrine suggests the US should expect attacks on a number of key points where it is particularly vulnerable - where a single jab would paralyze the entire nation. China would aim at targets such as the US electricity grid, its computer networks, its oil supply routes, and the dollar. Other vital "acupuncture" points are outlined below.

1 A powerful triumvirate

No one ever imagined before 1991 that China and Russia would

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come together to form a close-knit alliance politically, diplomatically and, most important of all, militarily. For more than three decades before the break-up of the Soviet Union, China and the USSR had been bitter rivals, even going into a shooting war with each other along their common border.

But now the picture has changed completely. China and Russia have embraced one another and help each other ward off the military advances of the lone superpower in their respective backyards. In fact, it was a series of strategic blunders by the superpower that forced China and Russia into each other's arms. How so?

When the Soviet Union disintegrated in 1991, it would have been the best time for the US to use soft power to win over Russia into the Western fold. Russia at that time was an economic basket case, with the price of oil at \$9 per barrel. But the promises of economic assistance from the US and Europe proved empty, and the Russian oligarchs were the main beneficiaries of relations with the Western powers.

NATO and EU then slowly advanced eastward, absorbing many of the countries making up the former Warsaw Pact alliance. Serbia,

a close ally of Russia, was subjected to 78 days of continuous air bombardment. Regime changes were instigated by US and Western-financed non-governmental organizations in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan - all former Soviet republics and considered Russia's backyard - giving Russia a feeling of strategic encirclement by the US and its allies. There was also the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, followed by the establishment of US bases and deployment of troops in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.

These aggressive geopolitical moves by the US pushed Russia into the waiting arms of China, which badly needed Russian energy resources, modern weapon systems and military technology as a consequence of the US-led arms embargo imposed after the Tiananmen incident. Furthermore, China also needed a reliable and militarily capable ally in Russia because of the perceived threat of the US.

Reinforcing this Chinese perception was the outrageously wanton bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade by US-led NATO forces in 1999; the spy plane incident in 2001; the unilateral withdrawal of the US from the ABM Treaty in 2002; the enhanced military cooperation between the US and Japan; the inclusion of Taiwan in the Theater Missile Defense program.; the setting up of a military base in Kyrgyzstan which is only some 250 miles from the Chinese border near Lop Nor, China's nuclear testing ground.

Add to that the announcement of President George W Bush that the US would come to the aid of Taiwan in the event that China uses force against it; the sending of two aircraft carrier battle groups to waters near Taiwan in 1995-1996; and the naval show of strength of seven aircraft carrier battle groups converging off the China coast in August 2004. All these aggressive moves by superpower America pushed China to embrace its former bitter rival, Russia.

Both China and Russia needed a secure and reliable rear; and both are ideally positioned to provide it. Moreover, their strengths ideally complement each other. It must be borne in mind that both are nuclear powers. The abundant energy resources of Russia ensures that China will not run out of gas in a major conflict - a strategic advantage over the US and its key allies.

Russia is also supplying China with many of the modern armaments and military technology it needs to modernize its defense sector. This effectively militates against the arms embargo imposed by the US and the EU on China. Russia in turn needs the increased trade with China, China's financial clout and assistance, and manufactured goods.

The coming together of China and Russia was one of the most earth-shaking geopolitical events of modern times. Yet hardly anyone noticed the transition from bitter enmity to a solid geopolitical, economic, diplomatic and military alliance. The combined strengths of the two regional powers surely surpass that of the former Warsaw Pact. If we add Iran to the equation, we have a triumvirate that can pose a formidable challenge to the lone superpower. Iran is the most industrialized and the most populous nation in the Middle East. It is second only to Russia in terms of gas resources and also one of the largest oil producers in the world. It is also one of the most mountainous countries in the world, which makes it ideal for the conduct of asymmetric and guerrilla warfare against a superior adversary.

Iran borders both the Persian Gulf and the Caspian Sea, two of the richest oil and gas regions of the world. Most importantly, it controls the gateway to the Persian Gulf - the Strait of Hormuz. Modern bottom-rising, rocket propelled sea mines and supersonic cruise missiles deployed along the long mountainous coastline of Iran, manned by "invisible" guerrillas, could indefinitely stop the flow of oil from the Gulf, from which the US gets 23% of its imported oil.

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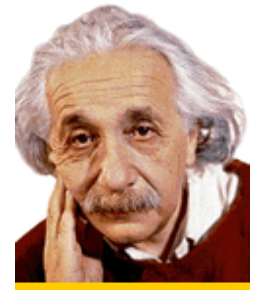
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Japan also derives 90% of its oil from the Persian Gulf area, and Europe about 60%. In a major conflict, Iran can effectively deprive the US war machine and those of its key allies of much needed energy supplies.

Imagine the war machine of the superpower running out of gas. Imagine also a US economy minus 23% of its imported oil. This 23% can rise considerably once Chinese and Russian submarines start sinking US-bound oil tankers. The triumvirate of China, Russia, and Iran could bring the US to its knees with a minimum of movement.

2 The US's geopolitical disadvantage

Another "acupuncture point" in America's anatomy in the event of a major conflict with China (and Russia) is its inherent disadvantage dictated by geography. Being the lone superpower, any major conventional conflict involving the US will necessitate its bringing its forces to bear on its adversaries. This means that the US must cross the Pacific, Indian, and/or Atlantic Oceans in order to bring logistics or troop reinforcements to the battlefield.

In so doing, the US will be crossing thousands of miles of sea lanes of communication (SLOC) that can easily become a gauntlet of deadly Chinese and Russian submarines lying in ambush with bottom-rising sea mines, supercavitating rocket torpedoes, and supersonic cruise missiles that even aircraft carrier battle groups have no known defense against. Logistic and transport ships and oil tankers are particularly vulnerable.

The air corridors above these sea lanes will also be put at great risk by advanced air defense systems aboard Sovremenny destroyers or similar types of warships in Chinese and Russian inventories. In short, the US will be forced by geography to suffer all the disadvantages of conducting offensive operations against adversaries in Eurasia.

Of course, the US has "forces in being" and "logistics in place" in numerous military bases scattered around the world, especially those strategically encircling China, Russia, and Iran. But when the shooting war starts, these bases will be the first to be hit by barrages of short- and medium-range ballistic missiles and long-range land-attack cruise missiles armed with electro-magnetic pulse, anti-radar, thermobaric, and conventional warheads.

Following the missile barrages, the remnants of such weakened US military bases will easily be overwhelmed by blitzkrieg assaults from Russian and Chinese armored divisions in the Eurasian mainland. China, for instance, has four large armored units constantly on standby, poised to cross the Yili Corridor in Xinjiang province at a moment's notice. The US base in Kyrgyzstan near the Chinese border would not stand a chance.

China, Russia and/or Iran, on the other hand, will operate on interior lines within the Eurasian mainland. When they move troops and logistics to meet any threat on the continent, they will have relatively secure lines of communication and logistics, using inland highways, railways and air transport.

Since the US cannot correct the dictates of geography, it and its main allies Japan and the UK will have to live and fight with this tremendous geopolitical disadvantage. Of course the US can bypass this geographic obstacle if it attacks China and Russia with its intercontinental ballistic missiles, sea-launched ballistic missiles and strategic bombers in a nuclear first strike, but China and Russia have the means to retaliate and obliterate the United States and its allies as well.

There are some among the leading neo-conservatives in the US who believe that a nuclear war is winnable; that there is no such thing as mutually assured destruction (MAD). Well, that truly mad way of thinking may well spell the end of planet earth for all of us.

agents for social change, take action in community projects, and carry positive messages to their peers. And they have a great time doing it.

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3 Asymmetric attack

Superpower America is particularly vulnerable to asymmetric attack. A classic example of asymmetric attack is the September 11, 2001, attack on America. Nineteen determined attackers, armed with nothing but box cutters, succeeded in toppling the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York City and causing the death of some 3,000 Americans. Notice the asymmetry of casualty ratio as well - the most lopsided casualty ratio ever recorded in history.

China, Russia, and Iran also possess asymmetric weapons that are designed to neutralize and defeat a superpower like America in a conventional conflict. Supersonic cruise missiles now in their inventories can defeat and sink US aircraft carriers. The same is true for medium- and short-range ballistic missiles with independently targetable warheads, extra-large bottom-rising, rocket-propelled sea mines (EM52s), and supercavitating rocket torpedoes (SHKVAL or "Squall"). The US Navy has no known defense against these weapons.

Iraqi insurgents are conducting a form of asymmetric warfare. They use improvised explosive devices, car bombs, booby traps and landmines against the most modern army the world has ever seen. The US's huge advantage in weaponry is negated by the fact that its soldiers cannot see their adversary. They are fighting against a "phantom" enemy - an invisible army.

And how can you win against an enemy you cannot see? This may be one reason why reports of massacres of Iraqi civilians by US soldiers have been increasing lately. But turning sophisticated weapons against civilians will never win wars for America. It will only heighten the rage of the victimized population and increase suicide bombings against US forces.

Connected to asymmetric warfare is asynchronous warfare, where the weaker side bides its time to strike back. And it strikes at a time and place where the adversary is totally unprepared.

For example, if the US were to strike Iran's underground nuclear facilities with bunker-busting tactical nuclear warheads, Iran could bide its time until it develops its own nuclear weapons. It could then use its Kilo class submarines, equipped with supersonic "moskit" cruise missiles armed with Iran's own nuclear warheads, to hit New York, or Washington, DC as a payback to the US for using nuclear weapons against Iran. Or the Iranians could infiltrate nuclear scientists into the US, where they would fabricate a "dirty" bomb to be detonated near the US Congress, in full session while the president is making his annual state of the nation address.

The possibilities for asymmetric and asynchronous warfare are limitless. Various weapons are available to the asymmetric or asynchronous attacker. If a simple box cutter produced such devastating results on September 11, 2001, imagine what chemical or biological weapons dropped from a private aircraft could do to a crowded city; or trained hackers attacking the US banking system and other key infrastructure and basic services; or man-portable surface-to-air missiles attacking US airlines taking off or landing in various airports around the globe; or non-nuclear electromagnetic pulse weapons hitting New York City or the US Capitol. No amount of even the best intelligence in the world can totally guard against and stop a determined asymmetric attacker.

4 Attack on US's command and control

C4ISR stands for command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance. In a war situation, C4ISR is a prime target because therein lies the center of gravity of one's adversary. Neutralizing C4ISR is like cutting off the head of a chicken. It can run around in circles for a while, but will soon collapse and die. The same is true in warfare.

Having the mightiest and most modern armed forces in the world,

America prides itself on having the most sophisticated and advanced C4ISR. US military spy satellites can gather intelligence data and disseminate it on a real time basis. US surveillance and reconnaissance satellites are so sophisticated that their sensors can detect objects on Earth as small as one-tenth of a meter in size, from several hundred miles up. Satellite sensors can also penetrate clouds and bad weather or see in the night. Some of these spy satellites can also monitor radio or telephone conversations.

Aside from communications, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, satellites are also used for navigation, most especially in guiding ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, aircraft and other smart weapon systems to their targets. Without satellite guidance, such "smart" and precision weapons turn into "dumb" bombs and directionless missiles.

The advances in C4ISR are rapidly revolutionizing warfare. Gathering, processing, disseminating, and acting on intelligence is now made possible on a real-time or near real-time basis on a global or regional level. Because of these developments, a new war principle is emerging in the modern battlefield: "If the enemy sees you; you are dead."

The US is far advanced in its C4ISR compared with, for instance, China. China cannot hope to catch up and match the American system anytime soon. So in order for China to survive in the event of a major conflict with the US, China has to resort to asymmetric means. This means that China has to develop effective means of countering and neutralizing America's C4ISR. And that is what China had been working on for more than two decades now.

The heart of America's C4ISR lies in its technologically sophisticated satellites. But this seeming strength is also an Achilles' heel. Neutralize or destroy the key satellites, and America's major forces, such as aircraft carrier battle groups, are blinded, muted, and decapitated. This concept is part of China's strategy for "defeating a superior with an inferior" called *shashaojian*, or "assassin's mace". It is like the mace kept by ladies in their bags, which they use when attacked by a mugger or rapist. They squirt the mace into the eyes of an attacker to temporarily blind him, giving the intended victim time to escape.

China now has the capability to identify and track satellites. And for more than two decades they have been busy developing anti-satellite weapons. China has been developing maneuverable nano-satellites that can neutralize other satellites. They do their work by maneuvering near a target satellite and neutralizing the target by electronic jamming, electro-magnetic pulse generation, clinging to the target and physically destroying it, bumping the target out of orbit, or simply exploding to bring the target satellite down with it. Such nano satellites can be launched in batches on demand by road-mobile DF21 or DF31 booster rockets.

Another anti-satellite weapon in the works is a land-based laser that blinds the sensitive sensors of satellites or even destroys them completely. Of course, if worse comes to worst, China can always use its weapon of last resort, destroying adversary satellites with a high-altitude nuclear burst. But this will only be used if China has not yet fully developed the other options when major hostilities start. With the neutralization of its C4ISR, America would be like "a blind man trying to catch fish with his bare hands", to quote Mao Zedong. In short, America would be brought to its knees.

5 Attack on US aircraft carrier battle groups

Aircraft carrier battle groups are the mainstay of US military supremacy. They serve as America's chief instrument for global power projection and world dominance. In this category, the US has no equal. At the moment, the US maintains a total of 12 aircraft carrier battle groups. In comparison, China has none.

From June to August 2004, the US, for the first time in its naval history, conducted an exercise involving the simultaneous convergence of seven of its 12 aircraft carrier battle groups to within striking distance of China's coast. This was the biggest and most massive show of force the world has ever seen. It was to remind China that if it uses force against Taiwan, China will have to contend with this kind of response.

It was mentioned earlier that China's strategy in defeating the superior by the inferior is *shashaojian* or the "assassin's mace". "Mace" is not only a blinding spray; it is also a meaner and deadlier weapon, a spiked war club of ancient times used to knock out an adversary with one blow. The spikes of the modern Chinese mace may well spell the end for aircraft carriers.

The first of these spikes consists of medium- and short-range ballistic missiles (modified and improved DF 21s/CSS-5 and DF 15s) with terminally guided maneuverable re-entry vehicles with circular error probability of 10 meters. DF 21s/CSS-5s can hit slow-moving targets at sea up to 2,500km away.

The second spike is an array of supersonic and highly accurate cruise missiles, some with range of 300km or more, that can be delivered by submarines, aircraft, surface ships or even common trucks (which are ideal for use in terrain like that of Iran along the Persian Gulf). These supersonic cruise missiles travel at more than twice the speed of sound (mach 2.5), or faster than a rifle bullet. They can be armed with conventional, anti-radiation, thermobaric, or electro-magnetic pulse warheads, or even nuclear warheads if need be. The Aegis missile defense system and the Phalanx Close-in Defense weapons of the US Navy are ineffective against these supersonic cruise missiles.

A barrage of these cruise missiles, followed by land-based intermediate- or short-range ballistic missiles with terminal guidance systems, could wreak havoc on an aircraft carrier battle group. Whether there are seven or 15 carrier battle groups, it will not matter, for China has enough ballistic and cruise missiles to destroy them all. Unfortunately for the US and British navies, they do not have the capacity to counter a barrage of supersonic cruise missile followed by a second barrage of ballistic missiles.

The first and second spikes of the "assassin's mace" are sufficient to render the aircraft carrier battle groups obsolete. But there is a third spike which is equally dreadful. This is the deadly SHKVAL or "Squall" rocket torpedo developed by Russia and passed on to China. It is like an under-water missile. It weighs 6,000lbs and travels at 200 knots or 230mph, with a range of 7,500 yards. It is guided by autopilot and with its high speed, makes evasive maneuvers by carriers or nuclear submarines highly difficult. It is truly a submarine and carrier buster; and again, the US and its allies have no known defense against such a supercavitating rocket torpedo.

The "assassin's mace" has still more spikes. The fourth spike consists of extra-large, bottom-rising, rocket-propelled sea mines laid by submarines along the projected paths of advancing carrier battle groups. These sea mines are designed specifically for targeting aircraft carriers. They can be grouped in clusters so that they will hit the carriers in barrages.

The final spike of the mace is a fleet of old fighter aircraft (China has thousands of them) modified as unmanned combat aerial vehicles fitted with extra fuel tanks and armed with stand-off anti-ship missiles. They are also packed with high explosives so that after firing off their precision-guided anti-ship missiles on the battle group, they will then finish their mission by dive-bombing "kamikaze" style into their targets.

If we now combine the mace as a means of blinding an adversary and the mace as a spiked war club, one can see the complete picture of how China will use the "assassin's mace" to send

America's aircraft carrier battle groups into the dustbin of naval history. Although China does not possess a single operational aircraft carrier, it has converted the entire China mainland into a "virtual aircraft carrier" that is unsinkable and capable of destroying all the aircraft carrier battle groups that the US and its allies can muster.

The sad part for the US Navy is that even if American leaders and naval theorists realize the horrible truth that aircraft carriers have been rendered obsolete in modern warfare by China's "assassin's mace", the navy cannot just change strategy or discard its carriers. Hundreds of billions of dollars have been poured into those weapon systems and hundreds of thousands of jobs would be affected if such behemoths are turned into scrap. Besides, even if US Navy authorities wanted to change strategy, the all-powerful and influential military-industrial complex lobby would not allow it.

So, if and when a major conflict between the US and China occurs, say over the issue of Taiwan, pity those thousands of American sailors who are unfortunate enough to be in one of those aircraft carrier battle groups. They won't stand a chance.

A challenge to America

The 10 "acupuncture points" mentioned in this article (See also Part 1: [Striking the US where it hurts](#)) are like a 10-stage riddle. It is an "assassin's mace" or war club of olden times with 10 deadly spikes. Any one of those spikes can bring America to its knees. I therefore throw this riddle to the think tanks in the Pentagon, to the US Congress, to the president's men, to US academe, and to every concerned American.

America is in the last two minutes of the fourth quarter of the "great game", and it is behind in points. If America can solve the riddle in time, it wins the game, it can seize global leadership, and the 21st century will truly be the American Century.

On the other hand, failure to solve the riddle will shake America to its very foundation and cause this great nation to collapse - just like that vivid image of the collapsing Twin Towers familiar to each and every American. America loses, and it will be down and out for the rest of this century.

Wake up, America!

***Victor N Corpus** is a retired brigadier general of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP); former chief of the Intelligence Service, AFP; and holds a master's degree in public administration from the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University.*

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