**Cognitive Domain Operations: The Key to Winning Modern Warfare**

**Source: China Military Network-People's Liberation Army Daily   
Author: Zhao Quanhong   
Editor: Li Jiaqi**   
**Date: 2022-07-14**

**introduction**   
Throughout modern warfare, cognitive games have become the focus of offense and defense. Whether or not one is good at planning cognitive domain operations greatly affects the direction and outcome of the war. A deep understanding of the connotation, extension, and scope of cognitive domain operations, and an accurate grasp of its winning mechanism and development trend are the keys to understanding the battlefield context and winning modern wars.

**Cognitive domain operations are the new focus of war games**

Unlike traditional warfare, cognitive domain warfare is no longer limited to land, sea, air, space, electricity, and the Internet. It has broken through the traditional physical and information domains, possesses unique advantages, presents new characteristics, and expands new frontiers on the modern battlefield.

**Cognitive domain operations expand the space of the war domain.**First, the cognitive domain battlefield space is extensive, mainly reflected in people's spiritual, psychological, thinking, belief and other cognitive activities, and its combat targets are mainly the heads of state, military personnel, social elites and the general public of the hostile country. Secondly, cognitive domain operations are extensive, including but not limited to political and diplomatic pressure, economic blockade and sanctions, cultural infiltration and erosion, etc. Thirdly, cognitive domain operations have a wide range of goals, mainly to shake the enemy's beliefs, disintegrate the enemy's will, influence and change the opponent's decision-making, and then cause social chaos, decision-making errors, military demoralization, and even subvert its national regime.

**Cognitive domain operations blur the boundaries of the war domain.**   
The main body of cognitive domain operations is people. As the most active factor in war, people, especially the cognition of high-level decision-makers, reflect the overall will of the war, directly influence the overall situation of the war, and determine the outcome of the war. The cognition of heads of state and military generals is the key offensive target of cognitive domain operations. The will of the people, social foundations, and international public opinion are usually the basis of cognitive domain operations and are the key forces that promote the progress and direction of war. Cognitive domain operations mix conventional and unconventional, blur the boundaries of the war domain, and aim to cognitively induce the attack on information recipients, bypass the traditional battlefield and go directly to the weakest link-people. Tactical actions can achieve strategic goals, fundamentally change the battlefield environment, and change the outcome of the war.

**Cognitive domain operations directly reach the ultimate strategic goal.**   
Ancient Chinese military tactics say: "In the way of using troops, attacking the heart is better than attacking the city; psychological warfare is better than physical warfare." Cognitive domain operations aim to occupy cognitive dominance, influence enemy decisions and behaviors, and achieve maximum combat effectiveness at the lowest cost. As Clausewitz mentioned in "On War", "war is an act of violence to force the enemy to obey our will." Since cognitive domain operations are not hard kills of living forces, but soft kills of intangible targets, they can not only "force the enemy to obey our will", but also objectively make the enemy destroy itself from the inside, making it unable to resist, split and disintegrate, and ultimately achieve the strategic goal of "total victory" without fighting.

**Cognitive domain warfare is a new product of military transformation**

At present, the world is undergoing a major change unseen in a century, the international situation is becoming increasingly complex, local wars and regional conflicts are continuing, and cognitive domain operations, as a new form of warfare, are becoming increasingly prominent under the impetus of the new wave of military change.

**The laws of war are the basic principles of cognitive domain operations.**Cognitive domain operations still follow the basic laws of war. First, justice must prevail. Just wars promote historical development and ultimately defeat unjust wars. Cognitive domain operations that occupy the moral high ground themselves have the conditions for victory first. Second, the strong win and the weak lose. The progress of science and technology has spawned advanced military theories and promoted the development of high-tech equipment. Seizing cognitive control can achieve dimensionality reduction and disintegrate the enemy. Third, subjective guidance is in line with objective reality. Cognitive domain operations must be based on a certain objective material foundation, comprehensively consider the battlefield environment, weigh the situation of both sides, and make favorable decisions. Fourth, critical operations affect the overall situation. In network-centric system operations, the cognitive domain often becomes the most critical link, and its success or failure is enough to determine the situation of the war.

**Theoretical innovation is the basic support for cognitive domain operations**.   
In recent years, the US military has successively proposed new operational theories such as "hybrid warfare", "mosaic warfare" and "gray zone conflict", and regarded cognitive domain operations as the main combat method, forming a relatively mature theory. The Russian army has also formed its own set of hybrid warfare methods in long-term military practice, especially in the Syrian battlefield. The "Gerasimov" tactics are used to deal with "hybrid warfare". Japan has also vigorously developed its military power in recent years. In its new version of the "Defense White Paper", it first proposed the concept of "domain traversal" operations, aiming to break through traditional fields and take new fields such as cognitive domains as the key direction of its military development, which is more proactive and outward-looking.

**Military practice is an important support for cognitive domain operations.**  
 Judging from the recent local wars, cognitive domain operations have become the main combat method of modern warfare, and have achieved high combat effectiveness. The confrontation between cognitive warfare and anti-cognitive warfare is quite fierce. In 2010, the United States and other Western countries launched cognitive warfare, hyped up and promoted the Tunisian democratic movement, created the "Arab Spring", and then plunged the Middle East into chaos, and terrorist organizations took the opportunity to wreak havoc. The United States attempted to consolidate its hegemony by overthrowing the Egyptian government, launching the Libyan War, and intervening in the Syrian War. In 2014, the Russian army took control of Crimea through comprehensive measures, multi-dimensional breakthroughs, and public opinion. Its cognitive domain operations are also very distinctive.

**Cognitive domain warfare is a new direction for war planning**

With the continuous development of high-tech and its widespread application in the military field, the future war form is evolving rapidly, and the complexity and uncertainty of war are increasing sharply. To this end, we should plan ahead, coordinate scientifically, strengthen the construction of cognitive domain combat power, deeply integrate into the future battlefield, and effectively control the initiative of future wars.

**Promote the research on the winning mechanism of cognitive domain operations.**As an important combat method in future wars, the status and role of cognitive domain operations will become more prominent, and the development prospects will be broader. Controlling cognition has become an important part of seizing control of war. To win future wars, we must keep up with the trend of the development of war forms, vigorously study the winning mechanism of cognitive domain operations, and use theoretical innovation to drive innovation in tactics and seek advantages and opportunities.

**Strengthen the construction of cognitive domain combat offensive and defensive forces.**   
From individuals to organizations to countries, the impact of cognitive domain combat covers all time and space elements, across different combat fields, and throughout the entire combat process. In future wars, commanders and fighters will face huge cognitive offensive and defensive challenges. Seizing cognitive control and then seizing comprehensive battlefield control will become the key to seizing control in future wars. We should adhere to demand-driven, strengthen the construction of cognitive domain combat offensive and defensive forces, build a cognitive domain combat system that integrates offense and defense, peace and war, and multiple dimensions, establish and improve exercise and evaluation mechanisms, and continuously improve capabilities through long-term military practice.

**Accelerate the research and development of high-tech cognitive domain warfare.**At present, with the rapid development of high-tech such as big data, artificial intelligence, and cloud computing, the acquisition of open source information has become more convenient and efficient, and cognitive domain warfare has increasingly shown the characteristics of fast startup, low cost, and high efficiency. In addition, with the quiet development of emerging technologies such as neuroscience and brain science, it can be inferred that cognitive warfare weapons will become increasingly abundant and widely used in future wars. We should keep up with the development of the times, plan ahead of time, vigorously develop cutting-edge technologies oriented towards seizing cognitive advantages, promote the updating of cognitive domain warfare concepts and means, and thus seize the initiative in future wars.