U.S. Air Force special operations soldiers prepare to conduct operations in the Arctic region. Photo by U.S. Air Force/Alejandro Peña.

We find ourselves at the start of a new era characterized by long-term strategic competition with revisionist powers. It is clear that we need to think hard about what competition is and what Special Operations Forces (SOF) require to address it. In *On Competition: Adapting to the Contemporary Strategic Environment*, we explore what competition means and outline a practical approach, bridging theory with practice. Competition is a consistent, natural occurrence across the history of human civilization. In the current and future security environment, states such as China, Russia, and Iran and non-state actors alike have new tools that allow them to pursue their interests in ways that undermine the existing international order and institutions.

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JSOU Report 21-5 On Competition: Adapting to the Contemporary Strategic Environment USSOCOM JSOU

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A SPECIAL OPERATIONS PERSPECTIVE

On Competition: Adapting to the Contemporary Strategic Environment

United States Special Operations Command

Foreword by USSOCOM Commander
General Richard D. Clarke

Edited by Aaron Bazin

JSOU Report 21-5

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Sharpening the Edge of SOF's Advantage: The All-Domain SOF Leader-Professional

On Competition: Adapting to the Contemporary Strategic Environment

United States Special Operations Command

Foreword by USSOCOM Commander General Richard D. Clarke

Edited by Aaron Bazin

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Back cover. U.S. Air Force special operations soldiers prepare to conduct operations in the Arctic region. Photo by U.S. Air Force/Alejandro Peña.

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Foreword

The 2018 National Defense Strategy (NDS) reoriented our perspective on the requirements for the use of the military instrument of national power. Our military had been focused on the global fight against violent extremist organizations for close to 20 years. The central idea of the NDS—the need to expand the competitive space against state adversaries—served as a wake-up call to the joint force and the special operations community at large. Shifting focus from near-term emergent threats to long-term geopolitical balance poses an organizational challenge.

We find ourselves at the start of a new era characterized by long-term strategic competition with revisionist powers. The 2021 Interim National Security Strategic Guidance reiterated these shifting global dynamics. It is clear that we need to think hard about what competition is and what Special Operations Forces (SOF) require to address it. In *On Competition: Adapting to the Contemporary Strategic Environment*, we explore what competition means and outline a practical approach, bridging theory with practice. Competition is a consistent, natural occurrence across the history of human civilization. In the current and future security environment, states such as China, Russia, and Iran and non-state actors alike have new tools that allow them to pursue their interests in ways that undermine the existing international order and institutions.

As actors pursue the influence, leverage, and advantage necessary to advance and protect their respective interests, our community will face both challenges and opportunities. The SOF enterprise must innovate and adapt to support the joint force in the competitive space and protect and advance American interests. We must embrace, not avoid, this new paradigm of competition. This collection of articles is the start of an important conversation. Carrying that conversation onward and evolving our organization to address long-term strategic competition is essential.

Thank you to all those who provided wise counsel in the development of this publication, including the United States Special Operations Command J5 and staff, Joint Special Operations University, NATO SOF headquarters, Service components, theater special operations commands, Joint Special

Operations Command, SOFWERX, academia, think tanks, the private sector, and all others that supported this effort.

Richard D. Clarke, General, U.S. Army
Commander, United States Special Operations Command

Preface

Colonel Montgomery Erfourth

With its focus on competition, the publication of the NDS in January 2018 prompted several questions within the broader defense establishment and particularly within United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM). Namely, what exactly is competition, how does one compete, with whom, and to what end? Before USSOCOM could execute the guidance promulgated in the NDS, USSOCOM would need to better understand its intent and how SOF might contribute. Planners and strategists in the USSOCOM J5 began to contemplate which SOF core capabilities and units might be brought to bear in competition with nation-states, contrasting the primary focus of SOF over the past two decades pursuing extremists.

The potential broadening of the focus of SOF was exciting, both intellectually and organizationally. After immediately envisioning a host of activities, the J5 returned to the fundamental questions surrounding competition: Why? Why would the U.S. act against another nation-state? Equally jarring and just as undefined: What is competition, its nature, and its purpose? The articles contained in this collection represent a collective effort to answer these questions and arm SOF leaders, planners, thinkers, and operators with the tools necessary to operationalize the NDS while preserving SOF unique character and capabilities.

Before the 2018 NDS, the prevailing SOF mindset was that a violent extremist organization (VEO)—any VEO—was or could be a threat to the American homeland. The "why" was simply to defend the homeland, which can be undeniably categorized as a vital national interest. Over time, this justification applied liberally and seemed to represent all VEOs. The purpose of countering VEOs as a strategic necessity had evolved into an article of faith that required no further analysis.

From 9/11 until the release of the 2018 NDS, SOF had acted like a hammer seeking its next nail. As efficient counterterrorists, "how do we act" was less a question than a preordained conclusion. After almost two decades of hyper-focus on terrorist groups, SOF planners instinctively defaulted to the question of how to counter, deter, or defeat a persistent and ever-evolving

foe. The why was assumed away under the banner of "protect the homeland." A generation of leaders bent on countering VEOs had minimized the institutional consideration of why and left a highly reactionary approach in its wake.

The 2018 NDS addressed this strategic shortcoming and spurred critical thought about where the Department of Defense was investing its resources. In response, the national security community attempted to pare down the long list of VEOs around the globe previously deemed threats that required military attention. While policymakers sought to prioritize actions against those capable and willing of attacking inside U.S. borders, the military—and perhaps SOF in particular—faced lingering mental and cultural challenges to avoid seeing any group labeled VEO as a threat.

Faced with shifting national priorities that wanted to confront both VEOs and nation-states, the J5 knew that any campaign plan for competition must also include a change to the SOF approach to countering VEOs. To accomplish the goals set out in the NDS, the J5 needed to establish why the U.S. should apply SOF against nation-states in competition. Simply labeling an entire nation-state as a threat and using SOF wherever they acted would lead to strategic exhaustion. The J5 also recognized the danger of falling into the war of attrition model adopted for VEOs. It became abundantly clear during initial analysis that the SOF enterprise needed to mature its understanding of all aspects of competition before it could contribute meaningfully to the role SOF played in it.

The first step toward mastering any new topic is to establish accepted definitions. A common lexicon is a vital element of shared understanding, so the J5 set out to define the terminology of competition. After an exhaustive research period that included discussing the meaning of competition with authors of the NDS, the J5 found robust discussions of intriguing ideas but no widely accepted definitions. Without a clear foundational understanding of this term, the J5 aimed to define competition in a manner consistent with the NDS and the newly minted Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning (JCIC) of "campaigning below the level of armed conflict."

"A Primer on Competition" introduces this edited monograph because it was the first effort to create a definition of competition. While the ideas have continued to mature, it still represents the core approach of the J5. In it, the group settled on three core concepts of competition—influence, leverage, and advantage—which form the common ways through which an actor secures

its interests. Influence is the power to cause an effect in indirect or intangible ways. Leverage is the application of influence gained or created to achieve an effect or exploit an opportunity, and advantage is the superiority of position or condition. Interests, which could be deemed a fourth core concept, are the focus of influence, leverage, and advantage. Accordingly, the J5 defined competition as the interaction among actors in pursuit of the influence, leverage, and advantage necessary to secure their respective interests.

After coalescing around this proposed definition, the group turned its attention to the meaning of competition "below the level of armed conflict." The J5 were not the only ones tackling competition around the joint force. An alternate, contrarian view within the joint force suggests that competition below the level of armed conflict is really about preparation for war. In this view, the aim in competition is to ensure adequate preparation should large-scale armed conflict arise. Proponents of this view often failed to consider military activities in peace beyond preparations and posturing for conflict. While preparation for conflict rightfully remains a core task for the military, the war itself remains a low-probability event. Considering this tension, how does a nation both protect and advance their interests while avoiding costly war?

China and Russia had demonstrated recent successes at employing this concept by leveraging incrementalism and ambiguity to secure their interests in the South China Sea and Eastern Europe, respectively. By comparison, the U.S. appeared flat-footed in the face of these less conventional approaches and also seemed to struggle to protect and advance its interests in conditions short of war. Both the NDS and JCIC state that the U.S. military must prepare for conflict, but these documents also recognize that the country can and must do more in peacetime to protect and advance U.S. interests. Accordingly, answering the question of "how do you approach campaigning in peace?" became a central theme of a more significant effort and focus, which is the first article in chapter 1, "Harnessing David and Goliath: Orthodoxy, Asymmetry, and Competition."

On the heels of "Harnessing David and Goliath" is "Starting With Why: The National Security Strategy and America's National Interests" followed by "Deterring 'Competition Short of War:' Are Gray Zones the Ardennes of Our Modern Maginot Line of Traditional Deterrence?" During the summer and fall of 2019, USSOCOM also commissioned more competition articles: "Strategy and Competition," "Between Competition and Global War," "Applying

SOF in Competition," "Balancing the Future," and "Transforming SOF for Competition: A Roadmap for Change." The latter is a fictional short story that describes SOF teams of the future in a competitive scenario. These excellent articles all contributed to our broader understanding of the role of SOF in competition, and they are included in this Competition Series.

Due to the sheer volume learned, the team agreed to consolidate ideas and conclusions into a single, synthesized article. This synthesis became the conclusion, "A More Perfect Union," and included the feedback of USSOCOM senior leaders who helped refine the definition of competition, review doctrine, and question strategic assertions. "A More Perfect Union" is the high water mark of our thinking and captures the fundamental principles that were more deeply explored in the other articles.

Despite the work that has been done thus far, it is far from being complete. The USSOCOM J5 team will continue to refine and develop the theory and strategy of SOF in competition. Strategic shocks like the COVID-19 pandemic will undoubtedly affect national priorities, relationships, and budgets and will shape understanding of the possibilities and limitations of SOF in competition. In the meantime, this volume offers the enterprise a way to see itself and its future as these ideas are culminated into doctrine. The team hopes leaders, planners, and operators will find these articles useful as they continue to shape plans, policy, and strategy while charting the future of SOF.

Acknowledgements

U.S. Army Colonel (Ret.) Monte Erfourth and U.S. Air Force Colonel (Ret.) Jeremiah Monk remained the two drivers of innovation and thought in the development of these articles. They had a series of long strategic discussions that contributed to how the team framed the problem. Throughout the process, Monte led the drive to write, research, and whiteboard each article in the volume, and Jeremiah was a principal researcher, intellectual contributor, writer, sounding board, discussion leader, and indispensable editor. Together, they made the volume possible. Ever-present in these discussions, J52 deputy U.S. Marine Corps Lieutenant Colonel Mike Arnone and lead strategist Dr. Aaron Bazin made lasting contributions framing the issues, pointing toward better answers to hard questions, and developing the products themselves.

Mr. Ryan Oliver, our China specialist, worked closely with Colonel Erfourth to develop a roadmap for the Competition Series, and researched and took the pen for the introduction, "A Primer on Competition," and the articles "Harnessing David and Goliath" and "Applying SOF in Competition." He provided invaluable contributions at dozens of whiteboard sessions and continued to support the effort for well over a year after deploying to Germany as a National Guardsman. His gifts as a writer and thinker gave the articles a sense of eloquence none of the rest of us could match. We added Jeremy Kotkin to the team in May 2019 in anticipation of Mr. Oliver's impending deployment to Europe. He contributed to the conclusion, "A More Perfect Union," and became the principal writer and contributor to our work on U.S. interests. Mr. Kotkin is a gifted strategist and exceptional writer. We were lucky to have him on the team.

U.S. Marine Corps Colonel Mark Reid and U.S. Army Colonel (Ret.) Bob Jones joined Mr. Oliver, Dr. Bazin, Colonel Monk, and Colonel Montgomery as we wrestled with researching the "Harnessing David and Goliath" article. Colonel Jones assisted in researching and writing segments of this article, while Dr. Bazin was critical in framing ideas and elevating our understanding of Army structure, doctrine, and institutional strategies to conflict. Lieutenant Colonel Arnone helped hammer out the mental kinks at daily whiteboard sessions. U.S. Air Force Colonel (Ret.) Jack Hester helped run a

weekly two-hour session that we established as a permanent group forum to present ideas and get cross-directorate input into the thought process. In March 2019, Colonel Erfourth assigned Dr. Bazin to spearhead a parallel effort to study what U.S. global interests might be. Dr. Nathan Barrick and Dr. Patricia Degennaro joined Dr. Bazin as they tackled U.S. foreign policy looking for a list of vital and essential interests. Ms. Theresa Cross later joined the team and led the way in the development of an article for publication on U.S. national interests and a fantastic index of the U.S. relationship to every nation in the world. Dr. Bazin arranged interviews with critical thinkers on the National Security Council and with two of the authors of the National Security Strategy as we attempted to develop a list of critically vital interests. Without his tireless work on understanding interests and mapping them, our entire theory would have remained a pet idea and not the foundation for the strategy behind the Campaign Plan for Global Special Operations.

The author of the JCIC, U.S. Army Colonel Scott Kendrick, discussed the topic with us virtually and in-person throughout our writing process. His insights were invaluable.

Command Chief Master Sergeant Greg Smith helped refine the definition of competition, review doctrine, and question strategic assertions. We also similarly engaged Dr. Jeff Meiser at the University of Portland, who was most helpful in exploring theories of victory. In March 2020, we engaged United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) Commander, U.S. Army General Richard Clarke, in a discussion on a refinement of the definition. His insights and focus helped cement our understanding of the problems and opportunities.

Regional experts Nitin Patel, Bernard Carreau, Oleg Borukhin, and Will O'Hara contributed deep insight and nuance to approaching rivals in competition. U.S. Marine Corps Lieutenant Colonel Pat Crawford added in critical regional problems and developed a brilliant approach to identifying global strategic priorities.

We owe a special thanks to Mr. Glenn Harned, Ms. Shannon Miller, and Mr. Ira Schurig for their work on institutional and cultural change. The story of Special Operations Forces in a competitive future, written by Scott Hopkins and found in chapter 4, is one of our favorites.

USSOCOM J5 Director of Strategy, Plans, and Policy, Mr. William "Joe" Miller, was a superb editor and a well-studied expert on deterrence and asymmetric theory. His research, analysis, and geopolitical understanding

were vital to framing the competition problem. He edited every article, joined us at the whiteboard, and suffered through Colonel Erfourth's indomitable persistence to complete these articles. Mr. Miller has worked on every word in these articles, and his energy and intellectual gifts were a vital source of confirmation and correction throughout the research and writing.

And finally, a humble thank you for support and advice throughout this process goes to U.S. Navy Vice Admiral Tim Szymanski, Command Chief Master Sergeant Smith, General Clarke, and especially Mr. Miller, who offered great discussion, feedback, and thoughtful editing. Colonel Erfourth and Colonel Monk want to thank everyone who gave their thoughts, words, passion, and effort to this long-term project and hope the readers get as much from this compilation as we did in putting it together.

Introduction. A Primer on Competition

William "Joe" Miller, Colonel (Ret.) Montgomery (Monte) Erfourth, Colonel (Ret.) Jeremiah Monk, Mr. Ryan Oliver, Dr. Aaron Bazin

Centuries ago, the Greek historian Thucydides offered a timeless conceptual framework for understanding what drives actors to conflict: fear, honor, and interests. Within this Thucydidean triad, not all factors are created equal. Fear and honor remain reasonably reliable predictors of geopolitical behavior, but both are conceptually reliant on interests. Fear arises from a perceived threat to one's interests. Honor reflects the credibility and reputation of an actor, the undermining of which challenges one's interests. In this light, interests remain the critical determinant in evaluating and anticipating behavior, and yet precisely what and how vital those interests are leaves room for interpretation. As stated in the 2017 National Security Strategy, the U.S. identifies four categorical interests: defense of the homeland, preservation of American prosperity, peace through strength, and expansion of American influence. Other actors across the global landscape have similar interests they pursue with varying degrees of effectiveness. As power swells and shifts in a dynamic strategic environment, the pursuit of interests, mitigation of fear, and defense of honor drive actors and risk escalation. Can the U.S. pursue its interests—amid the myriad of actors seeking their own—while avoiding the devastating costs and effects of war?

Since the publication of the 2018 National Defense Strategy, the Department of Defense has wrestled with the meaning and implications of a return to competition. As various elements of the national security enterprise set out to compete on the global stage, a foundational challenge immediately arises from the lack of a shared understanding of what competition is in the context of geopolitics. Reaching agreement on a definition is critical, as a lack of consensus contributes to a lack of understanding as to why a nation competes and what that competition should achieve.

In the face of this challenge, General Clarke, U.S. Special Operations Command commander and his staff have defined competition, linking the

definition to *why* a nation competes and *what* should be the result of successfully competing in a more cohesive theory. The following articulates both a definition and a theory of competition.

Actors compete to advance or protect their interests. Competition is the interaction among actors in pursuit of the influence, leverage, and advantage necessary to advance and protect their respective interests.[1] Competition is continuous because the conditions that define an acceptable end state are continually changing and require adaptation in action.[2] Success in competition requires the application of all elements of power.

There are four core elements of competition: *influence*, *advantage*, and *leverage* form the common, fundamentally interrelated aspects through which an actor advances and protects the fourth core element—its *interests*.

1. *Interests* define those things or concepts that a nation values—those things which states seek to protect or achieve concerning each other. They are contextual and may include the maintenance of physical security, economic prosperity, continuity of government and culture at home, and value projection in the geopolitical environment as well as emotional triggers (e.g., fear, honor, glory) and other drivers (e.g., virtual, cognitive) that animate action. "Strategy must begin ... with purpose, and purpose in foreign affairs strategy rests on the concept of the national interest."[3] A strategy framed by national interests allows us to identify threats and opportunities to promote and protect those interests. This point is often underappreciated in U.S. strategic conversation, which instead mostly focuses on perceived threats. An interest-led orientation, including understanding adversary interests more thoroughly, is the cornerstone of a comprehensive approach to competition.

2. *Influence* is the power to cause an effect in indirect or intangible ways. An actor can accumulate, spend, or lose influence. To make informed assessments about degrees of influence, one must develop a better understanding of populations, interest groups, governance, grievances, and other strategic issues.

3. *Advantage* is superiority of position or condition. It is created by the accumulation of influence toward the desired effect. Inherently relative, it is realized through the exercise of the instruments of

power—diplomacy, information, military, and economy. It is comprised of physical or virtual aspects (e.g., technology, geographic access, resources, and arsenal inventories) as well as more nebulous, cognitive elements (e.g., initiative, momentum, morale, and skill). Advantage is established partially through activities generating recognizable qualitative or quantitative competitive advantage—such as during the Cold War strategic arms race.

4. *Leverage*[4] is the application of advantage gained or created to achieve an effect or exploit an opportunity. From a position of leverage, an actor is more capable of promoting and protecting its interests. Leverage also involves applying principles of competition (some of which are discussed further on) and a deep understanding of other actors and the strategic environment to increase the likelihood and scope of success.

Cooperation, competition, and conflict all reflect the degree of friction among and between their efforts as actors pursue influence to leverage for an advantage that will best advance and protect their interests.[5] Where interests converge, actors cooperate; where interests diverge, actors compete—sometimes to the point of conflict. Actors with varying interests often cooperate and compete in different areas simultaneously. Furthermore, actors assign various degrees of significance to interests; what may be a peripheral interest to one actor may be a vital interest to another and the relative importance of a given interest changes over time. The ability of actors to build influence, action leverage through the various tools of power (the military being one of many), and establish and maintain advantage relative to others with divergent interests shapes their behavior and determines their freedom of action in competition.

Where interests converge, actors cooperate; where interests diverge, actors compete—sometimes to the point of conflict.

Success in competition demands the full and comprehensive application of power by an actor toward its interests. This requires gaining and maintaining sufficient influence to leverage for advantage regarding the interests (at the times and places) that matter. This is a dynamic challenge that continually evolves with geopolitical and technological developments. Today's competition sets the conditions for a better peace, the attainment

of objectives short of war, and if done comprehensively, sets more favorable conditions in the event of future conflict.

Competition provides opportunities to achieve outcomes before war, ensure favorable conditions for escalation, and gain advantage in the event of conflict. Building influence with allies, partners, and other actors is critical to producing opportunities in competition. Advancing a national narrative reinforced by principled and consistent actions can also generate influence. Proactively shaping change in the strategic environment rather than bluntly resisting perceived challenges can further buttress advantage. The choice is to shape the future now—exploit opportunities as offered and create others as we can—or be shaped by it.

Not unlike great powers of the past, the U.S. approach to contemporary competition has not adequately adapted to the strategic environment. Existing U.S. deterrence models, primarily based on strategic and large-scale conventional forces, have failed to prevent other actors from expanding their influence around the world through methods short of armed conflict. This shortcoming emerges precisely and paradoxically because the deterrence of conventional and nuclear conflict has been achieved. Rivals, adversaries, and enemies have adapted to the conventional superiority and nuclear parity of the U.S.; they have developed new approaches/concepts to pursue their objectives and secure their interests short of war, in effect avoiding our most potent military capabilities. In short, adversaries employ strategies that elude existing U.S. advantages, advancing their interests while avoiding direct conflict. This highlights a growing gap in U.S. strategy—a difference that will continue to grow as power diffuses to a broader range of actors.

Both state and non-state actors have adopted asymmetric approaches to compete effectively against the United States. Some compete through spectacular acts of terrorism, while others work to dismantle international institutions and alliances. Others compete for influence campaigns through economic, diplomatic, and information channels and leveraging asymmetries of interest. Still, others compete by leveraging ambiguities in the security environment using military means that elude existing deterrence models. These examples are illustrative, not exhaustive; actors continue to develop inventive ways to compete and the U.S. must proactively innovate to shape the environment.

An innovative approach to competition must not rely on conventional deterrence alone. Deterrence primarily focuses on the defense of the status

quo. Fundamentally elastic and psychological, deterrence is often described as the combined effect of an actor's advantage, the strength of will, and perceived credibility. As such, effective deterrence requires a deep comprehension of the targeted actor's strategic culture, motivations, priorities, and capabilities. However, in addition to maintaining the ability to deter, preclude, or preempt divergent behavior, competitive conditions also require the ability to enhance, enable, or promote convergent practice. A practical approach to competition must proactively shape the strategic environment by leveraging relative strengths to increase influence and build advantages.

To build a logical approach, leaders need a better understanding of the joint force's role in competition. The U.S. has had competitive approaches in the past—from the Monroe Doctrine to George Kennan's Containment. A contemporary approach for competition should be rooted in a pragmatic assessment of U.S. interests. It should meet challenges in competition using statecraft tempered by a sober realism concerning U.S. capabilities, resources, will, and attention. A deeper understanding of other actors' perspectives—enhancing options in competition and sharpening deterrence while identifying and exploiting openings for alignment—should focus on the approach. In seeking answers on competition, however, more questions emerge that must first be addressed.

- What is the U.S. competing for and why?
- How can the U.S. better identify and exploit opportunities for cooperation?
- How can the U.S. align its competitive efforts within a principled narrative?
- What alternative approaches can address gaps in traditional deterrence?
- How do other actors view and engage within competition?
- Is a more reliable conventional force sufficient to protect and promote U.S. interests? Asked another way: Would a larger "Goliath" deter "David?"

These questions do not have simple answers and go far beyond conducting business as usual. If these questions are left unanswered, Russia and China will continue to extend their influence and challenge U.S. interests. Unaddressed, the U.S. will lose influence, its power will wane, and the likelihood of conflict will increase significantly.

A strength taken to an extreme often becomes a weakness. The U.S. must maintain its military power, but it must be careful not to become a lumbering

giant that stumbles haphazardly while cunning challengers maneuver with agility. The U.S. should strive to be strong, smart, powerful, and precise. However, until the U.S. develops a shared understanding of exactly what competition is and is not, it will not only be on the losing side, it will not even be in the game.

Endnotes

1. Joe Miller, Monte Erfourth, Jeremiah Monk, and Ryan Oliver, "Harnessing David and Goliath: Orthodoxy, Asymmetry, and Competition," *Small Wars Journal*, 7 February 2019, https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/harnessing-david-and-goliath-orthodoxy-asymmetry-and-competition.
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Chapter 1. Understanding the Challenge

This chapter seeks to describe the theoretical underpinnings of competition in the contemporary context. Additionally, it explores critical terms in the competition lexicon such as advantage, leverage, influence, indirect approach, and U.S. interests. This chapter also intends to help form a common understanding among readers as to what competition is—and is not—as a conceptual foundation that later chapters will build upon. All articles in this chapter originally appeared in *Small Wars Journal* in 2019.

The first article in this chapter, "Harnessing David and Goliath: Orthodoxy, Asymmetry, and Competition," argues that the U.S. has enjoyed unprecedented influence over global affairs for nearly three decades, but the window of opportunity to exploit that advantage is closing quickly. In this environment, it suggests that without a forward-leaning effort to design the future, the U.S. remains at the mercy of other actors' more aggressive approaches and the inertia of systemic change. This article suggests that a diversified and compound approach can leverage the power of the "U.S. Goliath" and pair it with its David-like capabilities in a proactive fashion to compete. It also describes how rather than seeking to control global events, the U.S. should leverage its influence to build advantage and support favorable outcomes.

The second article in this chapter, "Starting with Why: The National Security Strategy and America's National Interests," starts from the foundational idea that national interests are the DNA of strategy and provide the underlying structure upon which every nation bases its strategic thinking. The authors argue that interests drive political decision-making, describe the *why*, and reveal the underlying logic of U.S. strategic choices—or lack thereof. This analysis looks into recent National Security Strategy (NSS) documents with an emphasis on the 2016 NSS. The chapter presents a weighting of stated national interests as vital, important, and peripheral. Finally, this chapter presents a regional view as the basis of an interest-based approach to competition.

The final article of this chapter is "Deterring 'Competition Short of War:' Are Gray Zones the Ardennes of our Modern Maginot Line of Traditional Deterrence?" In this chapter, Colonel (Ret.) Bob Jones builds on

an interest-based approach and introduces three new valuable concepts for considering U.S. activities in competition. The first concept is focused deterrence, which includes identifying all of the actors with vital interests in a particular issue and then shapes a flexible and adaptive package of activities designed to appropriately encourage positive behavior. The second concept, unconventional deterrence, does not just deter bad behavior but is a unique form of deterrence that encourages positive behavior in equal measure. The final concept is unconventional resilience, which suggests that instead of deterring the bad actor, this method works to preclude the bad actor by denying the opportunity for action.

Harnessing David and Goliath: Orthodoxy, Asymmetry, and Competition

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> Centuries ago in the Valley of Elah, Goliath swept his eye across the field between his Philistine army and towards Saul, standing in front of the Israelite Army. As he had done for each of the past forty days, Goliath called for an Israeli challenger. The call went unheeded, until a youth stepped forward. Saul, the king and leader of the Israeli army and cowed in fear by the giant, looked in shock at the youth who had accepted the call to single combat. Saul, second in power only to Goliath, offered his armor to the nearly naked young man, which he declined. The youth, David, untested by war and a mere shepherd, had surveyed the enormous armor-clad warrior at the head of the Philistines with his enormous spear and instantly saw weakness. Loading a smooth stone into his sling, a sling that had felled lions and bears, David judged the distance and aimed for the giant's forehead. David heaved and struck true. Within seconds, Goliath lay dead at his countrymen's feet. Undeterred by the ostensibly impossible challenge, the youth ended the reign of fear imposed by the seemingly invincible giant. David saw what others had not, that victory would not come by matching strength with strength. Victory was won by using his strength against the giant's vulnerability.

Introduction

The U.S. remains in a position to have a disproportionate impact on the shape of the future, but the window of opportunity is closing. While the military must continue to prepare for distant and unlikely wars, the U.S.

is losing ground in the present. Outside of war, actors are achieving desired outcomes and increasing their positional and policy advantages, often at the expense of U.S. interests. These actors have stolen intellectual property, annexed the sovereign territory of neighboring nations, interfered in political processes, and even caused the deaths of innocent non-combatants. Their militaries elude existing nuclear and conventional deterrence practices, often enabling other elements of a national effort to extend influence. Left unchecked, this behavior contributes to a future that will be more accommodating and hospitable to authoritarianism and disorder.

To meet this challenge, the 2018 National Defense Strategy (NDS) outlined the need for the U.S. military to compete short of armed conflict. However, it left ill-defined both how to compete and for what purpose, while doubling down on the deterrent effect of its conventional forces—the very aspect of the U.S. approach that rivals have learned to avoid. Competition now permeates nearly every contemporary U.S. strategic document. In the year since the publication of the NDS, no strategic document from the Department of Defense has defined competition—and more specifically, competition short of armed conflict—or described how to compete with any clarity.

This critical shortcoming puts the viability of the strategy at risk and threatens unity of effort. Stakeholders across the defense enterprise have already begun to interpret the idea through their own localized lens. Every Service and theater finds a way to distill their own flavor of competition in what may simply reflect existential concerns about retaining relevance and the resources that come along with it. While each service certainly has a role in competition, putting platforms and posture at the center of competition absent context defined by strategic objectives and national interests is a recipe for failure. These divergent perspectives fail to account for the fact that the adversaries described in the NDS have achieved significant gains at the expense of U.S. interests and in spite of U.S. conventional and nuclear superiority.

Over the past three decades, the U.S. has marshalled unprecedented military power and enjoyed greater freedom of action than any actor in history, and yet David-like rivals have increasingly found vulnerabilities that mitigate this Goliath-like strength. To be successful in conditions short of war, the U.S. must learn to engage as both Goliath and David, both overwhelming and precise in the coordinated application of power. While the joint force must maintain strategic deterrence and continue to prepare for

high-end conventional conflict, it must simultaneously leverage orthodox and unorthodox applications of power through a compound approach to achieve outcomes in competition short of war.

Competition in Contemporary Context

> While armies continue to fear Goliath, David has shown the world how to defeat the giant. As others learn of David's approach, Goliath has failed to draw on this experience and grows more vulnerable to those who emulate David.

The U.S. remains near the height of its power with a dominant role in the world economy and best-in-class military, but short-term developments and long-term trends are quickly eroding the foundation of that position of advantage. The U.S. defines its vital interests as protecting the American people, the homeland, and the American way of life; promoting American prosperity; preserving peace through strength; and advancing American influence.[1] Tempered optimism in previous administrations brought attempts to reset relations with Russia and to welcome rising China as a responsible stakeholder. However, the U.S. now views both as strategic challenges to those interests and asserts, "It is increasingly clear that China and Russia want to shape a world consistent with their authoritarian model."[2]

Sovereign states serve as the baseline around which societies function at present, however, a diverse cast of capable influencers has begun to emerge. Multinational corporations, such as Google, Amazon, Facebook, Alibaba, Huawei, and ZTE, control vast swaths of the telecommunications landscape—including massive amounts of data derived from populations. Online communities are taking on state-like qualities in the form of cyber nations, with physical embassies popping up globally to provide a venue for in-person interaction.[3] Individuals—from political leaders to lone wolves—bear greater power to influence events globally. In this time of rapid change, the next dominant social or political construct remains unknown.

Accelerating systemic changes are also shaping the strategic environment. Demographic developments suggest that traditional powers will soon confront significant internal pressures from aging populations and migration, while many less developed states face youth bulges that offer both economic opportunities and security challenges.[4] The proliferation of technology paradoxically enables both populations and states, providing opportunities for

individuals to exercise power while also affording states means to monitor, influence, and control populations. Environmental degradation has reached critical levels, driving food scarcity, ocean acidification, biodiversity loss, and coastal crises.[5] Economic trends are driving inequality among population segments within states. These trends suggest that "even well-functioning states are losing ground as power is dispersed downward and outward,"[6] as power and influence once exclusive to Westphalian states spread to a wider range of organizations and individuals.

Each generation faces challenges wrought by change, and these challenges cannot be met with simple fear and doubt. As Dr. Henry Kissinger observed in 2015, "The United States has not faced a more diverse and complex array of crises since the end of the Second World War."[7] Within the U.S. itself, a growing domestic culture of cynicism is compounding these global strategic challenges. Nevertheless, the U.S. stands poised to guide the world through its networked security, economic leadership, and diplomatic connectivity. Its community of allies and partners is unrivaled. Its people remain a creative and dominant economic force. Its values offer more for people than more transactional alternatives. Despite its vulnerabilities, the U.S. can further develop its position as the friend of choice and dominant player in the "great game" with strategic vision, adaptability, and statecraft.

The State of Strategy

In the words of former Secretary of Defense James Mattis, "Today, we are emerging from a period of strategic atrophy."[8] In the absence of a forward-looking vision for the world and the U.S. role within it, the joint force has become embroiled in avoidable conflicts with no clear end state, suffering from the demands of tactical urgency at the expense of strategic form. National resolve has wavered as the costs of these conflicts has accumulated, particularly in the wake of the global financial crisis. In General Mattis' assessment, the complex and dangerous strategic environment described above is "the result of 20 years of the United States operating unguided by strategy."[9] Indeed, U.S. strategies in recent decades have focused on either perceived threats or opportunities, often losing sight of national interests central to determining what is in fact a threat or opportunity.[10]

In this context, the NDS and 2017 National Security Strategy (NSS) have instructed the military to compete short of armed conflict while maintaining

readiness for high-end warfare. The NSS states, "An America that successfully competes is the best way to prevent conflict."[11] It emphasizes the military's role in competition within a broader national effort, establishing that "U.S. military strength remains a vital component of the competition for influence."[12] However, the NSS recognizes that "our diplomatic, intelligence, military, and economic agencies have not kept pace with the changes in the character of competition."[13] This inability to keep pace with changes further reflects the costs of strategic atrophy.

Building on the NSS, the central idea of the NDS is expanding the competitive space. The NDS explains, "A more lethal force, strong alliances and partnerships, American technological innovation, and a culture of performance will generate decisive and sustained U.S. military advantages."[14] According to the NDS, the role of the military with respect to its interagency partners is also a critical area of emphasis:

> A long-term strategic competition requires the seamless integration of multiple elements of national power: diplomacy, information, economics, finance, intelligence, law enforcement, and military. Our government partners are often the lead in key competition areas. The military, for its part, must continue to fulfill its role of deterrence but must also consider ways to apply the military instrument differently to better enable diplomatic, information, and economic elements of power.[15]

A critical gap in national strategy at present remains an enduring vision that can withstand changes in administration and distracting fluctuations in the security environment and guide the development of strategies and campaigning. George Kennan's Long Telegram in 1946 remains a landmark example of how a single document can integrate cultural understanding and strategic vision into an overarching lodestar for an existential challenge spanning generations.[16] Nested within that guidance, subordinate strategies over the course of the Cold War reflected that vision in space and time to address the contemporary environment at different stages. In the face of persistent disorder and accelerating change, no such enduring vision has emerged for how the U.S. might shape the world to better accommodate its interests and the values it shares with its allies and partners. In the absence of such a vision, the U.S. risks distraction in wars of choice and abdication of its position as the leading global power.

For the part of the U.S. military, however, the joint force—in full cooperation with its partners—must adapt its organizations, concepts, and doctrine to the evolving character of competition. To do so, the joint force must develop a deeper understanding of the character of competition.

Theoretical Context

Leaders have many lenses through which to evaluate the strategic environment, build deeper understanding of competition, and develop effective approaches to contemporary challenges and opportunities. Thucydides offers one such model, which is widely accepted as a conceptual framework for understanding what drives actors to fight: fear, honor, and interests.[17] Although contemporary strategic thinking orients predominantly around interests, the remaining two legs of the Thucydidean triad—fear and honor—influence behavior as well and can often account for deviations from interest-based rationality. Fear of encirclement or instability on the periphery—for example, in Eastern Europe for Russia or in the South China Sea for China—also shapes behavior. Similarly, China's sociological concept of "face" and Russia's emphasis on geopolitical respect both reflect how honor permeates contemporary strategic culture. Assuming that conflict is but competition in its most intense and violent form, this same triad may also provide insight into why actors compete and help to characterize actors' behavior and motivations in competition.

Theory and Practice

Dr. Terry Deibel offers another lens to consider when developing and evaluating strategy. Deibel assesses, "Strategy must begin … with purpose; and purpose in foreign affairs strategy rests on the concept of the national interest."[18] From this foundation of interests, strategists can identify threats and opportunities: "Threats are to (and opportunities for) interests. Indeed … threats are only threats if they jeopardize an interest, and opportunities only opportunities if they can help the state advance an interest." In this way, threats and opportunities are inherently relational to the interests that they affect. One actor leverages power to exploit identified threats and opportunities through its influence, described as "the effect of that power on its intended target."[19] These key building blocks of strategy—interests,

threats, opportunities, power, and influence—all play roles in constructing a more comprehensive understanding of competition.

A third lens through which to consider competition emerges from the indirect approach. In this sense, strategists should focus on challenging or disrupting an adversary's system, strategy, and underlying logic rather than directly confront what the adversary presents. While military theorist Liddell Hart helped to articulate and contextualize these concepts, they are not uniquely his; strategists reaching back to Sun Tzu have advocated for an indirect approach.[20] While Hart focuses on the development and application of strategy in war, his thoughts provide insight into competition as well—one actor can certainly target another's equilibrium without engaging in armed conflict. External interference in domestic media and electoral processes, deliberate use of economic tools to generate specific effects on an adversary, and military operations short of armed conflict that defy adversary expectations are but a few examples of how the indirect approach might manifest in competition. In other words, the principles incumbent to an indirect approach can help to inform a deeper understanding of competition.

Understanding the driving power of interests and the principles of indirect approach informs a broader strategic asymmetry critical to an effective approach to competition. Interests determine an actor's perceptions of threats and opportunities, but not all interests are the same; an actor will value certain interests, such as protection of its citizens, higher than more peripheral interests, such as productive relations with a given partner. Furthermore, actors will assign different values to interests, influencing their tolerance both for risk and for the encroachment of another actor on that given interest. Actors are able to address threats and opportunities depending on the capabilities they possess and the legal and ethical bounds of their respective strategic cultures. Therefore, competition takes place in a context where interests drive behavior and actors seek to shape the environment more favorably to the advantages of their strategic cultures.

Actors are able to address threats and opportunities depending on the capabilities they possess and the legal and ethical bounds of their respective strategic cultures.

Competition Short of Armed Conflict

Actors employ all tools of statecraft to maximize the impact of power applied toward advancing national interests without engaging in direct conflict. Influence, leverage, and advantage form the common ways through which an actor secures its interests and are fundamentally interrelated. Influence is the power to cause an effect in indirect or intangible ways. An actor can actively accumulate, spend, or lose influence; influence also passively emanates as it accumulates, much like interest gained on investment. Leverage is the application of influence gained or created to achieve an effect or exploit an opportunity. Advantage is superiority of position or condition. Inherently relative, it is established through leveraging tools of power—diplomatic, informational, military, and economic—used to manage and employ that influence. From a position of advantage, an actor is more capable of promoting and protecting its interests.

As actors pursue influence, leverage, and advantage to secure their interests, cooperation, competition, and conflict all reflect the degree of friction among their efforts. Where interests converge, actors cooperate; where interests diverge, actors compete—sometimes to the point of conflict. Actors often cooperate and compete in different areas simultaneously. Furthermore, actors assign different degrees of significance to interests; what may be a peripheral interest to one actor may in fact be a vital interest to another. The ability of actors to build influence, action leverage, and establish and maintain advantage shapes behavior and determines their freedom of action in competition.

Any contemporary effort to define competition must acknowledge other adjacent concepts that influence the current conversation, chief among them the concept of deterrence. Beginning in the wake of World War II and retrenched throughout the Cold War, the U.S. has viewed its nuclear and large-scale conventional might as the bedrock of national security. A leading premise suggested that mutually assured destruction had held the hounds of "hot war" at bay, keeping simmering violence from reaching a boil and providing statesmen space to maneuver against their counterparts. The Gulf War served as an exclamation point on the merits of nuclear and large-scale conventional deterrence, providing all observers with an unequivocal demonstration of that power and reinforcing the validity of the U.S. approach. Since that time, however, actors—state and non-state alike—have sought to

poke holes in that strategic deterrence. Al-Qaeda revealed a limitation of strategic deterrence that comes when an aggressor has virtually no physical territory or assets for the U.S. to impose its military might against. State actors have begun to test for limitations as well, as China's incrementalism in the South China Sea and Russia's operational ambiguity in Ukraine demonstrated further gaps in the U.S. approach. Precisely and paradoxically because the U.S. has successfully deterred nuclear and large-scale conventional war, actors have adapted to its conventional superiority and nuclear parity, developing approaches to pursue their objectives and secure their interests short of war. Deterrence will remain a necessary component of a U.S. approach to competition, but its limitations require consideration of a more comprehensive approach.

Legacy concepts reflect habits of mind for the U.S. national security community as a collective. Each era of defense issues—from the Cold War through the Gulf War and into the Global War on Terror—has imprinted the prevailing concepts of its day upon the U.S. strategic psyche and influences perspectives, biases, and approaches to prescribing a role for the U.S. in the broader environment. These cognitive ruts that have developed across U.S. institutions both offer guiding rails based on personal and national experience and also, if not questioned or mitigated, threaten to steer U.S. strategy along a more comfortable path to a less appropriate approach to the contemporary environment and its challenges. These concepts independently remain insufficient to address present issues, yet they collectively bear consideration in developing a military approach to competition.

Asymmetry and Competition

> Although Goliath's size and strength keep opposing armies from taking the battlefield, David-like options would likely prove more effective in competition short of armed conflict than a more powerful Goliath.

Within current U.S. strategy, a military approach to competition must begin with the NSS and NDS. Based on a "principled realism," these documents orient around favorable regional balances of power, the achievement of which would likely allow the U.S. sufficient global influence to moderate and guide change.[21] However, seeking these outcomes through a direct approach would

be a mistake; geographic distance, finite resources, and numerous actors ensure the U.S. cannot hope to achieve these outcomes simply through the direct application of its economic and military might. To this end, the NDS asserts that the U.S. must "[seize] the initiative to challenge our competitors where we possess advantages and they lack strength."[22] The joint force must develop an approach that makes most effective use of limited resources to maximize advantages derived from the differences, or asymmetry, between actors. In doing so, the joint force will drive rivals into the horns of a dilemma, leaving nothing but difficult options.

Fundamentally, asymmetry is a relational concept describing two sides that are not the same; in strategy, asymmetries are the material and immaterial differences between actors and the associated advantages and disadvantages in that relational context.[23] Geopolitical competition generally reflects infinite competition, within which a constellation of finite engagements take place to move the needle of advantage. Materially, actors possess unique arrays of qualities that introduce distinct advantages and disadvantages relative to other actors. One actor may benefit from a robust economy and high levels of cultural attractiveness while remaining vulnerable through the openness of its society and political spheres. Another may enjoy unity of vision under closed governance and social systems while remaining brittle in the face of popular dissent or internal subterfuge. Cultures may present similarly double-edged qualities, as can be seen in contrasting individualist and collectivist societies. Immaterially, as Sun Tzu long ago observed, "All warfare is based on deception."[24] This dictum is perhaps most applicable in the masking and leveraging of immaterial asymmetries, as rivals can exploit advantages and understanding to induce strategic miscalculation or paralysis. Another set of immaterial asymmetries emerges from the different ambitions—and different prioritization of those ambitions—that actors pursue. While rivals constantly seek to exploit asymmetries and shape competition to advantage over time, their approaches should ultimately reflect what they hope to accomplish in the long term.

Looking out across the strategic environment with myriad challenges both emergent and enduring, the U.S. must assess which challenges prevent it from accomplishing its goals, under what circumstances to engage rivals, and how to cultivate and exploit asymmetries in pursuit of those goals and favorable future conditions. Dissimilar values of competing interests, distinctive features of sociopolitical systems, and different operating logics for

the execution of national strategy all present asymmetries that one actor may leverage against another for advantage. In the Cold War, the U.S. cultivated an international system and influenced Soviet leadership toward difficult decision points that played to U.S. advantages while exposing Soviet weaknesses. Since the end of the Cold War, however, rivals have avoided engaging U.S. strengths and rather have sought to modify conditions and exploit opportunities of the international system to create a more favorable environment to their advantages. In this asymmetric spirit, the U.S. must now strive to change the game in a manner favorable to U.S. advantages.

Leaders at the national level can apply military power asymmetrically within a broader strategy, reflecting the indirect approach advocated by Hart. Historically, cases abound where superior powers and their militaries have been overcome or undermined by diplomatic, economic, and social forces. These cautionary lessons suggest that winning military battles but losing the war often manifests from decisive non-military effects generated by leveraging asymmetries between systems and strategies rather than forces. In other words, the ultimate victors employed asymmetric strategies. While asymmetric approaches are typically associated with weaker parties seeking to mitigate an adversary's advantage, the U.S. should seek its own asymmetric strategies that undermine rival strengths. To reshape and dominate the game once more, the U.S. must have the humility to recognize that an asymmetric military approach to competition does not simply mean doubling down on an already superior conventional and nuclear force.

Competition requires that the U.S. understand and leverage the layered asymmetries between itself and competitors to create differences in perception and comprehension. In strategy, asymmetry presents ways of engaging potential opponents in ways for which they are neither organized nor culturally prepared to address. In order to exploit asymmetries, the U.S. must build a military approach based on an operating logic that makes adaptation challenging for those that would threaten U.S. interests.

Competition requires that the U.S. understand and leverage the layered asymmetries between itself and competitors to create differences in perception and comprehension.

The joint force should aspire to harness the principles of asymmetry within an interest-based indirect approach, and the concept of compound warfare may provide an appropriate starting point for such an approach. In

its simplest description, compound warfare features a conventional force and unconventional forces fighting under unified direction to realize fully their complementary potential as each type of force conducts operations that give full expression to its own capabilities.[25] Both conventional and unconventional forces bring distinct advantages and vulnerabilities to bear on the battlefield. If used appropriately and in complement, they are able to mitigate each other's vulnerabilities while maximizing the impact of their employment. Although—like the Thucydidean triad and Hart's indirect approach—compound warfare describes conflict, this concept of a unified approach acting in complement provides a strong foundation for a military approach to competition.

To build a compound approach to competition short of armed conflict, the joint force should leverage orthodox and unorthodox applications of force toward a position of advantage. Whereas compound warfare describes the integration of conventional and unconventional forces, a compound approach focuses less on forces themselves than on the manner in which they are employed. Orthodox military applications are well defined by doctrine and use defined frameworks through which forces evaluate and address issues in the strategic environment. Unorthodox military applications, however, draw on doctrine where applicable and develop frameworks to fit emergent issues rather than rely on defined methodology. A compound approach to competition complements orthodox and unorthodox functions to more effectively exploit asymmetries to advance U.S. interests.

Both orthodox and unorthodox applications of force are essential elements of a comprehensive military. The joint force must continue to meet its traditional responsibilities, such as maintaining strategic deterrence and preparing for high-end conflict, to keep conventional and nuclear threats at bay. This includes ensuring that the joint force is equipped and postured, is at a relatively high level of readiness, and possesses sufficient political support to generate credible deterrent effects on targeted actors. Positioning combat credible forces in contested theaters reassures local allies and partners while also effectively acting as a tripwire for conventional military aggression. However, this approach has not deterred actors from maneuvering to avoid the strength of U.S. forces. As the joint force maintains orthodox approaches to maintain strategic deterrence and readiness for high-end war, it should also more deeply explore unorthodox approaches to both emergent and enduring problems.

In an age where large-scale conventional or nuclear war is in no state's interest, competition—not conflict—will often define more contentious conditions within peaceful coexistence. To complement orthodox functions oriented primarily on deterrence and high-end conflict preparations, the joint force should develop unorthodox military functions that include several key characteristics. Critically, the joint force should integrate its approach with civilian counterparts across the interagency from planning through execution to assessment. From this more dynamic position, an approach should articulate unorthodox options for both deterrence and, if deterrence fails, punitive actions. Finally, the joint force must also provide unorthodox options to achieve strategic gains proactively in conditions short of war—explicitly seeking to create decision dominance by exploiting asymmetries of understanding, position, and capability. In doing so, the U.S. can evolve strategy beyond a binary construct of war and peace and develop usable options that better reflect reality.

Competitive Options Short of War

Competitive elements within a compound approach should provide decision-makers with expanded unorthodox options spanning physical, virtual, and cognitive domains. For the joint force, competitive options short of war form three general groups of unorthodox options. First, these options should advance more comprehensive and dynamic deterrence. While conventional and nuclear forces reinforce conventional and nuclear deterrence, a deterrence suite must discourage a broader range of destabilizing activities. Enhanced deterrence should include the full spectrum of national power instruments, innovative applications of conventional forces, and dynamic use of unconventional forces. Relationship management and technological advancement will also remain essential components of effective deterrence. Organizations must innovate, adapt, and absorb technology rapidly—avoiding attachment to legacy systems, models, and ideas.

Second, unorthodox punitive options should respond in a timely and clear manner to behavior that violates established red lines. Punitive options should adhere to three principles: first, leaders must separately consider the effect on the targeted actor and the effect on the domestic U.S. audience; second, leaders must set limited objectives for the punitive action; and third, leaders must target recoverable assets that will yield a short-term effect rather

than causing more permanent destruction or disruption.[26] These options are temporally sensitive and rely heavily on managing perceptions with both target actors and other observers. Exercising punitive action in response to unacceptable behavior should both arrest deviant behavior and contribute to the credibility of future deterrence. Assumptions about other actors' red lines presently constrain punitive action; engaging in broader experimentation in competition to validate or disprove those assumptions may help to develop more robust options for leaders, particularly in the case of fait accompli conditions or incremental aggression.

Exercising punitive action in response to unacceptable behavior should both arrest deviant behavior and contribute to the credibility of future deterrence.

Third, unorthodox options should provide decision-makers with opportunities to achieve objectives proactively—seeking decisions relative to a limited set of objectives in conditions short of war. These unorthodox options will necessarily be interest-driven, housed within a strategy to establish desired conditions. Efforts should focus primarily on generating effects through non-kinetic methods aimed at targets in the human domain, cyberspace, the information environment, and other non-physical arenas. In the information age, these slings and stones should strive to change populations' minds and behavior rather than to convert the living to the dead, generate deception and miscalculation rather than mass destruction, or darken a city rather than raze it. Precision kinetic strikes may be necessary on occasion but will generally be less desirable given heightened associated risk of escalation and attribution, irreversibility, and perception implications. The emergence, cultivation, and exploitation of opportunities should drive employment of these unorthodox options used to advance goals within the limits of a broader interagency campaign—either in support of civilian counterparts or as independent operations.

Characteristics of Competitive Options

In combination, these unorthodox deterrent, punitive, and proactive options short of war round out a comprehensive suite of efforts within competition—all of which demand further exploration beyond this article. This multi-faceted approach should provide a more proactive complement to

a strategy currently oriented around reactive, posture-based deterrence. Through a more dynamic range of offensive options focused on achieving a decision around limited objectives, the joint force should support the active manipulation of the daily functions of rivals that leaves them disadvantaged in competition and pressed into the horns of a dilemma. Ultimately, these competitive activities should weave together in a global web to generate outcomes that protect and promote U.S. interests.

A more assertive approach to competition inherently involves a discussion of risk tolerance and assumptions with respect to the red lines that define actors' perceived response thresholds. Although policymakers determine thresholds for responses, the military owes its civilian leadership a wider range of options to address asymmetric advances, such as disruptive cyberattacks or aggressive influence operations. While options in competition should develop with awareness of the available political decision space and tolerable risk for leaders, those creating the options should not self-limit to the point of stifling innovation. During the Global War on Terror, decision-makers have grown accustomed to allowing activities with low levels of political risk and modest tactical risk to continue without much heartburn. Activities against more capable competitors without air and maritime dominance and in less defined conditions, however, demand that leaders recalibrate political risk calculations for interactions in a more complex strategic environment. Ethical and legal considerations must always inform the development and employment of options, but limitations imposed by political risk and consequences should derive from the leaders considering the options rather than those developing them. A more proactive posture will undoubtedly carry increased risk, but maintaining a reactive posture may generate even greater long-term risks.

In considering a broader range of engagement options, it will be equally critical for leaders to evaluate where not to engage. In some cases, this may simply mean transitioning to support interagency or multinational partners who may hold advantages specific to the mission or whose capabilities might better align with mission requirements. In other cases, creating space for rival actors to compete amongst themselves might in fact serve U.S. interests. In still other cases, engagement may provide more relative benefit to a rival actor such as the opportunity to study U.S. tactics and to gain operational experience in rehearsing their own responses. Particularly in a resource-constrained environment, the joint force must carefully examine

opportunities to empower partners, generate friction between rivals, and reduce benefiting rivals through ceding operational space.

Within a complementary approach, these competitive options support an antifragile position, helping to insulate the nation from disruption, attack, and aberrations in the strategic environment. As the rate of change continues to accelerate, the approach must leverage those on the frontiers of U.S. influence—particularly diplomats and the military—to understand and affect change favorably. More than just enhancing resilience, however, these forward assets can and should adapt to disturbances in the operational environment to improve the position of the U.S., seeking to cultivate and exploit emerging opportunities. More authoritarian actors competing in the strategic environment may benefit from greater unity of effort and vision; however, their militaries are often hamstrung at an operational level due to lack of trust and delegation of authority to subordinate elements. The U.S. is well-suited to strive for an antifragile position that maintains a relative advantage in contrast to rivals through rapid adaptation to changing conditions. With appropriate strategic direction and operational limitations in place, forward diplomatic and military assets must embrace the principles of mission command to maintain peak agility.

Enhanced risk tolerance and expanded risk mitigation measures—including restructured command and control (C2), improved ethics training, and more deliberate influence in the information environment—are critical to the development of this compound approach. Against a significantly less capable and resourced series of enemies in the Global War on Terror, the U.S. and its allies have enjoyed relentless technical and organizational advantage that has allowed decision-makers direct involvement and oversight throughout campaigns. This process may help to mitigate political risk but degrades operational agility, strategic adaptability, pace of execution, and consistency of effort. The U.S. should improve its ability to campaign within a broader strategy by establishing limitations, accepting political risk, designing coordinated campaigns, developing integrated C2, and synchronizing execution across military and civilian entities. By distributing decision-making with an approved campaign to forward elements—perhaps under the command of a transregional or global joint interagency task force—leaders accept additional political risk in order to enhance the ability to respond to challenges and opportunities at the pace of change.

The Way Ahead

> What if Goliath, for all his might, had the humility to recognize the limitations of his strength? What if David, for all his agility, had the strength of Goliath on his side? What if a nation possessed both the power of Goliath and the precision of David, and the prudence to use both to build a better peace?

Looking to the future, the U.S. must commit to a choice: the U.S. can shape—or be shaped by—the future. It is a question of perspective, vision, and strategy. Unforeseen shocks to the strategic environment are just that, and investing in resilience will remain essential. However, without a forward-leaning effort to design the future, the U.S. remains at the mercy of other actors' more aggressive approaches and the inertia of systemic change. Reclaiming the initiative requires a more diversified and complementary approach than simply leveraging the power of Goliath; the U.S. must pair its David-like capabilities with its conventional and nuclear deterrence, developing a proactive compound approach.

This compound approach is not a silver bullet. This approach does not replace deterrence or render the traditional functions of the joint force irrelevant but rather aims to complement and enhance the effectiveness of both. If a forward-postured joint force represents an orthodox approach, more unorthodox elements can advance interests in collaboration. This approach is also not about perfecting a methodology but rather inculcating institutional dynamism to adapt with changes. This approach is not a roadmap to preserve the U.S.-dominated status quo and ossify current power structures. Status quo conditions are destined to change, and that which is ossified can easily shatter. Rather, this is an effort to shape the evolution of the global future to promote security, prosperity, individual freedom, and rule of law.

Fundamentally, a joint force compound approach should promote and project the best version of America. The joint force on its own cannot replace a strong American brand in the international community, nor can it operate in isolation from domestic political realities and foreign policy machinations of the interagency. Rather, it should strive to reinforce a strong national brand, amplifying its

Fundamentally, a joint force compound approach should promote and project the best version of America.

strengths and mitigating its shortcomings. It should exercise strategic self-restraint, acting as a responsible arbiter of power and respectful partner. Particularly among those engaged in unorthodox applications of force, the joint force must uphold the highest standard of ethics and values. The effectiveness of a compound approach will largely hinge on these more intangible factors.

In order to reclaim the initiative in the face of eroding strategic advantage, the U.S. should consider employing a compound approach of both Goliath and David for the joint force in support of interagency campaigns within broader national strategy. As Goliath, the joint force should continue to provide strategic deterrence and prepare for the high-end war fight. As David, the joint force should provide leaders with competitive options to expand deterrence, conduct punitive actions, and execute offensive operations to achieve and consolidate gains short of war. By combining orthodox power with unorthodox precision, the joint force can enable national success.

The U.S. has enjoyed unprecedented influence over global affairs for nearly three decades, but the window of opportunity to exploit that advantage is closing quickly. Rather than seeking to control global events, the U.S. should leverage its influence to build advantage and support favorable outcomes. The U.S. should seize opportunities present in natural conditions characterized by the continuous turbulence of change and adaptation. This turbulence may never reach the threshold of war, but the joint force can still effectively engage in the strategic environment to shape conditions and achieve objectives in support of interagency campaigns.

Threats today may not pose as evident or immediate a challenge as the adversaries of generations past, yet the situation is no less urgent. Many a David has an eye for evading U.S. strength and exploiting Goliath-like vulnerabilities. Nevertheless, the U.S. remains well positioned to determine its own fate. To do so, however, the U.S. should seek to complement its global might with twenty-first century slings and stones along with a keen eye for opportunities and vulnerabilities. By harnessing both David and Goliath, the U.S. can reclaim its hand in shaping the future.

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Starting with Why: The National Security Strategy and America's National Interests

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In many ways, national interests are the DNA of strategy and the underlying structure upon which every nation bases its strategic thinking. Understanding America's current actions on the international stage requires a deeper look than the partisan-inspired rhetoric in the headlines. One way to approach this is to elevate the discussion beyond threats and adversaries to an analysis of national interests. Interests drive political decision-making and help us understand U.S. foreign policy. They describe the "why," reveal the underlying logic, and provide the standards of measurement upon which to base decisions.[1]

Strategic thinkers with military backgrounds often tend to fixate on threats. Without question, at the tactical and operational level, threats provide a valuable lens. However, when facing strategic-level complex adaptive problems such as competition, a focus solely on threats could quickly lead to miscalculation and loss of focus. The U.S. could find itself trying to chase competitors everywhere—thereby remaining reactive instead of proactive—and find itself strategically adrift.

Beyond this, discussion of interests is valuable because it helps strategic thinkers approach problems with a more open mind. Fundamentally, if strategic thinkers focus on interests, it helps move beyond one-dimensional discussions on positions; positions change but interests are less dynamic and remain more stable over time. Where positions are solutions, interests reveal the concerns, desires, and motives that underpin those positions.[2]

Introducing the topic of interest into any discussion serves to raise the level out of the tactical and operational weeds and helps strategic thinkers focus on the bigger picture. Fundamentally, if every Service member that is asked to go into harm's way understands the U.S. interests that he or she is

going forward to advance or protect, they understand their why. One can rightfully assume that America's Service members have the training, experience, and capabilities required to figure out the how.

This article provides an analysis of the 2017 National Security Strategy (NSS) and the national interests described within. First, it discusses American interests in the context of past and current policy and then details a logical categorization of these interests by criticality (vital, important, or peripheral). Finally, this article discusses the regional implications of these interests through a regional perspective.

American Interests in Context

In an environment where political positions are dynamic, interests provide a stable basis upon which a strategic thinker can discern what is truly important. An examination of the key aspects of the previous four NSS published between 2002 and 2015 highlight this continuity of thought over time:

- NSS 2002: Political and Economic Freedom, Peaceful Relations, Respect for Human Dignity
- NSS 2006: Promote Freedom, Justice, and Human Dignity; Lead a Growing Community of Democracies
- NSS 2010: Security, Prosperity, Values, International Order
- NSS 2015: Security, Prosperity, Values, International Order[3]

Although these narratives differ slightly, some themes emerge. First, each version of the NSS makes a clear statement concerning the security of the nation globally. Second, each discusses economic prosperity and well-being. Third, each document emphasizes the importance of American values. Taken together, these three elements—security, prosperity, and values—form the common threads that connect documents from differing administrations. Similarly, as one looks at each of these primary ideas of the 2017 NSS in context, these elements arise again and provide a degree of conceptual congruence and continuity over time. The 2017 NSS described the following main ideas:

Protect the American People, the Homeland, and the American Way of Life. This statement is the core of the Administration's "America First" policy. It highlights keeping threats out of the homeland by securing borders to protect Americans from weapons of mass destruction (WMD), pandemics,

unwanted immigration, and terrorist and organized crime incursions; blocking cyber-attacks (specifically to critical infrastructure); and focusing on resilience for the American people and the homeland. The main theme focuses on the control of inflows of threats that can endanger the sovereignty, stability, and security of the United States.

Promote American Prosperity. This main idea conveys that economic prosperity is fundamental to the American way of life and, more importantly, the foundation of America's power projection. Given the high level of importance of a strong economy in sustaining American power, this pillar's overall approach promotes viable economic concepts that should enable the country to reestablish itself both domestically and internationally.

Preserve Peace through Strength. This notion focuses on the need for the U.S. to renew its competitive advantage and capabilities after a long period of complacency and stagnation. As the U.S. focuses on strengthening the military, our allies and partners must also contribute capabilities and demonstrate the will to confront shared threats. Adversaries—often more agile and faster at integrating economic, military, and especially information—are finding advantages in the gray zone. The U.S. must confront and compete with adversaries in this space by leveraging the public and private sectors to develop such an advantage.

Advance American Influence. Similar to preserving peace through strength, this idea is a guarantor of security and prosperity. It gives guidance to U.S. agencies to ensure partners, allies, aspiring partners, and adversaries are clear about America's intentions, goals, and interests. Influence, as discussed in the NSS, is America's persuasive interactions in the international community that demonstrate partnership with the U.S. is mutually beneficial.

Categorizing U.S. National Interests. Looking at the current NSS in a deliberate and systematic way, key conclusions emerge. Realism and hard power are certainly at the forefront of American foreign policy. Protecting the American people, the homeland, and the American way of life and promoting economic prosperity reflect the heart of principled realism. When one categorizes current interests, it is clear that enhancement of homeland protection and emphasis on prioritizing bilateral approaches over multilateral ones to maximize return on investment for America are top priorities. "America first" also extends to the domestic context as technology,

innovation, and revitalization of the domestic industrial base increase in importance.

Arguably, a comprehensive and critical framework that can be used to categorize interest is the one developed by Graham Allison in 2000.[4] Under this framework, interests fall into four categories: vital, extremely important, important, or peripheral. In 2018, the joint staff authored Joint Doctrine Note (JDN) 1-18, formally codifying a similar framework based on critical categorical questions, as follows:

Vital: What are we willing to die for?

Important Interests: What are we willing to fight for?

Peripheral Interests: What are we willing to fund?[5]

Those that will ultimately determine the criticality of an interest and its associated level of commitment are policymakers as they make decisions that allocate resources. Outside these circles, opinions and criticality will always vary widely depending on the individual perspectives and perceived risks. However, for strategic thinkers and planners, it is important to analyze criticality of interests as a basis for the development of supporting documents, such as strategic guidance, plans, and policies. In summer of 2019, planners and analysts at U.S. Special Operations Command looked at, discussed, and debated where the descriptions of American interests in the 2017 NSS fell along the spectrum of the framework described in JDN 1-18 (see table 1).

Unsurprisingly, in this analysis, security-related interests came to the forefront as some of the most vital. Generally, the group categorized prosperity-related interests as the next most important. Finally, the group generally found that values related to interests were third; they recognized values are important, just not as important in practice. Again, one can debate the specific categorization of U.S. interests. But the true value is the ability of interests to help strategic planners and thinkers frame out and identify what really matters most. Although this provides a valuable global perspective, in practical application it is important to look at interests by region.

Regional Implications

The U.S. must tailor its approach to different regions of the world to protect U.S. national interests. Policymakers and agency leadership require integrated regional strategies that appreciate American interests to protect or

Table 1. Interest Criticality Analysis. Source: authors.

NSS 2017 National Interest Descriptions	Criticality
1. Protect the American people, the homeland, and the American way of life	**Vital**
a. Secure the U.S. borders and territory	Vital
b. Pursue threats to their source	Important
c. Keep America safe in the cyber era	Vital
d. Promote American resilience	Important
2. Promote American prosperity	**Important**
a. Rejuvenate the domestic economy	Important
b. Promote free, fair, and reciprocal economic partnerships	Important
c. Lead in research, technology, invention, and innovation	Important
d. Promote and protect the U.S. national security innovation base	Vital
e. Embrace energy dominance	Peripheral
3. Preserve peace through strength	**Important**
a. Renew America's competitive strategies	Important
b. Renew capabilities	Important
c. Diplomacy and statecraft	Vital
4. Advance American influence	**Important**
a. Encourage aspiring partners	Important
b. Achieve better outcomes in multilateral forums	Peripheral
c. Champion American values	Peripheral

advance them. Integrated regional strategies should recognize the nature of relevant competitions and actors and the promise of available opportunities—all in the context of local political, economic, social, and historical realities.

This 2017 NSS both directly and indirectly prioritizes interests, global regions, and primary areas of focus. It lists the Indo-Pacific and Europe as the priority regions because of the obvious geopolitical realities of both China and Russia. Therefore, the U.S. must understand how these nations have structured a network of influence across states and other relevant actors. With a better understanding of these networks and relevant actors, the U.S. can alleviate a monolithic, threat-based analysis and chart its own course for U.S. influence and competitive advantage. Moreover, U.S. Special Operations Forces should have a basic understanding of the interests that the Nation may ask them to defend or advance globally.

Indo-Pacific. The U.S. maintains important interests in this region that include ensuring freedom of navigation in the Malacca Strait and securing sea lines of communication in the South China Sea. Securing American interests requires traditional deterrence, ballistic missile defense, counterproliferation, anti-piracy, and counterterrorism. The U.S. will continue its forward military presence to counter/deter the proliferation of ballistic, WMD, and other weapons from states and non-state actors who wish to disrupt U.S. engagement. In response to a rising China, the U.S. will expand defense and security cooperation with India and support India's influence in the region. Alliances and partnerships with regional partners and allies catalyze the pursuit of America's interest.

U.S. economic engagement in the region is significant. American prosperity and way of life link to continued access, economic engagement, and shared technological advances with Indo-Pacific states. The U.S. seeks to both cooperate with and influence these regional sovereign states to support U.S. political, economic, and security interests while balancing China's geopolitical aspirations.

In sectors where the U.S. seems to lag in global competitive advantage with China, the U.S. will need to invest and innovate. Finally, American influence and competitive advantage can only succeed by using all tools of national power. The region spans a multitude of states that align with China, the U.S., or both when it suits their own values and interests. Therefore, keener synchronization of all elements of U.S. national power will enable achievement of "America first" for the long term.

Europe. Europe is an essential trading, political, and security partner for the U.S. In general, Europeans share U.S. values of freedom and democracy. The NATO military alliance remains resilient despite Russian efforts to disrupt it. Further, the U.S., England, and the EU align with efforts against non-state criminal and violent extremist groups that may seek to disrupt the European way of life.

Through highly skilled propaganda and misinformation efforts, Russia is working to undermine the faith of Western institutions and the international rule of law. Russia's asymmetric cyber and information skills are preying on widening wealth gaps, crumbling infrastructure, and seemingly waning opportunities. To mitigate these malign efforts, the NSS calls for a more robust and resilient polity and increased cooperation between the U.S.

and European NATO allies to counter growing cyber and other asymmetric aggression.

The U.S. and Europe can curtail Russian attempts to divide NATO and Chinese efforts to change the interpretations of international law. Through combined initiatives, partners can diversify energy reliance on Russia, lessen Chinese efforts to infringe on trademark and unfair trade policies, and reinforce security commitments to our Eastern European partners.

The Middle East. The U.S. has broad strategic interests in the Middle East. Primarily, America is concerned with the stability of the oil and gas market. Maritime security is key to economic stability as state and non-state actors continue to threaten transit via strategically and economically significant global maritime chokepoints including the Strait of Hormuz, Suez Canal, and Bab al-Mandeb Strait.

The U.S. must also concern itself with the export of jihadist terrorist networks and influence on U.S. and allied soil. Decades of instability have created opportunities for these actors to exploit weak governance and create divisions throughout the population due to conflict and war. In response, the NSS states that the U.S. will maintain the necessary forward posture in the region in pursuit of these groups when appropriate.

Iran's ballistic missiles and nuclear program also warrant specific concerns. The Iranian missile capability has the potential to degrade U.S. military strength and power in the region. While Iran continues to spend on weapons, its preferred approach to achieving aspirations for regional competitive advantage and influence is by means of diplomacy, alliances, and the irregular use of cognitive maneuver through cyber, information, proxy, and other networks.

America will work with aspiring, like-minded partners in the region to facilitate stability and ensure that the regional balance of power does not tip towards regional players who are hostile to American interests. It will also promote good governance that creates stability through gradual political reforms instead of direct and overt promotion of democracy.

South and Central Asia. The South and Central Asia region has struggled through decades of invasion and colonialism. After the demise of empires, the withdrawal of colonialists, and the fall of the Soviet Union, the region has transformed into a system of sovereign nations. In addition, energy and geopolitics play a big role here.

The region has vast opportunities for cooperation through economic and security initiatives. Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan have abundant oil and natural gas reserves, and Uzbekistan's own reserves make it more or less self-sufficient. Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan all have gold reserves, and Kazakhstan has the world's largest uranium reserves.

In the context of countering violent extremist organizations, Central Asia has once again become the center of geostrategic calculations. However, these countries present political challenges that inhibit the U.S. from fully capitalizing on these opportunities. Afghanistan continues to suffer from violent extremist, criminal, and terrorist organizations that have come to rely on both tacit and outright support.

In the context of countering violent extremist organizations, Central Asia has once again become the center of geostrategic calculations.

In addition, two nuclear powers—India and Pakistan—pose challenges of greater conflict in the region. The security of nuclear weapons, fissile materials, and their technology are at risk for transfer or illicit acquirement by transnational criminal and/or violent extremist groups.

India does $115 billion in annual trade with the United States. India also has a robust trade partnership with Iran amounting to upwards of $13 billion a year. On the surface, it seems easier for New Delhi to sacrifice trade with Iran for the more lucrative American one. However, India needs Iran's petroleum and natural gas for its future and wants to use Iran to circumvent Pakistan to the northwest.

Western Hemisphere. The strengths and opportunities of our hemisphere—democracy, respect for human rights, rule of law, and military-to-military relationships rooted in education, culture, and values—are matched with a troubling array of challenges and threats to global security and to our homeland. These include disasters, weak government institutions, corruption, under-resourced security organizations, violent crime, criminal organizations, and violent extremist cells. China, Russia, and Iran have accelerated expansion, supported misinformation campaigns, and exported state support for terrorism into the hemisphere, respectively.

Illegal immigration is a key factor in U.S. policy in the Western Hemisphere. The Administration is committed to the protection of the homeland through a physical border prohibiting unlawful entrance into the U.S. due

in some part to rampant economic, societal, and governance instability in many parts of Central and South America and even parts of the Caribbean.

Africa. The African continent is ripe with opportunity and abundant in resources. Unfortunately, it is replete with instability, ill-governed spaces, organized crime, and violent extremist groups. It also has areas of strong climate variation, irregular rainfall, food insecurity, and poverty. Although Africa presents a rich opportunity both for potential American markets and goods and many security partner prospects, instability remains a challenge. China and Russia are also exploiting African opportunities. Each is expanding its military footprint while China specifically is attempting to replace the U.S. as Africa's partner of choice by investing in significant trade and infrastructure projects.

Conclusion

Interests matter. As such, strategic thinkers should continually ask themselves the existential questions related to interests. If they fail to do so, the strategies and plans they develop could employ the valuable blood and treasure of America without the required level of political support. If they fail to do so, the nation could find itself looking back on its strategic decisions of the past decades and asking: What are we doing in country "X" again? Simply put, the point is that these are not one-time questions, and strategic thinkers should ask them continually and put the answers they develop into a contemporary context.

Without question, America will continue to face both direct and indirect challenges in applying the priorities of the 2017 NSS and those formulated in the future. These challenges will manifest in each region in different ways and will demand carefully tailored policies in application. Overall, the NSS reflects the many aspirations of the American government. Of course, this strategy has and will continue to change in practical application. However, it remains a fundamental piece of the puzzle for those seeking to understand how America sees itself and acts within a complex and dynamic world.

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Deterring "Competition Short of War:" Are Gray Zones the Ardennes of Our Modern Maginot Line of Traditional Deterrence?

Colonel (Ret.) Bob Jones

Introduction

In August 1914, Germany implemented the now famous Schlieffen Plan in a desperate six-week gamble to attack France through the lowlands of Belgium and the Netherlands to force their surrender in time to shift the army back to the eastern to meet a Russian assault. The campaign fell short, and Germany was ultimately defeated. In 1929, French Minister of War, Andre Maginot, began construction of a vast system of fortifications to deter, and if necessary, defeat any future German effort to revisit the misery of World War I. The Maginot Line performed as designed but did not cover routes through the rugged Ardennes Forest region (perceived as infeasible for supporting a major attack). In May of 1940, German armor employed those infeasible routes to quickly split and flank the French defenses, achieving the success that had eluded them on their previous attempt. In 2016, the U.S. found itself in a situation very similar to that faced by France in 1940. This is the Gray Zone.

In April 2016, U.S. Marine Corps General Joseph "Fighting Joe" Dunford stood before his assembled 4-star leaders as the 19th Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and bemoaned the corrosive effect the operational phasing construct was having on strategic thinking. He was equally concerned about the growing ineffectiveness of a family of military options designed nearly exclusively to deter some state actor from engaging in decisive (phase III) military action.[1] Increasingly, revisionist state challengers to the existing system of sovereignty are appreciating and exploring new opportunities to expand their privilege. These efforts incrementally erode the sovereignty of others in ways carefully designed to avoid clear triggers of phase

III responses. Campaigns are being waged and won while the U.S. stands waiting impotently for clear signals the conflict has even begun. This is competition.

We are effectively frozen by our own self-imposed and outdated bureaucratic framework. U.S. deterrence stands like a modern Maginot Line, deterring dominating military action while all activities short of war have become our Ardennes Forest. Like powerful France in 1940, the U.S. finds itself at risk of being outwitted, outflanked, and potentially defeated by more flexible and adaptive foes.

We label these interest-driven efforts—designed to expand one's sovereignty at the expense of another—as gray zones. General Dunford pragmatically sees this as "competition short of war." The tendency is to fixate on the ambiguity of individual actions rather than appreciating the very clear intent and unambiguous goals of the campaigns being waged. New labels applied to old perspectives are unlikely to resolve this growing challenge. In his acclaimed book, *The Age of the Unthinkable*, Joshua Cooper Ramo advises, "When living in revolutionary times, one must think like a revolutionary."[2]

While it is clear that we do indeed live in revolutionary times, the challenge for the U.S. is that we have lost much of our revolutionary mindset. Instead, we see our duty as to sustain the existing rules-based system as it currently is.[3] Sustainers of systems rarely think like revolutionaries. Perhaps the first step toward dealing more effectively with these gray zone challenges is to recognize no amount of leadership can preserve the system as it is. A more appropriate way of thinking about the duty of U.S. leadership is as one of facilitating the evolution of the global system to what it needs to be.

Now is not the time to double down on the thinking that brought us to where we are, thinking designed to hold others back. Now is the time to invest in the thinking that will take us to where we need to be, thinking designed to help carry everyone forward. Welcome to the revolution.

Now is not the time to double down on the thinking that brought us to where we are, thinking designed to hold others back.

Deterrence in the Modern Era

If the Maginot Line comparison is accurate, a few points worth considering emerge. The first point is that traditional deterrence continues to perform

as it was designed to perform. Adding additional capacity to traditional deterrence will provide only limited additional deterrent effect to what is already deterred—and little to no deterrent effect to what is currently undeterred. This is an essential insight for assessing both opportunity and risk. While our instinct may be to invest in more and improved conventional and nuclear capabilities, the reality is those are capacities in which we can currently assume risk. Opportunity lies elsewhere. Enhancing deterrence need not increase our debt.

The second point is that while the actual Maginot Line could have been physically extended to cover the Ardennes approaches, the challenge facing modern deterrence is much more functional than physical. Our phase III deterrent options effectively deter phase III conflict, but there is a threshold below which undesirable competition is undeterred. It is the lack of effective phase 0 through phase II deterrent options that are leaving our functional flanks open to gray zone competition short of war.

The first new deterrence concept offered here is focused deterrence. It is unique in that it identifies all the actors with vital interests in a particular issue and then shapes a flexible and adaptive package of activities designed to appropriately encourage positive behavior and discourage negative behavior across the spectrum of interested parties. The second concept, unconventional deterrence (UD), is rooted in the principles of unconventional warfare (UW). It recognizes that today's revisionist regimes share common traits of brittle internal stability and an intense desire to maintain power within a relatively small group of paranoid stakeholders. These leaders fear the revolutionary energy of their own populations far more than they fear the combined power of external parties. The final deterrence concept offered here is unconventional resilience, which is in many ways the mirror image of UD. Both theories are rooted in an understanding of those aspects of human nature necessary across cultures for a society to achieve a sustainable stability. The goal of unconventional resilience is to help those willing to work within the existing world system to achieve and sustain conditions across their respective populations that increase resilience to shocks (economic, ideological, climatic, etc.) and reduce the likelihood of exploitable internal instability. All three theories are imagined working as a system to help deter competition short of war. All also operate as suitable, acceptable, and feasible peacetime activities within this dynamic strategic environment that continues to evolve rapidly about us.

It is unlikely that our major challengers may change their perspectives as to what is in their respective interests anytime soon. Therefore, we must find new ways to effectively lower our threshold of deterrence. We must deny the temptation offered by our current vulnerability if we hope to deter activities of revisionist regimes set on modifying the current world order in their favor. As the Greek theorist Thucydides sagely observed, "The strong do what they can, and the weak suffer what they must."[4] As our competitors grow stronger, they are done suffering unmet interests and are actively doing what they can to bring their sovereign privilege in line with their growing power. We should not judge too harshly—the U.S., when rising from the industrial age, acted this way as well—but we need not simply yield to their ambitions either.

The following three proposals for deterring competition short of war in the current strategic environment are not conceived as uniquely Special Operations Forces options. Like most policy options, these proposals would include focused teams cutting across the entire joint force, our interagency community, and non-governmental organizations as well as a wide range of partners and allies working together around those interests we share and avoiding unnecessary friction where our interests diverge.

Focused Deterrence

Focused deterrence steps back from thinking in terms of friends and foes or permanent allies and enduring enemies. It is based in realist theory, recognizing that around any particular issue there will be a unique and dynamic group of actors who perceive themselves to have vital interests at stake. Focused deterrence recognizes that we compete with friend and foe alike, and that is okay.

Focused deterrence is different from specific deterrence or tailored deterrence, which seek to deter a particular actor.[5] In contrast, focused deterrence seeks to deter challenges to a particular interest. This is a critical distinction and is one more reason why a realist approach like focused deterrence is increasingly appropriate. As the U.S. works to find a balance between the permanent allies so necessary for Cold War containment and toward a more pragmatic and flexible approach to partners and alliances better suited to the restive peace of today, focused deterrence provides a powerful tool.

In the emerging strategic environment, even the best of allies may find themselves strongly divided over a particular issue or in aggressive competition to advance a specific interest. The strong network of U.S. alliances provides a major advantage over rising challengers such as China or Russia. However, those same alliances, if overused or allowed to grow dysfunctional with time, can quickly become major points of vulnerability for the United States. Focused deterrence provides a vehicle to help nurture and refresh alliances in an incredibly positive way that should help to soften perceptions of abandoned allies, or abused friendships, when and where interests inevitably diverge.

The focused deterrence process is simple in concept. First, identify who the interest-based stake holders in an issue are, and then sort stakeholders by strategically significant criteria. A nuclear state, for example, is vastly different than one without those weapons. Similar states possess similar deterrence characteristics. Sorting parties by significant characteristics frames the deterrence problem for clear analysis. This framing facilitates the design of a focused deterrence approach that incorporates a range of activities designed to most effectively encourage or discourage the behavior of each stakeholder across the spectrum. These bundles of carrots and sticks are then continually refined over time as conditions change. Actors can be added, deleted, or moved to different categories as the situation changes.

By being interest-based, focused deterrence helps overcome the urge to assume where a party might stand on a particular issue in general terms and helps one see more pragmatically both the vulnerabilities and opportunities associated with any issue. This approach to deterrence is less likely to be excessively provocative than traditional approaches to deterrence. In the emerging strategic environment, we must understand the evolving mosaic of shared and competing interests with clear eyes and continually design and refine deterrence/foreign policy approaches for best effect.

The U.S. has rarely appeared more ideologically guided and divided than it does today.

The U.S. has rarely appeared more ideologically guided and divided than it does today. For any decision on how to best advance an interest, address a threat, or engage an ally today, there is an equally passionate objection advocating wildly differing approaches. There are few foreign policy problems in the emergent strategic environment for which there is broad consensus on how to best secure U.S. interests.

Focused deterrence provides a mechanism to focus on what is truly important and to find positions for advancing and securing those interests with broader consensus across government and among partners and allies.

Focused deterrence also helps guard against the degree of strategic overreach that can exhaust a state's will and ability to respond to crisis. The example of Great Britain in the previous century is illustrative. Great Britain faced a similarly dynamic era as the industrial age generated rising powers such as Japan, Germany, Italy, and the United States. As these revisionist powers placed pressure on the British Empire from the outside, breakthroughs in information technology empowered the ability of populations to place growing pressure from within. The challenge of preserving a British-led system across their own empire proved to be a challenge that ultimately exhausted Great Britain. This does not bode well for a U.S. seeking to sustain a U.S.-led system globally in an era where the factors of change are exponentially greater than those a century ago.

The U.S. risks becoming an exhausted state. The perceived urgency of failing and failed states demands our attention, but far more dangerous to the global system is the looming emergence of powerful states that are becoming increasingly brittle or exhausted.[6] For example, the collapse of governance in Libya is a major problem for the world and a potential hotbed of insurgency and terrorism into the foreseeable future—such is the problem of failed and failing states. But the shattering of a brittle state such as China, Russia, North Korea, or the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia could be catastrophic. The rapid, internal collapse of brittle states or an increased reluctance to engage externally by exhausted states poses the potential of drawing the entire globe into the resultant vortex.

Focused deterrence helps prioritize what is profoundly important and lends clearer context to issues that are urgent but arguably less vital in the big scheme of things. Focused deterrence also provides a mechanism to help nurture resilience where it is in our interest to do so and to avoid inadvertently shattering an adversary in ways that are both unintended and unforeseen. However, focused deterrence is not enough to ensure effective deterrence of competition short of war. The following two approaches are variations on UW and focus on the growing power of populations to minimize gray zone incursions. Both are forms of specific deterrence but could nest within various focused deterrence programs as well.

Unconventional Deterrence

Many brittle states appear as unsinkable as the *Titanic*, and in truth, they are just that—disasters waiting to happen. These states steam along with apparent invulnerability but possess inherent flaws that make them unable to sustain the shocks that a healthier, more resilient society would easily weather. The four major challenger states share this vulnerable characteristic—all are brittle states. As such, these states are all extremely susceptible to the credible threat of UW.

While the inadvertent collapse of a brittle state could be a disaster for global stability, leveraging the fear of the potential destabilization and collapse of a brittle state could be a boon for the deterrence of competition short of war. Most governments of brittle states are far more aware of the degree of their internal vulnerabilities than outsiders. These governments also tend to be paranoid about outside powers exploiting this vulnerability. UD plays upon these fears.

Ideology does not cause insurgency (or terrorism). For conditions of insurgency to grow with any population, they must first perceive the governance affecting their lives as being poor. Poor governance is not a function of effectiveness, but rather it is a function of how a population perceives the governance affecting their lives.[7] Contrary to popular Western misconception in the post-9/11 era, a population generally satisfied with their conditions of governance is not easily incited to insurgency by some malign actor armed with an enticing but radical ideology. But where such conditions do exist—as they do within many identity-based populations within Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea—any number of factors, internal or external, could incite those people to action, and those governments know it.

This latent energy of discontent with governance is the essence of political instability, and it is the essence of UW as well. In fundamental terms, UW is any activity intended to leverage the insurgent energy resident within a population governed by another in order to advance one's own interests. Doctrinal definitions of UW are more detailed and tend to reflect the bias of our history, culture, and military experience. This bias distracts from an appreciation of which aspects of human nature contribute most toward any society being fundamentally stable and resilient or unstable and brittle. For purposes of deterrence, it is essential to understand the drivers of insurgency at a fundamental, human nature level and guard against overly coloring our

understanding with a Western bias born of our colonial experiences. Human nature provides a framework for understanding human endeavors and is constant over time and across cultures.

The energy behind revolutionary insurgency is a naturally occurring thing and perhaps the greatest driver of societal evolution in the history of mankind. Understanding that energy and creating lines of influence to shape that energy to one's advantage allows for the creation of an incredibly flexible and powerful form of UD.

UD is a concept that creates several concerns for those with backgrounds in more traditional forms of deterrence. Once a society is nudged into full-blown instability, how does one control what they have begun? Given our track record with regime change and stabilization operations, do we really want to get sucked into even larger potential quagmires? Is it even possible in the current strategic environment to conduct the type of clandestine operations necessary to develop the UW infrastructure mandated by doctrinal approaches without a very high risk of creating an embarrassing and counterproductive international incident? The greater one's appreciation of the fundamental nature of revolution and unconventional warfare becomes, however, the smaller these concerns appear to be.

One beauty of UD is that it pits an inherent strength of the U.S. against an inherent weakness of our most challenging competitors—and they know it. This is not the case with nuclear deterrence, which pits strength against strength with Russia and China and has been a powerful incentive for North Korea and Iran in their respective quests to become credible nuclear powers.

One beauty of UD is that it pits an inherent strength of the U.S. against an inherent weakness of our most challenging competitors—and they know it.

Yet when one speaks with experts in nuclear deterrence about the concept of UD, it can trigger a response of shock and concern. How could the U.S. consider the potentially devastating consequences of intentionally destabilizing the society of another? Yet somehow the idea of incinerating the society of another and inviting the inevitable retaliation in kind is one we have become disturbingly comfortable with. Nuclear weapons are with us forever, and continued proliferation is inevitable. However, by expanding deterrence options to include UD, the U.S. redefines the deterrence paradigm in ways that help turn back the nuclear doomsday clock.

With a focus on UD, gaining nuclear weapons is no longer the critical step allowing a rising power to compete with the U.S. and to pursue their interests free of coercion—that step becomes building greater resilience into their own societies instead. By threatening a challenger with UW, one incentivizes that challenger to take the actions necessary to reduce their vulnerability by improving their governance. UD does not just deter bad behavior, it is a unique form of deterrence that encourages positive behavior in equal measure. The same cannot be said for more traditional forms of deterrence.

UD, like nuclear deterrence, is about establishing a credible threat and not about actually employing the threatened action. The U.S. should indeed become as loathe to destabilize another state for political purpose as we are to engage in nuclear or conventional warfare. That would be a positive change from our historic willingness and belief that we can simply replace governments we disapprove of with ones we deem as more appropriate and somehow create a government that is both sovereign and possessed of the popular legitimacy necessary for natural stability. But the very fact the U.S. has been so quick to employ unconventional warfare in the past is what lends credibility to our willingness to do so again. This implicit will to act is a major component lacking in our current family of deterrence. Our major state challengers are well aware that the U.S. is unlikely to employ a phase III response to phase I aggression—thus the rise of competition short of war and the creation of gray zones.

Unconventional Resilience

In many ways, unconventional resilience is the opposite of UD. Instead of deterring the bad actor, unconventional resilience works to preclude the bad actor by denying the opportunity for action. Just as one can deter a brittle state through a credible threat of UW, so too can one help facilitate resilience within the society of an important partner or ally whose stability is essential to one's interests. While focused deterrence relies upon a balanced blend of carrots and sticks, these two UW-based approaches rely upon a sophisticated understanding and balanced leveraging of political grievance. Essential to all UW approaches is adopting a more realist perspective than characteristic of most post-Cold War policies. Foreign internal defense remains a major line of operation for the U.S., but far too often it is about preserving in power some foreign government and enabling their continued poor governance as

assessed by their own population. Increasingly, interests are better served by commitment to the facilitation of good governance not the preservation of any particular government. UW-related approaches facilitate this transition and prioritize one's own interests over the preservation of any particular foreign government, friend or foe. UW focuses on interests wherever they reside, and then seeks to either agitate or relieve insurgent energy within the populations occupying those spaces toward greater instability, or stability, as serves our interests. Understanding and leveraging political grievance among discrete population groups is how and where much of the competition short of war is likely to occur.

The idea for unconventional resilience comes from other widely recognized programs designed to prevent natural, undesirable conditions from occurring. The prevention of cancer and the prevention of wildfire are two solid examples of this approach. Neither cancer nor fire are actually prevented by these approaches, as true prevention is neither feasible nor desired. Prevention is more accurately about understanding natural dynamics for what they actually are, and then employing that understanding to nurture conditions that facilitate the positive aspects of some force and minimizing the negative. For all of its destructive potential, fire plays an essential role in natural ecosystems. Revolutionary insurgency is also naturally occurring and can be devastatingly destructive to a political ecosystem. If left unaddressed, revolutionary energy can grow to dangerous levels and ultimately destroy a society. But by understanding and proactively addressing the forces of revolution energy, one can thicken the relationships between governance and populations, thereby creating a natural resilience inherent to healthy societies.

Military doctrine lumps revolutionary insurgency in with other forms of war and warfare. One important concept emerging from the apparent chaos of the current strategic environment is the understanding that political conflict within a single system of governance is fundamentally different in nature than political conflict between two or more systems. This helps explain why warfare approaches to revolution tend to suppress rather than resolve the problems behind the conflict. It also helps to reveal that revolutionary insurgency is most accurately a form of illegal democracy, not war. This is perhaps the rawest and most dangerous form of democracy but often the only form available to populations where more traditional mechanisms

are denied. If war is the final argument of kings, then revolution truly is the final vote of the people.

Because firefighters understand the nature of fire, they attack the elements of the fire triangle (fuel, heat, oxygen) to put out a fire. In this process, smoke and flames are only managed and not attacked; even though smoke causes the most deaths, and flame causes the most destruction. By understanding the nature of fire, one's focus naturally shifts from flailing at problematic symptoms to addressing actual problems. Just as effective firefighting focuses on addressing some mix of fuel, heat, and oxygen, effective stability operations must focus on some mix of governance, population, and grievance. Understanding the instability triangle serves to shift the focus away from overly fixating on problematic symptoms like ideology, violence, and catalytic events.

Ultimately, resilience in a society is about trust. Populations form around identities in every system of governance. Those populations who perceive good governance have the type of trust necessary for natural stability. Those populations outside of that figurative circle of trust, however, are vulnerable to exploitation by both internal and external actors who would leverage that negative energy to their own advantage and agendas. By understanding these populations, how they feel about the factors affecting their lives, and who they blame, it allows one to identify where the points of fracture are within a society and to help inform relatively simple, low-cost approaches for encouraging and restoring trust.

Ultimately, resilience in a society is about trust.

In the modern era, thinking like a revolutionary is as important to sustaining stability where stability is desired as it is to threatening instability where behavior demands modification. Revolution is to a state what wildfire is to a forest. Both are examples of complex and dynamic ecosystems. While fire plays a critical role in preserving the health of a forest ecosystem, fire can also destroy a forest if that ecosystem is manipulated in unnatural ways or otherwise allowed to decay. Revolution plays a similar role in the ecosystem of a state. As Thomas Jefferson famously observed, "The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants. It is its natural manure."[8] Just as man's instinct is to suppress fire for fear it would destroy the forest, often to the ultimate detriment of the forest's health, so too is it our instinct to suppress revolution. Unconventional resilience

appreciates the positive role of revolutionary energy but the dangers as well and seeks to nurture societal ecosystems that are refreshed but not destroyed by this process.

Conclusion

The U.S. possesses tremendous capability and capacity to deter war. While we must maintain that capacity, we will not solve our current inability to deter competition short of war by enhancing war capacity. The U.S. must develop new approaches to deterrence designed for the mission of deterring competition short of war within this strategic environment that continues to emerge and evolve around us. The good news is that the U.S. has cheap and effective options for solving this problem. We need only change how we think about the problem and then make the minor adjustments necessary in how we operate and for what purpose to begin affecting a gray zone solution.

The four major state challengers identified by both the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs share a handful of critical vulnerabilities. Each is led by a small governing elite who are determined, above all other things, to retain control and power. Each employs autocratic forms of government that inadvertently create powerful pockets of revolutionary energy within several significant, identity-based populations within their borders. These governments are very aware of this situation and accept it as a necessary cost of retaining power. Each employs security measures designed to suppress that revolutionary energy. However, the most significant game changing aspect of the current strategic environment is the relative shift of power everywhere from governments to the governed. It is this shift of power that has enabled the rise of organizations like al-Qaeda and the Islamic State; and it is this shift of power that can enable a new layer of flexible and adaptive deterrence options designed to effectively deter unwanted competition short of war.

Through focused deterrence we can design and employ highly efficient and effective deterrence packages built around specific vital national interests. This approach employs a realist perspective that is better suited to the emerging strategic environment than the more ideological perspectives that evolved during the Cold War era. By managing a sophisticated system of carrots and sticks across the full range of stakeholders in a particular interest,

we can avoid many of the frustrations and unintended consequences associated with broader, threat-focused deterrence options.

With UD and its companion activity of unconventional resilience, we leverage the principles of UW to optimize the ongoing shift in power from governments to the governed. These approaches target the paranoia of our greatest competitors and create options for us while denying opportunities to others for waging UW-based competition short of war. This is a capability that will take time to develop to its full potential, but the psychological effect of deterrence will begin to accrue immediately. Many of the activities necessary to create this powerful deterrent effect will come from programs of relatively benign engagement conducted in permissive spaces.

Reinforcing the thinking and capabilities that brought us to where we are today is unlikely to solve the growing problem of gray zone aggression. However, by changing how we think about the problem and by creating new deterrence options, we can better deny opponents the opportunities currently provided by our modern Maginot Line of phase III deterrence.

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Chapter 2. Historical and Strategic Considerations

Chapter 2 seeks to put the key ideas and concepts introduced in the previous chapter into their proper historical and strategic context. In the first article of this chapter, "Strategy and Competition," Daniel Manning and Jeffrey Meiser argue that since the end of the Cold War, America's state-level adversaries have gradually advanced their interests without resorting to direct military confrontation with the United States. To this end, the authors argue that—because the costs of hard competition and war are great—the U.S. must create strategies accounting for these contingencies regardless of their probability. Holistically, these strategies must develop multiple, flexible capabilities and the creative ability to arrange and rearrange those capabilities to address challenges in the present or near future.

The next article in this chapter, "Between Competition and Global War: British Strategy Against Japan During the Early Sino-Japanese War, July 1937–June 1940" is a deep dive into a historical case study relevant to the discussion on competition today. Mark Whisler describes how Britain initiated low-level but continuous military, diplomatic, and economic competition to counter Japan's attempt to drive Britain out of China through a "gray zone" campaign and militarily defeat the Republic of China as part of Japan's effort to dominate Asia. Part of Britain's approach to competition was to provide low visibility, logistical, and financial assistance to sustain the Chinese government's war effort against Japan. London's fear, however, that Germany and Italy would take advantage of any expanded British naval effort to support actions against Tokyo meant that Britain placed strict limits on these options and put stringent conditions on a major fleet deployment to the Far East.

British policymakers also wanted to ensure that whatever courses of action they took did not alienate the U.S. because they judged that future U.S. support—either in the Far East or Europe—was likely to be important. British strategy was partly successful, but France's defeat in 1940 removed any sense of caution remaining in Japanese leaders; fueled their ongoing push to drive the European powers out of the Far East; and create the Japanese "New Order in East Asia." Britain's ability to strategically prioritize, to

consider how actions in one theater would have effects in another theater, and how to employ the "instruments of national power" in ways that worked towards securing its global interests are all issues that current U.S. policy-makers would find worthy of study. Moreover, more intangible factors—like how an adversary perceives another state's "reputation for power" and its impact on that adversary's decision-making—remains as important today as it was in 1937–1940.

Strategy and Competition

Daniel Manning and Jeffrey Meiser

Introduction

Since the end of the Cold War, America's state-level adversaries have gradually advanced their interests without resorting to direct military confrontation with the United States. Imbalances in military power favor the U.S. and constrain the rational courses of action available to its adversaries. However, soft competition over economic leverage, cyber and information advantage, and increasing other types of influence is ongoing with a set of shifting adversaries. The 2018 National Defense Strategy warns this level of competition "if unaddressed, will challenge our ability to deter aggression."[1] The failure of deterrence threatens the emergence of militarized or hard competition and possibly open warfare—whether through intention, miscalculation, or accident. Because the costs of hard competition and war are great, the U.S. must create strategies accounting for these contingencies, regardless of their probability.

While interstate competition continues to intensify, non-state and noncompetitive factors affecting the geostrategic environment cannot be ignored. The coronavirus pandemic and accompanying economic crisis has killed more Americans, eliminated more American jobs, caused more spending, reduced the value of the stock market, and reduced American productivity more than the rise of China or any other state action. Climate change and its effects pose additional noncompetitive phenomena that could drive policy and strategy in the future.

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As the U.S. plans for a post-pandemic world, military strategists must consider the structural consequences of the virus. Domestically, the American populace may demur when considering military responses, feeling

they are threatening to a fragile economic recovery. Planners may reconsider whether a global supply system should be trusted to provide uninterrupted logistical support for advanced weapon systems like the F-35. Meanwhile, the effects of the pandemic may alter the national security priorities of other nations in an age of worldwide trade disruptions.

Global pandemics and worldwide economic recessions are watershed moments in history. Increasing uncertainty and possible resource disruptions may serve to increase the level of geopolitical competition or, may provide new opportunities for peaceful cooperation. Whether these fundamental changes favor the U.S. or its adversaries will be a product and consequence of the strategies that leaders adopt in the coming months and years. The interwoven conditions of competition and uncertainty present both substantial challenges and opportunities for today's military strategists.[2] In the following pages, we explain the importance of strategy, describe the specific ways strategy can create advantages in competitive situations, and finally suggest how strategy applies to situations of high uncertainty. The main idea we hope readers take away from this article is the need for the U.S. government to create a national strategy or theory of national success for soft and hard competition, to develop flexible capabilities to compete successfully, and to meet other challenges and contingencies that may emerge.[3]

Strategy

A strategy is a theory of success.[4] All goal-seeking human behavior benefits from a strategy. Without a clear understanding of what you want to achieve and how you are going to achieve it, progress is unlikely. Defining strategy as a theory of success provides structure to action. The first requirement of a strategy is a goal or vision of what success looks like. Second, a well-designed strategy incorporates the context within which it is created. Third, strategists need a description of what actions they will take and explanation of why those actions will cause effects contributing to achievement of the strategy's vision of success.

All goal-seeking human behavior benefits from a strategy.

Using the metaphor of a journey, defining a vision of success provides the destination. A clear destination ensures efforts are focused on a common objective. Equally important, a clear destination allows operational planners

to select opportunities and necessarily reject others in pursuit of a goal. Without a clear vision, those trusted to execute the strategy are left rudderless when systemic changes emerge.

Context is critical for designing a strategy that "fits."[5] The unique combination of circumstance and capability creates a basis for inimitable strategic advantage and strategic sustainability. It is impossible for a rival to effectively imitate a strategy firmly grounded in context. The more tightly matched the strategy and context, the more frictionless the implementation. Genghis Khan, for instance, had a hall-of-fame level strategy—but that strategy could have only worked for Genghis Khan, and only in that time and location. The Mongol strategy aimed to create fear and surprise through swift cavalry movement and decisive action. It fit tightly with elements of traditional Mongol culture such as horsemanship, a nomadic lifestyle, and inclusivity, and resulted in an unprecedented and unmatched level of success.

The path between the origin (context) and destination (vision) is paved with actions the strategist prescribes and the logic for those actions. A clear, explicit statement of this theory of success allows the strategy to be put into execution by someone other than the strategist. The actions and the accompanying logic allow for prioritization and tradeoffs amidst evolving circumstances. Articulating an explicit theory of success also allows for evaluation of the internal and external validity of the strategy.[6]

Because of the pervasive uncertainty of human endeavor, the selection of an appropriate theory of success is the highest challenge of a strategist. When crafting strategy for the present, uncertainty is high because of the principle-agent problem, second-order effects, unintended consequences, reaction of other actors, and other complexities. While challenging, designing a theory of success for the present and even the near future is possible and necessary. The core function of strategy is to focus, prioritize, and coordinate resources and action. Against an opponent who fails to coordinate, prioritize or focus, this basic function alone will create advantage. Good strategy can also create advantage by helping you overcome your own weaknesses, exploit weaknesses in the adversary, create a favorable pattern of competitive interaction, focus and prioritize resources, and control the competitive dynamic in service of political goals. The more political goals are tied to recognized interests—as addressed in an earlier part of this article—the more coherent good strategy will be.

Strategies crafted today to address a set of challenges in the more distant future face deeper uncertainty. The challenge of defining and prescribing actions amid deep uncertainty requires the strategist to be a fortune teller who must not only predict the future, but also recommend a response to it. Rather than developing strategies designed to accurately predict an unpredictable future, strategists can choose to prescribe flexible capabilities allowing future operational decision makers the ability to respond to emerging contingencies. Strategies intended to develop capabilities rather than solutions are inherently more flexible, and therefore, more likely to be useful in addressing challenges ranging from epidemics, to terrorism, to natural disasters, in addition to competitive state actors.

Moving forward, the United States must develop a national strategy for addressing the current predicament of soft competition and the increasingly likely emergence of Cold War-style hard competition. In doing so, American national strategy should be rooted in a clear understanding of the advantages bestowed by good strategy, as described in the next chapter. The U.S. also needs to avoid being locked into any specific assumptions about, or mental model of, the future and maintain its flexibility. Arguably, one can measure competition by capability and capacity, yet moderated by will and chance. Competition can develop along a variety of scenarios. The most effective strategies are those which develop capabilities useful in a variety of scenarios. These points are explored in the subsequent chapter.

National Strategy and Competition

Strategy is so deeply imperfect that some wish to do away with it all together.[7] However, under conditions of security competition, there is no way to avoid it. The promise of strategy is such that if one competitor can develop and implement a partially successful strategy, they will gain a significant advantage.[8] The only plausible alternative is to focus instead on operational and tactical proficiency; disconnected from an overarching goal, tactical and operational effectiveness is unlikely to produce significant competitive advantage.[9] Michael Porter argues activities of an organization should fit together, reinforcing and supporting the unique advantage created by strategy. The tighter the fit and more reinforcing the activities, the more difficult it becomes to imitate. But how then does strategy create an advantage? Strategic theory suggests several answers to this question. Strategy can create

advantage by overcoming your own weaknesses, exploiting weaknesses in the adversary, creating a favorable pattern of competitive interaction, focusing and prioritizing resources, and controlling the competitive dynamic in service of political goals.[10] Each of these points is elaborated in the following.

The first advantage gained from strategy comes from Sun Tzu's warning that if we do not "know ourselves" we are at great peril.[11] To know ourselves is to know our strengths and weaknesses, which is one of the principles for crafting a competitive strategy. Business strategist Richard Rumelt also sees weakness or challenges as the starting point for strategy. He argues the failure of an organization to face its central challenge is a major barrier to good strategy. Facing the challenge requires admitting weaknesses and considering why problems or negative outcomes persist. For Rumelt, good strategy requires "an explanation of the nature of the challenge" and an "overall approach chosen to cope with or overcome the obstacles identified in the diagnosis."[12] A good theory of success can overcome a weakness or can turn a weakness or challenge into a strength. Rumelt's example of the latter is the story of David and Goliath, where David's ostensible weaknesses—no armor, smaller size—turned out to be strengths of better agility and quickness.[13] The Korean War provides an example of the former.

U.S. Army General Matthew Ridgway's actions after taking over the Eighth Army in South Korea illustrates how good strategy can overcome a weakness. When Ridgway arrived in the winter of 1950, the Eighth Army was in shambles after being forced to retreat down almost the entire Korean Peninsula by Chinese and North Korean forces. Theater commander U.S. Army General Douglas MacArthur warned Washington that evacuation of the peninsula was inevitable without massive reinforcement, and bombing Chinese territory.[14] General Ridgway quickly evaluated the weaknesses of the Eighth Army; he saw a poor theory of success and a defeatist attitude among the soldiers and Marines and lack of confidence in mission and command. To address the first point, General Ridgway shifted away from a military strategy of annihilation to one of coercion through denial and punishment.[15] The logic of coercion by denial meant convincing Chinese forces that victory was impossible, and the logic of punishment meant imposing costs on Chinese forces until they changed their strategy. Instead of focusing on holding specific territory or seeking to impose an outright defeat on the Chinese forces, General Ridgway's goal was to wear down the enemy while preserving his forces on the Korean Peninsula. To address the second weakness, he sought

to reactivate the fighting identity of the Eighth Army and instill values of aggression, confidence, and determination. The new commander believed the Eighth Army "needed to have its fighting spirit restored, to have pride in itself, to feel confidence in its leadership, and have faith in its mission."[16]

General Ridgway implemented his strategy in a way to slowly build the identity and values he needed. He ordered limited engagements that could provide small victories, building the confidence and fighting spirit of his forces. He also ordered active patrolling to identify enemy positions, increased use of artillery, and directed senior leaders to spend time at the front line and not in the headquarters. He leveraged the tactical advantage of artillery support and utilized the influence of active military leadership from the front to sustain awareness and contact with the enemy. With a better strategy, increased determination, and aggression, the Eighth Army withstood the fourth offensive and provided Chinese forces with a serious mauling, causing them to retreat north of the 38th parallel.[17]

The second advantage of strategy also begins with Sun Tzu, but this time focuses on his advice to build a strategy based on an analysis of the weaknesses of the adversary. He implores to "know your enemy"—which, according to Derek Yuen, means "interpreting and evaluating the intentions, traits, and thought patterns of the enemy as well as the mental condition of an opponent's troops."[18] Through this knowledge, one can observe patterns of action susceptible to exploitation. When it comes to applying this knowledge, Sun Tzu's advice is explicit: "what is of supreme importance in war is to attack the enemy's strategy."[19] In more contemporary terms, Sun Tzu is suggesting a path to success by denying victory to your adversary.[20]

Attacking the enemy's strategy can be seen as one way of finding and exploiting a critical vulnerability of the enemy society.[21] For Sun Tzu, a strategy based on deception and psychological manipulation can reveal these vulnerabilities.[22] This approach is foundational to Giulio Douhet's air power theory, J.F.C. Fuller's theory of mechanized warfare, B.H. Liddell Hart's indirect approach, and John Boyd's conceptualization of maneuver warfare.[23] To take one example, Boyd's concept of maneuver warfare—articulated in U.S. Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 1, *Warfighting*—gives a pithy statement of this approach: "the goal is to attack the enemy

Attacking the enemy's strategy can be seen as one way of finding and exploiting a critical vulnerability of the enemy society.

'system'—to incapacitate the enemy systemically." Stated from a broader perspective of competition, the goal would be to find a fundamental point of weakness in the protagonist's society and use this to compel, change, or degrade the protagonist's capacity to compete.

The logic of insurgency against an intervening democratic state is the most obvious manifestation of this strategic principle. The intervening state tends to kill noncombatants—no matter how careful they are—and create more opposition among civilians. These actions also directly undermine support at home and prolong the conflict, which favors the weak actor because the domestic public expects a quick victory.[24] According to Gil Merrom, "what prevents modern democracies from winning small wars is disagreement between state and society over expedient and moral issues that concern human dignity and life."[25] This disagreement over a tolerance for casualties and for killing by a state and citizenry creates a weakness an insurgency can exploit by imposing more casualties and triggering overaction and brutality. Martin Van Creveld explains this point with characteristic clarity: "for the strong, every soldier, policeman, or civilian killed becomes one more reason to end the struggle. For the weak, it is one more reason to continue until victory is won."[26] There are many examples of how the strategy of identifying and attacking a key weakness in an adversary's society: both French and American Vietnam Wars, the Northern Ireland conflict, and Israel's wars with Hezbollah and Hamas.

The third advantage of strategy is that strategists can create an advantage by identifying and manipulating the central characteristics of the war. According to Prussian General Carl von Clausewitz, "the most far-reaching act of judgment that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish ... the kind of war on which they are embarking ..."[27] This line of argument finds its fullest expression in J.C. Wylie's strategic theory: "The primary aim of the strategist in the conduct of war is some selected degree of control of the enemy for the strategist's own purpose; this is achieved by control of the pattern of war; and this control of the pattern of war is had by manipulation of the center of gravity of war to the advantage of the strategist and the disadvantage of the opponent."[28] Wylie goes beyond General Clausewitz's advice: to understand the kind of war to argue the main purpose of strategy is to manipulate the kind of war being fought. Wylie's examples suggest that determining the time and location of the fighting is key to exploiting an adversary's vulnerabilities, forcing them to react and fight on

terms dictated by the protagonist. Similarly, Sun Tzu instructs that "war is based on deception. Move when it is advantageous and create changes in the situation by dispersal and concentration of forces." He provides a series of aphorisms instructing clever generals to use deception to create a favorable disposition of forces.[29] We can see some similarities with Chan Kim's and Renee Mauborgne's advice to develop a strategy, creating a whole new area of action or "uncontested market space."[30] They also advise strategists to "make the competition irrelevant."

In national strategy, the goal is to create the analog of uncontested market space by changing the area or nature of the competition and creating conditions exceeding the enemy's capability—or at least their perception of their capability—to respond. This point is seen in chess, one of the premier games of strategy. The term "checkmate"—the ending of a game of chess—does not mean the king playing piece is dead, but rather "the king is left helpless, the king is stumped."[31] Ultimate victory does not come from attacking the king, but from placing capabilities around the king so no options remain. In high-level chess, competitors will even surrender the game when they see the opponent has an unassailable positional advantage. In the Chinese version of chess, this aspect is enhanced by the rules forbidding the opposing kings from ever directly opposing each other across the board; the kings are also limited in movements to the center back part of their board edge. We can also see this element of strategy in Russian investment in advanced air defense systems. Knowing the U.S. prioritizes decreasing military and political risk through airpower, they invested in systems to specifically increase that risk and drive the U.S. to other means of battle where the Russians have a quantitative and qualitative advantage. With its anti-access/area denial and submarine capabilities, China seeks to make U.S. naval power a vulnerability instead of a strength. At the same time, this is a key principle of insurgent warfare—they attack at a time and place when they are at the least disadvantage, and then blend back into the population. In a business sense, the iPod competed with every other MP3 player by creating iTunes, a new system for monetizing digital music. Netflix competed with Blockbuster by moving the buy decision into a person's home

In high-level chess, competitors will even surrender the game when they see the opponent has an unassailable positional advantage.

rather than in a brick-and-mortar store. In each of these varied examples, the theory of success shifted the competition to a more favorable arena.

The fourth advantage of strategy comes from its core function to focus, prioritize, and coordinate resources and action.[32] For Rumelt, "good strategy … works by focusing energy and resources on one, or a very few, pivotal objectives whose accomplishment will lead to a cascade of favorable outcomes."[33] In the early stages of the Cold War, the containment strategy held the promise of clearly delineating what really mattered in the competition with the Soviet Union, thereby allowing the U.S. to focus its energy and a set number of objectives. Kennan's strategy identified the protection of industrial centers as the core goal of containment. Preventing the USSR from controlling Western Europe and Japan was the key to successfully containing Soviet ambitions. Following this line of thinking, the U.S. could focus on those two areas and conserve resources. It took the Vietnam War to move the U.S. back to a more restrained version of containment.

The fifth advantage of strategy, as General Clausewitz explains, is that violence untethered from strategy and policy achieves nothing except the perpetuation of violence. For war to maintain a rational basis, violence must serve policy as articulated through military strategy.[34] Competition can exhibit similar dynamics. History is replete with examples of rivalry, causing the exhaustion of both competitors. Competition is not an end within itself. President Ronald Reagan, like Kennan and the architects of containment, understood intuitively that the Cold War competition with the Soviet Union was a way to achieve a goal and not a desirable situation within itself. In pursuing an end to the Cold War, President Reagan proved himself flexible in pursuing his goal of compelling the USSR "to moderate its conduct and accept a modus vivendi."[35]

President Reagan's first strategy, or theory of success, was to apply pressure on the USSR through a military buildup, an intensification of political warfare, and support for anti-communist insurgencies. The intense pressure would cause the USSR to come to the negotiation table. This was a faulty strategy. While the USSR did feel the pressure, President Reagan got the causal relationship wrong. The pressure caused Soviet leaders to feel insecure without good options for alleviating that insecurity. After the 1983 Able Archer incident, President Reagan understood pressure needed to be paired with a credible promise of better relations if the Soviets would moderate their behavior. After 1983, he sought to establish trust and focused on

conciliatory efforts to win over Soviet Union President Mikhail Gorbachev.[36] President Reagan changed his theory of success—from hypothesizing that pressure would cause moderation and end the U.S.-Soviet conflict, to the reassurance that better relations would cause moderation and reach the end. The important point is that President Reagan focused his strategies on ending militarized competition, not on finding the best way of perpetuating the conflict.

Strategy and Uncertainty

In national and corporate competitive strategies, protagonists attempt to create favorable circumstances for themselves while antagonists do the same. Human behavior under pressure is often unpredictable, yet this is only one of a series of unpredictable factors a strategist may face. Strategies are designed to prepare organizations, including nations, to cope with future circumstances. The rate of change of those circumstances—such as technology and politics—determines the level of uncertainty. As the circumstances of a challenge become less certain, the task of a strategist turns away from operational judgments on how to use existing capabilities and more towards a strategic judgment of which capabilities should be developed to realize a theory of success.

The current simultaneous challenges of rapid technological advancement and changing geopolitical conditions present great uncertainty for American strategists. Long-term strategies that produce a narrow theory of success only applicable in a curated set of conditions are frequently disrupted by cunning adversaries, innovative technologies, or capricious elements of the natural world.

The French interwar military strategy that resulted in the construction of the Maginot Line is an example of the consequences of developing a too narrow theory of success predicated on accurate predictions of the future. Taking lessons from the Franco-Prussian War and World War I, French generals and military leaders believed the best strategy to protect the nation from future German attack would be the construction of a series of impregnable

The current simultaneous challenges of rapid technological advancement and changing geopolitical conditions present great uncertainty for American strategists.

subterranean concrete fortresses between the two countries. The fortresses of the Maginot Line bristled with artillery, were protected by obstacles, and shielded by thick concrete walls.[37]

The French military leaders' theory of success hypothesized that the Maginot Line could sufficiently delay a German assault, while the French generated the manpower, materiel, and technology to decisively defeat the Germans.[38] These leaders experienced the battlefields of Verdun, where enormous, fixed fortresses slowed enemy advances—although at a staggering cost in human lives. The eponymous "Father of the Maginot Line," André Maginot, argued "concrete is better … and is less expensive than a wall of chests."[39] At the time of the idea's conception in 1920, the promise of a strong, immobile shield was an attractive alternative to the devastating toll total war inflicted on the nation a few years prior.

At the same time, the Treaty of Versailles was designed to keep historical German foes too weak to invade. It returned territory to France and precipitated the need to fortify this renewed border at a time when the French military and nation were recovering from war. In the north, a French-Belgian alliance and the unfavorable terrain in the Ardennes would safeguard the border. Given this assessment, and the experience of a recent war defined by massive clashes of infantry forces and fixed fortifications, building the best fixed defensive line was a rational choice.

On 10 May 1940, when German glider troops silently landed on the "impregnable" Belgian fort Eben Emael and penetrated it with explosive charges from above, the Maginot Line and the theory of success that created it had been defeated—not by firepower, but by a failure of imagination. The Maginot Line, however, was the symptom of a greater issue.

> in the 1930s the French military did not fail to modernize their weapons and doctrines because of the Maginot Line. Instead, the period of military stagnation was due to a handful of stuffy old generals, ranging from the inspector of infantry to the overall army commander, General Gamelin, who insisted on clinging to the obsolete methods of the previous war.[40]

While a strategy prescribing fixed defenses was a logical conclusion in 1920, it ultimately failed because it was a narrow capability only effective against invaders exercising a 1920s attack plan. In reality, technology and politics changed in the interim. Specifically, the German military

innovatively employed tanks as main attack elements rather than support to infantry.[41] Rather than lumbering beasts, the tank became a relatively agile piece of machinery capable of maneuvering through the Ardennes area of Belgium. In contrast, the French operated the best tanks in Europe but relegated them to a role supporting infantry troops. At the same time, the *Luftwaffe* had rapidly expanded its capabilities. German aircraft conducted swift reconnaissance operations against the Maginot Line while it was under construction; rather than fight through it, German airpower could simply fly over it without a credible response from the anemic French Air Force. The Spanish Civil War afforded a learning laboratory and combat experience for Nazi air and armored forces.

The political situation changed as well; in 1936, the new King of Belgium declared neutrality. As the formal alliance between France and Belgium ended, the northern border of France became more vulnerable. Most importantly, the rise of Adolph Hitler—at the time when European countries were the least capable of defeating his aims—left the French with few alternatives.

Finally, the vicissitudes of the natural world further undermined the French strategy. The French theory of success, delaying the Germans while French factories produced materiel and technology needed for an eventual decisive battle, was doomed to failure.[42] The human toll of World War I significantly decreased the French birth rate. As war was looming in Europe, French demographic realities meant factories and fortresses could not simultaneously operate at full capacity.[43]

When war came to France in 1940, Nazi forces simply bypassed the Maginot Line and the 20-year-old French strategy. Circumstances had changed, and the French military was eventually out of time and ability to make changes that would alter the outcome. They could not reorient armor elements without stripping the infantry of their much-needed support. They could not relocate defenses to the border area with Belgium without leaving the strategic industrial base uncovered. The French had invested so heavily in defense, that offensive operations to take the fight to the enemy were impossible.[44] The French could neither attack nor defend, and were thus defeated. The Germans had achieved checkmate months before the attack began.

From one perspective, the Maginot Line was effective. Nazi forces were deterred from taking on the massive fortresses. Pieces of the Maginot Line still stand relatively unscathed 100 years after the idea was born, a fact simultaneously impressive and irrelevant. The French strategy failed to account

for 20 years of uncertainty and change. As a result, these massive structures and the specially trained troops that manned them were powerless to stop Hitler's march on Paris.

For an example of a strategy recognizing and responding to uncertainty, we can look to one of history's greatest conquerors, Genghis Khan. By the time of his death, Genghis Khan controlled an area the size of Africa, spanning from the Pacific Ocean to the Danube. His conquests may have caused the deaths of 40 million people, and his impact is still visible in the genetics of Central Asia. Born into a culture defined by wars of revenge and conquest, his skill as a fighter and general fueled his rise, and he knew there would be many future opportunities to build not only his legend, but the Mongol Empire. His strategic goal was simple—win every battle and reap the rewards of every conquest.

Genghis Khan adopted a strategy designed explicitly to minimize loss of life among his forces. From a practical perspective, the Mongols were an invasion force, so replacement forces were not readily available. From a cultural perspective, death itself is a Mongolian taboo. The bodies of the dead are considered impure[45], and while thousands of Mongols eventually died in battles, Genghis Khan created a theory of success aiming to win battles through fear rather than arrows.

Despite the size of his armies, he was often outnumbered, always fighting on enemy territory, and often facing enemies entrenched inside fortress walls. Confronting an enemy directly under these conditions would guarantee failure, so Genghis Khan needed to terrify his enemies into submission. He understood the most effective way to instill fear is through surprise, so he developed capabilities allowing his armies to appear in unexpected places with unexpected instruments of war.

Genghis Khan developed an impressive array of capabilities long before the exact enemy was known, and he was able to bring them to bear swiftly and with massive impact to seize whatever opportunities arose. Such was the case in 1219 when Genghis Khan moved his armies 2,700 kilometers westward to redress an insult to Mongolian honor. The Shah of the Khwarezmian Empire had not only rejected Genghis Khan's offer of a trade relationship but massacred a trade caravan and Mongolian ambassadors.[46]

According to the thirteenth-century Persian historian, Juvaini, Genghis Khan did not seek this battle. Instead, he prayerfully asked for guidance and strength saying, "I am not the author of this trouble; grant me strength to

exact vengeance."[47] While he had previously directed his capabilities eastward toward Chinese adversaries, Genghis Khan was able to turn his capabilities to the west to fight a war he did not contemplate only a few years before.

Mongol warriors were able to move with startling swiftness toward the Khwarezmid Empire. Their protein-rich diet enabled them to ride for days without stopping. Genghis Khan had no slow-marching foot soldiers, only swift mounted warriors on horseback. Any dismounted manpower would come from the men captured along the way. He maintained no supply train back to Mongol territory, but instead fed on horses and looted the rest. Rather than building large, slow-moving siege engines to defeat fortresses, he captured capable engineers who could fell forests and create the catapults and siege towers he would need upon reaching the enemy's territory.

His forces moved across deserts, preserved food to be reconstituted on the move, passed orders in rhymes to overcome illiteracy, and standardized camp construction down to the arrangement of tools inside the primitive medical tents. Genghis Khan's forces may have had the most prolific bridge builders in history. He even turned captive Muslim scribes into propagandists to spread fear among the educated followers of Islam. Jack Weatherford, a Genghis Khan historian, noted terror "was best spread not by the acts of warriors but by the pens of scribes and scholars."[48]

In contrast to the French leadership of the twentieth century, who developed a strategy capable of defense against a specific foe executing a narrow style of attack, this leader of thirteenth-century Mongols developed and exploited capabilities allowing him to pursue his strategy of surprise across a significant portion of the known world. Rather than allowing his enemies to impose constraints on his options, Genghis Khan attacked with such surprise and violence that many enemies surrendered before a battle could ensue—thus preserving the lives of Mongol soldiers and fulfilling his strategic aim.

As American strategists consider requirements for the distant future, 2030 and later, they face a rapidly changing and unpredictable world. The 2020 RAND Corporation study, *The Future of Warfare in 2030: Project Overview and Conclusions*, also recommends a capability-based approach. Specifically, RAND predicts gray zone and cyber operations will increase the importance of information operations.[49] This prediction echoes the 2019 Defense Intelligence Agency's assessment of the Chinese approach to "controlling the 'information domain'—sometimes referred to as 'information

dominance'—as a prerequisite for achieving victory in a modern war."[50] If this is true, American strategists may choose to adopt a theory of success for this domain that values preserving the integrity of U.S. information by pursuing next-generation quantum encryption technology; advanced content provenance technologies to prevent Chinese actors from "deep faking" U.S. real-time intelligence feeds; and distributed blockchain capabilities to ensure the orders units receive were not manipulated in the electronic transfer.

By crafting a clear theory of success and prescribing specific, yet flexible capabilities, operational planners could understand both the intent and the general direction of friendly technological advance. These planners would have the information to invest in similar tools; increasing U.S. capability not only vis-à-vis China, but any state or nonstate actor seeking to disrupt the American information environment. This approach contrasts with the strategic approach published in the 2018 Department of Defense Cyber Strategy:

> Our strategic approach is based on mutually reinforcing lines of effort to build a more lethal force; compete and deter in cyberspace; expand alliances and partnerships; reform the Department; and cultivate talent.[51]

By crafting a clear theory of success and prescribing specific, yet flexible capabilities, operational planners could understand both the intent and the general direction of friendly technological advance.

Further detail of the strategy includes directions such as "innovate to foster agility" and "deter malicious cyber activities."[52] These statements, while aspirational, are not actionable. If not clarified in additional guidance, planners are likely to pursue solutions addressing problems specific to their area of responsibility or specialty—rather than capabilities with broad application. A unified theory of success around a concept—such as preserving the integrity of U.S. information—would give planners the clarity needed to make the hundreds of individual decisions required to unify actions against a determined adversary. Such a theory of success is oriented around an outcome that would result in an American advantage—rather than ambiguous characteristics like agility or end-state deterrence which require actions from actors not bound by the strategy in question.

Conclusion

Today's security competition is one where potential state adversaries choose to pursue strategies aiming to avoid direct competition with American strengths. Notably, unlike most of history, the primary competitive threat is not a force-on-force battle but the erosion of trade dominance (leverage), technological superiority (advantage), and international influence. Thus, we are in a moment of greater uncertainty than when Kennan defined the strategy and policy of containment.

While competition with China and Russia are explicitly mentioned in the 2018 National Defense Strategy, the degree of competition with other states is not as clear. We are not sure if we are in a competition, which brings significant uncertainty. Designing strategies under conditions of uncertainty and competition is a recursive process. Each player's actions serve to simultaneously increase both the level of uncertainty and competition. Under these scenarios, the most effective strategies are those which develop capabilities useful in a variety of possible futures.

Russian strategists know this lesson well. The so-called Gerasimov Doctrine quotes Soviet strategist Alexander Svechin:

> The situation in the war ... it is extremely difficult to foresee. For each war, it is necessary to develop a special line of strategic behavior, each war is a special case, requiring the establishment of its own special logic, and not the application of any template."[53]

To this end, the Russians have developed an array of capabilities—albeit with limited capacity—that can be applied to a variety of national security challenges. Cyber units can influence elections by steering the electorate in a favorable direction, but they can also attack government cyber infrastructure and impact the enemy they are targeting.[54]

The U.S. currently enjoys a qualitative technological advantage over any potential adversary due to its prodigious defense spending. This advantage alone, however, is insufficient to guarantee American security. Motivated, thinking, creative adversaries will aim to negate this advantage with surprise. American history contains several notorious and catastrophic examples of leaders' inability to accurately predict adversary actions.[55] Strategies requiring accurate predictions are built on a shifting foundation that becomes shakier the further into the future they go. The prediction capability-based

strategies, however, allow greater flexibility, more coherent decision-making, and more explicit prioritization than those based on prediction.

In this era of unprecedented uncertainty, strategists can learn from the experience of Special Operations Forces (SOF). Joint Publication 3-05, *Special Operations*, identifies the capability as being "built on individuals and small units who apply special skills with adaptability, improvisation, and innovation."[56] While SOF meticulously plan and rehearse missions, their ability to creatively employ their unique capabilities in response to emerging contingencies is among their greatest assets. Strategies that develop multiple, flexible capabilities and the creative ability to arrange—and rearrange—those capabilities to address challenges in the present or near future replace dependency on fortune tellers with reliance on operational creativity. Rather than out-guessing competitors, leaders can out-think them.

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Between Competition and Global War: British Strategy Against Japan During the Early Sino-Japanese War July 1937–June 1940[1]

Mark Whisler

British strategic concern over Japanese ambitions in China and the Far East began to grow during World War I.[2] Britain and Japan signed an alliance in 1902 to counter their mutual adversary—the Russian Empire—and renewed the alliance twice, in 1905 and 1911. However, strategic interests began to gradually diverge after Japan's victory in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905.[3] In August 1914, London requested Japanese naval assistance to support the Royal Navy's (RN) efforts to track down the Imperial German Navy's East Asia Cruiser Squadron, which posed a threat to British and Allied merchant shipping in the Pacific and the Indian Ocean. Japan used the British request—and great-power preoccupation with the war in Europe—as an opportunity to make a move to dominate a weak, post-revolutionary China and seize many of the German island colonies in the central Pacific.[4] While British diplomatic pressure, Chinese stubbornness, and Japanese elder statesmen's opposition combined to force the Japanese Government to limit its demands in China, Tokyo was able to retain the islands it had seized after the war as League of Nations mandated territories.[5]

Following the war, British policymakers and military leaders debated the threat that Japan posed to the British position in the Far East—in the context of whether to renew the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, a decision due by 1922; how the treaty fit within in the new League of Nations framework; and U.S. opposition to the alliance because of the growth of U.S.-Japan antagonism.[6] While there was consensus that Japan posed a challenge—the RN began to organize itself and formulate plans around Japan as its primary naval threat—Britain and other great powers agreed upon a series of treaties on naval arms control, China, and the Pacific in 1921–1922. This ameliorated the

immediacy of that threat as perceived within much of the British political and foreign policy establishment.[7]

British fears over Japanese expansion flared again in 1931–1932 over the Imperial Japanese Army's (IJA) move to increase Japan's existing stake in—and ultimately taking full control over—the provinces comprising China's Manchuria region. This was exacerbated by the IJA and the Imperial Japanese Navy's (IJN) subsequent efforts to militarily punish Chinese forces around the important British-dominated port and financial city of Shanghai.[8] Japan's aggressive actions, and Adolf Hitler's rise to power in Germany in 1933 triggered a review in London of Britain's military posture. This led to a decision in 1934–1935 to begin repairing identified military deficiencies and then expand the British military, particularly the Royal Air Force and the RN.[9] British perception of Japan's renewed military challenge also coincided with growing trade competition between Japan and the British Empire.[10] Britain added Italy to its list of potential adversaries after 1935 when the League of Nations imposed sanctions on Italy for its invasion of Ethiopia, and the RN was readied for war in the Mediterranean. Prior to this crisis, Britain had hoped to work with Italy and France to balance a resurgence in German power.[11] War with Italy never came, but Britain's support for the sanctions had made Italy a much more overt enemy and pushed it closer to Germany.

Japan's aggressive actions, and Adolf Hitler's rise to power in Germany in 1933 triggered a review in London of Britain's military posture.

The British Treasury and the Foreign Office (FO) during 1934–1937 debated the extent of the Japanese threat and Britain's ability to reach an accommodation with Japan that would keep British interests in the Far East intact.[12] The Treasury, then headed by future Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, wanted to keep defense spending as low as possible and focus almost entirely on Germany. They argued that Britain could reach a nonaggression pact with Japan or achieve a similar level of improved relations. Moreover, the Treasury's view was reinforced by its strong distrust of the U.S., believing that Britain should not take U.S. concerns about Japan into account. It saw the U.S. as unreliable with its failure to consider British interests since 1918. The FO argued that, while it supported improving relations with Japan, the Treasury did not understand the full extent of Japan's ambitions in the Far East; unless those ambitions radically changed, there could be no agreement

with Japan that would protect Britain's interests in the region. Moreover, while the FO agreed with much of the Treasury's critique of the U.S., it still argued the potential remained for Britain to be able to call on the U.S. for assistance in a crisis; alienating it would be counterproductive. The British Cabinet ultimately decided to plot a course between those two viewpoints.[13]

Road to the Sino-Japanese War

In May 1933, Chiang Kai-shek's Chinese Republican National Government agreed to a truce with the IJA in north China, to keep Japan from overrunning the area around Peking and the important port city of Tientsin after Japan had expanded its operations from Manchuria. Despite the truce, over the next four years IJA forces attempted to gradually take control of north China through a combination of small-scale military moves; the co-opting of local Chinese warlords and other leaders to attempt to turn north China into an "autonomous" region; and subversion of legal trade facilitated by the IJA. Japanese actions fueled Chinese nationalism and a growing desire among key leaders—eventually including Chiang Kai-shek—to stand up to Japan's incremental takeover of north China.[14]

In July 1937, an IJA battalion undertaking nighttime training near Peking clashed with a local Chinese unit, and the situation escalated—despite neither side intending for the incident to become a larger conflict. Chiang and the Chinese leadership eventually decided that it was time to militarily confront the Japanese. Full-scale war broke out in August—widening from north China to central China when Chiang attacked Japanese forces in and around Shanghai. The IJA deployed large-scale reinforcements to both north and central China to carry out major offensive operations against the Chinese military. The Second Sino-Japanese War had begun.[15]

The British Empire and Its Position "East of Suez" in 1937

The United Kingdom and its empire was the preeminent global power during the 1920s and 1930s, having territory in virtually every part of the world—global trade and financial interests, the bulk of the world's commercial shipping fleet, the world's largest navy, and a military presence to support it all.[16] The empire—also now referred to as the British Commonwealth of Nations—included the self-governing dominions in Australia, Canada, Irish Free State, New Zealand, and South Africa, which also had independent

foreign policies. In general, apart from the Irish Free State, they still hewed closely to supporting London. In addition, within Asia, the Indian Empire, British Malaya and British Borneo formed critical parts of Britain's strategic and economic space—together with the resource rich Netherlands East Indies, and independent Thailand.[17]

In China, Britain was viewed as the leading Western power, having been the prime mover in the nineteenth century to open up China for western trade and access. In 1937, Britain maintained a large, informal commercial empire there—in addition to the important British colony of Hong Kong—that centered around international concessions and treaty ports, especially the major financial and trade center at Shanghai's International Settlement.[18] Prior to the Second Sino-Japanese War, British trading and shipping companies still carried a large portion of the cargo on the Yangtze River and along the coast, and British banks had major investments in China. In 1937, British investments may have been about 35 percent of all foreign investments and British shipping companies carried almost 42 percent of the total shipping tonnage in China.[19] British officials and companies also saw China as a growing market in the future. However, British holdings in China were only six percent of the empire's overseas holdings.[20] Nonetheless, British global prestige hinged in some part on the worldwide perception of its importance in China.[21]

Despite this, Britain had decided in 1926 that, with the growth in Chinese nationalism and efforts to better centralize and govern the Chinese Republic, the extraterritorial privileges it had gained for its citizens in the nineteenth century should eventually be phased out.[22] As a result, British relations with Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist Party and his new government began to improve after a rocky start during 1925–1927. By 1937, Japan viewed Britain as one of the main structures underpinning the Chiang government.[23]

British National Security Decision-making Structure in 1937–1940

The British Government in July 1937 was headed by Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, who had moved up in May that year from his position heading the Treasury as Chancellor of the Exchequer, and remained Prime Minister until May 1940. Chamberlain was a strong-willed individual who preferred to centralize foreign policy decision-making in his hands rather than rely more broadly on the larger consensus within the Conservative

Party-controlled cabinet.[24] Despite Chamberlain's tendencies, the long-standing British practice of forming cabinet subcommittees with a smaller number of key ministers to address particular issues in question remained part of British deliberative processes.[25]

The cabinet and its committees were supported by the Committee of Imperial Defence (CID), which served as something of a combined national security council and defense planning organization—providing advice, coordinating planning documents, and estimates of a situation for ministers and other key government officials in the departments.[26] The chiefs of all three military services formed the chiefs of staff committee (COSC) under the CID to confer on global British defense issues; a joint planning committee supported the chiefs with planning articles or assessments that the chiefs or cabinet ministers requested.[27] In addition, the joint intelligence committee had also been added to the CID in 1936 to provide coordinated interagency intelligence assessments to the cabinet. The CID and its subcomponents, together with the FO and the Treasury, regularly drafted memos for circulation to the ministers in support of full cabinet or cabinet subcommittee meetings or debates.[28]

Ministers decided at cabinet or subcommittee meetings which policy options Britain should pursue, and regularly considered—supported by the permanent staffs from their departments—the global implications for decisions they made. For instance, if Britain chose policy option A for the Far East, there would be consideration of not just how Japan, France, the Soviet Union, and the U.S. would react in that region, but how other powers—like Germany, Italy, or the Soviet Union—might act in Europe or elsewhere.[29] However, the nature of the interdepartmental debates and strong policy views often held by some ministers meant that no one policy document for the Far East—or, more broadly, what the U.S. today would consider a global national security strategy document—was drawn up for circulation and approved to act as an overarching blueprint for action covering multiple years.[30] As a result, the interests, policy, and policy tools detailed in this article appear more cohesive and well-thought out as some form of integrated plan than was actually true in 1937–1940, despite the considerable strategic thought and discussion that often went into policy formulation.

British Interests in China and the Rest of the Far East During the Second Sino-Japanese War

British interests comprised two elements: overarching global objectives that constrained local or regional objectives. The first global objective was to avoid a great power war or near war crisis with Japan in order to minimize the possibility of Germany and Italy—either individually or together—taking advantage of the situation to make a major strategic move in Europe, the Mediterranean, or the Middle East. The second global objective was to engage the U.S. to support British policy objectives in the Far East; in the presumed likely event that the U.S. would not provide active support, avoid alienating the U.S. because of the judgment that at some point, either in the Far East or Europe, the U.S. would be critical to supporting Britain.

From 1937 to the start of World War II in Europe in September 1939, London viewed every policy option to secure British interests in China and the Far East through a prism that looked at whether the option would trigger a war with Japan that Germany and Italy could exploit. British civilian and military policymakers had been concerned about the British Empire's ability to fight two great powers—Germany and Japan—in widely separated theaters since 1934, and these fears had only been amplified with the addition of Italy as a possible enemy in 1935–1936.[31] Britain viewed Germany as its "ultimate potential enemy" with a possible intent of overthrowing the existing order in Europe; it viewed Italy as an additional rival that was seeking to replace Britain as the predominant power in the Mediterranean, the Middle East, and parts of Africa.[32] This was despite Prime Minister Chamberlain's efforts to reach accommodations—known both then and now as "appeasement"—with both states.[33] Germany had begun its rearmament program in 1933 in violation of the Versailles Treaty that ended World War I, reoccupied the demilitarized Rhineland in 1936, united Germany with Austria in March 1938, occupied German-populated parts of Czechoslovakia in October 1938, seized the rest of Czechoslovakia in March 1939, and began threatening Poland in April 1939. Italy had invaded and occupied Ethiopia during 1935–1936 and, together with Germany, supported Francisco Franco's right-wing nationalist rebellion against the left-wing Spanish Republican government in the Spanish Civil War from 1936–1939. Moreover, during 1939, Germany and Italy worked to form a military alliance with Japan aimed at the British

Empire, but Japan rejected it—something known to British leaders through intercepted Japanese diplomatic communications.[34]

Britain also felt the need to do its utmost—absent compromising British vital interests—to avoid alienating the United States. The belief was that U.S. political, economic, and military support would potentially be available to support Britain against Germany, and especially Japan—no matter how remote it might appear at various points in time because of U.S. isolationism.[35] London had long recognized U.S. potential power dating to the beginning of the twentieth century, seen the contribution of U.S. power to the Allied victory in World War I, understood longstanding U.S. concerns about Japan, and recognized that the large U.S. Navy was a force that could potentially deter or coerce Japan. Nonetheless, Britain had been disillusioned by the U.S. withdrawal from a global leadership role, its failure to join the League of Nations in the war's aftermath, and was well aware of U.S. isolationist attitudes, especially in Congress. Moreover, friction over naval arms control and World War I debt issues had made the relationship between the "cousins" during the 1920s and early 1930s a sometimes difficult one.[36] On Japan and China, the FO found the U.S. diplomatically willing to discuss many topics, but usually unwilling to take any coordinated action.[37] Complicating matters further, British diplomats were angry about public criticism from former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Stimson after the Manchurian Crisis in 1931–32; Britain and then Foreign Secretary Sir John Simon had abetted aggression by not participating in Stimson's official statement, refusing to recognize Japanese territorial acquisitions. British officials knew the U.S. was unwilling to take any real action to punish Japan, and the British saw Stimson's statement as little more than grandstanding. U.S. officials' continued perception of Stimson's claims as being accurate throughout the 1930s meant that the FO had to remain sensitive to this when proposing any option regarding Japan and China.[38]

Nonetheless, Britain had been disillusioned by the U.S. withdrawal from a global leadership role, its failure to join the League of Nations in the war's aftermath, and was well aware of U.S. isolationist attitudes, especially in Congress.

Within China itself, Britain had identified a set of interlocking interests that needed to be protected: the rights of British trading, shipping, and banking firms to continue to do business under nineteenth-century treaties

with China; the territorial inviolability of the concessions where these companies were located, especially the international settlement in Shanghai; the physical safety of any British subjects in China; and defense of the British crown colony at Hong Kong. Apart from Shanghai and Hong Kong, other key areas were the Yangtze River, the major British river shipping and trading companies that operated there, and the coastal shipping and related ports in both north and south China that these same companies sailed to and from. Apart from the primary concentrations of British subjects at Hong Kong, treaty ports, and concessions, small numbers of citizens—particularly missionaries—were also scattered in pockets throughout the country. On all these issues, while the British often predominated, the U.S. and France also had common interests.[39]

More broadly, Britain wanted to maintain its imperial status quo in the rest of the Far East, rather than let it be subsumed into the Japanese "New Order in East Asia," proclaimed publicly in 1938. Japan's longstanding goal was to become the dominant power in Asia—something the FO had recognized since 1933, but which British officials had been concerned about since 1914.[40] Britain's informal empire inside China was viewed initially as the forward edge of the larger British Empire-dominated space in the Far East detailed earlier; as a result, security of its China interests was a potential bulwark against Japanese expansionist efforts throughout Asia.[41] In February 1939, the FO, in a letter to the Admiralty, summarized the British government's ever growing concerns:[42]

> In Lord Halifax's opinion, it is not a question of devising measures which would have any direct or immediate effect in inducing Japan to pay greater regard to British interests in China itself. What appears to be necessary is the consideration from the broadest aspect of vital imperial needs of what measures should, and could most effectively, be taken permanently to defend British interests in the Far East against the threat inherent in Japan's plans for the setting up of what she calls a "new order in East Asia." The problem would appear to be one of preventing Japan from creating a vast closed area from which she would be able to draw nearly all the raw materials which are essential to her ... The power thus acquired by Japan would enable her to present, either in combination with Germany and Italy or

> even alone, a permanent and formidable threat to British interests throughout the Eastern Hemisphere.

This reflected the continued Japanese erosion of the forward British presence in China and the resulting larger threat to the rest of the British sphere in the Far East.

Measures Taken and the Means Available to Achieve British Goals

Japan attempted to use an incremental strategy spaced over years—what we would today refer to as a "gray zone" campaign—to force longstanding British and other western companies out of China and replace them with Japanese firms under the cover of Japan's ongoing combat operations against Chinese forces.[43] This was part of its broader goal to become the dominant power in China, and then the rest of Asia.[44] As the FO's foremost Japan expert stated in August 1939, "We must not underestimate Japan's present power to harm us in the Far East by acts which singly could not be regarded as war-like measures."[45] These steps included halting all non-Japanese shipping on the Yangtze River, claiming it was not safe due to combat operations even well after combat had moved on; a blockade along the China coast against Chinese shipping, but which also included searches and harassment of British and other western ships; and administrative constraints on British shipping access to Japanese military-controlled ports in China.[46] This intensified along the south China coast and its ports after the Japanese occupation of Canton, near Hong Kong, in October 1938 in order to better interdict supplies being shipped to Chinese forces from Hong Kong, greatly increasing tensions with British forces.[47] Japan also put extensive pressure on the foreign concessions in China in attempt to gradually remove the British and other foreign nationals from their control of these critical locations, and also to undermine the British-controlled Chinese maritime customs that provided a significant source of revenue to the Chinese government.[48] Such pressure often included use of local Chinese puppet governments and police to harass and gradually attempt to encroach on the concessions; IJA harassment of British nationals; IJA and puppet forces' checkpoints, blockades, and—initially at Shanghai in 1937—actions to contain the foreign presence or occupy critical economic districts under the cover of its combat operations against Chinese forces.[49] Japan used such an incremental strategy against the British, in large part out of concern that direct use of forces could trigger a

great power war with Britain—and possibly the U.S., which it judged it could ill afford while still attempting to defeat the Chinese military.

British diplomats and naval commanders in China, along with British diplomats in Japan, mounted their own counter "gray zone" effort by consistently delivering protests regarding Japanese violations of British treaty rights. The protests were in regard to Japan aggressively and constantly interposing RN ships and personnel on the Yangtze, or on the coast between Japanese forces and British shipping or other interests despite the potential for British military casualties.[50] These forces acted as tripwires to deter Japan from using lethal force to remove the British—despite Japan's significant military advantage in the theater; Tokyo and even commanders on the ground recognized that firing on British forces would trigger a war they wished to avoid for the moment.[51] The periodic incidents where Japanese forces did fire on British or U.S. ships, such as the sinking of the river gunboat USS *Panay*, and the attack on the river gunboat HMS *Ladybird* in December 1937, when British and American sailors were killed; the diplomatic uproar and threats of war these incidents caused reinforced this broader caution.[52]

Diplomats and British Army units stationed at Shanghai, the Tientsin concession in north China, and Hong Kong pushed back vigorously to exclude a Japanese military presence from within these spaces—permitting British, other western, and Chinese companies continued space to operate.[53] As with the RN, while hugely outnumbered by IJA forces, British troops acted as a tripwire to deter Japanese incursions into the concessions for fear of triggering a war.[54] In 1939 at Tientsin, during one of the major crises between Britain and Japan during the war, Japan instituted a blockade of the concession in an attempt to force Britain to hand over Chinese terrorist suspects. Japan also demanded the surrender of Chinese silver reserves stored in British and French banks, and attempted to force the use of Chinese puppet government currency through the blockade—but notably did not immediately attempt to forcibly overrun the concession despite only a single British battalion holding it.[55]

In terms of a correlation of forces, British naval and ground forces in China carrying out these operations from the start of the war to the beginning of the conflict in Europe in September 1939 were but a fraction of those available to Japan. For example, the RN's China Station in 1937 had a small aircraft carrier, five cruisers, 11 destroyers, five small escort and patrol ships, 18 river gunboats, and 15 submarines. All but the carrier and the submarines

were regularly involved in counter "gray zone" operations against the Japanese.[56] In contrast, the IJN in 1937 had nine battleships, five aircraft carriers, 29 cruisers, and 108 destroyers. While the bulk of these ships were stationed in Japan, they all could easily deploy to China within a few days.[57] British and Indian army forces available under the British China Command at Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Tientsin were even smaller in proportion to the IJA forces in China; numbering six infantry battalions, plus some supporting units, including one field artillery battalion and one coastal artillery battalion at Hong Kong.[58] In contrast, by September 1937 the IJA had deployed 800,000 troops in China.[59]

Britain also hoped to use the Sino-Japanese War to its advantage in protecting its broader far eastern interests by helping bog down Japan in China, imposing costs on Japan through facilitating logistical and financial support to Chiang Kai-shek's Chinese Government and military.[60] However, London calibrated this support at a level and in a way that it judged would not trigger overt Japanese military action against British interests in China, British military forces, or British territory elsewhere.[61] Support for this option within the British establishment was bolstered by a general consensus—though not universally shared—that China was too big for Japan to defeat.[62] In late September 1939 after the war in Europe began, the British COSC judged that Japan being tied down in China was to Britain's benefit. However, if Japan became even more frustrated at western support for China, she could strike at Britain's far eastern outposts at a time when British commitments elsewhere made it difficult to counter—a premonition of the situation that came about in 1941.[63]

Britain allowed China to import weapons and other supplies, like fuel, to sustain its war effort through the port of Hong Kong, which was linked by rail to Chinese military strongholds in central China.[64] Most of these supplies, particularly weapons and munitions, were not British in origin because of Britain's need for weapons for its own rearmament program. As a result, the non-British origins of the equipment provided an additional level of deniability for Britain in minimizing the visibility of its assistance to China. During the first 16 months of the war, China was able to bring in 60,000 tons of supplies per month via Hong Kong, 700,000 tons of which arrived at the rail terminus at Hankow—as well as 1.5 million gallons of gasoline, until Japanese forces landed in south China at Canton, near Hong Kong, to cut the rail supply route in October 1938.[65] Even after this operation, and

IJA interdiction actions along Hong Kong's border, Britain still continued to permit fuel and other supplies to flow into Hong Kong. These supplies were then transported across the porous border and up to Chinese forces, estimated at 1,500 to 5,000 tons per month.[66] London did halt munitions shipments via Hong Kong in January 1939 to limit the potential for retaliation from Japanese forces that were positioned on the border there.[67]

In addition, Britain began construction in October 1937 on a road from British Burma to southwestern China to allow China to import war material and other supplies via a route that was not vulnerable at the time to Japanese interdiction.[68] The road was completed in December 1938, and by the spring of 1939 some 1,000 tons a month were being transported during the dry season.[69] While the tonnage was far less than that which came via Hong Kong, the road gained added importance, militarily and symbolically, after the Hong Kong railway was cut in 1938. France suspended munitions shipments—but not that of other supplies—from the port of Haiphong in French Indochina, under Japanese pressure in November 1938.[70]

Britain also took steps to ensure that China's currency, the "Chinese dollar" or *fapi*, remained viable—including convertible for foreign trade—in order to sustain the Chinese war effort and China's commercial and financial interactions with the international community.[71] Britain, China, and Japan all recognized this was an absolutely critical factor in the Chinese government's ability to continue the war.[72] Japan attempted to replace the *fapi* in Japanese-occupied territory with new currency under the multiple puppet governments it established; the currency failed to take hold sufficiently, so the population continued to rely heavily on the *fapi*.[73] This included Chinese guerrilla forces operating within Japanese occupied territory.

British efforts to sustain the *fapi* were two-fold. First, the continued defense of the foreign concessions and the Shanghai international settlement with British military units—working with France and the U.S.—allowed use of the *fapi* in safe havens within the larger Japanese-controlled territory which surrounded these locations. Circulation here undermined the Japanese puppet currencies outside the concessions' walls. Britain recognized that Japanese pressure on the Tientsin concession in 1939 was focused on stopping the use of the *fapi*; London ultimately refused to buckle to Japanese pressure on this issue, because of the precedent it would set for other concessions and the resulting impact on China's war effort.[74]

Second, Britain helped China establish a currency stabilization fund in late 1938 in order to slow the fall in value of the *fapi* due to the broader overall war conditions, and what Japan was attempting to engineer. London also provided a loan to support the fund.[75] Britain, however, did calibrate the amount and timing of its financial support to attempt to avoid any Japanese military reaction.

Policy Roads Considered, But Not Taken

The British Government chose not to pursue other policy options that had the potential to protect British interests in China and the Far East or stop Japan from threatening them. They decided against implementing them, because the risk or potential cost was judged too high. These options included political accommodation acceding to Japanese control over China; the use of sanctions or reprisals to damage Japan's economy; and either a naval demonstration, blockade, or war using the RN to pressure or force a halt to Japan's expansionism. Britain solicited U.S. support for both sanctions and military options, but the U.S. was unwilling to support them openly.

The British Treasury, Ambassador to Japan Sir Robert Craigie, and some British banks with interests in China were the prime movers behind looking to negotiate an accommodation with Japan. They claimed this would have protected British commercial interests, and given Britain an opportunity to work with Japan in rebuilding a Japan-dominated China while minimizing the potential for tension and war, more broadly.[76] The supporters of this option also generally believed that Japan would defeat the Chiang-led Chinese Government. The FO, apart from Craigie, countered these arguments repeatedly, noting that Japanese objectives in China and the Far East were far greater than the "appeasement" supporters thought, and that ultimately Japan intended to eject Britain from its position in the Far East.[77] The Treasury and its supporters never gained sufficient traction within the British cabinet to succeed in getting approval for their preferred policy, although Craigie was authorized to explore possibilities with the Japanese government. In addition, the Cabinet's willingness to support such a policy was limited because it was known that the U.S. would oppose such a move, as would key parts of the British public who were angered by Japan's aggression in China. The announcement from Japanese Prime Minister Prince Konoe Fumimaro in November 1938 proclaiming a "New Order in East Asia" that would clearly

not include Britain seems to have finally muted much of the support for the accommodation policy.[78]

British policymakers actively considered attempting to damage—or threaten damage—to the Japanese economy in order to rein in its actions in China using sanctions or economic reprisal on several occasions between October 1937 and September 1939.[79] Each time, the cabinet decided against taking such a step; primarily because they believed it would likely trigger a war with Japan and that the more severe the sanctions, the more likely a three-front war became.[80] In addition, a detailed study undertaken in November 1937 by the interagency, "Advisory Committee on Trade Questions in Time of War," found that while sanctions could severely hurt Japan, it would take up to two years to have a major impact, during which time war was likely.[81] In addition, British officials judged that Japan was likely to take overt military action against British interests in Japanese-occupied China if sanctions were put in place, quickly wiping them out and eliminating one of the reasons for the sanctions in the first place.[82]

British considerations of military options to protect its interests in China and the broader Far East were usually closely tied to sanctions. The perception was that sanctions would lead to war, and British war planning focused on supporting economic warfare against Japan through an RN blockade.[83] The cabinet actively debated or considered the deployment of the RN's main fleet to the Far East on three occasions, between December 1937 and August 1939, to carry out a naval demonstration intended to coerce Japan, or, if war came, enact a blockade.[84] London chose not to carry out this option, primarily because of U.S. unwillingness to support it—even after the sinking of the USS *Panay* in December 1937.[85] British reliance on U.S. Navy support for what the RN would have seen as a combined effort was a reflection almost entirely of its three front war dilemma; there is no reason to believe that London would not have ordered a unilateral fleet deployment if it had not faced concerns about Germany and Italy at the same time. Nonetheless, if Japan had overtly attacked British interests in China, which seemed particularly possible during the 1939 Tientsin Crisis, London probably would have ordered the RN to execute its plans to deploy the bulk of its forces to Singapore and interdict Japanese maritime trade.[86]

British considerations of military options to protect its interests in China and the broader Far East were usually closely tied to sanctions.

In June 1939, Chamberlain discussed with the cabinet the possibility that the situation with Japan over the crisis might become "intolerable" and "strong action on our part might become inevitable," particularly if any settlement negotiated with Japan was not "consistent with our honour"—likely a concern about how any perception of capitulation to Japan would affect Britain's broader credibility.[87]

British Strategy a Partial Success—Until June 1940 and the Fall of France

Strategy is often about choosing the best of bad options to protect or secure a state's interests while weighing the level of risk involved. With that as a measure, Britain probably achieved the best that it could reasonably hope for in China and the Far East during 1937–1940, in light of the larger global strategic context in which Britain was operating and its small force posture in the Far East. That said, it is difficult to gauge the exact effects on the British interests detailed here from the courses of action that British policymakers pursued. British diplomatic and military counter "gray zone" actions probably slowed Japanese domination and takeover of British commercial interests in China, but eventually—apart from perhaps the concessions, and the Shanghai international settlement—the Japanese would have pushed the British out entirely through the pressure campaign if war had not come in 1941.[88] Moreover, the British military in China also probably deterred overt Japanese military action against British interests in the Far East through their presence. They were a small, but visible reminder to Tokyo that it could face a great power war, which it wanted to avoid at this time, even if both sides recognized that British air, naval, and ground units in theater were themselves no match for immediately available Japanese forces.[89] In the view of Japanese policymakers, Britain's overall position in south China and the rest of Far East at the end of 1938 represented the biggest obstacle in the creation of Japan's "New Order in East Asia."[90]

The importance of British support to the Chinese war effort tying down Japan in China is probably easier to assess as important, but difficult to determine exactly how important, particularly relative to other key factors that kept China in the war.[91] Certainly, the tenacity of the Chinese nationalist armies and the Chinese population was the most important reason, aided by the shortcomings—or impossibility—of Japanese strategy in China. Soviet

material assistance to China far outweighed what was provided via British logistical routes, but also key was the maintenance of the Chinese currency, which might have been impossible without the foreign concession areas that Britain dominated.[92] Japanese leaders saw the Soviet Union and Britain as the two key props to keeping Chiang Kai-shek and his armies in the war, although the Japanese also may have placed more importance on external support than Chinese military resistance itself out of an unwillingness to admit the failure of their own army and its strategy.[93]

Britain successfully avoided alienating the U.S. during this period, despite U.S. distress over British appeasement policies in Europe. However, the unwillingness or inability of the U.S. to support Britain in China, and the Far East more directly prior to 1941, made British strategy much more difficult to implement. That gave Japan more space to achieve its goals in China before France fell in 1940.[94] Even some steps that Washington did take were not coordinated with London. For example, British Foreign Secretary Lord Halifax lamented in July 1939 that if he had known the U.S. was going to cancel its commercial treaty with Japan in response to Japanese actions in China, Britain could have taken a harder line in its negotiations with Japan during the Tientsin Crisis.[95]

An indicator of at least the partial success of British strategy against Japan during this period is what it took for that strategy to catastrophically fail—a massive external shock, which was the fall of France in June 1940. Japanese leaders saw it as an opportunity to immediately move to change the entire order in Asia.[96] This had been Japan's stated goal for some time. Tokyo, however, only made a decision to start its broader, large scale "southern advance" when it did because of France's capitulation to Germany; that caused the complete unhinging of Britain's entire global strategy and left French and Dutch colonies—particularly the resource rich Netherlands East Indies—vulnerable.[97] France's fall made Germany the master of all Western Europe, removed the main ground force Britain could count on to fight Germany, opened up western French ports for use in unrestricted submarine warfare against British merchant shipping deep into the Atlantic, and brought Italy into the war to attack British interests in the Mediterranean and Middle East.[98] Moreover, Britain itself now faced a potential invasion. The combined effect of these losses left the British Empire in the Far East with little potential for reinforcement. Britain was able to start rebuilding its forces in the region and coordinate with the U.S. Navy in 1941 to plan shifts of major RN assets

from the Atlantic and Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean and Singapore.[99] Unfortunately, the chain of events set off in June 1940 left Britain—and the U.S.—insufficient time to rebuild defenses in British Asia and the western Pacific before Japan struck in December 1941.

Strategic Points to Ponder

There are several key issues for U.S. policymakers, commanders, and planners to consider today from this case study on British strategy. In light of the U.S. global role, key among them are both the importance of strategic prioritization among theaters or adversaries, and consideration of how actions in one theater can affect both adversarial and friendly states' actions in another. In addition, ensuring an appropriate mixture of the different instruments of national power can present an adversary with a multi-faceted challenge to overcome, as well as different possibilities of working with key partners and allies depending on their strengths. Finally, how both adversaries and partners or allies perceive the U.S. and its ability to act to protect its interests, its "reputation for power" can be as important as the tools of power themselves if it directly affects other states' actions in relation to the U.S.—as it appears to have affected actions in the case of Japanese perceptions of Britain during 1937–1940.

London understood the critical importance of strategic prioritization and the need to hew closely to those priorities in order to devise viable policy options and provide adequate planning guidelines to the British military.[100] The threat of a great power war in three separate theaters—particularly given the distances required to deploy the RN to the Far East, within the Pacific itself, and the finite number of RN capital ships—was just too great to do otherwise.[101] British political and military leaders held tightly to this understanding, and would not deploy the RN's main fleet to the Far East unless the criteria they had set were met. They did this even though it meant the RN was unable to deploy a standing force of capital ships to the Pacific to serve as a high-profile, symbolic deterrent to Japanese expansion—as the

London understood the critical importance of strategic prioritization and the need to hew closely to those priorities in order to devise viable policy options and provide adequate planning guidelines to the British military.

FO desired—or be ready to move more quickly to counter Japan militarily if necessary.[102] As a result, British actions against Japan in China were almost always calibrated to this reality.

Moreover, an additional consideration for the need to prioritize was that the three theaters were strategically linked; a major move or event in one could trigger actions by one of Britain's adversaries in another. This was something British leaders were also concerned about and raised at every cabinet meeting that convened to discuss a major British policy decision on China, Japan, and the Far East. It was not just that deploying the RN main fleet to the Far East might leave Britain vulnerable in Europe and the Middle East, but that doing so would potentially trigger a German or Italian move to take advantage of the vulnerability, given the time-distance calculations required for naval movements as compared to land campaigns. Similarly, the ability of U.S. policymakers and planners to consider how different actors around the world react to a U.S. move in another region is an important aspect of being a global power, consistent with the 2018 U.S. National Defense Strategy's focus on strategic competition with two great powers as well as "rogue regimes."[103]

Another factor in Britain's partial success in countering Japan in China during this period was the consideration by British policymakers of all the "instruments of national power" when examining policy options to secure British interests. Again, while British decision-makers did not devise a single integrated "plan" on how to counter Japan in China, they did look at how various diplomatic, economic, and military actions would all work in concert to achieve Britain's ends.[104] These efforts were also supported in theater by close working relationships between the FO's ambassadors and other diplomats, the RN, British army commanders, and Colonial Office officials in Hong Kong. British political leaders and officials also used intelligence collection and analysis to support the decision-making process—particularly, intercepted Japanese diplomatic communications.[105] In addition, London generally wanted to keep its counter-Japan actions unobtrusive in order to avoid triggering any escalation, and attempted to manage comment and criticism made towards its policies by opposition parliamentarians, the media, and public interest groups.

British policymakers and commanders in the 1930s frequently referred to the state of Britain's "prestige" around the world, fearing that it was in decline.[106] Prestige as British leaders used it at the time, would seem to match

Hans Morgenthau's definition for it as "reputation for power" with the idea that the "prestige of one's own nation will be great enough to deter the other nations from going to war."[107] Despite British fears about how Japanese leaders viewed British prestige during the Sino-Japanese War, all indications are that Japan was concerned about becoming involved in a major conflict with Britain. The question remains why. Certainly, Japanese concerns about fighting another great power while heavily engaged in China are part of the answer, but Japan knew it had a significant military advantage over British forces in the Far East and was aware of British fears of a simultaneous war with Germany and Italy. Nonetheless, Japan carried out a "gray zone" campaign against British interests in China during 1937–1940 and only moved forward with military plans to attack Britain's territories in the Far East after the fall of France. Moreover, Japanese leaders privately saw Britain as one of their main adversaries stopping their victory in China, and the Japanese public carried out large anti-British demonstrations in Tokyo because of the perception of Britain as Japan's main enemy.[108]

One possible explanation is that some key Japanese political and military leaders—probably at the more senior level rather than the often more extremist and confident mid-levels—still viewed Britain through a prism of a British Empire that had conquered much of the world, had a reputation for ruthlessness or some other "hard" qualities, and had defeated Germany in World War I.[109] A perception of Britain such as this, rather than the feeling of relative weakness that many of Britain's own leaders believed in light of the overwhelming responsibilities Britain had, may have colored Japanese leaders' decisions. That perception finally shattered when France fell in 1940.

The key for today's U.S. policymakers, strategists, and planners is understanding how an adversary perceives the U.S. "reputation for power," not how U.S. leaders perceive that reputation. In many ways, it did not matter or mattered less in 1937–1940 that British leaders perceived Britain as weak, because Britain continued to act as a great power defending its interests in many cases. Instead, what mattered—at least in terms of the Far East—was how Japan viewed Britain's "reputation for power" in the context of all the challenges Japan was facing and whether that helped deter Japan from acting militarily against Britain. This worked to Britain's advantage. Today, U.S. policymakers could benefit from understanding how potential adversaries assess U.S. strength vis-à-vis themselves, whether adversaries' perceptions are consistent with U.S. policymakers' own understanding of U.S. strength,

and how any difference between the two could affect U.S. or adversaries' strategic choices.[110]

Key Takeaways

- "Good" options are often elusive. As noted later, British strategists encountered a menu of bad options from which to choose in order to protect or secure their interests in China and Asia, and determined courses of actions based on the level of risk involved.
- British policymakers thought globally; they considered what the impacts from actions in one theater were on actors in another and across their use of all facets of national power. This included actions of both friendly and adversarial powers.
- Perceptions are critical. British leaders' perceptions of Britain's own declining prestige, and internal questions as to its ability to directly address Japanese actions short of conflict and implications of escalation to war, were one part of the equation. These played off apparent Japanese perceptions of Britain's historic "reputation for power" that likely made Japanese leaders more cautious in countering Britain than a comparison of military power in theater would suggest was necessary.

Endnotes

1. This is not an exhaustive study of the topic, which would require greater space and use of more primary sources to flesh out key points, but this is intended to highlight the challenges a global power can face when attempting to cope with strategic competition in a theater where it is at a disadvantage while simultaneously managing the potential for great power war in other regions.
2. This article refers to locations, people, and organizations using contemporary names found in British documents and studies rather than preferred present day spellings—for example, Peking (Beijing), Canton (Guangzhou), Hankow (Wuhan), Far East (East Asia), and Chiang Kai-shek (Jiang Jieshi).
3. Ian Nish, *The Anglo-Japanese Alliance: The Diplomacy of Two Island Empires 1894–1907* (London: The Athlone Press, 1966); Ian Nish, *Alliance in Decline: A Study in Anglo-Japanese Relations 1908–1923* (London: The Athlone Press, 1972);

Peter Lowe, "Great Britain and Japan's Entrance into the Great War 1914–1915," in *The Anglo-Japanese Alliance 1902–1922*, ed. Phillips Payson O'Brien (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), 159–175.

4. Lowe, "Great Britain and Japan's Entrance," 159–175; Ian Nish, "Japan and China 1914–1916," in *British Foreign Policy under Sir Edward Grey*, ed. Harry Hinsley (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 452–465; Ian Nish, "Admiral Jerram and the German Pacific Fleet 1913–15," *The Mariner's Mirror* 56, no. 4 (1970): 411–421; Kenneth Bourne, Donald Cameron Watt, and Ann Trotter, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs: Reports and Papers from the Foreign Office Confidential Print* (Bethesda: University Publications of America, 1991); Charles J. Schencking, "The Imperial Japanese Navy and the First World War: Unprecedented Opportunities and Harsh Realities," in *The Decade of the Great War: Japan and the Wider World in the 1910s*, eds. Tosh Minohara, Tze-ki Hon, and Evan Dawley (Boston: Brill, 2015), 82–106.
5. Lowe, "Great Britain and Japan's Entrance," 159–175; Nish, "Japan and China 1914–1916," 452–465; Bourne, Watt, and Trotter, *British Documents On Foreign Affairs*; Sochi Naraoka, "A New Look at Japan's Twenty-One Demands: Reconsidering Kato Takaaki's Motives in 1915," in *The Decade of the Great War: Japan and the Wider World in the 1910s*, eds. Tosh Minohara, Tze-ki Hon, and Evan Dawley (Boston: Brill, 2015), 189–210.
6. Nish, *Alliance in Decline*, 263–382.
7. Nish, *Alliance in Decline*, 263–382; Christopher Bell, *The Royal Navy, Seapower and Strategy Between the Wars* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 1–25, 59–67; Andrew Field, *Royal Navy Strategy in the Far East 1919–1939: Planning for War Against Japan* (New York: Frank Cass, 2004), 1–74; John Ferris, "It Is Our Business in the Navy to Command the Seas: The Last Decade of British Maritime Supremacy 1919–1929," in *Far Flung Lines: Studies in Imperial Defence in Honour of Donald Mackenzie Schurman*, eds. Keith Neilson and Greg C. Kennedy (New York: Routledge, 1997), 124–170; Schencking, *The Imperial Japanese Navy*, 82–106; B.J.C. McKercher, "A Sane and Sensible Diplomacy: Austen Chamberlain, Japan, and The Naval Balance of Power in the Pacific Ocean 1924–29," *Canadian Journal of History* 21, no. 2 (1986):187–213, https://doi.org/10.3138/cjh.21.2.187; Keith Neilson, "Unbroken Thread: Japan, Maritime Power, and British Imperial Defence 1920–32," in *British Naval Strategy East of Suez 1900–2000*, eds. Greg C. Kennedy (New York: Frank Cass, 2005), 62–89; R.G. Casey to P.M., 15 April 1926, Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, https://www.dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/historical-documents/Pages/volume-17/63.
8. Christopher Thorne, "The Shanghai Crisis of 1932: The Basis of British Policy," *The American Historical Review* 75, no. 6 (1970): 1616–1639.
9. Keith Neilson, "The Defence Requirements Sub-Committee, British Strategic Foreign Policy, Neville Chamberlain and the Path to Appeasement," *The English Historical Review* 118, no. 477 (2003): 651–684; Keith Neilson, "The Royal Navy, Japan, and British Strategic Foreign Policy 1932–1934," *Journal of Military History* 75 (April 2011): 505–531; See Norman H. Gibbs, *Grand Strategy Volume I:*

Rearmament Policy (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 2016), 69–177; Orest Babij, "The Royal Navy and the Defence of the British Empire 1928–1934," in *Far Flung Lines*, eds. Keith Nelso and Greg C. Kennedy (New York: Routledge, 1997), 170–189.

10. Ann Trotter, *Britain and East Asia 1933–1937* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 16–17; Stephen Endicott, *Diplomacy and Enterprise: British China Policy 1933–37* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1975), 66; Antony Best, "Economic Appeasement or Economic Nationalism? A Political Perspective on the British Empire, Japan, and the Rise of Intra-Asian Trade 1933–37," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 30, no. 2 (May 2002): 77–101.
11. Zara Steiner, *The Triumph of the Dark: European International History 1933–1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 101–136.
12. Antony Best, "The Jackal's Share: Whitehall, the City of London and British Policy Towards the Sino-Japanese War 1937–1939," in *The Foreign Office, Commerce and British Foreign Policy in the Twentieth Century*, eds. John Fisher, Effie G.H. Pedaliu, and Richard Smith (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016), 211–232.
13. See Trotter, *Britain and East Asia*; Endicott, *Diplomacy and Enterprise*, 52–185; Gibbs, *Grand Strategy Volume I*, 93–127; Steiner, *The Triumph of the Dark*, 474–492.
14. Steiner, *The Triumph of the Dark*, 488–492; Shimada Toshihiko and James B. Crowley, "Designs on North China 1933–1937," in *Japan's Road to the Pacific War - The China Quagmire: Japan's Expansion on the Asian Continent 1933–1941*, ed. James W. Morley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 3–202. *Road to the Pacific War* is a series that comprises selected translations from a landmark Japanese collection of historical essays, Taiheiyo senso e no michi. For comments on the latter, see the annotated bibliography in *The Battle for China: Essays on the Military History of the Sino-Japanese War of 1937–1945*, eds. Mark Peattie, Edward Drea, and Hans van De Ven (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 574–586.
15. For this paragraph, see Hata Ikuhiko and David Lu, "The Marco Polo Bridge Incident 1937," in *The China Quagmire* (New York: Columbia University, 1983), 233–261; and James B. Crowley, "A Reconsideration of the Marco Polo Bridge Incident," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 22, no. 3 (May 1963): 277–291. See also Edward J. Drea and Hans van de Ven, "An Overview of Major Military Campaigns During the Sino-Japanese War 1937–1945;" Yang Tianshi, "Chiang Kai-shek and the Battles of Shanghai and Nanjing;" and Hattori Satoshi and Edward J. Drea, "Japanese Operations from July to December 1937," in *The Battle for China: Essays on the Military History of the Sino-Japanese War of 1937–1945*, eds. Mark R. Peattie, Edward J. Drea, and Hans van de Ven (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 27–47, 143–158, 159–180.
16. See the four-article series in *International History Review* from 1991 (references following) that counters those historians who have argued for the decline of the British Empire starting from before World War I. Their argument is a more

complex one regarding the meaning of power and relative ability to protect key interests in comparison to the challenge from one or several other great powers. Regarding Britain's continued preeminence in the 1920s and 1930s—particularly in contrast with the potential power of an isolationist U.S.—see the lead paragraph of B.J.C. McKercher's article noting Britain being the only truly global power, pursuing its interests globally, backed by considerable military and economic strength. Gordon Martel, "The Meaning of Power: Rethinking the Decline and Fall of Great Britain," *The International History Review* 13, no. 4 (November 1991): 662–694; John Ferris, "The Greatest Power on Earth: Great Britain in the 1920s," *The International History Review* 13, no. 4 (November 1991): 726–750; B.J.C. McKercher, "Our Most Dangerous Enemy: Great Britain Pre-Eminent in the 1930s," *The International History Review* 13, no. 4 (November 1991): 751–783; Steiner, The Triumph of the Dark, 604–605; Greg C. Kennedy, "Great Britain's Maritime Strength and the British Merchant Marine, 1922–35," *Mariner's Mirror* 80, no. 1 (1994): 66–76; "American and British Merchant Shipping: Competition and Preparation 1933–39," in *The Merchant Marine in International Affairs 1850–1950*, ed. Greg C. Kennedy (Portland: Frank Cass, 2000), 107–154; Andrew Boyd, *The Royal Navy in Eastern Waters: Linchpin of Victory 1935–1942* (London: Seaforth Publishing, 2017), 4.

17. "Committee of Imperial Defence: Chiefs of Staff Subcommittee: Annual Review by the Chiefs of Staff 1935," CAB53/24 (London, The National Archives, 1935), https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/browse/r/h/C386562; Boyd, *The Royal Navy in Eastern Waters*, 63.
18. Endicott, *Diplomacy and Enterprise*, 19; Robert Bickers, *Britain in China: Community, Culture and Colonialism 1900–1949* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1999), 1–14; for a recent perspective on the importance of foreign influence and foreigners in modernizing China during the twentieth century before the Communist revolution in 1949, see Frank Dikotter, *The Age of Openness: China Before Mao* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 31–98.
19. Bradford A. Lee, *Britain and the Sino-Japanese War, 1937–1939: A Study in the Dilemmas of British Decline* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1973), 16–17.
20. Trotter, *Britain and East Asia*, 18.
21. Endicott, *Diplomacy and Enterprise*, 32.
22. William R. Louis, *British Strategy in the Far East 1919–1939* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 109–170; Bickers, *Britain in China*, 5.
23. Toshihiko and Crowley, "Designs on North China," 136–141.
24. Keith Neilson, *Britain, Soviet Russia and the Collapse of the Versailles Order 1919–1939* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 212–219; Greg C. Kennedy, "Neville Chamberlain and Strategic Relations with the U.S. during His Chancellorship," *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 13, no. 1 (March 2002): 95–120.
25. Neilson, *Britain, Soviet Russia and the Collapse of the Versailles Order*, 22.
26. For a brief and useful summary, see Neilson, *Britain, Soviet Russia and the Collapse of the Versailles Order*, 22; also Franklyn A. Johnson, "The British Committee

of Imperial Defence: Prototype of U.S. Security Organization," *The Journal of Politics* 23, no. 2 (May 1961): 231–261; for a more detailed look, see Gibbs, *Grand Strategy Volume I*, 767–789.

27. The Joint Planning Committee was not a permanent standing body, but it comprised the directors of plans for the three services; the Joint Planning Committee was augmented with additional staff in 1936. "Committee of Imperial Defence Joint Planning Committee Minutes and Memoranda," CAB 55 (London: The National Archives, 1923–1939), https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C3862.

28. For example, see the memo circulated by the Foreign Secretary, Lord Halifax, in response to cabinet discussions on the Tientsin Crisis and two other foreign policy issues the same morning, Lord Edward Wood Halifax, "Memorandum by Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs," C.P. 155 (39), CAB 24/288 (official memorandum, London: The National Archives, 1939), http://filestore.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pdfs/large/cab-24-288.pdf.

29. See for example the cabinet discussions on the Tientsin Crisis in "Conclusions of a Meeting of the Cabinet," C.P. 33 (39), CAB 23/100 (London: The National Archives, 1939), http://filestore.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pdfs/large/cab-23-100.pdf.

30. This is likely a point for debate depending on what one would describe as a plan and would make for fruitful comparison with modern states that develop public national security strategy documents. In general, for the British during this 1937–1939 period—before the start of the European war—one gets a sense that situations evolved, the Foreign Office or others drafted memos assessing the situation, the cabinet met to debate a way forward, and policy was agreed to, and then departments executed that policy. The role of particular ministers in these debates, particularly when it came to Chamberlain and Halifax, who either had strong views or it reflected their underlying departmental responsibilities, focused the debates. The underlying strategic concerns about Germany and Japan were established during 1933–1936, and then Italy in 1935–1936 during cabinet debates over policies toward one or all of them combined, often in the context of the latest crisis or major event. The closest to a unified national security strategy document is the Defence Requirements Committee report from February 1934—a report that had been prepared at the direction of a Prime Minister-chaired Committee of Imperial Defence meeting, although it is more akin to a national defense strategy document. See Gibbs, *Grand Strategy Volume I*, 94. The Defence Requirements Committee was an interagency subcommittee of the Committee of Imperial Defence comprising the senior-most civil servants in the Foreign Office and Treasury, together with the service chiefs. The Defence Requirements Committee debated and discussed over two months British defense requirements to fix identified deficiencies in light of Japan's recent moves in China and Hitler's rise to power in Germany and the cost of repairing these issues. The cabinet, however, then debated the document and modified some of its conclusions in terms of defense spending to reflect greater immediate concern about air defense of the UK itself, driven in large by then-Chancellor of the Exchequer Chamberlain's views. Nonetheless, this committee—the broad strategic priorities and issues like

multi-theater war that it identified—and the committee's continued review of defense issues into 1935 set the tone for the decade. For one of the best accounts of the Defence Requirements Committee, see Neilson, "The Defence Requirements Sub-Committee," 651–684. For the text of the initial Defence Requirements Committee report, see "Imperial Defence Policy Report of the Defence Requirements Committee," C.P. 64 (34), CAB 24/247 (London: The National Archives, 1934) for the Prime Minister-chaired Committee of Imperial Defence meeting that called the Defence Requirements Committee into being. See "Extract from the Draft Minutes of the 261st Meeting of the Committee of Imperial Defence, 9 November 1933," Document No. 39, in *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series*, vol. 20 (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1946), 72–82.

31. For some examples at different moments throughout the 1937–1939 time period, see Lee, *Britain and the Sino-Japanese War*, 64, 94, 107, 111, 131–136, 147–148, 176, 187–188; also, for some documentary examples, see "Conclusions of a Meeting of the Cabinet," C.P. 36 (37), CAB 23/89 (London: The National Archives, 1937) in which Prime Minister Chamberlain expresses concern that any move in the Far East at the time to counter Japan would be "suicidal" because the "Dictator States" would be tempted to take action; Chiefs of Staff Committee Meetings, C.P. 301–305, CAB 53/11 (London: The National Archives, 1939) discussing the situation in the Far East during the Tientsin Crisis and the effect a Royal Navy main fleet deployment would have on dynamics throughout the world, but especially regarding Germany and Italy; also "Military Implications of German Aggression against Czechoslovakia," CAB 53/37, CID, COSC, COS 698 (London: The National Archives, 1938), a paper tasked by Prime Minister Chamberlain to look at several hypothetical possibilities in terms of various combinations of allies to fight against Germany and assumes that Japan and Italy would be hostile and then assesses various courses of actions by friendly and enemy states; also "Appreciation of the Situation in the Event of War With Germany," C.P. 199 (38), CAB 24/278, CID, COSC, COS 765 (London: The National Archives, 1938), https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C373495, which was drafted and circulated to the cabinet at the request of Chamberlain and Sir R. Craigie in "(Tokyo) to Viscount Halifax No. 129 Telegraphic [F 1376/186/10], 11 February 1939," Document 481 in *Documents on British Foreign Policy 3rd Series*, vol. 8 (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1949), 451, which discusses British concerns that Germany and Italy were urging Japan to occupy China's Hainan Island in order to pressure France because of Hainan's proximity to French Indochina.

32. The term "ultimate potential enemy" was used in the Defence Requirements Committee report from February 1934 in Gibbs, *Grand Strategy Volume I*, 94.

33. For the best overview of the situation in Europe during the 1930s, including Chamberlain's appeasement efforts and German and Italian efforts to overturn the European order, see Steiner, *The Triumph of the Dark*.

34. Antony Best, *British Intelligence and the Japanese Challenge in Asia, 1914–1941* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), 148–149.

35. For view of Foreign Secretary Lord Halifax during the Tientsin Crisis in summer 1939, see Lee, *Britain and the Sino-Japanese War*, 187.

36. Zara Steiner, *The Lights That Failed: European International History 1919–1933* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), chap. 1; for an overview of Anglo-American relations in the 1920s, see *Anglo-American Relations in the 1920s: The Struggle for Supremacy*, ed. B.J.C. McKercher (London: MacMillan, 1991), 1–16; McKercher, "Our Most Dangerous Enemy," 751–783; Ferris, "The Greatest Power on Earth," 726–750.

37. Comments from Foreign Office Far Eastern Department official Sir John Brenan during the Tientsin Crisis in July 1939 provide an apt summary of British perceptions on the U.S. at the time. He stated, "As regards the Far East, it seems to me that the American reactions are likely to be as follows: "If we give way to the Japanese demands we shall alienate the Americans, who will regard us as poltroons and not worth saving. If we risk our position in Europe by standing up to Japan with force, and get away with it, the Americans will applaud and do nothing, because it will not be necessary for them to do anything. If we stand up to Japan and get a bad knock, American sentiment may after an interval, allow the Administration to come to our aid, but in the meantime, we may suffer a lot of damage. However, … if we do not stand up to Japan, we are going to suffer that damage anyway and alienate the Americans at the same time," quoted in Keith Neilson, "Defence and Diplomacy: The British Foreign Office and Singapore 1939–1940," *Twentieth Century British History* 14, no. 2 (2003): 138–164. For additional documentary examples of British perception of U.S. Far Eastern policy, see "Viscount Halifax to Marquess of Lothian (Washington) No. 645 18, October 1939," Document 316 [F 10549/87/10] and "Memorandum Respecting the Effect of American Policy on the Far Eastern Situation by M.E. Dening, 29 December 1939," Document 380 [F13134/74/10] in *British Documents on Foreign Affairs Part II Series E Asia 1914–1939*, vol. 48 China, June 1939–December 1939 (Frederick: University Publications of America, 1997), 288–289, 339–341.

38. See Keith Neilson, "Perception and Posture in Anglo-American Relations: The Legacy of the Simon-Stimson Affair 1932–1941," in *The International History Review* 29, no. 2 (June 2007), 313–337 for an excellent review of Anglo-American relations on Japan, China, and the Far East during the 1930s using the Simon-Stimson affair as a pivot.

39. "Situation in the Far East," CAB 24/248 (official memorandum, London: Foreign Office, The National Archives, 1933–1934); Lee, *Britain and the Sino-Japanese War*, 95–96; Trotter, *Britain and East Asia*, ix-x, 1–22, 35, 143–144; Bickers, *Britain in China*, 1–21, 67–169; Endicott, *Diplomacy and Enterprise*, 29–30, 42–43.

40. See "Situation in the Far East"; Trotter, *Britain and East Asia*, 203–216; Endicott, *Diplomacy and Enterprise*, 2, 56–57.

41. "Situation in the Far East"; particularly paragraph XIII in J.T. Pratt, "Memorandum on British Policy in the Far East," [F 7818/5189/61] (official memorandum, 1933); Trotter, *Britain and East Asia*, 21; Boyd, *The Royal Navy in Eastern Waters*, 63.

42. "Appendix I: Additional Correspondence on the Naval Situation in the Far East, (i) Letter from the Foreign Office to the Admiralty, 13 February 1939," in *Documents on British Foreign Policy 3rd Series*, vol. 8, (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1949), 542.
43. Lee, *Britain and the Sino-Japanese War*, 113–116. Michael Mazarr notes, "Gray zone strategies … will tend to reflect these aspects of what can be called strategic gradualism. They will unfold over time, bit by bit, each step carefully remaining below clear thresholds of response. Over time, however, the architect of such a campaign intends for these incremental steps to sum up to a decisive change in the status quo. Such strategies thus involve … acting in a deliberate and gradual manner to achieve partial revolution in the existing system." Michael Mazarr, *Mastering the Gray Zone: Understanding a Changing Era of Conflict* (Carlisle: U.S. Army War College/Strategic Studies Institute, 2015), 39–40. This is a good description of Japan's approach to Britain and the Western presence in China during 1937–1940.
44. The British embassy in Tokyo stated in its 1937 annual report that "Britain has got what Japan wants, and what no other country has, a dominating position in China," quoted in Lee, *Britain and the Sino-Japanese War*, 113.
45. Sir George B. Sansom, "Memorandum on British Policy in the Far East [F 8502/6457/10]," in *Documents on British Foreign Policy 3rd Series*, vol. 9 (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1949), 528–532.
46. Lee, *Britain and the Sino-Japanese War*, 41–42, 121–122; Anthony Eden, "Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Situation in the Far East, British Shipping in the Far East," C.P. 212 (37), CAB 24/271 (London: The National Archives, 1937); "Conclusions of a Meeting of the Cabinet: Draft Notes of a Meeting Held at the Foreign Office," C.P. 34 (37), CAB 23/89 (London: The National Archives, 1937).
47. Franco D. Macri, *Clash of Empires in South China: The Allies Nations' Proxy War with Japan 1935–1941* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2012), 127–139.
48. This article will not address the complicated subject of the Maritime Customs situation.
49. Lee, *Britain and the Sino-Japanese War*, 93, 113–123, 133.
50. For a perspective on similar U.S. Navy actions in support of U.S. interests, see Hunter Stires, "They Were Playing Chicken: The U.S. Asiatic Fleet's Gray-Zone Deterrence Campaign against Japan 1937–1940," *Naval War College Review* 72, no. 3 (Summer 2019): art. 9, https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol72/iss3/9.
51. The full list of incidents or actions by Royal Navy China Station warships would take too much space for this article—the most detail is in Martin Brice, *The Royal Navy and the Sino-Japanese Incident 1937–1941* (London: Ian Allan, 1973), which, while it does not include source notes, is obviously based on deep research in Admiralty records. For example, Royal Navy ships moved quickly at various points in Spring 1939 to stop Imperial Japanese Navy harassment of British merchant

ships along the south China coast while the Japanese were trying to halt supply smuggling to the Chinese. In addition, in February 1939, after the Imperial Japanese Navy stopped a British passenger ship near the entrance to Hong Kong, Royal Navy motor torpedo boats took up attack positions around the Imperial Japanese Navy warship; see Macri, *Clash of Empires in South China*, 134–136, 149–150. One of the most aggressive moves by a Royal Navy captain came in February 1939 after a Japanese-controlled Chinese customs vessel and Imperial Japanese Navy destroyers forced a British freighter into the Japanese-controlled north Chinese port of Tsingtao. The Royal Navy cruiser, HMS *Birmingham*, responded immediately, sailed into the port, placed an armed guard on board the freighter, and then sailed with the freighter out of port the next morning despite Japanese protests. Three Imperial Japanese Navy heavy cruisers in port trained their 8-inch guns on the *Birmingham* while the *Birmingham* returned the favor with her 6-inch guns. No shots were fired despite the tension. Brice, *The Royal Navy and the Sino-Japanese Incident*, 112–114; Alexander Clarke, "The Royal Navy and the Far East in the 1930s: Promoting Stability and Preserving Peace on a Budget," *The Second World War Research Group*, 8 January 2019, https://www.swwresearch.com/post/the-royal-navy-and-the-far-east-in-the-1930s-promoting-stability-and-preserving-the-peace-on-a-budg.

52. Foreign Office Far Eastern Department official Sir John Brenan said in June 1938 that "We know that the 'Panay' and 'Ladybird' incidents caused the Japanese such alarm that they abandoned the invasion of Kuangtang (Canton) for fear of complications with the Western powers," quoted in Lee, *Britain and the Sino-Japanese War*, 100. The British information apparently came from intercepted Japanese communications. See Best, *British Intelligence*, 148.

53. "Conclusions of a Meeting of the Cabinet," C.P. 47 (37), CAB 23/90 (London: The National Archives, 1937) includes a discussion on the need to retain two British infantry battalions in the Shanghai International Settlement in order to prevent Japanese encroachment.

54. In January 1938, Japan demanded the surrender of a Chinese individual living in Tientsin and said that they would enter the concession to arrest him if the British refused to hand him over; the Japanese backtracked when the British said that they would forcibly resist. In addition, the British blocked a Japanese pressure campaign in the spring of 1939 that would have allowed them to dominate the Shanghai International Settlement. British, American, and French naval forces also countered a Japanese attempt to take over the much smaller international settlement at Kulangsu near Amoy on the south China coast, putting ashore their own naval landing parties to counter a Japanese force that tried to intimidate the settlement's council into allowing a Japanese takeover. The Japanese eventually withdrew the bulk of their forces. Lee, *Britain and the Sino-Japanese War*, 116, 179–181.

55. Lee, *Britain and the Sino-Japanese War*, 181–204.

56. For Royal Navy order of battle, see Brice, *The Royal Navy and the Sino-Japanese Incident*, appendices, 153–163; Richard Carter, *The Navy List for December 1937,*

Corrected to the 18th November 1937 (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1937); Richard Carter, *The Navy List for August 1938, Corrected to the 18th July 1938* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1938); Richard Carter, *The Navy List for February 1939, Corrected to the 18th January 1939* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1939); and Richard Carter, *The Navy List for September 1939, Corrected to the 18th August 1939* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1939). The Royal Navy submarine flotilla based at Hong Kong was specially trained for massed wolf pack tactics against an Imperial Japanese Navy invasion force headed for Hong Kong or Singapore. See James Goldrick, "Buying Time: British Submarine Capability in the Far East 1919–1940," *Global War Studies* 11, no. 3 (2014): 33–50 and Alastair Mars, *British Submarines at War 1939–1945* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1971), 21–64, 239–247. Mars had served in Royal Navy submarines on China Station before the war and went on to serve and command submarines throughout World War II.

57. "Far East Appreciation, 1937, Prepared by the Joint Planning Sub-Committee," C.P. 579, CAB 53/31 (London: The National Archives, 1937), app. A.

58. British battalion-sized artillery units were actually designated regiments, but battalion is used here to avoid confusion for U.S. readers. "Far East 1930–1947: British Troops in China," *British Military History*, accessed 9 May 2020, https://www.britishmilitaryhistory.co.uk/docs-far-east-1930-1947-british-troops-china/.

59. Drea and Van De Ven, "An Overview of Major Military Campaigns," 35.

60. Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden noted in November 1937, C.P. 212 (37), CAB 24/271, that the British "should do what we cautiously can to make" the China war into Japan's 1812, referring to Napoleon's disastrous invasion of Russia in "Sir R. Craigie (Tokyo) to Foreign Office No. 632 [F 8982/9/10]," Document No. 326, in *Documents on British Foreign Policy 2nd Series*, vol. 21 (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1946), 416. Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Sir Robert Vansittart, stated in August 1937 that "I hope we shall stretch points in favor of the Chinese whenever we can. It is in our interest to help them prolong this struggle as long as possible," quoted in Lee, *Britain and the Sino-Japanese War*, 47–48. The Permanent Under-Secretary is the senior permanent official in the Foreign Office. The Foreign Office also judged that longstanding friction between Japan and the Soviet Union along the border with Manchuria was also critical to keeping Japan tied down and further expanding in China and elsewhere in the Far East but judged that actual war would be counterproductive to British interests globally, particularly in the potential for the Soviet Union to counter Germany in Europe. The Foreign Office also concluded, however, that any effort on London's part to encourage Soviet-Japanese friction would likely backfire. See Neilson, *Britain, Soviet Russia and the Collapse of the Versailles Order.*

61. Best, *British Intelligence*,133.

62. Lee, *Britain and the Sino-Japanese War*; Trotter, *Britain and East Asia*, 193; Endicott, *Diplomacy and Enterprise*, 140–141.

63. Prime Minister Chamberlain directed that the Chiefs of Staff Committee memo be circulated to the War Cabinet. "Appreciation of the Situation in the Sino-Japanese Hostilities," C.P. 39 (52), CAB 66/2 (official memorandum, War Cabinet Chiefs of Staff Committee Sino-Japanese Hostilities, London: The National Archives, 1939) and "Estimate of Chinese Capacity for Resistance," 28 September 1939. The Chiefs of Staff Committee stated: " … so long as the conflict proceeds, the greatest care will be needed lest the Japanese, who attribute Chinese resistance partly to our backing, become exasperated to the point of provoking hostilities at a time when our embarrassments elsewhere must seriously prejudice our capacity to defend our interests in the Far East. The extent of this danger to some degree depends on the attitude of the United States."
64. "Conclusions of a Meeting of the Cabinet," C.P. 36 (37), CAB 23/89; the most detailed study on the role of Hong Kong in the Sino-Japanese War is Macri, *Clash of Empires in South China*. Macri researched deeply into British Army intelligence reporting from Hong Kong and U.S. military attaché reporting that had extensive access to the situation in South China; see also Lee, *Britain and the Sino-Japanese War*, 60.
65. Macri also notes that the British approved a Chinese request to build a locomotive repair yard in Hong Kong for the critical rail line in May 1938. Macri, *Clash of Empires in South China*, 45–46; Lee, *Britain and the Sino-Japanese War*, 149.
66. Macri, *Clash of Empires in South China*, 84.
67. Macri, *Clash of Empires in South China*, 105.
68. Macri, *Clash of Empires in South China*, 46; Antony Best, *Britain, Pearl Harbor and Japan: Avoiding War in East Asia 1936–41* (London: Routledge, 1995), 52.
69. Lee, *Britain and the Sino-Japanese War*, 162.
70. Macri, *Clash of Empires in South China*, 107.
71. The Chinese currency, which was backed by silver rather than gold, had been seriously destabilized in 1934 after the U.S. passed a law that increased its silver reserves in order drive up its price to aid U.S. silver producers and which led to large-scale export of silver to the United States. Britain had assisted and supported the Chinese government's currency overhaul that came out of this crisis and resulted in a much better financial system coming into existence prior to the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War and which was critical to its ability to fight the war. Ironically, the British financial mission that assisted China's currency reform was initially intended as part of an effort in 1935 to work jointly with Japan to revitalize China's finances and commerce. Japan, however, rejected the British proposal, leading to an Anglo-Chinese only effort that was vital to helping defeat Japan. Endicott, *Diplomacy and Enterprise*, 115–117; Antony Best, "The Leith-Ross Mission and British Policy Towards East Asia 1934–7," *The International History Review* 35, no. 4 (2013): 681–701; Arthur F. Sewall, "Key Pittman and the Quest for the China Market 1933–1940," *Pacific Historical Review* 44, no. 3 (August 1975): 351–371; Toshihiko and Crowley, "Designs on North China," 136–141.

72. The British Commercial Secretary in Hong Kong reported to the Foreign Office in May 1939 that "Outcome of present war will probably be decided by 'currency war.' So long as Chinese currency can be maintained Japanese efforts to consolidate military gains will be in large measure frustrated. Collapse of currency would lead to breakdown of guerrilla campaign which turns on the people's confidence in *fapi*: it would moreover open the way to puppet currencies of North and Central China, thereby leaving trade and economic development at the mercy of Japan and making occupied areas lost forever. It is for these reasons that such strenuous efforts have been made to maintain free value and circulation of Chinese currency in North China." "Commercial Secretary (Hong Kong) to Viscount Halifax No. 38 [F 5160/75/10]," Document No. 131 in *Documents on British Foreign Policy 3rd Series*, vol. 9 (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1949), 117–118.
73. See Usui Katsumi and David Lu, "The Politics of War 1937–1941," in *The China Quagmire* (New York: Columbia University, 1983), 304, 355; Lee, *Britain and the Sino-Japanese War*, 115–116.
74. Katsumi and Lu, "The Politics of War 1937–1941," 361–364; Lee, *Britain and the Sino-Japanese War*, 178–179.
75. Lee, *Britain and the Sino-Japanese War*, 164; Best, *Britain, Pearl Harbor and Japan*, 65–66.
76. This was in many ways a continuation of a similar policy push that the Treasury made during 1934–1937. Craigie claimed that there were "moderates" in the Japanese Government that Britain should reach out to in order to reach such an accommodation. The Foreign Office's foremost expert on Japan, and one of the foremost experts in the world—Sir George Sansom, the former commercial counsellor, who had served in Japan for 25 years—refuted the idea that there was any difference between the moderates or the extremists in Japan in terms of their end goal of a Japanese-dominated Asia. They only differed on methods; "All Japanese want a 'new order' in Asia, and a 'new order' involves the ultimate displacement of Great Britain in the Far East." See Sansom, "Memorandum on British Policy in the Far East [F 8502/6457/1]," 528–532. For background on Sansom, see Hosoya Chihiro, "George Sansom: Diplomat and Historian," *Hitotsubashi Journal of Law and Politics* 8 (March 1979): 1–8, https://hermes-ir.lib.hit-u.ac.jp/rs/handle/10086/8232. For validation of Sansom's contemporary view, see Usui Katsumi, "A Consideration of Anglo-Japanese Relations: Japanese Views of Britain 1937–41," in *Anglo-Japanese Alienation 1919–1952: Papers of the Anglo-Japanese Conference on the History of the Second World War*, ed. Ian Nish (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 85–86, in which Japanese Foreign Minister Ugaki—seen by Craigie as a "moderate"—explained in July 1938 about the need to eliminate Britain and the Soviet Union's position in the Far East but noted that their removal had to occur in measured steps.
77. Trotter, *Britain and East Asia*, 172, 193–194. Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's appeasement policy in Europe toward Germany and Italy was not an incorrect option to avert war, if, by such a policy, all sides would have their core

interests protected based on mutual give and take in negotiations. This type of accommodation is and was a normal part of statecraft for centuries. The problem was that Germany and Italy wanted to overthrow the entire European order, not merely adjust it—which Chamberlain was unable or unwilling to see until Germany occupied all of Czechoslovakia in March 1939.

78. Best, "The Jackal's Share," 211–232.

79. Nonetheless, in February 1939, despite British concerns, Japan was worried about the impact of British and American sanctions on its ability to prosecute the war in China if Japan agreed to an alliance with Germany and Italy that German Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop was pushing at the time—and Britain knew that Japan was concerned about this because of intercepted Japanese diplomatic communications. Best, *Britain, Pearl Harbor and Japan*, 67.

80. During a June 1939 cabinet discussion over courses of action in response to the Tientsin crisis, Foreign Secretary Halifax commented, in response to Prime Minister Chamberlain's concern about past sanction failures—likely a reference to Italy and Ethiopia in 1935—and the difficulty in deploying the Royal Navy main fleet due to the situation Europe "that he shared the Prime Minister's apprehensions. At the same time it must be remembered that if we were to yield completely to the Japanese demand—a course which he thought no one would support—the result would be that we should be subjected to increasing pressure throughout the Far East. It was difficult to hold the balance between action which might involve us in serious difficulties and action which would result in our being subjected to further pressure from the Japanese." From "Conclusions of a Meeting of the Cabinet," C.P. 32 (39), CAB 23/99 (London: The National Archives, 1939).

81. For an analysis of the 1937 sanctions discussions, see Bruce Strang and Thomas G. Otte, "Imperial Hubs and Their Limitations: British Assessments of Imposing Sanctions on Japan 1937," in *British World Policy and the Projection of Global Power*, C.1830–1960 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 276–304, doi:10.1017/9781108182775.014; "Report of the Advisory Committee on Trade Questions in Time of War on Economic Sanctions against Japan, 5 November 1937," Document No. 334, in *Documents on British Foreign Policy 2nd Series*, vol. 21 (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1946), 432–446.

82. Strang and Otte, "Imperial Hubs," 293.

83. Lee judges that Britain was more willing to carry out a naval deployment as a demonstration of force or deterrent than sanctions as it judged that sanctions would trigger a war while a naval deployment would deter one. Lee, *Britain and the Sino-Japanese War*, 95; Best, *Britain, Pearl Harbor and Japan*, 44.

84. Lee, *Britain and the Sino-Japanese War*, 88–95, 187–190. Because of the nature of the Pacific theater and no plausible option for any action against the Japanese home islands directly, London viewed its military options against Japan almost entirely in naval terms. See comments from the Royal Navy First Sea Lord, Admiral Lord Chatfield, on the British position against Japan in the Far East

being directly tied to British sea power in Lee, *Britain and the Sino-Japanese War*, 88, 44, 247; see also Boyd, *The Royal Navy in Eastern Waters*, 62–63. The main fleet would have compromised the bulk of the Royal Navy's Mediterranean Fleet augmented by parts of the Home Fleet.

85. "Conclusions of a Meeting of the Cabinet," C.P. 47 (37), CAB 23/90 is an excellent example of a cabinet discussion debating the need to demonstrate that Japanese military action against British (and U.S.) forces would not go unanswered in the aftermath of the attacks on the USS *Panay* and HMS *Ladybird* gunboats, the preference for a joint UK-U.S. naval deployment, consideration of U.S. official opinion of the issue, its impact on British decision making regarding such a deployment, and the naval implications against Italy involving a redeployment of the Royal Navy Mediterranean Fleet to the Far East. See also "Conclusions of a Meeting of the Cabinet," C.P. 48 (37), CAB 23/90 and Lee, *Britain and the Sino-Japanese War*, 88–90. President Franklin D. Roosevelt told the British ambassador on 18 December 1937—in what apparently was a rambling discussion—that he thought that the Royal Navy and U.S. Navy together should institute a blockade of Japan and cut off its trade, including oil supplies; but that such a blockade would not need to be backed up by any capital ships; that the British should keep all of those in the European theater; and that the U.S. Navy should also not deploy any battleships to the western Pacific to back up the cruisers carrying out the blockade. Even the British ambassador thought that his discussion was strategically and militarily unsound, and the Royal Navy undoubtedly thought—from a war planning contingency and risk assessment standpoint—that it was militarily unfeasible, given the perception in London that such a blockade would trigger major Japanese military action. See "Sir R. Lindsay (Washington) to Mr. Eden No. 481, 482, 483 [F 11201/9/10] 17 December 1937," Document No. 433, in *Documents on British Foreign Policy 2nd Series*, vol. 21 (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1946), 589–592.

86. Royal Navy war planning from 1937–1939 centered around capital ship availability—battleships and battlecruisers—and with several ships undergoing major refit or modernization programs, the Royal Navy would have had to withdraw its forces from the eastern Mediterranean, potentially giving Italy a free hand there, in order to deploy sufficient ships to Singapore and at the same time cover British home waters against German navy moves using its own capital ships.

87. "Conclusions of a Meeting of the Cabinet," C.P. 33 (39), CAB 23/100.

88. Lee, *Britain and the Sino-Japanese War*, 123, notes the decline in tonnage transported via British shipping in 1937–38. Foreign Office Far Eastern Department official Sir John Brenan wrote in July 1938 that "The truth of the matter is that we acquired our dominant position in China as the result of our wars with that country in the nineteenth century and we can now only keep it by the same or similar methods. We must either use force, or otherwise being sufficient pressure to bear on the Japanese authorities to compel them to relinquish in our favor what they regard as the spoils of victory. We may, without fighting ourselves, be able to apply that pressure if the Japanese are exhausted by a long war with

the Chinese but it is futile to expect that we shall get what we want for the mere asking or by protests about the infringement of our 'rights' or by a more friendly attitude," quoted in Lee, *Britain and the Sino-Japanese War*, 142.

89. Best, *British Intelligence*, 149.

90. Judgment of Japanese historian Hosoya Chihiro, "Britain and the United States in Japan's View of the International System 1937–41," in *Anglo-Japanese Alienation 1919–1952: Papers of the Anglo-Japanese Conference on the History of the Second Cold War*, ed. Ian Nish (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1982), 64.

91. The effects of particular courses of action on protecting or supporting interests are often a lot muddier than policymakers probably would prefer because so many different factors are involved in causing a particular outcome. Brenan stated earlier in July 1938 that "I submit that no results worth having will materialise until we do something to frighten the Japanese. It is not reasonable to expect otherwise. [The Japanese foreign minister] may succeed in giving us a sop here or there; the release of a captured launch, permission for a few people to return to Nanking, satisfaction for some minor incident. But the fundamental Japanese policy to exploit China at our expense and to expel British influence from the Far East will only be modified by the fear of British intervention on an appreciable scale in some or another. Failing forcible action, or serious economic reprisals, the only thing we can do to frighten the Japanese is to let them think we might give financial assistance to China to prolong the war." From a 2 July Foreign Office minute in "Sir R. Craigie (Tokyo) to Viscount Halifax No. 794 [F 7031/62/10], 29 June 1938," Document No. 594, in *Documents on British Foreign Policy 2nd Series*, vol. 21 (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1939), 804. See Lee, *Britain and the Sino-Japanese War*, 178–179, for discussion on British perception that Japan judged in Spring 1939 that it was bogged down in China.

92. The chief of staff for the Imperial Japanese Army's Central China Expeditionary Army stated in July 1939 that "There is no doubt that the foreign settlements are disturbing the strengthening of discipline and order as well as affecting adversely economics and finance. To take some drastic measures against this state of affairs is the best way … to make Third Powers abandon their pro-Chiang policy and so awaken China and the Chinese people from their ominous dream of 'dependence upon Europe and America' … The problem of the foreign settlement is one of the most important questions relating to the construction of the New Order in East Asia … and it is our belief that the solution of this problem will constitute an important part of the settlement of the Incident." Japan's name for the Sino-Japanese War was the "China Incident," from a Situation Estimate of Central China Expeditionary Army 24 July 1939, in the International Military Tribunal for the Far East documents; quoted in Lee, *Britain and the Sino-Japanese War*, 179, 19, 272; see also Katsumi and Lu, "The Politics of War 1937–1941," 426–428.

93. A document found among then Japanese Prime Minister Konoe's papers dated to July 1939 states, "It is well known that at present the Chiang regime is supported by two pillars. Those of course are Great Britain and the Soviet Union. If one of these two pillars were to be removed, the China Incident could probably be

settled in an unexpectedly short time. If the Soviet Union is the pillar removed, it is a definite possibility that in less than half a year the present incident could be completely brought to an end," quoted in Hosoya Chihiro, "The Japanese-Soviet Neutrality Pact," in *Japan's Road to the Pacific War—The Fateful Choice: Japan's Advance into Southeast Asia, 1939–1941*, ed. James W. Morley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 23. An August 1938 Japanese Foreign Ministry paper stated, "It is not incorrect to assume that the Sino-Japanese War is to some extent an Anglo-Japanese economic war" and says that "It is fundamentally erroneous to expect that Britain will change her attitude towards Japan for the better," quoted in Hosoya Chihiro, "Britain and the United States," 63.

94. Prime Minister Chamberlain apparently judged in August 1937 that if the U.S. and Britain had cooperated in July 1937, the countries together might have been able to stop the Sino-Japanese War. See Lee, *Britain and the Sino-Japanese War*, 46; also note U.S. decision not to support Britain in early 1938 in Lee, *Britain and the Sino-Japanese War*, 93–96.

95. Lee, *Britain and the Sino-Japanese War*, 197. The U.S.-Japan 1911 Treaty of Commerce and Navigation "provided most-favored-nation treatment between the signatories but it established the legal basis for the commerce, navigation, property rights, residence, travel, protection of laws and access to courts of the nationals of each party in the territories of the other." W.H.M, "Economic Warfare with Japan or a New Treaty?" *Foreign Affairs*, January 1940, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/1940-01-01/economic-warfare-japan-or-new-treaty. Cancellation of the treaty meant that the U.S. could pass the 1940 Export Control Act under which the U.S. could require export licenses for key strategic items that Japan wanted to purchase—and for which the U.S. could legally refuse a license.

96. In contrast to June 1940, Japan was unable or unwilling to attempt to take advantage of British distraction at the start of the European war in September 1939, despite Royal Navy drawdown of some ships at the time from China Station, in large part because the Japanese Government was paralyzed and in disarray after the German betrayal of its pact with Japan to oppose the Soviet Union—the Anti-Comintern Pact—when Germany signed the German-Soviet Nonaggression Pact in August 1939. The German move left Japanese leaders feeling isolated and unwilling to directly take on another great power, amplified by the Red Army's defeat of the IJA at the Battle of Nomonhan/Khalkin Gol in August 1939, and the U.S. move to cancel its commercial treaty with Japan. Hosoya Chihiro and James W. Morley, "The Tripartite Pact 1939–1940," in *Japan's Road to the Pacific War—Deterrent Diplomacy: Japan, Germany, and the USSR 1935–1940*, ed. James W. Morley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 193–202; Katsumi and Lu, "The Politics of War 1937–1941," 371–372.

97. For one of the best accounts of Japanese decision making during this period, see Chihiro and Morley, "The Tripartite Pact 1939–1940," 179–258.

98. One of the best assessments of how the systemic linkages played out in 1940 is David Reynolds, "1940: Fulcrum of the Twentieth Century?" *International Affairs* 66, no. 2 (April 1990): 325–350.

99. See Boyd, *The Royal Navy in Eastern Waters*, 119–309; Ian Cowman, *Dominion or Decline: Anglo-American Naval Relations in the Pacific 1937–1941* (Washington, D.C.: Berg, 1996), 165–297.

100. For discussion of this issue, see Robert Jervis, "Deterrence and Perception," in *How Statesmen Think: The Psychology of International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017): 211. For discussion of this issue with the British, see Boyd, *The Royal Navy in Eastern Waters*, 79.

101. U.S. planners face many of the same challenges when considering naval deployments that Royal Navy planners did in the 1930s when it comes to the importance of considering distances, particularly given that standard warship cruising speeds have changed little since then. See Andrew Rhodes, "Go Get Mahan's Yardstick," *U.S. Naval Institute*, July 2019, https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2019/july/go-get-mahans-yardstick.

102. Lee, *Britain and the Sino-Japanese War*, 169–170.

103. U.S. Department of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America: Sharpening the American Military's Competitive Edge* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, 2018), https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf; see Robert Jervis, *System Effects: Complexity in Political and Social Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997) for additional discussion of how interlinkages in the international system often function.

104. One issue that seems to have been a problem between the civilians and military, however, was that Foreign Office officials in London do not appear to have fully understood some of the realities of large-scale naval deployments, Royal Navy war planning options, and coercive ability of such options in light of available Royal Navy resources. For example, in January 1938, in an otherwise perceptive memo on the current dynamics in the Far East, a senior Foreign Office official thought that a naval deployment could "force" the Chinese and Japanese to agree to a settlement, but he did not elaborate on what the Royal Navy operation would actually do to make the Japanese agree. Royal Navy planning only called for the defense of Malaya, the Indian Ocean, and Australia/New Zealand and a Pacific blockade to stop Japanese trade because of Royal Navy shortfalls. There was no intention in the late 1930s to carry out blockade operations closer to Japan. At the same time, the Royal Navy senior leadership may have missed the potential for a small squadron of capital ships permanently stationed in the Far East to act as more visible, symbolic deterrent. See Lee, *Britain and the Sino-Japanese War*, 95–96, and Boyd, *The Royal Navy in Eastern Waters*, 29, 55–115.

105. See Best, *British Intelligence*.

106. During the crisis in December 1937 over the attacks on the USS *Panay* and HMS *Ladybird*, amid British efforts to encourage a combined Anglo-American naval

response or naval demonstration in the Pacific, Prime Minister Chamberlain noted that British prestige was "suffering" in the Far East owing to Britain's "unavoidably passive attitude" and judged that a "simultaneous demonstration of force" with the U.S. would have a "steadying influence all over the world." "Conclusions of a Meeting of the Cabinet," C.P. 48 (37), CAB 23/90. See also Lee, *Britain and the Sino-Japanese War*, 92–93.

107. Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1948), 55. See also Robert Jervis who writes, when discussing the credibility of a state's ability to deter another, that "… there also is a component of credibility that inheres in the threatener, not the situation. In the same circumstances, one country's threat can be credible where another's would not be. Part of this difference of course comes from the country's strength, its ability to carry out the threat, and its ability to defend against the other's response. But there's more to it than this. Some states have reputations for being bolder, more resolute, and more reckless than others. That is, states are seen to differ in the price they are willing to pay to achieve a given goal." Jervis, "Deterrence and Perception," 196.

108. See Katsumi, "A Consideration of Anglo-Japanese Relations," 84, for discussion on the protests.

109. For additional perspective on Britain's reputation for power, see a wide-ranging but concentrated discussion on the image that German, Italian, and to a lesser degree Japanese leaders had of Britain in the 1930s, see John Ferris, "Image and Accident: Intelligence and the Origins of the Second World War 1933–1941," in *Intelligence and Strategy: Selected Essays* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 117–121. Ferris argues that German and Italian leaders' view of Britain veered wildly and often between fear and scorn. Hitler's perception of Britain as Germany's main enemy, for example, even after the fall of France, led him to order the invasion of the Soviet Union because he believed that the Soviets were Britain's last hope and their defeat—which he believed would be easy—would allow Germany to consolidate its victory in Europe.

110. For a useful look at how leaders and officials from two different states—the U.S. and Britain—viewed how a particularly diplomatic event occurred and the implications of those different perceptions, see Neilson, "Perception and Posture," 313–337.

Chapter 3. Considerations for Implementation

Chapter 3 goes into detail with regards to practical steps the Special Operations Forces (SOF) enterprise may take to implement the larger theoretical ideas described in earlier chapters. It begins with "Applying SOF in Competition." This chapter describes a theory of success in competition where the SOF enterprise—in cooperation with mission partners—will implement globally integrated campaigns employing primarily indirect approaches and unorthodox methods to protect and advance U.S. national interests and, when necessary, to defeat adversaries. It also has identified five principles to serve as decision rules for employing SOF in competition which may be of use in a variety of implementation contexts. Overall, it argues that competition will continue as an infinite game until the adversaries reach a political settlement regarding their currently incompatible national interests. Therefore, the SOF enterprise must transform itself from a counterterrorist-focused organization into a more versatile organization capable of addressing multiple threats globally and concurrently. Most importantly, the chapter highlights that SOF must regain their expertise in operating in the human domain to influence relevant actors to gain advantage over adversaries determined to defeat the U.S. without fighting us directly.

The next article, "Transforming SOF for Competition: An Organizational and Institutional Roadmap for Change," describes how—although current SOF operational culture has led to successes in the current operational environment—it is apparent that the operational environment of the future will be different from that of the present. As such, it details how the SOF enterprise will need to make institutional and cultural changes so that future SOF can operate as part of the joint force to protect and advance U.S. national interests against any threat. It argues that U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) should also take steps to change SOF operational culture to enable the institutional changes required to make SOF more effective operationally and more relevant strategically in the arena of competition. The chapter asserts that changing the organizational culture is challenging, but SOF can build on the strengths of its existing operational culture through visible and consistent leadership advocacy, grassroots involvement,

and informal interventions to change the culture incrementally. The future SOF operational culture must be one that assumes broader concepts of resilience and jointness. Also, the culture must value tactical proficiency and innovation in indirect actions and resilience in persistent and enduring irregular warfare—often in remote and austere locations. Simply put, SOF must rebalance its cultural focus on direct approaches to assign greater value to indirect strategies that enable partners to cultivate access and influence necessary to protect and advance U.S. national interests.

Applying SOF in Competition

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The article titled "On Competition" established a theoretical foundation for the employment, development, and design of Special Operations Forces (SOF) in competition. United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) defines competition as the interaction among actors in pursuit of the influence, leverage, and advantage necessary to advance and protect their respective interests. USSOCOM believes the primary role of SOF in competition is developing the access and placement to support and enable partners (joint, interagency, intergovernmental, multinational, and nongovernmental) to cultivate the access and influence necessary to protect and advance U.S. national interests. SOF build and use influence to help develop the military advantage required to deter, preclude, or preempt any foreign nation(s), organization(s), or actor(s) from using military force in a manner disadvantageous to U.S. national interests. The access and influence that SOF develop are key to providing the joint force options to transition rapidly and decisively to direct armed conflict should circumstances require it.

USSOCOM has identified five principles to serve as decision rules for employing SOF in competition:

- Orient campaigns on U.S. interests (not threats)
- Embrace integrated campaigning
- Exploit asymmetries of interest, strategy, and capability
- Leverage indirect approaches
- Focus on unorthodox methods

How Does SOF Apply These Principles in Competition?

The role of and principles for employing SOF in competition drive us to the next set of questions:

- What does success look like for SOF in competition?

- What is the SOF theory of success for achieving environmental conditions favorable to U.S. national interests?
- How should SOF apply the principles (decision rules) above to realize the theory of success and achieve desired changes in the strategic environment?
- How should USSOCOM develop, test, and implement SOF theories of success to make them operational at the SOF component and subordinate unified command levels?

Success in a Strategic Environment of Competition

> Today, we are emerging from a period of strategic atrophy, aware that our competitive military advantage has been eroding. We are facing increased global disorder, characterized by decline in the long-standing rules-based international order—creating a security environment more complex and volatile than any we have experienced in recent memory. Inter-state strategic competition, not terrorism, is now the primary concern in U.S. national security. - Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy

In this era of competition, preparing for war against our adversaries is necessary but insufficient. The U.S. must also protect and advance its national interests in competition without risking the collapse of the world economy in a long and catastrophic war.

> History doesn't repeat it itself, but it does rhyme. – attributed to Mark Twain

Competition is not a new phenomenon. History provides both positive and negative examples of successful and unsuccessful competition. The Great Game played by the British and Russian Empires for dominance in the Indian Subcontinent and Central Asia (1830–1895) provides a positive example of successful competition. The two powers eventually reached a political settlement that resulted in a stable regional balance of power. The struggle among the French, German, and British Empires for dominance in Europe and conflicting colonial interests (1870–1945) provides a negative example of unsuccessful competition. The competition resulted in two world wars and the collapse of the European empires. The competition between

the U.S. and the Soviet Union for global domination (1945–1991) is a third example that resulted in the collapse of the Soviet Union and strategic victory for the U.S. and its allies. Given the current competition between Russia and the U.S., it is too soon to judge whether the Cold War was a stand-alone competition or just a finite event within a longer competition. This contemporary competition is unique, but it shares similar drivers with previous competitions—competing worldviews, conflicting national interests over regional and global dominance, and contests for the control of foreign economic resources. Today's leaders and strategists would be wise to study past great games and learn what may happen in a contemporary or future competition. As George Santayana wrote, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."[1]

The strategic environment is volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA)—not just complicated.[2] A complicated problem is difficult to solve, but there is a fixed and knowable order that permits dealing with the problem in a repeatable manner. In contrast, a VUCA environment is complex, adaptive, and unpredictable without the same degree of order found in a complicated environment. Repeating a process in a dynamic VUCA environment does not produce predictable results.

The acronym VUCA combines four distinct types of challenges that demand four distinct types of solutions.

- Volatility exists when there is unstable change in an environment. The nature of the change is knowable and the outcomes predictable, but the timing of the change is unknowable. The outbreak of armed conflict with an adversary is an example of unstable change. The key to responding to unstable change is agility. The SOF enterprise can prepare for unstable change by pre-positioning forces and stockpiling resources for rapid crisis response and by building resiliency and redundancy into its forces and systems.
- Uncertainty exists when there is a lack of knowledge and understanding of the environment. Strategic surprise occurs when an actor cannot anticipate what, where, when, or how an adversary will act and does not have sufficient information to respond effectively. The key to mitigating the risk of uncertainty is collecting, processing, and correctly interpreting key indicators of adversary intent or action with sufficient time to take necessary action as conditions change. While SOF will

never enjoy complete understanding of an adversary, maintaining awareness of gaps in knowledge (known unknowns) and accounting for them in primary, alternate, contingency, and emergency plans can help mitigate the risk. Furthermore, the SOF enterprise can reduce uncertainty by enhancing language proficiency and cultural expertise, improving its capacity to collect and process intelligence (including publicly available information), and expanding collaborative networks for information sharing.

- Complexity exists when the volume of interactions in the environment—and the nonlinear consequences of those interactions—make it impossible to predict outcomes. Complexity can result in disproportionate and unintended consequences. The key to responding to complexity is to structure organizations to mirror the environment by decentralizing decision-making and reducing response times. The SOF enterprise can mitigate complexity by empowering component and subordinate joint force commanders to respond rapidly to unanticipated outcomes and unintended consequences.
- Ambiguity exists when there is significant doubt about the causal relationships at play in any given situation. In the context of gray zone activities, adversaries attempt to create plausible deniability to conceal their involvement and intentions in actions ostensibly taken by proxies. The key to responding to ambiguity is to gain understanding of the situation and make transparent the casual relationships at play. The SOF enterprise can reduce ambiguity by identifying and exposing (illuminating) the true nature of the relationships between proxies and their sponsors and then adapting rapidly to exploit the situation and regain advantage over adversaries.

Theories of Success

The USSOCOM theory of success in competition is that the SOF enterprise—in cooperation with mission partners—will plan, conduct, and assess globally integrated campaigns employing primarily indirect approaches and unorthodox methods to protect and advance U.S. national interests and, when necessary, to defeat adversaries' competitive strategies that threaten those interests. SOF will employ these approaches and methods:

- Against all adversaries concurrently and in a globally integrated manner

- Without triggering a direct armed conflict against an adversary
- Within legal and policy limitations
- At sustainable cost
- At acceptable levels of strategic and military risk

The USSOCOM components and subordinate commands will nest their theories of success under this overarching USSOCOM theory. They will apply the SOF framework and the four competitive options described below to employ and develop their current force over time to achieve assigned campaign objectives that will realize changes in their environment and gain comparative advantage. USSOCOM headquarters and the components will concurrently design and build the future SOF. The SOF enterprise will make the institutional and cultural changes necessary for future SOF to operate as part of the joint force to protect and advance U.S. national interests against any threat.

SOF Framework for Competition

Competition begins with an assessment of the environmental variables that present a challenge or offer an opportunity to gain advantage. Based on the assessment, SOF campaign planners formulate a working hypothesis for how to gain or maintain advantage over adversaries in order to stay ahead of them in the competition and avoid both war and strategic defeat in competition. Unlike an explanatory theory, a hypothesis is an assumption that serves as a starting point for further inquiry, analysis, and validation. A competitive actor needs a hypothesis because in an infinite game, campaigning is a process that resembles scientific experimentation in pursuit of knowledge and understanding that SOF can exploit by affecting environmental change to gain greater advantage over adversaries.

To test its hypotheses, the SOF enterprise develops approaches that may change variables to create new environmental conditions that provide the U.S. greater advantage over adversaries. The SOF enterprise then obtains and allocates the resources necessary to execute the approaches and realize the desired changes. As subordinate commanders conduct the actual operations and activities, they continually assess how well the approaches are working and offer recommendations for changes in the theories of success, strategic approaches, operational methods, or allocation of resources.

Embrace Integrated Campaigning

The *Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning* defines integrated campaigning as "joint force and interorganizational partner efforts to enable the achievement and maintenance of policy aims by integrating military activities and aligning non-military activities of sufficient scope, scale, simultaneity, and duration across multiple domains."[3] Integrated campaigning provides a process for integrating military activities and aligning them with the activities of interorganizational partners.[4] While not cast within the context of infinite games, integrated campaigning enables the joint force to adapt to changing conditions in VUCA environments to achieve favorable and sustainable outcomes that protect and advance U.S. national interests.

Integrated campaign design translates theories of success into campaign objectives. Subordinate commanders conduct operations and activities to achieve these campaign objectives to change environmental variables in a manner that protects or advances national interests. Typical campaign objectives may include:

- Shape or influence the environment
- Assure allies and partners
- Deter adversary aggression
- Counter adversary subversion and coercion short of direct armed conflict
- Deter or deny proliferation and use of weapons of mass destruction
- Deceive adversaries regarding friendly capabilities and intensions
- Enable and support interorganizational partners
- Prepare for war with an adversary
- Prepare for crisis response

In competition, SOF campaign objectives may disrupt, degrade, or neutralize adversaries' malign activities (subversion and coercion) to buy time and space for nonmilitary instruments of power—primarily diplomatic, informational, and economic—to change variables in the environment to create conditions more favorable to U.S. national interests.

The only way to achieve success in competition is to deny adversaries their strategic objectives without having to fight them to compel a change in their behavior. The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, combined with the integration of the global economy and the ubiquity of the information environment, make wars between great powers infeasible, inadequate, and

unacceptable.[5] Objectives will not be achievable within resource limitations and any strategic advantage gained will not justify the catastrophic costs. In the twentieth century, great powers applied the principles of mutually assured destruction only to nuclear warfare. In the twenty-first century, the impact of a major war would be so catastrophic that the principles of mutually assured destruction also apply to traditional warfare between great powers.

Competitive Options Short of War

Integrated campaigning blends four competitive options short of war with an adversary:

1. Deterrent options provide strategic deterrence and prepare for war—e.g., dynamic force employment, forward posture, joint training and exercises, military deception, and operational preparation of the environment within adversaries' sphere of influence. For example, SOF may support vulnerable partners to develop and demonstrate an asymmetric porcupine defense capability to resist aggression and occupation unconventionally.[6]

2. Denial options react to adversaries' malign activities in gray zone competitive spaces (i.e., below established red lines) in conditions short of war—e.g., security force assistance (SFA) and foreign internal defense.[7] For example, the reactive use of SOF after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan enabled the Taliban to resist Soviet occupation and eventually compel the Soviet Union to withdraw its forces.

3. Punitive options impose costs that punish adversaries for activities that violate established red lines. For example, SOF may conduct direct action strikes (physical or cyber) or clandestine sabotage against an adversaries' critical infrastructure or other strategic targets (military or economic/commercial) globally.

4. Proactive options expand the competitive space in our favor, impose costs, and create dilemmas in the gray zone in conditions short of war. For example, SOF conducted unconventional warfare (UW) against the Soviet Union's strategic partners and proxies in Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia during the Cold War.

Exploit Asymmetries of Interest, Strategy, and Capability

Asymmetries exist between U.S. and adversary interests, strategies, culture, postures, capabilities, and relationships. A partner's or adversary's vital interest may not be vital to the U.S. just as a U.S. vital interest may not be vital to an adversary or partner. Asymmetric interests may result in asymmetric strategies, risk-cost calculations, and resource allocations. Different cultures cause international actors to view the same environmental conditions asymmetrically. Asymmetries of capability may occur across domains (land, maritime, air, space, and cyber) or functions (command and control, intelligence, fires, movement and maneuver, protection, and sustainment). Asymmetric geographic, organizational, and demographic/ethnic boundaries may create exploitable gaps and seams. SOF strategists and planners should examine the environment for asymmetric trends, gaps, and seams that create exploitable vulnerabilities that SOF can incorporate into their campaigning.

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Leverage Indirect Approaches

Indirect approaches can take two forms. First, SOF may operate indirectly by, with, and through mission partners and proxies. In the context of competition, the term "by" means highly capable allied or strategic partner SOF (e.g., France in West Africa, Australia in the South Pacific, and Colombia in Mexico) operating independently of U.S. SOF to achieve a shared objective, relieving U.S. forces of an operational requirement. The term "with" means U.S. and allied or strategic partner SOF (e.g., NATO in Afghanistan) operating cooperatively under a single, multinational SOF headquarters. The term "through" means U.S. SOF directing and enabling the operations of proxy forces to avoid U.S. direct involvement in an armed conflict.

SOF indirect approaches are not limited to leveraging military and paramilitary forces. SOF may leverage the authorities of law enforcement partners by collecting and sharing intelligence and other information on illicit networks operating in friendly nations. SOF may leverage the authorities of the U.S. intelligence community by conducting sensitive special operations with them or by supporting their sensitive activities.

Second, SOF may attack adversary strengths indirectly by attacking vulnerabilities to disrupt, degrade, or neutralize those strengths. SOF do not limit themselves to military targets. SOF may operate indirectly by sabotaging critical nodes and linkages in adversaries' infrastructure and other economic/commercial target systems, by subverting their civil societies, or by bolstering the will and resilience of vulnerable friendly populations and groups.

Employ Unorthodox Methods (The Ways)

SOF planners translate the theory of success and campaign objectives into actionable tasks for tactical units to perform. Such tasks include:

Monitor: to surveil an actual or potential threat or opportunity. Threats to national interests and opportunities to advance them are not equal. Policy and resource limitations dictate the prioritization of threats and opportunities. Actors monitor low-priority threats to avoid strategic surprise and emerging opportunities to surprise adversaries. SOF military engagement activities with foreign security forces are a critical component of the national effort to maintain global situational awareness and alert national decision makers when and if it becomes necessary to act in response to an emerging threat or opportunity.

Expose: to uncover or reveal a clandestine or covert entity, platform, network, capability, or intention. Clandestine and covert activities thrive on uncertainty and ambiguity. Exposing those activities and attributing them to their sponsors is the essential first step in any campaign to disrupt, degrade, and ultimately neutralize those activities. SOF SFA activities in vulnerable countries are essential to exposing clandestine and covert threats.

Disrupt: to interrupt a target's current operation or activity without significantly degrading the target's ability or will to conduct future operations or activities. Disruption is an essential but indecisive denial activity. At the operational level, disruption is reactive and defensive; it cedes the initiative to an adversary. The purpose is to preempt, delay, or parry an adversary's attack on friendly interests. At the tactical level, disruption typically involves an attack on a component of an adversary's network or system. Tactical success may destroy the component and cause a temporary degradation of the network or system but without an operationally significant reduction in the

adversary's ability or will to control the location, tempo, intensity, or duration of future operations or activities. Policy and resource limitations and competing priorities may limit SOF to disruptive activities as an economy of force against lesser threats to U.S. interests.

Degrade: to significantly reduce a target's ability or will to conduct current or future operations or activities without reconstitution. Unlike disruption, degradation can be punitive or proactive. It seizes the initiative tactically by attacking multiple critical components of an adversary's networks and systems. The purpose is to suppress and/or attrite an adversary's ability and exhaust an adversary's will to conduct future operations. Over time, degradation may wrest the initiative from an adversary at the operational level by coercing an adversary to assume a defensive posture while regenerating losses, countering the suppression effort, and reconstituting attrited networks and systems. Policy and resource limitations and competing priorities may limit SOF to degrading activities against significant threats to U.S. interests.

Neutralize: to render a target ineffective or unusable.[8] Neutralization is the ultimate objective of any operation to degrade an adversary's ability or will to conduct future operations. Like degradation, neutralization can be punitive or proactive. Neutralization in the physical domains and the information environment means the threat has been reduced to a locally acceptable level of violence, and an adversary cannot continue current or future operations effectively without significant regeneration and reconstitution. Neutralization in the human domain means an adversary has lost legitimacy and influence with the relevant populations, rendering its operations and activities irrelevant strategically.

Destroy: to kill, demolish, ruin, or render a target useless. A destroyed target cannot be repaired or reconstituted. Destruction may be a denial, punitive, or proactive activity. Short of genocide, destruction is generally a tactical activity. SOF and their partners and proxies take direct action to destroy targets in the physical domains—individually or as part of a campaign of degradation. At the operational and strategic levels, it may be impossible to destroy an ideologically motivated adversary or its networks and systems. Neutralization may be the best achievable objective or effect against an adversary.

Influence: to reinforce or induce a change in a target audience's emotions, motives, objective reasoning, perceptions, attitudes, understanding, and behavior.[9] This article describes competition as an enduring and persistent pursuit of influence that actors can leverage to gain advantage and deny it to adversaries so the actors can protect or advance their interests. Gaining competitive advantage depends on the ability of actors to compete in the human domain for the legitimacy and credibility necessary to influence relevant populations, groups, and empowered individuals. Influence begins with strategic messaging in the battle of narratives in which adversaries struggle in the information environment to present a compelling narrative and discredit adversaries' narratives. Adversaries gain advantage by managing uncertainty and ambiguity with a blend of information, misinformation, and disinformation—including the full range of information activities from public diplomacy to strategic deception. They gain advantage by integrating their information activities with their activities in the physical domains to present a consistent and compelling multi-media message to the relevant actors. In addition to their military information support activities, SOF interactions with local populations, groups, and individuals affect U.S. legitimacy, credibility, and influence.

Enable: to provide another entity the means, opportunity, capability, or authority to perform a task. In competition, SOF and other elements of the joint force normally support their interagency partners. The purpose of this support is to enable interagency partners to conduct non-military activities that protect or advance U.S. national interests without resorting to armed conflict. SOF military engagement activities in foreign countries can open doors and create opportunities for interagency partners. SOF can provide local security and logistics to their partners operating in conflict areas. SOF can also provide augmentation packages with the ability to operate under the authority of the supported partner to extend the partner's operational reach beyond its organic capability.

Implications in Time

Near-Term (0–3 Years): Employ the Current Force (Operational Change)

Deterrent options. SOF will use dynamic force employment and strategic deception to create uncertainty, joint training and exercises to demonstrate

unity of effort with allied and partner SOF, and UW-related activities with vulnerable allies and partners to build their ability to resist aggression and occupation unconventionally.

Denial options. As conventional SFA capacity increases, SOF will divest SFA missions with allied and partner conventional forces and focus on (1) SFA to improve the capabilities of allied and partner SOF to share the global burden and (2) foreign internal defense missions with vulnerable allies and partners threatened by adversary subversion and proxy insurgencies.

Punitive options. SOF will be prepared to conduct direct action strikes (physical or cyber) or clandestine sabotage against adversaries' critical infrastructure or other strategic targets (military or economic/commercial) globally.

Proactive options. SOF will conduct UW, operational preparation of the environment, and related sensitive activities to foment/support insurgencies within adversaries' spheres of influence, expand the competitive space in U.S. favor, impose costs, and create dilemmas in the gray zone in conditions short of war.

Mid-Term (2–7 Years): Develop the Current Force (Institutional and Cultural Change)

Deterrent options. SOF will increase its forward posture to demonstrate the ability and will to defeat subversion, coercion, and aggression. It will improve the integration/alignment of SOF forward elements with U.S. missions in designated countries to realize the potential of integrated campaigning at the country, regional, and transregional levels.

Denial options. SOF will improve their ability to build the defense institutions necessary to direct, support, and sustain SOF partners and proxies over time.

Punitive options. SOF will improve their ability to integrate space-based, cyber, and electromagnetic spectrum capabilities into their operations and activities.

Proactive options. SOF will increase their ability to conduct UW missions and related sensitive activities in denied areas and high counterintelligence threat environments.

Long-Term (5–15 Years): Design the Future Force

The current SOF operational focus is on activities in the traditional physical domains (land, maritime, and air) enabled by activities in space, the information environment (which includes cyberspace), and the electromagnetic spectrum. In the future, SOF will shift its focus to integrated activities in the physical domains and the information environment to influence the human domain, as proposed in *Joint Concept for Human Aspects of Military Operations and Joint Concept for Operating in the Information Environment*.[10]

First, the SOF enterprise must gain and sustain the cultural and regional expertise necessary to operate effectively in the human domain throughout the competitive space. Second, the SOF enterprise must build sufficient resilience into its forces and their families to withstand the stress of enduring and persistent competitive activities in remote and austere locations. Third, the SOF enterprise must leverage advanced technologies such as robotics, cybernetics, artificial intelligence, human cognitive and performance enhancement, human-machine interface, and regenerative medicine that will alter the way humans work, interact, and fight in the not-so-distant future.

Conclusion

In cooperation with their interorganizational partners, SOF operate in competition and armed conflict to protect and advance U.S. national interests abroad and when necessary, domestically. SOF are engaged in an enduring and persistent transregional armed conflict with designated violent extremist organizations, but SOF are increasingly focused on adversarial competition that blends aspects of nonviolent competition with indirect forms of armed conflict to gain advantage and deny it to adversaries. Integrated campaigning in adversarial competition blends four options short of war with an adversary—deterrence, denial, punitive, and proactive. Within a campaign, SOF perform their core activities to monitor, expose, disrupt, degrade, and neutralize adversaries; influence relevant actors; and enable interagency partners.

Competition will continue as an infinite game until the adversaries reach a political settlement regarding their currently incompatible national interests. Therefore, the SOF enterprise must transform itself from a counterterrorist-focused organization into a more versatile group capable of addressing multiple threats globally and concurrently. SOF must build more resilience

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into the force so that it can withstand enduring and persistent campaigning in remote and austere locations. SOF must master new technologies that will alter the way humans work, interact, and fight in the not-so-distant future. Most importantly, SOF must regain its expertise in operating in the human domain to influence relevant actors to gain advantage over adversaries determined to defeat the U.S. without fighting directly.

Endnotes

1. George Santayana, *The Life of Reason: Reason in Common Sense* (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1980).
2. This discussion of volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous is derived from the article by Nathan Bennett, "What VUCA Really Means for You," *Harvard Business Review*, January–February 2014, https://hbr.org/2014/01/what-vuca-really-means-for-you and the podcast by Scott Berinato, "A Framework for Understanding VUCA," in *Harvard Business Review* (2014), podcast, https://hbr.org/2014/09/a-framework-for-understanding-vuca?referral=03758&cm_vc=rr_item_page.top_right.
3. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning* (2018): 6, https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/concepts/joint_concept_integrated_campaign.pdf?ver=2018-03-28-102833-257.
4. According to the *DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, the term interorganizational refers to "elements of the Department of Defense; participating United States Government departments and agencies; state, territorial, local, and tribal agencies; foreign military forces and government agencies; international organizations; nongovernmental organizations; and the private sector." For this paper, nongovernmental organizations include armed groups and their irregular forces, and the private sector includes private military companies. See Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (Washington, D.C.: The Joint Staff, 2019), https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/dictionary.pdf.
5. A course of action is feasible if the objectives are achievable within the established time, space, and resource limitations. A course of action is adequate if it can accomplish the mission, meet the commander's intent, and set the conditions necessary for strategic success. A course of action is acceptable if the estimated advantage gained justifies the estimated losses in forces, time, position, and opportunity.

See Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Planning*, 5-0 (2017), https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/jp5_0.pdf?ver=us_fQ_pGS_u65ateysmAng%3D%3D.

6. William S. Murray, "Revisiting Taiwan's Defense Strategy," *Naval War College Review* 61, no. 3 (Summer 2008): art. 3, https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol61/iss3/3.
7. In international relations, the term red line and the phrase to cross the red line describe a figurative point of no return or a limit past which the threat to a vital interest becomes unacceptable and will cause an armed conflict.
8. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Publication 3-0, Joint Operations (2017) Incorporating Change 1 (2018)*, https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/jp3_0ch1.pdf?ver=2018-11-27-160457-910, GL-13.
9. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Publication 3-13.2, Psychological Operations (2010)*, https://fas.org/irp/doddir/dod/jp3-13-2.pdf.
10. See Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Concept for Human Aspects of Military Operations (JC-HAMO)*, 2016, https://nsiteam.com/social/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/20161019-Joint-Concept-for-Human-Aspects-of-Military-Operations-Signed-by-VCJCS.pdf and Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Concept for Operating in the Information Environment (JCOIE)*, 2018, https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/concepts/joint_concepts_jcoie.pdf?ver=2018-08-01-142119-830.

Transforming SOF for Competition: An Organizational and Institutional Roadmap for Change

Shannon Finn, Ira Schurig, and Aaron Bazin

Introduction

> You can have the best plan in the world, and if the culture isn't going to let it happen, it's going to die on the vine. - Mark Fields, Former CEO of Ford Motor Company

When the context and environment in which an organization operates change, that organization must change to maintain its competitive advantage. After World War I, the French military failed—with disastrous consequences—to incorporate the lessons of the conflict and neglected to develop a strategy that allowed it to confront doctrinal innovations and adapt to a new way of warfare in World War II.[1] Conversely, the U.S. Marine Corps (USMC), whose culture as a naval infantry organization led to successes in Latin American small wars and World War I, accepted and embraced a new amphibious warfare mission during the interwar period. It was also a culture that encouraged junior officers to help develop doctrine for seizing advance naval bases and became the foundation of the Marines' mission in World War II. Moreover, the USMC and Army encouraged debating, conducting studies, and experimenting to develop the doctrine and organizational structure. This organizational change effort led to both Services embracing this new mission and subsequent success in World War II.[2]

These examples and the broader academic literature highlight the criticality of culture in shaping change and affecting organizational outcomes. The alignment of culture and strategy is critical to an organization's success; moreover, culture influences institutional decision making for the present and the future. Therefore, an organization's culture is foundational for institutional changes, and future success depends on understanding what culture is, what it consists of, and how it changes.

Definition and Structure of Culture

Organization psychologist Edgar Schein defines organizational culture as a pattern of shared underlying assumptions that a group invented, discovered, or developed as it learned to solve its problems of external adaptation and internal integration. By this definition, culture is a shared property of a group or an organization based on its successes. It is also a construct that arises out of the interactions between the organization, external environment, and individuals. Furthermore, culture is an enduring construct that is influenced by individuals within an organization but outlasts most individuals' tenures and influences organizational success long term.

Schein further proposed that organizational culture consists of three layers: artifacts and symbols, espoused beliefs and values, and basic underlying assumptions. Artifacts and symbols are visible elements of an organization such as uniforms, equipment, insignia, structure, and business processes. Espoused values and beliefs are tenets about what an organization should do and how they should do it and are manifested as organizational strategies, objectives, and philosophies. Problems arise when individuals' beliefs are not congruent with an organization's philosophy and goals. Underlying assumptions are deep motivations—and core beliefs embed deeply within an organization—and individuals may experience them as self-evident or may not even be consciously aware of them (figure 1).[3]

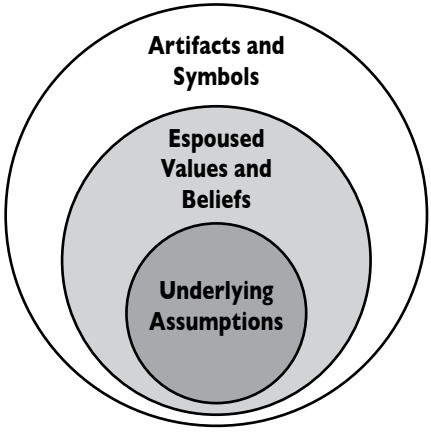

Figure 1. Schein's three layers of organizational culture.

There exists an extensive body of literature on culture in a military context. Some authors focus on the influence of national strategic culture on the conduct of war,[4] which nests within more philosophical ideas about strategic culture.[5] Others seek to understand the nature of war through the lens of a warrior culture.[6,7] The comprehensive nature of culture requires that it must necessarily be viewed through a lens to focus clearly on those specific cultural factors relevant to the discussion at hand. Organizationally and

institutionally, one must look at culture through a lens of the role of Special Operations Forces (SOF) in competition. SOF operational culture is the assumptions, values, beliefs, achievements, and particular ways of adapting to the environment and solving problems concerning gaining an advantage over an adversary by leveraging all available forms of influence for as long as required. As such, this definition of SOF operational culture should not be confused with the culture and ethics that are the focus of General Clarke's 2019 review of SOF culture and ethics.[8]

The Current SOF Operational Culture

SOF operational culture is not monolithic. U.S. SOF are a nation of tribes, each with a distinct subculture. Some SOF tribes favor direct actions to achieve tactical or operational objectives in short-duration raids or longer-duration operations composed of multiple raids unified by a common purpose. Other tribes prefer indirect action to achieve strategic goals by operating with or through foreign partners or proxies in long-duration campaigns to affect the legitimacy and influence of the parties to an armed conflict. Recent research into the creeds of various U.S. SOF selection programs has indicated that the community encourages its members to have the mindset of honor and exceptionalism and being a warrior, team player, effective leader, and patriot.[9]

However, the existence of different tribes and selection programs can also create friction and, at times, contribute to differing viewpoints within the larger community. This resulting friction could lead to ethical lapses while operational commanders entrust SOF with high profile missions and provide minimal supervision. Arguably, SOF lack clearly defined ethos and ethical code. One can assume that subcommunities default to their Service core values. Logically, this default mode has two flaws. First, it could lead to different SOF operating under incongruent core values while on missions. Second, if members of the SOF community feel elite or entitled, it could lead to a disregard for Service core values. Without a shared core set of values, the tribalism within SOF could lead to differences when it counts the most.

Recent studies[10] have indicated that SOF operational culture espouses qualities such as flexibility, adaptability, innovation, jointness, and resilience.[11,12] Arguably, SOF operational culture values a forward-leaning warfighter mentality, elite tactical capabilities, and a willingness to employ

those capabilities against threats to U.S. interests. The direct-action subcultures favor rapid and precise strikes as their preferred method of employment. In contrast, the indirect action subcultures favor persistent and enduring engagement with partners. As SOF are at the tip of the spear in the fight against violent extremist organizations (VEOs), they have successfully employed and grown to believe in the efficacy of direct approaches that incorporate flexibility, adaptability, and innovation to accomplish the counter-VEO (C-VEO) mission. (These values have become more critical as enemies that are not restrained by traditional rules of war have challenged SOF). Both SOF and U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) have a strong ethos of jointness; indeed, one of USSOCOM's fundamental defining characteristics is its inherent jointness at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels. Finally, the types of operations that SOF have routinely been called upon to execute in nonpermissive environments and against determined adversaries have reinforced a culture of mission command, self-reliance, and physical and mental resilience.

The Future Environment

Although current SOF operational culture has led to successes in the current operational environment, it is apparent that the operational environment of the future will be different from that of the present. Taken together, guidance from the 2017 National Security Strategy (NSS) and the 2018 National Defense Strategy (NDS) has changed DOD priorities.[13] Long-term strategic competitions with Russia and China are now principal priorities for the DOD because of the magnitude of the threats (political, economic, and military) they pose to the U.S. now and the potential for those threats to increase in the future. However, the NDS mandates that SOF continue to counter VEOs that threaten the homeland and U.S. interests and maintain its proficiency in irregular warfare (IW). This reprioritization of adversaries has significant implications for SOF. The political, economic, and military competitions described in the NSS require the U.S. to rethink policies of the past two decades. As such, the SOF enterprise will need to make institutional and cultural changes so that future SOF can operate as part of the joint force to protect and advance U.S. national interests against any threat.

SOF operational culture is a function of interactions between the SOF enterprise and the external environment (an environment in which VEOs

were the top priority) as well as the interactions among individuals within the SOF enterprise (especially individuals' beliefs and values about what makes the organization successful). Therefore, a change in the environment requires a corresponding transformation in SOF operational culture to successfully compete in the new environment (i.e., the new strategic environment described by the NSS and NDS). This concept and logic are compatible with strategic planning. As the nature of threats and mission priorities change, the SOF enterprise must advocate for and implement changes. This transformation should enhance the ability of SOF to employ competitive options short of war (deterrence, denial, punitive, and proactive) and support U.S. efforts to gain the advantage over adversaries.

The Risk of Misalignment between Culture and Future Strategy

In practice, USSOCOM directs its forces in all special operations activities. Still, the preponderance of operations, attention, and resources since 9/11 has focused on direct approaches to counter VEOs and—to a much lesser extent—on indirect approaches that develop indigenous security forces to fight VEOs alongside U.S. forces. Against a single type of adversary in a restricted geographic area of operations, it is natural that SOF operational culture would evolve to reflect those situational variables.

The current SOF operational culture has evolved to optimize its processes, operations, and activities for success against VEOs—a much different context than competition.[14] Since 9/11, USSOCOM has optimized its operations for success against VEOs and has gained a reputation for flexibility and tactical proficiency. SOF have focused much of their attention and resources since 9/11 on developing direct approaches that have proven successful against a particular adversary. This focus has come at the expense of maintaining and modernizing its pre-9/11 indirect action capabilities and has led to the evolution of a culture that has diminished the cultural value of indirect approaches that the future operational environment may require.

Also, some characteristics that make SOF employment more palatable for policymakers have resulted in ways of thinking that make cultural change more difficult. The relatively low cost and small footprint of SOF have made it the "easy button" for policymakers, particularly during conflicts, and decision- and policymakers may be reluctant to change priorities, funding, and policy for an organization that is successful. Successes in countering VEOs

have strengthened the basis for USSOCOM's funding and policy requests and bolstered its reputation as the nation's "first responder to everything."[15] However, if SOF are to embrace a changing strategic role in competition, they will need to adopt a new cultural paradigm. This shift should place greater value on indirect actions such as unconventional warfare (UW), foreign internal defense (FID), military information support operations, civil affairs operations, and security force assistance. This cultural rebalancing is critical to USSOCOM becoming a more versatile organization that steps out of its comfort zone and embraces its new strategic role in competition.

Adversaries will continue a hybrid strategy of direct and indirect approaches to competition through political, economic, and information manipulation—in addition to military campaigns to gain leverage in the cognitive domain and advance their national interests. They will also continue a transregional approach to expand influence by spreading strategic narratives. Recognizing the vulnerability of countries and populations struggling with political instability, social and economic pressures, and identity crises, adversaries exploit these weaknesses to expand influence. Competing in this space requires SOF to operate in globally integrated campaigns across a multi-domain environment. Such operations increase the demand for personnel with an appreciation for cultural awareness and linguistic capabilities, diversity of experience, an understanding of advanced technology, and the use of information and other non-military instruments of national power to gain influence.

The support of SOF for the interagency is primarily to fulfill its counterterrorism (CT) mission. However, the guidance in the 2018 NDS to pursue competition shifts responsibilities to non-military instruments of national power in competition. Support to competition requires that SOF play a more significant supporting role to the interagency. The unique capabilities and relationships of SOF are often deployed only due to the trust they have built with partners across the world. This fact makes them invaluable assets in the comprehensive approach needed to contest adversary influence and advance national interests in both the physical and cognitive domains and the information environment.

> Translating military success into the aims of policy is the ultimate purpose of armed conflict. Yet in an age of constant competition, gains will rarely go unchallenged. Thus, the maintenance of hard-won

> gains will require continued commitment, often of considerable duration. This 'follow through' requires methodical transitions occurring over years or even decades to ensure the perpetuation of favorable outcomes. - Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning (2018)

Unfortunately, there are several critical obstacles to implementing a seamless interagency approach to competition. Due to the lack of a mechanism to integrate activities across the U.S. Government (USG) departments and agencies in key regions or problem sets outside of CT, U.S. defense strategy falls within a more significant national interagency approach. Another well-known problem is the incongruence between the joint force's planning and command and control structures (C2), and the Department of State's (DOS) decision-making models. DOS staff are typically assigned multi-year postings, which means they think and plan in such time frames. SOF generally are deployed for six months, and thus anticipate and execute initiatives they can complete within that time frame or the next rotation. Compounding the factors above with the challenges of planning for vague threats that are opaque, difficult to characterize, and even more challenging to mitigate, it should come as no surprise that despite having the appropriate policy and authority to employ SOF capabilities in the competition space, U.S. Embassy Chief of Missions could deny permissions for SOF to execute missions.

The joint force also faces its internal bureaucratic challenges as efforts remain stove-piped by regional focus and departmental tasks. The Theater Special Operations Commands (TSOCs) struggle with coordinating transregional special operations activities across Geographic Combatant Command (GCC) boundaries due to lack of authority. Adversaries unanchored by such bureaucratic and regional barriers continue to exploit this vulnerability by expanding their influence across GCC boundaries.

Adversaries also exploit the DOD's dependence on hyper-enabled technology and advanced cyber capabilities. Although these capabilities provide SOF and their decision makers with incredible advantages in the battlespace, they foster new vulnerabilities that may ultimately drive specific technology-enabled capabilities back to analog. Advanced technology in the hands of adversaries severely impedes the C2 and communications and position, navigation, and timing (PNT) capabilities of SOF as virtually all electronic-based systems and technologies are vulnerable to denial, manipulation, and other attacks. USSOCOM recognizes the growing challenges operators face in

high counterintelligence threat environments where internal security forces employ artificial intelligence (AI)-enhanced facial recognition and other biometric data to monitor and control populations. However, its response is often to acquire new technology to navigate such challenges, perpetuating the cycle of vulnerability to attack. SOF must identify alternative approaches for C2, communications, and PNT when conducting operations that require low visibility throughout contested spaces and domains.

The reprioritization of adversaries (directed by the NSS and NDS) provides USSOCOM with a chance to review and rebalance its portfolio and culture to restore its ability to conduct persistent and enduring IW. U.S. SOF possessed this ability during the Cold War against the Soviet Union. The challenge for USSOCOM is to effect the cultural change necessary to provide the President and Secretary of Defense once again with risk-sensitive punitive and proactive SOF options to protect and advance U.S. interests below the level of armed conflict.

Building on Existing Culture for a New Environment

SOF operational culture has served the USG well in the fight against VEOs. Still, a change in the strategic environment means a change in culture—a change in how SOF think about what it takes to be successful in a new environment—is necessary. Because culture is a construct based on an organization's successes, SOF should strive to change the culture by building on past achievements and focus on enhancing existing culture as shown in figure 1. General Clarke's review of culture and ethics is about making SOF better and is an opportunity to strengthen values and reinforce trust. USSOCOM should also take steps to change SOF operational culture to enable the institutional changes required to make SOF more effective operationally and more relevant strategically in the arena of competition.

Many of the operations that SOF conduct in competition require extreme tactical proficiency because SOF teams almost always operate at a numerical disadvantage—often on the fringes of or beyond the timely operational reach of conventional fires. Such operations also tend to benefit from a small footprint and low profile due to their sensitive nature. These activities underscore the ability of SOF to move without detection, to minimize its operational footprint, and to remain secretive and silent about affiliation and identity.

USSOCOM must extend this requirement for extreme tactical proficiency to SOF focused on indirect approaches.

Also, special operations require individuals and small units who apply their unique skills with adaptability, improvisation, and innovation.[16] SOF value operational flexibility and an ability to adapt to changing environments, which allows them to succeed in a wide variety of capacities and campaigns. SOF innovations in technology and tactics typically focus on direct action countering VEOs. However, a culture that values and encourages innovating and investing in technologies and skills related to indirect actions will result in greater flexibility and innovative solutions. Here, SOF could leverage a wider variety of authorities to support other USG agencies to apply other instruments of national power. A culture that embraces planning and training in more diverse, non-conflict environments with a more varied array of civilian partners (e.g., industry partners and nongovernmental organizations) will enhance the ability of SOF to successfully compete against more adversaries in a broader range of environments.

While SOF and USSOCOM have an ethos of jointness and can work closely with Services in deployed environments, this commitment to jointness has been refined internally within the SOF community and in the context of countering VEOs. SOF have developed an appreciation for joint, interagency, and partner integration in the C-VEO fight. Still, SOF must now apply these best practices and lessons learned to other problem sets and extend the reach of existing networks and relationships to advance U.S. interests in competition. A culture that embraces a more expansive set of partners—and the accompanying risk inherent in such partnerships—will result in a wider variety of options and opportunities to advance U.S. interests.

In alignment with the first SOF truth, humans must remain a key area of focus in transforming the SOF enterprise. Who those humans are, however, remains an open and critical question. SOF oriented around precision strikes in a CT context may assign additional value to physical endurance, marksmanship, and mental acuity. One can imagine that SOF oriented around influencing populations in the cognitive domain might place greater emphasis on cultural awareness, linguistic capabilities, diversity of experience, and creativity. A SOF element operating in a technologically-saturated environment might

In alignment with the first SOF truth, humans must remain a key area of focus in transforming the SOF enterprise.

require cyber fluency, the ability to cooperate with artificial intelligence assets, or familiarity with space-based systems. The utility and viability of each future scenario are readily apparent.

The transformation of SOF will require a thorough evaluation of training and professional development from foundational to mission-specific programs. At its core, foundational training should aim to cultivate the qualities most valued: trustworthiness, adaptability, and audacity. SOF cannot teach trust; however, it can build trust within a team, and skills associated with building trust such as communication techniques and cultural sensitivity can undoubtedly be developed through formal training. Each Service within the SOF enterprise will have its own flavor of foundational training, whether long marches through the woods of North Carolina or frigid swims off the California coast. Nevertheless, all SOF should strive to possess and strengthen these qualities in themselves and their teammates.

For more technical and mission-specific training, SOF should look both to personnel returning from missions and to relevant civilian resources. SOF recently engaged in specialized mission sets can provide insights into conditions on the ground, unanticipated threat characteristics or behavior, and unforeseen gaps in mission preparation and execution. Armed with this perspective, SOF can look to civilian training institutions, experts, and solutions to develop capabilities to meet future mission needs. Particularly concerning technical solutions, civilian resources will remain critical partners.

Like training and professional development, the process of equipping SOF teams with appropriate technical resources must reflect the highest degree of adaptability. Currently, USSOCOM provides SOF with rapid prototyping and acquisition capabilities through its in-house Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics directorate. This process needs an innovation, development, and implementation process that seeks to address pressing challenges expeditiously through enterprise-wide collaboration and integration of operators and technical experts. SOF have increasingly looked to commercial off-the-shelf solutions—either as offered or with modification—to meet mission needs. These factors have all contributed to a more agile process to equip SOF.

As a result of training for and executing countless operations in non-permissive environments with minimal support, physical and mental resilience has become a primary underlying assumption of SOF operational culture. However, the application of indirect approaches in persistent and enduring

IW will require a SOF operational culture that embraces resiliency in all types of environments. For example, working with an indigenous partner for months or years at a time—often in remote and austere locations—takes a different toll on an individual than a short-duration, finite, direct-action mission. The infinite nature of UW, FID, and other indirect actions against great powers will require individuals who can appreciate incremental, long-term progress in contrast to being able to experience closure at the end of a finite, short-duration mission.

Creating Organizational and Institutional Change

> Organizational learning, development, and planned change cannot be understood without considering culture as the primary resistance to change. The bottom line for leaders is that if they do not become conscious of the cultures in which they are embedded, those cultures will manage them. Cultural understanding is desirable for all of us, but it is essential to leaders if they are to lead. - Edgar Schein, Professor Emeritus at MIT's Sloan School of Management

The events of 9/11 elevated USSOCOM to the forefront of U.S. military operations and—due to the requirements for proficiency in CT operations—elevated the command's role and status in two conflicts. Instead of first serving in a supporting role, SOF now had greater responsibility as the supported force for planning, conducting, and leading the nation's CT operations. The proficiency with which SOF performed their missions encouraged reliance on direct actions as the preferred option and relegated indirect actions to a secondary option. This abrupt change in role of SOF influenced the development of the current operational culture of SOF. This aspect presents a chance for SOF leaders and operators to build on the existing SOF operational culture to rebalance and reprioritize indirect actions for military engagement in competition.

Changing organizational processes, procedures, and ways of doing business are some of the most challenging activities that leaders can undertake. Cultural norms comprise a reinforcing system that resists change. Changing an organization's culture is the most difficult of all organizational or institutional change efforts because it occurs in the cognitive domain. Culture evolves slowly and is a product of both an organization's history and the

attitudes and beliefs of its members. It takes years to change how people think, feel, and behave. By its very nature, culture is pervasive throughout an organization and touches many aspects of members' lives. However, it is wise to work with and within a culture rather than fight the culture to change it. Research shows that organizations that have developed cultures that support high levels of performance have developed these cultures by applying a handful of time-tested principles.

Align Vision, Strategy, Resources, and Culture

During periods of significant external change, organizations cannot proceed with the learning and adaptation necessary for success in the new environment without a clear vision of the organization's purpose, the strategy for success, and the resources to implement change. Also, the symbols, beliefs, and assumptions that make up culture align with this vision and strategy—or else the individual members of the organization will not undertake behaviors congruent with achieving the vision. Establishing and maintaining this alignment is a leadership function. SOF leaders must clearly and frequently—in words, actions, and policy and resourcing decisions—make the case to the SOF enterprise for why its vision and strategy are correct, how appropriate resources match implementation, and how a SOF operational culture is critical to achieving this vision. If communication about this alignment and the criticality of culture to success is not early and frequent, leaders risk alienating those members committed to the status quo and resistant to change and allowing inertia to slow cultural change efforts.[17]

Focus on a Few Critical Behaviors to Change the Culture

One can view culture through many lenses in many contexts. To manage and guide changes in SOF operational culture, SOF leaders should focus on the most critical behaviors, attitudes, assumptions, and beliefs. This approach of changing the "vital few" cultural attributes follows from the Pareto principle—that eighty percent of consequences are the result of twenty percent of causes.[18] Although guiding and championing cultural change is a leadership function, selecting the specific cultural factors that should be changed should involve discussions among those who are in positions to observe and perform behaviors—namely, the people across the SOF enterprise. For example, leaders should hold talks with people at different levels and roles throughout

the enterprise to learn what behaviors are most affected by the current SOF operational culture—both positively and negatively. Such discussions should leverage the inputs from individuals known for motivating and leading teams effectively and strive to discover what new behaviors should be adopted and what actions should change to pursue the new strategy of SOF successfully.

Honor the Strengths of Existing Culture

The current operational culture of SOF has served it well in many respects. Still, as an evolving construct, it is imperative to look at how it aligns with vision and strategy. Leaders should acknowledge and demonstrate the relevance of the original values relevant to SOF operational culture—including communicating why people still believe in these values and how they can serve the enterprise and the country well. Recognizing the existing strengths of SOF operational culture will also help to minimize feelings that any cultural changes are imposed from the top down. Likewise, leaders should leverage those people within the enterprise who are already exhibiting values, behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs that will lead to success in the context of competition—those individuals who are already at the forefront of culture change.

Use Both Formal and Informal Interventions

As leaders promote changes to the SOF operational culture, they should incorporate formal methods—like new policies, metrics, organizational structures, and decision-making processes—alongside informal approaches. Such informal processes could involve establishing communities of interest, spontaneous or impromptu conversations, or peer interactions. These everyday activities should focus on asking individuals at different levels across the enterprise to reflect on identifying sources of concern about new roles for SOF and discussing values, beliefs, and assumptions and reinforce those aspects of SOF operational culture required for the future.

Along with those leadership-led, top-down processes used to guide culture change, leaders should enable and encourage grassroots-driven, bottom-up change. By identifying and interacting with core groups of key influencers across the enterprise, leaders can derive valuable insights and perspectives from all hierarchical levels. Even more importantly though, such interactions and discussions create rapport and establish a respected group of influencers

who will further communicate behaviors, values, assumptions, and attitudes throughout the enterprise via formal and informal communication channels and build momentum over time.

Reframe Command and Control

GCCs are complemented by non-geographic functional combatant commands, which consist of Transportation Command, Cyber Command, Strategic Command, Space Command, and USSOCOM. However, for virtually every conflict executed since the turn of the century, the military has formed joint task forces outside of the unified command plan (UCP) design to achieve the actual employment and coordination of forces, suggesting the operational limitations of such a construct.

To both mitigate this friction point and more effectively employ the military in competition short of war, the DOD should look to form global task forces oriented on specific threats to U.S. interests and supported by the formidable infrastructure offered by the GCC construct. Particularly in a strategic environment untethered by geography and unbound from traditional conceptions of war, a global task force can overcome seams in the UCP overlay, address threats and opportunities as they emerge, and integrate from planning through execution with joint force and interagency partners. For SOF explicitly, the TSOC elements currently subordinate to each GCC are well positioned to provide the necessary infrastructure to enable global special operations in support of global task forces. Critically, these global task forces must focus on enduring U.S. interests; simply orienting on a perceived threat will almost assuredly succumb to inertia towards unintended tension or conflict. By establishing globally-oriented task forces to coordinate and compete short of war, the U.S. will create adaptable and enduring C2 architecture for an uncertain future.

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Integrate with the Joint Force and Interagency

As threats, opportunities, and operations become less bound by geography, so too are they less divided by domain, demanding a deeper integration between elements of the joint force and with interagency partners. Although

their observations are already two decades past, perhaps no authors articulated the expansion of the battlefield across domains better than Colonel Qiao Liang and Colonel Wang Xiangsui of the Chinese People's Liberation Army:

> Technology is doing its utmost to extend the contemporary battlefield to a degree that it is virtually infinite: there are satellites in space, there are submarines under the water, there are ballistic missiles that can reach anyplace on the globe, and electronic countermeasures are even now being carried out in the invisible electromagnetic spectrum space. Even the last refuge of the human race—the inner world of the heart—cannot avoid the attacks of psychological warfare. There are nets above and snares below so that a person has no place to flee. All of the prevailing concepts about the breadth, depth, and height of the operational space already appear to be old-fashioned and obsolete. In the wake of the expansion of mankind's imaginative powers and his ability to master technology, the battlespace is being stretched to its limits.[19]

How SOF support partners, however, should be explored in greater depth. In competition short of armed conflict, the military will typically support the diplomatic, informational, or economic tools of power. In its present form, SOF are well suited to enable and enhance the efforts of interagency partners. SOF benefit from a far-reaching global footprint; a diverse network of allies, partners, and surrogates; rapid experimentation and acquisition capabilities; and deep integration and access to populations in restricted environments. Leveraging these characteristics in unorthodox ways can help to ensure the effectiveness or improve the outcome of a partner-led initiative.

Within a more autonomous C2 structure, leaders in a proposed global task force—integrating both joint force and interagency representation—should provide SOF teams with objectives, personnel, resources, and legal and ethical limitations. That guidance should enable the SOF team to operate with agility while mitigating political risk and preserving the unity of effort. Based on a SOF team's position in space and time, opportunities may emerge to provide ancillary support to adjacent or concurrent initiatives underway. For example, a SOF team emplaced to build access into a given population may identify an opening for a diplomatic breakthrough and support that effort through reconnaissance and human terrain mapping alongside an

existing mission set. That same SOF team could also provide insight into the effect of economic sanctions or information campaigns conducted through other elements of government. In those situations, coordination through the global task force would allow for rapid exploitation for SOF to further enable or enhance interagency efforts.

Monitor and Assessing Cultural Change

Just as it is essential to monitor progress against campaign accomplishment, it is also imperative to track and measure progress in the context of cultural change. Because culture is an evolving, eternal reality of organizational life, SOF leaders cannot implement changes to influence culture and simply expect them to happen.

Successes in countering VEOs have garnered USSOCOM with substantial legislative and budget support. Changes in SOF operational culture should accompany funding and congressional support for those activities that SOF seek to undertake in competitive options short of war. Increased funding and congressional support should result from USSOCOM's efforts to find such resources from Congress and within the DOD. As SOF begin to focus on building and using influence to help develop the military advantage required to compete against adversaries, the number of SOF personnel devoted to indirect activities should increase. Such metrics will indicate that personnel decisions are congruent with changes to SOF operational culture. Similarly, the budgets of SOF units focused on indirect activities should also increase. Finally, as SOF develop access and placement to support and enable an expanding set of partners, leaders should assess both the quantity and quality of such relationships.

Conclusion

When changes occur in the context and environment in which an organization operates, that organization must adapt to maintain its competitive advantage. SOF operational culture has evolved as forces have optimized activities and processes against a specific adversary—VEOs. To successfully operate in competition while simultaneously countering VEOs, SOF must review and build on its existing operational culture to guide decisions and changes necessary to address a wider variety of adversaries, partnerships, activities, and environments. Changing organizational culture is challenging,

but SOF can build on the strengths of its existing operational culture through visible and consistent leadership advocacy, grassroots involvement, and informal interventions to change the culture incrementally. The future SOF operational culture must be one that assumes broader concepts of resilience and jointness. Also, the culture must value tactical proficiency and innovation in indirect actions and resilience in persistent and enduring IW, often in remote and austere locations. Finally, SOF must rebalance their cultural focus on approaches to assign greater value to indirect strategies that enable partners to cultivate access and influence necessary to protect and advance U.S. national interests.

The current policies, processes, and procedures that govern SOF operations focus on winning wars, not on conducting persistent and enduring competitive campaigns. Ignoring the irony that we have more guns than we know what to do with, one might ask: Are we bringing a knife to a gunfight in the infinite game of competition?

To advance in this game, USSOCOM must innovate and remain flexible for the future. It must leverage successes and failures of SOF from the past to inform, but not constrain, its thinking. USSOCOM must address these challenges on an institutional level to secure uninterrupted influence and competitive advantage in the future global environment while maintaining its proficiency in countering threats to the homeland.

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Chapter 4. Balancing the Future

This chapter delves into the elements of force design by positing future concepts and exploring rich narratives that attempt to explain just what the competition may look like. As with all other aspects of force design, this chapter is exploratory and offered as food for thought. As such, U.S. Special Operations Command should continue to experiment with and explore these ideas before developing them further.

In "USSOCOM Special Operations Forces Future Operating Concept: An Elegant Alternative," Colonel Jones argues that there is tremendous potential energy for conflict and opportunity for change in an era characterized by rapidly shifting power—both between state actors and also between populations everywhere—and the various sources of governance affecting their lives. It highlights that those who most effectively understand, leverage, or reduce this energy will be best postured to prevail in this competition and avoid the devastating costs of war. The chapter asserts that sustaining prominent positions demands evolving to a more pragmatic and sophisticated leadership style, assuming greater risk in giving up those elements of control no longer essential to their interests, and enhancing those forms of influence so essential to national power in this rapidly evolving world.

In the next article, "SOF in Competition: A Vignette of the Future," Scott Hopkins explores the future using a much different methodology—narrative fiction. Through this story of a new type of special forces team in a new hyper-competitive environment, this article explores both the conceptual and human factors that could come into play as the U.S. takes a more proactive approach to competition around the globe.

USSOCOM Special Operations Forces Future Operating Concept: An Elegant Alternative

U.S. Army Colonel (Ret.) Bob Jones

The character of U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF) has changed considerably since the attacks of 9/11. SOF responded to the problem as understood and remained fully dedicated to the solutions believed best to achieve desired, durable strategic results. Yet despite tactical brilliance, strategic success has been eluded. The primary driver of this growing gap between tactical excellence and strategic success is likely related to the fact the only thing changing faster than SOF is character of the strategic environment—and along with it, the character of conflict itself. Unfortunately, these movements have been in opposite directions. SOF has become exceptionally good at what would have worked well 40 years ago, but the emergent strategic environment has been unable to stop the problem being pursued so diligently from doubling in size despite, if not because of, our best efforts.

Armed with the belief that the problem was understood, this lack of success had been attributed to either not having enough of what was needed or some blend of political, policy, and environmental factors was well beyond the ability to control. As the team drawn from across the enterprise worked on developing a new future SOF operating concept within in that context, this author wrote the following piece to help inform that process by taking a different perspective. What if we had the problem wrong?

What if violent extremist organizations (VEOs) are not terrorists who radicalize with extremist ideologies but rather are illegal political action groups waging sophisticated networked unconventional warfare (UW) campaigns, fully reliant on the revolutionary and resistance insurgency energy resident within Sunni Muslim populations already radicalized by the domestic governance and foreign policies affecting their lives? What if the vast majority of missions to counter terrorism or to build partner capacity were no longer special operations at all for no other reason than the fact the conventional force can perform them very well? What if the traditional

deterrence, failing to curb the problematic acts of competition by our greatest state adversaries, could be supplemented rather than reinforced? What if indeed.

The Strategic Environment

As the preeminent status quo power, the U.S. finds itself particularly challenged by the heightening competition between those who see their interests served best by preserving some semblance of the status quo and those revisionists who see their interests served best by change. In an era characterized by rapidly shifting power, both between state actors and also between populations everywhere and the various sources of governance affecting their lives, there is tremendous potential energy for conflict and opportunity for change.

Those who most effectively understand, leverage, or reduce this energy will be best postured to prevail in this competition and avoid the devastating costs of war. Revisionists are naturally better postured to see opportunity in this chaotic environment, but a status quo power who can think like a revisionist can chart a proactive course and avoid the slow attrition of reactive approaches. Sustaining prominent positions demands evolving to a more pragmatic and sophisticated leadership style, assuming greater risk in giving up those elements of control no longer essential to their interests, and enhancing those forms of influence so essential to national power in this rapidly evolving world.

Strategic Guidance. Focusing on deterring or winning wars is no longer adequate. The military must also serve to facilitate success in competition short of armed conflict. The greatest challengers of the U.S. currently are China, Russia, Iran, North Korea, and VEOs. Focus on them.

SOF and State Challengers. SOF plays an important but minor role in war with state challengers. The current mission is deterrence, and SOF currently plays an even smaller role in the deterrence of war. However, SOF is uniquely suited to create a powerful new source of deterrence of the competition short of armed conflict that currently takes place largely unhindered below the thresholds of traditional approaches to deterrence. The most important factor common to the four state challengers is that all are autocratic regimes premised in the idea that governments control populations. While effective in appearance, these regimes grow increasingly brittle and are far more

fearful of their own populations than they are of any foreign military. SOF can leverage the principles of UW to create a powerful deterrent effect. To this end, SOF should embrace a global campaign of unconventional deterrence (UD), which is not only a powerful new form of deterrence but also a variation of counter-unconventional warfare (C-UW).

In fundamental terms, UW is essentially any effort to leverage the insurgent energy in a population governed by another in order to advance one's own interests. Russia, Iran, al-Qaeda, and Daesh are all masters of the fundamentals of UW and conduct sophisticated campaigns designed to erode U.S. interests. The aspect of C-UW most appropriate to state actors is deterrence, and the form of deterrence most appropriate to competition short of armed conflict is UD. UD is also a form of psychological warfare as the goal is to create a credible threat of UW, not to actually conduct UW. Deterrence occurs when one's opponent believes the potential costs of an action exceed the potential gains. Unlike traditional approaches to deterrence, UD allows the creation of a deterrence effect without the associated risk of escalation that makes traditional approaches so ineffective in competition.

UD is not UW any more than nuclear deterrence is nuclear warfare. The goal of UD is not to destabilize the societies of enemies but rather to deter enemies from destabilizing the society of the U.S. and those of allies and partners. A global UD campaign will not demand larger SOF or a larger SOF budget. A global UD campaign will take place nearly entirely in permissive spaces and involve influence-building activities among populations essential to the developing competition. A global UD campaign will be more respective of the sovereignty of allies and partners and not place heavy demands on the same to act in ways counter to their own interests as their help is sought in the pursuit of U.S. objectives. A global UW campaign will also take a page from opponents, leveraging modern technologies and engaging the world as it actually is, rather than doing so in a manner overly shaped by fears and bias or constrained by doctrine.

SOF and Violent Extremist Organizations

Counterterrorism (CT) is a reactive, symptomatic approach that exaggerates the role of ideology and that does not produce strategic results that are both durable and desired. CT is not a sustainable strategy for our nation, nor is it sustainable for SOF. However, by reframing our understanding of

how insurgency and UW manifest in the current strategic environment, we can reframe our solutions as well. C-UW offers a framework that promises to be far more holistic, appropriate, durable, and sustainable. But first we must change how we think about the problem and abandon many calcified assumptions we have come to accept as fact.

Most individuals and organizations currently labeled as terrorists (a term with no strategic meaning) are more accurately revolutionary insurgents. They may accept assistance from VEOs conducting UW and they may travel and fight in support of VEO UW campaigns, but revolutionary insurgency is their *raison d'etre* (reason for existence). The U.S. must get out of the business of capturing and killing the insurgent populations of others. Similarly, building CT capacity in our allies and partners designed to enable them to more effectively capture or kill their own insurgent populations is equally dangerous to the interests of our country. SOF must avoid the urge to confuse being good at something with something doing well.

C-UW recognizes that VEOs conduct UW campaigns and focus on defeating their strategy, while at the same time outcompeting them for influence with the insurgent populations they rely upon. C-UW narrowly focuses CT on enemy UW operatives and foreign fighters. C-UW employs UW approaches to create lines of influence with insurgent groups and populations, offering better alternatives for addressing their grievances with governance. A C-UW campaign employs forces and capabilities across the SOF enterprise and employs many existing core activities. What makes C-UW unique is how it reframes the problem and repurposes and prioritizes SOF activity for greater strategic effect.

To meet the rapidly evolving security challenges associated with the emerging strategic environment and to meet and exceed the guidance of the National Defense Strategy, SOF must be willing to make changes that are equally significant. The current focus on CT is neither strategically successful nor sustainable. SOF is, however, uniquely suited to create a new layer of UD that promises to deter unwanted competition short of armed conflict. Evolving from CT to C-UW also promises to increase the strategic effectiveness of SOF in a manner that is far more sustainable and frees up capacity for the emerging competition deterrence mission. C-UW helps to facilitate an equally evolving approach to U.S. policy and diplomacy that recognizes that the U.S. serves its interests best when leveraging power more as a mediator, firmly insisting that difficult issues be addressed, than as an

arbitrator picking winners and losers and trapped for years in the thankless task of enforcing decisions.

Supporting Insights

VEO. During our application of a CT approach, the VEO problem has doubled in size. We attack forces and locations rather than alliances and strategies. A switch to a C-UW approach changes that focus. We must disaggregate problems by how they are strategically unique, not bundle them by how they are tactically similar, particularly if it is to fit a problem according to our authorities or preferred solution.

Causation. Recognize governance, not ideology as cause. We must help mitigate and disrupt violence while creating time and space for governance (local and our own foreign polices) to evolve.

Narrowing the CT Mission. Only do CT on UW operatives and foreign fighters. Do not kill or help kill the insurgent populations of partners and allies.

Status. Recognize that status is situational. A UW operative on the road is an insurgent at home.

Democracy. Take those who are primarily nationalist insurgents off the terror list (organizations and individuals).

Robin Sage. Conduct UW with insurgent groups, establish rapport with the guerilla leadership, and be the partner of choice for getting to better governance.

Host Nation Forces. Conduct building partner professionalism, not building partnership capacity, with host nation security forces like in the Philippines or Colombia where we respect the host nation sovereignty. Do not create death squads to do CT-lite through a partner.

Host Nation Government. There are no blank checks. Be a mediator, not an arbitrator. Practice tough love.

Host Nation Populations. Map out by critical identity. Assess critical perceptions (circle of trust). Help to create greater resilience by guiding programs to address failures of governance.

Partners and Allies. By disaggregating problems into strategically similar groupings for tailored engagement, it makes it easier to match partners

and allies to aspects of a problem that meet their unique capabilities and that are most appropriate for their own populations.

Transparent Trust, not Clandestine Networks. For this to work, it must be largely transparent and above board—trust with the host, trust with state, and trust with the agency. Our opponents will never believe we are only doing what we appear to be doing.

Understanding, Influence, and Relationships. SOF must get outside the wire among critical populations in regions where our interests manifest and operate in permissive space to create strategic effects in denied space.

UD. Conduct psychological warfare and seek to create a credible threat of UW.

Brittle States. Autocratic regimes are increasingly more fearful of their own populations than they are of our military power.

Good Governance. The best defense is to conduct resilience operations to improve perceptions of governance. If instead they crack down on populations, they will only make our program better and their own situation worse.

Retention and Preparation. Benign actions in critical locations prepare our forces for whatever missions or situations may arise. This is true agility and flexibility. Many will criticize these engagements as boondoggles. It's okay to have fun while creating strategic effects.

Full Spectrum. Conduct cyber infiltration from facilities at home, engage diasporas wherever they reside, and seek those segments of target populations that extend from denied space into permissive space. Find the pressure points and apply pressure. Find the populations affected by activities designed to advance their interests and to create strategic power projections. Get creative.

Non-attribution and Full Credit. If we have to pull a string, we can deny it. If instability happens of its own accord, we get credit.

SOF in Competition: A Vignette of the Future

Scott Hopkins

Getting into the country hadn't been the hard part. The wing suits brought the team in under Bolivian radar and allowed them to land close enough to the rendezvous point where they didn't have to travel too far. The hard part was moving through the dense jungle without being detected by national military forces and guerilla groups.

Accessing Bolivia over the past few years became more difficult as the Botega regime took a hard line against American influence in their country's policies. Inserting an Army special forces (SF) team through normal channels to protect the international medical personnel would have been obvious and likely caused problems getting the humanitarian effort approved in the first place. The novel use of training-with-industry provided the team cover for status as employees of a private military corporation. Bringing them in quietly and calling them private security gave the team more freedom to maneuver.

Subdued green body armor, the dark brown cargo pants and weapons belt, and the Bullpup assault rifle slung across his chest were all that distinguished Captain Steve Ramirez as private security rather than a local in the village they were visiting. His square jaw and dark Latin features allowed him to blend into the population. Fluency in the dialects of Central and South American Spanish allowed him to listen intently to the locals as they moved. Not everyone on his Operation Detachment Alpha team had a Spanish background, but everyone spent enough time in the region; they could converse in Spanish to integrate and engage to a level expected of SF teams this deep in country.

Cross-border operations into Brazil and Peru by guerrilla groups increased over the past few years, but that wasn't why Ramirez and his team were in Bolivia—protecting the humanitarian medical group was. At least that was the story. Babysitting a group of doctors in the jungles of Bolivia wasn't the most exciting assignment, but it created a chance to get eyes on

the ground outside of the usual intelligence and civil lines of effort. The interagency (IA) South American Host Enabled Access Team (HEAT) felt the operation posed a reasonable risk for getting a team in country.

The regional HEAT programs provided executive authorities delegated to the operational level in order to expedite activities for agencies in contested environments outside designated Department of Defense operational areas. But what it really did was create an expanded and integrated global posture that enabled more developed and sophisticated relationships with the IA, multinational organizations, and partner nation security forces.

In the face of rising international tensions and competition, the 2024 National Defense Appropriations Act gave Congressional approval for chapter 103 to U.S. Code Title 22, which deals with foreign relations and intercourse. This new legislation solved a never-ending struggle for authorities to synchronize and coordinate Special Operations Forces (SOF), IA, and international operations. Centralized direction through the Global Engagement Center (GEC) enabled HEAT programs, along with other designated interagency programs, to work through local embassies in contested regions of the world. GEC authorities also allowed for the prioritization of regional specialties in support of operations, giving it the flexibility to respond quickly to an ever-changing transregional environment.

Ramirez watched as a pair of his young enlisted men played soccer with some of the local village kids. Looking at the lot of them, no one could assume they were military from the shaggy hair, half grown beards, and relaxed demeanor. The whole battalion had worked behind the scenes throughout the region over the past few years, and any pretense of military bearing had long washed off. But then that was the intent. SF influence operations in this part of the world relied on being invisible. With the recent increase in anti-American sentiment coming from many South and Central American governments, not seeing American influence grew into a policy matter.

"Ramirez, we're getting a message over GIS." The voice was Gibson, the team's communications sergeant, her voice edgy and confident and at the same time unmistakable. Sitting back at their base camp a few kilometers away, they had a better line of sight to receive messages from the Global Information System (GIS), than the team did buried in the dense Bolivian rain forest.

Ramirez pulled the rectangular flat screen data pad out of his hip pocket, the heavy polymer casing around it keeping the delicate communications

system safe from damage. Accepting his fingerprint authentication, the screen came to life with a message from the operational fusion cell at the American Embassy in Brazil.

Re-task four-man team for immediate rendezvous with local interagency for priority mission. Local contact has tactical control. Acknowledge. The re-tasking of a part of his team came as a bit of a surprise but knowing how IA coordination and support worked, whatever they were being tasked to support was important to the bigger picture. Ramirez acknowledged the message. Immediately a new data packet with position information came up, showing that the contact position was a few hours travel from their current location.

"John," Ramirez called out to Chief Warrant Officer (CWO) Dawes, standing a few feet away talking to one of the civilian liaisons for the medical personnel. The shorter, staunch, balding warrant officer had been with the team since Ramirez came to Brazil. His long, round face carried the lines of a man who had seen years of deep operational stress.

"What's up boss?" Dawes asked, stepping close so they could talk privately.

"Re-tasking. I'm taking Hastings, Giles, and Nichols. We'll take one of the trucks. Shouldn't be more than a day. Keep your eyes open."

"No worries. Judging from what their liaison was saying, we'll be here a few days regardless." The smaller man looked back over his shoulder towards the civilian liaison he'd been talking to. It wasn't hard to guess he was a government man, just not an American government man, which meant keeping up the cover.

"Tell him we're surveilling the route to the next village." Ramirez gave his second a wry look, clapping the man on the shoulder before walking over to the two young men playing soccer.

The pre-insertion brief said that this region of the border was crawling with guerrilla forces. It was the main reason they hadn't come in on the ground, the other being the national army patrolling the border. The heavy forest ceiling and easy access to river mobility gave the guerrillas the ability to hide and shift their activities without retaliation. Similar guerrilla activity sprouted up from Argentina in the past few years, prompting more interest on finding the source of support. While there was no direct indication that the guerrillas were being funded by the Botega regime, the fact they were engaging in activities that supported his policy objectives didn't help loosen the ties.

If Ramirez worried about the lack of any activity on the trip to the rendezvous point, those fears vanished as their truck drove up. Through the trees, a large jungle camp with makeshift frames and metal roofs colored to match the forestation from above came into view. White smoke from smoldering wood fires filtered through the trees as they approached.

Hastings, Giles, and Nichols were on edge, weapons ready for anything the moment the men with weapons came into view. Only the rather scruffy looking man dressed very much like Ramirez standing in the middle of the road waving them in gave him pause. As they slowed to a stop at the edge of the clearing, the man drew closer, the only visible weapon holstered on his vest. His broad-shouldered frame fit well with his squarish head, framed by dark curly hair and a two-day-old beard. Dark, shadowed eyes of a man who had seen a lot of very uncomfortable things stared out as they dismounted. His white collared shirt was half hidden by a lightweight tactical vest with body armor unbuttoned below his neck, sleeves rolled up to his forearms. "Ramirez?" He asked in a deep raspy voice, walking up to the driver side of the car, extending a hand. "Travis Clark."

Ramirez took Clark's meaty hand in a firm grip. "We never received intel the company was out here," Ramirez commented. Finding the agency out here wasn't a surprise; they'd been coordinating development of guerrilla forces against leftist regimes for decades. With the more recent push of other nations to influence South America, the IA fusion to compete had taken on a whole new level of priority. It wasn't hard to tell why Clark was in the middle of a makeshift camp, in the middle of the Bolivian jungle with a bunch of well-armed men. The 10 or 20 shrouded bodies lying at the edge of the structure said a lot about what this was.

"Officially we're not," Clark replied with a shrug, turning back to the camp.

"Here I was thinking you needed us to blow something up for you," Ramirez joked as they walked towards the camp.

"Thankfully, I think we had that part covered. But I needed official eyes on this to make sure we met the authority requirement," Clark said, walking up to a blue tarp spread out over the ground. Tossing the tarp back revealed a cache of weapons laid out one by one—everything from rifles and grenade launchers to pistols and drones. Ramirez kneeled down, picking up a rifle, inspecting it before laying it back where it was.

"Gibson, it's Ramirez. I need uplink," he said, activating the commlink headset he wore and pulling his GIS data pad out of his pocket. Authenticating his identity on the pad, he waited and watched.

"Copy. Uplink established," Gibson said, just as a new connection on the data pad loaded. Pressing a button sequence on the touch screen, Ramirez took pictures of each weapon and piece of equipment laid out on the tarp.

"What was this?" Ramirez asked as the data uploaded, looking to the structure.

"Pro-Botega guerrillas. Drug lab. Found about 30 kilos of opium," Clark replied.

"Ramirez, this is Actual." The voice coming through his data pad was Tom Saunders, the National Security Agency senior executive service head of the South American HEAT.

"Go ahead," Ramirez replied, realizing that Clark could hear everything.

"Is Clark there with you?" Saunders asked.

"Yes sir, he's right here," Ramirez replied. A detailed display of technical data appeared on the screen, breaking down each weapon type.

"This is Eastern Bloc equipment. Not the 60-year-old post revolution crap we usually find down here. This stuff is brand new. DIA [Defense Intelligence Agency] is saying they have reports of these drones being used by front-line forces in the unrest in the Bloc countries."

"Sir, this is Clark. When our local commandos hit this camp, they thought it was a staging base for attacks into Brazil. It turned out to be an opium drug lab."

"That's good to know Clark. Ramirez, is your team carrying thermite?" Ramirez raised an eyebrow, looking to Clark then to his three men. All three shrugged as Clark shook his head.

"Negative sir," Ramirez answered.

"Very well. Ramirez, collect up whatever you can—computers, disks, data. Clark, have the ground forces secure the area out to 500 meters. We're sending in a demolition package by resupply drone. Once it arrives, Ramirez confirm destruction of all the military equipment along with the lab."

"Roger sir."

CWO Raymond Cruz walked along the glass wall of the conference room, his eyes sweeping the assembled men and women as they reviewed the projected

data floating half a foot above the long, shiny, black oval table. A civilian forensic accountant and a member of the New Mexico Army National Guard, Cruz was on active duty as the Counter Threat Finance (CTF) Team Chief attached to the Integrated Finance Operations Division of the Indo-Pacific HEAT. He stretched his neck, fighting back against the oppressive grip of his tie and collar. "As you can see," he said, "the last five years have seen a discernable increase in both economic activity across the islands as well as a discernable decrease in the recruitment compared to the five years prior."

The Interior, Finance, and Defense Ministers of the Philippines sat at the far end of the table. A varied range of other Asian and non-Asian men and women representing various non-governmental organizations and private business interests throughout the country filled in the rest of the chairs at the table.

"What is the next phase, Mr. Cruz? Certainly, removing government restrictions on business and promoting more investment in business development isn't going to stop extremist recruiting?" the older Filipino man at the head of the table, introduced as the Interior Minister, asked with a hint of incredulity in his voice. Cruz shook his head.

"No Minister. This is a long game. But incentivizing economic growth through business development will not only make your country more inviting to outside investment and industry, but it will diminish the appeal for extremist groups when the lower income spectrum of people have good paying jobs and steady pay checks to sustain them," Cruz replied. The extremist argument against capitalist greed was ageless, so making it less attractive removed a powerful recruiting tool.

The three government representatives at the head of the table all looked to each other. Closing their binders and standing after deciding they'd heard enough, each offered a hand. "Thank you, Mr. Cruz. We greatly appreciate everything your organization and USAID have done," said the Finance Minister, who shook Cruz's hand last before joining the other two men at the door.

Walking out of the Ministry building, Cruz cursed the humidity under his breath as his cell phone vibrated in his coat pocket. "Hey Boss," he said, putting the phone to his ear as his thin, squinted eyes stared out at the busy downtown streets.

"How'd it go?" His team lead's voice sounded distant on the other end as if he was talking over the speaker phone. The question had been hard to hear over the background noise of a busy city like Manila.

"Went fine. I don't think anything really surprised them. I think they were hoping to see a bigger reduction in VEO activity though," Cruz said as he walked into a courtyard on the side of the government building hoping to hear better. In reality, there was only so much short-term impact their economic development programs could have on extremist influence.

"Well, I guess that's why the program is going after both sides of the problem," the team lead stated. There was a long pause as the voice became much clearer. "By the way, got a call from the Embassy. You've been activated by the GEC. They need your team for some big thing that just came in."

"Really? We talking like immediately?" Cruz's surprise came out clear in the tone of his question.

"As of the minute I called, you're on their clock," he replied. The urgency furled Cruz's brow. This wasn't the first time they had brought in his team on projects, but this was the first time the urgency reached a drop everything level. CTF, in reality, rarely fell into the imminent threat arena of operations, being focused on a more long-term view.

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He felt odd walking in wearing a suit and tie, but given the amount of warning he had, there wasn't much to do. Approaching a large metal door with Integrated Finance Operations Division (IFOD) stenciled on the door, Cruz pulled out his access card, pinning in, the locking mechanism behind the door clicked allowing him to enter. Nested as part of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) Joint Task Force Indo-Pacific Civil Military Operations Center, Indo-Pacific HEAT gave IFOD the ability to interface a range of influence across a wide range of partners and agencies. The need to develop CTF strategies came into focus in the early 2000s with the war on terror, but the realization that threat finance was becoming a transregional problem prompted a need for integrated cells that could coordinate effectively.

The maze of cubicles and offices resembled a venture capital sales floor more than an operations center. Financial data displays, stock reports scrolling on screens, business news on monitors muted with subtitles—the only thing missing was the loud chatter of stockbrokers on the phone buying and selling everything they could come up with.
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"Chief, sorry for the abrupt timing," said Colonel Rogers as he walked up with a cup of coffee in one hand and his usual cheery smile across his face. "We received a high priority tasking and since it's coming through GEC channels, we needed your team on it."

Cruz nodded, walking into the small conference room where the rest of his team stood, each of them out of uniform and sharing the shock at being called in. That was the nature of the role they filled being embedded in the HEAT; as SOF National Guard members in the specialized CTF career field created in 2025, they knew they were always on the hook.

"Two days ago, a joint CIA/SF operation raided a guerilla drug lab in the rain forest of Bolivia," Colonel Rogers stated as he set his coffee cup on the table and activated a projection above the table that flipped through pictures taken of the drug lab before its destruction. "They found high-end arms and military equipment along with data terminals with a cache of useful information. Within that cache, they found financial data. With our expertise in tearing apart terror financial networks and narco-finance operations, our tasking is to tear into this." He looked over the gathered personnel around the table. "Our two objectives: priority one, find who is paying and getting paid for the weapons they found and determine methods for tracking and interdiction. Priority two, build a picture of the network that is funding, suppling, and supporting these guerrillas."

"What resources do we have for this job sir?" Sergeant Kim asked. Being the liaison for cyber operations, he'd want to know how deep he could go to meet the objectives. Rogers nodded.

"GEC has activated you under Title 22. The ambassador in Malaysia approved the mission and the Indo-Pacific HEAT lead has executive authority. Do what you need to. We'll keep them in the loop," Rogers replied. Kim nodded in acceptance.

"What is our time restriction?" Cruz asked, setting a level of expectation his team would be under. Rogers' face scrunched up in a thoughtful scowl as he considered the question and whatever information he hadn't shared yet. Then he shook his head.

"I would say priority one is more time compressed. If we can interdict any further arms supplies, that would be a good start to learning more. The rest I feel will be a more long-term game." Cruz nodded, looking around the table for other concerns on anyone's faces. Confident they were all aware of their duties, he stood.

"Thank you, sir. We'll take it from here," Cruz said, taking charge of the mission. "Everyone, take two hours, go get appropriately attired, and grab some lunch. We'll dig in once everyone is back."

It only took Sergeant Kim a day to hack his way through links to the blockchain server, even less to figure out the guerillas kept the encryption key with the other confiscated equipment. The hard part turned out to be breaking down the thousands of lines of transactions and data points and getting the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network to track down some of the more obscure entities they found in the ledgers.

"Ray, got something." CWO Marcus Oliver called Cruz's attention away from the ledgers he was searching. Being the second highest ranking officer on the team and the one guy on the team with forensic financial background, it made sense Oliver would find something.

The blonde man leaned back in his chair, a heavily mauled pen tapping against his teeth as Cruz walked over. "Two months ago, a series of transactions went to this Chinese shipping company in Cambodia. Small amounts, not enough to raise flags, but a lot of them. All told, almost a million U.S.," Oliver said as he reached out and placed the tip of the pen, which was more of a stylus, against the screen which highlighted a new block of data. That entry exploded into a larger display of information. "The Botega Treasury in Bolivia and a private import/export company registered in Bolivia but located in Ilo, Peru make up the two key payees for these recurring transactions." Oliver tapped on a second data point, which opened for more information. "A week after the last transaction came in, the Chinese shipping company transferred $100,000 to an escrow account connected to a Cambodian freighter they contract with—the *Dong Run*." Marcus looked up at Cruz, the end of the pen back against his teeth. "I'd bet a week's trading on the stock market that ship ain't carrying rice from Cambodia to Peru." The look of amusement on his colleague's face caused Cruz to nod in agreement.

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"Harimau five minutes out from target." Captain Cindy Kaimu couldn't tell if the crackle of radio chatter was from the helicopter's background noise and sensor dampening systems or if the pilot was whispering. Her eyes jumped to the four screens mounted above the drone technician flying their package toward the *Dong Run*. The thermographic imagery from the drones washed the long, slim cargo freighter in a rainbow of blues, greens, and yellows.
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Around the image, the dark blue and black of the South China Sea at night stood out as a stark contrast.

At various points along the ship's length, deeper red signatures moved, the majority of them being aft near the squat super structure of the bridge. "Harimau visual on four signatures top side. Two amidships, two forward. There are two more in the bridge aft."

"Copy Lotus." The pilot's response told her they were seeing the same on their own thermographic imagery now that they were closer to the target.

"Scan the ship," Kaimu instructed the technician. Inputting several commands on the flat screen display with the Drone head-up display (HUD), the four screens above switched. Each Firefly drone would shift to positions lower along the hull, level with each other, as the multi-mode passive scanner bombarded the hull with muons and electron particles, tracking their path through the object's inside. While Kaimu didn't quite understand the technical side of what the scanners did, she knew the advanced technology made the team's job significantly less dangerous and less politically sensitive. Originally designed for ports and border inspection, enhancements in miniaturization allowed comparable systems deployment on drones.

Each of the screens started out black, and a menu bar with scrolling data ran along the top. Within a minute, blurry splotches of color from green to blue to red filled the black. Over the next few seconds, the image turned into a long rectangular display of varied colors with blank, dark areas separating the colored areas into what Cindy could assume were cargo holds. Three of the four holds forward of the bridge showed a clear variation in color and size from the fourth. "Harimau scans show a high probability for ammunition and heavy metal content in a void below holds two, three, and four. You are clear to engage."

"Copy Lotus. Inserting in forty-five seconds." Without being tasked, the drone pilot flipped the image back to thermographic as their Firefly drones returned to their observation orbit around the ship. It would have been hard to hide the helicopter's approach if the ship's crew had the high-level thermographic sensors the drones carried, so when the red-blue silhouette of the helicopter approached low along the water and began hovering above the bow of the ship, Kaimu noted the time.

The one heat signature at the bow of the ship fell to the deck suddenly. A few seconds later, a swarm of eight more subdued heat signatures filled the bow moving aft. "Go defensive," Kaimu ordered the drone pilot. The

thermographic images highlighted the signatures of known friendlies in green and those not verified in red. At the same moment, each of the red designated signatures crumpled to the deck.

The eight visor feeds from each of the men projected onto a panel of monitors nearby. To the mix of men and women in Malaysian uniforms, civilian clothes, and American military uniforms, they saw what the tactical team saw of their surroundings. Inside each visor, the men enjoyed a visual augmented reality that interpreted external sensory data and downlinked targeting data from the drones. Designated target points, highlighted hostiles, and unknown heat sources all appeared in their field of view in a way that allowed them to make split-second decisions on how to proceed.

The gathered onlookers all watched on as the Malaysian marines approached the guard amidships. Crumpled into a ball on the deck, his hands stopped halfway to cover his ears as if frozen before collapsing. The visor display of the second marine to come up to the man showed him laying the guard flat on his belly and wrapping arms and legs in black speed ties.

Four Marines on either side of the ship worked their way toward the stern until they reached the superstructure in the back. The speed and efficiency of the boarding brought a sly grin to Kaimu's face as she watched. Her Raider company's work with the Malaysian SF in anti-piracy and opposed boarding operations in the face of increased Chinese tension in the exclusion zone showed in the efficient take down of the ship. Within five minutes of the initial take down at the bow, the team cleared all the main crew areas and moved through the open spaces of the ship until they accounted for all crew.

"Lotus, we have six crew accounted for. Five Asian males, one European male. We're uploading biometric data now. High-end small arms and encrypted SATLINK." The team leader for the insertion was standing on the main deck, just forward of the superstructure. They tied up all six men, sitting them against a bulkhead, their weapons and equipment laid out nearby. The drone zoomed in for a more accurate image.

"Copy Harimau One. Malaysian Coast Guard is coming up along the port side to embark pilot and search crew. Provide security until they dock the ship."

"Wilco," Harimau One replied. Kaimu turned her attention to the HUD for the drones as a smaller green and blue vessel approached the side of the freighter.

"They did good. Well done Captain," said Kepten Khairul Anuar, the Malaysian commander of the Naval Special Warfare Forces, as he stepped up, placing a hand on her shoulder. He was smaller than her but more stout with a much rounder head and graying hair.

Kaimu beamed at the praise. "Thank you, sir," she said. "I think the new tactics and integration of the drone systems will go a long way to the counter-smuggling and piracy operations." The first target to test everything in a threat environment was one with high confidence intelligence. A ship trying to sneak around patrols and shipping lanes by running dark without an automated information system (AIS) could end up being many things. Getting valid intelligence of a ship smuggling arms not only meant an effective operation in taking down a real target.

Eighteen hours later, Kaimu found that the uncertainty of being called to the embassy was twisting her stomach as an escort guided her through the building. She was led into a large conference room adorned with walls and furniture made of a warm, rich, reddish-tinged wood. She'd vacillated about wearing her Service uniform instead of her dress uniform for a meeting at the embassy. By the look of the other Service members in the room as she entered, her concerns subsided.

"Captain Kaimu," an older woman with a curly curtain of auburn brown hair framing her angular face said as she stepped up, hand extended. "Thank you for coming. I'm Ambassador Melba Reeves." The woman's greenish yellow eyes showed confidence and intensity as Kaimu met her hand with a firm Marine grip.

"Ambassador," Kaimu replied with a friendly crispness. Reeves turned back to the others arrayed around the long oval table.

"This is Malaysian Deputy Secretary-General Ramlan Ibrahim," Reeves said as she introduced a short, skinny man dressed in a gray pinstriped suit. He nodded. Kaimu returned the nod as her attention moved to the rest. "Phillip Stiverson, Indo-Pacific HEAT Lead, and Chief Warrant Officer Raymond Cruz. Chief Cruz is attached to the Integrated Finance Operations Division in Manila."

"Chief," Cindy said with a friendly nod to the Army CWO standing at the chair beside her. Half a head shorter than her, Cruz's intense, thin eyes almost seemed to stare through her. His short-cropped hair followed the angle at the top of his long face, ending in a sweeping, hard v-shaped jaw.

She could see by the U.S. Special Operations Command shoulder patch on his Service uniform that whatever this operation was, it was SOF focused.

"Captain," Cruz replied with his own respectful nod, as Reeves gestured with outstretched hands that everyone should sit.

"The Malaysian government has shared their inspection results from the seizure of the *Dong Run*," the ambassador said with a smile and nod towards Cindy. "They felt that since this was intelligence that came through our channels, we should take the lead on operations with their support. Secretary-General Ibrahim will be our Malaysian interface on this. He's been read in."

"A search of the *Dong Run* revealed an extensive cache of high-end small arms, ammunition, pirated software, and chemicals necessary to produce illicit drugs," Secretary-General Ibrahim said, leaning forward with his arms on the table as he looked to the assembled members. "We do not have estimates of the black-market value, but we can assume the loss of this merchandise will be substantial."

"Do we know where this shipment originated?" Kaimu asked, realizing she was likely the least up-to-speed on the operations scope.

"Manifests state that the *Dong Run* sailed from Karachi three weeks ago," Ibrahim replied.

Cindy's questioning tone reflected the fact that others at the table realized there was a problem with the calculations. "Three weeks? Never mind the fact they were traveling without their AIS on, that means they were either moving very slow to avoid detection or they stopped somewhere en route."

"DIA is still working pattern of life fusion on the route," Stiverson, in a crisp, commanding tone, interjected. "We're still waiting on Central Command surface movement data, but logistically, considering how they loaded the *Dong Run*, they needed a port facility to rearrange those cargo containers. Unless they left Karachi with the contraband already loaded, they stopped at a port that didn't register their arrival or departure to receive the extra cargo."

"The only reason we even knew about the shipment," Chief Cruz started, "was financial data captured from a guerilla drug lab in Bolivia that drew connections between the Botega regime and a Chinese shell corporation based in Cambodia that contracts with the *Dong Run*. We're still doing preliminary assessments, but GIS matches the weapons found in Bolivia and the weapons seized on the *Dong Run*.

"Considering the range of civil unrest in the Eastern Bloc right now, it's no surprise weapons are flowing out," Stiverson added.

The ambassador asked, "Chief Cruz, how deep has IFOD been able to dive into the data we received from Bolivia?"

Cruz began to shake his head, a look of consternation on his face. "We've only had a week Ma'am. This is all pretty surface view right now."

The ambassador nodded, accepting the assessment. "Very well. The GEC has prioritized this operation. Tom Saunders, the head of the South American HEAT in Brazil, has been designated as operational lead since they originated this. Use all resources necessary to investigate how these pieces tie together and develop a plan of how to compete against them."

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"Explain to me what I'm looking at?" Cruz turned his attention from the floating concept map with the multiple bubbles, boxes, and lines to the man identified as Saunders. He was the HEAT lead from South America that started the ball rolling on this investigation. The man's avatar was almost seamless if one could look past the occasional shift in pixels from the constant scanning. The digital construct conference room was austere compared to actual command centers Cruz knew. Being able to pull people from halfway around the globe into important meetings made this capability critical.

Cruz ran a couple of commands on the virtual command console he stood near. The very elaborate projected diagram faded out, reorganizing into a much smaller body layout of labels, boxes, and faces. Cruz continued, "Sir, here's an example for you to compare to. This is the Cali Cartel from back in the 1990s. Their position in the world mostly focused on South America, but they took advantage of a wide network of international businesses. They essentially ran a transregional network." The image shifted again, growing slightly larger and more complex. "This is the last known construct for the al-Qaeda network 10 years ago."

"You're saying this is some new form drug cartel or VEO?" said a middle-aged woman Cruz recognized as the USINDOPACOM Treasury attaché.

"No ma'am. From what we can tell from the limited network analysis we've been able to develop, this is a large, multifaceted organization of some sort that makes VEO and drug networks pale by comparison," Cruz replied. He brought back the original image, a spaghetti mess of lines and labels swirling from one box or bubble to another. "With a little over a month to
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pour over everything we've been able to find financially, the assessment is that there seems to be deep financial ties to several smaller Eastern European and Asian companies and governments."

A young female Air Force lieutenant stepped into the construct to Saunders' left. She had a slim frame and her corn silk blonde hair was pulled back tight against a round head that accentuated her long, round face. She had a small nose but firm, piercing oval-shaped blue eyes and a determination in her small angular jaw. "I may be able to add to the larger picture," she said, her tone soft but assertive. "This is Lieutenant Christian with the DNI fusion cell. Archangel, the DNI virtual intelligence, has been building a picture for the past three years on what we assessed as a series of small international networks influencing interests around the world." Cruz shifted the image again to show a panned-out view of 10 or 20 smaller networks ranging from red threat networks to black criminal networks.

Even with almost two decades of the tech industry touting the ability of artificial intelligence, it quickly became clear to Cruz that the ability for machine learning to actually evolve without human input was further off than many thought. On the other hand, the hyper-interconnected digital world that existed enabled virtual intelligence systems such as the Archangel powerful analysis capability of social, economic, cultural, and digital networks hundreds of times beyond what teams of analysts might provide in the same period.

To Cruz's surprise, friendly green and blue lines and bubbles also interweaved within the constructs various regions. "If the financial lines come together right …" Christian continued, the image Cruz was discussing appeared to superimpose itself over the digital network interface (DNI) image. Based on the new information, the image reorganized itself where several DNI networks connected through the financial lines. "… our assessment at this point is that this represents a workable model for a transnational syndicate with lines of influence across Eastern Europe, Russia, the Indo-Pacific region, and creeping into Latin America," Christian finished.

"Beyond the data from the drug lab, where did we get the financial data we have?" Saunders asked.

"The data we retrieved from the guerilla lab had encryption and access points for a blockchain data server. It's a compartmentalized system, but it gave us enough to tie pieces together," Cruz replied. "Within that data, we also found cryptocurrency ledgers and transactions from and through the

Botega administration. Cyber Command and Treasury are still working to breach deeper, but right now our lines are limited to Latin American financial information and any ties from there to other regions."

"Are we assessing that the Botega administration is funding these guerilla units?" the treasury attaché asked.

Cruz was silent for a moment, thoughtful, as he considered how to answer the question with the limited amount of data he had. "My team found financial lines coming from and going to a number of sources," he replied. "Some of them are Chinese companies tied to developing mineral and industrial infrastructure in the region. Some are from sources we determined are likely money laundering fronts or banks that are known to skirt international banking laws."

Cruz input a few commands on his console and several lines from his original diagram pulsed red. "Nothing ties Botega's administration directly to the guerilla groups, but lines pass through him and we've seen similar lines connected to other guerilla groups, government entities, and transnational criminal organizations in Latin America and Indo-Pacific."

"Thank you for your assessments Chief Cruz, Lieutenant Christian," Saunders said as he looked around the virtual table at the assembled people, many who added nothing but were there because they represented the combined teams of organizations working this operation. "Without better understanding the extent of this network, we can't anticipate or influence their big picture. GEC has designated the South American HEAT as the lead with the Indo-Pacific HEAT supporting since the threads of this originated in their regions. The ambassador here in Brazil will be the executive reporting authority. Regional entities will coordinate through her. Military activities will coordinate through Colonel Jackson here in Brazil," Saunders continued as he looked back to Cruz and Christian. "I would like IFOD and DNI to continue building a picture of our new player and how the network intersects national interests. Treasury and Cyber will prioritize assets to support and develop a plan of action to disrupt financial support for Botega."

"Understood sir," Cruz replied as he typed notes into his console.

Saunders turned his view to Ramirez standing two people down on his right. "Ramirez, I want your team back in Bolivia. Integrate with Clark on the ground and coordinate with the GEC MISO [military support information operations] team to figure out how we can stir things up a bit with the locals towards Botega and his policies regarding outside influence," Saunders

said as Ramirez nodded. "I also want the guerilla activity disrupted. We need to show our regional allies our commitment to their growth and stability."

"We can be over the border in 30 hours now that we have the northwest region clear," Ramirez replied, turning to speak to someone outside of the construct. Saunders nodded and continued, "Carson, Vega, your teams are going into Chile and Argentina." The two men standing to Lieutenant Christian's left both nodded. "Coordinate with the agency on the ground. As the only two less-than-friendly Latin America countries, we need to evaluate our new actors' level of influence in those positions."

Ramirez sat in the window of their current operations center, a medium-sized apartment a few blocks from the Plaza Murillo in La Paz. Cries, jeers, and chants of protesters filled the city streets surrounding the Palacio Quemado. Down on those streets for the past four months, his team played their part stirring things up as directed. Three weeks earlier, a protest of angry Bolivian workers, spurned by complaints and rumors of oppressive Chinese working conditions for infrastructure projects, ended in a heated confrontation between the protestors, private security, and national police that inadvertently left three Bolivian workers dead.

Understanding the cultural environment and the fears, desires, and struggles the local population dealt with allowed Ramirez and his team to craft an effective subversion campaign to stoke local anger against a corrupt government letting outside influence dictate policy. The ironic part turned out that Botega's anti-American influence stance didn't mirror well with a pro-anyone else stance. Unfortunately for Botega, anyone else didn't necessarily mean entities sympathetic to the plight of the local population. Ramirez's team walked among the people, interacted with them, and built connections, no matter how limited. Now he looked down, out of sight, at the fruits of their labor.

"Hey boss, Gibson's got a call coming in," Chief Dawes said as he stepped up to the edge of the window, just inside his field of view. They all looked like locals, which made Ramirez chuckle. Ragged clothes, unkempt beards, mustaches, and hair. He wasn't certain if a couple of his guys showered in the last few days. As he pushed away from the window and walked deeper into the apartment to the more secure location where the communications equipment was, Ramirez wasn't sure he wanted anyone to see him like this.

"It's Saunders." Gibson nodded towards the large piece of thin rectangular film spread across the wall. Gibson looked as unsorted as the rest of the team. Her straight, auburn hair was in a tangled mess of a ponytail on the back of her head with actual dirt stains on her face from climbing up on the top of the building to set up the uplink antenna.

The screen on the wall flickered to life revealing the face of Saunders and an older woman Ramirez remembered seeing around the embassy. Immediately, his mind recognized the Ambassador to Brazil, her wise, lightly tanned face and graying hair impressing upon him her veteran status in this ongoing game. "Madam ambassador, what can I do for you?" Ramirez asked, realizing nothing he did would hide the way he looked to his superiors.

"Captain Ramirez," the ambassador started, her voice chipper and full of mirth. "We're hearing chatter that the Botega regime is falling apart under the weight of public distrust and protests. His gradual loss of financial support from outside investment and disruption of paramilitary factions inside the country have him in a place where he has no leverage inside the country nor influence with the people." The ambassador paused for a second, looking to Saunders before speaking again. "Congratulate your team on a job well done."

"Thank you, Ambassador." Ramirez must have been smiling wide as he caught Gibson out of the corner of his eye shaking her head with an amused look on her face.

"Latest intelligence assesses that we didn't leave any fingerprints on this, so that's a bonus," Saunders added, as the ambassador let him take the lead. "We're sending you a care package through Clark along the border. Stay on mission. We need to follow through till there's a more friendly administration in place. Brazil, Venezuela, and Colombia are putting pressure on the friendly factions of the National Congress to appoint an interim president not tied to Botega and more in line with the greater regional development until national elections are held."

"State will send in an observer team once we have confirmation of a transition," the ambassador interjected. "We'd like to attach a few of your team to the DSS [Defense Support to Stabilization] Joint Task Force that SOUTHCOM is establishing to support international stabilization efforts once the interim government takes control. Your experience in country over the past few months will be critical to assessing the situation inside." She paused for a moment, letting him digest the request and ask any clarifications. When

none came, she continued. "Defense is sending Colonel Ramon Ortiz to Bolivia to work on reestablishing mil-to-mil contact with the Bolivian military in an effort to clear the last of the Botega guerillas from the country. He served in the Bolivian Special Forces as part of a personnel exchange program. He's maintained a relationship with a number of key officers in the Bolivian Military over the years. I have requested your team be attached to his group to assist Colonel Ortiz."

"Yes Ma'am. We'll be ready to meet and brief Colonel Ortiz," Ramirez said. "We're familiar with him. Chief Dawes was on his A team when Colonel Ortiz was a captain."

As Ramirez ended the call, he chuckled to himself. This was a victory, a chance put the system to the test. That's all it was though. They'd put pieces of a puzzle together and quietly influenced events in favor of U.S. interests. In the grand scheme of things, this was merely one move in an infinite game of developing influence and gaining advantage. As long as there were players working against U.S. national interests, the game would continue.

Conclusion. A More Perfect Union

Colonel (Ret.) Montgomery (Monte) Erfourth and Dr. Nathan Barrick

> Competition does not always mean hostility, nor does it inevitably lead to conflict … an America that successfully competes is the best way to prevent conflict. - National Security Strategy (2017)

States fight wars to achieve strategic objectives when leaders assess they cannot be achieved through other means—*ultima ratio regum* (the last resort of kings). Short of war (a spectrum of conflict or cooperation described by competition[1]), states wield instruments of power to create the political conditions most favorable to their national interests. Despite increasing the role of the military in accomplishing foreign policy objectives, the U.S. has traditionally been reluctant to mobilize the nation for war, perceiving war as aberrant and undesirable. However, pragmatic considerations to accomplish objectives more quickly than other approaches result in defaulting more and more regularly to reliance on the military instrument of national power.

The U.S. theory of war as a last resort also reflects a false binary construct artificially separating peace and war, where armies are designed solely to fight and win a nation's wars. This dynamic ignores the reality of competition—a defining concept in the enduring affairs of state—and hamstrings U.S. attempts to maintain strategic advantage to promote and protect its interests. It also points to the possibility that a military designed to fight and win in war might not be optimally organized, manned, trained, or equipped to win in twenty-first century competition.[2] The 2018 National Defense Strategy (NDS) acknowledges this shortcoming and brings renewed emphasis on "competition," as a term of strategic art and statecraft.[3]

Competition Defined

Actors compete to advance or protect their interests. Competition[4] is the interaction among actors in pursuit of the influence, leverage, and advantage necessary to advance and protect their respective interests. Competition is continuous because the conditions that define an acceptable "end state" are

constantly changing and require continuous adaptation in action.[5] Success in competition requires the application of all elements of power.

A Theoretical Construct for Competition

Reiterating from the introduction, there are four core elements of competition. Influence, advantage, and leverage form the common, fundamentally interrelated aspects through which an actor advances and protects its interests (the fourth element):

Interests define those things or concepts that a nation values—those things which states seek to protect or achieve in relation to each other. They are contextual and may include the maintenance of physical security, economic prosperity, continuity of government and culture at home, and value projection in the geopolitical environment, as well as emotional triggers (e.g., fear, honor, glory) and other drivers (e.g., virtual, cognitive, etc.) that animate action. "Strategy must begin ... with purpose; and purpose in foreign affairs strategy rests on the concept of the national interest."[6] A strategy framed by national interests allows us to identify threats and opportunities to promote and protect those interests. Again, this point is often underappreciated in U.S. strategic conversation, which instead largely focuses on perceived threats. An interest-led orientation, including understanding adversary interests more completely, is the cornerstone of a comprehensive approach to competition. This perspective is elaborated in Colonel Bob Jones' article in chapter 1 and Mark Whisler's article in chapter 2.

Influence is the power to cause an effect in indirect or intangible ways. An actor can accumulate, spend, or lose influence. To make informed assessments about degrees of influence, we must develop a better understanding of populations, interest groups, governance, grievances, and other strategic issues.

Advantage is superiority of position or condition. It is created by the accumulation of influence toward a desired effect. Inherently relative, it is realized through the exercise of the instruments of power—diplomacy, information, military, and economy. It is comprised of physical or virtual aspects (e.g., technology, geographic access, resources, and arsenal inventories) as well as more nebulous, cognitive aspects (e.g., initiative,

momentum, morale, and skill). Advantage is established partially through activities generating recognizable qualitative or quantitative competitive advantage—such as during the Cold War strategic arms race. The articles in chapter 3 provide further discussion of how Special Operations Forces (SOF) has unique advantages applicable to competition but requires an operational change of culture to fully exploit.

Leverage[7] is the application of advantage gained or created to achieve an effect or exploit an opportunity. From a position of leverage, an actor is more capable of promoting and protecting its interests. Leverage also involves applying principles of competition and a deep understanding of other actors and the strategic environment to increase the likelihood and scope of success.

Cooperation, competition, and conflict all reflect the degree of friction among and between their efforts as actors pursue influence to leverage for advantages that will best advance and protect their interests.[8] Where interests converge, actors cooperate; where interests diverge, actors compete—sometimes to the point of conflict. Actors with varying interests often cooperate and compete in different areas simultaneously. Furthermore, actors assign different degrees of significance to interests—what may be a peripheral interest to one actor may be a vital interest to another—and the relative importance of a given interest changes over time. The ability of actors to build influence, action leverage through the various tools of power (the military being one of many), and establish and maintain advantage relative to others with divergent interests shapes their behavior and determines their freedom of action in competition.

Success in competition requires the full and comprehensive[9] application of power by an actor towards its interests. This requires gaining and maintaining sufficient influence to leverage for advantage regarding the interests (at the times and places) that matter. This is a dynamic challenge that constantly evolves with geopolitical and technological developments. In chapter 2, Dan Manning and Jeff Meiser described how the right strategy, a good strategy, incorporates these elements to improve the likelihood of success. Today's competition sets the conditions for a better peace, the attainment of objectives short of war, and if done comprehensively, sets more favorable conditions in the event of future conflict.

Applying this theory of competition to the role of SOF in competition provides option-expanding opportunities to decision-makers who can adapt to changes in the strategic environment (see chapter 3 for a deeper elaboration of this point). Successful competition results in gains in influence, advantage, and leverage but also in revitalizing the concept of strategic deterrence.

A Value Proposition: SOF and Their Approach to Competition

SOF provide value to the nation by enabling the joint force and interagency to address unique national security challenges. SOF rarely serve as the main effort and instead focus on specific problems that shape the environment and generate options. Though a comparatively small portion of the joint force, SOF often produce outsized effects, enabling success across the continuum of competition and conflict. SOF continue to provide the unique capabilities the joint force expects and the national strategy requires.

SOF have a unique value proposition to the joint force and broader, national-level efforts. Special operations amplify joint force and interagency actions through unique capabilities applied directly and indirectly in unorthodox ways and in unusual contexts.[10] Organic requirements, acquisitions, and budget systems enable SOF to develop new concepts and acquire new technologies relatively quickly in comparison with other components in the joint force. SOF use unique modes of employment, tactics, equipment, and training typically conducted in hostile, denied, or politically-sensitive environments. Operations are often time-sensitive, clandestine, and conducted with or through indigenous forces. Frequently, they require regional expertise and involve high degrees of risk.

SOF continue to provide the unique capabilities the joint force expects and the national strategy requires.

In competition, SOF provide decision makers with expanded options through unique capabilities, placement, and access to weave collaborative partner relationships in a more perfect union to advance U.S. interests. SOF have demonstrated core competencies in developing influence with partner governments and militaries as well as through building relationships with population groups. As an integral part of the joint force, the SOF enterprise can leverage its network of domestic and foreign partners and extend

its influence, addressing emergent threats and identifying opportunities for collaboration. SOF can provide leaders with better escalation-sensitive options below our adversaries' red lines. This offers the joint force a range of capabilities for unorthodox activities to advance U.S. interests, mainly through SOF competencies in illuminating, understanding, and exploiting relationships among actors and populations in the strategic environment. In addition to precision strike capabilities, SOF contribute to the joint force's mission through counter-threat finance, messaging and counter-messaging, and other population-based solutions. In doing so, SOF help to evolve strategy beyond the war-peace dichotomy and develop options better reflecting the reality of competition.[11] U.S. SOF are a globally recognized qualitative military advantage which can be employed by decision-makers to build influence and leverage in the strategic environment.

In conflict, SOF can hold adversary military and political objectives at risk through irregular warfare and the use of unorthodox methods, creating the necessary time to position conventional forces for decisive operations. SOF can also provide options increasing the joint force's ability to maintain information advantage, drive targeting, and enhance both kinetic and non-kinetic precision strikes. By applying a unified approach to integrated campaigning, SOF can support conventional forces in execution of their core warfighting competencies. SOF can also do what conventional forces cannot.[12] Their small footprint and global accessibility make SOF adaptable for operations in austere environments with minimal support and sustainment requirements. SOF air and maritime tactical mobility provide unique capabilities extending the operational reach of the joint force and the interagency.

The following complementary propositions represent what SOF do for the nation in competition and conflict, agnostic of the adversary:

Develop understanding and leverage influence. Developing an understanding of the problems and leveraging influence to advance solutions is perhaps the most important aspect of what SOF provide joint force and interagency partners. SOF networks of personnel, assets, surrogates, and multinational partners provide early, granular understanding of emerging local, regional, and transregional threats, making SOF uniquely positioned to influence actors and outcomes in all aspects of competition and to prepare for and dominate in conflict.

Precision operations. SOF and select international SOF partners enable and provide alternatives through capabilities, including managed attribution options to overtly or discretely act against challenging high-value targets. Precision operations may involve both kinetic and non-kinetic direct action and counter-network activities enabled by SOF-unique intelligence, targeting processes, and technology. These operations create precise physical and psychological effects and can be used to collapse human or physical networks through deliberate targeting of critical nodes. They are employed against difficult target sets that may require operating in uncertain or hostile environments, careful and focused application of capabilities, and significant intelligence and operational preparation. These operations are executed by highly-trained, rapidly-deployable, and scalable SOF units and often include select SOF partners employed to buy time and space for other operations to gain traction. This is achieved through timely and relevant intelligence, thorough mission planning, precision target engagement to ensure appropriate effects while minimizing collateral damage, and close access to provide eyes-on and hands-on seasoned military judgment when and where it is most needed.

Tailored crisis response. Crisis response—provided through the continental U.S. and outside the continental U.S. alert forces and persistently dispersed units—provides national decision-makers with agile, tailorable, and rapidly employable SOF formations necessary to respond to emergencies. These forces provide options to rescue people under threat, recover sensitive material, provide humanitarian relief, or address other short-notice contingencies. By virtue of their rapid response and small footprint, SOF crisis response capabilities are often more acceptable than other military options.

Enable decisive operations by the joint force. In times of war, SOF enable the joint force by executing tailorable options which allow conventional forces to apply overwhelming combat power across the depth and breadth of an opponent's attack surface. SOF can conduct unconventional and irregular activities to disrupt adversaries and employ deep operations against high-value targets. Furthermore, SOF provide intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities to enable joint force targeting. Through some or all of those methods, SOF provide options to dominate

and win in war. In virtually every instance, conditions for these efforts must be established long before the conflict during periods of competition.

Work by, with, and through local populations. SOF can develop and sustain indigenous approaches capitalizing on cohesive networks of allies and partners. The indigenous approach both builds and is built upon trust. This trust is achieved through persistent engagement in not only fragile, inherently unstable places but also those that appear stable. By working together and sharing responsibility for common challenges, partners are enabled to resist coercion and are emboldened against mutual adversaries. SOF prepare the environment by building partner security capabilities to enable interagency partner development of broader elements of governance. These efforts can mobilize populations or reinforce governments as interests require. This approach bolsters the U.S. position in a region during competition and prior to crisis, and it also provides an added combat power multiplier in conflict.

Importantly, fully realizing the potential of SOF in competition will require a change in operational culture. This point was emphasized in chapter 3 but deserves reiteration that changes to culture are difficult and leaders must drive change across the entirety of the doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership, personnel, facilities, and policy spectrum.

Some Principles for SOF in Competition[13]

The SOF value proposition is only realized when it is leveraged. None of the above propositions provide value if SOF are only built and readied as elite forces. Rigid adherence to a belief that maintaining appropriate dwell time (the ratio of deployed time to non-deployed time) will translate into competitive advantage and may be short-sighted.[14] Just as in other military operations, there exist identifiable principles which, if followed, will increase the likelihood of successfully leveraging cognitive influence and physical or virtual advantage for strategic or operational effects in competition.

Indirect Approach[15]

An indirect approach, as more fully developed in the "Harnessing David and Goliath" article in chapter 1, seeks to offset an adversary's equilibrium by attacking their morale, supply, and command and control from an unexpected direction. It is here where special operations should focus—the

adversary's system, strategy, and underlying logic—rather than attempting to confront the threat head-on. Strategies that mitigate an adversary's strengths while attacking their weaknesses are not new. However, the integration and complexity of competition demands renewed emphasis on this point. Furthermore, indirect activities are most effective when fused with a direct effort to create a compound approach in which "conventional and unconventional forces fight under unified direction to realize fully their complementary potential."[16]

Asymmetry

Dissimilar values of competing interests, distinctive features of sociopolitical systems, and different operating logics for the execution of national strategy all present asymmetries that one actor may leverage against another for advantage as also expounded in "Harnessing David and Goliath." Both state and non-state actors have adopted asymmetric approaches to compete effectively against the U.S. They compete through spectacular acts of terrorism; by working to dismantle international institutions and alliances; and by advancing influence campaigns through economic, diplomatic, and information channels while leveraging asymmetries of interest or ambiguities in the security environment using military means that elude existing deterrence models. While asymmetric approaches are typically associated with weaker parties seeking to mitigate an adversary's advantage, the U.S. should seek its own asymmetric strategies that undermine rival strengths. By identifying asymmetry in competition, we can leverage options our adversaries are neither organized for nor culturally prepared to cope with or adapt to. SOF are uniquely positioned to widen boundaries for competition, expand our footprint, and eliminate cognitive and physical sanctuaries by influencing populations. Through asymmetries to exploit advantages and understanding, we can induce strategic miscalculation or even paralysis in our adversaries.

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Unorthodox Options

As introduced in chapter 1, "Harnessing David and Goliath," and expanded on in chapter 3, "Applying SOF in Competition," orthodox military approaches

and their frameworks are well defined by doctrine. However, their frameworks are developed specifically to fit emergent issues. The joint force—and SOF in particular—should explore both proactive and punitive unorthodox approaches to both emergent and enduring problems to expand on traditional options in the physical, virtual, and cognitive domains. Unorthodox punitive options should respond to violations of established red lines in a timely and clear manner.[17] At present, assumptions about adversary red lines constrain the use of punitive options. However, to validate or disprove these assumptions, experimentation with unorthodox punitive options may help develop more robust options for leaders. This would prove useful in the case of *fait accompli* conditions (where opponents believe we will self-constrain our responses) or incremental aggression, both of which are characteristics of hybrid warfare. Using unorthodox approaches proactively can also cultivate and exploit emerging opportunities to advance goals set within the limits of a broader interagency campaign. Unorthodox approaches must be integrated with civilian counterparts and are likely to be temporally sensitive options which rely heavily on managing the perceptions of both target actors and other observers, including those within the U.S. interagency. Incorporating unorthodox options into how the joint force conducts strategic messaging, partner development, security cooperation, humanitarian assistance, and civil affairs can present expanded options for a competitive strategy.

The previously discussed principles are only early results of examining SOF in competition. As the entire SOF enterprise embraces this definition and theoretical approach, more principles are likely to be realized. As indicated by the foreword written by the U.S. Special Operations Command commander, we invite readers to engage this definition, theoretical approach, and the arguments and recommendations made in this anthology. This collection is only the next step in an ongoing journey of SOF enterprise adaptation and transformation.

Why We Compete: Filling the Strategic Deterrence Gap

As persuasively argued in the first article of chapter 2, "Strategy and Competition," if done with the right strategy, competition provides opportunities to achieve outcomes before war and gain strategic advantage in the event of conflict. Success in competition can yield geographic access, placement, and influence as well as other strategic advantages in the event of escalation to

armed conflict. Through influence and leverage, successful competition can ensure allied support in a wartime coalition. But these are benefits related to winning in conflict—more desirable is to win (protect or promote our interests) without fighting. Proactively shaping change in the strategic environment rather than bluntly resisting perceived challenges can further buttress influence and advantage; it might also deter conflict or prevent escalation by achieving strategic deterrence.[18]

Deterrence as we have practiced it—preventing conventional or nuclear attacks on our vital interests—has been extraordinarily successful over the past 50 years at deterring war. This was sufficient when competitors felt too weak to flaunt the rules and pursue those interests illegally in peace. Existing U.S. deterrence models primarily relied on nuclear and large-scale conventional forces as strategic deterrence forces[19] but paradoxically placed U.S. leaders in the position where it would be the U.S. initiating an irrational act of escalation if applied to a problematic act of competition well short of our clear red lines. The willingness of rising powers to challenge the rules-based system served to create a gap in deterrence, a gap that simply reinforcing existing approaches could never address. This new gap demands new approaches. In chapter 1, "Deterring 'Competition Short of War," Bob Jones described this effect in greater detail and recommended adopting focused deterrence, unconventional deterrence, and unconventional resilience as needed steps in adapting to changes in the geostrategic environment.

Deterrence as we define it does not account for aggressive or disruptive behavior against our interests if they fall below a threshold requiring a significant military response. Frustrated with an inability to secure national interests using diplomatic or economic instruments of national power, some states have shifted to weaponizing information. Our adversaries wage non-war wars, playing a dangerous game of brinksmanship and creating ambiguous provocations by conducting military operations masked to disguise their nature and intent, stopping below the threshold of triggering a conventional military response. Over the course of the past 20 years, our adversaries have sought to advance their interests at our expense while operating below our political red lines. In chapter 1, "Starting with Why" highlighted the difference between threat-based and interest-based campaigning and offered a depiction and suggested categorization of U.S. interests. However, as "Harnessing David and Goliath," "Strategy and Competition," and "Between Competition and Global War" illustrate, we must evolve our concept of

deterrence based on a better understanding of our real interests and competitive advantages.

In other words, we cannot compete by deterrence alone nor will a traditional understanding of deterrence gain us the competitive advantage we seek to secure our interests. Because the U.S. has been successful in executing a strategy of deterrence to protect our vital interests, our adversaries have developed approaches to obviate or avoid our strategic approaches and operational strengths in pursuit of their goals. From Russia in Europe to Iran in Yemen to China in the South China Sea—our would-be adversaries are willing practitioners of campaigns of disinformation, deception, sabotage, and economic coercion as well as proxy, guerrilla, and covert operations. This highlights the growing gap in U.S. strategy, a gap which will continue to grow as power diffuses to a broader range of actors who choose not to be deterred by conventional or nuclear superiority. As we expand the competitive space, we must also expand the traditional understanding of deterrence.

The red lines and accepted roles of strategic deterrence forces, especially nuclear forces, will continue to set the parameters for the competition arena. Because they establish a threshold for intolerable acts of violence and political or economic disruption, the competitive space below the level of nuclear and large-scale conventional war is bound by adversaries' risk perceptions the closer they act to that threshold. Put simply, a successful strategy for competition must expand the threshold for strategic deterrence to include activities that threaten or undermine U.S. interests below the level of armed conflict. Expanding deterrence is also necessary for relevance in an age of competition. We must develop a deterrent suite of options beyond just conventional and nuclear forces to include the full spectrum of national power, innovative applications of conventional forces, and dynamic use of population-centric influence. SOF can generate such deterrent-expanding options in competition to strengthen the U.S. strategic advantage and enable other instruments of U.S. national power—such as diplomacy, information, finance, or law enforcement—to prevent conflict.

Leveraging Instruments of Power: Interagency, Conventional Forces, and SOF

An interest-based strategy for competition must unify the joint force and other elements of national power (grand strategy) in the pursuit of influence

and advantages which can be leveraged to promote or protect U.S. interests. In parallel, it must preclude any fait accompli roads to war attempted by adversaries by ensuring decision-makers have the requisite options to navigate the security environment successfully toward our interests. The National Defense Strategy makes clear that the military's relationship with its interagency partners is critical to success:

> A long-term strategic competition requires the seamless integration of multiple elements of national power: diplomacy, information, economics, finance, intelligence, law enforcement, and military. Our government partners are often the lead in key competition areas … The military, for its part, must continue to fulfill its role of deterrence, but must also consider ways to apply the military instrument differently to better enable diplomatic, information, and economic elements of power.[20]

While the joint force must maintain strategic deterrence and continue to prepare for high-end conflict, it must also find innovative ways to support other elements of national power in peacetime conditions. Perhaps most critically, the joint force must integrate and unify its approach with civilian counterparts across the interagency—from planning through execution to assessment. SOF, as an integral part of the joint force, have the skillset to serve a primary role in competition below the level of armed conflict. However, this requires a shift from a singular focus on warfighting to a unified and balanced approach to competition—including support to the interagency. SOF are uniquely positioned to advance U.S. interests in discrete operations with the conventional force, interagency, or on their own.

Conclusion: A More Perfect Union

In today's era of competition, campaigns and operations should focus on advancing U.S. interests over defeating threats and apply competition principles described in this article to improve the likelihood of success. These principles should be applied through a reliance on the value proposition SOF provide for enabling joint force and interagency partners in the current strategic environment.

To protect U.S. interests, SOF must evolve from a counterterrorism element to a fundamental part of a unified effort to gain influence, advantage,

and leverage. While the joint force deters adversaries from large-scale conventional military actions, SOF leverage access, placement, capabilities, and relationships to cultivate foreign relations, maintain a global defense posture, support diplomatic and intelligence actions, and help drive our rivals into the horns of a dilemma, leaving nothing but difficult options in the competitive space below the level of war.

Decision-makers who adapt to change with flexibility and agility can expand options to better achieve effects and exploit opportunities in the strategic environment. SOF are in a unique position to generate influence and advantage around the world. Support to the joint force, the interagency, and allies and partners serves a key role in competition. In support of national interests and objectives, the value proposition of SOF brings a more perfect union to the other instruments of national power our nation can bring to bear against its most pressing and enduring challenges.

Endnotes

1. Joint Chiefs of Staff, "Competition Continuum," Note 1-19 (2019), https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/jdn_jg/jdn1_19.pdf.
2. Questions about optimal design of military forces undergird U.S. Department of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America: Sharpening the American Military's Competitive Edge* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, 2018), https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf. Understanding this theory for competition can shift American strategic thought towards proper alignment of ends, ways, and means instead of falling into the false logic that operations, activities, and investments (OAIs) are strategic ways because they consume resources (means). In this theoretical construct for competition, means are now the influence and advantage generated by OAIs; ways are how influence, advantage, and instruments of national power are leveraged to generate strategic effects or promote and protect interests (ends). This fundamental shift deserves emphasis—bad strategy can lead to equating resources with accomplishing strategic ends. Under a bad strategy perspective, reducing resources might imply a requirement to constrain the strategic ends. More likely however, the need for the military to reduce resources is because national interests have expanded and other departments and agencies require resources to generate strategic means for whole of government approaches. (For more on bad strategy see Jeffrey W. Meiser, "Are Our Strategic Models Flawed? Ends + Ways + Means = (Bad) Strategy," *Parameters* 46, no. 4 (Winter 2016–17).
3. "Long term strategic competitions with China and Russia are the principal priorities for the Department … A long-term strategic competition requires the

seamless integration of multiple elements of national power … More than any other nation, America can expand the competitive space, seizing the initiative to challenge our competitors where we possess advantage and they lack strength." See U.S. Department of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy*.

4. This definition of competition has evolved through the authors' publications in this competition series. U.S. Special Operations Command will formally advocate for this definition's inclusion in joint publications. The Defense Department's lack of an approved definition of the term competition results in an inability to communicate to interagency and international partners what the idea means. To date, this lack of a shared lexicon inhibits communication and the unified action needed to implement the National Defense Strategy. This definition reflects the centrality of interests and the significance of the related concepts of influence, advantage, and leverage in competition short of armed conflict. See Joe Miller, Monte Erfourth, Jeremiah Monk, and Ryan Oliver, "Harnessing David and Goliath: Orthodoxy, Asymmetry, and Competition," *Small Wars Journal*, 7 February 2019, https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/harnessing-david-and-goliath-orthodoxy-asymmetry-and-competition.
5. Miller et al., "Harnessing David and Goliath."
6. Terry L. Deibel, *Foreign Affairs Strategy: Logic for American Statecraft* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
7. Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (Washington, D.C.: The Joint Chiefs of Staff, January 2021, https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/dictionary.pdf?ver=2020-01-24-100230-123, defines leverage, "In the context of planning, a relative advantage in combat power and/or other circumstances against the enemy or adversary across any variable within or impacting the operational environment sufficient to exploit that advantage." The proposed competition definition emphasizes the "other circumstances ... across any variable" aspect of leverage.
8. This is described in Joint Chiefs of Staff, "Competition Continuum."
9. Comprehensive blending of civilian and military tools (all elements of power) and enforcing cooperation between government departments is not only for operations but more broadly to compete with actors whose interests are not aligned with one's own.
10. Special operations require unique methods of employment defined by tactical techniques, equipment, and training and are often conducted with and through indigenous forces, leveraging personal relationships and regional expertise. Special operations occur under conditions that are often time-sensitive, clandestine, require low visibility, and involve a high degree of risk (political, mission, or force); they take place in hostile, denied, or politically sensitive environments. Special operations are not often war-winning, but when combined with the many and varied capabilities of our interagency partners and the other globally oriented combatant commands—space, cyber, strike and transportation—they provide a

range of options that offer the Joint Force significant advantages in competition and conflict.

11. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning*, 2018, https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/concepts/joint_concept_integrated_campaign.pdf?ver=2018-03-28-102833-257.
12. The *Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning* (JCIC) defines integrated campaigning as "Joint Force and interorganizational partner efforts to enable the achievement and maintenance of policy aims by integrating military activities and aligning non-military activities of sufficient scope, scale, simultaneity, and duration across multiple domains." The JCIC provides this definition and further explanation of integrated campaigning in competition.
13. For example, Hal Brands identifies twelve principles for competition in "The Lost Art of Long-Term Competition," *The Washington Quarterly* 41, no. 4 (Winter 2019): 31–51. "1) Have a theory of victory. 2) Leverage asymmetric advantage. 3) Get on the right side of the cost curve. 4) Embrace ideological competition. 5) Compete comprehensively and holistically. 6) Operate multilaterally to win bilaterally. 7) Exploit the strategic importance of time. 8) Know your competition intimately. 9) Institutionalize a capability to look forward as well as backward. 10) Understand that long-term competition is a test of systems. 11) Pace yourself. 12) Competition and confrontation are not synonymous."
14. Kristen Hajduk, "Special Operations Forces: Let SOF Be SOF," *Defense360*, 21 December 2016, https://defense360.csis.org/special-operations-forces-let-sof-be-sof/.
15. B.H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy* (1991), https://books.google.com/books/about/Strategy.html?id=pilmQgAACAAJAs. Hart articulates that an indirect approach "orients upon, targets, and upsets an adversary's equilibrium or balance" because a direct approach, on its own, will usually produce negative if not counterproductive results. The indirect approach can be the nuanced scalpel of force application, especially in politically sensitive or clandestine environments within relevant populations, opposed to the direct and overt sledgehammer inviting escalation spirals. Liddell Hart goes on to say, "while the strength of an enemy country lies outwardly in its numbers and resources, these are fundamentally dependent upon stability or 'equilibrium' of control, morale, and supply."
16. Miller et al., "Harnessing David and Goliath."
17. Unorthodox punitive options should adhere to three principles: a) leaders must separately consider the effect on the targeted actor and the effect on the domestic U.S. audience; b) leaders must set limited objectives for the punitive action; and c) leaders must target recoverable assets yielding only a short-term effect rather than causing more permanent destruction or disruption.
18. Deterrence theory suggests that one actor can discourage another from acting by convincing the latter that its actions will either fail or provoke retaliation—in other words, deterrence by denial or by punishment.
19. This discussion of deterrence is informed by William Kaufman and Michael Gerson. See William Kaufman, "The Requirements of Deterrence," in *Military*

Policy and National Security (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956), 12–38; and Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Strategic Deterrence Joint Operating Concept*, 2006, 33–35, https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/concepts/joc_deterrence.pdf?ver=2017-12-28-162015-3377.

20. U.S. Department of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy*.

Acronyms

AI	artificial intelligence
AIS	automated information system
C2	command and control
CID	Committee of Imperial Defence
COSC	Chiefs of Staff Committee
CT	counterterrorism
CTF	counter threat finance
C-UW	counter-unconventional warfare
C-VEO	counter-violent extremist organization
CWO	Chief Warrant Officer
DIA	Defense Intelligence Agency
DNI	digital network interface
DOD	Department of Defense
DOS	Department of State
DSS	Defense Support to Stabilization
FID	foreign internal defense
FO	Foreign Office
GCC	Geographic Combatant Command
GEC	Global Engagement Center
GIS	global information system
HEAT	host enabled access team
HUD	head-up display
IA	interagency

IFOD	Integrated Finance Operations Division
IJA	Imperial Japanese Army
IJN	Imperial Japanese Navy
IW	irregular warfare
JCIC	joint concept for integrated campaigning
JDN	Joint Doctrine Note
NDS	National Defense Strategy
NSS	National Security Strategy
PNT	position, navigation, and timing
RN	Royal Navy
SF	special forces
SFA	security force assistance
SOF	Special Operations Forces
SOUTHCOM	United States Southern Command
TSOC	Theater Special Operations Command
UCP	unified command plan
UD	unconventional deterrence
USG	U.S. Government
USINDOPACOM	U.S. Indo-Pacific Command
USMC	U.S. Marine Corps
USSOCOM	U.S. Special Operations Command
UW	unconventional warfare
VEO	violent extremist organization
VUCA	volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous
WMD	weapons of mass destruction