



JFQ

Joint Force Quarterly

Issue 106, 3rd Quarter 2022

Cyber in the Shadows

Insights from Insurgent Groups

Deterrence Without Escalation

Joint Force Quarterly

Founded in 1993 • Vol. 106, 3rd Quarter 2022
<https://ndupress.ndu.edu>

GEN Mark A. Milley, USA, Publisher

Lt Gen Michael T. Plehn, USAF, President, NDU

Editor in Chief

Col William T. Eliason, USAF (Ret.), Ph.D.

Executive Editor

Jeffrey D. Smotherman, Ph.D.

Senior Editor and Director of Art

John J. Church, D.M.A.

Internet Publications Editor

Joanna E. Seich

Copyeditors

Andrea L. Connell
Shira Klapper
Caroline Schweiter

Book Review Editor

Brett Swaney

Creative Director

John Mitrione, *U.S. Government Publishing Office*

Advisory Committee

RADM Shoshana S. Chatfield, USN/U.S. Naval War College; BG Joy L. Curriera, USA/Dwight D. Eisenhower School for National Security and Resource Strategy; Col Lee G. Gentile, Jr., USAF/Air Command and Staff College; Ambassador (Ret.) Greta C. Holtz/College of International Security Affairs; Brig Gen Jeffrey H. Hurlbert, USAF/National War College; Cassandra C. Lewis, Ph.D./College of Information and Cyberspace; MG Stephen J. Maranian, USA/U.S. Army War College; LTG Theodore D. Martin, USA/U.S. Army Command and General Staff College; BG Voris McBurnette, USAR/Joint Forces Staff College; VADM Stuart B. Munsch, USN/The Joint Staff; LTG Andrew P. Poppas, USA/The Joint Staff; Brig Gen Michael T. Rawls, USAF/Air War College; Col Blair Sokol, USMC/Marine Corps War College; Col Bradford W. Tippet, USMC/Marine Corps Command and Staff College

Editorial Board

Richard K. Betts/Columbia University; Eliot A. Cohen/The Johns Hopkins University; Richard L. DiNardo/Marine Corps Command and Staff College; Aaron L. Friedberg/Princeton University; Bryon Greenwald/National Defense University; COL James E. Hayes, USA/National War College; Douglas N. Hime/Naval War College; Paul J. Springer/Air Command and Staff College; Bert B. Tussing/U.S. Army War College

Cover 2 images (top to bottom): Air Force Band members perform for Moody Heritage Ball at Moody Air Force Base, Georgia, November 6, 2021 (U.S. Air Force/Katie Tamesis); Members of "The President's Own" Marine Band stand at ease as Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III welcomes Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal to Pentagon, Washington, DC, April 21, 2022 (DOD/Brittany A. Chase); Army Reserve Sergeant Christine Won, flutist with 78th Army Band, performs in Battle of the Bands competition at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey, April 9, 2022 (U.S. Army Reserve/Therese Prats)



In This Issue

Forum

- 2 Executive Summary
- 4 Cyber in the Shadows: Why the Future of Cyber Operations Will Be Covert
By Richard L. Manley
- 11 Overcoming Barriers to Institutional Learning: Insights from Insurgent Groups
By Nicholas A. Dudek
- 22 The Rules of the Game: Great Power Competition and International Law
By Durward Elton Johnson

Commentary

- 32 Insights on Theater Command and Control from the Creation of Allied Force Headquarters
By J. Bryan Mullins
- 43 Ghosts of Tsushima or Kobayashi Maru? Japan's Problematic Preoccupation with Decisive Naval Battles in World War II
By Michael W. Major

Features

- 52 Moving Past the Name: Focusing on Practical Implementation of the India-U.S. Strategic Relationship
By Nicholas O. Melin
- 63 U.S. Forces Korea's Operation *Kill the Virus*: Combating COVID-19 Together and Sustaining Readiness
By Sharon Y. Kim, Kenny Lee, Jason B. Tussey, Eric J. Dougherty, Derek C. Cooper, Douglas A. Lougee, Talib Y. Ali, Michael J. Fea, Michael I. Cohen, Stephen C. Williams, Robert B. Abrams, and Clinton K. Murray



About the Cover

Naval Air Crewman (Helicopter) 1st Class Dylan McCallum, assigned to "Wranglers" of Naval Air Station Lemoore Search and Rescue, prepares to rappel during search and rescue training exercise, Lemoore, California, July 13, 2021 (U.S. Navy/Shannon Renfro)

Recall

- 71 Deterrence Without Escalation: Fresh Insights into U.S. Decisionmaking During Operation *Earnest Will*
By Richard A. Mobley

Book Reviews

- 82 AI at War
Reviewed by Frank Hoffman
- 83 Sandworm
Reviewed by Janine Lafortune
- 84 This Is Not Propaganda
Reviewed by Jeffrey Mankoff

Joint Doctrine

- 86 The Integrated "Nonwar" in Vietnam
By Christopher Sims
- 96 Joint Doctrine Update

Joint Force Quarterly is published by the National Defense University Press for the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. *JFQ* is the Chairman's flagship joint military and security studies journal designed to inform members of the U.S. Armed Forces, allies, and other partners on joint and integrated operations; national security policy and strategy; efforts to combat terrorism; homeland security; and developments in training and joint professional military education to transform America's military and security apparatus to meet tomorrow's challenges better while protecting freedom today. All published articles have been vetted through a peer-review process and cleared by the Defense Office of Prepublication and Security Review.

NDU Press is the National Defense University's cross-component, professional military and academic publishing house.

The opinions, conclusions, and recommendations expressed or implied within are those of the contributors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Defense or any other agency of the Federal Government.

Copyright Notice

This is the official U.S. Department of Defense edition of *Joint Force Quarterly*. Any copyrighted portions of this journal may not be reproduced or extracted without permission of the copyright proprietors. *JFQ* should be acknowledged whenever material is quoted from or based on its content.

Submissions and Communications

JFQ welcomes submission of scholarly, independent research from members of the Armed Forces, security policymakers and shapers, defense analysts, academic specialists, and civilians from the United States and abroad. Submit articles for consideration to ScholarOne, available at <https://mc04.manuscriptcentral.com/ndupress>, or write to:

Editor, *Joint Force Quarterly*

NDU Press
300 Fifth Avenue
Fort Lesley J. McNair
Washington, DC 20319
Telephone: (202) 685-4220/DSN 325
Email: JFQ1@ndu.edu
JFQ online: ndupress.ndu.edu/jfq
3rd Quarter, July 2022
ISSN 1070-0692



Joint Advanced Warfighting School students and faculty listen as Alexandra de Hoop Scheffer, director of Paris office of German Marshall Fund of the United States, presents "The Transatlantic Relationship Following Russia's Invasion of Ukraine," in May 2022, at Hôtel de Talleyrand, George C. Marshall Center, Paris, France (Joint Forces Staff College/Mary S. Bell)

Executive Summary

Seventy-five years and counting of educating our military, and of late increasing numbers of government civilians and international military partners, have made an indelible mark on the ability of the U.S. joint force to fight and win our nation's wars and every other mission assigned to it. Long before the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986, this educational mission is what two of the National Defense University's colleges, the National War College and the

Joint Forces Staff College, have been doing since the immediate post-World War II period. Readers will remember we provided a great article celebrating the National War College's 70th Anniversary in *JFQ* 87. The Joint Forces Staff College (JFSC) in Norfolk, Virginia, celebrated last summer to commemorate its founding on August 13, 1946. In June of this year, it again celebrated with the induction of new members of the college's Hall of Fame. JFSC, originally the Armed Forces

Staff College, was the idea of General Dwight Eisenhower and Admiral Chester Nimitz to find a way to forge a more effective fighting force based on the difficult lessons of World War II. Forty years later, the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 solidified this idea of jointness and made it the law of the land.

The Nation's professional military education institutions have this joint requirement as an integral part of their

missions, but I would offer that none is so deeply dedicated to making our midgrade officers advocates of optimizing the capabilities of the Services as the “purple” JFSC. One of the National Defense University’s five colleges, JFSC’s mission has evolved over the 75 years but remains focused on jointness as the college is dedicated “to educate national security professionals to plan and execute operational-level joint, multinational, and interagency operations to instill a primary commitment to joint, multinational, and interagency teamwork, attitudes, and perspectives.”

That second part of the mission is worth a few words. Each student at any staff or war college comes to the seminar table having accomplished many important qualifications and achievements. All have come from a Service, agency, or nation that has its own traditions, culture, missions, and history. Joint education does not seek to remove those thoughts or perceptions from the minds of the students. Quite the contrary, joint education is designed to show each student the value that he or she brings to the discussion. Even the most ardent supporter of one’s military Service cannot honestly assess warfighting today and show how that Service, or nation for that matter, can win a war by itself. Joint and combined operations lie at the heart of successful accomplishment of strategy that involves the military instrument of power. I welcome any author who can successfully challenge this fact. Services may be proponents of their operational concepts and budgets to bring capabilities to achieve those visions, but in the end, the way of war, as the United States has learned to fight it, rests clearly on our ability to work together for a common end.

Those of you who are more than casual readers of *JFQ* will have noticed that quite a few of our articles have multiple military officers, and those that do are likely teams from JFSC. I estimate 40 percent or so of our submissions come from the college, and I believe that is both a robust and continuing result of the efforts contributed by the leadership, faculty, and staff of that little purple college. What better evidence

of the positive and enduring impact of the college’s efforts to achieve its mission, save the graduates’ work itself, than seeing its graduates’ and faculty’s thinking expressed so publicly. I offer that jointness must be constantly taught and never taken for granted or marked as “done.” To achieve the vision of Ike, Nimitz, General David Jones, Secretary Colin Powell, Senator Barry Goldwater, Representatives Bill Nichols, Ike Skelton, Owen Pickett, and all those who saw the better way to fight and win the nations wars, JFSC continues to help everyone who serves achieve mission success as it helps the next generation of joint leaders do so “That All May Labor as One.”

This edition’s Forum offers discussions on future cyber operations, learning within insurgent groups, and how law powerfully affects Great Power competition. In making the case that future cyber operations will be covert, Richard Manley sees the cyber advantage as being with weaker actors. In an interesting article especially for joint educators, Nicholas Dudek takes us inside the learning methods and practices used by al-Shabaab in recent conflicts in Somalia and Ethiopia that could be adopted by our education and training organizations. Law and warfare are a rising discussion area especially in the professional military education classroom, and Durward Johnson helps us see the nexus between international law and Great Power competition.

Commentary authors take us to the heart of classic discussions from World War II operations. Getting Allies to fight together has always had great advantages, especially in Europe, and these benefits find their way into how the war is controlled, as J. Bryan Mullins describes his insights on command and control at Eisenhower’s Allied Force Headquarters. Seeking to understand warfighting from the defeated enemy’s perspective is as ancient as war itself. Providing some useful insights to how contemporary challengers on the high seas might see events unfolding, Michael Major shows us how Japan’s military leaders viewed their options as they attempted to control their naval power.

Our Features section delivers on two important and timely topics. As the United States looks to balance its global security interests, Nicholas Melin suggests some practical steps to the continuing development of the U.S.-India relationship. For those who are looking at how other allies and partners dealt with the COVID-19 pandemic, Sharon Kim, Kenny Lee, Jason Tussey, Eric Dougherty, Derek Cooper, Douglas Lougee, Talib Ali, Michael Fea, Michael Cohen, Stephen Williams, Robert Abrams, and Clinton Murray team up to describe how U.S. Forces Korea worked with the Republic of Korea to assure U.S. readiness to “fight tonight” was maintained.

In Recall, we take you back to the 1980s for a different kind of operation in the Persian Gulf. Long before Iraq became a central stage of our nation’s wars, the Gulf region was the place where U.S. and our partners’ deterrence strategies were tested. Richard Mobley has done some important work taking us inside the U.S. decisionmaking of Operation *Earnest Will*, an operation to reflag and protect Kuwaiti tankers where the balancing act of using deterrence and preventing escalation to war played out. Going even further back in time to how operations in Vietnam could have been better adapted to conditions on the ground, Christopher Sims takes us into the details of the 1966 Program for the Pacification and Long-Term Development of Vietnam (PROVN) as a case study for future operations as discussed in Joint Publication 3-0, *Operations*. Tracking today’s Joint Doctrine developments is easy with our update and you will find three informative book reviews to help you dive deeper into the national security issues of the world today.

As always, we hope you have gained from what our authors have offered here, especially if it achieves our mission of helping the cause of jointness as JFSC has done for more than 75 years. *JFQ*

—William T. Eliason,
Editor in Chief



Technical Sergeant Jochen Emrich with 189th Airlift Wing Communications Flight assesses real world cyber threats, December 5, 2021, at Little Rock Air Force Base, Arkansas (U.S. Air National Guard/Jonathan Porter)

Cyber in the Shadows

Why the Future of Cyber Operations Will Be Covert

By Richard L. Manley

Current cyber conflict looks very similar to traditional conflict models. The difference from traditional power dynamics offered by the cyber domain, however, is the asymmetrical advantage of technology for would-be actors. This new element of national power allows weaker actors

Special Forces Chief Warrant Officer 3 Richard L. Manley, USA, is a Candidate for a Master of Science in Defense Analysis at the Naval Postgraduate School.

to “punch above their weight” in competition or conflict with Great Powers in a unipolar or multipolar world. John Arquilla describes this new environment as an “information revolution” that “implies the rise of cyber war, in which neither mass nor mobility will decide outcomes.”¹ Continuing in the spirit of Ivan Arreguín-Toft’s strategic interaction theory, cyber operations allow significant latitude for strong actors to compete indirectly, short of physical conflict in the traditional

sense.² Cyber also allows weak actors to impose costs against strong actors without incurring significant risk. Strong actors continue to integrate the effects achieved in the cyber domain into their doctrinal foreign policy, whether militarily or otherwise, to maximize layered effects. The outcomes of the new competitive space of cyber have been theorized for decades now, but what makes prediction difficult is the pace of innovation and the change in available technology.

This article discusses the effects of cyber operations on the strategic interaction of actors in the cyber domain, gives examples of the use of cyber in Great Power competition, and explains how cyber operations offer an asymmetric advantage to weaker actors. It focuses on works by Keir Giles, Austin Carson and Keren Yarhi-Milo, and Ryan Maness and Margarita Jaitner toward the use of cyber operations by revisionist state actors such as the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China. It demonstrates how cyber allows these actors to "play a weak hand well" in support of their respective theories of hybrid warfare and unrestricted warfare. Moving on from revisionist states, this article gives examples of strategic interaction in the cyber domain by rogue states such as North Korea by describing the asymmetric advantage that nation enjoys as the weaker actor in a struggle with South Korea and the United States. Works from Hyeong-wook Boo, Ellen Nakashima, and Paul Sonne enable explanation of how cyber operations allow rogue states to apply pressure on adversaries without necessarily advancing conventional conflict. Finally, in contrast to Arquilla, this article takes the position that, despite the asymmetrical advantages offered by cyber operations, their future use will necessarily be clandestine or covert to avoid crossing the threshold of armed conflict.

Revisionist State Operations

As the Russian Federation continues expansionist aims to its west to thwart North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) expansion in Eastern Europe, the Kremlin understands that the Alliance can mass more combat power and enjoys a spending advantage, should it unite with Eastern European nations. To combat this outcome, Russia has incorporated technology into its traditional form of "active measures" to ensure that psychological operations provide it a deceptive advantage. This ability to use political and psychological warfare allows Russia to create doubt in the minds of both Allies and aspirants. For example, during the incursion into Ukraine in 2014, "Russians cleverly

used SMS messages to text Ukrainian frontline troops to demoralize their frontline forces—which even include[d] references to their wives and children back in Kyiv."³ Adaptation of cyber tactics creates a definite psychological advantage for Russian forces against a distracted and potentially demoralized combatant on the battlefield. By shaping the battlefield through cyber-enabled information operations, Russia can prevent consolidation of an opposing ally's military power and create doubt within alliances.

These strong-arm tactics are not limited only to military capability but are also on full display in the political warfare arena. Russia's efforts to deploy active measures during the 2016 U.S. elections are well reported, and the latent effect is a lasting doubt in the minds of many Americans regarding the validity of the U.S. system. Maness and Jaitner explain that "Russian political interference is about keeping an adversary nation domestically divided for a long period of time. Russia looks to spread division, exacerbate any conflict possible, and ultimately destabilize the political system and erode trust in the government and institutions."⁴ Moscow has used this strategy of sowing distrust for decades, but the advantages afforded by the cyber environment will ensure these efforts continue aggressively unless checked.

Along with Russia, China seeks to upset global norms through incorporation of cyber operations. China's concept of unrestricted warfare allows it to combine all elements of national power to pressure opponents, and incorporation of cyber operations certainly allows China to dictate the pace of that competition. After an internal recognition that it was falling behind technologically, the Chinese Communist Party began a worldwide campaign of intellectual property theft to artificially advance its technological horizons. Today, China aggressively targets U.S. military contractors and infrastructure, seeking to improve its capabilities. In his nomination hearing to lead U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, Admiral Philip S. Davidson explained, the "Chinese are investing in

a range of platforms, including quieter submarines armed with increasingly sophisticated weapons and new sensors. . . . What they cannot develop on their own, they steal—often through cyberspace."⁵ These comments came on the heels of a Chinese hack of a "trove of highly sensitive data on submarine warfare," highlighting the seriousness of Chinese hacking.⁶ Despite U.S. pressure and diplomatic interactions, China seems poised to continue its online espionage practices while relying on the entanglement of competitors' economies with its own as security against decisive action to counter it. China's willingness to aggressively use technology to monitor and control its citizens internally while exporting similar technologies to would-be authoritarian states should make these efforts particularly concerning to free nations.

Rogue Actors and Asymmetrical Advantage

Rogue states, such as North Korea and Iran as well as violent extremist organizations, count on the asymmetric advantage offered by operations in cyber space, though with differing levels of success. North Korea's coercive efforts to strong-arm Sony in 2014 led to international recognition that a weak actor can find avenues of coercion in cyber, even if the stated goal of limiting release of the movie *The Interview* failed. But this widely reported attack is a small piece of what Hyeong-wook Boo describes as "very sophisticated cyber attacks against South Korea and the United States. Starting from simple DDoS [distributed denial-of-service] attacks on popular websites and e-mail hacking, their cyber offensive operations adopted advanced technologies called . . . Advanced Persistent Threat."⁷ These aggressive attacks are part of North Korea's strategic interaction with a stronger actor. Such risky operations by rogue states are allowed to continue because the stronger actor wishes to keep conflict low. The risk taken by rogue states in the cyber realm is that these operations hinge on the stronger actor's desire to maintain a low-conflict state. Should the strong actor determine

that it is no longer in its interest to allow such activities, and that direct conflict would provide a better alternative to absorbing attacks, the weaker actor cannot hope to prevail. The consequence is that cyber operations must necessarily exist under a threshold of acceptable violence, which limits the decisiveness of a cyber campaign.

Future of Cyber Operations: Movement Toward “Covertness”

The ability to use cyber operations as a shaping mechanism toward a desired policy will require the ability to plausibly deny the actor’s involvement. This interaction has been described as the “frontstage and backstage” of international relations where an “action [that] may be unseen or misunderstood by people only viewing the *frontstage* carries amplifying messaging and signaling to those with *backstage* access.”⁸ The full implication of an action or event is better understood by those with understanding of the backstage who can receive the full message. In this way, a form of communication can take place between a target and a sponsor who remains nonattributed to the activity.

This explains how a stronger actor can incorporate cyber operations into an overall deterrence strategy, but how can a weaker actor hope to accomplish decisive actions in the cyber realm? Because the weak actor is, by definition, less powerful across the spectrum of diplomatic, informational, military, and economic capacity than a stronger competitor, its operations can only exist under an acceptable threshold of violence or pressure. When a strong actor determines that it is no longer in its best interest to allow a weak actor to compete in the cyber realm, what is the weak actor’s response? John Gartzke explains

the relative risk factor of cyber attacks is “low mainly because those who have the power to intervene to stop or punish irritant behavior often do not have the motivation to do so.”⁹ This article’s position on the growing need to hide cyber activities draws heavily from Gartzke’s works revisiting the stability-instability paradox. The distinction lies in the credibility of the weaker actor’s capacity to address the response of the stronger. Carson and Yarhi-Milo explain that “covert action is intelligible because it contains a range of salient, qualitative thresholds that are mutually meaningful as symbols of a sponsor’s resolve,” but they stress that these signals must be “believable.”¹⁰ The degree to which a weak actor can credibly signal resolve to a strong actor plays a significant role in defining the stability (or instability) of their interaction.

Stability-Instability Paradox in Cyber

Much of Cold War deterrence theory was built on the concept of mutually assured destruction. Because the consequences of full-scale conflict between nuclear powers were so great, nuclear actors understood that their nuclear might was essentially not a viable strategy except for its deterrent effect. From that deterrent effect was born the stability-instability paradox, which posited that “scaling up nuclear deterrence might actually increase freedom of action at lower levels of violence.”¹¹ From this paradox, Professor Glenn Snyder considered the strategic interaction between the United States and the Soviet Union by hypothesizing that the “Soviets probably feel, considering the massive retaliation threat alone, that there is a range of minor ventures which they can undertake with impunity, despite the

objective existence of some probability of retaliation.”¹² Because the consequences of action taken to prevent these low-intensity conflicts were so great, the strategic actors naturally settled into a competitive environment where offensive actions were allowed provided that an acceptable threshold was not crossed. The question of the time was: What exactly is the acceptable threshold and how far could an adversary be pushed?

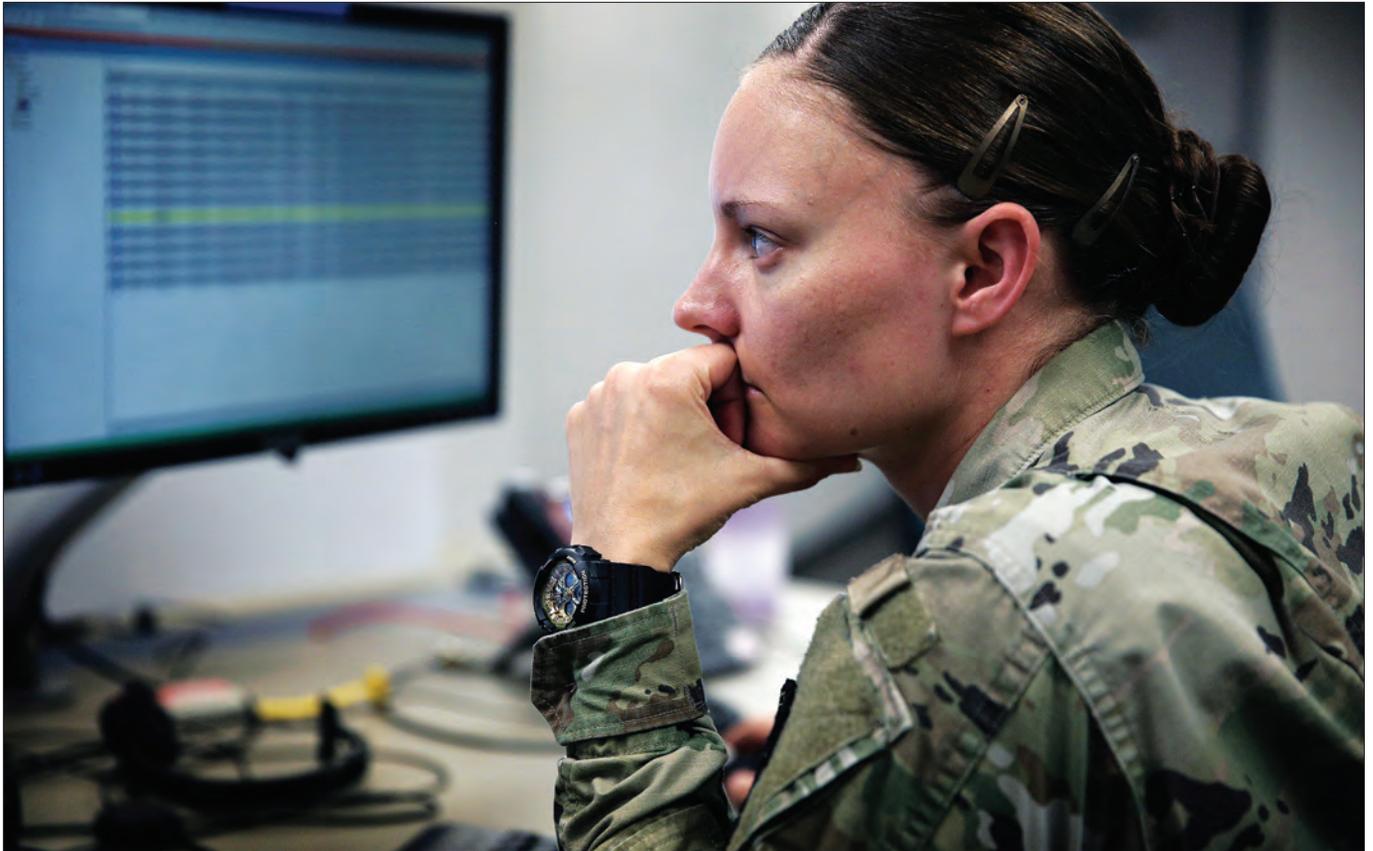
Recently, Gartzke revisited the stability-instability paradox by applying it to the cyber environment. Table 1 interprets that application as it relates to the “covertness” of cyber operations. Assuming the model is true, the following logic unfolds related to the future of cyber operations:

- The United States, as the unipolar actor, can continue to set the terms of cyber operations. When seeking to influence revisionists who are relatively strong and can retaliate, the United States can find an advantage in covertness, provided the backstage message is received. When dealing with rogues, the United States can conduct operations overtly, if desired, to send a clear message for deterrence or covertly if targeting a specific objective or individual. The United States will also dictate the acceptable threshold of activities by determining which cyber attacks it is willing to absorb, and where its cyber “red lines” for retaliation (physical attack) exist.
- Revisionist actors seeking to influence the United States should develop appropriate covert solutions through use of proxies and surrogates to allow for plausible deniability and should ensure their

Table 1. Strategic Interaction Model in Cyber

	Strong Actor	Weak Actor
Strong Actor	Covert interaction in cyber	Overt interaction in cyber
Weak Actor	Covert interaction in cyber	Either covert or overt interaction in cyber

Source: Adapted from Michael Krepon, “The Stability-Instability Paradox,” *Arms Control Wonk*, November 2, 2010, available at <<https://www.armscontrolwonk.com/archive/402911/the-stability-instability-paradox/>>.



U.S. Cyber Command Cyber National Mission Force member participates in training and readiness exercise at Fort George G. Meade, Maryland, May 24, 2021 (U.S. Army/Josef Cole)

cyber operations remain under the U.S. thresholds for overt retaliation. In competition with one another or with rogue actors, revisionists can operate either covertly or overtly, depending on the relative conventional strength of their opponent.

- Rogue actors should seek to remain as covert as possible, except in those instances where they determine that public support may limit conventional retaliation from a stronger actor. An example of this is the Sony hack perpetrated by North Korea. While it did not achieve its fully intended aims, North Korea did send a deterrent message to its adversaries and messaged its capabilities effectively.

Cyber Brinkmanship

In October 1962, the two global multipolar superpowers came to the absolute brink of nuclear war over missiles in Cuba. Each world leader faced

a seemingly unwavering adversary, and neither John F. Kennedy nor Nikita Khrushchev appeared to have any incentive to compromise first, short of preventing the end of modern civilization. Each nuclear superpower needed to demonstrate to the other and its populace that the terms of competition were being redefined. This redefinition nearly ended the world. What followed after this crisis was a recognition that conflict in the nuclear world was to be different—that superpowers seeking to damage one another had new consequences, and new rules to the game were necessary. The result was an era of covert activities that would allow for indirect pressure while avoiding direct pain. Neither side wanted to repeat the flare-up of the Cuban Missile Crisis, and so both settled into a covert status quo.

Considering the lessons of the beginning of the nuclear age, it seems appropriate to consider similar conditions most likely to exist in the digital

age. A period of “feeling out” each other’s capabilities seems natural as new norms and standards are defined. It is also natural to assume that some level of brinkmanship will take place in relation to cyber capability. In a piece for *Wired* magazine in August 2019, Andy Greenberg asserted that this brinkmanship is already taking place:

Over the past weekend, the New York Times reported that U.S. Cyber Command has penetrated more deeply than ever before into Russian electric utilities, planting malware potentially capable of disrupting the grid, perhaps as a retaliatory measure meant to deter further cyberattacks by the country’s hackers. But judging by Russia’s response, news of the grid-hacking campaign may have already had the immediate opposite effect. The Kremlin warned that the intrusions could escalate into a cyberwar between the two countries, even as it claimed that Russia’s grid was immune from such threats.¹³

The implications of cyber attacks against civilian utility grids are especially concerning based on the risk of widespread loss of innocent lives; while not as outright deadly as a nuclear attack, the level of damage and the follow-on effects are incalculable if conducted in an escalatory fashion. While Russia has folded cyber attacks on a limited to moderate scale into its hybrid warfare strategy, as demonstrated in the Crimea annexation of 2014, neither side fully understands the implications of these types of infrastructure attacks against a peer competitor.

Greenberg goes on to explain that the risk of this cyber brinkmanship may have been brought on by an effort from the Trump administration to signal a deterrent capability to the Russians. Former Homeland Security Advisor Tom Bossert explains that the potential for escalation is particularly important given our own vulnerabilities to attacks on the grid: “If you’re doused in

gasoline, don’t start a match-throwing contest.”¹⁴ Herein lies another paradox: How does one signal covert capability? What is the appropriate method to demonstrate a secret?

Covertess Limits Brinkmanship

Since the dawn of the nuclear age, covert action has been the “third option” for policymakers requiring a response to an adversary with whom war is impossible or too costly. According to Carson and Yarhi-Milo, “Using covert action to signal resolve can also appear credible because of its impact on the risk of crisis escalation.”¹⁵ This principle has allowed nuclear superpowers to compete with deniability, thus limiting the escalatory impacts of conflict and allowing one another a way out. Examples of this behavior in cyber space are beginning to emerge. The unclaimed Stuxnet attack on an Iranian nuclear subterfuge facility and

Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. Presidential election are both examples of nation-state competition in the covert cyber realm. These examples demonstrate the potential of direct covert cyber operations to allow flexibility in policy while affecting an adversary’s behavior. But is this the limit of cyber’s potential? Are there indirect attack vectors that can set the new tone of conflict in cyber? During the Cold War, a series of proxy conflicts emerged as the battleground for nation-states. Insurgencies and guerrilla war in Iran, Vietnam, Afghanistan, Tibet, and other places were conflict areas where nation-states could impose cost on an adversary and dictate terms of policy. Can the cyber realm provide the next covert battlespace?

The Arab Spring

A case study for the power of online connectivity and the influence of social



Protesters in Tunis, Tunisia, on January 23, 2011, during Jasmine Revolution that toppled former ruler Ben Ali (Idealink Photography)

media exists in the case of the Arab Spring. Erin Blakemore writes:

*Beginning in December 2010, anti-government protests rocked Tunisia. By early 2011 they had spread into what became known as the Arab Spring—a wave of protests, uprisings, and unrest that spread across Arabic-speaking countries in North Africa and the Middle East. Pro-democratic protests, which spread rapidly due to social media, ended up toppling the governments of Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen.*¹⁶

The pro-democratic protests were fueled through propagation of online messaging. Platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube fed a populace eager for change, even after governments attempted to shut down the communications networks. Philip Howard describes the power of social media and online connectivity related to the revolutions: “People who shared interest in democracy built extensive social networks and organized political action. Social media became a critical part of the toolkit for greater freedom.”¹⁷

As of this writing, no nation or entity has claimed responsibility for control of this social media toolkit. The online activist group Anonymous does claim to have provided technical support and expertise, but the messaging and content

are assessed to have been spontaneous and homegrown. But what if, in the future, themes and content could be guided? Insurgencies and political actions that formerly required agent interaction may now be propagated through social media, their grievances engineered by the aggressor. Russia’s attempts at political manipulation in the 2016 U.S. Presidential election came close to this type of social engineering, but the effects remained mostly in the cyber realm except for a few protests and fights. The social engineering aspects potentially available to a covert cyber operation are significant, especially when considered alongside already established research regarding social movement theory.

In his pioneering works on social movements, anthropologist David Aberle posits that there are four types of social movements. Table 2 illustrates his description of the four types, with an added consideration of a category for vulnerability to cyber influence.

As the Internet took shape as a component of everyday modern life, researchers began to look at the effects of a networked populace and its ability to share grievances. In the late 1990s, as social media was a ground-floor enterprise, Donatella della Porta and Mario Diani defined *social movement* in their foundational work on the subject as “informal

networks formed through the shared beliefs and solidarity of members, which mobilize to support specific positions on social issues through various forms of protest.”¹⁸ In 2003, Diani further emphasized the effect of social media on movements: “The new social movements that inspired the network model did not require membership, were decentralized, dynamic, and without formal hierarchy, and depended on participants identifying with the perspectives and positions of the movement and its objectives.”¹⁹ It is in this description where the opportunities for covert action emerge. A decentralized, leaderless network that ascribes truth to its own interpretations, is motivated through shared belief in those principles, and lacks a clear hierarchy presents an interesting opportunity to either witting or unwitting manipulation.

A motivated state actor, desiring to indirectly affect the actions of a competitor, could capitalize on this type of informal network structure to seed disinformation and deception to build toward social movement. This could be manifested in the social populace of a competitor’s ally, key trading partner, commodity supplier, or directly into the populace itself. Propagation of misinformation or amplification of counter-state narratives can allow for frontstage condemnation and pressure, all while

Table 2. Four Types of Social Movements

Movement Type	Focus of movement	Examples	Vulnerability to cyberinfluence	Examples of cybervulnerability
Alterative	Partial individual change	Mothers Against Drunk Driving	High—individuals are easily manipulated by social media	Anti-vaxxers, Tide POD eaters, birther movement
Redemptive	Total individual change	Religious movement	Medium—group change is difficult without a counterstate narrative	White nationalists, lone-wolf terrorists, Antifa members
Reformative	Partial social change	Women’s suffrage movement	Medium—affecting existing groups with common grievances is easier than convincing people to change groups	U.S. political parties, sports fans
Transformative	Total social change	Revolutions	Low—total social change requires actions outside of the cyber realm. Cyber is an enabling function and can engineer the environment for grievances to manifest	2016 U.S. elections, Arab Spring, Russian cyber-efforts in Crimea

Source: Nick Lee, “The Four Types of Social Movements,” *Medium*, August 2, 2019, available at <<https://medium.com/@nicklee3/the-four-types-of-social-movements-8db910192573>>.

controlling the narrative through covert action in the backstage. While this is not new to the concept of covert action, it is a new method of distribution and a new opportunity to act covertly using unwitting proxies. In the Arab Spring example, it is not impossible to imagine a state or group of states motivated by promulgation of democracy controlling the messaging to Tunisia, Egypt, and Syria covertly, manipulating the tone, tempo, and spread of counter-state narratives the same way a military general coordinates a campaign. In this manner, a covert actor can adjust the tenor and content of messaging in the backstage to either ratchet up pressure when hard negotiations are happening or dial it back when concessions are made—all while maintaining plausible deniability about involvement and managing escalatory risk.

Conclusion

As society comes to terms with the realities of a cyber-enabled world, the consequences of cyber attacks will most likely increase as strong actors seek to deter their weaker adversaries. The advantage that cyber attacks afford weaker actors can be mitigated through consequences in the physical space. These consequences will most likely drive cyber competition toward covert activities conducted through proxies and surrogates. The effects of cyber operations will seek to shape the environment for a competitive advantage in conflict, but the results of cyber operations will most likely not be decisive outcomes. Instead, cyber operations will be incorporated into other forms of strategic interaction, including wartime functions, as a supporting effort, much the same way current covert action is incorporated as a policy-shaping mechanism. The potential of covert social movement and manipulation outweighs the risk of overt actions, either cyber or war. The risk calculus weighs heavily into the covert realm, even if only as a shaping action with potential for full-scale success.

The net benefits of indirect cyber operations are a potential outlet for actors to compete in a nonlethal way, continuing

the trend of making warfare more precise and leading away from large-scale loss of life. The threat is the limiting effect that security requirements have on the technology surrounding a modern world and the vulnerabilities that exposure to cyber operations creates in a hyper-connected planet. The opportunities to engineer an environment to promote social change from within an adversary's borders, while managing escalation potential, demonstrate that covert cyber operations are a growth industry for both strong and weak actors. JFQ

Notes

¹ John Arquilla, "Cyberwar Is Already Upon Us," *Foreign Policy*, February 27, 2012, available at <<https://foreignpolicy.com/2012/02/27/cyberwar-is-already-upon-us/>>.

² Ivan Arreguin-Toft, "How the Weak Win Wars: a Theory of Assymmetric Conflict," *International Security* 26, no. 1 (Summer 2001), available at <<https://web.stanford.edu/class/polisci211z/2.2/Arreguin-Toft%20IS%202001.pdf>>.

³ Keir Giles, "Assessing Russia's Reorganized and Rearmed Military," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and the Chicago Council of Global Affairs, Task Force on U.S. Policy Toward Russia, Ukraine, and Eurasia, May 4, 2017, available at <https://carnegieendowment.org/files/5.4.2017_Keir_Giles_RussiaMilitary.pdf>.

⁴ Ryan C. Maness and Margarita Jaitner, "There's More to Russia's Cyber Interference than the Mueller Probe Suggests," *Washington Post*, March 12, 2018, available at <<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/03/12/theres-more-to-russias-cyber-meddling-than-the-mueller-probe-suggests/>>.

⁵ Ellen Nakashima and Paul Sonne, "China Hacked a Navy Contractor and Secured a Trove of Highly Sensitive Data on Submarine Warfare," *Washington Post*, June 8, 2018, 5.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Hyeong-wook Boo, "An Assessment of North Korean Cyber Threats," in *The Kim Jong Un Regime and the Future Security Environment Surrounding the Korean Peninsula* (Tokyo: National Institute for Defense Studies, 2017), available at <<http://www.nids.mod.go.jp/english/event/symposium/pdf/2016/E-02.pdf>>.

⁸ Austin Carson and Keren Yarhi-Milo, "Covert Communication: The Intelligibility and Credibility of Signaling in Secret," *Security Studies* 26, no. 1 (January 2, 2017), 124–156,

available at <<https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2017.1243921>>.

⁹ Jon R. Lindsay and Erik Gartzke, "Coercion Through Cyberspace: The Stability-Instability Paradox Revisited," in *The Power to Hurt: Coercion in Theory and in Practice*, ed. Kelly M. Greenhill and Peter J.P. Krause (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 40.

¹⁰ Carson and Yarhi-Milo, "Covert Communication."

¹¹ Michael Krepon, "The Stability-Instability Paradox," *Arms Control Wonk*, November 2, 2010, available at <<https://www.armscontrolwonk.com/archive/402911/the-stability-instability-paradox/>>.

¹² Glenn Herald Snyder, *Deterrence and Defense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).

¹³ Andy Greenberg, "How Not to Prevent a Cyberwar with Russia," *Wired*, June 18, 2019, available at <<https://www.wired.com/story/russia-cyberwar-escalation-power-grid/>>.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Carson and Yarhi-Milo, "Covert Communication."

¹⁶ Erin Blakemore, "What Was the Arab Spring and How Did It Spread?" *National Geographic*, March 29, 2019, available at <<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/topics/reference/arab-spring-cause/>>.

¹⁷ Catherine O'Donnell, "New Study Quantifies Use of Social Media in Arab Spring," *UW News*, September 12, 2011, available at <<https://www.washington.edu/news/2011/09/12/new-study-quantifies-use-of-social-media-in-arab-spring/>>.

¹⁸ David Zimbra, Ahmed Abbasi, and Hsinchun Chen, "A Cyber-Archaeology Approach to Social Movement Research: Framework and Case Study," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 16, no. 1 (October 1, 2010), 48–70, available at <<https://academic.oup.com/jcmc/article/16/1/48/4067637>>.

¹⁹ Ibid.



Burundian soldier serving with African Union Mission in Somalia cleans rocket launcher against Mogadishu skyline after sudden departure of al-Shabaab, August 18, 2011 (United Nations/Stuart Price)

Overcoming Barriers to Institutional Learning

Insights from Insurgent Groups

By Nicholas A. Dudek

The inescapable fog and friction of war make it important for state militaries to function as learning organizations capable of adapting their strategies in response to changing conditions. However, despite the importance of developing and maintaining

strategic flexibility, several dynamics often prevent state militaries from being learning organizations. Among these dynamics are histories of success and the availability of vast resources. A history of success can lead to the development of standard operating procedures (SOPs) from which leaders are reluctant to deviate even once conditions have changed. Similarly, the availability of vast resources can make

leaders more inclined to respond to strategic failures by simply attempting the same strategy with more resources rather than innovating strategically.

Attempts to overcome these barriers have traditionally focused on learning from other militaries or businesses. These efforts, however, have overlooked the possibility of learning from insurgent groups. These groups face many of the same problems and must overcome

Nicholas A. Dudek is a Research Intern in the Working Group on Children Recruited by Terrorist and Violent Extremist Groups.

them to survive; therefore, they provide a potential source of valuable insights for state militaries.

This article examines a case study of Islamic extremist groups in Somalia and their ability to overcome such barriers. Evidence from these groups indicates that the personalization of power by leaders can inhibit a group's strategic flexibility, as leaders fear that implementing a strategic shift will be seen as a sign that their leadership is "wrong," which can undermine their position. By contrast, the case study found that groups with *multiple* leaders can develop alternate strategies, allowing the group to select from a strategic menu, quickly adapt to crises of practice in which the existing strategic approach is ineffective, overcome the barriers, and thus function as a learning organization.

Barriers to Learning

Military scholars and theorists have long known that it is impossible to eliminate the fog and friction of war because the enemy gets a say.¹ This inescapable dynamic means that to be effective, military organizations must adapt to unexpected developments and alter their strategies in response to battlefield conditions. To do so, militaries need the "ability to recognize changes in the environment, identify the critical elements of a new situation, and trigger changes to meet new requirements."² In other words, successful militaries must be *learning organizations*. As Major General H.R. McMaster, USA (Ret.), stated in a 2013 interview: "First and foremost, we need leaders who can adapt and innovate. As Sir

Michael Howard has said—and I'm paraphrasing—we're never going to get the problem of future war precisely right. The key is to not be so far off the mark that you can't adapt once the real demands of combat reveal themselves, *and you need leaders who can adapt rapidly to unforeseen circumstances.*"³

Two central dynamics can inhibit adaptability and make it more challenging for militaries (especially global powers such as the U.S. military) to becoming learning organizations. The first barrier is a history of success, which can create a set of best practices or SOPs that are tried and true and a belief that such procedures will succeed in the current situation because they have succeeded in the past. This can be compared to "victory disease," which "comes from a high



Kenyan soldiers patrol streets of southern port city Kismayo, Somalia, October 12, 2013, as part of AMISOM initiatives (African Union–United Nations Information Support Team/Ramadan Mohamed Hassan)

Table 1. Islamic Courts Union Strategic Shifts

Time	Balance of Forces	Primary Strategy	Outcome
Early–mid 2006	Favorable	Semiconventional warfare	Victory
Late 2006–2007	Unfavorable	Semiconventional warfare (no change)	Defeat/demise

level of demonstrated military prowess.” As a result, “a military leader . . . sees the decisive impact of past solutions and believes that if these techniques are used in future conflicts, they will yield similar results . . . [and so] military leaders and planners adopt an attitude of: ‘Why change what has worked in the past?’”⁴ The second barrier is the availability of vast resources, which can have two impacts, each of which inhibits the tendency to adapt: It can mask poor strategy by providing a modicum of success,⁵ or it can make leaders believe that the strategy can work with additional resources, encouraging a “more of the same” approach rather than a strategic change in response to failures.⁶ As a result, experts in preeminent militaries have devoted considerable attention to discovering how to be learning organizations.⁷ This is a particularly important subject as it is commonly accepted that “70 to 80 percent of organizational change efforts fail.”⁸

Islamic Extremist Groups in Somalia: A Brief Overview

The Islamist phase of the Somali Civil War (2006–present) has been defined by a series of shifts in the balance of forces and resulting changes in the Islamists’ strategies. During periods in which the Islamists were dominant (such as in 2006 and from 2009 to mid-2011), they employed a strategy of semiconventional warfare. In such periods, the Islamists’ strategy contained many elements of conventional warfare (for instance, prioritization of control of territory, large military operations, and set-piece battles between opposing sides). However, even during these periods, the Islamists balanced the use of such tactics with continued use of insurgent tactics. The result was periods of warfare that were neither purely conventional nor purely insurgent but rather a mix of both. But when the Islamists faced

foreign interventions (2006–2009 and 2011–present), they were confronted by a disadvantageous balance of forces in which they faced adversaries with greater conventional military capacities than they possessed. In each instance, foreign forces defeated the Islamists in large-scale battles. These defeats resulted in crises of practice, failures that demonstrated that the strategies the Islamists had been using successfully prior to these defeats were no longer effective.⁹ As a result of the arrival of foreign forces, the Islamists were required to shift from a strategy that prioritized semiconventional warfare to a strategy of primarily insurgent operations.¹⁰ During these periods of strategic change, the impact of the barriers to organizational learning (including those faced by state militaries) on the Islamists’ strategic flexibility is particularly evident.

Since 2006, when the emergence of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) brought Islamic extremist groups to the forefront of the Somali Civil War (1989–present), they have faced three such shifts. The first major shift came in December 2006. Throughout the year, the ICU had been the strongest military force in Somalia, overcoming the warlords’ use of semiconventional warfare. The Ethiopian invasion altered the balance of forces, however, as the Islamists could not match the Ethiopians in conventional battle. The different responses of the ICU and al-Shabaab illustrate the importance of the barriers to change as the ICU, with a history of success and vast resources, was strategically stagnant, while the weaker but more adaptive al-Shabaab—which was not inhibited by either of these barriers—shifted to an insurgent strategy.

The second major shift came in 2009 when the Ethiopians withdrew, leaving a power vacuum that allowed al-Shabaab to return to semiconventional warfare and to rule much of the country, including parts

of Mogadishu. This period of dominance (2009–2010) gave al-Shabaab great success and vast resources, similar to the ICU or a conventional military, which likely hindered its adaptiveness somewhat in the face of a new shift in the balance of forces.

The third major shift came in 2011 when the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) shifted into an offensive role, and al-Shabaab faced an invasion from Kenya (Operation *Linda Nchi*). Although the barriers inhibited al-Shabaab’s ability to be a learning organization, the group was eventually able to overcome the obstacles and return to an insurgent strategy. To meet the demands of the battlefield and shift strategies, the Islamists needed to overcome organizational barriers to change, including some of the same ones that state militaries face.

Insurgent Groups and Barriers

Critical Juncture 1: The Ethiopian Invasion. Prior to the invasion in late December 2006, the preeminent militant Islamist organization in Somalia was the ICU, a broad coalition of militias that included the fledgling al-Shabaab. During this period, Islamists waged semiconventional warfare. They prioritized control of territory and set-piece battles against the warlords, including the U.S.-backed Alliance for Peace Restoration and Counter-Terrorism.¹¹ The ICU swept across Somalia with a series of large-scale assaults, using massive formations of as many as 600 fighters and 50 “battle wagons” or “technicals” (pickup trucks outfitted with mounted antiaircraft guns and machine guns).¹² ICU forces engaged in “fierce gun battles that left hundreds dead” and defeated each warlord in turn.¹³ By June 5, they were victorious and controlled most of the country, including Mogadishu.

The Ethiopian invasion radically altered the balance of forces in Somalia.

While Islamists were stronger than their domestic adversaries (the warlords), they could not match the conventional military strength of the Ethiopians, who had both better training and superior hardware. A pair of devastating defeats in “open, conventional warfare” within a week of each other demonstrated the power asymmetry.¹⁴ The first defeat occurred at Daynunay (December 19–23), where it became clear that the ICU had no way to counter the Ethiopian artillery strikes. The second defeat occurred at Iidale (December 21–26), where ICU forces waged trench warfare and held out against Ethiopian tanks for several days until Ethiopian helicopter gunships arrived and broke ICU lines.¹⁵ Over the course of 8 days of intense conventional warfare, as many as 1,000 ICU fighters were killed, and an additional 3,000 were injured.¹⁶ These defeats led to the first crisis of practice for Somalia’s Islamists, as the “battle at Iidale had just shown that there was no way al-Shabaab could win a toe-to-toe slugging match” against the Ethiopian forces.¹⁷ However, the way in which Somalia’s Islamist groups reacted illustrated the barriers to learning.

Even after these defeats, which demonstrated the futility of a conventional strategy, the ICU failed to shift to an insurgent strategy. Instead, the ICU and its allied militias (the Muqawama, or “resistance”), now under the leadership of Abdulkadir Ali Omar, decided to resist the Ethiopians. ICU forces dug in, fortifying their bases with trenches and waging an extremely bloody but ultimately futile year-long battle for control of Mogadishu against the superior military might of Ethiopia. For months, the two sides exchanged nearly constant barrages of mortars and rocket fire and mounted sporadic ground offenses, which resulted in thousands of deaths.¹⁸ However, despite the ICU’s determination not to yield the city, Ethiopia’s massive advantage in military hardware made it an unwinnable battle. As one observer noted, the “Muqawama did not have anything to fire on the tank[s] apart from an AK-47, which was ineffective,” limiting their ability to stop Ethiopian offensives.¹⁹ As a result, by the end of 2007,

Ethiopia had taken control of the city, and the ICU was all but destroyed.

Some attribute the strategic stagnancy of the ICU to the group’s ideology, the personality of its leaders, or its foreign backers. Despite a shared ideology, though, the ICU and al-Shabaab employed widely different strategies. Additionally, the ICU remained strategically stagnant despite a change in the leadership from Sharif Sheikh Ahmed to Omar, indicating that the group’s strategy cannot be attributed primarily to the leader’s preference. Finally, the Islamists’ ties to international backers, including Eritrea, became strong only after the defeat of the ICU, when Eritrea hosted the former ICU leaders to form the Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia. Thus, foreign backers likely had a limited impact on the ICU’s strategy during the immediate aftermath of the Ethiopian invasion.

Instead, its history of success and vast resources likely helps explain why the ICU (unlike al-Shabaab) remained committed to large-scale operations. Prior to the Ethiopian invasion, the ICU had experienced significant success through semiconventional warfare. This success likely made the ICU more confident in its ability to defeat the Ethiopians through large-scale operations and thus reluctant to adopt insurgent warfare. Similarly, its resources (strong ties to clan and business militias) gave it the ability to regroup and recommit to further large-scale operations. This extensive support network apparently made the ICU leadership believe that their previous defeats were caused not by poor strategy but by insufficient resources. This led them to continue to contest in the same manner for control of Mogadishu.

By contrast, the smaller al-Shabaab demonstrated a greater ability to learn and adapt to the new asymmetrical balance of forces. Although present in Mogadishu throughout 2007, “al-Shabaab was not a significant military actor” in the fighting; it resisted the ICU’s calls to engage in the fight for the capital.²⁰ Instead, al-Shabaab quickly abandoned conventional warfare strategies and reorganized itself as an insurgency.²¹ For instance, in the “face of regular combat al-Shabaab would

withdraw. [It] focused on small hit-and-run and suicide attacks”²² and focused on high-profile terrorist attacks to raise their stature. While the ICU fought, and lost, against Ethiopia’s overwhelming military might, al-Shabaab “systematically attacked the softer spots of the government,” targeting government officials and anyone collaborating with the Ethiopians, while simultaneously launching hit-and-run attacks on the Ethiopian forces.²³ This shift allowed al-Shabaab not only to survive—unlike the stronger, but strategically stagnant ICU—but also to thrive and become the main opposition to Ethiopia by the end of the year.²⁴

Some attribute this strategic shift to al-Shabaab’s ideology, the personality of its leaders, foreign backers, or geography. However, had ideology determined their strategy, the ICU and al-Shabaab would have fought similarly. Instead, despite similar ideologies, al-Shabaab employed a dramatically different strategy. Additionally, this strategic change occurred under the leadership of al-Shabaab’s first emir, Ayden Ayro, who also oversaw al-Shabaab during the first period of semiconventional warfare. The fact that this strategic change occurred despite consistent leadership indicates that the change was not caused by the leader’s personality. Furthermore, although al-Shabaab had ties to international backers, including Eritrea, its influence was limited. For example, in 2007 al-Shabaab refused to join an Eritrean-hosted summit for the formation of the Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia (which it subsequently denounced²⁵) and threatened to attack Eritrea.²⁶ Thus, the role of foreign backers appears to have been limited to financial support rather than strategic direction from afar. Finally, although geography often shapes insurgent groups’ strategies, it provides little explanation for al-Shabaab’s strategic shifts. Although the geography of al-Shabaab’s war has remained constant, its strategy has not.

Others argue that al-Shabaab was part of the ICU, whose leadership assigned al-Shabaab the role of waging an insurgent war while the ICU held the line in



Ugandan soldiers serving with AMISOM move to reinforce newly occupied positions around Mogadishu Stadium following al-Shabaab's withdrawal, August 7, 2011 (United Nations/Stuart Price)

Mogadishu. While intuitively plausible, this explanation overlooks the deteriorating relationship between the two groups, which “had gone from bad to worse in the weeks before the Ethiopian military intervention.”²⁷ As a result, al-Shabaab had broken with the ICU after the December 2006 fighting,²⁸ and there were reports of assassination attempts between al-Shabaab and ICU leadership.²⁹ By this time, the two groups no longer had a common leadership. Furthermore, close observers reported that “al-Shabaab stayed out of the large battles *and resisted any calls to coordinate with any Sharia Court forces.*”³⁰ Therefore, far from being assigned the insurgent role by ICU leadership, al-Shabaab’s shift was in defiance of ICU orders.

Another potential explanation is that al-Shabaab was able to pursue an insurgent strategy because the ICU was the primary opposition to the Ethiopian

forces. Had this been the case, the demise of the ICU in mid- to late 2007 would have forced al-Shabaab to take its place and employ a more conventional approach to fighting Ethiopia. But this did not happen, and despite the ICU’s defeat, which catapulted al-Shabaab into the position of the primary opposition to Ethiopia by late 2007, al-Shabaab continued to employ a strategy of insurgency until Ethiopia began its withdrawal in late 2008. This strategic consistency on the part of al-Shabaab, despite its changed status as the opposition to Ethiopian forces, shows that what caused (and allowed) it to employ an insurgent strategy was not its secondary status to the ICU, but rather its strategic flexibility in the face of an overwhelming conventional opponent.

Al-Shabaab’s transition to insurgency demonstrated its strategic flexibility, which can be partially attributed to the absence of barriers. By contrast to the ICU,

al-Shabaab had no history of success. According to Mukhtar Robow, a senior al-Shabaab leader, the organization was only formed in August 2006.³¹ As a result, it had no experience winning large-scale battles. In early 2007, the largest battles that al-Shabaab had participated in were the defeats at Daynunay and Iidale. Thus, the leadership had not experienced victories that could make them believe that a strategy of large-scale battles could be successful. Moreover, unlike the ICU, al-Shabaab lacked resource reserves. In early 2007, it consisted of only “a few hundred fighters.”³² As a result, it lacked the manpower to believe that future large-scale battles would end differently if more troops and resources were committed. Thus, unlike the ICU, al-Shabaab had little reason to think that a strategy of large-scale battles could defeat Ethiopia, making it easier for al-Shabaab to shift to a primarily insurgent strategy.



AMISOM Ugandan soldier walks through former steel factory in Mogadishu carrying 120mm mortar shell used by al-Shabaab, August 15, 2011 (United Nations/Stuart Price)

Critical Juncture 2: The Ethiopian Withdrawal. After the Ethiopian withdrawal in January 2009, the balance of forces shifted again. As al-Shabaab became “without question the most powerful force in southern Somalia,” it reverted to a semiconventional warfare strategy that emphasized larger scale battles and control of territory.³³ This strategic shift was evident in al-Shabaab’s organization, which prioritized the *Jabhat* (“army”), organized for large-scale operations, and included divisions of 300 soldiers equipped with battle wagons.

Moreover, this organizational change matched a strategic adjustment in al-Shabaab’s operations. While it previously had predominantly used secret small-scale operations, al-Shabaab now began to move large forces in the open. Its capture of the strategic port city of Merca involved “hundreds” of fighters,³⁴ and its conquest of Hudur in February 2009 involved 800 to 1,000 fighters.³⁵ As Bohumil Dobos writes, the “nature of the conflict in the second phase was closer to conventional warfare; al-Shabaab was trying to conquer the land as manifested

in its attempts to occupy important demographic and economic centers.”³⁶ And where previously al-Shabaab had withdrawn in the face of regular combat with pro-government forces, during this period it displayed a newfound willingness to engage in protracted combat.³⁷ In August, al-Shabaab seized Kismayo after “3 days of heavy fighting” against government forces, which left 90 dead and more than 200 injured.³⁸ This strategic shift culminated on May 7, 2009, when al-Shabaab launched an offensive to take over Mogadishu. The scale of this operation

Table 2. Al-Shabaab's Strategic Shifts

Time	Balance of Forces	Primary Strategy	Outcome
Early—mid 2006	Favorable	Semiconventional warfare	Victory
Late 2006—2009	Unfavorable	Insurgency (change)	Survive
2009—2010	Favorable	Semiconventional warfare (change)	Near victory
2011	Unfavorable	Semiconventional warfare (no change)	Defeats
2011—present	Unfavorable	Insurgency (change)	Survive

was unlike anything the Islamists had engaged in during the Ethiopian occupation, when they had relied primarily on small operations.³⁹ In contrast, this offensive was massive, including 6,000 to 7,000 fighters and hundreds of battle wagons. Although the leadership “offered no public explanation . . . [of the timing of the attack] the reasons were obvious: with the Ethiopians gone, AMISOM limited to defense, and the TFG [Transitional Federal Government] an unholy mess, this would be their best chance to seize Mogadishu and take power.”⁴⁰

This strategic shift succeeded, and al-Shabaab “shoved aside the official government to become the country’s true ruler.” It eventually controlled more than 80 percent of Somalia south of Puntland—including much of Mogadishu—and ruled at least three million Somalis.⁴¹ This period of dominance through semiconventional warfare (2009–2010) significantly affected al-Shabaab’s organizational structure and its ability to be a learning organization, giving it some attributes of a conventional army that included a history of success through semiconventional warfare. Additionally, during this period al-Shabaab derived as much as \$100 million USD per year in tax revenue⁴² and had thousands of new recruits (swelling its ranks to 13,000⁴³ or 14,000 fighters⁴⁴), giving it vast resources. Each of these dynamics (common among state militaries) hindered al-Shabaab’s ability to act as a learning organization and to shift strategically in 2010–2011.

Critical Juncture 3: AMISOM Offensives. Al-Shabaab’s Mogadishu offensive brought it into conflict with AMISOM, which defended critical government institutions, including the

presidential palace and the Mogadishu international airport. Although al-Shabaab repeatedly demonstrated its superiority over the Somali National Army, AMISOM counteroffensives and mortar fire repulsed al-Shabaab’s offensives each time.⁴⁵ For instance, on June 16, 2009, al-Shabaab seized control of part of Maka al-Mukarama Road, “one of the most critical” locations in the city, as it connected the palace to the airport and allowed the government to remain supplied. It was only an AMISOM counteroffensive that reopened the indispensable lifeline for the Somali government.⁴⁶ A few days later, when al-Shabaab seized the Shibis and Karan districts just two miles from Villa Somalia and the government appeared on the brink of collapse, AMISOM forces once again intervened, repelling the Islamists with counterattacks and a hail of mortar fire.⁴⁷

Although al-Shabaab controlled more than three-quarters of the capital, these repeated setbacks by AMISOM’s well-armed professional forces demonstrated that once again al-Shabaab faced a foe that exceeded its conventional military strength. However, despite these setbacks, it remained committed to a strategy of semiconventional warfare. Instead of reverting to insurgency, al-Shabaab recommitted itself to large-scale battles for control of the city. It brought new weapons and 1,800 additional fighters into Mogadishu, a decision made possible by the resources and recruits accrued during its dominance over the preceding years. On August 23, 2010, al-Shabaab launched the Ramadan Offensive (*Nihayat Al-Mu’tadin* or “The End of the Aggressors” or “The End of the Apostates”), an all-out assault on the

key institutions defended by AMISOM.⁴⁸ The result was the bloodiest month in Mogadishu’s history,⁴⁹ with stalemate fighting compared to trench warfare in World War I and the Battle of Stalingrad in World War II, although on a much smaller scale.⁵⁰ However, al-Shabaab was once again unable to overcome AMISOM’s advantage in conventional warfare—in particular, the presence of Ugandan tanks—and so the assault was a disastrous failure. More than 700 al-Shabaab fighters were killed and as many as 2,000 were injured.⁵¹ In just over a month, more than a quarter of al-Shabaab’s military strength had been spent, along with much of its treasury.

The failure of the Ramadan Offensive constituted a second crisis of practice; however, al-Shabaab still did not return to insurgent warfare as it had in 2006 when it faced a similar power asymmetry that was prohibitive to winning through conventional warfare. Instead, the crisis of practice grew more apparent in early 2011 as AMISOM went on the offensive beginning on February 19, overrunning one al-Shabaab stronghold after another. Despite this, al-Shabaab continued to fight to maintain control of important portions of the city, including the Bakaara Market and the ministry of defense, which had been its command center. In the fight for the ministry of defense, al-Shabaab faced as many as 700 Burundian AMISOM soldiers. It killed more than 50 fighters⁵² and lost as many as 400 of its own⁵³ before it was eventually forced to yield the facilities.

Some attribute al-Shabaab’s reluctance to abandon semiconventional warfare to its unwillingness to accommodate losses or to the belief that its legitimacy was rooted in its state-like

characteristics. These explanations undoubtedly contributed to al-Shabaab's hesitance to change strategies. However, these reasons would also have affected its strategic decisionmaking in 2006–2007, when it more readily shifted to insurgency in response to the Ethiopian invasion. Had these motives been the primary factor driving al-Shabaab's reluctance to shift strategies, it likely would have been able to revert to insurgency in 2010–2011 as it had in 2006–2007. Instead, what distinguished the al-Shabaab of 2010–2011 from that of 2006–2007 was its *history of success and accumulated resources*. In 2006–2007, al-Shabaab was uninhibited by these barriers and so was able to accurately assess the battlefield conditions and shift strategies despite these strong motivations to maintain control of territory. By contrast, in 2010–2011, al-Shabaab's ability to do so was more limited.

This apparent reluctance to embrace insurgent warfare can be partially attributed to al-Shabaab's history of success through conventional warfare, which led its leaders, particularly Emir Godane, to believe that additional conventional warfare (in the form of the Ramadan Offensive) could bring victory: "Although al-Shabaab conscripts were facing a professional and well equipped army, they just thought that waves of infantry fighters could defeat it."⁵⁴ This decision was made possible by the presence of vast resources, which allowed al-Shabaab to believe that conventional warfare could succeed if repeated with greater resources (1,800 new fighters) rather than shifting strategy, as it had done previously when it was far weaker.⁵⁵

Ultimately, al-Shabaab was again able to realize the asymmetric realities of the conflict, and on August 5, 2011, it shifted its strategy accordingly.⁵⁶ Al-Shabaab spokesman Ali Dhere declared that the group was reverting to insurgency. Al-Shabaab withdrew from Mogadishu and its other urban strongholds and became "a deterritorialized entity."⁵⁷ Since then, it has "generally avoid[ed] major engagements with AMISOM and SFG [government] forces."⁵⁸ Instead, it has "melted away into the bush" when

facing large AMISOM armies.⁵⁹ As Ali Dhere announced, the strategy has shifted to "hit-and-run attacks, where the Mujahideen will attack a spot wherever government or African Union forces are based."⁶⁰ Indeed, in the past decade, "most al-Shabaab attacks [have been] small scale, including assassinations, hit and run ambushes, or mortar or grenade attacks."⁶¹ In short, "with no chance to win a conventional battle, al-Shabaab leaders had fallen back again on the strategy used by outgunned armies since the beginning of time—guerrilla warfare."⁶²

This shift allowed al-Shabaab to survive and avoid the fate that the ICU had met when it waged a war against foreign forces for control of Mogadishu 3 years prior. This makes it clear that al-Shabaab's survival and the ICU's demise were a direct result of the groups' inability to overcome barriers and be a learning organization.⁶³ This suggests that insurgent groups that survive must all be learning organizations (since those that are not, like the ICU, perish). If state militaries wish to become learning organizations, perhaps some lessons can be found not in the preeminent militaries with all the resources and power in the world at their disposal, but in struggling insurgent groups on the brink of survival. Insurgent militaries have historically learned from state militaries. Perhaps it is time for the paradigm to be reversed.

Insights from Insurgent Militaries

Al-Shabaab's ability to shift strategically in response to the changing balance of forces in 2010–2011 provides insight into how insurgent groups shift strategies and how state militaries can be more efficient learning organizations. One surprising lesson from the case of al-Shabaab is that centralized command structures, in which decisionmaking power is concentrated in an individual or a small group of individuals, can inhibit, rather than facilitate, an insurgent group's ability to adapt. This is likely because "military leaders are promoted, largely based upon their ability to solve problems."⁶⁴ In other words, a leader's position in the group is tied

to the ability to choose the "right" strategy. For such leaders, changing strategies amounts to an admission that their strategy was wrong, which can undermine their position within the group. As a result, and until forced to do so, leaders will be reluctant to admit that their strategy was wrong and adjust accordingly. By contrast, organizations with a decentralized leadership are more able to develop a strategic menu of alternative strategies, which makes it easier to shift strategies in the face of changing battlefield conditions.⁶⁵

Al-Shabaab's strategic transformation (2010–2011) demonstrates this process. Despite setbacks against AMISOM forces, Emir Godane was committed to conventional warfare. Al-Shabaab's decision to double down on conventional strategies with the Ramadan Offensive was "Godane's strategy," which he implemented despite opposition from other senior al-Shabaab leaders.⁶⁶ This commitment can be attributed both to the expressed belief that victory through conventional warfare was possible and to Godane's belief that his position and status were tied to his ability to choose the "right" strategic path, which made abandoning conventional warfare personally risky.⁶⁷

Additionally, Godane was able to keep al-Shabaab committed to large-scale offensives because the "centralization of [power in] al-Shabaab had strengthened Godane's personal authority," enabling him to almost unilaterally keep al-Shabaab committed to a strategy of large-scale battles.⁶⁸ Godane consolidated power by promoting leaders loyal to him (such as Mahad Karate and Ali Dhere) while demoting those who opposed him (such as Robow) and developing the feared special operations division, the *Amniyat*, as a separate wing outside of al-Shabaab's command structure and loyal only to him.⁶⁹ Such efforts gave al-Shabaab a more centralized leadership, limiting the group's adaptiveness to a degree, which allowed the decision to launch the Ramadan Offensive to be "pushed through."⁷⁰

Despite Godane's efforts, however, he was unable to fully monopolize



Team of engineers with Kenyan contingent of AMISOM search former police station for improvised explosive devices, in Kismayo, Somalia, October 3, 2012 (United Nations/Stuart Price)

decisionmaking power, and al-Shabaab still had a plethora of significant leaders, most notably Robow, the former deputy emir and onetime face of al-Shabaab. Not all of these leaders were in lockstep with Godane's strategic approach. Prior to the Ramadan Offensive, Robow and others had "questioned the military wisdom of an all-out battle against AMISOM, claiming that al-Shabaab's strength had been related to insurgency tactics rather than conventional warfare."⁷¹ For these leaders, the failure of the Ramadan Offensive was proof that al-Shabaab should abandon conventional warfare.⁷² The presence of other leaders advocating for alternative strategies meant that in August 2011, when Godane was finally forced to admit the failure of his strategy,

he had strategic alternatives to choose from. In other words, although Godane's attempts to centralize power in himself hindered al-Shabaab's strategic flexibility, his inability to completely unite all decisionmaking power in himself meant that other leaders, such as Robow and Ibrahim al-Afghani (whose statuses were not tied to the strategy of conventional warfare), were able to suggest other strategies (such as insurgency). This allowed Godane to switch to an insurgent strategy more easily after conventional warfare had manifestly failed.

Al-Shabaab's 2011 transformation back to insurgency also demonstrates why organizations with power concentrated in a single leader are less strategically adaptive. This is at least in

part because leaders are (likely correctly) afraid that a strategic shift will be seen as a sign that their leadership is "wrong," which can undermine their position. This fear proved justified in Godane's case, as the "most serious crisis in the history of the organization" and the greatest threat to his leadership came after he essentially admitted the failure of his conventional warfare approach and switched to a strategy of insurgency.⁷³ Stig Jarle Hansen writes, "The fact that it was Godane who planned the ill-fated [Ramadan] Offensive . . . meant that the September defeat [retreating from Mogadishu] damaged his status as leader."⁷⁴ This retreat from Mogadishu "was a highly symbolic decision and an unacceptable humiliation for Godane

as al-Shabaab's [emir].⁷⁵ Sensing Godane's vulnerability, other leaders (including al-Afghani and Robow) wrote an open letter to al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri calling for Godane to be removed as leader of the group.⁷⁶ Although Godane was able to reassert his control with a brutal purge (2011–2014), in which al-Afghani and notable American jihadi Omar al-Hamammi (Abu Mansour al-Amriki) were killed and Robow was removed,⁷⁷ the intensity of the conflict during this period indicates that such strategic shifts make leaders uniquely vulnerable to internal opposition,⁷⁸ and many leaders are reluctant to jeopardize their position.

Conclusion

This article makes four key points to help address the need for militaries to function as learning organizations. First, state militaries are often hindered by their histories of success, which generate SOPs, and by the availability of vast resources, which make leaders of state militaries more strategically stagnant and likely to commit additional resources to their strategies, rather than to adapt strategically.

Second, insurgent groups are a possible source of lessons for state militaries. Scholars and policymakers often look to other state militaries or to businesses for insights on how to become learning organizations. However, they overlook the possibility of learning from insurgent groups. Although insurgent groups differ in many ways from state militaries, they face some of the same demands and must overcome some of the same barriers that states do, including, at times, histories of success and vast resources. However, for such groups, overcoming these barriers is a matter of not only success or failure but also survival.

Third, the personalization of power by leaders (as under Godane) can inhibit groups' strategic flexibility, as leaders fear that implementing a strategic shift will be seen as a sign that their leadership is "wrong," which can undermine their position.

Finally, groups with multiple leaders can develop alternate strategies, allowing

them to select from a strategic menu and quickly adapt to crises of practice in which the existing strategic approach is ineffective. Al-Shabaab's history suggests that the presence of multiple leaders with perspectives different from those of the primary leader is critical to a group's ability to overcome the barriers and function as a learning organization.

These findings likely apply not only to insurgent groups but to state militaries as well, even ones that differ from insurgent groups in many ways. In fact, there is evidence to suggest that to function as a learning organization, "problem solving must become a shared responsibility for the whole organization, not just the task of the leadership."⁷⁹ JFQ

Notes

¹ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976).

² William J. Cojocar, "Adaptive Leadership in the Military Decision Making Process," *Military Review* (November–December 2011), 24.

³ Andrew Erdmann, "How Militaries Learn and Adapt: An Interview with Major General H.R. McMaster," McKinsey and Company, April 1, 2013, available at <<https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-and-social-sector/our-insights/how-militaries-learn-and-adapt>>. Emphasis added.

⁴ Timothy Karcher, *Understanding the "Victory Disease," from the Little Bighorn to Mogadishu and Beyond*, Global War on Terrorism Occasional Paper 3 (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2004).

⁵ This is particularly powerful in organizations that have a history of success and are thus predisposed to believe that the strategy will be successful and are more likely to believe that success has been achieved.

⁶ Richard Shultz, "The Irreducible Minimum"—An Evaluation of Counterterrorism Operations in Iraq," *PRISM* 7, no. 3 (2018), 102–117.

⁷ Richard Shultz, *The Marines Take Anbar: The Four-Year Fight Against al-Qaeda* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2013); Shultz, "The Irreducible Minimum"; William F. Mullen III and Ryan Evans, "Learn Like a Marine," *War on the Rocks*, August 18, 2020.

⁸ Charles D. Allen, "Foreword," in *Leading Change in Military Organizations: Primer for Senior Leaders*, ed. Tom Galvin (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College Press, 2018), vii–ix.

⁹ Richard Shultz coined the term *crises of practice*. Personal conversation, 2019.

¹⁰ However, this was a shift in the *primacy* of one method of warfare over another rather than a complete shift. Periods of insurgency contained elements of conventional warfare, and even in periods when the Islamists prioritized semiconventional warfare, they continued to employ insurgent tactics in parallel in *support* of larger scale operations.

¹¹ Stig Jarle Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Islamist Group* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

¹² Bill Roggio, "The Fall of Kismayo," *FDD's Long War Journal*, September 25, 2006, available at <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2006/09/the_fall_of_kismayo.php>.

¹³ Harun Maruf and Dan Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabaab: The Secret History of Al-Qaeda's Most Powerful Ally* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018).

¹⁴ Bill Roggio, "The Rise and Fall of Somalia's Islamic Courts: An Online History," *Long War Journal*, January 4, 2007, available at <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2007/01/the_rise_fall_of_som.php>.

¹⁵ Maruf and Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabaab*.

¹⁶ Bill Roggio, "Islamic Courts in Retreat in Somalia," *Long War Journal*, December 26, 2006, available at <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2006/12/Islamic_courts_in_re.php>.

¹⁷ Maruf and Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabaab*, 50.

¹⁸ Human Rights Watch, *Shell-Shocked: Civilians Under Siege in Mogadishu* (New York: Human Rights Watch, August 13, 2007), 82.

¹⁹ Maruf and Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabaab*, 56.

²⁰ Roland Marchal, "A Tentative Assessment of the Somali *Harakat Al-Shabaab*," *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 3, no. 3 (2009), 381–404. See also Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia*, 53, for a similar description of the group's absence from the fight for Mogadishu, despite the Islamic Courts Union's exhortations to join the fight.

²¹ Bohumil Dobos, "Shapeshifters of Somalia: Evolution of Political Territoriality of Al-Shabaab," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 27, no. 5 (2016), 937–957.

²² Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia*, 54, 57.

²³ *Ibid.*, 53.

²⁴ Jason Mueller, "The Evolution of Political Violence: The Case of Somalia's Al-Shabaab," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 30, no. 1 (2018), 116–141; Katherine Petrich, "Cows, Charcoal, and Cocaine: Al-Shabaab's Criminal Activities in the Horn of Africa," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* (October 2019), 1–22.

²⁵ Mapping Militant Organizations, "Al Shabaab," Center for International Security and Cooperation, Stanford University, available at <<https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/al-shabaab>>.

²⁶ Andrew McGregor, "Opposition Group

Promises Attacks Following Sanctions on Eritrea for Support of Terrorism,” *Terrorism Monitor* 8, no. 1 (January 7, 2010), available at <<https://jamestown.org/program/opposition-group-promises-attacks-following-sanctions-on-eritrea-for-support-of-terrorism/>>.

²⁷ Marchal, “A Tentative Assessment,” 396.

²⁸ Maruf and Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabaab*, 53.

²⁹ Marchal, “A Tentative Assessment,” 396.

³⁰ Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia*, 53.

Emphasis added. Maruf and Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabaab*.

³¹ Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia*.

³² Marchal, “A Tentative Assessment,” 396.

³³ Matt Bryden, *The Reinvention of Al-Shabaab: A Strategy of Choice or Necessity?* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, February 21, 2014), 1–13.

³⁴ Mohamed Amiin Adow, “Islamic Rebels Grab Key Somali Port,” CNN, November 12, 2008, available at <<https://edition.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/africa/11/12/somalia.towns.seized/>>.

³⁵ Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia*.

³⁶ Dobos, “Shapeshifters of Somalia,” 950.

³⁷ Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia*, 54.

³⁸ Maruf and Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabaab*, 82.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 136.

⁴² Even the lowest estimates report that al-Shabaab earned “tens of millions of dollars” (estimated at \$35 million to \$50 million) per year. See Mueller, “The Evolution of Political Violence,” 125, 129. Matthew J. Thomas, “Exposing and Exploiting Weaknesses in the Merger of Al-Qaeda and Al-Shabaab,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 24, no. 3 (2013), 413–435, estimates that al-Shabaab takes in between \$70 million and \$100 million per year. Similarly, Petrich, “Cows, Charcoal, and Cocaine,” estimates that al-Shabaab revenue peaked between \$75 million and \$100 million per year. Counter Extremism Project estimates \$100 million per year (including \$35 million to \$50 million from Kismayo alone); Maruf and Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabaab*, cite a \$70 million to \$100 million per year income (although Marchal, “A Tentative Assessment,” is doubtful); Mary Harper, *Everything You Have Told Me Is True: The Many Faces of Al Shabaab* (London: Hurst, 2019), reports that al-Shabaab revenue peaked at \$70 million to \$100 million per year.

⁴³ Maruf and Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabaab*, 273.

⁴⁴ Thomas, “Exposing and Exploiting Weaknesses in the Merger of Al-Qaeda and Al-Shabaab,” 414.

⁴⁵ Al-Shabaab’s dominance over the Somali National Army (SNA) could largely be attributed to the SNA’s incompetence: See Roland Marchal, “The Rise of a Jihadi Movement in a Country at War. Harakat Al-Shabaab Al Mujaheddin in Somalia,” *SciencesPo*, January 3, 2011, 58: “Al-Shabaab first and

foremost is strong because of the weakness of its adversaries.” See Maruf and Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabaab*, 110, 168: “On the eve of battle, [government] forces still amounted to a mishmash of soldiers, police, and militia groups bound together by political expediency,” and they frequently fled during battle “sometimes because they ran out of ammunition, sometimes because they chose to flee rather than fight.” As a result, they were “largely irrelevant” to the battle. Also see Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia*, 82. Al-Shabaab’s forces were comparatively well trained, more unified, far more committed, and better armed. These advantages enabled them to repeatedly defeat government forces. However, this advantage did not apply to African Union Mission in Somalia forces (predominantly Ugandan), which were better trained and equipped, as al-Shabaab never developed an answer to the Ugandan tanks.

A full analysis of the comparative strengths of the combatants is beyond the scope of this article. For a more comprehensive analysis, see the works of Paul D. Williams, specifically, “Building the Somali National Army: Anatomy of a Failure, 2008–2018,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 43, no. 3 (2020), 366–391.

⁴⁶ Maruf and Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabaab*.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia*.

⁴⁹ Maruf and Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabaab*, 155.

⁵⁰ Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia*.

⁵¹ Seth G. Jones, Andrew Liepman, and Nathan Chandler, *Counterterrorism and Counterinsurgency in Somalia: Assessing the Campaign Against Al Shabaab* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2016), available at <https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1539.html>.

⁵² Maruf and Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabaab*; Marchal, “The Rise of a Jihadi.”

⁵³ Marchal, “The Rise of a Jihadi,” 59.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 62–63.

⁵⁵ Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia*.

⁵⁶ Mohammed Ibrahim Shire, “How Do Leadership Decapitation and Targeting Error Affect Suicide Bombings? The Case of Al-Shabaab,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (June 2020), 1–21.

⁵⁷ Dobos, “Shapeshifters of Somalia,” 950.

⁵⁸ Bryden, *The Reinvention of Al-Shabaab*, 7.

⁵⁹ Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia*, 71.

⁶⁰ Maruf and Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabaab*, 176–177.

⁶¹ Ken Menkhaus, *Elite Bargain and Political Deals Project: Somalia Case Study* (London: Stabilisation Unit, February 2018), 8.

⁶² Maruf and Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabaab*, 245.

⁶³ Somalia is not the only context in which insurgent groups have faced (and had to overcome) these barriers. Other examples include the Liberation Tamil Tigers of Eelam

(LTTE) in Sri Lanka, whose ultimate defeat in 2009 can be (partially) attributed to their victories, which gave them a history of success and vast resources (accrued from 2002 to 2006, when they effectively ran a semi-independent Tamil state in northern Sri Lanka). These victories led them to shift from a strategy that emphasized insurgency to one of conventional, large-scale battles, and made the LTTE reluctant to revert to insurgency in the face of a renewed and overwhelming offensive by the Sri Lankan government (2006–2009). Similarly, the Chinese Communist Party faced a similar set of challenges adapting to overwhelming government offensives in 1933–1934, when they were crushed in the Fifth Encirclement Campaign and subsequently needed to revert to insurgency. The author thanks peer reviewers for helpfully suggesting these additional examples.

⁶⁴ Rod Korba, “The Dilemma of Defense Innovation and Adaptation (Part II),” *Small Wars Journal*, November 25, 2016.

⁶⁵ However, it should be noted that while decentralization likely increases *strategic flexibility*, it can also be accompanied by other challenges, including infighting, particularly at critical junctures.

⁶⁶ Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia*, 102.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 100.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁶⁹ Bryden, *The Reinvention of Al-Shabaab*.

⁷⁰ Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia*, 101.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 100–101; Maruf and Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabaab*, also report that Robow “counseled caution” (154).

⁷² Maruf and Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabaab*.

⁷³ Hansen, *Al Shabaab in Somalia*, 103.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Bryden, *The Reinvention of Al-Shabaab*, 3.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Maruf and Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabaab*.

⁷⁸ Some argue such opposition is not inevitable and there are methods that Godane could have used to suppress or subvert this opposition. This is undoubtedly true; moments of change do not automatically result in uprisings against leaders. However, the lack of inevitability does not mean that such moments do not present heightened risk of opposition to leadership, which is sufficient to discourage leaders from taking such a risk and changing strategies.

⁷⁹ Shultz, “The Irreducible Minimum,” 105.



President Volodymyr Zelenskyy of Ukraine visited Bucha, in Kyiv region, where mass killings of civilians took place during occupation by Russian troops, April 4, 2022 (President of Ukraine)

The Rules of the Game

Great Power Competition and International Law

By Durward Elton Johnson

The varieties of skullduggery which make up the repertoire of the totalitarian government are just about as unlimited as human ingenuity itself, and just about as unpleasant. For, as you know, no holds are barred. There are no rules of the game. They can do anything that they think is in their interests.

—GEORGE F. KENNAN

Lieutenant Colonel Durward Elton Johnson, USA, is Chief of the Criminal Law Division for III Corps and Fort Hood.

These words were delivered by U.S. diplomat George Kennan during lectures at the National War College to describe the Soviet Union in 1946. It was the beginning of the Cold

War and the U.S. policy of containment. The case is being made that these words still apply today. Consider the National Security Strategy,¹ National Defense Strategy,² and operational concepts in

joint military doctrine³ painting a bleak picture of global threats and persistent competition. In fact, these documents portray the United States as being at another inflection point in modern conflict with a return to Great Power competition. For the Department of Defense (DOD), a renewed focus on state-on-state strategic competition is premised on revisionist powers, such as Russia and China, and rogue regimes, such as Iran and North Korea, exploiting U.S. vulnerabilities by taking deliberately malicious actions carefully crafted to avoid armed conflict and a powerful military response.⁴ This is a problem.

U.S. military operational concepts describe the notion of a competition continuum—“a world of enduring competition”⁵—acknowledging the need for the U.S. military to reframe how it competes in the space between peacetime and armed conflict, commonly known as the gray zone.⁶ To do so, DOD calls for a more nuanced approach, characterizing the traditional peace/war binary model as an artificial distinction in today’s global environment. Military doctrine portrays strategic, operational, and legal uncertainty in the gray zone, making it difficult to respond, fight, and win. In this space, a critical first step is identifying whether a legal framework can enable strategic and operational solutions within the boundaries of the law. This is especially true for nations such as the United States that promote the rule of law and advocate compliance with international law.

Indeed, if the United States failed to advocate the rule of international law, Kennan’s observations that “[t]here are no rules of the game” and that states will “do anything that they think is in their interests” would become the reality of Great Power competition, dissolving the international rules-based order. While there are scores of international law rules, three loom large within the gray zone. Within this space, international law can be reframed as a triad—composed of sovereignty, nonintervention, and the proscription on the use of force—offering the United States a better foundation for developing new national security strategies to compete outside traditional armed

conflict while upholding its position as a standard-bearer for the rule of law. The triad framework also provides the basis for measures of self-help, arming the United States with a menu of response options to counter malign behavior.

Removing the veil of legal uncertainty gives U.S. competitors less opportunity to exploit perceived gaps in international law. While specific application of international law to specific activities requires careful legal analysis, understanding the basis for lawful action enables the development of new national security strategies to counter malign behavior. This article does not address domestic law or policy. Instead, it explores *international* legal obligations to provide a prism through which domestic law and policy can be fashioned to meet U.S. national security objectives.

Freedom to Act

The modern state system derives from the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, which recognized that states are sovereign and generally not subject to the jurisdiction of others.⁷ Absent international obligations generally formed through treaties or customary international law, states generally have the right to engage in any national security activity subject only to internal domestic law and policy. This concept, also known as the Lotus principle, is reflected in the 1927 S.S. *Lotus* case in which the Permanent Court of International Justice recognized that

[i]nternational law governs relations between independent States. The rules of law binding upon States therefore emanate from their own free will as expressed in conventions or by usages generally accepted as expressing principles of law and established in order to regulate the relations between these co-existing independent communities or with a view to the achievement of common aims. Restrictions upon the independence of States cannot therefore be presumed.⁸

Thus, unless the United States chooses to ratify a treaty or accept a certain activity as prohibited under customary international law, almost nothing

in international law forbids that activity. This is true even when other states claim an activity is customary, so long as the United States has consistently objected to that emerging norm—in other words, a persistent objector.⁹

Consider treaties such as the Charter of the United Nations (UN Charter), the Statute of the International Court of Justice, and the Geneva Conventions I through IV. The United States ratified these treaties, creating international obligations. In contrast, the United States has not ratified other multilateral treaties such as the two Protocols to the Geneva Conventions and the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties. Since those treaties were not ratified, the United States is not bound by them, except where the United States treats certain aspects as customary international law.¹⁰ Where certain aspects are considered customary by other states, the United States only needs to persistently object to ensure that it is not bound by the rule.

Customary international law is described as “a general practice accepted as law.” This description is derived from Article 38 of the Statute of the International Court of Justice, a treaty the United States ratified along with all other UN member states—193 to be exact.¹¹ Essentially, states make binding customary international law through consistent practice combined with a sense of legal obligation—that is, *opinio juris*.¹² State practice, by itself, is not enough. Colloquially, states must practice what they preach. If enough states replicate the same behavior, it becomes custom subject to the exceptions of persistent objectors. Requiring these two aspects is generally accepted by most prominent legal scholars and illuminated in seminal works such as *Oppenheim’s International Law* and *Brownlie’s Principles of Public International Law*. A review of the *Department of Defense Law of War Manual* affirms the United States shares this view. Well-known sources of customary international law are found in official opinions of government legal advisers, rules of engagement, domestic court opinions, military manuals, and certain treaties and other international

instruments.¹³ The bottom line is that states, and no one else, make international law. The United States subjects itself to certain international obligations of its own choosing. The only exceptions to this essential aspect of creating international law are peremptory norms, also called *jus cogens*, which are fundamental principles, such as the prohibition against slavery, genocide, and crimes against humanity.¹⁴

Across the Competition Continuum

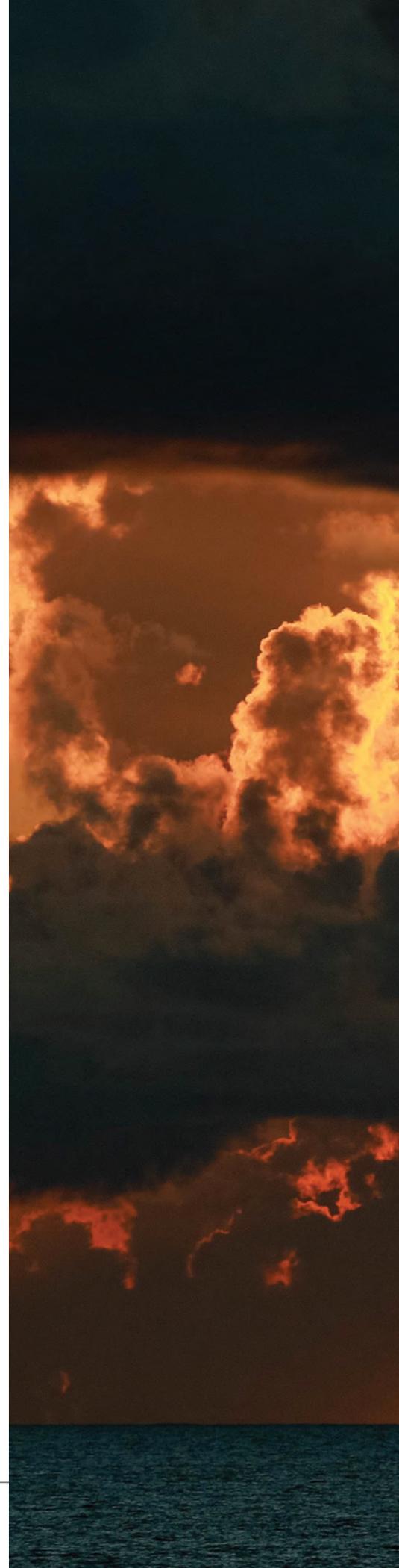
U.S. military operational concepts rightly argue that competition across the continuum requires more nuance, especially in the space between peacetime and armed conflict. International law is the foundation to enable new strategic and operational solutions. Arguably, gaps exist in current national strategy, policy, and domestic legal authorities to address hostile activities outside of armed conflict. However, international law is generally more permissive in allowing states to engage in national security activities as well as respond to other states' hostile behavior outside of armed conflict. There is no gap and certainly no gray zone in international law—just the need to understand, apply, and interpret the correct body of international law.

State-on-state behavior, whether during an armed conflict or outside of one, is regulated by primary rules of international law. These rules establish international obligations between states.¹⁵ This article does not address international human rights law and its application to state behavior toward individuals. The law of armed conflict (LOAC), also known as international humanitarian law or the law of war, regulates the activities of states that are part of an armed conflict. LOAC is primarily found in customary international law and treaties such as the Geneva Conventions I through IV. Outside of armed conflict, the use of interstate force is primarily regulated by the UN Charter and customary international law. Outside of armed conflict and the use of interstate force, customary international law applies to state-on-state behavior.

However, secondary rules of international law, commonly known as Responsibility of States for Internationally Wrongful Acts, begin when international obligations are violated and measures of self-help available to an affected state are limited.¹⁶ In 2002, the UN General Assembly adopted a report of the International Law Commission that contained draft articles on state responsibility never ratified by any state.¹⁷ The consensus among scholars and states is the draft articles on state responsibility generally codify customary international law principles describing what are termed *internationally wrongful acts*.¹⁸ The draft articles also provide states injured by internationally wrongful acts attributable to other states with response options to counter and stop the unlawful activity. Call it measures of self-help. When considering the customary state responsibility rules, along with treaty and customary international law obligations that apply to state-on-state behavior, an international legal framework can be applied across the competition continuum. Think of it as a triad framework in the space between peacetime and armed conflict. Understanding and applying the triad framework provide a legal basis for the United States to engage in national security activities outside of armed conflict and to counter activities that harm U.S. national security regardless of whether the malign behavior falls in the gray zone.

The Triad Framework

This framework involves three distinct and overlapping concepts that create international obligations and regulate state-on-state activity: the principles of sovereignty and nonintervention and the proscription on the use of armed force. Generally, if a state's activities comply with these three concepts, those activities are unregulated under international law, providing freedom to engage in those activities. If a state violates an aspect of the triad, however, it commits an internationally wrongful act, triggering the right for an injured state to respond. While there are exceptions to these guidelines and differing interpretations on the peripheries of the



A dramatic photograph of a sunset or sunrise over the ocean. The sky is filled with dark, heavy clouds, with bright, golden light breaking through in several places, creating a high-contrast scene. A large, bright lightning bolt strikes the water on the right side of the frame. In the lower center, the silhouette of a ship is visible on the horizon. The overall mood is intense and powerful.

USS *Mobile Bay* transits South China Sea,
April 2, 2022 (U.S. Navy/Lily Gebauer)



American and German crew members sit side-by-side working onboard North Atlantic Treaty Organization E-3A Airborne Warning & Control System, patrolling Allied airspace in Eastern Europe in wake of Russia's attack on Ukraine, March 1, 2022 (NATO)

rules, the triad framework provides a baseline for U.S. national security strategy to counter malign behavior.

The principle of sovereignty is perhaps the most fundamental international law principle in the triad framework and undergirds the other two. Sovereignty connotes a state's independence over its territory and freedom to choose how to conduct its affairs inside and outside its own borders. Territorial sovereignty applies to a state's control over the people, objects, resources, and state activities within its own borders. Classic violations of territorial sovereignty include a state sending "its troops, its warships, or its police forces into or through foreign territory, or its aircraft over it."¹⁹

Returning to the Lotus principle, the Permanent Court of International Justice affirmed a state "may not exercise its power in any form in the territory of another State."²⁰ The rule, however, is not absolute, as not all activities a state conducts inside another state violate sovereignty.

Consider the concept of innocent passage.²¹ As an exception to violating territorial sovereignty, the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea allows for a ship to transit through another state's territorial sea without that state's consent. Disagreements between leading international cyber law scholars on whether a state violates another state's sovereignty if engaged in unknown or nonconsensual

cyber activities on its territory are a more contemporary example.²² Does emplacing not-yet-activated malware into another state's cyber infrastructure, in and of itself, violate sovereignty?

Consider also espionage. Most leading scholars have long asserted espionage either does not violate sovereignty or has become a carved-out exception based on overwhelming state practice. In fact, DOD in its "Assessment of International Legal Issues in Information Operations" expressly stated the lack of international legal sanctions for espionage may be due to the international law doctrine of "*tu quoque*" (roughly, a nation has no standing to complain about a practice

in which it itself engages).”²³ Moreover, when a state receives the consent of another state to conduct a myriad of activities on its territory, there can be no violation of sovereignty.²⁴

Somewhat interdependent with sovereignty is the overlapping primary rule of nonintervention. There is general agreement supported by leading scholars and further confirmed in opinions of the International Court of Justice that nonintervention is a rule of customary international law.²⁵ In its 1986 judgment in the Nicaragua case, the International Court of Justice confirmed “the right of every sovereign state to conduct its affairs without outside interference.”²⁶ This right prohibits states from intervening “directly or indirectly in internal or external affairs of other States.”²⁷ This is commonly known as a state’s *domaine réservé*. While the use of interstate armed force under Article 2(4) of the UN Charter is the most obvious example, activities that do not rise to the level of armed force may be wrongful intervention in another state’s internal affairs. The critical requirement to violate this rule is coercion affecting a state’s *domaine réservé*.²⁸ While there are differing interpretations on the fringes of the meaning of coercion, the prevailing view among scholars is that coercion simply means the affected state has no “control over the matter in question.”²⁹ It is more than just interference with state affairs; it must be “dictatorial,” depriving the affected state of its free will.³⁰

The third component of the triad framework is the proscription on the use of armed aggression against another state. Pursuant to Article 2(4) of the UN Charter, “All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations.” This fundamental treaty rule is also customary international law. However, the charter does not define the term *force*. In fact, there is no authoritative definition of or criteria for a prohibited *use of force*. Some scholars view that such force is limited

to armed—or military—action.³¹ Others argue that Article 2(4) also covers physical force of a nonmilitary nature.³² For example, former Department of State legal advisor Abraham Sofaer defines force as any manner of physical violence.³³ At a minimum, there is broad consensus that actions that injure or kill people, or physically damage or destroy objects beyond a *de minimis* level, amount to a use of force. Other forms of coercion, such as economic, political, or psychological campaigns, are not prohibited under Article 2(4), although they still might violate the principle of sovereignty.³⁴ These coercive measures also have the potential to violate other international obligations formed through other treaties or customary international law such as the nonintervention rule, but they fall outside the scope of Article 2(4).

Understanding the triad framework serves as the international legal foundation for the United States to engage in national security activities around the globe outside of armed conflict. If U.S. national security activities do not violate another state’s sovereignty, coercively intervene in another state’s affairs, or are not a prohibited use of force outside its own borders, then the activity may be used lawfully under international law to achieve national strategic objectives absent any specific treaties the United States may have with the target state. Yet international law provides exceptions to compliance with the triad framework, absent any other relevant international agreements, instruments, or customary international law.

Countering Malign Behavior

Where another state, such as Russia or China, engages in internationally wrongful acts that injure the United States, a menu of response options is available to counter the behavior. In fact, many of these measures would be considered violations of the triad. However, they are lawfully justified when used to counter an internationally wrongful act. Think of these options as lawful measures of self-help. There are four major response options relevant to counter hostile and malicious activities

below the threshold of armed conflict. The four response options are retorsion, countermeasures, self-defense, and the legal doctrine of necessity.

First, the United States always has the right to retorsion. Examples of retorsion include expulsion of diplomats, economic sanctions, embargoes, and the withdrawal of aid.³⁵ These are perhaps the most common unilateral measures taken by states. Retorsion options are normally done in response to an internationally wrongful act of another state, yet they need not be.³⁶ Retorsion may be used in response to any undesired conduct of another state. But it must be in response. They are lawful measures used to compel other states to cease certain activities because the activities, in and of themselves, do not breach an international obligation as defined in the triad framework. They also cannot violate any treaties or international agreements the United States may have with another state, such as the United States–Mexico–Canada Agreement³⁷ or the U.S. and China Phase One Trade Agreement.³⁸ Indeed, because they are lawful measures, albeit unfriendly or unwelcome conduct, states are free to engage in retorsion.

Consider the removal of 60 Russian officials from the United States in 2018 after the poisoning of former Russian spy Sergei Skripal and his daughter in the United Kingdom. Senior U.S. officials stated the measure was taken due to Russia’s use of a military-grade chemical weapon in the territory of another state—the United Kingdom.³⁹ Or consider a series of additional economic sanctions by the United States against Iran in response to Iran and its proxy attacks against U.S. forces and interests in Iraq. According to the State Department, the United States initiated new sanctions against senior Iranian leaders and numerous sectors of the Iranian economy including construction, manufacturing, textiles, and mining.⁴⁰ While the United States took measures of retorsion against Russia and Iran, the events in question also arguably provided other avenues of self-help, such as countermeasures and self-defense.

Countermeasures are a broad and flexible concept. This legal doctrine

allows the United States to counter internationally wrongful acts committed by another state with a response, except armed force, that under other circumstances would be considered unlawful. They can be employed solely to stop hostile or malicious activity, not for purposes of retribution. Countermeasures may be used to compel and convince adversaries to cease their activity. The doctrine justifies or excuses violating portions of the triad framework, including the offending state's sovereignty or coercively intervening to counter the malign behavior. It also allows a state to violate any other international obligation formed through treaties or other international instruments, except the use of force under Article 2(4) of the UN Charter. However, certain conditions apply. Normally, states are required to provide advanced notice to the offending state to give it an opportunity to cease the activity. Yet this may be impractical when "urgent countermeasures" are necessary to avoid further injury or may give the offending state an opportunity to defeat the countermeasure.⁴¹ The countermeasure must also be proportionate. In this sense, the response must be "commensurate with the injury suffered." If the response is comparable in size and degree considering the gravity of the internationally wrongful act, it does not matter the means or methods of the response. The response is not limited to the same type of activity the offending state engaged in. The response can also be one measure or multiple measures if it is proportionate.⁴²

Consider the events during the 2018 U.S. midterm elections. According to the *Washington Post* and multiple other news outlets, the United States blocked Internet access of the Russian Internet Research Agency (IRA). The IRA was offline during the day of the midterm elections and a few days after until tallying of the votes was complete to ensure the IRA did not interfere.⁴³ Let us assume the cyber operation, without justification, would be an internationally wrongful act, either by violating Russia's sovereignty or the rule of intervention. U.S. officials assessed the IRA works on behalf of the Russian government and concluded it was

partly responsible for Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. Presidential elections. Assuming Russia, through the IRA, was engaged in a disinformation campaign to disrupt the 2018 midterm elections and it was deemed an internationally wrongful act, taking the IRA offline is likely a valid countermeasure. Making these assumptions, the United States is not limited to an in-kind response. If the Russians committed an internationally wrongful act by interfering in U.S. elections, the United States could resort to any measures short of armed force to stop the malicious activity subject to the requirements for countermeasures. In this case, blocking Internet access was enough.

The most powerful response option is self-defense. Unlike countermeasures, the principle of self-defense allows the United States to respond with interstate armed force only subject to certain requirements. Based on treaty law under Article 51 of the UN Charter and customary international law, the United States has the "inherent right" to defend itself against an armed attack. The term *armed attack*, however, is subject to some debate. There is a prevailing view recognized by the International Court of Justice in the aforementioned 1986 Nicaragua case that the notion of an armed attack is always a prohibited use of force under Article 2(4), but not all uses of force falling within the Article 2(4) prohibition qualify as an armed attack.⁴⁴ Accepting this view creates a gap where malicious state actors could engage in forceful actions in violation of Article 2(4) of the UN Charter without triggering the right of an injured state to forcefully respond; those hostile forceful actions are not considered severe enough to constitute an armed attack. This is significant because U.S. competitors would rather engage in hostile and malicious activities without generating a powerful military response. Instead, the United States would be relegated to only nonforceful countermeasures to stop forceful actions of a malicious state actor.

As expressed in the *DOD Law of War Manual*, however, the United States "has long taken the position that the inherent right of self-defense potentially applies against any illegal use of force."⁴⁵ Thus,

the U.S. view most aptly reflects the notion that no gap exists between a "use of force" and an "armed attack"—a position not expressly shared by other states. Most notably, Japan appears to be inching closer to the U.S. view.⁴⁶ Other U.S. allies and partners, nevertheless, do not openly share this view, which may create a dilemma. Where there is disagreement about whether hostile actions qualify as an armed attack during combined operations or other activities that involve other states, the availability of forceful response options may be limited.

Yet assuming a malicious state actor illegally uses force, the United States reserves its right to respond with armed force only subject to the requirements of necessity and proportionality.⁴⁷ *Necessity* essentially means that no reasonable alternative means other than armed force are available to deter or defeat the armed attack.⁴⁸ Proportionality in the self-defense context is different from required in countermeasures or during armed conflict. *Proportionality* for purposes of self-defense allows the use of armed force "to the extent that it is required to repel the armed attack and to restore the security of the party attacked."⁴⁹ While proportionality in the context of countermeasures must be commensurate in scale and intensity, a defensive forceful measure may be disproportionately larger or smaller depending on what is needed to defeat the armed attack. There can be multiple measures or one large-scale response, so long as it satisfies the requirements of necessity and proportionality.

To illustrate, the United States targeted and killed Major General Qasem Soleimani, a senior Iranian military commander in charge of the Quds Force within the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. The United States justified this use of armed force as a self-defense measure against a persistent and continuing threat. The initial statement by DOD confirms that Soleimani "was actively developing plans to attack" U.S. personnel, was "responsible for the deaths of hundreds" of troops, and "orchestrated attacks" against U.S. interests in Iraq over the preceding months.⁵⁰ While there is significant disagreement in blog posts and



Standing NATO Maritime Group 2 ships and submarines sail in formation in Ionian Sea off coast of Sicily, February 21, 2022, during exercise Dynamic Manta 22 (Courtesy French Navy/Stephane Dzioba)

academic circles regarding the legality of the strike, these analyses are based on incomplete information and a lack of access to the intelligence that likely informed the U.S. decision to forcefully respond. Employment of forceful defensive measures must be analyzed case by case on all available information known at the time of the decision, not *ex post facto*.

The final and seldom-used response option is based on the plea of necessity. The response may be of any nature, means, or methods, subject only to the requirements to invoke the doctrine. Necessity may be justified in situations that create a “grave and imminent peril”

to an “essential interest” of the state. Threats to the existence of the state are the most obvious case but may apply in the absence of an existential threat. Simply, it depends on all the circumstances. The response must also be the only means available to defend the essential interest and cannot “seriously impair” an essential interest of another state. Given these high standards, the doctrine of necessity is rarely used. In situations that may apply, necessity likely overlaps with other lawful response options, such as countermeasures or self-defense. However, the doctrine of necessity provides some flexibility as there is no

requirement that the triggering situation be deemed an internationally wrongful act or attributable to another state.⁵¹

The Starting Point

With a renewed focus on Great Power competition, how the United States reframes competition across the continuum is vital, most notably, in the space between peacetime and armed conflict. This gray zone is being leveraged to diminish U.S. global reach and power while creating discord among the United States, its allies, and partners. For the United States to effectively engage in this space to counter malign



Dutch-German Air and Missile Defense Task Force deploys Patriot surface-to-air missile systems near Sliač Air Base, Slovakia, to reinforce defense capabilities following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, April 19, 2022 (Courtesy Mediacentrum Defensie/Gregory Fréni)

behavior, understanding and applying international law is the starting point. Viewing international law through the lens of the triad framework offers a better foundation for developing new national security strategies to compete outside of traditional armed conflict. The framework also provides the basis for measures of self-help arming the United States with the ability to counter malicious state activities.

While this article provides guidelines for understanding and applying international law, context matters. Specific activities in specific situations require careful legal analysis. Regardless, the crux is the United States is not bound by international rules that constrain its ability to compete, fight, and win in the current

global operational environment. Certainly, international law need not be thought of as a binary model only applying to peacetime or wartime. Once reframed, U.S. domestic legal authorities, strategy, and policy can be reshaped to meet the needs of persistent engagement and undermine U.S. competitor objectives. JFQ

Notes

¹ *Interim National Security Strategic Guidance* (Washington, DC: The White House, March 2021), available at <<https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/NSC-1v2.pdf>>; *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: The White House, December 2017), available

at <<https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>>.

² *Summary of the National Defense Strategy of the United States of America: Sharpening the American Military's Competitive Edge* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2018), available at <<https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>>.

³ *Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, March 16, 2018); Joint Doctrine Note 1-19, *Competition Continuum* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, June 3, 2019); *Joint Operating Environment 2035: The Joint Force in a Contested and Disordered World* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, July 14, 2016); TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-1, *The U.S. Army in Multi-Domain Operations 2028* (Fort Eustis, VA: U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, December 6, 2018), available at <<https://adminpubs.tradoc.army.mil/pamphlets/TP525-3-1.pdf>>.

⁴ *Summary of the National Defense Strategy*, 2–3.

⁵ Joint Doctrine Note 1-19, 2.

⁶ Charles R. Burnett et al., *Outplayed: Regaining Strategic Initiative in the Gray Zone* (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College Press, June 2016).

⁷ James Crawford, *The Creation of States in International Law*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 10–11.

⁸ S.S. *Lotus* (France v. Turkey) (Judgment), 1927 Permanent Court of International Justice (series A) No. 10, 18.

⁹ *Department of Defense (DOD) Law of War Manual* (Washington, DC: Office of General Counsel, December 2016), para. 1.8.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, paras. 19.18, 19.20.1, 19.20.2.

¹¹ International Court of Justice, “Statute of the International Court of Justice,” available at <<https://www.icj-cij.org/en/statute>>.

¹² *DOD Law of War Manual*, para. 1.8.

¹³ James Crawford, *Brownlie’s Principles of Public International Law*, 9th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 21–22.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 595.

¹⁵ Eric David, “Primary and Secondary Rules,” in *The Law of International Responsibility*, ed. James Crawford et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 27–30.

¹⁶ General Assembly resolution 56/83, *Responsibility of States for Internationally Wrong Acts*, A/RES/56/83 (January 28, 2002), available at <<https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/56/83>>.

¹⁷ General Assembly of the United Nations, *Sixth Committee (Legal)—71st Session*, available at <https://www.un.org/en/ga/sixth/71/resp_of_states.shtml>.

¹⁸ Alain Pellet, “The ILC’s Articles on State Responsibility for Internationally Wrongful Acts and Related Texts,” in *The Law of International Responsibility*, 86–88.

¹⁹ Robert Jennings and Arthur Watts, eds., *Oppenheim’s International Law*, vol. 1, *Peace*, 9th ed. (London: Longman Group, 1992), 386.

²⁰ S.S. *Lotus*, 18.

²¹ Crawford, *Brownlie’s Principles*, 300–301.

²² Gary P. Corn and Robert Taylor, “Sovereignty in the Age of Cyber,” *AJIL Unbound*, vol. 111 (October 2017), 207–212; cf. Michael N. Schmitt and Liis Vihul, “Respect for Sovereignty in Cyberspace,” *Texas Law Review* 95, no. 7 (June 2017), 1639–1676.

²³ Michael N. Schmitt and Brian T. O’Donnell, eds., *Computer Network Attack and International Law* (Newport, RI: U.S. Naval War College, 2002), appendix, “An Assessment of International Legal Issues in Information Operations,” 517, available at <<https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1378&context=ils>>.

²⁴ Jennings and Watts, *Oppenheim’s International Law*, 385.

²⁵ *Case Concerning Military and*

Paramilitary Activities in and Against Nicaragua (*Nicaragua v. United States of America*), International Court of Justice, Judgment of June 27, 1986, para. 202. See also Jennings and Watts, *Oppenheim’s International Law*, 428–434.

²⁶ *Nicaragua v. United States of America*, para. 202.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, para. 205.

²⁸ Jennings and Watts, *Oppenheim’s International Law*, 430–431; *Nicaragua v. United States of America*, para. 205.

²⁹ Jennings and Watts, *Oppenheim’s International Law*, 432.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Albrecht Randelzhofer and Oliver Dörr, “Article 2(4),” *The Charter of the United Nations: A Commentary*, vol. 1, 3rd ed., ed. Bruno Simma et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 200–234.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Abraham D. Sofaer, “International Law and the Use of Force,” *American Society of International Law Proceedings* 82 (April 1988), 422.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Denis Alland, “The Definition of Countermeasures,” in Crawford et al., *The Law of International Responsibility*, 1131–1133. See also James Crawford, *State Responsibility: The General Part* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 676–678.

³⁶ Thomas Geigrich, “Retorsion,” in *Max Planck Encyclopedia of Public International Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), § 1-3.

³⁷ Office of the United States Trade Representative, *Agreement Between the United States of America, the United Mexican States, and Canada*, July 1, 2020, available at <<https://ustr.gov/trade-agreements/free-trade-agreements/united-states-mexico-canada-agreement/agreement-between>>.

³⁸ Office of the United States Trade Representative, “United States and China Reach Phase One Trade Agreement,” December 13, 2019, available at <<https://ustr.gov/about-us/policy-offices/press-office/press-releases/2019/december/united-states-and-china-reach>>.

³⁹ “Expulsion of Russian Intelligence Officers: Holding Russia Accountable,” Department of State, March 29, 2018, available at <<https://2017-2021.state.gov/expulsion-of-russian-intelligence-officers-holding-russia-accountable/index.html>>.

⁴⁰ Michael R. Pompeo, press statement, “Intensified Sanctions,” Department of State, January 10, 2020, available at <<https://2017-2021.state.gov/intensified-sanctions-on-iran/index.html>>.

⁴¹ James Crawford, “Overview of Part Three of the Articles on State Responsibility,” in *The Law of International Responsibility*, 938.

⁴² Alland, “The Definition of Countermeasures,” 1127–1134; Crawford,

State Responsibility, 686–706; Crawford, *Brownlie’s Principles*, 572–576.

⁴³ “U.S. Disrupted Russian Trolls on Day of November Election: Report,” Reuters, February 26, 2019, available at <<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-russia/u-s-disrupted-russian-trolls-on-day-of-november-election-report-idUSKCN1QF26Q>>.

⁴⁴ *Nicaragua v. United States of America*, para. 195; Albrecht Randelzhofer and Georg Nolte, “Article 51,” in *The Charter of the United Nations: A Commentary*, vol. 2, 3rd ed., ed. Bruno Simma et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 1397–1428.

⁴⁵ *DOD Law of War Manual*, para. 1.11.5.2.

⁴⁶ Craig Martin, “Japan’s Definition of Armed Attack and ‘Bloody Nose’ Strikes Against North Korea,” *Just Security*, February 1, 2018, available at <<https://www.justsecurity.org/51678/japans-definition-armed-attack-bloody-nose-strikes-north-korea/>>.

⁴⁷ *DOD Law of War Manual*, paras. 1.11.1.2 and 1.11.1.3.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, para. 1.11.1.3.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, para. 1.11.1.2.

⁵⁰ “Statement by the Department of Defense,” January 2, 2020, available at <<https://www.defense.gov/Newsroom/Releases/Release/Article/2049534/statement-by-the-department-of-defense/>>.

⁵¹ Crawford, *State Responsibility*, 306–315; Sarah Heathcote, “Circumstances Precluding Wrongfulness in the ILC Articles on State Responsibility: Necessity,” in *The Law of International Responsibility*, 491–502.



Navy warplanes (five Douglas SBD Dauntless bombers in foreground and one F4F-4 Grumman Wildcat at tip of deck) played major role in protecting armada during Operation *Torch*, November 1942 (Naval History and Heritage Command)

Insights on Theater Command and Control from the Creation of Allied Force Headquarters

By J. Bryan Mullins

Colonel J. Bryan Mullins, USA (Ret.), Ph.D., is the Division Chief for War Plans, Strategy, and Exercises at the U.S. Army Pacific G4.

This article explores the creation of Dwight D. Eisenhower's Allied Force Headquarters (AFHQ) over the summer and fall of 1942 and seeks insights into the difficulties faced by any joint, combined, theater-level headquarters during the early stages of a large-scale war. While 80-years hence technology and practice have improved our ability to stand up a theater headquarters rapidly, the critical challenges faced by AFHQ remain relevant. In general, new joint task forces (JTFs) will face the same five general challenges that AFHQ had to overcome.

First, AFHQ formed quickly, using manpower from a wide range of pre-existing organizations. Second, the command simultaneously planned and prepared for operations while trying to fill out its personnel and establish procedures to govern its business. Third, it was inserted into an already functional national and bilateral coordination structure that had been synchronizing strategy and global logistics for months. This new combined U.S.–United Kingdom (UK) staff triggered a complex reevaluation of the roles and responsibilities of each agency in the system. Fourth, AFHQ inherited a formidable range and depth of preexisting plans and supporting staff analyses of the operational and logistical problems associated with invading northwestern Africa that offered advantages and disadvantages for the command. Finally, AFHQ needed to establish and convey a phased command and control (C2) concept for the campaign while simultaneously defining internal responsibilities and coordination procedures for the operational and administrative portions of the staff and the component commands charged with action within each domain. Regardless of how good or imperfect the U.S. and UK models were for exercising C2 at the theater level, the real challenge was merging them into one system that was understood and functional at a massive scale. Based on observations of major command post exercises within U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) from 2015 to 2018, this article concludes

that these five factors remain relevant to future conflicts and likely apply to other combatant commands.

Building AFHQ

Despite the fact that the United States and United Kingdom had been discussing a combined venture against Vichy French possessions in Africa or the Atlantic islands since August 1941, AFHQ found itself in a sprint to man the headquarters, finalize the planning details necessary to pull off an invasion of North Africa (called Operation *Torch*), and mount the invasion force from July to November 1942.¹ The first key component of AFHQ, British First Army, stood up in late June 1942.² On July 24–25, the British and Americans agreed to the general terms for Operation *Torch*. The Combined Chiefs of Staff (CCS) appointed Dwight D. Eisenhower the overall commander and assigned him a new joint combined staff to plan and control the operation, with the planning effort to occur primarily in London.³ The initial conditional nature of *Torch*, proposed by U.S. Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall, was overridden by President Franklin D. Roosevelt almost immediately, lending urgency to the effort to man a large headquarters.⁴ On August 4, the executive planning team convened for the first time at Norfolk House in the heart of London. U.S. Brigadier General Alfred Gruenther was the first director of this group made up of 12 planners drawn from Combined Operations Headquarters, British First Army, and European Theater of Operations, U.S. Army (ETOUSA).⁵ Officially activated on August 11, the command held its earliest planning sessions less than 2 weeks later; Major General Humphrey Gale, the British chief administration officer, held his first logistics coordination meeting on August 22, 1942.⁶ Key U.S. personnel continued to trickle into the command over the following weeks, including U.S. G4 Brigadier General Archelaus Hamblen and Chief of Staff Brigadier General Walter Bedell Smith. Smith remained Eisenhower's staff coordinator for the duration of the war

in Europe.⁷ Not appointed until August 18, Brigadier General Smith of the U.S. portion of the AFHQ headquarters found himself in a race to assemble the core of his unit by September 15.⁸

AFHQ remained a relatively small organization during its first year of existence. In mid-November 1942, it was authorized 507 officers, 71 warrant officers, and 1,068 enlisted Soldiers.⁹ If this seems a large number, it is helpful to remember that until November 24, the command was spread among London, Gibraltar, and Algiers and retained a rear, main, and forward staff footprint for virtually the duration of the war. To appreciate the density of personnel at each location, the AFHQ staff directory for Gibraltar, published on November 5, listed about 140 individuals and coordination centers, with large contingents from the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force, and a robust combined political section.¹⁰ It is difficult to determine what percentage of authorized positions were filled by the time field operations began, but AFHQ had at least 80 percent of its officers and 50 percent of its total personnel in mid-November.¹¹ By mid-December, the entire G-3 section for AFHQ consisted of 31 officers concentrated primarily in Algiers.¹² Although deemed sufficient at the beginning of the campaign, the size of the AFHQ staff continued to expand throughout 1943. In addition, it gained a few new subordinate organizations, including 18th Army Group, U.S. Fifth Army, and North African Theater of Operations, U.S. Army, activated in part to help AFHQ better handle its diverse range of missions and units.

Although near full strength, the polyglot nature of its population and the inexperience of its U.S. members hampered the efficiency of the command. British personnel came from the Combined Operations Headquarters, Home Guard, the War Office, the Admiralty, and the Air Ministry. U.S. personnel coalesced around a core provided by ETOUSA, which traced its lineage back to the Special Observer Group and then U.S. Army Forces British Isles. (Some of these men had been in the United Kingdom since the

summer of 1940.¹³) These experienced hands received reinforcements from the Operations Division, Army Air Service, and Service of Supply (SOS) of the U.S. War Department.¹⁴ Additional officers came from military units scattered all over the United States and elements assigned to AFHQ. Key players among the Americans barely knew one another (unless they had been classmates), and everyone had to agree how to run a combined headquarters for the first time. The frantic pace and long duty hours common at Norfolk House accelerated the process of coalescing this group of individuals into a functional team.

A Kitchen with Many Cooks

Despite the need to form a headquarters from scratch on a compressed timeline, AFHQ did benefit from all the hard work that had already gone into planning the precursor to *Torch*—Operation *Gymnast*. But the sheer volume of preexisting plans and the number of agencies intimately involved in producing them also came with disadvantages. First, planners at AFHQ had to master the set of facts (and in some cases discover the mistakes) that their counterparts at the highest levels had been working with since the beginning of 1942. Second, they eventually had to not only understand the material as well as its original creators but also go beyond them, winning ownership over the process and progressing to detailed schemes of maneuver and logistical support, backed up by precise convoy schedules and packing lists.

One of the earliest challenges AFHQ faced was the need to establish a working relationship with the already existing national agencies tasked with determining strategy and directing operations. The British high command had a major advantage over the Americans: it had already established a functional national-level joint command. By early 1942, the British military had a functional executive planning body that answered to the Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff committee (General Alan Francis Brooke after March 1942) and then to Winston Churchill as the Minister of Defence. The

Americans operated under a much looser structure, where the War Department and Department of the Navy functioned as almost independent agencies. The Joint Staff planners—five officers from the Army (including Army Air Forces) and Navy, who supervised a joint strategic committee of six planners—guided what little informal coordination and synchronization occurred in Washington. Both organizations were established in March 1942 and were soon joined by a small secretariat plus intelligence, military transportation, communications, and other specialized committees. Retired Admiral William Leahy joined the team in July as the chief of staff for the President in his role as the commander in chief of the Army and Navy. Perhaps as expected, the American military organizations charged with fleshing out and synchronizing overall U.S. strategy were small, new, and at odds with one another throughout the second half of 1942.¹⁵

Like in any large, bureaucratic structure, the U.S. War Department was hardly a unified monolith. The Operations Division, established in March 1942 using a core of officers pulled from the old operations and planning divisions, consisted of the people who had worked out the garrisoning of the Western Hemisphere and the immediate shoring up of Great Britain and had published the first drafts of Operation *Gymnast* and its related expeditions in and around Africa.¹⁶ They remained the most logical Army planning counterparts for the Joint Board and CCS supporting staff in Washington and had easy access to Marshall and thus maintained firm control over future operations. General Brehon Somervell's SOS was responsible for maritime transportation and the resupply of U.S. units serving overseas. It was also responsible for deciding what percentage of service troops would be fed to each overseas theater command. If Eisenhower believed that ETOUSA and AFHQ were not getting their fair share of troops or material, he would have to take that up with Somervell through Marshall.¹⁷ Finally, the commanders of the Western and Central task forces, both of which

would sail directly from the United States, were in constant contact with planners in London and Washington, adjusting their landing scheme, loading plans, and reinforcement and resupply schedule—tasks that required coordination among AFHQ, SOS, Army Ground Forces, and War Department staff.¹⁸ Each minute change in the resources available or the planning factors being used reverberated throughout each organization, driving another sequence of coordination and synchronization meetings and cables.

Just as AFHQ had to try to remain tied in with half-a-dozen separate entities on the East Coast, it required similar cooperation with the British and American portions of the Eastern Task Force and its associated air and naval units, as well as the industrial and supply agencies that would sustain UK forces in theater. Relative proximity made coordination easier but probably also strengthened British influence over the AFHQ. While the British Joint Planning Staff facilitated the initial contact between AFHQ and the British Middle Eastern Command, real integration could wait until the two commands approached one another in Tunisia or Libya.¹⁹ Finally, the relationship between ETOUSA, the U.S. logistics staff officers at AFHQ, and the service troops within each task force had to be ironed out. In theory, ETOUSA would work itself out of a job soon after the third or fourth reinforcing convoy departed Great Britain (to be replaced by North African Theater of Operations, U.S. Army). Not every professional logistician agreed with this concept, however, and it did little to clarify who was responsible for what during the preparation, mounting, and immediate resupply of the American elements of the invasion force sailing from the United Kingdom.

The intent of the preceding discussion is not to imply that Allied C2 was uniquely defective or that some magical rearrangement of the organization chart and reporting scheme would have fixed most of the problems faced by AFHQ. Despite the near universal desire for simple wire diagrams, no such animal seems



Enemy shell lands close to 6-pounder during long-distance artillery duel as part of North African Campaign (Library of Congress/National Museum of the U.S. Navy)

ever to exist in the historical record, particularly in the case of joint and combined operations. What the example of AFHQ illustrates is the requirement for a large and well-networked staff to synchronize activities among a bewildering array of superior, peer, and subordinate organizations and staffs. AFHQ did not need to, nor could it have, centralize all planning within its own organization. But it did need to understand the plan as well as

all these other entities and have a strong, if not decisive, voice when it came to establishing priorities, evaluating risk, and determining exactly how to accomplish its overarching objectives. As relative newcomers to the planning efforts surrounding Operations *Gymnast* and *Torch*, AFHQ found this almost impossible, and it was not until late January 1943 that Eisenhower's command began to achieve this dominant position.

The Plan(s)

The War Plans Division and then Operations Division of the U.S. War Department had been working with their British counterparts from January to April 1942 to produce an acceptable plan for an operation in North Africa that would eventually be named *Torch*.²⁰ The War Department plan, titled "North West Africa Theater" and dated February 20, 1942, seemed to

have been widely distributed and relatively well known to officers working on the European theater.²¹ The plan included a large and detailed base order and dozens of annexes for each coordinating and special staff section; the entire document was several hundred pages long. This early version of *Torch* assumed little to no resistance from the French, semi-autonomous strikes by the Americans along the Atlantic coast and

the British at Algiers, the commitment of 6 divisions (rather than the eventual 13 projected in the final version), and sufficient civilian local labor to handle the distribution of supplies on the continent.²² The CCS approved the final Allied version, which included draft convoy schedules on April 6, but did not seem to make its way as deeply into U.S. records.²³ If a U.S. staff officer wanted to grasp the overall picture,

how each Service would play its part, and the detailed analysis for each staff and technical section, this was the most thorough and readily available source.

The second set of references were the three outline plans produced by AFHQ between August 9 and September 5.²⁴ The main sticking points revolved around the date for the invasion, the number and scope of the various landings, and the primary objective of the campaign.



Major General George S. Patton, Jr., and Rear Admiral H. Kent Hewitt share light moment on board USS *Augusta*, off Morocco, during Operation *Torch* landings, November 1942 (U.S. Navy/National Archives and Records Administration)

The British were willing to accept more risk to prioritize a rapid advance into Tunisia and follow-on operations in the Mediterranean. Marshall prioritized a low-risk approach focused on establishing a secure blocking force that could isolate Spanish Morocco. Both parties realized there needed to be some compromise between these almost mutually exclusive priorities but could not agree on the degree. The relative merit of the various positions is not important here; what is important is how powerless Eisenhower and his principal subordinates were in forcing a solution. Even though by late August Eisenhower, Mark Clark, and George S. Patton largely agreed with the British concept, they could not get Marshall to change his mind. President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill had to intervene—only Roosevelt could force Marshall to bend over the critical concerns voiced by the British.

In the end, Eisenhower convinced the CCS to postpone the invasion by a month to generate more resources for three full-fledged assaults. The Allies agreed to disagree quietly, or ignore, the unsettled issue of the relative importance of quickly clearing Tunisia versus containing any Axis forces that might reach Spanish Morocco. The U.S. Army would get the British First Army ashore at Algiers, but then they were on their own. U.S. Fifth Army and 12th Air Force would mass on the borders of Spanish Morocco, bottle up any Axis forces projected into the region, and perhaps manage to preserve the possibility of executing Operation *Roundup* in the spring of 1943.²⁵ The AFHQ staff found itself underemployed throughout August while various arguments bounced back and forth between Washington and London.

Once Eisenhower's Outline Plan C was published on September 5, it was revealed to be just that—an outline. But at least the staff could now get started adding details to this framework. One of the first crises that swept through the staff was Brigadier General Everett Hughes's announcement that the plan was logistically unsupportable.²⁶ The news put the War Department and Somervell's SOS into a spin; at one point in late

September, Hughes recommended to Clark that D-Day for *Torch* be pushed back over a month to December 15—a recommendation Clark refused to act on.²⁷ Despite frantic efforts by Somervell and Major General C.H. Lee's SOS in the UK, most of the missing and replacement equipment and reserve supplies never made it into the hands of the assault forces. In hindsight these issues were irrelevant to the failure or success of the early stages of *Torch* but were a massive distraction from mid-September through December for the logisticians assigned to the problem.

About the same time that Eisenhower submitted his consolidated shortage list to the War Department, his staff began to realize that the entire convoy loading schedule was unrealistic. Until September 17, planners had believed that the number of berths and manpower to unload ships and disperse supplies would constrain the buildup of forces. But by the end of the month, the Army began to realize that the real limiting factor would be the ratios of escorts to merchantmen demanded by the U.S. Navy.²⁸ The Navy was willing to provide enough escorts to shepherd 45 slow ships or 20 fast ships in each convoy. The logisticians believed it was possible to berth and offload 55 or 25 ships and had planned the capacity of each convoy accordingly. No one could get the Navy to provide more escorts or relax its escort ratio, so the planners were sent back to rework the composition of each convoy.

The consistent bill payer was logistical capacity—supplies, transportation assets, and service troops. Planners decided to strip out almost all 2.5-ton trucks and Jeeps from the combat units while also slashing the reserve stocks of general supplies and ammunition. The Americans faced a heavier bill, but British First Army cut service troops and cargo trucks as well.²⁹ Because slow convoys from Great Britain took about 2 weeks to sail and unload and those coming from the United States 25 days, the staff had to be working 3 to 5 weeks in front of the expected delivery date of units and supplies. The complexity of such a task in the face of slowly evolving decisions and significant

changes to the critical planning factors is mind-boggling. Just keeping up with all the changes was hard enough—trying to then project what needed to be done differently as a result was almost impossible. In many cases, exactly what was loaded on each convoy coming from the United States and then delivered to the theater was largely a mystery to AFHQ and the U.S. War Department. Designing and executing a campaign plan was extremely challenging under these conditions.

How to Run a Theater

Figuring out exactly how to run a joint campaign across vast distances was a new experience for the U.S. Army in mid-1942. Deploying units overseas was one thing, but no one in the U.S. military had any experience integrating strategic and operational logistics with air-sea-land engagements at the theater level. General guidelines for such an endeavor were vaguely outlined in Field Manual (FM) 100-15, *Field Service Regulations, Larger Units*, and FM 100-10, *Field Service Regulations, Administration*, but these documents lacked detail and were riddled with internal inconsistencies.³⁰ The British had slowly cracked the code in the Mediterranean within the Middle Eastern Command and had an excellent doctrinal reference on the conduct and logistical support of expeditionary operations in *The Manual of Movement*, but the Americans seemed equal parts ignorant and resistant to learning from their experience.³¹ Harnessing the considerable potential of the Army Air Forces seemed to be especially difficult during the initial months in North Africa.³² Eisenhower and the AFHQ appeared capable of adequately planning three isolated amphibious assaults but lacked a compelling concept for how to maximize advantages in the air and sea to support British First Army's drive from Algiers to Tunis.

Brigadier General Lyman Lemnitzer and the AFHQ staff clearly understood the nature of the problem confronting the command in the fall of 1942. The G-3 circulated a coordinating draft of "Organization of the North African

American troops on board landing craft head for beaches at Oran, Algeria, during Operation Torch, November 1942 (Royal Navy/Imperial War Museum/F.A. Hudson)





American "General Grant" medium tanks in western desert during North African Campaign, ca. November 1942 (Library of Congress/National Museum of the U.S. Navy)

Theater" on September 22 that was designed to explain what AFHQ had to do and to solicit input on the best way to go about it.³³ The core requirement was to transform AFHQ from a planning agency to an organization that could operate in the field. Lemnitzer began with the complexity of the administrative situation—U.S. and UK staff arrangements governing logistics were fundamentally different, and the American sea line of communications (SLOC) would run back to the port of New York while resupply for British General Kenneth Anderson's First Army would come from Great Britain.³⁴ The second major problem that worried Lemnitzer was how to achieve synergy among the joint force: how could the Allies harness naval power and airpower to achieve the objectives of *Torch*?

Each task force got its own decentralized air support during its assault

landings, but once established ashore, AFHQ needed something better. Lemnitzer envisioned an overarching air commander and staff collocated with AFHQ that could direct a centralized theater air campaign, a concept too progressive for its time and not enacted until mid-February 1943.³⁵ The Navy would contribute by securing SLOCs and providing support to First Army along its northern flank. The air staff collocated with AFHQ in Algiers would synchronize ground-based air support for navy forces. The remaining concerns pivoted on responsibility for coordination—with the Vichy government in Africa, with the national chains of command and support in Washington and London, and with Middle Eastern Command in Cairo. AFHQ reserved responsibility for doing so to itself and potential methods described.

AFHQ concurrently began to flesh out its understanding of where and when it would need to establish and adjust its footprints in London, Gibraltar, and Algiers. By October 18, Lemnitzer had worked out a four-stage C2 plan that incorporated a new concept, so-called rear links, and a general outline for how things would proceed.³⁶ The plan not only addressed the limitations of existing methods of communication but also increased the size of the staff and the complexity of its move into theater. Only a few leaders would fly; the rest would be unavailable for up to 14 days as they traveled by ship to Gibraltar or Algiers. The ground and naval task forces and two air commands faced similar requirements, and to help offset the loss of control, AFHQ planned to establish and maintain a consolidated rear echelon at Norfolk House, pulling in coordination teams



Royal Canadian Air Force Captain Jake Balfe (center), RCAF CC-130J Hercules aircraft first officer assigned to 436 Transport Squadron, gives mission brief to aircrew members and U.S. Army Soldiers, assigned to 1st Squadron, 40th Cavalry Regiment, 4th Brigade combat team, 25th ID, U.S. Army Alaska, prior to jumping into Joint Pacific Multinational Readiness Center 22-02 on Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska, March 9, 2022 (U.S. Air Force/Taylor Crul)

from the three ground task forces, two air commands, and naval command by D-12. Eisenhower would direct current operations first from Gibraltar and then Algiers, while Smith and Gale handled planning, coordination, and administrative support employing the large and well-connected staff in London. As the situation stabilized and transportation became available, most of the staff would shift to Algiers, leaving only a small liaison element behind to work with ETOUSA and the various services, departments, and ministries on narrow, logistical concerns. Although he tried to be as specific as possible, Lemnitzer

acknowledged that the timing would depend on tactical developments.

The final document published by AFHQ on this topic not only clarified weak areas of earlier documents but also backed off on some of the more progressive ideas contemplated by Lemnitzer.³⁷ Once the three assaults consolidated their lodgments, AFHQ could transition into its final configuration—an American force arrayed along the southern border of Spanish Morocco, and some blend of forces working for the British in Tunisia. Each force would have its own army, supporting air command, and rear-area sustainment organization. AFHQ would

serve as an administrative referee between the two regional commands and supporting naval forces, issue target priorities for the bombers assigned to 12th Air Force, and work with the remnants of the Vichy government to maintain civil control and secure labor and transportation support for Allied efforts. It seems as if AFHQ had given up trying to exert any direct control over naval assets and resigned itself to two autonomous regional subcommands, each with its own distinct goal and objectives. The concept for the campaign left little for AFHQ to do in the realm of operations beyond deciding which U.S. forces to place under Anderson's control;

Operation *Memoranda 30* described a command that would adjudicate the allocation of supplies among the regional commands and the Navy, and little else. It was a watered-down document that delivered little of the promise hinted at by Lemnitzer's musings from a month earlier about how to achieve synergy through decisive control over land, sea, and air elements of the coalition force.

The Past Is Present (and Future)

One might wonder how this summary of the early travails of AFHQ is relevant today. The U.S. military has standing combatant commands, Service components, and tactical and operational units with formal and informal linkages to each area of responsibility. Surely the chaos surrounding the formation of AFHQ is not a useful comparison to what USINDOPACOM or U.S. European Command will face during a future crisis. My personal experiences in what was U.S. Pacific Command from 2015 to 2018 suggest otherwise.

The details might be debatable, but experienced hands would acknowledge that USINDOPACOM does not have enough staff to handle the pace and scope of operations during a major crisis. It would need time and a surge of augmentees and civilian personnel to reconfigure the Service components along functional lines. Eventually, the command would consider establishing a JTF to shoulder some of the increased workload. How new people and organizations are integrated during such a stressful period is something touched on in exercises, but not mastered. Exactly how USINDOPACOM might interact with all the applicable agencies in Washington and its peer commands is also practiced in some exercises, but it is fair to say those events never have the full attention of their participants for more than a few days at a time. A further complicating factor would be the addition of command nodes of key allies and partners—something never fully replicated during training for classification reasons alone.

The time crunch placed on USINDOPACOM in the first weeks of a conflict would make the situation in

AFHQ look pedestrian. A minor dustup, or something that looked like just another routine iteration of an annual major exercise, could spiral into a major theater war in weeks, if not days. An advantage of this reality is that people understand they must be ready to fight with the team and structure they already have for a few weeks, until reinforcements arrive and the option of establishing a JTF presents itself. But executing the option of standing up a new JTF would need to come with a hefty instruction booklet describing how the new headquarters operates and its relationship with established organizations.³⁸

Like AFHQ, a staff officer working in the Pacific has access to a wealth of preexisting plans—perhaps more than any one organization could fully digest. On one hand, there are too many applicable documents; on the other, these documents seldom seem to get down to the level of detail one might hope for. Again, exercises help flesh these concepts out and result in products that are filed away for future use, but the exact conditions will always be slightly different than anticipated. How historically aligned organizations, new additions to the team, and a host of allies and partners would contribute to the existing battle rhythm and C2 processes to understand, refine, and execute these plans remains vague in many cases.

Rather than speculating about command and control during a modern crisis in the Pacific or Eastern Europe, this article set out to describe in some detail the nature of the problem faced by Eisenhower's Allied Force Headquarters in the fall of 1942. This approach has the advantage of being able to examine what happened rather than speculate about what might have happened, in some detail. It also suggests that historical case studies can help us work through future problem sets more thoroughly than we first thought possible. Some of the critical challenges confronting AFHQ are just as, or even more, applicable today, while others would be irrelevant or relatively easy, unless the voluntary decision was made to stand up a new command. There will be a rush to integrate a new team on a compressed timeline while simultaneously planning and conducting operations.

No new organization starts with a clean slate—concepts, plans, and operational preferences predate its creation. The new team must master this context while it tries to change some of it. The difficulty of these tasks is compounded by the need to define internal and external relationships and duties disrupted by the introduction of a new actor. This article lists a set of historical challenges faced by AFHQ to expand our ability to think through how best to command and control a joint campaign, not to suggest that one solution will fit all problems. JFQ

Notes

¹ Maurice Matloff and Edwin M. Snell, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare, 1941–1942* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 1953), 102–103.

² Lynn M. Case et al., *History of Allied Force Headquarters, Part I, August–December 1942* (Caserta, Italy: Printing and Stationery Services, Allied Force Headquarters [AFHQ], 1945), 5. The precursor was Force 110, Combined Operations Headquarters, which was created by Winston Churchill as a standing joint command in July 1941 to figure out how to return to the Continent and to harass the Germany military until that was possible.

³ Matloff and Snell, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare*, 280–281.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 282–283. The U.S. Army officially maintained the position that *Torch* would be conditional until September 15, when an assessment of Russian fortunes would be weighed against commitment of the Western Allies' operational reserve to North Africa. Both the U.S. and British militaries had fully committed to *Torch* by early August.

⁵ Case et al., *History of AFHQ, Part I*, 18. Major General Mark Clark, the deputy commander of AFHQ, assumed oversight of this planning team on August 10, 1942.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 17. There are discrepancies between the British and U.S. dates for activation of AFHQ attributable to the need to maintain the fiction that *Torch* was still conditional until September 15 to preserve George C. Marshall's reputation. Minutes of the daily chief administration officer (CAO) conference started on August 22. See Record Group (RG) 492, "Files of the CAO, AFHQ (Gale)"—one box, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) II, College Park, MD.

⁷ Case et al., *History of AFHQ, Part I*, 18–20. CAO conference notes, August 22–September 15, RG 492.

⁸ Colonel J.W. Ramsey, memorandum to Major General W.B. Smith, February 3, 1943.

RG 492, “Lessons Learned from Operational Torch” box, NARA II.

⁹ Case et al., *History of AFHQ, Part I*, 26.

¹⁰ “Staff Directory,” November 5, 1942, folder 3, box 19, Lemnitzer Papers (LP), National Defense University Library, Fort Lesley J. McNair, Washington, DC.

¹¹ Case et al., *History of AFHQ, Part I*, 26. The history admits that British numbers present appeared low; however, tasked personnel technically assigned to other organizations were working at AFHQ. U.S. officers present were overstrength (313 versus 217 authorized) and 70 percent of the authorized enlisted positions were filled.

¹² “Organization, G-3 Section AFHQ,” December 14, 1942, folder 3, LP.

¹³ Niall Barr, *Eisenhower’s Armies: The American-British Alliance During World War II* (New York: Pegasus Books, 2015). Richard H. Anderson, “Special Observers: A History of SPOBS and USAFBI, 1941–1942” (Ph.D. diss., University of Kansas, 2016).

¹⁴ Marshall reorganized the U.S. War Department in March 1942, which included the creation of the Operations Division, built largely on the foundation of the old War Plans Division. The three major subordinate commands of the War Department were the Army Ground, Air, and (eventually) Service Forces. Initially called the Service of Supply (SOS), General Brehon Somervell renamed his command the Army Service Forces in spring 1943.

¹⁵ Maurice Matloff, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare, 1943–1944* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 1959), 21n5, 38–39. Brigadier General Albert C. Wedemeyer, among others, argues that the Americans did not get properly organized until after the U.S. delegation was embarrassed at Casablanca in January 1943 and that these changes did not begin to bear fruit until May.

¹⁶ Ray S. Cline, *Washington Command Post: The Operations Division* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 1951).

¹⁷ Eisenhower retained his title as the commander of European Theater of Operations, U.S. Army (ETOUSA) until early 1943 and had direct operational and administrative control over the ground and air units assigned to AFHQ. North African Theater of Operations, U.S. Army (NATOUSA), was established in February 1943 (with Eisenhower its commander), and ETOUSA was relieved of any requirements to support U.S. units in that theater.

¹⁸ See Richard M. Leighton and Robert W. Coakley, *Global Logistics and Strategy 1940–1943* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 1955), 420–426.

¹⁹ Brigadier F.W. Vogel, “Memo for AFHQ Chief of Staff,” October 23, 1942, folder 5, box 19, LP. Vogel was AFHQ deputy G-3.

²⁰ See Matloff and Snell, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare*, 176n12.

²¹ “Operations Plans” file (one box), SOS, NATOUSA, RG 492, NARA II. Eisenhower, Everett Hughes (deputy CAO, deputy NATOUSA commander), Lyman Lemnitzer (AFHQ G-3), and Frank S. Ross (chief of transportation at ETOUSA and AFHQ) had all supervised work on, or directly contributed to, the document.

²² Pages 1 and 2 of the base order and the G-4 Annex, “Plan North West Africa Theater,” U.S. War Department, February 20, 1942. Copy filed in SOS, NATOUSA, “Operations Plans” box, RG 492, NARA II.

²³ The earliest records for AFHQ, ETOUSA (including its SOS), and NATOUSA at the National Archives and Records Administration are of poor physical condition, extremely unorganized, and thin. Copies of the final plan published on April 6 were probably used for reference, but the document that was carefully preserved in the historical record was the U.S. plan from February 20, 1942.

²⁴ Matloff and Snell, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare*, 286–293. First Army published its “first maintenance project” in September, and it was validated by Gale’s Inter-Service Committee in October. See J.A.H. Carter and D.N. Kann, *Army Maintenance in the Field, vol. 2: 1943–1945* (London: The War Office, 1961), 11; AFHQ published a draft logistics plan on October 27 that was finalized on December 4. See George F. Howe, *Northwest Africa: Seizing the Initiative in the West* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 1957), 66–67.

²⁵ Operation *Roundup* was the code name for the Allied invasion of France projected for the spring of 1943 or even the fall of 1942. Eisenhower took command of ETOUSA in July 1942 to apply the drive that Marshall argued was necessary to complete preparations and bring the British around to the American timeline.

²⁶ Hughes was the senior American logistician working on *Torch* and a close friend of Eisenhower. Diary, various entries in August and September 1942, box I-2, Everett S. Hughes Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress. This event and its denouement are summarized in Leighton and Coakley, *Global Logistics and Strategy 1940–1943*, 430–435.

²⁷ Diary, September 1942, box I-2, Everett S. Hughes Papers.

²⁸ Leighton and Coakley, *Global Logistics and Strategy 1940–1943*, 435–439.

²⁹ CAO Conference Notes, 2, 5, and October 23, 1942. CAO Conference File, RG 492, NARA II. British planners, largely protected from the argument about escorts and convoy size, were instead directed to reserve more cargo space for crated aircraft to serve as replacements in the Royal Air Force.

³⁰ J. Bryan Mullins, “For the Want of a Nail: The Western Allies Quest to Synchronize Maneuver and Logistics During Operations Torch and Overlord” (Ph.D. diss., Kansas State

University, 2020), 23–31, 39–56.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 56–65.

³² Robert S. Ehlers, Jr., *The Mediterranean Air War: Airpower and Allied Victory in World War II* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2015), 257–263, 266–271.

³³ AFHQ G3, Planning Paper 6, September 22, 1941, folder 5, LP. Planning Paper 6 was a draft version of Operation *Memorandum 30*, “Organization of the North African Theater.”

³⁴ The U.S. Army had decided to place its technical staff advisors under the SOS commander while the British subordinated them to the Adjutant General (G-1) and Quartermaster (G-4) who worked directly for the senior commander. AFHQ would have to come up with reporting systems and a formal delegation of responsibilities to make both methods work without any fundamental reorganization.

³⁵ Ehlers, *The Mediterranean Air War*, 269. The problem lay with the Americans.

³⁶ AFHQ G-3, Operation *Memorandum 22*, October 18, 1942, folder 4, LP.

³⁷ AFHQ G-3, Operation *Memorandum 30*, October 24, 1942, folder 4, LP.

³⁸ U.S. Indo-Pacific Command manages an operational capability assessment program to certify three- and four-star headquarters over an 18-to-24-month process that directs team-building, planning, and standard operating procedure–development sessions. There is no standard playbook because the managers of the program acknowledge the link between personal preferences and the art of command. There is also a command relationship document that captures duties and responsibilities under the array of possible headquarters structures.



Admiral Tōgō Heihachirō of the Imperial Japanese Navy on Compass Deck above bridge of IJN *Mikasa* at beginning of Battle of Tsushima, in 1905; oil painting, February 1906, Tōjō Shōtarō

Ghosts of Tsushima or *Kobayashi Maru*?

Japan's Problematic Preoccupation with Decisive Naval Battles in World War II

By Michael W. Major

Dr. Michael W. Major is a Teaching Assistant Professor in the Department of Marketing at West Virginia University.

When the tiny island state of Japan went to war with the continental nation of Russia in 1904, the world expected a lopsided

defeat for Japan; no Asian country had ever defeated a modern imperial power from Europe. Much to the world's surprise, Japan won nearly every battle



Scene on board USS *Yorktown* shortly after she was hit by three Japanese bombs on June 4, 1942, during Battle of Midway (U.S. Navy/National Archives and Records Administration/William G. Roy)

during the conflict.¹ The first significant naval victory for Japan was the decimation of the Russian fleet at the Battle of the Yellow Sea, on August 10, 1904. This embarrassing loss prompted Tsar Nicholas II to create the Second Pacific Squadron, comprised of 11 battleships, 8 cruisers, and 9 destroyers from Russia's Baltic Fleet, a grouping many thought would tip the power balance to Russia. Departing for the Far East in October

1904, Russia's Second Pacific Squadron traveled more than 18,000 miles to battle Japan's navy at the Straits of Tsushima,² where Russia was decimated: 21 ships sunk, 6 ships captured, 4,380 sailors killed, and 5,917 sailors captured.³

Tsushima, the great naval victory for Japan, brought Russia to the peace table. However, the consequences of such overwhelming naval victories in the Russo-Japanese War ultimately led Japan's

military leaders to a debilitating preoccupation nearly 40 years later during World War II. As it relentlessly tried to replicate that victorious performance against the United States, Japan's pursuit of another Tsushima resulted in strategic failures that contributed to its defeat in the Pacific, providing an excellent historical example of cognitive dissonance theory and demonstrating why it is important not to fight a current war with a previous war's strategy.

Ghosts of Tsushima

Japan's dominance of the seas at Tsushima had captured the attention of European powers as well as the United States. Japan had done the seemingly impossible against Russia, which motivated President Theodore Roosevelt to spearhead the peace negotiations that resulted in the Treaty of Portsmouth on September 5, 1905. While Roosevelt received the Nobel Peace Prize for these efforts, his motivation was not entirely altruistic; he wanted to limit Japanese expansionist moves in the Far East.⁴

Most had viewed Russia as the victor in the peace negotiations. As the *New York Times* wrote about the Portsmouth negotiations in 1905, "a nation hopelessly beaten in every battle of the war, one army captured and another overwhelmingly routed, with a navy swept from the seas, dictated her own terms to the victors."⁵ Furthermore, because Wall Street bankers had financed Japan's war effort, Japan was accountable to the United States for its war debt. The negotiations had been historically bad for Japan; rather than receive war reparations from Russia, Japan spent nearly 10 years repaying its war debt using the territories it gained in Manchuria.⁶ Many in Japan were left feeling that Roosevelt had cheated their country out of its war reparations, and resentment toward the United States grew.

Victory in the Russo-Japanese War emboldened Japan's military leaders to declare war against the United States in 1941. The legacy of the Battle of Tsushima would prove to be especially problematic for Japan's military leaders during World War II; it led Japan to believe it could defeat any country in naval warfare. Additionally, Japan's military leaders of the Shōwa era in 1940, who promoted Japanese imperialism and expansion, had a scapegoat for losing the peace. They believed that the Meiji-era leaders in 1905 had betrayed Japan's interests by allowing the unjust peace settlement to occur.⁷ The Shōwa-era military leaders supported the creation of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, in which Japan, as the industrialized power, would lead Asia and remove Western influences from the region. They also felt a blueprint was available to accomplish

their goal. Overwhelming naval success in the Russo-Japanese War, coupled with resentment toward the United States for allowing such an atrocity to be inflicted on a war victor during peace negotiations, led to a strategy of naval dominance. This would be followed by equally dominant peace negotiations once the U.S. ability to wage naval warfare was eliminated. The Pacific theater would be an opportunity to rectify the political mistakes and repeat the military successes of the Russo-Japanese War by dominating the enemy with overwhelming naval victories and crushing the opponent's will to fight. However, this time, Japan's diplomats would negotiate a better peace settlement than at Portsmouth and secure territories throughout East Asia, growing the empire.

Japan's Pacific Perspective

Many scholars argue that Japan entered the war with "no realistic plan on how to end it" and go so far as to state that "in terms of grand strategy, Japan's top leadership *utterly* failed their country."⁸ However, to understand why Japan consistently sought the decisive naval battle to win the Pacific theater, it is necessary to understand Japan's situation as well as its history.

Japan needed resources for its growing economy and war machine, and the United States was not cooperating. After establishing itself in Indochina in 1941, Japan's oil supplies were diminishing at a rate of 12,000 tons per day due to the U.S. oil embargo.⁹ The United States had also moved military forces into the region. The Asiatic Fleet, based in the Philippines, had received a substantial offensive augmentation in the form of the largest concentration of modern U.S. submarines anywhere in the world: 39 modern fleet boats and 6 older coastal defense submarines.¹⁰ The U.S. Army also assigned two of the five independent armored battalions to the area.¹¹ To repel enemy aircraft, the Philippines had received the best air defense unit in the army, the 200th Coast Artillery.¹² B-17 bombers had started arriving in September 1941.¹³ Japan's back was now against the wall, and it needed to act before it was out of resources. From the

perspective of Japan's military leaders, a successful strategy was available by replicating past successes.

For Japan's strategists in World War II, the key takeaway from the Russo-Japanese War was clear: "The truly important element in modern warfare was not technology but *morale*; and the morale, not of the army alone, but of the nation from which it was drawn."¹⁴ Japan's military leaders were aware of the U.S. public's desire for isolationism, specifically to avoid engaging in another world war. Japan's military leaders also knew their ability to sink two Russian fleets had ignited a revolution for Tsar Nicholas II and forced a peace settlement. If Japan could duplicate such naval success in the Pacific, it could inflict heavy loss of life on the United States. Since fear of losing American lives fighting another war drove the isolationist beliefs, Japan perceived the Americans' value of life as a potential center of gravity. If Japan could inflict enough casualties, it would force a peace settlement.

Realizing it could never inflict a total defeat on either the United States or Great Britain but desperate to control the seas and maintain its supply of oil and rubber, Japan planned for a limited war in the Pacific in two steps: first, secure resources within the Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere; second, create a defensive perimeter to shield the new holdings from Allied counterattack. While concerned about the idea of war with the United States, Japan's military leaders believed attacking Pearl Harbor would knock the United States off balance and provide Japan enough time to secure its gains in Indochina and set a defensive perimeter to repel a counteroffensive.

Japan "proposed to fight the Pacific War as it had fought China and Russia: limiting the conflict by escalating its material and moral costs beyond what the Western powers, America in particular, were willing to pay."¹⁵ By creating a limited conflict, Japan's strategy was "predicated not on American effectiveness, but on American rationality."¹⁶ Japan's military planners believed that duplicating victories by eliminating enemy fleets

similar to Tsushima would cause the presumed business-minded United States to “calculate costs and benefits, and come to terms with the realities created by Japanese arms,” similar to what Russia did in 1905. However, this time, Japan would win the peace negotiations.¹⁷

Finally, Japan believed a decisive naval victory would quell the U.S. will to fight because U.S. strategists also believed in seeking decisive naval victories. In fact, Japan emulated Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan’s strategy and belief in decisive naval battles. Minister of the Navy Mineo Ōsumi offered a compelling question in 1935 to support the idea that America’s will could be broken by losing a decisive naval battle: “Some argue that in future wars a decisive fleet engagement will never take place, but didn’t Admiral Mahan, venerated by American strategists, declare that the primary aim of naval power is annihilation of the enemy fleet in a decisive encounter?”¹⁸ Ōsumi believed if the United States lost a decisive naval battle, it would strategically see no option but to surrender.

The Reality

Japan’s military leaders misread the American will to win. According to Clausewitz, an opponent’s level of resistance can be measured by

*the product of two inseparable factors, viz. the total means at his disposal and the strength of his will. The extent of the means at his disposal is a matter—though not exclusively—of figures, and should be measurable. But the strength of his will is much less easy to determine and can only be gauged approximately by the strength of the motive animating it.*¹⁹

Unfortunately for Japan, Washington viewed the Pacific theater as an unlimited war and aimed to replace Japan’s government. The United States was willing to dedicate all its resources to victory, and the population was united with one goal: to defeat Japan. In Clausewitzian terms, the United States had total means at its disposal, and the strength of its will would be unbreakable until Japan was defeated.

From a means perspective, the “material superiority of the U.S. Navy was almost inconceivable.”²⁰ The United States could outbuy and outbuild Japan. Japan knew it was at a ship-building disadvantage as early as 1934, as the Japanese Navy Ministry Armament Limitation Research Committee (JNMALRC) noted, “The Japanese shipbuilding capacity was 45,000 tons per year, compared to 80,000 tons in the U.S.”²¹ The U.S. ability to outproduce Japan by 45 percent in 1934 meant that Japan needed to cripple the United States almost immediately for any chance at victory. Furthermore, the JNMALRC, aware of Japan’s limitations, grossly underestimated U.S. abilities: America would be ready to produce more than 300,000 tons per year. Once Congress passed the Vinson Act in June 1940 and the Two-Ocean Navy Act in July 1940, Japan knew it must strike quickly; the bills called for an 11 percent increase in naval tonnage, leading to orders for 4,500 new naval aircraft and 1.3 million tons of warships to be completed by 1944.²² Additionally, wartime supplemental orders would push U.S. totals even higher, adding more than 38 million tons of *Liberty* ships, 7.5 million tons of *Victory* ships, and 10 million tons of T-2 tankers.²³

Japan also greatly underestimated the strength of will for the United States. Specifically, the “United States, unlike China and Russia and despite the Great Depression, was not beset by internal problems that would cripple its military. On the contrary, the war lifted the United States out of the depression and both the government and citizenry fought to win.”²⁴ The attack on Pearl Harbor had created hatred toward Japan and mobilized the entire U.S. population. As Admiral William Halsey stated on December 7, 1941, “When this war is over, the Japanese language will be spoken only in hell.”²⁵

The Pursuit for Tsushima’s Sequel: The Elusive Decisive Naval Battle

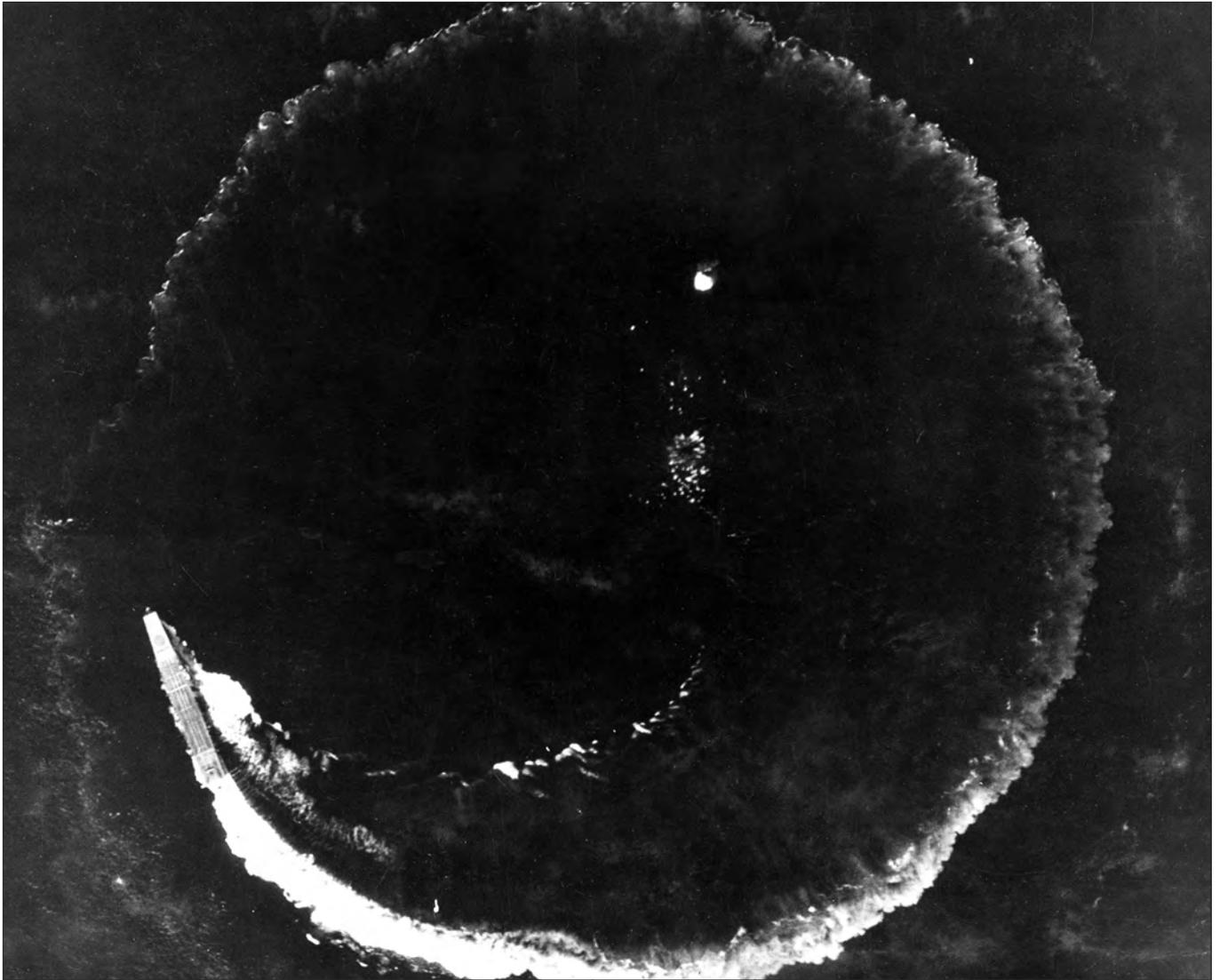
The Imperial Japanese Navy “planned to employ its battleships and cruisers to conduct a decisive battle.”²⁶ Japan’s

strategists held on to the belief that their technology and superior tactics “would give the inferior Japanese fleet an edge in the decisive battle.”²⁷ After Pearl Harbor, Marshal Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto stressed the need for a quick and decisive blow to crush the U.S. will to fight, and in April 1942, he advised, “The navy takes the initiative and keeps pounding the enemy. . . . We must always deliver fierce blows on the enemy and hit him where it hurts.”²⁸ This preoccupation with the decisive naval victory played out during three significant battles: Midway, the Philippine Sea, and Leyte Gulf.

Japan initially planned to repeat Tsushima at Midway in June 1942. However, Yamamoto could not rely on overwhelming force against the United States, so an alternative battle strategy was necessary. Comparing the forces at Midway, Japan’s four carriers were matched against three U.S. carriers (plus the Midway Atoll itself).²⁹ Japan’s fleet also consisted of 2 battleships, 2 heavy cruisers, 1 light cruiser, 11 destroyers, and 248 planes. When compared with the U.S. force of 7 heavy cruisers, 1 light cruiser, 14 destroyers, and 360 planes, Japan did not have an overwhelming force.³⁰ As a result, Yamamoto developed a complex plan based on deception for a decisive victory.

Ultimately, Midway was not a decisive battle for either side, but it did tip the balance of power in the Pacific to the United States: “In one fell swoop, Japan lost four of its six first-line fleet carriers. The effect was far greater than had exactly the same losses been incurred incrementally.”³¹ Midway was the final offensive that a hobbled Japanese navy would launch during the war. Midway also accelerated Japan’s loss of experienced naval aviators: 30 percent of Japanese carrier pilots present were killed, and 40 percent were wounded.³² Midway was the turning point of the war in the Pacific.³³

Despite its losses at Midway, the Imperial Japanese Navy did not abandon its original strategy, for “as late as the spring of 1944, the A-Go Plan called for a decisive battle.”³⁴ Japan saw another opportunity to deliver a decisive naval blow and enact the A-Go Plan at the



Japanese aircraft carrier IJN *Sōryū* circles, evading a direct hit, while under high-level bombing attack by U.S. Army Air Force B-17 Flying Fortress bombers from Midway base, shortly after 8:00 A.M., June 4, 1942 (U.S. Navy)

Battle of the Philippine Sea in June 1944. However, the United States was able to dictate the terms of the engagement, and U.S. pilots referred to the encounter as the “Great Marianas Turkey Shoot” because of the degradation of Japan’s airpower due to the loss of experienced pilots.³⁵ This pursuit of another decisive battle further degraded Japan’s airpower, as the “100 operational carrier aircraft that the Japanese had available after the Marianas Turkey Shoot were reduced to less than 50.”³⁶ The Battle of the Philippine Sea also affected Japan’s surface fleet: only two of Japan’s nine aircraft carriers remained seaworthy.³⁷ Defeat at the Battle of Philippine Sea, which Japan

designated as the “decisive battle,” left two options: “another ‘decisive battle’ to defend the Philippines; and the introduction of a new offensive type of operation, the *kamikaze* attack.”³⁸

Still believing in a decisive naval battle approach, the Imperial Japanese Navy planned for it at Leyte Gulf in October 1944. To fully support the goal, the “entire remaining combat power of the Imperial Japanese Navy was thrown into the breach at Leyte.”³⁹ The Battle of Leyte Gulf would be described as the “largest and one of the most decisive naval battles in history.”⁴⁰ Ironically, it was decisive for the United States, as Japan lost 4 aircraft

carriers, 3 battleships, 9 cruisers, and 10 destroyers—and the “Japanese Navy never recovered from this defeat.”⁴¹ Scholars now refer to the A-Go Plan as a “disaster.”⁴² Japan’s blind pursuit of this strategy had lasted to the end. The reasons behind such a catastrophic approach must be examined to understand the rationale of Japan’s military leaders.

Cognitive Dissonance and Social Support

Japan’s military leaders believed the strategy of winning a decisive battle, traced back to Tsushima 40 years earlier, would work. Takijirō Ōnishi, chief of the education division of Japan’s naval

aviation department in 1937, supported the traditional view that the “decisive battle is the essence of combat, and combat should always be based on the decisive battle.”⁴³ Osami Nagano, chief of Japan’s naval general staff, predicted in 1940 that the decisive battle against the United States would occur during a fight for the Micronesian islands.⁴⁴ However, despite clear and repeated evidence that the victory was not feasible, Japan’s military leaders held on to

this belief. Cognitive dissonance theory offers a theoretical explanation.

Cognitive dissonance occurs when an individual experiences a conflict between a belief and information. Sources of information that can cause cognitive dissonance include behaviors, feelings, opinions, and the environment. The conflict between the belief and contradicting information creates the uncomfortable feeling known as cognitive dissonance. According to Leon

Festinger, the psychologist who posited cognitive dissonance theory, “if a person knows various things are not psychologically consistent with one another, he will, in a variety of ways, try to make them more consistent.”⁴⁵ To resolve the discomfort caused by cognitive dissonance, a person has several options: change his or her belief to align with the information, change behaviors to align with his or her beliefs, change his or her opinion about the information causing



On flight deck of USS *Lexington*, Lieutenant Junior Grade Alexander Vraciu, U.S. Navy Reserve, holds up six fingers to signify his “kills” during Great Marianas Turkey Shoot, June 19, 1944, Philippine Sea (National Archives and Records Administration)

the dissonance, or ignore the inner conflict causing the cognitive dissonance.

Furthermore, groups who share a strong belief are able to support individual members despite strong evidence that contradicts the original belief. Experimental psychologists Leon Festinger, Henry Riecken, and Stanley Schachter demonstrated the power of social support to resolve cognitive dissonance and maintain devotion to challenged beliefs. They joined a small cult in Chicago called the *Seekers* that predicted the world would end on December 21, 1954, but its members would be rescued on a flying saucer and taken to the planet Clarion.⁴⁶ The cult consisted of adult leaders and college students. When the world did not end as predicted, the college students who went home for Christmas vacation and were separated from the group abandoned their beliefs and made no attempt to contact the group. However, the group members who were together on the night of December 21 continued to believe in the prophecy. To maintain their belief, cult members sang Christmas carols, cut all metal off their clothing, and quit jobs; remaining cult members also intensified their recruitment efforts to gain more followers.⁴⁷ Even though the belief was clearly flawed, and the cognitive dissonance created by the multiple disconfirmations should have caused them to abandon the prophecy, the social support provided by the group to individual members allowed the flawed belief to persevere.

Social support similarly enabled Japan's military leaders to continue believing in the decisive battle strategy after multiple defeats in World War II. Japanese naval doctrine for winning a decisive naval battle against the U.S. fleet due to superior naval tactics was built on an antiquated and flawed framework. However, because Japan's military leadership was fully committed to this belief, and because it was strongly shared among the group, losses intensified this commitment to the belief. These leaders ignored overwhelming evidence to the contrary and refused to adopt a new strategy. Their collective social support

enabled them to cling to the belief that the decisive naval battle strategy would still bring victory. Through this cognitive dissonance, the "Japanese disasters at the Philippine Sea and Leyte Gulf were the consequence of a desperate attempt" to land a decisive victory and reinforce collective belief.⁴⁸ Had Japan's military leaders been more individualistic thinkers, alternative strategies might have been adopted, such as a defensive strategy to hold key areas.

One specific example of individual cognitive dissonance within Japan's military leadership in the early phases of the Pacific War occurred when Yamamoto submitted a paper on January 7, 1941, to Naval Minister Koshirō Oikawa expressing concern about the decisive battle strategy. Yamamoto noted that "in past war games of such decisive battles the navy never achieved a convincing victory, and that these war games were usually suspended when it appeared that Japanese forces would be gradually whittled away."⁴⁹ Yamamoto's paper clearly questioned the widely held belief that repeating Tsushima was the path to victory. However, Yamamoto's beliefs would change, as he later posited that Japan must "strike the U.S. fleet a blow at the initial stage and afterwards destroy each fleet as it sets out."⁵⁰ The cognitive dissonance generated within Yamamoto by questioning the traditional belief of decisive battles was resolved by becoming a fervent proponent of the decisive battle strategy demonstrated in his planning for Midway.

Yamamoto's example shows not only individual cognitive dissonance resolution to adhere to the decisive battle strategy but also Japan's collective cognitive dissonance resolution to avoid the unpleasant reality that defeating the United States was not possible. Yamamoto, noting that war games were usually suspended on evidence that Japanese forces were losing, also demonstrates a cognitive dissonance sequence at a group level. Specifically, Japan's leaders believed that their nation was tactically superior and would quickly defeat the United States in a limited war. However, the continuous war game losses indicated

that this was a flawed belief. To resolve their cognitive dissonance and continue with war planning, Japan's military leaders canceled the war games to avoid facing the unpleasant truth: attacking the United States had no path to victory.

Kobayashi Maru

Fans of the *Star Trek* science fiction series may recognize some parallels between their fandom and Japan's situation in World War II. A training exercise administered to cadets at Starfleet Academy, known as the *Kobayashi Maru*, is an unwinnable scenario designed to help Starfleet officers face death. Cadets are assigned to rescue a civilian ship, named *Kobayashi Maru*, that has broken down in the Neutral Zone. A violation of the Neutral Zone is considered an act of war, and an enemy force will destroy the cadet's ship. Essentially, the *Kobayashi Maru* places Starfleet cadets in this no-win situation: "attempt to rescue the crew of a disabled civilian vessel and be destroyed in the process or avoid confrontation and leave the disabled ship and its crew to be captured or killed."⁵¹ Of note, as it relates to Japan's strategy in the Pacific, is the *Star Trek* fandom debate over the scenario's name. One group of fans takes a literal interpretation from Japanese to English and believe the doomed ship's name is *Little Woods*, which implies that students should not risk their ships for a small prize.⁵² However, a second fan theory offers that the *Kobayashi Maru* scenario "is named after WW2 Japanese commander Michio Kobayashi who went down with air carrier *Hiryū* while attacking American carrier *Yorktown* during the Battle of Midway on 4 June 1942."⁵³

At Midway, Kobayashi was a lieutenant commander who led the dive bomber unit on the carrier *Hiryū*, "which was widely regarded as among the best in the fleet."⁵⁴ Although he did not know it at the time, there was little Kobayashi could have done that day to prevent the deaths of his men or himself. As with the Starfleet cadets approaching their unwinnable scenario, Kobayashi performed his duties to the



Scene from *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan* (1982), directed by Nicholas Meyer and starring (from left), Lieutenant Sulu (George Takei), Admiral James T. Kirk (William Shatner), Lieutenant Uhura (Nichelle Nichols), and Dr. Leonard "Bones" McCoy (DeForest Kelley) (United Archives GmbH/Alamy)

best of his abilities, but ultimately, his dive bomber unit was doomed. It was an unwinnable situation.

While *Star Trek* might have honored the unwinnable situation of one outstanding officer, Japan as a nation faced its own *Kobayashi Maru* scenario the moment it bombed Pearl Harbor. The United States was not tsarist Russia, and it would have been nearly impossible to score a decisive naval victory that would force Washington to peace negotiations. Even if Japan would have won the Battle of Midway in a Tsushima-style victory, destroying all three U.S. carriers and not losing any of its own, the United States was able to outproduce Japan in new aircraft carriers nearly 10 to 1 by June

1943.⁵⁵ Furthermore, the U.S. population was twice that of Japan, and the United States produced five times more steel and seven times more coal in addition to having massive oil reserves.⁵⁶

The United States was also far more effective at naval warfare than Russia, and following Pearl Harbor, the U.S. population was completely committed to the war effort. Not only could the United States defeat Japan in battle as it had demonstrated at Midway, the Philippine Sea, and Leyte Gulf, but it also had a manufacturing advantage; it could lose multiple ships as long as Japan would lose one. For Japan, the war in the Pacific was an unwinnable situation; Japan was in the *Kobayashi Maru*.

Conclusion

Two critical lessons for future military leaders must be taken from Japan's strategic failures in the Pacific during World War II. First, just because a strategy worked in a previous war does not guarantee that it will work in the future. History will indeed regard the Battle of Tsushima in 1905 as one of the greatest naval victories in history, and Japan has every right to be proud and celebrate it annually. However, for Japan, the ghosts of Tsushima made military strategists unable to adapt to how a war could be won in 1941. They were living in the past, pursuing a strategy that probably would not have been successful even if it had been tactically executed. The

United States would have been able to replace a lost fleet and keep fighting.

Second, it is important to understand how cognitive dissonance can impact decisionmaking at both the individual and the group levels. Leaders must be able to recognize when their strategy is failing and make adjustments instead of holding on to a belief that a flawed strategy will somehow lead to victory. Sun Tzu advises, “Know the enemy and know yourself; in a hundred battles you will never be in peril. When you are ignorant of the enemy but know yourself, your chances of winning or losing are equal. If ignorant both of your enemy and of yourself, you are certain in every battle to be in peril.”⁵⁷ Japan did not understand the United States in 1941 and instead assumed that it was fighting a country with beliefs similar to those of Russia in 1904. When the Second Pacific Squadron was sunk at Tsushima in 1905, Tsar Nicholas II faced a rebellion within Russia and received external pressure from Germany to end the Russo-Japanese War. Japan envisioned a similar response from the United States in 1941. However, the United States viewed World War II as an unlimited war; the population sacrificed material goods, cultivated victory gardens, and committed to defeating Japan. In other words, Japan was ignorant of its enemy and itself. Failing to recognize that the United States was not behaving the way Japan assumed it would, Japan maintained a flawed belief, as its insistence on repeating Tsushima was exacerbated due to the cognitive dissonance of Japan’s military leaders. These leaders held on to the flawed strategy of winning a decisive naval battle until Japan no longer had the equipment and troops to pursue one.

Ultimately, Japan’s inability to know itself or its enemy put it in the *Kobayashi Maru* scenario. Past victories may inform but cannot dictate military strategy. Defeating the United States with a Mahanian-style blue-water battle was impossible, yet despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary, Japan refused to acknowledge this fact and held on to its flawed belief until the bitter end. JFQ

Notes

¹ Julian S. Corbett, *Some Principles of Maritime Operations* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1911; reprint, Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1988), 84.

² John W. Steinberg, “The Russo-Japanese War, 1904–05,” lecture, Naval War College, November 13, 2019.

³ Denis Warner and Peggy Warner, *The Tide at Sunrise: A History of the Russo-Japanese War, 1904–1905* (New York: Charterhouse, 1974; reprint, London: Frank Cass, 2002), 519.

⁴ D. Clayton James, “American and Japanese Strategies in the Pacific War,” in *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, ed. Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 708.

⁵ Warner and Warner, *The Tide at Sunrise*, 535.

⁶ Steinberg, “The Russo-Japanese War, 1904–05.”

⁷ Yoji Koda, “The Russo-Japanese War: Primary Causes of Japanese Success,” *Naval War College Review* 58, no. 2 (Spring 2005), 42.

⁸ Jonathan Parshall, “Midway: Turning Point in the Pacific?” lecture, Naval War College, January 28, 2020.

⁹ Denis Warner and Peggy Warner, “The Doctrine of Surprise,” *Military History Quarterly* 4, no. 1 (1991), 24.

¹⁰ Glen Williford, *Racing the Sunrise: Reinforcing America’s Pacific Outposts, 1941–1942* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2010), 62–65.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 76–78.

¹² *Ibid.*, 36–37.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 114.

¹⁴ Michael Howard, “The Doctrine of the Offensive,” in Paret, *Makers of Modern Strategy*, 519.

¹⁵ Dennis Showalter, “Storm Over the Pacific,” in *The Pacific War Companion: From Pearl Harbor to Hiroshima*, ed. Daniel Marston (Oxford, UK: Osprey, 2005), 27.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹⁸ Parshall, “Midway.”

¹⁹ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 77 (emphasis in the original).

²⁰ Kevin J. Delamer, “Syracuse in the Pacific?” in *The Battle of Leyte Gulf at 75: A Retrospective*, ed. Thomas J. Cutler (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2019), 139.

²¹ Ken Kotani, “Pearl Harbor,” in Marston, *The Pacific War Companion*, 32.

²² *Ibid.*, 33.

²³ Delamer, “Syracuse in the Pacific?” 139.

²⁴ S.C.M. Paine, *The Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895: Perceptions, Power, and Primacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 369.

²⁵ Showalter, “Storm Over the Pacific,” in Marston, *The Pacific War Companion*, 28.

²⁶ Yoichi Hirama, “Japanese Naval Preparations for World War II,” *Naval War College Review* 44, no. 2 (1991), 66.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 69.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 76.

²⁹ Parshall, “Midway.”

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Donald Chisholm and Kevin J.

Delamer, “Battle of Midway, 70th Anniversary Commemoration,” presentation, Naval War College, June 5, 2012.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Parshall, “Midway.”

³⁴ David C. Evans and Mark R. Peattie, *Kaigun: Strategy, Tactics, and Technology in the Imperial Japanese Navy, 1887–1941* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1997), 492.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Douglas Smith, *Carrier Battles: Command Decision in Harm’s Way* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2013), 74.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ H.P. Willmott, “After Midway,” in Marston, *The Pacific War Companion*, 192.

³⁹ Delamer, “Syracuse in the Pacific?” 145.

⁴⁰ David Horner, “General MacArthur’s War,” in Marston, *The Pacific War Companion*, 135.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Hirama, “Japanese Naval Preparations for World War II,” 77.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 73.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁴⁵ Leon Festinger, “Cognitive Dissonance,” *Scientific American* 207, no. 4 (1962), 93.

⁴⁶ Leon Festinger, Henry Riecken, and Stanley Schachter, *When Prophecy Fails: A Social and Psychological Study of a Modern Group That Predicted the Destruction of the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1956).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 198.

⁴⁸ Evans and Peattie, *Kaigun*, 492.

⁴⁹ Hirama, “Japanese Naval Preparations for World War II,” 75.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁵¹ Gregory Conti and James Caroland, “Embracing the *Kobayashi Maru*: Why You Should Teach Your Students to Cheat,” *IEEE Security & Privacy* 9, no. 4 (2011), 48.

⁵² See Kiyoshi Daniel Kohatsu, “What Would the Ship Name ‘Kobayashi Maru’ Mean in English? Please Ignore the Star Trek Stuff for This,” *Quora*, November 2, 2019.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Jonathan B. Parshall and Anthony P. Tully, *Shattered Sword: The Untold Story of the Battle of Midway* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, Inc., 2005), 262.

⁵⁵ Parshall, “. ”

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. with commentary by Samuel B. Griffiths (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), 84.

Marines currently under 4th Marine Regiment, 3rd Marine Division, and members of Indian military wade to shore during exercise Tiger Triumph, on Kakinada Beach, India, November 19, 2019 (U.S. Marine Corps/Christian Ayers)



Moving Past the Name

Focusing on Practical Implementation of the India-U.S. Strategic Relationship

By Nicholas O. Melin

Indispensable allies,” “natural allies,” “comprehensive global strategic partners,” “defining relationship of the 21st century.” These are a selection of ways American Presidents and Indian prime ministers have described the strategic bilateral relationship over

Colonel Nicholas O. Melin, USA, currently serves on the Joint Staff J5. He wrote this article while attending the Indian National Defence College in New Delhi from 2021 to 2022.

the past dozen years. Yet analysts in both countries continue to document a “creeping disappointment and doubt about the relationship’s long-term viability.”¹ From the American side, there is concern about India’s “strategic promiscuity” as it retains strong relations with nations in its neighborhood and beyond (such as Russia) that are at odds with U.S. policy positions. Two American commentators asked, “Is the United States giving too much

and getting too little?”² At every instance of friction in bilateral relations, Indian analysts express suspicion about U.S. intentions and question the relationship’s reliability.³ Even the proper label for the relationship itself is a hotly contested topic, so we must ask whether the United States and India are transactional partners, strategic partners, or informal allies.

The debate over semantics on both sides of the relationship underappreciates

the degree to which it is growing into an important strategic arrangement. Systematic review of the bilateral relationship reveals an alignment of strategic aims and a military-to-military interface that is already equivalent to America's closest Indo-Pacific allies. Driven by the pressing threat posed to their liberal democracies by China's strategic rise and authoritarian tendencies, the United States and India are on course for even closer strategic convergence.

To the extent that friction and doubt remains, what are the main contributing factors and what might be done in Washington and New Delhi to moderate them? During a recently completed year as an exchange officer in the Indian National Defence College, the author solicited the frank and anonymous views of senior leaders in both India and the United States. This study made it clear that both nations insufficiently understand each other's strategic culture and political constraints, which leads to frustration and predictable friction in relationship implementation. This article showcases the major gaps in strategic empathy found in an analytical survey of Indian and American strategic leaders and offers ways that policymakers on both sides of the relationship might best execute targeted reform.

Divergent Views of Partnerships and Alliances

To understand why India and the United States view interstate relationships differently, one must understand each nation's ingrained institutional preferences. During its first 40 years of independence, India espoused a policy of nonalignment. Given its insecure neighborhood and a colonial legacy of troops fighting on the frontlines of British wars, India's founding fathers felt entangling alliances would distract attention from internal development. In fact, India was a founding member of the 120 state Non-Aligned Movement.⁴ To this day, merely the use of the term *alliance* within a political context generates intense debate and resistance.

This historical scarring and aversion have not stopped Delhi from pursuing

alliance-like arrangements under the labels of "partnership" or "strategic partnership." India sought a military partnership with the United States in the 1960s in the wake of its war with China but was rebuffed.⁵ In 1971, India secured support from the Soviet Union that enabled it to prosecute its war against Pakistan with less fear of Chinese intervention or of U.S. posturing in support of Islamabad. The late 1971 Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation was, in effect, a limited alliance that provided guarantees of military support and deterred Beijing from attacking India again like it did successfully from the Himalayas in late 1962.⁶ It also chilled U.S.-India relations for more than two decades.

India's post-Cold War economic opening to the world economy and rapid economic growth in the 1990s have been accompanied by the adaptation of India's traditional approach toward strategic partnering. Over the past 30 years, Delhi has established a web of partnerships to advance its interests without taking sides in geopolitical rivalries that would restrict its ability to address its primary strategic challenges—Pakistan and China. Indeed, at the 2018 Shangri-La Dialogue, Prime Minister Narendra Modi asserted that a diversity of partnerships is the "measure of [India's] strategic autonomy."⁷

Recent Chinese actions are changing Indian strategic calculus. Although Sino-Pakistani strategic alignment against Delhi has been a reality since the early 1960s, Beijing's escalating support of Pakistan raises the troubling potential of a two-front war. China is also leveraging its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to increase its influence in the Indian Ocean region. India's rejoining the Quadrilateral Security Forum (QUAD) in 2017 and engaging in 2+2 dialogues with the United States, Japan, and Australia signal a new approach to tighter coupling with like-minded security partners. Indeed, then-Indian Foreign Secretary Vijay Gokhale asserted that "India is today an aligned state—but based on issues."⁸ The Chinese sudden and unprovoked attack on India's northern border in 2020 is accelerating this strategic shift.

In contrast to India's historic wariness of binding strategic relationships, the United States has long asserted that "allies and partners are [its] strategic center of gravity."⁹ Defined and committed interstate relationships are the American comfort zone. Indeed, U.S. strategic documents typically sort interstate relationships into ally and partner categories which drive prioritization within its vast bureaucracy. In the Indo-Pacific region, the United States is in the middle of a multidecade effort to strengthen its existing alliances, establish a network of opportunity-based partnerships, and forge multilateral groupings. In contrast to its Cold War-era reliance on formal security pacts, U.S. policymakers now employ a more flexible approach that seeks to progressively build trust, connectivity, and commitment with a broad array of countries. Then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton described this effort as "one of the most important tasks of American statecraft . . . to lock in a substantially increased investment—diplomatic, economic, strategic, and otherwise—in the Asia-Pacific region."¹⁰

Clearly, Indian and U.S. terminology do not align. India prefers ambiguity, and the United States is explicit in defining relationships. Nevertheless, each nation is adapting its approach while avoiding the use of terminology that creates resistance in each nation's polity. So if the terms *alliance* and *partnership* are decreasingly relevant, what is the status of the India-U.S. relationship?

Measuring Ongoing Strategic Convergence

Despite the ongoing debate over the relationship's name, its growth can be readily quantified. Bilateral engagement is accelerating. At the head-of-state level alone, there have been 17 leader or cabinet-level dialogues since 2010 that have generated over 110 pages of joint statements. Review of these documents reveals hundreds of ongoing initiatives launched by each nation's heads of state. Take, for example, the 2015 Joint Statement between President Barack Obama and



Indian army soldiers assigned to 7th Battalion, Madras Regiment, and U.S. Army paratroopers from the 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division, shield patient from rotor wash while conducting medical evacuation training during exercise Yudh Abhyas 21, at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska, October 19, 2021 (U.S. Air Force/Alejandro Peña)

Prime Minister Modi. The two leaders highlighted 79 separate national initiatives, including 28 launched during the visit.¹¹ Cataloguing the various facets of bilateral engagement, let alone assessing it, is challenging.

Economically, India is America's ninth largest trading partner and the third largest from the Indo-Pacific region. Importantly, the United States is India's largest trading partner, with almost 18 percent of all Indian goods and services exported to America in 2020.¹² The United States is India's largest foreign direct investor. Only Australia and Japan enjoy a larger share of U.S. foreign direct investment (FDI) in the region.¹³ Given that India and the United States have set an ambitious goal of growing annual bilateral trade from \$146 billion to \$500 billion, economic ties will only deepen in

the future.¹⁴ If economic interconnectivity leads to strategic convergence, then both Indian and U.S. objectives are on path for close alignment.

In the area of the primary shared India-U.S. strategic concern, China, alignment is increasingly robust. Facing an active border dispute with its northern neighbor, India has declined membership in the BRI, instituted screening of Chinese industries, refused to allow Chinese companies to install 5G telecommunications infrastructure, and consistently advocated for sustaining a free and open Indo-Pacific region. India is 100 percent aligned with the United States and other QUAD members. Indeed, the early 2021 image of Prime Minister Modi sitting with other QUAD heads of state, affirming joint resolve to ensure the Indo-Pacific

region is "unconstrained by coercion," signifies an unprecedented departure from India's historical preference for scrupulous nonalignment.¹⁵

The strongest and maybe most misunderstood pillar of the bilateral relationship is defense trade and security cooperation. While individual Indian defense procurement decisions, such as the purchase of the Russian S-400 air defense system, attract publicity and questions among U.S. commentators regarding Indian commitment to the bilateral relationship, India's defense trade is comparable to U.S. allies.¹⁶ India's over \$15 billion in cumulative defense purchases is on par with America's largest defense customers. The fact that over 40 percent of these sales have occurred since 2015 demonstrates a substantive pivot in overall Indian procurement

Table. Organizations Solicited for Survey Feedback

	India	United States
Defense Forces	Active and retired officers from all services	Office of the Secretary of Defense The Joint Staff Defense Intelligence Agency U.S. Indo-Pacific Command and Service components Defense Security Cooperation Agency
Diplomatic Corps	Ministry of External Affairs Embassy of India in the United States Retired Indian ambassadors	Department of State U.S. Embassy New Delhi
Civil Service	Civil service participants in National Defence College (NDC), 61 st course	U.S. Agency for International Development Sandia National Laboratories
National Government	Indian Department of Military Affairs Integrated Defence Staff	National Security Council Office of Net Assessment
Academic Institutions	NDC University of Delhi Jawaharlal Nehru University	U.S. Army War College National Defense University Tufts University The Johns Hopkins University East-West Center
Think Tanks	Observer Research Foundation Carnegie India Delhi Policy Group Vivekananda International Foundation	Brookings Institution Council on Foreign Relations Center for Strategic and International Studies Hoover Institution Stimson Center Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

Note: To ensure anonymity, survey participants were not asked to specifically identify their organization. Instead, they chose from a selection of general categories.

decisions.¹⁷ In terms of security cooperation, the United States is India’s largest exercise partner.¹⁸ The frequency of Indian exercise participation, including hosting the Malabar, Yudh Abhyas, and Tiger Triumph exercises, is on par with U.S. Indo-Pacific allies not currently hosting U.S. troops. India has signed four foundational defense agreements that establish a basis for an ally-like interoperability with U.S. military formations in the future.¹⁹

This growth in procurement and military-to-military engagement is not simply a tool for building stronger relations with America; it is also a strategic necessity for New Delhi. India faces a widening gap in terms of both military capability and capacity with its northern neighbor. China’s defense budget has grown almost sixfold since 2000, while India’s has only doubled. Cumulatively, China has spent \$1.97 trillion more than India. The disparity in defense spending is accelerating. Since 2014, China’s defense budget has grown by 41 percent, while India’s has only grown by 28 percent. For the foreseeable future, India will neither match

China’s yearly defense spending nor close the massive gap which has opened between the two nations’ militaries.²⁰

Assessing Implementation of the Bilateral Strategic Relationship

Given both the current bilateral alignment and prospects for even greater strategic convergence in the future, the question policymakers should ask is not how to label the bilateral relationship but rather how to ease the ongoing friction in its implementation. The author conducted a senior leader survey to assess implementation of the bilateral relationship. The survey received 98 responses—52 from Indians and 46 from Americans. Notably, 80 percent of the responses came from individuals directly involved in managing the bilateral relationship, and 40 percent from individuals meeting weekly with their counterparts (see table).

Anonymous feedback from the survey yielded insights into the influence of culture and constraints on bilateral interaction, each nation’s perception of the relationship’s trajectory, and the internal

challenges each nation must navigate to sustain strategic convergence.

Efficacy of Bilateral Engagements

The first question posed by the survey was how effective bilateral interaction is. Participants assessed the tenor of meetings, the level of shared understanding of objectives and constraints, and meeting productivity. Overwhelmingly, both Indians and Americans believe that meetings are positive, and both sides understand the other’s objectives. Given Indian and U.S. historical disagreements, this result is notable. Participants did not agree, however, on engagement productivity. On a five-point scale, Americans rated this category over a full point lower than their Indian counterparts. Almost 70 percent of U.S. participants identified bureaucratic inertia as the major limitation in engagements and highlighted patience with and specifying discrete objectives for the Indians as the most important ingredients to successful bilateral engagement. In the words of one participant, “I [worry]



U.S. Army paratrooper from 1st Squadron, 40th Cavalry Regiment (Airborne), 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division, and Indian army soldiers from 7th Battalion, Madras Regiment, rappel down wall using “scorpion” technique during exercise Yudh Abhyas 21, at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska, October 21, 2021 (U.S. Air Force/Alejandro Peña)

we want this relationship more than India.”²¹ While Indians agreed to the need for specific objectives, almost half of those surveyed felt that trust and equal treatment were the most important ingredients for relationship success. Interestingly, one-third of Indian respondents identified suspicion of American intentions as the primary engagement obstacle.

This dynamic of American impatience and Indian suspicions may be indicative of a cultural divergence. American and Asian cultural differences are well documented. U.S. culture is results oriented, with “[Americans], more than others in the world, [taking] a narrow, opportunistic view of relationships.

... Preoccupied with the economics of the deal, [they] frequently neglect the political, cultural, organizational, and human aspects of the partnership.”²² In contrast, Asian culture places a higher value on relationships, with particular emphasis “on . . . reputation.”²³ Within India, hierarchy and formality guide interactions. Indian participants may not even be empowered to make decisions in an engagement without the approval of senior leadership.

Another factor affecting interaction is differing perceptions of the relationship’s history. Most Americans downplay the importance of historical disagreements, instead focusing on over 20 years of constructive bilateral engagement. Indians,

however, take a longer and more skeptical view. Instances of Indian resistance to U.S. pressure as a global superpower, whether during its liberation of Bangladesh in 1971 or while seeking nuclear weapons capability, are points of national pride.

For some Indian senior leaders, whose professional experiences stretch back to the 1990s, there is also an ingrained perception that U.S. policy toward India oscillates between disinterest and pressure to conform to Washington’s immediate policy objectives—often at the cost of India’s own. This was borne out in the survey results. Of the 14 Indian senior leaders who identified suspicion of American intentions as the biggest bilateral friction point, five responses were given by

leaders who had never actually interacted with an American. Two leaders with over 20 years of experience and three leaders with over 30 years of experience elected to answer only this question among all the bilateral engagement questions.

If cultural differences and the lingering hangover of an estranged history are the principal factors affecting day-to-day bilateral interaction, how can both partners respond? American and Indian participants recommended:

- deliberate cultural preparation for engagement participants from each nation
- initiatives to build trust below the level of senior leader
- increased education about and transparency of each nation's bureaucratic processes
- a respectful and equal tenor in bilateral meetings, and tightly defined objectives.

Dynamics Affecting Relationship Progress

The survey next asked participants to identify the most productive areas of collaboration and prominent areas of friction. There was clarity on where India and the United States should prioritize engagement. Sixty percent of all participants identified Indo-Pacific security as the most important area, with defense cooperation, trade, and counterterrorism rounding out other inputs. There is clearly a strong bilateral basis for accelerating security cooperation.

Participant responses to areas of friction clarified the major Indian and U.S. differences. While over 60 percent of Indian participants agreed on Russia as the leading single point of friction between the two nations, their viewpoints widely diverged. American participants felt Russia's authoritarian actions should dissuade democratic governments, such as India, from engaging them. Also, many U.S. leaders felt that linkages between India and the United States are now much stronger than the India-Russia relationship. U.S. bilateral trade with India is almost 20 times higher than Russia's (\$146 billion versus \$7.5 billion), and

FDI since 2000 is not even comparable (\$340 billion versus \$18 billion).²⁴ Thus, India's continued engagement in select sectors, such as defense and nuclear energy, and silence on Russian behavior in international forums generate friction.

Indians, however, still see their relationship with Russia as a necessity. Over 60 years of military procurement from Russia has created path dependence. Russian-origin military platforms make up 70 to 85 percent of all Indian weapons systems, and Moscow has supported the development and maintenance of India's civil nuclear industry and the sea leg of its nuclear deterrent.²⁵ Delhi recognizes that dependency is a vulnerability, however, and is diversifying its supply network and decreasing foreign arms purchases. This has led to a 33 percent decrease in total arms imports.²⁶ Indian leaders see their cumulative \$15 billion of arms purchased from the United States, only slightly less than the \$20 billion to \$30 billion spent by America's leading defense customers, as a significant commitment to the bilateral relationship.²⁷

The chief source of disagreement in the survey was Pakistan. While the U.S. view of India's western neighbor is changing, this issue remains central to India's relations with any security partner. U.S. participants cited recent policy changes and growing economic and security integration with India as evidence that it recognizes India's concerns. At the same time, they questioned India's continued fixation on Pakistan given New Delhi's growing economic clout and Great Power aspirations. Numerous U.S. senior leaders questioned why India has not "moved on" from this legacy dispute. Indian participants, however, asserted that the United States has serially misjudged Pakistan to the detriment of India's security. They highlighted the ongoing military confrontation along the Line of Control between the two nations, Pakistan's support to terrorism, and its growing complicity with China as reasons the United States should take a stronger line against Islamabad alongside its Indian partner.

Cutting across all Indian responses was an assertion that Americans do

not appreciate the unique context of India's democracy and the constraints that shape its strategic approach. Indian independence was both the triumphant culmination of the long struggle to gain freedom from the British and a defining moment of national trauma. India was immediately thrust into a struggle to develop its own approach to democracy, stabilize the economy, address rampant sectarian violence, and, only 60 days after its birth, fight its first war with Pakistan.²⁸ Today, India is the world's largest democracy, with over 120 different recognized languages and over 1,000 separate ethnicities. As such, Indians feel they face a different set of challenges than America and reject commentary on their internal affairs as uninformed and paternalistic.

While India has the sixth largest gross domestic product (GDP) in the world, it also faces internal challenges that U.S. policymakers may not fully comprehend. India's population is four times larger than America's. Thus, American GDP per capita is over 30 times higher than India's.²⁹ In the Indian participants' view, this should both moderate U.S. requests and give additional weight to the contributions that India makes to the bilateral relationship.

Indian participants also highlighted two constraints that shape its strategic decisionmaking. India is situated adjacent to its two primary adversaries, with which it has fought 5 wars and shares almost 4,300 miles of unsettled and militarized borders. This is India's primary strategic problem, requiring Delhi to prioritize regional security. Access to energy also drives Indian strategic choices. While the United States has largely achieved energy independence, India's dependence on imported hydrocarbons is perhaps its greatest strategic vulnerability. India imports almost 90 percent of its oil, 50 percent of its natural gas, and 15 percent of its thermal coal.³⁰ Almost 60 percent of India's oil comes from the Middle East, and Delhi's energy challenge will only increase in the future. Demand for imported energy is forecasted to increase by 129 percent between 2015 and 2035, and India is projected to be the largest source of hydrocarbon demand until 2050.³¹

Gaps in shared understanding are present across both nations' senior leaders, even those tasked with relationship implementation. Both Indians and Americans overestimate their understanding of each other and seek conformity in partner engagement.

The Relationship's Trajectory

While quantitative analysis demonstrates Indian and U.S. strategic convergence, do leaders in both nations recognize this? The survey next asked participants to assess the status of the relationship and where they believed it might progress into the future. They chose from a set of relationship definitions drawn from both countries' strategic documents and public statements—although without identifying the specific national origin in the survey question:

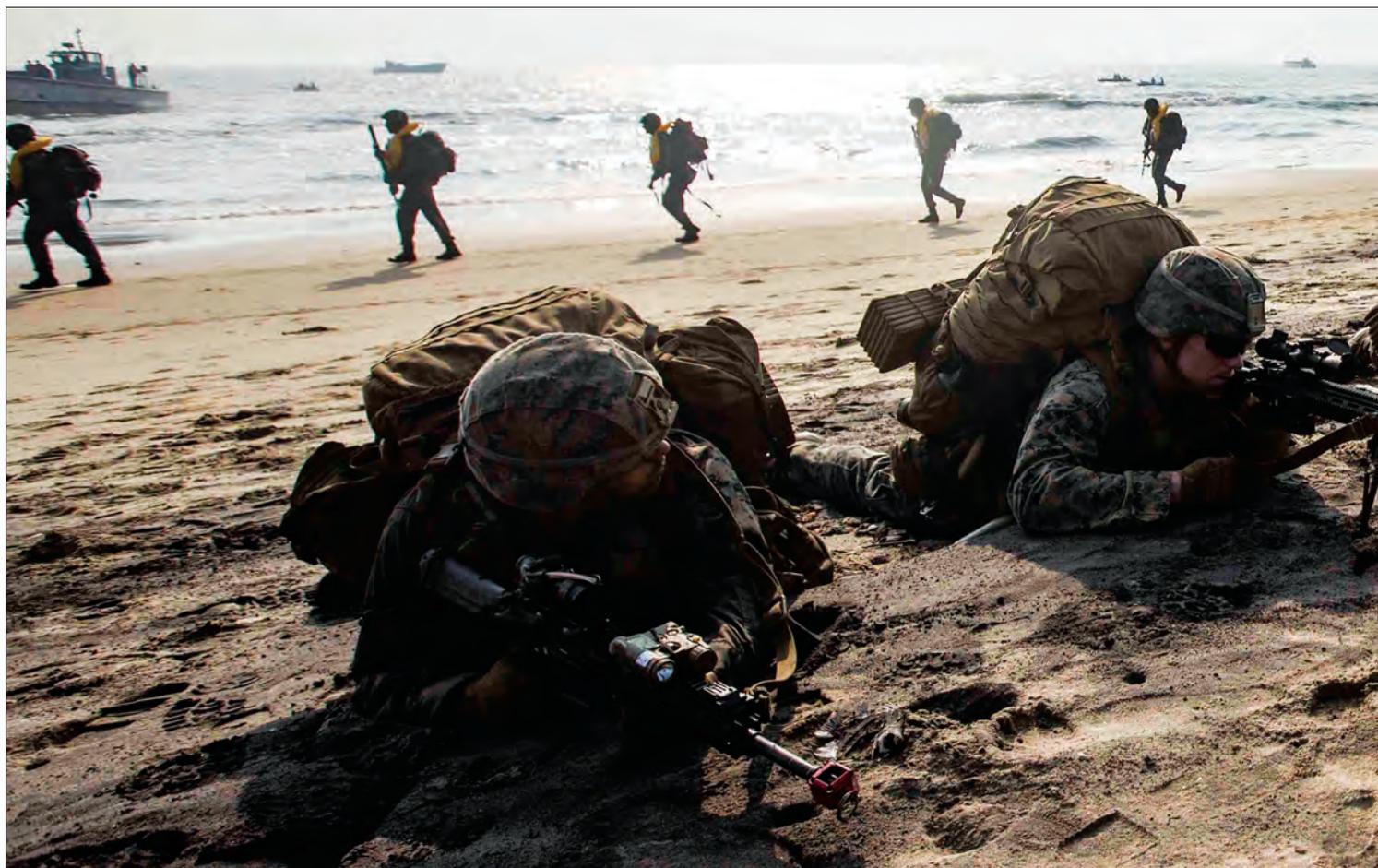
- Basic level of bilateral cooperation: Transactional, based on technology transfer and trade.

- Indian strategic partnership definition: Strategic alignment based on shared interests and issues of concern.³²
- U.S. strategic partnership definition: Combining efforts to address common challenges, share costs, and widen the circle of cooperation.³³
- U.S. alliance definition: Standing side-by-side against common threats and adversaries and working together to advance our shared interests and values.³⁴

When assessing the current relationship, 60 percent of all survey participants chose the Indian definition, and 15 percent viewed it as purely transactional. It therefore appears that both Indian and U.S. leaders may underestimate the extent to which both nations have already strategically converged. This is an important result because a lack of recognition of growing bilateral interdependence could lead to friction in interaction.

The future relationship, however, has an overwhelmingly positive trajectory. Only 1 of the 98 participants believes the future relationship will be transactional. Indian survey participants assess that both nations will be closely aligned in the future, with a narrow majority choosing alliance language. Only 35 percent of participants chose the Indian strategy partnership definition. U.S. responses also show a dramatic shift in perceptions. While 83 percent of Americans assess the current relationship does not meet the threshold for the U.S. partnership or alliance definitions, 78 percent felt the U.S. language was appropriate in the future. As with the Indian participants, 39 percent of U.S. responses favored the alliance language. Thus, for both Indian and U.S. participants, the trajectory of the relationship points toward close strategic alignment.

While participants agreed that the overall relationship trajectory is positive, analysis by experience grouping reveals



a generational divide. When the survey data was sorted into the 0–20-, 21–30-, and over 30-year experience groups, it became clear that the two younger demographic blocks see greater potential for progress than those whose professional service stretches back to a more troubled period in bilateral relations. Seventy-six percent of responses in the 0–20-year group and 83 percent in the 21–30-year group saw the relationship progressing to U.S. definitions. Importantly, 47 percent of the rising senior leaders in the 21–30-year group chose alliance language. This is a stark contrast with those currently serving and retired leaders with over 30 years of experience, where only 54 percent of respondents chose U.S. definitions. This trend is further cemented by looking at those respondents in each experience category who kept both their current and future assessments the same. For the youngest category, only 20 percent kept the relationship static. In the

21–30-year group, 28 percent kept the relationship static. In the over 30-year experience group, this percentage jumps to 43 percent.

What do these results tell both nations? First, there is clear desire to advance the bilateral relationship across national and experience demographics. Second, both those implementing the relationship in the trenches and the rising strategic leaders favor deepening bilateral commitment. Finally, it is in the oldest, most senior group where mutual strategic suspicions remain most salient.

Internal Tensions

The final topic explored by the survey was the competing views within each nation of the bilateral relationship. By examining the closing comments provided by each survey participant, it was possible to characterize the internal narratives that policy implementers must manage.

One group of Indian participants viewed U.S. relations as temporary and transactional. In their view, American interest in India “is only to serve . . . recent [U.S.] interest in the Indo-Pacific” and is “too transactional to be relied upon in a meaningful way.” For them, every perturbation in the relationship offers a fresh opportunity to cast doubt on the value of U.S. partnership. Others, however, see a deepening bilateral relationship that is “on an upward trajectory” that “will only strengthen in times to come.” Furthering the relationship, in the view of these participants, will “require shedding of dogma on both sides.” Even in this group, however, there is concern about moving too fast. In the words of one participant, “trying to outpace a natural pace of growth, even under influence of an external factor/player/event, may create differences in India-U.S. bilateral relationship.” Additionally, participants recognized that a pivot toward



Members of Indian military and U.S. Marines currently under 4th Marine Regiment, 3rd Marine Division, establish security during exercise Tiger Triumph, on Kakinada Beach, India, November 19, 2019 (U.S. Marine Corps/Christian Ayers)



Indian army soldiers assigned to 7th Battalion, Madras Regiment, and U.S. Army paratroopers from 1st Squadron, 40th Cavalry Regiment (Airborne), 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division, advance on objective while conducting joint field training exercise for Yudh Abhyas 21, at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska, October 28, 2021 (U.S. Air Force/Alejandro Peña)

America is a strategic risk, as described by one senior Indian participant:

Americans see India as a quasi-ally, with common security and military objectives. This, for the U.S., is the key driver of both strategic and operational cooperation. India's core concern is how much will such a support impact the [India-China] balance of power, particularly as China continues to coerce India? Can U.S. military equipment and technological support along with other inductions help shape strong dissuasive posture, preventing escalation of regional tensions?

India's internal challenge is balancing two opposing viewpoints on the bilateral partnership, while at the same time pursuing deeper U.S. collaboration on terms that are suitable to its domestic population.

From the U.S. perspective, there is an undercurrent of skepticism about how far

the relationship can progress. Some view India's desire to retain strategic autonomy as an "attempt to play all sides to maintain its freedom of movement that . . . discourages further engagement." This view, however, was in the minority. Many participants expressed surprise at how rapidly the defense relationship has progressed and recognized that a U.S. "failure to see the problem set through the lens of the Indians" is one of the primary handicaps to the relationship's progression. They also recognized India's challenge managing internal constituencies, but emphasized the rate at which the challenge to Indo-Pacific security is growing:

Like the United States, Indian bureaucracy is not monolithic and can be driven by personalities and interests internal to their system. This will contribute to the time necessary in forging a meaningful relationship. Unfortunately, the threat of China will outpace that timeline and the

relationship will unlikely catch up to the threat. This will manifest in the form of unrealistic expectations that will be unmet, unless India or the U.S. (or both) lean even harder into the relationship.

Considering the internal dynamics revealed in the survey, it appears American impatience for progress and Indian suspicion of U.S. intentions may be feeding each other and slowing bilateral progress. The U.S. challenge is to apply a measured pace to interaction and control internal frustration, while at the same time influencing India to accelerate partnership in selected areas required to balance China.

Recommendations

The 98 surveyed senior leaders see a positive and progressing strategic relationship with tremendous future potential. There is agreement on fruitful areas for near-term collaboration,

and those elements of the relationship that should be prioritized. Perhaps most important, both nations recognize the urgency of the threat that is driving bilateral convergence.

At the same time, gaps in shared understanding and a lack of strategic empathy are hampering progress. Leaders in both nations appear to underestimate bilateral strategic convergence. There is both a cultural disconnect and insufficient appreciation of each other's constraints. The internal dynamics of Indian suspicion and U.S. impatience may also be feeding each other in counterproductive ways.

To address these issues, the following recommendations are derived directly from survey feedback.

Focus on Implementing Initiatives, Not the Name. Given the differences in Indian and U.S. perceptions, there is little value in pressing for overt formal commitments. Instead, U.S. policy implementers should internally acknowledge progress in the bilateral relationship and take a measured approach to advance the relationship within bounds that are mindful of Indian constraints. Survey participants expressed frustration with both the ambiguity of the relationship as well as the lack of progress on priority initiatives. India's Major Defense Partner (MDP) designation by Washington and the decade-old U.S. Defense Technology Transfer Initiative (DTTI) are relevant examples. While both nations' leadership endorse these initiatives, they remain nascent. Both nations should identify and prioritize those initiatives requiring time-bound accomplishment.

Conduct a Bilateral Net Assessment. The U.S. and Indian response to the China challenge is disorganized. Indian requests for technology, U.S. requests for increased exercising and joint operations, and both nations' information-sharing are still conducted in an ad hoc way. A critical step recommended by a senior U.S. study participant is to conduct an in-depth net assessment of both states' capability to respond to the pacing threat in the region. This is the foundation for a coherent strategic partnership and will inform decisions on investment, technology transfer,

capability co-development, information-sharing, and exercising. It will provide a roadmap for implementation of the security pillar of the bilateral relationship and inform both MDP and DTTI. Critically, this effort requires a high level of trust and a 50/50 effort to have meaningful outputs. Its impacts will far outweigh the front-end investment.

Strengthen Bilateral Mechanisms Below the Senior Leader Level. While national-level engagement is robust, the survey demonstrates that mid-level engagements are affected by misunderstandings, bureaucratic friction, and restrictions. As a result, progress is slow on jointly agreed initiatives. The survey conducted for this article is, to the best of the author's knowledge, the first of its kind. Both nations should examine how they periodically assess the progress of initiatives below the senior leader level and what mechanisms are in place to assess the efficacy of bilateral engagement. Within the business world, there is a whole discipline—alliance management—that focuses on sustaining the health of the relationships between companies. For the sorts of mechanisms that businesses use to be effective, however, transparency and trust are the key ingredients.

Reform Bureaucratic Processes and Increase Interaction. Forty-two percent of all participants identified bureaucratic inertia as the primary area of friction. The survey also identified productivity as the lowest scored engagement category. Clearly, *progress* is being negatively affected by *process*. Both nations should consider establishing direct coordination channels and empowering junior leaders both to engage and to make working-level decisions. The requirement for review and approval for written correspondence and bilateral meetings and lack of direct, secure communications is generating unnecessary friction. While counterintelligence vetting is expected, direct communication is essential between close partners.

Address the Cultural Understanding Gap. This article shows that cultural differences and a lack of empathy inform the friction points both nations repeatedly face. To address this, the following steps should be considered:

- Conduct deliberate cultural preparation for all engagements. Most bilateral interaction occurs during short-term engagements when participants are unlikely to have ever worked with someone from the other nation's military. As such, the potential for misunderstanding is high. India and the United States must invest in preparing for and managing every interaction.
- Expand bilateral education and training. Exchanges between the two nations are insufficient. The limited slots in each nation's premier educational institutions should be prioritized for Indian and U.S. participation. While over 700 Indian leaders have been educated in U.S. military schools since 2010, India has the second largest military in the world with over 2 million servicemembers. With only 3 slots allocated in Indian military schools for U.S. officers each year, there are as few as 30 Indian-trained U.S. officers since 2010.³⁵
- Align bilateral training with positions managing the relationship. For both nations, the dearth of experts on the other's culture and systems is affecting progress. As the number and quality of leaders chosen for training increases, consideration must also be given to how they are employed.

Regardless of the name used to describe their bilateral relationship, India and America's strategic convergence is ongoing today and will be a future reality. The mutual value from better strategic collaboration to maintain a free and open Indo-Pacific is clear. There are no structural impediments that stand in the way. Instead, it is misapprehension of each other, lingering historical suspicion, and a deficit of strategic empathy that threaten future progress. These sources of friction are manageable if they are acknowledged and systematically addressed. The time to do so is at hand. JFQ

Notes

¹ Robert D. Blackwill and Ashley J. Tellis, "The India Dividend: New Delhi Remains Washington's Best Hope in Asia," *Foreign*

Affairs, September/October 2019, available at <<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/india/2019-08-12/india-dividend>>.

² Sameer Lalwani and Heather Byrne, “Great Expectations: Asking Too Much of the U.S.-India Strategic Partnership,” *The Washington Quarterly* 42, no. 3 (October 2019), 46.

³ K. Alan Kronstadt et al., *India-U.S. Relations*, R46845 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, July 19, 2021), 2, available at <<https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/R46845.pdf>>.

⁴ “History and Evolution of Non-Aligned Movement,” Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, August 22, 2012, available at <<https://mea.gov.in/in-focus-article.htm?20349/History+and+Evolution+of+NonAligned+Movement>>.

⁵ Chester Bowles, “525. Telegram from the Ambassador to India (Bowles) to President Johnson,” November 19, 1968, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968*, Vol. XXV, *South Asia* (Washington, DC: Office of the Historian, Department of State), available at <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v25/d525>>.

⁶ “Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation,” Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, August 9, 1971, available at <<https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/5139/Treaty+of>>.

⁷ Narendra Modi, “Prime Minister’s Keynote Address at Shangri La Dialogue,” Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, June 1, 2018, available at <<https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/29943/Prime+Ministers+Keynote+Address+at+Shangri+La+Dialogue+June+01+2018>>.

⁸ Vijay Gokhale, remarks, “The Road to 2030: Challenges, Partnerships, and Predictions,” video, 48:25, Raisina Dialogue 2019, New Delhi, January 10, 2019, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kmUI_owJpL8>.

⁹ Joseph F. Dunford, Jr., “Allies and Partners Are Our Strategic Center of Gravity,” *Joint Force Quarterly* 87 (4th Quarter 2017), available at <<https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Publications/Article/1325218/from-the-chairman-allies-and-partners-are-our-strategic-center-of-gravity/>>.

¹⁰ Premesha Saha, *From “Pivot to Asia” to Trump’s ARIA: What Drives the U.S.’ Current Asia Policy?* ORF Occasional Paper No. 236 (New Delhi: Observer Research Foundation [ORF], February 2020), available at <https://www.orfonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/ORF_OccasionalPaper_236_ARIA.pdf>.

¹¹ The author analyzed every national-level joint statement issued since 2010. A number are notable. For the bilateral shared vision, see “U.S.-India Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region,” The White House, January 25, 2015, available at <<https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/01/25/us-india-joint>

strategic-vision-asia-pacific-and-indian-ocean-region>. For rapidly expanding U.S.-India defense activities, see “India-United States Joint Statement on the Visit of Secretary of Defense Carter to India, April 10-13, 2016,” Department of Defense, April 12, 2016, available at <<https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/718589/india-united-states-joint-statement-on-the-visit-of-secretary-of-defense-carter/>>.

¹² “India Exports by Country,”

Trading Economics, available at <<https://tradingeconomics.com/india/exports-by-country>>.

¹³ “India,” Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, available at <<https://ustr.gov/countries-regions/south-central-asia/india>>.

¹⁴ “U.S.-India Joint Statement,” The White House, September 30, 2014, available at <<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/09/30/us-india-joint-statement>>.

¹⁵ “Quad Leaders’ Joint Statement: ‘The Spirit of the Quad,’” The White House, March 12, 2021, available at <<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/03/12/quad-leaders-joint-statement-the-spirit-of-the-quad/>>.

¹⁶ John Bolton, “India’s S-400 Missile System Problem,” *The Hill*, November 10, 2021, available at <<https://thehill.com/opinion/national-security/580864-indias-s-400-missile-system-problem>>.

¹⁷ Data for the table are derived from multiple sources, including the U.S. State Department Country Information Web site, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency’s *Historical Sales Book*, and information provided by U.S. Indo-Pacific Command.

¹⁸ Thomas Lynch III, “South Asia,” in *Charting a Course: Strategic Choices for a New Administration*, ed. Richard D. Hooker, Jr. (Washington, DC: NDU Press, 2016), 282.

¹⁹ “U.S. Security Cooperation with India,” fact sheet, Department of State, January 20, 2021, available at <<https://www.state.gov/u-s-security-cooperation-with-india/>>.

²⁰ Indian and Chinese defense expenditure analysis was conducted using the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) Military Expenditure Database, available at <<https://www.sipri.org/databases/milex>>.

²¹ Quotations from the bilateral survey are drawn from free text response questions. To preserve anonymity, only the nationality, occupation, and years of experience were collected from survey participants.

²² Rosabeth Moss Kanter, “Collaborative Advantage: The Art of Alliances,” *Harvard Business Review*, July-August 1994, available at <<https://hbr.org/1994/07/collaborative-advantage-the-art-of-alliances>>.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ U.S. and Russian trade with and investment in India were derived using the Indian Ministry of External Affairs fact sheet

on India-Russia cooperation, the U.S. Trade Representative Country data for India, the U.S. Agency for International Development Foreign Aid Explorer, and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

²⁵ Sameer Lalwani et al., “The Influence of Arms: Explaining the Durability of India-Russia Alignment,” *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs*, January 15, 2021, available at <<https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/JIPA/Display/Article/2473328/the-influence-of-arms-explaining-the-durability-of-indiarussia-alignment/>>.

²⁶ Pieter D. Wezeman, Alexandra Kuimova, and Siemon T. Wezeman, *Trends in International Arms Transfers, 2020* (Stockholm: SIPRI, March 21, 2021), available at <https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2021-03/fs_2103_at_2020_v2.pdf>.

²⁷ Dinshaw Mistry, *Aligning Unevenly: India and the United States*, Policy Studies No. 74 (Honolulu: East West Center, 2016), 42.

²⁸ Jyotika Saksena and Suzette Grillot, “The Emergence of Indo-U.S. Defense Cooperation: From Specific to Diffuse Reciprocity,” in *Engaging India: U.S. Strategic Relations with the World’s Largest Democracy*, ed. Gary K. Bertsch, Seema Gahlaut, and Anupam Srivastava (Oxfordshire, UK: Routledge, 1999), 146.

²⁹ “India,” Office of the U.S. Trade Representative.

³⁰ Sunjoy Joshi and Lydia Powell, *India: Energy Geo-Politics*, ORF Occasional Paper 173 (New Delhi, ORF, October 2018), 15, available at <https://www.orfonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/ORF_OccasionalPaper_173_Energy.pdf>.

³¹ BP, *Energy Outlook: 2020 Edition* (London: BP, 2020), 53, available at <<https://www.bp.com/content/dam/bp/business-sites/en/global/corporate/pdfs/energy-economics/energy-outlook/bp-energy-outlook-2020.pdf>>.

³² Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, “Indian Foreign Policy: Preparing for a Different Era,” video, 1:00:17, Center for Strategic and International Studies, October 1, 2019, available at <<https://www.csis.org/events/indian-foreign-policy-preparing-different-era>>.

³³ *Interim National Security Strategic Guidance* (Washington, DC: The White House, March 2021), 10, available at <<https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/NSC-1v2.pdf>>.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ *The U.S.-India Partnership: Ambition and Achievement* (New Delhi: Embassy of the United States of America, December 2020), 4, available at <<https://in.usembassy.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/71/Book-Ambition-and-Achievement-1.pdf>>. The number of slots for U.S. officers in the Indian Defence Services Staff College and the Indian National Defence College were gathered through informal engagement with the Office of Defense Cooperation, U.S. Embassy New Delhi.



Marines with Marine Corps Forces Korea begin receiving Moderna COVID-19 vaccine at Brian D. Allgood Army Community Hospital, on Camp Humphreys, South Korea, January 13, 2021 (U.S. Marine Corps/Ashley McLaughlin)

U.S. Forces Korea's Operation *Kill the Virus*

Combating COVID-19 Together and Sustaining Readiness

By Sharon Y. Kim, Kenny Lee, Jason B. Tussey, Eric J. Dougherty, Derek C. Cooper, Douglas A. Lougee, Talib Y. Ali, Michael J. Fea, Michael I. Cohen, Stephen C. Williams, Robert B. Abrams, and Clinton K. Murray

Sharon Y. Kim is a Research Associate in the Department of Defense at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences (USUHS). Second Lieutenant Kenny Lee, USA, is a medical student at USUHS. Colonel Jason B. Tussey, USA, served as the Deputy Chief of Staff at the United States Forces Korea (USFK). Colonel Eric J. Dougherty, USMC, served as the Joint Staff Current Operations Officer and is currently the Operations Chief for USFK. Colonel Derek C. Cooper, USA (Ret.), served as Commander of the 65th Medical Brigade, USFK. Colonel Douglas A. Lougee, USA, is the USFK Command Surgeon. Colonel Talib Y. Ali, USAF, is the Deputy Commander of the 51st Medical Group at Osan Air Base, USFK. Colonel Michael J. Fea, USAF, served as Commander of the 51st Medical Group at Osan Air Base, USFK. Colonel Michael I. Cohen, USA, is the Command Surgeon at Eighth Army, USFK. Major General Stephen C. Williams, USAF (Ret.), served as the special assistant to the Commander of Air Combat Command and Chief of Staff of USFK. General Robert B. Abrams, USA (Ret.), served as the Commander of USFK, United Nations Command, and Republic of Korea–U.S. Combined Forces Command. Brigadier General Clinton K. Murray, USA, served as the USFK Command Surgeon and is Commanding General at the Brooke Army Medical Center.

One of the keys to our success is that we operationalized our approach to combating COVID-19 from the very beginning. This is not an administrative task, this is not a medical task, and it's not a routine event, but it's an operation, similarly to how we operate in combat.

—GENERAL ROBERT ABRAMS
COMMANDER, U.S. FORCES KOREA

As we face one of the greatest public health threats in recent generations, joint military commands all over the world have been forced to develop operational strategies that maximize force health while sustaining combat readiness. Within the concept of a joint force, however, there remain ongoing struggles on how best to prepare for health crises and how well military commands can work together to handle new stresses of sustaining combat preparedness amid the ongoing pandemic. Among a continuum of uncertainties, how well a joint force works together, learns from each other, trusts each other, and leverages efficiencies will determine the outcome of its cooperative efforts against enemy threats, whether transnational or biological in nature.

U.S. Forces Korea (USFK) with its allied counterpart, the Republic of Korea (ROK), have been particularly successful in harnessing and executing key principles of military joint doctrine to sustain combined defense posture. With the growing need to analyze and document key lessons learned from joint commands globally, this article highlights USFK's success in operationalizing a health crisis response while strengthening its alliance with ROK counterparts.

Background and Context

South Korea continues to be one of the most important international and military U.S. partners in East Asia. The Mutual Defense Treaty Between the United States and the Republic of Korea, signed in 1953 following the Korean Armistice Agreement at the Korean War ceasefire, supports the mutual defense of both nations against external threats, particularly from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), while promoting U.S. interests in the

Asia-Pacific region and globally. Accordingly, USFK, a subunified command of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (USIN-DOPACOM), supports the United Nations Command and Combined Forces Command to fulfill its mission of maximizing U.S.-ROK alliance readiness on the Korean Peninsula.

In December 2019, COVID-19, a viral respiratory illness caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) coronavirus 2, emerged in Wuhan, Hubei, China, which was especially alarming to U.S. military units of proximity, including USFK. Given the need to maintain combined U.S.-ROK readiness, it was especially important for the joint command to maximize response efforts against COVID-19. Despite being one of the first countries outside of China to be affected by COVID-19 in January 2020, South Korea's advanced health infrastructure and strategies gathered from prior public health crises, such as the 2003 SARS outbreak and Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS) 2015 outbreak, enabled the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency (KDCA) to rapidly implement a successful emergency response (see figure 1). Given South Korea's effective early response, USFK sought success within the host country's health system. Forecasting the outbreak's consequences on mission readiness, USFK in early February proactively formulated peninsula-wide preventative health measures to protect the force, eventually initiating Operation *Kill the Virus*. The operation galvanized all USFK personnel and affiliated individuals to join the frontlines in combating the spread of the virus. Despite a lack of established guidance from international partners, such as the World Health Organization (WHO) or the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), USFK remained committed to collaboration

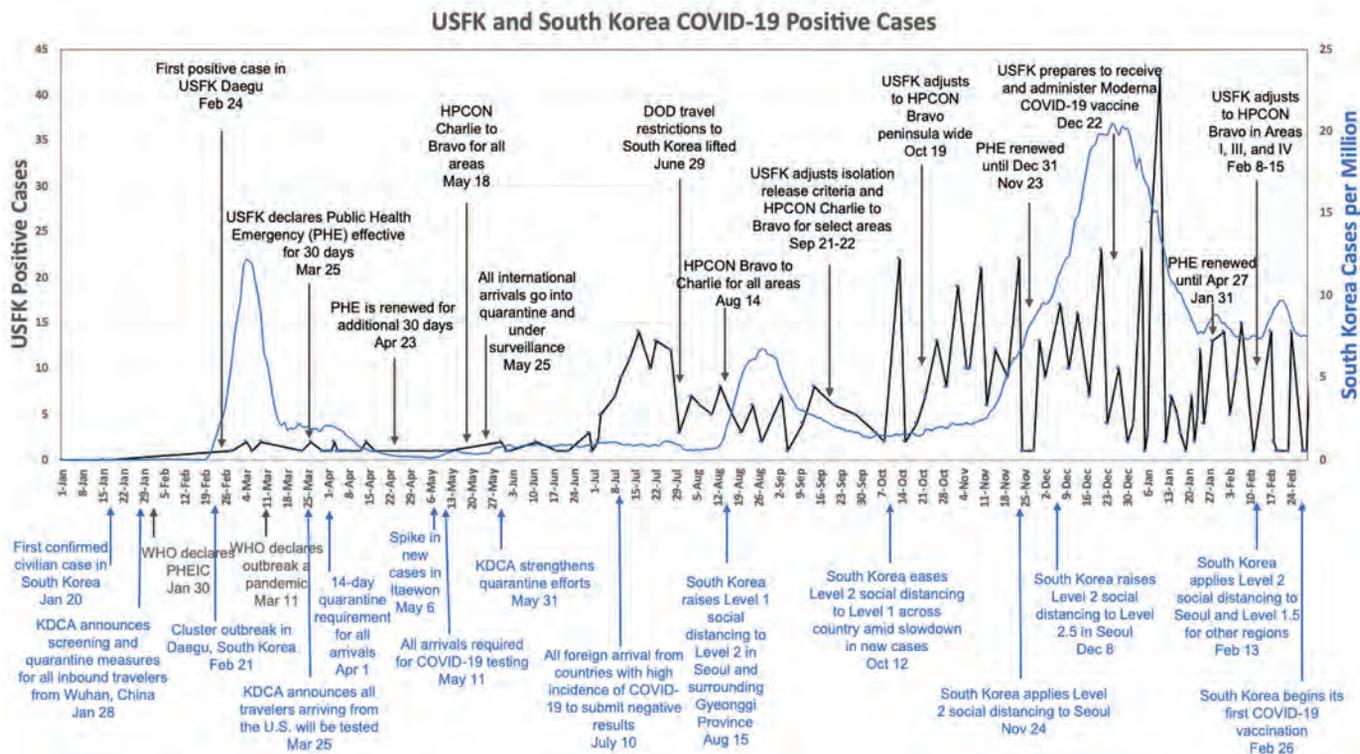
with ROK counterparts to combat a new enemy and ultimately win the ongoing battle against the novel virus.

A Joint Force Response Against COVID-19

Under the leadership of General Robert Abrams, USFK treated its campaign against COVID-19 as a full combat operation in terms of tempo, unit involvement, and spectrum. Operation *Kill the Virus* consists of eight principles, each of which contributes to USFK's capacity to test, trace, treat, and logistically support all personnel (see table 1). Senior leaders from both U.S. and ROK commands significantly emphasized risk assessments to develop precautions for every event, training, or activity undertaken to maintain a solid defense posture and enable a predictable process throughout the pandemic.

With escalating COVID-19 cases in South Korea and USFK's first positive case in February 2020, USFK immediately organized a clear leadership structure and implemented a public health emergency (PHE) that established authorities needed to take action. The declaration of the PHE unified all USFK personnel, including civilians, contractors, dependents, and Servicemembers, under the overarching authority of the commander who then directed consistent regulations and procedures to maximize force health protection. USFK also worked closely with the USFK Health Protection Council (HPC), which develops preventative policies and protocols with all USFK components, as well as the USFK surgeon, who collaborated with the ROK Armed Forces Medical Command and local governmental health agencies, including the KDCA, to assess, plan, and direct health policies through joint full-spectrum military operations. While the USFK HPC coordinated with

Figure 1. COVID-19 Trends in USFK and South Korea, January 2020–February 2021



elements internal to USFK, the USFK surgeon and component surgeons collaborated with relevant ROK stakeholders to maintain open communication and a flow of critical information.

Close collaboration between South Korean and U.S. health authorities was key to accurately reporting health data to the WHO and CDC and, in turn, receiving the most up-to-date status on the pandemic. Likewise, as U.S. military units globally remained vulnerable to the COVID-19 outbreak, it became a priority for the USFK surgeon to closely correspond with the military research and medical community as well as with international partners, such as USINDOPACOM, U.S. Forces Japan, DC Liaison Officer, U.S. Transportation Command, and the U.S. Embassy in Korea. With increasing demand for medical and laboratory assistance, the USFK surgeon requested an endemic infectious disease team from the 1st Area Medical Laboratory. Additionally, Eighth Army requested 65th Medical Brigade personnel assigned to the Modified Table of Organization and Equipment who were *not* stationed in South Korea

to deploy in support of Operation *Kill the Virus*, augmenting care at the 549th Hospital Center/Brian D. Allgood Army Community Hospital. These personnel were employed to augment the medical brigade response efforts across the peninsula, but specifically the hotspot region of Daegu in the early phases of the operation (see figure 2). Essentially, through the HPC, USFK was able to coordinate with multiple components and agencies to acquire a holistic understanding of the resources required and prioritize the distribution of logistical support, including personnel, administration, installations, supplies, and necessary infrastructure.

To streamline communication among all HPC and leadership components, USFK leveraged the “break glass bridge” tactic that assembles all members and experts to review initial reports, build contact trace history, conduct surveillance, and execute preventative measures. This tactic also provided the most comprehensive information to USFK’s public affairs officer, who would not only advise senior leaders on ROK’s current public health status but also assist them in making well-informed decisions and

translating them into effective public affairs operations. Finally, the tactic enhanced communication by allowing the USFK commander to drop down to lower echelons and receive updates from all USFK components through daily reporting with commander’s critical information requirements criteria and Department of Defense (DOD) databases, including SharePoint and non-classified Internet Protocol Router Network.

USFK directed the development of consistent policies that reflected the immediate operational environment of the host country and that applied to the joint force. As a subunified command, USFK consists of various components including Eighth Army, 7th Air Force, U.S. Naval Forces Korea, Special Operations Command Korea, and U.S. Marine Corps Forces Korea. With each element belonging to various departments under DOD, USFK directs consistent policies for all U.S. forces on the peninsula that reflect the immediate operational environment of the host country. Some USFK preventative policies included a 14-day quarantine and two COVID-19 screening tests on days 1 and 12 of

quarantine for Servicemembers and affiliated individuals arriving from outside of the Korean Peninsula. Additionally, USFK pragmatically adjusted policies and restrictions according to health protection condition (HPCON) levels defined by DOD Instruction 6200.03, which provides guidelines on readiness during a public health emergency.

USFK also learned from ROK health agencies about effective surveillance strategies of positive COVID-19 cases. The USFK surgeon collaborated with ROK-augmented intelligence to gather assets and secure USFK testing capabilities. All positive cases would be communicated to the ROK within 1 hour of confirmation to better monitor the situation. With each spike in positive cases in the ROK, USFK considered ROK risk assessments and social distancing recommendations when determining and adjusting HPCON status. While USFK assessments focused primarily on the local threat

to each installation, ROK assessments accounted for data across the entire peninsula to determine general trends. Based on the difference in scope of responsibility, USFK generally implemented restrictive measures ahead of ROK to establish safe zones on and around installations while taking a more conservative approach when it came to lifting restrictions by allowing ROK to lead.

The pandemic has undeniably affected many families across the enterprise. For instance, schools and daycares were temporarily stopped early on due to the low risk tolerance policy of the USFK commander. Consequently, Servicemembers with children, especially single parents and dual working parents, have simultaneous responsibilities to both occupational and family duties. Acknowledging these hardships, USFK continually follows incidence rates within various regions to justify HPCON levels and policies. Under HPCON Bravo,

for instance, families had outdoor day-care and activities available for children during parts of the day. With growing pandemic fatigue, USFK endeavored to meet the increased demand for mental health services and developmental support for children who have difficulty adjusting to virtual education during HPCON Charlie.

Finally, Operation *Kill the Virus* encourages community members to cope with uncertainty through creative avenues, including poster contests, yoga classes, or outdoor activities, while empowering community members to adhere to all preventative measures at the individual level. Indeed, the initial onset of the pandemic required extremely risk-averse and draconian measures that limited civil liberties and individual privacy to keep control of the emergency. Both USFK and ROK acknowledged the limitations and hardships that come with such measures and, throughout the

Table 1. Operation *Kill the Virus*

Principles	Key Points
1. Treat it like a combat operation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issue clear commander's intent. • Flatten communication with a clear leadership structure. • Institute control measures and execute battle drills at echelon; deploy additional medical and laboratory personnel. • Build shared understanding through routine updates and see the operational environment: Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency (KDCA), Armed Forces Medical Command, and governmental agencies. • Execute with "speed and violence of action."
2. Protect the force to protect the mission.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • USFK COVID-19 threat classification through health protection condition (HPCON) assessment. • Identify mission essential workforce.
3. Use Predictive Analysis.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand local, regional, and national data changes. • Monitor HPCON status throughout pandemic. • Maintain close connections with host nation agencies (KDCA, Embassy, local public health agencies).
4. Stay one step ahead of the curve by exercising an abundance of caution.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilize travel restrictions, screening, quarantine, isolation, and surveillance. • Contain outbreak by aggressively isolating cases and contacts. • Anticipate sporadic outbreaks. • Expedite necessary preventive actions for positive cases and contacts.
5. Maintain open and transparent dialogue with the community every day.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide data transparency and timely public announcements. • Leverage communication tools to issue clear guidance and intent (social media, USFK Web site, Google maps of COVID-19 hotspots, and alerts).
6. Be empathetic but prepare the community for lifestyle and culture changes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand the community and high-risk populations. • Fight for opportunities to compensate. • Engage community to help cope with pandemic challenges.
7. Follow and enforce rules.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instill sense of individual responsibility to adhere to preventive protocol. • Enforce social distancing through virtual meetings. • Empower subordinates to protect themselves and those around them.
8. Keep your foot on the gas and fight complacency.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remain vigilant on super-spreader events. • Continually assess operational environment, analyzing failures, and fine tuning strategies. • Strengthen the U.S.-ROK alliance.

pandemic, have aimed to relax measures in various forms and fashions to alleviate economic and mental strains. Ultimately, by showing empathy and compassion to its personnel and their families, USFK encourages everyone's vigilance and support of the mission of Operation *Kill the Virus*: protect the force to protect the mission.

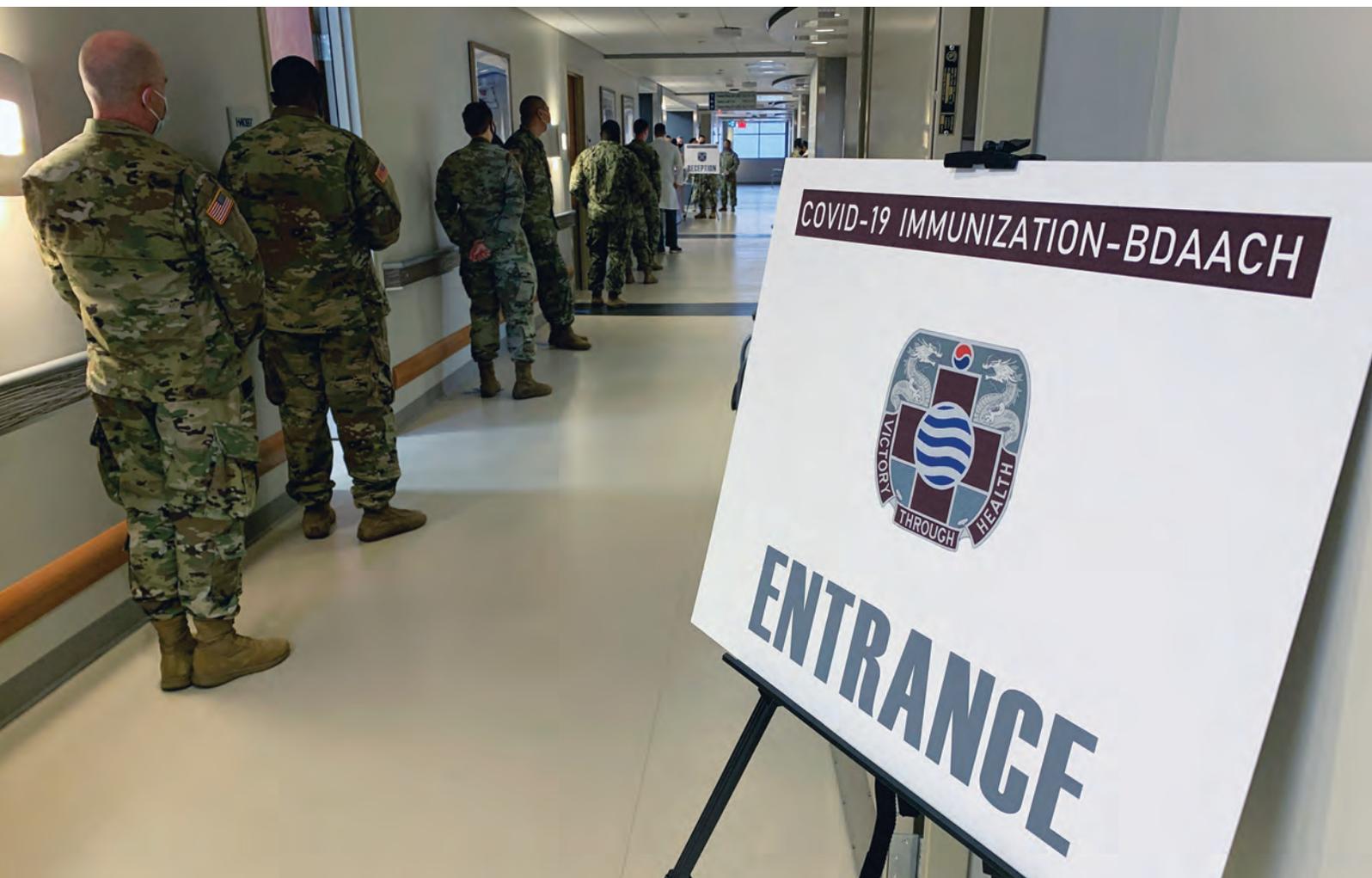
U.S.-ROK Joint Planning Process

Given the Korean Peninsula's unique operational environment, it remains imperative for USFK to adopt a planning approach that scrutinizes the immediate situation, compounding risk factors, national/international policy changes, and latest surveillance data. USFK's J5 Office of Primary Responsibility Working Group managed the joint planning process with four assess-

ment stages, including the planning approach, the operational environment, the campaign to contingency, and the contingency to campaign. From the start of the pandemic, the joint planning process was judiciously expedited through continual operational design and briefing of the course of actions and mission status. Joint Publication 5-0, *Joint Planning*, recommendations were also leveraged to guarantee continual interaction among key elements of the operational environment, strategic guidance, and problems at hand to ultimately calculate portended impacts on mission readiness. Some risk factors of interest included COVID-19, diplomatic changes (for example, the Korea Special Measures Agreement [SMA] on military cost-sharing between the

United States and ROK), key political events, strains on the U.S.-ROK alliance, ROK National Assembly elections, U.S. Presidential elections, economic effects nationally and locally, strategic industrial base impacts, and global supply chain disruptions. Finally, the third and fourth stages of joint planning were aimed at smoothly transitioning USFK back to campaign normalcy through contingency plans that resolve or mitigate compounding risk factors. USFK assessed various factors and their impacts on its overall campaign, including:

- mission readiness: Unit training, personnel, logistical support systems, manpower, sustainment enterprise, administrative systems.
- U.S.-ROK alliance: Friction from operational environment, including



Servicemembers assigned to Eighth Army and U.S. Forces Korea wait to receive COVID-19 vaccines at Brian D. Allgood Army Community Hospital, on Camp Humphreys, South Korea, December 29, 2020 (U.S. Army/Andrew Kosterman)



Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III greets members of 51st Medical Group and 731st Air Mobility Squadron and thanks frontline medical professionals for helping protect U.S. Forces Korea personnel from COVID-19, at Osan Air Base, South Korea, March 19, 2021 (DOD/Lisa Ferdinando)

COVID-19, SMA, and unknowns. USFK's commanding general implements fourth line of effort to continue to train and fight with allies and partners, integrating U.S.-ROK forces into training events that increase interoperability.

- peninsula-wide logistics: COVID-19 impact on peninsula-wide logistics and sustainment enterprises. Component SMA mitigation strategies may reduce risk, but residual risk and impacts remain.
- assignment of choice: Impact of HPCON levels, summer transition disruptions, and perceptions of safety and quality of life in South Korea may be negatively affected by COVID-19 and restrictive ROK and U.S. policies.

The goal of this joint planning strategy is to protect the force and preserve the USFK “fight tonight” posture against all immediate and portended threats

of the peninsula's unique operational environment.

Enhancing Medical Capacity and Vaccination Through Joint Efforts

The continued success of Operation *Kill the Virus* is evident in the overall low number of COVID-19-positive USFK personnel throughout the pandemic. Whenever a positive case is identified, USFK implements a 14-day quarantine, isolation at a designated building, random screening of essential personnel, and a tightly streamlined surveillance protocol that provides real-time data accessible to the public. Inevitably, USFK still experienced seasonal spikes. For instance, USFK experienced an anticipated spike of imported positive cases that coincided with large turnovers of personnel in August and October of 2020 (figure 1). In response to these

setbacks, USFK extended the PHE, which gave the USFK commander the authority to continue to enforce preventative measures. USFK also ensured that all new arrivals received mandatory training on Operation *Kill the Virus* principles and preventative protocols, especially for post-holiday travel returnees who could contribute to new COVID-19 spikes.

From the most recent MERS experience in 2015, ROK enlisted the private sector to ramp up its diagnostic testing capabilities and led the world by running more than 10,000 tests daily by February 2020. A small but significant element of this COVID-19 testing system applied to the U.S. military's contracted TRICARE facilities and College of American Pathologists–approved reference laboratory in Seoul, significantly increasing USFK's testing capability early in the pandemic before it was available

Table 2. Comparison of U.S.-ROK Joint Exercises Before and After the COVID-19 Pandemic

	U.S.-ROK Joint Military Exercises (Before COVID-19)	2020 U.S.-ROK Summer Joint Exercise	2021 U.S.-ROK Joint Military Exercises	Impact of COVID-19 on Military Readiness
Timing	Spring and summer.	Spring exercise postponed to August 2020.	March and August 2021.	Rising COVID-19 cases undermined force health protection and readiness.
Scale	Full scale with tens to thousands of troop members; augmentation of U.S. troops.	Full-scale USFK drills not possible amid pandemic; no augmentation.	Full-scale USFK drills not possible amid pandemic; limited augmentation with Reserve components.	Exercises involved primarily Active-duty personnel stationed in South Korea due to COVID-19 threat. Servicemembers have limited exposure to joint operational field environments with allied partners.
Scope	Field exercises, nighttime training and computer simulations.	Computer simulations, but no field exercises.	Computer simulations, but no field exercises.	Indoor simulations posed risk of infectious spread. Exposure to field operations is limited. USFK Servicemembers develop technical military expertise through computer simulations.
Logistics	Communication, travel, and information transfer unaffected by global outbreak.	Logistics hindered by preventative health measures (that is, social distancing, quarantine).	Logistics hindered by preventative health measures (that is, social distancing, quarantine).	Computer simulations are becoming advanced, and there is increased information accessibility.

at the military treatment facility. USFK also enhanced its readiness with ongoing vaccination efforts with the Moderna vaccine for its military personnel (including Korean augmentees to the U.S. Army), mission-essential civilians, healthcare personnel, and TRICARE beneficiaries.

In particular, the 549th Hospital Center/Brian D. Allgood Army Community Hospital, one of the largest medical assets aligned with USFK, was crucial in streamlining U.S.-ROK COVID-19 testing and vaccination of Servicemembers. The center also serves as a linchpin for promoting medical information exchange among USFK, KDCA, and ROK military counterparts. Through facility tours and virtual conferences with KDCA and ROK military medical teams, USFK continues to share information on COVID-19 testing capabilities, management, vaccination, and treatment to all relevant stakeholders. Information exchange on key planning factors and lessons learned have been fundamental to the operation’s success in promoting mission readiness.

U.S.-ROK Joint Military Operations Amid the Ongoing Pandemic

Since the beginning of the alliance, USFK has conducted joint military exercises with the ROK to maintain operational competence, promote soli-

arity, and support a robust deterrence posture. For the past decade, exercises have included a variety of training events throughout the year, with the largest combined exercises held each fall and spring, involving thousands of U.S. and ROK personnel across all branches of the military. However, these exercises have inevitably been affected by the pandemic, raising concerns over military readiness. Accordingly, USFK closely monitored HPCON changes to assess the status of U.S.-ROK military drills. For instance, USFK’s peninsula-wide implementation of HPCON Charlie in February 2020 prompted the delay of the U.S.-ROK annual joint training exercise held in the winter and spring seasons (see table 2).

As the HPCON level was lowered from Charlie to Bravo on May 18, 2020, USFK again decided to postpone and modify the annual summer drill, which was eventually held in late August 2020. To adhere to COVID-19 preventative health measures, USFK scaled back the summer 2020 drill by including fewer military personnel, replacing all associated field exercises with mostly computer simulations, and changing the utilization of usually crowded workplaces to ensure effective infection prevention and social distancing. Of note, computer simulations have been proposed and infused

into past exercises to avoid provoking the DPRK. Amid the pandemic, these simulations continue to serve as integral training components that mitigate the spread of the virus. The modified summer joint drill was successfully completed with minimal complications and zero COVID-19 transmission, demonstrating USFK’s capability in preserving military readiness while maximizing defense posture against COVID-19.

Additionally, the joint biannual military 2021 training event, known as the Combined Command Post Training, started March 8, 2021, in the context of the ongoing pandemic and COVID-19 vaccinations. However, the training only lasted 9 days, which is substantially shorter than previous springtime drills that normally run for 2 weeks. Furthermore, the training did not simulate a full-war scenario and involved only computer simulations of joint responses to emergency situations with no outdoor drills. The pandemic has restricted the number of available troop augmentees and reduced the overall scope and size of the spring 2021 joint exercise. However, progress has been made given that the spring 2021 exercise consisted of a normal number of augmentees compared to fewer augmentees in the summer exercise of August 2020.

It was easier for USFK to receive augmentees in March 2021 compared to August 2020, which coincided with permanent change of station season that led to a spike in COVID-19 cases. To control risk of infection on the influx of incoming augmentees, in addition to COVID-19 testing in predeparture, arrival, and quarantine-isolation stages, USFK implemented preventative measures, including thermal scanners on entry, hand sanitizers at every entrance, daily health questionnaires, plastic shields between computer stations, and thorough cleaning of workstations every four hours. These control measures were maintained for the August 2021 Combined Command Post Training, which was also scaled back and based primarily on computer simulations, with no field training.

These modified exercises, however, limit growth in the cultural and interpersonal aspects of readiness by minimizing face-to-face interaction between U.S. and ROK personnel. Full-scale joint exercises foster the relationship-building, common understanding, and trust that are crucial during wartime operations, while scaled-down exercises with fewer troop participants may hinder camaraderie and cultural competence among members of both militaries.

Finally, while the postponement, cancellation, or modification of drills may appear to arguably diminish military readiness, it is imperative for USFK to continue the utmost defense posture against COVID-19, as an infectious outbreak can prove just as detrimental to not only the overarching missions of USFK but also the local host nation. Despite unavoidable limitations, these altered exercises at the very least provide opportunities to visualize the operational environment through computer simulations and secure alliance solidarity amid pandemic limitations.

Conclusion and Lessons Learned

The pandemic has inevitably invoked new challenges for military commands to protect the force and to preserve the defense posture and mission readiness. This reality demands that joint commands evolve effective response

strategies that reflect the changing nature of the operational environment with its influx of unknowns and complexities. USFK targeted COVID-19 as a battlefield enemy and successfully initiated Operation *Kill the Virus* that engaged all community members, both national and international. Key to the operation's ongoing success is USFK's steadfast engagement with ROK counterparts to ensure alliance readiness and a joint fight tonight posture.

Despite ongoing restrictions and challenges, USFK continues to leverage the pandemic's times of uncertainty to open new opportunities for collaboration with the host nation. U.S.-ROK alliance readiness now encompasses a broader set of missions than ever before, with tight COVID-19 surveillance, information exchange, medical capacity augmentation, and community involvement as vital keystones for pandemic cooperation. USFK also expedited the joint planning process to ensure that the U.S.-ROK alliance has robust military capacity to conduct combined combat operations. Essentially, what USFK has demonstrated for military commands all over the world is that such capabilities do not come automatically and that high standards of "practice makes perfect" joint planning and execution are a prerequisite for success.

Wisdom dictates that rather than waiting and reacting to immediate problems, military leaders should proactively prepare by looking to exemplary cases of effective response strategies and asking the difficult questions on how mission readiness can be preserved against all threats. As this article demonstrates, ongoing joint planning and identifying areas where planning and execution may fall short are fundamental for navigating through countless unknowns. USFK continually evolves its health response, contingency, and joint operational planning with its alliance partners to rise to the pandemic's challenges. Ultimately, the USFK story is now relevant and useful for anticipating new unknowns that lie ahead for joint commands within their strategic environments, as the pandemic continually challenges the military in both predictable and unpredictable ways. JFQ

New from NDU Press

for the Center for the Study of Chinese Military Affairs

Strategic Forum 309

PLA Overseas Operations in 2035: Inching Toward a Global Combat Capability

By Joel Wuthnow, Phillip C.

Saunders, and Ian Burns McCaslin



The Chinese military presence in the "far seas" beyond Asia is growing and will expand further as

the PLA moves toward its 2035 goal of fielding a fully modern military. Existing overseas activities are mostly conducted by a single service and have not involved combat. Future scenarios for overseas joint operations include larger scale military operations other than war and overseas combat. Conducting more complex overseas operations would require substantial improvements in PLA capabilities, such as a stronger overseas joint logistics system. Changes in the domestic or regional security environment or intensified U.S.-China competition could accelerate a transition toward greater emphasis on expeditionary operations, including higher end combat scenarios.



Visit the NDU Press Web site for more information on publications at ndupress.ndu.edu



Iranian oil platform Rashadat is set afire after being shelled by four U.S. Navy destroyers during Operation *Nimble Archer*, October 19, 1987 (U.S. Navy/Henry Cleveland)

Deterrence Without Escalation

Fresh Insights into U.S. Decisionmaking During Operation *Earnest Will*

By Richard A. Mobley

The events of the so-called Tanker War in the Persian Gulf remain benchmarks in Iranian and U.S.

Commander Richard A. Mobley, USN (Ret.), has completed careers as a Civilian Military-Intelligence Analyst and a Naval Intelligence Officer.

military thinking and offer issues for U.S. senior leaders to reconsider should they again be faced with having to deter Iran in a fast-breaking crisis. Recently declassified material affords additional insights into the challenges of engaging Tehran during Operation *Earnest*

Will, the U.S. Navy effort to escort and protect reflagged Kuwaiti tankers against potential Iranian attack, particularly during the war's last years in 1987 and 1988. *Earnest Will* presented challenges in understanding Iranian decisionmaking, producing persuasive



USS *Stark* lists to port after being struck by two Iraqi-launched Exocet missiles, Persian Gulf, May 17, 1987 (U.S. Navy)

intelligence, messaging Iran, achieving deterrence without unintentional escalation, and discovering diplomatic offramps. Although decades have since elapsed, U.S. leadership might have reason to recall the following lessons from that operation should the United States face a bounded, but prolonged, conflict with the Islamic Republic:

- Iran’s decisionmaking was opaque to U.S. policymakers and military planners. The gaps in understanding core issues such as regime strategic intent, the firmness of Tehran’s resolve to undermine the tanker escort regime, and the reliability of its command and control complicated the military planning process.
- As the Intelligence Community (IC) sought to offer “truth to power” supported by carefully reasoned, precise national intelligence estimates, a disconnect developed between the IC and senior military leadership over how Iran might respond to *Earnest Will*.
- Messaging Iran was a fraught process complicated by failures to establish reliable, direct, and timely crisis communications with Tehran; difficulties in crafting a persuasive message to a regime hardened by 7 years of war with Iraq; and the guesswork in proving that any messaging effort worked.
- Achieving deterrence while not unintentionally expanding a conflict with Tehran was a central challenge to U.S. policy that was revealed in the National Security Council (NSC)’s conservative approach to reviewing options for rules of engagement (ROEs) and responding to Tehran’s repeated provocations.
- The United States, its allies, and Iran recognized diplomatic offramps that might end the maritime conflict, but no actor succeeded in persuading Baghdad to permanently stop its attacks on shipping to Iran, Tehran’s central requirement for halting the Tanker War.

We revisit this 34-year-old history to learn from hundreds of U.S. and British documents declassified since 2010 that address diplomacy, NSC and United Kingdom (UK) cabinet deliberations, current intelligence reporting, and military threat assessments during *Earnest Will*. The reporting augments a body of

archival evidence released in the United States in the first two decades after the Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988), additional secondary sources, and earlier memoirs and oral histories by U.S. leaders who helped craft strategy during the period.¹

To put this more recent evidence into perspective, however, we first offer a thumbnail sketch of the operation. The bulk of this article then highlights the dynamics and complexities of each of the five challenges cited above. Finally, we close with a few thoughts about *Earnest Will*, recalling choices that might haunt U.S. decisionmakers in 2022.

The Operation

Earnest Will was the U.S. response to Kuwait's request for maritime protection in the seventh and last year of the Iran-Iraq War. Iraq expanded the war to the Gulf in 1984 by attacking Iranian shipping in attempts to force Iran to accept a ceasefire and hinder its ability to export oil, its primary source of foreign exchange. Iran, unwilling to accept a ceasefire, reciprocated, but it generally responded to Iraqi ship attacks on a tit-for-tat basis while preferring to confine the war to land, where it enjoyed significant advantages.²

Kuwait in December 1986 asked Moscow to protect its tankers, and the U.S. Government seriously began considering a similar request by the spring of 1987. Iran perceived Kuwait as a near-cobelligerent to Iraq, however, given the economic aid it was providing and Kuwait's willingness to allow its ports to serve as primary points for arms transshipments to Iraq.³ Tehran saw U.S. assistance to Kuwait as a step toward widening the war, tilting the military balance toward Iraq and sharply increasing foreign naval presence in the Gulf—all developments it was determined to avoid.

Nevertheless, despite some domestic opposition, the Ronald Reagan administration was willing to protect 11 reflagged Kuwaiti tankers starting in July 1987 for a variety of reasons, including a general tilt in favor of Iraq in its war with Iran, a preference to block the Soviet navy from the region, a principled commitment to freedom of navigation,

and a desire to buttress allies in the Gulf Cooperation Council (particularly after recent revelations of U.S. military assistance to Tehran as part of the Iran-Contra affair).⁴

The U.S. operation would also be controversial in Tehran. Iranian military and diplomatic responses to the operation probably were driven by perceptions of asymmetries of national will and relative readiness of the two nations to sustain casualties should an incident between them escalate. Based on Tehran's history of combative posturing in the face of threats, its hostile rhetoric, and an attack on a Soviet vessel in May 1987, the IC judged that Iran would attempt to bring an early end to superpower protection of Kuwait ships.⁵ This mindset contributed to a series of attempts to hinder the operation and test U.S. resolve from the operation's start in July 1987 until the summer of 1988 when Iran finally accepted a ceasefire.

Iran Opaque

Correctly assessing an adversary's decisionmaking calculus is central to grand strategy and military planning. Unfortunately, Iran's decisionmaking was opaque to the IC, with the result that consumers could receive mixed answers to questions on issues such as Iran's depth of commitment to the war, control of operational commanders, and willingness to escalate quickly using more capable systems such as Silkworm antiship cruise missiles (ASCMs).⁶ A contemporary Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) memorandum characterized the problem as one of incomplete evidence by stating, "No one has all the information and, based on the limited facts, disagreement existed on the degree of threat."⁷ In a similar vein, Rear Admiral Harold Bernsen, then commander of Middle East Force, later lamented in his oral history that it was "very difficult to ferret out specific details concerning leadership decision-making. I never saw any report, and certainly no report to be authoritative. So what you really did was make your assumptions based on what you knew about them, their track record."⁸

Chronology of Major Events During Operation *Earnest Will*

1987

- Spring: United States considered Kuwaiti request for aid.
- July: *Earnest Will* reflagged tanker escort operations began.
- July 24: Reflagged tanker *Bridgeton* struck a mine.
- August 10: Tanker damaged and supply ship sunk in Iranian minefield in Gulf of Oman.
- September 21–22: U.S. Navy seized and sank Iranian naval minelaying vessel *Iran Ajr*.
- October 8: U.S. Army helicopters sank a Boghammer patrol boat and two Boston whalers in northern Persian Gulf after they fired at U.S. helicopters.
- October 16: Iranian Silkworm anti-ship cruise missile hit reflagged tanker *Sea Isle City* in Kuwaiti waters.
- October 19: U.S. Navy destroyed Rashadat oil platform in retaliation for *Sea Isle City* attack.

1988

- April 14: USS *Samuel B. Roberts* struck mine northeast of Qatar.
- April 18: U.S. Navy destroyed Sassan and Sirri oil platforms and sank or disabled three Iranian naval combatants and three small boats.
- July 3: USS *Vincennes* mistakenly shot down Iranian Airbus over the Strait of Hormuz.

Source: David Crist, *The Twilight War: The Secret History of America's Thirty-Year Conflict with Iran* (New York: Penguin Press, 2012).

Fissures Between the IC and Consumers

A primary responsibility of the IC is to offer truth to power using carefully reasoned, transparent assessments even if they contain unpopular conclusions,

particularly when the documents address such difficult topics as regime strategic intent and potential crisis behavior. The success of such efforts is never guaranteed, in view of previous cases in which the IC did not persuade decisionmakers to accept its conclusions. In this case, attempting to gauge Tehran's response to the escort regime, the IC informed but did not persuade all senior leaders about its judgments concerning Tehran's probable responses to *Earnest Will*. A lengthy special National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) published in June 1987 and supporting assessments collectively warned that Iran over the next year had the will to challenge *Earnest Will* with escalatory steps starting with terrorism and conventional attacks against unescorted Kuwaiti ships, including the reflagged tankers. If unable to dissuade the United States from using such tactics, however, Iran would eventually attack an escorted reflagged tanker. Tehran might even attack a U.S. warship directly given the perceived threat that successful completion of the operation would pose to long-term Iranian interest in attaining hegemony over the Gulf.⁹

The estimate was timely because its publication coincided with heated congressional hearings over whether the United States should undertake the operation. President Reagan and Secretary of State George Shultz subsequently alluded to the NIE, which was controversial among policymakers and in Congress.¹⁰ CIA Director William Webster's prepared remarks later stated, "Our view is not one that the policy community welcomed."¹¹ Admiral William Crowe, then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, subsequently challenged the assessment's validity:

The critical question in this case was not a matter of capabilities, but of what Iran's willingness would be to engage in a sea war. On this issue there was little history to follow, and the IC experts were speculating. They did not know, though they certainly had opinions. When the appraisals came in, they offered highly alarming "worst case" scenarios. The prospects of success were nil;

*the whole Gulf would be aflame. That, in general terms, was the intelligence estimate, and our opponents in Congress loved it.*¹²

Some senior military commanders seemed unwilling to conclude that Iran would directly challenge the convoy. Historian David Crist judged that their mindset betrayed an underlying assumption that Tehran would be deterred by the mere presence of U.S. naval power and would not resort to a direct attack on *Earnest Will* units even after it had mined the approaches to Kuwait:

*No one in Tampa or Washington bothered to change the assumption guiding the American convoy operations. Admiral Bernsen [Commander, Middle East Force], General George Crist [Commander, U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM)] and Admiral Crowe continued to believe that Iran would never dare take such an overt action against the U.S. Faith in the deterrent effect of the carrier and American firepower clouded every level of American thinking.*¹³

The military also chafed over the extent of influence the IC should have in evaluating the military planning effort. Admiral Crowe added to the discussion, "The experts in the IC did not believe they had been formally and adequately consulted. It seemed to me that up to this point our problem was more political than military, and I did not think intelligence types should control the decision. But this was a matter I should have handled more carefully."¹⁴

Despite such criticism and challenges, Webster rightfully defended the NIE in 1988 as a model of truth to power and a demonstration of IC resistance to politicization. He noted in a public speech that the problem had arisen when "policymakers had gotten ahead of the IC in making certain decisions, including the reflagging of tankers without knowing what all of the implications of their actions were."¹⁵ Webster publicly summarized the episode in 1988 when he stated, "There was some grouching that perhaps they [policymakers] ought to be allowed to have something to say about how the assessment

worked. . . . We made it very clear that our estimates would be the best we could produce. They would not for any political reason, or policy reason, be changed."¹⁶

Messaging Tehran Problematic

Messaging an adversary is central to deterrence and crisis management. Tehran in 1987, however, rebuffed repeated U.S. attempts to establish more reliable, direct communications. Tehran offered no interlocutor for either U.S. senior leadership authorities or tactical commanders in theater to approach and demonstrated no interest in any kind of hotline or deconfliction circuit. Repeated U.S. warnings against behavior such as mining were ineffectual, although other U.S. admonitions may have resonated in Tehran.¹⁷

Secretary Shultz publicly announced in September 1987 that he wanted direct communication with Tehran so that "it is clear exactly what is being communicated, and so the more direct it is probably the better."¹⁸ He particularly wanted to warn and dissuade Iran, stating, "They should have it clear in their mind the strength of our determination and not make any miscalculation about that"—a potential nod to IC warnings about the risks of Iranian overconfidence.¹⁹

The State Department again raised the issue in November 1987, this time approaching the United Kingdom. A U.S. memorandum noted that Washington had frequently used indirect communications to explain U.S. policy to Tehran, what the U.S. Navy and U.S. flag vessels were and were not doing in the Gulf, and to specify the circumstances that could require U.S. forces in international waters to exercise their right of self-defense. The note welcomed an opportunity to communicate directly through authorized Iranian government officials to clarify the U.S. position and reduce the risk of Iranian miscalculation.²⁰

Although unable to establish direct communications with a senior Iranian official, Washington sent Tehran *démarches* and other indirect communications. Washington sought to assure Tehran of U.S. neutrality in the Iran-Iraq conflict,



Mess management specialist 2nd class Williams Hendrickson scans for mines from bow of guided missile frigate USS *Nicholas* during Operation *Earnest Will* convoy mission, June 1, 1988 (U.S. Navy)

explain the rationale for *Earnest Will*, dissuade Tehran from again boarding U.S. flag vessels, and deter Iran from attacking U.S. ships, particularly by launching its new Silkworm ASCMs or by laying mines. Washington also sent messages to Tehran to help limit a conflict, particularly after the United States attacked Iranian oil platforms and warships in April 1988.²¹ The *démarches* themselves, however, acknowledged that Iran was not heeding U.S. warnings. Tehran would instead launch Silkworms at merchant ships near Kuwait and lay mines along *Earnest Will* convoy transit routes.²²

Boardings. After Iran boarded the U.S. flag merchant ship *President Taylor* and interrupted its radio communications on January 12, 1986, Washington asserted its rights as a neutral power. Immediately after the incident, the United States *démarched* Tehran, concluding that the visit and search of U.S.

flag vessels during a period of heightened tension and regional conflict “could lead to a confrontation between U.S. and Iranian military units.”²³ American diplomats viewed the document as laying down a red line for the Iranians, according to reporting from the UK embassy in Washington.²⁴ The United States subsequently warned Iran at the beginning of *Earnest Will* in July 1987 that no belligerent search party would be permitted aboard U.S. flag vessels.²⁵

Silkworm ASCMs. Washington was particularly concerned about Tehran’s deployment of Silkworm ASCMs early in 1987 because the missile qualitatively changed the maritime threat and could seriously damage or sink combatants and tankers with its 1,100-pound warhead.²⁶ Consequently, the United States sent warnings to dissuade Tehran from using the missile while crafting plans to destroy it.²⁷ Perhaps reflecting IC perception

that Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps command and control might be unreliable, the United States warned Iran, “We consider the activities of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps in the Persian Gulf or elsewhere to be the responsibility of the Islamic Republic.”²⁸

Mines. Although U.S. decisionmakers initially were more concerned about the Silkworms, they also repeatedly warned Iran against laying mines to hinder U.S. ships.²⁹ Shultz advised his British counterpart in April 1988:

*Four times last fall, we informed the Government of Iran that we could not accept Iran’s mine laying in international waters or in the waters of neutral states. We made clear we did not seek further confrontation with Iran, but indicated we would be prepared to meet any escalation of military actions by Iran with strong countermeasures.*³⁰



Iranian frigate IS *Sahand* burns after being attacked by Carrier Air Wing II aircraft from USS *Enterprise* in retaliation for mining of guided missile frigate USS *Samuel B. Roberts*, April 19, 1988 (U.S. Navy)

Seeking Deterrence While Avoiding Unintentional Escalation

U.S. policymakers repeatedly had to balance their twin goals of maintaining deterrence while avoiding a wider war during *Earnest Will*. Reconciling these objectives would be particularly problematic given the IC's warnings about the danger of escalation and Tehran's determination to frequently test U.S. resolve. Admiral Crowe did not share the IC's perceptions, but he did move additional forces into the region to preserve escalation dominance. He subsequently wrote, "I did not believe the Iranians were going to challenge us seriously, but I wanted to make sure that if they did we could hit them with overwhelming power."³¹

The military tendency to offer harsher crisis responses than policymakers would want to implement was apparent during *Earnest Will* as well. Although U.S. military commanders prepared more robust retaliatory plans to respond to increasingly serious incidents, the military found little appetite to approve them in Washington, according to the participants. U.S. retaliatory measures conducted through April 1988 were insufficient to shatter Tehran's resolve to continue attacking merchant ships. Only unfavorable developments culminating that summer—including loss of domestic support for the war and sweeping Iraqi victories—would convince Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khomeini to accept a ceasefire and only then because the state's very survival was at stake.

As *Earnest Will* loomed, the United States reviewed its ROEs and began contingency planning, particularly for responding to a potential Silkworm attack against an *Earnest Will* convoy while maintaining tight national control.³² Washington subsequently prepared plans for military responses after the reflagged tanker *Bridgeton* struck an Iranian mine in July 1987, a Silkworm ASCM damaged the reflagged tanker *Sea Isle City* in Kuwait in October 1987, and an Iranian mine nearly sank the USS *Samuel B. Roberts* in April 1988. Declassified national records and older sources such as memoirs and oral histories show that U.S. policymakers envisioned proportional damage to Iranian military targets with limited loss of life, sought to bound the incidents and to avoid escalation, and

were leery of striking the Iranian mainland despite planning by subordinate military commanders for more extensive strikes.

Despite the emphasis on tactical readiness to defend against attack after Iraq's inadvertent Exocet missile attack on the USS *Stark* in May 1987, however, Washington continued to constrain potential U.S. naval responses to an Iranian attack. In the National Security Planning Group (NSPG) meeting on May 18, 1987, participants commented that any response was to be limited to the actual attacker, and Iran's land mass could not be attacked without approval from Washington.³³ The UK embassy in Washington reported that its contacts on the Chief of Naval Operations staff had confirmed on June 8, 1987, that the ROEs for Middle East Force and the carrier battle group also excluded preemptive strikes. The embassy also wrote that its State Department and NSC contacts had confirmed that although preemption against the Silkworms had been one of the full range of options the United States considered, those sources "uniformly" stated preemption had few adherents.³⁴

Estimates from the IC also may have pushed national policymakers toward moderation in contingency planning. The National Intelligence Officer for Near East and South Asia in June 1987 highlighted the implications of an extensive attack on Iran: "They will not be easily intimidated. Even the threat of a major U.S. strike on Iranian shore facilities may not be sufficient [to make Iran back down] given the massive destruction already experienced and the vital Iranian interests at stake."³⁵ That August, the IC assessed that a major U.S. attack on Iran could be counterproductive: a U.S. attack that caused heavy Iranian casualties and damage would not guarantee a change in Iranian policies but would afford militant elements an opportunity to spur the population to greater sacrifice.³⁶

Such concerns notwithstanding, developing responses to potential Silkworm attacks occupied military planners for much of the spring and summer of 1987.³⁷ The NSC required DOD and the Joint Staff to provide an update on Tomahawk Land Attack Missile-C planning for

possible strikes against the Silkworm sites (as well as tactical air support requirements for Middle East Force surface combatants) in May 1987.³⁸ The NSC revisited the issue in June 1987, when Ambassador Robert Oakley, assistant to the President for Middle East and South Asia, wrote that the NSC needed to work with the Defense Department and State Department on contingency planning and response scenarios for the range of potential Iranian threats, "from terrorist attacks on U.S. facilities to mining to suicide small boat attacks to use of Silkworms."³⁹

The Joint Staff prudently planned for a range of courses of action, although the more extreme ones probably were unpalatable to the administration. The bulk of the initial planning probably was complete before August 1987, when National Security Adviser Frank Carlucci told British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher that the United States had prepared options "ranging from action against mine storage facilities to a major strike against Bandar Abbas. Any retaliation would be proportionate. But no decisions had been taken."⁴⁰ President Reagan in fact seemed interested in avoiding escalation. When Thatcher warned him in July 1987 that it was important not to escalate the conflict, he agreed, stating that the United States would only act in self-defense in response to an attack.⁴¹

***Bridgeton* Mining**

The United States considered military strikes against Iran after the reflagged tanker *Bridgeton* struck an Iranian mine near Farsi Island on July 24, 1987, but the level of damage and the ambiguity of the attack did not cross the NSC's threshold for warranting reprisals. Discussions with Reagan in the NSPG meeting on that date suggested a cautious approach with the tone being a "calm and steady course," in Reagan's words, with focus on the need first to find out what really had happened to *Bridgeton*.⁴² Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger subsequently wrote, "We considered retaliation but showed restraint, particularly since damage was limited and no personal injury occurred."⁴³

The UK embassy in Washington 3 days later described a "muted" U.S. reaction to the mining. Noting that it had approached its contacts in the NSC, Pentagon, and State Department, the embassy detected no pressure for military retaliation. The lack of casualties and conclusion that the incident was "not a clear-cut attack by Iran helped keep the temperature down," according to the embassy.⁴⁴

Admiral Crowe, a participant in several debates about potential U.S. retaliatory contingency operations against Iran, perceived restraint in national policymaker discussions of potential responses for *Bridgeton* as well as subsequent discussions about retaliation for attacks against the reflagged tanker *Sea Isle City* and USS *Samuel B. Roberts*. Crowe commented that State Department participants in the meetings insisted each time that retaliation be proportionate.⁴⁵ He elaborated, "Retaliation, they believed, had to be seen as a simple, clear response, not in any sense an escalation, and in this way they were usually seconded by the National Security Advisor."⁴⁶

Operation Nimble Archer

U.S. leaders again considered retaliating against Tehran after a Silkworm struck *Sea Isle City* in Kuwait on October 16, 1987. The declassified record corroborates statements by some participants that most U.S. policymakers envisioned a limited response against an offshore Iranian military target that would risk relatively few casualties. Ultimately, a U.S. Navy surface action group attacked two platforms in the Rashadat (formerly Rostam) oilfield with naval gunfire on October 19, 1987, in Operation *Nimble Archer*.

In discussing the deliberations over retaliation, Reagan and Weinberger approved of selecting the Rashadat platforms because they were limited targets with military value and risked few casualties on either side. Reagan mentioned that the NSPG discussed selection of targets that would entail "minimum risk to personnel—theirs and ours."⁴⁷ Weinberger stated that the principals selected it after a debate because it was a

staging area for small boat and helicopter attacks and served as a listening post collecting against U.S. ship movements.⁴⁸

Supporting the planning, General George Crist, the USCENTCOM commander, subsequently submitted a statement for the International Court of Justice stating that he had wished to strike a military target while avoiding escalation: “I believed the best way of undermining Iran’s ability to attack U.S. forces was to degrade their ability to observe our forces—in effect, put out their eyes.”⁴⁹ He, too, hoped to avoid further escalation of war with Iran and maintain U.S. status as a nonbelligerent. He noted, “The Rostam platforms were unambiguously offshore—not Iranian land territory.”⁵⁰ Attacking them would have the added advantage of minimizing the danger of civilian casualties, especially since, he noted, the United States had warned of the impending attack and allowed people to evacuate before the firing commenced.⁵¹ But General Crist did not allude to more robust courses of action that secondary sources state were being concurrently prepared by lower military echelons.⁵²

Rear Admiral Harold Bernsen, then the Navy commander in the Gulf, also sensed the national-level debate was bounded to avoid escalation. In a subsequent oral history, he stated, “A great many things were debated. . . . Those rather radical solutions were—except for in some quarters—dismissed pretty much out of hand. No one in Washington in retrospect really was interested in an all-out attack on Iran.”⁵³

The British wrote in November 1987 that discussions with State Department officials involved in planning the operation confirmed that U.S. national-level policymakers were attempting to maintain a posture combining “restraint, determination, and resolve.”⁵⁴ They noted, however, there was still support for the argument that “only action or the threat of action affecting Iran’s ability to prosecute the war against Iraq was likely to deter Iran.”⁵⁵ The memorandum elaborated:

- The decision reflected Reagan’s cautious attitude to the general issue

of retaliation, use of U.S. military power, and the risk of casualties. He personally added a 20-minute evacuation warning for the Iranians on the oil platform. Furthermore, the response against the oil platforms (the lowest-profile military option that was put to him) included a list of six possible targets, only one of which the President chose.⁵⁶

- The United States drew a clear line between options involving any action against Iranian territory (mainland and offshore islands) and other actions against Iranian military assets offshore (aircraft, ships, platforms). The British account noted that there was and would still be the greatest U.S. reluctance to attack mainland targets.⁵⁷
- U.S. ROEs called for an immediate response by local commanders to any Iranian attack on a U.S. flag merchant vessel or warship. The British were told that “a satisfactorily full immediate reaction would limit the demand for a secondary later response in retaliation or self-defense.”⁵⁸

Operation Praying Mantis

The administration’s debates about how to retaliate for the mining of USS *Samuel B. Roberts* in the southern Persian Gulf on April 14, 1988, were wider ranging than those over *Nimble Archer* or *Bridgeton*, judging from an account offered by David Crist.⁵⁹ The dynamics between those proposing more robust military solutions and officials pushing to bound the conflict were more apparent. Crist reported that although there was a consensus to retaliate for the mining, members of the administration were divided on how to respond. In a separate account, Reagan himself noted restraint as he wrote in his diary, “We didn’t want to kill—but to destroy those properties,”⁶⁰ a sentiment the military would have been well aware of given its participation in NSPG meetings. In a meeting held to discuss options on April 16, 1988, Defense Secretary Carlucci similarly wanted no loss of

life on either side and a very restrained retaliation—“little more than a couple of platforms,” according to Crist’s monograph.⁶¹ Crist elaborated:

*Neither Secretary of Defense Carlucci nor National Security Adviser [Colin] Powell had much enthusiasm for a large attack against Iran, and both advocated moderation. “No one has been killed,” Powell cautioned in a meeting in the Situation Room. “We don’t want to expand this conflict.” He brought up the possibility of grave environmental damage to the Gulf should one of the platforms be destroyed and tens of thousands of gallons of oil spilled. Carlucci seemed to agree with his old NSC deputy and expressed an almost obsessive concern with avoiding casualties, both American and Iranian. He insisted that any U.S. attack needed to be preceded by a warning.*⁶²

Both the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the USCENTCOM commander sensed national reluctance for a large retaliatory strike. Admiral Crowe summarized the national-level deliberations in his memoirs: “They were dealing in perceptions; what they really wanted to do was make something out of nothing. That meant striking a blow that would not hurt the Iranians so much that they would be moved to escalate, but that would at the same time impress the American public as the act of a strong and determined leadership.”⁶³ General Crist stated, “No one, however, supported an attack on the Iranian mainland. The only condition in which they would attack Iran proper would be if the Iranians launched their Silkworms against U.S. ships, at which time all bets were off.”⁶⁴

General Crist, Admiral Crowe, and Vice Admiral Anthony Less, the commander of Joint Task Force Middle East, however, had pushed for greater retaliation after the *Roberts* minestrike.⁶⁵ Admiral Crowe explained to the Joint Staff that General Crist wanted heavy retaliation. Admiral Less had proposed destroying the naval headquarters in Bandar Abbas and mining the port, thereby bottling up the Iranian navy.⁶⁶ Admiral Crowe was concerned that the retaliation would be



Air-to-air left side view of A-6E Intruder aircraft from attack squadron VA-95 Green Lizards dropping CBU-59 cluster bombs over Iranian targets in retaliation for mining of guided missile frigate USS *Samuel B. Roberts*, April 18, 1988 (U.S. Navy)

understated, saying that this time Iran had gone too far and a mere tit-for-tat response was not enough: “We have to let Tehran know that we are willing to exact a serious price, forcefully arguing to sink a ship.”⁶⁷

In addition to sinking an Iranian combatant, President Reagan agreed to sink the Iranian naval auxiliary *Charak*, the ship suspected of laying the mines that struck *Roberts*.⁶⁸ However, locating the unit was problematic. Washington assessed that *Charak*, last seen in port on April 12, was the minelayer and Washington was searching for the *Charak* on April 15, according to UK embassy reporting.⁶⁹ President Reagan wrote in his diary that on April 21, 1988 (3 days after *Praying Mantis*), he gave permission to board the vessel and, if mines were found aboard, to remove the

crew and sink it. The next day, however, Reagan was informed the ship had returned to port.⁷⁰

Diplomatic Offramp Tested

The United States also sought to use diplomacy to end—or at least to suspend—the Tanker War with brief success in August 1987. London and Washington agreed that the maritime conflict might be paused if Baghdad could be persuaded to stop maritime attacks against Iranian interests.⁷¹ They judged that Iran’s approach to the Tanker War operations was generally retaliatory; Tehran’s ship attacks tended to follow Iraqi maritime airstrikes. Both the United Kingdom and the United States judged that Tehran might halt its ship attacks if Iraq did so.⁷²

London and Washington accordingly agreed to pressure Baghdad directly or via its Gulf Cooperation Council allies to halt ship attacks in the hope that Tehran would do likewise.⁷³ In fact, the UK cabinet concluded on July 23, 1987, that the most important requirement in the immediate future was to end the ship attacks: “The government was doing everything possible to mobilize pressure for this on Iraq and Iran. There was hope that the message might have some effect.”⁷⁴

Iraq indeed reluctantly agreed to halt the attacks—a major concession given the role they played in Baghdad’s strategy to keep international focus on the Gulf and to motivate Tehran to end the ground war. Ship attacks in the Persian Gulf stopped for much of August 1987. Unfortunately, Baghdad resumed

airstrikes against tankers and oil installations on August 29, and Tehran resumed ship attacks 2 days later.⁷⁵

Iran raised the issue the following month but failed to secure another lengthy hiatus in Iraqi ship attacks, probably because of Baghdad's dissatisfaction with the lack of any progress on the diplomatic front. In its *démarche* to Washington, Tehran outlined its perception that the United States was not acting as a neutral party but implied that Iran would again consider stopping its ship attacks. The Iranians wrote, "Exerting pressure on the regime of Iraq to continue to refrain from attacking the marine targets in the Persian Gulf and the exit of foreign forces can be a very good guarantee for safeguarding the security in this region, the free export of oil, and the freedom of international cooperation."⁷⁶

Conclusion

The challenges and lessons discussed herein remain relevant in evaluating a future military crisis with Iran, although admittedly Iran has grown more powerful and less war-fatigued since Khomeini reluctantly accepted the ceasefire, effectively ending the long, bloody Iran-Iraq War in mid-1988. A few following thoughts address these challenges in 2022.

Iran's decisionmaking process probably remains opaque, although its decisionmaking calculus can be modeled. The most vexing part of preparing an assessment of wartime behavior of any potential adversary such as Iran can be the assessments of probable behavior before and during a conflict. Much of the information in such an assessment is simply not knowable because the adversary has not decided what to do. In other words, analysts are forced to investigate an intelligence mystery, a contingent development that cannot be known with certainty. The results can be unsatisfying to consumers should the resultant judgments constrain friendly military operations or portray an adversary as having boundless resolve no matter what courses of action Washington takes.

Establishing crisis communications as was proposed during *Earnest Will* can still

be problematic if a potential adversary such as Iran has a penchant for relying on deniability and an incentive to complicate U.S. decisionmaking by withholding information. Additionally, for messages to be effective, they also must be persuasive when a country such as Iran weighs them against the salience of their original strategic objectives or the U.S. track record in responding to previous provocations.

The phenomenon of daylight between the IC and consumers is not unusual; it has recurred since 1988 and is likely to be seen again when the IC's message clashes with policymaker or military objectives. Efforts to make the estimative process more transparent while using absolutely rigorous analytic tradecraft probably have helped preclude some of the rancor experienced in 1987–1988, but the tensions are unlikely to go away completely.

Balancing the risks of deterrence against avoiding unintended escalation remains a central challenge to planning. It is the challenge of our senior military leadership to ensure plans are congruent with the national leadership's strategic intent while simultaneously offering them a sufficient range of choices.

Although the United States sought consistently to help facilitate an end to the Iran-Iraq War—particularly its naval component—it lacked the diplomatic leverage to pressure Iraq to permanently suspend its ship attacks. Still, the search for offramps is embedded in crisis management and will remain critical in helping to bound conflicts. JFQ

Notes

¹ For some of the best secondary sources on Operation *Earnest Will*, see David Crist, *The Twilight War: The Secret History of America's Thirty-Year Conflict with Iran* (New York: Penguin Press, 2012); Harold Lee Wise, *Inside the Danger Zone: The U.S. Military in the Persian Gulf, 1987–1988* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2013); Lee Allen Zatarain, *America's First Clash with Iran: The Tanker War, 1987–88* (Philadelphia: Casemate, 2010); Then-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral William C. Crowe and Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger devoted lengthy sections in their memoirs to the operation.

See William Crowe, *The Line of Fire: From Washington to the Gulf, the Politics and Battles of the New Military* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 186–211; Caspar Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace: Seven Critical Years in the Pentagon* (New York: Warner Books, 1990), 387–428.

² Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), "The Tanker War: Ship Attacks in the Persian Gulf," June 1987, available at <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/DOC_0000268293.pdf>.

³ CIA Special Analysis, "Iran: Growing Threat to Persian Gulf Shipping," May 30, 1987, available at <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/DOC_0000252949.pdf>.

⁴ Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*, 387–428.

⁵ CIA, Special National Intelligence Estimate (NIE), "Iran and the Superpowers in the Gulf," June 1, 1987, available at <<https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP89B00224R000903140005-5.pdf>>.

⁶ See Richard A. Mobley, "Intelligence and Operation Earnest Will, 1987–1988," *Studies in Intelligence* 60, no. 3 (September 2016), for background on the Intelligence Community's role in *Earnest Will*.

⁷ CIA internal memorandum for Director, Office of Congressional Affairs, Request for Persian Gulf Hearing on Differences in Assessment between the Agency and the Department of Defense, June 17, 1987, CREST CIA-RDP90B0017R000300710004-0.

⁸ Paul Stillwell, *Reminiscences of Rear Admiral Harold J. Bernsen* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2014), 24.

⁹ CIA, "Iran and the Superpowers in the Gulf," 3–6.

¹⁰ George P. Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State* (New York: Scribner, 1993), 529; Ronald Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 509.

¹¹ CIA, proposed remarks by William H. Webster, Director of Central Intelligence, before American Business Conference, Washington, DC, March 23, 1988, available at <<https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP99-00777R000302120001-6.pdf>>.

¹² Crowe, *The Line of Fire*, 182.

¹³ Crist, *The Twilight War*, 240.

¹⁴ Crowe, *The Line of Fire*, 182.

¹⁵ CIA, remarks by William H. Webster, Director of Central Intelligence, to Phoenix Rotary Club, January 15, 1988, available at <<https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP99-00777R000301900002-0.pdf>>.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Secretary of State message, "USG Proposal for Direct Official Channel with Iran," September 16, 1987, Digital National Security Archive (DNSA); U.S. diplomatic note, "U.S. Readiness to Meet with a Senior Iranian Official," November 8, 1987 (delivered by U.S. Embassy London to Foreign & Commonwealth Office [FCO] on November 12, 1987) (FCO 8/7251), *The National*

Archives (United Kingdom) (TNA).

¹⁸ “USG Proposal for Direct Official Channel with Iran.”

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ “U.S. Readiness to Meet with a Senior Iranian Official.”

²¹ Message from United Kingdom (UK) embassy, Washington, DC, “US/Gulf,” (FCO 8/7251), TNA; memo from private secretary, “The Gulf,” April 19, 1988 (FCO 8/7251), TNA.

²² FCO Research Department, “Iran Annual Review,” 1987–1988 (FCO 8/7050), TNA.

²³ Enclosure to letter from UK embassy, Washington, DC, March 10, 1986, démarche to Iran on *President Taylor* incident, January 1986 (FCO 8/6329), TNA; White House, “Statement by Principal Deputy Press Secretary Speakes on Iran’s Search of the United States Merchant Ship *President Taylor*,” January 13, 1986, available at <<https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/statement-principal-deputy-press-secretary-speakes-irans-search-united-states>>.

²⁴ Letter from UK embassy, Washington, DC, “Shipping in the Gulf: U.S./Iran,” March 10, 1986 (FCO 8/6329), TNA.

²⁵ U.S. submission to International Court of Justice (ICJ) (Exhibit 42), “Démarche to Iran: Use of Silkworms/Protection Regime,” July 18, 1987.

²⁶ CIA memo, “Iran’s Silkworm Antiship Missile Capability,” July 2, 1987, available at <<https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP90T00114R000700410001-6.pdf>>.

²⁷ Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*, 397; Démarche to Iran, “Message to Iran,” May 23, 1987 (attachment to National Security Council memorandum, “Messages to Iran,” June 8, 1987), William J. Burns Files, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library (RRPL); U.S. submission to ICJ, “Démarche to Iran: Use of Silkworms/Protection Regime.”

²⁸ U.S. submission to ICJ, “Démarche to Iran: Use of Silkworms/Protection Regime.”

²⁹ Untitled message from Secretary of State Shultz to UK foreign minister, April 18, 1988 (FCO 8/7251), TNA; U.S. submission to ICJ (Exhibit 56), “Message for the Government of Iran,” August 31, 1987.

³⁰ Untitled message from Shultz to UK foreign minister.

³¹ Crowe, *The Line of Fire*, 189.

³² Minutes from National Security Planning Group (NSPG) meeting, “U.S. Policy and Gulf Security,” May 18, 1987, DNSA; untitled letter from Secretary of State to President of the Senate, May 20, 1987, NSC NESD Directorate Staff Files, RRPL.

³³ NSPG minutes, “U.S. Policy and Gulf Security,” May 18, 1987, DNSA.

³⁴ Message from UK embassy, Washington, DC, “U.S./Gulf: Silkworm,” June 8, 1987 (FCO 8/6816), TNA.

³⁵ CIA memorandum from National Intelligence Officer for Near East/South Asia, “Warning and Forecast Report for Near East

and South Asia,” June 3, 1987, available at <<https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP91B00776R000300060012-0.pdf>>.

³⁶ CIA NIE, “The Persian Gulf: Implications of a U.S.-Iranian Confrontation,” August 1987, available at <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/DOC_0005557215.pdf>.

³⁷ UK Ministry of Defence memorandum, “Note of a Meeting between the Rt Hon. J. Stanley and General Robert Herres, Vice Chairman, JCS,” April 2, 1987 (DEFE 13/2389), TNA; NSC memo, “Follow-up on May 22 PRG on U.S. Policy and Gulf Security,” May 22, 1987, available at <<https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP89B00224R000400940001-9.pdf>>; NSC memorandum, “NSPG on Persian Gulf Policy,” June 16, 1987 (Executive Secretariat files), RRPL; Memorandum from private secretary, “Prime Minister’s Meeting with Mr. Carlucci: The Gulf,” August 3, 1987 (DEFE 13/2390), TNA.

³⁸ NSC memorandum, “Follow-up on May 22 PRG on U.S. Policy and Persian Gulf Security.”

³⁹ NSC memorandum from Robert B. Oakley, “NSPG on Persian Gulf Policy, June 16,” June 16, 1987, Executive Secretariat Files, RRPL.

⁴⁰ Memorandum, “Prime Minister’s Meeting with Mr. Carlucci: The Gulf.”

⁴¹ Memorandum from private secretary to PM, “Prime Minister’s Visit to Washington: Meeting with President Reagan,” July 18, 1987 (FCO 8/6755), TNA.

⁴² NSC minutes, NSPG Meeting, July 24, 1987, Executive Secretariat, NSC, NSPG Records, RRPL.

⁴³ Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*, 404.

⁴⁴ UK embassy, Washington, DC, “U.S./Gulf.”

⁴⁵ Crowe, *The Line of Fire*, 200–201.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, 538.

⁴⁸ Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*, 419–420.

⁴⁹ U.S. submission to ICJ (Exhibit 48), letter from General George B. Crist re *Nimble Archer* planning, May 17, 1997.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Crist, *The Twilight War*, 255–257, 287.

⁵³ Stillwell, *Reminiscences of Rear Admiral Harold J. Bernsen*, 124.

⁵⁴ Memorandum from UK embassy, Washington, DC, “U.S./Iran: Contingency Planning,” November 25, 1987 (FCO 8/7251), TNA.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Crist, *The Twilight War*, 320–338.

⁶⁰ Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, 597.

⁶¹ Crist, *The Twilight War*, 336.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Crowe, *The Line of Fire*, 201.

⁶⁴ Crist, *The Twilight War*, 336.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 334–338; Crowe, *The Line of Fire*, 200–203.

⁶⁶ Crist, *The Twilight War*, 355.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 336.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 326–327, 334–337.

⁶⁹ Message from UK embassy, Washington, DC, “Mining of U.S. Warship in the Gulf,” April 15, 1988, TNA.

⁷⁰ Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, 599.

⁷¹ See Richard A. Mobley, “London and Washington Maintaining Naval Cooperation Despite Strategic Differences During Operation Earnest Will,” *Naval War College Review* 74, no. 2 (Spring 2021), for background on Anglo-American naval cooperation during the operation.

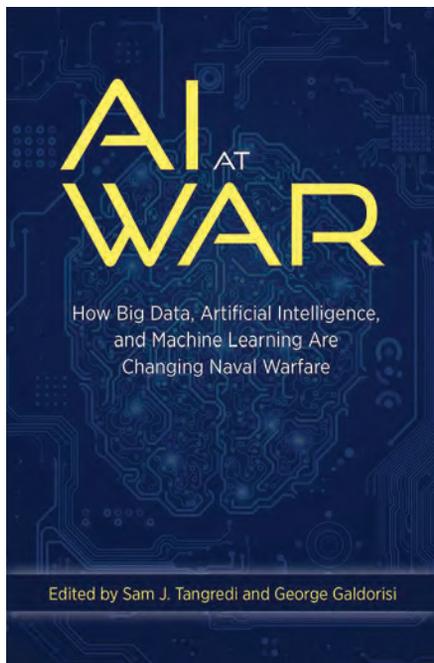
⁷² Private secretary (prime minister), “Prime Minister’s Visit to Washington: Meeting with President Reagan,” July 18, 1987 (FCO 8/6755), TNA; FCO to select embassies worldwide, message, “Iran/Iraq,” November 15, 1987 (FCO 8/6766), TNA.

⁷³ Cabinet meeting conclusions, July 23, 1987 (CAB 128/87/1), TNA; Private secretary, “Prime Minister’s Visit to Washington Meeting with President Reagan,” FCO, untitled memorandum re meeting between Secretary of State Shultz and foreign minister, July 20, 1987 (FCO 8/6755), TNA; Prime minister to emir of Kuwait, untitled letter, July 24, 1987 (FCO 8/6559), TNA.

⁷⁴ Cabinet meeting conclusions, July 23, 1987 (CAB 128/87/1), TNA.

⁷⁵ FCO Research Department, “Iran Annual Review, 1987.”

⁷⁶ Iranian démarche to United States, September 10, 1987 (attachment to NSC memo from Executive Secretary, “Recent Exchanges with the Government of Iran”), n.d., DNSA.



AI at War: How Big Data, Artificial Intelligence, and Machine Learning Are Changing Naval Warfare

Edited by Sam J. Tangredi and George Galdorisi

Naval Institute Press, 2020

461 pp. \$49.95

ISBN: 978-1682476062

Reviewed by Frank Hoffman

There are many books and TED Talks about artificial intelligence (AI) these days, and most assert that this technology will revolutionize our politics, economy, and way of life. Futurists including Martin Ford, author of *Rise of the Robots: Technology and the Threat of a Jobless Future* (Basic Books, 2016), claim that AI and the various technologies that constitute both it and robotics will transform industries and rival the impact of electricity in our lives. A decade ago, one could be doubtful about the hype associated with AI, automation, and autonomous systems. Today, however, AI systems are increasingly used commercially and generate tangible advantages for those who master its applications and alter their operating methods appropriately.

AI at War examines how well the presumptions about AI can be applied to military missions. A carefully curated anthology developed by two military veterans with solid research and academic credentials, Sam Tangredi and George Galdorisi, *AI at War* does not offer a roadmap, but it clearly identifies barriers to embracing AI and maximizing its potential in naval warfare. There are both obstacles and opportunities in applying such powerful tools, and the conceptual, organizational, and cultural ramifications are spelled out in the book's various chapters. There is cause for concern about rushing precipitously into new fields with emergent technologies, but there is also risk in being complacent—and outpaced by the competition.

AI at War has 19 chapters, plus a foreword by Admiral James G. Stavridis (Ret.), former commander of U.S. European Command, and an epilogue by Admiral Michael S. Rogers (Ret.), former commander of the National Security Agency and U.S. Cyber Command. There are chapters devoted to specific naval functions, including command and control; intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance; and integrated fires. Each chapter has merit, but three stand out.

Paul Scharre, director of studies at the Center for New American Security, addresses the U.S. Navy's mixed progress with unmanned systems. He is unsparing in his criticism of the Navy's failure to press forward with a carrier-based unmanned strike system:

Even in a zero-sum budget environment, it would be far more sensible for the Navy to cut one or more carriers to fund development of an uninhabited combat aircraft than continue building \$13 billion carriers that will lack the necessary aircraft to adequately project power against sophisticated competitors.

Scharre, a former Soldier, appreciates the influence of Service culture and identity in impeding progress in the naval aviation community. He is sensitive to how strongly pilots embrace their function of flying and notes that unmanned systems “strike at the very core of their

identity.” But he remains convinced that the risks the Navy is taking by relegating the MQ-25 Stingray to merely a refueler platform are unacceptable, putting the Service decades behind in advancing U.S. power projection capabilities against formidable competitors.

In her incisive chapter, Nina Kollars, a professor at the Naval War College, identifies a major limitation of AI. She is concerned that a centralized, top-down approach to AI or its employment as a closed system will deprive the fleet of the kind of bottom-up innovations that come from the edge of an organization in wartime. Such innovations have been a unique advantage of some military cultures and can be a force multiplier when Sailors and Marines improvise under fire and rapidly share their user-generated solutions. Kollars's chapter stresses that instead of displacing human creativity, the design of AI capabilities should “support ‘in stride’ adaptation at the tactical/operational level as applied by practitioners as they apply the tip of the spear to the problems of combat.” She may be discounting the potential for creativity from AI programs, but her reminder about the value of human intuition and inspiration should be heeded.

In another chapter, Adam Aycock and William Glenney relate their efforts to develop an operational-level AI-enabled system for naval commanders. This effort, which they facetiously call “putting Mahan in a box,” derived over a dozen observations from past uses of AI products in beating humans in competitive games. Many advocates think that AI victories in chess, Go, and poker games apply equally to the complexity of warfare. Their study finds that existing AI-supported gaming is woefully inadequate for the demands of the military operating environment:

In war, timely big data can be very hard to obtain and is often obfuscated by the adversary, the rules are not clear and are subject to change by all side of the conflict, the uncertainty for all aspects is huge; feedback loops are few and slow, there is often an absence of clear, direct cause and effect

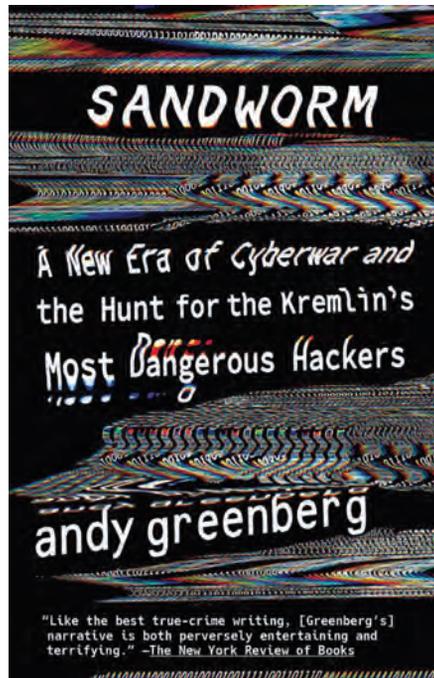
with divergent behaviors . . . the risk is significant; and the definition of success is cloudy at best.

Aycock and Glenney find no evidence that any existing system is going to produce a war-winning advantage for a fleet commander soon. What they do find is a lot of narrow or task-specific AI products that can support tactical tasks, but they contend these do not aggregate into operational success or support decision-making at the operational level of war. Rather than ignore the potential or limit AI systems to tactical tasks, the authors recommend that the defense establishment stop thinking about commercial games and initiate the development of operationally relevant AI-based military decision systems to support Navy or geographic commanders.

AI at War is a balanced product with several chapters ideal for professional military education curricula on the changing character of warfare and the role of technology. The future is uncharted, but the editors note the continuities facing the use of AI, including “the painstaking work required to achieve innovation, the need for rigorous policy analysis, the friction of implementation, ethical concerns, and the ever-present dilemma of how to trust new technologies.” Although produced for a naval audience, the book is just as valuable for the joint warfighting community.

All told, *AI at War* is the most important book-length contribution on this topic since Scharre’s highly regarded *Army of None: Autonomous Weapons and the Future of War* (Norton, 2019). It is practical, insightful, and replete with the kind of healthy skepticism and openness that the defense community should embrace as we enter the fourth industrial revolution. It is a highly commendable product for navigating the challenges and the opportunities of artificial intelligence. JFQ

Dr. Frank Hoffman is a Distinguished Research Fellow in the Center for Strategic Research, Institute for National Strategic Studies, at the National Defense University.



Sandworm: A New Era of Cyberwar and the Hunt for the Kremlin's Most Dangerous Hackers

By Andy Greenberg
Anchor Books, 2020
368 pp. \$18.00
ISBN: 978-0525564638

Reviewed by Janine Lafortune

Sandworm reads like a fiction crime thriller but raises the alarm about a looming nonfiction threat: unrestricted cyber war. Andy Greenberg, the author and a senior writer for *Wired*, cautions readers that the world is in the midst of a global cyber arms race. He forewarns that civilian critical infrastructure remains highly vulnerable to cyber attacks by aggressive state and nonstate actors. He identifies malicious cyber attacks, as part of a new tit-for-tat, with escalation mirroring that of the Cold War, with increasingly sophisticated cyber attack methods and capabilities constituting a new, modern arms race. He concludes with an ominous message: that the next cyber doomsday is not a matter of *if* but *when*.

The main narrative follows the aggressive and unrelenting cyber attacks

that have been bombarding Ukraine since 2015. For 5 years, Ukraine served as a petri dish for cyber operations by Russian state and nonstate actors, who were testing the limits of deniability, attribution, proportionality, and discrimination. Each time they conducted an attack—BlackEnergy in 2015, Industroyer in 2016, NotPetya and Bad Rabbit in 2017—these cyber hackers walked away unscathed and free to strike again. Intertwined with this narrative is a second one, detailing Greenberg’s quest to find and oust the masterminds behind many of these attacks, accompanied by civilian cyber security professionals. Together, the two accounts illuminate the new and evolving world of cyber conflict.

Greenberg traces the history of state-sponsored cyber attacks and offers a critique of U.S. cyber activities. Once Stuxnet, the computer worm identified in 2010, was compromised, it opened a Pandora’s box. Cyber gurus, aggressors, and defenders have been playing an escalating game of cat and mouse ever since. Greenberg warns that this is no game, however, and that it comes with real consequences—millions of dollars in economic losses, physical damage to property, and potential loss of life. He points to NotPetya as the perfect case study. The malware spread to more than 65 countries and caused an estimated \$10 billion in damages, demonstrating unprecedented scope. Greenberg argues that malicious cyber attacks are becoming more dangerous, and indiscriminate attacks on civilian critical infrastructure, spreading beyond traditional notions of state sovereignty, should serve as a warning to the global order.

Greenberg’s ability to present complex and dry technical jargon with fluidity and accessibility aids readers in navigating the more challenging elements of his argument. However, at times, *Sandworm* jerks the reader around in its six sections. Greenberg interrupts his main narratives with branch narratives, biographies, and fascinating but superfluous history. For instance, instead of presenting mysterious cyber hackers such as Fancy Bear, F Society, and Shadow Brokers in “Part V: Identity,” he introduces the former

two in “Part III: Evolution” and the last in “Part IV: Apotheosis.” Similarly, he presents a new cyber attack called Bad Rabbit/Olympic Destroyer, followed by a chapter on false attribution, all in “Section V: Identity.” These interruptions create confusion and tangents that detract from his fundamental question: Who is Sandworm? Nevertheless, Greenberg’s research, analysis, and impressive sources provide credibility, and a sense of urgency and mystery, making it an exciting read.

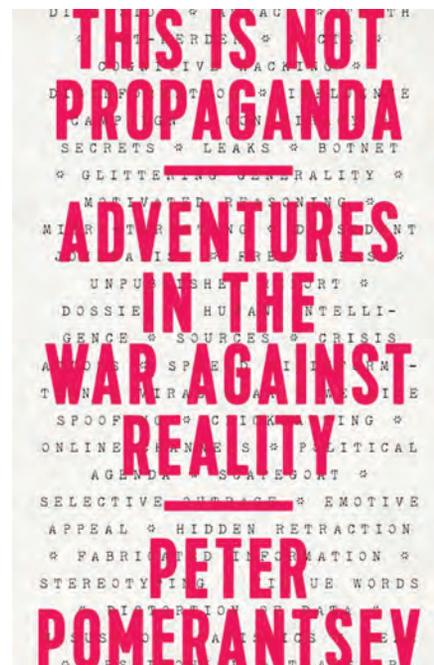
Sandworm makes a convincing case about the threats of unrestricted cyber war and the vulnerability of civilian critical infrastructure. The book is thorough, with rich accounts from cyber security specialists and cyber attack victims adding weight and perspective to the main argument. Greenberg’s focus on Ukraine as the test bed for Russian malicious cyber activities provides the greatest example of cyber conflict’s complexity. Offensive cyber attacks to support tactical military operations, as seen in Ukraine, are just a tiny facet of the cyber influence that strategic competitors leverage to obtain combat advantage. There is also a psychological component to cyber war, manifesting as harassment, extortion, and even destruction—all aimed at eroding civilians’ trust in their governments and their ability to protect its people.

Although Greenberg is careful to question U.S. cyber security policy in the wake of NotPetya, his efforts in this regard fall short. Despite interviewing top cyber security officials from the administrations of Barack Obama and Donald Trump, Greenberg never critically examines U.S. cyber security policy, U.S. Federal cyber security operations teams (national roles, authorities, and responsibilities), or the ways international humanitarian law applies to cyber activities. He fails to address the U.S. creation and alignment of responsible cyber security organizations, such as the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, and the policies that govern their activities—a notable omission. The Department of Defense’s official policy states that the law of war will apply to cyberspace operations; however, *Sandworm*

chronicles malicious activity that occupies the gray zone—below the threshold of armed conflict. In a missed opportunity, *Sandworm* pirouettes around the most significant issue the United States faces in the wake of the Ukrainian case study: How does the Nation conduct cyber operations consistent with domestic law, applicable international law, and rules of engagement, when the same rules do not constrict our competitors and adversaries?

Despite failing to address some of the most significant legal considerations the United States faces to cyber operations, *Sandworm* is one of the most comprehensive chronicles of cyber warfare available over open-source platforms. The book forces self-reflection—which at times triggers vulnerability—and challenges our underlying assumptions of U.S. cyber security policy, methods, and capabilities, as well as those belonging to actors within the strategic environment. Its warnings and insights on cyber’s “gray areas” make it a formidable resource for those in the joint force and the national security community charged with the preservation and the defense of U.S. military advantage and U.S. interests. JFQ

Major Janine Lafortune, USA, is a Space Operations Officer (FA40) serving in the Joint Information Operations Warfare Center at the Pentagon.



This is Not Propaganda: Adventures in the War Against Reality

By Peter Pomerantsev

PublicAffairs, 2020

256 pp. \$16.99

ISBN-13: 9781541762121

Reviewed by Jeffrey Mankoff

In the Jewish mystical tradition of Kabbalah, the concept of *tsimtsum* represents an alternative, essentially deistic vision of creation—with God stepping back from the universe He created, leaving behind a vacant space for humanity to impart its own meaning. From this concept, the critic Boris Groys coined the phrase *Big Tsimtsum* to describe the void created by the collapse of the intellectual, ideological, and moral certainties embodied (or at least claimed) by the Soviet Union. For journalist Peter Pomerantsev, Groys’s *Big Tsimtsum*, the absence of meaning left behind when the certainties of the past evaporated, was the necessary condition for the emergence of a new, more cynical brand of politics—and not only in post-Soviet Russia. Unlike the seemingly existential, ideologically infused

debates of the Cold War, this new politics is superficial, the product not of long-haired German intellectuals, but such spin doctors as Gleb Pavlosky, the Russian “political technologist” who, by his own account, was instrumental in selecting and promoting Vladimir Putin to the Russian presidency.

Weaving together stories from his own life and interviews with journalists, scholars, and practitioners (Pavlosky among them) in multiple countries, Pomerantsev has crafted, in *This is Not Propaganda*, a wide-ranging and readable account of how the post–Cold War promise of a global liberal democratic utopia came apart, first in Russia and then, increasingly, in the rest of the world—including the United States. While emphasizing the role of Putin’s Russia, Pomerantsev suggests that the current era of democratic malaise is extensive—and everywhere intractable.

Even before the rise of Putin, figures such as Pavlosky recognized the possibilities this new world offered, exploiting it first at home and then abroad. They paved the way for ambitious political charlatans, who use the tools of advertising to “sell” themselves to audiences whose identities have “broken down into mini-values that they cling to and that define them.” Such charlatans (among whom Pomerantsev includes the current generation of populist leaders in Europe and the United States) are primarily self-interested, and they attain power through instrumentally targeted appeals emphasizing narrow issues of identity over appeals to the common good. Instead of genuine mass movements, Pomerantsev sees modern politics as characterized by what a scholar he interviews terms *manufacturing consensus*, the work of political technologists, who have become the true power brokers. These figures are motivated less by belief in a cause than by purely mercenary considerations. One Mexican political technologist interviewed by Pomerantsev explains that while he himself is a man of the left, he will work for any cause or candidate who pays.

This shadowy figure offers up one of Pomerantsev’s key points for analysis: that “[p]opulism is not an ideology, it

is a strategy.” Pomerantsev goes on to show, for instance, how the authentic grassroots mobilization of Otpor, the loose collection of activists driving the protests that prompted the fall of Serbian strongman Slobodan Milošević, was soon mimicked by far-right groups and state actors in Serbia and beyond. Whereas Otpor succeeded by mobilizing a wide swath of Serbian society around demands for greater democracy, its illiberal opponents embraced Otpor’s mobilization techniques to rally subsets of the population around a wide range of grievances—some mutually exclusive—in a cynical bid for power.

Pomerantsev focuses primarily on Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, but he also includes interviews with journalists and activists from countries as diverse as Serbia, Mexico, Syria, and Ukraine. This wide net helps Pomerantsev avoid the trap some analysts fall into of overestimating the centrality of Putin’s Russia to the new era of virtual politics. Russia is among the most visible and aggressive practitioners of this kind of politics and, arguably, its pioneer. Putin’s Russia has also integrated disinformation and other forms of deception into its foreign policy to a degree matched by no other modern state. Yet the spread of virtual “manufactured” politics is global, arising out of the loss of meaning accompanying the end of the Cold War and its accompanying ideological battles.

Pomerantsev echoes Francis Fukuyama’s observations from three decades ago that, having vanquished its rivals on the left and the right, liberal democracy’s biggest threat will in the future come not from competing ideologies but from the quest for meaning among citizens whose role in public life has been reduced to that of consumers. In many ways, the end of the Cold War and the collapse of communism represented a vindication of liberal democracy, but, in true dialectical fashion, that triumph also contained in it the seeds of its own undoing. As Fukuyama feared, the collapse of old certainties created a longing and a void on both sides of the old Cold War divide—one into which the political technologists stepped. Once there, they

used techniques drawn from both old-fashioned Soviet propaganda and Western advertising to stir up popular passions not on behalf of grand schemes to remake the world but merely for the sake of wealth and power. As recent years have shown, the presumed victors of the Cold War were no more inoculated against this manipulation than their onetime rivals behind the Iron Curtain. The end of the Cold War did indeed usher in a new, more integrated world—the cynical world of the Big Tsimtsum.

For members of the joint force, *This is Not Propaganda* provides an important dissection of the warped information environment accompanying the erosion of democracy’s promise. The road back will be long. If “populism is a strategy” in the time of the Big Tsimtsum, Pomerantsev suggests, it is not enough to address the socioeconomic grievances of the “left behind” populations of the American Rust Belt or the north of England—or to pursue a containment strategy against Russia. The only solution, he argues, is to give ordinary people agency, allowing them—rather than social media companies, government-backed trolls, political technologists, or other 21st-century flotsam—to “engage with [information] on equal terms” while taking back control of their own stories. This task may be harder and more diffuse than deterring an invasion of the Baltic states, but its success may prove more consequential for the future of liberal democracy. JFQ

Dr. Jeffrey Mankoff is a Distinguished Research Fellow in the Center for Strategic Research, Institute for National Strategic Studies, at the National Defense University.



Private First Class Raymond Rumpa, C Company, 3rd Battalion, 47th Infantry, 9th Division, with 90mm recoilless rifle, walks by as Viet Cong base camp burns, My Tho, Vietnam, April 5, 1968 (U.S. Army/National Archives and Records Administration/Dennis Kurpius)

The Integrated “Nonwar” in Vietnam

By Christopher Sims

The failure of U.S.-led forces to forge a stable Afghan state with robust security forces in a two-decades-long civil-military effort is only the most recent of a series of foreign

Dr. Christopher Sims is a Research Affiliate in the School of Security Studies at King's College London.

policy failures that include the invasion and occupation of Iraq, intervention in Somalia, and reach back to the Vietnam War. A recurrent issue across time and geography is the discrepancy between American preconceptions of the operating environment and local reality. The inevitable result is that resources are misdirected. As one province

chief in the Vietnam War, Tran Ngoc Chau, recalled, “Give me a budget that equals the cost of one American helicopter, and I’ll give you a pacified province. With that much money, I can raise the standard of living of the rice farmers and government officials can be paid enough so they won’t think it is necessary to steal.”¹

Such a systemic shortcoming requires reassessment of our modeling of the operating environment. Models are a simplification of reality used as a tool to aid planning. The contemporary operating environment is subject to such simplification and is analyzed through the PMESII-PT framework of eight constituent variables: political, military, economic, social, information, infrastructure, physical environment, and time.² These variables are interrelated, meaning that change in one constituent part affects others, complicating the ability to understand the local area. When a system such as the operating environment functions in this way, it can be described as nonlinear. The two principal characteristics of nonlinear systems are the absence of additivity and proportionality: the whole does not equal the addition of the separate variables, and inputs are not proportional to outputs. The topic, though obscure, is critical to the effectiveness of military missions because failure to address the nonlinear character of the operating environment perpetuates a gulf between concept and reality.

This article asks how strategic planners should conceptualize the nonlinear nature of the operating environment. It explores how it has been analyzed in the past by examining one U.S. attempt to derive actionable insights from the operating environment in Vietnam, the 1966 “Program for the Pacification and Long-Term Development of Vietnam” (PROVN) study. Identifying shortcomings in current doctrine, this article subsequently uses the PROVN study to assess the implications of nonlinearity for contemporary warfighting. It finds that planners must address the nonlinear character of the operating environment to generate an effective qualitative understanding of the local area.

Contemporary doctrine identifies the presence of interrelating variables in the operating environment but does not consider the implications of nonlinearity. Joint Publication (JP) 3-0, *Joint Operations*, identifies the operating environment as a “system,” a “functionally, physically, or behaviorally related group of regularly interacting or interdependent elements forming a unified whole” where

the operating environment is “a set of complex and constantly interacting . . . PMESII systems” from which a “commonly shared understanding among stakeholders” can “promote a unified approach to achieve objectives.”³ These aspects of JP 3-0 encapsulate both the necessity to consider interrelations between variables and the importance of a commonly shared unified objective.

Nonlinearity is referenced in JP 3-03, *Joint Interdiction*, used in analyses of efforts to deleteriously impact enemy capability prior to military engagement. In it, nonlinear operations arise when “forces orient on objectives without geographic reference to adjacent forces” and “emphasize simultaneous operations along multiple lines of operation from selected bases.”⁴ This assessment only identifies that interdiction operations will involve multiple orchestrated pathways of compulsion applied in parallel. It does not, however, identify the two pertinent aspects of nonlinearity: that inputs are not proportional to outputs and that the sum of the pathways will not be equal to the overall effect of the operation because of the interrelations between variables. Nonlinearity therefore affects planning in ways beyond its current articulation in doctrine.

Origins of PROVN

The PROVN study’s description of conflict as a set of interrelated variables is remarkable in approximating the behavior of a nonlinear system. PROVN was commissioned in the summer of 1965 by U.S. Army Chief of Staff General Harold K. Johnson, who doubted the efficacy of ongoing large-scale search and destroy missions in Vietnam in bringing stability to the region.⁵ The authors of the PROVN study were tasked with developing new courses of action taken by South Vietnam forces, the United States, and its allies to achieve stated objectives.⁶ The two-volume report published the following year called for a unification of effort aligned to a clearly articulated single objective in the country and was widely briefed to senior officials in the Pentagon. Its impact was complex. The American historian Andrew Birtle

noted that the report “fell into obscurity” but nevertheless asserted PROVN to be an “important document” that “accurately catalogued the many problems that had bedeviled the war effort, offered solutions, and influenced several key decisionmakers.”⁷

At the heart of PROVN was the identification of a “nonwar” being fought in Vietnam. U.S. planners, the authors argued, had failed to grasp the complexities of the broader societal struggle being fought to the extent that “assistance techniques and support organization have proved to be only marginally effective in coping with the military, political, economic, and psychological components of the ‘nonwar’ being waged.”⁸ This term was to be an innovative aspect of the study, describing a form of confrontation in which “successful attainment of immediate military objectives still will leave political, economic, and social-psychological conflicts that initiated the ‘nonwar’ unresolved” and in which success “requires broad-gauge application of national power; its parameters exceed[ing] the purview of any single U.S. executive agency.”⁹

The PROVN authors in their analysis of the dynamics of the Vietnam War were articulating behavior that corresponds to that of nonlinear systems. As the American anthropologist Montgomery McFate noted in her assessment of PROVN, the “authors believed that strategy and operations had to conceptualize Vietnamese society as a whole society—an integrated system composed of interrelated, interdependent elements,” much as Clausewitz, more than a century before, had understood that “in war more than in any other subject we must begin by looking at the nature of the whole: for here more than elsewhere the part and the whole must always be thought of together.”¹⁰ To understand the operating environment in its entirety, it was necessary to first identify the single objective in the theater, and to that end the study referenced a sentence from the defining U.S. Government position, National Security Action Memorandum 55, *Relations of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the President in Cold War Operations*, published in 1961,



Army Major Bruce Crandall flies UH-1D helicopter after discharging infantrymen on search and destroy mission, November 14, 1965, during Battle of Ia Drang, Vietnam (U.S. Army)

which stated that “the most difficult problem in Government is to combine all assets in a unified, effective pattern.”¹¹

The conflict could only be understood by analyzing the linkages between constituent variables. Citing a misguided preoccupation with the “kill” ratio, measuring friendly versus enemy deaths in action, that ignored important aspects of development such as rural construction, the PROVN authors observed, “Varying a single factor may influence some of the other factors, but such manipulation cannot assure control over sufficient numbers of them to achieve an objective.”¹² Although the study did not hinge analysis to the concept of nonlinearity, it nevertheless identified behaviors of the social system that are hallmarks of nonlinearity: “This very interrelatedness is what makes the development of solutions so difficult. If the factors

were independent variables, it would be relatively easy to resolve the situation by addressing each problem with a separate program for solution.”¹³

The anthropologist Gerald Hickey, who had conducted ethnographic research in Vietnam in the 1950s and 1960s, later captured the nonlinear essence of the conflict:

*American planners and decisionmakers in Washington and Saigon failed to understand that the social, political, economic, religious, and military aspects of Vietnamese society were intrinsically interrelated and had to be understood that way. A decision regarding one aspect had to be based on its effect, its impact, on all other aspects. Making military decisions without considering what effects they would have on the society as a whole resulted in ever spreading disruption that weakened social order and structure.*¹⁴

This evident interconnectedness complicates planning. The PROVN authors concluded that for “staging and phasing” operations, “[e]ven the subcompletion times of subprogram projects cannot be forecast with accuracy. Programs are too interrelated, and situational factors are far too complex, to permit such prediction.”¹⁵

The evident inability of the Army to achieve effective integration of effort was identified by senior military staff. As General William Westmoreland, commander of U.S. forces in Vietnam, noted in a January 1966 meeting in Washington, DC, “Probably the fundamental issue is the question of the coordination of mission activities in Saigon. It is abundantly clear that all political, military, economic and security (police) programs must be completely integrated in order to attain any kind of

success.”¹⁶ That aspirational observation at the strategic level nevertheless required granular and actionable processes at the operational level, posing significant difficulties for the multiple U.S. agencies in the field at that time. It proved impossible to execute at the tactical level as commanders received orders for operations that focused on attrition of the North Vietnamese Army and irregular forces, which left little capacity or appetite for population engagement designed to diminish support for the adversary.

The authors of PROVN argued that this level of coordination would require development of a deep institutional memory to capture variables and their linkages. A proposal was made for a Blueprint for National Action that would explicitly integrate the military, political, social, and economic factors of the conflict. The authors argued that the complexity of the social system would be only adequately captured by qualitative assessment: “An integrated, current body of knowledge describing the Vietnamese society and identifying those elements within its political, economic, military, and other subsystems which must be stabilized through induced social change.”¹⁷

The Problem of the “Forest of Fractions”

The PROVN authors’ assertion of the primacy of narrative analysis was part of a broader duel being conducted in the Pentagon between advocates of qualitative and quantitative methods to capture aspects of the operating environment. There was a prevailing trend in the Department of Defense (DOD) for quantitative data that it derisively termed a *forest of fractions*, yet the PROVN authors were vociferous in maintaining that the

intense U.S. emphasis on demonstrable and measurable results must be abandoned. The reporting system is excessively preoccupied with the quantitative evaluation of dubious measures of success. Little credence is attached to the subjective assessments of experienced people on the ground. Somehow, a form of “metering philosophy” dominates both planning and operations. The

*demand for facts has created unreliable statistical inputs from Vietnamese and has established an orientation toward demonstrating U.S. advisory success at the expense of Vietnamese reality.*¹⁸

For the PROVN authors, this approach generated a quantitative corpus of illusory progress and “many of the more important indicators—particularly those concerned with the nonmilitary aspects of the conflict—are not subject to precise quantification.”¹⁹

Concern was evident on the ground. One Army advisor noted in retrospect of the kill ratio: “The problem with the war, as it often is, are the metrics. It is a situation where if you can’t count what is important, you make what you can count important. So, in this case, what you could count is dead enemy bodies” and in such statistics, the context is absent.²⁰ The body count evolved as a primary yardstick of progress across all three levels of war. It allowed military and civilian leaders to become convinced that the war in Vietnam was being won—when the war was in actuality being lost. As an approximation of reality, the body count proved a particularly egregious metric. There was difficulty in distinguishing between enemy combatants and civilians killed, which meant that counts were often too high. The issue was compounded by the centrality of search and destroy missions to the war effort, under which the body count metric inevitably emerged as an easily measurable component of each engagement and through which commanders in the field could offer a measure of their tactical achievements.

Indicators that may have more import for the commander, however—such as loyalty, allegiance, kinship, leadership—typically resist quantification. Carl von Clausewitz had conceptualized a friction in war more than a century before the Vietnam intervention: the aggregating incidents of chance that haunt the theater of conflict, bringing about “effects that cannot be measured” and that intelligence, “unreliable and transient,” makes war “a flimsy structure that can easily collapse and bury us in its ruins.”²¹ It is a problem that remains unresolved.

In the contemporary era, the strategist and counterinsurgency expert David Kilcullen has asserted that the “unpredictability of a chaotic system lies not in the formulation or solution of the differential equations that describe the rates of processes, but in our ability to relate those solutions to the practical system of interest given the inherent imprecision of experimental observations.”²² From Clausewitz to Kilcullen, the fidelity of data has been identified as a core issue that complicates the ability of a commander to develop a robust and reliable picture of the operating environment. The degree to which a commander utilizes qualitative or quantitative indicators to create an operating picture ultimately determines courses of action. The American historian Alan Beyerchen in his landmark study of Clausewitzian friction has argued that in understanding conflict, “Statistical laws of probability alone will never suffice, because moral factors always enter into real war.”²³

Qualitative data throw up a specific challenge: planners must select and develop categories for this unstructured data and feed them into the common operating picture. This was a central problem with PROVN because in asserting the primacy of qualitative analyses to map the social system of South Vietnam, there were problems in defining categories in such a geographically and ethnically diverse setting. The PROVN authors themselves referenced the challenges, chief among them the different languages and dialects.²⁴ Differences overlapped commonalities. Variations could be identified between urban and rural, illiterate and educated, but linkages were observed in different groupings, such as languages and value sets.

This lack of uniformity drove analytical uncertainty in Vietnam. Allegiances varied by geography, kinship, and time. Heterogeneity hampered effective orchestration of operations to achieve a unified objective because different geographic areas provided unique security and development challenges. The PROVN authors repeated a well-worn phrase lifted from the field: “There is not one war, there are 43 wars [corresponding to the then 43





"Huey" UH-1Ds airlift members of 2nd Battalion, 14th Infantry Regiment, from rubber plantation area to new staging area during search and destroy mission conducted northeast of Cu Chi, South Vietnam, 1966 (CPA Media)



Private First Class Fred L. Greenleaf, C Company, 3rd Battalion, 7th Infantry, 199th Light Infantry Brigade, crosses deep irrigation canal along with other members of company en route to Viet Cong–controlled village, November 21, 1967 (U.S. Army/National Archives and Records Administration/Robert C. Lafoon)

provinces] in South Vietnam.”²⁵ This was to generate a paradox of categorization that would hinder analyses—in some ways provinces possessed similarities, but in other ways, they stood in marked contrast to one other.

Made to Measure

Absence of social uniformity precipitated the introduction of an array of subnational metrics to attempt to understand the effects of operations on security. The war in Vietnam, enabled

by the nascent computational era, “pioneered the use of quantitative analysis for operational purposes.”²⁶ At stake was the quest for explanatory and predictive behaviors.

Seymour Deitchman managed insurgency modeling at the Advanced Research Projects Agency during this period. In a candid account of social science research at that time, Deitchman wrote in retrospect that the “problem of knowing *how* one was doing against the adversary in the counterinsurgency conflict and

of obtaining data for evaluation and planning loomed very large in all these discussions” and that the fidelity of data was often complicated by the difficulty of performing robust social science research in areas characterized by a marked absence of physical security.²⁷

Such difficulties with qualitative data contributed to the prevalence of quantitative indicators used by DOD as American involvement in Vietnam escalated. Quantitative indicators held promise because the behavior of a social

system beset by insurgency, in the view of contemporary political scientists Stathis Kalyvas and Matthew Adam Kocher, is so complex that it resists adequate characterization by narrative methods.²⁸ In pathbreaking research, Kalyvas and Kocher analyzed a narrow period of one of the core data collection and analysis programs of the Vietnam War, the Hamlet Evaluation System (HES), which arose from a DOD requirement to better gauge reporting on progress. They concluded that “most of the objections to HES turn on the inability of blunt quantitative indicators to capture complex social phenomena. We disagree, judging the HES to be remarkably sophisticated relative to measurement standards in the field of conflict studies *today*.”²⁹

Despite the strength of this assertion, the broad methodology of HES merits appraisal as a program that included logging incidents by American advisors to provide numerical assessments of security. Even though iterations moved away from subjective coding to the ostensible recording of facts, rating HES indicators was still a judgmental process that required estimation for many indicators and the opinion of experts to determine the weighting afforded each indicator upon aggregation. HES was, as Deitchman noted more generally of collection efforts at the time, a program hostage to the permissiveness of the reporting environment and the reporter. Indeed, after the withdrawal of American advisors in 1972, the program continued but by utilizing reports from Vietnamese officials, a change in methodology that asks questions of attempts to ascertain trends in the data across the transition from American to Vietnamese reporting.

Kalyvas and Kocher, in studying the relationship between territorial control and violence, by design limit their study to behavior as opposed to sentiment.³⁰ Therefore, while offering an important corrective to scholarship by highlighting the sophistication of HES, there nevertheless remains additional requirement for explanatory, qualitative analyses that can identify interrelations of variables. The objective is to identify commonly held behaviors and attitudes that can

yield actionable insights. Nicholas Krohley conducted social science research for the U.S. Army during the Surge in Iraq and noted of his team’s work: “Observations and comparisons of attitudes toward issues or events from one geographic area or identity group to the next helped illuminate both commonalities and fault lines in the human terrain, enabling researchers to trace patterns and trends.”³¹

Implications

The issues identified in PROVN have implications for contemporary military operations, particularly in PROVN’s practical assessment of effective courses of action. One way to accommodate these principles of nonlinearity is first to communicate the unified objective. Second, deductively nest those required taskings ascertained necessary to achieve mission success. By doing so, the most important variables of the operating environment can be gauged, and a crude understanding can be gained of the ways in which these variables are affecting, and are affected by, other elements in theater. Planners must recognize and therefore anticipate the lack of proportionality between system inputs and output, striving to identify and prioritize the factors most able to affect output in the field.

There were two aspects of the conflict in Vietnam that the authors of PROVN could not readily solve but for which the principle of nonlinearity has important implications. First, there is the optimal distribution of finite resources in theater. When attrition equals resupply, there is a set volume of resources that could be utilized across the spectrum of operations in a zero-sum arrangement: increasing one necessarily reduces another—for instance, amplifying combat resources may decrease advisory support. Nonlinearity, however, means that inputs are not proportional to outputs and, consequently, improvement in one constituent element of the social system may have disproportionate effect overall.

Engagement with the host population offers an opportunity to assess the optimum arrangement of resources.

The Vietnam War proved a lengthy and visceral lesson in resource allocation. In Tran Ngoc Chau’s statement regarding the budget of one U.S. helicopter, he argued powerfully for the granular application of development aid to raise living standards to address the actual needs of the local population rather than American conceptions of societal needs to lessen collective grievances. Tran Ngoc Chau’s stark belief in the primacy of dissuasion through development indicates the power in giving voice to local actors to generate a granular, qualitative understanding as to where resources can best be utilized in an operating environment.

The second unresolved aspect of the PROVN study is the level of intrusion to which U.S. forces and partners commit in cooperation with the host government. War is always a violation of society. In Vietnam, the U.S. command did not take control of the South Vietnamese army or “insert personnel into the Vietnamese bureaucracy”—an approach that Birtle notes “failed to transform the South Vietnamese political, military, or social systems in the way PROVN’s authors had hoped.”³² One reason was identified in PROVN as a cultural limitation: that “Americans appear to draw back from its complexity in practice and gravitate toward a faulty premise for its resolution—military destruction of the [Viet Cong]” and in that, failure to address political and social reform may well be a tragic blunder.³³ The concern is justifiable; legitimate grievance could be amplified by expanded, intrusive operations and hence create a powerful narrative of resistance girded by popular resentment of the exact activities intended to develop security. It is the culture of planners to prefer simplicity, but that tendency obscures the reality of the operating environment.

The primacy of the military component of U.S. involvement in Vietnam throughout the war meant that population-centered activities to develop security were continually overshadowed by combat operations and body counts. Justifiable concern at the inadequacy of civilian engagement initiatives was buried beneath the weight of military action and



Navy McDonnell F-4B Phantom II of Fighter Squadron VF-111 Sundowners drops 500-pound Mark 82 bombs over Vietnam, November 25, 1971 (U.S. Navy)

the quantitative indicators that charted progress.³⁴ Despite the obviously nonlinear character of social systems, deriving actionable insights from theory is understandably hindered by evident complexity. Planners prefer simplicity. There is a tendency to settle on easily articulated but ultimately unviable strategies. The two characteristics of nonlinear systems should therefore be considered by planners, no matter how crudely. The first is that a change in input will not generate a proportional outcome. The second is that in

assessing the constituent variables of the operating environment independently, the behavior of the social system as a whole is not equal to the summation of these constituents. Interrelationships between variables will always exert effects on the system in fundamentally important ways.

Finally, the relevance of nonlinearity can also be seen in contemporary conflicts. The insurgency in Afghanistan after the ousting of the Taliban was exacerbated by corruption in the Hamid Karzai government. This corruption

eroded loyalties between the population and the state by perpetuating legitimate grievances and complicating efficient and effective administration at both the national and local levels. In turn, corruption was catalyzed by the relatively enormous influx of foreign aid. Corruption on this scale affects the social, economic, political, and military variables in the PMESII-PT framework—the latter because an institution as large as the Afghan National Army, and especially its procurement contracts, were susceptible to the specter

of misconduct. The pervasiveness of corruption meant that significant expenditure of resources on equipping the Afghan National Army only increased the scale of corruption, amplifying political grievances that played into the hands of antigovernment forces. It cannot therefore be assumed that greater expenditure leads to greater overall security. In the examinations to come of the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan and subsequent collapse of the Afghan National Army, it is therefore necessary to examine the “nonwar” in Afghanistan and the deleterious impact of corruption on social cohesion.

Another nonlinear relationship is observed in the U.S. troop surge in Afghanistan authorized by President Barack Obama. An increase of 50,000 U.S. troops up to a peak of 90,000 in 2011 was accompanied by a tripling of civilian advisors in the 2 years up to 2011 to approximately 1,000 working in the country. The relative sizes give an indication that force was still the primary instrument of U.S. policy in the country to combat the insurgency. Combat operations were prioritized to provide security, despite increasing engagement of civilians, particularly from 2009 as a result of enhanced integration of civilian and military effort intended to focus efforts on the population. The troop surge and tripling of civilian advisors—that is, the input—in a nonlinear system does not carry a proportional increase in security—that is, the output. What is observed is that Afghan civilian fatalities at the hands of antigovernment forces reached a high in 2010 and then remained near-constant despite the troop surge.³⁵

The principal conflict in Afghanistan, as in Vietnam, was a “nonwar” being fought in the country that began in late 2001. This was a battle for popular allegiances and credible government that reflected legitimate concerns of the people and that, if won, would prevent an ever-expanding recruitment pool for the insurgency. Evident failure produced systemic fissures in the social, political, and economic variables that proved impossible to surmount through simple arithmetic addition of conventional resources. Nonlinearity not only underscores the obstacles in effective

integration of civilian and military effort and the appropriate distribution of resources but also points to methods of effective conceptualization and action.

This article has addressed a disquieting issue: the need for strategic planners to conceptualize the nonlinear character of the operating environment. This is not a facile endeavor, as it is necessary to acknowledge the complexity of conflict, the limitations of the application of force, and the difficulties inherent in coordinating an interagency mission. History is awash with examples of these difficulties. The PROVN study is one bold attempt to address identified shortcomings in a complex mission to push back against existing methods and as such has enormous value to contemporary practitioners. At its heart, PROVN consistently identifies the nonlinear character of conflict and as such remains an important reference to commanders engaged in complex interagency deployments. JFQ

Notes

¹ Quoted in “Riding the Tiger,” episode 2, *The Vietnam War: A Film by Ken Burns and Lynn Novick*, PBS, September 18, 2017.

² Training Circular 7-102, *Operational Environment and Army Learning* (Washington, DC: Headquarters Department of the Army, 2014), vii.

³ Joint Publication (JP) 3-0, *Joint Operations* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, 2017), IV-3.

⁴ JP 3-03, *Joint Interdiction* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, 2016), V-4.

⁵ Lewis Sorley, “To Change a War: General Harold K. Johnson and the PROVN Study,” *Parameters* 28, no. 1 (1998), available at <<https://press.armywarcollege.edu/parameters/vol28/iss1/9>>.

⁶ Andrew J. Birtle, “PROVN, Westmoreland, and the Historians: A Reappraisal,” *The Journal of Military History* 72, no. 4 (2008), 1216.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 1214.

⁸ *A Program for the Pacification and Long-Term Development of Vietnam* [PROVN], vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff of Military Operations, Department of the Army, 1966), 31.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 102–103.

¹⁰ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 75, cited in Montgomery McFate, *Military Anthropology: Soldiers, Scholars and Subjects*

at the Margins of Empire (London: Hurst and Company, 2018), 307.

¹¹ National Security Action Memorandum 55, *Relations of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the President in Cold War Operations* (Washington, DC: The White House, 1961), in PROVN, 111.

¹² PROVN, 1-72.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 1-77.

¹⁴ Gerald C. Hickey, *Window on a War: An Anthropologist in the Vietnam Conflict* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2002), 127, cited in McFate, *Military Anthropology*, 3.

¹⁵ PROVN, 2-30–2-31.

¹⁶ Quoted in Birtle, “PROVN, Westmoreland, and the Historians,” 1239.

¹⁷ PROVN, 55.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 2-42.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

²⁰ Quoted in “Resolve,” episode 4, *The Vietnam War*, September 20, 2017.

²¹ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (London: Everyman Library, 1993), 136, 138.

²² David Kilcullen, *Out of the Mountains: The Coming Age of the Urban Guerrilla* (London: Hurst and Company, 2013), 17.

²³ Alan Beyerchen, “Clausewitz, Nonlinearity, and the Unpredictability of War,” *International Security* 17, no. 3 (1992), 79.

²⁴ PROVN, 1-33–1-34.

²⁵ PROVN, 1-61.

²⁶ Stathis N. Kalyvas and Matthew Adam Kocher, “The Dynamics of Violence in Vietnam: An Analysis of the Hamlet Evaluation System (HES),” *Journal of Peace Research* 46, no. 3 (May 2009), 335.

²⁷ Seymour J. Deitchman, *The Best-Laid Schemes: A Tale of Social Research and Bureaucracy* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1976), 100.

²⁸ Kalyvas and Kocher, “The Dynamics of Violence,” 340.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 341.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Nicholas Krohley, *The Death of the Mehdi Army: The Rise, Fall, and Revival of Iraq’s Most Powerful Militia* (London: Hurst and Company, 2015), 190.

³² Birtle, “PROVN, Westmoreland, and the Historians,” 1243.

³³ PROVN, 53.

³⁴ Gregory A. Daddis, “The Problem of Metrics: Assessing Progress and Effectiveness in the Vietnam War,” *War in History* 19, no. 1 (2012), 83–84.

³⁵ Sam Gollob and Michael E. O’Hanlon, *Afghanistan Index: Tracking Variables of Reconstruction and Security in Post-9/11 Afghanistan* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2020), 16.

Joint Publications (JPs) Under Revision (to be signed within 6 months)

JP 3-01, *Countering Air and Missile Threats*

JP 3-03, *Joint Interdiction*

JP 3-15, *Barriers, Obstacles, and Mine Warfare in Joint Operations*

JP 3-20, *Security Cooperation*

JP 3-25, *Countering Threat Networks*

JP 3-33, *Joint Task Force Headquarters*

JP 3-42, *Joint Explosive Ordnance Disposal*

JP 3-52, *Joint Airspace Control*

JP 3-68, *Noncombatant Evacuation Operations*

JPs Revised (signed within last 6 months)

JP 2-0, *Joint Intelligence*

JP 3-0, *Joint Campaigns and Operations*

JP 3-04, *Information*

JP 3-07, *Joint Stability*

JP 3-35, *Joint Deployment and Redeployment Operations*

New from NDU Press

for the Center for Strategic Research

Strategic Forum 308

Baltics Left of Bang: The Southern Shore

By Marcel Hadeed, Mariusz Kaminski, Monika Sus, Brett Swaney, and Amelie Theussen



Detering and defending against Russian aggression in the Baltic Sea region prior to open hostilities,

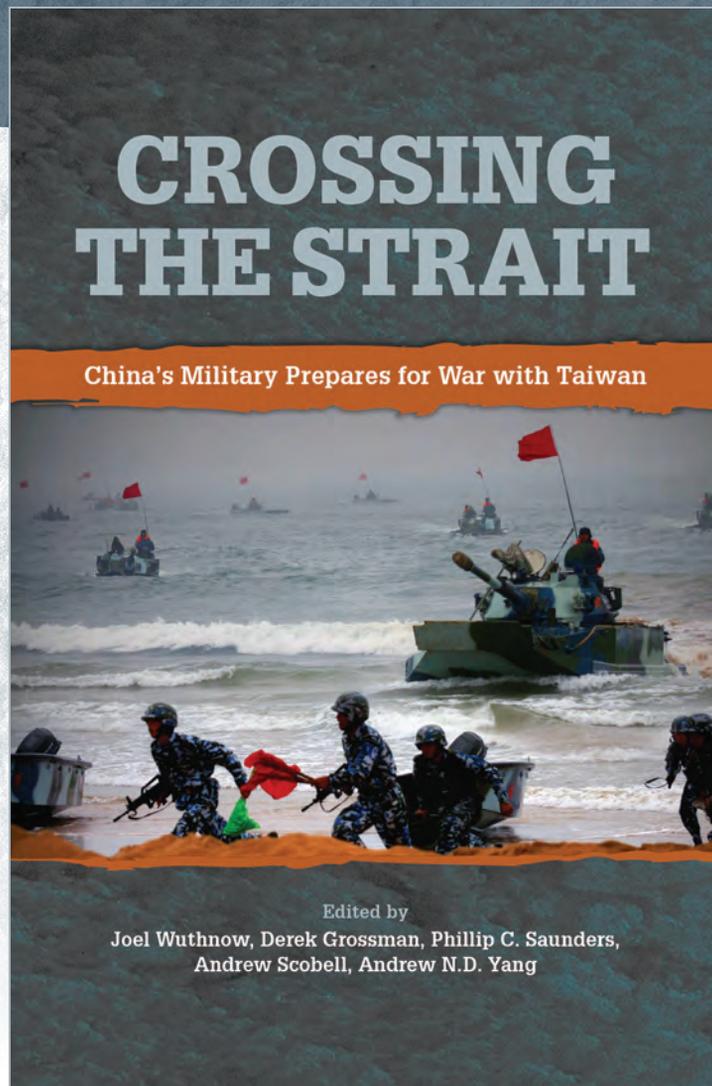
or “left of bang,” is a political problem that requires a coordinated regional approach by the Baltic southern shore states—Poland, Germany, and Denmark—in conjunction with their North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and European Union (EU) allies. Despite common membership in NATO and the EU, the southern shore states hold differing strategic perspectives that reflect the challenges of a coordinated approach. These states should prioritize Baltic maritime security, regional mobility, and unconventional warfare capabilities in coordination with regional allies and partners. They should also leverage or enhance EU capabilities in cyber, information, and strategic communications to better deter and defend against Russian hostile measures.



Visit the NDU Press Web site for more information on publications at ndupress.ndu.edu

Coming Soon from NDU Press

for the Center for the Study of Chinese Military Affairs



Both U.S. and Chinese militaries are increasingly focused on a possible confrontation over Taiwan. China regards the island as an integral part of its territory and is building military capabilities to deter Taiwan independence and compel Taiwan to accept unification. Based on original research by leading international experts, *Crossing the Strait: China's Military Prepares for War with Taiwan* explores the political and military context of cross-strait relations, with a focus on understanding the Chinese decision calculus about using force, the capabilities the People's Liberation Army would bring to the fight, and what Taiwan can do to defend itself.

Check Out NDU Press Online!

Each year over 1.5 million people visit the NDU Press Web site from 183 countries to discover the issues the joint force is experiencing in current policy, security, and warfighting arenas.

NATIONAL DEFENSE UNIVERSITY PRESS
THE PREMIER PROFESSIONAL MILITARY AND ACADEMIC PUBLISHING HOUSE

HOME COVID-19 GUIDANCE ABOUT JOURNALS PUBLICATIONS SUBMIT A MANUSCRIPT CONTACT

Search NDU Press

The Quantum Internet: How DOD Can Prepare

The future viability of a quantum Internet could shape the strategic environment for U.S. military forces.

[Read More →](#)

The premier professional military and academic publishing house of the National Defense University

STRATEGIC PERSPECTIVES 29 | MARCH 25, 2019
Russian Challenges from Now into the Next Generation: A Geostrategic Primer
Peter B. Zwack and Marie-Charlotte Pierre

JOINT FORCE QUARTERLY 104 | DEC. 29, 2021
Health, Pandemic Preparedness, and Multidomain Operations
Samir S. Deshpande, Amy B. Adler, Susan P. Proctor, Vincent F. Capaldi, James P. McClung, Toby D. Elliman, and Deydre S. Teyhen

PRISM VOL. 9, NO. 3 | NOV. 18, 2021
The Pentagon's First Financial War
Justin Bernier

JOINT FORCE QUARTERLY 104 | DEC. 29, 2021
Defending Taiwan in an Expanded Competitive Space
Joel Wuthnow

You can also find us on:



Twitter



Facebook



JFQ

JOINT FORCE QUARTERLY

Published for the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff by National Defense University Press
National Defense University, Washington, DC

