Countering Asymmetric Threats

A National Imperative

THE INTERPLAY OF OFFENSE AND DEFENSE

SYMPOSIUM SEVEN

On April 2, 2013, at the Ronald Reagan Building in Washington, D.C., CACI International Inc (CACI), the U.S. Naval Institute (USNI), and the Center for Security Policy (CSP) co-sponsored *Combating Asymmetric Threats: The Interplay of Offense and Defense,* the seventh symposium in our series on Asymmetric Threats to National Security.

This document is intended only as a summary of the personal remarks made by symposium participants and is published as a public service. It does not necessarily reflect the views of CACI, USNI, CSP, the U.S. government, or their officers and employees. The pro bono Asymmetric Threat symposia series was initiated by CACI in 2008 to contribute to the national discourse on the topic of asymmetric threats facing the United States.

Note: The content of this report reflects the invocation of the Chatham House Rule for the symposium and report as non-attributable forums.

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Executive Summary

On April 2, 2013, CACI International Inc, the U.S. Naval Institute, and the Center for Security Policy hosted Combating Asymmetric Threats: The Interplay of Offense and Defense. The event featured discussions on how the dynamics of offensive and defensive measures shape the character, conduct, and outcomes of asymmetric conflicts. The overarching objective was to examine whether – and, if so, why – the United States has forfeited its asymmetric advantages; how to reclaim those advantages; and how to apply these gains to deter and defeat asymmetric threats. The symposium was held under the Chatham House rule of non-attribution.

Offense and defense are inherent in the nature of war – intrinsic to any human interaction. They constitute the essential duality that defines any contest – symmetric or asymmetric. One of the most difficult aspects of waging modern war is devising strategies that translate battlefield successes into enduring strategic effects. This dilemma is most acute in the "age of the unthinkable," wherein adversaries are undeterred by sheer military might and willing to act outside the norms of civilized behavior to destroy an opponent's will and means to fight. To prevail, "we need a new paradigm, a fresh vocabulary and agile approaches. Fighting on the enemy's terms, scoring short-term wins at unjustifiably high cost in lives and treasure, is simply unacceptable."

Today's challenges are predominantly hybrids: offense and defense; foreign and domestic; regular and irregular; symmetric and asymmetric; synchronous and asynchronous; geographically focused and globally ubiquitous. This, in turn, requires multi-dimensional thinking, nuanced approaches, and nimble execution.

The confluence of global trends foreshadows significant challenges. The strategic environment will be shaped by the interaction of globalization, economic disparities, and competition for resources; diffusion of technology and information networks whose very nature allows unprecedented ability to harm and, potentially, paralyze advanced nations; and systemic upheavals impacting the world order. Conflicts are expected to be vicious, centered on life-sustaining necessities like food, water, and energy.

The U.S. military's unprecedented prowess drives opponents to adopt distributed operations and seek maneuver space in urban areas, ungoverned spaces, and loosely regulated networks. These adversaries challenge America's freedom of action and threaten vital interests at home and abroad. Concurrently, ascendant powers are posturing to contest U.S. superiority and global presence. These adaptive competitors are translating lessons from recent conflicts into new capabilities tailored to counter America's many strengths and capitalize on its equally numerous vulnerabilities.

Being the U.S. is, itself, strength and liability. The very values that make America great can be exploited to do harm. Often, the U.S. constrains itself unnecessarily and acts in a self-restricting manner, forfeiting core advantages.

For a great power, there is no such thing as a minor setback. Once the U.S. commits its prestige, victory is the only acceptable outcome. The alternative diminishes America's stature, credibility, and influence – as well as alliance cohesion. This, in turn, could push allies to fend for themselves – either entering coalitions of convenience or, for example, acquiring independent nuclear capabilities.

For a nation whose security is predicated on a strategy of dissuasion, the most fundamental risk is failure of deterrence. To mitigate the risk, the U.S. must retain a modern, secure, and well-trained military force; a responsive, collaborative Interagency; and a responsible, engaged private sector. Strategic risk can also mount through the accumulation of shortfalls in recapitalization and modernization, stale strategic and operational concepts, and unwillingness to let go of outdated bureaucratic arrangements, sector boundaries, and hierarchical relationships. America's future success depends upon the ability to adopt new, relevant concepts, constructs and technologies, suitable to the ever-shifting dynamics of the strategic environment.

In the age of knowledge, decision superiority, resiliency, agility, mutually supporting governance structures, and reliable partners are indispensable to victory. So is a holistic approach that balances today's exigencies with future imperatives. America will succeed only by developing and resourcing a strategy that closes the gap between ends and means. The window of opportunity is shutting fast.

The U.S. needs freedom of access across the global commons. Global reach, power, and vigilance are the indispensable means through which America promotes and defends its interests, reassures allies, and deters opponents. This strategy hinges on freedom of action and ability to maneuver simultaneously on land, at sea, in the air, in space, and in and through cyberspace. Since these domains are increasingly interdependent, loss of dominance in any one domain could lead to loss of control in all.

War is a human endeavor and, ultimately, a contest of wills. America's true asymmetric strength rests in the people of the United States. The nation must reclaim its asymmetric advantages, retain the ability to safeguard the homeland, assure allies, dissuade opponents, and inflict strategic paralysis on adversaries.

The shared touchstone of the noble virtues enshrined in the Constitution and the unifying purpose "to provide for the common defense" remains unchanged. The U.S. will have neither the buffer of time nor the barrier of oceans in future conflicts. The character, tempo, and velocity of modern warfare already severely test America's ability to adapt. Therefore, redefining the Interagency and the private-public relationship is an urgent national security requirement – not a luxury that can be deferred. Rising to this challenge is a shared responsibility and a national imperative.

"Fighting on the enemy's terms, scoring short-term wins at unjustifiably high cost in lives and treasure, is simply unacceptable."

1 The Dynamics of Offense and Defense

Offense and defense are inherent in the very nature of war. Indeed, they are intrinsic to any human interaction – be it sports, business, politics, tradecraft, or statecraft. While often presented as polar opposites, offense and defense constitute the essential duality that defines any contest – be it of wits, arms, or physical prowess. This duality was recognized five millennia ago by the Chinese warrior-philosopher Sun Tzu.

Sun Tzu spoke of offense and defense as two primordial forces – an inextricably linked yin and yang – one flowing into and giving rise to the other. He also spoke of *"cheng,"* the "ordinary force" – symmetric, conventional, predictable, slow, and plodding; and *"chi,"* the "extraordinary force" – asymmetric, unorthodox, fluid, agile, and lightning-fast. Their infinitely varying compositions keep the opponent off balance, while allowing the more talented practitioner to accomplish his strategic aims with minimal cost in blood and treasure. Fixation on either one at the expense of the other leads to "disharmony" and, thereby, prolongs the confrontation and risks defeat. The skillful combination of these forces, in contrast, opens up boundless possibilities. It is, therefore, the true essence of the art of war. Sun Tzu further taught that there were only five musical notes, five basic colors, and five basic tastes, but the endless variations could not all be heard, seen, or tasted. As such, "There are only two kinds of battle, but the variations of the ordinary and the extraordinary are endless. They give rise to each other, like a circle without a beginning or an end – who could exhaust them all?"

Sun Tzu's approach to warfare eventually transcended time and culture. Its universal applicability was first recognized in Europe, in the wake of the merciless carnage of the First World War, where an entire generation pitted old-fashioned mass and élan in futile attempts to overcome the unanticipated asymmetry generated by industrial-age killing machines: long-range heavy artillery, armor, poison gas, portable machine guns, airplanes, and submarines. Indeed, prominent military historian and theorist Sir Basil H. Liddell Hart penned the seminal *Strategy* – indicting what he called "the cult of the offense" – upon his return from the blood-soaked trenches of Verdun. Borrowing liberally from the ancient Chinese text, Hart became an early advocate of asymmetry and "the indirect approach" aimed at dislocating and, thereby, defeating the enemy through speed, mobility, stealth, maneuver, and surprise. It took another 50 years and the human, societal, and political toll of the Vietnam War for these ideas to gain traction in America's military academies, war colleges, and business schools.

Nonetheless, the traditional American way of war remains anchored in the belief that battles are won by mass and offensive action. Offense is enshrined among the Principles of War, following "mass" and "objective" in the hierarchy defined in

"It's the defense with attribution that gives you the opportunity for offense."

Army Field Manual FM-3-0 - Military Operations.[1] Defense, in contrast, is deemed primarily a supporting function, designed to protect a position, preserve combat power, or await relief. Barring exceptional circumstances, however, defense cannot achieve victory. Wars are won – or brought to an uneasy stalemate, as in Korea – by the offense, preferably executed by an overwhelming force. As General George S. Patton famously observed in 1944: "The object of war is not to die for your country but to make the other bastard die for his." This is a far cry from Liddell Hart's (and Sun Tzu's) view that "the object of war is to achieve a better peace, even if only from your own perspective."

The United States has engaged in three asymmetric conflicts since the end of World War II. The first was Korea. The forgotten, unfinished war, its murkiness was neatly summed up in the epitaph "die for a tie." The armistice signed 60 years ago retained a divided peninsula, with a Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) zigzagging across the 38th Parallel, serving as the boundary between North Korea and the U.S.-allied Republic of Korea. The cost of the miniscule territorial adjustment (a festering source of still ongoing tensions) was 44,700 Americans killed in action, 103,284 combat wounded, and 7,918 U.S. servicemen still on the official rosters as Missing in Action (MIA). In addition to 17,260 UN Coalition casualties, an estimated 1,600,000 Korean civilians and 300,000 South and 550,000 North Korean soldiers were killed or wounded. The Chinese suffered close to a million casualties, all in a "limited conflict," wherein the very meaning of "victory" was publicly disputed between President Harry S. Truman and General Douglas MacArthur.

America's second asymmetric fight was Vietnam, where U.S. forces won every battle, but failed to defeat the enemy. That war divided the nation, defined a generation, and, by ending the draft, dramatically changed how the U.S. military would operate. The essence of Vietnam is succinctly captured by a pithy exchange in Hanoi, in 1975: "You know you never defeated us on the battlefield," said the American colonel. The North Vietnamese colonel pondered this remark a moment. "That may be so," he replied, "but it is also irrelevant." In Vietnam, 58,282 Americans perished, 303,704 were wounded, and 1,647 remain officially listed as MIA. South Vietnamese allies bore the brunt of the casualties: 220,357 personnel were killed and 499,000 wounded in action, closely paralleling enemy losses: 444,000 North Vietnamese regulars and Vietcong insurgents died in combat. An estimated 587,000 Vietnamese civilians were killed in the war.

▼ The Demilitarized Zone separating North and South Korea is a constant reminder of a costly, unfinished war.

Photo courtesy of Johannes Barre

1 In order, the Principles of War are: mass; objective; offensive; surprise; economy of force; maneuver; unity of command; and security.

In stark contrast

to both Korea and Vietnam, America's third asymmetric war, DESERT STORM, was a phenomenal military success. Open hostilities lasted only six weeks, with the bulk of that time devoted to the air campaign; the ground war took a mere 100 hours. The air campaign battered Iraq's air defense system, its strategic strike capability, and its industrial, logistical, and command and control infrastructure. In the ground action, U.S. and Coalition forces inflicted severe losses on Iraqi forces, quickly ejecting them from Kuwait. It was an impressive display of overwhelming military superiority – derived from quantum advances in precision targeting, information gathering, data processing, and communications – all expertly applied by a professional, well-trained, all-volunteer force. America's victory capitalized upon new weaponry, synergistically combined with military prowess resurrected from the ashes of Vietnam.

Few campaigns in history have been as asymmetric in their conduct and lopsided in their outcome as DESERT STORM. The world's fourth largest army was defeated in less than four days. While estimates of Iraqi casualties vary widely, consensus is that at least 25,000 Iraqi soldiers and some 15,000 civilians lost their lives. U.S. casualties were uncommonly light: 147 were killed in action and 467 wounded – with a high percentage of casualties falling to friendly fire. General George Patton would have been proud. The troops came home to a ticker tape parade; the Armed Forces' prestige was at a zenith unseen since 1945. Articulating the euphoria of victory, President George H.W. Bush declared: "We've exorcised the ghosts of Vietnam." Or have they?

In the eyes of many, DESERT STORM replaced the specter of a Vietnam-like quagmire with the equally unrealistic image of a bloodless "PlayStation war" in which swift victory is a foregone conclusion. The complacency and hubris born of the easy victory – buoyed by the concomitant tectonic shift in the global environment resulting from the USSR's collapse – left the American public pining for a peace dividend and the military largely unprepared for the new asymmetric fights that were soon to follow.

The amazingly quick Coalition success left Saddam Hussein battered, humiliated, but still in charge. Concerned with negative images of "unfair overmatch" – such as the infamous "Highway of Death," a 60-kilometer stretch of road from Kuwait to Iraq littered with retreating tanks, trucks, and charred corpses – the U.S. halted the offensive. As General Chuck Horner, Commander of U.S. and Allied Air Operations, wrote in the aftermath: "… some people back home wrongly chose to believe we were cruelly and unusually punishing

Perceptions of unfair overmatch ▶ contributed to the decision to halt the offensive in DESERT STORM.

Photo courtesy of U.S. Air Force

our already whipped foes. By February 27, 1991, talk had turned toward terminating the hostilities. Kuwait was free. We were not interested in governing Iraq. So the question became: how do we stop the killing."[2]

Consequently, Iraq was allowed to limp from the battlefield with sufficient military strength to defeat internal threats and shore up the regime's grip on power. Indeed, after the cease-fire was signed, it took the Coalition's armed intervention to save the Kurd and Shi'a minorities from slaughter by the Iraqi army. For 12 years after the war was officially concluded in February 1991, Saddam stubbornly defied UN Security Council Resolutions and reneged on his post-war commitments. Coalition aircraft continued to fly missions over Iraq, while UN inspectors came and went on a fruitless quest to ferret out Iraq's chemical, biological, and nuclear programs.

Ultimately, nagging misgivings over the political termination of the first Iraq War had to await March 2003 and another lightning-swift military victory, symbolized by the toppling of Saddam's statue in Baghdad's central square on April 9. Major combat operations lasted only 21 days. This time, however, the swift, asymmetric victory was followed by a difficult, costly, nine-year-long land occupation and counter-insurgency fight. At its high point in 2006, 239,000 American servicemen and women were stationed in more than 500 bases throughout Iraq, assisted by some 135,000 contractors – a scale of commitment unseen since Vietnam. Yet, when the last U.S. troops pulled out of Iraq in December 2011, the war's final outcome was left uncertain – despite the sacrifice of 4,488 American lives, with an additional 50,000 physically and psychologically scarred.[3]

▲ The toppling of Saddam Hussein's statue in Baghdad was followed by nearly a decade of U.S. military operations.

Photo courtesy of U.S. Department of Defense

The toll in blood, treasure, and opportunity costs highlights one of the most difficult aspects of waging modern asymmetric war: how to devise strategies that translate battlefield successes into desired political outcomes and enduring strategic effects. As Paul Bremer, President George W. Bush's Envoy to Iraq, explained, "The definition of victory

2 Tom Clancy and Chuck Horner, *Every Man a Tiger* (New York: Putnam, 1999), pp. 499-50.

3 A study by the National Center for Veterans Studies notes that Traumatic Brain Injuries (TBIs) are considered a "signature injury" for military in Iraq and Afghanistan, caused by explosions, vehicle collisions, or falls. The prevalence of TBI is estimated to be about 8-20 percent in military personnel deployed to one of these locations. Moreover, TBI is closely associated with depression and suicide. Kathryn Smith, "Study: Brain injuries tied to suicide risk in military," *Politico*, May 15, 2013, https://www.politicopro.com/go/?id=22054.

actually was given by President Obama when he announced we were pulling out. He said a democratic Iraq can be a model for the region. That's right. That's what President Bush also said. And the question is, can a democratic Iraq survive if America pulls out before the job is done?"[4] Some 18 months later, this first-order question remains unanswered, as Iraq continues to convulse in sectarian strife.

The 2003 decision to invade Iraq was preceded and, in large measure, shaped by the most devastating asymmetric attack since the December 7, 1941 Japanese assault on Pearl Harbor: the September 11, 2001 attacks.

▲ Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, marking the first war of the 21st century, is as deeply rooted in the ancient past as it is in the information age.

Photo courtesy of U.S. Marine Corps

That morning, four commercial jets were hijacked by 19 terrorists. The energy stored in the jet fuel of the two airlines that hit the World Trade Center (WTC) was the equivalent of a quarter kiloton – off the charts in comparison with all other terrorist attacks. The airplanes did not explode like bombs. The fireball from each impact expanded, consuming some of the jet fuel, while the rest of the burning fuel swept through the building at temperatures comparable to a large nuclear generating station, incinerating everything in its path. In the end, 3,407 people (including 411 emergency workers) died at the WTC, in the Pentagon, and on a barren field in western Pennsylvania. Thousands more were wounded, traumatized, and dislocated. The price tag was breathtaking, topping $100 billion in immediate outlays and $2 trillion of directly attributable costs over a decade. The fall of global markets, lost wealth, and opportunity costs are, of course, incalculable.

"We are in the age of the unthinkable. Violent actors go well beyond the rules of engagement to conduct asymmetric attacks, to destroy the will and means to fight."

On September 11, America entered the Third World War – dubbed, until recently, the Global War on Terrorism. Since then, the U.S. has been engaged in a multi-front fight that includes operations in direct defense of the homeland and sustained campaigns overseas. As both Presidents Bush and Obama stated, this is "a new kind of war" – a struggle that demands the concerted application of all instruments of national power over an extended time frame.

The 9/11 terrorist attacks and the response that followed mark a new era of asymmetric,

4 "Analysts: Questions remain as U.S. troops leave Iraq," *CNN*, December 18, 2011, http://www.cnn.com/2011/12/18/world/meast/iraq-pullout-analysis/index.html?iref=allsearch

asynchronous, irregular, persistent wars. The al Qaeda jihadists who masterminded and perpetrated the assaults did not engage the U.S. military in overseas battles. Instead, they sought to kill American civilians on American soil. In the face of this new, diffuse, all-azimuth danger, the historic distinction in American strategy between matters that are foreign and those that are domestic – as well as between the public and the private sector – has been erased, perhaps forever. In this sense, 9/11 constitutes a strategic inflection point: a historic event that fundamentally transforms attitudes and approaches. It also changes most of the answers and many of the questions.

Yet this first war of the 21st century is as deeply rooted in the ancient past as it is in the imperatives of the information age. With its focus on global networks of nation states and non-state actors, it is also the first war that smashed the Westphalian paradigm. The states of Europe signed the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 because the preceding Thirty-Years War (essentially, a religious war) had been so destructive that the remaining powers felt compelled to place limits on what had become literally unrestrained slaughter. The Treaty is the foundation of the modern system of nation states – entities whose sovereignty within their borders is deemed inviolable – making it illegitimate for one country to make war on another to impose its belief system. Over the 365 years since Westphalia, the civilized world has essentially banished considerations of creed from the repertoire of acceptable reasons to wage war.

Religiously motivated violence is different from any other kind of asymmetric conflict for the simple reason that, for the true believer, there is no compromise about the sacred; there can be no bargaining, accommodation, or truce. In this context, killing becomes an end in itself; geographic boundaries are immaterial; and the duration is measured in generations. Strategic patience and crude innovations – like the suicide vest or an improvised explosive device (IED) – become as lethal and psychologically impactful as high-tech weaponry. Asymmetric, asynchronous, geographically dispersed, often anonymous engagements, in which battles won don't necessarily add up to clear-cut victory, are at the core of this new struggle.

Afghanistan – the first post-9/11 battleground – is a case in point: a lightning-fast military success and the enemy's official surrender eight weeks after the opening salvo did not translate into an enduring victory. Instead, the war descended into a 12-year, still ongoing nation-building and counter-insurgency endeavor. As of this writing, 3,358 Coalition lives have been lost in Afghanistan, with 2,254 American Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, and civilians making the ultimate sacrifice.

"Consequences don't have to be just in the military realm."

It has taken the U.S. 25 years to start acting as if it has really exorcised the ghosts of Vietnam. In truth, America remains haunted by these ghosts. Vietnam impacts the entire spectrum of politics and the totality of civil-military relations, with the ugly – false, yet always lurking just below the surface – stereotype of a war-mongering military-industrial complex pushing a reluctant President away from his Great Society agenda into protracted foreign commitments whose causes have long receded from the public's memory. This reality – along with the horrendous cost in blood, treasure, and credibility resulting from repeating the past's errors – makes the mastery of the interplay of offense and defense both a civic duty and a true national imperative.

2 Needed: A New Strategic Paradigm

The overarching challenge of national security is timeless: "Everything in war is simple, but the simple things are difficult." However, the unambiguous, binary distinctions between war and peace are vestiges of a bygone era. "Overwhelming military superiority doesn't necessarily translate into decisive victories. Today's adversaries are undeterred by sheer military might. They are strengthened by a zealous belief in their cause and even rejoice in martyrdom. We need, in my opinion, a new paradigm, a fresh vocabulary – agreed to and understood – and agile approaches for these new threat arenas." Today's challenges are predominantly hybrids: offense and defense; foreign and domestic; regular and irregular; symmetric and asymmetric; synchronous and asynchronous; geographically focused and globally ubiquitous. This, in turn, requires multi-dimensional thinking, multi-faceted approaches, and coherent, nimble execution.

The complexity of the security environment paints a stark landscape. "What keeps me awake at night are continuously evolving networks of ideologically driven actors who reject and actively undermine our fundamental secular belief system … They drive the instability that threatens our friends, our interests, and often – as we saw in Benghazi and most recently in Algeria – they threaten our citizens themselves. They cause problems from Afghanistan into Pakistan, in Yemen, Somalia, across all of North Africa and down into Mali and Nigeria … nation states that destabilize our neighborhoods and ultimately the global community of nations, with their drive to develop and proliferate nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons – including the means to deliver them, perhaps at intercontinental distances. Iran and North Korea come to mind. And lastly, there's a worrisome tendency that as our relative overmatch narrows and our potential adversaries are perhaps emboldened, that we see our friends and partners may be tempted to hedge and thus be less willing and able to join us in the kinds of resolute coalitions that we have counted on in the past to advance and to protect our common interests. So that should be enough to ensure anyone less than a satisfying eight hours of sleep."

"Everybody understands what asymmetric threats are, right? Those are the ones you didn't prepare for. Those are the ones [where you say] 'Oh, damn it, I forgot about that,' and they surprise you."

Deepening the sense of foreboding is the fact that the global threat array is growing more diverse, unstable, and dangerous than ever, "and we have to do even more than we've ever done before with

the fiscal challenges we're facing today." Worse, the U.S. has a painful history of identifying areas to de-emphasize, only to find itself in ferocious combat in those very theaters. "Our track record is almost 100 percent in failing to predict where the next war is going to be and how is it going to be fought."

It should not be assumed that future conflicts will resemble the recent fights in Iraq or Afghanistan – lest the U.S. lose the ability to project global power, inflict strategic paralysis, deter nation states, destroy their fielded forces, and defend the homeland, its allies, and friends. "We must commit to victory on our own terms." To this end, there must be a balance of current exigencies and future requirements. Any single-focus approach bears a huge opportunity cost.

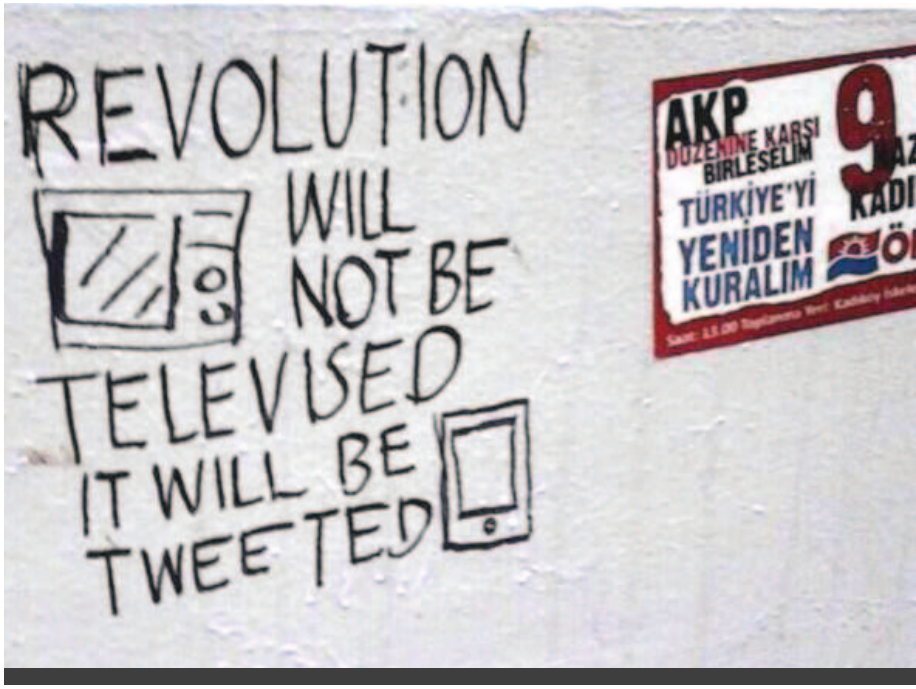
The U.S. must also beware of complacency and the perils of strategic myopia. Operational concepts, vocabularies, and institutional structures, valid for a specific time and place, should not be allowed to become dogma, stifling fresh thought. That, too, is a prescription for failure. "We have defeated the 'isms' of the 20th century" – ideology-driven, militant mass movements like Fascism, Nazism, and Communism. We are still fighting one 'ism' – a totalitarian, radical, expansionist ideology inelegantly termed Jihadi Islamism." This ideology, like Communism, "threatens us both in military means and also a lot of nonmilitary means – diplomacy, economics, politics, psychology, propaganda, and the rest of it – and a lot of espionage."

Thus, alongside dragons, the U.S. faces vipers' nests of unpredictable, asynchronous, and volatile asymmetric threats literally spanning the globe.

The ubiquity of high tech, at bargain-basement prices, has leveled the playing field at a speed and manner unprecedented in human history. "Cyber technology in the hands of the ungoverned could easily be used to destabilize vulnerable relationships or erode confidence in a government's ability to protect the people or provide critical services. We are entering the age of knowledge, an era where the ability to rapidly collect and process massive volumes of data to gain understanding must be looked at through the lens of cultural awareness in very specific areas."

"My position is we've not had the asymmetric advantage in cyber for some time."

Social media and information technology have elevated local issues to strategic importance and facilitated worldwide connections between



▲ A media ban in Turkey forced pro-democracy demonstrators on to social media, like Twitter and Facebook, to broadcast developments, such as videos of police brutality, locations of safe havens, and calls for legal and medical assistance.

Graffiti from Istanbul's Taksim Square (anonymous photo)

governments, non-state actors, and transnational threat networks, enabling and empowering individuals and loosely organized groups. "One extremist jihadist has 54,000 Twitter followers. Even assuming that only one percent of those are dedicated supporters, that is a dangerous number … A captain in Central Africa is leading thousands of troops using Twitter. He is commanding and controlling, via Twitter, unsecure multiple phones, and he is maneuvering his forces even though these forces weren't trained, ready military types. They knew where to go; they knew the area; they knew where that high ground was. We will have to learn to balance the opportunities of technology with its challenges."

Another byproduct of such technological advances is the networking of asymmetric threats. Of particular concern is "the mutually supporting relationships among franchised terrorism, al Qaeda in its primary form, but also its regional metastases, criminal activities, and other violent extremist organizations. They all operate in joint, mutually supportive, dynamic ways that we've never seen before. This allows those entities to move, shoot, and communicate across national boundaries … We are going to have to attrite that connectivity and the mutually reinforcing elements of the fight we're going to be in for a very long time."

Threat finance also demonstrates the pernicious nature of the problem. "On a daily basis, $4 trillion is moving globally. It's moving legitimately, and it's moving illegitimately. It's being exchanged. It's being bought and sold. It's being maneuvered. Really, really smart people, really, really cunning people, probably a few evil people are in that world. There's sort of the white market, the gray market, and the black market. So you always go back to follow the money, and for the world of asymmetry, it's definitely follow the money; crawl after it, if you have to, because where you see it go is really important."

The velocity of weapons proliferation and the speed at which lethal, even exotic, technologies spread across the interconnected world enable even minor players to wreak havoc on an extraordinary scale. Accelerated, as they are, by free societies' apparent inability to keep secrets, these trends result in extremely rapid decay rates of any technological advantage. Chemical and biological agents are a case in point. "The distinction between chem and bio is dissipating rapidly. Chemical companies are doing biology; biology firms are doing chemical reactions; and the fact of the matter is that the things that regulate life itself are chemicals, proteins, DNA, and RNA. So it becomes anachronistic to rely on such Cold War vestiges as arms control treaties that address biological or chemical weapons separately." What once might have been considered science fiction is now a genuine possibility. "The most worrisome trend – alongside the democratization of technologies – is the combination of technologies. It's the idea of nanoparticles, nanotechnology, and the ability to alter genetic code remotely – effectively subduing an enemy's military without battle. So you have this whole opportunity out there to do nefarious things at the bio-chemical level that you could never conceive of before."

Another example of rarely addressed perils is electromagnetic pulse (EMP). "EMP, generated by even a rudimentary nuclear weapon that is simply exploded high in the atmosphere, could destroy all electronics coast to coast." Depending on the power of the blast, which doesn't need to be aimed at any particular target, EMP could "fry" electrical grids to the point of there being neither heat nor light. The effects would be catastrophic. In the aftermath, the entire transportation network – trains, planes, and automobiles – grinds to a

▲ The new strategic paradigm must address threats that range from threat financing and cyberattacks on infrastructure, to nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons.

Photos courtesy of CACI

screeching halt. Computers and cell phones do not work. The Internet does not work. There are no more banking records. Nobody can use credit cards. Emergency services and hospitals are unable to function. Nobody can pump gas, and supermarkets cannot operate because there is no power, no supply, no money, and no refrigeration. Millions would die from starvation, disease, and societal chaos within a year of a massive EMP – or a similarly substantial cyber attack, particularly one that destroys the supervisory control and data acquisition (SCADA) systems that automatically control virtually every single industrial or life-sustaining process.

"Our SCADA infrastructure is a hacker's paradise."

That kind of primordial desperation is already evident in forecasted challenges. Future competition will be about the very essence of life: vital resources such as "food, water, energy, and rare earth elements." Other drivers of global instability and strife include:

- Explosive global population growth
- Demographic shifts and migration trends
- Resource scarcities
- Territorial and tribal disputes
- Hopelessness and lack of economic opportunity

While the U.S. recognizes these factors, it is often late in taking action to overcome them. In Africa, where there is both abundance (rare earth minerals) and scarcity (economic opportunity), one out of every eight paid workers today is Chinese. "Without making the Chinese our enemy or painting them as 10 feet tall, in their eyes it's all about competition. It's about competition for everything, not just food, water, and resources. It's about competition for partnerships. It's about competition for ideas and, in their consistent, very long-term view, it is about establishing relationships in new ways and penetrating

▲ "This is about national survival not through the next presidential election or the next 10 years. This is about national survival for the rest of time, period."

Photo courtesy of CACI

relationships that exist, to drive a wedge between allies and strengthen their own posture."

These global dynamics are closely intertwined with the changing character of 21st century warfare. Having experienced – or vicariously learned – the cost of challenging the U.S. head on, would-be adversaries are developing asymmetric approaches to attack vital levers of U.S. power. Their strategies seek to circumvent core U.S. advantages, while undermining international support and domestic resolve.

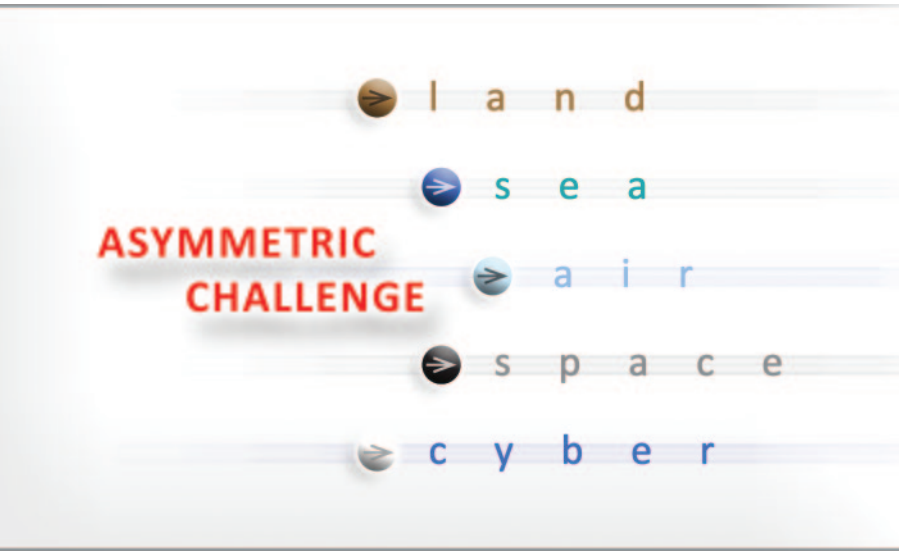
"The U.S. faces a rapidly shifting threat environment that promises to grow even more complex as populations grow, technology advances, and depleting natural resources rearrange the strategic landscape. Nation states and their subsidiaries develop temporary, loosely federated alliances with non-state actors that could threaten U.S. national interests. These alliances cross-cut transnational crime cartels, traffickers, national and international banks, ports and harbor management operations, strategic road and maritime choke points, passport and visa offices, and even lower-level military and law enforcement entities worldwide. We are up against a series of complex, shadowy networks, a world of non-state actors whose output is more than the GDP of many countries; hackers who can put our financial sector into a quickly spiraling downturn in a wide variety of markets or post national secrets on the Internet, breaking diplomatic alliances and generating conflict; and inter-linked actors capable of moving drugs, large sums of money, hostages, or even weapons of mass destruction to intended target areas. This type of warfare requires new approaches to successfully address the threats."

U.S. strategy is balanced on a knife's edge. Sequestration – a blind nine percent across-the-board chop – has no strategic underpinnings. The yawning gap between lofty ends and meager means renders strategic clarity and focus moot. Worse, the fissure undermines America's credibility as the indispensable global leader. Internally, the uncertainties and flux are debilitating, draining energy and diverting attention from real-world exigencies. "The skyrocketing deficit, sluggish economic recovery, and an atmosphere of indecisiveness will continue to tempt our nation to look increasingly inward. Several additional rounds of cuts will likely follow sequestration. So the message to the U.S. military is clear. The means of our strategic calculus are getting fewer and fewer, with little corresponding reduction in the required end-states. I am concerned about our ability to respond rapidly and forcefully against perhaps a more adventurous adversary, coupled with progressively less supportive partners. That's an unhappy set of circumstances, and I worry about that for the future."

There are only three ways to close the yawning gap between ends and means: scale down the objectives, thus restoring strategic clarity and focus; increase the means – highly unlikely, given fiscal realities; or, most dangerously, bluff. Doing nothing and allowing the gap to deepen is the worst approach.

"The worst thing we can do is self-deceive ourselves."

3 Has the U.S. Forfeited Its Asymmetric Advantages?



The confluence of global trends foreshadows significant challenges to U.S. organizations, systems, concepts, and doctrines. From this point forward, the U.S. should expect to be asymmetrically challenged in all domains, including in and through space and cyberspace, as well as on land, at sea, and in the air. Perhaps for the first time in history, the ability to inflict damage and cause strategic dislocation is no longer directly proportional to capital investment, superior motivation and training, or technological prowess. Consequently, the U.S. is at an historic turning point, demanding an equally comprehensive revolution. The future strategic environment will be shaped by the interaction of globalization, economic disparities, and competition for resources; diffusion of technology and information networks whose very nature allows unprecedented ability to harm and, potentially, paralyze advanced nations; and systemic upheavals impacting state and non-state actors and, thereby, international institutions and the world order.

The U.S. military's unprecedented lethality and effectiveness deter opponents from massing on the battlefield, driving them to adopt distributed and dispersed operations. They find maneuver space and sanctuary in dense urban areas, ungoverned hinterlands, and loosely regulated information and social networks. These adversaries pose a significant challenge to U.S. freedom of action and threaten its interests at home and abroad. Their operations are difficult to constrain with traditional force-on-force approaches, compelling all services, government agencies, and the private sector to think anew about the challenges of future warfare.

"We are at a disadvantage being a nation of laws and being a democratic republic, but the advantages outweigh the disadvantages, as long as we're smart about it."

Meanwhile, ascendant powers – flush with new wealth and hungry for resources and status – are posturing to contest U.S. superiority and global presence. These adaptive competitors are translating lessons from recent conflicts into new concepts, capabilities, and doctrines tailored to counter America's many strengths and exploit its equally numerous vulnerabilities. These vulnerabilities are both existential – meaning, inherent in America's nature and status – and

self-imposed. Stated differently, simply being the United States conveys both tremendous strength and exploitable liabilities.

Conceived in liberty, founded on hope, and built upon the belief that anything is achievable through hard work, commitment, and imagination, the U.S. strives to remain true to the values set forth in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. This very quintessence protects the country from domestic privation and the ravages of war. In America's national narrative, security is closely related to liberty and prosperity and rests on more than sheer military might. Security denotes freedom: freedom from fear; freedom from tyranny and oppression; freedom of expression unmarred by exclusionary ideologies, prejudices, and violations of human rights. In this construct, security is as much a state of mind as it is a physical reality: it cannot be safeguarded by borders, barriers, or force alone. Likewise, prosperity without security is unsustainable. Within a complex, interdependent, dynamic world, Americans view security and prosperity as enduring, universal interests, to be pursued and upheld by all.

America's international behavior generally avoids zero-sum calculations, accepting the reality that competitors are not necessarily enemies. Likewise, the U.S. is generally aware that credible influence requires combining strength with restraint; power with patience; and deterrence with detente. Therefore, the diplomatic, informational, military, and economic tools through which the U.S. promotes and defends its national interests are tempered by such overarching principles as human dignity and freedom; justice, compassion, and equality under the rule of law; sovereignty without tyranny; freedom of expression; tolerance for all

◄ Because asymmetric threats are difficult to constrain with traditional force-on-force approaches, the U.S. must think anew about the challenges of future warfare.

Photo courtesy of the Congressional Budget Office and the U.S. Army

cultures, races, and religions; opportunity for self-fulfillment and the pursuit of happiness. These values define America's national character and lend credibility and legitimacy to actions at home and abroad. They also set the bounds within which the U.S. pursues its enduring national interests of peace, stability, prosperity, and democracy.

America's self-perception as the "indispensable nation" reflects the ardent desire to be recognized not merely as the strongest but also as the most virtuous world leader – a beacon of hope to all who strive for freedom and opportunity. This notion – America's anchor and compass for two centuries – is best captured in John F. Kennedy's 1961 inaugural address: "Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, in order to assure the survival and the success of liberty." Moreover, American economic power, political influence, and military superiority are not merely a force to be reckoned with; they are a force to be trusted. Articulating this self-image, General Colin Powell stated at West Point in 1998: "We are the trusted leader of a world that wants to be free … All we ever asked for was the opportunity to raise up our former enemies, and to get back to the business of peace and democracy. The only other thing we ever asked for was enough land to bury our dead."

These perceptions, which some cynics might describe as naïve, add up to a coherent, compelling national narrative. As difficult as it might be to sustain in a 24-hour news cycle, "where the narrative is up for examination, critical discussion, deconstruction, and challenge on literally an hour-by-hour, almost minute-by-minute basis," a clear view of who the United States is serves as a source of strength, perseverance, and resilience. "We are a global power, an open society, and we have the superior power of ideas. Their [our adversaries'] goal is to make us an authoritarian society ourselves. Their goal is to make us overreact to them, so that we will not be conquered by them, but we will do it to ourselves. The citizens of the United States are not yet fully engaged in the defense of the nation that will be necessary in the 21st century as we move forward, and if they are and those advantages are brought to bear, then even though we live in a very dangerous world, we will prevail."

However, the very values that make the U.S. formidable can also be exploited by its foes. "If they understand our civil liberties, if they understand the privacy or freedom of religion principles upon which our republic is founded and can utilize that as a tool for undermining us or, as they say, destroying us from within, by our hands, that's a kind of asymmetric warfare technique" and thus a clear and present danger.

"Because of the constitutional protections that our citizens have, we tie one hand behind our back."

Americans' traditional expectation of safety and security at home poses a unique challenge. "The enemy wants to show that we can't protect our civilians. We can do battle with them militarily, but we can't protect our citizens at home. This is an asymmetric advantage that they have – the ability to destroy our citizens in sudden attacks, suicide missions, and to undermine the very idea of what we can or cannot do" to provide for the common defense.

The U.S. has always been a reluctant warrior. Military force has traditionally been used as a last resort after all other options have been exhausted. Once engaged, the U.S. rarely mobilized and employed the full panoply of its immense capability. Indeed, all of America's wars since World War II have been limited, fought for limited objectives, under restrictive Rules of Engagement (ROE), and without the total commitment of the people, the government, and the military.

Concurrently, throughout the 20th century, the U.S. initiated a wide variety of arms control and arms limitations negotiations – both bilateral and multilateral – further restricting its own ability to test and deploy nuclear, biological, space, and even conventional weapons, to include missile defense. Despite the ardent desire to serve as an example for others to follow, the international accords didn't prevent proliferation and outright cheating. "Those treaties don't apply to non-state actors and individuals, so that's a big gap, especially given the democratization of these capabilities that really enable anybody to, potentially, have a nuclear-equivalent weapon." Meanwhile, the U.S. is intentionally restricting itself. "We are in the midst of devaluing one of our greatest deterrent capabilities and that's our nuclear weapons. In some ways, we are saying we need to be less concerned about the use of nuclear weapons to deter these other kinds of events, particularly non-nuclear events, and I think that disadvantages us."

Bound by the Just War doctrine and international conventions, the U.S. has almost always constrained its own power, hewing to both the letter and the spirit of international treaties and laws. These accords and precepts have shaped America's decisions to go to war *(Jus ad Bellum)* and delimited the conduct of war *(Jus in Bello)*. The U.S. committed force with the "right intent" and for "a just cause" to confront "real and certain dangers"; to "redress a wrong"; or "for the cause of peace." Often, presidents and generals sought a congressional imprimatur, as well as a mandate from such international bodies as the United Nations Security Council or NATO to fulfill the requirement of "a competent, sanctioned, legitimate authority" authorizing action wherein "the expected positive outcomes outweighed the damage to be inflicted and the costs and risks to be incurred, with a reasonable chance of success."

In the conduct of its wars, the U.S. adheres to the *Jus in Bello* principles of proportionality and discrimination. The former prohibits "excessive force" – above what is necessary to attain the limited objective of righting the wrong. The latter requires that civilians be "held immune" by employing weapons in ways that discriminate between combatants and non-combatants. Harm to civilians is justifiable only if they are "the unavoidable victims of an attack on a military target."

▲ The U.S. regularly constrains its own power, often committing force only after consultation with the U.S. Congress, the United Nations Security Council, and/or the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

Photos courtesy of Silje Bergum Kinsten, Kevin Rutherford

Naturally, these principles cannot but constrain how and how much force is actually employed. Additional restraints and constraints are normally stipulated in the ROE applicable to specific circumstances. These Rules of Engagement reflect both operational realities as well as political considerations, most notably the desire to avoid the perception of unfair overmatch. "It's much like the kind of things that we did back when we were colonies fighting the British. We didn't fight fair against the phalanxes of the British Army marching forward in a very vulnerable way when our guys were shooting from behind the trees."

Its own historic experience notwithstanding, the U.S. generally strives to level the playing field and avoid the negative imagery of an overbearing giant beating up on a puny opponent. Given inherent disparities in size and might, however, it is virtually impossible for the U.S. to sidestep the Goliath versus David metaphor. Good intentions tend to backfire, particularly in environments where the

U.S. engages with limited understanding of local traditions and mores. These frictions, in turn, increase America's costs in blood and treasure, while alienating those whose "hearts and minds" are deemed to be key to success. Furthermore, because the public is prone to empathize with and favor the underdog, the counter-narrative quickly sprouts in both U.S. and foreign media, spreading at the speed of Twitter, often creating a public relations nightmare both at home and abroad.

Worse, fixation on the idiosyncrasies of any specific opponent or a particular type of warfare is a risk in and of itself. As a global superpower with a wide array of global commitments, the U.S. doesn't have the luxury of a single focus strategy. "The irony of where we stand with this type of a dangerous world is that we can make really fundamental errors. We can turn all of our attention now to an organization like al Qaeda and the al Qaedas that are coming behind them, either based upon that particular philosophy or another. We can get involved with that, and we can lose track of the conventional challenges that we have to be prepared to face in the nation state construct in which we're still living. Suppose we reduce the fleet. Suppose we reduce the aircraft. Well, then you're back to the place where you're perfectly prepared to deal with al Qaeda, and now you're no longer prepared to deal with the nation state challenge."

History teaches that aggressors tend to assume risks that seem irrational – and, thus, improbable. This leads to strategic dislocation – and, potentially, catastrophic national failure. Second, reputation and credibility born of past successes might not suffice as a deterrent. Third, while successes and failures – victories and defeats – are both relative, they are, ultimately, in the eye of the beholder. For a great power like the U.S., there is no such thing as a minor setback – symmetric or asymmetric. Once the U.S. commits its military and thus its prestige, victory, seen as such by friend and foe alike, is the only acceptable outcome. The alternative diminishes America's stature, credibility, and influence – as well as its alliances' cohesion and, ultimately, viability. This, in turn, could push allies to fend for themselves – either entering coalitions of convenience or acquiring independent nuclear capabilities to defend their own interests. Reneging on commitments – however justifiable it might seem due to economic imperatives or political choices – further undermines trust, potentially causing long-term damage to global stature and influence.

"Deterrence is about increasing risk and reducing reward."

For a nation whose security is predicated on an enduring strategy of dissuasion and deterrence, the most fundamental risk is failure of deterrence. Deterrence is a function of capability, will, and credibility and thus exists in the eye of the beholder. Its success – or failure – is measured only in the breach. To mitigate the risk, the U.S. must retain a modern, secure, and well-trained military force, a responsive, collaborative Interagency, and a responsible, engaged private sector. "We also need to evolve new deterrence concepts." In particular, it's necessary to rethink concepts such as extended deterrence and conceive new ways to deal with asymmetric actors who might have been deemed "undeterrable" in the Cold War construct.

"We have to figure out the strategy of deterrence by denial; we need to capitalize on such advantages as nanotechnology and the revolution in life sciences. So in some ways, where we have faltered or failed to take advantage of the asymmetry is understanding – how we can basically use these capabilities in a way that enhances defense. In some ways, we haven't really quite grappled with the idea of dealing with the asymmetry, not only with the asymmetry of technology, but the asymmetry of the Interagency process where we take agencies that normally don't think of themselves as relevant to national security and put them in the game, and that's not an easy proposition."

America's nuclear arsenal is still indispensable to deterrence. Yet, "the United States of America has shortchanged the care of the most sophisticated weapons ever devised by man – nuclear weapons and the delivery means of those weapons – to the point that it is becoming very, very difficult for the appropriate certifications to be made as to their efficaciousness, including everything from reliability to safety, surety, and so on. And we are not making adequate plans to develop the next-generation delivery systems, nor are we properly funding the modernization programs for extending the life of these very sophisticated weapons." Such neglect could expose to the U.S. and its allies to unacceptable risk and spawn further proliferation. "So what might cause proliferation? A belief that the U.S. nuclear umbrella isn't so protective after all. How might one conclude that? By looking at the open-source data about our nuclear program and by questioning government officials about their commitment to keeping our system effective and maintaining the will to use it." Likewise, missile defense "is a good example of what we need both for the big strategic deterrent, as well as for dealing with asymmetric threats."

Strategic risk can also mount through the accumulation of shortfalls in recapitalization and modernization, stale strategic and operational concepts, failure to revitalize organizational ethos, and unwillingness to let go of outdated structures, bureaucratic arrangements, sector boundaries, and hierarchical relationships. America's global posture and future success depend upon the ability of its people and organizations to adopt new, relevant concepts, constructs, and technologies, suitable to the ever-shifting dynamics of the strategic environment.

There are four additional areas where the United States incurs unnecessary risks, forfeits advantage and self-constrains capabilities: infrastructure; policy processes; the tendency to tip its hand with excessive transparency; and an "optimism bias."

"We need the ability to defend our nation's critical infrastructure from strategic attack while ensuring that our warfighting platforms are safe, secure, and defensible."

Critical infrastructure protection includes a vast array of the United States' resources, including energy grids, transportation networks, communications, and information technology systems. "In many ways, our infrastructure is not as defensible as it needs to be. We've basically had kind of a compliance mindset for some time, and we need to make sure that not just our desktops and networks, but our weapons systems, our command and control systems, our flying machines, our ships, our platforms are defended and hardened, so that if we take a hit, we can still fight through, and basically repair the infrastructure as we need to on game day." Resilience is, itself, a double-edged sword. "Our country can withstand a blow, a big blow. We can withstand another 9/11 attack. We can withstand even something larger than that. Now, the outcomes, the second-, third-, fourth-, fifth-, maybe sixth-order effects may cause us to overreact to what it is." Vulnerabilities often hide in those higher-order effects.

▼ The critical infrastructure of the U.S. is highly vulnerable.

Graphic courtesy of CACI

The American system of governance also poses unintended risks – "the weakest link in the chain is policy." At their very essence, asymmetric attacks are "most effective against large, stove-piped, hierarchical organizations and societies as they provide the means to achieve strategic surprise and quick wins or moral victories against a larger opponent." The bureaucratic necessities of processes, hierarchies, and authorizations often hinder the agility and cooperation needed to counter asymmetric threats. "We really need to get to a more flexible, timely policy that pushes authorities and approvals down the chain to be able to not only blunt the threat, but to enhance and reinforce our capabilities, both in their application and development."

"We function as coalitions of the uncomfortable."

Interagency and public-private collaboration could also become a double-edged sword, wherein inclusiveness comes at the expense of decision superiority, efficiency, and speed. "Integrated decision-making raises barriers to unauthorized ideas." Aligned also doesn't necessarily translate into streamlined or effective.

Moreover, large groups tend to operate by consensus, often compromising on the lowest common denominator. "We were always somewhat myopic. I think we've become much more open, much more transparent, much more inclusive, and I see in the relationships we're developing with the rest of the Interagency to bring the whole of government together, that's happening more and more. So that's on the positive note, and so that can help move some of these processes forward. But then again, the downside is that in doing that, you sometimes lose your prerogative to act quickly because you have built these linkages that you are committed to sustaining with this open and transparent relationship." The ramifications of the ever-expanding circle of coordination are by no means limited to Washington, DC. They impact actions in areas under the nominal control of regional Combatant Commanders, as well as operations in specific countries, wherein the desire

The Interagency. ▶

Graphic courtesy of CACI

to gain broad concurrence sometimes exceeds what is required by law and regulations, hindering rapid, decisive action.

"If we want to put the hurt on anybody opposing us, we ought to lay the Interagency process upon them. They'll be too busy to ever cause mischief again."

The highest echelons of government are not immune from these problems. "Congress is a fairly unwieldy body sort of by design, and it's always going to be that way, but we make it extra hard by the way we organize. For example, on the nuclear weapon program, it should be under the Department of Defense. The committees in Congress that should be dealing with it are the Armed Services Committee, for example, not the committees who fund water projects, and the Department of Energy. Under Homeland Security, we thought it was a good idea at the time to try to consolidate everything in one agency. I don't think it's worked very well, and not only have you got now one big agency that doesn't do it very well, in my humble opinion, but the other committees of jurisdiction haven't given up their jurisdiction, either."

America's transparency and tendency to over-communicate intentions, boundaries, and timelines often redounds to the opponents' advantage. "If you look at our enemies, both state and non-state actors, they very much recognize we have a high threshold of pain, and that becomes almost our top red line. Then we have a lower red line of almost benign neglect. In between is a zone of immunity, in which they all act with impunity, recognizing our tipping points on both of those extremes."

A compelling description of what failure might look like is key to narrowing – if not eliminating altogether – this perceived "zone of immunity." Yet imagining failure is simply not in America's DNA. Indeed, it isn't in any military's DNA. Consider the following truism: the only certain thing about war is that one side will lose. Yet since time immemorial, nations and armed groups have gone to war with nothing but a picture of victory imprinted in their minds. Saying that "failure is not an option" is nothing but an exhortation. In truth, failure is an ever-present – though obviously adverse – possibility.

Debacles-in-the-making develop over time, usually with plenty of opportunities to notice and correct the downward spiral. What prevents the necessary course correction are apathy, ignorance, systemic deficiencies, wishful thinking, and the primordial human ability to adjust to a "new normal." At its core, the inability to conceive anything but a resounding success is hubris. An optimism bias – the belief that the future is bright despite adverse trends – makes powerful nations and individuals particularly susceptible to this trap. To forge a solid foundation for victory, imagining failure, in all its possible permutations, is a necessary first step. Better still, "you tell me how you intend to fight in a 21st century construct and be effective on the first day of the war."

"Remember there is nothing more terrifying than ignorance in action."

4 Keys to Winning the Asymmetric Fight

Asymmetric warfare is based on the notion that "an effective and efficient small amount of power, exerted at a critical point, will produce results well beyond what the opposing force can manage. So the real question is: how can the national security system provide mitigating, preventative measures to keep the advantage in our favor?" Awareness and understanding of America's and adversaries' capabilities, limitations, and vulnerabilities are necessary steps in regaining the initiative, taking the field, and "winning on our own terms."

"Know the enemy and know yourself and in a thousand battles you'll never be in peril."

– Sun Tzu

All is not gloom and doom. "What advantages can we employ to counter the aforementioned negative effects to our national security? Our asymmetric advantages!" To combat asymmetric threats, "the U.S. will require decision superiority, resiliency, and agility, as we move to become a more interdependent, more cost-effective military. We must be prepared to recognize and rapidly respond as the threat environment changes around us. All of this will require much more than better use of open-source information and more intelligence. As we move towards the age of knowledge, operations at all levels in fact may be directed for the purpose and intent of intelligence collection for enhanced awareness and insight. That is what decisive intelligence and decision advantage are all about. Without a distinct knowledge advantage, we will not have decision advantage over our adversaries. Incorrect conclusions and decisions in future environments will prove to be more costly economically, militarily, politically, and beyond. The lack of decisive knowledge underscores the true value, if not the true nature, of an asymmetric attack and the low-effort/high-payoff consequences it produces."

After 12 years of continuous combat, U.S. doctrine has evolved far beyond General Patton's World War II adage to "make the other bastard die for his country" and Vietnam-era "body-counts" as measures of success. Even General Colin Powell's precept of "overwhelming force" – so ably demonstrated in DESERT STORM – has given way to principles more closely associated with Sun Tzu and Liddell Hart than America's traditional way of war: "The current key principles of maneuver warfare are preemption, dislocation, and disruption, rather than the destruction of the enemy, with the goal of influencing, coercing, or overwhelming the enemy's decision-making process." The prerequisite is maintaining the knowledge advantage. "This, too, is all about decision superiority: applying timely, accurate, and relevant intelligence, fused with precision action through operational imperatives. Intelligence must drive operations if

we are ever going to be in a position to preempt an asymmetric attack or prevent strategic surprise. We need to seek out knowledge and achieve awareness to be preemptive in nature against asymmetric attacks. In such conditions, we erode an adversary's use of surprise."

The object of war is to defeat an opponent's will, not necessarily or even primarily, by killing people and breaking things. Strategic dislocation – compelling the adversary to make mistakes by keeping him off balance – is key to success. "I would want to be on the side of the knowledgeable and decisive, who have thrown their adversaries into such a spiral that they're not even aware of what is happening to them and powerless to change their circumstances."

To regain the initiative and foster both offensive and defensive capabilities against asymmetric threats, the U.S. should focus on: strengthening enterprise agility; promoting a more holistic understanding of the strategic environment; developing robust international partnerships; and leveraging the opportunities afforded by new technologies – while overcoming limitations imposed by policy and process challenges. "Smart application of resources that provide enterprise agility can also provide our warfighters with enabling asymmetric capabilities, from which we can develop and deploy elegant, discreet, but powerful mechanisms to throw our adversaries off balance, seize control of momentum, and prevail in decision-making. Enterprise agility also requires trust and confidence of defense, intelligence, law enforcement, and homeland security leadership to conduct distributed operations through a decentralized, flattened network – something we don't necessarily have today. However, we clearly recognize it is something we need, and we must drive ourselves to achieve it. Lastly, the enterprise must be agile enough to operate at network speed – in some cases, with preloaded authorities to act before asymmetric threats create cascading second- and third-order effects on networks and our critical infrastructure."

"We must be responsive, resilient, and fully aware of emerging threats and share this information as transparently and as quickly as possible."

To prevail, America must nurture and retain leaders who are "willing to accept change," are engaged in and "intellectually curious about world events," and grasp the vital nexus between economic imperatives and national security. This is particularly critical for the Intelligence Community, which "must be willing to conduct 360-degree assessments of the environment, our adversaries, and our U.S. and closest allies' military capabilities in order to follow through on Sun Tzu's dictum: know your enemy, know yourself, and know your environment. Only through such critical review will we fully understand our vulnerabilities to asymmetric attacks, as well as develop means by which we can mitigate them."

The synergistic effects of the "Big Three" – special operations forces (SOF), cyber, and intelligence – are also part of the U.S. arsenal of asymmetric advantages. "These three are, and will increasingly become, major team players in the future of asymmetric warfare; in fact, in all forms of warfare. They are generally low-cost, high-payoff, soft power enablers. As such, we need to assess their use as potential tools for combating asymmetric threats and dealing with the interplay of offensive and defensive operations. National special operations, cyber, and intelligence assets are perfect enablers not only for decision superiority, but as strategic tools for tactical advantage and tactical tools for strategic advantage." To prevail, it is also necessary to understand their vulnerabilities, the unintended consequences of misapplication, and the dangers of being wholly dependent upon technology to provide a distinct advantage. "Remember the enemy has a vote. The enemy can move to another piece of high ground and do so with great ease and with little cost. We need to be there before he is."

Intelligence will have to fuse SOF operations, inform cyber capabilities, and integrate socio-cultural awareness to ensure U.S. forces are prepared for whatever type of warfare comes next. "Our force continues to harness the power of information technology like no other, employing the latest concepts and capabilities to eliminate adversary networks." U.S. forces have mastered the art and the science of fusing the multiple sources of intelligence, most notably human sources (HUMINT) and signals intelligence (SIGINT). This, in turn, allows for both economy of force and precision – focusing limited resources to engage the threat with extreme discrimination."

Cyberspace operations constitute a national security mission set, shared by the intelligence, law enforcement, and military communities. Success in this domain would require unprecedented levels of civil-military coordination and collaboration. This, in turn, calls for a re-examination of current national security policies, while maintaining civil liberties. There is a need for a more nuanced approach. "If we talk about cybersecurity as if it is one thing, we are not going to make much progress. It is only as we have begun to disaggregate this threat and realize that foreign espionage by state actors is not the same as identity theft by organized crime, and while there is some overlap there with intellectual property theft, it is a different challenge. Extortion through cyber vectors is different. It calls for different policy responses, as do potential attacks on industrial control systems." In cyber – as in all domains – "knowledge, preparation, fusion of the right talent and authorities, and then the appropriate force exerted with speed, surprise, and overwhelming advantage" are vital.

▲ The raid that killed Osama bin Laden demonstrates the fusion of special operations, cyber, and intelligence.

Photo courtesy of Executive Office of the President of the United States

Shared situational awareness and the ability to respond – or, if necessary, preempt – swiftly and effectively are particularly important in the cyber domain. "We can't fight what we can't see. Right now, I have a very good visibility into the DoD space. I have pretty darn good visibility into the red space, what the bad guys are doing. I've got very little visibility, because I'm not allowed to have visibility, into the commercial space, the critical infrastructure space. We have to get that sorted out, and it can't be phone call speed. This cyber stuff happens at light speed, and frankly, we ought to try to get out in front of this threat, out in front of our opponents. The shared situational awareness, the systems out there, how to do that at light speed, because that's something we're all uncomfortable with. It's not the way our policy is laid out right now, but we have to have that. So we can wait until something really bad happens to get that or we can do it ahead of need. We choose ahead of need. This is a very complex fight, but it's one we have to embrace. We have to come up with the policies that allow us to deal with this at light speed, not wait for the round to hit and then deal with the mitigation strategy, which would be not impossible but difficult."

The growing interdependence among U.S. national security elements – military, federal, state/local,

and private sector – and foreign partners is another aspect of this nuanced, sophisticated paradigm. "We have to operate as though you can't succeed without me and I can't succeed without you. Whether that's a U.S. force or whether that's with our partners, we have to be like that because when it comes time to go to the battlefield, there are long periods of boredom, and then there are these moments of madness. In those moments, doctrine is thrown out. You do whatever you have to do to either win or survive."

Daily interaction and coordination promote collaboration and enhance trust. In this context, mutual understanding and awareness of each other's capabilities and limitations are critical to success. For example, the private sector has "a unique perspective, understanding, and access to threat signatures and indicators in the cyber arena" that the government might not have, while the latter has access to information and insights the former might not have, mainly coming from the Intelligence Community. "One of the most important aspects is the reassurance that companies can share this information, both with the government and with each other, in a context that protects them from liability and sets appropriate guidelines for that sharing and, of course, appropriate privacy and civil liberty protections."

"I want to be doctrinally sound; I don't want to be doctrinally bound."

Fundamentally, collaboration and interdependence are a matter of trust – trust that needs to be created, sustained, and nurtured. In contrast to sheer military power, trust cannot be surged on demand. The corollary is that trust is fragile and perishable. It must be built and sustained over the long term, protected from the breaches and compromises that undermine personal and institutional mutual reliance. "It took us since 1947 in the Department of Defense to reach the point where we've established a modicum of trust and what I would call true, effective, joint operational thinking and capabilities." This trust will be tested in a period of constrained resources, challenging senior military leaders to avoid inter-service fights over their share of a shrinking budget.

Turning to America's enduring advantages in combating asymmetric threats, the human factor is often highlighted. "War has always been, and always will be, fundamentally a human endeavor, and this is where I believe we have a distinct advantage. You don't have to be raised in a special operations community to subscribe to that most fundamental of SOF truths: humans are more important than hardware." After 12 years of sustained overseas operations, the U.S. has the most combat-experienced force in the world. "Our service members – and, particularly, our junior officers and our noncommissioned officers – are adept at wading into uncertainty and prevailing. These warriors are accustomed to receiving mission-type orders from their higher headquarters in which they are told the desired end-state but not the path to get there. Initiative, flexibility, and agility are the guiding principles that our force employs to get the job done and, in my honest belief, there is no other force in the entire world that excels at this to the extent that our forces are able to."

A self-correcting force – one constantly seeking self-improvement – is another combat multiplier. "An inward-looking, critical eye is something that is ingrained in our military culture and manifests itself from our combat training centers to the brutally candid after-action reviews. This allows us to rapidly reassess our plans and capabilities and then refocus our efforts to both negate the effects of adversary success and to recognize opportunities on the battlefield." This asymmetric advantage, however, might not be as pervasive and all-encompassing as necessary. The synergies that accrue from networked, flexible, agile organizational dynamics need to bubble up from the tactical to the strategic level and permeate the

U.S. government writ large. "At the tactical level, our force is very comfortable with the power of combinations, quickly task-organizing with flexible command and control structures and capabilities to accomplish our missions. Over the past 12 years, we have seen it all: combinations of special operations forces with conventional forces, coalition with conventional and inter-agency forces, and even with non-governmental organizations. Admittedly, at the strategic and operational level, this networking is more of a work in progress, due to some of our bureaucratic processes. I believe that we are committed to removing the barriers to a comprehensive, synchronized, whole-of-government approach to our nation's security challenges."

To maintain this edge, the U.S. must invest wisely, particularly in light of current fiscal challenges. Fortunately, "many of the steps that we can take right now do not necessarily require significant injections of funding." These include talent management to retain our best and our brightest. "We need to discard many of our industrial-age human resource functions, which tend to treat service members as replaceable parts rather than talented operators with unique skills."

"We will do less. We will do nothing less well."

On the hardware side, faster, smarter acquisition processes, guided by clear strategic prioritization, are crucial to sustaining America's advantages. This is particularly true in an environment where asymmetric opponents aren't shackled by cumbersome, plodding bureaucracies and can simply buy – or steal – their way into technological innovation at low cost and with minimal risk. "Winston Churchill once said, 'We are out of money; now we have to think.' So I expect we will see a rigorous analysis of what really constitutes the proper ends, ways, and means balance for the United States. What will we, and what should we, be willing to expend blood and treasure on in the future?"

Strategic clarity, logic, and coherence are critical in combating asymmetric threats. So is a holistic approach that balances today's exigencies with the far-reaching, long-term implications of looming threats. America will succeed in the 21st century only by developing and resourcing a strategy that closes the gap between ends and means. The window of opportunity is shutting fast. Time is not on America's side: "The first thing is to recognize the problem. The second is to call it by its real name, and then you are better able to deal with it. Then you can generate the consensus and the strength politically to do the things necessary to confront it and to win. Until you do all that, you're not going to win."

As a global power with global commitments and distant allies, the U.S. needs freedom of access across the global commons of sea, air, space, and cyberspace. America's strategic partnerships are more important than ever. The U.S. must strengthen and broaden coalitions, attending to interoperability between allies and partners. Building these relationships is both an engine of progress and prosperity as well as a potent instrument of America's diplomacy in an increasingly interconnected world.

These partnerships – just like inter-service and interagency relationships – rest on a fragile foundation of trust. "We value what coalition partners bring to the table, and we have learned that it is not the lowest common denominator that counts." It behooves the U.S. to take full advantage of the individual capabilities that different partner nations bring to the table, be it a profound area of expertise or a unique understanding of and experience with a particular threat environment. To capitalize on partners' capabilities, the U.S. needs to realize that

"the physical size of a country's armed forces has almost no correlation to the level of professionalism or ability that it brings to the fight." In many instances, partners with relatively small forces "punch way above their weight." Likewise, partners stand to benefit from sharing American experience and expertise, particularly in terms of "fusing various types of information and intelligence and sharing it rapidly. We are eager to show our tactics, techniques, and procedures to turn at a higher rate, to target adversaries with extreme precision, extreme discrimination, and at unmatched speed."

"Virtual presence is actual absence."

Global reach, global power, and global vigilance are the indispensable means through which America promotes and defends its interests, reassures allies, and deters opponents.

- **Global Vigilance** is the persistent, worldwide capability to keep an unblinking eye on any entity – to provide warning on capabilities and intentions, as well as identify needs and opportunities.
- **Global Reach** is the ability to move, supply, or position assets – with unrivaled velocity and precision – anywhere on the planet.
- **Global Power** is the ability to hold at risk or strike any target, anywhere in the world, and project swift, decisive, precise effects.

This core strategy hinges on freedom of action and ability to maneuver in all domains: on land, at sea, in the air, in space, and in and through cyberspace. The vital importance of access and global power projection wasn't lost on America's competitors and adversaries. Several took advantage of Washington's 12-year-long focus on Iraq and Afghanistan – and the concomitant inattention to events outside the Southwest Asia orbit – to sprint ahead with new anti-access and area-denial systems (A2AD).

These weapons and operational concepts are intended to limit America's global reach, power, and influence by setting regional "no-go" zones, wherein the U.S. is unable to protect its own forces, its allies, and its friends. A2AD could impact America's freedom of action and operational flexibility by posing unacceptable risks to U.S. and allies' forces and platforms seeking to operate in denied environments. This is particularly true in cyberspace, seen by potential adversaries as a relatively inexpensive venue to offset America's traditional advantages. Since the air, sea, land, space, and cyber domains are increasingly interdependent, loss of dominance in any one could lead to loss of control in all. Consequently, superiority and freedom of action – the historically proven predicates of all successful operations – cannot be taken for granted.

▼ China rising.

Photo courtesy of U.S. Navy

The Air-Sea Battle (ASB) is designed to preclude the eventuality that the U.S. would be locked out of critical areas in peace, crisis, or war. Developed jointly by the U.S. Navy and U.S. Air Force staffs, ASB showcases the kind of far-sighted, forward-looking, preemptive approach that is indispensable in winning the asymmetric fight. ASB fuses offense and defense, while taking advantage of each Service's unique capabilities, expertise, and skills. "The Air Force operates in air, space, and cyberspace. The Navy operates in air, space, and cyberspace, as well as on and underneath the surface of the sea. Working together, they provide and share situational awareness, allowing rapid response to emerging events" and ensuring unimpeded access to the global commons upon which global peace and prosperity depend.

Like all such endeavors, the USN-USAF collaboration requires confidence and trust in each other's capabilities and core competencies. These, in turn, are fostered through joint training and common, standardized tactics, techniques, and procedures.

The USN and USAF are the nation's multi-dimensional maneuver force, unhindered by time, distance, and geography. Thereby, together with American and allied Soldiers, Marines, and Coastguardsmen, Airmen and Sailors underwrite the national strategy of defending the homeland and assuring allies, while dissuading, deterring, and defeating enemies.

"I can predict that the future – whether it's five or 10 or 20 years – will be more dangerous. Normally, when you fight someone, you need access, and you need to get in there and operate from there."

No modern war has been won without maritime and air superiority. No future war will be won without maritime, air, space, and cyberspace superiority. To promote and defend America's interests through global vigilance, reach, and power, the Joint Force must attain cross-domain dominance. Cross-domain dominance is the freedom to attack, and the freedom from attack, in and through oceans, the atmosphere, space, and the electromagnetic spectrum. It permits rapid and simultaneous lethal and non-lethal effects in these domains to attain strategic, operational, and tactical objectives in all domains: land, sea, air, space, and cyberspace. Cross-domain dominance integrates systems, capabilities, operations, and effects to gain competitive advantage in any and all domains. It transforms operational concepts to maximize synergy among the Services, thus generating a new array of simultaneous, synchronized effects and granting freedom of maneuver. This, in turn, allows the Joint Force Commander to achieve desired outcomes across the full range of military operations, from humanitarian relief saving those in need, through preventing war via dissuasion and deterrence, to inflicting strategic paralysis on implacable opponents.

War is a human endeavor and, "no matter how good the equipment in your hands or in your opponent's hand is, it is ultimately the contest of wills. The better trained, the more determined, the more devoted Airman, Sailor, Soldier, Marine, Coastguardsman, or civilian will ultimately carry the day. "The true asymmetric strength of the United States rests in the people of the United States." To capitalize on this advantage, "we must formulate innovative concepts to anticipate, adapt to, and overcome challenges. We must accelerate the deployment of evolutionary and disruptive technologies, as we address the urgent need to recapitalize and

"What are the tragedies of the 2030 time frame that we need to prevent right now? The day to talk about working together is not the first day of the crisis."

modernize. We should secure our future through continued investment in science and technology, as well as closer integration with industry and academe – across the public-private sector."

The U.S. must reclaim and enhance its own asymmetric advantages by delivering global surveillance, global command and control, and the requisite speed, range, precision, persistence, and payload to strike any target, anywhere, anytime, in and through any domain. The U.S. must retain the ability to safeguard the homeland, assure allies, dissuade opponents, and inflict strategic dislocation and paralysis on adversaries. The path forward is clear. The only question is: does the U.S. have the vision, resolve, and grit to follow through?

◂ Cross-domain dominance is the key to victory.

Graphic courtesy CACI

Keys to Winning the Asymmetric Fight

Understanding the Strategic Environment

- Improve awareness and understanding of America's and its adversaries' capabilities, limitations, and vulnerabilities.
- Maintain decision superiority through actionable intelligence that fuses SOF operations, informs cyber capabilities, and integrates socio-cultural awareness.

Improving Organizational Capacity

- Strengthen enterprise agility by enabling U.S. national security elements to conduct distributed operations through a decentralized, flattened network and preloaded authorities to act against asymmetric threats.
- Leverage opportunities afforded by new technologies, while overcoming limitations imposed by policy and process challenges.
- Invest wisely, particularly in talent management and faster, smarter acquisition processes.
- Capture synergistic effects of the "Big Three": special operations forces, cyber, and intelligence.
- Foster an inward-looking, critical eye in military culture to ensure ongoing self-improvement.

Promoting Collaboration

- Strengthen and broaden coalitions, attending to interoperability among U.S. national security elements (military, federal, state/local, and private sector) and international partners.
- Attain cross-domain dominance, granting the Joint Force freedom of action across the full range of military operations, from humanitarian relief through preventing war via dissuasion and deterrence, to inflicting strategic paralysis on implacable opponents.

5 Conclusions

The strategic mindset of the U.S. must shift to enable, rather than constrain. Likewise, the yawning gap between ends and means must be closed by either scaling down the policy objectives or increasing the resources allocated to national defense. Consistency and strategic coherence are key. "Pivots" from one region to another are inevitably perceived as sudden lurches – away from, rather than towards, an area of concern. These swings confuse both allies and competitors, adding uncertainty to an already volatile global situation. Likewise, empty threats and ever-shifting "red lines" – as well as commitments that clearly can't be kept – incur unnecessary risks. In the breach, they undermine trust, damage credibility, and limit future options. Bluffing is simply too dicey in a dynamic, inter-connected, transparent world.

Foresight and fortitude are virtues that the U.S. needs to relearn from its own history, if not from its adversaries. "You have the watches, but we have the time." This contemporary Afghani adage succinctly captures such readily apparent vulnerabilities as over-reliance on equipment and high tech; impatience; the tyranny of arbitrary deadlines; and the ardent desire to be liked rather than respected. These weaknesses have already been exploited and, unless corrected, will continue to weigh the U.S. down.

"The true asymmetric strength of the United States rests in the people of the United States."

Too often, the national security discourse gets mired in contrived dualities: war or peace; offense or defense; action or reaction; preemption or response; foreign or domestic; public or private. The new strategic paradigm requires integrated, holistic, nuanced approaches, accounting for the predominantly hybrid nature of today's challenges.

"Today and tomorrow's patterns typically force us to think about material solutions. Now, more than ever, we must broadly question how we will organize and execute future warfare."

Among the most pernicious of these artificial dichotomies is the sharp distinction between what is deemed "fair" and "unfair." Given obvious disparities in size and strength, the U.S. shouldn't expect a fair fight – in either reality or in the public narrative. Neither should it offer such comfort to its opponents by stooping down to fight on their terms. In fact, the very purpose of developing superior capabilities is to tip the odds in one's own favor and set the terms of the engagement – in order to increase the probability of victory. The U.S. should employ its capabilities, skill, and experience precisely to gain a decisive – and, yes, unfair – vantage in order to dissuade, deter, and, if necessary, defeat adversaries. The key to victory is the demonstrated will and resolve to use all means necessary – symmetric or asymmetric – realizing all advantages are fleeting.

Going Forward,

many aspects of how national security is framed and practiced will have to evolve if the U.S. is to prevail. The shared touchstone of the noble virtues enshrined in the Constitution and the single, unifying purpose "to provide for the common defense," however, remain unchanged. The U.S. will have neither the buffer of time nor the barrier of oceans in future conflicts. The character, tempo, and velocity of modern warfare already severely test America's ability to adapt. Therefore, redefining the strategic paradigm is an urgent national security requirement – not a luxury that can be deferred. Rising to this challenge is not a choice; it is a shared responsibility and a national imperative.

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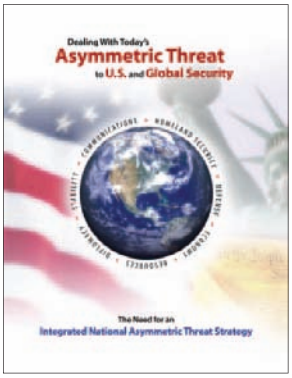

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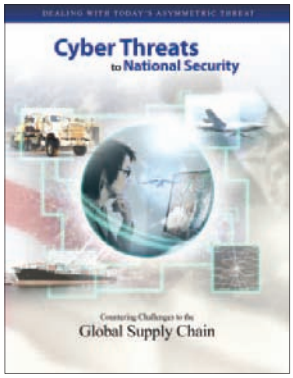

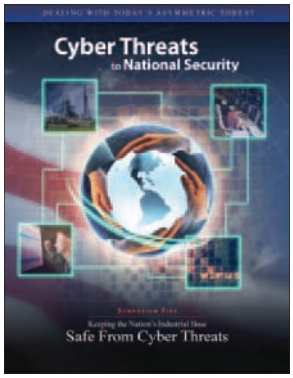

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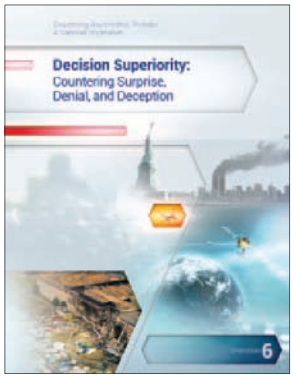

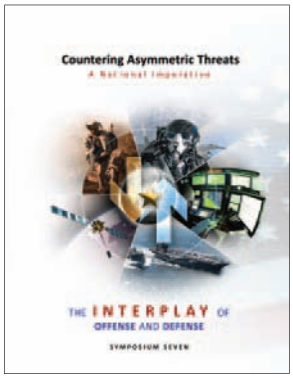

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