Staff Sergeant Russell Vidler, USA, leaps over wall at Fit to Win obstacle course on Fort Jackson, South Carolina, September 2015 (U.S. Army/Brian Hamilton)

Strategic Agility
Theory and Practice

By Charles H. Jacoby, Jr., with Ryan L. Shaw

As the combatant commander for the homeland, every day I contemplated the extant and emerging threats to our people, territory, and way of life. Defense of the homeland in depth was one of the strategic ends that I was charged with, and like the other combatant commanders (CCDRs) who are faced with sustaining U.S. leadership and protecting U.S. interests in a complex and dangerous world, I worked with my staff to find effective *ways* to employ available *means* in support of my assigned strategic *ends*. I also had responsibility for the accrued *risk*. This is the strategic calculus that all CCDRs must continually manage in the face of changing realities. In the homeland, the consequences of miscalculation come at the direct expense of our people and way of life.

For the North American Aerospace Defense Command and U.S. Northern Command, our ends are fixed, and they will not change. Obviously, we will never decide not to defend the territorial

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integrity of the homeland. Nor will we give up on sustaining a peaceful international order, protecting universal values, or promoting global prosperity, and we will not break faith with our international allies. But it is equally certain that our means are contracting. Budget cuts and drawdowns are happening, and they will continue. This is a reality we have faced before, and we will manage it as best we can.

Unfortunately, this time we seem to have lost the conversation on risk. In our eagerness to put years of war behind us and to turn our resources toward other important projects, we are increasingly unwilling to be honest with ourselves about the level of risk we currently face and are willing to assume in the future. We frame the conversation in the absolute terms of winning and losing without asking the more relative question: "At what cost?" But the trust of our offices demands that we have that conversation, especially regarding the homeland.

With our ends fixed and our means in decline, we must confront risk—but we must also recognize our obligation to mitigate that risk by finding better ways to use our available means. Agility seems to be the currency with which we hope to buy better ways. This is not a new idea: from AirLand Battle in the 1980s to the 2012 Capstone Concept for Joint Operations, agility has long been a part of our operational concepts, but we have never defined it in our doctrine.[1]

Nevertheless, in this particular moment of strategic challenge, the idea of agility has more cachet than ever. In May 2014, the Secretary of Defense hosted the CCDRs for an offsite discussion of strategic agility while the Joint Staff J7 simultaneously hosted a Chairman-directed wargame to test concepts of global agility. The latest operating concepts for each of the Services prioritize agility in one way or another. Yet it still seems that we lack a common understanding of what agility means in the abstract and how we might cultivate it in our joint force. Given our current, hard-edged calculus of ends, ways, means, and risk, we need more clarity than that. This article hopes to advance the discussion by defining and analyzing agility, providing a conceptual

model of how agility works in our system of national defense, and offering some thoughts on how we might increase our agility and therefore better balance the strategic equation in this period of national security vertigo.

The time is right for a deliberate look at agility. Our potential rival states are steadily increasing their investment in military capabilities at a rate not seen since the end of the Cold War, and they are demonstrating ever more assertive regional and global designs. Despite our years of effort and some real successes against al Qaeda, the terrorist threat remains and is retrenching in undergoverned spaces across the Middle East—a fact made plain in recent months by the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. The security of our homeland and our interests abroad is increasingly threatened by transnational criminal networks that traffic in narcotics, weapons, and other illicit goods, including humans. Our growing reliance on cyber and space assets makes us simultaneously more capable and more vulnerable. As a changing climate opens new approaches to the homeland and makes weather-related disasters more frequent, the demand for Defense Support of Civil Authorities continues to climb. Together, these developments mean that threats and challenges are less predictable, more diffuse, more globally interrelated, and less attributable than ever before. Meanwhile, our economy continues to struggle and our deficits increase. After more than a decade of wartime spending, our people and leaders are anxious to focus on real issues at home, even as we are forced to confront continued challenges abroad. Our budgets will not let us get bigger, and our threats will not let us do less. Agility seems to be the answer to this conundrum.

But if agility is to be more than just a buzzword, we need to give it some hard and deliberate thought. Our doctrine needs to comprehend a definition of agility and its component parts. We need to develop institutional and operational processes that promote agility. And as a foundation to all of this, we need a workable theory of agility.

Strategic Agility

Carl von Clausewitz defined a satisfactory *theory of war* as "one that will be of real service and will never conflict with reality."[2] A satisfactory theory of agility in war must meet the same criteria. Theory is useful only insofar as it reflects reality; reality cannot be remade to reflect our theory. And to be useful, a theory cannot be overly narrow—a theory of strategic agility cannot be incompatible with the common usage of the word agility, nor can it contradict agility at the tactical and operational levels. Academics discuss mental agility and business leaders pursue agile marketing and supply chain strategies, but the most common context in which agility is understood is in the physical domain of athletics. Even those of us who are neither athletes nor fans understand agility when we see it displayed on a field or court. Quite simply, the common usage of the word *agility* is in reference to athletics, so athletic analogies can be useful for communicating a theory of strategic agility.

Clausewitz further claimed that the "primary purpose of any theory is to clarify concepts and ideas that have become, as it were, confused and entangled. Not until terms and concepts have been defined can one hope to make any progress in examining the question clearly and simply and expect the reader to share one's views."[3] Toward that end, we offer the following definitions of agility. *Agility* is the capacity to respond quickly, effectively, and efficiently to a wide variety of unpredictable demands. More than mere strength, speed, power, or endurance, agility implies a capacity to employ any of these competencies individually or in combination and to switch between employment patterns to accomplish a goal with a minimum waste of time or energy. In the athletic realm, while sprinters are fast, running backs are agile; marathons demonstrate endurance, but parkour demonstrates agility; weightlifting demonstrates strength, but wrestling demands agility. In the context of military strategy, agility is the ability to identify and capture relevant opportunities faster than our rivals, to rapidly adjust

Commander of U.S. Strategic Command, Admiral Cecil D. Haney, and U.S. Air Force Chief of Staff General Mark A. Welsh III speak during strategic studies seminar at Eisenhower Executive Office Building, December 2014 (DOD/Sean K. Harp)

Table 1.

Agility	Physical Capacity
	Environmental Dexterity
	Decisiveness

priorities and shift resources to the main effort. We define *strategic agility* as our capacity at the global or theater level to rapidly assess complex and unpredictable security challenges and opportunities and to decide and respond quickly, effectively, and efficiently.

A sprinter, runner, or lifter may, in fact, be agile, but one could not know it by watching them compete within the predictable parameters of their respective disciplines. Similarly, we do not demonstrate agility by throwing resources against a predictable threat, no matter how great the threat or the magnitude of the resources. But agility allows us to promote and defend the Nation's interests in a complex and rapidly changing

international security environment even with limited and uncertain fiscal resourcing.

Components of Agility

In any context, agility depends on the three components of physical capacity, environmental dexterity, and decisiveness.

Physical Capacity. While agility is not *merely* strength, speed, power, or endurance, those are all prerequisites, or enablers, of agility. The laws of physics still matter. To win through agility, one does not have to be the fastest or the strongest, but one does have to be strong *enough* and fast *enough*. The athletic application is obvious; for military power, this has to do with the hard facts of budgets, programming, acquisitions, and research and development, along with recruiting and training personnel.

Environmental Dexterity. Agility is never exercised in a vacuum; it happens

in an environmental context. Indeed, as discussed above, the absence of obstacles or opponents negates agility as a relevant factor. Athletes apply agility on a course, court, or field; we defend the Nation across the hard geographic realities of land, sea, and air, in the developing domains of space and cyber, among varied human cultures, and against thinking and adaptive enemies.

Environmental dexterity requires both knowledge of the environment and the ability to shape and use it. A running back reads the defense, uses his blockers, and quickly changes direction based on an intuitive sense of the interface of his cleats with the turf. A parkour practitioner turns obstacles into opportunities by vaulting, jumping, or swinging in ways that increase rather than decrease momentum. For military purposes, knowing the environment requires sustained strategic intelligence and cultural acuity. We shape and use the environment

through Theater Security Cooperation (TSC) and Building Partner Capacity (BPC), through access agreements, prepositioned stocks, and the discriminating use of overseas basing and force rotations, which provide us with what Antoine Henri De Jomini called "pivots of operations" across the globe.[4]

Decisiveness. No amount of physical capacity or environmental dexterity can compensate for an inability to make decisions. Agility demands both the ability and the willingness to assess, decide, and execute in stride. This requires clarity of purpose (the running back knows that no matter how many times he changes direction, his aim is forward yardage), an appreciation of your own capabilities and limitations (how far can I jump? how fast can I run?), and courage (execute with conviction or fail). In national defense, these requirements translate to a widespread agreement on the national interest and a shared strategic vision or "theory of victory," which allow for a rapid consensus on relevant, emerging opportunities. Capturing those opportunities requires clear and appropriate authorities at all levels and strategic leaders with the courage to say "yes" or "no." At our best, we enable decisiveness through a culture of mission command—through decentralized execution and mission-type orders, through trust-empowered command and control (C2) and unity-of-effort relationships.

Our Agile System

These three components of agility—physical capacity, environmental dexterity, and decisiveness—map directly to three strategic-level components of our defense establishment.

Our *physical capacity* lives within the Services—Army, Marine Corps, Navy, Air Force—and the functional component commands (FCCs)—U.S. Strategic Command, U.S. Transportation Command, and U.S. Special Operations Command. It is built through the strategic acquisition of manpower and materiel and through tough, realistic, and consistent training. As force providers, the Services train and equip our combat formations. The FCCs provide the

Table 2.

Agility	Physical Capacity	Manpower	Services, FCCs
		Materiel	
		Training	
	Environmental Dexterity	Know the Environment	GCCs, FCCs
		Shape the Environment	
	Decisiveness	Clarity of Purpose	POTUS, OSD, JS
		Know capabilities and limitations	

"backbone," the scaffolding that enables our global reach, and they develop and employ our strategic capabilities in space, cyber, and global strike.

Geographic combatant commands (GCCs) provide *environmental dexterity.* With support of the FCCs, GCCs develop intelligence, refine cultural acuity, and maintain up-to-date strategic assessments. Through TSC and BPC, they shape the environment on a day-to-day basis during Phase 0 and Phase I. In coordination with the Department of State, GCCs earn strategic access for the Department of Defense (DOD); it is the long-term, steady-state engagement of the GCCs that facilitates rapid shifts of priority during crises.

While *decisiveness* is important at every level, for the achievement of global agility at the national strategic level, decisiveness is the purview of the Joint Staff, Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), and President. It is here that strategic ends are set, strategic priorities established, and strategic opportunities identified. It is here that a culture of mission command begins, and in a resource-constrained environment, it is here where hard decisions must receive "yes" or "no" answers.

Joint Publication 5-0, *Joint Operation Planning*, describes a proven process for identifying ends, setting priorities, and allocating resources at the strategic level. Through documents ranging from the National Security Strategy to the Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan, the President, Secretary of Defense, and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff provide strategic direction that enables the CCDRs to produce coherent theater strategies, campaign plans, and contingency plans.[5] When properly executed, this Joint Operation Planning Process (JOPP) enables effective and properly resourced steady-state activities across DOD during Phase 0, and efficient transitions to crisis action planning when necessary. In the words of the doctrine, "Clear strategic guidance and frequent interaction among senior leaders, Combatant Commanders, and subordinate joint force commanders promotes an early understanding of, and agreement on, strategic and military end states, objectives, planning assumptions, risks, and other key factors."[6] The product is a clear set of strategic priorities and a shared understanding of strategic risk. In other words, the JOPP is built to provide clarity of purpose and a clear understanding of capabilities and limitations, the first two components of the decisiveness required for strategic agility. The third component—courage—is a less tangible question, a moral one. As such, it cannot be programmed so deliberately.

The Moral Component

In our business, agility is only partly a physics problem—it is also a moral problem. We cope with the laws of nature and also the laws of human nature. Behind the questions of physical capacity and organizational processes there lies a question of trust. In fact, any experienced athlete or coach would agree that there is a moral component to competitive sports as well—if there were not, spectators and fans would not find it so compelling. But dealing as we do with the deeply moral questions of state-sanctioned violence, the lives of our sons and daughters, and the sacred obligation of defending American sovereignty and our way of life, this moral dimension is infinitely more important for the soldier than the athlete—more critical,

Ugandan Brigadier General Apollo Kasiita-Gowa talks to U.S. Army Pacific Commanding General, General Vincent K. Brooks, during U.S. Army War College International Fellows program's visit where 39 participants received firsthand experience on strategic-level leadership and national security challenges (U.S. Army/Kyle J. Richardson)

Table 3.

Organizational Agility	Individual Agility	Physical Capacity
		Environmental Dexterity
		Decisiveness
	Trust	

in fact, than the physical components. As Clausewitz wrote of the moral component, "Theory should only propose rules that give ample scope to these finest and least dispensable of military virtues, in all their degrees and variations."[7]

We have one of the few forces in the world that will reliably close with and destroy the enemy. This is based on a courage born of trust. The rifleman will move forward to the objective because he has absolute confidence in the soldiers to his right and left, that the logistician will find a way to support him when he gets there, and that a medic will be there to drag him from the field if he becomes wounded. This is tactical courage based on tactical trust, but the culture of trust always has started and always must start at the top, and it is sustained reciprocally with the faith of our people.

Across the Total Force—across all Services, Reserve Components, and National Guard—we must be able to believe that we are all working toward the same ends. We cannot be agile if some of us are prioritizing job security over national security—or even if it seems that we are. And we cannot be agile if we confuse means with ends; the combatant commands have to know that their interactions with the Joint Staff will be governed by the prerogatives of our national strategic ends, not by Service parochialism, the equities of a particular staff section, or the "job jar" of a given duty description. Likewise, when the uniformed force interacts with the civilian leadership at OSD, the civilians must be confident that they will receive unvarnished professional military advice based on the needs of the Nation, not the parochial interests of a Service or component, and the military must be confident that that advice will be received in good faith and incorporated into decisions fully in our best long-term security interests. This is never easy, but it all becomes much more difficult as budgets get tighter.

Physical competence, environmental dexterity, and decisiveness, together with the added moral component of trust, comprise a model of agility that applies

to athletics and to any other meaningful application of the word, including the tactical, operational, and strategic levels of war. In fact, it applies to individual military leaders as well. Agile organizations demand agile leaders, and we encourage leaders and leadership theorists to examine the utility of this model at the individual leader level. But the focus of this article is the corporate agility of our national strategic-level defense enterprise. What follows are some initial thoughts about our present level of agility and our possibilities for improvement.

How Can We Be More Agile?

First, do no harm. Six competitive advantages have sustained American military preeminence for many decades. We must sustain these at all costs, whatever challenges lie ahead. We must not allow them to be broken, either by sins of commission—from an eagerness to change just for the sake of change—or omission—from neglect for lack of resources. We should frame our strategic choices in terms of their effects on these six. Three of these competitive advantages feed our physical capacity: the all-volunteer force, our defense industrial base, and our tradition of excellence in exercises, education, and training. Two of them have to do with our environmental dexterity: our international alliances and our time-tested strategy of defending forward. And one—our culture of jointness and civilian control—enables our decisiveness and is built on trust.

Physical Capacity. For the last quarter century, we have enjoyed a tremendous advantage in physical capacity over any potential rival. With downsizing an imminent reality, we must be careful to remain big *enough*, strong *enough*, and fast *enough*—not just to win, but to do so without violating our moral imperative to minimize the risk to American lives. We must sustain our dominance in strategic lift; intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance; global strike; and the special operations forces enterprise—the backbone that enables our agility. And we must build and maintain resilience in the cyber and space domains.

Even in an era of tight budgets and reduced acquisitions, we must keep faith with our partners in industry to maintain the on-demand capacity of our industrial base. We have to find a way to sustain readiness in our combat formations through tough and realistic training and exercises, and when we are down to our last dollar, we should spend it on professional military education.

Sustaining the competitive advantage of our all-volunteer force means we have to keep faith with our veterans and care for our families, ensure we maintain adequate and predictable compensation packages, and manage talent within the force to make a career of military service both personally and professionally rewarding. The early phases of this drawdown have generated much discussion and warning of a "hollow force." By this we usually mean that we should not try to sustain a force structure larger than what we can adequately train and equip. But that is only part of it—the hollowest of forces is the force that does not have or does not understand its mission. We will only sustain vitality in our all-volunteer force if leaders at all levels communicate to their formations the essential role of their mission in the Nation's defense strategy—and leaders can only do that if the strategy has an essential and clearly defined role for each of those formations.

Environmental Dexterity. In the quest for greater agility and lower expenditures, there has been much discussion of reorganizing the combatant commands. With every budget cycle, we see a renewed proposal to reduce the number of GCCs, usually by re-absorbing U.S. Africa Command into U.S. European Command or by combining U.S. Northern Command and U.S. Southern Command. Recent think-pieces have proposed hybrid or flexible C2 arrangements, organized against specific global threats rather than by geographical areas of responsibility. While it is true that each problem set is unique and many of today's threats recognize no political or geographic boundaries, it remains the case that we buy agility for Phases I–V with our investment in knowing and shaping the environment in Phase 0. The

Table 4.

Competitive Advantages

- The All Volunteer Force
- The Defense Industrial Base
- Exercises, Education, Training
- International Alliances
- Defend Forward Strategy
- Jointness & Civilian Control

GCCs, with our country teams under the guidance of the State Department, build and maintain trust as the face of America in our longstanding alliances, and they are the physical embodiment of the forward defense strategy that has served us well since 1917. Power politics, nation-states, and relationships still matter; they happen in geographical space, and managing those relationships within that space is expressly the role of the GCCs. As long as *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21ˢᵗ Century Defense* is still our strategy, and if greater agility is what we want, we should redouble that Phase 0 investment, not cut it. The Army's Regionally Aligned Forces concept, if properly defined and executed, could be an important step in that direction. Because the GCC construct is not broken, we should not try to fix it.

Decisiveness. As discussed above, the JOPP does provide us with the tools we need to conduct effective shaping operations in Phase 0 and to plan for the contingencies we foresee; it does set the conditions for agility—but only if we use it correctly and adapt it as required.

Each of the system's products is essential to the production of the others, so they each must be produced on time and to standard. In this sense, the agility required to manage the unexpected demands some degree of predictability in our processes. Working backward in time, a GCC cannot transition well to crisis action if it does not have the right contingency plans. Those contingency plans must be nested with the Theater Campaign Plan, all of which must be nested with the endstates prescribed and the resources allocated in national strategic guidance, particularly the theater endstates in the Guidance for Employment of the Force (GEF) and the resource allocation in the Global Force Management Implementation Guidance

Secretary Carter answers Sailor's question during troop event at Naval Base San Diego, California, February 2016 (DOD/Tim D. Godbee)

(GFMIG). It would be an inappropriate overreach for the combatant commander to write a plan that pursued endstates other than those prescribed by the GEF or that depended for success on resources not made available through the GFMIG. It is likewise—and equally—an awkward overreach and a violation of the mission command philosophy for OSD to produce a GEF that prescribes objectives, rather than endstates, in an effort to avoid tough decisions about resource allocation. This amounts to a bureaucratic sleight of hand to conceal risk when what we really need is a more honest conversation between the Secretary and the combatant commanders, the principals who actually own the risk. The first thing we can do to improve our agility is to use the system we have in the way it was designed.

Recent conversations about strategic agility and the related concept of dynamic presence have focused on the role of the Chairman. The Joint Staff has the trappings of a general staff and we frequently treat them like one, but the Chairman—by design, as the principal military advisor to the President—has no command authority. This makes it difficult to reallocate resources between GCCs during Phase 0. Some argue that we could increase our agility by investing the Chairman with real command authority. But that would be a fundamental departure from the time-tested arrangement of the National Command Authority, which we should not undertake without serious consideration of how it would affect the Chairman's advisory role. In any case, reallocating resources between theaters during Phase 0 represents a departure from approved Theater Engagement Strategies and a reprioritization of our commitments to our alliances; that *should be* difficult. Under the present arrangement, it takes true escalation of a real security crisis to engage the Secretary to reprioritize, but we owe it to our allies not to reprioritize for anything less.

The drawback of the current system is that synchronization of contingency plans between combatant commands happens only in an ad hoc, nonbinding, and independent manner, and the Services—the force providers—are only indirectly accountable to the commanders who employ those forces. We can do better than this. We should adapt to the reality of globalized threats with a process for the global synchronization of contingency plans for Phases I–IV while enhancing the assurance function in Phase 0 with appropriate and reliable steady-state force allocation.

It must also be said that we cannot plan for future agility in the absence of clear resource guidance in the Federal budget. As commissioned officers in the Armed Forces, we took an oath to obey the lawful orders of the President. A signed budget is just such an order,

and we will obey them when they come whether we like them or not. But recent budget battles and the calamity of sequestration represent an absence of coherent orders, which results in strategic paralysis—the opposite of agility. When we are denied the ability to decide and act strategically, the best we can do is to decide and act morally—to prioritize the readiness of the Soldiers, Marines, Sailors, and Airmen whom we send into harm's way and do our best not to break those six competitive advantages. That is nonnegotiable, but it comes at the cost of future agility. And the ongoing budget negotiations—the attempts to protect pet projects for key constituencies against the best military advice of our senior leaders—threaten even our ability to provide for that readiness and maintain those advantages. Part of the decisiveness required for strategic agility must come from our elected leaders.

This speaks to the larger question of civil-military relations, which inevitably affect our decisiveness and are presently under real strain. In 1957, Samuel Huntington claimed, in *The Soldier and the State*, that military professionalism was best promoted and preserved by what he called an objective model of civil-military relations.[8] In contrast to the politicized military of subjective control, objective civilian control seeks to insulate the military from politics as much as possible, allowing them to develop expertise in the management of violence on the battlefield while the politicians develop and exercise a separate expertise in policy, strategy, and diplomacy. Huntington's book became the standard in the field, and it remains the starting point for discussions of civil-military relations at the academies and war colleges today. His preference for objective control has thus become an article of faith.

Even in 1957, though, Huntington was clear that objective control was an aspirational rather than a descriptive idea. The Founders made the American military subordinate to the President, who is the commander in chief, but accountable to Congress, which raises it, funds it, and authorizes its employment. This requirement to provide military advice to two

branches of government that are designed to check and balance each other inevitably draws senior military leaders into political controversy. As a recent reviewer tells it, "Huntington suggests that as a result of this constitutional arrangement, his objective form of civil-military control is literally impossible in the United States."[9] Since Huntington's writing, the effect of military policy domestically and of American foreign policy internationally has grown more consequential, and our recent ventures in stability operations and nation-building abroad demand greater political involvement than other forms of military operations. Our system was designed to make military professionalism hard, and it is only getting harder.[10]

But this makes professional military advice and a professional military ethic more important, not less. Though we never will completely, we are all obligated to try to live up to Huntington's ideals of professionalism and objective control. Senior military officers—active and retired—should aspire to provide their best military advice and to leave politics to the politicians. Likewise, the deeper that partisan politics are allowed to reach into the uniformed Services, the more military professionalism is compromised. Frankly, the sheer size of OSD, with a civilian counterpart for every desk at the Joint Staff and every directorate at the combatant commands, and with political appointees proliferating deeper into the organization at the expense of the professional staff, ensures that politics will reach very deeply indeed. Any continued efforts to resize DOD should look at trimming OSD to save not just money, but also our tradition of civil-military relations.

Civil-military challenges, born from constitutional checks and balances not only within the Federal Government but also between the Federal and state governments, also affect each of the elements of strategic agility. Almost by design, our Total Force system creates tension between the Federal components (both Active and Reserve) and state forces in the National Guard. Federal forces accountable to the President as commander in chief and state forces accountable to their respective governors are likely to

have different priorities regarding funding, structure, and readiness issues based, according to the dominant interpretation of Huntington's theory, on different imperatives influencing their professional military ethic. This potential conflict between components with different pathways of accountability is in essence a political conundrum between levels of government. While it is appropriate to consider the prerogatives of each of the components when shaping the Total Force, our model of strategic agility would dictate that, for both the integrity of the process and the efficacy of the product, the requirements for national security and global agility should take priority over the interests of individual components.

The Moral Component. Courage—and the trust that is both its cause and its effect—cannot be budgeted for. It cannot be legislated into being, designed in a lab, or built into an organizational process. It can only be demonstrated by example and promulgated by practice. It is tough to build and easy to lose.

Fortunately, just as we have inherited an overwhelming physical capacity and a proven institutional process, we have inherited a longstanding American tradition of courage and trust in the service of our nation. Despite our flaws and our missteps, the American people continue to trust their military Services—as evidenced by the fact that they are still willing to contribute their best and brightest to our ranks. They will continue to give us that trust as long as we continue to earn it. It is the trust we have built with each other that has enabled us to develop, over the last several decades, a culture of true jointness that is the envy of militaries across the world. Our civil-military relations have not always been happy, but happiness is necessary neither as a prerequisite nor as a product of that relationship. Trust, however, is necessary. We have always been at our best when there was trust sufficient to the mission, and historically, our failures have involved a deficit of trust. Do we have sufficient trust now?

This moral component of agility is ours to lose. To retain it, we only have

to live up to the highest ideals, laws, and traditions of our American profession of arms. As we face the difficult choices ahead, let us maintain faith with the American people and with one other, and let us renew our determination not to lose it.

Conclusion

Any attempt to move the recent focus on agility—which has been earnest, if poorly defined—from mere words into meaningful action implies three possibilities: We must either make some changes to gain the agility we now desperately need, or work to preserve the agility we have and must retain, or debunk agility as the coin of the realm every time we face a budget cut and admit that agility either is not what we want or is too hard to achieve. We argue that agility *is* the right approach for our future national security strategy. From our perspective, we have the baseline components for agility, and we only need to capitalize on them in a deliberate way, but we can also make some substantive changes to improve our agility moving forward.

In constructing his theory of war, Clausewitz recognized that the military was only a part of the equation. "As a total phenomenon," he wrote, "its dominant tendencies always make war a paradoxical trinity" comprising the army, the government, and the people. "A theory that ignores any of them or seeks to fix an arbitrary relationship between them would conflict with reality to such an extent that for this reason alone it would be totally useless. . . . Our task therefore is to develop a theory that maintains a balance between these three tendencies." Likewise, in attempting to construct a theory of agility, this article looks beyond just DOD, our equipment, and our processes to examine the moral dimensions of agility that arise from our dynamic relationship with our government and our people, which lives in tension "like an object suspended between three magnets."[11]

The hope is that doing so allows the construct presented here to "be of real service and . . . never conflict with reality." Beginning from the commonly understood concept of agility in athletics, this construct of physical capacity, environmental dexterity, and decisiveness, plus the moral component, is equally applicable to all other meaningful uses of the word, including the tactical, operational, and strategic levels of war. It is further hoped that the specific recommendations for increasing our strategic agility will at least spur honest discussion and help move the idea from an abstract buzzword to a real focus of our defense strategy. The task ahead is to incorporate agility into our doctrine, adapt our processes to promote it, and recommit to a professional ethic of courage based on trust. **JFQ**

Notes

[1] Agility was one of the four tenets of AirLand Battle doctrine, which approached a definition but was focused primarily at the tactical and operational levels and did not usefully distinguish agility from speed: "Agility emphasizes the ability of friendly forces to act faster than the enemy." See "Doctrine and Concepts" in *Department of the Army Historical Summary: Fiscal Year 1989* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1998), 46, available at <www.history.army.mil/books/DAHSUM/1989/CH4.htm>. A recent Joint Staff product does better on both counts with a focus at the geographic combatant command (GCC) level, defining *GCC agility* as the "ability to rapidly shift focus and forces to other emergent challenges in the AOR [area of responsibility]." See Deployable Training Division J7, *Insights and Best Practices Focus Paper: Geographic Combatant Commander (GCC) Command and Control Organizational Options* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, March 2014), 10, available at <www.dtic.mil/doctrine/fp/fp_gcc.pdf>.

[2] Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976, 1984), 142.

[3] Ibid., 132.

[4] Baron De Jomini defined *pivots of operations* as "practical temporary bases . . . a material point of both strategic and tactical importance that serves as a point of support and endures throughout a campaign." Antoine Henri De Jomini, *The Art of War*, *Special Edition*, trans. G.H. Mendell and W.P. Craighill (El Paso, TX: El Paso Norte Press, June 2005), chap. III, art. XX, 98.

[5] Joint Publication 5-0, *Joint Operation Planning* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, August 11, 2011), xiii, fig. II-1, II-5.

[6] Ibid., x.

[7] Clausewitz, 86.

[8] Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1957, 1981), 80–85.

[9] Dayne E. Nix, "American Civil-Military Relations: Samuel P. Huntington and the Political Dimensions of Military Professionalism," *Naval War College Review* 65, no. 2 (Spring 2012).

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid., 89.