



C-130 Hercules pilot with 36th Airlift Squadron performs visual confirmation with night vision goggles during training mission over Kanto Plain, Japan, October 14, 2015 (U.S. Air Force/Osakabe Yasuo)

Avoiding Becoming a Paper Tiger

Presence in a Warfighting Defense Strategy

By Elbridge Colby and Jonathan F. Solomon

The American military is reentering a period of competition. For the 20 years following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the U.S. military reigned supreme, nearly unchallengeable in any state-on-state contingency that Washington might seriously care to take on. This meant that a whole generation of U.S. policymakers and military professionals became accustomed to U.S.

military dominance, a dominance that enabled, and in some cases even propelled, a more ambitious and assertive foreign policy.

Yet as the Pentagon has been making increasingly clear in recent years, this long-accepted ascendancy is now in question. The conventional military buildup of China's People's Liberation Army (PLA), Russia's sophisticated

modernization of its nuclear and nonnuclear forces, the proliferation of nuclear arms to North Korea, and the general diffusion of advanced technologies associated with the Revolution in Military Affairs all mean that U.S. military primacy is under increasingly severe stress.

The Pentagon has already begun to take steps to try to respond to these troubling developments, including through its commendable new Third Offset Strategy and related initiatives. These are designed to leverage U.S. advantages in the development and exploitation of

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technology, in bureaucratic flexibility, and in military doctrine and training to extend U.S. conventional military superiority into the future. Hopefully this endeavor will pay off.

But the reality is that even if they are successful, these efforts will not spare the U.S. military the need to alter the way it is postured, operates, and plans for conflict. Indeed, the Offset Strategy's very success likely *depends* upon such changes. And some of these modifications are likely to be significant—not only in strictly military terms but also in the political and strategic consequences they entail.

The Importance of “Presence”

One of the most fundamental of these changes will be the way the U.S. military postures itself and operates, particularly in peacetime. Since the end of World War II, the United States has pursued a national strategy of forward engagement, allying or partnering with a host of countries in Europe, the Middle East, and Asia, and, as it viewed necessary, fighting adversaries in these key regions. As a corollary of this strategy, U.S. military forces have been forward-based in or otherwise rotationally deployed to these areas. The *presence* of U.S. forces has thus been a regular feature of the strategic landscape of these regions, playing a significant role in shaping perceptions and calculations among allies and foes of Washington.

Indeed, this presence has become such a regular feature of political-military life in these areas that many consider it a significant factor in the deterrence of adversaries and the reassurance of allies. In fact, to some, the visible, tangible presence of U.S. forces has been as much—if not more—of a factor in deterrence and assurance as the actual warfighting ability of those forces. To this way of thinking, one that has become particularly ascendant since the end of the Cold War, the fact that U.S. forces were present to demonstrate American will and resolve was more important than their combat capabilities.

Such a view represents a distinct change from how U.S. strategy conceived

of the purpose of forward presence prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union. During the Cold War, U.S. forces abroad evidenced American resolve, but they were also expected to perform important specific military objectives in the event of war. U.S. conventional military posture, force design, and operations, especially after the Soviet Union attained the ability to launch nuclear strikes at the American homeland, were typically determined—or at least heavily influenced—by the particular military concerns of how to stave off and, ideally, defeat Soviet Bloc aggression or coercion and, if this failed, to make the threat of U.S. nuclear usage more credible. The U.S. military of the latter part of the Cold War consequently developed conventional forces, based and operated them, and planned for their employment primarily with these warfighting concerns in mind.

In the wake of the dissolution of the Soviet threat, however, this demanding requirement evaporated. U.S. forces no longer faced a peer or near-peer challenger that could seriously contest them in plausible contingencies. Yet at the same time, Washington—sensibly—elected to maintain its national strategy of forward strategic engagement and the military primacy that underwrote it. Even as the United States reduced its force structure from its 1980s peak, though, it retained many of the forward-presence requirements (albeit with some reductions and tailoring) that it had established during the Cold War. U.S. forces still actively patrolled the waters of the Western Pacific and the skies over the Middle East and were stationed in Germany, Japan, and South Korea.

This led to a situation in which, as the memory of the Soviet threat faded, the presence of U.S. forces seemed to become as much the point of their existence as their warfighting capabilities. The value of presence independent of warfighting capability had some strategic logic; visible forces continued to demonstrate the U.S. commitment to stay engaged, both to friend and foe. But they also allowed the military Services and sympathetic defense decisionmakers and strategists to argue for sustained, if not larger,

budgets. Allies abroad, meanwhile, rarely objected to U.S. forces deployed nearby. As long as U.S. forces were sized above certain thresholds and challenges to the supremacy of the U.S. military remained relatively modest, Washington faced no serious tradeoffs between combat readiness and day-to-day “showing of the flag.” As a consequence of all these factors, the importance of presence as a goal in and of itself was trumpeted in documents such as Quadrennial Defense Reviews and Service strategic documents.¹

Yet this is no longer the world the U.S. military faces. Rather, the United States is confronted with intensifying challenges to its military primacy, especially from China and Russia. At the same time, the United States has been chipping away at its own military preeminence through sequestration and a straitjacket approach to budget efficiency that prevents the Defense Department from downsizing in a strategic fashion.

In this world, presence is no longer a relatively costless good; peacetime forward presence in this more challenging, emerging military-technological environment will involve tradeoffs, including some drastic ones, with war-waging ability. U.S. forces that operate forward within the expanding and darkening threat envelopes generated by the increasing military power of potential U.S. opponents will be placing themselves at greater and greater risk. For instance, U.S. warships such as aircraft carriers that are lauded for showing the flag in the Western Pacific are increasingly vulnerable to potential Chinese attack capabilities, such as the DF-21D anti-ship ballistic missile and the PLA's large arsenal of anti-ship cruise missiles.²

At the same time, impressive new U.S. shorter range aircraft such as the F-35 need to operate from airfields, such as on Okinawa, well within the reach of Chinese precision-guided land-attack munitions. The bases that house U.S. ground forces on Okinawa and elsewhere in the Western Pacific that show the U.S. commitment to staying put in the region, meanwhile, are also increasingly vulnerable—as are the aircraft and ships designed



Chief Warrant Officer 3 signals to E/A-18G Growler on flight deck of aircraft carrier USS *Dwight D. Eisenhower*, April 11, 2016 (U.S. Navy/J. Alexander Delgado)

to supply and move these forces around. The essential point is that the U.S. forces that are postured and employed primarily for visible frontline presence as an independent mission are increasingly sacrificing their combat survivability, with corresponding degradation of their war-waging utility.

Presence and Warfighting Ability

This is a problem, in fact a very serious one, because, despite some of the rhetoric of the post-Cold War era, deterrence derives not from the symbolism of being present but above all from a potential attacker's perceptions of the defender's realistically employable military power and capability—in other words, from warfighting ability. Presence can contribute to this calculus by reinforcing the perception of the defender's will or by latently complicating an aggressor's path toward conquest, but it does not itself constitute effective deterrence. Rather, at its root, deterrence stems

from the perceived ability to harm an opponent or to defeat or blunt his actions to such a degree that he will act with restraint or back down.

In the realm of nuclear weapons, the ability to harm tends to predominate as a driver of decision. In calculations of conventional conflict, however, deterrence by denial tends to be more salient than deterrence by cost-imposition (though the latter can play a significant role). That is, conventional deterrence relies primarily on a potential aggressor's judgment of one's ability to prevent him from forcibly attaining his political objectives, if not defeat him outright. Thus the conventional forces that deter most effectively are those that can contribute to the frustration or decisive defeat of the adversary's pursuit of his aims.³

Because of the different mechanism of effect, what defines effective conventional deterrence is different from what typifies its nuclear variant. In nuclear deterrence, after a certain threshold, resolve tends to be central. In conventional dynamics,

however, the ability to bog down and frustrate if not prevail over an opponent's military forces is usually central because the ability to harm is so circumscribed, especially against near-peer adversaries. Thus what is particularly important for conventional deterrence is maintaining an advantage in conventional military power, particularly with respect to a given potentially contested area.⁴ In particular, scholarship indicates that conventional deterrence has been most effective when adversaries judged that a potential defender's conventional forces could resist their attacks, particularly in a relatively short timeframe. To put it another way, the combined effects of the defender's in-theater and otherwise quickly surgeable forces' capabilities, quantities, postures, and positioning had outsized effects upon the decisions made by the potential aggressor state leaders. When defenders induced those leaders to believe that any notional conventional offensive would likely be arrested and that, at minimum, would result in a protracted

conflict fraught with high cost, risk, and uncertainty, successful deterrence was almost always the historical result.⁵

This not only shows the value of forward-deployed and decisive surge forces, but it also demonstrates that the former must, at least in aggregate, be both militarily effective and practically usable, especially within a campaign context. In an increasingly competitive military-technological environment, therefore, the United States can no longer afford to deploy substantial forces in ways that would not contribute to—or could even detract from—prevailing in the event of conflict. Rather, the U.S. defense posture writ large, including its forward-deployed forces, must make clear to more capable and ambitious potential adversaries that U.S. forces can *effectively* resist and respond to any aggression.

Yet at the same time, the United States has an interest in maintaining the benefits afforded by presence. Figuring out how to maximize forward-deployed forces' warfighting capabilities and survivability, while also enabling at least some portion of the force to perform traditional "show the flag" missions, therefore represents one of the era's most significant and pressing strategic planning challenges. This is beginning, albeit haltingly and partially, to receive the recognition it merits at the highest levels of defense policy. Deputy Secretary of Defense Robert Work, in unjustifiably little-noticed speeches in 2014 and 2015, described in clear and unmistakable terms the increasingly high costs presence demands that stress the U.S. military's supply of deployable forces; these costs can and will exact from combat effectiveness—and thus deterrence.⁶ As Work described, the "surge forces" of the United States (those designed to decisively prevail in a conflict) are becoming decreasingly competitive in a much more challenging military-technological and geopolitical environment. This, according to Work, is leading the Defense Department to look for innovative and flexible ways to conduct presence missions while focusing on the main challenge: augmenting the warfighting capabilities of the joint force.

While technology offers some options for addressing these challenges, the fact remains that it generally requires a minimum of 10 years under current laws and Defense Department policies to develop and then initially field new systems and platforms. And that assumes applied research has already reduced a technology's developmental risks to fairly low levels. Deputy Secretary Work highlighted exactly these points in his aforementioned speeches when he observed that many of the Offset Strategy initiative's technological research investments will not bear fruit until the 2020s or early 2030s. Some especially mature technologies may be fielded over the next 5 years, but by and large they will do so via capability upgrades to existing systems and platforms. Solutions to the presence-versus-surge-readiness dilemma over the next 15 years, then, must lean heavily on creative new ways for positioning, posturing, and employing our existing forces.

The starting point for confronting this problem, however, must begin with the recognition that warfighting considerations must predominate, at least with respect to any decision affecting substantial or material portions of the joint force. Thus any significant forward deployment or basing should be integrated into a credible strategy for fighting and prevailing against a major power adversary such as China or Russia. Building a force commensurate with this logic will involve change because over the past 30 years the U.S. military has grown accustomed to surging forces unopposed into a combat theater, initiating conventional operations at a time of its choosing, and then decisively defeating adversary countries over the span of a few weeks to months.

Yet as American military advantages narrow and potential adversaries expand their abilities to strike at U.S. forces forward while also hindering American reinforcement surges into theaters, such an approach will no longer suffice. Indeed, if the United States prematurely deploys or dispatches campaign-critical forces substantially into a theater's contested zones, it risks their destruction or disablement in the event of conflict. For instance, U.S. warships that were once

secure in their Japanese ports when China could not strike accurately against these facilities are now imperiled there in the event of war.

Framework for Optimal Deployment

Accordingly, the United States needs a framework for determining how to optimally deploy its conventional forces to deter most effectively in light of more capable potential opponents. Such an approach should build on the following model informed by conventional deterrence thinking.

The first layer of forces are those that must be deployed in close proximity to a potential contested zone to allow them to immediately arrest and inflict costs upon an opponent's offensive. These forces should be capable of absorbing an aggressor's withering conventional first strike with adequate allotments for losses, then rallying to arrest the aggressor's offensive progress and contribute to preventing a fait accompli U.S. defeat. Submarines, tactical aircraft suited for dispersed operations from austere airbases, and dispersible ground forces that can immediately arrest an aggressor's land offensive or threaten an aggressor's use of the sea or air within the contested zone exemplify the kinds of forces that should be allocated to this layer.

Many of these forces would need to be permanently stationed near frontline areas in peacetime so that they would not have to be deployed in the midst of tensions, a posture that could well undermine crisis stability and unfavorably compel the United States to appear to be the party responsible for escalation. Land-based frontline presence forces would need large, hardened, and dispersed stockpiles of munitions as well as other stores to account for an aggressor's likely ability to pressure U.S. and allied supply lines early in a conflict. Some light "tripwire" forces might also be added to this echelon's land and sea contingents during peacetime to promote deterrence, but they would not be expected to play major combat roles if a war broke out. Such tripwire forces might be particularly suitable for more symbolic showing the flag operations.



U.S. Air Force joint terminal attack controller uses laser rangefinder designator for close air support training mission at Grayling Air Gunnery Range, Grayling, Michigan, July 29, 2015 (U.S. Air National Guard/Scott Thompson)

Presence forces that would be critical to preventing an aggressor's quick victory should be allocated to a second and much heavier layer and would be positioned at the contested zone's periphery during a crisis. Nothing would prevent these forces from conducting peacetime training or engagement operations in forward areas that might be contested in a conflict. The key would be to base these forces outside likely contested zones and to be able to quickly sortie or disperse them in a crisis to reduce an aggressor's opportunities for preemptive attacks. Ground forces sized to quickly reinforce the frontlines from rearward garrisons in-theater, aircraft carriers, ships capable of supporting amphibious operations, large naval surface combatants, and theater-range land-based air forces exemplify the kinds of forces that should be allocated to this echelon. The air and naval forces in this contingent would be used to provide frontline forces with combined arms support, with the caveat that they would typically do so by conducting brief forays into the contested zone during the early phases of a war, as dictated by calculated risk and operational conditions.

It is of vital importance to appreciate that the use of light forces as a tripwire at the frontline would not be credible without the second layer's latent backing from "over the horizon" locations. Furthermore, the second echelon would be responsible for ensuring the protection of the sea, air, and overland transportation routes necessary for allies' basic economic sustenance, frontline forces' logistical sustainment, and the flow of U.S. reinforcements and materiel into the theater during a war's first days and weeks.⁷

While forward-deployed forces would focus on stemming and bloodying an adversary's advance, actual war-winning forces would have to be surged from the continental United States. These forces would fall into four categories:

- forces that conduct combat operations directly from their bases (for example, intercontinental-range bombers)
- forces able to quickly arrive in the theater (surge-ready theater-range aircraft, airmobile Army units, and

Army and Marine units designed to marry up with equipment prepositioned in theater)

- forces ready for deployment on short notice but that could take a week or more to arrive in the theater (surge-ready U.S. naval forces)
- forces that require lengthy preparation to be ready for overseas combat (the rest of the deployable joint force).

With the exception of the immediately employable long-range bombers, these surge forces would build up over days to weeks, accumulating the military capability to allow the joint force to eject or defeat enemy forces and/or impose such costs on the adversary as to compel him to terminate the conflict on acceptable terms.

Adapting U.S. military posture to this approach would require substantial changes. To start with, the Department of Defense should redesign its contingency plans for major conflicts to conform to this logic, such that they focus on making use of available

peacetime U.S. forces in theater, backed by long-range weaponry as well as aircraft to the maximum extent possible, to delay and bloody (if not deny) adversaries' efforts to score quick and cheap gains through aggression. In other words, rather than concentrate on achieving rapid and decisive victory, which would be exceedingly difficult against the likes of Russia or China, the United States should instead strive to ensure that any conflict these nations would initiate would result in a costly, risky, and uncertain contest in which they would clearly be the aggressor, and one in which the United States would be ready and capable of deploying its surge forces for decisive effect.

Fortunately, a contingency response along the above lines and the peacetime posture to enable it could be executable before 2020 using systems and platforms that exist today or are being delivered within that timeframe. Doing so, however, would need to proceed from near-term efforts by the Defense Department to develop doctrine and operating concepts, improve training, and field off-the-shelf technologies that extract greater combat readiness and capacity from available forces.

Measures to Strengthen Warfighting Capabilities

One approach is to develop new operating concepts that enable rapid reinforcement of the two peacetime forward layers. Forces and materiel would need to be surged forward from bases in a theater's rear areas and from the United States itself in the face of the adversary's probable efforts to retard or block those flows. Cold War-era surge concepts, such as the Return of Forces to Germany (Reforger), ought to be closely studied to harvest ideas that may be applicable to today's circumstances. More attention would need to be paid to how reinforcements would be protected as they enter an opposed theater and then proceed toward their destinations by air, sea, and land.

A second method is through operating concepts and doctrine to address the division of labor between long- and

short-range strike forces. History suggests that munitions expenditure rates in war will be well in excess of peacetime estimates, and complex long-range strike weapons are less likely to be quickly producible in wartime than guidance kits for short-range strike weapons.⁸ It would therefore be necessary to allocate the scarce inventories of the former toward punching holes in an adversary's defenses and suppressing an adversary's operations. This would allow the two forward echelons to obtain greater margins of temporary localized superiority for their operations within a contested zone early in a war. It would also pave the way for the entire joint force to use comparatively more plentiful and readily producible shorter range munitions over the course of a protracted conflict.

A third avenue is via doctrine and plans that embrace dispersed operations to reduce forward forces' susceptibility to attack within a contested zone. To do this, the Services as well as the combatant commanders would need to develop viable approaches for logistical support and supply line protection of dispersed forces. New tactics and procedures would also be needed to enable on-scene coordination/cooperation among the different Services' combat arms. Additionally, combatant commanders would need to work with their allied counterparts to develop suitable forward locations for ad hoc airbases, logistical distribution sites, mobile sensor and weapons launcher positions, relocatable headquarters sites, and the like.

A fourth method is through a more decentralized command and control doctrine that embraces delegation of tactical initiative to the lowest practicable level. Also known as "mission command," this is intended to account for the impossibility of exercising tightly centralized tactical control over dispersed forward forces in a supremely complex and dynamic battlespace. This also accounts for the certainty that adversaries would strive to disrupt and exploit U.S. command, control, and communications pathways through kinetic as well as nonkinetic means. Much experimentation, training, and "cultural adjustment" would be necessary for forces to become proficient in

this "trust-based" approach to command and control.

A fifth route is through a vastly greater attention to electronic warfare. Improved electronic warfare capabilities are critical to protecting forward forces from adversaries' wide-area surveillance, reconnaissance, and strike assets. While it would take the better part of the next decade to broadly introduce the next-generation electronic warfare systems currently in the development pipeline throughout the joint force, mature advanced electronic warfare technologies that already exist could nonetheless be rapidly packaged for use by forward forces as interim solutions until that time.⁹ It also follows that the Services would need to do much to condition their forward-deploying forces so that they could safely and effectively conduct complex operations under restrictive electromagnetic emissions control, not to mention under an adversary's electromagnetic opposition. The ability to smartly employ electromagnetic deception while countering the adversary's attempts to do the same would be particularly crucial.

Improved tactical training regimes constitute a potential sixth area of effort. Rigorous, routine, and realistic tactical training is essential to the combat readiness of forces preparing for peacetime forward presence missions. In this era of constrained training budgets, tactical-level commanders still have many training tools and opportunities at their disposal that do not require units to leave their garrisons, take to the air, or go to sea. The Services should accordingly expand use of off-the-shelf simulation technologies as much as possible to enable tactical training events that would otherwise be too difficult or expensive to conduct in actual environments.¹⁰

A final set of efforts could take into account that many of our forward allies would be core contributors to the frontline echelon as they would be inherent parties to conflicts waged in their defense. It stands to reason that these allies' forces could do much to multiply forward-deployed U.S. forces' combat potential. For example, many



Ships from USS *George H.W. Bush* Carrier Strike Group simulate strait transit during predeployment evaluation, December 10, 2013 (U.S. Navy/Justin Wolpert)

have proposed that multinational Brigade Combat Teams reporting to the Supreme Allied Commander Europe could be formed using ground unit contributions from the United States and its North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Allies to deter Russian aggression against the Baltics.¹¹ Similarly, a standing NATO maritime task force could be established for the Baltics that includes not only warships but also land-based aircraft, air and missile defenses, and anti-ship missile batteries. Combatant commanders' efforts to cultivate these kinds of combined forces, plus U.S. armaments sales or financial or technical assistance that helps allies procure off-the-shelf capabilities, could have disproportionately high returns on investment.

Taken together, the aforementioned measures offer great promise for strengthening the warfighting capabilities—and thus the conventional deterrence credibility—of U.S. forward forces in relatively short order. It is clear, though, that the trends driving the U.S. military's presence-versus-readiness challenges will not be diminishing anytime soon. Indeed, if anything, those trends will only worsen during the 2020s.

Unfortunately, the same may well be true of overall fiscal pressures on defense acquisition. As a result, technology research, development, and procurement priority decisions made today will have an outsized impact on forward forces' warfighting capabilities in the mid-2020s and beyond.

Five Critical Capabilities

Five capability areas in particular will be critical to developing a joint force that can prevail in regional wars while still performing peacetime presence missions at a reasonable level:

- Forward forces would need affordable and wartime mass-producible guided munitions that are “good enough” for waging protracted conflicts. This means that there would be tradeoffs between weapon capabilities and the numbers that could be quickly manufactured using available commercial electronics and other materials, tested, and then delivered during a conflict.
- As the effective strike ranges of potential adversaries continue to increase and contested zone sizes expand accordingly, many U.S. air-

bases used early in a war would need to be located at increasing distances from the frontline. This means U.S. aircraft performing missions in support of the frontline or second echelon would need greater range, on-station endurance, and payload capacity than the fighters we presently have or will soon field. This highlights key attributes for the Air Force's planned long-range strike platform as well as for the Navy's proposed F/A-XX fighter. The latter in particular would need to take on the long-range fleet air defense role last performed by the F-14.

- Since the strike capabilities of potential adversaries would hold forward port facilities at risk, and since every day of transit from forward areas to rearward ports represents time that warships are not fighting at the front, the Navy should equip its logistics ships with the capability to reload surface combatants' vertical launchers and submarine magazines at sea or in anchorage. Failure to do so would present a potentially campaign-breaking problem for forward naval surface and submarine forces.

- Unmanned systems will provide future forward forces with dramatically expanded capabilities. Particularly important will be the use of such systems as communications relays within a contested zone; the resultant highly directional line-of-sight pathways will be extraordinarily difficult for adversaries to detect, degrade, or exploit. Unmanned systems will also play central roles in electronic warfare, whether as direction-finding sensors, decoys, or electronic attack platforms. Unmanned systems will additionally be needed as scouts to support high-confidence classification of targets and avoid weapons or strike platform wastage, to serve as “wingmen” for manned platforms, and to serve as strike platforms themselves.
- Directed energy weapons may offer forward forces radically expanded capability enhancements. Electromagnetic railgun technologies offer ground and surface naval forces the tantalizing promise of being able to strike targets with inexpensive projectiles from increased standoff ranges. Similarly, high energy laser systems may be ideally suited as point defense weapons against an adversary’s use of inexpensive air or surface vehicle swarms. The electro-optical/infrared sensors used to aim lasers will additionally provide U.S. forces with an excellent situational awareness tool, most notably when radars are being jammed.

Investments in these five areas should be harmonized among the Services as well as among core allies. This would allow the creation of constructive capability redundancies while avoiding unnecessary duplications of effort. Cooperative research and development with allies may be especially beneficial in this regard, as not all good ideas or cutting-edge technologies are born, or best or most efficiently developed, in America. The more U.S. and allied forces coordinate or share responsibilities for holding the line forward in specific theaters, the more that armaments cooperation—and

foreign military sales as well as direct commercial sales—could strengthen those bulwarks.

A Present and Capable Force

The recommendations offered here are intended to be stimulative and suggestive rather than exhaustive or definitive. Hopefully, they will provide defense decisionmakers and those who influence them with a framework for ideas and ways of grappling with the need to augment the joint force’s warfighting capability while enabling presence missions. But perhaps the most significant result would be for the defense establishment simply to recognize the existence and severity of the problem, the reality of the tradeoffs involved, and the need for earnest and creative responses.

Recognition of the problem would be significant because the formidable military buildups of potential adversaries and the general diffusion of advanced military technology mean that the U.S. defense establishment needs to change. The United States can no longer afford the luxury it enjoyed during the years following the collapse of the Soviet Union, when the United States, bestriding the world like a military colossus, could easily—almost thoughtlessly—reconcile the demands of warfighting prowess with the advantages of forward presence. Instead, in a world in which American forces are increasingly vulnerable and in which the United States will have to prepare to struggle for mastery of every domain against increasingly capable opponents, the U.S. defense establishment needs to concentrate much more on the increasingly daunting task of ensuring that the joint force can effectively fight and prevail in a conflict with America’s plausible foes.

Effective conventional deterrence derives ultimately not from the mere sight or knowledge of the defender’s presence, but from respect for his evident ability and resolve to defend and overcome and, usually less reliably, to punish. A force that is present but not capable of inflicting damage or inducing frustration sufficient to dissuade a potential aggressor is not a force that will instill the fear needed to deter. Far better for

deterrence is a force that can adequately punish or defeat a prospective aggressor. Forward and visible presence will often be reconcilable with this need, especially in peacetime; but when it is not reconcilable, the U.S. defense establishment must give due priority to the warfighting ability of the joint force. For ultimately, it is in the ability of the U.S. Armed Forces to do grave damage to or defeat opponents that U.S. coercive strength lies. A military strategy that neglects this simple but unforgiving reality risks creating a hollow force and, ultimately, a paper tiger. JFQ

Notes

¹ See, for example, *Quadrennial Defense Review* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 1997), 39, available at <www.bits.de/NRANEU/others/strategy/qdr97.pdf>; *Quadrennial Defense Review* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2001), 11, 25; and *The National Military Strategy of the United States of America 2015* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, June 2015), 9, 11.

² The Chinese People’s Liberation Army’s (PLA’s) ability to conduct long-range anti-ship attacks, though, is highly dependent on an integrated theater-wide ocean surveillance and reconnaissance sensor network. This “system of systems” contains many inherent vulnerabilities that suggest it would be most capable at the outbreak of a war, and thereafter would suffer increasing degradation due to U.S. use of deception, electronic and cyber attacks, and physical attacks to suppress, disrupt, confuse, or destroy the PLA’s ability to maintain a high-confidence “picture” of the battlespace. For more elaboration, see Jonathan F. Solomon, “Defending the Fleet from China’s Anti-Ship Ballistic Missile: Naval Deception’s Roles in Sea-Based Missile Defense” (Master’s thesis, Georgetown University, 2011); and Jonathan F. Solomon, “Maritime Deception and Concealment: Concepts for Defeating Wide-Area Oceanic Surveillance-Reconnaissance-Strike Networks,” *Naval War College Review* 66, no. 4 (Autumn 2013), 87–116.

³ See Michael S. Gerson, “Conventional Deterrence in the Second Nuclear Age,” *Parameters* 39, no. 3 (Autumn 2009), 32–48; Edward Rhodes, “Conventional Deterrence,” *Comparative Strategy* 19, no. 3 (Fall 2000), 221–253; and Jonathan F. Solomon, “Demystifying Conventional Deterrence: Great Power Conflict and East Asian Peace,” *Strategic Studies Quarterly* (Winter 2013), 117–157.

⁴ For an excellent exposition of this point, see Evan Braden Montgomery, “Contested Primacy in the Western Pacific: China’s Rise



Ships from U.S. and Indian navies and Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force participate in trilateral naval field training exercise Malabar 2014 to improve collective maritime relationship and increase understanding in multinational operations, July 30, 2014 (U.S. Navy/Chris Cavagnaro)

and the Future of U.S. Power Projection,” *International Security* 38, no. 4 (Spring 2014), 115–149.

⁵ Paul K. Huth, *Extended Deterrence and the Prevention of War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988). See in particular pages 56–76. See also Solomon, “Demystifying Conventional Deterrence.”

⁶ See “A Conversation with Robert O. Work,” Council on Foreign Relations, September 30, 2014, available at <www.cfr.org/asia-and-pacific/deputy-secretary-defense-rob-ert-work-asia-pacific-rebalance/p35728>; and Speech as Delivered by Deputy Secretary of Defense Bob Work at McAleese/Credit Suisse Defense Programs Conference, Washington, DC, March 17, 2015, available at <www.defense.gov/News/Speeches/Speech-View/Article/606653/mcaleesecredit-suisse-de-fense-programs-conference>.

⁷ For the authors’ discussion of this kind of presence in Europe, see Elbridge Colby and Jonathan F. Solomon, “Conventional Defense and Deterrence in Europe,” *Survival-Global Politics and Strategy* 57, no. 6 (December 2015–January 2016), 21–50.

⁸ For elaboration on this point, see Jonathan F. Solomon, “Guided Munitions Inventory Management, Producibility, and

Their Effects on Strategy (Part 1 of 2),” *Information Dissemination Blog*, November 3, 2014, available at <www.informationdissemination.net/2014/11/guided-munitions-inventory-management.html>; and Jonathan F. Solomon, “Guided Munitions Inventory Management, Producibility, and their Effects on Strategy (Part 2 of 2),” *Information Dissemination Blog*, November 4, 2014, available at <www.informationdissemination.net/2014/11/guided-munitions-inventory-management_4.html>.

⁹ For example, see the discussion of interim off-the-shelf electronic warfare systems fielded by the U.S. Army for operations in Afghanistan, as well as discussion of the Army’s timeline for acquiring its next-generation electronic warfare systems in Joe Gould, “Electronic Warfare: What the U.S. Army Can Learn from Ukraine,” *Defense News*, August 4, 2015, available at <www.defensenews.com/story/defense/policy-budget/warfare/2015/08/02/us-army-ukraine-russia-electronic-warfare/30913397/>.

¹⁰ For an assessment of how this point is already being implemented by the U.S. Navy, see Jonathan F. Solomon, “The Use of Simulators and Synthetic Environments for Advanced Tactical Training,” *Information Dissemination*

Blog, September 3, 2015, available at <<http://www.informationdissemination.net/2015/09/the-use-of-simulators-and-synthetic.html>>.

¹¹ Terrence K. Kelly, “Stop Putin’s Next Invasion Before It Starts,” *U.S. News and World Report*, March 20, 2015, available at <www.usnews.com/opinion/blogs/world-report/2015/03/20/stop-putins-aggression-with-us-forces-in-eastern-europe>.