



# From the Chairman

## Strategic Challenges and Implications

I have previously written in this column to share with you the areas where I am devoting my time and focus: joint readiness, joint warfighting capability, and the development of leaders for the future. I have also shared with you my thoughts regarding the imperative for the Joint Force to remain focused on and responsive to the current National Command Authority. That responsiveness underpins healthy civil-military relations and is the hallmark of the Profession of Arms. I now write to share with you how we are channeling these priorities and professional focus into execution.

### Joint Readiness

One of my priorities is joint readiness, which, from my perspective, is an ongoing engagement with the President and Secretary of Defense to provide timely and viable military options that, in the event of a crisis or contingency, are responsive to the desired policy endstate objectives of the National Command Authority. I also consider flexibility (transitioning from one crisis or contingency to another across the range of military options) and resiliency (sustaining what the Joint Force is doing) as part of joint readiness. Underlining the principles of

responsiveness, flexibility, and resiliency is ensuring that our men and women never enter a fair fight.

### Strategic Challenges

Many of you have heard me talk about five strategic challenges: the four potential state competitors of Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea, and the nonstate challenge of violent extremist organizations. We colloquially refer to these five challenges as the 4+1. But these challenges cannot be the only ones we plan against. I am humble about our ability to predict the future, so I use the 4+1 as a planning construct. Bench-

marking the Joint Force against one of these challenges or two of these state challenges simultaneously, along with violent extremism, helps inform our assessment of the current inventory of current joint capabilities and capacities. Looking at the trajectory of capability development in the context of the 4+1 also informs priorities for joint capability development. I assume that if we build a force that can deal with the challenges associated with the 4+1 today and in the future, we will have a Joint Force that can respond to the unexpected and that has a competitive advantage against any potential adversary.

## Implications

The five strategic challenges have a number of implications for the Joint Force. The first one is foundational. We need a balanced inventory of joint capabilities that allow us to deter and defeat potential adversaries across the full range of military operations. As a nation, we do not have the luxury of choosing between a force that can fight the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant and one that can deter and defeat a peer competitor. Nor do we have the luxury of choosing between meeting our current operational requirements and developing the capabilities we need to meet tomorrow's requirements. Getting that balance right—between current requirements and future requirements—will probably be one of the most important non-operational challenges we have as a team over the next few years.

The second implication is the need for us to more effectively employ the military instrument of national power to address the challenges Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea present. Each of these nations, in different ways, fully leverages economic coercion, political influence, unconventional warfare, information operations, cyber operations, and military posture to advance their interests. This is competition with a military dimension that falls below the threshold that would trigger a traditional and decisive military response. And since these countries compete in ways that mute our response, they

continue to advance their interests at the qualitative and quantitative expense of our own.

The third implication, and to me one of the most significant, is that we have a mandate to keep pace with the character of war in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. While the nature of war—the violent clash of political will—has not changed, we should expect that any future conflict is going to be transregional, rapidly crossing the boundaries of geographic combatant commands; multidomain, simultaneously involving combinations of land, sea, air, space, and cyberspace operational domains; and multifunctional, including conventional operations, special operations, ballistic missiles, strike, cyber, and space capabilities. Not only will the pace and scope of future conflict be accelerated, but we are also going to see these functional capabilities fielded by both state and nonstate actors who will continually look for ways to harness those capabilities to exploit our vulnerabilities.

Therefore, the fourth implication is the need for greater strategic integration in the future, both in our strategy development and in our decisionmaking processes. The intent is to build a framework within which we can address these 4+1 challenges across the five operational domains with which we are dealing and the many associated functions. By expanding the way we develop our approach to Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea, we are working to expand the intellectual capital that we are expending on these challenge sets, with the intended result of opening the aperture of viable and timely options to our National Command Authority. The next version of the National Military Strategy is being written to support this endstate.

## Strategic Integration

To increase strategic integration in our decisionmaking process, the Joint Staff and I are working on how to better organize ourselves and organize information from across the Joint Force to better facilitate National Command Authority decisionmaking in a timely manner. We need to give the President and Secretary of Defense the right

information on a routine basis so they can have real-time ability to see the fight; to visualize in time and space the opportunities to seize the initiative; and to better identify potential opportunity costs. Over time, as we successfully help the Secretary of Defense to see the Joint Force better, it will inform the assessment process to make recommendations for the prioritization and allocation of resources across all the combatant commands. In short, we are working to develop the conditions to exercise mission command at the strategic level.

What drives me, and what motivates our Joint Staff team, is the changing character of war. How do we get more agile? How do we frame decisions for our senior leadership in a more effective way? Just like every other endeavor in our profession, it begins with a common understanding of the threat, and a common appreciation for the capabilities and limitations of the Joint Force, and then a framework within which we could make real-time decisions that will most effectively employ that force.

It remains an honor to serve as your Chairman, and I look forward to hearing from you. JFQ

**GENERAL JOSEPH F. DUNFORD, JR.**  
Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

