



Damage Controlman tests countermeasure wash-down system on forecastle aboard USS *Green Bay*, Gulf of Thailand, February 9, 2017 (U.S. Navy/Chris Williamson)

A New Approach to Joint Concepts

By Erik Schwarz

Lieutenant Colonel Erik Schwarz, USAF, is an Intelligence Officer in the Joint Concepts Division, Joint Staff J7.

The future operating environment will feature broad changes in the character of warfare. Driven

by the rise of competent and competitive states; economic, social, and environmental challenges; and rapidly evolving technologies, these changes will necessitate innovation within the Department of Defense (DOD). Innovation must develop and employ new capabilities, organizational constructs, and approaches to warfighting to maintain competitive advantage over a broad range of potential adversaries. However, plans for innovation within DOD must not start with a blank sheet of paper. Rather, the joint force should be provided with a blueprint for innovation to channel creativity toward addressing specific operational challenges. Innovation aligned with strategy will help ensure that the future joint force will have the ability to stand firm, while at the same time maintain responsiveness to adapt and respond in new ways as the environment evolves.

In the past, joint operating concepts were developed to describe how the joint force would execute military operations within a specific mission area.¹ However, the 2016 National Military Strategy reoriented the strategic framework for the joint force, identifying Russia, China, Iran, North Korea, and violent extremist organizations—commonly referred to as “4+1”—as the most pressing challenges.² These challenges, when aggregated, serve to benchmark and inform capability development and defense innovation.³ To align joint concept development with strategic guidance, the decision was made to adopt a challenge-based structure for future operating concepts. This change will enable the family of joint concepts, consisting of the capstone concept, joint operating concepts, and supporting concepts, to extend the challenge-based framework out to 2035 and will realize the Chairman’s vision for joint concepts “offering educated judgments about future military challenges . . . defining future requirements and addressing gaps in our existing approaches and capabilities.”⁴

Applying the challenge-based framework to the family of joint concepts will provide real-world context to the environment in which the future joint force

will be called to operate. This reinforces clear thinking about the true character of future challenges and helps to guard against building the force for the fight we want rather than the fight we will actually face. Regardless of future technological innovation, war will remain a human endeavor, a competition between and among belligerents. The contextual aspects of politics, history, culture, and geography, as well as technological capabilities, must be considered as joint concepts propose new ways of operating. Ultimately, the challenge-based family of joint concepts will provide a blueprint for the joint force out to 2035 with the fidelity to drive future force development and inform senior leaders as they make investment decisions today to prepare the joint force for tomorrow.

Family of Joint Concepts

Joint concepts provide solutions to compelling, real-world challenges, both current and envisioned, for which existing doctrinal approaches and joint capabilities are deemed inadequate.⁵ As the range of strategic goals evolve and battlefield conditions, technology, and opposing force capabilities change, the family of joint concepts provides an overarching structure to address these challenges in a comprehensive and strategically relevant way (see figure). When applied comprehensively, the family of joint concepts will support the Chairman's best military advice to alter the trajectory of future risk.

Capstone Concept. The capstone concept represents the Chairman's unifying vision for how the joint force must adapt and evolve to counter future challenges. It provides a common view of the future operating environment and vision for how the joint force will conduct globally integrated operations. The National Military Strategy's Secretary of Defense Global Integration annex defines *global integration* as "the arrangement of cohesive military actions in time, space, and purpose, executed as a whole to address transregional, multidomain, and multifunctional challenges."⁶ The capstone concept will incorporate and extend this vision of globally integrated operations to

provide comprehensive options to meet future strategic challenges. A capstone concept will be developed when the confluence of new concepts, strategies, lessons learned, and emergent challenges necessitates an updated, unifying vision for future force development.

The capstone concept is developed in collaboration with combatant commanders and Service chiefs, enabling horizontal integration of force development responsibilities and priorities. Much as the National Military Strategy is the foundation for strategic integration, planning, and resource allocation for the joint force out to 2025, the capstone concept forms this foundation for future force development across the spectrum of doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership and education, personnel, facilities, and policy (DOTMLPF-P).

Joint Operating Concepts. Joint operating concepts that are synchronized with and complementary to national strategy provide a clear vision of how the joint force may be called to operate in the future operating environment. By establishing touchpoints between strategy and a vision of future joint operations, joint operating concepts arm the Chairman with the required information to balance near- and mid-term risk with long-term force development requirements.

The Joint Staff, in coordination with the Services and combatant commands, are developing joint operating concepts that correspond to the 4+1 priority challenges identified in the National Military Strategy. The joint operating concepts should not be viewed as a prediction of future conflict. Rather, these priority challenges are being utilized as benchmarks for future force development, recognizing that adversaries are developing capabilities and stratagems to exploit perceived vulnerabilities in our way of war. Holistically, the 4+1 represent great power competitors with modernized nuclear arsenals and advanced counter-power projection capabilities, who export malign influence, pose threats to homeland security and regional peace, and perpetuate violent extremism. By integrating concept-required capabilities from the joint operating concepts into

a coherent set of force development recommendations, senior leaders will be better prepared to make capability and capacity decisions that provide the joint force with the inherent operational flexibility necessary to address any unexpected or emergent challenge.

By leveraging the joint operating environment and intelligence estimates, the joint operating concepts will project future capabilities and strategies of the adversary out to 2035. These will be compared to anticipated U.S. and allied capabilities and strategies to expose shortfalls the joint force will face if the force development trajectory is not altered. The concept will then describe alternate methods of operating to mitigate these shortfalls and identify the corresponding implications for joint force development.

Supporting Concepts. Supporting concepts describe how the future joint force will execute a function, domain, or activity to allow a future joint force commander to synchronize, integrate, and direct joint operations. Supporting concepts may be specific to a joint operating concept or may support multiple joint operating concepts equally. Ultimately, they will add depth and breadth to the compelling operational approaches required to meet the challenges of the future. There is a significant library of active joint concepts that serve as the baseline supporting concepts for the family of joint concepts.⁷ Future supporting concepts will be developed as additional conceptual gaps are identified during the development of the challenge-based joint operating concepts.

What Will the Challenge-Based Joint Operating Concepts Do?

The persistent degradation of joint force readiness resulting from 16 years of war, a deteriorating global security situation, and adversaries' growing capability to contest U.S. military capabilities require fundamental changes to how we develop the future joint force. New capabilities and weapon systems will be necessary, but we will not be able to simply purchase competitive advantage. New operational approaches must be developed so we can rethink how we



USS *Ronald Reagan*, USS *Theodore Roosevelt*, and USS *Nimitz* conduct operations in international waters as part of three-carrier strike force exercise, Western Pacific, November 12, 2017 (U.S. Navy/James Ku)

use existing capabilities, integrate new capabilities, and present our adversaries with unsolvable dilemmas. Joint operating concepts will serve as the foundation of operational adaptation to convert potential military strength into actual combat power.

The decision to adopt the 4+1 challenge-based construct for the joint operating concepts has required a significant shift in how we approach concept development. This new approach is focused on meeting the operational needs of a future joint force commander. Joint operating concepts should serve as precursors for future plans, expanding the options available to joint force commanders by anticipating changes in the character of war, delivering joint force capabilities, and proposing alternate approaches necessary to maintain competitive overmatch.

While joint operating concepts will inform future plans, it is important not to view them as operational or contingency plans. Rather than address a specific operational challenge, each joint operating concept will address the full span of missions while accounting for the transregional, multidomain, and multifunctional aspects of the challenge.⁸ This broad approach will enable the operationalization of the concepts by describing how the joint force must be integrated across functions, domains, organizations, and geographic boundaries.

To ensure operational relevance of the challenge-based joint operating concepts, the decision was made to write the documents at the classified level. This has enabled the incorporation of Service and combatant commander assessments, wargame results, and intelligence products as the foundation for joint operating concept development. While these

assessments—particularly those from the combatant commands—tend to focus on near- and mid-term challenges, they provide useful insights into challenges that current joint force commanders are facing and highlight areas where competitive overmatch is eroding relative to the 4+1 challenges.

The joint operating concept writing teams require a detailed understanding of how each of the 4+1 challenges affects national objectives, military capabilities, operational concepts, socioeconomic trends, and threat perceptions from today through 2035. To achieve this in-depth understanding, operations, planning, and intelligence subject matter experts from across the combatant commands, Services, and Intelligence Community have been incorporated into the core writing teams for each concept. This approach integrates diverse perspectives into the development process. Ultimately, the

process of reexamining and revalidating the challenges and proposed solutions serves to enhance the concepts' credibility and utility.

Finally, by integrating the development of the joint operating concepts across the Services and combatant commands, proposed solutions will truly reflect the aspirational goal of globally integrated operations. The ideas will break the longstanding paradigm of Service interdependence and drive the future joint force toward true integration. The goal is to provide the future joint force commander with a force capable of operating and winning in the future operating environment, however it may manifest.

Integration

Each of the joint operating concepts will present a hypothesis for how the joint force could operate to achieve national military objectives relative to 4+1 challenges. These potential solutions will include concept-required capabilities that will span the range of DOTMLPF-P. However, the family of joint concepts is not suggesting that the future joint force will require five unique sets of capabilities to address the most pressing challenges. Rather, aggregation and analysis of required capabilities across the family are required to ensure that future force development activities provide solutions capable of addressing the full range of future challenges.

A comprehensive understanding across the full range of priority challenges will not only serve to identify capability requirements that are cross-cutting but will also highlight challenge-specific, high-consequence capability requirements. By providing a comprehensive understanding of future capability requirements, senior leaders will be able to make informed joint force development decisions with an understanding of future risk balanced with current operational requirements.

To be successful, this effort requires a shift from the current view that the joint force exists when the Services are employed by combatant commands. A common, DOD-wide view of future

force development requires integrated joint force capability development, resourcing, and prioritization from inception. To maintain competitive overmatch, the family of joint concepts must lead the Services' concept and capability development processes by providing a single standard for how the future joint force must operate. This will likely force us to rethink how we approach domain-specific concept development and drive hard choices about the future trajectory of Service capabilities.

Ultimately, the family of joint concepts must serve as a shared point of departure for future joint force development. The ideas in the concepts must be continually evaluated and refined through wargames, experiments, and studies. As the conceptual ideas are honed, they must inform the Chairman's tools for influencing the budgeting process—namely, the Chairman's Risk Assessment and the Chairman's Program Recommendation—to ensure a unified view of near-term and future joint force requirements.

The operating environment that the joint force will be called to operate in, both today and into the future, is marked by contested norms and persistent disorder. The joint force cannot mortgage its ability to compete below the threshold of armed conflict to dominate the conventional battlefield. Nor can we further delay future force development to meet our current operational requirements and buyback readiness.

The family of joint concepts will provide the Chairman and Services with a blueprint required to meet the operational challenges of the future operating environment. The family will be innovative, operationally relevant, and provide novel solutions to our most pressing challenges to guide senior leader priorities for future force development. Joint concepts will enable the Chairman to alter the trajectory of future risk and ensure that future joint force commanders are armed with the competitive advantage to fight and win the Nation's wars. JFQ

Notes

¹ The previous family of joint concepts contained cooperative security, deterrence operations, irregular warfare, major combat operations, stability operations, and homeland defense/civil support.

² *National Military Strategy* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, November 11, 2016), foreword. This document is CLASSIFIED.

³ Joseph F. Dunford, Jr., "Meeting Today's Global Security Challenges," speech, Washington, DC, March 29, 2016.

⁴ Joseph F. Dunford, Jr., "Maintaining a Boxer's Stance," *Joint Force Quarterly* 86 (3rd Quarter 2017), 3.

⁵ Joint Publication 1, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, March 25, 2013, Incorporating Change 1, July 12, 2017), vi-9, available at <<https://fas.org/irp/doddir/dod/jp1.pdf>>.

⁶ *National Military Strategy*, Secretary of Defense Global Integration annex, 1. This passage is UNCLASSIFIED.

⁷ The full library of joint concepts is available at <www.jcs.mil/Doctrine/Joint-Concepts/Joint-Concepts/>.

⁸ These missions are to shape or contain, deter or deny, disrupt or degrade, and compel or destroy.