

General Dunford works aboard C-130 aircraft at Bagram Airfield before visit to Task Force–Southwest at Camp Shorab, Helmand Province, March 22, 2018 (DOD/Dominique A. Pineiro)



The Character of War and Strategic Landscape Have Changed

Over the past two decades, the strategic landscape has changed dramatically. While the fundamental nature of war has not changed, the pace of change and modern technology, coupled with shifts in the nature of geopolitical competition, have altered the character of war in the 21st century.

Advancements in space, information systems, cyberspace, electronic warfare, and missile technology have accelerated the speed and complexity of war. As a result, decision space has collapsed, and we can assume that any future conflict will involve all domains and cut across multiple geographic regions.

Today's strategic landscape is also extraordinarily volatile, and the Nation faces threats from an array of state and non-state actors. Revisionist powers such as China and Russia seek to undermine the

credibility of our alliances and limit our ability to project power. North Korea's efforts to develop a nuclear-capable, inter-continental ballistic missile now threaten the homeland and our allies in the Pacific. Iran routinely destabilizes its neighbors and threatens freedom of navigation while modernizing its maritime, missile, space, and cyber capabilities. Violent extremist organizations (VEOs), such as the so-called Islamic State (IS) and al Qaeda, remain a transregional threat to the homeland, our allies, and our way of life. These realities are why some have called today's operating environment the most challenging since World War II.

At the same time, the U.S. military's long-held competitive advantage has eroded. Our decisive victory in Operation *Desert Storm* was a wake-up call for our enemies; they observed that

our operational source of strength is the ability to project power where and when needed to advance U.S. interests and meet alliance commitments. This spurred dramatic tactical, operational, and strategic adaptations and accelerated modernization programs to asymmetrically counter our ability to project power. All the while, budget instability and the challenges of a decades-long campaign against violent extremism adversely affected our own modernization and capability development efforts required to preserve—or in some cases restore—our competitive advantage.

Additionally, the Joint Force lacks sufficient capacity to meet combatant command requirements. Over the past 16 years, we made a conscious choice to limit the size of the force to preserve scarce resources necessary for essential investments in immediate upgrades to critical capabilities. And requirements have not abated, as we assumed they would after major combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan ended. As a result, global demand for forces continues to exceed the inventory.

Finally, as a nation that thinks and acts globally, the United States cannot choose between a force that can address IS and other VEOs and one that can deter and defeat state actors with a full range of capabilities. We require a balanced force that can address the challenges outlined in the recently published National Defense Strategy and has the inherent flexibility to respond to the unexpected.

We Must Adapt to Maintain a Competitive Advantage

Advances in technology and the changing character of war require that our plans address all-domain, transregional challenges and conflict. In the past, we assumed most crises could be contained to one region. That assumption, in turn, drove regionally focused planning and decisionmaking processes. Today, this assumption no longer holds true. Our planning must adapt to provide a global perspective that views challenges holistically and enables execution of military campaigns with a flexibility and speed that outpaces our adversaries.

We must also be prepared to make decisions at the speed of relevance. While the cost of failure at the outset of conflict has always been high, in past conflicts there were opportunities to absorb costs and recover if something went wrong. Today, that cannot be assumed, and our strategic decisionmaking processes must adapt to keep pace. Senior leaders require routine access to synthesized information and intelligence to ensure their ability to see the fight in real time and seize initiative.

We must manage the force in a manner that allows us to meet day-to-day requirements, while maintaining readiness and the flexibility to respond to major contingencies and the unexpected. To ensure that the Joint Force provides viable options and is in position to execute when called on, our force posture must be optimized to strategic priorities and provide strength, agility, and resilience across regions and domains.

To arrest and, in time, reverse the erosion of our competitive advantage, our force development and design processes must deliver a Joint Force capable of competing and winning against any potential adversary. This future force must remain competitive in all domains, deny adversaries' ability to counter our strengths asymmetrically, and retain the ability to project power at a time and place of our choosing.

Finally, we must further develop leaders capable of thriving at the speed of war—leaders who can adapt to change, drive innovation, and thrive in uncertain, chaotic conditions. The nature of war has not changed, and, in a violent clash of wills, it is the human dimension that ultimately determines the success of any campaign.

The How of Global Integration

To address these imperatives, we are adapting our approach to planning, decisionmaking, force management, and force design. These processes are interdependent and mutually reinforcing—intended to drive the changes required to maintain our competitive advantage. Over the past 2 years, we have made progress in each of these areas, but more work remains.

The National Defense Strategy establishes clear priorities for the Department of Defense, and the National Military Strategy is nested within to provide a global framework for the Joint Force to operate across regions, domains, and functions. We reoriented the Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan to operationalize the strategy and developed Global Campaign Plans to provide a framework for planning an all-domain, transregional approach to the challenges outlined in the National Defense Strategy. These plans are designed to bring coherence to operations of all functional and geographic combatant commands.

The Joint Force is also improving how it frames decisions for the Secretary of Defense in an all-domain, transregional fight. This begins by developing a common intelligence picture and a shared understanding of global force posture, which then serves as a baseline to test operational plans and concepts through realistic and demanding exercises and wargames. By testing our assumptions and concepts, exercises and wargames provide senior leaders with the “reps-and-sets” necessary to build the implicit communication required to facilitate rapid decisionmaking in times of crisis.

Our force management processes are evolving to support the objectives laid out in the National Defense Strategy. Setting the globe begins by allocating resources against strategic priorities—optimizing the way we posture capabilities globally to support our strategy, provide strategic flexibility, and ensure our ability to respond rapidly to the unexpected. Once the globe is set, we are applying the concept of Dynamic Force Employment to provide proactive and scalable options for priority missions while maintaining readiness to respond to contingencies. In a global environment that demands strategic flexibility and freedom of action, these adaptations enable the Joint Force to seize the initiative rather than react when faced with multiple challenges.

To ensure our competitive advantage, we are implementing a process for force design that provides the Secretary with integrated solutions to drive the development of a more lethal force. This process

begins by assessing our ability to execute the strategy and compares our capabilities and capacities vis-à-vis our adversaries. Assessment findings shape the development of comprehensive materiel and nonmateriel recommendations that inform the Secretary's priorities for investment, concept development, experimentation, and innovation. This approach is designed to provide integrated solutions, across the Services, which ensure competitive advantage today and tomorrow.

Finally, we are reinvigorating strategic assessments to support all these efforts. Assessments provide the analytic rigor to inform our ability both to meet the current strategy and to develop a future force that maintains our competitive advantage. A cornerstone of this process is the Chairman's Risk Assessment, which evaluates our current ability to execute the National Military Strategy and provides a global perspective of risk across the Joint Force. And, in 2016, we published the Joint Military Net Assessment for the first time in 20 years—benchmarking the Joint Force against near-peer adversaries today and comparing our trajectory over the next 5 years. These assessments are essential to provide an analytic baseline for everything we do—from planning to force management and from exercise development to force design.

There is no preordained right to victory on the battlefield, and today the United States faces an extraordinarily complex and dynamic security environment. To keep pace with the changing character of war, we must globally integrate the way we plan, employ the force, and design the force of the future. If we fail to adapt, the Joint Force will lose the ability to compete. JFQ

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