



U.S. Marines with Force Reconnaissance Company, 3rd Reconnaissance Battalion, 3rd Marine Division, III Marine Expeditionary Force; British Royal Marines with J Company, 42 Commando; and U.S. Sailors with Explosive Ordnance Disposal Mobile Unit 5, attempt to breach door during raids training in Guam, March 20, 2018 (U.S. Marine Corps/Carl King)

Transregional Capstone Exercise

Training for Tomorrow's Fight

By William A. Buell, Erin Dorrance, and Robert West

Train the way you fight because you will fight the way you train.” Just about every U.S. military commander embraces this time-honored military mantra. In his column for *Joint Force Quarterly*, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) Joseph

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F. Dunford, Jr., describes how he sees the current and future fight. Noting the significant implications for how the joint force will fight, he writes, “it [is] probable that future conflicts will most often be transregional and fought across multiple domains and functions. Driven by this assumption, one of my highest warfighting priorities is to improve our ability to integrate joint capabilities in a transregional, multidomain, and multifunctional fight.”¹

In response to the Chairman’s guidance, the Joint Staff quickly implemented a Globally Integrated Exercise (GIE)

framework that promises to enhance training against the most challenging threats. To fully realize the CJCS vision for fully integrated transregional, multi-domain, and multifunctional capabilities across the joint force, however, the GIE framework should include a new Transregional Capstone Exercise (TCE) incorporating all geographic combatant commands (GCCMDs) and functional combatant commands (FCCMDs). While the joint force has shown steady progress toward exercising in multiple domains and across multiple functions within regional theaters, large-scale transregional

exercising remains in its infancy. This article highlights the transregional threat that the exercise should address, delineates some basic requirements, proposes four training objectives, and addresses three potential challenges to implementation.

Transregional Threats and Response

Militaries must now operate in a complex and dynamic world where several multifaceted real-world threats may affect an ever-growing battlefield. Not only do state actors such as Russia, China, and Iran have the capability to conduct transregional operations, but a variety of nonstate actors, such as the so-called Islamic State, al Qaeda, and a multitude of transnational criminal organizations (TCOs), also threaten to disrupt the international order across traditional combatant command boundaries. While globalization trends have connected countries around the world, they have also enabled threat networks and violent extremist organizations (VEOs) to operate on the global stage. In Admiral Kurt Tidd's 2017 posture statement for U.S. Southern Command, he states that some criminal networks in his area of responsibility are globally integrated enterprises with profit margins that rival Fortune 500 companies. These networks smuggle precursor chemicals and fentanyl from China into Central America and Mexico in order to make extremely potent heroin that causes overdose epidemics in the United States. There are networks that transport large cocaine shipments to the United States, West Africa, Europe, and Australia, while others make tremendous profits by illegally mining gold in Guyana, Peru, and Colombia. Other networks kidnap, money launder, and extort—all moving illicit goods across the globe.²

Combatant commanders face some subset of five key challenges (competing long-term with China and Russia, while deterring and countering North Korea, Iran, and VEOs), referred to as the “2+3” in their geographic region or functional area.³ Speaking at the annual Air Force Association conference

in 2016, General Dunford observed that such threats increasingly operate across the regional combatant command structure.⁴ For managing these threats, he recommended improving the ability of the Secretary of Defense to work across both geographic and functional combatant commanders and strengthening the Joint Staff.⁵

As early as 2013, a Joint Staff J7 Deployable Training Division paper on mission command and cross-domain synergy noted that, while leadership often discusses the benefits of cross-CCMD activities, the U.S. military has not fully understood or addressed challenges in cross-CCMD coordination. Moreover, how the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) would establish authorities, responsibilities, and processes with necessary Joint Staff support required for globally integrated operations outlined in the Capstone Concept for Joint Operations (CCJO) had not yet been tested.⁶ The J7 paper poignantly imagined reallocation processes for critical resources such as munitions, intelligence, support, strategic lift, and cyber assets as limiting to mission success in a global fight.⁷ While some initial progress in this area has been made, there are, no doubt, many other challenges the Department of Defense (DOD) has not considered that a global TCE could reveal.

A TCE involving all GCCMDs and FCCMDs would give Secretary James Mattis and General Dunford a realistic, in-time transregional training platform to prepare for conflict against the five key challenges. A total of five TCEs spread over time as part of the GIE framework would focus on each challenge—Russia, China, Iran, North Korea, and VEOs on a global scale—to focus training and allow sufficient time for planning. Currently, there are a handful of exercises that do, in fact, attempt to exercise transregionally with more than one CCMD. In February of 2017, the 3-week Austere Challenge exercise included four CCMDs: U.S. European Command, U.S. Northern Command, U.S. Pacific Command, and U.S. Strategic Command.⁸ U.S. European Command Commander General Curtis

M. Scaparrotti described the exercise as a complete success, stating that the exercise validated the ability to rapidly respond together with decisive and overwhelming success in Europe and to enable other CCMDs.⁹ Austere Challenge is a good initial step toward transregional exercising; however, it is time to build on that success by moving toward a new exercise built on the premise that conflict with the 2+3 will affect the entire force to some degree.

Exercise Program Requirements

As part of the Joint Training Policy, the Chairman's Exercise Program (CEP) is designed to improve capability and readiness of U.S. military forces to conduct joint operations through regularly scheduled strategic, national-level exercises that look at plans, policies, and procedures under different simulated crisis situations.¹⁰ The CEP further stipulates that DOD entities conduct exercises for a multitude of purposes to include joint training, theater-engagement activities, mission and plan rehearsal, concept analysis, lessons learned evaluation, doctrine validation, and interagency integration.¹¹ A TCE, as part of the GIE framework, would fall under and embrace all facets of the CEP with special emphasis on joint training, concept analysis, and doctrine evaluation.

Implementing the Joint Training Policy, the annual Chairman's Training Guidance is a clear call for leadership to shift their way of thinking about training and exercising. It directs the joint force to conduct “exercises involving multiple CCMDs, the Joint Staff, and appropriate CSAs (Combat Support Agencies) oriented on the priority strategic challenges [2+3] and homeland defense.” These exercises should “strengthen the ‘connective tissue’ between leaders and organizations, validate assumptions, examine globally integrated operations and other mature concepts, test key ideas, and confirm the joint force can execute assigned missions.”¹²

Each TCE would incorporate all essential characteristics outlined in the Chairman's Training Guidance. Mainly,

the TCE would reflect the strategic environment, emphasize global integration across the five key challenges, span the range of military operations, and enable innovation.¹³ If designed properly with concrete objectives, the TCE would strengthen the connective tissue between key leaders by addressing both higher level collaboration of the Joint Staff with OSD and horizontal coordination among CCMDs that will be needed in crisis.

TCE Objectives

To realize the Chairman's transregional training guidance, a TCE should accomplish four specific training objectives directed toward supporting one of the five key challenges scenario to give GCCMDs and FCCMDs realistic training against a benchmark competitor. These objectives include exercising command and control constructs, improving situational awareness on transregional problems across GCCMD boundaries, improving cross-CCMD coordination, and stress-testing communications systems.

Global Command and Control.

Exercising command and control as a training objective in a global scenario is needed to address shortfalls in DOD's ability to integrate operations under the current regional command construct. General Dunford does not believe that the current organizational and command and control constructs are ready for the current or future fight.¹⁴ He states what is truly required is "global integration."¹⁵ In attempting to address mission command and synergy challenges, the J7 recommended incorporating OSD into exercises as a best practice: "Where applicable, exercise the agility of OSD as the establishing authority together with the [Joint Staff] under crisis conditions to plan and direct responsive and synchronized cross-combatant command operations."¹⁶

To best train for this objective, a TCE's primary training audience should be at the Tier One level and include the Secretary of Defense, CJCS, Joint Staff, and all CCMDs. The Tier One level of training is designed to prepare national-level organizations and combatant

commanders and their staffs at the strategic and operational levels of war to integrate interagency, nongovernmental, and multinational partners in highly complex environments. The Joint Training Policy advocates integrating a diverse audience into exercises in order to identify "core competencies, procedural disconnects, and common ground to achieve U.S. unity of effort."¹⁷

Understanding that the Secretary and CJCS will likely be unable to clear their schedules for the entire duration of the exercise, a global command and control objective would also test the ability of these leaders, as well as combatant commanders, to synchronize and coordinate information while traveling or attending to real-world schedules. This would differ sharply from current exercises where typically a role player is appointed to play the Secretary and CJCS and updates occur at regular intervals, an unlikely scenario during a major crisis.

Common Situational Awareness.

Global participation would test not only command and control, but also coordination among nine unified CCMDs as the joint force strives to meet the second objective of improving situational awareness on transregional problems across GCCMD boundaries. This second objective would be useful to determine how the joint force would collectively contribute to shared awareness amid a multitude of defense and commercial options for building a common operating picture or common intelligence picture. While Global Command and Control System-Joint is the program of record intended to provide a one-stop shop for joint planners to build awareness, most combatant commanders gravitate toward some sort of tailored system for their region for a variety of reasons. Google Earth, All Partners Access Network, CENTRIXS (Combined Enterprise Regional Information Exchange System), and BICES (Battlefield Information Collection and Exploitation Systems) are all examples of systems currently in use to build a common operating or common intelligence picture. Classification, bandwidth, manpower management requirements, and compatibility

considerations can be evaluated in an exercise environment and lessons learned applied to doctrine development or acquisition programs.

Cross-CCMD Coordination. Once common awareness is established, the joint force should be stressed to use that information in a coordinated fashion against the adversary. Hence, a third training objective to improve cross-CCMD coordination is needed to bridge the gap from information to action. In the joint concept on rapid aggregation, the J7 recommends that CCMDs become increasingly collaborative and interdependent in both planning and execution: "They must expand virtual and physical collaboration among commands to allow for shared situational understanding and for the collective capacity of multiple commands to quickly combine and solve problems."¹⁸

Communications Systems Stress.

Finally, each TCE should stress communication systems. An exercise could then validate communications systems architecture, including satellites, information servers, multinational collaboration networks, and email services, when all CCMDs are straining communications infrastructure simultaneously. Admiral Tidd capitalized on a unique opportunity to stress-test communications when he found himself required to travel for other obligations during PANAMAX 2016, an exercise that brings together land, sea, and air forces in a joint and combined operation focused on defending the Panama Canal. The staff coordinated multiple video teleconferences that patched into Joint Training Center Norfolk headquarters and CENTRIXS from a variety of locations, including one occurrence while airborne. This unintended inject, though fraught with challenges, provided great realistic training and lessons learned to the CCMD.

A proposed TCE could only satisfy the four proposed training objectives with full participation from the primary training audience. Full participation is needed to test a variety of dilemmas that leaders may face, such as how the CJCS and Secretary will prioritize assets to CCMDs when every CCMD would be making

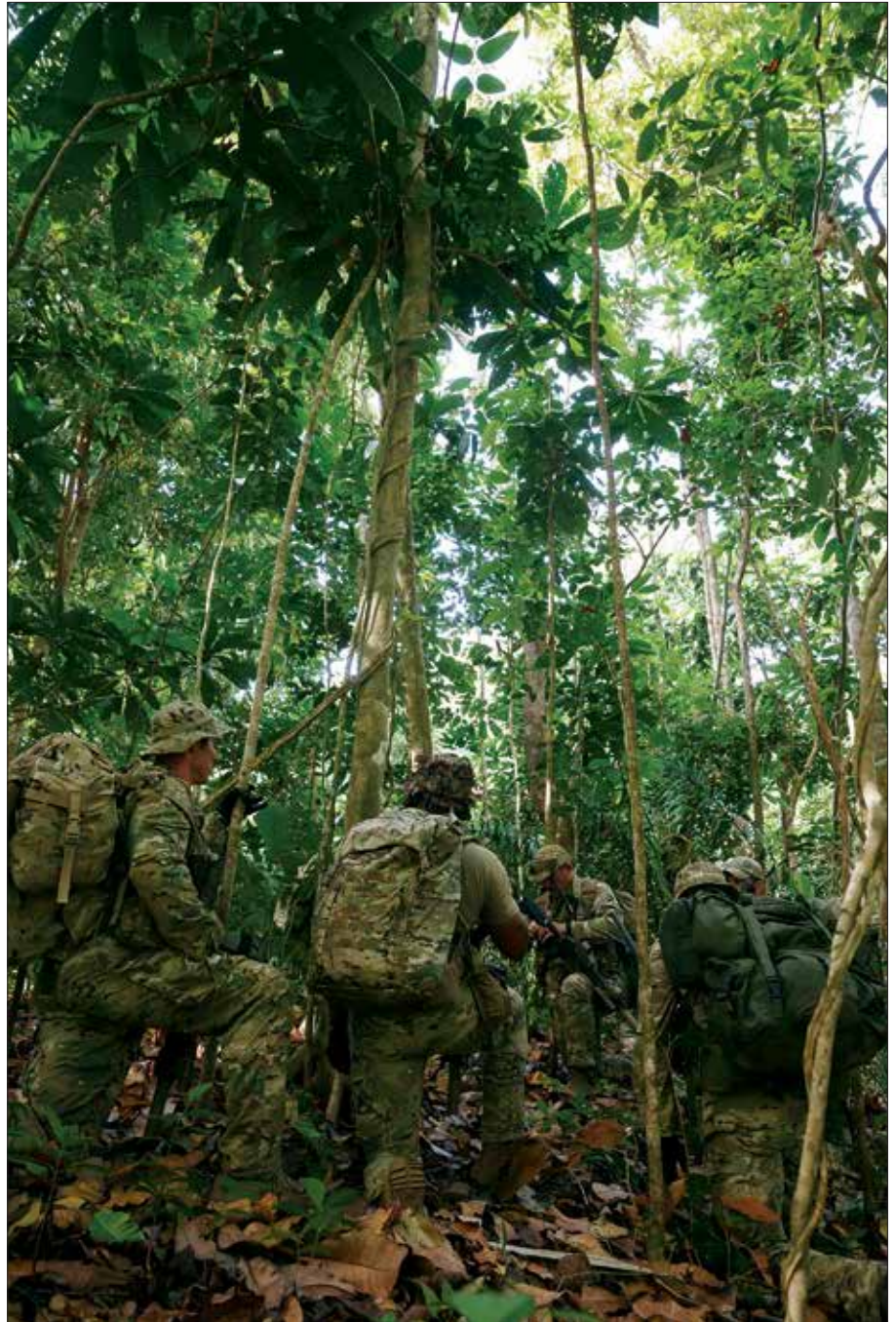
requests at the same time for the same challenge or threat. Conducting this exercise once every 2 years would efficiently train key leaders and their staffs during their command tenures and provide valuable lessons learned to improve the ability to fight transregionally.

Challenges

Too Hard to Integrate with Existing Exercises. Some may say a biennial exercise that includes all GCCMDs and FCCMDs is unrealistic given the often frantic operations tempo and fiscal constraints that burden DOD. At present, this is true. However, reevaluating existing exercises and either canceling or integrating them into the capstone exercise could alleviate much of the additional burden of a new mandatory requirement for the Joint Staff and CCMDs. Development of a TCE should follow the lessons learned from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). In the wake of the Crimea crisis, NATO quickly went from about 100 to 300 exercises per year and reached the limit of the Allies' ability to support them. Instead of adding additional exercises, NATO is now focused on increasing their realism, flexibility, and robustness. This change in thinking has allowed for NATO to plan and execute faster.¹⁹ Likewise, a TCE provides an opportunity for combatant commanders to set aside redundant training exercises while keeping the intent of higher guidance providing a "less-is-more" training option for the CCMD.

The first full biennial capstone exercise should not be executed until 2020 to provide planners adequate lead time to plan and schedule the exercise across DOD. Furthermore, a TCE would have to be assigned priority event status to ensure prioritization throughout DOD. Once scheduled far in advance, planners should be able to schedule other events around an established battle rhythm that runs a TCE every other year, on even years, starting in 2020.

Scheduling and Resources. Others might argue that a TCE is just another exercise requirement that takes away time they could spend on real-world issues and that there is not enough time



U.S. Army Special Forces reconnaissance team with U.S. Special Operations Command South prepares for patrol during Joint Combined Exchange Training culmination exercise with Panamanian security forces in Colon, Panama, February 1, 2018 (U.S. Army/Osvaldo Equite)

and resources to do both. DOD and other agencies are indeed faced with fiscal challenges that have resulted in the United States having the smallest Army, Navy, and Air Force since World War II.²⁰ At the same time, with the plethora of exercises already being executed, finding a time that would work across the joint force would be difficult. To

address this concern, the Joint Staff and CCMDs should first establish a culture that recognizes the value of a TCE and set it as a top training priority in order to solidify support for aggressive exercise participation. Rotating through the five key challenges in a variety of scenarios could further validate the legitimacy of the exercise, as it would allow assigned



Ships and aircraft representing 19 nations participating in multinational exercise Unitas 2017 conduct joint amphibious landing demonstration, Salinas, Peru, July 22, 2017 (U.S. Navy/Bill Dodge)

CCMDs synchronizing responsibilities to exercise against a variety of benchmark threats. Despite the resource challenges, ensuring the Secretary, Joint Staff, and all GCCMDs and FCCMDs participate in the exercise is central to achieving proposed training objectives, especially command and control and communications stress-testing. Each GCCMD and FCCMD's unique capabilities and geographic expertise should be represented in the exercise, and this would indeed pose the greatest challenge to scheduling and execution.

To address the resourcing issue, it is important to put a mark on the calendar as soon as possible to enable Global Force Management processes time to allocate any shift in resources. The Joint Staff and CCMDs will also need to quickly determine required staff to serve as role players and determine how best to meet this

need. Options for building the necessary training elements could include assigning select staff a temporary duty assignment, employing modular training teams, hiring short-term contractors, or creating computer system simulations. For an exercise of this scale, new collaboration mechanisms among training elements might be required, as physical space to house a training element of this magnitude would likely not permit complete collocation. The key to addressing all of these challenges would be sufficient time for planning.

Not Enough Doctrine to Exercise.

Another argument against incorporating a TCE into the training schedules of GCCMDs and FCCMDs is the lack of transregional joint doctrine. The Joint Training Policy for the U.S. Armed Forces states that training must be based on approved joint doctrine unless the

training is being used primarily for concept development.²¹ Currently, there is not a sufficient amount of cross-CCMD doctrine. When combined with the need to determine the resourcing described above, this would indeed be a formidable challenge for joint force planners. It is important to note, however, that this exercise could be a fire starter to generate and/or validate joint doctrine in development.

Each successive TCE would aid doctrine development by feeding a cycle of assessment. As a starting point for development, exercise planners could aim to test some of the ideas put forward in the Globally Integrated Operations CCJO. This concept advocates eight key elements among which mission command, global agility, and flexibility in establishing joint forces could be tested in a TCE.²²

While mission command may be preferable in most situations, complex conflicts with near-peer adversaries may require integrating mission command with centralized control mechanisms required for employment of nuclear weapons or other national capabilities. Training objectives on global agility could test the joint force's ability to shift resources between CCMDs as strategic dilemmas emerge and help validate existing posture. Lastly, the CCJO insight on flexibility in establishing joint forces should be tested. It notes that while current joint forces are typically organized around geographic or functional considerations, the future force may have to consider that "this might be done globally" or as a "joint task force operating across multiple non-contiguous geographic areas to accomplish its mission against a single threat."²³

The Chairman has stated that his warfighting priority is to improve the military's ability to integrate joint capabilities in a transregional, multidomain, and multifunctional fight. While the joint force has shown steady progress toward exercising in multiple domains and across multiple functions within regional theaters, transregional exercising remains immature. The joint force needs to institutionalize biennial TCEs that incorporate all GCCMDs and FCCMDs as a key element to realizing the Chairman's highest warfighting priority. A TCE should test command and control constructs, improve situational awareness on transregional problems across GCCMD boundaries, enhance cross-CCMD coordination, and stress-test communication systems as primary training objectives. These objectives reflect current shortfalls and are needed to prepare the joint force to face any of the 2+3 challenges.

Though implementation of a TCE will be met with challenges from competing priorities, scheduling, resourcing, and nascent transregional doctrine, overcoming these challenges will set the joint force on a trajectory to defend the United States against the transregional threats of tomorrow. Without this exercise or another like it, critical shortfalls in joint

force capability to address these threats will persist. Smartly adding TCEs within the GIE framework will help realize the Chairman's vision for the future joint force and help him fulfill his statutory responsibilities to advise, direct, assess, and execute joint operations against the most challenging transregional threats. Using a TCE, we can train the way we fight so we will fight the way we train. JFQ

Notes

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² Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC), *Posture Statement of Admiral Kurt W. Tidd, Commander, U.S. Southern Command*, April 6, 2017, 6, available at <www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Tidd_04-06-17.pdf>.

³ SASC, *Posture Statement of Admiral Harry Harris, Jr., U.S. Navy Commander, U.S. Pacific Command*, February 23, 2016, available at <www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Harris_02-23-16.pdf>; SASC, *Posture Statement of John E. Hyten, Commander, U.S. Strategic Command*, April 4, 2017, available at <www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Hyten_04-04-17.pdf>; SASC, *Posture Statement of General Lori J. Robinson, Commander, U.S. Northern Command and North American Aerospace Defense Command*, April 6, 2017, available at <www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Robinson_04-06-17.pdf>; SASC, *Posture Statement of General Curtis M. Scaparrotti, Commander, U.S. European Command*, March 23, 2017, available at <www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/17-24_03-23-17.pdf>; SASC, *Posture Statement of General Joseph L. Votel, Commander, U.S. Central Command*, March 9, 2017, available at <www.centcom.mil/Portals/6/Documents/Votel_03-09-17.pdf>; SASC, *Posture Statement of General Raymond A. Thomas III, Commander, U.S. Special Operations Command*, May 2, 2017; and SASC, *Posture Statement of General Thomas Waldhauser, U.S. Africa Command*, March 23, 2017, available at <www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Waldhauser_03-09-17>.

⁴ Colin Clark, "CJCS Dunford Calls for Strategic Shifts; 'At Peace or At War Is Insufficient,'" *Breaking Defense*, September 21, 2016, available at <<http://breakingdefense.com/2016/09/cjcs-dunford-calls-for-strategic-shifts-at-peace-or-at-war-is-insufficient/>>.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Gary Luck et al., *Mission Command and Cross-Domain Synergy* (Suffolk, VA: Joint Staff J7, March 2013), 12, available at <www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/fp/mission_comm_fp.pdf?ver=2018-03-29-142405-290>.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ John Vandiver, "From 'Sleepy Hollow' to War-Fighting Footing, EUCOM Muscles Up," *Stars and Stripes*, October 13, 2016, available at <www.stripes.com/from-sleepy-hollow-to-war-fighting-footing-eucom-muscles-up-1.433867#.WP4xtIWcHVg>.

⁹ "EUCOM Participates in Global Command, Control Exercise," *Department of Defense Online*, February 17, 2017, available at <www.defense.gov/News/Article/Article/1087601/eucom-participates-in-global-command-control-exercise/>.

¹⁰ Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruction (CJCSI) 3500.01H, *Joint Training Policy for the Armed Forces of the United States* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, April 25, 2014), B-5, available at <www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/training/cjcsi3500_01h.pdf?ver=2017-12-29-171241-630>.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., 5.

¹³ CJCS Notice 3500.01, *2017-2020 Chairman's Joint Training Guidance* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, January 12, 2017), 2, available at <www.jcs.mil/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=4yR5p7EjAFI%3D&tabid=19769&portalid=36&mid=49212>.

¹⁴ Dunford, 2-3.

¹⁵ Clark.

¹⁶ Luck et al., 13.

¹⁷ CJCSI 3500.01H, B-6.

¹⁸ *Joint Concept for Rapid Aggregation* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, May 22, 2015), 8, available at <www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/concepts/joint_concept_rapid_aggregation.pdf?ver=2017-12-28-162030-587>.

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²⁰ Robert Barnett, "Goldfein Speaks on the Imperatives of Airpower," Center for Strategic and International Studies, February 23, 2017, available at <www.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/1093476/goldfein-speaks-on-the-imperatives-of-airpower/>; Harlan Ullman, "Smallest Army and Navy Since Before WW II: So What?" *Defense News*, August 10, 2015, available at <www.defensenews.com/story/defense/commentary/2015/08/10/smallest-army-and-navy-since-before-ww-ii-so-what/31428429/>.

²¹ CJCSI 3500.01H, C-1.

²² *Capstone Concept for Joint Operations: Joint Force 2020* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, September 10, 2012), 4, available at <www.defenseinnovationmarketplace.mil/resources/JV2020_Capstone.pdf>.

²³ Ibid., 4-6.