Putting the “FIL” into “DIME”
Growing Joint Understanding of the Instruments of Power

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Despite how long the DIME has been used for describing the instruments of national power, U.S. policymakers and strategists have long understood that there are many more instruments involved in national security policy development and implementation.

—Joint Doctrine Note 1-18, Strategy

While the U.S. military tends to view the instruments of power (IOPs) strictly through the lens of the diplomatic, informa—
ntional, military, and economic (DIME) framework, it is increasingly imperative to consider additional IOPs such as finance, intelligence, and law enforcement (FIL). The U.S. military focuses primarily on the kinetic employment of the military, prioritizing the big M to demonstrate power, destroy the enemy, and celebrate victory. This military-centric approach often neglects other IOPs, resulting in suboptimal use of resources, the creation of an echo chamber, and poor transitions to other organizations, agencies, and/or national governments. The emergence of a new strategic environment necessitates an orchestration of multiple instruments of power. As a result, it is perhaps time to transition from a DIME to DIME-FIL concept.

U.S. peer competitors, namely Russia and China, have already developed alternative concepts to leverage IOPs to compete below the threshold of conflict. For example, Russia conceptualizes political warfare using nonmilitary and above-military categories (political, network, economic, financial, intelligence, legal, cultural, propaganda, drug, and so forth), which are similar to the DIME-FIL IOPs while continuing to emphasize the military instrument. As peer competitors develop such fluid and threshold-based gray zone concepts, the United States must adapt in order to compete in a changing threat environment. To succeed, commanders and their staffs will need to understand, select, and synchronize IOPs to ensure a whole-of-government and international approach to these problem sets.

Currently, doctrine and planning emphasize the DIME model. The scant literature on IOPs mentions the addition of FIL, but the focus has been its application to combating terrorism. The first mention of FIL pertaining to the National Security Strategy was in 2003, in a document that called for defeating terrorism through the direct and indirect use of DIME-FIL IOPs. Subsequently, similar language appeared in the 2006 National Military Strategic Plan for the war on terror and focused on cooperation among U.S. agencies, coalitions, and partners to “integrate all instruments of U.S. and partner national power . . . DIME-FIL.”

U.S. strategic direction and joint doctrine state the importance of synchronizing and incorporating a whole-of-government approach in order to utilize all IOPs for unity of effort. The Joint Force 2020 concept of globally integrated operations argues for a transregional, all-domain, and multifunctional approach and urges the joint force to prepare for the future competitive security environment by leveraging Service capabilities. However, this approach ignores the necessity of incorporating interagency and global partners and capabilities. Thus, a more strategic global integration concept is vital in today’s environment. Global integration is defined by Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruction 3100.01D and the Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America as “the arrangement of cohesive joint force actions in time, space, and purpose, executed as a whole to address transregional, multifunctional challenges across all domains through the seamless integration of multiple elements of national power—diplomacy, information, economics, finance, intelligence, law enforcement and military.” The concept addresses the importance of a unified effort across all elements of national power and could provide a framework to incorporate global integration for the commander and planners to truly leverage all government agencies’ strengths, achieve military objectives, and ultimately protect national interests.

However, there is little explicit information on the new IOPs and even less guidance regarding the potential application of a more granular conception of IOPs in a competitive environment. Failing to clarify or ignoring the DIME-FIL concept leads to a lack of synchronization and global integration in the whole-of-government approach. Therefore, U.S. military leadership should consider adding the FIL IOPs to the DIME construct and incorporating it into joint doctrine to improve interorganizational planning for an international and intergovernmental approach in the new environment of Great Power competition.

Clarifying the definition of FIL IOPs, identifying key mission partners, and detecting potential applications for each of the new FIL instruments can mitigate the gap in doctrine and planning. An increased understanding of the FIL IOPs will allow the U.S. military to update doctrine, synchronize the IOPs, become more globally integrated, and perform in the competitive environment, ultimately achieving unity of effort and effectively protecting national interests.

Understanding the FIL Instruments

Financial. The financial IOP was born during the war on terror, as the United States sought to disrupt and dismantle global terrorist financial networks. The National Security Strategy for Combatting Terrorism identified the importance of affecting financial systems used by terrorist organizations that support their survival and continued operations. In relation to violent extremist organizations (VEOs), the financial IOP is characterized as the specific means by which insurgents acquire and distribute capital, whether via formal or informal banking and monetary exchange systems. The routine use, success, and precision of the financial IOP over the past two decades prove that it is an essential addition to DIME. Although the focus of the financial IOP has been on the VEO threat, it could be expanded to address other threats and actors including transnational crime organizations, state proxy groups, nonstate actors, and states. Generally, the financial instrument should be understood as the denial of access to specified individuals or groups from a formal or informal financial system, network, or source of funding.

At first glance, the financial and economic IOPs appear similar; however, they are fundamentally different in scope, enabling instruments, and associated activities. The economic IOP is used at the political level to influence the behavior of another state or organization. This is normally achieved through foreign aid, trade agreements, tariffs, embargos, or
economic sanctions. These actions tend to be broader in scope and political in nature as they impact entire nations. As a result, the economic instrument relies on the diplomatic instrument to carry out these actions.

The financial IOP relies heavily on the Department of the Treasury, in close cooperation with banks, corporations, organizations, and international partners, in order to protect U.S. financial systems, combat adversary actors, administer sanctions, and freeze assets. Treasury wields a significant amount of power through the USA PATRIOT Act, requiring foreign banks to establish a contact for receiving subpoenas, scrutinize deposits from residents of nations that do not cooperate with U.S. officials, and impose sanctions on banks that do not provide information to law enforcement agencies. Through the PATRIOT Act and the Banks Secrecy Act, Treasury’s Financial Crimes Enforcement Network requires financial institutions, as of May 2018, to know their customer and perform customer due diligence to ensure customers are not involved in illegal activity and to cooperate with government agencies to detect and prevent money laundering. Leveraging key mission partners enables the U.S. Government to prevent or deny access to financial systems to those actors that threaten national interests.

The financial IOP tends to be more agile in nature as it can specifically target countries, organizations, companies, and individuals utilizing banking systems to project power. A disruption of funding for a target entity can be achieved through compelling private banking institutions to deny currency loans or credit; blacklisting individuals, corporations, or states; utilizing financial sanctions; or freezing assets. Disruptions are made possible because of U.S. worldwide dominance in the financial sector. In 2014, the U.S. dollar was involved in 87 percent of the world’s foreign exchange transactions, proof of its ability to influence financial institutions to comply. The intelligence IOP often pairs with the financial to detect and contain, and then the financial IOP deters and disrupts target adversary individuals or groups. The financial and intelligence IOPs are closely linked, delivering more precise effects related to financial systems and funding, whereas the economic IOP is tied to the diplomatic IOP, broader in scope and related to interstate commerce.

The benefit and relevance of the financial IOP is its precision. When targeting specific actors, the United States can achieve desired effects by focusing on critical vulnerabilities and capabilities without suffering second- and third-order effects caused by the economic IOP. This in turn can reduce the suffering of the
population and improve U.S. legitimacy and credibility. The focus of the financial IOP has historically been VEOs, but it applies to all problem sets. In 2017, the United States targeted North Korea’s ability to generate funds by potentially “suspending U.S. correspondent account access to any foreign bank that knowingly conducts or facilitates significant transactions tied to trade with North Korea or certain designated persons.” In 2018, the restoration of sanctions on Iran targeted financial institutions, companies, and individuals tied to Iran’s shipping, financial, and energy sectors, resulting in 700 additional companies and individuals on the sanction rolls, causing concern from the Iranian public and flaming potential unrest toward the regime.

After the Ukraine conflict, the Office of Foreign Assistance Control created a blacklist to paralyze the financial dealings of a Russian billionaire friendly to the Kremlin, blocking transactions and payments from his bank by JPMorgan Chase, Visa, and MasterCard at a Russian embassy in Kazakhstan. In an attempt to halt Chinese global investment, mergers to steal intellectual property, technology, and sensitive data, the Trump administration recently expanded the power of the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States. National security reviews now include transactions in which a foreign investment was merely a minority interest instead of a controlling share and extend review powers into the real estate sector. Similarly, citing national security concerns, Australia, Canada, the European Union, France, Germany, Japan, and the United Kingdom have all joined an unprecedented global backlash against Chinese capital. Although many U.S. peer competitors tend to have nationalized industries, they must participate in the global market in order to be profitable, thus making them vulnerable to exploitation via the financial IOP. In turn, the use of these actions can result in slowing peer expansion and protecting U.S. national interests.

**Intelligence.** The multifaceted nature of intelligence makes it difficult to define. However, intelligence can be broadly broken down into three parts: activities, products, and organizations. The organizations participate in the activities of “collection, processing, integration, analysis, and interpretation of available information” of hostile or potentially hostile forces that result in intelligence products. Activities are often associated with processes (such as the Joint Intelligence Preparation of the Operational Environment process, the targeting process, the intelligence process, etc.), as well as intelligence disciplines. The products are typically intelligence estimates and assessments that are often broken down into categories and could be in the form of written documents or verbal presentations, hard-copy publications, or electronic media. Organizations can be broken down into Department of Defense (DOD) agencies, other national agencies, foreign agencies, host-nation or local sources, and corporations. According to Craig Mastapeter in his Naval Postgraduate School thesis, “The intelligence instrument, or element, of national power integrates foreign, military, and domestic capabilities through policy, personnel, and technology...
actions to provide decision advantage to policymakers, diplomats, financiers and economists, strategic communicators, warfighters, homeland security officials, and law enforcement.” A more succinct and functional definition of the intelligence IOP that corresponds to both the joint concept and Mastapeter’s definition is the products, interdisciplinary activities, and organizations that convert disparate data about the environment, future capabilities and intentions, and relevant actors into coherent information to provide decision advantage for decisionmakers, both policymakers and commanders.

The term intelligence is often confused by operators and planners with the term information. Fortunately, the recent designation of information as a new joint function helped to shed some clarity on the difference in terms. As with all instruments of power, there is overlap, but the major difference is in the purpose, players, audience, and activities involved in each instrument. The focus of the intelligence IOP is the production of value-added data for the commander or decisionmaker to make informed decisions. Distinctly, the focus of the information IOP is to affect decisionmaking in the cognitive, informational, and physical dimensions of the target audience—whether friendly, neutral, or adversary—to create a desired effect. For example, the intelligence IOP may provide the critical information necessary for the commander to make a decision whereas the information IOP would help to create a desired effect in the target audience. Ultimately, the intelligence IOP provides decision advantage, and the information IOP is meant to influence a target audience.

The intelligence IOP involves many mission partners, all with varying and important missions articulated in the following categories: national agencies, allied partners and agencies, host-nation resources, and private sources. The U.S. Government has 17 national agencies with different mission sets utilized for intelligence-sharing and cooperation. Allied partners provide partnerships for intelligence-sharing and verification. Partner nations assist with local intelligence, while the private sector provides independent investigation and analysis.

Access, speed, insight, the ability for direct action, and cover for U.S. interests are the advantages of utilizing mission partners outside of the United States. Commanders, however, must be judicious in their use of the foreign intelligence and host-nation and private-sector entities due to the disadvantages of conflicting interests, hostile collection, poor information gathering, and moral hazards.

It is vital to refocus U.S. intelligence efforts from the VEO threat to peer competition with Russia and China. Since 9/11, the reorganization of U.S. intelligence agencies has proved vital in disrupting terrorist and criminal organizations. To dismantle the VEO and criminal networks and neutralize high-value individuals, the U.S. Government and military have focused intelligence at the operational and tactical level for the past 20 years, relying heavily on intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance; dynamic targeting; and nodal analysis. The National Intelligence Council’s Global Trends Report indicates that the blurring of peacetime and wartime, the ease of disruption caused by nonstate groups, increase in standoff and remote attack capabilities, and new concerns about nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction are shaping conflicts that are more “diffuse,” “diverse,” and “disruptive.” The 2019 National Intelligence Strategy provides some guidelines on the trends and focus areas such as strategic intelligence, anticipatory intelligence, current operations intelligence, and cyber threat intelligence.

The United States will need to harness the intelligence instrument to meet the new environment. Indications and warning intelligence as well as counterintelligence will be critical to enable U.S. military and information instruments. Intelligence will need to emphasize attribution to identify criminal cyber and proxy actors that enable financial and law enforcement instruments to act. Data superiority and managing artificial intelligence and machine learning will be necessary to navigate the sea of big data and to select and combine data in useful ways for decisionmaking. Finally, information-sharing between agencies and partnerships with external agencies and nations will be paramount to optimize intelligence activities, make faster decisions, and create unity of effort with mission partners.

Law Enforcement. Under the current DIME construct, the diplomatic and military IOPs’ legal efforts are not sufficient and are extremely complex. As a result, a separate IOP is necessary. The law enforcement IOP is challenging to define because it has two parts (legal and enforcement); encompasses the political, strategic, operational, and tactical levels; operates through other IOPs; and relies heavily on national, international, foreign state, and local partners and organizations. Unlike other IOPs, the legal IOP is complex, incredibly diverse, and rapidly changing over short periods of time. A functional definition of the law enforcement IOP is the understanding and adherence to national, international, and local laws and the activities to support or carry out the enforcement of those laws and thereby restore order.

The law portion of law enforcement pertains to the legal expertise required to understand national law, international law, and foreign laws. This aspect is more strategic in nature and requires synchronization with the diplomatic instrument to avoid missteps in international and host-nation legal systems, carefully balancing the laws and interests of all national, international, and foreign entities. The enforcement aspect requires law enforcement agencies to work closely via the diplomatic IOP with data from the intelligence IOP to prosecute crimes and conduct activities at the tactical level through the military IOP or local law enforcement.

There are many key mission partners involved with the law enforcement IOP that include national, international, and foreign legal departments and law enforcement agencies. The key U.S. organizations for the legal aspect are the Department of State and Department of Justice, which
provide legal expertise for national and international law while working with partner-nation justice departments to achieve an understanding of key legal issues. U.S. agencies, regional agencies, intergovernmental organizations, and host-nation partners are critical to enforcing laws and protecting the population. Through the diplomatic, intelligence, and financial IOPs, the law enforcement IOP is able to balance enforcing U.S. national laws and sovereignty with adhering to international law to maintain legitimacy while proactively detaining criminals to protect U.S. citizens and assist mission partners with their security needs.

A key U.S. strength is its alliances and leadership in the international system. U.S. competitors seek to attack partnerships, use the international system to slow actions, and delegitimize efforts across the globe. U.S. military legal expertise should broaden to international law and be incorporated into planning (not just law of armed conflict and rules of engagement). Commanders should also incorporate legal expertise from State or Justice into planning. Commanders could improve U.S. legitimacy with strategic communication, clarifying the message that the United States wants to enable countries to establish their own rules of law and improve their security and stability. Additionally, peer competitors increasingly use proxy, cyber, and criminal actors. International law and international law enforcement are key capabilities for defeating terrorist and adversary networks that span multiple national boundaries. It is therefore critical to reinforce whole-of-government, international, and interorganizational partnering to quickly identify, locate, and detain criminals anywhere on the globe, shortening our observe-orient-decide-act loop compared to our competitors and communicating attribution while defending U.S. national interests. The law enforcement IOP is crucial to achieving legitimacy by balancing national, international, and foreign law with national interests and partnering with local law enforcement entities to achieve unity of effort and accomplish objectives.

**Recommendations: Putting the FIL into DIME**

The DIME construct is overused and outnumbered in our current environment. In order to perform in the competitive environment and navigate the gray zone, a full understanding of all IOPs is necessary. A more polished understanding of the new FIL IOPs is required to achieve unity of effort. In order to address the gap in understanding the FIL IOPs, it is critical to define concepts, incorporate them into doctrine, identify the appropriate mission partners, and apply DIME-FIL to the competitive environment. The following recommendations will improve the understanding and implementation of the DIME-FIL framework and allow the U.S. military to address the global problem sets, ultimately achieving unity of effort and effectively protecting national interests.

**Update Joint Doctrine with DIME-FIL.** The acronym DIME-FIL is colloquially being used in the joint lexicon, but the term has not been specifically defined or included in doctrine. Definitions provide the foundation for a common understanding of concepts and terms. The preliminary definitions addressed for the finance, intelligence, and law enforcement instruments provide a solid starting point to incorporate and update joint doctrine related to strategy, concepts, and planning. A clear definition can assist in the understanding, application, and synchronization of the IOPs for unity of effort in a competitive environment. Some logical publications to address the gap by defining, explaining, or listing the FIL IOPs are Joint Doctrine Note 1-18, *Strategy,* Joint Publication (JP) 1, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States,* JP 3-08, *Interorganizational Cooperation,* and the *Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning.*

**Identify the Mission Partners Involved with Each Instrument and Incorporate Them Early and Often in Planning.** Planners and commanders are tasked with implementing the concept of global integration and executing different types of missions across the spectrum that will be transnational, all domain, and multifunctional, so agility is key. Each line of effort will require a distinct and harmonious combination of the IOPs. Having a solid understanding of the key mission partners and their strengths across the DIME-FIL will enable commanders and planners to develop more creative plans that share the mission, tasks, and successes through a whole-of-government, international, and interorganizational approach.

Incorporating partners early into planning will garner mutual trust and buy-in from partners who have a better understanding of their particular instruments. The U.S. military has more resources and planning experience compared to other agencies and partners, which provide a tremendous opportunity to coordinate, synchronize, and harmonize the instruments and subsequently the mission partners involved.

**Train and Plan with DIME-FIL for Near-Peer Threats.** Training should not be singularly focused on the big M and conventional warfare. Opening the aperture and adding more instruments of power to the U.S. lexicon signal that warfare has changed and that all instruments and partners are necessary for success. Planning should seriously consider harmonizing DIME-FIL, whole-of-government, and interorganizational concepts in the U.S. peer competition environment to compete in the gray zone and address U.S. problem sets. The DIME-FIL concept is a natural progression to a globally integrated approach that could be achieved through incorporating the key mission partners of all instruments in interorganizational exercises, the global campaign plan, and stability operations planning. These instruments should focus on creating effects on adversary critical capabilities and vulnerabilities, many of which will not be military in nature. Some key themes that may help us in the new environment are partnerships, strategic messaging, legitimacy, information sharing, decision advantage, technology, attribution, and tempo.

Additional IOPs have been identified, along with key mission partners,
that have the potential to result in better resource utilization, diversity of thought, and smoother transitions. It is the responsibility of planners and commanders to synchronize the instruments and create a more strategic globally integrated approach. The current doctrinal approach stymies the understanding of new IOPs, leaving commanders with plans that result in a limited conceptualization, a lack of creativity, and an echo chamber of DIME-centric operational approaches. By defining each of the FIL instruments, identifying key mission partners, and determining its application in the near-peer environment, commanders and planners are able to achieve understanding and apply the FIL framework to their way of thinking and approaching complex problem sets. The key aspect of the financial instrument is the denial of access to financial systems, mainly through the Treasury Department, providing precision effects and denying adversaries access to financial systems. The intelligence instrument delivers decision advantage through activities, products, and organizations, mainly through national and international intelligence agencies, enabling value-added data for the rest of the IOPs. The two-pronged law enforcement instrument focuses on adherence to and enforcement of laws mainly through State and Justice, as well as DOD, granting the United States authority and legitimacy to take action and enabling the United States to detain criminals and restore order.

The “America First” strategy relies on U.S. partners to do more, which requires joint planners and commanders to leverage all resources, capabilities, and instruments in a concerted effort to achieve a more safe, stable, and secure world. The increased understanding of the FIL IOPs allows the joint community to update doctrine, synchronize, and involve mission partners early in planning and perform in the competitive environment, ultimately achieving unity of effort and effectively protecting national interests. The DIME-FIL concept lends legitimacy to the U.S. cause and utilizes global integration to synchronize efforts, compete, and win in the strategic environment.

Notes

Joint Publications (JPs) Under Revision (to be signed within 6 months)

JP 1-0, Personnel Support
JP 2-0, Joint Intelligence
JP 3-0, Joint Operations
JP 3-05, Special Operations
JP 3-26, Combating Terrorism
JP X-XX, Joint Electromagnetic Spectrum Operations

JPs Revised (signed within last 6 months)

JP 1, Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States, Vols. 1 and 2
JP 3-31, Joint Land Operations
JP 3-40, Countering WMD
JP 5-0, Joint Planning
JP 6-0, Joint Communications System

(Emphasis added for clarity)