

# PRISM

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## PRISM

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Former NATO Supreme Allied Commander Transformation General Denis Mercier (right), speaks at a NATO–Industry Forum in 2016. (NATO ACT)

# NATO's Adaptation in an Age of Complexity

By Denis Mercier

Next year NATO will celebrate its 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Through decades of a sometimes tumultuous existence in an ever-evolving and challenging security environment, the transatlantic Alliance has managed to remain a cornerstone of stability, peace, and security in the Euro–Atlantic region. Comprising 29 nations since the accession of Montenegro in 2017, NATO is grounded on the same values that presided at its creation, to:

*safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilisation of their peoples, founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty, and the rule of law, to promote stability and well-being in the North-Atlantic area.<sup>1</sup>*

In the aftermath of World War II and in the early phases of the Cold War, this preamble could be read as an unambiguous will to preserve peace and security by all means necessary, and to prevent the resurgence of massive conflicts such as those that had twice ravaged Europe and the rest of the world during the previous 30 years. The menace to peace then identified has changed and evolved ever since, but the principles still stand as valid. The 1949 Treaty of Washington is quintessential in this regard, because it goes to the absolute essentials of what an alliance is—should it have to be rewritten today, changing a single word would probably be close to impossible.

Though its values have remained constant, NATO the organization has evolved to meet new challenges and to adapt to a changing security environment. Indeed, NATO's durability is closely connected to its ability to change, and to the collective resolve of its members to preserve the Alliance as an international security hub.

NATO's history can be traced through four main eras, each era beginning and ending with a paradigm shift to which the Alliance had to adapt.

- The Cold War (1949–91) was the age of collective defense. Facing the imminent threat posed by the Soviet Union and its allies, NATO emphasized deterrence and defense based on the principle expressed in Article 5 of the Treaty of Washington, which states that an attack on one shall be considered as an attack on all.
- The post–Cold War era (1991–01) followed the downfall of the Eastern bloc. Cooperative security was the landmark of this period, with the enlargement to Eastern European nations, but also through the

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General Denis Mercier, French Air Force, is a former Supreme Allied Commander Transformation for NATO.



In 2014, Georgian and U.S. soldiers conduct a key leader engagement with village elders, role-played by civilians during a mission rehearsal exercise at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center in Germany. The combined training exercise prepares soldiers on counterinsurgency, stability, and transportation operations for a deployment to Afghanistan in support of NATO. (DOD/ Justin DeHoyas)

- development of partnerships, including with Russia in the Partnership for Peace framework.
- 9/11 snapped the Alliance back to the reality of a dangerous world (2001–14), in which NATO focused its efforts on projecting stability and on expeditionary missions, in Afghanistan and elsewhere, sometimes at the expense of responsiveness and collective defense.
  - Since 2014 and the crisis in Ukraine, NATO has entered its fourth and current phase, characterized by the resurgence of conventional threats, the continuation of stability operations, and the emergence of hybrid threats.

### Adaptation in a Complex World

The Wales Summit of 2014 symbolized the beginning of this fourth phase of NATO's history. But it was actually the following Warsaw Summit of 2016 that explicitly acknowledged the complexity of our strategic environment, leading the Alliance to critical decisions regarding NATO adaptation. In this sense, Warsaw was a historical summit, but before we elaborate on its outcomes, it is important to understand what triggered them. And for this, the starting point is the strategic context.

Our security environment is evolving at an increasing pace. But several defining trends can nonetheless be identified. The first is the interrelation of crises: today, any event in a regional crisis can impact another crisis in another region. The actions of Russia in Northeastern Europe, for example, have ramifications for their actions in the Middle East and for their relationships with neighboring countries. The second trend is the interrelation of threats, wherein state and non-state actors are present in different crises and following different agendas, or interacting differently in different regions. The variety of threats is a third distinctive feature of our contemporary security environment, especially when several threats of differing nature are present in the

same region. This is especially true in the Balkans, for example, a region confronted simultaneously with the influence of Russia, the rise of radical Islamism, massive migration, and organized crime. A fourth trend is the ease of access to technology, which empowers potential adversaries, and contributes to the emergence of new confrontation domains, such as cyber or the information environment. And finally, the increasingly blurred transition between peacetime and crisis is another defining trend.

These characteristics of the security environment have converged in the sense that our world has transitioned from *complicated* to *complex*. In a *complicated* world we had to deal with many interacting factors, but analysis remained possible and linear as we identified possible outcomes and evolutions of a given situation. In today's *complex* world where the interacting factors are so numerous and so interconnected, accurately predicting the evolutions of a situation has become impossible. Consequently, in a *complex* world, surprise is certain, decisionmaking based on imperfect information is more commonplace, failure has become a possibility, and resilience a necessity.

In such a context, strategic awareness is essential. While NATO's area of operations is centered on the Euro-Atlantic space, the possibility of early signs of a developing crisis appearing outside of this area—in Asia, in Africa, or elsewhere—can no longer be dismissed. To be able to react appropriately, the Alliance must ensure that it has the capacity to monitor situations on a global scale. Conversely, the global nature of threats may lead NATO to consider scenarios that would engage a wide range of partners, far beyond its historical borders; explore innovative decisionmaking architectures to face future transnational challenges; and help in the definition of requirements to empower all like-minded parties willing to play a role in international security. In essence, the complexity of the environment demands the constant ability of NATO to interact with anybody, operate

anywhere, and be persistently aware of the weakest signals. This is a considerable endeavor.

Consequently, NATO as a whole must also be able to learn from experience. Consistent with the need for a global strategic awareness is the need to process lessons learned in various theaters and implement them in our training and education models. In a complex environment, however, it is also necessary to develop the ability to share lessons learned with our partners, and in particular, with other international organizations, alongside which we operate across the planet.

Cooperation mechanisms for crisis management exist between NATO and the European Union, between NATO and the UN, and between the EU and the UN. But nothing similar exists for stability operations, in spite of shared experiences in these organizations. This must be developed, starting with an assessment of what works in theaters where all three organizations are present, but must also expand to include other actors, such as non-governmental organizations. Capturing the lessons learned in Afghanistan and sharing them on a portal accessible to our partners, for example, could be a first step toward enhancing our cooperation. This is why NATO is developing a shared lessons learned portal to allow partner contributions and to enhance our collective ability to improve and implement best practices. The next step would be to develop exercises involving other international organizations to try and build the mechanisms and working habits, as well as to harmonize our respective objectives when deployed in a partner country we are trying to help.<sup>3</sup> This is the case in Afghanistan, and Iraq should follow.

## **The Historical Significance of the 2016 Warsaw Summit**

The Warsaw Summit aimed to address the challenges of this complex environment, building on a better understanding of the implications of complexity for the security of the Allies. In that sense,

it represented a watershed moment for NATO, converging decisions on the encompassing objective to build a renewed defense and deterrence posture, while expanding the ability to project stability beyond the Euro–Atlantic space.<sup>3</sup>

Significant decisions were made in the realm of defense and deterrence, with the establishment of the Enhanced Forward Presence in Poland and the three Baltic States, and the Tailored Forward Presence in Romania, Bulgaria, and Turkey. These deployments of forces constitute a first line of defense, intended to deter adversary intrusions into these regions challenged by the resurgence of an aggressive Russian posture. In this context, the return of American and Canadian troops to Europe underscored the vitality of the transatlantic bond. Cyberspace was recognized by Allies as an independent operational domain of potential confrontation, allowing better coordination of initiatives and the establishment of common terminology, doctrine, and principles. More importantly, it enabled the integration of cyber activities into joint effects, encompassing all domains of warfare. In 2016, Allies also declared initial operational capability of the Ballistic Missile Defense effort that NATO had decided to develop in 2010 to pursue the Alliance's core task of collective defense.

In terms of projecting stability, NATO initiated a significant upheaval of its partnership activities, aimed at both expanding its reach and harmonizing different initiatives. Symbolic of this effort is the creation of the Hub for the South, the purpose of which is to coordinate activities in the Mediterranean region with concerned countries and other international organizations, and enhance NATO's understanding of the stakes and challenges. In the broad theme of strengthening relationships with international organizations, a specific focus has been put on the NATO–EU partnership, with the signature of a joint declaration identifying key areas for an expanded cooperation.<sup>4</sup>



One of the most significant decisions taken in Warsaw, with regard to the complexity of the strategic environment and its consequences, was to perform a functional assessment of the NATO Command Structure. The objective was to determine if the Alliance was able to meet every potential challenge up to its highest level of ambition. This assessment came to the conclusion that the NATO Command Structure had to be adapted, which in turn prompted the Allies to initiate a functional adaptation. Overall, the process took only a few months, the conclusions having been approved at the political level early this year. The Alliance is now at the stage of refining the details and beginning the implementation. This impressive pace demonstrates the sense of urgency that has driven the collective work on adaptation efforts.

### The Uniqueness of the NATO Command Structure

What makes NATO truly unique among international organizations is that it is the only one possessing a permanent command and control structure, which defines the decisionmaking process from the highest political level—heads of state and governments—down to the tactical level—the troops deployed on the ground, on the sea, and in the air.

This decisionmaking process is designed to allow the 29 member nations to reach a consensus on a range of topics—because there is no quorum, no majority, and no veto. But the real specificity of the NATO Command Structure is that it is not merely a central headquarters designed to harmonize national positions and turn them into actionable collective policy: the two strategic commands—Allied Command Operations (ACO) and Allied Command Transformation (ACT)—are permanent structures in charge of implementing these decisions, whether they are related to current or future operations. Connected to these strategic commands are: headquarters at the operational and



In 2017, NATO opened a force integration unit (NFIU) in Slovakia. One of eight NFIUs, all are part of the Readiness Action Plan that NATO agreed to in 2014 at the Wales Summit. (NATO)

single service level, which in turn are liaised with the NATO Force Structure—the actual military capacity owned by the nations. Establishing a coherent link between national forces and a collective command structure was one of the stakes of the Alliance's adaptation—to ensure the ability of NATO to conduct its three core tasks with the simultaneous ability to deter any aggression against its territory.<sup>5</sup>

Adapting the NATO Command Structure to a complex environment required an analysis of the functions the structure was to perform. The objective was not only to assess operational functions, but also to identify overlaps and suboptimal arrangements across the entire structure. The design outline that was proposed to the nations took this assessment into account, but it was integrated into a broader reflection to allow the proper leverage of expertise and capacity existing in the nations—a “one NATO” approach. The urgency of adapting to the environment will lead to an incremental implementation over the coming months, bearing in mind the objective of relying on a structure that is flexible by design, to face any potential challenge in a rapidly changing environment.

## The Future of NATO

One of the main drivers of the adaptation of the Command Structure was to ensure more responsiveness. In a complex environment, the process allowing decisions taken at the political level to be enforced at the tactical level must allow for greater speed. This raises the question of the level of autonomy to be granted to subordinate commands, among others. But responsiveness also implies a structure that is robust enough to manage the requirements of a major, all-out conflict, while being at the same time flexible enough to better adapt to the evolutions of the world.

The objective of the Alliance remains to preserve peace and security, but to be effective, deterrence must rely on credible forces and structures, the collective resolve to use them, and an unambiguous message to support it. What this means for NATO is that its responsiveness cannot be limited to the decisionmaking process. It must extend also to the integration of its forces, allowing them to transition seamlessly between baseline activities all the way up to the Alliance's maximum level of effort. So, regardless of the responsiveness of the structure to reach decisions and implement them, NATO needs forces that are ready to fight on short notice—and that are consequently, fully equipped, manned, trained, interoperable, and exercised, relying on key logistics units disposing of sufficient stocks and able to use vital infrastructure.

However, the decisions taken in the present to improve responsiveness at every level must also remain relevant in the future, which is why a medium-and-long-term perspective is necessary as well. In the words of Peter Drucker, who is widely regarded as the Father of Management, “long-range planning does not deal with future decisions, but with the future of present decisions.”<sup>6</sup> The adaptation of NATO's military capacity is not exempt from this, and the

complexity of the environment demands the ability to operate and adapt simultaneously.

This dual imperative has informed the delimitation of roles and responsibilities between NATO's two strategic commands, in a mutually supportive way: ACO, located in Mons, Belgium, is refocusing on current operations, supported by ACT, located in Norfolk, Virginia. Conversely ACT is responsible for future operations, and is supported by ACO.

To identify the key principles necessary to deal with a complex environment, it is useful to study how some of the most innovative private companies, especially in the digital world, have adapted more rapidly than the defense community. Several principles developed and implemented by these companies that have enabled them to thrive in complex situations can be identified. These principles have, more often than not, a direct applicability to NATO and to the defense community as a whole. The most important are:

- No nation or organization alone holds every key to solving a crisis. This is why NATO is expanding its network of partners, and developing ways to better federate the capacity and expertise owned by its nations, but also by a range of actors, including international organizations, private companies, and academia;
- Strategic awareness is necessary and must be global if it is to detect the early signs of a developing situation as soon as possible;
- Complexity renders surprise inevitable. This means that flexibility and resilience must be integrated into the organization at every level, to withstand potential setbacks and turn them into opportunities. This has contributed to the reasoning behind NATO's adaptation;
- Regardless of how demanding day-to-day operations are, permanent adaptation efforts remain essential. Successful organizations are those that preserve their ability to operate and adapt

at the same time—hence the mutually supporting roles of ACO and ACT;

- The emergence of disruptive technologies will transform our organizations and concepts. This presents us with threats, but also with potential opportunities. Both must be considered if NATO is to stay on pace with its potential adversaries;
- In a world increasingly driven by technology, the two main strategic resources are data and human capital.

These principles have contributed to informing the adaptation efforts of the Alliance, with the overall objective to evolve at the speed of relevance. In a complex environment evolving at an increasing pace, NATO must cultivate a culture of innovation.

### The Innovation Imperative

In military circles on each side of the Atlantic, innovation is the latest buzzword permeating every reflection on adaptation efforts. But dismissing it entirely because of its trending nature would be a mistake: innovation is not just about having new ideas, but about their implementation as well. The complexity of the environment renders this necessary.

At the scale of NATO, developing a culture of innovation presents a double challenge. The first line of resistance is the nature of military organizations, built around a vertical hierarchy that is necessary in combat situations, which tends to hamper the circulation of new ideas, especially when they come from the lower end of the chain of command. The second line of resistance is the multinational nature of the Alliance, which means that the emergence and diffusion of new ideas has to overcome the cultural misgivings and sensitivities of 29 nations. But the resistance also has a potential upside: the military culture grants a solid framework allowing for easier implementation, and the multinational culture

enriches the reflection considerably. ACT is developing initiatives to foster a culture of innovation, both internally and with external stakeholders.

While these initiatives are both internal and external, the first step is to allow a collective culture of innovation to thrive. Being a multinational military organization, ACT faces a twofold cultural challenge in enhancing the flow and exchange of ideas within a population used to vertical hierarchical models, and taking into consideration the national aspects of culture. To alleviate these difficulties, ACT has put in place training events for its personnel, with the aim of rendering our human capital receptive to innovation. But innovation also needs champions across the structure, and a tailored innovation bootcamp aimed at the intermediate management level has been developed as well.

Innovation also requires external inputs and fresh ideas: the Innovation Hub ensures that ACT remains connected to the outside world. Both a virtual and physical meeting space, it allows companies, universities, and even individuals to contribute to different events, conferences, and, since last year, innovation challenges. This latest initiative is based on open innovation. ACT builds a challenge based on a simple scenario, and outside contributors develop solutions. The winners, or the most promising projects, can then be turned into actual capability projects in cooperation with the headquarters. These are but a few examples of developing initiatives that aim at going beyond the sole declaration of intention.

The next step is to turn this culture of innovation into tangible results—otherwise, it will remain a buzzword, without substance. This is a domain where NATO cannot afford to fail, especially at a time when technology is profoundly transforming the way we plan, prepare, and conduct operations. Symbolic of this is an anecdote involving U.S. Secretary of Defense James Mattis, who was asked about the enduring nature of the principles of war

during a return flight from Europe early this year.<sup>7</sup> Secretary Mattis—like me, also a former Supreme Allied Commander Transformation for NATO—answered that he had spent more than 40 years in the military being absolutely convinced that said principles would never change. However, he added, recent developments and breakthroughs, especially regarding artificial intelligence, had shaken his convictions. He concluded that keeping an open mind on what the future held was necessary. And this is perhaps the most important case for innovation: in a complex environment, where we know we will be surprised, innovative solutions will be required to preserve our flexibility and our responsiveness.

### NATO at a Crossroads

Successful and lasting organizations must adapt quickly, and militaries are not exempt from that requirement—even less so than their civilian counterparts, because preparing for past wars generally has dire consequences for them, and for their countries. NATO, as the hub for transatlantic and European security it has strived to be for the past 70 years, is undergoing a significant structural upheaval, as it wishes to stay relevant to contemporary threats and challenges, while putting itself in a position to keep an edge on any potential opponent in the foreseeable future.

Of course, like any multinational organization, NATO will face internal challenges and tensions. But the Warsaw Summit proved that the unity of NATO members was not a mere display. In an age of complexity, the famous Churchill quote—“There

is only one thing worse than fighting with allies, and that is fighting without them”—rings truer than ever.<sup>8</sup> The Warsaw Summit was an important step for NATO in meeting the demands of our security environment, but its outcomes will only be lasting if the Alliance’s adaptation efforts are put into a broader and longer-term perspective; if they bring coherence in leveraging a global network of partners, like-minded people, and organizations that can help foster innovation through the Alliance.

The Brussels Summit drew upon the decisions made by the Nations in Warsaw and reinforced many of their commitments. Since responsiveness is a priority both at the political and military levels, quick implementation of the many decisions taken in Brussels (more than one hundred!) will be the main challenge for the Alliance in the months to come. But we have already shown our ability to adapt at the speed of relevance. No doubt NATO, as one team, will continue to demonstrate its unity by implementing these decisions in a coherent, traceable, timely, efficient, and effective manner. **PRISM**

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*... innovation is not just about having new ideas, but about their implementation as well. The complexity of the environment renders this necessary.*

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> The North Atlantic Treaty, April 4, 1949, available at <[https://www.nato.int/cps/ic/natohq/official\\_texts\\_17120.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/ic/natohq/official_texts_17120.htm)>.

<sup>2</sup> The exercise *Viking 18*, involving 50 countries and 35 organizations, is a good example of the efforts that NATO supports. For an overview of this spring 2018 exercise see <<https://www.forsvarsmakten.se/en/activities/exercises/viking-18/>>.

<sup>3</sup> By “projecting stability,” NATO envisions the actions necessary to prevent a crisis—either inside its traditional area of operations or not—and, when necessary, the ability to intervene before it degenerates and reaches allied borders.

<sup>4</sup> These seven areas are: hybrid threats, operations, cyber defence, defence capabilities, exercises, maritime security, and capacity building for partners.

<sup>5</sup> The three core tasks are collective defense, crisis management, and cooperative security. NATO, "2010 Strategic Concept 'Active Engagement, Modern Defence'," November 19, 2010, available at <[https://www.nato.int/cps/ic/natohq/topics\\_82705.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/ic/natohq/topics_82705.htm)>.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted by Elisabeth Matsangou, *A History of Peter Drucker and his Impact on Management Theory*, European CEO, December 3, 2015, available at <<https://www.europeanceo.com/business-and-management/a-history-of-peter-drucker-and-his-impact-on-management-theory/>>.

<sup>7</sup> Aaron Metha, AI makes Mattis Question 'Fundamental' Beliefs about War, C4ISRNET, February 17, 2018, available at <<https://www.c4isrnet.com/intel-geoint/2018/02/17/ai-makes-mattis-question-fundamental-beliefs-about-war/>>.

<sup>8</sup> This comment was pronounced by Churchill at Chequers, the official country residence of British Prime Ministers, on April 1, 1945, according to the Churchill Foundation. This and other quotes are available to review at <<https://winstonchurchill.org/uncategorised/quotes-slider/>>.

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## Photos

Page 2. Original NATO caption: NATO Secretary General attends the NATO–Industry Forum in Brussels. 140213-A-RJ750-001

Page 7. Original NATO caption: NATO inaugurates small unit headquarters in Slovakia. Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 2.0 Generic (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0), available at <<https://www.flickr.com/photos/nato/32350160962/in/album-72157679537061225/>>



In January this year, Afghan Special Security Forces destroy former ISIS-K fighting positions and weapon caches in Nangarhar Province. (U.S. Army/Jacob Krone)

# The Fight So Far...

By Michael K. Nagata

**A**merica has invested enormous treasure, exerted extraordinary effort and sent many of its best, brightest, and most courageous to combat terrorism in the past 17-plus years since 9/11.<sup>1</sup> As we pass another anniversary of that tragic day, this narrative seeks to take stock of where we have been, where we are, and where we should strive to go.

Achieving significantly greater strategic success against terrorism remains within America's grasp, but only if we are willing to be as adaptive and flexible—indeed more so—than our terrorist adversaries have proven to be. Achieving this will require us to make investments, adopt practices, and make choices we previously have not. The purpose of this narrative is to encourage a larger and more effective discussion about these investments, practices, and choices. Although the U.S. Government (USG) has frequently claimed to take a whole-of-government approach in utilizing all elements of national power to fight terrorism, our struggle against the Islamist State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has demonstrated that we must strengthen our emphasis and resourcing of non-kinetic counterterrorism (CT) efforts to match the strengths that we and our allies have developed since 9/11 in kinetic efforts.

## Where We Have Been

According to a recent U.S. Army-sponsored RAND study, since 9/11 the United States has deployed more than 2.7 million military service members and government civilians to conduct or support dozens of CT campaigns and military operations; many of which endure to this day.<sup>2</sup> During these years, the United States has developed extraordinary capabilities and strengths for contesting terrorism, ranging from precise military actions to capture or kill terrorist leaders, to impressive law enforcement operations to bring terrorist perpetrators to justice, to sophisticated intelligence operations to enable both ourselves and our international partners to disrupt dangerous terrorist plots, and beyond.

Entire CT career fields have been created or have expanded. The “Find-Fix-Finish-Exploit-Analyze” formula for illuminating and attacking terrorist networks has become a permanent part of the CT lexicon. All Americans can and should be immensely proud of the progress we have made in creating the most impressive array of kinetic CT capabilities in our history. However, despite our best efforts and the efforts of our partners

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LTG Michael K. Nagata, U.S. Army, is the Director of Strategic Operational Planning at the National Counterterrorism Center.

and allies around the world, terrorism today is more widespread and more complex than when we began.

Today, the Salafi Jihadist movement—as well as a multitude of other violent extremist movements—continues to grow globally. Outside our country, the problem of Salafi Jihadist terrorism has expanded from its original roots in locales such as Yemen, Sudan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan into dozens of countries and across every region. Terrorist movements across the political-religious spectrum are becoming increasingly effective in using the internet and inspiring radicalization and mobilization of individuals around the world, including inside our own country. Despite our efforts of the past 17 years, terrorists' ability to raise revenue and resources, sponsor and broadcast extremist ideologies, recruit fighters, and move terrorist operatives from country to country has significantly grown.

Said more simply, the United States is facing an upward strategic trajectory of global terrorism. According to the U.S. State Department's annual *Country Reports on Terrorism* publication, in the five years after 2012, worldwide terrorism-related attacks increased by 64 percent and associated fatalities by more than 130 percent although absolute numbers thankfully leveled off in 2015 and 2016.<sup>3</sup> This has occurred despite the otherwise effective action that the United States and our partners around the world have taken against our terrorist adversaries.

Here at home, the FBI is in some stage of investigating at least 1,000 homegrown violent extremists, inspired or connected in some way to international terrorist ideologies, in communities across all fifty states.<sup>4</sup> The homegrown violent extremist (HVE) population in the United States has expanded significantly since 2014, and an unprecedented number of people are radicalizing and mobilizing to violence in response to ISIS' rise. We are now seeing more and more minors—some as young as 12—becoming more radicalized and involved in active plotting.<sup>5</sup> Although we have seen a drop in actual HVE attacks

during the past two years, the scope, scale, and trajectory of this challenge should remain very worrisome for us all.<sup>6</sup>

## Where We are Now

Today, the United States finds itself simultaneously confronted with both a return to nation-state strategic competition (e.g. Russia, China and beyond) in addition to the large international and domestic terrorism challenge we have faced since 9/11.<sup>7</sup> Not surprisingly, this is forcing us toward choices over priorities, resources, and risks that are both complex and strategically consequential. America is increasingly challenged to effectively deal with terrorist threats without the luxury of having CT be our entire strategic focus.

For example, the United States is approaching an inflection point in its struggle against ISIS. While the United States and The Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS have waged a highly successful military campaign against ISIS' geographic caliphate and its associated military arm in the Levant, large numbers of their fighters still remain there, and more importantly, ISIS' globally distributed network has become capable of planning, resourcing, coordinating, and/or inspiring terrorist attacks in every hemisphere.<sup>8</sup>

Meanwhile, ISIS is today a malign “innovator” among terrorists everywhere in demonstrating the significant advantages to be gained by incorporating technological advances. One example is ISIS' extraordinarily effective use of the internet to promote radicalization and mobilization-to-violence in ways that have added thousands of adherents to its global ranks. A second example has been ISIS' efforts to weaponize and effectively employ affordable and commercially available technology such as unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) into devices that can both enhance or even conduct terrorist attacks.<sup>9</sup> We should not be surprised that terrorists will seek to take advantage of the relentless pace of technological change.



## Where We Should Go

The United States has extraordinary strengths and capabilities in dealing with terrorism. However, in a rapidly accelerating world that increasingly provides more powerful tools for both good and bad actors alike, we should remain mindful of Abraham Lincoln's 1862 exhortation:

*The dogmas of the quiet past, are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise with the occasion. As our case is new, so we must think anew and act anew.*

This is not to suggest we should abandon the tools or techniques that have served us so well since 9/11; many of which were the fruits of experimentation, lessons learned, and great American courage over years of toil, investment, and even direct combat against terrorism in its various guises. However, we have already learned that these impressive strengths have not achieved a durable reduction in the international or domestic scope and scale of terrorism thus far.

Therefore, we should more seriously examine the question of what capabilities we should now invest in to achieve such durable outcomes; particularly as we must devote more of our strategic attention and resources to other national security challenges. The answers lie within what can be imperfectly described as “non-kinetic counterterrorism.” Examples are efforts to combat recruiting online, prevent the creation of more terrorists, or frustrate terrorists’ ability to travel or garner revenue.

While we should maintain our already formidable capability to attack and disrupt terrorist activities, terrorists have expanded their reach and networks into environments and locations, both internationally and domestically, where the use of kinetic CT approaches will be unwelcome, inappropriate, and/or counterproductive. Inevitably, we will have to increasingly rely on forms of CT that do not involve the use of physical force, kinetic action,

or even law enforcement arrest; though these will remain necessary to some degree.

Furthermore, if we can make ourselves stronger and more effective in non-kinetically contesting the “drivers” of terrorist movements, we would likely discover that we could both achieve the durable outcomes we seek, and that non-kinetic CT activities are far more economical than the large costs typically associated with kinetic CT action.

This is not to suggest we must lavish equivalent fiscal or manpower investment on non-kinetic forms of CT on the scale of what we have invested into kinetic efforts. The organizations, both governmental and non-governmental, that currently strive to prevent or contest terrorism through non-kinetic means possess neither the absorptive capacity nor, in some cases, the proven methodologies today that could justify such a massive investment approach. Furthermore, the United States and many partner governments have learned they must be very thoughtful in how they support or fund non-kinetic programs such as terrorism prevention or messaging/counter messaging, especially with respect to our obligations to ensure civil and human rights, personal privacy, political freedoms, and freedom of commerce.

Nonetheless, both within our own country and across the international community—we need a much more vibrant discussion about the degree to which we are willing and able to increase our investments in terms of fiscal resources, manpower, and genuine policy support for becoming more effective in at least five non-kinetic counterterrorism efforts:

1. Preventing terrorism—also referred as countering violent extremism (CVE)—by assisting local communities, schools, law enforcement, and families in identifying those most vulnerable to terrorist recruitment and enabling local actors to either prevent or “off-ramp” these individuals or groups by teaching them how to address their needs or grievances without resorting to violence.

2. Countering or contesting terrorist ideologies, particularly in the arena of offering more attractive positive alternatives to their poisonous ideas, while retaining our efforts to critique and expose the terrorist narrative.
3. Countering or contesting terrorist use of the internet, both as a global and increasingly secure command-and-control system, and as an increasingly powerful radicalization and recruitment instrument.
4. Denying terrorists the resources they require to operate and conduct their malign activities. This goes beyond denying traditional terrorist financing, and should include frustrating their access to non-traditional forms of revenue (e.g. crypto-currency), rapidly evolving technology (e.g. UAS), and increasingly powerful fabrication technologies (e.g. 3-D printing).
5. Preventing terrorist travel, both domestically and internationally. ISIS alone has inspired the travel of tens of thousands of foreign terrorist fighters across several regions, and the ease and convenience of international travel continues to rise. Nonetheless, the United States and international community must find pathways toward more effectively denying terrorist travel without hindering the commercial prosperity or individual freedom that legitimate travel affords.<sup>10</sup>

It is important to acknowledge that many around the world strive to succeed in these arenas today. Both in the United States and around the world, thousands of extraordinary, dedicated people from across many agencies, across civil society, and within industry (e.g. the telecommunications and social media industry) are striving to contribute in various ways to all five of these areas today, and have achieved some significant successes. Unfortunately, the collective scope and scale of these are insufficient today, they almost universally suffer from significant resource shortfalls, and—perhaps most importantly—they would benefit

from the constant and durable policy support that kinetic CT approaches enjoy today.

Regarding policy support, it is important to recognize that during the past 17 years, kinetic CT actions against terrorists and their plots have experienced vivid and substantial policy support. Not everything we attempted to do in locating or attacking terrorists was successful, but we learned from every mistake. We were willing to absorb these setbacks, publicly defend them against both domestic and international criticism, and persevere because it was so important that we learn how to succeed kinetically.

## The Future

If we are to strategically succeed in these five non-kinetic efforts, it will take the same kind of sustained commitment, to include some additional resources, as we have been willing to provide our highly successful kinetic efforts. We do not yet know all of the prescriptions, approaches, skills, capabilities, or organizational models best suited to strategically succeed non-kinetically, and it will only be through the kind of ruthless experimentation and trial and error we were once willing to endure in our kinetic journey that we will learn how to be equally successful in preventing terrorism. This will ultimately determine if we learn to prevent the creation of new terrorists or prevent terrorist actions as well as we are able to kill, capture, or disrupt them today.

There will be many obstacles to taking such a course; it will likely prove daunting. Shifting our investments toward non-kinetic CT will, at a minimum, engender uncertainty and even skepticism about its wisdom and effectiveness. Just as important, building and sustaining this proposed shift in our CT approach toward non-kinetic methods will take years, in the same way building our proficiency in kinetic CT has required the past 17 years. Said more simply, all of this will require strategic patience and risk acceptance.

If we are willing to embark on such a journey, we could finally achieve the kind of strategically durable reductions in global and domestic terrorism that we have long sought, and that our citizens everywhere deserve. **PRISM**

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The views expressed in this publication are entirely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views, policy, or position of the United States Government, Department of Defense, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, or the National Counterterrorism Center.

<sup>2</sup> Jennie W. Wenger, Caolionn O’Connell, Linda Cottrell, “Examination of Recent Deployment Experiences Across the Services and Components,” (Washington, D.C.: The RAND Corporation, 2018), available at <[https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR1928.html?adbsc=social\\_20180320\\_2212921&adbid=97592816763334272&adbpl=tw&adbpr=22545453](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1928.html?adbsc=social_20180320_2212921&adbid=97592816763334272&adbpl=tw&adbpr=22545453)>.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. State Department, “Country Reports on Terrorism: 2012-16,” available at <<https://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/>>.

<sup>4</sup> Mark Hosenball, “The U.S. Has More Than 2,000 Probes Into Potential or Suspected Terrorists: FBI Director,” *Reuters*, May 16, 2018, available at <<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-fbi-wray/us-has-more-than-2000-probes-into-potential-or-suspected-terrorists-fbi-director-idUSKCN1IH341>>.

<sup>5</sup> Leigh McManus, “Chilling Footage Shows Four Knife Wielding Boys ISIS Claim Carried Out Bomb Attacks in Syria,” *The Daily Mail*, August 22, 2018, available at <<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-6087513/Chilling-footage-shows-four-knife-wielding-boys-ISIS-claim-carried-bomb-attacks-Chechnya.html>>; Shireen Korkzan, “American ISIS Widow Charged in Hammond Federal Court with Lying to FBI,” *NWI.com*, July 24, 2018, available at <[https://www.nwitimes.com/news/local/american-isis-widow-charged-in-hammond-federal-court-with-lying/article\\_2d907599-56da-565d-aab9-3efa66c787cc.html](https://www.nwitimes.com/news/local/american-isis-widow-charged-in-hammond-federal-court-with-lying/article_2d907599-56da-565d-aab9-3efa66c787cc.html)>; Simon Veazy, “Foreign Women and Minors Who Joined ISIS ‘Significantly Underestimated,’ Says Report,” *Epoch Times*, July 24, 2018, available at <[https://www.theepochtimes.com/foreign-women-and-minors-who-joined-isis-significantly-underestimated-says-report\\_2602419.html](https://www.theepochtimes.com/foreign-women-and-minors-who-joined-isis-significantly-underestimated-says-report_2602419.html)>; 850 WFTL, “FBI: ISIS-Inspired Teen Allegedly Stabs Three During Sleepover in BallenIsles,” available at <<https://www.850wftl.com/>>.

fbi-isis-inspired-teen-allegedly-stabs-three-during-sleepover-in-ballenises>; Tiffany Caldwell, “A Utah Student Flew the ISIS Flag—and Then Brought a Bomb to School, Police Say,” *The Salt Lake Tribune*, March 9, 2018, available at <<https://www.sltrib.com/news/2018/03/08/fire-fizzled-out-before-igniting-a-handmade-explosive-device-hidden-in-a-utah-high-school-students-backpack/>>.

<sup>6</sup> Lora Shiao, Acting Director of Intelligence, National Counterterrorism Center, “Adapting to Defend the Homeland Against the Evolving International Terrorist Threat,” hearing before the U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, December 6, 2017, available at <[https://www.odni.gov/files/NCTC/documents/news\\_documents/FINAL\\_NCTC-Shiao\\_SHSGAC-SFR\\_6-December-HearingWEB.pdf](https://www.odni.gov/files/NCTC/documents/news_documents/FINAL_NCTC-Shiao_SHSGAC-SFR_6-December-HearingWEB.pdf)>.

<sup>7</sup> President Donald Trump, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (2017), the White House, available at <<https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/.../NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>>; James Mattis, *National Defense Strategy of the United States of America* (2018): “Sharpening America’s Competitive Edge,” The Department of Defense, available at <<https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/.../2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>>.

<sup>8</sup> U.S. State Department, “The Global Coalition—Working to Defeat ISIS Fact Sheet,” March 22, 2017, available at <<https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2017/03/268609.htm>>.

<sup>9</sup> Don Rassler, “The Islamic State and Drones: Supply, Scale, and Future Threats,” The Combatting Terrorism Center at Terrorism, July 11, 2018, available at <<https://ctc.usma.edu/islamic-state-drones-supply-scale-future-threats/>>.

<sup>10</sup> Russ Travers, Acting Director, National Counterterrorism Center, “National Counterterrorism Center Acting Director Russ Travers Speaks at DoDIIS Worldwide,” Wednesday, August 29 2018, available at <<https://www.dni.gov/index.php/nctc-newsroom/nctc-speeches-testimonies-and-interviews/item/1901-national-counterterrorism-center-acting-director-russ-travers-speaks-at-dodiis-worldwide>>.



The National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency in August released a commercial GEOINT strategy update, emphasizing innovation in the face of a rapidly advancing technological landscape. The strategy meets the advancing operating environment and reflects the priority of sustaining American leadership through research, technology, and innovation outlined in the U.S. National Security Strategy. (NGA)

# The Mandate to Innovate

By Christina Monaco

**F**or years the U.S. Intelligence Community (IC) has been grappling with a threat environment that is growing exponentially more complex. The U.S. National Security Strategy and National Defense Strategy both emphasize the need to rapidly develop and integrate innovative technology. It is no longer enough for intelligence professionals to focus on delivering on their operational missions. We must also identify the means to continuously replenish the nation's intelligence advantages to match current and future threats. In other words, we have a mandate to innovate.

In autumn of last year the new Office of Ventures and Innovation (OVI) officially stood up, with a mission to guide partnerships, pathways, and solutions to improve upon existing, invent new, and imagine transformational geospatial-intelligence (GEOINT) capabilities.<sup>1</sup> In a move somewhat “meta-innovative,” OVI includes not only functions of the activities that are more conventionally included in similar offices (including sponsoring of hackathons, challenges, and prototyping using Other Transactions Authority, or “OTA”)—we also include NGA's acquisition governance activities as well. This reflects Agency leaders' understanding that in order to innovate successfully, we must take into account the full spectrum of the acquisition lifecycle. Thus, OVI helps NGA source innovation, incubate potential solutions, adopt new capabilities, and mainstream successful capabilities in programs of record.

## New Business Models

OVI is a relatively new organization at NGA, but we are not unique. Counterpart organizations exist in many other federal government and Department of Defense (DOD) entities. While the U.S. national security community has a long history of innovation, the establishment of organizations specifically dedicated to innovation within the government is becoming a norm. Taking a cue from such successful organizations as the Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA) that was established in 1958 by President Dwight D. Eisenhower, new DOD and IC organizations have been established in recent years. The Defense Innovation Unit (DIU), the Defense Digital Service, SOFWERX, and CIA's Directorate of Digital Innovation were all established in 2015, and other similar organizations have followed suit. The impetus is primarily the recognition that it is a “disrupt, or be disrupted” world out there. The status quo for innovation and acquisition

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of new capabilities will be akin to running in place, as noted by Steve Blank in his article “The Red Queen Problem: Innovation in the DOD and Intelligence Community.”<sup>2</sup> New organizational and business models are therefore necessary to ensure we can outpace our adversaries’ efforts to modernize. Throughout NGA—and particularly in OVI—experimentation with such models is gaining traction. In some cases, entirely new concepts are being tried. And in other cases, we are finding ways to improve upon existing practices.

### OTA

Growing in popularity throughout DOD, Other Transaction Authority agreements, or “OTAs,” allow for the rapid acquisition of research and prototype capabilities. OTAs are not subject to the Federal Acquisition Regulation, can be up to \$250 million, and either all commercial participants are small businesses or non-traditional vendors, or a non-federal government agency funds at least one third of the total cost of the project. Within DOD, OTAs are intended primarily to support acquisition from “non-traditional” contractors, defined as entities not currently performing (or that have not performed for at least one year prior to the solicitation) either a contract or subcontract subject to full coverage under the Cost Accounting Standards. Traditional vendors can, however, be awarded OTAs if they partner with non-traditional organizations to a significant extent.

If an OTA is competitively awarded, any post-prototype capability acquisition may be sole-source awarded to that vendor. Alternatively, an OTA may be non-competitively awarded, but post-prototype acquisition would be subject to the normal competitive process. Many organizations (including NGA) award OTAs through capability-oriented consortia formed by industry partners of all sizes. Others, such as DIU, leverage commercial solution openings.

NGA recently awarded an OTA agreement through a consortium to a vendor that had never

before directly contracted to NGA, and is the epitome of a small business: a sole proprietor offering uniquely developed cognitive artificial intelligence algorithms, software applications, and application programming interfaces (APIs) to automatically fuse and validate multiple streams of contextual geospatial intelligence data—that is increasing in volume exponentially—into NGA’s analysis. One of the challenges NGA’s analysts find is that they need to create and maintain highly customized analytic models for specific intelligence problems, but their analytic outputs must conform to a set of enterprise standards in order to be searchable and interoperable in a practice referred to as “structured observation management.” Normally the translation of the customized models to standard form outputs would be highly manual drudgery for NGA analysts whose time and attention are better spent solving intelligence problems. The prototype, if successful, will reformulate imagery data collected in the diverse analytic schemas into the required outputs. The NGA “problem owner,” an analyst named Jeremy Boss, noted:

*The simplicity and adaptability of the OTA make it a key resource as we pursue automation at NGA. The simplicity of the process makes it accessible to analysts without an acquisition background, and its high degree of adaptability makes it customizable to analysts’ current challenges. Together, what this means is that the people closest to analytic problems are able to design innovative responses, greatly improving problem-solution fit.*

### CRADA

NGA is also expanding use of Cooperative Research and Development Agreements (CRADAs) with non-traditional partners, such as start-ups and companies whose business is not primarily related

to geospatial technologies, but with which NGA has some shared interests. While NGA's CRADAs do not involve the exchange of funds with CRADA partners, several benefits accrue to these entities. These primarily relate to cost avoidance and access.

For a small business, research and development (R&D) can be a very costly undertaking, financed either through debt or equity. Capital financed through debt may be difficult or prohibitively expensive, and capital raised through equity financing may force a founder to relinquish more equity (and corporate control) to outside investors than they would like, particularly in early stages of start-up. Cost-sharing of R&D with a stable, safe (particularly in terms of intellectual property) partner like the federal government offers an attractive option. Firms involved in CRADAs with NGA have access to a ready pool of expert and trustworthy co-developers and customers. In many cases, partners can also gain access to unique geospatial data, imagery, storage, and compute resources for which they would otherwise have to pay. In turn, NGA gains insights into novel research or early access to developing and cutting-edge technologies.

Small businesses may also accrue other benefits through CRADAs. Such agreements can be used, for example, to justify processing of facility (and personnel) clearances. Companies may also note past experience with the government as CRADA partners as they position themselves for future procurement actions. Finally, CRADAs have the intangible benefit of demonstrating market interest in a capability—this becomes important during a firm's efforts to raise capital.

### *Hackathons and Challenges*

These days, it seems you cannot be considered an innovative organization without holding a hackathon or an incentivized prize and challenge competition. At NGA, we have held several of these.

And while such events and contests can yield interesting insights about novel approaches, identify unknown opportunities (or vulnerabilities), and build goodwill and outreach, often the promise of our efforts has remained largely unrealized. In fact, hackathons and challenges have something of a rap for being "innovation theater," or events you must hold to seem open to innovation, but which do not actually result in the adoption of new solutions.

A few organizations, however, have cracked the code to increase the return on investment. To wit, the fine print that accompanies SOFWERX challenge announcements reads:

*Announcement of TeamWERX prize challenges, sponsored by SOFWERX, that are considered to have high potential for further efforts that may be accomplished via FAR based contracting instruments, Other Transaction Authority (OTA) for Prototype Projects 10 USC 2371b, Prizes for advanced technology achievements 10 USC 2374a, and/or Prize Competitions 15 USC 3719, may be made at the [www.sofwerx.org](http://www.sofwerx.org) and [www.teamwerx.org](http://www.teamwerx.org) website. All announcements made at the website(s) are considered to satisfy the reasonable effort to obtain competition in accordance with 10 USC 2374a (b), 15 USC 3719 (e) and 10 USC 2371b (b)(2). All FAR based actions will follow announcement procedures per FAR 5.201(b) accordingly.<sup>3</sup>*

In other words, SOFWERX allows challenges to be used as the competitive element necessary to award a subsequent contract action. The specific clause that permits this in the Title 10 section that applies, S.2374a "Prizes for advanced technology achievements," is subsection (d), which reads:

*Relationship to Other Authority: A program under subsection (a) may be carried out in conjunction with or in addition to the*

*exercise of any other authority of an official referred to in that subsection to acquire, support, or stimulate basic, advanced and applied research, technology development, or prototype projects.*

These authorities hold much promise for turning innovation theater into “innovation reality shows.” This concept is also at the base of one of OVI’s major efforts, GEOWorks.

### ***GEOWorks and Public Private Partnerships***

The GEOINT discipline has evolved rapidly from pictures to pixels to data. To make sense of the flood of data now streaming into the IC and DOD from both government and commercial GEOINT capabilities, we need to develop machine learning and computer vision technologies. The advanced technologies we need are not always rapidly available to the government. To ameliorate this, in 2017, NGA rolled out a new concept for a means of public-private partnership (PPP) that leverages our existing holdings of petabytes of geospatial data and imagery for the development of technologies related to what we refer to as “AAA,” or automation, augmentation, and AI. Our value hypothesis is that by providing outside entities access to NGA’s data, the partners could use them, for example, as training datasets for the development of AI algorithms with potential for both government and commercial purposes. By partnering with NGA in this fashion, new AAA technologies might be invented, and NGA could benefit not only from the availability of these technologies, but also by receiving licenses and government use rights for the co-development efforts.

In true start-up style, NGA has begun a number of experimental means of testing the hypothesis that there is a market for these kinds of geospatial data partnerships. First, we have been pursuing CRADAs with companies willing and able to experiment alongside NGA on this effort. What we have initially

found is that there is broad interest in co-developing technology in this manner, yet we must carefully consider risks and benefits when it comes to the intellectual property rights that would accrue as a result of such efforts.

Second, we created a new website that allows for open access to NGA data holdings and some basic processing and compute resources. This website, “GEOWorks,” ([www.NGA-GEOWorks.com](http://www.NGA-GEOWorks.com)) was developed and launched in just eight weeks. The website leverages [login.gov](http://login.gov) for user access control, allowing the public to access several NGA and other publicly available geospatial datasets. At this point, the data is largely foundation data (related to mapping, charting, and geodesy), including for example terrain elevation data, vertical obstructions, and navigational information—and we are pursuing the release of additional unclassified or declassified data (such as historical imagery from satellites). While the data cannot be downloaded by users, we are also providing access to various processing capabilities, such as a geospatial viewer, TensorFlow, and Jupyter Notebooks. In order to maximize interest in the data and the GEOWorks platform—and eventually to allow for GEOWorks to be a platform from which NGA directly acquires new technology (e.g., software or AI algorithms)—the site includes links to ongoing hackathons and challenges. Our intent is to use this latter capability to identify the most promising AAA technologies and formally acquire them through, for example, OTAs leveraging the authorities cited above. The hackathons and challenges to be posted will be actual AAA needs to which the datasets posted on GEOWorks relate. And while GEOWorks is a technical underpinning for our PPP efforts, the site also benefits NGA for purposes such as recruiting and outreach. Academia will be able to use the data and capabilities available on GEOWorks to practice geospatial data science and analysis, enriching the talent stream that feeds NGA and the GEOINT enterprise.



GEOWorks has some indirect benefits to NGA in that its development and launch have helped the agency adopt product management practices. We have leveraged our recent successes with NGA's GEOINT Services efforts, and are applying the "build low, move high" mentality in which we first test and prove capabilities on unclassified networks before we integrate them into our classified networks and workflows. For example, one of the subcomponents of GEOWorks is figuring out the technical aspects of ingest and integration of algorithms developed through the platform. As a result of this learning aspect of the project, we are better able to integrate agile, lean, and iterative technology practices.

### **Acquisition Restructuring: Organizing for Agility**

Innovation at NGA is not just about new capabilities. We are also focusing on innovation in organizational structures and processes to achieve the elusive goal of agility. One of the first activities undertaken by the NGA Office of Ventures and Innovation was to overhaul acquisition oversight within the agency. NGA Director Robert Cardillo recently designated his deputy, Justin Poole, as the agency's Component Acquisition Executive (CAE). For several years, that authority had rested deeper within NGA's management structure. However, as part of a recent restructuring of senior management at NGA, Director Cardillo felt it prudent to elevate the CAE role. In order to ensure not only that acquisition oversight was being properly managed, but also that innovation is actively incorporated into NGA's programs, the Deputy CAE and staff support for that function aligns to the OVI.

In partnership with NGA's Chief Information Officer (CIO) and Information Technology (IT) management directorate leadership, Poole has implemented a new acquisition governance schema in his role as the CAE. First, these leaders agreed on a rough number of what we have come to know

as "big chunky programs" organized by GEOINT mission outcomes, such as "sensor integration" or "foundation GEOINT modernization." (Prior to this designation, NGA had dozens of programs, mostly aligned to existing workflows that in turn were reflected in singularly-aligned contracts). The consolidation of programs aligned to mission outcomes is allowing program managers to have a more holistic view of all the related capabilities in their portfolios. They can more easily identify potentially duplicative capabilities, prioritize development backlogs, and manage budgets with greater accountability.

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These big chunky programs and their program managers are adopting modular contracting strategies, looking to integrate in-house software development and DevOps efforts, and participating in technology and innovation boards that offer the opportunity to introduce technologies to satisfy requirements in their backlog or to potentially offer new capabilities of which the customer was unaware. To ensure that the aggregation of existing programs and requirements did not become a bureaucratic roadblock, the CAE has identified and delegated decision authority for program and service acquisition approval/oversight to the agency's Senior Procurement Executive and to the CIO, consistent with their statutory responsibilities. This is a subtle



Not all innovative ideas come from inside NGA. As an example, NGA also awards academic grants that support innovative, high-payoff research that provides the basis for revolutionary progress in areas of science and technology affecting the needs and mission of the Agency. (NGA)

but meaningful cultural shift in an agency which previously required any program or contract action to be reviewed and approved by the CAE when the dollar threshold was greater than \$35M.

Furthering the cultural change, NGA's CIO and IT management directorate is leading the creation of new NGA Integrated Program Offices that align to the "big chunky programs." These integrated program offices are being designed around the need to have customers and subject matter experts (mission owners, developers, security personnel, contracting officers, and innovation advisors, to name a few) working daily with efforts that are employing agile software development methods or DevOps. By fully integrating these stakeholders into the program offices and tying mission and product owners to the development side of the house, NGA is organizing for rapid delivery and acceptance of mission enhancing capability to the customer. The kind of tangible outcome that will result from this structure is, for

example, the broader adoption of NGA's "ATO-in-a-Day" (authorization to operate) assessment and authorization process for new software.

### Culture

All new business models must be supported by an organizational culture that thrives on experimentation and learning and is willing to "fail forward." As noted by the U.S. House of Representatives Armed Services Committee Chairman Mac Thornberry (R-Texas) in 2016, experimentation:

*encourages innovative thinking, not just in developing the technology, but in how you use it. It helps ensure there is mature technology before you start production so that you don't have those unexpected surprises. It reduces the odds that you are going to spend a lot of money on a program of record that you then have to cancel and have it all wasted.<sup>4</sup>*

In other words, there is room in the federal government to adopt some of the much-ballyhooed fail fast, fail often mantra of Silicon Valley. To do so—even in government—is a realist’s way of avoiding the far worse infraction of failing late, and failing expensive. In fact, in Silicon Valley and the D.C. Beltway, the worst crime might be not to try at all. At NGA and in other partner organizations, we are encouraging entrepreneurial practices similar to those practiced in the start-up world in order to grow more comfortable operating with this mentality.

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### ***Lean Start-Up***

Lean Start-Up practices as made popular by Eric Ries and widely adopted in the business world have a foothold in the government as well. Within the IC, several agencies (including foreign ally agencies) have joined efforts in an education program called “Fast Forward” that is training intelligence professionals from virtually all disciplines. The program particularly emphasizes problem curation—the effort that must be put into talking to customers and

other stakeholders and in surveying the existing landscape of possible solutions to ensure capabilities being pursued are truly needed and innovative. Fast Forward participants come away from the course with a “mission model canvas” that kick starts their efforts to solve a particular problem and create value for beneficiaries. Using a concept outlined by entrepreneurs Alex Osterwalder and Steve Blank, this artifact helps innovators visualize how to turn customer needs into mission outcomes.<sup>5</sup>

At NGA, we have also formalized a six-phase “lean innovation pipeline” model based on the work of Blank, Osterwalder, and Pete Newell of BMNT (and former director of the Army’s Rapid Equipping Fund). The model aligns with NGA’s existing corporate and acquisition governance processes, to provide a roadmap for moving projects from concept development through integration. One of the needs OVI has identified from past and ongoing innovation efforts at NGA is that agency innovators need a clearer understanding of the means available to them and the potential pathways they could take to move their projects through this pipeline. To address this, OVI developed an internal web-based reference to help agency innovators identify the best means available to advance their innovation projects through the phases of innovation, from sourcing, to problem curation and prioritization, into solution/hypothesis testing, incubation, and finally transitioning to integration. In OVI we also have established a cadre of experts in the pipeline and in lean start-up practices who serve as “caddies” working alongside agency innovators to advise them as they move through these processes. This “full service” assistance model is particularly useful for first-time innovators, many of whom seek our assistance as a result of participation in NGA’s formal innovation contest.

### ***Innovation Experience***

One means NGA has implemented to both identify needed capabilities and to nurture innovative

business practices from within the agency has been something we call the “NGA Innovation Experience.” Similar to programs such as the Spark Program sponsored by the Director of National Intelligence, what sets the NGA Innovation Experience apart is how we bring together concepts from the start-up community and venture capital world in a government context. The program solicits ideas for innovation projects from the NGA workforce, and teams interested in participating can take NGA’s Fast Forward courses. There, they become familiar with the concepts of lean start-up and product/market fit. After an initial round of judging by executives from across the agency, the teams participate in a showcase to pitch their ideas to NGA’s Venture Board. The board includes a smaller subset of executives, including C-Suite leaders, who have the authority to grant some teams the time to step away from their day-to-day missions for a month of intensive innovation accelerator activity. Similar to commercial start-up incubators, the accelerator staff help the teams to refine their problem statements, develop “minimum viable products” to better understand customer needs, and develop solution hypotheses.

After this month of activity, the teams return to the Venture Board to make another round of pitches, using data collected during their accelerator participation and investment-based logic to convince the Board to further advance their ventures. In this round, the Board can award either additional on-the-job time or the needed resources from a Venture Fund set aside for these types of projects. This concept of incremental funding based on data proving projects’ alignment to key “-ilities” (such as viability, feasibility, and desirability) is specifically what helps the Venture Board avoid locking up agency resources in solution investments that have little initial proof of future success. This approach helps the agency buy down technical, cost, and even schedule risk. It also puts the user at the center of both the product design and resourcing decisionmaking processes.

In some cases, the teams participating in the Experience accelerator find that they must pivot off their initial concepts in order to better solve the problem they have identified. In 2017, one such team, known as Team MEANS (Modern Environment for Analysis of Networks), entered NGA’s accelerator with full intentions to build a tool for road network analysis to support NGA military customers that would have integrated existing road networks databases (akin to Waze for tanks). After spending time curating their problem and conducting customer discovery, they realized that without underlying data hierarchical integration their original concept wouldn’t work. As a result, the team pivoted to creating this hierarchy, prior to building out any routing analysis algorithms. Absent this problem curation, the solution Team MEANS developed would not have the “-ilities” necessary to successfully achieve the intended outcome, and would have been a waste of time and resources.

Of course, in the world of geospatial intelligence, not all innovative ideas for NGA’s mission come from inside the agency. As the geospatial industry grows and expands to include such new technologies as artificial intelligence, machine learning, and computer vision, we at NGA are finding we need new relationships with non-traditional partners—many of whom do not see DOD or the IC as customers. NGA has established small teams we call “Outposts” in Silicon Valley and the Austin/San Antonio, Texas corridor to identify such new potential partners and scout technologies that could help advance NGA’s capabilities. The Outposts are staffed with personnel representing specific NGA missions (e.g., intelligence analysis, mapping/charting/geodesy, geospatial analysis, security, IT) who fill the role of translating NGA’s needs into commercial language and vice versa. When they find a technology with unique potential to fill mission needs, the Outposts are able to leverage a budget of “seedling” funding to place on OTAs or to negotiate CRADAs. By virtue of their locations,

Outpost personnel are able to build deep professional networks in the country's cradles of innovation. In addition to direct engagement with innovative commercial solutions providers, the Outposts are building relationships with venture capital firms and start-up incubators. These parts of the innovation ecosystem are often in a position to guide the corporate and product maturation for technologies and services that could be of use for GEOINT missions, and to connect NGA with innovative new solutions.

The Outposts often set up "technical terrain walks" for NGA personnel who are involved in problem curation, so they can better understand what commercial solutions have already been developed. Recently, the Silicon Valley Outpost hosted a small group visiting from NGA's headquarters in Springfield, Virginia and from our St. Louis, Missouri location who were curating needs related to NGA's role as the IC/DOD functional manager for GEOINT. Specifically, this group was beginning an effort to completely revamp how the GEOINT enterprise requests capabilities needs and how those needs are tracked until they are delivered. The group engaged with a number of companies that have grappled with similar issues, such as Sevanta DealFlow, Appian, SurveyMonkey Apply, and Composable Analytics. The participants came away from the visit with a better sense of how analogous organizations tackled these problems. After their terrain walk, the group convened a larger group in Springfield to design a capabilities requirements management process for the GEOINT enterprise, leveraging what they learned in the Valley, and is on track to deliver a new process this fall.

The Outposts also serve as talent scouts for the agency, bringing attention to the possibility of federal service in tech hubs rich with talent. And just as importantly, the Outposts serve as "culture scouts." Outpost personnel, working alongside partners in industry, academia, and government help identify new methods and practices that NGA can apply to improve

the acquisition of new capabilities. Additionally, the Outpost teams are proving that not only is it possible for an intelligence agency to operate in a largely unclassified environment, but there is great value in doing so. Using OTAs we can quickly bring in commercial technologies, assess their "-ilities," and move to integration in a fraction of the time it would take to pursue a more traditional procurement.

## What Can We Improve?

While NGA's efforts to maintain an innovative GEOINT advantage are advancing, there are some areas still ripe for corporate innovation. The Agency's agile innovation backlog still includes, for example, the following requirements.

### *Tech Insertion*

Program managers have long been encouraged to plan for tech insertion as they build out their programs of record across the future years defense program (FYDP). Yet, as budgets tighten, it is often tempting to cut such funds from plans. After all, when every dollar is scrutinized by oversight, loosely defined tech insertion "wedges" without a lot of detail on specific capability are tempting targets for realignment to other needs. Yet a program without funding for tech insertion is a broken and wasteful program in the making—practically guaranteeing that by the time of delivery, the technology will be obsolete. We must vigilantly plan for and protect tech insertion funds, similar to how we protect R&D through program guidance. In fact, this need may even warrant a new "color" of appropriation—or even "colorless" funding that can be applied in the year of execution to any appropriation, as long as the funds are specifically applied to acquisition of technology that was developed inside the window of the program cycle.

### *Workforce Development*

Rapid innovation requires the acquisition workforce to be conversant in both technology and the models

being applied in the commercial world. Exposure to fundamental concepts of software development/coding and data science will not only help the workforce better appreciate and understand the programs they manage, but will also develop skills in critical and computational thinking. Additionally, widespread adoption of coursework in business concepts such as agile software development and lean start-up will provide insights into commercial practices and help the workforce become comfortable with the “fail fast” mentality that is needed to succeed as innovators and entrepreneurs. The Defense Acquisition University has piloted the “Hacking for Defense” course, and the U.S. House of Representatives has included a related amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act that requests DOD to explore expansion opportunities for this program. These are tremendously encouraging developments, given the reach of professional education throughout DOD. Beyond training, managers must encourage and reward the workforce as they engage with industry and academia to maintain insights about the current and future state of technology. Only by occasionally stepping away from the day-to-day rigors of their jobs will an empowered workforce have the strategic technological perspective needed to inform their innovation efforts.

At the more senior levels, defense and intelligence executives also need to understand how to apply decisionmaking criteria in a lean start-up context. When deciding whether to allow an innovation project to begin, what kinds of data should executives operating with a venture capital mindset expect to see? (Hint: Successful angel investors listen for clues about unmet market demand or creative ways around traditionally high barriers to market entry in this phase.) And how can defense and intelligence executives decide whether to provide more time or resources to a project that has developed a solution to a hypothesis? (Another hint: look for actual customer data indicative of product-market fit.)

At NGA, we offer a course specifically tailored to executive decisionmakers to introduce them to these concepts. This course focuses on managing uncertainty, strategic choice making, innovation at scale, and innovation accounting and metrics. As leaders become more comfortable with applying these business concepts to our mission, we should be able to more rapidly and efficiently support innovation and acquisition throughout the agency.

### *Innovation Metrics*

As Alex Osterwalder has noted, many organizations struggle with measuring innovation:

*How you measure results for a known and proven business model or value proposition substantially differs from how you measure progress in an innovation project for an unproven potential business model.<sup>6</sup>*

He goes on to note that the application of traditional execution metrics to innovation will doom such projects to failure. But how are we to know if government innovation efforts are worthwhile investments of time and taxpayer dollars?

First, we must recognize that not every innovation project will be successfully integrated. However, every innovation project will result in organizational learning. We can begin to measure learning as an additional return on time and resources spent on a project. One way to do so in a government context is to establish up front a set amount of time that will be spent on an innovation project, and to track the use of that time similar to how a start-up would track the burn rate on their available capital. At the same time, the innovation project should define a set of learning objectives it will accomplish. Tom Chi, formerly of Google X, notes that tracking key learning, which he defines as “an embodied or observed experience that materially changes the path forward,” is an entirely desired outcome for any learning organization.<sup>7</sup> The kinds of learning objectives to be tracked could

include, for example, identifying the means to reduce risk or increase the impact of a project. Chi has also spoken of not only metering time to innovation projects, but also establishing a rigorous schedule for prototype development for those projects (e.g., we will spend four months and build exactly 100 separate prototypes). By setting and adhering to that kind of goal as a condition for further investment decisionmaking, teams are incentivized both to move at pace and to accomplish as much learning as possible. When that time is up, the organization decides whether or not to further invest—and that decision should include a review of whether the learning objectives set out up front have been met, and an assessment of the value of any further learning that could accrue with the project. Similar rigor could certainly be applied in a government context.

Additionally, at the corporate level, the CAE should conduct a periodic accounting of the percent of programs with specific innovation efforts underway, as well as the percent of innovations being applied to each of three future horizons. Based on a model defined by McKinsey & Company, in NGA's OVI we define these horizons as improving existing products and services, inventing new ways to accomplish existing lines of business, and imagining entirely new and transformational lines of business.<sup>8</sup> While tracking such metrics would not necessarily tell us about the effectiveness of the innovation efforts, it would give us a sense of the scope of innovation across the organization.

## Conclusion

At the end of the day, all of NGA's efforts to innovate relate to one singular purpose: delivering GEOINT to our customers when and how they need it. It is certainly easy for us to become endlessly fascinated by new capabilities and wrapped up in the minutiae of corporate processes. Yet delivering decision advantage to a policymaker or situational awareness to a warfighter is becoming a more competitive

challenge. As geospatial and AAA technologies increase in capability and availability—both within the United States and allied GEOINT enterprise as well as for our adversaries—the complexity of that mission increases. Empowering rapid experimentation and innovation, adopting new business models (particularly those that have proven successful in the business world), and applying the breadth of the means available to us to acquire new capabilities are ways for us to continuously replenish the nation's GEOINT advantage. **PRISM**

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Steve Blank, "The Red Queen Problem, Innovation in the DOD and Intelligence Community," SteveBlank (blog), October 17, 2017, available at <<https://steveblank.com/2017/10/17/the-red-queen-problem-innovation-in-the-dod-and-intelligence-community/>>.

<sup>2</sup> SOFWERX challenge announcements are available at <<https://www.sofwerx.org/>>.

<sup>3</sup> Scott Maucione, "Mac Thornberry Wants DOD to Start Failing," Federal News Radio, January 13, 2016, available at <<https://federalnewsradio.com/defense/2016/01/mac-thornberry-wants-dod-start-failing/>>.

<sup>4</sup> Steve Blank "The Mission Model Canvas—An Adaptive Business Model Canvas for Mission-Driven Organizations," SteveBlank (blog), February 23, 2016, available at <<https://steveblank.com/2016/02/23/the-mission-model-canvas-an-adapted-business-model-canvas-for-mission-driven-organizations/>>.

<sup>5</sup> Alexander Osterwalder, "Innovation Metrics vs. Execution Metrics," Strategyzer (blog), November 20, 2017, available at <<https://blog.strategyzer.com/posts/2017/11/20/innovation-metrics-vs-execution-metrics>>.

<sup>6</sup> Tom Chi, "Rapid Prototyping & Product Management by Tom Chi at Mind the Product in San Francisco," Mind The Product, posted to YouTube on May 31, 2018, available at <<https://youtu.be/wINoHEXJ2-M>>.

<sup>7</sup> "Enduring Ideas: The Three Horizons of Growth," *McKinsey Quarterly*, December 2009, available at <<https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/strategy-and-corporate-finance/our-insights/enduring-ideas-the-three-horizons-of-growth>>.



A German infantryman participates in a Combined Georgian special operations force exercise for *Noble Partner 18*, the fourth iteration of the Georgian Armed Forces and U.S. Army Europe cooperatively-led exercise. "Strength through partnership" was the theme for this year's exercise, which also emphasized joint, combined planning for complex operations. (U.S. Army/ Kris Bonet)



# Examining Complex Forms of Conflict

## Gray Zone and Hybrid Challenges

By Frank G. Hoffman

The Joint Force, and the national security community as a whole, must be ready and able to respond to numerous challenges across the full spectrum of conflict including complex operations during peacetime and war. However, this presupposes a general acceptance of a well-understood taxonomy describing the elements that constitute the “continuum of conflict.” The U.S. security community lacks this taxonomy, despite its engagement in a spate of diverse conflicts around the globe from the South China Sea, to Ukraine, Syria, Iraq, and beyond. Partially as a result of this conceptual challenge, we are falling behind in our readiness for the future. As the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Joseph Dunford has admitted “We’re already behind in adapting to the changed character of war today in so many ways.”<sup>1</sup> The U.S. national security establishment must devote greater attention to the range of challenges and adversaries it faces. The first step is recognizing the diversity of potential conflicts and understanding the relative risks of each.

American strategic culture is sometimes criticized for its emphasis on conventional, interstate war. This was acknowledged in a major 2012 lessons learned project produced by the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff that observed how a “big war” paradigm clouded our understanding and delayed the adaptation required for U.S. forces to succeed in Iraq and Afghanistan.<sup>2</sup> The tendency to ignore certain types of threats or forms of conflict has impeded U.S. strategic performance in the past, and will continue to do so until we grasp the full range of conflict types.<sup>3</sup> Without explicit recognition of diverse conflict types in U.S. strategy and doctrine, the armed services are likely to remain in a perpetual state of costly and reactive adaptation when called upon to address various threats.<sup>4</sup>

As should be expected in any attempt to describe something as complex as war, there is much debate over characterizations and definitions. The lexicon of national security and defense analysis has been strained lately, struggling to describe the emerging and ambiguous complex threats we face, most of which fall well short of conventional war. Indeed, some threats do not meet the current threshold of what we think of as war at all.

Embracing a narrow conventional conception of conflict does not prepare future leaders for the range of emerging threats we face, nor is it conducive to developing doctrine and training. A myopic focus on conventional threats obscures the complexity of the phenomena and oversimplifies the challenges. It may also be a way of overemphasizing a preferred mission set or a conventional, big war paradigm, which narrows our

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cognitive understanding of conflict.<sup>5</sup> That is a risk we have been bearing and for which we have paid a dear price for far too long.

As the Prussian theorist of war, Carl von Clausewitz argued, war is an ever-evolving, interactive phenomena.<sup>6</sup> Understanding the complexity and distinctions of various modes of warfare conducted across the continuum of conflict is critical, as is understanding our adversaries, their methods, and conceptions of victory. To navigate through the fog of complexity, a heuristic construct for conflict is presented in Figure 1.

Rather than perpetuate the binary peace/war distinction, this continuum of conflict depicts a range of different modes of conflict arrayed by increasing levels of violence, from measures short of armed conflict, to large-scale conventional wars, utilizing modality and scale of violence as distinguishing factors. A continuum is not a rigid tool, but rather an intellectual construct that opens our cognitive lens to the full-range of challenges we must understand, and will bring analytic coherence to both the complex array of contemporary security problems as well as the range of the military professional’s domain within the national security arena.

Well-defined elements within the continuum of conflict facilitate our thinking about future and current opponents and their ways of war.<sup>7</sup> Though some

scholars have rejected such parsing and argue for a unitary vision of war, war can take many forms.<sup>8</sup>

### Back to the Future

The Joint Staff’s projected security environment forecasts a future of contested norms in which adversaries will employ stratagems to gain influence and undermine U.S. interests with techniques well short of traditional armed conflict.<sup>9</sup> This is not unprecedented. During the Cold War, the United States faced persistent efforts to undermine order, weaken our alliances, and undercut our interests by activities well short of military violence. The former Soviet Union had well-established directorates in their intelligence organizations designed to sow discord, de-legitimize political opponents, and weaken the resolve of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization NATO alliance.<sup>10</sup>

Cold War and recent experience with Russia suggests that the mixture of political, economic, and subversive activity is a consistent element of their operational art.<sup>11</sup> Russia uses these tactics in Ukraine and elsewhere, a form of “simmering borscht” that seeks to extend Moscow’s sphere of influence without triggering an armed response. The former Soviet Union frequently employed what it called “active measures” in the information domain, including forgery, propaganda, and false stories or “fake news.”<sup>12</sup> Russia’s interest in and

**FIGURE 1: A HEURISTIC CONSTRUCT FOR CONFLICT.**



application of active measures does not seem to have abated, and has perhaps even intensified via social media and proliferating fake news outlets in the last several years.<sup>13</sup> This includes the development of “social bots”—computer-generated online accounts implanted into sites like Facebook that masquerade as real users—to communicate and amplify narratives or disinformation streams. These can dominate or manipulate group pages and disseminate political advertisements. Facebook representatives testified to Congress that prior to the U.S. Presidential election in 2016 a Russian “troll farm” with ties to the Russian Government paid \$100,000 for advertisements that produced thousands of Facebook and Instagram posts, to which more than 125 million users could have been exposed. The same Russian firm, the Internet Research Agency, has made widespread use of bots in its attempts to manipulate public opinion through the use of social media.<sup>14</sup> This is the 21<sup>st</sup> century version of classical Soviet *dezinformatsiya*.<sup>15</sup>

Russia’s current leaders emerged from Soviet intelligence entities and seem experienced in the use of covert approaches and the use of distortion, disinformation, subversion, and propaganda.<sup>16</sup> Russian meddling in U.S. electoral campaigns has received much attention lately, but such influence efforts have been a routine part of their arsenal of trade tricks.<sup>17</sup> Russia has also directed its cyber mischief activities at Estonia, Georgia, and Ukraine.<sup>18</sup> Moscow’s interference in European political parties, and its development of soft power “false front” organizations is also noteworthy.<sup>19</sup>

Russia’s toolkit has always included the exploitation of non-military aggression.<sup>20</sup> Experts have identified the extent to which Russia appears willing to go to project influence and sow confusion within U.S. and European democracies.<sup>21</sup> While Russia’s cyber and propaganda intrusions are intensifying, the U. S. Government is neither effectively organized nor conceptually prepared to address Russia’s information weapons.<sup>22</sup>

More recently, China’s use of diplomatic assertions, deliberate use of fishery/maritime law enforcement forces, and aggressive seizures of disputed islands in the Pacific offer another modern case study.<sup>23</sup> China’s assertiveness in the South China Sea appears designed to erode the existing international order and change the norms of international behavior by acts of latent coercion. Maritime militia forces have allowed China not only to disrupt foreign survey, energy development, and commercial fishing operations, but to extend and consolidate areas it views as Chinese territory with low escalatory risks.<sup>24</sup> China strikes with all instruments of national power, and has particularly intensified its use of military diplomacy since 2009.<sup>25</sup> China has also learned to wield influence using funding to both incentivize and coerce academic and media voices.<sup>26</sup>

China is well-organized to conduct operations short of military conflict.<sup>27</sup> As the scholar Stefan Halper perceptively noted in a study from 2014 for the Pentagon, China “employs diplomatic pressure, rumor, false narratives, and harassment to express displeasure, assert hegemony and convey threats.”<sup>28</sup> Guided by the doctrinal principle of “disintegrating enemies,” political warfare promotes the suppression of perceived threats to China by using psychological operations as a means of leading international discourse and influencing policies of friends and foes. Propaganda, carried out during both peacetime and in armed conflict, amplifies or attenuates the political effects of the military instrument of national power.<sup>29</sup> Recent reports that China is operating deep inside Australia to destabilize the Australian government and turn it toward Chinese aims suggest that Beijing’s doctrine is more than merely academic.<sup>30</sup>

Some analysts from the Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA) argue that future wars will be marked by the “three non” warfares: non-contact (*fei jierong*), non-linear (*fei xianshi*), and non-symmetric (*fei duicheng*). In non-contact warfare the more advanced adversary exploits

its advantage by staying outside the reach of the other side’s weapons, while retaining the ability to directly target and strike its rival.<sup>31</sup> Chinese conceptions of “quasi-war” and “three warfares,” as depicted in Figure 2, embrace legal, psychological, and information activities short of war.<sup>32</sup> China’s growing conventional military power suggests that it is employing these techniques as it builds up its national power and extends its military reach. To what degree will it retain an interest in non-contact and indirect methods when it has obtained regional parity? Recent research suggests that a convergence of China and Russian tactics is occurring, emanating from Chinese interpretations of Russia’s actions in the Crimea and in the cyber domain. This is not authoritative but we should also expect Russia (and others) to absorb lessons from the South China Sea.<sup>33</sup>

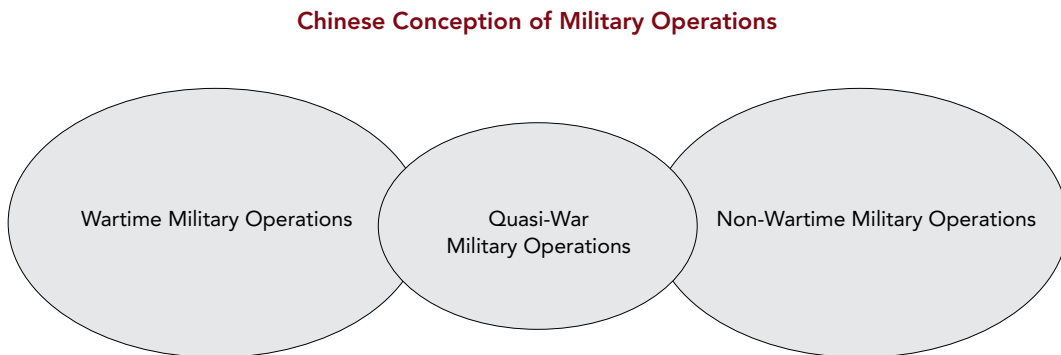
**Clarity and Unclear in the Gray Zone**

The need to compete with greater agility at lower levels short of war, against multi-functional or multi-dimensional threats is belatedly recognized today. The gap has existed for some time and was deemed decades ago to be a shortfall in U.S. strategic culture.<sup>34</sup> More recently, a security scholar noted,

*By failing to understand that the space between war and peace is not an empty one—but a landscape churning with political, economic, and security competitions that require constant attention—American foreign policy risks being reduced to a reactive and tactical emphasis on the military instrument by default.*<sup>35</sup>

This suggests that the U.S. security or policy community does not recognize the importance of competing in this arena. However, an examination of any regional or theater commander’s engagement plans would suggest this view is somewhat exaggerated. Theater security cooperation plans, military-to-military engagement, military aid or support, exercises and various forms of engagement are routinely employed by our regional commands to compete for influence and signal U.S. commitment.<sup>36</sup> The United States has recently been heavily engaged in many failing states and regions employing what might be best described as the constructive and stabilizing instruments of traditional statecraft. We may need to better understand and execute these missions, and scholars have recently noted that our assistance

**FIGURE 2: WAR, QUASI-WAR, AND NON-WAR, AS EXPRESSED IN A PLA TEXT FROM 2009.**



Source: Liu Xiaoli, *Military Response to Significant Sudden Incidents and Crises: Research on Military Operations Other than War*, 8. Adapted from Alison A. Kaufman and Daniel M. Hartnett, *Managing Conflict: Examining Recent PLA Writings on Escalation Control* (Arlington, VA: CNA, 2016), 26.

**TABLE 1: FORMS OF STATECRAFT AND INFLUENCE.**

Traditional/Legitimate	Non-traditional/Illegitimate
Security cooperation and foreign military sales	Political subversion by penetration or false-front organizations
Economic sanctions	Economic corruption
Public diplomacy and support for IGO/NGO	Propaganda/psychological operations/disinformation
Military presence/engagements/exercises	Cyber intrusions/cyber corruption/disruption
Foreign internal defense	Sponsored criminal activity
Freedom of navigation exercise (maritime or aerospace domains)	Electoral interference

programs can be improved.<sup>37</sup> It is the character of tools used that distinguishes us from other powers. Some of the tools used by others are more ambiguous and nontraditional instruments of statecraft, and may be of nefarious or of questionable legitimacy. The salient questions are: “are we doing the right things? are we doing enough? and, are the right agencies doing it?” Table 1 presents a sample list contrasting these two sets of tools.

Scholars and practitioners within the Department of Defense, and the U.S. Special Operations community in particular, have examined various case studies to better understand how to conceptualize the problem set and respond accordingly. Some recall U.S. diplomat George Kennan urging the use of political warfare to counter adversary activities.<sup>38</sup> Kennan defined political warfare as “the employment of all the means at a nation’s command, short of war.”<sup>39</sup> His understanding of the problem was informed by a deep understanding of Russian strategic culture and its preference for indirect methods. But his definition was too expansive (“all means”) and mislabeled as a form of warfare despite its focus on activities “short of war.” The term was used during the Cold War with a general understanding, though eventually displaced by covert action (or activities). It has generally been dropped from governmental usage.<sup>40</sup> Kennan himself recognized this in his

lectures on “Measures Short of War” during the 1950s at the National War College.<sup>41</sup>

The conflict mode which Kennan originally referred to as political warfare has recently been re-anointed as “gray zone conflict.” Actors in the gray zone are,

*employing sequences of gradual steps to secure strategic leverage. The efforts remain below thresholds that would generate a powerful U.S. or international response, but nonetheless are forceful and deliberate, calculated to gain measurable traction over time.*<sup>42</sup>

As noted this is not unprecedented; in fact, it rather resembles classical “salami-slicing” strategies, fortified with a range of unconventional techniques—from cyberattacks to information campaigns to energy diplomacy. One scholar lists numerous current relevant examples, including the ongoing crisis in eastern Ukraine. But Ukraine—particularly the fighting in Donbas—has blown past being an ambiguous “no-man’s land” or gray zone, given the violent scope of the conflict (10,000 dead) and the overt use of advanced conventional power (armor, rockets, missiles).

Others argue that,

*the gray zone is characterized by intense political, economic, informational, and*

*military competition more fervent in nature than normal steady-state diplomacy, yet short of conventional war.*<sup>43</sup>

Yet others note that gray zone conflicts,

*involve some aggression or use of force, but in many aspects their defining characteristic is ambiguity—about the ultimate objectives, the participants, whether international treaties and norms have been violated, and the role that military forces should play in response.*<sup>44</sup>

They list Russia's annexation of Crimea, its support of separatists in eastern Ukraine; the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) advances; Boko Haram's insurgency in Nigeria, among others, as gray zone conflicts. That range includes very distinct conflicts and asks a lot of the concept. Russia's war inside Ukraine is hardly covert or ambiguous. Similarly, ISIL is responsible for an estimated 20,000 fatalities, and an estimated 10,000 casualties in Nigeria have been attributed to Boko Haram. These belligerents appear to worry little about crossing lines or facing escalation from the international community. Clearly these are not gray or ambiguous acts.

The definition of gray zone conflicts remains both expansive and elusive. Definitions found in recent literature are applied very inconsistently and do not contribute to analytic coherence as they cover such a vast portion of the conflict spectrum, overlooking different historical contexts, methods, and best practices. These over-wide definitions rob gray zone conflict of analytical utility, as they mask more than they reveal. Indeed, this new term captures more a failure in U.S. military and security culture than it characterizes any new method or form of conflict. The real gray zone is "between our ears," in our faulty models and education about what conflict entails. Enshrining our intellectual fault line as an opponent's method is not enlightening. As John Arquilla, a professor and Chair of Defense Analysis

at the Naval Postgraduate School, has convincingly argued, instead of creating an imaginary zone, we should understand that all of this activity is an essential part of the realm of human conflict.<sup>45</sup>

The importance of the measures addressed by these scholars is valid even as they struggle to define it. This area has been consistently highlighted by strategic assessments of the U.S. Intelligence Community and cannot be ignored.<sup>46</sup> The only issue is whether the use of these tactics will dissipate or increase in the future.

Conceptual progress requires clear and distinct definitions, and vague terms like political warfare or gray zone are of limited help.<sup>47</sup> This is not war in the classic sense, but we should not misconstrue the fundamental element of conflict inherent to this part of the security environment.

A formal definition of gray zone tactics is offered:

*Those covert or illegal activities of non-traditional statecraft that are below the threshold of armed organized violence; including disruption of order, political subversion of government or non-governmental organizations, psychological operations, abuse of legal processes, and financial corruption as part of an integrated design to achieve strategic advantage.*

This definition emphasizes the actual activities over intent. Placing this to the far left of the proposed continuum of conflict, short of violent military force or war, represented by the thick red line, positions it clearly along the continuum of challenges that our security policy must address.

## Defining Hybrid Warfare

Nearly 15 years ago, analysts in the Department of Defense and at the Marine Corps' Warfighting Lab identified trends and evidence of deliberate efforts to blur and blend methods of war. Their forecast suggested that the prevailing technological advantage of the American-dominated Revolution

in Military Affairs would produce a counter-revolution that would exploit the convergence of different modes of conflict. This threat hypothesis evolved into a theory of hybrid threats.<sup>48</sup> The projection was affirmed in the summer of 2006 in Southern Lebanon by the actions of Hezbollah, and appears to be relevant to other conflicts as well.<sup>49</sup> Three U.S. Secretaries of Defense, including the incumbent, have found the hybrid warfare concept useful and have warned of the emergence of hybrid adversaries.<sup>50</sup>

Military leaders as well, including Chiefs of Staff of the Army and several Joint leaders, have recognized

that current categories do not match contemporary conflict.<sup>51</sup> Hybrid threats are frequently referred to in the 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review, national-level intelligence reports on the future character of war, and in various top-level documents of other countries.<sup>52</sup> The Futures Study Group at NATO–Allied Command Transformation (ACT) also anticipated this threat in 2007.<sup>53</sup> Numerous policymakers and military leaders have agreed, as shown in Figure 3.

A hybrid threat transcends a blend of regular and irregular tactics. More than a decade ago, it was defined as an adversary that “simultaneously and adaptively employs a fused mix

### FIGURE 3: HYBRID WARFARE, AS MENTIONED BY SELECT U.S. DEFENSE AND POLICY OFFICIALS.

*Hybrid warfare will be a defining feature of the future security environment.*

—the Honorable Michele Flournoy, then U.S. Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, along with Special Advisor Shawn Brimley, in their article on “The Defense Inheritance: Challenges and Choices for the Next Pentagon Team,” *The Washington Quarterly* 30 (Autumn 2008).

*In reality, as [academic] Colin Gray has noted, the categories of warfare are blurring and do not fit into tidy boxes. We can expect to see more tools and tactics of destruction—from the sophisticated to the simple—being employed simultaneously in hybrid and more complex forms of warfare.*

—the Honorable Robert Gates, then U.S. Secretary of Defense, in his article “The National Defense Strategy: Striking the Right Balance,” *Joint Force Quarterly* 52, no.1 (2009).

*Rarely are such conflicts decided on conventional battlefields by traditional armies. They become hybrid wars—a fused mix of conventional weapons, irregular tactics, terrorism and criminal behavior in the battlespace.’*

—the Honorable Joseph S. Nye, Jr., former Undersecretary of State and Chairman of the National Intelligence Council, in *The Future of Power: Its Changing Nature and Use in the Twenty-First Century* published by PublicAffairs (©2011).

*... one of the most costly lessons ... learned over the last decade: how to deal with the challenge of hybrid warfare. It will be increasingly common for the army to operate in environments with both regular military and irregular paramilitary or civilian adversaries, with the potential for terrorism, criminality and other complications.*

—General Raymond T. Odierno, then Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army, in his article on “The U.S. Army in a Time of Transition: Building a Flexible Force,” *Foreign Affairs* 90, no.3 (May–June 2012).

*But if the streets of Baghdad and the valleys of Afghanistan were a laboratory for irregular warfare, I believe that ground force will increasingly need to prepare for future hybrid warfare.*

—the Honorable Robert O. Work, then U.S. Deputy Secretary of Defense, in a speech delivered at a U.S. Army War College Strategy Conference in April, 2015.

*Future wars could have conventional forces, Special Forces, guerrillas, terrorists, criminals all mixed together in a highly complex terrain environment, with potentially high densities of civilians.*

—General Mark A. Milley, 39<sup>th</sup> Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army as quoted by journalist Helen Cooper in “The War of the Future? Picture Big Armies and Many Fronts,” *New York Times*, June 10, 2016.

of conventional weapons, irregular tactics, catastrophic terrorism, and criminal behavior in the battlespace to obtain desired political objectives.”<sup>54</sup> The criminal, or more broadly “socially disruptive behavior,” and mass terrorism aspects should not be overlooked, but the fusion of advanced military capabilities with irregular forces and tactics is key, and has appeared repeatedly during the past decade from Hezbollah to the Russian campaigns in Georgia and Ukraine.<sup>55</sup> Hezbollah’s method of fighting Israel as is described by its leader Hassan Nasrallah, is an organic response to its security dilemma and “not a conventional army and not a guerrilla force, it is something in between.”<sup>56</sup> As lethal as Hezbollah has been in the past decade, we should be concerned about the lessons it is learning in Syria from the Russians.<sup>57</sup>

Hybrid threats can also be created by a state actor using a proxy force. A proxy force sponsored by a major power can generate hybrid threats readily using advanced military capabilities provided by the sponsor. Proxy wars, appealing to some as “warfare on the cheap” are historically ubiquitous but chronically understudied.<sup>58</sup>

The hybrid threat concept captures the ongoing implications of globalization, the diffusion of military-related technologies, and the information revolution. Hybrid threats are qualitatively different from less complex irregular or militia forces. They, by and large, cannot be defeated simply by Western counterterrorism tactics or protracted counterinsurgency techniques. Hybrid threats are more lethal than irregular forces conducting simple ambushes using crude improvised explosive devices, but they



A cyber warfare operations officer reviews visualization data as analysts review log files and provide a cyber threat update. (U.S. Air Force/ J.M. Eddins, Jr.)



are not unfamiliar to Western forces and can be defeated with sufficient combat power.<sup>59</sup>

Events in the Crimea and eastern Ukraine have led European security officials to pay greater attention to Russia's assertive behavior and its ways of war. For this reason, hybrid warfare is now an explicit discussion point among NATO military and civilian leaders.<sup>60</sup> In the Crimea, Russia demonstrated that it had learned from its performance in Georgia in 2008 and employed inherently conventional methods, but with better agility and illegal methods.<sup>61</sup> This was hardly new or ambiguous but it was effective under circumstances that are not easily replicated.

Numerous foreign sources describe President Vladimir Putin's preferred method as "hybrid warfare," a blend of hard and soft power. A combination of instruments, some military and some non-military, choreographed to surprise, confuse and wear down an opponent, hybrid warfare is ambiguous in both source and intent, making it hard for multinational bodies such as NATO and the EU to craft a response.<sup>62</sup> This is not novel, especially in Russia. These are actually time-tested methods with which the U.S. security community has experience, albeit not for several decades.<sup>63</sup>

European military analysts, prompted by Russia's behavior, have also embraced the hybrid phenomenon as a feature of contemporary conflict.<sup>64</sup> However the NATO interpretation of hybrid warfare is much broader, depicting it as a mixture of military means with non-military tools including propaganda and cyber activity. This differs from the earlier American definition, and is much closer to the so-called gray zone conflicts described earlier. The distinction between indirect and less violent gray zone conflicts and the more violent methods of hybrid threats has been noted by several scholars.<sup>65</sup> Key NATO leaders define hybrid threats as "a wide range of overt and covert military, paramilitary, and civilian measures are employed in a highly integrated design."<sup>66</sup> This broad definition could describe just

about all wars, which tend to contain combinations of military and non-military activity in an integrated plan. The NATO definition reflects a combination of methods, and clearly emphasizes a purposeful design to achieve desired outcomes, but it does not necessarily include kinetic applications of violent force.

A historical case study illuminates the distinctions between the original, American view of hybrid threats and its more recent NATO interpretation. While Russia's efforts to influence Ukraine's efforts to reach out to the EU constitute an example of a gray zone conflict, clearly competing well short of traditional armed conflict, the ongoing violence in eastern Ukraine is a classical form of hybrid warfare within an integrated design that has produced a costly conflict with more than 10,000 fatalities.<sup>67</sup> The fusion of the various forces or means employed in the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts (combinations of separatists, Spetsnaz special forces, Russian regulars with advanced military capabilities, electronic warfare, drones, large volume rocket launchers, and some armor) is distinctly representative of hybrid warfare.<sup>68</sup> The employment of political repression, influence over food supplies to control the local population, and the accidental catastrophic act of killing of 217 passengers aboard MH-17 suggest a less conventional character closer to the middle of the conflict spectrum, and all are elements consistent with hybrid threat methods. The evidence of rampant corruption and suppression of employment and economic security evince all the elements of a hybrid operational context which appear to be part of a deliberate design.<sup>69</sup> Those who have repeatedly visited Ukraine and Donbas confirm the conflict as inherently hybrid in accordance with the original definition.<sup>70</sup>

As a recent RAND Corporation report noted, Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Russia Valery Gerasimov's article described the current character of warfare, rather than outlining a particular doctrine or institutional approach.<sup>71</sup> The Russian understanding of conflict constitutes

a full spectrum approach, which means it can include measures short of war or more violent hybrid approaches as appropriate to the situation.<sup>72</sup> Historically, Russia's approach has appreciated the value of indirect approaches and non-military instruments. We would do well to better re-learn Russia's strategic culture and history.<sup>73</sup>

The NATO Defense College has been at the forefront of thinking on this topic, and other European analysts are carefully examining the implications.<sup>74</sup> These analyses are primarily focused on the intelligence agencies that make routine use of the criminal underworld for "services" including cyberattacks and violence. As U.K. scholar Mark Galeotti has noted, "one of Russia's tactics for waging war is using organized crime as an instrument of statecraft abroad."<sup>75</sup> The malign influence of criminal activity and the corrupting nature of illicit networks in the battlespace is growing and merits greater study.<sup>76</sup> It should be made clear that Russia would employ these criminal networks in both measures short of armed conflict and in more violent contingencies.

We should also be concerned about Hezbollah and the lessons it may be absorbing from its stint in Syria.<sup>77</sup> Hezbollah has always been more than a well-armed guerilla movement and constituted a more classical hybrid threat. Now, though it has suffered significant combat losses, it has also been exposed to an extensive learning cycle from the Russian special operations advisors supporting the Assad regime. Hezbollah's own special forces may have mastered the integration of cyber, combined arms, and intelligence operations at an even higher level than before. Thus, even if ISIL is defeated and Syria is stabilized into a stalemate, our allies in Israel may face a greater threat than before.

To update our understanding and better distinguish hybrid conflict from irregular warfare, a revised definition of the former is offered:

*The purposeful and tailored violent application of advanced conventional military*

*capabilities with irregular tactics, with terrorism and criminal activities, or combination of regular and irregular forces, operating as part of a common design in the same battlespace.*

The major distinction here is the addition of "violent" to the definition to clarify its placement in the continuum, and to further distinguish it from activities short of violent conflict.

## Looking Forward—So What?

All elements of the U.S. national security community must assess and prepare for the complete array of challenges they face in today's dynamic environment. As Clausewitz said in probably his most oft-quoted passage,

*... the first, the supreme, the most far reaching act of judgment that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish ... the kind of war on which they are embarking.<sup>78</sup>*

One cannot make this supreme judgment without a deep understanding of history, of war and the various ways in which it is waged. Lacking that understanding increases the risk of mistaking the essential nature of the conflict being considered or those we must adapt to as a result of the ever-evolving character of warfare.<sup>79</sup> The continuum concept and hybrid threats remain controversial since they distract from the efforts of "big wars" and great power competition advocates.<sup>80</sup>

The new U.S. National Defense Strategy (NDS) identifies China and Russia as our primary competitors and threats.<sup>81</sup> Some analysts misread the NDS as embracing great power wars of a conventional type. This misinterpretation of the strategy reflects a lack of appreciation for both Chinese and Russian strategic culture, which both recognize unconventional methods and non-military conflict. The Secretary of Defense and his NDS explicitly recognize a full

spectrum of conflict and warn against over-investing in a single and preclusive form of warfare, a mistake an adversary will surely exploit.<sup>82</sup> We face an array of different threats and require a comprehensive suite of options to address the full range of conflict we may face. Joint doctrine recognizes a conflict continuum, yet fails to define it in detail.<sup>83</sup> Doctrinal efforts to address that are in progress.

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Yes, we are facing an era of great power competition, but that competition is not inherently limited to one point in the continuum. The first step in generating an effective response to the challenge our adversaries may present along the continuum is defining what that continuum consists of, with some granularity.<sup>84</sup> Until we do so we will continue to be outplayed at influence competitions and will remain surprised at the

ingenuity of our adversaries and their evolving ways of warfare.<sup>85</sup> We should also remain cognizant of the reality that major adversaries now have the means to directly attack our political will and the resilience of our societies and will attempt to do so in any form of conflict, well to the left of armed conflict or during high-intensity conflict.<sup>86</sup>

Countering measures short of armed conflict is the subject of various new studies, and the U.S. defense policy community and military are belatedly devoting significant intellectual capital to this issue.<sup>87</sup> But countering this method of conflict will require more than traditional military strategy responses and must incorporate more than special operations forces. We must establish a broader framework for conflict short of violent warfare that incorporates a wider range of tools than the traditional set, and special forces, or paramilitary operations.<sup>88</sup> For example, how do we counter manipulation of elections and efforts to sow discord via cyber intrusions and the deliberate distribution of false information?<sup>89</sup> How do we ensure that forms of subversion or disinformation, at home and abroad, are neutralized? Getting beyond the operational or tactical perspective is surely warranted as suggested by the U.K. scholar, Dr. Robert Johnson of Oxford's Changing Character of War Programme.<sup>90</sup>

### *Political Aims*

A particularly valid point is the need to consider the political dynamics of conflict, not just its methods or modes. This is not simply a statement of the obvious.<sup>91</sup> It addresses a longstanding deficiency in the American way of war. "Too often governments miss critical components of their adversary's strategy, typically because of a near-exclusive focus on its use of violence. Partial responses such as these can be counterproductive."<sup>92</sup> This is the largest deficiency in hybrid threat theory; its emphasis on "how" the adversary applies violence overlooks the

“why,” which is ultimately more critical to counter-strategies and conflict resolution.

### **Intelligence**

U.S. analysts should continue to explore past and current doctrine of our major competitors. Ongoing changes in the Russian way of war, and how their mental model is adjusting under Putin’s leadership, are worthy of detailed assessment.<sup>93</sup> But this work should go beyond military articles and speeches that will offer little insight into a decisionmaking circle that is centered on President Putin and a clique largely comprised of former KGB officers. A broader evaluation of Russian history and nonconventional methods is more appropriate to compete with Moscow’s propensity to target seams and institutional gaps with its active measures.

### **Organization**

Once we ascertain the relative scope of the problem, structural issues must be addressed, along with authorities. How should we organize ourselves to address this challenge?<sup>94</sup> Is this a function for the State Department, or is an interagency model similar to the National Counterterrorism Center needed to better integrate activities in intelligence, campaign design, and assessment in counter-influence activities? This may be another place where the Special Operations community can apply its unique skill sets in the post-counterterrorism world.<sup>95</sup>

### **Multi-Dimensional Partnerships**

What is evident is the changing character of conflict today, which demands both a mindset and an organizational approach that is creative and multi-dimensional. The capacity to generate and execute effective strategies across government lines, including private sector and international organizational contributions, is especially salient in complex contingencies. The relative weight

of intelligence, law enforcement, development, information activity, and military security will vary depending on the contingency, but there is no doubt that complex conflicts require more than sheer conventional military might.<sup>96</sup> Both field experience and scholarship on networked and multi-dimensional problems demonstrate that we will require equally inventive solutions.<sup>97</sup>

Understanding our future security challenges demands that we reflect and interpret the past, understand the present, and think rigorously about what lies over the horizon in order to adapt to the changing character of conflict.<sup>98</sup> This requires keeping an open and informed mind about the breadth of the various modes of conflict that exist. The wars of the 21<sup>st</sup> century may take many forms. As conflict reflects a greater degree of convergence and complexity, so must our mental models and frameworks. **PRISM**

### **Notes**

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Two destroyed tanks in front of a mosque in Azaz, Syria. A battle between the Free Syrian Army and the Syrian Arab Army was fought from March to July in 2012 for control over the city of Azaz, north of Aleppo, during the Syrian civil war. (Christian Triebert)

# Post–Conflict Stabilization

## What Can We Learn from Syria?

By Michael Ratney

Reflecting upon a decade of writing on post–conflict stabilization efforts and U.S. efforts to develop and improve stabilization capabilities, one thing becomes clear: the Iraq and Afghanistan experiences have deeply informed U.S. Government (USG) views and the U.S. military’s stabilization doctrine. And yet, Iraq and Afghanistan may be the exceptions, and quite unlike the conflicts in which the United States may find itself involved in the future.

At the risk of oversimplification, in both Iraq and Afghanistan, the United States effected the overthrow of a central government—Saddam Hussein’s Ba’athist state in Iraq and the Taliban-controlled government in Afghanistan—and set about to stabilize and rebuild legitimate, internationally recognized, and capable governments in their place. In both Iraq and Afghanistan, the decision to get involved—to launch a military operation that sought initially to bring about regime change but which evolved into a much longer-term conflict and commitment—was ours, and the eventual U.S. military and financial investment was substantial.

The war in Syria that began in 2011 presented a new model of the sort of conflicts into which the United States may be drawn, and challenged the efficacy of our tools and doctrine designed for stabilization. In particular, the Syria conflict presents a more complicated scenario in which U.S. stabilization efforts take place in the midst of an ongoing civil conflict and where the United States must deal with an array of non-state actors rather than a central government. Further, U.S. stabilization efforts in Syria were consistently challenged not by under-resourced insurgents, but by an internationally recognized government with key foreign allies. In these ways and no doubt others, Syria contains many of the ambiguous, multifarious, and chaotic elements that may characterize the 21<sup>st</sup> century conflicts in which our country may become involved—and for which our military and civilian agencies should be prepared.

What characterizes the Syria experience is that unlike other conflict-afflicted situations, in which we have worked to empower a central state to assume the functions of governance, in Syria we have worked to disempower the central state and stabilize areas outside the central government’s control. This suggests that in addition to state-centric and counterinsurgent approaches to stabilization, the United States must also

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contemplate non-state-centric and pro-insurgent approaches to stabilization. Compared to more traditional stabilization efforts, stabilization in situations where the United States does not have the option of working with the internationally recognized central government requires:

- a potentially enduring military commitments and security guarantees;
- robust economic assistance by some party; and
- a high tolerance for working with non-state actors, which act as proto-state entities that substitute for the central government (and which have their own agendas that may ultimately be counter to U.S. political objectives).

## Building Doctrine on Iraq and Afghanistan

The U.S. experience in Iraq and Afghanistan has spawned numerous books, articles, and commentary on America's role in post-conflict stabilization and reconstruction. Much of this literature focuses less on the peculiarities of various conflicts and more on the tools and organizational structures the USG needs to respond effectively. In 2004, for example, the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) published a book-length anthology, "Winning the Peace, An American Strategy for Post-Conflict Reconstruction," that focused principally on building the USG's institutional capacity to respond effectively in the aftermath of conflicts.<sup>1</sup> The authors argued, *inter alia*, for greater civilian response capacity, training and funding for post-conflict stabilization efforts, and the need to enlist allies and ensure bipartisan consensus on U.S. initiatives. In 2005, during what emerged as a high point in U.S. stabilization and reconstruction efforts in Iraq, a Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) Task Force produced another set of practical recommendations for improving U.S. post-conflict capabilities.<sup>2</sup> Although the report draws on

experiences beyond Iraq and Afghanistan, including Kosovo, Bosnia, and Haiti, it is clear that those first two, very difficult, years of the Iraq conflict weighed heavily on the Task Force recommendations, which point to weak states as a source of threats to our own national security. Like the CSIS anthology, the CFR recommendations focus on ensuring that USG agencies, military and civilian alike, are adequately resourced and sufficient importance is accorded to reconstruction and stabilization efforts.

Many recommendations of the CSIS strategy and the CFR Task Force were implemented, and in 2008—still three years before the outbreak of violence in Syria—the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) published the detailed and comprehensive U.S. Army Field Manual on Stability Operations 3–07 (and the reissued DOD Instruction 3000.05 in 2009, and Joint Publication JP 3–07 in 2016).<sup>3</sup> Not surprisingly, that document also draws heavily on the U.S. experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan.

In Syria, as in Iraq and Afghanistan, the United States became progressively more involved in a complicated stabilization effort. By 2017, scholars and practitioners both inside and outside government asked what lessons could be taken from Iraq and Afghanistan, even as our engagement in those two countries continued and new conflicts emerged.<sup>4</sup> One report from 2017 by the CSIS about "Stabilization in Syria: Lessons from Afghanistan and Iraq," zeroed in on some key features of the Syria conflict:

*The United States faces a fragmented country without a single national authority to partner with . . . opposition groups are weak and fractured, unlikely to coalesce as a viable national alternative to the current government. The atomization of Syrian society proves an additional obstacle to sustainable stabilization efforts, without a local framework to house development and governance initiatives once U.S. and coalition assistance decreases or ceases to exist.<sup>5</sup>*

Recognizing that reality, this year the U.S. Department of State, DOD, and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) released “A Framework for Maximizing the Effectiveness of U.S. Government Efforts to Stabilize Conflict-Affected Areas”—an assessment that consciously looks beyond Iraq and Afghanistan, taking in the U.S. experience of eight very diverse conflicts from Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. Like other attempts to distill a set of lessons learned, the report prioritizes coordinated efforts among all the USG elements—defense, diplomatic, development—as well as with international partners, to maximize effectiveness of stabilization operations.

These studies, while welcome and useful, suffer from two shortcomings. First, they take certain structural elements of our missions in Iraq and Afghanistan for granted. Namely, the studies assume a situation in which the United States will work to strengthen the legitimacy and capabilities of an internationally recognized central government, effectively mixing elements of state- and institution-building. The Syria experience, however, suggests that the requirements of stabilization may be different when the United States is not working with a central government. And second, many of these reports tended to avoid analysis of the specific characteristics of the areas in which stabilization operations would be conducted and how those local conditions affect our choice of strategies and tools, the level of resources required, and the specific challenges we would face if we choose to get involved.

### Are These Countries Alike?

On some levels, Syria does resemble Iraq and Afghanistan. It is a fragile state with weak governance. Each has terrorist and insurgent groups, both homegrown and foreign, that threaten the United States and our allies. Tribal groups with diverse and sometimes shifting loyalties play a critical role in state stabilization, particularly in

outlying areas. In all three cases, state breakdown has led to a mass exodus of refugees and internally displaced persons, warlordism, and wartime economies. And religion and sectarianism weigh heavily on societies in all three countries and aggravate efforts to promote stabilization.

U.S. stabilization objectives in Syria are also similar to those in Iraq and Afghanistan. The U.S. Army Stability Operations Field Manual (and the later JP 3-07 “Stability”) state that these operations are called upon to “reduce the drivers of conflict and instability and build local institutional capacity to forge sustainable peace, security, and economic growth.” Phrased slightly differently, we undertake stabilization assistance in fragile post-conflict environments to help mitigate the security threats to the United States and our allies that could emanate from those areas—particularly terrorism and refugee flows; and to create conditions in which the conflict can ultimately be resolved, ideally through a peaceful political settlement.

It is worth reviewing more specifically how the United States defined its overall objectives in Afghanistan and Iraq, and how they informed our stabilization objectives, to get a better sense of how Syria is different.

### *Afghanistan*

Although there may be a perception that the U.S. mission in Afghanistan has grown, our objectives have actually remained fairly stable. U.S. intervention began with the objectives set forth by President George W. Bush in his speech on October 7, 2001:

*By destroying camps and disrupting communication, we will make it more difficult for the terror network to train new recruits and coordinate their evil plans. Initially, the terrorists may burrow deeper into caves and other entrenched hiding places. Our military action is also designed to clear*

*the way for sustained, comprehensive and relentless operations to drive them out and bring them to justice. At the same time, the oppressed people of Afghanistan will know the generosity of America and our allies. As we strike military targets, we will also drop food, medicine and supplies to the starving and suffering men and women and children of Afghanistan.*<sup>6</sup>

In other words, U.S. intervention began as a fairly narrow counterterrorism mission supported by humanitarian assistance. However, by the time the U.S. National Security Strategy was issued in September of 2002—the first update since the start of U.S. major combat operations in Afghanistan—our objectives were defined more expansively, encompassing not only counterterrorism and

humanitarian aid, but also reconstruction and state-building:

*As we pursue the terrorists in Afghanistan, we will continue to work with international organizations such as the United Nations, as well as non-governmental organizations, and other countries to provide the humanitarian, political, economic, and security assistance necessary to rebuild Afghanistan so that it will never again abuse its people, threaten its neighbors, and provide a haven for terrorists.*<sup>7</sup>

By November of that year, the coalition of countries involved in Afghanistan, principally through the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), had broadened considerably; we had begun establishing interagency (though military-led) Provincial



In 2011, a U.S. marine greets local children during a partnered security patrol with Afghan National Army soldiers in Helmand Province, Afghanistan. The marines aided Afghan National Security Forces in assuming security responsibilities; their interoperability is designed to further the expansion of stability, development, and legitimate governance by defeating insurgent forces and helping to secure the Afghan people. (DOD)

Reconstruction Teams throughout the country; and the value of various U.S. economic assistance programs in Afghanistan had grown to nearly a billion dollars.<sup>8</sup> From that point forward, U.S. objectives remained relatively constant, and the assistance resources we brought to bear remained substantial. As of this year, the U.S. objective remains a “stable and self-reliant Afghanistan” and our civilian assistance goals are ambitious and diverse, targeting the empowerment of the country’s central government.<sup>9</sup> Specifically,

*helping the Afghan government to better serve Afghan citizens by supporting efforts to boost the transparency and accountability of its institutions and management, make government processes more efficient, improve public outreach, enhance financial management, and strengthen the linkages between central and subnational levels of government.*<sup>10</sup>

## Iraq

U.S. objectives in Iraq were initially defined in President Bush’s speech on March 17, 2003, which gave then Iraqi President Saddam Hussein a final ultimatum to leave the country or face military action, which began two days later. Like Afghanistan, U.S. objectives in Iraq were driven by U.S. national security—i.e. countering the threats that Saddam Hussein’s Iraq posed to the United States and our allies. And similar to Afghanistan, a humanitarian assistance mission followed. But unlike Afghanistan, we signaled early on that Iraq would also have a state-building mission.

*If we must begin a military campaign, it will be directed against the lawless men who rule your country and not against you. As our coalition takes away their power, we will deliver the food and medicine you need. We*

*will tear down the apparatus of terror and we will help you to build a new Iraq that is prosperous and free.*<sup>11</sup>

Much has been written about the absence of advance preparation for what became a costly nation-building effort that lasted more than a decade. A RAND study from 2003 about “America’s Role in Nation-Building from Germany to Iraq” is among the most comprehensive, particularly at that early phase of the U.S. intervention.

*Over the past decade, the United States has made major investments in the combat efficiency of its forces. The return on investment has been evident in the dramatic improvement in warfighting demonstrated from Desert Storm to the Kosovo air campaign to Operation Iraqi Freedom. There has been no comparable increase in the capacity of U.S. armed forces or of U.S. civilian agencies to conduct post-combat stabilization and reconstruction operations.*<sup>12</sup>

As of this year, our objectives in Iraq remain a “long-term strategic partnership with Iraq as an independent state.”<sup>13</sup> Although a few observers have posited the likelihood or even desirability of a formally partitioned Iraq, we continue to support development of a capable Iraqi national government, albeit in the context of a commitment to decentralization.<sup>14</sup>

## What is Different about Syria?

Not only is the conflict in Syria more complex than most others, but the policies driving the U.S. response are also different. The United States’ initial involvement in Syria was restricted to political (and later material) support for the popular uprising that began in 2011 against the government of Bashar al-Assad. Although the United States linked Assad’s rule with the empowerment of terrorists, and thus

considered it a threat to U.S. national security, U.S. military involvement in Syria did not begin in earnest until late 2014. At that time, the United States began conducting air strikes against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and Syrian-based affiliates of al-Qaeda.<sup>15</sup>

The United States, for much of the seven years of the Syria conflict, has had two parallel policies: to resolve the core regime-opposition conflict by pressuring the Assad regime via international ostracism of his government and support for the insurgency against it; and to defeat ISIL. The United States undertook civilian assistance, including stabilization and governance, in areas throughout the country controlled by Syrian opposition militias and other civilian insurgent governance bodies, as well as in areas recaptured from ISIL after 2014. Unlike post-2003 Iraq and Afghanistan—but not unlike 1991 Iraq in Operation *Provide Comfort*—in Syria, the United States undertook a stabilization mission with the express policy of keeping stabilized areas out of the clutches of a central state that covets them and is actively attempting to recapture them.

Thus, a key difference in Syria is the way we treat state authority. Most of the literature and doctrine on stabilization, including from the U.S. military, and much of our own post-conflict experience, prioritizes state sovereignty and authority. It presumes the goal and desirability of an empowered central state that can increasingly assume responsibility for state services, maintain security, and create conditions for a revival of productive economic activity.

In Syria, however, the United States has sought to keep territory outside the control of the central state and in the hands of non-state actors. Even in areas which the United States has worked to liberate from ISIL, we have sought to empower different non-state actors rather than the central government. The United States Government's local governance and security partners throughout the country have been rebels in insurrection against the central government

and/or seek to establish parallel governing structures partially disconnected from the state, at least until the national Syrian leadership changes. While as a matter of policy, the United States wishes to see a different leadership in Syria that it can support—i.e. a government not led by Assad and his cronies—the imperative for tangible steps toward stabilizing areas outside Syrian government control has outpaced the United States and the international community's ability to put in place a process, political or otherwise, that would bring about a change of regime.

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A second difference in Syria, therefore, is the variety and types of non-state authorities the United States has had to deal with as stabilization partners. In Syria, there are three principal areas outside of state control (excluding areas of residual ISIL control). The regional distinctions of the Syrian Democratic Force-, opposition-, and Turkish-controlled areas have emerged as the war has evolved and particularly as conflict lines have stabilized since 2017.

It is worth noting that none of these three regions is a legally recognized political or



administrative unit within Syria, which is still officially divided into 14 governorates or provinces. Even those local councils that have been established with external support in areas outside of state control are not necessarily indicative of Syria's eventual administrative structure, though their existence may influence future decisions. As in Iraq, regional affiliations and elements of local governance have become a reality on the ground that directly affects stabilization efforts. Also as in Iraq, for the United States and other foreign parties, the ultimate political objective remains a unitary state, even while the process by which regions within the country are knitted back into a Syrian whole remains uncertain.

Consequently, when addressing stabilization in Syria, two characteristics of territories held by non-state actors become relevant; structure and organization, and relationship with other actors, particularly the central government. Areas dominated by disorganized and fragmented non-state actors will be more difficult to stabilize; multiple competing parties, absence of a clear organizational structure, and multiple nodes of authority make it hard to allocate resources and implement projects efficiently. War aims—and the nature of the relationship with the government—also matter because they affect the kinds of pressures these areas will face, the space in which the United States has to work, and the nature of necessary security guarantees.

### *Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)– Controlled Areas*

In northeast Syria, the focus of our defeat–ISIL campaign, U.S. forces have worked with a local militia—the SDF—and emerging local governance partners. At the center of the SDF is the Kurdish-dominated YPG, but the force comprises a large number of Arabs, Turkmen, and others. It is probably the most cohesive non-state actor in



A U.S. soldier in June stands on a mound before taking part in a handgun night fire range near the Iraq–Syria border. Iraqi Security Forces and Coalition partners provided fire support and continually work on combat skills to assist the Syrian Democratic Forces as they continued Operation *Roundup*, the military offensive to rid the final pockets of the ISIL terrorist organization from the Middle Euphrates River Valley in Syria. (U.S. Army/Anthony Zendejas IV)

Syria (possibly with the exception of ISIL), and the only one to enjoy a significant degree of U.S. military support. Although the principal function of U.S. forces in this area is to work by, with, and through SDF partners to eradicate ISIL, the U.S. presence also encourages stabilization by deterring attempts by ISIL, the Syrian regime, or other parties to assert unilateral control.<sup>16</sup> In that way, the U.S. military presence helps create conditions in which local governance functions, economic activity and some measure of normal life can resume.

The situation on the ground in these areas remains complex, with different local elements, including tribal groups, on a spectrum of relationships with the Syrian government, ranging from militant opposition to uneasy co-existence to full-on alliance. The SDF also has its own political agenda: to secure greater administrative autonomy for areas of Syria where it predominates. As such, it does not pose an existential threat to the Syrian government and does not necessarily demand regime change, though the SDF and the government are deeply at odds over the political future of areas under SDF control. The area remains economically fragile; although there is a degree of trade and other economic interaction with regime-controlled Syria, SDF-controlled areas are economically isolated by their antagonistic relationship with Turkey, the Kurdistan Regional Government in northern Iraq, and Syrian opposition-controlled areas further to the west.

### *Opposition-Controlled Areas*

Opposition factions have sought to capture power in Damascus and unseat the regime. They pose a structural threat to the Syrian government, and so both have been in intense and violent competition with one another. Armed factions of the Syrian opposition once controlled nearly 60 percent of Syrian territory but they lost ground, particularly after the Russian escalation in September 2015. As of October, opposition-controlled areas were largely limited to Idlib province, where multiple factions—some quite extreme—competed for control. Beginning in July 2017, stability in southwest Syria had been ensured by a ceasefire negotiated by the United States, Russia, and Jordan. During this period, which effectively ended with the fall of the area to regime forces this summer, the southwest had been the largest and most stable area of opposition control. Dubbed an interim de-escalation area, that ceasefire created a sufficient reduction

in violence such that local opposition-controlled bodies could provide at least some of the services of a central state. Absent normal economic relations with neighboring countries or with regime-controlled parts of Syria, the area remained highly dependent on foreign assistance. Because there were effectively no security guarantees, the stability of the region was dependent on the viability of the ceasefire and willingness of the regime and opposition to respect it. In the absence of a political agreement effectively ending the conflict, responsibility rested with signatories to the ceasefire document—United States, Jordan, and Russia—to restrain the belligerent parties.

### *Turkish-Controlled Areas*

In late 2016 and early 2017, the Turkish military in partnership with Syrian proxy forces (local Arab and Turkmen groups) launched Operation *Euphrates Shield* in Aleppo Governorate of northwestern Syria to clear ISIL and the Kurdish YPG from the area, and to establish what has effectively become a Turkish protectorate. The area is still referred to as Euphrates Shield after the name of the original military operation. Security and governance in this enclave are largely delegated to a discrete number of Turkish-supported Syrian armed opposition groups and affiliated political bodies at least nominally in opposition to the Assad regime. The Turkish military also maintains a presence, which helps maintain the cohesion of the local Syrian militias there and avoids the chaotic conditions found in Idlib province to the south. Security in Euphrates Shield is ultimately guaranteed by Turkey and, reportedly, by tacit understandings with Russia that the Syrian regime will not attempt to retake control of the area. In that sense, Euphrates Shield represents a hybrid arrangement combining both foreign military control and political agreement with the central government. The area has been

increasingly integrated into the Turkish economy, with Turkish banks and cell phone companies reportedly operating there.

### Is the Situation in Syria Unique?

The United States has been involved in other fragile and conflict-afflicted environments that contain similar elements and may inform future stabilization efforts.

#### *Somalia*

In Somalia in the 1990s, the United States worked with local powers (often little more than warlords) because there was no central state at all.<sup>17</sup> There was also an imperative to do so, both to mitigate the humanitarian crises and to address terrorism threats that threatened to coalesce.

Ken Menkhaus, a scholar who studied state collapse in Somalia extensively, has written about the challenges of conducting any sort of foreign assistance in such an environment. Despite what he has called “the most ambitious, costly, precedent-setting external stabilization operations in the post–Cold War period,” Somalia is “anything but stable.” Somalia may actually be the most extreme case of international stabilization operations in an environment in which the central state was not only absent at the local level, but was also for long periods effectively non-existent anywhere in the country. Since the fall of the Barre regime in the early 1990s and Somalia’s subsequent descent into anarchy, the United States and other donors have been forced to improvise, providing assistance in areas where the security conditions are more permissive and control does not rest in the hands of designated terrorist groups.

Even in the anarchy of Somalia, international efforts were long centered on creating and empowering a functional central government, notably the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) that governed in Somalia, in many areas just nominally, from 2004–12. Those efforts carried particular

challenges because humanitarian, stabilization, and counterterrorism objectives in Somalia (as in other conflict-afflicted areas) have at many times been at odds. Humanitarian aid is theoretically apolitical and directed wherever need exists regardless who is in control; stabilization assistance is inherently political, geared toward empowering desirable governing authorities and weakening undesirable ones; counterterrorism activities, because they address clear and present threats to us and our allies, often transcend all other considerations and so can unintentionally hamper other lines of effort.

In a country suffering from all manner of misfortune, including a virulent al-Qaeda-led insurgency, rampant corruption and criminality, and one of the worst famines in the past three decades, the absence of a central government may not have been Somalia’s principal problem. But the Somalia experience does illustrate the challenge of foreign parties bringing stability to a country when there is no legitimate indigenous government with which to partner and empower. Or, as Menkhaus puts it, the “Somalia case suggests that state building is exponentially more difficult where the country has been in a state of collapse for an extended period of time.”<sup>18</sup>

And yet, in recent years, as the nascent national Somali Government has become more functional, the United States has supported efforts to strengthen it. Even while USG assistance efforts continue to support stabilization and governance at the district and community level, the United States articulates a policy of “helping Somalia’s government strengthen democratic institutions, improve stability and security, and deliver services for the Somali people.” Despite the high degree of decentralization (encouraged to some degree by foreign donors, but also a function of strong clan domination of various regions), U.S. policy makes clear that the goal is to “recognize the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Somalia within its 1960 borders in accordance with the Somali

provisional constitution.”<sup>19</sup> Thus, even in the still-fragile environment of Somalia, strengthening national state institutions remains an important priority. Specifically,

*since 2013, the Federal Government of Somalia has made progress establishing government institutions, negotiating relationships with regional authorities, and supporting community stabilization. The United States supports the FGS’s state-building agenda for completing federal state formation, completing a review of the provisional constitution and holding a constitutional referendum, preparing for democratic elections, promoting reconciliation, and strengthening responsive and representative governing institutions.*<sup>20</sup>

### **Northern Iraq (1991–2003)**

In northern Iraq, from 1991, when Operation Provide Comfort (OPC) began until after 2003, when the government of Saddam Hussein was overthrown, the United States theoretically recognized Baghdad’s sovereignty over the entire country. Although not explicit, the United States followed a “One-Iraq” policy and respected UN sanctions on all of Iraq, even though Saddam Hussein had withdrawn Iraqi military forces from parts of the North. While the Kurds created a Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in 1992, the United States did not recognize its authority. At the same time, however, the United States interacted with Kurdish authorities in their capacity as political party leaders independently of Baghdad. The United States also provided humanitarian assistance to populations in the safe-haven in northern Iraq—alongside other governments and international organizations—and maintained a no-fly zone to prevent Saddam from attacking parts of the North, although legally the territory remained part of Saddam Hussein’s

Iraq. The net effect was to semi-legitimize and empower the Kurdistan Region and Kurdish aims for independence, while also effectively encouraging internal Kurdish power struggles (from 1994–98 the Kurds engaged in a civil war). After the U.S. intervention in 2003, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq emerged as a relatively stable, comparatively prosperous region that pursued a high degree of autonomy and eventually—and unsuccessfully—attempted to realize full independence.<sup>21</sup>

It may be tempting to draw parallels between the case of northern Iraq and the situation in northeastern Syria, and indeed there are some similarities. But that the historical trajectories of dominant Kurdish groups, the nature of the Syrian and (post–2003) Iraqi states, and Kurdish-state relations is fundamentally different. Iraqi Kurds had an “Autonomous Region” created and legally recognized by the Iraqi government since 1970; this is not the case in Syria, but could theoretically change as a result of an eventual political resolution of the Syria conflict and a future Syrian constitution.<sup>22</sup>

### **Afghanistan**

After 2001, the United States had two conflicting lines of effort in Afghanistan: counterinsurgency operations aimed at killing or capturing terrorists; and stabilization and democracy promotion. The first required working with local chieftains to stabilize outlying areas and push out Taliban—and thus unintentionally challenging central government authority—while the second focused on legitimizing and strengthening the central government.<sup>23</sup>

In Afghanistan, the central government has historically been weak and unable to control tribal leaders and operate in large parts of its own territory. Consequently, the United States has sought to work with regional authorities, in some cases even with regional authorities that maintain an adversarial relationship with the Kabul government. Some have argued that we should ultimately go further—that

decentralization is the only way to keep Afghanistan together. Robert Blackwill, for example, argued in a 2011 article in *Foreign Affairs*, that “reluctantly accepting a de facto partition of Afghanistan is hardly a utopian outcome in Afghanistan. But it is better than all the alternatives.”<sup>24</sup> But the United States nonetheless works from the premise that the Kabul government is its principal partner, and asserting central government control over the entire country is desirable.<sup>25</sup>

### “Indefinite Stabilization”

Taken to an extreme (certainly beyond any current military definition of “stabilization”) almost any area could in theory be stabilized indefinitely—it just requires a sufficient financial and military investment. There are a few extreme examples of this “indefinite stabilization”—cases in which an outside party controls territory where it is not sovereign, in anticipation of a political resolution that never materializes. Northern Cyprus, for example, will supposedly be unified one day with the rest of the island through an as-yet-unsuccessful political process. In the meantime, Turkey serves as the ultimate guarantor for the nominally independent Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus until such time as a unification deal is struck with the Republic of Cyprus.

Another example is the Golan Heights. The Government of Syria considers the Golan Heights to be Israeli-occupied territory, as does much of the rest of the world. Israel applies Israeli law there but has not formally annexed it. At various times, the status of the Golan Heights has been the subject of Syrian–Israeli negotiations that, in principle, could have led to the return of the Golan Heights to Syrian control.

In the case of Northern Cyprus, a political process continues, but has thus far been unsuccessful. In the case of the Golan Heights, the last political negotiations were many years ago, and Iranian expansionism in Syria and the Syrian civil war have hardened Israeli views of the Golan and made

the prospect of a resumed political process seem remote. What the two territories have in common is that they are both quite stable, but that stability has come at a price: an unqualified military commitment from Turkey and Israel, and the complete integration of those territories into their respective economies. Those commitments are absolute, and they are open-ended.<sup>26</sup>

These are certainly imperfect analogies, largely because the strategic value of those territories is greater for Turkey and Israel than any part of Syria will ever be for the United States. But there is a lesson—maintaining such “indefinite stabilization” requires open-ended security control and economic support of some party. Absent such a commitment, or a viable political process, one should expect a renewed effort by the sovereign state to resume control.

### What is Required?

Some have suggested that such ambiguous scenarios as Syria, Somalia, or Afghanistan, require a willingness to look at other models of governance. Stephen Krasner of Stanford University, for example, looked at the situation of failed and fragile states and argued that something short of full Westphalian sovereignty might be the best we can hope for. He essentially argues that the world is such a mess that “to reduce international threats and improve the prospects for individuals in such polities, alternative institutional arrangements supported by external actors, such as de facto trusteeships and shared sovereignty, should be added to the list of policy options.”<sup>27</sup> While these views have been criticized in some quarters as a sort of neo-colonialism, Krasner at least recognizes that the chaos of weak, failed, and conflict-torn states and their potential to export harm to others calls for a high measure of realism when evaluating acceptable end states.<sup>28</sup>

We may find in the Syrian model many of the challenges of the future, including this one: a region of importance for the United States and our partners

where there is simply no central state able or willing to maintain control and assume responsibility, or—as in the case of Syria—kept purposely outside the control of the central government. Post-conflict stabilization is difficult enough, and even *with* a willing and motivated state partner there are strong odds of a return to de-stabilizing political violence.<sup>29</sup> To undertake stabilization in regions outside the control of a central state that considers it part of its sovereign right, adds a considerable layer of challenge and complexity and suggests a financial and security commitment that goes beyond what the USG might wish to invest.

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Without a viable political process that leads in a realistic timeframe toward a resumption of central state control, what are the prospects for maintaining stability? If security could be guaranteed, could local authorities function as the government indefinitely without connection to the capital? What about economic livelihood—does a stabilized-but-isolated area become abjectly dependent on foreign aid? Under what conditions could the foreign security guarantor depart? Does it effectively become impossible to depart in the absence of a stable arrangement with the central state, i.e. a final and broadly

accepted political settlement? Do these efforts create areas permanently in insurrection against the central state, and is such a scenario sustainable? What steps could be taken to maximize the prospects for stability? Is there a minimal level of instability that we are willing to accept—if so what is it?

These are complicated questions, but such scenarios seem to have a minimum of three requirements.

### ***Credible Security Guarantees via an Enduring Military Footprint***

Experience suggests that the support of local populations for ad hoc and imperfect governance structures depends in large measure on their perception of the solidity of external support. In other words, if the local populace believes we are going to leave, they will find some other party that can ensure their security, and that party may not be friendly to the United States. The Syria experience has shown us that the U.S. military presence need not be large to protect the area from the predations of a government that seeks to assert control over it. But the presence needs to be sufficient to deter the government and its allies, possibly bolstered by a political agreement such as a ceasefire or de-confliction arrangement. Absent credible security guarantees from the United States or some other external party, another possibility is an international peacekeeping force. But finding the necessary degree of international consensus and resources (and, presumably, UN involvement) to manage such an operation in a politically fraught environment like Syria would be exceptionally challenging.

### ***Economic Development Assistance and Humanitarian Aid***

Until some fragmentary territory is sufficiently re-integrated into a viable economy, it will remain highly dependent on foreign aid. Long-term aid may be politically unpopular in the United States and elsewhere, and cause economic distortions that may serve

to further cement that dependency. But absent an international willingness to provide aid (and sometimes even with it), residents will not choose to starve, and will resort to smuggling, criminality, or surreptitious trade with parties we may find objectionable. Providing aid in areas outside of government control brings its own challenges, including finding reliable delivery mechanisms. The UN, for example, works with member-state governments, so aid deliveries to opposition-controlled areas in Syria have never been reliable. The United States and other external parties have developed their own delivery channels.

***A High Tolerance for Working with Non-State Actors, Including Armed Rebel Groups, to Provide Basic Governmental Services, Including Justice***

Krasner and Thomas Risse, a professor of international politics at the Freie Universität Berlin, have looked at governance in failed states and areas of limited statehood, and noted in a 2014 study that,

*in many polities there are areas of limited statehood in which central authorities are unable to effectively enforce decisions. Yet areas of limited statehood are not ungoverned spaces where nothing gets accomplished and Hobbesian anarchy reigns. Rather . . . a variety of other actors—state and non-state—have stepped or stumbled into those these spaces.<sup>30</sup>*

Ken Menkhaus, whose extensive work on Somalia has focused in particular on governance in areas of limited state functions, calls this phenomenon “governance without government.” In a study from 2007, he explains that,

*communities that have been cut off from an effective state authority—whether out of governmental indifference to marginal frontier territories, or because of*

*protracted warfare, or because of vested local and external interests in perpetuating conditions of state failure—consistently seek to devise arrangements to provide for themselves the core functions that the missing state is supposed to assume, especially basic security.<sup>31</sup>*

So, while non-state actors tend to start off as insurgents, that is, politically motivated armed rebels, we need to deal with these groups not only as militias, but also as bodies responsible for governance and administration, often with their own political project. Many of the non-state elements in conflict environments do not fully share our values or long-term vision, and yet are the only parties capable of governing. Even then, many of them are operating in highly chaotic settings with a high degree of internal fragmentation. This suggests that not only do we need to be prepared to deal with non-state actors as governing bodies, but we need to do so with a high tolerance for ambiguous, sub-optimal situations. Further, we need to contemplate the longer-term consequences, including the legal and political status of non-state partner forces, their ultimate relationships with central state governments, and the United States’ practical, moral, and political obligations.

## **Conclusion**

Trying to draw lessons, even initial ones, from the U.S. experience in Syria is daunting, but the bottom line is that any conflict setting—and any effort to design a program of stabilization—brings a unique set of peculiarities that may not resemble conflicts in which we have been involved in the past. The Syria experience, where there is no central government with which the United States and others in the international community can partner and empower, is an excellent example, and suggests a need for careful analysis of the specific

circumstances of settings in which the United States may find itself operating in order to develop stabilization doctrine and tools that are suited not only to the last conflict, but to the next one. **PRISM**

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Rober C. Orr, ed, “Winning the Peace, An American Strategy for Post-Conflict Reconstruction,” *Significant Issues Series*, 27 no. 7 (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> Samuel R. Berger, Brent Snowcroft, and William Nash, “In the Wake of War: Improving U.S. Post-Conflict Capabilities,” *Independent Task Force Report* no. 55 (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Army, Field Manual 3-07: Stability Operations, Washington, D.C., October 6, 2008, available at <<https://usacac.army.mil/cac2/repository/FM307/FM3-07.pdf>>. Department of Defense Instruction 3000.05, September 16, 2009, available at <<http://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/DD/issuances/dodi/300005p.pdf>>. Joint Publication 3-07 “Stability,” August 3, 2016, available at <[http://pksoi.armywarcollege.edu/default/assets/File/jp3\\_07.pdf](http://pksoi.armywarcollege.edu/default/assets/File/jp3_07.pdf)>.

<sup>4</sup> A very good example was produced by National Defense University. See: Richard D. Hooker, Jr., and Joseph J. Collins, eds., *Lessons Encountered: Learning from the Long War*, (Washington DC: National Defense University Press, September 2015).

<sup>5</sup> “Stabilization in Syria: Lessons from Afghanistan and Iraq,” commentary by Hijab Shah and Melissa Dalton on Center for Strategic and International Security Studies website, June 9, 2017 available at <<https://www.csis.org/analysis/stabilization-syria-lessons-afghanistan-and-iraq>>.

<sup>6</sup> President George W. Bush “Address to the Nation,” October 7, 2001, available at <<https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/10/20011007-8.html>>.

<sup>7</sup> President George W. Bush, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (2002), the White House available at <<https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/63562.pdf>>.

<sup>8</sup> It would eventually grow much higher. See: Kenneth Katzman and Clayton Thomas, “Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy,” (Washington DC: Congressional Research Service, July 11, 2014), available at <<https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL30588.pdf>>.

<sup>9</sup> President Donald Trump, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, The White House, December 2017, available at <<https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/>

NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> USAID, “Where We Work: Afghanistan and Pakistan,” USAID.gov, available at <<https://www.usaid.gov/where-we-work/afghanistan-and-pakistan>>.

<sup>11</sup> President George W. Bush, “Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation,” The White House, March 17, 2003, available at <<https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2003/03/20030317-7.html>>.

<sup>12</sup> James Dobbins, John G. McGinn, Keith Crane, et all, *America’s Role in Nation-Building: From Germany to Iraq*, (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2003), available at <[https://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph\\_reports/MR1753.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph_reports/MR1753.html)>.

<sup>13</sup> President Donald Trump, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (2017).

<sup>14</sup> Some have argued that partition would not be the worst thing in fragile states that are on the verge of splitting up anyway. Author and political commentator Peter Galbraith has repeatedly made these arguments with respect to Iraq, such as in his 2006 article on “Divide Iraq,” *Newrepublic.com*, November 27, 2006, available at <<https://newrepublic.com/article/63017/divide-iraq>>. Robert Blackwill and others have argued that a de facto ethnically based partition is the least bad option for Afghanistan. But in the case of Syria, like Iraq and Afghanistan, U.S. policy has been—and remains—a commitment to these countries’ unity and territorial integrity. Even U.S. support for de-escalation areas in Syria, or partnership with the Syrian Democratic Forces to fight ISIL in the northeast, or support for anti-Assad rebels, was never meant to suggest a policy of partition. A commitment to the territorial integrity of Syria (like Iraq and Afghanistan) remains a common thread through successive U.S. Administrations, including the current one. USAID, “Where We Work: Iraq,” USAID.gov, available at <<https://www.usaid.gov/iraq/governance>>.

<sup>15</sup> Confirmed by the Department of Defense Spokesman on September 23, 2014. See Department of Defense, “DOD Press Briefing on Operations in Syria by Lt. General Mayville in the Pentagon Briefing Room,” Spetmeber 23, 2014, available at <<https://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript-View/Article/606931/departement-of-defense-press-briefing-on-operations-in-syria-by-lt-gen-mayville/>>.

<sup>16</sup> Joseph L. Votel, USA, and Eero R. Keravuoiri “The By-With-Through Operational Approach,” *Joint Forces Quarterly* 89 (Washington D.C., National Defense University Press, April 2018), available at <<http://ndupress.ndu.edu/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/1491891/the-by-with-through-operational-approach/>>. His interview in the same edition of *Joint Forces Quarterly* is available to read here <<http://ndupress.ndu>



edu/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/1491689/an-interview-with-joseph-l-votel/>.

<sup>17</sup> Zachariah Mampilly, a scholar at Vassar College, in a fascinating study of governance in rebel-held areas, cautions against use of the term “warlord,” which suggests bandits motivated exclusively by extraction of money. He argues that the reality is often more complex, with rebels demonstrating a willingness and capacity to provide governance in the absence of formal government control. Zachariah Cherian Mampilly, “Rebel Rulers, Insurgent Governance and Civilian Life During War,” (Cornell University Press, 2011).

<sup>18</sup> Ken Menkhaus, “Stabilization in Practice, the Somali Case,” in *Stabilization Operations, Security and Development: States of Fragility*, Robert Muggah, ed., (Routledge, 2014).

<sup>19</sup> Markus Virgil Hoehne, a German scholar at Leipzig University, makes this point, and also observes that “territoriality” became a simple survival mechanism after the Somali state collapsed in 1990. Markus Virgil Hoehne, “The Rupture of Territoriality and the Diminishing Relevance of Cross-cutting Ties in Somalia after 1990,” *Development and Change*, Vol 47 no.6, (The Hague: International Institute of Social Studies, November 2016), 1379–1411.

<sup>20</sup> U.S. Department of State, “U.S. Relations with Somalia,” Bureau of African Affairs Fact Sheet, April 12, 2017, available at <<https://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2863.htm>>.

<sup>21</sup> Denise Natali, *The Kurdish Quasi-State, Development and Dependency in Post-Gulf War Iraq* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2010).

<sup>22</sup> It is also worth remembering that there was a four year civil war *within* northern Iraq that resulted from changes in the local balance of power between the principal Kurdish political leaders there, a phenomenon with no parallel in modern Syria.

<sup>23</sup> Arguably, this contradiction also existed in post-Saddam Iraq, where the U.S. engaged in democracy promotion and state-building, but also worked with local militias, tribes and the Peshmerga to stabilize outlying areas, and undertake counter terrorism operations.

<sup>24</sup> Robert D. Blackwill, “Plan B in Afghanistan: Why a deFacto Partition is the Least Bad Option,” *Foreign Affairs* (January/February 2011), available at <<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/afghanistan/2010-12-13/plan-b-afghanistan>>.

<sup>25</sup> USAID, “Where We Work: Afghanistan and Pakistan,” USAID.gov, available at <<https://www.usaid.gov/where-we-work/afghanistan-and-pakistan>>.

<sup>26</sup> In addition, there are UN peacekeeping or monitoring forces in both Cyprus and the Golan.

<sup>27</sup> Stephen D. Krasner, “Sharing Sovereignty,

New Institutions for Collapsed and Failing States,” *International Security*, 29, no. 2 (Fall 2004).

<sup>28</sup> For example, Tod Moore, “Violations of Sovereignty and Regime Engineering: A Critique of the State Theory of Stephen Krasner,” *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 44, no. 3 (September 2009).

<sup>29</sup> Paul Collier of Oxford University has written extensively about this and offered statistical evidence, including in his book *War, Guns, and Votes—Democracy in Dangerous Place*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2009).

<sup>30</sup> Stephen D. Krasner and Thomas Risse, “External Actors, State-Building, and Service Provision,” *Governance* 27, 545–67.

<sup>31</sup> Ken Menkhaus, “Governance without Government in Somalia: Spoilers, State Building, and the Politics of Coping,” *International Security* 31, no. 3, (Winter 2006–07), 74–106; We tend to think of non-state actors as either insurgents to be defeated or rebels whose cause we champion, though that dichotomy often belies the complex realities. The complexities of rebel governance is dealt with at length in Zachariah Mampilly’s “Rebel Rulers,” referenced earlier

*Rather than equating insurgent governance systems with mere criminality or, more generously, with a form of embryonic state building . . . it is better to focus on examining the limits and possibilities of establishing political order outside the control of the state.*

Nonetheless, working indefinitely with non-state actors has obvious drawbacks, including empowering separatist impulses and sowing the seeds of long-term civil war, and should therefore ideally occur in coordination with a central state, or only until a competent central state is recognized. At that point, support should be contingent on the eventual recognition of state authority—perhaps with decentralized governance—but one that emphasizes territorial integrity and state sovereignty above non-state demands.

## Photos

Page 48. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/christiaantriebort/795551210/in/photolist-d81hd3-hHUUVn-hHTXzB-fatNA7-fk4mmb-fjPaNt-fk4nUL-fk4zjQ-fk4w7Y-fk4vD7-rjjjt6-fk4rvq-fk4wSo-fjPdRp-fjPm6H-pPYm2H-fk4pvu-AKQ15P-DNX-2At-AJCGN9-DNX2mk-t411ip-xDKhtL-xF6mL8-xCa2E7-xnRYk3-xDD42j-xC9XqW-wHASdz-wHAHBr-xnRWxL-xnYrd8-xF5R6X-xnXTB2-xDCSH3-xF6kD8-xC9sAb-xnY4jZ-xF6gT2-xEt2cp-xnXYwc-xDCdC-xnRj9Y-xnXWQ6-xEtsmH-wHAAt9D-xEtvnc-xDD2jS-xDD88f-xF69Xt/>. Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 Generic License. Photo unaltered.



The view of the sprawling Kutupalong refugee camp near Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. More than 623,000 mainly Rohingya people have arrived at the camp since late August 2017, fleeing violence and religious persecution in Burma—creating one of the world's largest humanitarian crises. (UK Department for International Development/Russell Watkins)

# Economic and Financial Sanctions in U.S. National Security Strategy

By Jill Jermano

**C**oercive U.S. strategies often feature the use of economic and financial sanctions to address national security threats. According to the most recent U.S. National Security Strategy, sanctions and other economic tools “. . . can be important parts of broader strategies to deter, coerce, and constrain adversaries.”<sup>1</sup> Sanctions’ potency derives from U.S. economic power, and they generally involve lower cost and risk than the use of military force.

The U.S. Government (USG) has increased the use of economic and financial sanctions against other states and non-state actors in the post–Cold War era, refining their design to improve precision.<sup>2</sup> Achieving desired effects with sanctions, however, requires careful assessment of target vulnerabilities, available U.S. leverage, orchestration with other policy tools, and potential obstacles and risks.<sup>3</sup>

## The Nature and Effects of Economic and Financial Sanctions

The use of sanctions in coercive strategies to effect behavioral change involves the sender demanding that the target cease or reverse an action, backing the demand by a credible threat. Sanctions aim to change a target’s decision calculus about resisting pressure by increasing the cost and difficulty of the target’s economic activity or financial transactions. Targeted trade sanctions, for example, can make imported consumer goods and industrial inputs more expensive and difficult to obtain, boosting inflation and dampening productivity and possibly economic growth if substitutes are unavailable. Sanctioning exports can deprive a target country of revenue, increase unemployment in export sectors, and erode domestic firms’ competitive advantage in overseas markets.

Financial sanctions rely on cooperation from banks and other financial institutions to restrict or deny a target’s ability to obtain financial services or capital. Freezing elites’ overseas assets or blocking their transactions can prevent them from accessing their wealth or doing business. Sanctions banning foreign investment in key economic sectors or curtailing access to capital markets and hard currency can threaten targeted firms’ liquidity, decrease productivity, and erode economic growth. Reinforcing these effects are the prohibitions sanctions impose on U.S. persons from conducting business or financial activity with sanctioned individuals or entities.<sup>5</sup>

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**TABLE 1: EXAMPLES OF TARGETED ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL SANCTIONS.**

<b>Economic Sanctions</b> Target trade, other economic activity	<b>Financial Sanctions</b> Target access to capital, financial services
Restrict/ban specific imports/exports, associated services, guarantees, credits	Freeze/block assets and transactions*
Deny/withhold economic aid, debt relief	Restrict/deny access to capital markets
Restrict/prohibit investment in key economic sectors	Destabilize currency
	Restrict/deny access to multilateral financial assistance (e.g., International Monetary Fund, World Bank)

\* Blocking an asset renders it inaccessible to the owner. Blocking a transaction prevents it from occurring.

Sanctions can also affect foreign entities that do business with a target. Private sector entities often opt to cut ties to avoid jeopardizing their reputation and market share and incurring penalties and fines. U.S. sanctions against key Iranian banks beginning in 2006, followed by European Union (EU) sanctions and financial restrictions in a number of UN Security Council Resolutions led numerous global banks and other multinational firms to stop doing business with Iran, significantly diminishing its ability to trade and attract foreign investment.<sup>6</sup> Some firms, however, may view sanctions as an opportunity to profit from the target's situation and expand or capture market share, particularly when risks seem manageable. A recent example from the Iran case was the banking official from a major Turkish bank who was convicted in a U.S. Federal District Court in January 2018 for helping Iran violate U.S. sanctions.<sup>7</sup>

Table 1 lists the many measures applicable primarily to foreign governments, associated elites, and national economic sectors, but strategies against non-state actors also make use of targeted sanctions. For example, U.S. counternarcotics efforts since the 1990s have included sanctions against drug cartels and kingpins.<sup>8</sup> After 9/11, the United States and foreign governments expanded use of targeted sanctions against terrorists and other illicit actors and their support networks.<sup>9</sup> Asset freezes and blocking actions can disrupt the ability of these groups to access the financial

system and deter persons and entities from facilitating their operations.

Sanctions can impose economic and financial hardship on state and non-state actors, but the actual effects of these measures depend on the target's specific circumstances and the sender's ability to exploit them. Sanctions design should account for these factors.

### **Sanctions Evaluation and Selection**

Decisions to include sanctions—or any other policy instrument—in a coercive strategy should reflect an assessment of the target's vulnerabilities. Vulnerabilities are different for states and non-state actors (see Table 2), but they generally reflect economic or financial dependencies, chokepoints, and exposure that a sender can exploit to affect the target's costs, risks, and ability to continue the objectionable conduct. State vulnerabilities can derive from a country's economic conditions as well as its reliance on foreign economic relationships and market and financial access.<sup>10</sup> Following Russian interference in Ukraine in 2014, the United States and the EU imposed financial sanctions on political elites close to President Putin and sectoral sanctions on state-owned energy, defense, and financial entities that relied on access to Western capital, foreign investment, and technology.<sup>11</sup>

Non-state actors' vulnerabilities can stem from the nature and locations of their economic or financial activities, funding sources, and reliance on third-party

facilitators.<sup>12</sup> Early post-9/11 U.S. counterterrorism sanctions, for example, targeted individuals and entities that provided material support to al-Qaeda.<sup>13</sup> U.S. and multilateral efforts to target the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in recent years have focused on denying the group access to funds and assets located in territory it has controlled.<sup>14</sup>

Not all vulnerabilities present an opportunity to apply pressure. In the era of targeted sanctions, U.S. decisionmakers generally avoid certain types of economic coercion, such as trade sanctions limiting a target's imports of food staples or medicine that ultimately could harm civilians.<sup>15</sup>

A vulnerability assessment helps to determine if sanctions are an option, but it is also important to evaluate U.S. leverage over a target. Leverage is the ability to exploit vulnerabilities stemming from the target's ties to or reliance on the sender or entities under sender jurisdiction.<sup>16</sup> U.S. leverage derives from the size of the U.S. economy and the U.S. dollar's central role in global trade and capital markets and enables the USG to wield considerable influence, but actual U.S. leverage is context dependent.<sup>17</sup> Situations involving limited U.S. leverage may require coordinating sanctions actions with governments better-positioned to pressure a target, if

**TABLE 2: SELECT FACTORS TO CONSIDER WHEN ASSESSING TARGET VULNERABILITIES.**

State Actors	Non-state Actors
Macroeconomic indicators: economic self-sufficiency, diversification, dependence on imported energy, industrial inputs, technology	Area of operations, relative permissiveness of jurisdiction(s)
Size of state sector; extent of direct/quasi-state/elite ownership in key industries	Operational chokepoints
Reliance on external markets, capital, credit	Primary revenue, funding sources
Corruption, state-criminal nexus	Revenue allocation, budgeting
Private sector economic stakeholders or other elites' access to, influence over state officials	Internal corruption, embezzlement
Market liquidity	Type, value of resources, assets
Strength and stability of financial sector, currency	Primary financial nodes, mechanisms
Type, level of foreign exchange reserves, sovereign wealth funds	Trust-based relationships within/outside of organization
Bank solvency; exposure and access to, reliance on global credit markets, financial services	Reliance on third-party brokers/service providers
Foreign presence in financial sector	Ties to national/local government/law enforcement
Trade financing, correspondent relationships	
Primary exports, imports	
Primary trading partners	
Reliance on trade-related services	
Reliance on types/sources of foreign direct investment	
Type, amount, sources of foreign government, private/non-profit sector aid	

Sources: Kirshner, 41–42; "Principles of Economic Coercive Action" against state and non-state actors in David L. Asher, "Pressuring Kim Jong Il: The North Korea Illicit Activities Initiative, 2001-2006," in ed. David L. Asher, Victor D. Comras, and Patrick M. Cronin, *Pressure: Coercive Economic Statecraft and U.S. National Security* (Washington, DC: CNAS, January 2011), 35, 41–42, available at <<https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/pressure-coercive-economic-statecraft-and-u-s-national-security>>.

they have a shared interest in doing so. For example, Russia's extensive economic ties with Europe have given the EU more leverage than the United States for coercing Moscow.<sup>18</sup> Unilateral U.S. sanctions, including measures aimed at a target's external supporters, might be a better option if multilateral support is limited or when the United States has more leverage over third parties than the target.<sup>19</sup>

When existing leverage appears sufficient to exploit target vulnerabilities with sanctions, the process of imposing sanctions requires determining whether existing U.S. sanctions authorities provide the basis for taking action. U.S. sanctions derive from statute and presidential executive orders. Congress can include sanctions provisions in legislation to address national security and foreign policy issues. The President may issue an executive order for the purpose of implementing such a law, meeting U.S. obligations under UN sanctions, or initiating new sanctions based on his emergency powers.<sup>20</sup> The U.S. Department of the Treasury (DOT) in coordination with the Departments of State (DOS) and Justice (DOJ), and other federal agencies implement and enforce sanctions pursuant to executive orders and statute.

The process of imposing sanctions involves preparing a legal case for the action and coordinating with interagency actors to identify and de-conflict equities and competing priorities and assess legal sufficiency.<sup>21</sup> Interagency coordination of a strategy featuring sanctions also involves weighing options for timing and sequencing the use of sanctions with other policy instruments and assessing relevant domestic and international factors, political constraints, and national and global economic conditions. As with any policy tool, competing domestic policy priorities and U.S. bureaucratic obstacles can affect political will to implement and sustain sanctions over time.

## Sanctions Orchestration

Meghan O'Sullivan, Harvard University professor and former Deputy National Security Advisor for

Iraq and Afghanistan during the George W. Bush Administration, argues that coherent and effective strategies combine sanctions with other policy instruments to augment the impact of the action on the target.<sup>22</sup> For example, informational tools such as a public announcement in the form of a *Federal Register* notice and a press release are usually part of a sanctions action.<sup>23</sup> Publicizing sanctions sends a message to multiple audiences, including the target and its constituents, other governments, private sector entities that could be affected by the action or that do business with the target, and the U.S. public.

Sanctions actions also often have a diplomatic dimension, such as engaging the target directly or indirectly before or after imposing sanctions to send a warning or sustain pressure during negotiations.<sup>24</sup> U.S. and multilateral sanctions on Iran remained in place during several years of P5+1—China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States plus Germany—negotiations with Tehran that led to the 2015 deal on Iran's nuclear program.<sup>25</sup> U.S. consultation with allies and partners helps coordinate the timing of a multilateral sanctions action, and diplomatic outreach to governments and foreign firms can alert them to the action or the issues at stake, enlist their support, or warn them of the consequences of undermining the sanctions.<sup>26</sup> Direct USG engagement with foreign private sector entities to warn them of the risks of doing business with Iran was key to the effective isolation of Iran from the global economy.<sup>27</sup>

Sanctions can also coincide with U.S. or multilateral law enforcement actions, such as seizing or forfeiting a target's assets in addition to freezing or blocking them.<sup>28</sup> One example was DOJ's announcement in 2014 of the seizure of more than \$6 million in funds associated with sanctioned front companies for Li Fang Wei, a Chinese national the USG had sanctioned in 2009, who was charged in U.S. Federal Court with operating a network to procure controlled goods for Iran.<sup>29</sup> Law enforcement measures can augment the effects of sanctions on the target

and potentially deter third parties from helping the target evade the measures.

Sanction actions may also precede or occur concurrently with the threat or use of military force. Imposing sanctions prior to kinetic action is one way to increase pressure to persuade the target that ceding would be less costly in the near term. For example, U.S. and multilateral sanctions against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia occurred prior to and continued after NATO airstrikes against Bosnian Serb targets began in August 1995, ultimately serving as a bargaining chip in the Dayton Peace negotiations.<sup>30</sup> The simultaneous use of sanctions and military action can amplify the overall impact on the target. Multilateral efforts to counter the financing of terrorism, for example, have combined targeted sanctions with the use of force.<sup>31</sup>

### Strategic Assessment

As with any strategy to achieve national security goals, it is necessary to assess the soundness of a coercion attempt involving sanctions prior to taking action, even if sanctions are designed to play a minor role relative to other tools. Sanctions sometimes can have unanticipated effects, be challenging to implement, and produce unintended consequences for U.S. interests, allies, and partners.

One factor to consider is the expected impact of the measures on the target—what kind of damage will it suffer, and how will it and other parties react? Sanctions can have negative unintended effects on the target, neighboring jurisdictions, or third parties; the use of targeted sanctions has reduced but not eliminated this possibility.<sup>32</sup> Sanctions can also undermine other U.S. foreign policy goals and potentially damage U.S. relations with countries with a stake in the issue.

Another risk is the target's ability to evade, work around, or mitigate the impact of sanctions by using its own resources or relying on external facilitators. For example, the former Iraqi regime in the late 1990s extensively circumvented sanctions to

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generate revenue and buy the loyalty of the military and security services.<sup>33</sup> The Iraq case is an example of how sanctions busting can contribute to what Andreas calls the “criminalization” of a target regime and the broader economy and society, as government officials partner with illicit actors to work around sanctions.<sup>34</sup> In recent years, expert panels established to monitor compliance with UN sanctions regimes have extensively documented evasion techniques targeted states have adopted in response to escalating U.S. and international pressure.<sup>35</sup> The March 2018 report of the UN Panel of Experts established for the North Korea sanctions regime, for example, describes the North's “increasingly sophisticated evasion practices,” including the use of illicit shipping techniques to circumvent the UN's export ban on specific North Korean commodities and Pyongyang's use of complicit third-party nationals and service providers to facilitate financial and trade transactions.<sup>36</sup> The DOT and the U.S. Coast Guard jointly published an advisory this February that detailed the North's deceptive shipping practices, such as changing vessel identifiers, disabling and manipulating automatic identification systems, falsifying shipping documentation, and using ship-to-ship transfers of sanctioned cargo.<sup>37</sup>

The Venezuelan regime's establishment in early 2017 of the “petro,” a national cryptocurrency

allegedly backed by Venezuelan oil reserves, for the stated purpose of evading U.S. sanctions that have isolated the country from accessing U.S. debt markets represents a new innovation for Caracas and other states seeking to mitigate the effects of coercive U.S. economic pressure.<sup>38</sup> In the near term, the petro is unlikely to shield Venezuela from U.S. sanctions as long as foreign investors are reluctant to invest in a rapidly deteriorating economy beset by hyperinflation.<sup>39</sup> The USG responded to Venezuela's move by prohibiting U.S. individuals and firms from all dealings in any Venezuelan digital currency, coin, or token, which could further deter non-U.S. investors with U.S. exposure.<sup>40</sup> Sovereign cryptocurrencies will provide Venezuela, Russia, and other oil exporters only limited relief from U.S. sanctions as long as the U.S. dollar remains the primary currency of the global oil trade.<sup>41</sup> On the horizon, however, the increasing integration of crypto-assets in international financial markets could provide new opportunities for sanctions evasion or mitigation.<sup>42</sup>

Retaliatory measures by the target or an outside supporter is another risk. For example, Miller argues U.S. efforts to freeze Japan's U.S.-based assets in 1941 were a catalyst for Tokyo's decision to attack Pearl Harbor.<sup>43</sup> Moscow responded to Western sanctions in 2014 by banning agricultural imports from the United States and the EU, which was the largest source of food exports to Russia at the time.<sup>44</sup> The action sharply reduced Russia's imports of EU agricultural products while boosting Russian domestic food production, but EU producers were able to shift some exports to other markets.<sup>45</sup> Non-state actors typically have less ability to respond in kind to U.S. actions, but can resort to asymmetric methods. For example, Hezbollah in June 2016 may have bombed a Beirut bank in reaction to Lebanese banks' compliance with the *U.S. Hizbollah International Financing Prevention Act*.<sup>46</sup>

The USG's use of sanctions depends on private sector cooperation, so the impact of sanctions on industry is another potential risk. U.S. and foreign

financial firms in particular have incurred increasing costs to ensure compliance with sanctions.<sup>47</sup> The impact on firms' bottom lines means that sanctions actions can meet resistance from the domestic business community and interest groups. Two major U.S. business lobbying organizations in June 2014 publicly warned U.S. sanctions on Russia would negatively affect U.S. manufacturing and jobs.<sup>48</sup>

Before imposing sanctions, it is worth revisiting initial assessments of expected impact, risks, feasibility, costs, and implications. The process of establishing a baseline expectation of the outcome can inform an assessment of the actual use of sanctions in the context of the overall strategy.

### After-Action Assessment

Evaluating the outcome of a sanctions action involves measuring impact and effectiveness. Impact is the actual effect of the sanctions on the target as well as the target's response and third-party reactions. It can be challenging to gauge impact, especially if reliable data are limited, target decision-making is unclear, or other political or economic variables are at play. Effectiveness is the extent to which sanctions achieve policy goals.<sup>49</sup> The literature's tendency to conflate impact and effectiveness reflects a long-running debate about whether sanctions "work."<sup>50</sup> Skeptics who highlight instances of targets refusing to compromise or cede to senders' demands often examine the use of sanctions in isolation from other instruments, which does not reflect actual practice. This perspective also tends to rely on empirical cases involving broad trade restrictions rather than the targeted sanctions that became more common in the 1990s and 2000s.<sup>51</sup> For example, U.S. sanctions imposed on North Korea in the 1950s included an embargo on U.S. exports and denial of Most-Favored Nation trade status, whereas the George W. Bush Administration used new post-9/11 targeted authorities to curtail North Korea's access to the U.S. financial system.<sup>52</sup>



A strategy's effectiveness in achieving policy goals rests on the coordinated use of multiple tools of statecraft. The comparative utility of sanctions reflects their contribution to the outcome of a strategy relative to that of the other tools.<sup>53</sup> Measuring effectiveness and comparative utility can be difficult if there are multiple objectives or if the combined use of several instruments produces synergies or multiplier effects.

## Conclusion

The attractiveness of economic and financial sanctions reflects their potential to augment coercive strategies for achieving foreign policy goals, but their successful use depends on careful evaluation of target vulnerabilities and available U.S. leverage to exploit them, orchestration dynamics, expected impact, and factors that could affect implementation. These types of assessments inform both strategy design and outcome and help decision-makers determine if course corrections are needed. Target adaptation to sanctions might help identify new nodes to pressure and disrupt as well as sanctions loopholes to close. Efforts by other states or actors to facilitate sanctions evasion may point to the benefit of secondary sanctions. Unintended consequences for domestic firms or innocent populations may require allowing exemptions. Or target resilience to economic pressure may underscore the need to adjust the strategy to emphasize use of another tool of statecraft. **PRISM**

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> President Donald Trump, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, (Washington, DC: The White House, 2017), 34, available at <<https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>>.

<sup>2</sup> Robert D. Blackwill and Jennifer M. Harris, *War by Other Means: Geoeconomics and Statecraft* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016), 197.

<sup>3</sup> This article follows the literature's convention of referring to the country or multilateral organization imposing sanctions as the "sender" and the party

subject to sanctions as the "target." For example, see Jonathan Kirshner, "The Microfoundations of Economic Sanctions," *Security Studies* 6, no. 3 (Spring 1997): 33, available at <<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09636419708429314?journalCode=fsst20>>.

<sup>4</sup> Sue E. Eckert, Thomas J. Biersteker, and Marcos Tourinho, "Introduction," in *Targeted Sanctions: The Impacts and Effectiveness of United Nations Action*, ed. Sue E. Eckert, Thomas J. Biersteker, and Marcos Tourinho (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 1–3.

<sup>5</sup> U.S. persons include U.S. citizens, permanent resident aliens, U.S. companies and their foreign branches, and foreign nationals and companies present or based in the United States. R. Richard Newcomb, "Targeted Financial Sanctions: The U.S. Model," in *Smart Sanctions: Targeting Economic Statecraft*, eds. David Cortright and George A. Lopez (Lanham, MD: Roman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2002), 45.

<sup>6</sup> Rachael L. Loeffler, "Bank Shots: How the Financial System Can Isolate Rogues," *Foreign Affairs* 88, no. 2 (March/April 2009), 105–08, available at <<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/north-korea/2009-03-01/bank-shots>>.

<sup>7</sup> Benjamin Weiserjan and Carlotta Gall, "Banker from Turkey is Convicted in U.S. Over Plot to Evade Iran Sanctions," *The New York Times*, January 3, 2018, available at <<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/03/world/europe/turkey-iran-sanctions-trial.html>>.

<sup>8</sup> See U.S. Department of the Treasury, *Narcotics Sanctions Program*, July 18, 2014, available at <<https://www.treasury.gov/resourcecenter/sanctions/Programs/Documents/drugs.pdf>>.

<sup>9</sup> Zarate details U.S. and multilateral efforts after 9/11 to use sanctions and other targeted financial measures against terrorist organizations and other illicit actors. Juan C. Zarate, *Treasury's War: The Unleashing of a New Era of Financial Warfare* (New York, NY: Public Affairs, 2013), chapters 1–4. United Nations Security Council Resolution 2253 (2015), available at <[https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2253\(2015\)](https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2253(2015))>.

<sup>10</sup> Newcomb, 49–50.

<sup>11</sup> William E. Pomeranz, "Sanctions Finally Find Russia's Achilles Heel," *Reuters*, July 23, 2014, available at <<http://blogs.reuters.com/great-debate/2014/07/23/sanctions-finally-find-russias-achilles-heel/>>; Marcus Walker, Matthew Dalton, and Carol E. Lee, "Europe, U.S. Significantly Expand Sanctions Against Russian Economy," *The Wall Street Journal*, July 29, 2014, available at <<https://www.wsj.com/articles/europe-u-s-significantly-expand-sanctions-against-russian-economy-1406666111>>; Peter Baker and Andrew Higgins, "U.S. and European Sanctions Take Aim at Putin's Economic Efforts," *The New York Times*,

September 12, 2014, available at <<https://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/13/world/europe/european-union-de-tails-tightened-sanctions-against-russia.html>>.

<sup>12</sup> For example, see U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Testimony of Matthew Levitt, “Attacking Hezbollah’s Financial Network: Policy Options,” 115th Cong., 1st sess., June 8, 2017, available at <<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/attacking-hezbollahs-financial-network-policy-options>>; Jacob N. Shapiro and David A. Siegel, “Underfunding in Terrorist Organizations,” *International Studies Quarterly* 51, no. 2 (June 2007), 426–27, available at <[http://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/Shapiro\\_Underfunding\\_in\\_Terrorist\\_Organizations.pdf](http://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/Shapiro_Underfunding_in_Terrorist_Organizations.pdf)>.

<sup>13</sup> Zarate, 37–38.

<sup>14</sup> United Nations Security Council Resolution 2253 (2015), available at <[https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2253\(2015\)](https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2253(2015))>.

<sup>15</sup> Newcomb, 47–48.

<sup>16</sup> On the balancing of political leverage for effective use of sanctions, see Elizabeth Rosenberg et al., *The New Tools of Economic Warfare* (Washington, DC: Center for a New American Security [CNAS], April 15, 2016), 39, available at <<https://s3.amazonaws.com/files.cnas.org/documents/CNASReport-EconomicWarfare-160408v02.pdf>>.

<sup>17</sup> Blackwill and Harris, 3.

<sup>18</sup> Edward Fishman, “Even Smarter Sanctions: How to Fight in the Era of Economic Warfare,” *Foreign Affairs* 96, no. 6 (2017), 104, available at <<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2017-10-16/even-smarter-sanctions>>.

<sup>19</sup> The United States can impose “secondary” (or extraterritorial) sanctions against non-U.S. third parties to compel or deter them from doing business with a designated target. See Meredith Rathbone, Peter Jeydel, and Amy Lentz, “Sanctions, Sanctions Everywhere: Forging a Path,” *Georgetown Journal of International Law* 44, no. 3 (2013): 1070, available at <<https://www.law.georgetown.edu/academics/law-journals/gjil/recent/upload/zsx00313001055.PDF>>.

<sup>20</sup> *The International Emergency Economic Powers Act* enables the President to declare a national emergency related to a national security threat and impose sanctions by designating specific individuals or entities. The President can also issue an executive order pursuant to the UN Participation Act to implement a UN Security Council Resolution. Designated individuals and entities appear on the Treasury Department’s Specially Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons (SDN) list, which is available at <<https://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/SDN-List/Pages/default.aspx>>.

<sup>21</sup> See Newcomb, 48–49, 52–55.

<sup>22</sup> Meghan L. O’Sullivan, *Shrewd Sanctions: Statecraft and State Sponsors of Terrorism* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2003), 288.

<sup>23</sup> Newcomb, 55–56. The *Federal Register* is the U.S. Government’s official journal, available at <<https://www.federalregister.gov/>>.

<sup>24</sup> See O’Sullivan, 288, on combining sanctions with dialogue with the target.

<sup>25</sup> Arms Control Association, *Fact Sheet: Timeline of Nuclear Diplomacy with Iran*, May 2018, available at <<https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheet/Timeline-of-Nuclear-Diplomacy-With-Iran>>.

<sup>26</sup> See Newcomb, 56.

<sup>27</sup> Loeffler, 106.

<sup>28</sup> See United States General Accountability Office, *Financial Institutions: Fines, Penalties, and Forfeitures for Violations of Financial Crimes and Sanctions Requirements*, GAO-16-297 (Washington, DC: GAO, March 2016), available at <<http://www.gao.gov/assets/680/675987.pdf>>.

<sup>29</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, “Karl Lee Charged in Manhattan Federal Court with Using a Web of Front Companies to Evade Sanctions,” April 29, 2014, available at <<https://www.fbi.gov/contact-us/field-offices/newyork/news/press-releases/karl-lee-charged-in-manhattan-federal-court-with-using-a-web-of-front-companies-to-evade-u.s.-sanctions>>. U.S. Department of the Treasury, Press Release, “Treasury Targets Networks for Facilitating Iran’s Ballistic Missile Procurement and Supporting Oil Sanctions Evasion,” April 29, 2014, available at <<https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/jl2372.aspx>>.

<sup>30</sup> David Cortright and George A. Lopez, *The Sanctions Decade: Assessing UN Strategies in the 1990s* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 2000), 79–80; Gary Clyde Hufbauer, Jeffrey J. Scott, Kimberly Ann Elliott, and Barbara Oegg, *Economic Sanctions Reconsidered*, 3rd Edition (Washington, DC: Peterson Institute for International Economics, 2009), 175–76.

<sup>31</sup> For example, see Joby Warrick, “Coalition Efforts Are Putting ISIS in the Red,” *The Washington Post*, January 1, 2017, A01, available at <<https://www.pressreader.com/usa/the-washington-post-sunday/20170101/281500750921785>>.

<sup>32</sup> Rosenthal et al., 19; Bruce W. Jentleson, “Economic Sanctions and Post-Cold War Conflicts: Challenges for Theory and Policy,” in ed. Paul C. Stern and Daniel Druckman, *International Conflict Resolution After the Cold War* (Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2000), 146, available at <<https://www.nap.edu/read/9897/chapter/5#128>>.

<sup>33</sup> O’Sullivan, 131–32.

<sup>34</sup> Peter Andreas, “Criminalizing Consequences of Sanctions: Embargo Busting and Its Legacy,” *International Studies Quarterly* 49, no. 2 (June 2005), 335, available at <<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.0020-8833.2005.00347.x>>.

<sup>35</sup> An overview of UN sanctions regimes and the committees and panels that monitor their implementation and compliance is available at <<https://www.un.org/sc/suborg/en/sanctions/information>>.

<sup>36</sup> UN Security Council, *Report of the Panel of Experts Established Pursuant to Resolution 1874* (2009), S/2018/171, March 5, 2018, 4–5, available at <[http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/2018/171](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2018/171)>.

<sup>37</sup> U.S. Department of the Treasury, “Sanctions Risks Related to North Korea’s Shipping Practices,” February 23, 2018, available at <[https://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/OFAC-Enforcement/Documents/dprk\\_vessel\\_advisory\\_02232018.pdf](https://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/OFAC-Enforcement/Documents/dprk_vessel_advisory_02232018.pdf)>.

<sup>38</sup> Kejal Vyas, “U.S. Bans Use of Venezuela’s Cryptocurrency,” *The Wall Street Journal*, March 19, 2018, available at <<https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-bans-use-of-venezuelas-cryptocurrency-1521496566>>.

<sup>39</sup> “Venezuela’s ‘crypto-currency’: A Sunny Place for a Shady Currency,” *The Economist*, March 17, 2018, 36–7, available at <<https://www.economist.com/news/americas/21738948-petro-probably-scam-better-designed-crypto-currency-could-work-venezuelas>>.

<sup>40</sup> Executive Order 13827 of March 19, 2018, “Taking Additional Steps to Address the Situation in Venezuela,” *Federal Register* Vol. 83, No. 55, available at <<https://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/Programs/Documents/13827.pdf>>.

<sup>41</sup> David Tweed, “Bitcoin Can’t Save the World’s Autocrats from the Sanctions Squeeze,” *Bloomberg*, January 15, 2018, available at <<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-01-15/bitcoin-can-t-save-world-s-autocrats-from-the-sanctions-squeeze>>.

<sup>42</sup> Nathaniel Popper, Oleg Matsnev, and Ana Vanessa Herrero, “To Evade Sting of U.S. Sanctions, Nations Ponder Digital Currency,” *The New York Times*, January 3, 2018, available at <<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/03/technology/russia-venezuela-virtual-currencies.html>>.

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<sup>45</sup> European Parliament Directorate-General for External Policies Policy Department, 17–18, 25.

<sup>46</sup> Josh Wood, “Hizbollah Sanctions Back Lebanon’s Banks into a Corner,” *The National*, July 12, 2016, available at <<https://www.thenational.ae/world/hizbollah-sanctions-back-lebanon-s-banks-into-a-corner-1.165976>>

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<sup>48</sup> Kenneth Rapoza, “U.S. Exports to Russia Rise Despite Tensions, Minor Sanctions,” *Forbes*, July 4, 2014, available at <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kenrapoza/2014/07/04/u-s-exports-to-russia-rise-despite-tensions-minor-sanctions/#642b95fa63bb>

<sup>49</sup> See O’Sullivan, 27–28.

<sup>50</sup> For example, see Robert A. Pape, “Why Economic Sanctions Do Not Work,” *International Security* 22, no. 2 (Fall 1997), 90–136, available at <[https://web.stanford.edu/class/ips216/Readings/pape\\_97%20\(jstor\).pdf](https://web.stanford.edu/class/ips216/Readings/pape_97%20(jstor).pdf)>; Robert A. Pape, “Why Economic Sanctions Still Do Not Work,” *International Security* 23, no. 1 (Summer 1998): 66–77, available at <<https://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/abs/10.1162/isec.23.1.66>>; and Kimberly Ann Elliott, “The Sanctions Glass: Half Full or Completely Empty?” *International Security* 23, no. 1 (Summer 1998): 50–65, available at <<https://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/abs/10.1162/isec.23.1.50>>.

<sup>51</sup> Jentleson, 141.

<sup>52</sup> Dianne E. Rennack, *North Korea: Economic Sanctions*, RL31696 (Washington D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 2003), 9–10, available at <<https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL31696.pdf>>; Zarate, 225.

<sup>53</sup> O’Sullivan, 29, distinguishes comparative utility from *utility*—the ability of sanctions to achieve policy goals at reasonable or proportionate cost.

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## Photos

Page 64. UK Department for International Development photo. From: <<https://www.flickr.com/photos/dfid/37930256914/in/album-72157690566133336/>>. Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 Generic License. Photo unaltered.



A view of the Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan where, as of March 2017, an estimated 80,000 Syrian refugees still lived. (UN)

# Learning and Innovation

## Jordan at the “Crossroads of Armageddon”

By Beth E. Cole

**T**he literature on conflict prevention and stabilization operations is replete with criticism that our national security agencies fail repeatedly to learn from past interventions. If true, innovation is stymied and success remains elusive. But in a study of three environments undertaken by this author and a team under the auspices of the U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP), we found quite the opposite.<sup>1</sup>

### The New Normal

A recurring feature of the past few decades is the presence of the nation’s three principal national security institutions (the 3Ds)—Department of State (DOS), U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and Department of Defense (DOD)—operating in complex environments abroad marked by conflict, crisis, and state fragility.<sup>2</sup> This paradigm, dubbed the “new normal” by many, begs a few questions. What are we learning from these critical missions undertaken in pursuit of national security? Are we adjusting our strategies to maximize the prospects for prevention of conflict based on that learning? Is innovation occurring that enables us to work better together to address challenges in these environments?

This article examines recent efforts in Jordan, a key ally in the Middle East surrounded by conflict and instability. Of keen interest is what the 3D did to address the unique challenges in Jordan, and how. Understanding both the “what” and the “how” might reveal if we are learning and innovating.

### A High Stakes Environment

A senior U.S. Embassy official once portrayed Jordan as the “crossroads of Armageddon.” The apt description needs little explanation beyond a look at the map. Jordan is bordered by Syria, Iraq, the West Bank, Israel, and Saudi Arabia, all experiencing conflict or directly involved in those in the neighborhood. As a result of its location at this “crossroads,” the tiny desert kingdom has absorbed millions of Iraqi, Palestinian, and Syrian refugees during the past decade, adding to a population of eight million people, already faced with severe water and energy shortages. Its geographic location also produced an array of constantly evolving security threats to Jordan’s territory and concomitant demands for appropriate response.

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### *Violent Conflict and Violent Extremism Across Jordan's Borders*

With the advent of the “Arab Spring” in 2011, mass demonstrations spread from northern Africa to the Middle East, igniting an arc of instability that toppled governments in Tunisia and Egypt and resulted in civil wars in Syria, Libya, and Yemen. In Syria, a brutal crackdown by President al-Assad’s forces on opposition groups led to a conflagration involving hundreds of groups with shifting alliances and the introduction of foreign fighters (including from Jordan). The groups included reorganized al-Qaeda remnants from Iraq operating under the new banner of Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) that were intent on creating a “caliphate” traversing both states. Its sometime equal, the al-Qaeda-affiliated al-Nusra front, later called Jabhat Fateh al-Sham, also fought against Assad, and both created unholy alignments with opposition forces that needed more firepower against the unyielding regime. Buoyed by assistance from a plethora of states—notably the United States, Middle Eastern, and European allies—the opposition limped on while the main focus for the West was the defeat of ISIL. Meanwhile, Iran and then Russia joined the conflagration with troops and material to keep Assad in power. As years passed and conflict in Syria spiraled, Iraq also succumbed to the peril of ISIL as major cities fell to the deadly terrorist group. The Syrian war and renewed conflict in Iraq proved to be extremely costly for Jordan’s security, amplifying both fear of its spread into the Hashemite Kingdom, and the potential for violent extremism to take root in Jordan.

Signs of the spread of violent extremist organizations (VEOs) intensified in Jordan, with several attacks in 2015 and 2016. Civilian casualties occurred in December 2016 when ISIL was disrupted from executing an attack, and, in the process of escaping, fired on people at a tourist destination. ISIL actors are not alone in Jordan; roughly one third of Jordan’s 15,000 Salafis are estimated to

be jihadis.<sup>3</sup> They have been getting target practice in Syria, to where an estimated 2,000 reportedly have traveled, with some even assuming leadership positions with al-Qaeda-affiliates.<sup>4</sup> Fear grips Jordan that these battle-tested foreign fighters have returned or will return to use their new skills and recruit from unemployed and disaffected youth to mount attacks within.

### *State Fragility and the Battered Relationship between State and Citizen*

Jordan has cause to worry about disaffected youth and other disgruntled citizens. For a long period, Jordan provided for its citizens through large public programs that created unsustainable debt. Pressed by donors, Jordan has dialed back its public spending in recent decades and attempted to liberalize its economy. The resulting growth and decreased debt relative to the Gross Domestic Product has come at a cost.<sup>5</sup> While some urban dwellers benefited from this policy shift, the Kingdom’s strongest supporters who reside in rural southern and eastern areas—have not, thereby increasing discontent and fraying the traditionally warm relationship with King Abdullah II and his government.

In addition to the cuts in subsidies and public spending, conflict in the region accelerated Jordan’s energy scarcity, significantly reduced tourism, and stretched schools, housing, health care, sanitation, and water to the breaking point where refugees settled. As a remedy against rising discontent, the government was forced to reinstate subsidies for basic needs, including food, reduced fuel taxes, and increased wages and pension outlays. Jordan has to rely more and more on Western and Middle Eastern donors for assistance; even so, the majority of its entire budget goes directly to salaries and energy subsidies.<sup>6</sup>

The concentration of power in the hands of King Abdullah’s regime is yet another source of tension between the government and the population. With

widely perceived corruption and lack of accountability, civil society organizations have pressured the government to devolve power. As the Arab Spring tore across the region, protests throughout Jordan finally forced a change of government, constitutional reforms, and later, more political parties able to field candidates.

### *Scarcity of Natural Resources*

The lack of water is noticeable to the naked eye as one traverses the arid landscape. Compounding the scarcity of water, Jordan, unlike its oil rich neighbors, lacks any domestic fossil fuel. The twin curses were exacerbated as conflict in the region disrupted energy supplies, and the influx of refugees increased demand for these precious resources. The added thirst for water and energy fueled discontent among Jordan's existing population and even catalyzed conflict as people competed for their share.

Jordan's per capita water resources are among the lowest in the world.<sup>7</sup> Water is taken from aquifers that are overdrawn and often polluted; and from the Jordan and Yarmouk rivers which also supply Israel and Syria. To serve the huge refugee population, Jordan had to increase investment in water infrastructure to deliver it to people that are settled far from the primary sources.

With no fossil fuels of its own, the Kingdom has to import oil and gas for energy, which consumes one-fifth of its gross domestic product. While refugees account for some of the increased demand, conflict in the neighborhood has simultaneously reduced supply through disruption of gas imports. Prior to the Arab Spring in 2011, Jordan bought gas from Egypt at a negotiated rate. Sabotage to Egypt's pipeline rendered that deal null and forced Jordan to purchase much more costly gas from Saudi Arabia. In 2016, Jordan finally negotiated a 15-year, \$10 billion contract with Israel.<sup>8</sup> That same year, Jordan began construction on its first nuclear power plant to use the country's abundant uranium reserves, but completion of the first reactor is not expected until 2025.<sup>9</sup>

### *Refugees*

Jordan hosts an enormous refugee population for a country its size. 500,000 Iraqis settled in the Kingdom as of 2016, joined by a conservative estimate of 649,000 Syrian refugees.<sup>10</sup> Added to this mix are two million Jordanians who are either Palestinian refugees or of Palestinian descent, and another million migrant workers.

The welcome mat in Jordan's host communities has worn thin.<sup>11</sup> According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), an estimated 85 percent of Syrian refugees have settled in some of Jordan's poorest municipalities in the northern governorates of Amman, Balqa, Irbid, and Mafraq—each absorbing an estimated 100,000 new inhabitants. Fewer refugees chose to live in rural communities, and still others landed in one of Jordan's three official refugee camps or other unofficial camps; as of December 2016, more than 140,000 Syrians were still in these settings.<sup>12</sup> For those Jordanians who live in the East and South, a perception that the host communities are receiving more assistance throws fuel on the fire of discontent.<sup>13</sup>

### *The U.S. Response*

The United States had to address a multitude of complex problems in order to help keep its key ally from succumbing to the fate of others in the region wracked by conflict and violent extremism. After the closure of the U.S. Embassy in Damascus in 2012, the United States had to rapidly scale-up assistance to those trapped in Syria's conflict from neighboring countries; help those bordering Syria deal with the influx of refugees; and block the flow of arms and fighters into Syria. All proved to be daunting tasks. Throughout that year, responsibility for these efforts increasingly shifted to the U.S. Embassy in Amman.

In February 2013 what was supposed to be a relatively normal embassy was in reality operating at a frenetic pace. A thin, overworked staff was shouldering new additional burdens to help contain the crisis

next door and serve as a focal point for humanitarian and other assistance to Syria's trapped citizens. Fear was palpable as the once family-friendly post took on an edge of guarded vigilance; the risk of failure meant conflict spilling over to one of the United States' most important allies in the world.

The trickle of Syrian refugees in 2011 became a flood as 236,487 and nearly 300,000 arrived in 2012 and 2013 respectively.<sup>14</sup> In the early days of the conflict Embassy staff were able to cross the border into Syria. But that same border soon devolved into a fortified, defensive one as fear of spreading conflict became a paramount concern.

The U.S. Central Command Forward-Jordan (CF-J) operation at the King Abdullah Special Operations Training Center was a hastily built plywood warren of frigid, bare offices with a freshly assembled amphitheater for "sit reps" on the evolving conflict to the north. Thousands of uniformed personnel led by a one-star U.S. Army General had taken up residence on a train and assist mission. In view of past interagency experiences, it was not hard to imagine that future tension between U.S. civilian and military agencies could impede mission success. As a former U.S. four-star General remarked, "we come in hot and heavy." The barreling freight train had arrived. It would be matched by thousands of incoming civilians from a number of agencies. Indeed, the staff at U.S. Embassy Amman mushroomed by almost 75 percent between 2010-16.<sup>15</sup>

This dramatic influx of U.S. personnel in Jordan arrived in response to an array of complex challenges, which included a river of refugees into Jordan itself, and a host of conflict-affected Syrians inside Syria's borders. Hospital emergency rooms and poorly equipped clinics were overrun as Syrian refugees sought health care. A large number of these refugees, some with heart conditions and other ailments easily treatable in normal times, had been denied access to medical care in Syria. Health conditions had declined. People were desperate. Many were victims of trauma, having witnessed

unspeakable atrocities, and required psychological services not available in the desert kingdom. Schools groaned under the weight of new students. Water lines were illegally tapped, damaging water systems and blocking access. Garbage piled up more rapidly than it could be carted away and the question of where all the garbage would go was a vexing one.

The velocity of emerging problems strained communities, threatening to unleash a spiral of conflict within Jordan's northern municipalities. As the human stampede continued across the border, fear of VEOs infiltrating Jordan rose to the short list of priorities.

Fortunately, the United States was not starting from scratch as it had in Iraq and Afghanistan after toppling governments that forbade U.S. assistance. The United States had a long history of political, security, and development assistance to Jordan, and was actually in the process of significantly reducing its health and education programs when the Syrian crisis unfolded. In 2008, the United States helped Jordan build a set of surveillance towers on the border with Syria; a move that would be augmented later with additional gear. Prior to the outbreak of conflict in Syria, the United States also provided border patrol and customs inspection assistance, and trained police in forensic criminal investigation procedures.<sup>16</sup>

The 3Ds moved quickly to respond to events across the border, working together to deliver cross-border assistance from Jordan to conflict-affected Syrians. This required balancing between tight security of Jordan's border, while allowing refugees to cross into the Kingdom, and assistance to cross into Syria. Because the challenges of cross-border assistance and border security were so massive and complex, the U.S. Ambassadors to Turkey and Jordan decided to divide Syria into northern and southern areas of responsibility.

The 3Ds also collaborated to ramp-up assistance to the Government of Jordan (GOJ) and host communities for development, security challenges, and resource shortages exacerbated by the refugee influx.



They had to confront threats of homegrown violent extremism as well as those from ISIL infiltration. This required humanitarian assistance, increased health, sanitation, water, power and education services, conflict management, work to counter violent extremism, and security support.

### *Host Country Assistance*

With fresh memories of Iraq and Afghanistan where host nation governments railed against alleged U.S. "occupation," the United States decided to work hand-in-hand with the GOJ on the response. To an extraordinary degree, all proposed assistance to both Jordan and to Syrians was discussed with the Jordanians. The United States also agreed to vet all implementers and beneficiaries of assistance in Syria prior to delivery.

The 3Ds often went together to meet with GOJ representatives so that proposed assistance and ongoing programs could be thoroughly briefed. This reduced the common stove-piped responses based on mutual ignorance that could potentially undermine goals and objectives. An example of this novel approach, discussed below, is the briefing on VEO activity in Jordan arising from a joint study undertaken by the 3Ds.

Finally, Embassy Amman revised the reform-focused conditionality on cash transfer assistance during this time to ensure that conditionality did not undermine Jordan's precarious stability.<sup>17</sup>

### *Humanitarian Assistance to Displaced Syrians and Refugees*

Years of work in the "new normal" had led to an appreciation that most refugees do not return to their home countries for at least a decade, if ever. As Jordan understood, life in an adopted homeland can entail hardship for the refugee, and impact the host nation population. The goal was to help Syrians remain in Syria, if safety permitted, with provision of assistance. The assistance included

plastic sheeting for shelter; blankets and mattresses; flour for bakeries; emergency medical supplies; and material to support children's welfare.<sup>18</sup>

To accomplish this behemoth task, the 3Ds organized themselves to ensure unity of effort, including sharing of information uniquely possessed by each of the agencies, special structures to facilitate coordination, and embedding staff in each other's organizations to enhance alignment. This benefitted the assistance to Jordan's beleaguered population and Syrian refugees as well.

Three refugee camps had to be built in Jordan, with U.S. support, to accommodate the flood

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*Three refugee camps had to be built in Jordan, with U.S. support, to accommodate the flood of refugees from 2012–16. Zaatari, the largest camp, topped out at 120,000 people, and became Jordan's fourth largest city.<sup>19</sup> Within a five-year span, at least a half million refugees passed through its barbed-wire walls, traversing pitted, hastily erected roads in buses and other means supported by the 3Ds.*

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of refugees from 2012–16. Zaatari, the largest camp, topped out at 120,000 people, and became Jordan's fourth largest city.<sup>19</sup> Within a five-year span, at least a half million refugees passed through its barbed-wire walls, traversing pitted, hastily erected roads in buses and other means supported by the 3Ds.



An aerial view of the Zaatari camp for Syrian refugees in 2013, as seen from a helicopter carrying the U.S. Secretary of State and Jordanian Foreign Minister. (Department of State)



The State Department Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) provided funds to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, while DOD assisted in construction of the camp and USAID provided funding to the World Food Programme (WFP). The latter was established as a cash-based transfer system that gave refugees vouchers to purchase goods at stores in the camps; an innovation developed in border countries during the Syrian crisis. This system was copied for refugees in communities outside of the camps. It offers refugees the ability to purchase food of their choice and aids the local economies in a manner more dignified than waiting in lines to receive handouts.

The long-term status of refugee camps and the impact on the refugees and host nation gave impetus to encourage Syrians to move to host communities in Jordan. Many had friends and families in Jordan to aid in this deliberate policy choice. Though the accelerated pace of refugee flows made the construction and administration of camps a reality for Jordan, the majority of the refugees did settle outside of the barbed-wired encampments. The United States supported refugees in both situations.

Development programs run by USAID for Jordan's communities struggled with the added refugee population. Flexibility is not a hallmark of programs that are planned and budgeted for years in advance. Luckily, USAID had already been working to renovate hospitals in some of the hardest hit communities and began to help Jordan's Ministry of Health develop means to assist the refugees. U.S. activities included opening hospitals and clinics, stocking them with essentials—items such as defibrillators that were rare for these communities—and providing psychological support to victims of trauma. In the beginning, a sole American health officer and three Jordanian staff ran these efforts; they were augmented later as more personnel arrived at the USAID mission.

Schools were deeply impacted and the USG moved to address that problem. It built additional schools in the north and advised existing school leaders on how to serve more children. Schools started to hold three shifts in an extended school day to accommodate all the students.

To alleviate tension within refugee-affected communities, USAID began a community engagement program that offered both existing and new residents the opportunity to create solutions to problems they were facing. To deal with the mountains of newly generated trash, USAID imported trash trucks and trained people to operate them. As water became an issue of contention and pipes were hacked, USAID assisted in the delivery of more water from alternative aquifers to meet demand. The United States also provided funding for a desalination plant to augment scarce water resources throughout the country.

### *Layered Humanitarian and Development Assistance*

As Syria's crisis evolved into one of most complex conflicts in recent history, and cognizant of protracted stays by refugees in other host countries, the United States had to evolve its strategy. The development approach shifted in an innovation that was being tested globally to promote "resilience" within communities that suffer from repeated shocks. Beginning in 2015, rather than separating humanitarian from development efforts, one directed at the refugee population and the other at the native Jordanian population, the United States layered both in the same location.<sup>20</sup> The aim was to directly help communities benefit developmentally from the added refugee population and to help refugees become productive members of the communities. In this landmark shift, the United States moved from development



Scene from Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan in 2017. (UN)

programs that were created to serve only Jordanians to ones that counted the refugees as beneficiaries as well, impacting the planning and monitoring processes that now took into account the added population. Humanitarian assistance, for example, provided by DOS/PRM, was used to pilot a vocational training project for refugees that could potentially lead to wholesale efforts to serve entire border communities in Jordan.

The problem of separate, but parallel humanitarian and development streams of enormous size extended to the UN and the Government of Jordan. The United States urged the UN to help the Jordanian government build the capacity to leverage both types of assistance to benefit communities writ large with the goal of supporting community resilience. As a result, USAID helped the GOJ's Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation to manage programs that create efficiencies in the delivery of humanitarian and development assistance. Finally, in 2016, the Ministry launched the "Jordan Compact," that applies a resilience approach to assistance that is requested of international donors, with the goal to "turn the Syrian refugee crisis into a development opportunity," that spurs Jordan's economy and increases development in Jordan's refugee-impacted communities.<sup>21</sup>

### ***Financial and Security Support to Jordan***

Given its excellent, long-standing relationships with the Jordanian Armed Forces and Border Guard (JAF), the United States established CF-J to assist them, as described above. That presence expanded as Syria devolved ever more into chaos with the United States' move to deploy elements of the 1st Armored Division Headquarters to Jordan to,

*provid[e] a cohesive command and control element in cooperation with Jordan forces . . . , could be expected to coordinate with CF-J, . . . [and] if directed . . . establish a joint task force headquarters that would*

*provide command and control for chemical weapons response, humanitarian assistance efforts, and stability operations.*<sup>22</sup>

Following ISIL's seizure of Raqqa in March 2014, DOD amplified its security support to Jordan as fear of a jihadist state emerging next door increased. In early 2014, the United States completed another part of the fence between Jordan and its volatile neighbor to improve the GOJ's capability to execute surveillance, detection, and interdiction, and focused on ISIL fighters, smugglers, and refugees on both sides of the fence.<sup>23</sup>

As ISIL marched swiftly in June 2014 to shock the world by taking Mosul and later the Mosul Dam, the mobilization of a military response to ISIL began. By the fall, DOD had sent 1,500 more troops to Iraq which were joined by Jordanian forces. Airstrikes began in Iraq and then Syria as part of Operation *Inherent Resolve* (OIR).<sup>24</sup>

The introduction of Russian military support to Syria's President al-Assad in September 2015 increased the complexity for the United States and its allies. Violent extremist activity in Jordan accelerated in 2015 and continued into 2016. In December 2015, CF-J morphed into the Combined Joint Operations Center-Jordan to help Jordan and coordinate equipment and other support to OIR.

Compounding the security situation, Jordan's fiscal health continued to be a concern. In 2015, the United States signed a \$1.5 billion loan guarantee agreement with the GOJ—in addition to separate guarantees proffered in 2013 and 2014, for \$1.25 billion and \$1 billion respectively. These loan guarantees augmented cash transfers of \$700 million in 2015 and 2016 with the intent of reinforcing the country's political and economic stability.<sup>25</sup>

### ***Assessment of Violent Extremism in Jordan***

During the period 2011–16 Jordan became a highly dynamic and challenging humanitarian

and security environment. Violent extremism had become more than a passing concern. Indeed, with increasing appreciation of what had become a more tangible threat, in 2015 the Royal Hashemite Court of Jordan (the Royal Court) permitted U.S. Embassy Amman to conduct an assessment of violent extremism in the Kingdom. To accomplish this task, the USG employed an innovative approach toward coordination that leveraged resources from across DOD and expertise from USAID.

### *Field Assistance Coordination with Headquarter Elements*

While this article focuses on field coordination, extraordinary measures were also taken in Washington, D.C. to respond to the complex catastrophe unfolding in Syria and impacting its neighbors. This included the establishment of a USAID Syria Task Force, discussed further below, the creation of a new office in DOS to grapple with the immense challenge of assistance coordination—the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs Office of Assistance Coordination—and numerous senior level table top exercises, led most frequently by USAID, but funded and staffed in part by the Joint Staff Force Structure Directorate (J8), and the U.S. Army War College. Participation by all 3Ds occurred in each of these structures and/or activities.

### **Why the 3D was Successful**

The Jordan case arguably represents a scenario where the USG effectively applied its hard-learned lessons across the 3Ds. Capable and experienced leadership in each organization was key; individuals brought previous experiences working across the 3D agencies that enabled them to better appreciate the mix of capabilities and needs, understand that special crisis structures were needed in addition to regular embassy systems, and recognize that embedding personnel from one agency within another greatly improved

coordination and collaboration. These insights also enhanced the ability to balance immediate humanitarian imperatives with long-term developmental and security priorities.

### *Leadership*

Whether a deliberate innovation or not, the 3D organizations recognized the complexity of integrated USG operations and assigned leaders who possessed invaluable prior experience in working across the USG interagency community. In 2011 DOS assigned a seasoned diplomat in Ambassador Stuart Jones who had extensive experience in global hotspots as well as on the National Security Council staff. DOD assigned Brigadier General Gary Cheek, CF-J Commander, who had worked with interagency colleagues in Afghanistan, and led the early U.S. military presence there. For their part, USAID assigned Beth Paige as Jordan Mission Director who came to the assignment with experience in numerous “conflict embassies” as well as at the U.S. Army War College as professor of international development.

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Likely inspired by a visit to CENTCOM and Special Operations Command that USAID/CMC arranged prior to her onboarding as Jordan Mission

Director, Paige invited SOCCENT to participate in the development of the USAID Country Cooperation Strategy (CDCS) for Jordan, an interagency first. This innovation helped pave the way for SOCCENT's incoming Civil Military Support Element (CMSE) to collaboratively, vice independently, support 3D goals. Further, SOCCENT petitioned for and obtained DOD approval for out-of-cycle Overseas Humanitarian, Disaster, and Civic Assistance Funds to contribute to needs identified by the 3Ds.

USAID and DOS representatives participated in DOD's annual "Eager Lion" exercises with the Jordanians and at least a half dozen scenario-planning exercises which anticipated responses to developing challenges. Together, this joint development of strategy, assessments, and exercises clearly and effectively recognized and applied the lessons of prior operations in a meaningful and efficient manner.

### *Embedded and Co-Located Personnel*

In another first, USAID formally requested a civil affairs planner from SOCCENT to join USAID/Amman as an integral member of the staff. The innovation was matched later by the appointment of a Senior Civil-Military Affairs Advisor (SCMA), a USAID Foreign Service officer who had just attended the U.S. Army War College, with responsibilities at both CF-J, and the new Southern Syria Assistance Platform (SSAP). At SSAP, DOD, DOS, and USAID all provided embedded personnel. In 2014, as USCENTCOM was given the train and assist mission for Syrian opposition forces, one of the first actions taken by the new commander was to ask for DOS and USAID senior "embeds." A key problem however was the lack of available experienced staff at USAID or DOS to fill this type of role. Unfortunately, unlike DOD, because of staff constraints, neither foreign affairs agency has the equivalent of "troops" at home waiting to be deployed or training for the next mission.

### *Special Structures*

Complex environments can impose severe demands on normal embassy operations. Embassies struggle to manage the added burden of dealing with massive, dynamic change. Reinforcing structures that are temporary and flexible in nature can help relieve the burden and enhance progress toward resolution or mitigation of the crisis. Such was the case with the creation of the SSAP. The U.S. Embassy in Amman had already formed a working group in the early days of the Syrian conflict with 3D representatives. For its part, USAID had implemented an extraordinary innovation in the creation of the position of deputy mission director for Syria in the Amman Embassy. With the escalating Syrian conflict, the Embassy decided to turn the working group into something more structured and dependent on USAID for administrative purposes. This move was intended to facilitate dismantling of the structure when it was no longer needed. It featured the innovation of co-location, where 3D agencies worked side-by-side. Though similar in concept to the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) in Iraq and Afghanistan, the SSAP operated at the headquarters level only without deployed staff in the country of focus; and personnel were more evenly distributed among the 3Ds as opposed to the thin veneer of civilians in the PRTs.

### *Civil-Military Coordination*

The U.S. military can provide intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance assets, personnel from across the armed services, planes, helicopters, land vehicles, and many other resources. The sheer amount of personnel and material can rapidly overwhelm the much smaller, less-equipped DOS and USAID staffs. Though much of the discussion above indicates civil-military coordination, the unprecedented level of coordination in Jordan deserves special attention as an innovation.

A four-person CMSE team planned and implemented a relatively modest (in dollar terms) array of

projects that served as both gap fillers and focused on areas where other agencies were restricted from using appropriated funds.<sup>26</sup> The embedded civil affairs planner helped the CMSE team coordinate those activities with both USAID and DOS.

The newly created SCMA position filled a need for coordination on small projects to encompass design, authorization, execution, and monitoring. In addition, the SCMA facilitated interaction between USAID and DOD counterparts and coordinated all direct engagement between the CMSE team, the GOJ, and implementing partners. CF-J and later the Combined Interagency Joint Task Force that coordinated counter-ISIL programs hosted the SCMA as a liaison. The interagency interaction was nonetheless not totally free of problems. Rapid rotation of CMSE teams—every six months—combined with concomitant attempts to rehash old issues created pressure to codify rules to govern the relationships. The SMCA wrote a “rules of the road” guide in 2015. Approved by the Ambassador, this guide formalized the relationships between the USAID SMCA, embedded CA planner, the CMSE team leader, and their parent organizations. The rules included the use of assessment to guide planning. DOS/Population, Refugees, and Migration worked the UN and other partner channels; USAID gave technical assistance and often liaised with local officials; and the CMSE team wrote actual project plans.

## Opportunities

A 3D community that embraces learning and innovation to better succeed in these tough crises will require support to continue on this promising path. The recent promulgation of the “Stabilization Assistance Review” in a joint effort by the 3Ds offers new hope that some support might be forthcoming.<sup>27</sup>

### *Enhance Workforce Preparation*

Give the workforce the 3D training and education needed to prepare it for crises and make 3D

experience and interagency rotations a professional requirement to ensure leaders have the tools and knowledge to handle crises. This will enable leaders and personnel to leverage other institutions’ critical capabilities at pivotal moments.

### *Foster a Culture of Training and Education*

For decades, personnel from across the agencies that have operated in these settings have benefited from episodic, often intense preparation together. In the 1990s, the “Interagency Training and Education for Action” housed under the National Gaming Center at National Defense University (NDU) began a series of informational dialogues to bring interagency personnel together. Eventually, this and other initiatives gave rise to move to rename NDU the “National Security University.” The formal change never occurred but later, in May 2007, a Presidential Directive—Executive Order No. 13434—attempted to ensure that the professional workforce was “equipped to carry out coordinated national security operations with their counterparts in other Federal agencies and in non-federal institutions.”<sup>28</sup>

Again, despite an intensive effort spanning years, the results were not enduring. In between the promise of a National Security University and the National Security Professional Directive effort, the massive deployments of both military and civilians to Iraq and Afghanistan forced the USG’s hand. A frequent series of intensive, multi-day trainings regularly put the “interagency” together to prepare for these missions. Hosts spanned the “interagency”—to include DOD, DOS, USAID, and USIP. The personnel learned the basics about their specific capabilities and what their plans were for work in the intended environment. Other initiatives—too numerous to mention here—were undertaken.

The important point here is that they are all gone. No real, regular, robust training is occurring any longer. Agencies have fallen back on the assignment of personnel and faculty to DOD’s NDU and



the Service's War Colleges where a small number of non-DOD personnel mingle and study with their colleagues from other agencies and countries.

***Embrace Operational Experience***

Those in the business of conducting such complex operations have witnessed the profound impact that the *Goldwater Nichols Act* created for jointness among the armed services and with other agencies in the national security community. Service men and women are sprinkled throughout the "inter-agency" performing real staff jobs and gaining critical knowledge and skills through these rotations. Other agencies have "rotations" and representatives: notably, DOS and USAID place foreign policy and development advisors respectively in the Pentagon and subordinate commands. DOD assigns representatives from each of the Combatant Commands and some of the services to USAID where they are housed in the Office of Civilian Military Cooperation. USAID has been "deputizing" personnel in its critical Missions as mission civil-military coordinators to enable coordination. This innovation is modeled after the successful designation of mission disaster resource officers to facilitate cooperation during natural and man-made disasters. During the past tumultuous years with rough environments spanning the globe, these assignments

have narrowed the gap in understanding and helped to foster real cooperation. The sticking point of actually rewarding civilian personnel for these assignments—as DOD does—bedevils these efforts and must be addressed for success.

***Support Real-Time Alignment of Activities and Programs with Topline Priorities, with an Eye Toward Long-Term Plans***

Leaders should be encouraged to adapt steady-state planning processes (e.g., USAID's Country Development Cooperation Strategies, DOS's

Integrated Country Strategies, and DOD's Country Cooperation Plans) and mechanisms (e.g., embedding military planners in USAID missions) to enable crisis planning that establishes and communicates clear priorities based on shared assessments.

The United States does not have adequate processes for crisis planning. Standard department-specific frameworks often force resources and programs into long-term commitments, undermining the ability to align programs with evolving priorities during crises. The sudden and urgent need for organizations—that have not planned together—to then

work together, often yields confusion, lack of coordination, lost resources, time, and even costs lives.

Well-prepared 3D leaders already work outside of standard planning structures, customizing tools

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*The United States does not have adequate processes for crisis planning. Standard department-specific frameworks often force resources and programs into long-term commitments, undermining the ability to align programs with evolving priorities during crises. The sudden and urgent need for organizations—that have not planned together—to then work together, often yields confusion, lack of coordination, lost resources, time, and even costs lives.*

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that align assets and approaches with goals in order to clearly prioritize programs. Even when processes are ad-hoc, the act of planning helps U.S. agencies advance clear priorities; say “no” to unaligned programs and activities; see gaps in resources and authorities; elevate obstacles while spotting leverage points; and identify opportunities for leveraging allies, multilateral institutions, and the private sector. A strong planning process communicates priorities to all involved, and establishes a process for information sharing among stakeholders so that each understands what the other is doing. Attempts at forging closer planning among agencies have yielded modest success during the past decade;

- *The 3D Planning Guide*, published as a pre-decisional draft in 2012, outlined different planning processes and sought to bring agencies together but was not institutionalized;<sup>29</sup>
- Promote Cooperation, a program of the Joint Staff, seeks to bring numerous and voluminous DOD plans to other agencies for review as they are finalized—perhaps too late in the process;
- USAID and DOS embed the advisors described above in DOD’s protracted planning processes but when just one Combatant Command has more than 50 plans, it is not possible to cover all of them;
- USAID codified a policy of sharing its plans in draft with the DOD in the new 2015 “USAID Policy on Cooperation with the Department of Defense” to push understanding and alignment further;
- As the Jordan innovation shows, assigning a full time DOD planner to USAID and the Embassy during a complex crisis is an experiment—now validated—and worth repeating.<sup>30</sup>

***Use Existing Authorities and Funding Creatively, and Seek Exceptions, New Authorities, or New Funding to Confront Crises***

### ***in Changing Circumstances***

Congress and the Executive Branch should collaborate to right-size resources, while establishing trust that enables flexible funding and new or adapted authorities during crises. Normal budgetary cycles are too long to account for the volatility of complex crises. Restrictive authorities and earmarks can hamstring implementers and, during crises, the accelerated operational tempo does not always permit drawn-out consultation and guidance to alter those authorities.

In complex crisis environments, discretionary funds such as economic support funds, and flexible accounts such as USAID’s Transition Initiatives account empower 3D leaders to respond to new or unforeseen developments. Suspended this year by the Trump Administration, the Counter ISIL Relief and Recovery Fund authorized by the U.S. Congress in 2017 represented an attempt at flexible funding. Carve-outs or exceptions to existing authorities can help ensure Washington does not create artificial barriers to achieving results. However, flexibility does not supplant the need to right-size resources, so that the agency with the appropriate tool for the mission is able to employ it. And more is not always better; too many actors or too many resources can threaten the mission.

### ***Permit the Foreign Policy Machinery to Adjust During Crises***

The United States should stand up new structures or processes as needed to support the mission (including special representatives), with clear guidance regarding when they will phase out. Breaking events often outpace the ability of U.S. structures and processes to adapt to new needs and realities, even when there are experienced leaders, clear priorities, authorities, and funding.

Real-time adjustments to staffing, implementation mechanisms, and structures and processes are necessary to meet rapidly evolving crises. Co-location of the 3Ds, purposeful layering of funding streams

and authorities to achieve impact, and embedding personnel from one department in another can create efficiencies and help ensure unity of effort. Success requires both empowered field leadership and robust structures in Washington; field versus Washington-based leadership is a false dichotomy.

### *Harness Bilateral Assets to Address Transnational Challenges*

The 3D institutions should bring together teams that normally work via bilateral engagement mechanisms to align activities and budgets so that they can serve transnational priorities. Even the most flexibly resourced, adaptive missions may not be fully prepared to address all crises. Many are driven and exacerbated by non-state factors and regional dynamics; yet U.S. foreign policy remains bilaterally focused and ill equipped to tackle transnational issues. While foreign and security assistance and diplomatic influence are typically delivered bilaterally, effective U.S. responses often require pursuit of regional objectives.

### **Conclusion**

The hypothesis that concerted U.S. action—together with Jordan and other allies—prevented the situation in Jordan from getting much, much worse, still holds. Jordan remains politically stable, ISIL has not rolled across its borders nor has it executed widespread attacks. Host communities have not imploded under the weight of new inhabitants, the country has been able to meet water and energy needs, the weakened economy has not collapsed, eastern and southern governorates have not revolted, and Jordan has remained a stalwart ally and partner in the Middle East. For those who doubt the potential for and efficacy of conflict prevention, Jordan offers a compelling case. Imagine a world where Jordan had succumbed to ISIL, like its neighbor, Iraq, almost did, to really comprehend the impact of our actions at the “crossroads of Armageddon.”

Three decades of work in some of the most daunting missions conducted by all 3Ds has yielded fruit. Learning and innovation—in the trenches of these operations—have prevented the spread of conflict and all of its attendant misery. **PRISM**

### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> The views expressed in this paper are my own and do not represent the U.S. Institute of Peace. The three case studies—all written by Ms. Beth Ellen Cole, Ms. Alexa Courtney, Ms. Erica Kaster, and Mr. Noah Sheinbaum—were published by USIP in in September 2017: “From Pariah to Partner: The US Integrated Reform Mission in Burma, 2009 to 2015,” available at <<https://www.usip.org/3dlessons/burma>>; “Breaking Boko Haram and Ramping Up Recovery: US Engagement in the Lake Chad Region, 2013 to 2016,” available at <<https://www.usip.org/3dlessons/lakechadregion>>; and “Preserving Stability amidst Regional Conflagration: US Engagement in Jordan, 2011 to 2016,” available at <<https://www.usip.org/3dlessons/jordan>>.

<sup>2</sup> “Fragility is the absence or breakdown of a social contract between people and their government. Fragile states suffer from deficits of institutional capacity and political legitimacy that increase the risk of instability and violent conflict and sap the state of its resilience to disruptive shocks.” Fragility Study Group, U.S. Leadership and the Challenge of State Fragility (Washington, DC: Center for a New American Security, Carnegie Endowment for international Peace, and United States Institute of Peace, September 2016), 5, available at <<https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/US-Leadership-and-the-Challenge-of-State-Fragility.pdf>>.

<sup>3</sup> Mona Alami, “The New Generation of Jordanian Jihadi Fighters,” Sada, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, February 18, 2014, available at <<http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/?fa=54553>>.

<sup>4</sup> David Bishop, “Legitimizing Crackdown on Dissent in Jordan,” Sada, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, July 20, 2014, available at <<http://carnegieendowment.org/sadafa=56223>>.

<sup>5</sup> Alami, “The New Generation.” Jordan’s per capita income reportedly grew from \$10,229 in 2010 to \$10,880 in 2015, although a UN document outs the per capita gross domestic product at \$5,749 in 2013. The USAID 2013 to 2017 Country Development Cooperation Strategy cites positive opportunities for development in Jordan that include a young workforce, a forward-leaning reform-minded government, and improving health and education indicators.

<sup>6</sup> “Jordan: Country Development Cooperation Strategy 2013-2017,” USAID, amended March 2015, 13, available at <[www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1883/Amended-Jordan-Country-Development-Strategy-March-2015.pdf](http://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1883/Amended-Jordan-Country-Development-Strategy-March-2015.pdf)>.

<sup>7</sup> “CIA Factbook: Jordan.” “Jordan: Water is Life,” the Health and Environmental Linkages Initiative (HELI), World Health Organization, available at <[www.who.int/heli/pilots/jordan/en/](http://www.who.int/heli/pilots/jordan/en/)>.

<sup>8</sup> Donna Abu-Nasr, “Unwanted: The \$10 Billion Gas Deal With Israel that Jordan Needs,” Bloomberg, October 26, 2016, available at <[www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-10-26/unwanted-the-10-billion-gas-deal-with-israel-that-jordan-needs](http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-10-26/unwanted-the-10-billion-gas-deal-with-israel-that-jordan-needs)>.

<sup>9</sup> “Jordan’s First Nuclear Reactor to Start Operations by 2025,” *Jordan Times*, March 19, 2016, available at <[www.jordantimes.com/news/local/jordan-s-first-nuclear-reactor-start-operations-2025](http://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/jordan-s-first-nuclear-reactor-start-operations-2025)>.

<sup>10</sup> “Syria Regional Refugee Response,” UN Human Rights Commission, available at <<http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=107>>.

<sup>11</sup> “Jordan: Country Development Cooperation Strategy 2013-2017,” USAID, amended March 2015, 13, available at <[www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1883/Amended-Jordan-Country-Development-Strategy-March-2015.pdf](http://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1883/Amended-Jordan-Country-Development-Strategy-March-2015.pdf)>.

<sup>12</sup> “Syria Regional Refugee Response,” UNHCR, available at <<http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=107>>.

<sup>13</sup> Statement made by a Jordanian member of Parliament, quoted in Maha Yahya, “Refugees and the Making of an Arab Regional Disorder,” Carnegie Middle East Center, November 9, 2015, 40, available at <<http://carnegie-mec.org/2015/11/09/refugees-and-making-of-arab-regional-disorder-pub-61901>>.

<sup>14</sup> “Population Statistics,” UNHCR, available at <[http://popstats.unhcr/en/time\\_series](http://popstats.unhcr/en/time_series)>.

<sup>15</sup> “Preserving Stability amidst Regional Conflagration: US Engagement in Jordan, 2011 to 2016,” 3, available at <<https://www.usip.org/3dlessons/jordan>>.

<sup>16</sup> Jeremy M. Sharp, “Jordan: Background and US Relations,” Congressional Research Service, January 27, 2014, 14, available at <[www.refworld.org/pdfid/5301e9e64.pdf](http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/5301e9e64.pdf)>.

<sup>17</sup> Dollar amounts are from “US Foreign Aid by Country (Jordan 2015),” USAID, [https://explorer.usaid.gov/cd/JOR?implementing\\_agency\\_id=1](https://explorer.usaid.gov/cd/JOR?implementing_agency_id=1); conditions are from USAID, “Jordan: Country Cooperation Development Strategy 2013-2107,” 13.

<sup>18</sup> “Syria Humanitarian Assistance Response Plan (SHARP) 2012,” Financial Tracking Service, available at <<https://fts.unocha.org/appeals/396/>

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<sup>19</sup> Suleiman Al-Khalidi, “In Jordan, a Syrian Camp Withers,” Reuters, November 22, 2016, available at <[www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-jordan-camp-idUSKBN13H1D1](http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-jordan-camp-idUSKBN13H1D1)>.

<sup>20</sup> U.S. Department of State, “Operation Inherent Resolve: Quarterly Report and Biannual Report to the United States Congress,” Lead Inspector General for Overseas Contingency Operations, December 17, 2014, to March 31, 2015, available at <[https://oig.state.gov/system/files/oir\\_042915\\_-\\_a2.pdf](https://oig.state.gov/system/files/oir_042915_-_a2.pdf)>.

<sup>21</sup> “The Jordan Compact: A New Holistic Approach between the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the International Community to deal with the Syrian Refugee Crisis,” Government of Jordan, February 7, 2016, available at <<http://reliefweb.int/report/jordan/jordan-compact-new-holistic-approach-between-hashemite-kingdomjordan-and>>.

<sup>22</sup> “US Central Command (Forward)-Jordan (CF-J),” GlobalSecurity, available at <[www.globalsecurity.org/military/agency/dod/cf-j.htm](http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/agency/dod/cf-j.htm)>.

<sup>23</sup> U.S. Department of State, “US Security Cooperation with Jordan, Fact Sheet,” Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, January 20, 2017, available at <[www.state.gov/t/pm/rls/fs/2017/266863.htm](http://www.state.gov/t/pm/rls/fs/2017/266863.htm)>. This is “an integrated border security surveillance, detection, and interdiction system along Jordan’s land borders.”

<sup>24</sup> U.S. Department of State, “Operation Inherent Resolve.”

<sup>25</sup> USAID, “United States and Jordan Sign Third Loan Guarantee Agreement,” press release, May 31, 2015, available at <[www.usaid.gov/news-information/press-releases/may-31-2015-united-states-and-jordan-sign-third-loanguarantee-agreement](http://www.usaid.gov/news-information/press-releases/may-31-2015-united-states-and-jordan-sign-third-loanguarantee-agreement)>.

<sup>26</sup> “For example, civilian organizations of the US government sometimes cannot procure items quickly enough or do not allow construction. Some programs are limited by statutes forbidding the provision of foreign assistance to armed actors (e.g. border guard military officials who needed office equipment; camps supporting ISIS defectors),” Preserving Stability amidst Regional Conflagration: US Engagement in Jordan, 2011 to 2016, <https://www.usip.org/3dlessons/jordan>.

<sup>27</sup> U.S. Department of State, “Stabilization Assistance Review (SAR),” June 2018, available at <<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/283589.pdf>>

<sup>28</sup> Testimony of Nancy Kichak, Office of Personnel Management, April 30, 2009 available at <<https://www.opm.gov/news/testimony/111tPrh-congress/>

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<sup>29</sup> <https://archive.org/details/3D-Planning-Guide-Diplomacy-Development-Defense-31-July-2012>

<sup>30</sup> USAID Policy on Cooperation with the Department of Defense, June 2015, available at <<https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/USAIDPolicyCooperationDoD.pdf>>.

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## Photos

Page 74. United Nations Photo: Zaatari refugee camp, Jordan. From <[https://www.flickr.com/photos/un\\_photo/35200567271/in/photolist-2a64bte-28GYMmp-VCy7hg-VQ2Vbv-VQ2Vai-VCy7dP-VQ2V8K-VCy7fH-VeMotq-SR6t3d-TeF74R-PGYtjG-HKHnQi-JCTiNC-Fw6LcE-G2rSum-FwhcDR-Gip8jU-GkHFA8-GrymiX-FR748F-FGW5tG-EVRf8x-FGW5iS-Dt1Upf-pKPPMx-ptnYrC-dWGdNT-8B4nDo-6R1KQH-6R5Nxf-6R5Nwy-6R1KNT-6R1KPP-6R1KNr-6R1KLM-6R1KLR-6R1KKp-6R5NrE-6R5NqE-6R1KK4-72kEss-6pmvEr-63srmZ](https://www.flickr.com/photos/un_photo/35200567271/in/photolist-2a64bte-28GYMmp-VCy7hg-VQ2Vbv-VQ2Vai-VCy7dP-VQ2V8K-VCy7fH-VeMotq-SR6t3d-TeF74R-PGYtjG-HKHnQi-JCTiNC-Fw6LcE-G2rSum-FwhcDR-Gip8jU-GkHFA8-GrymiX-FR748F-FGW5tG-EVRf8x-FGW5iS-Dt1Upf-pKPPMx-ptnYrC-dWGdNT-8B4nDo-6R1KQH-6R5Nxf-6R5Nwy-6R1KNT-6R1KPP-6R1KNr-6R1KLM-6R1KLR-6R1KKp-6R5NrE-6R5NqE-6R1KK4-72kEss-6pmvEr-63srmZ)>. Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 Generic License. Photo unaltered.

Page 82. United Nations Photo: Zaatari Refugee Camp, Jordan. From <[https://www.flickr.com/photos/un\\_photo/33628939391/in/photolist-2a64bte-28GYMmp-VCy7hg-VQ2Vbv-VQ2Vai-VCy7dP-VQ2V8K-VCy7fH-VeMotq-SR6t3d-TeF74R-PGYtjG-HKHnQi-JCTiNC-Fw6LcE-G2rSum-FwhcDR-Gip8jU-GkHFA8-GrymiX-FR748F-FGW5tG-EVRf8x-FGW5iS-Dt1Upf-pKPPMx-ptnYrC-dWGdNT-8B4nDo-6R1KQH-6R5Nxf-6R5Nwy-6R1KNT-6R1KPP-6R1KNr-6R1KLM-6R1KLR-6R1KKp-6R5NrE-6R5NqE-6R1KK4-72kEss-6pmvEr-63srmZ](https://www.flickr.com/photos/un_photo/33628939391/in/photolist-2a64bte-28GYMmp-VCy7hg-VQ2Vbv-VQ2Vai-VCy7dP-VQ2V8K-VCy7fH-VeMotq-SR6t3d-TeF74R-PGYtjG-HKHnQi-JCTiNC-Fw6LcE-G2rSum-FwhcDR-Gip8jU-GkHFA8-GrymiX-FR748F-FGW5tG-EVRf8x-FGW5iS-Dt1Upf-pKPPMx-ptnYrC-dWGdNT-8B4nDo-6R1KQH-6R5Nxf-6R5Nwy-6R1KNT-6R1KPP-6R1KNr-6R1KLM-6R1KLR-6R1KKp-6R5NrE-6R5NqE-6R1KK4-72kEss-6pmvEr-63srmZ)>. Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 Generic License. Photo unaltered.



The guided-missile destroyer USS *Porter* conducts strike operations against a target in 2017. (U.S. Navy/Ford Williams)

# The Machine Beneath

## Implications of Artificial Intelligence in Strategic Decisionmaking

By Matthew Price, Stephen Walker, and Will Wiley

**O**n the morning of May 17, 2024 U.S. and Chinese leaders authorized a limited nuclear exchange in the western Pacific. No one, including those who made the decision, is completely sure what caused the flash war. However, historians are confident that neither side deployed fully autonomous weapons or intentionally violated the law of armed conflict. Each side acted in anticipatory self-defense. Irrespective of the intent, in less than two hours, the technologies in use prompted a conflict that killed millions.

### The Two Hour Road to War

As the 2020s dawned, tension in the South China Sea (SCS) continued to escalate. China, the United States, Vietnam, the Philippines, and Taiwan expanded their deployment of forces in the region and made increasingly uncompromising territorial claims. At the same time, both the United States and China fielded artificial intelligence (AI) systems designed for strategic, multi-domain awareness. AI allowed the fusing and incorporation of billions of diverse data points across a spectrum of intelligence sensors, online meta-material, social media, economic indicators, and human reporting. Initial versions of the U.S. systems received extensive verification and validation of performance to ensure system reliability and safety assurance. These systems proved highly reliable in identification of the various predictors of adversary actions around the globe, as did the Chinese systems, despite receiving less rigorous testing and evaluation. AI development proceeded rapidly and by late 2022 dual-use AI systems became commercially available that could not only synthesize fused data, but make recommendations for complex problem sets. As an early adopter of “strategic AI” for military decisionmaking, Israel acted upon a strategic AI recommendation to outmaneuver and defeat an impending Syrian attack in February 2023.

With tension reaching new heights that summer, leaders in China and the United States clamored for immediate fielding of the latest strategic AI to gain faster analysis and advantage over potential adversaries. The newest system was not only trained on historical engagements, wargames, and

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At the time of writing, Lt Col Matthew Price, USAF, was a political-military affairs officer in the Joint Staff Directorate for Strategy, Plans, and Policy (J5). LTC Stephen Walker, USA, was an exercise and training chief for the Office of Defense Cooperation in Greece. CDR Will Wiley, USN, was the Commanding Officer of the USS *John Warner*. National Defense University's Joint and Combined Warfighting School selected their article for the MacArthur Foundation Award in March.

intelligence data, but drew primary insight from competing against versions of itself, generating novel and superior strategic recommendations. Buoyed by a chorus of voices expounding the immediacy of the threat, and the exemplary performance of prior versions, in January 2024 the United States fielded the Enhanced Autonomous Recommendation System (EARS), with test and evaluation still incomplete. Senior leaders mitigated the risk by ensuring that no lethal weapons system could be autonomously authorized by EARS and each system recommendation was provided to a human decisionmaker. China fielded a similar system, the Advanced Military Advisory System (AMAS) and likewise ensured it could not authorize autonomous lethal action. However, in order to gain an asymmetric advantage, China directly linked non-lethal systems to AMAS's recommendations, allowing preparatory activity in integrated logistics, cyber, space assurance, and energy management. Acting on an AMAS decision, these systems would autonomously increase levels of preparedness.

On May 17, 2024, at 0435 local time in the SCS, a Vietnamese registered fishing vessel collided with a Chinese flagged vessel en route to a manmade island. The collision caused the Chinese vessel to sink along with its classified sensor and hypersonic weapons package. Ten minutes later, a Carrier Strike Group—the largest operational unit of the U.S. Navy—entered the region. Vietnamese forces had been preparing during the last few days for ground exercise maneuvers north of Hanoi, within 100km of the Chinese border. A few hours earlier, markets in the United States reacted to the unexpected cancellation of a Malaysian hedge fund's purchase order from the China National Offshore Oil Corporation, which extracts from the SCS. At 0439, social media hits for an anti-Chinese Government demonstration, initiated early that week by a half-American Chinese dissident,

exceeded a predefined government threshold of ten million hits. At 0447, EARS notified U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) that Chinese cyber intrusions had spiked on Pacific networks, automated PRC logistics systems were activating, Chinese national space assets had initiated defensive orbital maneuvers, and power generation had spiked at Chinese railgun sites. In addition, EARS assessed an impending major internal security operation in Beijing and noted the embarkation of numerous Chinese naval vessels to the SCS.

By 0500, USINDOPACOM headquarters, the Pentagon, and the White House were deliberating a response. At 0505, AMAS notified Chinese military leaders of increased communication loading between Pacific sensor sites, USINDOPACOM, and key command and communication nodes in Washington. EARS assessed the Chinese might be considering a lightning strike against allied-held islands in the SCS. EARS recommended an elevated posture to deter this action and at 0515, U.S. leaders authorized an immediate increase in threat level and issued orders for a strategic show of force. Incorporating indications of this U.S. action, AMAS assessed the United States was preparing a strike to eject China from the SCS and contain long-term Chinese military expansion. AMAS recommended achieving escalation dominance through a limited, preemptive strike against major American, Vietnamese, and Philippine bases using high-velocity weapons including cyber, ballistic, hypersonic, and counter-space assets. Believing the U.S. attack would commence at any time, at 0520, Chinese leaders authorized the strike, for which AMAS had already calculated and prepared the plan of action. At 0520:07, EARS alerted U.S. leaders that American forces were under massive cyberattack and Chinese hypersonic missiles would impact the Philippines in 73 seconds. EARS recommended a limited nuclear strike to end the Chinese attack, assessing that the Chinese would only respond in kind, but avoid



an attack on the U.S. homeland and subsequent strategic annihilation. U.S. missile defenses could successfully intercept a significant portion of the Chinese theater nuclear response. EARS was correct. By 0624, after a limited nuclear exchange, millions were dead, tens of millions wounded, and both sides had ceased hostilities.

During peace talks, the Chinese claimed their systems were only responding to Vietnamese maneuvers, U.S. war preparations, and the suspicious sinking of a Chinese ship. The United States claimed it was only reacting to aggressive Chinese actions. Secretly both sides attempted to

reconstruct in detail the analysis and decisions made by EARS and AMAS. However, the creators of the underlying AI systems explained that it was not possible to keep retroactive interrogation protocols up to date under the time constraints imposed by the military and business customers. These protocols are a data reconstruction program designed to explain the decision rationale of the AI. Even with those protocols, knowing the reasoning behind every subset decision was likely not possible given the system design. Though EARS and AMAS were decommissioned, the advantages of strategic AI proved too valuable to fully reject, as Russia and



In March, an unarmed Trident II D5 missile launches from the USS *Nebraska* in the Pacific Ocean. The successful test launch certified the readiness of the ballistic submarine missile crew and the operational performance of the submarine's strategic weapons system. (U.S. Navy/ Ronald Guttridge)

Iran continued to advance their systems, and today almost all nations field these systems.

## Did AI Cause the Flash War of 2024?

This fictional narrative demonstrates how two nations might enter into war without their respective leaders fully understanding why their countries were engaged in hostilities. The speed of future military action will incentivize increased reliance on complex autonomous analysis, recommendation, and decisionmaking. Autonomous systems of today are limited by an inability to synthesize large data sets in a complex operating environment, but future systems are likely to possess such capability. How will these technologies be managed and implemented in the future? Will they be treated with the same caution and control as strategic nuclear weapons or seen as just another innovative tool for understanding the military environment?

To date, the debate about fielding autonomous military systems has focused on ensuring a human is in the decision loop for lethal engagements by battlefield weapons.<sup>1</sup> Mostly absent is a rigorous debate over the implications of relying on autonomous systems for strategic analysis and recommendation. AI was only used to recommend action. Leaders in the loop chose the actions that led to a nuclear exchange. The decisionmaker trusted the recommendation of the strategic AI similar to the trust placed in map applications used to find the fastest route to a destination. Individuals do not fully understand how the route is generated, but they know it is normally correct, so they follow it. Such reliance on autonomous systems for strategic recommendation could both marginalize the value of human review and invalidate the historical assumptions about adversary intent that underpin deterrence theory, increasing the risk of escalation. U.S. policy and international law must take these risks into account in developing new norms for militarized autonomy, broadening their scope beyond battlefield autonomy to AI

systems created to support strategic decisionmaking, or what these authors term strategic AI.

## When We say AI what do We Mean?

Understanding the scope of AI under consideration is critical to addressing the potential impacts of reliance on increasingly sophisticated AI for military decisionmaking. In lay terms, AI breakthroughs can conceptually be categorized into three categories:

- Artificial Narrow Intelligence (ANI) already exists. Examples include image recognition and game supremacy in chess or Jeopardy;
- Artificial General Intelligence (AGI) is a human level intelligence that operates across a similar variety of cognitive, creative, and possibly emotional tasks. Often the focus of intellectuals and futurists, this level of AI does not exist;
- Artificial Super Intelligence (ASI) is another theoretical category of artificial intelligence beyond any human level. Notably, achieving ASI is not required for AI to be superior to human intelligence in particular tasks.<sup>2</sup>

This article is concerned with the application of likely improvements in ANI, which will allow for automated synthesis and analysis of large, diverse data sets, and provide utility in military decisionmaking, as envisioned in the Flash War of 2024. Numerous avenues within AI are under development, with recent, impressive gains in machine learning and artificial neural networks.<sup>3</sup> This article does not attempt to predict the future of specific AI mechanisms, but rather grapples with general implications of applying advances in the broad field of ANI to military strategy.

## Ambitions for Military Use of AI

The U.S. National Defense Strategy (NDS) declares that future defense spending will focus on AI:

*The Department will invest broadly in military application of autonomy, artificial intelligence, and machine learning, including rapid application of commercial breakthroughs, to gain competitive military advantages.<sup>4</sup>*

The pursuit of AI development and research outlined by the NDS has been matched with dedicated funding in the 2019 Pentagon budget submission.<sup>5</sup> These are overt messages to our near-peer competitors and adversaries, but there is no clear discussion or policy on how this money will be spent in the outlying years.

The United States' main competitors, namely China and Russia, are also investing heavily in AI. In July 2017, China released its "New Generation Artificial Intelligence Development Plan," which outlined efforts to "lead the world" in artificial intelligence by 2030.<sup>6</sup> The leadership in Beijing is serious about leveraging breakthroughs in the private sector and utilizing them in a military capacity. Likewise, Russian President Vladimir Putin said recently, "Artificial intelligence is the future not only of Russia, but of all of mankind."<sup>7</sup> From these statements and actions, it is clear that the United States' main competitors are investing heavily in this technology but, as for the United States, how they will use this technology remains unclear.

### **U.S. Military Guidance and Attempts to Establish International Norms**

Department of Defense (DOD) Directive 3000.09 "Autonomy in Weapon Systems" signed in 2012 by then Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter serves as the governing document for AI technology in DOD.<sup>8</sup> The directive aims to "minimize the probability and consequences of failures in autonomous and semi-autonomous weapon systems that could lead to unintended engagements" and to ensure there are "appropriate levels of human judgement over the use of force." The U.S. military must remain compliant with the Law of Armed Conflict (LOAC) principles

of military necessity, distinction, and proportionality. The primary concern with lethal autonomous weapons systems (LAWS) is whether they can determine if a target has the military significance (military necessity), that the target is a combatant (distinction), and if the military action is overkill to accomplish the task (proportionality).<sup>9</sup> To date, the U.S. military is worried about whether or not the LOAC and the rules of engagement (ROE) for the operation can be adequately applied by an autonomous system without a human in the "loop" to make these decisions. It is unclear if China or Russia have a similar policy.

Many civilian and government parties have called for international agreement on LAWS. Beginning with informal discussions in 2014, the UN Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (UNCCW) has addressed LAWS.<sup>10</sup> In 2017 these discussions were elevated to the UN Group of Governmental Experts process wherein the majority of GGE members agreed on the need for a legally binding instrument of regulation and the need for meaningful human control over LAWS.<sup>11</sup> The 2017 and 2018 GGE meetings set the framework for further discussions, but few concrete steps toward formal agreement have been made. In 2017 Russia announced it would not adhere to any "international ban, moratorium, or regulation on such weapons."<sup>12</sup> In concert with the 2018 talks, 26 countries pledged support for a ban on fully autonomous weapons, including surprise support by China.<sup>13</sup> However, key nations including the United States, opposed negotiating a politically or legally binding document on LAWS. The U.S. delegation at the GGE argued that autonomous weapons development should be consistent with existing International Humanitarian Law and a ban would constitute an unrealistic and premature judgement on the future of autonomous technologies.<sup>14</sup> As evidence of the complexity of the problem, the international community has yet to agree on a detailed definition of LAWS. Like

the DOD guidance, international discussions have mostly focused on tactical systems.

## How Autonomous is the U.S. Military Arsenal?

The United States already fields autonomous technology on the battlefield. For example, the U.S. Navy's submarine force uses the Mk 48 advanced capability torpedo that has autonomous features. A human makes the decision to launch the weapon at a target and takes great pains to enter search parameters into the weapon that will avoid engagement of a non-combatant vessel. However, if the weapon detects another target inside of its search parameters it will home in and destroy that object without checking with the human. It makes the "decision" to lethally strike an unintended target despite the best efforts of the operator who fired the torpedo.

Similarly, the U.S. Navy's Close-In Weapon System (CIWS) has a full autonomous mode. This system is a rapid firing gun mounted on many of the Navy's surface warships that can detect incoming aircraft or missiles and shoot them down before they attack or impact the ship. A human decision-maker determines when the system is placed in automatic, but once it is in that mode the system engages anything it detects as a target whether it is friendly or enemy. Like the torpedo, the U.S. Navy trusts the system operators to employ the CIWS in automatic mode only when the targets detected are likely to be enemies.

Finally, the Missile Defense Agency's Counter Rocket Artillery and Mortar (C-RAM), is used to protect U.S. military bases and sensitive areas. C-RAM aggregates fire finder and aviation radars, and acoustic sensors to verify incoming indirect fire in fractions of a second. The system verifies the safety of friendly aircraft by comparing their locations with the potential effects of engaging the incoming rounds. Optional responses include localized alarms to personnel and direct fire interceptors to shoot

down the incoming round mid-air. C-RAM has an autonomous mode where it fires without additional permission at an incoming missile it detects.

These are just a few of the examples in the current U.S. arsenal that feature autonomous capabilities. These systems, and their inherent risks, are accepted by senior leadership as not violating the LOAC treaties because they have been fielded for numerous years (torpedo and CIWS) or are defensive in nature (CIWS and C-RAM). Policymakers appear unwilling to change the standing policy, believing the system is "working" since no treaties are violated and a human is in control of the technology.

Though the current debate about LAWS centers on AI-empowered advances in the autonomy of such battlefield weapons, the use of AI for strategic decisionmaking may pose a greater threat.

## AI Evolution and Adaptation, and the Changing Character of War

In 2017 the UN Institute for Disarmament Research used the term "flash war" to describe shortened time cycles between decision and action, incentivized by increasing autonomy.<sup>15</sup> The Flash War of 2024 is a creative extrapolation of emerging AI capabilities, applied to the strategic environment. If this prospect seems unrealistic, consider that in March of 2016, Google's AlphaGo AI made headlines with an unprecedented defeat of world champion Lee Sedol at the extremely complex board game Go.<sup>16</sup> It accomplished this feat after months of exhaustive observation, practice against human experts, and play against versions of itself. The next year, Google programmers unveiled AlphaGo Zero. In only three days it exceeded the abilities of the version that defeated Sedol, and did so without any historical knowledge, observation, or human intervention.<sup>17</sup>

Hedge funds, such as the Man Group, have been using similar technology for years to analyze large financial data sets, along with sources such as press releases, corporate reports, and other information.<sup>18</sup>

According to an interview by Bloomberg Market, the CEO of the Man Group, Luke Ellis, admittedly quarantined the system when it was first introduced because its engineers could not “explain why the system was executing the trades it was making.”<sup>19</sup> Notably, the Man Group’s incorporation of the software is reported to have taken off after test runs demonstrated consistent profit making, not as a result of a method for explaining all the trading decisions.<sup>20</sup> The Man Group now has AI incorporated into management of more than \$12 billion, and many other investment groups have followed suit, despite the fact AI analytics are known to occasionally drive bad investments based on spurious correlations.<sup>21</sup>

The exact processes by which advanced AI like AlphaGo Zero come to decisions is very difficult to determine, sometimes impossible, and their complexity is increasing rapidly.<sup>22</sup> Though Google’s engineers, and other AI researchers, are now working techniques to interpret the broad outlines of how their machines arrive at conclusions, experts such as Uber’s Jason Yosinski admit that as AI “. . . get more complicated, it is going to be fundamentally difficult to understand why they make decisions.”<sup>23</sup>

The ability to automate data analysis across multiple domains will allow a state to gain an informational and temporal advantage, through enhanced understanding of the social, political, economic, and military factors affecting a strategic environment. AI is already helping intelligence organizations sift through the data noise to find the proverbial signal.<sup>24</sup> The Army’s Communications-Electronic Research, Development, and Engineering Center (CERDEC) has produced an Automated Planning Framework prototype to analyze the decisionmaking process, with the acknowledged goal of AI that “helps us understand, plan and fight in multi-domain battle.” According to Lisa Heidelberg, CERDEC’s Mission Command Capabilities Division chief, autonomy will shorten the decision process and “facilitate recommendations and predictions.”<sup>25</sup>

Separately, AI researchers have made gains in the synthetic modeling of human belief architectures to more accurately predict adversary behavior within a military hierarchy operating in simulated battlefield conditions.<sup>26</sup> Fusing these breakthroughs to enable strategic prediction and recommendation is the next logical step and this increasingly appears feasible in the near-term.

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Even with the advent of such systems, critics could argue that this is merely an evolution in the age-old attempts to reduce the fog and friction of war. Commanders have always tried to better understand the enemy and environment, and strategic AI will just be a new tool in this effort, so long as the software is not allowed to direct lethal action. Human leaders would not cede critical recommendation making to software in high-consequence scenarios. This argument misses two key points. First, people are generally poor judges of risk under complexity, tending to both underestimate the probabilities of failure and incorrectly judge risks posed by low probability, high-consequence events.<sup>27</sup> Second, time pressures can result in severe risk taking and decreased ability to discriminate probabilities.<sup>28</sup> Even a cursory review of existing applications of AI undermines the

assumption that humans will retain strong control over important decisions, particularly as decision time is curtailed by technological advances. As mentioned earlier, AI systems are currently used extensively in equity trading and other investments decisions. Forty four percent of surveyed Americans would ride in a driverless car given the chance despite the limited real-world deployment of this technology.<sup>29</sup> Billions of users around the world rely on social media information curated by algorithms.<sup>30</sup>

Each of these examples relates to high-consequence events, where the common outcome is benign or positive. Algorithmic trading enabled the stock market flash crash of 2010, empowering a London trader's "spoofing" of the market, followed by several smaller, "innocent" flash crashes since, including a 700 point Dow Jones drop within 20 minutes in February 2018.<sup>31</sup> Autonomous vehicles have the potential to dramatically reduce driving fatalities due to human error, but ill-considered over-reliance on early versions have resulted in occupant deaths.<sup>32</sup> Russian influence operators utilized the algorithmic curation of social media during the 2016 election cycle to target susceptible groups for influence and spread divisive disinformation.<sup>33</sup> The automated trading example is again instructive because it bridges into the concept of an arms race in a time constrained environment. Algorithms that analyze and act on emergent data more rapidly than their competitors can make more money in trading. This is a classic, albeit non-lethal, arms race and prisoners' dilemma in a high-risk, high-speed environment. Errors in these systems have the potential to cause devastating consequences for the company acting alone or to the global economy when acting in concert, but for most individual companies they provide an unquestionable advantage, most of the time. Who is going to give them up first?

What makes this informational arms race different from historical examples is that the root cause

of miscalculation might prove unknowable, as with some market flash crashes. The counterargument is that the seeds of historical miscalculation, particularly in military affairs, have often been unknown, lost in the fog and friction of war. However, the basis of such decisions was always knowable. If you could go back and ask the responsible person, they could tell you how they came to their decisions. With the evolving nature of modern AI, this is not necessarily the case.<sup>34</sup> AI may not only change the character of war, but even the nature of warfare as a contest of human will.<sup>35</sup> Even if interrogation protocols could be mandated for all strategic AI, possessing the capability to parse out the key decisional reasoning, it will likely be impossible to explain the complex rationale to a human decisionmaker fast enough to be useful in the future combat environment. In this way, strategic AI systems may reduce the friction of war, while increasing the fog. If fast, strategic AI also achieve strong average accuracy, this may result in leaders accepting high levels of absolute risk under time pressure, as investment firms do now, but with potentially catastrophic consequences.

From the invention of cavalry, to mechanized armor, to supersonic aircraft, improved speed of action has preoccupied military leaders throughout history. Today, military innovators are pushing new boundaries with technologies such as maneuverable hypersonic vehicles and cyber effects that breach the digital/physical divide. Speed has always constrained commanders' decision time and that trend is accelerating. This will generate huge pressure to rapidly understand and act upon information. AI holds the promise to help with this problem and creates a temptation to value the risk posed by the enemy much higher than the risk posed by algorithmic error and opacity. This could lead to the operational deployment of prototype AI systems that have not undergone rigorous evaluation and testing. Imagine Congressional hearings about a combat defeat in which the senior military leaders

explain they did not use available strategic AI programs as capable as the adversary’s because the programs were still undergoing rigorous testing for reliability and validity.

## Implications for Deterrence and Conflict Escalation

Deterrence is used to offset strategic disadvantage or the possibility of unacceptable consequences from military action. Simply put, it is designed to prevent war. Deterrence works through the existence of a credible threat of unacceptable counteraction and/or belief that the cost of action outweighs the perceived benefits.<sup>36</sup> In other words it is a state of mind that exists in an adversary.<sup>37</sup> For this reason, U.S. experts during the Cold War spent time analyzing the personality and psychology of Soviet leaders, and the Soviets sought similar understanding.<sup>38</sup> The knowledge obtained made each side believe in their ability to understand the other’s rationale. Despite several close calls, deterrence appears to have worked, as the Cold War did not turn into another world war. The fundamental reliance of deterrence theory on the mind of the adversary causes today’s theorists to question whether it can be applied to North Korea. The implications for deterrence policy are the reason the U.S. Intelligence Community

has made a significant effort to determine whether North Korean Leader Kim Jong Un is a rational actor, who will act in accordance with traditional motivations.<sup>39</sup>

Miscalculation, failures of deterrence, and unintended escalation are branches of the same tree, and are all failures to understand an adversary. Hannibal thought the Romans would sue for peace after suffering a few decisive losses.<sup>40</sup> The

United States thought former Iraq President Saddam Hussein would be deterred in his aspirations for Kuwait and he in turn thought the United States would not make an escalatory counteraction.<sup>41</sup> How would using strategic AI be different?

As previously discussed, trends in AI development are creating opaque systems with elements of their underlying decisions that cannot be fully parsed. Programmers set parameters and build in their desires and biases, as with prior computer algorithms, but validating the translation of the programmers’ goals to system outputs is more

difficult. If this is difficult for the system designers, it may be all but impossible for the adversarial party to understand. In a new world of autonomous analysis, how well designers know the “minds” they have created will be questionable and understanding the “minds” the adversary has created may prove

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*Speed has always constrained commanders’ decision time and that trend is accelerating. This will generate huge pressure to rapidly understand and act upon information. AI holds the promise to help with this problem and creates a temptation to value the risk posed by the enemy much higher than the risk posed by algorithmic error and opacity. This could lead to the operational deployment of prototype AI systems that have not undergone rigorous evaluation and testing.*

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impossible. As envisioned in the opening vignette, both the Chinese and the American AI systems produced outputs that were similar to their design goals, and arguably proportional, but the true intent of the adversary was mutually unintelligible. As the future speed of warfare decreases command decision time, this added layer of complexity in deterrence and escalation theory could increase uncertainty in strategic conflict.

## Recommendations and Conclusion

Despite the risks posed by the adaptation of AI to military affairs, the United States must seek to be at the forefront of this technology. It is unthinkable that America will cede this new territory to our competitors, such as China and Russia, who are aggressively pursuing it. Even if the United States decided to opt out of this arms race, it would have little effect, as the technologies described in this paper are inherently dual use, and the private sector around the globe will pursue them with abandon. So how can the United States, its partners, and its adversaries avoid consequences like those described in the opening vignette?

Ethicists, weapon engineers, and military leaders are already hard at work on the challenges associated with designing and deploying battlefield LAWS. With this article, the authors hope to begin a new conversation, highlighting and differentiating the risks posed by employing strategic AI in military decisionmaking, particularly as the pace of warfare accelerates. The following recommendations are only intended to start this new discussion, one that is related to the challenge of LAWS from underlying advances in AI, but distinct in its implications and approach. This is a wicked problem that escalation and deterrence theorists must address in haste, but there are existing mechanisms that could be employed.

DOD Directive 3000.09 should be expanded beyond a focus on individual weapon systems to address strategic concerns and to remove the current exemption for autonomous cyberspace systems

designed to create physical effects. Additionally the directive should be updated to include additional guidance for systems likely to generate compounding effects or interactions with other autonomous systems.

Another avenue is international arms control, including some of the proposals that have been considered under the UNCCW. Arms control does not have to mean ceding the technological initiative. The United States and the former Soviet Union continued to improve their nuclear weapons knowledge and technology even while engaging in talks and nuclear stockpile reductions. While strategic AI is inherently different than nuclear warheads, key principles could be developed. It is in the U.S. interest to demonstrate leadership in the UNCCW discussions on autonomous weapons, in order to shape common principles and global norms. These might include proscribing not just the autonomous release of certain weapons, but even any recommendation for strategic attack by such systems. Weapons inspection regimes and a type of “Open Skies” treaty for militarized AI could be agreed to by the international community. Such agreement might seem unrealistic today, but probably no more so than Strategic Arms Limitations Talks or the Treaty on Open Skies would have been to U.S. and Soviet leaders in that late 1940s.<sup>42</sup>

It might also be possible for the international community to agree on some level of required interrogation capability for strategic AI. Increasing the transparency of the strategic AI decisionmaking process could decrease the chance of miscalculation. Communication protocols might also be developed that automate delays in escalatory iterations. The ultimate consequence of the opening vignette would likely be avoided if each system had recommended adversary communication during the various steps of its analysis. Though it is unlikely to be as simple as a flashing banner that says “pick up the red line,” programming de-escalatory parameters may be possible.

Whatever the mechanism, deterrence, escalation, and arms control professionals must be an



integral part of the development of AI systems used in military decisionmaking. Failure to address these threats before such systems are broadly deployed could have catastrophic consequences. Alternatively, the appropriate use of autonomous analysis and recommendations could actually reduce the chance of conflict, if used to decrease the fog of war without increasing strategic volatility. The United States needs to take a clear position on strategic AI. Simply stating that the U.S. Government is focusing on AI and investing in this technology is insufficient to address the coming disruption to global security. **PRISM**

### Notes

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<sup>31</sup> BBC News, “UK “flash crash” trader Navinder Sarao pleads guilty in US,” November 10, 2016, available at <<http://www.bbc.com/news/business-37932250>>. Drew Harwell, “A down day on the markets? Analysts say blame the machines.” *The Washington Post*, February 6, 2018, available at <[https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-switch/wp/2018/02/06/algorithms-just-made-a-couple-crazy-trading-days-that-much-crazier/?utm\\_term=.83176e45214a](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-switch/wp/2018/02/06/algorithms-just-made-a-couple-crazy-trading-days-that-much-crazier/?utm_term=.83176e45214a)>.

<sup>32</sup> Neal Boudette, “Tesla’s Self-Driving System Cleared in Deadly Crash,” *The New York Times*, January 19, 2017, available at <<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/19/business/tesla-model-s-autopilot-fatal-crash.html>>.

<sup>33</sup> Nicholas Fandos, Cecilia Kang and Mike Isaac, “House Intelligence Committee Releases Incendiary Russian Social Media Ads,” *The New York Times*, November 1, 2017, available at <<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/01/us/politics/russia-technology-facebook.html>>. Massimo Calabresi, “Inside Russia’s Social Media War on America,” *Time*, Updated May 18, 2017, accessed March 8, 2018, available at <<http://time.com/4783932/inside-russia-social-media-war-america/>>.

<sup>34</sup> Will Knight, “The Dark Secret.”

<sup>35</sup> “War at hyperspeed—Getting to grips with military robotics: Autonomous robots and swarms will change the nature of warfare,” *The Economist*, January 25, 2018, available at <<https://www.economist.com/news/special-report/21735478-autonomous-robots-and-swarms-will-change-nature-warfare-getting-grips>>.

<sup>36</sup> U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Publication 1-02: Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, Department of Defense, November 8, 2010 (As Amended Through 15 February 2017), 67.

<sup>37</sup> Debra K. Rose, “*Only in the Mind of the Enemy*:

*Can Deterrence Effectiveness be Measured,*” (Master’s Thesis, Joint Advanced Warfighting School, 2011), 6, accessed March 11, 2018, available at <[www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a545543.pdf](http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a545543.pdf)>.

<sup>38</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, “*Khrushchev—A Personality Sketch*,” OCI No. 2391/61, CIA-RDP79S00427A000100020010-6, available at <<https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP79S00427A000100020010-6.pdf>>.

<sup>39</sup> Zachary Cohen, “CIA: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un isn’t crazy,” *CNN*, October 6, 2017, available at <<https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP79S00427A000100020010-6.pdf>>.

<sup>40</sup> Brett Mulligan, “Second Punic War (218-201 BC),” *Dickinson College Commentaries*, accessed March 11, 2018, available at <<http://dcc.dickinson.edu/nepos-hannibal/second-punic-war>>.

<sup>41</sup> Frontline, “*The Gulf War*,” television broadcast, Public Broadcasting Service, January 9, 1996.

<sup>42</sup> James Smith and Gwendolyn Hall, “Milestones in Strategic Arms Control, 1945-2000: United States Air Force Roles and Outcomes,” September 2002 (US Air Force Institute for National Security Studies, Air University Press, Maxwell AFB, AL), 90, available at <[https://media.defense.gov/2017/Apr/06/2001728010/-1/-1/0/B\\_0087\\_SMITH\\_HALL\\_STRATEGIC\\_ARMS\\_CONTROL.PDF](https://media.defense.gov/2017/Apr/06/2001728010/-1/-1/0/B_0087_SMITH_HALL_STRATEGIC_ARMS_CONTROL.PDF)>.



A Marine amphibious assault vehicle hits the beach through the Namsos fjord in March 2016 to support NATO allies and partners during the final training of Exercise *Cold Response 16*. The cold-weather training integrated air, land, and sea capabilities of 13 nations and more than 15,000 troops to improve capacity to coordinate and respond to threats as a team. (U.S. Marine Corps/ Chad McMeen)

# High North and High Stakes

## The Svalbard Archipelago Could be the Epicenter of Rising Tension in the Arctic

By Michael Zimmerman

500 nautical miles north of the city of Tromsø, off of the northern cape of Norway, lies the Svalbard Archipelago; a collection of islands nearly one fourth the size of continental Norway with a unique history and an even more unique status under international law.<sup>1</sup> Since its official discovery in the mid-1500s Svalbard has generally been an area of peace and cooperation due in large part to its location on the fringes of civilization.<sup>2</sup> However, Svalbard's tranquility has been punctuated by periods of competition and conflict when profitable resources are at stake. From whaling in the 1700s, coal in the late 1800s, and fishing in the present, profit from natural resources has been a consistent driver of instability in the area.<sup>3</sup> Outside of resource-driven tension, the island chain spent most of its pre-20<sup>th</sup> century existence as a de facto "no man's land" or global commons, ungoverned by any one nation.<sup>4</sup>

Svalbard's legal status changed under the 1920 Treaty of Paris, which marked the end of World War I and spawned the related Spitsbergen Treaty, bestowing Norway with sovereignty over the archipelago.<sup>5</sup> However, the Spitsbergen Treaty simultaneously granted the citizens of each party to the treaty "equal enjoyment" and "equal liberty of access" to the islands.<sup>6</sup> Nowhere else in the world does such a legal framework exist over a land mass with permanent human habitation; where an area is both under the full authority of one country and also subject to unrestricted access by citizens of dozens of other nations. Thus, Svalbard is a region where considerable ambiguity exists over who controls resources, especially in the adjacent sea, and under the sea floor.

One signatory to the Treaty, Russia, has paid particular attention to guarding its interests in the area. Russia has a historical presence on Svalbard dating back to the 1500s, but it is Svalbard's proximity to the Kola Peninsula, home of Russia's strategic Northern Fleet, that likely explains why Norway's eastern Arctic neighbor closely monitors developments on the remote island chain.<sup>7</sup> This added focus is cause for concern since Russia has shown a proclivity to exploit gray areas, where the rules and norms are less defined.<sup>8</sup> Whether by cyber incursions in the Baltics, little green men in the Ukraine, or manipulating domestic regulations to make excessive claims along the Northern Sea Route, Russia has used ambiguity as a means to accomplish its goals while obscuring its actions.<sup>9</sup>

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Svalbard's ambiguous status as both fully Norwegian and yet completely open to the interests of 46 other nations, including the United States and Russia, make it a ripe target for Russian aggression.<sup>10</sup> The addition of rich oil reserves in the seabed around Svalbard and the ability to exploit internal NATO division over the extent of Norwegian control pushes the potential for conflict even further.<sup>11</sup> This article will examine Svalbard's unique status under international law, and the current drivers of conflict, both political and economic.<sup>12</sup> The article concludes with the argument that maintaining a credible, Arctic-capable, amphibious force in Norway will be key to the United States' and NATO's interest in deterring armed aggression in the area; ensuring that competition remains peaceful and does not ripen into armed hostilities.

However, other instruments of national power must be coordinated as well to protect against aggression below the threshold of armed conflict. A unified front, leveraging the resources of NATO nations, must be arrayed to ensure that key terrain on NATO's northern flank does not become a critical vulnerability. One principal aspect of that will be resolving the ongoing disagreement among members of NATO concerning the 200 nautical mile zone surrounding Svalbard.

### **The International Law Problem: Unusual Beginnings and Unresolved Questions**

Svalbard's historical status as essentially a no man's land began to change in late 1800s when the Kingdom of Norway entered talks with Tsarist Russia to jointly administer the islands.<sup>13</sup> Those talks continued until 1914 and were nearing agreement when World War I broke out across Europe.<sup>14</sup>

During the war, Norway remained neutral but provided significant merchant maritime assistance to the Allied powers, which included Russia,

against the Central Powers of Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria, the Ottoman Empire, and Germany.<sup>15</sup> However, in 1918 the Russian revolution precipitated Russia's withdrawal from the conflict and resulted in the signing of a peace treaty with the Central Powers. A German–Russian supplement to that Treaty required the discussions from 1914 between Russia and Norway on the future of Svalbard to be reopened once the war was over; with Germany now included in the conversation.<sup>16</sup> However, the eventual defeat of Germany and the Central Powers rendered that agreement meaningless. Instead, the victorious Allied powers met in Paris in 1920 to divide up the spoils of war; Russia was not invited.<sup>17</sup>

At the 1920 Paris peace talks Norway was able to advance its interests in the Svalbard Archipelago. The Allies, undoubtedly preoccupied with much bigger issues over the ending of the World War I, acquiesced to Norwegian requests for sovereignty over Svalbard but in a unique way. The resulting Treaty of Spitsbergen granted Norway the authority to administer the islands as Norwegian territory subject to two qualifications.<sup>18</sup> Articles 2 and 3 of the Treaty give citizens of the signatories the same rights to live on and profit off of Svalbard and “its territorial waters” as Norwegian citizens.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, a novel construct under international law was born whereby Norway was granted “full and absolute sovereignty” in Article 1, only to have that sovereignty restricted by subsequent Articles of the Treaty. This legal structure creates significant ambiguity about the authority to control activities on Svalbard. In addition, the way Norwegian sovereignty was conferred—without Russia's involvement—set the stage for decades of tension among the Arctic neighbors.

In the years following the Spitsbergen Treaty, Russia was not shy about expressing its feelings on how the issue of Svalbard's sovereignty was

decided. Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov publicly declared in 1946 that the whole Spitsbergen Treaty should be “thrown in the trash can.”<sup>20</sup> According to Molotov, Bear Island (the southernmost island lying almost exactly halfway between the north cape of mainland Norway and the southern tip of the main Svalbard island chain) belongs to Russia and the rest of Svalbard should be jointly administered by Norway and Russia.<sup>21</sup> Though Norway reopened negotiations with Russia about the joint administration of Svalbard in 1946,

Norway’s admission to NATO in 1949 and inclusion of Svalbard in the NATO defense area in 1951 quickly ended those discussions.<sup>22</sup>

By the 1970s Norway began a concerted effort to solidify and extend its jurisdictional reach over Svalbard.<sup>23</sup> This included attempts to establish an exclusive economic zone around Svalbard, consistent with the ongoing negotiations of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).<sup>24</sup> Beginning in the mid-1970s, UNCLOS had the desired goal of codifying historic state practice



In 2018, a U.S. Marine with Marine Rotational Force–Europe moves into position before a mountainous assault on an enemy position during the field training portion of Exercise *White Claymore* in Norway. The U.K. Royal Marines-led training in northern Norway focuses on training in defensive and operations in winter conditions. (U.S. Marine Corps/Marcin Platek)

regarding the sea rights of coastal states while preventing abuse of natural resources or territorial overreach so that freedom of navigation could be maintained.<sup>25</sup> One of the results of the UNCLOS negotiations was the establishment of a 12 nautical mile territorial sea of a coastal state, extending from the baseline measurement, and the creation of a new exclusive economic zone (EEZ), extending 200 nautical miles from the baseline.<sup>26</sup> This new zone gave a coastal state sole authority of all resources below the surface of the water within that area. This includes fishing, mining and drilling rights within the EEZ.

With the ongoing UNCLOS negotiations in mind, the Norwegian Government quickly conceded that the terms of the Spitsbergen Treaty required the country to allow access and use of the islands as well as Svalbard's 12 nautical mile territorial sea. However, unlike territorial waters, the exclusive economic zone was not a concept that existed in 1920 and Norway took the position that the Spitsbergen Treaty did not apply to this newly created area.<sup>27</sup> Russia disagreed with Norway as did NATO nations such as Iceland, Spain, and the United Kingdom.<sup>28</sup> The United States adopted what can best be described as a tepid position; outwardly supportive of Norway's sovereignty goals, particularly as it related to disagreements with Russia, while maintaining claims to mineral rights in the EEZ around Svalbard.<sup>29</sup>

Not wanting to press what appeared to be an unpopular issue, Norway eventually changed course and established a Fisheries Protection Zone (FPZ) in the 200 nautical mile zone around Svalbard instead of an EEZ.<sup>30</sup> This new direction had its foundation in Article 2 of the Spitsbergen Treaty which allowed Norway "to maintain, take or decree suitable measures to ensure the preservation and, if necessary, the re-constitution of the fauna and flora of the said regions, and their territorial waters."<sup>31</sup> However several European countries, and

in later years the EU, have lodged objections to this exercise of authority.<sup>32</sup> Norway's corresponding attempts to enforce its regulatory power by seizing foreign vessels that violate Norwegian law has met with some tense interactions between Norway and members of the European fishing fleet, including Spain, Latvia, and Russia.<sup>33</sup>

The net effect of these actions by Norway and reactions by the international community is that significant questions exist about who has the right to exploit resources in the 200 nautical mile area around Svalbard. The Norwegian contention is that the Spitsbergen Treaty does not apply to the area outside of Svalbard's territorial waters, while many other nations believe that it does. This lack of certainty could have consequences as tension grows in the battle for natural resources and Arctic regional supremacy.

## Potential Drivers of Competition and Conflict in the High North

The unique international law landscape created by the Spitsbergen Treaty sets the conditions for competition and conflict to erupt. Though the Arctic has been an area where issues have ordinarily been handled peacefully, that has not precluded conflict over profitable resources.<sup>34</sup> Svalbard's unusual governance framework inadvertently exacerbates potential conflict drivers such as Russian national perceptions; natural resource competition; the strategic value of the islands based on their proximity to Russia's Northern Fleet; and the opportunity Svalbard presents to exploit seams in the NATO alliance.

### *Russian Perceptions*

To understand the real potential for conflict over Svalbard one must first understand the key role that the Arctic plays in Russian national pride and perception. The region is so intertwined with Russian national sentiment that Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin recently tweeted in English that



FIGURE 1: OVERLAPPING CLAIMS IN THE ARCTIC.



RAND RR1731-3.3

Source: Stephanie Pezard, Abbie Tingstad, Kristan Van Abel, Soctt Stephenson, "Maintaining Arctic Cooperation with Russia: Planning for Regional Change in the Far North" (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2017) <[https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR1731.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1731.html)>. Reproduced with permission from the RAND Corporation.

"the Arctic is Russian Mecca" and that "Norwegians bring their tourists here in snowmobiles to explore the 'Soviet heritage'."<sup>35</sup> The "here" Prime Minister Rogozin was referring to was Svalbard, where Mr. Rogozin was visiting.

Mr. Rogozin's tweets were provocative well beyond their stated message. Prior to becoming the head of Russia's Arctic commission, Mr. Rogozin was heavily involved in Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and was subsequently placed on a travel ban in the EU and Norway.<sup>36</sup> His presence on Svalbard one year later was a not-so-subtle suggestion by Russia that Svalbard is not part of Norway, or at least that Norway lacks the authority to exclude Mr. Rogozin from the archipelago. This instance underscores how ambiguity in the authority over Svalbard is a potential source of conflict. Though the Treaty grants Norway full sovereignty, it also gives citizens of the parties equal access, so what authority

does Norway have to impose a travel ban in Svalbard on the citizens of a contracting party?

Mr. Rogozin also took the opportunity to explicitly refer to the Arctic in the Crimea context, stating that the two issues are essentially the same.<sup>37</sup> Viewing those comments in light of Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov's previous statements about Russian sovereignty in the archipelago and national resentment regarding the way Svalbard's governance was determined and it is easy to see how conflict could ignite. More than just a struggle over control of resources, there is a Russian nationalistic chord to be struck in reclaiming the islands that would only need a pretext, like Crimea, to act upon.

That risk of hostilities is tempered by Russian actions in the Arctic, which have largely trended toward cooperation, and statements from Russian officials, including Mr. Rogozin, that diplomacy in the Arctic remains a priority.<sup>38</sup> However, the

current preference for cooperation over conflict is by no means a guarantee of future actions and needs only a precipitating event to change Moscow's calculus.<sup>39</sup> As a study from 2016 by the University of Copenhagen Center for Military Studies finds,

*the underlying rules governing the Russian game in the Arctic rests on the assumption that collaboration will benefit Russia the most, actively attempting to isolate the Arctic from the deteriorating Russian-Western relations—while modernizing its military forces. Internal changes in Russia might conceivably alter this course. A deteriorating economic crisis in Russia combined with continuously low oil prices, in turn generating low freight rates, might lead Russian decisionmakers to reconsider and lower their ambitions for developing the Arctic region . . . The combination of the symbolic and historical significance of the Arctic in Russian self-perception coupled with a tendency to view themselves as marginalized in international politics might lead Russian decisionmakers to view the Arctic as being more in need of protection, isolation, and defense rather than an area to be developed via international collaboration . . . The view prevails in Russia that Western sanctions are not so much linked to Ukraine, but rather to a long-term Western conspiracy to, primarily, undermining the Putin regime and, secondly, Russia's opportunity to maintaining and developing her superpower position generally. [Sic] According to this line of thought, the West will always try to limit or undermine Russian potential—also in the Arctic. If Russia is to realize her rightful interests, a confrontation is unavoidable.<sup>40</sup>*

Thus, while Russian policy currently favors collaboration in the region, there is no guarantee

that this trend will continue. Russia does not collaborate out of a sense of duty to an international system that generally demands that interstate disputes be resolved peacefully. If the West's system for resolving disputes benefits Moscow, so be it. If not, then Russia may simply elect to use more traditional means of exercising power within its sphere of influence. This is especially so given the manner in which Svalbard was acquired by Norway, with Russia excluded from the process, and how neatly that episode fits into the Russian narrative of marginalization by the West.<sup>41</sup> Add to that available justifications for aggression such as protecting Russian citizens, which are an estimated 10–20 percent of Svalbard's population, or Russian economic interests in oil and fishing rights, and one could easily see how Moscow might decide to solve its Svalbard problem the same way it solved its Crimea problem.<sup>42</sup>

### **High North Competition**

Competition for profitable resources could also fuel the rise of conflict in the region, as it has historically done. The Arctic has long been known to hold immense potential for oil and natural gas production. In 2008, the United States Geological survey estimated that the area above the Arctic Circle contained at least 13 percent of the planet's easily recoverable oil reserves and 30 percent of its natural gas.<sup>43</sup> Norway recently doubled its estimate of the oil contained in the 200 nautical mile zone around Svalbard, indicating that the area holds the equivalent of several billion barrels.<sup>44</sup> Figure 2 illustrates how the largest projected oil and gas fields lay directly beneath Svalbard and the adjacent sea. While the technological ability and profitability of drilling in the Barents Sea remain to be seen, the first attempts are already being made.<sup>45</sup> Russia has objected to Norwegian drilling permits issued in the area.<sup>46</sup> Those objections have recently manifested in Russia labeling Norway's Svalbard policies

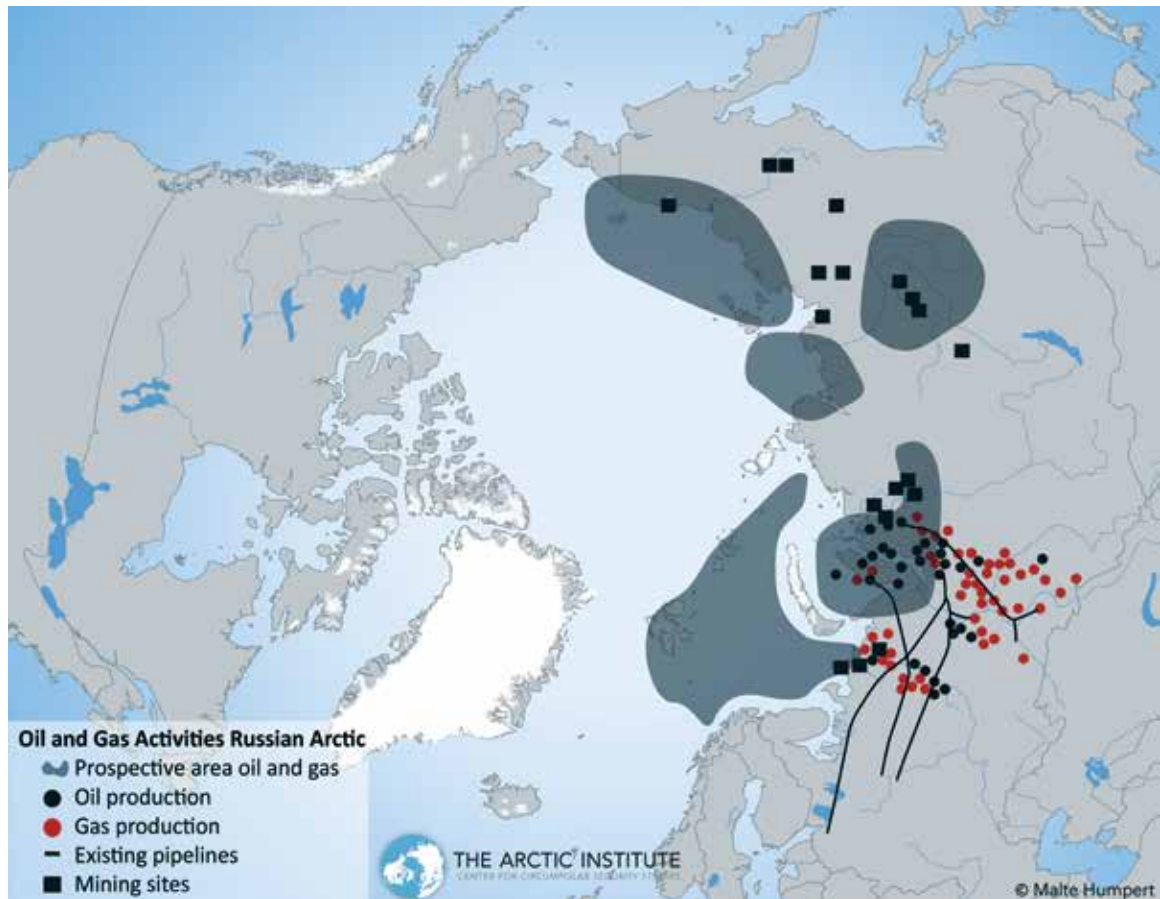
as a specific source of potential armed conflict in the region.<sup>47</sup>

In an odd twist, it may not end up being oil or gas that ends up pushing this issue towards conflict. There is currently a significant dispute between Norway and the EU regarding the right to control crab fishing in the sea adjacent to Svalbard.<sup>48</sup> Crabs are not only a valuable commodity in their own right, but are classified as a sedentary species and have the same status as mineral rights under international law.<sup>49</sup> Thus a decision on crab fishing rights could dictate the future for oil and gas in the region. That may be why the fight over the regulation of crab fishing has been so contentious.

### Strategic Key Terrain and Seams on The Northern Flank

Another potential driver of conflict is the location of the Svalbard Archipelago in relation to Russia's Northern Fleet, a critical strategic asset.<sup>50</sup> The Northern Fleet is Russia's largest naval force and is augmented with some of Russia's best infantry and aviation assets. Together those forces form Russia's "bastion" defense and are a keystone element of Russia's military might.<sup>51</sup> The Svalbard Archipelago, including Bear Island, sits just to the west of the Northern fleet's home port of Murmansk. The islands act as a bottleneck with the north cape of Norway that Russia describes as a "strait."<sup>52</sup> Russian

**FIGURE 2: OIL AND GAS ACTIVITIES IN THE RUSSIAN ARCTIC.**



Source: Map by Malte Humpert. Reproduced with permission from the Arctic Institute Center for Circumpolar Security Studies.

surface vessels and submarines must pass through that narrow area before proceeding past Greenland, Iceland and the United Kingdom, into the North Atlantic. That is a likely explanation for why Russia protests so stringently to the mere potential military use of Svalbard by another nation.<sup>53</sup>

Finally, the possibility of aggression in the area could rise because of the opportunity Svalbard presents to inject friction into the NATO Alliance. NATO's strength lies in Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, which states that an attack on one is considered an attack on all.<sup>54</sup> However, that strength is still dependent on consensus; 29 nations must unanimously agree to invoke that provision. Thus, an adversary would logically look for ways to fracture that cohesion and pit allies against each other.<sup>55</sup> One way to do that would be to exploit ambiguous issues and intra-alliance divisions, particularly under the color of legitimate right. Svalbard presents just such an opportunity.

Several NATO member states hold views similar to Russia's in relation to Norway's claim to the 200 nautical mile zone around Svalbard.<sup>56</sup> Iceland, Denmark, Spain, and the United Kingdom all have objections to Norwegian interests that closely mirror those of Moscow.<sup>57</sup> Even the United States has had a position that, while outwardly supportive, still contains reservations concerning economic rights in the surrounding sea.<sup>58</sup> Thus, Svalbard is a fault line through which cohesion in the high north could be tested. Russian actions short of war, taken under the guise of enforcing an interpretation of the Spitsbergen Treaty identical to that of NATO members, could result in serious internal division within the Alliance.

The synergy between Svalbard's ambiguous international law status, Russian national perceptions, natural resource competition, and the strategic value of the islands creates an environment where tension and instability can quickly escalate. An appropriate barrier is needed to deter aggression and ensure that diplomacy and cooperation remain

the norm in solving disagreements over Svalbard, its adjacent sea, and the Arctic at-large. This includes an ability to respond to a competitor's actions across the spectrum of conflict; deterring armed invasion as well as "gray zone" activities.

## **A Case for an Arctic Capable, Forward Postured, Amphibious Force and Coordination of NATO Power**

Svalbard's unique international law status exposes the island chain to the risk of conflict in a manner unlike any other part of the High North. This risk is magnified as Norwegian attempts to exercise sovereignty are met with objections from not only Russia, but NATO allies. All of those factors could easily be stoked by the Russian narrative of western marginalization and thus raise the competitive temperature toward conflict.

The National Security Strategy of the United States (NSS) makes clear that deterring conflict is an endeavor best undertaken from a position of strength.<sup>59</sup> While mindful of the classic security dilemma, whereby increasing military capability to ensure peace can drive the opponent to do the same and trigger a destabilizing "arms race," armed hostility can be prevented by the forward presence of a credible counterweight.<sup>60</sup>

Russia's military expansion in the Arctic is the largest since the Soviet era.<sup>61</sup> Attempts to gain parity in Arctic capability would be expensive and time consuming.<sup>62</sup> However, tit-for-tat equality across the entire Arctic is not required to effectively deter the use of military action when settling disputes over Svalbard. A credibly sized force, postured and trained in the Arctic so that it has the capability to operate in the harsh climate, with an amphibious character, would serve as a strong buttress against hostility. A force capable of responding to and contesting the presence of "little-green-men" (though likely clad in arctic white) on the archipelago could have the desired effect of ensuring that negotiation



Carved into a frozen mountain in the Svalbard Archipelago is the Global Seed Vault (less formally known as the “doomsday vault,” for which the conflict in Syria triggered the first ever withdrawal in 2015. (Wikimedia/Dag Terge Filip Endresen)

and cooperation remain the norm on Svalbard. The NSS confirms the need for forward staging of troops, stating that “[w]e must be able to get to a theater in time to shape events quickly. This will require a resilient forward posture and agile global mobility forces.”<sup>63</sup>

The Marine Rotational Force–Europe (MRF–E), currently established in Norway, provides sufficient counterweight to deter armed aggression. While initially a small element located in central

Norway, MRF–E was recently expanded, at the invitation of the Norwegian government, to a total of about 700 Marines; a large portion of which will be located above the Arctic Circle.<sup>64</sup> MRF–E is not just an augmentation to Norwegian forces, rather the Rotation Force provides a significant amphibious capability to operate alongside Norway’s Brigade Nord, the Norwegian Army’s Arctic warfare specialist and its only standing Brigade. The Marine Corps elements in Norway are not a permanent presence

but are deployed on a rotational basis to train with the Norwegian Army and other partners in multinational exercises and gain critical Arctic expertise. The skill set generated from constant immersion in the environment is much more than can be garnered from an episodic deployment for training or from cold weather training areas in the United States.<sup>65</sup> The MRF-E units live in the Arctic environment for months at a time and learn how to deal with the mentally and physically demanding climate in a way that only daily experience can provide.

The Arctic is a treacherous place in large part due to the fact that cold weather is exceedingly dangerous. According to a British study covering multiple countries across the globe, cold weather is twenty times deadlier than hot weather.<sup>66</sup> Given this fact, it's not surprising that the history of warfare is littered with examples of the dangers associated with fighting in extreme cold weather when not properly trained or prepared. The Marine Corps learned this lesson during the Korean War. Colonel Homer Litzenberg, the Commander of Regimental Combat Team 7 during the Chosin Reservoir Campaign, specifically noted in his after action report that "hot weather, however uncomfortable it may be, is fighting weather as compared to sub-zero cold which seems to numb the spirit as well as flesh."<sup>67</sup> The cold of the northern Korean Peninsula inflicted more casualties on Marines than enemy action during the Campaign, making the extreme cold weather an adversary in its own right.<sup>68</sup> The bone chilling experience of the Marines during the Korean War is so enduring that it still resonates within Marine Corps ethos today.<sup>69</sup> This lesson is but one of many from history that serves as a stark warning for how different and dangerous extreme cold can be.<sup>70</sup>

Surviving and operating under Arctic conditions demands professional expertise as opposed to episodic familiarization. The rotational aspect of the MRF-E deployment provides the long-term, exposure to the conditions needed to build expertise in

small-unit Arctic survival skills. The frigid temperatures and ice covered landscape of Norway are home to the NATO Cold Weather Operations Center of Excellence for a reason, and offer the right training environment to ensure a capable force is postured in an area of high-stakes competition on NATO's strategically important northern flank.

In addition, MRF-E is the right force to provide tactical balance in the area because Marines are amphibious experts. The Svalbard problem set requires an ability to operate from the sea and project power from mainland Norway onto the islands of Svalbard if necessary. Having a forward posture coupled with the ability to move from ship to shore makes the regular presence of MRF-E a conflict deterrent, while the lack of overwhelming size makes it decidedly unlikely that their presence will trigger a destabilizing arms race. Though not a massive force, the MRF-E element is significant enough that an adversary must plan for dealing with it in the event of armed conflict and the Marine element could easily partner with Norwegian forces, such as Norway's Brigade Nord, to be the forward echelon of a more robust NATO response in a defense of Svalbard scenario.

A credible amphibious force necessarily requires Arctic-capable amphibious shipping. The regular presence of United States or NATO amphibious ships in the area would ensure that the MRF-E element could train to be rapidly delivered at the moment of need. This would likely require the addition of NATO Ally or Nordic Partner ice breaking capability since the United States has a significant icebreaker shortfall.<sup>71</sup> Exercises like *Trident Juncture*, a NATO-led multinational training event, provide the opportunity for critical naval focus and experience in the Arctic, but more consistent deployment of naval assets in the region is needed. A regular rotation of U.S. Navy, Allied, or Partner Nation amphibious ships, with necessary ice breaking capability, would allow the amphibious force to gain and maintain critical Arctic ship to shore capabilities.

Even without the requisite naval assets, aviation platforms like the MV-22 Osprey could be leveraged to accomplish the mission of maneuvering from the mainland onto Svalbard to respond to a crisis. However, regular exposure to and employment in the harsh environment is critical to ensure the Arctic capability of those platforms as well. The Marine Rotational Force does not currently possess its own aviation assets. Augmenting the force with its own aircraft and thus forming what the Marine Corps refers to as a Marine Air-Ground Task Force, while certainly beneficial, is not required. A frequent rotation of United States and Allied tilt-rotor or helicopter assets to the area would allow the force to regularly train on airborne maneuvers in the harsh climate.

While MRF-E is a great countermeasure to the most dangerous contingency, armed conflict on Svalbard, it is not a universal answer to all possible incursions on NATO's northern edge. The non-militarization clause found in Article 9 of the Spitsbergen Treaty prevents the use of the archipelago for warlike purposes. Thus, the western binary view of either being in an armed conflict or not can serve as an intellectual limiting factor when considering a response to borderline or below the threshold action because of Article 9's prohibitions. That means that military presence is an important bulwark to the most dangerous course of action, an armed invasion of the archipelago, but the more likely course of action, below the threshold incursion, requires engagement of other elements of national power.

Russia's preference to operate in the gray zone and achieve its objectives without crossing the line into armed conflict has been repeatedly displayed all along the NATO boundary. Svalbard presents an inviting opportunity to continue those activities in an area of multidimensional significance. The United States, Norway, NATO allies, and possibly other Nordic partners need to come together to discuss what steps can be taken

to counter any below-the-threshold threats to Norwegian sovereignty.

Non-military entities, such as the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, should take on the task of coordinating the other elements of Allied power to counter those threats and deter the most likely Russian course of action, a gray zone incursion. While the Arctic Council or the European Union (EU) might first come to mind as potential bodies to address the matter both of those forums have flaws. Russia is a member of the Arctic Council and would thus be privy to the discussion of how to counter the potential threat it poses. Norway is not a member of the EU and there has been significant tension between the two parties over fishing in the waters off of Svalbard.

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*... military presence is an important bulwark to the most dangerous course of action, an armed invasion of the archipelago, but the more likely course of action, below the threshold incursion, requires engagement of other elements of national power.*

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NATO, however, is both a political and military organization so a diplomatic effort is certainly within the purview of the Alliance. The Parliamentary Assembly "is an inter-parliamentary organization, which brings together legislators from NATO member countries to consider security-related issues of common interest and concern."<sup>72</sup> In May of 2017 the Assembly held a seminar in the city of Longyearben on Svalbard's main island "to discuss the changing

climate in the Arctic and the implications for regional cooperation and security.”<sup>73</sup> Therefore, the security issues Svalbard present are a matter that the Assembly can address and is already aware.

One vital action that the Parliamentary Assembly could take would be to hold discussions about the 200 nautical mile zone around Svalbard with the end goal of resolving internal alliance differences. If the Alliance can take the lead on a resolution to that issue and provide a unified diplomatic position on how Norway’s sovereignty impacts the rights of the international community in Svalbard’s adjacent sea, a potential seam between its members would be mended and a significant conflict driver removed. However, the longer that issue remains a source of division amongst NATO allies the more likely it is that the fuse on this thawing powder keg is eventually lit.

Resolving the issue of the applicability of the Spitsbergen Treaty to the adjacent waters of Svalbard would not only be a significant diplomatic achievement but would also clear the way for investment in fishing and petroleum exploration in the region. Whether the equal access provision of the Spitsbergen Treaty applies to the 200 nautical mile zone around Svalbard or not, corporations put a premium on certainty and having the issue resolved would undoubtedly spur greater investment. The resulting economic stimulus to Norway and NATO allies would increase resilience to Moscow’s actions, particularly in countries that border Russia. Furthermore, Europe presently suffers from a dependence on Russian Petroleum products that affords Moscow a significant measure of influence.<sup>74</sup> The increased investment in petroleum exploration, and eventually production, could have the ultimate benefit of further marginalizing the influence of Russian oil and gas if NATO Allies take the lead in extraction.

The end result of all of these efforts must be to deter Russia from importing its aggressive activities seen elsewhere along the NATO border

to the Arctic and protect key terrain on NATO’s northern approach. Far from being “no-man’s-land” the Svalbard Archipelago is a potential flash point of a looming Arctic regional power struggle. If Russian malicious acts are to be discouraged, across the spectrum, it is in the best interest of the United States and NATO to do so from a position of strength and unity. **PRISM**

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Though initially named Spitsbergen, by Willem Barents in 1596, the Kingdom of Norway changed the name to Svalbard, meaning “cold coast”, in 1925 to refer to the entire archipelago. See Christopher R. Rossi, “A Unique International Problem: The Svalbard Treaty, Equal Enjoyment, and Terra Nullius; Lessons of Territorial Temptation From History,” 15 Wash. U. Global Stud. L. Rev. 93, 95 n3, and 112 (2016). Since Svalbard is the official name this paper will refer to the area as Svalbard unless making specific reference to the Spitsbergen Treaty. Though one would think an area located so far north would be completely ice covered, Svalbard has an ice sheet that permanently covers just a little more than half of the land. See Valery Konyshev and Alexander Sergunin, “Russia’s Policies on the Territorial Disputes in the Arctic,” *Journal of International Relations and Foreign Policy* (March 2014) 2, no. 1, 73. In addition, far from being desolate, Svalbard boasts the world’s northernmost city. See Alan Taylor, “Svalbard: Halfway Between Norway and the North Pole,” *The Atlantic* (March 8, 2016), available at <<https://www.theatlantic.com/photo/2016/03/svalbard-halfway-between-norway-and-the-north-pole/472785/>>.

<sup>2</sup> *The Svalbard Archipelago: American Military and Political Geographics of Spitsbergen and Other Norwegian Polar Territories, 1941–1950*, ed. P.J. Capelotti, (© 2000 by McFarland & Company, Inc, Publishers). In that book the author details a few, small, allied operations on the archipelago to deny Nazi Germany access to Coal production facilities and weather stations during World War II.

<sup>3</sup> Christopher R. Rossi, “A Unique International Problem: The Svalbard Treaty, Equal Enjoyment, and Terra Nullius; Lessons of Territorial Temptation from History,” 15 Wash. U. Global Stud. L. Rev. 93 (2016), 113–20; Torbjørn Pedersen, “The Svalbard Continental Shelf Controversy: Legal Disputes and Political Rivalries,” 37 *Ocean Dev. & Int’l L.* 339, (2006) 345–46. See also Alexander Nurnberg, “An Arctic Circle Chase Pits Norway and Russia,” *The New York Times*, October 21, 2005, available at <<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/10/21/>



international/europe/an-arctic-circle-chase-pits-norway-and-russia.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Torbjørn Pedersen, “International Law and Politics in U.S. Policymaking: The United States and the Svalbard Dispute,” *Ocean Development and International Law*, 42 no. 11, (February 11, 2011), 122.

<sup>5</sup> Treaty Between The President of the United States of America; His Majesty the King of Great Britain and Ireland and of the British Dominions beyond the Seas, Emperor of India; His Majesty the King of Denmark; the President of the French Republic; His Majesty the King of Italy; His Majesty the Emperor of Japan; His Majesty the King of Norway; Her Majesty the Queen of the Netherlands; His Majesty the King of Sweden Concerning the sovereignty of Norway over the Archipelago of Spitsbergen, including Bear Island Signed in Paris February 9, 1920, University of Oslo available at <<http://www.jus.uio.no/english/services/library/treaties/01/1-11/svalbard-treaty.xml>>.

<sup>6</sup> See id.

<sup>7</sup> A.N. Vylegzhanin & V.K. Zilanov, “Spitsbergen: Legal Regime of Adjacent Marine Areas,” W.E. Butler ed. and trans., (Eleven International Publishing, 2007), 2.

<sup>8</sup> Throughout this Article the terms “gray,” “gray zone,” or “below the threshold” will be used to describe “conflicts as a segment of the conflict continuum [essentially occupying the space between peace and war] characterized by intense political, economic, information, and military competition more fervent in nature than normal steady-state diplomacy, yet short of conventional war.” John Chambers, “Counter Gray-Zone Hybrid Threats: An Analysis of Russia’s ‘New Generation Warfare’ and Implication for the US Army,” *Modern War Institute at West Point*, October 18, 2016, 13.

<sup>9</sup> Damien McGuinness, “How a Cyber Attack Transformed Estonia, British Broadcasting Corporation,” BBC, April 27, 2017, available at <<http://www.bbc.com/news/39655415>>. See also Christopher S. Chivas, “Understanding Russian ‘Hybrid Warfare’ And What Can Be Done About It,” testimony presented before the U.S. House of Representatives Armed Services Committee, March 22, 2017, available at <<https://www.rand.org/pubs/testimonies/CT468z1.html>>. The moniker “little green men” was created to describe the groups of armed men in military uniform but without any national markings that appeared in Crimea during the annexation. Julius Bodie, “Modern Imperialism in Crimea and the Donbas,” *Loyola of Los Angeles International and Comparative Law Review*, October 5, 2017, available at <<http://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/ilr/vol40/iss2/4/>>, citing: Vitaly Shevchenko, “‘Little Green Men’ or ‘Russia Invaders?’ BBC News, March 1, 2014, available at <[\[www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26532154\]\(http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26532154\)>. See also: Sally DeBoer, “Arctic Security and Legal Issues in the 21st Century: An Interview with Commander Sean Fahey,” Center for International United States Coast Guard, The Maritime Executive, March 1, 2017, available at <<http://cimsec.org/arctic-security-legal-issues-21st-century-interview-cdr-sean-fahey/31016>>.](http://</a></p>
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<sup>10</sup> Spitsbergen Treaty supra note 7; see also Trude Petersen, “North Korea Signs Svalbard Treaty,” *Anchorage Daily News*, February 2, 2016, available at <<https://www.adn.com/arctic/article/north-korea-signs-svalbard-treaty/2016/02/02/>>. Of note, China is also a signatory of the Spitsbergen Treaty and has some lofty Arctic ambitions. See Eleanor Ross, “How China’s Arctic Empire Will Upset the Global Balance of Power,” *Newsweek*, July 14, 2017, available at <<http://www.newsweek.com/chinas-arctic-goals-620794>>. The grey area Svalbard occupies under international law combined with rich natural resources, Russian national perceptions of how Svalbard’s sovereignty was decided and the opportunity to exploit NATO division form a perfect geopolitical storm that make the possibility of Russian aggression significant. One need only look at Deputy Prime Minister Dimitry Rogozin’s 2015 trip to Svalbard where he drew parallels to Crimea along with Russia’s recent foreign policy leak that listed Norway’s Svalbard policy as a risk of war to see that the foundation for aggression may already be in motion. Atle Staalesen, “Expansionist Rogozin looks to Arctic,” *Barents Observer*, April 21, 2015, available at <<http://barentsobserver.com/en/arctic/2015/04/expansionist-rogozin-looks-arctic-21-04>>; and Thomas Nilsen, Kommersant: Russia Lists Norway’s Svalbard Policy As Potential Risk Of War, *The Independent Barrents Observer*, October 4, 2017, available at <<https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/security/2017/10/kommersant-russia-lists-norways-svalbard-policy-potential-risk-war>>.

<sup>11</sup> NATO Publication 132 JOINT 17 E, NATO Parliamentary Assembly, Joint Special Seminar Report, paragraph 31, May 22, 2017; see also White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, December 2017, available at <<https://www.whitehouse.gov/articles/new-national-security-strategy-new-era/>>. On page 47, the NSS states “Russia is using subversive measures to weaken the credibility of America’s commitment to Europe, undermine transatlantic unity and weaken European institutions and governments.”

<sup>12</sup> The term “conflict” is meant to describe events occurring across the spectrum from competition short of armed conflict up to armed conflict.

<sup>13</sup> See Christopher R. Rossi, “A Unique International Problem: The Svalbard Treaty, Equal Enjoyment, and

Terra Nullius; Lessons of Territorial Temptation From History,” Washington University Global Studies Law Review, 15 issue 1, 2015, available at <[https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/law\\_globalstudies/vol15/iss1/7/](https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/law_globalstudies/vol15/iss1/7/)>.

<sup>14</sup> *Id.*

<sup>15</sup> *Id.* at 130–31.

<sup>16</sup> Peace Treaty of Brest Litovsk, German-Russian Supplementary Agreement, Article 33, March 3, 1918, available at <[http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/bl34.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/bl34.asp)>. The article states that contracting parties will endeavor to attain that in the international organization of the Spitsbergen Archipelago, provided for in the Spitsbergen conference of 1914, both parties shall be placed on an equal footing. For this purpose the Governments of both parties will ask the Royal Norwegian Government to convoke as soon as possible after the conclusion of general peace a continuation of the Spitsbergen conference.

<sup>17</sup> Though Russia’s new Communist government was not formally recognized at this point the interests of its citizens who were already on the island and engaging in mining operations was accounted for to some degree in Article Ten of the treaty. Svalbard Treaty *supra* note 7. However, this attempt to recognize Russian interests did not prevent significant Russian resentment over the handling of the issue. See Christopher R. Rossi, *supra* note 18, 132 (2016).

<sup>18</sup> The original name of the main island is Spitsbergen. The Kingdom of Norway later renamed the entire area Svalbard to refer to all of the islands. See *supra* note 3.

<sup>19</sup> Article 3 states:

*The nationals of all the High Contracting Parties shall have equal liberty of access and entry for any reason or object whatever to the waters, fjords and ports of the territories specified in Article 1; subject to the observance of local laws and regulations, they may carry on there without impediment all maritime, industrial, mining and commercial operations on a footing of absolute equality.*

*They shall be admitted under the same conditions of equality to the exercise and practice of all maritime, industrial, mining or commercial enterprises both on land and in the territorial waters, and no monopoly shall be established on any account or for any enterprise whatever.*

*Notwithstanding any rules relating to coasting trade which may be in force in Norway, ships of the High Contracting Parties going to or coming from the territories specified in Article 1 shall have the right to put into Norwegian ports on their outward or homeward voyage for the purpose of taking on board or disembarking passengers or cargo going to or coming from the said territories, or for any other purpose.*

*It is agreed that in every respect and especially with regard to exports, imports and transit traffic, the nationals*

*of all the High Contracting Parties, their ships and goods shall not be subject to any charges or restrictions whatever which are not borne by the nationals, ships or goods which enjoy in Norway the treatment of the most favoured nation; Norwegian nationals, ships or goods being for this purpose assimilated to those of the other High Contracting Parties, and not treated more favourably in any respect.*

*No charge or restriction shall be imposed on the exportation of any goods to the territories of any of the Contracting Powers other or more onerous than on the exportation of similar goods to the territory of any other Contracting Power (including Norway) or to any other destination.*

<sup>20</sup> See Christopher R. Rossi, “A Unique International Problem.” The author specifically notes that the “deep seated” national psychological impact of capitulating on Svalbard has framed Russian Diplomacy from 1946 to the present.

<sup>21</sup> *Id.*, 104.

<sup>22</sup> Matthew Melino et al., “History Lessons For The Arctic: What International Maritime Disputes Tell Us About a New Ocean,” Center for Strategic & International Studies,” December 19, 2016, 16–17, available at <<https://www.csis.org/analysis/history-lessons-arctic>>.

<sup>23</sup> Christopher R. Rossi *supra* note 26 at 104–07; and Matthew Melino et al *supra* note 28 at 17–20.

<sup>24</sup> See Matthew Melino et al *supra* note 28 at 17–20.

<sup>25</sup> UN, Division For Ocean Affairs And The Law Of The Sea, “The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (A Historical Perspective),” available at <[http://www.un.org/depts/los/convention\\_agreements/convention\\_historical\\_perspective.htm#Historical Perspective](http://www.un.org/depts/los/convention_agreements/convention_historical_perspective.htm#Historical%20Perspective)>.

<sup>26</sup> UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Law of the Sea*, December 10, 1982, 1833 U.N.T.S. 397, Articles 2–5 and 55–57. Herein referred to as UNCLOS.

<sup>27</sup> Morgane Fert-Malka and Troy Bouffard, “The Unique Legal Status of an Arctic Archipelago, Arctic in Context,” *World Policy Journal*, December 6, 2017, available at <<http://www.worldpolicy.org/blog/2017/12/06/eyes-svalbard>>.

<sup>28</sup> Christopher R. Rossi, “A Unique International Problem,” 104–08.

<sup>29</sup> *Id.* citing Torbjørn Pedersen, “International Law and Politics in U.S. Policymaking,” 120, 131; see also “U.S. Policy Toward Svalbard,” National Security Decision Memorandum 325, April 20, 1976, available at <<https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsdm-ford/index.html>>. This reservation by the United States can most easily be understood in the desire to maintain good relations with Norway in an area of strategic import. The channel between the Svalbard archipelago and mainland Norway is narrow and located very near the Kola Peninsula, home to Russia’s Northern Fleet.

<sup>30</sup> The term “Fisheries Protection Zone” is not actually found in UNCLOS but the concept has a foundation in the control over the EEZ granted in Articles 61 and 62. According to one author term that was crafted to permit regulation over the area by Norway while the authority over the EEZ was in dispute. Dr. James Kraska, *Victim Participation in the International Criminal Court: From Pariah to Partner—Russian-American Security Cooperation in the Arctic Ocean*, 16 *ILSA J. Int’l & Comp L.* 517, 526 (Winter 2010). Christopher R. Rossi *supra* note 34 at 104–108. Norway’s claim in the Arctic regarding Svalbard changed to claiming that the islands do not have their own continental shelf but instead are an extension of Norway’s continental shelf to avoid the issue the applicability of the treaty. This view has been negatively received by the international community and even described by Norwegian allies like the United States as “wishful thinking.” See Torbjørn Pedersen, “International Law and Politics in U.S. Policymaking,” 120, 124. For ease and clarity the nuance of that position is not addressed in this paper since it appears that Norway’s position is not shared by the international community.

<sup>31</sup> The Svalbard Treaty *supra* note 7.

<sup>32</sup> See Christopher R. Rossi *supra* note 34 at 104–107 citing Torbjørn Pedersen, “The Svalbard Continental Shelf Controversy: Legal Disputes and Political Rivalries,” *Ocean Development & International Law*, 37 no. 3–4 (©Taylor&Francis, 2006), 339, 345–46.

<sup>33</sup> See Alexander Nurnberg, “An Arctic Circle Chase Pits Norway and Russia,” *The New York Times*, October 21, 2005, available at <<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/10/21/international/europe/an-arctic-circle-chase-pits-norway-and-russia.html>>; see also Christopher R. Rossi, “Norway’s Imperiled Sovereignty Claim over Svalbard’s Adjacent Waters,” *German Law Journal*, 18 no.6 (November 16, 2017), 1498.

<sup>34</sup> For example the Arctic Council is the governing entity in the region but more of a voluntary forum for dialogue among the eight Arctic nations—Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, and the United States—and representatives of the indigenous populations. For more information on the Arctic Council, see their backgrounder, which was last updated on January 3, 2018 and is available at <<http://www.arctic-council.org/index.php/en/about-us>>. Their website includes an “Agreements” page that details how the forum has been successful in advancing cooperative agreements on scientific, environmental and regional safety issues; see <<http://www.arctic-council.org/index.php/en/our-work/agreements>>.

<sup>35</sup> British Broadcasting Corporation, “Norway in Arctic Dispute with Russia over Rogozin Visit,” *BBC*

*News*, April 20, 2015, available at <<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-32380101>>.

<sup>36</sup> Ishann Tharoor, “The Arctic is Russia’s Mecca Says Top Moscow Official,” *The Washington Post*, April 20, 2015, available at <[https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/04/20/the-arctic-is-russias-mecca-says-top-moscow-official/?utm\\_term=.084fc183bfe2](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/04/20/the-arctic-is-russias-mecca-says-top-moscow-official/?utm_term=.084fc183bfe2)>.

<sup>37</sup> Atle Staalesen, “Expansionist Rogozin looks to Arctic,” *Barents Observer*, April 21, 2015, available at <<http://barentsobserver.com/en/arctic/2015/04/expansionist-rogozin-looks-arctic-21-04>>.

<sup>38</sup> Morgane Fert-Malka and Troy Bouffard, “The Unique Legal Status of an Arctic Archipelago, Arctic in Context,” December 6, 2017, available at <<http://www.worldpolicy.org/blog/2017/12/06/eyes-svalbard>>. “[f]or about a decade, Arctic experts have effectively debunked myths of a new “gold rush” or conflict over resources, territory, and navigation rights throughout the High North. The region has emerged as an example of successful cooperation and innovative governance”; see also Kristian Soby Kristensen and Casper Sakstrup, “Russian Policy in the Arctic After the Ukraine Crisis,” 26–27. Dmitry Rogozin, “The Arctic Herald,” *Arctic Portal*, 3 no. 14 (April 11, 2016), 3, available at <[http://library.arcticportal.org/1881/1/AH\\_No3\\_2015\\_view.pdf](http://library.arcticportal.org/1881/1/AH_No3_2015_view.pdf)>.

<sup>39</sup> Morgane Fert-Malka and Troy Bouffard, *supra* note 45, “[i]n any case, Svalbard will be worth keeping an eye on, if not two, in the coming years. If disagreements are not addressed peacefully, Svalbard would be the first instance of an escalating Arctic dispute that both international law and regional governance frameworks failed to keep in check.” See also Christopher R. Rossi, “A Unique International Problem,” *noting*: “the waters off Svalbard highlight increasing tensions regarding the legal status of the archipelago and its surroundings, making it an emerging centerpiece of a new global power race for influence and resources. ‘For anyone interested in geopolitics,’ noted the president of the Norwegian Scientific Academy for Polar Research, ‘this is the region to follow in years to come.’”

<sup>40</sup> Kristian Soby Kristensen and Casper Sakstrup *supra* note 45 at 33–34.

<sup>41</sup> Kristian Soby Kristensen and Casper Sakstrup *supra* note 45 at 28.

<sup>42</sup> Central Intelligence Agency World Factbook, Svalbard 2016, available at <<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sv.html>>. Given that Svalbard’s total population is estimated to be only 2,500, the ratio of ethnic Russian’s could quickly and easily be manipulated.

<sup>43</sup> Kenneth J. Bird et al., “Circum-Arctic Resource

Appraisal: Estimates of Undiscovered Oil and Gas North of the Arctic Circle,” U.S. Geological Survey, (2008), available at <[pubs.usgs.gov/fs/2008/3049/](https://pubs.usgs.gov/fs/2008/3049/)>.

<sup>44</sup> Thomas Nilsen, “Norway Doubles Arctic Oil Estimates,” *The Independent Barrents Observer*, Apr 25, 2017, available at <<https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/industry-and-energy/2017/04/norway-doubles-arctic-oil-estimates/>>; see also Nerijus Adomaitis, “Norway Doubles Oil, Gas Resource Estimates for Barents Sea,” *Reuters*, April 25, 2017, available at <<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-norway-oil-arctic/norway-doubles-oil-gas-resource-estimates-for-barents-sea-idUSKBN17R0QQ>>.

<sup>45</sup> Thomas Nilsen, “Professor Says Goliat Will Likely Never Become Profitable,” *The Independent Barrents Observer*, November 6, 2017, available at <<https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/industry-and-energy/2017/11/professor-says-goliat-will-likely-never-become-profitable>>.

<sup>46</sup> Christopher R. Rossi, “A Unique International Problem,” 101–02.

<sup>47</sup> Thomas Nilsen, “Kommersant: Russia Lists Norway’s Svalbard Policy As Potential Risk Of War,” *The Independent Barrents Observer*, October 4, 2017, available at <<https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/security/2017/10/kommersant-russia-lists-norways-svalbard-policy-potential-risk-war>>.

<sup>48</sup> Morgane Fert-Malka and Troy Bouffard, “The Unique Legal Status of an Arctic Archipelago,” *Arctic in Context*, December 2017, available at <<http://www.worldpolicy.org/blog/2017/12/06/eyes-svalbard>>; see also Andreas Østhaugen and Andreas Raspotnik, “Op-Ed: Crabtaacular! Snow Crabs on their March from Svalbard to Brussels,” *High North News*, April 3, 2018, available at <<http://www.highnorthnews.com/op-ed-crabtaacular-snow-crabs-on-their-march-from-svalbard-to-brussels/>>.

<sup>49</sup> *Id.*; see also UNCLOS Art 77, which states “The natural resources referred to in this Part consist of the mineral and other non-living resources of the seabed and subsoil together with living organisms belonging to sedentary species, that is to say, organisms which, at the harvestable stage, either are immobile on or under the seabed or are unable to move except in constant physical contact with the seabed or the subsoil.”

<sup>50</sup> Christopher R. Rossi *supra* note 54 at 132; see also Kristian Soby Kristensen and Casper Sakstrup, “Russian Policy in the Arctic.”

<sup>51</sup> International Security Advisory Board, Report on Arctic Policy, September 21, 2016, 21–25

<sup>52</sup> Torbjørn Pedersen, “International Law and Politics in U.S. Policymaking,” 120, 122.

<sup>53</sup> Christopher R. Rossi *supra* note 54, at 132 noting that civilian capabilities that could be converted to military use are protested by Russia as a violation

of the Svalbard treaty’s non-militarization provision; see also Thomas Nilsen, “Moscow Says NATO Meeting on Svalbard is a Provocation,” *The Independent Barrents Observer*, April 21, 2017, available at <<https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/arctic-security/2017/04/moscow-says-nato-meeting-svalbard-provocation/>>; see NATO Publication 132 JOINT 17 E, NATO Parliamentary Assembly, Joint Special Seminar Report, May 22, 2017, which notes that Russian objections are unfounded as the NATO Parliamentary Assembly is a political vice military organization.

<sup>54</sup> The North Atlantic Treaty, April 4, 1949.

<sup>55</sup> Reuters, “Nordic Nations Agree on Defense Cooperation Against Russia,” April 9, 2015, available at <<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-nordics-russia-defence/nordic-nations-agree-on-defense-cooperation-against-russia-idUSKB-N0N02E820150409>>. This article by Reuters staff asserts that “Russia’s actions are the biggest challenge to the European security . . . Russia’s propaganda and political maneuvering are contributing to sowing discord between nations, and inside organizations like NATO and the EU.”

<sup>56</sup> Torbjørn Pedersen, “The Dynamics of Svalbard Diplomacy,” *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 19 no.2 (June 14, 2008), 236–62. The article states that in “2006 the United Kingdom hosted a discussion regarding Svalbard and invited the United States, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark, Russia, Spain, Iceland, and Canada. Norway was conspicuously left off of the list.”

<sup>57</sup> Christopher R. Rossi, “A Unique International Problem.”

<sup>58</sup> Torbjørn Pedersen, “International Law and Politics in U.S. Policymaking,”; see also National Security Decision Memorandum 325.

<sup>59</sup> White House, NSS, 3, 4, 26, 28.

<sup>60</sup> Kristian Soby Kristensen and Casper Sakstrup, “Russian Policy in the Arctic.”

<sup>61</sup> Andre Osborn, “Putin’s Russia In Biggest Arctic Military Push Since Soviet Fall,” *Reuters*, January 30, 2017, available at <<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-arctic-insight/putins-russia-in-biggest-arctic-military-push-since-soviet-fall-idUSKBN15E0W0>>.

<sup>62</sup> For example, Russia currently has a fleet of more than 40 icebreakers, six of which are the only nuclear powered icebreakers in the world. The United States currently has two icebreakers. See Ryan Scarborough, “Ice-Cold War: Russian Icebreakers Outnumber U.S. Vessels In Vital Arctic,” *Washington Times*, February 19, 2017, available at <<https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2017/feb/19/coast-guard-icebreakers-in-arctic-vital-to-us-acce/>>; see also Tom O’Connor, “Russia Leads World With New Nuclear Icebreaker Ship,

Putin's Latest Arctic Move," *Newsweek*, September 25, 2017, available at <<http://www.newsweek.com/russia-deploys-worlds-largest-and-most-powerful-nuclear-icebreaker-ship-bring-670621>>.

<sup>63</sup> White House, NSS, 29.

<sup>64</sup> Gwladys Fouche, "Norway to Invite More U.S. Marines, for Longer and Closer to Russia", *Reuters* June 12, 2018, available at <<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-norway-us-russia/norway-to-invite-more-u-s-marines-for-longer-and-closer-to-russia-idUSKBN1J8149>>.

<sup>65</sup> A recent After Action Report from the Battalion Commander of the MRF-E element echoed this point. Specifically the Battalion Commander was emphatic that the Marine Corps can send Marines to all of the formal cold weather training courses in the world but that does not replace immersion into the environment. Deployments for Training only allow the units to go through the survival phase but are not enough time to then learn how to maneuver and fight in the Arctic. In addition the Battalion Commander noted:

*Marines must have time to adapt to the environment before they can thrive. A three week [Mountain Training Exercise] or periodic [Deployments for Training] do not provide sufficient time to adapt to the environment. As a result, Marines never move beyond the survival phase. Summer/winter [Mountain Leaders Course] help, but cannot substitute for full unit immersion time. Accordingly, that type of deployment will not develop a [cold weather] capability or institutional knowledge for the Service. If the Marine Corps is committed to developing a [cold weather] capability, lengthy rotational deployments are key.*

<sup>66</sup> Antonio Gasparrini et. al, "Mortality Risk Attributable To High And Low Ambient Temperature: A Multicountry Observational Study," *The Lancet*, 386 no. 9991, July 25, 2015, 369.

<sup>67</sup> Lynn Montross and Nicholas A. Canzona, *U.S. Marine Operations in Korea 1950–1953, Volume III: The Chosin Reservoir Campaign* (U.S. Marine Corps Headquarters, 1957), 121.

<sup>68</sup> See *id.* and compare 351 and 381–82. The Chinese also sustained heavy casualties from the extreme cold weather during the Chosin Reservoir Campaign with estimated rates number in the 10,000's. See *id.* at 354.

<sup>69</sup> Gidget Fuentes, "Marines Celebrate 65th Anniversary of Cold Weather Training Center Rooted in Korean War Legacy," U.S. Naval Institute News, September 29, 2016, available at <[https://news.usni.org/2016/09/29/chosin\\_marine\\_corps\\_korea](https://news.usni.org/2016/09/29/chosin_marine_corps_korea)>.

<sup>70</sup> The Department of Defense's recent successful experience with familiarization training for desert deployments could serve to obscure the important difference

between extreme heat and extreme cold in the minds of decision makers. Extreme heat can be adapted to with some basic training in hydration and managing heat related casualties. The experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan have shown that the familiarization with a desert environment from pre-deployment training exercises was effective in training the military to fight in hot weather. History and the objective facts show that the Arctic is simply more demanding and deadly than other climates and requires more time to learn to survive and adapt. Numerous After Action Reports from recent Marine Corps cold weather training and exercises in the Nordics show that everything, no matter how trivial or complex, becomes exponentially more difficult in the extreme cold. Therefore, a fighting force must spend significant amounts of time simply learning how to stay alive before they can even begin to operate in this deadly climate.

<sup>71</sup> Ryan Scarborough, "Ice-Cold War: Russian Icebreakers Outnumber U.S. Vessels In Vital Arctic," *Washington Times*, February 19, 2–17, available at <<https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2017/feb/19/coast-guard-icebreakers-in-arctic-vital-to-us-acce/>>.

<sup>72</sup> NATO, "NATO Parliamentary Assembly," November 13, 2017, available at <[https://www.nato.int/cps/ic/natohq/topics\\_50080.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/ic/natohq/topics_50080.htm)>.

<sup>73</sup> NATO Publication 132 JOINT 17 E, NATO Parliamentary Assembly, Joint Special Seminar Report, Paragraph 1, (May 22, 2017).

<sup>74</sup> Ivana Kottasová, "Europe is Still Addicted to Russian Gas," *CNN Money*, June 5, 2018, available at <<http://money.cnn.com/2018/06/05/news/economy/russia-europe-gas-dependency/index.html>>.

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In 2016, the U.S. Department of State (DOS) in partnership with Discovery Communications, Vulcan Productions, and the film "Racing Extinction" projects images of wildlife on the DOS Washington DC façade to raise awareness of and spur action on the global threat of wildlife trafficking. (State Department)

# Wildlife and Drug Trafficking, Terrorism, and Human Security Realities, Myths, and Complexities Beyond Africa

By Vanda Felbab-Brown

**T**he planet is experiencing alarming levels of species loss caused in large part by intensified poaching stimulated by a greatly expanding demand for animals, plants, and wildlife products. The rate of species extinction, now as much as 1,000 times the historical average and the worst since the dinosaurs died out 65 million years ago, deserves to be seen, like climate change, as a global ecological catastrophe meriting high-level policy initiatives to address its human causes. In addition to irretrievable biodiversity loss, poaching and wildlife trafficking pose serious threats to public health, with diseases such as Ebola, SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome), and various influenza types linked to the illegal wildlife trade, thus potentially causing global pandemics. Wildlife trafficking can also undermine human security of forest-dependent communities and cause local, national, and global economic losses. And under some circumstances, it can even pose threats to national security.

The latter, particularly the involvement of terrorist and militant groups in poaching and wildlife trafficking, has lately received much attention from the international conservation community as well as the U.S. Congress and national governments around the world. Governments in Africa, for example, particularly like that concern as it brings them military assistance from abroad. The involvement of militants in wildlife trafficking should not generate surprise as many have extensive experience with deriving not just money, but also political capital from a wide range of illicit economies.<sup>1</sup>

Yet analyses of the wildlife-trafficking-militancy-nexus are often shrouded in unproven assumptions and myths. Crucially, they divert attention from several uncomfortable truths with profound policy implications: First is that the nexus of militancy in wildlife trafficking constitutes only a sliver of the global wildlife trade and countering it will not resolve the global poaching crisis. Second, counterterrorism and counterinsurgency forces, even recipients of international assistance, also poach and smuggle wildlife and use anti-poaching and counterterrorism efforts as covers for displacement of local populations and land grabbing. Third, corruption among government officials, agencies, and rangers has far more profound effects on the extent of poaching and wildlife trafficking. And finally, local communities are often willing participants in the global illegal wildlife trade.

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This article dissects the realities and myths of the violent-conflict /militancy nexus. It also draws analogies from and contrasts the illegal wildlife trade with the illegal drug trade. It concludes with policy recommendations.

## **Militants Trafficking in Wildlife—No Surprise and Nothing New**

That terrorist and insurgent groups participate in illegal economies such as illicit drug production and trafficking is old news. Should it be surprising that they also poach animals and trafficking in wildlife?

For decades, numerous militant groups have tapped into the drug trade and other illicit economies. In the drug trade alone, groups as diverse as the Taliban in Afghanistan, Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path) in Peru, FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia) and rightist paramilitaries in Colombia, to name just a few, have participated. Groups involved in illegal logging and mining include again the Taliban and the Haqqani network in Afghanistan, FARC and other leftist guerrillas and rightist paramilitaries in Colombia, the RUF (Revolutionary United Front) in Sierra Leone, and Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, and many others.

From their sponsorship of or participation in illicit economies, militant groups derive a multitude of benefits. With profits in the order of tens of millions of dollars annually, belligerents can immensely improve the physical resources they have for fighting the state and their rivals: they can hire more combatants; pay them better salaries; and equip them with better weapons. In fact, the increase in the belligerents' physical resources is frequently immense.

Better procurement and logistics also enhance "the freedom of action" of belligerents—that is, the range of tactical options available to them and their ability to optimize both tactics and grand strategy. Prior to penetrating illicit economies, belligerents frequently have to spend much time and energy on

activities that do little to advance their cause, such as robbing banks and armories to obtain money and weapons, or extorting the local population for food supplies. Once their participation in an illicit economy solves the belligerents' logistics and procurement needs, they become free to concentrate on high-value, high-impact targets.

Violent conflict, of course, overlaps with natural environments. An estimated 80 percent of major armed conflicts have occurred within biodiversity hotspots.<sup>2</sup> Forests, being particularly dense, provide good hiding places. Nor is it surprising that militant and terrorist groups have also exploited the illegal wildlife trade to feed their soldiers and generate funding. In Africa, such actions include the LRA's (Lord's Resistance Army) poaching of elephants in Uganda, South Sudan, and the Congo, and perhaps the Janjaweed Arab militia of Sudan, who have been accused of butchering thousands of elephants in Cameroon, Chad, and the Central African Republic.<sup>3</sup> The Muslim Seleka rebels in the Central African Republic, which include armed fighters from the Sudan, have similarly been accused of poaching in the Dzanga-Ndoki National Park. RENAMO (Resistência Nacional Moçambicana) also traded in rhino horn and ivory during Mozambique's civil war.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the current focus on the issue, involvement by militants in poaching and wildlife trafficking is not new either. During the 1970–80s, militant groups such as UNITA (União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola) in Angola as well as the militaries of African governments killed thousands elephants for bushmeat and generated revenues from ivory. Even today, both the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), linked to the Rwandan genocide, and the Coalition of Patriotic Resistance (PARECO), as well as the Congolese national army fight each other in Congo's national parks, where they also poach.<sup>5</sup> In India, the Nationalist Socialist Council



of Nagaland in the country's northeast and militant Islamist groups in Bangladesh have traded in many poached species and genera, such as birds. In Afghanistan, the Taliban (as well as powerbrokers associated with the Afghan government) facilitate the hunting of houbara bustards, snow leopards, and saker falcons for wealthy Saudis and Emiratis.<sup>6</sup> War refugees have also on occasion turned to poaching to make ends meet when humanitarian assistance is inadequate, such as in refugee camps in Tanzania since the 1990s.<sup>7</sup> War may displace local populations into protected areas where their presence results in hunting, timber gathering, or cattle grazing, all of which can have detrimental environmental effects.

One of the most bizarre instances of militancy being funded by wildlife trafficking occurred in Nepal's civil war from 1996–2006. The collection and international trade in *yarchagumba*—a form of caterpillar fungus scientifically known as *Ophiocordyceps sinensis*—was a significant element of the Maoist insurgency's fundraising. Used in Traditional Chinese Medicine and viewed as a potent aphrodisiac and cure for a variety of ailments, including cancer, *yarchagumba* was (and continues to be) highly profitable. Maoist revenues from the illegal trade were so large that the Nepalese army devoted significant resources to push them out of the subalpine grasslands where the caterpillar fungus was found.<sup>8</sup> Despite the fact that collection of *yarchagumba* was legalized in Nepal in 2001, the Maoists were not excluded from the trade and continued to derive significant revenues from it. Even after the legalization of the trade and the end of the civil war, *yarchagumba* prices have continued to rise, from \$400 to \$800 per kilogram in 2004 to \$4,600 to \$5,900 in 2010, an astounding order of increase reflecting growing demand and scarcity.<sup>9</sup> Since the civil war ended, the *yarchagumba* trade no longer funds militancy.

Pushing militants out of sensitive ecosystems can reduce poaching. During Nepal's civil war,

for example, fifteen rhinoceros were killed in the prized Bardia National Park in one year alone.<sup>10</sup> After the war's end, poaching declined substantially, to less than five rhinos and five tigers killed per year, and rhino populations rebounded.<sup>11</sup> Several reasons account for the poaching decline. First, the Maoists became a dominant political force and acquired access to the legal economy. Second, surplus Nepalese military troops, eventually augmented by integrated Maoist units, were sent to the national parks. Still, the military units deployed to national parks are handicapped in their anti-poaching operations by a lack of sufficient intelligence, mobility, and rapid-reaction assets. Most patrolling takes place on foot, with often only one car—for the commanding officer—available for the entire battalion deployed in a national park.<sup>12</sup>

### **But Counterterrorism and Counterinsurgency Forces Are Culprits Too**

Importantly, official militaries and paramilitary forces, not just anti-state militants, have been involved in wildlife poaching and smuggling. The South African apartheid state and its military and intelligence units traded in ivory and rhino horn in the 1970–80s.<sup>13</sup> The militaries of Uganda, a close U.S. defense and counterterrorism partner in Africa, and of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as well as Congolese militias, have been accused of poaching elephants.<sup>14</sup> Sudanese armed forces are believed to have massacred thousands of elephants in 2005 for ivory destined for China.<sup>15</sup> The Zimbabwe military likely poached more elephants in Zimbabwe's Gonarezhou National Park than Mozambican RENAMO units.<sup>16</sup> Myanmar's military is as much an actor in illegal logging as ethnic insurgents.<sup>17</sup> Militaries deployed in the name of conservation have engaged in land theft from local populations, such as in Honduras.<sup>18</sup> Conversely, members of

anti-poaching units, prized for their military skills taught by private security companies and foreign technical advisors, have at least on one occasion joined an armed anti-state rebellion and insurgency, notably in the Central African Republic.<sup>19</sup>

Sadly and paradoxically, however, peace can produce even more detrimental results for protected species and natural ecosystems than war if it enables greater access to valuable natural resources, and hence habitat destruction. Ceasefires involving ethnic insurgents in Myanmar have been bought by allowing them and other actors to engage in poaching and free-for-all resource extraction.<sup>20</sup>

This “peace detriment” is only one example of the complexities of the linkages between militancy/terrorism and poaching. Combating terrorism also gets much better funding than preserving biodiversity. Exaggerated and one-sided portrayals of the nexus skew policy responses toward tough law-enforcement approaches, often at the expense of protecting the rights of local communities and compensating them for displacement and food loss. Other times, local poachers and local communities are unjustly labeled as militant sympathizers to allow for their expulsion from national parks and other protected areas and for the dispossession of their land. Yet most poachers are not terrorists, and most militants and terrorists are not poachers.

### **Militarization of Conservation and Human Security of the Vulnerable**

Conservation scholars critical of such conflation label this “green militarization.”<sup>22</sup> They criticize the violence exacted on local communities in the name of suppressing the alleged terrorism–poaching nexus. Some question outright whether any linkages between militancy and poaching exist. They are also wary of the use of private security companies and the deployment of drones and modern technologies to combat poaching.

At other times, the state’s exaggeration of national security threats is used to prevent environmental conservation measures, such as the demarcation of protected areas. In Laos’s borderlands, powerful businesses and state-linked industries, including the Laotian military, engage in profitable extractive industries such as logging, including the felling of rosewood, a desirable but endangered and hence prohibited species. Manufacturing security threats becomes a politically convenient way to prevent environmental protection and perpetuate profitable unrestrained legal and illegal economies.<sup>23</sup>

Even today, violent conflict not only overlaps with poaching, but often also permeates conservation efforts. Sometimes forced displacement is masked by counterinsurgency and counterterrorism narratives. In Colombia’s Tayrona National Park from 2005–10, counterinsurgency efforts also enabled one ecotourism company to displace people in order to generate economic revenues from ecotourism. Elites and powerful businesses profiting from ecotourism have similarly sponsored the forced displacement of local communities in the name of conservation in Honduras.<sup>24</sup> There are many valid and important national security reasons to pursue militants into protected areas, but in the Tayrona case in Colombia, the counterinsurgency effort also served as cover for and an enabler dispossessing marginalized local communities of their land.<sup>25</sup>

The eradication of illegal drug crops often also leads to the forced displacement of people. Sometimes this is simply the consequence of people losing their illegal livelihoods. At other times, displacement can be orchestrated by vested economic interests seeking to acquire land. As post–insurgency land in Colombia has become valuable, including for the cultivation of legal crops, such as coffee, cacao, African palm oil, or for logging or mining, the forced displacement of people is taking place well beyond Tayrona.<sup>26</sup>



In July, U.S. soldier assigned to the Combined Joint Task Force–Horn of Africa provides guidance for Tanzania Wildlife Management Authority game wardens during a ground surveillance exercise in Tanzania. (U.S. Navy/ Timothy M. Ahearn)

## Counterterrorism Cover for Corruption in Wildlife Enforcement

Yet it is the terrorism–poaching nexus that is frequently exaggerated by many countries that feed the supply chain of the illegal traffic in wildlife. In Kenya, for example al-Shabaab, and Somalis more broadly, are pervasively blamed by government officials and the public for poaching and all kinds of criminality.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, the narrative that Somalia’s terrorist group al-Shabaab is behind elephant poaching in Kenya received wide coverage in the press.<sup>28</sup> Yet the claim turned out to be flimsy at best, with some reports casting strong doubt on much of the evidence.<sup>29</sup>

It is possible that al-Shabaab does tax ivory smuggled from Kenya into the Somali port of Kismayo. Al-Shabaab controls important parts of the surrounding Juba region, including key corridors to Kenya. Many terrorist, militant, and criminal groups tax legal goods, illegal contraband, and all kinds of economic activity within their spheres of influence. So does al-Shabaab.<sup>30</sup>

Oftentimes, militants are pushed into or come to control territories with pre-existing illicit economies that are new to them. Eventually, they often come to tax the economies, and sometimes even seek to displace other traders from a particular market in order to make more money. That has been the case with many militant groups with respect to drugs as well—from Sendero Luminoso in Peru and the FARC in Colombia to the Taliban in Afghanistan and Abu Sayyaf in the Philippines.<sup>31</sup> As income streams, militant groups may at times see little difference between drugs, timber, and wildlife. That does not mean, however, that such nexuses emerge every single time.

Moreover, even militants make choices of what and what not to get involved in. Sometimes they not only abstain from participating in a particular illegal economy, including the drug trade; at other times they prohibit even local populations from

participating in it.<sup>32</sup> When Sendero Luminoso, the FARC and another leftist guerrilla group in Colombia, the ELN (Ejército de Liberación Nacional, National Liberation Army), as well as the Taliban, first encountered drugs, they tried to ban illegal drug production. However, they all learned that such a policy prevented their ability to consolidate control, and undermined their capacity to develop support and gain acceptance and legitimacy in the eyes of local populations. Thus they rescinded the prohibitions, and came to tax and trade the contraband. Many subsequent militant groups did not repeat their mistakes and embraced drugs and other illicit economies right away. Some groups, however, do not learn from the experience of other militants, and are tone-deaf to pushback from local populations who are dependent on illegal economies. Unlike the Taliban, Islamic State in Afghanistan, for example, still imposes a ban on poppy cultivation in the province of Nangarhar, and chooses to rule through brutality and not legitimacy.<sup>33</sup>

Moreover, to the extent that ivory is exported through the port of Kismayo, the odds are that the Kenyan Defense Forces present in southern Somalia, including Kismayo, and Ahmed Madobe, president of Juba State and a former al-Shabaab commander who defected, get a substantial cut. Both allegedly tax smuggled sugar and charcoal, produced from acacia illegally logged throughout East Africa and transported to the Middle East.<sup>34</sup>

Yet for many countries that are the sources of wildlife products, a preoccupation with poaching terrorists is a convenient distraction from addressing the issue of corruption among rangers and anti-poaching militias and military units, ecolodges, and high-level government officials. Without rooting out this pervasive corruption, and ending the economic dependence of local communities on participating in or tolerating poaching, many conservation efforts will fail, no matter how sophisticated the rangers’ equipment against poachers becomes.

To the extent that it exists at all, the participation of militant groups in poaching is only a fraction of the illegal trade that goes on. As discussed in *The Extinction Market: Wildlife Trafficking and How to Counter It*, this is not merely the case simply in terms of market share; they also play only a small role in global smuggling chains, particularly beyond their locus of operation.<sup>35</sup> For many reasons, including attempts to reduce militants' income sources, it makes sense to push them out of protected areas when they are involved in poaching. But as long as there is strong demand and limited enforcement capacity, someone else will take their place as poachers. With the rise of poachers' firepower, militants do not have a comparative advantage in poaching. A lot of what law enforcement does is not to determine whether an illicit economy exists or not, but rather who runs it and has access to it.

Local communities can often (though not always) choose whether to participate in poaching carried out by militants, whether to yield to it if the community is unable to mount effective resistance, or whether to mobilize against it. Neither the various ethnic militant groups in Myanmar nor the Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland in India, for example, experienced any popular pushback from their supporters or local communities against their participation in hunting and wildlife trafficking since the local population also participated in the illegal economy and hunting was a centuries-old tradition.

But while also operating in northeast India like the Naga militants, the Bodo insurgents had a very different experience with participating in poaching and wildlife trafficking. Building on a local culture of animal protection, the Bodo Security Force (BdSF), which has been seeking to liberate "Bodoland" from Assam, took it upon itself to enforce anti-poaching laws. For example, they singled out known rhinoceros poachers and told them to desist from their activities. If the poachers failed to comply, the Bodo militants killed them. The BdSF's location in the Manas National Park and the need to fund their insurgency later

encouraged the group to violate its own edicts and dabble in wildlife trafficking. But the subsequent public outcry from the local population that constituted its base was so strong that the BdSF aborted its participation in the illicit trade and went back to enforcing environmental protection.<sup>36</sup>

Similarly, although the *dacoits* (robbers and bandits) in Uttar Pradesh, India, in the 1980s so undermined public safety that their

activities amounted to a de facto insurgency, the *dacoits* sought to protect the unique wildlife in their area by such acts as burying poachers alive.<sup>37</sup> In the Central African Republic, local communities that embraced conservation were so determined that in one instance they resorted to using violence against outside herders. During one altercation, they encouraged officially sanctioned anti-poaching guards to use their firearms to prevent the

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*... for many countries that are the sources of wildlife products, a preoccupation with poaching terrorists is a convenient distraction from addressing the issue of corruption among rangers and anti-poaching militias and military units, ecolodges, and high-level government officials.*

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herders from coming back, even killing their cattle. They also mobilized volunteers to help the existing anti-poaching militias take on the intruders.<sup>38</sup>

## The Political Capital of the Illegal Drug Trade and Illegal Wildlife Trade

Conversely, local communities often do not mobilize against poaching, illegal grazing, or logging, but rather are willing participants in them. Economies and behavior labeled as illegal by authorities are often considered legitimate by local communities. Suffering intense hardships as a result of being forced to obey the law, they rebel against it.

Under such circumstances, the sponsorship of illicit economies greatly increases not just the physical resources and freedom of operation of the sponsors, but also crucially, their political capital—that is, the extent to which the population welcomes and tolerates the presence of the sponsors.<sup>39</sup> This is true regardless of whether the sponsors are belligerents, criminal gangs, individual powerbrokers, or powerful local poachers.<sup>40</sup>

Beyond providing marginalized populations with livelihoods, sponsors of illicit economies sometimes use the proceeds of their activities to distribute real-time economic benefits to local populations, such as otherwise absent social services. Sendero Luminoso and the FARC, for example, provided clinics, roads, sewage, trash collection, and schools.<sup>41</sup> Sponsors of illicit economies can also provide protection and regulation services to the illicit economy itself, including protecting producers from, for instance, brutal and unreliable traffickers or military forces who want to eradicate drug crops or stop poaching by local communities.

Examples of such political capital accruing to sponsors of illicit economies also exist in wildlife trafficking. For example, in her excellent study of rhino horn trafficking, Annette Michaela Hübschle shows how local heads of poaching groups in Mozambique and South Africa, whom she refers

to as local “kingpins,” claim to fulfill important social welfare functions.<sup>42</sup> Some promise to provide poachers with legal support if they are arrested or provide “life insurance” to their families if they are killed. They justify their poaching as a necessary activity forced on them by the neglect of the state and its failure to provide jobs and livelihoods. Other poachers are drawn to areas of successful poaching, sometimes even from other countries, but they usually have connections such as kinship ties with people in that area. Economic spillover from poaching revenues and activities also creates other jobs within communities, such as that of traditional healers who prepare good luck charms to enhance the success of poaching expeditions and who foretell when a poaching expedition will be successful. Many of the younger poachers are buying modern houses in their villages while others are buying them hours away on the coast of Mozambique. Others are purchasing cars, even luxury ones. Poachers from the older generation, on the other hand, continue to buy cattle, a sign of prestige and affluence. One of the local poaching kingpins Hübschle interviewed bought himself a hotel.<sup>43</sup>

The local poaching kingpins thus develop recognition, prestige, and legitimacy within their communities. Poaching is portrayed not merely as a matter of economic necessity but a means of claiming reparations for the loss of land that was designated as an environmental area and which they can no longer access for economic opportunities, such as grazing, logging, hunting, and agricultural production. Hübschle describes the local kingpins as “self-styled Robin Hoods.” “We are using rhino horn to free ourselves,” they claim.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, abalone poaching gangs in the Western Cape province of South Africa justify their illegal wildlife trade, and gain political capital with local communities, by labeling commercial fishing quotas as unjust and unfair to struggling grassroots communities.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, while the



Examples of rhino horn products seized by the Hong Kong Government displayed in Hong Kong's Agriculture, Fisheries, and Conservation Department Visitor Center. (U.S. Government Work)

community knows who the poachers and perhaps the middlemen are, it is not willing to provide that information to the state.

Four factors critically influence the extent to which illicit economies bring political capital to their sponsors.<sup>46</sup> First, the state of the overall economy in the country/region; second, the labor-intensive character of the illicit economy; third, the presence or absence of independent traffickers; and fourth, the government's response to the illicit economy. The state of the overall economy determines the size of the local population who cannot obtain legal livelihoods. The labor-intensive character of the illicit economy determines the extent to which the illicit economy provides livelihoods to marginalized populations. The presence or absence of thuggish traffickers separate from other sponsors of the illicit economy, such as militants, determines the extent to which those sponsors can bargain on behalf of the population for better prices and otherwise protect them from the traffickers. Finally, government responses to an illicit economy determine the extent to which local populations become economically and politically impoverished

or empowered through the illicit economy and dependent on sponsors for the preservation of their illegal livelihoods. In a nutshell, if the state of the overall economy is poor, the illicit economy is labor intensive, thuggish traffickers are present, and the government tries to suppress the illicit economy without plans for alternative livelihoods or compensation, then sponsors of illicit economies obtain large amounts of political capital.

Political capital can be further augmented by other historic or normative grievances that make locals see laws as unjust, such as when poaching becomes a form of anticolonial resistance and a form of self-empowerment, or when the killing of an animal is seen as a rite of passage, taking a boy into manhood.

By and large, mitigating the threats posed by the drug trade is easier than assuring the key objective of suppressing poaching and wildlife trafficking, namely, preserving species and ecosystems. The one structural advantage that poaching and wildlife trafficking have in terms of policy mitigation is that even when poaching involves the large-scale willing participation of local

communities, it still tends to be less labor intensive than poppy or coca cultivation. The more labor intensive an illegal economy is, the more difficult it is to generate adequate alternative livelihoods and provide sufficient compensation for those severely hurt by efforts to suppress the illegal economy, and the more political capital sponsors of the illicit economy have. Nonetheless, ecotourism often fails to provide adequate alternative livelihoods and its effectiveness is highly contingent on many factors. So is the effectiveness of other community-based natural resource management efforts that seeks to transfer wildlife policy decisions to local communities and can involve hunting for commercial enterprises or trophies. Elite capture of resources and inadequate and seasonal flows of tourists, as well as the presence or absence of easily visible large iconic species, are among the factors influencing the success of such policies.

## Conclusions and Policy Implications

As in the case of drug trafficking, the threats from poaching and wildlife trafficking include not only a wide range of environmental and economic threats, but also political and national security threats. Even so, much of the current policy focus of the role of terrorist and militant groups in wildlife trafficking exaggerates the extent of their involvement and runs the risk of misdirecting policy focus. Not only are counterinsurgent and counterterrorism forces, such as militias, but also national militaries, often involved, the involvement of terrorists and militants in wildlife trafficking is often not its most significant element.

Most poachers are not terrorists, and most militants and terrorists are not poachers. The intersection of militancy with wildlife trafficking is only a sliver of the global wildlife trade. To the extent that it exists at all, the participation of militant groups in poaching is only a fraction of the illegal trade that goes on. This is not merely the case in terms of

market share; the militants also play only a small role in global smuggling chains, particularly beyond their locus of operation. But as long as there is strong demand and limited enforcement capacity, someone else will take their place as poachers.

And a failure to generate political support among local communities for measures to suppress an illicit economy can be very costly politically. Widespread opposition to law enforcement and widespread rule violations severely complicate the resource demands and ethical burdens of effective law enforcement. Laws are far easier to enforce if they are internalized by most of the relevant population.

Thus, even though ecotourism schemes have often been a disappointment, making them more effective when possible or promoting other alternative livelihoods, such as off-park, off-farm income remain imperative. Trophy hunting and other sustainable commercialization of wildlife that channel money to poor marginalized indigenous communities, as well as other community-based natural resource management schemes, are a crucial part of saving wildlife and promoting social justice. However, addressing the needs of the poor and marginalized will need to get more creative if wildlife conservation is to succeed—such as direct financial transfers, strictly-monitored and enforced, to local communities not to poach or convert natural habitat to agricultural land.

Going after corruption and involvement of counterinsurgent forces, government officials, rangers, and politicians in poaching and wildlife trafficking is equally imperative. This will require that international conservation donors and international militaries providing assistance in countering the illegal wildlife trade closely vet the recipients of their assistance and be willing to suspend aid if pervasive corruption persists. But aid should also be withheld if anti-poaching units or counterterrorism forces battling the presumed wildlife-trafficking-conflict nexus engage



in systematic human rights violations. Wildlife conservation policies can only succeed and be sustainable if they are perceived as just—economically as well in terms of accountability. **PRISM**

## Notes

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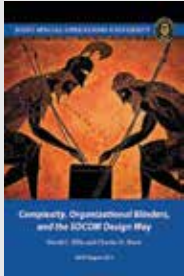
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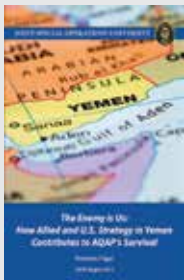
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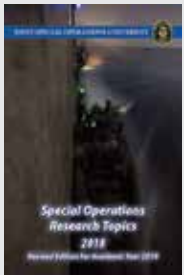
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Revised for academic year 2019, this edition of JSOU research topics highlights a range of topics collaboratively developed and prioritized by experts from across the SOF community. As with the previous versions of this publication, this list is tailored to address command priorities. The topics in these pages are intended to guide research projects for professional military education students, JSOU faculty, fellows and students, and others writing about special operations during this academic year. This research will provide a better understanding of the complex issues and opportunities affecting the strategic and operational planning needs of SOF. This revised edition includes 11 new topics of interest.



Philippine flag flown in war torn Marawi. (iStock)

# Sending in the Cavalry

## The Growing Militarization of Counterterrorism in Southeast Asia

By See Seng Tan

There is a growing consensus among security analysts that the Battle of Marawi in the Philippines, which lasted from May to October 2017, constitutes a watershed moment in the evolution of the terrorist threat in Southeast Asia. Pro-Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) militants threatened to turn Marawi into “the Mosul of Southeast Asia,” with their astounding ability to operate large groups capable of controlling territory and exposing the inadequacy of the region’s security services.<sup>1</sup> Although member countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) had pondered the question of possible participation by their armed forces in counterterrorism well before the Battle, it is undeniable that Marawi has become the catalyst behind the regional drive to militarize counterterrorism efforts in Southeast Asia.<sup>2</sup>

Cooperative frameworks furnished by ASEAN have since taken on added significance, especially the defense-oriented arrangements that bring together the defense establishments and armed forces of the ASEAN countries as well as those of external powers including China, India, Japan, and the United States. The growing militarization of counterterrorism efforts will neither be easy nor straightforward, given long-standing regional sensitivities and the potentially diversive ramifications that excessive securitization could have for democratic life within ASEAN countries.

### **Battle of Marawi: Game Changer?**

At their retreat in early February, the defense ministers of the 10 ASEAN member countries identified terrorism as the single biggest threat to their region, even as they recognized a number of other regional security challenges including the South China Sea and North Korea. In a joint statement following the retreat, the ministers noted: “Terrorism is a severe threat to ASEAN’s progress, prosperity and very way of life.”<sup>3</sup> Terrorism and insurgency are not new to Southeast Asia. Various groups have taken to violence for ideological, secessionist, and religious reasons since colonialism. Terrorism gathered pace after 9/11 with a series of attacks perpetrated mostly but not exclusively by the Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) terrorist organization.<sup>4</sup> The emergence of the Islamic State or ISIL in Southeast Asia—with the attacks in Jakarta, Indonesia in January 2016

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widely seen as the first conducted in its name—is but the latest addition to a complex story of terrorism in the ASEAN region.

That said, some analysts have cautioned against undue exaggeration of the ISIL threat because they see the greater, long-term threat arising from a rejuvenated JI, which has a larger network and is better funded than the pro-ISIL groups in the region.<sup>5</sup> The concern has to do not only with possible attacks carried out by “lone wolves” and ISIL affiliates, official or otherwise, but equally if not more worrisome, with future conflicts on the scale and style—and with the *savoir faire*—of Marawi prosecuted by more established and better resourced terror networks such as the JI in the Philippines, Indonesia, or other parts of the region.

Reportedly, the pro-ISIL groups that drove the conflict in Marawi, particularly the Maute Group and the Abu Sayyaf, had in mind to turn Mindanao island into a *wilayah* (province) of ISIL.<sup>6</sup> This is not a particularly novel goal in itself since the JI has long aspired to establish an Islamic caliphate in Southeast Asia. But what surprised analysts most about the Marawi conflict was the evident readiness of the militants to take the fight to the Philippine military by engaging in a drawn out urban war and employing tactics that initially confounded the government troops, such as the transformation of the hundreds of densely packed buildings in the city center into a warren of improvised tunnels, and bearing, in addition to the ubiquitous AK-47 assault rifles, high-powered weapons such as the .50 caliber anti-material rifle and M-14 assault rifle.<sup>7</sup> What is most sobering about the Marawi episode is the prospect that it could inspire and embolden other groups, if they have the requisite men and material to emulate or even outdo Marawi in scale, style, and substance in other ASEAN cities and urban areas. Such a likelihood could warrant the involvement of the armed forces of the ASEAN countries, whose force capabilities match or exceed that of the Marawi terrorists.

In response to this evolving threat, many ASEAN countries have broadened the remit, and are building the capacity of their police forces and domestic security services to better counter it. It has been suggested that there is in fact a “Southeast Asian approach to counterterrorism,” one that ostensibly emphasizes a “bottom-up” and “indirect” strategy.<sup>8</sup> However, ASEAN countries historically have not handled terrorism in the same way. For example, Malaysia and Thailand have relied on more coercive, militaristic responses, whereas Indonesia and Singapore have mostly adopted a non-militaristic, law enforcement approach to tackling the problem. In the post-9/11 period, there has been a growing para-militarization of law enforcement in some ASEAN countries.<sup>9</sup> The Indonesian police’s counterterrorism squad, Detachment 88, is one such example. Yet the lesson of Marawi suggests that such a limited response, no matter how successful it hitherto has been, is unlikely to be sufficient. The greater likelihood is that Southeast Asian governments will have to militarize their counterterrorism strategies as broadly as possible, including giving their armed forces key roles in the war on terror—even if it means combating terrorism on home soil. For instance, dissatisfied with the ineffective response of the Indonesian police to terrorist attacks, the Indonesian military purportedly sought to establish a new anti-terror unit known as the Joint Special Operations Command (*Koopssusgab*) in June 2015.<sup>10</sup>

### **Growing Military Cooperation in the Region**

Much as Marawi could alter the way terrorism in Southeast Asia would henceforth be conducted, the manner in which ASEAN countries respond to the terrorist threat could also change in a number of ways. First, ASEAN countries and their defense establishments are likely to deepen their collaboration in counterterrorism not only among themselves but also with their external partners. They will do



In August, a Royal Thai Coast Guardsman (left), A Philippine sailor (center), and a Philippine Coast Guardsman practice tactical visit, search, and seizure procedures during the Southeast Asia Cooperation and Training (SEACAT) exercise that included participants from nine partner nations. SEACAT began in 2002 under the name “Southeast Asia Cooperation Against Terrorism” but was renamed in 2012 to expand the scope of training among regional navies and coast guards. (DOD/Micah Blechner)

so through joint exercises, sharing information, and enhancing their force capabilities within existing frameworks such as the ASEAN Defense Ministers’ Meeting (ADMM), which comprises all ten ASEAN countries, and its “plus” spinoff, the ADMM+, which comprises the ASEAN ten plus Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand, Russia, South Korea, and the United States. In this respect, joint counterterrorism exercises such as the one that took place in Singapore in May 2016 involving 40 Special Forces teams from all 18 ADMM+ countries could well increase.<sup>11</sup> Efforts by the ADMM to deepen regional collaboration among the ASEAN defense establishments are backed up by interrelated supporting

frameworks such as the ASEAN Chiefs of Defense Forces’ Informal Meeting (ACDFIM), the ASEAN Military Intelligence Informal Meeting (AMIIM), the ASEAN Military Operations Informal Meeting (AMOIM), and the like.<sup>12</sup>

Second, the Marawi conflict engendered separate offers of military assistance from Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore to their imperiled ASEAN neighbor. Traditionally, most ASEAN countries have viewed with suspicion the prospect of each other’s armed forces traipsing on their home soil. Yet member countries have committed troops to one another’s aid, as Brunei, Malaysia, and Indonesia have been doing in support of the implementation



In May 2017, a Filipino soldier participates counterterrorism training in the U.S.–Philippines Balikatan Military Exercise at Fort Magsaysay in the Philippines. (U.S. Marine Corps/Matthew Casbarro)

of the 1997 Agreement on General Cessation of Hostilities between the Philippines government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).<sup>13</sup> Together with external parties, ASEAN militaries are increasingly involved in humanitarian operations around the region. Moreover, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore—the so-called “core countries” of ASEAN—have had a long history of security cooperation among themselves, including the Malacca Strait Sea Patrols, or MSSP, comprising Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand, and the Eyes-in-the-Sky initiative.<sup>14</sup> More recently,

Indonesia and Malaysia established the Trilateral Maritime Patrol (or INDOMALPHI) with the Philippines in June 2017 to patrol the Sulu-Sulawesi seas, long a hub for transnational organized crime and militancy.<sup>15</sup>

In February 2018, ASEAN defense officials signed the Our Eyes Initiative, a cooperative arrangement aimed at countering terrorism.<sup>16</sup> Championed most vigorously by the Indonesian Defense Minister Ryamizard Ryacudu, the present membership of Our Eyes includes Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore,



and Thailand. Modeled after the post-World War II Five Eyes alliance comprising Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States, Our Eyes involves the sharing of strategic—and, subsequently, operational and tactical—intelligence on terrorism among all member countries of ASEAN. Our Eyes envisages the establishment of centers in each ASEAN country whose purpose would be to facilitate intra-regional communication, intelligence-sharing, and counterterrorism cooperation among and across national defense (as well as homeland security) establishments. Moreover, the initiative follows closely the ASEAN emphasis on open security regionalism through cooperation with select ASEAN dialogue partner countries, as exemplified by the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the ADMM+.<sup>17</sup> Reportedly, Australia, Japan, New Zealand, and the United States have been identified as the first set of partners with whom the ASEAN states could cooperate. Although China is not included in this set, it is likely just a matter of time before the invitation is extended to China to participate, in the light of ongoing efforts by both ASEAN and China to explore concrete ways to boost their defense ties.<sup>18</sup> However, for Our Eyes to work effectively, participating countries would first have to manage and overcome the deep-seated distrust that persists among them. In this respect, it is noteworthy that when introducing the initiative in October 2017, Ryamizard felt the need to explain how “Our Eyes would have nothing to do with politics. It is purely an initiative to fight the existence of terrorist groups and maintain peace in our region.”<sup>19</sup>

The prospect that cooperative initiatives such as the Malacca Sea Straits Patrols, the Trilateral Maritime Patrol, and Our Eyes could conceivably serve as models for intra-ASEAN military collaboration against terrorism raises the question of whether such collaboration, if and when it takes place, might warrant resort by the ASEAN countries

to the “ASEAN-minus-X” formula. Codified in the ASEAN Charter, the formula allows member countries ready to participate in economic initiatives to do so, while those that are not ready could join in later; a form of minilateralism.<sup>20</sup> In recent years, the unity and cohesion of ASEAN, fragile even in the best of times, have been rocked by the South China Sea disputes, not least because of China’s efforts to ensure that the ASEAN states—four of which (Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam) are South China Sea claimant countries themselves—do not band together and balance against it. In the light of ASEAN’s seeming inconsequence as a diplomatic actor in the South China Sea because of its consensus model, some analysts have proposed that ASEAN should consider expanding ASEAN-minus-X to include the security domain as well, if only to ensure that ASEAN avoids the dire prospect of being consigned to irrelevance in perpetuity.<sup>21</sup> It has also been argued that in fact the principle has already been applied on an informal basis to counterterrorism cooperation, since the ASEAN Convention on Counter Terrorism (ACCT), signed in January 2007, entered into force in May 2011 upon ratification by only six of the ten ASEAN countries.<sup>22</sup> However, it is highly unlikely that ASEAN countries would consent to the broad application of ASEAN-minus-X to security collaboration among themselves because of the possibility that they could one day end up, intentionally or otherwise, as the target of collective security action undertaken by their fellow members or, at the very least, be “outvoted” by other members given that ASEAN-minus-X, under certain conditions, could conceivably function much like a majority-rule formula.<sup>23</sup>

Moving forward, the ASEAN defense establishments are likely to leverage these existing forms of cooperation in their quest for new and innovative approaches in response to the growing scale and complexity of the terrorist threat in their region. At the ADMM retreat held in Singapore in early

February 2018, the Defense Minister of Singapore announced the development of a “3R” framework—namely, resilience, response, and recovery—that would tie the region’s counterterrorism initiatives together.<sup>24</sup> Reportedly, the aims of the 3R would be accomplished through: building resilience against radicalization and enabling the prevention of terrorist attacks; coordinating counterterrorism responses to address ongoing threats; and, recovering from any terrorist attacks that occur. The 3R framework presumably not only provides a coherent and comprehensive regional approach against terrorism, it also enhances ASEAN’s centrality as well as coordination and partnership among the various counterterrorism initiatives of the ASEAN member countries. The framework acknowledges the historical differences and varying force capabilities among the ASEAN member states and seeks to enhance counterterrorism cooperation among the ASEAN militaries by leveraging their niche capabilities to better complement the efforts of home front or internal security agencies. At the same time, through the 3R framework, the ASEAN states also seek to shore up their capabilities to respond to chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) threats from terrorist groups and rogue actors. Indeed, the potential employment of CBRN weapons by such groups renders the integration of the armed forces to the overall counterterrorism strategy of ASEAN states all the more crucial. In that regard, ASEAN has announced the establishment of an ASEAN Armies Information Sharing Workshop (AAISW) as a way to enhance cooperation among the region’s armed forces in response to CBRN threats.<sup>25</sup> Not unlike the Our Eyes Initiative, the 3R remains a work in progress with—despite the post-9/11 emphasis in the region on a “whole-of-government cum society” approach to counterterrorism—much work still to be done on how the plans and efforts of the armed forces and home front agencies can best be integrated.<sup>26</sup>

## ASEAN’s Challenge: Balancing Security and Liberty

Needless to say, the prospect of Southeast Asian militaries joining the fight against terrorism is by no means a foregone conclusion especially in a region with a difficult history of rule by the military.<sup>27</sup> The prospect of a growing regional role in counterterrorism for ASEAN’s armed forces raises questions over how national governments are to avoid stepping on civil liberties at home even as they work to protect their citizens from terrorism and violence. Democratic transition in Southeast Asia has been patchy, uneven, and—as evidenced by the 2014 coup d’état in Thailand led by General (now Prime Minister) Prayut Chan-o-cha, the then-commander of the Royal Thai Army—prone to authoritarian reversal.<sup>28</sup> Hence, even as Southeast Asian countries brace themselves for the likelihood of a growing role for their armed forces in counterterrorism, they ought to bear in mind the consequences such a development could have for civil liberties at home as well as for regional sensitivities abroad.

The likelihood of militarization is especially poignant for countries with a complicated military past, such as Indonesia. For example, the Indonesian military’s establishment of its counterterror unit *Koopssusgab* immediately reignited fears, unjustified or otherwise, over potential interference by the military once again in the country’s civilian affairs. On the other hand, there are regional sensitivities as well. As noted earlier, the possibility that ASEAN countries may soon find soldiers from other nations, including external powers, operating on their home soil cannot be ruled out. For instance, some studies have shown how persistent mutual distrust among ASEAN countries, the primacy of the deterrence logic, and their enduring preoccupation with sovereignty concerns have complicated and even hindered the implementation of humanitarian and search-and-rescue missions in the region.<sup>29</sup> If the quest to establish deeper and more extensive

intra-ASEAN collaboration in counterterrorism is likely to be hampered by these same reasons, what other impacts may arise when the armed forces of the ASEAN countries enter the fray. How affected countries and societies in need of external assistance are able to host foreign troops and to facilitate counterinsurgency operations without jeopardizing their sovereignty is likely to emerge as a key concern as ASEAN countries and their militaries cooperate to tackle the common challenge of terrorism in their neck of the woods. **PRISM**

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Primrose Riordan, "Region facing 'a Mosul of its own' in Marawi," *The Australian*, August 9, 2017, available at <<https://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/defence/region-facing-a-mosul-of-its-own-in-marawi/news-story/e668d955fec0680474dabb16d53b9649>>

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Tan See Seng, "After Marawi: Military's Regional Role In Counter-Terrorism?— Analysis," *Eurasia Review*, February 2, 2018, available at <<https://www.eurasiareview.com/02022018-after-marawi-militarys-regional-role-in-counter-terrorism-analysis/>>, and, See Seng Tan, "Countering Terrorism in ASEAN After Marawi: a Regional Role for the Military?" PacNet No. 11, February 2, 2018, available at <<https://www.csis.org/analysis/pacnet-11-countering-terrorism-asean-after-marawi-regional-role-military>>.

<sup>3</sup> "Joint Statement by the ASEAN Defence Ministers on Countering Terrorism in ASEAN," MINDEF Singapore, February 6, 2018, available at <[https://www.mindef.gov.sg/web/portal/mindef/news-and-events/latest-releases/article-detail/2018/february/06feb18\\_js](https://www.mindef.gov.sg/web/portal/mindef/news-and-events/latest-releases/article-detail/2018/february/06feb18_js)>.

<sup>4</sup> Kumar Ramakrishna and See Seng Tan, eds., *After Bali: The Threat of Terrorism in Southeast Asia* (Singapore: World Scientific, 2003); Andrew T. H. Tan, ed., *A Handbook of Terrorism and Insurgency in Southeast Asia* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2007); Bruce Vaughn, Emma Chanlett-Avery, Ben Dolven, Mark E. Manyin, Michael F. Martin, and Larry A. Niksch, *Terrorism in Southeast Asia*, CRS Report for Congress, October 16, 2009, available at <<https://fas.org/sgp/crs/terror/RL34194.pdf>>; and, *Arabinda Acharya, Whither Southeast Asia Terrorism?* (London: Imperial College Press, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> Joseph Chinyong Liow, "Congressional Testimony: ISIL in the Pacific: Assessing Terrorism in Southeast Asia

and the Threat to the Homeland," Testimony before the Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence Committee on Homeland Security United States House of Representatives, April 27, 2016, 6–7, available at <<https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Liow-ISIL-in-the-Pacific-Full-Testimony.pdf>>.

<sup>6</sup> See, *Marawi, the "East Asia Wilayah" and Indonesia*, IPAC Report No. 38, July 21, 2017 (Jakarta: Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict, 2017), available at <[http://file.understandingconflict.org/file/2017/07/IPAC\\_Report\\_38.pdf](http://file.understandingconflict.org/file/2017/07/IPAC_Report_38.pdf)>.

<sup>7</sup> "Tunnels reveal terrorists' ratlike tactics," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, October 27, 2017, available at <<http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/940926/tunnels-reveal-terrorists-ratlike-tactics>>. Jeffrey Maintem, 'Militants fighting in Marawi using gov't-owned guns, says Army exec', *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, September 15, 2017, available at <<http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/930750/militants-fighting-in-marawi-using-govt-owned-guns-says-army-exec#ixzz57Bm8OLWr>>.

<sup>8</sup> Kumar Ramakrishna, "'The Southeast Asian Approach' to Counter-Terrorism: Learning from Indonesia and Malaysia," *The Journal of Conflict Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (2005), available at <<https://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/jcs/article/view/189/333>>.

<sup>9</sup> Peter Chalk, Angel Rabasa, William Rosenau, and Leanne Piggott, *The Evolving Terrorist Threat to Southeast Asia: A Net Assessment* (Santa Monica, CA: National Defense Research Institute, RAND Corporation, 2009), 83.

<sup>10</sup> See, Tan See Seng, "Military's regional role in counter-terrorism," *New Straits Times*, February 7, 2018, available at <<https://www.nst.com.my/opinion/columnists/2018/02/332838/militarys-regional-role-counter-terrorism>>; and, Rohan Gunaratna, "Counterterrorism: ASEAN Militaries' Growing Role," *RSIS Commentaries*, CO18042, March 13, 2018, available at <[http://www.rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/icpvtr/co18042-counterterrorism-asean-militaries-growing-role/#.WqoC\\_E0h33g](http://www.rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/icpvtr/co18042-counterterrorism-asean-militaries-growing-role/#.WqoC_E0h33g)>. On the other hand, there have been unconfirmed reports that *Koopssusgab* may just have been scrapped. Inaugurated in 2015 by General Moeldoko, then Commander of the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI), there has since been no mention of it whatsoever, including in the TNI official website. Although the *Koopssusgab* was supposed to be a new combined unit, it however effectively comprised old TNI anti-terror units established in the 1980s and early 1990s, such as *Gultor-81 Komando Pasukan Khusus (Kopassus) TNI Angkatan Darat* (established 1982), *Detasemen Jala Mengkara (Denjaka) Marinir TNI Angkatan Laut* (established 1984), and *Satuan Bravo-90 Korps Pasukan Khas (Korpaskhas) TNI Angkatan Udara*

(established 1990). The author is indebted to Emirza Adi Syailendra for this information.

<sup>11</sup> For a recent analysis of ADMM+ “mil to mil” exercises, see See Seng Tan, “The ADMM-Plus: Regionalism That Works?” *Asia Policy*, No. 22 (July 2016), 70–75.

<sup>12</sup> Prashanth Parameswaran, “What Did the ASEAN Defense Chiefs Meeting in Singapore Achieve?” *The Diplomat*, March 8, 2018, available at <<https://thediplomat.com/2018/03/what-did-the-asean-defense-chiefs-meeting-in-singapore-achieve/>>.

<sup>13</sup> Joseph Raymond Silva Franco, “Malaysia: Unsung Hero of the Philippine Peace Process,” *Asian Security*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (2013), pp. 211–230.

<sup>14</sup> “Member states mark 10th anniversary of Malacca Straits Patrol,” *Channel News Asia*, April 21, 2016, available at <<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/member-states-mark-10th-anniversary-of-malacca-straits-patrol-8068218>>.

<sup>15</sup> Grace Guiang, “Are Minilaterals the Future of ASEAN security?” *East Asia Forum*, September 30, 2017, available at <<http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2017/09/30/are-minilaterals-the-future-of-asean-security/#more-89218>>.

<sup>16</sup> Prashanth Parameswaran, “What’s Next for the New ASEAN ‘Our Eyes’ Intelligence Initiative?” *The Diplomat*, January 27, 2018, available at <<https://thediplomat.com/2018/01/asean-launches-new-our-eyes-intelligence-initiative/>>.

<sup>17</sup> See Seng Tan, “A Tale of Two Institutions: The ARF, ADMM-Plus and Security Regionalism in the Asia Pacific,” *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (August 2017), 259–264.

<sup>18</sup> Lim Yan Liang, “Singapore and China to deepen defence ties, cooperation,” *The Straits Times*, September 23, 2017, available at <<http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/east-asia/singapore-and-china-to-deepen-defence-ties-cooperation>>.

<sup>19</sup> “Indonesia proposes ‘mini-Interpol’ plan to boost Asean counter-terrorism efforts,” *The Straits Times*, October 24, 2017, available at <<http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/indonesia-proposes-mini-interpol-plan-to-boost-asean-counter-terrorism-efforts>>.

<sup>20</sup> Stewart Patrick, “The Unruly World: The Case for Good Enough Global Governance,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (January/February 2014), 58–73.

<sup>21</sup> See, for example: Ralf Emmers, “ASEAN minus X: Should This Formula Be Extended?” *RSIS Commentaries*, No. CO17199, October 24, 2017, available at <[https://www.rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/cms/col17199-asean-minus-x-should-this-formula-be-extended/#.Ws1\\_4k0h33g](https://www.rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/cms/col17199-asean-minus-x-should-this-formula-be-extended/#.Ws1_4k0h33g)>; and Richard Javad Heydarian, “ASEAN needs to move to minilateralism,” *East Asia Forum*, December 5, 2017,

available at <<http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2017/12/05/asean-needs-to-move-to-minilateralism/>>.

<sup>22</sup> The ACCT was completely ratified by all ten ASEAN states in January 2013. For an analysis of counter-terrorism law and policy in Southeast Asia, see, See Seng Tan and Hitoshi Nasu, “ASEAN and the Development of Counter-Terrorism Law and Policy in Southeast Asia,” *UNSW Law Journal*, Vol. 39, No. 3 (2016), 1219–1238.

<sup>23</sup> As Dewi Fortuna Anwar, one of Indonesia’s leading political scientists, has cautioned about application of ASEAN-minus-X (or 10-X, as she calls it): “There are already those that have suggested that a more flexible sort of consensus should be taken in the realms of politics and security, similar to that in the economic realm that uses the 10-X formula, because the credibility of ASEAN will diminish if it too often fails to reach an agreement on strategic issues. Yet it must also be asked whether removing the consensus principle in politics and security matters, which are ‘high politics’ and related to the core interests of a nation that are often not negotiable, will truly strengthen ASEAN or not? What would happen if Indonesia had a different view from all the other ASEAN members on an issue it feels strongly about on principle, but because consensus is no longer needed, ASEAN can still make a decision with majority-rule that overrides Indonesia’s objections?” See, Dewi Fortuna Anwar, “Indonesia, ASEAN and Regional Stability,” Inaugural Lecture as a Member of the Social Science Commission of the Indonesian Academy of Sciences, February 16, 2017, 24.

<sup>24</sup> Tan See Seng, “Singapore paving the way for greater regional security,” *The Straits Times*, February 23, 2018, available at <<http://www.straitstimes.com/opinion/singapore-paving-the-way-for-greater-regional-security>>.

<sup>25</sup> As declared in the “Joint Statement of the 15th ASEAN Chiefs of Defence Forces’ Informal Meeting,” Singapore Ministry of Defence, March 8, 2018.

<sup>26</sup> Eugene K. B. Tan, “Mutual trust is central in efforts to counter terrorism,” *Today*, June 24, 2017, available at <<http://www.todayonline.com/commentary/commentary-mutual-trust-central-efforts-counter-terrorism>>.

<sup>27</sup> See, William Case, *Contemporary Authoritarianism in Southeast Asia: Structures, Institutions and Agency* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2013); and, Marcus Mietzner, ed., *The Political Resurgence of the Military in Southeast Asia: Conflict and Leadership* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2012).

<sup>28</sup> See, William Case, “Low-quality democracy and varied authoritarianism: elites and regimes in Southeast Asia today,” *The Pacific Review*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (2009), 255–269; William Case, ed., *Routledge Handbook of Southeast Asian Democratization* (Abingdon, Oxon:

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<sup>29</sup> Needless to say, these efforts have not been without their challenges. See, Dylan Ming Hui Loh, "ASEAN's norm adherence and its unintended consequences in HADR and SAR operations," *The Pacific Review*, Vol. 29, No. 4 (2016), pp. 549–572; and, Alan Chong and Jun Yan Chang, "Security competition by proxy: Asia Pacific interstate rivalry in the aftermath of the MH370 incident," *Global Change, Peace & Security*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (2016), 75–98.

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## Photos

Page 138. iStock Photo ID 899073932.



## Interview with General John R. Allen, USMC (ret.)

### **We retaliated against the Taliban for harboring al-Qaeda, ousting them from power in Afghanistan in 2001. Why are we still there?**

The mission was not just about al-Qaeda. We had two objectives; to destroy al-Qaeda, and to prevent the resurgence of the Taliban, which would have created the cycle all over again. The day I took command in Afghanistan (on July 18, 2011) I initiated an immediate campaign review which started with my review of the political objectives, which were the elimination and control of the potential for the resurgence of al-Qaeda, and to prevent the Taliban from overthrowing the Afghanistan government.

The second of the two missions was the principal role that I played there for the almost 19 months I was in command and defines the U.S. presence thereafter, which is to provide the capability for the Afghanistan government to stand on its own. One of the things that is lost often in this question, which is an important question, is that there is this sense we are still fighting in Afghanistan. The combat mission ended on December 31, 2014, and since that time the purpose of NATO forces, with the United States of course as part of it, has been to train and advise the Afghans, and that is what we have been doing ever since; over time giving the Afghans the capacity to provide for their own security.

It has been very difficult, and one of the difficulties is that we made bad decisions as we were moving towards the end of the campaign. I commanded 150,000 troops, and the day I took command I gave up 10,000. The President's guidance to me, during my command, was to pivot the war. In other words, the intent was to begin the process of ramping down. This would include returning the 33,000 surge troops, 10,000 of which I signed off on the day I took command, and beginning to close down the theater. When I took command, I had 835 bases, 500 of which I closed within a year, heading ultimately toward fewer than 20 bases by December, 2014;

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This interview was conducted by Mr. Michael Miklaucic on July 27, 2018.

I was to move the Afghans into the lead for combat operations, and re-posture our forces from being the principal combat forces in Afghanistan to being an advisory force for the Afghans. All of that had to be done within a very short period. From my perspective, the decisionmaking on the drawdown was flawed. We came down too fast, and the residual force after December 31, 2014 was too small and on too short a timeline to realistically support the continued development of the Afghan security forces needed to give the Afghans the ability to stand on their feet over the long term.

**Was that one of the major decision points during your time in Afghanistan?**

Yes, and it was a mistake. My recommendation to the President was 13,600 troops, with another 6,000 or so non-U.S., NATO, and allied forces. So, 20,000 troops, distributed across the country. The concept was to have a “pervasive touch,” meaning we needed to be in direct training and advising contact with as much of the Afghan security force as we could to improve its capabilities and professionalism and to keep it constantly trained. Over time we would lift up off the ground forces, gradually ascending to higher echelons of the Afghan commands, and finally concentrating our training and advisory presence at the Corps level across Afghanistan including the six regional Corps and one capital Corps. But the final, post-2014 number was too small, and the glide slope to come out was far too sharp. We should have been there at least 10 years. I fully support President Trump’s decision to accept Secretary Mattis’ recommendation to remove the end date for the U.S. commitment.

**We have been there 17 years; looking back over the whole 17-year effort, what are the capstone lessons we should have learned by now?**

Continuity of operations is one of them, continuity of command. When I took command in July of

2011, I was the fourth 4-star that President Karzai had to deal with in four years. You cannot fight these kinds of wars one year at a time. You have got to have continuity of command. Our current commander has been there going on two and a half years. We should have had our commanders go there for two, three, four years at a time so we had a continuity in the headquarters. You could rotate people out, but we needed to have that continuity. That was the first thing. Second thing was, we needed to stay there long enough in force to give the Afghans the time they needed to get ready to go. I think the analysis would stand up even to this day that the 33,000 surge forces, which I was required to bring home by September 30, 2012 should have remained for at least another year. We, Generals Petraeus, Allen, and others believed the surge forces should have been there until well into 2013, and not come home in 2012. Their early return did two things—it cut back on our combat capabilities, and hastened the movement of Afghans into the fight before they were ready. And that of course created some problems. They were not ready and we got too small too fast.

I think the current President made the right decision, which is to stay there until we are able to accomplish the objectives that we have on giving the Afghan security forces the capacity to provide security for the government. But this is a triangular issue. It is not a single issue for our strategy. Our grand strategy should be not just to provide for security, but to provide for enhanced governmental capacity and also to provide the kinds of economic stimulus necessary to tie it all together. All three of those things need to exist together, and we do not have a coherent policy in that regard.

**Can you speak for a minute about the governance side of the equation? The military and security side is one thing, but the challenge of developing**

**Afghan governance seems to be out of our reach. How do we accomplish that goal?**

It is a joint operation that requires that the Europeans be involved—as they have been—but I think we have to be realistic about our expectations for how Afghanistan has traditionally been and will be governed in the future. No Afghan government in modern history has governed every square inch of Afghanistan. Sometimes it is called the “Swiss cheese” approach. I do not want to be trite or diminish the importance of the problem, but from the days of Alexander the Great, Kabul was the center of governance, and then you had what they call the “Four Corners” approach; Mazar-e-Sharif in the North, which is primarily Uzbek and Tajik with some Turkmen; Herat in the West, which has a heavy and ancient Persian influence; and Kandahar in the South and Jalalabad in the East, the populations of both being principally Pashtun. Typically, Kabul governed through those four power centers, and power resided there with governors or strongmen who governed at the local level. The challenge we always had when I was commander there was while our great young troops were able to relatively effectively organize grassroots-level governance in the villages and had pretty good governmental development in Kabul, it was connecting the central government to the provincial level that was the challenge and an elusive element to us. If we do not invest in that, then it is going to continue to be elusive.

**At this point, how long do you think it will take, if we were to stay all in as we are, to prepare the Afghans to take on the security challenge?**

I do not think we have built the benchmarks yet. I am not in the day-to-day strategy development process, but we have been in Kosovo now for more than 20 years. We have been in the Sinai for well-over 30. I do not know what the final length of the commitment, or the numbers of troops will be, but I do know that a commitment of two and a half years

and 9,000 troops going down to 500 troops, was not going to do it, frankly, and so I applaud President Trump’s decision to remove the end date of the deployment. I do not know how long we will stay or if we can even put a date on it yet, but how long have we been in Korea? I do not propose we stay big and long, but it is worth remembering that at the end of the Korean War, Korea was flat on its back. It had no discernable government, its economy was in shambles, and its military capacity was very limited. Today, Korea has a functioning and admirable democracy, with one of the most vibrant economies on the planet. None of that could have happened if the United States had not stayed. We do not have to stay and fight forever, but our political, economic, and security presence ought to be coordinated with our allies and the Afghans, and have some discernable objectives for how we can begin to wind down that presence, or stay for some longer period of time. But to go from 150,000 troops to 7,000 to 500 in five years after fighting an insurgency across an entire country was a decision that was not going to work.

**When you left ISAF [International Security Assistance Force], you were given the assignment as the U.S. President’s Special Representative to the International Counter-ISIL Coalition. Do you think it is safe now to say that ISIL has been defeated?**

No. I have said from the very moment I took the job that until we defeat the idea of ISIL it is not defeated. As you know ISIL exploded in our face in 2014 although it had been in Iraq and in Syria for a while. The corrupt governance in Iraq under the Shia, Maliki regime, along with the activities of Shia militias against the Sunni minorities both in and around Baghdad and also in the west up the Euphrates in al-Anbar, were so horrible that in many respects, as ISIL began to materialize as a Sunni jihadist organization, they were embraced by the Sunni tribes as a rescue force from the corruption and abuse of the Maliki regime.



The emergence of ISIL was neither spontaneous nor was it superficial. It emerged as a direct lineal descendent of al-Qaeda in Iraq, which we largely neutralized in 2006 when we killed al-Zarqawi. The group went into Syria, where it found safe haven in the context of the civil war and grew alongside Jabhat al-Nusrah—which was the al-Qaeda-based Syrian resistance element to President Bashar al-Assad since 2012—but became so abusive, so violent, and so repugnant that even al-Qaeda kicked them out of the organization, and they would ultimately move into Iraq again. By 2015, we defined it as a “monster with three heads.” One is what we call Core-ISIL in Iraq and Syria. Then you had Provincial ISIL, which were pre-existing jihadist organizations that raised the black flag of ISIL in locations around the world and were accepted into the broader global caliphate of the Islamic State. Then we talk about Network ISIL.

The Global Coalition deserves a lot of credit. It helped the Iraqis and those willing elements in Syria to largely defeat Core ISIL and the identifiable ISIL center of gravity. But it has not killed them all. There are pockets of ISIL still existing, and there was just a terrorist attack in Erbil believed to be ISIL. And then we have many of the provinces or wilayats. Ansar al-Sharia in Northern Africa, Boko Haram, and others; these are all now provinces of ISIL and we have to deal with them over time. The Global Coalition is not going to fight them. This will have to be local coalitions led by the United States, but today I do not think anyone knows whether or not the United States is leading on these issues.

The one that worries me the most is Network ISIL. It is riding on the internet and using encrypted cellphone capabilities for global strategic communications, for the movement of forces regionally, and as necessary to facilitate tactical encrypted communications in the attack. I was in Paris in January 2015 when the first ISIL attack occurred there. We did not even know it was coming until the first rounds were

fired because all communications had been done over WhatsApp and other systems like this.

**In your view, what was the added value of the Coalition? How did it justify itself in terms of the value added as opposed to a unilateral American operation?**

The United States should never have picked this challenge up alone, in any case, as a unilateral effort. From the beginning, this needed to be an international approach to defeating the organization. The UN could not have picked it up, because China and Russia were not going to participate, so the UN could never have issued a UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR). It needed to be an ad hoc coalition. President Obama called for it; [then Secretary of State] John Kerry to his great credit held a series of rolling conferences around the world, chaired in Paris, France, and Riyadh, [Saudi Arabia] etc. where a growing number of nations attended; so when the President called on the international community to defeat this scourge, countries signed up. The President asked me to run the Coalition for him. The first meeting we had was on December 3, 2014 in Brussels, where 58 countries appeared of the 65 that had signed up by then. As a Global Coalition, they contributed forces, money, and stabilization efforts aimed at rescuing populations to be liberated. We simply could not have done it without the Global Coalition.

**After 17 years of prioritizing the Global War on Terror, the new National Security Strategy elevates great power competition above international terrorism. What is your opinion on that?**

I think it is important. Remember that terrorism is never more than a tactic. If you engage in a grand strategic war on tactics then you are missing the point. However from my perspective, while the U.S. has to be prepared for peer competition, which we will increasingly find across the board from China and to a significant but much less dangerous

extent from Russia, as well as from other nations that will challenge us as they grow regionally. That said, there remain truly substantial, and unresolved human causal factors that will continue to radicalize millions of men and women in the developing world, which of course continues to feed the violent extremist ranks and networks. We have not really embraced the solutions to many of the reasons why young men and women are radicalized in the world and then enfolded into the arms of extremists and become terrorists. Many of the motivations evident in the so-called Arab Spring of 2011 are shared by millions of young men and women around the world. Rather than fighting these organizations when they become dangerous terrorists, we would reap a lot more benefit by swimming upstream from the point of terrorist attack, and trying to solve the human factors that have radicalized so many.

When we talk about strategies for countering violent extremism, from my perspective that strategy begins too late in the process. We should have strategies for countering radicalization and taking those steps that are not necessarily, or even mostly security related, yet that help the economic circumstances of the preponderance of the populations in these countries.

About 60 percent of the population in the Middle East is below the age of 25, which constitutes a youth bulge of frustrated young people whose aspirations can never be fulfilled by their own governments. Demographers and governments in the region have been concerned for a very long time about what will be the outcome when this ticking time bomb goes off. If we as a community of nations have not worked to solve the base causal factors, we are going to get another tsunami just as we did in 2011. The result of our inability to solve these problems has resulted in massive unrest in the region resulting in toppled governments and civil wars of which the tragedy of the Syrian Civil War is only one example. How many refugees has that generated?

How much change has Europe had to undergo because of the influx of millions of refugees that have come out of an unstable Middle East and North Africa. What this ultimately means is that until we get serious as a community of nations and address the factors that cause radicalization and political unrest, we are going to be fighting forever.

Now, should we be preparing ourselves for great power competition? The answer is absolutely yes. China will be the most consequential relationship for the United States for the 21st century and we should view it as opportunity. The indispensable relationship for the United States though will be India, and we need to put a lot more emphasis on developing that relationship. It is the largest democracy on the planet, has a relatively vibrant economy, and there is a lot that we share in terms of common values, so we ought to be cultivating that relationship as much as we can.

**One of the key phrases in the National Security Strategy is “America First.” What is your understanding of America First, and what are the ramifications of that?**

America has always been strongest when in partnership with our allies and partners. It has always been strongest in that regard, and it did not take very long after 9/11 for us to realize the limits of American power when we go it alone. So when America First is our mantra, and we then back it up with protectionist trade policies and poorly considered trade wars, and tough, often-times isolationist and xenophobic rhetoric, there is a strong likelihood it will instead become “America Only” from our having isolated ourselves or, simply, “America Alone.” And China, with an alternative model to the new American way, is only flowing rapidly into the resulting vacuum. China is largest in foreign direct investment in many countries around the world today, and has proliferated the concept of “debt trap diplomacy,” where a country becomes so

indebted to another that its economic and political decisionmaking is enormously constrained and even captured by the relationship with the lender. We are well-down that road, and the United States with its America First-based policies has not supplied a counter to that type of foreign intervention.

**What kinds of reforms does NATO need to remain relevant and a reliable partner for the United States?**

From my perspective, the greatest weakness of NATO is not the Russian threat, which is a threat we can deal with, nor the instability to the south which has generated hundreds of thousands of refugees and weakened the cohesion of Europe. These are the visible threats, but for me the greatest threat to NATO is its inability to clearly articulate what its requirements are, accompanied by a logical spending plan that supports those requirements. NATO must spend what is necessary to have the kinds of forces it needs with interoperability across the Alliance.

That being said, NATO has always been a reliable partner for the United States and I absolutely disagree with anyone who says NATO is obsolete. With the rise of Russia and all that it has done to Ukraine, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Syria, plus the rise of China and the potential for debt trap diplomacy, and the continued Salafi jihadist movements around the world, one of the most important aspects of NATO is that it is a coalition of 29 nations with similar values and beliefs on human rights and the rule of law. We have a couple of members that are straying from the pack and we are going to have to deal with that at some point, but NATO remains the largest grouping of states on the planet with shared values, values that we as Americans hold as self-evident. That is why NATO is important, and is why when President Obama called for a global coalition to fight ISIL, all 29 members of NATO signed up immediately, along with virtually all members of the EU. Others came later, but NATO

came immediately. That is why this is a relevant process, and why we will sort out the articulation of the requirements. The headquarters is absolutely full of people smart enough to do that.

**What do you consider to be the biggest holes in our national security architecture as we look forward to the challenges ahead?**

From my perspective, science and emerging technologies are galloping away from the capacity of government to understand, embrace, and to support, and even regulate these breathtaking developments. We have the digital and tech giants with all of their capabilities with respect to influence within large segments of the population overwriting, if you will, the concept of sovereignty as we have defined it since the Peace of Westphalia, at the end of the Thirty Years' War, and which would define for the next several centuries the modern concept of sovereignty. That concept is undermined by the internet. And following the advent of the internet, and using the internet as a backbone, the emergence of social media has extended the influence of these non-governmental platforms, and we are now seeing, what I view as the alarming growth of digital governance. For example, and even though it has taken a beating of late, Facebook influences as many as 2.4 billion people every single day. There is no country on the planet with that kind of reach. Facebook shows you what you can buy, influences what you should think, and the Russians used that platform and advertisements on Facebook to directly impact the U.S. elections in 2016. So the whole idea of operating in the cyber environment and the implications for our national sovereignty and national defense are sobering, made all the more so when one considers the emergence of AI, high-speed computing, with the idea that one day quantum computing will create orders of magnitude greater capability both in terms of the capacity of AI to be influential and the capacity to extend influence. This seems to me to

be a huge gap . . . a vulnerability . . . for our national security, the enormity of which we are only beginning to understand.

At the same time that we are making paltry national investments in this, the Chinese are putting 150 billion dollars into research in AI and emerging technology just at the governmental level. That does not include other corporate efforts within China; Chinese President Xi Jinping has set China on the road to surpass U.S. tech capabilities by 2030. We have to recognize that much of the technology that they are developing will not only benefit Chinese citizens, it will also find its way into the military realm. We have to be ready for that—war that is fought by autonomous systems, and perhaps even autonomous weapons at speeds hitherto unknown in the annals of warfare. Called “hyperwar” this will be warfare at the computer level with highly sophisticated AI algorithms where humans are seldom found in the loop. The role of the human in the loop is and should be the subject of an enormous ethical debate. And while the speed of conflict used to be governed primarily by physical laws, soon it will be governed by the speed of light as autonomous systems, operating in both the cyber and physical realms contest the new battlespace for dominance. The implications of hyperwar, if we are not ready, could be dire. **PRISM**

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## On Grand Strategy

By John Lewis Gaddis

Penguin Press, 2017

384 pp., \$ 23.40

ISBN: 9-781-59420-351-0

Reviewed By James MacDougall

With an historian's keen eye for detail and nuance, John Lewis Gaddis surveys a variety of case studies from the Peloponnesian War to World War II in his new book *On Grand Strategy*, identifying in the process several general precepts that may help guide modern-day grand strategists. The book is not, however, a how-to guide for formulating grand strategy or conducting statecraft. It is rather more an examination of select strategic leaders and the ways in which they pursued priority objectives; some successfully, some not so. In focusing on individual leaders and not states, Gaddis' approach to the topic echoes the view of Machiavelli whom he quotes from *The Prince* identifying the fundamental importance of the "knowledge of the actions of great men, learned by me from long experience with modern things and continuous reading of ancient ones."<sup>1</sup> The book adds meaningfully to the growing literature on grand strategy, particularly as regards strategic leadership and its historical context.

In his book, *Grand Strategy in Theory and Practice: The Need for an Effective American Foreign Policy*, William Martel usefully identifies four distinct professional approaches to the study of grand strategy: historians; social scientists; practitioners, and military strategists.<sup>2</sup> He places Gaddis, based on his impressive body

of scholarship on post-World War II American foreign policy and strategies of containment, squarely in the camp of "historians." As a rule, the historians' approach to grand strategy proceeds inductively, reviewing historical cases and deriving appropriate insights and lessons. In contrast, social scientists proceed deductively, identifying theories of grand strategy and citing relevant historical examples. Rounding out Martel's general typology are practitioners whose views on grand strategy are based on practical professional experience and military strategists whose principal focus is the use of military power to achieve national objectives.<sup>3</sup>

In this his most recent book, Gaddis remains firmly in the historians camp. To begin, he defines grand strategy as, "the alignment of potentially unlimited aspirations with necessarily limited capabilities."<sup>4</sup> He examines a range of historical case studies to arrive at his central insight that "You *proportion* aspirations to capabilities. These are opposites—the first being free from limits and the second bound by them—but they must connect." This counsel appears throughout the book, in case studies on Sun Tzu, Machiavelli, Augustine, Hamilton, and, most prominently, in the book's conclusion. There Gaddis quotes Edmund Burke: "in all fair dealings . . . the thing bought must bear some proportion to the price paid."

This conclusion echoes the thinking of Walter Lippmann:

*Without the controlling principle that the nation must maintain its objectives and its power in equilibrium, its purposes within its means and its means equal to its purposes, its commitments related to its resources and its resources adequate to its commitments, it is impossible to think at all about foreign affairs. . . . An agreement has eventually to*

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*be reached when men admit that they must pay for what they want and that they must want only what they are willing to pay for.*<sup>5</sup>

And how are states or leaders to align ends and means? The context for Gaddis' answer is provided in metaphorical terms by reprising the dichotomy between hedgehogs and foxes described by Isaiah Berlin.<sup>6</sup> Hedgehogs, Gaddis quotes, "relate everything to a single central vision" through which "all that they say and do has significance." Foxes, in contrast, "pursue many ends, often unrelated and even contradictory, connected, if at all, only in some *de facto* way." Gaddis identifies the trouble with hedgehogs in his first case study, on the Persian King Xerxes: "Xerxes failed, as is the habit of hedgehogs, to establish a proper relationship between his ends and his means. Because ends exist only in the imagination, they can be infinite . . . Means, though, are stubbornly finite . . ." Foxes, on the other hand, seem to err at the other end of the ends-means spectrum by failing to establish a fixed objective. Failing, in the memorable description by Dean Acheson, "to look ahead, not into the distant future, but beyond the vision of the operating officers caught in the smoke and crises of current battle; far enough ahead to see the emerging form of things to come and outline what should be done to meet or anticipate them."<sup>7</sup>

Gaddis's answer to this conundrum is "to combine . . . the hedgehog's sense of direction *and* the fox's sensitivity to surroundings." By the end of the book he describes individuals able to combine the two qualities as "foxes with compasses" and includes, from his case studies, such figures as "the younger Pericles, Octavian Caesar, Machiavelli, Elizabeth I, the American Founders, Lincoln, Salisbury and especially Roosevelt [FDR] . . ." Their strategic genius, in Gaddis's assessment lay in having had, "the humility to be unsure of what lay ahead, the flexibility to adjust to it, and the ingenuity to accept, perhaps even leverage, inconsistencies." In addition, Gaddis attributes to many of the successful

strategic leaders, (particularly U.S. Presidents Abraham Lincoln and Franklin Delano Roosevelt) the quality of coup d'oeil or "the ability to take in the whole of a situation at once and know almost automatically how to proceed."<sup>8</sup>

While these conclusions, representing as they do wisdom distilled from many case studies over many centuries, are important in their own right, for social scientists and practitioners they leave more to be desired. Grounding grand strategy on the strategic genius of the leader runs a high risk. As Kissinger noted with reference to Bismarck and Germany, "A system which requires a great man in each generation sets itself an almost insurmountable challenge . . ." <sup>9</sup> Further, one of the characteristics typically attributed to grand strategy is its long-term nature. Paul Kennedy, a colleague of Gaddis in the Yale Grand Strategy Program, noted, for example, "It [is] about the evolution and integration of policies that should operate for decades, or even for centuries."<sup>10</sup> Focusing analysis on the behavior of individual strategic leaders runs the risk of overlooking broader grand strategic approaches pursued by states over the long-term and based on a set of organizing principles derived from the state's history, geography and culture.

To the question of how states or leaders might align ends and means to craft grand strategy, political or social scientists would respond differently, based on an approach that seeks generalizable theories or strategic principles. Framing the challenge in terms of commitments and power, Samuel Huntington offered the following ways an imbalance of the two might be addressed: redefine interests; reduce threats through diplomacy; enhance the contributions of allies; increase resources; substitute cheaper forms of power for more expensive ones, and devise more effective strategies for using existing capabilities.<sup>11</sup> To illustrate this range of strategic and diplomatic

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responses, Huntington cites the case of Great Britain and the imbalance in aspirations and capabilities it faced in the late 1890s and 1900s, a case often used by both social scientists and historians in examining grand strategy.<sup>12</sup> What emerges from this example, is the fact that the different disciplinary approaches to grand strategy yield quite different prescriptions on how grand strategy might be conceived.

In this regard *On Grand Strategy* is as much a discourse on the relative merits of approaching the subject through the different disciplinary approaches of theory and history as it is a study of grand strategy itself. Seen in this light, one can perhaps explain one of the more perplexing parts of the book. In a chapter titled “The Grandest Strategists” Gaddis juxtaposes the thinking of Clausewitz in *On War* and Tolstoy in *War and Peace*. While each wrote lucidly on strategy and war, neither actually bore responsibilities for aligning or proportioning aspirations and capabilities; that is, for making grand strategy. What makes the chapter central in the book is their competing perspectives on the explanatory power of theory and history. Clausewitz approached his subject from a theoretical perspective; Tolstoy from an historical perspective; albeit an unconventional one. Appearing in Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*, Clausewitz and his theories of strategy are dismissed by Prince Andrei as “not worth an empty eggshell.”<sup>13</sup> It is rather to the “sum of men’s individual wills” and the more elemental characteristics of the Russian nation and people that Tolstoy attributes the outcome of Napoleon’s war in Russia.<sup>14</sup>

Indeed, based on his disdain for theory, Tolstoy has been described by other scholars as an “anti-strategist” and a “strategic nihilist.”<sup>15</sup> In his own views on theory, particularly international relations theory, Gaddis echoes some of Tolstoy’s skepticism. Yet, in the end, Gaddis recommends not a choice between theory and history, hedgehogs and foxes, but a synthesis. This conclusion is reached early in the book, “. . . the academic mind

is itself divided. A gap has opened between the study of history and the construction of theory, both of which are needed if ends are to be aligned with means.” Some years ago, in a seminal article assessing the role of international relations theory and the end of the Cold War, Gaddis reached a similar conclusion:

*My point, though, is not to suggest that we jettison the scientific approach to the study of international relations; only that we bring it up to date by recognizing that good scientists, like good novelists and good historians, make use of all the tools at their disposal in trying to anticipate the future. That includes not just theory, observation, and rigorous calculation, but also narrative, analogy, paradox, irony, intuition, imagination, and not least in importance-style.<sup>16</sup>*

This is sage advice and should be taken to heart by all those involved in the evolving study of grand strategy be they historians, social scientists, practitioners or military strategists. *On Grand Strategy* likely will take an important place in the future study of grand strategy, deservedly so, alongside other works from the associated disciplinary approaches. **PRISM**

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, *On Grand Strategy* (New York: Penguin Press, 2017), 23.

<sup>2</sup> William C. Martel, *Grand Strategy in Theory and Practice: The Need for an Effective American Foreign Policy* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 7.

<sup>3</sup> The four approaches and some representative examples are discussed further in Martel, *Grand Strategy in Theory and Practice*, 7–19.

<sup>4</sup> In a useful article on the semantics of the ‘grand strategy’ concept: Nina Silove, “Beyond the Buzzword: The Three Meanings of ‘Grand Strategy,’” *Security Studies*, 27:1, the author identifies three broad categories of meaning: grand plans; grand principles, and grand (patterns of) behavior. (34–45, summarized on 49.) With its focus on the relationship (alignment) between ends and means, Gaddis’ definition fits most closely into the patterns of behavior category, or, as Silove says on page

49, “. . . a state’s distribution and employment of its military, diplomatic, and economic resources towards ends.”

<sup>5</sup> Walter Lippmann, *U.S. Foreign Policy: Shield of the Republic* (1943) quoted in Colin Dueck, *Reluctant Crusaders: Power Culture and Change in American Grand Strategy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006), Epigram.

<sup>6</sup> Isaiah Berlin, *The Hedgehog and the Fox* (New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1966).

<sup>7</sup> Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1969), 214.

<sup>8</sup> Gaddis quoting Allen C. Guelzo, *Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation: The End of Slavery in America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004), 3–4.

<sup>9</sup> Henry Kissinger, “The White Revolutionary: Reflections on Bismarck,” *Daedalus* 97, no. 3 (Summer 1968), 921.

<sup>10</sup> Paul M. Kennedy, ed., *Grand Strategies in War and Peace* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), 4.

<sup>11</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, “Coping with the Lippmann Gap,” *Foreign Affairs* 66, no. 3 (1987), 456.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* See also, Aaron Freidberg, *The Weary Titan: Britain and the experience of relative decline, 1895-1905*. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2010) and

John Gooch “The Weary Titan: Strategy and Policy in Great Britain, 1890-1918” (Chapter 10, 278–306) in *The Making of Strategy: Rulers, States, and War*, Williamson Murray, MacGregor Knox, Alvin Bernstein, eds. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

<sup>13</sup> Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, (New York: Penguin Putnam Inc., 1982), 920. The translation Gaddis uses renders the Russian as “not worth a tinker’s damn,” 185. “Not worth a brass farthing” is also a popular translation. At all events, the sense conveys that theory is worth little.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Lawrence Freedman, *Strategy: A History* (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 2015), 99. Dominique Lieven, in *Russia Against Napoleon: The True Story of the Campaigns of War and Peace* (New York: Viking, 2010) describes Tolstoy’s focus as “elemental Russian patriotism as uniting in defence of national soil,” 10.

<sup>15</sup> Lawrence Freedman, *Strategy: A History*, 307 and Elliot Cohen, *Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen and Leadership in Wartime* (New York: The Free Press, 2002), 234–235.

<sup>16</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, “International Relations Theory and the End of the Cold War,” *International Security* 17, no. 3 (Winter, 1992–93), 57–58.

## Peace Works: America’s Unifying Role in a Turbulent World

By Ambassador Frederick D. Barton  
Rowman & Littlefield, 2018

312 pp., \$35.00

ISBN: 978-1-5381-1300-4

Reviewed By Ambassador Lawrence E. Butler

**P** *Peace Works* is two things: an impassioned argument on why the United States should involve itself in conflict prevention, management and peace-making; and an important contribution to the practitioner’s tool box for dealing with conflict situations. Ambassador Barton’s

first-person description of efforts in places like Rwanda, Bosnia, Haiti, and Syria merits study for use in responding to future humanitarian tragedies. While *Peace Works* has two obvious weaknesses—a political partisan bias and a predilection for humanitarian intervention, even when by his own guidelines, we should not—the book should be required reading for conflict management practitioners (diplomats, development experts, NGOs, the military—especially components most likely to be confronted with stabilization tasks) and Congressional staff.

Ambassador Barton, a political appointee in Democratic administrations including two international organizations, created two *potentially* important and more agile tools for conflict prevention and management, USAID’s Office of Transitional Initiatives (OTI) and the State

Ambassador Lawrence E. Butler (ret.) worked across the spectrum of peace and conflict management with U.S. diplomacy, NATO, and OSCE in Iraq, Afghanistan, Northern Ireland, and the Balkans. His last assignment was as the U.S. European Commander’s Civilian Deputy and Foreign Policy Advisor.



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Department's Bureau of Conflict and Stability Operations (CSO). *Peace Works* draws on his quarter century of experience in seeking solutions for 40 conflicts. He offers a survey of academic and real world thought on America's experience with waging peace, from post-WWII to a rich retelling of his personal involvement from the transitional aftermath of the Cold War through Syria in 2016. *Peace Works* provides a bold, if unrealizable, policy recommendation for a new way to organize the nation's response to crisis, and argues that Washington has not done enough to engage the American people on why we (should) engage in foreign conflicts.

However, this reviewer cringed at parts of the book, such as his critique of U.S. assistance to Pakistan that went mainly to the military, which he believed doomed that country, but then admitting that his predictions were not borne out. And, ironically, I read *Peace Works* as news broke of the Israelis rescuing "Syrian White Helmets" fleeing President Assad's forces as rebel resistance collapsed. Ironic because Ambassador Barton devotes a large portion of book to the role CSO played in supporting the creation of the renowned and courageous civilian first responders in rebel-held parts of Syria. Barton recognizes the ambivalence of Obama Administration in playing a decisive role against Assad, which meant he was relegated to working at the margin to save lives while hoping for arrival of the cavalry. Undaunted, Barton saw the positive, impressed at the commitment and risks his Syrian interlocutors took in helping their communities and building off of experience in Pakistan, Bosnia, Haiti, Central America and Rwanda, zeroes in on doing what OTI and CSO could by supporting local initiatives, especially amplifying communication and reconciliation. However this sadly echoes of the well-intentioned efforts of the international community to feed besieged Sarajevans while not addressing their vulnerability to Serbian snipers and mortars.

What makes this book especially valuable is Barton's insider's view of Washington bureaucratic warfare: creating USAID's Office of Transitional Initiatives (OTI) in 1994, intended to support democratic transitions in the former Soviet Bloc; and transforming the Secretary of State's Iraq-era Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization (S/CRS) into the Bureau of Conflict and Stability Operations (CSO) in late 2011, giving this well-intentioned effort a more solid bureaucratic footing shortly after the fall of Gaddafi in Libya and just in time for the Syrian Conflict.

The author implicitly understands that the scale of today's crises exceeds any one organization's ability to handle, hence focus on "micro" responses to events, arguing America should be the catalyst, arriving early, identifying and supporting local initiatives and jump-starting change. He urges listening to locals, prioritizing, avoiding taking over, measuring effectiveness, seeking public support via communication, and circumventing institutional/bureaucratic inertia.

*Peace Works* is organized into five parts, with a powerful introduction: Syria represents America's hand wringing, "wicked" dilemma, proliferating conflicts that baffle policy-makers. Barton notes that "our record in the last 25 years is a powerful argument for humility" as the United States has little to show for expenditures of billions of dollars and sacrifice of American lives. This despite the United States having the resources, and implicitly the obligation, to make the world more peaceful and (he believes) that the rest of the world will follow our lead.

Part one leads with a survey of peace making highlighting Syria and Pakistan with insights into the challenges facing the United States with proliferating international conflicts, and makes the case that the United States is poorly organized or prepared to get ahead of the curve. He highlights developments, such as the challenge posed by technological miniaturization and social media.

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Part two, the 1990s, features Barton's first-hand and moving engagement in post-genocide efforts to rebuild Rwanda. His retelling of OTI's work in Haiti, where his people seemed to have partnered with Special Forces detachments, is must reading. The OTI's efforts in Bosnia were peripheral given that 100,000 people perished despite UN and NATO military presence, including the genocide of 7,000 men and boys of Srebrenica. OTI identified methods to empower the opponents of the Serbian effort to dominate Bosnia with media outreach to citizens, with collateral damage: a brave newspaper publisher OTI backed had his legs blown off in an assassination attempt. The U.S. eventually intervened in August 1995 to stop the slaughter, but a gap was exposed between traditional development with decades-long horizons, and the need to get after near term issues. In short, Barton belatedly re-discovers Maslow's basic building block of human needs: security.

In part three Barton provides an outsider's perspective on Afghanistan and Iraq. Working for CSIS, he engaged with locals in both countries. His lessons were that the U.S. must clarify goals before intervening, commit to real-time measurements of progress, and follow through to promote systemic changes. Unfortunately the author does not appear to appreciate the geo-political dimensions or the scale of the challenges in either country, but does back away from the idea that the United States should engage in nation-building.

In addressing Syria in part four, Barton again urges policymakers to state purpose and remove ambiguity (implicit criticism of the Obama Administration), which hampered CSO throughout his tenure in getting Washington to make and resource decisions, and address concerns of local communities, and then rely on their courage and ingenuity. CSO's contributions (White Helmets) were noble for saving countless lives while waiting for Washington to act. As in Bosnia.

Part five features his policy proposal—building off frustrations to get CSO a leading role in crisis response, he proposes that the USG accept more risk to its people; create a stand-by bench that can be called up to lead a crisis-response team; put that person in charge of the interagency response; and get the Congress and the American public involved.

Throughout the book, Ambassador Barton provides painfully learned lessons of being an innovator in hide-bound organizations like the State Department as he sought to make CSO relevant and effective by building personal relations with counterparts at U.S. embassies and in the geographic bureaus. Among the things that the author decries is the increasingly isolated American diplomat who lives and works on a heavily fortified compound with limited local contact because of a risk averse Washington. Barton cites OTI and CSO's willingness to engage with local audiences as an organizational strength. In short, greater tolerance for (policy and personal) risk is vital to making peace, more akin to small Special Forces team working with local populations. Barton, however, hand waves the killing of Ambassador Stevens and three others as the cost of doing business.

Which inadvertently spotlights the pass he gives Obama administration on its role in Libyan regime change that lacked a post-conflict stabilization plan, a repeat of Afghanistan and Iraq, and came as the U.S. military was winding down its presence in Iraq. Ironic because he lambastes the Bush Administration for ignoring the work that he did at a think tank ahead of the 2003 Iraq invasion to prepare for the aftermath. Ambassador Barton cites "Responsibility to Protect" (R2P—non-binding commitment made at the 2005 UN World summit) as well as the Obama-era Atrocities Prevention Board for why we intervened with the bombing campaign that led to Gaddafi's overthrow and killing. In the case of Libya his view is that the Europeans had the lead post-Gaddafi, which took CSO off of the hook.

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The post-Libya fiasco confirms the author's argument that the United States needs to be thoughtful in its determination of when and where to intervene, and that we need to act as a catalyst—where we go, others will follow, and when we are not present, things do not go (as) well. Ambassador Barton provides noble and practical examples of

how to intervene on the margins of conflict but—no matter how compelling the humanitarian grounds for getting involved to stop the killing of innocents—our efforts are feel-good Band-Aids that prolong the suffering and may actually worsen matters absent an all-in, whole-of-government commitment with a clear strategy. **PRISM**

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## Building Militaries in Fragile States: Challenges for the United States

By Mara Karlin

University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017

283 pp., \$63.56

ISBN: 9-780-81224-926-2

Reviewed By Joseph Collins

After more than a decade of supporting large expeditionary forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, the U.S. battle cry today is “by, with, and through” (BWT). According to General Joseph Votel, Commander U.S. Central Command, BWT means “that operations are led by our partners, state or non-state, *with* enabling support from the United States or U.S.-led coalitions, and *through* U.S. authorities and partner agreements.”<sup>1</sup> When U.S. soldiers discuss this concept, they usually dwell upon train, advise, and assist actions in the field. At the top end of the BWT food chain, however, are those instances where, as it did in Iraq and Afghanistan, the United States believes that it must rebuild the militaries of its partners, often when they are in perilous circumstances.

There are few books on this critically important subject.<sup>2</sup> One newcomer to the collection is Dr.

Mara Karlin's aptly titled, *Building Militaries in Fragile States*. Karlin finished the book after a tour as the U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Strategy and Force Development; she now teaches in the strategy program at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies. Karlin knows this subject from the training ground through the archives to the Ivory Tower. Her work is careful, judicious, well-written, and peppered with archival and interview material. *Building Militaries in Fragile States* will be a benchmark for the next generation of scholars. It is a book about past policies, but it is full of wisdom for the future.

Karlin starts with a blinding flash of the obvious from Winston Churchill: “However beautiful the strategy, you should occasionally look at the results.” Sir Winston's marvelous quote is the guiding light of this book on U.S. attempts to help its fragile allies build militaries. Her conclusion is that the U.S. record is “uneven at best,” a conclusion which has been borne out by recent studies of our efforts to rebuild military sectors in Afghanistan and Iraq.<sup>3</sup>

*Building Militaries in Fragile States* looks deeply into four cases: Greece in the late 1940s, South Vietnam in the 1950s, Lebanon in 1982–84 and again in 2005–09. Only one of these cases, Greece, after fits and starts, was a success. Vietnam was a failure, and in both Lebanon cases, a partial failure. The differences in these cases, Karlin tells us, is not

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“more” but “how.” The U.S. default setting seems to be provide equipment, training, and military-only advice, but that is not the way to succeed in the business of building militaries in dire straits. Karlin’s summary of the case of Greece is telling

*The U.S. program to strengthen the Greek military succeeded as Greece established a more enforced and sustainable monopoly on violence. The program was marked by deep U.S. involvement in sensitive Greek military affairs, including the military’s structure and personnel, while limiting the U.S. military from becoming a co-combatant. Its coupling with the decrease in external support to the guerrillas, including equipment and sanctuary, enabled the Greek state to effectively confront the guerrillas and increasingly control its territory.*

At the strategic level, Karlin’s two key variables that favor success are 1) deep involvement by the United States in sensitive, partner military decisions, to include personnel, and 2) a diminishing (or diminished) role played by the external, antagonistic actors. The first of these variables will always be a problem. The United States respects sovereignty and does not want to get into its partners domestic politics. The State Department is especially sensitive about sovereignty and letting states run their own political-military affairs. Karlin notes the failure of those good intentions in the chapters on Vietnam and Lebanon. If you want to succeed, you have to be intrusive in areas where your partners are not eager to hear your input. Training and equipment are key inputs but not decisive ones. Refraining from being a co-combatant generally seems to be a good idea, as well, but was not directly assessed in any of the cases.

To succeed in the future, Karlin provides a useful set of questions for policymakers that range from an operation’s purpose to U.S. domestic politics. She warns us, that we have to see training and

equipping only as “light security sector reform.” Real transformation of a partner’s military sector, if that is the goal, requires U.S. intrusion into sensitive politico-military decisions of our partners, including leadership decisions, and working to limit external actors who meddle or spoil. The goal is for partners to be able “to maintain internal defense” and to achieve the Weberian monopoly of legitimate violence within their territory.

In the end, Karlin the practitioner cannot help but reflect critically on our efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq, which reflect our “thin record of success.” She makes an important point

*The United States must rethink its traditional orientation when it seeks to strengthen partner militaries. At a minimum, simply training and equipping partner militaries is not a panacea for the United States to secure fragile states facing insurgencies. Over the last seventy years, the United States has not had overwhelming success in pursuing this policy.... Put simply, training and equipping a military is not transforming it.*

Karlin concludes that the key, expensive as it may be, is for the United States “to make a concerted effort to influence the partner’s military agenda by advising it at all levels on all affairs.” This is a complicated business and not one for amateurs or those seeking quick results, a group that often includes Americans.

Dr. Mara Karlin’s book is a superb addition to the literature on security assistance and state transformation. Its value lies in its expert, practitioner-scholar viewpoint, and its focus on results and the critical variables that produce them. It is commonplace for both scholars and policy wonks to bemoan the gap between policy and scholarship. Karlin has done yeoman’s work to reduce that gap on this important subject. **PRISM**

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> GEN Joseph Votel, USA, and COL Eero Keravouri, USA, “The By-With-Through Operational Approach,” *Joint Force Quarterly*, JFQ 89, 2nd quarter 2018, 40.

<sup>2</sup> A major new text on building national-level defense institutions from both regional and functional perspectives is Alexandra Kerr and Michael Miklaucic, eds., *Effective, Legitimate, Secure: Insights for Defense Institution Building* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Center for Complex Operations, 2017), available at <<http://cco.ndu.edu/Publications/Books/>>. This edited volume was produced with the help of a grant from the Office of Secretary of Defense-Policy, supervised by the first Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Security Cooperation, Tommy Ross, who served under the Obama Administration.

<sup>3</sup> For an analysis of our efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan that bears out Karlin’s overall assessment, see T.X. Hammes, “Raising and Mentoring Security Forces in Afghanistan and Iraq,” in Richard Hooker and Joseph Collins, eds., *Lessons Encountered: Learning from the Long War* (Washington, DC: NDU Press, 2015), 277–334.

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