



AFTER-ACTION REVIEW (AAR)

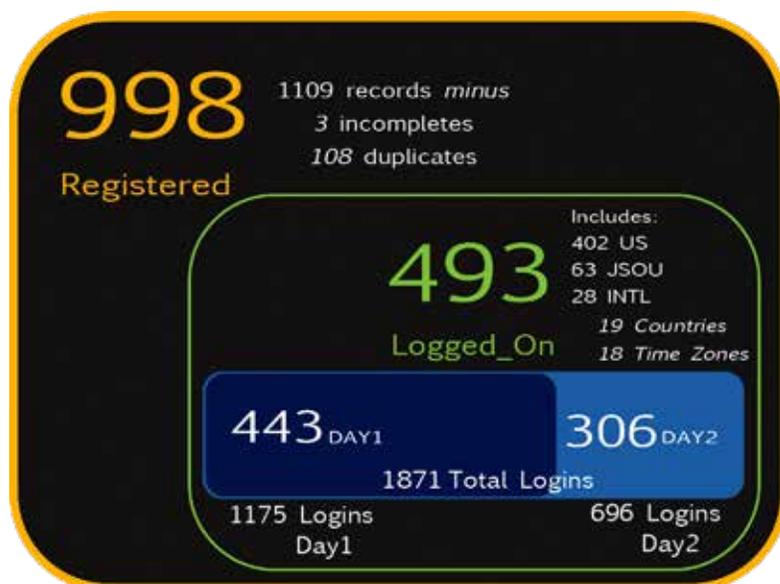
**Submitted by Dr. Christopher Marsh and Mr. Joe Whittington
10 June 2021**



JOINT SPECIAL OPERATIONS UNIVERSITY | THE FUTURE OF SOF FORUM SERIES | A VIRTUAL EVENT

Executive Summary

- In order to further our understanding of Strategic Competition and the future role of Special Operations Forces (SOF), the Joint Special Operations University held a 2-day fully hybrid forum—combining both virtual and live elements via the Vimeo web-streaming platform—from 5–6 May 2021.
- The event included 40 presenters from across the DOD, interagency, and academia.
- Based on survey results, open responses, and word-of-mouth feedback, the forum was an overwhelming success.
- The forum met or exceeded participant expectations, was well-organized, and was useful to participants in their jobs.
- The event had over 1,100 registrants and nearly 300 participants at any given time.
- Participants included significant senior leaders from the active duty and retired ranks, as well as participants from numerous foreign countries.
- This comprehensive after-action review identified several areas for improvement, including ways of better engaging the audience, recommended best practices for moderators to lead their panels, and ways to maximize data collection efforts.
- This review also identified aspects that should be retained, including a full-on “dress” rehearsal to get all presenters acquainted with the platform, the employment of a cross-functional team, and the value of daily “hot-washes.”
- The quarterly Great Power Competition (GPC) forum outputs, such as this AAR and the forthcoming “proceedings,” will provide the immediate and necessary feedback for understanding the SOF involvement in strategic competition as part of a “running net estimate” of SOF strategic roles and capabilities.
- The next GPC forum is tentatively scheduled for September 2021 and will focus on science & technology.



JSOU Q3 FORUM 2021

Marketing At-A-Glance
April 5–May 6

DIGITAL MARKETING SNAPSHOT

46,858

Views when the post is visible
on more than 50% of the
screen or clicked on or both

IMPRESSIONS



REGISTRATION CONVERSION



43.9%

Of the 998 that registered,
430 actually logged on at
some point over the 2 day
forum

23% MILITARY

24% PRIVATE SECTOR/EDUCATION

56% OTHER

VISITOR DEMOGRAPHICS



THINK JSOU



3,200 HOURS

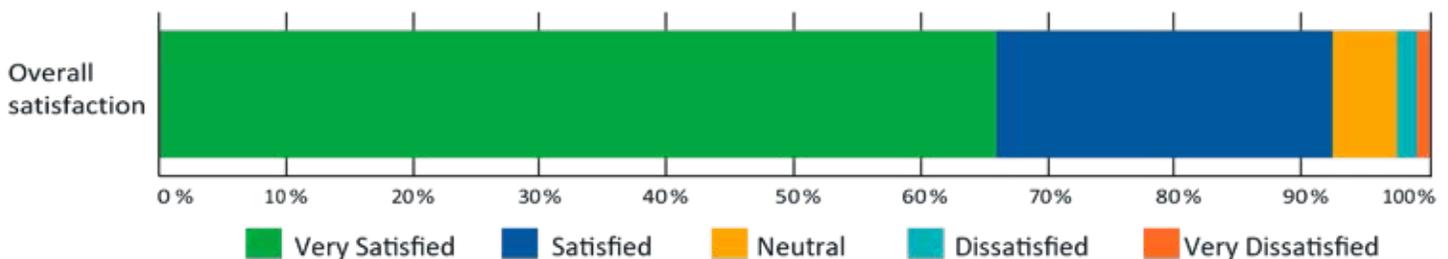
Spent watching JSOU
videos on ThinkJsou
YouTube Channel

12,056 TOTAL VIEWS

Survey Highlights

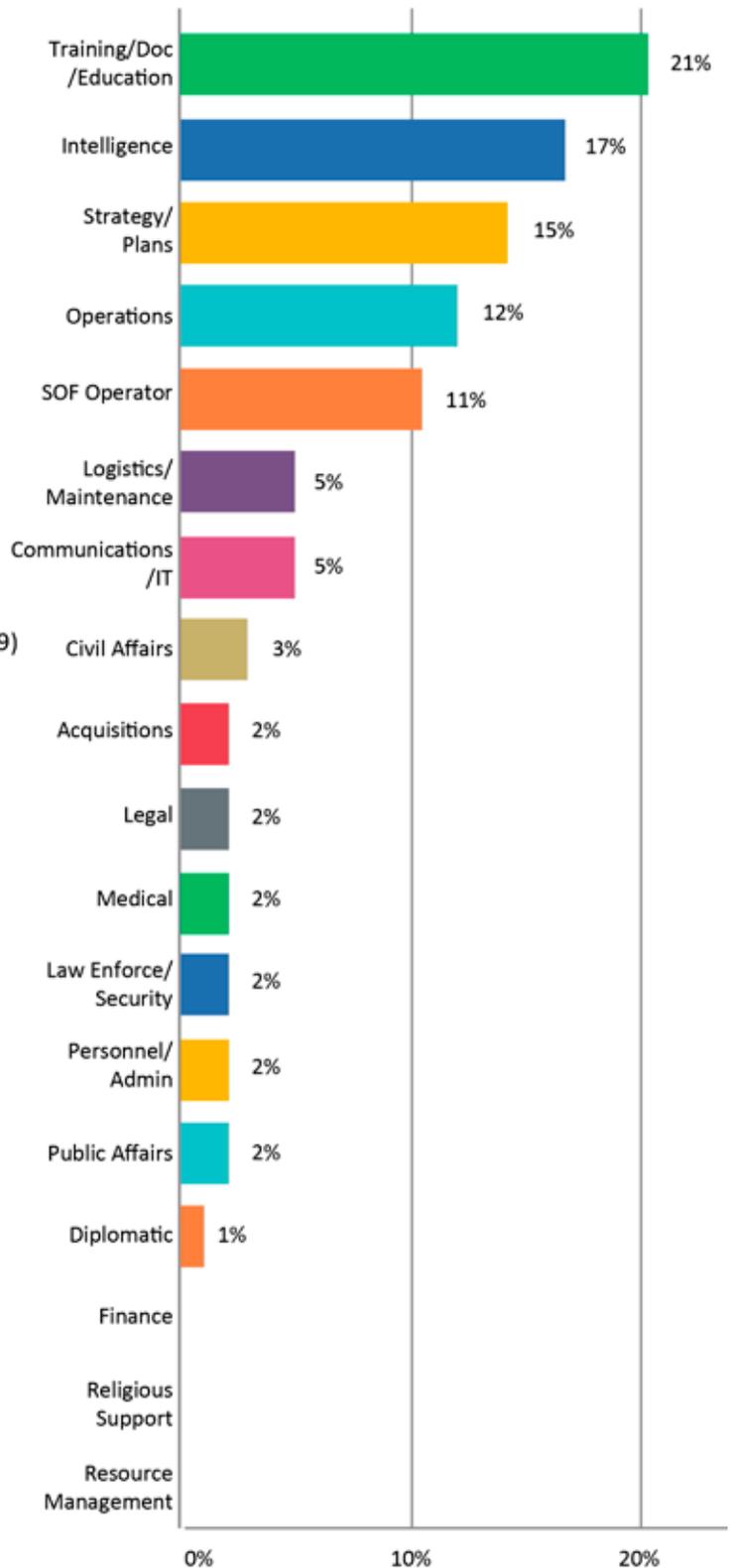
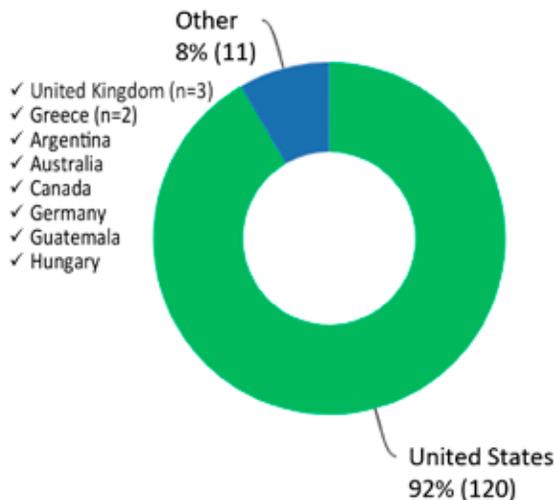
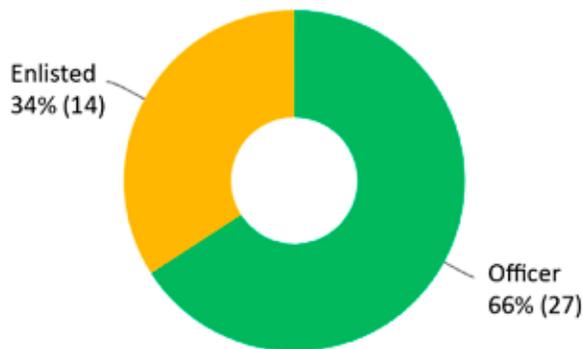
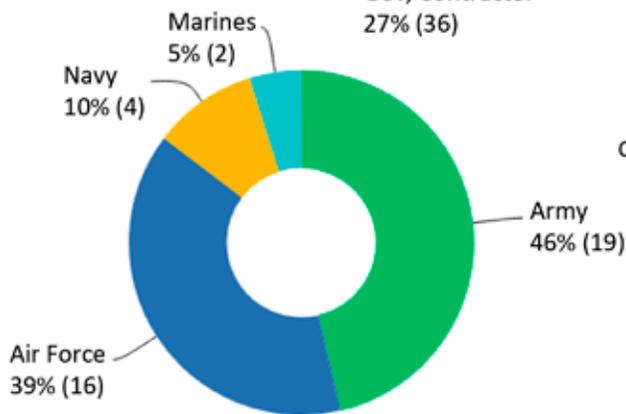
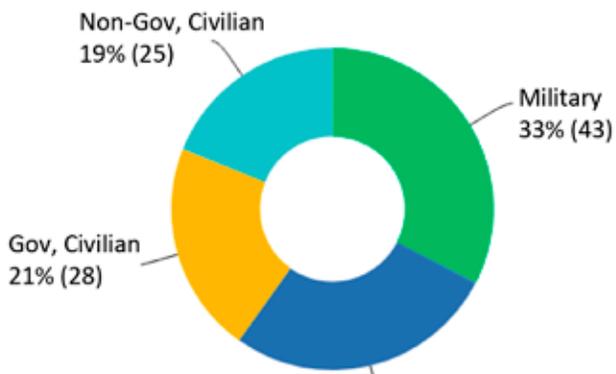
- A total **134 forum participants** and an additional **14 registered non-participants** provided feedback on the JSOU Forum Survey for a **total of 148 respondents**.
 - Approximately 66% of forum participants were first-time attendees.
- The forum **met its goal** of facilitating discourse among divergent perspectives within the SOF enterprise and beyond (91%). The vast majority of survey respondents were **satisfied** with the event (93%) and indicated **information from the forum would be useful** in their current jobs (92%). Further, the event was seen as **well-organized** (95%) and the content was **as expected or better** (93%). Nearly all respondents **would recommend the forum to others** (93%) and are **likely to participate** in a future JSOU forum (96%).
- Aspects of the forum that were identified as most beneficial and valuable include the **quality and variety** of panelists, **relevant content**, and **forum format**.
- One-third of respondents were return-forum participants. Over 80% indicated **information from previously attended JSOU Future of SOF Forums has been useful to them** in their current jobs.
- Top recommendations to enhance the forum experience include **increased opportunities for interaction** and **resolving technical difficulties** (both items addressed later in this report).
- **Scheduling conflict** was the primary reason provided by the Third Quarter Forum (Q3) registrants who ultimately did not attend the forum.
- JSOU implemented several effective advertising techniques for the Q3 forum: **41% of respondents learned of the forum via an email from JSOU**, 25% from LinkedIn, 20% from word-of-mouth, and 16% from the JSOU website.
- While a direct comparison between forums is not the intent, **an increase in favorable ratings from the Second Quarter Forum to Q3** suggests JSOU's efforts to refine the forums are appropriate.

PARTICIPANT SATISFACTION: OVERALL SATISFACTION WITH THIS EVENT



PROFILE OF FORUM PARTICIPANTS WHO PROVIDED FEEDBACK

Demographics of Survey Respondents who Attended the Forum (n=134)



* Individuals associated with the coordination or production of the event accounted for <7% of responses.

Introduction

The recently released 2021 Interim National Security Strategic Guidance can be viewed in a variety of ways. On the one hand, the Biden administration’s guidance is a departure from the 2017 Trump-era National Security Strategy, which, along with the 2018 National Defense Strategy, focused intently on the imperatives of “Great Power Competition,” or the global pursuit of diplomatic, economic, and military advantage among the U.S., Russia, and China. It highlights that strategic competition is centered more specifically on an increasingly assertive China than a disruptive Russia. Moreover, diplomacy and alliances are again of central focus, as is the soft power of America’s “unique” advantage—democracy.

On the other hand, the underlying strategic logic of the United States, China, and Russia seeking relative advantage is still clearly present. Russia may have been “downgraded” from the list of great powers, but its ability to disrupt the international order is still very much a cause of concern. It is China, however, that is the sole power capable of destroying the international order and is thus rightly focused on in the Interim National Security Strategic Guidance as America’s major contender that vies for the status of global hegemon.

The global areas of concern for U.S. foreign policy are Europe, the Western Hemisphere, and the Indo-Pacific. These regions all need to be viewed and approached through the lenses of intersectionality, convergence, and compound security. In this JSOU’s third forum on Great Power Competition, we turn our attention to the way strategic competition is playing out in the Indo-Pacific in particular, and neighboring and interlinked areas more generally. This examination focuses specifically on the ways that risks are being anticipated, calculated, and managed in order to prevent competition from leading to state-on-state conflict.

This strategic competition forum was a resounding success. Based on survey results and word-of-mouth feedback, the forum met or exceeded people’s expectations, was well-organized, and of use to participants in their jobs (see the following and Attachment 1). The event had over 1,100 people register and over 250 participants take part on day 1. This number stayed very consistent over the course of each of the two days, with a low point just below 200 during the final roundtable on day 2. Finally, participants included significant senior leaders from the active duty and retired ranks, as well as participants from numerous foreign countries.

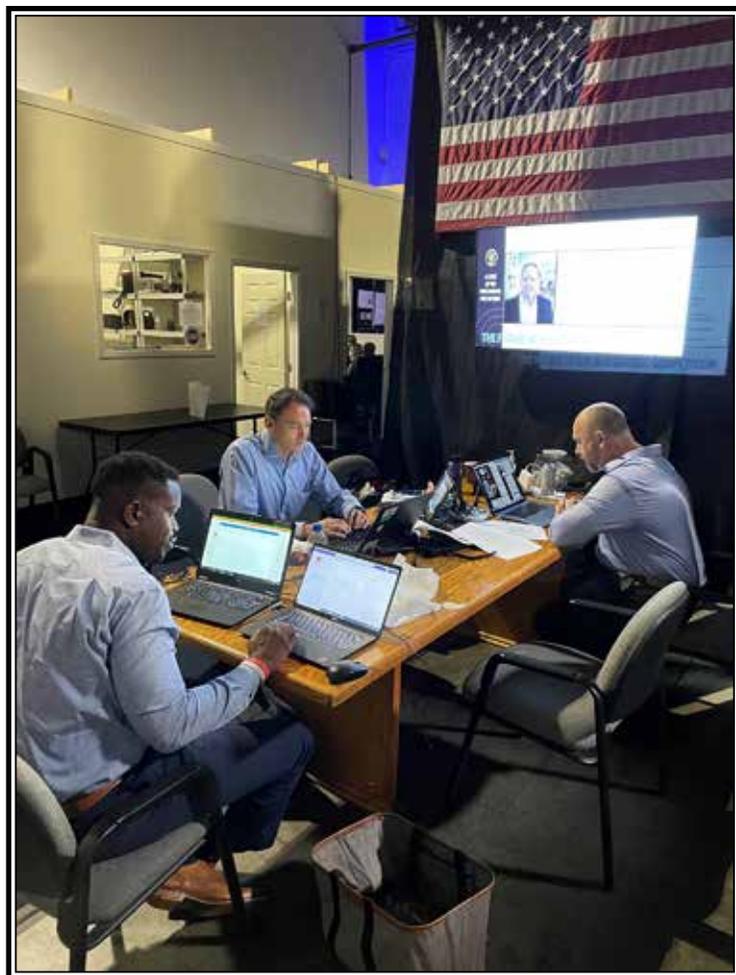
Like the previous forum held in March 2021, this forum contracted DCE Productions to handle event production and broadcasting duties. The hybrid approach—which combined



Managing panels from the “green room”

both virtual and live elements—helped to create a personal, interactive information and perspective-sharing opportunity via the Vimeo web-streaming platform.

The forum can be broken down into 4 phases: Planning, Rehearsal, Execution, and Post-event activities (including this AAR), with each phase having its own team. The primary planning team consisted of: Mr. Joe Whittington, Dr. Chris Marsh, Ms. Molly Quintero and BG (Ret.) Russ Howard. Additional support was provided by Mr. Eddie Edwards, Ms. Beth Fidermutz, Mr. Charlie Black, Mr. Mark Raney, Dr. Karla Mastracchio, Mr. Eon Pereira, Mr. Craig Hodges, Mr. John Byrd, Ms. Katie Calvillo, Ms. Robin Casey, and Mr. Ryan Bernosky.



The team at work behind the scenes

The rehearsal and execution teams consisted of the following: BG (Ret.) Russ Howard, Mr. Joe Whittington, Dr. Chris Marsh, Ms. Molly Quintero, Mr. Terry Doan, Mr. Mike Clark, Mr. Craig Hodges, Ms. Katie Calvillo, Mr. John Byrd, Mr. Ryan Bernosky, and Mr. Mike Raimondi.

The post-event/AAR team consisted of the following: Mr. Joe Whittington, Dr. Chris Marsh, Ms. Molly Quintero, Mr. Mike Clark, Mr. Craig Hodges, Ms. Katie Calvillo, Mr. Eddie Edwards, Ms. Beth Fidermutz, Dr. Karla Mastracchio, Mr. John Byrd, and Ms. Maike Buckingham. Rapporteur duties were performed by: Dr. Homer Harkins, Mr. Greg Metzgar, and Mr. Mark James.

In conducting this AAR, the cross-functional team (CFT) acted deliberately and followed the guidance contained in the JSOU President’s Guidance and

Expectations, “Future of SOF” Action-Studies Memorandum, 6 February 2021. The AAR process was split into two phases. First was the “blue sky, unrestrained” focus on the substance of the forum, while the second phase focused on the administrative side of things, e.g., people, processes, organization, and resourcing matters. Likewise, each phase was split into two stages, with the first focusing on external partner-participants and relying extensively upon quantitative and qualitative analysis of the 148 survey respondents. The second stage focused on small group “hot-washes”—one for phase 1 issues and another for phase 2 issues (along with a third to review the draft AAR itself). All assessments employed the key **Takeaways-Issues-Discussion-Recommendations (T-I-D-R) method**, and included not only the CFT but also key members of the lead team for the next forum, specifically Dr. David Oakley, Mr. Mark Raney, and Ms. Molly Quintero.

The process resulted in the following key takeaways, in no particular order of importance.

Takeaway: Maximize data collection efforts during event registration.

Issue:

1. The “vanity” metrics for the social media campaigns are impressive; however, we don’t know/have the data to actually determine the most effective means of driving individuals to: a) register for; and b) subsequently participate in, the forums.
2. Participant interaction/networking is limited due to the virtual nature of the forum.

Discussion: The event registration phase is the best timeframe to obtain more complete data on all registrants versus limiting it to only survey respondents (40% indicated learning about the forum via an email from JSOU). During this time, the individual is initiating contact and wanting something from JSOU, i.e., to sign up for the event; all other times JSOU requests data/input from the individual (e.g., survey feedback), there is no direct benefit to the individual.

Recommendation:

1. Add “How did you hear of the event?” to the registration fields.
2. Add an “Opt in” or “Opt out” button to the registration fields. This can be used to create a forum roster that is shared with participants post-forum to increase opportunities for follow-on interaction and networking.
3. Maintain an ongoing email distribution list from email addresses collected during registration in order to send periodic emails to this group to: a) inform people about additional JSOU offerings, and b) provide information related to strategic competition to reinforce forum learning/experience.

Takeaway: A shorter password will enable easier access by the audience.

Issue: Vimeo password length is unnecessarily long and difficult to cut and paste accurately.

Discussion: Vimeo password length made cut/paste the most desired way to gain access to the forum. However, it appeared that cut/paste was disabled or not functioning properly. As a result, some attendees were required to make numerous attempts to successfully access the virtual event.

Recommendation: Request and use a shorter password.

Takeaway: All registrants should receive a confirmation email.

Issue: Not all registrants—particularly those who used a .mil email address—received a confirmation email after registering.

Discussion: Should we encourage those with a .mil account to sign up with a personal email, or require it? We tell people in the auto reply confirmation that replies sent to .mil accounts oftentimes end up in the Junk mail folder, but it seems to be overlooked based on the number of emails received asking, “Where is my email confirmation?”

Recommendation: We can better communicate that “auto reply confirmation emails” are automatically kicked into junk email on .mil accounts.

Takeaway: People want to know when they can get access to forum videos and related content.

Issue: While it was communicated that the forum videos and content would be made available, specific details relating to when they’d be available and where were not advertised.

Discussion: Many emails were received inquiring as to when the recorded forum sessions would be available and where they could be accessed.

Recommendation: We could better communicate about when and where these will be made available. Specifically stating that JSOU will release the videos via its YouTube and LinkedIn pages should help address this concern.

Takeaway: Chat Box needs to be incorporated with the video feed.

Issue: Chat box was placed under video content and not intuitively merged with video window. Additionally, chat required a second log in.

Discussion: Chat feature was unavailable for first 30 minutes and when it did come up it was nonintuitive how to pull up. Then, it required a second sign-in and although you could decouple from video window, it required a bit of discovery learning.

Recommendation: Chat should be integrated with the forum log-in (single sign on) and be either merged to video window side or overlaid.

Takeaway: Increase engagement leading up to the forum with confirmed registrants via high-quality and informative emails.

Issue: Roughly 40% of survey respondents indicated hearing about the Q3 forum via an email from JSOU, suggesting email is an effective means of engaging with our audience. Currently, registrants only receive two emails from JSOU: 1) confirmation email (a bit boilerplate/underwhelming compared to other JSOU forum material); 2) a resend of the confirmation email the week of the forum.

Discussion: We are missing opportunities to engage with registrants—this group is interested enough to sign up, BUT, what about to show up? Great effort with social media marketing and driving individuals to register; expand this effort to drive registrants to participate. Need to find a balance between email overload and piquing interest.

Recommendation: Stay engaged with registrants leading up to the forum through well-planned and designed emails. Consider 1) automated confirmation email, 2) weekly engagement emails leading up to the forum (using content from social media campaigns), 3) email highlighting read-aheads one week out, 4) “morning of” email as a final reminder (note, several registered nonparticipants selected “forgot” on the forum survey as their reason for not attending).

Takeaway: Access to zoom room for the presenters.

Issue: Problems tracking the presenters once they logged into the Zoom meeting.

Discussion: Once the presenters clicked the link that was provided, they were let into a waiting room that nobody in the production room was able to see or track. The presenters had to be called and then instructed to log in manually via the Zoom page. The presenters that saw this anomaly all said the link took them to a space which said on their screens that they were awaiting to be allowed into the meeting by the host. Of interesting note during the rehearsals this problem didn't arise but for whatever reason during the actual forum this problem was experienced by multiple presenters.

Recommendation: Give the presenters the Zoom log-in and passcode and let them manually log into the Zoom at their appropriate time.

Takeaway: Give better guidance to moderators to improve audience input.

Issue: Some moderators made limited use of audience input leaving people feeling like they were only in receive mode.

Discussion: With a virtual event, getting audience interaction is a difficult and challenging task, but one that must be addressed. Participants want to know that their inputs are being considered and hopefully even utilized.

Recommendation: Moderators need to be given more explicit guidance about utilizing audience inputs and paying attention to the curated questions being sent their way via Zoom. Also, the explicit (and frequent) mentioning of encouraging words to the audience can go a long way.

Takeaway: Have question curator(s) encourage more audience participation.

Issue: There were not a lot of questions asked during some of the panels.

Discussion: With a virtual event, audience input is something that needs to be

deliberately promoted. Sometimes participants are reluctant to ask questions, even though the moderators and panelists are eager to engage with them.

Recommendation: Greater encouragement by the question curator(s). The curator(s) should encourage questions during every panel, reminding the audience that they are an integral part of the forum.

Takeaway: Be prepared for tech failures and breakdowns and be ready to respond quickly.

Issue: During this forum and the previous one, Zoom went down for several minutes.

Discussion: This is now the second forum in a row where Zoom has gone down during the forum. Although the team reacted quickly and effectively—we were back up and running within less than 15 minutes—that time could be cut down and better guidance could be given to the participants.

Recommendation: Having a slide that says we are experiencing technical difficulties at the ready would be helpful and inform participants about what is going on. Also, messaging from the curator(s) to the audience via Vimeo can be prepared in advance and pushed immediately upon any Zoom crash.

Takeaway: Collect feedback from moderators/panelists/speakers via a survey.

Issue: No formal method to follow-up with moderators/panelists/speakers on their experience.

Discussion: Need to continue to refine processes for moderators/panelists/speakers.

Recommendation: Institute a short survey to each forum's moderators/panelists/speakers.

Takeaway: Ensure attendee usage data requirements are communicated and coordinated prior to the event.

Issue: The data provided by DCE Productions does not capture participation time (total time logged in, time on screen, access per hour, or other).

Discussion: The previous forum (March 2021) utilized Livestream to broadcast the event. The platform had robust analytics and reports functions. Livestream was acquired by Vimeo prior to the May 21 forum and was the replacement streaming platform used by DCE Productions. It appears that Vimeo may not have the same types of analytics and report functions that offer a better understanding of user participation and level of engagement.

Recommendation: During the Planning phase, identify the desired data types/categories and request the corresponding reports be delivered at the end of each day the forum is in session.

Takeaway: Need to institute a mechanism to determine if forum content is influencing JSOU curriculum development/improvement.

Issue: There is currently no validation that forum content is being utilized by the professorate in educational settings.

Discussion: One of the primary goals of the forums is to generate new knowledge for the SOF and joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational-commercial enterprises. Currently, there is no mechanism to determine whether or not the new knowledge being generated is finding its way into JSOU courses.

Recommendation: Periodically conduct surveys of the JSOU faculty to determine the perceived utility of the forum content and provide the results to the JSOU leadership.

Takeaway: Rapporteur reports need to be combined and edited before final submission.

Issue: Rapporteur notes were inconsistent in content, quality, and formatting. Having separate reports led to a missed opportunity to fully distill each panel's content and show how the panels interconnected.

Discussion: The way the rapporteur assignments were distributed (one rapporteur observed panels 1–3, another observed panels 4–6, and one observed 7–8) resulted in the inability to offer a complete and holistic picture of the panels and their interconnectedness.

Recommendation: Identify and assign rapporteurs early, educate and train them on the role's requirements and strategies for collecting and distilling content, and require them to collaborate on one quality-checked final submission for inclusion into the after action report and the event Proceedings products.

Key Academic Takeaways — Rapporteur Observations

Over the two-day event, the rapporteurs observed each panel and captured key highlights. Their inputs were framed under the following focus areas: Teaching and Learning (T&L), Research and Analysis (R&A), and Service and Outreach (S&O). Each rapporteur provided recommendations to inform/improve JSOU curriculum. For reference, the forum program is provided as Attachment 1 and the full rapporteur reports are consolidated and available in Attachment 3.

Panel 1: Reconsidering the Strategic Landscape. Rapporteur: Dr. Homer Harkins. Moderator: Dr. Dave Oakley/Panel: Dr. Yuval Weber, Dr. Dave Dudas, Mr. Bob Jones.

Teaching and Learning (T&L). Create learning objectives that address current geopolitics wherever appropriate in current courses and seminars. Emphasize what GPC is and how relevant actors are playing the game. All elements of national power should

be addressed. JSOU interagency education courses can help here.

Inject current strategic thought into courses and seminars, particularly those that come from the USSOCOM J5. JSOU should both leverage and feed this strategic thought.

Research & Analysis (R&A).

- The new strategic landscape
- The value of alliance in the 21st Century
- The role of SOF in GPC
- Cross-spectrum conflict management
- Competitor IW strategies
- Strategic control versus strategic influence

Service Outreach & Engagement (SO&E). We should feed the J5 strategic thought process.

Panel 2: China's Aspirations and Strategy in the Greater Pacific. Rapporteur: Dr. Homer Harkins. Moderator: Dr. Chris Marsh/Panel: Mr. Kelly Hicks, Dr. Andrew Erickson, Brig. Gen. David "Baja" Shoemaker

Teaching and Learning (T&L). Challenge students to think strategically and without bias. This can be done in a variety of ways—gaming, exercises that require imagination and critical thought, required student feedback through learning management system methodologies, etc.

Maximize foreign student attendance in JSOU courses to help learners enhance their multicultural expertise and comfort with other points of view.

Research & Analysis (R&A).

- Chinese strategic perspective
- Chinese force buildup and implications for U.S. SOF
- The use of SOFT power in influence

Service Outreach & Engagement (SO&E). We should work with the Australian-U.S. SOF task force to expand it to other countries (e.g., FVEY plus Japan).

Panel 3: Actors and Aspirations in the INDOPACOM AOR. Rapporteur: Dr. Homer Harkins. Moderator: Dr. Nikolas Gvosdev/Panel: Dr. Elizabeth Wishnick, Mr. DeVan Shannon, CW5 Maurice "Duc" Duclos

Teaching and Learning (T&L). Incorporate learning activities that highlight the SOF role in SOFT power such as relationship building and demonstrated ability to improve partner capability in low intensity conflict and competition.

Inject modern unconventional warfare (UW) case studies in courses or in JSOU-sponsored theoretical wargames which heighten student understanding of the complex inter-player dynamics of modern UW.

Research & Analysis (R&A).

- The risk/return nature of partners
- The common interests of our key competitors
- Competition in a multiplayer, multipolar world/environment
- New strategic landscape
- How to cooperate with our key competitors

Service Outreach & Engagement (SO&E). We should provide periodic region reports that provide a SOF-unique view of important regions that will play a salient role in GPC (e.g., Central Asia or western Pacific) that can be used to inform the Enterprise in general and JSOU learning activities specifically. These products can be used to move learning quickly to the analysis level where critical and creative thinking can occur.

Panel 4: The “Indo” in INDOPACOM. Rapporteur: Mr. Greg Metzgar Moderator: Dr. Robert Tomlinson/Panel: Dr. Anit Mukherjee, Dr. Sumit Ganguly, Dr. Joe Felter

Teaching and Learning (T&L). Explore the impacts of India as a non-aligned actor when working with any element of the special operations forces (SOF) enterprise, especially the SOF maritime and naval components.

Research & Analysis (R&A). There are several areas which could be used to develop SOF research topics, especially with the withdrawal of forces from Afghanistan.

- Impacts of China/Russia in Western Indian Ocean (WIO)
- Pakistan-India terrorist tensions between two nuclear armed powers
- Over-the-horizon military projections

Service Outreach & Engagement (SO&E).

- Proactive engagement with the Joint Staff (JS) J7, especially as the JS, develops/refines their concept for globally integrated operations/planning
- Engagement with INDOPACOM headquarters and staff for targeted JSOU course/SME support
- Partnerships with strategic studies centers at specific universities with pacific studies programs

Panel 5: Surrogate Forces and Proxies in the Indo-Pacific Region. Rapporteur: Mr. Greg Metzgar. Moderator: Dr. Tom Dolan/Panel: Mr. Will Irwin, AMB Harry Thomas, COL (Ret.) Dave Maxwell

Teaching and Learning (T&L). This panel could inform some of the ongoing course work in irregular warfare, sensitive activities, design, and planning.

Research & Analysis (R&A). The JSOU *Resistance Operating Concept* is an important

place to start as the JSOU faculty and interested partners (e.g. INDOPACOM staff and interagency) work to identify national resilience and the “criticality of maintaining legitimacy during the conduct of resistance operations during the struggle to restore and resume national sovereignty” if conflict comes in this AOR.

Service Outreach & Engagement (SO&E). Further develop outreach to the strategists, policymakers, researchers, academics, and practitioners involved in furthering resistance capabilities.

Panel 6: Interests and Linkages Beyond the GCC. Rapporteur: Mr. Greg Metzgar. Moderator: Dr. Rebecca Patterson/Panel: Dr. Evan Ellis, Dr. Marlene Laruelle, Dr. Derek Reveron

Teaching and Learning (T&L). This panel could inform some of the ongoing course work in irregular warfare, sensitive activities, design, and planning, and expanded opportunities to highlight civil affairs and military influence operations.

Research & Analysis (R&A). China and Russia are using a series of indirect methods (e.g. cyber and influence operations). This presents unique opportunities to explore integration of SOF into cyber operations and strategic/operational influence linkages.

Service Outreach & Engagement (SO&E). Facilitate engagement between the SOF enterprise and civilian academic/think tank organizations working to find holistic solutions to address this challenge.

Panel 7: Strategic Culture: Avoiding Mirror Imaging. Rapporteur: Mr. Mark James. Moderator: BG (Ret.) Russ Howard/Panel: Dr. Alastair Iain Johnston, Dr. Andrew Scobell, Dr. Dima Adamsky

Teaching and Learning (T&L). Learning objectives that address past, current, and future strategic environment wherever they exist in current courses in the university. This panel nests in JSOU-Enlisted Academy (EA) CEP 3 strategic threat-based series and the strategic estimate in the JSW capstone.

Research & Analysis (R&A). There are several areas that could be used to develop SOF research topics—China’s strategic culture, Russian strategic culture, and a study on the Gerasimov versus the Primakov doctrine.

Service Outreach & Engagement (SO&E). Continue facilitated engagements between the SOF enterprise, JSOU, and civilian academic and think tank organizations working to address and solve challenges.

Panel 8: Future Force Capability, Capacity, and SOF Core Activities. Rapporteur: Mr. Mark James. Moderator: MCPO (Dr.) Brad Rhineland / Panel: Dr. Dave Ellis, Dr. Lilian “Doc” Alessa, Mr. Charlie Black

Teaching and Learning (T&L). Learning objectives that address past, current, and future strategic environment wherever they exist in current courses in the university. This panel nests in JSOU-Enlisted Academy (EA) CEP 3 strategic threat-based series and the strategic estimate in the JSW capstone.

Research & Analysis (R&A). There are several areas that could be used to develop SOF research topics—China’s strategic culture, Russian strategic culture, and a study on the Gerasimov versus the Primakov doctrine.

Service Outreach & Engagement (SO&E). Continuing facilitated engagements between the SOF enterprise with JSOU specific panels working to address and solve challenges can be of value to other organizations and academia.

Plan of Action & Milestones (POAM)

One deliverable that will be produced from this forum will be a “Proceedings,” consisting of panel videos, rapporteur session summaries, and substantive findings from this AAR. The videos will be posted onto the (Commercial) Microsoft O365 Stream application (which includes transcription option) and onto JSOU’s YouTube and LinkedIn pages. Additionally, the videos, rapporteur reports, and copy of the AAR will be posted at JSOU.us/Events.

The timeline and milestones for these deliverables are as follows:

<i>Deliverable</i>	<i>Draft complete</i>	<i>Final version complete</i>	<i>OPR</i>
Proceedings	14 June 2021	1 July 2021	IS3

Red Team Analysis

- a. Requirement: According to the Memorandum for Record of the JSOU President, dated 6 February 2021, this AAR was “red teamed” (i.e., put through an external critique).
- b. Composition: The red team for this AAR was comprised of the following individuals:
 - Lt. Col. Patrick E. Gruber, SOCNORTH J5/8
 - MAJ (P) Brett M. Butler, Commander’s Action Group, 1st Special Forces Command (Airborne)
 - Dr. Golfo Alexopoulos, Professor and Director of USF Institute on Russia
- c. Findings and Observations: The third Great Power Competition Forum AAR captured many of the essential elements of the 2-day conference. The Red Team agrees that the individual sections are beneficial to anyone—JSOU or SOCOM leadership—who would like to understand the scope of the event and effort that went into it, the areas for improvement, the next steps, and other relevant information. Upon completion of the analysis, there were no further additional areas to include that would further inform the audience; a few aspects of the AAR stood out to the team.

- Regarding Panel 1: The team would recommend including mention of Dr. Weber’s comment, “we must get comfortable with uncertainty.” On a related note, the U.S. will need to understand how to assess—and the timelines that come with assessing—winning (gaining relative influence) or losing (declining relative influence) in GPC.
- Regarding Panel 2: The team would recommend to expand “without bias” to include understanding the pitfalls of viewing the world—allies, competitors, and ourselves—“through a U.S. lens.” Without bias, to the team, falls short of the importance of this.
- The vast majority of those attending were government/military, yet fewer than half of those who registered were able to attend. In addition to the remedies captured in the AAR, JSOU might consider whether the scheduling of the sessions could be adjusted to enable more individuals to attend live.
- A huge percentage of attendees indicated that the GPC forum was beneficial for their work, yet a minority of attendees were repeats—as many as 66 percent were first-time attendees. It is assumed that previous events generated similarly positive feedback. What is keeping people from attending again, despite their overwhelmingly positive impression of previous forums?
- Regarding technology (glitches, difficulties, etc.): It is possible that technical obstacles are inhibiting repeat attendance. JSOU might consider a more user-friendly platform, considering the trade-offs.
- An overwhelming number of participants indicated that the GPC forum was useful for their work. It would be helpful to drill down a bit more to understand exactly why, or in what ways the forum was useful or beneficial. This would enable JSOU to make improvements to future programs that would continue to add value.
- One of the primary goals of the forums is to impact JSOU curriculum development/improvement; the AAR recommended surveys of JSOU faculty would be very helpful. Organizers of the forums might solicit input from faculty regarding specific issues that they are addressing in their classes, so that future panels can be constructed that would serve particular classes and directly impact curriculum development. This kind of bottom-up approach might help faculty enhance their classes to a greater degree.
- As part of the registration, JSOU might consider an “add to calendar” function. In addition to reminder emails, it’s always helpful to be able to add an event to one’s calendar, that includes the relevant links.
- Finally, it is suggested not to worry too much about audience participation and input, because this often does not reflect the value that people derive from an event.

Conclusion

Despite the many issues identified here in this AAR, the 5-6 May 2021 “The Future of SOF in Strategic Competition” forum was—across a wide-range of indicators—an overwhelming success. Survey data shows that nearly all respondents had a positive appreciation of the event and found that it met their expectations or exceeded them (see Attachment 1).

The quarterly GPC forums will combine the strategic insight and experience of senior leaders from our strategic, operational, and tactical SOF formations with the theoretical, analytic, and emerging re-

search perspectives of top scholars from across the DOD and academia. This iteration, with its focus on “The Future of SOF in Strategic Competition” was an overwhelming success. Key topics included discussion panels exploring the nature of strategic competition as being distinct from, as well as similar to, Great Power Competition. Furthermore, the panel on the “Indo” in INDOPACOM generated lively discussion and was one of the most widely mentioned panels in the survey’s comments section. The forum also explored the emerging



JSOU leadership and forum production team

challenges to the current global order to understand better the myriad strategic intents of partner forces and adversaries alike in the age of strategic competition. Lastly, the forum allowed senior leaders, scholars, and stakeholders to consider emerging doctrinal concepts and how they might apply in the INDOPACOM AOR and beyond and hopefully helped them move from a position of thinking-to-know to thinking-to-do in innovative and unique ways.

Attachments

Attachment 1. Forum Program

Attachment 2. Forum Survey Report

Attachment 3. Forum Rapporteur Reports

Attachment 4. Draft Agenda for Next Forum (FY21Q4/September 2021)

