

LEARNING PATHWAYS-IN-ACTION Primer

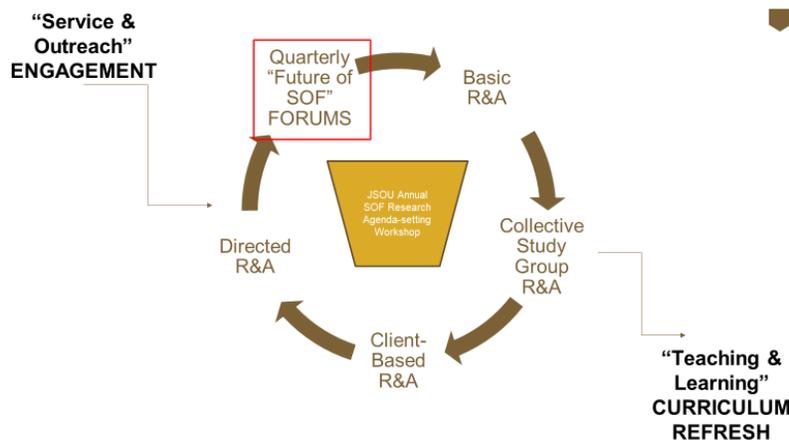
The “WHY” behind the ‘Learning Pathways ‘Initiative

These are times of dramatic, international-security and domestic-political change; a time of ‘power-in-transition’, bringing the real possibility for transformational systems change. Strategic uncertainty is only made more ambiguous by lingering unstable global economic tendencies, trends toward greater illiberal democratic regime changes, and trans-regional conflicts that weaken states and the ‘western-liberal’ international order itself. A comprehensive understanding of the changing character of geopolitical competition and the environment of conflict, first and foremost, *is prerequisite* for true strategic leadership. Anticipatory-outcomes based, strategic foresight-oriented Leader-Operator Education is the key to gaining and securing (retaining) this essential enhanced knowledge and understanding.

Determining what kind of (Joint and Combined) Special Operations Force (SOF) is needed to match and overmatch the challenges and opportunities in this evolving geostrategic environment, through the remaining 2020s and outwards towards (well beyond!) the 2050s, is the ultimate question underpinning the JSOU “NEXT” change leadership efforts; answering this question, for Nation not self, and on behalf of producing the next-generation SOF *H.E.²R.O.TM* Professionals¹ the Nation requires today, and will need tomorrow, is the unique purpose, value proposition, and *raison d’être* of the Joint Special Operations University (JSOU).

Being and becoming more anticipatory and prospective in “all-things” is the new imperative leader attribute if the [intellectual overmatch desired by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff](#) (CJCS) (and all U.S. Joint Service Chiefs have identified as currently lacking across the joint force, and within our joint PME) is to be assured and in ways that produce overmatch solutions to what are ‘compound security threats’ (CSTs) defining a new character of global geopolitical competition best described by, and governed by, a new “compound security dilemma.” Equally imperative is the building-in of a “strategic-mindedness” within the current and future SOF leader-operator, equal and matching to that same operators’ exquisite ‘operational’ acumen – and to find and make new ways and moments of “building this in” earlier, more consistently, and continually throughout the full lifecycle of joint SOF professional officership² development, cradle to ‘SOF4Life’.

At the heart of the JSOU Learning Pathways-in-Action Initiatives is a running collaborative (collective study group-based) research & analysis (R&A)-driven net estimate process.



And grounding and guiding this ‘process’ of thinking-thru-doing applied discovery learning are at least six (6) tenets that are informing and purposing JSOU’s leadership in the effort to assist the SOF Enterprise – *America’s vanguard security affairs problem-solving element of power – rediscover its full use and utility* at the [‘threshold crossing’](#) of a next era of strategic rivalry, and strategic competition ripe with

¹ *H.E.²R.O.TM* stands for, Highly Educated, Hyper-Enabled, Responsible Operators. See JSOU (Next) White Paper #5 (dated, June 2020).

² By SOF “Officership” we refer to “all officers,” commissioned, warrant, and non-commissioned officer development.

potential for great power conflict, and war.

This new character of global geopolitical competition demands a use and utility of SOF equally “compounded;” that is, ... *a comprehensive combination of all the skills, techniques, operational methods, and tradecraft of all past ‘Ages’ of SOF, amplified by 21st century emergent technologies.* As General Richard Clarke, current Commander of U.S. Special Forces Command (USSOCOM; 2019-2022), stated in the lead-up to his congressional confirmation hearings,

In order to confront these challenges, we need an interoperable, healthy, trained, and ready Special Operations Force, to deliver lethal forces and capabilities globally, as well as provide SOF unique capabilities to expand the competitive space with our strategic competitors below the level of armed conflict. ... [W]e must drive transformation of the force and of our organization to improve our lethality, agility, and sustainability in a complex, strategic environment.³

This demands a “Back to Our Futures” philosophy, approach, *and identity* to rediscovering SOF’s full role, purpose, and identity undercarriage to future SOF Leader Development & Education.

Table 1. Six Tenets to SOF’s “Rediscovery”

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. SOF must be prepared for, capable of, and enabled to ... operate across the full cooperation-competition-conflict continuum, and comprehensively so (i.e., in full JIIM-C ways and force packages); 2. National preferences for particular kinds of wars, and Service and SOF Enterprise parochial preferences for certain select “types of war-fare” and utilities of force over others can no longer be permitted to persist and pervade in the determinations of policy, strategy, force modernization, and utility of force decisions. This has far too long fed the paradox within the American (and wider ‘Western’) way of war and peace, producing pyrrhic results in the western-liberal orders’ approaches to securing a relative peace as we can come to know it; approaches that fall far short of the <i>Integrative (whole-of-governments) Statecraft Solutions</i> and Integrated Deterrence solutions intended, to resolve (preferably, through preventive defense, short-of-conflict actions) intersectional threats.⁴ 3. The global security environment of conduct is governed by a compound security dilemma (CSD) – all ways of cooperation, competition, and conflict must be recalibrated accordingly. <i>Preventive Defense, Active Containment, Competitive Engagement, and Deterrence</i> (general and specific) ... all must be relearned, re-contextualized, and understood in light of new CSD conditions 4. CSD now makes unilateral approaches to “all things” a most rare (if ever) solution. CSD now makes alliances and partnered approaches to the utility of force for power purposes less a “choice” and more a non-negotiable imperative. Nothing less than a comprehensive combined-joint, JIIM-based approach to ‘readiness’ will solve. 5. The so-called ‘return’ to ‘Great Power Competition’ (GPC) isn’t. At least not in the ways we have traditionally thought of it. History is illustrative; but only if we revisit it, study it, and listen to the lessons it offers – all past “returns” to GPC have found a renewed and amplified incidence of so-called ‘small wars’ and irregular war-fare. The utility of SOF has always been a regulating “rheostat” of competition and conflict – keeping both as indirect, limited, low-intensity as possible. This has helped ‘preserve the relative peace’ below the threshold of full/total and epochal great power-based conflicts and wars. 6. The utility of SOF must always remain exquisite, proactive, and aimed at solving problems, and in ways that avoid moral injury to the Nation.
--

The “WHAT” and the “HOW” behind the ‘Learning Pathways’ Initiative

JSOU serves the United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), as the Command’s Educational Activity, and as a cognitive force multiplier in support of the Campaign Plan for Global Special Operations. With concurrence from Enterprise Commanders and Command Senior Enlisted Leaders, JSOU has identified five mutually reinforcing Learning Pathways. These pathways illuminate and advance learning in five identified Joint SOF Common Core Knowledge Competency arenas. The meta-frame uniting these pathways is the focused set

³ United States Senate, Armed Services Committee. 04 December 2018. Advance Policy Questions for Lieutenant General Richard D. Clarke, USA Nominee for Commander, United States Special Operations Command.

⁴ See the 2021 U.S. Interim National Security Strategic Guidelines for more details.

of unique capabilities USSOCOM possesses that can be employed to gain Irregular Warfare asymmetric and informational advantages over competitors and adversaries across the entire competition continuum, with special focus on gray zone competitions.⁵

The pathways cover a broad array of knowledge including 21st Century Information Advantage, emergent technology that enables and informs at the Strategic-Operational level, advanced application of Resistance and Resilience theory, Designed-Based Integrative Statecraft, and ethically-sound Leadership and Decision-making concepts and methodologies. The learners who journey along these pathways will serve as Enterprise Future Experts and thought-leaders whose knowledge competencies will benefit current and future joint, interagency, interorganizational, and multinational cross functional efforts across the spectrum of Cooperation-Competition-Conflict and War.

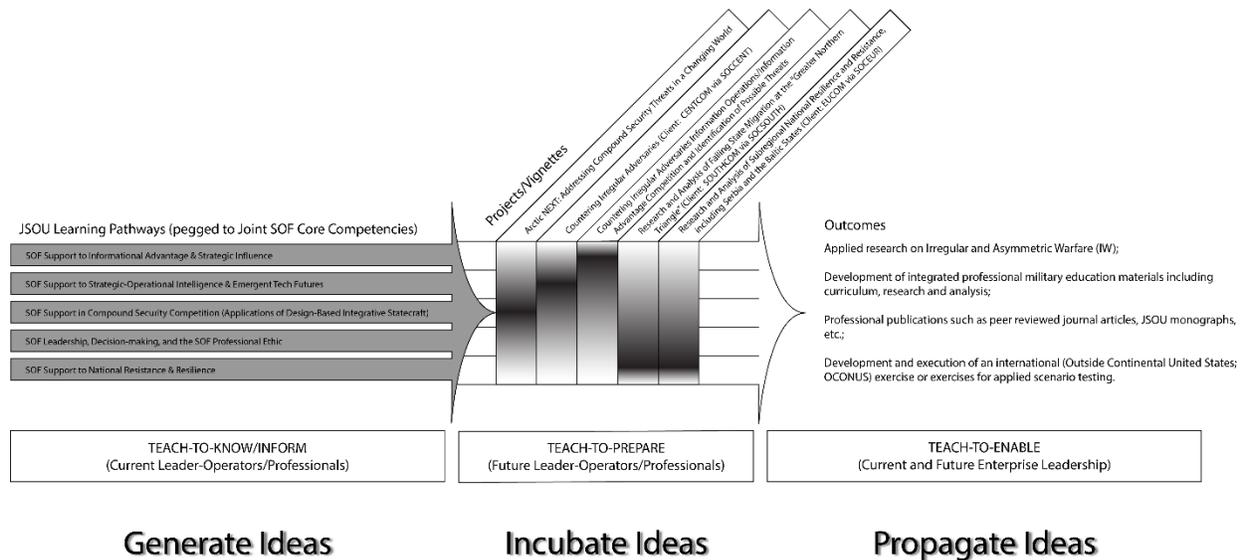


Fig. 1 The JSOU 'Next' Applied Learning Lab Model

The SOF Support to Information Advantage and Strategic Influence Pathway integrates the changes to Joint Publication 1- Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States, that established Information as the seventh joint function. This pathway will help to ensure that SOF professionals are fully capable of the management and application of information and its deliberate integration with other joint functions to influence relevant-actor perceptions, behavior, action or inaction, and human and automated decision making.

The Information Advantage and Strategic Influence learning pathway will help SOF build information into operational art to design operations that deliberately leverage information and the information aspects of SOF activities to achieve enduring strategic outcomes. To compete in the information environment, SOF must understand the Joint Concept for Operations in the Information Environment (JCOIE), which aims to institutionalize and operationalize the Joint Force's approach to information. This update requires SOF to understand information, the informational aspects of military activities, and informational power. (JCOIE, vii)

The Information Advantage and Strategic Influence Pathway will incorporate how SOF utilizes information and provides critical capabilities to the Department of Defense in the Information Related Capabilities. This Pathway also is inherently Joint, Interagency, Intergovernmental, Multinational, and Commercial (JIIM-C) in

⁵ See 2018 U.S. National Defense Strategy (NDS) and its 2019 Irregular Warfare (IW) Annex for more details.

that the information environment is not confined to just the Department of Defense. As such, this pathway provides opportunities to learn, study and discover across the JIIM-C information landscape.

The SOF Support to Strategic-Operational Intelligence and Emergent Tech Futures Pathway: Per the 2018 National Defense Strategy, U.S. national security will likely be affected by “rapid technological advancements and the changing character of war.” While the United States remains the international pace setter in developing advanced technologies and integrating them into military operations, the U.S. strategic competitors, namely China and Russia, are making strides to erode the competitive advantage the U.S. has long enjoyed. Driven by the explosion in internet connected devices, the knowledge that was once the exclusive purview of a select few is now available to almost anyone. As a result, second and third tier adversaries have developed and/or adopted many of the same technologies the U.S. military and intelligence community have used against America’s adversaries. This leveling means the U.S. government, and in particular SOF, cannot rely only upon technological overmatch to compete against our adversaries.

Given that America’s adversaries will increasingly use their technological expertise to reduce America’s relative advantages, it is crucial that SOF professionals appreciate how this “new normal” influences the compound security environment, while simultaneously identifying ways to exploit technology, intelligence, and related partnerships across the Cooperation-Competition-Conflict-War spectrum. Therefore, the purpose of this pathway is to link emerging technology with strategic and operational intelligence, meaning how they interrelate and impact one another and impact SOF leader-operator decision-making and risk management, within the scope of SOF’s global mission set. This pathway seeks to provide SOF professionals the intelligence/emergent technology education necessary to become thought leaders and attain H.E.² R.O.TM status.

SOF Leadership, Decision-Making, and the SOF Professional Ethic Pathway: As SOF remains perpetually engaged in global operations supporting strategic competition, SOF professionals must develop and sustain the ability to engage in strengthening partner resiliency as part of strategic irregular and unconventional warfare operations. And to do so, for others (i.e., allies and partners), SOF must first and always reconsider the moral-ethical factors and aspects of its own identity. This requires that SOF formations understand leadership and ethical decision-making in the context of unfamiliar and highly complex combat environments involving indigenous and irregular paramilitary partner forces who often lack any formal military training. The leadership challenges that SOF operators face involve the need to understand cross-cultural and relational leadership styles within complex adaptive systems and networks in conditions when SOF teams are alone, outnumbered, and completely reliant on their partner force for survival.

The leadership skills necessary for engaging in SOF-specific *partner force leadership* are characteristic of the SOF Profession, yet they build on the foundation of the quality military leadership training and experiences that service members receive before joining SOF. In conjunction with executing military operations in unconventional, irregular, counterinsurgency warfare and gray zone environments, the SOF Professional must also understand how to lead in a complex network of actors that includes their irregular partner forces, affiliated partner and foreign military formations, local government officials, local civilian populations, other friendly military presences, and potential adversaries that evolve at the micro-level in developing countries and in tribal societies. Knowing doctrine, speaking a foreign language, and having cultural awareness are necessary skills, but understanding *partner force leadership* is the critical educational tool that remains distinct and peculiar to the SOF Profession. This pathway provides the necessary leadership and ethical decision-making education for preparing SOF leaders at all levels to thrive in highly complex *partner force leadership* environments.

The SOF Support to National Resistance and Resilience Pathway: Adversarial positional advantage and privileged access are gray zone activities neutralizing American influence by setting political conditions

conducive to the emergence or maintenance of pro-governments, through a wide range of non-lethal and low-cost ‘disruptors’ playbook’ methods, including influence operations, information operations, manipulation of traditional and social media, economic coercion, covert support of domestic protest movements, cyber operations, and other tools of political warfare.

While the United States cannot and should never envy such subversive approaches that seek to undermine the rules-based international order, much less attempt to replicate them, we can instead orient our efforts on positive aims that reinforce our democratic values and the ideas that underpin our conceptions of political sovereignty and territorial integrity, the very cornerstones of the international system we seek to strengthen in our strategic competition with China and Russia as disruptor states, and other malign actors.

SOF does this by helping allies and partners in their efforts to build national resilience and resistance against predatory subversive ‘gray zone’ threats, and by helping to shape a mutually beneficial security environment through our foreign assistance and security cooperation programs. As far back as its origins in World War II, *support of National Resistance and Resilience Operations* has long been a core competency of Special Operations; cornerstone to SOF’s use and utility as an early indications and warning, strong-pointing, and ‘rheostat’ capability for Nation.

As U.S. strategic competitors with expansionist aspirations threaten or attack and occupy the sovereign territory of U.S. partners, SOF can be called upon to conduct operations aimed at strengthening partner resilience and enabling the development and execution of effective resistance. To fulfill its unconventional warfare (UW and FID) role in strategic competition, SOF must develop and employ optimum special warfare skills to help build partner capacity in resisting and countering subversion and armed aggression by authoritarian states. When U.S. interests are at stake, the United States might choose to support either foreign armed resistance or nonviolent civil resistance, or some blending of the two. Such “irregular” operations will likely be carried out in denied or contested environments and require support from the Services and collaboration with joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational partners.

SOF professionals should proactively consider and debate UW approaches designed for the contemporary security environment. As expansionist authoritarian powers threaten U.S. partners who resolve to push back against subversion and aggression, SOF must be prepared to support partner resilience initiatives and, in the event of armed aggression, transitioning from support to resilience to support to resistance operations. Preparation for such operations will benefit from an understanding of the counterinsurgency doctrine and practices of our strategic competitors. This pathway seeks to challenge learners and researchers to explore bold and innovative approaches to UW, improving existing capabilities or benefitting from new approaches. Future pathway developments might address challenges such as adversary’s rapidly improving anti-access area denial capabilities and the need to conduct some UW activities remotely. This pathway seeks to inform senior leaders and prepare SOF professionals to convincingly advocate a UW course of action to senior leaders and decision makers when such opportunities arise.

The SOF Support in Compound Security Competition Pathway focuses on “applications of Design-based Integrative Statecraft” approaches to gaining better understandings of, and designing and testing practical solutions to, today’s *intersectionality of threats* best understood as compound security threats (CSTs), produced by a new aspect of [the classic security dilemma](#), theorized as the Compound Security Dilemma (CSD).

Today’s tumultuous global security environment is one that can perhaps be best characterized, in summary, as *converging, trans-regional compound security dilemmas*⁴, and a *growing pathological weakening of nation-states*... and as some now argue, even worse, a weakening of the western-liberal international system itself. The need to reorient the SOF enterprise for this coming “4th Age” is motivated by the unique challenges posed

by a major feature of the strategic and operational environment – a change in the character of global geopolitical competition – a new compound security dilemma (CSD).

What makes this ‘CSD’-driven global security environment so uniquely ‘dangerous’ is *the nature of the threats*, which have all “compounded” largely due to the inability to address the “root causes” and underlying conditions (“currents”) that fuel what the paper describes as Compound Security Threats (CSTs) which are incredibly complex and multi-dimensional, trans-“everything,” and temporally dynamic. This change reflects a major and ongoing *shift* from a ‘balance of power’ environment of geopolitical competition to one of greater instability and unpredictability; in essence, a return to pre-World War I *geo-mercantilism* rife with [“beggar-thy-neighbor”](#) competitive behaviors that encourage *go-it-alone* and *do-it-your-own-way* attitudes and approaches to solving security dilemmas within one’s individually perceived spheres of influence.

This environment also results in a growing tendency for coalition member states to drift toward “self-help” solutions to their own individual security dilemmas. Doing so worsens tendencies to fail to see and approach what are collective security problems as such, and to address them in collective ways, making forming and norming coalitions for collective security and defense—all the more difficult while also making the formation of such coalitions all the more essential. Compound threats demand nothing less than compound solutions to achieve lasting and durable compound wins. In the continued absence of an overall, overarching governing strategy, the risk remains that ‘tactical’ discrete, sequential approaches to problems could worsen this ‘new compound security dilemma’, and lead to an unintended wider conflict.

These new compound threats are hard if not impossible to “contain” and especially so by traditional means. They are transnational and transregional, with the potential for metastasizing into big compound “contagion wars” with potential for big global-wide disruptions. The challenges of the Arctic, and rising strategic and operational competition therein, are a perfect contemporary examples of the boundaries-spanning aspects of the compound security threats (CSTs) phenomenon and of compound security dilemma as both a theory-of-next and as a methodological pathway towards the design and implementation of integrative competitive statecraft solutions.

As part of the development of this Learning Pathway, JSOU will address SOF support to the 2019 Arctic Strategy. As an emerging space where strategic competition, compound security threats and irregular/asymmetric warfare converge, the Arctic is a region where U.S. supremacy could be challenged by adversaries through complicated and complex physical, economic, and social means. Climate and environmental changes in the Arctic have disproportionate effects on DOD’s global ability to operate, engage, and deploy. But strategic advantages that can be utilized by the United States to maintain global position will also arise. The Arctic is an exceptional laboratory environment to study complex interactions in a dynamic setting.

Therefore, JSOU’s Arctic NEXT pathway program explores, tests, and seeks to address Compound Security Threats (CST) including aspects of irregular warfare, emerging technologies, and challenges to the rules-based international order. The dynamics of CST will be balanced through diverse analyses of the role of the Arctic in a global power system. These strategic ways will inform SOF as it supports DOD efforts in the Arctic and affected regions. Students will become arctic-competent and capable of supporting design and campaigning that achieves strategic effects in the Arctic. Students will be able to frame the Arctic in relate to CST and IW dynamics globally. **Arctic NEXT** is a large-scale effort that integrates PME, research & analysis (R&A) and emerging SOF-peculiar technological requirements through strong partnerships and collaborations. It also ensures that US needs are clearly served, SOF advanced technology requirements are met and next-generation, adaptive training to the SOF Professional is delivered. **Project Niflheim** is the R&A, science & technology portion of Arctic NEXT and leverages work conducted since 2013 across the JIIM-C.

Arctic NEXT is working with the NATO Climate Security Arctic Working Group, through the Multinational Capability Development Campaign (MCDC2), Joint Staff J7 in coordination with JS J5 as well as Service components and the Office of the Undersecretary of Defense (OUSD) Research and Engineering (R&E), MINERVA program, the Advanced Research Laboratory for Intelligence and Security (ARLIS), the University of Maryland’s Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) program, [and others](#).

The Arctic NEXT Pathway enables SOF professionals to assess Arctic security using state of the art science, practice, tradecraft and art. Core topics focus on systems science, adaptation and the resilience of SOF-peculiar capabilities and the ability to influence, inform and assist partner missions toward the same across the Cooperation-Competition-Conflict spectrum.

These five (5) Learning Pathways-in-Action (LPiA) – as individual R&A-driven LPs, as well as in combination – will produce a number of essential outcomes crossing the areas of Research, Curricula Development (New Builds and Refit), Knowledge & Tradecraft (applied products), and Partnerships.



UNCLASSIFIED



Learning Pathways

The Joint Special Operations University has created new learning pathways, directly linked to, and supporting, Special Operations Forces core competencies. The pathways are realized via a series of programs (or “vignettes”) selected to meet COCOM client priorities, supporting research and analysis, curriculum improvement, tangible products, and enhanced partnerships across the Joint, Interagency, Intragovernmental, and Multination enterprise.



Research: Applied research on Irregular and Asymmetric Warfare (IW), integrated social sciences and complex adaptive systems for models to improve operations planning.



Curriculum: Enhancement of materials for the military professional to include using research and analysis, stakeholder engagement, critical thinking, and advanced communication tools in education.



Products: Peer-reviewed publications, the NEXT Navigator—an integrated research, teaching and decision-support tool for SOF Leaders-Operators to work and conduct experimentation across DOD and USG partners, monographs and war games/adaptive exercises and applied scenario testing.



Partnerships: A Joint, Interagency, Intragovernmental and Multination and Services scenario-building process to build and enhance trust relationships across key SOF partners, stakeholders, and allies.

Fig. 2 Learning Pathways Outcomes-Based “Deliverables”

While each and all (combined) of the outcomes-based products generated by and through the LPiA Initiatives are important, primary to our JSOU purposes – as SOF’s University and Center for Joint SOF Thinking – is the refreshment to and enhancements of joint-combined (JIIM-C, Integrated Statecraft-enhancing) applied SOF curricula and knowledge. Enhancement of our SOF Teaching & Learning (T&L) stable of applied learning experiences, courseware, and training plans-of-instruction (POIs) is the core, fundamental purpose of the LPiA Initiative.

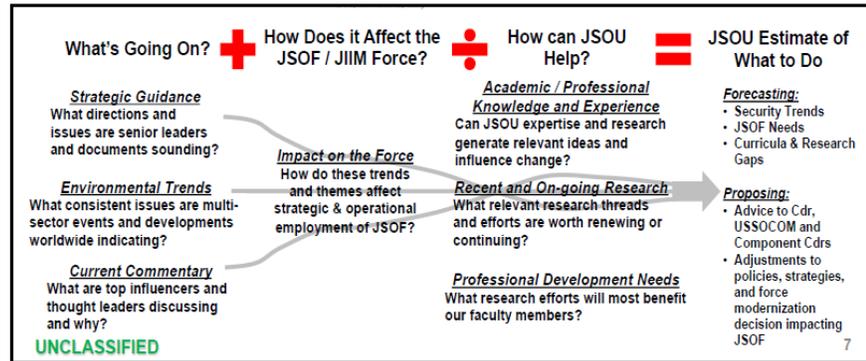
Table 2. The Seven Steps in Learning Pathway, re: Curriculum Development

1. A grouping of learning activities designed to produce learning outcomes that can be demonstrated, assessed, and certified
2. Develop knowledge competency in a specified arena of learning.
3. Approximately 300 contact hours of instruction culminating in certification
4. Challenge designers and developers to think critically about the unique role of SOF in that arena
5. Challenge learners to think creatively about the practical application of this knowledge in future SOF activities, programs, and operations along the ‘continuum’ of Cooperation-Competition-Conflict (SO/LIC3), and War in Joint, Interagency, Intergovernmental, Multinational, and Commercial collaboration (JIIM-C)
6. Employ a broad variety of instructional methodology that allows maximum learner flexibility in a modular format (e.g., seminar, asynchronous computer-based learning, seminars, wargames, research, traditional legacy and new courses)
7. Connected to other pathways through an overarching theme: Shaping SOF unique capabilities to expand the competitive space along the ‘continuum’ of Cooperation-Competition-Conflict (SO/LIC3) through integrated campaigning

As JSOU, we see four (4) enduring strategic-operational knowledge lines of inquiry: *The changing strategic environment, the changing character of war and security, America's changing world role, and Towards a more effective utility of SOF.* And from these four broad lines of knowledge, derive the following major compound security issue areas, and companion question sets, that a Fourth Age SOF curricula and training POI must be pegged against in the face of compound security.

Human security vs. National security.

“Human security is an approach to assist Member States in identifying and addressing widespread and cross-cutting challenges to the survival, livelihood and dignity of their people...It calls for people-centered, comprehensive, context-specific and prevention-oriented responses that strengthen the protection and empowerment of all people.” More directly, human security “refers to the security of people and communities, as opposed to the security of states.” If society shifts away from national identities to various supra-identities along socio-economic and other needs, what implications does this have for US security and SOF’s purpose? Conversely, how does the rise of strident nationalism in some areas affect the global security environment and global SOF?



“Human security “refers to the security of people and communities, as opposed to the security of states.” If society shifts away from national identities to various supra-identities along socio-economic and other needs, what implications does this have for US security and SOF’s purpose? Conversely, how does the rise of strident nationalism in some areas affect the global security environment and global SOF?

Technological development. Developments today in robotics, AI, quantum computing, and a wide variety of other areas may lead to astounding new capabilities that radically change human life and how humans interact with technology. As technological innovation and proliferation continues to accelerate rapidly, how can SOF adapt itself to better leverage technology for its own use and better prepare for its use by adversaries?

Revisiting “competition.” What are the new modes of competition already seen today as well as ones that our adversaries are likely to initiate? How can the US shift from reacting to these and instead become more opportunistic? What are the limits of what SOF can do and what help it must seek from others?

Revisiting Deterrence and SOF's role. Since the ending of the Cold War (early 1990s) there has been a precipitous decline in practical experience with, and knowledge of, the theories, history, and practice of Deterrence – simply defined as, *the action of discouraging an action or event through instilling doubt or fear of the consequences.*¹⁵ *If the change in the character of global geopolitical competition does in fact find, among many factors and variables, a return to a new 21st century form – forms – of major/'great' power competition, then, the recovery of our understandings of deterrence (and its relationship with compellence theory and praxis), and its differing types, including recognizing several important complexities of deterrence, including distinctions between specific and general deterrence, absolute and restrictive deterrence, and actual and perceived punishments¹⁶ is of vital importance. How does the utility of SOF need to be re-understood, reconceived, and recalibrated as a more effective instrument of strategic-operational escalation/de-escalation management? This issue and the questions it raises is perhaps the most important (re)defining factor of SOF utility and purpose, and relevancy, in the 21st century 'Fourth Age.'*

Future value of alliances. *If the US continues to diminish its support for and its valuation of alliances, what would SOF look like without such alliances?*

SOF's role in civil conflict. *Given an apparent rise in the need for conflict zone governance / building partner capacity, transnational groups and networks, and endemic corruption, abroad and domestically, what can SOF do to defend the peace for the United States and its allies?*

Redefining "Information Operations." *After decades of being "out-hustled" and "out-messaged" by far more agile adversaries and their disinformation campaigns, the US needs to level, rethink, and then rebuild its approach and methods to messaging so we can fight and win "the battle of the narrative."*

Rethinking SOF Readiness. *Is SOF's current readiness model appropriately balanced for the changed and changing character of global geopolitical, geoeconomics, and geostrategic competition? Recognizing that SOF can't be everywhere in every possible type of contingency at all times, nor the expert in all-things, SOF needs a better, and more comprehensive idea of and approach to 'readiness' for the Fourth Age – **comprehensive combined-joint SOF readiness.***

The "WHO" behind Our 'Learning Pathways'

Put most simply, the "Who" behind the LPiAs is "us." And the "us" begins with subject-matter experts (SMEs) from the JSOU Professorate, as the "core group" of what are intended to be(come) extensive and extended (expansive) cross-functional teams (CFTs) that, first define, and then lead the client-focused and sponsored multi-month/year R&A "scholarship-w/-impacts" projects that develop the foundations, advanced, and 'sensitive activities' levels of refitted known knowledge, new knowledge, core and elective SOF curricula, in the forms of lessons plans, modules, portfolios that – ultimately – form Joint-Combined (JIIM-C context) SOF Common Core Competency knowledge arena Pathways of Learning.

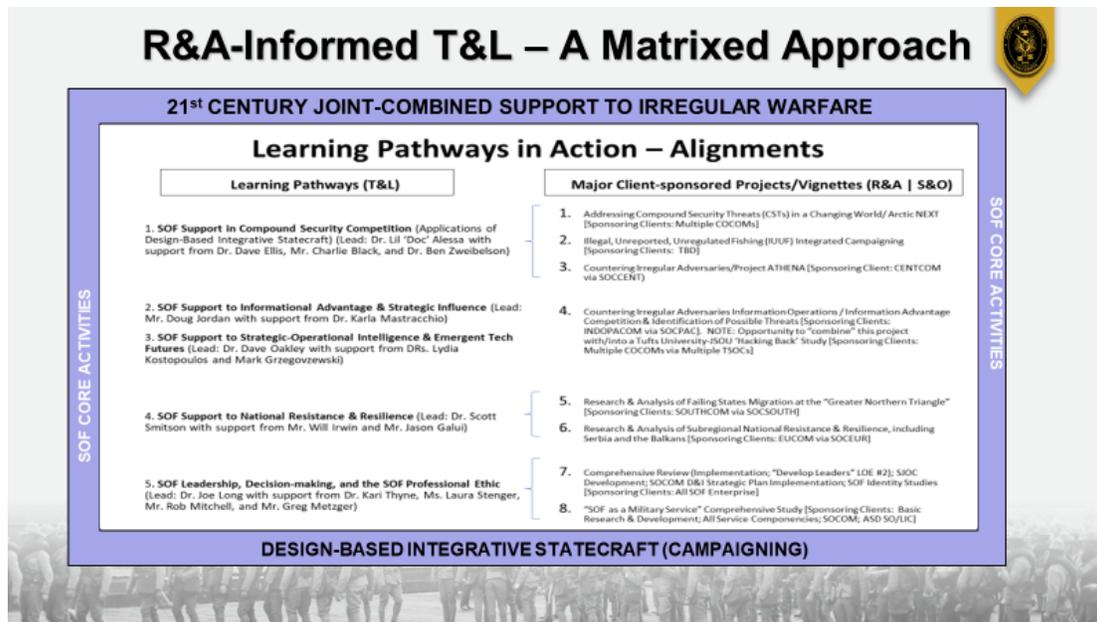


Fig. 3 Matrixing SOF Applied Learning

The JSOU (NEXT) "Learning Pathways in Action *align and rationalize* ("integrate") the three Lines of Effort of teaching & learning (T&L), research & analysis (R&A) and service & outreach (S&O), that defines JSOU's core corporate university, polytechnic-like uniqueness as a JPME-"like" educational activity. Each LPiA:

- Represents and builds upon one of five (5) JSOU-discovered "Joint SOF Common Core Competency" knowledge arenas, implying a non-discretionary (mandatory) knowledge arena that "all SOF leader-operators" must know, be, and do, to achieve mastery level thinking-doer skills, attributes, and experience defining of the next-generation, 4th Age SOF H.E.²R.O.TM. JSOU's decision and ability (as a JPME educational activity with a mission-writ to be a laboratory of curricular and pedagogical/andragogical experimentation and innovation) to "go modular" in the creation of applied learning experiences and courseware design, and to "go hybrid" in education delivery will prove transformational in improving the strategic-mindedness of the SOF leader-operator Professional, and in strengthening the Force & Family through comprehensive SOF Education readiness. **(T&L)**
- Relates to, builds upon, and leads, "drives," and purposes the generation of new T&L knowledge, curricula, and training POI, at least one (1) major "puzzle" (CST-related challenge and/or opportunity) that is a top priority for at least one (1) TSOC, representing a priority operation, action, and activity (OAA) of a USG geographic combatant command and the regional and country-team diplomatic and development mission imperatives residing therein. **(R&A)**
- Through the collective (study group-based) R&A works of the CFTs, subject-relevant existing relationships – individual SME and Institutional SME; networked – are constantly, dynamically assessed; the exploration and development of new relationships are foresighted and forecasted. **(S&O)**

Thus, irregular warfare as the dominant method of GPC/strategic rivalry requires adept and well-educated forces with 'specialized' knowledge and capabilities to position the Nation effectively for strategic-operational escalation ladder management, by shaping SOF's intellectual, organizational, and institutional models. SOF will therefore need to build expert knowledge across five (5) interdependent, learning pathways for illuminating and advancing Joint SOF Common Core Knowledge Competency arenas. The meta-frame uniting these pathways is the focused set of unique capabilities USSOCOM possesses that can be employed to gain irregular warfare asymmetric and informational advantages over competitors and adversaries across the entire Cooperation-Competition-Conflict continuum. The pathways cover a broad array of knowledge including 21st

Century Information Advantage, emergent technology that enables and informs at the Strategic-Operational level, advanced application of Resistance and Resilience theory, Designed-Based Integrative Statecraft, and ethically-sound Leadership and Decision-making concepts and methodologies. The learners who journey along these pathways will serve as Enterprise Future Experts and thought-leaders whose knowledge competencies will benefit current and future joint, interagency, interorganizational, and multinational cross functional efforts across the spectrum of Cooperation-Competition-Conflict and War continuum.

Conclusion: *Epilogue is Prologue*

Ultimately, the purpose of the JSOU Learning Pathways-in-Action (LPiA) Initiative is to improve USSOCOM's (and DoD's, more broadly) urgent requirement to adapt to rapidly changing operating environments. To do so, it is critical that both the social sciences and biophysical sciences be more effectively leveraged. USSOCOM operates in both areas as well as effectively integrating them. To meet this urgent need, JSOU has developed these five Coordinated Pathways focused on research, education, and capabilities. Each 'Pathway' will also be key to enhancing both MINERVA and OUSD R&E related and relevant efforts.

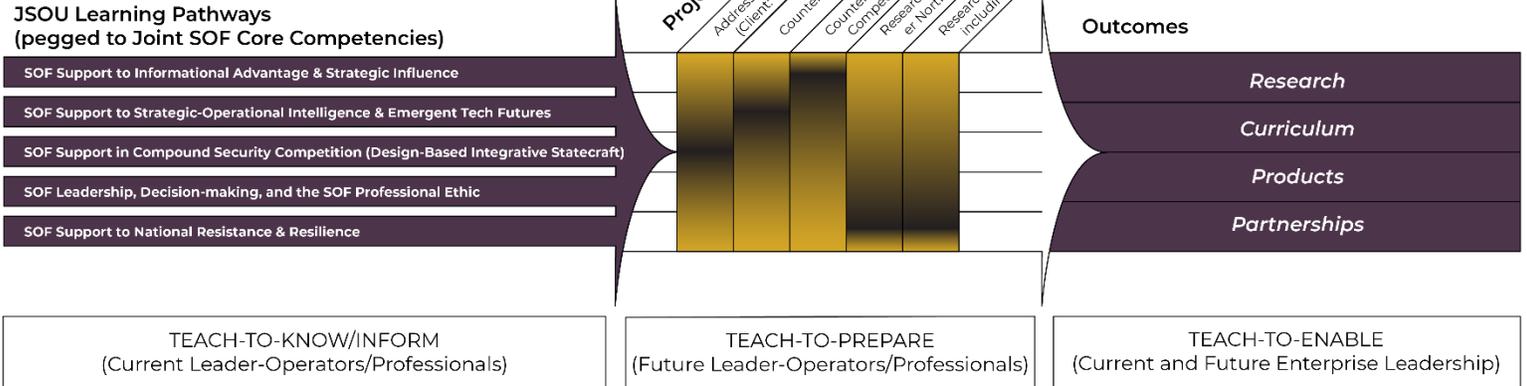
It bears repeating: The "compound security" character of the global security environment is such that it demands a utility of SOF that is equally 'compounded'; that is, ***a comprehensive combination of all the skills, techniques/technics, and operational methods of all three preceding "Ages," amplified by 21st century technological advancements.*** To drive and inspire such transformations, we need strategically-minded leaders who are also masters in the art, science, and craft of operations, who can bring to the moment strategic vision, tailored recommendations, discrete analysis, and fully developed concepts.

As the Joint Force focuses on "All" Domain Operations (ADO), JSOU (NEXT) must provide the Commander, USSOCOM with the intellectual energy and foresight to look at ADO's complement in the JSOF domain, in order to lead efforts to "*innovate within the model*" of SOF's traditional roles and missions-sets in ways that 'enlarge the context' as well as the impact of SOF's core expertise in direct action and strategic raiding. SOCOM has been at the forefront of global campaign planning and true global SOF integration; however, in what some are now calling a "post-ISIS" (or, at least, a "beyond"-ISIS) context, where does CJSOF go from here? Or rather how does CJSOF adapt from here? Exploring and charting CJSOF's role in an expected return to major power competition is now an imperative.

THE JSOU MISSION

To prepare SOF Professionals to address strategic and operational challenges, arming them with the ability to think through problems with knowledge, insight, and foresight.

JSOU Learning Pathways in Action



Generate Ideas

Incubate Ideas

Implement Ideas

* AFRICOM/SOCAC is anticipated as a future effort encompassing all JSOU Learning Pathways in equal focus, estimated to begin within 12-18 months.

The Joint Special Operations University has created new learning pathways, directly linked to, and supporting, Joint Special Operations Forces core competencies. The pathways are realized via a series of programs (or "vignettes") selected to meet COCOM client priorities, supporting research and analysis, curriculum improvement, tangible products, and enhanced partnerships across the Joint, Interagency, Intragovernmental, Multination and Commercial enterprise.



Research: Applied research on Irregular and Asymmetric Warfare, integrated sciences and complex adaptive systems for models to improve operations planning.



Curriculum: Develop modular materials for the military professional to include using research and analysis, stakeholder engagement, critical thinking, and advanced communication tools in education.



Products: Peer-reviewed publications, the NEXT Navigator—an integrated research, teaching and decision-support tool for SOF Leaders-Operators to work and conduct experimentation across DOD and USG partners, monographs and war games/adaptive exercises and applied scenario testing.



Partnerships: A Joint, Interagency, Intragovernmental, Multination and Commercial and Services scenario-building process to build and enhance trust relationships across key SOF partners, stakeholders, and allies.



Sharpening the Edge of SOF's Advantage: the Next-Generation SOF Professional."

Resourcing Support and Enablers Learning Pathways-in-Action Initiative (LPI)

Over the past year, JSOU Leadership has been working to secure funding to support Leader Development and Education Efforts based on the JNEXT Vision, consistent with the overarching JNEXT Plan of Action and Milestones, with various external organizations including Office of Secretary of Defense (Research and Engineering (OSD(R&E))), University of Maryland's University Applied Research Center: Applied Research Lab for Intelligence and Security (ARLIS)¹ and the Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START)². Additional partnerships are actively being discussed and may prove to be viable funding sources in the future, only the funds received via a Congressional add to OSD R&E (\$5M for OSD R&E in Basic Research Funds) and JSOU via Special Operations Technology and Development (SOTD) line (\$7M in Applied Research Funds) in the 2021 NDAA are applicable to JSOU support at this point in time.

The \$12M was received in 2021 to support OSD R&E and the JSOU LPI, OSD R&E has also committed to providing support from other programs including support from the MINERVA³ Research Initiative program. As of May 2021, additional proposals are being discussed to provide JSOU and OSD R&E continued financial support specific to START, however, no legislation or approved funding line has been officially secured. In addition, there are other Centers of Excellence with Federal funding that have expressed interest in supporting JSOU and the LPI initiatives as described. With JSOU's success in moving forward and meeting the expectations laid out in the JSOU President Guidance dated 26 May 2021, additional support and funds over FY22-27 are anticipated.

A brief description of the ***funds from the FY21 NDAA for START*** is as follows:

OSD R&E Proposed Spend Plan for Basic Research START Initiative (\$5M add)

- **Support data sets** managed, maintained, and acquired by START, including the Global Terrorism Database
- Use remaining funds to **develop 6.1 research projects** on emerging stability dynamics utilizing the START consortium of researchers with DoD providing topics developed in collaboration with START and SOF/IW educational community

Special Operations S&T via Joint Special Operations University (JSOU) partnership

- JSOU received similar funds (\$7M add; PE 1160401BB) to support START and IW centers of excellence
- Accordingly, \$6M will support efforts with START with \$1M reserved for JSOU academic expertise and ancillary costs necessary to execute the applied research efforts
- Intention is to partner in managing investment in IW research to include (approximately \$6M):
 - **Applied Research** on Irregular and Asymmetric Warfare
 - Utilizing **START as a hub** connecting with other relevant centers and consortia, including the Applied Research Lab for Intelligence and Security (a DoD-UARC at UMD) and other academic centers of excellence relevant to IW/SOF topics of interest

¹ [HOME | UMD ARLIS Website](#)

² [About START | START.umd.edu](#)

³ [Home \(defense.gov\)](#)

- Develop **international integrative statecraft (“3-Ds”)** applied scenario testing to understand multinational and interagency challenges to IW/SOF scenarios
- Integrate insights, products, and outcomes into **IW/SOF Joint (JIIM-C) Professional Military Education** educational activities (T&L; R&A; Service & Outreach), partner networks, research, and support to training programs of instruction (POIs)

Funds execution and contract will combine funds from both OSD R&E and SOTD JSOU into one delivery order through the ARLIS – reserving funds required to enable the LPs to apply research to primary Major Client-sponsored Projects or ‘Vignettes’ that may require research in a classified environment to produce key deliverables based on the intended outcomes. However, to get the full value and benefit of working in a “JIIM-C approach” (including understanding challenges, creating trusted “SOF” networks, and gaining additional support from non-standard organizations) efforts will be executed at the unclassified level to the greatest extent possible. ONLY BY EXCEPTION should the classification level of conversation exceed the Unclassified levels.

Lastly, other than hiring specific experts to support the LPs, the funds are not intended to provide ‘manpower augmentation’ as the funds are SPECIFIC to applied research efforts as laid out by the LP Leads and detailed in the challenge statement(s), anticipated key and supporting stakeholders, intended outcomes, key deliverables and schedules based on the JSOU President’s Guidance and articulated expectations. This is tantamount to being able to continue to receive funding over a sustained period.