



WHITE PAPER #1



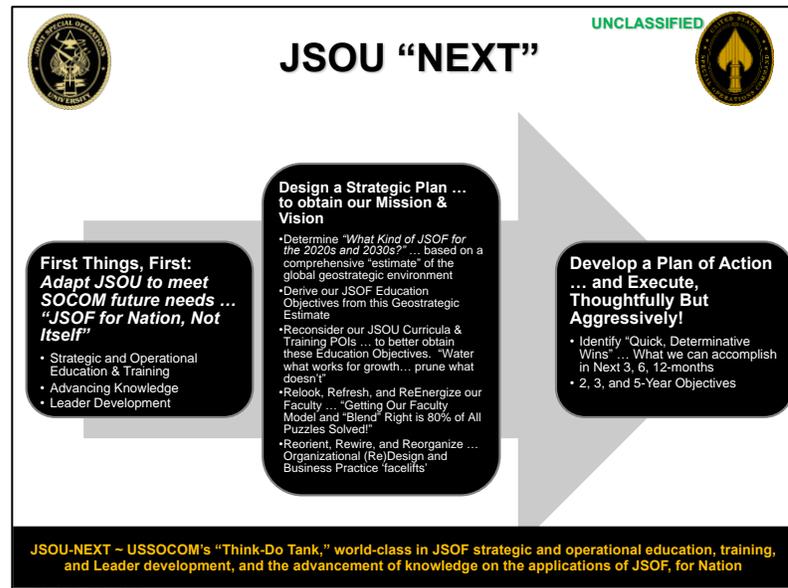
“Sharpening the Edge of SOF’s Advantage” *Towards an Adapted Vision and Plan of Action for JSOU “NEXT”*

The Future Challenges, and Opportunities, for The Joint Special Operations Profession

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 global economic recessionary tendencies and trans-regional conflicts that weaken states and the 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. Education is the key to this knowledge and understanding.

With this in mind, as the next President of Joint Special Operations University (JSOU)— serving as the Command’s and Commander’s senior leader and principal advisor in the academic arena – our “roadmap” for JSOU “NEXT” begins with (and will always build upon) *a comprehensive estimate of the changing character of geostrategic competition and implications for US national and global interests, roles and responsibilities.*

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 for the 2020s and 2030s* is the penultimate question the JSOU “NEXT” Strategic Plan must answer. This question drives a running comprehensive “estimate” of the global geostrategic environment (+COMSOCOM Intent) from which we will derive our combined-joint SOF Education Objectives. These Objectives must produce – in broad stroke and by way of JSOU’s approach to strategic & operational education and training, advancement of knowledge, and leader development – the following Outcomes enabling Future SOF Leader-Operators to:



1. Understand the security environment and the contributions of all instruments of power;
2. Anticipate and respond to surprise and uncertainty;
3. Anticipate and recognize change and lead transitions;
4. Operate on Intent through trust, empowerment, and understanding;
5. Make ethical decisions based on the shared values of the profession of arms;
6. Think critically and strategically in applying joint special operations forces warfighting principles and concepts to joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational (JIIM) operations.

As these Learning Outcomes define the JSOU Mission, we must *review, renew, reorient and reenergize* the “critical capability” that powers JSOU – *the JSOU Faculty*; a faculty that must be a balanced mix of academic professors and professors of practice (Title 10; GS/T5; in-resident; adjunct/affiliative/remote). Our faculty will lead a “Needs-based” reconsideration of the JSOU Curricula and all Training POIs.

Our JSOU “NEXT” Roadmap includes a plan to reorient, redirect, and where appropriate reorganize JSOU’s Organization and business practices, towards the ultimate goal of *One JSOU Team*, contemporized in its updated



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leading-edge education and leader development curricula, training POIs, and pedagogy. It is a JSOU Team unified in support to the Nation, through “SOF’s Advantages” which sustains and leverages the unique advantages of SOF to advance America’s security, defense, and military strategies consistent with the following “Seven Ps.”

Sustaining & Projecting SOF’s Advantage = P?

Priorities – *what SOF focuses on* ... [US] interests, ideas, investments, etc.
Posture/Presence – *where SOF is and where SOF goes* ... “comprehensive joint-combined readiness” [SOF cannot be everywhere, so be where our priorities are...]
Preparedness – *what SOF knows and does* ... embracing a “Back to Our Future” approach, preparing for the coming “Fourth Age of SOF,” by revisiting Eras 1, 2, and 3 [paradigm shift of adapting without transitioning away from]
Partnerships/Partnered – *who SOF serves, and serves “by-with-through”* ... with 1) other countries; 2) US agencies and commands; 3) policy processes in DC; 4) private sector/innovation [SOF supply and demand of innovation is key]
Principles/Principled – *who we are, as SOF* based on *how we do what we do* principles of SOF doctrine across all these domains is huge, but so are “principles” (ethics)
People – *what is the ‘Leading Edge’ of SOF’s Advantage* ... For Nation, are we preparing, promoting, and preserving our talent and their families? Within JSOU itself, are we gaining, retaining, and “leveraging in” the right talents – “Faculty Blend” -- on the leading edge of the sectors and domains that impact SOF to input into JSOU education?
Politics – the *who gets what, how and why of SOE* ... war(fare) is politics (policy) by other means, and US [political dynamics] will have a downstream effect on SOF in terms of budgets, how employed, etc.

These seven performance measures of SOF’s Advantage (for Nation) will shape and inform an eighth “P” – JSOU Pedagogy/Andragogy – or rather, our teaching & learning model; how we deliver JSOU’s educational, training, and leader development advantages to SOF. Pedagogically (and andragogically), we will use the best in teaching effectively even while using (levering in and innovating both “within” and “beyond” existing models) modern tech and distance learning... *we will never abandon good, proven andragogy and pedagogy.*

Three “Big Ideas”

Getting the Big Ideas right is essential and requires, at its core, an appreciation for the character of the change JSOU must embrace and lead going forward – that is understanding what JSOU “NEXT” is and is not. Rather than approaching this from a standpoint of *JSOU undergoing a period of whole cloth transition*, which would suggest a disruptive move from one thing completely to another thing; instead, JSOU “NEXT” will proceed forward into a period of *adaptation*. Building our roadmap on lines of adaptation means we will continue to excel in key areas of past and current strengths while developing new knowledge, understanding, and capabilities in other areas.

Our three big ideas undergirding JSOU “NEXT” derive from (at least) three big questions. First, *while we may be doing things right... are we doing the right things?* This question yields **our first Big Idea** – development of *a strategic theory of fourth-age SOE*. Second, *is the current organization/disposition of our people correct to achieve stated objectives and goals?* This yields **our second Big Idea**, *getting the faculty (and faculty blend) right (being 80% of the puzzle solved)*. And thirdly, *are the processes by which the organization receives and integrates data adequate?* This question yields **our third Big Idea** (two-part) – *redesign of a “fourth-age” outcomes-focused joint-combined SOE Curriculum and reorientation of JSOU’s ‘corporate university’-styled education and training delivery model*. These three Big Ideas are the mile-markers guiding the way along our roadmap leading to a “sharpened edge” to SOF’s “All Officer and Senior NCO” Advantage.



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Towards a “SOF Fourth Age” Strategic Theory, Curricula, and Faculty Blend

In the lead-up to his congressional confirmation hearings, General Richard Clarke was asked for his view on *what are (will be) the major challenges confronting the next Commander of USSOCOM*. GEN Clarke offered that the next Commander of USSOCOM would confront three principal challenges through SOCOM’s continued leadership (as DOD’s ‘Coordinating Authority’) in (1) Countering Violent Extremist Organizations (CVEO) and (2) Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction (CWMD); as well as dealing effectively and with greater improved foresight, with (3) rising competition with China and Russia, under conditions of eroding US relative military advantage.

Today’s tumultuous global security environment is one that can perhaps be best characterized, in summary, as *converging, trans-regional compound security dilemmas, and a growing pathological weakening of nation-states...* and as some now argue, even worse, a weakening of the western-liberal international system itself,

which is premised on the primacy of the nation-state. The rise (perhaps ‘return’?) of major (great) power competition (and specifically, the threats of a rising China and a revanchist Russia) only further compounds. This convergence of compounded security threats is presenting unique challenges and opportunities in very particular, and historically important, key border and regional geostrategic nexus locations.

General Clarke, in his testimony, continued,

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.¹

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 JSOF go from here? Or rather how does JSOF adapt from here? Exploring and charting JSOF's role in an expected return to major power competition is now an imperative. “To be SOF’s Advantage, for Nation.”*

JSOU-NEXT ~ USSOCOM’s “Think-Do Tank,” world-class in CJOSF strategic and operational education, training, and Leader development, and the advancement of knowledge on the applications of CJOSF, for Nation

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JSOU Education, Training & Advancing Knowledge Priorities
What the Nation needs...What we must own and be expert in

1) Humans are more important than hardware | 2) Quality is better than quantity | 3) SOF cannot be mass produced | 4) Competent SOF cannot be created after emergencies occur | 5) Most Special Operations require Non-SOF assistance

Cognitive frame – the “why”

Changing Strategic Environment

Geostrategic Not Assessment

- Regional and transregional threat analysis: Eastern Europe | Western Europe | Middle East | South / Central Asia | Northeast Asia | Southeast Asia | Latin America | Africa | Arctic
- Sources of adversary conduct (strategies, dynamics, operational methods, and decision-making): Russia | PRC | DPRK | Iran | Jihadists, VEOs | Transnational Crime Orgs | Compound threats (Climate Change | Pandemics)
- Partner / Allied / IA / Joint / Commercial cooperation and interoperability: NATO | ROK | Japan | FVEY | Australia, New Zealand | India, Thailand, Philippines | Israel | Arab, Mideast States | Joint Services | USG Interagency | Contractors | Industry

Strategic Forecasting (Anticipating Change)

- Geopolitics: Evolution of War | Evolution of Peace
- Geo-economics: Economics of National Security and Defense
- Technological development: Robotics | Artificial Intelligence | Autonomous Systems | Quantum Computing | Block-Chaining | Human Augmentation, Engineering
- Disruption and innovation

Industrial / Enterprise Management, Leadership, and Innovation

- Ethics and the profession: Civil-Mil Relations | Private Military Contractors | Emerging Technologies and Threats | Status as a Profession | Comparative Ethics
- Organizational culture, effectiveness, transformational change: Creative Thinking | Critical Thinking | Judgment-Decision Analytics | Culture-Climate-Collaboration | Learning (incl. Educational Methodology)
- Talent development and management
- Force mobilization and modernization (all things readiness)

Applied Strategic Art

- Spectrum of conflict: Conventional War | Unconventional War | Political Warfare | Hybrid, Gray Zone | Proxy Warfare | CT | COIN | FID | SFA | DSCA | Homeland Security | HA/DR
- Mastery of joint and multinational campaigning: Strategy Making | Operational Art, Design | Allied, Coalition Warfare | All-Domestic Operations
- Warfare and warfighting functions: Megacities | UGFs | Sustainment | Defend the Homeland (includes CWMD) | Space | Cyber, C4I | Information Warfare

SOF “Core Activities”

DA | SR | CWMD | CT | LW | FID | SFA | HR&R | COIN | FHA | MISO | CA

LINES OF EFFORT

- Educate SOF & SOF Enablers
- Interagency Education & Outreach
- International Education & Outreach
- Conventional Forces Interaction
- Interaction w/ Academia & Others

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Towards A More Effective JSOF

Cognitive frame—the “why”

¹ 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.*



JOINT SPECIAL OPERATIONS UNIVERSITY
OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
7701 TAMPA POINT BLVD.
MACDILL AIR FORCE BASE, FLORIDA 33621-5323

Date: 27 April 2020

JSOU-C

MEMORANDUM FOR COMMANDER, U.S. SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND
(USSOCOM), 7701 TAMPA POINT BLVD., MACDILL AIR FORCE BASE, FLORIDA 33621-5323

SUBJECT: Executive Summary, JSOU "NEXT" White Paper #2, "Towards a New 4th Age of SOF."

1. The attached paper serves as a comprehensive geostrategic review ('horizon scan') of the current and coming global security environment.
2. 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).
 - a. The paper begins with an appreciation of the major disruptive change that has occurred in the global security environment, as this is one of the most complex and dangerous periods in our Nation's history.
 - b. What makes it 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.
 - c. 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 Syria Problem is a perfect tragic example; it is not one conflict, but actually a three-in-one compound war (with a possible "fourth war"), that transcends geographic, ethno-religious, cultural and even civilizational boundaries.
 - d. 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.
3. 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.
4. 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. Our country’s current ‘*America First*’ foreign policy¹ and philosophy, benchmarked upon a strategic theory of *competitive engagement*,² and codified in the 2017 U.S. National Security Strategy (NSS) and 2018 Nation Defense Strategy (NDS), openly embraces this return to this pre-WWI, unregulated ‘elemental’ nature of International Relations.

5. Although the lineage of special operations dates to work with the Office of Strategic Services in World War II, President Kennedy described the environment that gave rise to special operations forces in his 1962 West Point graduation speech:

This is another type of war, new in its intensity, ancient in its origin—war by guerrillas, subversives, insurgents, assassins, war by ambush instead of by combat; by infiltration, instead of aggression, seeking victory by eroding and exhausting the enemy instead of engaging him . . . [It requires] a whole new kind of strategy, a wholly different kind of force, and therefore a new and wholly different kind of military training.

6. As was then, so it is again today; and will be, tomorrow. Yet, only further complicated by the interplay of rapid advancements in ‘disruptive technologies’. To ‘command’ such transformative times, the Nation needs 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. USSOCOM 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?* Clearly a central part of that next direction will involve taking a lead in exploring and charting JSOF’s role in an expected return to major power competition; the ‘now’ imperative.

7. 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.*** Nothing less than this comprehensive joint-combined utility of SOF philosophy, culture, and approach is required for overmatching power in and under 4th Age conditions; a “trans-Everything” view of, and approach to SOF.

Isaiah Wilson III

ISAIAH WILSON III, Ph.D.
Incoming President

¹ In a recent WSJ OpEd penned by LTG H.R. McMaster, President Trump’s national security advisor, and, Mr. Gary Cohn, chief advisor and director of President Trump’s national economic council offered the following description.... “*According to these top advisors, President Trump’s outlook is ‘clear-eyed’.... “that the world is not a “global community” but an arena where nations, nongovernmental actors and businesses engage and compete for advantage. We bring to this forum unmatched military, political, economic, cultural and moral strength. Rather than deny this elemental nature of international affairs, we embrace it.*” See, H.R. McMaster and Gary D. Cohn, “America First Doesn’t Mean America Alone,” WSJ, 30 March 2017, accessible [online] at: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/america-first-doesnt-mean-america-alone-1496187426>.

² Nadia Schadlow, *Competitive Engagement: Upgrading America’s Influence Orbis, Volume 57, Issue 4, Autumn 2013, Pages 501-515.*



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“Sharpening the Edge of SOF’s Advantage” *Future Utility of CJSOF in an (4th) Age of ‘Compound Security’*

While we may be doing things right... are we doing the right things?

Where should one begin to unpack this question, to address it and come up with practical answers that directly help us to *sharpen the edge* of JSOU as *SOF’s Advantage* to the Nation? The simple answer is this: begin with a strategic-operational ‘Net Estimate’—a retrospective assessment of SOF’s first three past-to-present ‘Ages’ of SOF, plus a contemporary forecast of the future of CJSOF, 4th Age SOF, that is conducted based on a comprehensive geostrategic review and ‘horizon scan’ of the global security environment of conduct. This White Paper provides an initial ‘cut’ of such a net estimate.

We will approach this from a “*Back to the Future*” philosophical and methodological tact-line, developing our initial strategic theory of *4th-Age SOF* upon a hypothesis that 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*. Nothing less than this comprehensive joint-combined utility of SOF philosophy, culture, and approach is required for overmatching power in and under 4th Age conditions; a “*trans-Everything*” view of and approach to SOF.

Who We Are: SOF’s History and Lineage¹

SOF’s heritage, and its “1st Age” traces back to WWII and to the Office of Strategic Services led by Major General William “Wild Bill” Donovan. The OSS envisioned a military cadre with capacity to merge intelligence and operational activities; forward deployed in the operational environment with a unique ability to understand and influence the psychological and social setting in which uncertainty normally prevails. The 1960s perhaps mark an ‘official’ beginning of the 2nd Age of SOF. President John F. Kennedy was visionary in his efforts during this time to increase the capability of the United States Department of Defense, pointedly in the conduct of counter-insurgency (CI) and unconventional warfare (UW), focused at the time, as President Kennedy stated plainly, “against the struggle against despotic insurgency.”² Two particular historical episodes become major mile-markers of this ‘road of the 2nd Age.’ In 1970, America’s special operators carried out one of the most masterful and daring raids in American military history to rescue American Prisoners of War suspected of being held at Son Tay, a mere 40 miles from the North Vietnamese capital of Hanoi. Then, just ten years later, on Nov. 4, 1979 more than 3,000 Iranian militants stormed the U.S. Embassy in Tehran, Iran, taking 66 Americans hostage and setting the stage for a rescue attempt called Operation Eagle Claw, which has become known as Desert One. The forces tasked, among the best from each of our military Services, could not successfully conduct a complex joint special operation. Desert One, although a mission failure, was the catalyst for transformational change. The Holloway Commission Report that followed the operation recognized that there was a need for a specialized organization for joint special operations, and recommended the establishment of a command to lead and direct the nation’s Special Operations Forces. These events perhaps can be considered as marking an ‘ending’ of the 2nd Age.

¹ “United States Special Operations Command,” accessible [online] at: <https://slideplayer.com/slide/9402754/>

² Ibid.

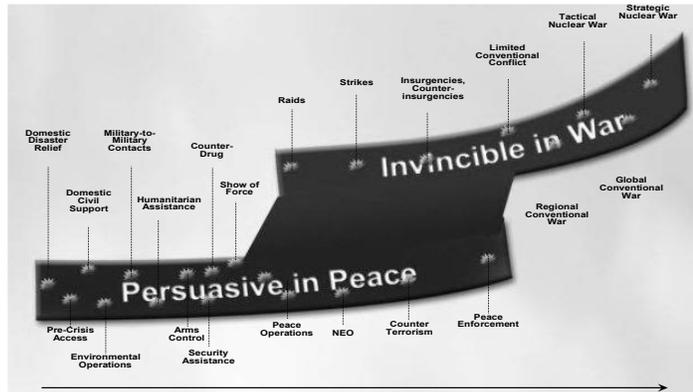


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Marking a clear right and left range fan for SOF's 3rd Age, is an elusive target. What can be considered an official start of SOF's 3rd Age. One thing that is clear and therefore more easily recorded and assessed is the coming into full(er) view, between the late-1980s at least through the end of the 1990s, the twelve (12) *Major SOF Activities*, spanning the full-spectrum of war/war-fare and peace/peace-fare. See Table 1.

The terror attacks of September 11, 2001 are a genuine watershed moment in almost every respect; but certainly so, when it comes to the utility of Special Operations Forces. In the wake of the 9/11 attacks, the adoption of the indirect strategic-operational design of marrying direct action (DA) SOF raiding with precision Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) in support of local indigenous ground forces, first applied in Afghanistan and then in Iraq and elsewhere, became the core of a "signature" tactic, technique, and operational method and profile of the post-9/11 utility of CJSOF era.



<p>Direct Action Short-duration strikes and other small-scale offensive actions employing specialized military capabilities to seize, destroy, capture, exploit, recover, or damage designated targets.</p>	<p>Special Reconnaissance Actions conducted in sensitive environments to collect or verify information of strategic or operational significance.</p>	<p>Unconventional Warfare Actions to enable a resistance movement or insurgency to coerce, disrupt, or overthrow a government or occupying power.</p>	<p>Foreign Internal Defense Activities that support an HN's internal defense and development (IDAD) strategy and program designed to protect against subversion, lawlessness, insurgency, terrorism, and other threats to their internal security, and stability, and legitimacy.</p>
<p>Civil Affairs Operations CAO enhance the relationship between military forces and civilian authorities in localities where military forces are present.</p>	<p>Counterterrorism Actions taken directly against terrorist networks and indirectly to influence and render global and regional environments inhospitable to terrorist networks.</p>	<p>Military Information Support Operations MISO are planned to convey selected information and indicators to foreign audiences to influence their emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and ultimately the behavior of foreign governments, organizations, groups, and individuals in a manner favorable to the originator's objectives.</p>	<p>Counter-proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction Activities to support USG efforts to curtail the conceptualization, development, possession, proliferation, use, and effects of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), related expertise, materials, technologies, and means of delivery by state and non-state actors.</p>
<p>Security Force Assistance Activities based on organizing, training, equipping, rebuilding, and advising various components of Foreign Security Forces.</p>	<p>Counterinsurgency The blend of civilian and military efforts designed to end insurgent violence and facilitate a return to peaceful political processes.</p>	<p>Hostage Rescue and Recovery Offensive measures taken to prevent, deter, preempt, and respond to terrorist threats and incidents, including recapture of U.S. facilities, installations, and sensitive material in overseas areas.</p>	<p>Foreign Humanitarian Assistance The range of DOD humanitarian activities conducted outside the US and its territories to relieve or reduce human suffering, disease, hunger, or privation.</p>

Table 1. SOF Activities

For the following roughly two decades, applications of this indirect method were largely confined to two types of war-fare along the wide full-spectrum: *counter-terrorism* and *counter-insurgency*. Experiments with a particular form of COIN, *population-centric COIN*, implied a blended mix of a number of the 12 SOF activities unified in a 'secure the people' purpose through all four stages of a full-spectrum approach – *Clear, Hold, Build, Transfer*.



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Today, SOF finds itself at a possible threshold crossing.

The United States' former top general, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Joseph Dunford, stated around 2017, "our traditional approach where we are either at peace or at war is insufficient to deal with that dynamic"—the "four-plus-one" challenges [of Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea, as well as Islamist extremism] and the five domains" of land, sea, air, space, and cyberspace... that we now face a state of "adversarial competition with a military dimension short of armed conflict" military and security studies scholars and practitioners have come to label gray-zone conflict.³ While this might describe the players and their playbooks of this new, next threshold marking a new 4th Age of SOF, it does not explain the field of play. Understanding the field of play is an essential first-step to recalibrating the utility of SOF for a Fourth Age.

The New(?) Compound Security Threat (and Opportunity) Environment

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, which is premised on the primacy of the nation-state. The rise (perhaps 'return'?) of great power competition only further compounds. This convergence of compounded security threats is presenting unique challenges and opportunities at very particular, and historically important, key border and regional geostrategic nexus locations.

To begin, it's important that we appreciate the major disruptive change that has occurred in the global security environment... This is one of the most complex and dangerous periods in our Nation's history. What makes it so uniquely 'dangerous' is.... *The nature of the threats... they have all "compounded" largely because we have allowed the "root causes" and underlying conditions ("currents") to go for so long, unaddressed or under-addressed.*

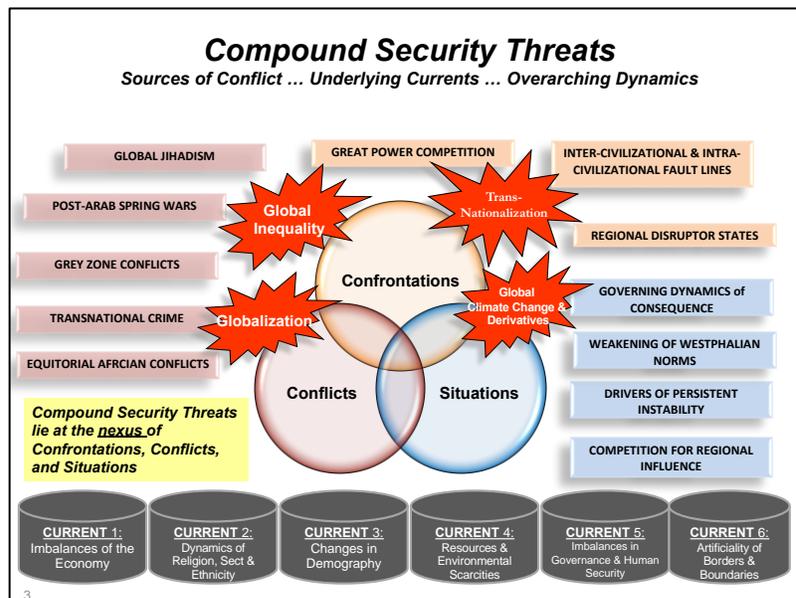


Figure 2. The Compound Security Threat

³ Colin Clark, "CJCS Dunford Calls for Strategic Shifts; 'At Peace or at War Is Insufficient,'" *Breaking Defense*, September 21, 2016.

⁴ By "compound" we are referring to the increased interaction – interconnectedness and collision – of otherwise once separate policy issues reflective of this new, post-Cold War (and now post-9/11) international security environment. Where there was once a brighter line dividing those policy issues of a limited domestic context and scope of impact and consequence, there is today less of a relevant and viable division between the national and the international; there is no longer a "water's edge" to domestic and foreign policy and policymaking. Traditional security concerns over material resources (i.e., access to oil and other scarce resources) are less divorceable from issues of human security (local concerns and challenges over food shortages, health concerns, human rights protections, etc.). Old concepts of domestic politics and policies, such as energy policy and immigration policy, now take on a global context. We now must think of these policy issues and concerns in a security context (i.e., energy security policy, immigration and security policy). The rising threats of natural and manmade biological threats (pandemic flu, HIV/AIDS, etc.) now make health policy – traditionally an issue relegated to domestic concerns and jurisdictions – a global security policy issue. This compounding character of 21st century public policy issues heralds a new kind of security dilemma: compound security dilemmas. For more on "compound security challenges" and the "compound security" dilemma and concept, see Hugh Liebert, John Griswold and Isaiah Wilson III, eds., *Thinking beyond Boundaries: Transnational Challenges to U.S. Foreign Policy*, New York: Johns Hopkins University Press, November 2014, and Isaiah Wilson III and James J. F. Forest, eds. and contributing authors, *Handbook of Defence Politics: International and Comparative Perspectives*, New York: Routledge Press, July 1, 2015.



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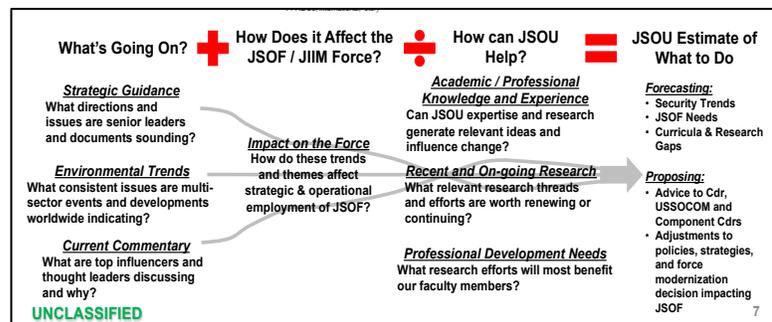


These compound threats are incredibly complex and multi-dimensional. The Syria Problem is a perfect tragic example – these are “not our grandparent’s traditional conflicts.” Syria is not one conflict, but actually a three-in-one compound war (with a possible “fourth war”)... I’ll talk about this a bit more later in this paper. And finally, 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.

All of this is a result of, but also at the same time contributes to, big transformational changes in the character (and consequences) of global geopolitical competition... change that perhaps began in earnest nearly 30 years ago, with the end of Cold War. 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. Dr. Richard Haass, the president of the Council on Foreign Relations, calls this a return of international relations to a “self-help” system and style of competition. And our new *‘America First’* foreign policies and philosophy, benchmarked upon a strategic theory of *competitive engagement*,⁵ and codified in the 2017 U.S. National Security Strategy (NSS) and 2018 Nation Defense Strategy (NDS), openly embraces this return to this pre-WWI, unregulated ‘elemental’ nature of International Relations... reflecting in many ways a *walking away* from the rules-based western-liberal ordered International system that we helped build in the wake of two great wars born out of the last time the world embraced a transactional, merchantilistic approach to international affairs; a moderate Intl System that we have led and preserved for over 70-plus years.

This beggar-thy-neighbor merchantilistic predatorily competitive environment also results in a growing tendency for coalition member states to drift toward “self-help” solutions to their own individual security dilemmas, and in so doing to worsen tendencies to fail to see and approach what are collective security problems as such, and to address them in collective ways. This competitive environment makes forming and norming—holding together capable and willing coalitions for collective security and defense—all the more difficult while also making the formation of such coalitions all the more essential. This is *the paradox of Compound Security*.

Compound threats demand nothing less than compound solutions to achieve lasting and durable compound wins. However, in the continued absence of an overall, overarching governing strategy, some worry—myself included—that ‘tactical’ decisions and discrete, sequential approaches to problems could actually worsen this ‘new compound security dilemma’, and lead to an unintended wider conflict... “the bigger map’s, Larger (and Longer) Wars” marking a Fourth-Age for SOF.



⁵ In a recent WSJ OpEd penned by LTG H.R. McMaster, President Trump’s national security advisor, and, Mr. Gary Cohn, chief advisor and director of President Trump’s national economic council offered the following description.... “According to these top advisors, President Trump’s outlook is ‘clear-eyed’.... “that the world is not a “global community” but an arena where nations, nongovernmental actors and businesses engage and compete for advantage. We bring to this forum unmatched military, political, economic, cultural and moral strength. Rather than deny this elemental nature of international affairs, we embrace it.” See, H.R. McMaster and Gary D. Cohn, “America First Doesn’t Mean America Alone,” WSJ, 30 March 2017, accessible [online] at: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/america-first-doesnt-mean-america-alone-1496187426>.

⁶ Nadia Schadlow, [Competitive Engagement: Upgrading America’s Influence](#) *Orbis*, Volume 57, Issue 4, Autumn 2013, Pages 501-515.

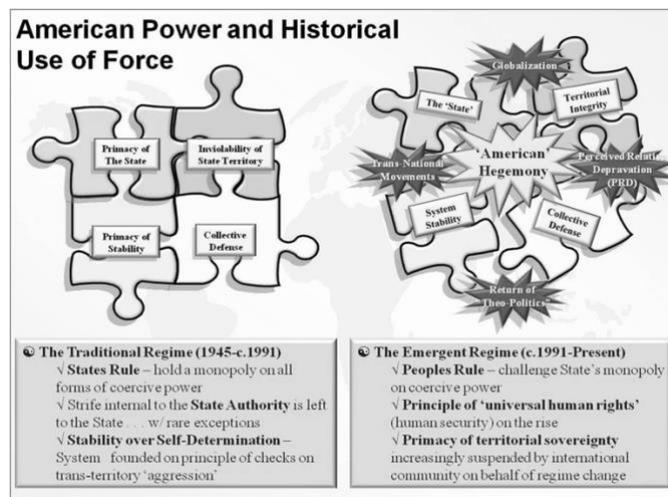


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SOF faces an emerging strategic environment characterized by the fragmentation and decline of traditional structures (alliances, institutions/actors, economic order, state-based system) and ideas (ethics, values, norms). These transformative disruptions are driven in large part by the proliferation of advanced technologies and adversary disinformation campaigns. Such transformative disruptions are creating additional space for even more threats new and old – nuclear weapons, cyber-attacks, diseases. The economic world order is also changing as new trends (virtual currencies?) challenge the Bretton Woods system of monetary management and its traditional actors, decreasing political commitment in the United States to the U.S.-led international order. This encompasses Bretton Woods and the dollar as world reserve currency, UN, Alliances (as other than pay-to-play arrangements), and others. The dynamics of stability and control are changing as emerging technologies such as 5G, AI, and the ‘Internet of things’ lead to a decentralization of influence and less hierarchical political structures. Rapid advancement and proliferation of these new technologies is also redefining traditional views and norms on such things as what it means to win, what constitutes a crime, and what behavior is acceptable in modern war.

Transnational criminal groups and networks are becoming more pervasive and yet more fragmented. This makes them more dangerous and more difficult to combat. They challenge typical notions of the state and drive internal conflicts. These trends enable the expansion of PRC power and influence, along with other malign actors such as Russia, Iran and North Korea, as well as nonstate and ‘other-than-national state’ statehoods and violent extremist organizations.



Adversary disinformation campaigns and a battle for control of the narrative underlie and accelerate all of these trends. The ability to resist such campaigns and build resilience is critical but will be undercut by limitations on DoD’s role in managing US strategic communication and information. These trends point to a shift away from the traditional notion of national (state) security and more toward human security – that is concern over conflict related to particular socio-economic populations based on peoples’ and communities’ needs rather than related to a nation-state. Strategic historian Walter Russell Mead has offered a more elegant description of this dramatic change in character of geopolitical competition defining the current and future global

security environment:

Sometime in 2013, we reached a new stage in world history. A coalition of great powers has long sought to overturn the post-Cold War Eurasian settlement that the United States and its allies imposed after 1990; in the second half of 2013 that coalition began to gain ground. The revisionist coalition hasn’t achieved its objectives, and the Eurasian status is still quo, but from this point on we will have to speak of that situation as contested and American policymakers will increasingly have to respond to a challenge that, until recently, most chose to ignore. The big three challengers—Russia, China and Iran—all hate, fear and resent the current state of Eurasia. The balance of power it enshrines thwarts their ambitions; the norms and values it promotes pose deadly threats to their current regimes. Until recently there wasn’t much they could do but resent the world order; now, increasingly, they think they have found a way to challenge and ultimately to change the way global politics work.

We, of course, need to add to Mead’s list of big challengers, the hermit kingdom of Kim Jong UN’s North Korea. All of this has contributed to fundamental change in the character of war and war-fare. As former chief of staff of the Army (and the current Chairman, JCS), General Mark Milley has said,



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“Technology, geopolitics, and demographics are rapidly changing societies, economies, and the tools of war-fare... [which are, in turn] producing changes in why, how, and where wars are fought—and who will fight them. The significantly increased speed and global reach of information and misinformation likewise will have unprecedented effect on forces, [force and capability development], and how they fight.”

Trans-Regionally, we see the rising presence of boundary-spanning, transregional compound security threats and challenges that because of their trans-state, trans-national, and trans-regional spread and contagion potential, are placing more and more pressures on countries and their states’ and societies’ capabilities and capacities to maintain their sovereignty, protected private rights, and core value systems. Today, hyper-polarized, nationalist-populist forces are threatening to reverse decades of order and stability across the western-liberal international system, European integration across the continent — from Brexit in the United Kingdom to Catalan separatism in Spain to Lombard regionalism in Italy — and threatening both the Transatlantic Alliance, between America and the ‘West’, and the United States-proper, amid the fractious trends of compound security. Russia now leads a systematic assault on Western democracies, and the international system that is founded on western-liberal rules and values. Putin’s Russia aims to subvert Western democracies internally, spread anti-NATO and anti-European Union sentiment, and undermine the rules-based international order.

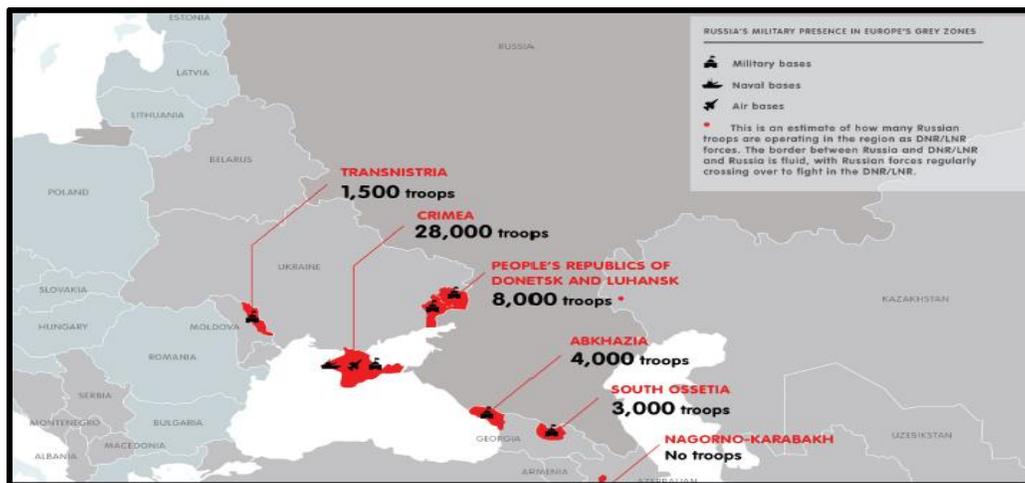


Figure 5. Russia’s Military Presence in Europe’s ‘Grey Zones’

As Figure 5 shows, Russia’s revanchist tendencies and expansionism are most easily seen in her physical military presence along the traditional and historically vital nexus of its territorial and ethno-cultural near-abroad. However, it would be a grand mistake, and gross misunderstanding and underestimation of the Russian revisionist threat, if allowed to be limited (or limitable) in traditional or classical, and all too linear, restricted topographical ranges. As the 1990s and 2000s witnessed a western-liberal states’ expansionism in various forms, to include a NATO enlargement – eastward and southward – the 2010s and teens evidence a precipitous spread



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of a Russia ‘sphere of influence’ – westward and southward. Russia’s recent involvement in the Syrian conflict can be seen as a continuance of this trajectory.

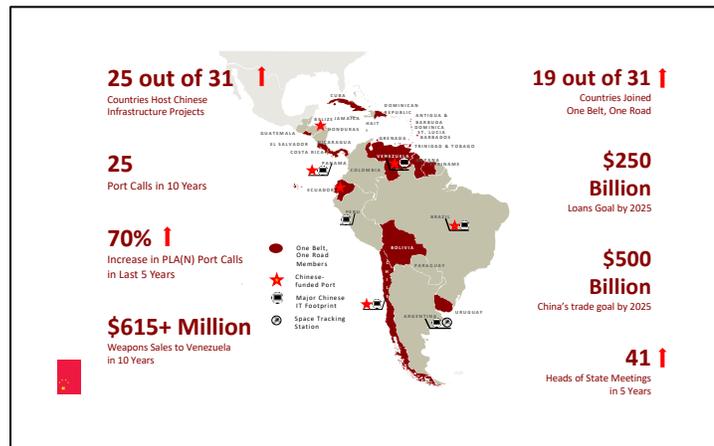
And then there is the potential rising perils (and maybe ‘promise’, potentially, as well) of China. China is the ‘pacing threat’ for the United States, and future U.S. global primacy. While China continues to use its

One Belt, One Road initiative to gain access and influence throughout all regions of the world, China has also heavily invested in critical infrastructure, to include ‘dual use’ ports at key geostrategic choke points. These actions extend well beyond the traditional Asia-Pacific ‘sphere of influence’ we typically equate to China’s rise, to include the significant influence that China retains on the future of strategic pivot states, such as Venezuela, demonstrative of a broader pattern of influence across the Western Hemisphere.

All of this in many ways reflects back to the ‘old’ Great Game of the 18th and 19th centuries, anew, in 21st century form and context



and span of implications. For Arthur Conolly⁷, the British Empire’s strategic conflict with the Tsars’ Russian Empire for supremacy in Central Asia seemed a “Great Game.” Since Conolly (and later, Rudyard Kipling) popularized it, this term has been recycled and reapplied to geostrategic contests pitting adversaries against one another on a constantly shifting and uncertain playing field. The large-scale challenges facing the United States and the world today merit the moniker as much as previous struggles have. Much of the present-day “Great Game” – contradictory territorial claims, predatory interests in material resources, and even the settings – appears similar to its predecessors; what sets the current “Game” apart is its scope and scale and the nature of the conflicts that constitute each of its “turns.” The struggle stretches across not only Central Asia (though this contested region is certainly included) but the globe; and its conflicts involve human security dilemmas that can no longer be neatly separated from matters of concern to strategists, classically trained to focus more on the ‘foreign’ plane, as well as public policymakers, more traditionally locked in to a ‘domestic’ frame of reference and action.



The United States faces the challenge of developing a security strategy that can effectively counter idiosyncratic and asymmetrical compound threats of local-to-global, *trans-everything* operational reach and potentially catastrophic impact. This is a tall order. But it seems even taller when one considers that for a U.S. strategy to be effective it must also be efficient. U.S. strategy must align ends to means, and objectives to the resources available, in a way that reflects a just and right intent behind our interventions. It must also identify the proper scope of these interventions. If, as P.M. Barnett has suggested, today’s global security dilemmas are most likely to arise within an “arc of instability,”⁹ we would do well to tailor national geo-strategy accordingly,

⁷ “Arthur Conolly, 1807-1842,” accessible [online] at: <http://worldcat.org/identities/lccn-no2002069741/>

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ The phrase “Arc of Instability” has separately also been used by the National Intelligence Council to describe “a great arc of instability stretching from Sub-Saharan Africa through North Africa, into the Middle East, the Balkans, the Caucasus, and South and Central Asia, and parts of Southeast Asia.” See, *Global Trends 2025* - Director of National Intelligence.



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and not only in terms of the ‘classical’ foreign-v-domestic stovepipes. If we do not, we risk adopting courses of action that exacerbate security dilemmas rather than eradicate them.

Operational Overview

New Timings, New Spacing, and New Purposes

Conflicts at the “seams”

- Conflicts w/in Ungoverned and Mal-governed areas
- Pivot States/Areas: Some old, some new
- From “Three-Block Wars” to “Block Parties”

A “Post-Industrial era of war and peace

- Victory defined well beyond battle (MCO no longer the ‘decisive phase’)
- Protracted interventions
- Unilateral treatments often fail the “return of scales” test

Question: Is the traditional “Modern System” (Biddle 2005) of US/Western warfare (intervention) **adequately calibrated** to ensure an effective ends-ways-means balance in future US/Western intervention policy?

Another challenge manifesting from, while at the same exasperating, the compound security phenomenon is the “separated and unequal” bifurcated architecture of our U.S. National Security & Defense Enterprise, that give safe-harbor and sustenance to organizational cultures of separateness, silo, and self-help. And it is the increasingly adversarial relationships the United States faces with great powers such as Russia and China, in addition to regional-level disruptors such as North Korea, Iran, and the self-declared Islamic State that exacerbate those architectural and process cleavages that are leading the concerns of America’s senior defense leadership. Consequently, the Pentagon and the armed services have called for major strategic shifts in

policy, war plans, planning architectures, and approaches.

What we have come to call ‘gray zone’ conflicts are nothing more than manifestations of the compound security dilemma – but also, vice versa – that the compound security dilemma is, at least in part, an artifact of limitations in how we as a nation view and understand and approach the following: (a) what constitutes (and does not), an issue or situation of ‘security’ versus non-security (which is an ideational blinder), (b) how we are institutionally structured for planning, decision-making, and implementation (an organizational flaw), and (c) how we view and value (or ‘weight’ and prioritize) an issue or a situation (which is an organizational cultural dynamic). All three, combined, impact or even determine behavior. In the face of compound threats, and the new compound security dilemma, these three factors have retarded the solving power of our traditional policy and strategy planning, decision-making, and operations. The challenge, the imperative, of achieving real, practical and ‘doable’ whole-of-governments planning solutions is not limitable to one simple problem; this is a multidimensional, multi-functional, multi-echelon, temporal puzzle.

Human Security

Human security: emerging paradigm for understanding global vulnerabilities... challenges traditional notion of national security...argues that **proper referent for security should be at the human rather than national level.**

<https://www.un.org/humansecurity/what-is-human-security>

	Traditional Security	Human Security
Referent	<i>Policies promote states’ demands.</i> Other interests subordinated. Protects a state’s boundaries, people, institutions and values.	<i>People-centered focus on protecting individuals.</i> Entails the well-being of individuals, responds to ordinary people’s needs in dealing with threats.
Scope	<i>Defends states from external aggression.</i> Preserve ability to deter or defeat attack. Maintain integrity of the state and protect the territory.	Expands scope of <i>protection to broader range of threats:</i> environmental pollution, infectious diseases, economic deprivation, etc.
Actor(s)	<i>The state is the sole actor.</i> Decision making power centralized in the government. Assumes sovereign state operates in anarchical international environment with no world governing body.	Involves <i>broader participation of different actors:</i> regional and international organizations, NGOs, and local communities.
Means	<i>Relies upon building up national power and military defense - armament races, alliances, strategic boundaries, etc.</i>	Not only protects, but <i>also empowers people and societies</i> as a means of security. People contribute by identifying and implementing solutions to insecurity.

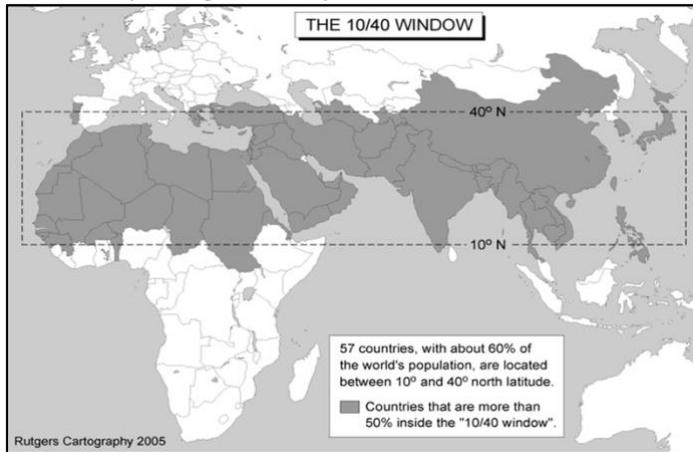
A people-centered approach to security has implications for how to understand conflict assessment, strategic planning, implementation, and evaluation of peacebuilding initiatives



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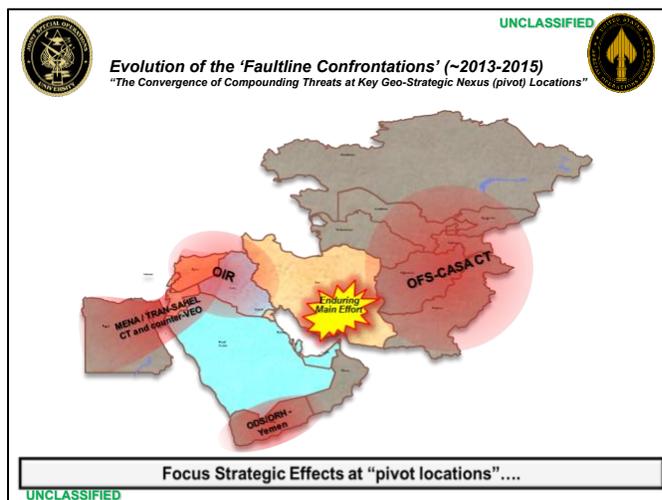
The “problem” we face and seek to overcome can now be described, in summary, in at least five dimensions – three primary, and two derivative. **First**, there is *The Problem* of an altered state of threat(s) and a drastically changed security and threat environment of conduct: *compound threats that are also transregional*.



Second, there is *The Problem* of a “flawed by design,” (Zegart 2000), institutional, operational, and procedural sub-optimality, within our National Security & Defense Enterprise (and only one part of a much broader sub-optimality within and across the entire public policymaking process, in structure and cultural-cognitive terms), that perpetuate divisions and separations in *D-I-M-E elements of national power, denying us the achievement of true “whole-of-government” solutions*. And **thirdly**, we face *The Problem* of a multi-echelon implementation (campaign) planning and ‘estimate’ (i.e., assessments + forecasting) architecture and system of processes

challenged with “gaps-and-seams” within and between varied agencies, organizations, and echelons that hobble efforts at achieving integrated and synchronized, “WoG” planning and estimate and predictive modelling and wargaming solutions. We see the two *derivative “problems”* in terms of at least two major impacts and consequences of prime concern, (a) of impacts on and consequences for, policy and strategy, and (b) of impacts on and consequences for, force planning and risks calculation and mitigation.

Yet another redefining driver of change in the character of the global environment of competition is the *compounding and convergence dynamics, and the unique role and implications of geography*. Looking at the actual *trajectory and directions* of these threat trends, *we see a convergence* of these compound challenges toward certain very specific key geographic locations; locations that just so happen to reside at major ‘seams’ — political, cultural, ethno-sectarian, policy sector, etc. — offering both challenges as well as possible benefit and opportunities, interestingly, at or near key states (“strategic pivot states and spaces”) at the ‘nexes’ of our present-day ‘Federalism’ boundaries dividing local, state, national, and international governance jurisdictions, and in the martial context, the current geographic combatant command UCP boundaries. It is here where it seems some “big opportunities” lie and can be taken advantage of, allow us to focus our geopolitical and geo-economic efforts and investments “at or near” these “threat nexes,” and in creative, collective defense and security ways.



These “threat nexes” are places where this convergence of compound threats presents the United States with additional challenges for certain; but also with opportunities *to sharpen our focus and apply our resources in more precise and economical ways*, at decisive geographic locations through simultaneously-executed named operations and several enduring efforts creating possibility for the achievement of overmatching compound wins.¹⁰

These compound threats are incredibly complex and multi-dimensional, and transcend the traditional boundaries of the foreign “versus” the domestic, the public “versus” the private, the stuff of public government “versus” of the private sector, the military “versus” the non-military.

¹⁰ Previous eras of strategic thought have utilized a similar logic. George Kennan’s conception of containment advocated for a ‘strong point’ defense of only a select number of areas around the globe that directly informed the balance of power.



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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 events” (including compound wars) with potential for big global-wide disruptions. And at this time of major strategic reflection by the United States in the midst of a global pandemic, we argue that the trans-“everything” viral threat of the recent/ongoing novel coronavirus COVID-19 is, frankly, not all that different in its epidemiology that was – and continues to be – the contagion of violent extremism that the communities of democratic and non-democratic states, alike, have been struggling to contain, mitigate against, and overmatch to ultimately eradicate (“defeat”) now at least for the last two decades. Perhaps our clearest case is our challenge with Al Qaeda and it’s stage-3 metastasis, the so-called ‘Islamic State’.

The Case of Countering the Self-proclaimed ‘Islamic State’

The terrorist-led insurgency threatening Iraq, regional states, and Western governments is comprised of a confederation of Sunni actors that includes ISIL, former Baathist regime elements, Awakening tribes, and other extremist groups. ISIL’s sudden gains in early 2014 followed from a four+ years devoted effort (and more broadly, from an over 10 year evolution), characterized by deliberate strategic calculation. The Syrian conflict enabled ISIL to establish multiple revenue streams, recruit foreign fighters, build organizational capacity, and then return to Iraq to complete the work AQI began in 2004. Equally crucial to its success was Iraqi PM Maliki’s divisive, non-representative governance that deepened sectarian divisions and created a Sunni population receptive to revolution. In this context, an increasingly marginalized and militant Sunni populous remains ISIL’s operational center of gravity, as well as a source of wider regional instability.

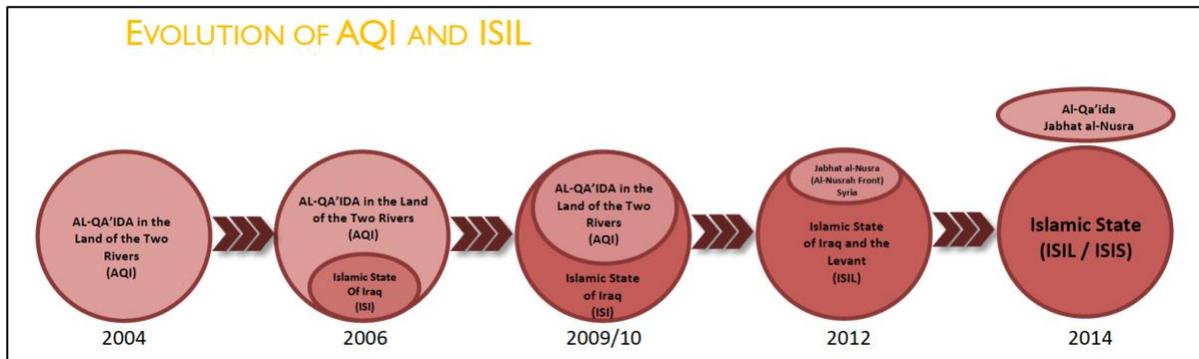


Figure 12.

United States vital ‘national’ security interests did not necessarily fall *within* either one or even both of the discrete states of Iraq or Syria, but rather lied squarely *at the ‘nexus’* of both these two fractured states and statehoods.

ISIL spearheaded the Iraqi Sunni insurgency (in 2014) as part of a broader strategic campaign to establish an Islamic caliphate spanning the greater Levant. To achieve this end, ISIL employed and employs three lines of effort: i) traditional terrorist tactics to instill fear and shape the operational environment; ii) guerrilla warfare to seize and hold territory; and iii) sophisticated information operations to influence, shape, and define the conflict. Importantly, post-Mosul ISIL developed capabilities beyond those of a typical terrorist organization. By June 2014, ISIL possessed the required resources, arms, and organization to pose a real and credible threat to the GoI. Since that time, however, the progress of the U.S. Counter-ISIL Strategy and the U.S. Central Command Regional Coalition Military Campaign Plan (CMCP), the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant has been robbed of its “myth of invincibility;” its ability to form and mount traditional-style, para-conventional combined arms assaults has been degraded and dismantled, causing the organization to revert back to more of a terrorist organization and to the conduct of more traditional trans-regionally-spanning terror attack type operations. The rise of IS terror attacks in regional and western European



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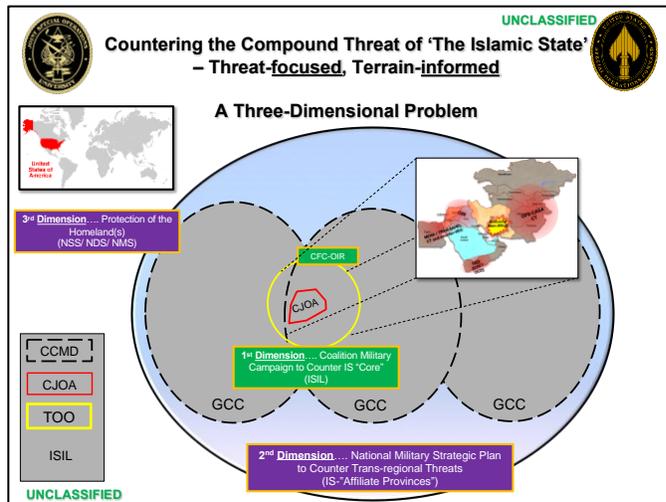
homelands, as well as in the United States proper, is actually an indicator of the successes of the now five+ year execution of counter-ISIL campaign operations across the Middle East and the greater Levant.

When we look at IS as an increasingly globalizing threat, we can see three major dimensions to this compound threat that we need to dismantle – on multiple fronts, near simultaneously – in order to ultimately defeat them: 1) ISIL “core” (Iraq-Syria nexus); 2) ISIL “provinces” (Iraq-Syria, AFG-PAK, Sinai-to-N. Africa threat corridor, Yemen and the Trans-Sahel threat corridor); and 3) External plotting (protect the homeland). Right now, ISIL’s self-defined statehood makes it terrain-dependent and that terrain lies in strategically-important places (i.e., Iraq-Syria, AFG-PAK, Sinai, Yemen). We have to continue to attack to destroy its “core” (Iraq-Syria), shape the fight and prevent the spread in the provinces outside of the core, while continuing to disrupt and dismantle external plotters.

As we began the important work of expanding our collective sense of the threat posed by the ‘Islamic State’, and enlarge our campaign design and approach to countering it, we could not afford to lose focus of the “heart of the threat” – the Islamic State “of the Levant” (ISIL) – and the imperative of dismantling and destroying IS at its epicenter. We had to *dismantle* the threat at its geographic base and center, before we

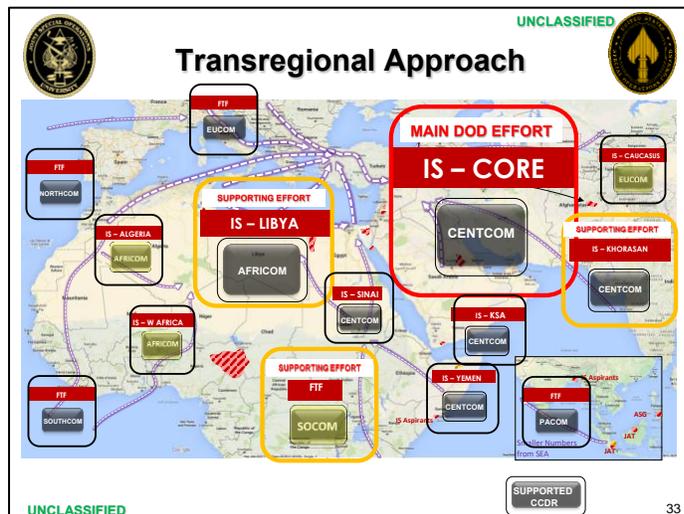
could begin to achieve true lasting results against its trans-regional “provincial” affiliates.

Just as we increased the dosages of our treatments against the spreading disease that is the ‘Islamic State’, we continued to attack the disease at its source tumor; a lasting remission depends on a regimen of simultaneity and ‘cocktail’ treatments. Our delivery mechanism for such a treatment lied in effective coalition management. The near-80 nation C-ISIL Coalition was our source of power in this trans-regional fight; it provided us the degree of depth, agility, theater-strategic reach, and legitimacy for the difficult months and years of hard work that lay ahead.



terrain-dependent and that terrain lay in strategically-important places (i.e., Iraq-Syria, AFG-PAK, Sinai, Yemen, and Libya). We had to attack to destroy its “core” (Iraq-Syria), shape the fight and prevent its spread in the provinces outside of the core, while continuing to disrupt and dismantle external plotters. To dismantle

and ultimately defeat IS in this environment we had to be able to identify and simultaneously manage these various conflicts. Starting with the ISIL-core, in the Syria-Iraq nexus we had (and still have) an Insurgency, a civil war, and an international war against the Islamic State “all-in-one” (a compound war) in an area of rising ethno-sectarian competition that is being manipulated by both non-state and state actors. In Afghanistan-Pakistan we had (and still have) regional threats, to include an emerging IS-KP, which will continue to benefit from ungoverned space and will threaten local governments and western interests. In





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Yemen we had another compound conflict: an internal civil war, direct competition between Iran and Sunni Arab States, and competition among terrorist groups, AQAP/IS-Y, which is intent on attacking western interests. And in the Sinai we have a persistent IS-S threat that is benefitting from historically under-governed space, a population that is distrustful of the government, and uneven government responses. These conditions required, then, and will continue to require a comprehensive approach in order to address all the components of these converging threats. The United States, and in fact the entire world, in our commitment to thinking of and approaching the crisis that is Syria as a simple, single civil war, have added to the contagion of this anything-but-simple conflict. Syria, or rather “Syraq,” is not a simple civil war by any stretch of the imagination. It is a compound war; a composite of at least three wars,... and possibly a fourth.

1. First is the Syrian Civil War in which Assad has brutally murdered hundreds of thousands of the Syrian people. He has primarily used his conventional forces to wage this war.
2. Second, there is the Syrian Insurgency against the Assad regime. In this part of the conflict, insurgents have been trained and resourced by a multitude of different countries who are anxious to see Assad depart.
3. Finally, and foremost is the international war against the Islamic state and other trans-regional terrorist organizations. This is, of course, priority one for the United States.

One could also make the case that there is a fourth war, in which the major combatants are weaponizing refugees by causing mass migration into Southern Europe; and thus, metastasizing a threat to NATO’s southern flank and to EU country’s internal domestic stability (stresses on public admin good and services systems). This is a crisis that many still fail to see as a form of war when it is exactly that —“*a continuation of politics by other means,*”—with vectored, forced migrations aimed at overburdening and eventually “breaking the nations”¹¹ of Europe. It is part of Russia’s deliberate strategy of disruption.¹²



So, what does all this mean for the future of a “Fourth Age” SOF?

“With the personifications of his destiny to guide and aid him, the hero goes forward in his adventure until he comes to the ‘threshold guardian’ at the entrance to the zone of magnified power. Such custodians bound the world in four directions—also up and down—standing for the limits of the hero’s present sphere, or life horizon. Beyond them is darkness, the unknown and danger; just as beyond the parental watch is danger to the infant and beyond the protection of his society danger to the members of the tribe. The usual person is more than content, he is even proud, to remain within the indicated bounds, and popular belief gives him every reason to fear so much as the first step into the unexplored. The adventure is always and everywhere a passage beyond the veil of the known into the unknown; the powers that watch at the boundary are dangerous; to deal with them is risky; yet for anyone with competence and courage the danger fades.”¹³

¹¹ Robert Cooper, *The Breaking of Nations: Order and Chaos in the Twenty-First Century*, Grove Press; Reprint edition (October 8, 2004).

¹² Geoff Dyer, “Nato accuses Russia of ‘weaponising’ immigrants,” *Financial Times*, March 1, 2016, accessible at <https://www.ft.com/content/76a52430-dfe1-11e5-b67fa61732c1d025>.

¹³ Campbell (2008), p. 67-68.



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SOF, like the Nation it serves, is at least at *the threshold crossing*¹⁴ of a new Fourth Age. In fact, we may have been through and well beyond this ‘crossing’ for many years now. This ‘new’ Fourth Age is one of ‘compound security threats’ and a character of global geopolitical competition governed by a new ‘compound security dilemma’ (CSD). 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.*** Nothing less than this comprehensive joint-combined utility of SOF philosophy, culture, and approach is required for overmatching power in and under 4th Age conditions; a “trans-Everything” view of, and approach to SOF.

Growing, fostering, preserving, and *sharpening the edge* of this Fourth-Age SOF Advantage, for Nation, is all about talent/leader development through a PME governed by the following Six Principles of Leader Development that will underpin JSOU-“NEXT’s” approach to teaching & learning (T&L) and research & analysis (R&A)—all about educating and training, and advancing knowledge in order to develop 4th Age SOF Leaders that ... (1) Understand the security environment and the contributions of all instruments of power; (2) Anticipate and respond to surprise and uncertainty; (3) Anticipate and recognize change and Lead Transitions; (4) Operate on Intent through trust, empowerment, and understanding; (5) Make ethical decisions based on the shared values of the profession of arms; and (6) Think critically and strategically in applying joint special operations forces warfighting principles and concepts to joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational (JIIM) operations.

As JSOU, we see four (4) enduring strategic-operational knowledge lines of effort: *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?

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*

¹⁴ Relating to The Hero’s Journey, this is the point where the hero actually crosses into the field of adventure, leaving the known limits of his world and venturing into an unknown and dangerous realm where the rules and limits are unknown. See, Joseph Campbell (1949), *The Hero with a Thousand Faces.*



WHITE PAPER #2



*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.**

Conclusion: Epilogue is Prologue

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.**

In the lead-up to his congressional confirmation hearings, General Richard Clarke was asked for his view on what are (will be) the major challenges confronting the next Commander of USSOCOM. In response, he offered the following:

*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.*¹⁷

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*

¹⁵ Definitions of Deterrence, accessible [online] at: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/deterrence>

¹⁶ “Deterrence Theory,” accessible [online] at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/computer-science/deterrence-theory>

¹⁷ 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.*



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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.

“To be SOF’s Advantage, *for Nation.*”



WHITE PAPER #3



“Sharpening the Edge of SOF’s Advantage”

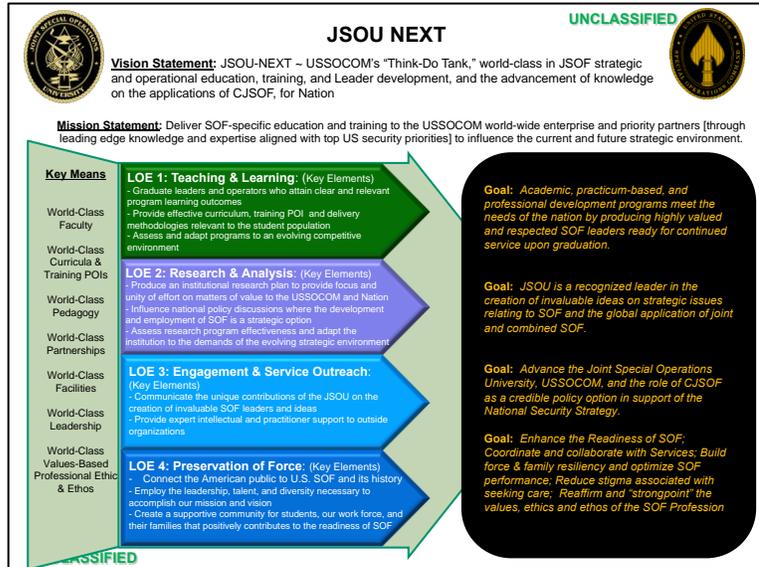
Preparing and Organizing for the Development of Fourth Age SOF Adaptive Leaders

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 for the 2020s and 2030s* is the penultimate question the JSOU “NEXT” Strategic Plan must answer. JSOF Education Objectives derive from a running geostrategic net estimate of the changed and changing global strategic and operational environment of conduct. These Objectives must produce – in broad stroke and by way of JSOU’s approach to strategic & operational education and training, advancement of knowledge, and leader development – the following Outcomes enabling *Future SOF Leader-Operators* to:

1. Understand the security environment and the contributions of all instruments of power;
2. Anticipate and respond to surprise and uncertainty;
3. Anticipate and recognize change and lead transitions;
4. Operate on Intent through trust, empowerment, and understanding;
5. Make ethical decisions based on the shared values of the profession of arms;
6. Think critically and strategically in applying joint special operations forces warfighting principles and concepts to joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational (JIIM) operations.

As these Learning Outcomes define the JSOU Mission, we must review, renew, reorient and reenergize the “critical capability” that powers JSOU – *the JSOU Faculty*; a faculty that must be a balanced mix of academic professors and professors of practice (Title 10; GS/T5; Contractor; in-resident; adjunct/affiliate/remote). Our faculty will lead a “Needs-based” reconsideration of the JSOU Curricula and all Training POIs. **“Getting Our Faculty Model and “Blend” Right is 80% of All Puzzles Solved!”** This must be more than a slogan. One of if not our #1 top foci lie in talent decisions; and in thinking through and planning for the right necessary way ahead on “adapting” our Key Leader Faculty and Staff talent billets. In this sense, our efforts on reworking the JSOU faculty blend and reworking, refreshing, and reorganizing the Organizational Design (Chart) of JSOU-core – and specifically, the top four echelons of that organizational design – Getting this “core” as right as we can is imperative and the essential first-step for moving to next-steps of education program curricula/training program POI refreshment and org design adjustments.

Identifying, selecting, and expeditiously hiring the right, precision-picked **core group of senior ‘applied social scientists’** through tailored search processes is the essential first-step. More pointedly, there are four (4) major enduring topical and functional expert knowledge and expertise areas (in some cases also representing gaps within the current JSOU body of knowledge, curricula and training POI), upon which JSOU-“NEXT” will select and hire “associate or full-professor” senior Title 10 faculty, as Senior (eventually, ‘Named’) Chairs:



- (1) Professor of Geostrategy and Transnational Affairs;
- (2) Professor of Leadership and the SOF Professional Ethic;
- (3) Professor of Strategic Intelligence and Integrative JIIM Operations;
- (4) Professor of Science & Technology (S&T) and Futures



WHITE PAPER #3



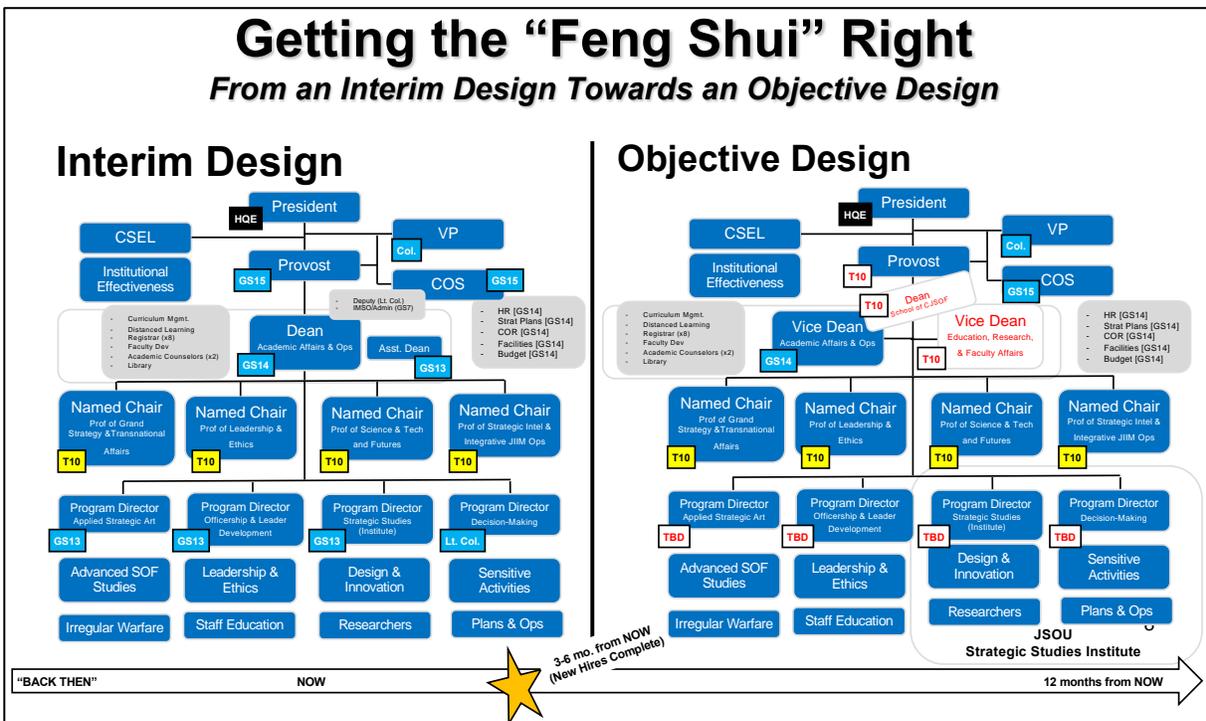
By our initial net estimate, these are the core “outrider” talents we will need to help us lead a JSOU-NEXT adaptation. This net estimate followed the following three (3) steps: (a) determination of “*What Kind of JSOF for the 2020s and 2030s?*” ... based, (b) on a comprehensive “estimate” of the global geostrategic environment (See White Paper #2); from here, (c) deriving our JSOF Education Objectives and a reconsideration of our curricula and training POIs from this analysis; a “needs”-based, not a “wants”-based analysis. These four key faculty talents will share the following common skills, attributes, and experience/expertise in addition to and beyond their particular areas of subject-matter expertise:

Should be a person of vision and leadership who can build strong working relationships with students, faculty, staff, and administration. PhD degree in relevant discipline. Important needs for this position are a strong academic background, the ability to translate vision into action, a record of program innovation, strong team-building and communication skills, and experience with professional military education (PME). Each professorial position will combine several roles: responsibility for supporting the development of the JSOU curriculum; advising JSOU’s President and other leaders on matters of [subject matter expertise] and leadership, as well as other areas as needed; and leading outreach for the University in [subject matter expertise].

Additionally, as most Special Operations require non-special operations support, each professor will develop an “engagement network” for the university through engagement and connection with academia, regular forces, relevant government agencies, and the think tank world.

Towards a New JSOU Organizational Design: *Getting the ‘Feng Shui’ Right*

Creation of a new position of **Provost**, and by-name “selection” of a top-quality talent for this key leadership position rounds out a core grouping of five initial talent positions upon and around which our JSOU-“NEXT” adaptation will build and commence. We will endeavor to adapt the current JSOU Organization Chart in a deliberate, strategically-paced progression, *evolving from the Interim Design to our ‘Objective Design’*.



Even as we begin this adaptation, we will remain true and grounded in cornerstone attributes of the current JSOU design and education, training and leader development model, building on “*What Works.*”



WHITE PAPER #3



Keeping with, and finding creative ways of “innovating within the model” of JSOU’s original and lasting corporate university design and approach is a top priority.

There are numerous definitions and successful models of corporate universities in use today throughout US businesses and federal agencies. A definition of a typical corporate university is:

A learning organization with a governance system that aligns all learning with the corporate or agency mission, strategy, and goals. The governance system typically includes a governing board consisting of the CEO and other senior executives and a chief learning officer (CLO) who has overall responsibility for managing the organization's investment in learning. CEOs of best-practice learning organizations leverage their corporate university to achieve performance goals, drive cultural transformation, reform and integrate training departments, and establish and sustain competitive advantage through learning.¹

In a general sense, the successful corporate university helps an organization exceed operational performance objectives by equipping employees and future leaders with appropriate development opportunities. It drives higher quality programs at lower costs by managing enterprise-wide learning resources for consistency, selection, and management and focuses learning programs on business needs through a model of enterprise-wide education with central oversight to address needs of business units with unique learning and development requirements.² As a corporate university, JSOU-“NEXT” will continue to provide a spectrum of learning activities throughout the SOF member’s career that significantly improves their intellectual competence to successfully perform the USSOCOM mission.

To adapt to using *corporate university principles*, JSOU will reconfigure its organization and mission, incorporating key corporate university elements. **First**, we will foster the strategic objectives of USSOCOM, both short and long term. **Second**, we will foster a capacity to quickly adapt to rapidly changing learning needs and continuously develop better approaches to knowledge or learning delivery. **Third**, JSOU-“NEXT” will continue to respond to the local *needs* of the force, and do so in ways that help the force determine and distinguish between *wants* and real *needs*. **Fourth**, the “whole-of-university” campus will remain distributed throughout the SOF community to engage a dispersed workforce. And **fifth**, the university must continue to coordinate and leverage existing programs and learning opportunities whenever possible, providing for close relationships and coordination with SOF education stakeholders to be responsive to their needs, allowing for the continual increase in capacity of a learning organization, and providing ease of access to education. Lastly, years of study analyses continuously indicate the force wants the core JSOU curriculum delivered via resident *and* seminar style education. This simply reaffirms a JSOU-“NEXT” commitment to a distributed campus organization that has a main or central hub with satellite locations distributed through the SOF education stakeholders.³

That said, some immediate changes in organizational design and internal orientation are called for. First, by current JSOU org design, what was/is intended to be a “University” has been organized internally more in the form of an operational “command” rather than an institute of teaching & learning, research & analysis, and external service outreach. Secondly, to meet our mandate as JSOU (NEXT), the organization needs to adopt a “hybrid” organizational design and internal structure—one that allows us to meet and live up to our “dual, hybrid” mission: (a) academic institution that serves (b) a professional service enterprise. Thirdly, and consequently, our org design needs to reflect elements of BOTH; same is true for our JSOU-“NEXT” Faculty Blend.

Our challenge – our obligation – will be in finding ways to achieve this hybrid blend in an effective but least-disruptive way. As we progress towards our ‘Objective Design’, we will look to “combine” (merge) what are currently two separate (but mutually-supporting) sub-organizations — JSOU-A and JSOU-E — into ONE organization, re-designated as the *School of Combined-Joint Special Operations*. As a “university,” JSOU should architecturally be composed of a school (or multiple schools) of learning

¹ Learning Circuits, Glossary, <http://www.learningcircuits.org/glossary>. Feb 08.

² Corporate University Exchange, Learning and Development Programs, http://www.corpu.com/services/cu_design.asp

³ “JSOU Future Vision” (2008).



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(education and training), center(s) of policy, practice, and experimentation, and institute(s) (for relevant research & analysis). As one unified “School,” we will move toward appointment of a DEAN of the School, preferably as a Title 10 (at the associate professor or full professor level of experience and rank); and the re-designation of the current JSOU-A “dean” and JSOU-E “director” as “Vice Dean” positions (1 x Vice Dean for Academic Affairs & Operations; 1 x Vice Dean for Faculty & Research, as GS15 or Title 10 leader positions).

As early as the Interim Design, we will relook our current “Centers” under JSOU-E, in the near-term recast as educational departments under the School, led by ‘Department Heads/Chairs; again, who should be Title 10s, representing the “core curricula” for the School of Combined-Joint Special Operations (S-CJSO). But for the immediate term, these positions will be retained as-is, until we complete our “Internal Review” of faculty (by expertise and expert knowledge on-hand versus required) and curricula and training POIs (based on what we have on-hand versus what is “needs-based” required) that we conduct “on the move” as part of a running geostrategic estimate of US national security interests and SOF “needs” to meet those interests in light of a changed and changing global “compound” security environment.

Conclusion: JSOU, Sharpening the Edge of SOF’s Advantage, For Nation.

In all of these adaptations, our ultimate goal is simple: *One JSOU Team, Not Many.* With this adapted Faculty Blend, and these modest yet strategically-focused Organizational adjustments, JSOU-“NEXT” will be poised, postured, prepared and positioned to better provide the Nation what it needs, when, where, and how it needs it.



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JSOU Education, Training & Advancing Knowledge Priorities

What the Nation needs...What we must own and be expert in



1) Humans are more important than hardware

2) Quality is better than quantity

3) SOF cannot be mass produced

4) Competent SOF cannot be created after emergencies occur

5) Most Special Operations require Non-SOF assistance

Cognitive frame – the “why”

Changing Strategic Environment

Changing Character of War and Security

Geostrategic Net Assessment

- **Regional and transregional threat analysis**
Eastern Europe | Western Europe | Middle East | South / Central Asia | Northeast Asia | Southeast Asia | Latin America | Africa | Arctic
- **Sources of adversary conduct (strategies, dynamics, operational methods, and decision-making)**
Russia | PRC | DPRK | Iran | Jihadists, VEOs | Transnational Crime Orgs | Compound threats | Climate Change | Pandemics
- **Partner / Allied / IA / Joint / Commercial cooperation and interoperability**
NATO | ROK | Japan | FVEY | Australia, New Zealand | India, Thailand, Philippines | Israel | Arab, Mideast States | Joint Services | USG Interagency | Contractors | Industry

Applied Strategic Art

- **Spectrum of conflict**
Conventional War | Unconventional War | Political Warfare | Hybrid, Gray Zone | Proxy Warfare | CT | COIN | FID | SFA | DSCA | Homeland Security | HA/DR
- **Mastery of joint and multinational campaigning**
Strategy Making | Operational Art, Design | Allied, Coalition Warfare | All-Domains Operations
- **Warfare and warfighting functions**
Megacities | UGFs | Sustainment | Defend the Homeland (includes CWMD) | Space | Cyber, C4I | Information Warfare

SOF “Core Activities”
DA | SR | CWMD | CT | UW | FID | SFA | HR&R | COIN | FHA | MISO | CA

America’s Changing World Role

Strategic Forecasting (Anticipating Change)

- **Geopolitics**
Evolution of War | Evolution of Peace
- **Geo-economics**
Economics of National Security and Defense
- **Technological development**
Robotics | Artificial Intelligence | Autonomous Systems | Quantum Computing | Block-Chaining | Human Augmentation, Engineering
- **Disruption and innovation**

Industrial / Enterprise Management, Leadership, and Innovation

- **Ethics and the profession**
Civil-Mil Relations | Private Military Contractors | Emerging Technologies and Threats | Status as a Profession | Comparative Ethics
- **Organizational culture, effectiveness, transformational change**
Creative Thinking | Critical Thinking | Judgment-Decision Analytics | Culture-Climate-Collaboration | Learning (incl. Educational Methodology)
- **Talent development and management**
- **Force mobilization and modernization (all things readiness)**

LINES OF EFFORT

- 1) Educate SOF & SOF Enablers
- 2) Interagency Education & Outreach
- 3) International Education & Outreach
- 4) Conventional Forces Interaction
- 5) Interaction w/ Academia & Others

Towards A More Effective JSOF

Cognitive frame– the “why”

UNCLASSIFIED

JSOU-NEXT ~ USSOCOM’s “Think-Do Tank,” world-class in CJSOF strategic and operational education, training, and Leader development, and the advancement of knowledge on the applications of JSOF, for Nation



WHITE PAPER #4



“Sharpening the Edge of SOF’s Advantage” *The Fourth Age SOF Adaptive Leader-Operator*

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 for the 2020s and 2030s?

In the lead-up to his congressional confirmation hearings, General Richard Clarke was asked for his view on what are (will be) the major challenges confronting the next Commander of USSOCOM. In response, he offered the following:

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.²

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. This is a need only we can provision, through ourselves, *for Nation*.

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 CJSOF 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 (great) power competition is now an imperative.*

JSOF Education Objectives derive from a running geostrategic net estimate of the changed and changing global strategic and operational environment of conduct. These Objectives must produce – in broad stroke and by way of JSOU’s approach to strategic & operational education and training, advancement of knowledge, and leader development – the following Outcomes enabling *Future SOF Leader-Operators* to:

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6. Think critically and strategically in applying joint special operations forces warfighting principles and concepts to joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational (JIIM) operations.

Despite the narrow focus on counterterrorism and counterinsurgency over the past twenty years, U.S.-led combined-joint special operations forces offer policymakers certainly what proved the *sin qua non* of America’s fighting edge during the decades of CT and COIN – direct action raiding – but also much more

¹ “There is more to sustaining a competitive advantage than acquiring hardware; we must gain and sustain an intellectual overmatch as well.” See, *Developing Today’s Joint Officers for Tomorrow’s Ways of War: The Joint Chiefs of Staff Vision and Guidance for Professional Military Education & Talent Management* (2020), p. 2.

² 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.*



WHITE PAPER #4



than expertise in “kicking doors.” SOF expands the range of military options (both in quality of capability and in operational and strategic utility of employment) to enable other instruments of statecraft to succeed. Throughout the Cold War this SOF full-range of operational capacity offered the United States the ability to win without fighting; to not have to resort to armed conflict—the way and means of fulfilling George Kennan’s prescription of a ‘Active Containment-based’ national (grand) strategy. Special operations forces do this, not just on the ‘lower ends’ of this range of operations, actions, and activities (OAAs) but continuously throughout, by shaping adversary and partner behavior, both through behavior reinforcement—detering adversaries and assuring partners, and behavior modification—compelling adversaries and inducing partner cooperation.³

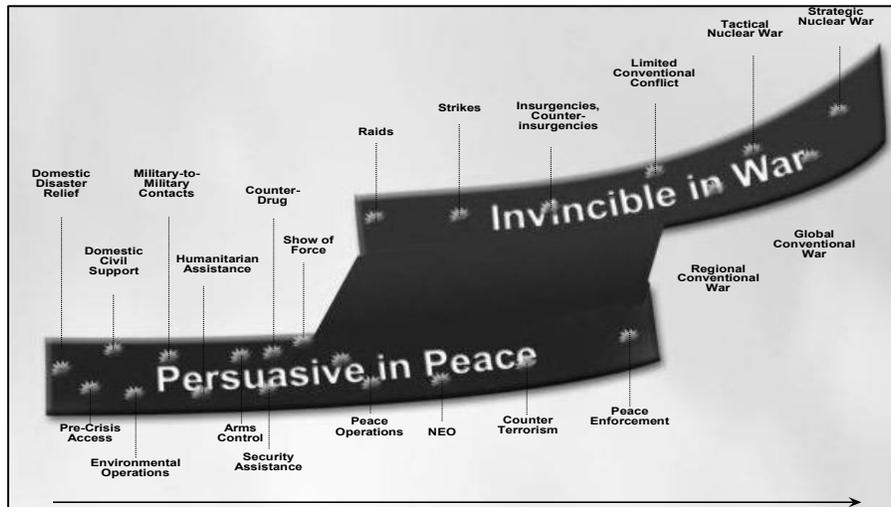


Figure 1. SOF “At the Threshold Crossing” of a ‘4th Age’

Today’s ‘compound security threat’⁴-based environment of conduct is now popularly regarded and referred to as one of ‘gray zone’ conflicts, i.e., “below the thresholds of classical war,” and *competition*; the latter, basically about proactively seeking positions of strategic advantage against an adversary, or as fabled Sun Tzu said over 2500 years ago, to “subdue the enemy without fighting.”⁵

The theory and concept of *competitive engagement*⁶ that underpins the *2018 National Defense Strategy* builds on the very two core concepts of utility of force that have long been cornerstone to and at the heart of American power, and the American grand strategy: *coercion and partnerships*. Furthermore, competitive engagement asserts that *influence* is the critical element underpinning both. Working with and through foreign partners, special operations forces have a long rich tradition and heritage of developing the understanding and relationships required to wield the influence necessary to shape behavior.⁷

³ Keith Pritchard, Roy Kempf, and Steve Ferenzi, “How to Win an Asymmetric War in the Era of Special Forces,” *The National Interest*, 12 October, 2019.

⁴ This environment of “compound security” is a world of “Convergence”: the point where the gap between non-state and state actor capabilities diminishes and the threat to force and mission success increases significantly. And for more on ‘compound security’ see Hugh Liebert, John Griswold and Isaiah Wilson III, eds., *Thinking beyond Boundaries: Transnational Challenges to U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014); and Isaiah Wilson III and James J. F. Forest, eds., *Handbook of Defence Politics: International and Comparative Perspectives* (New York: Routledge Press, July 1, 2009).

⁵ Sun Tzu, *The Art of War* (Griffith translation, 1962).

⁶ See Nadia Schadlow, “Competitive Engagement: Upgrading America’s Influence,” *Orbis*, Volume 57, Issue 4, Autumn 2013, Pages 501-515, accessible [online] at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0030438713000446>

⁷ Schadlow (2013); Pritchard, Kempf, Ferenzi (2019).



WHITE PAPER #4



Both China and Russia are aggressively advancing their interests through proxies, information warfare, and subversion, achieving war-like objectives without triggering a conventional military response from the United States and its allies. This is happening at a time when today's national security commentaries tend to speak of such gray zone activities as some form of 'New Wars'⁸ entirely unfamiliar to the American 'Way'. That same narrative tends to cast 'competition' as something equally new and 'foreign' to what the United States has ever known. Neither interpretation nor understanding could be more inaccurate. As President Kennedy noted during his 1962 address to West Point's graduating class regarding gray zone competition:

This is another type of war, new in its intensity, ancient in its origin--war by guerrillas, subversives, insurgents, assassins, war by ambush instead of by combat; by infiltration, instead of aggression, seeking victory by eroding and exhausting the enemy instead of engaging him.⁹

SOF's 'Fourth Age':

'Comprehensive Joint-Combined Ready SOF' for a 'Compound Security Dilemma' World

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.***

SOF mission-sets, in and of themselves, have not significantly changed. However, the environment in which they are conducted is, and will continue, to change significantly. Yet, amid all this ever-change, tomorrow's Fourth-Age SOF Leader-Operator will always need to be comprehensively versed in the following core arenas: ***geostrategy and transnational affairs; strategic intelligence and integrative Joint-Interagency-Intergovernmental-Multinational (JIIM) Operations; science & technology (S&T) and futures; and SOF leadership and the SOF professional ethic.***

In this new 'fourth age', geography has returned with a vengeance as a governing dynamic of international relations. And 'positional advantage' is once again a determinative factor of this new 'compound security' world (dis)order.

The newly found emphasis and awareness of issues related to *geostrategy*¹⁰ is a welcome development across the U.S. defense intellectual and strategic planning community, as evidenced by the logic of the 2018 National Defense Strategy. But an embrace of the study and application of geostrategic studies is not only important for future leaders of the Joint and Combined SOF community to inform USG and Joint approaches to strategy and force design, but also because geostrategy is an essential element to the "2+3 Threats" playbook, and more pointedly, to China's expansion globally, as they seek to couple targeted control and access to key geostrategic locations to outmaneuver and hold at risk U.S. interests

⁸ Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era*, Stanford University Press, 2003.

⁹ John F. Kennedy: "Remarks at West Point to the Graduating Class of the U.S. Military Academy." June 6, 1962. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=8695>.

¹⁰ A subfield of geopolitics, a type of foreign policy guided principally by geographical factors as they inform, constrain, or affect political and military planning. The systematic analysis to develop a sensitive understanding of: geographical realities, political forces, historical experience, and that factors that change these, to formulate prescriptions on the application of military power to achieve vital objectives. (Derived from CSIS Brzezinski Institute)



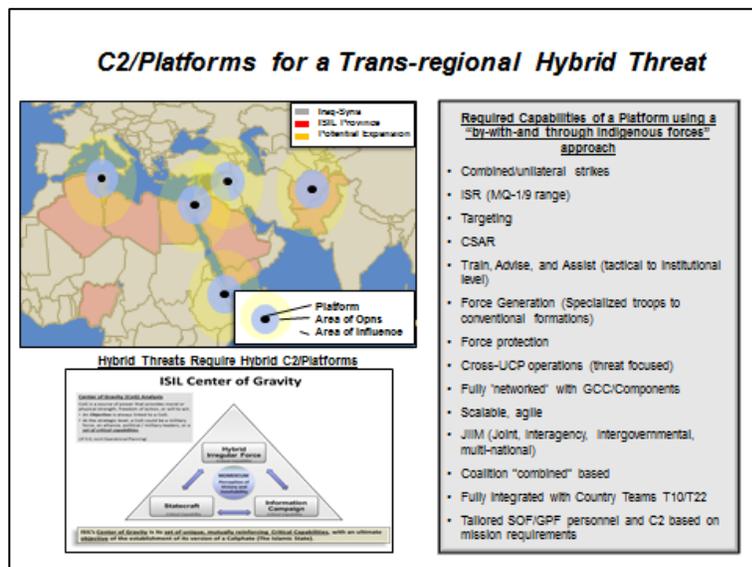
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regionally and globally. U.S. adversaries are now pursuing 'positional advantage' through their strategies and actions, globally.

As we know, RUS, CHN, and IRN are deliberate in the WHAT and the WHERE of their activities.....and the WHERE makes issues of geostrategy all the more relevant to JSOU “Next.” Amplifying around 2014, RUS activities in Crimea, Cyprus, Greece, Egypt, and Syria have been all about holding the E. Med SLOCs at risk. CHN efforts in LATAM are all about gaining influence to place the Panama Canal in a series of overlapping influence levers to 'salami slice' to a new normal of either control or positional 'denial' of US Access, Basing, and Overflight (ABO). Again, this is all about gaining positional advantage. Chinese strategists think and write using geopolitical terms, dividing the world up into regions or zones, and deploy concepts like “heartland” and “rimland” in their works, with frequent direct referrals to the great geostrategic theorists like Sir Halford Mackinder and Alfred Thayer Mahan.

We need our SOF leaders to think this way as well. Another thing that a geostrategic/positional advantage approach by the threat does for a competitor or an adversary is that it allows one to focus their



resources at what the famed George Kennan called, 'the strong points'. For the 'Fourth Age', we will need SOF to play point vs. area defense at or proximate to these 'strong points'. It is important to note that the *point of action* may be far removed from the *point of effect*. And in that sense, SOF can indirectly affect behavior and decision-making calculations through actions that may be in other tangible and non-tangible domains. This is the EXACT logic of placing CJIAATFs/CJSOTFs at the geostrategic nexes!

Figure 2. 'Strong-pointing' at the Critical Nexes

Special Operations Forces (SOF) are designed to operate in austere environments and continue to be in the forefront of the United States efforts confronting an emerging reality where any opponent possesses potential for overmatching capabilities. These gray zones will require us to be more agile, using non-kinetic capabilities to enhance competitive engagement/deterrence. Therefore, CJSOF must strive to work towards unprecedented Joint, Interagency (IA), Intergovernmental, and Multinational coordination to synchronize all elements of national power, and beyond. Today's new compound security "normal" for SOF will be to operate in satellite denied/disrupted environments, under ubiquitous intelligence surveillance (UIS), threat of targeting by high-end military capabilities, including Weapons of Mass Destruction, where the Cyber and Electronic Warfare domains are contested, and increased scrutiny is routine.

The U.S. Special Operations community now speaks towards a "Hyper Enabled Operator" (HEO), who is intended to be a SOF professional, empowered by technologies that accelerate tactical decision making by increasing situational awareness and reducing cognitive workload. No single technology will independently make operators hyper enabled. Instead, operators will become hyper enabled through the integration of technologies.



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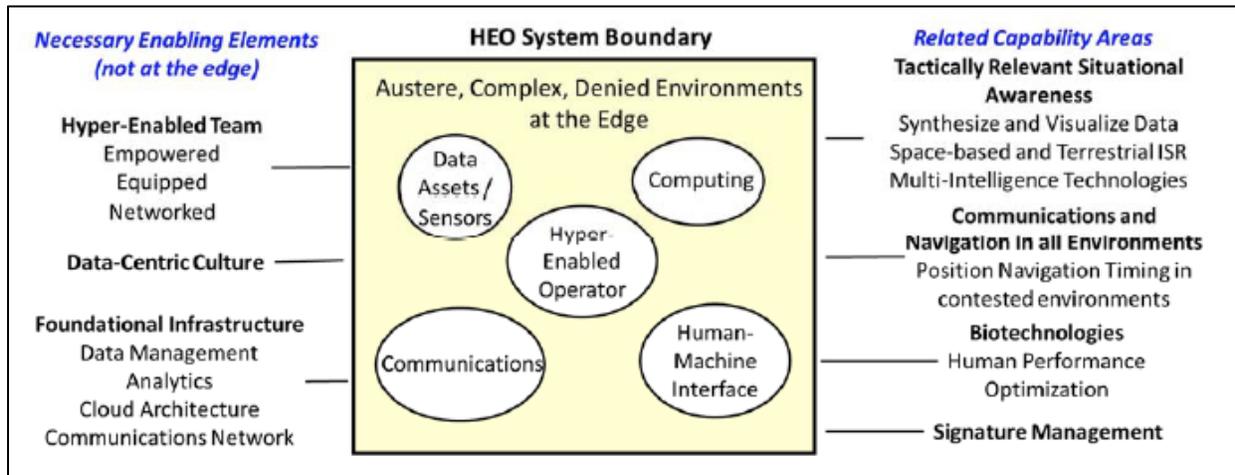


Figure 3. The ‘Hyper-Enabled SOF Operator’

More specifically, ...

[t]he Hyper Enabled Operator will have technologies which permit the persistent, near-real-time collection of data; the rapid, automated distillation of those data into mission relevant information; the dissemination of that information to the personnel who require or can best use it; the presentation of that information in easily understandable formats and user-friendly modalities; the ability to use that information to select, direct, and implement tailorable, nonlethal and lethal effects to best meet mission objectives; all while maintaining freedom of movement and tactical invisibility.¹¹

Thus, the ‘Fourth-Age’ Adaptive SOF Leader-Operator will also need to be ‘armed’ with the knowledge and technical skills relating to *Next Generation Intelligence Surveillance and Reconnaissance, Networking and Data Management, Biotechnology and Human Interface, Next Generation Effects and Precision Strike, and Next Generation Mobility and Signature Management.*

Implications for SOF Combined-Joint PME

For the Joint (and ‘combined’) Force, changes in the character and conduct of war and operations now demand:

- Continuous integration of national instruments of power and influence in support of national objectives;
- Critical strategic thinking across the Joint Staff and other joint headquarters;
- Unprecedented degree of global integration of the all-domain resources available from our Combatant Commands, ASCCs, and TSOCs to generate advantage for ourselves and dilemmas for our competitors;
- Creative approaches to joint warfighting and sustaining momentum in our campaigns;
- Highly effective coalition, allied, international partner and U.S. coordination and integration; and

¹¹ Excerpted from, Special Operations Forces Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics Directorate of Science and Technology (SOF AT&L-ST), Broad Agency Announcement USSOCOM-BAAST-2020 for Technology Development and Advanced Technology Development.



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- Deeper understanding of the implications of disruptive and future technologies for adversaries and ourselves.¹²

In May 2020, the Joint Chiefs of Staff responded to this changed (and ever-changing) geostrategic environment of conduct with a new vision and guidance statement for professional military education: *Developing Today's Joint Officers for Tomorrow's Ways of War*. Most crucially, the new vision signals that the services are “all in” on the need to reform professional military education.¹³ What this signals is nothing less than potentially transformational: an agreement amongst The Joint Chiefs that professional military education has stagnated and that the present PME ~~but~~ system is not currently optimized to provide the Nation what it needs to win future wars, much less to win in competition short-of-war.

Put plainly, we require leaders at all levels who can achieve intellectual overmatch against adversaries. To achieve this, we must continue to adapt and innovate throughout our PME programs and talent management efforts to shift our policies, behaviors, and cultures to keep pace with the changing character of war. The cognitive capabilities these leaders bring to globally integrated operations are not solely the output of a 10-month course; they are the product of a deliberate careerlong professional development ethos and learning continuum.¹⁴

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JSOU Education, Training & Advancing Knowledge Priorities

What the Nation needs...What we must own and be expert in

1) Humans are more important than hardware

2) Quality is better than quantity

3) SOF cannot be mass produced

4) Competent SOF cannot be created after emergencies occur

5) Most Special Operations require Non-SOF assistance

Cognitive frame – the “why”

Changing Strategic Environment

Geostrategic Net Assessment

- **Regional and transregional threat analysis**
Eastern Europe | Western Europe | Middle East | South / Central Asia | Northeast Asia | Southeast Asia | Latin America | Africa | Arctic
- **Sources of adversary conduct (strategies, dynamics, operational methods, and decision-making)**
Russia | PRC | DPRK | Iran | Jihadists, VEOs | Transnational Crime Orgs | Compound threats | Climate Change | Pandemics
- **Partner / Allied / IA / Joint / Commercial cooperation and interoperability**
NATO | ROK | Japan | FVEY | Australia, New Zealand | India, Thailand, Philippines | Israel | Arab, Mideast States | Joint Services | USG Interagency | Contractors | Industry

Applied Strategic Art

- **Spectrum of conflict**
Conventional War | Unconventional War | Political Warfare | Hybrid, Gray Zone | Proxy Warfare | CT | COIN | FID | SFA | DSCA | Homeland Security | HA/DR
- **Mastery of joint and multinational campaigning**
Strategy Making | Operational Art, Design | Allied, Coalition Warfare | All-Domains Operations
- **Warfare and warfighting functions**
Megacities | UGFs | Sustainment | Defend the Homeland (includes CWMD) | Space | Cyber, C4I | Information Warfare

SOF “Core Activities”
DA | SR | CWMD | CT | UW | FID | SFA | HR&R | COIN | FHA | MISO | CA

Strategic Forecasting (Anticipating Change)

- **Geopolitics**
Evolution of War | Evolution of Peace
- **Geo-economics**
Economics of National Security and Defense
- **Technological development**
Robotics | Artificial Intelligence | Autonomous Systems | Quantum Computing | Block-Chaining | Human Augmentation, Engineering
- **Disruption and innovation**

Industrial / Enterprise Management, Leadership, and Innovation

- **Ethics and the profession**
Civil-Mil Relations | Private Military Contractors | Emerging Technologies and Threats | Status as a Profession | Comparative Ethics
- **Organizational culture, effectiveness, transformational change**
Creative Thinking | Critical Thinking | Judgment-Decision Analytics | Culture-Climate-Collaboration | Learning (incl. Educational Methodology)
- **Talent development and management**
- **Force mobilization and modernization (all things readiness)**

LINES OF EFFORT

- 1) Educate SOF & SOF Enablers
- 2) Interagency Education & Outreach
- 3) International Education & Outreach
- 4) Conventional Forces Interaction
- 5) Interaction w/ Academia & Others

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Towards A More Effective JSOF

Cognitive frame–the “why”

Figure 4. “Compound SOF” Education, Training & Leader Development

¹² The Joint Staff, *Developing Today's Joint Officers for Tomorrow's Ways of War: The Joint Chiefs of Staff Vision and Guidance for Professional Military Education & Talent Management* (2020).

¹³ James Lacey, “Finally Getting Serious About Professional Military Education,” *War on the Rocks*, 18 May 2020.

¹⁴ The Joint Staff (2020), p. 3.



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What this means for JSOU “NEXT” is simple in statement, but profound in its implications and imperatives. Beyond just technical ‘knowing’, today and tomorrow’s Fourth-Age SOF Leader-Operators must be well and deeply and broadly educated, trained, and practically experienced in the policy, (geo)strategy (national, regional, and ‘grand’ levels thereof), geopolitics, geoeconomics, and geo-societal and demographic aspects and characteristics of the new changed (and ever-changing) character of global geopolitical competition: a compound security threats-based environment of conduct.

Conclusion: *Imperatives for the SOF Profession and Professional Ethic*

In 2007, the Department of Defense published an updated version of *The Armed Forces Officer*.¹⁵ This effort was the culmination of nearly a decade of research, study, and discussion about officership and the profession of arms that took place at the service academies, at war colleges, and within the joint staff 3–5. This book captured and described four key roles for the military officer: (1) warrior-leader in the profession of arms, (2) member of a profession, (3) servant of the nation, and (4) leader of character.¹⁶

As we work by, with, and through USSOCOM on behalf of helping our Nation and national allies and partners come up with answers to the ultimate and penultimate questions of our times – how has the character of global geopolitical competition changed (ultimate) and to what impacts on what kind of SOF the Nation needs for the 2020s and 2030s (penultimate)? – regardless of the pointed specifics of those answers, fundamental and enduring to any and all answers will be holding the line, and reaffirming, SOF’s commitment to the four keystones of American Officership. Understanding each of these roles is important because together they comprise the key aspects of officership.

JSOU “NEXT” must reorient, refresh, and renew itself and all our practices in ways that Take The Lead on re-sharpening the edge of Special Operations’ enduring ethos of ‘The Quiet Professionals’ as SOF’s Advantage *for Nation, not itself*. This is imperative; a top priority.

It is appropriate to conclude by speaking to the importance of the professional armed forces officer’s commissioning oath. Returning to S.L.A. Marshall’s classic work, *The Armed Forces Officer*, both Marshalls—S. L. A. Marshall and George C. Marshall, secretary of defense at ~~that~~ the time—emphasized the linkage of the officer corps with service to nation:

*Thereafter, [the officer] is given a paper which says that because the President as representative of the people of this country reposes “special trust and confidence” in his [or her] “patriotism, valor, fidelity, and abilities,” he [or she] is forthwith commissioned.*¹⁷

S.L.A. Marshall went on to highlight one quality in particular: *fidelity*. Fidelity is commonly considered “faithfulness to something to which one is bound by pledge or duty.”¹⁸ In spite of all the formal rules and legal statutes obligating the commissioned and noncommissioned officer to the Constitution, and through it, to the American people, officers’ fidelity has proven to be the most enduring tie that binds officership and the profession of arms to the nation. This bond has helped the nation weather many storms,

¹⁵ US Department of Defense. *The Armed Forces Officer*. Washington DC: National Defense University Press; 2007.

¹⁶ ISALAH WILSON III, PhD, and MICHAEL J. MEESE, PhD, “Officership and the Profession of Arms in the 21st Century,” Chapter 3 in *Fundamentals of Military Medicine*, Borden Publishing (2017).

¹⁷ Marshall SLA. *The Armed Forces Officer*. Washington, DC: Department of Defense; 1950. DA Pamphlet 600-2, p. 2.

¹⁸ Fidelity. Merriam-Webster online dictionary. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/fidelity>. Accessed January 22, 2018.



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both foreign *and domestic*. The fidelity of the military professional has always found its strongest roots in the rich soils of American history. Examples set by leaders from General George Washington to Admiral Bill McRaven reinforce the principle of subordination of the military practitioner to civilian authority, and through that authority, to the defense of the nation.

Special operations personnel address unique, specialized, and difficult military problems that require exceptionally trained, exquisitely equipped, and tremendously supported warfighters. While other services can overwhelm enemies with massive combat power, special operations provide discreet, sometimes covert, precision military capabilities that have become increasingly relevant in modern warfare, but have at the same time, over the past 20 years, come with its own ‘gray area’ legal and ethical ambiguities and complications. Today’s and tomorrow’s compound security dilemmas demand a re-striking of that critical balance of fidelity with the ‘General Will’ we serve – between SOF’s elite specialized warfighting and the Nation’s core values – in a Fourth-Age SOF Professional Ethic.

JSOU-NEXT ~ USSOCOM’s “Think-Do Tank,” world-class in CJSOF strategic and operational education, training, and Leader development, and the advancement of knowledge on the applications of JSOF, for Nation



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“Sharpening the Edge of SOF’s Advantage”

H.E.²R.O.TM—Towards the Next-GEN, Fourth Age SOF Adaptive Leader-Operator

"With the personifications of his destiny to guide and aid him, the hero goes forward in his adventure until he comes to the 'threshold guardian' at the entrance to the zone of magnified power. Such custodians bound the world in four directions—also up and down—standing for the limits of the hero's present sphere, or life horizon. Beyond them is darkness, the unknown and danger; just as beyond the parental watch is danger to the infant and beyond the protection of his society danger to the members of the tribe. The usual person is more than content, he is even proud, to remain within the indicated bounds, and popular belief gives him every reason to fear so much as the first step into the unexplored. The adventure is always and everywhere a passage beyond the veil of the known into the unknown; the powers that watch at the boundary are dangerous; to deal with them is risky; yet for anyone with competence and courage the danger fades."¹



Special Operations Forces, SOF, like the Nation it serves, is at *the threshold crossing*² of a ‘Next-Era’ – a new, Fourth Age. In fact, we may have been through and well beyond this ‘crossing’ for many years now. This ‘new’ Fourth Age is one of ‘compound security threats’ and a character of global geopolitical competition [governed by a new and transformative ‘compound security dilemma’ \(CSD\)](#).

The “compound security” character of the global security environment is such that it demands a future 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.*** Nothing less than this comprehensive joint-combined utility of SOF philosophy, culture, and approach is required for overmatching power in and under 4th Age conditions; a “trans-Everything” view of, and approach to SOF.

Growing, fostering, preserving, and *sharpening the edge* of this Fourth-Age SOF Advantage, for Nation, is all about talent and leader development through a *professional military education* (PME) governed by the following Six Principles of Leader Development that will underpin the Joint Special Operations University (JSOU)-“NEXT’s” approach to teaching & learning (T&L) and research & analysis (R&A). It’s all about educating and training, and advancing knowledge in order to develop 4th Age SOF Leaders that (1) Understand the security environment and the contributions of all instruments of power; (2) Anticipate and respond to surprise and uncertainty; (3) Anticipate and recognize change and Lead Transitions; (4) Operate on Intent through trust, empowerment, and understanding; (5) Make ethical decisions based on the shared values of the profession of arms; and (6) Think critically and strategically in applying joint special operations forces warfighting principles and concepts to joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational (JIIM) operations.

¹ Campbell (2008), p. 67-68.

² Relating to The Hero’s Journey, this is the point where the hero actually crosses into the field of adventure, leaving the known limits of his world and venturing into an unknown and dangerous realm where the rules and limits are unknown. See, Joseph Campbell (1949), *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*.



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As JSOU, we see four (4) enduring strategic-operational knowledge lines of effort: *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, we 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?

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 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.*³ 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 punishments⁴ ... 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.”

³ Definitions of Deterrence, accessible [online] at: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/deterrence>

⁴ “Deterrence Theory,” accessible [online] at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/computer-science/deterrence-theory>



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Rethinking SOF Readiness. Is SOF’s current readiness model appropriately balanced for the changed and changing character of global geopolitical, geo-economics, 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.***

Epilogue is Prologue

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.***

What kind of (Joint and Combined) Special Operations Force (SOF) is needed to overmatch⁵ the challenges and opportunities in this evolving geostrategic environment, 2020s through the 2040s?

In the lead-up to his congressional confirmation hearings, General Richard Clarke was asked for his view on what are (will be) the major challenges confronting the next Commander of USSOCOM. In response, he offered the following:

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.⁶

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. This is a need only we can provision, through ourselves, *for Nation.*

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 CJSOF 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 (great) power competition is now an imperative.*

Despite the narrow focus on counterterrorism and counterinsurgency over the past twenty years, U.S.-led combined-joint special operations forces offer policymakers certainly what proved the *sin qua non* of America’s fighting edge during the decades of CT and COIN – direct action raiding – but also much more than expertise in “kicking doors.” SOF expands the range of military options (both in quality of capability and in operational and strategic utility of employment) to enable other instruments of statecraft to succeed.

⁵ “There is more to sustaining a competitive advantage than acquiring hardware; we must gain and sustain an intellectual overmatch as well.” See, *Developing Today’s Joint Officers for Tomorrow’s Ways of War: The Joint Chiefs of Staff Vision and Guidance for Professional Military Education & Talent Management* (2020), p. 2.

⁶ 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.*



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Throughout the Cold War this SOF full-range of operational capacity offered the United States the ability to win without fighting; to not have to resort to armed conflict—the way and means of fulfilling George Kennan’s prescription of an ‘Active Containment-based’ national (grand) strategy.

Special operations forces do this, not just on the ‘lower ends’ of this range of operations, actions, and activities (OAAs) but continuously throughout, by shaping adversary and partner behavior, both through behavior reinforcement—i.e., deterring adversaries and assuring partners, and behavior modification—in other words, compelling adversaries and inducing partner cooperation.⁷

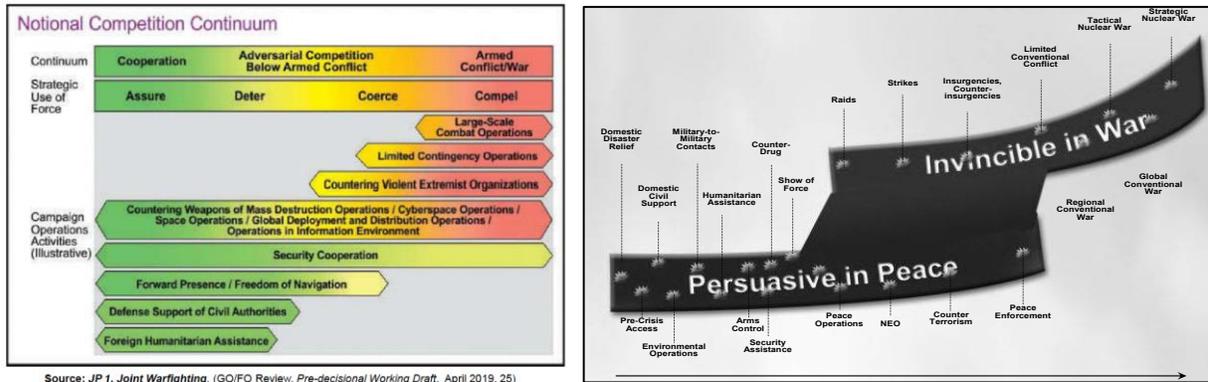


Figure 1. SOF “At the Threshold Crossing” of a ‘4th Age’

Today’s ‘compound security threat’⁸-based environment of conduct is now popularly regarded and referred to as one of ‘gray zone’ conflicts, i.e., those “below the thresholds of classical war,” and *competition*; the latter, basically about proactively seeking positions of strategic advantage against an adversary, or as fabled Sun Tzu said over 2500 years ago, to “subdue the enemy without fighting.”⁹

The theory and concept of *competitive engagement*¹⁰ that underpins the *2018 National Defense Strategy* builds on the very two core concepts of utility of force that have long been cornerstone to and at the heart of American power, and the American grand strategy: *coercion and partnerships*. Furthermore, competitive engagement asserts that *influence* is the critical element underpinning both. Working with and through foreign partners, special operations forces have a long rich tradition and heritage of developing the understanding and relationships required to wield the influence necessary to shape behavior.¹¹

Both China and Russia are aggressively advancing their interests through proxies, information warfare, and subversion, achieving war-like objectives without triggering a conventional military response from the United States and its allies. This is happening at a time when today’s national security commentaries tend to speak of such gray zone activities as some form of ‘New Wars’¹² entirely unfamiliar to the American ‘Way’. That same narrative tends to cast ‘competition’ as something equally new and

⁷ Keith Pritchard, Roy Kempf, and Steve Ferenzi, “How to Win an Asymmetric War in the Era of Special Forces,” *The National Interest*, 12 October, 2019.

⁸ This environment of “compound security” is a world of “Convergence”: the point where the gap between non-state and state actor capabilities diminishes and the threat to force and mission success increases significantly. And for more on ‘compound security’ see Hugh Liebert, John Griswold and Isaiah Wilson III, eds., *Thinking beyond Boundaries: Transnational Challenges to U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014); and Isaiah Wilson III and James J. F. Forest, eds., *Handbook of Defence Politics: International and Comparative Perspectives* (New York: Routledge Press, July 1, 2009).

⁹ Sun Tzu, *The Art of War* (Griffith translation, 1962).

¹⁰ See Nadia Schadlow, “Competitive Engagement: Upgrading America’s Influence,” *Orbis*, Volume 57, Issue 4, Autumn 2013, Pages 501-515, accessible [online] at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0030438713000446>

¹¹ Schadlow (2013); Pritchard, Kempf, Ferenzi (2019).

¹² Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era*, Stanford University Press, 2003.



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'foreign' to what the United States has ever known. Neither interpretation nor understanding could be more inaccurate. As President Kennedy noted during his 1962 address to West Point's graduating class regarding gray zone competition:

This is another type of war, new in its intensity, ancient in its origin--war by guerrillas, subversives, insurgents, assassins, war by ambush instead of by combat; by infiltration, instead of aggression, seeking victory by eroding and exhausting the enemy instead of engaging him.¹³

SOF's 'Fourth Age':

'Comprehensive Joint-Combined Ready SOF' for a 'Compound Security Dilemma' World

SOF mission-sets, in and of themselves, have not significantly changed. However, the environment in which they are conducted is, and will continue, to change significantly. Yet, amid all this ever-change, tomorrow's Fourth-Age SOF Leader-Operator will always need to be comprehensively versed in the following core arenas: ***geostrategy and transnational affairs; strategic intelligence and integrative Joint-Interagency-Intergovernmental-Multinational (JIIM) Operations; science & technology (S&T) and futures; and SOF leadership and the SOF professional ethic.***

In this new 'fourth age', geography has returned with a vengeance as a governing dynamic of international relations. And *'positional advantage'* is once again a determinative factor of this new 'compound security' world (dis)order.

The newly found emphasis and awareness of issues related to *geostrategy*¹⁴ is a welcome development across the U.S. defense intellectual and strategic planning community, as evidenced by the logic of the 2018 National Defense Strategy. But an embrace of the study and application of geostrategic studies is not only important for future leaders of the Joint and Combined SOF community to inform USG and Joint approaches to strategy and force design; but also because geo-strategy is an essential element to the "2+3 Threats" playbook, and more pointedly, to China's expansion globally, as they seek to couple targeted control and access to key geostrategic locations to outmaneuver and hold at risk U.S. interests regionally and globally. U.S. adversaries are now pursuing 'positional advantage' through their strategies and actions, globally.

As we know, RUS, CHN, and IRN are deliberate in the WHAT and the WHERE of their activities.....and the WHERE makes issues of geostrategy all the more relevant to JSOU "Next." Amplifying around 2014, RUS activities in Crimea, Cyprus, Greece, Egypt, and Syria have been all about holding the E. Med SLOCs at risk. CHN efforts in LATAM are all about gaining influence to place the Panama Canal in a series of overlapping influence levers to 'salami slice' to a new normal of either control or positional 'denial' of US Access, Basing, and Overflight (ABO). Again, this is all about gaining positional advantage. Chinese strategists think and write using geopolitical terms, dividing the world up into regions or zones, and deploy concepts like "heartland" and "rimland" in their works, with frequent direct referrals to the great geostrategic theorists like Sir Halford Mackinder and Alfred Thayer Mahan.

¹³ John F. Kennedy: "Remarks at West Point to the Graduating Class of the U.S. Military Academy." June 6, 1962. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=8695>.

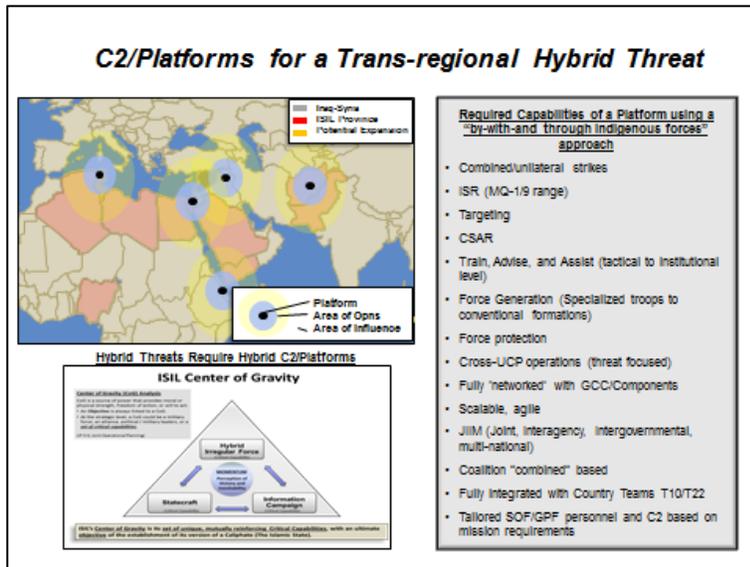
¹⁴ A subfield of geopolitics, a type of foreign policy guided principally by geographical factors as they inform, constrain, or affect political and military planning. The systematic analysis to develop a sensitive understanding of: geographical realities, political forces, historical experience, and that factors that change these, to formulate prescriptions on the application of military power to achieve vital objectives. (Derived from CSIS Brzezinski Institute)



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We need our SOF leaders to think this way as well. Another thing that a geostrategic/positional advantage approach by the threat does for a competitor or an adversary is that it allows one to focus their



resources at what the famed George Kennan called, *'the strong points'*. For the 'Fourth Age', we will need SOF to play point vs. area defense at or proximate to these 'strong points'. It is important to note that the *point of action* may be far removed from the *point of effect*. And in that sense, SOF can indirectly affect behavior and decision-making calculations through actions that may be in other tangible and non-tangible domains. This is the EXACT logic of placing CJATFs/CJSOTFs at the geostrategic nexes!

Figure 2. 'Strong-pointing' at the Critical Nexes

Special Operations Forces (SOF) are designed to operate in austere environments and continue to be in the forefront of the United States efforts confronting an emerging reality where any opponent possesses potential for overmatching capabilities. These gray zones will require us to be more agile, using non-kinetic capabilities to enhance competitive engagement/deterrence. Therefore, CJSOF must strive to work towards unprecedented Joint, Interagency (IA), Intergovernmental, and Multinational coordination to synchronize all elements of national power, and beyond. Today's new compound security "normal" for SOF will be to operate in satellite denied/disrupted environments, under ubiquitous intelligence surveillance (UIS), threat of targeting by high-end military capabilities, including Weapons of Mass Destruction, where the Cyber and Electronic Warfare domains are contested, and increased scrutiny is routine.

The U.S. Special Operations community now speaks towards a "Hyper Enabled Operator" (HEO), who is intended to be a SOF professional, empowered by technologies that accelerate tactical decision making by increasing situational awareness and reducing cognitive workload. No single technology will independently make operators hyper enabled. Instead, operators will become hyper enabled through the integration of technologies.



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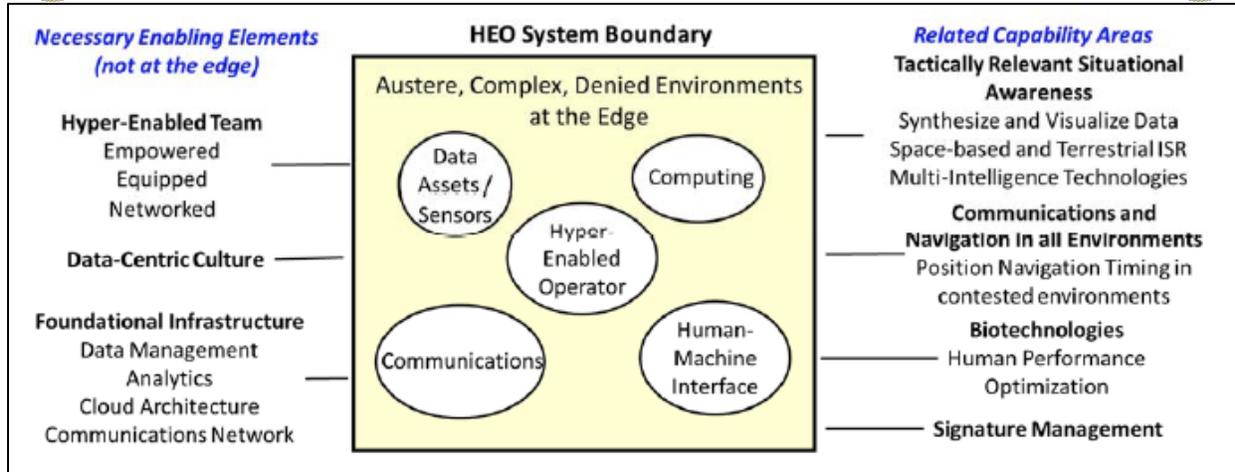


Figure 3. The ‘Hyper-Enabled SOF Operator’

More specifically, ...

[t]he Hyper Enabled Operator will have technologies which permit the persistent, near-real-time collection of data; the rapid, automated distillation of those data into mission relevant information; the dissemination of that information to the personnel who require or can best use it; the presentation of that information in easily understandable formats and user-friendly modalities; the ability to use that information to select, direct, and implement tailorable, nonlethal and lethal effects to best meet mission objectives; all while maintaining freedom of movement and tactical invisibility.¹⁵

Thus, the ‘Fourth-Age’ Adaptive SOF Leader-Operator will also need to be ‘armed’ with the knowledge and technical skills relating to *Next Generation Intelligence Surveillance and Reconnaissance, Networking and Data Management, Biotechnology and Human Interface, Next Generation Effects and Precision Strike, and Next Generation Mobility and Signature Management.*

Implications for SOF Combined-Joint PME

For the Joint (and ‘combined’) Force, changes in the character and conduct of war and operations now demand:

- Continuous integration of national instruments of power and influence in support of national objectives;
- Critical strategic thinking across the Joint Staff and other joint headquarters;
- Unprecedented degree of global integration of the all-domain resources available from our Combatant Commands, ASCCs, and TSOCs to generate advantage for ourselves and dilemmas for our competitors;
- Creative approaches to joint warfighting and sustaining momentum in our campaigns;
- Highly effective coalition, allied, international partner and U.S. coordination and integration; and

¹⁵ Excerpted from, Special Operations Forces Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics Directorate of Science and Technology (SOF AT&L-ST), Broad Agency Announcement USSOCOM-BAAST-2020 for Technology Development and Advanced Technology Development.



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- Deeper understanding of the implications of disruptive and future technologies for adversaries and ourselves.¹⁶

In May 2020, the Joint Chiefs of Staff responded to this changed (and ever-changing) geostrategic environment of conduct with a new vision and guidance statement for professional military education: *Developing Today's Joint Officers for Tomorrow's Ways of War*. Most crucially, the new vision signals that the services are “all in” on the need to reform professional military education.¹⁷ What this signals is nothing less than potentially transformational: an agreement amongst The Joint Chiefs that professional military education has stagnated and that the present PME system is not currently optimized to provide the Nation what it needs to win future wars, much less to win in competition short-of-war. In their own words, ...

Put plainly, we require leaders at all levels who can achieve intellectual overmatch against adversaries. To achieve this, we must continue to adapt and innovate throughout our PME programs and talent management efforts to shift our policies, behaviors, and cultures to keep pace with the changing character of war. The cognitive capabilities these leaders bring to globally integrated operations are not solely the output of a 10-month course; they are the product of a deliberate careerlong professional development ethos and learning continuum.¹⁸

**JSOU Education, Training
& Advancing Knowledge Priorities**

What the Nation needs...What we must own and be expert in

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1) Humans are more important than hardware	2) Quality is better than quantity	3) SOF cannot be mass produced	4) Competent SOF cannot be created after emergencies occur	5) Most Special Operations require Non-SOF assistance
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Cognitive frame – the “why”
Changing Strategic Environment

Geostrategic Net Assessment

- **Regional and transregional threat analysis**
Eastern Europe | Western Europe | Middle East | South / Central Asia | Northeast Asia | Southeast Asia | Latin America | Africa | Arctic
- **Sources of adversary conduct (strategies, dynamics, operational methods, and decision-making)**
Russia | PRC | DPRK | Iran | Jihadists, VEOs | Transnational Crime Orgs | Compound threats | Climate Change | Pandemics
- **Partner / Allied / IA / Joint / Commercial cooperation and interoperability**
NATO | ROK | Japan | FVEY | Australia, New Zealand | India, Thailand, Philippines | Israel | Arab, Mideast States | Joint Services | USG Interagency | Contractors | Industry

Applied Strategic Art

- **Spectrum of conflict**
Conventional War | Unconventional War | Political Warfare | Hybrid, Gray Zone | Proxy Warfare | CT | COIN | FID | SFA | DSCA | Homeland Security | HADR
- **Mastery of joint and multinational campaigning**
Strategy Making | Operational Art, Design | Allied, Coalition Warfare | All-Domains Operations
- **Warfare and warfighting functions**
Megacities | UGFs | Sustainment | Defend the Homeland (includes CWMD) | Space | Cyber, C4I | Information Warfare

SOF “Core Activities”

DA | SR | CWMD | CT | UW | FID | SFA | HR&R | COIN | FHA | MISO | CA

Strategic Forecasting (Anticipating Change)

- **Geopolitics**
Evolution of War | Evolution of Peace
- **Geo-economics**
Economics of National Security and Defense
- **Technological development**
Robotics | Artificial Intelligence | Autonomous Systems | Quantum Computing | Block-Chaining | Human Augmentation, Engineering
- **Disruption and innovation**

Industrial / Enterprise Management, Leadership, and Innovation

- **Ethics and the profession**
Civil-Mil Relations | Private Military Contractors | Emerging Technologies and Threats | Status as a Profession | Comparative Ethics
- **Organizational culture, effectiveness, transformational change**
Creative Thinking | Critical Thinking | Judgment-Decision Analytics | Culture-Climate-Collaboration | Learning (incl. Educational Methodology)
- **Talent development and management**
- **Force mobilization and modernization (all things readiness)**

LINES OF EFFORT

- 1) Educate SOF & SOF Enablers
- 2) Interagency Education & Outreach
- 3) International Education & Outreach
- 4) Conventional Forces Interaction
- 5) Interaction w/ Academia & Others

Changing Character of War and Security
America's Changing World Role

Towards A More Effective JSOF

Cognitive frame–the “why”

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Figure 4. “Compound SOF” Education, Training & Leader Development

¹⁶ The Joint Staff, *Developing Today's Joint Officers for Tomorrow's Ways of War: The Joint Chiefs of Staff Vision and Guidance for Professional Military Education & Talent Management* (2020).

¹⁷ James Lacey, “Finally Getting Serious About Professional Military Education,” *War on the Rocks*, 18 May 2020.

¹⁸ The Joint Staff (2020), p. 3.



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What this means for JSOU “NEXT” is simple in statement, but profound in its implications and imperatives. Beyond just technical ‘knowing’, today and tomorrow’s Fourth-Age SOF Leader-Operators must be well and deeply and broadly educated, trained, and practically experienced in the policy, (geo)strategy (national, regional, and ‘grand’ levels thereof), geopolitics, geoeconomics, and geo-societal and demographic aspects and characteristics of the new changed (and ever-changing) character of global geopolitical competition: a compound security threats-based environment of conduct.

Conclusion: *Imperatives for the SOF Profession and Professional Ethic*

In 2007, the Department of Defense published an updated version of *The Armed Forces Officer*.¹⁹ This effort was the culmination of nearly a decade of research, study, and discussion about officership and the profession of arms that took place at the service academies, at war colleges, and within the joint staff 3–5. This book captured and described four key roles for the military officer: (1) warrior-leader in the profession of arms, (2) member of a profession, (3) servant of the nation, and (4) leader of character.²⁰

As we work *by, with, and through* USSOCOM on behalf of helping our Nation and national allies and partners come up with answers to the ultimate and penultimate questions of our times – *how has the character of global geopolitical competition changed (ultimate) and to what impacts on what kind of SOF the Nation needs for the 2020s and 2030s (penultimate)?* – regardless of the pointed specifics of those answers, fundamental and enduring to any and all answers will be holding the line, and reaffirming, SOF’s commitment to the four keystones of American Officership. Understanding each of these roles is important because, together, they comprise the key aspects of officership.

JSOU “NEXT” must reorient, refresh, and renew itself and all our practices in ways that *Take The Lead* on re-sharpening *the edge* of Special Operations’ enduring ethos of ‘The Quiet Professionals’ as SOF’s *Advantage for Nation, not itself*. This is imperative; a top priority.

It is appropriate to conclude by speaking to the importance of the professional armed forces officer’s commissioning oath. Returning to S.L.A. Marshall’s classic work, *The Armed Forces Officer*, both Marshalls—S. L. A. Marshall and George C. Marshall, secretary of defense at the time—emphasized the linkage of the officer corps with service to nation:

*Thereafter, [the officer] is given a paper which says that because the President as representative of the people of this country reposes “special trust and confidence” in his [or her] “patriotism, valor, fidelity, and abilities,” he [or she] is forthwith commissioned.*²¹

S.L.A. Marshall went on to highlight one quality in particular: *fidelity*. Fidelity is commonly considered “faithfulness to something to which one is bound by pledge or duty.”²² In spite of all the formal rules and legal statutes obligating the commissioned and noncommissioned officer to the Constitution, and through it, to the American people, officers’ fidelity has proven to be the most enduring tie that binds officership and the profession of arms to the nation. This bond has helped the nation weather many storms,

¹⁹ US Department of Defense. *The Armed Forces Officer*. Washington DC: National Defense University Press; 2007.

²⁰ ISIAH WILSON III, PhD, and MICHAEL J. MEESE, PhD, “Officership and the Profession of Arms in the 21st Century,” Chapter 3 in *Fundamentals of Military Medicine*, Borden Publishing (2017).

²¹ Marshall SLA. *The Armed Forces Officer*. Washington, DC: Department of Defense; 1950. DA Pamphlet 600-2, p. 2.

²² Fidelity. Merriam-Webster online dictionary. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/fidelity>. Accessed January 22, 2018.



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both foreign *and domestic*. The fidelity of the military professional has always found its strongest roots in the rich soils of American history. Examples set by leaders from General George Washington to Admiral Bill McRaven reinforce the principle of subordination of the military practitioner to civilian authority, and through that authority, to the defense of the nation.

Special operations personnel address unique, specialized, and difficult military problems that require exceptionally trained, exquisitely equipped, and tremendously supported warfighters. While other services can overwhelm enemies with massive combat power, special operations provide discreet, sometimes covert, precision military capabilities that have become increasingly relevant in modern warfare, but have at the same time, over the past 20 years, come with its own ‘gray area’ legal and ethical ambiguities and complications. Today’s and tomorrow’s compound security dilemmas demand a re-striking of that critical balance of fidelity with the ‘General Will’ we serve – between SOF’s exquisitely specialized warfighting and the Nation’s core values – in a Fourth-Age SOF Professional Ethic.
