GPC Forum (#2) Post-Forum After-Action Review (AAR)
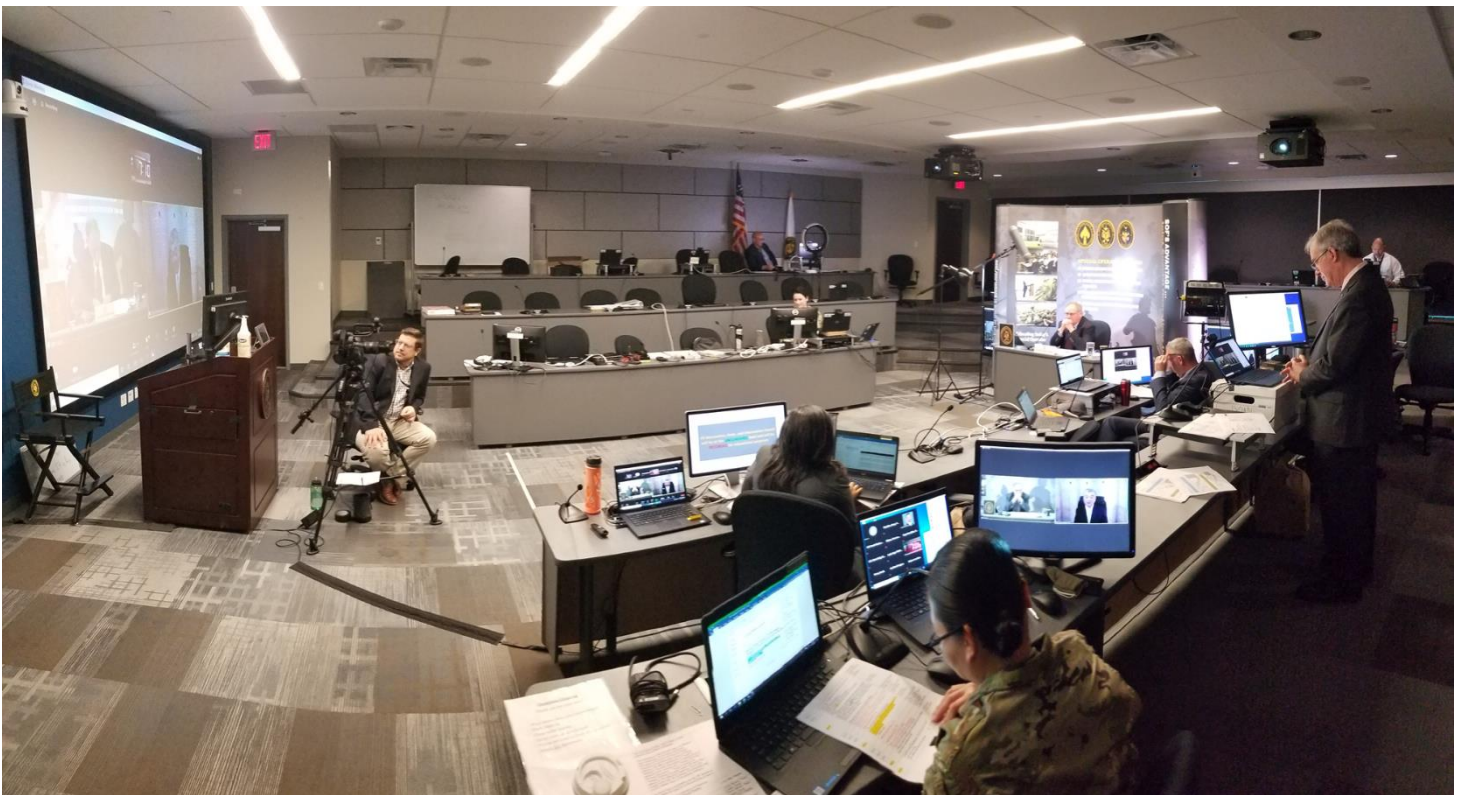
Submitted by: Dr. Christopher Marsh and Mr. Joe Whittington

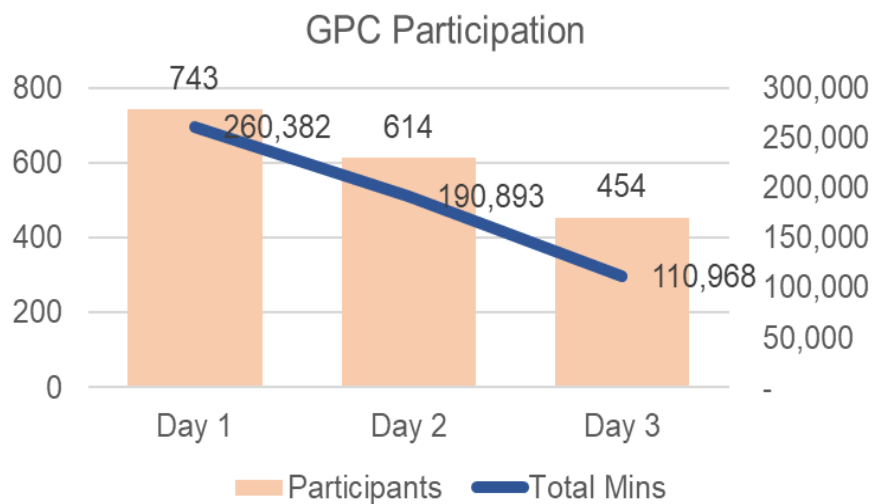14 December 2020

Executive Summary:

- In order to further our understanding of Great Power Competition (GPC) and the role of the compound security dilemma, the Joint Special Operations University held a 3-day fully on-line forum using Zoomgov from 4-6 November 2020
- The event included 51 presenters from across the DOD, Interagency, and academia
- Based on survey results, open responses, and word-of-mouth feedback, the forum was an overwhelming success
- The forum met or exceeded people's expectations, was well-organized, and of use to participants in their jobs
- The event had over 1,400 people register and over 700 participants took part on day 1, with over 600 participants on day 2, and over 450 participating on day 3
- Participants included significant senior leaders from the active-duty and retired ranks, as well as participants from numerous foreign countries
- Due to the intensive approach taken to the 3-day forum with 7-8 hour sessions, many people suffered from "Zoom fatigue," i.e. too much content over a short period of time, which accounts for the above-mentioned drop-off
- This comprehensive after action-review identified several areas for improvement, including having a clearer understanding of who comprises the audience, the importance of properly assessing resource requirements early on, and finally the finding that the theme might have been overly broad for some participants
- This review also identified aspects that should be retained, including a full-on "dress" rehearsal to get all presenters acquainted with the platform, the employment of a cross-functional team, and the value of daily "hot-washes"
- The quarterly GPC forum outputs, such as this After-Action Review (AAR) and the forthcoming "proceedings", will provide the immediate and necessary feedback for understanding the SOF involvement in GPC as part of an emerging compound security dilemma as a "running net estimate" of SOF strategic roles and capabilities
- The next GPC forum is tentatively scheduled for Summer 2021

Introduction:

Based on the 2018 National Defense Strategy, Great Power Competition is the emerging focus for the US Department of Defense (DOD) and American strategic engagement. The challenge of GPC, in providing a renewed focus on long-term competition with other global powers, while also sustaining the appropriate American interests in the Middle East, challenges many aspects of the current DOD defense posture and the strategic requirements for sustaining American global primacy for the foreseeable future. As the DOD explores the nature of GPC, the United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) must likewise explore similar roles for how Special Operations across the joint environment will support whole-of-government approaches to GPC and mitigate many of the challenges of the emerging compound security dilemma. Hence, the pressing question – what is (will need to be) SOF's utility in a 'return' to GPC? – served as the foundation of this forum, and will for those that follow. The ultimate question thus becomes nothing less than, how and why, both in terms of our country's 'national' interests as well as the United States' global roles as a leading great power?

To expand the advantage of Special Operations Force's role in GPC, the Joint Special Operations University (JSOU), as a centerpiece for advancing SOF knowledge and expanding SOF critical thinking, engaged senior-leaders, stakeholders, and enablers across the SOF enterprise for active participation in its GPC forum. This forum provided a necessary environment to explore concepts related to SOF's role in GPC and to challenge the current assumptions of the global environment to explore emerging opportunities for maximizing SOF's role as a critical part of the DOD's broad strategic intent. The GPC forum is intended to be a recurring quarterly venue for optimizing the integration of key SOF leaders, enablers, and scholars to review GPC strategic options and emerging concepts and share information across SOF formations. The quarterly GPC forum outputs, such as this After-Action Review (AAR), will provide the immediate and necessary feedback for understanding the SOF involvement in GPC as part of an emerging compound security dilemma as a "running net estimate" of SOF strategic roles and capabilities.

This great power competition forum was a resounding success. Based on survey results and word-of-mouth feedback, the forum met or exceeded people's expectations, was well-organized, and of use to participants in their jobs (see below and Attachment 1). The event had over 1,400 people register and over 700 participants take part on day 1. There was significant drop-off, however, with over 600 participants taking part on day 2 and over 450 on day 3. This drop-off was probably due to the intensive approach taken to the 3-day forum, with many people suffering from "Zoom fatigue," i.e. too much content over a short period of time (see below) and the full-day agenda of the forum. Finally, participants included significant senior leaders from the active-duty and retired ranks, as well as participants from numerous foreign countries.

Course Overall

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total	Mean	Std Dev
The event was well organized.	121	28	2	1	3	155	4.7	0.6
The content was what I expected or better.	97	46	6	2	4	155	4.48	0.68
The information provided in the course will be useful to me in my job.	85	52	10	5	3	155	4.36	0.73

Speakers and Topics

	Excellent	Good	Average	Fair	Poor	Total	Mean	Std Dev
Speakers	119	28	2	1	1	155	4.72	0.62
Discussion Topics/Focus	108	38	7	2	0	155	4.63	0.48

Overall Satisfaction

	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	Mean	Std Dev
Please indicate your overall level of satisfaction with the event.	109	35	6	4	1	4.59	0.62

This forum would not have been possible without the leadership and participation of the following. MAJ Jacklyn Mott served as the course director, while Dr. Christopher Marsh served as the cross-functional team lead. Rounding out the planning team were Dr. Dave Ellis and Mr. Charlie Black (responsible for developing learning objectives and along with Dr. Marsh identifying presenters). Finally, Dr. Joe Long was tasked with maintaining a running estimate of the AAR.

The forum can be broken down into 4 phases: Planning, Rehearsal, Execution, and Post-event activities (including the AAR), with each phase having its own team. The planning team consisted of:

MAJ Jacklyn Mott, Dr. Christopher Marsh, Dr. Dave Ellis, Mr. Charlie Black, Dr. Joe Long, BG (ret) Russ Howard, and Mr. Kelly Hicks.
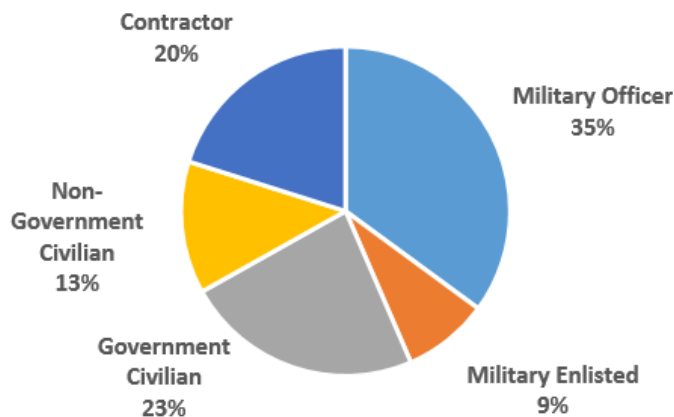
The rehearsal and execution teams consisted of the following: BG (ret.) Russ Howard, MAJ Jacklyn Mott, Mr. Terry Doan, Mr. Joe Whittington, Mr. Mike Clark, Mr. Brian Ventrone, Mr. Craig Hodges, SFC Carolina Deng, Mr. Christian Ramthun, Mr. Ben McLaren, Mr. Ryan Bernosky, Ms. Grisel Mundo-Love, Ms. Christina Warrilow, Dr. Mark Grzegorzewski, Ms. Molly Quintero, Mr. Mike Raimondi, Mr. Kirk Bell, Dr. Chris Marsh, Dr. Dave Ellis, Mr. Charlie Black, Mr. Kelly Hicks, Dr. Joe Shiver, Dr. Shannon Meade, Dr. Curt Harig, Dr. Joe Long, MCPO Brad Rhinelander, Mr. Marlon Figgins, Mr. Mark Raney, Mr. Dan Binette, Mr. Eon Pereira, Ms. April Branam, Ms. Kim Norman, Dr. Ben Zweibelson, Dr. Sean Lux, Mr. Nate Schwagler, Mr. John Cabra, Mr. Jason Glemser, Mr. Tommy O'Hare, and members of the IT/AV/Education Tech team, and JSOU library staff.

The post-event/AAR team consisted of the following: Dr. Christopher Marsh and Mr. Joe Whittington (co-leads); Mr. Terry Doan, Mr. Mike Clark, Mr. Brian Ventrone, Dr. Dave Ellis, Dr. Joe Long, Mr. Charlie Black, Mr. Jeff Edwards, Dr. Mark Grzegorzewski, Ms. Grisel Mundo-Love, and Ms. Molly Quintero.

In conducting this AAR, all members of the cross-functional team (CFT) acted very deliberately and followed the explicit guidance contained in the Memorandum for Record of the JSOU President, dated 13 November 2020. The AAR process was split into two phases. First was the "blue sky, unrestrained" focus on the substance of the forum, while the second phase focused on the administrative side of things, e.g. people, processes, organization, and resourcing matters. Likewise, each phase was split into two stages, with the first focusing on external partner-participants and relying extensively upon quantitative analysis of the 155 survey respondents. The second stage focused on small group "hot-washes" – one for phase 1 issues and another for phase 2 issues (along with a third to review the draft AAR itself). All assessments employed the key **Takeaways-Issues-Discussion-Recommendations (T-I-D-R)** method, and included not only the CFT but also key members of the lead team for the next forum, specifically Dr. Joe Long and Ms. Molly Quintero.

Number of Responses Analyzed: 155

Category of Participants

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

CONSOLIDATED T-I-D-Rs

Takeaway #1: Great Power Competition as a theme is very broad.

Issue: Great Power competition is so broad and overarching as a concept that it is hard capture all that it entails in a single academic forum.

Discussion: As evidenced by the survey data, and confirmed by the open responses and discussion in the small group, GPC is so vast as a truly global strategy that it is hard to touch upon every dimension. Inevitably parts of the world will be excluded, and other parts will seem over-emphasized due to their simple inclusion.

Recommendation: Future forums should attempt to focus on GPC in a select AOR or AORs, and the same for the Great Powers (i.e. focus on one great power).

Red Team Comments/Observation: Although focusing the GPC on select topics is a good idea, it is still packing a lot of information into three days and risks overwhelming or exhausting the audience. We recommend identifying thematic quarters (e.g. GPC in Africa) and then nesting some of the Think JSOU events into the quarterly themes. For example, you could have a few Think JSOU events that focus on: 1) China in Africa, 2) U.S. in Africa, 3) An African continent perspective that provides the "understanding the environment" view of GPC and beyond GPC. These events would be captured and uploaded on the forum website (website is a great recommendation) and made accessible to future conference attendees. The conference can then focus on institutional roles and/or strategies within the environment. This would allow individuals to develop knowledge over time and think about the issues prior to showing up to the forum. It should also alleviate some of the "drinking from a firehose" aspect and instead take a nurturing of knowledge approach.

Takeaway #2: Need to have a clearly identified target audience.

Issue: Some saw the discussion as jargon-filled and at too high of an academic level for practitioners.

Discussion: The seminar was seen by some as jargon-filled and at too high a level of the subject matter. As a result, this highlighted the issue of just who the target audience was, practitioners or academics? Several of the participants were struggling to get past panelist/speaker use of academic/field specific terminology, or referencing important concepts by simply referring to the author or theory name.

Recommendations: Due to the diversity of participants (JIIM-C), use plain language (layman's terms and references) to cement understanding of concepts that may be difficult to understand particularly by non-academic members. Also, consider having a targeted starter session discussing the "nuts and bolts" in an easily digestible manner, then push on to more specific topics. Ask the speakers in their invitation to remember that some in the audience are generalists and will likely not be familiar with discipline-specific jargon. Furthermore, it would be beneficial to keep the participant's "WIFM" (what's in it for me) in mind when framing the event and the sessions.

Red Team Comments/Observations: Before you identify the audience, you should identify the purpose of the quarterly forums (both the broader forum program and the individual forums—how they are

nested). Is the forum to educate SOF? Is it to educate outside partners (other DOD, interagency, academics, etc.? Is it to collaborate with outside partners to establish a common appreciation of the environment? We think it should be "all the above" to support the objectives in the JSOU Next White Papers. Perhaps the purpose of each forum and therefore the target audience could be different depending on the broader forum approach and objectives. If this is the case, the best approach would be to think through the purpose of each of the next forums (1-2 years out) and then decide upon the audience. This would ensure nesting of the forums and would allow you to communicate the long-term vison of the forums and their nesting to partners.

Regarding "jargon-filled"— Much of this language is not jargon, but professional lexicon. Although it can be confusing at times, it is also necessary if there is going to be collaboration between practitioners and academics. There is value in the practitioner being introduced to academic language and the academic being introduced to practitioner language. It might be difficult and confusing at times, but this is the best way to eliminate barriers and is needed to further the education and partnership identified in the White Papers.

Takeaway #3: Cross-functional teaming (CFT) works and yields positive outcomes.

Issue: Size and complexity of a GPC-like event prohibits one work center from wholly supporting (plan, rehearse, execute, post-event actions) while balancing other scheduled or tasked requirements (e.g. educational courses, topical studies, etc.).

Discussion: Due to the breadth and scale of preparation and production required to execute the GPC forum, pooling resources and talent helped to balance burden-sharing while enabling functional and work center awareness and understanding—internal and external to JSOU. Additionally, using a CFT approach helped to identify and employ the full potential and talents of JSOU's whole population of Military, Government Civilians, Full-time and Part-time contractors, and external partners. Key to a CFTs success is a willingness for work centers to nominate their most capable members—not necessarily the available ones—to maximize the outputs and actions required from start to finish of the event.

Recommendation: Where appropriate, continue to assemble and employ a CFT to further internal and external relationship-building and talent development.

Takeaway #4: Large-scale events like the GPC forum can be successfully conducted virtually.

Issue: Orchestrating virtual events requires a stable, user-friendly platform (e.g. Zoomgov), reliable internet connectivity, and knowledgeable and experienced users/facilitators.

Discussion: A thorough understanding of associated information-sharing or learning-focused activities will influence the selection of technology and platform(s) required to conduct the event. Factors such as security classification, target audience size, and type of presenter/participant interaction will help to identify the appropriate network and hardware/software that will be needed. Furthermore, this information will help to identify if additional resources (people, equipment, funding, licensing, etc.) will be required to facilitate the experience. Early and adequate thought and preparation is key to developing, selecting, communicating, and utilizing a virtual platform to realize desired event outcomes.

Recommendation: Include IT/AV/Learning tech professionals into the concept development stage through execution of the event. Additionally, identify and train team members that have the requisite technical/computer skills needed to employ the equipment/software.

Takeaway #5: Properly estimating resource requirements (e.g. funding, personnel) must be completed early in the planning stage, fully supported, and tracked throughout the event and post-event period.

Issue: Planning and executing an event of this size requires a significant amount of resources that have to be requested and coordinated across JSOU work centers. Additionally, deliberate faculty and staff development needs to be developed and incorporated to help transform JSOU into a learning organization—one where each member is aware of their importance to event/education success.

Discussion: Identifying key tasks and selecting team members to perform them is paramount to event success. Using a holistic CFT formed of military, government civilians, full-time and part-time contractors helped to match abilities to jobs. However, since this event was a first of its kind, there was no template to follow. As planning progressed, an increasing amount of manpower was identified as necessary to support the event. The final cost of the GPC forum was $336,036 (Mil/GS/FTE = $179,355), (PT CTR = $152,683), (Honorarium checks = $3,998), with the involvement of over 40 personnel from across JSOU.

Recommendation: For future GPC-like events, provide a formal tasking letter to all interested JSOU parties prior to initiating the Planning stage. The letter should convey the "5 Ws + H" (who, what, when, where, why, and how). Furthermore, the expectation that the best capable talent with requisite subject matter knowledge (event core team, moderator, facilitator, rapporteur, panel member, production & support team member, etc) be nominated and sought versus a "who's available" approach will help to ensure the finest event outcome(s). Furthermore, day-to-day work assignments and responsibilities should be adjusted accordingly to allow for the proper amount and degree of focus and effort needed during the planning, rehearsal, execution, and post-event (AAR) stages. Additionally, a budget amount should be given to help scope the event. As a result of this guidance, more accurate resourcing/talent estimates and support coordination can be developed during POAM development/phasing of the event through Rehearsal, Execution, and Post-Event (AAR) stages.

Takeaway #6: Relevance to SOF unclear/uncertain.

Issue: Some questioned how the content material was relevant to SOF. Substantive discussions of how to incorporate SOF into the next paradigm were scant. Furthermore, no method(s) were developed and implemented to assess/measure if learning took place.

Discussion: There was limited discussions on how to transfer the material into reality in the SOF education and training areas. It was difficult to see and assess the actual application of the topics for SOF operators, enablers and JIIM-C members.

Recommendation: Have panels that consists of a variety of SOF operators (SF, CA, PSYOP, CSO, SEALs,), enablers, and JIIM-C members to discuss how they interoperate in different settings: combat zones, foreign area non-combat, and in embassy/interagency environments. This way we can see how better to implement SOF teams at all levels from tactical to operational to strategic in the GPC paradigm. Have a

few more industry partners (SAF/IA Office of Commercial and Economic Analysis) to showcase how these partners are available to DOD/SOF. More emphasis on GPC through the SOF operator and enabler lens.

Red Team Comments/Observations: This is related to Takeaway #1 and the importance of first identifying the purpose of each forum and thinking through how the individual quarterly forums are nested within a broader forum approach. We believe a three day conference is too short to capture all the issues identified in the JSOU Next White Papers (i.e. understanding the compound security environment, appreciating the different instruments of national power, understanding/collaborating with partners [other agencies, allies, academics], understanding SOF's role, etc.). This is such an important topic that one forum should be set aside to focus on this topic – but a common appreciation of the environment should be established first.

Takeaway #7: Creating small-group interaction with an extremely large audience can be difficult to execute.

Issue: Difficulty with the interaction of the audience using small-group activities and Zoomgov features such as the "White Board."

Discussion: With almost 8 hours of content over a virtual platform some felt it was difficult to stay engaged. We attempted to engage in small-group like interaction by identifying selected participants and placing them into "Rings," offered opportunities to "choose your adventure" (ARI or D&I sessions) and participate in "Brainstorming" sessions using Zoomgov's "White Board" function (which proved difficult to use for new users). Even one of the presenters was inadequately familiar with the platform. This led to frustration. Additionally, switching between Zoom meeting rooms or routing participants into several Zoomgov "Breakout rooms" presented some execution challenges.

Recommendation: Make the audience interact with the material as much as possible. Have a JSOU member walk through a quick example of the "White Board" or routing into a "Breakout Room" before having the participants engage. Ensure that the presenters who have "White Board" exercises in their presentations rehearse the exercise with the Tech Team before the day of presentation. Brainstorming was also suggested as a way to get maximum participation.

Red Team Comments/Observations: Collaborative work is always going to be more difficult with a virtual audience this large. If you are going to pursue more collaborative "White Board" work, you will need to not only train the presenters/facilitators, but provide resources for the participants.

Takeaway #8: Zoom fatigue and length of the forum.

Issue: The forum was comprised of long days with few and short breaks.

Discussion: There were more than 12 mentions of the seminar being drawn out too long (nearly 10 percent of respondents). As discussed in the open responses (see Attachment 2), the "agenda was brutal with few breaks and no lunch." The sessions were drawn out causing some to feel they had Zoom fatigue.

Recommendation: Break the seminar into shorter segments over 4 or 5 days, instead of an intense 3-day program. Having more structured breaks so that the attendees won't have to take breaks on their own therefore missing the start and end of some of the panels.

Red Team Comments/Observations: This is tied to the recommendation in Takeaway #1 that focuses on a quarterly thematic approach. We believe that spreading the material over the quarter will help you mitigate fatigue, while also building knowledge over time (nurturing approach vs. a firehose approach).

Takeaway #9: Developing and instituting a P-A-C-E (Primary, Alternate, Contingency, and Emergency) Plan ensures necessary redundancy for virtually-hosted events and required social distancing of personnel.

Issue: Due to COVID-19 social distancing directives, personnel limits were instituted for each of the JSOU classrooms. As a result, multiple rooms were needed to be made available and specifically reserved for GPC to allow for both social distancing and continuity of operations.

Discussion: Operations were conducted in Classroom 5 (primary), Classroom 6 (alternate), and Classroom 1 (contingency) and if necessary, another room such as Classroom 8 was held in reserve (emergency). Each of the rooms had the required commercial internet connectivity and requisite AV/IT infrastructure. Classroom 5 was selected as the primary since it had "hard wired" commercial internet connectivity with Classrooms 6 and 1 having wireless internet access. Also, to allow proper social distancing and to reduce noise and disruptions, operations were split between rooms 5 and 6. Room 5 was the "main stage" that had BG Howard as moderator and the bulk of the production team. Room 6 was used to host presenters and panels that opted to work from JSOU versus a remote location. Room 1 was set up and available for use for those wanting to observe the event. Should connectivity or equipment problems have occurred in room 5, the production would have moved to room 6 and room 6 operations would have moved to room 1; thereby, enabling continuity of the event.

Recommendation: Develop a P-A-C-E plan for the required rooms and reserve them with the JSOU event scheduler to ensure they are available for the duration of event rehearsal and execution periods.

Takeaway #10: Prior Proper Planning Prevents Poor Performance (6Ps).

Issue: Establishing a Plan of Action and Milestones (POAM) and adhering to it is critical.

Discussion: While a POAM was developed for this GPC forum, the duration of the Planning stage went longer than anticipated due to agenda and related changes, talent and event-related document coordination, participant registration, etc. Additionally, the frequency of IPRs where further tasks were added to the agenda prolonged the Planning stage. In turn, this decreased the time available for transitioning to setting up and executing the Rehearsal stage as the CFT focus was divided.

Recommendation: Allow for set timeframes for accomplishing Planning, Rehearsal, Execution, and Post-event AAR and related products and allow for adjustments as necessary.

Takeaway #11: Utilizing and broadcasting a countdown timer promoted on-time agenda adherence.

Issue: Conference and seminar-like events oftentimes have sessions run long or short which can cause schedule challenges. The GPC agenda was three full days of presentations and activities with few breaks and a large list of presenters and participants "Zooming in" from various time zones. Coordinating on time start and stop of each session was a concern for the event director, moderator, and producer.

Discussion: To assist all parties—local and remote—to stay on time, a countdown timer (clock) was incorporated and broadcast to everyone in the Zoomgov meeting room. From each session to scheduled lunches and breaks, the countdown timer projected time remaining which helped all parties plan, prepare, and act accordingly.

Recommendation: Keep using the clock and display it for all parties to "see."

Takeaway #12: Conducting a full dress rehearsal prior to the event aids familiarization and identifies process strengths and weaknesses—areas to sustain and improve (anticipate potential audibles).

Issue: Conducting virtual events is difficult when combining "real-time" collaboration between in-person, on-site personnel and virtually remote personnel.

Discussion: Rehearsal stage oftentimes is the first time the entire team is brought together and execute their assigned tasks/functions. Conducing a full dress rehearsal following the final agenda allows a "Crawl, Walk, Run" approach to ensuring understanding, expectations, and processes required for a successful event execution.

Recommendation: Schedule and conduct full dress rehearsal based on the agenda timelines at least one-week prior to event execution.

Takeaway #13: Providing participants "how to" information for using the virtual platform combined with pre-event tech checks greatly aids familiarization and use during the event.

Issue: Not all event contributors and participants were familiar with using Zoom and some of its popular features (e.g. White Board).

Discussion: While Zoom has become a popular virtual meeting platform, there are varied degrees of familiarization and experience using it. Common challenges the GPC Tech Support team assisted with dealt with accessing the meeting room, changing their user profile, how to add a name and/or photograph, etc.

Recommendation: Develop FAQs and "how to" handouts as well as make a Tech Support function available to assist—especially during rehearsal and execution stages.

Takeaway #14: During Execution, daily Pre-briefings and Post-briefings (hot washes) promoted communication, lessons learned, and allowed for necessary adjustments.

Issue: During execution stage, confusion and misunderstanding among the team can easily be experienced.

Discussion: A method is needed to ensure all requisite GPC team members are accounted for and informed. Conducting daily pre-briefings that go over the day's agenda in a manner to ensure everyone has understanding is critical to smooth operations. Similarly, at the end of day, a "Hot wash" needs to be conducted to assess how the day's production went and to glean lessons learned and to identify needed changes or items to sustain.

Recommendation: Build and conduct daily pre-briefings and end-of-day debriefings.

Takeaway #15: Using commercial Microsoft O365 Teams enabled collaboration, file sharing, and internal chat through all stages – especially during event execution.

Issue: Government networks such as NIPR may limit ability to communicate and collaborate with external partners/participants.

Discussion: NIPR email—by itself—may not be the most timely or easiest way to communicate between the CFT and individuals external to JSOU. Utilizing a commercial platform such as MS O365 enabled individuals internal and external to JSOU—when granted proper access—to work together and update/share information and products throughout the planning, rehearsal, and execution stages of the GPC forum.

Recommendation: To promote timely information sharing and collaboration, institute the use of MS O365 for future GPC and SOF studies events.

Takeaway #16: For GPC-like events, JSOU event scheduling is key to securing required rooms and focusing support personnel and capabilities (IT/AV, security, facility maintenance, etc.).

Issue: JSOU classrooms and auditoriums are in high demand with competing requests from internal users (to support educational courses/events) and external users (HQ USSOCOM staff). Without proper prioritization and rescheduling—if necessary, competing demands can distract from the focus and resources needed to support GPC-like events.

Discussion: As the 4-6 November 2020 GPC forum was being planned, classroom 5 was selected as the primary room to host the Zoomgov meeting. As planning transitioned to rehearsal, with COVID 19 social distancing in mind, classrooms 6 and 8 were identified as necessary to host in-person presenters, speaker panels, and related event activities. However, the JSOU operations schedule had several rooms already reserved. Understanding the need, the event scheduler—with oversight by Academic Affairs— notified requesters and rescheduled as appropriate, thereby, freeing up the space required.

Recommendation: Identify and contact JSOU event coordinator as early as possible to reserve anticipated rooms/space and to allow for needed de-confliction and/or rescheduling.

Takeaway #17: A mechanism, infrastructure, and process for sharing event content (e.g. slides, videos, speaker notes, etc.) within the USSOCOM enterprise and externally needs to be codified and utilized.

Issue: At present, there does not appear to be a codified JSOU process, mechanism, or infrastructure to facilitate GPC-related information sharing with both internal and external entities.

Discussion: Throughout the GPC forum and afterwards, many participants—from the JIIM-C and academia—have requested access to products such as slides, videos, and speaker notes. However, it does not appear there is an approved way to share this information (after it has been properly reviewed) or a place for external entities to go to access the information when available. Internal to JSOU, instructors have also asked for access to the GPC-related slides, videos, and transcripts and there is not a central repository where they can access the sought after content.

Recommendation: Form a CFT to address and identify ways to make GPC-like content available (after properly screened and security reviewed) in a timely fashion to both internal and external customers.

Takeaway #18: Utility of a formal tasking letter/formal tasking authority.

Issue: Formal tasking/appointment letter from senior leadership to department heads and assigned project officer(s) is essential to getting requisite support.

Discussion: The CFT had difficulty in the beginning in finding personnel willing to contribute to the team. It became necessary for the course director and CFT lead to go to higher authorities to get "volunteers" to join the team.

Recommendation: The course director and CFT lead be given authority – much like for this AAR – to work with division heads and formally task individuals necessary for the effective execution of the event.

Takeaway #19: Website value and effectiveness.

Issue: Having a website where information was housed is critical to event effectiveness.

Discussion: Though barely mentioned in the survey open responses, we believe the website was done extremely well (thanks to the library staff, primarily Stacy Harn). We attribute the lack of mention of the website to the fact that it was done so well and so effectively utilized (call-in hotline, registration links, FAQ page, etc.) that it met everyone's expectations for an event such as this.

Recommendation: A website is used for future forums.

Red Team Comments/Observations: Recommend that the website is not just for the specific individual forum, but is used to tie the forum program and other JSOU events together. This would enable the execution of the quarterly-focused approach mentioned under Takeaway #1.

Takeaway #20: Serial Review needs to be done early and often.

Issue: Serial review (including OPSEC, PAO, and security review) needs to be done for all products that will be made available; this includes signed release forms from participants for their appearance/recording via video and the publishing of presenters' pictures and biographical sketches.

Discussion: The need for serial review is something that caught the course director and CFT by surprise late in the preparation phase. Having no direct experience in conducting an event quite like this, it was something that was not considered in the planning model.

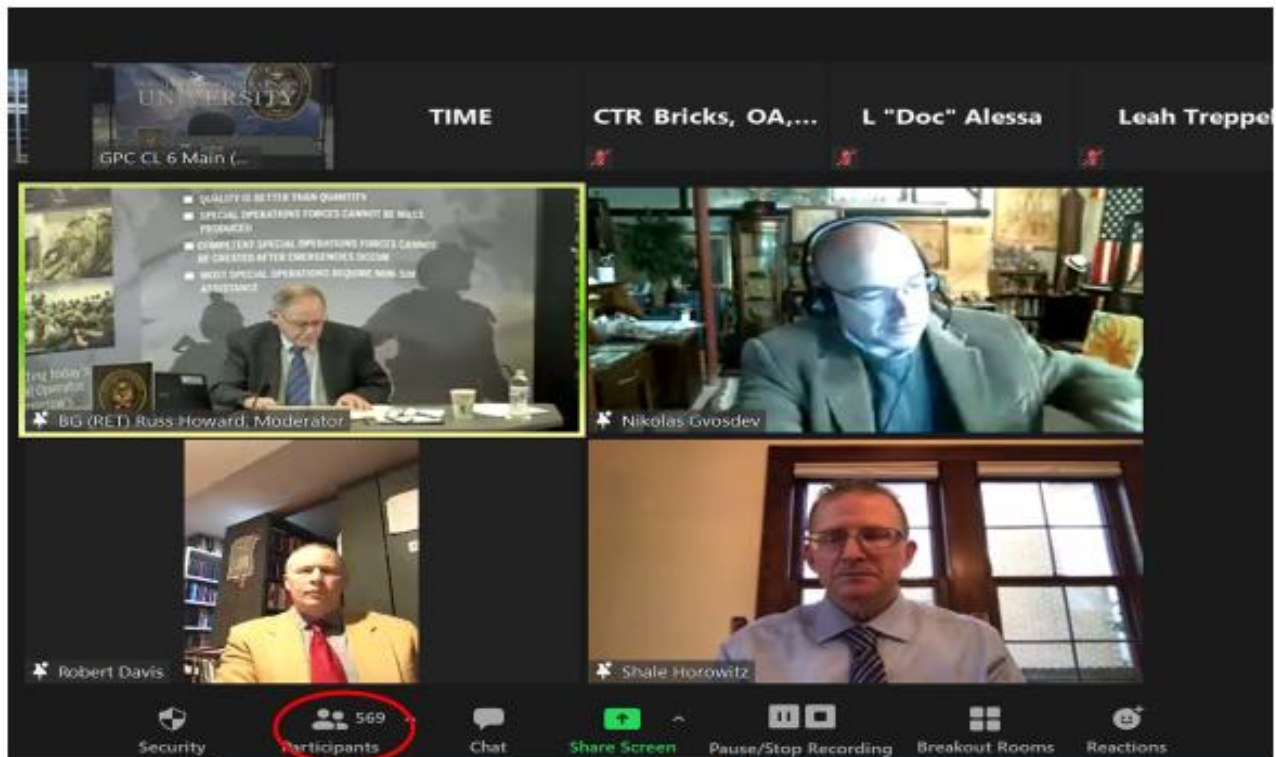**Recommendation:** Serial review needs to be considered at all stages of the process, including this AAR.

KEY ACADEMIC TAKE-AWAYS

Drawing upon participant-observation, rapporteur notes, and video analysis, AND employing the T-I-D-R method, we were able to capture the following key academic takeaways, listed below by day and session (see Attachment 3 for a full agenda, including learning objectives, speakers, and speaker bios). These takeaways are further broken down by relevant theory, history, and contemporary and future practice on the utility of force (see Attachment 3, the agenda, for information on each session and speaker, including speaker bios).

Day 1:

The current and emerging geo-strategic context referred to as Great Power.

Competition shares some similarities but on the whole is different than the Cold War. Unlike the Cold War, the world has evolved into a multi-polar schema comprised of old and rising powers compounded by the diffusion of power beyond states including sub-state and non-state actors with global reach and influence. This circumstance is further fueled by proliferation of communications technology that connects the globe offering new pathways for distribution of information and vectors for influence.

However, there are some theory and concepts that do carry forward and can be applied within the new era.

Sessions 1-2: The below insights are framed through the lens of theory, history, and contemporary and future practice. More specifically, these areas of study are necessary in order to appreciate the evolving international order, better understand our adversaries' behaviors, and identify opportunities to gain advantage in the competition space.

a. **Theory**: Several relevant theories emerge: (1) A *theory of relative gains* is needed to effectively interpret competitors' strengths and weaknesses while also increasing partners relative gains; (2) *Theory of soft balancing* explains the use of non-kinetic and non-military ways and means to erode the power and influence of a competitor and adversary. This helps us better understand our opponents' strategy as well as create new ones that enable our aims: (3*) Realist Theory* of non-intervention in juxtaposition and in tension with *Democratic Peace Theory* which underpinned US approach in from 1991-2001.

b. **History:** (1) The *history of Soviet containment* is critical to draw the right lessons and illuminate the differences in the strategic and local level contexts; (2) a historical look at the *liberal international order* and its institutions such as WHO, IMF, UN etc. Explore how these institutions have empowered and have been leveraged the USA as the hegemon and now by our near-peer competitors who seek to challenge US hegemony.

c. **Contemporary and Future Practice:** SOF has an emergent role as a sub-element of statecraft by supporting its JIIM-C partners. The DOD and SOF will not lead, rather they will enable the attainment of broader influence objectives that may be derived in other Departments or Agencies. This may demand new knowledge, skills and increased importance of Psychological Operations and Civil Affairs forces, as well as closer integration with the Cyberspace domain, and its corresponding activities and operations. Most notably, this will require more integrated activity outside conflict zones and increased political sensitivity.

Session 3: This session explored changes to and impacts from the global finance system and expansion of communications since the Cold War. These discussions highlight the critical non-military dimension of competitors' strategies.

a. **Theory:** Three theories are important for future SOF: (1) the emergent *theory of synthetic media* which directly relates to the growth of the virtual space and ability to create metanarratives within social media; (2) *Social Construction of Reality* is foundational to understanding influence and it supports any implementation of the Joint Concept-Human Aspects Military Operations (JC-HAMO) and Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning (JCIC); (3) the emergent *Theory of Sub-sovereign Operations* whereby non state entities and non-military regulatory and law enforcement become vectors to diminish and degrade adversary or to increase one's own State influence.

b. **History:** (1) the *evolution of multinational corporations* and rise of true *global corporations* with their own interests, power and influence delinked from a particular state; (2) the evolution and history that led to the global convergence of Information, Communications and Telecommunications (ICT) and expansion of virtual space

c. **Contemporary and Future Practice:** The impact of converging technologies that create the "hyper-connection" and "hyper-surveillance" that is spreading globally. The ability to be unseen is increasingly limited and will drive change to operating approaches. The commercial competition over the 5G space and low-orbit commercial satellites has significant consequences depending upon the outcomes.
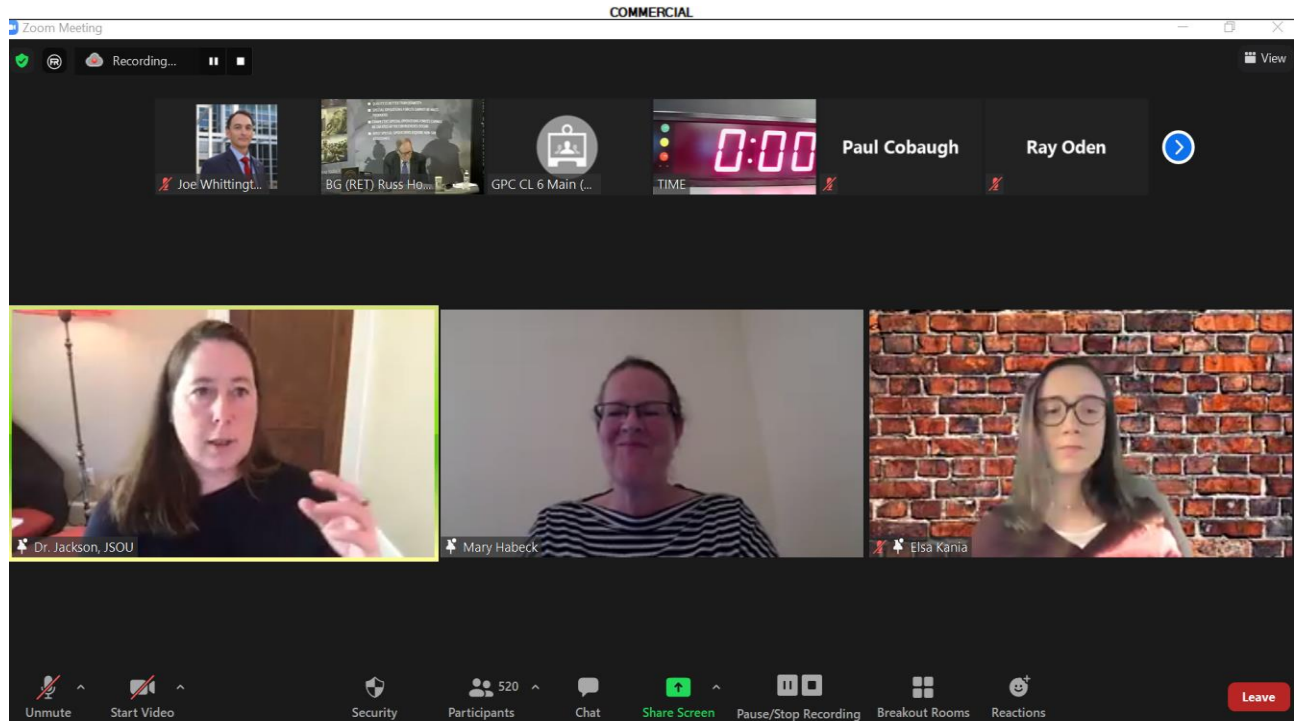
Session 4: Diffusion of power away from States. These ideas directly inform judgments about where and how to intervene in the competition space. This moves beyond the traditional orientation of the enemy formation or network to the human terrain within which the competition for influence will largely occur.

a. **Theory:** *Evolutionary Governance Theory* offers a pliable framework for action within a dynamic, complex system. This theory in conjunction with history below becomes the basis for socio-cultural analysis and intelligence needed to realize concepts in JC-HAMO and the JCIC.

b. **History:** In order to ensure historical context for the emerging system it is important to revisit three topics: (1) the decolonization period to understand why states fragmented and their dependent factors; (2) explore peasantry politics which is critical to appreciate the agricultural and subsistence populations (large proportion of the world); (3) migratory populations that cover large areas beyond borders such as Arctic indigenous people or nomadic pastoralist of Saharan-Sahel Africa. These groups are vectors for influence.

c. **Contemporary and Future Practice:** The concepts of *resilience and resistance*. The first is oriented on inoculating populations of interest against malign or competitor influence by making them more self-reliant. The second, resistance, is further right on the continuum wherein you are contesting or in direct competition over a population group. That is, the adversary has already overwhelmed or infiltrated a relevant population, and it seeks support to regain its independence.

Session 5: Hegemony and Great Power Competition Strategies

a. **Theory:** (1) *Theory of hegemony; (2) Liberal Institutionalism and path dependency; (3) Cultural Marxism (Gramsci); (4) Social Movement Theory.* Collectively these theories provide ways to assess adversary strategic aims and grand strategies to achieve them. These are beyond the traditional military perspectives in order to broaden the aperture, and they directly relate to the JC-Operating in the Information Environment.

b. **History: (1)** Historical patterns and evolution of the CCP to include the Century of Humiliation, Great Leap Forward, Cultural Revolution, Deng's opening and Xi. This history is critical for understanding the current context; (2) Soviet KGB – Russian Federation "active measures" and use of "leftists" in the U.S./Europe past and present; (3) Color Revolutions.

c. **Contemporary and Future Practice:** Can we assess where and the mechanisms used by China and/or Russia to create path dependencies that support their political aims? The CCP seeks to progressively expand cultural and political influence, while Russia's focus is to diminish and

weaken adversaries. If we can analyze and interpret their strategies, we can more appropriately intervene in the system.

Day 2: The second day predominately focused on questioning the efficacy of existing preconceptions and adopted ways of thinking about the operating environment, our self, our partners, and the multiplicity of adversaries and competitors. The guidance and ideas offered in the NDS, NMS, and Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning were foundational for sessions.

Sessions 6-7 (A & B): National Power & Infinite Game and Traditional Planning

a. **Theory:** (1) *Regime Theory* could serve as a way of generating coherence across IIM-C structures/processes, especially the interagency, as well as external frameworks that can be leveraged across the continuum; (2) *Complexity Theory* erodes the strength of reductionist thinking and offers new ways of thinking when confronting emergent challenges; (3) emerging *Theories of Complexity in Public Policy* frame behavior and approaches used by intergovernmental entities that SOF will need to understand and support.

b. **History:** (1) A reflective look at jointness, Goldwater-Nichols, Nunn-Cohen and SOF; (2) Evolution of service SOF, jointness and emergence of the SOF enterprise.

c. **Contemporary and Future Practice:** Highlight the failure of "counter" strategies and reframe SOF's 21st century role to support resiliency and resistance as a part of broader statecraft aims. Integrated among SOF and with its JIIM-C partners to Inoculate vs. respond or counter. Conflict and war is not the primary focus.

Sessions 8-9 (A & B) & 11: Integrated Campaigning & Statecraft

a. **Theory:** (1) *New Theory of Special Operations* (Searle); (2) *Theory of Force Without War* (Blechman & Kaplan); (3) *Complexity Theory; (4) Theory of Compound Security Dilemma*

b. **History:** Framing of and changes to National Security Act; evolution of USG organization for national security (swim lanes); explain the paradigm shift away from the dichotomy of war-peace.

c. **Contemporary and Future Practice:** Contemporary evolution of Joint conventional forces capabilities, roles and future design. A shift to integrated campaigning across the conflict continuum by, with, through JIIM-C partners – wherein SOF is not the lead – requires a paradigm shift, new thinking, new force structures. SOF's role across the continuum.

Session 10: Compound Security Dilemma

a. **Theory:** (1) Emergent *Theory of Compound Security Dilemma; (2) Complexity in International Relations; (3) Theory of Social Construction of Reality.*

b. **History:** Understanding Cold War, 1990s "democratic peace" and the post-9/11 era; roles, mission, orientation.

c. **Contemporary and Future Practice:** Shift in conventional force operating concepts as well as intergovernmental partners. How will SOF carve its niche role within the evolving USG approaches within resourcing constraints? What is SOF's new value proposition in confronting this dilemma?
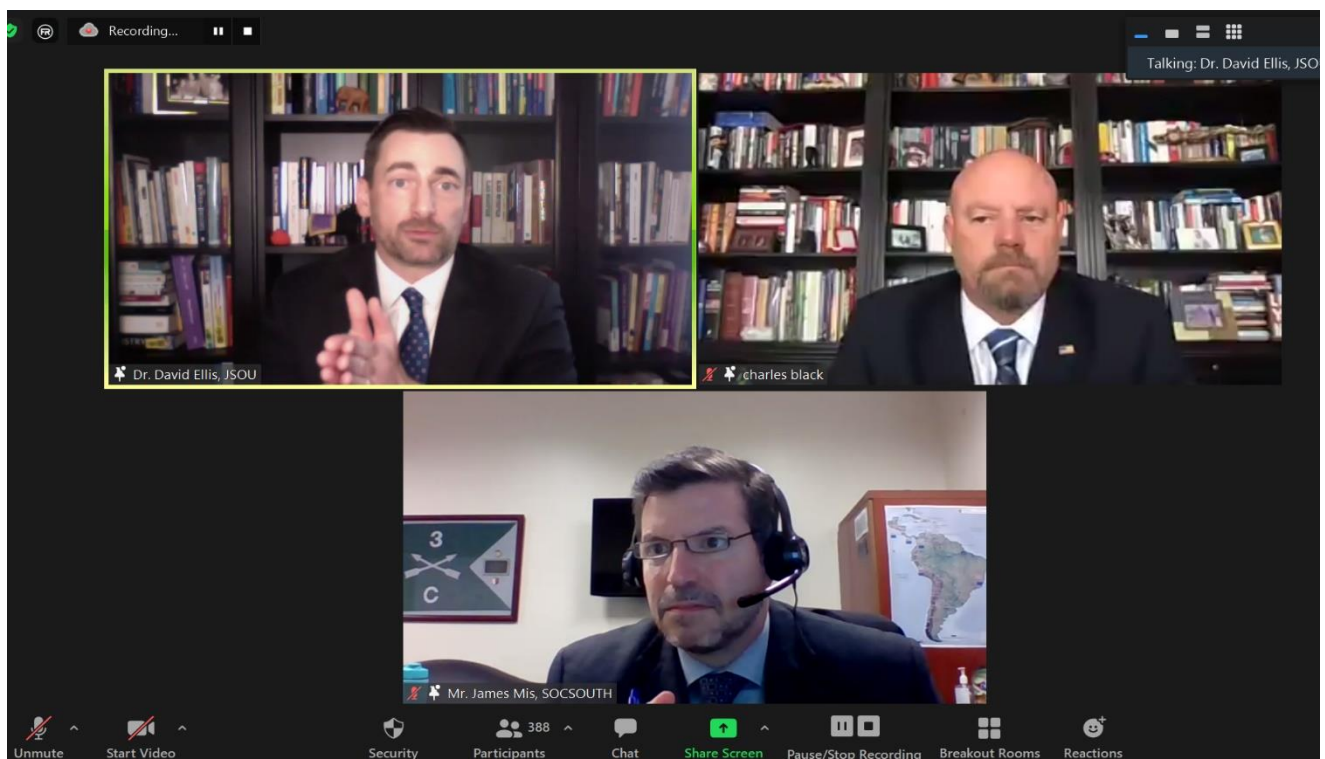
Day 3: Platform to share current research and support to the enterprise.

China ARI Series: Key Insights reinforced by Day 1-2 Panels

a. CCP is vulnerable in that its social security systems are directly linked to the viability of East Coast industrial economic growth. Slowdowns in industrial manufacturing reverberate across the society from the urban sector to the rural.

b. CCP is not universally liked among the indigenous populations of the states it engages abroad either politically and economically, especially in many members of the Belt & Road Initiative (BRI). There is significant opportunity to engage populations for positive effect.

c. CCP has mastered the strategic communications and influence to advantage their objectives both internally and externally. Statecraft expands cultural influence as a non-military approach to power and influence. We are failing to interpret correctly.

1. **Recommendations:**

   a. We must prioritize creation and sustainment of new and broad relationships with the Academy, interagency, intergovernmental, and commercial partners to better interpret the evolving world using a non-military lens, while retaining our existing military perspective.

   b. The SOF enterprise must adopt statecraft as the model to support and integrate with others, especially in competition below armed conflict.

   c. The Joint Special Operations Integrated Campaigning Course (JSOICC) curriculum should be rebirthed as a core course. Alternatively, assess the piloted curriculum from which modules can be easily derived to meet emergent needs identified in Day 1-2: Theory, history and contemporary and future practice.

   d. JSOU must begin to teach that which few military institutions teach – politics. If war is a continuation of politics and we seek to achieve aims short of conflict, it follows that the SOF enterprise must understand the broader context and key theory and history derived from Day 1-2 sessions. It is possible grand strategy and politics might be a major programs/pathways of study, both of which are currently curricular gaps (a preliminary cross walk was completed in March 2020).

   e. Dr. Wilson's Compound Security Dilemma presentation could be used to produce a module on that topic, perhaps in concert with a USAID module on Human Security. In addition, we should consider offering alternative theory that also addresses the same issues and produce that as a complimentary module.

2. Overarching Takeaways

a. *Recommendations regarding Teaching and Learning:* Two of the biggest takeaways observed from a teaching and learning perspective of the Nov GPC was the presentation methodology and forum organization. The first takeaway was the presentation methodology used in the forum was facilitated discussion. Each session began with the facilitator (BG Howard) introducing the presenters and the topic that was to be discussed. BG Howard allotted a portion of each session for the presenters to deliver facts and personal opinions relating to the topic. The additional time was reserved for questions from the audience. This method was very effective in keeping the audience engaged throughout the session. The second takeaway was the forum organization. Each session began and ended on time. This may seem like a small detail but to attendees, it sets the tone and tempo of the forum.

- The topics were listed in the agenda but needed more context. Recommend creating a syllabus or detailed agenda which outlines the objective of the session and a description of the topic. It would also be helpful to provide the attendees a reading list or read-ahead prior to the forum.
- If we are going to count forums toward achievement of badges, there needs to be some measurement of achievement of outcomes. But if they don't want to incorporate assessment in the forums, the student could write a short paper on the forum and that could be graded. Also, there needs to be some mechanism to oversee student participation, so that people cannot log on for 15 minutes on day one and receive credit for the event. From an andragogical perspective, planners should consider cognitive overload before cramming excessive amounts of content and scheduling very long days into the event.

b. *Recommendations regarding Research and Analysis:* The GPC forum highlighted how important it is to understand various aspects of the strategy itself as well as the way the other great powers (i.e. Russia and China) are reacting to and engaging in great power competition. This should be highlighted in our topics workshop and resulting topics handbook, as well as financially supported by the annual call for papers (in collaboration with the JSOU Press).

c. *Recommendations regarding Outreach and Engagement:* Regarding modes and methods of delivery and socialization of this AAR, the final version should be disseminated to the following groups: 1) CG's office; 2) Each Directorate or J Code; and 3) Each JSOU Division Head. It should also be given to knowledge management to be hung somewhere in the JSOU portal. The AARs from each forum should be hung in a designated spot where a body of knowledge from these forums can be built.

Plan of Action & Milestones (POAM)

One particular deliverable that will be produced from this forum will be a "proceedings," consisting of a digital program (formatted as 'print-ready') that includes the GPC forum precis, rapporteur session summaries, and substantive findings from this AAR.

Another deliverable will be mini-course modules, which will include videos of all available (and releasable) sessions, coupled with bullet points and significant transcript "captures" from the sessions. The intent is for these to be used by faculty to augment the teaching of GPC-related topics.

Finally, specific content for the SOF chairs will be added to the existing materials compiled for the development of a GPC SOF Chairs' course.

The timeline and milestones for these deliverables are as follows:

Deliverable	Draft complete	Final version complete	OPR
Proceedings	FEB 1, 2021	MAR 1, 2021	S (Strat Studies)
Mini-course modules	*TBD Pending JSOU Next Finalization*		
SOF Chairs' course	*TBD Pending JSOU Next Finalization*		

Red Team Analysis:

a. *Requirement:* According to the Memorandum for Record of the JSOU President, dated 13 November 2020, this AAR was "red teamed" (i.e. put through an external critique).

b. *Composition:* The red team for this AAR was comprised of the following individuals:

LTC David Oakley, Ph.D., National Defense University (lead)

COL Ed Croot, 1st Special Forces Command (invited and accepted; unable to participate)

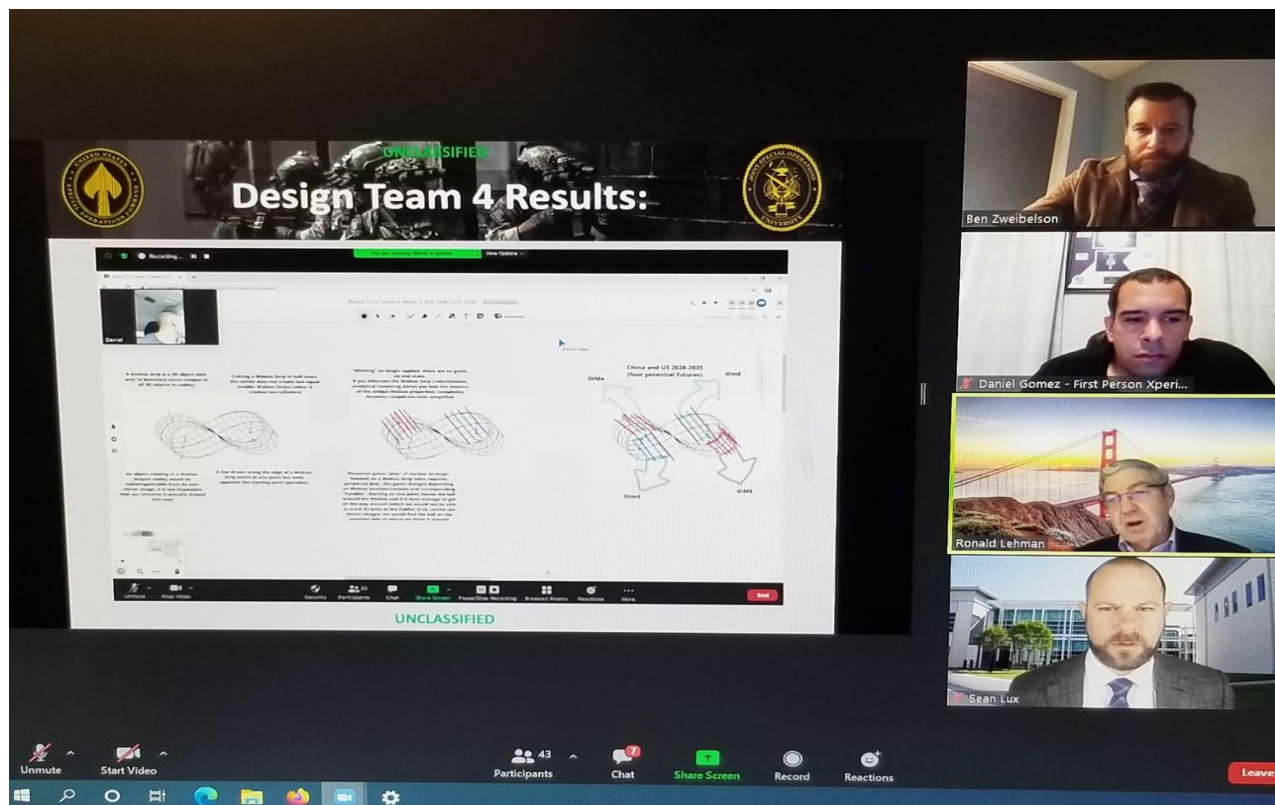Dr. Jeff Kubiak (Col., USAF, ret.) Arizona State University

c. *Findings:* Overall, the Red Team concurred with the AAR assessment that the GPC forum was a success and we believe it provides a strong foundation for future forum events. Although successful, we believe there are a few adjustments that should be made to the quarterly forum approach to ensure future forums build upon its success. First, and most important, we believe identifying the purpose of the forum program and how they enable the JSOU Next vision is important and should precede "identifying target audience" (please see more on this under Takeaway #2). Closely linked to this is the need to expand the forums beyond the GPC environment and incorporate the entire compound security environment as identified in the White Papers. The quarterly forums provide a great opportunity to establish a common understanding of the environment, but this environment should include all aspects of the compound security environment and not just GPC. Although this runs the risk of going too broad, we believe it is necessary and can be achieved through an approach that nests the forums and other JSOU events/programs. Finally, we believe the forums are a great opportunity to further the practitioner-scholar engagement described in the White Papers and something JSOU is uniquely situated to advance. These quarterly forums should be used as an opportunity to both educate/inform SOF on outside organizations/perspectives and as an opportunity to educate/inform outside organizations about SOF. This is the only way we are going to truly nurture a common appreciation of the compound security environment.

The Red Team focused its review/discussion on the participant experience and the issues we believe should be considered as JSOU develops the quarterly forum approach. Please see the "Red Team Comments/Observations" within the T-I-D-Rs above for more detailed feedback on specific AAR recommendations.

Conclusion:

Despite the many issues identified here in this AAR, the 4-6 November 2020 "Great Power Competition and the Compound Security Environment" forum was – across a wide-range of indicators – an overwhelming success. Survey data shows that nearly all respondents had a positive appreciation of the event (149 out of 155 found the event well organized) and found that it met their expectations or exceeded them (143 out of 155; see Attachment 1).

The quarterly GPC forums will combine the strategic insight and experience of senior leaders from our strategic, operational, and tactical SOF formations with the theoretical, analytic, and emerging research perspectives of top scholars from across the DOD and academia. This iteration, with its focus on "Great Power Competition and the Compound Security Environment" was an overwhelming success. Key topics included discussion panels exploring the geostrategic nature of the GPC environment as being distinct from, as well as possibly similar with, many assumptions from the Cold War. Furthermore, the GPC forum explored the role that Westphalian state actors and non-state and sub-state actors play as both adversaries and partners in the compound security environment. The forum also explored the emerging challenges to the current global order to understand better the myriad strategic intents of partner forces and adversaries as part of a broad network of international actors. The forum also analyzed varying approaches to gaining "intellectual overmatch" in GPC and understanding how emerging complexity and subsequent paradigm shifts will challenge the global strategic future. Lastly, the forum allowed senior leaders, scholars, and stakeholders to apply the newly uncovered knowledge about the GPC environment into the integrated campaign of practice and will help drive options for future strategic designs, from a combination of thinking-to-know and thinking-to-do innovative design and applied research techniques.

Attachments:

Attachment 1 – GPC Event Report

Attachment 2 – GPC T-I-D-Rs from Office of Institutional Effectiveness

Attachment 3 – Forum Agenda 4-6 NOV

Attachment 4 – GPC Team Roles and Responsibilities

Attachment 5 – Draft Agenda for Next Forum