

From National to Theater Developing Strategy

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Strategy without tactics is the slowest route to victory. Tactics without strategy is the noise before defeat.

—Sun Tzu

As a consequence of budget deficits and rebalancing the force, the Department of Defense (DOD) increasingly requires strategy to operate in a fiscally constrained environment. While resources are in decline, national security challenges persist as new ones emerge. Reflected in documents such as the National Security Strategy and National Military Strategy, the United States attempts to shape the international security environment by balancing threats in key regions of the world, assisting partners in combatting internal challenges, and supporting allies to solve their own security dilemmas. While security strategies are developed in Washington, combatant commands must translate national objectives into theater strategy to advance and defend U.S. interests.

With a strong notion that strategy should prevent “train wrecks,” or at least be prepared for train wrecks, Dan Dresdner argues that grand strategies:

matter most when actors are operating in uncharted waters. They can function as cognitive beacons, guiding countries to safety. During normal times, decisionmakers will extrapolate from current capabilities or past actions to predict the behavior of others. In novel times, however, grand strategies can signal to outsiders the future intentions of a country’s policymakers, reassuring or repulsing important audiences.¹

Hal Brands argues that strategy “should flow not from mere reactions to day-to-day events, but from a judgment of those enduring interests that transcend any single crisis.”²

Uncertainty associated with China’s rise, the Arab Awakening, and the persistence of transnational threats suggests strategy is essential to avoid going from crisis to crisis. In general, the United States attempts to diffuse situations before they become crises through a strategy of prevention and building partner capacity to control security challenges.³

Strategies are relatively easy to develop, but Carl von Clausewitz is instructive here: “Everything in strategy is very simple, but that does not mean that everything is very easy.”⁴ The challenge for the strategist is to coordinate the various levers of national power in a coherent or smart way. Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton emphasized this idea: “We must use what has been called ‘smart power’: the full range of tools at our disposal—diplomatic, economic, military, political, legal, and cultural—picking the right tool, or combination of tools, for each situation.”⁵ Calls for smart power were a reaction to George W. Bush’s foreign policy, but more importantly underscores that power relations are differentiated. In the context of military power, unipolarity dominates thinking about the U.S. position in the world, but recent foreign policy frustration illustrates that power relations are stratified.⁶ At the military level, U.S. power is unparalleled and unprecedented. At the economic level, the United States is checked by other great economic powers such as Japan, the European Union, and the People’s Republic of China, and through institutions such as the World Trade Organization. At the informational level, the United States is but one of many state and nonstate actors that influence global events.

To be effective in a differentiated world, strategists must answer three basic questions. What do we wish to achieve or what are the desired *ends*? How do we get there or what are the *ways*? And what resources are available, or what *means* will be used? While the first question is largely the domain of civilian policymakers, military officers are expected to advise and ultimately implement strategy. As Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Martin Dempsey noted, “Strategic coherence . . . does not just happen. Rather, it results from dialogue and debate.”⁷ With regular interactions with their counterparts throughout the world, combatant commanders are key national security actors in the strategy development process.

Defining Strategy

At a minimum, strategy should link ends, ways, and means. For DOD, *strategy* is “a prudent idea or set of ideas for employing the instruments of national power in a synchronized and integrated fashion to achieve theater, national, and/or multinational objectives.”⁸ Strategy also is about *how* leadership can use the *power* available to the state to exercise control over people, places, things, and events to achieve *objectives* in accordance with national interests and policies. In fact, Hal Brands describes *grand strategy* as a “discipline of trade-offs: it requires using the full extent of national power when essential matters are at stake, but it also involves conserving and protecting the sources of that power.”⁹

Henry Barnett visualized strategy as an *interaction* among key variables: the security environment, ends, ways, means, resource constraints, and risk.¹⁰ As represented in figure 1, strategy is shaped by the security environment, as it attempts to shape the security environment. Just as no plan remains intact after first contact with the enemy, no strategy can exist outside the real world. Allies, partners, and adversaries can affect successful strategy implementation by balking at U.S. demands (for example, Turkey

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refused to allow the United States to transit through its territory to invade Iraq in 2003), imposing caveats on forces in coalition operations (Germany's refusal to engage in certain types of combat operations in Afghanistan), and outright efforts to undermine U.S. objectives (China's support of authoritarian regimes that forestall democratic change).

At the same time the international security environment impacts strategy, so do resource constraints. As Colin Dueck argues, the American approach to strategy is flawed: "Sweeping and ambitious goals are announced, but then pursued by disproportionately limited means, thus creating an outright invitation to failure."¹¹ Since the 1990s, the limits (and frustration) with U.S. grand strategy tend to be explained by an expansive view of security challenges that includes subnational and transnational challenges. While burden-sharing through coalition operations is the norm, the United States increasingly identifies more challenges than it and its partners can manage. Given global defense cuts, the resource gap will be exacerbated unless balance is achieved among ends, ways, and means. Combatant commands are key in this process as they train and equip partners, sponsor regional exercises, and employ military forces.

To set priorities, the strategist can look to national interests as a starting point to determine ends because they help identify the reasons countries employ military forces. National interests can be universal and enduring, such as ensuring the security of the state and its people. Additionally, national interests

can be the product of national policymakers, such as advancing democratic institutions or protecting the environment. The attempt to distinguish intensity of national interests is important to set priorities. Hans Morgenthau differentiated between vital national interests and secondary interests, which are more difficult to define.¹² In a 2011 speech, President Barack Obama offered his priorities and intimated the conditions under which his administration might consider something vital: "I have made it clear that I will never hesitate to use our military swiftly, decisively and unilaterally when necessary to defend our people, our homeland, our allies, and our core interests."¹³ In the same address, President Obama clarified what he thought were secondary interests:

There will be times . . . when our safety is not directly threatened, but our interests and values are. Sometimes the course of history poses challenges that threaten our common humanity and common security, responding to natural disasters, for example; or preventing genocide and keeping the peace; ensuring regional security; and maintaining the flow of commerce. In such cases we should not be afraid to act but the burden of action should not be America's alone. As we have in Libya, our task is instead to mobilize the international community for collective action.¹⁴

Presidential policy is one source for discerning vital from secondary interests. Peter Liotta observed that national interests

should also answer a fundamental question: "What are we willing to die for?"¹⁵ That is, where is the United States willing to put Servicemembers' lives at risk? To this we add, "What are we willing to kill for?" and "What are we willing to pay for?" One relatively simple approach to this rather complex and somewhat ambiguous concept is to stratify national interests:

- Vital interests. What are we willing to die for (for example, invade Afghanistan with ground forces to destroy al Qaeda training camps)?
- Important interests. What are we willing to kill for (for example, participate in a North Atlantic Treaty Organization air campaign to prevent genocide in Libya)?
- Peripheral interests. What are we willing to fund (for example, train and equip African Union peacekeepers for Somalia)?

Given the U.S. ability to achieve air supremacy or launch standoff weapons, the Nation can kill with limited risk to its Airmen or Sailors, giving it a coercive advantage during diplomatic crises. In the 1990s, for example, missile attacks against Iraq and the air war for Kosovo exemplified that the United States was willing to kill to achieve objectives but not willing to die. In both cases, the United States deliberately withheld ground force options, which would have considerably raised the stakes. It seemed that airpower alone could achieve strategic interests.¹⁶ Advances in remotely piloted vehicles over the last decade have enhanced U.S. ability to conduct casualty-free warfare, as evidenced by regular drone strikes in Pakistan, Yemen, and Afghanistan.

In addition to using military force, the United States also pursues its national interests through friendly surrogates. In cases such, the Nation is willing to fund others to provide humanitarian assistance, conduct peacekeeping operations, and contribute to international military coalitions. The clearest example is through the Global Peacekeeping Operations Initiative, which was designed to train and equip foreign peacekeepers for global deployment.¹⁷ A program such as this initiative seeks to limit the impact of regional crises while providing the international community a ready pool of international peacekeepers. Along these lines, Washington was willing to fund African militaries to operate in Somalia, but it was not willing to deploy

Figure 1. The Shaping of Strategy



ground forces or establish a no-fly zone. This approach is likely to increase in an era of burden-sharing where “building partner capacity is an essential military mission and an important component of the U.S. Government’s approach to preventing and responding to crisis, conflict, and instability.”¹⁸

After ends are defined, policymakers and national security professionals develop the ways to achieve national interests. Ways can be thought of as concepts, which are end-to-end activities that define how elements, systems, organizations, and tactics combine to accomplish national objectives or tasks.¹⁹ By specifying ways or concepts, the military departments can then develop required capabilities and attempt to limit redundancies. For example, the military might identify global strike operations as a key concept or “way” the force will operate in the future (for example, in response to local access denial). That concept could be used to identify required capabilities, such as the ability to accurately deliver a strike anywhere in the world with 24-hour notice. The means to provide that capability could range from submarine-launched missiles to long-range bombers or even sabotage missions conducted by special operations forces, but the concept would provide the key guidance on what means the military would actually need.

As Presidents and their administrations evaluate ways to advance and defend national interests, criteria emerge suggesting conditions for military force employment. Not all crises around the world garner or warrant the commitment of U.S. forces. The public, according to the 2012 Chicago Council Survey, increasingly seeks to cut back on foreign expenditures and avoid military engagement whenever possible, yet 70 percent “support the use of U.S. troops to stop a government from committing genocide and favor their use in dealing with humanitarian crises.”²⁰ The military, however, favors a conservative approach to force employment, tracing its roots to the Vietnam experience and embodied in the Weinberger Doctrine.²¹

When evaluating ways, strategists should analyze suitability, acceptability, and feasibility? Most importantly, is the action suitable or likely to actually achieve the desired ends? Also, is it an acceptable choice given ethical, legal, political, and organizational constraints? At tactical levels, planners must ensure their ideas are feasible or can be carried out with the resources they

have been granted. Feasibility at the strategic level is more complicated, as strategists have the dual task of identifying resource gaps to guide future investments, while not relying on concepts whose resource demands will never plausibly be met. This is one reason the “Bartlett Model” of figure 1 shows never-ending iteration. As Colin Gray notes, strategy development is a dialogue.²²

If *ways* provide the framework or concepts identifying how elements of national power will be used to promote ends, *means* are the specific tools or capabilities available for carrying out those concepts. Raw resources such as money and people are not means until they are considered and prioritized within the context of strategy. Overall, the United States has a complex system for prioritizing and developing defense capabilities. Details change over time, but essentially DOD aims to identify gaps between capabilities needed to carry out desired strategies and those it actually possesses, prioritize those gaps given likely resource constraints, develop programs to create those capabilities, and work with Congress to fund the programs.²³

As the eventual consumers of DOD capabilities, combatant commands provide important support to concept and capability development. The Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 formalized this process to “utilize the significant experience and knowledge of [combatant commands] in the validation of critical capabilities and the development of future forces in U.S. defense planning.”²⁴ One of the ways combatant commanders accomplish this objective is by producing an Integrated Priority List (IPL) that sends a formal “demand signal” to the Pentagon by identifying capability gaps and providing the commander’s “highest priority requirements, prioritized across Service and functional lines. IPLs define shortfalls in key programs that may adversely affect the combatant commander’s mission.”²⁵ Additionally, combatant command representatives are invited to participate in Joint Requirements Oversight Council meetings, which are critical to determining and validating DOD capability requirements.²⁶ Although this goal is intuitive and rational, in practice, effective combatant command participation has proved challenging given competing perspectives and interests.

Overall strategic success is based on how well ends, ways, and means are balanced.

Julian Corbett observed that one has to constantly keep in view the politico-diplomatic position of the country (on which depends the effective action of the military instrument), and its commercial and financial position (by which the energy for working the military instrument is maintained).²⁷ In its simplest form, defense budgeting is a key variable that impacts strategy implementation. Former commander of U.S. Central Command General Anthony Zinni emphasized the importance of resources: “In my era, even if the [commanders in chief] produced good strategies at their level (and I believe we did), with good ends and reasonable ways to achieve them, we still had no idea whether or not the administration and the Congress would come through with the means.”²⁸ Although it is clearly not ideal, commanders are well advised to heed Corbett’s advice.

A strategy is not considered complete until a risk analysis is conducted to determine the ability of the organization to carry out the tasks and missions specified and implied by the strategy. Risk results from a mismatch among ends, ways, and means. In considering military strategy, DOD considers four dimensions of risk.²⁹ *Operational risk* is associated with the current force’s ability to execute the strategy within acceptable costs. *Future challenges risk* considers the military’s capacity to execute future missions against an array of prospective challengers. *Force management risks* consider recruiting, training, equipping, and retaining personnel. Finally, *institutional risks* focus on organizational efficiency, financial management, and technology development.³⁰ To identify and measure risk, DOD uses exercises, scenarios, and experimentation.³¹

As the preceding discussion suggests, strategy is developed in the context of the international security environment, and strategies must be reviewed as they encounter the real world. Reevaluation and interpreting surprise recalls Sun Tzu’s famous exaltation, “Know the enemy and know yourself; in a hundred battles you will never be in peril.”³² Ideally, perfect knowledge ensures success, but history is replete with evidence to the contrary. Because “[w]ar is . . . an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will,” the enemy has a vote, too.³³ War is characterized by fog and friction. Winston Churchill understood this: “The statesman who yields to war fever must realize that once the signal is given, he is no longer the master of policy

but the slave of unforeseeable and uncontrollable events.”³⁴ The preceding discussion applies to the development and evaluation of strategy in general, but national security professionals are primarily concerned with three specific levels of strategy: national or “grand” strategy, military strategy, and theater strategy.

Levels of Strategy

Grand strategy is the highest level of strategy and encompasses all elements of national power—diplomatic, informational, military, and economic.³⁵ While the country has always followed a grand strategy (for example, containment during the Cold War), Congress requires the President to publish a National Security Strategy. As required by the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Act, the strategy describes:

*the worldwide interests, goals, and objectives . . . the foreign policy, worldwide commitments, and national defense capabilities of the United States necessary to deter aggression . . . the proposed short-term and long-term uses of the political, economic, military, and other elements of national power of the United States to protect or promote the interests . . . the adequacy of the capabilities of the United States to carry out the national security strategy.*³⁶

Since the statutory requirement, there have been 10 national security strategies released by U.S. Presidents (two from Ronald Reagan, two from George H.W. Bush, three from Bill Clinton, two from George W. Bush, and one from Barack Obama). While each President responded to particular security challenges during his tenure (that is, the ending of the Cold War for Presidents Reagan and Bush, and the rise of nationalist conflicts and global terrorism for Presidents Clinton and Bush), there have been continuous policies related to trade, America’s leadership in global affairs, and the promotion of international organizations to unify action. For example, Paul D. Miller argues that “contrary to widespread belief, the United States has been pursuing at least one pillar of an implicit grand strategy since the end of the Cold War: building the democratic peace.”³⁷ Other examples include the continuation of President Kennedy’s Cuba Policy, President Nixon’s China policy, President Clinton’s

trade policy, and President Bush’s counterterrorism policy.

Deriving strategic guidance from the country’s grand strategy, DOD has regularly produced a National Military Strategy (NMS) since the 1990s. In 2003, Congress required the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to submit a biennial review of the national military strategy in even-numbered years. The NMS outlines the strategic direction for the Armed Forces (the military lever of national power), which should be consistent with the current National Security Strategy and contain the following elements:

*A description of the strategic environment and the opportunities and challenges that affect [U.S.] national interests . . . a description of the regional threats . . . a description of the international threats posed by terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, and asymmetric challenges . . . identification of national military objectives . . . identification of the strategy, underlying concepts, and component elements that contribute to the achievement of national military objectives . . . assessment of the capabilities and adequacy of forces . . . and assessments of the capabilities, adequacy, and interoperability of regional allies.*³⁸

Though there is no statutory requirement, the Secretary of Defense released a National Defense Strategy (NDS) in 2005, 2008, and 2012. Since the strategy is written (or at least directed and signed) by the civilian head of the military, the strategy should be read as directions to the uniformed military. Strategic documents are one form of civilian control through providing broad policy guidance to the military. The National Defense Strategy intends to provide a link between the National Security Strategy and the National Military Strategy. The 2012 NDS, for example, states that the ways the military element of national power will be used to support national strategy will be through 10 missions to include countering terrorism, deterring aggression, operating in cyberspace, and providing a stabilizing presence abroad.³⁹ With these assigned missions, combatant commanders develop theater strategies and request new or refined capabilities from the military Services to execute these missions.

The number of strategic documents in the United States can be overwhelming and are intended to work together to provide

“nested strategic direction” supporting the tasks, missions, and intent of the next higher strategy. One of the ways that is accomplished is through the Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR), which is a congressionally mandated activity that occurs every 4 years and requires the Secretary of Defense to conduct a review that includes a “comprehensive examination of the defense strategy, force structure, force modernization plans, infrastructure, budget plan, and other elements of the defense program and policies.”⁴⁰ The QDR sets a “long-term [20 years] course for DOD as it assesses the threats and challenges that the nation faces and re-balances DOD’s strategies, capabilities, and forces to address today’s conflicts and tomorrow’s threats.”⁴¹

With this “nesting of strategy” in mind and an understanding of how to develop strategy, the following focuses on how to develop theater strategy.

Theater Strategy

Using national strategy as a guide, combatant commands develop theater strategies that are “an overarching construct outlining a combatant commander’s vision for integrating and synchronizing military activities and operations with the other instruments of national power in order to achieve national strategic objectives.”⁴² Theater strategy is the bridge between national strategic guidance and joint operational planning as it guides the development of the Theater Campaign Plan (TCP). Theater strategy, and the TCP that operationalizes it, should offer an integrated approach to achieving security objectives: ongoing engagement, assistance, and presence activities should support contingency plans (for example, securing access to bases or improving ally capabilities), but more broadly, theater strategies should seek to make conflicts less likely by achieving U.S. ends through security cooperation and other tools of national power.⁴³

A major challenge in the development of theater strategy is the requirement to coordinate theater security cooperation activities with other U.S. Government activities. These activities can cover the entire spectrum of conflict—from peace operations to major combat operations—and often occur simultaneously, providing an additional level of complexity for the commander’s staff to consider during planning and execution of the theater strategy. Theater strategy must therefore be broad and flexible enough to

encompass a wide variety of political-military activities across a combatant command's area of responsibility at the same time.⁴⁴ It must also take into account other countries' activities. General Rick Hillier, former chief of the Canadian Defense Staff, remarked, "International cohesion is usually the first casualty of having tactics without a strategy to guide you."⁴⁵ Consequently, military diplomacy is essential for combatant commands to coordinate their activities with their partners and allies in a region to approach unity of effort.

Despite the complexity and criticality of theater strategy, there is relatively little doctrine or other guidance on developing it. Perhaps this is a contributing factor in Charles Bouchat's observation that "No two combatant commands follow the same process, format, or procedures for developing theater strategy. Each combatant command has adapted its method to the peculiarities of its region and the personalities of its commanders."⁴⁶ As part of this unifying effort, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff has directed professional military education institutions to teach senior officers to "[a]nalyze how national military and joint theater strategies meet national strategic goals across the range of military operations."⁴⁷ Additionally, to bring rigor to theater campaign plan development, the Office of the Secretary of Defense released the *Theater Campaign Planning Planner's Handbook*, which is "designed to assist planners by presenting a broad approach to TCPs and country-level planning that considers

ongoing security cooperation efforts, current operations, the Phase 0 component of contingency plans, and resourcing constraints as part of the combatant commander's implementation of his strategic approach to the area of responsibility."⁴⁸ This handbook acknowledges limited combatant command resources in theater and emphasizes the point that the TCP "provides a framework to guide operational activity in order to achieve strategic objectives, while also providing a point of reference for the Services and other agencies to justify resource allocation."⁴⁹ Finally, it also discusses the "interagency nature" of planning and strategy implementation and the requirement to ensure that the combatant commander's strategic objectives are aligned with other U.S. Government efforts.⁵⁰

While acknowledging the complexity of developing and aligning the various strategy and operational planning efforts, we offer a logic model designed to translate grand strategy and associated strategic direction into theater strategy and associated plans including TCP.⁵¹

The model begins with national (grand) strategy, which defines U.S. security interests, objectives, and priorities, and provides guidance to all who are charged with its execution including geographic combatant commands. Given the National Security Strategy, DOD and the Joint Staff produce strategic guidance that focuses on the military instrument of national power and provides direction for the combatant commanders through several critical documents. For example, in addition

to the NMS, NDS, and QDR, the Unified Command Plan "sets forth basic guidance to all unified combatant commanders; establishes their missions, responsibilities, and force structure; and delineates the general geographical area of responsibility for geographic combatant commanders."⁵²

DOD also publishes Guidance for the Employment of the Force (GEF) that is the "method through which [the Office of the Secretary of Defense] translates" the strategic priorities set in these documents into a "single, overarching guidance document" that issues "implementable direction for operational activities."⁵³ Specifically, the GEF "provides two-year direction to the combatant commands for operational planning, force management, security cooperation, and posture planning. . . . The GEF is an essential document for combatant command planners as it provides the strategic end states for the deliberate planning of campaign plans and contingency plans. It also directs the level of planning detail as well as assumptions, which must be considered during the development of plans."⁵⁴

In addition to the GEF, the Chairman's Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan (JSCP) is the "primary vehicle through which the [Chairman] exercises responsibility for directing the preparation of joint plans." The JSCP implements the guidance contained in the GEF and "provides [focused] military strategic and operational guidance to [combatant commanders], Service Chiefs . . . and applicable DOD agencies for preparation of campaign plans and contingency plans based on current military capabilities."⁵⁵ The JSCP also provides guidance concerning global defense posture, security cooperation, and other steady-state (Phase 0) activities.

Armed with national strategy and strategic direction and the commander's guidance, the staff is prepared to begin formulating theater strategy. One of the most critical steps in developing strategy is to conduct a thorough theater estimate, which is "the process by which a theater commander assesses the broad strategic factors that influence the theater strategic environment, thus further determining the missions, objectives, and courses of action throughout their theaters."⁵⁶ The estimate includes a mission analysis that derives specified, implied, and essential tasks, as well as theater-strategic objectives (ends) and desired effects.⁵⁷ Given the complex nature of the security environ-

Figure 2. Theater Strategy Logic



ment, as well as changes in strategic direction, the theater estimate requires continuous refinement. In addition to a detailed analysis of the combatant command's mission, capabilities, and limitations, the estimate should address the following:

- Identify any states, groups, or organizations in the security environment that might challenge the combatant command's ability to advance and defend U.S. interests in the region. This analysis should include an appreciation for relevant geopolitical, geo-economic, and cultural considerations within the area of operations.

- Identify the major strategic and operational challenges facing the combatant command.

- Identify known or anticipated opportunities the combatant command could leverage including those states, groups, or organizations that could assist the command in advancing and defending U.S. interests in the region.

- Broadly assess the risks inherent in major uncertainties in the depiction of the security environment.

The theater estimate is crucial to set the context for the combatant command's mission analysis. Commanders articulate their intent through a vision that describes how the theater strategy supports U.S. goals and objectives. The vision should discuss the general methods to achieve those objectives including international assistance and diplomacy, as well as military means. Additionally, it may describe where the combatant commander is willing to accept risk. Finally, it should introduce and describe the appropriate strategic and operational concepts for the military instrument of power.

When crafting a vision, it should succinctly capture the desired strategic outcome. The vision is a snapshot of what the combatant commander wants the theater to look like in the future. Effective visions are usually short, focused, imaginable, positive, and motivating.⁵⁸ Constructing an effective vision statement is difficult: one or two sentences must reflect the consolidated theater strategy's goal so it is easily understood and engaging (for example, "[a]s we look forward, [U.S. Southern Command] seeks to evolve into an interagency oriented organization seeking to support security and stability in the Americas"⁵⁹).

A good vision must be compelling to a broad audience. For instance, if the combatant commander's vision is embraced by coalition partners, regional leaders, and Congress, there is a good chance that the strategy has a critical mass necessary for success. A coherent and credible vision serves as a communication tool that provides essential continuity and integrity to the everyday challenges and decisions within the combatant command's theater.

Once the theater estimate is complete, the strategist must develop strategic concepts that articulate the ways to achieve the theater strategy objectives or ends. First, the strategist must develop and consider strategic alternatives that can be expressed either as broad statements of what is to be accomplished or lines of operations.

As a useful reference in this process, the strategist can turn to the *Capstone Concept for Joint Operations: Joint Force 2020 (CCJO)*, which provides "potential operational concepts through which the Joint Force of 2020 will defend the nation against a wide range of security challenges. Its purpose is to guide force development toward Joint Force 2020, the force called for by the new defense strategic guidance, *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense*."⁶⁰ The CCJO describes the future operating environment by focusing on what is new and different, while suggesting "attributes" that will define the future force. The document also emphasizes the concept of globally integrated operations that require a "globally postured Joint Force to quickly combine capabilities with itself and mission partners across domains, echelons, geographic boundaries, and organizational affiliations."⁶¹

The strategic concept also forms the basis for subsequent planning efforts that include combat operations (i.e., concept of operations plans), security cooperation, and other support operations.⁶² Additionally, the concept identifies the means necessary for the command to attain its identified theater-strategic and national objectives. The means normally include interagency and multinational capabilities, as well as the full spectrum of U.S. military resources. In many cases, combatant commanders identify capability gaps that can be filled with resources that already exist within DOD but are not assigned to that theater or do not exist in sufficient quantity. In other cases, the command may identify capabilities—from

across the spectrum of doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership and education, personnel, facilities, and policy, not just hardware—that need to be created, modified, or accelerated. Such capability requests are submitted through an IPL, and in either case, sound and clear strategic concepts are invaluable in articulating those capability needs to senior leaders.

Implementation

Once the theater strategy is complete and approved, the next step is implementation, or executing the strategy. Without the means, competencies, and informed thinking to carry out the commander's intent, the strategy is just an idea.⁶³ For example, deterrence is a key concept in all theaters, but Elaine Bunn noted that when the 2006 QDR directed that deterrence be tailored, "hard work [was] needed to flesh out the concepts and capabilities underlying tailored deterrence."⁶⁴ To implement tailored deterrence, combatant commanders must identify countries and groups the United States wants to deter, understand the motives of those actors, and request capabilities to prevent an adversary taking action the United States seeks to deter.

The theater strategy should also outline the structures, policies, technology, and people necessary to carry out the strategy. In today's complex security environment, theater strategy implementation requires the cooperation of multiple governmental and nongovernmental organizations, as well as international allies and partners. One of the most challenging tasks for the combatant command is ensuring that there is a credible commitment among all participants to accomplish the common goals.

With strategy playing an important guiding role in U.S. foreign policy, it is important to know how to evaluate the strategy. At a minimum, a strategy is designed to change the security environment by preventing the emergence of a peer competitor, increasing the number of democracies in the world, and preventing the spread of nuclear weapons. In a broader sense, as this article makes clear, strategy develops and employs all tools of national power to advance and defend national interests. Consequently, when evaluating strategy, one must examine the strategy's concept of national interests, view of the security environment, strategic priorities,

role of power, impact on resources, required means, risk, and acceptability.

In pure combat terms, it is relatively easy to measure whether the military disrupts, degrades, or destroys enemy forces. In permissive environments, the objectives are less clear and are broader than military objectives. Former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mike Mullen noted that the effects may never be clearly measurable and that cultural sensitivities might preclude measurement.⁶⁴ However, in a resource-constrained environment, it is important to understand which activities are more effective.

A theater strategy should contain measurements to calibrate its progress toward achieving goals and objectives. There are three broad categories of measures: input, output, and outcome. Resources (funds, personnel, and equipment) are typical examples of *input*. Interagency or coalition support might be another resource prerequisite. *Outputs* are performance measures that directly track progress toward goals and objectives. Outputs are dependent on adequate resources, such as securing an area or building infrastructure, and are accomplishments over which the combatant command has considerable direct control. These measures are usually quantifiable and have associated timeframes. In contrast, *outcomes* are often qualitative and are therefore more difficult to measure, and they are usually only influenced and not directly controlled by the combatant command. Examples may include the strength of regional security agreements or the relative receptivity to U.S. forces within the partner country. Outcomes are often referred to as strategic *effects*, the ultimate goals of the theater strategy and combatant commander's intent.⁶⁶ If the desired strategic outcome is political or economic stability, examples of outcome measures or effects might be representative participation in government or the reduction of political violence.

The practical value of performance measurement systems is that they enable the combatant command to evaluate the theater strategy's progress in achieving desired and clearly identified goals and objectives. Most theater strategies have a hierarchy of performance metrics starting with high-level outcome metrics that are supported by more detailed and granular performance (output)

metrics. The essential point is that performance measurement systems need to be consistent and aligned with strategic goals.

Conclusion: Evaluating Strategy

In practice, strategic decisions must always compete with the demands of domestic politics, or what Samuel Huntington has called "structural decisions."⁶⁷ These are choices "made in the currency of domestic politics." The most important structural decision concerns the "size and distribution of funds made available to the armed forces." The strategic planner can never ignore fiscal constraints. Indeed, political reality sometimes dictates that budgetary limits will constitute the primary influence on the development of strategy and force structure. Additionally, bureaucratic and organizational imperatives play a major role in force structure choices. Potential mismatches create risks. If the risks resulting from an ends-means mismatch cannot be managed, ends must be reevaluated and scaled back, means must be increased, or the strategy must be adjusted.

That said, when done correctly, theater strategy enables the combatant command to synchronize available resources and achieve theater objectives. **JFQ**

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NOTES

¹ Daniel W. Drezner, "Does Obama Have a Grand Strategy? Why We Need Doctrines in Uncertain Times," *Foreign Affairs* 90, no. 4 (July/August 2011), 59.

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