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## In Focus

*Was the Russian Invasion of Ukraine  
a Failure of Western Deterrence?*

Bettina Renz

*Ukraine's Lessons for Future Combat:  
Unmanned Aerial Systems and  
Deep Strike*

Harry Halem

## Deterring Major Powers

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*Introduction to the China Landpower  
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Richard D. Butler

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## From the Editor in Chief

**W**elcome to the Winter 2023–24 issue of *Parameters*. This issue opens with two *In Focus* commentaries offering observations from the Russia-Ukraine War, two forums addressing deterrence and strategic influence, and the inaugural Director's Corner for the China Landpower Studies Center (CLSC).

Our first commentary, “Was the Russian Invasion of Ukraine a Failure of Western Deterrence?” is by Bettina Renz, a contributing editor and member of the *Parameters* editorial board. She argues the West never articulated a clear strategy to deter Moscow's invasion. Instead, she shows the West's deterrence efforts were based on problematic assumptions about the Kremlin's motivations. The second commentary, “Ukraine's Lessons for Future Combat: Unmanned Aerial Systems and Deep Strike,” is by Harry Halem. He demonstrates how the reconnaissance-strike complexes used by both sides in the Russia-Ukraine War have changed modern combat. He pays special attention to Ukraine's development of a battle-management system that fuses remotely piloted aircraft systems and satellite reconnaissance to coordinate deep strikes into Russia's rear areas.

Our first forum, *Deterring Major Powers*, includes three articles providing insights into how America can develop and implement successful deterrence strategies. In “Deterring Russian Nonstrategic Nuclear Weapons: A Revised Approach,” Cliff Parsons argues the US military should develop a restrained, deliberate, and empathetic strategy centered on minimalist military objectives. In the second article, “Ambivalent Offshore Balancer: America in the Middle East and Beyond,” John Schuessler questions the logic underpinning the strategy of offshore balancing; he makes the case that the United States is, in fact, an ambivalent balancer due to the “stopping power of water.” In the forum's final article, “Integrating Army Capabilities into Deterrence: The Early Cold War,” Robert Williams draws parallels to the current strategic environment by assessing how the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations forced institutional change by integrating atomic weapons and other capabilities across multiple domains with allies and partners worldwide to deter the Soviet Union and China.

Our second forum, *Achieving Strategic Influence*, features two articles proposing ways America can better understand its allies and adversaries



to shape a more favorable security environment. In “Competing for Global Influence: How Best to Assess Potential Strategic Partners,” Brian Forester argues US military planners should consider how economic globalization shapes the preferences of potential defense partners. In the second article, “Reflexive Control: Influencing Strategic Behavior,” Maria de Goeij explains reflexive control through a complex-adaptive-systems framework, which she contends can help US military planners understand other actors and their behaviors, especially Russia.

Our *From the Archives: Civil-Military Relations* highlights the article, “Are Retired Flag Officers Overparticipating in the Political Process?” by Zachary Griffiths originally published in the Spring 2020 issue. He shows the active participation of retired generals and admirals in politics does little harm to US democratic institutions or to the nonpartisan reputation of the US military.

Finally, Colonel Richard Butler, the first director of the CLSC, introduces the Center, its mission, organization, capabilities, research agenda, and expected products. ~AJE



# Was the Russian Invasion of Ukraine a Failure of Western Deterrence?

Bettina Renz  
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**ABSTRACT:** In February 2022, many observers initially evaluated the Russian invasion of Ukraine as a failure of Western deterrence. That assessment was and is flawed inasmuch as the West never articulated a clear strategy to deter such an invasion. Engaging with relevant conceptual debates about how deterrence works and relating this information to what the West did and did not do in the run-up to the invasion, this article shows that deterrence efforts were based on problematic assumptions about the Kremlin's motivations. The study concludes with lessons for Western military and policy practitioners with the intention to enable better future thinking about how to deter Russia.

**Keywords:** deterrence, Ukraine, Russia, Putin, NATO

One of the many questions observers asked when Russia launched a large-scale war of aggression against Ukraine in February 2022 was why Western deterrence had failed.<sup>1</sup> As a long-time analyst of Russian foreign and security policy, I found it surprising that this question attracted so much attention. The West had long been concerned with the Kremlin's increasingly aggressive foreign policy. After the annexation of Crimea in 2014, the West began to strengthen its own deterrence posture because of fears over a possible Russian incursion into NATO territory. The West also supported Ukraine in reforming its armed forces to stand up to ongoing and future Russian aggression. As evidence of an impending invasion mounted toward the end of 2021, I hoped the difficulties and potential risks of a full occupation of Ukraine would stop the Kremlin from proceeding. The possibility that the Kremlin's failure to act would result from Western deterrence never crossed my mind. After all, the West had not articulated or communicated a clear strategy to dissuade Russian President Vladimir Putin from invading. A closer look at why some observers nevertheless believed Western deterrence should have prevented the February 2022 invasion offers valuable lessons for future thinking about how to deter Russia.

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1. See Daniel W. Drezner, "Why Did Deterrence Fail in Ukraine?," *Washington Post* (website), March 22, 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2022/03/27/why-did-deterrence-fail-ukraine/>; and Aurel Braun, "Opinion – Western Deterrence Has Failed in Ukraine," *Globe and Mail* (website), February 24, 2022, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-western-deterrence-has-failed-in-ukraine/>.

## Western Deterrence and the Russian Threat

For the first two decades after the fall of the Soviet Union, few in the West pondered the need to deter Russia. Given the country's economic and military weakness and apparent lack of global ambition, the question no longer seemed relevant. An increasingly aggressive foreign policy under President Putin—and especially Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014—reversed this trend. Policymakers recognized that NATO needed to enhance its conventional deterrence posture through increased defense spending and reinforcement of its eastern flank. At the same time, the West made considerable efforts to aid Ukraine in providing its own security. Arguably, however, these efforts did not amount to the formulation and articulation of a Western strategy to deter the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

### Securing the West

The successful annexation of Crimea evoked fears that the West had overlooked important developments in Russian military capabilities and intentions. The defense posture of the West, and of NATO, specifically, required adjustments to deter the threat of Russian aggression. Consequently, Western defense planning focused on improving the means and ways necessary to deter a possible Russian attack on NATO territory. This preparation included debates about the need for European member states to increase their defense spending. The Alliance also strengthened its posture on the eastern flank and demonstrated unity and resolve to defend Allied territory against Russian aggression. Such efforts included the Readiness Action Plan agreed upon at the NATO summit in 2014, which detailed assurance measures for NATO members in Central and Eastern Europe.<sup>2</sup>

Congruent Western defense debates and scenario planning related to the deterrence of the Russian threat since 2014 had the same geographical focus.<sup>3</sup> Although the West perceived a militarily resurgent Russia as a potential threat to global stability, its dominant and perhaps reasonable concern was how to secure itself. The “Russian threat” that needed to be deterred

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2. “Readiness Action Plan,” NATO (website), last updated September 1, 2022, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_119353.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_119353.htm).

3. For example, see Elbridge Colby and Jonathan Solomon, “Facing Russia: Conventional Defence and Deterrence in Europe,” *Survival* 57, no. 6 (2015): 21–50, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2015.1116146>; David A. Shlapak and Michael W. Johnson, *Reinforcing Deterrence on NATO's Eastern Flank: Wargaming the Defense of the Baltics* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2016), [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR1253.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1253.html); and Alexander Lanoszka and Michael A. Hunzeker, *Conventional Deterrence and Landpower in Northeastern Europe* (Carlisle, PA: US Army War College Press, 2019), <https://press.armywarcollege.edu/monographs/381>.

was defined not principally as a threat to Ukraine but as “an armed attack by Russia against a NATO member,” as a 2020 RAND report put it.<sup>4</sup>

### Helping Ukraine to Help Itself

The West’s preoccupation with deterring the Russian threat against itself did not mean it disregarded Ukraine and the devastation the country experienced at the hands of the Kremlin. Measures taken to support Ukraine, however, never amounted to a Western deterrent against an invasion. In response to the annexation of Crimea, the majority of Western states imposed punitive sanctions on Russia. With NATO-Ukraine relations dating to the early 1990s, the Alliance promised to “intensify political and military cooperation” and “support . . . the transformation of Ukrainian armed forces into modern and effective organizations, able to provide credible deterrence and defense against military threats.”<sup>5</sup> These promises were realized in 2016 with the NATO endorsement of a Comprehensive Assistance Package for Ukraine, which offered tailored support measures, especially for the defense sector, and was intended to help the country “to become more resilient, to better provide for its own security.”<sup>6</sup> The Comprehensive Assistance Package included training and the provision of some equipment under bilateral agreements, but it prioritized Ukraine’s long-term democratic development as the basis for creating effective armed forces. Glen Grant, a former British army officer and adviser to the Ukrainian Ministry of Defence, notes the United States and other NATO partners approached defense reforms in Ukraine like “any other peacetime country in Central and Eastern Europe.”<sup>7</sup> Helping Ukraine to help itself was at best an element in the West’s broader efforts to contain Russian aggression, but it did not equate to a strategy to deter a potentially imminent invasion.

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4. Stephanie Pezard and Ashley L. Rhoades, *What Provokes Putin's Russia? Deterring without Unintended Escalation* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2020), 11, <https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE338.html>.

5. Anders Fogh Rasmussen, “A Strong NATO in a Changed World” (speech, Brussels Forum, Brussels, March 21, 2014), [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions\\_108215.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_108215.htm).

6. “Fact Sheet: Comprehensive Assistance Package for Ukraine,” NATO (website), July 2016, [https://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf\\_2016\\_09/20160920\\_160920-compreh-ass-package-ukra.pdf](https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2016_09/20160920_160920-compreh-ass-package-ukra.pdf).

7. Glen Grant, “Seven Years of Deadlock: Why Ukraine’s Military Reforms Have Gone Nowhere, and How the US Should Respond,” Jamestown Foundation (website), July 16, 2021, <https://jamestown.org/program/why-the-ukrainian-defense-system-fails-to-reform-why-us-support-is-less-than-optimal-and-what-can-we-do-better/>.

## Western Deterrence and the Invasion of Ukraine

### General Deterrence

For most of 2014–22, the West did not articulate a strategy aimed specifically at deterring a Russian invasion of Ukraine. It seems that observers who evaluated the invasion as a failure of Western deterrence expected general deterrence to suffice. Colin S. Gray describes general deterrence as the assumed “effect of the threat latent [in a state or alliance’s] military power addressed ‘to whom it may concern.’”<sup>8</sup> As such, general deterrence, unlike immediate deterrence, is not a deliberate strategy targeted at dissuading a specific actor (Russia) from resorting to force in a concrete scenario (the invasion of Ukraine). Instead, it is a much broader “expression of existing power relationships” between states.<sup>9</sup>

The invasion of Ukraine does not denote a failure of Western general deterrence in the sense that Russia saw the combined military power of NATO as inferior. Rather, since the collective defense clause did not cover Ukraine, as the Alliance consistently confirmed, the “latent threat” inherent in the Alliance’s collective military capabilities had little bearing on the Kremlin’s planning in this case.<sup>10</sup> This situation should not have come as a surprise. General deterrence also had its limitations during the Cold War. Although Western deterrence of the Soviet Union worked in the sense that it never came to a war between the superpowers, it did not dissuade the Kremlin from using force in other scenarios—for example, in proxy conflicts in developing countries and in Afghanistan. As Ted Hopf explains, these armed interventions did not mean “the salience of absolute American military capabilities to Soviet calculations of American credibility” had been overestimated. Instead, “these calculations were not based on American use of these assets in third world arenas, but rather concerned the conventional and nuclear forces the United States had dedicated to the central front in Europe, Northeast Asia and the Persian Gulf.”<sup>11</sup>

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8. Colin S. Gray, “Deterrence in the 21st Century,” *Comparative Strategy* 19, no. 3 (2000): 259, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01495930008403211>.

9. Richard N. Lebow and Janice G. Stein, “Beyond Deterrence,” *Journal of Social Issues* 43, no. 4 (Winter 1987): 8, as cited in Lawrence Freedman, “General Deterrence and the Balance of Power,” *Review of International Studies* 15, no. 2 (April 1989): 203, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20097179>.

10. Jens Stoltenberg, “Press Conference by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg following the Extraordinary Meeting of NATO Ministers of Foreign Affairs,” NATO (website), January 7, 2022, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions\\_190508.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_190508.htm).

11. Ted Hopf, *Peripheral Visions: Deterrence Theory and American Foreign Policy in the Third World, 1965–1990* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 241.

## Extended Deterrence

Observers might also have hoped that the effects of Western extended deterrence would discourage Russia from invading Ukraine. Extended deterrence is the idea that the latent threat of an actor's military power is expected to prevent a direct attack and that this power can also be projected "to deter attacks on a third nation, usually the deterrer's ally or protégé."<sup>12</sup> As Russia amassed military forces on Ukraine's borders from 2021 and evidence of an imminent invasion started to mount, the West's signaling to the Kremlin became more specific and included explicit extended deterrent threats. Putin was told in no uncertain terms that an invasion would have severe consequences for Russia. Some NATO Allies stepped up the delivery of weapons. As US President Joe Biden and other Western leaders have stated, these consequences would include the reinforcement of the posture of NATO on the eastern front, unprecedented sanctions, and the provision of defensive capability to Ukraine.<sup>13</sup> Unsurprisingly, the effects of these threats on the Kremlin's calculations turned out to be rather limited. It is widely acknowledged that it is particularly hard to make threats credible, in situations of extended deterrence, when an actor's national security is not immediately at stake.<sup>14</sup> With the option of NATO forces fighting Russia to protect Ukraine off the table because of the latter's nonmembership in the Alliance, the West's options to convey a credible extended deterrent threat to the Kremlin were severely limited at this point.

## (In)credible Deterrent Threats

On the most basic level, deterrence works if the deterred nation is dissuaded from taking a desired course of action because it believes that the costs imposed will be unacceptable. None of the West's signaled threats created this belief in the mind of the Kremlin. Warnings that NATO would strengthen its defensive posture on its eastern flank and in the Baltic States did little to deter an imminent invasion. This process had been ongoing since 2014, and Moscow likely expected such a consequence. Finland's and Sweden's

12. Vesna Danilovic, "The Sources of Threat Credibility in Extended Deterrence," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 45, no. 3 (June 2001): 341–69, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3176149>.

13. Joseph R. Biden Jr., "Briefing Room: Remarks by President Biden before Marine One Departure," White House (website), December 8, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/12/08/remarks-by-president-biden-before-marine-one-departure-10/>; and Patrick Wintour et al., "West Plans to Arm Resistance if Russian Forces Occupy Ukraine," *Guardian* (website), February 20, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/19/west-plans-to-arm-resistance-if-russian-forces-occupy-ukraine>.

14. Paul K. Huth, "Extended Deterrence and the Outbreak of War," *American Political Science Review* 82, no. 2 (June 1988): 423, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1957394>.

subsequent memberships were perhaps unanticipated and went counter to the long-standing Russian foreign policy goal of preventing further NATO enlargement. The Alliance's efforts to bolster its own defense had little relevance, however, for the Kremlin's central war goal of subjugating and occupying Ukraine.

Western threats of crippling economic sanctions did not constitute a credible deterrent factor. It has been suggested that sanctions did not deter the Kremlin because, based on previous experience, the Russian leadership underestimated the West's resolve to implement ruthless and persistent sanctions that would be costly for the West itself.<sup>15</sup> In this respect, it is possible that a more persuasive articulation of the magnitude of expected sanctions would have "impacted Russia's calculations about the costs of the military aggression."<sup>16</sup> This outcome could not have been guaranteed, however. As Richard Connolly demonstrates in his book on Russia's response to Western sanctions after 2014, there was a clear sense in Moscow that the sanctions, though not entirely unproblematic, also offered opportunities. Strengthening the state's role in the economy, bolstering import substitution, and diversifying economic relations to regions other than the West meant that economic indicators quickly started to normalize.<sup>17</sup> As such, there is a strong possibility that the Kremlin's wish to take Ukraine was matched by the strong belief in its ability to withstand even much more stringent sanctions.

The threat of sanctions as the major form of retaliation was also insufficient. On the one hand, deterrence is an act of diplomacy and, as such, is about more than military capabilities and the willingness to use them. As previously discussed in the 2022 *National Security Strategy*, deterrence might work best if it integrates efforts from across the toolkit of modern statecraft, which includes economic sanctions.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, without the threat of armed force, many actors intending to launch a high-stakes war will accept the costs of sanctions and other nonmilitary responses.

When the annexation of Crimea raised fears in the West about the dangers of a militarily resurgent Russia, NATO saw the need to bolster its military capabilities as essential. As Richard Dannatt, the then Chief

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15. John Bolton, "How Russia Is Beating the West at Deterrence," *Time* (website), March 9, 2022, <https://time.com/6155990/russia-ukraine-invasion-deterrence/>.

16. Dumitru Minzarari, "SWP Comment – Failing to Deter Russia's War against Ukraine: The Role of Misperceptions," Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (website), April 29, 2022, <https://www.swp-berlin.org/10.18449/2022C33/>; see also Drezner, "Why Did Deterrence Fail."

17. Richard Connolly, *Russia's Response to Sanctions: How Western Economic Statecraft Is Reshaping Political Economy in Russia* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

18. Joseph R. Biden Jr., *National Security Strategy* (Washington, DC: White House, October 2022), 22, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf>.



of Staff of the British Armed Forces, put it, sanctions and diplomacy were not enough of a deterrent because Putin “[would] look beyond those things to see where the real check on his actions might come from.”<sup>19</sup> In its *2022 Strategic Concept*, NATO confirmed that its deterrence posture required a “full range of forces, capabilities, plans, resources, assets and infrastructure . . . including for high-intensity, multi-domain warfighting against nuclear-armed peer competitors.”<sup>20</sup> As such, it is unclear why in the case of Ukraine the threat of sanctions, no matter how crippling, ever would have been enough.

The West’s threat to provide defensive capability to Ukraine in the case of an invasion did not deter the Kremlin. As mentioned above, the Comprehensive Assistance Package for Ukraine for much of the 2014–22 period focused primarily on long-term reforms of the defense and security sector, fostering shared norms and values and the strengthening of democratic institutions. Efforts to build up Ukraine’s immediate defensive capability, especially in view of the ongoing war in the Donbas, included military assistance through trust funds and bilateral training programs. These contributions ranged from intelligence support, the use of command-and-control and defensive weapons systems, secure communications, and military medical treatments.

Throughout much of this time period, the majority of Western states limited their materiel support to the provision of “non-lethal equipment” because of fears of escalating tensions with Russia.<sup>21</sup> A few years into the war in the Donbas, a number of Allies, including the United States and United Kingdom, put some “lethal” defensive weapons, like anti-tank weapons systems, in their aid packages. The explicit threat to supply Ukraine with serious defensive capabilities was not articulated, however, until an invasion seemed inevitable in spring 2022. In fact, serious debates over the supply of heavy equipment required for high-intensity warfare, like main battle tanks, artillery rocket systems, and surface-to-air missiles, did not commence until after the invasion had started. The mere prospect of Western equipment for Ukraine did not deter the Kremlin.

The West’s threat to equip Ukraine with defensive capability lacked credibility. It has been argued that one of Putin’s major miscalculations

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19. Helene Cooper and Steven Erlanger, “Military Cuts Render NATO Less Formidable as a Deterrent to Russia,” *New York Times* (website), March 26, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/27/world/europe/military-cuts-render-nato-less-formidable-as-deterrent-to-russia.html>.

20. *NATO 2022 Strategic Concept* (NATO Summit, Madrid, June 29, 2022), 6, [https://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/6/pdf/290622-strategic-concept.pdf](https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/6/pdf/290622-strategic-concept.pdf).

21. Peter J. Marzalik and Aric Toler, “Lethal Weapons to Ukraine: A Primer,” *UkraineAlert* (blog), Atlantic Council (website), January 26, 2018, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/lethal-weapons-to-ukraine-a-primer/>.



before the invasion was to underestimate the West's unity and determination to support Ukraine, including with weapons.<sup>22</sup> This assessment might well be true, but realistically, in February 2022, there was little evidence to suggest to the Russian leadership that such unity would be forthcoming. Even as the invasion unfolded, the West's determination to provide Ukraine with significant defensive capabilities only emerged after lengthy and serious disagreements. The first Western tanks did not reach Ukraine until several months into the invasion, and debates over the delivery of other equipment, such as fast jets, are ongoing.<sup>23</sup>

If the Ukrainian armed forces had at their disposal a range of Western military equipment required for high-intensity warfighting by the start of the invasion, their ability to withstand Russian aggression would have been stronger, and many lives might have been saved. The presence of this equipment might also have deterred the invasion in the first place, but that idea is far from guaranteed. Like many observers in the West, the Kremlin seriously overestimated Russian military capabilities vis-à-vis those of Ukraine based on mistaken assumptions about the effects of numerical superiority in equipment and personnel.<sup>24</sup> In order to adjust this vast imbalance significantly, the West would have had to supply an unrealistic volume of equipment.<sup>25</sup> The operations in Crimea and in Syria, which the Kremlin viewed as highly successful, had imbued the Russian leadership with a serious confidence in its military's capabilities. Russia's military was yet again seen—and not only by the Kremlin—as a global player that could compete with other great powers, such as the United States, and with China.<sup>26</sup> Within this context, it is unclear if the Kremlin would have considered the possibility of defeat by Ukraine, which it saw at best as a peripheral state, even if its armed forces had been equipped with Western weaponry.

Finally, the West never entertained the idea of providing Ukraine with more than a conventional deterrent. Unlike nuclear deterrence,

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22. Simone Shah, "The Russian Military's 4 Big Mistakes in Ukraine," *Time* (website), February 24, 2023, <https://time.com/6258141/ukraine-russia-war-putin-military-mistakes/>.

23. Robbie Gramer, Jack Detsch, and Amy Mackinnon, "The West Finally Starts Rolling Out the Big Guns for Ukraine," *Foreign Policy* (website), April 15, 2022, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/04/15/tanks-heavy-weapons-ukraine-russia-nato-putin-offensive/>; and Ben Farmer, "Why F-16s Are No Quick Fix for Ukraine," *Telegraph* (website), May 29, 2023, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2023/05/29/why-f-16-are-no-quick-fix-for-ukraine/>.

24. See Phillips Payson O'Brien, "How the West Got Russia's Military So, So Wrong," *Atlantic* (website), March 31, 2022, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/03/russia-ukraine-invasion-military-predictions/629418/>.

25. For details on the numerical military imbalance before February 2022 see Jonathan Masters and Will Merrow, "How Do the Militaries of Russia and Ukraine Stack Up?," Council on Foreign Relations (website), February 4, 2022, <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/how-do-militaries-russia-and-ukraine-stack>.

26. See David Kilcullen, *The Dragons and the Snakes: How the Rest Learned to Fight the West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

conventional deterrence is contestable, meaning the costs of a conventional war will not necessarily be unacceptable. As a result, “history is replete with incidents in which those subjected to conventional deterrent . . . threats posed by even a vastly superior power adopted a ‘come and get it’ attitude,” as James J. Wirtz describes it.<sup>27</sup> Assuming Putin saw the subjugation of Ukraine in February 2022 as highly desirable or even essential, even a stellar conventional deterrent might not have been enough.

## Conclusions and Implications

### Was the Invasion of Ukraine a Failure of Western Deterrence?

The Russian invasion of Ukraine was not a failure of Western deterrence in that the West had never articulated a clear strategy to deter such an eventuality. Having said this, it is obviously problematic if the West believed the measures it had put in place would deter such an invasion. This belief would indicate that the West had little understanding of the Kremlin’s motivations and overestimated its ability to influence Russian decision making.

Given the priority in Russian foreign policy afforded to controlling developments of what it has long described as its “sphere of influence,” it was unrealistic to expect the West’s limited deterrent threats would dissuade the Kremlin once Russia had decided to invade. At the same time, the Russian invasion of Ukraine should not be confused with a failure of Western deterrence on a general level. Western defense planning vis-à-vis Russia after 2014 focused on deterring an incursion into NATO territory and, as others have noted, this deterrence has held.<sup>28</sup> The invasion of Ukraine did not mean Russia saw the West’s collective military capabilities as weak. Since the direct involvement of Western military forces in Ukraine was out of the question, it simply did not figure into Russian calculations. The invasion of Ukraine could even strengthen the West’s deterrence posture in the Kremlin’s eyes: for many years, the Russian leadership saw the West as weak, divided,

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27. James J. Wirtz, “How Does Nuclear Deterrence Differ from Conventional Deterrence?,” *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 12, no. 4 (Winter 2018): 61, [https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Portals/10/SSQ/documents/Volume-12\\_Issue-4/Wirtz.pdf](https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Portals/10/SSQ/documents/Volume-12_Issue-4/Wirtz.pdf).

28. Benjamin Jensen, “The Two Sides of Deterrence in Ukraine,” CSIS (website), March 30, 2022, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/two-sides-deterrence-ukraine>; and Collin Meisel, “Failures in the ‘Deterrence Failure’ Dialogue,” War on the Rocks (website), May 8, 2023, <https://warontherocks.com/2023/05/failures-in-the-deterrence-failure-dialogue/>.

and hypocritical.<sup>29</sup> The unity and resolve developed after the invasion surprised Moscow and might affect future decision making.

### **Could the West Have Deterred the Invasion of Ukraine?**

It is impossible to say whether the West could have deterred the Ukraine invasion. As Gray writes, “there is absolutely no way in which the success of deterrence can be assured, ensured or guaranteed.”<sup>30</sup> Several relevant issues have also been raised due to the benefits of hindsight. Would a clearer strategy aimed specifically at deterring a Russian invasion of Ukraine have offered better chances for success? The West only made concrete deterrent threats about what would happen in the case of an invasion once it seemed almost inevitable. Should it have put forth this information sooner? Perhaps, but the formulation of such a strategy at an earlier stage required the conviction that a full invasion in the near future was highly likely. Clearly, this was not a majority view in the West until at least summer 2021. The prioritization by NATO of Ukraine’s longer-term democratic development as a basis for defense reforms over practical training and the supply of equipment certainly conveyed no sense of urgency in the matter.

Would stronger Western deterrent threats have dissuaded the Kremlin from invading? This question is difficult to answer. As is well known, many Western states were unprepared to risk their political and economic ties with Russia, and there were also concerns over the possible escalation of tensions. These barriers made reaching a consensus impossible at the time, but the lack of a unified Western approach was not the biggest problem. With the direct involvement of NATO forces in Ukraine ruled out, the options for ramping up deterrent threats were in fact severely limited. It is far from guaranteed that stronger sanctions or the delivery of serious defensive capability to Ukraine at an earlier stage would have been enough. Realistically, it is hard to envisage how any combination of threats that did not involve the prospect of devastating military retaliation could have been credible enough to deter the Kremlin from invading. Even though the threat or implication of such retaliation

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29. Fiona Hill, “Commentary: This Is What Putin Really Wants,” Brookings (website), February 24, 2015, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/this-is-what-putin-really-wants/>.

30. Gray, “Deterrence in the 21st Century,” 256.

would have increased the chances of successful deterrence, this is, understandably, not an option that the West seriously entertained.

### Can Russia Be Deterred in the Future?

With the caveat that the success of deterrence can never be guaranteed, there is no reason as to why Russia would be less susceptible to deterrence than other states. Nevertheless, the question of whether Russia can be deterred begs a follow-up—deterred from what? The fact that some observers interpreted the invasion of Ukraine as a failure of Western deterrence, though there had not been a strategy aimed at deterring this specific eventuality, suggests there was a belief that a functioning Western deterrent should be able to prevent Russia from employing military force in all circumstances, unless perhaps in direct self-defense. This idea was unrealistic. A major reason why the Russian leadership invested so many resources in the revival of its military capabilities since 2008 was its desire to counter what it perceived as the Western—and, more precisely, American—monopoly on the use of force since the end of the Cold War.

The ability to pursue what the Kremlin calls an independent foreign policy, including military operations in support of its international interests like in Syria, is an important aspect of its military decision making. Dominating developments in what Moscow has long claimed is its “sphere of influence” is a central plank in Russian foreign policy priorities.<sup>31</sup> For this reason, even the threat and implementation of crippling sanctions would never have deterred the invasion of Ukraine. It was an action Putin perceived as essential for achieving these goals. Although the costs of the invasion turned out to be significant for Russia and will undoubtedly continue to mount, the Kremlin likely sees them as a price worth paying to guarantee its ongoing freedom of action.

To increase the chances of deterring Russia in the future, the West needs a clearer understanding of what exactly it wants to dissuade the Kremlin from doing. This goal requires a detailed appreciation of Russian motivations and priorities, which include, but are not limited to, competition with the West that can be deterred with Cold War approaches. As Andrew Monaghan elaborates in his 2019 monograph, rather than reactive crisis management and the vague hope of figuring out the Kremlin’s decision making based on Cold War analogies and lazy stereotyping, the West needs a long-term strategy for dealing with the

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31. Bettina Renz, *Russia’s Military Revival* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2018), 19–40.

Russians in the twenty-first century. Achieving this objective will not be easy. Deterrence cannot be successful unless it is based, in Monaghan's words, on a "forward-looking approach that includes a sophisticated grasp of Russian defense and security thinking and the trajectory of Russian capabilities."<sup>32</sup>

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32. Andrew Monaghan, *Dealing with the Russians* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2019), 122–23.

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# Ukraine's Lessons for Future Combat: Unmanned Aerial Systems and Deep Strike

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**ABSTRACT:** The Russia-Ukraine War holds many lessons for the US Army and American policymakers and leaders on the nature and role of reconnaissance-strike complexes in modern combat, especially Ukraine's development of a battle-management system that fuses unmanned aerial systems and satellite reconnaissance to enable the fire coordination for deep strikes into the enemy rear. In the research presented here, open-source analysis and interviews in Ukraine focus on the development and employment of reconnaissance-strike complexes with respect to deep strike and the likelihood of mutual territorial attack.

**Keywords:** unmanned aerial systems, deep strike, reconnaissance-strike complex, electronic warfare, Russia-Ukraine War

**T**he Russia-Ukraine War presents the first instance in which both combatants deploy robust, if still largely primitive, reconnaissance-strike complexes (RSCs) that they innovate during wartime. This situation allows observers to identify fundamental mechanics of the interaction between these complexes that provide programmatic and intellectual lessons for the US Army as it prepares to face near-peer adversaries for the first time since the 1980s. Ukraine's experience demonstrates the relevance of RSCs to the deep fight—in Ukraine's case, a complex enabled by unmanned aerial systems (UAS) is employed to allow for strikes deep into the Russian rear, using a handful of precision weapons to generate major effects.

This analysis first identifies the roots of Ukrainian military learning from 2014–22 and argues that the Russia-Ukraine War constitutes a watershed moment in combat because both sides employ a primitive RSC. It then explicates the technical and operational characteristics of Ukraine's unmanned aerial system and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) system and identifies the manner in which Ukraine's UAS-ISR system generates opportunities for deep strike. Finally, it outlines several programmatic and intellectual takeaways for the US Army, particularly on the role of deep strike.

## Context: Ukraine's Strategic Problem and Military Learning

The current Armed Forces of Ukraine (ZSU) reflect a cross section of Ukrainian society, making civilian applications like Signal and Scribble Maps crucial to Ukrainian UAS-ISR use as new soldiers turn to technologies they know from civilian experience. Nevertheless, the system's basic idea—to create a pervasive UAS-ISR complex, link it to commanders, and enable distributed fires—has existed since the 2014 Donbas war because Ukraine has confronted a relatively consistent strategic problem.

The Russian armed forces have outmatched the ZSU since the Donbas war began.<sup>1</sup> In 2014, Ukraine had around 6,000 combat troops, had just experienced a traumatic change in political leadership, and had virtually no international partners even when compared to Russian-backed forces in eastern Ukraine.<sup>2</sup> Yet, Ukraine's ragtag forces gained an advantage over the Russian-backed separatists, prompting a Russian intervention, and despite setbacks, performed reasonably well.<sup>3</sup> From that point, Ukraine's strategic problem was apparent: it confronted a qualitatively and quantitatively superior Russian military while lacking clear allies. The Ukrainian armed forces were, therefore, compelled to innovate.

Despite Ukraine's structural political issues, specific bureaucratic shifts and its political culture gave the ZSU a learning advantage over the Russian military. In 2018, Ukraine redesignated the Anti-Terrorist Operation—

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Author's Note: In between this article's composition and publication, one of its sources, and one of my close friends, was killed in action. His loss, like so many others, came in defense of his country and serves as a reminder of the sacrifices liberty demands.

Acknowledgments: I spent several weeks in Ukraine in March 2023 and discussed unmanned aerial systems (UAS) employment in intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, and targeting (ISR/T) contexts with a variety of active Ukrainian military personnel. My dataset is, of necessity, incomplete. Any number of interviews do not indicate a legitimate sample size for data experimentation. The nature of this war and the time that analysts have to collect and process information indicate that my conclusions are more inductive inferences subject to future refinement than deductive truths. Nor did my limited Ukrainian linguistic abilities help the situation. I am indebted to those Ukrainian soldiers and civilians, among many others in Ukraine, who were willing to help bridge the gap with subjects who would have struggled to communicate with me. Indeed, the openness of many Ukrainians to foreign observers should not be underestimated—in retrospect it should come as no surprise that a nation of 44 million struggling for its existence should welcome all the help it can receive from external assessors. One unimpeachable conclusion I can draw is that the United States and its allies should leverage this cultural reality and get as many analysts—uniformed and civilian—into Ukraine as possible. Moreover, in a war as violent and intense as this one, any data rapidly lose accuracy with time. All conclusions must be updated with fresh information.

1. Mykhaylo Zabrodskyi et al., *Preliminary Lessons in Conventional Warfighting from Russia's Invasion of Ukraine: February–July 2022* (London: Royal United Services Institute [RUSI], November 2022), 13–18, 36.

2. Lawrence Freedman, *Ukraine and the Art of Strategy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 106–16.

3. Freedman, *Art of Strategy*, 114. See also Andriy Zagorodnyuk et al., "Is Ukraine's Reformed Military Ready to Repel a New Russian Invasion?," *UkraineAlert* (blog), Atlantic Council (website), December 23, 2021, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/is-ukraines-reformed-military-ready-to-repel-a-new-russian-invasion/>.

the bureaucratic title for Kyiv's operations in the country's east—as the Joint Forces Operation.<sup>4</sup> This change formally recognized Russia as a belligerent in the conflict and shifted command responsibility from the Security Service of Ukraine to the Ukrainian General Staff. This transition enabled a robust learning process within the Armed Forces of Ukraine since its soldiers and officers could openly discuss the war they were fighting. Internal learning dovetailed with the West's training missions.<sup>5</sup> The Russian military, by contrast, was never formally at war. The Syrian Civil War became its reference point—a conflict in which Russia held absolute air control and played an enabling role was not a helpful analogy to the current Russia-Ukraine War.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, multiple high-level Ukrainian commanders today experienced combat in the Donbas or were part of the post-2014–15 training cycle and are far younger than their Western counterparts, indicating significant cultural turnover that enables innovation.<sup>7</sup>

Also developed from 2014–22 was the sophisticated volunteer nongovernmental (NGO) system that interfaced directly with the military since the earliest days of the Donbas war. Most notable of these NGOs is the UAS-focused Aerorozvidka.<sup>8</sup> Relations between the Ukrainian defense ministry and these NGOs have been fractious at times. Even in wartime, it took months for the defense ministry to begin procuring unmanned aerial systems for units directly—and today, private donations remain essential. The elements of the current Ukrainian system, however, have deep roots in the strategic culture of the ZSU.

## Historical Trends and Modern Strike

The Ukrainian armed forces' UAS-ISR system, an outgrowth of their unique strategic culture, is of interest for more than just tactical and

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4. Adam Coffey, "Commentary – Ukraine Declares 'Anti-Terrorist Operation in the Donbas' Officially Over: What Does That Mean?," RUSI (website), May 16, 2018, <https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/ukraine-declares-anti-terrorist-operation-donbas-officially-over-what-does-mean>.

5. Per the author's work in Ukraine (March 29, 2023), these missions have had a cultural effect since the 1990s, which only intensified after 2014 when the ZSU pivoted to a war footing. See also John Jaworsky, "Ukraine's Armed Forces and Military Policy," *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 20 (1996): 238–40.

6. For Russian assessments of Syria, see Mason Clark, *The Russian Military's Lessons Learned in Syria*, Military Learning and the Future of War Series (Washington, DC: Institute for the Study of War [ISW], January 2021), 11–12.

7. "General Valerii Zaluzhnyi: Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine," Ministry of Defence (MoD) of Ukraine (website), last updated September 23, 2021, <https://www.mil.gov.ua/en/ministry-of-defence-leader/general-valerii-zaluzhnyi.html>; Yuri Lapaiev, "New Appointments in the Ukrainian Military: Occasion for Restrained Optimism?," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 18, no. 132 (August 2021), <https://jamestown.org/program/new-appointments-in-the-ukrainian-military-occasion-for-restrained-optimism/>; and "Lieutenant General Serhii Shaptala: Chief of General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine," MoD of Ukraine (website), last updated September 23, 2021, <https://www.mil.gov.ua/en/ministry-of-defence-leader/lieutenant-general-serhii-shaptala.html>.

8. Patrick Tucker, "Ukraine's Drone Warriors," *NATOSource* (blog), Atlantic Council (website), March 10, 2015, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/natosource/ukraine-s-drone-warriors/>.

programmatic reasons. The Russia-Ukraine War, the first large-scale conflict since the 2003 invasion of Iraq, is also the first war during which both sides have had to innovate and modify their reconnaissance-strike complexes and, indeed, the first conflict in which both combatants have something approximating RSCs.

The RSC concept has its roots in Soviet and Russian doctrine but is conceptually identifiable in Western military thought.<sup>9</sup> In brief, the reconnaissance-strike complex is an integrated intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, and targeting (ISR/T) fires system, in which the time between target identification and engagement is extremely compressed.<sup>10</sup> Sensors and shooters operate together in a harmonized network that makes combat a game of target identification, in which the side that is found first is usually killed.<sup>11</sup>

The RSC concept is inextricably linked to intellectual-doctrinal developments in the 1980s in the United States and Soviet Union.<sup>12</sup> Both doctrines increasingly pointed toward attacking the enemy at operational depth, a more natural line for the Soviets with deep operational theory, but one that finally translated into the West.<sup>13</sup>

A properly constructed RSC should enable the synchronization of violence across an immense battlespace at depth and width, creating a combat area orders of magnitude larger than what was historically feasible.<sup>14</sup> The US military deployed an early reconnaissance-strike complex in the Iraq wars, while China and Russia have deployed their own RSCs since the late 2010s.<sup>15</sup> These complexes should also include artificial intelligence (AI); the fact that neither Ukraine nor Russia employs major AI indicates the degree to which their reconnaissance-strike complexes are still primitive.

9. Lester W. Grau and Charles K. Bartles, *The Russian Reconnaissance Fire Complex Comes of Age* (Oxford, UK: University of Oxford Changing Character of War Centre/Axel and Margaret Axson Johnson Foundation/Pembroke College Oxford, May 2018), <https://www.ccw.ox.ac.uk/s/The-Russian-Reconnaissance-Fire-Complex-Comes-of-Age-lz7p.pdf>.

10. B. A. Friedman, "Reconnaissance-Strike Tactics and Maneuver Warfare I," *Marine Corps Gazette* (April 2022), WE3, <https://mca-marines.org/wp-content/uploads/Reconnaissance-Strike-Tactics-and-Maneuver-Warfare-I.pdf>.

11. Andrew F. Krepinevich, *Maritime Warfare in a Mature Precision-Strike Regime* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2014), 82–83, <https://csbaonline.org/uploads/documents/MMPSR-Web.pdf>.

12. See Milan Vego, *Rece-Strike Complexes in Soviet Theory and Practice* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Soviet Army Studies Office, June 1990), <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADA231900.pdf>; and Michael J. Sterling, *Soviet Reactions to NATO's Emerging Technologies for Deep Attack*, RAND Note (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, August 1985), <https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/notes/2009/N2294.pdf>.

13. Douglas W. Skinner, *Airland Battle Doctrine*, Professional Paper 463 (Alexandria, VA: Center for Naval Analyses, September 1988), 13, 31.

14. Gordon R. Sullivan and James M. Dubik, "Land Warfare in the 21st Century," in *Envisioning Future Warfare* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: US Army Command and General Staff College Press, 1995), 12.

15. Andrew F. Krepinevich Jr., *The Origins of Victory: How Disruptive Military Innovation Determines the Fate of Great Powers* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2023), 39ff.

Ukraine is not the first conflict in which UAS and loitering munitions have been deployed at large scale. The Second Nagorno-Karabakh War included extensive UAS employment and, arguably, a nascent RSC on Azerbaijan's part.<sup>16</sup> Azerbaijan's success (at least partly) stemmed from structural deficiencies in the Armenian military, namely its lack of short-range air defenses against loitering munitions, inability to intercept fixed-wing UAS consistently, and limited electronic systems.<sup>17</sup>

By contrast, the Russia-Ukraine War provides sufficient scale and sophistication for conclusions to be drawn. Indeed, it is the first case of two militaries deploying and modifying their reconnaissance-strike complexes at scale in a competitive manner during wartime. Ukraine and Russia use much of the same equipment in their RSCs, while Russia has replicated Ukrainian employment methods.

### Ukrainian UAS-ISR System

The ZSU has developed a sophisticated method of UAS employment that is integrated with a broader battle-management system that also receives information from US and private satellites.<sup>18</sup> Precision-guided munitions are increasingly capable of hitting any individual target. Historically, however, weapons performance has exceeded practical ISR range.<sup>19</sup> Ukraine demonstrates how unmanned aerial systems can narrow the precision-ISR gap through the creation of a UAS-enabled reconnaissance-strike complex.

Ukraine's UAS-ISR system accomplishes two goals. First, it transforms traditional artillery fired in battery into "precision" weapons that can individually engage targets and rapidly improve accuracy. Second, it enables the Ukrainian armed forces to employ artillery in a distributed manner by facilitating responsive surveillance over a much wider area when combined with

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16. Jack Watling and Sidharth Kaushal, "Commentary – The Democratisation of Precision Strike in the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict," RUSI (website), October 22, 2020, <https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/democratisation-precision-strike-nagorno-karabakh-conflict>.

17. Shaan Shaikh and Wes Rumbaugh, "The Air and Missile War in Nagorno-Karabakh: Lessons for the Future of Strike and Defense," Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) (website), December 8, 2020, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/air-and-missile-war-nagorno-karabakh-lessons-future-strike-and-defense>.

18. See Aaron Stein, "Airpower after Ukraine – The TB2: The Value of a Cheap and 'Good Enough' Drone," Atlantic Council (website), August 30, 2022, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/content-series/airpower-after-ukraine/the-tb2-the-value-of-a-cheap-and-good-enough-drone/>. On Kropyvka's defense mapping software, see David Axe, "There's a Good Reason the Russian Air Force Is Faltering. Ukrainian Air-Defense Crews Have Better Apps," *Forbes* (website), October 18, 2022, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidaxe/2022/10/18/theres-a-good-reason-the-russian-air-force-is-faltering-ukrainian-air-defense-crews-have-better-apps/>; *Kyiv Independent* News Desk, "News Feed – Ukraine to Introduce Delta Situational Awareness System for Military," *Kyiv Independent* (website), February 4, 2023, <https://kyivindependent.com/government-introduces-nato-standard-delta-management-defense-system/>; and "GIS 'ARTA': Automated Command and Control System," n.d., GIS ARTA (website), <https://gisarta.org/en/>.

19. Benjamin F. Koudelka Jr., *Network-Enabled Precision Guided Munitions* (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air War College Center for Strategy and Technology, November 2005), 86.

a fluid battle-management system. This capability reduces the need for exposed logistics hubs and decreases Russian counter-battery effects, thereby allowing the ZSU to remain competitive despite a materiel disadvantage.

Ukraine’s UAS-ISR system requires the four types of UAS outlined in table 1 below.<sup>20</sup> It must be noted that Russian forces increasingly replicate Ukrainian practices, though on average without commensurate results because of poor training standards, less effective equipment, and a lower-quality officer and technical specialist corps. Given the author focused overwhelmingly on Ukrainian tactics, techniques, and procedures during his time in-country and only incidentally discussed Russian practices, the UAS description focuses largely on Ukrainian ISR/T practices. Moreover, while factory specifications vary from the information depicted below for each type of unmanned aerial system, battlefield conditions often limit operational range.

**Table 1. Four types of unmanned aerial systems required by Ukraine’s UAS-ISR system**

Diameter	Cost	Range	Service Ceiling	Special Features
Small > 1 meter	< \$1,000	5 kilometers	> 1,000 meters	First-person view, copter, used for very short-range reconnaissance and as loitering munitions
Medium 1 meter	\$1,000 – \$10,000	6 kilometers	1,000 meters	Short-range reconnaissance, light ordnance, and night work
Large 1–3 meters	\$10,000 – \$30,000	10 kilometers	> 1,000 meters	Backbone of Ukrainian ISR
Fixed-Wing > 3 meters	> \$30,000	> 20 kilometers (some reach several 100 kilometers)	1,000 meters plus	Highest-quality sensors

Units often share information at the fireteam and squad level, but most intelligence analysis and target distribution occurs at the company to battalion level. The system’s flexibility stems from Ukraine’s technological literacy and extensive efforts to shift UAS-dense units around the front line. Much UAS training occurs through private charities that acquire unmanned aerial systems on the European market, transfer systems to units, train operators, and conduct the equivalent of doctrinal development.

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20. Information in table 1 comes from the author’s interviews, alongside other information in the public domain. See Jeffrey A. Edmonds and Samuel Bendett, *Russia’s Use of Uncrewed Systems in Ukraine* (Arlington, VA: Center for Naval Analyses, March 2023), 10, <https://www.cna.org/reports/2023/03/Russian-Uncrewed-Systems-Ukraine.pdf>; and David Hambling, “Editors’ Pick: Ukraine’s Next-Generation Drone Fleet Is Packed with Upgrades,” *Forbes* (website), March 1, 2023, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidhambling/2023/03/01/ukraines-next-generation-drone-fleet-enhances-capabilities/>.



The Ukrainian battlespace is extraordinarily congested. A 20-kilometer zone around the contact line contains extensive trench lines, ground-based electronic warfare (EW) systems, air defenses, artillery batteries, and counter-battery radars. Moreover, most Ukrainian UAS are dual use, making them operationally intuitive and cheap but decreasing their resilience to electronic warfare and the quality of their sensors and optics. Copter optics, with their roughly 20-kilometer daytime range, create a 30-kilometer ISR range. Major Russian targets are beyond this bubble, however, given Russia's adjustment of logistics after its 2022 deployment of the high-mobility artillery rocket system (HIMARS).<sup>21</sup> While large unmanned aerial systems have optics that can identify targets 40–80 kilometers away—and much better range than copter UAS—they are loud and vulnerable to point air defense and EW. Even large copter UAS are too loud for night operations, but smaller copters with worse optics limit the range of artillery.

To compensate for electronic warfare, Ukrainian units deploy all unmanned aerial systems, barring first-person view drones, with four-man teams comprised of a driver or scout, drone operator, navigator, and gimbal operator.<sup>22</sup> Since UAS are jammed so often, the crew must track movements manually to prevent losses from inattention.<sup>23</sup> Experienced UAS operators are the most valuable military occupation specialty to the ZSU, bar combat medics, and they lose far fewer unmanned aerial systems than the publicly quoted average would imply.<sup>24</sup>

## Deep Strike and Fires Corridors in Ukraine

While skilled operators can reduce EW disruption to UAS, the range question remains. An effective RSC must be capable of facilitating strikes across the battlespace, particularly into the enemy's depth. Fighting deep is critical in the Ukrainian case because of the need for a breakthrough and Russian fires volumes.

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21. Jack Watling and Nick Reynolds, *Meatgrinder: Russian Tactics in the Second Year of Its Invasion of Ukraine*, RUSI Special Report (London: RUSI, May 19, 2023), 11, <https://static.rusi.org/403-SR-Russian-Tactics-web-final.pdf>.

22. Per the author's interviews (March 24, 25, and 27, 2023), two-man teams are uncommon. They are restricted to medium UAS and highly competent operators.

23. The author's interviews (March 25, 27, and 30, 2023) indicated the majority of losses came from inattentive operators.

24. The author's interview subjects emphasized both military occupation specialties. Particularly in drone-specialist ISR units and artillery formations, UAS losses are extremely low. Moreover, by recovering hostile or lost friendly unmanned aerial systems, units can augment numbers over time. The author found that an average loss rate of one unmanned aerial system per month was typical for his subjects, though once again, line unit UAS losses are dramatically higher. The RUSI team, from which the 10,000-per-month figure generally stems, has also found the same need for contextualization.



Beyond the first few weeks of fighting, particularly around Kyiv, thickening front lines have defined the war, necessitating a breakthrough.<sup>25</sup> Conducting or foiling a breakthrough requires winning the deep fight.<sup>26</sup> Breaking through a thickly defended front line and defending it requires extreme effort.<sup>27</sup> A sophisticated logistical system is crucial because artillery amplifies the role of logistics, which urban combat amplified again.<sup>28</sup> On the offensive, artillery is needed to suppress and destroy defensive positions to enable an armored breakthrough.<sup>29</sup> On the defensive, artillery is needed to blunt attacking spearheads and ultimately destroy them. Deep strikes are needed both to starve the front line of shells, disrupt electronic assets, and suppress defender command-and-control (C2) nodes and to disrupt the attacking force.

The difficulty, therefore, is applying precision at distances of 30–100 kilometers: the Ukrainian armed forces must sequence fires to maximize precision effects and avoid Russian counter-battery fire. The solution is to create what can be termed fires corridors, gaps in the electronic warfare and antiair warfare (AAW) defensive system that UAS and long-range fires can exploit.<sup>30</sup>

In Ukraine, US space-based capabilities and commercial satellite imaging help the ZSU identify targets.<sup>31</sup> Suppressing or destroying the Russian EW-AAW blanket that defends the front line, however, currently requires unmanned aerial systems simply for their imaging responsiveness, even if these civilian-specification models are vulnerable to Russian jamming.

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25. Dan Rice, “The Untold Story of the Battle for Kyiv,” *Small Wars Journal* (website), May 31, 2022, <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/untold-story-battle-kyiv>.

26. Jonathan Bailey, “The Birth of the Modern Style of Warfare in the Great War,” Defence Viewpoints from the UK Defence Forum (website), July 8, 2014, <https://www.defenceviewpoints.co.uk/military-operations/the-birth-of-the-modern-style-of-warfare-in-the-great-war>. See also Stephen Biddle, *Military Power: Explaining Victory and Defeat in Modern Battle* (Woodstock, UK: Princeton University Press, 2004), 29–39.

27. Georgii Samoilovich Isserson, “The Foundation of Deep Strategy,” in *Deep Operations: Theoretical Approaches to Fighting Deep*, ed. Jack D. Kem (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Army University Press, 2021), 15–23, <https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/combatastudies-institute/images/LSCO%20DeepOps%20book%20interactive%20with%20cover%20spread%2012Nov21.pdf>.

28. Alexander Grinberg, “Glass Cannons from Grozny to Mariupol: What Should the US Military Learn from Russia’s Use of Artillery in Protracted Urban Sieges?,” Modern War Institute (website), February 13, 2023, <https://mwi.usma.edu/glass-cannons-from-grozny-to-mariupol-what-should-the-us-military-learn-from-russias-use-of-artillery-in-protracted-urban-sieges/>.

29. Kyiv Independent News Desk, “News Feed – Zaluzhnyi: Russia Uses up to 60,000 Rounds of Ammunition Daily,” *Kyiv Independent* (website), August 16, 2022, <https://kyivindependent.com/zaluzhnyi-russia-uses-up-to-60-000-rounds-of-ammunition-daily/>.

30. Zabrodskyi et al., *Preliminary Lessons*, 3.

31. David T. Burbach, “Airpower after Ukraine: Early Lessons from the Russia-Ukraine War as a Space Conflict,” Atlantic Council (website), August 30, 2022, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/content-series/airpower-after-ukraine/early-lessons-from-the-russia-ukraine-war-as-a-space-conflict/>. See also Ariel E. Levite, *Integrating Cyber into Warfighting: Some Early Takeaways from the Ukraine Conflict* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, April 18, 2023), 6, [https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Levite\\_Ukraine\\_Cyber\\_War.pdf](https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Levite_Ukraine_Cyber_War.pdf).

The UAS-ISR complex is remarkably effective at mapping Russian frontline forces, enabling decentralized battery operation. To strike deep, enough fires must be concentrated to suppress or destroy multiple AAW, EW, artillery, and counter-battery assets 10–15 kilometers into Russian-held ground. This action creates a hole in the enemy AAW-EW network through which fixed-wing UAS can be used to identify the target and engage it with precision weapons at 70-plus kilometers. The deeper the target, the longer the window must be.

Fires corridors allow Ukraine to conduct deep strikes at scale, thereby targeting the logistical underpinnings of the Russian military. Indeed, the primacy of the deep fight is the central lesson analysis of the Russia-Ukraine War provides for future combat.

Ukraine has waged three successful anti-logistical efforts demonstrating the relevance of deep strike. First, Ukraine used a handful of Western-provided HIMARS to derail the summer 2022 Donbas offensive. A limited Ukrainian attack in the forest west of Izyum, the Russian forward supply hub in the Donbas, provided Ukraine an ideal position for HIMARS strikes against Russian logistics and C2 nodes. The effect was almost immediate: after taking Syeverodonetsk and Lysychansk and surging forward toward the Bakhmut-Siversk-Soledar line, Russian forces abruptly halted in the face of Ukraine's deep strikes. The relevance of deep strike is reinforced by the fact that Russia had continued its advance before the HIMARS campaign began.<sup>32</sup> Naturally, other factors were relevant here, particularly Ukraine's choice to commit reserves to Syeverodonetsk, thereby prompting Russian reserve commitments as well.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, deep strike plays a crucial role.

Second, in the fall of 2022, Ukrainian deep strikes helped enable the Kharkiv offensive. Along with a deception campaign to reduce Russian force density, long-range strikes disrupted Russian logistics command and control, generating the operational vulnerability Ukraine exploited.<sup>34</sup>

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32. Karolina Hird et al., *Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment* (Washington, DC: ISW, July 24, 2022), <https://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Russian%20Operations%20Assessments%20June%204.pdf>.

33. Kateryna Stepanenko, Mason Clark, and George Barros, *Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment* (Washington, DC: ISW, June 4, 2022), <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-june-4>.

34. Franz-Stefan Gady and Michael Kofman, "Ukraine's Strategy of Attrition," *Survival* 65, no. 2 (April-May 2023): 10. Although Gady and Kofman do concede that long-range strikes against C2 and logistics degraded Russian responses through three months of careful strikes, they correctly insist upon the broader theater strategic context, Russia's rotation of quality units, and limited remaining forces in Kharkiv oblast. The point is that an undercurrent of deep strikes prompted other changes that hollowed out Russia's defenses in Kharkiv, enabling major gains.

Third, Ukraine leveraged the unique conditions of the Kherson bridgehead between September and November 2022 to erode the Russian position, ultimately prompting a withdrawal from the Dnieper River's right bank. Long-range artillery played a decisive role in this campaign, hitting Russian rail and road links to the bridgehead and ultimately hollowing out Russian logistics so thoroughly as to compel a withdrawal.

In each case, the operative factor was a general hollowing out of enemy capacity. By shortening some aspect of the Russian system—typically Russia's ability to sustain large-scale forces deployed forward, but also by disrupting the Russian C2 network—Ukraine could compel Russia to roll its forces back, either retreating or halting an offensive.

As of this writing, Ukraine is on the offensive again. Although there are weeks to months of fighting ahead, the ZSU engaged in another deep-strike campaign that includes loitering munitions, cruise missiles, and sabotage.<sup>35</sup> The Russians, however, have responded with a UAS-RSC of their own. Russia's greatest innovation has been on the counter-battery side.<sup>36</sup> Russia's Lancet loitering munitions, cued by the Russian UAS-ISR system linked to counter-battery radars, attack Ukrainian artillery as Ukraine seeks to create fires corridors. The Lancet flies fast enough to evade most Ukrainian short-range air-defense weapons. Ukraine's response has been better dispersion as well as disruption to ISR-focused unmanned aerial systems, alongside a probable reduction in the number of towed artillery pieces deployed near the front line. Russian and Ukrainian RSCs are therefore interacting in a fluid manner.

Winning the deep fight need not entail completely paralyzing enemy C2 and logistics, though paralysis is ideal on the offensive. The objective, rather, is to impose costs upon enemy logistics. This burden will force the enemy to extend the distance between its major logistics hubs and the front line, complicate transportation, and force the enemy to devote time and resources to defending against deep attack. The result will be a diffusion of enemy resources even after logistical adjustment.

Russian fires weight has decreased across the front, as the Russian military now struggles to sustain the countrywide bombardment curtain it employed throughout 2022, primarily because deep strikes have forced

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35. *Kyiv Independent* News Desk, "News Feed – CNN: Ukraine Starts 'Shaping Operations' for Counteroffensive," *Kyiv Independent* (website), May 12, 2023, <https://kyivindependent.com/cnn-ukraine-starts-shaping-operations-for-counteroffensive/>.

36. Jack Watling, "Commentary – Ukraine's Counteroffensive Begins: Shall the Leopards Break Free?," RUSI (website), June 14, 2023, <https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/ukraines-counteroffensive-begins-shall-leopards-break-free>.

a logistics redistribution. This change creates additional failure points in the system. Defensive forces in fixed positions receive less materiel. Mobile reserves are exposed to long-range strikes with outsized impact, as incidents like the Makiivka Strike demonstrate.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, C2 nodes must be light and mobile, or very well hardened, either requiring more defensive resources or increasing the cognitive load on commanders.

The Russian logistical system was likely more exposed to pressure than other alternatives because of its lack of truck-based transports, manpower-intensive system, and emphasis on rail transport.<sup>38</sup> Yet, the United States has logistical chokepoints as well, in particular, a reliance upon large depots—admittedly much farther from the combat zone than the Russian system—and upon civilian transports that may not be available in wartime.<sup>39</sup>

Ukraine's success has stemmed from an ability to leverage a small number of long-range precision weapons to hit high-value targets in the Russian rear area. Leveraging precision effects requires careful preparation to ensure, in the Ukrainian case, they can be applied through the creation of fires corridors to strike deep. In a competitive duel with Russia's reconnaissance-strike complex, striking deep allows Ukraine to roll Russian forces back by creating C2 and logistical seams. Ideally, over time, this situation will enable a breakthrough and exploitation.

## Implications for the US Army

While the Russia-Ukraine War is an illustrative case, it is unique in many respects. Both sides derive their doctrine from similar sources and employ similar or identical weapons. Neither side can break the other's integrated air defense network—Ukraine for lack of modern airframes, Russia for lack of enough precision-guided munitions—meaning deep strike is primarily a missile-based phenomenon. Russia and Ukraine also field armies with far less overall experience than anticipated before the war, having gone through several rounds of mobilization, making logistical and command centralization all the more appealing and strikes against logistics and C2 nodes more fruitful. Russia has refused to deploy

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37. *Guardian* Staff and Agencies, "Explainer – Makiivka Strike: What We Know about the Deadliest Attack on Russian Troops since Ukraine War Began," *Guardian* (website), January 4, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/04/makiivka-strike-what-we-know-about-the-deadliest-attack-on-russian-troops-since-ukraine-war-began>.

38. Alex Vershinin, "Feeding the Bear: A Closer Look at Russian Army Logistics and the Fait Accompli," *War on the Rocks* (website), November 23, 2021, <https://warontherocks.com/2021/11/feeding-the-bear-a-closer-look-at-russian-army-logistics/>.

39. Michael Trimble and Jobie Turner, "Asymmetric Advantage or Achilles Heel: Logistics in the U.S. Military," *Strategy Bridge* (website), June 14, 2022, <https://thestrategybridge.org/the-bridge/2022/6/14/asymmetric-advantage-or-achilles-heel-logistics-in-the-us-military>.

kinetic anti-satellite interceptors, nor is there much available in the open source about satellite jamming, an undeniably relevant factor in future wars. Ukraine and Russia both defend some of the world's most extensive ground fortifications—in the Ukrainian case, built over years of positional conflict in the Donbas. The US Army should not plan to fight the last war, let alone a war it has not actively fought.

Ukrainian and Russian UAS-enabled RSCs, however, and the need to conduct deep strikes to attrit an RSC, will only intensify over time as RSCs become more sophisticated. The US Army will likely face near-peer conventional adversaries with a distributed reconnaissance-strike complex that has multiple redundancies and, critically, includes AI to shorten the kill chain.<sup>40</sup>

This future RSC will need to be tugged in or disrupted to create opportunities for US land, air, and sea power to deliver the heavy capabilities needed to break an enemy position and achieve a combat decision. The Ukrainians do not face an abstract network that they must attrit but a specific, geographically textured adversary they must hollow out. Much in the way Russian forces that mass too early are extraordinarily vulnerable to a precision strike, so too are the Ukrainian forces at risk. The United States will face a similar type of threat, albeit at a greater degree of sophistication. If it seeks to mass, it must reduce the enemy RSC's ability to hit concentrated forces—otherwise, the combat power that mass generates will be wasted.

From this reality stems the need for a fluid reconnaissance-strike complex that includes a distributed ISR system, one that enables the specific application of precision effects to hit RSC nodes in the enemy's depths. Perhaps penetrators can help, whether this assistance entails an electromagnetic pulse warhead that can knock out jammers or, in the future, directed-energy weapons used for air defense or a fires corridor akin to that of Ukraine. Unmanned aerial systems will almost certainly be part of the solution. As commercial UAS technology develops, small, cheap UAS hardened against some electronic effects will proliferate. Artificial intelligence and edge computing will reduce UAS reliance on GPS and human control, while smaller, higher-quality optics will increase the ability of unmanned aerial systems to operate undetected and identify targets at range. Satellites will also matter, especially microsatellites with advanced sensors.

The technology, however, is not the point. The Russia-Ukraine War demonstrates the intensity—in materiel, manpower, and cognitive load—

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40. Amy J. Nelson and Gerald L. Epstein, "Commentary – The PLA's Strategic Support Force and AI Innovation," Brookings (website), December 23, 2022, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-plas-strategic-support-force-and-ai-innovation-china-military-tech/>.

of combat between adversaries with actual RSCs, even if both parties suffer from obvious technical, organizational, and logistical limitations. In a conflict with a near-peer adversary, the United States will likely face a reconnaissance-strike complex with greater range, comprehensiveness, and scale. This network will likely involve units and positions on enemy territory. Ukraine, even with limits on its ability to engage targets within Russia, has managed to fight effectively, but it has been nearly helpless against the Russian strategic-strike campaign. The United States is unlikely to face an adversary it can defeat absent some consideration of strikes on its territory, at least if it hopes to win on a timescale more closely approximating months or years than a decade. Two equally sophisticated RSCs, then, can increase the likelihood of mutual territorial strikes and the potential for escalation.

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# Detering Russian Nonstrategic Nuclear Weapons: A Revised Approach

Cliff R. Parsons

**ABSTRACT:** A change in deterrence thought and strategy is necessary to avoid nuclear escalation in armed conflict with Russia. Traditional threat-based deterrence strategies will not be successful, and a new strategy must address the conditions that might cause Russian leadership to employ nuclear weapons. An examination of the Able Archer 83 exercise using an original framework highlights the ways Russian interests and US actions interact to generate misperception and inhibited deterrence. The US military must execute extremely restrained, deliberate, and empathetic operations that pursue minimalist military objectives to achieve the political goal.

**Keywords:** deterrence, nuclear, misperception, Russia, multidomain operations

**I**magine the following scenario: the Russia-Ukraine War ends with an armistice; Russia begins to rebuild its depleted military and continues energy-related economic coercion in Europe. After repeated disputes with the Baltic states over energy, ethnic Russian minorities, and access to Kaliningrad, Russia begins its quadrennial military exercise, Zapad-2028, in the Western Military District, resulting in the massing of Russian forces near Estonia. Russia's leader does not intend to invade but rather to intimidate the Baltic states and demonstrate the revitalization of the Russian military following the costly Ukraine war. Yet, NATO responds by deploying defensive weapon systems and naval forces to Finland and Estonia to deter Russian aggression. These NATO capabilities enable the potential for an effective blockade of Russian naval forces in St. Petersburg. Despite repeated assurances from NATO leadership regarding the intent of these weapons systems and naval forces, Russian leaders perceive the threatened containment of the Baltic Fleet as an unacceptable risk to national security.

The Russian president orders an attack on northern Estonia to occupy the city of Tallinn to enable Baltic Sea access. A NATO force counterattacks and decisively defeats the Russian Combined Arms Army in Estonia and consolidates gains on the Estonian-Russian border. During the fight, the US Army-centric NATO force successfully executes a variant of multidomain operations by penetrating and disintegrating Russian anti-access, area denial systems to enable joint maneuver. Executing current Army doctrine

required striking delivery platforms and command-and-control nodes deep inside Russian territory.

As domestic rivals maneuver to capitalize on his failure, the Russian president also fears an incursion into Russian territory to institute a regime change due to his decision to attack a NATO nation. Lacking effective conventional options following the destruction of most of the Western Military District's forces and recognizing that NATO had achieved air superiority and could extend operations eastward at will, he resorts to employing multiple nonstrategic nuclear weapons (NSNW) that destroy a large portion of the forward-positioned NATO force. By doing so, he intended to blunt NATO offensive capabilities, deny terrain that could be used for an offensive into Russia, and signal his resolve to escalate the situation vertically to secure Russian sovereignty, territorial integrity, and regime survival.

This scenario demonstrates one way the interaction of Russian interests and US actions can generate misperception and lead to a catastrophic failure of deterrence. After a series of misperceptions and miscalculations, US and NATO forces decisively executed current doctrine and unintentionally escalated the situation from a high-intensity, but limited, border conflict to one of existential crisis for the Russian leadership. The Russian president misinterpreted NATO's intent leading to a misperception that the criteria for NSNW employment had been met.

In future conflicts with Russia, traditional deterrence strategies, including denial and punishment, will be unsuccessful because Russian leaders may perceive the US military's penchant for rapid, decisive victory as a threat to its vital interests. Many in the national security community assume deterrence requires an element of threat, but a new approach is necessary. Deterrence via dissuasion holds the best chance for success. Rather than employing a threat-based strategy, a dissuasive strategy focuses on removing the conditions that cause Russian leadership to feel the necessity to employ NSNW in the first place. This strategy targets the adversary with a neutral incentive-based approach and requires a substantial shift in the way military leaders envision the execution of large-scale combat operations. If the US military and its partners engage Russia in armed conflict, they must execute extremely restrained, deliberate, and empathetic operations that pursue minimalist military objectives to achieve the political objective.

I will introduce a new framework here, the Interests, Action, and Misperception (IAM) framework, designed to simplify and improve the deliberate thought process required to account for the fundamental barriers to successful NSNW deterrence. The IAM framework describes how interests and actions interact to generate misperception. After describing and defining the IAM framework, I will apply it to the 1983 NATO exercise Able Archer to demonstrate its utility and will provide considerations for modern Russian NSNW deterrence.

## The Interests, Action, and Misperception Framework

The IAM framework enables analysis of the common foundational variables across deterrence schools of thought. These variables are simplified categories, or bins, of the fundamental barriers that inhibit deterrence. Although derived from many schools of thought, the IAM framework most closely aligns with the tailored deterrence school and assumes that deterring Russian NSNW requires the precise application of tailored deterrence.<sup>1</sup> Tailored deterrence evolved from traditional, cookie-cutter deterrence policy and argues that deterrence strategies must be customized to a specific adversary.<sup>2</sup> The idea is that “if one does not threaten the right target for the right reasons, it may not matter how well one does it.”<sup>3</sup> The IAM framework consists of three variables: Russian interests, US actions, and misperception. The framework captures and simplifies the systems-based approach required to account for the complex state-on-state interactions that inhibit deterrence by breaking those variables down into their fundamental building blocks—interests, actions, and misperception—and then analyzing how those variables interact with one another either to enhance or inhibit deterrence.

The power of the IAM framework lies in its explanatory and general predictive qualities. It is useful in analyzing past occurrences and ongoing or future interactions. At its most basic level, the framework’s utility is that it helps national security practitioners consider whether they truly understand how an adversary may perceive US actions. It is not a catchall framework and is not intended to predict with certainty—however, it can prompt strategists to ask the right questions. The IAM framework does not introduce new concepts to the field of deterrence, but it does provide a straightforward and methodical approach to analyzing if and how specific

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1. M. Elaine Bunn, “Can Deterrence Be Tailored?,” *Strategic Forum*, no. 225 (January 2007), <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADA463735.pdf>.

2. Keith B. Payne, “Nuclear Deterrence in a New Era: Applying ‘Tailored Deterrence,’” *Information Series*, no. 431 (May 2018): 3–4, <https://nipp.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/IS-431.pdf>.

3. Peter Karsten, Peter D. Howell, and Artis Frances Allen, *Military Threats: A Systemic Historical Analysis of the Determinants of Success* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1984), xii.

US actions and adversary interests interact to generate misperception. The framework is designed for use in bilateral deterrence relationships and has limited but relevant predictive potential for the acute problem of Russian NSNW deterrence.

Figure 1 demonstrates the IAM logic flow. The initial inputs into the framework are Russian interests and US actions. The interaction of these two variables fuels the “IAM Engine” (step 1) and either drives actors toward misperception or proper perception. The interest-action-reaction cycle found in deterrence case studies and literature is the basis of the IAM Engine. <sup>4</sup>What occurs in the IAM Engine box in figure 1 is the core of the framework. The interaction of Russian interests and US actions may generate either misperception, likely leading to miscalculation and inhibited deterrence, or proper perception, likely resulting in successful deterrence (steps 2 and 3). The dashed lines in step 3 indicate that perception and deterrence do not share a perfect relationship and that misperception may lead to successful deterrence, while proper perception may still result in inhibited deterrence.

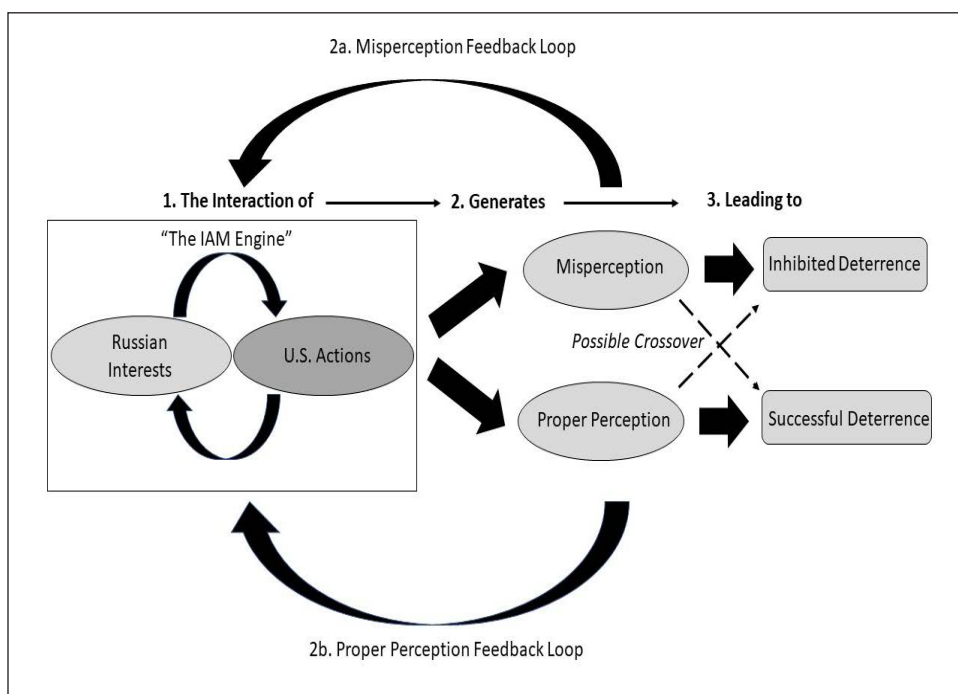


Figure 1. Interests, action, misperception framework (created by author)

4. Michael J. Mazarr et al., *What Deters and Why: Exploring Requirements for Effective Deterrence of Interstate Aggression* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2018), 6–7, [https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research\\_reports/RR2400/RR2451/RAND\\_RR2451.pdf](https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR2400/RR2451/RAND_RR2451.pdf).

The two feedback loops shown in figure 1 (steps 2a and 2b) depict how an initial interaction of interests and actions that generated misperception or proper perception can loop back and change the dynamic within the IAM Engine to generate additional perception outcomes. The process could be repeated multiple times. This article will primarily focus on the Misperception Feedback Loop (step 2a) to demonstrate its inherent dangers. The Misperception Feedback Loop begins after the IAM Engine's initial interests and actions relationship works to generate misperception. This initial misperception is fed back into the IAM Engine and alters or enhances either one of the variables to generate further misperception. Unless proper perception is restored, inhibited or failed deterrence can result at any point throughout this feedback process. Each iteration of the Misperception Feedback Loop creates a more unmanageable and unpredictable situation because an actor's interests or actions are repeatedly based on misperceptions that move further and further away from reality each time. For example, in the introductory scenario, the Misperception Feedback Loop began when the Russian leader misperceived NATO's intent in the deployment of defensive forces to eastern Europe. This misperception fed back into the IAM Engine, and the Russian leader's subsequent decision to invade Estonia was based on a perception that was not grounded in reality. The initial misperception of Western aggression continued to feed back into the IAM Engine, exacerbating Russian security interests and culminating in NSNW use. The feedback loop mechanism is a way to conceptualize and account for iterative complex interactions affecting perceptions in specific circumstances.

Misperception will not always generate a negative outcome and may in fact lead to a positive unintended coercive effect. Yet, designing policy or taking actions to generate misperception intentionally to attain a specific deterrent effect is risky. Communicating to generate proper adversary perception is already fraught with uncertainty and difficulty, and seeking successful deterrence via misperception is even more unpredictable. At best, a positive outcome from misperception would be a happy accident, and a deterrent strategy should remain grounded in the more predictable arena of generating proper perception.

The next section applies the IAM framework in its explanatory role to analyze US-Soviet activity during the Able Archer 83 Exercise. The IAM framework will highlight how US actions interacted with Soviet interests to generate an extreme misperception that severely strained deterrence. As scholars continue to uncover the extent of the Soviet reaction,

the degree of Soviet paranoia and misperception generated by US actions becomes more foreboding.<sup>5</sup>

## Exercise Able Archer

It is an especially grave error to assume that since we know the U.S. is not going to start World War III, the next leaders of the Kremlin will also believe that—and act on that belief.<sup>6</sup>

During a period of heightened Cold War tensions in 1983, NATO began its annual military exercise Autumn Forge, which culminated in Able Archer, an annual command post exercise that exercised nuclear release authority in response to a notional Soviet attack. The eight-day exercise took place in early November at Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe and included small personnel movements throughout Europe. Able Archer was meant to test command post operations and escalation procedures and to exercise nuclear release authority functions. Although the United States had designed deliberately proactive exercises earlier in the 1980s, it did not intend for Able Archer to elicit an alarmist Soviet reaction.<sup>7</sup> By itself, Able Archer was a routine exercise, but when combined with a long list of intentionally provocative US actions and increasing paranoia in the Soviet leadership, Able Archer had an outsized impact on Soviet strategic perceptions.<sup>8</sup> The routineness of Able Archer collided with a strategic atmosphere of heightened tensions, mutual distrust, and Soviet vulnerability and paranoia, which resulted in one of the most profound Soviet misperceptions of the Cold War: that the Reagan administration considered an unprovoked surprise nuclear first strike as an option to win the Cold War.

## Able Archer's Strategic Setting

Ronald Reagan assumed office in 1981 and immediately increased pressure against the Soviet Union. He believed he could force changes

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5. Nate Jones, ed., *Able Archer 83: The Secret History of the NATO Exercise That Almost Triggered Nuclear War* (New York: New Press, 2016), 25–26.

6. President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board (PFIAB), *The Soviet "War Scare"* (Washington, DC: White House, February 15, 1990), <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/document/21038-4-pfiab-report-2012-0238-mr>.

7. Peter Schweizer, *Victory: The Reagan Administration's Secret Strategy That Hastened the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1994), xvi.

8. "Spike Callendar," *1983: The Brink of Apocalypse*, produced by Taylor Downing (transcript of televised documentary, United Kingdom: Channel 4/Discovery US2008), 3–4.

in Soviet behavior through strength and sought to “rearm America.”<sup>9</sup> To these ends, he embarked on aggressive policies intended to place the Soviets under extreme political, diplomatic, economic, and military pressure to achieve a lasting peace favorable to the United States. Reagan attacked the foundations of the Soviet Union, calling it an “evil empire” and claiming that Soviet society “wantonly disregards . . . the value of human life.”<sup>10</sup> Simultaneously, the US military significantly increased spending and ramped up exercises. Between 1981–83, the US military conducted operations specifically designed to test Soviet responses, expose vulnerabilities, and put pressure on Soviet leaders.<sup>11</sup> These actions were exacerbating tensions in Moscow when two additional actions took place just days before Able Archer began.

The US invasion of Grenada and the Beirut barracks bombing occurred one week before Able Archer. These events and their fallout were unrelated to any US policies directly targeting the Soviet Union, yet Soviet intelligence took notice. The United States conducted Operation Urgent Fury to restore a US-friendly government in Grenada. British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher was incensed by the incursion into a Commonwealth nation and exchanged a series of secret communications with Washington to express her disapproval. Soviet signals intelligence monitored the increased flurry of encrypted activity between the two nuclear-armed allies on the eve of Able Archer. The second US action occurred in response to the barracks bombing in Beirut. Immediately, US government facilities and military installations around the world increased their security postures.<sup>12</sup> The heightened security would be obvious even to casual observers, and Soviet intelligence undoubtedly reported the widespread, abrupt change in US force posture. As these unrelated actions aggregated with the United States’ earlier provocative actions, they exacerbated Soviet security interests and generated the misperception that, under the right circumstances, the United States would launch a surprise

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9. George C. Wilson, “Weinberger, in His First Message, Says Mission Is to ‘Rearm America,’” *Washington Post* (website), January 23, 1981, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1981/01/23/weinberger-in-his-first-message-says-mission-is-to-rearm-america/6da4406e-1857-45b7-97fa-8755a5e77c1f/>.

10. Ronald Reagan, “Remarks at the Annual Convention of the National Association of Evangelicals in Orlando, FL” (speech, Annual Convention of the National Association of Evangelicals, Orlando, FL, March 8, 1982), <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/remarks-annual-convention-national-association-evangelicals-orlando-fl>.

11. Ben B. Fischer, *A Cold War Conundrum: The 1983 Soviet War Scare*, intelligence monograph CSI-9710002 (Washington, DC: Center for the Study of Intelligence, September 1997), 64–65, <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB426/docs/3.The-1983-War-Scare-in-U.S.-Soviet-Relations-circa-1996.pdf>.

12. Taylor Downing, *1983: Reagan, Andropov, and a World on the Brink* (New York: De Capo Press, 2018), 209–11.



strike to end the Cold War. These concerns culminated with the perfect cover to initiate such a strike—a NATO command post exercise designed to exercise nuclear release authority.

In 1983, the senior Soviet leaders were best described as vulnerable and paranoid. They understood that the West was gaining a strategic edge. In March 1983, a Soviet official admitted, “We cannot equal the quality of US arms for a generation or two. . . . We will never be able to catch up with you in modern arms.”<sup>13</sup> Leading up to Able Archer, US military exercises also exposed glaring holes in Soviet detection and interception capabilities.<sup>14</sup> The paranoia ingrained in the senior Soviet leaders from their formative experiences also increased their security concerns. A senior KGB official remarked,

[Barbarossa] was sort of embedded in their . . . mindset—that we must not allow this to happen again . . . do not overlook, do not just miss when they are going to attack, do not repeat again June 22nd of 1941 . . . that was part of the Russian political culture . . . it was almost an obsession.<sup>15</sup>

Furthermore, neither General Secretary Yury Andropov nor KGB Chief Vladimir A. Kryuchkov—notorious for his paranoia about the West—had visited the West and rarely interacted with its leaders.<sup>16</sup> Soviet experiences in World War II, the increasing disparity in the US and Soviet economies and technological abilities, and the Soviet awareness of their military vulnerabilities led Soviet leadership to consider the worst as they observed an aggressive US administration ratchet up pressure they could not realistically compete against. The Reagan administration had no knowledge of these internal Soviet fears and continued to blunder toward a crisis. Soviet interests ran at direct odds with US actions, and this volatile combination culminated with the Able Archer exercise.

None of the military planners involved in Able Archer considered that their actions were having an outsized effect on Soviet perceptions and never contemplated that it may be especially provocative.<sup>17</sup> Yet, the Soviets responded just as a fearful but vulnerable actor would—by increasing intelligence

13. Leslie H. Gelb, “Foreign Affairs; Who Won the Cold War?,” *New York Times*, August 20, 1992, as cited in Bryan Leese, “The Cold War Computer Arms Race,” *Journal of Advanced Military Studies* 14, no 2 (Fall 2023): 102, <https://doi.org/10.21140/mcu.20231402006>.

14. “Vladimir Kryuchkov and Stanislav Petrov,” *Brink of the Apocalypse*, 1–11, 16–19, 40.

15. “Oleg Kalugin,” *Brink of the Apocalypse*, 31–32.

16. Downing, 1983, 35, 45.

17. “Spike Callendar,” *Brink of the Apocalypse*, 51.

and reconnaissance efforts, quietly readying selected units while stopping short of a general alert, and by positioning key leaders in wartime headquarters. Their air force grounded all training flights and flew an unprecedented 36 reconnaissance flights in one week while also placing fighters on strip alert.<sup>18</sup> Moscow sent frantic messages to KGB offices in Western nations asking for indications of imminent military action.<sup>19</sup> While intelligence efforts went into overdrive, Soviet nuclear forces also prepared for a potential US first strike.

Soviet nuclear forces were placed on heightened combat alert for the duration of the exercise. Additional personnel, likely KGB enforcers, were added to missile silos, and five times the peacetime amount of mobile nuclear launchers were deployed. The missile force commanders also assumed positions in their wartime headquarters.<sup>20</sup> Soviet Chief of the General Staff Marshal Agarkov spent the final night of Able Archer in the central wartime command bunker.<sup>21</sup> While Able Archer's NATO training audience blindly continued ahead in the routineness of the exercise, it appears many Soviet leaders were anxious about the exercise's real purpose. Fortunately, despite detecting increased Soviet military activity, NATO leaders correctly perceived that the reaction was likely a response to Able Archer and did not reciprocate the heightened alert levels.<sup>22</sup> Had NATO increased readiness levels during the culmination of Able Archer, it would only have exacerbated an already anxious Soviet military and intelligence community. Ultimately, the exercise concluded without incident, and Soviet alert levels returned to normal.

### Soviets Interests, US Actions, and an Extreme Misperception

The Soviet response must be analyzed in its strategic context. Soviet leaders already feared Western aggression, knew their early warning capabilities were unreliable, and observed three years of aggressive US military posturing. Able Archer was exactly the kind of exercise that could be used for a first strike, and the combination of US actions and heightened Soviet vulnerability generated a perfect scenario for Soviet paranoia to translate into misperception. While "Reagan was not Hitler, and America does not do Pearl Harbors," US officials at the time committed the cardinal sin of deterrence—mirroring what one knows to be objective reality on an adversary's perception of that

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18. PFIAB, *Soviet "War Scare,"* 70–73.

19. "Rainer Rupp," *Brink of the Apocalypse*, 22.

20. "Victor Yesin," *Brink of the Apocalypse*, 6–7, 15, 26–27.

21. "Vladimir Kryuchkov," *Brink of the Apocalypse*, 20.

22. Leonard H. Perroots to the special assistant to the president and executive secretary and to the PFIAB chairman, memorandum, "End of Tour Report Addendum," January 9, 1989, Washington, DC: Defense Intelligence Agency, <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/sites/default/files/documents/rj8i2n-7auqn/Perroots%20Censored%20by%20CIA.pdf>.

reality.<sup>23</sup> Only after Able Archer did Reagan realize the extent of the Soviet misperception, stating that he “began to realize that many Soviet officials feared us not only as adversaries but as potential aggressors who might hurl nuclear weapons at them in a first strike.”<sup>24</sup> Western leaders never considered that the Soviets would believe them capable of a surprise nuclear strike because they themselves never considered it a realistic option.

Applying the IAM framework to this event reveals how the Soviets reached such an extreme misperception. The framework’s iterative process began years before the exercise occurred, as Reagan applied intense military pressure to an increasingly vulnerable Soviet Union. Soviet actions and statements pointed to a growing concern of a possible US first strike well before Able Archer. The security-conscious Soviet Politburo and intelligence services believed that as the West gained real and perceived strategic power advantages, the likelihood of a US first strike increased, and this misperception generated a genuine concern that it was in the interest, if not the intention, of the United States to launch a surprise first strike. The Soviets were already multiple cycles deep in the Misperception Feedback Loop when Able Archer began, and each time they made a decision under the assumption that the United States was considering a first strike, they moved the conceptual boundaries of their decision-making process further from reality. America’s actions exacerbated this cycle and contributed to the Misperception Feedback Loop. Oblivious to the effect they were having inside the Soviet Union, the Reagan administration and NATO’s actions severely inhibited deterrence.

Historians disagree on the degree and even the existence of a Soviet war scare during Able Archer. Due to a problematic lack of Soviet archival evidence, Western sources and interviews of Soviet officials provide the bulk of available documentation of the Soviet reactions to Able Archer.<sup>25</sup> Some claim they were never concerned with an imminent nuclear strike and that the Soviet leadership engineered the crisis for political purposes. They explain that the alarmist Soviet rhetoric was primarily a propaganda campaign to gather domestic support while weakening the Reagan administration’s standing in the West to prevent the deployment of intermediate-range nuclear missiles to Europe.<sup>26</sup> These motivations are not mutually exclusive, and they can exist in tandem

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23. See Fischer, *1983 War Scare*.

24. Ronald Reagan, *An American Life: The Autobiography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), 588–89.

25. Simon Miles, “The War Scare That Wasn’t: Able Archer 83 and the Myths of the Second Cold War,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 22, no. 3 (Summer 2020): 103, 116, [https://doi.org/10.1162/jcws\\_a\\_00952](https://doi.org/10.1162/jcws_a_00952).

26. Vojtech Mastny, “How Able was ‘Able Archer’?: Nuclear Trigger and Intelligence in Perspective,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 11, no. 1 (Winter 2009): 117–18, 120, <https://doi.org/10.1162/jcws.2009.11.1.108>.

with genuine concerns over an increasingly aggressive US administration. Although the war scare should not be overstated, the truth likely lies somewhere between the opposing views on the subject. With the current information available, it is difficult to grasp the degree and levels of government at which the war scare occurred. Yet, the evidence suggests there was a degree of Soviet concern that a surprise strike was a viable option for the United States.

The fact that Soviet leaders believed, to any degree, that the United States would launch nuclear weapons without provocation or preemption was a years-long US foreign policy blunder and represented a complete breakdown in strategic messaging and empathy. Able Archer leads to three unsettling conclusions for US deterrence strategists. The first is that regardless of how far from reality a course of action may be, if the United States possesses the capability to take an action and does not communicate intent effectively, then an adversary may perceive the United States will take that action, given the right circumstances. The second is that deterrence is globally connected, and unrelated actions in one region can impact deterrence in another. The third is that while it is dangerous to overestimate the coercive influence of US power in an adversary's mind, it is equally dangerous to underestimate the destabilizing effect that threatening overwhelming power can have on a weaker, insecure adversary. The events that culminated in Able Archer demonstrate clearly that ill-conceived US actions can have a radioactive interaction with adversary interests and generate extreme misperception that results in inhibited deterrence. Able Archer demonstrates the interests/action IAM Engine generating misperception and highlights the dangerous role the Misperception Feedback Loop can play. The concluding section carries forward these observations and applies the IAM Framework to a future conflict between Russia and NATO.

## Conclusions for Russian Nonstrategic Nuclear Weapons Deterrence

There are ways of conquering that quickly transform  
victory into defeat.<sup>27</sup>

The following conclusions derive from the application of the IAM framework and lessons from the Able Archer incident to a future NATO-Russia armed conflict. The first two conclusions are specific to nuclear armed adversaries, while the final two deal with deterrence more broadly, but all are applicable to Russian NSNW deterrence. The main takeaway is that denial and punishment deterrent strategies will not be effective under the conditions that would likely trigger Russian NSNW use. A strategy of dissuasion grounded in empathy

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27. Raymond Aron, *The Century of Total War* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1985), 158.

and carried out through judicious military restraint will be the most effective approach to deterring Russian NSNW while in conflict.

From the Western perspective, it is true that the United States “does not do Pearl Harbors,” but it is unlikely that Vladimir Putin, a man raised in Kryuchkov’s notoriously paranoid KGB and surrounded by sycophants, holds such a benign view of the West.<sup>28</sup> If the sources of information that fed Putin failed so dramatically to provide him with a proper perception of the reality in prewar Ukraine, his perception of future realities—especially in a time of extreme crisis or conflict—may be inaccurate. Putin’s assessment of the threat to Russian interests at play will inform his perceptions, which are critical to analyzing the interaction of those interests alongside US actions. Russian vital interests remain relatively unchanged since the time of Able Archer and revolve around sovereignty, regime survival, and territorial integrity.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, the relationship between US restraint, or the lack thereof, and Russian interests and misperception is the key to a successful dissuasive strategy.

### Deterrence via Dissuasion

Deterrence via dissuasion is the best strategy for vulnerable, security-fixated adversaries like Russia. Dissuasion is the overarching strategy that must originate with civilian leadership and permeate military contingency planning. A paranoid, embattled, vulnerable, and besieged Russian leader may misperceive NATO actions and rationally determine that NSNW are the best answer if Russian conventional forces are decisively defeated. “Winning too big” must be a critical concern for US leaders. Therefore, the best way to deter Russian NSNW use is to remove Russian leaders’ perception of the necessity to use them in the first place. This is the strategy of dissuasion.

Dissuasion targets an actor’s need to conduct an action to attain a benefit. Whether through positive persuasion, restraint, distraction, or reward, dissuasion seeks to make an action no longer necessary for the target of deterrence.<sup>30</sup> For Russia, restraint should be the method of dissuasion employed. Punishment and denial approaches rely on an adversary perceiving that he or she has some benefit to gain or lose. It is unlikely that NATO

28. Strobe Talbott, “The Making of Vladimir Putin,” *Politico* (website), August 19, 2014, <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2014/08/putin-the-backstory-110151/>.

29. Jasen Castillo, John Schuessler, and Andrew Natsios, *Policy Briefs from Russia Policy under the Next U.S. President* (College Station, TX: Albritton Center for Grand Strategy and Scowcroft Institute of International Affairs at the Bush School of Government and Public Service, Texas A&M University, October 15–16, 2019), 2, 11–13, <https://bush.tamu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Russia-Policy-Under-the-Next-US-President05.pdf>.

30. Stephan De Spiegeleire et al., *Reimagining Deterrence: Towards Strategic (Dis)Suasion* (Brussels: Hague Centre for Strategic Studies, March 2020), 17, 47–50.

can deny the defensive utility of NSNW on the battlefield, and for a Russian leader, the perceived benefits of sovereignty and regime survival will likely outweigh the costs of punishment resulting from limited NSNW use. The war in Ukraine makes it clear that Russian leaders value asserting territorial sovereignty over the acceptance of international norms or immediate economic prosperity. Focusing on the negative incentive-based approaches of punishment and denial can lead to the detrimental exclusion of neutral or positive incentive-based approaches that are more suitable for the tailored strategy required. Nonetheless, dissuasion requires willingly foregoing many of the strengths that the US military has enjoyed for decades.

### Application of Military Power

The deliberate and measured application of military power is necessary when confronting a nuclear-armed Russia. Decisive NATO military operations in eastern Europe will threaten Russia's vital interests to the point where their leaders may perceive NSNW employment as their only recourse. The US military must execute extremely restrained, deliberate, and empathetic operations that pursue minimalist military objectives to achieve a limited political end. The US proclivity for decisiveness and quick victory will make exercising restraint difficult during large-scale combat operations with Russia, but undisciplined decisiveness may prove even more catastrophic to national ends.

The Russian Federation released a comprehensive nuclear policy in 2020 outlining the circumstances in which nuclear weapons would be employed. Among other conditions, this policy states that Russia reserves the right to transition to the use of nuclear weapons "in the event of aggression against the Russian Federation with the use of conventional weapons when the very existence of the state is in jeopardy" or in the event of an "attack by [an] adversary against critical governmental or military sites of the Russian Federation, [the] disruption of which would undermine nuclear forces response actions."<sup>31</sup> Decisive, large-scale NATO operations could easily trigger one or both of these conditions.

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31. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation (MID), "Basic Principles of State Policy of the Russian Federation on Nuclear Deterrence," MID (website), June 8, 2020, [https://www.mid.ru/en/web/guest/foreign\\_policy/international\\_safety/disarmament/-/asset\\_publisher/rp0fiUBmANaH/content/id/4152094](https://www.mid.ru/en/web/guest/foreign_policy/international_safety/disarmament/-/asset_publisher/rp0fiUBmANaH/content/id/4152094).



Figure 2. Russian NSNW probability (created by author)

Russian military doctrine and professional military writings also categorize conflict into types and roughly align military actions and conflict escalation considerations with each type.<sup>32</sup> The type of limited war likely resulting from a Russian *fait accompli* of NATO territory is termed “regional war” in Russian doctrine. Professional Russian military writings establish that the use of NSNW is an acceptable option in regional war but also stress the limited nature of their use and intent.<sup>33</sup> The exact conditions in which Russia would employ NSNW cannot be known with certainty, but these documents bring greater clarity to both the conceptual winds of Russian thinking on nuclear use and its likely triggers. The probable conditions for Russian NSNW become clear after combining declared Russian nuclear policy with its military doctrine and professional military writing. Generally, the likelihood of Russian NSNW use is positively correlated to a perceived threat to their vital interests combined with a diminishing ability to secure those interests through conventional means. Put another way, as the decisiveness of NATO’s victory increases, the decisiveness of Russia’s defeat increases, and Russia’s ability to secure vital interests via nonnuclear means diminishes (see figure 2). Still, this situation is only a concern if Russia perceives that its vital interests are threatened.

32. Michael Kofman, Anya Fink, and Jeffrey Edmonds, *Russian Strategy for Escalation Management: Evolution of Key Concepts*, DRM-2019-U-022455-1Rev (Arlington, VA: Center for Naval Analyses, 2020), 6, 16, 19, <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/AD1102855.pdf>.

33. Kofman, Fink, and Edmonds, *Russian Strategy*, 19, 23, 25, 40, 49.



The IAM framework is useful for analyzing Russian misperception resulting from the interaction of Russian interests and US military actions. In accordance with its doctrine, a US-led NATO will plan to conduct operations quickly, decisively, and with minimal loss of life.<sup>34</sup> Russia's interests and NATO's actions are likely to result in severely strained, if not failed, NSNW deterrence. For example, as NATO counterattacks to rollback a Russian *fait accompli*, its forces will first seek to establish local air superiority to enable joint maneuver. Fires from multiple domains will suppress and then destroy Russia's integrated air defense network by penetrating and disintegrating enemy anti-access, area-denial systems. This goal requires not only destroying the weapon delivery systems, but also the network of command-and-control nodes and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance systems deep inside Russian territory.<sup>35</sup> As Russia loses both its ability to contest the air and see the battlefield, NATO ground forces will decisively maneuver to destroy and expel Russian forces from the contested territory. The simultaneous effect of stripping Russia's anti-access, area-denial systems hundreds of kilometers into their territory, restricting their situational awareness by destroying strategic reconnaissance assets, and decisively defeating their ground forces may generate the misperception that NATO forces are pursuing broader objectives than those being communicated by NATO states' political leadership. Deterrence will fail as Russian leaders perceive the necessity to employ NSNW to secure territorial integrity or national sovereignty.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, military leaders must balance the amount of destruction required to achieve the political end with the risk of escalation resulting from decisive military actions that generate or exacerbate Russian vulnerabilities.

### Adversary Perceptions of US Capabilities

If the United States possesses a capability, an adversary may regard the use of that capability as probable, under the right circumstances. Regardless of how remote the possibility of an action may be from the US perspective, an adversary's assessment of that likelihood could be very different. The severity of the destabilizing effects that misperception has on adversary decision making should not be underestimated. Experts contend that within the contemporary Russian mind there is "always a lingering fear of strategic surprise, and that if escalation is likely, then Russia should take

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34. NATO, *Allied Joint Doctrine for Land Operations*, edition B, version 1, Allied Joint Publication 3.2 (Brussels: NATO Standardization Office, February 2022), 3.2, 3.9, 3.14, [https://www.coemed.org/files/stanags/01\\_AJP/AJP-3.2\\_EDB\\_V1\\_E\\_2288.pdf](https://www.coemed.org/files/stanags/01_AJP/AJP-3.2_EDB_V1_E_2288.pdf).

35. Department of the Army, *Operations*, Field Manual 3-0 (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, October 2022), 6–9, [https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR\\_pubs/DR\\_a/ARN36290-FM\\_3-0-000-WEB-2.pdf](https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/ARN36290-FM_3-0-000-WEB-2.pdf).

36. MID, "Nuclear Deterrence State Policy."

the lead.”<sup>37</sup> As in 1983, fears of an Operation Barbarossa–like attack may remain embedded in the Russian security apparatus psyche. Western society and leaders may know with certainty that they will never take an action, but that does not mean that a Russian leader with unique culture- and history-based assumptions, perceptions of an ever-tightening (if self-induced) NATO noose, and imperfect information from reality-distorting advisers will come to the same conclusion regarding Western intentions.

### Global Deterrence

In a globally connected world, deterrence is connected globally. Unrelated actions in one region can impact deterrence in another region. To account for the multipolar nature of modern deterrence, the whole-of-government approach envisioned in integrated deterrence must ensure that isolated or unrelated actions are not unintentionally inhibiting deterrence in another location or domain. National security strategists must avoid the pitfalls of Grenada and Beirut in 1983 as America navigates the uncharted waters of adversarial nuclear peer tri-polarity. Managing deterrence within such a complex environment requires a high level of fidelity regarding adversary interests, a great degree of interagency coordination, and strategic thinkers able to view the world with mirror-free strategic empathy. Who is integrating integrated deterrence and campaigning globally? The answer is ambiguous and unsettling. One organization must possess the responsibility, authority, and resources to coordinate whole-of-government efforts across combatant commands. Seams between and within combatant commands are ripe for exploitation by adversaries and are also vulnerable to our own blundering. A national-level organization is required to coordinate unified action effectively to avoid generating unintentional misperceptions.

### Deterrence through Perception

In armed conflict, Russian interests and US actions will interact to generate either proper perception or misperception. Applying the IAM framework to Russian NSNW deterrence strategy yields conclusions that are at odds with traditional deterrence and require a reevaluation of how the United States and its allies will conduct large-scale combat operations against a nuclear adversary. Despite US leaders’ clarity and understanding of their own strategic objectives, Russian leaders may have a different assessment

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37. Michael Kofman and Anya Loukianova Fink, “Commentary – Escalation Management and Nuclear Employment in Russian Military Strategy,” *War on the Rocks* (website), September 19, 2022, revised and updated, originally published June 23, 2020, <https://warontherocks.com/2022/09/escalation-management-and-nuclear-employment-in-russian-military-strategy-2/>.

of US intentions. A combination of Russian interests, the decisive application of Western military power, or even unrelated US actions may fuel this misperception. Accounting for these variables enables a US strategy focused on removing the fundamental need that drives Russian NSNW use. A strategy of dissuasion accounts for the historical, cultural, and personality-driven attributes that influence Russian interests and demands a military approach to armed conflict that requires civilian and military leaders to consider how their actions might impact Russian perceptions.

The most effective way to deter Russian NSNW use is to remove Russian leaders' *perception* of the necessity to use them in the first place. This goal can be accomplished by executing extremely restrained, deliberate, and empathetic military operations that pursue minimalist military objectives to achieve a political end. Applying military doctrine deliberately and judiciously will enable military leaders to attain the political end without stumbling into strategic failure. Let T. R. Fehrenbach's warning remain at the fore: "To make a war, sometimes it is necessary that everyone guess wrong."<sup>38</sup>

A counterinsurgency adage states that the more secure you are the less safe you are. The more a force protects itself in opaque armored vehicles and alienates itself from the population, the less safe the force may become in the long run and the less effective it will be in achieving the political objective. A similar concept may be applied to war with Russia. The more decisively NATO wins at the tactical and operational level, the less decisively NATO may win at the strategic level. After all, "there are ways of conquering that quickly transform victory into defeat," and the use of even one Russian NSNW likely means strategic failure for NATO.<sup>39</sup>

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38. T. R. Fehrenbach, *This Kind of War: The Classic Korean War History* (Washington, DC: Brassey's, 1994).

39. Aron, *Total War*, 158.

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# Ambivalent Offshore Balancer: America in the Middle East and Beyond

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**ABSTRACT:** This article enters the debate on American grand strategy by questioning the logic underpinning offshore balancing. It concludes that the United States is an ambivalent balancer due to the stopping power of water. It builds on the relevant literature in international relations, producing a novel set of theoretical propositions that are applied to the contemporary Middle East. There and elsewhere, the United States could fail to maintain the balance of power when it is most threatened.

**Keywords:** freedom to roam, grand strategy, offshore balancing, offensive realism, regional hegemony, stopping power of water, Middle East

**H**ow committed is the United States to maintaining the balance of power abroad? John J. Mearsheimer, a well-known realist, has long argued that the United States intervenes as an offshore balancer to forestall the rise of regional hegemonies when local states prove unequal to the task. The stopping power of water, or the way large bodies of water sharply limit the power projection capabilities of armies, underpins his logic. The stopping power of water, Mearsheimer argues, explains why great powers can aspire to regional hegemony at best, even though they would be more powerful and thus more secure as global hegemonies. When applied to American grand strategy, the stopping power of water explains why the United States contents itself with being the only regional hegemon while acting as a balancer of last resort against any other power that tries to duplicate the feat.<sup>1</sup>

I contend that the stopping power of water allows the United States to tolerate the emergence of another regional hegemon when offshore balancing becomes prohibitively costly. If the United States has an incentive to remain the only regional hegemon in the international system, it is to enjoy the freedom to roam that comes with that. The freedom to roam, however, is a luxury and not a necessity, and the benefits that flow from it need to be weighed against the costs of balancing. Exactly because balancing against a potential hegemon is costly, it is destined to be politically controversial.

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1. John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, updated ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 2014).

Even when the United States ends up balancing, the outcome is therefore contingent rather than inevitable. In other words, the United States is an ambivalent balancer, in large part due to the stopping power of water.

In the Middle East, Iran is the most plausible candidate for regional hegemon, even if the prospects for that are remote at the moment. Can we be confident that the United States will balance against Iran if the need arises? To the extent that balancing entails leading a diplomatic coalition, applying economic pressure, or even supplementing the defenses of local allies, the most likely answer is yes. The offshore balancing logic gets that right. If the United States is forced to confront the prospect of a major war with Iran, however, then the domestic debate will become contentious and unpredictable, with the final outcome contingent. A hegemonic Iran, in turn, could wield the oil weapon to coerce the United States or aid a rising China in its efforts to become a regional hegemon, all of which would be problematic for offshore balancing.

More generally, this analysis underscores that restraint is embedded in the American grand strategic tradition and will remain influential as the debate pivots to great-power competition.<sup>2</sup> Restraint reminds us that the United States is easy to defend and thus can be discriminate in the commitments it makes and the wars it fights. It has been easy to lose sight of restraint in the post–Cold War period when the United States has been a unipole. American grand strategy during this period has been invariably described in hegemonic terms. Indeed, offshore balancers have been among the most persistent in explaining why the United States has not adopted their preferred grand strategy but has sought hegemony instead.<sup>3</sup>

Although hegemony has proven durable in the unipolar era, restraint should not be underestimated. If the United States is indeed as geopolitically blessed as offshore balancers claim, then, paradoxically, we cannot be confident that the United States will balance when the need arises. Containing a potential hegemon near the peak of its strength is a formidable undertaking, and the United States might shy away from the high costs involved. When it matters most, offshore balancers may find that their arguments

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2. On restraint, see Barry R. Posen, *Restraint: A New Foundation for U.S. Grand Strategy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014). On the return of great-power competition, see Brian D. Blankenship and Benjamin Denison, “Is America Prepared for Great-Power Competition?” *Survival* 61, no. 5 (October–November 2019): 43–64, <https://www.iiss.org/publications/survival/2019/survival-global-politics-and-strategy-octobernovember-2019/615-04-blankenship-and-denison/>; and Hal Brands and Evan Braden Montgomery, “One War Is Not Enough: Strategy and Force Planning for Great-Power Competition,” *Texas National Security Review* 3, no. 2 (Spring 2020): 80–92, <http://dx.doi.org/10.26153/tsw/8865>.

3. John J. Mearsheimer, *The Great Delusion: Liberal Dreams and International Realities* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018); and Stephen M. Walt, *The Hell of Good Intentions: America’s Foreign Policy Elite and the Decline of U.S. Primacy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018).

are too persuasive by half: If the United States is the most secure great power in history, then why balance? Why not trust the stopping power of water? To the extent that the United States derives grand strategic benefit from being free to roam, then offshore balancers should be concerned.

Going forward, I critically assess offshore balancing to reach firmer conclusions on whether it is a sound basis for American grand strategy. First, I situate offshore balancing within the grand strategy debate. Second, I discuss the stopping power of water. Third, I unpack the implications of the stopping power of water for American grand strategy, with a focus on whether to balance or not. Fourth, I derive hypotheses for what we should see empirically if the United States is as ambivalent about balancing as the argument implies. Fifth, I use these hypotheses to inform an analysis of offshore balancing's prospects in the Middle East, with a focus on Iran. Finally, I conclude with some general reflections.

## Offshore Balancing in the Grand Strategy Debate

Offshore balancing occupies a critical position in the ongoing American grand strategy debate. Relative to alternatives like deep engagement, liberal internationalism, and conservative primacy, offshore balancing asserts that the United States can stop short of global hegemony.<sup>4</sup> Instead, offshore balancing asks the United States to be the balancer of last resort in core regions like Europe, East Asia, and the Middle East. In essence, "the aim is to remain offshore as long as possible, while recognizing that it is sometimes necessary to come onshore" when local states cannot handle a threat on their own.<sup>5</sup> Deep engagement, liberal internationalism, and conservative primacy, on the other hand, insist on global hegemony. Specifically, they privilege those long-standing alliances and partnerships that have allowed the United States to keep the peace among the major powers, which has headed off the kinds of security competitions and wars that threatened American security and prosperity in the past.

Offshore balancers have made a number of important contributions to the grand strategy debate, such as situating offshore balancing within international relations theory. Mearsheimer, in particular, has argued that offshore balancing is consistent with offensive realism: offshore balancing

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4. Paul C. Avey, Jonathan N. Markowitz, and Robert J. Reardon, "Disentangling Grand Strategy: International Relations Theory and U.S. Grand Strategy," *Texas National Security Review* 2, no. 1 (November 2018): 31, <http://dx.doi.org/10.26153/tsw/869>.

5. John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, "The Case for Offshore Balancing: A Superior U.S. Grand Strategy," *Foreign Affairs* 95, no. 4 (July/August 2016): 74, <https://www.foreignaffairs-com.usawc.idm.oclc.org/articles/united-states/2016-06-13/case-offshore-balancing>.



is the grand strategy we should expect from a regional hegemon that is determined to remain the *only* regional hegemon.<sup>6</sup>

Offshore balancers have also explained why the United States has not consistently pursued offshore balancing, despite its merits—namely, when the United States enjoys a preponderance of power, it can pursue global hegemony free of external constraints. Offshore balancers disagree among themselves about whether the United States has pursued global hegemony since the end of World War II or the end of the Cold War. Christopher Layne dates the American pursuit of global hegemony to World War II. Michael Desch, Mearsheimer, and Stephen Walt treat it as a post–Cold War phenomenon.<sup>7</sup> All agree, however, that when the US power position becomes dominant enough, it will pursue a grand strategy of global hegemony rather than offshore balancing.

Offshore balancers have provided a powerful critique of global hegemony as well, highlighting its costs and failures.<sup>8</sup> Among the most consequential are damaged relations with other great powers, unhealthy alliance dynamics, failed military interventions, and illiberalism at home. Ultimately, offshore balancers argue, global hegemony will become unsustainable as unipolarity passes and the United States must contend again with great-power competitors.

Offshore balancing is a firmly established and legitimate contender in the grand strategy debate. Its critique of global hegemony is particularly well-developed, but its proponents have yet to grapple thoroughly with the implications of the stopping power of water.

## The Stopping Power of Water

In *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, Mearsheimer develops a theory of offensive realism that explains why great powers attempt to maximize their share of world power. While the ideal situation is to be a hegemon—a state so powerful that it dominates all other states in the system—it is virtually impossible for any state to achieve global hegemony. According to Mearsheimer, “The principal impediment to world domination is the difficulty of projecting

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6. Mearsheimer, *Great Power Politics*.

7. Christopher Layne, *The Peace of Illusions: American Grand Strategy from 1940 to the Present* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006); Michael C. Desch, “America’s Liberal Illiberalism: The Ideological Origins of Overreaction in U.S. Foreign Policy,” *International Security* 32, no. 3 (Winter 2007/08): 7–43, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30130517>; Mearsheimer, *Great Delusion*; and Walt, *Good Intentions*.

8. Layne, “The Containment of Europe: American Hegemony and European Responses” and “Liberal Ideology and U.S. Grand Strategy,” chaps. 6–7 in *Illusions*, 118–58; Mearsheimer, “Liberalism as a Source of Trouble,” chap. 6 in *Great Delusion*, 152–87; Walt, “A Dismal Record” and “Why Liberal Hegemony Failed,” chaps. 1–2 in *Good Intentions*, 21–90; and Posen, “The Perils of Liberal Hegemony,” chap. 1 in *Restraint*, 24–68.

power across the world's oceans onto the territory of a rival great power.” In other words, because of the stopping power of water, “there has never been a global hegemon, and there is not likely to be one anytime soon.”<sup>9</sup> Rather, the best outcome a great power can hope for is to be a regional hegemon and dominate its neighborhood. The United States, in fact, is the only great power to have succeeded in securing hegemony in its region, the Western Hemisphere.

Since becoming a regional hegemon, the United States has worked hard—not to secure global hegemony, but to prevent hostile powers like Nazi Germany, Imperial Japan, and the Soviet Union from overturning the balance of power in their respective regions. In fact, the United States has been reluctant to intervene in Europe and Northeast Asia unless a peer competitor has been on the horizon, preferring to pass the buck to local states instead. The United States, in other words, has acted as an offshore balancer, intervening in other regions to forestall the rise of potential hegemonies when local states have proven unequal to the task. The ultimate rationale has been geopolitical: if there are two or more great powers in other regions, those powers will spend most of their time competing with each other rather than meddling in the offshore balancer's backyard.<sup>10</sup>

The stopping power of water and the related tendency of insular great powers to act as offshore balancers add an element of stability to the international system. States may have incentives to maximize their share of world power, but only regional hegemony is attainable. Even this has been in doubt since the United States came to dominate the Western Hemisphere and proved itself ready to intervene should another great power attempt to dominate its region. Even in an offensive realist world, the stopping power of water limits how much a great power can and should expand.

Mearsheimer's incorporation of the stopping power of water in his analysis is consistent with offense-defense theory, which states that factors that privilege the defense relative to the offense should disincentivize expansion and war.<sup>11</sup> Essentially, the stopping power of water amounts to the claim, “armies that have to traverse a large body of water to attack a well-armed

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9. Mearsheimer, *Great Power Politics*, 41.

10. Mearsheimer, *Great Power Politics*, 41–42, 140–43.

11. Barry R. Posen, “The Best Defense,” review of *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, by John J. Mearsheimer, *National Interest*, no. 67 (Spring 2002): 121, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42897407>; Layne, *Illusions*, 20; David W. Blagden, Jack S. Levy, and William R. Thompson, “Correspondence: Sea Powers, Continental Powers, and Balancing Theory,” *International Security* 36, no. 2 (Fall 2011): 196, [https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC\\_c\\_00060](https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_c_00060); and David Blagden, “When Does Competition Become Conflict? Technology, Geography, and the Offense–Defense Balance,” *Journal of Global Security Studies* 6, no. 4 (December 2021): 13–16, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jogss/ogab007>.

opponent invariably have little offensive capability.”<sup>12</sup> In offense–defense terms, water shifts the offense–defense balance in favor of the defense.

The significant limits on the number of troops and the amount of firepower a state can bring to bear in an amphibious operation against another state make it extremely difficult to overwhelm a prepared defender on land.<sup>13</sup> Robert Jervis foreshadows the logic of the stopping power of water in his seminal treatment of the security dilemma:

Anything that increases the amount of ground the attacker has to cross, or impedes his progress across it, or makes him more vulnerable while crossing, increases the advantage accruing to the defense. When states are separated by barriers that produce these effects, the security dilemma is eased, since both can have forces adequate for defense without being able to attack.<sup>14</sup>

Oceans serve as buffer zones in this respect—if all states were islands, Jervis argues, anarchy would be much less of a problem.

Similarly, Mearsheimer finds exceedingly few cases in which a great power launched an amphibious assault against territory that was well-defended by another great power. Exceptions, such as the Normandy landings, prove the rule: only when a great power has been on the verge of catastrophic defeat, with its forces stretched thin and pinned down on multiple fronts, has it become vulnerable to amphibious assault, and then only when the invading force has enjoyed clear-cut air superiority. Additionally, neither of the insular great powers—Great Britain and the United States—has ever been invaded, whereas France and Russia, two leading continental powers, have been invaded a total of 12 times since 1792—11 times across land, but only once from the sea. “The apparent lesson,” Mearsheimer argues, “is that large bodies of water make it extremely difficult for armies to invade territory defended by a well-armed great power.”<sup>15</sup>

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12. Mearsheimer, *Great Power Politics*, 114.

13. Mearsheimer, *Great Power Politics*, 114–19.

14. Robert Jervis, “Cooperation under the Security Dilemma,” *World Politics* 30, no. 2 (January 1978): 194–96, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2009958>; Stephen Van Evera, “Offense, Defense, and the Causes of War,” *International Security* 22, no. 4 (Spring 1998): 19, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2539239>; Charles L. Glaser and Chaim Kaufmann, “What Is the Offense-Defense Balance and Can We Measure It?,” *International Security* 22, no. 4 (Spring 1998): 64–66, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2539240>; Keir A. Lieber, *War and the Engineers: The Primacy of Politics over Technology* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 30; and Charles L. Glaser, *Rational Theory of International Politics: The Logic of Competition and Cooperation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 141.

15. Mearsheimer, *Great Power Politics*, 118–19, 126–28.

The stopping power of water is not absolute, however. Take, for instance, the anomaly of Imperial Japan.<sup>16</sup> An insular power, Imperial Japan nonetheless annexed Korea and conquered large parts of China in the first half of the twentieth century. Mearsheimer chalks up Japan's gains to the fact that the Asian mainland was a soft target from 1900–45. Unlike Europe, which “was effectively a giant fortress closed to conquest by distant great powers,” Asia was “open for penetration from abroad.”<sup>17</sup> This fact suggests that water only has stopping power if there is a formidable army waiting on land to exploit its defensive advantages.<sup>18</sup> In offense-defense terms, though water may shift the balance toward defense, it will not be dispositive if the power asymmetry between the attacker and defender is too great.

### American Grand Strategy and the Stopping Power of Water

The stopping power of water provides the United States with a defensive advantage par excellence and, according to Mearsheimer, explains why the United States has traditionally acted as an offshore balancer.<sup>19</sup> Unrivaled in its hemisphere and separated from other great powers by the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, the United States is exceptionally secure—“probably the most secure great power in history.”<sup>20</sup> Its margin of security allows the United States to pass the buck to frontline states in core regions, intervening only at the last moment when a potential hegemon threatens to overturn the balance of power.

At first blush, Mearsheimer seems to capture an important tendency in American grand strategy. The United States ostensibly intervened in World War I and World War II to turn back potential hegemonies and waged a protracted Cold War to contain the Soviet Union, another potential hegemon. On its face, this evidence suggests that the United States is committed to maintaining the balance of power abroad. A closer look at these cases, however, demonstrates that the offshore balancing logic tenuously applies in each instance. Galen Jackson, for example, has argued that balance-of-power considerations were simply not a major factor in the American entry into

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16. Posen, “Best Defense,” 123; Glenn H. Snyder, “Mearsheimer’s World—Offensive Realism and the Struggle for Security: A Review Essay,” review of *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, by John J. Mearsheimer, *International Security* 27, no. 1 (Summer 2002): 160, <https://doi.org/10.1162/016228802320231253>; and Richard N. Rosecrance, “War and Peace,” review of *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, by John J. Mearsheimer, *World Politics* 55, no. 1 (October 2002): 149, <https://doi.org/10.1353/wp.2003.0007>.

17. Mearsheimer, *Great Power Politics*, 264–65.

18. Patrick Porter, *The Global Village Myth: Distance, War, and the Limits of Power* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2015), 20.

19. Mearsheimer, “The Offshore Balancers,” chap. 7 in *Great Power Politics*, 234–66.

20. Mearsheimer, *Great Power Politics*, 127.

World War I.<sup>21</sup> In the World War II case, balance-of-power considerations were front and center with Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan together threatening to dominate Eurasia, but only the latter's (fortuitous) attack on Pearl Harbor opened up sufficient political space for the United States to join the war in full.<sup>22</sup> As far as the Cold War, Marc Trachtenberg and others have ably documented the United States' reluctance to assume a security commitment to Europe through at least the 1950s.<sup>23</sup> In short, the United States has amassed a record of balancing, but it could easily have been otherwise. The cases for and against offshore balancing still need to be fleshed out.

### The Case for and against Offshore Balancing

Given the stopping power of water, it is not clear why the United States should act as an offshore balancer. More generally, it is unclear why a regional hegemon should fear the emergence of another regional hegemon. Mearsheimer concedes the point: "One might wonder why a state that stood astride its own region would care whether there was another regional hegemon, especially if the two competitors were separated by an ocean. After all, it would be almost impossible for either regional hegemon to strike across the water at the other."<sup>24</sup> Focusing on the freedom to roam can resolve this contradiction—namely, regional hegemons are free to roam and interfere in other regions because they dominate their own neighborhoods.<sup>25</sup> The United States, for example, can project power abroad in part because it does not need to worry much about defending itself at home. As Mearsheimer puts it:

Most Americans never think about it, but one of the main reasons the United States is able to station military forces all around the globe and intrude in the politics of virtually every region is that it faces no serious threats in the Western Hemisphere. If the United States had dangerous foes in its own backyard, it would be much less capable of roaming into distant regions.<sup>26</sup>

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21. Galen Jackson, "The Offshore Balancing Thesis Reconsidered: Realism, the Balance of Power in Europe, and America's Decision for War in 1917," *Security Studies* 21, no. 3 (July–September 2012): 455–89, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2012.706502>.

22. John M. Schuessler, "Shifting Blame to the Axis," chap. 2 in *Deceit on the Road to War: Presidents, Politics, and American Democracy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015), 27–58.

23. Marc Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement, 1945–1963* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999); Mark S. Sheetz, "Exit Strategies: American Grand Designs for Postwar European Security," *Security Studies* 8, no. 4 (Summer 1999): 1–43; James McAllister, *No Exit: America and the German Problem, 1943–1954* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002); and John M. Schuessler and Joshua R. Shiffrinson, "The Shadow of Exit from NATO," *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 13, no. 3 (Fall 2019): 38–51, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26760127>.

24. Mearsheimer, *Great Power Politics*, 142.

25. On the freedom to roam, see John M. Schuessler, Joshua Shiffrinson, and David Blagden, "Revisiting Insularity and Expansion: A Theory Note," *Perspectives on Politics* (forthcoming), <https://doi.org/10.1017/S153759272100222X>.

26. Mearsheimer, *Great Power Politics*, 365.

In this respect, the United States can be usefully contrasted with the string of European great powers who failed to gain regional hegemony and have thus been unable to realize their global ambitions.<sup>27</sup> A rising China faces similar constraints today in breaking out of its neighborhood in East Asia.<sup>28</sup>

When there are two or more great powers in other regions of the world, they spend most of their time competing with each other, rather than causing trouble in the United States' backyard.<sup>29</sup> By acting as an offshore balancer, the United States ensures that it retains the freedom to roam while denying that freedom to others. In turn, this means that the United States can go on the offense and encircle others rather than stand pat on the defense and risk being encircled itself. Offshore balancing, in other words, locks in a surplus of security for the United States by preserving its freedom to roam.

The freedom to roam is desirable, but the stopping power of water means it may not be desirable *enough* to justify the high costs of balancing. Recall that offshore balancing entails intervening in another region to forestall the rise of a hegemon when local states have proven unequal to the task. If intervention becomes necessary, it can only be costly and protracted, as the potential hegemon will be at the peak of its strength. Is such a sacrifice warranted, given the amount of security at stake? The stopping power of water makes the answer unclear. Even in the worst case—the emergence of a rival hegemon—the relevant threat is indirect. Consider the most-cited danger: an alliance between a rival hegemon and a state that neighbors the offshore balancer. Such an alliance would force the offshore balancer to devote more strategic attention to its own backyard, thus restricting its freedom to roam. It seems implausible, however, that the offshore balancer would allow the rival hegemon to project so much military power via the neighboring state that attack and conquest become real possibilities. In other words, a rival hegemon could not do much more than meddle in the offshore balancer's backyard.<sup>30</sup>

Crucially, there is a legitimate debate to be had over whether indirect threats are so unendurable that the case for balancing trumps the one for staying offshore. Along these lines, Robert J. Art has argued that the United States could have remained secure from invasion had it stayed out of World War II and had Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan consolidated

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27. Layne, *Illusions*, 29.

28. Evan Braden Montgomery, "Contested Primacy in the Western Pacific: China's Rise and the Future of U.S. Power Projection," *International Security* 38, no. 4 (Spring 2014): 124–25, [https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC\\_a\\_00160](https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_a_00160).

29. Mearsheimer, *Great Power Politics*, 41–42, 140–43.

30. Peter Gowan, "A Calculus of Power," *New Left Review* 16 (July/August 2002): 58–59, 62, <https://newleftreview.org/issues/ii16/articles/peter-gowan-a-calculus-of-power>; and Christopher Layne, "The 'Poster Child for Offensive Realism': America as a Global Hegemon," *Security Studies* 12, no. 2 (Winter 2002/3): 126–27, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09636410212120011>.



control over Eurasia. The American public, however, would have suffered a degraded standard of living in an Axis-dominated world, which was reason enough to have entered the war.<sup>31</sup> Perhaps he is right, but his analysis underscores that US entry into World War II was a matter of choice—and a closer call than often assumed.<sup>32</sup> More generally, a great power should not give up its freedom to roam lightly—nor should it pay any and all costs to preserve it, which renders offshore balancing controversial.

## An Ambivalent Balancer

The stopping power of water presents the United States with a dilemma: maintain the freedom to roam, or avoid the high costs of balancing? Since the answer is not obvious, the United States should be an ambivalent balancer. Specifically, we should see the following when the United States is confronted with the prospect of balancing against a potential hegemon in a core region:

1. *The prospect of high costs should trigger a contentious domestic debate—at all levels—over balancing.* This outcome would be consistent with Randall L. Schweller's insight that balancing is costly and risky and thus politically contentious.<sup>33</sup> The states that Schweller highlights, however, are so internally divided that they are effectively unable to balance. In the American case, it is a materiel factor—the stopping power of water—that makes balancing particularly contentious.

2. *To the extent that the United States ends up balancing, the outcome should be contingent, with a provocation opening the needed political space.* As Richard Ned Lebow argues, a provocation can be “held out to the public as compelling evidence of the adversary’s aggressive intentions” and “portrayed as a serious enough challenge to the nation’s commitments, credibility, or honor to demand a forceful response,” overriding resistance to balancing.<sup>34</sup> If the public becomes convinced the other side has forced the issue, they will be more tolerant of the high costs of balancing against a potential hegemon.

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31. Robert J. Art, “The United States, the Balance of Power, and World War II: Was Spykman Right?” *Security Studies* 14, no. 3 (July–September 2005): 365–406, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636410500323120>.

32. Patrick Porter, “A Matter of Choice: Strategy and Discretion in the Shadow of World War II,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 35, no. 3 (June 2012): 317–43, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2012.667369>.

33. Randall L. Schweller, “Unanswered Threats: A Neoclassical Realist Theory of Underbalancing,” *International Security* 29, no. 2 (Fall 2004): 159–201, <https://doi.org/10.1162/0162288042879913>; and Randall L. Schweller, *Unanswered Threats: Political Constraints on the Balance of Power* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

34. Richard Ned Lebow, *Between Peace and War: The Nature of International Crisis* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), 29.



In contrast to offensive realism—which predicts a linear progression from buck-passing to balancing as a potential hegemon comes closer to overturning the regional balance of power—the prediction here is that the United States will remain ambivalent about balancing right until the end, with the final outcome by no means inevitable.

Before proceeding, an important caveat is in order—namely, the stopping power of water’s effects are not all in the direction of restraint. As I have argued elsewhere with coauthors, insular powers enjoy two advantages when it comes to expansion. First, they are free to roam. Second, they are at the same time relatively nonthreatening. Combined, these advantages translate into spheres of influence abroad.<sup>35</sup> This observation helps make sense of the fact that the United States has been both ambivalent about balancing and quite expansionist at times. In a related piece of scholarship, Paul van Hooft argues that the United States enjoys so much security by virtue of the stopping power of water that its grand strategy is pushed and pulled toward extremes. Most importantly, in the event the United States commits to maintaining the balance of power in a core region, credibility concerns leave it little choice but to go “all-in,” which means risking major war.<sup>36</sup> It is exactly when Americans are confronted with this fact, I argue, that their commitment to maintaining the balance of power wavers.

### Offshore Balancing in the Middle East

Ambivalent balancing has important implications for the US approach to the Middle East. Many agree that Iran is the most plausible candidate for regional hegemon, even if the prospects for that outcome are remote at the moment. Certainly, Iran has tense relations with its neighbors, especially Israel, and the continued wrangling over its nuclear program means war cannot be ruled out. Currently, however, Iran is much too weak economically and militarily—not to mention internally divided—to entertain a run at hegemony.<sup>37</sup>

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35. Schuessler, Shiffrinson, and Blagden, “Revisiting Insularity and Expansion.”

36. Paul van Hooft, “All-In or All-Out: Why Insularity Pushes and Pulls American Grand Strategy to Extremes,” *Security Studies* 29, no. 4 (August–September 2020): 701–29.

37. Joshua Rovner, “After America: The Flow of Persian Gulf Oil in the Absence of the U.S. Military Force,” in *Crude Strategy: Rethinking the US Military Commitment to Defend Persian Gulf Oil*, ed. Charles L. Glaser and Rosemary A. Kelanic (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2016), 149–53; and David Blagden and Patrick Porter, “Desert Shield of the Republic? A Realist Case for Abandoning the Middle East,” *Security Studies* 30, no. 1 (January 2021): 33, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2021.1885727>.

If Iran were to overcome these obstacles, offshore balancing counsels that the United States should do what is necessary to prevent it from becoming a regional hegemon. As Mearsheimer and Walt advise:

Iran has a significantly larger population and greater economic potential than its Arab neighbors, and it may eventually be in a position to dominate the Gulf. If it begins to move in this direction, the United States should help the other Gulf states balance against Tehran, calibrating its own efforts and regional military presence to the magnitude of the danger.<sup>38</sup>

To the extent that these efforts entail leading a diplomatic coalition, applying economic pressure, or even supplementing the defenses of local allies, the United States should be capable of containing the Iranian threat. Indeed, well-placed analysts expect a light military footprint to suffice to secure US interests in the region, which can be taken as a vote of confidence for offshore balancing.<sup>39</sup>

Serious problems would emerge only if that light footprint proved insufficient and the United States confronted the choice between a major war and Iranian hegemony. Why might the United States tolerate the latter outcome? Beyond the costs associated with fighting Iran, the strategic stakes are less clear-cut in the Middle East than in other core regions. The prevailing concern has long been that a Middle East hegemon would manipulate the oil market, not project power into the Western Hemisphere.<sup>40</sup> Although serious, the oil threat arguably implicates US economic interests more directly than its security.<sup>41</sup>

With the rise of China, the Middle East's strategic salience may soon increase again. China depends heavily on Middle Eastern oil imports and may not indefinitely tolerate the United States' ability to interrupt those imports.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, a hegemonic Iran could boost China's prospects

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38. Mearsheimer and Walt, "Offshore Balancing," 83; and Walt, *Good Intentions*, 270.

39. Joshua Rovner and Caitlin Talmadge, "Hegemony, Force Posture, and the Provision of Public Goods: The Once and Future Role of Outside Powers in Securing Persian Gulf Oil," *Security Studies* 23, no. 3 (August 2014): 575–80, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15325024.2014.935224>; Rovner, "After America," 161; Caitlin Talmadge, "The Future of U.S. Force Posture in the Gulf: The Case for a Residual Forward Presence," in *Crude Strategy*, 251–79; and F. Gregory Gause III, "Should We Stay or Should We Go? The United States and the Middle East," *Survival* 61, no. 5 (October–November 2019): 20.

40. Rovner, "After America," 142.

41. Charles L. Glaser and Rosemary A. Kelanic, "Should the United States Stay in the Gulf?," in *Crude Strategy*, 235.

42. Charles L. Glaser, "How Oil Influences U.S. National Security," *International Security* 38, no. 2 (Fall 2013): 133–37, [https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC\\_a\\_00137](https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_a_00137).

for regional hegemony if the two states sided together against the United States. Even the China factor cuts both ways, however, as balancing too aggressively against Iran could undermine the United States' ability to balance directly against China. For this reason, Evan Braden Montgomery recommends that the United States adopt a "punishment-via-blockade" strategy against Iran to conserve high-value military assets for a more demanding "denial" strategy against China.<sup>43</sup>

The United States certainly has an interest in preventing Iran from becoming a regional hegemon, but it could tolerate Iranian hegemony just the same. It would be unwise to assume that the offshore balancing logic will inevitably prevail.

## Conclusion

The United States is destined to be an ambivalent balancer, which is another reminder that restraint is embedded in the American grand strategic tradition. Along these lines, Colin Dueck has identified a preference for "limited liability" as a persistent feature of American strategic culture.<sup>44</sup> Limited liability has manifested itself in resistance to: entangling alliances, involvement in foreign wars, the creation of a large standing army, and constraints on America's freedom of action abroad. While not as powerful today as it was in the first half of the twentieth century, limited liability still influences American grand strategy, in part due to the stopping power of water. In Dueck's words, "America's relative distance and security from conventional military threats have frequently fed into a mindset that denies the need for costly, long-term commitments overseas."<sup>45</sup>

It has been easy to lose sight of restraint in the post-Cold War period, when the United States has been the only great power in the international system.<sup>46</sup> However durable hegemony has proven in the unipolar era, and however wedded the elite foreign policy establishment remains to it, offshore balancers should be careful not to underestimate restraint. Indeed, if the United States is as geopolitically blessed as it claims, then we cannot be confident that

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43. Evan Braden Montgomery, "Primacy and Punishment: US Grand Strategy, Maritime Power, and Military Options to Manage Decline," *Security Studies* 29, no. 4 (August-September 2020): 769–96, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2020.1811463>.

44. Colin Dueck, *Reluctant Crusaders: Power, Culture, and Change in American Grand Strategy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 26–30.

45. Dueck, *Reluctant Crusaders*, 29.

46. On unipolarity, see William C. Wohlforth, "The Stability of a Unipolar World," *International Security* 24, no. 1 (Summer 1999): 5–41; G. John Ikenberry, Michael Mastanduno, and William C. Wohlforth, *International Relations Theory and the Consequences of Unipolarity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011); and Nuno P. Monteiro, *Theory of Unipolar Politics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

it will actually balance when the need next arises. Containing a potential hegemon near the peak of its strength is a formidable undertaking, so it would not be surprising if the United States shied away from the high costs involved. When it matters most, offshore balancers may find that their arguments are too persuasive by half: If the United States is the most secure great power in history, then why balance? Why not trust the stopping power of water? To the extent that the United States derives grand strategic benefit from being free to roam, offshore balancers should be concerned that American ambivalence may ultimately prevail.

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# Integrating Army Capabilities into Deterrence: The Early Cold War

Robert F. Williams

**ABSTRACT:** The strategy of integrated deterrence is a repackaged version of Cold War strategies. The integration of assets to deter adversaries was part of both the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations' overarching strategies that forced the military services to change their operating concepts, capabilities, and doctrine simultaneously. The US Army is an example of how national strategy forces organizational changes. This article assesses how the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations forced institutional change while considering the significance of integrating deterrence. These examples will assist US military and policy practitioners with adapting their organizations to existing national defense strategies.

**Keywords:** integrated deterrence, strategy, Cold War, flexible response, New Look

The 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine seems to signal a failure of American strategy. With its new defense strategy predicated on integrating allies and partners across multiple domains, how could the United States look at the near-peer invasion of a partner as anything less? Ukraine, the United States, and NATO failed to signal costs significant enough to prevent a Russian invasion. At the same time, the Russia-Ukraine War represents a much broader success in that the war has not expanded beyond a limited regional conflict.<sup>1</sup> Much like limited regional wars during the Cold War in Korea, Vietnam, and Afghanistan, the deterrent threat of atomic weapons has thus far prevented a general nuclear war. Similarly, national strategy is forcing intense bureaucratic and institutional changes, of which the US Army is a crucial example.

Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III has identified integrated deterrence as critical to how the Biden-Harris administration defines the United States' role in the world. The Pentagon has identified China as the pacing threat to which the United States must respond and deter across all domains of potential conflict. Still, Russia is dangerous. According to General John E. Hyten, Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the goal is “to compete with a global competitor and at all levels of conflict”—all levels, and across

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1. Benjamin Jensen, “The Two Sides of Deterrence in Ukraine,” Center for Strategic and International Studies (website), March 30, 2022, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/two-sides-deterrence-ukraine>.



all domains: land, sea, air, cyber, space, and information.<sup>2</sup> As Austin said in 2021, “[I]ntegrated deterrence means using every military and non-military tool in our toolbox in lockstep with our allies and partners. Integrated deterrence is about using existing capabilities, . . . building new ones, and deploying them all in new and networked ways—all tailored to a region’s security landscape, and growing in partnership with our friends.”<sup>3</sup> Throughout the Cold War, American strategic formulations featured flexible capabilities tailored toward the geostrategic context where they were required.

For the historian, however, great-power competition is familiar. Indeed, Thucydides wrote about it long ago in his history of the Peloponnesian War, acknowledging that human nature meant similar great-power competition might happen again and that his work might be “a possession for all time.”<sup>4</sup> These ideas are timeless, and the Cold War offers a good, if imprecise, parallel. Political scientist John J. Mearsheimer has likewise written about how the West will look back fondly on the Cold War as a time of predictability. His thesis is flawed, however, in that it is predicated on the fundamentally untrue idea that the Cold War was a long peace. The Cold War was, in fact, deadlier than the preceding period, mostly for non-Europeans. It was an era of revolution, “wars of national liberation,” and proxy wars, not unlike what the world has experienced since. While Mearsheimer notes the stability and predictability brought by superpower competition, he overlooks the complexity and uncertainty accompanying limited wars throughout the periphery. No doubt, seeing everything through the good-versus-evil, capitalism-versus-Communism lens during the Cold War had deleterious effects on the handling of crises such as those between the West and Vietnam or the Soviet Union and Hungary—not to mention the constant struggle for Berlin. The Cold War’s history nonetheless provides “intellectual depth” as the West moves into its next phase of challenges.<sup>5</sup>

The ideas that undergird integrated deterrence have been critical components of American global strategy for over half a century. The Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations specifically sought to integrate atomic weapons and other capabilities across multiple domains with allies

2. Michael Clarke, “Back to the Future: Is ‘Integrated Deterrence’ the New ‘Flexible Response?’,” *National Interest* (website), October 23, 2021, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/back-future-integrated-deterrence-new-flexible-response-195274>.

3. Lloyd J. Austin III, “Transcript: Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III Participates in Fullerton Lecture Series in Singa,” U.S. Department of Defense (website), July 27, 2021, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/2711025/secretary-of-defense-lloyd-j-austin-iii-participates-in-fullerton-lecture-series/>.

4. Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, trans. J. M. Dent (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1910), 1.22.4.

5. John J. Mearsheimer, “Why We Will Soon Miss the Cold War,” *Atlantic* 266, no. 2 (August 1990): 35–50, <https://www.theatlantic.com/past/docs/politics/foreign/mearsh.htm>; Paul Thomas Chamberlin, *The Cold War’s Killing Fields: Rethinking the Long Peace* (New York: Harper Paperbacks, 2019); and Hal Brands, *The Twilight Struggle: What the Cold War Teaches Us about Great-Power Rivalry Today* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2022), 8–11.

and partners worldwide to deter the Soviet Union and China from starting World War III. Today, the United States finds itself in a similar strategic position, with China representing its major pacing threat and Russia a lesser one. Consequently, US leaders have once again taken up a national strategy of integrated deterrence. As in the past, a shift in national strategy means institutional change. During the Cold War, the transition to integrated deterrence caused an identity crisis for the US Army, forcing Army leaders to make organizational changes to carry out integrated deterrence. The two approaches taken by the Army during the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations thus provide key lessons for today's leaders on adapting to a national strategy of integrated deterrence.

### The New Look

In the aftermath of Hiroshima, strategist Bernard Brodie wrote that “the chief purpose of [the US] military establishment” had changed from that of victory to prevention.<sup>6</sup> As such, by August 1950, the State Department—not the Joint Chiefs of Staff—codified a strategy of containment and deterrence in National Security Council Memorandum-68.<sup>7</sup> For its part, the Army endeavored throughout the decade to understand and nest itself within that concept, impressing upon its officers the importance of merging US Army efforts with all elements of national power—diplomatic, informational, military, and economic. Major General Charles H. Bonesteel III concurred in a 1960 speech to the National War College, when he noted that the military's chief role was to reassure allies. He stated that forward-based troops, “a strategy of alliances to try to prevent the Free World from being nibbled to death by lesser wars,” and nuclear deterrence provided an umbrella of power for newly independent nations.<sup>8</sup>

When Dwight D. Eisenhower assumed the presidency, his administration articulated a strategy that avoided inclusive ground wars and placed a premium on atomic weapons. Known as the “New Look,” the idea was to reduce costs, through this strategy included a robust commitment to supporting allies and partner regimes rather than spending on US forces. His foreign policy

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6. Bernard Brodie, ed., *The Absolute Weapon: Atomic Power and World Order* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1946), 74.

7. James S. Lay Jr., *A Report to the National Security Council by the Executive Secretary (Lay)* (Washington, DC: April 4, 1950), document no. 85 in NSC 68 series in Foreign Relations of the United States: 1950, Foreign Economic Policy, vol. 1, 237–39, Office of the Historian (website), <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1950v01/d85>; and John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).

8. Charles H. Bonesteel, “The Role of the Military in Non-military Warfare” (speech, National War College, Washington, DC, July 21, 1960), box 1B, Charles H. Bonesteel II Papers, US Army Heritage and Education Center (USAHEC), Carlisle, PA; and Department of the Army (DA), *United States Army and National Security*, ROTC Manual 145-5, June 1958, 36.

also included covert operations such as the CIA-orchestrated coups in Iran and Guatemala.<sup>9</sup> Nonetheless, much of the focus was on atomic weapons, as Eisenhower believed in the power of technology—especially nuclear weapons—to deter Soviet and Chinese aggression, an overarching strategy that the administration conceptualized as a massive retaliation. Eisenhower wanted to save money by relying on atomic deterrence at the expense of a powerful army and believed that the deterrent value of nuclear weapons lay in their destructive power. If atomic war were the only option, the destructiveness of such a war should deter any rational actor from pursuing it.<sup>10</sup>

Many military leaders blamed foreign policy frustrations on massive retaliation. In 1954, Admiral Arthur W. Radford, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs during the first Eisenhower term, critiqued the policy to Congress, stating that “our planning does not subscribe to the thinking that the ability to deliver massive atomic retaliation is, by itself, adequate to meet all our security needs . . . I believe that this Nation could be a prisoner of its own military posture if it had no capability other than the one to deliver a massive atomic attack.”<sup>11</sup> The United States’ nuclear advantage from 1945–49 created a false belief in atomic weapons as an all-purpose deterrent capability. Limited aggression continued despite the atomic advantage—and the Army noticed. American nuclear superiority, in the Army’s view, had failed to check Communist aggression in the Berlin blockade and the outbreak of war on the Korean peninsula. The Army learned from these examples that nuclear weapons were an insufficient deterrent and that the country must have a sizable ground force to remain influential in world affairs.

While it is possible that the American nuclear advantage and fear of atomic retaliation helped quell the Second Taiwan Strait Crisis, aggressive acts by adversaries did not cease. Atomic weapons deterred a superpower war but prompted adversaries to create strategies to support wars of national liberation and to assist revolutionary efforts through aggressive insurgency worldwide. World leaders were calling the Americans’ bluff, wagering that the Americans would not use such powerful weapons to protect these peripheral areas at the risk of an all-out nuclear war with the Soviet Union. These acts of defiance occurred despite the administration’s success in handling

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9. Saki Dockrill, *Eisenhower’s New-Look National Security Policy, 1953–61* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996); and Richard A. Aliano, *American Defense Policy from Eisenhower to Kennedy: The Politics of Changing Military Requirements, 1957–1961* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1975).

10. Jack Raymond, “The Influence of Nuclear Weapons on National Strategy and Policy” (lecture, Naval Command Course and the School of Naval Command and staff, September 7, 1966), in *Deterrence: Selected Articles from the Naval War College Review*, ed. Robert C. Ayer, Newport paper no. 46 (Newport, RI: Naval War College Press, 2021), 11.

11. *Hearings before the United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations*, 83rd Cong. (1954) (statements of John Foster Dulles, secretary of state, and Arthur Radford, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff), 50.

the twin Taiwan Strait crises in 1954 and 1958, in addition to the Berlin crisis and American intervention in Lebanon that same year. Nations and non-state actors played to American weaknesses through these gray-zone activities, creating a significant deterrence challenge.

To continue deterring Communist influence in nonaligned states, the Eisenhower administration integrated nuclear deterrence with an exemplarist foreign policy, intended to demonstrate that democratic capitalism leads to better outcomes.<sup>12</sup> Eisenhower pursued this policy in part by prioritizing communication and psychological warfare to shape the international environment. According to historian Kenneth Osgood, Eisenhower's myriad programs were designed to convince the world that Soviet peace protestations were propaganda and their "hostility and intransigence . . . compelled the United States to adopt policies of strength." This form of psychological warfare, what might be termed "information operations" today, was accomplished through consistent messaging by the US Information Agency, the Atoms for Peace program, and the Open Skies treaty. The latter two demonstrated American willingness to cooperate, while the Atoms for Peace program promulgated the idea of the peaceful application of nuclear technology. A key example of the confluence of propaganda with the American example of capitalist dominance occurred during the so-called kitchen debates in Moscow in 1959, in which then Vice President Richard Nixon showcased the advanced state of the middle-class American single-family home, thanks to a capitalist economy.<sup>13</sup>

Another key component of the New Look was to reduce spending on major overseas commitments, which the Eisenhower administration accomplished by supporting allies. Rather than assign the Army these sorts of missions, anything short of general atomic war—particularly limited local wars—was the responsibility of local actors and allies. This idea manifested in the myriad military assistance advisory groups dedicated to training conventional armed forces and facilitating military aid in multiple countries worldwide. Today, officers even seek to revive the more focused military assistance advisory groups—especially for Taiwan.<sup>14</sup> These groups were an essential military arm of broader efforts to support allies during the 1950s.

12. George F. Kennan, *Realities of American Foreign Policy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1954), 84; and John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), 63. For more on the exemplarist foreign policy see H. W. Brands, *What America Owes the World: The Struggle for the Soul of Foreign Policy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), vii–viii.

13. See Kenneth Osgood, "Eisenhower's Dilemma: Talking Peace and Waging Cold War," in *Selling War in a Media Age: The Presidency and Public Opinion in the American Century*, ed. Kenneth Osgood and Andrew K. Frank (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2010), 140–69; and Kenneth Osgood, *Total Cold War: Eisenhower's Secret Propaganda Battle at Home and Abroad* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006).

14. Jake Yeager and William Gerichten, "Commentary: Reestablish the U.S. Military Assistance Advisory Group-Taiwan," War on the Rocks (website), January 7, 2022, <https://warontherocks.com/2022/01/reestablish-the-u-s-military-assistance-advisory-group-taiwan/>.

In a broader show of international support, Eisenhower emphasized the US Mutual Security Program throughout his presidency. The program was an existing foreign aid program organized under the Mutual Security Act of 1951 that had replaced the Marshall Plan. Eisenhower ensured that the act creating the program was renewed each year of his presidency. A bipartisan committee of civilian and military personnel, known as the Draper Committee for its president, William H. Draper Jr., analyzed the Mutual Security Program in 1958 and found that the threat of Communist dictatorships was greater than ever. The committee proposed that economic and military assistance was necessary to deter the threats “posed by the activities of international communism” and that, while costs would rise to \$1 billion per year by fiscal year 1961, funding allies was critical to staving off Communist expansion.<sup>15</sup> Overall, the program helped create a strong network of allies worldwide, but it was disbanded as the Kennedy administration reorganized American aid in 1961.<sup>16</sup>

The military assistance advisory groups and mutual security programs provided an essential means to integrate the United States with allied and partner-force militaries, financially and logistically. Mutual security, alliances, and covert operations were paramount to American retrenchment behind atomic weapons, leaving little role for the Army’s large conventional formations. The Eisenhower administration proposed a mop-up duty role for the Army in the event of general war: occupying nuclear wastelands or restoring order to the devastated United States.<sup>17</sup> Army leaders could not stomach this sort of role.

Eisenhower’s New Look and massive retaliation affected the operating concepts and capabilities of the services, notably the US Army, which found itself suddenly unpopular and without its traditional role. For its part, the Army continued to emphasize its role within a national security program that included “political, diplomatic, military, economic, psychological and cultural fields which contribute to the security of our people in the enjoyment of their basic rights as citizens of the United States and to the attainment of the national objectives.”<sup>18</sup> To that end, it sought to integrate its capabilities within the national emphasis on atomic munitions and its need to maintain a conventional force capable of deterring Communist aggression. The US Army began reorganizing itself as a dual-capable force ready for either eventuality.

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15. President’s Committee, *Composite Report of the President’s Committee to Study the United States Military Assistance Program* (Washington, DC: White House, March 1959), Draper Committee records, 1958–59, Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, KS.

16. Act for International Development of 1961, Public Law 87-195, 87th Cong. (1961), U.S. Statutes at Large 75 (1961), 424–65.

17. Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change* (New York: Doubleday, 1963), 446–47.

18. DA, *National Security*, 36.

If war broke out with the Soviet Union, the Army visualized a limited atomic land war against the Soviet Union that did not include atomic strikes on cities but tactical exchanges of nuclear weapons between land forces. It developed the Pentomic division to meet this requirement. This new division structure used fewer personnel than before, was completely air-transportable, and promised to be better suited for mobile warfare on an atomic battlefield. The Pentomic division was a five-sided infantry division consisting of five battle groups (formerly battalions) capable of fighting alone in all directions. Each battle group consisted of five rifle companies. The battle group was intended to be the perfect nexus of a unit that was capable of sustained combat, yet expendable in a nuclear blast.<sup>19</sup>

Dual capability required immense flexibility for both commanders and soldiers—however, it was never fully achieved, as units were never well prepared for anything other than nuclear war, even as the realization that the next war would be conventional increased. The Secretary of the Army agreed and believed the Army had achieved a dual-capable force ready for “all-out or limited war.” Naturally, many officers were displeased with the idea of a dual-capable force and found it increasingly difficult to train their formations for multiple eventualities. Nevertheless, General Maxwell Davenport Taylor, Chief of Staff of the Army from 1955–59, believed that developing a capability for limited nuclear warfare gave the Army a key role in deterrence and that atomic firepower would be key to future victory. To Taylor, the US Army needed strong conventional capabilities augmented by atomic firepower and mobile doctrine.<sup>20</sup>

As far-fetched as the Pentomic Army and limited atomic warfare sounded, it was an attempt by the Army to integrate itself into the existing deterrence framework. If the Soviets were to launch an invasion of Europe—if massive retaliation failed and they called Ike’s bluff—then the idea was that a nuclear-capable land army employing battlefield atomic munitions might provide another layer of deterrence or, if not, a way to defeat an adversary with numerical superiority. Tactical atomic warfare or not, the role of the Army in “non-military warfare,” as Major General Charles H. Bonesteel put it, was “to make manifest to the people that want to remain free that there

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19. Secretary of the Army, *Semiannual Report of the Secretary of the Army, FY 1958* (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 1959), 106. See also A. J. Bacevich, *The Pentomic Era: The US Army Between Korea and Vietnam* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1986), 5; and Brian McAllister Linn, *Elvis's Army: Cold War GIs and the Atomic Battlefield* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 87.

20. Maxwell D. Taylor, “Missions of the United States Army” (remarks, Armed Forces Staff College, Norfolk, VA, November 1956), box 5, Maxwell D. Taylor Papers, National Defense University, Washington, DC.



is a free world power backing them.” Military deterrence, then, was a crucial cog in the overall national deterrence framework.<sup>21</sup>

## Flexible Response

Although it was President John F. Kennedy’s stated strategy, flexible response was the product of ideas championed by successive Army Chiefs of Staff. They were fed up with their service’s role and foresaw the need for the country’s ground force to prepare for multiple missions and published post-career memoirs advocating this change. Taylor’s post-career book, *The Uncertain Trumpet*, defined flexible response as “a capability to react across the entire spectrum of possible challenge, for coping with anything from general atomic war to infiltrations and aggressions.”<sup>22</sup> Opponents of Eisenhower’s policies were convinced that the administration’s preoccupation with “general war and the long-range strike forces” overshadowed any built-in flexibility to integrate capabilities across multiple domains.<sup>23</sup> These opponents believed the country had to be prepared to deter or fight any war as necessary. While he defended the 1957 budget, Taylor also used his day in Congress to outline his vision for deterrence at the local and strategic levels and the need to provide adequate means to fight limited wars. His testimony was the first public acknowledgment of his thinking on what became flexible response.<sup>24</sup>

Flexible response fit Kennedy’s desire to calibrate the American response more precisely to the nature of the Soviet threat. Senator Kennedy asserted that the New Look had damaged the United States’ military preparedness, reducing its ability to influence the world. In a speech on the Senate floor on June 1960, he declared, “We must regain the ability to intervene effectively and swiftly in any limited war anywhere in the world—augmenting, modernizing, and providing increased mobility and versatility for the conventional forces and weapons of the Army and Marine Corps.” The missile gap served as political posturing for his burgeoning candidacy and ignored the wide integration of assets that occurred within Eisenhower’s foreign policy. Kennedy wrote, “our nuclear retaliatory power . . . cannot deter Communist aggression which is too limited to justify atomic war.” Almost as soon

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21. “The Role of the Military in Non-military Warfare,” box 1B, Charles H. Bonesteel II Papers, USAHEC.

22. Taylor, *The Uncertain Trumpet*, 6.

23. National Security Council Report, “NSC 5906/1, Basic National Security Policy,” August 5, 1959, *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS)*, 1958–1960, III, National Security Policy; and Arms Control and Disarmament, document 70; *Task Force Report: American Strategy and Strength* (July 19, 1960), box 17, Brucker Papers.

24. *Hearings before the Subcommittee on Department of Defense Appropriations, House of Representatives, Relative to the Department of the Army Budget for Fiscal year 1957* (statement of Maxwell D. Taylor, US Army Chief of Staff), Taylor Papers.



as he entered office, he increased the defense budget by 15 percent and doubled the Army's strategic reserve.<sup>25</sup>

Although President Kennedy campaigned against massive retaliation, he also argued forcefully in his campaign rhetoric that the United States had fallen behind the Soviet Union in atomic missile capability. This so-called missile gap proposed that the United States had fallen behind the Soviet Union regarding its capabilities to deliver nuclear payloads at intercontinental ranges. Originating from an Eisenhower study, Secretary of Defense Neil H. McElroy declared the Soviet Union would have three times as many intercontinental ballistic missiles as the United States by the early 1960s. For many, the successful launch of Sputnik in 1958 exemplified the idea of a gap. This idea drove Kennedy's campaign on national security and undergirded some of his policies regarding the procurement of new and better nuclear weapons. Whether true or not, the widespread belief that the United States was falling behind the Soviet Union in weapons technology fueled further development in that field. Kennedy believed that a policy based on deterrence through the threat of massive atomic retaliation created only two viable courses of action in the event of Communist aggression: all-out atomic war or retreat.<sup>26</sup> Nuclear threats remained valid, as evidenced by the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, but its de-escalation reinforced Kennedy's reliance on the menu of options that flexible response provided because it seemed an all-or-nothing approach à la massive retaliation might have led to general atomic war. The Cuban missile crisis exemplified mutual deterrence, or that, while atomic weapons might deter conflict between the two nuclear superpowers thanks to a "balance of terror," limited wars were still likely.<sup>27</sup>

Atomic capabilities remained critical to Kennedy-era deterrence, especially after he campaigned on ending the missile gap. The effect of the gap demonstrates the importance of political pressure on defense spending and the concomitant need for a feeling of security. Like today, Kennedy's conception of deterrence relied upon a strong atomic capability as the bedrock to build additional deterrence capabilities through conventional, covert, and diplomatic means. The Space Race served as a de facto cover for developing long-range missiles that simultaneously pushed research funding into ostensibly peaceful space exploration. The demonstration of the advanced missile technology that was needed to put astronauts on the moon signaled

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25. John F. Kennedy, *The Strategy of Peace* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 184; and James N. Giglio, *The Presidency of John F. Kennedy* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006), 48.

26. Kennedy, *Strategy of Peace*, 33–45.

27. Jack Raymond, "The Influence of Nuclear Weapons on National Strategy and Policy" (lecture to the Naval Command Course and the School of Naval Command and Staff, September 7, 1966), in *Deterrence*, 13.

the concomitant capability to put warheads all over the Eurasian landmass. Kennedy's administration continued to increase and upgrade American strategic nuclear capabilities alongside his conventional forces buildup. By mid-1964, the United States doubled the number of Minuteman missiles the previous administration had ordered and added 10 additional Polaris missile submarines. This development constituted a 150 percent increase in nuclear weapons.<sup>28</sup> In effect, the administration prioritized nonnuclear means while providing an ample stockpile of weapons to continue deterring the Soviet Union from pursuing general nuclear war.

Deterring wars of national liberation was another critical component of Kennedy-era deterrence. In response to Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev's January 1961 pledge to support Communist rebels worldwide, the Kennedy administration emphasized unconventional warfare while assisting indigenous forces to resist Communist expansion across the globe.<sup>29</sup> As such, the Kennedy administration poured resources into special forces trained to understand irregular warfare's political, social, and economic aspects.<sup>30</sup> Mandatory courses on counterinsurgency at the various war colleges and within the State Department, coupled with discussions of Mao Zedong, Vo Nguyen Giap, and Che Guevara's writings on guerrilla warfare, demonstrated the seriousness of the administration and the Army's efforts to focus on this sort of warfare. At the Army's Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, instructional hours concerning the nuclear battlefield dropped from a high of 600 in the late 1950s to 53 in 1961 and to 16 by 1966. Counterinsurgency instruction, meanwhile, ballooned from 35 to 222 between 1961–69.<sup>31</sup>

Kennedy took a personal interest in Special Forces training and equipment. He personally ensured the approval of the famous green beret as official headgear and even kept one on his desk. During his administration, the number of special forces personnel at Fort Bragg (now Fort Liberty), North Carolina, increased from fewer than 1,000 to more than 12,000, and their training school now bears his name. Kennedy also created an ad hoc Special Group (Counterinsurgency) in January 1962, led by Taylor, responsible for overseeing all counterinsurgency efforts worldwide. Despite some resistance and a desire to focus on the

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28. Giglio, *The Presidency of John F. Kennedy*, 47–49; and Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 217.

29. Conversations between President Kennedy and Chairman Khrushchev, June 3–4, 1961, *FRUS*, 1961–1963, V, Soviet Union, document 95.

30. Robert McNamara, *Report to the President, FY 1961 and 1962 Military Programs and Budgets*, annex A, attachment 2: Limited War Proposals, February 21, 1961, Papers of John F. Kennedy, Presidential Papers, President's Office Files, Departments and Agencies: Defense, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, Boston, MA.

31. Boyd L. Dastrup, *The US Army Command and General Staff College: A Centennial History* (Manhattan, KS: Sunflower University Press, 1982), 110–11.

Soviets in Europe, by the early 1960s, the US Army was increasingly concerned with the problems of counterinsurgency and unconventional warfare.<sup>32</sup> Stopping brush fires before they could become larger was vital to deterring general war. Initial US efforts in Southeast Asia during the Kennedy administration were primarily in an advisory role supporting South Vietnam as a partner.

Equally critical to the Kennedy administration's symmetrical approach to a more activist foreign policy were various programs that increased American soft power worldwide: the Food for Peace program, the US Agency for International Development, the Alliance for Progress in Latin America, and the Peace Corps. While Kennedy created the latter, the former were retooled and reemphasized Eisenhower-era programs.<sup>33</sup> These programs followed the new modernization theory that aimed to develop the Global South in America's image while integrating American capabilities across multiple domains to deter Communist influence in these regions.<sup>34</sup> More than just altruism, these efforts, to Kennedy, were additional weapons in the Cold War. When combined with US Army recalibration toward irregular warfare and a continued emphasis on atomic deterrence, these soft-power programs represented an essential example of a whole-of-government approach to integration.

## The Current Environment

The primary lesson from both Cold War strategies is that deterrence can be achieved in various forms. Neither strategy was completely successful at deterring all conflict, but they did contribute to preventing general nuclear war. They offer examples of how to integrate numerous capabilities to deter great powers in today's international environment. Finally, these examples demonstrate that the US Army must remain a living organism, prepared to adapt to various national strategies while remembering its overall purpose as an instrument of policy and not just a force built for large-scale combat operations.

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32. Alfred H. Paddock, *U.S. Army Special Warfare: Its Origins* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 146; Lawrence Freedman, *Strategy: A History* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2015), 188; Giglio, *The Presidency of John F. Kennedy*, 48–49; and Gregory A. Daddis, *Westmoreland's War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 15–37.

33. Agricultural Trade Development and Assistance Act of 1954, Public Law 83-480, 83rd Cong. (1954), U.S. Statutes at Large 68 (1954), 454–59; and Act for International Development of 1961, Public Law 87-195, 87th Cong. (1961), U.S. Statutes at Large 75 (1961), 424–65.

34. Walt W. Rostow, draft, "Basic National Security Policy," March 26, 1962, 110–11; and Michael Latham, *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and "Nation Building" in the Kennedy Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

As throughout the Cold War, atomic weapons remain a critical component of integrated deterrence. Yet, like in the past, today's challenges from China and, to a lesser degree, Russia require conventional forces to form the core component. Leaders must integrate these conventional forces into not only American nuclear deterrence capabilities but also into NATO and other allied forces. Economic sanctions on Russia and financial and logistical support to Ukraine have proven incredibly important in stemming the Russian "special operation." Further integration with EU, NATO, and US equipment will be critical for the Ukrainians to expel their Russian invaders. Despite failing to prevent the Russian invasion, the credible threat of an overwhelming NATO response—conventional or nuclear—has contained the war. Like integrated deterrence, flexible response promised to deter because the United States had capabilities prepared and calibrated for a spectrum of possible adversary actions. Flexible response relied on a "universal security perimeter" that was a veritable line in the sand but promised to deter any action—from nuclear attack to subversion and guerrilla warfare.

During the Cold War, the Army felt lost in the competing demands of preparing for myriad forms of conflict. Trying to prepare for atomic warfare with the near-peer and irregular warfare elsewhere proved taxing and gave the institution little focus. A lack of focus might also be contributing to a curriculum shift at the United States' senior service colleges today. Students learn less about irregular warfare and more about deterrence and geopolitical competition. According to Professor John A. Nagl, US Army War College students spend just one out of 200 class days dedicated to irregular warfare.<sup>35</sup> Likewise, these different concepts create demands on different elements of the Department of Defense in ways that make each service feel it must justify itself. Justification is essential for the United States in the Pacific as the various services are recalculating their capabilities for a potential war with China. As Secretaries Antony J. Blinken and Austin have said, American allies and partners are "force multipliers," critical to achieving US foreign policy goals, and integral to deterring China, Iran, North Korea, and Russia. Thinking of allies as partners in deterrence is why the Departments of State and Defense have made updating and renewing partnerships a vital part of American foreign policy going forward.<sup>36</sup>

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35. John A. Nagl in "Hindsight and Foresight: A Twenty-year Retrospective on Irregular Warfare and Counterinsurgency," in *The Irregular Warfare Podcast*, Julia McClenon and Louis Tobergte, August 11, 2023, presented and produced by the Modern War Institute at West Point, podcast, MP3 audio, 18:09, <https://mwi.westpoint.edu/irregular-warfare-podcast-a-twenty-year-retrospective-on-irregular-warfare-and-counterinsurgency/>.

36. Antony J. Blinken and Lloyd J. Austin III, "Opinion: America's Partnerships are 'Force Multipliers' in the World," *Washington Post* (website), March 14, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/03/14/americas-partnerships-are-force-multipliers-world/>.

Cyber, irregular warfare, and gray-zone activities should constitute a focus akin to Kennedy-era counterinsurgency. Like deterrence, successful irregular warfare sometimes means undermining an adversary without having to fight at all. As other scholars have noted, Russian misinformation operations and the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative offer essential examples of irregular warfare in the twenty-first century. In today's world of asymmetric power, adversaries are even more likely to rely on irregular warfare to avoid direct confrontations.<sup>37</sup>

Neither the New Look nor flexible response was wholly successful in deterring all conflicts. Where they were successful—in integrating national power and forcing the US Army to redefine itself and reconfigure its force—the early Cold War offers important lessons for today's Joint force. The United States, NATO, and the rest of their partners and allies must also continue to frame multiple options across the spectrum of responses and well outside those that military hard power can provide. From the economic sanctions imposed on Russia to a more robust Peace Corps response to the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative, the United States and NATO must wield hard and soft power together. Continuing to use all elements of national power and those of Allies and partners is vital. The United States, NATO, and their partners must transmit the values of free and open democratic societies worldwide to be beacons of peace and prosperity backed up with credible military capabilities. Ideas are essential for maintaining a free and open liberal international order that is predicated on deterring war with China and escalation of the war in Ukraine.

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37. Elena Pokalova, "Teaching Irregular Warfare in the Era of Strategic Competition," Modern War Institute (website), November 7, 2022, <https://mwi.usma.edu/teaching-irregular-warfare-in-the-era-of-strategic-competition/>.

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## Competing for Global Influence: How Best to Assess Potential Strategic Partners

Brian G. Forester

**ABSTRACT:** To compete effectively for global influence, US Army and defense planners should focus on economic globalization in addition to security interests when assessing potential foreign military partners. The results of a quantitative analysis of US-led exercise participants between 1990 and 2016 demonstrate the variety of interests, including economic, that underlie a partner's decision to train or not with US forces. Since the US Army bills itself as the “partner of choice,” this piece will interest military and policy practitioners involved in strategically assessing potential international military partners.

**Keywords:** economic interests, globalization, strategic competition, multinational exercises, bilateral exercises

Strategic competition with China is about global influence. A crucial component of that influence depends on the United States' ability to attract and maintain a robust network of allies and partners. The *2022 National Defense Strategy's* central tenets of integrated deterrence and campaigning emphasize the criticality of global partners.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, the US Army recognizes the importance of military partnerships and strives to be a “partner of choice” in the global narrative competition, which involves reputation-building efforts.<sup>2</sup> Yet, the US military has arguably given limited consideration to partners' interests in the recent past, undermining security force assistance missions in places like Iraq and Afghanistan. In the competition for global influence, the US military cannot afford to overlook partner interests; otherwise, prospective partners could choose to align more closely with China instead.

The Army employs multinational exercises as a primary tool to attract new partners and strengthen existing partnerships in support of strategic competition. Current scholarship highlights post–Cold War security and political change as the key driver of multinational military exercise activity. Major powers began using multinational exercises with the goal

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1. Lloyd J. Austin III, *2022 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense [DoD], 2022), <https://media.defense.gov/2022/Oct/27/2003103845/-1/-1/1/2022-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY-NPR-MDR.PDF>.

2. James C. McConville, *The Army in Military Competition*, Chief of Staff Paper no. 2 (Arlington, VA: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 2021), 8–9, <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/AD1143196.pdf>.



of favorably shaping the security environment.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the abrupt end to the Cold War rivalry between politically opposed superpowers incentivized smaller countries to hedge by forming military ties with multiple stronger countries while also gaining experience in multilateral military and peacekeeping operations.<sup>4</sup> Multinational military exercises served such purposes. Current research neglects to consider another systemic change that accelerated after the Cold War: economic globalization, or the extent of non-domestic participation in an economy, which represents openness or exposure to the global economy.<sup>5</sup>

To compete effectively for influence, US Army and defense planners should consider economic globalization when developing strategic assessments of potential foreign military partners. Empirical evidence demonstrates that countries are more likely to participate in US-led military exercises as their exposure to the global economy increases. While US military doctrine identifies broadly defined economic considerations as relevant to the strategic assessment underpinning US military exercises, planners are left to sift through a dizzying array of sectoral, domestic, regional, or international economic variables.<sup>6</sup> The findings presented here suggest a narrower focus on economic globalization would best predict US-led exercise participation. Economically globalized countries are more likely to participate in exercises led by the United States, regardless of security and political variables, such as alliance ties and regime type. Quantitative results show that economic globalization is as powerful as shared democracy in predicting US-led military exercise participation.

## The Changing Face of US Military Exercise Partners

If combined military exercises represent some degree of interest alignment, then we might expect most US military exercise partners to be formal allies. Alliance portfolios, after all, often indicate shared interests between states.<sup>7</sup> The perception of an unreliable alliance can invite

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3. Kyle J. Wolfley, *Military Statecraft and the Rise of Shaping in World Politics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2021), 5–9.

4. Jordan Bernhardt, “The Causes and Consequences of Joint Military Exercises” (PhD diss., Stanford University, 2020), 34–77, <https://stacks.stanford.edu/file/druid:kb768wv0832/BernhardtJordanDissertation-augmented.pdf>.

5. Claudius Gräbner et al., “Understanding Economic Openness: A Review of Existing Measures,” *Review of World Economics* 157, no. 1 (February 2021): 87–120, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10290-020-00391-1>.

6. Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), *Joint Planning*, Joint Publication 5-0 (Washington, DC: JCS, 2020), II-9, IV-9, [https://irp.fas.org/doddir/dod/jp5\\_0.pdf](https://irp.fas.org/doddir/dod/jp5_0.pdf).

7. Douglas Gibler and Toby J. Rider, “Prior Commitments: Compatible Interests versus Capabilities in Alliance Behavior,” *International Interactions* 30, no. 4 (2004): 325, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03050620490883985>.

aggression, thus, allies can signal capabilities and resolve through exercises.<sup>8</sup> Combined training activities also improve the interoperability of allied military forces, enhancing their collective defense capabilities and thereby contributing to deterrence. This pattern was evident during the Cold War as the United States and its NATO allies regularly held large-scale maneuvers.<sup>9</sup> These NATO exercises increased in scope and frequency following Russia's 2014 aggression toward Ukraine and have accelerated since Russia's 2022 invasion.<sup>10</sup> Bilateral US alliances with states such as South Korea also generate military exercises.<sup>11</sup> Some US alliances produce exercise activity.

We might also expect most US exercise partners to be democracies, given that democracies form alliances with each other more often than with other regime types.<sup>12</sup> Nonetheless, shared democracy may be independently associated with US-led exercise participation. Democracies are generally more cooperative, less belligerent, and more likely to fight in multilateral coalitions than autocracies, which suggests they would have greater interest in combined military training with the United States than with nondemocratic nations.<sup>13</sup>

Yet, figure 1 suggests a less robust relationship between alliances, shared democracy, and US-led exercise participation than conventional wisdom and existing scholarship might expect. The plot reflects the percentage of countries exercising with the United States from 1990–2016 and yields two interesting trends. First, the share of US-led exercise participants that are treaty allies has dropped dramatically from roughly 75 percent in 1990 to 30 percent in 2016. The vast majority of US-led exercise participants are not allies, not because the United States has lost allies, but because the number of non-allied countries with which the United States conducts exercises has increased substantially over this period. Second, the share of US exercise partners considered autocracies steadily increased from nearly

8. Alastair Smith, "Alliance Formation and War," *International Studies Quarterly* 39, no. 4 (December 1995): 419, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2600800>.

9. Robert D. Blackwill and Jeffrey W. Legro, "Constraining Ground Force Exercises of NATO and the Warsaw Pact," *International Security* 14, no. 3 (Winter 1989–90): 72–73, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2538932>.

10. Ralph Clem, "Military Exercises as Geopolitical Messaging in the NATO-Russia Dynamic: Reassurance, Deterrence, and (In)Stability," *Texas National Security Review* 2, no. 1 (November 2018): 134–38, <http://dx.doi.org/10.26153/tsw/865>.

11. Jordan Bernhardt and Lauren Sukin, "Joint Military Exercises and Crisis Dynamics on the Korean Peninsula," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 65, no. 5 (May 2021): 855–88, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002720972180>.

12. Randolph M. Siverson, and Juliann Emmons, "Birds of a Feather: Democratic Political Systems and Alliance Choices in the Twentieth Century," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 35, no. 2 (June 1991): 285–306, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/174148>.

13. David A. Lake, "Powerful Pacifists: Democratic States and War," *American Political Science Review* 86, no. 1 (March 1992): 24–37, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1964013>; and Benjamin A. T. Graham, Erik Gartzke, and Christopher J. Fariss, "The Bar Fight Theory of International Conflict: Regime Type, Coalition Size, and Victory," *Political Science Research and Methods* 5, no. 4 (October 2017): 613–39, <https://doi.org/10.1017/psrm.2015.52>.

25 percent in 1990 to over 40 percent in 2016. Notably, since 2006, more US exercise partners have been autocracies than allies.

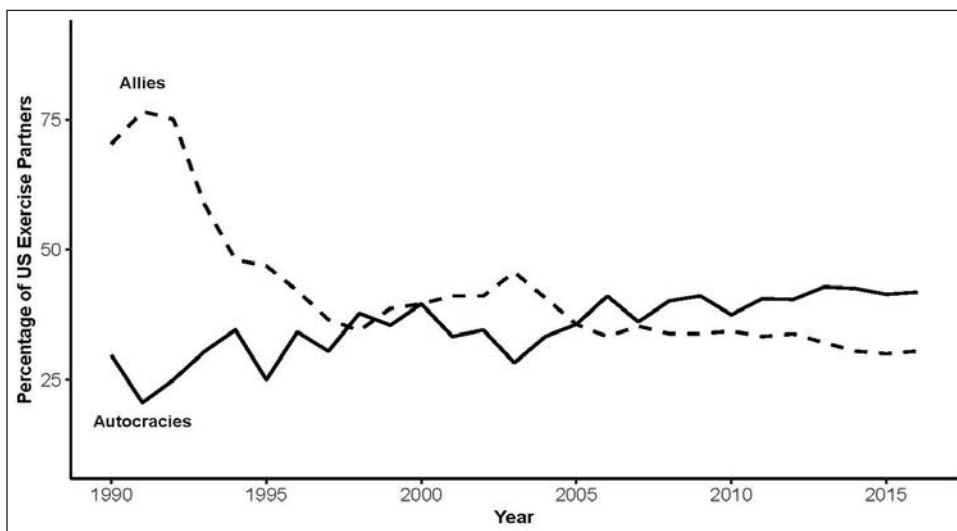


Figure 1. Percentage of US exercise partners between 1990–2016 shown as allies and autocracies

Source: Jordan Bernhardt, “Joint Military Exercises Dataset,” Harvard Dataverse (website), V1, November 24, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/HXQFHU>; Brett Leeds et al., “Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions, 1815–1944,” *International Interactions* 28, no. 3 (2002): 237–60; and Michael Coppedge et al., “V-Dem Country-Year Dataset v12,” Varieties of Democracy Project (website), 2022, <https://www.v-dem.net/data/the-v-dem-dataset/country-year-v-dem-core/>.

The puzzling trends in figure 1 suggest alliances and shared democracy alone are insufficient explanations of US-led military exercise participation. Fewer US exercise partners are treaty allies, indicating other incentives shape the choices of potential partners. Similarly, autocratic countries increasingly participate in exercises with US military forces, which is perplexing, given the conventional view of such countries as more belligerent and less cooperative. Security and political variables emphasized in existing scholarship on multinational military exercises are thus necessary but insufficient to understand participation in US-led military exercises. Instead, an empirical analysis of economic globalization and US-led military exercise participants is necessary to illustrate globalization’s relevance to Army and defense planners engaged in strategically assessing potential military partners.

## Economic Globalization and Military Exercises

Scholars and practitioners generally accept that a nation’s economic interests influence its foreign policy behavior. The relationship between economic activity and war has received greater attention since the publication of the 1933

edition of Norman Angell's *The Great Illusion*.<sup>14</sup> Angell's thesis—that economic integration makes waging war too costly for states—spawned a generation of scholastic debate and analysis of the mechanisms by which economic interests shape the conflict behavior of states. A general consensus emerged that, because of the significant economic disruptions wrought by war, economic development and trade decrease a state's interest in aggression or conquest, though this relationship may be conditional on the underlying structure of that state's economy.<sup>15</sup> The extent of a state's exposure to the global economy is thus a key indicator of the interests shaping its foreign policy behavior. If globalized countries are, on average, less conflict-prone than countries with closed economies, then globalization may also influence countries' cooperative behavior.

The logic connecting exposure to the global economy and participation in US-led exercises rests on an assertion that economic globalization closely links a state's security with the stability of the external environment. War, natural disasters, humanitarian crises, and pandemics can have particularly grave economic repercussions for a highly globalized state. Aware of their vulnerabilities, such countries tend to intertwine their foreign policy with economic policy as a preventative measure. In short, foreign policy for highly globalized economies is economic policy.

Participation in US-led military exercises can promote the stability essential to globalized countries' economic security. Deterrence through military exercises incentivizes globalized countries to participate and provides a venue for smaller countries to advance their military capability more cheaply than they could through unilateral training. Lower costs are especially beneficial for highly globalized countries given their interest in developing the expensive power projection capabilities necessary to secure their access to sea, air, and land trading routes.<sup>16</sup> Finally, some US-led exercises involve collective training on humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. The susceptibility of globalized economies to crisis-driven disruptions—especially in natural disaster-prone regions like the Indo-Pacific—incentivizes the development of a response capability in conjunction with the United States.

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14. See Norman Angell, *The Great Illusion: A Study of the Relation of Military Power in Nations to Their Economic and Social Advantage*, 2nd ed. (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1933).

15. Richard N. Rosecrance, *Rise of the Trading State: Commerce and Conquest in the Modern World* (New York: Basic Books, 1986); and Jonathan N. Markowitz et al., "Productive Pacifists: The Rise of Production-Oriented States and Decline of Profit-Motivated Conquest," *International Studies Quarterly* 64, no. 3 (September 2020): 558–72, <https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqaa045>.

16. Jonathan Markowitz, Christopher Fariss, and R. Blake McMahon, "Producing Goods and Projecting Power: How What You Make Influences What You Take," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 63, no. 6 (2019): 1373–78, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002718789735>.

Economic globalization may have amplified importance on US-led exercise participation among politically illiberal governments not formally allied with the United States. Two features of globalized autocracies lead to this amplification. The first is that autocracies may participate in US-led exercises because forming alliance ties with the United States is not possible. Alliance ties represent the sort of public signal of support that the United States may not be willing to send to autocratic governments. Domestic political constraints prevent democratic major powers such as the United States from forming alliance commitments with such governments.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, most US treaty allies are democracies, with the notable exception of several South and Central American countries that are signatories to the Rio Treaty, which provides collective defense for an armed attack against an American state.<sup>18</sup>

The second reason the relationship between economic globalization and US-led exercise participation may be amplified among autocracies is that globalized autocracies seek to reduce the perceived risk of foreign investment. Democracies attract more foreign direct investment than non-democracies because investors perceive the former as a safer financial bet.<sup>19</sup> The inherent disadvantage in attracting foreign direct investment due to their political institutions suggests globalized autocracies may pursue alternative means to promote security and signal stability to would-be investors. Participation in US-led exercises may contribute to such an interest by publicly signaling alignment with the United States, the world's leading democracy.

Economic interests, and exposure to the global economy in particular, interact with security and political interests to help clarify the trends depicted in figure 1. Increasingly globalized autocracies are more likely to participate in US-led exercises since formal alliance ties with the United States are unavailable. This expectation implies that exercise participation is conditional on the interaction of a state's regime type and its exposure to the global economy. Economic globalization has a stronger impact on autocratic rather than democratic regime types, even if the latter are, on average, more likely to participate in US-led exercises. If participation

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17. Roseanne W. McManus and Keren Yarhi-Milo, "The Logic of 'Offstage' Signaling: Domestic Politics, Regime Type, and Major Power-Protégé Relations," *International Organization* 71, no. 4 (Fall 2017): 707–10.

18. Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance and Final Act of the Inter-American Conference for the Maintenance of Continental Peace and Security, American Republics, Sept. 2, 1947, 324 UNTC 21, 77, <https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%2021/volume-21-I-324-English.pdf>.

19. Nathan M. Jensen, "Democratic Governance and Multinational Corporations: Political Regimes and Inflows of Foreign Direct Investment," *International Organization* 57, no. 3 (Summer 2003): 587–616, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3594838>.

in US-led exercises is conditional on the interaction of economic globalization and regime type, then systematic analyses of observed data should furnish corroborating evidence. Specifically, it should be evident that the relationship between economic globalization and US-led exercise participation is amplified among autocracies.

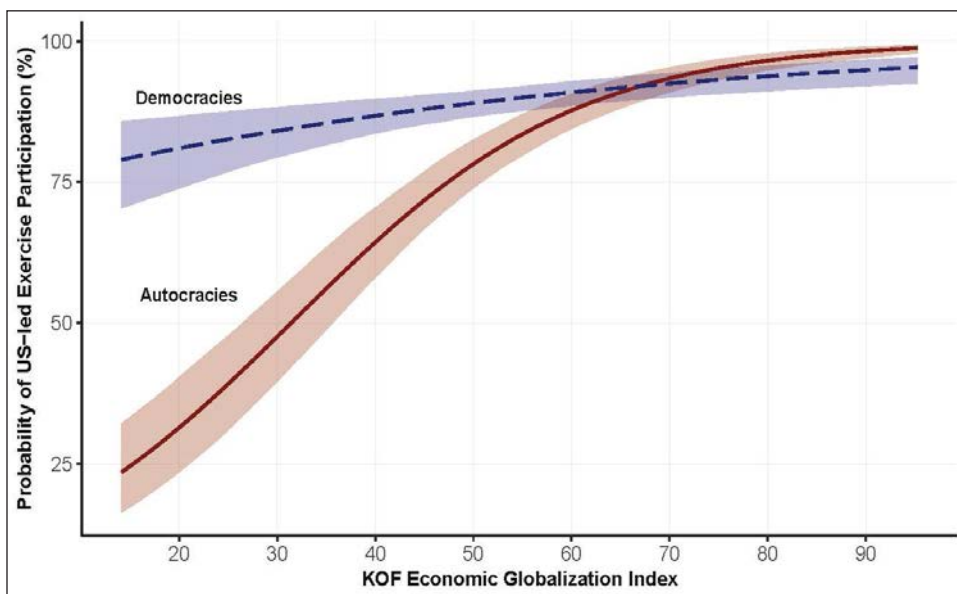


Figure 2. Predicted probability of participating in US-led military exercises as a function of economic globalization. The dark lines represent point estimates; shaded areas represent 95 percent confidence bands.

Source: Savina Gygli et al., “The KOF Globalisation Index – Revisited,” *Review of International Organizations* 14, no. 3 (September 2019): 543–74, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11558-019-09344-2>.

Illustrating the relationship between globalization and US-led exercises, figure 2 depicts the predicted probability of participating in a US-led exercise as a function of economic globalization. The predicted probabilities are generated from a statistical model fit to observed US military exercise participation data for 165 countries between 1990–2016. Fit represents the computational process by which parameters are algorithmically adjusted to reflect the observed relationship between exercise participation and the predictor of interest, economic globalization. The model is fit using logistic regression, which uses a maximum likelihood estimation to compute the predicted probability of exercise participation given a set of explanatory variables.<sup>20</sup> The inclusion of polynomial time count variables accounts for serial

20. Michael D. Ward and John S. Ahlquist, *Maximum Likelihood for Social Science: Strategies for Analysis* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 50–54.



autocorrelation.<sup>21</sup> The exercise data come from a new dataset of multinational military exercises.<sup>22</sup> The economic globalization index is a widely used indicator of economic openness capturing a country's trade and financial flows. The index is constructed on a 100-point scale, with higher values reflecting greater exposure to the global economy.<sup>23</sup> The model also includes a variety of country-level control variables such as alliance ties, wealth, military power, and ongoing rivalries.

The model includes an interaction term between the economic globalization index and a binary indicator of democracy, which enables the disaggregation of the resulting predicted probabilities by regime type. As the figure indicates, democracies are, on average, more likely to participate in US-led exercises than autocracies. At lower levels of economic globalization, democracies exhibit a much higher probability of participating in US-led exercises than autocracies. The probability that autocratic nations will participate in US-led exercises jumps by approximately 50 percent between globalization levels of 0 and 55 and then becomes virtually indistinguishable from the probability of democratic participation above 55. Above 80, the model predicts autocracies are actually more likely to participate in US-led exercises, though this result should be interpreted with caution given the closeness of the shaded confidence bands. The most appropriate interpretation is that globalized autocracies are at least as likely to conduct exercises with the United States as democracies.

The results in figure 2 confirm the expectation of an amplified relationship between economic globalization and autocratic regime type. Although autocracies are, on average, less likely to train with the United States, the results above suggest that economic globalization mediates the negative relationship between autocracy and exercise participation. At higher levels of economic globalization, democracies and autocracies are roughly equivalent in their probability of US-led exercise participation. This relationship is not deterministic but probabilistic. Drawing a causal link between economic globalization and exercise participation is premature given the evidence presented. Nevertheless, a probabilistic relationship may be useful for analysis of potential defense partners in the strategic competition for global influence.

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21. David B. Carter and Curtis S. Signorino, "Back to the Future: Modeling Time Dependence in Binary Data," *Political Analysis* 18, no. 3 (Summer 2010): 271–92, <https://doi.org/10.1093/pan/mpq013>.

22. Bernhardt, "Joint Military Exercises Dataset."

23. Axel Dreher, "Does Globalization Affect Growth? Evidence from a New Index of Globalization," *Applied Economics* 38, no. 10 (2006): 1091–1110, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00036840500392078>.



## Singapore: An Illustrative Example

Singapore illustrates the relationship between economic globalization and participation in US-led exercises. Singapore is highly globalized, with trade accounting for more than three times its annual GDP.<sup>24</sup> As a highly globalized minor power, Singapore centers its foreign policy on economics. Singapore “securitizes” supply chains, market access, finance credit, and techno-industrial access to ensure its continued survival.<sup>25</sup> Additionally, Singapore is politically illiberal and characterized as “partly free” by Freedom House, a research institute devoted to the study of political freedom globally, thus making it an appropriate illustration of the amplified relationship between economic globalization and US-led exercise participation among autocracies.<sup>26</sup> Finally, Singapore annually participates in US-led exercises, including the Army’s oldest bilateral training opportunity, Exercise Tiger Balm.<sup>27</sup>

Statements by Singapore’s leaders reflect a recognition that participation in US-led exercises is a pathway to promote the stability so essential to its economic security. During a 2022 visit to the United States, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong linked the US military presence with a stable regional and international environment. He noted, “we share the belief that the US military presence in the Asia-Pacific is critical to the region’s continued peace, stability, and prosperity.”<sup>28</sup> In these remarks, the prime minister implicitly recognizes US-led military exercises as a stabilizing force in the region that contributes to economic well-being.

Singapore’s defense policy recognizes that participation in US-led exercises develops military capability important for regional stability and economic security. Joint training with the United States is a vital component of Singapore’s military capability development, recognizing that such training speeds the assimilation of technology into military

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24. Michael Intal Magcamit, “Trading in Paranoia: Exploring Singapore’s Security-Trade Linkages in the Twenty-First Century,” *Asian Journal of Political Science* 23, no. 2 (2015): 187, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02185377.2014.999248>.

25. Christopher M. Dent, “Singapore’s Foreign Economic Policy: The Pursuit of Economic Security,” *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 23, no. 1 (April 2001): 5–8, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25798525>.

26. Freedom House, “Singapore,” accessed August 31, 2023, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/singapore>.

27. Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, “Fact Sheet: U.S. Security Cooperation with Singapore,” Department of State (website), April 12, 2023, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-security-cooperation-with-singapore/>.

28. Lloyd J. Austin III, “Transcript: Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III Remarks at a Meeting Welcoming Singapore’s Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong to the Pentagon,” DoD (website), March 28, 2022, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/2980686/secretary-of-defense-lloyd-j-austin-iii-remarks-at-a-meeting-welcoming-singapore/>.

organizations.<sup>29</sup> The Singapore Armed Forces also seek to develop military capabilities for unconventional threats to peace and stability. In 2005, for instance, Singapore signed a defense cooperation agreement with the United States “expanding the scope of current cooperation in areas such as counter-terrorism, counterproliferation, joint military exercises and training” and “developing military expertise and defence capabilities to deal with the wider range of non-conventional threats facing armed forces today.”<sup>30</sup> Singapore thus illustrates how economic globalization generates security interests that can be fulfilled through participation in US-led military exercises.

In sum, the Singapore case combined with the quantitative results of this study point to the potency of economic globalization in the foreign policy behavior of potential US exercise partners. If the US military is to compete effectively for influence, it must have greater awareness of the economic interests of its potential defense partners.

### Implications for Defense Planning

The quantitative data and case study presented here have important implications for US Army and defense planners engaged in the strategic assessment of potential defense partners. Broadly, the preceding discussion emphasizes the need to consider the interests underlying a partner’s choice to exercise with US forces, which is vital in the competition for influence and especially salient in regions such as South Asia, the Middle East, and Africa, where many countries “prefer a less-than-clear alignment with the United States or China.”<sup>31</sup> Effective engagement with such countries requires flexible approaches that recognize the variety of preferences—including economic—underpinning their foreign policy behavior. Historically, the US military has given partners’ interests limited consideration, either assuming those interests are in alignment or will eventually converge with ours. This flawed assumption has significantly undermined security force assistance missions, most notably in Iraq and Afghanistan. Unlike in those missions, though, the United States is now competing with China for global influence, meaning the partners could more

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29. John Battilega et al., “Singapore,” in *Transformations in Global Defense Markets and Industries: Implications for the Future of Warfare*, Intelligence Resource Program, Federation of American Scientists (website), June 2001, 4ff, <https://irp.fas.org/nic/battilega/index.htm>.

30. Ministry of Defence, “News Release: Factsheet – The Strategic Framework Agreement,” National Archives of Singapore (website), July 12, 2005, 2, [https://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/data/pdfdoc/MINDEF\\_20050712001/MINDEF\\_20050712003.pdf](https://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/data/pdfdoc/MINDEF_20050712001/MINDEF_20050712003.pdf).

31. Madiha Afzal, Bruce Riedel, and Natan Sachs, *The United States, China, and the ‘New Non-Aligned’ Countries*, Global China Project Policy Brief (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, February 2023), [https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/FP\\_20230213\\_china\\_regional\\_strategy.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/FP_20230213_china_regional_strategy.pdf).

closely align with China instead. Winning this competition will require US defense planners to think carefully about the underlying interests of potential partners and to search for creative ways to align our interests where possible.

The economic globalization index used in the analysis above is a publicly available and widely used measure of economic openness that US Army and defense planners could use as an indicator. Planners engaged in the strategic assessment of a potential military partner would benefit from a narrow focus on the global exposure of that country's economy to predict the likelihood of prospective partners' participation in US-led military exercises. Additionally, the amplified relationship between economic globalization and US-led exercise participation among autocracies suggests opportunities may exist with the military instrument of power that may not exist with the diplomatic instrument. Military exercises may be a foreign policy tool particularly well-suited for engagement with globalized autocracies if formal alliance ties are unfeasible. Strategically capitalizing in this way, however, requires close interagency coordination between defense planners and State Department officials, deconstruction of bureaucratic silos, and enhanced interagency cooperation.

For the Army, senior leaders must recognize that the interests important to a potential defense partner may undermine the Army's organizational interest. Exercise readiness objectives may have to be sacrificed for the sake of the partner's interests. Highly globalized partners, for instance, may desire to focus training on maritime activities or disaster response capabilities instead of large-scale ground combat operations. Army leaders will need to tailor expectations and clearly communicate to participating units the larger strategic objectives associated with an exercise. Training on unit mission essential tasks may not be desired by the partner nor feasible with available resources. Unnatural as it may be, organizational interests must be kept in check if the Army is to do its part in the whole-of-government approach to strategic competition effectively. Otherwise, potential partners may increasingly turn toward China for defense cooperation.

## Conclusion

Competing for strategic influence requires that the Army and defense planners consider how economic globalization shapes the preferences of potential defense partners. The analysis presented here confirms that economic globalization is an important predictor of participation in US-led

military exercises. Army and defense planners conducting strategic assessment should focus on economic globalization as a relevant indicator of a potential partner's likelihood of exercise participation. Moreover, the analysis shows how economic globalization interacts with political regime type to condition a prospective partner's choice to participate in unexpected ways. Globalized autocracies are among the most likely participants in US-led exercises—as likely to cooperate militarily with the United States as democracies.

The current era of strategic competition with China implies that the United States is no longer the *de facto* military partner. American military forces must become the more attractive option to prospective partners by considering their needs and wants, including their level of global economic engagement. If the Army is to be the true “partner of choice,” then it must understand the interests underlying the choice of a partner. Failing to do so will undermine US strategic competition for global influence.

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## Reflexive Control: Influencing Strategic Behavior

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**ABSTRACT:** Reflexive control aims to change the other's perceptions about their utility sets. It contains underlying elements that could help give structure to analyses of strategic behavior by using a nonlinear approach that aims to improve the quality of assessments. This article is an exploratory literature study into the interpretations of the concept of reflexive control, how elements of reflexive control link to the more widely accepted body of knowledge, and how these elements could be valuable additions to the current work on the analysis of strategic behavior.

**Keywords:** reflexive control, strategic behavior, strategic analysis, nonlinearity, complex adaptive system

Reflexive control's conceptual development began in 1967 with Soviet mathematical psychologist Vladimir Lefebvre. Western literature defines reflexive control as "a means of conveying to a partner or an opponent specially prepared information to incline him to voluntarily make the predetermined decision desired by the initiator of the action."<sup>1</sup> In the years since it was first developed, reflexive control has gained a somewhat mythical status in international relations and military science, with many Western publications on the topic often focusing on whether the Russian government uses reflexive control. There have also been various descriptions and commentaries on the theory within international-relations and security studies over the years. Since the 1980s, contributions in the West have for example been made by Diane Chotikul, Clifford Reid, Timothy Thomas, Keir Giles, James Sherr, and Anthony Seaboyer.<sup>2</sup> Of particular note for those interested

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1. Vladimir A. Lefebvre, *The Algebra of Conscience: A Comparative Analysis of Western and Soviet Ethical Systems*, Theory and Decision Library, vol. 26 (Dordrecht, NL: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1982); and Timothy L. Thomas, "Russia's Reflexive Control Theory and the Military," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 17, no. 2 (2004): 237–56, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/13518040490450529>.

2. For example, see Diane Chotikul, *The Soviet Theory of Reflexive Control in Historical and Psychocultural Perspective: A Preliminary Study* (Monterey, CA: Naval Postgraduate School Monterey, July 1986), <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADA170613.pdf>; Clifford Reid, "Reflexive Control in Soviet Military Planning," in *Soviet Strategic Deception*, ed. Brian D. Dailey and Patrick J. Parker (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1987), 295–308; Timothy L. Thomas, *Russian Military Thought: Concepts and Elements* (McLean, VA: MITRE Corporation, August 2019), <https://www.mitre.org/sites/default/files/2021-11/prs-19-1004-russian-military-thought-concepts-elements.pdf>; and Keir Giles, James Sherr, and Anthony Seaboyer, *Russian Reflexive Control* (Kingston, ON: Royal Military College of Canada, October 2018).



in the theory's history is Antti Vasara's comprehensive and impressive literature study, the *Theory of Reflexive Control*.<sup>3</sup>

There are indications that Russia has used reflexive control and that it has a place in Russian military doctrine. Han Bouwmeester states that it falls under the umbrella of *maskirovka* (маскировка), alongside active measures and *dezinformatsiya* (дезинформация), but that is not the same as whether they can pull it off in practice.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, there is evidence that reflexive control has been studied in Russia, with notable contributions from F. Chausov, Valery Makhnin, D. Kontorov, and V. Druzhinin.<sup>5</sup> For a short while, there was a journal devoted to the topic, with contributions from both the East and the West.

Thus far, the West has not given much attention to the complex adaptive systems (CAS) background from which reflexive control emerged, nor has much research been devoted to the practical modeling of reflexive control. There is a largely unexplored opportunity to learn from the concept of reflexive control and perhaps to incorporate some of its elements into our approaches to strategic problems.

The concept's value does not necessarily or exclusively lie in influencing others: reflexive control and deception have arguably the same effects. What is different is the reflexive process of analysis precedes any action or outcome. Reflexive control—especially the thought process behind reflexive control—can help us understand other actors and their behaviors while also illuminating elements around our own vulnerabilities. If we successfully employ such a structure, we could improve our resilience against actors trying to influence our decision making. Learning from reflexive control could also improve our thinking about risk, deterrence, and military strategy by offering structural or framework foundations to help analyze strategic behavior.

After a brief discussion of the meaning of reflexive control, I will highlight my interpretations of three core aspects of the concept: the complex adaptive systems perspective, the reflexive process, and the “model” of the self. I will remove some of the mystique around the concept, move it beyond some

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3. Antti Vasara, *Theory of Reflexive Control: Origins, Evolution and Application in the Framework of Contemporary Russian Military Strategy* (Helsinki, FI: National Defence University, 2020).

4. Thomas, *Russian Military Thought*; Giles, Sherr, and Seaboyer, *Russian Reflexive Control*; and Albert Johan Hendrik Bouwmeester, “Krym Nash: An Analysis of Modern Russian Deception Warfare” (PhD diss., Utrecht University, 2020), 39–40, <https://dspace.library.uu.nl/bitstream/handle/1874/400504/proefschrift%20krym%20nash%20ajh%20bouwmeester%20-%205fbcdb1b309bc9.pdf>.

5. For example, see F. Chausov, “Osnovy Reflexivnogo Upravlenija Protivnikom (Основы рефлексивного управления противником),” *Morskoi Sbornik*, no. 1 (1999); V. L. Makhnin, “Reflexive Processes in Military Art: The Historico-Gnoseological Aspect,” *Military Thought*, no. 1 (2013): 44, <http://pstmprint.ru/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/INFW-3-2012-6.pdf>; and V. Druzhinin and D. Kontorov, *Voprosi Voennoi Sistematiki* (Вопросы военной систематик) (Moscow: Voennoe Izdatelstvo, 1978).

of the previous interpretations, and make it accessible to a larger audience by approaching the concept from a practical perspective. This approach is taken with the aim to begin exploring how the elements of reflexive control link to and synthesize more widely accepted work in military strategy, deterrence, international relations, and behavioral psychology and how they could be valuable additions to the existing work on the analysis of strategic behavior.

## The Meaning of Reflexive Control

Reflexive control is an epistemological process that seeks to understand not only how one principal party or agent sees the other, but also how the other agent sees the principal party and believes the principal party perceives them, such that information can be introduced into the other and prompt behavior that will give the principal party a competitive advantage.

Reflexivity means there is no such thing as an independent variable: everything happens in a complex adaptive system (CAS) and everything in that system influences everything else.<sup>6</sup> A complex adaptive system is a nonlinear system in which a network—or system—of connected parts, often referred to as agents, interacts and adapts to succeed. A complex adaptive system is a nonlinear network of connected parts, often referred to as agents, that interact and adapt to survive and succeed. It is also an open system, which means external stimuli can interact with and become part of the system. The self-organizing adaptive nature of a complex adaptive system and the absence of a dependent variable make it hard to control and relatively unpredictable. Ecosystems, social groups, and indeed wars can, and should, be described as complex adaptive systems. Complex adaptive systems differ from a closed system, which could be compared to a circuit that behaves predictably.

The nonlinear foundations of reflexive control contradict the idea that control is possible. When Lefebvre began developing reflexive control as a concept, he referred to it as *reflexivnoe upravlenie* (рефлексивное управление). Vasara points out that the word *upravlenie* has no full English equivalent and could mean control, management, administration, or the concept of command and control.<sup>7</sup> For most reflexive control research in English, “control” is chosen as the translation of *upravlenie*. It is important to acknowledge, however—for the acceptance of the definition and interpretation of reflexive control I will use throughout this paper—that “control” is not the full translation.

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6. For example, see George Soros, *Alchemy of Finance: Reading the Mind of the Market* (Hoboken, NJ: J. Wiley, 2003).

7. Vasara, *Theory of Reflexive Control*, 8.

The nonlinear foundations of reflexive control also mean it is highly unlikely that it can meaningfully be reduced to a solvable equation.<sup>8</sup> The simplification to an equation would require removing too much important contextual information, which is central to the underlying concept upon which reflexive control relies.<sup>9</sup>

Lefebvre based reflexive control on reflexive game theory, a Soviet-specific form of game theory that he initiated.<sup>10</sup> By nature, reflexive games do not have an equilibrium and are based on considerations of the other party's decisions—and the mechanisms behind those choices—of the other.<sup>11</sup> Reflexive games add a more significant element of psychology to game theory—and to rational choice theory—as we most commonly know it in the West.

Taking into account the importance of the concept of reflexivity in reflexive control, it would be more productive to view reflexive control as an art and a practical matter rather than as a science, as would be the case for the wider topic of military strategy.<sup>12</sup> In reflexive control—like in military strategy—there are no certainties or “laws,” and the focus should not be on getting everything exactly right, as the probability of succeeding would be close to zero. It is more effective to improve understanding and thereby build a “good enough” strategy.”<sup>13</sup> Equations could in some situations help make sense of data and thereby play a part in building understanding, but they should not be considered to paint the complete picture.

For practical purposes, it could be useful to see reflexive control as a nonlinear and CAS approach to the interaction between perception, influence, and behavior, with reflexive control at its core and the aim of changing the other's perceptions about their utility sets at its core: making (influence) the other misperceive what options they have (perception) and what their best choices are (behavior).

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8. Antulio J. Echevarria II, “The Problem of Stability: Military Strategy in a Non-Newtonian Universe,” *Military Strategy Magazine* 7, no. 1 (Spring 2020): 12–16, <https://www.militarystrategymagazine.com/article/the-problem-of-stability-military-strategy-in-a-non-newtonian-universe/>.

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10. For example, see Vladimir A. Lefebvre, *Lectures on the Reflexive Games Theory* (Los Angeles: Leaf and Oaks Publishers, 2010).

11. Andrew Schumann, “Reflexive Games in Management,” *Studia Humana* 7, no. 1 (March 2018): 44–52, <https://doi.org/10.2478/sh-2018-0004>.

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## Reflexive Control: A Systems Approach

The application of reflexive control in theory consists of three steps that need to be taken by the “controlling party,” the principal agent, before the “controlled party,” the other agent, makes a decision. These three steps are followed by a feedback loop:<sup>14</sup>

1. Building an understanding of the perception of the situation: what does the other agent think the situation looks like?
2. Determining what the other agent’s goals are and what they should be to meet the principal agent’s needs: what does the other agent perceive to be their best choices and what would they need to be?
3. The principal agent introduces a solution “algorithm” that analyzes possible scenarios of interactions and how to influence them.
4. A feedback loop occurs to understand what decision the other has made and why.

The literature on reflexive control theory makes clear that any “model” should include data on both agents to capture the reflexive nature of the action and reaction between the “controlling” principal agent and “controlled” other agent. The first three steps are part of reflexive control’s model of the self, with the feedback loop feeding into the model to help improve it.

The abovementioned steps may resonate somewhat with the tactical-level Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield (IPB) and Decision Point Tactics (DPT) analyses. A more applicable comparison could be made, however, with John Boyd’s OODA (Observe, Orient, Decide, Act) loop. Both Boyd’s work and reflexive control find their origins in cybernetics, one of the scientific fields later integrated into general systems theory.<sup>15</sup>

Although the OODA loop is known for increasing decision-making speed at the tactical level, its utility extends to decision making at multiple levels. Reflexive control can also be used on multiple levels. In 1984, Lefebvre made a distinction between “constructive” and “destructive” categories of reflexive control.<sup>16</sup> Makhnin in 2013 used the term “creative” rather than “constructive,” but both authors describe this category as reflexive actions that can be used in slow-paced situations—including on grand- and

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14. Bouwmeester, “*Krym Nash*,” 39–40.

15. Frans P. B. Osinga, *Science, Strategy and War: The Strategic Theory of John Boyd* (London: Routledge, 2007), 72.

16. Vladimir Lefebvre and Victorina D. Lefebvre, *Reflexive Control: The Soviet Concept of Influencing on an Adversary’s Decision Making Process* (Englewood, CO: Science Applications, 1984), 144–45; and Chotikul, *Reflexive Control*, 81.

military-strategic levels—where there is time for a “controlling” principal agent to conduct an in-depth analysis of the situation and the goals of the “controlled” other agent.<sup>17</sup> Constructive reflexive control is different from destructive reflexive control, which can be used in fast-paced, mainly tactical, situations.

The same four steps would form both constructive and destructive reflexive control processes, but the time frame to draw conclusions and the depth of analysis would vary between the two categories. This would be the same for either a rapid or more slow-paced OODA loop. An important difference between reflexive control and Boyd’s OODA loop is of course the focus.

Boyd focuses on impairing the opponent’s capability to adapt, whereas reflexive control focuses specifically on altering other other’s perceptions during the “Observe” and “Orient” (OO) stages in a decision-making process, thereby steering the other’s decision and actions (DA). In both the OODA loop and reflexive control, the aim is to influence the other actor’s decision making. For the former, a principal agent would attempt to limit the feedback mechanism, impair adaptability, and remove the adversary’s opportunities through closing the adversary’s “open” system. For the latter, however, there is a variety of ways through which a principal agent could influence or manage the other agent’s decision making.

Reflexive control could thus be used as a layer on top of the OODA loop. It could be used offensively to observe how we can alter the perception of OO and influence or alter DA. It could also be used defensively to assess whether there are any reflexive control “traps” (or genuine misunderstandings) that alter our perception of the situation and could thus be influencing how we behave.

Boyd is not the only one to apply a CAS or nonlinear approach to international relations and war studies, though in these fields, the OODA loop is probably the most widely recognized example of the approach. Others who incorporated a nonlinear approach include Robert Jervis, Colin S. Gray, and indeed Carl von Clausewitz.<sup>18</sup> Gray states:

[The OODA loop] is revered by many as summarizing the wisdom of the ages on how to win. The core notion is that success rewards the warrior who can operate within the decision cycle of the enemy. It is a sound idea, but as the philosopher’s stone for victory at all levels of warfare it is distinctly sub-Clausewitzian.<sup>19</sup>

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17. Makhnin, “Reflexive,” 44; and Vasara, *Theory of Reflexive Control*, 38.

18. Echevarria, “Problem of Stability,” 12–16.

19. Colin S. Gray, *Another Bloody Century: Future Warfare* (London: Phoenix, 2006), 192.

It is indeed never as simple as following four steps for guaranteed victory, and the comparison with linking reflexive control to the OODA loop is not meant to give that impression. Rather, the comparison shows how reflexive control could fit within or alongside the OODA loop's more familiar context.

The four steps of reflexive control provide the starting point for a framework that could help with analyzing strategic behavior in a way that incorporates a CAS approach. The next two sections focus on the reflexive process and the model of the self, which are two key underlying concepts that need to be understood better and explored further to continue to build the foundation for such a framework. These two concepts are what makes reflexive control a valuable concept to explore further in the context of the analysis of strategic behavior.

## The Reflexive Process

Reflexive control literature indicates that any reflexive control operation should have a reflexive element to "forecast" the other agent's thought and behavior.<sup>20</sup> Such forecasting should include an assessment of the level of reflexivity the other actor expects, though Schumann notes that it is impossible to be certain about the level of reflexivity the other will use.<sup>21</sup> Thomas Schelling, for similar reasons, assumes an infinite level of reflexivity (in the sense of "I think that you think that I think," etc.) in forecasting thought and behavior, which, in his opinion, makes it unhelpful to use the level of reflexivity as a variable.<sup>22</sup>

The better question to ask might be whether it is likely that the other is thinking about the principal agent's perception of the situation or not, which will help to determine whether reflexivity is a factor for the other. In nuclear deterrence, and active combat situations, this thought process is vital and can therefore be assumed to have taken place. Yet, this same assumption cannot always be made in situations where the other might not (yet) realize they are in a competitive or hostile situation.

If the other agent plans for a competitive situation while the principal agent thinks they are in a cooperative situation, the other agent has a significant advantage over the principal agent if it wants to influence the principal agent's decision making. This advantage arises because the principal agent in that case is not likely to have its guard up and is not necessarily reflexively

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20. For example, see Vasara, *Theory of Reflexive Control*, 51–61.

21. Schumann, "Reflexive Games," 44–52.

22. For example, in tacit games, see Thomas C. Schelling, "Bargaining, Communication, and Limited War," in *The Strategy of Conflict*, rev. ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980).

thinking about the other agent. Arguably, the risk of not having one's guard up is larger in grand strategy than in military strategy, but it is nonetheless relevant in either context.

More important is the question of whether the analysis of the reflexivity is correct—whether the principal agent has a correct image of the other agent, and vice versa. In reflexive control, such an image would be the model of the self, of which the question about reflexivity is one element alongside other elements, as outlined in the next section.

## The Models of the Self and the Other

In reflexive control, any probability of success relies on correctly modeling and interpreting the perceptual worlds of the other versus the principal agent's own perception. Although the literature only mentions a model of the self, it is helpful to think about this model as both the model of the self and the other.<sup>23</sup> This model can be imagined as a subjective net assessment of a relationship between two actors, including how they perceive each other and the situation, how they are likely to interact or could interact, and how their interaction could be changed to influence the outcome. In this subjective net assessment, it is important to try to “think about the unthinkable”—the importance of which Herman Kahn also stressed. For example, if the principal agent's ethical system is different from the other agent's, the principal agent might not have a clear idea yet about how far the other is willing to go or what its perceived utility sets are like.<sup>24</sup>

A key underlying idea to the concept of reflexive control and the model of the self and the other is the recognition that, though an objective reality exists, it is unlikely that people's perceptions correspond with this reality.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, it is unlikely that anyone bases decision making on objective reality. Rather, decisions are thought to be made on the basis of a perceived version of reality. Daniel Kahneman calls this concept “bounded rationality,” which he describes as “different maps of the same landscape,” whereas Robert Jervis

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23. Lefebvre, *Algebra of Conscience*.

24. Herman Kahn, *Thinking about the Unthinkable* (New York: Horizon Press, 1962).

25. Chotikul, *Soviet Theory of Reflexive Control*, 29.



uses “perceptual worlds” and generally refers to descriptions of the concept throughout his work.<sup>26</sup>

In this perceptual world, subjective factors such as ethical systems, long- and short-term goals, time lines available to make decisions and act, biases, noise, and weak spots all influence actors’ decisions. The above implies that a subjective utility set, based on the actors’ perception of a situation, including subjective probabilities—rather than an objective utility set based on an objective truth and taking into account “objective” probabilities—would be a better way to analyze behavior and potential future interactions.

Bounded rationality and subjective utility do not imply that people necessarily behave unpredictably, though of course they may. Rather, people’s perceptions of their own utility sets—what they see as their best options—do not necessarily correspond with what external actors would see as their best options. Schelling also recognized that different actors require a different “rationality” to be deterred. He maintains, however, that it is impossible to have certainty about what the other’s value sets are.<sup>27</sup>

This model of the self and the other consists of the first three steps of the reflexive control process. Ethical systems, long- and short-term goals, perceptions of each other, reflexivity, biases, noise, time lines for decision making, and weak spots are all elements of what a subjective utility set could be. Additionally, these elements, and thus the subjective utility set, should be thought about for both parties in the model of the self and the other. Thinking about a model of the self and the other—including the introduction of subjective utility sets—means there is an explicit necessity not only to think about the other, but also to think critically about the self, which provides an explicit opportunity to illuminate potential vulnerabilities.

Various authors have worked on measuring and analyzing some of the individual abovementioned factors, but they have not yet been combined into one framework for strategic analysis.<sup>28</sup> Such a framework

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26. Daniel Kahneman, “Maps of Bounded Rationality: Psychology for Behavioral Economics,” *American Economic Review* 93, no. 5 (December 2003): 1449–75, DOI: 10.1257/000282803322655392; and Robert Jervis, “How Statesmen Think: The Psychology of International Politics,” WoodrowWilsonCenter (channel), April 5, 2019, YouTube video, 1:27:45, <https://youtube.com/watch?v=XLLcoTe5Olc&feature=share>; and Robert Jervis, “Perceiving and Coping with Threat,” in *Psychology and Deterrence*, Robert Jervis, Richard Ned Lebow, and Janice Gross Stein (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press 1989), 33.

27. Thomas C. Schelling, “The Retarded Science of International Strategy,” in *Strategy of Conflict*, 13.

28. For example, see Robert M. Axelrod, *Evolution of Cooperation* (New York: Basic Books, 1984); Jervis, “Perceiving and Coping”; Dominic D. P. Johnson, *Strategic Instincts: The Adaptive Advantages of Cognitive Biases in International Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020); Herman Kahn, *World Economic Development: 1979 and Beyond* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1979); Daniel Kahneman, Olivier Sibony, and Cass R. Sunstein, *Noise: A Flaw in Human Judgment* (Glasgow, UK: William Collins, 2021); and Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (London: Penguin, 2012).

could help improve assessments in deterrence, military strategy, and general conflict risk detection through improving how we analyze strategic behavior, with the aim to understand the other more accurately. It is important to recognize that while the abovementioned factors can all be analyzed, every analysis is subjectively probabilistic and should not be reduced to an equation.

Of equal importance is that, in such a model of the self and the other, it is unlikely that a higher volume of data would help with building a model or image that matches the perceptual situation as closely as possible—rather, the right contextual data is of value.<sup>29</sup> More data would likely give a more accurate representation of the objective situation but would not necessarily represent the situation perceived by the actors involved in the interaction. The model of the self and the other does not have to correspond to the objective reality—it is indeed highly likely that it does not. Step four, the feedback loop, would give information about whether the model of the self and the other are “correct” and would allow for learning and subsequent adjusting of the model.

## Conclusion

Reflexive control is a CAS approach to the interaction between perception, influence, and behavior. At its core, it aims to change the other’s perceptions about their utility sets: making (influence) the other misperceive what options they have (perception) and what their best choices are (behavior). The concept contains valuable elements that could give structure to the analysis of strategic behavior within a nonlinear, CAS approach. Such an approach is important to include, as linearity is often the approach of choice but not representative for how groups of people, and thus wars and conflicts, behave.

The application of reflexive control consists of four steps. The first three include analyses of ethical systems, long- and short-term goals, perceptions of the other, reflexivity, biases, noise, time lines for decision making, and weak spots for both actors (the self and the other), an analysis of the ways in which they could interact, and how this interaction could be changed to influence the outcome. This analysis could be seen as a subjective net assessment of the relationship between two (or more) actors. The fourth step, a feedback loop, enables learning and improvement of your understanding of what works and what does not.

Reflexive control offers the foundation of a structure we could develop to help us understand other actors and their perceived utility sets. It also

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29. For example, see Robert Jervis, *System Effects: Complexity in Political and Social Life* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 253.

encourages us to examine our own utility sets and the ways in which we could be perceived, as well as our vulnerabilities and perceptions. Learning from reflexive control could help us improve the way we analyze strategic behavior and “do” strategy—the bridge between policy and tactics that decides “how.”

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## Are Retired Flag Officers Overparticipating in the Political Process?

Zachary E. Griffiths

**ABSTRACT:** Retired United States general and flag officers participate politically as individuals and in groups. Purportedly, participation damages civil-military relations. But this article argues these activities, including but not limited to endorsements of candidates, do little harm to US democratic institutions and to the nonpartisan reputation of the military institution.

**Keywords:** civil-military relations, general officers, promotions, flag officers, political participation

With every presidential election, the public turns toward retired general and flag officers to see whom they will endorse. Senior leaders such as retired General Martin E. Dempsey and retired Admiral Michael G. Mullen have criticized these endorsements despite also participating in the political process themselves. This article presents the first holistic description of retired flag officer participation in politics. Drawing on the participation typology of Joakim Ekman and Erik Amnå, this research finds retired general officers participate politically in nearly every manner, individually and collectively.<sup>1</sup> It also finds, in contrast with other scholarship, that current levels of political participation by retired general officers do not significantly harm civil-military relations.

In 2016, Dempsey penned an op-ed in *USA TODAY*, encouraging professional athletes to “stand and pay it forward for what you think America should do” instead of kneeling to protest police brutality.<sup>2</sup> A month earlier, however, he wrote, “retired generals and admirals can but should not become part of the public political landscape.”<sup>3</sup> Dempsey aimed his criticism solely at participation by retired flag officers in formal partisan politics, while he himself participates politically in many other ways.

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1. Joakim Ekman and Erik Amnå, “Political Participation and Civic Engagement: Towards a New Typology,” *Human Affairs* 22, no. 3 (January 1, 2012): 283–300.

2. Martin E. Dempsey, “Why We Stand for the Flag: Gen. Dempsey,” *USA TODAY*, September 18, 2016.

3. Martin E. Dempsey, “Keep Your Politics Private, My Fellow Generals and Admirals,” *Defense One*, August 1, 2016.

Political participation is more than just voting. It includes a range of activities such as “voting, persuading, campaigning, giving, contacting, attending, and signing.”<sup>4</sup> In one guide for servicemembers, the Department of Defense authorizes “voting and making a personal monetary donation” but prohibits partisan political activities.<sup>5</sup> In the framework chosen for this article, even engagement in civic life and abstention from politics are characterized as political activities because of the resulting political impact.

In Dempsey’s case, his wide-ranging civic and political participation certainly has political consequences. Dempsey sits on boards of nonprofits and leads the youth participation program of the National Basketball Association (NBA), the Jr. NBA. The NBA pursues political interests—new basketball stadiums, favorable regulations, and tax breaks—by donating and meeting with politicians. During the same election cycle in which Dempsey criticized his peers, the NBA contributed \$190,010 to candidates.<sup>6</sup> Several authors agree “Dempsey’s Twitter feed, which never mentions [Donald] Trump specifically, seems to be a continuing sub-tweet of the president, hashtagged under ‘#Leadership.’”<sup>7</sup> Through his political participation, Dempsey seeks change. Other retired general and flag officers participate politically as well. But does their political participation harm civil-military relations?

Beyond just endorsing candidates for public office, the manifest political activities of general and flag officers, their participation in civil society, and even their disengagement from public affairs have some impact on government policy and civil-military relations. The first obligation of military professionals is “to do no harm to the state’s democratic institutions.”<sup>8</sup> Such harm might take three forms. First, political leaders may lose trust in the advice of military leaders. Second, increased public expressions of partisan views may undermine trust by political leaders in the military. Finally, the public may lose trust in the military as a nonpartisan entity.

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4. Steven J. Rosenstone, John Mark Hansen, and Keith Reeves, *Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America* (New York: Longman, 2003), 5.

5. US Department of Defense (DoD), “FAQs Social Media and Political Activities-Guidance for Members of the Armed Forces,” Standards of Conduct Office, August 31, 2017, 1.

6. Center for Responsible Politics, “Influence & Lobbying/Lobbying/Clients/Client Profile: National Basketball Assn: 2018,” OpenSecrets, accessed May 27, 2018.

7. Tom Nichols, “Trump Escalates His Assault on Civil-Military Relations,” *Atlantic*, January 2, 2019; Carol Giacomo, “This General Doesn’t Mention Trump, but His Tweets Speak Volumes,” *New York Times*, February 1, 2019; and Paul Szoldra, “Former Joint Chiefs Chairman: Sending Troops to the Border Is ‘A Wasteful Deployment,’” *Task & Purpose*, November 2, 2018.

8. Marybeth P. Ulrich and Martin L. Cook, “US Civil Military Relations since 9/11: Issues in Ethics and Policy Development,” *Journal of Military Ethics* 5, no. 3 (November 1, 2006): 165.

The impact of retired general officer political participation is inconsequential—neither negative nor significant—in our large and diverse republic. Dempsey and other writers on civil-military relations scarcely mention retired flag officer voting, donations, board memberships, or abstention from politics. But they do comment on their endorsements of presidential candidates every four years.<sup>9</sup> Despite these criticisms of endorsement, current retired general officer political participation does not significantly harm civil-military relations.

Retired flag officers are exceptional and ambitious former military officers. They clear at least six promotion hurdles to reach the summit of the Department of Defense's "up-or-out" system. The military's promotion process culls between 6 and 45 percent at each rank between O-4 and O-6.<sup>10</sup> The services promote only about 3.4 percent of O-6s to O-7—the first general and flag officer rank.<sup>11</sup> About 82 general and flag officers retire each year with 28 to 35 years of service. This body is small: in 2017, there were 7,428 living retired officers in the O-7 to O-10 pay grade compared to 109,920 officers who retired in the pay grade of O-6. Despite receiving a comfortable pension at an average of \$91,432 per year, general officers often begin a second career in government, academia, or business.<sup>12</sup>

After leaving senior positions in the military, flag officers face frequent criticism for their employment and political decisions after retiring. Despite the variety of potential paths for retired officers, retired Major General Paul D. Eaton suggested about "80 percent of his peers took 'less honorable' jobs in the military-industrial complex."<sup>13</sup> Some experts criticize this revolving door because of "conflicts of interests that may arise in such a second act."<sup>14</sup> Beyond defense-related conflicts of interest, retired general officers may influence the opinions of active-duty personnel or the general public.<sup>15</sup>

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9. Marybeth Peterson Ulrich, "'Cashing In' Stars: Does the Professional Ethic Apply in Retirement?," *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 9, no. 3 (Fall 2015).

10. Military Leadership Diversity Commission (MLDC), "Promotion," Decision Paper (Arlington, VA: MLDC, February 2011).

11. MLDC, "Promotion."

12. For the source of the author's calculations, see DoD "Statistical Report on the Military Retirement System, Fiscal Year 2017" (Alexandria, VA: Office of the Actuary, 2017), 144; and Ulrich, "'Cashing In' Stars," 102.

13. Paul Eaton (retired major general), interview by Zachary Griffiths, July 19, 2018.

14. Ulrich, "'Cashing In' Stars," 105.

15. James Golby, Peter Feaver, and Kyle Dropp, "Elite Military Cues and Public Opinion about the Use of Military Force," *Armed Forces & Society* 44, no. 1 (January 2018): 44–71; and Kori Schake, "Why Donald Trump's Endorsement by 88 Generals Is So Dangerous," *Foreign Policy*, September 6, 2016.



The influence of retired flag officers on the military and general public concerns many commentators. Of the scholarly articles surveyed for this article, all but one criticized these endorsements.<sup>16</sup> Arguments critical of candidate endorsements by retired general officers suggest a slippery slope from such endorsements to three outcomes.<sup>17</sup> First, partisan activities such as endorsements may cause elected leaders to lose trust in the military's advice.<sup>18</sup> Second, they may increase the politicization of the active-duty force.<sup>19</sup> Finally, they may undermine popular perceptions of the military as nonpartisan.<sup>20</sup> The next section explores how retired flag officers participate politically and reviews recent political science research to see whether these concerns are legitimate.

### Political Participation

Of all the ways retired flag officers participate in politics, only endorsing draws negative attention. For example, Dempsey participates broadly: voting, writing op-eds, leading for-profit and not-for-profit enterprises, and actively *not* endorsing. Other retired general officers participate differently, but they all participate. But, negative commentary focuses overwhelmingly on endorsement, despite the broad range of activities highlighted. Table 1 details retired flag officer political and civic participation using Ekman and Amnå's participation typology.<sup>21</sup>

Previous typographies of political participation focused primarily on formal and informal political participation. Ekman and Amnå recognize civil engagement and nonparticipation can be political acts, and they also recognize people participate as individuals and collectively. In total, their typology includes three forms of political engagement: nonparticipation, civic participation, and political participation (see table 1).

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16. Clifford M. Bayne, "From Stars to Stumps: How Retired Flag Officer Political Endorsements Effect Civil Military Relations" (master's thesis, Air University, School of Advanced Air and Space Studies, 2016); Steve Corbett and Michael J. Davidson, "The Role of the Military in Presidential Politics," *Parameters* 39, no. 4 (Winter 2009–10): 58–72; Mackubin Thomas Owens, "Military Officers Political without Partisanship," *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 9, no. 3 (Fall 2015): 88–101; Richard H. Kohn, "Tarnished Brass: Is the U.S. Military Profession in Decline?," *World Affairs* 171, no. 4 (2009): 73–83; and Richard Swain, "The Obligations of Military Professionalism: Service Unsullied by Partisanship" (Washington, DC: National Defense University, 2010).

17. Martin L. Cook, "Revolt of the Generals: A Case Study in Professional Ethics," *Parameters* 38, no. 1 (Spring 2008); and Corbett and Davidson, "Role of the Military," 58–59, 67–69.

18. Owens, "Military Officers," 97–99.

19. Swain, "Obligations of Military Professionalism," 16.

20. Golby, Feaver, and Dropp, "Elite Military Cues," 60.

21. Ekman and Amnå, "Political Participation."

Table 1. General officer and flag officer participation in politics<sup>22</sup>

	Nonparticipation		Civic Participation		Political Participation		
	Active	Passive	Social	Civic	Formal	Informal <sup>23</sup>	Illegal
Individual	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Collective		X	X	X	X	X	
(X indicates some general and flag officers participate in a specific way.)							

Nonparticipation

Some retired general officers choose not to engage in politics after retiring because they adhere to the military’s nonpartisan ethic. *The Army Profession* reflects this ethic when it states “senior Army leaders have a direct stewardship responsibility . . . to political nonpartisanship in the execution of their duty.”<sup>24</sup> Nonparticipation can be active or passive. Dempsey’s op-ed criticizing endorsement is an example of active nonparticipation—a public statement against political participation by retired military members. Passive nonparticipation takes place out of the public eye. “The overwhelming majority of retired officers” refrain from politics to avoid politicizing the military.<sup>25</sup> Others may leave the military and not participate out of indifference toward politics. But they still participate passively—even those who eschew voting are likely to engage in civil society activities, which have political effects.

Civil Engagement

Civil engagement takes two forms. The first form is social participation. As individuals, retired general and flag officers bring attention to issues important to them in their interactions with others. For example, retired Major General John Batiste hosted a fundraiser to raise awareness about veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder.<sup>26</sup>

22. I coded retired general and flag officers as participating in a specific activity if I found any evidence of that form of participation. I coupled this research with eight interviews focused around general and flag officer decisions to endorse partisan presidential candidates.  
23. Ekman and Amnå describe this category as “extralegal” but “informal participation” better describes retired general and flag officer participation in this arena.  
24. Headquarters, Department of the Army (HQDA), *The Army Profession*, Army Doctrine Reference Publication 1 (Washington, DC: HQDA, 2015), 45.  
25. Richard H. Kohn, “Building Trust: Civil-Military Behaviors for Effective National Security,” in *American Civil-Military Relations: The Soldier and the State in a New Era*, ed. Suzanne C. Nielsen and Don M. Snider (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 283.  
26. Robin Kaminski, “Retired U.S. Army General to Head ‘Stand for the Troops’ Fundraiser Tonight at Mitchells of Westport,” *Hour*, May 7, 2012.

Others participate socially by joining advocacy groups or identifying with a political party. According to the *Boston Globe*, 3 of 39 flag officers retiring in 2007 joined the boards of directors for nonprofit organizations.<sup>27</sup> The other form, civic participation, requires more personal effort than social participation. Civic-minded retired general officers attempt to persuade others of their views. Retired General Stanley McChrystal drew on his status as a “34-year combat veteran” when he argued in support of the Public Broadcasting Service as a “small public investment that pays huge dividends for Americans.”<sup>28</sup> Collectively, civic-minded individuals volunteer their time with social, faith-based, or other organizations.

### Political Participation

In the final category, political participation, individual retired flag officers engage formally and informally. In their formal participation, retired general officers individually vote, donate money to candidates, and lobby. Retired General Colin Powell first donated money to candidates in 1994, only one year after he retired, and has since donated 55 times (as of January 2020).<sup>29</sup> Research reveals nearly 80 percent of officers with greater than 21 years of service voted.<sup>30</sup> Likewise, 18 percent of officers reported donating money to political campaigns.<sup>31</sup> Beyond voting and donating, at least 7 retired admirals registered as lobbyists between 2000 and 2014 and lobbied on defense and transportation-related issues.<sup>32</sup>

Retired flag officers also participate collectively through organizations. The Flag and General Officer’s Network, established in 1995 as a social club, is now a 501.C.19 organization “authorized to engage in active participation with the U.S. Congress and federal government” on military issues.<sup>33</sup> Other retired general officers lead or join the boards of directors for large nonprofit organizations that lobby the government. After retired Admiral Patrick M. Walsh left the Navy in 2012, he joined the board of the Veterans of Foreign Wars Foundation. That foundation employs a full-time lobbyist and donated an average of \$85,000 a year between 2014 and 2018.<sup>34</sup> Historically, the predecessors of veterans’ organizations,

27. Bryan Bender, “The 2007 Class of Retiring Generals,” *Boston Globe*, December 26, 2019.

28. Stanley McChrystal, “Stanley McChrystal: Save PBS. It Makes Us Safer,” *New York Times*, April 5, 2017.

29. Center for Responsible Politics, “Search/Donor/Colin Powell,” OpenSecrets, accessed May 27, 2018.

30. Jason K. Dempsey, *Our Army: Soldiers, Politics, and American Civil-Military Relations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 135.

31. Dempsey, *Our Army*, 133.

32. Center for Responsible Politics, “Official Position Lookup for ‘Admiral,’” OpenSecrets, August 1, 2018.

33. “About Us,” Flag and General Officers’ Network, “About Us,” accessed January 15, 2020.

34. Center for Responsible Politics, “Influence & Lobbying/Clients/Veterans of Foreign Wars/2018,” OpenSecrets, accessed August 1, 2018.

like the Society of the Cincinnati in the post-Revolutionary War period, have drawn negative attention. But today, veterans organizations are broadly accepted as part of the political process.

Informal participation, the next category of political participation, includes legal efforts to persuade political leaders. When retired flag officers endorse as individuals, they fall into this category. An individual endorser in the 2014 elections, McChrystal spoke carefully for only himself when he endorsed Representative Seth Moulton of Massachusetts and retired Major General Irving L. Halter Jr. of Colorado.<sup>35</sup> Other retired general and flag officers endorse collectively.

Following a political endorsement by retired General Paul X. Kelley in 1988, collective endorsements exploded, reaching their peak when 501 retired flag officers endorsed Governor Mitt Romney in 2012.<sup>36</sup> By matching endorsements with campaign contribution data, researchers found retired general officers endorse largely because of their social connections, suggesting interpersonal connections play a more important role in endorsements than political preferences or desire for material advancement.<sup>37</sup> This work built on a 2012 survey that found a significant though small impact of retired flag officer endorsements on low-information and independent voters.<sup>38</sup> Beyond presidential candidates, retired general officers collectively endorse around issues, such as higher physical education standards, support for the State Department, gun control, and nuclear missile defense.<sup>39</sup>

The final category of political participation is illegal participation including political violence or terrorism. There were no examples of retired flag officer participation in these behaviors.

Retired general officers are citizens with interests. No one should be surprised when such officers engage in politics across the entire typography, both individually and collectively. Of the 11 forms of participation retired flag officers engage in, only collective endorsements garner significant criticism from military professionals and scholars

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35. Martin Matishak, "McChrystal Wades into Midterm Races," *The Hill*, August 28, 2014.

36. Campaigns recruit retired general and flag officers from all ranks to support their candidates. Between 2004 and 2016, 110 O-10, 278 O-9, and 952 O-8 and O-7 retired officers made endorsements. Author's calculations.

37. Zachary Griffiths and Olivia Simon, "Not Putting Their Money Where Their Mouth Is: Retired Flag Officers and Presidential Endorsements," *Armed Forces & Society*, December 9, 2019.

38. James Golby, Kyle Dropp, and Peter Feaver, "Military Campaigns: Veterans Endorsements and Presidential Elections" (Washington DC: Center for New American Security, October 2012).

39. Tom Lisi, "Retired Generals Oppose Grand Bargain's Lower Phys Ed Standards," NPR Illinois, February 22, 2017; US Global Leadership Coalition, "Over 120 Retired Generals, Admirals, on State and USAID Budget: 'Now Is Not the Time To Retreat: The Letter,'" February 27, 2017; Veterans Coalition for Common Sense to Mitch McConnell et al., letter, March 14, 2017; and "Read: An Open Letter from Retired Generals and Admirals Opposing the Iran Nuclear Deal," Open Letter, August 25, 2015.

of civil-military relations (see table 2). This criticism may occur because it is hard to distinguish retired flag officer private political action from political positions taken based on military expertise. The collective nature of these endorsements, with headlines focused on the number of retired general officers involved, make differentiation even harder and at least partly explains the negative reception.

Table 2. Criticism for retired general and flag officer endorsements of presidential candidates by military professionals and scholars of civil-military relations

	Nonparticipation		Civic Participation		Political Participation		
	Active	Passive	Social	Civic	Formal	Informal	Illegal
<b>Individual</b>	X	X	X	X	X	X	
<b>Collective</b>	X		X	X	C	X	
(X indicates some general and flag officers participate in a specific way; C indicates the activity is widely criticized.)							

Endorsement is distasteful to those familiar with Samuel P. Huntington’s theory of objective control, which expresses concern about the state of civil-military relations. In his op-ed criticizing retired flag officer endorsements, Dempsey argued endorsing a candidate is different than running for office because elected officials are accountable to the voter.<sup>40</sup> Also, individual endorsements from retired general officers open each individual to public criticism as their names appear in the media. This critique of political stances weighs on some retired flag officers. In an interview, retired Lieutenant General Daniel W. Christman expressed concerns his endorsements might undermine his position at the US Chamber of Commerce.<sup>41</sup>

Unfortunately, the media rarely highlights individual retired general or flag officer endorsements because these officers are not well known.<sup>42</sup> Retired officers from the reserve component may be known in their state, but active-duty officers move frequently, removing their familiarity with hometown issues. Without connection to specific places, such endorsements are most valuable on national security issues. But these individuals are not well enough known to be picked up by the media as influential individuals. (Even Dempsey, a former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, leveraged his title in his op-ed on kneeling professional athletes.)

40. Dempsey, “Keep Your Politics Private.”

41. Daniel W. Christman (retired lieutenant general, US Army; senior counselor for international affairs at the US Chamber of Commerce), interview by Zachary Griffiths, February 14, 2018.

42. For a rare exception, see McChrystal, “Save PBS.”

## Impact on Civil-Military Relations

Notwithstanding the relatively rare cases of political endorsements by individual retired general officers, concerns have been raised about the effects of these individual and collective endorsements. This article will now evaluate three theorized harms to civil-military relations resulting from endorsements. First, elected leaders may lose trust in military advice if retired flag officers endorse candidates.<sup>43</sup> Second, endorsements may lead the active-duty force to assert increasingly political views.<sup>44</sup> Finally, endorsements may undermine the confidence in the military that is rooted in the view of the military as nonpartisan.<sup>45</sup>

The concern that a president may lose trust in his military advisors is reasonable. Presidents nominate the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff from a small pool of existing senior military officers. Some evidence exists indicating presidents nominate politically sympathetic officers for senior posts when their copartisans control Congress, making it less likely a president will distrust the chairman.<sup>46</sup> However, if the president loses trust in the chairman, the National Security Council might make worse decisions or miss important military considerations.

Unfortunately for this theory, case-based research presents limited evidence that retired general officer endorsements undermine relationships between senior active-duty military members and political leaders. In a study on the impact of high-profile individual endorsements on civil-military relations, of six cases considered, only Admiral William Crowe's endorsement of then Governor Bill Clinton undermined trust between the military and then President George H. W. Bush.<sup>47</sup> Crowe retired as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff under Bush in 1989 and joined Clinton's campaign in 1992. After Crowe's endorsement of Clinton, Bush said, "I was pretty disappointed in Bill Crowe."<sup>48</sup> The study concluded that personal relationships between the president and senior military officers exacerbate or reduce trust concerns, but broader impacts on civil-military relations by endorsements are limited by the public's ability to "distinguish between the individual and the organization."<sup>49</sup>

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43. Owens, "Military Officers," 97–99.

44. Swain, "Obligations of Military Professionalism," 16.

45. Golby, Feaver, and Dropp, "Elite Military Cues," 60.

46. James Golby, "Duty, Honor . . . Party? Ideology, Institutions, and the Use of Military Force" (PhD diss., Stanford University, 2011), 129.

47. Bayne, "Stars to Stumps," 57.

48. Bayne, "Stars to Stumps," 58.

49. Bayne, "Stars to Stumps," 59.

With the increasing number of endorsements since Kelley's groundbreaking first endorsement, military members may have taken a cue from retired flag officers to participate more. As previously mentioned, political activity of active-duty servicemembers is restricted by the Department of Defense.<sup>50</sup> After retiring, however, the political activities of flag officers may set an example of increased partisanship or participation for those still in the ranks. As more retired general officers endorse political candidates, some would expect active-duty servicemembers also to participate more.

In surveys of military members' political participation in 2004 and 2009, some scholars found limited evidence that participation changed during the period when endorsing became more common.<sup>51</sup> These years align closely with the 2004 and 2008 presidential election cycles where 343 and 311 retired flag officers endorsed presidential candidates, the second- and third-largest number of endorsing general officers.<sup>52</sup>

Despite the increasingly prominent role of retired flag officers in presidential politics, however, officer corps' political activities remained remarkably stable over time. On the subject of donations and public partisan displays, 2010 survey results "closely mirror [Jason] Dempsey's findings" from 2005.<sup>53</sup> These findings indicate "Army officers' political views remained intact and largely unaffected by combat deployments" and their active-duty service in general.<sup>54</sup>

Although the negative effects of political participation by retired flag officers are limited with regard to high-level civil-military relations or as this participation influences active-duty servicemembers, such activities by prominent military experts might still undermine public trust in the military as a nonpartisan institution. Researchers proposed and tested a similar idea: cues from military endorsers about the use of force could influence a public with low interest in foreign affairs. Based on a series of surveys of 12,000 respondents, some research concludes endorsements can move public

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50. DoD, *Political Activities by Members of the Armed Forces on Active Duty*, Directive 1344.10 (Washington, DC: DoD, 2008), 1.

51. Dempsey, *Our Army*; and Heidi A. Urben, "Civil-Military Relations in a Time of War: Party, Politics, and the Profession of Arms" (PhD diss., Georgetown University, 2010).

52. Griffiths and Simon, "Retired Flag Officers," 2.

53. Urben, "Civil-Military Relations," 93.

54. Urben, "Civil-Military Relations," 152.



opinion, especially if an individual is Republican or the military recommends against the use of force.<sup>55</sup>

A similar mechanism could work with public confidence in the military overall. Visibly increased political participation by retired general and flag officers might reduce public confidence in a nonpartisan military for those who disagree with these officers' positions. Fortunately, national polls have collected data on confidence in the military since retired general officers started endorsing presidential candidates in 1988. Surprisingly, the rise of retired general and flag officer endorsements corresponded with increased *confidence* in the military as an institution. Between 1988 and 2016, Gallup surveys report a 15 percent increase in the public reporting a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in the military.<sup>56</sup>

Over the same period, the total retired flag officer endorsements in presidential election cycles increased from 1 to 180, with a peak of 506 endorsements in 2012.<sup>57</sup> Increased general officer endorsements are strongly correlated with confidence in the military. Though oversimplified and omitting other possible explanatory variables, a linear model with the count of retired flag officer endorsements on public opinion finds that each endorsement is associated with a 2.67 percent increase in public opinion.<sup>58</sup> While a causal relationship between retired general and flag officer political endorsements and public confidence in the military is unlikely, this provides evidence increased participation by these officers has not significantly undermined public trust.

In short, the impacts of political participation by retired general officers appears very limited and perhaps is constrained to cases where participation undermined trust in personal relationships between politicians and flag officers. As previously discussed, in only one of six cases did endorsement undermine trust with politicians.<sup>59</sup> Active-duty officers maintained a constant level of political participation throughout the period of increased participation by retired general officers. Finally, increased participation

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55. Golby, Feaver, and Dropp, "Elite Military Cues," 54.

56. "Confidence in Institutions," Gallup, accessed August 2, 2018.

57. Griffiths and Simons, "Retired Flag Officers," 2.

58. Using *r* statistical software, the author calculated this linear regression coefficient with the dependent variable being Gallup's confidence in the military (great deal/quite a lot) from Note 57 and the number of endorsements as gathered by Griffiths and Simon between 1988 and 2019.

59. Bayne, "Stars to Stumps," 61.

by flag officers did not undermine confidence in the military but is associated with a period of *increased trust*.

## Conclusion

Like other people, retired general officers participate in politics in a variety of ways for many reasons. Some of these officers retire and then abstain from high-profile political participation. The nonpartisan ethic inculcated through several decades of service pushes many in this direction. Others choose to participate in civic life, either individually or collectively. Leaning on their military experience, many retired flag officers write op-eds to influence policy debates or on behalf of organizations they support. Politically, general officers participate in nearly every way. A few run for office while most vote and others chose to endorse candidates either as individuals or collectively. A select few register as lobbyists. None engage in violent or illegal protest. In short, retired flag officers participate in political life like other civilians.

While the increase in political endorsements by general officers has been a cause for concern, recent political science research indicates the nature of current retired general and flag officer political participation does limited harm to civil-military relations. Flag officers are high-profile individuals who capture the attention of researchers of civil-military relations and the general public when they participate in collective political endorsements. Yet despite this participation, none of the theorized harms to civil-military relations has occurred.

Relationships between serving general officers and politicians remain firm. As of December 2019, the US Senate continues to confirm general and flag officers by voice vote—hardly an indication of mistrust in military officers by national political leaders.<sup>60</sup> Likewise, the active military is less partisan today than when party politics were pushed out of the military “by ending the practice of electing officers.”<sup>61</sup> Today’s troops vote in elections and abide by policies limiting political expression. Finally, confidence in the military remains high, perhaps because of its culture of selflessness, absence from domestic politics, or its distance from the average citizen.<sup>62</sup> Increased participation by retired flag officers has not impacted this confidence.

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60. “PN1253 – Air Force,” United States Senate, 116th Congress (2019–2020), November 12, 2019; “PN1287 – Maj. Gen. Douglas M. Gabram – Army,” United States Senate, 116th Congress (2019–2020), December 18, 2019; and “Nominations Confirmed (Non-Civilian),” United States Senate, February 28, 2019.

61. Stephen Skowronek, *Building a New American State: The Expansion of National Administrative Capacities, 1877–1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 93.

62. Andrew A. Hill, Leonard Wong, and Stephen J. Gerras, “Self-Interest Well Understood: The Origins & Lessons of Public Confidence in the Military,” *Daedalus* 142, no. 2 (Spring 2013): 54.

General officer political participation has not undermined civil-military relations in at least these three areas.

Although available evidence indicates few challenges to civil-military relations, researchers must continue to investigate why civil-military relations in the United States remain stable while other nations suffer from military coups. Where Clifford M. Bayne focused on individual endorsements, future research should consider how senior government officials, the media, and the voters interpret endorsements and other political participation. Comparative analyses involving other countries could be especially illuminating.

Researchers could also consider why political participation is different for these retired senior officers. As private citizens, they are free to participate politically. However, discerning private political sentiments from those expressed based on military expertise is challenging, and retired general officers cannot escape their military credentials. Deeper understanding of this tension could help us better understand this participation.

Quantitative methods could also generate answers. As noted earlier, confidence in the military increased from 1988 to 2016, suggesting the public's view of the military is not swayed by endorsements. But there may be measurable changes in civil-military relations at lower levels. Textual analysis of Congressional hearings could indicate whether collective endorsements impact the policymaking or nomination processes. Finally, surveys could unpack assumptions about the interpretations of collective endorsements by the public.

Flag officers maintain high profiles after retiring, which may lead civil-military researchers to overly focus on their behavior. In other countries, retired general officers can wreak havoc. Fortunately for the United States, retired flag officers participate in politics like other citizens. This participation does not significantly harm civil-military relations. Barring major shifts in American politics, political activities of retired general officers are unlikely to significantly undermine political and public trust or politicize active-duty troops.

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**Zachary E. Griffiths**

Major Zachary E. Griffiths, a graduate of the United States Military Academy and Harvard Kennedy School of Government, is a Special Assistant to the Chief of Staff of the Army focused on renewing professional writing.



## Introduction to the China Landpower Studies Center

Richard D. Butler

Welcome to the Director's Corner for the China Landpower Studies Center (CLSC). This will be a regular feature in *Parameters* that will discuss critical military and security issues related to China, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), and the People's Liberation Army (PLA). It will also highlight the Center's research agenda and key activities. My objective in this first installment is to outline the purpose, organization, capabilities, research agenda, and expected products of the Center.

### Purpose and Mission

The Center will open in January 2024, and it is intended to be an approachable organization. It will tackle the complex and pressing questions about China's emergence as a global power and its implications for the US military. It will provide senior leaders and practitioners with a better understanding of the strategies, capabilities, and the integration of the PLA into the CCP's campaign to turn the rules-based international order to its advantage. Further, the Center will share insights and recommendations for developing better deterrence strategies and campaigns for the United States and our allies.

### Organization and Capabilities

Internally, the Center will benefit from the great scholarly foundation of the US Army War College on which we will build our research, analysis, and education portfolios. The Center resides within the Strategic Studies Institute—the US Army's think tank—which has always evolved to meet the challenges of the ever-changing strategic requirements of the Army. Our experienced staff of research

professors, intelligence analysts, visiting professors, and foreign fellows will considerably increase our reach and ability to support our stakeholders.

Externally, we will partner with similar centers in the other senior service colleges to coordinate our research and analysis. We will also work closely with counterpart centers in allied and partner nations in the Indo-Pacific region and elsewhere to share perspectives, analyses, and recommendations.

### Research Agenda and Products

The Center will focus on Strategic Landpower, which includes Army, Marine, and Special Operations Forces. Strategic Landpower integrates combat power across all domains to seize, control, and defend the “key terrain” where people live and the interests of sovereign nations. We will study how the use of Strategic Landpower relates to the Joint Force and the US government’s many agencies. While the Center will limit its scope to the operational and strategic levels of war, it will include the whole spectrum of conflict from peacetime competition to protracted war.

Our stakeholders, especially the US Army in the Pacific, are asking critical questions to enable campaign planning in support of our country’s policy of Integrated Deterrence. These questions can be summarized from the framework outlined in table 1.

Table 1. Questions to enable campaign planning

Red PLA	Blue US Military	Green Allies and Partners
How does the PLA fight and win?	How can the US military better prepare now?	How do allies and partners help themselves?
How does the PLA support the Belt and Road Initiative (also known as One Belt, One Road)?	What must change in the US Army, the Joint Force, and the interagency?	How can the United States help allies and partners?

The Center will produce “campaign-quality” insights and solicit research and analysis from our staff and affiliates to inform our stakeholders. To that end, the Center will publish short essays aimed at senior leaders and practitioners. We will also collaborate on longer monographs and academic peer-reviewed works that engage in deeper analysis of strategic issues. Additionally, we will promote active dialogue

and commentary on significant events in the global environment relevant to the rise of China and its use of military power.

Another aspect of our research agenda is engagement. The information age has greatly expanded our ability to reach numerous outlets and venues. Our website will be refreshed periodically with new content. The Center will also be active on social media. Most of our publications will be unclassified and easily accessible. We will initiate a podcast series to share our authors' insights, host discussions and panels, and sponsor live webinars. Finally, we will continue to host our capstone Carlisle Conference on the PLA. Look for the next one in fall of 2024.

As the first CLSC director, I look forward to our interaction. I invite you to participate to stay informed. Please contact me if you would like to contribute to our engagements or if you desire to publish an essay on a topic relevant to our charter.

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**Richard D. Butler**

Colonel Richard D. Butler is the director of the China Landpower Studies Center at the US Army War College Strategic Studies Institute.





## Book Reviews

### MIDDLE EAST

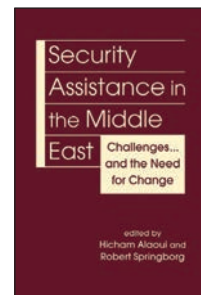
## Security Assistance in the Middle East: Challenges ... and the Need for Change

Hicham Alaoui and Robert Springborg, eds.

Reviewed by Thomas W. Ross Jr., former deputy assistant secretary  
of defense for security cooperation

©2023 Thomas W. Ross Jr.

For decades, the Middle East has purchased more arms from the United States, and received more US grant assistance for its militaries, than any other region in the world. Despite hundreds of billions of dollars of US security assistance, American leverage to influence Middle Eastern governments remains weak and arguably on the decline. In a multifaceted, rigorously researched, and thoughtful new volume, editors Hicham Alaoui and Robert Springborg have assembled a valuable collection of voices interrogating this paradox.



The authors move from wide-lens explorations of the shape and value of security assistance across the region to careful examinations of individual actors and contexts. American security assistance to Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Tunisia, and the Gulf monarchies receive specific scrutiny, while other chapters consider roles of other security assistance providers, including NATO Allies, spoilers such as Iran and Russia, and hybrid recipient-providers like the Gulf monarchies.

As the editors state in their introduction, “the question becomes not whether but whither SA [security assistance]—that is, not should it be discontinued, but how can its costs be reduced and its benefits enhanced?” (4). The authors diagnose a range of challenges associated with current assistance initiatives, including mission creep, cultural imperialism, the privileging of militaries over civilian government agencies and of individual units over broader military institutions, insufficient attention to military governance and professionalization, and the development of specific capabilities without consideration of long-term strategic outcomes. In spite of these challenges, the authors do not gravitate toward discontinuing military aid, nor do they propose ambitious, wholesale reforms to current approaches.

The book also effectively dismantles the principal-agent relationship as a primary lens through which to view security assistance relationships.

Simone Tholens's chapter on regional entanglements serves as a Rosetta Stone for the rest of the book, arguing that "In the Middle East, security assistance is increasingly entangled, both spatially and temporally; that is, it cannot be analyzed as simple costs and benefits but is deeply interlinked with the practice of others, coproduced by conglomerates of different types of actors, and accompanied by existential narratives of the past and projections for the future" (196).

Other chapters provide case study after case study showcasing this entangled complexity. They demonstrate: recipient governments balancing competing and ambiguous interests and diverse, sometimes adversarial donors; providers managing competing interests and competing public narratives; states simultaneously playing roles of principal and agent and leveraging one role to perform the other better; shifting regional alliances and competitions; and what the editors term the "democratic paradox" (325). American security assistance intended to strengthen democratic institutions and build capable militaries instead "simply incites a self-perpetuating cycle of foreign patronage, deepening authoritarianism, and military subsistence" (228). The result of the book's many examples of the nuanced, complicated, and constantly shifting nature of security assistance relationships is to explode the principal-agent relationship and dramatize the fundamental messiness of the practice.

The book proposes few concrete solutions for how the costs of security assistance might be reduced and the benefits enhanced. Few chapters offer actionable recommendations. The authors ultimately endorse enhanced investments in military governance, institutional capacity building, and professionalization, though they acknowledge that such investments will produce benefits only at the margins and only over long time frames.

Security assistance is often mistaken for a strategy. It is used by various actors to achieve diverse and contradictory goals; its success is as dependent on the strength of the strategy as on the strength of the tool. The chapters collected in this volume understand that critical distinction and produce a deeply insightful, wide-ranging critique of US strategy toward the Middle East and the role the security assistance tool plays within it. Despite the dearth of actionable solutions, the volume offers tremendous value to students and practitioners of security assistance in the Middle East. Solutions will come only with a piercing, honest appraisal of the problem, to which this book makes a tremendous contribution.

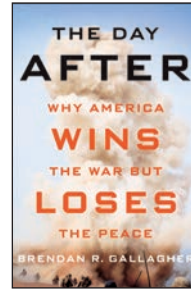
# The Day After: Why America Wins the War but Loses the Peace

by Brendan R. Gallagher

Reviewed by Dr. John A. Nagl, professor of warfighting studies,  
US Army War College

©2023 John A. Nagl

With the dust settling after two decades of protracted limited and irregular wars, students of American national security policy are asking hard questions about why the most expensive military in the world is not better at winning. An early and notable effort is Don Stoker's *Why America Loses Wars: Limited War and US Strategy from the Korean War to the Present* (Cambridge University Press, 2019). Stoker is a pure and talented academic, and the lessons he presents are extremely valuable, but his work has now been reinforced by that of a talented young soldier-scholar who has spent much of the past 20 years studying in the hard classrooms of Iraq and Afghanistan.



Brendan R. Gallagher is an infantryman with seven combat tours in Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom, many of them with the 75th Ranger Regiment. His book *The Day After: Why America Wins the War but Loses the Peace* is suffused with a ground-level appreciation for the very real costs of limited wars, as well as a focus on strategic lessons to help prevent future grunts from bearing the burdens he and his friends have carried in their rucksacks. The fruit of a successful Princeton University PhD dissertation, the book uses the lens of prewar planning for postwar conditions to examine four recent limited wars: Afghanistan, Iraq, Kosovo, and Libya. He discovers dismayingly similar mistakes across the four cases and the Clinton, Bush, Obama, Trump, and Biden-Harris administrations that made them, suggesting that there are systemic issues beyond the idiosyncrasies of individual decisionmakers and the challenges presented by particular countries.

Gallagher's inclusion of Kosovo, which he considers the least badly planned and conducted war, provides a useful "what right looks like" baseline to evaluate the other cases. He takes pains to point out that the Clinton administration that succeeded in Kosovo had learned bitter lessons in earlier interventions, particularly in Somalia, after which a wiser Clinton team "showed up to the marathon start line as a world-class athlete:

trained, tested, and ready to confront most of the challenges that might arise” in Kosovo. Gallagher continues, “But in the next three war zones, we showed up drunk, overconfident, and missing our running shoes while believing if we just sprinted a few seconds and handed off the baton, victory was assured” (216).

A maddening theme in the book is that administrations appear almost completely incapable of learning from their predecessors’ mistakes. Gallagher also notes the importance of implementing the lessons of postwar condition setting immediately; the “golden hour” of medevac is echoed by the moment at the immediate aftermath of hostilities when American power to shape a country’s future trajectory is at its zenith. In Iraq and Afghanistan, America squandered that golden opportunity, making future progress far harder than it needed to be, even given the many difficulties presented by both postwar scenarios; Gallagher cites a Pentagon official who argued that we were “sort of flat on our butt” for years attempting to determine what we wanted to achieve in the early years of the Afghanistan War (22).

Gallagher suggests recognizing that postwar planning is hard and success is rare and that planners beware magical thinking and instead study history. He recommends empowering the National Security Council to coordinate the efforts of the many US agencies (and allied partners) involved in postwar stabilization and reconstruction and avoiding mission creep. Most of all, Gallagher says, decisionmakers should be selective in choosing when to topple a regime.

That advice is easier given than followed. The Obama administration was elected to office in no small part in reaction to the George W. Bush administration’s planning and execution failures in Iraq and Afghanistan; President Barack Obama described his foreign policy philosophy as “don’t do stupid [stuff].” Still, it was his team that “led from behind” in Libya and remade there many of the mistakes that it had so vociferously decried in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Limited wars are hard. Studying them intently does not guarantee that we will do better the next time we (inevitably) engage in them, but not studying them makes that already all-too-likely outcome a near certainty. Professionals should look harder at the wars we lose than the ones we win; Gallagher’s book is a terrific place to start that study.

Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019 • 320 pages • \$32.95

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**Keywords:** Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation Enduring Freedom, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, Barack Obama

## NUCLEAR ISSUES

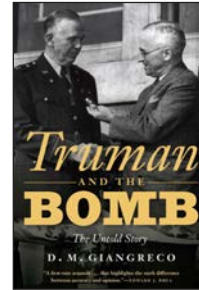
## Truman and the Bomb: The Untold Story

by D. M. Giangreco

Reviewed by Dr. Clayton K. S. Chun, retired faculty, US Army War College

©2023 Clayton K. S. Chun

Author D. M. Giangreco examines the events surrounding President S. Harry Truman's momentous decision to drop atomic bombs on Japan to end World War II in *Truman and the Bomb*. His extensive research and incisive analysis provide ample evidence that Truman chose to use nuclear weapons to finish the war by the fastest means and, more importantly, with the least American casualties. At the war's closing, Truman feared the potential of suffering horrendous American wounded and killed by invading Kyushu and Honshu, Japan. Throughout the book, Giangreco takes aim at "revisionist" historians who claim Truman's motivation to authorize employing the atomic bomb was made for nefarious reasons. The book explores these counterarguments and debunks them with well-argued rationale backed by ample historic evidence, organized in detailed appendices for the reader's consideration.



As the Americans proceeded toward Tokyo, they were met with increasingly stubborn Japanese resistance. American loss rates skyrocketed as a result. For Truman and his Joint Chiefs of Staff, the projected American casualties for the invasion of Japan appeared ominous. The Imperial Japanese Army leadership could easily trace the American advance through the Philippines, Saipan, Iwo Jima, and to Okinawa. The next logical step was Kyushu. Tokyo started to prepare a vast and deadly resistance. To man these defenses, the Japanese could shift hundreds of thousands of troops from Manchuria. Japan was still at peace with Russia, but Tokyo could redeploy these forces home. Giangreco invests much effort to demonstrate how Truman was determined to gain a Soviet declaration of war against Japan and subsequent invasion of Manchuria. Attaining this agreement was Truman's main objective at the 1945 Potsdam Conference. This declaration would tie down the Japanese in Manchuria and potentially reduce opposition for the upcoming American assaults on Kyushu and Honshu. Releasing the atomic bomb was an added threat that might compel Tokyo to surrender. If it worked, the proposed invasion would be canceled and spare American lives. Giangreco investigates other areas that influenced Truman's "hardest decision" of his presidency, including providing logistical and

training support to Soviet forces preparing for a future Manchurian invasion. Additionally, Giangreco assesses how Truman, as a senator, was aware of the Manhattan Project but knew few specifics about the nuclear weapon itself. He also dismisses the idea that Japanese leadership, dominated by the military, was concerned about seeking peace in early 1945.

Giangreco spends considerable effort proving that Truman, contrary to the revisionists, considered the projected fatalities for the Japanese invasion well before he authorized using the atomic bomb. Truman consulted his staff and asked for casualty estimates. One calculation, by former President Herbert Hoover, of 500,000 to 1 million losses was not dismissed and had a significant impact on Truman. This assessment and others shocked Truman, who sought ways to reduce the number of American deaths. In contrast, Truman's critics claim the president's apprehension about casualties was merely a postwar justification for the atomic bomb. Giangreco disproves this claim.

*Truman and the Bomb* is relevant to today's national security professionals. Giangreco delivers a highly readable account that touches on the political and military aspects of a key presidential decision during war. This momentous decision during World War II is still felt today. Readers can think about all the other considerations that one might make if faced with a similar dilemma to employ a new powerful, unproven weapon. Truman made his judgment based on ending the war immediately and largely without postwar considerations or impacts. Future political and military leaders may one day grapple with decisions involving systems with consequences much like the atomic bomb.

Lincoln, NE: Potomac Books, 2023 • 280 pages • \$34.95

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**Keywords:** Harry S. Truman, atomic bomb, World War II, Japan, Russia



## Hinge Points: An Inside Look at North Korea's Nuclear Program

by Siegfried S. Hecker with Elliot A. Serbin

Reviewed by Dr. Gates M. Brown, associate professor of military history,  
US Army Command and General Staff College

©2023 Gates M. Brown

One of the major problems with policy formation is that leaders cannot know their adversaries' motives, and it is difficult to comprehend actions and decisions without knowing why people made them. National security concerns only increase the complexity of this problem because of the risks of getting things wrong. In *Hinge Points: An Inside Look at North Korea's Nuclear Program*, Siegfried S. Hecker investigates the issue of misunderstood motives. A professor emeritus at Stanford University and the emeritus director of the Los Alamos National Laboratory, he is well suited to explain the technical aspects of North Korea's nuclear program, though it is not the book's central theme. His thesis is that US presidential administrations—from William J. Clinton to Donald J. Trump—missed opportunities to work with North Korea on denuclearization issues. He asserts that North Korean leaders—from Kim Il-Sung through Kim Jong-Un—wanted diplomatic successes and leveraged nuclear weapons in talks and as insurance, in case diplomacy failed.

Hecker's first hinge point is the George W. Bush administration's decision to leave the 1994 Agreed Framework, which came about during the Clinton administration because of North Korea's threat to leave the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. The framework mitigated the risk of North Korea's movement toward a nuclear weapon by promising two light-water reactors that were more proliferation proof than the North Korean graphite-mediated reactors and immediate shipments of heavy fuel oil to address energy needs. The second Bush administration, determined to be firmer with North Korea and catalyzed by the September 11 attacks, decided the Agreed Framework was too lenient. Hecker criticizes this decision because it did not effectively balance the risks and benefits of the framework. Key to proliferation concerns, the Agreed Framework mandated that North Korea stay in the Non-Proliferation Treaty and allow for International Atomic Energy Agency inspections. By unilaterally leaving the agreement, Hecker argues that the Bush administration allowed North Korea to leave the Non-Proliferation Treaty and to resume its weapons program without foreign inspectors. *Hinge Points*



contends that US policymakers never understood North Korea's need for security guarantees or their desire to normalize relations with the United States to counter China's influence. North Korean leaders—from Kim Il-Sung to Kim Jong-Un—used a dual-track strategy of diplomacy and nuclear weapons. Hecker asserts North Korean leaders saw their nuclear weapons program as a diplomatic tool to be used to receive promises from the US government not to use military force (especially nuclear weapons) against North Korea. If diplomacy failed to garner this goal, then a nuclear weapons arsenal provided similar security. Hecker criticizes US policymakers for too often seeing aggression and dishonesty in North Korean actions when North Korean leaders were open to real progress toward denuclearization.

Hecker does not discuss the broader context of US-North Korean relations, including the aggression and subversion that characterized North Korean actions from the initial partition of the Korean peninsula. The Korean War confirmed in the minds of US policymakers the inherently aggressive and secretive character of the North Korean regime. Subsequent actions, like the 1968 seizure of the USS *Pueblo* and the attack on US soldiers, Republic of Korea soldiers, and Korean Service Corps personnel in 1976 while they were trimming a poplar tree in the Joint Security Area, further confirmed this view. Acts of aggression—from ballistic missile tests to civilian airplane bombings—continued through the 1980s and 1990s. Presidents must consider these actions when assessing the trustworthiness of any individual North Korean proposal. With this broader view, it is easier to understand why the George W. Bush administration and subsequent administrations were skeptical of North Korea's offers of cooperation.

Hecker's work is most effective in his area of expertise—nuclear technology. He masterfully describes the details of North Korean nuclear weapons technology and explains to readers unfamiliar with the field the proliferation concerns with different reactor and refinement technologies. While lacking integration of the subject into a broader diplomatic and security context, *Hinge Points* should be read by anyone who wants to know more about the development of the North Korean nuclear program and the importance of understanding the technological implications of diplomatic policy and as a good counterpoint to the usual interpretation of North Korean actions as inherently aggressive.

Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2023 • 410 pages • \$40.00

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**Keywords:** nuclear war, North Korea, George W. Bush, Kim Il-Sung, Kim Jong-Un, Bill Clinton

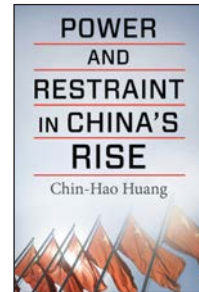
## REGIONAL STUDIES

## Power and Restraint in China's Rise

by Chin-Hao Huang

Reviewed by Dr. José de Arimatéia da Cruz, Georgia Southern University  
and US Army War College Center for Strategic Leadership

Author Chin-Hao Huang's *Power and Restraint* argues that small state actors are not as helpless in the international system as we may believe. Huang is an assistant political science professor and head of global affairs studies at Yale-NUS College in Singapore.



Huang's work adds to the existing literature on small-state actors or middle powers, with three crucial theoretical and empirical implications for students of international relations theory. First, it provides a new framework to explain the political phenomenon of China's rise. Second, Huang's probative argument delimits the claim that material and narrow self-interests undergird all state behavior in an anarchic environment. Finally, Huang points out that "strong-state restraint as an observable outcome implies that small states have agency and an important role in inducing such behavior" (6). The critical question as it relates to Huang's work is why would a superpower, in this case China, not force submission of its weaker neighbors?

Huang contends that the argument for restraint rests on a critical causal factor: the consensus of regional security norms. According to Huang, the key to preventing and restraining China's imposition of power on its smaller and less powerful neighbors is a unity of consensus. When China's neighbors speak in unison about geopolitical strategy and security they are more likely to restrain China's use of force. As Huang asserts, "When small states band together and cooperate to develop a strong consensus on their preferred security norms, the clarity in their collective agreement provides a powerful incentive for their large neighbor to consider and adopt foreign policy changes that reflect the shared preference of the smaller states" (14). When small states or middle powers band together and their message is cohesive and unified, China's behavior is more likely to reflect the region's consensus. Conversely, when there is discordance among China's neighbors, China is more likely to exercise its material power capabilities, and power politics become more prominent when there is visible regional disunity. Another important concept discussed by Huang is the idea of legitimacy—the recognition of something (a law passed) or someone (an authority) being

recognized as right and proper. According to Huang, a rising power's aspirations for acceptance and recognition of legitimacy become "key incentives for restraint, even if the material source of power—coercion, threats, and the use of force—are tempting and easily within its reach" (25). In China's case as a rising regional and global power, the Chinese leadership recognizes that in an anarchic world or world of "legitimate great power," legitimacy is a strategy. Huang argues that consultative authoritarianism is "a new model of state-society relationship that encourages the simultaneous expansion of a fairly autonomous civil society and the development of more indirect tools of state control" (36).

China's restraint in its decision-making process and political actions also legitimizes China's idea and vision of China's peaceful rise and the concept of the "Chinese Dream" (102–3). China's peaceful rise is the notion that China's rise does not represent an economic threat to the rest of the world. Instead, China's rise benefits the world economy and prosperity of all nations. The "Chinese Dream," a concept put forward by China's President Xi Jinping, is based on two aspirations. First, China aimed to develop a "moderately well-off" society by 2021. Second, China seeks to become a fully developed nation, or in Walt Rostow's stages of economic development, China will enter the age of high mass consumption by 2049. The years 2021 and 2049 are significant in China's history. The year 2021 represents the 100th anniversary of the founding of the CCP, and 2049 represents the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the People's Republic of China. Given China's rising power and strategic trajectory, Beijing will face two distinct and diametrically opposed foreign policy objectives. On the one hand, China can continue to augment its material capabilities and exert those advantages unilaterally. On the other hand, to legitimize its rise, China can maintain a path of cooperative diplomacy.

Whether China is "destined for war" or becomes a member of a rules-based international system will determine what kind of international system the world will inherit. *Power and Restraint in China's Rise* should be a mandatory reading for sinologists and students at the US Army War College concerned with the future of China's rise.

New York: Columbia University Press, 2022 • 240 pages • \$35.00

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**Keywords:** China, Xi Jinping, Chinese Dream, authoritarianism, diplomacy

## STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP

## Command: The Politics of Military Operations from Korea to Ukraine

by Lawrence Freedman

Reviewed by Dr. Frank G. Hoffman, lieutenant colonel, US Marine Corps Reserve (retired), and distinguished research fellow, National Defense University

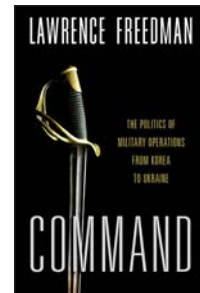
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This book is a valuable set of historical case studies and perspectives that addresses a central element of senior leadership in the conduct of war. *Command* combines a remarkable breadth of history with the insight, subtlety, and clarity that marks all of Lawrence Freedman's works.

The central theme is the impact of politics, both high and low, on operational matters in wartime. Freedman rejects the false premise of the Huntingtonian model, which allocates autonomy to military officers in return for staying out of politics, since an astute sense of politics is essential to high command and the impact it has on strategic and military objectives. As he states in the opening chapter, “[P]olitical sensibility is an essential part of a professional competence, enabling officers to understand the contexts in which they operate, and how the way they act affects these contexts” (8). He extends its influences on other sources of friction, such as institutional politics, personal animosities, bureaucratic frictions, and annoying civilian policymakers that impinge upon seemingly rational decision making.

These overlapping forces strain the skill set of high command, blurring the characteristics of aggressive battle leaders like General George S. Patton with the nuanced negotiating skills of a coalition leader like General Dwight D. Eisenhower. The list of leaders who have mastered the intensive cognitive and emotional demands of this level of command is short but worthy of detailed study.

The Falklands chapter is the book's finest, with meticulous detailing of British political ambitions. The case is a rare example of strong civil-military relationships in London and highlights the importance of Joint integration, given the United Kingdom's lack of a theater commander in this conflict. Equally valuable is the Iraq chapter, which captures the challenges of coalition warfare and the difficulty of aligning allies and the divergent positions of field commanders with their masters back in their capitals. Future civilian policy leaders and military



officers aspiring to higher responsibility will glean numerous lessons from this superb chapter, despite its British perspective.

The one minor fault in the book lies in the author's reduced emphasis on national and military cultures, which frame each country's approach to civil-military relations. The Clausewitzian subordination of military matters to civilian control is not a universal construct, though it is a strong norm in Western democracies. That said, Freedman acknowledges the influence of culture and the professional ethos in the case study centered around Ariel Sharon. That chapter, titled "The Very Model of Insubordination: Ariel Sharon and Israel's Wars," captures the uniqueness of Israeli politics and its acquiescence to intense disagreement among its senior commanders.

Freedman's concluding chapter explores the future and the changing character of war, including the impact of artificial intelligence (AI). The rapid introduction of AI will undoubtedly impact staff processes—the synthesis of multisource intelligence, the gaming of options, logistical planning, and so forth. This change should help commanders maintain a competitive edge by facilitating faster decision cycles and freeing up commanders and their teams from mundane matters for more creative applications of human ingenuity. Yet, AI-supported systems will not be capable of understanding the politics that must shape command decisions. Freedman agrees with the British scholar Kenneth Payne, who labeled current AI-enabled decision capacity as strategically naive.

I recommend Freedman's *Command* because of its valuable exploration of the influence of politics and personality. All higher command courses should embrace this book for its central theme on the confluence of politics and personal character and their impact on operational decisions. The book is also invaluable for recognizing that command evolves with the changing character of war.

Command is a leadership function over people who need to be inspired to achieve success by making great sacrifices under adverse conditions. In the political and military spheres there is no substitute for leadership, and certainly not by neural networks and algorithms. The formations that modern commanders must inspire are not inanimate pawns on a game board. The moral and human dimension of warfare is what gives senior command its most demanding cognitive challenge. The model general of the twenty-first century, like the great captains over the last millennium, cannot escape that reality.

New York: Oxford University Press, 2022 • \$37.99 • 624 pages

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**Keywords:** Samuel P. Huntington, Carl von Clausewitz, Dwight D. Eisenhower, George S. Patton, Kenneth Payne

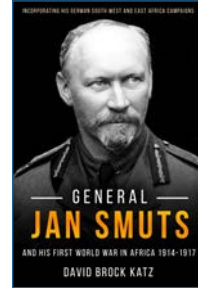


# General Jan Smuts and His First World War in Africa, 1914–1917

by David Brock Katz

Reviewed by Dr. James D. Scudieri, senior research historian,  
Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College

Jan Smuts represented a senior Afrikaner “bitter ender” who wanted to prolong the struggle against the British during the Second South African (Boer) War of 1899–1902 (8–9). He typified Whites who dismissed Black South Africans’ rights. This biography on his World War I years is impressive. The sources number 26 pages and include South African archival documents, official and otherwise, plus books from publishers in Johannesburg and Praetoria, materials rarely cited in North America.



The book consists of an introduction, eight chapters, and a conclusion. The introduction provides an overview of his major accomplishments and a critique of earlier biographies. Chapter 1 covers the years 1870–1910. Chapter 2 explains the state of domestic South African politics in 1910–14. Chapters 3 and 4 analyze the campaign to conquer German South West Africa, now Namibia. Chapters 5 through 7 detail the operations against German East Africa, now Tanzania, Burundi, and Rwanda. Chapter 8 is the epilogue and is followed by a conclusion.

The book has several threads of continuity. The first is a historiographical essay on the shortcomings of existing works. Second, Smuts ardently supported British objectives in Africa to promote a Greater South Africa with expanded territory. Katz is not the first to cite South African strategic aspirations and does so with Smuts at center stage. Third, the development of a United Defence Force capable to fight and support these campaigns had to reconcile two conflicting force structures that, in turn, represented two distinct “ways of warfare.” One was English colonial, reflecting British doctrine and methods and noted as slower and prone to frontal attack. The other way was Afrikaner, adept and fond of maneuver warfare with turning movements key for envelopment. Smuts is personification of the latter school. He succeeded British command in East Africa on February 12, 1916, following embarrassing British reverses. This coverage of his German East African operations is as much historiographical treatise as campaign analysis. Katz underlines Smuts’ cumulative experience in the Second South African War, German South West Africa, and



the subjection of the Afrikaner rebellion before taking command in East Africa. The narrative recognizes the punishing climate and geography and is critical of dismissive attitudes on sideshows.

Chapter 8 highlights Smuts and his service at higher levels for the rest of the war. He handed over command in East Africa on January 8, 1917, and joined the Imperial War Conference in March–April 1917. His positive reputation moved him to the British War Cabinet. He intervened to end three domestic strikes in Britain (226–27) and contributed to the reports that ultimately established an independent Royal Air Force in April 1918 (230–37). The conclusion is a summary of chronological events, political and military, closely interwoven with his corrective to the extant historiographical record.

There is considerable tactical detail, including 22 functional maps and several detailed tables. Katz has integrated the strategic, theater, operational, and tactical levels masterfully, demonstrating their iterative relationships. His sharp dichotomy between Boer and British doctrine and ways of warfare is perhaps overdone.

This work is a case study in senior leadership. The context is an emerging nation state with chronic, deep-seated internal divisions. Katz underlines how Britain’s “colonials” had their own national aspirations and strategic interests. They also had to devise a defense policy with forces to wage what is now labeled as large-scale combat operations.

Of greatest importance, Katz renders observations of significance to all historians. He does not submerge Smuts or his individual shortcomings or note how he was representative of racist Afrikaners. An extract from the introduction is worthy of quotation in full: “Contemporary historians who are unable or unwilling to transport their minds into the past, fall into the trap of anachronism. Historians have a duty to account for their subject’s historic conduct in terms of the standards of the time in which it occurred”(xv).

Haverton, PA: Casemate Publishers, 2022 • 288 pages • \$37.95

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**Keywords:** Jan Smuts, South Africa, World War I in Africa, German South West Africa, German East Africa

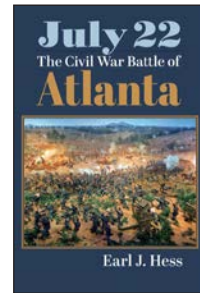
## MILITARY HISTORY

## July 22: The Civil War Battle of Atlanta

by Earl J. Hess

Reviewed by Dr. Richard L. DiNardo, professor of national military affairs,  
US Marine Corps Command and Staff College

Arguably the key event of the Civil War in 1864 was the monthslong campaign conducted across north Georgia by General William T. Sherman's small group of three armies against the Confederate Army of Tennessee, led initially by Joseph Johnston and later by John B. Hood. Sherman claimed the ultimate prize of the contest, Atlanta, on September 2, an event that many claimed guaranteed the reelection of Abraham Lincoln. Earl J. Hess, a prolific scholar of the Civil War, takes a close look at one of the key tactical events of the campaign—Hood's attack on the Army of Tennessee, commanded by Sherman's favorite, Major General James B. McPherson—known to history as the battle of Atlanta.



Hess's account is a blow-by-blow description of the actions of July 22, accompanied by close and shrewd analysis. Far from being an unthinking exercise in hurling men against entrenched troops, Hess credits Hood with employing elements of two corps against a potentially open flank, while Sherman engaged in what he described as a "delicate maneuver" to sever Atlanta's communication lines to the east and south. Hood was aided by Sherman, who had to some degree mismanaged his cavalry, and by Army of Tennessee commander James B. McPherson.

The ultimate failure of the attack, according to Hess, was unfavorable terrain for the attackers, poor command and control by the Confederates, better performance by the Union subordinate commanders than the Confederate commanders (a necessity as McPherson was killed very early in the battle), and determination by Union soldiers to hold the key position, a rise known as Bald Hill. The result was that Sherman still held the critical position, suffering more than 3,700 casualties while inflicting 5,500 on Hood, who could ill afford the losses.

Hess applies criticism and approbation to the commanders on both sides fairly and judiciously. Once engaged, Hood exerted little effort to control the battle. Sherman did a bit more than Hood but, like Hood, left the

tactical actions to his subordinates. Sherman also made no effort to employ his largest force, the Army of the Cumberland, under George Thomas. Although Hess notes that they were confronted by a Confederate corps that was well entrenched, Hess is much more justly critical of McPherson, whose faulty deployment of the Union XV, XVI, and XVII Corps left them vulnerable to a flanking attack. The commander most responsible for Union success was John Logan of the XV Corps, who took over after McPherson's death, and who handled the situation admirably. He was aided by several division and brigade commanders who performed well.

The same could not be said on the Confederate side. Hess could have extended his argument a bit. Historians Douglas Southall Freeman and Gary Gallagher have argued that by 1864, the Army of Northern Virginia was facing a command crisis, owing to the loss of so many able and experienced subordinate leaders. Hess could argue that by July 1864, the Army of Tennessee was in a similar condition. Command at lower levels, especially corps and division, too often had to be entrusted to people promoted to a level beyond their competence, such as Ben Cheatham, who had taken over Hood's Corps. Poor coordination helped foil the initial phase of Hood's attack when the chances of success were greatest, especially after division commander William H. T. Walker was killed.

Regarding the place of the battle in Civil War history, Hess gives it much less importance than previous scholars, most notably Gary Ecelbarger, who argues that the battle of July 22, 1864, was a turning point in the campaign. Instead, Hess regards it as one of a series of engagements in the Union extended campaign that began at Nashville in 1862 and concluded with the capture of Atlanta.

Since the battlefield ultimately disappeared amidst southern suburban sprawl, Hess includes an interesting chapter on the most notable artifact from the battle, *The Battle of Atlanta*, the cyclorama painting that tourists and students of the battle still visit. The research is exhaustive and thorough, a standard one would expect from any work authored by Hess.

Taken all together, this book adds considerably to our knowledge of one of the critical campaigns of the Civil War. Novices and experienced students alike will benefit from reading it.

Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2023 • 432 pages • \$44.95

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**Keywords:** Civil War, Army of Tennessee, John B. Hood, William Tecumseh Sherman, Battle of Atlanta

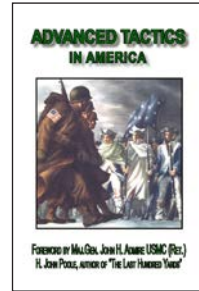
## Advanced Tactics in America

by H. John Poole

Reviewed by B. A. Friedman, strategic assessment analyst

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**L**ikely no one knows more about small-unit tactics than H. John Poole. After 28 years of service as an infantryman in the Marine Corps, including tours in Vietnam from 1966–67 and 1968–69, Poole has spent the last 25 years researching small-unit tactics and teaching military units from all US service branches and special operations forces. *Advanced Tactics in America* is his 23rd book on the subject, a prodigious accomplishment. In it, he looks back at American military history, finds a wealth of examples of American small-unit tactics, and concludes with a warning: the US military is ignoring its small infantry units, to its peril. He is undoubtedly correct.



As Ukrainian squads and platoons successfully execute the kind of tactics Poole specializes in, the United States is seemingly uninterested in the actual combat occurring today. The Army is refocusing on division and corps tactics, and the Marine Corps focuses on battalion and regiment tactics. Special operations tactics remain shrouded behind a phalanx of security classification guidelines, their efforts unable to inform the wider infantry community. Even the Close Combat Lethality Task Force, begun in 2018 by Secretary of Defense General James N. Mattis, seems to have done nothing for the effectiveness of American small infantry units, the success of which is the foundation of any tactical and strategic success on land.

Poole's style should be familiar to readers of any of his numerous other books. He writes at a snappy, sometimes frenetic pace that easily holds a reader's attention and is ideal for his intended audience of small-unit leaders. Poole covers a vast array of small-unit actions throughout the American infantry's experience from the French and Indian War to Afghanistan. His strength here, as in his other books, is his devotion to finding sources of insight into tactics anywhere they might be: if even a sentence of an article in some obscure newspaper pertains to his subject, Poole finds it. This devotion has served him well in studying the tactics of adversaries in the previous 22 books, as sources tend to be difficult to find and inaccessible.

Unfortunately, while Poole may be right about his thesis, he also undercuts it. First, while Poole, as usual, assembled a great deal of sources, he includes

many that are questionable and unreliable, like a painter's depiction of World War I combat and the works of military historian S. L. A. Marshall. Other statements are not sourced at all or are insufficiently annotated, like the frequent quotations of Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*, without any indication of which translation Poole consulted.

The lack of solid sourcing leads Poole to some erroneous conclusions, such as attributing the 2007 success of Coalition sources against insurgents in Sadr City, Iraq, to the use of local militias. The author of this review was there, embedded with the Iraqi Army infantry units that entered Sadr City, and local militias certainly were not. This error is unfortunate because the manner in which the Iraqi Army assaulted Sadr City would have bolstered Poole's argument far better.

Second, he frames the evolution of ground warfare in the long-discredited generations of war style. Third, he paints Russia and China as proponents of bottom-up, decentralized command-and-control systems. While that may have been true at one point, it is certainly not true of today's Russian armed forces and the People's Liberation Army, both of which employ command-and-control philosophies that are far more centralized than the United States'. Fourth, Poole employs an unfortunate amount of racially charged slang—like referring to the Germans as Huns—that has no place in serious analysis.

What *Advanced Tactics in America* lacks in rigor it makes up for in focus. Poole is correct that there is not enough scholarly and analytical focus on small-unit action and maneuver. American infantry personnel should have more than just doctrine and training to help them prepare for combat. The few works of outstanding merit, like Bruce I. Gudmunsson's *Stormtroop Tactics: Innovation in the German Army, 1914–1918* (Praeger, 1995), are not always easily available. He also hits the mark for why there is too little upper-echelon attention paid to small-unit tactics—excessive focus on standardization and simplistic drills, which stifle creativity and innovation. For readers interested in the US military's long history of small-unit success, *Advanced Tactics in America* is a good place to start, but without a better foundation in reliable sources, it cannot be a place to stop.

Emerald Isle, NC: Posterity Press, 2023 • 362 pages • \$13.95

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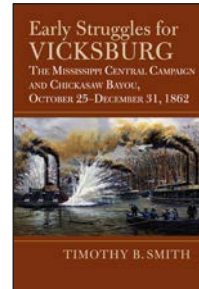
**Keywords:** Close Combat Lethality Task Force, Secretary of Defense General James N. Mattis, Russia, China, Iraq

## Early Struggles for Vicksburg: The Mississippi Central Campaign and Chickasaw Bayou, October 25–December 31, 1862

by Timothy B. Smith

Reviewed by Dr. Mitchell G. Klingenberg, US Army Command and General Staff College

Author Timothy B. Smith is one of the most prolific historians writing about the American Civil War today and perhaps its leading authority on military affairs in the Mississippi River Valley. He has undertaken an ambitious five-volume history of the Vicksburg Campaign, of which this work is the third published installment (though chronologically and sequentially the first title) in the series.



*Early Struggles for Vicksburg* examines the initial, twin-drive attempt of US forces under General Ulysses S. Grant to capture Vicksburg—the “Gibraltar of the Confederacy.” Smith presents a Grant new to department- and theater-level command and strains to interpret the early phase of the Vicksburg Campaign according to principles outlined in the writings of the nineteenth-century theorist Baron Antoine-Henri Jomini. Throughout, the reader sees a Grant who waged warfare in autumn 1862 by the proverbial book: moving and massing his forces against decisive points; securing advance bases of supply; turning flanks; and threatening lines of communications. Thus, in this first phase, Grant evidenced what Smith and other scholars have identified as the rational science of war—as opposed to its art—more closely associated with Jomini than with other expounders of Napoleonic warfare.

With the privileged place he accords Jominian theory, Smith frames this book as a command study, requiring almost 600 pages to chronicle two months of action culminating in the defeat of US forces at the Battle of Chickasaw Bayou. His grasp of the sources is strong, but there is a problem of perspective: the character of the historical evidence marshaled favors a bottom-up, not top-down, approach. Soldiers’ diaries and missives never fail to inspire, but often they are detached from the considerations of senior command. As a result, there exists an interpretive gap between the central premise of the study and the evidence the author employs to advance that argument.

Grant’s autumnal 1862 movements met tactical defeat. While Confederate forces checked Grant’s initial moves on Vicksburg, however, they failed to seize the operational or strategic initiative—the measure of which is the character,

diversity, and number of military options available to a commander to impose his will on the adversary. Even in the grand-strategic picture, despite their victory at the Battle of Fredericksburg in Virginia, Confederates confronted problems as manpower waned, US forces consolidated incremental territorial gains in the South, and decisive victory in the eastern theater remained elusive. In January 1863, despite previous failures, Grant retained the initiative at the operational and strategic levels of war, though his campaign for Vicksburg remained difficult and the movements necessary to capture it complicated.

One wonders whether Chickasaw Bayou proved an inflection point after which Grant jettisoned Jomini's approach to warfare (as Smith suggests) and whether Grant was limited to waging war "by the book" (as Smith imagines). True, Grant hoped his campaign would appeal to the sensibilities of Henry Halleck—a graduate of the United States Military Academy, a student of Jominian theory, the author of *Elements of Military Art and Science* (1846), and in 1862, Commanding General of the Army—in Washington. Nevertheless, to whatever extent Jomini's principles animated Grant's campaign, military operations under review here—Grant's overland approach utilizing the Mississippi Central Railroad and Sherman's joint, expeditionary operation down the Mississippi River from Memphis to the Yazoo River—demonstrate a departure from, not strict adherence to, Jominian principles: for example, Grant utilized exterior (as opposed to interior) lines and divided his forces (separated by the Mississippi River Delta), thereby violating Jomini's principle of mass. In a foreshadowing of future operations, Grant created military dilemmas for the enemy, accepted prudent risk, and demonstrated significant trust (a central tenet of mission command) in General William Sherman.

*Early Struggles for Vicksburg* delivers mixed results. Smith assembles an impressive amount of research and offers a colorful narrative of the Vicksburg Campaign to December 1862. Yet, his effort to square Grant's early operational art with the principles of Jomini is neither novel nor altogether convincing. Nevertheless, this book illustrates how Grant's setbacks provided important lessons by which the soldier was able to profit. Never an excellent tactician, Grant committed mistakes in this campaign and throughout the war, but he never allowed those errors to assume a quality of finality. So determined, and with tremendous competence, Grant retained the confidence of his troops and President Abraham Lincoln, and thus his command, which increased in scope as the war protracted. In this sense, Smith provides a meaningful picture of General Grant's maturation in the art—and science—of war.

Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2022 • 632 pages • \$45.00.

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**Keywords:** Vicksburg Campaign, Ulysses S. Grant, William T. Sherman, Chickasaw Bayou

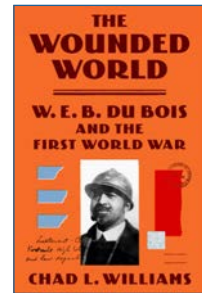


## The Wounded World: W. E. B. Du Bois and the First World War

by Chad L. Williams

Reviewed by Dr. Nathan K. Finney, lieutenant colonel, US Army,  
Indo-Pacific Command, founder of *The Strategy Bridge* and the *Military Writers Guild*

Following up on his award-winning book *Torchbearers of Democracy: African American Soldiers in the World War I Era* (University of North Carolina Press, 2010), Brandeis University professor Chad L. Williams again demonstrates his brilliance and extraordinary writing ability in *The Wounded World: W. E. B. Du Bois and the First World War*. Although on the surface a biography of W. E. B. Du Bois in the context of World War I, *The Wounded World* approaches the subject from multiple angles and uses the famous intellectual and activist as a lens to interrogate layer after layer of the history of 1914–1963, weaving in war, race, politics, ideology, international relations, citizenship, and memory. It is a tour de force that is also easily digested and, like few books do, leads to frequent moments of simply pondering the beauty of specific sentences. *The Wounded World* must be read with a pencil and tablet in hand.



The beauty of Williams's latest book is that it wraps four highly complex stories into one. It is a biography of Du Bois and an analysis of his work, including thoughtful and diligent criticism of the work and the ego of the man. It is also the story of the relationships of Black men of the "Talented Tenth" striving for equality among their people, as well as a criticism of Du Bois's relative dismissal of Black women in that project. At the same time, *The Wounded World* is the story of Du Bois's unpublished "The Black Man and the Wounded World," which was to describe and analyze the contribution of Black Americans in World War I. Finally, the book is a masterfully crafted history of World War I and the aftermath for Black Americans. While telling these four rich stories, Williams details how:

"through disillusionment, frustration, and anger, [Du Bois] evolved. World War I and its lessons, personal and historical, fueled his dogged critique of [W]hite supremacy, empire, and, most of all, war itself. His maturation into an uncompromising peace activist would not have been possible without his struggle to write "The Black Man and the Wounded World" and the failure that came with it" (427).

By focusing on Du Bois and the unfinished “The Black Man and the Wounded World,” Williams uses the man and the manuscript as symbols of the unfinished work of inclusive democracy, racial equality, economic justice, and the promise of World War I.

*The Wounded World* is organized into 12 chapters broken into three sections. The sections detail the chronological sequence of hope, disillusion, and failure—from Du Bois’s hope that World War I would bring positive change to the lives of Black Americans to the disillusionment found in the peace process and the treatment of Black soldiers during and following the war to the failure seen in the deeper retrenchment of White supremacy in the 1920s. These three sections also describe Du Bois’s crafting of “The Black Man and the Wounded World” to capture and publish a history of Black men in the war and detail the frustration in finishing the book and the recognition of the challenges to the legacy of Black participation in the war and to the failure to complete the book due to the vast undertaking and the intervening activity, ultimately overshadowed by the outbreak of World War II.

*The Wounded World* should be used in professional military education and by soldiers as a staple text for self-study. The themes of historical change, intellectual growth, and impact of military policies will equip leaders with a better understanding of identity, politics, power, and the role of the military in shaping society. As Williams quotes Du Bois’s analysis of World War I, “A nation with a great disease set out to rescue civilization; it took the disease with it in virulent form and that disease of race-hatred and prejudice hampered its actions and discredited its finest profession” (180). Military leaders need to understand that their actions and policies are based in, and flow from, the politics of the day and that the political world impacts the lives of soldiers and civilians alike.

New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2023 • 544 pages • \$30.00

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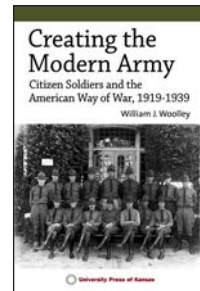
**Keywords:** World War I, World War II, W. E. B. Du Bois, Talented Tenth, 1920s

## Creating the Modern Army: Citizen-Soldiers and the American Way of War, 1919–1939

by William J. Woolley

Reviewed by Dr. Robert S. Burrell, assistant professor of interdisciplinary studies,  
Joint Special Operations University  
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Author William J. Woolley, a professor emeritus at Ripon College in Wisconsin, has written a historical gem with *Creating the Modern Army: Citizen-Soldiers and the American Way of War, 1919–1939*. These two decades proved crucial to the US Army that emerged in World War II, and these events shaped the Army in fundamental ways that remain visible. *Creating the Modern Army* offers an enhanced institutional understanding of one of America's finest and most important organizations.



The prevalent topics include the new citizen army, professional military education, the Army vision for itself (in the midst of budget crisis and congressional constraints), and the advancement of Army branches. Woolley also briefly discusses issues regarding race and segregation. This topical approach facilitates a wide discussion on these important subjects without merging them into one timeline. One prevalent theme revolves around the Army's pursuit of training and making ready the ideal citizen soldier, an ideal based on the principles in the US Constitution and the Jeffersonian model—common citizens ready to defend the United States when called upon. Even during this period, the industrialization of America and urbanization of its population created challenges for maintaining a citizen army. Remarkably, Army leadership, Congress, and multiple presidents continued to support this idea—one that might seem antiquated today in light of the professional modern Army, where less than half of one percent of the American public serves.

Another element of the text illuminates the cuts made by Congress and presidential administrations following World War I. The 1920 National Defense Act minimized the Army to fewer than 165,000 soldiers and 14,000 officers. What makes these figures so striking is the growth of the Army two decades later to more than 8 million. Fielding a massive army in such a short time is directly tied to the programs instituted during the interwar years, particularly the implementation of the Reserve Officer Training Corps, the federalization of state militias into a National Guard during

emergencies, and the investments in Citizen Military Training Camps. Despite deficiencies, the Citizen Military Training Camps offered up to 100,000 officers for service in 1939. Meanwhile, the National Guard mobilized 18 of the 29 divisions called up for war following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. In short, “the American army that fought World War II was clearly a citizen army whose leadership was largely trained within the framework of the intuitions created by the National Defense act of 1920” (253).

Woolley describes another important development in the interwar years, the evolution of Army branch structures, including infantry, artillery, coastal artillery, and armor. Simultaneously and relatedly, he outlines the evolution of respective Army bases to include Fort Benning (now Fort Moore), Fort Knox, Fort Leavenworth, Fort Monroe, Fort Riley, and Fort Sill. This breakdown explains how and why infrastructure developed during this critical time, including bases and stations that continue to support Army branch requirements today. Woolley also details the opinions and actions taken by influential key figures in the Army, including generals John J. Pershing, Douglas MacArthur, and George C. Marshall (and many other officers and congressional elite), and demonstrates the power and limitations of personal leadership over the evolutionary process.

Woolley draws information from the Library of Congress, the National Archives, US Army archives, and Army-related journals. He demonstrates a commanding knowledge of the debates and internal machinations occurring within the Army during these decades. His professional proficiency as a gray-bearded historian makes this book stand apart as first-rate history published by an expert at the peak of his knowledge and skill. My only complaint about the book is the font. The words appear so small on the page the content can prove challenging to read. That stated, I recommend the book for soldiers as part of their professional education and development. It also proves informative for sailors, airmen, and Marines in understanding their US Army counterparts. Due to the Sustainable History Monograph Pilot, the work is free to download at <https://kansaspress.ku.edu/9780700633029/creating-the-modern-army/>.

If you are looking to expand your knowledge about the US Army, then *Creating the Modern Army* is a must-have on your bookshelf.

Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2022 • 336 pages • \$44.95

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**Keywords:** World War I, World War II, citizen-soldier, National Guard, modern Army

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Text must be provided in a single MS Word document (.docx).

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Charts, graphs, and photographs may be provided to clarify or amplify the text. Tables should be presented in the body of the Word document. Microsoft-generated charts and graphs should be submitted in Excel. Photos should be provided as .jpg images of not more than 9MB (at 300 dpi). For tables, charts, graphs, or photographs that have been previously published, authors must obtain written permission from the copyright holder to republish the content and provide proof of permission to use the content.

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Use the *Chicago Manual of Style – 17th Edition* format to document sources. Indicate all quoted material by quotation marks or indentation. Reduce the number of footnotes to the minimum consistent with honest acknowledgment of indebtedness, consolidating notes where possible. Lengthy explanatory footnotes are discouraged and will be edited.



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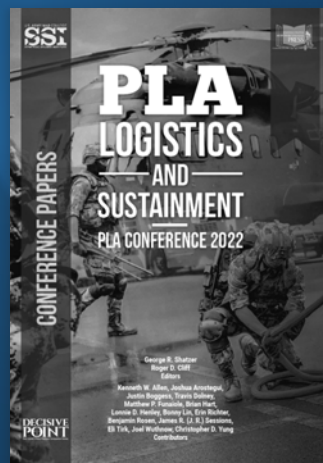
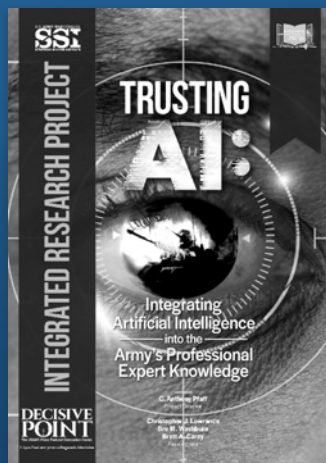
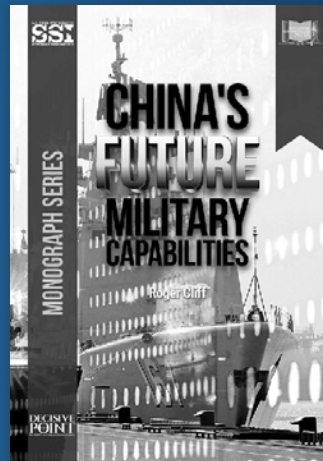
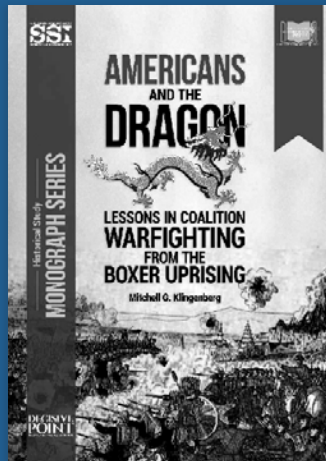
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