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THE SIMONS CENTER

About The Simons Center

The Simons Center for Ethical Leadership and Interagency Cooperation, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas is a major program of the Command and General Staff College Foundation, Inc. The Simons Center is committed to the development of ethical leaders with interagency operational skills and an interagency body of knowledge that facilitates broader and more effective cooperation and policy implementation. The Simons Center celebrated its 10th anniversary in 2020.

Command and General Staff College Foundation, Inc.

About the CGSC Foundation

The Command and General Staff College Foundation, Inc., celebrated its 15th anniversary in 2020. The Foundation was established on December 28, 2005 as a tax-exempt, non-profit educational foundation that provides resources and support to the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College in the development of tomorrow's military leaders. The CGSC Foundation helps to advance the profession of military art and science by promoting the welfare and enhancing the prestigious educational programs of the CGSC. The CGSC Foundation supports the College's many areas of focus by providing financial and research support for major programs such as the Simons Center, symposia, conferences, and lectures, as well as funding and organizing community outreach activities that help connect the American public to their Army. All Simons Center works are published by the "CGSC Foundation Press."

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Vol. 13, No. 2 (2023)

The Simons Center
for Ethical Leadership and Interagency Cooperation

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From the Editor-in-Chief

It was two years ago with our Spring issue that we once again began publishing the *InterAgency Journal* after a hiatus brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. Since then, we have continued to publish the *IAJ* semi-annually receiving numerous, relevant articles from across the interagency community. This issue is no exception.

The issue begins with three pieces that focus on the Asian-Pacific region discussing U.S. national strategy, China's Belt and Road Initiative, and the U.S. approach to engaging its partners and allies. Then, in the light of the recent political events, Simons Center Senior Research Fellow Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Bob Caslen addresses the appropriateness of retired flag officers participating in public discourse.

As we have done each year, in this issue we are bringing you selected articles from Command and General Staff College students who participated in our Interagency Writing Award Competition. Major Chinedu Chickwe of the Nigerian Army discusses how his country is addressing the complexities of border security. Our issue concludes with a discussion of the U.S. approach to limited war and a review of Simons Center Senior Research Fellow Ambassador (Ret.) Ed Mark's most recent book.

Over the past several months, the Simons Center has been busy on multiple fronts. Our book based on the proceedings of our Cold War Symposium is published and available online in the CGSC Foundation gift shop and on Amazon. Edited by Dr. Mark Wilcox and Dr. Sean Kalic, faculty members of the Command and General Staff College, *The End of the Cold War and its Aftermath* includes essays from nine contributing authors covering the Cold War's origins, arms control and implications for NATO, and global security.

Our flagship program, the Arter-Rowland National Security Forum (ARNSF), has enjoyed a mix of talks on both historical and national security topics during the past several months. A highpoint was the presentation by Terry Buckler who provided his firsthand account of the famous Green Berets raid on the Son Tay prison camp in North Vietnam in November of 1970. The raid is recounted in detail in *Interagency Paper 18W* (July 2022) written by Simons Center Fellow Ken Segelhorst. The ARNSF also featured presentations discussing the history and status of Sino-American relations as well as NATO's nuclear posture in the Cold War. These same presentations were delivered to our Des Moines National Security Forum.

We were also fortunate to have two events spotlighting the security situation in Europe. Maj. Gen. (Ret.) Gordon "Skip" Davis, one of our Senior Research Fellows, provided an overview of the 2023 NATO Summit in Vilnius, Lithuania covering topics spanning NATO defense plans, readiness, capabilities, and the NATO responses to Russian aggression. And in early October, the Simons Center hosted a panel discussion on the war in Ukraine, featuring Col. (Ret.) Matt Dimmick, European Regional Program Manager for Spirit of America, and Lt. Col. (Ret.) Donald Wright, Ph.D., Deputy Director, Army University Press. We were privileged to have Ukrainian Maj. Taras Karhalskov, an international military student in the 2024 Command and General Staff Officers Course, conclude the event with his personal thoughts on the conflict.

We thank you for being a reader of the *InterAgency Journal*. We are continually seeking new articles and book reviews covering interagency and ethical leadership topics to publish, so please consider submitting your work to the Simons Center. We look forward to any feedback you have on the *Journal* or on our various programs. – RRU

Contributors Wanted!

The Simons Center is looking for articles that involve contemporary interagency issues at both the conceptual and the application level.

The *InterAgency Journal* is a refereed national security studies journal providing a forum to inform a broad audience on matters pertaining to tactical and operational issues of cooperation, collaboration, and/or coordination among and between various governmental departments, agencies, and offices. Each issue contains a number of articles covering a variety of topics, including national security, counterterrorism, stabilization and reconstruction operations, and disaster preparation and response.

The *InterAgency Journal* has worldwide circulation and has received praise from various military, government, and non-government institutions, including the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

We're also looking for book reviews!

Submit a book review or suggest a book to review to editor@TheSimonsCenter.org.

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Half-Pivot:
Why the Obama Pentagon Could Not Shift to the Pacific

by John Q. Bolton

> ***Policymakers tend to live within existing constraints rather than challenging them.[1]***
>
> ***Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad***

This article examines the Pentagon's attempts to refocus American military power to the Asia-Pacific region as part of the Obama Administration's 2009 to 2014 "Pivot to Asia." The effort, known variously as the "rebalance", "adjustment", and, most notably, the "Pacific Pivot," sought to re-vitalize diplomatic ties to Asia's regional powers, shift military resources, and improve American economic linkages to the region. Often unsaid by officials – but built into the strategic logic of the Pivot – was an emerging need to balance growing Chinese power.

But change proved elusive. The Pivot's diplomatic and economic achievements notwithstanding, military power was largely unchanged by the end of the administration. Defense spending, force structure, and security cooperation efforts proceeded haphazardly and, by 2016, only partially reflected administration rhetoric from 2011-2012 about prioritizing the Pacific. Most apparent to regional powers wary of China, the administration failed to aggressively deter Chinese actions in the South China Sea. Lingering wars in the Middle East, budget fights, increasing partisanship, and other frictions combined to stifle the Pivot.

The Pivot was not without critics. Some argued the Pivot masked a shirking of American leadership; superpowers, Kagan argued, "don't get to retire."[2] Some critics accused the administration

Lt. Col. John Bolton recently completed doctoral coursework at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies as an Army Goodpaster Scholar (ASP3). This article is adapted from his dissertation. He previously commanded Bravo Company, 209th Aviation Support Battalion and Alpha Company, 1-1 Attack Reconnaissance Battalion and as an aviation task force executive officer and the aviation officer for an airborne infantry brigade. He is a graduate of the Command and General Staff College's Art of War Scholars Program and holds degrees in military history and mechanical engineering. An AH-64D/E Apache attack helicopter aviator with 800 combat hours, he has deployed with engineer, aviation, and infantry units.

of executing a "branding exercise" to mask retrenchment from the Middle East using existing Bush Administration initiatives as cover.[3] Others said Obama was needlessly provoking China by claiming hegemony within China's traditional sphere of influence.[4]

Much criticism of the Pivot was unfair and often partisan.

Much criticism of the Pivot was unfair and often partisan. Indeed, some commentators called the Pivot a "failure" as early as 2012.[5] Some accurately accused the Obama Administration of muddled messaging and unclear prioritization.[6] Others accused Obama of ambivalent leadership.[7] Yet even former administration officials called the Pivot "incomplete" or "unfinished."[8] Even Assistant Secretary of State Kurt Campbell (2009 to 2013) conceded there was a persistent challenge explaining the Pivot and "delivering on [the Pivot's] promise."[9]

These shortcomings included:

- the U.S. Navy did not place 60 percent of its ships in the Pacific Fleet until 2017, six years after Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta (2011-2013) announced the goal in 2012;[10]
- the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade pact proceeded without the United States;[11]
- regional states remained pro-China in policy, if not sentiment.[12] No smaller Asian state except Vietnam forthrightly challenged China's island-building campaign;
- without a comprehensive Pivot plan, public or otherwise. Consequently, implementation varied across departments, agencies, and military commands and over time. The disconnect between U.S. messaging and action confused regional leaders.

Explaining why the Pivot fell short is a complicated interaction of domestic politics, changing power dynamics, and bureaucratic friction. But for the Pentagon, the limitations came about due to a bureaucracy unable to shift funding and focus from the Middle East to the Pacific. And without clear prioritization, existing efforts prevailed over changes.

Three factors influenced this stasis. First, the 2008 economic crisis and lingering decisions regarding Afghanistan limited the administration's decision-making space through 2009.[13]

Second, nascent shifts in funding were largely upended when the new Republican Congress aggressively cut spending including a previously off-limits Pentagon. Arguably the administration failed to protect Pivot programs via the budget process, but sequestration would have affected any policy.

Last, bureaucratic processes built over the previous decade to support military deployments to Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Greater Middle East remained entrenched. Without senior leader's support, these processes ended up largely unchanged.

The Pivot's challenges were not entirely process-based or bureaucratic. The Pivot also encountered exogenous challenges. Regional states continued to hedge between the PRC and the United States, fearing Chinese economic backlash. In 2014, the rise of ISIS had returned U.S. troops to Iraq. Coupled with Russia's invasion of Crimea that year, the Pivot effectively ended with the administration focused on these crises amid reduced resources.

The Pivot is a compelling case study of strategy implementation.[14] Despite presidential endorsement and Congressional support, interagency and national security processes failed to translate produce substantive action. The Pivot shows that how well a presidential administration *implements* a strategy is as important as *conception*. Thus, studying the Pivot offers important lessons learned and

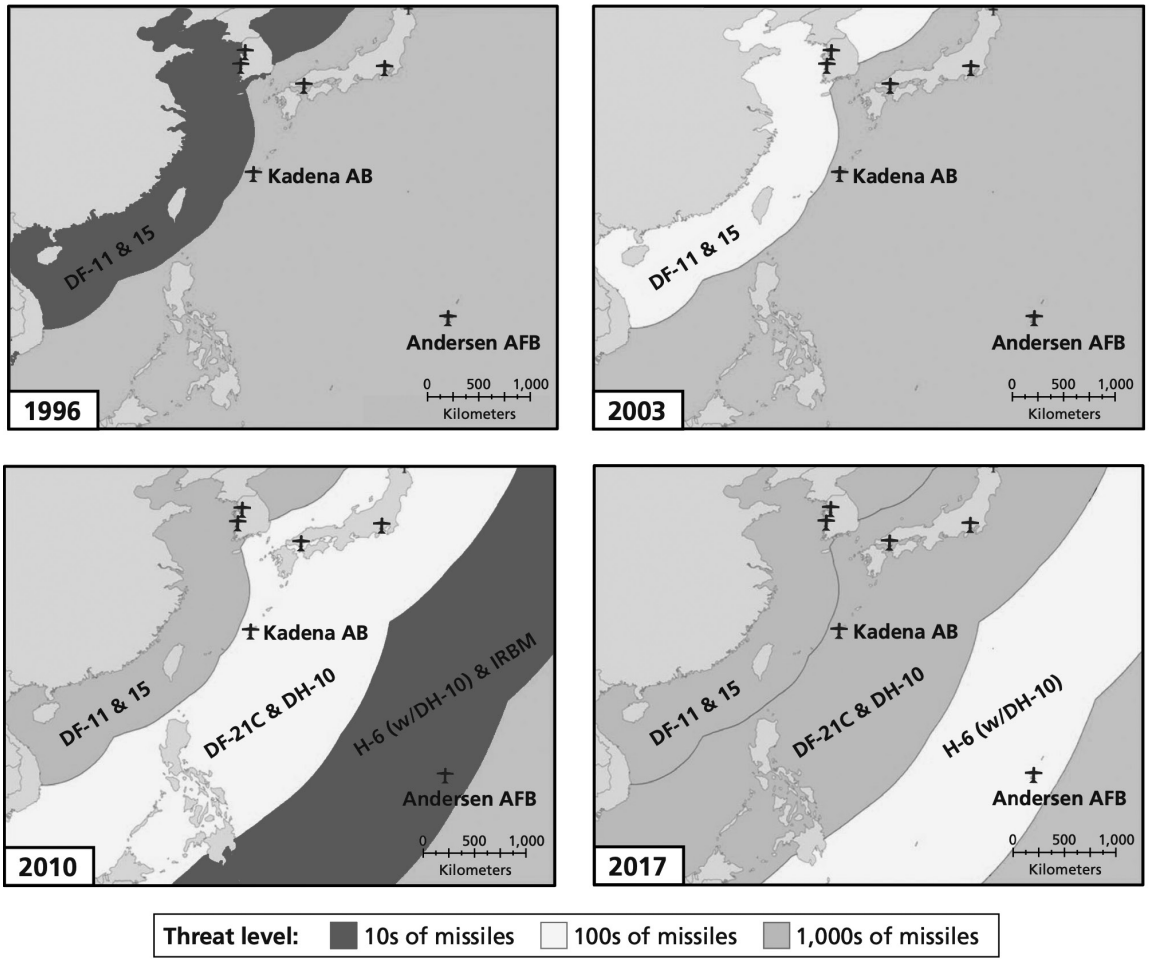


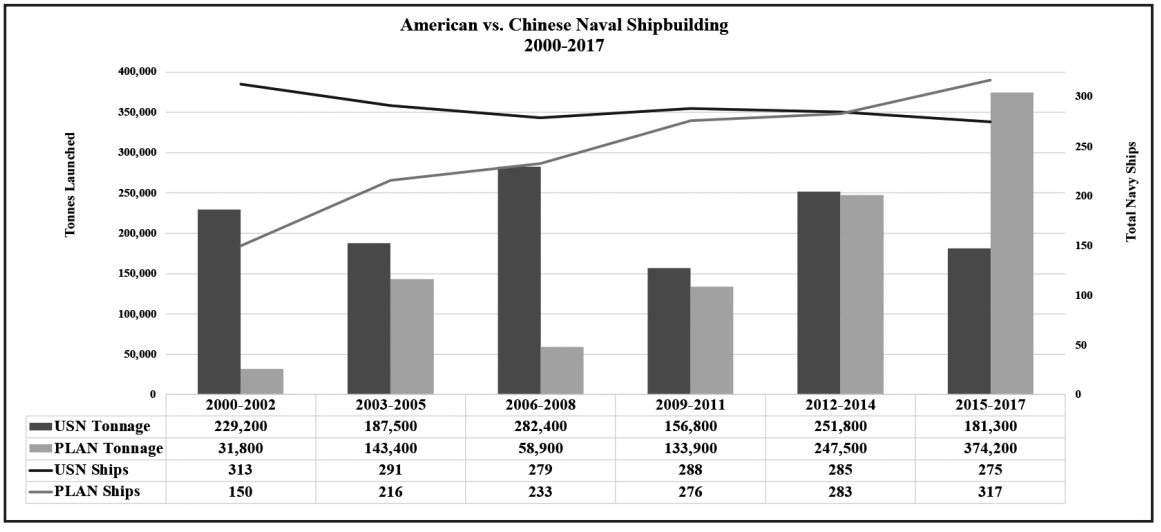
Figure 1. PRC Missile Capabilities 1996-2017[22]

insights into effective strategy development and execution.

While the Pivot was indeed a comprehensive set of policies to shape U.S. actions along diplomatic, security, and economic lines of effort, the security aspect is easiest to assess. Pentagon spending, force structure, and military exercises are generally measurable. To explore the Pentagon and the Pivot, the paper proceeds as follows: First, we briefly review the strategic logic behind the Pivot; second, we assess defense and security cooperation efforts; third, we examine some of the bureaucratic and messaging surrounding the Pivot. The paper concludes that the Pivot was limited by bureaucratic processes built for operations in the Middle East.

The Pivot as Conceived by the Obama Administration

That Obama would conduct foreign policy differently from President George W. Bush (2001 to 2009) was clear during the 2008 presidential election. But the administration made a deliberate choice to focus on Asia.[15] Obama Administration officials shared a conviction "that the Asia-Pacific region had not been accorded a policy prominence commensurate with its true importance."[16] Asia's economic growth portended increasing importance while China's expanding military capabilities and deep economic ties threatened longstanding American interests in Asia, namely military and economic access.[17] China's economy increased nineteen-



	2000-2002	2003-2005	2006-2008	2009-2011	2012-2014	2015-2017
USN Tonnage	229,200	187,500	282,400	156,800	251,800	181,300
PLAN Tonnage	31,800	143,400	58,900	133,900	247,500	374,200
USN Ships	313	291	279	288	285	275
PLAN Ships	150	216	233	276	283	317

Figure 2. American vs. Chinese Naval Shipbuilding, 2000 – 2017

Source: DOD Comptroller; U.S. Naval Heritage Command; International Institute for Strategic Studies.

fold from 1985 to 2010 and weathered the 2008 financial crisis well, outpacing the United States' growth by nearly 1,000 percent (80 percent to 7.3 percent from 2007 until 2014).[18] But it was Chinese military capabilities which poised a substantive challenge to U.S. power in Asia.

Most pressing was China's Anti-Access/ Area-Denial (A2/AD) system, a formidable network of sensors and missiles which could strike ships and aircraft up to 1,000 km away, as far as American and Japanese military bases in Japan and Guam.[19] The U.S. Navy would now "pay an increasingly high – perhaps prohibitive – price" to operate in the Western Pacific.[20] After 2008, Chinese foreign policy also became less benign; People's Republic of China (PRC) naval and coast guard ships increasingly encroached into neighboring economic and territorial waters. While these disputes were longstanding, the nature of PRC actions had changed. To Pentagon leadership, it appeared China was no longer "concealing its capabilities and biding its time."[21]

China was also building a larger, now-expeditionary navy, though the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) still trailed the U.S. Navy in per-ship capabilities. China's refurbishment of a Russian aircraft carrier in the 2000s made news, but the PLAN was on pace to surpass an older, shrinking U.S. Navy, which decreased to just 222 warships in 2016, by 2030.[23]

Given the strategic situation in 2009, some degree of "pivot" was inevitable.[24] However, the Obama Administration went further, broadcasting the Pivot to Asia as a *de novo* policy change.[25] The Pivot's strategic logic was simple: Asia's ripening economic potential represented the future of global commerce as well as area where the United States had margins to improve ties. The Pivot would improve U.S. economic, diplomatic, and military influence, thus strengthening American power while hedging against China. Politically, increasing American ties to the Pacific provided strategically sound, politically plausible, and budgetarily justifiable rationale for reducing military commitments in the Middle East.[26]

Prioritizing Asia began early in the administration in 2009 and peaked in late 2011. Clinton made her first overseas trip in February 2009 to Asia.[27] Following that trip the United States signed the ASEAN Amity Treaty and joined the East Asia Summit. Doing so, Clinton said, was "just the beginning" of a new web of diplomacy tying the United States to Asia.[28] Clinton was not alone in her outreach, both the

president and other officials increased travel to Asia. For example, Clinton's visits to Asia outpaced both her predecessors Colin Powell (2001-2005) and Condoleezza Rice (2005-2009).[29] Obama made over 60 trips to Asia himself.

Beyond showing up, American diplomats made commitments. During ASEAN 2010, Clinton condemned China's expansive South China Sea claims, calling freedom of navigation an American interest.[30] This implied the United States would be actively involved in long-standing South China Sea disputes (at least that is how regional powers understood the Pivot). Though denouncement of Chinese behavior remained limited, states such as Vietnam, Indonesia, and Malaysia were receptive toward American overtures.[31]

The Year of the Pivot

The formalization of the Pivot in late 2011 followed the administration's response to the Arab Spring and tortured decisions to intervene in Libya. The effort started with Clinton's October 2011 *Foreign Policy*. Giving the Pivot, the United States, Clinton said, was "at a pivot point," calling the next 100 years "America's Pacific Century." [32]

In November, Clinton and Obama hosted APEC leaders in Hawaii, a bastion of American power in the Pacific. Speaking to the Australian Parliament the following week, Obama echoed Clinton, the United States, he said, was "turning [to] the vast potential of the Asia Pacific region," by embracing TPP, and rotating U.S. Marines to Darwin.[33] Critically, Obama promised budget cuts would not "come at the expense of the Asia Pacific."[34]

Though nine speeches and documents would eventually outline the Pivot, Clinton's article and Obama's speech formed its core.[35] Engagement would, senior officials believed, ensure American access.[36] Second, Obama believed a more powerful, coherent "institutional architecture" would help shape how rising powers, especially China, behaved.[37] More generally, the Obama team were firm believers in multilateralism and pursuing rules and norms. American presence at multilateral bodies such as ASEAN and increased military ties to regional states would benefit the United States.[38] The administration also sought to improve tri-lateral coordination between the United States and its Pacific allies.

The interagency mechanisms behind the Pivot were insufficient or nonexistent.

Rhetoric aside, the Pivot resulted in few *actual* structural changes to the U.S. Military's force posture and Pentagon processes. The interagency mechanisms behind the Pivot were insufficient or nonexistent.[39] There were, for example, no programs to develop regional specialists or Sinologists as the United States did during the Cold War.[40]

Notably, the Pivot never received a formal strategy document (public or otherwise) outlining its various components or strategic logic, nor were tradeoffs discussed. Because there was not a "clear-cut decision among distinct options, departments and agencies assumed they were authorized to pursue their preferred course of action."[41] As we will see, sometimes these actions supported the Pivot; in other cases, subaltern actions merely continued the status quo.

This was the fate of the Pivot. It became whatever subordinates wanted it to be – simultaneously everything and nothing. Without guidance, however, officials and diplomats were unable to adequately explain the Pivot to American allies, partners, and potential partners in Asia. As a result, regional leaders would increasingly see the Pivot as mere rhetoric.[42] And China saw the Pivot as militarized containment.

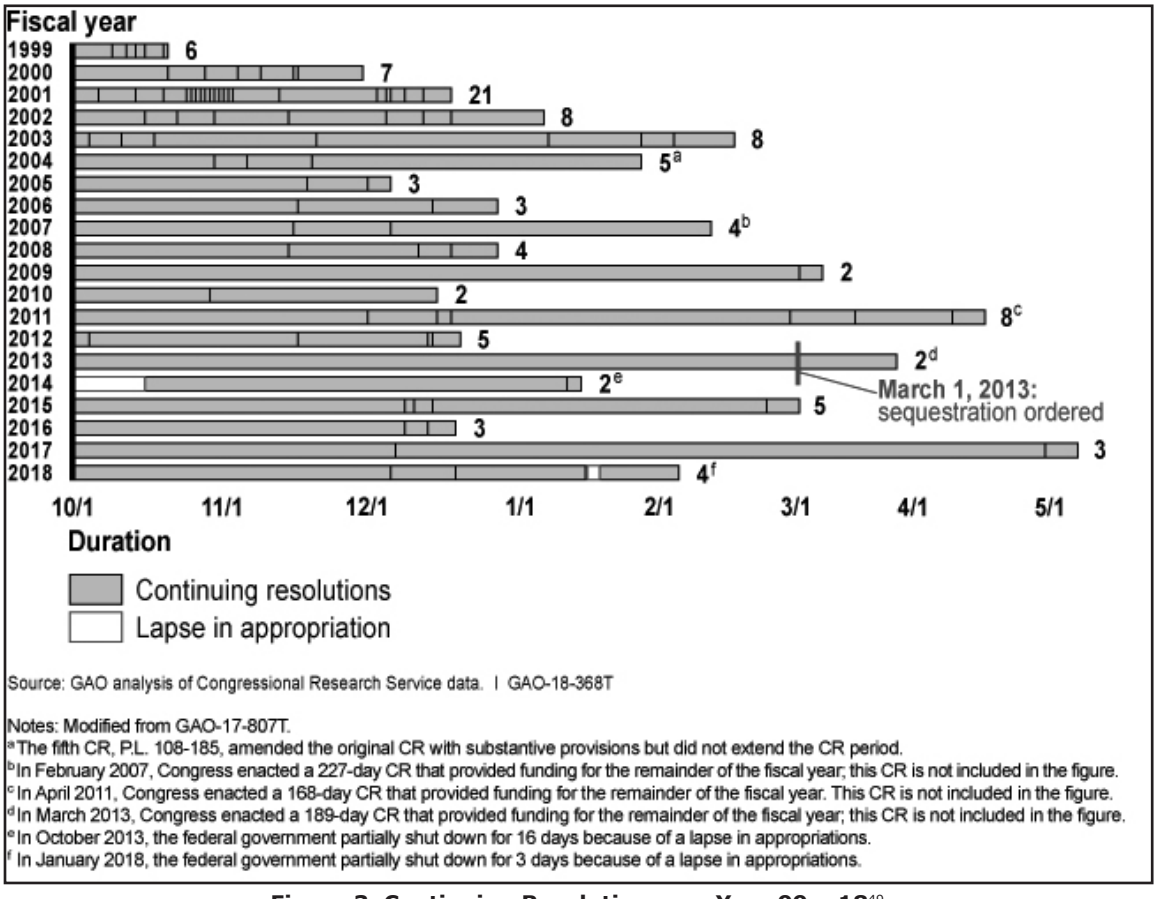
The Pentagon and the Pivot

> ***Accordingly, while the U.S military will continue to contribute to security globally, we will of necessity rebalance toward the Asia-Pacific.***[43]
>
> ***Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta, June 2012***

While a wholistic assessment of the Pivot requires analyzing Obama Administration actions encompassing all elements of national power, doing so is beyond the scope of this article.[44] The following analysis considers the defense and security cooperation actions taken in support for the Pivot. This includes qualitative and quantitative accounting of spending measured by regions and recipient states.[45] Additional insight was provided by over a dozen interviews with senior defense officials.

The Pentagon initially embraced the Pivot, rhetorically at least. Panetta had extensive experience in government and, as a Congressman from California, had travelled extensively in the region. His January 2012 strategic guidance document and remarks at the June 2012 Shangri-La Defense Forum made clear this intent. Specifically, Panetta promised the U.S. Navy would place sixty percent of its ships in the Pacific.[46] Moreover, Obama's 2009 "surge" to Afghanistan was scheduled to end in 2012, giving the Pentagon additional resources.

But funding was lacking. Nominally, the Pentagon spent approximately $700 billion annually by 2009. Nominal amounts, however, do not account for *real* change. The real defense budget shrank by over fifteen percent from 2010-2015.[47] Moreover, the use of Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) funds meant



Source: GAO analysis of Congressional Research Service data. | GAO-18-368T

Notes: Modified from GAO-17-807T.
[a] The fifth CR, P.L. 108-185, amended the original CR with substantive provisions but did not extend the CR period.
[b] In February 2007, Congress enacted a 227-day CR that provided funding for the remainder of the fiscal year; this CR is not included in the figure.
[c] In April 2011, Congress enacted a 168-day CR that provided funding for the remainder of the fiscal year. This CR is not included in the figure.
[d] In March 2013, Congress enacted a 189-day CR that provided funding for the remainder of the fiscal year; this CR is not included in the figure.
[e] In October 2013, the federal government partially shut down for 16 days because of a lapse in appropriations.
[f] In January 2018, the federal government partially shut down for 3 days because of a lapse in appropriations.

Figure 3. Continuing Resolutions per Year 99 – 18[49]

much of defense spending went toward the Middle East.

Though the Pentagon's budget was enormous, the use of Continuing Resolutions (CRs) increasingly disrupted funding. Repetitive CRs limited budget flexibility because they amounted to "copy and pasting" budget information from one fiscal year to the next on a pro-rated basis. According to Deputy Secretary of Defense Michèle Flournoy (2009 to 2012), CRs meant many items remained unchanged year to year.[48] The loss of time for both Congressional staff and Pentagon planners meant less analysis and strategic input went into each budget.

Complicating matters was the 2013 Sequester. Created to force a budget compromise, the Sequester cut billions arbitrarily in early 2013 following the failure of negotiations between Obama and Congressional Republicans. The Sequester arbitrarily cut Pentagon spending by ten percent. However, OCO funds were largely exempt from Sequester. Consequently, maintenance and training in the United States was suspended for months. Likewise, nascent efforts to change defense procurement and security cooperation in support of the Pivot were stillborn.

Panetta said the Sequester would cost the Pentagon $500 billion in fees and losses over ten years.[50] Katrina McFarland, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Acquisition (2011 to 2017), was more blunt, "Right now, the pivot is being looked at again, because candidly it can't happen."[51] Pacific Command (PACOM) Commander Admiral Samuel Locklear (2012 to 2015) testified, "Budget uncertainty has hampered our readiness and complicated our ability to execute long-term plans and efficiently use resources."[52]

Misplaced hopes explain why the cuts were so arbitrarily applied. Up until early 2013, the administration felt a compromise would be reached; but when talks failed, the cuts immediately started. Bureaucratic politics played a role as well. According to Joint Chiefs Vice Chairman (2011 to 2015) Admiral James Alexander "Sandy" Winnefeld Jr, Pentagon spending was subject to a "non-virtuous flywheel" of interservice rivalries, and the processes built to support the War on Terror. By 2011 these processes were deeply ingrained into Pentagon culture and processes.[53]

Though the Pentagon's budget was enormous, the use of Continuing Resolutions (CRs) increasingly disrupted funding.

Military Personnel in the Pacific

Established processes preferring – directly and indirectly – help explain why, even as deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan decreased, forces did not necessarily move to the Pacific, though the lack of shift resulted, in part, from an overall shrinking of the military. But, as shown below, aside from modest increases in Alaska and Hawaii and Marine Corps rotations to Darwin, overall American military forces stationed in the Pacific *declined* through 2016 (though some alignment changes gave PACOM control of additional forces).[54]

While specifics are difficult to ascertain because many operations involve rotational forces, Air Force personnel and aircraft data is illustrative.[55] From 2007 to 2017 the number of Air Force active-duty personnel assigned to the Pacific and Europe *declined* though aircraft numbers remained consistent. According to former PACOM Deputy Commander Lieutenant General Anthony Crutchfield (2014 to 2017), another factor was limited basing options.[56] Aside from Darwin, there were no new facilities available to handle major increases in force structure.

There were subtle changes, however. For example, the U.S. Army blocked the First Corps headquarters and its two divisions from Middle

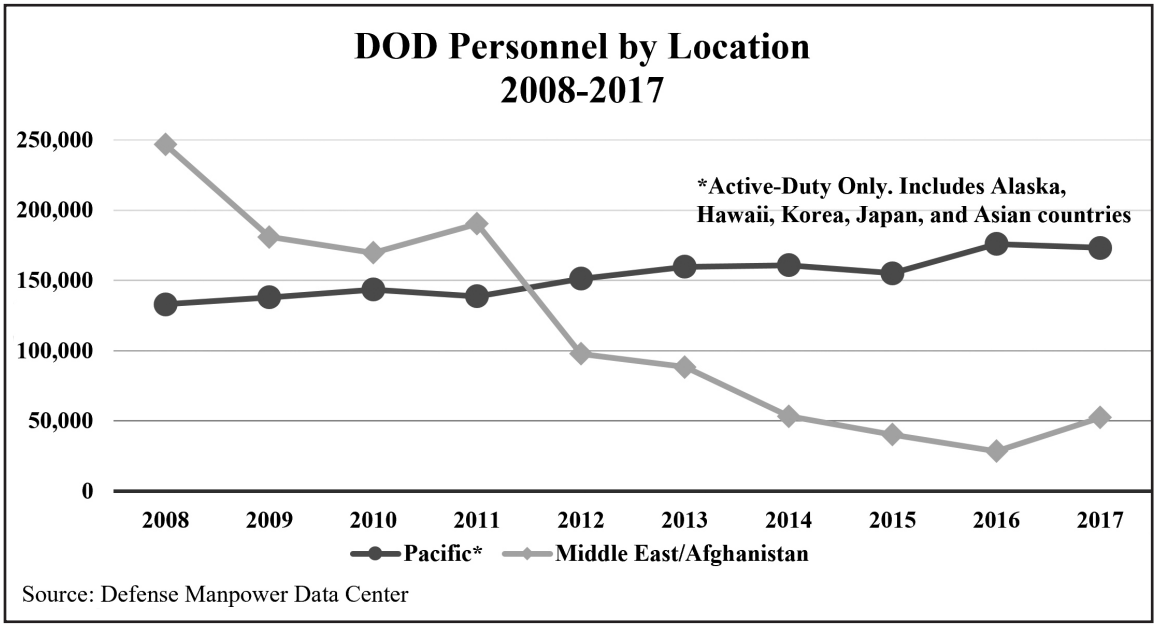


Figure 4. DOD Personnel by Location 2008 - 2017

East deployments.[57] This gave PACOM six more U.S. Army brigades (25,000 soldiers).[58]

Other actions included rotating B-52 bombers to Guam as well as high-altitude reconnaissance aircraft such as the U-2 and Global Hawk.[59] Yet despite the rotational Marine Corps unit in Darwin, nowhere in any official remarks was there talk of *increasing* permanently forces.

Military Construction (MILCON)

Likewise, MILCON spending in the Pacific also remained flat or decreased.[60] Several MILCON projects had started during the Bush Administration, including facilities in Guam and South Korea. Funding went to *existing* rather than new facilities or access points, making the Pivot's impact on MILCON unclear.[61]

New spending, excepting Guam, favored installations in Washington State and Southern California.[62] Improvements at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, a World War II-era facility south of Seattle enabled the base to support new U.S. Army units including an aviation brigade and a division headquarters, all assigned to U.S. Army Pacific.

On Guam, MILCON funded munitions storage, an enlarged aircraft ramp, and improved wharfs.

Procurement

Shipbuilding provides a window into Pentagon procurement related to the Pivot. Given the ocean-dominated geography of the Pacific, the U.S. Navy is an *ideal case*; building more ships was an obvious means for the Pentagon to support the Pivot, especially if the U.S. Navy was going to place sixty percent of the fleet in the region.

Shipbuilding budgets remained flat or experienced a real decline during the Pivot years. This was especially concerning given an older, smaller, and busier U.S. Navy fleet. Older ships require longer maintenance periods, costing time and resources.

In fact, from 2000 to 2016 the Navy lost 1,300 carrier operational days and 12,500 days for submarines.[63]

More missions with a smaller fleet with longer maintenance times increased personnel stress and set conditions for the 2017 collisions of the USS *McCain* and the USS *Fitzgerald*.[64]

Naval Presence and Freedom of Navigation Operations

The U.S. Navy made some force structure changes, basing a second carrier group at Yokosuka Naval Base in Japan and moving several submarines, cruisers, and destroyers from Bahrain to San Diego.[65] Pacific Fleet Commander Admiral Scott Swift (2015 to 2018) said he "was surprised at how quickly ships moved" to the region following Panetta's 2012 guidance.[66]

The new ships included Littoral Combat Ships (LCS), multi-mission ships designed to perform and operate in the littoral environments prevalent in Southeast Asia. Unfortunately, mechanical issues meant "[LCS ships] mostly sat at the pier in Singapore" according to 7th Fleet Commander Vice Admiral Robert Thomas (2013 to 2015).[67] The new P-8 Poseidon had similar issues.[68]

Importantly, the military's rotational presence in the Pacific *did* increase. Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs), port visits, and overflights through 2016 roughly doubled those of the early-2000s.[69] Military reconnaissance flights also increased from "260 in 2009 to over 1,200 in 2014."[70] But presence was not permanence. By 2017, the U.S. military force's posture in Asia was *both smaller and more concentrated* since the closing of Subic Bay and Clark Air Force base twenty-five years earlier. The lack of increased presence, coupled with the failure of the Obama Administration to challenge China during the 2012 Scarborough Shoal affair discredited the Pivot. Though rotational forces helped improve interoperability with allies and did signal American engagement in Asia, it was not possible to reassure allies "on the cheap."[71]

Security Assistance/Cooperation

Between 2006 and 2016 the United States provided over $200 billion in security assistance.[72] Funding overwhelmingly went to the Middle East; post-2012 cuts there did not fund increases elsewhere. The Pacific percentage remained around one percent.

Like defense spending, security cooperation funding was also subject to bureaucratic capture. FY16 spending provides an illustrative example.

Figure 5. Security Cooperation Funding by Region

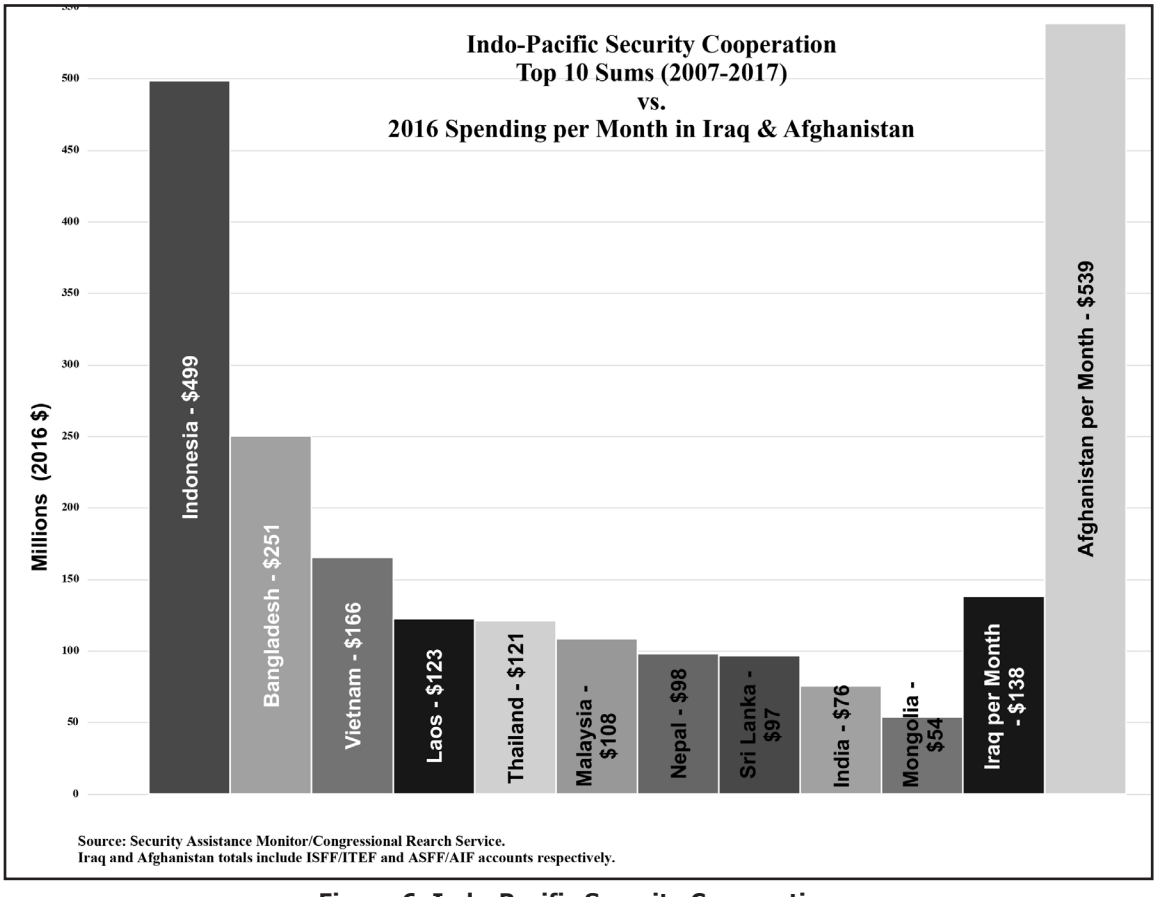


Figure 6. Indo-Pacific Security Cooperation

Five years into the Pivot, Middle East spending still dwarfed other regions. As Figure 5 shows, spending on the top ten Pacific recipients totaled between $50 and $500 million each for the *ten years* from 2007 to 2017. None of these sums exceeded 2016 *monthly* spending in Afghanistan ($539 million).[73]

Pacific Pathways – Faces Without Bases

One Pivot-related security cooperation expansion was "Pacific Pathways," a program created by U.S. Army Pacific (USARPAC) Commander General Vincent K. Brooks (2013 to 2016).[74]

Pathways added Army exercises to existing joint wargames with Thailand, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Indonesia. Tellingly, Pathways did not receive a budget.[75] The program also lacked explicit support from PACOM and the interagency level; it was, instead, Brook's *sui genesis* interpretation of strategic guidance.[76] According to one officer, Pathways "provided a lifeline" for U.S.-Philippine relations during the tenure of President Duterte.[77]

More broadly, only one Asia-specific security cooperation program, the Maritime Security Initiative (MSI), was enshrined in the budget.[79] Announced by Secretary of Defense Ash Carter (2015 to 2017) in 2015, MSI expanded a State Department program and provided $425 million for Southeast Asian navies over five years.[80]

But MSI was paltry compared to other programs.[81] For example, OCO Lift/Sustain funding, which supported airlift in the Middle East, was triple MSI.[82]

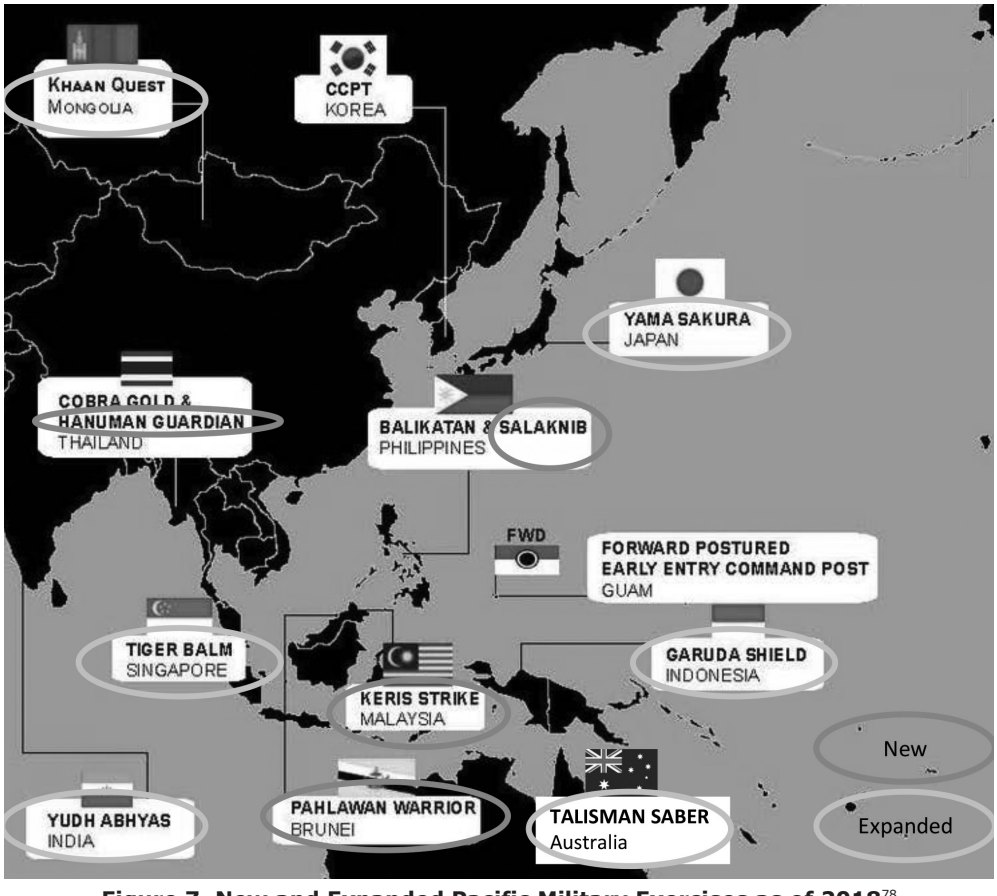


Figure 7. New and Expanded Pacific Military Exercises as of 2018[78]

Bureaucratic Processes and Messaging

> ***The methods of policy execution are just as important as the results: how a policy is pursued and perceived can impact its success as much as the actual mechanics of its implementation.***[83]
>
> ***U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee Staff Report, 2014***

Despite Obama's desire to reduce military commitments in the Middle East, his administration enacted few limits on operations abroad prior to 2014.

Indeed, requests from U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) – the command overseeing military operations in the Middle East – frustrated senior military officers who agreed with the Pivot's strategic logic. CENTCOM tended to get "whatever it wanted," according to Marine Corps Commandant General Robert Neller (2015 to 2019).[84] CENTCOM priorities were baked into Pentagon processes, according to Winnefeld.[85] This deference impacted military operations elsewhere. Pacific Air Forces commander, General Herbert Carlisle (2012 to 2014), explained: "resources have not followed [the Pivot] … ongoing operations obviously in the Middle East [and Sequestration] make it actually incredibly hard to find places to pivot money to the Pacific."[86]

CENTCOM's prioritization was also reflected in the rhetoric and messaging of administration officials. As discussed, the Pivot never had a specific strategy document. Key strategy documents such as the National Security Strategy or National Military Strategy also exhibit a pattern regarding the Pivot and Asia.[87]

Though mentions of Asia/Pacific increased, the Middle East remained predominant. In fact, no document had *fewer* mentions of the Middle East (including Afghanistan) than any other major foreign policy area. The Middle East remained predominant in strategy documents.

The administration's rhetorical support for the Pivot ebbed over time and other efforts took priority. By 2014, the Middle East, terrorism, and Russia dominated administration rhetoric. Remarks of defense secretaries mirror this prioritization; even Panetta, a supporter of the Pivot, discussed the Pivot less than the Middle East.[88]

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Topic Mentions Secretaries of Defense in Speeches/Remarks

The State of the Union (SOTU) also shows lessening support for the Pivot. The address each February is the most important guidance issued to the executive branch.[89] Obama SOTUs mentioned Middle East topics much more frequently than the Pivot. Unsurprisingly, Pivot-related terms spike in 2011 to 2012 during the policy's formalization before dropping.

One area where the Pivot created rhetorical was popularizing "Indo-Pacific." The term became common in both government and academic discussions of Asian affairs around 2010. Vice President Biden's July 2013 speech prior to a trip to India and Singapore said the administration viewed the region as "Indo-Pacific in character if not necessarily in name."[90]

Social media also provides a window into administration messaging.[91] Though only five to ten percent of 186,000 tweets issued by the Obama Administration from late 2011 to 2017 concerned foreign policy, the tweets reveal focus and priorities.[92] The relatively paucity of the Pivot compared to the Middle in tweets is telling. For example, of 41,775 White House tweets, 9.1 percent were Middle East-related compared to 3.9 percent related for the Pivot. Tweets about the Middle East averaged between 150 to 200 monthly, often exceeding 250.[93] After spiking through 2012, Pivot-related tweets only surpassed 100 per month five times through January 2017.

The Pivot Compared to Europe – An Apt Comparison

The world also got a vote. Events in 2014 illustrated the difficulty of shifting to Asia but also showed how quickly a motivated administration and Congress could react. Following Russia's invasion of Crimea in early 2014, Congress and the Obama Administration – at the height of Sequestration – worked together to fund the European Reassurance Initiative (ERI). ERI provided $1 billion loan guarantees and nearly $100 million in direct assistance and eventually became a budget item surpassing $6 billion in FY19.[94] The ERI increased U.S. military forces in Europe by 8,000 soldiers and thousands of airmen, marines, and sailors.[95] Though these deployments did not directly affect the Pivot, they cost billions annually and limited forces available for other operations.

One can hardly fault the Obama Administration and NATO for decisively responding to Russian aggression and improving the West's deterrence posture in Eastern Europe. On the other hand, the alacrity with which money and troops went to Europe vis-à-vis the Pacific. That the rapid and enormous funding of a European initiative occurring during Sequestration contrasts with the stasis and occasional decline of both force structure and Pacific-focused military spending.

Better processes and structures would not have assured the Pivot's success. Any wide-

ranging policy faces varying challenges across its breadth. And Obama faced additional exogenous challenges as mentioned above but also from within the region. For example, better Obama Administration processes could not have changed the Philippines' acquiescence to China's maritime encroachment. Nor would better processes have prevented Obama's skepticism about intervention abroad, mostly notably seen in his hesitancy in Libya (2011) followed by punting a decision on striking Syria to Congress in 2014.

Nevertheless, processes are important. Had the Obama Administration implemented an effective policy process and supporting bureaucratic structures and backed the Pivot with explicit guidance, the policy would have better survived the challenges described above. Better management of the Pivot, including providing guidance to specific departments and shaping the annual budget more favorably to the Pacific, would have ameliorated some of the ongoing resource capture and predilection toward the Middle East. With better processes, Pivot efforts such as naval shipbuilding and Pentagon security cooperation efforts may have survived Sequestration rather than fall victim to the across-the-board cuts. Synchronizing Pivot efforts across the government would have improved the messaging supporting the Pivot and better tied specific efforts to the Pivot holistically.

Conclusion

Contrary to criticism that the Pivot was simply a branding exercise, the Obama Administration made an earnest effort to better link the United States to the Pacific. This included a series of bilateral trade and partnership agreements as well as additional military exercises and additional rotations of military units to the region.

Some successes notwithstanding, the Pivot's limitations emerged from a particularly powerful confluence of *process, geopolitics, and political* challenges that confounded Obama's attempts to re-focus and re-prioritize American foreign policy towards Asia. These challenges compounded in interesting ways, often confounding the Pivot. Political fights with Congressional Republicans seeking to deny Obama any wins, regardless of the cost, inevitably affected foreign policy.[96] Congressional scrutiny pushed the Obama White House and National Security Council toward micromanagement: of the anti-ISIS campaign; embassy security; and numbers of troops in Afghanistan.[97] This micromanagement, however, tended to favor the status quo – that is, the Middle East. Existing efforts held *de facto* priority over the Pivot due to bureaucratic path dependence. More security cooperation and military assistance funding, as well as arms sales financing, went to Middle East recipients than Asian states. Election year politics also delayed and then derailed the administration's push for TPP in 2016.

Had the Obama Administration implemented an effective policy process and supporting bureaucratic structures and backed the Pivot with explicit guidance, the policy would have better survived the challenges...

But many of the Pivot's challenges resulted from structural and process issues endemic to any presidential administration (or large organization) attempting any change. While the Pivot was indeed buffeted by exogenous events, the administration's failure to adequately plan, process, protect/prioritize, and publicize the Pivot created most of these limits.

Importantly, designating a specific Pivot "czar" to shepherd officials and processes would have helped. The Obama Administration, in fact, used this exact model for nearly thirty

other governmental functions, appointing over fifty "czars." Additionally, because the Pivot was never integrated through a formal interagency process by the National Security Council (NSC) or elsewhere, guidance issued to departments and agencies as well as military commands was largely indirect. Subordinates understood Asia was the priority but, absent specific guidance, were free to pick and choose what the policy meant for their specific agencies. This freedom, however, avoided hard tradeoffs. As a result, the status quo *effectively remained the same*.

The Pivot demonstrates two challenges of implementing any strategic change. First, while a superpower must indeed be able to do multiple things concurrently, it can only prioritize a few things. That focus is borne out in action, but action is informed by strategy documents, rhetoric of senior officials, and budgets. Because strategy is ultimately a zero-sum affair – a state ultimately has limited military force, funding, and time – strategy is really about prioritization. The bureaucracy affects both *how* presidential policy is enacted and *to what degree*. No matter how well supported by process, converting presidential ambitions into actions and effects is no easy task. "Policy," according to scholar Hal Brands, "is more exciting than bureaucracy. But bureaucracy enables policy because it is how states organize for action."[98]

Second, the time of senior officials is limited. Senior officials' true priorities are demonstrated not only through their rhetoric, but also through their actions. Economists call the distinction between rhetoric and reality "revealed preference." For practitioners of strategy, this is a key lesson. Any U.S. involvement, particularly the deployment of military units to dangerous locations, carries attendant costs in attention and money. As the lingering costs associated with Afghanistan demonstrate, *any* commitment to combat operations will out-prioritize any *non-combat* operation. Hence, even a "manageable footprint," as many advocated for Afghanistan, inevitably carries a heavy cost.[99]

Last – and often unsaid in discussions of strategy by both practitioners and scholars – is the predicate of domestic political consensus. Though presidents and the executive branch generally conduct foreign policy unilaterally, Congress controls the purse strings. Strategy, of course, requires funding and thus Congressional support. During Obama's presidency, domestic partisanship limited budget flexibility and affected key decisions on trade policy in Congress. Granted, the administration could have done better to sell the Pivot domestically, but without at least a general consensus about the direction and goals of U.S. policy, it may vary wildly from one president to another. This naturally limits the effectiveness of any strategy shift. ***IAJ***

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Harbors and *Hidden Agendas*

by John Paul "J.P." Thompson

Setting the Course for Understanding China's Belt and Road Initiative

In the early 2000s, U.S. researchers theorized that Chinese investments in the Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea region were part of a broader strategy to develop overseas naval bases to support extended naval deployments in the region, which became known as the "String of Pearls."[1] In 2014 an article in the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) Pacific Forum stated that "little evidence supports Chinese naval bases along the Indian Ocean littoral, particularly as that specific arrangement may not be beneficial to China."[2] This *may* have been true at the time; however, since then China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has emerged as a focal point in discussions about global economics and geopolitics.

Officially launched by Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2013, the initiative aims to create a network of infrastructure, trade, and economic corridors connecting Asia with Europe, Africa, and beyond.[3] While the BRI is commonly portrayed as an economic venture designed to advance global trade and investment, its implications extend far beyond the financial realm.

The purpose of this article is to examine the dual nature of the BRI, focusing on its economic as well as military dimensions. Utilizing case studies of Chinese investments and activities in Sri Lanka, the Maldives, Pakistan, and Djibouti, this article aims to dissect China's strategic intentions behind these seemingly economic endeavors. Each of the cases investigates the specific economic and military benefits accrued to China and reviews each of the host nations, juxtaposed with existing trade data and geopolitical considerations.

As we navigate the complexities of geopolitics, understanding the underlying motivations of

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China's actions becomes imperative to better recognize and predict their future foreign policies and security strategy. I hope this article contributes to a better understanding of the multifaceted strategies at play, thereby offering valuable insights into future policy-making aimed at preserving regional stability and global maritime security. Also, I hope this allows those in the interagency community to continue to re-visit the question of whether the "string of pearls" is an actuality, and if so, how does this affect the actions of the U.S.? Are her allies in the maritime security arena?

The international community at large has been increasingly cautious about the rise of China as a global power.

Background and Context: Charting and Navigating the Origins

China's BRI, also known as the One Belt, One Road (OBOR), was officially announced by President Xi Jinping in 2013. The ambitious project seeks to revive ancient trade routes, linking China's trading partners in Asia, Europe, Africa, and even South America through a web of railways, roads, pipelines, and shipping lanes. The BRI is touted as a monumental plan for economic cooperation and regional development, aimed at facilitating the free flow of goods, capital, and people. However, the initiative has raised questions about China's ultimate intentions, both economic and strategic.

The rise of China as an economic superpower has been dramatic and its global influence is undisputed. China was the world's second-largest economy with a $17.7T GDP,[4] an expanding middle class, and a growing demand for consumer goods, technology, and energy. Given this context, it is reasonable to expect that the BRI would have considerable economic motivations, such as opening new markets for Chinese goods, utilizing its excess industrial capacity, and securing energy supplies.

However, the way China structures its investments—often providing large loans for infrastructure projects—has raised concerns about 'debt-trap diplomacy.'[5] Critics argue that China is deliberately investing in unsustainable projects to put recipient countries in debt, potentially using it as leverage for strategic concessions. This has been a focal point of controversy in places like Sri Lanka[6] and the Maldives, where significant Chinese investment has not translated into expected economic viability for the host countries.[7]

The geographic scope and scale of the BRI projects inevitably intersect with regions that are of strategic military interest, not just to China but also to other global powers. It is important to note that several BRI projects are located near *key maritime chokepoints, such as the Strait of Malacca, the Suez Canal, and the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait*. The dual-use nature of many infrastructure projects—ports that can handle commercial and military vessels, for instance raises questions about the initiative's role in China's broader military strategy. This is further accentuated by China's increasingly assertive maritime activities, including the presence of its submarines and naval vessels in or near port projects like Sri Lanka and Pakistan to support operations in the area.[8]

The international community at large has been increasingly cautious about the rise of China as a global power. Part of this cautiousness yielded the "string of pearls theory." Additionally, as we have closed the book on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, U.S. military and diplomatic strategies are being recalibrated to address the "Era of Intense Strategic Competition,"[9] particularly in regions like the South China Sea, East China Sea, and the Indian Ocean. As the BRI projects continue to proliferate in these sensitive regions, understanding the initiative's dual economic and military objectives becomes

crucial for crafting effective geopolitical strategies.

Given this complex backdrop, the primary objective of this article is to scrutinize the multidimensional aspects of China's BRI, particularly focusing on its potential military-strategic implications. In sum, the context within which the BRI operates is multifaceted, marked by economic ambitions, strategic calculations, and geopolitical tensions. This look at BRI investment in strategic locations endeavors to unpack these complexities to present a comprehensive view of the initiative's broader implications.

Case Study #1: Sri Lanka and the Hambantota Port Project

The Hambantota Port Project in Sri Lanka serves as a prime example to explore the complexities of China's BRI. Located in the Southern Province of Sri Lanka, Hambantota Port has been thrust into the spotlight as a critical junction within the maritime Silk Road, part of China's larger BRI. So, let us look at the economic, military, and geopolitical factors influencing China's investment in Sri Lanka's Hambantota Port.

From the viewpoint of economic structuralism, the Hambantota Port Project exemplifies China's strategy of exporting its excess industrial capacity. Built with the promise of transforming Sri Lanka into a key trading hub, the port was financed mainly by Chinese loans.[10] However, despite the optimistic economic forecasts, the port underperformed. Consequently, Sri Lanka found itself unable to repay the mounting debts, leading to a 99-year lease agreement with China in 2017.[11] Critics argue that this arrangement puts Sri Lanka in a 'debt-trap', echoing concerns of economic neocolonialism.

Realism and power politics theories suggest that control over Hambantota serves China's military interests as well. The port's strategic location along major maritime routes offer the potential for dual use, including military purposes. Although Chinese and Sri Lankan officials have denied any military intentions behind this overseas port investment in the past,[12] their actions have often contradict these statements, leading to recent skepticism that Sri Lanka may be the next Chinses overseas military base, following Djibouti.[13] Sri Lanka's decision in 2014 to allow a Chinese submarine to dock at another port in Colombo, is just one example of activities that have raised questions about the possible military objectives behind China's investment in Hambantota.[14]

China might be sing the Hambantota Port to secure its maritime interests and project power across the Indian Ocean. Located near *key shipping lanes that connect the Suez Canal to the Strait of Malacca*, Hambantota provides China with a foothold in a region traditionally influenced by India. Through the BRI, China is reshaping the geopolitical landscape, effectively encircling India and increasing its presence in the Indian Ocean.

...the Hambantota Port Project exemplifies China's strategy of exporting its excess industrial capacity.

While China promotes BRI projects like Hambantota as opportunities for mutual growth and regional cooperation, the reality often contradicts these claims. Though soft power theory would predict that such a project would enhance China's image as a global leader, the controversy surrounding the Hambantota Port has instead fueled suspicions about China's intentions, both in Sri Lanka and internationally.

Conclusion and Implications

The case of the Hambantota Port illustrates the multifaceted objectives that underpin China's BRI projects. While the economic aspect is

evident, it is inextricably linked *with military* and geopolitical interests. Furthermore, attempts at soft power projection through these projects may backfire, particularly when host countries like Sri Lanka find themselves trapped in unfavorable economic conditions. The Sri Lanka example demonstrates that, in the context of the BRI, economic, military, and geopolitical motives are not mutually exclusive but interconnected strands of a complex web of objectives. By closely examining the Hambantota case through a multifaceted theoretical lens, we may garner a more nuanced understanding of the BRI's implications.

the Maldives offers China a strategic advantage in the Indian Ocean, a region traditionally influenced by India and Western powers.

Case Study #2: The Maldives and Chinese Infrastructure Investments

The small archipelago nation of the Maldives serves as another intriguing focal point to understand China's multifaceted strategy under the BRI. Known for its pristine beaches and luxury resorts, the Maldives might appear an unlikely candidate for major international infrastructure projects. However, its strategic location forms key sea lines of communication, connecting the Arabian Sea to the Indian Ocean. This case study aims to unpack the economic, military, and geopolitical dimensions of China's infrastructure investments in the Maldives.

At first glance, the Maldives might not seem like a lucrative investment opportunity for a country like China, which has a limited history of significant trade with the island nation. However, China has been active in providing risky loans for infrastructure projects in the Maldives, including the development of airports, bridges, and housing projects.[15] From an economic structuralist perspective, these investments align with China's broader goal of finding new markets and internationalizing its domestic enterprises. Realist theory provides a lens to assess military objectives behind China's involvement in the Maldives. Notably, in August 2017, three Chinese naval ships docked at a Maldivian port, sparking speculation about China's long-term strategic intentions.[16] The islands of the Maldives form several channels, including the *Eight-Degree Channel* (named so as it lies along 8° N latitude), an *important chokepoint for maritime traffic*. Such naval activities in these strategic corridors indicate a dual-use potential for China's infrastructure investments, which could be leveraged for military gains in addition to economic benefits.

Geostrategic considerations are essential in understanding China's interests in the Maldives. Situated near critical shipping routes, the Maldives offers China a strategic advantage in the Indian Ocean, a region traditionally influenced by India and Western powers. Through infrastructure projects, China may be seeking to reshape the geopolitical landscape and offset India's influence, thereby advancing its own interests in a broader regional context.

Although China has promoted its projects in the Maldives as beneficial for local economic development, these claims often fall short of expectations. Instead of cultivating goodwill and enhancing its soft power, China's actions in the Maldives have resulted in some skepticism and contributed to local political tensions, as well as straining relations with other influential countries in the region like India.

Conclusion and Implications

The Maldives case demonstrates that China's infrastructure investments under the BRI can serve multiple, interwoven objectives. While economic gains are a consideration, they cannot be divorced from the military and geopolitical advantages that these projects offer to China. The

dual-use nature of these investments complicates their interpretation and should caution other nations engaging with China under the BRI framework. As with the Sri Lanka case, the Maldives example suggests a complex interplay of economic, military, and geopolitical factors that are pivotal in shaping China's BRI strategy.

Case Study #3: Pakistan and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor

Pakistan serves as one of the most comprehensive and illustrative examples of China's multifaceted approach within the BRI. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a critical component of this relationship, bringing together economic, military, and geopolitical dimensions.

From an economic perspective, CPEC is a high-profile pillar of the BRI. As reported by Gurmeet Kanwal from the Center for Strategic & International Studies, the Pakistani port of Gwadar is instrumental in connecting China and Pakistan by both sea and land lines of communication; this project "speaks to both the strength of the China-Pakistan relationship and the reach of China's grand strategy."[17] According to the Observatory of Economic Complexity, trade between the two countries has significantly grown; exports from China to Pakistan have increased at an annualized rate of 15%, from $616M in 1995 to $23.5B in 2021, and exports from Pakistan to China have increased at an annualized rate of 11%, from $215M to $3.25B in the same period.[18] This consistent economic engagement suggests that China views its investments in Pakistan as strategically beneficial for long-term economic gains.

While the economic components of CPEC are undeniable, realist theory prompts us to consider the security dimensions. Numerous reports indicate that Chinese submarines[19] and warships have docked at Pakistani ports,[20] and the Gwadar port's location has potential strategic military utility. The dual use of such infrastructure projects reveals a blurred line between economic and military objectives, reinforcing the notion that China's investments often serve a composite agenda.

From a geopolitical standpoint, China and Pakistan have maintained a reasonably amicable relationship. The CPEC not only boosts China's economic reach, but also solidifies a strategic partnership that serves as a counterbalance to India's influence in the region. In the larger geopolitical chessboard of South Asia and beyond, CPEC acts as a lever for China to exert its influence and project power.

China's investments, particularly in the Gwadar port, have not been without controversy. China Overseas Port Holding Company (COPHC) was granted a lease by the Pakistani government for 40 years, and the revenue sharing agreement appears to be skewed in China's favor.[21] Such arrangements led to concerns within Pakistan, creating a narrative that casts doubt on China's intentions and muddies the waters of its soft power aspirations.

China Overseas Port Holding Company (COPHC) was granted a lease by the Pakistani government for 40 years...

Conclusion and Implications

The Pakistan case study showcases the complexity and multidimensionality of China's BRI strategy. Economic gains are tightly interwoven with military and geopolitical objectives, creating a complex tapestry that nations must carefully scrutinize. Furthermore, China's long-term lease and revenue-sharing agreements suggest an imbalanced relationship that could be detrimental to Pakistan in the long run. CPEC is emblematic of China's broader strategies under the BRI. It serves multiple purposes: an economic venture, a military

tactic, and a geopolitical maneuver. Therefore, understanding the various facets of projects like CPEC is essential for any evaluation of China's global ambitions through the BRI.

China's activities in Djibouti are arguably more transparent in their military objectives than in other BRI countries.

Case Study #4: Djibouti and China's Belt and Road Initiative

Djibouti, a small East African nation, has emerged over the last ten years as an improbable yet consequential player in China's BRI. Given its strategic location near the *Bab-el-Mandeb Strait*—a key maritime chokepoint connecting the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden—Djibouti has become an attractive investment for China.

At first glance, Djibouti may seem an unlikely candidate for significant Chinese investment; it has a GDP below $1.8 billion, a population of less than one million, and few natural resources.[22] However, China has committed to infrastructure projects like the initial $4 billion Ethiopian-Djiboutian electric railway, now merged with the Addis Ababa–Djibouti Railway projects led by the China Rail Engineering Corporation and the China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation (CCECC),[23] as well as a $300 million-plus water pipeline from Ethiopia to Djibouti.[24] Overall China has invested approximately $14B in infrastructure projects and loans from 2012 to 2020. While economic figures suggest a rise in trade (with Chinese export to Djibouti growing from $509M in 2011 to $2.57B in 2021),[25] Chinese investments seem to outweigh the volume of trade, thereby signaling other strategic intentions.

China's activities in Djibouti are arguably more transparent in their military objectives than in other BRI countries. In 2017, China completed construction on its first-ever overseas military base in Djibouti, alongside the commercial Doraleh Multipurpose Port. According to Monica Wang's article for the Council on Foreign Relations, the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) reportedly has exclusive use of at least one of the port's berths.[26] The close proximity of the military base and the commercial port suggests a dual-purpose strategy aimed at both economic and military interests.

The geopolitical ramifications of China's involvement in Djibouti are significant. Located in a volatile region, the base provides China with the capability to exert influence and power across the Horn of Africa and the broader Middle East. Furthermore, Djibouti is home to military bases from other nations, including the U.S., making the area a focal point for great power competition.

China's substantial investments in Djibouti have led to increased scrutiny and suspicion from both the local population and the international community. Given the disproportionate scale of investment compared to the size of the Djiboutian economy, concerns have arisen about the nation falling into a debt trap, a scenario that could further augment China's influence and control.

Conclusion and Implications

China's activities in Djibouti serve as a paradigmatic example of the multifaceted approach of the BRI. Unlike other projects that may emphasize either economic or military objectives, *Djibouti sees a clear blend of both*. Understanding this dual-purpose strategy is essential for assessing China's broader objectives in the BRI and its impact on geopolitical stability. The case of Djibouti underscores the necessity for careful examination and nuanced understanding of China's increasing global footprint.

Conclusion: Beyond the Next Horizon

The BRI has frequently been analyzed through a purely economic lens. However, the BRI is a multi-faceted strategy that simultaneously serves both economic and military interests alike. While economic motives are more explicit in some instances, like Pakistan, the military dimension cannot be dismissed, especially in strategic locations like Djibouti and Sri Lanka. Thus, China's activities under the BRI present a complex combination of economic opportunity and strategic posturing, making it crucial to assess both dimensions for a comprehensive understanding of China's global ambitions.

By recognizing the complexity and dual nature of China's BRI, nations can better anticipate China's future moves, adjust their own strategic calculations, and engage more effectively in this new paradigm of global geopolitics. Specifically, the U.S. and her allies should implement the following strategies.

Strategic Partnerships and Maritime Security

In regions significantly impacted by the BRI, we should not only focus on forming strong strategic partnerships to offset China's influence but also continuing to enhance combined multinational maritime strategies. Given that many BRI projects are situated at key maritime chokepoints, a robust multilateral maritime strategy is essential to safeguard freedom of navigation and national interests. Partner nations should also work towards building domestic capacity in countries receiving Chinese investments, lessening long-term dependency on China.

Transparency and Public Engagement

Affected nations should collaborate with international bodies like the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and United Nations Conference on Trade and Development to advance transparency initiatives and combat the risk of 'debt-trap diplomacy.' This should be complemented by efforts to build public awareness through public education, educational institutions, and social media about the multifaceted impacts of BRI projects. A well-informed populace can act as a check against governmental oversights and corruption, making continuous monitoring and adaptation of strategies more effective.

By focusing on these recommendations, stakeholders and the international community at large can develop a more coherent and effective response to the complexities of China's BRI and it maritime and security implications. ***IAJ***

Notes

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A Whole-of-Government Approach to Leveraging Our Most Strategic Asset – Allies and Partners

by Max Nauta

> ***Perhaps the most impressive testimony to the extraordinary quality of the Marshall Plan came from Winston Churchill, whose active participation in the shaping of modern history made him acutely aware of the likelihood that the altruistic reasons given by a major power for supplying aid to another nation are merely a cover for sordid intentions. The Marshall Plan, in Churchill's judgment, was 'the most unsordid act in history.' [1]***

Strategic competition is most successful as an unsordid act. The State Department understood this when it developed the Marshall Plan in 1947. This is because of the asymmetric nature of competition. It is competition between status quo and revisionist states, between democracies and authoritarian states. The U.S. views the current international rules-based order as a win-win game. We succeed through the achievements of our allies and partners. On the other hand, the People's Republic of China (PRC) and Russia view the international rules-based order as a zero-sum game. They try to succeed at the cost of the international community's success.

Our partners and allies are our most significant asymmetric advantage in strategic competition. However, we often fail to appreciate or communicate that. Sometimes, we fail for external reasons, such as competitors sewing distrust to undermine U.S. credibility. Sometimes, we fail because of internal causes, such as conflicting messages from the interagency community or failing to listen to our allies and partners. How do we counter competitors' malign influence, unify interagency efforts, and leverage the strengths of our allies and partners? The Marshall Plan was resilient to disinformation, projected a unified message, and leveraged the strengths of our allies and partners.

Major Max Nauta is a civil affairs officer in the U.S. Marine Corps who recently completed his thesis at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College. His thesis investigates observations from his experiences in the U.S. Forces, Southern Command area of responsibility, where he deployed with Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force – Southern Command in 2016, 2018, and 2019. In 2018 he served as the liaison officer to the U.S. embassy in Tegucigalpa, Honduras. In 2019 he served as the key leadership engagement coordinator, which included planning and participating in key leadership engagements with the U.S. embassies and partner nation senior leaders in over ten countries in the region.

How do we replicate the successful, unsordid influence of the Marshall Plan?

The author presents a solution to these challenges through a case study on the Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force—Southern Command (SPMAGTF-SC) that deployed to Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) from 2015 to 2020 to strengthen partnerships and address shared challenges in the region. The study's problem statement is that the PRC and Russia have significantly increased their influence in LAC in ways that jeopardize U.S. influence and threaten democratic governance. The PRC and Russia exploit the ambiguity of the gray zone through predatory, opaque lending practices and disinformation campaigns. Through transparency, U.S. Forces, Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) counters PRC and Russian gray zone activities. By fostering a climate of trust and transparency, SOUTHCOM reduces the ambiguity of the gray zone, which exposes the malign nature of their influence. SOUTHCOM promotes trust and transparency in LAC by strengthening partnerships through military cooperation activities.

The author found that integrating partner nation (PN) officers into SPMAGTF-SC exponentially strengthened partnerships at a relatively insignificant cost. First, he found a strong positive correlation between integrating PN officers and strengthening partnerships. He then compared these findings with relevant theories on narrative and culture to illuminate why integrating PN officers strengthened partnerships to the degree it did. In doing so, he found that this correlation was causation.[2] To explain this causation, he developed the concept of a shared regional narrative (SRN) based on the principles of mutual contribution and equal ownership. The principles of the SRN make these findings generalizable to other regional theaters and the interagency community and provide a model for a whole-of-government approach in strategic competition. In this article, the author offers a model for a whole-of-government approach that is resilient to disinformation, projects a unified message, and leverages our most significant strategic asset—our allies and partners.

How do we replicate the successful, unsordid influence of the Marshall Plan?

This article consists of three parts. The first part introduces the study. This includes SPMAGTF-SC, the regional challenges, and the purpose of the study. The second part reviews the research, findings, and how they apply to the interagency community. Finally, the third part offers three recommendations for how the joint force and interagency community can leverage our allies and partners through a whole-of-government approach. These recommendations are:

1. Integrate allies and partners in the planning and execution of diplomatic, information, and military activities.
2. Incorporate the principles of mutual contribution and equal ownership for a whole-of-government approach to strategic competition.
3. Use this case study as an educational example for operations in the information environment, strategic competition, and how the interagency community can better leverage military support for shared objectives.

Background

What is SPMAGTF-SC and why do a Case Study on it?

The SPMAGTF-SC deployed to LAC from 2015 to 2020 to work with partner nations through mutually beneficial engagements, such as security cooperation training and humanitarian

and civic assistance projects, while being on standby to respond to natural disasters and humanitarian crises.[3] Every year, the task force deployed to Central America for six months during hurricane season (i.e., June to November). The SPMAGTF-SC totaled approximately 300 Marines and Sailors organized into a ground, air, logistics, and command element. Its mission, duration, formation, and funding remained relatively unchanged.

...integrating [Partner Nation] officers provided asymmetric ways and means to achieve theater strategic objectives...

The author conducted a case study on SPMAGTF-SC for two reasons. First, he believed integrating PN officers provided asymmetric ways and means to achieve theater strategic objectives in SOUTHCOM's resource constrained AOR. Second, the author's experience deploying with this task force in 2016, 2018, and 2019 provides credibility and an essential perspective in investigating this proposition.

The author believed that integrating PN officers provided asymmetric ways and means to achieve theater strategic objectives because their integration correlated with an exponential increase in the quantity of military engagements and PNs it conducted those engagements with. The SPMAGTF-SC 15, 16, and 17 were U.S.-only task forces. Each deployment conducted twelve to fourteen military engagements with four PNs: Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Belize. Through these military engagements, the SPMAGTF-SC 15, 16, and 17 successfully built partner capacity and demonstrated U.S. commitment, but at a constant rate. There was no year-over-year increase in military engagements or PNs.

The SPMAGTF-SC 18 integrated one PN officer to become the first multinational task force. The task force's deputy commander was a lieutenant colonel from the Colombian Marine Corps. Without any significant increase in cost, duration, or U.S. personnel, the SPMAGTF-SC 18 increased the quantity of military engagements from fourteen to twenty-five and the number of PNs from four to ten.

The following year, the SPMAGTF-SC 19 integrated ten PN officers from Colombia, Brazil, Peru, Chile, Argentina, Belize, and the Dominican Republic. The task force conducted multiple subject matter expert exchanges, developed original exercises, and implemented a robust key leadership engagement (KLE) plan. Again, without any significant increase in cost, duration, or U.S. personnel, the SPMAGTF-SC 19 increased the quantity of military engagements from twenty-five to fifty-four and the number of PNs from ten to eleven. While the mission, funding, duration, and U.S. staffing remained relatively unchanged from 2015 to 2019, the task force's influence grew exponentially in correlation with integrating PN officers.

The second reason for conducting this study was because the author's experience with the SPMAGTF-SC 16, 18, and 19 provides credibility and an essential perspective for investigating this correlation. Strategic competition is inherently challenging to assess because its effects occur over an extended period. The author's experience provides four years of observation of the SPMAGTF-SC's evolution from a U.S.-only task force to a multinational task force. As the supply officer of the SPMAGTF-SC 16, he assisted in developing the purpose, mission, and mission essential tasks. This provided a foundation for the mission, activities, and desired effects.

In 2018, he was the liaison officer to the U.S. embassy in Tegucigalpa, Honduras. Here, he observed the transition from a U.S.-only task force to a multinational task force, its messaging

through the embassy's staff and country team, and the associated overlapping efforts throughout the interagency community.

As the KLE coordinator of the SPMAGTF-SC 19, the author coordinated and accompanied the commander on all KLEs, which included meetings with the U.S. embassy and PN leadership of most countries in the SOUTHCOM AOR. He was responsible for the task force's liaison officers to the U.S. embassies in Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Belize, who maintained a reliable assessment of those PNs and their relationship with the U.S. embassies. Finally, the author's responsibility for integrating the ten PN officers into the SPMAGTF-SC 19 provided a personal appreciation of their perspectives—although some sentiments may have been lost in translation when they made him practice Spanish in return for their practicing English. The author's first-hand perspective offers a qualitative assessment that cannot be attained from a report. He can attest that the interest and contributions of the PNs were genuine.

Why Should the Interagency Community Care about SOUTHCOM Military Activities?

First, the SOUTHCOM problem set is an interagency problem set, and SOUTHCOM's military activities help provide a solution to this interagency problem set. Second, we cannot mirror-image our U.S. construct (i.e., diplomatic, information, military, and economic) on competitors and partners. SPMAGTF-SC's military activities had effects in the information and diplomatic spheres.

The SOUTHCOM problem set is that the PRC and Russia have significantly increased their influence in LAC in ways that jeopardize U.S. influence and threaten democratic governance. If given the freedom to maneuver in LAC, the PRC and Russia will continue to destabilize the economic and democratic foundations of the region, imposing costs on the U.S. and discrediting its international credibility. They exploit the ambiguity of gray zone activities through predatory, opaque lending practices and disinformation campaigns.

The PRC conducts predatory, opaque lending practices in support of their One Belt One Road initiative. From 2002 to 2022, PRC trade with Latin America and the Caribbean grew from $18 billion to $450 billion. The PRC employs heavily subsidized state-owned enterprises to underbid on infrastructure projects, which include deep-water ports in seventeen countries in the region; several projects related to the Panama Canal; installations in Southern Argentina within proximity of the Strait of Magellan and Antarctica; and 11 PRC-linked space facilities—more than any other geographic combatant command's AOR.[4] PRC-linked space facilities in Argentina and Chile are managed by an agency subordinate to the People's Liberation Army (PLA).[5] Twenty-nine of the thirty-one countries in LAC have existing PRC telecommunication infrastructure. Five of those are Huawei's 5G technology. There are "twelve countries using PRC-created Safe City programs that provide persistent surveillance and give PRC [state-owned enterprise] technicians access to government networks."[6] PRC investments create debt traps. Logistics infrastructure projects create physical access. Space and telecommunications infrastructure projects create cyber access and surveillance vulnerabilities. The infrastructure and economic weight of these activities make an unavoidable dependence.

From 2002 to 2022, PRC trade with Latin America and the Caribbean grew from $18 billion to $450 billion.

The PRC then leverages this dependence to pressure the region towards their anti-democratic agenda. Seven of the remaining

thirteen countries that recognize Taiwan are in LAC. Nicaragua switched diplomatic allegiance from Taiwan to the PRC in December 2021 and has "engaged with the PRC in bilateral talks for a comprehensive Free Trade Agreement."[7] Honduras broke relations with Taiwan in March 2023. Further, the PRC is the largest perpetrator of illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing, logging, and mining in the region.[8] LAC cannot protect itself against these PRC-perpetrated illegal activities when the PRC has no genuine interest in preventing them, and LAC has no influence over the PRC. The PRC's malign influence in the region erodes the foundations of fair trade, security, and democratic values.

Russia spreads disinformation in the region to impose costs on the U.S. Russia spreads disinformation and false narratives through "RT en Español" and "Sputnik Mundo."[9] Except for Russian, Spanish is the most propagated language on RT.[10] At a low cost, Russia's disinformation campaign promotes instability and undermines democracy in LAC.[11] Russia imposes costs for the U.S. in the region to detract its focus from Europe.[12]

Russia tries to attract any country that feels slighted by the U.S. while taking advantage of lingering historical fears of U.S. and Western imperialism.

Russia tries to attract any country that feels slighted by the U.S. while taking advantage of lingering historical fears of U.S. and Western imperialism.[13] Russia has garnered Nicaragua's support as one of seven countries to vote against a UN resolution condemning Russia for its invasion of Ukraine.[14] Mexico's President, Andres Manuel Lopez, characterized NATO's military aid to Ukraine as immoral.[15] Argentina's President Alberto Fernandez offered his country as a gateway for Russian investments in Latin America.[16] In 2008, 2013, and 2018, Russia sent nuclear-capable T-160 Backfire bombers to Venezuela. And in 2013, 2019, 2020, and 2021, Russian military aircraft repeatedly violated Colombian airspace.[17]

The SPMAGTF-SC countered PRC and Russian malign influence by conducting military engagements to strengthen partnerships. Nested under SOUTHCOM's Ends, Ways, and Means, and in agreement with doctrine on strategic competition, the SPMAGTF-SC's military engagements built trust and confidence, assured and strengthened allies and partners, shared information, coordinated mutual activities, and maintained access and influence.[18] Trust sets the conditions for transparency, exposing PRC and Russian malign influence.

The interagency community should care because strengthening partnerships and building transparency is not a military-specific activity. The joint force competes through campaigning, which requires aligning these military cooperation activities with the other instruments of national power in pursuit of strategic objectives.[19] The asymmetric nature of strategic competition requires a whole-of-government approach. The SPMAGTF-SC is an example of leveraging the military instrument of national power to support the NSS's goal of a "free, open, prosperous, and secure international order."[20] A goal shared by the whole interagency community.

A Low-Cost Solution

The study aimed to investigate whether the SPMAGTF-SC provided a low-cost, asymmetric solution to PRC and Russian malign influence. Did integrating PN officers into the SPMAGTF-SC 18 and 19 strengthen partnerships to a higher degree than the SPMAGTF-SC 15-17? If so, why did integrating PN officers strengthen partnerships? Was integrating PN officers into the SPMAGTF-SC an asymmetric way to counter PRC and Russian malign influence in

SOUTHCOM's resource constrained AOR? And lastly, are these findings generalizable to other geographical regions and the rest of the interagency community?

Research, Findings, and Generalizability

To answer these questions, the research was broken into two parts. The first part was quantitative, investigating whether integrating PN officers strengthened partnerships. This was done by examining the degree to which each SPMAGTF-SC deployment strengthened partnerships and correlating that data with the quantity of integrated PN officers. The second part was qualitative and attempted to answer why integrating PN officers strengthened partnerships. Was this correlation a causal relationship? This was done by comparing the findings from the first part with theories on narrative and culture.

Did Integrating PN Officers Strengthen Partnerships?

Strengthening partnerships was measured through military engagements and KLE primary source evidence. Military engagements are a means to strengthen partnerships. Therefore, strengthening partnerships was first measured through the quantity and total value of military engagements conducted by the task force. The value of military engagements was determined by duration, quantity of personnel involved in engagements, level of engagements (i.e., squad-level, service chief-level, etc.), and SOUTHCOM's posture statements. The quantity and value of military engagements correlated with the amount of integrated PN officers. This was then complemented by KLE primary source evidence that directly measured strengthening partnerships.

The aggregate of circumstantial evidence indicated that integrating PN officers caused an increase in the degree to which the SPMAGTF-SC strengthened partnerships in the region. While remaining a U.S.-only task force from 2015 to 2017, the SPMAGTF-SC had no significant increase in military engagements. Integrating PN officers, on the other hand, correlated with a two- to five-fold year-over-year increase in the quantity and value of military engagements, an increase in the number of PNs the task force conducted military engagements with, and an increase in the amount of integrated PN officers for the subsequent year. Additionally, every integrated PN officer created the opportunity for a KLE with that PN.

...every integrated partner Nation officer created the opportunity for a key leader engagement...

SPMAGTF-SC 19 conducted thirteen KLEs with ten different PNs. The SPMAGTF-SC Commander, Sergeant Major, and Colombian Deputy Commander met with PN service-level leadership (i.e., PN Navy G-3/5, Chief of Naval Operations, or Minister of Defense). As the KLE coordinator, the author attended all engagements. To guard against potential bias, all findings were corroborated with the KLE trip reports. Before meeting with PN personnel, the KLE team met with the Security Cooperation Office, the Defense Attaché Office, and the U.S. Embassy representation to synchronize messaging.

During these KLEs, PNs expressed interest or commitment to conduct more military engagements, increase the quantity of IPNOs for the current or future SPMAGTF-SC iterations, and participate in planning conferences. Some examples include Argentina's invitation for Marines to conduct cold weather training in Antarctica, Chile's cold weather training in Patagonia, and even discussions on hosting and basing future iterations of the SPMAGTF-SC. This expressed interest in military engagements and cooperation activities indicates

strengthening partnerships. With over ten years of security cooperation experience in the Indo-Pacific, European, African, and SOUTHCOM theaters, the author strongly believes that PN senior leadership's interest in strengthening partnerships during these KLEs was sincere.

Further, PNs confirmed their commitment to strengthening partnerships by acting on the interests expressed during KLEs. One example of this was the Colombia humanitarian assistance and disaster relief exercise. This two-week exercise included approximately two-thirds of the SPMAGTF-SC personnel, the deployment of the air combat element's CH-53s, and a jungle warfare course developed by the integrated Colombian officers. The exercise was proposed near the beginning of the deployment at a KLE in May and executed towards the end in October.

...integrating PN officers into the task force in 2018 and 2019 exponentially strengthened partnerships...

By becoming a multinational task force, the SPMAGTF-SC increased the quantity and value of military engagements, the number of PNs it conducted military engagements with, the amount of integrated PN officers, and the degree to which it strengthened partnerships. At a relatively insignificant cost, integrating PN officers into the task force in 2018 and 2019 exponentially strengthened partnerships in LAC.

How did Integrating PN Officers Strengthen Partnerships?

The findings from the first part were compared against theories on culture and narrative to answer how integrating PN officers strengthened partnerships. The asymmetric aspects of culture are explained through Geert Hofstede's cultural dimensions.[21] The author's initial assumptions were that the U.S. shared more cultural values with PNs in LAC than the PRC and Russia, and that the U.S.'s closer cultural values were an asymmetric advantage in strengthening partnerships. Surprisingly, both these assumptions were wrong.

Out of Hofstede's six cultural dimensions, the U.S. aligned closest with LAC only in the Long-Term Orientation and Indulgence-Restraint dimensions. The PRC aligned closest with LAC in the Power Distance and Individualism-Collectivism dimensions. Russia aligned closest with LAC in the Masculinity-Femininity and Uncertainty Avoidance dimensions.

Even more surprising, the U.S. misalignment in the Power Distance and Individualism-Collectivism dimensions provided an advantage in strengthening partnerships. The U.S. low Power Distance value is advantageous in developing multinational organizations. Conversely, the PRC and Russia's high Power Distance value is a disadvantage in developing multinational organizations. The U.S. high Individualism-Collectivism value (less shared values between the U.S. and LAC) is an advantage over the PRC's and Russia's low Individualism-Collectivism value (more shared values between the PRC, Russia, and LAC). A high Individualism-Collectivism value is a strength in working with another culture, regardless of that culture's Individualism-Collectivism value.

After reviewing the literature on narrative, the author developed the concept of an SRN. An SRN is a narrative with mutual contribution and equal ownership from all PNs, among which it is shared. In 2018 and 2019, the task force developed an SRN by integrating PN officers and becoming a multinational task force. This resulted in three primary findings. First, the planning and development of an SRN in cooperation with PNs exposes U.S. blind spots and increases the narrative's accuracy, legitimacy, and will. Second, by integrating partners to communicate an SRN,

the multinational task force fostered a sense of ownership in our partners and strengthened the narrative's meaning, identity, and content. Third, the SRN is an asymmetric advantage because an authoritarian regime like the PRC or Russia cannot replicate it.

Integrating partners in planning an SRN effectively identifies and addresses the U.S. blind spots because of its two underlying principles: mutual contribution and equal ownership. Mutual contribution includes the partner's participation in the planning and execution of the SRN. Equal ownership makes the partner's involvement optional. Therefore, by participating, the partner accepts to be represented by the SRN. This incentivizes the partner to identify and address U.S. planning considerations that do not accurately represent them (i.e., U.S. blind spots). If the U.S. fails to address the identified blind spots, which could result from biases, mirror imaging, groupthink, etc., then the partner may decline the invitation to participate. This serves as a forcing function for the U.S. to either acknowledge its blind spots or accept the partner's refusal to participate.

Integrating PN officers in the execution (i.e., the task force's deployment) improves regional expertise and empowers our partners. This strengthens the meaning, identity, and content of the narrative. Integrating PN officers is a low-cost solution to building cultural expertise, improving cross-cultural communication, and strengthening partnerships. Often, the U.S. views burden sharing in terms of financial contributions. This perspective deprives our partners of the opportunity of responsibility when they lack the financial resources. Integrating them, however, serves as an alternative method, thus empowering them to address our shared regional challenges.

An SRN is an asymmetric advantage because an authoritarian regime cannot replicate it. The SRN requires mutual contribution and equal ownership from all PNs with which it is shared. This would require an authoritarian regime to cede authority over PNs, elevating them to an equal status. This is contradictory to the revisionist state nature of authoritarian regimes. While an asymmetric disadvantage for the PRC and Russia, the SRN is an asymmetric advantage for the U.S..

Integrating PN officers in the execution (i.e., the task force's deployment) improves regional expertise and empowers our partners.

How are These Findings Applicable to the Joint Force and Interagency Community?

The first part of the research found that by integrating PN officers, the task force significantly increased the degree to which it strengthened partnerships and countered threats within the region. For the joint force, the relevance of this is straightforward. But what about the interagency community? Here, we turn to the second part of the research, which answered how integrating PN officers strengthened partnerships. The three primary findings are:

1. Integrating partners in planning an SRN is a forcing function to identify U.S. blind spots.

2. Integrating partners in the execution of an SRN instills partner ownership.

3. Culture is asymmetric, complex, and requires a holistic understanding.

The SRN is generalizable to the joint force and interagency community through its principles of mutual contribution and equal ownership. The SRN may not be suitable or feasible for every situation or organization. Instead of replicating the SRN, the joint force and interagency community can develop activities

built on the principles of mutual contribution and equal ownership. Integrating partners in the planning and execution of that activity will yield the same advantages of addressing blind spots, improving regional expertise, and empowering our partners. In strategic competition, the principles of mutual contribution and equal ownership provide a method for leveraging our most strategic asset—allies and partners—as the asymmetric advantage that they are.

Integrating allies and partners helps identify U.S. blind spots...

Recommendations

How do we counter malign influence, unify interagency efforts, and leverage the strengths of our allies and partners? How do we replicate the successful, unsordid influence of the Marshall Plan? Presented here are three solutions. First, the joint force and interagency community should integrate allies and partners in the planning and execution of diplomatic, information, and military activities. Second, the joint force and interagency community should identify their overlapping efforts in strategic competition and incorporate the principles of mutual contribution and equal ownership for a whole-of-government approach. Third, practitioners in the joint force and interagency community should utilize this case study as an educational example of strategic competition, operations in the information environment, and how the interagency community can better leverage military support for shared objectives.

1) Integrate Allies and Partners in the Planning and Execution of Diplomatic, Information, and Military Activities.

The joint force and interagency community should integrate partners consistent with the principles of mutual contribution and equal ownership. Integrating allies and partners helps identify U.S. blind spots, instills partners with a sense of ownership, and is an asymmetric advantage. Empowering our allies and partners is a low-cost and effective solution to building cultural expertise, improving cross-cultural communications, and strengthening partnerships. The principles of mutual contribution and equal ownership are generalizable to other task forces, geographic theaters, and the rest of the interagency community.

The joint force should integrate PN officers into staff like the SPMAGTF-SC to remain the security partner of choice throughout the region. This answers the U.S. Forces Joint Staff's JDEIS request for research on strategic competition in the Western Hemisphere with desired research objectives of "How the U.S. can remain the security partner of choice throughout the region within the scope of the NDS and SOUTHCOM strategy," and "Identify asymmetric ways and means to achieve U.S. strategic objectives given region is a resource constrained AOR." Integrating partners is a low-cost and asymmetric way to strengthen the U.S.'s position as the security partner of choice.

This could be replicated by recreating a task force like the SPMAGTF-SC, incorporating the SRN and its principles into an existing organization, or designing them into a new organization. Recreating the SPMAGTF-SC would be the simplest and most effective solution, but it is also resource-intensive. However, the second solution would be inexpensive yet still effective. Consider the following example. Rather than re-creating the SPMAGTF-SC, the joint force could incorporate the SRN and its principles into the JTF-B. Since the JTF-B already had many of the same capabilities and was co-located in Honduras, it would require significantly fewer resources to augment the JTF-B with the necessary support yet still effectively leverage the benefits of the SRN and its principles.

In addition to existing task forces, the

SRN and its principles should be considered in designing new organizations operating in strategic competition. For the USMC, this may look like integrating PN officers into the headquarters elements of Marine Littoral Regiments or Marine Expeditionary Units. Other opportunities could be joint interagency task forces or the Army's Multi-Domain Task Forces. Integrating PN officers would be minimal cost with substantial effects in strategic competition. Any task force operating in strategic competition should consider incorporating the SRN and its principles as part of its design.

Lastly, this is generalizable to other echelons of command and geographic theaters. Combatant commands should integrate partners in the planning of their command narrative. Integrating PN liaison officers into planning a command narrative protects against mirror imaging and is a forcing function to address these blind spots. Finally, leveraging our allies and partners based on mutual contribution will strengthen the command narrative's positional advantages of legitimacy and will.

The State Department and interagency community should integrate allies and partners in the planning and execution of diplomatic and information activities. Where a task force or the SRN may not be feasible, this can still be employed through mutual contribution and equal ownership. Activities that leverage these principles will still set the conditions to identify blind spots, instill partner ownership, and improve cultural expertise and cross-cultural communications.

Are there opportunities for integration in the U.S. embassy's country team? What about the U.S. Agency for International Development or the crisis action team? Could the Department of Commerce or Department of Agriculture integrate partners in planning committees? Could the embassy's public affairs or political-military section integrate partners through a policy development or community relations task force? The author is familiar and impressed with the versatility of the U.S. embassy environment—no two embassies look the same. The embassy environment is a treasure trove of untapped talent. The interagency community should capitalize on that talent to find new and ingenious ways to leverage the strengths of our allies and partners, and then share those practices with the rest of the community!

The State Department and interagency community should integrate allies and partners in the planning and execution of diplomatic and information activities.

2) Incorporate the Principles of Mutual Contribution and Equal Ownership for a Whole-of-Government Approach to Strategic Competition.

Joint Concept for Competing (JCC) asks, "How should the Joint Force, in conjunction with interorganizational partners, compete in support of U.S. Government efforts to protect and advance U.S. national interests, while simultaneously deterring aggression, countering adversary competitive strategies, and preparing for armed conflict should deterrence and competition fail to protect vital U.S. national interests?"[22] The joint force and interagency community should compete in support of U.S. Government efforts through a whole-of-government approach based on the principles of mutual contribution and equal ownership.

Integrating interorganizational partners into a whole-of-government approach based on mutual contribution and equal ownership will yield the same benefits as integrating allies and partners into the multinational task force. Planning competition activities through a whole-of-government approach will serve as a forcing function for interorganizational

partners to identify and address their blind spots. The execution of competition activities through a whole-of-government approach will instill interorganizational partners with a sense of ownership. Finally, a whole-of-government approach is necessary to succeed in strategic competition.

Planning competition activities through a whole-of-government approach will build a shared understanding of interagency strategic approaches, identify interagency-shared objectives, and address blind spots. Interorganizational partners support national strategic objectives through organization-specific strategic approaches. A whole-of-government approach will build a shared understanding of interorganizational partners' independent strategic approaches and help identify shared objectives.

A whole-of-government approach will identify the shared objectives and coordinate the differing means in a complementary manner.

SOUTHCOM strengthened partnerships through military engagements. Strengthening partnerships affected the informational and diplomatic spheres, overlapping with the interagency community's objectives. Military engagements, however, were SOUTHCOM's means to strengthen partnerships. Interorganizational partners will likely employ different means to achieve our shared objectives. A whole-of-government approach will identify the shared objectives and coordinate the differing means in a complementary manner. Coordinating the means for complimentary effects will require assessment from across the interagency community, which is how the community will identify and address each other's blind spots. When interorganizational partners fail to justify their activities in support of achieving shared objectives, the interorganizational partner either fails to communicate a potentially successful plan or the plan is riddled with bias and errors. Both cases indicate potential blind spots. In the former, the partner may have failed to understand the audience's strategic approach and communicate how that plan would support it. In the latter, the plan contained errors identified by the interagency community. In both cases, the blind spot must be identified and addressed. A whole-of-government approach based on mutual contribution will serve as a forcing function to identify and address these blind spots. The execution of competition activities through a whole-of-government approach will enable a holistic understanding of the operating environment, focus resources, and instill a sense of ownership.

The third primary finding from the research found that culture is asymmetric, complicated, and requires a wholistic understanding. Every interorganizational partner has a unique perspective of the operating environment. Only through a whole-of-government approach can we build a complete understanding. Due to the complex nature of culture, understanding the environment is resource-intensive. Where there are shared objectives, such as understanding the environment, there are shared requirements, such as assessing the environment. This is an opportunity for the joint force and interagency community to focus resources supporting shared objectives. A whole-of-government approach would focus the interagency community's limited resources for the requirements (i.e., assessment of the environment) that support shared objectives (i.e., understanding the environment). Failing to do so wastes resources through duplicative efforts. And just like with the SPMAGTF-SC, integrating interorganizational partners into a whole-of-government approach to strategic competition will instill a sense of ownership.

Strategic competition requires a whole-of-government approach because it is a competition between nations. First, no single U.S. instrument of national power can compete with a competitor's whole-of-government efforts. Second, no single U.S. instrument of national power can compete with a competitor's same instrument of national power—that incorrectly assumes they employ the same construct (i.e., mirror imaging). Third, each instrument of national power's effects bleed into the other spheres, as demonstrated through SPMAGTF-SC's effects in the diplomatic and informational spheres.

A whole-of-government approach based on mutual contribution and equal ownership will be difficult. Developing the Marshall Plan was slow, tedious, and confrontational. However, those challenges are worth the benefits of addressing blind spots, building a shared understanding, and leveraging the strengths of the entire interagency community. Strategic competition requires a whole-of-government approach, and it is ideally suited for the approach's slow, methodical, deliberate planning.

3) Use this Case Study as an Educational Example for Operations in the Information Environment, Strategic Competition, and how the Interagency Community can Better Leverage Military Support for Shared Objectives.

Strategic competition requires a more whole-of-government approach. A whole-of-government approach requires interagency cooperation, coordination, and understanding. Joint force practitioners must understand how military activities affect the information and diplomatic sphere. Interagency practitioners must understand how the military instrument of power can support their efforts.

The joint force should use this case study as an educational example for operations in the information environment and strategic competition. JP 3-04, *Information in Joint Operations*, JDN 1-22, *Joint Force in Strategic Competition*, and *Joint Concept for Competing* were all published within the last year. These publications indicate a change in mindset. The introduction of inherent informational aspects makes information a responsibility of all forces, not just information forces. Similarly, strategic competition has implications across the total force. Information and strategic competition are less tangible than most military activities. This case study provides a concrete example for introducing these intangible disciplines.

The interagency community should use this case study as an educational example to better understand how to cooperate and leverage the military's capabilities. The military instrument of national power includes foreign humanitarian assistance, protecting human rights (i.e., women, peace, and security), and promoting stability and security. The SPMAGTF-SC strengthening partnerships is just one example of how the U.S. military and State Department can succeed through cooperation. By understanding the military's capabilities, the interagency community can better leverage the military to support shared objectives.

By understanding the military's capabilities, the interagency community can better leverage the military to support shared objectives.

Conclusion

The U.S. successfully contests PRC and Russian malign influence by working by, with, and through allies and partners. Integrating PN officers from Colombia, Brazil, Peru, Chile, Argentina, Belize, and the Dominican Republic into the SPMAGTF-SC 18 and 19 exponentially strengthened partnerships in LAC at a relatively insignificant cost. Through strengthening

partnerships, SOUTHCOM built trust and fostered a climate of transparency. Transparency reduces the ambiguity of the gray zone that the PRC and Russia exploit. Through integrating PN officers, SPMAGTF-SC strengthened partnerships and countered PRC and Russian malign influence in the region.

The author found that integrating PN officers strengthened partnerships through the SRN. Integrating partners in planning an SRN is a forcing function to identify U.S. blind spots. Integrating partners in the execution of an SRN instills partner ownership. This is built on the underlying principles of mutual contribution and equal ownership. These principles are generalizable to the joint force and interagency community.

The author offered three recommendations for the joint force and interagency community from these findings. First, the joint force and interagency community should integrate allies and partners in the planning and execution of diplomatic, information, and military activities. Second, the joint force and interagency community should identify their overlapping efforts in strategic competition and incorporate the principles of mutual contribution and equal ownership for a whole-of-government approach. Third, practitioners in the joint force and interagency community should use this case study as an educational example of strategic competition, operations in the information environment, and how the interagency community can leverage military support for shared objectives.

The U.S. government must embrace an unsordid mentality to succeed in strategic competition, as was done when the Marshall Plan was developed. The U.S. government can accomplish this by integrating allies and partners through a whole-of-government approach founded on mutual contribution and equal ownership. This case study proposes a method for leveraging our most important strategic asset–our allies and partners–as the asymmetric advantage that they are.[23] ***IAJ***

NOTES

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Retired Flag Officers and Public Political Criticism

by Robert L. Caslen

Lock her up! Lock her up!" So screams a retired Army lieutenant general at a presidential nominees' party convention. This chant certainly received a lot of attention from the American people, and not necessarily from what the opposing candidate did, but simply because America was not used to seeing senior military leaders, whether active or retired, so publicly supporting—or condemning—a political person or a political issue. But this public appearance, I would argue, met the presidential nominee's intent to secure military votes and to show the public that he was a pro-military nominee. Not to mention that it also certainly gained the chanting retired general officer a key position in the president's inner circle as the president's National Security Advisor.

Not to be outdone, the opposing party's presidential nominee gathered about 20 or so retired generals and admirals to stand alongside her during her nominating convention. And sure enough, there were plenty of flag officers I personally served with who were publicly choosing sides in the upcoming presidential political election. One of them, a retired 4-star general who had previously commanded all forces in Afghanistan, was on the convention's final night's agenda, addressing the convention attendees, as well as a national audience on TV. And again, the American people were wondering what this new norm of public political support from retired flag officers was all about.

America was comfortable with a nonpartisan, apolitical military leadership that was constitutionally bound to provide military advice that was not laced with political influence. But now that many retired flag officers are coming public in support or criticism of a serving politician, what does something like this mean to the American people, and what message is America really hearing?

When we officers take the military oath of service upon entering the Army or any of the other services, we swear an oath of allegiance to the Constitution, and through this oath we are

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joining the profession of arms. What is key about a profession—any profession for that matter—is that those in the profession provide a unique service their clients need, and this service is unique in that only those in this profession can provide it. Think of the profession of administering physical and mental health by a doctor, psychologist, or dentist. They provide the unique act of providing health services, and by doing so, they earn the trust of their patients.

So, in the profession of arms, who is our client? And what is the "unique service" we provide to our clients? Quite simply, our client is the American people, and the unique service we provide is the use of lethal force in an ethical way to protect them. And what is particularly unique is that we are willing to give our lives for their protection. First responders have a similar unique service, but their client is limited to the community they serve. The United States military's client includes all of America, to include all ethnicities, races, faiths or no faith, genders, and all political affiliations.

One of the Army's published field manuals specifically talks about the Profession of Arms, and how the professional ethic and its values are defined. The field manual is *Army Doctrine Publication 6-22 (ADP 6-22), Army Leadership and the Profession*, and I commend the Army for putting this together and publishing it.

Concerning the ethical application of lethal force, ADP 6-22 states, "Soldiers in combat operations are responsible for the ethical application of lethal force in honorable service to the Nation. The law is explicit. Soldiers are bound to obey the legal and moral orders of their superiors; but they must disobey an unlawful or immoral order. Soldiers are also legally bound to report violations of the law of war to their chain of command."[1]

The client for the Profession of Arms is the American people, and the basis for this relationship is found in our Constitution. When we take the oath of allegiance to the Constitution, we believe and adhere to what the Constitutions says. The U.S. Constitution puts the military in a subordinate relationship to our elected officials, where these elected officials are elected by the American people. So, if you connect the dots, those we serve are the American people who elect our government officials, of whom we are subordinate to.

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ADP 6-22 goes on to say that the "Army profession is a trusted vocation of Soldiers and Army civilians whose collective expertise is the ethical design, generation, support, and application of landpower (sic); serving under civilian authority; and entrusted to defend the Constitution and the rights and interests of the American people."[2]

Addressing this issue of a "trusted vocation," APD 6-22 states,

> The Army's essential characteristics of trust, honorable service, military expertise, stewardship, and ésprit de corps enable the Army to serve America faithfully as an established military profession. These characteristics of the Army Profession reflect our national ideals, the Army Values, the Army Ethic, and the Army's approach to accomplishing its mission to defend the Constitution and the American people. Soldiers and Department of the Army (DA) Civilians are professionals, guided in everything they do by the Army Ethic. They are certified and bonded with other Army professionals through a shared identity and service within a culture of trust.[3]

As I said before, a profession requires a relationship with its client, and that is a relationship built on trust. Stephen Covey wrote a great book called *The Speed of Trust*. The

premise is quite simple. Those companies or organizations that have deep trust among their employees are able to operate at accelerated speeds. Bureaucracy is reduced or removed, and informed decisions are quickly made, thus setting the conditions for increased accomplishments. Covey illustrated that trust always has two outcomes—speed and cost. When trust goes up, costs will go down, and the speed of doing business will go up. Covey also wrote that "Trust is the highest form of human motivation. It brings out the very best in people."[4]

Character becomes the most important element in effective leadership.

Covey defines trust as a function between competence and character. If you are given the world's best arsenal and military equipment, and you do not know how to fly it, sail it, or use it, then you are not going to have the trust and confidence of either your superiors, or your client—the American people—to use it properly when you have to. If you are conducting operations of mass destruction without concern for collateral damages, you are not going to be trusted to use your equipment in accordance with the *ethical* application of combat arms. Another way to make this point is to simply say that if you are not competent, then your client—the American people—will not trust you.

Because character is necessary for trust to exist, if you cannot deliver on your word, no one will trust you. Or if you violate culture norms and values, again no one will trust you. A leader's character embraces, teaches, and inculcates the values of its institution. The Army's values, for example, are loyalty, duty, respect, selfless-service, honor, integrity, and personal courage. Those who violate these values are seen by the profession as one who possesses a character defect. Not only will the client no longer trust him or her, but trust is also lost by the leader's subordinates, peers, and superiors within the leader's organization. Character becomes the most important element in effective leadership. You can be the top of your class, but if you fail in character, you fail in leadership.

When I was a division commander in northern Iraq towards the end of the surge, commanding an Army division of over 23,000 military members, I found myself, halfway through the rotation, signing letters of reprimand, or Article 15s at least once or twice a week, mostly for character violations. My policy was that I would adjudicate senior leader misconduct, which was defined by all officers—from second lieutenant to general officer, all warrant officers, and senior enlisted grades of E-7 and above. My rotation in theater was only 12 months, but in those 12 months, I adjudicated 78 cases of officer and senior NCO misconduct. Given there are 52 weeks in a year, this equates to one and a half letters of reprimand or article 15s each week! The rank breakout was one colonel, eight lieutenant colonels, 10 majors, 18 captains, 15 lieutenants, nine warrant officers, and 17 NCOs (E8-E9). Studying the 78 offenses was revealing as well, as 76 of them were offenses inside the operating bases, and only two were offenses that occurred while conducting combat operations, which were detainee abuse and negligent discharge. The other 76 were inappropriate relationships, hostile environments, false official statements, sexual harassment, fraternization, violation of General Order #1 (alcohol, pornography, visitation violation), adultery, dereliction of duty, disobeying a lawful order, loss of sensitive item, assault, aggravated sexual contact, abuse of subordinates, drug use, AWOL, DUI, and wearing unauthorized tabs.

Writing the article 15s and the letters of reprimand was difficult—I knew they would all end up disqualifying the senior leader of another promotion and resulting in forced leave from the Army. But what was more concerning was

the impact it had on the unit. I had a battalion lose its battalion commander to a vehicle born improvised explosive device (VBID). The battalion commander was respected and loved. He was a great leader, no-nonsense, highly competent, and everyone looked up to him. It was a tragic loss. But working with his home station unit, we were able to quickly find a replacement. I initially thought this replacement officer was a great fit. But within a month of installing him as the new commander, he was under investigation for an act of misconduct, which was substantiated, and resulted in relieving him of command and required him to move elsewhere. That officer would never see another promotion and would be forced to leave the Army within the next two to three years.

But, the impact it had on the unit's morale was devastating. The unit that was once one of the best in the Division was soon one of the worst. I went on patrol with them one day, and there was argument on the open radio net, disrespect by subordinates of senior leader's decisions, unmaintained vehicles that were breaking down, and a nose-dive in morale. Said another way, a senior leader's misconduct not only has an adverse impact on the leader that normally results in his or her removal, but also has a remarkable negative impact on unit performance.

Why is this so important? Simply because, if you fail in character, you fail in leadership. And not only do you fail, but you end up bringing your unit down with you.

So how does all this apply to retired general officers who publicly criticize serving politicians? There is no shortage of retired flag officers appearing on news networks today giving perspectives of the war in Ukraine, the defection of an Army Soldier rushing across the South Korean border into North Korea, or the latest Chinese naval and air training with incursions into Taiwan's water and airspace. I had a conversation with a former Chairman of the Joint Staff, and he was in support of retired officer's military assessments, as this is what we are obligated to do—to provide apolitical military advice. And quite frankly, their assessments add much to the American public's understanding of what is occurring as well as bring forward military issues and perspectives that the public would otherwise not understand. In other words, the appearance of retired flag officers providing military assessments and advice about on-going military issues is welcomed and, in most cases, helpful.

Strategic leaders have a stewardship responsibility for the relationship between the military and civilian leaders of the Army.

ADP 6-22 recognizes the issue of a senior military leader providing military advice to their elected officials and encourages senior military leaders to provide professional military advice.

> Strategic leaders have a stewardship responsibility for the relationship between the military and civilian leaders of the Army. Leaders take an oath of office that subordinates the military leader to the laws of the Nation and its elected and appointed leaders, creating a distinct civil-military relationship. Army professionals understand this and appreciate the critical role this concept has played throughout America's history. Equally important, this concept requires military professionals to understand the role of civilian leaders and their responsibilities to the civilian leadership. A critical element of this relationship is the trust that civilian leaders have in their military leaders to represent the military and provide professional military advice. Military professionals have unique expertise, and their input is vital to formulating and executing defense policy.

> Based on mutual trust, this relationship requires candor and authority to execute the decisions of the civilian leaders. These decisions provide the strategic direction and framework in which strategic military leaders operate.[5]

But "professional military advice" is not the same as "public criticism." So, what happens when one of these retired flag officers crosses the line, and instead of providing military advice, they use their forum to publicly criticize a currently serving political leader by being critical of the policies they profess and the actions they may have taken?

…"professional military advice" is not the same as "public criticism."

Quite simply, the American public will see that senior military leaders are providing politically laced advice, rather than the apolitical nonpartisan advice they are required to provide, and thus begins an erosion of trust between the American people and their military.

ADP 6-22 states that

> Army professionals have a duty to provide their unique and vital expertise to the decision-making process. It is our responsibility to ensure that professional military advice is candidly and respectfully presented to civilian leaders. The key condition for effective American civil-military relations is mutual respect and trust. … Army professionals properly confine their advisory role to the policy-making process and do not engage public policy advocacy or dissent. Army professionals adhere to a strict ethic of political nonpartisanship in the execution of their duty.[6]

One can ask that since active-duty flag officers must adhere to an ethic of political nonpartisanship, then why is it that retired officers cannot publicly speak their mind, particularly if they are critical of currently serving political policy?

Most of my research deals with active-duty officers and I have not found much written about the ethical duties and responsibilities of *retired* officers. However, I have seen the impact of retired officer's public criticism of currently serving political administrators, and the equivalent degradation of public trust and confidence of our military.

According to a Statista Research Department research summary published July 31, 2023, U.S. public confidence in the armed forces from 1975-2023 has shifted considerably in the last five years, dropping from 72% in support in 2018 to 60% in 2023.[7] There are a lot of circumstances related to this drop in confidence, but I am certain the significant amount of recent retired flag officer criticism of existing public officials, particularly the U.S. President, has contributed to this drop in trust and confidence. The public does not separate an active-duty flag officer with a retired flag officer. When they see a retired officer critical of a serving public official, they feel that *all* flag officers are politically motivated, and this idea of "military advice" is laced with political considerations, and not what is best for the security of our nation. And a consequence is the drop in their trust that the American military is no longer able to provide the security our nation requires.

Another question is whether retired flag officers can be held accountable for their public criticism or public support of a currently serving political administrator? The simple answer is that I have yet to see any retired officer being held accountable. But *should* they be held accountable? There is no easy answer to this question. Some would say they should be held accountable simply because they are still commissioned officers in a retired status. When officers take their commissioning oath, they swear allegiance to the Constitution, and as explained earlier, the Constitution places the

military subordinate to its civil authority. So, the logic would argue that whether you are active or retired, you remain a commissioned officer, and as a retired commissioned officer, you aspire to the same ethic that is expected of our active-duty officers. Frankly, I have floated this idea a few times during my time as Superintendent of West Point and did not find many takers. Perhaps this can be a topic of debate for another time. But in the end, the issue that has to be addressed is trust—the trust of the American people with their military to prosecute war in a lethal and moral way, and win. And as I write this, that trust is waning.

I am often asked if a retired military officer should be able to serve in political office? After all, President Dwight Eisenhower was once a five-star general, only to become the President of the United States shortly after his Army retirement. President Ulysses Grant did the same almost a century before. The answer is complicated and my recommendation is taken from the American people's perspective.

First, we have numerous former military who currently serve in public political office—82 veterans in the 118th Congress House of Representatives and 17 in the Senate. These members are not all *retired* military, nor are they retired flag officers. My observation is that the public does not see them as retired *flag* officers who provide politicized military advice, but rather honorable Americans who elected to serve their country. And since most are not retired, and are not retired flag officers, they do not have the mandate to provide military advice that flag officers have. The bottom line is that America values and respects their military service to our country and trusts their continued service in their new political position.

But what about a retired *flag* officer seeking a political position? Again, I would argue America sees them as honorable service members, whose service is respected, and who have already earned the trust from their colleagues who elected them for political service.

I would argue, however, a slightly different position with respect to retired *flag* officers. In order to build the confidence of the American public and to avoid any conflict of interest, if I were a retired flag officer seeking a political position, I would resign my military commission in order to seek my political position. When you resign your commission, you are no longer in a conflict of interest and you can argue any political position you want. The disadvantage of resigning your commission is that you would personally no longer receive your retired commissioned officer pension. That may place you and your family in a challenging fiscal situation, but it will certainly clear you of anyone who would fault you for representing the military as providing politicized military advice.

...if I were a retired flag officer seeking a political position, I would resign my military commission in order to seek my political position.

In summary, I applaud our retired officer corps for participating in news reports that help explain military operations and their complications. They provide significant insights into the challenges of prosecuting conflict, and I feel that is an important service to the people of our nation. However, when these retired officers cross the line from explanation to criticism of serving political officials, it forces America to question whether the constitutionally directed impartial military advice is indeed impartial or not.

If you want to see what is not only right, but also symbolic, of the military's political non-partiality, watch the Service Chiefs of Staff at our nation's annual State of the Union address made by the President of the United States. If you ever watch this speech, it is a hugely

political speech during which the President praises his successes and provides policy advocating issues that need to be addressed. At some suggestions, the President's party will all stand and cheer. At other suggestions, where there is bi-partisan support, both parties will stand up and cheer. And when he cheers America, you will again see bi-partisan support and cheering. But what is revealing is to watch the Service Chiefs of Staff during each of these policy suggestions and accomplishments advocating the pride in America. When there is a partisan comment and the President's party are all standing and cheering, the Chiefs just sit there stone-faced. And when our Country is highlighted for accomplishment without partisan bias, they, too, will stand and cheer.

But I love to see them sitting there stone-faced at a partisan comment. That is the picture our country wants to see. A military that is apolitical, and one that will provide pure military advice to our Nation's president. This is the picture that is not only what our country wants, but it is also the one that builds the trust relationship with the American people.

That is not the case when one of our military flag officers—whether active or retired— stands up in criticism or in political public support. Although a retired flag officer may feel empowered to criticize a public political person, they should take into consideration that their actions are like a bullet shot into our nation's 'bank of public trust' that exists with our military and the American people. It takes significant goodwill to fill that bank of public trust and it takes just a bit to empty it out.

Trust is the glue that holds our relationship with the American people together. I encourage all my retired flag officer colleagues to be sensitive when they are on TV, or on their social media, or elsewhere, slamming a political administration. It will quickly drain the bank of public trust and that is something our Nation cannot afford right now. ***IAJ***

Notes

1 Headquarters, Department of Army, Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) No. 1 (July 31, 2019): 18.

2 Ibid., 16.

3 Ibid., 1-2.

4 From my blog https://www.robertcaslen.com/blog/trust-the-most-important-element-in-effective-leadership

5 Headquarters, Department of Army, Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) No. 6-22 (October 9, 2019): 113.

6 ADP 6-22, 19.

7 Statista Research Department. Public confidence levels in the United States armed forces from 1975 to 2023 (July 31, 2023), https://www.statista.com/statistics/239149/confidence-in-the-us-armed-forces/

Challenges Of Border Security in Nigeria:

A Case Study of Nigeria's Joint Border Patrol Team

by Chinedu N Chikwe

The effective management of a nation's land and maritime border is vital to its security and economic growth. This is because borders provide legal passage routes to convey persons and goods in and out of a country. Since independence, Nigeria's borders have continued to play a significant role in integrating its economic activities with those of other nations, especially within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) region. These economic activities have become even more integrated since the adoption of the ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, Residence, and Establishment by Member States in 1979, as well as Nigeria's ratification of the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) in 2019, amongst others. Unfortunately, these protocols and agreements have not been particularly beneficial to Nigeria's security and economic development.

Nigeria's role as a regional power continues to impact the growth and development of the entire West African sub-region. However, the country currently faces dire security challenges which are complicated by transnational organized crimes (TOCs) and extremist movements. Major threats to border security have been linked to the activities of smugglers, drug traffickers, irregular migrants, and human/drug traffickers. Similarly, maritime threats such as piracy and sea robbery in the Gulf of Guinea continue to threaten Nigeria's national security. While the effective regulation and control of cross-border activities remain vital to ensuring peace and promoting economic integration, successive governments have struggled with the dilemma of to how best to defeat this problem.

On August 20, 2019, in an attempt to confront the challenge of Nigeria's porous borders, the Federal Government of Nigeria initiated a joint border operation codenamed *Operation Swift Response* to secure the nation's land and maritime borders along the South-South, South-West,

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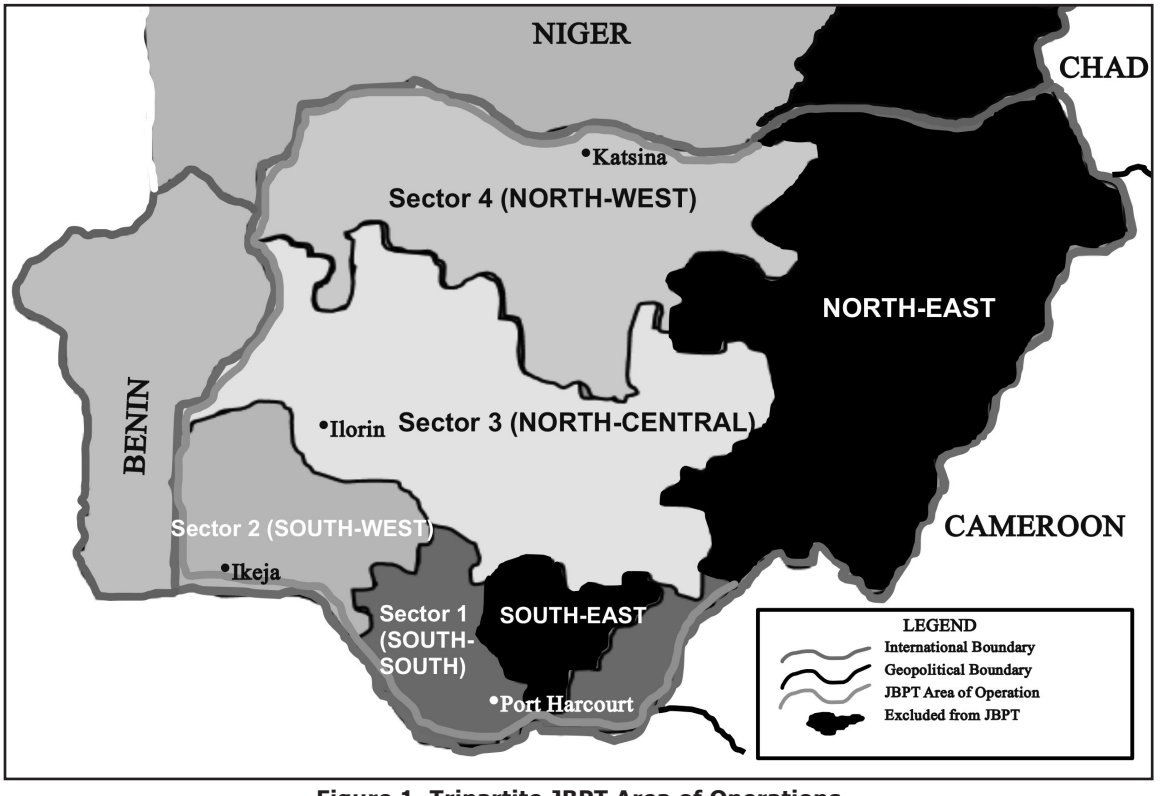

Figure 1. Tripartite JBPT Area of Operations
Source: Created by author.

North-Central, and North-West regions of the country.[1] The operation was meant to enforce the existing ban on prohibited imported goods through the borders, protect locally produced goods from unhealthy competition with foreign products, as well as foster inter-agency and international collaboration.[2] The plan was for the security agencies involved to support the nation's statutory agencies tasked with the responsibility of securing the borders, specifically Nigeria Customs Service (NCS) and Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS), to achieve and sustain a high level of security at the borders.[3]

Operation Swift Response was largely successful as several prohibited items, smugglers, and traffickers were intercepted.[4] However, the associated partial border closure generated severe economic and diplomatic concerns from neighboring Benin and Niger Republics.[5] This led to the establishment of a tripartite committee comprising members from Benin, Niger, and Nigeria to deliberate on how to collectively resolve the challenges along common borders.[6] The tripartite committee reached several agreements, among which was that each country should establish a Joint Border Patrol Team (JBPT) aimed at fostering intelligence sharing and combined operations to mutually secure adjoining border areas.[7] Thus, Nigeria's Operation Swift Response was transformed into the JBPT in line with the tripartite agreement.[8] Figure 1 shows the tripartite JBPT area of operations as established across the contiguous borders of Benin, Niger, and Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

In spite of the JBPT intervention, Nigeria continues to grapple with the same border security challenges that prompted its establishment. Therefore, this study seeks to examine Nigeria's border peculiarities in order to

suggest ways of effectively securing its borders. This would be achieved by identifying obstacles that currently hinder the JBPT from achieving its mandate, and suggesting possible changes that the Federal Government of Nigeria could make to enhance the JBPT's capacity to effectively secure the nation's borders along designated regions.

Analysis of Operational Environment of the JBPT

The JBPT operates in a dynamic environment, influenced by several factors such as the prevailing political/diplomatic landscape across contiguous border areas, military intervention in border security, and the border economy. Others are the social influences, infrastructural realities, as well as prevailing information management across border communities. These factors are analyzed in subsequent paragraphs.

Political and Diplomatic Landscape

To curb the challenges along the nation's borders, the Federal Government of Nigeria ordered the partial closure of Nigeria's land borders in August of 2019.[9] Expectedly, the closure of the nation's land borders had far-reaching implications for the prospects of regional integration among Nigeria's immediate neighbors and the rest of Africa. First, the decision to close the borders came just a few months after Nigeria signed the AfCFTA which aimed to create the world's largest free trade area in Africa.[10] Africa currently has 54 member countries, a combined GDP of $3.1 trillion, and a total population of about 1.4 billion.[11] Although critics have argued that shutting down the land borders was a violation of the AfCFTA trade integration agreement, the government of Nigeria insisted that the AfCFTA declaration in Kigali makes clear provisions for countries to take unilateral decisions in situations where their domestic economy is threatened.[12]

To maintain diplomatic relations with neighboring countries, the Nigerian government previously made several unsuccessful appeals to the governments of Benin, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger to curb illegal trading activities along adjoining borders with Nigeria.[13] While these countries often agreed to cooperate with Nigeria, such agreements were hardly implemented. For instance, on February 26, 2017, the Comptroller-General of the NCS, Hameed Ali, and the Director-General of Customs and Indirect Taxes, Republic of Benin, Mr. Sacca Boco Charles, met in Abuja and agreed to tackle smuggling and other transborder crimes between the two nations.[14] Similarly, a joint security team from Nigeria met with counterparts from the Niger Republic on May 16, 2019 at Dakana in Niger Republic to deliberate on how to curb the security challenges along the borders of both countries.[15] Unfortunately, these meetings did not yield the desired results of preventing smuggling and securing mutual borders, hence Nigeria's decision to commence Operation Swift Response in August of 2019.

To curb the challenges along the nation's borders, the Federal Government of Nigeria ordered the partial closure of Nigeria's land borders in August of 2019.

The ensuing partial land border closure generated significant concerns from neighboring countries, especially the Republics of Benin and Niger, who were affected economically by their inability to export into Nigeria.[16] This led to the establishment of a tripartite committee comprising members from Benin, Niger, and Nigeria to deliberate on how to collectively address the shortfalls and non-implementation of the several agreements and memoranda of understanding previously entered to check smuggling and other TOCs along contiguous

borders.[17] The members of the tripartite committee met on November 14, 2019 at the ECOWAS Headquarters in Abuja.

Under these circumstances, one can deduce that the establishment of Nigeria's JBPT prompted the much-needed conversation with neighboring countries of Benin and Niger, leading to meetings by officials from the three countries at both ministerial and operational levels, as well as the establishment of their respective JBPTs. [18] This was considered an unprecedented law enforcement collaboration in terms of the scope and scale of its components, considering previous attempts by the Nigerian government.[19] However, while some security analysts believe that both countries only agreed to establish their JBPTs in order to persuade Nigeria to consider re-opening its land borders, others believe that Nigeria closed its land border to force the compliance of its neighbors to existing trade rules.[20]

...another major challenge is the existing language barrier between Nigeria and its neighbors. Nigeria's official language is English, while the official language of all its neighbors is French.

Military Intervention

To achieve the intended impact, a large force was generated from various security and intelligence agencies and coordinated by the Office of the National Security Adviser.[21] The operation was also expected to promote inter-agency cooperation among the participating agencies through information sharing and coordinated joint operations.[22] This cooperation would be achieved through intensive patrols by the joint security forces along the borders of the affected geopolitical zones, as well as facilitating the acquisition of non-intrusive equipment for the detection of contraband goods.[23]

Additionally, cordial cross-border collaborations help to improve the security and economy of adjoining border communities to the benefit of both countries. Unfortunately, Nigeria's border security agents have experienced numerous challenges with the border security agencies of neighboring countries in the past and this has shaped the general perception of expected future collaborations.[24] One of the major issues originated from disagreements on boundary delineations and adjustments established during the colonial era, without regard to ethnic and cultural heritage.[25] This led to several hostilities among inhabitants of border communities and between cross-border security agencies. These historical encounters have created a general feeling of distrust and suspicion among the border security agencies within the region.

Apart from the seeming lack of trust in the overarching intent to secure the borders and prevent the smuggling of contraband products, another major challenge is the existing language barrier between Nigeria and its neighbors.[26] Nigeria's official language is English, while the official language of all its neighbors is French. Regrettably, most security operatives deployed along Nigeria's border cannot communicate in French, neither can the officials of neighboring francophone countries communicate in English.[27] This communication barrier poses a major challenge when trying to fuse intelligence or plan joint operations.

Nigeria's Border Economy

Since the establishment of ECOWAS in 1975, the idea of a borderless region with unrestricted movement of citizens and goods has continually received widespread support. Unfortunately, this has not been achieved as the continent of Africa accounts for only about 13 percent of Nigeria's exports and 4 percent of its imports.[28] The AfCFTA aimed to close this

gap by removing trade barriers and facilitating free movement of commodities within Africa, which is expected to improve agriculture and manufacturing within the continent.[29] Therefore, the sudden closure of Nigeria's land borders due to the joint border operation was perceived by neighboring countries as an impediment to the anticipated benefits of this agreement.[30]

Nigeria's Economic Recovery and Growth Plan of 2017 aimed to increase investments in agriculture and the sector's contribution to the growth of the economy from about 5 percent in 2017 to about 8.4 percent by 2020.[31] This was to be achieved by reviving domestic farming and saving on food imports which stood at over $22 billion annually.[32] Thus, while most Nigerian farmers were delighted at the government's border closure to curtail the smuggling of food items and increase investments in the sector, economists raised concerns about the capacity of local farmers to produce enough food to feed Nigeria's large population.[33] For instance, the local demand for rice was about 6.7 million metric tons in 2017, while the local production in the same year was only about 3.7 million metric tons, leaving a shortfall of about 3 million metric tons.[34] It is therefore not surprising that despite the restrictions on the importation of prohibited goods from neighboring countries into Nigeria, large volumes of smuggling still persist through the several porous borders.[35]

Research has consistently shown that Nigeria's trade with Benin and Niger remains largely dominated by informal transactions with minimal statistical records or formal documentation.[36] Economists believe that the unrecorded and informal flows through the key economic corridors between Nigeria and its neighbors could account for as much as 64 percent of Nigeria's GDP.[37] They also believe that most of these illegal trades occur due to trade policy differences between Nigeria and its neighbors. For instance, while Nigeria leans towards a more protectionist policy with high tariffs and import prohibitions, the Republic of Benin largely operates a more liberal trade policy.[38]

According to a World Bank Report, the economy of Benin is hugely dependent on informal re-export and transit trades with Nigeria, with about 80 percent of imports into Benin destined for Nigeria.[39] This is said to account for about 20 percent of Benin's GDP.[40] Additionally, a BBC report confirmed that the biggest smuggling route in the region is believed to be between Cotonou which is Benin's largest city and Lagos, which is Nigeria's largest commercial city.[41] Furthermore, a Luxembourg-based shipping company, BIM e-solutions, revealed that an average of 10,000 cars arrive from Europe at the Cotonou port monthly, most of which are believed to be smuggled into Nigeria.[42] These illegal trades were said to have accounted for over 15,000 Beninese jobs and about 25 percent of the Beninese customs revenue between 2012 and 2015.[43] Unfortunately, these informal trades are believed to have thrived over the years due to Nigeria's huge market which it has been unable to adequately cater for.[44]

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To be more specific on the incentives of these illegal commodity trades, an example can be seen in the rice economy. Nigeria only allows the importation of foreign rice into the country through its ports with a 70 percent tax imposed since 2013.[45] However, neighboring Benin reduced its tariffs on imported rice from 35 percent to 7 percent in 2014, while Cameroon, which had a 10 percent duty, completely removed all taxes on imported rice.[46] As depicted

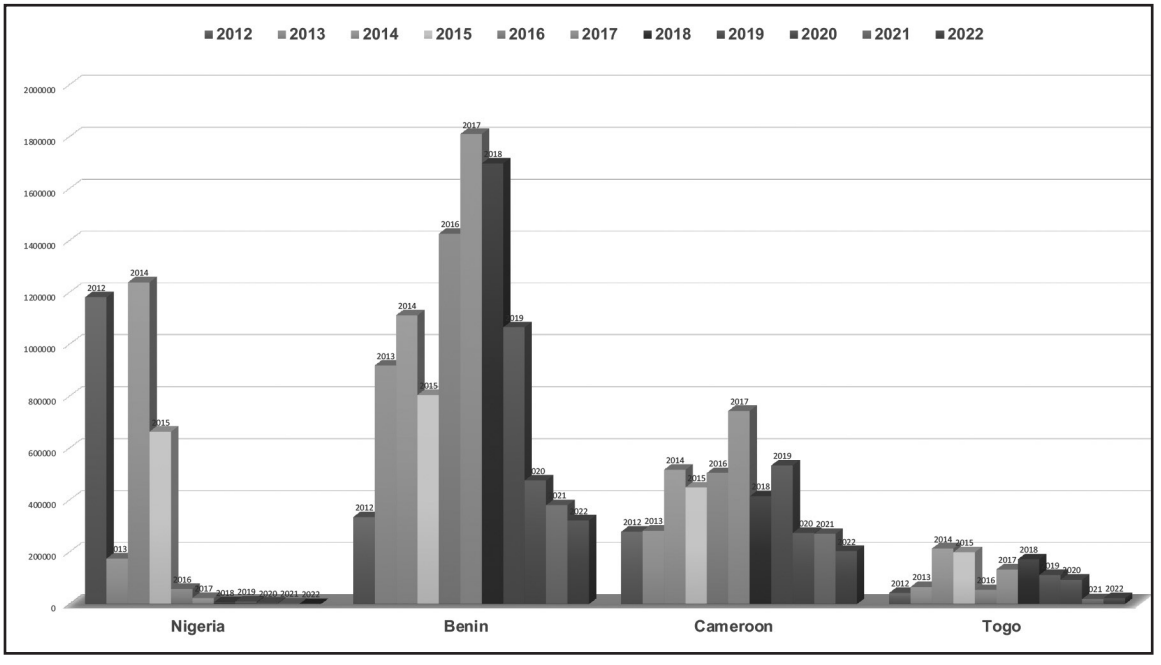

Figure 2. Rice Imports from Thailand into Nigeria, Benin, Cameroon and Togo (2012 – 2022)
Source: Created by author, with data from Thai Rice Exporters Association (TREA), "Rice Export Statistics."http://www.thairiceexporters.or.th/List.

in Figure 2, Benin subsequently recorded an astronomical increase in parboiled rice imports from Thailand, most of which were believed to have been smuggled into Nigeria to feed its over 200 million population.[47] Interestingly, Figure 3 further shows that there has been a significant decline in the importation of parboiled rice into the Republic of Benin since the implementation of the JBPT in August of 2019.

Besides the illegal inflow of food items and cars, Benin, Niger, and Cameroon often serve as destinations for Nigeria's subsidized petroleum products.[48] Nigeria's largest export product is crude oil, while its largest import product is refined petroleum.[49] Because domestic refineries are reportedly operating far below their capacity, fuel imports averaged about 29 percent of total imports into the country between 2016 and 2019.[50] Therefore, approximately 90 percent of petroleum products consumed in Nigeria is imported, all of which is subsidized by the government for its citizens.[51] The Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) confirmed that the country spent about $9.7 billion on petrol subsidy in 2022.[52]

As of April 3, 2023, a liter of petrol costs about $0.57 in Nigeria, $1.07 in Benin, $1.21 in Cameroon, $1.22 in Ghana, and $1.16 in Togo.[53] The prices of petrol in Benin, Cameroon, Ghana, and Togo more than double the price in Nigeria, making it obviously lucrative to smuggle petroleum products from Nigeria into any of its neighboring countries. Unfortunately, this illegal trade amounts to the use of Nigeria's resources to subsidize the petrol consumption of these neighboring countries. Since the border closure, however, reports have suggested that the import of fuel into Nigeria has declined by about 20 percent.[54] Figure 3 shows the estimated prices (in U.S. dollars) of petrol in Nigeria and some of its neighbors as of April 3, 2023.

Social Influences Across Nigeria's Borders

The borders of most African countries are often described as artificial because they were mostly arbitrarily drawn by the colonial powers at the time.[55] Researchers believe that countries in sub-Saharan Africa have some of the most

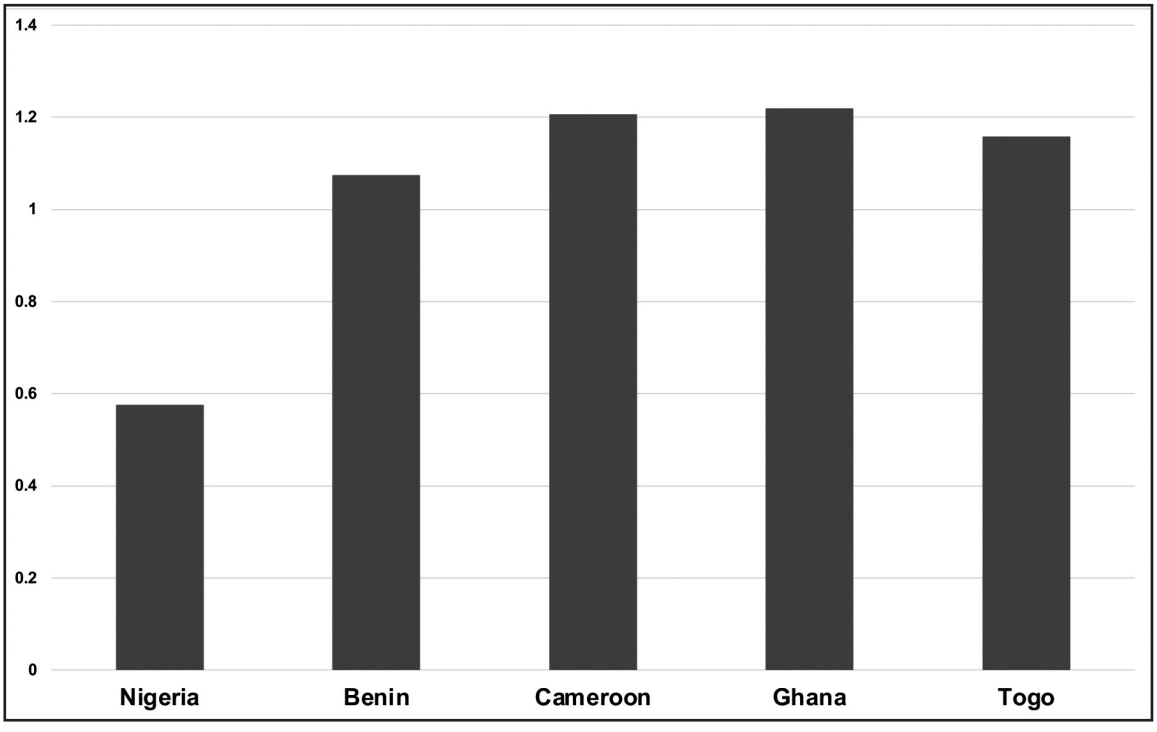

Figure 3. Estimated Prices (in U.S. dollars) of Petrol in Selected African Countries as of April 3, 2023

Source: Created by author, with data from Global Petrol Prices, "Gasoline Prices, Litre, 27-Mar-2023," accessed 3 April 2023, https://www.globalpetrolprices.com/gasoline_prices/.

artificial borders in the world, with about 44 percent of these borders drawn as simple lines which ended up dividing people who share the same traditions and cultures into separate nations.[56] This is also true for the boundaries between Nigeria and neighboring Benin, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger. Nigeria's current borders reflect the late-nineteenth-century agreements between the British, French, and Germans, rarely reflecting indigenous history or culture.[57]

The reality today is that many Nigerians living along the borders of Benin, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger still maintain ancestral relationships and cultural ties across the borders in spite of prevailing political influences and international boundaries.[58] This historic cultural bond has continued to promote cross-border mobility, trade, and socio-cultural interactions irrespective of current physical boundaries.[59]

Infrastructural Realities Along Nigeria's Borders

Although the basic source of livelihood for residents of most border communities in Nigeria vary across regions, it mostly revolves around farming, hunting, and trading.[60] Unfortunately, these sources of livelihood are often constrained by inadequate government infrastructure such as the lack of clean water, electricity, healthcare, schools, good roads and security.[61] Hence, the quest for survival in the midst of poverty and the absence of infrastructure encourages informal cross-border activities.[62] Interestingly, most trading activities conducted by inhabitants of border communities occur in the form of these informal cross-border trades which the government literally refers to as smuggling.[63]

Cross-border trading activities in Nigeria are regulated by the Federal Government through the NCS who implements laws and policies to control the movement of goods across the

border, as well as collect duties or levies, and enforce trade regulations.[64] The NCS also ensures the enforcement of and compliance to custom-related fiscal policies and processes as stipulated by government.[65] In reality, however, the enforcement of these regulations has been inconsistent due to corruption. For instance, at Imeko, a border town between Nigeria and Benin, it has been observed that security officers at the checkpoints were willing to take bribes from foreigners who did not possess any official means of identification, and from drivers or traders conveying banned items such as rice, cereals, and vegetable oils.[66] Thus, it is not surprising that despite the JBPT, banned commodities are still found in the markets and smuggled rice is being re-packaged and made to look like local products.[67]

It is...pertinent that government strengthens collaboration with traditional and religious leaders to manage the perception of government policies...

Information and Perception Management Across Border Communities in Nigeria

In addition to traditional audio, video, print, and social media channels, the role of traditional or cultural institutions in communicating the ills of smuggling and other TOCs within the border communities cannot be overemphasized, especially considering the socio-cultural histories of most of these border communities before international boundary delineations. This was attested to by a former Area Comptroller of the NCS, Ade Dosumu, who confirmed that traditional rulers in the border areas were often involved in fighting smuggling.[68] Similarly, religious leaders in border communities populated with people who share common religious beliefs and values, play influential roles within these communities because they exercise moral authority over their members and are able to shape public opinion within their immediate communities and the broader society.[69]

It is therefore pertinent that government strengthens collaboration with traditional and religious leaders to manage the perception of government policies within border communities. This would help to discourage undocumented trading activities in order to improve the economy and livelihoods of residents. This can be achieved by using the traditional and religious institutions as channels for information dissemination, as well as involving them in awareness campaigns, economic development programs, community policing initiatives, mediation, and conflict resolution.

Operational Capabilities of the JBPT

Analyzing the operational capabilities of the JBPT would entail viewing its establishment and operations across specific domains, namely doctrine, organization, training and policy.

Doctrine

According to a statement conveyed by the then-spokesman of the NCS, Joseph Attah, the joint border operation being coordinated by the Office of the National Security Adviser emphasized cooperation among all participating security agencies with the goal of securing the nation's land and maritime borders in the interest of national security.[70] To achieve this cooperation, each operative is expected to adhere to the training received from their respective agencies based on the agency's doctrine. While the doctrines of the various participating agencies may be efficient in guiding the execution of their respective primary functions, they may not fully align with the primary objectives of the JBPT in particular and border security in general. Unfortunately, there is no specific doctrine guiding Nigeria's border security operations. Therefore, it is pertinent that the Nigerian government establishes a harmonized doctrine

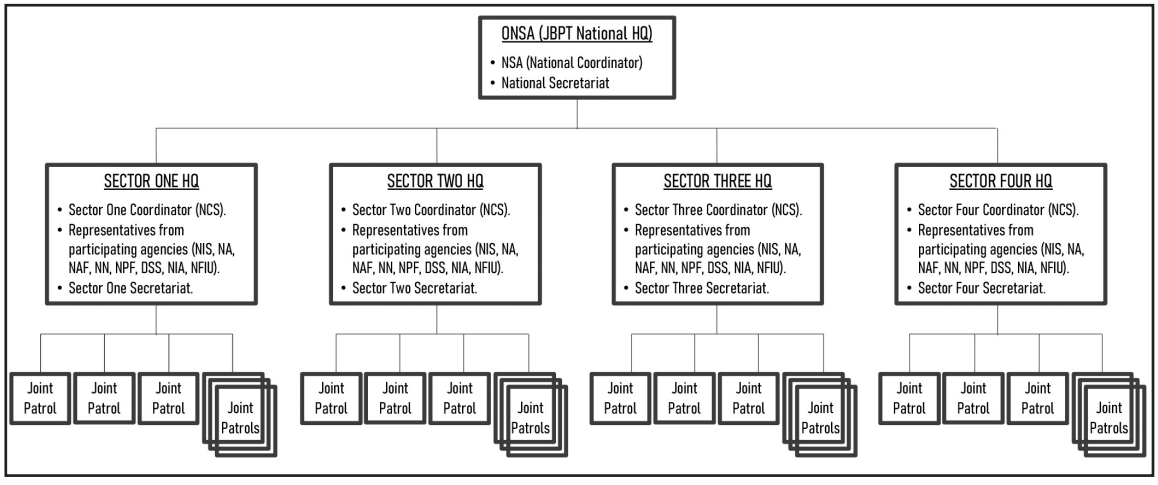

Figure 4. Assumed Organogram of the JBPT
Source: Created by author.

that would outline standard operating procedures (SOP) on how border security operations will be conducted. Such harmonized doctrine would guide the activities of all operatives deployed to the JBPT and reduce most of the administrative and operational bottlenecks currently being experienced.

Organization

Nigeria's JBPT is organized hierarchically to facilitate coordination and integration among the various security agencies involved. At the top of the hierarchy is the national coordinating headquarters located at the Office of the National Security Adviser, Abuja.[71] The coordinating headquarters administers and monitors JBPT operations across the affected geopolitical zones.[72]

At the regional level, the JBPT is organized into four sectors to cover the four affected geopolitical zones, as follows: Sector One covers the land and littoral borders across the south-south geopolitical zone; Sector Two covers the south-western land and littoral borders; Sector Three covers the north-central land borders; while Sector Four covers the land borders across the north-west geopolitical zone.[73]

Each Sector Headquarters is comprised of representatives from the various participating agencies, and coordinated by a senior NCS officer in the rank of *Comptroller of Customs*.[74] The researcher believes that this was a deliberate decision because it allows the JBPT to leverage existing NCS border infrastructure in the respective geopolitical zones, such as detention facilities for arrested smugglers or traffickers, and warehouses for intercepted items.

In addition, the joint patrols comprise of personnel from the participating units, and are often led based on knowledge of the terrain and specialization. For instance, the NN leads the JBPT maritime patrols.[75] While the precise organogram of the JBPT could not be ascertained, the assumed organogram from information gathered by the researcher is depicted in Figure 4.

Training

At the onset of Operation Swift Response in August 2019, joint familiarization exercises were conducted for operatives in the four affected geopolitical zones of the country to strengthen inter-agency collaboration.[76] However, there is no record of any particular joint training conducted to equip the operatives with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively carry out border operations and keep them informed of contemporary border

security procedures. This is worrisome considering the diverse security backgrounds of the officers from the participating agencies. Furthermore, the establishment of the tripartite JBPT with counterparts from the republics of Benin and Niger would require some form of combined training and exercises to help foster collaboration, intelligence sharing and trust. While a few cross-border meetings have been held between regional political and JBPT leaderships on the Nigeria-Benin and Nigeria-Niger borders, there is no record of a coordinated training exercise that has been conducted.[77] The absence of joint and combined training is detrimental to the cross-border collaboration which the JBPT aims to achieve.

The JBPT is currently the only establishment of the Nigerian government that is solely assigned the primary responsibility of securing the nation's borders...

Policy

Since independence in 1960, the Nigerian government has designed and implemented various policies to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of border management in the country. While some of these policies were conveyed as directives, statements, communiqués, or memos, others were contained in officially promulgated policy documents.

However, apart from the implementation of joint patrols through the establishment of Operation Swift Response involving the AFN, very little has been done to implement most border policies. This could be because most of these policies lie independently as isolated documents or within the primary policy documents of different departments of government, making them difficult to implement and monitor. Therefore, it is imperative to harmonize all border-related policies into a promulgated policy document, under a specific agency, to guide border security operations across the country.

Furthermore, while the three organizations responsible for administering and managing Nigeria's borders all have their primary responsibilities, none of them is solely tasked to secure the nation's borders. Thus, it is not surprising that the security of the nation's borders hardly receives the degree of attention that it deserves.

The JBPT is currently the only establishment of the Nigerian government that is solely assigned the primary responsibility of securing the nation's borders, however, its ad-hoc status restricts its access to funding and other operational enablers. This explains its dependence on the Office of the National Security Adviser for strategic coordination and NCS-established infrastructure across the country for most of its administrative and operational requirements.[78] Therefore, the Federal Government could consider changing the ad-hoc status of the JBPT into a statutory agency of government tasked with the sole responsibility of executing border security operations across the country. This would enhance its independence, access to budgetary funding, and other necessary resources.

Conclusion

Accomplishments of the JBPT

Despite its challenges, the JBPT has recorded noteworthy accomplishments since its establishment. Of significance was the establishment of the JBPTs in the Republics of Benin and Niger, which brought neighboring countries together to foster collaboration in fighting the security and economic challenges along adjoining borders.

Domestically, the JBPT has increased inter-agency cooperation through joint operations and collaborative intelligence sharing. Although

more needs to be done in this regard to achieve the desired results, it is believed that the necessary foundations have been laid by the JBPT. In addition, the JBPT has positively impacted the agricultural sector of Nigeria's economy, by encouraging investment and increased local production to meet domestic demands.

Obstacles Hindering the Operations of the JBPT

While arrests and interceptions continue to be recorded by the JBPT, banned commodities still find their way to the markets. It was observed that the JBPT struggles with maintaining cross-border collaboration, as well as sustaining information operations and perception management within border communities. The research also noted that, although doctrines exist to guide the operations of the respective agencies that make up the JBPT, there is no harmonized doctrine guiding the operations of the JBPT as an establishment. This has resulted in several administrative and operational bottlenecks in the daily operations of the JBPT.

Additionally, the research revealed that joint training amongst the participating agencies of the JBPT was only conducted at the inception of the operation in August of 2019, in the form of a familiarization exercise. Since then, no further training has been conducted to keep the operatives abreast of current border security procedures. Similarly, apart from the few cross-border meetings occasionally held with JBPT partners from Benin and Niger, combined training exercises were not being conducted. Considering the fact that training is a vital aspect of promoting synergy and encouraging intelligence sharing, it is regrettable that this opportunity is not being harnessed by the JBPT.

Furthermore, the research revealed that Nigeria's border policies exist either in isolation or within the policies of different government agencies, making them difficult to implement and monitor. As a result, these policies are unable to positively impact border management operations in general and the JBPT operations in particular. Harmonizing all policies on the administration and management of Nigeria's borders into a promulgated policy document under the direct supervision of a particular agency would be a major boost to border security operations in Nigeria.

Recommendations

In answering the primary question of this study, the researcher recommends that the following changes be made by the Federal Government of Nigeria to enhance the operational capacity of the JBPT to effectively secure the nation's borders:

1. Develop a border management policy that would harmonize all existing border-related policies in the country. Such policy would capture the Federal Government's overarching vision for border management.

2. Consider changing the ad-hoc status of the JBPT to an agency of government tasked with the responsibility of executing border security operations across the country. This would enhance its independence, access to budgetary funding, and other enabling resources.

3. Develop a JBPT doctrine that would outline standard operating procedures guiding the conduct of border security operations across the country.

4. Strengthen synergy and collaboration amongst agencies of Nigeria's JBPT and

JBPTs from neighboring countries through periodic joint and combined training exercises.

5. Integrate traditional and religious institutions in border awareness campaigns, economic development programs, community policing initiatives, mediation, and conflict resolution efforts along the borders.

6. Improve the welfare of border security officers to discourage corrupt practices, and implement punitive measures on those found wanting to serve as deterrence to others.

7. Take deliberate measures to improve the ability of Nigeria's JBPT operatives to communicate in the French language. ***IAJ***

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A System Under Strain:
Coherence and Incoherence in the American Way of Limited War

by Ryan J. Orsini

Only months apart, popular opinions regarding the U.S. action to withdraw from Afghanistan and reinforce Ukraine stand in stark contrast. They exemplify how the American way of war is seemingly criticized and praised within a given news cycle. This disparity between outcomes and perceptions is warranted. Notwithstanding its unprecedented military and non-military endowments, America has an inconsistent record in limited war in the post-1945 era. While all war is inherently uncertain, conflict that seeks limited ends short of an opponent's complete political capitulation is often the hardest to properly assess. America's track record in this kind of conflict is indicative of a way of war that lacks the coherence to translate force into a lasting desired outcome.[1] Perception of the U.S. military's track record in limited war and the roots of its successes and failures matters. Historically, American campaigns were both subject to, and contributors of, the emergent domestic and international political consensus of their time, which engendered the use of military or non-military force.[2] In short, how the U.S. military as an institution and the wider national security community perceive the relative utility of force shapes present policy options and future policy advantage.

Today, as the U.S. and its partners guardedly await the outcome of Ukraine's 2023 counter offensive, a critique of the American limited way of war, to include its sustained advantages, and the challenges and mechanisms of success and failure, is overdue.[3] There is a duality to the American way of limited war, one of military and non-military battle, that both breeds success and sows the seeds of failure. Like two interlocking gears, the complimentary ways of battle are designed to shape, fight, and exploit an adversary during conflict. However, these gears do not always turn as designed, and often fail to translate force, both military and non-military, into desired influence. America's mixed record in limited conflict post-1945 exemplifies this duality. America benefits from military access, non-military conflict expansion, and tactical adaptability, while suffering from the erosion

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of civilian control and operational agility. As the U.S. embarks on another generation of limited conflict, the post-1945 era provides a powerful lesson for today's military professional on the use of force when the very system of war is under strain due to the strategic environment and adversary.

Military and Non-military Ways of Battle: Sources of Failures to Translate

The central tension in the gears of America's way of limited war rests in the ability to translate military and non-military force into influence over time. One source of tension is structural incoherence of force application arising from the independence of U.S. agencies. On one hand, the military way of battle focuses on an enemy's defeat rather than broader political aims.[4] During military campaigns, the U.S. military typically applies strategies of attrition and annihilation independent of larger political considerations.[5] U.S. military doctrine refers to campaign completion as military end state, when its instrument of power is no longer the primary means to achieve desired national objectives.[6] On the other hand, non-military battle utilizes diplomatic, informational, and economic means to shape the conflict horizontally and convert political ends.[7] These non-military ways and means generate predominantly non-lethal influence and effects varying widely from economic sanction or political pressure campaigns against specified targets or regions. While the military gear often acts absent political purpose, the non-military gear acts without unity of effort. America's non-military means are dispersed throughout its interagency departments, decentralizing its unified projection.[8] The economic instrument exemplifies this disunity.

U.S. economic statecraft lacks vertical integration with jurisdiction spread across multiple agencies such as Treasury and Commerce Departments. Due to limits of government control over free market enterprise, it also suffers from consistent horizontal integration of purpose to surge resources toward specific geopolitical challenges. Akin to gear teeth that fail to interlock, this structural lack of cohesion among military and non-military battle decreases overall effectiveness of force in application.

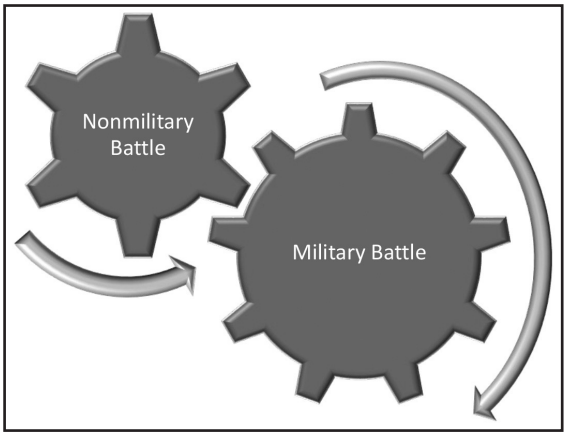

Figure 1. The duality in the American way of limited war.

Two sources of tension systematically inhibit the translation of America's military and non-military ways and means into desired ends. Structural incoherence, like gears that fail to interlock, prevents the various interagency departments from synchronizing military and non-military force. Dynamic incoherence, represented by gears that spin at disproportionate rates, limits the ability to properly assess the utility of force against a given objective.

Another source of tension is the dynamic incoherence of the perceived utility of force. American consensus over the relationship between the use of force and policy is marked by periods of skepticism and optimism, often apart from the reality of the operating environment.[9] The last conflict often becomes an analogy to constrain future use of force and objectives in limited war.[10] This trend is magnified by domestic electoral, budget, and news cycles that combine to incentivize short-term outcomes

from military and non-military ways of battle.[11] The trend is also enabled by strategic narcissism, or the propensity to view outcomes based on one's own actions, toward the adversary and geopolitical context. This inhibits critical assessment on power instrument application over time.[12]

Given this friction, it is difficult to appropriately sequence and vary military and non-military force combinations, particularly during the conduct of a given campaign. The Joint Phasing Model represents a standard assumption about the political utility of force for a given adversary and geopolitical context. It presents a generally linear progression between non-military and military force with known transition points between instruments of power to reach a desired set of objectives.[13] Similar to gears that spin at disproportionate rates, this dynamic lack of coherence among military and non-military battle inhibits the proper allocation and exploitation of American war instruments.

Favorable American Capacities in Limited War

The American way of war provides several advantages that range from military access to non-military conflict expansion and an overall tactical adaptability that has allowed the U.S. to effectively use force since 1945. Throughout this period, the American ability to generate and sustain theater access, preserve executive decision space, and tactically adjust to the politico-military context of the operating environment provides key benefits during limited war.

First, America retains an excellent ability for military access and operational reach. The U.S. combines an extensive body of allies and partners with logistical, sensor, shooter, and communication nodes to employ force largely on its own terms.[14] This provides the U.S. with a platform to project force across a range of military operations and purposes, including its preferred method of maneuver war for decisive military objectives.[15] This combination of superior technology and modern employment and maneuver systems creates a sustained advantage on contemporary battlefields.[16] Further, while typically thought of in terms of a large-scale military force, the advantage of consistent force projection during crisis and competition also bears fruit. While projection enables smaller footprints in the pursuit of objectives, it also enables the deterrent effect of dynamic deployment of military force, one of the most flexible coercive tools in the U.S. policy tool kit.[17] Finally, projection also facilitates the multinational interoperability of the U.S. as a preeminent global security cooperation partner, incentivizing other nations to integrate American military techniques and equipment.[18] The American strategic advantage in access and projection has grown so vast that it has translated directly into adversary security dilemmas and inspired deliberate countermeasures such as air and maritime domain denial techniques and capabilities.[19]

...America retains an excellent ability for military access and operational reach.

Second, America's ability to use non-military means to shape and expand conflict horizontally also enables it to fight limited war. While vertical escalation increases the intensity of weapons and targets, horizontal escalation expands conflict previously regarded as neutral, be it new geographical regions or domains.[20] The American way of limited war bears a rich tradition of diplomatic, information, and economic tools to shape bilateral outcomes from strategic to tactical levels in the post-1945 era.[21] For example, at the macro level, America's creation and stewardship of governance institutions, such as Bretton Woods

and NATO, fundamentally shaped the political context within which any potential adversary could attempt to achieve its goals.[22] At the micro level, the targeted financial sanction emerged over the 21st century to become one of the most effective and used policy instruments of the U.S..[23] America's advantage spurred adaptation, as potential adversaries modeled the American ability to augment military force through non-military action. This response is perhaps best captured in the so-called Gerasimov Doctrine's tenet of 4:1 ratio of non-military to military means in successful future warfare.[24]

...the American way of limited war combines political endurance with high human capital to innovate solutions.

A final advantage in the conduct of the American limited war is adaptability. While typically unprepared at the outset of crisis, the American way of limited war combines political endurance with high human capital to innovate solutions.[25] At the strategic and policy level, this adaptability preserves the executive decision space.[26] A professional military funded largely through deficit spending lowers the perceived financial and social costs of the wider electorate, which bolsters the endurance of American force.[27] This allows the U.S. to wage conflicts with less popular and governmental scrutiny.[28] It also provides resources, such as time, materiel, and talent, to overcome problems on the ground, varying the application of military and non-military means into new tactics, techniques, and procedures.[29]

Despite these advantages, America best applied force since 1945 against modest goals.[30] The sources of tension in America's way of limited war, both structural and dynamic incoherence, favored a generally linear and circumscribed use of force. Militarily, America's advantage of access was arguably best demonstrated in use of force against limited objectives and peripheral interests in Grenada and Kosovo.[31] Similarly, America's non-military use of force might be best defined by the cyber and economic tools used to temporarily compel Iran's nuclear program with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.[32] However, when needed, the American ability to adapt provided the capacity to reassess and redefine goals. For example, the development of limited objective attack and counterinsurgency concepts during the Korean War and the Iraq War, respectively, exemplify the ability to preserve the executive decision space and tactically adapt based on the strategic context of the theater of operations and in the domestic political landscape.[33]

Unfavorable American Capacities in Limited War

The duality of the American way of limited war also reveals trends of weakness. The post-1945 era has uncovered two unfavorable capacities in the American conduct of limited war: eroding civilian control and operational agility. America's adversaries, past and present, successfully exploited these weaknesses against U.S. short run objectives and long run interests.

First, limited war requires increased civilian control to mitigate strategic incoherence between the desired ends and chosen ways and means.[34] However, in practice, American leaders increasingly defer policymaking control to the military to boost approval, avoid responsibility, and mitigate interagency tension.[35] Since 9/11, in particular, eroding civilian control has magnified the military's embrace of the Huntington objective control to isolate military and non-military instruments of power.[36] Without consistent interagency coordination, the American unity of effort, and by extension holistic policy perspective, increasingly falls to the National Security Council. However, National Security Council effectiveness,

both in terms of personnel and procedure, historically varies and is largely a function of the executive personality. It also trends toward a consensus-driven decision-making process.[37] Taken together, these frictions make the design, assessment, and execution of limited coercive campaigns difficult. Perhaps this incoherence is best exemplified in the planning and implementation of military surge policy options to meet the broader U.S. national security goals in Afghanistan.[38] Ultimately, U.S. policy is often unable to communicate effective coercion during conflict, both in understanding the will and ends of an adversary and adapting to them over time.[39]

Another unfavorable capacity of American way of limited war is the military's constrained operational agility. This stems in part from a bias toward large-scale combat and the tactical level of war. An institutional idealism about the true nature of war and the military's role in limited conflict is both embraced and forced upon the military institution in the post-1945 era. On one hand, the U.S. military culture selectively incorporates lessons of past conflicts, orienting its technological and conceptual forms of improvement on tactics against a prioritized list of typically conventional and state-based threats.[40] On the other hand, the post-nuclear era focus on deterrence and compellence at the policy level largely relegates military thinking to the operational realm and below, which enables the military to grow concepts such as modern maneuver-based operational thought inside a policy vacuum.[41] This focus accentuates the incoherence within America's way of limited war as competing schools of military thought on service identity, capacity, and mission remain isolated from broader policymaker and academic debate without challenging the services' core assumptions.[42] As a result, the U.S. military often lacks the ability to measure and reassess durable success that meets policy aims at acceptable cost rather than through legacy views of decisive military victory, a type of war termination often absent in limited war.[43]

Since 1945, U.S. action has positioned many of these problems, as well as their antecedents, in the structural and dynamic incoherence of the American way of war to translate force into policy outcomes. In Vietnam, U.S. domestic political considerations repeatedly usurped the complexity of the operating environment, from initial coercive air campaigns that launched the war to the process of Vietnamization that ended American participation in the conflict.[44] Meanwhile, the U.S. military organizational culture struggled to integrate counterinsurgency lessons into its attritional strategy and exploit changes in the operating environment following the 1965-1967 counteroffensives, which blunted North Vietnamese conventional attacks and threatened the survival of South Vietnam's weak regime.[45] Military biases inhibited what would have already been a dramatic shift to rebalance resources between conventional force, pacification, and border security.[46] It also exaggerated host dependencies as American popular and elite support declined.[47]

...the U.S. military often lacks the ability to measure and reassess durable success that meets policy aims...

Similarly, the U.S. was slow to adapt the state and non-state actor counterstrategies with the U.S. paradigms that won the Cold War and Desert Storm.[48] In Iraq and Afghanistan, the U.S. struggled to identify war termination criteria without upsetting its bargaining position with adversaries.[49] For example, the internal power dynamics of the Karzai regime—who in the years following American intervention increasingly focused on weakening political rivals rather than defeating Taliban threat—diffused American opportunities to sense and exploit a post-invasion or post-surge settlement.[50] More recently, the

U.S. has been slow to understand how traditional measures of U.S. military and non-military overmatch eroded in competition with Russia and China, as these actors continually seek to accrue advantage in the space between detection, attribution, and response and widen the conflict space based on intensity and activity.[51] Today, it is clear that core tensions in the American way of limited war were purposefully targeted by the nation's adversaries. If human conflict is defined by a battle of complex and adaptive systems, then subsequent strategy in pursuit of policy must become equally willing to embrace and exploit change.[52]

Military and non-military objectives should align not only with the adversary's losing conditions, but also with the true political purpose, which is often unrealized at the outset of limited war.

Implications: Improving An Institution's Stance

The Joint Force is due for a reassessment of its readiness for the disordered limited conflict it is likely to continue to face, sharpening its ability to simultaneously fight and negotiate toward a desired political end. As the history of limited force since 1945 shows, the American military toolkit does not inherently guarantee success. Nor does it challenge future requirements because military coercive capability is a necessity when asserting SUS national interests.[53] Rather, each threat will require unique integration and sequencing of military and non-military capabilities that are able to identify and exploit opportunity over time. Reflecting on the first decades of the U.S. military's limited war, theorist J.C. Wylie outlined that advantage comes from the ability to control the pattern of conflict, which is a seizure of initiative that is not based merely on threat or terrain-based objectives.[54] This requires a candid dialogue both internal and external to the institution to recognize the desired pattern of conflict and then shape military and non-military objectives and methods accordingly.

One way to improve force readiness for limited conflict is to reexamine the objectives that contribute to the U.S. military end state and war termination during conflict. Military and non-military objectives should align not only with the adversary's losing conditions, but also with the true political purpose, which is often unrealized at the outset of limited war.[55] Counter to the Powell Doctrine—the accepted logic of well-defined and static objectives—this alternative model necessitates the active exploration or probing of the operational and strategic levels of the friendly and adversary systems and a disciplined tolerance for changing objectives. It also requires the force to understand that particular military strategies, such as decapacitation, while often most politically and militarily feasible, are also almost certainly incomplete.[56] Finally, the alternative also accepts that emerging battlefield conditions, refracted by activities in the information space and diplomatic arena, will likely constrain tactical and strategic options alike.[57] Through this candid internal dialogue over military objective, the U.S. military may identify the desired pattern of conflict, mitigating the structural incoherence in the American way of limited war that drives it toward default setting of enemy defeat through attrition or annihilation agnostic of true political purpose.

The U.S. military can also improve its stance for limited war well in advance of conflict through candid external dialogue with political leaders to shape the perceived utility of military force for a potential threat over time. This dialogue also comes at a price of military independence. Rather than the commonly accepted Huntingtonian notions of professional

independence, this dialogue requires military leaders to invite civilian policy into the initiation, execution, and termination of war strategy.[58] This puts forward a more objective view of the utility of military or non-military ways and means and requires the military to accept complimentary roles to the coercive potential of other instruments of power across strategic contexts. As a result, the U.S. military can better inform the perceived utility of force that typically aggravates the American way of limited war.

Conclusion: Fighting with a System Under Strain

Despite an impressive suite of military and non-military tools, America's mixed record in limited conflict uncovers a way of war that lacks the organic coherence to translate force into a lasting, desired outcome. Limited war acutely stresses not only the American participants, but the entire system itself. This problem will only deteriorate as the politicization of force and costs of decisive military operations increase over time.[59] A central challenge for America's future way of war, therefore, is to evolve with state and non-state actors' ways and means specifically designed to inhibit its effectiveness. The U.S. cannot afford for its national security establishment to gauge the utility of force based on pronounced success or failure of a past conflict. Rather, it must be based on a nuanced understanding of the adversary and operating environment. In this process of change, the U.S. can heed a lesson of the last great competition: military contests are a dynamic process of strength exploitation and cost imposition.[60] More than ever, the U.S. must be willing to question the fundamental assumptions that govern its perceived asymmetric advantages—and change America's way of war accordingly. ***IAJ***

Notes

1 This study uses an expanded view of Julian Corbett's definition of limited war based on desired ends, not applied means. As a result, it excludes from the post-1945 Operation Just Cause, Operation Uphold Democracy, as well as the early stages of Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom. It also captures uses of force used to coerce opponents before, during, and after conflict in accordance with the US Joint doctrine for the "Competition Continuum." For more on conception of limited war see Julian Corbett, *Principles of Maritime Strategy* (New York: Dover Publications, 2004), 40-51 or Donald Stoker, "Everything You Think You Know About Limited War is Wrong," *War on the Rocks,* December 22, 2016, https://warontherocks.com/2016/12/everything-you-think-you-know-about-limited-war-is-wrong/. For more on the US competition continuum, see *US Joint Doctrine Note 1-19* Competition Continuum (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2019), https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/jdn_jg/jdn1_19.pdf.

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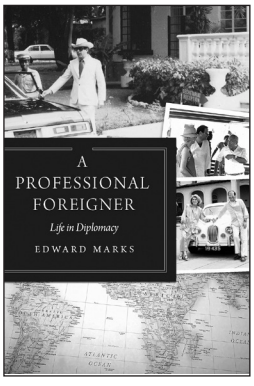

A Professional Foreigner: Life in Diplomacy

by Edward Marks

Potomac Books, University of Nebraska Press, 2023, 304 pp.

Reviewed by Col. Robert R. Ulin, U.S. Army, Ret.
Director, Simons Center for Ethical Leadership and Interagency Cooperation

Edward Marks has written a very interesting and highly readable memoir about his life in the U.S. Foreign Service. He had multiple tours of duty throughout Africa (Kenya, Zambia, Zaire, Angola, Cape Verde, and Guinea-Bissau) during the period of decolonization. He had a front row seat as an observer of transition during the transition to independence for many of these countries. His explanations of the events and the many characters he encountered make for a very interesting read.

He also had some obligatory assignments at the State Department in Washington, D.C., and an interesting stint with the United Nations in New York. Having served in many areas with the military, Ambassador Marks shares his observations about working with the military and their differences in style and substance - State is from Venus, Defense is from Mars.

This book is beautifully written and not laden with diplo-speak. His prose style paints a vivid picture of life as a diplomat, and the patient and deliberate method of diplomacy that is both settling and reassuring. He takes us back to a time when African colonies were exercising their newfound rights and struggling with the transition to independence. The portrait Ambassador Marks paints of African leaders adjusting to the new realities of independence is both interesting and informative. He regrets he didn't serve in any countries experiencing revolution or upheaval, either arriving before or after such events.

He looks back at the period from the 1950s to the end of the Cold war as the "Golden Age of American Diplomacy" where the policy of containment provided the framework for American diplomacy and the professional Foreign Service of the United States flourished and contributed mightily to demise of the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact, bringing the Cold War to a close.

This book is for readers of history, diplomacy, and international relations. It is well written and engaging and is worthy of your time. ***IAJ***

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