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## Beyond the “Hybrid” Threat: Asserting the Essential Unity of Warfare

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*Foreword: Idea papers are key inputs in the Joint Futures Group's development of the Joint Operating Environment (JOE). One of our recent projects involved a multi-national effort to describe the "hybrid" threat. In the process of writing the paper, we developed something that took in more than just the "hybrid" threat. Although we received many favorable comments on the paper, we felt our audience was a bit limited. We are publishing in the Small Wars Journal in order to generate a wider debate on this important topic prior to including any of these ideas in the next JOE.*

*The opinions expressed in this paper are the authors' and do not represent any U.S. Government, Department of Defense, or U.S. Joint Forces Command positions.*

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Within the national security communities of the United States and many of its friends and allies, there is an ongoing debate as to the nature of future adversaries and the capabilities that will be required to maintain a competitive edge over these threats. Over the past six decades, capital-intensive conventional military forces and investments in advanced C4ISR, and precision strike capabilities, have allowed the U.S. to overwhelmingly intimidate or crush adversary state military forces. This superiority has not, however, translated into a world in which state and non-state adversaries are deterred from competing militarily with the United States and its ally's altogether. Indeed, within the U.S. national security community there is a growing sense of unease as many state and non-state actors appear to be assembling distinct blends of conventional military forces and indirect or irregular approaches to warfare to deter the U.S. from engaging, to confound its strategic approaches, or to confront the U.S. military with difficult operational and tactical challenges

Future threats are evolving by incorporating new ideas and capabilities while divesting others through atrophy. Though not “revolutionary” in the sense commonly understood by the “RMA” school, the current relentless evolution of militaries and other armed groups around the world present significant challenges to our own strategic military culture that assumes technical, operational and tactical superiority. What may give the appearance of “revolution” is the shortened time span of one change to the other, which cumulatively may give the illusion of revolution in capabilities and concepts.

Further, many contemporaneous writings on the future threat jump directly to the *means* by which an adversary may fight (precision guided mortars, cyber warfare, armed unmanned aerial systems) without a coherent understanding of the *ways* in which adversaries will approach both strategy and warfare in service to their political objectives (deterrence through low scale attrition, active defense, war on the enemies infrastructure and economy). We intend to provide a clearer description of the emerging threats that U.S. forces will confront and to frame a more specific problem set for use in guiding the design of a future joint force that is as agile and adaptive as the threats we may face in the future.

If we are to get the future “right” we should return to first principles and arrive at a better understanding of the context within which wars are understood, and how adversaries will work within that context to arrange capabilities in time and space to address their own strategic requirements. Ultimately, the ideas in this paper must support the Secretary of Defense's intent of re-shaping the culture of the U.S. Armed Forces into one that is highly adaptive in

its organizational structures, in how it employs the capabilities at its disposal, and in how it conducts operational campaign design, planning and execution. Through refining the description of the future threat, we hope to create the correct context that helps force planners design the future joint force. This imperative applies across all activities of the Department from relatively small wars to large interstate conflicts, which will be discussed later in this paper.

So what is a “hybrid” threat? A definition that is too narrow may miss important features of our emerging future, while a definition that is too wide defines nothing at all. In the case of the “hybrid” threat though, attempts to define “hybridity” has led to a “confusion of concepts.” Instead of defining the threat, we propose a description of the threat that is relevant across the entire range of military operations. That is, any actors’ approach to warfare can be described by the mix of **material** and **cognitive** capabilities it brings to bear in conflict and war. “Hybridity” then, should be seen as a reflection of this underlying unity of warfare, based on an understanding of the necessity of applying a mix of cognitive and material elements to succeed. In fact, the ability to shift among material and cognitive approaches with agility and speed is both the essence of the future threat, as well as of Secretary Gates’ vision of U.S. Armed Forces that are adaptive in organizational design, capabilities development, and campaign design and execution. In short, the future threat should not be conceived of as a category of future warfare that is distinct from other forms of warfare but is instead the very essence of future warfare itself, and are just as applicable to friendly forces as to our competitors and adversaries. We propose the following as a starting point for this description: Future threats will be entities or movements that continually scan the environment for opportunities, and threaten to or apply violence to affect the will and psyche of others to achieve their political objectives.

“Especially machine-minded forces, like the American, have long been inclined to seek to reduce the conduct of war to mechanical mobility and the application of firepower.”

~Colin Gray

<sup>1</sup>In spite of the relative success of the American style of warfare over the past three decades, an array of actors around the world continue to develop their own set of political and strategic goals and design military forces to pursue those goals. Israeli experience against Hezbollah in 2006 and Russian operations in Georgia in 2008, as well as ongoing U.S. operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, illustrate that actors around the world are developing new and unfamiliar ways to defeat “conventional” military power. Meanwhile Russia, China,

Iran, and others are avoiding direct (and expensive) platform-for-platform competition with the United States and are instead crafting sets of military capabilities that are keyed to their own unique strategic situation -- with one eye always toward making the capital-intensive U.S. way of war obsolete. Today there is a sense that the once solid foundation of military superiority (upon which much of our national strategy is founded) appears to be shifting beneath our feet.

This unease has resolved into the evolving debate over the notion of emerging “hybrid” threats and what to do about them. The nominal starting point for this relatively long-running debate was the 2006 version of the Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR), which described future challenges as taking place in one of four types or “quadrants” in a matrix, arranged according to the likelihood of the threat occurring and the overall impact of the threat on U.S. security. These quadrants included traditional (conventional) warfare, irregular warfare, catastrophic attacks, and disruptive threats (usually technological in nature).<sup>2</sup> According to the 2006 QDR report, the U.S. military has invested too heavily in the “traditional” quadrant of the chart and needs to adjust in order to adequately address all four elements of the chart. In short, the U.S. needs to “rebalance” its capability profile so that discrete threats within each of the categories can be defended against.

### Blurred Challenges

Fast forward to 2009 and we find that the threats that have emerged cannot be templated or forced into any one of the neat and convenient categories found in the quad chart. The world is instead

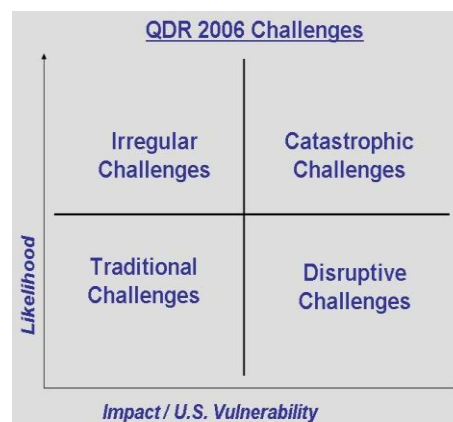


Figure 1

<sup>1</sup> Text box quote from Colin Gray, *Another Bloody Century* (Phoenix Press, 2005), p. 98

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report* (February 6, 2006) p. 19.

very messy and refuses to be neatly categorized. Indeed, potential adversaries will not necessarily adhere to our Western conventions of war and will exploit whatever tactics, methods, and technologies that speak most clearly to their specific strategic context.<sup>3</sup> As Michele Flournoy, Undersecretary of Defense for Policy recently noted “The ‘quad chart’ was useful in its time, but we aren’t using it as a point of reference or departure... The traditional, neat categories - those are types that really don’t match reality any more.”<sup>4</sup>

The first steps in describing this future threat have been taken most prominently by Mr. Frank Hoffman, who is perhaps the most well known proponent of a future security environment featuring adversaries that blend different quad chart challenges. He proposes that in order to get beyond the quad chart, one must realize that future (or “hybrid”) threats are “any adversary that simultaneously and adaptively employs a fused mix of conventional weapons, irregular tactics, terrorism and criminal behavior in the battle space to obtain their political objectives.”<sup>5</sup> Regardless of the precise definition, proponents of future threats as being “hybrid” in nature tend to emphasize the blending of regular and irregular approaches to warfare in novel and unexpected ways. For example, Secretary Gates notes that “the old way of looking at irregular warfare as being one kind of conflict and conventional warfare as a discrete kind of warfare, is an outdated concept.”<sup>6</sup>

Previous definitions also do not adequately describe the complexity of the future threat that may employ any or all of the political, economic, social, information and infrastructure tools available to them.

It is our contention that the notion of “hybrid” threats has been instrumental in helping the military mind move beyond its “comfort zone” construct of victory in a major theater war against a regional state-based adversary. However, the conceptions of “hybrid” threats as blurring together conventional and irregular capabilities in some fashion do not adequately get to the heart of the issue. It highlights the inadequacy of the current definitions of “hybridity” that simply melds a set of features, (Is it one, two, three, or four?) while omitting an underlying logic that describes why adversaries chose the capabilities and operations that they do. Current definitions are also overly insurgency “centric”, lacking a universality that helps to explain and understand other threat types, such as the high end asymmetric threat. The advantage of this definition is that it highlights the complexity of the future threat – the disadvantage is that in this form it is a poor guide to force development and deployment. In other words, merely recognizing a threat’s complexity does not necessarily lead to creation of an appropriate strategy to defeat the threat.

The result of this debate is a “confusion of concepts” and a resulting inability to come to grips with the slippery notion of “hybridity”. Figure 2 above illustrates the confusion inherent in attempting to define the “hybrid” threat in terms of the mix between conventional and irregular capabilities. Without a clear description, we will very likely look back and see that we have overlooked some important questions that lay in wait at the very foundation of the “hybrid” threat construct which will directly affect our ability to devise the “correct force” to deal with this threat. These questions revolve around notions such as, “Why should future threats blend traditional, irregular, criminal,

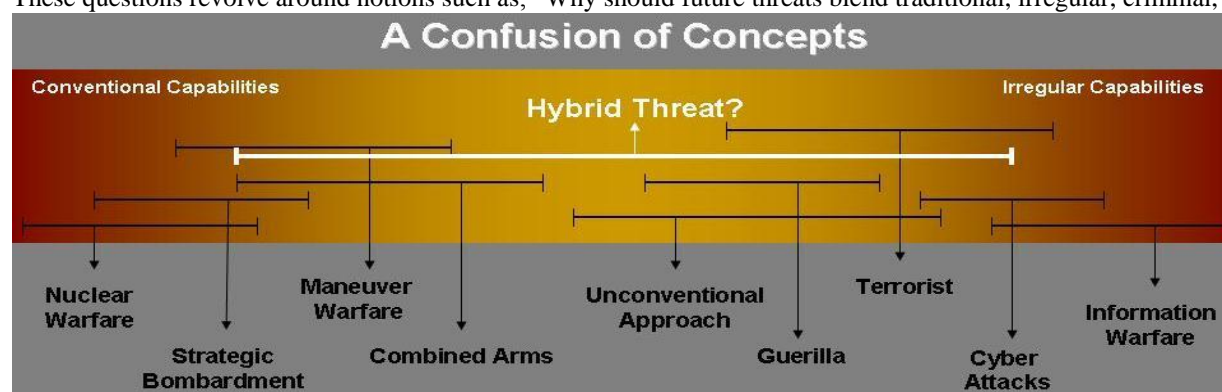


Figure 2

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Joint Forces Command, *Joint Operating Environment 2008* (December 2008) p. 49.

<sup>4</sup> Thom Shanker, “Pentagon to Outline Shift in War Planning Strategy” *New York Times* (22 June 2009)

<sup>5</sup> Frank G. Hoffman, “hybrid” vs. compound war: *The Janus choice: Defining today’s multifaceted conflict*, *Armed Forces Journal International*, October 2009.

<sup>6</sup> Press Conference with Secretary Gates and Adm. Mullen, (June 18 2009), <http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=4435>

and terrorist modes of warfare in novel ways?”, “What is the difference between regular and irregular warfare?”, “What differentiates conventional and unconventional conflict, and what elements do adversaries blend in attempting to defeat the U.S?” Perhaps most consequentially for the Department of Defense, “What is it about ‘hybrid’ threats that we need to pay attention to?” With these questions in mind, let us look more deeply into the theory of warfare and the role the future threat plays in it.

### **The Material and Cognitive Approaches to Warfare**

The discussion about “hybrid” threats relies on an intellectual heritage derived from the “fourth generation warfare” school of thought.<sup>7</sup> The distinguishing feature of this type of warfare is that states no longer hold a monopoly on the use of violence for political ends. Furthermore, this mode of warfare is highly complex as all elements of a society, including political, technological and social means are brought to bear, usually against a state. This approach places warfare within a historical context by noting that one “generation” of warfare succeeds the next, with labels such as “primitive,” “industrial,” “maneuver” and “information” all describing an actor’s particular arrangement of political and military capabilities to conduct warfare. We have chosen what we believe is a simpler and perhaps more helpful formulation.

This paper proposes that warfare can be conducted by any political actor, regardless of the “military” capabilities at its disposal.<sup>8</sup> This perspective allows us to maintain our focus on war’s enduring nature while understanding the different approaches to warfare that will be pursued by competitors and adversaries based on the strategic and political context within which they operate, as well as the physical and moral assets that they control. To illustrate the idea, imagine that the conduct of war – i.e. warfare – has two “platonic” (and indeed unachievable) ideals, termed respectively the cognitive approach and the material approach. Each ideal represents how a given actor or society at large may approach political goals through conflict or war.

A material approach to warfare is founded on the belief that physical, material advantages – such as more, better weaponry, economic power, or technological prowess translates into a decisive advantage on the battlefield. *Materialschlacht*, as it came to be known in interwar German writings on the subject, brings to mind the campaigns of the Civil War under Grant in Virginia, of trench warfare in Northern France during the First World War, and of the mobilization of American and Russian industry to defeat Germany during the Second World War. The material approach to warfare focuses on the capture or destruction of some critical portion of an adversary’s material assets which will cause his defeat. This ideal approach to warfare assumes that the will of an adversary to resist can be rendered irrelevant if he does not have the physical means to exercise his will. In this idealization of war, military operations are focused on eliminating or negating this physical capacity to resist. Thus, destruction or damage to military forces and economic assets, the physical control and occupation of adversary populations, political centers, or key assets or terrain will directly cause an adversary to capitulate. During the era of total warfare, starting with the Napoleonic wars up to the Second World War, this mindset resulted in modes of warfare that led to the reduction of cities through airpower as well as the outright occupation of belligerent great powers.

The U.S., with its massive economic, technological, financial, industrial, and human assets often approaches the conduct of warfare in a materially-driven way, and recently has focused more specifically on the application of technology (especially information technologies) to “engineer” victory in war through the precise disruption of key material systems. However, for the Germans of the interwar period, *Materialschlacht* of the Allied forces was a military problem to be solved; as German forces absorbed the lessons of World War I trench warfare they attempted to restore maneuver to the battlefield and produce victory through the psychological dislocation of adversaries. Relying on speed and shock, the Germans bypassed very expensive fortifications and struck directly at the emotional and mental processes of their adversaries.<sup>9</sup> These examples lead us to a discussion of the second platonic idealization of warfare, the “cognitive approach to warfare.”

A “cognitive” approach to warfare is based on the notion that the will of the adversary is central in war. In this approach, belligerents attempt to bypass the material assets of an adversary altogether and focus on the mind, mental processes, emotions, feelings, perceptions, behaviors, and decisions of a person, group, nation, or other community. The cognitive approach to warfare is typically developed most quickly by actors that in war may face adversaries

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<sup>7</sup> See Martin Van Creveld, *The Transformation of Warfare* (1991); William Lind, *The Changing Face of War, Into the Fourth Generation* (1989), or T.X. Hammes, *The Sling and the Stone* (2006)

<sup>8</sup> Our proposition is based on the Clausewitzian notion that all war is political.

<sup>9</sup> Max Boot, *War Made New*, (New York, NY, Gotham Press, 2006), pp 220-222.

with significant material advantages and thus for whom a material style of warfare is impractical.<sup>10</sup> By its nature, it is less expensive than the material style of warfare but, to be effective, it also requires a significant level of professional competence, in addition to intangible cultural factors such as social trust, a high degree of discipline, and ideological cohesion. A cognitive style of warfare focuses on distracting, dissuading, deterring, or outlasting an adversary as the primary defeat mechanism. In this way, strategy is focused on disrupting the will of an adversary to continue the fight or interfere with the adversary's political aims.



Figure 3

### The “Hybrid” Threat is the Future Threat

The reality of warfare, as with all concepts or theories, is more complex than the platonic ideals that we have outlined above. Our central argument is that any actors’ approach to warfare can be defined by *the mix of material and cognitive capabilities brought to bear in conflict and war*. Indeed, all military operations employ a distinctive and ever changing mix of both cognitive and material approaches to warfare as they unfold. Alone and in isolation, neither approach is possible nor could a pure manifestation of either achieve victory. The most successful commanders understand how and when to use cognitive and material elements, and perhaps most importantly, how to use them in combination. The danger is that we must not take one of the ideal approaches to warfare, or even a single particular combination of these two approaches as the doctrinal solution to all wars. Over-reliance upon material superiority and material factors may overlook human-centric concerns that animate adversary behavior and may be, in fact even more decisive. The so called “irregular” adversary relies on the belief systems (and, in turn the acquiescence of) a civilian population to avoid decisive battle and wear down an adversary. On the other hand, this same irregular adversary cannot achieve positive ideological goals – such as the construction of a state, or more modestly, build an army to harass and kill occupying military forces – without some consideration of the physical, material characteristics of the occupying force.

“Hybridity” then, should be seen as a reflection of this underlying unity of warfare, based on an understanding of the necessity of applying a mix of cognitive and material elements in order to succeed. The future threat recognizes .



Figure 4

<sup>10</sup> David C. Gompert, *Heads We Win: The Cognitive Side of Counterinsurgency* RAND Counterinsurgency Study Paper 1, (Arlington, VA, RAND Occasional Papers, 2007), pp 31-33



that the cognitive and material approaches to warfare are both inherent to any conflict, and the relative influence of each will depend on situational factors. *The future joint force must also be capable of doing the same.* The future threat and the future joint force must strive to balance and integrate the two according to each particular situation. The future threat seeks to apply violence only where necessary, or where dramatic effect can be achieved (through suicide bombings, or violations of the rules of armed conflict, for example). Suasion and the indirect approach is usually favored, with violence typically reserved for the irreconcilables, or leaders (formal and informal) that hold a rival organization or society together, or key social, economic or military assets that are vulnerable. Violence is also used selectively to send or reinforce messages

Adaptability between cognitive and material approaches to warfare is a salient feature of future threats, and must become the same for the future joint force. The future threat will adapt specific mixes of cognitive and material capabilities based on a continual assessment and re-assessment of the other's strengths and weaknesses. The *sine qua non* of adaptation can be found in the German experience with "Stormtroop Tactics" developed late in the First

**"The profoundest truth of war is that the issue of battle is usually decided in the minds of the opposing commanders, not in the bodies of their men."**

**~Lidell Hart**

World War. Later, these innovations were paired with the then modern technologies of radios, aircraft, and motor vehicles in the 1930s to produce the notion of combined arms operating at a furious pace, famously known as Blitzkrieg.<sup>11</sup> From the perspective of the French and the British, (who had more modern, and indeed more numerous forces in the field) the swift German assault was a novel mix of material capabilities with a decisive cognitive effect ("We have been defeated. We are beaten; we have lost the battle" ~French Prime Minister Reynaud).<sup>12</sup>

This experience highlights the constant adaptation, experimentation and learning that is the hallmark characteristic of the future threat. Likewise, in the future adversaries will use material assets and technologies in ways that will surprise and even astonish, despite our own material advantages. The perhaps prototypical (and indeed oft-cited) Hezbollah example illustrates the spread of technologies, such as the surprise appearance of anti-ship missiles, anti-tank rockets and combat teams prepared to stand and fight, combined with persistent rocket bombardment of Israeli cities to reinforce its messages and themes.

The ability to flexibly employ both cognitive and material approaches means that future threats will work to employ cheaper means to create rather costly effects within advanced societies, often bypassing their military forces altogether. For example, John Robb sees this changing cost equation as the most consequential trend shaping future military operations and one that defines how a future adversary makes choices about the capabilities and strategies in which he will invest. During the Cold War, the United States possessed a decided cost advantage in its competition with the Soviet Union. Against future threats, this competitive disadvantage has all but disappeared. Robb contends that on 9/11, "a \$250,000 attack was converted into an event that cost the United States over \$80 billion (with some estimates as high as \$500 billion in damage to the U.S. economy)."<sup>13</sup>

In addition to a reduction in cost, the advent of "open source warfare" is yielding a time dividend for the future threat. In this case, the time required to develop a new, and potentially asymmetric capability, will become shorter, reducing a state actor's ability to sense and respond to the threat, but without sacrificing any political benefit for the future threat. Future threats will learn very rapidly from each other, as tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs) spread in viral fashion around the globe. Disseminated within cyberspace, the goal is systemic disruption of states, in the hope of carving out their own "proto-state" or otherwise autonomous zone – not necessarily physical in nature. State based militaries that do not understand this dynamic will not be in a position to innovate quickly enough to keep up in an "ecosystem of violence"<sup>14</sup> that is open source in nature and utterly unconcerned with the forms, conventions, and rituals of (Western) state warfare.

<sup>11</sup> Max Boot, *War Made New*, (New York, NY, Gotham Press, 2006), pp 220-222

<sup>12</sup> Williamson Murray and Allan Millet (eds), *Military Innovation in the Interwar Period* (1998)

<sup>13</sup> John Robb, *Brave New War* (Hoboken, NJ, John Wiley and Sons, 2007).

<sup>14</sup> John Robb, *Brave New War* (Hoboken, NJ, John Wiley and Sons, 2007).

The legal and ethical constructs under which the United States operates are also part of the cognitive / material construct of warfare. Our own cognitive means of warfare includes an insistence on internationally-derived norms of conduct. These norms, designed and built in a state-on-state framework, have been extended to apply to what would in the past be described as “pirates” or brigands to be dealt with in the harshest of means. Such an approach has strengths and weaknesses that are well beyond the scope of this paper, but it bears repeating that criminality is a

“hybrid” Warfare (sic) is not only a phenomenon associated with the “low end” of the spectrum of conflict. There is no reason that a future peer competitor would restrict military competition with the United States to the ‘traditional’ category”

~Defense Science Board

lucrative option – though not a defining characteristic – of the future threat. Criminality, both in the sense of ignoring or disobeying civil law, and ignoring customary and codified law of war, is a form of cognitive warfare that will continually challenge the U.S., her Allies and coalition partners. The future threat will also examine the web of legal and ethical constructs that surround governance and warfare, and attempt to manipulate and re-define these constructs in order to maximize their strategic, operational, and tactical advantages vis-à-vis their opponents, a concept labeled “lawfare” described and used by the People’s Republic of China.<sup>15</sup>

Finally, the future threat thrives in the information environment. Warfare and other activities in the three dimensions of the information environment,<sup>16</sup> but especially in the cognitive dimension, pay off early and substantially for the future threat. A commander that is unaware of his adversaries’ force movements, intentions, or state of readiness is much easier to defeat than an informed adversary, thus, the future threat focuses on manipulating the information environment so that others cannot orient properly on his operations. It is also through the cognitive dimension that deterrence is effected, whether by communicating the ability to deny benefits, impose costs, or encourage adversary restraint.<sup>17</sup> All of these states of perception and understanding can be affected through the information environment and the cyberspace domain.

### Clarity – The Future Approach in Wars, Big and Small

The next element in our discussion is to stretch our minds and attempt to describe what the reality of future approaches to warfare will present for the joint force commander. First, the future threat must be explored in the context of two spheres, or classes of conflict – the small war and the big war. Our defining criteria between these two classes of war is in our own threshold for responding; e.g., must the United States respond to a threat with a national military response involving conventional and / or nuclear forces? If yes, it’s a big war. No? It’s a small war. Small wars do not breach state or United Nations thresholds for responding with major conventional or nuclear combat operations. This definition is important because it helps us to get at the capabilities and goals that adversaries will pursue within each context.

Mr. Mackubin T. Owens of the Naval War College put the problem another way:

“In the area of irregular warfare, opponents will attempt to impose untenable costs on the United States by using time-tested techniques against superior force, threatening a protracted war of attrition to undermine domestic public support, raising the level of violence and brutality, and expanding and escalating the conflict by targeting the U.S. homeland and those of its key allies. In the area of power projection, opponents will attempt to raise the cost of access by increasing the risk to the United States of naval and air operations, by, in turn, expanding the area of a “contested zone,” seeking to destroy high-value assets—for instance, aircraft carriers—dissuading allies and partners from providing bases and other forms of support to U.S. forces, and degrading the ability of the United States to deploy forces into an area of interest.”<sup>18, 19</sup>

Resolution of small wars entails more than material solutions to achieve success, typically requiring endurance and strategic patience; threats encountered in small wars also tend to be characterized by a cognitive approach. Small wars can be categorized in six ways, perhaps more:

<sup>15</sup> *Unrestricted Warfare*, by Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui, Beijing: PLA Literature and Arts Publishing House, February 1999

<sup>16</sup> See JP 3-13, Information Operations, for a full explanation of the information environment and the information, physical and cognitive dimensions.

<sup>17</sup> Deterrence Operations Joint Operating Concept Version 2.0, December 2009

<sup>18</sup> *The Future of War as We Know It*, pp. 17, 56

<sup>19</sup> Naval War College Review, Summer 2008, Vol. 61, No. 3

- Insurgencies / Wars of National Liberation: This is the classic insurgent previously found in China and Vietnam, but now found in Uttar Pradesh, Iraq and Afghanistan.
- Terrorism: Either a global threat or brand, like Al Qaeda, or local such as Jemaah Islamiyah. As much a criminal enterprise as a movement, neither deserving of respect nor quarter.
- Piracy: Blackbeard returns, not to Cape Fear, but to the Horn of Africa and the Malacca Straits. Pirates are becoming increasingly emboldened, to include attacking first world naval combatants.
- Criminal Enterprises: With an estimated world wide annual income of over three trillion dollars, the Triads, Russian and Italian Mafias, Mexican drug cartels, and to a large extent the Afghan Taliban, disprove the idea that crime doesn't pay. Many of these enterprises are growing state like military capabilities to protect and expand their areas of influence and control, and are increasingly unafraid of using these capabilities against the state. The Revolutionary United Front in Sierra Leone epitomizes this idea of an armed insurgency and a criminal organization (blood diamond trade). It was only when the criminal trade in diamonds was strangled that the RUF ceased to exist.
- Constricting access to the global commons.
  - Iran – Strait of Hormuz: mine laying capabilities, quiet diesel electric submarines, anti-ship cruise missiles.
  - Patriotic Hackers of the PRC: Disrupt or destroy access to cyberspace by U.S. users from our financial system, stock markets, cyber marketing and sales, to U.S. Government operations.
  - Russia versus Georgia, Estonia, Ukraine in Cyberspace: Disruption of government operations, the financial system.
- Rise of “proto-states.” Many of these groups were originally thought of and treated as terrorists or insurgents, but they attempted to “grow up” into governments in their own right, hoping to displace a legitimate government. A defining characteristic is that they control territory and populations with the acquiescence, active or otherwise, of a legitimate government. The archetypal “proto” state was the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People’s Army (FARC) during the time they were ceded control of southern Columbia by the government. A far more successful example has been Hezbollah, which is striving to establish an Islamic Republic of Lebanon and seeks the destruction of Israel. Other (unsuccessful) examples include the Islamic Courts Union (Somalia), and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam of Sri Lanka. From a military point of view, what differentiates a proto-state from an insurgency is the ability of their adversaries to influence or attack them. In Lebanon, Hezbollah is an insurgency (for the most part) to the government of Lebanon. To Israel though, Hezbollah isn’t an insurgency, but a full fledged military competitor with many state like capabilities. But Hezbollah isn’t a state, but one in the making; hence it is a proto-state. A second major factor is the growing use of political, social, and economic tools to develop support for what would otherwise be a well armed gang of bank robbers, as evidenced by Hezbollah’s political support and electoral success in Lebanon. It is this complexity that makes the proto-state the most difficult of the small war future threats to defeat. This type of phenomenon is also becoming increasingly common, and may become the prevalent threat to international peace and stability for a significant time into the future.

Big wars, on the other hand, do breach thresholds for a major conventional or nuclear warfare response. In this case, civilian and inter-agency resources are needed to secure victory, but are not essential to achieve victory. Big wars are fought by adversaries who will be as adaptive and creative as those we will fight in small wars, but big wars are characterized by a higher level of lethality, are more widespread, and tend to be much shorter in duration. Big wars are not necessarily nuclear, but nuclear powers will be the primary players in big wars, so the use of nuclear weapons will never be far from policy makers’ minds. Finally, big war aggressors will mix and match conventional and unconventional lethal fires, lawfare, cyber, information capabilities, and economic and diplomatic powers to achieve their ends. A prime example is the potential conflict between the United States and the Peoples Republic of China over the future of Taiwan. The PRC has carefully, slowly, and with almost infinite patience re-invented the People’s Liberation Army, People’s Liberation Army Air Force, and the Peoples Liberation Army Navy, and the numerous directorates of the General Staff, into a capable, modern armed force with capabilities sharply focused on what the PLA considers critical vulnerabilities in the armed forces of Taiwan and the United States. Others, such as Iran, appear to be studying and copying the People’s Liberation Army’s approach to their strategic and operational challenges.



But the nature of big wars and small wars will remain the same: the use or threatened use of violence to achieve political objectives. For the future threat, we describe two major “archetypes” of threat based on their overall mix of capabilities and aspirations.

<b>Local Insurgent</b>		<b>High End Asymmetric Threat</b>	
Deterrence	→	Compellence	
Absorption	→	Initiative	
Attrition	→	Decisive Victory	

**Figure 5**

not all inclusive descriptions of the future threat, but are of only intended to illustrate our theory of warfare.

Small wars are more likely to feature local insurgents or “defensive” threats. As the figure below illustrates, these threats work to construct capabilities built around deterring the U.S. or from escalating the fight once engaged. Second, the local insurgent tends to absorb punishment that traditional military forces dish out, even when in COIN and counterinsurgency mode, and attempt to survive the onslaught. The local insurgent will attempt to wear down the military force arrayed against it and work to outlast an opponent in the hopes that he will go home and cede the battlefield. If the local insurgent can convince the world that it has survived, it is well on the way to convincing the world that it has won.

Big wars are more likely to feature “offensive” threats, but can also be the major feature of a contest with a proto-state. These threats are not content with deterrence, but rather seek to force an adversary to take some action that they may not wish to (surrender of territory for example). The high end asymmetric threat will attempt to take the initiative and take more active measures to intellectually and physically maneuver against an adversary. Finally, the high end asymmetric threat will seek victory on its own terms, rather than simply surviving.

The local insurgent tends to have more limited goals, or are less militarily or politically capable relative to their adversaries. The high end asymmetric threat tends to have far more capabilities at their disposal or have maximal goals – such as the utter destruction of their adversary – and attempt to construct a mix capabilities to make decisive victory a reality. These archetypes are

	<b>Local Insurgent Defensive Strategy</b>
<b>Strategy</b>	Defensive, combined with offensive elements - attrition, deterrence, and absorption; avoids decisive defeat
<b>Identity</b>	Regionally focused nation-state or non-state organization
<b>Short-term Objectives</b>	Survival/preservation of PMESII capabilities (avoid decisive defeat); Achieves exhaustion of adversary population and/or military Resist & build PMESII capabilities
<b>Long-term Objectives</b>	Political / Ideological legitimacy

**Figure 6**

	<b>High End Asymmetric Threat Offensive Strategy</b>
<b>Strategy</b>	Dynamic, aggressive, initiative; maneuvers to gain, compel and maintain initiative, while avoiding enemy military
<b>Identity</b>	More globally or regionally focused nation-state or non-state organization
<b>Short-term Objectives</b>	Force a change to the status-quo (shape a new reality), by disrupting enemy centers of gravity to destroy its will to fight
<b>Long-term Objectives</b>	Political / Ideological Dominance (e.g. Islamic Caliphate, impose Socialist or Communist system, etc.)

**Figure 7**

## Final Thoughts

### Force Design:

Finally, as we go forward to assist force designers, we would propose a few ideas from Mr. MacKubin Owens and Mr. Andy Krepinevich, that, “(t)he best way to think about the future is not to try to predict it but to project a number of plausible alternative futures against which to test strategies and force structures. To do so, planners must develop a representative — not exhaustive — set of plausible contingencies that encompass the principal challenges the military might encounter ‘over the planning horizon’ (more than fifteen to twenty years out). This approach is particularly relevant to the United States, which, given its global responsibilities, must be prepared for a variety of contingencies across the entire range of military operations.”<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> See Mackubin Thomas Owens, “The Logic of Force Planning” (briefing to the 2007 Defense Science Board Summer Study “Future of War” panel, 24 April 2007).

Andrew Krepinevich has suggested a useful methodology for addressing areas of future military competition—the reintroduction of the concept of “color plans” reminiscent of those the United States employed during the interwar period.<sup>21</sup> His scenarios include:

- China (disruptive peer) (Plan YELLOW)
- North Korea (nuclear rogue) (Plan RED)
- Pakistan (failed nuclear state) (Plan GREEN)
- Radical Islam (Plan PURPLE)
- Global energy network defense (Plan BLACK)
- Global commons defense (Plan ORANGE)
- Nuclear/biological homeland attack (Plan BLUE).

These illustrative scenarios seek to identify a representative array of contingencies encompassing the principal military challenges U.S. planners may confront over the planning horizon. As such, they presumably enable strategists and force planners to hedge against uncertainty by testing concepts of operations and force structures against plausible alternatives—not the most familiar ones or the contingencies believed to be the most likely—permitting planners to assess realistically the potential impact of a range of possible futures on relative military effectiveness.”<sup>22</sup>

#### Problems without answers:

A central conundrum in future war, especially as the spread of technical knowhow spreads from state to non-state actors, will be the use of weapons of mass destruction (chemical, biological, nuclear and radiological) by a non-state actor such as Al Qaeda. Central questions of “How do we deter the use of these weapons?”; “How do we destroy these weapons pre-, trans- and post-attack?” and most importantly, “Who will pay for this outrage?!?” are almost unanswerable in the present. Will the future joint force have the capabilities to meet and overcome this conundrum?

Another consideration is the movement away from state on state wars being “Total Wars”, i.e., the strategic objectives of the belligerents does not include the occupation nor the complete destruction of the other. It can be plausibly argued that a war between the PRC and the US over Taiwan could see a rapid return to a state close to that *antebellum*, complete with increasing PRC holdings of US Treasuries and an ever widening trade deficit in favor of the PRC. A question for policy makers will very much be, “What should the “new normal” look like following such a conflict?”

The world is moving to a state of constant, pervasive conflict. Many of these conflicts don’t endanger the national interests of the US and her allies, but their resolution would assist in stabilizing regions, contributing to international peace and stability. Think the Maoist insurgency in Kathmandu, Somali pirates or the Houthi uprising in Yemen. The US attitude is essentially, “We care, but not that much.” What should be our criteria for becoming engaged? Should we build a scalable COIN force that can be deployed without disturbing the conventional “big war” force?

#### **Conclusion**

We propose that the future threat should not be seen as a category of warfare that is distinct from other forms of warfare but is the essence of future warfare itself. The current debate over the notion of the “hybrid” threat is an attempt to come to grips with an underlying unity of warfare based on the necessity of applying a mix of cognitive and material elements to succeed. In fact, the ability to achieve balance between material and cognitive approaches to warfighting is both the essence of the future threat, as well as part of the struggle to build a force that is **adaptive** in organizational design, capabilities development, and campaign design and execution. The adaptability of an individual or an organization is a measure of one’s ability to change in order to fit altered circumstances. A force that is adaptive provides the joint force commander a measure of resilience in the face of the unknown.

The need for adaptability points to a potential gap in our doctrinal system. Joint Publication 3-0, *Joint Operations*, describes nine classic principles of war that govern the employment of the joint force.<sup>23</sup> In addition to the enduring

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<sup>21</sup> See Stephen Ross, *American War Plans 1890–1939* (London: Routledge, 2002); and Edward Miller, *War Plan Orange: The U.S. Strategy to Defeat Japan, 1897–1945* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1991).

<sup>22</sup> Andrew F. Krepinevich, *The Quadrennial Defense Review: Rethinking the US Military Posture* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2005), pp. 56–59.

<sup>23</sup> These are, “Objective,” “Offensive,” “Mass,” “Economy of Force,” “Maneuver,” “Unity of Command,” “Security,” “Surprise,” “Simplicity” Joint Publication 3-0, *Joint Operations* p. II-2.

principles, *Joint Operations* identifies three additional principles that may also apply to joint operations which are “Restraint,” “Perseverance,” and “Legitimacy.” Resilience is not found in this list.

The purpose of resilience is to develop and maintain an ability to recover readily from setbacks or other unexpected conditions. Sometimes the world evolves in ways that we do not have the capacity to change, or even shape, no matter how powerful our military, or even civilizational capabilities. Systems and organizations that cannot cope with unexpected events or conditions will fail, often spectacularly, with disastrous political, strategic, and military consequences, including loss of human life and national treasure. Commanders at all levels must organize and equip their forces so they do not rely on a single solution or approach to problem sets. Furthermore, commanders must be prepared when approaches to problems do not work as anticipated and be ready to alter plans and operations accordingly. When failures or unanticipated consequences inevitably play out, plans and operations should fail gracefully such that the “failure state” is not worse than what can be dealt with.<sup>24</sup> However, our current doctrine does not ascribe resiliency as a key feature of the joint force. Thus, we may wish to undertake further research into the addition of “resilience” as an additional principle for consideration in addition to those of “restraint,” “perseverance,” and “legitimacy.”

The reason that adversaries are adopting “hybrid” approaches, often network-based, decentralized organizational structures is to avoid the hammer of U.S. military forces. Those that have not adapted have faced rapid extinction in the jungle of the global strategic order. Those that do are *entities or movements that, based on a continuous scanning of their operational environment, maneuver with speed and agility through material and cognitive capabilities to affect the will and psyche of others, in order to attain their political objectives.*

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<sup>24</sup> Adapted from Jamais Cascio, “The Next Big Thing: Resilience” *Foreign Policy* (May/June 2009)

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