

Assessing Alternative Theater Design Choices: A Framework for Analysis

Authors

Nathan Freier
Robert Hume

Project Directors

Nathan Freier
Robert Hume
Albert Lord
John Schaus

Contributors

Jasan Rosenstrauch
Brian Evans

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Nathan Freier

Robert Hume

Jason Rosenstrauch

Brian Evans

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Each working paper in this series is a product of the US Army War College INDOPACOM Project on Theater Design and represents the judgment of project researchers at the time of its publication. Though considered complete at this time, this and other working papers are subject to further development or amendment with new information or additional work in the future.

2019 - 2020 US Army War College Integrated Research Project on the Indo-Pacific Team:

Project Directors

Nathan Freier
Robert Hume
Albert Lord
John Schaus

Game Designers

Derek Martin
Christopher Miller

Contributing Researchers

Brent Bak
Brian Evans
Alison Goldsmith
John Klug
David Mitchell
Elizabeth Martin
Jason Rosenstrauch
Bryan Schott
Henry Wicks

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About this Project

Indo-Pacific Working Papers are products of the on-going US Army War College (USAWC) study on US Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) theater design. The project identifies and assesses the opportunities, challenges, paths to implementation and risks associated with the Army adopting four transformational roles in the USINDOPACOM Area of Responsibility (AoR) over the next decade.

The 2020 USAWC report *An Army Transformed – USINDOPACOM Hypercompetition and US Army Theater Design* argues that the “Army should adopt the transformational roles of grid, enabler, multi-domain warfighter, and capability and capacity generator” because of an “urgent [Joint Force] change imperative in the Indo-Pacific region.” That change imperative stems from the study’s principal finding that US Joint Forces are out of position “physically, conceptually, and in terms of deployed and anticipated capabilities” for hypercompetition with an aggressive People’s Republic of China (PRC) rival.

These working papers are a series and reflect Army War College analyses over 2020 and 2021. The papers in this series offer specific recommendations to US senior leadership as to how the US Army, as part of the larger Joint Force, might operationalize two of the four transformational roles (the Army as “the grid” and the Army as “the enabler”) outlined in the 2020 War College study *An Army Transformed: USINDOPACOM Hypercompetition and US Army Theater Design*. The Army embrace of all four transformational roles in USINDOPACOM—grid, enabler, multidomain warfighter, and capability and capacity generator—now and through the next decade, is a necessary first step for US Joint Forces to thrive in persistent hypercompetition with China and, if necessary, prevail in armed hostilities in the event of escalation. Working papers in this series are intended to provide in-progress views on current War College thinking and elicit feedback and comment from a wide audience. This paper in particular offers defense and military senior leadership with a way to think about and weigh various theater design choices in INDOPACOM and worldwide.

Introduction – A Two-Step Risk-Informed Framework for Analysis

This working paper is a companion to *Four Paths to the Grid* and it is a continuation of Army War College work introduced in the Secretary of the Army-sponsored report *An Army Transformed: Hypercompetition and US Army Theater Design in the INDOPACOM Theater*.¹ This working paper provides senior defense and military leaders with an adaptable two-step qualitative analytic tool for assessing the hypercompetitive potential and risk associated with the Army pursuing any transformational change to its INDOPACOM theater design.

The 2020 report, *An Army Transformed*, offered one such alternative for transformational change in INDOPACOM theater design. And, last summer's *Four Paths to The Grid* described four viable paths to change to illustrate how the Army might realize the recommendations advanced in *An Army Transformed*.² US Army Pacific's (USARPAC) recent strategy *America's Theater Army for the Indo-Pacific* is yet another—more official—alternative for INDOPACOM theater design.³ The framework for analysis provided here should help Army leaders gauge the relative value of competing approaches like these.

What this paper does specifically is describe an adaptable framework for analysis. What it does not yet do is employ the same framework to make qualitative judgments on either the design and paths introduced in *An Army Transformed* and *Four Paths to the Grid* or alternatives emerging from official service, Joint, or department-level posture work such as the recent USARPAC strategy. Army War College researchers invite senior leaders, staffs, and analysts to use the ideas in this paper to assess alternative options in light of their priorities and preferences.

While the animating intent of this framework is near-term assessment of specific Army changes in INDOPACOM theater design, the authors believe the framework's utility is much broader. Though it emerged from Army War College INDOPACOM work

¹ See John Schaus, et al., "Four Paths to the Grid," *Indo-Pacific Theater Working Paper 3*, (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute and U.S Army War College Press, April 2021), <https://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Four-Paths-to-the-Grid.pdf> and Nathan P. Freier, et al., *An Army Transformed: INDOPACOM Hypercompetition and US Army Theater Design* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute and US Army War College Press, July 2020), <https://pubs-repository.s3-us-gov-west-1.amazonaws.com/3731.pdf>.

² *Four Paths to the Grid* suggests that the Army can realize the transformational roles of "grid" and "enabler" (but to varying degrees of effectiveness) by adopting one of four "paths to implementation"—Army-Centric, Army-Sister Service, Army Ally, and Joint and Combined.

³ United States Army Pacific, *America's Theater Army for the Indo-Pacific*, (Fort Shafter, HI: United States Army Pacific, September 2021).

occurring between 2018 and 2021, we suggest that the principles it advances apply equally to assessment of any significant design change to any US military theater of operations. This is especially true for those design choices focused on enhancing US and partner hypercompetitive position vis-à-vis great power rivals China and Russia.

Thus, as the Department of Defense (DoD) concludes its worldwide posture review and makes design recommendations to the Secretary of Defense and President, this framework may be one important analytic tool for weighing design and posture alternatives for the Army and for all of DoD.⁴ While this will borrow from and refer to prior USAWC work on INDOPACOM, it is a simple construct through which senior defense leaders might assess and describe the opportunity and risk associated ANY path to a more hypercompetitive theater design in ANY functional or geographic context.

Terms of Reference — Hypercompetitiveness, Theater Design, Path to Implementation, Risk, and Enterprise Tempo

Before moving forward with a description of the two-step analytic framework, orientation on basic terms of reference is important. Five concepts are central to this paper and the simple analytic tool it describes—hypercompetition and hypercompetitiveness, theater design, paths to implementation, risk, and enterprise tempo.

Hypercompetition is a business concept first introduced by Dartmouth Professor Richard D'Aveni and later adapted by Army War College researchers to describe contemporary great power rivalry.⁵ In this specific context, Army War College researchers suggest, “hypercompetition is the persistent struggle for important but transient advantage across highly-contested competitive spaces.”⁶ The “highly

⁴ Jim Garamone, “Global Posture Review Will Tie Strategy, Defense Policy to Basing,” *DoD News*, February 5, 2021, <https://www.defense.gov/Explore/News/Article/Article/2495328/global-posture-review-will-tie-strategy-defense-policy-to-basing/> and Jim Garamone, “Global Posture Review Still on Track, Pentagon Spokesman Says,” *DoD News*, September 13, 2021, <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/2772376/global-posture-review-still-on-track-pentagon-spokesman-says/>.

⁵ Richard D'Aveni (with Robert Gunther), *Hypercompetition: Managing the Dynamics of Strategic Maneuvering*, (New York: The Free Press, 1994). See Nathan Freier, et al., “Game On or Game Over: Hypercompetition and Military Advantage,” *War Room*, May 22, 2018, <https://warroom.armywarcollege.edu/articles/the-new-defense-normal-nine-fundamentals-of-hypercompetition/>; Nathan Freier and Jonathan Dagle, “The Weaponization of Everything,” *Defense One*, September 9, 2018, <https://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2018/09/weaponization-everything/151097/>; Nathan Freier, et al., “In the Pacific, US Army Must Be a Running Back Who Blocks,” *Defense One*, May 20, 2019, <https://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2019/05/us-army-pacific-must-be-running-back-who-blocks/157136/>; Nathan Freier, et al., “The US is Out of Position in the Indo-Pacific Region,” *Defense One*, July 19, 2020, <https://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2020/07/us-out-position-indo-pacific-region/166964/>; and Freier, et al., *An Army Transformed*.

⁶ Freier, et al., “Game On or Game Over: Hypercompetition and Military Advantage.”

contested competitive spaces” at issue include the traditional Joint domains of air, land, sea, space, and cyberspace, as well as the domain-like electro-magnetic spectrum, and the strategic influence space.⁷

Thus, in this work, **hypercompetitiveness** is the relative ability of a chosen theater design and its roadmap for implementation to generate, exploit, and regenerate transient advantages faster and more effectively than can pacing rivals like China and Russia. Informed judgments about a path and design’s relative hypercompetitiveness should yield high-level insights on the degree to which a specific US military approach to regional or functional competition stacks up against opposing rival designs.

In hypercompetition, the temporary loss or degradation of advantage is a setback not a defeat. It is an inevitable feature of a highly contested strategic environment. Strategists should anticipate it, plan for it, and maneuver through it employing innovative theater design options most suited to best rivals’ attempts at hypercompetitive maneuver. Hypercompetitive success is defined by ‘thriving’ and not necessarily definitively ‘winning’ or permanently defeating great power rivals.

Thriving in hypercompetitive rivalry hinges on maintaining the ability to regain and exploit initiative given sudden, disruptive, and unfavorable changes in conditions. New or restored advantages should always challenge and complicate rival decision making across multiple domains simultaneously. Indeed, the ability to serially restore lost advantages, create new ones, and ruthlessly exploit one or both is the sine qua non of hypercompetitive theater design.

In this and previous Army War College work, **theater design** is described as the broad operating structure within which a service, group of services, Joint command, or a multinational coalition implement regional defense and military strategy in pursuit of common objectives.⁸ Change to theater design comes via some deliberate path to implementation. A **path to implementation** is the planned concept that the Army, sister services, the Joint Force, and/or multinational coalition partners might pursue in order to implement a specific theater design. A theater design and its alternative paths to implementation are best expressed in terms of five core elements: strategy and operational concepts; forces and capabilities; footprint and presence; authorities, permissions, and agreements; and command and control arrangements.⁹

⁷ Freier, et al., *An Army Transformed*, 1-5 and 20-22. *An Army Transformed* provides the most fulsome discussion of hypercompetition. The 2020 Secretary of the Army-sponsored work describes in great detail how Army War College researchers adapted Richard D’Aveni’s work to assess great power rivalry in general and INDOPACOM rivalry specifically.

⁸ Freier, et al., *An Army Transformed: INDOPACOM Hypercompetition and US Army Theater Design*, 22-23.

⁹ Ibid, xiii. *An Army Transformed* uses the Army term “mission command” to remain in line with US Army warfighting functions in place of the more common Joint term “command and control.”

In broad strokes, **risk** is the likelihood of failure or prohibitive cost in pursuit of one or more of an organization's strategic objectives.¹⁰ In this work, risk has two important touchpoints—theater risk and global risk. The former—**theater risk**—is the likelihood that a specific path to implementation will not satisfy the purpose and approach of its endstate theater design. And, the latter—**global risk**—assesses the likelihood that pursuit and adoption of a specific theater design in one region or functional concern will undermine important US military efforts in others. Because this paper focuses on assessment of theater design and its implementation, theater-level risk gets a more fulsome treatment herein.

Theater risk specifically is a synthesis of judgments on the aforementioned hypercompetitiveness and what the paper's authors describe as enterprise tempo. **Enterprise tempo** is the relative speed, rhythm, and flexibility by which the Army, sister services, the Joint Force, and/or a multinational partners implement a specific path over time relative to a rival's ability to do the same. The risk judgments that emerge from synthesizing hypercomeptitiveness and tempo should help leadership understand the degree to which a path will or will not contribute to meeting the purpose and approach of a specific theater design.¹¹

The five concepts described here—hypercompetition, theater design, paths to implementation, risk, and enterprise tempo play a pivotal role in determining the relative value of one set of theater design choices over others. A great deal more will be said on each of the concepts introduced here in the forthcoming sections. However, before diving into these concepts and describing the analytic tool they support, a clearer understanding of “purpose” and “approach” in the context of theater design would be useful.

Purpose and Approach—What to Do and How to Do It?

A clear strategic vision—captured within an easily consumable and widely understood purpose and approach—is elemental to assessing both hypercompetitiveness and risk. Effective judgments on hypercompetitiveness and risk emerge from identification of tangible theater- (or functional-) level demands. A specific theater- (or functional-) level purpose and approach—tied to the intent and actions of specific rivals—help determine this essential military demand.

¹⁰ Nathan Freier, “In Defense of Rational Risk Assessment,” (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute and US Army War College Press, February 2007), <https://publications.armywarcollege.edu/pubs/1861.pdf>.

¹¹ Freier, et al., *An Army Transformed: INDOPACOM Hypercompetition and US Army Theater Design*, 22-25.

Purpose, in this context, is WHAT broadly the United States military is trying to achieve through a specific theater (or functional) design. **Approach** is HOW the United States military—in broad terms—intends to achieve its desired objectives given known, presumed, and projected strategic and operational circumstances.

An example is the design purpose and approach described in *An Army Transformed* relative to INDOPACOM. In that report, both purpose and approach are interpreted from contemporary strategic guidance—specifically, the 2018 National Defense Strategy (NDS 18).¹² *An Army Transformed* describes the ‘purpose’ of a transformed INDOPACOM design (and Army contributions to it) as gaining and “maintain(ing) a favorable military balance sufficient to underwrite a free and open Indo-Pacific region.”¹³ This is consistent with NDS 18.

Given *An Army Transformed* liberally leverages the concept of hypercompetition (and transient advantage), a favorable military balance is not restoration of permanent US regional dominance. Rather, it is defined more as a persistent ability to “hypercompete” or “thrive” against rivals as described above in the terms of reference. In INDOPACOM, War College researchers concluded that a favorable balance equates to being positioned physically, conceptually, and with forces and capabilities to generate and exploit transient advantages faster and with greater impact than can the rival China.

As with “purpose,” *An Army Transformed* also provides a concrete example of a theater design’s “approach” relative to INDOPACOM as well. Much like the aforementioned purpose, the approach described by War College researchers in *An Army Transformed* emerged from interpretation of recent defense strategic guidance. Again, consistent with NDS 18, War College researchers suggest the most appropriate approach of an adapted or transformed INDOPACOM theater design is seizing the strategic initiative and expanding the competitive space vis-à-vis the pacing rival China.¹⁴ In INDOPACOM specifically, War College researchers suggest this means pursuing ‘seize’ and ‘expand’ in ways that:

- Are in fact hypercompetitive across what the “Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning” calls the “competition continuum;”¹⁵

¹² See James Mattis, “Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America—Sharpening the American Military’s Competitive Edge,” Department of Defense, January 19, 2018, <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>.

¹³ Freier, et al., *An Army Transformed: INDOPACOM Hypercompetition and US Army Theater Design*, 23.

¹⁴ See Mattis, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America—Sharpening the American Military’s Competitive Edge*, 24.

¹⁵ For a discussion of the JCIC, see Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), *Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning* (Washington, DC: JCS, March 16, 2018).

- Have a reasonable chance of deterring rival aggression or coercion – including coercive hostile gray zone maneuver, and, finally (because it is an Army-focused report);¹⁶
- Set the Army up to enable and contribute to large-scale Joint and Combined military operations consistent with the aforementioned purpose and any new Joint Warfighting Concept (JWC).¹⁷

Thus, in very concrete terms, assessing the hypercompetitiveness and risk of the base design and alternative paths to implementation suggested by *An Army Transformed* and *Four Paths to the Grid*, as well as USARPAC's *America's Theater Army for the Indo-Pacific*—as just examples—starts with a clear description of purpose and approach relative to the specific theater of concern. In the very specific context of *An Army Transformed*, for example, the purpose and approach of a hypercompetitive design should position Army forces to support evolving Joint and Combined concepts for gaining (or regaining) and maintaining exploitable albeit transient advantage vis-à-vis China first.

An effective Army path would help disrupt China's intentions and persistently best China's advantages. It would facilitate and exploit the creative application of Joint and Combined operations across contested spaces and within a continuum of activity ranging from active gray zone rivalry to armed hostilities in the event of escalation. Finally, a more hypercompetitive path should be resilient in the face of China's attempts to do all of the above as well.

Translating a design and path's hypercompetitive vision into executable reality demands a deliberate tool for weighing alternative paths. Therefore, this working paper offers a two-step framework for assessing competing alternatives. First up in the analytic framework is an assessment of hypercompetitiveness.

¹⁶ See multiple references to "gray zone" competition including, Michael J. Mazarr, *Mastering the Gray Zone: Understanding a Changing Era of Conflict*, (Carlisle, PA: US Army War College Press, December 2015), https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/2015/ssi_mazarr_151202.pdf and Nathan Freier, et al., *Outplayed: Regaining the Strategic Initiative in the Gray Zone*, (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute and US Army War College Press, June 2016), <https://press.armywarcollege.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1924&context=monographs>.

¹⁷ For a discussion of a new JWC, see Aaron Mehta, "'No lines on the battlefield': Pentagon's new war-fighting concept takes shape," *Defense News*, (August 14, 2020), <https://www.defensenews.com/pentagon/2020/08/14/no-lines-on-the-battlefield-the-pentagons-new-warfighting-concept-takes-shape/> and Mark A. Milley, "Statement of General Mark A. Milley 20th Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Department of Defense Budget Hearing," House Armed Services Committee, (June 23, 2021), 4-5, <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/AS/AS00/20210623/112846/HHRG-117-AS00-Wstate-MilleyM-20210623.pdf>.

Assessing Hypercompetitiveness and Risk: Step One—Hypercompetitive Potential

USAWC researchers organize their adapted conception of hypercompetition around three lines of effort (LoE) and nine fundamentals (See Table 1). The LoE organize activity and characteristics by like-type and the fundamentals describe specific activities and characteristics within each LoE. War College researchers first introduced the LoE and fundamentals in the 2018 War Room article *Game On or Game Over*. A more detailed discussion of both occurs later in 2020's *An Army Transformed*. What follows here is a restatement and further explanation of the concept of hypercompetition outlined in both pieces.

Hypercompetition—A Primer ¹⁸

Recall that War College analysts adapted Richard D'Aveni's business concept hypercompetition as one lens for great power rivalry. At times, the LoE and fundamentals mirror or rhyme with D'Aveni's now 25-year-old concept.¹⁹ At other times, this and previous War College work capture the spirit of D'Aveni's ideas but add wholly new interpretations specific to great power military rivalry. In combination, the LoE and fundamentals offer strategists a flexible, qualitative assessment tool that fits into the larger analytic framework described herein.

The fundamentals of hypercompetition are particularly germane for assessing the relative value of alternative paths to implementation and their endstate theater design. Table 1 provides an abstract description of hypercompetitive fundamentals and their relationship to the LoE. We suggest objective assessments of strength and weakness in some combination of the fundamentals yields informed judgments on the relative hypercompetitiveness of a specific design and its endstate path.

¹⁸ See Freier, et al., *An Army Transformed: INDOPACOM Hypercompetition and US Army Theater Design*, 20-22. This section draws on direct and indirect references to material contained in *An Army Transformed* and other works establishing War College researchers' perspectives on hypercompetition.

¹⁹ See Richard A. D'Aveni, *Hypercompetition: Managing the Dynamics of Strategic Maneuvering* (New York: The Free Press, 1994) and Freier, et al., *An Army Transformed: INDOPACOM Hypercompetition and US Army Theater Design* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute and US Army War College Press, July 2020), 5.

<i>Line of Effort</i>	<i>Fundamental</i>	<i>Description</i>
Purpose, Vision, and Partnerships	Strength of Interest *	Strength and clarity of will, objectives, interest, and risk.
	Legitimacy *	Broad influence over and cooperative relationships with willing partners.
	Innovation	Foresight, early recognition, and risk-taking to: identify and exploit game-changing opportunity, expand and exploit competitive spaces.
Capabilities and Capacity	Strategic Capacity	Quickly mobilize military/non-military, public/private/partner resources to seize opportunities, meet surge demands, and generate disruptive advantages.
	Speed and Agility	Ability—through positioning, transformation, maneuver, re-organization, and/or re-tasking—to rapidly reframe strategic conditions in one's favor.
	Surprise	Generate disruptive conceptual, cognitive, technological, and positional advantage.
Strategic Methods	Shifting Rules of Competition	Redefining character of security competition and expanding competitive space – including weaponizing and exploiting non-military capabilities and methods.
	Strategic Signaling	Combining material change, movement, narrative, and information to: manipulate perceptions, erode confidence, undermine position, and impact decision-making.
	Disruptive Maneuver	Ability to act as a disruptive “first mover” and “fast follower” across Joint domains, contested spaces, and/or broad instruments of power to unhinge rival advantage and intent.

* Fundamentals used to describe the nature of relative geo-strategic advantage and considered in the design process prior to weighing various design choices and their paths to implementation.

Table 1. Lines of Effort and Fundamentals of Hypercompetition.²⁰

Hypercompetitiveness: Three Lines of Effort; Seven (of Nine) Fundamentals

Step one of the analytic framework employs all LoE and seven of nine fundamentals to arrive at qualitative conclusions on a specific path and design’s ability to generate and exploit transient military advantages. The seven fundamentals USAWC researchers recommend that leaders, staffs, and analysts employ in their analysis are Innovation, Strategic Capacity, Speed and Agility, Surprise, Shifting Rules of Competition, Strategic Signaling, and Disruptive Maneuver. We review the relevant LoE and fundamentals here.

LoE 1 — Purpose, Vision, and Partnerships. The LoE Purpose, Vision, and Partnerships is the strategic foundation upon which effective hypercompetition rests. It includes maintenance of a strong but adaptable focus on one’s desired position vis-à-vis rivals and the resolve to aggressively pursue and maintain that position.²¹ It further

²⁰ See Freier, et al., “Game On or Game Over: Hypercompetition and Military Advantage,” and Freier, et al., *An Army Transformed: INDOPACOM Hypercompetition and US Army Theater Design*, 22. Both works present slightly different versions of this chart.

²¹ John Schaus, Brian Evans, and Elizabeth Martin, “A Changing Indo-Pacific Region: Growing Complexity for the Six Anchor Partners,” *INDOPACOM Working Papers* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute and US Army War College Press, September 2020).

accounts for one's ability to persistently attract and maintain the mutual support of likeminded and committed foreign partners.²²

The strategic fundamentals included under the rubric of Purpose, Vision, and Partnerships are: Strength of Interest, Legitimacy, and Innovation.²³ The War College team decided that the value of the former two—legitimacy and strength of interest—are determined well before evaluation of specific theater design options. They should be considered in the design building process. A theater design should account for the relative legitimacy of the United States (and its partners) vis-à-vis rivals, as well as an honest assessment of will (measured in strength of interest). However, these are exogenous factors in a strategy or strategic design's success or failure. Thus, innovation is the first of the fundamentals employed to assess a path and design's relative hypercompetitiveness.

Innovation is the perceived predisposition of a particular path and endstate design to support and encourage foresight, early recognition, and risk-taking in pursuit and exploitation of game-changing windows of opportunity.²⁴ Innovation can be viewed both as the vehicle or inspiration for a specific path to implementation, as well as the by-product of a particular path's adoption. On the latter specifically, a path may afford military leaders with a platform for broader hypercompetitive transformation across LoE and fundamentals. In short, any innovation can trigger additional transformational change.

LoE 2 — Capability and Capacity. The Capability and Capacity LoE captures the quality of an organization's various abilities to persistently generate material and conceptual options that dislocate, outpace, and outmaneuver rivals' intentions and actions. In the context of *An Army Transformed*, for example, it involves assessment of the capability and capacity of a new INDOPACOM design and path to generate options for Joint Force leadership. This LoE includes three fundamentals: Strategic Capacity, Speed and Agility, and Surprise.²⁵

Strategic Capacity involves judgments on a specific path's utility in the effective mobilization and employment of US and foreign military, non-military, public, and private (or commercial) resources to seize opportunities, meet surge demands, and generate disruptive advantages.²⁶ In the specific context of INDOPACOM, this means fulfilling all of these in intense hypercompetition with the pacing PRC rival. Strategic capacity is

²² Nathan P. Freier and John H. Schaus, "Geostrategic Net Assessment: INDOPACOM through 2030," *Parameters* 50(2), (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute and US Army War College Press, Summer 2020), 33.

²³ Freier, et al., "Game On or Game Over: Hypercompetition and Military Advantage."

²⁴ Ibid, 22.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

directly enhanced by the posture and capability qualities of depth, resilience, agility, and redundancy described in *An Army Transformed*.²⁷

Speed and Agility involves critical judgments on a specific design and path's predisposition to combine positioning, transformational change, purposeful maneuver, re-organization, and/or organizational re-tasking to rapidly reframe strategic conditions in ways that are favorable to the United States and its Joint Force commanders.²⁸ Speed and agility involves the pace, cadence, timing, and athleticism associated with the purposeful application of military power to produce desired Joint effects.²⁹ This applies across the "competition continuum."³⁰

Surprise is the ability of an adopted design and path to generate (or support generation of) disruptive conceptual, cognitive, technological, and positional advantages for military operations. Surprise involves much more than the ability for sudden overwhelming kinetic attack. Indeed, surprise may be best understood as the ability for novel exploitation of critical vulnerabilities largely unanticipated by rivals prior to their exposure.

LoE 3 — Strategic Methods. The third and final line of effort—Strategic Methods—and its supporting fundamentals involves the translation of the preceding Capability and Capacity into meaningful action to gain or regain initiative and persistently put adversaries in an unfavorable or untenable position. Strategic Methods includes the hypercompetitive fundamentals of Shifting Rules of Competition, Strategic Signaling, and Disruptive Maneuver.³¹

Assessing **Shifting Rules of Competition** involves judgments on a specific design and path's ability to redefine the character of the security competition and expand the competitive space – including weaponizing and exploiting non-military capabilities and methods.³² It also considers the utility of a path for seizing opportunities and rapidly shifting efforts between domains and highly contested competitive spaces. An assessment of shifting rules involves an aggregate judgment about the likelihood that a path and resulting design allows the United States to 'fight' or hypercompete faster, smarter, and more creatively than can its pacing adversaries.

²⁷ Ibid, 53.

²⁸ Ibid, 22.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Joint Staff, *Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning* (Washington DC: Department of Defense, March 16, 2018), 7-11, https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/concepts/joint_concept_integrated_campaign.pdf.

³¹ Freier, et al., *An Army Transformed: INDOPACOM Hypercompetition and US Army Theater Design*, 22.

³² Ibid.

Strategic Signaling makes specific judgments on how a path to implementation and its resultant design allows or enables the effective combination of material change, movement and maneuver, narrative, and information to manipulate rival perceptions, erode rival confidence, undermine rival position, and impact rival decision-making.³³ As one evaluates a path to implementation or its endstate design against this fundamental, one must consider the cognitive context for ongoing military hypercompetition.³⁴ This involves judgments on a design and path's ability to blend action and messaging in ways that create real exploitable opportunities. Effective strategic signaling is about constructing narratives, employing information, and manipulating perceptions to gain, regain, or exploit transient advantages vis-à-vis rivals.

Disruptive Maneuver considers a design and path's utility in enabling Joint Force, Army, sister service, and combined partners to act as a disruptive "first movers" and "fast followers" across Joint domains, highly contested competitive spaces, and/or instruments of power to unhinge rival advantage and intent.³⁵ This fundamental entails an assessment of a selected design and path's likelihood to challenge a rival's at-risk interests, compress or complicate their decision-making, and disrupt their aims.

A Way of Assessing Design and Paths by Hypercompetitive Fundamentals

This work recommends employing a Likert scale to assess the hypercompetitive potential of a given path and endstate design according to the seven operative hypercompetitive fundamentals described above. The Likert scale recommended here evaluates hypercompetitive potential in gradations from "not at all" to "a great deal" (see Table 2).³⁶ This is an objective qualitative approach. It relies on data, experience, judgment, and deliberation to arrive at meaningful conclusions in each area.

The Table 2 example – Assessing Hypercompetitive Effectiveness, shows how – through synthesis of original research and data collection, expert engagement, and wargaming—senior leaders and staffs might grade the hypercompetitive potential of alternative paths or endstate designs using the seven fundamentals as a guide. Again, we offer this example in the context of specific Army War College work on INDOPACOM. However, its utility is widely transferable.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Patricia DeGennaro, "The Power of Cognitive Maneuver: Don't Underestimate its Value," *Small Wars Journal*, (September 19, 2017), <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/the-power-of-cognitive-maneuver-don%E2%80%99t-underestimate-its-value>.

³⁵ Freier, et al., *An Army Transformed: INDOPACOM Hypercompetition and US Army Theater Design*, 22.

³⁶ See Katherine A. Batterton and Kimberly N. Hale, "The Likert Scale What It Is and How To Use It," *Phalanx* (Vol. 50, No. 2, June 2017), pages 32-39. The Likert Scale is a psychometric technique for measuring attitudes, first described by Rensis Likert in 1932. Often used for qualitative subjective evaluations, respondents are typically asked to rate the level to which they agree with a given statement.

Hypercompetitive Effectiveness – A function of the ability to (1) facilitate hypercompetition, (2) deter rival aggression or coercion, and (3) improve Army and USINDOPACOM readiness to conduct large-scale Joint and Combined military operations.

For a given path, rate the degree that each fundamental is demonstrated.

Fundamental	(1) Not at all	(2) Little	(3) Somewhat	(4) Much	(5) A great deal
Innovation			✓		
Strategic Capacity		✓			
Speed & Agility			✓		
Surprise			✓		
Shifting Rules of Competition				✓	
Strategic Signaling			✓		
Disruptive Maneuver				✓	

Total Score = 22

Use Total Score to help gauge * level of Hypercompetitive Effectiveness (very effective is better).

Not Effective	Somewhat Effective	Effective	Very Effective
7-13	14-20	21-27	28-35

* Note: Given their subjective nature, one should not view 'scores,' as precise measurements. They are only approximations to help inform judgement.

Table 2. Example - Assessing Hypercompetitive Effectiveness.

Final judgements on each path's relative hypercompetitiveness emerge from a combination of aggregated Likert scoring and qualitative analysis by relevant commanders, staffs, and/or analysts. Final judgments on the hypercompetitive potential of paths or their endstate design arm senior decision makers with a snapshot of the abstract effectiveness of various alternative approaches considered.

The first analytical step in the framework is complete when judgments on the relative hypercompetitive potential of each path or endstate design are recorded for consideration. Judgments on the relative hypercompetitiveness of a theater or functional design's path and endstate design are important by themselves and provide senior leadership with valuable insights for strategic decision making. In combination, these judgments are also a first analytic benchmark for assessing a path and design's theater and global risk.

Assessing Hypercompetitiveness and Risk: Step Two – Enterprise Tempo and Risk

goals.³⁷ For the recommended design outlined in *An Army Transformed* and the paths to it described in *Four Paths to the Grid*, the foundational goals are articulated or implied in NDS 18. These are translated into the purpose and approach articulated above and in *An Army Transformed*.

As it relates to theater design and paths to implementation, War College researchers recommend risk judgments in two specific areas – theater risk and global risk. For assessing the risk of specific theater designs and their alternative paths to implementation, USAWC analysts recommend that senior leaders, staffs, and analysts combine insights on two key points of evaluation—hypercompetitiveness and enterprise tempo. For example, in the context of *An Army Transformed*, theater risk would assess the hypercompetitive sufficiency of the design described in that work and the alternative paths to it—described in *Four Paths to the Grid*.

Theater risk assessments render judgments on a path and design’s ability to hypercompete over time at an enterprise tempo that outpaces rival efforts. In short—in the very specific context of *An Army Transformed* and *Four Paths to the Grid*, theater risk reflects judgments on the likelihood that a specific INDOPACOM theater design and a selected path to implementation will not enable the Joint Force to seize the strategic initiative, expand the competitive space, and restore a favorable military balance in the region.

Global Risk is admittedly more abstract. It reflects judgments on the likelihood that adoption of a specific path or endstate design in INDOPACOM or elsewhere will undermine broad US military efforts worldwide outside of the immediate theater (or function) of concern. War College researchers recommend characterizing theater and global risk as high, significant, moderate, or low. These are described in greater detail below. And, like insights on hypercompetitive potential described above, these judgments also rely on, data, experience, judgment, and deliberation to arrive at meaningful risk conclusions.

Principal Focus – Theater Risk

Theater risk is the principal concern of the War College’s most recent work on INDOPACOM. As described above, there are two key benchmarks for theater risk—hypercompetitiveness and enterprise tempo. Theater risk combines qualitative judgments on the prospects of failure and/or unacceptable cost associated with achieving adequacy in both. Theater risk reflects best judgment on the degree to which a path or its endstate design is or is not hypercompetitive at high tempo. As introduced

³⁷ Nathan P. Freier, et al., *At Our Own Peril: DoD Risk Assessment in a Post-Primacy World* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute and US Army War College Press, June 2017), xvi, <https://publications.armywarcollege.edu/pubs/3348.pdf>.

above, theater risk is expressed as high, significant, moderate, or low. Judgment on relative hypercompetitive potential (Step One) is the first half of the theater risk equation. Judgement on enterprise tempo is theater risk's second key component.

Enterprise tempo is the relative speed, rhythm, and flexibility by which any organization in concert with strategic partners can implement a specific design and path over time relative to rivals.³⁸ In the context of *An Army Transformed* and *Four Paths to the Grid*, for example, it is an inward look at the ease or degree of difficulty encountered by the Army, Joint Forces, sister services, and multi-national partners in implementing a specific path relative to the military demands associated with hypercompetition against the rival PRC. Ideally, tempo – when optimized for hypercompetition – enables the enterprise to adapt, dictate terms, and seize and hold initiative faster and longer than can its principal or most consequential rivals.

Enterprise tempo consists of three factors: Adaptability, Synergy, and Compatibility.

Adaptability reflects the degree to which an enterprise – in the case of recent USAWC work, the Army or Joint Force – has control over and can if necessary reprioritize efforts to adopt a transformed design. It gauges an organization's ability to implement and adapt a path to implementation in progress—e.g. speed up, slow down, shift weight, expand, and/or re-direct resources. More adaptability is conducive to higher, more effective enterprise tempo.

Synergy accounts for the degree to which a chosen design and path effectively integrates the unique contributions of stakeholders with a material interest in a path and design's success and whose contributions are essential to their implementation. While more stakeholders increase complexity, they also increase resilience and redundancy. The former is a measure of a design and path's strength to recover from and perform in the face of loss through preservation of built-in alternatives. And, the latter is a judgment on the degree to which a design and path reduce the prospect of single points of failure. Naturally, greater synergy offers the prospect of higher, more effective tempo.

Synergy is not as simple as more is better or less is easier. Synergy should account for the number of stakeholders involved, the strength and quality of existing relationships between stakeholders, and the degree to which stakeholders have undertaken like initiatives at scale in the past. In this regard, a path or design could rely on multiple stakeholders with no prior relationship and, thus, initially exhibit low levels of synergy. Or, a path may involve a similarly large number of stakeholders who have a history of

³⁸ Freier, et al., *An Army Transformed: INDOPACOM Hypercompetition and US Army Theater*, 75. The substance of the basic design recommended in *An Army Transformed* is located here.

quite successful large-scale joint endeavors. Thus, the prospects for synergy in this instance may be quite high.

Finally, **compatibility** reflects the path or design's alignment with existing Army, Joint, and partner strategy, policy, plans, and/or operational concepts. Compatibility is a qualitative judgment on the newness or novelty of a given path and the ability of the enterprise to reconcile existing approaches with those essential to the path and design's implementation. The more distinct or unique a path or design from current strategy, policy, plans, or concepts, the likelier it is to pose some compatibility challenges. On the other hand, the more consistent a path is with the same, the likelier it is to align with or integrate into existing approaches quite well. In short, more compatibility reduces internal and external friction. It also limits institutional disruption. And, makes it likelier that a path can generate higher, more effective tempo overall.

However, on the subject of compatibility, some caution is warranted. Just because a path is compatible with some or all current Joint, Army, and sister service initiatives, it does not necessarily mean that it automatically merits higher consideration. How and why a path is compatible are important considerations. For example, compatibility with some commonly shared features – distributed operations, agility, etc. – are likely net positives. However, to the extent a path's compatibility may validate less Joint and more single-service concepts of operation, a path and design's overall compatibility may in fact undermine their prospects for generating acceptable levels of enterprise tempo.

In judging the relative value or contribution of each contributing factor, this work again recommends employing a simple Likert rating scale similar to that used in assessing overall hypercompetitiveness. Moreover, in the same way a hypercompetitive score was determined by aggregating the fundamentals, an overall enterprise tempo score is derived by aggregating individual factor ratings as shown in Table 3.

Enterprise Tempo – The relative speed, rhythm, and flexibility by which the Army in concert with Joint and Combined partners can implement a specific path over time relative to the PRC or other rivals.

For a given path, rate the degree that each factor is demonstrated.

Factor	(1) Not at all	(2) Little	(3) Somewhat	(4) Much	(5) A great deal
Adaptability			✓	✓	
Synergy				✓	
Compatibility			✓		

Total Score = 10

Use Total Score to help *gauge* * level of Enterprise Tempo (high is better).

Very Low	Low	Moderate	High
3-5	6-8	9-12	13-15

* Note: Given their subjective nature, one should not view 'scores,' as precise measurements. They are only approximations to help inform judgement.

Table 3. Example – Assessing Enterprise Tempo.

Qualitative judgments on the ability of each path to hypercompete at high tempo will be expressed in terms of high, significant, moderate, and low risk. **High Risk** suggests a path is likely to fail or engender prohibitive cost – broadly translated as a course of action that is decidedly not hypercompetitive and not high tempo.³⁹ **Significant Risk** suggests that failure or prohibitive cost is more likely than not. A path that engenders significant risk exhibits some combination of low to moderate levels of hypercompetitiveness and enterprise tempo combined.

Moderate Risk advantages success. A moderate risk path is a course of action where success is judged to be more likely than not. Naturally, moderate risk paths will have vulnerabilities. But, in the end, a moderate risk path exhibits some combination of moderate to high levels of hypercompetitiveness and tempo. Finally, **Low Risk** indicates that success is highly likely. A low risk path stands out as clearly both hypercompetitive and high tempo. Figure 4 illustrates the abstract relationship between “hypercompetitiveness” and “enterprise tempo” for the purposes of risk assessment.

³⁹ Cost in this context is measured in tangible assets like lives, personnel, money, materiel, etc., as well as less tangible assets like time and opportunity cost, political capital, relationships, etc.

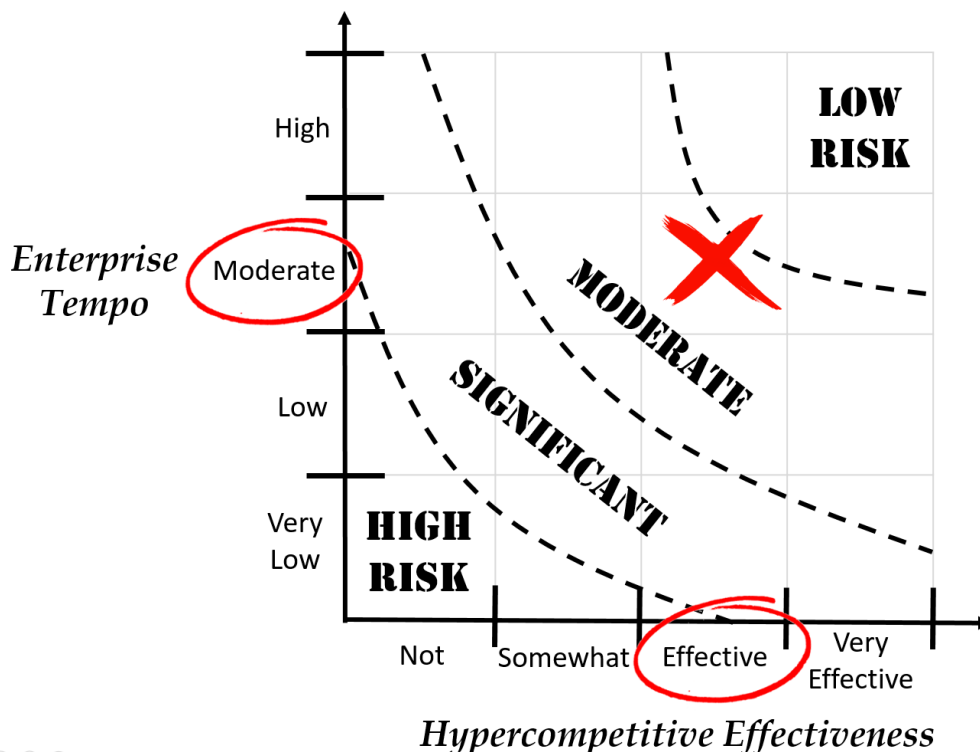


Figure 4. Example - Theater Level Risk.

Global Risk

Assessments of “global risk” reflects judgments as to the likelihood that adoption of specific theater design options combined with a specific paths to implementation will undermine achieving US military responsibilities worldwide. Relative to theater design changes in INDOPACOM, global risk assessment should examine the likelihood that the Joint Force, Army, sister services, or multi-national partners underperform or fail in a theater or functional responsibility outside of INDOPACOM because of the adopted path and design for the Indo-Pacific. In the case of the recommendations in an *An Army Transformed* and the paths described in *Four Paths to the Grid*, global risk would judge the prospects that pursuit of those recommendations would negatively affect performance in other regions or functional responsibilities.

Assessment of global risk mirrors that of theater risk by employing the same value judgments of high, significant, moderate, and low risk. Global risk assessment of design change in INDOPACOM, as in any theater, will come via broad consideration of the scope, scale, and nature of change, as well as the degree to which an alternative path to implementation and endstate design adversely affects the Joint Force and/or Army meeting high priority military demands not directly related to that theater. Of all the topics considered in this paper, global risk judgments are perhaps the most qualitative.

Meaningful global risk insights require collaborative assessments transcending domains, regions, and functional areas of responsibility.

Conclusion

Acknowledging the importance of the Indo-Pacific and recognizing the US military requirement for a more hypercompetitive footing in that region, this working paper offers an analytic framework for senior decision makers to assess various theater design options and the paths to implementation available to make them a reality. This two-step methodology combines qualitative judgments on hypercompetitiveness and risk; the latter risk a combination of hypercompetitiveness and more inward looking enterprise tempo.

This methodology is intentionally qualitative. War College researchers suggest it provides an outline tool for senior leaders to adapt to any context in order to assess transformational design choices and the various paths to implementing them. There is room for leadership to adapt the tool and weight criteria according to changing priorities, as well as inject additional evaluative criteria if it would be helpful.

As is, the framework described here provides senior defense and military leaders with a common analytic start point captured in an adaptable qualitative standard. We suggest that this standard helps senior leadership frame and communicate implementation and resourcing choices as they adapt theater design for strategic competition with great power rivals.