



# An Army Transformed:

USINDOPACOM Hypercompetition and US Army Theater Design

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**AN ARMY TRANSFORMED:  
USINDOPACOM HYPERCOMPETITION  
AND  
US ARMY THEATER DESIGN**

*A Report Requested by the Secretary of the Army and Supported by United States Army Pacific*

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## FOREWORD

The United States is in the midst of an intensifying period of hypercompetition where great-power rivals pursue their strategic objectives in novel ways at the expense of US interests. Previous US Army War College (USAWC) work defines “hypercompetition” as a persistent struggle for transient but exploitable advantage.

This study emerged within this context and, specifically, from increased defense and military anxiety about the strength of the US position in the Indo-Pacific region. In 2018, then-Secretary of the Army (SECARMY) Mark Esper asked USAWC researchers to examine how change in Army theater design in the Indo-Pacific region will enable full implementation of the objectives identified in the unclassified *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy* (NDS) by 2028. To answer the secretary’s query, this study builds on recent USAWC scholarship on United States Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) and the pacing challenge that the People’s Republic of China (PRC) presents.

This study arrives at an important principal finding: Physically, conceptually, and in terms of deployed and anticipated capabilities, the United States is out of position for multi-domain competition and multi-domain conflict with the PRC over the medium to long term. The study also leads to an equally important principal recommendation for the Army in light of mounting US vulnerability and in support of emerging Joint concepts. Specifically, the Army must embrace four transformational roles in the Indo-Pacific region: *the Grid, the Enabler, the Multi-Domain Warfighter, and the Capability and Capacity Generator*.

This study’s principal recommendation is a culturally disruptive, strategic necessity in light of the pacing PRC. Our researchers suggest this recommendation will require immediate Joint Force and Army action across five elements of theater design. In the end, the authors suggest this kind of transformational change is essential if the United States, its Army, its Joint Force, and its regional partners are to seize the strategic initiative, expand the competitive space, and restore and maintain a more favorable regional military balance.

The Strategic Studies Institute is proud to present this report to offer senior defense and national security leaders actionable recommendations for the nation’s pacing theater and threat.



DR. CAROL V. EVANS  
Director  
Strategic Studies Institute and  
US Army War College Press



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study emerged in an environment marked by increased senior- and working-level anxiety about the American military position in the United States Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) area of responsibility (AOR), as well as a third attempt in two decades to refocus American defense and security strategy on the USINDOPACOM theater. Specifically, the study was initiated by then-Secretary of the Army (SECARMY) Mark Esper and questions he asked of US Army War College (USAWC) leadership and scholars in 2018. Ultimately, USAWC researchers asked and answered a single research question to get at Secretary Esper's concerns: For 2028 and beyond, what is the foundational US Army theater design in the USINDOPACOM AOR that will *best support* the unclassified *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy* (NDS) objectives across the anticipated range of military demands?

Researchers at the USAWC suggest theater design has five elements: *strategy and operational concepts; forces and capabilities; footprint and presence; authorities, permissions, and agreements; and mission command arrangements*. The study also proceeded from the idea that Army theater design is by definition only one component of a broader Joint Force approach to USINDOPACOM's military demands. Over the course of a year-long study effort, the USAWC team responsible for this report arrived at multiple high-impact insights, findings, and recommendations certain to influence how Department of Defense (DoD), Joint Force, and Army leaders approach USINDOPACOM across all five elements of theater design.

### HYPERCOMPETITION, A PACING THREAT, AND A PRIORITY THEATER

This work is a natural next step in an ongoing four-year campaign of study by USAWC scholars on the USINDOPACOM theater. Recent USAWC research on the character of contemporary competition and conflict points to a pair of consistent insights. First, America's once-unassailable military competitive advantage has eroded. Second, this erosion is the product of hubris, distraction, miscalculation, and deliberate rival great-power resistance.

Researchers at the USAWC characterize current strategic circumstances as a high-risk, hypercompetitive environment. They adapted "hypercompetition"—a term first coined in a business context by Dartmouth College's Richard D'Aveni—to contemporary military rivalry. In the context of military rivalry, this and previous USAWC work characterizes hypercompetition as the persistent struggle for transient but exploitable advantage in the face of great-power rivals motivated to achieve the same at US expense.

This work and previous work also suggest the hypercompetitive great-power challenge is particularly acute in the United States' priority theater: USINDOPACOM. In that theater, the United States faces a pacing, revisionist, near-peer challenge in the People's Republic of China (PRC). The PRC increasingly presents US decision makers with compound challenges—across Joint domains, contested spaces, and instruments of national power—that in sum offer a credible and unfavorable alternative to American Indo-Pacific leadership. The security dynamics of the Indo-Pacific region are further

complicated by a legacy Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) threat and a hypercompetitive Russian spoiler.

## **LOST INITIATIVE AND AN IMPERATIVE FOR TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE**

As a foundational insight, this study suggests the People's Republic of China retains the strategic initiative in the USINDOPACOM AOR. Absent effective US action, the PRC is likely to retain and exploit that initiative to decisive effect, severely limiting US freedom of action. The following are significant foundational concerns.

The People's Republic of China is actively transforming its military forces with an eye toward defeating the United States in the event of armed hostilities. The PRC is also creatively employing its military and paramilitary assets to outmaneuver the United States and partners strategically in meaningful gray-zone approaches. The PRC enjoys strategic depth and increasingly operates on internal or heavily protected lines of communication while demonstrating the ability to threaten American interests with a variety of multi-domain capabilities and forces.

Finally, through skillful all-of-government, military, paramilitary, and commercial maneuver, the People's Republic of China is increasingly expanding its broad political-military reach and influence across the Indo-Pacific well beyond the South and East China Seas and western Pacific and deep into the Pacific Islands and Indian Ocean. In the end, the PRC's Go-game approach of crowding out or boxing in the United States and partners persistently generates new strategic and operational dilemmas for the DoD, Joint Force, Army, and partner senior leaders and strategists.

This study concludes that, on the current path and as the decade proceeds, the People's Republic of China will have more military options complementing its hypercompetitive gray-zone approaches, whereas the United States will have fewer. Further—given the same considerations—all US regional partners and interests will be more vulnerable to Chinese coercion and/or overt PRC military aggression.

Researchers at the USAWC suggest that US failure or defeat is not inevitable under these circumstances, but it is possible. Thus, it flags for senior Joint Force and Army leadership an urgent change imperative in the Indo-Pacific region. Lost strategic initiative and the erosion of once-unassailable military advantage already present significant hazards to US regional and global interests. This trend will continue without decisive US action. Reversing this trend is well within reach, but doing so depends almost entirely on DoD, Joint Force, and Army senior leadership making bold transformational choices over the next decade.

## **PRINCIPAL FINDING: THE JOINT FORCE IS OUT OF POSITION FOR HYPERCOMPETITION**

Because the SECARMY chartered this work, the study's detailed findings and recommendations focus predominantly on the US Army. But the Army exists in a broader, Joint, interagency, and geostrategic context. The Indo-Pacific region presents unique strategic and operational challenges based on rivalry and threat, geography, legacy military posture, and alliance relationships. Combined, these factors increasingly



demand fundamental transformational change in the way the Joint Force and the Army organize, operate, and employ capabilities in the theater. In the end, a hypercompetitive rival *necessitates* Joint Force and Army *transformation* to a hypercompetitive theater design.

Toward this end, this study identified a single, principal finding: *Physically, conceptually, and in terms of deployed and anticipated capabilities, the US Joint Force (including the Army) is out of position for hypercompetition with an innovative, aggressive, and transforming PRC. Consistent with the USAWC team's commitment to identify the most Joint Force-relevant Army solutions, the principal finding is first a judgment on the wider Joint context within which the Army operates.*

Conceptually, the USAWC team finds no unifying, coherent, hypercompetitive, Joint theater design in force. US military components in the Indo-Pacific region are not yet on a Joint path that transfers greater risk to PRC decision makers while lowering risks for the United States and its regional partners. Physically, US regional posture is concentrated in northeast Asia, predicated on discredited advantage, and positioned for the efficient prosecution of a second Korean War. This posture is not necessarily conducive to effective hypercompetition with an increasingly capable and transforming PRC. Finally, regarding deployed and anticipated capabilities, current and anticipated in-theater Army capabilities are increasingly focused on the delivery of lethal and nonlethal multi-domain effects and large-scale ground combat operations. Future operational needs will benefit from short-term Army changes biased toward *enabling* the distributed Joint theater first.

## **PRINCIPAL RECOMMENDATION: THE ARMY NEEDS TO ADOPT FOUR TRANSFORMATIONAL ROLES**

Based on the 2019–20 research and several previous USAWC study efforts, this work concludes that the Joint Force and a supporting US Army will need more disruptive, agile, and resilient theater designs to be effective in USINDOPACOM hypercompetition. The contours of a transformed Joint design are assumed in this report. Researchers at the USAWC are more specific with respect to the Army. Thus, this study recommends that the Army adopt and adapt to four transformational roles in the USINDOPACOM AOR: the Army as *the grid*, the Army as *the enabler*, the Army as *the multi-domain warfighter*, and the Army as *the capability and capacity generator*.

The grid sees the Army establish a distributed, resilient, and mutually reinforcing theater network of expeditionary base clusters, hubs, and nodes as the foundation for regional Joint operations. The core purpose of the grid is expanding the competitive space; creating options for Joint Force commanders; and, ultimately, enabling effective Joint, multi-domain maneuver.

The enabler calls for Joint-focused Army transformation specific to USINDOPACOM in the areas of mission command, sustainment, protection, movement, and intelligence (and information) to animate the grid. This transformation would require persistent, small-unit, multifunctional Army presence prepared to light up clusters, hubs, and nodes and accept follow-on forces to meet Joint operational demands. Army forces would need to organize tasks based on mission into composite, multifunctional formations

that operate in a distributed fashion well below brigade level, and often in ways that challenge even the most liberal interpretations of mission command.

The multi-domain warfighter sees the Army fielding a primarily land-based multi-domain warfighting capability with theater-wide presence and reach in concert with sister services and foreign partners. Army and sister-service multi-domain capabilities and concepts should be inspired by and integrated into a unified, Joint, multi-domain theater concept.

Finally, the capability and capacity generator leverages a significant asymmetric US advantage—a strong network of regional Allies and partners—to enhance traditional ground-force competencies and expand complementary multi-domain capability. Army forces—within a unified, Joint concept for multi-domain competition and conflict—can be a catalyst for fielding a combined, land-based, multi-domain warfighting network that draws on the unique strengths and competencies of US partners.

### **UNACCEPTABLE RISK ABSENT TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE**

Absent transformational change in Joint and service theater design, US leadership will see the perceived risks associated with defending partners and interests in the Indo-Pacific region rise dramatically, while the People’s Republic of China leadership will perceive a parallel reduction in its own risk. A new, transformative, Joint and service theater design of the type suggested in this report should focus on regaining the strategic initiative, expanding the competitive space, and restoring and maintaining a more favorable military balance in the USINDOPACOM AOR. Both action and inaction present hazards, but this study believes the latter is likely to result in unacceptably high risk to US objectives.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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In addition to our sponsors, research partners, and their associated leadership, the study team was fortunate to engage with dozens of deeply knowledgeable organizations, agencies, institutes, and individuals both in the United States and throughout the Indo-Pacific region. We are exceedingly grateful to all for their contributions. Dozens—even hundreds—of subject matter experts contributed to this report’s findings and recommendations. Indeed, too many individuals contributed for the authors to acknowledge each of them here, except for a few special cases. In most cases, therefore, we acknowledge contributions by noting the participation of the various organizations and agencies the individual contributors represent.

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In addition to the working group, the USAWC study team conducted several roundtable engagements with defense, military, and intelligence professionals and analysts in the national capital region. The organizations and institutions the study team engaged include the Center for Strategic and International Studies; the Defense Intelligence Agency’s (DIA) Asia-Pacific Regional Center; the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Strategy and Force Development; the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Plans; the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for East Asia; the Office of the Secretary of Defense’s (OSD) Cost Assessment and Program Evaluation office; and representatives of the Joint Staff Strategy, Plans and Policy Directorate and Force Structure, Resources and Assessment Directorate.

During six research trips to the United States Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) theater and USINDOPACOM-concerned military commands,

USAWC work benefited from extensive one-on-one engagements and multiple-participant discussions with an assortment of US and Allied military commands and staffs, intelligence professionals, diplomats, and international security analysts. The research included engagements in Hawaii, Japan, the Republic of Korea (RoK), the Philippines, Singapore, and Washington State. Each research trip abroad included at least two members of the USAWC research team and meetings with US military and civilian officials, foreign military and government officials, and defense academics.

Final thanks are due to our senior review group. This group of distinguished senior national security professionals gave generously of their time, experience, and insights. This year's senior review group challenged us to refine the findings and recommendations to have the highest impact in senior Army and Department of Defense (DoD) decision making. The senior review group members' interventions improved the quality of the final product immeasurably. The senior reviewers were: Lieutenant General George Flynn, US Marine Corps (retired); Mr. David Helvey; Dr. Kathleen Hicks; Dr. Frank Hoffman; Major General John Kem, US Army; Dr. Maren Leed; Lieutenant General Chris Miller, US Air Force (retired); Ambassador David Shear; and Ambassador Kathleen Stephens.

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## CHAPTER 1. PROLOGUE: DIVINING D’AVENI

### WHY WE ARE HERE: HYPERCOMPETITION

Four years of US Army War College (USAWC) inquiry into the character of contemporary competition and conflict and its manifestation in the United States Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) area of responsibility (AOR) boil down to two consistent insights.<sup>1</sup> The first finds that American military competitive advantage has eroded to the point where periods of disadvantage across contested domains and competitive spaces are likely to occur through the next two decades (throughout this study, references to “domains and competitive spaces” center on the Joint domains – air, land, sea, space, and cyber, as well as the domain-like electromagnetic spectrum and strategic influence space). The second insight holds that this now widely recognized erosion of US capability, position, and freedom of action is the product of overconfidence, distraction, and miscalculation, as well as the deliberate counter-US transformation and resistance of rivals.<sup>2</sup>

Failure or defeat is not inevitable under these circumstances, but it is possible. To date, USAWC work has suggested future success is almost entirely tied up in the deliberate choices made by senior defense and military leadership over the next decade. In the end, the recovery of a more competitive US military stance vis-à-vis the most consequential strategic rivals remains in American hands and, by extension, in the hands of Allies and partners. Going forward, success will hinge on having a more sophisticated view of great-power rivalry and the Joint Force’s role in it. Successive USAWC research teams have found adaptation of the groundbreaking business concept “hypercompetition” to be a useful first step in this direction.

### DESCRIBING THE CONTEMPORARY COMPETITIVE SPACE

This report draws one of its foundational animating ideas from the concept of hypercompetition. Richard D’Aveni—the Bakala Professor of Strategy at Dartmouth College’s Tuck School of Business—introduced hypercompetition in his 1994 book of the same name.<sup>3</sup> This prologue discusses hypercompetition to provide context because of the great extent to which hypercompetition and its subsequent adaptation by the military have framed the last two years of USAWC research and emerging US Army USINDOPACOM strategy.

For important reasons, USAWC researchers found hypercompetition to be particularly useful in characterizing and evaluating contemporary strategic rivalry. But

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1. The principal author of this prologue is Lieutenant Colonel James Hayes, US Army War College (USAWC) graduate in academic year 2018.

2. Jim Garamone, “US Military Advantage over Russia, China Eroding,” DoD News, accessed June 6, 2020, <https://www.jcs.mil/Media/News/News-Display/Article/1374604/dunford-us-military-advantage-over-russia-china-eroding/>.

3. Richard A. D’Aveni, *Hypercompetition: Managing the Dynamics of Strategic Maneuvering* (New York: The Free Press, 1994).

this concept's usefulness is not limited to emerging great-power competition with both the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Russian Federation (Russia). For starters, D'Aveni's 1994 work describes a commercial environment where sustained competitive advantage is impossible.<sup>4</sup> This condition makes D'Aveni's hypercompetition wholly consistent with recent USAWC descriptions of "post-primacy." The 2016 USAWC work on enterprise-level risk describes post-primacy in terms of increasingly effective counter-US resistance and an attendant erosion of American military advantage and freedom of action, especially for competition below the level of armed conflict.<sup>5</sup>

Further, D'Aveni's hypercompetition displays important parallels to new US strategic guidance and military concepts. For example, official descriptions of the contemporary strategic decision-making environment routinely acknowledge declining US advantage and the associated imperative to gain (and/or regain) initiative against transforming great-power challengers. Such descriptions can be found in the unclassified *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy* (NDS) and emerging military concepts like multi-domain operations (MDO)—any future reference to the NDS in this report will be a reference to the unclassified summary of the NDS.<sup>6</sup>

The former is subtitled, *Sharpening the American Military's Competitive Edge*, as if to suggest that edge has grown less sharp—even dull—over time. The latter is discussed in *The US Army in Multi-Domain Operations 2028*, which is rife with references to opening and exploiting "windows of opportunity" across highly contested Joint domains and competitive spaces to secure vulnerable strategic objectives.<sup>7</sup> References to creating and opening windows of opportunity or advantage suggest that, in the future, all military advantage will be transient, constantly in dispute, and ripe for exploitation once identified. All of the aforementioned themes play central roles in D'Aveni's conception of hypercompetition.

## STRATEGIES FOR A HYPERCOMPETITIVE BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

D'Aveni argues that hypercompetition is "characterized by intense and rapid competitive moves" in which rival corporations "build [or create] advantages" while eroding the strength of their principal competitors.<sup>8</sup> He describes hypercompetitive behavior as "the process of continuously generating new competitive advantages"

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4. D'Aveni, *Hypercompetition*, 2.

5. Nathan Freier et al., *At Our Own Peril: DoD Risk Assessment in a Post-primacy World* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, USAWC Press, July 2017), 3–5.

6. See James Mattis, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America: Sharpening the American Military's Competitive Edge* (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense [OSD], January 19, 2018); and US Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC), *The US Army in Multi-Domain Operations 2028*, TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-1 (Fort Eustis, VA: TRADOC, December 6, 2018).

7. TRADOC, *Multi-Domain Operations 2028*.

8. TRADOC, *Multi-Domain Operations 2028*, xiii.

accompanied by the persistent destruction or nullification of advantages resting in the hands of rival businesses.<sup>9</sup>

Hypercompetition deviates from conventional business wisdom in one very important way. At one time, widely accepted business thought held that the “essence of strategy is building [an enduring] competitive advantage.”<sup>10</sup> According to D’Aveni, no competitive advantage is actually sustainable. Therefore, success lies in the serial creation and exploitation of new advantages in anticipation of their future unavoidable loss.

D’Aveni and Robert Gunther describe the differences between the more traditional (and perhaps discredited) business model – where sustained competitive advantage is a reality – and a hypercompetitive model where businesses vie for temporary advantage in a series of competitive moves.<sup>11</sup> As competition reaches an ever-greater intensity, D’Aveni and Gunther suggest all rivals look to create and exploit newly generated advantages rapidly at their competitors’ expense.

The foundation of D’Aveni’s hypercompetition lies in the “New 7S’s” – or seven hypercompetitive strategies.<sup>12</sup> The strategies being labeled as new in 1994 draws inevitable comparisons to McKinsey and Company’s earlier 1980s 7S construct, which includes the hard elements of strategy, structure, and systems, as well as the soft elements of shared values, style, skills, and staff.<sup>13</sup> D’Aveni’s 7S construct includes: (1) superior stakeholder satisfaction; (2) strategic soothsaying; (3) positioning for speed; (4) positioning for surprise; (5) shifting the rules of competition; (6) signaling strategic intent; and (7) simultaneous and sequential strategic thrusts.

D’Aveni’s seven strategies are further divided into three subcategories: vision, capabilities, and tactics.<sup>14</sup> The first two strategies of D’Aveni’s 7S construct, stakeholder satisfaction and soothsaying, create a vision for market disruption. The third and fourth, speed and surprise, are key capabilities to employ across markets. The last three, shifting rules of competition, signaling, and strategic thrusts, are disruptive tactics levied against rival businesses.

## A ROUGH MILITARY TRANSLATION OF D’AVENI

D’Aveni’s 7S construct focuses on the ability of an organization to thrive in hypercompetition by “creat[ing] disruption, seiz[ing] the initiative, and creat[ing] a series

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9. Richard A. D’Aveni, “Strategic Planning for Hypercompetition Era,” LinkedIn SlideShare, June 16, 2007, <https://www.slideshare.net/nusantara99/strategic-planning-for-hypercompetition-era>.

10. “Facing Challenge of Hypercompetition—Fast, Smart, Bold: Traditional Competitive Strategies Are Not Sustainable . . .,” BizShifts-Trends, September 6, 2012, <https://bizshifts-trends.com/facing-the-challenge-of-hypercompetition-faster-smarter-bolder-traditional-strategies-are-not-sustainable/>.

11. Richard A. D’Aveni and Robert Gunther, “Hypercompetition: Hypercompetitive Rivalries,” PowerPoint presentation (Austin: University of Texas, June 17, 1995).

12. D’Aveni and Gunther, “Hypercompetition: Hypercompetitive Rivalries,” 30–34.

13. Will Kenton, “McKinsey 7S Model,” Investopedia, January 5, 2018, <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/m/mckinsey-7s-model.asp>.

14. D’Aveni, *Hypercompetition*, 29–34.

of temporary advantages.”<sup>15</sup> Through research efforts over two years, two USAWC study teams found utility in adapting hypercompetition to assess and/or develop key insights relevant to great-power rivalry. Obvious, immediate parallels arose between D’Aveni’s hypercompetition and trends and concepts emerging in USAWC work.

For example, in D’Aveni’s construction, “stakeholder satisfaction” means the relative comfort or contentment of customers and business partners. He even suggests stakeholder satisfaction is the “key to winning each dynamic strategic interaction with competitors.”<sup>16</sup> Recent USAWC work identifies US Allies and partners, American political and military leaders, and the American people as stakeholders.<sup>17</sup> As in D’Aveni’s book, the satisfaction of these stakeholders is essential to a winning military strategy.

D’Aveni’s strategic soothsaying is the process of identifying and determining the viability of “new temporary windows of opportunity.”<sup>18</sup> In a military context, the soothsaying function relates to vision, strategy, policy, and concept development. Armed with vision, D’Aveni’s speed and surprise create opportunities and set the conditions for their subsequent exploitation. In all three cases—soothsaying, speed, and surprise—and in any context, D’Aveni and contemporary US military strategists would suggest, “Fortune favors the bold.”

The concept of shifting the rules involves “actions that redefine” the competitive environment.<sup>19</sup> In a defense and military context, rival gray-zone competition is perhaps the most obvious exemplar. So too, however, is expanding the competitive space, the explicit strategic approach described in the NDS.<sup>20</sup> In its description of that approach, the summary observes, “America can expand the competitive space, seizing the initiative to challenge our competitors where we possess advantages and they lack strength.”<sup>21</sup>

Through action and/or inaction, signaling focuses on strategic influence; this is true in the realms of business and international security. The strategic influence space is the contested ground where the most consequential and impactful choices are made. In addition to the five Joint domains and the electromagnetic spectrum the strategic influence space is one of seven highly contested domains and competitive spaces considered in this and other recent USAWC work.

Finally, D’Aveni’s simultaneous and sequential strategic thrusts are actions designed to “stun or confuse” competitors.<sup>22</sup> Consistent with contemporary strategy and concepts, the combination of these competitive moves with contributions from the aforementioned

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15. D’Aveni, *Hypercompetition*, 31.

16. D’Aveni, *Hypercompetition*, 31.

17. Joseph F. Dunford Jr., “From the Chairman: Allies and Partners Are Our Strategic Center of Gravity,” *Joint Force Quarterly* 87 (4th Quarter 2017): 5.

18. D’Aveni, *Hypercompetition*, 32.

19. D’Aveni, *Hypercompetition*, 33.

20. Mattis, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy*, 4–5.

21. Mattis, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy*, 4.

22. D’Aveni, *Hypercompetition*, 34.



ideas creates opportunities for friends and dilemmas for rivals. Each of these strategies has a significant analog in contemporary strategic considerations.

## TOWARD AN ADAPTED FRAMEWORK FOR HYPERCOMPETITION

Since 2018 and as USAWC work matured, war college researchers recognized hypercompetition was a useful framework through which to view the United States' most pressing military challenges. The use of hypercompetition as an animating concept would allow – as D'Aveni suggests of business – US defense and military leadership to answer the important question, “How do organizational structure, culture, and process inspire military strategy and build forces tailored for persistent hypercompetition?”<sup>23</sup>

In chapter 4, “Analytic Framework,” USAWC researchers introduce nine – vice seven – fundamentals of hypercompetition: strength of interest, legitimacy, innovation, strategic capacity, speed and agility, surprise, shifting rules of competition, strategic signaling, and disruptive maneuver.<sup>24</sup> Like D'Aveni, the USAWC perspective on hypercompetition organizes the fundamentals according to three adapted lines of effort: purpose, vision, and partnerships; capabilities and capacity; and strategic methods.<sup>25</sup> As is clear above, the USAWC adaptation retains some of D'Aveni's original 7S strategies, albeit with adapted descriptions. But the model outlined in chapter 4 captures all of the spirit of his groundbreaking concept and effectively translates it into a hypercompetitive military context.

As a result of USAWC work on hypercompetition, US Army Pacific (USARPAC) adopted this concept to characterize the command's operating environment.<sup>26</sup> This work endeavors to offer implicit Joint Force and explicit US Army responses to USINDOPACOM's hypercompetitive environment and the theater's hypercompetitive pacing rival.

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23. D'Aveni, Giovanni Battista Dagnino, and Ken G. Smith, “The Age of Temporary Advantage,” *Strategic Management Journal* 31, no. 13 (December 2010): 1373.

24. 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/>.

25. Freier et al., “Game On or Game Over.”

26. US Army Pacific (USARPAC), *United States Army Pacific Strategic Guidance: Competing for a Free and Open Pacific* (Fort Shafter, HI: USARPAC, November 2018), 3.



## CHAPTER 2. INTRODUCTION: WHY USINDOPACOM MATTERS

### Key Takeaways:

- US military superiority has eroded substantially and is vulnerable to continued deterioration in the face of great-power rivals.
- The United States' great-power challenge is particularly acute in the Indo-Pacific region.
- The Indo-Pacific region is ground zero for the most consequential American competitive relationship since the end of the Cold War—the pacing People's Republic of China (PRC).

This study emerged in response to questions asked by then-Secretary of the Army (SECARMY) Mark Esper in 2018. Chapter 3, “Study Origin, Purpose, Methodology, and Scope,” describes the study’s foundation in more detail. The study questions, analysis, and outcomes emerged in an environment marked by increased senior- and working-level anxiety within the US defense establishment about the American military position in the United States Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) area of responsibility (AOR), as well as a third US attempt in two decades to refocus American strategy on the USINDOPACOM theater.

The United States has increasingly been in an uncertain strategic position in the Indo-Pacific region; this most likely started with 9/11 and the wars in which the United States became entangled afterwards. The United States and its Joint Force are in the midst of adapting to a high-risk, hypercompetitive, post-primacy environment.<sup>1</sup> Expansive US interests and the global military objectives associated with them are under pressure from ascendant or lingering challengers. Multiple rivals that have long objected to US economic, political, or military primacy now increasingly have the resources, capabilities, and methods necessary to threaten the United States effectively on all three fronts. US rivals’ newfound freedom of action springs from important changes in the strategic environment.

Previous US Army War College (USAWC) work has found that the character of military competition and the definition and durability of military advantage are changing.<sup>2</sup> The environment has transitioned from active competition to hypercompetition, as described in the prologue. In hypercompetition, permanent advantage is unattainable. Instead, the hypercompetitive environment is defined by the persistent pursuit and exploitation of transient advantage. Hypercompetition is ongoing today in the Indo-Pacific region and globally across all Joint domains and contested spaces.

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1. Nathan Freier et al., *At Our Own Peril: DoD Risk Assessment in a Post-primacy World* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College [USAWC] Press, July 2017).

2. 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/>.

In combination, these factors indicate US military cross-domain superiority has eroded substantially and is vulnerable to continued deterioration.<sup>3</sup> Further, these factors indicate US policy makers, strategists, and senior military leaders at both the national and theater levels can no longer automatically assume unchallenged American cross-domain dominance or freedom of action. In light of contemporary hypercompetition, the United States is at once underadapted and overextended. Continuing to attempt to gain permanent advantage or permanently overmatch rivals across all domains will likely overextend available resources without achieving either. This observation is especially applicable given the current prominence of great-power competition in strategy and planning efforts; the *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy* (NDS) describes the contemporary environment as one characterized by the “reemergence of long-term, strategic competition . . . [with] revisionist powers.”<sup>4</sup>

The United States’ great-power challenge is particularly acute in the Indo-Pacific region, where the United States faces a pacing revisionist near-peer challenge in the People’s Republic of China (PRC). In this study, the PRC is considered a pacing challenger because it presents comprehensive threats—across Joint domains and instruments of national power—that in sum offer a credible and unfavorable alternative to US regional leadership.

The security of USINDOPACOM is further complicated by a legacy threat from the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) and Russia, an active and opportunistic spoiler. In combination, these challenges increase the risk of regional hypercompetition escalating to great-power military conflict. Chapter 6, “The Indo-Pacific Military Problem,” describes this problem in greater detail.

## **WHY USINDOPACOM MATTERS: THE RISE OF A CREDIBLE NEAR-PEER RIVAL**

The importance of the Indo-Pacific region and the pacing People’s Republic of China challenge within it transcend a simple recitation of salient facts. But, for the record, the Indo-Pacific region is home to 7 of the world’s 9 known nuclear powers, 7 of the 10 largest militaries, 7 of the 10 most populous countries, 5 US treaty allies, 10 members of the G20, over half of Earth’s surface, and more than half of the human population. In the context of securing US interests and maintaining a global system favorable to the United States and its partners, one cannot overstate the Indo-Pacific region’s importance.

The central role of the Indo-Pacific region in US national security, defense, and military strategy is not solely defined by legacy relationships, treaty obligations, or bottom-line economic benefits. Rather, combined with these, the region is ground zero for the most

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3. Current US policy acknowledges as much; see James Mattis, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America: Sharpening the American Military’s Competitive Edge* (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense [OSD], January 19, 2018), 1.

4. See Mattis, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy*, 2; see also Donald Trump, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: Office of the Federal Register, December 2017). Under the heading of “A Competitive World,” the 2017 *National Security Strategy* observes, “China and Russia challenge American power, influence, and interests, attempting to erode American security and prosperity.”

consequential American competitive relationship since the end of the Cold War. In short, the Indo-Pacific is the first and most important region within which the pacing PRC rival is aggressively pursuing and attempting to advance a credible alternative to the US-led rules-based order. The region is also the first where the United States, its partners, and its Allies will have to demonstrate an effective counter narrative to a potent PRC challenge.

The contest between the United States and China is unlikely to be as simple or as binary as the Cold War's US-Soviet rivalry. The political, economic, and security fortunes of one great-power rival are inextricably tied to the other. The two rivals are commercially, financially, and culturally interdependent, as is virtually every other country on Earth.

Worldwide, nations and their commercial enterprises see the People's Republic of China as an economic opportunity. Though as this work is published the COVID-19 crisis puts all economic futures in doubt, 2019 predictions suggested the PRC may surpass the United States as early as this year.<sup>5</sup> China is a voracious importer and consumer of raw materials.<sup>6</sup> But most Indo-Pacific states are also in an increasingly uncomfortable position vis-à-vis the PRC, where economic and security interests are in direct competition.

On the one hand, China is a dominant and irreplaceable economic partner. On the other, the PRC is commonly perceived as increasingly invasive, aggressive, and predatory. Thus, the United States becomes the security counterweight to China's overreach or armed hostility. For its part, the United States is incentivized to counter PRC aggression both as the region's traditional security guarantor and in defense of a liberal international system within which the country has grown accustomed to holding significant sway. In particular, policy makers in Washington increasingly see PRC actions as antagonistic to a long-standing international order favorable to the United States.

## **EROSION OF US REACH AND INFLUENCE**

Although many in the region continue to look to the United States for security at present, China holds the strategic initiative. Absent effective US action, the People's Republic of China is likely to retain and exploit that initiative to decisive effect, severely limiting US freedom of action well prior to any military conflict. The following paragraphs discuss significant foundational concerns.

China is actively transforming its military forces, with an eye toward defeating the United States in the event of armed hostilities. The PRC is also creatively employing its military and paramilitary assets to outmaneuver the United States and its partners strategically in meaningful gray-zone approaches. Furthermore, the PRC enjoys strategic depth and increasingly operates on internal or heavily protected lines of communication within the first island chain. China routinely demonstrates the ability to threaten US

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5. Nikki Sun, "China to Surpass US as World's Biggest Consumer Market This Year," *Nikkei Asian Review*, January 24, 2019, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Economy/China-to-surpass-US-as-world-s-biggest-consumer-market-this-year>.

6. Huileng Tan, "Charts Show China's Explosive Consumption of Four Critical Commodities," CNBC, September 24, 2019, <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/09/25/chinas-the-worlds-biggest-buyer-of-soybeans-and-copper-its-commodities-appetite-is-still-growing.html>.

partners and key US capabilities in the first and second island chains with a variety of multi-domain capabilities and forces.

Finally, through skillful all-of-government, military, paramilitary, and commercial maneuver, the PRC is increasingly expanding its broad political-military reach and influence across the Indo-Pacific region well beyond the South and East China Seas and western Pacific, deep into the Pacific Islands and Indian Ocean. In the end, the PRC's Go-game approach of crowding out or boxing in the United States and its partners persistently generates new strategic and operational dilemmas for Joint Force and partner senior leaders and strategists.<sup>7</sup>

This study focuses on Joint Force and Army responses to China's military challenge primarily, but acknowledges a more comprehensive PRC hypercompetitive campaign encompassing – and frequently prioritizing – nonmilitary capabilities and methods. But even nonmilitary maneuver has significant military implications (for example, long-term port agreements, leases, or purchases).

For its part and despite strong Indo-Pacific relationships, the United States has accumulated some theater-level setbacks over three decades that open up competitive space for a rising People's Republic of China. With its 1991 departure from the Philippines, the United States lost permanent presence in and continuous military access to Southeast Asia.<sup>8</sup> Rodrigo Duterte's election as president of the Philippines and his often negative view of relations between the United States and the Philippines have limited the impact of the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement to a lower level than US policy makers anticipated when the agreement was signed in 2014.

Likewise, US military presence in Japan encountered some public resistance, necessitating a theater-wide redistribution of some American forces starting in 2006. As part of this redistribution, 5,000 US Marines relocated from Japan to Guam.<sup>9</sup> Finally, the United States negotiated and then summarily retreated from the Trans-Pacific Partnership. To some, this signaled an American retreat from its traditional broad leadership role in the Indo-Pacific region.

A combination of American setbacks, real or perceived inaction, and persistent malign Chinese regional activism and gray-zone maneuver may combine to hamper a rapid US return to a more competitive, cost-imposing security posture. Failure to reverse this trend may substantially increase US and partner vulnerability and limit meaningful US, partner, and combined military options, resulting in an expansion of the competitive space in China's favor and a compounding of strategic and operational risk for the United States.

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7. David Lai, *Learning from the Stones: A Go Approach to Mastering China's Strategic Concept*, Shi (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, USAWC Press, May 2004), 6–22.

8. David E. Sanger, "Philippines Orders US to Leave Strategic Navy Base at Subic Bay," *New York Times*, December 28, 1991, <https://www.nytimes.com/1991/12/28/world/philippines-orders-us-to-leave-strategic-navy-base-at-subic-bay.html>.

9. Emma Chanlett-Avery, Christopher T. Mann, and Joshua A. Williams, *In Focus: US Military Presence on Okinawa and Realignment to Guam*, IF 10672 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, April 9, 2019), 3.

## TAMING THE PACING RIVAL

At present, the United States is decidedly off-balance in its priority military theater. Much like Europe during the Cold War, the Indo-Pacific presents the United States with a theater where strategic and operational risk are increasing almost daily. On this point, Ashley Townshend et al. of Australia's United States Studies Centre observe:

America's defence strategy in the Indo-Pacific is in the throes of an unprecedented crisis. It is, at its core, a crisis born of the misalignment between Washington's strategic ends and its available means. Faced with an increasingly contested regional security landscape and with limited defence resources at its disposal, the United States military is no longer assured of its ability to single-handedly uphold a favourable balance of power in the Indo-Pacific.<sup>10</sup>

Absent significant change in US and partner theater strategy and concepts, mounting challenges emanating from the People's Republic of China may compound into a de facto strategic fait accompli. For example, without a meaningful countervailing US military (and ideally whole-of-government) approach beginning in the very short term, the broad risks associated with reversing real PRC theater advantage will become prohibitive or unacceptable to US senior leaders. In their recent work, *Tightening the Chain: Implementing a Strategy of Maritime Pressure in the Western Pacific*, analysts at the influential Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments describe the US military dilemma this way:

The US military has a problem in the Western Pacific: the tyranny of distance and time . . . China's military capabilities have increasingly matured to the point where . . . the People's Liberation Army (PLA) could launch a rapid attack to change the status quo, including territorial seizure, before the United States could meaningfully respond, thus presenting Washington and its allies with a fait accompli.<sup>11</sup>

The fundamentals of risk mitigation are either in place or within reach. Gaining and maintaining the strategic initiative and restoring a favorable military balance in the Indo-Pacific region consistent with the goals of the 2018 NDS require transformational change in theater design. This work recommends transformational change across five broad elements of theater design in the Joint Force and its subordinate military services. Having originated with the US Army, this study implies the broad contours of essential Joint Force change while explicitly describing essential Army transformation to support that change. Chapter 3, "Study Origin, Purpose, Methodology, and Scope," and chapter 4, "Analytic Framework," capture the broad course USAWC researchers followed to arrive at the findings and recommendations of this study.

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10. See, for example, Ashley Townshend et al., *Averting Crisis: American Strategy, Military Spending, and Collective Defence in the Indo-Pacific* (Sydney, Australia: United States Studies Centre, August 19, 2019).

11. Thomas G. Mahnken et al., *Tightening the Chain: Implementing a Strategy of Maritime Pressure in the Western Pacific* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, May 23, 2019), 1.





## CHAPTER 3. STUDY ORIGIN, PURPOSE, METHODOLOGY, AND SCOPE

### Key Takeaways:

- This study was chartered by the Secretary of the Army (SECARMY) and sponsored by US Army Pacific (USARPAC).
- The study proceeds from two animating concepts emerging from 2017–18 US Army War College (USAWC) research: United States Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) hypercompetition and its attendant imperative for transformational Joint theater design.
- The study answers a single charter question: For 2028, what is the foundational US Army theater design that will best support 2018 *National Defense Strategy* (NDS) objectives across the anticipated range of military demands in the USINDOPACOM area of responsibility (AOR)?

### ORIGIN

In November 2018, the US Army War College (USAWC) initiated the fourth in a series of sponsor-driven studies on contemporary defense challenges. Similar to previous USAWC studies, this study has benefited from direct Department of Defense (DoD) sponsorship and close working relationships with defense and military stakeholders. Though sponsors may change year to year, DoD sponsorship reflects senior leader interest in questions about policy and strategy.

This study originated in questions first posed by the Secretary of the Army (SECARMY) to the USAWC commandant in the spring of 2018. The SECARMY chartered this work first. Thus, he and his staff are the study's original sponsors. But the project also benefits from direct in-theater sponsorship from US Army Pacific (USARPAC) Strategy, Plans, and Policy (G5).

Neither SECARMY nor USARPAC sponsorship connotes endorsement of the report or its findings and recommendations. Rather, sponsorship indicates endorsement of the project's pursuit and carries with it implied responsibilities to: (1) provide meaningful background perspectives; and (2) help USAWC researchers gain access to key leaders and stakeholders. Consistent with the war college's academic freedom policy, this study's sponsors were instrumental in framing the principal research question; however, responsibility for that question's answer rests with USAWC researchers alone.

### PURPOSE

This report provides the SECARMY, his staff, wider senior civilian DoD leadership, and senior Army and Joint Force military leaders with actionable recommendations for United States Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) theater design for 2028 and beyond. The USINDOPACOM theater is home to the United States' long-term pacing rival, the People's Republic of China (PRC); a legacy, nuclear-armed threat in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK); and a prospective regional spoiler in Russia.

This study endeavors to answer a single question: *For 2028 and beyond, what is the foundational US Army theater design that will best support NDS objectives across the anticipated range of military demands in the USINDOPACOM area of responsibility (AOR)?* Answers to this question are presented as findings and recommendations that—when

combined—focus on transformational US Army change within a Joint and combined USINDOPACOM theater context.

With a specific emphasis on US Army contributions to Joint operations, this study describes a strategic reorientation of American military power in the Indo-Pacific region for long-term hypercompetition. Again, hypercompetition is characterized by a persistent struggle for transient but exploitable advantage across and within Joint warfighting domains and contested spaces (air, land, sea, space, and cyberspace; the electromagnetic spectrum; and strategic influence). The prologue describes the origins of hypercompetition as an animating idea. Chapter 4, “Analytic Framework,” elaborates on the use of hypercompetition as an evaluative tool.

## **STUDY SCOPE: WHAT THIS STUDY DOES AND DOES NOT DO**

The United States faces profound challenges to its national interests in the Indo-Pacific region. These challenges transcend instruments of national power, DoD functions, and military service departments. Based on the study question and recognizing study team limitations in time and resident expertise, the study scope adhered to the following analytical boundaries.

*First, because the SECARMY chartered this work, this study’s findings and recommendations focus predominantly on the US Army.* The study offers the secretary a principal finding and recommendation for 2028 and beyond, as well as specific findings and recommendations by elements of theater design. Despite the study’s narrow Army focus, however, USINDOPACOM’s hypercompetitive environment demands a more comprehensive Joint, combined, and interagency transformation.

This need for transformation was widely acknowledged during interviews and engagements with US government and military officials and nongovernment defense and military analysts. Therefore, where practical, this study endeavors to portray future Army initiatives within an assumed or recommended strategic context, accounting for these broader perspectives. In short, this study is explicit in its recommendations for Army leaders and implicit as it relates to Joint and interagency recommendations.

*Second, this is a qualitative survey of the Army’s 2028 USINDOPACOM design.* In the course of this work, the USAWC team encountered numerous parallel or contributing quantitative efforts. These efforts are implicitly acknowledged or accounted for in study work. But this study will not offer quantitative insights best left to organizations that are better equipped for that kind of analysis.

*Third and finally, this study makes some implied or unspoken assumptions.* Principal among these is the durability of the United States’ commitment to the Indo-Pacific region and that of the People’s Republic of China as a regional and global pacing challenge. In short, this work accepts that the United States will remain an engaged and active regional power, and that the PRC, for its part, will pace US military decision making and activity in the Indo-Pacific theater.

The study also accepts the basic premise of the 2018 NDS: The United States is in the midst of increased great-power rivalry, and its military advantage is eroding, has eroded, or is vulnerable. The study proceeds from a presumption that the United States will actively defend its global and regional position in the face of deliberate counter-US

resistance from actors like China. Finally, the study generally accepts that the broad Indo-Pacific community of interest and practice is also watching the character and trajectory of the evolving PRC military closely.

In short, given constraints on time and resources, this report provides the secretary and senior Army and defense leadership with broadly informed perspectives on USINDOPACOM theater design for 2028 and beyond. The report provides these perspectives with the benefit of original research, one-on-one and group engagements, and study team analysis, all of which are ably informed by significant work on the Indo-Pacific region that preceded the study's initiation and completion.

As a final note, this report does not explicitly revisit foundational questions that are answered in strategic guidance or assumed in the traditions of US foreign and security policy. Neither of these latter points are in the study's original mandate for inquiry.

## **STUDY METHODOLOGY: SPIRAL DEVELOPMENT ACCORDING TO THREE GENERAL STAGES**

The study is a product of a rolling, spiral net assessment—informed by the work of the previous USAWC year (2018)—and concluding in the 2019 USAWC year. The work occurred over three stages of research and expert/stakeholder engagement. The study team generated insights via: (1) thorough literature, policy, and plan reviews; (2) expert/stakeholder interviews and consultations; (3) original research; and, finally, (4) expert working groups and the senior review group.

This inherently complex research endeavor required dozens of small group and plenary discussions, deliberations, and debates across and within the USAWC USINDOPACOM research team. The unstructured nature of the study's charter problem led the war college team to opt for a research approach that persistently spiraled through a handful of research constants—captured in the analytic framework outlined below—to perpetually gather new evidence and refine study insights from stage 1 (Develop Preliminary Insights) through stage 3 (Report Findings and Recommendations).

### **STAGE 1 (DEVELOP PRELIMINARY INSIGHTS, NOVEMBER 2018 TO FEBRUARY 2019)**

In stage 1, the USAWC team performed a series of foundational tasks and established a conceptual baseline for further investigation in stage 2. Stage 1 included the refinement and validation of research questions; the development of a preliminary analytic framework; a review of literature, policy, and strategy research; and, finally, the formation of early testable insights. The latter were the product of multiple meaningful research engagements across the USINDOPACOM community of interest and practice. The insights, frameworks, and findings that emerged in stage 1 evolved over the course of the study.

The following are among the significant research engagements that occurred during stage 1. Within the continental United States, the study team conducted one-on-one and roundtable discussions with representatives of national security staff; Army Futures Command; the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD); the Army Strategic Plans and Policy Directorate; the Center for Strategic and International Studies; the commander,

US Forces Korea; the Commander's Initiatives Group, US Forces Korea; and the Korean Institute for Defense Analysis.

Stage 1 also included a weeklong research engagement in Hawaii. While in Hawaii, the USAWC team met with, or participated in one-on-one discussions or roundtable forums with, USINDOPACOM staff; the deputy commander, USARPAC; USARPAC staff; US Pacific Air Forces; US Pacific Fleet; US Marine Corps Forces, Pacific; the Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies; the 8th Theater Support Command; the 94th Army Air and Missile Defense Command; the OSD Cost Assessment and Program Evaluation; and the RAND Corporation.

The USAWC study team also conducted a major research trip to Japan, holding substantive senior- and staff-level discussions with representatives of the Ground Staff Office; the Ground Self-Defense Force Training, Evaluation, Research, and Development Command; the Japanese Joint Staff; the Maritime Self-Defense Force Staff College; Japan's National Institute for Defense Studies; the Fujitsu National Security Laboratory; and the commander and staff of US Army Japan.

Further, stage 1 also included participation by USAWC researchers in a range of USINDOPACOM-focused seminars, decision-making forums, and tabletop exercises, including events hosted by the Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, the 8th Theater Support Command, and the Center for Army Analysis.

Stage 1 ended with the convening of two expert working groups on consecutive days at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. The working group process assembled diverse representatives from across the defense, military, and national security communities of interest and practice. A list of this study's participants is provided in "Expert Working Group Participants."

## **STAGE 2 (REFINE, TEST, AND RECORD INSIGHTS, FEBRUARY 2018 TO MAY 2019)**

Stage 2 opened with the development of a set of preliminary findings. In addition, early stage 2 activities included the drafting and circulation among senior Army leadership of an information paper outlining preliminary findings and recommendations. The information paper's primary purpose was to update and elicit early reactions from senior Army and Joint Force stakeholders on the direction of the inquiry. The information paper reached the Office of the SECARMY, the Army Staff, USINDOPACOM, USARPAC, US Army Japan, I Corps, Eighth Army, and US Forces Korea.

In addition to continued research and refinement of preliminary findings and recommendations, USAWC researchers conducted a US Department of State roundtable. Further, USAWC researchers traveled to Fort Lewis, Washington, to gather operational-level perspectives from I Corps senior leadership and staff.

Stage 2 involved significant research engagement abroad. Researchers at the USAWC conducted face-to-face individual and roundtable consultations in Korea, Singapore, and the Philippines with both Allies and partners and US stakeholders. In Korea, USAWC researchers met with representatives from the US embassy and Joint US Military Assistance Group Korea, US and South Korean officers at Combined Forces Command, US officers at US Forces Korea, representatives from the Republic of Korea (RoK) Joint

Staff and RoK Army, and representatives from the UN Command. Researchers from the USAWC also held an extended roundtable with representatives of 8th Army. In addition, the study team met with scholars and analysts from the Asan Institute for Policy Studies and the Korean Institute for Defense Analysis.

While in Singapore, the team engaged with the US embassy, staff from Commander Logistics Group Western Pacific (US Navy), Special Operations Command Pacific, the Singapore Ministry of Defense, and the Institute of Defense and Strategic Studies at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies. In the Philippines, the USAWC team conducted engagements and roundtable discussions with the US embassy, the Philippines Department of Foreign Affairs and Department of National Defense, and the Armed Forces of the Philippines.

Stage 2 included continued consultations with Army Futures Command, US Army G-4, and the China Maritime Studies Institute of the US Naval War College. As in stage 1, stage 2 activities involved meaningful research team participation in official conferences, decision-making forums, and tabletop exercises; these included the OSD Net Assessments Future Warfare 20XX tabletop exercise and the Army Worldwide Planner's Seminar.

As stage 2 drew to a close, the USAWC research team conducted the last of three executive working groups and a series of briefings in Washington, DC, on preliminary findings and recommendations. The latter included meetings with US Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC); the Joint Staff Operations Directorate and Strategy, Plans and Policy Directorate (Asia-Pacific); the Embassy of Japan; OSD Strategy, Plans, and Capabilities; OSD Cost Assessment and Program Evaluation; and Army G-3/5/7 and G-4.

Stage 2 closed with two senior-level review engagements. In the first of two senior-level reviews, the Center for Strategic and International Studies Senior Vice President Dr. Kathleen Hicks hosted a senior review group. The senior review group replicated sponsor-level senior leadership and stakeholders. Meetings of the USAWC senior review group routinely included former flag officers, political appointees, senior civil servants, and/or prominent defense and military experts. The review group that supported this research effort is identified in "Senior Review Group."

The second senior-level review in stage 2 was an executive briefing to the SECARMY in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. The senior review group and the SECARMY executive briefing were final opportunities for senior-level study vetting. Simultaneously with the SECARMY briefing, members of the study team participated in a preliminary rollout event, hosting a panel discussion at the annual Association of the US Army's Land Forces – Pacific 2019 Symposium and Exposition in Honolulu, Hawaii. In combination, these events closed the inquiry and moved the study into stage 3.

### **STAGE 3 (REPORT FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS, MAY-DECEMBER 2019)**

During stage 3, the USAWC study team refined and recorded study insights in this final report and its associated executive briefing.

This report benefits from the collective wisdom of all experts and stakeholders engaged throughout the process, but the report's final content is the responsibility of the study team alone. In addition to report writing and publication, stage 3 included a USAWC lecture during the National Security Seminar in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. The presentation of study findings continued through the summer of 2019 and included briefings to Army G-3/5/7 and G-8, the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, the Center for Army Analysis Joint Force Lethality team (led by Army Futures Command), and the Theater Posture Seminar hosted by the US Army Futures and Concepts Center.

Throughout the study effort, the team received direct support from the USAWC Strategic Studies Institute and School of Strategic Landpower, USARPAC, and the Center for Strategic and International Studies. Also, from initiation, the study benefited from the individual and collective wisdom of the broad USINDOPACOM community of interest and practice and the priceless insights of our expert working and senior review groups. Without the support and material contributions of all mentioned here, this report would not be complete.

Chapter 4, "Analytic Framework," describes the analytic touchpoints employed by the USAWC study team as it spiraled through its analysis. The analytic framework is described as one question, three lenses, and "ready for what." The study team employed these three ideas as qualitative instruments through which emerging insights were identified, refined, and vetted en route to becoming the actionable findings and recommendations described in chapters 8 and 9.

## CHAPTER 4. ANALYTIC FRAMEWORK

### Key Insights: Analytic Framework

- The analytic framework has three components.
- The three components are one question, three lenses, and “ready for what.”
- The three lenses are hypercompetition, strategic purpose and approach, and elements of theater design.

### BACKGROUND: ONE QUESTION, THREE LENSES, AND “READY FOR WHAT”

This study’s analytic framework has three major components. They are: *one question, three lenses, and “ready for what.”* Each is described below.

The analytic framework defined the focus, direction, and limits of the inquiry. At each turn, the framework’s three components were filters for assessing the quality and relevance of emerging insights and for evaluating, organizing, and articulating this report’s final findings and recommendations.

The analytic framework evolved over the life cycle of the research. The US Army War College (USAWC) study team kept the framework purposefully dynamic, allowing for the persistent acquisition, evaluation, validation, and inclusion of new information in study outcomes. Throughout the course of the study, the framework and its components provided just enough structure for USAWC researchers to—in a spiraling fashion—classify and evaluate insights as they emerged, transforming the best among them into the thoroughly vetted set of actionable findings and recommendations located in chapters 8 and 9.

The study question focused research on a specific target at a specific time; this helped focus research efforts on appropriate policy- and strategy-relevant lines of inquiry. The lenses served as foundational filters for research and analysis. Finally, the proposed “ready for what” provided a conceptual end state against which analysis and options could be evaluated.

### ONE QUESTION

The analytic framework’s “one question” is the Secretary of the Army’s (SECARMY) study charter introduced in chapter 3: For 2028, what is the foundational Army theater design that will best support 2018 *National Defense Strategy* (NDS) objectives across the anticipated range of military demands in the United States Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) area of responsibility (AOR)? The charter question is the first and perhaps most important component of the analytic framework.

The charter question, like the other two components, was both an organizing principle and a frequent touchstone for study deliberations. The study team often reviewed the question to ensure the research remained on course as the work progressed. The question also allowed the USAWC research team to quickly separate the essential study topics from the interesting but less relevant study topics.

The charter question captures the broad scope of the SECARMY's original inquiry; it also features multiple embedded ideas and lines of investigation essential to the US Army's role in Joint Indo-Pacific solutions. The latter set of ideas resulted in USAWC researchers identifying three lenses for assessing and refining emerging study insights relevant to answering the SECARMY's charter question.

### THREE LENSES

The analytic framework employs three conceptual lenses drawn from original USAWC work and current strategic guidance. The three lenses are: *hypercompetition*; a presumed *strategic purpose and approach* underwriting all USINDOPACOM theater design; and the *elements of theater design*, as determined by the study team in collaboration with US Army Pacific (USARPAC).

The three lenses were guardrails for research, filters for emerging insights, and useful categories for evaluating, organizing, and articulating findings and recommendations. Actionable, evidence-based study outcomes emerged from serial consideration of relevant insights filtered through the charter question, the three lenses, and the declarative proposition "ready for what" described below.

The first lens, hypercompetition, is a conceptual tool that emerged from last year's USINDOPACOM research. Hypercompetition applies to myriad contemporary defense and national security challenges. The second lens, strategic purpose and approach, emerged from the examination and interpretation of contemporary defense and military strategy and policy guidance in a USINDOPACOM context. The third lens, elements of theater design, is a product of early collaborative analysis between USAWC researchers and USARPAC G5 staff on the charter question and its essential elements.

The real value of the three lenses is their utility as quick reference points for study insights as they emerge and mature in the research. Each lens is a cluster of interrelated questions. For example, is the emerging insight consistent with our understanding of hypercompetition? If so, how? Does the emerging insight enable or hinder a more hypercompetitive US military approach to the Indo-Pacific region? How does it do so? If the emerging insight enables hypercompetition, how might the Army and the Joint Force reinforce their positions? If the emerging insight hinders, does an opportunity to restore a more competitive position exist? Each of the lenses lend themselves to quick reference questions like these.

### LENS ONE: HYPERCOMPETITION

The study's first analytic lens is hypercompetition. Dartmouth College's Richard D'Aveni introduced hypercompetition to the business world in a 1994 book of the same name.<sup>1</sup> The prologue to this report describes how previous USAWC work adapted D'Aveni's concept and applied it to modern strategic competition. To reiterate briefly, D'Aveni characterized the contemporary business environment as having transformed to one of hypercompetition. He saw hypercompetition as the persistent pursuit,

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1. Richard A. D'Aveni, *Hypercompetition: Managing the Dynamics of Strategic Maneuvering* (New York: The Free Press, 1994).



exploitation, loss, and restoration of impermanent market advantages relative to equally hypercompetitive commercial rivals.

Many years later, USAWC analysts adapted D’Aveni’s concept of hypercompetition to help describe and evaluate intensifying great-power rivalry in the Indo-Pacific region.<sup>2</sup> An adaptation of D’Aveni’s concept was the principal by-product of directed 2017–18 research sponsored by USARPAC G5 on Indo-Pacific military rivalry. That work found the United States to be in the midst of persistent hypercompetition in the Indo-Pacific region with a pacing China.<sup>3</sup> The work characterizes hypercompetition as the “persistent struggle for important but transient advantage across highly-contested competitive spaces (i.e., warfighting domains, the electro-magnetic spectrum, and the heavily-disputed strategic influence space).”<sup>4</sup>

The core idea of hypercompetition is the notion of transient advantage: How does one gain it, lose it, regain it, exploit it, and secure one’s vulnerabilities against others’ possession of it? This notion of transient advantage is consistent with the “windows of opportunity” described in emerging US Army concepts on multi-domain operations (MDO).<sup>5</sup> Consistent with D’Aveni and as suggested in the prologue, successive USAWC research teams found that most US competitive advantages are highly contested, unsustainable, or—even worse—gone (for the time being) vis-à-vis China.<sup>6</sup> This latter controversial point is a judgment increasingly shared by other strategists.<sup>7</sup>

In hypercompetition, however, the temporary loss or degradation of advantage does not necessarily mean defeat; rather, it is inevitable and should be anticipated and accounted for in planning. The trick to thriving in a hypercompetitive environment is: (1) remediating lost advantage by restoring it; or (2) creating new advantages laterally and exploiting them ruthlessly. In a military context, hypercompetition is not focused on decisive victory; rather, it is focused on the persistent pursuit and exploitation of opportunity. Hypercompetition is defined by sudden, disruptive change; agility; and resilience.

In light of that view, the 2017–18 USAWC research concluded that China appeared poised for success in regional hypercompetition against a currently less agile

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2. Nathan Freier and Dana Tucker, “Hypercompetition and Transient Advantage (Indo-Pacific Series),” May 14, 2019, War Room, mp3, 29:29, <https://warroom.armywarcollege.edu/special-series/indo-pacific-region/indopacom-4-transient-advantage/>.

3. 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/>.

4. Freier et al., “Game On or Game Over.”

5. See Freier, “Faster, Transient, Endless: How America Must Adapt to Today’s Great-Power Competition,” *Defense One*, July 22, 2018, <https://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2018/07/american-choice-game-or-game-over/149938/>.

6. Freier et al., *Outplayed: Regaining Strategic Initiative in the Gray Zone* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College [USAWC] Press, 2016).

7. James Mattis, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America: Sharpening the American Military’s Competitive Edge* (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense [OSD], January 19, 2018).

United States. To overcome that trajectory, the Joint Force would need to adapt to a hypercompetitive China. In that research effort, USAWC analysts found that immediate transformational Joint Force change is essential for the United States to thrive in a hypercompetitive Indo-Pacific future featuring China as the region’s principal rival.<sup>8</sup>

Researchers from the USAWC organize their adapted conception of hypercompetition around three lines of effort and nine fundamentals. These are captured in table 1 below.

**Table 1. Three lines of effort and nine fundamentals of competition**

<b>Line of Effort</b>	<b>Fundamental</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Purpose, Vision, and Partnerships</b>	<i>Strength of Interest</i>	Strength and clarity of will, objectives, interest, and risk.
	<i>Legitimacy</i>	Broad influence over and cooperative relationships with willing partners.
	<i>Innovation</i>	Predisposition to combine foresight, early recognition, and risk-taking in pursuit of game-changing innovation and opportunity.
<b>Capabilities and Capacity</b>	<i>Strategic Capacity</i>	Breadth and depth to quickly mobilize resources and harness and blend public, private, and partner solutions to seize opportunities, meet surge demands, and generate disruptive strategic advantages.
	<i>Speed</i>	Capability – through posture, maneuver, reorganization, and retasking – to rapidly reframe strategic conditions in one’s favor.
	<i>Surprise</i>	Capability to generate conceptual, cognitive, technological, and positional advantage.
<b>Strategic Methods</b>	<i>Shifting Rules of Competition</i>	Ability to redefine the character of security competition and selectively weaponize and exploit nonmilitary capabilities and methods.
	<i>Strategic Signaling</i>	Capability to create narrative(s) and use information to advance interests and objectives while eroding adversary position.
	<i>Disruptive Maneuver</i>	Ability to act as a disruptive “first mover” and “fast follower” across instruments of power to unhinge rival advantage and intent.

The fundamentals offer strategists and analysts a flexible, qualitative assessment tool. Hypercompetition was a key driving factor of this study. Explicitly or implicitly, all of this study’s recommendations are expected to be resilient in the face of rival hypercompetitive maneuver and to posture Army forces to support an assumed Joint concept for gaining, regaining, and/or maintaining exploitable advantages.

## **LENS TWO: STRATEGIC PURPOSE AND APPROACH**

In the abstract, theater design is the broad operating structure within which the Joint Force implements regional defense and military strategy to secure at-risk American

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8. Freier et al., “Game On or Game Over.”

interests. Theater design should have a unifying purpose, a governing strategic approach, and core elements for organizing activity. The first two of these are combined in the study's second analytic lens.

Strategic purpose and approach drive effective theater design. Purpose and approach provide the elements of design described below with a unifying focus. Consistent with guidance from the SECARMY, the USINDOPACOM strategic purpose and approach described here emerged directly from the study's charter question and subsequent consideration of the 2018 NDS.

The SECARMY preferred that USAWC researchers employ the NDS as one tool in their analysis. After consideration of its language, the study found that the in-situ strategy captured a reasonable, strategic-level purpose and approach through the study's 2028 time horizon. In short, USAWC researchers concluded they could reasonably assume the Joint Force, USINDOPACOM, and the Army will mirror Department of Defense (DoD) strategic guidance now and in 2028. Further, USAWC analysts determined that current Pentagon guidance was sufficient to judge gross Joint Force, theater combatant command, and Army needs.

## **STRATEGIC PURPOSE: MAINTAIN FAVORABLE MILITARY BALANCE**

As it relates directly to strategic purpose and approach, a review of current DoD guidance (the NDS) flagged two themes as particularly relevant to this study and its USINDOPACOM focus. The first was the concept of a "favorable military balance" linked to a "free and open international order." The *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy* states, "A more lethal, resilient, and rapidly innovating Joint Force, combined with a robust constellation of allies and partners, will sustain American influence and ensure favorable balances of power that safeguard the free and open international order."<sup>9</sup>

The second theme was the concept of "expanding the competitive space" by "seizing the strategic initiative." Both ideas are central to the current strategy governing DoD decision making. In practice, both implicitly underwrite a more hypercompetitive military posture, and the *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy* argues, "more than any other nation, America can expand the competitive space, seizing the initiative to challenge our competitors where we possess advantages and they lack strength."<sup>10</sup>

The first idea—maintenance of a favorable military balance—is both an elemental component of the new defense strategy and an explicit defense objective for the USINDOPACOM AOR.<sup>11</sup> Given the intensity of great-power competition in the Indo-Pacific region, the character of the theater's hypercompetitive military problem, and an acknowledged erosion of US military advantage vis-à-vis consequential rivals like China, USAWC researchers determined the governing strategic purpose of transforming the USINDOPACOM theater design would be to *maintain a favorable military balance sufficient to underwrite a free and open Indo-Pacific region.*

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9. Mattis, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy*.

10. Mattis, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy*, 4.

11. Mattis, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy*, 4.

The concept of a favorable military balance suggests the possession of capability, capacity, and will sufficient to secure, when necessary, at-risk regional objectives with force and forces in the face of active military rivalry. The concept of a “free and open Indo-Pacific” connotes a region where hostile coercion and threats to national sovereignty and access are held in check by both a stable, rules-based order and actors capable of upholding it.<sup>12</sup> Specifically, the recently published DoD Indo-Pacific strategy describes a free and open Indo-Pacific as a region governed by

- respect for sovereignty and independence of all nations;
- peaceful resolution of disputes;
- free, fair, and reciprocal trade based on open investment, transparent agreements, and connectivity; and
- adherence to international rules and norms, including those of freedom of navigation and overflight.<sup>13</sup>

In the context of this study, a favorable military balance is favorable from a US perspective. The United States pursues such balance, specifically to secure leverage over rivals and enjoy a stake in the most important regional outcomes. Naturally, these actions will incur active resistance from US rivals.

## **STRATEGIC APPROACH: SEIZE THE INITIATIVE AND EXPAND THE COMPETITIVE SPACE**

Like hypercompetition, the concepts of seizing the strategic initiative and expanding the competitive space were animating ideas for this study and key elements for assessing, validating, and refining study insights. Researchers from USAWC found a symbiotic relationship between an emerging US strategic imperative to thrive in hypercompetition and the NDS notion of expanding the competitive space.

A previous USAWC study concluded that contemporary hypercompetitive advantage most often favors rivals that are biased for action and postured to seize fleeting windows of opportunity. Over the last decade, the emergence of gray-zone strategies and rival efforts to expand the competitive space necessitated a more expansive conception of where and how those windows of opportunity manifest in both competition and conflict.

This study found three of nine hypercompetitive fundamentals to be directly impacted by the retention and effective employment of strategic initiative: innovation, speed and agility, and surprise. Likewise, the fundamentals of shifting rules and disruptive maneuver are defined by a deliberate expansion of competitive options across domains and contested spaces.

These ideas and their importance in contemporary US defense strategy led the USAWC research team to identify *seizing the strategic initiative* and *expanding the competitive space* (combined) as the most appropriate strategic approach against which to judge the merits of Army theater design in the Indo-Pacific region. Both elements of the

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12. US Department of Defense (DoD), *The Department of Defense Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnerships, and Promoting a Networked Region* (Washington, DC: DoD, June 1, 2019).

13. DoD, *Indo-Pacific Strategy Report*, 4.

approach reflect the continued – and possibly increasing – relevance of hypercompetition in understanding threat and response in the context of Indo-Pacific great-power rivalry.

The strategic approach embodied in these two concepts further acknowledges the implicit relationship between thriving in hypercompetitive environments and a “bias for action.” On a practical institutional level, a strategic approach that combines initiative with the creative expansion of competitive military options reinforces the direct connection between hypercompetition as the best frame for contemporary Indo-Pacific rivalry and the Army’s emerging concept of MDO. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, expanding the competitive space and its prominence in US defense strategy represents a conceptual bridge between current DoD guidance and future USINDOPACOM design.

### **LENS THREE: ELEMENTS OF THEATER DESIGN**

This study’s third and final analytic lens is elements of theater design. The elements are the five areas of inquiry that emerged from early study-related collaborative problem framing with USARPAC G5.<sup>14</sup> The USAWC researchers used the elements of design as a foundational basis for the organization of the study. The five elements of theater design are: strategy and operational concepts; footprint and presence; forces and capabilities; authorities, permissions, and agreements; and mission command arrangements.

The elements of theater design provided USAWC researchers with a standing inventory of critical issue areas worthy of assessment, comment, and recommendations. The elements are both stand-alone areas of inquiry and interdependent in a design context.

Strategy and operational concepts involves a detailed vision for the employment of military capabilities and forces for the purpose of contributing to or achieving specific strategic and operational objectives. Capabilities and forces covers manned and unmanned formations and tools employed or employable in pursuit of specific military ends. Footprint and presence describes the physical and virtual disposition and reach of capabilities and forces relative to their intended employment and missions. Permissions, authorities, and agreements are the formal and informal policies, arrangements, and accords governing the control, employment, positioning, movement, and partner relationships of military forces. Finally, mission command arrangements includes the governing structures and networks that facilitate and enable the formal and informal exercise of authority and direction over military forces and capabilities.

### **“READY FOR WHAT?”**

A definitive “ready for what” is the final component of the study’s analytic framework. This study’s ready-for-what consideration is the bottom-line focus for recommended Army-specific adaptations to the Indo-Pacific region’s hypercompetitive conditions. The study team determined the Army in the Indo-Pacific region should be ready to *compete and deter now and through 2028, while persistently preparing to enable and contribute to a Joint and combined campaign sufficient to deny coercive change to the regional status quo.*

Like the strategic purpose and approach above, “ready for what” comes from an interpretation of current national- and theater-level guidance. The NDS pursues three

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14. US Army Pacific (USARPAC) G5, interview by USAWC researchers, fall 2018.

lines of effort in seeking to expand the competitive space: build a more lethal force, strengthen alliances and attract new partners, and reform the department for greater performance and affordability.<sup>15</sup> The *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy* suggests in the introduction to the defense objectives that these lines of effort are undertaken to “defend the homeland, remain the preeminent military power . . . ensure the balances of power remain in our favor, and advance an international order that is most conducive to our security and prosperity.”<sup>16</sup>

Regionally, USINDOPACOM and USARPAC support NDS objectives with their own lines of effort. In the case of USINDOPACOM, the lines of effort are strengthen alliances and partnerships, increase Joint Force lethality, enhance design and posture, and integrate exercises and experimentation.<sup>17</sup> United States Army Pacific supports USINDOPACOM by ensuring a combat-credible force, strengthening and building alliances and partnerships, and developing a dynamic forward posture.<sup>18</sup>

Consistent with the SECARMY’s interest in developing Army design options in the Indo-Pacific region aligned with the objectives of the NDS and broadly informed by theater-level implementing guidance, the USAWC study team’s “ready for what” rested on three key ideas. First, the United States will remain decisively engaged in the USINDOPACOM theater for the purpose of actively securing its national interests in 2028 and beyond. Second, the basic architecture and philosophy of DoD and theater-level strategy will remain consistent over the same time frame. Third, the USAWC team assumed that current projections of China’s intent and military development will remain intact across the study’s time horizon.

## WHY THIS FRAMEWORK?

The research team might have taken any number of analytical paths. The framework described here, combined with the specific course outlined in chapter 3, yielded a thorough treatment of Joint Force and Army theater-design requirements for 2028 and beyond. The framework’s three components—*one question, three lenses, and “ready for what”*—provided the most relevant touchpoints for researchers to examine as important insights emerged.

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15. Mattis, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy*, 5.

16. Mattis, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy*, 4.

17. United States Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) J56, “USINDOPACOM Strategy and Posture Brief” (PowerPoint presentation, USINDOPACOM, Honolulu, HI, n.d.).

18. USARPAC, *United States Army Pacific Strategic Guidance: Competing for a Free and Open Pacific* (Fort Shafter, HI: USARPAC, November 2018).

## CHAPTER 5. STUDY ASSUMPTIONS

### Key Takeaways: Nine Foundational Assumptions

- The United States will adopt a more competitive, proactive approach to defending its interests in the United States Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) area of responsibility (AOR).
- Active US-China military competition will accelerate.
- The Republic of Korea will assume greater responsibility for its conventional land defense.
- The United States will retain six Indo-Pacific anchor partners.
- Allies and partners will not combine with the United States into a formal collective security arrangement.
- Allies and partners will continue to welcome some combination of permanent, rotational, and expeditionary US force presence.
- Distributed multi-domain strategy, plans, and operations will characterize the Joint Force approach to the USINDOPACOM AOR.
- US Army forces will adopt a comprehensive “on and from land” operational concept within a Joint, multi-domain context.
- The United States will primarily field capabilities anticipated in the president’s budget for fiscal year 2020.

### BACKGROUND: ASSUMPTIONS AS AN ESSENTIAL STARTING POINT

As in all forward-looking analysis, this work relies on multiple assumptions. The study assumptions serve two purposes. First, the assumptions bridge today’s strategic environment at the theater level to an anticipated future in 2028 and beyond. Second, the assumptions bound the study’s scope, targeting research on the most relevant trends impacting the form and function of Joint Force and Army theater design in the Indo-Pacific region at the end of the next decade.

Similar to hypercompetition, the assumptions described here were core to the study’s operating system. Consistent with this work’s spiral development process, the assumptions evolved over the study’s life cycle. Nonetheless, the core ideas behind the assumptions remained generally consistent throughout the research effort. The nine foundational assumptions presented below were central to research team analysis and study outcomes.

### NINE FOUNDATIONAL ASSUMPTIONS

The nine assumptions listed below represent the most salient trends shaping US defense and military decision making for the United States Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) theater over the coming decade. The assumptions do not represent an exhaustive description of the USINDOPACOM operating environment in 2028 and beyond. Instead, the assumptions are the essential conditions underpinning this work’s findings and recommendations.

Should one or more of the assumptions prove materially invalid at any point, multiple recommendations described in this study will require reassessment. These assumptions were adopted and validated through the rigorous process described in chapter 3, “Study Purpose, Methodology, Origin, and Scope.”

In addition to the assumptions, the analysis and assessment in this report considered multiple long-term strategic trends, including economic growth or decline, changing demographics in key states, and stresses on regional and global governance; however, none were judged to be significant drivers of specific change in military theater design for 2028 and beyond.

### **Assumption 1**

*The United States will adopt a more competitive, proactive approach to defend its interests in the USINDOPACOM area of responsibility (AOR).* As the primary study sponsor, the Secretary of the Army (SECARMY) was keen to look at USINDOPACOM theater-design options through the filter of the 2018 *National Defense Strategy* (NDS). Chapter 3 describes the course that this assessment took.

Both the 2017 *National Security Strategy* and the 2018 *National Defense Strategy* identified great-power competition as the United States' primary future security challenge. The *Department of Defense Indo-Pacific Strategy Report* designated the USINDOPACOM AOR as the United States' "priority theater."<sup>1</sup> All three documents identify three countries in the Indo-Pacific region as active US rivals and threats to long-term US interests: the People's Republic of China (PRC), Russia, and North Korea.<sup>2</sup>

Among the United States' three regional rivals, The People's Republic of China stands out as the nation's pacing military challenge. Current USINDOPACOM Commander Admiral Philip Davidson encapsulated this position in testimony, stating, "China . . . represents the greatest long-term strategic threat to a Free and Open Indo-Pacific and to the United States."<sup>3</sup> Chapter 6, "The Indo-Pacific Military Problem," describes the character of the pacing PRC challenge in greater detail.

This study anticipates that regional great-power competition between the United States and China will remain below the threshold of armed conflict for the foreseeable future. The PRC engages in gray-zone maneuver for a variety of reasons, including to weaken US strategic position regionwide and constrain US freedom of action.<sup>4</sup> Successive analyses by myriad experts suggest reactive US approaches to China's gray-zone

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1. US Department of Defense (DoD), *The Department of Defense Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnerships, and Promoting a Networked Region* (Washington, DC: DoD, June 1, 2019).

2. James Mattis, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America: Sharpening the American Military's Competitive Edge* (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense [OSD], January 19, 2018).

3. *Posture of United States Indo-Pacific Command and United States Forces Korea: Hearing before the Senate Armed Services Committee*, 116th Cong. (February 12, 2019) (statements of Admiral Philip S. Davidson and General Robert B. Abrams), <https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/hearings/19-02-12-united-states-indo-pacific-command-and-united-states-forces-korea>.

4. Michael J. Mazarr, *Mastering the Gray Zone: Understanding a Changing Era of Conflict* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College [USAWC] Press, 2015); Michael J. Green et al., *Countering Coercion in Maritime Asia: The Theory and Practice of Gray Zone Deterrence* (Washington, DC: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017); Kathleen Hicks et al., *By Other Means Part 1: Campaigning in the Gray Zone* (Washington, DC: Rowman and Littlefield, 2019); and Nathan Freier et al., *Outplayed: Regaining Strategic Initiative in the Gray Zone* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, USAWC Press, 2016).



challenge are unlikely to succeed, and virtually all conclude the United States would benefit from a more activist approach.<sup>5</sup>

The ongoing reorientation of US national security and defense strategy toward great-power competition and greater attendant defense of US interests in the USINDOPACOM theater indicate activity has already increased, and the United States is likely to pursue a more proactive gray-zone campaign in the future. Examples of reoriented or refocused US government activity include the 2017 *National Security Strategy*, the 2018 *National Defense Strategy*, the 2019 *Department of Defense Indo-Pacific Strategy Report*, and expanded authorities and funding for development and international finance agencies, as demonstrated by the Better Utilization of Investments Leading to Development Act of 2018.<sup>6</sup> Although not confined to the military instrument of power, the gray-zone campaign will have a significant Joint military component to it. By itself, more activist counter-PRC gray-zone approaches point toward significant changes across the five elements of theater design described in the analytic framework above.

## Assumption 2

*Active US-China military competition will accelerate.* Ongoing PRC investment in conceptual and material military innovation and cutting-edge military technologies progressively provide China with multi-domain military capabilities. Further, China is building a deep bench of expertise and knowledge focused on the effective employment of innovative military capabilities and concepts of operation.<sup>7</sup> As both capability and experience accumulate, China expands its ability to deter or counter potential US intervention or military action in Asia and the western Pacific.<sup>8</sup>

In sum, the arc of The People's Republic of China military modernization suggests China will possess a large, highly advanced Joint Force by 2028 and beyond. That force will feature manned and unmanned fighters and bombers; ballistic and cruise missiles; manned and unmanned naval surface and subsurface vessels; up to three aircraft carriers; cyber, electromagnetic spectrum, and space assets; and a sophisticated terrestrial and

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5. See, for example, Ashley Townshend et al., *Averting Crisis: American Strategy, Military Spending, and Collective Defence in the Indo-Pacific* (Sydney, Australia: United States Studies Centre, August 19, 2019); and Linda Robinson et al., *Modern Political Warfare* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2018), 294–307.

6. For a summary of the Better Utilization of Investments Leading to Development Act of 2018, see George Ingram, "How the BUILD Act Advances Development," Brookings (blog), July 10, 2018, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/future-development/2018/07/10/how-the-build-act-advances-development/>.

7. DoD, *Assessment on US Defense Implications of China's Expanding Global Access* (Washington, DC: DoD, December 2018).

8. James McBride and Andrew Chatzky, *Backgrounder: Is 'Made in China 2025' a Threat to Global Trade?* (Washington, DC: Council on Foreign Relations, May 13, 2019), <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/made-china-2025-threat-global-trade>; European Chamber of Commerce in China, *China Manufacturing 2025: Putting Industrial Policy ahead of Market Forces* (Beijing, China: European Chamber of Commerce in China, 2017); and Lindsay Maizland, *Backgrounder: China's Modernizing Military* (Washington, DC: Council on Foreign Relations, February 5, 2020), <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/chinas-modernizing-military>.

space-based intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance network.<sup>9</sup> In combination, Chinese joint military assets already provide the PRC with significant regional coercive power and present US and partner joint forces with a potent anti-access/area-denial challenge.

These resident and expected capabilities are the products of the PRC's 20-year military transformation. The capabilities are an indication of a long-standing PRC effort to establish a more competitive and disruptive Indo-Pacific military posture and an ability to wield considerable coercive influence across the region at the expense of US and partner interests.

The US-Soviet Cold War standoff proved that possession of large, capable military forces operating in close proximity to one another does not automatically indicate the inevitability of military conflict. But China's high-tempo, 20-year military transformation, its regional ambitions, and its hostility toward an American-led regional order make US-China competition and rivalry inevitable.

Each rival sees the other as a pacing military challenge.<sup>10</sup> The American military is just now reorienting itself to counter PRC military development, whereas the best open-source estimates indicate China has long focused its military modernization on countering US military forces in a regional context.<sup>11</sup> Thus, this study assumes active military competition—or hypercompetition—is inevitable between the United States and the PRC through and beyond the coming decade.

Until recently, the United States enjoyed unprecedented qualitative and quantitative advantages vis-à-vis China. The extant regional military balance was in the People's Republic of China's favor. For now and through 2028, however, that favorable balance will be increasingly contested given the PRC's military transformation and its skillful manipulation of US risk perceptions.

### **Assumption 3**

*The Republic of Korea (RoK) will assume greater responsibility for its conventional land defense.* This study assumes US political commitment to RoK defense will remain unaltered and the US-South Korea mutual defense treaty will endure through 2028. Nonetheless, some specifics in US-RoK defense cooperation will likely evolve over the coming decade. This study's most fundamental assumption is South Korea will assume greater responsibility for its conventional land defense. A variety of factors contribute

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9. OSD, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2019* (Washington, DC: OSD, May 2, 2019).

10. Mattis, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy*; Mark Cancian et al., *Formulating National Security Strategy: Past Experience and Future Choices* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, October 2017); and Information Office of the State Council, "China's National Defense in the New Era 2019" (white paper, Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, July 24, 2019).

11. Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), *China Military Power: Modernizing a Force to Fight and Win* (Washington, DC: DIA, 2019), 23; and Hal Brands and Zack Cooper, "Getting Serious About Strategy in the South China Sea," *Naval War College Review* 71, no. 1 (March 6, 2018).

to this determination. The report expands on this further in chapter 6, “The Indo-Pacific Military Problem.”

One prominent consideration is the presumption that although the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) will continue developing, testing, and fielding ballistic missiles and weapons of mass destruction, its conventional forces will atrophy. Parallel to this development, this study assumes progress toward the transition of wartime operational control from a US commander to a South Korean commander and South Korea’s ongoing Army modernization toward a more robust, full-spectrum capability will increase Republic of Korea confidence while materially reducing contingency demands on American forces for large-scale ground combat. US forces, including a large number of US ground forces, are, however, anticipated to remain stationed in South Korea to complement and augment the South Korean military.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, the primary focus for regional US Army readiness – large-scale, combined arms maneuver with conventional RoK forces – will likely shift in emphasis over the next 10 years to a range of mission-specific enabling tasks in support of combined South Korea and US Joint Forces. Tasks will likely include critical enabling in the areas of sustainment, protection, fires, mission command, and intelligence (and information). Joint multi-domain fires will remain key US warfighting contributions in the event of conflict on the Korean peninsula.<sup>13</sup> This study anticipates some decline in the requirement for US ground maneuver forces in most warfighting scenarios.

This assumption has obvious implications for the US Army in the Indo-Pacific region. Two implications are particularly salient. First, the demand from Korea for more advanced kinetic and nonkinetic, multi-domain fires will likely increase. Second, enabling Allied and Joint Forces – with a focus on protection, sustainment, intelligence, and mission command – will become more important to Korean warfighting scenarios. Should the Korean peninsula become a hub of theater-wide security, these capabilities will become increasingly valuable to a more distributed, multi-domain concept for regional competition and conflict.

#### **Assumption 4**

*The United States will retain six Indo-Pacific anchor partners.* Current defense strategy calls for expanding the network of Allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific region.<sup>14</sup> Doing so will be critical to seizing the strategic initiative and expanding the competitive space in the theater vis-à-vis China. But this study also assumes the United States will retain six anchor partners: Australia, Japan, the Philippines, South Korea, Singapore, and Taiwan.

Researchers from the US Army War College (USAWC) judged these six nations to be essential Allies and partners based on four considerations. All have some formal security relationship with the United States. Australia, Japan, the Philippines, and South Korea are Allies through bilateral mutual defense treaties. Singapore is a reliable regional US strategic partner that routinely opens its facilities to visiting US forces, including

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12. Statement of General Robert B. Abrams in *Posture of United States Indo-Pacific Command*.

13. Statement of General Robert B. Abrams in *Posture of United States Indo-Pacific Command*.

14. Mattis, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy*, 9.

hosting rotational US naval forces on a regular basis. Likewise, the United States remains committed to Taiwan, through the Taiwan Relations Act, to provide sufficient defense articles and services for it to maintain sufficient self-defense capability.

All six nations occupy strategic geography. All have a long-standing history of meaningful defense cooperation with the United States. Finally, all are deemed by USAWC researchers as likely to maintain or expand US military presence, engage in more detailed collaborative (mostly bilateral) military strategy development and planning with the United States, and/or develop and field complementary military capabilities and forces.

This assumption in no way precludes the expansion of a complementary network of military partnerships regionwide. Nor does it preclude the emergence of new anchor partners. This study recognizes the United States maintains important relationships—including mutual defense treaties—with many states in the region not considered to be anchor partners. Top among these are Thailand, New Zealand, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mongolia, and Vietnam. But current impediments to stronger defense ties between the United States and each of these latter countries will continue through 2028.

### **Assumption 5**

*Allies and partners will not combine with the United States into a formal collective security arrangement.* The Indo-Pacific security architecture is less structured than that of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. The architecture is commonly described as a hub-and-spoke arrangement because the United States and its Allies have no multilateral mutual defense treaties with any of the countries in the region. Instead, US and Allied interests in the region are secured through bilateral mutual defense treaties, less formal individual partnership agreements, international law, and US legislation.<sup>15</sup>

This study assumes that by 2028, the Indo-Pacific region will not have a multilateral mutual defense treaty binding the United States and a significant group of like-minded states into a unitary alliance structure in the same way the North Atlantic Treaty Organization does in Europe. Although Europe has demonstrated the benefits of such a framework—particularly under the best of conditions—the countries of the Indo-Pacific region lack Europe’s level of interest in a multinational alliance. No indicators suggest that conditions will change by 2028 to make a regional mutual defense arrangement any likelier.

### **Assumption 6**

*Allies and partners will continue to welcome some combination of permanent, rotational, and expeditionary US force presence.* Posture is the physical manifestation of US forces in a theater (throughout this study, posture is defined as the combination of forces and capabilities; footprint and presence; and authorities, permissions, and agreements). This study assumes US treaty allies—and many nontreaty partners—will continue to

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15. Bruce Vaughn, *US Strategic and Defense Relationships in the Asia-Pacific Region*, RL33821 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, January 22, 2007), 14–26.

welcome US forces in some combination of permanent, rotational, and expeditionary presence in 2028 and beyond.

The United States has had military forces stationed in the Indo-Pacific region since before the turn of the last century. That presence became more robust after World War II and through the Cold War. Today, US forces are stationed in or operate throughout the region on a continuous basis. Current theater postures range from permanent main operating bases in Japan, South Korea, Hawaii, and Guam to a lighter rotational presence in Australia, the Philippines, and Singapore. In addition, American forces maintain a more expeditionary presence through routine theater operations and exercises. This study assumes the current pattern will continue into 2028 and beyond.

Transformation to a hypercompetitive theater design is predicated on seizing the initiative and deliberately expanding the competitive space; this includes exploring new opportunities for an expanded or rapidly expandable theater force posture. This work will argue in more detail that posture is one of a handful of areas ripe for short-term, hypercompetitive quick wins in the USINDOPACOM AOR.

Although this study assumes Allies and partners will continue to host American forces in some combination of permanent, rotational, and expeditionary presence, it also assumes growth through 2028 will most likely arrive via impermanent, low-cost, largely expeditionary change. In other words, to the extent the United States desires and is able to increase its military presence in the theater, that presence will be a more distributed, lower-visibility operational posture conducive to simultaneously generating expanded Joint Force options and new rival dilemmas across both competition and conflict.

### **Assumption 7**

*Distributed multi-domain strategy, plans, and operations will characterize the Joint Force approach to the USINDOPACOM AOR.* This report assumes distributed multi-domain approaches represent the next generation of Joint Force concepts and will characterize future US military operations in both competition and conflict. Given the nature of the challenge from the People's Republic of China, this assumption will prove particularly true in the USINDOPACOM AOR.

Inherent in this assumption is the military services and the Department of Defense (DoD) will continue to invest in the connective and integrative capabilities necessary for operationalizing Joint multi-domain operations (MDO)—increasingly also referred to as Joint all-domain operations. Further, USAWC researchers assumed the Joint Force will continue to experiment with and refine concepts of operation that will enable and enhance the Joint Force's distributed multi-domain competence.

The US Army is embracing and refining its own MDO concept.<sup>16</sup> Sister services are also pursuing operational concepts focused on decidedly distributed, multi-domain characteristics. The US Air Force, for example, is pursuing innovation in multi-domain command and control and agile combat employment.<sup>17</sup> Likewise, the Navy-Marine

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16. US Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC), *The US Army in Multi-Domain Operations 2028*, TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-1 (Fort Eustis, VA: TRADOC, December 6, 2018).

17. Amy McCullough, "Ace in the Hole," *Air Force Magazine*, March 30, 2017, <https://www.airforcemag.com/article/ace-in-the-hole/>.

Corps team—individually and together—is developing distributed maritime operations and expeditionary advanced base operations.<sup>18</sup>

All of these concepts have inherent value in a USINDOPACOM context. All are pursued with China’s thorny and maturing anti-access/area-denial complex in mind. But none are being pursued and actively adapted according to an integrated, theater-specific vision or within a unified Joint Force concept. This report assumes that by 2028, service concepts will conform to an integrated, hypercompetitive, theater-focused Joint concept for competition and conflict, and the concept will be predicated on widely distributed MDO.

### **Assumption 8**

*US Army forces will adopt a comprehensive “on and from land” operational concept within a Joint, multi-domain context.* Commensurate with the assumption that the Joint Force will adopt a multi- or all-domain outlook going forward, this study assumes that by 2028, the US Army will more fully develop and ultimately operationalize an evolved, more mature concept for MDO focused on enabling a Joint, and possibly combined, MDO campaign. This effort would involve more than the provision of forces for “sustained land dominance,” as called for in *The Army Strategy* of 2018.<sup>19</sup>

This study suggests the Army will (or should) increasingly focus on generating effects on land against rival ground forces and expand this effort into the air, sea, cyber, and space domains, as well as the highly contested electromagnetic spectrum and strategic influence spaces. This study also finds that the Army can underwrite Joint effects across domains and contested spaces through critical enabling functions. The study team found that a more mature and realistic Army MDO concept should reflect department-level, Joint military, and sister-service perspectives. Further, the Army MDO concept should accommodate the significant differences between the two priority multi-domain theaters and threats: US European Command/Russia and USINDOPACOM/the People’s Republic of China.

This study assumes a US Army multi-domain model for the Indo-Pacific region specifically will need to be predicated first on the Army as the principal enabling foundation for widely distributed Joint operations across domains and contested spaces (air, sea, space, cyberspace, the electromagnetic spectrum, and the strategic influence space). Although lethal and nonlethal multi-domain effects from Army forces contribute to favorable outcomes in this model, the enabling of Joint MDO by US Army forces theater-wide in both competition and conflict is equally, if not significantly more, decisive.

Thus, the study assumes that Army multi-domain concepts and materiel solutions will continue to evolve. That evolution will pursue parallel adaptations. A first will be predicated on the Army projecting multi-domain warfighting effects “on and from land”

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18. Thomas S. Rowden, Peter Gumataotao, and Peter Fanta, “Distributed Lethality,” *Proceedings* 141, no. 1 (January 2015); and David H. Berger, *Commandant’s Planning Guidance: 38th Commandant of the Marine Corps* (Washington, DC: Department of the Navy, United States Marine Corps, 2019).

19. Mark T. Esper and Mark A. Milley, *The Army Strategy* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2018).

as part of a Joint whole.<sup>20</sup> A second sees Army forces enable Joint and foreign partners to deliver important multi-domain effects with decisive, enabling support also on and from land. The two conflict but are not irreconcilable.

### **Assumption 9**

*The United States will primarily field capabilities anticipated in the president's budget for fiscal year 2020.* The ninth assumption holds that by 2028, neither the US Army nor the Joint Force will field game-changing operational capabilities that are not programmed in the president's fiscal year 2020 request. New capabilities will likely mature over the next decade, and may come online by 2028. But this study assumes none will be fielded in strategically significant quantities, nor will they be deployed in ways that decisively tip the regional military balance in the United States' favor over the forthcoming decade.

The emergence of silver bullets would be welcome. At present, steady progress toward and essential course adjustments in the Army's Big Six material priorities, as well as quick wins in operational concepts, task organization, mission tailoring, and physical posture, would yield hypercompetitive quick wins. The more these elements are combined in a Joint Force approach to the USINDOPACOM theater and the People's Republic of China, the more likely it will be that the United States will have more options sooner to seize the strategic initiative, expand the competitive space, and restore a much more favorable regional military balance.

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20. Nathan P. Freier, "Op-Ed: Toward an Army Story: It's Not the 'People' Part, It's the 'Land' Part," Strategic Studies Institute, USAWC Press, accessed June 8, 2020, <https://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/op-ed-toward-an-army-story-its-not-the-people-part-its-the-land-part/>.





## CHAPTER 6: THE INDO-PACIFIC MILITARY PROBLEM

### Key Insights: The Indo-Pacific Military Problem

- Hypercompetition is most acute in the Indo-Pacific region.
- The Indo-Pacific region is home to three active rivals: the pacer, the legacy, and the spoiler.
- China is the United States' most significant military rival since the Cold War.
- The central military problem is preventing China from making coercive change in the Indo-Pacific region.

### THE PACER, THE LEGACY, AND THE SPOILER

The United States is in the midst of a hypercompetitive post-primacy environment.<sup>1</sup> Hypercompetition is most acute where US political, economic, and security interests are most challenged: in the United States Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) area of responsibility (AOR). The challenge stems from the Indo-Pacific region being home to three active US military rivals: the People's Republic of China (PRC), the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), and the Russian Federation (Russia). Each seeks to enhance its strategic position and achieve its strategic objectives at the expense of the United States and its partners. The PRC is a transforming and pacing military rival; the DPRK, a legacy, traditional threat; and Russia, a regional spoiler.

China has been the United States' most significant strategic competitor since the end of the Cold War. Within the context of that rivalry, USINDOPACOM is also the region where the erosion of US military advantage is most apparent.<sup>2</sup> At present, the United States retains a qualitative military edge vis-à-vis the PRC. Thus far, the United States has defended its regional interests and fulfilled its security obligations in the USINDOPACOM AOR relative to PRC military transformation and gray-zone maneuver. But China's rapidly expanding military capability and reach are becoming increasingly problematic to US strategists. This problem will compound through the next decade.

In 2028 and beyond, the United States will most likely be locked in a progressively more intense hypercompetitive contest with China for transient but exploitable military advantages across Joint domains and defense-relevant contested spaces; these spaces include air, land, sea, space, cyberspace, the electromagnetic spectrum, and strategic influence. This reality will be made more complex and challenging to the extent that North Korea and Russia will remain active regional military challengers.

In combination, these factors place USINDOPACOM at the center of American strategic decision making for the foreseeable future. Hypercompetition between the

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1. Nathan Freier et al., *At Our Own Peril: DoD Risk Assessment in a Post-Primacy World* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College [USAWC] Press, July 2017).

2. *Posture of United States Indo-Pacific Command and United States Forces Korea: Hearings before the Senate Armed Services Committee, 116th Cong.* (February 12, 2019) (statements of Admiral Philip S. Davidson and General Robert B. Abrams), <https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/hearings/19-02-12-united-states-indo-pacific-command-and-united-states-forces-korea>; and Ashley Townshend et al., *Averting Crisis: American Strategy, Military Spending, and Collective Defence in the Indo-Pacific* (Sydney, Australia: United States Studies Centre, August 19, 2019), 2.

United States and China in the Indo-Pacific region is a fundamentally different military problem than US strategists have become accustomed to confronting.

At present, the People's Republic of China's offensive gray-zone maneuver is buying time and space for the PRC's multidecade military modernization effort to fully mature – in many cases, at the expense of US interests in the region. That transformation's principal objectives are simple: (1) deny American military regional freedom of action by manipulating US risk perceptions and materially eroding American military credibility; (2) deter active US military intervention in the core interests of the PRC (for example, Taiwan reunification, territorial claims in the South and East China Seas, etc.); and (3) defeat US forces in a theater conflict should deterrence fail.<sup>3</sup>

The United States' military challenge in the USINDOPACOM theater for 2028 and beyond is to deny coercive change to the Indo-Pacific status quo by a revisionist power. Researchers from the US Army War College (USAWC) assess that this will require an urgent military transformation across the five elements of theater design introduced earlier (strategy and operational concepts; forces and capabilities; footprint and presence; authorities, permissions, and agreements; and mission command arrangements).

## **THE PAST AND PRESENT AS PROLOGUE: THE INDO-PACIFIC'S 2028 MILITARY PROBLEM**

Given current trends, the 2028 Indo-Pacific military problem will grow even more pronounced, complex, and sophisticated. Despite the continued challenge of three consequential regional competitors, the PRC will remain the United States' most durable, comprehensive, and consequential challenger over the short, medium, and long term, both regionally and globally. The People's Republic of China's is ascendant, well-resourced, and transformational.

By 2028, China will present the United States with twin hazards that, when combined, separate the PRC from all other contenders. First, the PRC will pose obvious threats of strategically consequential political, economic, and military injury. Second, the PRC will actively contest US strategic position in the Indo-Pacific with the specific purpose of replacing the United States as the region's principal arbiter of political, security, and economic outcomes.

In the military sphere specifically, the PRC will continue contesting US position across all nine hypercompetitive fundamentals: strength of interest, legitimacy, innovation, strategic capacity, speed and agility, surprise, shifting rules, strategic signaling, and disruptive maneuver.<sup>4</sup> Consistent with recent open-source intelligence judgments, the United States can anticipate that the People's Liberation Army will expand on its current and emerging strengths (long-range precision strike, information warfare, nuclear second strike, power projection, special operations, and civil-military fusion (that is, gray-zone actions) and innovate to offset identified short-term vulnerabilities (logistics,

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3. Robert D. Kaplan, *Asia's Cauldron: The South China Sea and the End of a Stable Pacific* (New York: Random House, 2014), 28.

4. 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/>.

command and control, and Joint operations) over the next decade.<sup>5</sup> Thus, by 2028 and beyond, a substantially transformed and hypercompetitive People's Liberation Army and its various service components will be more capable, competent, and confident theater-wide, multi-domain challengers.<sup>6</sup>

The People's Republic of China and its increasingly more capable multi-domain People's Liberation Army will continue aggressive counter-US gray-zone maneuvers across and within Joint domains and contested spaces.<sup>7</sup> By 2028, the PRC's comprehensive military power and regional access will have advanced to a point where they rival US and partner military capabilities in regions near China.

As stated by the National Defense Strategy Review Commission, "the US military could lose the next state-versus-state war it fights."<sup>8</sup> In short, now and through 2028, an American failure to offset PRC military transformation adequately and counter-US gray-zone campaigning with a coherent, countervailing, strategic approach risks the irresponsible loss of American military position and influence in a region that is consistently identified as vital to US security and prosperity.

In addition to the the People's Republic of China, the legacy Democratic People's Republic of Korea threat will remain in 2028. Although the extent to which North Korea remains a fixture of USINDOPACOM insecurity is a significant future "known unknown," there is one 2028 "known known" relative to the DPRK.

Given the likelihood of an expanding US-China multi-domain peer rivalry and a presumption of negative qualitative changes in North Korea's conventional readiness, the importance and urgency of the DPRK threat in US defense calculations will most likely decline over the next decade. Despite this assumed relative decline, however, a conservative middle path on the future DPRK threat trajectory remains relevant for US regional strategy and plans.

Thus, US strategists can anticipate North Korea will continue to complicate US risk calculations. These complications will occur through some combination of positive and negative political-military actions and forces. These actions and forces include continued PRC political top cover, presumed DPRK regime fragility, cyclical DPRK provocation and accommodation, some warming of cross-border relations, and the soft employment of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery as instruments of coercive

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5. Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), *China Military Power: Modernizing a Force to Fight and Win* (Washington, DC: DIA, 2019), 27; and Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2019* (Washington, DC: OSD, May 2, 2019).

6. Sandeep Gopalan, "China Has Transformed Its Military to 'Fight and Win Wars,' Pentagon Warns," Australian Broadcasting Corporation News, September 2, 2018, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-09-02/pentagon-report-on-chinas-military-contains-warnings-australia/10148162>.

7. Dr. Jeffrey M. Reilly, "Multidomain Operations: A Subtle but Significant Transition in Military Thought," *Air & Space Power Journal* 30, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 13; and John Schaus and Michael Matlaga, "Competing in the Gray Zone," *Critical Questions*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, October 24, 2018, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/competing-gray-zone-0>.

8. Eric Edelman et al., *Providing for the Common Defense* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, November 13, 2018).

regional influence. These forces and activities will be targeted predominantly at two US treaty allies – South Korea and Japan – as well as the United States.

In 2028 and beyond, North Korea will likely retain significant conventional military capability. But the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea’s conventional forces will almost certainly decline in quality, readiness, and reliability.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, North Korea will continue fielding weapons of mass destruction.<sup>10</sup> The DPRK’s nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons and their delivery systems will generate the greatest strategic-level concern among US decision makers.

Public testimony from the director of national intelligence indicates North Korea will continue modernizing and fielding more advanced nuclear systems and their means of delivery for the foreseeable future.<sup>11</sup> Despite the likelihood of the DPRK’s conventional capability atrophying by 2028, its military forces will retain significant conventional mass, vast numbers of fielded long-range fire systems (artillery, rockets, and missiles), and a more mature offensive cyber capability; these, in combination with the DPRK’s weapons of mass destruction and related delivery systems, will afford it significant potential coercive leverage over South Korea, Japan, and the United States. Therefore, North Korea is likely to remain a lingering strategic concern for the United States and its northeast Asian Allies through the next decade and beyond.

Finally, Russia will not abandon its traditional security interests in northeast Asia or along its Indo-Pacific periphery by 2028. Russia’s territory and physical presence in northeast Asia will be perceived by Moscow as both vulnerability and opportunity.<sup>12</sup> Although Russian forces and Russian military activity in northeast Asia may provide it with potential leverage over the United States, Japan, Korea, China, and Central Asian states, by 2028 Russia will likely be more focused on securing its European near abroad.

Prudent US strategic planning, therefore, calls for a conservative approach focused on Russia as a potent counter-US spoiler in the USINDOPACOM AOR. Despite the potential for friction between regional US rivals, Russia shares with China and North Korea a common interest in undermining US strategic position in the Indo-Pacific region. This common interest offers Russia an open-ended opportunity to combine when convenient with either US rival to apply coercive military leverage.

The worst-case scenario—a formal China-Russia counter-US entente—is unlikely. Russian military forces will nonetheless continue to operate with strength at significant levels of activity in northeast Asia and throughout the USINDOPACOM AOR in 2028 and beyond. Recent activities have demonstrated a PRC-Russian willingness to combine

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9. Kyle Mizokami, “North Korea’s Military Is Falling Apart—Is Kim Jong Un’s Regime Next?,” *Week*, August 6, 2014, <https://theweek.com/articles/444795/north-koreas-military-falling-apart--kim-jong-uns-regime-next>.

10. John M. Donnelly, “The Other North Korean Threat: Chemical and Biological Weapons,” *CQ Roll Call*, June 12, 2018, <https://www.rollcall.com/2018/06/12/the-other-north-korean-threat-chemical-and-biological-weapons/>.

11. Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI), *Worldwide Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community* (Washington, DC: ODNI, February 13, 2018), 9.

12. Alexey D. Muraviev, *BEARing Back: Russia’s Military Power in the Indo-Asia-Pacific under Vladimir Putin* (Barton, Australia: Australian Strategic Policy Institute, February 15, 2018).

in military activities that signal cooperation and coordination. The deepening of such a cooperation would be reason to reevaluate the possibility of a PRC-Russian entente.<sup>13</sup>

Proximity enables Russia to apply direct pressure on US Allies Japan and South Korea. Though principally a continental landpower, increasing Russian multi-domain capability is extending the country's reach, influence, and impact, affording it opportunity and motive to project power beyond continental Eurasia and either spoil US designs or reshape with the other two rivals the regional military balance at the expense of the United States and its Allies.<sup>14</sup>

In light of the aforementioned factors, the United States should assume no permanent Indo-Pacific military advantages for 2028 and beyond. Rather, the United States should plan for periods of meaningful disadvantage across some subset of highly contested domains and competitive spaces. US military forces will be beset by new, more intense levels of hypercompetition defined by an ongoing and intense regional struggle to gain, hold, and exploit transient military advantages. China and, to the extent it chooses to engage, the United States will pace Indo-Pacific hypercompetition. But North Korea's potent legacy military threat and Russia's expanding multi-domain capability can be costly US and Allied strategic diversions from China's pursuit of a substantially altered, unfavorable, revisionist regional military balance.<sup>15</sup>

A transformational focus on China would yield an adequate set of credible military options to contend with either North Korea or Russia in isolation. Conversely, excessive or outsized concentration on either the Democratic People's Republic of Korea or Russia (in an Indo-Pacific context) at the expense of a China-focused transformation would be imprudent and risky. The study has more to say on this latter point in chapter 10, "Conclusion."

## CONTOURS OF A 2028 JOINT MILITARY SOLUTION

This survey of the Indo-Pacific military problem suggests substantial erosion of US military position will occur absent significant adaptation. As strategic conditions in the USINDOPACOM AOR devolve toward a less favorable and less stable regional security order, USINDOPACOM's legacy design will be increasingly unsuited for the region's strategic dynamics: persistent hypercompetition with China and the complications of a legacy North Korea and a potentially more activist Russia.

Past assumptions, biases, and choices about the US military approach to the Indo-Pacific region are insufficient for current and future strategic conditions at the theater level. The 2018 *National Defense Strategy* (NDS) calls for an expansion of the competitive

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13. Franz-Stefan Gady, "China, Russia Conduct First Ever Joint Strategic Bomber Patrol Flights in Indo-Pacific Region," *Diplomat*, July 23, 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/07/china-russia-conduct-first-ever-joint-strategic-bomber-patrol-flights-in-indo-pacific-region/>.

14. Thomas S. Griesemer, "Russian Military Reorganization: A Step toward Multi-Domain Operations," *Over the Horizon*, November 19, 2018, <https://othjournal.com/2018/11/19/russian-military-reorganization-a-step-toward-multi-domain-operations/>.

15. Thomas Wright, "Op-Ed: China and Russia vs. America: Great-Power Revisionism Is Back," *Brookings*, April 27, 2015, <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/china-and-russia-vs-america-great-power-revisionism-is-back/>.

space vis-à-vis emerging great-power rivals.<sup>16</sup> The People's Republic of China is already committed to expanding the competitive space, and US efforts to respond are just getting underway.

This study notes the PRC has a significant head start in adapting to Indo-Pacific hypercompetition. Discussions with current and former government officials and military officers highlight that the United States has changed its approach since the beginning of the Trump administration, including President Trump's less structured or formalized approach to negotiations and risk-taking. In addition, attitudes are shifting among many in Washington's Asia-Pacific policy community on the risk-reward balance for continuing status-quo engagement with China.<sup>17</sup>

This reality implies some US catch-up is both in order and perhaps underway. More importantly, however, this reality argues for deliberate changes in USINDOPACOM's Joint theater design. Researchers at the USAWC suggest USINDOPACOM will have to begin with a unified, theater-level, Joint concept for competition and conflict paced by China.

This report ultimately recommends a transformational Army theater design within a presumed Joint concept focused on achieving a more favorable and durable military balance. Any positive change in the military balance should contribute decisively to the security of a "free and open Indo-Pacific."<sup>18</sup> The point of greatest emphasis for changes in theater design is regaining the strategic initiative and expanding the competitive space relative to the PRC.

In the process, however, prudent, risk-based planning requires some attention to the related goal of limiting Democratic People's Republic of Korea and Russian coercive influence and freedom of action. This report focuses on adaptation to China and assesses that changes that contribute to a more credible competition and conflict presence vis-à-vis the People's Republic of China will also contribute to other regional challenges.

Successful adaptation in USINDOPACOM theater design will not occur absent complementary innovation in the political and economic space. But defense and military conceptual innovation may have to inspire parallel political and economic change. Chapter 7 will present the key strategic insights that led to this study's findings and recommendations.

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16. James Mattis, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America: Sharpening the American Military's Competitive Edge* (Washington, DC: OSD, January 19, 2018), 5.

17. A clear example of this can be seen in Kurt M. Campbell and Ely Ratner, "The China Reckoning," *Foreign Affairs* 97, no. 2 (April 2018).

18. Donald J. Trump, "Remarks by President Trump at APEC CEO Summit" (speech, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Chief Executive Officer Summit, Da Nang, Vietnam, November 10, 2017).

## CHAPTER 7. STRATEGIC INSIGHTS

### Key Takeaways: Seven Strategic Insights

- The United States has ceded strategic initiative in the United States Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) area of responsibility (AOR) to the pacing rival, China.
- The Indo-Pacific region is a vast, Joint, multi-domain theater of operations.
- Anchor partners are essential but insufficient to expand the competitive space.
- Active competition and preparation for armed conflict are inseparable components of USINDOPACOM theater design.
- The Joint and service posture in the Indo-Pacific region needs greater depth, resilience, agility, and redundancy.
- Joint Force success in the Indo-Pacific region relies on a transformed Army theater design predicated on enabling the Joint Force.
- Seizing the strategic initiative and expanding the competitive space in the Indo-Pacific region require that the Army and Joint Force persistently operate, experiment, adapt, and compete.

This study arrived at seven major insights. The insights are top-level conclusions that have a direct bearing on Joint Force and Army theater design. These seven insights are separated from study findings because they are foundational from a geostrategic; theater; or defense, Joint, or service component perspective. In some cases, the insights point directly to a specific finding or recommendation. In other cases, the insights provide decision-making principles for defense and military leadership. These strategic insights provide the foundation for this report's outcomes.

### INSIGHT 1

*The United States has ceded strategic initiative in the United States Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) area of responsibility (AOR) to the pacing People's Republic of China (PRC) rival.* The most consistent US Army War College (USAWC) research conclusion on the subject of the Indo-Pacific region over the previous four years has been the United States is reactive and off-balance militarily in the face of a transforming, activist, and hypercompetitive PRC rival.<sup>1</sup> Broad expert and stakeholder consensus has been reached on this point.<sup>2</sup> This challenge spans all Joint domains and contested competitive spaces referenced in this report. The inclusion of seizing the strategic initiative and expanding the competitive space in the 2018 *National Defense Strategy* (NDS) is tacit senior-level acknowledgment of this reality.<sup>3</sup> The current US position is not irredeemable; however, a transformational perspective on theater design will be required if US vulnerability is to be reversed.

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1. Kurt M. Campbell and Ely Ratner, "The China Reckoning," *Foreign Affairs* 97, no. 2 (April 2018).

2. Eric Edelman et al., *Providing for the Common Defense* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, November 13, 2018), vii-viii; and Michael J. Green et al., *Countering Coercion in Maritime Asia: The Theory and Practice of Gray Zone Deterrence* (Washington, DC: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017), 19.

3. James Mattis, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America: Sharpening the American Military's Competitive Edge* (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), January 19, 2018), 4.

China consistently operates inside the US decision-making cycle.<sup>4</sup> Research conducted at the USAWC finds that where the PRC appears to operate according to a deliberate strategic design, the United States reacts, if it acts at all. Further, China's strategic design appears focused on overturning the existing regional status quo, denying future US military options, and elevating US and partner risk sensitivity.<sup>5</sup> Previous USAWC work calls the latter effect "risk confusion."<sup>6</sup>

Risk confusion is the by-product of incremental acts of the People's Republic of China gray-zone aggression that—in isolation—appear less significant than the sum that ultimately emerges. In risk confusion, the hazard associated with acting against obvious aggression and the hazard associated with not acting appear equally undesirable. The first choice threatens costly military escalation, and the latter choice promises an erosion of position and influence. As the latter choice generally amounts to deferred hazard in the minds of US decision makers, it is often the default choice. Unfortunately, the progressive aggregation of PRC wins and realization of a PRC fait accompli ultimately leave the United States with only the costliest military options.

The United States retains numerous important strengths in the USINDOPACOM theater, three of which are most important for military hypercompetition. These strengths can form the basis of a more activist US campaign to regain the strategic initiative and effectively expand the competitive space.

First among US-retained strengths is the depth and breadth of American partnerships in the Indo-Pacific region. Five treaty allies, numerous close and important partners, and the decades-long pursuit of mutually beneficial, prosperity-enhancing policies provide the United States with a reservoir of potential goodwill from which to draw renewed motivation for active hypercompetition.

Second, the United States continues to be the security partner of choice for many regional actors. Continued security cooperation and partner willingness to exercise and work alongside the United States at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels remain strong indications that many states recognize the United States as an important counterweight to a potentially dominant People's Republic of China.

Third, the United States is already present throughout the USINDOPACOM theater. The US Joint Force is more forward-deployed in the USINDOPACOM AOR than in any other theater.<sup>7</sup> Those in-theater forces and forces deploying from the continental United States routinely engage in exercises, shaping activities, security assistance,

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4. Kathleen H. Hicks, John Schaus, and Michael Matlaga, *Zone Defense* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, November 2018); and US military officers in Hawaii and Washington, DC, interview by the authors, 2018–2019.

5. Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), *China Military Power: Modernizing a Force to Fight and Win* (Washington, DC: DIA, 2019); and OSD, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2019* (Washington, DC: OSD, May 2, 2019).

6. Nathan Freier et al., *Outplayed: Regaining Strategic Initiative in the Gray Zone* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College [USAWC] Press, 2016), 4.

7. *Posture of United States Indo-Pacific Command and United States Forces Korea: Hearings before the Senate Armed Services Committee*, 116th Cong. (February 12, 2019) (statements of Admiral Philip S. Davidson and General Robert B. Abrams), <https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/hearings/19-02-12-united-states-indo-pacific-command-and-united-states-forces-korea>.



counterterrorism, and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. Further, US forces fly and sail wherever international law allows – underscoring all countries’ right to do so.

Of particular note, US air and maritime forces routinely transit the South and East China Seas and the Taiwan Strait, exercising freedom of navigation where the United States believes a coastal state’s claims are excessive under international law. Often, these actions are in response to the PRC’s assertion of maritime claims, which was judged illegitimate by the Permanent Court of Arbitration.<sup>8</sup> The United States also conducts sensitive intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance activities in the theater in ways consistent with international law.<sup>9</sup> The United States’ presence in the Indo-Pacific region enables the country to build strong relationships through a variety of routine and contingency activities, ranging from port calls and bilateral exercises to deterrence and shows of force.

These extant US strengths, however, do not translate automatically into permanent, durable, or even transient advantage vis-à-vis China. Instead, the strengths are indicative of the routine deployment and employment of American forces, both of which have been common since the end of the Cold War. The study team assesses that the current deployment and employment of American forces regionwide are not yet part of or adapted to a unified, Joint concept for persistent competition (and a potential transition to conflict).

US theater design has not kept pace with PRC military transformation or active PRC gray-zone maneuver. US Joint strategy, plans, and concepts – translated to action vis-à-vis the pacing China – have not yet materially changed the People’s Republic of China decision making with respect to either China’s ongoing aggressive gray-zone maneuver or its US-focused, anti-access military transformation. Relative to this study’s “ready for what,” USAWC researchers find the US Joint Force is neither effectively competing nor deterring now if one accepts that the PRC is achieving warlike effects in the absence of open military hostilities. For example, China’s conversion of coral reefs and low-tide elevations into installations capable of supporting military platforms and coercive operations constitutes, in the judgment of the USAWC research team, warlike military gains.<sup>10</sup>

In short, US military strategy and operations in the USINDOPACOM AOR have yet to respond in kind to PRC decision makers by imposing higher cost for deliberate gray-zone aggression and unacceptable cost in any future conflict with the United States. Current US theater design – reflected in the five elements of strategy and operational concepts; forces and capabilities; footprint and presence; authorities, permissions, and agreements; and mission command arrangements – reflects adherence to a

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8. Statements of Davidson and Abrams in *Posture of United States Indo-Pacific Command*; and *The Republic of the Philippines v. The People’s Republic of China*, Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) Case No. 2013-19 (The Hague, Netherlands: PCA, July 12, 2016).

9. Statements of Davidson and Abrams in *Posture of United States Indo-Pacific Command*, 46.

10. For details, see *Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative: A Look at China’s SAM Shelters in the Spratlys* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, February 23, 2017), <https://amti.csis.org/chinas-sam-shelters-spratlys/>.

long-vulnerable and even discredited position of theater advantage.<sup>11</sup> The United States is postured and predisposed only to respond or react to PRC actions—certainly not to get ahead of Chinese decision making.

Although the United States may—with latent military power—deter Chinese escalation to open hostilities at this time, American strategy, plans, operations, and capabilities have yet to dissuade the People’s Republic of China from investing heavily in anti-access/area-denial capabilities and methods.<sup>12</sup> To date, China has been undeterred in its aggressive gray-zone maneuver against the United States and its partners in the region.

At present, the offensive nature of China’s gray-zone activities in the Indo-Pacific region and resulting risk confusion by US and partner leaders are combining to limit any potential coalition freedom of action.<sup>13</sup> The PRC’s hypercompetitive exploitation of initiative likewise shrinks the competitive space available to US senior leadership. Ultimately, the absence of a transformational Joint military outlook on theater design cedes initiative to an increasingly more confident peer rival, allowing China to dictate the terms and character of regional hypercompetition.

## INSIGHT 2

*The Indo-Pacific region is a vast, Joint, multi-domain theater of operations.* From a Joint military perspective, the Indo-Pacific region is a vast patchwork of complicated human and physical terrain. The theater of operations covers 52 percent of the Earth’s surface, comprises 36 nations, and accounts for more than half of the human population (see figure 1).<sup>14</sup>

The region’s inhabitants and their political and military leadership are all combatants in the hotly contested strategic influence space. The strategic influence space is the cognitive terrain on all competitive sides where US, partner, and rival strategic leadership make consequential decisions colored by intense hypercompetition between various worldviews, the strongest of which are the status-quo US and revisionist PRC perspectives.<sup>15</sup>

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11. David Ochmanek, *Improving Force Development within the US Department of Defense* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2018).

12. Ochmanek, *Improving Force Development*.

13. US Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), “The Gray Zone” (white paper, USSOCOM, September 9, 2015), 5.

14. United States Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM), “USINDOPACOM Area of Responsibility,” US Indo-Pacific Command, accessed June 8, 2020, <https://www.pacom.mil/About-USINDOPACOM/USPACOM-Area-of-Responsibility/>.

15. 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/>.



**Figure 1. Map of USINDOPACOM AOR**

Map from United States Indo-Pacific Command

Researchers at the USAWC found that at the headquarters level, USINDOPACOM military culture—down to the individual service components—exhibits a refreshing rhetorical commitment to Jointness and its twenty-first-century, multi-domain character. Unfortunately, and notwithstanding excellent concept development work at the service component level, USINDOPACOM remains a patchwork of single-service approaches and narrow, domain-specific solutions.<sup>16</sup>

Researchers at the USAWC also found three lingering strategic deficiencies at the theater level that, if allowed to continue, will inevitably limit US Joint, multi-domain military effectiveness. Insight 1 notes the first deficiency: the absence of a unifying, Joint concept for theater competition and conflict. The second deficiency is a legacy theater design and posture that is increasingly vulnerable to active PRC gray-zone maneuver and overt military aggression. The third deficiency is the yawning gap between US strategic objectives and the integration of Joint and service concepts and resources to secure them.

Progress has been made in the Indo-Pacific region toward addressing the first deficiency and, by implication, perhaps the third. Open-source descriptions of emerging

16. Senior military headquarters officials, interviews by the authors, December 2018 through May 2019; and prominent nongovernment individuals in national security, defense, and military affairs, interviews by the authors, December 2018 through May 2019.

USINDOPACOM strategy point toward a more agile, distributed military posture and the future employment of innovative and complementary US and partner capabilities and methods.<sup>17</sup> Though the Department of Defense (DoD) leadership recognizes the military challenges posed by North Korea and Russia, it is increasingly focusing its resources on the long-term pacing challenge posed by the transforming, multi-domain China.<sup>18</sup> Thus, a more tightly integrated Joint concept for competition and conflict benefiting from complementary (vice competing), multi-domain service concepts would be a first step toward seizing the initiative and expanding the competitive space against the pacing rival. Ultimately, this report makes assumptions about the contours of that concept and makes recommendations for the Army consistent with those assumptions.

### INSIGHT 3

*Anchor partners are essential but insufficient to expand the competitive space.* As noted in the first insight, regional partnerships are an existing US strength; they are not, however, a permanent or invulnerable advantage. Doubling down on Allies and partners is essential to a hypercompetitive strategy for managing theater great-power rivalry. Of particular note, the United States should work very hard to retain and tighten its relations with six countries that are deemed anchor partners in this study: Australia, Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, Singapore, and Taiwan.

The US security relationship with each of the six countries is important for long-term US interests in the region. Sustaining and strengthening relations with each country may, at times, be challenging. Difficulties in relationship management will likely be compounded as the People's Republic of China demonstrates both the will and acumen to pressure the anchor partners and others, penalizing them for close security relations with the United States.

Reseizing the strategic initiative and expanding the competitive space will rely on a network of Allies and partners beyond the anchors. In short, although anchor partners are a necessary component of a more activist and hypercompetitive US strategy for the region, they are insufficient for enduring success. Overreliance on the anchors may build single points of failure into US strategy; however, this outcome is avoidable. A more diversified portfolio of regional partnerships leveraging more than the military instrument of US power would broaden competitive US options, shore up the US regional position, and demonstrate a renewed US commitment to outcomes centered on a "free and open Indo-Pacific."<sup>19</sup>

Top on the list of expanded partnerships are New Zealand and Thailand. The cultivation of closer security ties with India, Vietnam, and Malaysia on the Asian mainland and with archipelagic Indonesia also ranks high. Perhaps the most neglected and underserved opportunities lie in the Pacific Island states that are party to the

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17. USINDOPACOM J56, "USINDOPACOM Strategy and Posture Brief" (PowerPoint presentation, USINDOPACOM, Honolulu, HI, n.d.).

18. *Department of Defense Budget Posture: Hearings before the United States Senate Committee on Armed Services*, 116th Cong. (March 14, 2019) (statement of Joseph F. Dunford).

19. US Department of Defense (DoD), *The Department of Defense Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnerships, and Promoting a Networked Region* (Washington, DC: DoD, June 1, 2019).

Compact of Free Association (COFA)—a treaty signed by the United States, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Marshall Islands, and Palau.<sup>20</sup> Reaffirmation of US commitment to the compact states, including nondefense investments, will be important for US relations with those countries in advance of the renegotiation of the compact by 2023.<sup>21</sup>

To achieve stretch goals with respect to partnerships, the United States might also work to increase engagement and security relationships, potentially leveraging the experiences and capabilities of Australia and New Zealand. Consistent efforts by the United States can thicken the security presence in the USINDOPACOM theater and increase US and partner strategic depth.

Achieving any or all of these partner-related objectives would inevitably rely first on the concerted efforts of American diplomats and nondefense US government officials. Thus, significant harmonization of military and nonmilitary activities is required to achieve maximum outcomes. Continued US foreign policy approaches that appear transactional will undermine the very partnerships the United States requires in the region.<sup>22</sup>

#### INSIGHT 4

*Active competition and preparation for armed conflict are inseparable components of USINDOPACOM theater design.* The current hypercompetitive contest in the Indo-Pacific region does not yet involve armed hostilities; however, it does feature meaningful military activity on both sides. For the foreseeable future, hypercompetition short of armed conflict is the likeliest form of active US-China rivalry. Hypercompetition manifests first and most prominently in diplomacy, economics, and strategic influence—areas outside the military sphere.<sup>23</sup>

Prevailing in hypercompetition while avoiding armed conflict is the goal of both sides in the US-China contest. But US hypercompetitive moves short of armed conflict will be most effective when they benefit from an explicit or implicit security component. Further, persistent hypercompetitive campaigning—including deliberate employment of the broader instruments of power—must set conditions for seamless transition to armed hostilities to be credible and enhance deterrence.

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20. Compact of Free Association of 1985, Pub. L. No. 99-239, 99 Stat 1770 72 (1986); Subsidiary Agreements of the Compact of Free Association with Palau, US-Palau, 1989; Compact of Free Association: Military Use and Operating Rights, US-Marshall Islands, April 30, 2003; and Subsidiary Agreements: Compilation for the FSM, US-Federated States of Micronesia, 1982.

21. Brian Harding and Kim Mai Tran, “Pompeo’s Landmark Visit to the Federated States of Micronesia,” CogitASIA, August 2, 2019, <https://www.cogitasia.com/pompeos-landmark-visit-to-the-federated-states-of-micronesia/>.

22. Heather A. Conley, Kathleen H. Hicks, and Michael J. Green, “Donald Trump Doesn’t Understand the Value of US Bases Overseas,” *Foreign Policy*, April 7, 2016, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/04/07/donald-trump-doesnt-understand-the-value-of-u-s-bases-overseas/>.

23. Linda Robinson et al., *The Growing Need to Focus on Modern Political Warfare* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2019).

The combination of legacy posture (forces and capabilities; footprint and presence; and authorities, permissions, and agreements), strategic diversion (and conversion) to the unique demands of irregular warfighting, and inattention have created real vulnerability for the United States in the Indo-Pacific region over the last two decades. As articulated in insight 1, a consensus has been reached that the United States has ceded strategic initiative in the Indo-Pacific region. US policy makers and strategists were captured by a combination of risk confusion and strategic diversion in the form of post-9/11 counterterrorism campaigns. Decisions taken and sustained following 2001 have positioned the United States significantly behind in the evolution of great-power competition with both the People's Republic of China and Russia.<sup>24</sup>

As US defense strategists catch up to contemporary competition, greater strategic innovation in Washington and Honolulu are essential for offsetting the pacing PRC rival's expanding capability, capacity, and concepts. Unchecked Chinese innovation poses credible and growing challenges to American access and freedom of action across instruments of national power and Joint warfighting domains.<sup>25</sup> The pacing military threat does not yet possess war-winning strategic overmatch. But, in the event of military escalation, the PRC could put significant US and partner interests at risk.<sup>26</sup> As China conducts its deliberate gray-zone campaign across the AOR, it does so under the protective and coercive umbrella of an increasingly sophisticated and transforming the People's Liberation Army force supported by paramilitary and parastatal forces.<sup>27</sup>

China's military transformation is focused on the United States. Two decades into that transformation, the People's Liberation Army and its components operate from sanctuary, primarily on internal lines of communication, with sufficient strike capability to sow doubt for US and regional leaders about risk and outcomes of US intervention in regional armed conflict. In short, the People's Republic of China merges competition and (the prospect of) armed conflict to maneuver effectively in the gray zone and achieve its objectives. Researchers at the USAWC suggest the United States should adopt a similar tack. Yet, this study found no current evidence of an operative, strong, coherent, countervailing, Joint Force hypercompetitive design that leverages unique Joint and service strengths against PRC vulnerabilities.

This study finds that making a binary choice—however strategic—between competition and conflict significantly increases the risk of failure in each. A strategy focused on prevailing only in competition will be unlikely to resource a robust

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24. Statement of Dunford in *Department of Defense Budget Posture*; and Ashley Townshend et al., *Averting Crisis: American Strategy, Military Spending, and Collective Defence in the Indo-Pacific* (Sydney, Australia: United States Studies Centre, August 19, 2019).

25. Phillip C. Saunders et al., eds., *Chairman Xi Remakes the PLA: Assessing Chinese Military Reforms* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2019).

26. Eric Heginbotham et al., *The US-China Military Scorecard* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2015); and David Ochmanek et al., *US Military Capabilities and Forces for a Dangerous World* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2017).

27. Andrew S. Erickson and Ryan D. Martinson, eds., *China's Maritime Gray Zone Operations* (Studies in Chinese Maritime Development) (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2019); and Conor M. Kennedy and Andrew S. Erickson, *China's Third Sea Force, The People's Armed Forces Maritime Militia: Tethered to the PLA*, China Maritime Report No. 1 (Newport, RI: China Maritime Studies Institute, 2017), 22.

warfighting Joint Force and posture that enjoys sufficient credibility with Allies, partners, and adversaries. Similarly, a Joint Force and posture focused only on conflict will likely fail to make the moves short of armed conflict necessary to ensure that Allies and partners are incentivized to remain available in competition. Allies and partners' availability is both essential to hypercompetitive positional advantage and an essential precondition for transition to armed conflict. This latter point is particularly problematic in a hypercompetitive environment where Allies and partners seek the luxury of being able to avoid choosing between competitors. This trend is endemic across the Indo-Pacific region today.

Ideally, in light of the continuum of competition, a countervailing US hypercompetitive design would persistently campaign theater-wide in the gray zone while setting conditions for armed hostilities on US terms in the event that extraordinary efforts to avoid war fail. In short, competition (or hypercompetition) and conflict are indivisible components of a seamless whole. Unfortunately, USAWC researchers find that US leadership separates competition and conflict artificially in ways that are culturally comfortable but strategically and operationally problematic.<sup>28</sup>

The United States continues to mistake the routine deployment, employment, training, and exercising of military forces in the theater as competition itself. By contrast, the PRC has demonstrated the will and capability to both actively compete and escalate if necessary. In the study team's judgment, isolating conflict to a wholly different set of planned actions can lead, and may have already led, to US military activity for its own sake without meaningful connection to operational demands associated with transition to and effective prosecution of military conflict with the PRC.

This work suggests US forces, with regional partners, should engage actively in competition in which each action is part of a comprehensive effort to demonstrate the ability to escalate seamlessly to armed conflict if necessary. Competition and armed conflict must be inseparable components of a new Joint theater design that deliberately expands the competitive space, creates new rival dilemmas and costs, and generates additional military options for theater commanders. To date, the United States has not incorporated this design into its approach.

The introduction of the *Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning* in 2018 presented theater commanders and senior decision makers with an alternative to the long-standing six-phased warfighting construct. The Joint concept's "competition continuum" signaled that all competitive (or hypercompetitive) rivalries could simultaneously feature cooperation, (hyper)competition, and conflict.<sup>29</sup>

The *Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning* highlights the necessary intertwining of competition and conflict, including the ways in which both can exist simultaneously. The emergence of the Joint concept demonstrates an important gap, however, in the ways in which US forces are employed short of conflict. Researchers at the USAWC understand from dozens of engagements that absent a unified, theater-specific, Joint concept for competition and conflict, US forces are routinely employed with insufficient focus on

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28. Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), *Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning* (Washington, DC: JCS, March 16, 2018).

29. JCS, *Competition Continuum*, Joint Doctrine Note 1-19 (Washington, DC: JCS, June 3, 2019).

the competitive effects each action may have on rival, neutral, or Allied decision making. Absent this perspective, contemporary theater activities are most likely underperforming relative to their desired objectives or effects.

## INSIGHT 5

*The Joint and service posture of USINDOPACOM need greater depth, resilience, agility, and redundancy.* The US Joint Force in the USINDOPACOM theater is excessively concentrated in a handful of large, increasingly vulnerable operating locations. The United States' physical posture is the product of US alliance commitments emerging from the post-World War II and Cold War periods. Except for the withdrawal from the Philippines (in 1991-92) and, to a lesser extent, Thailand, US theater posture remains largely unchanged since the end of the Cold War. Current US posture may be adequate for large-scale conflict with a less capable legacy challenger like North Korea, but it is grossly inadequate for either hypercompetition or armed hostilities with a transforming People's Republic of China.

For at least the past three presidential administrations, the United States has recognized that its military presence in the Indo-Pacific region is overweighted in northeast Asia and underweighted in Southeast and South Asia and the Pacific Islands (except Guam). Figure 1 is a general depiction of US forward presence throughout the USINDOPACOM theater. The forward-deployed US Joint Force in the Indo-Pacific region is concentrated in Japan and South Korea.

The tight concentration of forward-deployed US forces in a relatively small number of facilities in northeast Asia is at once cost-effective and irresponsible strategically. Most forward-deployed US forces are within the PRC anti-access/area-denial umbrella.<sup>30</sup> With the exception of the Hawaiian Islands, most of the forward-deployed forces are well within range of the PRC's conventional ballistic and cruise missile capabilities, surface and subsurface naval combatants, and manned and unmanned aerial attack platforms.<sup>31</sup> In addition to the physical threat from kinetic attack, USINDOPACOM's dedicated and supporting space, cyber, and electromagnetic spectrum connective tissue are vulnerable to rival attack and/or exploitation.<sup>32</sup>

In the past, US forces have demonstrated an ability to act decisively, often under duress, and in the absence of centralized command and control. This capability will increasingly need to be a defining quality of Indo-Pacific theater design going forward. Even in their current concentrated configuration, US and partner air and missile defense forces are likely insufficient for reliable protection from the volume of air sorties and incoming missiles anticipated in the event of armed conflict with the PRC.<sup>33</sup> Likewise, the United States should expect significantly degraded capabilities in space, cyberspace,

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30. Ochmanek et al., *US Military Capabilities*, 10.

31. Ochmanek et al., *US Military Capabilities*, 10.

32. Michael Green et al., *Asia-Pacific Rebalance 2025: Capabilities, Presence, and Partnerships: An Independent Review of US Defense Strategy in the Asia-Pacific* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, January 2016), 202.

33. Ochmanek et al., *US Military Capabilities*, 130.



and the electromagnetic spectrum during any outbreak of hostilities in the Indo-Pacific theater.

Researchers at the USAWC conclude that, over the short to medium term, a renewed capability to deliver effects across domains under pressure from precision multi-domain attack will be necessary if the United States is to regain the military initiative in the USINDOPACOM AOR. Achieving this capability implies the ability to mass effects at the time and place of the theater commander's choosing from a more widely distributed and survivable regional posture. Posture in this context includes three elements of theater design: forces and capabilities; footprint and presence; and authorities, permissions, and agreements. The widely distributed and survivable regional posture suggested here would best be described as possessing *depth, resilience, agility, and redundancy*.

Depth implies a theater posture that is routinely more distributed, networked, and multinodal. A deeper posture should provide a wider array of expansible contingency options for the coordinated employment of Joint and combined forces. In the Indo-Pacific region, a deeper posture would include distributed, land-based and land-enabled, Joint operations across the first and second island chains, the South and southwestern Pacific, continental Asia, and the Indian Ocean.

Resilience is the ability to bounce back or recover from loss. Resilience requires some combination of wide distribution; disaggregation; and a physical, virtual, and conceptual hardening of military capabilities. In all cases, distribution, disaggregation, and hardening cannot result in the degradation of desired operational effects.

Agility suggests a degree of built-in athleticism where posture enables the theater commander to shift weight and options at the time and place of greatest need or opportunity. In the context of hypercompetition, agility is that quality that enables the rapid exploitation of transient advantage. Agility in this context implies changes in both organizations and concepts of operation.

Redundancy calls for the deliberate and ruthless elimination of single points of failure. Researchers at the USAWC suggest this latter point is exceedingly important because two decades of perceived advantage may have resulted in theater decisions that, although logical in isolation from an efficiency standpoint, may compromise future operational effectiveness.<sup>34</sup>

Service operational concepts are generally moving in this direction within the Indo-Pacific region, particularly those of US Pacific Air Forces; US Pacific Fleet; and United States Marine Corps Forces, Pacific. Each of the three services is pushing forward with concepts that embrace the need to operate in a widely distributed theater setting with military assets employed at increasingly lower levels of aggregation and mission

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34. Townshend et al., *Averting Crisis*, 6.

command.<sup>35</sup> The current Army approach of conducting multi-domain operations (MDO) controlled at echelons above brigade runs counter to this trend.<sup>36</sup>

## INSIGHT 6

*Joint Force success in the Indo-Pacific region relies on a transformed Army theater design predicated on enabling the Joint Force.* A deeper, more resilient, increasingly agile, and appropriately redundant Joint Force relies on an Army-enabling foundation. The most important first step toward a transformational theater concept for competition and conflict in the Indo-Pacific region is an effective and appropriate DoD allocation, acknowledgment, and investment in Joint Force roles tailored to specific service strengths. The campaign quality of the Army, its depth of capability, and its traditional role in setting the theater make it uniquely suited to act as the foundational Joint Force enabler in the USINDOPACOM AOR.

Army culture may not adapt well to this initially because US ground forces have been the supported main effort over the last 18 years of combat operations in the post-9/11 wars. But USAWC research indicates the demand for large-formation ground maneuver forces in the theater may decrease over the next decade. This decrease—combined with a strategic and operational bias in the Indo-Pacific region toward greater agility and force distribution—indicates an emerging need to reconfigure theater Army forces and reset their mission within a unified, Joint, multi-domain concept for operations across the spectrum of challenges, from competition to conflict.

The implication for Army forces in the Indo-Pacific region now and in 2028 and beyond could not be clearer. This study concludes US ground forces—and the Army specifically—may not be the theater’s supported main combat effort in the Indo-Pacific region. But the USAWC team argues Army forces will be the essential enabling foundation upon which a more hypercompetitive theater design rests.

Broad Army-enabling responsibilities in the areas of Joint sustainment, protection, intelligence (and information), and mission command in particular are foundational to theater-level Joint military operations. In light of the pacing People’s Republic of China challenge, this report finds that the bulk of Army forces routinely operating in support of the USINDOPACOM theater must be increasingly focused on enabling a unified, Joint concept that is mission-tailored at lower echelons to accommodate distributed, Joint operations that are multifunctional in their capability and multi-domain in their orientation.

Army forces focused on the Indo-Pacific region will increasingly need to aggregate and employ multifunctional and multi-domain assets at increasingly lower levels of

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35. Amy McCullough, “Ace in the Hole,” *Air Force Magazine*, March 30, 2017, <https://www.airforce.mil/article/ace-in-the-hole/>; Chief of Naval Operations, *A Design for Maintaining Maritime Superiority*, Version 2.0 (Washington, DC: Department of the Navy, December 2018); and “EABO [Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations],” *Marines*, accessed June 8, 2020, <https://www.candp.marines.mil/Concepts/Subordinate-Operating-Concepts/Expeditionary-Advanced-Base-Operations/>.

36. US Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC), *The US Army in Multi-Domain Operations 2028*, TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-1 (Fort Eustis, VA: TRADOC, December 6, 2018); and US Army Combined Arms Center, *The US Army Concept for Multi-Domain Combined Arms Operations at Echelons Above Brigade 2025–2045* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: US Army Combined Arms Center, September 2018).

mission command. And, given an essential reorientation toward enabling the Joint Force, these smaller, more widely distributed Army assets will need to seamlessly integrate into and underwrite Joint operations and accept and employ niche Joint capabilities to achieve a diverse array of enabling functions.

At present, US Army modernization efforts are not trending toward these broad USINDOPACOM requirements. Army modernization emphasizes the Army's Big Six materiel priorities.<sup>37</sup> These modernization priorities are inwardly focused and do not reflect an emerging Army imperative to enable Joint MDO across the widely distributed, hypercompetitive Indo-Pacific theater.

The development of the Army MDO concept in its current form and the continued delivery of lethal and nonlethal, multi-domain effects are vital. But this study strongly recommends that work on MDO—as it relates to USINDOPACOM specifically—broaden substantially to account for the Army's role as the central hub for Joint and combined, multi-domain, theater-wide enabling. This study assesses that armed hostilities with the PRC are unlikely to involve large-scale ground combat operations; rather, the Army would likely be engaged in mission command, protection, sustainment, intelligence (and information), movement, and fires.<sup>38</sup> This perspective will be essential to USINDOPACOM planning going forward.

Researchers at the USAWC find that, currently, all service components are pursuing independent war-winning concepts of operation absent the benefit of a unified, Joint rubric that harmonizes the Joint demands of competition and conflict with the complementary capabilities provided by each service. Army modernization and concept development efforts for MDO, for example, start with standoff lethal and nonlethal effects but, as might be anticipated, culminate in large-scale ground combat operations employing divisions, corps, and field armies in decisive land battles.<sup>39</sup> The Air Force pursues its own version of MDO, as well as agile combat employment.<sup>40</sup> For its part, the Navy-Marine Corps team has distributed maritime operations and expeditionary advanced base operations.<sup>41</sup>

Each concept is largely service-centric, confined to open conflict, and roughly focused on achieving redundant operational effects without the benefit of a unifying, Joint vision. At the same time, each concept generally assumes widely distributed employment of multi-domain forces and capabilities to impose costs, generate dilemmas, and complicate decision making for US rivals while expanding military options available to Joint Force commanders. But existing service concepts lack a well-developed integrating logic for sustainment, mission command, and force protection. Finally, though the service concepts share a common and quite useful intellectual consistency, they appear

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37. *Army Modernization: Hearings before the Subcommittee on Airland, United States Senate Committee on Armed Services*, 115th Cong. (February 7, 2018) (statements of Joseph Anderson, LTG [USA]; John M. Murray, LTG [USA]; Paul A. Ostrowski, LTG [USA]; and Robert M. Dyess Jr., MG [USA]).

38. Current and former US Army officers at US Army Pacific (USARPAC); I Corps; Headquarters, Department of the Army; and other locations, interviews by the authors, 2015–19.

39. TRADOC, *Multi-Domain Operations 2028*.

40. McCullough, "Ace in the Hole."

41. Chief of Naval Operations, *Maintaining Maritime Superiority*; and "EABO."

to be internally competitive, representing each service's preferred role vice the needs of Joint Force commanders given theater and functional demands and unique service capabilities. As this study proceeded, the team frequently used the analogy that services were rowing in the same direction, but none were doing so in the same canoe.

This study suggests the US Army has the opportunity to lead toward an integrated Joint concept founded first on Army enabling. Army recognition of and adaptation to the service's broad theater-enabling responsibilities, while incorporating efforts to enhance and contribute to lethal and nonlethal multi-domain warfighting, would provide the Joint Force a stable foundation upon which to initiate essential transformation in theater design.

## **INSIGHT 7**

*Seizing the strategic initiative and expanding the competitive space in the Indo-Pacific region require that the Army and Joint Force persistently operate, experiment, adapt, and compete.* The study team identified the need to shift the current mindset about theater military activities from the conventional approach to one focused on a learning chain based in the following sequence: operate to experiment, experiment to adapt, adapt to compete, and compete to prevail. Leveraging the US capability to experiment, solve problems, and adapt would simultaneously improve the US Joint Force, expand the competitive space, and create dilemmas for US rivals.

The Indo-Pacific region is already home to intense hypercompetition across Joint domains and defense-relevant contested spaces in the great-power rivalry between the United States and China. The People's Republic of China already contests US theater primacy across instruments of national power and promises, in the event of hostilities, to constrain US options and deny access and freedom of action in land, air, sea, space, cyberspace, the electromagnetic spectrum, and the strategic influence space. Although the United States retains many of its conceptual, material, and technical advantages today, these are fleeting or transient. Ultimately, at least in a theater context, PRC capability and capacity will be on par with that of the United States.

Accepting the United States has lost the strategic initiative in the USINDOPACOM AOR as previously stated, this study suggests the US Joint Force in the theater needs a transformational design and campaign strategy focused specifically on regaining the initiative and expanding the competitive space vis-à-vis the pacing PRC. But the pursuit of perfection cannot be an enemy of either the sufficient or the experimental. The change imperative is palpable in the Indo-Pacific region.

Thus, this study suggests that the initiation of immediate, purpose-driven, multi-domain military operations aimed specifically at influencing the People's Republic of China decision making across the competition continuum is an urgent priority. These operations would amount to an American gray-zone response to ongoing PRC agitation below the threshold of armed conflict. The operations would also be a platform for iterative, multi-domain experimentation in an operational context.

This work suggests USINDOPACOM should work hard to dispense with the mindset of routine employment, deployment, training, and exercising. Instead, USAWC researchers argue the command should reframe all theater activity in the context of

purposeful, hypercompetitive, multi-domain military operations. Each discrete operation should have clear strategic, operational, training, and learning objectives associated with it. All four sets of objectives combined will—if effectively captured—yield meaningful rolling, transformational, Joint insights, with the expectation that each insight will in turn yield meaningful adaptation.

For example, the transformational chain described above would provide current and future US commanders with a range of new options for posturing and employing friendly forces to counter adversary capabilities and methods. Operating to experiment and experimenting to adapt would likely generate solutions that are at times inconsistent with current US doctrine and concepts but, nonetheless, transformational and highly disruptive to a pacing PRC suddenly forced to keep pace with an adaptive US rival.

The synergy of purpose-driven operations targeted at vulnerabilities in the pacing rival's decision making and concepts of operation—matched with persistent learning and adaptation—would communicate seriousness of purpose, demonstrate transformational capability, and effectively expand the competitive space. The “operate to experiment, experiment to adapt, and adapt to compete” chain should serially generate new hypercompetitive options for theater commanders and forces. In the aggregate, the deliberate demonstration or exercise of these options should begin generating favorable change in strategic conditions at the theater level.

The chain described above should assure US regional partners of American commitment. In addition, the chain should progressively become a more effective deterrent to rival gray-zone maneuver and military escalation. Furthermore, the chain should help dissuade the entry of rivals into disruptive hypercompetitive markets. Ultimately, the chain should contribute to the construction of a transformational Joint theater design with demonstrated agility to scale and employ purpose-driven military operations that compel changes in rival behavior or defeat rival military forces in the case of outright escalation to armed conflict. Thus, the chain represents a Joint framework for theater hypercompetition that serially generates new options and exploitable, transient advantages for effective rivalry with China.

Drawing Allies and partners into the chain would enhance transformational reach and durability; it would also enable complementary partner development of the capabilities, concepts, plans, and methods that are most appropriate to Allies and partners' unique strategic positions, resource limitations, potential contributions, and political constraints. Further still, the integration of Allies and partners into a combined transformational agenda would be a concrete demonstration of American commitment to contending with common security challenges.

Chapter 8 builds on these insights and the synthesized knowledge of the study effort to present a principal finding and recommendation relevant to Army theater design in the USINDOPACOM AOR. Chapter 9, “Findings and Recommendations by Element of Theater Design,” presents detailed ideas on transformational adaptations to Army theater design.



## CHAPTER 8. PRINCIPAL FINDING AND RECOMMENDATION

### Key Takeaways: Principal Finding and Recommendation

**Principal Finding:** Physically, conceptually, and in deployed and anticipated capabilities, the US Joint Force (including the Army) is out of position for hypercompetition against an innovative, aggressive, and transforming China.

**Principal Recommendation:** The Army must embrace four transformational roles in the Indo-Pacific, including

- the Army as *the grid*;
- the Army as *the enabler*;
- the Army as *the multi-domain warfighter*; and
- the Army as *the capability and capacity generator*.

### PRINCIPAL FINDING: OUT OF POSITION FOR HYPERCOMPETITION

The Indo-Pacific region presents unique strategic and operational challenges based on rivalry and threat, geography, legacy military posture, and alliance relationships. Taken together, these challenges will require a fundamental change in the way the Joint Force and the Army organize, operate, and employ capabilities in the Indo-Pacific region now and in 2028 and beyond. This study identified that a hypercompetitive rival necessitates Joint Force and Army transformation to a hypercompetitive theater design.

Any transformation must enable the Army—and, by extension, the Joint Force—to achieve this study’s “ready for what” statement originally presented in chapter 4: “*compete and deter now and through 2028, while persistently preparing to enable and contribute to a joint and combined campaign sufficient to deny coercive change to the regional status quo.*”

Toward this end, this study identified a single, principal finding introduced in the summary: “*Physically, conceptually, and with deployed and anticipated capabilities, the US Joint Force (including the Army) is out of position for hypercompetition with an innovative, aggressive, and transforming PRC [People’s Republic of China].*” Consistent with the US Army War College (USAWC) team’s commitment to identify the most Joint-relevant Army solutions, the principal finding is first a judgment on the wider Joint context within which the Army operates.

Conceptually, the USAWC team finds no unifying, coherent, hypercompetitive, Joint theater design in force. The United States’ military components in the Indo-Pacific region are not yet on a joint path that transfers greater risk to the People’s Republic of China decision makers while lowering risks for the United States and its regional partners. Instead, China aggressively pursues its regional interests at the expense of the United States and its partners through military transformation and gray-zone campaigning. In the absence of effective US counteraction, both military transformation and gray-zone campaigning progressively increase US risk and limit realistic future US military options.

Physically, US regional posture is concentrated in northeast Asia, predicated on discredited advantage, and positioned for the efficient prosecution of a second Korean War. This forward posture is not necessarily conducive to effective hypercompetition or

the prospect of effective transition to armed hostilities with an increasingly capable and transforming PRC pacer.

Finally, regarding deployed and anticipated capabilities, current and anticipated in-theater Army capabilities are increasingly focused on the delivery of lethal and nonlethal multi-domain effects and large-scale ground combat operations. Future operational needs will benefit from short-term Army changes biased toward distributed deployment/employment and enabling the Joint theater. These benefits will require innovative reconfiguration and employment of Army mission command, protection, sustainment, intelligence (and information), and movement assets.

On the current path and as the decade proceeds, China will have more military options complementing its hypercompetitive gray-zone approaches, whereas the United States will have fewer. Further – given the same considerations – all US regional partners and interests will be more vulnerable to Chinese coercion and/or overt military aggression. Finally, in the absence of significant transformational change in Joint and service theater design, US leadership will see the perceived risks associated with defending partners and interests in the Indo-Pacific region rise dramatically while PRC leadership perceives a parallel reduction in its own risk.

A new, transformative, Joint and service theater design should focus on regaining the strategic initiative, expanding the competitive space, and restoring and maintaining a more favorable military balance in the United States Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) area of responsibility (AOR). The principal recommendation below and the findings and recommendations by element of design that follow in chapter 9 speak directly to how the Army assists the Joint Force.

From this point forward, the study's findings and recommendations are Army remedies for the palpable change imperative perceived among broad USINDOPACOM communities of interest and practice. The predominantly Army-focused findings and recommendations included hereafter, however, are also vehicles for communicating a broader requirement for Joint Force adaptation in the USINDOPACOM theater.

## **PRINCIPAL RECOMMENDATION: FOUR TRANSFORMATIONAL ROLES**

To meet this report's "ready for what" statement, this report recommends that the Army immediately adopt and adapt to four transformational roles within a broader Joint concept for competition and conflict. The four transformational roles are

- the Army as *the grid*;
- the Army as *the enabler*;
- the Army as *the multi-domain warfighter*; and
- the Army as *the capability and capacity generator*.

Though they are focused on enabling Joint, multi-domain efforts first, the four transformational roles are consistent with the three tenets of Army multi-domain operations (MDO): calibrated force posture, multi-domain formations, and convergence.



## THE ARMY AS THE GRID

Vulnerable legacy posture combined with efforts by USINDOPACOM to shift toward more agile and distributed Joint operations will require changes to US Joint Force operational architecture, footprint, and capabilities. Operating exclusively from a relatively small number of large, fixed bases in the Indo-Pacific region is becoming increasingly untenable.

Across the continuum of competition, US commanders require new options for projecting power theater-wide. Emerging Joint and service operating concepts focus on widely distributed operations from a range of fixed, expeditionary, transient, and/or austere operating locations. By consistently adopting the concept of distributed operations, the service concepts reflect tacit admission that current US force deployment and basing in the Indo-Pacific are an insufficient operational foundation from which to compete and fight.

As conceived by the study team, the grid is a distributed, land-based network of Joint-focused theater operating locations maintained by or within reach of mission-tailored, multifunctional Army forces. A persistently maturing, Army-enabled grid envisions mutually reinforcing, fixed and expeditionary bases and operating locations suitable for activation and exploitation in various combinations.

Operational demands across the competition continuum would dictate the distribution and functionality of activated grid locations. Overall, however, an expanding, Army-enabled grid would diversify Joint Force options and underwrite a theater-wide transformation to an on-demand, distributed, operational posture. The grid would also enable the Joint Force to maneuver and fight “across strategic distances” on an Army backbone. Though this study focuses on transformational Army change, it implies and at times explicitly recommends substantial change in Joint Force theater design as well.

In practice, the grid is a division of the USINDOPACOM theater into operationally relevant subdivisions. Each subdivision includes a combination of one or more hubs and multiple nodes. A hub is a point of entry and onward movement, a robust operating and sustainment location, and/or a regional mission command site. Nodes are widely distributed expeditionary or austere operating sites from which a variety of Joint Force and Army functions are performed.

Hubs and nodes should be complementary and mutually supportive, with each postured to perform a variety of site-appropriate, Joint functions. The physical distribution of operating locations and capabilities should also enable prudent redundancy, allowing the transfer or assumption of missions should key hubs or nodes become isolated or denied in the course of operations. Figure 2 offers an illustrative example of a potential USINDOPACOM grid layout.



**Figure 2. Illustrative depiction of the Army as the grid**  
 Map adapted from Porcupen/Shutterstock.com

A hallmark of the grid is its suitability to enable operations, from humanitarian assistance and disaster relief to networked, Joint, multi-domain warfighting. The grid begins from the existing network of US facilities in the USINDOPACOM AOR. To realize the region’s full potential for competition and conflict, however, this study envisions the grid as a constellation of austere, expeditionary operating sites supported by more developed power projection hubs and clustered in key areas of operational significance. Within the constellation, individual locations are held at various states of readiness based on theater requirements and subject to host-nation support. All locations are catalogued, exercised, activated, and maintained by Army forces in support of Joint operations.

Although the hub locations are more developed and, thus, are often key airports and seaports of debarkation, the strength of the grid lies in a future Army capability to expand the grid rapidly from an expeditionary setting. The hubs – sustained by resilient distribution networks – would support multiple key Joint and service functions through transformed Army capabilities in the areas of mission command, protection, sustainment, intelligence (and information), and movement (US Army Pacific [USARPAC] has responsibility for 146 tasks in support of the Department of Defense [DoD] and other services).<sup>1</sup> The precise missions and positioning of the grid’s networked hubs and nodes should be determined by combatant command operational priorities, not by service preferences.

The grid is both an operational platform for underwriting Joint operations across the competition continuum and an instrument for the immediate intensification of effective

1. US Army Pacific (USARPAC), “Army Support to DoD—With OPRs,” 2018, document reviewed January 2019.

US hypercompetition theater-wide. The process of building, expanding, exercising, and proving the grid under a variety of routine and contingency circumstances would be a tangible demonstration of capability and will to rivals and partners. Done right, the process of building the grid should have a profound impact on rival decision making.

Operationalizing the grid in competition is a necessary prerequisite for exploiting it in the event of conflict. Realizing the grid's full potential requires host-nation support and buy-in. Allies and partners will incur risk by embracing the grid concept. Thus, consistent engagement, cooperative presence, and ongoing demonstration of the benefits will be the key whole-of-government activities likeliest to set conditions for a fully functional theater-wide grid network from which to enable Joint operations. To the extent partners participate in building, activating, and exploiting the grid concept, the message to the pacing rival will become clearer: The United States no longer assumes advantage, but is instead prepared to compete for, seize, exploit, and defend it.

## **THE ARMY AS THE ENABLER**

At present, US Army modernization efforts focus on the service's MDO concept and its Big Six material priorities. Although these are all valid Army needs, their relationship to and integration within a unified, Joint, multi-domain concept for competition and conflict are not well-established. Further, Army MDO only describes service-specific lethal and nonlethal contributions to an as yet abstract Joint, multi-domain demand. In short, the Army MDO concept does not

- make specific reference to the delivery of Army effects according to a unified, Joint theater design and in concert with specific, Joint capabilities and methods; or
- make specific, detailed reference to the essential Army-enabling functions that will by necessity underwrite the conduct of future, lethal and nonlethal, Joint MDO.

Researchers at the USAWC determined that this latter point signals a gross underrepresentation of Army responsibilities for enabling the Joint Force theater-wide in the areas of mission command, protection, sustainment, intelligence (and information), and movement. Both the Army's MDO concept—in its current form—and Army modernization priorities presume (as do all companion sister-service concepts and priorities) a certain single-service war-winning bias that on its face does not support the kind of hypercompetitive unity of Joint Force effort demanded in the USINDOPACOM AOR. Numerous interviews with staff officers and policy professionals over the course of the study highlighted a consistent belief across the broad USINDOPACOM communities of interest and practice that the theater's constituent service components are pursuing independent operational concepts without the benefit of a unifying, theater-level, Joint concept for competition and conflict.<sup>2</sup>

This study argues if multi-domain convergence is critical to Army MDO success, it is even more critical to the successful prosecution of Joint MDO and the integration of

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2. United States Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) communities of interest and practice, interviews by the authors, December 2018 through May 2019.

capabilities, concepts, and methods of Joint and combined partners.<sup>3</sup> The Army is well-positioned to make its top theater priority enabling the Joint Force, with a particular focus on decisively underwriting the effective convergence of Joint capabilities and effects from a sustainable and survivable theater posture.

The role of the Army as an enabler builds on the role of the Army as a grid. The enabler role calls for an Army transformation in the mission command, sustainment, protection, movement, and intelligence (and information) warfighting functions to facilitate the sustained convergence of Joint, multi-domain effects across the continuum of competition in the Indo-Pacific region. Transformation of this kind would animate the grid, populating it with in-place or expeditionary capabilities specifically designed and missioned to underwrite Joint MDO.

This approach will require recurring, small-unit, multifunctional Army presence that is prepared to light up hubs and nodes across the grid, accept follow-on Joint Force and Army forces, and facilitate a variety of critical Joint theater demands; much of this is outlined above in the description of the Army as a grid.

This approach will further require Army forces to organize unlike parts based on mission requirements. These new mission-tailored units of action will need to be composite, multifunctional formations that operate in a widely distributed fashion well below the brigade level, combining combat, combat support, and combat service support capabilities at very low levels of aggregation.

Perhaps most difficult for Army culture is the fact that the role of theater enabler requires the Army to be a foundational supporting (vice supported) instrument of active, Joint military hypercompetition against the People's Republic of China. Army contributions may not be the most overtly martial or coercive aspects of hypercompetition. In the event of a transition to hostilities, the Army is not likely to be the main warfighting force; however, the Army will provide an indispensable framework upon which a more activist, Joint, hypercompetitive design can rest.

## **THE ARMY AS MULTI-DOMAIN WARFIGHTER**

This report has less to say about the service-specific, multi-domain warfighting concept and much more to say about the other three transformational roles of grid, enabler, and capability and capacity generator; this is due to the degree to which the Army concept development and modernization communities are laser-focused on MDO at the expense of transformational requirements in the Army's USINDOPACOM theater design more broadly.

The conclusion of this study is lethal and nonlethal Army MDO—as currently conceived—would in reality be a fraction of the Army's quite substantial role in an effective, integrated, Joint USINDOPACOM concept for competition and conflict. The USAWC team believes the Army MDO concept should either incorporate this enabling role or develop a comprehensive Army theater concept to tailor current thinking on Army MDO so it fits inside a broader USINDOPACOM, Joint Force-enabling construct. The most significant components of Army theater-level operations are captured by the

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3. US Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC), *The US Army in Multi-Domain Operations 2028*, TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-1 (Fort Eustis, VA: TRADOC, December 6, 2018), 20.

roles of grid and enabler. These roles largely focus on underwriting Joint MDO, of which lethal and nonlethal Army MDO are just one component.

None of this is meant to suggest ongoing Army work on MDO is without merit. On the contrary, Army MDO—integrated with current and future sister-service, multi-domain approaches—will be important features of a more hypercompetitive, future Joint concept. This study does suggest, however, that lethal and nonlethal Army MDO assets required across the competition continuum will plug into and be commanded, sustained, protected, informed, and often moved by and within the same Army enabling grid that will by necessity inevitably underwrite broader, Joint MDO. This latter Army role is more representative of the kind of multi-domain Army transformation required in USINDOPACOM theater design than the current Army MDO concept by itself is.

In the context of the other three transformational roles, the multi-domain warfighter role sees the Army fielding a land-based, multi-domain warfighting capability with theater-wide presence and reach on the back of an existing, Army-enabled grid and in concert with sister services and foreign partners. Army and sister-service, multi-domain capabilities and concepts should be inspired by and integrated into a unified, Joint, multi-domain theater approach. The purpose of these capabilities and concepts is not to solve complex, Joint problems with isolated, service-specific concepts. In short, all service concepts—including Army MDO—that are pointed squarely at the military challenge of rising peer rivals like the People’s Republic of China will inevitably be more powerful when they are integrated into a unified, joint (and combined) whole.

With all of this in mind, USAWC researchers generally agree with two common critiques of the Army MDO concept. First, many US Joint Force and partner military leaders and staffs find the MDO concept to be focused almost exclusively on warfighting against a rival continental power—specifically Russia—and less applicable to the USINDOPACOM theater.<sup>4</sup> This study agrees with that assessment, despite the test-bed multi-domain task force (MDTF) being focused on the Pacific in the form of the Army’s 17th Fires Brigade.<sup>5</sup>

Guidance from the DoD has shifted all services’ focus to prioritize consideration of the military threat posed by China in the Indo-Pacific and beyond. The Marine Corps’ *Commandant’s Planning Guidance* issued in July 2019 is indicative of conversations with other services—albeit far more direct—in calling out the commandant’s priority of ensuring a force capable of competing against China’s “malign activities.”<sup>6</sup> The challenge for US Army leadership will be to seize and exploit the current window of opportunity to achieve Joint success vice narrow service preference.

The second critique is innovations like the MDTF are examples of having too narrow a focus in an expansive theater that demands much more disruptive operational

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4. Senior military headquarters officials, interviews by the authors, December 2018 through May 2019; and prominent nongovernment individuals in national security, defense, and military affairs, interviews by the authors, December 2018 through May 2019.

5. Christopher Wendland, “Multi-Domain Task Force Takes on Near-Peer Operations,” *Fires*, May–June 2018, 2.

6. David H. Berger, *Commandant’s Planning Guidance: 38th Commandant of the Marine Corps* (Washington, DC: Department of the Navy, United States Marine Corps, 2019).

innovation. On balance, this study found the MDTF (more than the broader MDO) to be a welcome experiment among the USINDOPACOM Joint leadership and community.<sup>7</sup> But noticeable skepticism exists about the MDTF's organization and utility across the theater. The MDTF, after all, is a somewhat conventionally organized Army formation with limited intra-theater mobility and reach.<sup>8</sup> This study suggests a more activist, hypercompetitive US approach would benefit more from an agile, adaptable, and redundant, Joint, multi-domain network.

Army MDO warfighting capabilities will be one component of the networked system of systems described so far. The capabilities will naturally include lethal and nonlethal fires, intelligence, protection, and movement and maneuver. Within the dynamic and adaptable hypercompetitive network described above, lethal and nonlethal multi-domain capabilities envisioned by Army MDO will benefit from the same wholesale transformation in operational concepts, task organization, mission tailoring, and physical posture suggested for Army theater-enabling capabilities. That transformation cannot occur independent of a more comprehensive, Joint transformation across the same categories and elements of theater design described earlier.

Thus, the Army MDO tenet of multi-domain formations (“the capacity, capability, and endurance . . . necessary to operate across multiple domains”) is relevant within the Army.<sup>9</sup> This tenet is relevant from the perspective of Army MDO capabilities integrating into Joint solutions. In addition, the tenet is relevant from the perspective of the Army as the theater's core enabler, facilitating Joint, multi-domain integration theater-wide.

## THE ARMY AS CAPABILITY AND CAPACITY GENERATOR

As discussed in chapter 7, the United States retains a significant but potentially weakening asymmetric advantage in the Indo-Pacific: a strong network of regional Allies and partners. The way in which the United States strengthens or leaves vulnerable that network's collective security posture will determine much about the future of US influence and freedom of action in the region. Given this observation, the Army as capability and capacity generator cannot be ignored.

Capability and capacity building are long-standing Army responsibilities in USINDOPACOM (as they are with other services). Historically, the Army has been a significant security partner to ground forces throughout the Indo-Pacific region, focusing on the twin goals of building partner capacity and enhancing interoperability. Presently, USARPAC continues this practice, seeking to strengthen partnership and alliance interoperability in the theater.<sup>10</sup> Over the last two decades, these responsibilities

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7. Senior military headquarters officials, interviews by the authors, December 2018 through May 2019; and prominent nongovernment individuals in national security, defense, and military affairs, interviews by the authors, December 2018 through May 2019.

8. Senior military headquarters officials, interviews by the authors, December 2018 through May 2019; and prominent nongovernment individuals in national security, defense, and military affairs, interviews by the authors, December 2018 through May 2019.

9. TRADOC, *Multi-Domain Operations*, vii.

10. Robert B. Brown et al., “Competing with China for a Free and Open Indo-Pacific,” *Military Review* (September–October 2019), 4.

have also included critical activities associated with the war on terrorism.<sup>11</sup> In fact, US Army and Allied forces in the Philippines and elsewhere in the region have been in harm's way repeatedly since 2001, confronting the Indo-Pacific region's enduring violent extremist threat.

All of these traditional missions will be operative for Army forces in 2028 and beyond; however, in light of the aforementioned three transformational roles of grid, enabler, and multi-domain warfighter, Army capability and capacity building in the Indo-Pacific region will also increasingly be a platform for revolutionary Army, Joint Force, and combined change across elements of theater design. Army forces will continue to collaborate extensively on self-defense with treaty Allies, the anchor partners, and other established or emerging regional security partners. Increasingly, however, the balance of resources should begin to favor support of a unified concept for theater-wide competition and conflict vis-à-vis the pacing PRC.

This movement toward a unified concept will mean Army forces will continue enhancing traditional partner ground-force competencies in decisive combined arms maneuver and wide-area security. But Army forces will also increasingly expand the transformation of partner theater design in ways similar to the ones described above. Specifically, multiple key regional partners will themselves become increasingly interested in their ground forces, engaging in and underwriting Joint MDO. Two anchor partners—Japan and Australia—are the likeliest and most important partners for the combined development of joint, multi-domain capability.<sup>12</sup>

US regional partners are under persistent gray-zone pressure from the People's Republic of China. Frequently, PRC gray-zone maneuver against US partners features a significant military component. Further still, China presents regional partners with the same vexing anti-access/area-denial challenges faced by US forces in the region. US Allies and partners already secure their interests under the coercive specter of a sophisticated and continuously transforming People's Liberation Army and its various air, land, sea, space, and cyber components and capabilities, and this will become even more problematic with time.<sup>13</sup>

Key US regional partners may be tempted to pursue their own agile, distributed, multi-domain solutions, sparking local transformation toward some version of the grid, enabler, and multi-domain warfighter. In addition to an interest in self-defense, some regional partners—perhaps the anchor partners at first—may also become increasingly

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11. See, for a recent example, *Posture of United States Indo-Pacific Command and United States Forces Korea: Hearings before the Senate Armed Services Committee*, 116th Cong. (February 12, 2019) (statements of Admiral Philip S. Davidson and General Robert B. Abrams), <https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/hearings/19-02-12-united-states-indo-pacific-command-and-united-states-forces-korea>.

12. For example, see Rachael Jeffcoat, "17th Field Artillery Brigade Participates in Orient Shield 2019 as Multi Domain Task Force," United States Indo-Pacific Command, September 6, 2019, <https://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/1954286/17th-field-artillery-brigade-participates-in-orient-shield-2019-as-multi-domain/>; and Paul McLeary, "Talisman Sabre: Land-Based Missiles vs. China," *Breaking Defense*, July 31, 2019, <https://breakingdefense.com/2019/07/talisman-sabre-land-based-missiles-vs-china/>.

13. Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), *China Military Power: Modernizing a Force to Fight and Win* (Washington, DC: DIA, 2019), 24.

interested in partnering with US forces to secure a “free and open Indo-Pacific” more broadly.<sup>14</sup> To the extent the United States adopts a more distributed and agile, theater-wide, Joint concept for competition and conflict, these partners will be increasingly interested in or incentivized to opt for operating approaches consistent with those adopted by the United States. In some cases, the United States is certain to encourage partner transformation to US concepts and complementary multi-domain capability to expand the competitive space and offer US and Allied commanders a wider array of military options across the continuum of competition.

Thus, US Joint Force and Army concepts for security cooperation and security force assistance will require a substantial reexamination in the USINDOPACOM AOR. That reexamination should focus on increasing partner multi-domain competencies, expanding Joint and combined military options, and ensuring freedom of action. The surest way to hypercompete now and demonstrate future US commitment vis-à-vis the pacing PRC is through mutual strategy, planning, concept development, and targeted exercising; this includes the combined development of theater-enabling and multi-domain warfighting capability. Army forces—within a unified, Joint concept for competition and conflict—can be a catalyst for fielding a combined, land-based, multi-domain warfighting network that draws on the unique strengths and competencies of the United States and its partners.

## WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

The implications of adopting the four transformational roles are profound. The roles span Joint Force and Army choices in the areas of strategy, plans, operations, readiness, modernization, and training. Transformational change in theater design is first a Joint Force issue. But the Army can play a lead role in Joint Force solutions. Enacting the recommendations in this report will require changes in policy, budget, service, and Joint practice, as well as buy-in from Allies and partners. Each of these steps will be difficult.

The findings and recommendations presented in the next chapter by element of design identify an Army-enabling foundation as the most in-demand Army capability in future Indo-Pacific competition and conflict. Though it may be somewhat counter to the Army’s culture, broad demand for an Army-enabling foundation is elemental to Joint Force success and, thus, must be the US Army’s number-one priority in the Indo-Pacific region for the next decade.

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14. US Department of Defense (DoD), *The Department of Defense Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnerships, and Promoting a Networked Region* (Washington, DC: DoD, June 1, 2019).



## CHAPTER 9. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS BY ELEMENT OF DESIGN

### Key Takeaways: Findings by Element of Design

- Enabling the Joint theater—not Army-specific multi-domain operations (MDO)—should be the principal driver for Army transformation in the United States Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) area of responsibility (AOR).
- Rather than a different Army, USINDOPACOM needs the current, projected, and evolved Army to be missioned, task-organized, and employed differently.
- From a widely distributed posture, the Army can provide the Joint Force with a more durable, resilient, and expeditionary operational foundation.
- Theater hypercompetition requires significantly more formal US-partner and Joint Force integration.
- Theater mission command should be lean, flat, forward, and more widely distributed.

In addition to the four transformational roles, this study arrived at numerous detailed findings and recommendations based on the elements of design: strategy and operational concepts; forces and capabilities; footprint and presence; authorities, permissions, and agreements; and mission command arrangements. The detailed findings and recommendations that follow complement and further develop the principal finding and recommendation in chapter 8.

These findings and recommendations are more than key ideas developed by US Army War College (USAWC) researchers through the course of this study. In fact, the findings and recommendations are considered to be among the most important to the realization of the principal recommendation. Through recognition and adoption of these findings and recommendations, the Army will assist the Joint Force in restoring a more favorable and influential military position throughout the highly contested United States Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) theater of operations. Table 2 lists each of the theater design elements, findings, and recommendations.

**Table 2. Theater design elements, findings, and recommendations**

Theater Design Element	Finding	Recommendations
<b>Strategy and Operational Concepts</b>	1) Enabling the Joint theater—not Army-specific multi-domain operations (MDO)—should be the principal driver for Army transformation in the United States Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) area of responsibility (AOR).	1) The Army should, with USINDOPACOM and sister services, develop a theater design that includes MDO within a larger Army theater-enabling mission.
<b>Forces and Capabilities</b>	2) Rather than a different Army, USINDOPACOM needs the current, projected, and evolved Army to be missioned, task-organized, and employed differently.	2) Army forces should be ruthlessly Joint, mission-tailored, multifunctional, and multi-domain. 3) Prioritize transformation and innovative employment of USINDOPACOM capabilities focused on mission command, protection, sustainment, intelligence (and information), and movement. 4) With Japan and Australia first, develop and field a land-based USINDOPACOM multi-domain warfighting network.
<b>Footprint and Presence</b>	3) From a widely distributed posture, the Army can provide the Joint Force with a more durable, resilient, and expeditionary operational foundation.	5) Establish a theater-enabling and multi-domain warfighting grid of clustered hubs, nodes, and materiel prepositioning. 6) The USINDOPACOM commander should leverage the grid as a means of conducting dynamic force employment (DFE). 7) Bolster permanent and rotational Army-enabling presence in Japan, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific Islands.
<b>Authorities, Permissions, and Agreements</b>	4) Theater hypercompetition requires significantly more formal US-partner and Joint Force integration.	8) Designate the Army as the Joint coordinating authority for the military relationship between the United States and the Philippines. 9) Reshape the Pacific Pathways and Defender Pacific drills as Army-led, Joint operations to establish, expand, and stress test the grid. 10) Develop, with anchor partners first, a road map for maximizing interoperability, complementarity, and freedom of action as they relate to the four transformational goals. 11) With partners, the US Joint Force and the Army should adapt relationships, plan collaboratively, and enhance effectiveness by operationalizing all theater military activity.
<b>Mission Command Arrangements</b>	5) Theater mission command should be lean, flat, forward-oriented, and more widely distributed.	12) In concert with partners, establish a resilient and redundant land-based mission command network. 13) Establish a multinodal, theater-enabling command west of the International Date Line. 14) Set conditions for Army-led, standing, multi-domain Joint task forces (JTFs) in northeast and Southeast Asia. 15) Reset the mission of and employ I Corps as a multinodal, theater-level, all-domain warfighting headquarters.

## STRATEGY AND OPERATIONAL CONCEPTS

In the category of strategy and operational concepts, this study arrived at a single finding and a single recommendation. In addition to the development of a unifying Joint design for theater competition and conflict, these two insights combined would mark the first concrete steps toward operationalizing the study's principal recommendation. The finding and recommendation suggest Army recognition of the Joint theater as a driving inspiration for service transformation in the Indo-Pacific region can be an important catalyst for essential Joint Force adaptation.

### Finding 1

*Enabling the Joint theater – not Army-specific multi-domain operations (MDO) – should be the principal driver for Army transformation in the USINDOPACOM area of responsibility (AOR). The Army MDO concept is a welcome innovation in the USINDOPACOM AOR, and USINDOPACOM and US Army Pacific (USARPAC) are leading Army MDO experimentation. The theater is also home to the Army's flagship MDO test-bed formation: the Multi-Domain Task Force (MDTF).*

But the study team finds MDO and the MDTF to be inadequate Army contributions to the goal of wholesale USINDOPACOM transformation. Although Army MDO is a critical, future, hypercompetitive warfighting instrument, it cannot be the sole or even principal driver for Army theater-level transformation.

If it intends to achieve a more agile and distributed theater, USINDOPACOM will require a robust enabling foundation. Success will only be possible with a transformed Army foundation based on existing and proposed theater-level Army responsibilities in the areas of mission command, protection, sustainment, intelligence (and information), and movement. The Army's broad and diverse capability set will be elemental in enabling the Joint Force theater-wide. Thus, USAWC researchers find the wider mission of enabling Joint MDO in both competition and conflict to be an apt driver for Army theater transformation through the next decade.

### *Recommendation 1*

**The Army should, with USINDOPACOM and sister services, develop a theater design that includes MDO within a larger Army theater-enabling mission.** Senior Army leadership should champion a Joint effort to identify Army-enabling and MDO requirements for a more agile, distributed, and disruptive Joint theater design. Further, the Army – alongside its Joint and foreign partners – should develop a service-specific operating concept and design for the theater with the principal responsibility of enabling the Joint Force.

This report has already recommended that this new Army design focus on four transformational roles. Work should begin immediately to codify these roles through appropriate transformation of theater-level strategy and operational concepts; forces and capabilities; footprint and presence; authorities, permissions, and agreements; and mission command arrangements.

## FORCES AND CAPABILITIES

The promise for an improved US military approach to the USINDOPACOM theater will be realized through tightly integrated, Joint, multi-domain solutions and associated innovations in operational concepts, task organization, mission tailoring, and physical posture. Thus, in the area of forces and capabilities, this study arrives at one key finding and two supporting recommendations.

### Finding 2

*Rather than a different Army, USINDOPACOM needs the current, projected, and evolved Army to be missioned, task-organized, and employed differently.* Consistent with the principal recommendation's four transformational roles, the widely distributed Army forces enabling Joint MDO across the competition continuum will need to be shape-shifters. Routine and contingency maintenance of the grid, widely distributed enabling of the Joint Force, and Army MDO all point toward an Army that is comfortable organizing into smaller, more autonomous, mission-tailored force packages. Further, Army personnel and capabilities will need to operate at the lowest possible effective level of functionality, alongside other Army and Joint Force capabilities performing radically different—yet mutually supportive—missions.

### Recommendation 2

**Army forces should be ruthlessly Joint, mission-tailored, multifunctional, and multi-domain.** Achieving this study's principal recommendation would require the Army to adopt a Joint-first orientation in concept development, strategy, missioning, and task organization. All military resources are finite for a global power with wide-ranging, worldwide responsibilities. The Army should focus its efforts on detailed planning for adaptable forces across warfighting functions with the ability to disaggregate and reaggregate in novel, mission-specific configurations; animate the grid with the right capabilities; and adequately support widely distributed, Joint MDO.

A more agile and distributed USINDOPACOM Joint Force design would require an Army that is increasingly proficient at organizing into smaller, more autonomous, mission-tailored force packages that perform a variety of missions, from Joint sustainment, mission command, and force protection to multi-domain warfighting. In addition to Army forces aggregating into and operating in smaller, multifunctional force packages, Army forces will need to integrate specialized, Joint capabilities routinely into Army-led formations. This integration is especially critical to the transformational roles of the grid and the enabler.

Joint and sister-service concepts indicate the kinds of specialized, Joint capabilities that may be required. Among them are intelligence and targeting, communications, space operations, armaments, maintenance, fuel and materiel handling, weather, and air and naval logistics.<sup>1</sup> The durable campaign quality of Army forces and the sheer depth of Army capabilities also indicate the grid and enabler roles may require Army forces to

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1. Senior military experts in the United States and the United States Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) theater, interview by the authors, December 2018 through May 2019.

adopt some specialized, Joint competencies—not routinely associated with the Army—to accommodate a lack of sister-service depth. The study team found this latter point to be particularly sensitive as it may indicate trades in force structure.<sup>2</sup>

### *Recommendation 3*

**Prioritize transformation and innovative employment of USINDOPACOM capabilities focused on mission command, protection, sustainment, intelligence (and information), and movement.** In the context of the USINDOPACOM theater, where decisive ground maneuver will be less central to Joint mission success vis-à-vis the pacing People’s Republic of China (PRC) rival, Army leadership should direct service innovation and transformation in the concepts of operation; missioning; task organization; and, ultimately, materiel modernization to accommodate a new foundational role for enabling and contributing to theater-wide, Joint MDO. Enabling the Army theater in the areas of mission command, protection, sustainment, intelligence (and information), and movement (including intra-theater watercraft) will ultimately pave the way for the convergence of Joint, multi-domain effects, as proposed in MDO. The Army concept of MDO defines the concept of “convergence”—one of three tenets of MDO—as “the act of applying a combination of fully integrated capabilities in time and space for a single purpose.”<sup>3</sup> Thus, Army leaders should start the transformation in these areas first because they are most relevant to a widely distributed, theater-level, Joint design for competition and conflict.

The Army bins 31 materiel initiatives into six basic clusters: Long Range Precision Fires, Next Generation Combat Vehicle, Future Vertical Lift, the Network, Air and Missile Defense, and Soldier Lethality. Although the Army’s Big Six captures areas of high-priority service transformation, the Army should expend additional intellectual energy and materiel investment on distributed, Joint sustainment.<sup>4</sup> Currently, distributed, Joint sustainment is not an Army priority, but it will be essential to a broad, multi-domain enabling role and to an effective Joint Force in the Indo-Pacific region.

Furthermore, the Army should reevaluate its prioritization of each of the Big Six initiatives in light of the USINDOPACOM Joint-enabling mission. In addition to the consideration of distributed, Joint logistics (Army watercraft systems likely fall into this category) as a potential new priority, the functions of grid and enabler suggest the clusters of the Network, Theater-Level Air and Missile Defense, and Future Vertical Lift are vital to a more competitive USINDOPACOM theater design vis-à-vis a hypercompetitive PRC. The form and course of the reevaluation and materiel modernization are highly dependent on the character of any new, Joint concept for multi-domain competition and conflict.

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2. Senior military headquarters officials and leaders in the United States and the USINDOPACOM theater, interview by the authors, December 2018 through May 2019.

3. US Army Combined Arms Center, *The US Army Concept for Multi-Domain Combined Arms Operations at Echelons Above Brigade 2025–2045* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: US Army Combined Arms Center, September 2018).

4. Sydney J. Freedberg Jr. “Army ‘Big Six’ Ramp up in 2021: Learning From FCS,” *Breaking Defense*, March 14, 2019, <https://breakingdefense.com/2019/03/army-big-six-ramp-up-in-2021-learning-from-fcs/>.

## Recommendation 4

**With Japan and Australia first, develop and field a land-based USINDOPACOM multi-domain warfighting network.** Tight integration with key anchor partners is a powerful immediate force multiplier. The closest possible integration of military strategy, concepts, and capabilities in a theater that lacks the unifying structure of a collective defense agreement is vitally important. Thus, the United States and its military must bolster relationships with its six anchor partners first. Engaging closely with Allies and partners to develop and integrate emerging military concepts from inception will also more rapidly catalyze theater-wide change and interoperability in operationally relevant ways.

Multi-domain operations (MDO) is an area ripe for immediate exploitation by US Joint Force and Army leaders. Across the competition continuum, this study finds that combined and complementary MDO concept and capability development among the United States, Japan, and Australia will be vitally important to restoring strategic initiative and establishing a more favorable and durable military balance.

Ultimately, the other four anchor partners and additional US regional partners will be key to the development of a theater-wide concept for MDO. But an initial multi-domain consortium with Japan and Australia would accelerate the development of novel approaches to the region's pacing rival. Both Japan and Australia boast modern military forces and sophisticated doctrine and concepts of operation. In addition, each country is likely to bring a unique perspective because each has a substantially different PRC-related challenge.

## FOOTPRINT AND PRESENCE

This study's principal finding is the US Joint Force is out of position for hypercompetition with an innovative, aggressive, and transforming China. Although US footprint and presence in the USINDOPACOM AOR are rooted in World War II, the current US distribution of forces and capabilities is the legacy of the Korean War and the Cold War.

### Finding 3

*From a widely distributed posture, the Army can provide the Joint Force with a more durable, resilient, and expeditionary operational foundation.* US forces have realigned since the Cold War; nevertheless, this study finds that significant physical vulnerabilities and limitations remain.<sup>5</sup> The US Joint Force is forward-stationed at a small number of large main operating bases across northeast Asia.<sup>6</sup> These forces rely on long, increasingly insecure physical and virtual lines of communication to conduct routine and contingency

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5. Mark Gunzinger et al., *Force Planning for an Era of Great Power Competition* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2017), 1-11.

6. Mira Rapp-Hooper et al., *Counterbalance: Red Teaming the Rebalance in the Asia-Pacific* (Washington, DC: Center for a New American Security, November 2016), 15.

military operations.<sup>7</sup> The physical footprint of forward-deployed forces underwriting US regional strategy now relies on an accumulation of potentially multiple single points of failure.

In contrast, China is deliberately expanding its regional footprint, often with modest investments, such as ports, warehousing, and maintenance agreements.<sup>8</sup> The net effect of these outwardly benign moves is the surreptitious creation of latent military options for the People's Republic of China.<sup>9</sup> China appears to be quietly establishing its own theater grid. In combination, US vulnerabilities and competitive PRC posture changes increasingly cede initiative, freedom of action, and competitive space to China. Reversing these trends will require revolutionary changes in US military footprint and presence.

In light of China's increasingly sophisticated, multi-domain military reach, US presence in the USINDOPACOM AOR requires much greater depth, resilience, agility, and redundancy. From its current legacy footprint, US defense leadership will be challenged to sustain a hypercompetitive position vis-à-vis China's active gray-zone campaigning. Further, the USAWC team finds that from its current posture, the United States would not be able to generate disruptive military advantages or transition to armed conflict in the event of escalation to such conflict. Thus, transformational changes in theater posture are essential. Change will be most durable and effective on a transformational Army backbone.

#### *Recommendation 5*

**Establish a theater-enabling and multi-domain warfighting grid of clustered hubs, nodes, and materiel prepositioning.** This study imagines the Army-enabled grid as a living operational ecosystem of clustered hubs, expeditionary nodes, and reimagined materiel prepositioning that, in combination, allow the Joint Force – through the Army – to rapidly activate theater-level military responses for the broad range of USINDOPACOM demands. The physical process or campaign for creating a deep, resilient, agile, and operationally redundant theater-level enabling grid will by itself be a profound demonstration of US commitment to outcomes in the USINDOPACOM AOR.

Further, construction of the grid will create a new competitive tempo within the Army and Joint Force in the Indo-Pacific region. In combination, these factors will undoubtedly influence rival decision making and enhance regional confidence in US commitment. Deliberate Army expansion of a multi-domain enabling grid should increasingly eliminate positional vulnerabilities and single points of failure while creatively expanding the number of Army-enabled options at the disposal of Joint Force commanders.

When combined, depth, resiliency, agility, and redundancy create an Army-enabling footprint that integrates fixed, transient, and expeditionary operating sites spanning

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7. For a useful discussion of how the People's Republic of China (PRC) is modernizing to deny the United States and its partners freedom of maneuver, see Malcolm Davis, *Dragon at the Door: How China's Military Is Changing the Game in the Pacific* (Ottawa, Canada: Macdonald-Laurier Institute, November 2017).

8. Keith Johnson and Dan DeLuce, "One Belt, One Road, One Happy Chinese Navy," *Foreign Policy*, April 17, 2018, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/04/17/one-belt-one-road-one-happy-chinese-navy/>.

9. Johnson and DeLuce, "One Belt, One Road."

northeast Asia, Southeast Asia, Australia, and the Pacific Islands as initial priorities. Proving the principle with interested and able Allies and partners should come first, followed by expanding where possible thereafter.

For example, the opportunity to experiment with establishing an expeditionary grid inside long-standing anchor partners like Japan, South Korea, and Australia may exist already. Further, the Philippines' strategic location at the center of the USINDOPACOM AOR highlights that particular ally's importance to future US and regional security. But increased cooperation between the Philippines and the United States would rely on significant high-level improvement in the relationship between them.

This report only suggests potential locations for grid clusters, hubs, and nodes. The precise positioning of clusters, hubs, and nodes will rely on the combined evolution of Joint and service concepts for multi-domain competition and conflict in the AOR. Similarly, this study did not make judgments on the precise composition of Army or Joint Force prepositioned stocks and capabilities to underwrite or support the grid. Follow-on USAWC work examining some of these specifics through research, analysis, and gaming is already underway.

#### *Recommendation 6*

**The USINDOPACOM commander should leverage the grid as a means of conducting dynamic force employment (DFE).** The *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy* (NDS) advances the concept of DFE as the "use of ready forces to shape proactively the strategic environment."<sup>10</sup> As a tool of DFE, the Army should operationalize the grid in partnership with sister services. The grid would be a significant step toward realizing the DFE model.

Activating the Army enabling grid and routinely employing Joint Force and Army forces throughout it would shape the perceptions, strategic decisions, and actions of friends and rivals alike. To the extent the grid demonstrates effective Joint Force integration, the ability of the United States to shape the perceptions of the pacing PRC rival would become even more powerful.

The purpose of the grid and the forces supporting it is the rapid activation and exploitation of its most relevant clusters, hubs, and nodes to achieve a range of Joint Force objectives. Activating and exploiting the grid across the competition continuum under various routine and contingency conditions—including, for example, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief—meets the intent of DFE by demonstrating the unmistakable ability of US forces to combine Joint capabilities at the time and place of greatest need on a resilient enabling backbone. Researchers at the USAWC believe this capability is well within US reach now and by 2028 and beyond, whereas it is a more challenging objective for the People's Republic of China to realize over the same time frame.

Combining the Army enabling grid with sister-service concepts of operation provides the Joint Force with a powerful mechanism with which to operationalize a more agile,

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10. James Mattis, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America: Sharpening the American Military's Competitive Edge* (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense [OSD], January 19, 2018).



distributed, and disruptive theater design. Ongoing demonstration of the utility and power resident in combining these concepts would underwrite theater deterrence first. In the event of escalation to armed conflict, prior exploitation of an Army enabling grid by the US Joint Force to conduct routine and contingency operations would make effective transition to armed hostilities that much easier.

#### *Recommendation 7*

**Bolster permanent and rotational Army-enabling presence in Japan, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific Islands.** Researchers at the USAWC find that the Army should explore an immediate expansion of multifunctional and multi-domain enabling presence in Japan, the Philippines, and Compact of Free Association (COFA) countries. Although recommendation 6 states the Army should seize opportunities to build an expanded set of hubs and nodes in a future enabling grid, this recommendation focuses on the Army making an immediate investment in multifunctional and multi-domain presence to underwrite, expand, or restore the military relationships that are essential to a transformed USINDOPACOM theater design.

In each of these states, the study team sees the unique convergence of existing relationships, strategic utility, vulnerability, and potential opportunity. Two of the three states are anchor partners. All three have standing defense or security agreements with the United States. Maintaining US relationships in these countries will require flexible approaches across the range of foreign policy instruments. Likely, each state will also seek tailored security solutions appropriate to its unique strategic and political circumstances.

Japan provides the United States with a permanent safe haven inside the PRC's considerable anti-access/area-denial umbrella. Japan is a reliable base of operations from which the United States and Japan can secure common interests against People's Republic of China, Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), and Russian aggression.

The Philippines is a strategic pivot point in the theater. By position alone, close cooperation and increased (likely rotational) Army (and Joint Force) presence in the Philippines would enable a coalition between the Philippines and the United States to secure at-risk common interests in the event of regional aggression from myriad hubs and nodes positioned throughout a vast Southeast Asian archipelago. Increased cooperation and Army presence would also further enhance a military response from the United States and the Philippines with international support in the event of humanitarian disaster. Finally, in light of the aforementioned physical advantages, increased military cooperation between the United States and the Philippines would further enable multi-domain military influence over the South China Sea and western Pacific. These objectives are important across the continuum of competition with the pacing PRC and would be invaluable in the event of wider conflict with either North Korea or Russia.

Finally, across the continuum of competition, a deep, agile, resilient, and redundant footprint and posture will rely on the active support of the COFA states. The COFA states provide strategic depth and sanctuary for US forces in the event of armed hostilities in the USINDOPACOM AOR. In the ongoing gray-zone competition for regional influence, the COFA states' traditional relationship with the United States—and continued US

commitment to the states' broad political, economic, and military security—could effectively limit PRC coercive potential.

In all cases and contrary to current trends toward a more transactional approach to foreign and security policy, USAWC researchers find that the United States will need to invest in the Indo-Pacific region to receive dividends. Additional forces alone will not necessarily strengthen essential relationships in any of these cases. Instead, the USAWC team suggests the persistent demonstration of mutual benefit and, perhaps on occasion, disproportionate partner benefit would enable the United States to thicken the theater-wide connective tissue essential to a transformed USINDOPACOM design.

## **AUTHORITIES, PERMISSIONS, AND AGREEMENTS**

Authorities, permissions, and agreements are the formal and informal policies, arrangements, and accords governing the control, employment, positioning, and movement of military capabilities and forces, as well as the relationships between US and partner militaries. Authorities, permissions, and agreements—the necessary basis for US military operations—range from service roles, missions, responsibilities, and rules of engagement to status of forces agreements and mutual defense treaties.

At present, two key obstacles to a transformed USINDOPACOM design have direct bearing on authorities, permissions, and agreements. The first obstacle is the absence of a strong multilateral security arrangement binding the United States and regional partners together in an effective alliance structure. This reality means as many perspectives on Indo-Pacific security threats and obligations exist as do formal and informal, bilateral US regional security partnerships. The second obstacle is the widely acknowledged absence of a common, unifying, Joint Force concept for multi-domain competition and conflict in the theater.

On the former, the Indo-Pacific is not destined for a US-led mutual defense treaty like the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Instead, the United States will need to continue working diligently through a series of point-to-point or mini-lateral relationships with regional partners. Researchers at the USAWC are more sanguine on the latter. A more agile and distributed Joint theater design—when properly implemented—may have disruptive effects on the hypercompetitive pacing PRC rival.

### **Finding 4**

*Theater hypercompetition requires significantly more formal US-partner and Joint Force integration.* Effective hypercompetition is about accumulating advantage across iterative cycles of strategic and operational decision and action. A more mature and sophisticated level of Joint and combined integration is essential to operationalizing a more hypercompetitive theater design. But, among regional partners, agreement on the intensity and sophistication of the People's Republic of China military threat is elusive. Among the constituent services of the US Joint Force, truly integrated Joint approaches are equally elusive.

Nonetheless, the USAWC researchers believe that although the United States will not enjoy the benefits of a multilateral alliance in the Indo-Pacific region, the country can ultimately benefit from complementary coalitions of common purpose. Further, this

study concludes that the Joint Force and the Army can ultimately leverage agreement on common threats to find opportunities to harmonize Joint and combined military concepts, capabilities, and competencies.

This study finds the United States should start developing complementary coalitions with the anchor partners first on a functional basis. Among areas of potential common agreement and need are air and missile defense, resilient combined mission command and continuity of operations, cyber and space employment and security, electromagnetic spectrum management and access, maritime and air domain awareness, intelligence, and broad Joint military sustainment. Many of these areas of functional cooperation also have more benign applications in the realms of public safety, law enforcement, and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. These areas are also vulnerable to increasingly sophisticated and aggressive People's Republic of China military capabilities and methods. Thus, early and deep collaboration in these areas can minimize significant foundational risk.

Where the United States has strong, long-standing, and durable military ties, as well as a relatively common perception of military threat, more formal integration is possible relative to China. Australia, Japan, and Taiwan fall into this category. The anchor security partnership between the United States and South Korea has some potential for repurposing in the event strategic and operational circumstances change on the Korean peninsula. Finally, anchors like the Philippines and Singapore may benefit from integration that initially emphasizes more benign or alternative (for example, counterinsurgency and counterterrorism) applications of military power.

Although clearly vulnerable to the accusation of American subterfuge, codevelopment or complementary development of dual-purpose military capabilities, methods, and conventions can answer immediate real-world contingency demands (for example, counterinsurgency and counterterrorism, natural and human disaster, counter-piracy/law enforcement, etc.) while hedging against a more hostile future great-power confrontation. Either way, US and partner militaries should more fully integrate their military concepts, capabilities, and competencies. Creatively cultivating common purpose and formalizing relationships are challenging but essential.

As critical as increased US-partner integration might be, this report concludes an equally urgent requirement exists for more comprehensive Joint Force integration. This requirement is a matter of authorities, permissions, and agreements precisely because achieving greater integration may require increased Joint Force authority over the form and substance of some key service priorities.

This theme has surfaced in multiple areas in this report already. Briefly, USAWC researchers would restate the imperative for a Joint theater design for competition and conflict paced by the People's Republic of China, but agile enough to accommodate the Indo-Pacific region's range of military demands.

At present, the USAWC study finds US approaches to theater competition are neither effects-based nor objective-focused. Further, as has been stated throughout this report, the individual services are pursuing their own individual war-winning concepts, with only passing reference to a Joint, combined approach to multi-domain hypercompetition and warfighting.

This report recommends a comprehensively integrated Joint Force approach at both the theater and service levels. Finite resources and unique service competencies underscore the need for a Joint Force concept that leverages, harmonizes, and synchronizes service activity into a seamless Joint Force whole. Surrendering some service authority over capability and concept choices to Joint preferences may require changes in law, process, and defense conventions.

#### *Recommendation 8*

**Designate the Army as the Joint coordinating authority for the military relationship between the United States and the Philippines.** The combination of a continuing counterterror/counterinsurgency security assistance relationship matched with Army adoption of and adaptation to the four transformational roles indicates a need for greater Army responsibility in military cooperation between the United States and the Philippines. Toward that end, the Army should assume responsibility as the Joint Force coordinating authority for the Philippines. In the study team's view, the Army roles of grid, enabler, multi-domain warfighter, and capability and capacity generator meet and combine optimally in the Philippines.

The US Army has a long-standing relationship with the Philippines. And, over the last two decades, US Army and US Marine Corps forces have fought alongside the Armed Forces of the Philippines against extremists in Mindanao.<sup>11</sup> As the Joint Force reorients for great-power competition, the United States must also engage in cooperation with the Philippines that balances the latter's challenges with internal security and longer-term challenges from the theater pacing rival.

#### *Recommendation 9*

**Reshape the Pacific Pathways and Defender Pacific exercises as Army-led, Joint operations to establish, expand, and stress test the grid.** In addition to recommendation 6 on DFE, the USINDOPACOM commander should ensure all future military activities in the USINDOPACOM AOR occur according to a unified, Joint theater design for competition and conflict focused first on influencing the strategic choices and decision making of the pacing PRC rival; this would include current and projected, Joint and service exercises and training. For the Army in particular, USAWC researchers argue for the operationalization of Army exercises Pacific Pathways and Defender Pacific.

Pacific Pathways is a routine Army combined arms exercise intended to increase simultaneously Army expeditionary capability in the Indo-Pacific region and strengthen ties with Allies and partners. The Defender Pacific exercise, which is new to the Indo-Pacific region, mirrors a similarly named Army exercise in Europe.<sup>12</sup> Both exercises currently focus on ground combat operations and traditional combined arms

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11. Eleanor Albert, *The US-Philippines Defense Alliance* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, October 21, 2016).

12. Jen Judson, "US Army's 'Defender Pacific' Drill to Focus on South China Sea Scenario," *Defense News*, March 27, 2019, <https://www.defensenews.com/digital-show-dailies/global-force-symposium/2019/03/27/defender-pacific-to-focus-on-south-china-sea-scenario/>.

competencies. Researchers at the USAWC recommend a radical reshaping of these two flagship Army programs consistent with the principal finding and recommendation in section 7.

If the Army is to assume the four transformational roles in the Indo-Pacific region, a deliberate, campaign-like effort to establish the grid and exercise the Joint Force-enabling role throughout the grid will be required. To ensure these goals are accomplished, the Army should convert Pacific Pathways into a recurring, Army-run operation undertaken with the expressed purpose of establishing the deep, agile, resilient, and redundant theater-level enabling grid recommended in this report. As the grid matures, the Defender Pacific drill should be similarly employed to test, prove, and demonstrate the grid and enabler roles as a coordinated, Joint platform for theater-wide competition and conflict.

On this latter point, the USAWC research team believes demonstrations of Joint operations have enormous deterrent value. Routine contingency demonstrations of complex, distributed, Joint operations—underwritten by enabling the Army—would prove far more valuable in influencing PRC choices than isolated, service-specific training exercises would.

#### *Recommendation 10*

**Develop, with anchor partners first, a road map for maximizing interoperability, complementarity, and freedom of action as they relate to the four transformational goals.** If the United States is to adopt a hypercompetitive, Joint theater design and a supporting, Army-enabling concept, the anchor partners will be the bedrock upon which transformational changes rest. Greater cooperation, interoperability, and combined action will be essential. This study finds a range of possibilities that depend on the anchor partner.

In most cases, the possibilities are bounded foremost by an anchor partner's domestic political considerations, and not necessarily wise military judgment. In virtually every instance, maturing each relationship for mutual benefit will be an extended and politically challenging effort. In some cases, maturing a relationship may mean making small adjustments to existing agreements or cooperative frameworks. In other cases, maturing a relationship may require significant diplomatic and policy work to create new, more comprehensive agreements.

Joint transformation and Army adoption of the four transformational roles will be more impactful to the extent that anchor partner militaries adopt complementary concepts alongside the United States. In some cases, anchor partners may welcome increased US physical presence and develop—alongside the United States—combined enabling and multi-domain warfighting capabilities as a deterrent to PRC aggression.

In other cases, anchor partners may develop sovereign enabling and multi-domain solutions that complement (and, in extremis, are accessible to) US forces. US decision makers should strive to shape outcomes with the anchor partners that give US forces the greatest direct access, while recognizing a wide variety of acceptable partner solutions and approaches may exist.

As noted earlier in this report, the greatest immediate potential for complementary transformational change is with Japan and Australia. In both countries, that transformation would likely span domains, contested spaces, and warfighting functions. Thus, USAWC researchers see Japan and Australia in the short term as likeliest to buy into, underwrite, and adopt key aspects of the four transformational roles.

With Japanese defense policy already hinging on the concept of MDO (or cross-domain operations and forces) and given Japan's strategic position at the north end of the first island chain, the country is the likeliest launching point for a more distributed Army-enabling network. Japan is also a key strategic platform for the integrated forward-positioning of lethal and nonlethal, US and Japanese, land-based MDO capabilities, all anchored inside the People's Republic of China's thorny anti-access/area-denial umbrella.

Australia can contribute to transformational change in the Indo-Pacific region in multiple critical ways. First, Australia provides a degree of sanctuary and strategic depth for the performance of activities across warfighting functions. Further, to the extent Australia adopts its own hypercompetitive grid approach to Indo-Pacific security, the country can be a vanguard in establishing functional military presence in areas of the Pacific where a US lead may be less welcome or appropriate. Finally, Australia's sophisticated armed forces are essential partners for the US Joint Force in the codevelopment of and experimentation with new, hypercompetitive capabilities and methods uniquely tailored to the expansive Indo-Pacific theater.

In Singapore, USAWC researchers see great potential for additional meaningful military cooperation. But, in the short term, that cooperation likely will be limited to innovation in theater sustainment and, perhaps, mission command. This contribution from Singapore is not insignificant. The country's position at the mouth of the strategic Strait of Malacca and its expanding naval support facilities make it a reliable enabling hub.

Researchers at the USAWC see a strong potential transformational ally in the Republic of Korea as it relates to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, though with limited, short-term adaptation to a wider role in hypercompetition with the PRC. Although USAWC researchers see enormous potential for the RoK as a complementary regional security exporter, current understandable focus on peninsular stability, the PRC's proximity and political-military-economic influence, and increasing tension between South Korea and fellow anchor partner Japan are obstacles to a more comprehensive transformational change to the purpose and implementation of combined US-RoK military strategy.

Over time, South Korea—like Japan—will provide the United States with a potential operational strongpoint with myriad options for a widely distributed Joint Force enabling grid. The RoK provides for US presence on the Asian mainland, and it is well within the PRC's anti-access/area-denial umbrella. Ultimately, as both an independent pan-Pacific security force and reliable US ally, South Korea has enormous potential for affecting outcomes both on the Asian mainland and well outside of the Korean peninsula in the wider Indo-Pacific.

Taiwan is also an important theater strongpoint inside the first island chain. China is focused on gaining sovereign control over Taiwan, but cannot do so without great political-military cost. The United States is legally obligated to support Taiwan's

efforts to defend itself. As both a legal and policy issue, support for Taiwan has broad-based, bipartisan support in the US Congress and executive branch. US policy is also cognizant of the escalatory hazard associated with the most overt demonstrations of that commitment. Thus, Taiwan is an economy of force for the United States and its partners.

Taiwan disproportionately consumes PRC military focus while simultaneously being seemingly off-limits for direct US military theater involvement short of armed conflict. A future Taiwan with increased, sovereign, land-based, multi-domain capability and its own widely distributed enabling grid will provide the United States with an in-place force multiplier. To the extent Taiwan's sovereign enabling grid is consistent with concepts developed by the Army and Joint Force, it may also provide the United States a foundational support network in the event direct US intervention becomes unavoidable.

Finally, the Philippines provides significant opportunities for any new transformational theater design across warfighting functions, but only to the extent Washington and Manila are able to align regional and security priorities. Lately, such an alignment has been problematic. The challenges, however, are not necessarily insurmountable. Thus, US strategists should pursue increased coordination and cooperation with the Philippines – even if progress is uneven, slow, and expensive for the United States.

Identifying mutually agreed-upon security objectives and approaches relative to the transformational roles of each anchor partner is an essential early step. No progress will be made with anchor partners without early and explicit support from those countries' political leadership for such steps. From that point, reverse engineering the necessary constituent elements of interoperability, cooperation, complementarity, and access provides a start-to-finish road map for moving forward.

In some recent cases, one or both sides of processes like this have paused after reaching a milestone because of uncertainty about the next steps. As one example, the US-India Defense Trade and Technology Initiative, although focused on seemingly easier-to-manage elements such as procurement, trade, and technology development, has made episodic progress since its inception. The authors assess that the greater sensitivity of operational planning may make it even more susceptible to such start-and-stop impacts. Mutually agreed-upon road maps avoid outcomes like these and enable sustained momentum. A road map also provides a clear signal of resolve to rivals and unambiguous resourcing priorities within and across partner governments.

### *Recommendation 11*

**With partners, the US Joint Force and the Army should adapt relationships, plan collaboratively, and enhance effectiveness by operationalizing all theater military activity.** In many ways, this recommendation is a corollary to recommendation 9 concerning Pacific Pathways and Defender Pacific. Going forward, all Joint, Army, and multinational military activities in the Indo-Pacific region should be demand-based, which means they should occur according to a unified theater design for competition and conflict, they should mirror anticipated operational requirements, and they should seek to convey a message to others in the region.

The United States can no longer afford activity for activity's sake in the USINDOPACOM AOR. In short, all unilateral, bilateral, and multilateral military activities in the theater should be operationalized to advance US and partner interests materially vis-à-vis threats, set conditions for the conduct of anticipated combined military operations, and develop and/or demonstrate combined capabilities and methods that shape the strategic decision making of friends and rivals.

The United States will require a transformational theater design and a deliberate, campaign-like approach to USINDOPACOM's pacing military challenger and its wider range of military demands. Thus, at every turn, US and partner senior leadership should ask and answer a simple set of questions with respect to each exercise, training event, presence activity, or combined planning effort: Is this the best available way to advance US/partner interests, underwrite an increasingly hypercompetitive theater approach, favorably impact rival decision making, and restore or maintain confidence in US commitment and will?

## MISSION COMMAND ARRANGEMENTS

Current Joint Force and Army mission command arrangements in the USINDOPACOM AOR are not well-suited to accommodate an agile, distributed, and disruptive theater design. Army mission command, in particular, has been relatively unchanged since the Cold War, and almost exclusively focused on the Korean peninsula. In some cases, US theater headquarters are fixed and excessively administrative. In other cases, the potential for innovation exists, but the command's mission, staffing, or position are not optimal. For example, US Forces Japan and US Army Japan are fairly small headquarters with in-place senior leadership. Expanding the mission—and the staff—would enable a more robust mission set with a minimal impact on the overall in-country footprint or the overall Army force.

In general, the study team found the beginnings of a potential transformational Army mission command architecture stretching across the theater. A robust Army enabling grid with a distributed and resilient mission command architecture is within reach over the short term. Though the demand may exist to create new mission command structures from scratch, these instances are the exception, not the norm.

### **Finding 5**

*Theater mission command should be lean, flat, forward-oriented, and more widely distributed.* At present, Army command relationships and organization in USINDOPACOM are ill-suited to hypercompetition. Most Army mission command nodes in USINDOPACOM are focused on the Korean peninsula. The limited number of non-Korea-focused mission command nodes are too senior, layered, reliant on cumbersome support infrastructure, or far away to be relevant to hypercompetition.

The Army's Korea mission remains important, but no mission command-related adjustment exists to account for transformational change in the People's Republic of China's ability to strike a majority of the United States' in-theater headquarters. When one also considers the force-multiplying potential of Russian theater- and national-level



capabilities and the AOR's propensity for human and natural disaster, the imperative for change in mission command arrangements becomes clearer.

In combination and alongside the Army adoption of the four transformational roles, these factors point toward the demand for a new, flatter, leaner, and more distributed theater mission command architecture that spans the AOR. A transformed Army mission command architecture should leverage the preexisting advantages of US presence throughout the region to begin the creation of an expansive, redundant, and creatively disruptive network of mission command nodes from which to underwrite and control theater-level enabling, multi-domain competition, and armed conflict.

#### *Recommendation 12*

**In concert with partners, establish a resilient and redundant land-based mission command network.** The lingering advantage of American presence leads USAWC researchers to believe the skeletal foundation for an adapted, more widely distributed mission command network already exists across the Pacific and Indian Oceans. For the Army specifically, physical presence in Alaska, Washington State, Hawaii, Guam, Japan, and Korea provide an initial foundation for a broad, redundant, and resilient theater mission command architecture from which to control theater enabling, multi-domain competition, and, if necessary, conflict.

Theater engagement throughout the study effort also led USAWC researchers to conclude that existing Joint Force presence in or rotation through Australia, Singapore, the Philippines, and Diego Garcia provide additional immediate opportunities for the expansion of a lean, forward-based, technology-enabled mission command network. The migration of redundant mission command options from northeast Asia into Southeast Asia, the Pacific Islands, the Indian Ocean, and the western United States will be essential in the evolution and maturity of the Army mission command network necessary for underwriting the transformed enabling role recommended in this report.

In the case of all mission command nodes, including those in the United States, USAWC researchers recommend wide distribution, redundancy, and new protocols for degraded or compromised communications. Further, a multinodal, distributed approach should underwrite new levels of operational resilience. In short, the mission command network recommended here is both a reflection of and essential to the Army enabling grid recommended and described above. At their core, both the enabling grid and its supporting mission command network are intended to provide the Joint Force commander a wider range of options for myriad theater-level military demands.

#### *Recommendation 13*

**Establish a multinodal, theater-enabling command west of the International Date Line.** If the Army is to assume the new transformational role of enabling the Joint Force theater-wide, it will require the appropriate mission command structure and subordinate mission command elements to accomplish the task under a variety of demanding operational conditions. Researchers at the USAWC suggest that a transformational, senior-level, theater-enabling command is the answer. As discussed earlier, theater enabling is focused foremost on the warfighting functions of mission

command, sustainment, protection, intelligence (and information), and movement. This study suggests theater enabling—although not the visible main effort in Joint, multi-domain competition and conflict—is nonetheless equivalent to the main effort in that it is elemental to Joint Force success.

A theater-enabling command is not an enhanced theater sustainment command. Instead, a theater-enabling command is a multi-domain formation capable of employing widely distributed, multifunctional, mission-tailored forces across the theater as they perform a variety of tasks in direct support of Joint Force and Army forces in the field. This report suggests the precise composition and missioning of the recommended theater-enabling command relies on a new, unified, theater-level, Joint design for competition and conflict.

But, in outline, the theater-enabling command is the instrument that directly enables the Joint Force commander to seize transient advantages across domains, contested spaces, and geography and exploit them with confidence on the back of a resilient and redundant enabling architecture. In brief, the USAWC team notes that the theater-enabling command is, at times, the Joint Force commander’s decisive instrument in theater-wide hypercompetition.

Researchers at the USAWC recommend that a new theater-enabling command not be deployed on order, but instead be a standing in situ asset responsible for the persistent maintenance of Joint Force options across the Army enabling grid. The theater-enabling command is responsible for and operates within the distributed mission command network described above, and key theater-enabling decision-making nodes should be positioned west of the International Date Line.

#### *Recommendation 14*

**Set conditions for Army-led, standing, multi-domain Joint task forces (JTFs) in northeast and Southeast Asia.** Although this study spends a majority of its effort on the transformational roles of grid and enabler specifically, USAWC researchers have two specific comments on the trajectory of Army MDO development in the USINDOPACOM AOR. This recommendation and the next capture the study team’s thoughts.

First, this study suggests, despite the dominant enabling mission recommended in this report, the Army’s focus may be too narrow with respect to MDO in the Indo-Pacific. In addition to recommended partnerships with Japan and Australia on MDO concept and capability development, the study team recommends the establishment of standing, multi-domain JTFs in northeast and Southeast Asia. The JTFs would plug into the distributed mission command network described above and receive foundational enabling from the transformational theater command described in recommendation 13.

In the case of northeast Asia, USAWC researchers found in Japan an enormous appetite for collaboration on MDO. Growing Japanese unease with PRC gray-zone maneuver, combined with a large, standing US military presence in Japan, create the possibility to develop a standing, Army-led, multi-domain presence in Japan. Such coordination would materially advance the concept of land-based MDO as it relates to the People’s Republic of China. Further, such coordination would provide a new deterrent capability in close proximity to all three regional challengers. Finally, the establishment

of a standing, Army-led MDO JTF would provide a timely and transformational demonstration of US commitment to Japan's security.

Southeast Asia may be trickier politically, and may at first require that the JTF be established elsewhere in the theater. But, for the same reasons a standing MDO JTF makes sense in northeast Asia, Southeast Asia is an equally relevant location. Indeed, given Japan's explicit policy commitment to MDO in its most recent National Defense Programming Guidelines, US multi-domain buildup in Southeast Asia would provide for greater depth of capability while complicating PRC military planning. The optimal location for a standing, Army-led MDO JTF in Southeast Asia is uncertain. Significant change in political circumstances in the Philippines would make it the ideal location.

#### *Recommendation 15*

**Reset the mission of I Corps and employ it as a multinodal, theater-level, all-domain warfighting headquarters.** The US Army I Corps is already the senior headquarters for multi-domain experimentation through its 17th Fires Brigade being designated as the Army's MDTF. But, consistent with the Army's focus on MDO being too narrow, USAWC researchers recommend a thorough reexamination of I Corps' role in the development and fielding of land-based MDO capability in the USINDOPACOM AOR. In short, this study recommends that a more senior Army headquarters take on the role of MDTF in a USINDOPACOM context precisely because of the expansive nature of the USINDOPACOM multi-domain challenge.

Ultimately, I Corps may comprise one or both of the standing MDO JTFs recommended above. But, for now, USAWC researchers believe a properly resourced senior operational command is essential for land-based MDO to reach its full potential in a USINDOPACOM context. This observation is particularly true given the weight that US ally Japan places on multi-domain strategy, concept, and capability development. Although the Army and the Joint Force would assume some risk with the temporary (or permanent) loss of a three-star maneuver headquarters in the USINDOPACOM AOR as it transforms and adopts to a multi-domain warfighting mission, this study suggests more senior-level MDO missioning would yield greater results. This higher-level focus will see those results reach further into Army and Joint Force concepts and capabilities.

At present, the MDTF is a tactical asset with limited reach. As with the rest of this report, USAWC researchers recommend that the Army think on a bigger scale. Ultimately, land-based MDO with significant lethal and nonlethal reach will provide the Joint Force commander with a durable and more survivable MDO option. Land-based MDO is more fixed, but will ultimately exhibit more endurance. Multi-domain operations will only reach their full potential with a higher-level operational focus. Given its current authority over the MDTF, US I Corps provides a more appropriate locus of higher-level MDO experimentation and fielding over the short to medium term.



## CHAPTER 10. CONCLUSION

### Key Takeaways: Conclusion

- Action and inaction engender significant risk.
- The risk of action is moderate to high.
- The risk of inaction, deferred action, or insufficient action is significantly higher.

Current United States Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) theater design is built on remnants of Cold War logic, discredited perspectives on US military advantage, and lingering post-Cold War hubris. None of these qualities will help secure vulnerable US interests from a hypercompetitive People's Republic of China (PRC). The change imperative in USINDOPACOM at the Joint and service component levels is palpable.

This research and analysis led the authors to determine that any answer to Army theater design questions must draw inspiration from an actual or assumed, Joint vision for competition and conflict in the USINDOPACOM area of responsibility (AOR). Thus, this study is as much implicit commentary on Joint theater design as it is explicit commentary on Army choices about the same. In the end, this report recommends wholesale Joint Force and Army transformation across five elements of theater design to overcome significant strategic and operational vulnerability to an increasingly aggressive and persistently transforming and pacing PRC rival.

The strategic purpose of a new USINDOPACOM design must be creatively reseizing the strategic initiative from the rival PRC and expanding the competitive space in ways that give it new strategic planning dilemmas. A transformational theater design should also begin to impose risk on China and persistently generate innovative Joint Force options for the myriad military demands in the region. All of these—in combination—are essential to the United States restoring or maintaining for the foreseeable future a favorable Indo-Pacific military balance.

In the hypercompetitive military rivalry between the United States and China, a favorable balance does not connote permanent military advantage. Rather, a favorable balance would be the persistent capability to generate or regenerate military advantage at the time and place of greatest need or desire. This report assesses that the PRC already has, or is quickly trending toward, durable advantage in multiple areas. The report recommends actions intended to reverse that trend.

Army adaptation to the four transformational roles will necessitate substantial—and sometimes uncomfortable or countercultural—change. But Army recognition, pursuit, and rolling implementation of the transformational roles in the Indo-Pacific region will provide the theater commander with both a launchpad and a sustaining superstructure for a multi-domain, Joint theater design with broad utility across the continuum of competition and the range of USINDOPACOM military demands.

### THE RISKS OF ACTION AND INACTION

All strategic decisions involve risk. The transformational course of action recommended in this report is no different. Policy makers must weigh two broad risks:

the risk of action and the risk of inaction. A choice to take no, deferred, or ineffective action involves risk that is at least equal to the choice to pursue transformational change. Risk here is defined as the likelihood of failure or prohibitive cost in realizing the study's principal recommendation.

## **RISK OF ACTION: MODERATE TO HIGH**

This study assesses the risk associated with adopting the principal recommendation and its four transformational roles as moderate to high. With sufficient resources and focus, the likelihood of failure is only moderate. But broad costs will be associated with adopting transformation. The most significant costs will be strategic, political, and military. These costs may manifest as undesired escalation, strategic distraction, or institutional resistance. Risk is significant in virtually all of the transformational recommendations made in this report.

### **Escalation**

In any competitive standoff, each actor gets a vote. In the case of Army theater design in the Indo-Pacific, all rivals—but specifically the People's Republic of China—may respond to the transformational actions outlined in this report in ways that escalate military tensions or impose political and economic costs on some combination of the United States and its regional partners.

US and partner senior leadership should evaluate the potential for aggressive PRC countermoves across Joint domains, contested spaces, and nonmilitary instruments of power prior to selecting specific transformational choices. No change in theater design should occur without adequate consideration of reciprocal cost and hazard. Senior leaders should also be aware that making no decision, or deferring decisions, will also incur escalatory risk. If recent history is a guide, deferred action vis-à-vis PRC gray-zone maneuver, for example, has only accelerated China's penchant for testing rival resolve. Thus, risk sensitivity and the deferred action that ensues have only increased the cost of future action to reverse perceived US and partner losses.

### **Strategic Distraction**

With the recent reorientation on the Indo-Pacific by the Department of Defense (DoD), the United States has refocused strategic attention and resources on the region for the third time in 20 years. The prior two efforts—the 2001 *Quadrennial Defense Review* and the 2012 *Defense Strategic Guidance*—were undone or diluted by military challenges in or from the Middle East. The likelihood of a third misfire is nontrivial and potentially disastrous for the United States given the overall trajectory of the US-China rivalry and the potential negative impact on the perceptions (and resulting choices) of Allies and partners.

US senior leadership should also recognize that once transformation is underway, hesitation, distraction, or tepid US commitment may undermine meaningful change in strategic conditions. Any of these on the part of the United States—in the face of

countervailing Chinese gray-zone maneuver or military intimidation—may negatively impact partner confidence in US will and accelerate PRC hypercompetitive moves.

Thus, buffering transformation of USINDOPACOM theater design against the hazard associated with strategic distraction will be vital. Embarking on and again aborting a deliberate transformation to a more hypercompetitive Indo-Pacific theater design will incur significant strategic, political, and military cost. Likewise, regaining trust, influence, or access lost by distraction will incur significant additional outcome- and cost-based risk.

### **Institutional Resistance**

Shifting the Army's focus to the Indo-Pacific broadly, and the hypercompetitive PRC specifically, is challenging for an institution that has spent much of the past 20 years operationally and intellectually engaged in irregular conflicts in US Central Command and decades evaluating the prospects for ground maneuver in Europe. This study further finds recent efforts by the Army to prioritize and repurpose for large-scale ground combat operations and multi-domain operations (MDO) at echelons above brigade run counter to the operational imperatives of modern competition and conflict in the Indo-Pacific.

The Army will experience culture shock as it embraces enabling the Joint Force in a USINDOPACOM context. The shock will be compounded by a generation of Army leaders who have grown accustomed to being supported Joint warfighters vice supporting enablers of Joint warfighting. Framing a transformation imperative within the institution is critical. Overcoming the expected culture shock will require senior leader buy-in and significant investment of senior leaders' time and attention to reshape and operationalize new institutional priorities.

### **RISK OF INACTION: HIGH TO EXTREMELY HIGH**

The US Army War College (USAWC) study team judges the risk associated with failing to adopt the principal recommendation as high to extremely high. This judgment applies to both the implied case of Joint transformation and the explicit case for Army transformation. As implied above, inaction is tempting; it artificially defers cost and hazard, but often only temporarily. In reality, inaction likely promises irreversible damage to US position and costly deterioration of the regional military balance and political status quo. Over the time frame of this study, inaction offers a high or extremely high likelihood of both regional failure and prohibitive or unacceptable strategic, political, and military cost.

To date, the central challenge for the United States in the Indo-Pacific region has been an inability or unwillingness to transform theater design and act competitively against purposeful counter-US gray-zone maneuver by the People's Republic of China. The authors believe PRC provocation will likely increase absent a more activist US military theater design. Accelerating provocation heightens the prospects of escalation, fait accompli, and irrevocable negative change in the regional status quo. At worst, a failure to transform—combined with an unthinkable escalation to armed conflict—harbors the prospect of military defeat.

Thus, the United States is at a decision point. In 2028 and beyond, the legacy theater design of USINDOPACOM will be thoroughly insufficient to reassure friends or bolster their capability, deter rival aggression, or rapidly transition to military hostilities from a position of relative advantage. Perpetuating the current design would leave the US military precious few options to maneuver strategically and deny PRC advantage and objectives.

Similarly, from an institutional perspective, Army transformational choices optimized exclusively for continental theaters like Europe are a prime example of USINDOPACOM inaction. Pursuit of such courses would undermine US military competitiveness in the theater and further imperil a regional military balance.

Thus, inaction, incomplete action, or insufficient action by the Joint Force and the Army significantly heighten the prospect of failure. Inaction would further cede strategic initiative, constrain competitive US options, and further erode US position. Inaction promises prohibitive political, strategic, and military cost associated with recovering and offsetting or accepting failure in the event of decisive rival fait accompli or military escalation.

This study does not wish to suggest that the Army make a stark choice favoring the Indo-Pacific exclusively. Rather, USAWC researchers suggest the Army will need to think creatively about developing operational capabilities and methods appropriate for multiple theaters with minimal adaptation. The Army adaptations most appropriate for a continental war in the European theater are likely inappropriate and would likely increase risk for the widely distributed, Joint demands of the Indo-Pacific. On the other hand, the Indo-Pacific-focused adaptations described in this report are likely more transferable between the European and Indo-Pacific theaters and would likely lower strategic and operational risk in both.

## **LIMITATIONS OF THIS REPORT AND AREAS FOR FURTHER STUDY**

This report is built on existing analysis of the current USINDOPACOM theater and based on guidance offered in the 2018 *National Defense Strategy* (NDS). The report makes specific recommendations to Army leadership on a new service-level, conceptual approach that would enable the Joint Force to regain the strategic initiative in the USINDOPACOM AOR. In developing the concept, the study did not attempt to assess specific options for costs, military capabilities, force structure and force size, or Allied forces.

Rather, the USAWC team hopes the foundational ideas provided herein will enable more detailed future study by the USAWC, other professional military education and research institutions, and the wider nongovernmental defense and military analysis community. Other essential work, such as assessing optimal force structure at a given echelon for a particular mission set, detailed selection of optimal operating locations, and integration with contingency plans would be best conducted by commanders and staffs inside the Army and the Joint Force.



## A FINAL WORD

The US Army and broader Joint Force operate within a constitutional, legal, political, social, and budgetary environment beyond their control. The Army and Joint Force receive strategic guidance from civilian authorities and civilian-controlled processes that resulted in the 2017 *National Security Strategy* and the *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy* discussed in this study. The Army and Joint Force receive resources appropriated by the US Congress. These resources provide the broad contours of end strength, capabilities, and operations and maintenance funding available to the force. Taken together, these functions determine the ends to which the Army is directed and the means available to achieve those ends. This study was predicated on a recognition that the Army's ability to materially change any of these is, at best, marginal.

Instead, this study focused its efforts on considering alternative ways the Army could approach its expanding responsibilities in the Indo-Pacific region as ultimately determined, defined, or bounded by the aforementioned sources of guidance and resources. This study focused on a single theater and did not assess potential trade-offs associated with Army responsibilities in other theaters. Even within this narrow focus, however, the USAWC study team strongly believes that strategic realignment of the Army on tomorrow's challenges is well within the scope of current Army leadership authority. Whether by embracing the four transformational roles recommended here or through some other, as-yet-unnamed approach, the future will be better if steps are taken now – however difficult those steps may seem today.

Finally, thriving in hypercompetition requires a disruptive and agile Joint and service theater design. Ideally, a new, transformative, Joint and service theater design would be integrated into yet another coherent whole that includes all instruments of national power. This point is not lost on the People's Republic of China, but it remains conspicuously underdeveloped in US strategic calculations. Although a comprehensive, whole-of-government competitive strategy is ideal, USAWC researchers consistently assess that Joint Indo-Pacific strategy, plans, concepts, and operations have substantial room for innovation and growth.

The DoD and the US Joint Force cannot wait for whole-of-government solutions to emerge. Instead, DoD and Joint Force leadership may need to set an example and inspire interagency partners to develop complementary, theater-level, hypercompetitive strategies focused on the pacing PRC. Until then, the Joint Force and the Army have plenty of work to accomplish by themselves.



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