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Strategizing Forward in the Western Pacific and Elsewhere

by

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Introduction

In a previous Landpower Essay (“The Hard Truth About ‘Easy Fighting’ Theories,” April 2013) I argued that “easy fighting” theories cannot be relied upon to deliver high-stakes results.¹ I was referring to those promoted by the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments (CSBA) in its 18 May 2010 study titled “AirSea Battle: A Point-of-Departure Operational Concept.”² Throughout this paper I will refer to that version of AirSea Battle because it is the one longest in the public domain; it is the package of ideas most familiar to government policy elites, lawmakers, academics and the media; and it is also the one most fully developed as a method of war should “gaining access” lead to war with the power threatening to deny it. It was this concept about which Secretary of Defense Robert Gates spoke in May 2011 when he said it “has the potential to do for America’s military deterrent power at the beginning of the 21st century what AirLand Battle did near the end of the 20th.”³

In the previous essay I said that a defense establishment based on AirSea Battle theories risks wars on unwinnable terms because it is one thing to trigger change on the ground by setting internal forces free; it is another to control such forces once freed. The best way to avoid the need for “hard fighting” by Soldiers and Marines is to retain the capacity to do it well while playing chess rather than checkers in the rapidly evolving 21st century. American leaders should be strategizing about how to make military aggression unprofitable in the Western Pacific, and even unthinkable, as their predecessors have done since 1945 in Europe.

I agree with the authors of AirSea Battle to the extent that the old military strategy for peace in the Western Pacific may have expired in some important respects, but the ends, ways and means suggested by them combine dangerously. In fact, if AirSea Battle is taken seriously by responsible American officials, it could lead, in the long run, to a brittle peace that could tip into long and very expensive global warfare without winners—and the most undesirable version of a future China.

The derivative concepts shared between the Department of Defense AirSea Battle Office and the air and naval services are classified but share the CSBA AirSea Battle label. Any reasonable person would assume that a movie based on the same book would share key ideas. That leaves the derivative Joint Operational Access Concept (JOAC) that addresses the function of gaining access at the outset of military interventions but does not explain how to follow through to conclusions. All derivatives of the CSBA concept rely on the systemic Attack-in-Depth method of defeating defenses introduced to joint warfare with the 1980s AirLand Battle reforms in case the Cold War turned hot. Such in-depth attack methods were actually applied with success in the first Gulf War against Iraq, as well as in the first stages of the subsequent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. While “Networked and Systemic Attack-in-Depth” approaches of the recent past are the most efficient way to initiate war with an adversary when undefended access to its borders is denied, they are not an effective way to ensure access to threatened allies before war begins. Therefore, I believe that such concepts are destabilizing.

While great dangers could arise in the future, today the challenge for American strategists is managing the rise of new powers in an economically inter-linked world in such a way as to avoid the emergence of the greatest dangers

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and to promote the emergence of new global security partnerships where they are lacking—and doing so without wrecking the very complex and interactive global economy. Economic, diplomatic and military rationales must be very subtly intertwined with global politics.

With a little deep thought and patience we can keep an advantageous peace in the Western Pacific and promote stable, secure and prosperous conditions world-wide with far less fighting of any kind, but we must have a clearer understanding of warfare in the modern era and be capable of performing realistically and decisively when war does become the last resort in a desperate situation.

A Dangerous Misapplication of Linear Cold War Long-Range Planning Paradigms

AirSea Battle's civilian authors argue that we should use what China could be and could do as a planning foil, just in case China were to do and be those things. This is a dangerous misapplication of linear Cold War long-range planning paradigms. During the Cold War we could plan, as we did, because our adversaries were what they were, and it was rational to assume that they would remain that way beyond our planning horizons. We could also plan that way because regional military strategies were logically embedded in a stable grand strategic consensus. And it was not difficult to envision the outlines, if not the details, of the war that could ensue—technology would change, but not much else. In other words, Cold War long-range force planning was based on known adversaries and comparisons of pertinent engineering metrics—hard numbers, real places, real or presumable weapons capabilities and the physics of space and time—all encased in stable and well-framed strategic and operational problem sets that merely needed tweaking as technology gave rise to unanticipated new capabilities. A close reading of the CSBA document reveals this kind of logic. While this approach is familiar and appealing, it is wrong-headed.

On the road ahead there are three dangers to avoid. There are also alternative ways to build on current advantages and positive developments to shape the course of security in the Western Pacific.

The Danger of Militarizing a Multifaceted Relationship

One danger of a Western Pacific regional military strategy based on AirSea Battle is that it would further militarize a now multifaceted relationship that is still evolving and very complex. Whereas the Cold War East–West relationship was a stark divide in most dimensions, the relationship with China is mutually positive and beneficial in many ways. The allies that we particularly value in the Western Pacific Theater include Australia, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan. Each of these has a very close, complex and growing mutually beneficial economic relationship with China, as does the United States. (Today China buys more goods from American manufacturers than any nation other than Canada and Mexico.) Disruptions in those relationships would be costly to all parties. This was not the case in the Cold War; Western and Warsaw Pact economies were segregated to a great degree and U.S. trade with the former Soviet Union was miniscule. And thus the deterrent calculus that mattered most was the military balance. Now economics will enter into the equation of deterring considerations to a very large degree—for us and for them. As much as our traditional allies have expanded their economic interactions with China, recent (even if minor) interactions with the Chinese military have reminded them why they are allies of the United States and why managing the *peaceful* rise of China is so important.

Henry Kissinger, in *On China*,⁴ and Fareed Zakaria, in *The Post-American World*, are both concerned about striking the right balance and making the right strategic choices in framing the new grand strategy:

How to strike this balance—deterring China, on the one hand, accommodating its legitimate growth, on the other—is the central strategic challenge for American diplomacy. The United States can and should draw lines with China. But it should also recognize that it cannot draw lines everywhere. Unfortunately, the most significant hurdle the United States faces in shaping such a policy is a domestic political climate that tends to view any concessions and accommodations as appeasement.⁵

We are in a very complex interactive relationship with China. And there is no clear consensus about how to manage the “rise of China”—not in Congress, not in the business community, not even in either major political party and certainly not with key allies. Such a consensus may arise over time, but it does not exist today. It would be a tragedy if a backward-looking and Cold War-influenced military strategy were to further skew the strategic problem-framing consensus toward an already alarmist view that clearly is not warranted.

There is much to be said for the perspective of Micah Zenko and Michael A. Cohen in their recent article “Clear and Present Safety: The United States Is More Secure Than Washington Thinks.”⁶ As much as recent Republican presidential contenders hyped foreign threats to the United States, and as much as the Democratic administration

officials echo them, the world is not a more dangerous place than it was during the Cold War—not even close. Yes, there are jihadists who are at war with us, but they are more at war with others closer to their homes. Yes, there is a near nuclear Iran—and a nuclear Iran could create a nuclear arms race in the Middle East—but we are neither alone in this nor the most threatened. We have ways to bring pain to Iranian decisionmakers, slow them down or, if need be, mount a very difficult and costly war with allies to bring about a regime that is a reasonable partner in peace. The Middle East may be turbulent, Iran may be nearly nuclear, Pakistan may be unstable, North Korea may be unpredictable, Russia may be problematic and China may be an emerging global power. But the overwhelming majority of American citizens are not at risk. The U.S. economy remains one of the world's most vibrant and adaptive. We face no great-power rival, no near-term competitor, no plausible existential threats. The U.S. military is by far the world's most powerful. American diplomacy is still the mainstay of the international system. And the American economy is still the keystone of the global economy. What we have is many manageable international challenges and the tools to maintain this advantageous position as long as we act sensibly and think clearly.

Managing China's rise as a military power will require firmness and strength as well as subtlety and tact. Just as we read intentions into the military actions and words that we see, hear and read, they do the same. Any military actions we take to deter can be interpreted as provocation, disrespect of sovereignty or military containment. Military actions they take to defend sovereignty and status we can interpret as unprovoked counter-access aggression, bullying or "coercion." In this transparent world, how can our government and theirs juggle our multifaceted relationship when each paints the other as the 10-foot-tall "adversary" in one dimension of the relationship while continuing to need a trusting partnership in several others. Talking and acting as if China were our chief military adversary can easily spiral into self-fulfillment, however benign and theoretical American intentions might be. (Selling the very costly program of 21 AirSea Battle Initiatives to Congress and the American people will tend to magnify the military risks.) The Cold War was allowed to end in part because the military balance was maintained, but also largely because of efforts during the two prior decades to agree to evolve "confidence-building measures" and to add "conventional arms control measures" as well. We may have to abandon Cold War deterrence strategies and tactics and invent new ones.

As was stated earlier, I agree with the authors of AirSea Battle to the extent that the old military strategy for peace in the Western Pacific may have expired in some important respects and needs to be rethought, especially with regard to its ways and means. We have been able to deter China's military adventurism, especially with regard to the defense of Taiwan, by exercising the right to navigate international waters and without threatening the sovereignty of China on the mainland. What the authors of AirSea Battle tell us is that we are now in a very tight box. To live up to our promises to Taiwan and others, we must act immediately; we must, before long, act vigorously against the Chinese military systems that will constrict our freedom of action; and to counter that system we must immediately attack a large number of military facilities throughout the depth of the Chinese homeland. They also tell us that to achieve our strategic ends we need to implement their 21 Initiatives or what they call the AirSea Battle "piece parts." But the ends, ways and means suggested by the AirSea Battle authors combine dangerously in their conception.

Not only does the concept to gain access require immediately attacking the Chinese homeland, but AirSea Battle provides a flawed logic for its successful conclusion as well. A close examination of the CSBA concept document reveals just how dangerously rigid, deterministic, mechanical and flawed is the logic of the concept itself. Once China chooses to interdict American or allied reinforcements or deterrent deployments in or over international waters, hostilities commence and escalate as if on a yellow brick road without an optional off-ramp to end in lengthy and expensive high-tech mutual-attrition warfare—by the authors' own admission.⁷ The best of circumstances assume that China would not escalate to nuclear arms. It is not clear what strategic logic and what accompanying rules of engagement would trigger the AirSea Battle mechanical chain reaction. The immediate response prescribed by the logic of the CSBA concept is to attack deep into the Chinese homeland with aircraft and missiles to destroy military targets that threaten our freedom of action to intervene somewhere in the area. This, of course, is unrealistic.

But this lack of realism should not be surprising. One should expect any strategic conception derived from Cold War-style long-range force planning—a way of thinking pegged primarily to the physics of the weapon systems assumed for both sides, the dimensions of the theater and the location and properties of relevant facilities—to produce a deterministic outcome that might have been appropriate for the world of AirLand Battle. But this approach leaves little choice for the Chinese, in even a small local crisis, between choosing war or choosing humble inaction. Is that what is intended? During the Cold War, statesmen and strategists on both sides worked hard to create a space for diplomatic crisis management between the "off" and "on" positions on the switch. But within CSBA's thinking there is no off-ramp, or de-escalatory mechanism, to permit decisionmakers on both sides to avoid the inevitable.

The Danger of Yielding the Initiative on Vital Questions of War and Peace to the Adversary

Just as it is unwise in legal strategy to ask any question to which the answer is not already known, it is unwise in military strategy to yield the initiative on vital questions of war and peace to an adversary. If we can only deter an adversary's adventurism by starting a dangerous chain of events that we cannot control, how would our assurances of support to allies be credible? Is this not allowing the Chinese to play nonlinear chess while we play simple linear checkers? Why would we think that it is wise to fight for freedom of action if the one sure outcome is a protracted war to follow (however it is fought)? Why would China choose not to fight back if its homeland were attacked? What is our level of confidence that air and naval bombardment of "high value" targets within China—supplemented by "choking off Chinese seaborne commerce to the maximum extent possible"—would produce the peace we prefer? The key question is not the one the authors pose—whether this mode of fighting "would likely be preferred to conducting large-scale operations in China itself." The real question is whether "distant blockade" and in a more modern way with new ships and close Air Force support can—by "disrupting Chinese undersea telecommunications lines; and seizing or destroying of Chinese undersea energy infrastructure and/or disrupting undersea energy flows to China"—force Chinese leaders to make the choices we desire them to make at a cost acceptable to ourselves and our allies.⁸

It is one thing to trigger change on the ground by setting internal forces free; it is another to control such forces once freed. Because military efforts that aim to coerce enemy leaders to accept undesirable terms are very problematic, they are historically accompanied by complementary efforts that force closure by defeating the enemy's power to resist regardless of his will and thus make it possible to enforce desired changes in conditions on the enemy. This prudent addition is costly in land forces. And when we cannot pay that price, our strategy should be to avoid placing war and peace decisions in the hands of any potential adversary, and assuming the risk of open-ended and mutually-destructive forms of warfare.

The Danger of Missing the Turnoff to "Better"

There is also the danger that by trying too hard to prevent the worst case we miss the turnoff to "better." This is the curse of long-range force planning in general. Planners must assume that they know the way the world works, that the logic of its workings will remain stable and that they can control the factors relevant to their aims. Let us examine the costs and risks of missing the turnoff to "better" and having the planned-for "worst case" materialize.

Managing the rise of emerging powers is always a tricky business, especially for the reigning power. According to Raoul Heinrichs, "The AirSea Battle concept for countering China's military rise is expensive and unhelpful. And could even spark a nuclear conflict."⁹ Others have also raised such concerns.

From the Army's Title 10 wargames of the late 1990s (Army After Next), we learned many things relevant to the potential worst-case situation posed by the CSBA AirSea Battle authors. By looking forward 25 years to how science and technology could affect joint and combined operations in counter-aggression scenarios, we saw that our near peer competitors could create what we then called "operational exclusion zones"—as much as 1,000 kilometers beyond their national borders. And large-scale military aggression against our allies could launch under the umbrella of such operational exclusion zones created by means of forward-projected "surveillance strike complexes" possible today and in our near future. Coming to the aid of an ally under such attack meant first having to suppress these powerful surveillance strike complexes.

Surveillance strike complexes, a concept invented by the Soviets and familiar to the Chinese, are nothing but forward-projected defenses; their utility as an umbrella to shield an invasion is, it can be argued, a secondary benefit.

And, as Raoul Heinrichs suggests, we experienced some difficult decision dilemmas that tempted preemption before it was possible to know whether the aggressor is merely posturing for political effect or is actually attacking. Even though the price of preemption was to risk action before unequivocal evidence of aggression could be found, the cost of acting too late was also very high in such situations. This is because, when the aggressor is shrewd, the act of aggression occurs in a very brief "blitzkrieg"—a period so short that the potential counter-aggression force arrives to a consolidated outcome. And this would incur the costs of recovering the sovereign soil of an ally by a ground invasion force of impossibly large proportions (per lessons of Iraq). And it would also risk triggering a nuclear escalation in the event that the aggressor's regime senses an existential threat.

Just the simple and lawful process of Chinese military modernization is easily justified on the basis of defense of the Chinese mainland alone to match its growth in economical and technical capacity. During those studies more than a decade ago, we also learned that Clausewitz was more right than ever when he said that defense is the strongest form of war (all things being equal).¹⁰ Surveillance strike complexes are defenses that can be made super-efficient by

modern technology when responding to recognizable hostile incursions into their defended space. Thus they can be enabled by lower levels of technology and less capacity than are required to dismantle them. An arms race between their projected defenses and our projected dismantling offenses would cost us a considerable amount more than it would for the Chinese to offset it. And to be far enough ahead in the race to make deterrence credible would require us to spend a great deal more than the Chinese need to spend. What should we be willing to give up to stay ahead? Or can we continue to borrow from the Chinese?

In the Army After Next wargames, of course, diplomacy and deterrence failed, and we had a war for the benefit of learning. Applying what we learned then to the case at hand suggests a need to rethink U.S. strategy in the Western Pacific—if not its ends, then its ways and means. Otherwise we could, like the Soviet Union, bankrupt ourselves for the sake of the current strategy. We would be wise to find ways to make the Chinese see themselves as fellow stakeholders with us in a cooperative international security arrangement that poses difficulties enough to require us both. Most of all, we are not facing stable and well-framed strategic and operational problem sets that merely need tweaking as technology gives rise to unanticipated new capabilities. Our world is in flux.

A Conceptual Roadmap Forward

The Cold War planning paradigm assumed that the political and economic logic of their world would continue indefinitely. It did not, to the surprise of those wedded to it. And the factors that led to its ending were out of their control and mostly beyond the military dimension. They were, however, within the logic of George Kennan’s understanding of Soviet Communism’s inner contradictions.¹¹ Having learned from that experience, today’s military strategists need to do something different to plot the course forward toward an advantageous peace. We are living in a world in which any assumed extended planning rationale (or strategic problem frame) will expire. We will not be able to control all of the factors relevant to our long-term aims. Grand masters of strategy do not *plan* their strategies. They *design* them.

Before considering Western Pacific strategy, it is useful to look forward globally. Military strategy and force modernization face two global challenges. One is deterring the dangers we see, and the other is preparing for those we do not see. There is no doubt that we will have to deter military adventurism and possibly support the defense of allies if not, some day, defend ourselves, and we will likely need to intervene to change the status quo should it become intolerable. Over the past 50 years we did not encounter the most likely situations; those are easily deterred when the power needed to oppose military adventurism is credibly in hand. Instead, “unlikely” ones have surprised us repeatedly.

The Rise of Integrated Strike Networks

The United States also faces a major challenge that we need to understand far better than we do: the nature and uses of “super-efficient” lethal and destructive defensive and offensive “integrated strike networks” made possible by the cyberelectromagnetic technology of this age. These will comprise a vital dimension of all 21st century operations against any technically savvy adversary and in all so-called “domains”—not just those at sea and in aerospace. There are two aspects of this major challenge: One is building the capacity to deploy reliable and multiservice integrated strike networks *on a theater scale*. And the other is building *the concrete ways and means to incapacitate and defeat very capable and resourceful adversaries*—and doing so in ways that are not always so invasive as to precipitate war. Thus I see the new Joint Operational Access Concept, an AirSea Battle derivative, as too narrowly focused.

The *Joint Operational Access Concept* (JOAC) describes in broad terms my vision for how joint forces will operate in response to emerging antiaccess and area-denial security challenges. Due to three major trends—the growth of antiaccess and area-denial capabilities around the globe, the changing U.S. overseas defense posture and the emergence of space and cyberspace as contested domains—future enemies, both states and nonstates, see the adoption of antiaccess/area-denial strategies against the United States as a favorable course of action for them.¹²

Developing the capacity and concepts for Joint Air-Sea-Land-Space Integrated Strike Networks will greatly enhance national security by increasing the defensive, offensive and deterring potential of all our armed forces wherever they become engaged in the decades ahead. The power of military forces to perform modern missions of all kinds is very much dependent on advantaging their own operations and disadvantaging the various kinds of adversaries they face in the dimension shaped and bounded by modern communications, information processing, automation, networked “sensors and shooters” and other rapidly evolving network applications.

Just as other complex mission dimensions have their own logic and principles, so has this one.¹³ Some of CSBA’s 21 AirSea Battle and JOAC initiatives are sensible for deployment in all combatant commands and should

be considered within a revised strategic problem frame. But these measures should be thoroughly examined in a global context and across all “domains.” And as much effort should be placed on defensive applications—denying freedom of action to a potential aggressor—as is now focused in the JOAC and AirSea Battle on winning freedom of action for air and sea maneuver.

Finally, while tactical concepts and capabilities for overcoming the new and envisioned antiaccess tactics of great and modern powers are vital additions, they cannot just be “Attacks in Depth” as described by the air and naval service chiefs or by the CSBA authors in their AirSea Battle publications. Such approaches are useful and efficient after the question of war has been decided. But in a crisis short of war they also have to be surgical operations that leave few scars yet incapacitate the increasingly powerful “counter-access systems” of potential adversaries without immediately drawing them into war with us. Not only can this be done, it *must* be done.

Strategic Thinking Is About Finding Your Way Forward

Strategic thinking, or “design,” is about finding your way forward to an improved position in a situation that is in flux. The “situation” is not only about the physics of space, time and capabilities and changes in technical possibilities—it is even more so about thinking and interacting human beings who are constantly experiencing evolving relationships, ideas, movements and needs. Where the Cold War logic permitted simple analysis of static conceptions, today’s strategic logic requires designing a course forward to avoid the worst case and instead to maintain, and even improve, the present advantageous condition. This depends on sound strategic design and on strategic learning and adaptation. Sound strategic design consists of periodically updating the security problem frame in the Western Pacific (or elsewhere) and revising the current conceptual solution strategy based on the new frame. This may be as simple as identifying and taking advantage of the tendencies that are already making it “better” and blocking and mitigating those tendencies making it “worse.” Rather than planning backward from a fixed “worst case” scenario assumption (or even from a slate of possibilities), the grand masters of strategy have historically designed a strategic course forward to avoid the worst cases and to achieve a more advantageous condition instead. Strategic learning and adapting is periodically making new choices about how to understand the always-opaque situation and also about making new choices of practical and concrete actions to improve it. It is important to make such choices free of Cold War biases. It is also advisable not to have fixed plans for too far into the future.

A strategic grand master would design a strategy based on a holistic theory of the situation, not only on the military dimension of it. He would remain skeptical about this theory, constantly testing its continuing validity. He would arrive at this theory about the nature, history and possible future of the current situation by asking a number of probing questions through “new eyes.”

This might produce the following set of initial hypotheses. Our allies are not in a multinational alliance with a simple triggering aim to respond in unison to aggression against any member. Our allies are democracies with political parties who rule in turn as their agendas attract voters. Economic factors will play a much greater role in the choices of all parties. China’s Communist Party is not monolithic in the way it was during Mao’s time. Even former party bosses are expressing competing ideas about the future of China. The party is not as much in control of the population as it once was. It is gradually loosening, and former levels of control will be extremely difficult to regain. The Communist Party knows that it rules as long as it retains “the mandate of heaven,” a traditional Chinese way of saying “at the pleasure of the people.” And this is also a check on the options of the People’s Liberation Army.

But a master grand strategist would probe deeper into the situation. For example, what makes the current situation more disadvantageous (or intolerable) than it was in the past? What gave rise to that disadvantage or intolerability? If nothing is done, will the situation get worse, and by what course of events? What changes in the situation would make it tolerable, or even advantageous? Answers to such questions remain hypotheses and combine to shape the theory of the situation. This understanding controls the logic of the strategy that emerges from it.

Such an exploration of our knowledge about the situation would also reveal that applying new technology to the ancient problems of defense have empowered and extended defenses much further than AirLand Battle defensive technologies of the 1980s extended late Cold War defenses deep over the approaches to the German interzonal border. Just as allied defenses on the Korean Peninsula today extend deep into North Korea when activated, Chinese defenses of their territory potentially already extend uncomfortably far across the international waters we have depended on to reinforce and reassure our allies, thus calling into question our future ability to control our access to them. We might also realize that our current strategy is threatened because the concrete ends, ways and means (the tactics) of that strategy are becoming obsolete.

A strategy is really a theory for exploiting the way things appear to be in a particular situation by taking a number of specific sequential or parallel conceptual steps designed to advance toward some conceptual aim. That strategy emerges from asking a number of questions such as these: If we have a theory about what changes in the situation would make it tolerable or advantageous, how do we formulate this into a useful and broad strategic aim? Are there confluences of interests or overlapping interests that can be exploited to our advantage? What tensions, tendencies and potentials for change support progress toward our strategic aim? And we ask the opposite: What tensions, tendencies and potentials for change hinder or block progress toward our strategic aim, and how can these be confronted, replaced, removed or mitigated most advantageously? What conceptual objectives are the relevant means toward gaining advantage within the situation and achieving success? What is the logic that governs the relationships and sequencing of these? And what conceptual references can aid our thinking?

The theory that emerges from answering such questions takes form in a strategy of conceptual ends, ways and means. But rather than attempting to formulate such a strategy from my distant and relatively inexpert perspective, let me suggest some ideas about such conceptual ends, ways and means about which I have thought and written.

The conceptual end of deterring aggressive military adventurism may be achieved by different conceptual ways and means. For instance, self-help defensive investments of the right kinds by our prosperous and information technology-savvy allies in the Western Pacific could increasingly deter aggressive adventurism. If countering access is part of a solution strategy, is another part of the solution strategy establishing defensive joint and combined strike complexes to counter aggressive maneuver by potential adversaries? How can these be “reinforced” rapidly without triggering counter-access defenses and before aggression against an ally can occur?

The grand master strategist is not finished until he has transformed this conceptual strategy into tactical and concrete ends—and the concrete tactical ways and means to achieve them. The conceptual means of his strategy become lines of effort that are expressed in concrete objectives in stepping-stone fashion toward the broad conceptual strategic aim.

The grand master realizes that the entire scaffolding of logic underlying his strategy is contingent on an understanding that is incomplete and is also becoming irrelevant as the situation continues to evolve; therefore, he must also have a workable and concrete scheme of probing actions to test the validity of his strategy and the underlying understanding of the situation. He would be probing for answers to such questions as: How is our understanding of the situation flawed? How are our actions affecting various elements of the situation? Are we doing the right things to improve the situation? What potential changes in the situation will nullify our strategy? What additional concrete actions can be taken to scout the unknown future terrain and find additional opportunities to gain advantage?

In simple terms the operating logic of a grand master strategist would be something like this: *If we create these new realities in this way, then we will not only progress toward our goal but be in a better position to advance further, avoid hazards, gain understanding and reveal new opportunities for continuing progress.* But this would still be, in his mind, a theory to be tested and revised in systematic fashion.

The grand master’s art for managing long-range complex endeavors can be boiled down to continually making two kinds of choices in harmony while learning and adapting. The first kind of choice is conceptual: how to frame the problem in the given situation. The second kind of choice is concrete: how to solve that problem by taking near-term sensible concrete actions in a direction that counts as progress and contributes to learning.

Conclusion

The combatant commands and ground services have produced the still evolving JOAC, but they have not yet framed the problem broadly and usefully enough. For instance, freedom of action for air and sea maneuver is only one, even if the first, crucial means required for a broader strategy. And having the means during a crisis to retain access to the “commons” is useful only when it can be done without precipitating unwanted war. Another complementary means that needs developing is the ability to deny freedom of action to potential aggressors as well. This is looking at “counter-access” the other way around. Finally, they need to come to grips with, and settle the issues of, theory and doctrine on defeat mechanisms in war. When all else fails to change an intolerable situation, what does it take to enforce the needed changes in the situation? If they have the courage, they should abandon references to the CSBA AirSea Battle label. The Joint Staff has already done so with the name they chose—Joint Operational Access Operations. The air and naval services should continue to combine their efforts in the many ways that make sense, but they too should abandon the AirSea Battle label.

Endnotes

- ¹ Huba Wass de Czege, "The Hard Truth about 'Easy Fighting' Theories: The Army is Needed Most When Specific Outcomes Matter," Landpower Essay 13-2, April 2013, <http://www.ausa.org/publications/ilw/DigitalPublications/Documents/lpe13-2/index.html>.
- ² Jan van Tol with Mark Gunzinger, Andrew Krepinevich and Jim Thomas, "AirSea Battle: A Point-of-Departure Operational Concept," 18 May 2010, <http://www.csbaonline.org/publications/2010/05/airsea-battle-concept>.
- ³ Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates, speech at U.S. Air Force Academy, Colorado Springs, CO, 4 March 2011, <http://www.defense.gov/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1543>.
- ⁴ Henry Kissinger, *On China* (London: Penguin, 2011).
- ⁵ Fareed Zakaria, *The Post-American World* (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 2008), p. 236, <http://archive.org/details/ThePost-americanWorld>.
- ⁶ Micah Zenko and Michael A. Cohen, "Clear and Present Safety: The United States Is More Secure Than Washington Thinks," *Foreign Affairs*, March–April 2012, p. 79.
- ⁷ Van Tol et al., "AirSeaBattle."
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 75–78.
- ⁹ Raoul Heinrichs, "America's Dangerous Battle Plan," *The Diplomat*, 17 August 2011, <http://thediplomat.com/2011/08/17/america%E2%80%99s-dangerous-battle-plan>.
- ¹⁰ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, Michael Howard and Peter Paret, ed. and trans. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 358; Clausewitz insisted in no uncertain terms that defense is a stronger form of war than offense primarily because the aim of defense is merely to cause an attack to fail. This is not a controversial idea; U.S. Army and joint doctrine accepted this proposition during the 1980 doctrinal reforms.
- ¹¹ See X, "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," *Foreign Affairs*, July 1947, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/23331/x/the-sources-of-soviet-conduct>. The article, written by George F. Kennan, former Deputy Chief of Mission of the United States to the USSR from 1944 to 1946, was a condensation of a very long report he wrote from Moscow in February 1946 to explain the new postwar behavior of a recent ally and to suggest a new strategic approach by exploiting the Soviet Union's internal contradictions, weaknesses and vulnerabilities.
- ¹² Martin E. Dempsey, General, United States Army, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, Foreword, *Joint Operational Access Concept*, v. 1.0, 17 January 2012, http://www.defense.gov/pubs/pdfs/joac_jan%202012_signed.pdf.
- ¹³ For a broad conceptual discussion of strike complexes see Huba Wass de Czege, "NetWar: Winning in the Cyberelectromagnetic Dimension of Modern Full-Spectrum Operations," *Military Review*, March–April 2010.

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