

# The Joint Narrative

## Describing the Future Environment and Joint Operations

By JOHN M. RICHARDSON

**A**mong the most vexing challenges that confront today's national security professional are the notions of change, complexity, and uncertainty, and more importantly how to respond to these. Two recently published documents make important contributions toward addressing these issues. U.S. Joint Forces Command (USJFCOM) published the *Joint Operating Environment (JOE) 2008* in November to describe potential future operational environments and their implications for the joint force. The JOE outlines likely challenges and opportunities, in essence describing the demand signals for the future joint force. The *Capstone Concept for Joint Operations (CCJO)*, signed in January 2009 by Admiral Michael Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, articulates his vision for how the future joint force will address the challenges and opportunities of the future operating environment, meeting the demands described in the JOE.

The principles of joint operations found in the JOE and CCJO form a strategic framework that outlines how the joint force can best address future challenges. The dominant themes found in these two documents can be thought of as an emerging joint narrative—a succinct, cohesive, and coherent logic that connects the complex and uncertain threats and opportunities of the future to the concepts of joint force operations, and then to joint doctrine.

The idea of the *joint narrative* is the opening statement in a larger conversation about the nature of the future and the role of the joint forces within it.

The major theme of the emerging joint narrative is doing what is required to prevail in current fights while simultaneously preparing for an uncertain future. This requires a balanced and versatile joint force that is

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Helicopters extract Soldiers following combat operations south of Balad Ruz, Iraq



superior across the full spectrum of military operations. Without balance, we risk being dominant but irrelevant—that is, superior in nuclear and conventional warfare but vulnerable in irregular contests.

As Secretary of Defense Robert Gates has emphasized, the defining principle for defeating both current and future threats is balance, and this is the central thesis for the joint narrative. Recognizing and avoiding our strengths, our future enemies are likely to confront us through indirect methods, in wars of a hybrid nature that combine irregular and conventional modes of attack, using a blend of primitive, traditional, and high-tech weapons and tactics.

This article highlights the ideas contained within the JOE and CCJO—the companion documents that begin to outline the joint narrative.

### International Environment

The purpose of the first element of the joint narrative, the JOE, is to focus national security professionals on the security environment 8 to 25 years into the future. The JOE approaches this goal by examining three questions:

- What trends and disruptions are likely to affect the joint force over the next quarter century?
- How are these trends and disruptions likely to define the contexts for joint operations?
- What are the implications of these trends and contexts for the joint force?

Although the JOE is speculative and does not presuppose what will happen in the next 25 years, it is intended to serve as a starting point for discussions about the future security environment at the operational level of war. JOE 2008 first recognizes that while much about the future will change, much will also stay the same. The nature of war will not change. Fundamentally, war will remain an endeavor based in competition and conflict between two learning, creative, and adaptive forces. It will retain its political dimension, whether originated by state or nonstate actors. Fog and friction will continue to distort and conceal, perturbing judgment and the course of events.

As well, despite our best efforts at prediction, the future will be characterized by uncertainty, change, and surprise. One only has to examine the last 25 years to see that much of what has transpired was almost completely unforeseen. Surprise will never be eliminated, but the JOE contends that we must make the effort to forecast the future, or we will certainly be caught off guard.

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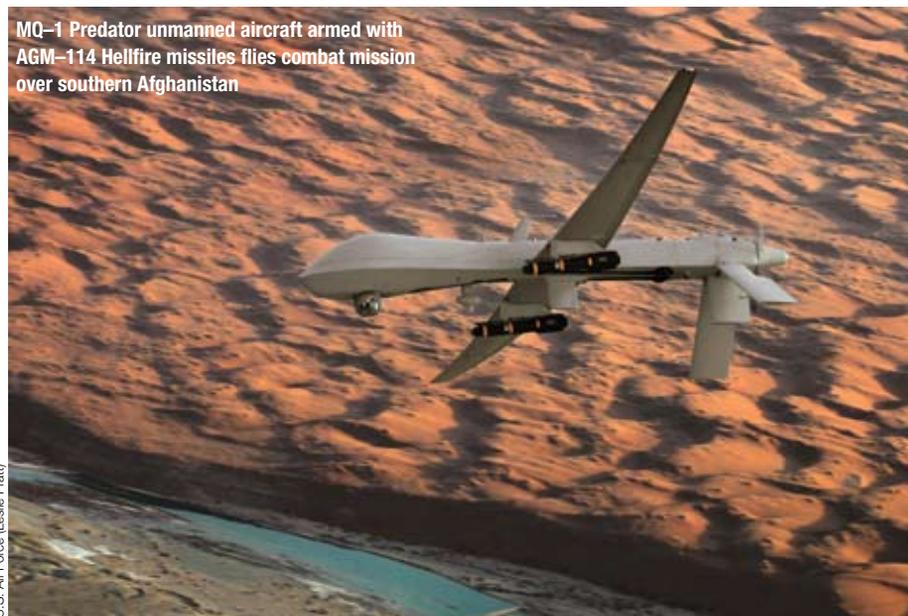
After the discussion of constants in human nature and in the nature of warfare, the JOE quickly transitions to a description of some of the major trends that are changing today's world into tomorrow's. JOE 2008 describes changes in a number of areas that

will have significant implications for the future joint force. These include shifting demographic patterns and the relative economic strength of great powers around the world. Most specifically, the balance of economic strength is shifting away from Europe and North America and toward emerging Asian economies. The JOE looks at the phenomenon of globalization with its expanding trade and investment patterns and movement of peoples around the world. It also includes a discussion of the nature of energy scarcity, its relation to geopolitical events, and the increasing scarcity or abundance of other natural resources, such as water and food. Another situation depicted in the JOE is the nature of technological change, including key trends in the information revolution, the realm of cyber threats, and the exploitation of space for civilian and military purposes by a wide array of actors.

The trends discussed in JOE 2008 can be grouped by three major themes: trends that are eroding conventional state power, trends that are enhancing conventional state power, and trends that are accelerating the pace of change.

The first group of trends highlights that the state as a unit of political organization is increasingly competing with a range of actors for power and influence. As borders become ever more permeable to trade, human migration, information, and money, states will find their claims to legitimacy and the allegiance of their citizens challenged by other groups, associations, and identity-based networks. For this reason, the international environment will feature states that are increasingly unable—or unwilling—to maintain a global monopoly on violence and war. Thus, irregular and unconventional forms of conflict feature prominently in JOE 2008.

The second major theme of future trends is that, while the state is certainly being challenged by a host of unconventional powers, it will likely remain the primary broker in providing security and stability for the next quarter century—even as many states employ proxies to engage in unconventional conflict, or more accurately, a hybrid form of conflict employing both conventional and unconventional means. The United States will maintain the largest single concentration of power in the world, but the margin of primacy is shrinking as the economic, political, military, and cultural power of other states grows more quickly. For this reason, new centers of conventional power will emerge in the international arena. This “rise of the rest” will rebalance relations between the



U.S. Air Force (Leslie Pratt)

United States and these new centers of power and feature aspects of both competition and cooperation.<sup>1</sup> As the population continues to grow more rapidly in the developing world, and as new economic and scientific powers rise in Asia, the world of the 2030s will be characterized by growing economic and technological power around the globe and greater levels of wealth and prosperity. Moreover, that world will feature far greater potential for encounters with state adversaries with advanced technical, human, military, or economic power. Thus, the future joint force may confront new or heightened forms of competition in space and cyberspace, over the global commons around the world, or for the control of sources of scarce natural resources used to fuel growing economies and the chokepoints that link great nations to the world around them.

The third major theme of the trends found within the JOE is the increasing complexity of networks around the world and the speed at which technological change is occurring. The globalization of trade and financial links means the United States is more dependent than ever on the foreign financing of its debt and must import critical technologies such as microchips or Internet routing hardware used throughout our society and by our joint forces. Military procurement programs that take decades may be obsolesced in an afternoon by new technological innovations. Meanwhile, faraway events, such as a pandemic health crisis in Africa or an earthquake in Asia, can have global repercussions that may swiftly draw U.S. interest. Issues such as climate change could exacerbate humanitarian disasters in unanticipated ways. Increasing connections and the speed of technological change mean adversaries will have more avenues to “reach into” U.S. society and attempt to directly influence or bend it to their will—through violence or persuasion.

### Contexts of Future Conflict and War

The task for the JOE 2008 was to resolve the many complex and disparate trends found at the strategic level and translate and focus them into hard-hitting, operational level challenges. The device that USJFCOM developed to make this transition is the idea of “contexts.” These contexts are a set of troubling “knots” in which technological, geopolitical, legal, social, and demographic trends might merge to create conflict and war. Together, these contexts describe a potential set of circumstances that might explain how and why future wars could

be waged and the vectors through which the joint force may become involved.

Competition and cooperation among conventional powers will likely remain the primary context for the joint force as states will remain the most powerful institutions in the international environment. States often have massive military, economic, social, and legal resources at their disposal and will act in the international environment to secure those interests. Often, state powers around the world will have many interests in common with the United States, and the joint force will have a role in encouraging or reinforcing common interests with these states. At times, conventional state powers will perceive their interests to be at cross-purposes, or even opposed to U.S. interests around the world. In these cases, the joint force will have a role in deterring or dissuading these activities. The United States will likely remain the most powerful state over the time frame posed by

the JOE. However, in a world of perhaps a dozen countries with populations greater than 100 million and economies larger than \$100 billion, it will not have the ability to dominate or dictate and must seek to partner with others to achieve its security objectives.

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Threats from unconventional powers will be the second major challenge for future joint forces. Militias, transnational terrorist groups, international criminals, pirates, and other “substate” or “trans-state” entities will challenge both states themselves and the wider international system in which they are embedded. Empowered by weakening state borders and massively increasing flows of money,

**The Joint Operating Environment 2008** describes seven specific contexts of conflict and war that will engage future joint forces:

- ★ competition and cooperation among conventional powers
- ★ potential challenges and threats
- ★ threats of unconventional power
- ★ proliferation of weapons of mass destruction
- ★ technological change
- ★ battle of narratives
- ★ need for security in urban environments



Air Force Reserve pararescueman scans ravaged Texas landscape during rescue and relief operations following Hurricane Ike

U.S. Air Force (Paul Fipise)

people, information, and trade across borders, a bewildering array of transnational organizations will make their own rules and challenge U.S. interests around the world. These groups will employ niche technologies and present little physical presence, but they will be capable of wreaking havoc far beyond what their small size and limited resources might suggest.

The challenge of conventional and unconventional power will be amplified by the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the increasing availability of advanced technologies, and urbanization that blunts traditional U.S. military advantages. Each of these three contexts will make the employment of military force more difficult and more susceptible to surprise as adversaries adapt to the U.S. way of war and apply the fruits of technology in new and innovative ways.

Perhaps the most far-reaching context found within the JOE is the notion that all conflict and military competition will be embedded within a “battle to capture the narrative.” This battle will take place through the global media and across the communications links that tie the world together. Joint force commanders already wrestle with pervasive media presence during their operations. In the future, the joint force will be confronted with a profusion of new media, and each member of the joint force will have a role in reinforcing and amplifying America’s strategic narrative at all times.

**Implications for the Joint Force**

A number of important implications flow from this discussion of trends and contexts. These are introduced in the JOE but are further expanded and refined within the CCJO. The first and perhaps most important challenge is that in a world of change, complexity, and uncertainty, the ability to both wage and deter war will be central to wider U.S. security strategy interests. The joint force is the key instrument for these missions. The difficulty facing the joint force today is to understand what mix of human, conceptual, and technical capabilities will address these security challenges at a reasonable cost to the Nation. Today, the joint force faces a period of reconstitution and rebalancing that requires sustained physical, intellectual, and moral effort. The challenge is to build into future joint forces the ability to innovate, be flexible, and adapt as conditions, adversaries, and circumstances shift and evolve.

The ability to innovate in peacetime and adapt during wars requires institutional and individual *agility*. This agility is the product of rigorous education, appropriate applications of technology, and a rich understanding of the social and political context in which military operations are conducted. But above all, innovation and adaptation require

Finally, future adversaries will remain learning, adaptive, and willful actors. The lessons of today, no matter how accurately recorded and then learned, may no longer prove relevant tomorrow because the enemy is human and therefore part of a living organization as well. As we have seen, adversaries are studying the American way of war and will



Refugees gather in internally displaced persons camp, Darfur region, Sudan

UN (Eskinder Debebe)

imagination and the ability to ask the right questions. Adaptation in war provides little time for reflection because of the immediate demands of combat. Here, the patterns of thought developed in peacetime are crucial because adaptation requires the questioning of assumptions with which military organizations have entered the conflict. In

develop methods to challenge our established and often predictable preoccupation with the science of warfare and speedy recourse to precision firepower, materiel, and money as the answer to operational challenges. JOE 2008 provides a stark warning that adversaries may adapt faster than we can unless we develop a force that is intellectually, organizationally,

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the past, military organizations that have ruthlessly examined and honestly evaluated their assumptions in peacetime have done the same in war.

The defining element in military effectiveness in war lies in the ability to recognize when prewar visions and understanding are wrong and must change. The fog and friction that characterize *all* wars make the task of seeing and understanding events extraordinarily difficult. The application of human thought through command and action is the key to success. No technology will lift the fog of war or reduce the friction inherent in the clash of human wills that defines war.

and technologically adaptable. Additionally, the JOE highlights the need for acquisition and personnel policies that are innovative and adaptive enough to “fight through” inevitable surprises.

**Nature of the Future Joint Force**

The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff has described his vision of future joint force operations. This vision is set out in the second element of the joint narrative, the CCJO, which expresses in broad terms the Chairman’s view for how the joint force will operate in response to the wide variety of future security challenges. It describes

the joint force as one of many instruments of national power and sets the enduring national security challenges that will demand its employment. This description provides a backdrop for the central ideas of the CCJO about how the joint force can contribute to meeting national security challenges and advocates a set of common operating precepts that likely will underpin successful future joint operations. Each subordinate joint and Service concept should reflect the vision of the CCJO and take its precepts into account.

The future joint force will face a changed world in which some capabilities, modes of operation, and habits of thought will be less relevant than in the past. The CCJO takes change and complexity seriously. It eschews the idea that the joint force is the only tool through which the President conducts his national strategy and policy. Rather, it will be one part of a whole-of-government effort and one that works best in concert with other instruments of national power. At the highest levels, the CCJO describes a future joint force that will remain engaged in the tasks of winning the Nation's wars, deterring potential adversaries, developing cooperative security approaches with friends and allies, defending the homeland, and responding to civil crises. These challenges will be enduring products of the political environment from today through the 2030s. Each of these challenges, however, will exhibit new features based on the character of change, complexity, and uncertainty.

The CCJO describes the imperative that will require the joint force to be as adaptive as potential adversaries while creating unique asymmetries that force the adversary to react. Furthermore, the future joint force will have to find balance between winning major wars against the less likely, but perhaps more dangerous, conventional adversaries while growing the capability to fight and win against irregular adversaries who are far more likely to attack the United States. The CCJO emphasizes the need to balance these competing imperatives, helps to define the nature of some of the tensions, and even provides some guidance on how to do this, but each such decision will have to be the product of detailed and thoughtful analysis. Each national security challenge presents its own unique set of imperatives, which will be further explored and elaborated in subordinate concepts.

To avoid war, the United States will require capabilities to deter and dissuade

adversaries from taking actions contrary to our interests. In order to ensure the credibility of deterrence, the joint force must have a role in developing cooperative security arrangements to “harden” the global security framework that is threatened. Part of the maintenance of this security framework is to employ joint forces to respond to civil crises that may disrupt civil society and international peace. The ultimate obligation of U.S. joint forces is to defend the homeland. The joint force is engaged around the world to ensure that U.S. sovereignty, territory, domestic population, and critical infrastructure are protected against external threats. This mission requires considerable interagency cooperation and integration. The future joint force must be prepared to meet any of these challenges, finding an appropriate balance in the process since preparing for one does not necessarily prepare the joint force for another.

altogether counterproductive. The joint force commander will have to think through the ultimate nature of the situation and define and question assumptions along the way. Planning must imbed broad political and resource limits within which operations might be conducted.

The second major idea is to conduct and integrate a combination of combat, security, engagement, relief, and reconstruction activities according to a concept of operations designed to meet the unique circumstances of the situation. Most joint operations will require some combination of two or more of these broad categories of military activity, which in total embrace virtually every mission a joint force could be called on to perform. Operational art thus becomes the arranging and balancing of these activities to achieve the objectives of the joint operation or campaign—and their continual rearranging as that operation or campaign unfolds. Thus,

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### **Future Joint Operations**

The core of any operating concept is the central thesis, the fundamental description of how the force will resolve the military problem that has been set out. It is the Big How, the “concept of the concept.” In the case of the CCJO, it is a single concept for how joint forces will meet any or all of the national security challenges described above. The central thesis of the CCJO comprises three inter-related ideas that together describe broadly how joint forces will operate. Together, these three ideas portray a process of operational adaptation designed expressly to cope with the complexity, uncertainty, and change that the JOE identifies as the defining features of the future operating environment. This process applies to all joint operations, even though the specific ends, ways, and means of those operations may vary widely according to the situation.

The first idea is to address each situation on its own terms, in its unique political and strategic context, rather than attempting to fit the situation to a preferred template. In a world of change, complexity, and uncertainty, the underlying causes of any situation may not be obvious, and “off the shelf” solutions may be inadequate or

for every operational situation, the joint force commander will have to develop a concept of operations that integrates—and reconciles—the frequently competing demands of each broad category of military activity.

The third major idea is to conduct operations subject to a continuous assessment of results in relation to expectations, modifying both the understanding of the situation and the conduct of subsequent operations accordingly. Because of the complex, uncertain, and changing characteristics of the environment, any initial operational design, no matter how carefully conceived, is likely to prove inadequate in some respects. The plan must therefore incorporate specific means of continuously reevaluating the fundamental assumptions on which that plan is based.

The CCJO goes on to identify 10 broad precepts of action that it proposes will underlie all successful future joint operations. All flow logically from the conditions and challenges described earlier in the CCJO. Although none is fundamentally new, the emphasis each receives and how it is implemented in the future may change. Subordinate joint operating concepts will apply these precepts in greater detail to more specific situations.

**What's Next?**

The JOE and CCJO articulate the joint narrative at the most fundamental level and will be used to inform and guide the contents of the library of joint operating concepts, joint integrating concepts, and joint doctrine. Underpinned by the enduring themes and fundamental principles about the nature of warfare and joint operations found in the JOE and CCJO, the library of joint publications will “flesh out” the details of the joint narrative.

The emerging joint narrative should provide a compelling common framework for military professionals for thinking about joint

operations, describe a future operating environment tailored to the joint force, describe future joint operations for policymakers and others, establish a conceptual foundation for subordinate concepts, and guide experimentation in joint operations and capabilities.

The intention is to further develop and expand this dialogue with a wider array of partners over the coming year. USJFCOM, together with the Services, other combatant commanders, and interagency and multinational partners, will further explore and refine the ideas of the JOE and CCJO in a series of collaborative wargames and seminars leading up to the capstone event in this effort, the

CCJO Experiment, held simultaneously in Suffolk, Virginia, and Washington, DC.

The body of work developed through the joint narrative should also influence the Department of Defense (DOD) Analytic Agenda and Defense Planning Scenarios. This effort is focused on the difficult challenge of ensuring that defense acquisition is properly focused on anticipating future national security challenges. The JOE plays an important role in informing the larger contexts and wider international environments in which the DOD Planning Scenarios’ more specific analytic wargames could be embedded. The CCJO will influence the concepts of operations by which joint forces are employed in wargames and studies across the span of the DOD analytic agenda.

The ideas found within the JOE and CCJO were developed with an eye toward defining the operational constructs of a balanced joint force that is capable of making the adaptations and adjustments necessary to prevail in the face of inevitable surprise. Indeed, the ultimate objective of the JOE and CCJO is to assist in understanding and recognizing key military challenges in the future, and how the joint force must respond given this vision.

Building the optimum joint force will require tough choices. Our resources are not unlimited and nobody has a crystal ball to see the future. We also can expect our enemies to continue to study us, learning and adapting so they can challenge our vulnerabilities. We must be prepared to out-study the enemy, using our knowledge and creativity to imagine ways to checkmate his logic.

Again, as Secretary Gates made clear, balance will be the guiding principle behind our efforts to prepare for an uncertain future. Balance will enhance the agility and effectiveness of the joint force across the spectrum of warfare as we work to make irregular warfare a core competency. As the emerging joint narrative captures these ideas, connecting our best vision of the future with joint concepts and doctrine, it will serve to enhance the long-term security of our nation. **JFQ**

**NOTE**

<sup>1</sup> See Fareed Zakaria, *The Post-American World* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008); or Robert D. Kaplan, “America’s Elegant Decline,” *The Atlantic* (November 2007).



Marine walks through alley during operations to capture suspected anticoalition forces near Methar Lam, Afghanistan

U.S. Marine Corps (James L. Yarboro)

**The Capstone Concept for Joint Operations** proposes that these precepts will underlie future joint operations:

- ★ achieve and maintain unity of effort within the joint force and among the joint force, U.S. Government, and international and other partners
- ★ plan for and manage operational transitions over time and space
- ★ focus on operational objectives whose achievements suggest the broadest and most enduring results
- ★ combine joint capabilities to maximize complementary rather than merely additive effects
- ★ avoid combining capabilities where doing so adds complexity without compensating advantage
- ★ drive synergy to the lowest echelon at which it can be managed effectively
- ★ operate indirectly through partners to the extent each situation permits
- ★ ensure operational freedom of action
- ★ maintain operational and organizational flexibility
- ★ inform domestic audiences and influence the perceptions and attitudes of key foreign audiences as an explicit and continuous operational requirement

work currently performed by Army Brigade Combat Teams (BCTs) and their Marine Corps equivalents.<sup>7</sup>

But what will happen after 2011 when the AABs come home? Who will take over responsibility for helping the Iraqi air force and navy reach their initial operating capabilities by 2015 (at the earliest)?<sup>8</sup> Who will sustain the rural development and local governance projects now supervised by the U.S. Department of State's Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs)? Moreover, who will continue to mentor civilian government ministries in Baghdad? In short, how can the United States avoid creating a strategic vacuum in American influence across Iraq when all military forces are withdrawn?

There are two schools of thought on this. One claims that by the end of 2011, Iraq should assume full responsibility for its own affairs—and that, after 8 years of U.S. support, Iraq should negotiate with international corporations and other foreign governments for additional technical and advisory assistance it may require. Proponents of this view argue that the deteriorating U.S. economy, coupled with competing war demands from Afghanistan, make it impractical for the United States to continue any level of development assistance, to say nothing of nationbuilding, after 2011. Accordingly, the U.S. Ambassador to Iraq and his Country Team should take the baton from the commander, U.S. Forces–Iraq, and move to normalize the U.S.–Iraq relationship along the lines of the traditional diplomatic model that the United States uses in other countries.

Bennett Ramberg, who supports full withdrawal, recently wrote in *Foreign Affairs*, “Washington can swallow its pride and follow the lessons of Vietnam, Cambodia, Lebanon, and Somalia: when internal political dysfunction overwhelms external attempts at stabilization, getting out sooner rather than later is the United States’ best chance to protect its interests.”<sup>9</sup>

Perhaps, but Ramberg misses two critical points. First, fragile and failed states that the United States abandons after abortive interventions seem to return with a vengeance to haunt the international community. Two of his four examples—Lebanon and Somalia—are arguably greater sources of violence and instability today than they were in 1983 and 1992, respectively. With Somalia alone, the threat that Somali pirates pose to international shipping and the Federal Bureau of

Investigation manhunt now under way to find U.S. citizens of Somali origin—potentially recruited as suicide bombers *inside* the United States—seem to undercut Ramberg’s argument that going home early solves geostrategic problems. Perhaps a less disingenuous thesis might have been, “Pay me now, or pay me later . . . but pay you will.”

Second, Ramberg implies that military force, or hard power, is the only instrument at America’s disposal to be committed to, sustained in, or withdrawn from these messy conflicts. This was probably true in Lebanon and Somalia where civil wars had not yet burned out sufficiently to allow both warring factions to reconcile and the United States to introduce the soft power tools needed to pursue stabilization and reconstruction. But in postconflict situations with low levels of violence, such as Haiti in 1995 or Iraq in 2009, the opportunity to constructively surge U.S. soft power instruments to consolidate the gains achieved by U.S. military forces is reasonably high. However, policymakers must recognize that a “window of opportunity” exists for implementing such a surge, and, more importantly, the civilian capacity must exist to be able to deploy forward within a reasonably short time. Today, these are problematic.

The opposing school of thought contends that by the end of 2011, Iraq will not yet be a “normal” country—that it will still be a fragile state that could easily backslide into chaos and civil war. Moreover, given the U.S. investment in blood and treasure, this school contends that it would be irresponsible for America to rely on a conventional Embassy approach—similar to Paris and Rome—with a state just emerging from conflict. Proponents of this view contend that given America’s energy needs and geopolitical concerns about Iran, it is not in the national interest to allow other powers to trump American influence in Iraq and the Middle East. In short, this school of thought seeks a solution that will retain the benefits accrued from a country-wide presence (as with BCTs) that has been made both smaller and more civilian.

It appears that President Obama was thinking along the same lines when he stated, “We must use all elements of American power to achieve our objectives, which is why I am committed to building our civilian national security capacity so that the burden is not continually pushed to our military.”

The President’s instincts are arguably right and subscribe to the second school of

thought discussed above. For these reasons, we recommend that policymakers consider a seamless transition from AABs to a network of Regional Embassy Offices (REOs) across Iraq. The REOs would be located near critical sectarian fault lines and major lines of communication. They would facilitate development programs, monitor and report on the delivery of essential services, support citizen participation in the political process, and encourage the rule of law. Ideally, REOs would serve as interagency “lily pads” and act as the “eyes and ears” for the U.S. Ambassador and his robust Embassy staff in Baghdad in order to focus and monitor U.S. efforts. Obviously, close cooperation with the Department of Defense would be necessary given the security, intelligence, and liaison support required at each location.<sup>10</sup>

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Critics of this idea likely will focus on three arguments. First, they will contend that mobile teams operating from the main U.S. Embassy in Baghdad could accomplish the same mission more economically than permanent REOs. If cost and efficiency were the only metrics that mattered, we might agree. But stabilizing a nation in the aftermath of a protracted insurgency requires close and continuous interaction with the host nation’s populace. This has been amply demonstrated time and time again by BCTs and PRTs, and it will no doubt prove true once more after AABs take over. For this reason, we recommend against a post-2011 engagement strategy that relies on Embassy personnel commuting from Baghdad.

Second, critics will argue there are too few resources available in the Department of State to make REOs a reality. This may be true today; however, with imagination, foresight, and bold action, it need not be the case in 2011. And importantly, there is a foundation upon which to build. By increasing resources available to the Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization, it could be transformed into a sustainable global planning organization that has its own action arm—a

standing civilian expeditionary response element with significant numbers of active and standby components of the Civilian Response Corps—elements of which could be deployed to Iraq to experiment with an REO “proof of concept.” This approach would have value outside Iraq as well by providing the United States with a quick response civilian capability that could conduct sustained overseas operations in fragile and failed states.

Of course, other agencies besides the Department of State should help staff the REOs. Representatives from the Departments of Justice, Interior, Agriculture, Energy, Education, and Treasury all possess vital knowledge and skill sets that the REOs need.

to Iraq’s long-term prosperity. If this does not occur, then the personnel slated to man the REOs could be assigned to the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad on a rotational basis or used in other contingencies.

### Reintegration into the Region

Reintegrating Iraq into the Middle East region is essential to its stability, security, and prosperity—and to the region’s. This is not an easy task given its checkered history with its neighbors. Moreover, Iraq’s increasingly open, democratic, and traditionally secular regime challenges the legitimacy of neighboring authoritarian states.

Still, there is ample opportunity for Iraq

undertaking joint border security initiatives. Some progress has already been made on these initiatives, but major breakthroughs are less important in these areas than the trust and respect that will be engendered among the participating nations.

Second, Iraq’s economic reintegration will expand trade and generate increased demand for the cross-border flow of goods and services. This will reduce unemployment and strengthen business ties. It is important to remember that the GCC currently ranks as the world’s 16<sup>th</sup> largest economy, and, if growth patterns continue at current rates, it should become the 6<sup>th</sup> largest by 2030.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, as Iraq modernizes its oil infrastructure

*as trust grows, it is plausible that Baghdad would come to appreciate the critical role American Embassy satellite offices would play in sustaining programs vital to Iraq’s long-term prosperity*



Marines train Iraqi army commandos in basic infantry tactics, Camp Ripper

U.S. Marine Corps (Eric C. Schwartz)

However, given Iraq’s regional differences, REOs should not attempt to mirror one another. Rather, they should be tailored to best meet the needs of the local population and environment. This means personnel quotas may be unequally distributed across the U.S. Government.

Third, critics will argue that Iraq will not accept REOs because of sovereignty and for cultural and religious reasons. Were the idea presented today, this might be true. But as trust grows between the United States and Iraq during the next 3 years, it is entirely plausible that Baghdad would come to appreciate the critical role these American Embassy satellite offices would play in sustaining programs vital

to cooperate with its neighbors bilaterally and multilaterally across a range of political, economic, and security issues. Initially, the primary goal of these cooperative undertakings should be to stimulate regional discussion, focus confidence-building measures on achievable aims, and identify issues on which Iraq and its neighbors (especially Turkey and the Gulf Cooperation Council [GCC]) are willing to engage.

For starters, the United States can demonstrate its commitment to peaceful diplomacy by redoubling its efforts to get Iraq’s neighbors to reopen embassies in Baghdad. Moreover, the United States should assist Iraq in reopening its own diplomatic offices around the region, facilitating refugee returns, and

and expands its agricultural sector, regional markets will flourish, stimulating long-term economic growth and prosperity.

In the area of collective security, small projects should be pursued to bolster confidence in cooperative ventures between neighboring states. Currently, there are overlapping mutual defense needs in areas such as maritime security patrols, intelligence-sharing, and officer exchange programs. Perhaps over time these endeavors could be expanded to include annual military exercises, a cooperative regional air defense system, and counterterrorism efforts.

Security initiatives take time to mature. Nevertheless, there is some promise that a comprehensive approach to regional security could mitigate Iraq’s perceived need to unilaterally fund a modern, combined arms military at a time when it faces other pressing domestic needs. Collective security is no panacea. By sharing its regional defense responsibilities with its neighbors in some niche areas, however, Iraq could reduce the overall burden as Secretary of Defense Robert Gates publicly noted during the 2008 Manama Dialogue in Bahrain.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, there is Iran, whose radical ideology, support to terrorists, and ambitions to militarize nuclear power have polarized much

of the world in opposition against it. Iran continues to exert malign influence on Iraq's domestic affairs in hopes of inciting sectarian unrest to undermine or weaken the central government's authority. Tehran seeks to create an Iraq that will defer to its geostrategic aspirations and spurn U.S. overtures to form an enduring strategic partnership that would enhance U.S. influence in the region.

While none of this is good news, the United States must be careful not to exaggerate the nonnuclear threat Iran poses to its neighbors, with many of whom it continues to trade and enjoy diplomatic relations. Reintegrating Iraq into the region so it can collaborate with likeminded states in collective security initiatives would be an important component of a broader strategy intended to defeat deleterious influences and balance other forms of Iranian expansionism.

In this regard, it is important that the United States continues to reassure Saudi Arabia, the Gulf states, Jordan, Egypt, and Iraq with credible security guarantees that counterbalance the most threatening aspects of Iran's behavior. Given U.S. power projection dominance, it is probably unnecessary to permanently forward-base large numbers of U.S. forces in the region. However, a robust, combined annual exercise program that showcases improved Arab warfighting capabilities integrated with U.S. forces in a common defensive strategy would help deter Iran in a meaningful way.

## Endgame

President Obama's vision for ending U.S. participation in the Iraq War is achievable in our opinion. Now, the United States must adopt a war termination strategy that best serves the policy goals he has laid out. The challenge is to demilitarize America's relationship with Iraq by 2011 without creating a strategic vacuum once the last U.S. forces come home.

This is only possible if nonmilitary elements of U.S. power remain engaged inside Iraq in a meaningful way after the U.S. military leaves. For this to happen, the United States must cooperate with a sovereign and co-equal Iraq over the next 3 years in a way that builds trust, inspires both countries to fully participate in the SFA, and encourages Iraq to invite the United States to sign a new Security Agreement after 2011. The latter is necessary to formalizing a long-term strategic partnership between the two countries.

A key component of any new Security Agreement would be Baghdad's request that Washington leave behind an in-country support capability to help Iraq more effectively execute the seven areas outlined in the SFA. We believe such a U.S. capability should be structured around REOs that can serve as satellite offices for Embassy Baghdad—whole-of-government operating nodes—to foster the "success" President Obama defined.

Combined with a new strategic narrative, a U.S. in-country support capability could serve to increase the credibility of American policies and their acceptance by the Arab and Muslim worlds. The new narrative requires U.S. goals and objectives in Iraq to be clearly articulated, an expanded and improved outreach campaign with the world's Muslim community, and progress on the Israel-Palestinian issue. Additionally, a new strategic narrative will help reintegrate Iraq politically, economically, and militarily into the region—securing its future and eliciting the U.S. domestic support and resources required to protect U.S. long-term interests.

While there is no guarantee that recent security gains in Iraq will hold until 2011 even with BCTs and AABs on the ground, it is clear that U.S. forces continue to have a stabilizing influence and prevent the return of al Qaeda. This is a key reason why Iraq has not asked the United States to withdraw forces earlier. But when the last U.S. troops depart, the potential for a strategic vacuum is significant unless the United States plans now for an alternative. We think REOs or a similar structure that retains U.S. civilian presence at the local level are needed to successfully transition the U.S. presence from AABs to traditional Embassy operations (a single Embassy in Baghdad) and "win the peace" in Iraq. **JFQ**

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> "Remarks of President Barack Obama—Responsibly Ending the War in Iraq," Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, February 27, 2009, available at <[www.whitehouse.gov/the\\_press\\_office/Remarks-of-President-Barack-Obama-Responsibly-Ending-the-War-in-Iraq/](http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-of-President-Barack-Obama-Responsibly-Ending-the-War-in-Iraq/)>.

<sup>2</sup> Fred Charles Iklé, *Every War Must End*, 2<sup>d</sup> rev. ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 16.

<sup>3</sup> *War termination* in this article is defined as a transition of ways and means toward the achieve-

ment of U.S. objectives. The authors use the phrase confident that some level of conflict within Iraq and between Iraqis will continue after the implementation of the SFA, Security Agreement, and the new U.S. policy. The long history of this region and the fundamental nature of its challenges make any other expectation unrealistic.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Vlahos, *Fighting Identity: Sacred War and World Change* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2009), 162–163.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Muslim Engagement Project, *Changing Course: New Directions for U.S. Relations with the Muslim World* (Washington, DC: Search for Common Ground and the Consensus Building Institute, September 2008). The four pillars are elevate diplomacy as the primary tool for resolving key conflicts involving Muslim countries, engaging both allies and adversaries in dialogue; support efforts to improve governance and promote civic participation in Muslim countries, and advocate for principles rather than parties in their internal political contests; help catalyze job-creating growth in Muslim countries to benefit both the United States and the Muslim countries' economies; and improve mutual respect and understanding between Americans and Muslims around the world.

<sup>7</sup> Robert M. Gates, *Meet the Press*, March 1, 2009, available at <[www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/](http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/)>. This same point was explicated in a February 27, 2009, memorandum from General Raymond Odierno, USA, to Multi-National Force–Iraq (MNF–I), available at <[www.mnf-iraq.com/](http://www.mnf-iraq.com/)>.

<sup>8</sup> Nasier Abadi via interpreter, MNF–I Press Conference, November 2, 2008, available at <[www.mnf-iraq.com/images/stories/Press\\_briefings/2008/november/081102\\_transcript.pdf](http://www.mnf-iraq.com/images/stories/Press_briefings/2008/november/081102_transcript.pdf)>.

<sup>9</sup> Bennett Ramberg, "The Precedents for Withdrawal: From Vietnam to Iraq," *Foreign Affairs* (March–April 2009), 2–8.

<sup>10</sup> The United States currently has regional Embassy offices in Hillah and Basrah, consistent with the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations (1961) mission architecture. In Hillah, the office serves as an administrative and logistical support platform for Provincial Reconstruction Teams and U.S. Government agencies and organizations. We are proposing offices that are far more robust interagency entities.

<sup>11</sup> Kristin Smith Diwan, "The Perils of Partial Openings," *Middle East Policy* 15 (Winter 2008), 153.

<sup>12</sup> Robert M. Gates, qtd. in Loveday Morris, "The Manama Dialogue," International Institute for Strategic Studies, December 13, 2008, available at <[www.iiss.org/whats-new/iiss-in-the-press/press-coverage-2008/december-2008/gates-calls-for-gcc-to-embrace-iraq/](http://www.iiss.org/whats-new/iiss-in-the-press/press-coverage-2008/december-2008/gates-calls-for-gcc-to-embrace-iraq/)>.