

# Have a Plan

*The dusty dogmas of the past are insufficient to confront our stormy present. As our world is new, we must think anew.*

—Abraham Lincoln

In reading these words by President Lincoln, I am reminded of something President Ronald Reagan said in his 1982 address to the British Parliament. Surveying the strategic landscape and assessing the global threats and challenges at the time, he commented, “the ultimate determinant in this struggle now going on for the world will not be bombs and rockets, but a test of will and ideas.” He was, of course, referring to the ideological struggle between capitalism and Soviet communism; but his words ring as true today as when he uttered them.

The physical nature of the threats and challenges we face, as well as the entire range of opportunities present before us, has changed—that much is very clear. No longer can our nation’s security organizations and processes focus myopically on a single overarching and potentially existential threat. Today’s world is much more complicated and nuanced, with the challenges emanating not from a single peer competitor but from multiple sources, including a growing number of different types of potentially influential state and nonstate actors. In this multipolar (some would even argue “nonpolar”) world, beset by shifting centers of economic and political power, the challenges to national, regional, and even global security are marked by greater complexity, ambiguity, and speed. And much of what and how we see is based on the lens through which we look. In fact, it might be more correct if we didn’t think of it as looking at the world through a lens, but rather peering into a kaleidoscope. Every gaze—indeed, every rotation—will produce something enormously difficult to anticipate and virtually impossible to predict. To presume we have any way of knowing how the various fragments will combine, and which of a seemingly limitless number of mosaics will result, is optimistic at best and naïve at worst.

Though the world has changed and power balances shift continually, at the broad strategic level, the ultimate determinant between victory and defeat is, as it has always been, a contest of wills and ideas—“brain-on-brain” warfare, if you will. Our senior leaders, specifically within the military, do not spend enough time thinking strategically about how to win that competition. As I briefly mentioned in the preceding chapter, in Latin America and the Caribbean, we are in a “marketplace of ideas” and we need to increase our market share; in this chapter, I will articulate one manner and one forum in which to truly concentrate on the substance and delivery of such ideas—strategy and strategic planning.

A late 1980s study of U.S. military culture once characterized the different branches of military service as being “driven by glacial engines for stability.”<sup>1</sup> Changing the military back then, therefore, was like trying to speed up a glacier—huge mass and implacable momentum inevitably carving out its own course. Despite improvements, to some extent, this is still true today for our military, and it continues to apply to many other large, complex, tradition-centric, and vertically oriented and integrated organizations. Indeed, the history of management over the past two decades will reflect this was the beginning of true postmodern organizations that developed the ability to couple strategic speed with global reach and purpose.

In the military’s case, it took significant congressional legislation, a new integration philosophy, two decades of trial and error, and several intervening crises and conflicts to slowly increase the speed and change the course of our particular glacier. Today’s military is more agile and capable than ever before. Yet creating an organization—especially of the size and scope of the military—that is able to adapt to 21<sup>st</sup>-century realities requires developing a culture that is change-centric and that has an adaptive structure to match external conditions and forces.

That is the first task before us, then: to take the long view, to think rationally, to ask tough questions, to challenge assumptions, to assess and mitigate risks. We undertake all this in the hopes of attempting to avoid repeating the mistakes of yesterday, shaping the environment today and creating opportunities for tomorrow—in other words, to think strategically.

In surveying our own strategic landscape, we find that the specific challenges we face today are not the same ones faced by those upon whose shoulders we stand. The challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century are far more complex and multifaceted, the speed with which they operate and interact is infinitely greater, and their reach is undeniably regional and increasingly global. This mix of complexity, speed, and reach has forced us to reassess our current paradigms and to ask critical questions. How

can we work *together* to help create a more peaceful, stable and prosperous world? How do we act more effectively to confront these challenges, deter potential conflicts, and prevent new crises? How do we transition from a reactive mindset of simply responding to threats and crises, to a more proactive one that focuses on shaping and ultimately creating lasting peace and security in our shared home?

In answering these and other questions, we find that we must *adapt*, we must increase our *speed*, and our *reach* must also be global and our presence persistent. In crafting strategy, whether it is our new maritime strategy, Southern Command's regionally focused Command Strategy 2018, or the National Military Strategy, our vision must be properly focused, our views must be pragmatic, and our missions must be anchored by our values and ideals. We must also strive to remain realistic and inclusive throughout the process.

Military strategy must be envisioned and developed with the idealism embodied in the Constitution, but must be crafted in a realistic tone to ensure military employment remains scalable, flexible, and adaptable to a rapidly changing world. It is a very precarious balance, but it is a balance that must be achieved and maintained.

Sound military strategy must also address the entire spectrum of 21<sup>st</sup>-century challenges: from constructive humanitarian assistance and civic action, to low-intensity conflict, all the way to major theater war. Executing such a strategy in support of national goals and interests will undermine the base for transnational terrorists and criminal groups, as well as other state and nonstate threats to global stability and peace.

But as we develop strategy and refine it to meet new challenges, we need to lend the proper level of strategic thought and carefully shape the advice we provide our senior civilian leaders. The effective military strategist must be cognizant of the expanding complexity of what defines national interests. We, as military leaders, are typically not responsible for the definition of those interests—rather we are the defenders and protectors of them. In this manner, we can help ensure our strategies indeed reflect the vital national interests of the American people and help the United States remain the partner of choice in this region. We must be increasingly aware that these interests are often transnational in character, as our linked economies and advances in technology continue to shrink the globe. Our desired endstates, as well as our intended (and unintended) audiences, always have to be foremost in our minds when crafting these strategies and formulating messages; in other words, we need to not only *think* strategically, but *communicate* strategically, as well.

We need to be constantly mindful of the bigger picture; that is not always easy. What is easy, however, is to become focused on what pains us the most right now. This is a natural human reaction to distress. And what is most painful right now is the conflict in the Middle East. But to the degree that we narrow our focus solely on that region, we lose sight of other state and nonstate threats around the world, specifically including the region we call home—the Americas. We also start to lose focus on the opportunities to engage world populations at the grassroots level and promote the desire for liberty from within.

This brings me to the importance of being practical and possessing a certain degree of pragmatism in first articulating the principles, and then pursuing the conditions, that underline peace. In looking at things from 50,000 feet, I see that any strategy for success in the Western Hemisphere must be envisioned in the context of a broader global view. It must also be focused on our own vital and enduring national interests, which have to be clearly defined in our strategic documents. We must also remember that due to an increasingly globalized and interconnected region and world, our interests are inextricably linked with those of our neighbors to the South.

As players in the large global system, the security and prosperity of the United States depend as much on the well-being of the rest of this region—and the rest of the world—as the rest of the region and world depends on the well-being of the United States. As Secretary of State Hillary Clinton commented in her remarks at the Asia Society in February 2009, “America cannot solve the problems of the world alone, and the world cannot solve them without America.” Today’s global system is more economically coupled than ever, but remember, too, there are several *other* linkages that connect us to the many inhabitants of our shared home in the Americas.

Building on these linkages and crafting open and shared strategies to confront mutual challenges and multinational threats will require persistent engagement to foster new relationships, strengthen enduring ones, and build trust. Additionally, we will need to labor tirelessly to ensure that freedom and equality take root and grow, even in unaccustomed soil, blossoming into the regional (and perhaps eventually global) harvest of peace and prosperity we all hope to enjoy within our shared home.

Achieving peace and prosperity is not simply an idealistic dream; rather, it is a reasonable and realistic goal and we must therefore always ask what must be done to achieve it and then maintain it.

“Reason and free inquiry,” wrote Thomas Jefferson, “are the only effectual agents against error.” These words still resonate today, at times deafeningly. In this competitive environment in which we live, this marketplace,

this test of wills and ideas, we must rely on reason and free inquiry—not just on sentiment—to gain market share. We must be innovative and act with boldness *and* restraint. We must have a willingness to pursue multicultural enlightenment to contend with the adversarial and inherently flawed doctrines of ideologically driven extremists, insurgents, politically aligned oppressors, and demagogues. We must recognize that these groups are unable or unwilling to contend with change, and therefore we must focus on presenting their intended disciples and followers with better alternatives. Success in this pursuit is defined by the empowerment of these people to break the chains that keep them shackled to the past, and then joining together in a combined pursuit of freedom and stability in our shared home and around the globe.

### **The Jellyfish Analogy**

Change starts with vision, and from that, a strategy to achieve that vision. No organization can endure without an effective one. But who possesses this vision and then articulates it into an effective strategy? The leader? An elite collection of “seers”? An external consulting group? One flaw in many organizations is the belief that strategy should come *only* from the very top—from an Olympian viewpoint looking down on an organization, essentially formed by a “star chamber” approach. This approach and belief will fail.

Although the leadership of an enterprise provides vision, guidance, and strategic decisions, it is the *entire* enterprise that helps build and carry out a strategy. Much like a jellyfish, where every cell is a sensor and part of the cerebral nervous system, leaders must sense the strategic environment through the sum of the enterprise’s parts. To survive in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century environment, an organization needs each member to be a sensor: no one of us is as smart as all of us together. The entire organization has to exist as a living, breathing, adapting, fluid, and evolving organism.

How do we create an organization like this?

To create an enterprise that can sense both itself and the world around it with an imbedded culture connected to strategy, it is tremendously important to flatten the organization and its information flows. Technology, combined with unencumbered decisionmaking processes, can help us do that. With technology, we can potentially tap into the entire organization from almost anywhere in the world. Figuratively, we can hold the entire enterprise, if not the world, in the palms of our hands. With technology, we can potentially minimize stovepiped information flows, reduce redundancies, speed up communication, and move the strategic message both internally and externally.

But throughout, leadership needs to remove friction and open up access to the organization—access to email accounts, inboxes, and office doors—and to allow this information to come in mostly unimpeded. Leaders need to be capable of processing vast amounts of information and moving or acting on it swiftly.

All of this creates special challenges in the military and other large, bureaucratic organizations, where the ability to access leadership and information across the enterprise often collides with a rigid and vertically-integrated culture. In the military, for example, we are particularly fond of hierarchical structures with strict reporting processes, where entire publications are devoted to organizational charts and information flow models. These old models, however, simply do not stand up to today's fluid security and information environment. The leadership challenge in the military—and in many large, hierarchical companies—is to develop a culture that does not alienate the experience base, yet clearly and inexorably pulls information flow into the modern age.

Another key concept in flattening the organization and removing stovepipes is what Stephen M.R. Covey portrays as the “speed of trust.”<sup>2</sup> Especially in a military organization, where there is usually a high turnover of people in a given unit—normally every 2 to 3 years (including the commander)—there is great need to create trust rapidly. Fortunately, in the military, our system is based on the ingrained concept of trust. But to operate and adapt rapidly to the changing global security environment and to compete in a 24/7 instant news cycle, our system of trust must adapt to allow flattened communication flows. As Covey writes, “Low trust slows everything—every decision, every communication and every relationship. On the other hand, trust produces speed.”<sup>3</sup> It is this speed that is required in a large, complex organization living out in the world in today's globalized society.

## **Mythology and Strategy**

Let me introduce you to three figures from Greek mythology whose stories illustrate some aspects of strategy.

### **Sisyphus**

Simply put, strategy generation and strategic planning is a Sisyphean endeavor. It takes discipline; it takes a culture of planning across the enterprise; it requires constant attention; and, it never ends. Just when you think your strategy is complete, the world shifts, and you could be back at square one, just as in the myth Sisyphus was condemned to roll a boulder up a hill only to have it roll back down, and to repeat this task eternally. Publishing

a strategy is the easiest part of strategy development. It is strategy execution, building enterprise-wide understanding, and the constant feedback for adjustment that require constant leadership attention and a process for continual strategy “re-development.” In this context, one could say that Sisyphus is actually pushing two boulders—one boulder is “strategy the process” and the second is “strategy the document.”

Focusing for a minute on the second stone, a strategy is a military organization’s theory about how to produce security, first and foremost for itself and then for and within its own immediate environment. How the organization defines itself and its environment, and how and where it places or sees itself within that environment, are the primary steps in beginning the strategic planning process—pushing the first stone up the hill. In so doing, both process and document must clearly enumerate and prioritize threats and challenges, and potential remedies and counteractions to confront and minimize those threats and challenges. In addition, it must recognize the entire range of opportunities present in the *current* strategic environment to shape the *future* one, thus attempting to prevent the emergence of those challenges and threats. In all three categories—challenges, threats, and opportunities—the complete strategy should unmistakably justify the prioritization, particularly in reference to clearly stated vital and enduring national interests, as well as provide some description of how resources will be applied to achieve the desired results. Make no mistake, however—a strategy is not a rule book; rather, it is a set of concepts and arguments that need to be revisited regularly.<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, the purpose of strategic planning is not solely to produce a single, comprehensive document or an assortment of secondary documents, or to try and prepare for an endless array of specific contingencies. Recalling the jellyfish analogy, the true milieu of strategy is information, primarily in the form of ideas and concepts via sensory interaction with the external environment; thus, the proper aim of strategic planning is really to inform and support the deliberations of leaders throughout the organization as they attempt to make long-range strategic decisions that affect the security of the organization and its environment. As Aaron Friedberg puts it, “The true nature of strategic planning should be heuristic; it is an aid to the collective thinking of the leadership of all levels of the organization, rather than a mechanism for the production of operational plans.”<sup>5</sup> In competitive situations, this thinking would lead to creating or exploiting a decisive asymmetry and advantage. In noncompetitive situations, it would result in the steadfast commitment of resources to shape or build an envisioned future.

## Tantalus

Tantalus provides an appropriate second metaphor for strategic planning, as we are too often tantalized by the search for the *perfect* strategy. In the myth, Tantalus is punished by the gods by being placed for eternity in a pool of water under a fruit tree; when he reached up to satisfy his hunger, the tree branch would rise beyond his reach; when he bent down, the water would recede, preventing him from getting a drink. We often feel that with just a little more effort, a little more time, we can write the perfect strategy. Somehow, it always seems to elude us, resting just outside our reach; yet we refuse to relent, thus fixating on it to the exclusion of other, more fruitful pursuits. We should never let the pursuit of the perfect strategy be the enemy of the very, very good one. When we develop a strategy, we need to recognize that it will not be perfect—that it will *never* be perfect; but after well thought-out, enterprise-wide effort, it *is* time to get the strategy out. We need to let our organization see it, our partners see it, and if appropriate, the world see it. And then, of course, we need to adapt—*constantly* adapt, on all levels. This analogy and concept will be explored in greater detail in describing the transition from academic discussion to real world application, and how honest and critical assessment is an invaluable tool. Further emphasizing the value of the process and downplaying the worth of the product, General Dwight D. Eisenhower once remarked, “In preparing for battle, I have always found that plans are useless, but planning is indispensable.”

## Prometheus

The end of the process, publishing and explaining a strategy, brings “light” to the rest of the organization, much as Prometheus brought fire to give light and innovation to mortals. His efforts came at great cost to him, however, which is the third and final leg of the planning metaphor: transparency—letting light through—has a cost. If you open your strategy up to others, inside or outside the organization, you expose yourself to risk, but a necessary one.

Without illuminating the organization, without informing partners, a strategy is useless. Learning from Tantalus and allowing that the perfect strategy is never attainable, transparency will enable criticism, both constructive as well as destructive. This can provide enlightenment internally, as well as arm external competitors to find faults with your organization. The difficulty lies in judging the opportunity costs of transparency. In many cases, the benefits of an open strategy, both during development as well as once complete, outweigh those of a closed one.

First, resources are invariably scarce; thus, if a strategy includes clearly delineated priorities, it provides a guide for the distribution of these

scarce resources, in addition to shaping the discussion of development of future procurement efforts. Second, in the interdependent and cooperative region and community in which we live, multiple large and complex organizations—both governmental as well as nongovernmental—must work together and collaborate to achieve shared security goals. Detailed orchestration of this synergy could prove difficult. An open, perhaps even jointly authored, strategy helps these multiple partners better coordinate their activities. Third, as we have already stated, we exist in a competitive marketplace of ideas; thus we have a vast external audience, both intended and unintended. We must be able to communicate messages of deterrence and persuasion to potential adversaries, as well as reassurance and support to allies and friends—both groups must understand that diplomacy is always preferable to the use of actual force, but that we stand ready and able to utilize *all* tools at our disposal when needed. Open strategies communicate these ideas and interests—those produced in isolation and shrouded in secrecy do not. Finally, clearly stated strategies assist internal accountability. They permit criticism and correction when they are proposed; they organize public discourse when new projects are suggested; and they allow for evaluation of such policies after the fact.<sup>6</sup> Again, this may be painful, but it is ultimately beneficial in the end, as the organization will be better for bringing “light” to their strategy.

The moral of these stories is not that strategic planning is a punishment, although to some it may seem that way. The enduring images of these three ancient myths drive home the point that strategy development and execution are grueling, unending, and never will be perfect.

## Hits and Misses

A key cornerstone of any viable organization is a culture of learning: the entire enterprise needs to be a learning organism. This involves setting goals for continued learning in areas that benefit the enterprise, as well as in areas that may only benefit the employee. Leaders throughout the organization need to allow time for learning; good leaders will make it a subtle requirement. In the military, continued learning, called professional military education, is actually a requirement for advancement. There is a minimum continuing education requirement for each rank of service, but for further or accelerated advancement, going above and beyond the required learning is encouraged and rewarded.

A critical element of a learning organization is innovation. When commenting on the value of innovation, particularly in a highly aggressive and volatile market where one is in direct competition with

another organization, Steve Jobs, the founder and CEO of Apple, remarked, “Innovation has nothing to do with how many R&D dollars you have . . . It’s not about money. It’s about the people you have, how you’re led, and how much you get it.”<sup>7</sup> In a perfect world, we’d have all the resources we need to accomplish our mission. With national, regional, and even global commitments, however, the simple fact of life is that we do *not* have all we want; thus, we have to rely upon innovation in all we do. And when we do, we find that innovation often comes from unexpected sources, so it needs to be part of the culture of any modern organization—not just the culture of engineers or technical experts, but the culture of the entire enterprise.

Innovative ideas, to include technical breakthroughs, often bubble up from nontraditional locations. During the World Wide Developers Conference in June 2008, Apple introduced new software for its iPhone. Amidst a list of traditional and expected sources of new ideas for software—like Sega, eBay, and Intuit, among others—an *insurance worker* from England demonstrated an idea for a virtual instrument player, an idea that looks to have genuine promise.

In military organizations, innovation also comes from some unlikely sources. Since our organizations are populated by a cross-section of society, each Sailor, Soldier, Airman, Coast Guardsman, and Marine represents a potential innovator due to their unique backgrounds. Examples abound, such as the Army Sergeant in World War II, whose welding experience and innovative spirit helped quickly modify Allied tanks and solved the challenge that the coastal hedgerows of Normandy posed to the tanks of General Omar Bradley’s 1<sup>st</sup> Army.<sup>8</sup>

Recognizing the great potential of innovative talent inherent in the military, each branch of service has an “ideas” or “innovation” program that actually provides a monetary stipend and personal recognition for inventions that save lives or resources. Moreover, these novel ideas and inventions are often outside the normal technical field of the individual Servicemember and frequently save numerous lives and millions of taxpayer dollars. But to incubate ideas from concept to reality requires the innovators have the ear of, or at least a clear path to, the decisionmakers. Good ideas need quick resourcing for evaluation—and the organization cannot have a zero-tolerance mentality for failure.

In this regard, innovation can be like baseball: if you are batting .250, you are having a rather good year. That is one in four successes—or, put another way, three in four failures. If you are batting one-for-three (.333), you are destined for Cooperstown and the Hall of Fame. Ty Cobb has the

Hall of Fame record for career batting average at .366 and it has been over 60 years since anyone had a season average of over .400. Innovators hit . . . and innovators miss. The key is to know when you miss and to not continue swinging away in hopes of hitting a ball that is already in the catcher's mitt.

The problem of innovation in the military is that the stakes are so high (some might argue too high). “Failure is not an option,” is the cultural mindset. And we are deeply predisposed to repetitive practice as the highest value good in preparing for operations, which is quite the opposite of innovation. Yet not all innovation in the military involves national security—in fact most of it does not. Still, the mindset prevails with many leaders.

Not long ago, an external consultant group rated a group of brand new Navy Admirals on numerous common attributes of senior leaders and compared them to the civilian sector. The new Admirals had fairly high marks across the board—decisiveness, vision, determination, intelligence—but surprisingly, they ranked at the bottom for *risk-taking*. This seems counterintuitive for a group of military leaders who presumably have spent their lives flying airplanes over enemy shores, launching missiles, driving ships at high speed, and engaging in countless other risky behaviors. Yet when you consider it carefully, it makes sense.

When it comes to physical risks and the dangers of combat, military leaders are good at mitigating and accepting risk. It is what we do. But when it comes to less tangible risk—essentially “career risk”—like betting on an untested idea for networking and information flow, or trying a new technique, we sometimes have difficulty committing. This is a direct reflection of the high risk of failure and the culture of conservatism and repetitive training.

A strategist, therefore, needs to understand and work hard at breaking that culture to improve large organizations in today's world.

## How Goes It?

It is often said that even the perfect plan does not survive the first contact with the enemy. In the execution of our acknowledged “very good, yet still imperfect” strategy, we need a mechanism for making adjustments. We need to be able to assess our performance and our effectiveness. And if all your indicators tell you everything is going great, look out! As comedian Steven Wright once said, “When everything is coming your way, you're in the wrong lane.”

Honest, unbiased assessment, like strategic planning, is hard work and often very difficult to do, if done at all. Perhaps in the traditional business sense, the bottom line of sales figures provides an objective assessment

of effectiveness, but certainly there are many intangibles in sales that also need weighing. In the security business, however, the measure of effectiveness is not so black and white—especially when we consider that the *prevention* of crisis and conflict provides the majority of our military history when compared to combat operations.

Dedicated and rigorous assessment leads right back to strategic culture. The sensing strategic organism must have assessment as one of its core organizing concepts. Each cell of the organism should understand its role in measuring success through objective and subjective metrics, all of which are linked back to intermediate and strategic goals.

This personal assessment needs to start right from the highest levels in the organization. A common mistake many leaders make is to allow themselves to become too engrossed in the details, too fascinated by the tactical aspects of the enterprise. This is understandable since whether it is security matters or sales of a particular product, the ultimate terminal transaction—or tactical level of execution in military parlance—all tend to be more exciting and draw us in. The toughest job for the leader, then, is to trust in the strategy, trust in subordinate leaders, and trust the sensors to do their jobs to report the right information; in so doing, they should be able to stay out of the thicket of tactical execution.

Every day, the leaders need to ask the question “Am I part of the solution or am I part of the problem?” As leaders, we need to be part of the solution, and that involves rising above the tactical level to maintain sight of the big picture. Leaders need to set tempo, direction, and goals; the only way to do this, however, is by maintaining a ruthless standard of self-examination, making sure we are part of the solution. We need to focus on ensuring we can extract the nuggets of strategically important information amidst the deluge of background noise in the daily grind of the organization.

Assessment must also include an exacting analysis of external factors as well. As previously described, we are engaged at the strategic level in a competition of ideas and wills; as such, it is not sufficient for us to simply choose one particular course of action and then blindly stick to it until we have reached our desired endstate—there is another participant in this venture. And unless this adversary is completely outmatched, overcome, or otherwise inert, he will react and his actions and his own strategy will almost always necessitate alteration and perhaps even a completely new approach on our part. Without a constant focus on assessment and evaluation, taking into account both our own moves as well as the moves of our opponent—in addition to external factors that exist in the strategic landscape—we will not be able to judge our progress or adapt and evolve to

overcome the emerging environment and its challenges. Aaron Friedberg makes this point when he observes:

Although it is always conceivable that a combatant may stumble into victory simply by “staying the course,” there is also the danger of blundering into defeat. Like a sailor in heavy winds and high seas who fails to consult his sextant and compass, a nation that does not regularly assess the performance of its strategy and that of its opponent is likely to wander far from its intended destination.<sup>9</sup>

Despite all that you do, and all the calculations, forecasts, and approximations of what the opponent might do and what he might not do, there will still be surprises; this is because there are still factors outside your or your competitor’s sphere of influence. Like the old saying goes, “Man plans, fate laughs.” Expect the unexpected to occur, both good outcomes and bad ones, and develop a culture and organization capable of dealing with it. Many times in military history, unexpected success created as many problems as unexpected failure. Your organization needs to be able to adapt to both—actually, the most secure strategic organization is the one that has evaluated and assessed the possibility of multiple future outcomes and positioned itself based on some factor of probability and consequence: namely, risk. Returning to Friedberg, because the interplay of all these actors and forces can never be predicted with any degree of certainty, “this kind of calculation is always imprecise and becomes even more so the farther into the future it attempts to project. Yet, for nations as well as individuals, some attempt to identify and evaluate different paths forward is the *sine qua non* of rational behavior.”<sup>10</sup>

One such attempt to articulate these different paths and the variables that can be juxtaposed to create them is a methodology called *scenario-based planning*. This approach is a technique by which organizations develop and test strategies using a systematically created range of multiple alternative futures or scenarios. Scenario-based planning centers on developing strategies for managing future uncertainty, instead of focusing on specific conflicts or events as occurs with wargaming and contingency planning. Considered a best practice in the private and public sectors, scenario-based planning is a proven means of creating strategic and operational alignment across diverse and even conflicting organizations.

The power of the approach derives not from the merits of any one scenario, but rather from the strategic insight gained through using a set of

scenarios that covers the fullest practical range of relevant and plausible future potential outcomes. Thus, the methodology allows for the creation of broader “platform” scenarios usable at the enterprise level that can be subsequently customized for use by component organizations.

Scenario-based planning is a technique for managing uncertainty, risk, and opportunity, and differs from traditional strategic planning processes by not “assuming the future.” It not only yields remarkably strong strategic frameworks and practical bases for immediate operational action, but also—by virtue of being highly inclusive of diverse perspectives—serves to cultivate strategic thinking and alignment across large organizations and between diverse partner organizations. By systematically considering the future and by including multiple perspectives, scenario-based planning seeks to avoid institutional “failures of imagination.”

Underlying your assessment strategy, there also needs to be a clear understanding of “that which really scares you.” Certain triggers, trends, or metrics should be identified as critical to your organization’s survival or mission accomplishment. When one of these triggers is reported back through the organization, there needs to be a plan to deal with it; and as all plans go, the organization needs to have a mechanism to adjust based upon the realities on the ground. Thus, the sensors throughout the organization need to understand the strategic vision—the commander’s strategic intent, the big picture—allowing it to identify key trends and emerging issues of potential significance for ongoing or possible future strategic interactions. In the words of Richard Rumelt,

Strategic insight is impossible if the problem is not defined. The quality of the strategy cannot be assessed unless the problem is defined. A good, succinct assessment of the situation—both *before* you start your strategic planning process, *and* once the first iteration is produced/published—helps generate good strategy; makes bad strategy more transparently bad; includes limits on resources and competence which promote focus.<sup>11</sup>

Once you have built a strategic culture rooted in planning and assessment, and you have a flattened organization based on horizontal as well as vertical information flow—perhaps you have even reorganized—then on a strategic level, you need to exercise some patience. In fact, patience is the key to leading change in any large, complex organization: patience to plan, patience to assess, patience for structural and process changes to take root.

Most of all, patience is needed not to make too many adjustments to your “very good” strategy.

There will be many tactical level victories and defeats. Neither of which, by themselves, heralds the success or failure of a given strategy. Strategic assessment takes time for the forces in play to settle out and to report a true measure of success. It is like the pilot struggling to keep a plane in straight and level flight. Sometimes aerodynamic forces result in a situation where every effort the pilot makes to maintain altitude tends to worsen the situation. This is called “pilot induced oscillations.” In this case, the pilot is working too hard and is overcorrecting for the external forces. In most cases, the wisest thing for the pilot to do is to simply let go of the control stick and let the forces dampen out over time. Letting go is not a natural reaction, particularly for pilots, but we as leaders need to trust in the process and trust in our people—we are in the business of strategy, and that means having the long view.

### **To Reorganize or Not to Reorganize**

Remembering Lincoln’s counsel to “think anew,” we need to take this a step further and actually *act* anew, as well. Inevitably, as we are all taught, form follows function. But form matters! Often, a reorganization is dubbed a simple “rearrangement of the deck chairs.” Indeed, without rigorous attention to strategy and process, a reorganization might turn out to be just that. In today’s environment, however, old hierarchical structures do not compete well. In today’s military, our big military staffs are roughly organized in structures devised by the Prussians over a hundred years ago—a structure perfectly adept at moving men and materiel on the battlefield, but imperfectly suited to moving ideas and reacting to today’s information environment.

U.S. Southern Command recently underwent an internal reorganization to flatten the enterprise, to match structure and process to strategy, and to build an organization better prepared to meet today’s security realities. A common misperception among our personnel that we continually try to dispel is that the reorganization was an end in and of itself. Many think that after moving offices, changing phones and titles, and flattening reporting chains, the transformation was over. Reorganization is simply a tool, but creating a new culture with a 21<sup>st</sup>-century mindset is the real goal. And reaching this goal will necessitate continued change and continued strategic analysis and planning. To quote Winston Churchill, “To improve is to change. To be perfect is to change often.”

An important challenge of attaining the right structure is connecting “islands of excellence” and breaking down cylinders of excellence, also

known as stovepipes. Most organizations have an overall culture, but they also have numerous microcultures. From a competition standpoint, these microcultures promote new ideas, and competition among them impedes overall stagnation.

However, in a flat organization, these islands of excellence need to be connected so that the other parts of the organization benefit from the quality work being done, as well as to avoid undue duplication of effort. Too often, internal divisions are reluctant to share their work because of the very human (and professional) need to receive credit, praise, and reward. This tendency equates to reinforcing stovepipes and a vertical flow of information. The leadership challenge is to promote a culture of openness, create the proper structure and processes for information-sharing, and ensure credit and reward are appropriately placed.

### **A Lesson from the Opponent**

Sitting outside our headquarters in Miami is a small nautical vessel that serves as a monument to innovation. It is a low profile boat about 30 feet long that can skim along just at the surface of the water. This innovative boat uses a diesel engine, has a crew of two, and is difficult to detect on radar and sonar, all with a payload capacity of a little over 1 ton of cocaine. The vessel was very cheap to make, and it went from design concept to operational status much faster than the norm in the defense establishment.

Sounds great, right? Real innovation!

The bad news, however, is that the vessel was not our idea or design. It represents the type of vessel being used by Colombian drug cartel transporters to bring cocaine to market in the United States and elsewhere, and they have made great strides in improving their design.

Perhaps it makes an unusual monument since many military bases have monuments of U.S. airplanes, ships, or ground vehicles. But since one of our organization's functions is to interdict illegal narcotics traffickers, we placed it there to drive home a very important point. Remembering that no good plan survives first contact with the enemy, we can further caveat this by acknowledging that the enemy gets a vote in the final outcome. And make no mistake: our enemies . . . our competitors . . . our opponents are innovators. They wake up every day trying to figure out how to defeat us. To view them in any other light is to do so at our own detriment. They have created flat organizations: networked, technology savvy, and quick to adapt—all great lessons for us. We cannot afford to stagnate. We also must change and adapt.

For our military, as for our industry, our current rigid, stovepiped, and slow moving institutions—our “glacial engines for stability”—simply will not do. We need a culture and a vision that is change-centric, one that can effectively meet the challenges of this unfolding 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond.

### **A Southern Command Example**

As mentioned earlier, over the last few years, U.S. Southern Command realized it needed to rethink itself to fit into the realities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and 21<sup>st</sup>-century security. As Peter Drucker wrote in the *Harvard Business Review*, we realized we needed change, since “The assumptions on which the organization has been built and is being run no longer fit reality.”<sup>12</sup> We needed a new theory of the business. We were doing many of the right things, but very much needed to renew our strategy, culture, vision, goals, processes, and structure. We needed to evolve.

As stated earlier, changing a military culture—one rooted in tradition and hierarchical structures—is not an easy task. National security is a “highest stakes” business. We could not afford to neglect our mission while we spent the time and effort to adapt and re-grow our organization. Like retooling a car’s engine while driving 70 miles per hour, our core functions needed to remain intact, even while we made significant changes to the enterprise.

Our change initiative began with a lot of thinking and rethinking. We held a strategic offsite with senior leadership, midlevel muscle, and nontraditional partners. We analyzed the strategic security environment, allowed for innovative approaches, and published a strategic vision to begin the change process. Some of our change proposals were obviously appropriate to a military organization while many others have stretched the established norms but are critical to matching strategy to effective execution and action.

Once new thinking was established, we went about the business of changing culture to match the vision and strategy; honestly, we are still in this phase, and probably will remain so for quite some time. In the success column, we have improved information flow to senior leadership. Paperwork that used to take weeks to get processed due to old formal protocols now gets done in days or hours. Innovative and collaborative thinking is also starting to take off. And a sense of real momentum has begun taking root.

Our most recent step in evolving the enterprise was to reorganize the hierarchical organization into a mission-focused, flattened model, with horizontal integration and matrixed functions. Seeded throughout the new structure, and at every level of the organization, are key nodes of input for our strategic planning, execution, and assessment cycles. As a military

establishment, some of our key stakeholders exist outside the organization, both in the nations in our region of focus and within the U.S. Government. Central to our new process, therefore, is a strategic messaging effort designed to inform these key stakeholders and to process feedback for inclusion in our designs.

Our largest challenge so far has been resisting the temptation to rest and declare victory. There have been many successes in our change efforts, many road bumps, and some resistance from both expected *and* unexpected sources. For our change initiative to work, the evolution of the enterprise will require continued attention to strategic planning and execution, as well as a constant sense of rolling the first boulder up the hill. As a military organization, we also exist within a clearly defined relationship between the Executive and Legislative branches of our government. Any change at our level has to be understood and, to a certain extent approved, at the national level, which raises the importance of strategic messaging and a clear, transparent strategy—the second boulder.

As previously described, strategic planning is often viewed as a complex and punishing process. But as we have also pointed out, it is a worthwhile and necessary endeavor that if performed correctly and thoroughly leads to a more successful organization and secure environment. In attempting to define the primary product of this trying and arduous process, Harry Yarger comments, “In simplistic terms, strategy at all levels is the calculation of objectives, concepts, and resources within acceptable bounds of risk to create more favorable outcomes than might otherwise exist by chance or at the hands of others.”<sup>13</sup> The official Department of Defense definition of strategy is “a prudent idea or set of ideas for employing the instruments of national power in a synchronized and integrated fashion to achieve theater, national and/or multinational objectives.”<sup>14</sup>

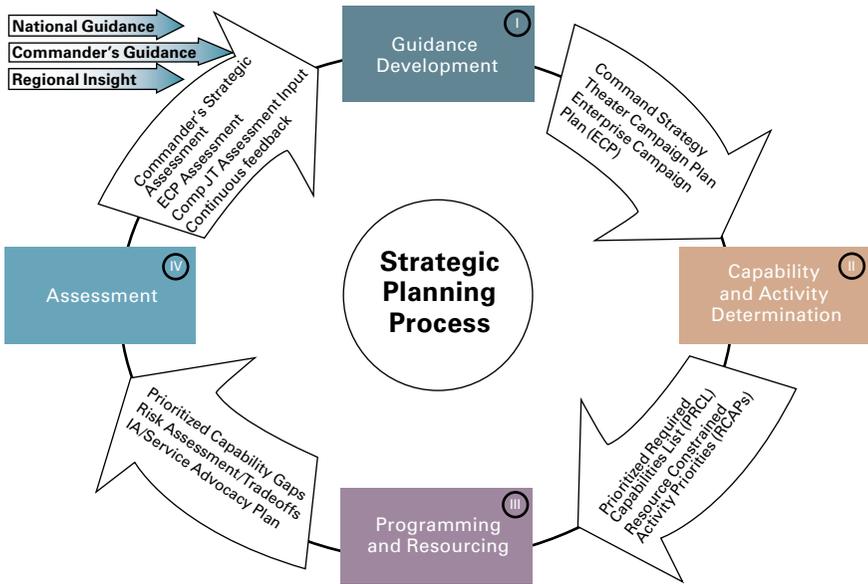
As the method to produce this “calculation of objectives, concepts and resources” and “prudent idea or set of ideas,” Southern Command uses a four-phase Strategic Planning Process (SPP) model to align its organizational mission with the resources needed to accomplish the strategy. This process ensures unity of effort throughout the command so that every element is working toward the achievement of the objectives set forth in the command strategy and Theater Campaign Plan (TCP).

This process is the foundation for how Southern Command sets command priorities and makes decisions for the allocation of resources to achieve the command vision. The Strategic Planning Process is a cross-functional, interagency, enterprise-wide process that requires broad-base participation to ensure success. It provides the corporate structure to

develop strategic guidance, determine required capabilities, focus command-wide programs and activities, identify and program for resources, and measure progress toward achieving the commander’s vision and theater objectives.

The SPP (figure 2–1) applies a simple strategy-to-task/resource methodology with clear linkages to both national-level as well as the commander’s guidance. These linkages assist in determining and prioritizing capability requirements, focusing command activities and programs, defending and prioritizing resources, as well as identifying gaps and disconnects that increase risk. The SPP also enables the command to measure progress on how well command-wide operations, activities, and actions are achieving the Theater Campaign Plan intermediate objectives, as well as measure performance of the Enterprise Campaign Plan (ECP).

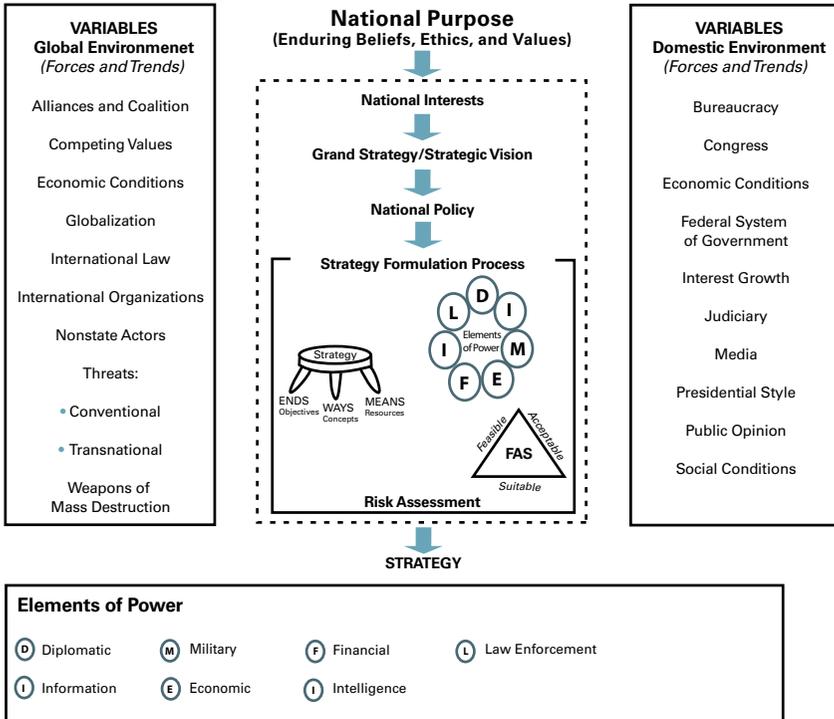
Figure 2–1. Strategic Planning Process Model



In the Southern Command area of focus, strategy development requires a whole-of-government approach to achieve the commander’s vision. As a result, the command’s SPP incorporates national, Presidential-level guidance and strategic themes from across the interagency, the commander’s vision, as

well as regional insight and analysis. Figure 2–2 below illustrates the methodology Southern Command utilizes for strategy development.

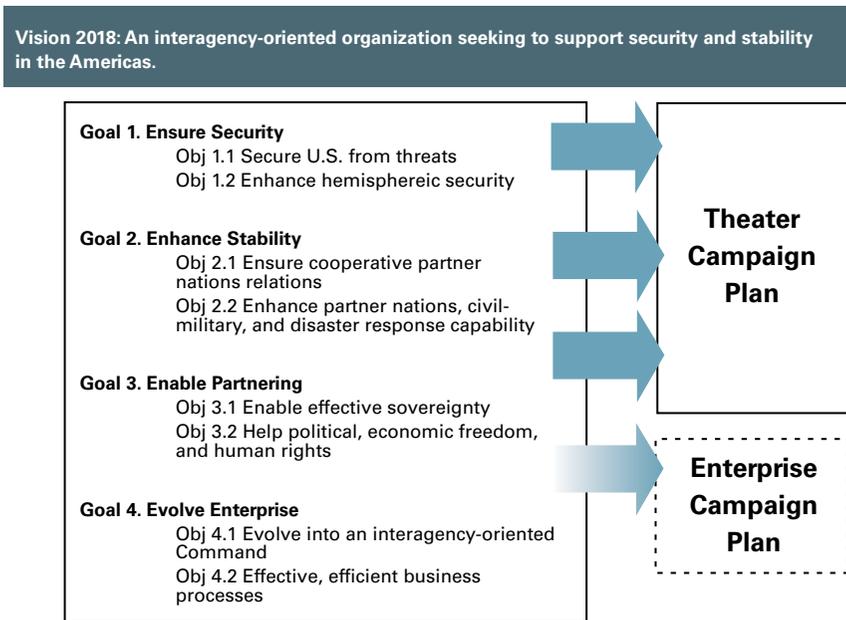
Figure 2–2. U.S. Southern Command Strategy Methodology



The product of this model—and the first output of the Guidance Development Phase of the SPP—is the Command Strategy, an enduring document that serves as the foundation for the command and has a 10-year timeline horizon. The current version is Command Strategy 2018 and provides the framework for achieving U.S. Southern Command’s goals and objectives over the course of the next decade, setting forth and ensuring the efforts of the command are along the correct path. It defines the linkages, explores future challenges, and determines the ways and means for Southern Command to assist in fulfilling the commander’s intent. The strategy will not remain static over this 10-year period; it is a living document and therefore we will make changes when needed to take advantage of emerging opportunities or address new challenges and threats.

Command Strategy 2018 includes two distinctive objective areas: Hemispheric (external) and Governmental Enterprise (internal). This division allows the command to determine external objectives for the area of focus along with internal objectives to accomplish required missions. The Theater Campaign Plan focuses externally, serving as the document that “operationalizes” the strategy’s external objectives. The Enterprise Campaign Plan focuses on Southern Command internal processes and products to address the Strategy’s goal to “Evolve the Enterprise.”

Figure 2–3. Strategy Goal Linkages to the Theater Campaign Plan and the Enterprise Campaign Plan



The Theater Campaign Plan is the second key output of the Guidance Development Phase. It derives its direction from national-level guidance and from Command Strategy 2018 and serves as the practical application of the command strategy. It provides the construct for focusing and prioritizing Southern Command’s steady-state activities as they relate to current operations, security cooperation, and interagency and any preventive activities. It is created from page one with our interagency partners’ input and is designed to enhance synchronization and prevent conflict. Southern

Command's Strategic Communication Framework, intended to foreshadow strategic shifts, is an annex to the TCP. This framework should be used throughout the process to anticipate future events and assist with prioritization. It is also used as a standalone document to guide the various efforts in the command and is updated every 2 years or as required.

The TCP contains intermediate objectives which are linked to the Theater Strategic endstates, goals, and objectives from Command Strategy 2018. These objectives provide the command with a construct for focusing and prioritizing every operation, activity, and action, have a 2- to 5-year window of vision, and enable measurable and achievable progress toward goals. These objectives are evaluated annually through the Commander's Strategic Assessment (CSA) as phase IV of the SPP.

The TCP also defines the interrelationships of the various Theater Security Cooperation (TSC) governing documents. It drives and synchronizes security cooperation efforts in the region, as contained within Country Campaign Plans, Embassies' Mission Strategic Plans, and Country Security Cooperation Reports.

The Enterprise Campaign Plan is the third and final output of the Guidance Development Phase of the SPP. The ECP provides a 3-year roadmap for continuing the transformation of Southern Command toward the accomplishment of the Command Strategy goal to "Evolve the Enterprise." Transformation efforts to date have created tremendous potential for improving Southern Command's efficiencies, with macro reorganization as the first step. We now must develop the discipline of continual improvement and alignment in order to evolve into an interagency-oriented enterprise actively executing a strategic communications approach in cooperation with international and interagency partners and, where appropriate, the private sector.

In phase II of our SPP, the Capability and Activity Determination Phase, we determine the Prioritized Required Capabilities List (long-range) and Resource Constrained Activity Priorities (short-range). These capabilities and activities are based on a review of command guidance and emergent threats, and are linked to the TCP intermediate objectives to ensure the command has the best mix of programs and actions to support the objectives.

In phase III of our SPP, the Programming and Resourcing Phase, we address critical capability shortfalls associated with command activities and programs. During this step, we link the Southern Command Staff, Service Components, and sub-unified command programs, and use a joint interagency program review to identify, prioritize, and recommend disposition of

critical capability gaps in the short (1–2 years) and long (5-year) fiscal year defense plan terms. As a first step, this capability gap analysis includes a validation of the funded baseline. This program review is an enterprise-wide entity that meets annually and evaluates each program on its efficiency and effectiveness in covering the command's requirements, ultimately providing the commander with a resourcing strategy for developing programs to meet the required capabilities.

The final phase of our SPP, the Assessment Phase, is a critical activity throughout the process. Periodic evaluations of strategies, tactics, and action programs are essential to assessing success of the entire process. A combination of multiple assessments done at various levels by a variety of sources provides enterprise decisionmakers answers to the following four questions:

- How well are we doing?
- Are we doing the right things?
- Are we doing things right?
- What's next?

These answers and the arduous process of asking all the right questions help to determine the overall level of performance and effectiveness and show progress toward stated objectives. A critical assessment identifies whether we are doing the right activities, and how well we are doing the right activities. Ultimately, assessments allow us to gain the insight necessary to reallocate resources, modify the objectives, or change the strategy in order to continue working toward the achievement of our vision.

Within this larger assessments phase, we have one specific effort, the Commander's Strategic Assessment (CSA). This is performed annually and answers "how well are we doing," identifying intermediate objectives where progress is lacking in order to focus the efforts of operational assessments. The CSA provides critical feedback to enterprise decisionmakers and informs and supports enterprise decisionmaking, program/activity prioritization, and resource allocation. Where an interagency partner has the lead for a program or activity, we work with that partner to obtain all the relevant data to incorporate in the CSA. Operational assessments allow identification of whether our activities and actions in the field are being conducted as planned. Finally, based on the knowledge of where we are, knowledge of outcomes of ongoing and completed activities, and an understanding of whether the results were due to execution issues or some other level in the process, decisionmakers can make informed recommendations on what to do next and where.

In summation, U.S. Southern Command's Strategic Planning Process is a four-phase process designed to align the organizational mission with processes and products that address our strategy-to-resource model and meet the strategic endstates contained in the higher level national strategic guidance, as well as the commander's vision. The SPP starts with guidance development as contained in the command strategy and two organizing campaign plans, one focused externally and one internally. During all four phases, the intent is to ensure unity of effort throughout the command so that every element, every sensor at every level, is working toward achievement of the same shared strategic objectives that define the strategic problem. We have an extremely robust assessments phase which actually permeates all three other phases and runs continuously. And omnipresent at every level and in every phase of our change-centric organization, ideas are the fuel that runs this engine, and the "speed of trust" is what keeps the engine revving high.

I do not claim that strategy is or can be a "science" in the sense of the physical sciences. It can and should be intellectual discipline of the highest order, and the strategist should prepare himself to manage ideas with precision and clarity and imagination. . . . Thus, while strategy itself may not be a science, strategic judgment can be scientific to the extent that it is orderly, rational, objective, inclusive, discriminatory, and perceptive.

—Admiral J.C. Wylie

*Military Strategy: A General Theory of Power Control*

We—individually, and as a trusted and valued partner and neighbor in this shared home of the Americas—are in an era in which the strategic landscape has changed and is continuing to change. The nature of the challenges and threats to the Nation and partners, as well as the opportunities available to us to confront and mitigate them, are constantly emerging and shifting shapes and origins. What should remain constant and enduring, however, are our core vital national interests, as well as the shared vision of all free and democracy-loving peoples in the region. We must also factor into the ever-changing equation that resources are finite and increasingly scarce; thus, strategic priorities have to be established.

The intent, therefore, is a balanced approach to strategic risks: confront the most pressing and probable threats to the Nation today, while at

the same time, posture the joint, combined, and multinational force to prevent, and if necessary, defeat the most consequential threats to tomorrow. The factors that influence strategic thinking—the prisms of the kaleidoscope we peer into—are multiple, and their possible combinations and permutations are infinitely variable. Even so, the barrel of the kaleidoscope contains the seeming “chaos” and we are able to manipulate the barrel to in some way influence and bring about new combinations and results. So, too, can the “scope” of strategic planning serve a similar function to establish boundaries and contain the risks of global events.

A key enabler in this balancing act is persistent engagement to build partner capacity, extend trust and confidence, and assure access to the commons and the natural resources therein. This is critical to fostering and sustaining cooperative relationships with friends around the world and contributes significantly to our shared security and prosperity. Ultimately, we will achieve enduring security for the peoples of the Americas in a stable and prosperous regional, international, and global system.

In the end, by anchoring the lofty ideals we value to the realities of the world we live in, we can and will overcome the test of wills and ideas that are defining the new era, but it will take time—years, decades even. Such is the way of strategy: it requires patience to let the forces at work play out and let the process work. We have a unique opportunity to use our reason and our free inquiry to influence the debate to help develop our future strategy. So I challenge you today to engage your organization’s leadership and chain of command, bring them your ideas, and continue to help them stay dynamic and evolutionary, particularly in assessing and crafting our future strategies.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Carl H. Builder, *The Masks of War: American Military Styles in Strategy and Analysis*, A RAND Corporation Research Study (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 202.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen M.R. Covey with Rebecca R. Merrill, *The Speed of Trust: The One Thing That Changes Everything* (New York: The Free Press, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Barry Posen, “A Grand Strategy of Restraint,” in *Finding Our Way: Debating American Grand Strategy*, eds. Michele A. Flournoy and Shawn Brimley (Washington, DC: Center for a New American Security, June 2008), 84.

<sup>5</sup> Aaron Friedberg, “Strengthening U.S. Strategic Planning,” *The Washington Quarterly* (Winter 2007–8), 48.

<sup>6</sup> Posen, 84.

<sup>7</sup> Steve Jobs, *Fortune* (November 9, 1998), 24.

<sup>8</sup> Lida Mayo, “The Ordnance Department: On Beachhead and Battlefield,” ed. Stetson Conn, *The United States Army in World War II* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1991), 253.

<sup>9</sup> Friedberg, 49.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>11</sup> Richard Rumelt, "Some Thoughts on Business Strategy," CSBA Seminar, September 2007.

<sup>12</sup> Peter F. Drucker, "The Theory of the Business," *Harvard Business Review* (September-October 1994).

<sup>13</sup> Harry Yarger, *Strategic Theory for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: The Little Book on Big Strategy* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2006), 1.

<sup>14</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (Washington, DC: 2006), available at: <<http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/jel/doddict/data/s/05163.html>>.