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On: 28 December 2014, At: 16:35

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



The RUSI Journal

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rusi20>

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Published online: 23 Dec 2014.



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To cite this article: Charles D Allen & Jeffrey L Groh (2014) Avoiding Strategic Misfortune, The RUSI Journal, 159:6, 58-66, DOI: [10.1080/03071847.2014.992151](https://doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2014.992151)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2014.992151>

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AVOIDING STRATEGIC MISFORTUNE

A FRAMEWORK FOR DEFENCE LEADERS

CHARLES D ALLEN AND JEFFREY L GROH

As the global security environment becomes increasingly complex and world leaders are less and less willing to fund defence capabilities, the key question is how senior defence and military leaders can better prepare themselves to analyse the strategic environment and avoid misfortune. Charles D Allen and Jeffrey L Groh argue that senior defence leaders need an integrated analytical approach and outline one such developmental framework for learning, anticipating and adapting to emerging challenges in the strategic environment. This framework should be applied to address the security challenges of the twenty-first century.

In the turbulent wake of the early twenty-first century, the US Department of Defense (DoD) conducted a detailed Strategic Choices and Management Review (SCMR) in 2013.¹ This review identified operational and institutional challenges facing the nation in the next decade and presented the major choices that the DoD must make to protect the national security interests of the US. The SCMR and the 2012 Defense Strategic Guidance (DSG),² as well as other US national strategy documents, provided the contextual framework for the recently published Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR).³ The QDR provides an important strategic direction for US security policy by detailing the DoD's objectives and the force-sizing construct for Joint Force 2025.

By all accounts, the US is only one of many countries struggling to develop a defence strategy that can navigate the global security landscape.⁴ It faces fiscal uncertainty owing to the Budget Control Act (BCA) of 2011 in addition to the challenges of determining and resourcing its defence strategy, as is the case in other countries.⁵ This article proposes a framework through which senior national civilian and military leaders can address

the ill-structured or 'wicked' problems of national defence in a complex and uncertain security environment. Horst W J Rittel and Melvin M Webber clearly articulate the nature of wicked problems in their seminal work, 'Dilemmas in General Theory of Planning':⁶

"wicked" problems, whereas science has developed to deal with "tame" problems. Policy problems cannot be definitively described. Moreover, in a pluralistic society there is nothing like the undisputable public good; there is no objective definition of equity; policies that respond to social problems cannot be meaningfully correct or false; and it makes no sense to talk about "optimal solutions" to social problems unless severe qualifications are imposed first. Even worse, there are no "solutions" in the sense of definitive and objective answers.

The framework integrates the operational design methodology commonly used for joint operations planning, with the 'Learn-Anticipate-Adapt' schema proposed by Eliot Cohen and John Gooch in *Military Misfortunes: The Anatomy of Failure in War*.⁷ Security practitioners of other states

can employ this dynamic framework to understand the nature of the problem, guide their development of strategy and then monitor the efficacy of the enacted strategy to meet future security challenges. The authors use the proposed framework and apply it to the Korean War in order to examine the US's evolving defence strategy in the twenty-first century – in the wake of its rebalancing towards the Asia-Pacific region – and to assess the implications for Joint Force 2025.

National Strategic Direction and the Catalyst for Change

US national security professionals have a plethora of documents to inform the strategy-development process.⁸ President Barack Obama's 2010 National Security Strategy (NSS) provides the strategic approach for the DoD in collaboration with other executive-branch agencies (such as the National Security Council, Department of State and US Agency for International Development) to advance US national interests.⁹ The president could be likened to an architect who produces the broad vision and plan with enough detail for the engineers (that is to say, the secretary of defense, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS), combatant



A US tank landing ship balances precariously off the end of an Inchon pier after being caught by a 31-foot receding tide in September 1950. Can the US avoid strategic misfortune by learning from its experiences in Korea? *Courtesy of AP Photo/US Army.*

commanders, and service secretaries and chiefs) to produce a functional blueprint, calculate a bill of materials and then construct the building.¹⁰

The enduring interests are the security of the US, economic prosperity, respect for universal values and an international order which enhances peace and stability through co-operation. These stated interests provide the foundation for a defence strategy. Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel supported these interests with ends-ways-means as guidance to the US armed forces in the 2014 QDR.¹¹ Concomitantly, General Martin Dempsey, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, collaborates

with the service chiefs and combatant commanders as he develops his version of the National Military Strategy (NMS).¹² General Dempsey published the second edition of his Strategic Direction to the Joint Force articulating his vision and objectives to advance and protect US interests as a bridge to a new NMS.¹³

Strategic guidance in the NSS, QDR, as well as the then-Chairman's strategic direction outlines a robust series of military objectives and approaches to achieve policy objectives. The challenge facing national leaders is to align the resourcing of the strategy. Admiral James Winnefeld, vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, succinctly stated the

problem in August 2013 when he said, 'We need to understand that the more our means are reduced, the more we may have to adjust the ends that we hope to achieve, or accept more risk as we achieve those ends.'¹⁴ This is the context for the investigation of a framework for strategy formulation in a period of fiscal uncertainty. Understanding the strategic direction in an evolving security environment plays a critical role in the development of an innovative and dynamic defence strategy. Such an inquiry is not uniquely American: Hew Strachan recently criticised the British government for 'the failure to think through the relationship between policy direction

and operational implementation, the institutional and intellectual heart of strategy.¹⁵

Learn-Anticipate-Adapt

Scholars have offered many models through which to examine the past missteps of government and military leaders in times of conflict. Graham Allison and Phillip Zelikow provide the most persuasive approach with their examination of the Cuban Missile Crisis.¹⁶ In the classic *Essence of Decision*, they apply three models: 'Rational Actor', 'Organizational Behaviour', and 'Governmental Politics' to deconstruct events and subsequent decisions that brought the world to the brink of nuclear war in 1962.

A Learn-Anticipate-Adapt schema may be useful to frame strategic issues

A simpler Learn-Anticipate-Adapt schema may be useful to frame strategic issues and develop prudent approaches for their resolution. Cohen and Gooch developed this approach primarily to explain military failures in operational campaigns. With its focus on leadership decisions and actions, this framework is useful for individual actors, organisational leaders and policy-makers in the domain of national security where strategic leadership requires a set of personal and organisational competencies that enable effective navigation of the strategic landscape.

Cohen and Gooch define military misfortunes as defeat or lost opportunities for victory. Their basic premise is that such misfortunes result from the failure of military organisations to accomplish key tasks and are the natural result of critical lapses in effective analysis. Accordingly, unsuccessful military leaders exhibit the failure to learn, anticipate and adapt.¹⁷ The US military prides itself on possessing expert knowledge gained through the study of historical and contemporary conflicts, including those in which it has

not participated directly. Such analysis provides insight and offers lessons that could be applied to current or future operations. Appropriate application to future conflicts requires a synthesis of lessons from the past that informs a vision for the conduct of operations for the future force – in other words, it applies this knowledge in order to anticipate. Perhaps the greatest challenge is to adapt organisational policies, structures and processes at the higher level of the enterprise. This may be true when the wrong lessons are drawn from experience or history, the anticipated future does not materialise or the profession does not recognise that changes in the operational environment require adaptation.

Within the strategic realm, senior national security professionals have an important role in providing direction and guidance for the defence establishment. They are the focal agents who monitor the external environment, interact with and shape organisations, define roles and missions, and develop strategies for the defence of national security interests. Monitoring the strategic environment allows the analysis of multiple sources (for instance, defence agencies and panels, and think tanks) to compare and contrast findings and thus distil and learn lessons that drive judgements and strategic choices. Dynamic environmental conditions require national security professionals to anticipate security challenges and decide what the defence establishment should be able to do – in terms of military capabilities and capacities – to safeguard national interests. Alignment with the environment requires deliberate adaptation of organisations and the ability to modify strategies when faced with either changing conditions or the failure to achieve desired or anticipated results.

How should senior leaders approach strategic issues in an environment characterised by the overused acronym for volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA)? It is imperative for leaders to have a functional framework to consider the factors for strategic matters, to assess and judge their importance as points of leverage, and then develop a prudent strategy.

National security professionals must be vigilant in monitoring and interacting with the external environment. They must understand and influence the organisational culture that is the internal environment. They are ultimately responsible for determining how best to achieve the mission through the development and execution of national military strategy. Successful strategic leaders must understand 'where we are' to navigate the environment. Through their leadership influence, they promulgate a vision to guide 'where we want to go' and 'how we get there'. Leaders must be sufficiently mentally agile to learn from the past and anticipate the future from trends in order to identify problems and frame the problem set. They can then guide their organisations to adapt to current circumstances and emerging situations. Leaders should establish clarity of purpose and have the ability to communicate with internal and external constituencies.¹⁸

Design Thinking

National security professionals can apply the Learn-Anticipate-Adapt framework using the current US military doctrine of operational design to address the ill-structured problem of defence-strategy formulation. Operational design 'requires the command to encourage discourse and leverage dialogue and collaboration to identify and solve complex and ill-defined problems.'¹⁹ The application of design principles will allow senior military leaders to provide their best advice to the president and secretary of defense for military policy and strategy development. Design thinking is an approach to applying the Learn-Anticipate-Adapt framework to address the challenge of formulating a contemporary DoD strategy. The operational design methodology examines the strategic direction in the context of understanding the security environment. This analysis informs the definition of the central problem. Subsequently, the secretary of defense, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, combatant commanders and their staffs build a strategic approach to manage responses to the problem. The strategic approach is not a complete strategy; it provides objectives and end-states that inform detailed strategy development.

The Korean War: Applying the Integrated Strategy Formulation Framework

The current strategic situation of the US has four parallels that can be drawn with the advent of the Korean War. First, the US is emerging from two protracted conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. Second, there is a renewed desire among the wider American public to divert national resources toward the domestic agenda. Third, as the world's only superpower, it is revising its national security policy. Fourth, because the US perceives China as its one predominant source of competition, it is rebalancing its strategic posture toward the Asia-Pacific region.

Understand the External and Internal Strategic Environment

From 1939 to 1945, the Allies engaged in a global conflict. After defeating the Axis Powers of Germany, Italy and Japan, the Allies with their war-weary populations sought – in different ways – to consolidate their security interests and shift their focus to domestic agendas. The US, for instance, hastily reduced its military forces to 1.5 million personnel in June 1947 from a peak of 12 million in June 1945,²⁰ and in 1947 slashed its defence budget to 5.6 per cent of gross national product, down from 42 per cent in 1945.²¹

Frame the Problem Sets

As the Second World War came to an end, the emergence of the Cold War prompted US leaders to anticipate that future security challenges would come from the modernised and formidable combat forces of its erstwhile ally, the USSR. Such an assessment established strategic priorities that dismissed and relegated communist threats in the Pacific region to a distant second place. As historian Mark Stoler wrote, 'Europe remained the primary area of U.S. interest and the area in which limited U.S. intervention could be decisive. In China the reverse was true.'²² George C Marshall, who in 1945 served as special presidential envoy to China prior to being named as secretary of state, did not think that communist victory in China would constitute a threat to US security of the same magnitude as the Soviet threat in Western Europe.²³

Perhaps the lessons derived from the use of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki provided comfort to senior US civilian and military officials that combat in the Pacific would be most appropriately (or efficiently) deterred by nuclear weapons. Stoler captured sentiment that 'In the aftermath of total victory over the Axis, [Americans] saw their power and prestige as more than sufficient ... to turn China into a thriving Western-style democracy.'²⁴ The defence of Europe, however, would require an integration of forces from the armed services. George C Marshall, then secretary of state, identified the central problem to address in a secret memorandum to President Harry Truman:²⁵

The world situation is still dominated by the Russian effort in the post-hostilities period to extend their virtual domination over all, or as much as possible, of the European land mass ... An integral part of that project has been to neutralize our [US] ability to oppose it by weakening in every way our national potential by undermining confidence everywhere in our motives and our fitness for leadership.

A Strategic Approach

From this complex and turbulent environment, a piecemeal national policy evolved that identified new policy objectives, security interests and threats with greater emphasis on economic rather than military instruments of national power. The security strategy sought to 'recreate a multipolar, balance-of-power world in which the full burden of containing the Soviets would not fall on an overextended United States.'²⁶ Subsequently, the National Security Act of 1947 reorganised the US national military establishment under the new Department of Defense, which developed a general military strategy approved by the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

In April 1948, the State Department added an important component to the national strategy with the European Recovery Program (ERP) to provide economic support to nations devastated by the Second World War. The Marshall Plan (so named after the newly

appointed secretary of state's 1947 address to garner support for the ERP) demonstrated a clear understanding of the economic landscape and a unique approach to the aftermath of the military operations in Europe. The US grand strategy described in the top-secret National Security Council Report 68 (NSC-68) outlined the containment of the perceived main threat posed by the USSR and communism. The president issued NSC-68 on 14 April 1950 – a mere seventy days before North Korean forces crossed the 38th Parallel.

Did the US get its post-Second World War strategy wrong?

The question must be asked, therefore, whether, despite the breadth and depth of experience gained from years at war and efforts to shape the international security environment, the US got its post-Second World War strategy wrong.²⁷ While George Kennan's 'asymmetrical containment' using economic strength was well considered,²⁸ the US focus and prioritisation on Europe begat a security strategy that was not comprehensive enough to deter conflict in the Pacific.

The combination of lessons taken and the anticipated threat led to both purposeful and ad hoc adaptation that focused the US instruments of national power – diplomacy, economic, information, and military – toward containing the communist threat posed by the Soviet Union. As Stoler concluded:²⁹

The military policy had been justified on numerous grounds, including the need for a balanced budget and the relative cheapness of nuclear over ground forces ("more bang for the buck") ... and the belief that the US nuclear monopoly and a buildup of Western European forces could best deter any hostile moves by Soviet Armed Forces... Implicit in such arguments was a future US policy of withdrawal in Asia and the Western Pacific on both strategic and political grounds.

Executing the Strategic Approach

For the US military, the resulting strategy meant the deployment of substantial numbers of ground forces in Europe while mostly constabulary units occupied the Pacific region. The US withdrew its last combat troops from the Korean Peninsula in June 1949.³⁰ As late as January 1950, only six months before the Northern invasion of the South triggered the Korean War, Secretary of State Dean Acheson explicitly defined the defensive perimeter for 'the military security of the Pacific area' without making any mention of Korea.³¹ The US preparation for the post-Second World War environment, specifically in the Pacific, was a miscalculation born of an inability to understand the strategic situation. The near operational failure in the opening months of the Korean War could have easily resulted in a strategic misfortune for the US with global implications.

Top US military leaders avoided failure when they eventually recognised and admitted that the existing strategy needed to change. As a young Major David Petraeus wrote in 1987:³²

Especially in retrospect, the Korean War came to be regarded by the military as precisely the type of costly and indecisive conflict to be avoided in the future ... Particularly unsettling for American military leaders, who during and after World War II were accustomed to broad domestic support, was the gradual erosion of public backing as the war dragged on and casualties mounted.

The lesson that senior army leaders gleaned and embraced from the Korean experience was to 'never again' be trapped by civilian political leaders into conducting warfare contrary to their better and expert judgment in military affairs. Given the US military's adherence to the principle of subordination to civilian authority, it would be difficult to put this lesson into practice, however. Application of the proposed Integrated Strategy Formulation Framework might have led to a different understanding of the post-Second World War strategic environment, which in turn may have challenged the singular focus on the USSR and its threat to Europe. Such an

assessment and subsequent development of a design approach might have generated a more effective adaptation of US strategy prior to the Korean War.

Understanding the Strategic Environment

An essential element in the Integrated Strategy Formulation Framework is an understanding of the global security environment. The current documents outlining the direction for US strategy begin with the identification of the key actors and factors influencing the security situation in the milieu of US national interests. Following the 2012 Defense Strategic Guidance, the 2014 QDR and the chairman's Direction to the Joint Force (2014) are in considerable agreement over the main trends in the security environment. The overarching theme is one of 'instability':³³

Challenges to our many allies and partners around the globe remain dynamic and unpredictable, particularly from regimes in North Korea and Iran. Unrest and violence persist elsewhere, creating a fertile environment for violent extremism and sectarian conflict, especially in fragile states, stretching from the Sahel to South Asia, and threatening US citizens abroad.

There are many specific aspects of regional and global trends as sources of instability. The QDR points out the challenges of climate change, technology diffusion, cyber-security, contested space domain, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. It is important to recognise the diverse nature of instability that results in conflict and threatens US interests around the world. The US government perspective, however, is far from the only assessment of the global security environment available to the country's national security policy-makers.

There are numerous compelling reports and studies examining the contemporary and future security environment. Two that are noteworthy are 'Global Trends 2030: Alternative Worlds', produced by the National Intelligence Community,³⁴ and 'Ensuring a Strong US Defense for the Future', published by the National Defense

Panel.³⁵ These reports focus on the same theme of rising instability around the world, with the latter stating that: 'The bipolar constancy of the Cold War era has yielded to regional forces of instability and new strategic challenges to US interests and security.'³⁶ Any relevant defence strategy must address explicit and implicit factors of global instability by developing a Joint Force with the appropriate capabilities and capacity to protect and advance US interests.

Defence strategy must address explicit and implicit facets of global instability

Identify the Problem

Comprehensive appreciation of the security environment is essential and helps senior decision-makers to identify the central problem and subsequently develop a new strategy. US joint doctrine assists in comprehending how to define the central problem: 'it involves understanding and isolating the root causes of the issue at hand – defining the essence of a complex, ill-defined problem. Defining the problem begins with a review of the tendencies and potentials of all concerned actors and identifying tensions among the existing condition and the desired end state.'³⁷

The example of the Korean War shows how George C Marshall, in his role as secretary of defense, faced a daunting task in September 1950: he had to define the problem and develop a corresponding defence strategy with US military forces already committed in Korea. Marshall had to define the Korean War problem in the context of President Harry Truman's national strategy to counter the threat of communism after the Second World War. Stoler assessed that, 'He [Marshall] would also have to expand the armed forces as a whole, for the postwar demobilization and large budget cuts that had precipitated the Revolt of the Admirals had also left those forces unprepared for any conflict except a nuclear one.'³⁸

The complexity of defining the problem is no less challenging today,

after more than a decade of war and in ambiguous security and fiscal environments. The question is whether the senior DoD leadership has expended enough thought on framing and focusing on the core problem outlined in the QDR.

‘Operational’ refers to developing an approach that manages the problem

The ‘Defense Strategic Guidance Statement’ (2012) and ‘Strategic Choices and Management Review’ (2013) provided substantial analysis to define the problem, which was then more fully articulated in the 2014 QDR. The broad and overarching problem, according to the QDR, is that, ‘Given major changes in our nation’s security environment – including geopolitical changes, changes in modern warfare, and changes in the fiscal environment – our updated defense strategy requires that the Department rebalance the Joint Force in several key areas to prepare most effectively for the future.’³⁹ The statement of the problem clearly maps to the notion of global instability, the requirement to rebalance Joint Force 2025, and the challenge presented by the fiscal constraints imposed by the 2011 BCA. The next element in the Integrated Strategy Formulation Framework is to develop the strategy.

Strategy Development

Once the problem has been defined, the next phase of the design methodology is to develop a focused strategic *approach* that provides the foundation for the development of a more detailed strategy. In this instance, it is appropriate to extend the US military definition for an ‘operational approach’ to the strategic level. Simply stated, an operational approach is ‘a description of the broad actions the force must take to transform current conditions into those desired at end state.’⁴⁰ The use of the word ‘operational’ here does not refer to a level of war – tactical, operational or strategic; instead, it refers to developing an approach that manages the problem. At

the strategic level, the application of the concept outlines the broad actions and objectives. The National Defense Panel Review of the 2014 QDR raises concerns over the current defence strategy, which may have a means mismatch resulting in high operational and force-sizing risks:⁴¹

Yet the capabilities and capacities rightly called for in the 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review ... clearly exceed the budget resources made available to the Department. This gap is disturbing if not dangerous in light of the fact that global threats and challenges are rising, including a troubling pattern of territorial assertiveness and regional intimidation on China’s part, the recent aggression of Russia in Ukraine, nuclear proliferation on the part of North Korea and Iran, a serious insurgency in Iraq that both reflects and fuels the broader sectarian conflicts in the region, the civil war in Syria, and civil strife in the larger Middle East and throughout Africa.

Tough decisions must be made about Joint Force 2025

‘Where Do We Want to Go?’

The secretary of defense and Joint Chiefs must make extremely tough decisions about the capabilities and capacity of Joint Force 2025 in light of the 2011 BCA. The essence of the strategic approach anchors on this notion:⁴²

Rebalancing for a broad spectrum of conflict. Future conflicts could range from hybrid contingencies against proxy groups using asymmetric approaches, to a high-end conflict against a state power armed with WMD or technologically advanced anti-access and area-denial (A2/AD) capabilities. Reflecting this diverse range of challenges, the US military will shift focus in terms of what kinds of conflicts it prepares for in the future, moving toward greater emphasis on the full spectrum of possible operations. Although our forces will no longer be sized to conduct large-scale prolonged stability operations, we will

preserve the expertise gained during the past ten years of counterinsurgency and stability operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. We will also protect the ability to regenerate capabilities that might be needed to meet future demands.

The strategic approach is to downsize force structure (capacity) and to enhance capabilities while relying on the ability to regenerate ‘capabilities’ to address unknown future threats to US interests. The DoD plans to mitigate operational and strategic risk through innovative approaches to employ regionally aligned forces and work with partners and allies, observing that: ‘with allies and partners, we will make greater efforts to coordinate our planning to optimize their contributions to their own security and to our many combined activities.’⁴³

The DoD plans to mitigate risk through partnerships and alliances

‘How Do We Get There?’

The next question is how national security professionals use lessons learned to adapt to anticipated future challenges. Experience shows that large institutions and their leaders are resistant to change, even in the face of brutal facts, such as that environmental conditions have changed and existing strategies no longer seem to be working. Prior to the onset of the Second World War, Winston Churchill warned that Britain must face the impending threat posed by Germany. Perhaps he had read and embraced the closing words of Bertrand Russell’s 1934 essay, ‘To understand the actual world as it is, not as we should wish it to be, is the beginning of wisdom.’⁴⁴ To exercise wisdom in the quest for national security is a tough but necessary responsibility of strategic leaders.

National security professionals must base strategic guidance and policies on clear and relevant assumptions. Accordingly, it is essential to select and

test the most critical assumptions on which the strategy's potential for success rests.⁴⁵ This is a difficult proposition. How could the US have tested the assumption that the invasion by North Korean forces was a strategic demonstration to distract from Soviet intentions in Western Europe? As the historical record shows, American civilian and military leaders tightly embraced such core assumptions even when presented with evidence to the contrary.⁴⁶

In the contemporary security environment, events in Africa, the Middle East and Levant, and Eastern Europe constantly challenge the strategic intent to rebalance US military posture to the Asia-Pacific region. Rather than one or two major conflicts (that is, major combat operations), which drive force-sizing for the US military, senior civilian and military leadership have evidence that smaller-scale conflicts resulting from regional instability are more prevalent. While the US military has the *capability* to operate across the range of operations, with the current trend in defence resourcing and force-structure decisions, it will lack the *capacity* to do so for repeated and sustained operations.

Additionally, the DoD must have processes and organisational structures to monitor the execution of the strategy and assess it against expected and desired results. The processes and structures must accept and provide feedback to senior defence leaders to support their judgement of the efficacy of the strategy. A leader's greatest value is perhaps in his or her assessment that the strategy requires adjustment (in ends, ways or means) and then subsequently directing institutional adaptation. Within the US military, the Joint Strategy Review is such a process to inform the 'Development and revision of [US] strategic direction'.⁴⁷ The design element of the Integrated Strategy Formulation Framework also requires constant assessment and iteration of the strategic approach in the context of strategic objectives.

In 1950, Marshall led the adaptation of American strategy to

assess the emerging realities of the Korean War against the existent US strategy. This assessment included the potential employment of nuclear weapons to preclude the need for extensive land operations.⁴⁸ In present circumstances, it is essential that national defence institutions are both learning organisations (testing core assumptions) and adaptive organisations (changing proactively in anticipation of national security requirements). This comports well with Michael Howard's enduring recommendation that military professionals should have the intellectual capacities required to learn, anticipate and adapt.⁴⁹ It is unlikely that the world is entering an age of peace and stability, so prudence should be the watchword for the US and its partner nations. Prudence requires consideration of short- and long-term horizons, commitments to allies and, importantly, an alignment of the defence strategy with policy and enduring US national interests. Accordingly, defence leaders must address the gaps in resourcing the strategy that not only provides war-fighting capability but also the capacity to generate readiness to accomplish security missions. With the US presidential elections on the horizon in 2016, the DoD must apply design thinking to present the next commander-in-chief with an accurate assessment of the strategic environment and a clear statement of the essential problems; this can then be used to guide the strategic approach to continue the rebalancing of Joint Force 2025.

Conclusion

More than two decades ago, military historian and national security scholar David Jablonsky concluded in *Why is Strategy Difficult?*⁵⁰

The United States is entering an era in which the strategic landscape has changed and is continuing to change. Nevertheless, the core problems that make strategy so difficult for a global power remain essentially the same as they did for earlier powers ranging from

Rome to Great Britain. To begin with, there are challenges to US interests throughout the globe. In a constantly changing strategic environment, however, it is difficult in many cases to distinguish which of those interests are vital, not to mention the nature of the challenge or threat to them. In any case, there are never enough armed forces to reduce the risk everywhere; strategic priorities have to be established.

National security professionals must look at the strategic canvas before them. They seek to compose an image of the world as they would wish it to be. As was the case after the end of the Second World War, the US and its allies and partners have drawn conclusions from lessons based on their military experiences in the previous and present century. Each country assesses the global environment, projects threats to its interests, and develops military and other strategies (that is to say, diplomatic and economic) to provide for its national security. Such strategies should be the culmination of informed choices and, importantly, they should be adaptable to changing domestic and international conditions – thus, the process is inherently iterative and dynamic. The extension of operational design concepts combined with the Learn-Anticipate-Adapt framework is useful to see the world as it is, and thus could preclude strategic misfortune by facilitating purposeful adaptation of a state's chosen strategy. ■

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The views expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy of the US Army, Department of Defense, or the US government.

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