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Hybrid Threats: Reconceptualizing the Evolving Character of Modern Conflict

by Frank G. Hoffman

Key Points

America's ongoing battles in Afghanistan and Iraq have highlighted limitations in our understanding of the complexity of modern warfare. Furthermore, our cultural prism has retarded the institutionalization of capabilities needed to prevail in stabilization and counter-insurgency missions.

An ongoing debate about future threats is often framed as a dichotomous choice between counterinsurgency and conventional war. This oversimplifies defense planning and resource allocation decisions. Instead of fundamentally different approaches, we should expect competitors who will employ *all* forms of war, perhaps simultaneously. Such multimodal threats are often called *hybrid* threats. Hybrid adversaries employ combinations of capabilities to gain an asymmetric advantage.

Thus, the choice is not simply one of preparing for long-term stability operations *or* high-intensity conflict. We must be able to do *both* simultaneously against enemies far more ruthless than today's.

This essay widens the aperture of the current debate to account for this threat. It compares and contrasts four competing perspectives and evaluates them for readiness and risk implications. This risk assessment argues that the hybrid threat presents the most operational risk in the near- to midterm. Accordingly, it concludes that hybrid threats are a better focal point for considering alternative joint force postures.

Secretary of Defense Robert Gates directly challenged the Pentagon's strategists and military chiefs in an important speech at the National Defense University in September 2008. The speech was a critical assessment of the prevailing U.S. military culture and the prism through which our Armed Forces see themselves. This prism clarifies what is important *about* the future and how we posture our forces *for* the future. Secretary Gates questioned that mindset and its hold on the Services and the Department of Defense's capitalization practices.

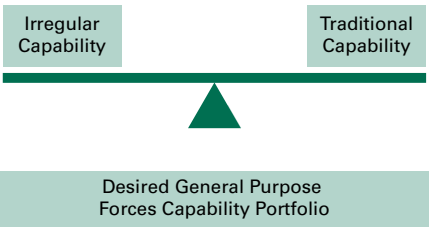
Secretary Gates also declared that "the defining principle of the Pentagon's new National Defense Strategy is balance,"[1] a principle that will also be key in the upcoming Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR). This principle will force the critical examination of assumptions about the future, our understanding of threats, and their relative priorities. Gates emphasizes achieving a balance between our current conflicts and the Pentagon's penchant to plan toward more canonical, conventional scenarios. The Secretary believes that the Pentagon is devoted to postulated longer term challenges that have little to do with current conflicts and more likely threats. He used the term *Next-War-itis* to describe a prism that distorts the Services' ability to see military affairs clearly and objectively.[2]

The concept of *balance* is central to today's security debate, but it is a complex problem rather than a simple equation. To what degree should investment resources be allocated to conducting current operations, and what needs to be invested in the future? How much should be devoted to so-called nontraditional or irregular missions such as counterinsurgency versus traditional military capabilities? How should we invest scarce funding to reflect this balance? How do we balance not only missions, but also force capabilities, risks, and resources?

In the defense community, this "fight over the next war" has been going on for some time.[3] The debate has been poorly framed as a choice between idealized dichotomous options (see figure 1). This distorted conception grossly oversimplifies critical defense planning and resource allocation decisions. Secretary Gates implied that this was not how he perceived balance in any event. This essay aims to widen the debate over post–Operation *Iraqi Freedom* defense budgets and the posture of the joint warfighting community.

This reconceptualization will have significant implications for military force design and posture. In a perfect world, our military would be robustly sized, and we would build distinct forces for discrete missions along the conflict spectrum. We would have separate forces to deal with counterterrorism, protracted counterinsurgencies, expeditionary missions, and the rare but existential interstate conflagration. The training and equipping of these forces would be well matched to their expected operating environments and threats. But we do not live in such a world, and we need to prepare and shape our forces in an

Figure 1. Balancing the Joint Force



environment of greater uncertainty and fewer resources. As Secretary Gates has noted, the 9/11 funding spigot is about to be turned off, requiring the Pentagon to rethink its priorities and make hard calls. We no longer have the resources to simply buy everything and eliminate every risk. The time for thinking anew has arrived.

This essay sets out to expand the array of potential posture options for the U.S. military set against an appreciation for the evolving character of modern conflict. There are far more contenders in this debate, and a far broader range of options with significantly different risks and distinct investment shifts. Given the economic crisis and the need to carefully husband our defense resources in the next decade, it is important that the Obama administration grasp the numerous modes of warfare that we face and have a broader spectrum of options. The administration needs to avoid strategic overstretch and make difficult decisions about what to emphasize and how to prudently balance risk.[4]

Moreover, the debate so far has focused on shaping land forces for future scenarios instead of understanding implications for the entire joint warfighting community. Inasmuch as the Navy and Air Force are relevant to both current conflicts and will undoubtedly be critical contributors to future fights, a wider lens is needed.

Competing Schools

Andrew Bacevich captures today's post–*Iraqi Freedom* strategy and forces debate in his widely cited article, "The Petraeus Doctrine." He portrayed a stark choice between two competing camps in the U.S. military.[5] At one end of the spectrum of conflict is a group that Bacevich derisively calls the Crusaders, who emphasize counterinsurgency and irregular threats as the proper focus for our Armed Forces. Proponents of the competing school of thought at the other end of the spectrum are labeled the Traditionalists, who argue for a force structure to fight conventional wars. Bacevich personalized the ongoing debate by using two prominent contemporary authors, John Nagl and Gian Gentile, as the polar protagonists.[6]

H.L. Mencken would have characterized Bacevich's essay as offering something neat, clean, and completely wrong. His "black-and-white" option set creates a false binary choice that is great for media consumption, but that represents a gross oversimplification and distorted conception of America's strategic options.

Four of the various schools of thought on how to address this force posture problem will be assessed here. In each school, the principal military threat and its probability and consequences are identified. An alternative approach based upon the growing "hybrid threat" literature is also incorporated as a better construct for sizing and shaping the joint force. Additionally, the force structure requirements and posture shifts that would be required to support each school are examined. The four schools are:

- *Counterinsurgents*, who emphasize the high likelihood and rising salience of irregular adversaries
- *Traditionalists*, who focus on conventional threats
- *Utility infielders*, who attempt to balance the risks posed by multiple threats by striving to create forces agile enough to cover the full spectrum
- *Division of labor proponents*, who balance risk differently by specializing forces to cover different missions.

The Counterinsurgents. Proponents of this camp challenge the narrow orientation of traditionally focused forces and argue for a transformation based on today's fights. They believe that Iraq and Afghanistan represent far more than a passing trend in the evolution of conflict. The Counterinsurgents contend that massed formations comprised of traditional arms and large-scale conflict between conventional powers are not realistic planning scenarios and should not be the focal point for shaping tomorrow's military. They maintain that the most likely challenges and greatest risks are posed by failing states, ungoverned territories, transnational threats, and followers of radical versions of Islam.

The Counterinsurgents contend that the purpose of a military is not to perpetuate its preferred paradigms but rather to prepare for likely contingencies and secure America's interests. They worry that U.S. military culture will reject the primacy of, or even the need for, competency in irregular warfare as operations in Iraq wind down. That would be a strategic mistake, even more reprehensible than the institutional memory dump that occurred after Vietnam.[7] In their opinion, preparing for an age of asymmetric wars is neither folly nor a matter of strategic choice or an "imperial delusion"; it is simply a strategic necessity in an era of persistent conflict.[8]

Advocates of this school stress that this should be the focus of effort for the American military. Some of them deride the notion of irregular warfare in our military's culture as fallacious and criticize the U.S. military's conceptual blindness about the frequency and complexity of nontraditional forms of conflict. As military expert Barak Salmoni has argued:

It will only be when American military and civilian leaders recast the irregular as regular that they will begin to fundamentally restructure forces, properly re-educate personnel, effectively plan operationally and usefully deploy as well as employ military forces.[9]

The Counterinsurgents believe that America's enemies are learning and adaptive beings who recognize the futility of confronting the United States in open warfare. Rather than present predictable aim points for easy targeting and destruction, these opponents will continue to confound the American military until it demonstrates that it has mastered irregular warfare.

Some highly regarded military officers who are part of this school are concerned that the U.S. military is misreading the shifts, especially in ground force training and capabilities, that will be required to create forces capable of

Lieutenant Colonel Frank G. Hoffman, USMCR (Ret.), is a Research Fellow in the Center for Emerging Threats and Opportunities at the Marine Corps Combat Development Command.

producing the same dominance in irregular warfare that we currently have in air and naval warfare. As one author put it:

Today's wars represent the latest data points of a continuum of experience in the next phase of conflict. This new epoch of wars in the "American era" has fundamentally changed how America has fought its wars since the end of the industrial age and will shape how we fight our wars for a generation or more to come.[10]

The Counterinsurgent school argues that irregular warfare is not only different and of greater priority, but it also cannot be successfully conducted by general purpose forces that prepare for it only marginally. Its proponents challenge "current orthodoxy [which] says that what is needed is a one-size-fits-all medium force that is both strategically mobile and tactically robust."[11] Instead, they argue for a greater emphasis on wars among the people, and a force particularly shaped for sustained irregular warfare.

The Traditionalists. At the opposite end of the spectrum of conflict are the Traditionalists, who seek to reestablish the focus of the Armed Forces on "fighting and winning the Nation's wars." They focus on major, high-intensity interstate wars. They advocate against reorienting forces, especially ground forces, away from their traditional emphasis on large-scale, Industrial Age warfare against states or alliances.

Proponents of this school do not ignore the frequency of irregular warfare or dismiss its persistent nature; they just believe that such scenarios are not amenable to military intervention and that these contingencies should not be the focus of the American military. Traditionalists want to retain the Pentagon's current procurement profile and its emphasis on the "big guns" for a future they predict will be conventional in nature and for which a large and expensive military is strategically necessary.[12]

This school would concur with a key assessment in U.S. Joint Forces Command's *Joint Operating Environment* that concludes "competition and conflict among conventional powers will continue to be the primary strategic and operational context for the Joint Force over the next 25 years."[13]

Traditionalists are particularly wary about the newfound embrace of messy, protracted counterinsurgencies such as Iraq and Afghanistan. They are rightfully concerned about the degradation of combat skill sets within the Army and Marine Corps due to the severe operational tempo of today's conflicts.

The debate is inherently mixed with the strategic lessons of Iraq. To the Traditionalists, our experiences in Iraq should have "raised questions about the wisdom of employing American military power to build nations where none exist or where an American military presence is not wanted."[14] The Traditionalist proponents make clear that irregular warfare/counterinsurgency/nation-building does not match well with U.S. culture or priorities. As Gentile has argued:

The real question . . . is whether the Army should be prepared to conduct stability operations, nationbuilding, counterinsurgency, and related operations for more than very brief periods. Experience to date both indicates the limitations of American military capability to reshape other people's societies and governments and points to the limits of American military and economic resources in the conduct of these operations.[15]

Traditionalists also ask the valid question of whether our culturally based inadequacies against ambiguous threats are largely immutable.[16] Can America's military culture be sufficiently adapted to deal effectively with the insidious character of irregular combat and terrorism? How real and permanent are the institutional adaptations that have been made since 2003? Is being prepared for irregular warfare really "folly"?[17] Should we dismiss the irregular foe as merely "mischievous," or will this result in reruns of the "David over Goliath" show?[18] As one critic of this school observes, "The institutional military still seems to think that the current conflicts are mere temporary distractions from some future main showdown with an as-yet-undefined peer force."[19]

All in all, the Traditionalist school presents strong arguments for not conducting stability operations, but it has not tested much less defended its assumptions about the salience of interstate conflict. Most of the geopolitical arguments for focusing on near-peer or large states presume automatically that conflicts will be essentially conventional and high intensity.[20] The results of these assumptions will be tested later.

Utility Infielders. The third and most prevalent school, at least among American ground force commanders, is the Utility Infielder school. Its advocates recognize the need to adequately deal with both strictly conventional tasks and irregular threats. They propose covering the entire spectrum of conflict and avoiding the risk of being optimized at either extreme. Instead, they seek to spread this risk across the range of military operations by investing in quality forces, educating officers for agility in complex problems, and conducting tough but flexible training programs.

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The Utility Infielders school is officially represented in the Army's new doctrinal publication Field Manual 3–0, *Operations*, which declares "stability operations are a core U.S. military mission that must be given priority comparable to that of combat (offensive and defensive) operations." This construct rejects the narrow mission profile of the Traditionalists and claims that the Army must train its units in the application of full-spectrum operations to ensure it provides a balanced, versatile force to joint and combined force commanders. These full-spectrum operations emphasize the importance of adaptive, flexible forces able to fight and win in combat, whether facing a terrorist entity or the modern forces of a hostile nation. However, the real priorities of this school might be found in this crucial statement: full-spectrum operations "will take us into

the 21st-century urban battlefields among the people without losing our capabilities to dominate the higher conventional end of the spectrum of conflict."[21] The assumption inherent in these statements is that conventional conflict is at the higher end, but that urban battlefields and today's emerging threats are somehow less demanding and less costly.

Likewise, the Marine Corps' long-range vision and capstone operating concept that extols the versatility of "multi-capable" Marine Air-Ground Task Forces (MAGTFs) across the full range of military operations reflect this school of thought. In its latest long-range Service vision, the Marines Corps claims to cover an "extraordinary range of operations," but seeks to add new competencies only "without losing our conventional capabilities."[22]

The proponents of the Utility Infielder school do not address a number of crucial questions. How reasonable is it for general purpose forces to be able to train, equip, and be proficient at such a wide range of operational missions and contexts? How can our ground forces be good at many things, and shift emphasis in training, doctrine, and equipment without losing time and resources for so-called conventional capabilities? Are increased resources or a much larger ground force implied? An even more critical question is whether the new version of full-spectrum operations is any different than the 1990s version, when nontraditional programs got so little attention. Since full-spectrum operations and the Marine "3-block-war" were prevalent before 2003 but apparently given only lip service, how can defense policymakers now be assured that our general purpose forces will truly be ready across a broadening spectrum of tasks in an increasingly complex operating environment? Is it operationally feasible for troops to cover such a wide mission profile, and is the military hiding behind the rhetoric of full-spectrum dominance while remaining devoted to yesterday's battles? Aside from the experience gained painfully in Operations *Enduring Freedom* and *Iraqi Freedom*, are the Services really making the necessary doctrinal, organizational, and equipment changes needed to succeed across the range of military operations? On these questions, the jury is still out, and a look at the Army and Marine equipment lists does not give comfort. Both Services emphasize the same hardware priorities they held before the current operations.

The Army has not seriously altered its move toward modular force structures or its $200 billion Future Combat System, despite the fact that those plans were predicated upon a different threat and an untested concept and an even less mature suite of technologies. Critics suggest that the Marine Corps should stop perceiving its mission based on the iconic Iwo Jima model built around its World War II experiences and urge it to conceptualize its development efforts on more relevant and modern enemies.[23]

Understandably, both Services have their particular mask of war, but it is hard to square their fixed programmatic priorities with a newly expressed understanding of irregular warfare. Will either Service move past concepts and doctrine and adapt longstanding organizational models? Is the current mantra of full-spectrum operations and "multi-capable" MAGTFs simply more of the same? Are we really going to be ready against more implacable and irreconcilable enemies who seek adaptive and asymmetric means? How do we measure that commitment and readiness, and how do we test the assumptions and risk exposure that this force posture presents?

Division of Labor. A number of analysts reject the fundamental premise of the Utility Infielders school. They instead take a page from C.E. Callwell and argue that irregular and conventional warfare are markedly different modes of conflict that require distinctive forces with different training, equipment, and force designs.[24] This camp places a great emphasis on preventing conflict, preparing for stability operations, and investing in indirect forms of security forces with a greater degree of specialization for security cooperation tasks and warfighting. Because this school specifically divides roles and missions between the Services, it can be labeled the "division of labor" option.

One of the earliest proponents of this particular option is Thomas P.M. Barnett. In *The Pentagon's New Map*, he argued that the U.S. military needed to perform two distinctly different missions: maintaining stability around the globe on a daily basis to dampen the dysfunctional "nonintegrating gap," and traditional warfighting. The first mission, Systems Administration, would be assigned to the naval Services. The second task, fulfilling the role of the warfighting Leviathan, would belong to the Army and Air Force. The Systems Administration force would maintain the global commons and provide constabulary and crisis response forces.[25] Other observers reinforced this concept and recommended that the Marine Corps return to its small wars roots and drop its pursuit of major programs designed to preserve its forcible entry mission.[26]

A team from RAND proposes a different approach that also rationalizes roles and missions, and offers a means of guiding future defense investments:

The imperative to promote stability and democracy abroad will place the greatest demands on the Army, the Marine Corps, and special operations forces. The most plausible regional wars that U.S. forces might be called on to fight—involving Iran, China (over Taiwan), and North Korea—call for heavy commitments of air and naval forces and, in the first two cases, fewer U.S. ground forces.[27]

Accordingly, RAND recommended that the Department of Defense consider focusing a much larger proportion of U.S. ground forces on direct and indirect stability operations and "accept the risk of shifting some of the burden for deterring and defeating large-scale aggression to air and naval forces."[28] This recommendation appears based upon a set of assumptions: that the three scenarios listed represent the most serious force-driving contingencies for U.S. planners; that all three are vulnerable to standoff precision warfare; and that U.S. political interests can be guaranteed or obtained reliably without ground forces.

Instead of inter-Service divisions of labor, Andrew Krepinevich proposes that the Army divide its ground forces between stability operations and warfighting.[29] He challenges the critical assumption of the Utility Infielder school:

Because the range of missions is so broad, and the skill sets required sufficiently different, attempting to field forces that can move quickly and seemlessly [sic] *from stability operations to high-intensity conflict appears destined to produce an Army*

that is barely a "jack-of-all-trades" and clearly a master of none.[30]

His proposal would bifurcate the Army into two components: a warfighting force of 27 Brigade Combat Teams (BCTs), and a stability operations force comprised of 15 Security Cooperation BCTs. The National Guard would also be similarly reconfigured. This arrangement would ensure higher readiness for these distinct tasks by ensuring that forces were organized, trained, and equipped to fulfill the missions. Should a sustained conventional fight arise, the stability formations could be cycled into more traditional combat forces over a 12- to 18-month cycle.[31]

Hybrid Threats

There is a fifth potential perspective on this critical debate. Some analysts have suggested that future conflict will be *multimodal* or *multivariant* rather than a simple black-or-white characterization of one form of warfare. These analysts call for greater attention to the blending of war forms in combinations of increasing frequency and, perhaps, lethality. This construct is most frequently described as *hybrid warfare*. This concept builds upon other noteworthy conceptions about conflict.[32]

In hybrid warfare, the adversary most likely presents unique combinational threats specifically designed to target U.S. vulnerabilities. Instead of separate challengers with fundamentally different approaches (conventional, irregular, or terrorist), we can expect to face competitors who will employ *all* forms of war, including criminal behavior, perhaps simultaneously.

This expectation suggests that our greatest challenge in the future will come not from a state that selects one approach, but from states or groups that select from the whole menu of tactics and technologies and blend them in innovative ways to meet their own strategic culture, geography, and aims. As Mike Evans wrote well before the last QDR, "The possibility of continuous sporadic armed conflict, its engagements blurred together in time and space, waged on several levels by a large array of national and sub-national forces means that war is likely to transcend neat divisions into distinct categories."[33]

This conception of blurring modes of war was a subtext to the Bush administration's National Defense Strategy of 2006. It is also central to Secretary Gates' prodding of the Pentagon and the false depiction of a binary choice. In addition, it is reflected in newly issued joint concepts as well as the maritime strategy and Marine Corps capstone concept. These documents reflect the understanding that outdated assumptions about states (conventional) and nonstate actors (unconventional and weak) are no longer the basis for realistic defense planning. Future threats can be increasingly characterized by a hybrid blend of traditional and irregular tactics, decentralized planning and execution, and nonstate actors, using both simple and sophisticated technologies in innovative ways.

Hybrid threats incorporate a range of different modes of warfare including conventional capabilities, irregular tactics and formations, terrorist acts (including indiscriminate violence and coercion), and criminal disorder. Hybrid wars can be also be *multinodal*—conducted by both states and a variety of nonstate actors.[34] These multimodal/multinodal activities can be conducted by separate units or even by the same unit but are generally operationally and tactically directed and coordinated within the main battlespace to achieve synergistic effects in the physical *and* psychological dimensions of conflict. The effects can be gained at all levels of war.

Hybrid threats blend the lethality of state conflict with the fanatical and protracted fervor of irregular warfare. In such conflicts, future adversaries (states, state-sponsored groups, or self-funded actors) exploit access to modern military capabilities including encrypted command systems, man-portable surface-to-air missiles, and other modern lethal systems, as well as promote protracted insurgencies that employ ambushes, improvised explosive devices, and assassinations. This could include states blending high-tech capabilities such as antisatellite weapons with terrorism and cyber warfare directed against financial targets, as suggested by the pair of Chinese officers who wrote *Unrestricted Warfare*.

So instead of seeing the future as a suite of distinct challengers in separate boxes on a matrix, a more complex future may be ahead. Traditional or conventional capabilities will remain an important part of war, and the United States must preserve its competitive advantages in this domain. It is increasingly probable, however, that we will face adversaries who blur and blend the different methods or modes of warfare. We do not face a widening *number* of distinct challenges but rather their *convergence*.

Hybrid challenges are not limited to nonstate actors. States can shift their conventional units to irregular formations and adopt new tactics as Iraq's fedayeen did in 2003. Evidence from open sources suggests that several powers in the Middle East are modifying their forces to exploit this more complex and more diffused mode of conflict. We may find it increasingly irrelevant to characterize states as essentially traditional forces, or nonstate actors as inherently irregular. Future challenges will present a more complex array of alternative structures and strategies, as was seen in the battle between Israel and Hizballah in the summer of 2006. Hizballah

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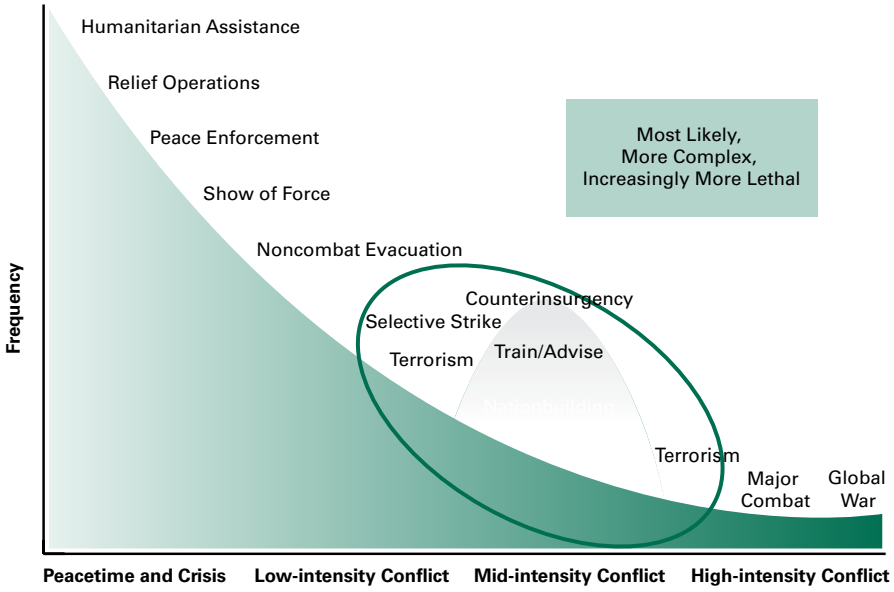
clearly demonstrated the ability of nonstate actors to study and deconstruct the vulnerabilities of Western-style militaries and devise appropriate countermeasures. Ralph Peters described the combination of Hizballah's combat cells and militia as "a hybrid of guerrillas and regular troops—a form of opponent that U.S. forces are apt to encounter with increasing frequency."[35] This prism also offers an interesting angle through which to reexamine the conflict against Serbia in Kosovo and Russia's latest intervention in Ossetia, which was also markedly hybrid in character.

The lessons from these confrontations are filtering to other states and nonstate actors. With or without state sponsorship, the lethality and capability of organized groups are increasing, while the incentives for states to exploit nontraditional modes of war are on the rise. This requires that we modify our mindsets with

Figure 2. Implied Change in Spectrum of Conflict



respect to the relative frequency and types of threats of future conflict. Irregular tactics and protracted forms of conflict are often castigated as tactics of the weak that are employed by nonstate actors who do not have the means to do anything else. Future hybrid opponents may exploit combinations and profoundly asymmetric means not because of the opponents' weakness but because of the proven effectiveness of those means; they are the evolving *tactics of the smart and nimble.*

Hybrid as Focal Point

The hybrid threat construct appears valuable at this point in time for a number of reasons. It serves as a concept that:

- describes the evolving character of conflict better than counterinsurgency
- challenges current "conventional" thinking and the binary intellectual bins that frame debate
- highlights the true granularity or breadth of spectrum of human conflict
- raises awareness of potential risks and opportunity costs presented by the various options in the ongoing threat/force posture debate.

The hybrid threat could be viewed as a better focal point for the development of capabilities on the range of military operations, and it should weight our effort in the upcoming QDR and inform our investment portfolio and risk assessment. The increasingly probable scenario of preparing to win a hybrid conflict and operate in contested urban zones is a stressing one that generates the most operational risk in the near- to mid-range. Stability operations may occur more frequently, and the rare conventional war may generate the most consequence or perception of danger. However, the hybrid threat, especially by states such as China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea, actually presents the greatest operational risk, which is represented in figure 2 by the greater intensity of conflict and greater frequency of occurrence. This focal point should be the "sweet spot" around which to prepare our joint forces of the future. This spot is depicted as the knee in the curve of a modified spectrum of conflict in which missions and tasks converge in time and are not executed in linear fashion.

Risk Analysis

The benefit of this new focal point is best depicted by the risk analysis displayed in the table, which reflects the potential benefits and disadvantages by the four prevailing schools today, and their relevance to the hybrid threat.

The Counterinsurgent school focuses on today's fights and what could be tomorrow's most likely scenarios. This school would markedly improve our preparation for stability operations and counterinsurgency tasks by improving individual cultural and language skills, small unit tactics, and training/advisory missions. At the same time, this focus would leave the United States less prepared for rare but demanding conventional conflicts and for hybrid threats that would severely maul light forces not ready for the ferocity of some scenarios. But this school would reduce defense spending overall by precluding the need for heavy and expensive ground forces and attendant aviation support for multiple interstate wars.

The Traditionalist camp preserves today's competitive advantages in large-scale conflicts and avoids entanglements in messy protracted stability operations. It focuses on conventional combined arms in the most dangerous of scenarios and emphasizes traditional kinetic maneuver. This posture would perpetuate the sine wave of American military disinterest in small wars, the "small change of soldiering" in Kipling's phrase. What this school overlooks is America's global leadership role and the destabilizing effects of the withdrawal of U.S. forces and the concomitant decline in American access and influence it would produce. As Secretary Gates has noted, "The United States does not have the luxury of opting out because these scenarios do not conform to preferred notions of the American way of war."[36] This option only ensures that the military "remains [an] expensive tribute to the past" that will "both bankrupt the taxpayer and perpetuate anachronistic military organizations."[37]

The Utility Infielders have no specific posture or focal point. They accept risk that forces will be *suboptimal* for any specific threat but strive to increase their effectiveness across the range of military operations. This posture may make the unlikely assumption that force size and resources will remain high. Under all but the most favorable resource projections, the force would be spread thin, and most units and individuals would not obtain proficiency in many tasks. Because of the manpower, training, and equipment costs, the Utility Infielders force is slightly more expensive than those

of the other options because it underwrites the retention of many legacy systems and the development of high-end systems, receiving criticism from Secretary Gates for preserving a notional American Way of War.

Finally, the Division of Labor school proposes dedicated and separate forces or Services for discrete missions. It offers high levels of unit readiness for stability operations *and* conventional state-based scenarios. However, it exposes the United States to some risk that its forces would lack the depth and capacity for long-duration scenarios. Because the specific options described represent the two extremes of the conflict spectrum, this posture option produces forces suboptimized for hybrid threats, but optimized for the two extremes. There are risks attendant here, too. As a former British officer noted, the blurring of neat delineations in modern operations risks troops of one specialization finding themselves in situations for which they are unprepared and unsuited.[38]

This option would have little impact on total resources projected; however, investment in ground forces would be reduced since they would not be required to provide combat formations for more than one scenario. The resources could be shifted to the Air Force and Navy to ensure that their modernization needs are met.

Overall, the Division of Labor school approaches balance differently and with greater attention to the resource balance dilemma. This approach acknowledges that the Services do not have to receive fixed shares of the budget and that each Service does not play equally in all modes of war. However, the RAND team's version noted earlier is largely incongruent with Secretary Gates' conclusion that "we should look askance at idealistic, triumphalist, or ethnocentric notions of future conflict that aspire to transcend the immutable principles and ugly realities of war, that imagine it is possible to cow, shock, or awe an enemy into submission."[39]

The hybrid force has greater focus of effort, orienting the joint force on the hybrid threat in complex operating terrain. Its lower readiness for initial and protracted stability operations of the type envisioned by Krepinevich is an admitted risk. But this risk is offset by the potential that the joint force will end up being employed in scenarios for which the law enforcement, intelligence, and nongovernmental agency communities are better suited. Shifting forces toward the middle of the conflict spectrum to address its complexity may come at the expense of conventional capacity such as tank divisions or some number of artillery battalions. This might increase the risk that the joint force may not have as much capability for large-scale, multidivisional maneuver against a great power. That possibility might have to be mitigated by other military means or coalition assistance. Resource implications depend on ground force modernization needs and the anticipated extensive training requirements but should be easily accommodated within today's anticipated funding levels.

Table. Assessment of Potential Postures

	Counterinsurgents	Traditionalists	Utility Infielders	Division of Labor
Threat focus	Irregular adversaries: most likely	Conventional threats: most dangerous	No focus	Ready for failed and conventional states
Readiness emphasis	Individuals and small units for counterinsurgency	Traditional kinetic maneuver	Full range of military operations	Higher readiness for two polar missions
Operational risk	Unprepared for conventional war by regional threats, force suboptimized for hybrid threats	Ignores destabilizing effects of failed states, loss of global leadership; perpetuates learning curve for irregular and hybrid threats	Spreads force thin, seeks journeyman level of individual and unit readiness	Less joint capacity in conventional scenarios for decisive results
Hybrid threats readiness	Less prepared	Unprepared	Partly prepared	Suboptimized
Resource impact	Reduced spending	Current levels	Highest	Current levels

Potential Construct

A key element that this debate will eventually inform is the force sizing and shaping model that will come out of this year's QDR. A revised force planning construct is certainly needed; it should place far more emphasis on unconventional or hybrid combinations of irregular war, terrorism, and socially disruptive challengers. It must differentiate between forward deployed and steady-state and surge levels of effort, home and abroad. As Michael Vickers has stressed, the construct must be able to explain the application of forces, in form, scale, and duration, in major combat operations.[40] However, we should not automatically assume that these are synonymous with Cold War models. Undoubtedly, the Nation should preserve the capacity to engage in more than one major conflict, but the force sizing and shaping concept should include more than just conventional conflicts and should posture itself for success against enemies using more advanced approaches such as the Chinese "Assassin's Mace" concept.[41]

A joint force prepared to conduct two major regional conflicts of a hybrid nature is suggested as the best force posture construct to adopt. The aggregate "conventional" combat capabilities of these two asymmetric scenarios could constitute the required total combat power for a purely conventional contingency, should one ever arise. More likely, the composite stability operations capacity in the two hybrid scenarios would provide the requisite assets for some sustained failed state scenario that did not require the ability to defeat modern armed groups. How the Air Force is best shaped for these models, and what the role of special operations forces and their degree of integration within the joint force will be, are excellent issues for the QDR to resolve. The inherently complex nature of hybrid threats suggests that a truly joint combined arms approach will be necessary to prevail.

The current bifurcation of the spectrum of conflict between irregular and conventional

wars is a false choice that intellectually blinds us to a number of crucial issues. We need to assess our beliefs about frequency, consequences, and risk far more carefully and analytically. The choice is not simply one of preparing for either long-term stability operations or high-intensity conflict. We must be able to do both and do them simultaneously against enemies far more ruthless than today's.

While we continue to compartmentalize the various modes of war into convenient categories, future adversaries will not gaze through our analytical prism. There is a greater amount of granularity across the spectrum of conflict, and a greater potential for hybrid types of war. Future opponents will exploit whatever methods, tactics, or technologies they think will thwart us. We need to better posture our forces, reduce the risks we face, and allocate scarce resources against threats that pose the most operational risk. Hybrid threats are profoundly asymmetric and do present the greatest operational risk to U.S. forces and to the attainment of America's strategic interests.

We must maintain the ability to wage successful campaigns against both large, conventionally armed states and their militaries and against widely dispersed terrorists—and against *everything in between*. We must be smart about our force posture and lean toward agile, rigorously multipurpose forces capable of being adaptive in approach to the unique conditions each conflict poses. Some degree of specialization might be necessary, but for a joint perspective, forces should be postured not for just one end of the spectrum or the other but rather for the greater lethality and complexity of hybrid threats in urban terrain and complex operating environments. This focal point will minimize risks and maximize readiness demands within constrained resources. This posture offers a different kind of balance between competing demands and constrained resources.

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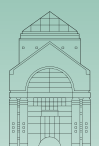

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