



U.S. Special Operations Command



Harnessing David and Goliath

**A Compound Approach to
the Great Game**

2019

The overall classification of this briefing is:

UNCLASSIFIED



The State of Strategy

“America is emerging from a period of strategic atrophy...”

2017 National Security Strategy

- **Competition a leading theme:** “An America that successfully competes is the best way to prevent conflict.”
- **Military role in competition:** “U.S. military strength remains a vital component of the competition for influence.”
- **Need to evolve to compete:** “Our diplomatic, intelligence, military, and economic agencies have not kept pace with the changes in the character of competition.”

2018 National Defense Strategy

- **Central idea of NDS:** Expanding the competitive space
- **Keys to military competition:** A more lethal force, strong alliances and partnerships, technological innovation, and a culture of performance

“The military, for its part, must continue to fulfill its role of deterrence, but must also consider ways to apply the military instrument differently to better enable diplomatic, information, and economic elements of power.”

National Interests

1. Protect the American People, the Homeland, and the American Way of Life
2. Promote American Prosperity
3. Preserve Peace through Strength
4. Advance American Influence

Key Threats

- China
- Russia
- Iran
- North Korea
- Violent Extremist Organizations



Central Theme: David and Goliath

Goliath: dominating size, strength, and power; intimidation and deterrence

David: agility, precision, and an eye for vulnerability / opportunity

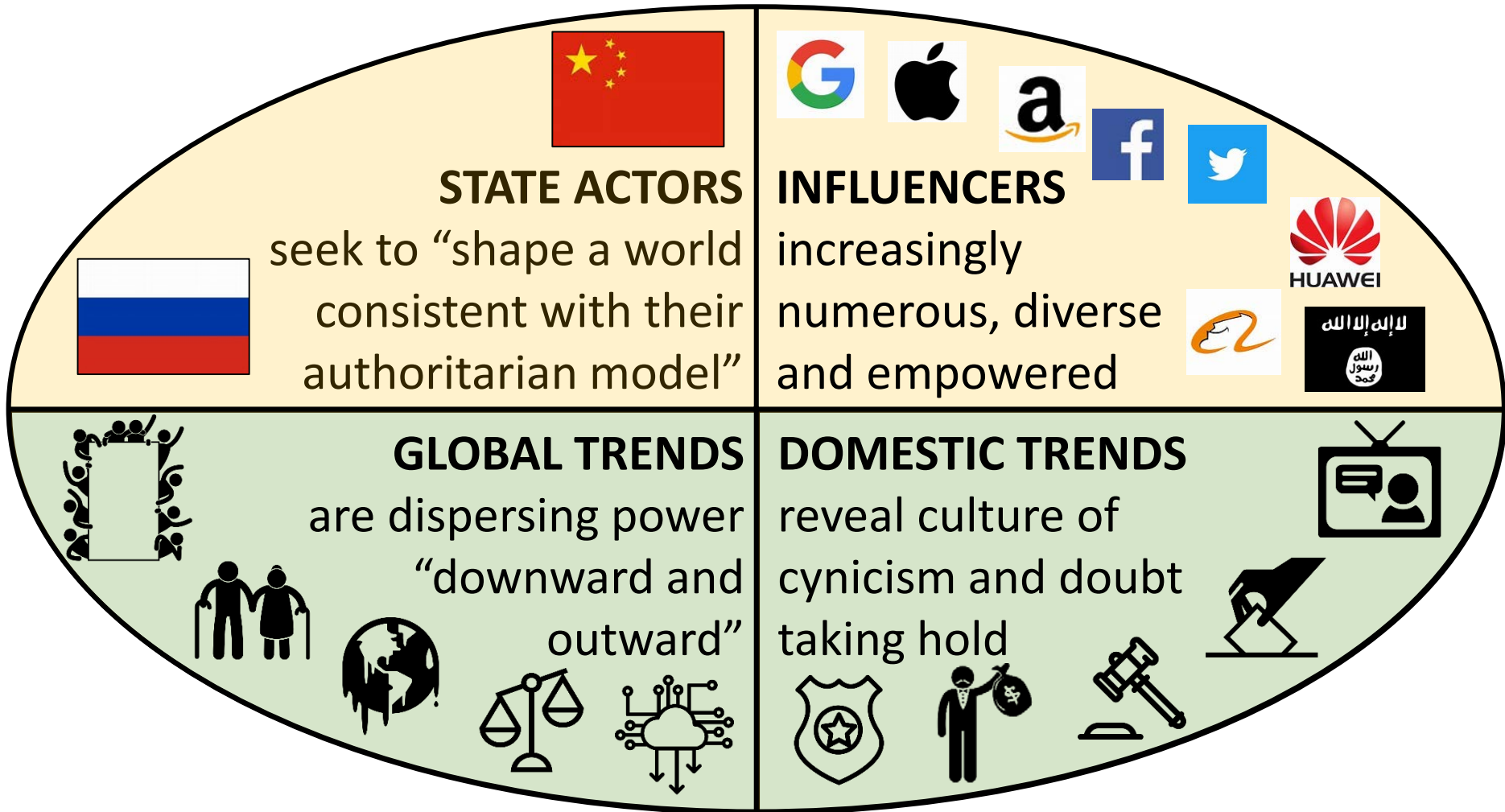


- **Problem:** US approach resembles Goliath, and rivals have adopted approaches resembling David
- **Proposal:** US must adapt to complement Goliath qualities with David capabilities in a compound approach



Strategic Environment

EXPANSION OF NETWORKS

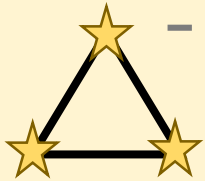


EROSION OF NORMS



Theoretical Context

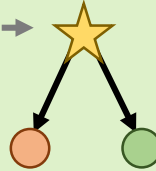
Leaders have many lenses through which to evaluate the strategic environment, build deeper understanding of competition, and develop effective approaches...



Thucydides' Triad

An actor's behavior is driven by three related concepts:

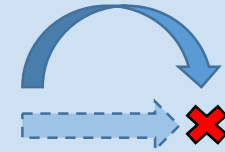
- ★ *Interests*
- ★ *Fear*
- ★ *Honor*



Diebel's Interests

Interests define both threats and opportunities for actors:

- *Opportunity – define by ability to advance interests*
- *Threat – define by ability to hurt interests*



Hart's Indirect Approach

"In strategy, the longest way round is often the shortest way home."

–B.H. Liddell Hart

"The direct and the indirect lead on to each other in turn. It is like moving in a circle – you never come to an end."

–Sun Tzu

Asymmetry

An interest-driven indirect approach must exploit inherent asymmetries derived from the differences in dissimilar actors, informed by understanding of competitors and engaged in ways for which they are neither organized nor culturally prepared to address



Defining Competition

The central theme of the National Defense Strategy is expanding the competitive space – but what is competition?

GEOPOLITICAL COMPETITION

Competition is the interaction among actors in pursuit of the **influence, leverage, and advantage** necessary to secure their respective interests.

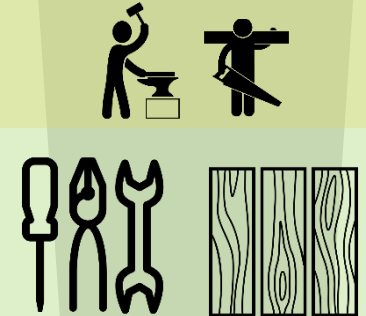
INFLUENCE

Influence is **the power to cause an effect**. An actor can actively accumulate, spend, or lose influence; influence also passively emanates, much like interest gained on investment.



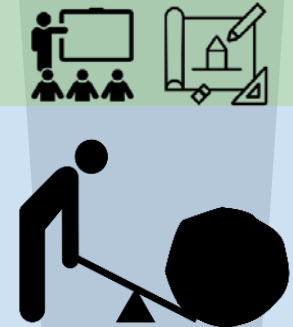
LEVERAGE

Leverage is **the application of influence** gained or created to achieve an effect or exploit an opportunity.



ADVANTAGE

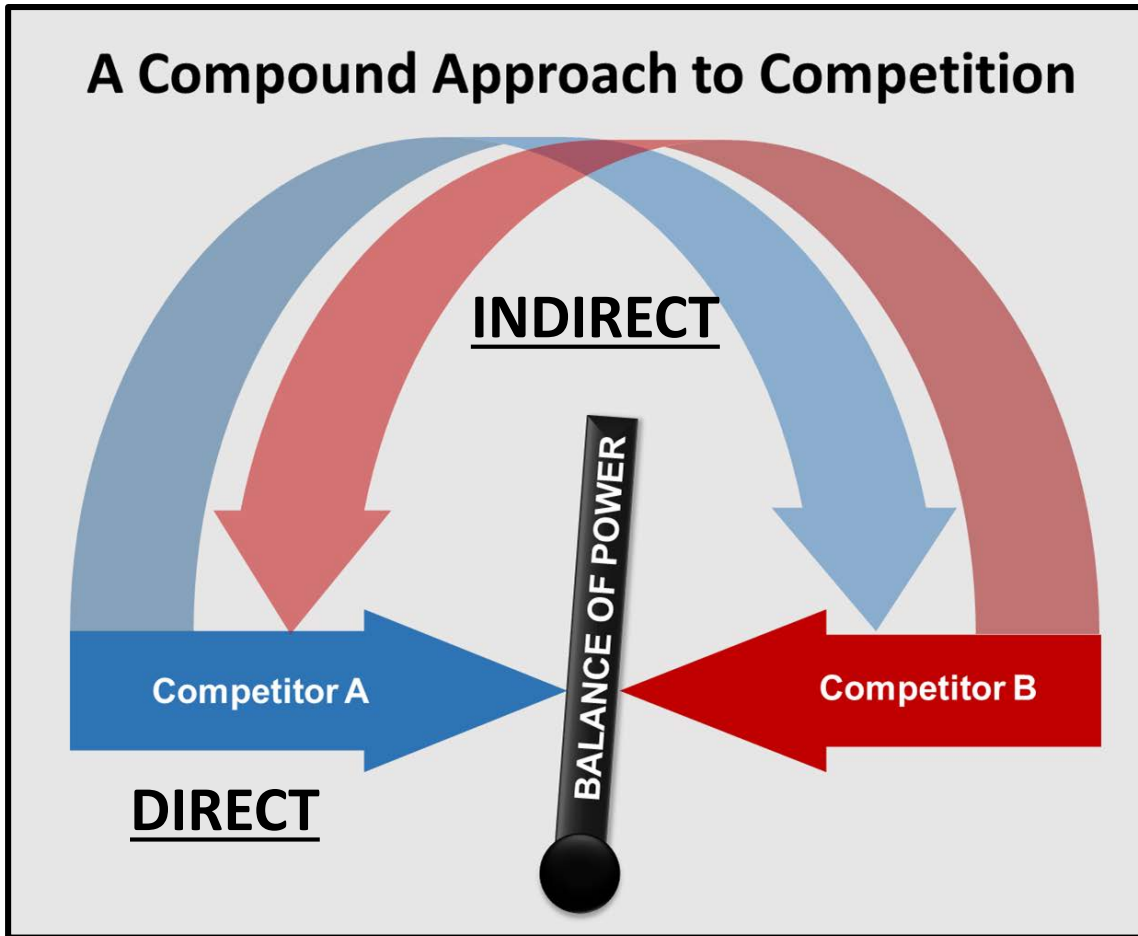
Advantage is superiority of position or condition. Inherently relative, it is built through that **accumulation of influence and the development of tools of power** used to manage that influence.





A Compound Approach to Competition

The Joint Force should combine **direct** and **indirect approaches** that leverage **orthodox** and **unorthodox** applications of force toward a position of advantage...



Direct

- Maintain strategic deterrence
- Prepare for high-end conflict
- Credibly equipped and postured
- Positioning forces in contested theaters (e.g. tripwire deterrence)

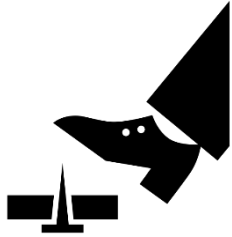
Indirect

- Pair orthodox direct approach with unorthodox options
- Deeply integrated with Interagency partners
- Unorthodox competitive options consist of deterrent, punitive, and proactive options



Competitive Options Short of War

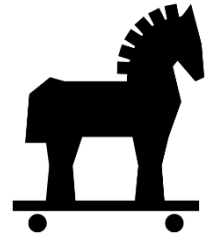
Deterrent Options



Punitive Options



Proactive Options



The Joint Force must continue to prepare for high-end conflict and to provide strategic deterrence; unorthodox options should complement that more orthodox deterrence.

Full spectrum of national power instruments

Innovative applications of conventional forces

Dynamic use of unconventional forces

The Joint Force owes its civilian leadership a wider range of punitive options to address activities that violate established “red lines.” Punitive actions should both arrest deviant behavior and contribute to the credibility of future deterrence.

Deliberately deepening partnerships

Targeted information operations

Disruptive cyberattacks

Unconventional activities

The Joint Force must provide decision-makers with unorthodox military options to achieve objectives proactively in conditions short of war.

Information and cyber operations

Enabling surrogates

Support to intelligence partners

Financial effects

Special reconnaissance and surveillance

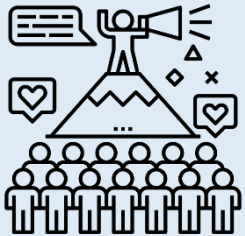
Infrastructure disruption



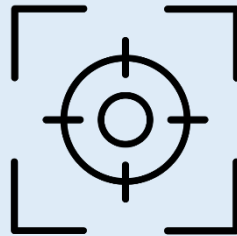
A Deeper Look at Proactive Options

Shifting to a more proactive and unorthodox mindset, the Joint Force must develop 21st century slings and stones to enable more David-like maneuver...

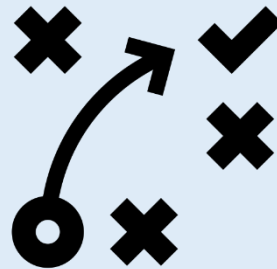
Primarily non-kinetic activities generating non-physical effects



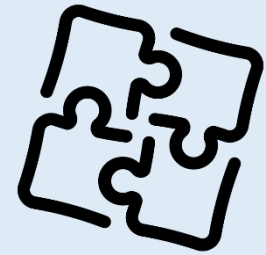
Precision kinetic strikes may be necessary but are less desirable



Cultivation and exploitation of opportunities drives employment



Integration with Interagency partners is paramount



Given the political sensitivity of offensive operations, maneuver elements must:

- Ensure operational discretion
- Represent the highest ethical and professional standards
- Develop specialized training and capabilities
- Maintain awareness and shared understanding of “red lines”
- Respond rapidly to emerging opportunities





Further Considerations in Competition

These unorthodox deterrent, punitive, and proactive options short of war round out a comprehensive suite of efforts within competition – all of which demand further exploration...

Political Will and Risk

Ethical and legal considerations must always inform the development and employment of options

While options in competition should develop with awareness of the available political decision space, those creating the options should not self-limit to the point of stifling innovation

Limitations imposed by political will, risk, and consequences should derive from the leaders considering the options rather than those developing them

Engagement Discipline

In considering a broader range of engagement options, it will be equally critical for leaders to evaluate where not to engage

When transitioning to support Interagency or multinational partners who may be better suited to the mission

When creating space for rival actors to compete amongst themselves might in fact serve U.S. interests

When engagement may provide more relative benefit to a rival actor

Questions for Further Exploration

How does the Joint Force conduct assessments in competition?

How does the Joint Force better account for the risk of inaction when considering the risk of action?

How does the Joint Force strive toward “anti-fragility,” where change in the environment provides relative advantage to the U.S.?

How does the Joint Force – and partners – command and control global competition short of war?

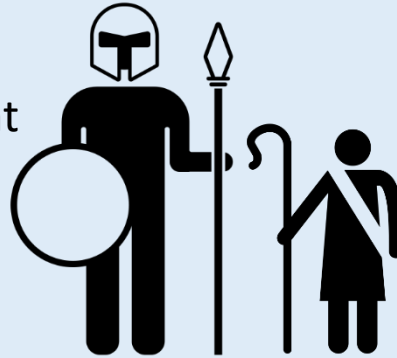


A Compound Approach

Integrated with the Interagency, the Joint Force should develop a compound approach that couples an orthodox focus on preventing and preparing for high-end war with unorthodox options to achieve objectives short of war

“Goliath”

Provide strategic deterrence
Prepare for the high-end warfight
Enable global operations with infrastructure and logistics support



“David”

Provide leaders with unorthodox options to expand deterrence, conduct punitive actions, and proactively achieve and consolidate gains short of war

A compound approach is...

- Aiming to promote and project the best version of America
- Designed to inculcate institutional dynamism to adapt with changes
- An effort to shape the evolution of the global order to promote security, prosperity, individual freedom, and rule of law

A compound approach is not...

- A replacement for deterrence or traditional functions of the Joint Force
- Operating in isolation from domestic political realities, foreign policy machinations, or the Interagency
- A call to perfect process or preserve status quo power structures



Questions?
