My name is Dr. Gregory Cantwell and I will moderate the discussion. I am the Course Director for the CJCS, Joint Force Land Component Commander Course (JFLCC) conducted at the US Army War College. I have served in the Army for over 30 years and have been associated with the JFLCC program for over 7 years. LTG Paul Mikolashek is one of the US Army War College’s (USAWC) Highly Qualified Expert -Senior Mentors (HQE-SMs). He will provide some thoughts based on his expertise developed over years of service to the nation working within the defense community. He has significant experience in preparing for and conducting operations across the full spectrum of conflict. He is one of the few remaining experts with experience in commanding organizations focused on large scale ground combat operations (LSGCO). I have provided a more detailed biography in the read ahead material.

Today, we will lead a discussion of increasing importance to national security: Setting the Theater. The actions taken to “set the theater” determine the strategic options that will be available to achieve our national objectives. Those individuals that are not involved in the tough government work that ensures the right resources and agreements are in place prior to the start of an operation may not appreciate the efforts these actions require. At the tactical and operational levels, many of these activities are conducted by units assigned at echelons above brigades (EAB), which are invisible to many or assumed to just make things appear like magic. Like “magic”, the true efforts that create the illusion are transparent to the observer. The Theater headquarters that coordinate the access and agreements, provide the resources, and perform the “magic” are not considered “the tip of the spear”. Many people, even some in uniform, consider these organizations “unnecessary headquarters” and “redundant overhead”. This lack of understanding has been identified in defense studies and reflects a gap in our professional military education.

The Title 10 responsibilities for the Army to conduct sustained operations on land and Army support to other services (ASOS) are significant. Understanding these requirements, rather than assuming support will appear like “magic” to the Joint Force, is essential to the discussions of Multi-Domain Operations (MDO). Additionally, a return to considering “near peer” adversaries has increased some awareness of the significance of the actions these headquarters perform during the competition phase. As an example, many Theater Army headquarters have been reduced to an economy of force effort during the last 18 years of combat operations. Their collective efforts to “set the theater” to provide credible strategic options for the Joint Force commander and our national leaders have been severely limited. Some recent assessments indicate, against a near peer adversary, that we lack a credible strategic military response option short of escalation to global nuclear war. If true, this statement challenges the core rationale for the future organizational design of the Department of Defense.

LTG Paul T. Mikolashek, US Army Retired, has served the nation since 1969 and has commanded Combined, Joint, and Army organizations Including Theater Army and Coalition Force Land Component Commands (C/FLCC). He has served overseas in Pacific, Europe, and Central Commands. He also has significant experience working in the private sector on defense related issues in North America, Europe, the Middle East, and Africa.

His presentation will discuss the essential roles of these organizations in identifying and addressing problems during the “competition” phase to set the conditions for the “conflict” phase to accomplish our national objectives. He will address: what setting the theater entails; provide some of his insights as a former coalition land component commander (C/FLCC); and, also discuss some of these implications for the Joint force in Multi-Domain Operations.

 LTG Mikolashek will provide his presentation based in the slides that we provided in the read ahead and then we will open the phone lines for questions. Thank you for this opportunity. Please give your attention to LTG Mikolashek.