

STRATEGIC LANDPOWER



WINNING THE CLASH OF WILLS

Strategic Landpower: Odierno, Amos and McRaven

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the United States Special Operations Command

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Strategic Landpower White Paper

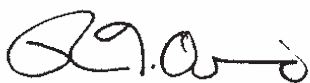
The United States and its Armed Forces once again find themselves at a crossroads. After ten years of war, the Nation is rebalancing its national security strategy to focus on engagement and preventing war. Some in the Defense community interpret this rebalancing to mean that future conflicts can be prevented or won primarily with standoff technologies and weapons. If warfare were merely a contest of technologies, that might be sufficient. However, armed conflict is a clash of interests between or among organized groups, each attempting to impose their will on the opposition. In essence, it is fundamentally a human endeavor in which the context of the conflict is determined by both parties. Operations in the land domain, (that must increasingly leverage cyber interactions among people) are most effective at achieving the human outcomes that are a prerequisite for achieving national objectives. Because the Army, Marine Corps and Special Operations Forces conduct the preponderance of those kinds of operations we have chartered the Strategic Landpower Task Force to study the application of landpower to achieve national objectives in the future.

During operations our three organizations intersect in the land domain among people. This intersection provides the basis for our combined exploration of the joint application of military power at the convergence of the land, cyber and "human domains." The attached White Paper, Strategic Landpower; Winning the Clash of Wills, identifies a growing problem in linking military action to achieving national objectives and describes the requirement for rigorous analysis to determine solutions that will ensure we provide the right capabilities for the nation in an era of fiscal austerity. The subsequent concept, studies and papers that follow will propose solutions that will ideally occasion vigorous debate that result in the adaptations we must make across the joint force.

In this exploration of the confluence of land, cyber and human actions, we seek to:

- address the role of forces "that operate on land," and how they can contribute to preventing and containing conflict;
- address why past tactical and operational successes have not always achieved strategic outcomes;
- reinforce the necessity of integrating our understanding of achieving physical objectives with a fuller understanding of, and consideration for identifying and achieving human objectives in the formulation and execution of strategy, operational plans, and tactical actions;
- expand the dialogue around the "social sciences" of warfare alongside the "physical sciences" of warfare

When we have formally studied the relevant lessons of our past, and applied that knowledge against the risks posed by the future operating environment, we have come away better postured to advance or achieve our nation's strategic objectives. We encourage all to critically consider the enclosed white paper and subsequent papers not only for what they say, but also for what may be missing. This intellectual journey will help inform the Defense establishment's thinking on better integrating human factors into the planning and execution of military operations to achieve enduring outcomes.



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Strategic Landpower: Winning the Clash of Wills

Strategic Landpower and the Inherently Human Nature of Conflict

The National Security Strategy of the United States outlines how the U.S. pursues comprehensive engagement with nations, institutions, and peoples around the world to protect and advance its national interests. It does this with a whole of government approach that includes defense, diplomacy, development, and other tools of American power. This nation takes action in the international arena aimed at influencing human activity and the environments in which that activity occurs. It could not be otherwise, as all institutions – states, corporations, NGOs, etc. – are populated, controlled, and directed by people. Influencing these people – be they heads of state, tribal elders, militaries and their leaders or even an entire population – remains essential to securing U.S. interests. All elements of national power have an important role in these interactions with other nations and peoples.

Given the fundamental premise that people are the center of all national engagements, it is equally self-evident that war, or more broadly, conflict, is also an inherently human endeavor. War is a violent clash of competing interests between or among organized groups, each attempting to impose their will on the opposition. Sea power, airpower and landpower are normally employed in various combinations, and to greater or lesser degrees, depending on the nature or phase of the conflict, to impact strategic human objectives. Inasmuch as humans reside on land and political authority is exercised from within that domain, the actions of other U.S. government agencies to apply political, informational, and economic power against the human objective also occur primarily on land. Therefore, because joint force combat power overmatch is insufficient for achieving strategic success, strategies to accomplish the ten missions in the defense strategic guidance must have human objectives, defined as actions taken to influence people, be they government and military leaders or groups within a population, as their core strategic focus.

Primary missions of the U.S. Armed Forces

- Counter Terrorism and Irregular Warfare
- Deter and Defeat Aggression
- Project Power Despite Anti-Access Area Denial Challenges
- Counter Weapons of Mass Destruction
- Operate Effectively in Cyberspace and Space
- Maintain a Safe, Secure and Effective Nuclear Deterrent
- Defend the Homeland and Provide Support to Civil Authorities
- Provide a Stabilizing Presence
- Conduct Stability and Counterinsurgency Operations
- Conduct Humanitarian, Disaster Relief, and Other Operations

That competition and conflict are about people is hardly a revelation. Nevertheless, this fundamental premise often has not received the central emphasis that it should in U.S. military deliberation. War is inarguably the toughest of physical challenges, and we therefore tend to focus on the clash and lose sight of the will. In fact, the neglect or misjudgment of population-centric considerations in U.S. strategic calculations is easily documented. Time and again, the U.S. has undertaken to engage in conflict without fully considering the physical, cultural, and social environments that comprise what some have called the “human domain”.

One has only to examine our military interventions over the last 50 years in Vietnam, Bosnia and Kosovo, Somalia, Iraq, and Afghanistan, to see the evidence and costs of this oversight. For example, our failure to understand the depth of Slobodan Milosevic’s ambitions and the intense ethnic animosities of his military forces when Tito died in 1989 greatly contributed to a human catastrophe in Bosnia and Kosovo that the early, focused employment of sufficient landpower could have prevented.

Two factors may comprise the root of this repetitive shortfall. First, the physical insularity of the U.S. coupled with its egalitarian ethic underpins the simplistic idea that other people are like us or, at least, want to be like us. Second, the American culture's focus on technology and productivity drives a tendency to view conflict as a technical problem to be resolved primarily by technical means. The U.S. has been more successful when its policies and actions stemmed from a focus on achieving an understanding of the human and societal dynamics of the nations or regions where we have deployed military forces, reinforced by the unique ability of forces on land to take discriminating actions based on this knowledge. Similarly, long term investments of U.S. military power overseas buttressed the enduring partnerships that were essential to deterring war with the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and maintaining a peaceful Europe until that adversary collapsed.

What we know and project about the future operating environment tells us that the significance of the "human domain" in future conflict is growing, not diminishing. Many factors underpin this assertion: the threat of hybrid warfare, involving multiple entities; the increasing ability of non-state actors to de-stabilize entire regions and challenge national forces; the complexity of rules of engagement that constrain one side and enable the other to operate with near impunity "amongst the people"; and, importantly, the increasing pace and mutability of human interactions across boundaries, through virtual connectivity, to form, act, dissolve, and re-form in pursuit of hostile purposes. Simultaneously, the importance of conflict prevention and the ability to shape conditions in regions to maintain stability through actions highly focused on human factors is also rising in significance. The U.S. cannot afford to ignore these developments nor minimize their origins and solutions within the "human domain" as have occurred in the past. In a word, the success of future strategic initiatives and the ability of the U.S. to shape a peaceful and prosperous global environment will rest more and more on our ability to understand, influence, or exercise control within the "human domain."

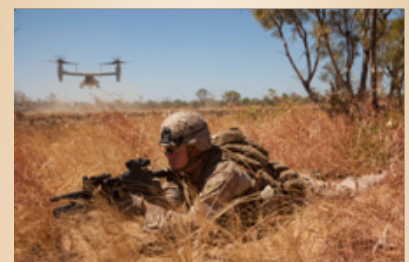
Understand, influence, or exercise control within the "human domain."

The Central, Essential Role of Strategic Landpower

Land operations have a uniquely significant role, in both peacetime and conflict, in addressing human factors. This assertion rises from the recognition that: 1) the Army, Marine Corps, and Special Operations Forces significantly contribute to the activities central to influencing the "human domain" short of war, such as peacekeeping, comprehensive military engagement, security force assistance, building partner capacity, and stability operations; 2) in conflict, the same forces are those most intimately and closely involved with the human networks – friendly, enemy, and neutral -- that comprise the "human domain"; and 3) strategic success or failure most often occurs within the land domain, especially in the shared space between humans and the land, and potentially in the shared space between humans and the cyberspace domain.

Within that context, this paper focuses on Strategic Landpower, defined as the application of landpower towards achieving overarching national or multinational (alliance or coalition) security objectives and guidance for a given military campaign or operation. This paper was crafted by the three U.S. military organizations that, while designed for different purposes, conduct the preponderance of operations on land. The Army is the Nation's principal land force. The Marine Corps is an expeditionary force in readiness within the Nation's maritime force.

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Special Operations Command possesses a core competency for effectiveness within the “human domain” through its pervasive interactions with foreign partners and its ability to consider the importance of human dynamics in all operations. What all three have in common is that their purposes and forces intersect in the land domain, and a recognition that, although the problem is clear, rigorous study and analysis is required to translate emerging understanding and adapt lessons from our ten years of war into effective military capabilities that achieve both human and physical objectives in the future. This recognition provides the basis for these organizations to explore their combined application of military power at the nexus of the land domain and what we have informally termed the “human domain.”



Employment of Landpower Short of War

As important as the military’s lethal power is to coerce within the international arena, it is not the only or often the most effective way the United States has to deter war and meet the nation’s other strategic goals. If one accepts that the capacity to avoid or prevent a conflict is at least as important as waging war, then it is easy to see that the use of military power across a wide range of situations does not fundamentally weaken or imperil the nation’s security. Rather, it strengthens it. While it would be arrogant to think we will be able to prevent all events with implications to our national security, it is vital that we prevent or at least shape the context of consequential events. Acknowledging this imperative, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mike Mullen said, “We must not look upon the use of military forces only as a last resort, but as potentially the best, first option when combined with other instruments of national and international power.”

Just as during the Cold War, future successes may not rest on combat victories. Rather, the nation should measure the value of forces that operate on land as much by their contributions to sustaining the international order and the security of our international partners and allies as by their contributions to war. Operations in the “human domain” provide a unique capability to preclude and deter conflict through shaping operations that leverage partners and populations to enhance local and regional stability. Moreover, effective engagement does not rest entirely on the forward stationing of large formations. Interdependent teams of conventional and special operations forces can build local forces capable of handling many situations that previously called for direct U.S. intervention, while maintaining a low-cost, small footprint presence almost indefinitely.

Preventing conflict is always difficult, but it remains a far better option than reacting after fighting has erupted. Success at maintaining the peace however carries its own paradoxical risk. Forward deployed, actively engaged forces have proven essential to contributing to peace by reassuring our friends and deterring our enemies. Such forces provide a broad range of benefits that includes: demonstration of U.S. commitment, establishment of enduring relationships with regional military and political leaders, improved capability of hosts to handle their own internal security challenges, increased willingness of hosts to participate in friendly coalitions, ability of the U.S. to achieve a higher level of understanding than is possible just with technical means, reduced chance of experiencing strategic surprise, reduced chance that an aggressor will miscalculate U.S. resolve or capability, and increased responsiveness to crises.

Yet, those very military forces and actions critical to preventing conflict frequently remain invisible to the public and policymakers as well. Many see only the expense and not the value. Historically as we have come out of a war we have significantly reduced our capacity to operate on land, without adequately accounting for what one risks by doing so.

For the foreseeable future, it is inevitable that United States forces that operate on land will be employed to exercise national power and strategic influence as the country addresses the increasingly complex set of challenges and opportunities in the global security environment.

In the modern environment, the need to conduct large-scale aid and consequence management missions, both within the United States and internationally, is certain to grow. Army, Marine Corps and Special Operations Forces continue to provide crucial aid to Americans in distress at home, and all people in need around the world regardless of affiliation. Whether or not natural disasters increase in power, intensity, or quantity, their destructive consequences will climb exponentially because there are far more people to affect, as well as increased infrastructure to destroy. Moreover, as a result of globalization and specialization within the global supply chain disasters that once only had a local impact can now systemically threaten the global economy.

Landpower at War

As this nation goes forward into a new century one thing remains certain; landpower will remain central to our strategic success. There is no more unmistakable or unambiguous display of American resolve than the highly visible deployment of landpower.

U.S. operations in the past few decades have led some potential adversaries to conclude that it may be more advantageous to prevent joint forces from gaining access to an operational area rather than allowing for an unhindered deployment of forces and capabilities. That approach is described in the Joint Operational Access Concept as anti-access and area denial strategies. Gaining and maintaining access in the face of opposition requires a comprehensive joint force and interagency solution. From a campaign perspective, solutions for gaining access to the operational area are generally weighted to air and sea power while continuing operations toward the larger political objective will generally emphasize landpower. Regardless of the phase of operations, anti-access and area denial capabilities often require the synergy achieved through the cross domain application of military power that seeks to exploit asymmetries and counter intra-domain points of failure. Although countering enemy technologies remains an imperative, anti-access and area denial operations also have a human objective and defeating enemy will is still preeminent.

How a war ends is more important to the future than how it began. The absence of U.S. land operations in the conduct of a campaign can reduce or even eliminate the ability of the U.S. to influence the post war situation so as to ensure the national interests that prompted our involvement are protected and that a stable peace is derived. Those that risk most gain most in post war negotiations.

The past ten years have underscored the role of Army, Marine and Special Operations Forces, and their unique ability to focus on the human objective in irregular warfare. The discriminate application of military power – the ability to both build and destroy and the knowledge to know when to build and when to destroy - comes from close and sustained operations among the people.



Our future thinking and preparation must do two things. First, we must maintain the capacity to fight and win on the battlefield; strategic success cannot be built upon battlefield failure. Second, we must think beyond the battlefield, and consider what else is required to turn joint tactical victories into strategic success. In the final analysis, operations to wrest control of the physical domains are vital but insufficient to military success. Tactical and operational success depends in part on controlling or exploiting fleeting opportunities in the air, sea, land, cyber, and space domains. But strategic success lies in winning the clash of wills.

Looking to the Future

Ensuring this nation has the forces it needs to meet the challenges of an uncertain future in an era of fiscal austerity requires intellectual rigor and honest debate. Today's situation is much different than the one we intellectually prepared for in the post-Vietnam military revolution. The bipolar Cold War world has been replaced by a multi-polar world of many significant actors, some of whom are not nation-states. Unpredictable events will continue to cause strategic surprise. The widespread effects of the Arab Spring, for example, are still being felt and have potentially significant strategic repercussions. To date, rulers have been forced from power in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen; civil uprisings have erupted in Bahrain and Syria; major protests have broken out in Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, and Sudan. How these events will play out and whether or not new governments will be cooperative with the U.S. remains uncertain. What is more certain is that U.S. national interests will be challenged in this environment.

The strategic environment of the multi-polar world is changing at an accelerating rate. The rise of powerful regional competitors with the ability to challenge us militarily, particularly in East Asia, will pose a national and international security challenge. Asymmetric anti-access capabilities, such as advanced anti-ship cruise missiles, anti-satellite weapons, and cyber warfare will challenge the United States' ability to safeguard and guarantee access to the global commons. With some 90% of global trade moving by sea, any eruption of hostilities threatening free access to the commons would have immediate worldwide consequences. Our ability to intervene in the face of a crisis is exacerbated by declining force levels, reduced forward basing, reliance on unfettered access to improved ports and airfields, and ongoing economic turbulence

Further impacting on the complexity of the strategic environment is the rising velocity of human interaction (e.g., through the Internet, Twitter, Facebook, and other social media), multiplied by the ever increasing numbers of people in constant close association (urbanization). This velocity and mass, combined with individual access to increasingly lethal capabilities, generates momentum that requires policymaking and action at corresponding speed in order to respond. It is becoming ever more difficult to calculate the effects of any action, as increasing interconnectedness multiplies the number, scale and speed of second, third, and fourth order effects. Counter-intuitively, while people in general are enabled by technology, the last ten years has highlighted the limits of technical means at providing reliable, predictive intelligence. In the end, human to human contact is the only reliable means of assessing how people will act. Strategically employed forces operate on land and can develop knowledge in close contact with governments, militaries and populations and possess the inherent capacity to continuously influence events in real time. There is a wide range of complex environments and potential crises where U.S. forces may find themselves involved over the next two decades. Iran and North Korea continue as adversaries, while the Middle East and Africa also remain sources of tension as radical ideology and internal frictions foster an unstable peace and provide safe havens for radical groups. What stands out in this list of potential crisis spots is that consistently engaged forces operating on land can provide essential long-term responses. Indeed, ready, robust, responsive and regionally engaged forces operating on the land are critical for preventing and resolving many of the challenges of an emerging operational environment.

This emerging environment, characterized by unpredictability, complexity and disorder, may manifest itself in the collapse of nuclear armed nations, destabilizing conflict in geo-politically vital regions, and humanitarian crises. Forces that operate on land are essential to Joint force operations to counter proliferation, respond to humanitarian crises and atrocities, preclude enemy action and deny our adversaries opportunity by our presence, provide defense support to civil authorities, and rescue our citizens abroad, while responding to political direction in order to ensure that relatively small crises do not become major ones.

Even if one focuses on the difficult challenges presented by China the value of landpower remains apparent. As tensions mount, many of the nations threatened by China's rise are looking to the United States to "balance" China's growing military power in the region. The Air Force and Navy obviously have a crucial role in this arena, both as a deterrent to aggression and in military engagement. Still, those efforts must be complemented by forward engaged and creatively employed Soldiers, Marines, and Special Operations Forces, as it signals a high level of American commitment to its partners and allies.

The Landpower Challenge

The implications of the future environment, coupled with the nation's strategic rebalancing to Asia, demands a thorough study of how all the elements of landpower can be best employed to support national strategic objectives. This requires a fuller understanding and consideration of the human objective in the formulation of strategy, operational plans and tactical actions. That the Joint Force must adapt, so as to continue delivering relevant strategic capabilities to policymakers is a given. This adaption must be grounded in a deep understanding of the nature of strategic landpower, closely coupled with a keen appreciation of what each organization delivers to create final outcomes across the full range of military operations. To continue this inquiry and spark the intellectual renaissance that will underpin the strategic uses of landpower in the 21st century we have chartered the Strategic Landpower Task Force. This task force will:

- Examine the role of strategic landpower in accomplishing the key missions sets contained in Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership, the current strategic guidance.
- Study the confluence of land, human, and cyberspace domains through research and analysis in order to better inform the national security establishment's thinking on integrating the "human domain" into the planning and execution of military operations to set the conditions for decisive outcomes.
- Inform how best to account for human considerations in formal Joint and service doctrine, to include whether to adopt the term "human domain" as a doctrinal term and the DOTMLPF implications.

Conclusion

Despite our best efforts, over the next two decades there remains a high likelihood that the United States will once again find itself at war. Victory relies on the employment of a fully integrated Joint force, capable of combining individual Service attributes so as to create a synergetic combat effect. As we relearned in Afghanistan and Iraq, the United States should not enter a conflict with a strategic plan that amounts to little more than engaging and destroying the enemy order of battle. Lasting strategic success is not a function of enemy units eliminated or targets destroyed. A successful strategic outcome rests, as it has since time immemorial, on winning the contest of wills.

As Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Harold Stark noted just before World War II in a comment about the risk of lack of military success on shore: “while we might not lose everywhere, we might, possibly, not win anywhere.” If the United States military is going to prevent war or win the wars it must fight it must commit to a balanced, adequately resourced, and sufficiently sized Joint force. Within this Joint force must be a capable landpower. Without the combined capabilities and capacity of the Army, Marine Corps and Special Operations Forces, lasting strategic success is unattainable.

When we have formally studied the lessons of our wars and anticipated the demands of the new order that historically follows those wars, we have been successful in subsequent conflicts. A small cadre of Army and Marine Corps professionals spent the years between the World Wars thinking long and hard about the future of war, and landpower’s role in it. While most of the world’s armies gave up on amphibious operations after the Gallipoli fiasco, the U.S. Marines, with their U.S. Navy partners, used the interwar years to develop the doctrine and tools that they successfully employed throughout the Pacific War. Similarly, the U.S. Army, with their U.S. Air Force partners, developed AirLand Battle after fighting a long-term counterinsurgency in Vietnam, tenets of which contributed to a powerful offensive to free Kuwait. One of the great lessons the Marines and Army learned during the forced austerity of the Great Depression was that thinking is free.

We are using the Strategic Landpower Task Force in that vein: to study historic, contemporary, and emerging military, human, and strategic considerations, as well as the enduring relationship between the land domain and the “human domain”; to generate ideas, and develop concepts for operations on land and among populations; and to effectively posture those forces to provide Strategic Landpower that best secures and advances the Nation’s interests and those of our allies in an increasingly complex and evolving operational and strategic environment.





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