



**Joint Interdependence –
the Key to Integrated
Deterrence**



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"War is an extremely complex subject and becomes even more complex with the new opportunities, interactions, interdependencies and tensions created by accelerated technological and cultural evolution". Anonymous



2 CR conducts Joint Force Entry Operations in the Czech Republic, photo by Sgt. D. Bistarkey

The principal strategic approach of the United States National Military Strategy is Integrated Deterrence, which generates warfighting advantages by synchronizing operations across warfighting domains, theaters, the spectrum of conflict, instruments of national power, the interagency, private sector, and allies and partners. To achieve and maintain this Integrated Deterrence, the United States military seeks unified understanding, effort, and action under the Joint Warfighting Concept (JWC).

The new Joint Warfighting Concept (JWC) is our guide to that warfighting future. It will drive our doctrine, organizational design, training, and ultimately, warfighting itself. This is not the first time we have adapted to reframe an uncertain future. Just as “Air Land Battle” provided the intellectual and cognitive framework of the Cold War to “fight outnumbered and win,” the JWC will provide a framework for joint interdependence in our military services that will seek advantages in all the joint warfighting functions in all five domains to attain joint overmatch, and thus, directly contribute to persistent integrated deterrence. We believe Joint interdependence is when one military service relies on another's capabilities to maximize the complementary and reinforcing effects of both or of several.

However, joint interdependence is easy to recognize and to describe on paper, but exceedingly difficult to define and implement. Our argument is to convey to planners the list of advantages and objections to joint interdependence. By understanding the incentives and impediments to joint interdependence, the joint force can first address the “why” before the “how to” and make real progress on this worthy aspiration.

This brief argumentative essay will address the context and brief history of this elusive goal, then describe the benefits and disincentives of interdependencies in the joint force, then finally offer broad approaches to progress in this very consequential effort.

As GEN Milly said in his latest Joint Force Quarterly essay (JFQ 110, 3rd Quarter 2023), we are at a “strategic inflection point.” He is right, but he is also in the same position many of our past senior officers were in through the many decades of our nation’s military history. During the Pacific Campaign of World War II, our Commander in Chief and senior officers were also at a strategic inflection point concerning the war in the Pacific.

Historical Context

During the Pacific Campaign of World War II, the American theory of victory hinged on the President’s mantra of “unconditional surrender” of the Imperial Forces of Japan. However, the “how” of that campaign, regardless of stated direction, consisted of three distinct methodologies and defeat mechanisms. The domains of land, sea, and air, each with their own cultures, expertise areas, experiences, histories, and leaders, offered separate ways of warfare defined by their domains. Curiously, the concept of “unconditional surrender” seems to have grown into a cultural expectation within the United States. However, joint interdependence and its contribution to integrated deterrence are rooted in the competition continuum that recognizes such surrenders are the outlier, instead of the norm.



General McArthur



Admiral Nimitz



General LeMay

The Land: General McArthur, of the United States Army, sought a land campaign through large land masses, coming back to reconquer the Philippine Islands in a land campaign across the southwest Pacific. His control of population centers across the Pacific had a strong logic, and the President eventually did not have to select which campaign would be primary, as he had the means to afford them all. While avoiding many Japanese held fortified islands, McArthur’s strategy was land centric, akin to many of the theories espoused by Carl von Clausewitz.

The Sea: Admiral Nimitz, of the United States Navy, preferred an “island hopping” campaign that would avoid many Japanese held island to avoid pyrrhic victories such as Tarawa and other early island battles, in favor of capturing more strategic islands which would be then used as power projection platforms to finally take the main island of Japan. Ending the war with a massive force of 110 aircraft carriers of assorted designs, configurations, and missions in numerous strike groups with hundreds of escort and support ships, he had the largest and most powerful Navy ever assembled. His maritime centric strategy was aligned with the sea power theories of Mahan and Corbit.

The Air: Finally, Generals Hap Arnold and Curtis LeMay, of the United States Army Air Forces, provided a third approach to campaigning which was as much an experiment as it was a methodology – aerial bombardment of military, industrial and populations centers and area denial by the aerial mining of sea ports which exported military power and imported the necessary resources for subsistence for the population and raw materials for the industrial base. Both created the 20th Air Force just for this purpose, using the principal weapon of the B-29 to raze Japan and compel it to surrender after the two aerial atomic attacks of August 1945. Knowing they would push for an independent Air Force after the war, their theory of war was nested in the recent writings of airpower theorists Douhet, Trenchard and Mitchell.



Map of Pacific Campaign from the Imperial War Museum, West Pacific, 1944, IWM MD (Military District) 12255

Three “services” using three approaches to warfare in parallel provided the highest command authorities a selectable theory of victory in the Pacific because the United States was able to resource all three while still fighting another front in Europe. While they were able to work in concert on a grand scale due to the industrial might of the United States, this cannot be considered an exemplary case study in joint interdependence due to anticipated resource limitations and contested decision space.

The Contemporary Environment

Today, we do not have the luxury of being able to afford three different campaigns like that. We simply will not have the time, resources or even the will to fight that way. Tomorrow’s fight will involve allies, coalition partners, our United States interagency partners, and a joint force that will need to be much more interdependent. What does it mean to be “jointly interdependent” in today’s parlance? Again, Joint interdependence is when one military service relies on another's capabilities to maximize the complementary and reinforcing effects of both or of several. It is essential to provide the greatest number of military options for leaders to preserve peace and respond to crises as we will further describe below.

Realizing there are both proximate and structural issues of friction in the quest for joint interdependence, we will attempt to address the significant issues associated with this effort.

Enter the Joint Warfighting Concept that leverages service models within the DoD (e.g., multi-domain operations or agile combat employment) as a unifying effort supporting integrated deterrence. For the new Joint Warfighting Concept to be effective, the Services need to accept the idea of joint interdependence, overcoming conceptual and cognitive objections. This means accepting more risk as reliance on the other Services grows. While easy to articulate and even stipulate into doctrine, joint interdependence is difficult to inculcate, imbed and reinforce. The natural cultural bias towards independence in prosecuting the Services core missions is difficult to overcome. This can change, but an incremental approach is best to reinforce the cultural changes necessary to embed a true shift in joint interdependence.



Joint Operational Planning, photo by Petty Officer 3rd Class Daniel Schumacher

Our national defense strategy calls for integrated deterrence to dissuade competitors and adversaries from operating outside the bounds of international laws and norms to achieve advantages. Integrated deterrence seeks to integrate all tools of national power across domains, geography, and spectrum of conflict, while working with allies and partners. The denominator of integrated deterrence is joint interdependence.

How has the United States military addressed joint interdependence in the past? Incrementally. Our joint force has executed magnificent combined-arms and joint force campaigns in the past. We have also displayed periods of complete disdain for interdependency. Joint interdependence is not a new concept. From the Campaign at Yorktown where ground and naval forces of the United States and France forced capitulation of the British, and forced an end to the Revolutionary War, the idea of forces from multiple domains to present dilemmas to opposing forces is a viable concept long proven in warfare.

The Evolution of Joint Integration

The United States has matured in the ability to fight interdependently over the centuries of warfare, but progress has not always been smooth, linear, or continuous. It has been a struggle borne by necessity and the realities of the environment that forced us to move in that direction. Even the landmark the Goldwater- Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986, an attempt to fix problems caused by inter-service rivalry, was not popular with senior officers at the time of its' codification into law.



Joint Operations Order, photo by SSGT RJ Lannom, 124 PA (PUBLIC AFFAIRS) Det

While this study is not a historical survey of joint operations, we will briefly describe the organizational behavior of the War or Defense Department through conflict to underpin our point showing the incremental improvements from deconfliction to coordination to integration to interdependence over the last 75 years as technology and revised paradigms emerged.

-Deconfliction: During the conflicts of World War II, Korea, and Vietnam, the Services each had their own methodology for prosecuting the war based on their primary domain. Earlier, we described the Pacific Campaign, but the Korean War was similar in minimal integration, except the brilliant landings at Inchon. During Vietnam, it is noteworthy the Navy, Army and Air Force all had diverse ways to contribute. Furthermore, the Air Force had two air wars – one using fighter-bombers on targets from the Tactical Air Command and another from the Strategic Air Command using B-52 bombers in a conventional role. Often, these separate but deconflicted operations were redundant or not aligned strategically or even operationally.

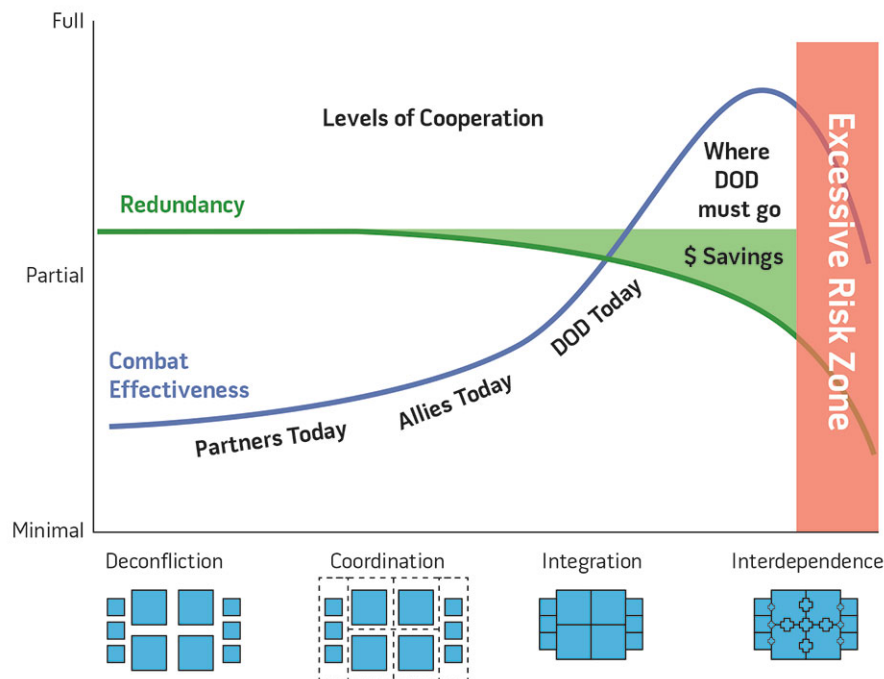
-Coordination: Following the disastrous results from the Desert One attempt to retrieve our American hostages in 1979, the Congress forced the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986. This compelled the Services to become more joint as witnessed during the intervention in Panama via Operation Just Cause, and the

Persian Gulf War in 1990-91. Forces were under one commander who was the joint force commander who provided direction and control of his subordinate commanders via the domains and ostensibly, the Services.

-Integration: By the early 90's following the stunning military success of the Persian Gulf War, small wars called for joint forces for peace enforcement operations in Bosnia, Somalia, and Haiti. The rise of the special operations forces paved the way and truly showed how integration could work when forces were well-led, resourced and synchronized under a joint force commander. While not perfect, the joint force made impressive strides in joint command and control and other joint functions to mass effects and selectively achieve unified action, drawing in agency partners in the United States Government and routinely included our alliance and coalition partners.

-Interdependence: The Department of Defense witnessed glimpses of true interdependence on the tactical and operational levels during the irregular warfare campaigns of Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Horn of Africa through the 2001-2021. Campaigns under a single Joint Force Commander were mostly synchronized and harmonized to leverage asymmetric effects on an elusive adversary who rarely engaged in traditional, large to medium scale combined arms combat operations. Even with all the progress in these conflicts, the joint force still had glaring failures to include the Battle of Tora Bora in Afghanistan Nov-Dec 2001, where there were major command and control, communication and joint fires issues between the Army and Air Force. The consequence of poor interdependence is considered one of the most significant missed opportunities to destroy the core of Al Qaeda and their leader Osama Bin Laden. Still, the interdependence of both special operations and conventional forces took a step forward, albeit temporarily, during this period.

Figure. "Smart Interdependence" Improves Warfighting and Fiscal Responsibility



Chart, credit Admiral Jonathan W. Greenert, 30th Chief of Naval Operations from Sep 2011, to Sep 2015

Motives of Joint Interdependence

What drives or motivates the Services to move towards joint interdependence? It is clearly harder to implement at the institutional level, yet the benefits are exponentially more advantageous on the battlefield. Joint interdependence has many advantages which are often cited by advocates as the asymmetric advantage of joint/combined military force. In this case, we are specifically speaking of forces from all five warfighting domains and include alliance and coalition partners as part of that equation. Creating policy, strategy, concepts, and joint doctrine calling for joint interdependence is a great start, but implementation is much more challenging. Before we go to the “how” let us start with the “why” with joint interdependency. What incentives and disincentives are there to this objective?

-Increased deterrence: In the era of Integrated Deterrence as the centerpiece of our posture, deterrence is certainly a major factor in joint interdependence being an advantage. If an adversary perceives they are confronting capabilities from all five domains simultaneously, they will be compelled to consider the potential risks and consequences of their actions. The United States sought deterrence against Russia through providing lethal and non-lethal support to Ukraine. Integrating deterrence outside military means and across the whole of government includes economic sanctions. Extending unilateral US (United States) actions into rules-based organizations, values of the International Criminal Court (ICC) were reinforced when South Africa recommended that President Putin not attend the BRICS summit hosted there because the government felt obligated to enforce the ICC issued warrant for his arrest.

-Reliance and Reinforcement: A force that is interdependent is by nature stronger and more powerful, being able to wield multiple threats against an adversary where the cumulative effects will have a pronounced outcome in warfare. Personnel recovery stands out as an example wherein each service is directed to provide the ability to recover and reintegrate isolated personnel they deploy. A joint force commander typically employs these various methods through the joint personnel recovery center that can task any of the presented forces that best meets the need of the isolating event. Not only does this allow a type of menu of mission execution options, but the services also rely on a network of interconnected systems that aid in locating and identifying anyone in need of recovery.

-Shared Roles and Responsibilities through limited overlap: Clearly, each service has equities in the primary domains of the others, and in many ways shares roles and responsibilities through the employment of assets in given geographic location. Thus, becoming more interdependent can strengthen ties between and among the services. During conflicts and military operations, airpower plays a crucial role in achieving objectives and providing support to ground and maritime forces. The Air Force, Army, Navy, and Marine Corps each have their own aviation assets and capabilities that are employed in a coordinated manner to maximize effectiveness. For instance, in a joint operation involving ground forces, the Air Force may provide close air support (CAS) to assist ground troops in engaging enemy targets. The Air Force's fighter aircraft, such as the F-16 or A-10, can conduct airstrikes against enemy positions, provide reconnaissance and surveillance, and deliver precision-guided munitions to support ground operations. At the same time, the Army and Marine Corps may have their own aviation assets, such as attack helicopters like the AH-64 Apache or the AH-1 Cobra, which can also provide close air support to ground forces. These helicopters can engage enemy targets, provide aerial reconnaissance, and deliver firepower in support of ground operations. The Navy, with its aircraft carriers and carrier-based aircraft, also contributes to joint operations by providing air support to ground forces. Carrier-

based aircraft, such as the F/A-18 Super Hornet, can conduct airstrikes, provide air cover, and perform other missions in support of ground operations.

-Costs: In theory, and in some cases proven by practice, interdependence can lower the cost of deterrence by decreasing unnecessary redundancy. In warfare, an element of redundancy is desired, but too much can lead to waste or a self-imposition of opportunity costs that could inhibit development or modernization in another weapon system in a different domain. During the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union pursued the Nuclear Triad (land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs), and strategic bombers) strategy to ensure a credible and robust nuclear deterrent. The interdependence of these three components allowed for a more cost-effective and efficient deterrence posture. Each component had unique advantages and capabilities, and their integration reduced the need for excessive redundancy in any single component. For example, land-based ICBMs provided a fixed and hardened launch platform, capable of delivering nuclear warheads over long distances. Submarine-launched ballistic missiles offered a mobile and stealthy platform, providing a survivable second-strike capability. Strategic bombers provided flexibility and the ability to recall or retarget weapons if necessary.

-Options: An interdependent force, where one can wield forces from any of the five domains; land, sea, air, space and cyber, provides sovereign leaders with multiple options to apply coercion or compellence. This means an interdependent force can also leverage multiple operational and strategic dilemmas for the adversary, who may be in a quandary over which threat to address in priority and then what resources might be applied to that threat, leaving other areas open for exploitation. Providing options to sovereign leaders creates more creative and innovative “decision space” for political maneuvering as force is applied. In October 1962, it was discovered that the Soviet Union had secretly deployed nuclear missiles in Cuba, just 90 miles off the coast of Florida posing a significant threat to United States national security. In response, the US military presented multiple options to address the crisis. These options included diplomatic negotiations, economic sanctions, naval blockade, and even the possibility of a military strike to destroy the missile sites. By providing these multiple options, the US military and political leaders aimed to create a range of choices for coercion or compellence against the Soviet Union. This approach allowed for more creative and innovative decision-making, as it provided flexibility in responding to the crisis.



Italian and American Airborne Operations, photo by Sgt. Patrick VanBuren

-Better Defense Posture: Similarly, an interdependent force provides expertise in all domains and therefore, an elevated level of situational awareness in defending aggression in each domain. This awareness in all domains creates a superior intelligence mosaic of what the adversary intends to do next. This expertise in all domains creates many more situations of asymmetric advantage over an adversary while on the defensive. A variation on the concept of “wisdom of the crowd,” experts across each domain capable of providing independent action to defending against or attacking an enemy; these actions may even be synthesized for even greater effect.

-Increased lethality: Forces who can operate in all domains interdependently can mass and disperse as needed to exponentially increase lethality. The massing of effects – lethal or in some cases non-lethal, is another asymmetric advantage. Fires from the multiple domains converging on one target are difficult to defend against, creating dilemmas for the adversary. As seen in conflict over the last thirty years, the operations using electromagnetic spectrum enhanced kinetic operations. Strikes against Iraqi radar sites delayed detection of attacks in the opening hours of Operation DESERT STORM. COIN operations saw the enemy use cell phones to detonate improvised explosive devices only to see that tactic countered by friendly convoys jamming of those bands.

Impediments to Joint Interdependence

While many advocates for change in this direction cite the above incentives, far fewer have outlined the disadvantages and disincentives of joint interdependence. If there were only advantages to moving in this direction, we would “be there” by now and not still struggling. Far less scholarship is dedicated to the opposition of joint interdependence. However, this is where our focus should be as we as a nation need to address these objections to move forward and assuage the lack of trust and confidence in services outside their own. Change and inter-reliance between entities as large as military services

causes friction. Even elegantly designed systems portrayed on organizational theory charts belie the true tension and friction resulting from the movement of our services from deconfliction, to coordination, to integration, and finally to interdependence. The following is a broad description of the motivations to move toward or away from joint interdependency.

We will now move to discuss the major impediments to that transition, realizing that we must first discuss the “why” before we move to “how” we will overcome these frictions. To contextualize “friction” in this study, we will briefly unpack what “friction” means for this argument. Friction: Forced inter-reliance, or interdependence causes friction. The idea of friction was central to Carl von Clausewitz’s theories of war in 1832, as he recognized this was endemic to war’s objective, which is to say the presence of friction is a permanent condition. Friction is suffered by all belligerents, but the side who can ameliorate the friction the fastest usually prevails. In war, there is both proximate and structural friction, meaning the unanticipated urgent friction of the moment, and the large-scale friction of integrating massive bureaucracies like the military services while campaigning in conflict or even during competition.

-Loss of Agency: Loss of agency, or priority setting is foremost. Services strongly desire independence and the agency to set agendas and manage their “own” resources to the point of near ownership and not stewardship. Each Service views adversaries and the threats they wield slightly differently and thus puts a higher level of urgency on mission sets. The 1947 Key West Agreements originally set forth contemporary roles and missions and the services have been reluctant to surrender any agency to another since then.

-Loss of Direct and Total Control: Loss of control of forces is near the top of the fear of joint interdependence as well. The visceral infighting over authorities of combatant command, operational control and tactical control of forces is an ongoing and unending tension between forces. Returning to the capabilities of personnel recovery, a decision to pre-positioning combat search and rescue forces (CSAR) in direct support of a specific mission was delayed over a concern at higher command echelons that if CSAR forces were used at that time, then those forces would not be available to execute another mission if one became necessary. Passing control in advance, even temporarily, created a real concern for the approving authority even though the same CSAR forces would have likely been called upon from their regular location if an isolating event occurred.

-Potential Increased Costs: Costs of joint interdependence may increase the total cost of defense as new equipment, procedures, and integrated exercises to validate concepts all require dedicated assets from Services otherwise used on internal preferences. As technology is embraced by one Service, it may be imposed on another, and internal tradeoffs may be imposed from unexpected or unwanted external factors. Radios, computer systems, even remotely piloted vehicles have been sources of tension and friction among the services as technology progresses, and unless there is an identified executive agent responsible for making those decisions, the services will continue to develop what is best for their own needs, regardless of standardization or interoperability. On rare occasions, we will produce a piece of equipment that is similar in name only. For example, the Air Force and Marine versions of the F-35 fighter are radically different.

-Service Culture: Cultural tensions between Services may be exacerbated by a push to joint interdependence. Services each have their own distinct strategic cultures and trying to compel or coerce each to adopt parts of another is not only difficult but has points of diminishing returns. This recognizes

that even inside Services, there are sub-cultures opposed to others inside their own Services. Attempting to craft a framework where one size fits all undermine the expertise and experience each Services has in mastering their own warfighting domains. Canada codified all their services into “one big service” but time and necessity have re-created their original forces without changing the law that established the consolidation. The initiative failed because the services required a deeper and more professionalized focus within the domains.

-Service Identity and Legacy: Along with cultural tensions, each Service’s identity is also a factor in why achieving joint interdependency is a challenge. Culture and identity are intricately linked, and the Services strongly prefer to retain their own image of who they are to themselves, the American people, and to the other branches, departments, and agencies in the United States government. The fact we now have a Space Force is a culmination of all the reasons why each domain has its’ own Service to address issues therein. One of the first things the Space Force did was change their identity through new mission statements, uniforms, the naming of organizations and many other “symbology” issues to immediately stake out a new identity.



Joint Communications Exercise in US AFRICOM, photo by MSGT Carlotta Holley

-Time: There is a temporal aspect to achieving Joint interdependence as well, and Services may have diverging views of the urgency of such changes, investments, or shifts in priorities. Each domain has its’ own set of environmental issues, and each a set of its own priorities for primacy over adversaries and competitors. Finding the equilibrium in this ongoing tension is the primary challenge that may never be ameliorated satisfactorily. During the early years of the Iraq War, the US military faced a threat from improvised explosive devices (IEDs) that caused casualties among troops. The existing military vehicles were not adequately protected against these attacks, leading to a pressing need for specialized vehicles that could withstand Improvised Explosive Device blasts. The urgency of acquiring MRAP vehicles to protect troops on the ground clashed with the long lead time required for naval shipbuilding. Naval shipbuilding projects, such as aircraft carriers and submarines, typically involve complex design,

engineering, and construction processes that take many years to complete. While the Navy had its own set of priorities for maintaining maritime superiority and projecting power, the urgent need for MRAP vehicles on the battlefield created tension between the services. The Army and Marine Corps, responsible for ground operations, emphasized the immediate need for MRAPs to protect their personnel from Improvised Explosive Device attacks. Finding the equilibrium between the long lead time of naval shipbuilding and the urgent acquisition of MRAP vehicles was a significant challenge. The services had to balance their respective priorities and allocate resources accordingly. The urgency of protecting troops on the ground led to expedited acquisition processes for MRAPs, including leveraging existing commercial off-the-shelf technologies and modifying existing vehicle platforms.

-Historical Budget Share: The services each have their own historical and consistent “share” of the DoD (Department of Defense) budget that is incredibly hard to adjust in the near term. Breaking this highly political paradigm is another source of friction and tension that is easier to program deep into the future than it is to accomplish in the next 3-5 years. Even if Services agree to shifts, the Congress controls the power of the purse and consistently asserts that control through budgetary decisions. These decisions often run counter to the DoD’s vision of investment towards joint interdependence. Even during the wartime through the Iraq and Afghanistan Campaigns, the “share” of the budget shifted only slightly towards a more ground-centric emphasis. Congress establishes a base Department of Defense budget to maintain the services, and then as necessary funds an “OCONUS” or Outside the Continental United States” fund to employ the services through the combatant commanders.

The Way Ahead

What is next, and how do we now move towards a more joint interdependent force that will be commensurate with the new Joint Warfighting Concept, leading to integrated deterrence? This is not the first or last time this idea has been examined. Admiral Jonathan W. Greenert, Chief of Naval Operations from Sep 2011 to Sep 2015 astutely asserted the joint force would need move incrementally in this direction through a series of efforts to align the Services towards a more joint interdependent force. He accurately argued for “...avoiding overspending on similar programs in each Service, selecting the right capabilities and systems to be “born joint,” better connecting existing tactics, techniques, procedures, concepts, and plans, institutionalizing crosstalk on Service research and development, requirements, and programs and expanding operational cooperation and more effective joint training and exercises.” (Joint Forces Quarterly 76, 1st Quarter 2015 Admiral Greenert)

While Admiral Greenert’s proposals seem modest and not particularly revolutionary, we believe he is still correct, as he inherently understood the “why” before he outlined the “how.” Counter to many other experts in this field, we believe this process requires “slow thinking” underpinned by a deep understanding of our future mission, but also looking back at our history and culture as well. Understanding this problem through the lenses of human behavior, procedural history, technical expertise, and financial feasibility will be essential. We advocate not for the “fail fast and learn” approach, but one of deep contemplation and a profound respect for the risks accepted by some and imposed on others during the transformation to interdependence, and ultimately, to integrated deterrence.

About the Author(s) The views expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or the United States Government.

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